
Spatial identities in the nineteenth century: Venice as a case study

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ABSTRACT *We have drawn our attention to the historiographies of Venice written in that city in the nineteenth and early twentieth century and have offered to read Venice as a synecdoche for Italy. It was Venice's very uniqueness and specificity that made it possible to exploit it as a case study: it was revealing to consider the most distinctive as the most typical. Our objective was to explore the relationship between different sorts of spatial identity as reflected in historical texts; in particular, we wanted to show that the local did not necessarily stand in opposition to the national during a period of national unification and consolidation. The various phases we have identified within Venetian historiography show how the field of historical studies was used for debates and constructions of spatial identities. In reality, the main narrative changed little, but the interpretations drawn from it followed very diverse paths, and the key concepts used proved highly polysemic and flexible, allowing change within an apparent continuum. Many tropes dear to the Risorgimento canon were hardly found in Venetian historiography, which presented a very singular model: but this singularity was considered as a strength at the service of «Italianness» and gave a powerful example of what Italians were able to do.*

Introduction

If it goes without saying that Venice is a highly specific city geographically and historically, in reality every Italian city has got some claim to specificity and uniqueness; a sense of place founded in the imagined city¹ remains to this day a fundamental reference in Italy, and the local is still a defining part of identity. What we would like to question here is the common place, during the *Risorgimento*, that localism and nationalism were necessarily antagonistic. On the contrary, could we not conceive a localism that would be a building block for nationalism – as historians such as Applegate (1990) and Confino (1997) have successfully demonstrated for Germany? We have consequently decided, in spite of the apparent paradox, to focus on the most atypical of Italian cities as a way to approach a phenomenon that largely char-

acterised most of Italy – not to mention many other parts of Europe – in the nineteenth century. Our idea was that this century, although it is familiarly considered as the century of nationalism and Empire, also covers other realities in term of spatial identities, in particular local, regional and transnational. It is this more nuanced and mingled reality, its construction and its evolution, that we would like to throw light on through the analysis of the Venetian case.² More precisely, we have drawn our attention to the historiographies of Venice written in that city in the long nineteenth century,³ and have argued that, in many ways, the history of a city could be more representative of national history than attempts to write the history of the whole peninsula: in that perspective, we have offered to read Venice as a synecdoche for Italy.⁴ Therefore, it was Venice's atypical nature that made it possible to exploit it successfully as a case

1. I am referring here to ANDERSON 2006.

2. For a historical background on nineteenth-century Venice see ZORZI 2000; BENZONI, COZZI 1999; ARNALDI, PASTORE STOCCHI 1986; LAVEN 2002.

3. For general studies on nineteenth-century Venetian historiography see CANELLA 1976; POVOLO 2000.

4. The present article takes place in a research on nineteenth-century historiography of Venice, developed thanks to the AHRC-funded project entitled *Venice remembered*, directed by Dr David Laven and based at the University of Manchester.

study: it was revealing to consider the most distinctive as the most typical. Our objective was to explore the relationship between different sorts of spatial identity as reflected in historical texts; in particular, we wanted to show that the local did not necessarily stand in opposition to the national during a period of national unification and consolidation.

It is well known that without a sense of a shared past, a nation cannot exist. From the late eighteenth century, discourses on the nation flourished, and the construction of national narratives multiplied during the following century. For Italy, history assumed a particular importance as the peninsula's past occupied a central position in debates that surrounded the process of unification; and, after unification had been achieved, history continued to play a major role in attempts both at legitimizing and in resisting the «making of Italians» (BANTI 2000; LYTTLETON 2001). To a large degree the history of Italy had always been the history of its *cento città*, but it was only during the eighteenth century that arose, among that minority of Italy's educated classes who came to espouse a nationalist programme, the belief that a loyalty to one's own city was actively antithetical to a strong sense of nationhood. This idea later became a commonplace, following changing conceptions of the relationships both between the state and the nation, and between the people and the nation, conceptions with their origins in the Enlightenment, Revolutionary and Romantic eras (LAVEN 2006). In early modern Venice, notwithstanding the frequent conflicts with other Italian states, there was widespread recognition that the population shared political interests as well as cultural affinities with the other inhabitants of the peninsula, and that Italy was a coherent political entity because of, as much as in spite of, repeated foreign invasion. The craze for historical writing that characterized the whole of Europe in the nineteenth century remained fundamentally ambiguous in Italy: while the study and writing of history was an essential tool in the process of legitimizing the new country, at the same time these activities highlighted levels of municipalism and enmity that appalled many patriots, most of whom considered such divisions to be quite as damaging to Italy as invasion and foreign domination.⁵

