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Rhetorical vs. Historical Discourse?

The War of Cyprus (1570–1573) and Its Aftermath as a Mirror of Domestic Debate in Sixteenth-Century Venetian *Relazioni*

Abstract: The status of Venetian *relazioni* has long been debated in historiography. Since Leopold von Ranke, *relazioni* have been read as „the perfect type of testimony“, while more recent interpretations have highlighted their complex rhetorical scope. Starting with a framing of the genre, this article focuses on a particular case study, namely the *relazioni* of the Venetian *baili* and the extraordinary ambassadors in the Ottoman Empire around the Cyprus War (1570–1573), with the aim of defining their rhetorical vs. historiographical function. Through a comparison with contemporary sources from the Venetian area, the skillful rhetorical construction of the texts is emphasised, testifying to an ideological function that goes beyond mere reporting. At the same time, the realistic and pragmatic perspective of the genre is highlighted in its capacity to delineate a lucid fresco of the relations between the Serenissima and the Sublime Porte. A multi-layered reading of the reports is thus proposed, which integrates their rhetorical and historiographical dimensions, and which identifies them, in their allusions to the internal Venetian debate in the post-Lepanto years, as an instrument of participation and of reflection on the part of the urban elite on the Venetian system of government.

Keywords: Venice, Ottoman Empire, *Relazioni*, Rhetoric, Cyprus War

The reports of the Venetian ambassadors to the Senate (hereafter referred to as *relazioni*) represent a fundamental historical source on the foreign policy of the early modern Republic of Venice. The existing corpus of *relazioni*, which are documented as a tool for reporting diplomatic activities since the thirteenth century, spans from the late fifteenth century to the years preceding the Treaty of Campoformio (1797). Although individual reports or selections of them were included in printed publications as early as the late sixteenth century – first and foremost in the „Thesoro politico“ (1589) – the role of these reports as historical sources only became a subject of debate in nineteenth-century historiography. In this context, Leopold von Ranke (1795–1886) emerged as the most fervent advocate of reading *relazioni* as a cornerstone of empirical historiography,¹ considering

¹ On the intellectual development of Ranke and his use of *relazioni* as a historical source starting with *Die römischen Päpste* (Berlin 1834–1836), see Theodore von Laue, Leopold Ranke. The Formative Years, Princeton 1950.

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them as one of the richest and most reliable sources for studying the history of European states in the early modern era, and a valuable tool for the empirical verification of facts and the reconstruction of the past „as it really was“.

This perspective on *relazioni* prevailed within several national historiographical traditions. One notable example can be found in the nineteenth-century emerging field of Ottoman studies, which, beginning with Hammer-Purgstall (1774–1856) and his monumental „Geschichte des Osmanischen Reiches“ (1827–1835), increasingly used these reports as documentary sources for the history of the Ottoman Empire.² Outside Mitteleuropean historiography, scholars such as Rawdon Brown (1806–1883) and Armand Baschet (1829–1886) similarly made use of *relazioni* for their studies on Venetian history and diplomacy.³

Since the mid-twentieth century, a more critical view of the reports as historical sources has gradually emerged. Charles Howard Carter, for instance, questioned the extent to which Venetian ambassadors had access to reliable and first-hand information.⁴ Within Italian historiography, scholars such as Gino Benzoni, Angelo Ventura, and Paolo Preto highlighted the Venetian-centric perspective of the reports, which often aligned with the celebration of Venetian republican ideology.⁵ More recently, Filippo De Vivo, through a study of the circumstances surrounding the drafting, circulation, and reception of the reports, has suggested emphasising their rhetorical dimension and reinterpreting these texts as a vehicle for a pluralistic vision revealing the diverse political perspectives within the urban patriciate.⁶ This approach aligns with newer critical perspectives that recognise a significant rhetorical component in Renaissance diplomatic writing, highlighting the importance of tropes in facilitating and contributing to the effectiveness of diplomatic discourse.⁷ In parallel to this interpretive framework,

2 Joseph von Hammer-Purgstall, *Geschichte des Osmanischen Reiches*, 10 vols., Pest 1827–1835.

3 Armand Baschet, *La diplomatie vénitienne. Les princes de l'Europe au XVI^e siècle. François I – Philippe II, Catherine de Médicis, les papes, les sultans etc., etc., d'après les rapports des ambassadeurs vénitiens*, Paris 1862; Rawdon Brown et al. (Eds.), *Calendar of State Papers and Manuscripts, Relating to English Affairs, Existing in the Archives and Collections of Venice, and in Other Libraries of Northern Italy*, 38 vols., London 1864–1947.

4 Charles Howard Carter, *The Ambassadors of Early Modern Europe. Patterns of Diplomatic Representation in the Early Seventeenth Century*, in: id. (Ed.), *From the Renaissance to the Counter-Reformation. Essays in Honor of Garrett Mattingly*, New York 1965, pp. 269–295, at pp. 279 f.

5 Paolo Preto, *Le relazioni dei baili veneziani a Costantinopoli*, in: *Il Veltro* 23 (1979), pp. 125–132; Angelo Ventura, *Scrittori politici e scritture di governo*, in: Girolamo Arnaldi/Manlio Pastore Stocchi (Eds.), *Storia della cultura veneta*, vol. 3: *Dal Quattrocento al Concilio di Trento*, Venezia 1980, pp. 513–563, at pp. 513 f.; Gino Benzoni, *Ranke's Favorite Source. The Venetian Relazioni*, in: *The Courier* 22,1 (1987), pp. 11–26.

6 Filippo De Vivo, *How to Read Venetian „Relazioni“*, in: *Renaissance and Reformation* 34 (2011), pp. 25–59; id., *Information and Communication in Venice. Rethinking Early Modern Politics*, Oxford 2007, pp. 57–70.

7 Timothy Hampton, *Fictions of Embassy. Literature and Diplomacy in Early Modern Europe*, Ithaca 2009; Tracey A. Sowerby/Joanna Craigwood (Eds.), *Cultures of Diplomacy and Literary Writing in the Early Modern World*, Oxford 2019.

some have called instead for a functionalist reconsideration of the historiographical value and relevance of *relazioni* as historical sources.⁸ Indeed, the Venetian figures involved in and around diplomacy themselves, *mutatis mutandis*, were aware of the tension between historiography and rhetorical discourse. In one passage from his 1575 *relazione* from the Duchy of Ferrara, Emilio Maria Manolesso (1547–1584), while emphatically describing the profound popular mourning following the death of Cardinal Ippolito d'Este, took care to stress that he was speaking not as an „orator“, but as a „historian“.⁹

Building on this debate, the present contribution aims to develop a reflection on the rhetorical vs. historiographical status of *relazioni*, focusing on a corpus that includes the *relazioni* of the *baili* and extraordinary ambassadors from Constantinople regarding an event particularly prone to contemporary rhetorical reinterpretation: the War of Cyprus (1570–1573). After comparing these reports with contemporary Venetian literature and surveying the historiographical and rhetorical scopes of the *relazioni* from Constantinople, this study examines these texts as an example of deliberative rhetoric and discusses their degree of political reflection, in order to evaluate their indirect contribution to the internal debate on Venice's deliberative and governing bodies.

The *Relazioni* from Constantinople

The custom of submitting a detailed final report on the information gathered during a diplomatic mission dated back to a law of 1268. However, only a minority of ambassadors complied with this obligation, to the point where a series of decrees were issued over time, reminding them of the duty to „have them put in writing or have them written“.¹⁰ As late as 1425, the Venetian Senate decreed that once delivered, these reports

⁸ Eric D. Dursteler, Describing or Distorting the „Turk“? The *Relazioni* of the Venetian Ambassadors in Constantinople as Historical Source, in: *Acta Histriae* 19 (2011), pp. 231–248, at pp. 233–238.

