

The Scuola Dalmata di San Giorgio e Trifone

A Place for the Dalmatian Community in Venice

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Abstract The largest part of references available until today, on the Scuola dalmata di San Giorgio e Trifone tend to emphasize the role of Venice' Dalmatian community with respect to the courageous contribution given in the course of the long-time' conflicts against the Turks. The aim of this paper is to show instead, through the personal stories of the Scuola's members and chiefs (Guardian grande), how they were able to distinguish themselves in other type of occupations which gained them a relevant position in town, as solid contributors not only to the economic life of Venice, but also to the cultural and spiritual one. Moreover, it will be shown how, at the end of Republic independence, in the conclusion of the XVIII century, their gradual integration as 'Venetians' made them suitable for a larger commitment as "trainers of italianity", even in other regions of Italy ready to unify into a national State.

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Keywords Dalmatia. Venice. Scuola dalmata di San Giorgio e Trifone.

1 Introduction

This paper will present and discuss the case of one *Venetian Scuola* belonging to the group of so-called 'Scuole minori'. The *Scuola dalmata di San Giorgio e Trifone* has received until today, a relatively limited attention by scholars. The peculiar concept of its establishment, i.e. the common nationality and background of its members, marks it as *Scuola di nazione*, where religious devotion was certainly a feature required to the *confratelli*, but whose priority was to gather in Venice, the Dalmatians who arrived in town for mainly professional matters, i.e. their employment as skilled sea men in the Venetian fleet. Mutual support and aid, including welfare' needs and medical care, were among the expected duties, but despite the size and somehow specific scope of the brotherhood, the case stands well as a 'citizenship' case within a European framework (Picchio Forlati 2014). In fact, by a methodological point of view, as one trace back the biographies, the historical contexts and the diverse experiences of the Dalmatians, what

come out is going across three different countries of today' Europe, such as Italy, Croatia and Montenegro with some further references to Greece, Serbia and Turkey.

As a matter of fact, the 'teleri' painted by Vittore Carpaccio until 1507, showing, among other subjects, the heroic episodes of Saint George' saving of the city of Selene from the dragon, remain the main cue of interest of this minor *Scuola*. Moreover, one of the most recent titles (Gentili 1996) attempt an iconographic analysis which emphasizes the references to the underlying political propaganda of the artistic project, with respect to Venice commitment against the Ottomans. Within such a view, the Dalmatians appear like a community invested with a special mandate for the defense of their native land, involved in the whole series of conflicts that occurred in the Adriatic Sea, in order to preserve the borders by the Turks' advance, along a time' space lasting until the end of the Republic. In the course of such an effort, i.e. centuries of sea' conflicts against the Turks, it is plausible that the military value of courageous ones, couldn't but stand out and increase the fame of the Venetian value. The accomplishments of many admirals, captains, etc. are easily available in the than chronicles: it is also the case of the exploits of the Admiral Pietro Mocenigo in the 'East', dating to the second half of the fifteenth century, that were preserved in the report compiled by the Dalmatian Coriolano Cepione from Traù (today Trogir) (Gentili 1996, 73-4), "sopracomito di galera".¹ But what remains in today' popular unconscious about the Dalmatians and their involvement in Venice events either as individuals as well as a community, is the scene represented by Giuseppe Lallich' painting *Il Bacio di Perasto al Gonfalone di San Marco* painted in 1930. The well-known picture representing the Captain of Perast Count Giuseppe Viscovic bestowing his last, touching tribute to Venice along with the local notables and citizens, acquired popularity when Gabriele D'Annunzio choose "Ti con nu, nu con Ti", as a quotation from the final speech Viscovich held on that same day 23 August 1797: the Italian poet in 1918, flew with his squadron 'Serenissima' on Vienna with his team of aviators, by flooding it with Italian tricolored leaflets. Two years later, in Fiume, D'Annunzio used the same sentence to finish his speeches.

1 The office was on use especially between Middle Age and Renaissance, to point the role of the galley' captain. In the case of Venice' fleet, only members of aristocracy were listed for it, as it was considered a good start to a brilliant career.