A difficult repossession of the past

Historiography was a fundamental part of Venetian culture, and had contributed to define local identity for centuries.⁶ Before the loss of independence, most Venetian productions aimed at praising the constitutional model of the Republic, presented as an ideal mix between aristocracy, democracy and monarchy. However, the shame of Venetian attitudes in 1797 and the disarray in the face of the disappearance of the Republic made it impossible either to scrutinise the past with a critical eye, or to continue lauding the perfection of the defunct system. Indeed it remained very difficult for Venetians to face history serenely, and to draw constructive links between past and present. Yet, slowly, nineteenth-century Venetian historiography invented itself at a crossroads between: influential historians of the nation such as Thierry, Guizot and the young Thiers (incidentally, the three of them were Samuele Romanin's correspondents); the high respect felt for Ranke, who notoriously praised Venice's archives; the awakening created by Sismondi and the local shock due to Daru; the development of linguistics; the close attention to Italian works, from the Romantic *Risorgimento* to the histories of Cuoco, Gioberti or Balbo, together with the desire not to be left behind; and, finally, a proud inscription in the strong local tradition. Yet, during this period, historical texts written by Venetians remained essentially a defence of the Republic. Renewing an old tradition, the dominating feeling was that Venice was under attack from foreign calumniators, and Venetians pretended, with much difficulty, to write both in name of truth and of Venetian pride. However, a central problem was what to defend: fighting for the defunct regime as such became less and less sensible, although some authors wrote as if it still existed – as Gian Domenico Tiepolo (1828). A crucial difficulty lay in the long identification of the ruling aristocracy with the state, even though some democratic readings of the first centuries of Venetian history had appeared – most notably Foscolo's in 1826 (FOSCOLO 1978). It became increasingly necessary to define in a different manner what made Venice all through the centuries and to search for other elements of continuity and identification. Pierre Daru's⁷ 8-volume *Histoire de la*

5. The belief in the necessity of centralisation and uniformity was particularly strong because it had its roots in two major strands of *Risorgimento* thought, the Mazzinians and the supporters of the Savoy.

6. For an analytical bibliography ZORDAN 1998; for the role of Renaissance historiography GAETA 1980.

7. Daru was a major administrator during the Consulate and the Empire.

République de Venise published in 1819 (DARU 1853) set a durable methodology and framework, with its focus on administrative documents, its analyses of power structures and its interest for the Venetian state's specificities. Some factual mistakes were denounced in the following years and they were often used to dismiss the whole book, unjustly condemned as a continuum of the Black Legend and as a justification of Bonaparte's actions. Yet, it remained a central reference for decades, at least up to Samuele Romanin, who published the most important nineteenth-century history of Venice, the *Storia documentata di Venezia*, between 1853 and 1864.

Instead of focussing on the fall of the Republic, seeing it as a trauma and trying to understand the reasons for this failure, by the 1840s the Venetian state was finally considered as well buried. Another historical approach became slowly possible, away from regret of the old regime. History ceased to be an aristocratic one, both as regards its conception and its writing: Venetian historians could now define themselves, together with what was Venice for them, outside that mould. On one hand, they aimed at a clearer understanding of where they were coming from, trying to get rid of some mystifications. On the other hand, they wanted to renew a knot with the past, as there was an unmovable idea that identity depended on faithfulness to the ancestors (the «fathers»): change could only take place and be acceptable in the name of tradition.

Venetian history and the *Risorgimento* agenda

A pioneering work was Agostino Sagredo's historical introduction in *Venezia e le sue lagune*, published at the occasion of the ninth congress of Italian scientists, held in Venice in 1847, in which he established a very influential program of studies. Sagredo was eager to prevent any possible criticism of lack of objectivity on the ground that he was a Venetian and from a patrician family, although it was mostly this second point that seemed to him a threat to serious history. He was determined not to hide the patricians' weaknesses, nor the crucial social divisions within their caste. But he also asserted that the aristocratic nature of the Venetian state should not have been an embarrassment for Venetian commentators, because it was the reason itself for the strength and duration of the state. Well aware of the democratic aspiration of the nineteenth century and of the impossible return of the aristocratic model,