⁹ „Parlando non come oratore, ma come istorico“ (Arnaldo Segarizzi, *Relazioni degli ambasciatori veneti al Senato*, vol. 1, Bari 1912, p. 31); on this, cf. Hampton, *Fictions of Embassy* (see note 7), p. 26. Strictly speaking, Manolesso's diplomatic role should be understood as informal: although he presented a report on Ferrara to the Venetian Senate in 1575, he had not been granted any official commission by the Serenissima. Manolesso likely traveled to Ferrara in the 1560s to enter the service of Duke Alfonso II d'Este, though the nature of his position remains unclear, raising the suspicion that he may have been a political exile or an informant for the Venetian government (see Roberto Zago's entry on Emilio Maria Manolesso, in: *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani*, vol. 69, Roma 2007).

¹⁰ „Facere poni in scriptis aut facere scribi“ (Roberto Cessi [Ed.], *Deliberazioni del Maggior consiglio di Venezia*, vol. 2, Bologna 1931, p. 1); see also De Vivo, *How to Read* (see note 6), p. 32.

were to be put in writing and housed in the Senate.¹¹ Starting in 1524, this practice was extended to all public officials sent abroad on official duties.¹²

Regarding Venetian embassies to the Ottoman Empire, the establishment of a permanent mission replacing the one to the Byzantine emperor was decreed only after the Ottoman capture of Constantinople in 1453.¹³ Even before the Ottoman conquest, the most important representative of Venetian political authority in Byzantine Constantinople was the *bailo*, initially entrusted with consular functions, including jurisdiction over the Venetian community. From 1453 onwards, despite the change in regime, the Venetians continued to send *baili* to Constantinople, whose role gradually became indistinguishable from that of other Venetian ambassadors assigned to European courts. Alongside the *baili*, the Republic occasionally sent special ambassadors to Constantinople, with shorter mandates and specific responsibilities, such as negotiating peace treaties. Both figures – *baili* and extraordinary ambassadors – were required to present a final report upon their return to Venice.

Once put in writing, the report – sometimes significantly revised from the version presented to the Senate – was handed over to the Grand Chancellor to be archived in the *Segreta*.¹⁴ Interest in these reports was such that copies were often made and circulated widely, finding their way into the libraries of cardinals and statesmen. The publishing history of the *relazioni* from Constantinople, like that of all Venetian diplomatic reports, is thus quite complex.¹⁵ The first printed edition of a selection of ten ambassadorial

11 Venezia, Archivio di Stato, Senato Misti, reg. 55, fol. 117v. The first register of the *relazioni*, which was supposed to begin with Paolo Correr's report, has not been transmitted.

12 Maria Pia Pedani, *Venezia porta d'Oriente*, Bologna 2011, p. 78.

13 The bibliography on the relations between the Venetian State and the Ottoman Empire is particularly extensive. Among the seminal studies figure Géraud Poumarède, *L'Empire de Venise et les Turcs. XVI^e–XVII^e siècle*, Paris 2020; Paolo Preto, *Venezia e i Turchi*, Roma 2013; Pedani, *Venezia porta d'Oriente* (see note 12) and e d., *In nome del Gran Signore. Inviati ottomani a Venezia dalla caduta di Costantinopoli alla guerra di Candia*, Venezia 1994; on the relations between Venice and Byzantine Constantinople, see Donald M. Nicol, *Byzantium and Venice. A Study in Diplomatic and Cultural Relations*, Cambridge 1988; on Venetian diplomacy in the sixteenth century, see Guillaume Allongé, *Ambasciatori. Diplomazia e politica nella Venezia del Rinascimento*, Roma 2019. For a detailed list of the Venetian diplomats sent to Constantinople, compiled based on archival sources, see Maria Pia Pedani, *Elenco degli inviati diplomatici veneziani presso i sovrani ottomani*, in: *EJOS* 5,4 (2002), pp. 1–54.

14 Regarding the archival location, the reports of the Venetian ambassadors to the Sublime Porte are now housed at the Archivio di Stato di Venezia, in the Fondo Collegio, series „Relazioni finali di ambasciatori e pubblici rappresentanti“, sub-series „Ambasciatori“, sub-series „Costantinopoli“. Copies of ambassadorial reports can also be found at the Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana and the Civico Museo Correr, in private collections, and in public archives and libraries (cf. Francesca Antonibon, *Le Relazioni a Stampa di Ambasciatori Veneti*, Padova 1939, pp. 17 f.; Donald E. Queller, *The Development of Ambassadorial Relazioni*, in: John R. Hale [Ed.], *Renaissance Venice*, Totowa 1973, pp. 174–196).

15 For a preliminary survey of the reports of Venetian ambassadors from a philological and linguistic perspective, see Luca D'Onghia, *Note linguistiche e testuali sugli ambasciatori veneti*, in: Jean-Louis Fournel/Matteo Residori (Eds.), *Ambassades et ambassadeurs en Europe (XV^e–XVIII^e siècles)*. Prati-

reports, the „Thesoro politico“ (Cologne 1589),¹⁶ included a discourse on the Ottoman Empire and the 1573 *relazione* from Constantinople by Marcantonio Barbaro. Published some years later, Lazzaro Soranzo's „L'Ottomanno“ (Ferrara 1598) relied heavily on the reports of Venetian *baili*. Neither the re-edition of the first part of the „Thesoro“ in 1595 and 1598, nor the second part published in Bologna in 1603, nor the third part published in Tournon in 1605, included any further reports from Constantinople. Between the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, indeed, publishers focused mainly on reports from European states. It was only in the nineteenth century that further reports from Constantinople, such as those by Marco Minio (1521) and Giovanfrancesco Morosini (1585), were published as wedding gifts.¹⁷ The first major editorial project for these reports can be traced to Eugenio Albèri's edition, printed in Florence in fifteen volumes between 1839 and 1863. Constantinople was the focus of the three volumes that made up the third series of this edition, published in 1840, 1844, and 1855, respectively.¹⁸ In the slightly later edition by Nicolò Barozzi and Guglielmo Berchet, which focused on seventeenth-century *relazioni*, twelve reports by *baili* and extraordinary ambassadors were collected.¹⁹ No reports from Constantinople were included in Arnaldo Segarizzi's edition, published between 1912 and 1916, while a more recent edition by Maria Pia Pedani includes a selection of previously unpublished reports written between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries, starting with Andrea Foscolo (1512) and ending with Girolamo Zulian (1789).²⁰ In recent years, more philologically accurate editions of individual reports have been published, such as the letter-report from Constantinople by the *cogitore* Gian Giacomo Caroldo (1530), edited by Daniele Musto.²¹ Overall, however, it is worth noting the absence of a comprehensive philological study on Venetian *relazioni* (despite the

ques, écritures, savoirs, images, Genève 2020, pp. 361–378, especially its methodological considerations on the problematic nature of defining the surprisingly vast corpus of reports and basing the analysis on editions which are not always philologically accurate.

16 Despite what is stated on the cover page, it cannot be ruled out that the place of publication may be elsewhere (cfr. Jean Balsamo, *Les origines parisiennes du Tesoro Politico* (1589), in: *Bibliothèque d'Humanisme et Renaissance* 57,1 [1995], pp. 7–23). On the „Thesoro politico“, cf. especially Simone Testa, *Una interpretazione del „Thesoro Politico“* (1589), in: *Nuova Rivista Storica* 85 (2001), pp. 347–362, and *id.*, *Alcune riflessioni sul „Thesoro Politico“* (1589), in: *Bibliothèque d'Humanisme et Renaissance* 64,3 (2002), pp. 679–687.

17 *Relazione di Costantinopoli di messer Marco Minio patrizio veneto anno 1721*, Venezia 1845; *Relazione dell'ambasceria a Costantinopoli di Giovanfrancesco Morosini, bailo della Repubblica di Venezia dal 6 maggio 1582 al 12 giugno 1585*, Venezia 1854.