Figura 1. Giuseppe Lallich, *Il bacio di Perasto*. (ca. 1930). Oil on canvas, 90 × 120. Roma, Associazione nazionale dalmata. © Cace 2006

The aim of this paper isn't a discussion on why and for what reasons the Italian historiography debate on Fascist rethoric propaganda has pushed apart the history and the CH of the Eastern Adriatic into a sort of *limbo*, still today approached mainly by specialized scholars. References to the complex history of this region might still remain somehow confused, in a way that we also should stress that Perast is located in today Montenegro. The small town was where Venice gonfalon' standard was guarded, preserved by twelve *Gonfalonieri* whose vow of allegiance, implied death rather than having it lost by the enemy.

In 1444, *La Serenissima*, with the sole exception of Ragusa, current Dubrovnik, achieved the peak of its dominance on Dalmatia, after the self-donation of the Republic of Poljica. However, the tight connections between Venice and its province, passed through across a series of hard-fought border conflicts, which the drawings of three different boundaries across time, i.e. the Linea Nani of 1671, the Linea Grimani of 1699, and the Linea Mocenigo of 1721, clearly show. Evidence on the Venetian commitment not only on the military side but also on the bureaucratic effort to govern the Dalmatian territories, is provided by the reports of the Rectors (*rettori*) appointed at a number of cities, town and islands, for

administrative and judiciary ruling. (Passarella 2016).² Still, the reasons why such papers might provide just a limited portrait of the Dalmatian people, their culture, habits, traditions, etc., might be partially recognized by the administrative nature of the reports. What will be rather aimed in this paper, will be to present a few examples of some relevant members of the *Scuola dalmata*, by showing instead how their individual existence became interwoven with Venice economic, devotional and cultural life.

2 The Scuola Dalmata: a Confraternity of Warriors for the Crusades?

As largely known, the first meeting of two-hundreds Dalmatians in the current location of the *Scuola*, dates back to 24 March 1451, whereas the approval of the Council of Ten was given just few months later, on 19 May. However, the very first news concerning the possibility for the Venice' Dalmatian community to gather, is the indulgence granted by Cardinal Bessarione on 10 February 1464, by which a total of one hundred days of divine absolution ('divina remissione') could be granted to the visitors of the church where the *societas Sclavorum* was found, to be done during the fests of the saints George, Jerome and Trifone, on the *Corpus Domini's* day and during the first Sunday after the Ascension.

With respect to wider geopolitical analysis, it is interesting to note that these dates somehow correspond to more than one relevant event of the Eastern Adriatic area which, among other consequences, must have provoked huge movements of people. First, the settling of the crusade of 1458 promoted by Pope Pius II, after Constantinople definitive fall of 1453; secondly, on the mainland side, the battle of Kosovo Polje of 1389 already marked the beginning of the long geopolitical control by the Ottomans on the Balkans, pushing also a wide number of Orthodox Christians such as the Serbs, to repair in the Dalmatian, i.e. Christian, coast. To such refugees, the Venetian territories and Venice' geopolitical position stood by the upper Adriatic Sea as the strongest and closest Christian power, in control of the sea routes leading to the newly established Muslim Near East. In this sense, Venice might appear to be a peaceful and tolerant State, where a multicultural environment could provide new opportunities for social, business and cultural emancipation. On the other hand, in this paper, the birth of an approved community such as the Dalmatian one, will be

2 The peculiar mandate on the provinces of the Eastern Adriatic 'coast, might be read in the reports available at [http://www.statodamar.it/content.php?lang=1&txt=2&sid=\(2017-12-15\)](http://www.statodamar.it/content.php?lang=1&txt=2&sid=(2017-12-15)), starting by the time each single province, district, area started to be part of the "Stato da Mar".

inscribed within a specific case that is the flourishing of the *Scuole*, commonly known as ‘confraternities’, i.e. the story of *the Scuole* within the life of Venice, rather than connecting them to a strategic or *external* priority.

In 1501 Marin Sanudo The Young could list already two hundred confraternities in town identified as *Scuole di devozione* (devotional confraternities), *Scuole di arti e mestieri* (guilds), but also *Scuole di nazione*, created by those communities immigrated in Venice from the provinces dominated by *La Serenissima*. At the end of the century in 1581, Francesco Sansovino son of the architect Jacopo, clarified the aim of such institutions with special focus on devotional and mutual assistance between the affiliated members. Their social background might differ, including citizens, business men, artists “et alter persone popolari della città”.³ Official approval by the Council of Ten was compulsory, but relevant space was acknowledged to spiritual training as well as to devotion for the deceased ones. Still, bureaucratic regulation of the confraternities’ status might be found in the first half of the fifteenth century. The approval from the Council of Ten was established on October 1401; on May 1451, provisions were taken to prevent or settle scuffles and fights between brothers, and in 1453 it was decided to prevent the General Chapter to continue after the sunset. In other words, the development of legislation for confraternities confirm their relevance within the religious, social and cultural life of Venice, i.e. not just with respect to their contribution to any outside conflict of the Republic. Still, the words of the Venetian scholar Perocco (1964) point well to the actual role that has to be correctly assigned to the *confraternite*:

In una città così traboccante di attività artigianali e mercantili come Venezia, in un emporio così variopinto di nazionalità e costume diversi, le Scuole furono spesso anello di congiunzione tra il potere pubblico e la vita privata del cittadino, che si inseriva attraverso di esse nel connettivo sociale, secondo affinità di lavoro, di interessi e di nazionalità. Esse avevano il potere, d’altro canto, di porre in luce di fronte allo Stato le benemerienze dei cittadini facoltosi che avessero elargito denaro a favore delle loro iniziative: la comunità della Scuola veniva così a creare, quasi per osmosi, un accordo economico e sociale, accanto ai motivi di pietà, che si legavano ad una religione di patria, secondo certi principi basilari e costanti della Repubblica di Venezia. (17)⁴

3 ‘Other popular ones in town’.

4 “In a city overflowing with artisans and seamen’ business such as Venice was, in a commercial hub enriched by diverse nationalities and costumes, the Scuole were often the joining link between State’ power and citizens’ private life, as they provided connection to the social environment, through working affinities, similar interests or nationalities. On the other hand, the Scuola had the power to present to the State the merits of the wealthy citizens willing to support financially *La Serenissima*’ ventures. A Scuola community through

The Zara-born historian Giuseppe Praga (1893-1958) in his major work *Storia della Dalmazia* (1981) remarked that after the previously mentioned inclusion of the most of Dalmatia into the Republic dominance by the half of the fifteenth century, the main wish of Dalmatian people was to become part of Venice such as their new homeland:

Specialmente il popolo, non ne vuol più sapere né di bosnesi, né di napoletani, né di ungheresi, né in genere di tutti quei dominatori estranei e lontani che con le loro lotte, i loro intrighi, le loro estorsioni conducevano i comuni alla rovina. Nell'impossibilità ormai di realizzare l'indipendenza assoluta si pensa con nostalgia al dominio veneziano, lo si desidera, lo si invoca. (Vallery 2009, 9)⁵

It might be plausible to ascertain the extent in those centuries, people developed such an awareness of a clear belonging to a specific cultural background, in a region whose ethnic framework was ever since, a largely mixed one. Still, donation to Venice, in order to gain protection from the mainland invasions and attacks, was a choice that Istrian cities, in the upper part of the Eastern Adriatic coast, started since the twelfth century and completed by the half of the XIV. An ever-growing number of Dalmatians started to come to Venice, whose main motivations seemed to be business or sailing as crew of the Republic galleys. In a city where social groups were provided with such a structured organization, precariousness and uncertainty given by daily issues such as sickness or oldness brought to the need of haven for rest:

molte et infinite volte achade, molti et assai poverer non haver i de la nostra nation nelle armade vostre esser feridi a morte e vegnir in questa vostra terra, ocorendo al più de le volte lor manchar de necessitade e desasio per non haver subsidio ni sovengo da parsona alguna. Et anchor molto poveri famei i quali a la morte soa non havendo da sepelirse sono astreti far portar soto i portegi del vostro palazzo e li demorar fin che per alguna bona persona li sia fato alguna limosina, mediante la qual possano far sopolire. Et etiamdio molti poveri presonieri de la dita nation li qual per non aver sollicito ni aiutorio da parsona alguna perisse de

this sort of mutual exchange, was able to set an economic and social agreement, besides devotional priorities referring to a 'homeland' religion', within specific and permanent fundamentals of Venetian background". Translation by the author.

5 "The people especially, don't want to know more about Bosnians, Neapolitans, Hungarians, and about all those foreign and distant dominators whose fights, plots, and blackmails have brought citizens on ruin. As independence turned unattainable, Venetian dominion started to be seen as desirable". Translation by the author.

fame e da desasio ne le carcere vostre. (Vallery 2009, 11)⁶

It is clear that the need to establish a retreat in Venice, was felt by the Dalmatians in order to solve very trivial issues.