he stressed that he did not mean that, as a matter of principle, aristocratic power was fair: but it was what worked better for (a sort of) common good. In his opinion, the existence in power of a conservative group – identified with the aristocrats in the *ancien régime* and, when he was writing, composed of ex patricians and high middle class – was essential for the stability of a state, and for the establishment of a status-quo guaranteeing a certain justice. One aporia was that, as only the aristocrats from Venice constituted the political body, no modern idea of nation or statehood was possible: that was precisely why Daru ultimately thought the Venetian Republic had done its time. Sagredo admired Venetian organisation and patriotism only in the capital city: but no proselytism, no concept of constructing a bigger nation, no extension of citizenship was ever possible in this system.

Having in mind both the Renaissance myths and his contemporary situation, Sagredo liked mentioning that there was no animosity between the patrician class and the other strata of the population: on the contrary, they did closely collaborate. He highlighted numerous and subtle relations of interdependence, both between the various patricians' groups, and between the patricians and the others. The collaboration he most liked stressing was the one between the aristocracy and the bourgeois elements of the «popolo»:

il popolo [...] era associato agli ottimati nel commercio loro [...] prendeva parte nelle guerre continue, e tali guerre essendo quasi tutte per causa del commercio e delle industrie, ed avendo il popolo parte principale in esso commerciale e nelle industrie, ne seguiva che le tenesse comme guerre proprie. Ma non è a dirsi che guerreggiasse solamente per l'interesse proprio; combatteva per la guerra nazionale: San Marco era la parola della nazione (SAGREDO 1847, p. 58).

After enunciating that there was nothing fundamentally wrong in doing everything to consolidate trade and industry, including provoking wars, he therefore added a glow of patriotism to these actions. Such rhetoric was intended to give these events an extra dignity, as if a purely mercantile state was not quite right after all (in fact, that was one of Daru's accusations against Venice – and, in contemporary times, it was also how Britain was described by its critics). The idea to act with (at least a dimension of) disinterest gave a moral aspect to wars, made them more acceptable. It is relevant that, here, Sagredo used the words «nation» and «national». When he was writing, the concept of modern nation was the

norm, and it conveyed the idea that men had to fight and sacrifice themselves for moral, disinterested motivations, that is for their nation. The reference to a symbol, San Marco, which brought a superior level of abstraction, unification and sanctification, added to this nationalist construction.

In the sake of contemporary exigencies, Sagredo recommended giving up some old historiographic discussions such as the long debates upon the origins of the Venets (a recurring question that Filiasi had generously illustrated)⁸ and the original independence of the islanders (an arduous thesis to prove, however essential to Venetian pride). On the contrary, what was most meaningful to him was the Roman presence in the whole peninsula, because this long unity had formed «la grande famiglia italiana» (SAGREDO 1847, p. 2). He must have thought that the inquiries on the Venets, stressing the different origins of the tribes composing Italy, did not help to consolidate the discourse on the existence of a long Italian unity, by recalling the heterogeneity and dissents between the previous populations. He chose to ignore the questions of blood and language (although he acknowledged the development of linguistics and the information this discipline could bring to historians), and neglected the local and regional variations. He preferred to promote the idea of a unity under Rome – without looking too much into the wars leading to this domination.

A corollary of this categorical point of departure – the Roman unity – was the assertion of a constant link maintained between ancient Rome and Venice, which directly inherited the Roman tradition; this, in turn, implied tracing back the Venetian aristocratic power to Roman traditions. This lineage was undisturbed by the spread of feudalism, which Venice, unique example in Europe, avoided. This inheritance went together with a radical denial of a Greek tradition in Venice, which was an additional way to root Venice in the Western and Latin world (Sagredo shared the widespread orientalist vision which associated Greeks with degeneration, corruption, lack of vigour, effeminacy etc.). This discourse perpetuated the fixed image of Venice as the New Rome, as in Bernardo Giustinian's times,⁹ but it also meant to an-