18 Eugenio Albèri (Ed.), *Le relazioni degli ambasciatori veneti al Senato*, ser. 3, vol. 1, Firenze 1840; vol. 2, Firenze 1844; vol. 3, Firenze 1855.

19 Nicolò Barozzi/Guglielmo Berchet (Eds.), *Le relazioni degli stati europei lette al Senato dagli ambasciatori veneziani nel secolo decimosettimo*, Venezia 1856–1878, 10 vols., ser. 5, vols. 1–2.

20 Maria Pia Pedani (Ed.), *Relazioni di ambasciatori veneti al Senato. Tratte dalle migliori edizioni disponibili e ordinate cronologicamente*, vol. 14: *Costantinopoli. Relazioni inedite (1512–1789)*, Padova 1996.

21 Daniele Musto, *Da Costantinopoli a Venezia (1503). Una lettera di Giangiacomo Caroldo tra privato e pubblico*, in: *Carte di viaggio* 11 (2018), pp. 29–60.

commendable editorial project directed by Luigi Firpo). The sheer size of the corpus has thus far discouraged such an undertaking, favoring investigations focused on individual reports or groups of reports selected based on authorship, chronology, or geography.

The War of Cyprus (1570–1573): A Breakdown and Its Rhetorical Representation

Within the broad context of the conflicts between the Serenissima and the Ottoman Empire in the sixteenth century, the War of Cyprus (1570–1573) stands out, in terms of cultural impact, as the most paradigmatic event.²² The aftermath of the naval victory of the Christian coalition in 1571 quickly became, in a particular way, the subject of vigorous encomiastic celebration, generating a massive corpus of texts.²³ Although it was not the only occasion interpreted through a propagandistic lens by Venetian sixteenth-century literature,²⁴ the verses inspired by Lepanto represent a particularly significant case due to the vastness of the corpus, which, as Carlo Dionisotti noted, could be seen as a

²² On the War of Cyprus, see Alessandro Barbero, *Lepanto. La battaglia dei tre imperi*, Bari 2010, and the associated bibliography. For its impact on the Ottoman side, see Onur Yıldırım, *The Battle of Lepanto and Its Impact on Ottoman History and Historiography*, in: Rossella Cancila (Ed.), *Mediterraneo in armi* (secc. XV–XVIII), Palermo 2007, pp. 533–556, and Halil İnalcık, *Lepanto in the Ottoman Documents*, in: Gino Benzone (Ed.), *Il Mediterraneo nella seconda metà del '500 alla luce di Lepanto. Atti del convegno di studi promosso e organizzato dalla Fondazione Giorgio Cini* (Venezia, 8–10 ottobre 1971), Firenze 1974, pp. 185–192.

²³ For a survey of the extensive printed works around Lepanto, see Simona Mammano, *Lepanto. Rime per la vittoria sul Turco*, Roma 2007. For a more general overview of the celebration of Lepanto in the Venetian culture of the time, see the classic studies by Carlo Dionisotti, *La guerra d'Oriente nella letteratura veneziana del Cinquecento*, in: id., *Geografia e storia della letteratura italiana*, Torino 1967, pp. 163–182, and id., *Lepanto nella cultura italiana del tempo*, in: *Lettere italiane* 23,4 (1971), pp. 473–492; see also Cecilia Gibellini, *L'immagine di Lepanto. La celebrazione della vittoria nella letteratura e nell'arte veneziana*, Venezia 2008, and Anastasia Stouraiti, *Costruendo un luogo della memoria. Lepanto*, in: *Storia di Venezia* 1 (2003), pp. 65–88. For a closer focus on the popular press, refer to Dennis E. Rhodes, *La battaglia di Lepanto e la stampa popolare a Venezia. Studio bibliografico*, in: Alessandro Scarsella (Ed.), *Metodologia bibliografica e storia del libro. Atti del seminario sul libro antico offerti a Dennis E. Rhodes*, Venezia 1997, pp. 9–63. For a broader perspective on the battle's impact on material culture, see Stefan Hanß, *Die materielle Kultur der Seeschlacht von Lepanto (1571). Materialität, Medialität und die historische Produktion eines Ereignisses*, 2 vols., Würzburg 2017.

²⁴ On this, see the „Stanze composte nella vittoria africana novamente havuta dal sacratissimo imperatore Carlo Quinto“, in which Lodovico Dolce praised, in 1535, the Habsburg victory against the Ottomans in Tunis, or the sonnet „La nostra e di Giesù nemica gente“, in which Pietro Bembo, in 1526, alluded to the Battle of Mohács; in the same vein Gian Giorgio Trissino, in the poem „Signor, che fosti eternamente eletto“, lamented the loss of Rhodes suffered by the Venetians in 1522.

„huge amount of poetry and prose, which has understandably, and rightly so, caused considerable discomfort to scholars“.²⁵

Between 1571 and 1572 alone, several anthologies that gathered poems often already circulating independently were published in Venice.²⁶ Authorial collections such as Luigi Groto's „Trofeo della vittoria sacra“ (1571), and poems like Giovan Battista Amalteo's „Canzone sopra la vittoria seguita contra l'armata Turchesca“ (1572) and Giovanni Mario Verdizotti's „Nova, & Dotta canzone nella Gloriosa Vittoria contra Turchi“ (1571) achieved widespread reach. Similarly, Bartolomeo Malombra's „Nuova Canzone della felicissima vittoria contra infideli“ (1571) and Girolamo Muzio's „Rime“ (1571) garnered equal attention. More than for their literary quality, which is in most cases unremarkable, these texts stand out clearly for their distinctly propagandistic objectives, aiming to incorporate the main themes that had shaped the anti-Turkish tradition in the Venetian sphere. The same fervor is evident in public discourse, with the emergence of a powerful patriotic spirit and a renewed ideal of crusade against Muslims, as seen in Giovanni Battista Nazari's „Discorso della futura et sperata vittoria contra il Turco“ (1570),²⁷ and in the pamphlets that began circulating after the constitution of the Holy League in July 1571, such as „Il bellissimo et sontuoso trionfo“ (Venice 1571) and „Cerimonie fatte nella publicatione della Lega“ (1571).²⁸ In the field of religious oratory, a flourishing of compositions was also observed around the events of Lepanto: the first solemn celebration of the event, commissioned from the scholar Giovanni Battista Rasario, was pronounced in St Mark's Basilica on October 19, 1571, the same day as the victory over the Ottoman fleet. Rasario's oration was followed by some others, the most remarkable of which was Paolo Paruta's „In laude de' morti nella vittoriosa battaglia contra a' Turchi“.²⁹

25 „Quel cumulo enorme di poesie e di prose ha dato in passato un evidente e del resto giustificabile fastidio agli studiosi“ (Dionisotti, *Lepanto nella cultura italiana* [see note 23], p. 482). Regarding sixteenth-century Venetian poetry around Lepanto, see also *id.*, *La guerra d'Oriente nella letteratura veneziana del Cinquecento*, in: *Lettere italiane* 16,3 (1964), pp. 233–250.

26 *Composizioni di diversi sopra la vittoria dell'Armata del Turco*, cioè stanze, sonetti sopra vari soggetti in tal materia, Venezia 1571; *Raccolta di varii poemi latini e volgari, fatti da diversi bellissimi ingegni nella felice vittoria reportata da Christiani contra Turchi*, Venezia 1571; *Historia dell'immortal successo et fato d'arme della santissima Lega contra il perfido Turco*, Venezia 1572; *Varii componimenti di diversi autori, sopra la vittoria dell'armata della santissima lega*, Venezia 1572; *Raccolta Di Varii Poemi Latini, Greci, e Volgari: Fatti da diversi bellissimi ingegni nella felice Vittoria riportata da Christiani contra Turchi alli VII d'Ottobre del MDLXXI*, Venezia 1572; *In foedus et victoriam contra Turcas iuxta sinum corinthiacum* Non. Octob. MDLXXI partam *Poemata varia*, Venezia 1572.

