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THE GRANITE COLUMN IN MODON: HOW TO MAKE A STONE SAY WHAT YOU WANT IT TO SAY!

Summary. The 3 km long ramparts of the castle of Modon survive remarkably unscathed despite the attacks of Man and Nature over the centuries. The most interesting monument which remains, a column of red granite, crowned with a capital and a stone slab, has escaped the looters of antiquities who often passed by Modon. It has also escaped the scholars who have failed to give a reliable interpretation of the monument. This paper seeks to deal with this question and to set the monument in its proper historical context.

Modon is very well situated at the south-westernmost extremity of the Peloponnese, in Greece. As an important site for geopolitics in the past, it was the subject of dispute between the Byzantine, Venetian and Ottoman empires who fought one another, century after century, for the castle of Modon. Periodically mentioned during the time of the Greeks, the Romans and the Byzantines, Modon enjoyed an exceptional development under the Most Serene Republic of Venice. During the two periods under Venetian rule, from 1209 to 1500 and again from 1686 to 1715, the castle and harbour of Modon were a main port-of-call for shipping. Commercial exchanges between the Occident and the Orient, travellers on the Mediterranean Sea and pilgrims going to and coming from the Holy Land passed through Modon because of its strategic position.

Within the castle, which has been abandoned since the nineteenth century and is today under restoration, there is an open area, once the main square of the fortified city, in which stands a granite column. Many historians, architects and chroniclers have proposed various interpretations of this monument. Furthermore, on the capital of the column, which used to be the pedestal of a statue now lost, sits a stone slab; it has no connection with the rest of the monument. I will attempt to show that earlier interpretations of this construction are erroneous, and that its *raison d'être* can best be considered by a careful study of the evidence.

THE STONE SLAB PLACED *A POSTERIORI* ON THE COLUMN

No account of the granite column in Modon (Fig. 1) offers any comment about the carved stone slab clumsily placed on the capital, except for a work by Kevin Andrews. The historian and architect mentions rather briefly in his book on the castles of the Peloponnese (Andrews 1953, 82) '[. . .] a flat, rectangular stone, placed on top of the capital, which is carved with the three Bembo, Foscarini, and Foscolo shields'. This description, and a photograph taken



Figure 1

The granite column in the castle of Modon and the stone slab placed *a posteriori* on its capital. South, narrow side of the capital (left) and east side with the carved lion on it (right). (© Photo: Patrice Foutakis; Modon, 7-10-2002.)

by Andrews himself between 1949 and 1951 (*ibid.*, 67, fig. 68), are, as far as I know, the first text and the first illustration of the stone slab. The engraving made by the architect Achille Poirot in 1829, during the *Expédition scientifique française* in the Peloponnese, shows the capital of the column with its abacus, but without the plaque placed on the top (Blouet 1831–1838, vol. I, planche 12, fig. II). Nor do the accounts by William Martin Leake in 1805, Jean-Baptiste-Geneviève-Marcellin Bory de Saint-Vincent in 1829, Jean-Alexandre Buchon in 1841 and Stephen Luce in 1928 mention the stone slab in their descriptions of the granite column. Since such a strange and discordant positioning would certainly have provoked some comment if this stone slab had been there at that time, the implication is that the carved stone was probably placed later on top of the column, after 1928 and before 1950, probably in order to protect it from looters of antiquities.

The three heraldic shields carved on the narrow side of the stone slab are wrongly identified by Kevin Andrews as those of Bembo, Foscarini and Foscolo. Although the right and left arms are rather eroded, they are still recognizable, while the arms in the centre are completely obliterated. Since Andrews (1953, 71) had identified the arms of Foscarini, Bembo and Foscolo with an inscription embedded in a bastion of the castle, he deduced that the three arms of the slab belonged to the same officials. Nevertheless, these identifications are wrong in all six cases. Kevin Andrews did not take into consideration that the position of the arms corresponds to the responsibility of each official whose arms should appear according to the hierarchy. The arms of three persons together mean that a triumvirate of one *castellano* (governor), and two *consiglieri* (general councillors) were elected and sent to Modon every two years or so by the political bodies of Venice. This form of Venetian government lasted, in Modon, from 1307 to 1460. Three coats of arms together suggest the governor, in the centre, the first general councillor on his right and the second general councillor on his left.

According to the catalogue of Venetian dignitaries in Modon, which I established after a stay in Venice and research in her National Archives (Foutakis 2001, 114–16), the three heraldic shields with the inscription embedded in the bastion do not belong to Foscarini, Francesco Bembo and Foscolo with a date after the year 1480, as Andrews thought, but to Ermolao Minio, Giovanni Bembo and Bartolomeo Erizzo with the date 20 October 1460. Furthermore, the inscription bears the name of IO[HANNES] BEMBO and the date MCCCCLXX OCT[OBRIS] (Foutakis 2003, 64–5). Giovanni Bembo was elected governor of Modon on 14 May 1459. Ermolao Minio was elected general councillor of Modon on 13 April 1459. Three documents (Sathas 1880–1890, vol. IV, 31 and 173), dated 29 October 1459, 3 December 1459 and 2 December 1460, mention him as the first general councillor to distinguish him from Bartolomeo Erizzo, who was elected general councillor of Modon on 13 August 1457.