The official charter of each *Scuola* was called *mariegola*, and those authors who have worked on the original documents, including also the 'Catastico' (book of accounts), provide a precious repertoire of news on the story of the *Scuola dalmata* since its founding. And there seems to be the chance to discuss some of the previously selected quotations.

Minuets from the first meeting, mention that the brothers felt united as part of the "Nation Dalmatina ovvero Sclavonica", reminding to the Praga's consideration on the way the Dalmatians considered themselves within Venice Republic' social framework.

If the location was the same as today, still the current building was the first issue to engage the brothers with particular involvement by the *Guardian Grande*' side. The meeting of the first two hundred Dalmatian brothers, was held in a hall of the "Hospedal de Madona Santta Catharina", the hostel just next the church of "missier San Zuane del Tempio", i.e. the former church of the Templars, granted the *Scuola* by the Chief Reverend of the Order of Knights of the Hospital of Saint John of Jerusalem which acquired the Templars' estate when the Order was banned in the first half of the fourteenth century.

The closeness to the Venetian headquarter of such knights' orders, who strongly contributed the success of Crusades, might clash with the modest occupation of the small Dalmatian community- whose *Scuola* within some fifty years' time, would have been decorated with paintings celebrating a warrior' saint such as Saint George.

per Governador

per Vicario

per Scrivan

per Degani

Simon Zuane dalee Stagnade⁷

mistro Paolo Barbier

Nicolò de Catharo

mistro Zorzi de Marco casselero⁸

Agustin de Alegreto Fruttarolo⁹

6 "It often happens that many of us, ended up in poverty, mortally wounded by fighting in your troops, come into your territory, by necessity and in lack of any support and help by anyone. Such a deprived condition doesn't even allow proper burial, by forcing them to beg for charity under the colonnade of your palace and remain there until some good soul might grant some money, by which they can finally pay burial. Not to mention many poor prisoners of the nation, with no help by anyone, ending up dying of hunger and struggle in your jails" Translation by the author.

7 Stagna: copper kitchenware.

8 Casselero-casseler: wood craftman, especially skilled in wooden boxes.

9 Fruttarolo: greengrocer

Zuane de Zorzi scudellaro¹⁰ in piazza
Zuane de Piero orevese¹¹
mistro Zorzi de Jacomo coffanaro¹²
mistro Piero sartore¹³ de San Fantin
mistro Paolo de Zorzi callegaro¹⁴
mistro Martin Zancheta muraro¹⁵
mistro Mathio de fior sartor¹⁶
mistro Nicolò cimador¹⁷
mistro Michiel Surian

(Vallery 2011, 11-12)

Besides the prevailing occupation of the first *confratelli* in the manufacturing business, the others were seamen. Further evidence can be found in the ledger or *Catastico*, the other important document for the *Scuola*'s management which confirm how the *confraternita* soon started to be the main reference for the crew member of the galleys reaching *La Serenissima* from Cattaro (today Kotor), Zara (Zadar) and Sebenico (Sibenik). References on this document (Perocco 1964, 24) bring attention on the case of "Stefano da Budua fu Zorzi" through the detail extracted by his testament. The paper dates back to 1485: it confirms his employment on a galley leaving from today Budva, Montenegro, and quoted his wish to have his soul kept in the memory by the brothers, by lightening two candles at the newly built church of Santa Maria dei Miracoli. The act of mercy from Pope Sisto the IVth in 1481, recorded as *Indulgenza di Rodi*, show how few decades after the *Scuola* foundation, Rome started to become aware of the role of the Dalmatian community in the military commitment of Venice against the Ottomans. As largely known, the donation of the relic of Saint George in 1502 from Captain Paolo Vallaresso celebrated the conquest of the Methoni and Koroni in Western Peloponnese' coast.

- 10 Scudellaro: bowls' craftman.
- 11 Orevese, orese: goldsmith.
- 12 Coffanaro: rattan baskets' maker.
- 13 Sartor: taylor.
- 14 Callegher, calegher, calzolar: shoemaker.
- 15 Muraro: bricklayer.
- 16 Sartor: Taylor
- 17 Cimador: trimmer.

