

David Laven

'CRISIS', 'DECLINE' AND 'FALL' OF THE SERENISSIMA: REMEMBERING VENICE AS A MEDITERRANEAN POWER IN THE WORK OF HISTORIANS, 1797-1820

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ABSTRACT: *British observers of the condition of Venice and its former territories in the post Napoleonic period were inclined to attribute the situation of the city to Austrian maladministration and the moral and economic decline of Venice after the loss of Candia. Much modern Anglophone historiography tends to echo these judgements. This article explores the degree to which this hostile attitude to the late Republic stems less from a number of Francophone historians who condemned the policies of the Serenissima, than from the works of some late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century Venetian historians (for example, Giacomo Tentori and Carlo Antonio Marin) who were often significantly more critical of the Republic than some French commentators. While the Genevan Sismondi's wider thesis surrounding Italian decadence made him deeply critical of the Venetians, historians such as the Napoleonic army officer Eugène Labaume and the Emperor's favourite civil servant, Pierre Daru were actually quite positive about the Serenissima in its last century of existence.*

KEYWORDS: *History of historiography; fall of the Venetian Republic; Byron; Tentori; Marin; Sismondi; Labaume; Daru.*

'CRISI', 'DECLINO' E 'CADUTA' DELLA SERENISSIMA: MEMORIE DELLA REPUBBLICA DI VENEZIA COME POTENZA MEDITERRANEA NELLE OPERE DEGLI STORICI, 1797-1820

SOMMARIO: *Nel periodo post-napoleonico, gli osservatori britannici della condizione di Venezia e dei suoi ex territori avevano la tendenza d'attribuire il destino triste della città alla cattiva amministrazione austriaca e soprattutto al declino morale ed economico di Venezia nell'epoca dopo la perdita di Candia. Gran parte della storiografia anglofona contemporanea tende a fare eco a questi giudizi. Questo articolo esplora in che misura questo atteggiamento ostile nei confronti della tarda Repubblica derivi meno dagli storici francofoni, che condannarono le politiche della Serenissima, che dalle opere di alcuni storici veneziani settecenteschi e dei primi dell'Ottocento (ad esempio, Giacomo Tentori e Carlo Antonio Marin) che furono spesso significativamente più critici nei confronti della Repubblica che alcuni commentatori francesi. Mentre le più ampie tesi del ginevrino Sismondi sulla decadenza italiana lo rendeva profondamente critico nei confronti dei veneziani, altri storici francofoni come l'ufficiale napoleonico Eugène Labaume e Pierre Daru, funzionario preferito dell'imperatore francese, erano in realtà piuttosto positivi sulla storia della Serenissima nel suo ultimo secolo di esistenza.*

PAROLE CHIAVE: *Storia della storiografia; Caduta della Repubblica di Venezia; Byron; Tentori; Marin; Sismondi; Labaume; Daru.*

1. Prologue

On 10 November 1816, Byron arrived in Venice¹. Less than a week after the poet's arrival, the British consul, Richard Belgrave Hoppner

¹ On Byron's engagement with Venice see D. Laven, *Sex, self-fashioning, and spelling: (auto) biographical distortion, prostitution, and Byron's Venetian residence*, «Litteraria Pragmensia», vol. 23, issue 46 (2013), pp. 38-52; D. Laven, *Lord Byron, Count Daru, and*

(1786-1872)², who soon became Byron's riding companion, wrote a long letter to Richard William Hamilton (1777-1859), Permanent Under Secretary at the Foreign Office. Hoppner's letter, full of hypochondriac grumbling, described the condition in which he found Venice. Hoppner never stopped complaining about his posting to Venice. But his representation of the state of the impoverished city is interesting:

This unfortunate country is in a truly deplorable state. The people are reduced to the greatest distress; the country is infested with robbers, and no one measure has been taken by the government to alleviate the general suffering. The people are no longer permitted to complain, nor to draw comparison between their present situation and that in which they were while under the French government, and that the Austrians themselves seem to feel the justice of their general detestation in which they are held so strongly as no longer to express any surprise at it. The little trade which was still carried on here last year is now almost entirely at a stop [...]. Venice indeed appears to be at her last gasps, and if something is not done to relieve and support her, must be soon buried again in the marshes from whence she originally sprang. Every trace of her former magnificence which still exists serves only to illustrate her present decay³.

Hoppner's image of Venice's slipping back into the marshes matches common tropes in British accounts of the city after 1797. Byron predicted in his *Ode to Venice* (1818) that the former *Dominante's* marble walls would end «level with the waters»⁴; Samuel Rogers in the second edition of his *Italy, a Poem* (1830) similarly prophesied that there would be a time when «the wave rolls o'er Venice»⁵. William Wordsworth's *On the extinction of the Venetian Republic* (composed at some point between 1799 and 1802) spoke of grief at the *Serenissima's* lost grandeur⁶. If Percy Bysshe Shelley's characterisa-

anglophone myths of Venice, «MDCCC 'Ottocento», n° 1 (2012), pp. 5-32. For more traditional and hagiographic accounts of Byron in Venice, see P. Quennell, *Byron in Italy*, Collins, London, 1941; P. Cochran, *Byron and Italy*, Cambridge Scholar Press, Newcastle upon Tyne, 2012; F. MacCarthy, *Byron: Life and Legend*, Faber and Faber, London, 2002, pp. 316-73.

² On Hoppner's career, see C.S.B. Buckland, *Richard Belgrave Hoppner*, «The English Historical Review», vol. 39, issue 155 (1924), pp. 373-85.

³ Hoppner to Hamilton, Venice, 15 November 1816, National Archive, FO7.130.

⁴ G. Byron, *Beppo: Mazeppa: Ode to Venice: a Fragment; a Spanish Romance: and Sonnet, translated from Vittorelli*, John Murray, London, 1820, p. 115.

⁵ S. Rogers, *Italy, a Poem*, Cadewell, London (1830), p. 59. Note that in the first edition of the poem, this line was not included, although the notion of a doomed Venice was still strong. S. Rogers, *Italy, a Poem*, Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme & Brown, London, 1822.

⁶ A.J. George (ed.), *The complete poetical works of William Wordsworth in ten volumes*, vol. IV (1801-1805), Boston & New York, Houghton Mifflin, 1904, p. 95. On the debated

tion of the city in his *Lines written among the Euganean Hills* as «Ocean's child, and then his Queen;/Now has come a darker day/And thou must soon be his prey» was perhaps the most doom-laden description⁷; Byron's judgement in Canto IV of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* is the most famous⁸. Most savage of all was Thomas Moore (1779-1852) in his *Rhymes on the Road*: «Mourn not for VENICE; though her fall/Be awful, as if Ocean's wave/Swept o'er her, she deserves it all/And Justice triumphs o'er her grave»⁹.