As for the arms carved on the stone slab (Fig. 1), they do not belong to Francesco Bembo, Foscarini and Foscolo in the year 1494 (following Andrews' identification). The right and left arms, representing two general councillors, compare with the arms of Napoleone Foscolo and Scipione Bembo, general councillors of Modon in 1394 (Foutakis 2001, 114). Therefore, the central arms, today obliterated, must belong to governor Nicolò Valaresso. Even if the arms with the chevron belonged to Francesco Bembo, commander and provveditor of Modon from 1494 to 1497, the opposite arms with one fess should belong to the superintendent and civil commander of Modon of the same period, and the central, obliterated arms to the governor. The arms of Pietro Gradenigo and Francesco Lippomano, successively superintendents and civil commanders in Modon while Francesco Bembo was the commander and provveditor of the castle, do not have a fess like the heraldic shield carved on the stone

slab. Moreover, it was unusual to place together the arms of the triumvirate of the governor and provveditor, the commander and provveditor, and the superintendent and civil commander during the period 1461–1500; it was, however, the usual practice for the triumvirate of the governor and the two general councillors during the period 1307–1460.

Nicolò Valaresso is mentioned as *castellano*, governor of Modon, in a document dated 3 December 1394 (Sathas 1880–1890, vol. IV, 69), and as governor of Coron and Modon in five documents dated 25 August 1393 (Thiriet 1958–1961, vol. I, 198), 12 October 1393 (Sathas 1880–1890, vol. IV, 2), 3 February 1394,¹ 10 February 1394,² and 27 May 1394 (Chrysostomides 1995, 269–70). The last two documents concern the Treaty of Modon between Venice and Theodor I Paleologue, despot of Morea, and mention Nicolò Valaresso and Filippo Correr as *castellani di Corone e Modone*. Since the Treaty was signed in Modon on 27 May 1394, and Nicolò Valaresso is always mentioned first in these documents, it means that he was at this time governor of Modon and Filippo Correr governor of Coron. Moreover, the same Treaty mentions Napoleone Foscolo and Scipione Bembo as general councillors of Modon who were also joint signatories to the Treaty. The order in which the names of the officers appeared was determined by hierarchy, but this did not apply to the names of the two castles. Whichever the castle, a governor was always called *castellano di Corone e Modone*. This was because from 1209, when Modon and Coron came under Venetian rule after the Treaty of Sapienza, Modon was almost completely ruined. The nearby castle of Coron was at that time where the Venetian government set up its headquarters for both castles. Thus, it was normal that the governors for both castles were called *castellani di Corone e Modone* and not *castellani di Modone e Corone*. This title was so familiar from writing and oral use, that even when, from the fourteenth century, Modon became much more important than Coron, owing to its strategic position, its well-protected port and its economic development, the order in which the names of the two castles appeared in the title remained unchanged.

Consequently, the central obliterated arms carved on the stone slab belong to the governor Nicolò Valaresso, with the arms of the first general councillor Napoleone Foscolo on his right – his name is mentioned first in the Treaty of Modon – and the arms of the second general councillor Scipione Bembo on his left. This identification is all the more important for it reveals the year 1394 as the date when this stone slab was carved.

The *Expédition scientifique de Morée* stayed in Modon for some time in the year 1829, after the castle was liberated by General Maison's French army in the autumn of 1828. It was the successful outcome of the French Expedition in Greece that earned General Maison the rank and baton of marshal of France when he returned to Paris in 1829, the Minister of Foreign Affairs and later on the Minister of War. The scientific part of the expedition consisted of the Section of Architecture and Sculpture directed by the architect Abel Blouet, the Section of Natural Science directed by the naturalist Jean-Baptiste-Geneviève-Marcellin Boty de Saint-Vincent, and the Section of Archaeology directed by the archaeologist M. Dubois. The work carried out by this scientific expedition provides an important account of the monuments, as well as the flora and fauna in the Peloponnese at the beginning of the nineteenth century.

During this expedition, in the spring of 1829, the architect Amable Ravoisié drew six fragments of medieval sculpture in Modon (Blouet 1831–1838, vol. I, planche 13). The first five fragments of decorative sculpture were found embedded in the wall of a Greek church in Modon,

1 1393 according to the former calendar. Sathas 1880–1890, vol. IV, 59.

2 1393 according to the former calendar. Predelli and Bosmin 1876–1914, tomo III, libro 8, 223.

and the sixth (Fig. 2, central drawing no. VI) in a house near this church. They represented the remains of various Venetian constructions, removed from their original places during the second Ottoman occupation from 1715 to 1828, in order to decorate or fortify other buildings. In 1829–30 all buildings within the castle of Modon were razed to the ground by the French army for health reasons. Some of these fragments are today kept in the archaeological store in the castle.

The foliage of fragment VI is almost the same as that carved around the stone slab placed on the granite column (Fig. 3), in its decorative form and the manner in which the carved plants are interlaced. Given the political importance of the Treaty of Modon, signed in 1394 between Venice and the Byzantine despotate of Morea, it is reasonable to assume that this stone slab, and maybe fragment VI as well, come from a commemorative construction erected on the occasion of this Treaty. Venice and Byzantium realized that they had to unite in order to face the Ottoman Empire's military preparations for invading Morea: a long-lasting peace between the two signatory parties, an exchange of territories between them in the Peloponnese, in those days called Morea, and mutual protection for the Venetian and Greek population against the Turkish threat were the main points of the Treaty of Modon.

