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Empire, city, nation: Venice's imperial past and the 'making of Italians' from unification to fascism

David Laven and Elsa Damien

In the aftermath of the 1848-9 revolutions, even amongst those political commentators most deeply sympathetic to the cause of Italian unification, it remained a commonplace to decry not only the politically fragmented nature of the peninsula but the deep internal divisions within the Italian people. Thus, for example, the French historian François-Tommy Perrens, writing in a work completed shortly after New Year 1857, reflected that,

Agreement is no more than a dream. Everywhere division rules, between subjects as much as between princes, between one province of city and another, even within the very heart of an individual city. Nothing can be done that requires collective effort. Much has been spoken of federations and leagues, without a single one ever having been formed. In vain has it been desired to unite Rome with Florence, Lombardy with Piedmont, Sicily with Naples; but no one can agree on anything, even on the battle field. [...] These suspicions, these universal jealousies have made Italy fail in favourable circumstances that perhaps will not be seen again for many years.

L'accord n'est qu'une vague aspiration. Partout règne la division, et entre les sujets comme entre les princes, d'une province d'une ville à l'autre et jusqu'au sein d'une même cité. Rien ne s'y fait de ce qui demande des efforts collectifs. On a beaucoup parlé de fédérations et de ligues sans en former une seule. Vainement on a voulu réunir Rome à Florence, la Lombardie au Piémont, Venise à la Lombardie, la Sicile à Naples ; on n'a pu marcher d'accord nulle part, pas même sur les champs de bataille ... Ces défiances, ces jalousies universelles ont fait échouer l'Italie dans des circonstances favorables qui ne renouvelleront pas de longtemps peut-être.¹

At first glance it might appear as though Perrens spoke too soon: four years after the publication of his book, the new Kingdom of Italy was constituted, albeit without Venetia and Rome, which would not be acquired until 1866 and 1870 respectively. Yet despite the formation of a united, constitutional monarchy, under the rule of House of Savoy, Italy's new rulers, and, indeed, most of those who had played a pivotal rôle in the unlikely process of unification were painfully aware that, while a single Italian state had been created for the first time since the fall of the Western Roman Empire, the overwhelming bulk of the population was at best indifferent, and at worst actively resentful and hostile towards the new political structure. Despite the massive endorsement offered by (heavily rigged) plebiscites, which were held in all the House of Savoy's the newly annexed territories bar Lombardy, it was not possible to avoid the obvious conclusion that for the majority of Italians the process of unification was an alien or fundamentally negative experience. A process of centralisation – in large part a panicked response to widespread public opposition to the new order – was greeted by popular unease; in the south especially resistance took the form of violent unrest and open insurrection, misleadingly labelled the *grande brigantaggio*, in an attempt to demonise a movement that was political and social in its aims as purely criminal. It was in such a climate that the great Piedmontese moderate, Massimo d'Azeglio is commonly alleged to have uttered the phrase, 'Fatta l'Italia, bisogna fare gli italiani' ('With Italy made, it is necessary to make Italians). In fact, d'Azeglio seems never to have made this remark,² but awareness of the problem it so succinctly expresses was without doubt general within Italy's ruling élites; it would remain so until the fascist era. Despite the recent attempts by Alberto Banti to argue that the *Risorgimento* was a 'movimento di massa',³ those who

¹ François-Tommy Perrens, *Deux ans de révolution en Italie (1848-1849)* (Paris : Hachette, 1857), 357-8.

² For a discussion of this phrase see the introduction by Simonetta Soldani and Gabriele Turi, in *id.* (eds), *Fare gli italiani. Scuola e cultura nell'Italia contemporanea. I. La nascita dello stato nazionale* (2 vols, Bologna: Il Mulino, 1993), vol. I, 17. See also Alberto M. Banti, *La nazione del Risorgimento. Parentela, sanità e onore alle origini dell'Italia unita* (Turin: Einaudi, 2000), 203.

³ Alberto Banti, 'Per una nuova storia del Risorgimento' in Banti and Ginsborg (eds), *Il Risorgimento*, xxiii-xli, xxiii.

had actively supported unification had never amounted to more than a tiny percentage of population and contemporaries knew it: Italians needed to be made. The systematic use of repression by the new state (characterised by a calculated brutality that far exceeded anything ever adopted by any of its restoration predecessors), the undemocratic nature of its political system until the eve of the Great War,⁴ and the fiercely anticlerical nature of the régime in an essentially Catholic country combined to create a climate in which the creation of a strong sense of national identity was little more than a fantasy. To make matters worse, the bulk of the population continued to identify the new order with unprecedented rates of taxation, and burden of military service.

It was in part in response to these problems that, during the final decades of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century, Italian governments pursued an imperial mission. Although often justified in strategic, economic and demographic terms, Italian attempts at empire-building had two principal goals: first, to raise Italy's international status, and, second, to try to construct a stronger sense of nation at home. Indeed, it is hard not to see the former of these ambitions as largely arising from the latter: international recognition of Italy as a major imperial power would help build public confidence in the new state. It is not, however, our intention in this essay to offer a comprehensive analysis of the way in which the idea of the Italian nation was fashioned through the government's efforts to acquire an empire, through the inevitable conflicts that this generated with other powers (most notably the Ottoman Empire, France, and Austria-Hungary), or through the invention of 'Italianness' outside the peninsula (a process, after all, that was as likely to take place amongst emigrants in Buenos Aires, New York or New Orleans as in the outposts of the nascent Italian imperium). Rather we intend to take a different approach, namely to focus on how debates surrounding empire, the practical consequences of imperial policy, and a 'colonial imaginary' played a part in shaping attitudes to the nation in a particular city – Venice – and eventually played a pivotal rôle in the 'making of the Italian nation' – or perhaps more accurately 'the imagining of the Italian nation' – in that urban centre.

A case study of a single city is particularly fruitful as an approach to understanding spatial identities in post-unification Italy. On the one hand, such a case study recommends itself because, given the severe reservations of many Italians at the new order established by unification, it is perhaps unsurprising that much of the population continued to look to local rather than national allegiances. Indeed, it is something of a historical commonplace to emphasise the resilience of local and municipal particularisms as one of the great obstacles to effectively attaching Italians to the national idea in the liberal era. On the other hand, research on Germany and France has increasingly demonstrated not only that national and local loyalties were not necessarily at loggerheads, but also that they were often mutually-reinforcing.⁵ This sense that local identity could actually be the basic building block for creating the nation has been recently applied to the Italian case, perhaps most persuasively by Axel Körner in his study of Bologna.⁶ It is our intention in this essay to build on these approaches, but to address them from a slightly different perspective, asking how far Venetian responses to both unification and 'the making of Italians' were shaped by imperialist ambitions and the experience of empire. In doing this we shall examine both the historical

⁴ The Zanardelli law of 1882 extended the suffrage to slightly under 7% of the population. It was only during Giolitti's fourth ministry of 1911 to 1914 that steps were taken towards the adoption of a system approaching universal male suffrage; this was to be finally introduced in the 1919 elections.

⁵ Alon Confino, *The Nation as Local Metaphor. Württemberg, Imperial Germany, and National Memory, 1871-1918* (Chapel Hill, NC.: University of North Carolina Press, 1997); Celia Applegate, *A Nation of Provincials: The German Idea of Heimat* (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 1990). Similar arguments have been put forward for nineteenth-century France. See especially the works of Anne-Marie Thiesse: *Écrire la France: le mouvement littéraire régionaliste de langue française entre la Belle Époque et la Libération* (Paris : PUF, 1991) ; *Il apprenaient la France. L'exaltation des régions dans le discours patriotique* (Paris : Maison des Sciences de l'Homme, 1997). See also Jean-François Chanet, 'Maîtres d'école et régionalisme en France, sous la Troisième République', *Ethnologie française* 18 (1988), 244-56 ; id., *L'école républicaine et les petites patries* (Paris : Aubier, 1996) ; Jacqueline Lalouette, 'L'éducation populaire au canton : Edmond Groult et les musées cantonaux', *Jean Jaurès cahiers trimestriels* 152 (1999), 91-104.

⁶ Axel Körner, *Politics of Culture in Liberal Italy. From Unification to Fascism* (London: Routledge, 2009).

legacy of the *Serenissima's* imperial past, and the practical consequences of contemporary Italian imperialism, but most significantly the interplay of the two.

Venice, it must be remembered, was one of the last significant parts of Italy to be united under the rule of the House of Savoy. Although the war of 1859, which had pitched French forces – inadequately supported by the Piedmontese – against the Austrian army, had originally been intended to liberate the whole of Venetia from Habsburg rule, peace had been made when only Lombardy had been secured. Despite the outrage of Cavour, who resigned in protest at the failure to pursue the originally-agreed war aims and to push on to the Adriatic, the lands to the east of the River Mincio were not secured for the House of Savoy for another seven years. The acquisition of Venice was a fairly ignominious process,⁷ dependent on the victory of Italy's Prussian allies at the battle of Königgrätz-Sadowa and the good offices of Napoleon III rather than on the military glories dreamed of by Vittorio Emanuele and his generals; only when the Austrians withdrew the vast bulk of their men to defend Vienna did the Italians make any significant headway – more-or-less unopposed – into Venetian territory. Significantly, while inhabitants of both the *Terraferma* and the Venice itself welcomed the advance of the Italian army, there was no spontaneous insurrection in support of unification. Moreover, while observers recorded the delighted celebrations of the local population,⁸ disillusionment followed swiftly. Even the departure of the garrison from Venice seems to have been marked by a certain melancholic display of affection for the Habsburg 'whitecoats'. The overwhelming margin of support for unification in the plebiscite held on 21-22 October saw 647,246 votes in favour of annexation, and only 69 against. The result reflected in part optimism at a new order, but the presence of heavily armed Italian troops at the polling stations, the use of easily distinguishable 'Yes' and 'No' voting slips in public view, the intimidation of clergy to guarantee that they preached in favour of unity, and the lack of any alternative proposal to the immediate establishment of Savoyard rule, left Venetians with little choice but to accept the vote as a foregone conclusion. Disillusionment followed rapidly, as Venetians switched from patriotic excitement to confronting the reality of the situation in which they found themselves.⁹ Not only was it clear that rule from Vienna had permitted much greater levels of autonomy than under Italian rule, but, perhaps paradoxically, the need of balancing the competing interests of the periphery within a multinational empire meant that the government in Vienna was actually probably more responsive to local needs than the new national government in Florence. As a consequence of unification, Venice also found itself relegated from the position of the Habsburgs' second port with a vast imperial hinterland containing a seventh of Europe's population, to a distinctly subsidiary status, facing competition from Genoa, Livorno, Ancona, Naples, and a host of smaller Italian maritime cities. Any chance of a commercial renaissance was distinctly limited. To aggravate matters, Venice was annexed at a moment of fiscal crisis: in the aftermath of the creation of the Kingdom of Italy in 1861, a major campaign of state investment had been undertaken, in part to improve the national infrastructure for its own sake, and in part to create vested interests in defending unity amongst the disparate parts of the peninsula. Much of this expenditure had taken the form of heavy investment in railways, but, in the years up to 1866, the young Italian state had also indulged in heavy expenditure on public health, welfare and education. By the time of the acquisition of Venice such government largesse had come to an end. The cost of policing the unrest in the south between 1861 and 1865, and dealing with the uprising in Palermo in 1866, coupled with the massive expenditure on the ultimately disastrous war against Austria left Italian coffers empty. Matters were aggravated by inheriting Venetia's share of the Austrian national debt, and by peace terms under which the Italians undertook to pay compensation for Austrian fortifications and railways in the annexed territories. This all meant that the Italian government could no longer consider

⁷ The poor showing of the Italian army and, most especially, navy in 1866 led to an outpouring of self-lacerating articles, pamphlets and books. The most famous of these was the short work of the Neapolitan historian and academic, Pasquale Villari, in the Milanese journal *Il Politecnico* of 1867, entitled 'Di di è la colpa? O' sia la pace e la guerra', later republished several times as a free-standing pamphlet. *Di chi è la colpa?* (Milan: Francesco Zanetti, 1866).

⁸ See, for example, the descriptions offered by Dickens's friend and sometime collaborator, George Augustus Sala, *Rome and Venice: with other wanderings in Italy, in 1866-7* (London: Tinsley Brothers, 1869), 217-21.