2. Anglophone historiography and the decline and fall of Venice

British views of Venice in the decade immediately after the fall of Napoleon was one of a once-great city, grown corrupt and decadent, a deserving prey for Bonaparte's armies. If its old glories were mourned by poets, even seen as a warning to Britain of the fallibility of a mercantile and maritime, oligarchic and imperial commonwealth, then British commentators after 1797 saw the collapse of the Republic as essentially the fault of the Venetians themselves. The Whig historian Henry Hallam (1777-1859) summarised this position in his *View of the state of Europe during the Middle Ages*, first published in 1818. Hallam believed the Venetian Republic was simply a corrupted hangover from the Middle Ages: while there was no doubt that the *Serenissima* was the victim of the Napoleonic treachery, the Venetians had only themselves to blame for their loss of independence:

[...] too blind to avert danger, too cowardly to withstand it, the most ancient government of Europe made not an instant's resistance; the peasants of the Underwald died upon their mountains; the nobles of Venice clung only to their lives¹⁰.

date of composition, see A.G. Hill, *On the date and significance of Wordsworth's sonnet 'On the extinction of the Venetian Republic'*, «The Review of English Studies», vol. 30, issue 120 (1979), pp. 441-445.

⁷ K. Everest and G. Matthews, *The poems of Shelley*, vol. II, Routledge, Abingdon, 2014, p. 183.

⁸ G. Byron, *The works of Lord Byron*, vol. II, John Murray, London, 1821, pp. 87-9.

⁹ T. Brown, *Rhymes on the road, fables, etc*, Galignani, Paris, 1823, p. 17. On Moore's publishing under the nom de plume of Thomas Brown, see J. Moody, *Thomas Brown (alias Thomas Moore), censorship and Regency cryptography*, «European Romantic Review», vol. 18, issue 2 (2007), pp. 187-94.

¹⁰ H. Hallam, *View of the State of Europe during the Middle Ages*, 2nd edn, 3 vols, John Murray, London, 1821, vol. I, p. 485.

I do not wish to dwell on the causes of the collapse of Venetian independence. The Venetian Republic did not expire because of mask-wearing, whoring, gambling, or, indeed, neutrality; it collapsed because of the military superiority of French forces and the total absence of scruple on the part of Bonaparte as commander of the *Armée d'Italie*. Bizarrely, anglophone historians and commentators continue to repeat the tired story of Venice as a city of the *Ridotto* and the coffee house, of *cicisbei* and Carnival, of Goldoni and Longhi, somehow equating these with the failure of republican government. Just as it seemed beyond the comprehension of the anglophone poets and scholars of the early nineteenth century to attribute the collapse of the *Serenissima* to the Directory's most talented and violent general, it seems beyond many later twentieth- and twenty-first-century historians to understand that Venice was just one of dozens of states that Napoleon wiped from the map of Europe. British and American historians glibly continue to dismiss the history of the Venetian Republic in the century after the loss of Candia as a narrative of terminal decline, often willfully ignoring the existing secondary literature.

Consider, for example, *Venice: a new history* by Thomas F. Madden. That Madden's expertise is as a mediævalist explains his sketchy understanding of the eighteenth century, but his treatment of Venice's more recent history offers an unedifying panoply of ignorance¹¹. It is scarcely surprising that Joanne M. Ferraro's *Venice: history of a floating city* is vastly superior to Madden's work¹²: Ferraro is one of the most respected historians of early modern Venice, innovative, thoughtful, and meticulous in her archival research. Yet her general text also displays a marked lack of engagement with research on the last 300 years. For many British and American historians, the years after the fall of Candia can be summed up by a series of lazy assumptions with scant reference to those who have actually bothered to study the period¹³. For Ferraro, eighteenth-century Venice is culturally vibrant but little more than an international irrelevance. Between the fall of Candia and French invasion, her Venetian chronology mentions

¹¹ T.F. Madden, *Venice. A new history*, Viking, London, 2012. See, for example, comments on p. 358, pp. 362-3.

¹² J.M. Ferraro, *Venice. History of a floating city*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2012.

¹³ Jean Georgelin's *Venise au siècle des lumières*, École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales/Mouton, Paris & The Hague, 1978, for example, is absent from the bibliographies of Madden or Ferraro. Meanwhile, some anglophone historians have simply opted to assert that they treat the eighteenth century, only to disregard it. Oliver Logan's otherwise excellent *Culture and society in Venice, 1470-1790*, Batsford, London, 1972 could easily have inserted an end date in the 1690s.

only the second war of Morea, the opening of Caffè Florian. Her text barely mentions trade, ignores the ecclesiastical reforms of the 1760s (more radical than those of Pombal or Joseph II), the complex negotiation of Venice's international situation, the Republic's continued naval and military presence in the Mediterranean. With a few nods in the direction of mainland industry, an exaggerated assessment of the significance of tourism, and some mention of music and art, Ferraro treats the reader to a set of clichés, a city of romantic trysts and Carnival disguises, Rousseau and Casanova¹⁴.

For many years I have argued that the almost wilful misunderstanding of Venice's supposed decline and only too real fall was the legacy of Francophone historiography, too readily embraced by coeval anglophone scholars, or transmitted in mediated form through popularisers: Hallam, Byron, Ruskin, Fenimore Cooper, the paintings of Etty, Parkes Bonington, and Turner¹⁵. I was apt to emphasise especially the *Histoire de la République de Venise* written by Comte Pierre Daru¹⁶. Daru was a member of the Académie française and a brilliant translator of Latin poetry; he was also Napoleon's favourite civil servant and a political chameleon¹⁷. He never set foot in Venice, but this was no deterrent to writing a seven-volume history of the Republic. Uncritically, I quoted Francis Palgrave: «Daru's history [...] must be read with caution, for it was written with the feeling of placing the extinct Republic in an unfavourable light, and

¹⁴ J.M. Ferraro, *Venice. History of a floating city* cit., p. 193.

¹⁵ See, for example, D. Laven, *Lord Byron, Count Daru, and anglophone myths of Venice* cit.

¹⁶ P.A.N. Daru, *Histoire de la République de Venise*, 7 vols, Firmin Didot, Paris, 1819); *Histoire de la République de Venise*, 8 vols, Firmin Didot, Paris, 1821; P.A.N. Daru, *Histoire de la République de Venise*, 8 vols, Firmin Didot, Paris, 1826; P.A.N. Daru, *Histoire de la République de Venise*, 8 vols, Charles Hoffmann, Stuttgart, 1828; P.A.N. Daru, *Histoire de la République de Venise*, 8 vols, N.J. Gregoir, V. Wouters, et Cie, Brussels, 1840; P.A.N. Daru, *Histoire de la République de Venise*, 9 vols, Firmin Didot, Paris, 1853; P.A.N. Daru, *Storia della Repubblica di Venezia, di P. Daru, della Accademia di Francia*, Francesco Andreola, Venice, 1819; P.A.N. Daru, *Storia della Repubblica di Venezia*, 11 vols, Tipografia Elvetica, Capolago, 1832-8; P.A.N. Daru, *Auszug aus Daru's Geschichte der Republik Venedig von N.D. Böhntlingk*, trans. Nikolaus Diedrich Böhntlingk, St. Petersburg, Gräff und Lissner [sometimes rendered Lißner], St. Petersburg, 1824. Printed Leipzig: Carl Cnobloch.