27 The first edition frontispiece dated 1570, but likely presented the text as a prophecy of the future Christian victory over the Turks; on this hypothesis, cf. Gibellini, *L'immagine di Lepanto* (see note 23), p. 23.

28 „Il bellissimo et sontuoso trionfo fatto nella magnifica città di Venetia nella pubblicazione della Lega, con tutti i particolari degni che in simile negozio sono occorsi“, Venezia 1571.

29 „Oratione funebre del Mag. M. Paolo Paruta in laude de' morti nella vittoriosa battaglia contra Turchi seguita a Curzolari l'anno 1571 alli 7 d'ottobre“, Venezia 1572. However, the „Oratione“ was perhaps never actually delivered and should be considered as a rhetorical exercise from a later period; on this, see

The portrayal of the Turks in the propagandistic literature surrounding Lepanto emphasises three main characteristics: a lack of *pietas*, cowardice, and military inadequacy. The first point is particularly evident in the verses celebrating the martyrdom of Venetian governor Marcantonio Bragadin (1523–1571) following the Ottoman occupation of Famagusta in August 1571.³⁰ Bragadin's tragic and gruesome execution, which shocked the Venetians and spurred a more resolute stance against the Porte, transformed him into a secular martyr, depicted according to the Christological conventions of *passio*. At the same time, his brutal martyrdom served as a means to underscore the cruelty and barbarity of the Turkish general Lala Kara Mustafa Pasha (c. 1500–1580) and, more broadly, the entire Ottoman people, in contrast to the Christian *pietas* of the Venetians. Regarding the second and third points, the *zeitgeist* is captured in the anonymous verses of the „Raccolta di varii poemi“, which consolidated the main themes of the anti-Turkish tradition in Venetian literature, while also celebrating the naval forces of the Serenissima. This is evident in the poem „Hor mi darete ben Signor, la mancia“,³¹ which contained clear allusions to the outcome of the battle, with exaggerated details on the number of Ottoman dead and prisoners juxtaposed with the limited losses of the Christian coalition, and polemical jabs at Ottoman cowardice, vividly portrayed through the flight of the Viceroy of Algiers.

The image of the Ottoman Empire that emerged from this vast body of literature was, on the whole, largely shaped by stereotypes and aligned with a long rhetorical tradition that portrayed the Turk as the ultimate enemy of Christendom.³² From the fifteenth to the sixteenth century, numerous Christian accounts of the Ottoman conquest of Constantinople denounced its cruelty and barbarism; in a more general way, the Turk was perceived both as the embodiment of an exotic and inaccessible world, and as the incarnation of a degenerate form of humanity, definable by the expression

Claudio Marazzini, *La lingua degli stati italiani. L'uso pubblico e burocratico prima dell'Unità*, in: Gabriella Alfieri/Arnold Cassola (Eds.), *La lingua d'Italia. Usi pubblici e istituzionali. Atti del XXIX Congresso della Società di linguistica italiana* (Malta, 3–5 novembre 1995), Roma 1998, pp. 1–27. Based on a detailed linguistic analysis, Marazzini rules out the possibility that Paruta's oration might have been a real one, due to the absence of deictics such as greetings to authorities and the particularly elaborate style. The absence of Paruta's oration among those cited by Paruta himself in his „Storia“ supports this observation. For a discussion of the *Oratione funebre* and the debate over its public delivery, see Marco Giani, *L'Oratione funebre per i patrizi veneziani caduti a Lepanto, di Paolo Paruta (1572). Storia editoriale e discussione sull'eventuale esecuzione pubblica*, in: *Archivio Veneto serie VI* 14 (2017), pp. 13–30.

³⁰ Gibellini, *L'immagine di Lepanto* (see note 23), pp. 35–37.

³¹ *Raccolta di varii poemi latini e volgari, fatti da diversi bellissimi ingegni nella felice vittoria reportata da Christiani contra Turchi, Venezia 1571*, fol. 41v–42v.

³² For a general overview of the perception of the Turks in early modern Italy, see Mustafa Soykut, *Image of the „Turk“ in Italy. A History of the „Other“ in Early Modern Europe, 1453–1683*, Berlin 2001; for a broader European framework, see Andrei Pippidi (Ed.), *Visions of the Ottoman World in Renaissance Europe*, Oxford 2013.

immane genus, which is found widely in anti-Turkish literature from the mid-fifteenth to the sixteenth centuries.³³

The Rhetorical Scope of the Venetian *Relazioni* from Constantinople

The War of Cyprus also represented a turning point for the genre of Venetian *relazioni*, as can be seen from the rapid rise in their circulation beyond Venetian archives amongst private collections and libraries throughout Europe.³⁴ From a rhetorical perspective, the reports of ambassadors from Constantinople regarding the War of Cyprus incorporated aspects of the anti-Ottoman rhetorical tradition,³⁵ while simultaneously serving, as has been demonstrated, as a crucial vehicle for the circulation of ethnographic information and a model for other forms of ethnographic writing.³⁶ The most widespread *topos* in the late sixteenth-century reports from Constantinople was the observation of the Ottoman Empire's decline and its degeneration, in accordance with the rhetorical formula of the *laudatio temporis acti*. This emphasis on the Ottoman „crisis“, which replaced the focus on the sequence of conquests and the invincibility of the Turkish enemy following major Ottoman military victories of the 1520s and 1530s (Belgrade, 1521; Rhodes, 1522; Mohács, 1526; Preveza, 1538), recurred frequently, particularly in the reports from the years and decades following Lepanto. This was especially true for those of three *baili* – Marcantonio Barbaro (1573), Paolo Contarini (1583), and Lorenzo Bernardo (1592) – laying the groundwork for a theme that would come to characterise Ottoman historiography.³⁷ The reasons for this crisis were attributed to different causes: demographic decline and land abandonment (Marcantonio Barbaro),³⁸ moral decay (Paolo Contarini),³⁹ or the

33 On the rise of this pattern, see Constantinos Apostolos Patrides, „The Bloody and Cruell Turke“. The Background of a Renaissance Commonplace, in: *Studies in the Renaissance* 10 (1963), pp. 126–135.

34 As shown by De Vivo (How to Read [see note 6], pp. 42–47), these documents were beginning to have a substantial market. On the circulation of Venetian archival materials at this time, with particular reference to the period around the War of Cyprus, see Fabio Antonini, A Diplomatic Narrative in the Archive. The War of Cyprus, Record Keeping Practices, and Historical Research in the Early Modern Venetian Chancery, in: Sowerby/Craigwood (Eds.), *Cultures of Diplomacy* (see note 7), pp. 160–172.

35 Benzoni, Ranke's Favorite Source (see note 5).

36 Kathryn Taylor, *Ordering Customs. Ethnographic Thought in Early Modern Venice*, Newark 2023. Taylor shows that, throughout the sixteenth century, ambassadors increasingly focused on ethnographic matters, paying close attention to the customs, religious practices, dietary habits, and clothing styles of the states in which they served.