⁹ Renato Camurri, 'Istituzioni, associazioni e classi dirigenti dall'Unità alla Grande guerra' Mario Isnenghi and Stuart Woolf (eds), *Storia di Venezia. L'Ottocento e il Novecento I, L'Ottocento. 1797-1918* (Rome: Istituto della Enciclopedia Italiana, 2002), 225-303, 237.

sustaining an annual budget deficit of over 25%. Retrenchment was essential in order to address huge debts. This meant that Venice and its mainland were suddenly obliged to shoulder a share of Italy's huge state debt, when they would not benefit directly from the heavy expenditure that had generated it. To make matters worse, annexation aggravated Venice's economic situation in other ways. During the American Civil War that had disrupted cotton production and exports to Europe, Venice – albeit far from flourishing economically – had become a key port of entry for Egyptian cotton destined for the central European market; this was disrupted less because peace in America led to renewed competition from the former Confederate states anxious to regain lost markets, but because Venice was now deprived of access to consumers in the Habsburg lands. Similarly, Vicentine woollen manufactures – largely destined to clothe Austrian soldiery – collapsed as a consequence of annexation.¹⁰ Venetians who had hoped for prosperity and liberty as a result of unification, found themselves impoverished, their autonomy snatched, and with little voice in government.

If the immediate consequences of unification were largely negative for Venice, then it was also far from easy to appeal to Venetian involvement in the *Risorgimento*, which rapidly became *the* foundation myth for unity. On the one hand, Venice and its surrounding territories had a longstanding reputation for political passivity. Although a fair number of *veneti* had participated in Garibaldi's expedition to Sicily in 1860, the general reputation of the region was that it had lacked patriotic fibre. During the restoration years the likes of Pellico and Mazzini had despaired of its inhabitants' refusal to challenge Austrian rule, and the one famous Venetian conspiracy, that of the Bandiera brothers, had ended in a tragic-comedy of errors that scarcely added lustre to Venice's association with the national struggle for independence.¹¹ In neither 1859 nor 1866 did Venetians rally in significant numbers to the Italian cause. The one episode in recent Venetian history to which patriotic appeal might be legitimately made was the Venetian rising of 1848-9. Indeed, by the early 1870s, its most famous protagonist, Daniele Manin, had been successfully repackaged as a national hero. This process was facilitated by Manin's open condemnation of Mazzinian republicanism, and his adoption of a pro-Piedmontese monarchist stance in the years between his flight from Venice in 1849 and his death in 1857, a transformation that was symbolised on the one hand by his broadside against the former Roman Triumvir in the pages of the *Times*,¹² and on the other hand by his pivotal rôle in the formation of the moderate *Società Italiana Nazionale*.¹³ Already by September 1861, a monument had been erected to Manin in Turin; in March 1875 a huge bronze statue, with a reclining winged lion at its pedestal was inaugurated in Venice in Campo San Paternian, subsequently renamed Campo Manin. Nevertheless, the incorporation of Manin and the Venetian revolution of 1848-9 into the patriotic prehistory of Italian unification was deeply problematic.¹⁴ As a member of Turin's *consiglio comunale* vociferously protested in 1861, Manin had been part of a fiercely republican tradition and a statue of him was, therefore,

¹⁰ On the economic impact on Venice of unification, see Albert Schram, *Railways and the Formation of the Italian State in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 82-6. On the already depressed state of the Venetian economy in the period 1859-66, see also Adolfo Bernardello, 'Iniziativa economiche, accumulazione e investimenti di capitale (1830-1866)' in Isnenghi and Woolf (eds), I, *L'Ottocento. 1797-1918*, 567-617, 584-6. For more general reflections on the Venetian economy, see Gino Luzzatto, 'L'economia veneziana dal 1797 al 1866' in *La civiltà veneziana nell'età romantica* (Florence: Sansoni, 1961), 85-108; Giovanni Zalin, *Aspetti e problemi dell'economia veneta dalla caduta della Repubblica all'annessione* (Vicenza: Comune di Vicenza, 1969).

¹¹ On the politically passive, even supine, nature of Venetians in the Restoration era, see David Laven, *Venice and Venetia under the Habsburgs, 1815-1835* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 149-212.

¹² *The Times*, 27 May 1856.

¹³ The definitive account of the *SNi* remains Raymond Grew, *A Sterner Plan for Italian Unification. The Italian National Society in the Risorgimento* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1963).

¹⁴ The key values of the Venetian revolution found expression within the historiography of the *Serenissima* in the monumental work of Samuele Romanin, his vast *Storia documentata di Venezia* (10 vols, Venice: Naratovich, 1853-64). Romanin's work remained the fundamental reference point for historians of the city until the twentieth century, but his desire to extol ideas of democracy and republicanism, as well as the fundamental distinctiveness of Venice rested uneasily with a political climate that sought unity through the House of Savoy, and utterly rejected any federal solution to the Italian question.

inappropriate in the Savoyard capital.¹⁵ Indeed, attempts to incorporate Manin in the patriotic pantheon raised as many problems as it solved. For while there was no doubt that, as Vincenzo Gioberti observed in 1851, Manin's name was inseparable from that of the 'eroica città',¹⁶ then the Venetian resistance to the Austrians was both widely perceived as essentially particularist, and hostile to the Piedmontese (who had failed to provide the besieged city with any tangible support).¹⁷ In addition, 1848-9 had been characterised by squabbling between Venetians and non-Venetian patriots, by clashes of interest between genuine *veneziani* and *veneti* from the *Terraferma*, and by class and ideological fissures within population of the city itself. These were all symptomatic of the historical divisions that had traditionally made the peninsula so vulnerable to outside domination: the mid-century revolutions did not automatically make for an edifying spectacle. Attempts to use the events of the 'quarantotto' to embed Venice firmly within a narrative of national liberation nonetheless continued. They came both from Venetians anxious to seek accommodation and influence within the new order, and from those nationalists who sought to foster a strong and uniform sense of Italian national identity.¹⁸ Such conscious myth-making ran the risk of alienating the Venetian public still aware of the betrayal of 1848-9 or the far from positive consequences of 1866.

A far more successful means of stitching the Venetians into the Italian boot than any patriotic appeal to its part in the *Risorgimento* was to be found in the imperialist project – or, at least, in aspects thereof – that had its origins in pre-unification debates about overseas expansion and Italy's rôle as a Mediterranean power, but which blossomed in the liberal era. Central to this are two key elements. First, that the Republic of Saint Mark's experience as a major imperial power permitted Venetians not only to reinvent themselves as integral to a new state from which they had initially felt alienated; and, second, that those who championed *irredentismo*, and the extension of Italian domination in the Balkans and Eastern Mediterranean, not only sought legitimacy through presenting their ambitions as harking back to Venice's *stato da mâr*, but also sought to link them to the fostering of commercial, military and cultural projects that brought genuine advantages to the city. Imperialism thus played an important rôle in making Venetians less inward-looking, less likely to seek refuge in *venezianità*. In short, through looking to Italian expansionism, Venetians were able to position themselves at the centre rather than on the periphery of Italian nationalism. At the same time, the adoption of so-called Adriatic nationalism – to a great degree championed by Venetians – and pursuit of irredentist claims were pivotal in bringing Italy into the Italo-Turkish War of 1911-12, in its jettisoning of its partners in the Triple Alliance, and in its hesitant entrance into the Great War in 1915. The latter of these two conflicts turned Venice into a frontline city, threatened by Austrian bombardment, which in turn helped cement its place in nationalist rhetoric: during the Great War and in its

¹⁵ Cristina Lanfranco, 'L'uso politico dei monumenti: il caso torinese fra 1849 e 1915', *Il Risorgimento*, 48 (1996), 207-273. On the Venetian monument, see Luisa Alban, 'Il monumento a Daniele Manin', *Venetica* 5 (1996), 11-44. We are grateful to our research student, Laura Parker for bringing the existence of the Turin monument to our notice.

¹⁶ Gioberti, *Del rinnovamento civile d'Italia* (Turin & Paris: Libraio S.S.R.M., 1851), 295.

¹⁷ A famous *Times* leader of 1 September 1849 on the heroism of the Venetians referred significantly to the fact that Venice constituted a nation in its own right.

¹⁸ See, for example, the two long articles in the *Archivio Veneto* dating from much the same period as the erection of the Manin monument. R. Fulin, 'Venezia e Daniele Manin', *Archivio Veneto* 9/1 (1875), v-cxxxvi, and Alessandro De Giorgi, 'Venezia nel 1848 e 1849', 1-50. Significantly Fulin stressed that Manin's life was 'sì gloriosa parte della storia moderna della città' ('so glorious a part of the modern history of the city'), while simultaneously pointing to the wider service both the revolutionary leader and the city had rendered 'alla patria comune'. De Giorgi, a neo-Thomist expert on Roman Law, sometime editor of *Romagnolois* and friend of Manin, was, in contrast, at pains to emphasise that even Venice's fourteen centuries of glory 'sono in fine glorie italiane'. Similarly he underlined the ease with which Venetian republican traditions could be reconciled to 'una monarchia nazionale' (13). Was De Giorgi who was purged by the Italian authorities in 1867 from his chair in Roman Law at Padua University, which he had held since 1849, perhaps trying to appease the new order? On De Giorgi's career, see Angelo Manfredi, *Vescovi, clero e cura pastorale. Studi sulla diocesi di Parma alla fine dell'Ottocento* (Rome: Editrice Pontificia Università Gregoriana, 1999), 150-51. See also Alessandro De Giorgi, *Memorie della mia vita* (1865) with a preface by Roberto Treves in Ettore A. Albertoni and Roberto Ghiringhelli (eds), *I tempi e le opere di Gian Domenico Romagnosi* (Milano: A. Giuffrè, 1990).

immediate aftermath there was renewed emphasis on Venice's history of resisting the Habsburgs, which both encouraged its citizens turn to the nation as their protector against 'teutonic' aggression, and underpinned demands for imperial expansion into the lands of the former *stato da mâr* for reasons of strategic defence. Under the Fascists *venezianità* would be seen as a link with *romanità* legitimating attempts to build a new Roman imperial edifice with the *duce* at its head.

Venice and the prehistory of Italian imperialism

Just as Italy was a late comer as a European nation state, so it was tardy in its acquisition of overseas imperial possessions. This does not mean that nineteenth-century Italians were not thinking about possible colonies long before unification was achieved. As Maurizio Isabella has recently demonstrated there was a long history of Italian imperialist thought prior to the establishment of the Kingdom of Italy. Perhaps surprisingly, even Giuseppe Mazzini (so quick to vilify the Habsburgs for stifling national independence) and the brilliant federalist Carlo Cattaneo could on occasion be found defending colonialism, although a marked ambivalence always informed their writings.¹⁹ For Vincenzo Gioberti, geographical determinism dictated that Italy should dominate the Mediterranean.²⁰ But the Piedmontese cleric also stressed in his enormously influential *Primato* of 1843 – the work that triggered the neo-guelf movement, so influential in the outbreak of revolution in 1848 – that the strong historical precedent for Italian imperialism within the Mediterranean basin was to be found not only in the glories of the Roman Empire: the tradition lived on long after the collapse of the western Empire; both Venice and Genoa (which we shall discuss briefly by way of comparison later in this essay) possessed extensive overseas territories.²¹ Moreover, it was to Italian military and cultural prowess that all other Europeans owed their current glories. Indeed, Britain's maritime prowess, on which its own empire was built, would never have existed without the lessons taught by Italy's maritime republics.

Non potreste, arditì Britannici, dominare i mari ed essere i Romani dell'oceano [...] se le flotte cattoliche di Amalfi, Pisa, Genova, Venezia, non avessero insegnata ai vostri maggiori l'arte di signoreggiare i flutti [...]²²

You, brave Britons, would not be able to dominate the seas and be the Romans of the oceans [...] if the Catholic fleets of Amalfi, Pisa, Genoa, Venice had not taught your forefathers the art of mastering the waves [...]

Two key elements can be detected in the way that the imperial and Mediterranean rôle of the former Republic of Venice was located within pre-unification discussions of a potential imperial mission for Italy. On the one hand, authors stressed the importance of Venice's former Mediterranean presence as both a bastion of *italianità* and as a bulwark in defence of a wider western and Christian culture. On the other hand, it was also widely presented as a model of maritime hegemony and imperial rule, and as a bridge between eastern and western economies and cultures. Such sentiments were already evident in the years immediately after the fall of the *Serenissima* in 1797: they are, for instance, neatly encapsulated in the opening lines of William Wordsworth's much-quoted 'On the extinction of the Venetian Republic'

Once did she hold the gorgeous East in fee,
And was the safeguard of the West: the worth
Of Venice did not fall below her birth,
Venice, the eldest child of Liberty.²³

¹⁹ Maurizio Isabella, 'Liberalism and Empires in the Mediterranean: the view-point of the Risorgimento', in Lucy Riall and Silvana Patriarca (eds), *The Risorgimento Revisited. Nationalism and Culture in Nineteenth-Century Italy* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, forthcoming).