¹⁷ B. Bergerot (with a preface by J. Tulard), *Daru, intendant général de la Grande Armée*, Tallandier, Paris, 1991; B. Bergerot, *Daru en ses temps (1767-1829)*, Atelier National de Reproduction des Thèses, Lille, 1983; B. Morand (ed.), *Pierre Daru, 1767-1829. Intendant général de la Grande Armée*, M.-F. Royer-Daru, Villargoix, 1993 consists largely of extracts from his correspondence; H. de La Barre de Nanteuil (preface by F. de Langle), *Le Comte Daru ou l'Administration militaire sous la Révolution et l'Empire*, J. Peyronnet & Cie, Paris, 1966; B. Daru, *Le Comte Daru (1767-1829). Daru et Napoléon, une relation de confiance*, Éditions RJ, Boulogne-Billancourt, 2012.

thus justifying the faithless conduct of Napoleon in subverting it, and delivering it over to Austria»¹⁸. Daru had apparently written his *Histoire* to legitimate the destruction of Venetian independence by the man he had served¹⁹.

What I write here is a *mea culpa* in which I question my own lazy suggestions about Daru and certain other francophone historians. I want to analyse what historians in the aftermath of 1797 *actually* said about the supposed decline and fall of Venice in its last century or so of independence. I want to stress that among both Venetian and French historians there was a surprisingly wide recognition that Venice retained economic and administrative dynamism, and that it was not without military capacity or Mediterranean significance. At the same time, I want to show that much of the declinism – still evident in modern historiography – can be traced to Venetian historians themselves. If French writers pointed to Venetian decadence, then they did little more than echo Venetian historiography. This was not a strategy to deprecate Venetians and excuse Bonaparte; it emerged from a sometimes self-lacerating Venetian perspective that helped the nobles, citizens, and subjects of the former Republic come to terms with the end of the independence.

3. Venetian historians and the decline and the fall of Venice

The collapse of the Venetian Republic came as a shock. Venetian historians responded quickly, celebrating the longevity of their lost 'nazione' and mourning its fall. In this they benefitted from the relatively benign rule established in January 1798 under the Austrian *prima dominazione*, which initially sought to accommodate Venice's patrician élites²⁰. Venetians, such as Cristoforo Tentori and Carlo Antonio Marin, who wrote on the extinguished Republic, drew on a longstanding tradition of apologetic Venetian histories. Works published in the decades after the fall of Venice continued to depend heavily on this older historiography. Indeed, it is worth emphasising a very simple point – often neglected by historians of historiography –, eloquently made by William St Clair: books are not always read as soon

¹⁸ F. Palgrave (Cohen), *Handbook for travellers in Italy*, John Murray, London, 1842, p. xviii.

¹⁹ D. Laven, *Lord Byron, Count Daru, and anglophone myths of Venice* cit.

²⁰ M. Gottardi, *L'Austria a Venezia. Società e istituzioni nella prima dominazione austriaca, 1798-1806*, Franco Angeli, Milan, 1992.

as they are purchased; even those that are instantly consumed, are then re-read; books, after all, have a very long shelf life²¹.

A second banal but important point is that the studies on the history of Venice written after 1797 have a strongly teleological stance: their authors wanted to explain the collapse of the longest-lived republic in history. Indeed, Hallam, as we have seen, felt obliged to discuss the fall of Venice even though it fell several hundred years outside his chronological span. Yet, when writing about Venetian history, authors in the quarter century or so after 1797, made use not only of, say, mediæval chroniclers, and of the more-or-less official early modern historiographers (Sabellico and Navagero, Bembo and Foscarini, Paruta and Morosini, often citing the Lovisa volumes of *Degl'istorici delle cose veneziane* [1718-22])²², but also of more recent studies from the last half century, perhaps most notably the work of Giacomo Filiasi on the early history of Venice²³, and Vettor Sandi (1703-1784), author of a ponderous six-volume *Storia civile* that took the history of the Republic's institutions and laws up to 1700, supplemented with an additional three volumes that continued to 1767²⁴. After the fall of the *Serenissima*, historians also continued to employ non-Venetian works such as Amelot de La Houssaie's *Histoire du gouvernement de Venise*²⁵, and the twelve-volume *Histoire de la République de Venise* by the sometime Jesuit and then Benedictine, Marc Antoine Laugier²⁶.

Despite the teleological frenzy unleashed by Bonaparte's attack and the rapid régime changes that followed until the Congress of Vienna, there are strong lines of continuity between those writing before and after 1797. Indeed, many historians' lives straddled the loss of independence and several régime changes. Giambattista Gallicciolli, linguist,

²¹ W. St Clair, *The reading nation in the Romantic period*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2004, pp. 3-6.

²² *Degl'istorici delle cose veneziane i quali hanno scritto per pubblico decreto*, 10 vols, Domenico Lovisa, Venice, 1718-22.

²³ G. Filiasi, *Saggio sopra i Veneti primi*, 2 vols, Pietro Savioni, Venice, 1781.

²⁴ V. Sandi, *Principj di storia civile della Repubblica di Venezia dalla sua fondazione sino all'anno di n.s. 1700*, 6 vols, Sebastian Coletti, Venice, 1755-6; V. Sandi *Principj di storia civile della repubblica di Venezia [...] dall'anno di N.S. sino all'anno 1767*, 3 vols, Sebastian Coletti, Venice, 1769-72.

²⁵ A.N.A. de La Houssaye, *Histoire du gouvernement de Venise*, 2 vols, Frédéric Léonard, Paris, 1677 / Gijsbert Van Zijll, Utrecht, 1677. There were numerous editions of the *Histoire* produced during the final quarter of the seventeenth century and the early years of the eighteenth century.

²⁶ M.A. Laugier, *Histoire de la République de Venise*, 12 vols, N.B. Duchesne, Paris, 1759-68. Laugier's work was translated into Italian as *Istoria della Repubblica di Venezia dalla sua fondazione fino al presente [...] tradotta dal francese*, 6 vols, Carlo Palese & Gasparo Storti, Venice, 1st edn 1767-9, 2nd edn 1778.

parish priest, Foscolo's tutor, and author of *Delle Memorie Venete* (1795) was born in 1733 and died in 1806, the first year of Napoleonic rule of Venice; Gallicciolli's great rival, the former Jesuit Cristoforo Tentori was twelve years younger and died in 1810; Giacomo Filiasi was 47 when the Republic fell and died in 1829, fifteen years after the Habsburg restoration; Carlo Antonio Marin, 44 in 1797, died in 1815. These men were all adults when Bonaparte destroyed the *Serenissima*, but had lived under the Republic and observed at first-hand how it functioned.