After an important event, memorials were very often erected in order to immortalize the occasion and embellish the town, countryside or other place where this event had taken place. The form of the carved stone slab, as well as the circular supporting tracks for a piece missing today on the opposite side of the heraldic shields, show that this stone slab was certainly an integral part either of a civil construction or a thanksgiving monument offered to the cathedral of Modon, dedicated to Saint John the Evangelist. If this construction was connected to the Treaty of Modon, which is almost certain because of the heraldic 'signature' on the stone slab, then it was either a public commemorative monument, or a decoration for a government building, or an ex-voto given to the cathedral of Modon, but whatever the structure the erection would have been the initiative of the triumvirate of governor Nicolò Valaresso, and general councillors Napoleone Foscolo and Scipione Bembo. It cannot be a fragment from a patrician house of a noble Venetian living in Modon since, if it were, the carved rectangular stone would carry only the arms of a single person.

The Treaty of Modon was signed on 27 May 1394 and Nicolò Valaresso was still governor of Modon on 3 December 1394. The stone slab and the monument from which it comes were therefore created during the summer or autumn of 1394.

THE CONTRADICTORY POINTS OF VIEW ON THE ORIGIN OF THE COLUMN

The granite column in the main square in the castle of Modon (Fig. 1) has given rise to many comments, not only because it adds attraction to a castle which is today austere and devoid of ornament, but also because the strange shape of its capital, combined with a Latin inscription weathered by rain and wind around the abacus of the capital, have caused many to offer their own descriptions and interpretations about the origin of the column and the meaning of its inscription. It is necessary to quote briefly earlier interpretations so that the reader of this article will be able to decide if the new explanation suggested here resolves the long controversy.

1.

The British colonel and chronicler William Martin Leake stayed in Modon from 28 to 30 April 1805 on the occasion of his travels through the Peloponnese. His account of the granite

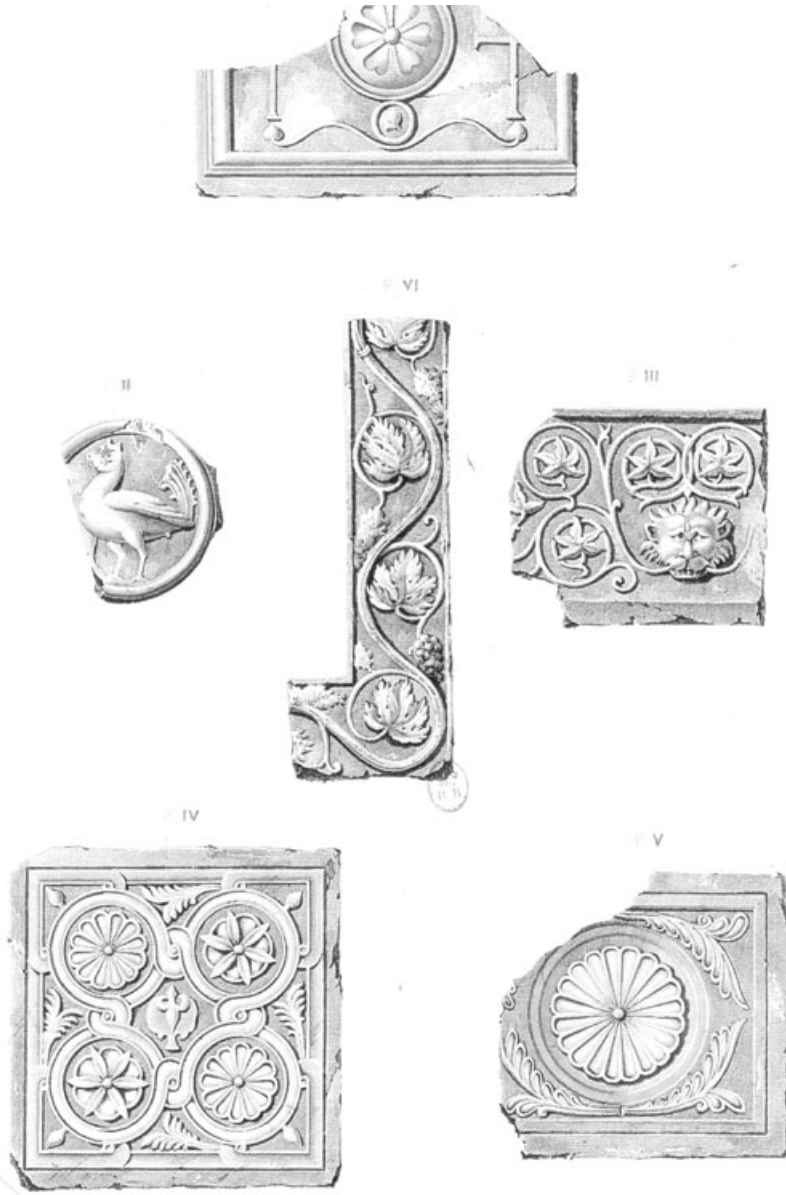


Figure 2

The six drawings made by the architect Amable Ravoisié in Modon (spring 1829). (© Photo: Bibliothèque Nationale de France; Réserve J 12.)