²⁰ Vincenzo Gioberti, *Del Primato morale e civile degli Italiani* (2 vols, Lausanne: Bonamici & co, 1846 edn), vol. ii, 52. Gioberti bizarrely argued that the only other country destined for imperial grandeur by virtue of its geographical position was Guatemala. *Ibid.*, 387-8.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 91-2.

²² *Ibid.*, 72.

²³ The piece was written in 1802, but not published until 1807. *The Poetical Works of William Wordsworth* (4 vols, Boston: Cummings, Hilliard, & Co., 1824), vol. ii, 320.

There is not space to treat exhaustively here how this view of Venice's past imperial and hegemonic rôle developed in the course of the *Risorgimento* era, but it was clearly extremely widespread. Let us offer just a few examples. Take the position adopted by novelist and *garibaldino* Ippolito Nievo in his pamphlet 'Venezia e la libertà d'Italia'.²⁴ Elsewhere, Nievo had been critical of the late Republic, most notably in his posthumously published novel, written in 1857-8,²⁵ but in this propagandistic pamphlet Venice – 'dopo Roma è la città più italiana della patria nostra' ('after Rome it is the most Italian city of our fatherland')²⁶ – embodied not only all the virtues of the 'spirito antico italiano' but was represented the unparalleled champion of Italian freedom *and* culture against a hostile 'other':

Libertà e civiltà, ecco gli antichi segni della gente latina perduti dall'Italia del Medio Evo e serbati sempre da Venezia e difesi con una sequela infinita di guerre, di trattati, e di interne rivoluzioni. [...] lo schermo stesso che difese contro i Turchi di Costantinopoli, contro gli Usococchi del Don e i Barbareschi di Tunisi le transazioni e gli stabilimenti commerciali di Venezia, proteggeva in pari tempo il rinascimento letterario, scientifico ed artistico dell'Italia e del mondo.²⁷

Liberty and civilisation, behold the ancient characteristics of the Latin people lost in mediaeval Italy, yet preserved always by Venice and defended through an innumerable series of wars, treaties and internal tumults [...] the same shield that defended Venetian trade and commercial establishments against the Turks of Constantinople, against the Uskoks of the Don, and against the Barbary Corsairs of Tunis, while at the same time defending the literary, scientific and artistic rebirth of Italy and the whole world.

Venice was above all to be celebrated as the shield of Christendom, *italianità*, and western culture, betrayed by an ungrateful Europe both during its seventeenth-century defence of Crete and on the eve of Campo Formio, for it was to Venice that Europe owed centuries of freedom from the Ottomans.²⁸ But there was another side to Venice's existence, which Nievo identified clearly in the *Confessioni*: Venice's mercantile contact with the East had made it 'la mediatrice dei due mondi' ('the bridge between two worlds').²⁹

Cesare Balbo similarly pointed to the pivotal rôle of mediaeval Venice, likening it to modern London as an imperial, military, commercial and industrial centre,³⁰ while Carlo Cattaneo extolled Venice as a model of maritime hegemony in the Mediterranean, in 1846, advocating Venetian-style imperialism as a way forward for the European influence in North Africa: rather than occupying great swathes of territory, argued the Milanese, the French would be well-advised to copy the Venetian example and to limit their presence to urban centres on the littoral:

²⁴ Ippolito Nievo, 'Venezia e la libertà d'Italia' in Sergio Romagnoli (ed.), *Ippolito Nievo. Opere* (Milan & Naples: Riccardo Ricciardi Editore, 1952), 1033-1052.

²⁵ *Id.*, *Le confessioni d'un Italiano* in *ibid.*, 3-883. See especially the opening pages of Chapter 6, 211-18.

²⁶ Nievo, 'Venezia e la libertà d'Italia', 1033.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 1035.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 1034.

²⁹ Nievo, *Confessioni*, 400.

³⁰ 'Venezia fu come la Londra d'allora; il suo arsenà fu il Woolich e il Plymouth [sic]; la sua piazzetta, i suoi canali furono i Dochs [sic] ... la signoria d'un quarto dell'Imperio Orientale tenuta alcuni anni, e poi Candia e Cipro e Morea tenute da' Veneziani [...] non furono indegni, comparativamente ai tempi corrispondenti, delle colonie europee presenti.' 'Venice was like the London of today; its Arsenal was Woolwich and Plymouth; its *piazzetta* and its canal were the Docks [...] its mastery of one quarter of the eastern Roman Empire, held for some time, and then of Crete and Cyprus and Morea, were within the context of the times, equivalent to modern day European colonies.' Cesare Balbo, *Pensieri sulla storia d'Italia* (Florence: Felice Le Monnier, 1858), 187.

[...] una catena di *stazioni maritime* [sic], simili alle colonie dei Fenicii e dei Greci e alle città venete della Dalmazia, in cui la stirpe italiana e la slava, a sì diverso stadio di civiltà, vissero pure insieme in profonda pace.³¹

[...] a chain of maritime stations, similar to the colonies of the Phoenicians and the Greeks and to the Venetian cities in Dalmatia, in which latter the Italian and Slav races of such different levels of civilisation, nonetheless lived together in the most stable peace.

Significantly in this passage, Cattaneo emphasised the ability of the Venetians to reconcile their non-Italian subjects to their rule. This too was increasingly a commonplace: Gioberti, for example, stressed the benign nature of the Republic's rule – 'un paterno dominio' – of its colonies.³² Much more critical had been the Swiss economist and historian, Simonde de Sismondi, who, while happy to portray the Venetian state as the most systematic defender of Europe from the ravages of the Turks, cruelly 'abandoned by all Christendom',³³ and a kindly overlord of its Italian *terraferma*, was much more critical of attitudes and conduct in their Greek, Albanian and Illyrian possessions. According to Sismondi, Venetians were disdainful of their 'sujets levantins' ('Tous les Grecs étoient estimés faux et corrompus, tous les Illyriens barbares'/ 'All the Greeks were deemed false and corrupt, all the Illyrians barbarian.'). incapable of affection for their overseas empire, and prepared to spend time there purely with a view to amassing a fortune.

Enfin les habitans des provinces situées au-delà des mers, formoient une troisième classe, méprisée, opprimée, et toujours sacrifiée aux deux autres [Venetians and inhabitants of the *Terraferma*]. Leurs ports étoient marchés réservés aux seuls Vénitiens, où ils exerçoient, sans rivaux, un odieux monopole ; leur fortresses devoient contenir les sujets dans la crainte, et assurer la domination de la mer Adriatique ; mais elles ne couvroient point les frontières, et ne protégeoient point l'agriculture et la paix dans une enceinte inviolable ; leurs milices n'étoient point régulièrement armées ; les soldats, levés dans ces pays guerriers, n'étoient point incorporés avec le reste de l'armée vénitienne ; ils étoient repoussés au dernier rang de l'établissement militaire.³⁴

Finally, the inhabitants of the overseas provinces formed a third class, despised, oppressed, and whose interests were always sacrificed to those of the two others [Venetians and inhabitants of the *Terraferma*]. Their ports were markets preserved purely for Venetians, where the latter exercised an odious and exclusive monopoly; their fortresses were designed to control their subjects through fear, and to guarantee the domination of the Adriatic; but these fortifications did not defend the frontiers, nor protect agriculture or peace through an unbreachable barrier; their militias were frequently left unarmed; the troops levied in this land of warriors, were not incorporated with the rest of the Venetian army, but were relegated to the very lowest rank of the military establishment.

Amongst Italian authors, however, Venetian rule of the *stato da màr* was generally portrayed in a positive light. This was particularly true of the Venetian presence on the eastern shores of the Adriatic. A powerful narrative both of affection for Venetian rule, and of the cultural as well as commercial benefits that

³¹ Carlo Cattaneo, 'Di alcuni stati moderni', *Alcuni Scritti* (Milan: Borroni e Scotti, 1846), vol. ii, 229-65, 257.

³² Gioberti, *Primato*, ii, 91.

³³ Jean-Charles-Léonard Simonde de Sismondi's vast *Histoire des Républiques Italiennes du moyen âge* (16 vols, Paris : H. Nicolle, and subsequently Treuttel & Würtz, 1807-1818). The quotation comes from the abridged English translation of Sismondi's work, *A History of the Italian Republics, being a View of the Origin, Progress and Fall of Italian Freedom* (London: Longman, Brown, Green & Longmans, 1832), 259.

³⁴ Sismondi, *Républiques italiennes*, (1815) vol. x, 262-3. Elsewhere he argued that 'Dans le maintien de ce système, la république de Venise manifestoit au moins de la vigueur et de la prévoyance ; mais on ne voyait que corruption, négligence et péculat dans les possessions d'outre mer. Les sujets grecs de la république étoient tellement vexés par les injustices des gouverneurs vénitiens et les monopoles des marchands, qu'ils regrettoient le joug des Turcs.' ('In maintaining this system, the Republic of Venice manifested at least vigour and foresight; but in the overseas territories, there was nothing to be seen except corruption, negligence and embezzlement. The Greek subjects of the Republic came to be so vexed by the injustice of Venetian governors, and by the monopolies of the Venetian merchants, that they were nostalgic for the Turkish yoke.') *Ibid.*, vol. xiv, 340-41.

Dalmatia and Istria derived from close connection with the Republic of Saint Mark became widespread.³⁵ This relationship was probably most powerfully stated in the work of Niccolò Tommaseo. Hero of the 1848 revolution, brilliant lexicographer and linguist, accomplished polemicist and author, Tommaseo was extremely proud of his Dalmatian origins, and certainly never an advocate of renewed Italian rule of the eastern Adriatic coast.³⁶ Nevertheless, he was passionate in his defence of both the Venetian legacy and of the wider Italian cultural influence in his homeland, albeit in part as a means of undermining Croat 'Illyrianist' claims to the region. Repeatedly returning to this theme, he was perhaps at his most eloquent in his *La questione Dalmatica* of 1861. Tommaseo was dismissive of those who sought to vilify Venetian rule, whether Daru in an attempt to legitimate Napoleon – 'suo padrone, gran maestro di libertà, come tutti sappiamo' ('his patron, great master of liberty, as everyone knows') – or Croat propagandists seeking to blacken the name of and marginalise the littoral's educated, Italianised community. The Venetians merited affection and esteem not merely because no other European power would have saved the region from Ottoman control ('Se Venezia non era, Dalmazia invece di Bani avrebbe pascià'/'If it were not for Venice Dalmatia would have pashas not bans'), but also because they had been an actively positive influence.³⁷ Mocking those who echoed Sismondi in alleging the hatred felt for Venetian misrule, Tommaseo remarked:

Ma se tanto abbominevole la tirannide di questi stranieri; perchè dunque i Dalmati nella lega di Cambrai, e in altre opportunità, no la scossero? [...] Dalmazia oppressa ama Venezia; ha San Marco per nome sacro, per sacra bandiera; fino all'ultimo combatte per essa, sovr'essa piange.³⁸

But if the tyranny of these foreigners was so abominable, why was it that the Dalmatians did not shake it off during the League of Cambrai, or when other opportunities presented themselves? [...] Subjugated Dalmatia loved Venice; Saint Mark was a sacred name, gave the sacred banner; until the very last Dalmatians fought for her, and over her [defeat] they wept.

By the time Venice was annexed to Italy there already existed a strong sense of its distinctive place within Italian history. On the one hand, it had for centuries retained its independence far more effectively than others within the peninsula; on the other hand, it had wielded an influence across the eastern half of the Mediterranean, which had not only brought wealth, but had also played a pivotal part in the protection of Italy and the rest of western Christendom from Ottoman subjection. In the years immediately after 1866 historians appealed to these traditions in an attempt to find past glories that linked an unenthusiastic

³⁵ To some degree this harked back to earlier writings on the intimate links between Venice and its Slav subjects. The eighteenth-century playwright Goldoni, for example, stressed the tight and mutually-beneficial links between Venice and Dalmatia. On the eighteenth-century attitudes to Venice's relationship with Dalmatia, see Larry Wolff, *Venice and the Slavs: the Discovery of Dalmatia in the Age of Enlightenment* (Stanford, Ca.; Stanford University Press, 2003). See also *id.*, 'Venice and the Slavs of Dalmatia: the Drama of the Adriatic Empire in the Venetian Enlightenment', *Slavic Review* 56 (1997), 428-55.

³⁶ Significantly, despite his position of prominence within the anti-Austrian revolution of 1848-9, Tommaseo sought to block attempts made by Venetian propagandists to appeal to Dalmatians to support the insurrection. See Dominique Reill, 'A Mission of Mediation: Dalmatia's Multi-national Regionalism from the 1830s-60s' in Laurence Cole (ed.), *Different Paths to the Nation. Regional and National Identities in Central Europe and Italy, 1830-70* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 16-36, 16-17.