Let me take Tentori and Marin as examples. Tentori, born in Andalusia to a Venetian father, became a Jesuit at sixteen, only for the order to be outlawed when he was 22. Having become a priest and returned to Venice, he emerged as an enormously productive historian, best known for his *Saggio sulla storia civile, politica, ecclesiastica e sulla corografia e topografia degli stati della Repubblica di Venezia ad uso della nobile e civile gioventù*²⁷. In 1799 he published his *Raccolta cronologico-ragionata* [... della] *storia diplomatica della rivoluzione e caduta della Repubblica di Venezia*, just one of a host of works that treated Venice's fall²⁸. The bulk of Tentori's two volumes consisted of diplomatic correspondence, little of which put the French in a good light. But the early section of his books sought to explain «il Come! il Perché» of the «fausto momento». It is worth stressing here that Tentori – attacked by Gallicciolli for not being a real *veneziano* – was an outspoken Venetian patriot:

Venezia, quella Repubblica, che formava la meraviglia delle più colte Nazioni, quella, che pel lungo corso di 1342 anni fu seconda Madre di Eroi in pace ed in guerra, quella, in cui formato erasi il più giusto, il più saggio, ed il più mite Governo, di quanti vantar può la storia dell'umanità, quella in oggi più non esiste; esso spirò fra le lagrime de' più onorati, e de' più leali sudditi²⁹.

For Tentori the problems faced by the Venetians stemmed originally from the Portuguese rounding of the Cape of Good Hope, which undermined their dominant commercial position with the East. Facing challenge from the English, Portuguese, and Dutch traders, Venice also lacked France's enormous natural wealth or Spain's colonial

²⁷ C. Tentori, *Saggio sulla storia civile, politica, ecclesiastica e sulla corografia e topografia degli stati della Repubblica di Venezia ad uso della nobile e civile gioventù*, 12 vols, Giacomo Storti, Venice, 1785-1790.

²⁸ C. Tentori, *Raccolta cronologico-ragionata di documenti inediti che formano la storia diplomatica della rivoluzione e caduta della Repubblica di Venezia corredata di critiche osservazioni*, 2 vols, where?, Augusta, 1799.

²⁹ *Ibidem*, vol. I, p. 3.

heft³⁰: over extension in the Eastern Mediterranean in the face of the Ottomans could not be maintained indefinitely. From 1713, Venice was reduced to a *Terraferma* rump, along with «suo Golfo», and a handful of islands. It is significant that Tentori skimmed swiftly over the loss of Cyprus and Crete, and barely mentioned Morea. In his *Saggio sulla storia civile* he again emphasised that the key to decline in Venetian trade was the rounding of the Cape. This not only shifted trade from the Mediterranean but necessitated a more cautious Venetian policy towards the Turks in which possession of Cyprus and Candia assumed greater significance³¹. The loss of Cyprus meant not just a weaker Mediterranean position, but also launched competition from other European powers for Levantine trade. The exclusion of Venice from its Greek possessions determined that, henceforth, the Republic was obliged to see its policies in terms of «sua conservazione» rather than as the great power that, during the League of Cambrai, had been able both to maintain «l'impero del Mediterraneo» and resist «alle forze riunite insieme di quasi tutta l'Europa»³². Caught between the hegemonic designs of France and Austria, the Republic was forced to adopt its policy of «l'osservanza della più impuntabile Neutralità armata»³³. Tentori was realistic about the state of Venice's military power in the eighteenth century:

A dir il vero, lo stato delle Truppe non corrispondeva nè a' suoi bisogni, nè alla sua potenza: ma poteva essere sul momento considerabilmente accresciuto con le truppe leggere Schiavoni, ed Albanesi, [...] che la vicinanza col Turco, e le continue passate guerre avevano molto agguerrite [...]: Uomini eccellenti, e de' bravi Soldati³⁴.

The Republic could additionally mobilise 30,000 militiamen. In other words, it should have been able to «sostenere colle proprie forze la *Neutralità armata*, da cui dipendeva la di lei conservazione». Meanwhile, Venice's navy numbered 50 ships, with the *Arsenale* easily able to augment this force. Nor did the Republic want fiscal resources: in an average year it generated nine million ducats of revenue³⁵. In Tentori's view, the huge sums extracted by Bonaparte further demonstrated that the Venetians possessed the fiscal wherewithal to have sustained much greater resistance. After 1718, Venice's «debolezza in

³⁰ Ibidem, vol. I, p. 9.

³¹ C. Tentori, *Saggio sulla storia civile* cit., vol. II, 1785, p. 128 and 143.

³² C. Tentori, *Raccolta cronologico-ragionata* cit., vol. I, p. 3.

³³ Ibidem, p. 10.

³⁴ Ibidem, p. 12.

³⁵ Ibidem, p. 13-14.

confronto dell'antica possanza» had meant that armed neutrality was not only wise but the only realistic course: in essence it reflected the wisdom enshrined in Venice's widely-admired constitution³⁶. Why was Venice not more resilient? If much of Tentori's book stressed the unscrupulous conduct of the French, he also highlighted the degeneration Venice's élites. The «lunga pace» and «il continuo ozio» accompanied «gravi disordini, i quali indebolivano le pubbliche deliberazioni»³⁷. Venice suffered from «un certo egoismo, sempre fatale alle Repubbliche», «un riflessibile raffreddamento» in patrician zeal, indulgent magistrates, a cavalier attitude to state secrets,

un serpeggiante stravizzo, una noncuranza delle cose sacre e religiose, un immoderato spirito di passatempi, una scandalosa impudenza nelle donne, un libertinaggio [...]»³⁸.

Venice became «una spezie di *Oligarchia*, quanto funesta alla Causa Pubblica, altrettanto contraria alla Costituzione della Repubblica»³⁹. Venice's collapse reflected the corruption of its élites, a failure of will, rather than military impotence. Tentori deplored the brutal hypocrisy of the French, but ultimately he blamed «lo stato d'inerzia» of the Senate and the *Maggior Consiglio's* unconstitutional vote to dissolve itself.⁴⁰

Tentori's lament contrasted with Marin's. Few people today read Marin's eight-volume *Storia civile e politica del commercio de' Veneziani*⁴¹. He is remembered only as the model for Ippolito Nievo's tragicomic Count Rinaldo in *Le confessioni d'un Italiano*. All but the last of Marin's volumes were published under Austrian rule; the last came out when Napoleon ruled Venice. Yet, despite being written from the perspective of foreign domination, Marin's history remained nostalgically patriotic. In the volumes published under the Austrians, Marin proudly described himself as «Patrizio Veneto».

At the basis of Marin's approach was the need to place the history of commerce centrally to the history of the Republic:

³⁶ Ibidem, p. 15.

³⁷ Ibidem, p. 16.

³⁸ Ibidem, p. 16.

³⁹ Ibidem, p. xiv.

⁴⁰ Ibidem, vol. II, p. 414.