column and the inscription, inserted in manuscript in the printed text of the book, is as follows (Leake 1830, 430–1):

Just within the land gate is the old Venetian piazza ; in the midst of it stands the shaft of an ancient granite column about three feet in diameter and twelve feet high, with a barbarous base and capital, which appear to have been added by the Venetians when they fixed upon the top of it a figure of the Lion of St. Mark, the usual symbol of the Venetian Republic, and which the Turks of the Moréa call To aio Skyli, “the sacred dog”. On one side of it I distinguish the following characters:

COL CCCCLXXXIII
HLICER HIC LEO SVPER

on the opposite side these –

R ORI FRANCISCI BR
I I ROSPICIT ALTA MARIS

The date appears to have been 1493, and the last words of the inscription “prospicit alta maris.”

2.

The French colonel and naturalist Jean-Baptiste-Geneviève-Marcellin Bory de Saint-Vincent stayed in the castle of Modon from 9 to 30 March, and from 5 to 20 May 1829, as the director of the Section of Natural Science for the *Expédition scientifique de Morée*. His account of the granite column is as follows:

[. . .] à l’entrée de celle-ci [place], un peu vers la gauche, s’élève une colonne remarquable par la matière qui la compose, et par le mauvais goût de ses proportions. Cette colonne, en beau granit rouge d’Egypte, est évidemment une œuvre des Vénitiens, qui, pour la construire, empruntèrent d’un plus ancien monument, dont on ne saurait retrouver aucune trace dans les environs, deux puissants tambours qui, assez mal ajustés l’un sur l’autre, sont couronnés par un chapiteau disproportionné, ne se rattachant à aucun ordre d’architecture, et sur la face occidentale duquel M. Dubois ne parvint qu’avec beaucoup de peine à déchiffrer ces derniers mots d’une inscription latine fort mal gravée: HIC LEOSVPER. . . RESPICIT. . .³

3 [at the entrance (of the square), not very much to the left, stands a column, which is notable because of its material and the bad taste of its proportions. This column, made of fine red granite from Egypt, is obviously a work done by the Venetians, who constructed it by taking two big drums from another monument, that we could not find nearby, and by adjusting them badly one on the other, they put on them a disproportioned capital which belongs to no architectural order; on the west side of the capital Mr. Dubois could hardly read these last words of a badly engraved Latin inscription: HIC LEOSVPER. . . RESPICIT. . .] Bory de Saint-Vincent 1836–1838, vol. I, 174.

3.

The French architect Abel Blouet stayed in the castle of Modon for two weeks, until 6 April 1829, as the director of the Section of Architecture and Sculpture for the *Expédition scientifique de Morée*. Although he was an architect, his account is superficial compared with that of the naturalist Bory de Saint-Vincent, as far as the granite column is concerned:

Au-delà de cette entrée est la place principale, au milieu de laquelle s'élève une colonne de granit oriental, couronnée par un chapiteau du Bas-Empire, sur lequel est une inscription latine à demi effacée, et dont les restes sont presque illisibles.⁴

4.

The French historian and chronicler Jean-Alexandre Buchon stayed in the castle of Modon for a week during the summer of 1841. His account of the granite column is as follows:

Sur la place en entrant est une sorte de colonne rostrale de granit rouge, surmontée d'une sorte d'architrave. Au dessus était placé quelque objet sculpté qui a disparu ; peut-être un buste de François Morosini ? Autour de cet architrave, au bas de la plinthe du haut, on lit une inscription latine gravée sur les quatre faces, mais si mutilée qu'à cette hauteur il m'a été très-difficile de la déchiffrer. Toutefois, voici ce que j'ai cru y lire ; d'autres pourront peut-être me rectifier.

Sur la première face:

RECTORI:FRANCISCI MOROS (INI)
RESPICIAT ALTA MARIS

Sur l'autre face:

CEPETES: . . . EPO

Sur la troisième face la moisissure de la pierre m'a empêché de distinguer aucun caractère.

Sur la quatrième face:

COL . . . MCCCCLXXXIII
VICER. LEO SUPER . . .

Cette colonne, qui avait probablement été élevée à la première époque de l'occupation de Modon par les Vénitiens, comme le témoigne la date 1483, aura sans doute été relevée

4 [Beyond this entrance there is the main square in the midst of which stands a column made of Oriental granite, crowned with a capital dating from the Lower Empire, with an almost erased Latin inscription on it, and a few remains that are practically illegible.] Blouet 1831–1838, vol. I, 11.

par François Morosini, après 1686, ainsi que le témoigne son nom qu'on lit sur la première face.⁵

5.

The American historian Stephen B. Luce visited Modon in 1928. He does not describe the column, but nevertheless he considers Leake's and Buchon's interpretations, and takes a stand on the interpretation he believes to be the correct one (Luce 1938, 206–7):

The first scholar of mediaeval Greece to examine Modon, Buchon, who visited the town in 1840 or 1841 mentions the column in the square and seeks to see in the inscription on it a reference to Morosini. The reading of Leake, however, is to be preferred and it is not likely that Morosini's name can be read here. Buchon reads MORO (SINI) while for the same place Leake reads BR-. Buchon reads a date of MCCCCLXXXIII (which is impossible for Morosini), Leake . . . MCCCCLXXXIII a difference of ten years. Furthermore in a Latin inscription Morosini's Latinized name of MAVROCENIVS would have been employed.

