



Istituto Veneto  
di Scienze, Lettere  
ed Arti

**6-9 marzo 2013**

**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**

***La dimensione contrattuale dello stato***

***The contractual nature of the Venetian state***

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Abstract

This paper takes as its starting point the argument that the Venetian state ruled itself as well as its domains through contestation and negotiation, and the base of these negotiations were both implicit and explicit contracts. It focuses on the individuals and groups in society who, in a variety of ways, acted as guarantors of these contracts; participants in the family ties, social networks, informal associations and affiliations that animated and allowed dry legal agreements to work in practice. The paper will discuss two intersecting circles of these relationships—the contract among the Venetian patriciate itself that formed the basis for the state as well as the relationships between that state and its subject territories. The close connection between patriciate and state have long been at the heart of scholars' understanding of Venetian government, but viewing the relationship as an overlapping and expanding circle of contracts allows us to connect the functioning of the Venetian state at its center to its governance of its maritime and mainland territories. The paper offers a broad survey of marriages between patricians and territorial elites, as well as several specific examples of the way networks of kinship, property ownership, and office holding created formal and informal affiliations between center and periphery. The examples are drawn from the maritime state but offer opportunities for comparative analysis with the mainland state as well. Through these examples, the paper suggests that when individual marriage contracts between Venetian patricians and territorial elites are seen collectively, they provide an important insight into how the formal contractual relationship between Venice and its subject territories worked in practice. The paper thus makes connections between the operation of the Venetian state and an emerging body of scholarship in both the Italian and the Anglo-Saxon historiographical traditions that is reconceptualizing the relationship between individual, family and state in the early modern world.