nounce the new Italy. After the Romantic interest for pre-Roman civilisations, and after a certain distrust in Rome because of its uses during Napoleonic times, there was currently a revival of the Roman tradition in Italian historiography (following Cuoco or Gioberti, for instance) (LYTTLETON 2001). Nineteenth-century Venice was largely an heir of the myths crystallised during the Renaissance by Giustinian and his followers,¹⁰ even if they were stripped of some providential and eulogistic rhetoric. If the city at the times of the *Signoria* (1423) still imposed itself in the historiographers' imagination (and the fundamental importance of Renaissance iconography should also be kept in mind), however they avoided using the term *Signoria*, always preferring references to the *Repubblica*, thus amalgamating more easily *Venezia*-capital and *Venezia*-state. Reference to the Republic was favoured because it allowed a local historical continuum, and helped erasing internal differences and contradictions. This term was locally so strong that it completely over-shadowed the French and democratic connotations many other Italian populations associated with it, and did not carry the same fears at all, even amongst social elites.

Conforming to a *Risorgimento* habit, references to Italy and to the Italian «brother states» abounded in Sagredo's text: they were considered as being part of the same country and the same nation, in a natural way. The Italy involved was not only cultural, but also political – however uncertainly. If Sagredo did not see the point of blaming this dysfunctional family – despite doing it himself, as a concession to the *Risorgimento* canon –, his unexpected reference to the Hanse suggested that his political ideal lay in a federal solution for Italy. Yet, it was very noticeable that, in this family of brothers, Venice was undoubtedly intended as the hegemonic character. As was *de rigueur* in Italian patriots' narratives, Sagredo dedicated some paragraphs to the *Lega lombarda*, trying not very convincingly to present Venice as a player in these events. However, for political and social reasons, he was not very enthusiastic about the model of the *comuni*, and recalled that they did not last long before degenerating in «signorie assolute» (SAGREDO 1847, p. 66) – as Verona, Padua,

8. Conte Jacopo Filiasi first published in 1772 an essay on the «Veneti primi» and then reprinted and developed his ideas on the topic: he was aware that some points had been voluntarily obscured by Venetian writers «per un eccesso di amor patrio» (FILIASI 1811-1814, p. vii).

9. Bernardo Giustinian is thought to have written his *De origine urbis venetiarum* between 1477 and 1489.

10. For an actualisation GRUBB 1986.

Treviso (and it was not accidental that he named towns which ended up being ruled by the *Dominante* - suggesting that it was a better fate for them). He was weary of any opening to a democratic system of governance. At least, the cities which ended up belonging to the Venetian *terraferma* «conservavano intatti ai sudditi gli antichi statuti municipali» (SAGREDO 1847, p. 67). These statutes were intended by Italian historiographers as the key to the common political identity between Italian city-states. They were the expression together of community and independence, and they best expressed what was an Italian state. Overall, Sagredo's tribute to the *Lega lombarda* and, to a lesser extent, to the *comuni*, sounded more like an obligation than a real interest - and it was, ultimately and paradoxically, another occasion to stress Venice's superiority... via its very peripheral involvement in the matter, which was all to its advantage. Sagredo was also careful to differentiate the medieval wars from the successive conflicts between Italian states: the long and ferocious Renaissance wars were not to be viewed as wars between brother states, but between a Republic and various tyrannies. His main objective was to free Venice from accusations of imperial greediness and responsibility for fratricidal hatred, although this did not go without contradictions.

Interestingly, Sagredo paid tribute to Carlo Cattaneo (SAGREDO 1847, p. 63): this had a strong contemporary resonance in a *Lombardo-Veneto* which had been sharing a parallel fate from 1815, and where there had been recent attempts to get closer economically and intellectually - despite deep resentments between these two areas, from Republican to Napoleonic times. In the 1840s, the campaigning of the Venetian bourgeoisie for the Venice-Milan railways was symptomatic of them looking at Milan for modernisation and help in integrating Venice in a larger network (Cattaneo had also notoriously participated to this debate: CATTANEO 1892). To accompany these powerful economic motivations, authors as dissimilar as Cantù, Cattaneo and Sagredo had been trying to find a certain conciliation between Milanese and Venetian histories (usually in vague terms), in order to strengthen the association between the two capitals of the *Lombardo-Veneto*. The state of the trade was a major concern for the Venetian elites, and was the source of their main disappointment towards their Austrian rulers.