37 For an overview of this tradition, see Michel Lesure, *Lépante. La crise de l'Empire ottoman*, Paris 2013.

38 Albèri (Ed.), *Le relazioni* (see note 18), ser. 3, vol. 1, p. 313.

39 *Ibid.*, vol. 3, p. 227.

decline of military units, primarily the prestigious Janissary infantry corps (Lorenzo Bernardo).⁴⁰

The motif of the Ottoman „crisis“ found rhetorical support in the descriptions given of the physiognomy of the Sultan and court dignitaries, which often adopted a moralistic tone. For example, the melancholic face of Suleiman (1494–1566) suggested to Ambassador Bernardo Navagero, returning from Constantinople in 1549, a premonition of a possible anti-Venetian turn in Ottoman foreign policy.⁴¹ The physicality of Selim II (1524–1574), Suleiman's successor and a proponent of breaking the peace with Venice, appeared even more portentous to the Venetian diplomats.⁴² Both the description offered by extraordinary ambassador Andrea Badoer and that by *bailo* Marcantonio Barbaro subtly alluded, through a nuanced physiognomic rhetoric emphasising Selim's unpleasant appearance, to his dissolute habits and, in a broader sense, to the inherent corruption of the empire,⁴³ a depiction that was mirrored in the private report of another member of Badoer's mission, Venetian senator Costantino Garzoni.⁴⁴

In terms of *dispositio*, the Venetian ambassadors' reports adhered to a conventional order. From a macrotextual perspective, it is possible to identify a basic scheme common to most sixteenth- and seventeenth-century reports from Constantinople: a) a solemn preamble, in which the diplomatic agent described the journey to Constantinople, expressed devotion to the Republic, and reiterated gratitude for the assignment, often using rhetorical devices such as *captatio benevolentiae* and self-diminishment; b) a descriptive-argumentative section, where the Sultan, his family, the court, and the viziers were described, and a survey of the land and naval forces, an economic-financial analysis of revenues and expenses, and an overview of the Sublime Porte's diplomatic relations with other nations were provided; c) an apologetic section, where the diplomatic agent summed up his actions, often pleading for clemency for any mistakes made during his mandate; d) a concluding *peroratio*, expressing thanks to the Senate and reaffirming the importance of the role performed, by making use of *devotio* and *diminutio*. In this section, a report of the hardships faced or of the illnesses contracted during service could be included to emphasise dedication to the diplomatic mission.

This semi-rigid structure, formalised as an ideal model as described in a sixteenth-century Marciana manuscript attesting to the „Ricordi per ambasciatori“,⁴⁵ with

⁴⁰ Ibid., vol. 2, pp. 332 f.

⁴¹ Ibid., vol. 1, p. 35; see also Hampton, *Fictions of Embassy* (see note 7), p. 26.

⁴² For a general overview of Ottoman historiography and its themes, cf. Pedani, *Note di storiografia sull'Impero ottomano*, in: *Mediterranea. Ricerche storiche* 34 (2015), pp. 445–458. The reason for the progressive decline of the Ottoman Empire starting from the age of Suleiman, which Pedani primarily attributes, within Turkish historiography, to Ahmet Refik (ibid., p. 447), is in fact already well attested in the reports, which appear to be quite consistent on this point.

⁴³ Albèri (Ed.), *Le relazioni* (see note 18), ser. 3, vol. 1, pp. 360 f.

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 403.

⁴⁵ Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana, Marc. It. VI, 187, fol. 245–251.

a brief epilogue summarising key information for a report, could be supplemented by additional sections to expand, when necessary, the range of information to be relayed to the motherland.⁴⁶ Some reports included, for instance, a historical excursus on the Ottoman dynasty, while others presented a geographical survey of the empire's territory, whose relevance is understandable given the exotic nature of the locations described.⁴⁷ Reports submitted after particularly sensitive mandates or near decisive events also included references to the historical-political context, as in the case of *bailo* Marcantonio Barbaro's report (1573), which devoted significant space to the sequence of events surrounding the War of Cyprus and the Battle of Lepanto.⁴⁸

In some cases, reports not only adhered to a conventional formulaic model but also repeated verbatim passages from a previous report. Indeed, it was not uncommon for newly appointed ambassadors to consult the reports preserved in the *Segreta* in preparation for their diplomatic mission.⁴⁹ It is striking to observe how, three decades later, Lorenzo Bernardo's *relazione* (1592) copied almost word-for-word the remarks of Marino Cavalli regarding the Ottoman system of recruitment and promotion within the military:

„In this matter, I would like your Lordships to act like the Turk, who from vile slaves and the abject creates and makes excellent captains, *sanjak-beys*, and *beylerbeys*, giving them all the credit, status, and reputation; and thus he never fears being abandoned or betrayed by his own, for no one would know how to live or breathe if they left their master.“ (Marino Cavalli, 1560)⁵⁰

„It would be good if this Most Serene Republic, imitating in this part that Great Lord, who from this sort of people, his slaves, creates and makes excellent captains, *sanjak-beys*, and *beylerbeys*, giving them credit and reputation in this way, would also take care of its private citizens, giving them ranks and authority, for in this way the Republic would be served faithfully, without bribes, without desertions, and without betrayals.“ (Lorenzo Bernardo, 1592)⁵¹

⁴⁶ It should be noted that the rhetorical formalisation of ambassadorial reports can be considered a crucial and distinctive aspect of Venetian diplomatic writing, unlike what is observed in other chancelleries of Renaissance Italy (e. g. Milan, Florence, Rome, Naples). A comparison between different writing cultures allows to highlight some of the characteristic features of Venetian diplomatic writings (e. g. for a comparison of diplomatic writings around the first War of Castro, see Caroline Callard, *Diplomacy and Scribal Culture. Venice and Florence, Two Cultures of Political Writings*, in: *Italian Studies* 66,2 [2011], pp. 249–262).

⁴⁷ A historical survey can be found in a few reports, as in those by Antonio Tiepolo (1576), which contains an excursus on the rise of the Turks and their successes in the Byzantine-Ottoman wars, and by Lorenzo Bernardo (1592), in which a history of the empire is outlined from the origins of the Osman dynasty.

⁴⁸ Albèri (Ed.), *Le relazioni* (see note 18), ser. 3, vol. 1, pp. 300 f.

⁴⁹ Dursteler, *Describing or Distorting the „Turk“* (see note 8), p. 239.

⁵⁰ Albèri (Ed.), *Le relazioni* (see note 18), ser. 3, vol. 1, p. 283. This and all subsequent translations from the text are my own („vorrei in questa parte che vostre signorie facessero come fa il Turco, che di vili schiavi ed abietti crea e fa ottimi capitani, sangiacchi e *beilerbei*, dando lui ad essi tutto il credito, l'essere e la riputazione; e così non dubita mai di essere abbandonato, né tradito dai suoi, perché niuno sapria vivere né respirare partendosi dal suo signore“).

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, vol. 2, pp. 358 f. („saria bene, che anco questa serenissima repubblica, imitando in questa parte quel Gran Signore, il qual in questa sorte di gente suoi schiavi crea e fa ottimi capitani, sangiacchi e

Besides the schemes regulating the macrotextual organisation of reports, some rhetorical devices recur with notable frequency across a significant portion of the corpus. The primary one is the advice to the Venetian Senate, introduced by formulaic expressions consisting predominantly in politeness formulas, litotes, or preteritions,⁵² where the *bailo* or ambassador proposed recommendations based on the information gathered during their mandate. Regarding the reports from Constantinople during the War of Cyprus, the advice might concern, among other things, the adoption of a practice (e. g. the custom of diplomatic gifts), a specific foreign policy line (e. g. safeguarding the peace treaty with the Ottomans), or a domestic policy stance (e. g. promoting social mobility and access to military leadership positions across all social classes).

In addition to the advice, the authors of the reports could draw on a wide range of rhetorical devices, such as *enumeratio* (e. g. listing the Ottoman military assets), *partitio* (e. g. opposing two poles in an argument, such as accidental causes and ordinary causes of conflicts), *insinuatio* (e. g. suggesting a hidden judgment by the viziers or the Sultan), *concessio* (e. g. acknowledging the readiness of the Ottoman subjects to bear heavy taxation, provided it was not enforced through despotic oppression), and hyperbole (e. g. overstating the military unpreparedness of the Turks). Frequent use of tropes, primarily metaphor and simile – sometimes particularly refined and complex – complemented the ambassadors' rhetorical toolkit. It is also important not to overlook the inclusion of proverbs („where the Ottoman horse sets foot, no grass grows“,⁵³ just to mention one reported by Marcantonio Barbaro) and anecdotes, sometimes of questionable plausibility: for instance, Lorenzo Bernardo, to illustrate the Turks' willingness to sacrifice themselves for their faith, referred to generic „stories“ in which Turks allegedly acted as human bridges to allow their comrades to cross a river.⁵⁴

During the oral presentation of the report to the *Pregadi*, the dimension of *actio* also played a crucial role. It is not unreasonable to imagine, as De Vivo suggests, *bailo* Simone Contarini, returning from Constantinople in 1616, opening his arms and addressing the audience to lay out a representation of the world, which he intended to depict „as in a theater“. ⁵⁵ At a more general level, information of a proxemic and extra-textual nature regarding relationships can be obtained from external testimonies, such as those that frequently appear in the observations of contemporary chroniclers, primarily in Marino

beilerbei, dando loro per questa via credito e riputazione, così ancor lei si curasse dei privati e bassi uomini col dar loro gradi ed autorità, perché così la repubblica saria servita fedelmente senza taglie, senza fughe e senza tradimenti“).