3 The Dalmatians in Venice: Their Lives, Their Accomplishments

For the first fifty years after its official foundation, that hall granted from the fourteenth century' shelter by the Order of the Knights of Saint John in Jerusalem, remained as the gathering place of the *Scuola*. The Dalmatians after winning a few legal occurrences with the nearby Order of the Knights of Rhodes concerning the maintenance of the lodge, eventually gained the grant, agreed also by the Pope, to start the restoration of the building. By the mid-sixteenth century, the small Dalmatian community reached a respectable economic status which allowed them to financially contribute to the renovation project thanks to their own donations. From 1516 until 1551 at least five bequests enriched the *Scuola* budget: the first from "Helena relicta Marco da Cattaro" (Elena, daughter of Marco from Kotor), in 1541 from "Alessio della Torre da Dulcigno" (Alessio della Torre from Ulcinj, Montenegro), in 1544 another one from "Lucia da Lesina vedova di Matteo da Spalato" (Lucia from Hvar, widow of Matteo from Split, Croatia) until the last one from "Zuane quondam Petrus di Lissa" (Giovanni, son of Pietro from Vis, Croatia). Besides other valuables acquired by the *confraternita*, the 'teleri' completed by Carpaccio by 1507 required an appropriate arrangement.¹⁸

Documents have provided plenty of news on the life of "Giovanni da Lissa" who was appointed *Guardian Grande* for four times in 1541, in 1544, 1549 and in 1551. The birth in today island of Vis is confirmed whether the date remains unknown even though it is possible to place it at the end of the fifteenth century. After a first attempt into the ecclesiastical career, later news confirms his permanent occupation as wine trader: insurance policies on his name are found on shipments across the Adriatic Sea in 1524, 1525, 1526, 1528, 1533 and 1539. Married with Isabella, born by the ship owner Francesco Foresti from Corfù, Giovanni had no children but coherent to his devoted nature, continued to financially help all his closest relatives. Documents concerning his work life, show him as a successful business man: his store was located at San Domenico, in Castello, but a good deal started when he was able to become a supplier of the Arsenal; his trade spread across 'Vegli' (today Krk, Croatia), Ancona, Corfù, 'Anti-vari' (Bar, Montenegro), Rimini, Chioggia, Trieste and Lepanto, including the mainland until Oderzo, Treviso and Spilimbergo. Giovanni didn't miss opportunities for estates investments, but also charity continued to be among his interests, such as for his financial support to the *Scuola del Sacramento*, providing dowries for the poorest young girls aiming to get married or to become nun. Papers from Giovanni include the inventory of

18 Vallery 2009, 43. All the news concerning the *confratelli* that will be mentioned from now on, are found in this same book.

his house and store, as well as his testament drafted by the notary at the moment he passed: a detailed description of the furniture in every single room of the house show his sober measured nature, whereas the bequest left not only to the wife Isabella but also to other relatives such as the cousins living in the Dalmatian town of 'Spizza' (today Sutomore, Montenegro), and also at the *Scuola* complete the portrait of a peaceful and devoted Dalmatian man, who clearly considered the sharing of his material accomplishments, a natural part of such a successful existence he was given to live in Venice. No mention is given to the date and the cause of his death, still his properties' inventory was completed between April and May 1552. Gifted with such an industrious nature, it is no surprise that he was the one to manage the initial restoration of the new building of the *Scuola*. The first contract was signed in 1550: the *Guardian Grande* Giovanni da Lissa wrote that Giovanni de Zon' project for the façade' building, was selected as the 'most beautiful' with the condition added to have only Istrian stone from the cave of Rovigno as construction' material. One year later, on 8 March, Giovanni signed another contract with Sansovino pupil Pietro da Salò, for the carving of the bas-relief representing Saint George which still today stand out on the front façade.

The initial quoting of Lallich' famous painting, bring us to five centuries later, until March 1838. On the fourth of that month Pier Alessandro Paravia was appointed *Guardian grande*, as successor of his uncle Nicolò Zech Messevich. The family connection was from the mother of Paravia, Anna Missevich, born in Corfù in 1759, married the Venetian Colonel Giovanni Paravia on 1782. The fate gave to the father of the future *Guardian Grande*, the sad honour to take part to the other tribute given by the Dalmatians in Zara, as *Commander of the Schiavoni*, i.e. the oversea' infantry corps of the Venetian navy, where a less-known flag lowering' ceremony was held on the evening of 30 June 1797. Just the day after the sad event, Colonel Paravia wrote to his brother about the anxiety provoked by the memory of the last day of Venice independence:

Da che esisto non mi ricordo di aver provato giornata più terribile, particolarmente al momento che, ammainate furono le insegne e inalberate quelle imperiali. (Vallery 2009, 67)¹⁹

Nicolò Messevich was almost one-hundred years old when he died on January 1838. Not only his life but also the one of his Dalmatian relatives, had been strongly bound to the development of Venice 'Stato da Mar'. His family was listed among the notable patricians of the 'Repubblica di

19 "Since birth, I can't remember having experienced a worst day, especially when the flags were taken down and the imperial one were hoisted". Translation by the author.