³⁷ Niccolò Tommaseo, *La questione dalmatica riguardata ne'suoi nuovi aspetti* (Zare: Fratelli Battara, 1861), 18.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 18-19.

Venetian population to a national narrative, tradition which also increased Venice's chance of attaining benefits from the new government.³⁹

The Arsenale and venezianità

One of the central hopes of Venetians in the years immediately after 1866 was that the *Arsenale* – for centuries the biggest industrial enterprise in Europe, and still a significant producer of warships even in the final years of the Republic – might be revived. In the years after 1860, the Italian government had spent lavishly on constructing a modern, armoured, steam-powered fleet, only for Persano's ironclads to be crushed by Tegetthoff's mostly wooden ships with crews drawn predominantly from formerly Venetian lands, who apparently celebrated victory with shouts of 'Viva San Marco!' Despite the need for post-war retrenchment, there was widespread recognition after the humiliating defeat of Lissa that naval construction had to continue both to defend Italy's shores and as a prerequisite for any future extension of Mediterranean influence. Days before the plebiscite of 21-22 October 1866, a decree had been passed promising regeneration of the Venetian *Arsenale*. Yet it was not long before a petition signed by over 1400 Venetians was sent to Parliament demanding that action be taken for the purposes of 'restituirlo alla sua naturale grandezza'.⁴⁰ Of course, one of the problems with developing Venice as a naval centre was that it was in competition with other ports with similar claims: La Spezia – preferred naval base of Cavour, and once the favoured site for an arsenal of the Napoleonic régime – had already become the premier naval base of the new Kingdom despite the jealousy of the Genoese; many in Naples also hoped for greater investment in military boat yards in the hope of economic benefits.⁴¹ Just as rivalry between the Ligurians and Neapolitans had played a key part in the defeat of the Italian fleet at Lissa, so the competition for investment in developing shipyards generated antagonism between different Italian cities. Even by the mid-1870s imperial ambitions within the Adriatic had led to a preference for Taranto and Brindisi in Puglia – in large part because of their region's proximity to Albania, seen as a potential Italian acquisition.⁴²

³⁹ Interesting in these terms is a review published in the *Archivio Veneto* of a three volume work in Italian published in Zara in the early 1870s under the auspices of the Habsburg régime. The reviewer acknowledged that geographically the eastern Adriatic 'non è che una prolungazione occidentale della Turchia europea' ('is nothing more than a westward extension of European Turkey'), but was anxious to stress its historical and cultural links with the west. In mediaeval and early modern times Dalmatian valour had helped save Italy from the Ottomans, and in return the Italians had sowed the seeds of culture, which had flourished in Dalmatian soil. 'Questa lunga striscia di terra, che con Roma e Venezia divide un giorno i lutti e le glorie della patria, – che i possessori d'Italia calcolarono in tutti i tempi come loro supplemento naturale, – e che Venezia ritenne come parte integrante de' suoi stati, e come la migliore guarentigia del Mare Adriatico, onde si mostrò sempre gelosissima del suo possesso, sì che allora solo che ne divenne padrona assoluta, si proclamò *Regina dell'Adriatico*, è più inutile tacerlo, – è la Dalmazia.' ('This long strip of land, that alongside Rome and Venice will share one day the sorrows and the glories of the fatherland, – that rulers of Italy have always seen as their natural extension – and it is pointless to keep quiet about the fact that Venice held it as an integral part of its territories, and as the best guarantee of the Adriatic Sea, and always showed herself extremely jealous of its possession, so that only when she was absolute master of it, did she proclaim herself *Queen of the Adriatic* – is Dalmatia.') N. Battaglini review of Luigi Maschek, *Manuale del Regno di Dalmazia* (3 vols; Zara: Fratelli Battara, 1872; G. Woditzka, 1873-4) in *Archivio Veneto* 8/i (1874), 157-79, 158-9.

⁴⁰ 7 May 1867 *Rendiconti del Parlamento Italiano. Sessione del 1867. Discussioni della Camera dei Deputati* vol. I dal 22 marzo al 6 giugno 1867 (Florence: Eredi Botta, 1867), 559. The phrase is that of Galeazzo Giacomo Maldini, recently elected as deputy for Venice, naval captain and member of the *Società italiana geografica*. Maldini would later serve on a government committee to establish priorities for the development of a railway network around Venice. See Giacomo Collotta (ed.), *Intorno alle questioni ferroviarie nei riguardi della provincia, della città e del porto di Venezia: relazione della commissione nominata nella seduta del 26 settembre 1872, composta dei signori Maldini, Bertoli e Collotta relatore* (Venice: Stabilimento di G. Antonelli, 1873).

⁴¹ Giorgio Bellavita, *L'Arsenale di Venezia. Storia di una grande struttura urbana* (Venice: Cicero, 2009), 221-3.

⁴² Mariano Gabriele and Giuliano Fritz, *La flotta come strumento di politica nei primi decenni dello stato unitario italiano* (Rome: Ufficio Storico Marina Militare, 1973), 160.

Nevertheless, Venice's historical rôle in the Adriatic coupled with the somewhat diffident attitude of the bulk of its inhabitants towards the newly united state recommended that investment be ploughed into the *Arsenale* as a means of winning over Venetians and strengthening Italy's naval position. This was championed with especial determination by Nino Bixio, disciplinarian *garibaldino*, regular army general in 1866, and senator. Perhaps improbably for so dedicated a man of action, Bixio spent long periods in 1867,⁴³ studying the history of the *Serenissima's* navy as a means of legitimating its rôle once more as a key port in pursuit of Italian naval power in the Adriatic and Mediterranean. The eventual drive for the expansion of the *Arsenale* was triggered in large part by the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869. This project – once mooted by the Venetians in the early sixteenth century in response to Portuguese rounding of the Cape – shifted considerable focus towards the eastern Mediterranean, the traditional sphere of Venetian influence. The possibilities it opened played a pivotal part in the formation of the Società Veneta, established in Padua in January 1872.⁴⁴ Its president the future senator Vincenzo Stefano Breda who would later also establish the Cantieri Navali Breda – the shipyards – at Marghera on the mainland facing Venice across the lagoon. The Società Veneta – which by 1881 had a technical and administrative staff of over 700 – became one of the key contractors for public works in Italy, and was instrumental in the massive redevelopment of the *Arsenale* from the early 1870s onwards, dramatically adapting and expanding its structures make it capable of producing modern warships.⁴⁵ One of the first major warships to be constructed at Venice was appropriately *Francesco Morosini*, named after the seventeenth-century naval and land commander, and doge, who had been one the last great military heroes of the Republic in its wars against Ottoman expansion, famously portrayed by the artist Giacomo Favretto in 1879.⁴⁶ By the turn of the twentieth century, *Dreadnoughts* were also in production in the *Arsenale*. This revivification of the historical military boat yards, brought about in large part to pursue an imperial mission, helped to breathe new life into Venice's moribund economy,⁴⁷ as well as creating a link between Venice's past and a more dynamic modernity. But while linked to the past there was also a sharp contrast, as the patriotic writer Gabriele d'Annunzio observed in his great novel of 1898, *Il fuoco*

⁴³ Teodoro Toderini & Bartolomeo Cecchetti, *L'Archivio di Stato di Venezia nel decennio 1866-1875* (Venice: Naratovich, 1876), 96. In a long list of those using the archive for research is 'Bixio gener. Nino – Antiche colonie romane nelle Venezie – Colonie dei Veneti in Oriente. Viaggi dei Veneziani nel mar rosso. Armamenti straordinarii nell'Arsenale di Venezia.'

⁴⁴ On the formation of the Società Veneta, see Alberto Marino Banti, *Storia della borghesia italiana. L'età liberale* (Rome: Donzelli, 1996), 147.

⁴⁵ Bellavitis, *L'Arsenale*, 231.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 222-3; Margaret Plant, *Venice. Fragile City. 1797-1997* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2002), 175. In both Fascist and post-war Italy warships and submarines have been named after the warlike doge. In 1961 his name was also adopted by Venice's naval *collegio*, the 'Scuola navale militare "Francesco Morosini"', which still seeks to emphasise the links between Venice's former maritime grandeur and the modern Italian navy, its pupils past and present, according to the Italian navy's official website 'respirando la marittimità, la storia e la cultura di questa grande città, orgoglio della Nazione e di ogni uomo di mare [...]. ('[...] breathing the maritime nature, the history, the culture of this great city, the pride of the nation and of every seafaring man [...]) <http://www.marina.difesa.it/morosini/cerimonia.asp>

⁴⁷ Some indication of the economic impact of enlargement of the *Arsenale* can be drawn simply from the numbers of those working there. The only other industrial enterprise to approach it in terms of providing work was the Manifattura Tabacchi, which employed like the *Arsenale* around 1500 workers in 1871 1500; by 1911 the *Arsenale's* workforce had risen to over 2,400. See Luca Pes, 'Le classi popolari' in Isnenghi and Woolf (eds), *L'Ottocento*, 771-800, 779 & 782. It should, of course, be noted that, perhaps paradoxically, among the *arsenatotti* themselves support for imperialism or militarism was not especially strong given a tendency to align with the political left.

[...] il voci degli arsenalotti che andavano al lavoro guerresco, tutta l'emanazione forte di quella riva ove si sentivano ancora le vecchie galere imputridite della Serenissima e rimbombavano sotto il martello le corazze delle navi d'Italia [...]⁴⁸

[...] the clamour of the Arsenal workers on their way to their warlike work, all the emanation of the water's edge where one could still smell the old rotten galleys of the *Serenissima* and where the iron-cladding of Italian ships reverberated under the blows of the hammer [...]

Venetian hopes that rejuvenation of the *Arsenale* as an essential prerequisite for a stronger naval presence in the Mediterranean might bring material benefits to the city co-existed with a very different sense that the city's future lay not in modernisation but in an emphasis on its distinctive past and picturesque present. While new wharves and workshops were erected, and English-built industrial cranes began to compete with Venice's belltowers, the 1870s to 1890s saw a flowering of slightly kitsch Venetian art – best represented in the works of Giacomo Favretto and Ettore Tito – that celebrated both past glories and the *Venezia minore* – the everyday life of the city's ordinary, contemporary inhabitants. The emphasis on this distinctive *venezianità* could be seen in the works of both Venetian and non-Venetian scholars and commentators. Thus the Roman-born but Venetian-trained architect, critic and novelist Camillo Boito, now best known for *Senso* (his novella set against the backdrop of the 1866 war), wrote an eloquent defence of the disappearing popular Venice in the influential *Nuova Antologia*.⁴⁹ A host of Anglophone artists from Sir Samuel Luke Fildes to John Singer Sargent and Maurice Brazil Prendergast sought to capture scenes of everyday life with varying degrees of verisimilitude, while writers such as the American novelist and consul William Dean Howells and the British historian Horatio Brown produced what amounted to affectionate ethnographies based on long residence and familiarity,⁵⁰ Ruskin – who actually hated modern Venetians – championed all aspects of Venetian gothic.⁵¹ Such emphasis on the distinctive nature of Venice helped, alongside the growing trend in sea bathing,⁵² to transform the city into a highly seductive tourist destination by the final quarter of the nineteenth century.⁵³ This both encouraged a fierce emphasis on what was distinctively Venetian (and, therefore, appealing to the visitor), and often went hand-in-hand with resistance to modernization and an emphasis on continuity. Such views were perhaps most fervently articulated by the social historian, school teacher, parliamentary deputy for Brescia, and eventually senator and briefly Sottosegretario alle belle arti, Pompeo Molmenti, both before and in the aftermath of the Great War. A fierce opponent of anything that might threaten the unique beauty of Venice, Molmenti was perhaps at his most outspoken in the essays, published four years before he died in 1928, in *I nemici di Venezia*,⁵⁴ in which his principal targets were the so-called *pontisti*, the supporters of a road bridge linking Venice to the

⁴⁸ Gabriele d'Annunzio, *Il fuoco* (Rome: L'Oleandro, 1933), 198. On d'Annunzio and *venezianità*, see Mario Isnenghi, 'D'Annunzio e l'ideologia della venezianità' in E. Mariano (ed.), *D'Annunzio e Venezia. Atti del Convegno (Venezia 28-30 ottobre 1988)* (Rome: Lucarini, 1991), 229-44.

⁴⁹ Camillo Boito, 'Rassegna artistica: Venezia ne'suoi vecchi edifici', *Nuova Antologia*, 20 (1872), 916-27.

⁵⁰ William Dean Howells, *Venetian Life* (2 vols enlarged version, Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1881; originally published 1866); Horatio Brown, *Life on the Lagoons* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench & Co., 1884).