⁴¹ C.A. Marin, *Storia civile e politica del commercio de' Veneziani*, 8 vols; vol. 1-2 Sebastian Coletti, Venice; vol. 3-8 printed privately at author's expense, Venice, 1798-1808.

Questa mia Storia civile e politica del commercio de' Veneziani egli è molto tempo dacchè l'ho ideata, necessario quasi vedendo, e per istruzione, e per nazionale decoro, che vi fosse almeno un saggio storico del nostro commercio. E riuscir doveva ben sorprendente [sic] sì a' nostri che a forestieri, che una nazione, qual altra Fenicia o Cartaginese, nata col commercio, da quello nutrita, accresciuta, ed ingrandita, e sempre ragguardevole mantenuta per quasi quattordici secoli, d'esso non avesse una qualche estesa e regolata memoria⁴².

Marin, as with all the authors I discuss here, continued to see Venice as a nation, even after Campoformido. For Marin it was a nation born of trade, nourished by trade, and that expanded as an imperial power because of trade. But all eight of Marin's volumes were published when Venice had no chance of regaining its past status as an imperial capital or its commerce. His work, however, is more than a melancholic valediction. It is also an attempt to understand how Venice, after so glorious and prosperous a past, could have fallen from great estate.

Like Tentori, Marin saw the collapse of Venice principally as a failure of will power and want of virtue. The key problem was that the strength of the Ottomans meant that the Republic feared them to such a degree that it avoided involvement in continental conflict: the significance of losing Cyprus, Crete, and ultimately Morea, was to reinforce Venetian determination to adopt a neutral position towards the major European powers. It was the Mediterranean identity, the desire to hang on to the remnants of Mediterranean power that drove Venice's neutrality. Marin argued that it was the very success of this policy that lay – paradoxically – at the root of internal political problem⁴³. Without international conflict, the Republic's political and administrative classes turned upon one another:

[...] dietro alle mormorazioni si riducevano ad aperta guerra; nella quale non si adoperavano armi di fuoco, da punta, da raglio, od altra arma micidiale; ma adoperandosi in essa i voti negativi nella dispensa degli onori, degli uffizj, si veniva a togliere a più d'uno la vita civile⁴⁴.

Meanwhile, Venetians lost any sort of martial spirit. Marin recounted, for example, how in 1740 the British had offered «di pagar a sue spese le truppe della Repubblica» in exchange for a military alliance; the Senate had rejected such overtures:

⁴² C. A. Marin, *Storia civile e politica del commercio de' Veneziani* cit. vol. I, p.III.

⁴³ *Ibidem*.

⁴⁴ *Ibidem*.

Tanto pusillanime indolenza, ed inerzia andò sempre più diminuendo il credito dei Veneziani preso le straniere Potenze. Fe raffreddare il genio nei Nobili, e nei più distinti Cittadini. Si volle per tale condotta, che la Nazione tutta avesse a scancellare dalla sua mente il nome di guerra, e che i sudditi fossero resi affatto imbelli, ed incapaci di difendere al caso animosamente lo Stato⁴⁵.

The one exception to Marin's tale of woe was Angelo Emo. Yet Marin could not resist emphasising Emo's hernia and hæmorrhoids⁴⁶, alongside offering qualified praise for actions against the Barbary pirates and «per aver disciplinato la marina». Marin also criticised the expense of Emo's ventures, and his failure to secure any place of strategic significance within the Mediterranean and or to destroy the defences of La Goletta, which would have hit the trade of Tunis⁴⁷. Like the *oriundo* Tentori, the proud Venetian patrician saw his own class as cowardly, bored with politics, venal, and seeking «soltanto il divertimento, il piacere»⁴⁸.

I shall turn to one further 'Venetian' account by Vittorio Barzoni (1767-1843). Barzoni, the Brescian born author of the *Tributo di un solitario alle ceneri di Angelo Emo*⁴⁹, was profoundly anti-French. His *I romani nella Grecia*, in which the Greeks are the Italians and the Romans the brutal, raping, thieving French, has similarities with Kleist's *Hermannsschlacht*⁵⁰. Barzoni, an early advocate of a united Italian Republic, worked with the British authorities in Malta to publish two anti-Napoleonic newspapers, *L'Argo* and *Il Cartaginese*. That his *Rivoluzioni della Repubblica veneta*⁵¹ was translated into English during his Maltese residence reflects British efforts to use him as part of their propaganda war⁵². Swift to lambast French want of scruple and love of rapine, Barzoni nonetheless identified the causes of Venice's collapse in its neutrality and failure to prepare militarily:

⁴⁵ C.A. Marin, *Storia civile e politica del commercio de' Veneziani* cit., vol. VIII, p. 319.

⁴⁶ Ibidem, p. 378.

⁴⁷ Ibidem, p. 378-9.

⁴⁸ Ibidem, p. 24.

⁴⁹ V. Barzoni, *Tributo di un solitario alle ceneri di Angelo Emo*, Francesco Andreola, Venice, 1792.

⁵⁰ V. Barzoni, *I romani nella Grecia*, Rivington, London (actually Francesco Andreola, Venice), 1797, p. 33-5.

⁵¹ V. Barzoni, *Rivoluzioni della Repubblica veneta*, Francesco Andreola, Venice, 1799.

⁵² V. Barzoni, *An accurate account of the fall of the Republic of Venice* (trans. J. Hincley), J. Hatchard, London, 1804.

In una sì spiacevole crisi la Repubblica Veneta credette di dover seguire quell’antico metodo, al quale avea dovuta fin a quel momento la sua sicurezza, e la sua tranquillità. Non volle urtare, nè favorire alcuna Potenza, credendo di preservarsi, tutte egualmente accarezzando⁵³.

4. Venice’s decline and fall in the works of Francophone historians

Let me turn now to the authors who wrote in French. The first work I wish to consider is by Simonde de Sismondi (1773-1842). Sismondi’s *Histoire des républiques italiennes du Moyen Âge* first appeared in press Zurich in eight volumes 1807 to 1809⁵⁴. Unlike the other authors I discuss, Sismondi’s extensive treatment of Venice was inserted into a wider framework: his study of the Italian republics. Throughout the 7,000 pages of the *Histoire*, the Genevan economist stressed the distinctiveness of Venice from other Italian *comuni* in part because of its tendency to look to the sea rather than the mainland, but principally because of its *governo stretto*, which permitted stability, internal order, and the longevity of the Republic. While Sismondi’s version of the rise of Venice, with its emphasis on the pivotal rôle of the crusades and its conflict with other Italian maritime republics differed little from other standard accounts, his description of Venice’s decline was part of his scathing attack on all Italians, which dominated the conclusion of the *Histoire*. Italy’s decline was a consequence of post-Tridentine Catholicism, an emphasis on rote learning, which stressed «la mémoire seule» rather than originality of thought. (He never explained how this system gave rise to Galileo, Galvani, Beccaria, Vico, or Muratori.) The adoption of secretive and arbitrary legal systems – neither unique to the peninsula nor new – failed to attach Italians to their states. Above all, Spanish hegemony was disastrous for the inhabitants of the peninsula. The Moorish influence on Spanish culture brought with it an exaggerated and perverted notion of male honour, manifest in vengeance and vendetta. Rather than emphasising forms of government, Sismondi, in a manner typical of early-nineteenth-century liberal thought, sought to explain the marginalisation of all of Italy’s states through a cocktail of cultural, religious, racial, and geographical determinism.

