

Renaissance Society of America
Annual Conference
Boston, 31 mars-2 avril 2016

Session: **"(Dis)order and Popular Politics in Renaissance Venice. From Actions to Representations"**

Org. Maartje van Gelder (University of Amsterdam), Claire Judde de Larivière (Université de Toulouse/Labex SMS)

Session 1. Jeudi 31 mars, 9h-10h30

Chair: Maartje van Gelder (University of Amsterdam)

Respondent: Andrea Zannini (University of Udine)

Paper 1: Monique O'Connell (Wake Forest University)

Reflecting on Rebellion in Venetian History Writing: Caroldo on the Revolt of San Tito

Venetian patricians, like many other European elites, did not typically write resistance to their rule into the official historical record. This absence became particularly striking at the turn of the 16th century, decades that saw not only the beginnings of an official urban historiography but increasing economic instability, recurring wars, and a wave of popular uprisings across the mainland and maritime domains. Gian-Giacomo Caroldo, a Venetian citizen and secretary who represented the Republic in both the war of Cambrai and on Crete, authored a chronicle of Venice from its origins to 1382 that treated the Cretan Revolt of San Tito (1363-65) in detail. This paper explores Caroldo's representation of past rebellion as an expression of Venetian concern with 16th century resistance to patrician authority, suggesting that history writing served as a site of reflecting on rebellion in an indirect way for Venetian elites.

Paper 2: Claire Judde de Larivière (University of Toulouse)

The invisible *popolo*. Discourses and representations of ordinary people in Venetian patrician writings (16th century)

A well known tradition of *diarii*, chronicles, political treatises and correspondences flourished in Venice during the sixteenth century. Written by patricians, and to a lesser extent by citizens, these texts offer essential insight into Venetian society, its organisation and political institutions. But behind a simple description of sixteenth-century Venice, emerge strong normative discourses about the social and political order, in which ordinary people, the *popolani*, had a very limited role to play. The *popolo* was represented as a large, passive and anonymous group, only mentioned in specific contexts and for determined purposes.

My paper will be an attempt to deconstruct these discourses, analysing how patricians deliberately produced the image of an "a-political" *popolo*. It will consider the way *popolani* were described and in which occasions, and with which types of action or intervention they were associated.

Paper 3: Enrico Valseriati (University of Verona)

Writing against the central authority in the Venetian Mainland: *La massera da bé* and the pro-Spanish party in Brescia (1554)

In 1554 chancellor Galeazzo dagli Orzi – who worked for the Martinengo family, an old family of military and feudal tradition of Brescia – published a poem intitled *La massera da bé* (*The good housewife*), often considered the masterpiece of vernacular literature of Venetian Lombardy during the Renaissance. In addition to a long list of how to manage a home, the poem's protagonist (the

housewife herself) describes the difficulties that farmers and *popolo* in general faced daily. In particular, the *massera* describes the police violence, the abuses of the Venetian rectors and the inability to pay central taxes, invoking the conquest of Brescia by Charles V. The aim of this proposal is to show how the poem reflected not just the pro-Spanish sympathies of Brescia's patriciate, but at the same time also the hardship of men – and first of all women – who felt themselves oppressed by Venetian sovereignty.

Session 2. Jeudi 31 mars, 11h-12h30

Chair: Claire Judde de Larivière (University of Toulouse)

Respondent: Joanne Ferraro (San Diego State University)

Paper 1: Maartje van Gelder (University of Amsterdam)

Subversion in the *Serenissima*. Popular Political Dissent in Early Modern Venice

While other Italian and non-Italian states went through numerous political uprisings and rebellions, Venice's central story has been its continuity, stability, and lack of political discontent: this paper argues that the mechanisms of Venetian popular dissent, and the tensions it caused, have been systematically underestimated.

The sixteenth and seventeenth centuries were a period of cyclical dearth, epidemics, and economic decline, which sparked frequent and intense bouts of popular unrest. The legitimization of Venetian power relations hinged on demonstrations of patrician authority - such as ducal elections, coronations, and funerals - which required a popular audience. It was precisely during these carefully orchestrated events that public and hidden transcripts collided and that popular dissent became visible, readable and audible. This paper will examine forms of Venetian dissent relating to ducal elections and funerals, from songs, jokes and graffiti to crowd protests and riots.

Paper 2: Andrea Vianello (St. Joseph's College of Maine)

“We don’t want him!” Popular Rebellion, Aristocratic Politics and Welfare Reform in Seventeenth Century Venice

In 1676 the imminent election of Giovanni Sagredo as doge encountered a strange reaction from the *popolo* of Venice, who congregated where the final confirmation should have taken place and started to protest it violently. Their protest was surprisingly successful and another nobleman was elected in his place. Using official documents, letters from foreign ambassadors, manuscript histories and memoirs from Venetian nobles, I will show how this event represents an extremely rare case of a full-fledged popular revolt against the Venetian government, strained at the time under multiple threats, both foreign and domestic. Its aftermath involved the expulsion of thousands of people from the city, changed profoundly the political balance inside the Venetian government and opened the way to a reform of its system of assistance and control of the lower strata of the Venetian society in the following century.

Paper 3: Andrea Zannini (University of Udine)

Inside the *populo*. The language of conflicts in the world of Venetian guilds (16th-18th c.)

The historiographical cliché of the alleged internal peace of Venice has always underestimated the conflicts inside the Venetian popular world. Although it is undisputable that these conflicts never reached the stage of open revolts, nevertheless their analysis may help to understand one of the main feature of the Venetian society: its flexibility. Thirty years after the ‘linguistic turns’ in the history of labor, this communication aims to look at the conflicts inside the world of Venetian guilds considering the language used by the different social actors, taking into consideration the long discussion that

followed the seminal book of W.H. Sewell. The focus will be on two main aspects: the tensions between *patroni* and *lavoranti* in the guilds where these two components were clearly defined, and the conflicts between different groups of immigrant workers, in open or partially open guilds.