⁵¹ See especially Robert Hewison, *Ruskin on Venice. 'The Paradise of Cities'* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2009).

⁵² See unpublished PhD thesis, Laetitia Levantis, *Venise un spectacle d'eau et de pierre. Architecture et paysage dans les récits de voyageurs français (1756-1850)*, Université Pierre Mendès-France, Grenoble II, 2009.

⁵³ Andrea Zannini, 'La costruzione della città turistica' in Mario Isnenghi and Stuart Woolf (eds), *Storia di Venezia. L'Ottocento e il Novecento II, L'Ottocento. 1797-1918* (Rome: Istituto della Enciclopedia Italiana, 2002), 1123-1149.

⁵⁴ Pompeo Molmenti, *I nemici di Venezia* collected and edited by Elio Zorzi (Bologna: N. Zanichelli, 1924).

mainland.⁵⁵ But well before the debate over linking Venice to the mainland with a second causeway, Molmenti had made clear his position regarding the need to conserve what was distinctive about the city:

Certamente i nuovi tempi muovono guerra alla vecchia poesia, e ha ragione chi dice che con la poesia si muore di fame. Ben vengano adunque a Venezia il lavoro e le industrie, ma perchè non conciliare le esigenze odierne col rispetto della bellezza antica? Esiste forse un dissidio così profondo fra i doveri verso la storia e i bisogni della civiltà moderna? Nessuno può opporsi ad alcuni parziali allargamenti di strade e alla demolizione di miserabili e sudicie catapecchie, ma chi distrugge una cosa deve pur sentire l'obbligo di sostituirla una migliore. [...] Venezia non può sicuramente rimanere inerte, immutabile e priva di vita, mentre tutto intorno a lei è moto e avanzamento, ma chi volesse ridurre la più singolare città del mondo uguale a molte noiose e monotone città moderne [...] commetterebbe un delitto artistico, contro il quale dovrebbero protestare tutti coloro, che sentono ancora l'amore e il culto del bellezza.⁵⁶

Certainly modern times have declared war on the old poetry, and whoever says that with poetry you die of hunger is quite right. It is a good thing, therefore, that work and industry come to Venice. But why not try to reconcile today's requirements with ancient beauty? Is there really such a rift between duties owed to the past and the needs of modern civilization? No one can oppose some partial widening of roads, and the demolition of miserable and filthy hovels, but whoever destroys something ought to feel the obligation to replace it with something better [...] Venice certainly cannot remain unchanging, immutable, lifeless, while everywhere around it is movement and progress, but whoever might want to reduce the most distinctive city in the world to the same level as many tedious and monotonous modern cities [...] would be committing a crime against art, against which all those who still feel love for the cult of beauty.

Yet in championing the preservation of a city he loved, Molmenti also stressed its specific mission and its connection with an imperial past.⁵⁷ Take for example his engagement with the memorialisation of Sebastiano Venier, the Venetian commander at the victory of Lepanto, and subsequently doge.⁵⁸ Molmenti wrote extensively on both the naval victory and Venier himself, always preferring the Italianised version of the latter's name in his titles ('[...] perché non diremo venezianamente «Venier?»' / [...] why not simply say "Venier" in proper Venetian fashion?' remarked one of his reviewers),⁵⁹ but he was also the driving force behind the transfer of Venier's bones from Santa Maria degli Angeli on Murano to the church of SS. Giovanni e Paolo in Venice itself. Having won the approval of the *consiglio comunale* in April 1896, the move was finally effected in the presence of Queen Margherita and the duca di Genova, and Venice's *sindaco* on 30 June 1897, during a carefully orchestrated ceremony involving a considerable naval and military presence.⁶⁰ As Stouraiti has argued, Molmenti's emphasis on a Venetian who owed his fame to an attempted defence of Venetian dominance in the eastern Mediterranean made him an unlikely ally of some

⁵⁵ On the debates between *pontisti* and *anti-pontisti*, see Plant, *Venice*, 282-4.

⁵⁶ Pompeo Molmenti, *Venezia* (Bergamo: Istituto Italiano d'Arti Grafiche, 1905), 125-6.

⁵⁷ See, for example, his brief *Veneziani e Turchi in Dalmazia* (1915). On Molmenti's career, see Monica Donaglio, *Un esponente dell'élite liberale: Pompeo Molmenti politico e storico di Venezia* (Venice: Istituto veneto di scienze, lettere ed arti, 2004). Also useful is *id.*, 'Il difensore di Venezia. Pompeo Molmenti fra idolatria del passato e pragmatismo politico', *Venetica* 13 (1996), 45-72.

⁵⁸ On Molmenti and Lepanto, see Anastasia Stouraiti, 'Construendo un luogo di memoria' in M. Sbalchiero (ed.), *Meditando sull'evento di Lepanto. Odierne interpretazioni e memorie* (Venice: Corbo e Fiore, 2004), 35-52. Also available electronically at: http://www.storiadivenezia.net/sito/saggi/stouraiti_lepanto.pdf, 1-17.

⁵⁹ Pompeo Molmenti, *Sebastiano Veniero e la battaglia di Lepanto* (Florence: G. Barbèra, 1899); *id.*, 'Sebastiano Veniero dopo la battaglia di Lepanto', *Nuovo Archivio Veneto* new ser. 15; 30/i (1915), 3-146.

⁶⁰ Stouraiti, 'Costruendo un luogo', 13-14; Pompeo Molmenti, 'Sebastiano Veniero e la sua tombe', *Nuova Antologia* 66 (1896), 240-73. For pictures of the ceremony, see Gilberto Secrétant, 'Fra la grandezza e la decadenza di Venezia. (Lepanto, il suo eroe, i suoi monumenti)', *Il Secolo XX* 10 (1907), 793-813.

of the modernisers who sought radically to change his native city.⁶¹ In this he had a surprising amount in common with the imperialist and naval vision of Gabriele d'Annunzio, and was not so different from key opponents in the campaign to modernise the city, notably the energetic businessman Giuseppe Volpi, the most dynamic of all Venetian industrialists and one of the most effective and energetic advocates of Adriatic expansionism.⁶²

D'Annunzio, Volpi, and the problems of a Roman model of imperialism

For all his desire to conserve the uniqueness of Venice, Molmenti saw the *Serenissima's* past as a model to which other Italians might aspire. Repeatedly calumniated by the proponents of 'la leggenda di terrore e di mistero' ('the myth of terror and mystery'), modern archival history had restored the Republic and its citizens to their rightful place in Italian historiography:

[...] appare la gloriosa vita di questo popolo, che non aspettò dal caso la sua fortuna, ma seppe conquistarla con la prodezza e l'accorgimento, che estese il lavoro come un redenzione e assicurò lo Stato con le leggi e la giustizia, che combatté validamente contro gl'infedeli della religione e gl'infedeli della libertà, afferrando, tra lotte immmani, lo scettro del mare, non abbassando mai dinanzi ai più potenti nemici, passando attraverso i secoli, risoluto, unito, concorde, in mezzo agli italiani, divisi, discordi, inermi, senza pratiche idee politiche, senza alti intenti civili.⁶³

[...] the glorious life of this people presents itself as one which did not await the outcome of fortune, but knew how to conquer it with courage and wisdom, that expanded this task as an act of liberation and guaranteed the state by laws and by justice, that fought effectively against the religious infidels and against those who had no faith in liberty, seizing, by means of immense struggles, the sceptre of the seas, never bowing in the face of the most powerful enemies, passing the centuries resolute, united, in concord, amid the Italians who were divided, fractious, defenceless, deprived of practical political ideas, wanting in high civil goals.

Molmenti's notion of Venice as historically superior to the rest of Italy was, therefore, premised in part both on its capacity to resist outside threats, most notably from the Turks, and on its dominance of the seas. Through the final decade of the nineteenth century and the first three lustra of the twentieth these views would receive clearer and clearer articulation, yet a complete consensus was never achieved even amongst Venetian nationalists. Take, for example, the response to the imperialist and militaristic message that underpinned d'Annunzio's controversial play *La nave*. First performed on 11 January 1908 in Rome before an audience that included both King Umberto and Queen Margherita, the play told a tale of the origins of the Venetian Republic in the sixth century, with the Venetian population attempting to assert its independence against Byzantium. The text of *La nave* is littered with phrases urging an aggressive maritime

⁶¹ 'Iniziativa del Molmenti, severo conservatore della venezianità e uno dei principi apologeti dell'antico regime, appare in perfetta coerenza con l'attribuzione alla guerra di un valore particolare per Venezia, considerata un'occasione per la conquista di territori che in passato appartenevano alla Serenissima, del tutto in accordo per le ambizioni di uomini come [...] Volpi per la conquista delle terre della "quarta sponda" come territori economicamente vantaggiosi per il capitalismo italiano.' ('An initiative of Molmenti, a fierce defender of *venezianità* and one of the principal apologists for the old régime, appeared to fit perfectly with a specifically Venetian valuation of war, seen as the opportunity to conquer territories that had in the past belonged to the *Serenissima*, which in turn concurred entirely with the ambitions of figures such as [...] Volpi to conquer the lands of the "quarta sponda" as territories that would be of economic advantage to Italian capitalism.' Stouraiti, 'Costruendo un luogo', 14. Molmenti's interest in the Republic's imperial possessions was not limited to Venier or Lepanto. For example, he collaborated on a heavily illustrated work stressing the Italian artistic legacy in Dalmatia (produced almost simultaneously in French and Italian), contributing a chapter on the *Serenissima's* rôle in the artistic and architectural patrimony of the eastern littoral of the Adriatic. Adolfo Venturi, Ettore Pais, Pompeo Molmenti, Tomaso Sillani, *La Dalmazia monumentale* (Milan: Alfieri & Lacroix, 1917); *La Dalmatie monumentale* (Milan: Alfieri & Lacroix, 1918). This was one of a number of volumes officially accredited by the Italian delegation to the Paris Peace Conference at the end of the Great War. See *A Catalogue of Paris Peace Conference Propaganda in the Hoover War Library* (Stanford, Ca.: Stanford University Press, 1926), 51.

⁶² Still the standard work on Volpi is Sergio Romano, *Giuseppe Volpi: Industria e finanza tra Giolitti e Mussolini* (Milan: Bompiani, 1970).

⁶³ Molmenti, *Venezia*, 122.

policy: ‘La patria è su la nave!’ (‘The fatherland is on the ship!’), ‘Patria ai Veneti tutto l’Adriatico!’ (‘Fatherland for Venetians is the whole Adriatic!’), ‘Arma la prora e salpa verso il mondo!’ (‘Arm the prow and weigh anchor for the world!’), ‘Il Mondo! Il Mondo! arma la Nave grande!’ (‘The World! The World! Arm the great vessel!’). In an event stage-managed by Piero Foscari – a Venetian naval officer and capitalist from one of the most famous of all the city’s patrician lines who, in 1910, would be a founder member of the Associazione Nazionale Italiana – d’Annunzio came to Venice in April 1908 to present the manuscript of his verse tragedy symbolically to the city.⁶⁴ The *sindaco* Filippo Grimani, initially hostile to the idea, was eventually pressurised into accepting the gift, delivered by d’Annunzio himself, who carried it along the Grand Canal in Foscari’s gondola. Lauded by the *Gazzetta di Venezia*, the newspaper,⁶⁵ edited by Luciano Zuccoli, which sought to represent both the established *notabili* and the new financial-industrial élite of the city, both the play and those who fawned over its author drew the fire of the conservative and Catholic *La Difesa*: sexual immorality, and historical inaccuracies made ‘questa porcheria’ repellent:

[...] cattolici e veneziani noi ci ribelliamo! Se il conte Zuccoli forestiero, ospite di Venezia, vuole turibolare il D’Annunzio si accomodi, ma lasci la Venezianità a noi, checché avvenga, noi la difendiamo fino all’estremo, e la nostra parola suonerà a monito e rampogna a tutti coloro che volessero imporre questa viltà, questa vergogna alla nostra cara, veramente nostra Venezia.⁶⁶

[...] Catholics and Venetians it is time to rebel! If conte Zuccoli, a foreigner, a guest of Venice, wants to burn incense in honour of D’Annunzio, he is welcome to do so, but could he please leave *venezianità* to us, because whatever happens, we shall defend it to the last man, and our word will sound a warning and rebuke all those who wish to impose this vileness, this shame on our dear, our very own Venice.