52 („dico che ...“, „non bisogna pensare ...“, „non per questo dovremo ...“, „né pensino le signorie vostre eccellentissime che ...“, „questa è cosa necessaria ma il modo è ben da considerarsi ...“).

53 Albèri (Ed.), *Le relazioni* (see note 18), ser. 3, vol. 1, p. 309.

54 *Ibid.*, vol. 2, p. 367.

55 De Vivo, *How to Read* (see note 6), p. 31.

Sanudo's „Diarii“, where information on the clarity and speed of speeches and on the manner of presenting them before assemblies is often reported.⁵⁶

The Historiographical Scope of the Venetian *Relazioni* from Constantinople

The image of the Turkish-Venetian conflict as shaped by the diplomatic reports surrounding the War of Cyprus appears, however, strikingly lucid and pragmatic when compared to the Venetian propaganda literature. Despite relying on an established formulaic structure, common *topoi*, and rhetorical tropes, the ambassadors' accounts do not seem reducible to a mere refined exercise in style adorned with the usual *clichés* about the Turk.⁵⁷ The issue is therefore to what extent these texts deliberately and consciously served as bearers of a historiographical consciousness that was not influenced by ideological bias.⁵⁸

In the first place, the reports concerning the 1570–1573 Turkish-Venetian war display a surprising awareness on the part of Venetian diplomatic agents of the gravity of the political situation, as well as a keen understanding of the balance of power and the interests at play in the *détente* process that led to the peace agreement of 1573. Returning to Venice in the same year, the *bailo* Marcantonio Barbaro (1568–1573) recognised, through a subtle analysis of the causes of the crisis – i. e., the demographic, financial, and administrative weaknesses of the Ottoman Empire, and the loss of momentum of the Turkish expansionist force –, the empire's unpreparedness for the conflict.⁵⁹ In this favorable

⁵⁶ A complete survey of these observations in Sanudo's „Diarii“ cannot be conducted here, given the size of the text. For the edition of the work, refer to *I Diarii di Marino Sanudo*, ed. by Rinaldo Fulin et al., 58 vols., Venezia 1879–1903.

⁵⁷ It is precisely in light of the analytical clarity found in the *relazioni* that it has been suggested that the reports from Constantinople gradually came to play a decisive role in moving beyond the earlier, admiring portrayals of the sultan and his empire, laying the groundwork for his depiction as a monstrous tyrant – an idea which lies at the heart of Lucette Valensi's argument in: *Venise et la Sublime Porte. La naissance du despote*, Paris 1987.

⁵⁸ At a general level, the theoretical framework for interpreting literature on the East as conditioned by ideological biases can be found in Edward Said's seminal work, *Orientalism* (London 1978), and in its successful reception. It is, in any case, an older and more debated historiographical issue that has sometimes overlapped with the problem of the Ottoman „decline“, as emerges, for instance, from the 1970s controversy that saw Roger Owen oppose Hamilton Gibb and Harold Bowen, centered primarily on the legitimacy of key traditional Orientalist assumptions, such as the notion that Islamic cultural creativity culminated in the early medieval era (see Roger Owen, *The Middle East in the Eighteenth Century. An „Islamic“ Society in Decline? A Critique of Gibb and Bowen's „Islamic Society and the West“*, in: *Bulletin [British Society for Middle Eastern Studies]* 3,2 [1976], pp. 110–117).

⁵⁹ „These Turks come to acknowledge their weakness when they are oppressed by some misfortune, and then, setting aside their pride and arrogance, they confess the advantages that Christians have in better

context, the Venetians were advised to maintain a firm yet pragmatic stance, akin to the skillful balance evoked by the metaphor of playing with a glass ball, which aptly illustrated the nature of Turkish-Venetian relations at the time of Barbaro's appointment.⁶⁰ After Lepanto and during the negotiations led by the senator (and envoy as extraordinary ambassador) Andrea Badoer, *bailo* Antonio Tiepolo (1573–1575) also supported, while recognising the need for a prudent policy that closely monitored the Sultan's true interests, the realistic need to preserve the framework established by the 1573 negotiations.⁶¹ This position was broadly shared by his successors' *relazioni* (Giovanni Correr: 1575–1577; Niccolò Barbarigo: 1577–1579; Paolo Contarini: 1580–1582).

Additional factors contribute to corroborating the factual dimension of the discourse developed in the *relazioni*. Firstly, the ability of ambassadors to set aside, when necessary, the rhetorical conventions of the genre. For example, Antonio Tiepolo, in presenting his report from Constantinople in 1575, stated that he would omit the description of the Seraglio, the court, and the empire's wealth, as these had already been reported in other accounts – a disavowal of a model that, conversely, confirms its authority.⁶² Furthermore, the diachronic evolution in perspective observed in the sixteenth-century reports helps to challenge the idea of a static image solely serving to reinforce *clichés* about the empire. Particularly revealing is the portrait of Suleiman, who in early sixteenth-century reports was depicted through the vices typically associated with the Grand Turk in the Venetian perception (lust, anger, pride, greed),⁶³ whereas these traits tend to fade in later reports, where the Sultan begins to be recognised for qualities outside the usual anti-Ottoman rhetoric, such as virtue and wisdom.⁶⁴

Another crucial analytical tool is the evaluation of the proximity or even correspondence of the information conveyed by the Venetian reports with Ottoman historiography. This comparison highlights, among other things, that some of the judgments

terms when fighting, both in defense and in attacking the enemy, in the quality and manner of handling artillery, and many other things that I shall leave unsaid." (Albèri [Ed.], *Le relazioni* [see note 18], ser. 3, vol. 1, p. 308).

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 341.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, vol. 2, pp. 174 f.

⁶² Dursteler, *Describing or Distorting the „Turk“* (see note 8), p. 243.

⁶³ In this perspective, the report by the *bailo* Daniello de' Ludovisi (1534) places Suleiman as short-tempered, idle, of limited intelligence, and imprudent (Albèri [Ed.], *Le relazioni* [see note 18], ser. 3, vol. 1, p. 28). Approximate and wavering judgments, based on an overall suspicious assessment, also emerge from the first reports received, such as those whose summaries were published by Albèri in the third volume of his edited series on the *relazioni* from Constantinople: Pietro Zen (1524, 1530), Pietro Bragadino (1526), and Marco Minio (1527).