On the same page, as a footnote, Luce notes that Buchon is '*a classic case of making a stone say what you want it to say, at all costs*'. This reproach, which is not entirely false, although excessive, and to which I will return later, provided the idea for the title of this article.

6.

The American historian and architect Kevin Andrews examined and photographed the castle of Modon during his studies in Athens from 1949 to 1952. As for the granite column, he mentions the contradictory interpretations by Leake and Buchon, Luce's remark about the latinized name Maurocenius for Morosini in case the inscription could be connected with him, and puts forward another interpretation (Andrews 1953, 81–2):

5 [In the square after the entrance there is a kind of rostral column of red granite, surmounted by a sort of architrave. A piece of sculpture that has disappeared was placed on top of it ; maybe the bust of Francesco Morosini ? On the lower part of the plinth up on the architrave can be seen a Latin inscription engraved on four sides, but so mutilated that it was very difficult for me to read it in such a high position. Anyway, here is what I thought I read ; others can probably correct me.

On the first side:

RECTORI: FRCISCI MOROS (INI)
RESPICIAT ALTA MARIS

On the other side:

CEPETES: . . . EPO

On the third side I could read no character because of the mould on the stone.

On the fourth side:

COL . . . MCCCCLXXXIII
VICER. LEO SUPER . . .

This column, which was probably erected by the Venetians during the first period of Venetian rule in Modon, in view of the date 1483, was certainly restored by Francesco Morosini after 1686, since his name is mentioned on the first side.] Buchon 1843, 457.

Outside the wall stands a pillar of red granite, 12 feet high by 3 in diameter, with a rudely carved poros capital of Byzantine pattern encircled with an inscription, now almost obliterated [. . .] Examination of the stone proves Leake's reading to be the more correct. The date 1493 can be clearly read, together with the words below it, HIC LEO SVPER, and on the other side of the capital the fragment . . . SPICIT ALTA MARIS. The name of the official to whom the column was raised was weathered away beyond all recognition. If however, Leake could have mistaken BR for BE, and the date CCCCLXXXIII for CCCCLXXXVIII, it could be construed that the inscription commemorates [sic] the name of the Rettore Francesco Bembo, who held office at Methone in 1494, and appears to have been active in architectural construction. The supposition seems more probable in view of the presence of a flat, rectangular stone, placed on top of the capital, which is carved with the three Bembo, Foscarini, and Foscolo shields.

7.

The British chronicler and theatrical author Eric Forbes-Boyd passed through Modon in the early 1960s. His account of the granite column (Forbes-Boyd 1964, 160) is as follows:

Also in the square, opposite the third gate, is a peculiar monument, formed of a pillar of red granite with a carved capital. This is not, as is sometimes imagined, either a classical relic, or a monument to Morosini, but apparently commemorates the Bembo of the bastion, a Venetian official who held office here in 1494.

Forbes-Boyd mentions the book and its author, Kevin Andrews, in order to specify the source of this interpretation, which he considers to be the correct one.

To sum up, the accounts, descriptions and interpretations of the granite column in Modon make two basic assumptions on the origin of the capital and three assumptions on the identity of the official mentioned in the inscription: the capital is either dated from the Later Empire or was of a Byzantine order; the official was either Francesco Br., Francesco Morosini or Francesco Bembo.

SOME ELEMENTS FOR A NEW AND RELIABLE INTERPRETATION

The foliage decoration (Fig. 3) is rather well preserved on all four sides and four corners of the capital. The north and south sides, which are the narrow sides of the capital, are decorated, except for the acanthus, with a carved piece of fruit. On the other two wide sides, the east has a floral decoration with the well-preserved lion of Venice (Fig. 1), while the west has the same decoration but with a completely obliterated heraldic shield in the place of the lion.

In fact, the order of the capital is strange and atypical. Nevertheless, to identify it as originating from the Later Roman Empire, that is from AD 284 to 476, or of a Byzantine order seems wrong. The capital of the granite column in Modon, when compared to Roman and Byzantine capitals, is quite different in the way the vegetal themes are carved and arranged on the capital; but more significantly this capital is very different in shape. It is true that the acanthus of the capital bears a resemblance to the acanthus of some Byzantine capitals. Rudolf Kautzsch's excellent work on capitals is an inventory of several hundred capitals from the Oriental Roman Empire and of the Byzantine order, from the fourth to the seventh century. Some of them present certain similarities to the foliage of Modon's capital (Kautzsch 1936, tafel 1, nos. 2, 4, 6, 9;

tafel 2, no. 16; tafel 5, no. 46; tafel 16, no. 209; tafel 17, no. 240; tafel 23, no. 365; tafel 30, no. 490). However, the acanthus is not enough to determine the origin of a capital. Moreover the Corinthian order often also uses, like the composite order, the Ionic volute on the four upper corners of the capital. The capital from Modon has no volute at all (Figs. 1 and 3).