This sense of a home-grown, Catholic, conservative, yet distinctively Venetian opposition, respectful of the history and myths of the Republic, is indicative of a widespread underlying resentment in Venice of outside attempts to appropriate *venezianità* to legitimate Italian overseas territorial expansion.⁶⁷ It was not just the Swiss Zuccoli – born in Ticino and bearing the title Graf von Ingenheim – who was considered as an outsider by many Venetians; d’Annunzio himself was also seen as an alien imposter.⁶⁸ Yet at the same time

⁶⁴ On the episode surrounding the production and dedication of *La Nave*, see: Mario Isnenghi, *L’Italia del Fascio* (Florence: Giunti, 1996), 50-53; John Woodhouse, *Gabriele d’Annunzio. Defiant Angel* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 240; Michael Arthur Leeden, *D’Annunzio: the first Duce* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2009 edn; first published as *The First Duce*, 1977); Alfredo Bonadeo, *D’Annunzio and the Great War* (Cranbury, NJ: Farleigh Dickinson University Press, 1995), 29-34. Useful on the general place of Venice and the idea of the Mediterranean in d’Annunzio’s work is Filippo Caburlotto, ‘D’Annunzio, la latinità del Mediterraneo e il mito della riconquista’, *Californian Italian Studies Journal* 1 (2010), available on line at: <http://escholarship.org/uc/item/7gx5g2n9;jsessionid=D37D5EE65BD0042A2C84171D63C8EB57#page-1>. For an example of Foscari’s agitation based around his involvement with both *irredentismo* and the Lega Navale pressure group, see Piero Foscari, *Il porto di Venezia nel problema adriatico*, conferenza tenuta nella sala maggiore dell’*Ateneo Veneto* a beneficio della *Dante Alighieri* e della *Lega Navale* (Venice: F. Garzia & C, 1904).

⁶⁵ On the emergence of *La Gazzetta di Venezia* as a nationalist mouthpiece, and its rôle in transforming nationalism from a minority movement of a largely literary nature into a powerful political force, see Richard Drake, ‘The theory and practice of Italian nationalism, 1900-1906’, *Journal of Modern History* 53 (1981), 213-41, 215-17.

⁶⁶ 18 April 1908, *La Difesa*. Cited in Isnenghi, *L’Italia del Fascio*, 52.

⁶⁷ Despite the anger of some Venetians at d’Annunzio’s liberties with the past, as Gino Damerini recognised that, despite all the liberties taken by the poet, the first five chapters of Romanin’s *Storia documentata* and the first hundred odd pages of Molmenti’s *Vita privata* clearly provided d’Annunzio with the historical material for his play. See Gino Damerini, *D’Annunzio e Venezia* (Venice: Albrizzi editore, 1992; originally published 1943), 95-125.

⁶⁸ On d’Annunzio’s appropriation and uses of *venezianità*, see Mario Isnenghi, ‘D’Annunzio e l’ideologia della venezianità’, *Rivista di Storia Contemporanea* 19 (1990), 419-31.

the fact that *La nave* succeeded, as Margaret Plant has remarked, in repositioning Venice ‘in the Adriatic as powerfully as in the days of the first Republic’ and in offering ‘a vision of historic energy with contemporary relevance’. This vision of Venice came to be deeply seductive to the city’s élites, both to the *nobil homeni* or *patrisi* (because it spoke to the past grandeur of Venice), and to the new class of entrepreneurial industrialists and financiers (because it offered a historical/mythical legitimacy to their plans for future grandeur).⁶⁹ *La nave*’s potential to inspire nationalist and imperialist claims to the Adriatic was such that it was widely rumoured that the Austrian Naval Minister kept a copy on his desk as a reminder of the Italian threat.⁷⁰ Certainly the work chimed with a new spirit amongst a new Venetian bourgeoisie increasingly determined to resolve the problems of the city through a fusion of radical patriotism and a more dynamic, aggressive emphasis on economic innovation.⁷¹ Moreover, the gap between, on the one hand, the patricians and the older, liberal bourgeoisie, and, on the other hand, a more energetic and imperialistic ‘nuovo capitalismo veneziano’ was bridged by the nationalist patrician Piero Foscari, whose business interests focused largely on electrical enterprises. However, it was Giuseppe Volpi, who, like Foscari, had based his fortune on an electrical company (the Società Adriatica di Elettricità) but who, unlike Foscari, did not come from ancient aristocratic stock,⁷² who really embodied the new spirit of aggressive and opportunist expansionism, and proved the most dynamic advocate of Venice’s economic growth, symbolised by the development of the port and industrial zone of Marghera,⁷³ and Adriatic nationalism.

Even before he had become the principal force behind the electrification of the Veneto, Volpi had developed commercial interests in the Balkans dealing at the turn of the century in agricultural produce, selling insurance, and mining. Volpi’s business interests would eventually become truly international – in the 1930s he owned the Altrincham and mid-Lincolnshire electrical supply companies, as well as controlling the Italian activities of Thomas Cook – but his real obsession was with the economic

⁶⁹ These assessments of the significance of *La nave* are taken from Plant, *Venice*, 208 & 251. It is striking that in 1912 a film version was made of *La nave*. Originally d’Annunzio was paid an advance of 10,000 lire to produce a number of film scripts, but these he actually provided almost nothing on banking his fee. The Turin-based Film Ambrosio subsequently employed the prolific script-writer Arrigo Frusta (whose real name was Augusto Sebastiano Ferraris) and Ricciotto Canudo to fill the gap left by the poet. This first cinematic version of the film was directed by Eduardo Bencivenga. In 1920 the film was remade with a script by d’Annunzio’s son Gabriello in collaboration with Mario Roncoroni. Despite d’Annunzio’s outrage at the ‘vittoria mutilata’, the remake was something of a financial flop. On the transformation of *La Nave* for screen, see Massimo Cardillo, *Tra le quinte del cinematografo. Cinema, cultura e società in Italia, 1900-1937* (Bari: Dedalo, 1987), 47 & 59-60. See also Claudio Quarantotto, ‘Cinema di D’Annunzio e cinema dannunziano (1908-1928’ in Franco Perfetti (ed.), *D’Annunzio e il suo tempo: atti del Convegno di studi. Genova 19, 20, 22, 23 settembre; Rapallo 21 settembre 1989* (2 vols, Genoa: SAGEP, 1992), vol. ii, 169-97. An interesting perspective from the fascist era is Francesco Soro, *Splendori e miserie del cinema. Cose viste e vissute* (Milan: Consalvo, 1935). On d’Annunzio’s failure to deliver the promised scripts, see Woodhouse, *D’Annunzio*, 260.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 233.

⁷¹ Gianni Riccamboni, ‘Cent’anni di elezioni a Venezia’, in Woolf (ed.) *Storia di Venezia. L’Ottocento e il Novecento II*, 1183-1254, 1186; Luca Pes, ‘Il fascismo urbano a Venezia. Origine e primi sviluppi 1895-1922’, *Italia Contemporanea* 58 (1987), 63-84, 70.

⁷² Volpi was ennobled as the conte di Misurata only in 1920.

⁷³ On the growth of Marghera, and Volpi’s part in it, see ‘Gli uomini capitali: il «gruppo veneziano» (Volpi, Cini e gli altri)’ in Woolf (ed.) *Storia di Venezia. L’Ottocento e il Novecento II*, 1255-1311, 162-6.

penetration of the Adriatic, Balkans and Eastern Mediterranean.⁷⁴ Backed by the Milanese Banca Commerciale, he led Italian penetration of Montenegro, and was the pivotal figure, albeit often in an unofficial capacity, during negotiations with the Turks at the end of the Libyan War.⁷⁵ At the centre of the so-called ‘gruppo veneziano’ of nationalist economic modernisers, his vision of an imperial and industrial Venice, both forward and backward looking, helped him to place the city firmly within the framework of nationalist agendas both under the liberal and the Fascist régimes.⁷⁶ As both Governor of Tripolitana from 1922-5 and as Ministro della Finanze from 1925, he pushed hard for a policy of Mediterranean expansionism, which echoed that of his Fascist masters. But while Mussolini turned to *romanità* to legitimate his pursuit of the Mediterranean as *mare nostrum*, Venetian nationalists continued to emphasise claims to Adriatic territories on the basis of the cultural, commercial, and historical links with the *Serenissima*. Of course, many historians sought to establish tight links between a Roman inheritance and the Venetian Republic, portraying Venice in some senses as the direct heir to the Roman imperial tradition. But there lay a number of distinct dangers in placing too much emphasis on *romanità*. During the *Risorgimento* anxiety about the internal divisions, civil wars, and ultimate decadence of the Roman Empire caused concern even if it did not preclude entirely looking to Roman models for inspiration. Much more problematic was the manner in which other Europeans – and even Americans – had seen fit to stress their own close relationship and lines of continuity with ancient Rome. Just as the Catholic church was both too universal and too reactionary for Papal Rome to become the focus of nationalist aspirations (despite the hopes of Giobertian neo-guelfs before 1848), so classical Rome was simply insufficiently Italian, too obviously international. As the cosmopolitan scholar Arturo Graf – he was himself half-German, half-Italian, and Athenian-born – stressed, Rome was both a symbol of universal citizenship and a common *patria* with which *everyone* identified.⁷⁷ This in essence was why nineteenth-century Italians were more inclined to look to the middle ages and, indeed, to the unification itself for their foundation myths.⁷⁸ But if ancient Rome was problematic when seeking historical justification for Italian unity, it was perhaps even more awkward a model for imperialist ambitions. The Roman Empire was not only international in its extent, but included the lands of most of Italy’s rivals as European powers – lands to which the new Italy could certainly not risk laying claim. Above all, comparison with the Roman Empire simply highlighted the inadequacies and insignificance of modern Italy. This is probably no more clearly demonstrated than in the panels erected by the Fascist régime in the Via dei Fori Imperiali in Rome, which illustrated the expansion of Rome from city state to its maximum extent under Trajan. A final panel, no longer displayed today, showed the modern Italian empire, and its ambitions in Africa and the Mediterranean. These panels were just one symbol of Mussolini’s dream of rekindling the spirit and ambition of ancient Rome amongst modern Italians. But while Mussolini’s desire to turn the Mediterranean into a *Mare nostrum* was not entirely fantastical, and his aspirations to break free from Anglo-French-Jugoslav encirclement certainly

⁷⁴ Romano, *Volpi*, passim.; on Volpi’s involvement with Thomas Cook, see Richard J.B. Bosworth, ‘Tourist planning in Fascist Italy and the limits of a totalitarian culture’, *Contemporary European History* 6 (1997), 1-25. On Volpi’s interest in developing the tourist trade in Venice – he owned both the Excelsior and the Grand Hotel – was fused with his prominent rôle in both the *biennale* and the associated film festival, which was launched in 1932. Marla Stone, *The Patron State. Culture and Politics in Fascist Italy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1998), 38-9, 82-3.

⁷⁵ Timothy Winston Childs, *Italo-Turkish Diplomacy and the War over Libya, 1911-1912* (Leiden: Brill, 1990), 152-9.

⁷⁶ Roland Sarti, ‘Giuseppe Volpi’ in Ferdinando Cordova (ed.), *Uomini e volti del Fascismo* (Rome: Bulzoni, 1980), 521-46; Filippo Maria Paladini, ‘Velleità e capitolazione della propaganda talassocratica veneziana (1935-1945)’, *Venetica* 17, terza serie 6 (2002), 147-72, 148-9. Also available at: http://www.storiadivenezia.net/sito/saggi/paladini_propaganda.pdf

⁷⁷ Arturo Graf, *Roma nella memoria e nelle immaginazioni del medio evo* (Turin: Loescher, 1882), 13-14.

⁷⁸ Adrian Lyttelton, ‘Creating a National Past: History, Myth and Image in the Risorgimento’ in Albert Russell Ascoli and Krystyna von Henneberg, *Making and Remaking Italy: The Cultivation of National Identity around the Risorgimento* (Oxford: Berg, 2001), 27-74; David Laven, ‘Italy: The Idea of the Nation in the Risorgimento and Liberal Eras’ in Timothy Baycroft and Mark Hewitson, *What is a Nation? Europe 1789-1914* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 254-71, 265-8.

convinced many Italians,⁷⁹ any sense that Italy might one day become a new Rome with even a fraction of the territory of the caesars was absurdly unrealistic. In contrast with the ancient Roman model, the notion that Italy might aspire to the influence of the former maritime republics was more clearly consonant with nationalist ambitions and even possibly reconcilable with the policies of at least some of the major powers. Venice (and Genoa) made better models for expansion than Rome.