Poglizza' (Poljica, Croatia), nearby today Split.

Lately moved to 'Sebenico', when the name 'Messevich' is found among the Council of Patricians, late nineteenth century documents mention an uncle of Nicolò, called Doimo employed as 'Primo Alfiere' (First standard' bearer) in the defence of the Sign fortress (today Sinj, Croatia) during the Ottoman assault of 1715; the father Antonio after fifty-seven years' duty on the Venice fleet' galleys received a special mention in the dispatches of the Senate along with a life-time jubilation. Nicolò went in charge with a number of appointments that brought him close to illustrious Venetian *condottieri*. As a young, Nicolò also was employed in the Schiavoni corps, first as a cadet in the Marcovich regiment, later on since 1757 in the Levant as scribe for seven years, and eventually for the same amount of years, promoted as 'sopramasser' (accountant) of Paolo Boldù, 'Provveditor all'Armar' (overseer) for the Levant, and Captain of the Adriatic Fleet. Moved to Corfù, Nicolò was put in charge with the local accounting department until the arrival of the new 'Provveditore Generale da Mar', residing in the island as Chief of the 'Stato da Mar' provinces. From 1774 Nicolò worked some other seven years in Levant, as 'sopramasser' of Captain Giambattista Contarini, but soon was back on service for Paolo Boldù who had been appointed 'Provveditore Generale in Dalmazia e Albania'. There in the city of Zara, is where Messevich received the special office of inspecting munitions of the whole province and those at the city' military hostel.

His health spoiled by such twenty years' dedication to the oversea' bureaucracy, Nicolò submitted his request to be relocated at home in Venice. The 'Consiglio dei Quaranta al Criminal' (Council of Forty)²⁰ granted him the privilege to be listed for those appointments set only to Venice-born citizens, whereas the 'Cinque Savi agli Ordini' (Council of the Five Advisers).²¹ His careers was completed with Nicolò' admission in the 'Collegio dei veneti Ragionati' by acknowledging in such a manner, full accomplishment of his career but especially of his *status*, within Venice' articulated bureaucracy. Messevich continued to be involved in other bureaucratic positions, including in 1787, the appointment as *Scontro* (accountant) at the Arsenal, for which he was reconfirmed also by the new Austrian government. It goes without saying that such a hard worker couldn't but turn also into a highly-regarded member of the Dalmatian community in Venice. When his nephew Pier Alessandro Paravia succeeded to him, Messevich had been involved in the *Scuola* board in the last twenty-five years already. The acceptance of the office as *Guardian Grande*, required instead to Pier Alessandro to

20 One of the highest constitutional bodies of the ancient Republic of Venice, with both legal and political functions as the Supreme Court.

21 In charge since the early fifteenth century with the overseas dominions and the fleet, this *Magistrato* later turned into the training authority for the younger service men recruited among Venice's patricians.

leave Turin where since 1832, he was in charge with the chair of Oratory by direct appointment of the King Carlo Alberto. In the Piedmont' capital, Paravia had become the official speaker of every public ceremony. Born in Zara in 1797, he moved to Venice as a teenager, to start his secondary education at the High school for Classical Studies Liceo Marco Foscarini, (than named Liceo Santa Caterina). Completed his university course in Law in Padua, was soon employed in mainland' bureaucracy but his talent as intellectual prevailed and brought him in touch with some of the most important personalities of his time, such as the Dalmatian Nicolò Tommaseo and philosopher Antonio Rosmini. The appointment received from the Savoy in Turin, required him to scale down the French background of the young educated Piedmontese, in order to train them toward a more defined national awareness as 'Italians'.