By contrast, it was striking that, in mid nineteenth-century Venetian historiography, there was no real attempt at a discourse at a regional level on

what could be Venetia. The original duality *Venetia/Venetiae* (MAZZARINO 1976; DORIGO 1984) kept its ambiguity and its explanation was relegated to times which remained obscure. The existence of a past and/or future homogeneity at a regional level was not seriously discussed; the base of the original Venets' settlements was not considered relevant. Despite the interest for Rome, there was no inclination either to investigate the eventual legacies of the xth Roman Province created by Augustus (*Venetia et Histria*). No exploring was conducted upon the effects of centuries of life under the Venetian Republic in the *terraferma*. All this seemed either insignificant or too embarrassing; the self-assured discourse of domination and superiority of the patricians over the *terraferma* people was not possible any longer, but nothing replaced it.

If the capital of an independent state had since been amputated of its possessions and, in reality, had shrunk to a modest provincial city, the permanence of a sense of «venetianess» linked to the form of Venice-city was beyond doubt. The use of the same terms all over again gave the impression of a similarity of content to that feeling, whilst making these concepts open to new connotations and associations, absorbing the cultural agenda of the time. Behind the term «Venice», a fusion and a confusion were thus constantly operated between: the Republic of Venice, the *Dominante*, the contemporary city of Venice, sometimes the territory of the ex *dogado* - culminating, during the Revolution, with the association with the «Repubblica Veneta» of Daniele Manin. This lexical and geographical irresolution created a space for imagination: in the discourse, the city of Venice could come to absorb the various entities referred to loosely, therefore gaining in importance and influence. The reinvestment in myths and traditional concepts was more powerful than a disappointing geographic reality. For instance, Sagredo used *paese* for Italy (despite the absence of any precise geographical definition, the existence of this spatial entity was taken for granted), and *nazione* and *patria* alternatively for Venice and for Italy. *Popolo* was generally used in the *ancien régime* acceptation to designate the stratum of the population which was not patrician. The polysemy of some of the words at the heart of Venetian historiography - as *patria*, *nazione* and *Venezia* itself -, allowed the Italian-national discourse to make its way, through the use of some traditional forms and the reference to well-known myths, to the readers of the *Risorgimento* era. Writers made constant references to the lived

experience of a real geographical and social place, and they used and revived collective remembrances: only such a vocabulary could make the concept of the new Italian nation concrete and imaginable. The national discourse was coined through references to this long local experience, which gave it content and form, and which in turn found a renewed energy and *raison-d'être* thanks to the national agenda.

The urgency and vigour of Sagredo's tone were in close connection with the intellectual revival amongst the Venetian elites during the years 1846-1847 (as a prelude to the *lotta legale*). However, it must be added that talking about Italian culture and Italian nation did not necessarily mean talking against the Austrians' rule, despite the recent growing discontent in the Italian part of the Empire. Indeed, Italians could imagine the Habsburg Empire hosting successfully different nations, including the *Lombardo-Veneto*, providing their rulers: respected national differences, in particular in terms of laws and customs; allowed the local bourgeoisie to develop their activities freely in a large market, giving more autonomy to the various regions of the Empire; and treated the various parts of the Empire in equal manner (in particular, without privileging Trieste to the detriment of Venice). Venetians' priority was the improvement of their city at all levels, in order to make it a significant European centre again. In that context, an idea of political unification with the rest of Italy, or even a close rapprochement with Piedmont, which they regarded as much more retrograde than Lombardy in all respects, could hardly appear the safer way to achieve their objective.

In his *Storia documentata di Venezia* (1853-1864), Romanin tried to show how Venetians could relate to the whole of Italy, and how other Italians could relate to Venetians as the inheritors of the most Italian of qualities. He particularly promoted ideas of democracy, republicanism, social conservatism, paternalism, moralism and even economic liberalism. But what he most enthusiastically analysed, as I have developed elsewhere (DAMIEN 2011), were the models of *patria* building and the cultivation of *patriottismo* unifying social classes: he believed the Venetian model should have been a powerful base for

the modern Italian nation. When he started publishing, Venice had recently been shaken by the Revolution of 1848-1849: as well as locating the city at the centre of challenges to the Restoration order, the insurrection had been experienced and portrayed as a redemption for the mistakes of the Republic (TABET 2009). Despite the shattering of nationalist, democrat, and liberal hopes by the restoration of Habsburg rule, Romanin's literary project continued to impose itself as a historical and civic necessity.

