

The Venetian "Commonwealth"
between 1204 and the end of the Republic – identity and specificities
Venice – March 2013

The conference will assess the status quo of current research on the Venetian "Commonwealth" in the long period between the establishment of the Latin Empire of Constantinople in 1204 and the end of the *Respublica* in 1797. The scope is on one hand an overview of Venetian affairs in general and on the other the definition of the features of a state and its specific traits and very particular experiences.

On the first issue, namely the general overview of "Venice as a system", the aim is to grasp the results of a series of studies that were conducted in recent and not so recent years, all of which are characterised by increasingly targeted investigations that were frequently forced to focus their attention to different sections of the Venetian reality and ended up acting as separate and independent fields of study, despite the common focus on the global experience of Venice. It is no accident (this is possibly one of the most eloquent examples of the above statement), that quality research has inevitably concentrated on the events and the developments either of the mainland or the overseas territories, highlighting specific areas or issues. This has led to strong advancement and extraordinary results. On the other hand this has often led research to take little notice of the uniting elements of a reality that reached out from the Black Sea to the Western Mediterranean and that, despite taking on different forms and peculiarities, was nevertheless part of an organised structure. The aim is to reveal, by reading the contributions of some of the greatest experts, some of these elements of unity (or fragmentation) of the Venetian system in general, and to assess their importance and quality.

As to the second issue, the purpose is to assess the specific character of the Venetian state system. The historiographic position (that in the past was at the core of any advancement in these studies) on Venice's failure to build a modern state appears to have been surpassed. There is much to say also as a contribution to the broader debate on the features, characteristics and the same concept of the modern state. For Venice, the intention is to highlight the issue of the characteristics and the events that allowed the Republic to last for centuries, even in far-away lands where the Venetians were guests rather than citizens entitled to rights of their own, despite the apparent weakness of the Republic's organisational and power management machinery. The timeframe must necessarily embrace many centuries, while bearing in mind that its history over the centuries was characterised by what can be definitely considered deep developments (especially from a territorial viewpoint).

In facing such extremely broad issues, the speakers are naturally invited to proceed not so much by providing new, exact assessments of specific events, but rather to use the results of their overall research in an endeavour to summarise. As is obvious, individual competences, targeted to mirror the research conducted over the years, will necessarily make reference to specific areas of the Venice's long history: nevertheless, these references will be asked to take into account the general issues on which the conference is focused. In other words, even specific case studies should be considered within the general framework in the terms suggested above. The result should be a series of contributions that despite being independent and undoubtedly different, will act as the individual components of a broader unitary framework, like the tesserae of a mosaic to be built in its complex (and articulated or even fragmentary) unity.

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