⁵³ V. Barzoni, *Rivoluzioni della Repubblica veneta* cit., p. 31.

⁵⁴ J.C.L.S. de Sismondi, *Histoire des républiques italiennes du moyen âge*, 8 vols, Henri Gessner, Zurich, 1807-1809; J.C.L.S. de Sismondi, *Histoire des républiques italiennes du moyen âge*, 16 vols, vols 1-8, Henri Nicolle, Paris, 1809, vols 9-16, Treuttel et Würtz, Paris, 1809-1816; J.C.L.S. de Sismondi, *Histoire des français*, 18 vols, Treuttel et Würtz, Paris, 1821-44.

There was one other aspect on which Sismondi focused that resonates with Venetian accounts: the neglect of and contempt for military careers. Expressing views close to those of his friend Mme de Staël in *Corinne* and of Stendhal in *La Chartreuse de Parme*, not to mention of the thousands of Napoleonic officers who engaged in publicly performed contempt for the population of the peninsula⁵⁵, Sismondi pointed to the supposed fact that powerful, rich, noble Italians had no shame in avowing «hautement leur pusillanimité»: «Ils parlent sans rougir de la grande peur qu'ils ont eue, ils confessent que leurs femmes ont plus courage qu'eux [...]»⁵⁶. The problem for Sismondi was that Venice did not fit comfortably into this narrative: it displayed a marked independence from Rome; it never fell under Spanish hegemony; moreover, it continued in the seventeenth century – not least in the defence of Candia and in its wars against the Uskoks – to demonstrate considerable military resolve.

While Sismondi did appreciate Venice's independence from Rome, he displayed a more ambivalent attitude to Venetian military power in the face of the Ottoman threat in the eastern Mediterranean. He recognised that, through most of the seventeenth century, the Venetians remained capable of defeating the Turks at sea; and he acknowledged that when the Venetian army encountered the Ottomans it was capable of victory, albeit less often and less convincingly. He noted too the valour the Venetians during the siege of Candia. Nevertheless, in his treatment of the loss of Crete, Sismondi put greater emphasis on the devastating effects it had for Venetian power, than on the fact that Venetians displayed much of their old warrior spirit. Sismondi was rather less impressed by the brief Venetian reconquest of Morea: his account was of failure and decline, when he might have stressed that the Republic, albeit beleaguered and lacking its former economic and fiscal strength, could still wage effective campaigns. Unfairly, he ascribed the credit for the brief re-establishment of Venetian power on the Greek mainland to a «général suédois» (Otto Wilhelm von Königsmarck) rather than to the valiant Venetian, and future doge, Francesco Morosini⁵⁷. Sismondi was especially critical of the nature of rule of the *Stato da Mar*, which he presented as exploitative of – and hated by – the Republic's Greek subjects:

⁵⁵ M. Broers, *The Napoleonic Empire in Italy, 1796-1814. Cultural imperialism in a European context*, Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke, 2005.

⁵⁶ J.C.L.S. de Sismondi, *Histoire des français* cit., vol. xvi, pp. 453-4.

⁵⁷ Ibidem, p. 283.

[...] on ne voyoit que corruption, négligence et péculat dans ses possessions d'outre-mer. Les sujets grecs de la république étoient tellement vexés par les injustices des gouverneurs vénitiens et les monopoles des marchands, qu'ils regrettoient le joug des Turcs⁵⁸.

The final two hundred years of the *Serenissima's* history posed problems for Sismondi: they simply did not fit his wider narrative. He was presented with the teleological problem that has dominated the history of the late Republic since its fall. The end of Venetian independence was not the product of long decline: it was the direct consequence of French Revolutionary armies. Reluctant to denounce the architects of Venice's fall, Sismondi could not assess Venice impartially; instead, he looked for signs of decay and weakness to explain its collapse. Sismondi – like many observers (including educated Venetians) – attributed the blame for the current state of the peninsula to its native population, not to its invaders; this was true even for Venice, which had, after all, retained its independence throughout the period of so-called decadence. Sismondi, it should be noted, knew little about this period. It is quite striking that he mentioned only two sources in his notes. One of these was Laugier's *Histoire*, which he used selectively. For example, he followed Laugier in recognising that the Venetian fleet maintained «son ancienne réputation» in its clashes with the Turkish navy, but he did not follow Laugier's account of the 1716 defence of Corfu, which demonstrated both the bravery of the Venetian forces, and the continued loyalty of the auxiliaries from the *Stato da Mar*. The other source Sismondi mentioned was the three final volumes of the *Storia civile* by Sandi, dismissed as «pas lisibles»⁵⁹. The comment seems to be code for the fact that Sismondi had not read them. Had he done so, he would probably have offered a much more even-handed assessment of the *Serenissima's* neutrality, which Sandi had explored at length. Venice's policy of neutrality served the Republic well during the years between the Peace of Passarowitz and Bonaparte's invasion. But it was necessary to Sismondi's interpretation to vilify such a stance as symptomatic of Italians' want of martial masculinity, which permitted other European powers to carve up the peninsula. The allegedly craven position of the Venetians was highlighted by the way, that, while the Republic «arma ses villes et ses forteresses, et augmenta ses troupes de ligne pour se faire respecter ses voisins»,

⁵⁸ Ibidem, p. 341.

⁵⁹ Ibidem, p 342.

the violations of neutrality «ne put la déterminer à sortir de la neutralité qu'elle avoit adopté»⁶⁰.

The *Républiques italiennes* did not address the French aggression that brought Venetian independence to an end in 1797, but Sismondi's abridged *History of the Italian Republics* of 1832 did deal with the episode⁶¹. His account of the final years of Venetian independence treats the latter with complete hostility, immeasurably nastier than anything written by Daru, the supposed apologist for Napoleon. In a piece of brilliant rhetoric, quite unsupported by evidence, Sismondi's summary of the Venice's political system replicated the most caricatured criticisms of the *Serenissima*:

The families from among whom alone was selected the Council of Ten made every other tremble and obey. They regarded the state as a prey to be divided among themselves. Justice was venal; the finances dilapidated; the fortifications falling into ruin; the effective forces of the army did not amount to one half of what appeared on the roll; every thing was to the Venetian noble an object of embezzlement and robbery. The oppression of the distant provinces was so great, that the eastern Christian subjects of the republic regretted the dominion of the Ottomans⁶².