Throughout Romanin's text the word «Venice» constantly changed meaning. It variously stood for: the Republic of Venice, the Venetian government and the Venetian administration; it indicated the capital city, the Empire and the *dogado*. From a more democratic perspective, it could mean the Venetian people and include the various strata of the population. The population which was supposed to constitute this compact Venetian community was the one living on the islands as they politically grouped around the new capital of Rialto, which became the seat of government around year 810, after the successful resistance to Pepin (ROMANIN 1853-1864, I, p. 148).¹¹ What Romanin saw in this event was the significance of a now immutable centre, the idea that a free unified nation had formed around it, and the fact that a continuous history could develop from these elements. What really counted was the birth of Venice the city - or, rather, the city of Rialto (Venice originally being the state rather than the urban centre). This was the Venice nineteenth-century readers would have immediately recognised, rather than a state with more extended and fluctuating borders.¹² Significantly, the geographical focus did not change in Romanin's ten volumes, despite the considerable transformations of the Venetian state. The nation remained equivalent to the inhabitants of the capital, the urban form giving the boundaries of the community. The inequality of status between the capital and the other lands was too obvious in the nineteenth century to make any interpretation of the Empire as a nation remotely possible: the national narrative had to be confined to the metropolis (BENVENUTI 1999). Contradicting official republican historiography, Romanin established a radical distinction between the Venetian state and the patrician class. He asserted the democratic origins of the

11. This refoundation was supported by the tradition of saint Mark having preached on the Rialto, and the corpse of saint Mark is said to have been brought in Venice in 829.

12. The relative obliteration of the first centuries of Venetian history was in itself a long tradition (ORTALLI 2003, p. 81).

state and described the concentration of power in the hands of the aristocracy as a process that took centuries. Moreover, some «democratic principles» (ROMANIN 1853-1864, III, p. 345) persisted at the basis of the national culture. Nevertheless, Romanin was very wary of the «plebeian» classes, whose conduct always threatened anarchy: the Republic always managed to avoid it – until 1797, an event which continued to cast a shadow over nineteenth-century Venetian historiography whenever the topic of democracy was raised.

Conforming to a wide-spread *Risorgimento's* trend, Romanin's nationalisation of history followed two main paths: on one hand, he gave an Italian significance to glorious episodes of Venetian history, making them *exempla* of «Italianness»; on the other hand, he incorporated in his narration some elements of the *Risorgimento* canon, although his developments often appeared ill at ease with his main thesis. Although Romanin invariably talked about «brother» states, those which he saw as most distinctively Italian were undoubtedly the republican city-states, because it was the political form in which love of freedom and independence was best expressed.¹³ He considered the period of the *comuni* as the beginning of Italian modernity, and treated these medieval states as very similar to each other, including the Venetian one – neglecting the characteristics of the Empire. Yet, his discussion of Venice and the other Italian states (not to mention those outside the peninsula) normally took the form of comparisons favourable to the Republic. Typically, they were all shown exhausting themselves in internal and external conflicts, whilst Venetians formed: «un popolo che fra le tempestose ire de' discordi fratelli, fra l'ingordo rapinare che ci pioveva dall'Alpe, si mantenne per quattordici secoli libero, ed italiano» (ROMANIN 1853-1864, III, p. 361). Romanin therefore established Venice as an epitome for the best of Italy, whilst the rest of it was collapsing under problems of misgovernment and foreign or priestly rule. Whilst being morally uncomfortable with the process of mainland expansion, and although he recognised the inferior status of these lands – *terraferma* and distant maritime possessions were all equally «paesi di conquista» (ROMANIN 1853-1864, IV, 11, p. 444) –, yet his overall opinion was that these lands were ruled in a rather beneficial way (and this went against many criti-

cisms addressed to the Republic, notably by Daru, Sismondi and Machiavelli).

In reality, most of his text highlighted the specificities of the Republic of Venice and constituted a modern eulogy of the defunct state. The traditional local mythologies remained largely pertinent, although they were read in a contemporary key: Romanin modernized them and made them meaningful in the context of the construction of the new Italy by bourgeois patriots. Yet, his monumental work proved to be both the culminating point of an epoch and its ending. The importance of the Venetian lessons for the emerging Italy declined rapidly as the inevitability of the Savoyard solution imposed itself. The republican model ceased to be an issue; the federalist option was jettisoned as dangerous and impractical; democratisation was not a priority either. The peripheral situation of the lagoon city, so long dreaded, was becoming a reality in the Italian monarchy, as it had been in the Habsburg Empire; the centralisation of the state and its «Piedmontisation» appeared inevitable.

