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Il "Commonwealth" veneziano tra il 1204 e la fine della Repubblica – identità e peculiarità

The Venetian "Commonwealth" between 1204 and the end of the Republic - identity and specificities

Between Venice and Istanbul: Triangulating Subjecthood in the Early Modern Mediterranean

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Abstract

How were the shifting parameters of early modern Venetian subjecthood negotiated beyond the Venetian oecumene and, moreover, by those of only tenuous juridical claim to Venezianità? This question was first broached decades ago by economic historians of the eastern Mediterranean, who focused on commercial and juridical dimensions of the problem. This paper revisits and broadens the question by considering its textual and performative aspects. To understand the full range of possibilities of being Venetian, this paper argues, requires that we move beyond rigid categories of "Venetian" and "foreigner." We should also consider the ways in which those who could never become full members of the metropolitan elite, still asserted affinities with the Serenissima. To explore this, the paper focuses on how Ottoman subjects in Venetian employment in seventeenth-century Istanbul represented themselves. It shows how trans-imperial subjects (as I have termed them) not only helped shape metropolitan notions of Venetian subjecthood, but did so while building on Ottoman idioms of membership and belonging and, indeed, by triangulating such notions via Ottoman institutions. After situating these subjects in their multiple trans-imperial social, professional, and kinship networks, the paper outlines some of their strategies for engaging Venetian and Ottoman officialdom, viz. their petitioning practices and their use of official genres of documentation (both "Venetian" and "Ottoman"). I show how the everyday documentary practices of Venetian-Ottoman diplomacy not only mediated between the two imperial centres, but enacted specific claims in relation to these centres. Rather than interpret their textual and embodied practices as iterations of "fluid identities" or "porous boundaries," this paper argues for the need to study Venetian and Ottoman practices of subject making as inherently braided and dialectic. It thus follows recent developments in the historiography of the early modern Mediterranean in calling for moving away from comparative to connected histories of the region. Ultimately, the paper illustrates how a trans-imperial framework is useful for understanding the inter-relationship between processes of state formation and imperial consolidation on the one hand, and the Mediterranean genealogies of our very notion of ethnolinguistic difference on the other.