Sismondi dismissed the Venetian decision not to get involved in the wars of succession as based merely on 'timidity', and then denigrated the policy of neutrality: other powers, he argued, no longer respected the Venetian state and its territory in consequence was «always open to every belligerent power [...] often the theatre of the most obstinate warfare». He followed these observations with an even damning attack on the nature of Venetian government and economy, which bears no semblance to the circumstances described by eighteenth-century commentators:

Her debt [...] was always increasing; her manufactures always in decay; her territory was infested with robbers [...] A suspicious and cruel government, which maintained itself only by the vigilance of spies, which had promoted immorality to enervate the people, which made the most profound secrecy its only safeguard, – which did not tolerate even a question on public affairs, –

⁶⁰ Ibidem, pp. 340-41.

⁶¹ J.C.L.S. de Sismondi, *Histoire de la renaissance de la liberté en Italie, de ses progrès, de sa décadence et de sa chute*, Treuttel et Würtz, Strasbourg & London, 1832; J.C.L.S. de Sismondi, *A history of the Italian republics, being a view of the origin, progress and fall of Italian freedom in one volume*, Longman, Rees, Orme, Brown, and Green, London, 1832.

⁶² J.C.L.S. de Sismondi, *History of the Italian Republics* cit., p. 359.

which deprived the accused of every protection before the tribunals, – which acknowledged no other limit to the right of punishing by the dagger, by poison, or by the axe of the executioner, than that of the terror of the its rulers; – a government such as this became execrated by its subjects. It stained with the most odious tyranny the very name of republic⁶³.

Sismondi's calumny was designed to justify Bonaparte's overthrow of the Venetian Republic. This was done best by painting it in the darkest of hues. Of all the governments of Europe faced with the threat from republican France, the Venetian government was «the most opposite in principle», but it nevertheless refused to enter a coalition against France because of costs that would have «diminished the spoils of provinces which the patricians divided amongst themselves». On the one hand, «sacrifice of the public to private interests» prevented any effective military response; on the other hand, it was Austrian violation of Venetian neutrality that obliged Bonaparte to cross into the Republic's territory, where the French were welcomed by the population of the *Terraferma*, immediately won over by revolutionary values so that «the republic was at last made to understand how much it was detested by all those who had the least elevation of soul or cultivation of mind»⁶⁴. Sismondi explained away the widespread popular resistance to the French invasion by attributing it purely to «the lowest class [...] completely under the influence of priests, comprehending only what exists, fearing all change, and still deeply excited by the name of St. Mark»⁶⁵. The Austrians «refused all assistance» to Venice, permitting the French to overthrow the Republic, and eventually after the Treaty of Pressburg to annex all its territories:

It was thus that the invasion of the French, at the end of the eighteenth century, restored to Italy all the advantages of which her invasion at the end of the fifteenth century had deprived her. [...] When Napoleon Bonaparte was appointed to command the army in Italy [...] he began to effect the regeneration which gave to the Italian nation more liberty than it had lost⁶⁶.

How does Sismondi's unsympathetic treatment of Venice's decline compare with that of two men who actually served Napoleon? I shall turn first to Eugène Labaume (1783-1849). Labaume was an experienced soldier and military engineer, when, in the service

⁶³ Ibidem, pp. 360-61.

⁶⁴ Ibidem.

⁶⁵ Ibidem, pp. 361.

⁶⁶ Ibidem, pp. 363.

Eugène Beauharnais, Napoleon's stepson and viceroy of the Regno d'Italia, he wrote his *Histoire abrégée de la république de Venise*⁶⁷. Labaume was a not unsympathetic historian of Venice, and clearly used his work to make occasional, far from oblique criticisms of aggressive foreign policies and imperialist ambitions – Napoleon was the obvious target. Labaume saw Venice as a nation in its own right, albeit one that based its success on openness to immigration and an outward-looking mentality. In common with all the historians I have mentioned, Labaume believed the twin threat of France and Austria central to Venice's undoing. He identified the loss of Candia as pivotal to Venice's decline, not because of the marginalisation of Venice as an eastern Mediterranean presence or loss of trade, but because it led to a demilitarisation of Venetian policy and society: «Dès-lors on licencia les troupes, et l'amour de la paix et du commerce devint l'unique objet des vœux de la nation». This led to Venice's drift towards neutrality⁶⁸.

Defeat at the hands of the Turks encouraged doges not just to retrench finances but also «à faire goûter au peuple les douceurs de la paix», altering «le caractère de la nation»⁶⁹. Labaume almost immediately contradicted this in recounting Morosini's successful campaigns, and the victories of Alessandro Molino who won «l'amour de la Nation, en triomphant des Turcs, et sur terre et sur mer»⁷⁰. But such victories were transitory. When in 1714 the Venetian ambassador was imprisoned in Istanbul, the Venetians had no choice but to appeal to the Holy Roman Emperor Charles VI to mediate for them: «Son long assoupissement ne lui présageait que défaites: sans argent, sans soldats, elle ne savait comment soutenir la guerre»⁷¹. The loss of Morea and the wider legacy of Passarowitz signalled a «paix humiliante»: Venice could no longer aspire to grandeur, «et mit en plein jour sa faiblesse et son impuissance»⁷². Henceforth, the smallest Turkish attack was

[...] un sujet de crainte et de terreur; entouré d'ennemis puissans, qui tous lui faisaient la loi, il était obligé de tout endurer sans se plaindre. Les uns violaient son territoire, d'autres lui ravissaient ses colonies; et cette antique souveraineté du golfe, jadis si respectée, et à laquelle Venise semblait

⁶⁷ E. Labaume, *Histoire abrégée de la république de Venise*, 2 vols, Le Normant, Paris, 1811.

⁶⁸ E. Labaume, *Histoire abrégée de la république de Venise* cit., vol. ii, p. 405.

⁶⁹ Ibidem, p. 406.

⁷⁰ Ibidem, p. 415.

⁷¹ Ibidem, pp. 418-19.

⁷² Ibidem, p. 422.

attacher son existence, n'était plus qu'une chimère dont l'empereur Charles VI détruisit le prestige en choisissant Trieste pour l'établissement de sa marine⁷³.

Despite occasional flirtations with rearmament, Venice simply could not compete with more powerful states. For Labaume this was highlighted by Emo, who, despite successful actions against «les corsaires de Tunis [...] n'obtint qu'une paix honteuse à sa patrie» because the state could not afford «les sommes immenses» needed for his naval actions. «La même nation, qui jadis avait triomphé de Constantinople, et mis une barrière au débordement des Turcs, consentit à devenir tributaire d'une régence barbaresque»⁷⁴. Venice was a paradox. If it was its traditions of stability, its slowness to reform that had ensured its durability, it also proved unable to adapt; it was military not commercial weakness that signalled its doom:

Lorsque Venise se vit entourée d'États puissans, lorsque les grandes familles furent éteintes, que l'amour de la patrie et les nobles exemples devinrent de plus en plus rares, le sentiment qu'elle eut de sa faiblesse fit dégénérer toutes ses résolutions. L'usage heureux de la prudence en fit chez elle une loi d'habitude. Craignant de s'égarer dans les voies nouvelles, elle ne connut d'autre règles, pour le présent, que les leçons du passé; elle vieillit et se dessécha dans la pratique répétée des mêmes maximes. Enfin, semblable à l'eau dormante de ses lagunes, que nul vent s'agite, que nulle tempête ne remue. [...] dès long-temps elle avait cessé de vivre; elle ne fit que cesser d'être⁷⁵.