Towards new horizons?

A certain resignation thus afflicted Venetian scholars-patriots, who tended to return to erudition and exegesis deprived of larger ambitions. From then on, the strengthening of the local rather became a resistance to an absorption by the centre, and a re-«venetianisation» of history operated in the sense of municipal resistance to centralisation and homogenisation, as works by Giuseppe Tassinari (1863) or Pompeo Molmenti (1880) suggest. Most Venetian historiographers focussed on the peculiarities of local life, lamenting their disappearance, and once again they widely perpetuated the golden legend of the *Serenissima*, exalting its good governance, paternalist ruling and peaceful politics. But by the end of the nineteenth century, this dominant reading of the *Serenissima's* history ceased to satisfy writers in search of modernisation and new horizons for Venice and Italy. The debate between conservation and modernisation was then omnipresent within the city, with both sides defending their position in name of «Venetianess». At a national level, Italian interest in colonialism and the growth of Adriatic nationalism gave new breath to Venetian pretence to «Italianness», as it hugely enhanced the memo-

13. Sismondi's lessons are echoed here (SISMONDI 1807-1809).

ry of the Venetian Empire, which came to claim a central part in Italian political, economical, military, diplomatic and intellectual life. In that period, irredentism was jettisoning its democratic stance and its principles of respect for nationality (CATTARUZZA 2007; MONZALI 2004), and anti-Slav movements were developing in the North-East of the country. Political nationalism was fuelled with an idea of revenge and conquest of the so-called natural borders and of the sea. In Venice, nationalist policies definitely fused with irredentism around 1907-1909, before flourishing with the interventionist movement, in an anti-Triple Alliance stance and a pro-Adriatic direction (POMONI 1998; PES 1987; PES 2002; REBERSCHAK 2002). Imperialist irredentism and nationalist movements gained early supporters on the lagoons, as Fascism did later on, and it grew parallel to the ambitious transformations of the city due to a close political, financial, industrial and cultural elite.

For instance, Antonio Battistella's 1897 *Repubblica di Venezia dalle sue origini alla sua caduta* was imbued with disillusion towards contemporary Italy, whilst Venetian history, by contrast, shone as a display of winning qualities. Venetian fierce insularity was not something to be eluded or tempered, as in Romanin's time, but to be celebrated. The idea of a radical separation from the rest of the peninsula was shared by most historiographers: but, in Battistella's views, this re-«Venetianisation» of history was perfectly compatible with pro-active nationalism, because the Republic's isolation had allowed it to remain more Italian. His text transmitted the sense of an identity crisis, and a call for Italy to follow a different path: references were made to Adowa, which proved a dramatic episode in a series of military and colonial disasters since 1866, and signalled the fall of Crispi's government. This low point in national pride led to even less respect for liberal Italy in many circles, a contempt Battistella shared, further stimulated by his fear of socialism and anarchism.

Not only did Battistella praise the aristocratic nature of the Venetian state, but he insisted proudly that no democratic tendencies ever existed in its history. He radically separated Venice from the tradition of the *comuni*, dismissing an institution which had long been dear to Italian republicans and democrats. Frustrated by liberal Italy, he asserted that Venice offered patriotic lessons that transcended petty materialistic considerations, and expressed

desires of grandeur based on a mystical and messianic nationalism. Battistella was mostly interested in foreign policy, which he mainly conceived as long and fatal hatreds between the Venetian state and a series of enemies. In his opinion, not only did Italy inherit the geographical borders of the Republic (or should inherit them), but also its memories and its enemies. Yet, conforming to Venetian tradition, Spain remained the principal enemy, whilst Austria appeared rather as a by-product. However, the rhetoric of *Mare nostrum* was present, together with the image of Venice as the precious guardian of the Italian borders. But Battistella also added that Ottoman power had been largely exaggerated: he was encouraging modern Italy not to be intimidated by this enemy in its colonial pursuits, in a contemporary context of growing trouble with the Empire around the Eastern question.