Roman, Byzantine, Romanesque, Gothic and Renaissance sculpture borrowed the acanthus from Greek architecture but each uses the acanthus ornament in its own way. The capital in Modon (Figs. 1 and 3) has a characteristic which is rarely repeated: it is exceptionally short. This detail comes from Gothic architecture of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, very often accompanied by a simple, vertical acanthus, rolled below the abacus, and with additional acanthuses on the four upper corners of the capital, like that from Modon, and not with Ionic volutes, like most Roman and Byzantine capitals. Among other examples, there are the choir capitals of Canterbury cathedral, carved at the end of the twelfth century, which present a remarkable resemblance to the capital in Modon (West 1993, 251, 253, fig. 2). The capital of the granite column at Modon is therefore of the Gothic order, because of its shape which is very short, and the fact that it has four additional acanthuses on the four upper corners of the capital, in the place of Ionic volutes.

As far as the identity of the person mentioned in the inscription is concerned, Buchon's assumption that it must be an inscription in honour of Francesco Morosini should be rejected. Not only because in the year 1483 – read by Buchon – no official named Morosini was present



Figure 3

The capital (north side) and the stone slab. (© Photo: Patrice Foutakis; Modon, 11-5-2003.)

in Modon and because his name should be engraved in Latin as Maurocenius (two pertinent remarks by Luce), but also because during the entire fifteenth century (in case the decade and year of the inscription might have been misread by scholars) no Francesco Morosini, indeed no Morosini at all, had been governor or commander in Modon. Even if Francesco Morosini, who reconquered Modon from the Ottoman Empire in August 1686, reused this column in order to display the Lion of Venice or maybe his own bust, nothing from this later intervention now exists on the column. Furthermore, the same calligraphy for all characters of the inscription and the degree of wear show that the entire text was engraved by the same hand, and at the time of the official who was named, not by someone who might have reused this column two centuries later.

Andrews' assumption that the official mentioned must be the commander Francesco Bembo in 1494 should also be rejected. I have shown that the arms with the chevron carved on the stone slab placed on the column do not belong to the commander Francesco Bembo of the year 1494, as Andrews thought, but to the general councillor Scipione Bembo of the year 1394. Besides, Francesco Bembo was elected by the political bodies of Venice as commander of Modon on 21 December 1494 (Archivio di Stato di Venezia, *Segretario alle voci, Universi o Misti*, registro 8, fo. 93 recto), and he arrived at the castle on May 1495 (*ibid.*, registro 6, fo. 77 verso). Even if he had started to engrave his name as soon as he arrived there, it would have been 1495. The way Andrews makes use of information is reminiscent of Luce's reproach of Buchon: that he makes a stone say what you want it to say, at all costs! Buchon at least admitted that what he reports is what he thought he read on the inscription, allowing the possibility that others might correct him.

The inscription is today even more eroded than it was at the time of Leake, Bory de Saint-Vincent and Buchon who all tried hard to copy the characters that were left, respectively in 1805, 1829 and 1841. A careful reading of what is left today from the inscription shows that the date ends clearly with the symbols LXXXIII and therefore the last two numbers of the date are 93. Bory de Saint-Vincent could not distinguish any date or name, and he contented himself with copying other words of the inscription. Leake and Buchon agreed on the number of centuries, CCCC: consequently the year is 1493. There is only one more point of agreement in Leake's and Buchon's accounts: the word R . . . ORI before the first name, and the word FR . . . CИСCI as a first name. It is certain, beyond any doubt, that the inscription mentions a rector whose first name was Francesco.

At the end of the fifteenth century the assemblies of Venice used to elect three dignitaries for Modon: one *castellano e provveditore di Modone* (governor and provveditor of Modon), one *capitano e provveditore di Modone* (commander and provveditor of Modon) and one *camerlengo e capitano di borgo di Modone* (superintendent and civil commander of Modon) (Foutakis 2001, 111). The title of *rettore* (rector) does not appear in the election listing registers of the Archivio di Stato di Venezia, even though it accompanies the names of some governors and commanders in their correspondence. This title implied a special responsibility, but mainly it was a generic term: all high dignitaries in the territories of the Venetian Empire were called, in a general way, rectors.

The title of rector in the inscription on the granite column in Modon refers to a governor or commander in the castle whose first name was Francesco. From 1450 to 1493, the year of the inscription, there were only two Francescos possible for these two posts in Modon: the commander and provveditor Francesco Loredan for the period 1477–80 and the governor and provveditor Francesco Bragadin for the period 1485–6.

Francesco Bragadin played an important part, to be explained below, in reorganizing Modon, as well as being governor, whereas Francesco Loredan was commander only of the fortress of Modon. This suggests that Francesco Bragadin is the official mentioned in the inscription. However, there is one further piece of evidence which is even more convincing. On the occasion of a second visit and study in the castle of Modon, I carefully examined the inscription, in daylight by exploring every character with my fingertips, and at night by successively using the light of a normal lamp and afterwards an ultraviolet lamp. Normal light, projected level to the stone and parallel to the surface of the inscription at night, brings out engraved characters much better than during the day when the sunlight outshines the bumps of a surface. Ultraviolet light, projected vertically on the inscription at night, detects different components and minuscule engraving tracks in the stone, which are invisible under normal light.