Labaume, of course, skirted over the fact that Venice fell not because its repetition of old maxims, or hostility to change, but because Bonaparte disregarded its neutrality and independence. Labaume's matter-of-fact comment that Venice «a été constitué partie intégrante de son royaume d'Italie» lacks any gushing praise or sense of future grandeur: he knew that Venice was now no more than a departmental capital, shorn of trade and status⁷⁶.

What then of Daru, whom I so long vilified as Napoleon's creature, a mere apologist for the overthrow of Venice? I have come to realise that such a caricature of Daru is unfair and unhistorical. Daru published his great work in the years after the second

⁷³ Ibidem, p. 423.

⁷⁴ Ibidem, p. 431.

⁷⁵ Ibidem, pp. 438-9.

⁷⁶ Ibidem, pp. 439.

restoration of Bourbon rule. At the time, the middle-aged Machiavellian and translator of Horace was trying to ease his way back into favour, under a régime in which he had initially been marginalised and persecuted. The *Histoire de la République de Venise* is not a piece of Napoleonic propaganda⁷⁷. For example, its account of the events immediately before the French occupation of the city it is incredibly balanced. When treating the pro-French risings in Venetian Lombardy, he is dismissive both of those commentators who saw them as purely the result of French agitation and intimidation, and of those who sought to present them as spontaneous revolutions against Venetian domination: «Je ne prétends ni concilier ces deux versions, ni leur en substituer une qui soit exacte. Il est probable que dans l'une et l'autre il y a de l'exagération»⁷⁸.

When it came to a narrative of Venetian decline, Daru was also more indulgent than many Venetian historians. Reflecting on the outcome of the War of Candia, he remarked that «Ce n'était pas un médiocre gloire pour les Vénitiens d'avoir soutenu pendant vingt-cinq ans une lutte corps à corps avec l'empire ottoman. Ils n'en sortaient pas sans pertes, mais l'honneur des armes leur restait»⁷⁹. Victorious in ten naval battles, and having inflicted 100,000 casualties on the Turkish besieging army, «ils pouvaient se vanter d'avoir porté les premiers coups à ce colosse, qui avait menacé de fondre de tout son poids sur l'Europe»⁸⁰. In Daru's opinion, the eighteenth-century adoption of neutrality was not a mistake on the part of the Venetians. In discussing the War of the Spanish Succession, for example, he highlighted how the Piedmontese with fewer resources than the Venetians only managed to profit from the conflict through pure self-interest and duplicity. Daru never suggested that the Venetians should have done the same, but that they should have profited more from the peace: while they rebuilt fortifications, and maintained an army of some 20,000 men, they did not invest sufficiently in their military capacities⁸¹. Daru criticised them *not* for remaining neutral, but for their impotence in the face of both French and Austrian violations of that neutrality. And faced with the Turkish threat in Morea, the Venetians were again unable to mobilise sufficient men to pose a

⁷⁷ P.A.N. Daru, *Histoire de la République de Venise* cit., 1819; P.A.N. Daru, *Histoire de la République de Venise* cit., 1821; P.A.N. Daru, *Histoire de la République de Venise* cit., 1826.

⁷⁸ P.A.N. Daru, *Histoire de la République de Venise* cit., 1816, vol. v, p. 293.

⁷⁹ P.A.N. Daru, *Histoire de la République de Venise* cit., 1819, vol. iv, p. 632.

⁸⁰ Ibidem, p. 632.

⁸¹ Ibidem, p. 666.

threat to the Ottoman forces; that Dalmatia remained secure was not due to any inherent loyalty to the *Serenissima* but due to the bellicose nature of the local population and their intense «animosité contre les Turcs»⁸².

For Daru the great reason for Venice's decline was its military impotence, which became more entrenched with neutrality. «Isolée au milieu des nations», Venice became a passive onlooker «imperturbable dans son indifférence, aveugle sur ses intérêts, insensible aux injures, elle sacrifiait tout à l'unique désir de ne point donner d'ombrage aux autres États, et de conserver un paix éternelle»⁸³. The problem in Daru's view was that the Republic could clearly not compete on the international stage because of lack of resources. Its only way to remedy this was *not* through «la puissance du commerce» but through expansion of power to generate «une certaine masse de population»⁸⁴. Venice had managed to do this in the past. The problem was that Venice's constitution did not permit the integration of that population within the polity. The position of the *Dominante* meant that it was only Venetians patriicians who truly identified with the state. Had Venice been a monarchy «les sujets italiens, les Dalmates, les Grecs, se seraient trouvés égaux devant le prince. Tous auraient pu participer aux emplois [...]»⁸⁵. The irony of course is that this was precisely what the Napoleonic imperial system failed to do in Italy. The preservation of élite posts for French, and at a pinch Lombard and Piedmontese officials and officers thoroughly alienated the Venetians; the French sense of inherent superiority antagonised Italians throughout the peninsula.

Daru's account of Venetian decline is judicious. He is cautious to contextualise. Thus, while Labaume defined the paying of tribute to Barbary pirates after Emo's expedition as «honteuse», Daru qualified this shame: «cette humiliation était partagée par des puissances bien plus considérables»⁸⁶. He understood that the Venetian ships could not start trading under foreign colours because the moment they did so they could no longer «prétendre à la souveraineté du golfe Adriatique»⁸⁷.

⁸² Ibidem, p. 684.

⁸³ Ibidem, vol. v, p. 3.

⁸⁴ Ibidem, p. 4.

⁸⁵ Ibidem, p. 5.

⁸⁶ Ibidem, p. 55.

⁸⁷ Ibidem, p. 56.

What is striking about all the historic accounts I have discussed is that, whether or not authors adopted narratives of moral or economic decline, what they all had in common was that they argued the failure of the Venetian state in its last century of existence was premised on military rather than commercial weakness. Such emphasis on Venetian military weakness is probably correct: Venice fell because it could not resist Bonaparte. Where such a narrative is misleading is when it attributes want of martial vigour to the Venetian constitution or to moral decline. This perspective, long perpetuated in art and popular culture, has persisted in historiography. It misses the point that the Venetian Republic, a vigorous Mediterranean power until its final days, was not defeated in any ordinary conflict; it was destroyed by Bonaparte. Bonaparte was equal opportunity in his wanton destruction of European polities, and the nature of those polities was quite irrelevant to the «Weltseele zu Pferde».