⁶⁴ This more objective attitude in the description of Suleiman can be observed, for example, in the report by Bernardo Navagero (1553), in which his sobriety, temperance, equanimity, and loyalty are highlighted (Albèri [Ed.], *Le relazioni* [see note 18], ser. 3, vol. 1, pp. 72–74), and in that of his successor Domenico Trevisan (1554), who more succinctly emphasises Suleiman's humanity and benevolence (*ibid.*, pp. 114 f.).

expressed by Venetian diplomats found a symmetrical counterpart on the Ottoman side, particularly in the description of abuses and corrupt practices in administration, which emerge in what has been termed „qānūn consciousness“.⁶⁵ The idea of the Ottoman decline in the post-Suleimanic age and around the Cyprus War actually appears, contrary to what was claimed by the Orientalist school, to be a predominantly indigenous conception, developed within the framework of literature on Ottoman decline from the mid-sixteenth century, and subsequently consolidated in national historiography between the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries.⁶⁶ In this perspective, the motif of denouncing the corruption of public administration, which in the late sixteenth century appears in several Venetian *relazioni*, from Marino Cavalli (1562) to Lorenzo Bernardo (1592), is equally evident among the writers of the Ottoman decline in the late sixteenth century, starting with the *Âşafnâme*,⁶⁷ a treatise by one of Suleiman's grand viziers, Lütü Pasha (1488–1564), which can be considered as an example of an Ottoman *speculum principis* from which a successful literary tradition focusing on the crisis of the Porte emerged. The internal analysis of the Ottoman Empire, mirroring the Venetian one, highlighted some of the key points in the *bailo* reports and confirmed, to some extent, their reliability, even beyond the rhetorical framework in which the discourse of the diplomatic agents was situated.

Venetian Domestic Debate in the 1570s: Reading *Baili's Relazioni* as a Contribution to Political Discourse

The discourse developed by the Venetian diplomatic agents thus appears to be embedded within a well-articulated rhetorical logic. However, it cannot be reduced to an exclusively rhetorical reading, nor to a neopositivistic interpretation that emphasises its primarily documentary value. To make some preliminary observations regarding this, it is therefore necessary to introduce two key elements into the analysis that allow for a better understanding of the nature of the Venetian ambassadorial report: the purpose and the audience of *relazioni*.

In terms of purpose, the *relazioni* played a fundamental role in influencing Venetian foreign policy. They were, indeed, the only formal means of communicating information on the internal political developments and foreign policy strategies of the countries

⁶⁵ On this, see Douglas A. Howard, Ottoman Historiography and the Literature of „Decline“ of the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Century, in: *Journal of Asian History* 22,1 (1988), pp. 52–77.

⁶⁶ On the not strictly Eurocentric origins and the formative role of the early modern Istanbulite milieu in shaping the Orientalist paradigm, see Natalie Rothman, *The Dragoman Renaissance*, Ithaca 2021.

⁶⁷ For the first edition of the text, see Rudolf Tschudi, *Das Asafname des Lutfi Pasha*, Leipzig 1910.

with which Venice maintained bilateral relations, either through permanent legations or through diplomatic agents entrusted with ad hoc missions. This functional logic allows for a different interpretation of some of the rhetorical strategies employed by the ambassadors. The need to adhere to a formulaic structure and to repeatedly review the institutional, bureaucratic, and administrative structures, as well as the naval and land forces of the empire (*enumeratio*), for instance, should be seen as a tactic based on the logic of exposition before collegial bodies, whose elective and *ex officio* members underwent periodic changes.⁶⁸ In the same vein, the rhetorical verve of certain descriptions of sultans (*hypotiposis*) should be understood not so much as a celebratory tool intrinsic to epideictic (i. e., *laudatio* or *vituperatio*), but rather as a strategy for constructing a discourse that makes sense when viewed as a form of deliberative rhetoric – in the case at hand, to outline the degree of seriousness of the interlocutor, thus allowing listeners to immediately visualise their reliability (as in the late descriptions of Suleiman) or lack of reliability (as in all the descriptions of Selim II). The need to transpose the relationships into written form completed the picture, promoting rhetorical formalisation in the transition from the oral to the written form.⁶⁹ The subtle work of rhetorical structuring should therefore be seen here as a second step in the stylistic and ideological building of the discourse, which was conceived to encourage the pursuit of the *honesta* and *utilia*.

Regarding the question of audience, the privileged recipients of the ambassadorial reports were primarily those senators whom Paruta described as „men of sound and mature judgment, who measured future outcomes by past experiences“.⁷⁰ These senators, however, were not unanimous regarding the policy of pacification, and, for them, the *relazione* – and its rhetorical scope – had to serve as a persuasive tool. This diversity of perspectives is also reflected in the official historiography of the Serenissima, where a similar stance took shape, with Paruta himself suggesting a conciliatory approach after Lepanto in relation to the Turkish enemy, while decrying those who advocated for the renewal of the Christian alliance and the prolongation of conflict against the Ottomans.⁷¹

To better understand these dynamics, it seems relevant to make some remarks on the general historical context. The negotiations leading to the peace with the Turks in 1573 were conducted in secret by the Council of Ten, which had gradually assumed an increasing role in managing Venetian foreign policy since the years preceding the War

68 For a comprehensive look at the functioning of the Venetian governing bodies in the sixteenth century from a historical perspective, see Victor Crescenzi, „Esse de maiori consilio“. Legittimità civile e legittimazione politica nella Repubblica di Venezia (secc. XIII–XVI), Roma 1996; from a sociological perspective, see Edward Muir, Civic Ritual in Renaissance Venice, Princeton 1981, pp. 185–211.

69 For an insight on the transition from oral to written forms in the *relazioni*, see again De Vivo's seminal study, How to read (see note 6), especially pp. 30–33, and the linguistic remarks of Luca D'Onghia, Note linguistiche e testuali (see note 15).

70 Paolo Paruta, Storia della guerra di Cipro. Libri tre, Siena 1827, p. 413.

71 Ibid., p. 306.

of the League of Cambrai.⁷² However, dissatisfaction with the unfavorable terms of the peace and with the decisive role played by the Council of Ten in the secret negotiations fueled discontent among certain members of the Senate, where opinions were more diverse. The 1570s, therefore, saw growing tension between two competing political visions, linked to the two poles of the *res publica* and *racion di stato*, embodied respectively by the Senate and the Council of Ten. This confrontation, which took political shape in the opposition between the two generations of the „old“ and the „young“, saw the rapid rise of the latter starting in the late 1570s.⁷³ Beyond the debate on the greater or lesser perfection of the mixed government and its variants, the discussion seemed predominantly focused on the interpretation of the competencies of the deliberative and governmental bodies and the primacy of one body over another.⁷⁴ Evidently, this was not an idle debate, but rather a confrontation aimed at finding a formula that would ensure the competitiveness of the Venetian system among the rise of new absolutist models represented by European courts, as well as offer a solution to the weaknesses of a system that the Cyprus crisis and the cautious handling of negotiations had revealed as extremely fragile and subordinate.⁷⁵

Thus, the convergence toward a common position, such as the Ottoman *détente* that characterised Venetian diplomacy after the 1573 peace, should not overshadow a crucial aspect of these reports, which reveals a far more problematic ideological framework. Beyond addressing issues in the international sphere, these reports often alluded to pressing matters of internal politics through a subtle game of allusions, references, and veiled remarks about Venetian political debates. Alongside the explicit advice to the Senate, rhetorically recognisable through customary formal phrases, many reports often subtly allude to Venice's internal context. By following the prudential principle of *de te fabula narratur*, the diplomatic agent indirectly proposed a moderate suggestion to the Senate, marking a personal position while simultaneously contributing to the debate on the efficiency and prerogatives of the councils.

In several reports from Constantinople, the problem of a radical opposition between the political-institutional system of the Serenissima and that of the Ottoman Empire emerges clearly, as does the incompatibility of two alternative models for identifying

72 Antonio Conzato, Sulle „faccende“ da „praticare occultamente“. Il Consiglio dei Dieci, il Senato e la politica estera veneziana (1503–1509), in: Studi veneziani 55 (2008), pp. 83–165.

73 See William J. Bouwsma, Venice and the Defense of Republican Liberty, Berkeley 1968, especially chapters III and IV (pp. 162–292).

74 Dorit Raines, Il patriziato veneziano tra eredità repubblicana e modelli monarchici, in: Dimensioni e problemi della ricerca storica 2 (2023), pp. 109–147, at pp. 127–131.