Venice's imperial legacy and Adriatic nationalism from an international perspective

The story of *irredentismo* has been told many times and it is not our intention to repeat it here.⁸⁰ What is significant for our argument is the way that *irredentist* goals helped place Venice at the centre of arguments about the nation, and how this in turn enabled Venetians increasingly to consider themselves Italian. Italian nationalists in the late nineteenth century laid claim not only to lands where the majority or even a substantial minority of the population was Italophone (Trieste and Trento), as well as to regions that were in some sense within Italy's 'natural frontiers' marked by the mountains and the sea (the German-speaking South Tyrol). But the desire to annex significant territories on the opposite side of the Adriatic (Dalmatia and Albania) was less easy to legitimate internationally, and even more likely to lead to clashes with neighbouring states. In the aftermath of the Great War, such pursuit of 'unredeemed' lands seemed at loggerheads with the alleged (although inconsistently respected and applied) adoption by Italy's allies of Mazzinian and Wilsonian principles of self-determination. Yet strikingly the notion that the former extent of the Venetian empire justified a modern Italian claim on these lands remained extremely vibrant both within the peninsula and beyond.

In both the Anglophone and French press the view that a widespread *italianità* persisted on the eastern shores of the Adriatic was frequently articulated from the 1890s. By contrast there was generally rather less sympathy for Italian claims to the so-called *quarta sponda* (the Libyan coastline), or, indeed, for Italian penetration in the Horn of Africa. For Venetians, imperialist aspirations were usually focused on these nearby lands that had once been part of the *stato da mâr*. Admittedly some Venetians entertained wider ambitions. Indeed, the nationalist Foscari had seen action as a naval officer in East Africa in 1896, bombarding Mogadishu in revenge for a Somali attack on Italian sailors; he subsequently emerged as an eloquent spokesman for a wider-ranging imperialism. Similarly Volpi had an obvious interest in Libya, of which, as we have noted, he was governor in the early years of fascist rule. However, most Venetians, in common with other northerners, were less expressly interested in African colonies and preferred to look

⁷⁹ While heavily criticised by historians such as Richard Bosworth, MacGregor Knox, and Paul Preston Rosaria Quartararo, *Roma tra Londra e Berlino: la Politica estera fascista dal 1930 a 1940* (Rome: Bonacci, 1980) argued convincingly for the coherence of Mussolini's planning to seek Italian hegemony within the Mediterranean. For a very different version of Mussolini's Mediterranean imperialism, see Davide Rodogno, *Il nuovo ordine mediterraneo. Le politiche d'occupazione dell'Italia fascista in Europa 1940-1943* (Turin, Bollati Boringhieri, 2003); the English version of this work is published as *Fascism's European Empire: Italian Occupation during the Second World War* (trans. Adrian Belton; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

⁸⁰ For a good recent introduction to questions of irredentism, see Marina Cattaruzza, *L'Italia e il confine orientale* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2007). See also, *id.* (ed.), *Nazionalismi di frontiera: identità contrapposte sull'adriatico nord-orientale: 1850-1950* (Coenza: Rubbettino Editore, 2003). The classic contemporary text remains Angelo Vivante, *Irredentismo adriatico. Contributo alla discussione sui rapporti austro-italiani* (Florence: Libreria della Voce, 1912). With particular reference to the Dalmatian question, see Luciano Monzali, *Italiani di Dalmazia: dal Risorgimento alla Grande Guerra* (Florence: Le Lettere, 2004); the English version of this volume is published as *The Italians of Dalmatia: From Italian Unification to the World War* (trans. Shanti Evans; Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009).

eastward in pursuit of essentially European expansionist designs.⁸¹ We shall return later to the underpinning that was offered to these Adriatic and Aegean claims by historians writing in Italian for mainly domestic consumption. First, however, it is worth reflecting on the degree to which they seem to have been supported by both foreign authors and foreign editors commissioning Italians to write for foreign journals and papers. Thus in 1902, Luigi Villari – son of the astute political commentator, historian, and famous biographer of Savonarola and Machiavelli – wrote a piece on Dalmatia for a popular English periodical.⁸² The younger Villari, an English-schooled diplomat, was at the time working on book on the Republic of Ragusa, which was far from complimentary towards the devious and oppressive policies pursued by the Venetians against their fellow maritime republic.⁸³ As one reviewer remarked of Ragusa's conflict with 'her hated rival', 'the only yoke that galled her elastic neck was that of Venice'.⁸⁴ Yet writing in his handsomely-illustrated article on Dalmatia, Villari stressed not only the coast's essential *italianità*, but also that this was the direct consequence of a powerful Venetian inheritance in the region. This is stressed from the very opening lines of his article:

Of the many thousands of travellers who annually spend a few weeks in Venice, who know the towns of the Venetian mainland as well as those of their own country, only a very small proportion push on a little further and visit the former territory of the Venetian Republic on that wonderful Eastern coast of the Adriatic. There a group of towns may be seen, thoroughly Italian in character, which once formed one of the chief bulwarks of Christendom against the advancing Turk.⁸⁵

Time and again Villari emphasised the fundamentally Venetian nature of the ports of the eastern littoral. The reader is reminded of that the architectural and artistic highlights of each town are Venetian in style, design, and production; there is talk of 'the handsome Venetian doorways', the use of 'the best style of Venetian Gothic' for public buildings and palaces, the presence of the Lion of St Mark.⁸⁶ Villari leaves no doubt that – in contrast to the rural hinterland, home to a picturesque and hardy Croatian peasantry – the true urban character of Dalmatia is Italian because it is Venetian.

The language spoken by the people is to a great extent Italian, especially at Zara, and it is pronounced with the soft lisping Venetian accent. Another thoroughly Venetian feature is that in no Dalmatian town, save Ragusa, are carriages seen in the streets [...] Outside in the harbour flocks of gaily painted Venetian sails add another Venetian touch.⁸⁷

Such views on the fundamental 'Venetianness' of Dalmatia had perhaps been articulated most forcefully in the work of the Oxford architect Jackson, who travelled to the Adriatic three times with his wife in 1882, 1884 and 1885, both to help with the construction of ecclesiastical architecture and to research his vast

⁸¹ It is something of a commonplace that whereas northern apologists for imperialism looked to the Balkans and eastern Mediterranean, southerners were more inclined to look to Africa. As one foreign correspondent remarked, 'Broadly speaking, the advocates of the Abyssinian colony and the war to extremity are to be found in the southern provinces of Italy, the principal organs of the continuation of the war and the retrieval of the honour of Italy [after the humiliation of Adowa] are the Neapolitan journals; whereas the advocates of peace at any price and the abandonment of colonial honours are to be found in the north of Italy, in the plains of Lombardy and Venetia, where the newspapers are taking up a unanimous line on this point.' J. Theodore Bent, 'The Italians in Africa', *Fortnightly Review* 60: 357 (1896), 363-73, 364.

⁸² Luigi Villari, 'Dalmatia', *English Illustrated Magazine* 225 (Jun. 1902), 239-49.

⁸³ Luigi Villari, *The Republic of Ragusa: An Episode of the Turkish Conquest* (London: J.M. Dent & Co., 1904).

⁸⁴ Margaret Vaughan, 'Ragusa', *The Speaker* (23 Jul. 1904), 390-91.

⁸⁵ Villari, 'Dalmatia', 239.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 244-7.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 240.

three volume work on the region's history and material patrimony.⁸⁸ For Jackson, Istria and Dalmatia possessed an evident and unchallenged superiority over all other lands in the Danube-Balkan region because of the enduring contact with Italy, which permitted the local population to retain the language and political traditions of 'civic liberties', 'civil order' and 'settled law', as well as 'an ancient culture' in the face of 'barbarian colonization'.⁸⁹

To this day they cling to their '*coltura Latina*' with passionate affection; and though the Croats backed by the Austrian government, are fighting hard to Slavonize the cities and reduce them to the same rule as the rural districts, the issue of the struggle is still doubtful. The survival of these waifs and strays of the Roman empire is unique; it is an historical phenomenon of almost unparalleled interest; and one cannot contemplate without regret the possibility of its disappearance.⁹⁰

Jackson saw the cultural and political superiority of Dalmatia as descending directly and with unbroken continuity from Roman times. He was also both matter-of-fact and not entirely uncritical in his narrative of Venetian conquest and control. But his discussion of the architecture of the region makes the case repeatedly for the *latinità* of Dalmatia and Istria as being owed directly to the Venetian presence. Moreover, he stressed in uncompromising terms the enormous debt owed by Europe as a whole to 'the resolution of the Republic of S. Mark, and the stubborn valour of her Dalmatian subjects' for saving Italy from Ottoman rapacity.⁹¹ In adopting such a line, Jackson departed slightly from the position put forward by the John Wilkison Gardiner forty years earlier. Writing at a time when British observers still tended to view Venetian history through the distorting lens of Daru and Sismondi, and before the city's redemption in the eyes of the British public through their resistance to the Austrians in 1849,⁹² the eminent Egyptologist gave a relatively even-handed assessment of Venice's rôle in the region. Yet at the same time he hinted at an over-all opinion of the *Serenissima*'s dabbling in Dalmatian affairs that was not always favourable. For example, while he was at pains to stress the anguish felt by Venice's Slav troops at the fall of the Republic in 1797, pointing to their readiness 'to resist the French to the last drop of their blood' and the 'great honour that they coveted, that of fighting for the cause they had sworn to defend,'⁹³ he wrote of his own arrival in Ragusa thus:

Here for the first time, the winged lion of St. Mark ceases to appear; and the absence of this emblem of Venetian subjugation, the boast of the Ragusans, cannot fail to inspire every one with respect for a people, who preserved their country from the all-absorbing power of Venice.⁹⁴

⁸⁸ On Jackson's ambitions to emulate Ruskin and his Dalmatian sojourns, see William Whyte, *Oxford Jackson. Architecture, Education, Status and Style 1835-1924* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

⁸⁹ T.G. Jackson, *Dalmatia, the Quarnero and Istria with Cettigne in Montenegro and the Island of Grado* (3 vols, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1887), vol. i, ix.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, vol. i, 143-4.

⁹² See, for example, the *Times* leader of 1 September 1849 wrote of 'the heroic defence of the Venetians, the good use they made of their liberty' arguing that 'never did a people vindicate their claim to be enrolled in the virile populations of Europe with more determined spirit, or in a more effective way.'

⁹³ John Gardiner Wilkinson, *Dalmatia and Montenegro: with a journey to Mostar in Herzegovina and Remarks on the Slavonic Nations; the History of Dalmatia and Ragusa; the Uscocs, &c, &c* (2 vols, London: John Murray, 1848), vol. ii, 294. It should be remarked that in general earlier nineteenth-century Anglophone commentators had a much lower opinion of Venetian imperialism than those writing after Romanin. For example, George Finlay, *The History of Greece under Othoman and Venetian Domination* (Edinburgh & London: William Blackwood and Sons, 1856) portrayed the Venetians in Greece, Crete and Cyprus as inclined to brutality and cruelty. Similarly, an article of 1832 spoke of 'the usual arbitrary exactions of arbitrary governors were the principal proofs of the maternal protection of Venice'. 'The Ionian Islands', *Chambers' Edinburgh Journal* 24 (14 Jul. 1832), 189-90.

⁹⁴ Gardiner Wilkinson, *Dalmatia and Montenegro*, vol. i, 273-4.

Jackson by contrast, despite an awareness of occasional misdeeds perpetrated in the name of Saint Mark, saw the Venetian presence – even in reluctantly subdued Ragusa – as almost without exception a force for good. At the very end of his monumental work he wrote of how:

In every place we visited on mainland and island Venice had set her stamp; her architecture fills the streets, her silversmiths; work and broidery enriches the treasuries, her evangelistic lion guards every gate, presides over the judge's bench, frowns from every bastion, and the accents of her smooth softened dialect strike the ear at every turn. [...] no European state since the days of the Romans has more strongly stamped its individuality on its empire than Venice; [...] her influence may still be traced wherever the standard of St, Mark has been planted; and if the defects of her political system become apparent as one wanders over her ancient dominion, one learns to appreciate her greatness.⁹⁵

So strong an endorsement of the Venetian legacy in the eastern Adriatic fed powerfully into later propaganda in favour of irredentist claims to the region. In August 1915 in the *Fortnightly Review* an article was published entitled 'Italy and the Adriatic' by Antonio Cippico. Criticising those alleged Italy's tardy intervention in the conflict in May, the author argued that the reasons declaration of war lay 'sheer imperialist motives'. For Cippico, Italy's actions were based principally on defending Italians within the Dual Monarchy. The Habsburg policy of favouring Croats and discriminating against the Italian community in Dalmatia was the absolute justification for hostilities. While acknowledging the presence of Slavs on the eastern coast of the Adriatic since the seventh century, the author stressed that 'the Latin and Italian element is the sole and autochthonous element of the country and of the country's history, civilization and art.'⁹⁶ Such views were to be deployed again and again during the Great War and the Peace Conference, as the Italian government pursued its war aim, recognised by the allies in the Treaty of London of April 1915, of dominating the Adriatic. This became more significant as Clemenceau grew determined to foster a Yugoslav state as a counterbalance to Italy, with a view to reducing Italian potential to challenge France's position within the Mediterranean and in North Africa. While some Italian army officers warned of the danger of acquiring a province where the bulk of the Slav population might be permanently on the brink of insurrection, fomented by Yugoslav irredentists, there was widespread belief that Italy required possession of the Dalmatian coast for reasons of security. Thus in the summer of 1917 the *Review of Reviews* cited an Italian general who made

[...] a strong case for the possession by Italy of the Dalmatian coast as a measure of defence vital to her [Italy's] well-being. [...] From Brindisi to Venice the Italian coast is so straight that there is no possibility of creating a decent naval port, whereas the deeply indented coast of Dalmatia, protected by many islands, forms the most admirable naval base that any sea power could desire.⁹⁷

Increasingly, though the French, British and Americans became less tolerant of the deployment of arguments focusing on the *venezianità* or *latinità* of Dalmatia in favour of Italian imperialism. Take two examples of responses to the massive work produced by the Triestine irredentist and friend of James Joyce, Attilio Tamaro,⁹⁸ *La Vénétie Julienne et la Dalmatie: Histoire de la nation italienne sur les frontières*

⁹⁵ Jackson, *Dalmatia*, vol. iii, 438-9. For another clear example of this late nineteenth-century British recognition of the *venezianità* of Dalmatia, see Herbert Kilburn Scott, 'A visit to Dalmatia and Montenegro', *Belgravia. A London Magazine* 96 (1898), 98-126.