The half-obliterated text of the inscription encircles the abacus on all four sides of the capital, with the text on two lines on the south and north sides (the narrow ones) and one line on the west and east sides (the wide ones). The upper line is engraved in smaller characters and the lower one in larger. The few isolated characters on the west and east sides cannot be resolved into words. On the south side of the abacus the two levels are as follows:

M. CCCCLXXXIII
HI ICER · IC LEO · SVPER ·

On the north side of the abacus, with also two levels, the following characters can be read:

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R ORI FR BRAGAI
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The rector mentioned is undoubtedly the provveditor Francesco Bragadin, which means that Leake's reading, which distinguished the name Francesco Br., is correct. The legible fragments of the inscription refer to the glory of Venice: '*. . . vincer hic leo super . . . prospicit alta maris . . .*', '*. . . this conquering lion placed on the top . . . dominates on the open sea . . .*', meaning that the powerful Most Serene Republic of Venice rules over all the Mediterranean. This kind of inscription would have been engraved on the occasion of an important event (victory, treaty, military or civil construction, political or administrative reorganization), and therefore the Modon inscription, engraved in 1493, mentioning among others the rector Francesco Bragadin, must refer to some project undertaken during his term as governor and provveditor of Modon from 1485 to 1486.

The agreement between Venice and Milan in 1493, made under pressure from Pope Alexander VI to protect peace in Italy, although important for Italians, was not an event likely to lead to the erection of a column in Modon. No doge's election took place in 1493, and no major military or political event connected with Modon is known in the Peloponnese for the year 1493 that could justify any commemorative construction. However, the year 1493 was very important for Modon's reorganization and fortification. As early as 1483 the pilgrim Felix Faber, who stayed there ten days from 9 to 18 December, noted that '[Metona civitas] *et mirabilibus fossatis per petras et rupes scissas est munita, et spissis altisque muris et turribus est vallata.*'⁶

6 [and (the city of Modon) is endowed with a wonderful ditch made of stones and hewn rock, and surrounded by big and high ramparts and towers.] Faber 1849, 337–8.



Figure 4

The gate of San Marco, south side of the castle of Modon. (© Photo: Patrice Foutakis; Modon, 7-10-2002.)

In 1485, another pilgrim, Georges Lengherand (1861, 98), who stayed in Modon from 4 to 5 July, pointed out that '*De ce costé de la terre ferme ilz ont fort fortifiée, car il y a fausses brayes et aucuns lieux et fossez doubles à fons de cuve fort parfons.*'⁷

A pilgrim again, Pietro Casola, after a stay in Modon from 25 to 27 July 1494, had recourse to superlatives so that he could give his impression: '[. . .] *verso terra ferma è fortissima e tutavia se fa più forte, adjungendoli la Signoria una grande fossa e dopia murata de grosse mure; e sarà una cosa stupenda e ben posta quando sarà fornita.*'⁸

Another pilgrim, Arnold von Harff (1946, 81), reported in the spring of 1497 that '*On the land side it has three suburbs with three walls and three ditches hewn out of the natural rock, on which they are building daily.*'

Although all these accounts come only from travellers, they make it clear that in the mid-1480s a double, very deep ditch replaced the old one, that beginning in the 1490s a military construction undertaken on this side was built to an imposing height, and that fortification work was still going on just before 1500 (Fig. 4).

From 1460 the Ottoman presence in the Peloponnese became more and more threatening for Venice, hence a 1485 *commissio* which led to the reorganization of Modon. The date of this document, sent to the governor and provveditor of Modon Francesco Bragadin, is 10 May 1485, while the date of his election to this post is 3 June 1485, mentioned in two different

7 [it is very well fortified on the mainland side, because there are faussebrayes, and in some places very deep double ditches like a deep tank.] Lengherand 1861, 98.

8 [It is very strong on the mainland side, and it becomes stronger and stronger. The Venetian government is adding a big ditch and a double rampart with wide walls; it will be something stunning and very well placed once it is finished.] Casola 1855, 37.

registers of the Venetian archives (Archivio di Stato di Venezia, *Segretario alle voci, Universi o Misti*, registro 5, fo. 31 recto; registro 6, fo. 77 verso). It can only mean two things: either the election took place on 3 June, and it was decided in advance – for the document mentions him as governor since 10 May – or the archives record the date of arrival to his post in Modon, and not the election day. This has happened in other cases, but it cannot always be checked in some registers. Although the election of a dignitary was sometimes decided in advance, and two different registers mention the same date, 3 June 1485, I am inclined to believe that it is the date of arrival to hold office and not the election date. The chronological inconsistency between the date of the document and that of the registers can thus be explained. Even if the election of Francesco Bragadin as governor was decided in advance, I think that, since Venice was very attached to the letter of her institutions, the doge and the *Consiglio dei Dieci* would wait for the official election and its validation by the Venetian political bodies, before sending to the governor such an important and exceptionally long government document.