In his 1897 volume, Battistella had tended to heap praise on Venice and blame on Italy; his 1921 text in contrast, sang the triumph of both Venice and contemporary Italy, which now appeared as a nation-state finally accomplished and sanctified by the blood sacrifice of the Great War. He presented the War as the long-awaited conclusion of a journey started under the Roman Empire, continued by the Republic of Venice, and accomplished thanks to modern Italy, finally redeemed. Eternal enemy of Austria and the Ottoman Empire, «protector» of the Adriatic and the Balkans, Venice became associated with the idea of a strong, dynamic, aggressive and colonialist state, until embodying national-fascist ideals of «Italianness». In his preface, Fradeletto paid tribute to Volpi and the *grande Venezia*, an old project which was officially launched, after a long delay, in 1917, and on a very grand scale: it signalled the creation of the industrial area of Marghera, which had also become the new port of Venice (ZUCCONI 2002; REBERSCHAK 2002, pp. 1262-1263). This preface witnessed the coalition of the modernising right, Adriatic nationalism and some old conservative representatives (such as Fradeletto): they united briefly, before the old right became outdistanced by rising Fascism.¹⁴

Battistella could no longer ignore decades of research on Byzantium: yet, he cancelled its significance, presenting this influence as a simple transformation of a Roman inheritance (BATTISTELLA 1921, p. 24). He insisted instead on geographical and genetic

14. For successive development see PES 2002; for historiography see TABET 2005.

criteria to define Venetian identity. He also increasingly stressed Venice's masculinity, which helped in reconciling and fusing the notions of «Venetian-ess» and «Romaness». His Roman references, still very generic, were more distinctly imperial, and he abruptly dismissed the Roman Republic. This continuity between Roman Empire, Republic of Saint Mark and modern Italy allowed him to locate the city of Venice at the heart of Italian strategic, political and economic life. Italian and Venetian views finally coincided, and Venetian history provided a national winning model to follow. The Venetian Empire was even perceived as a better model than the Roman one, and could be acclaimed as more intrinsically Italian. The anti-Spanish dimension shifted towards a heated anti-Austrian bias: Battistella greatly accentuated the direct and indirect role of Austria, founding this long rivalry on Austrian desires to destroy Venetian supremacy on the Adriatic, together with competition for territories. The gulf was now perceived as the barycentre of Italian history. Even the death of the Venetian state was portrayed as an initially Austrian idea, and not Bonaparte's. Battistella allowed more space to Trieste, although he displayed little consideration for its inhabitants, and saw perfectly well that the Venetians' wish had always been to suffocate this rival city. Apart from Friuli, he was mostly interested in Istria and Dalmatia, highlighting their old links with the *Dominante*. By contrast, he felt more uncomfortable regarding far-away adventures involving the control of large territories. Indeed, Venetian historiographers tended to remain above all fervent supporters of the «other shore», which offered the advantage of keeping Venice at the centre of the stage, nationally and internationally.

Conclusion

The various phases we have identified within Venetian historiography show how the field of historical studies was used for debates and constructions of spatial identities. In reality, the main nar-

rative changed surprisingly little, but the interpretations drawn from it followed very diverse paths. For instance, mid nineteenth-century Venetian patriots were motivated by the increasing fear of being marginalized, together with the conviction that the Venetian model could be used as a base for all Italians. Some of the rhetoric and myths of the aristocratic Republic were used as a vocabulary: they were recuperated to invent and express a new identity based on geographical and social roots (the bourgeoisie and ex patriciate living in the city of Venice), and on a belonging to a cultural and political horizon, whose aim was to insert Venice in a larger circuit, and to assert the existence of Italy as an entity able to compare and compete with the main European powers. Many tropes dear to mainstream *Risorgimento* (PATRIARCA 2005) canon were hardly found in Venetian historiography, which presented a very singular model; there was even a reversion of the signs compared both to popular romantic images about Venice, and to some dominating aspects of Italian narratives. But this singularity was considered as a strength at the service of «italianness» and it gave a powerful example of what Italians were able to do, perfectly independently.

Yet, not only did this discussion on spatial identities appear to us relevant for a better understanding of Venetian history, but we believe it also highlights the uses and shifts of key concepts such as nation, city or fatherland, which are still central today in many areas. We hope that our close analysis of Venetian historiographies helps to demonstrate how these ideas can evolve, circulate and be appropriated by the most diverse political agendas, and how, in turn, historical texts contribute to these debates. Indeed, spatial identities, with all their cultural, economic, political and financial implications are being avidly disputed to this day and can simultaneously give rise to the most diverse and antagonistic conclusions (from the *leghisti* to the «think global act local» movements, to give but two obvious and opposed examples).

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