It is clear that the appointment of Pier Alessandro in 1838, came in a time when the political situation of Italy was going toward unification, to be gained through opposition to the Austrian Empire whose dominance in Venice was hardly tolerated. It is no surprise that his new office caught the attention of the imperial delegation, such as a letter written at the end of March clearly shows:

si invita la Scuola dalmata di riferire entro giorni cinque come abbia potuto aver luogo la nomina del signor Paravia al carico di direttore cassiere quando il carico stesso esige la continua presenza in luogo dell'individuo che lo esercita e quando il signor cav. Paravia, che d'altronde si è dichiarato suddito sardo, deve per la cattedra che cuopre a Torino starsene presso chè tutto l'anno fuori dagli stati di Sua Maestà l'imperatore d'Austria. (Vallery 2009, 69)²²

Paravia's reply to the appointment came few weeks later, at the beginning of April: the way he commented on his new office, cannot but remind us of the sense of responsibility and courage that marked the commitment of the Dalmatians, to the duties assigned by *La Serenissima*:

mi è dolce la prova di bontà e fiducia datami dalla Nazione Dalmata alla quale non lascerò mai d'appartenere e per nascita e per cuore. (Vallery 2009, 70)²³

22 "The Scuola is invited to provide explanation within five days, why and how that Mr. Paravia could be appointed treasurer as long as this appointment require permanent presence by the employee, in consideration of Mr. Paravia' s declaration as Sardinian subject, and his chair in Turin which requires him to stay all-yearlong outside the borders of His Majesty' Emperor of Austria" Translation by the author.

23 "I feel touched by the proof of good will and trust received by the Dalmatian Nation, to which I will never cease to belong by birth and spirit". Translation by the author.

4 Conclusions

This paper has aimed a confrontation between different titles written about the *Scuola dalmata*, in order to provide a new perspective in considering its role within Venice' history.

As a matter of fact, its foundation occurred in a time when the struggle of Venice for the Adriatic Sea, was at the peak of the conflicts with the Ottomans, at a time when the Turks started to be the main occupying force in the Balkan mainland. This is why, by reading the biographies of the *Guardiani*, the 'Venice factor', rather than the 'Rome one', might seem to be the main reason bringing many Dalmatian seamen and business men, to *La Serenissima*. In other words, in the fifteenth and in the sixteenth century, strategic interference from the Pope in order to establish a community of soldiers inspired by the figure of Saint George and fight against the Muslim threat on Europe, might be much less relevant.

In this sense, future research might focus on the origins of the first *confratelli*, in order to consider whether their religious background might be the actual reason for the choice of the guardian' saints. In fact, the two saints have a 'eastern' origin as Saint George was born in Cappodocia, and San Trifon in Greek city of Lampsacus, located in today Turkey: the first was patron of Antivari whereas the latter was guardian for Cattaro (today Kotor), two cities with a typical multicultural, still Dalmatian mood, filled with a population of diverse background. The fact that Saint George still remains the most important saint worshipped in Serbian Orthodox Church on the special celebration of the Đurđevdan (6 May of the Gregorian Calendar), might be worth to reconsider the heavy symbolism of Carpaccio's painting within a stronger Byzantine' approach on the iconography. After the religious ones, hypothesis on the ethnic background of the first Dalmatians who reached Venice, might easily follow.

It is clear also that daily needs, by a time similar to the ones of today 'economic migrants', pushed Dalmatians to reach Venice. As a matter of fact, the ongoing inclusion into the 'Stato da Mar' made Venice the 'capital' of the many cities, towns and islands of the Dalmatian province, but such as the personal story of Giovanni da Lissa has shown, *La Serenissima* offered a stable *milieu* to the career of men gifted with great deal of initiative. Religious devotion might be channelled toward the surrounding social group in Venice, by providing the path to active integration either social either cultural. Messevich's rich career has brought to light the story of a man whose office in the oversea provinces, wasn't at all a warrior' one but rather of a meticulous accountant whose ability appeared useful even to the Austrians who considered Nicolò as a Venetian official provided with an expertise of a high value for the new Empire' bureaucracy.

The personal events of *Guardiani*'s lives, from the founding ones until the more recent ones of the nineteenth century, have shown how members

of a relatively small community, have been involved in greater events of geopolitics. Still, such as by Paravia's appointment in Turin, the outstanding ability of a community naturally provided by a multicultural background, made their level of cultural and social integration as an asset for the Italian's unification process, as esteemed trainers of 'Italian character'.

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