75 On the awareness of the crisis of the republican model and the emergence of the principality system in the Italian area within the Venetian patriciate, see again the fundamental considerations of Ventura, Scrittori politici (see note 5). For a framework of the issue from a legal-institutional perspective, see especially Claudio Povoio, Un sistema giuridico repubblicano. Venezia e il suo stato territoriale (secoli XV–XVIII), in: Italo Birocchi/Antonello Mattone (Eds.), Il diritto patrio tra diritto comune e codificazione (secoli XVI–XIX), Roma 2006, pp. 297–353.

and selecting both civil and military ruling class. This was a particularly sensitive issue for the Venetian patriciate in the late sixteenth century, which was grappling with a process of rethinking its identity and role. A particularly telling example is the advice offered by *bailo* Marino Cavalli upon his return from Constantinople in 1560, who proposed the introduction of a meritocratic system for military promotion, as opposed to one based on social rank. This suggestion ran counter to the aristocratic system that governed military careers in Venice, where officer roles were almost exclusively reserved for Venetian patricians.⁷⁶ Similarly, Lorenzo Bernardo's report emphasised the need to introduce career advancement dynamics in the Venetian military that were independent of social class, comparing military skill to equestrian competence and arguing that „in war, neither the duke nor the soldier is spared from being cut to pieces, but the victor is the one who knows how to compete“.⁷⁷

Opposed to this logic of opening up command positions to non-traditional forms of participation were several *relazioni*, most notably Marcantonio Barbaro's one. Barbaro recognised in the Ottoman system of selecting the ruling class through the *devşirme* (recruitment of Christian slaves) an inherent weakness of the empire, as it elevated to government ranks „people born ignoble, inexperienced, abject, servile, devoid by nature of knowledge of governance, justice, or religion“.⁷⁸ A few decades later, in his report upon returning from his mission as *bailo* in Constantinople in 1612, Simon Contarini expressed similar disdain for the social ascent of lower classes and ethnic-religious minorities (such as the Jewish community) in the empire, which he considered unacceptable within the predominantly oligarchic framework that governed Venice's magistracies and military careers.⁷⁹ Like Barbaro, Contarini condemned the rise of military officers, officials, and magistrates through the co-optation of the prince, contrasting it with the horizontal model typical of an aristocratic republic like Venice. Contarini viewed the Serenissima as embodying an ideal system based on respect for hierarchy and the primacy of a narrow aristocracy, which involved free citizens – unlike the Ottoman model, where the fortunes of a multitude of slaves were subject to the sultan's discretion, who had power of life and death over them. Supporting this view, several reports emphasised the condition of Ottoman slaves, who were recognised as having the advantage of accessing the civil and military *cursus honorum* but were, at the same time, entirely dependent on the sultan for their „wealth, life, and honors, just as all created things take their strength from the sun“, as Barbaro described it.⁸⁰ For the *Pregadi* gathered to hear the report, these words would have resonated as an implicit

⁷⁶ Albèri (Ed.), *Le relazioni* (see note 18), ser. 3, vol. 1, p. 283.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, vol. 2, p. 359.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, vol. 1, p. 317.

⁷⁹ Barozzi/Berchet (Eds.), *Relazioni* (see note 19), ser. 5, vol. 1, p. 183.

⁸⁰ Albèri (Ed.), *Le relazioni* (see note 18), ser. 3, vol. 1, pp. 327 f.

celebration of Venetian supremacy, based on the consular management of power in the hands of free men.

Reports from the Ottoman Empire, in addressing the issue of military career advancement, also indirectly touched upon the topic of republican constitutional order, its degenerations, and its ideal forms. The Ottoman Empire, in this context, embodied the paradigm of monarchical government in a phase of degeneration, trapped between the hypertrophy of the sultan's power (or, in cases of weakness, that of the grand vizier) and the rise to government roles of minorities and individuals who, in the eyes of a late-sixteenth-century Venetian patrician, lacked the nobility essential to command. A similar strategy of indirect reflection on constitutional models can also be seen in the reports of ambassadors sent to other courts: for example, from the late sixteenth century onwards, the Grand Duchy of Tuscany represented an alternative form of government to Venice's republican-oligarchic system. This model found support among some segments of the city's aristocracy, which were not averse to the prospect of a more radically oligarchic evolution of the Venetian institutional order, following the aristocratic-authoritarian model envisioned in the late fifteenth century by Domenico Morosini in his „De bene instituta re publica“,⁸¹ a model welcomed by those advocating for strengthening the powers of the Council. In the eyes of the ambassador Francesco Barbaro (son of Marcantonio), almost recalling Contarini's ideal of division of powers expressed in his treatise „Della repubblica et magistrati di Venezia“, late-sixteenth-century Savoy embodied the perfect synthesis and integration of a mixed government, capable of ensuring a reasonable distribution of responsibilities among constitutional bodies.⁸²

Conclusion

Was Manolesso, then, right to claim the factual nature of his discourse and to contrast it with the intrinsically rhetorical scope of the orator's speech? In the case of the *relazioni* from Constantinople regarding the War of Cyprus that have been examined, the rhetorical dimension of the genre stands out particularly due to the use of canonical themes drawn from the anti-Ottoman tradition (e. g. the unreliability of the Turks), a semi-rigid *dispositio* of the discourse, established rhetorical devices (e. g. the *consilium* to the Senate), and a sophisticated tropism (e. g. the frequent use of metaphors and similes), which reveals a not insignificant attention to stylistic and formal aspects.

⁸¹ The reference is to the treatise written by Morosini between 1497 and 1509 and left in manuscript form, before being edited by Claudio Finzi (Milano 1969). On Morosini's work, see Gaetano Cozzi, Domenico Morosini and the „De bene instituta re publica“, in: Studi Veneziani 12 (1970), pp. 405–458.

⁸² For the text of Francesco Barbaro's report, see the „Relazione della corte di Savoia di Francesco Barbaro tornato ambasciatore nel 1581“, in: Eugenio Albreri (Ed.), Le relazioni degli ambasciatori veneti al Senato, ser. 2, vol. 5, Firenze 1858, pp. 75–96.

At the same time, the reports demonstrate a clarity and sharpness that highlight their primary function in influencing Venetian foreign policy (e. g. the *consilia* on the Ottoman *détente*), occasionally consciously deviating from rhetorical conventions, and showing a particularly dynamic diachronic evolution (e. g. in the physiognomy of the sultans).

How, then, can this dual nature of the reports be accounted for? First, the audience for whom they were originally intended must be considered: the members of the *Pre-gadi*.⁸³ The heterogeneity of the senators' positions regarding the stance to take toward the Porte, which became especially evident after the 1573 peace and resulted in the split between the „old“ and the „young“, required, on the ambassadorial side, an effort of persuasion that purely factual discourse could not achieve. Alongside this persuasive strategy, the reports also reveal a desire to participate in the ongoing internal debate on the ideal model of government and reflections on the effectiveness of Venice's constitutional bodies.

When discussing the dynamics of progression in the Ottoman military and the rise of Christian slaves (involved in the *devşirme* practice) to positions of government, and frequently dwelling on the discretionary power of the sultan, the ambassadors took the opportunity to implicitly refer to the Venetian system, both to highlight its limitations and suggest potential reforms (e. g. Cavalli, Bernardo), and to assert its superiority over the empire (e. g. Barbaro, Valier). Far from being, as Ranke claimed, a factual description of history „as it is“, but equally not mere rhetorical constructions unsuited to conveying a discourse of factual value, the reports seem to require a multi-layered reading that considers not only the primary need to direct foreign policy, but also the *relazione* as a form of deliberative oratory aimed at influencing Senate debates, illustrating the speaker's position, and contributing to internal political discourse.

⁸³ The reception – and thus, specifically, the audience (in the oral context) and the readers (in the written context) – of the *relazioni* therefore plays a central role in the analysis of the texts, as convincingly highlighted by De Vivo in *How to read* (see note 6).