The authority of the Council of Ten should be considered so that the importance of this document can be understood. The Council of Ten was created in 1310 on the occasion of the failed conspiracy by the influential patrician Bajamonte Tiepolo to overthrow the doge. It was an extraordinary commission, in all senses of the word ‘extraordinary’, made up of ten members elected among the most distinguished patricians of the *Maggior Consiglio* of Venice, and responsible for the *Serenissima*’s order and security. The effectiveness of the Council of Ten had so deeply marked Venetian politics of those days that from being a provisional commission for a few months, it became a permanent one by 1335. The ten members were elected for one year, the same persons were never re-elected, they were not remunerated, no family could have more than one member among the ten and the members received instructions only from their three chiefs, who changed every month. In every session the doge also participated, as well as his six councillors, an advocate from the Commune as a public prosecutor and some substitutional members. The total number of participants was therefore more than ten, approximately 20. The Council of Ten would meet every day, listen to the accounts of its spies, of witnesses and of different parties, and decide on cases of treason, conspiracy and corruption. Deliberation was not possible even when the votes in favour exceeded the votes against; the votes in favour had to be superior to the votes against and the abstentions taken together. The decisions of this Council had such legal and political authority that the doge, the Senate, the noble class, diplomats and administration came under the surveillance and control of the Council of Ten, a fundamental and merciless institution of the Most Serene Republic of Venice.

In the light of this explanation, the *commissio* that the Council of Ten sent in the name of the doge Giovanni Mocenigo on 10 May 1485 to the governor and provveditor of Modon Francesco Bragadin is exceptional for its length and the number of issues it refers to. Although it was not dealing with a case of treason, conspiracy or corruption, the Council of Ten orders the governor in detail, in a text covering today 23 printed pages, to make arrangements for reorganizing the administration of Modon, including Venetian officials’ duties and income, the restricted and controlled right for a person to stay within the fortified city, the duties of the Greek inhabitants, the supply of water, food and ammunition, trade, expenses, navigation in the port, defence, security, and dealings with confrontations with Turks (Sathas 1880–1890, vol. I, 283–306).

Normally, it was the Major Council or the Senate who determined such cases. The unusually long document, and the fact that it was the Council of Ten ordering the governor on behalf of the doge (*Nos Joannes Mocenigo Dei gratia Dux Venetiarum etc. Committibus tibi*

nobili viro Francisco Bragadeno . . . Volumus etiam, et cum consilio nostro X mandamus tibi . . . dictum mandatum nostrum non revocabitur tibi, tu penitus debeas . . . obedire, quoniam cum nostro Consilio X decrevimus . . .) reveal the importance of the event. It was not really that unusual for the Council of Ten to become involved in military and administrative cases, but normally it would be only when the issue was of great importance. The reorganization of Modon in the geopolitics of 1485 was not just a local military and administrative renovation, but a state affair concerning the Venetian Empire's safety and security.

The erection of the granite column in the main square of Modon, its carved capital and its inscription commemorated in 1493 the completion of one important part of the military and administrative work (some work had already been finished, other work was still ongoing) started during Francesco Bragadin's innovative term of office between June 1485 and October 1486. The official who decided to erect this monument was certainly the governor and provveditor of Modon in 1493. The engraved inscription encircling the abacus must have mentioned, as usual, the commemorated event, its date, the name of the official in office, the name of a former official if the commemorated event had started or was planned under a former official and the date of this former office. Among these five pieces of information, the half-obliterated text of the inscription today gives only the date of the commemorated event, 1493, which is also the date of the monument, and the name of the former official, Francesco Bragadin, who, seven years earlier, had initiated the political, administrative and military reorganization in Modon. The official, who did not neglect to mention this in the inscription of 1493, was Pietro da Canal, elected governor and provveditor of Modon on 4 May 1492. He stayed there until the next governor Antonio Venier, elected on 25 September 1494 (Archivio di Stato di Venezia, *Segretario alle voci, Universi o Misti*, registro 8, fo. 92 verso), had arrived at Modon on 4 January 1495 (1494 according to the former calendar. *Ibid.*, registro 6, fo. 77 verso). The name of Pietro da Canal must certainly have been engraved as well, in a part of the inscription that is today obliterated. Following the same custom, his arms would have been carved on the monument raised under his term of office. These arms are still on the capital, but are very damaged and unrecognizable; all the same they can be restored, since they are known.

As a result of the effort devoted by many scholars to deciphering the inscription, in order to understand why the column was raised in Modon, this monument has become famous. It has been damaged by man and weathered by the elements, while its context has been misinterpreted, like a mosaic with some of its tesserae lost and others mismatched. I have tried to refute the hasty and contradictory interpretations of the column by studying and identifying the order of the capital, by confronting the various accounts of the inscription, by using ultraviolet light at night to better read the obliterated characters, by carefully consulting the catalogue of Venetian dignitaries in Modon, by referring to heraldry and by taking into consideration a government document of Venice and pilgrims' accounts of the castle's fortification.

Although the problem of identifying this commemorative monument seems resolved, there are many other questions remaining to be answered. The column of red granite in the main square of the castle is the most attractive monument within the castle today, denuded as it is of its treasures. For there are many others engulfed in the sea and buried in the earth that are waiting for archaeologists. Greek, Roman, Byzantine, Venetian and so many other ships, using Modon as a leading port-of-call, are lying today at the bottom of the sea with their precious cargo in sculpture, silver, gold, numismatics and pottery. Some of these wrecks have already been located, but not explored. On the other hand, treasures crammed by centuries into the soil could

easily be brought back to light so that the long and shady history of Modon could be reconstituted. If you study in depth, you finally realize that the most precious treasures are those which do not gleam.

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