⁹⁶ Antonio Cippico, 'Italy and the Adriatic', *Fortnightly Review* 98:584 (Aug. 1915), 296-304, 299.

⁹⁷ *Review of Reviews* 55:330 (Jun. 1917), 585. In an article by Virginio Gayda of 1919, the arguments of redemption, the legitimacy of the Treaty of London, the desirability of Italianisation, and the strategic necessity of expansion were combined with the 'continuity of historical possession throughout twenty centuries, first by Rome and then by Venice'. 'The Adriatic Problem and the Peace Conference', *Fortnightly Review* 105:627 (Mar. 1919), 478-91.

⁹⁸ Tamaro, former archivist and future diplomat for the Fascist régime, was the author of a number of irredentist works. See, for example, *L'Adriatico – Golfo d'Italia, L'italianità di Trieste* (Milan: Fratelli Treves, 1915); *Italiani e Slavi nell'Adriatico* (Rome: Athenaeum, 1915); *Le condizioni degli italiani soggetti all'Austria nella Venezia Giulia e nella Dalmazia* (Rome: G. Bettero/Società italiana per il progresso delle scienze, 1915); *Il trattato di Londra e le rivendicazioni nazionali* (Rome: Reale Società geografica italiana, 1918); *Storia di Trieste* (Rome: Alberto Stock, 1924).

orientales, with a view to legitimating annexation of the territory stretching from Trieste in the north to the most southerly tip of Dalmatia. In the *American Geographic Journal*, the sceptical reviewer, W.E. Lunt, pointed out that Tamaro 'practically acknowledges' the work as little more than 'an attempt to justify the Italian claims to territory on the north eastern shores of the Adriatic'. Lunt's unnamed British colleague, while apparently more convinced by Tamaro's line that 'Venice always looked upon Dalmatia as the bastion for defending her territories against the common enemy of Christendom', was equally alert to the fact that books was 'avowedly a work of propaganda, written in support of Italy's claims for presentation to the Peace Conference'.⁹⁹ But if outside observers had started to challenge the propagandising invocation of Venice, this in one sense served to cement the city place firmly within nationalist rhetoric. The denial of Dalmatia, a prize which had been promised to the Italians by the terms of the Treaty of London, came to be seen by Italian nationalists as central to the so-called *vittoria mutilata*. Given that Italian claims to the region were so tightly associated with its fundamentally Venetian character, the refusal of Clemenceau, Lloyd George and Wilson to contemplate seizure of the littoral from the new Yugoslavia was a blow not only to Italian pride but to *venezianità*. The offence to Venice and nation helped to make Italian nationalists of Venetians.

Venetian historians, empire, and the impact of the Great War: Battistella and Fradeletto

If Venice's historical rôle as Mediterranean power, protector of Christendom, and benign exporter of Italian culture to the Balkans was widely extolled abroad, it was even more significant in shaping opinion in the city itself. Rare were the occasions in home-grown historiography when even the smallest criticism was made of Venice's imperial mission were offered by Venetian authors. Nevertheless, there developed during the course of the final years of the nineteenth and early twentieth century a far stronger emphasis on Venice's *stato da mâr* than can be detected in the earlier historiography. Probably the most eloquent and persistent exponent of this position was the Udinese-born Antonio Battistella, who wrote two general histories of Venice, published in 1897 and 1921 respectively. These two works are worth looking at in some detail as they highlight the changing Venetian perspective on empire either side of the Great War.

Battistella's first volume came out of a series of eleven lectures delivered at the *Ateneo Veneto* in the spring of 1896 to mark the fall of the Venetian Republic a hundred years earlier.¹⁰⁰ The timing of these lectures was pivotal in that they coincided with a sense of national disaster following the humiliating defeat of the Italian army by an Ethiopian force at the battle of Adowa in March 1896. When fused with the growing threat posed to traditional the political status quo in Italy by increasingly restless and well-organised socialists and anarchists, many conservatives and nationalists seemed to revert to the sense of collective woe that had greeted the military failings thirty years beforehand. The threat of the left (felt at a municipal as well as a national level), fused with Italy's failure in Abyssinia triggered a backlash in Venetian politics. This saw the municipality fall to a coalition of Catholics and conservatives, and ultimately to the long tenure in office of Grimani. Battistella was principally known as a historian of his native Friuli, but the series of lectures he delivered – destined to be published by Zanichelli for an essentially popular audience – were delivered with a clear political agenda that emphasised the Venetian Republic and nationalism. Put at its crudest Battistella's aim was to hold up Republican Venice as a model for a failing modern Italy. In common with Molmenti, Battistella was eager to stress Venice's distinctiveness and past grandeur, but unlike Molmenti this was not premised on any whimsical nostalgia or myths of benign government.

Battistella's Venice was an independent, aggressive, expansionist state; its government firm, determined and unashamedly oligarchic, possessed of a constitution, the justification of which lay principally in efficient administration and the ability of the *Serenissima* to mobilise military resources: the

⁹⁹ W.E. Lunt review of *La Vénétie Julienne et la Dalmatie: Histoire de la nation italienne sur les frontières orientales* (3 vols, Rome : La Società « Dante Alighieri », 1918 & 1919), *American Geographical Society* (1921), 153-4 ; *The Geographical Journal* 54 (1919), 314-15.

¹⁰⁰ Antonio Battistella, *La Repubblica di Venezia dalle sue origini alla sua caduta, 11 conferenze tenute all'Ateneo Veneto nella primavera del 1896* (Bologna: Zanichelli, 1897).

implicit criticism of modern Italy as it lurched towards democracy was none too hidden.¹⁰¹ Jettisoning a growing wealth of evidence that showed the extent to which the early Venice had been subject to Byzantine rule,¹⁰² he argued that Venetians had tolerated the authority of the eastern Emperors principally to further their own commercial interests, and that any 'sudditanza politica' was far from total.¹⁰³ Later when Dandolo led the sack and seizure of Constantinople during the Fourth Crusade in 1204, it was a simple issue of 'regolare i vecchi conti con l'impero greco' ('to settle old scores with the Greek Empire').¹⁰⁴ Such unashamed celebration of aggression and *sagro egoismo* could not have been further from Molmenti. Battistella was not unusual in arguing that Venice, having never known outside rule, had remained essentially Roman in character, in contrast with the rest of the peninsula had been subjected to barbarian domination and foreign rule.¹⁰⁵ However, more than any previous historian of the city he sought to fuse this delight in a Roman heritage and Venetian grandeur with a near mystical and messianic nationalism. This had the interesting consequence of his stress on Venice's superiority over the Piedmontese and the House of Savoy in terms both of patriotism and the defence of Italian independence.¹⁰⁶ Rejecting the recent work of Vincenzo Marchesi, who had disapproved of a policy he accused of wasting colossal financial and military efforts in a useless cause, Battistella was relatively conventional in his assessment of Venice's pivotal part in resisting the Ottoman threat:¹⁰⁷ fighting the Turks was 'il compito storico di Venezia e la più fulgida se non la principale sua gloria' ('Venice's historical task and the most brilliant if not the principal reason for its glory').¹⁰⁸ But even here the nationalist historian added a novel twist: in Battistella's account, the power of Ottomans had been much exaggerated. In effect this was a call for contemporary Italy not to be intimidated by the Turks in its pursuit of colonial expansion, and to see in early-modern Venice a model for glory, expansion and national pride. It was indeed in the Venetian empire and its defence that Italian greatness lay, and to which modern Italians should now look.

O grande potenza di questi ricordi di gloria che resero celebre il nome d'Italia allora quando un'Italia non c'era, e che vivono e vivranno circumfusi d'eterno splendore a tener sacro il culto delle cose belle e a sferzare con la loro ala immortale l'afa stagnante e neghittosa di tempi borghesemente prosaici e positivi!¹⁰⁹

O what vast powers there were in these memories of past glories that made the name of Italy great even when Italy did not exist, that live on and will always live surrounded by eternal splendour, keeping alive the cult of beauty and scourging with their immortal wings the stagnant and laziness airlessness of a prosaic and matter-of-fact bourgeois era.

¹⁰¹ For Battistella the Venetian administration and constitution constituted 'un capolavoro di buon senso pratico'. *Ibid.*, 373.

¹⁰² The emphasis on the Byzantine origins of Venice were already a centre of historiographical debate in earlier decades. Central to this was the posthumously published work of August Friedrich Gfrörer, *Geschichte Venedigs von seiner Gründung bis zum Jahre 1084* ed. G.B. Weiss, (Graz: Vereins-Buchdruckerei, 1872), which the *Archivio Veneto* reviewed and subsequently started publishing in Italian translation. F. Brunetti review, *Archivio Veneto* 7/I (1874), 372-93, and 'Storia di Venezia dall sua fondazione fino all'anno 1084', 12-16 (1876-8).

¹⁰³ *La Repubblica dalle sue origini.*, 36.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 90.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 23.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 320-21.

¹⁰⁷ Vincenzo Marchesi, *La Repubblica di Venezia (appunti critici)*, (Udine: Tipografia cooperativa, 1894), 49

¹⁰⁸ Battistella, *La Repubblica dalle sue origini*, 56.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 266.

Battistella's second general history, *La Repubblica di Venezia ne' suoi undici secoli di storia*,¹¹⁰ was originally commissioned for the inauguration of the new bell-tower in 1912. The *campanile* had collapsed July in 1902, and its reconstruction was both widely portrayed as a symbol of the rebirth of Venice – the bell-tower now embodying the strength and prestige regained by the *nuova Venezia* – and was exploited to emphasise continuities with the Republic.¹¹¹ However, it was not until 1921 that Battistella's work was published: by this stage the Great War and the outcome of the Paris peace settlement had radically changed approaches to Venice's imperial past. In his 1897 volume, Battistella had tended praise Venice and to blame any failures and shortcomings on Italy. In his second account of Venice's 'eleven-hundred-year' history, Battistella's text offered a rather different perspective. Now, rather than sniping at the House of Savoy, Battistella sang the praises both of Venice and of a triumphant contemporary Italy, now presented as a fully-fledged nation-state, sanctified by the blood sacrifice of the Great War. In his new work Venice became a bridge linking ancient Rome directly with the nation; notions of *venezianità*, *romanità*, and Italian nationalism were increasingly conflated. And whereas Spain had been set up as the arch-enemy of the *Serenissima* in his 1897 text, Battistella now switched his target to Austria. The Habsburgs were presented both as the Republic's main rival within on the Adriatic itself and for territories along its coast, and even the disaster of 1797 was presented as principally the work of Vienna rather than the young Bonaparte.¹¹² In adopting this stance, Battistella not only linked the history of Venetian imperialism to the *Risorgimento* foundation myth (which identified the Austrians as the great enemy of the Italian nation),¹¹³ but he also emphasised a powerful continuity with the recent bloody conflict.

Of course, one problem thrown up by the *irredentist* successes of Italy in 1918 was the acquisition of Trieste, which, while a traditional target of Italian nationalist expansion, was a much better adapted port than Venice, even after the war time expansion of Marghera. Battistella's approach to Venice's Adriatic rival (and the favoured maritime outlet of the Habsburgs) is informative, given that he showed scant sympathy for its inhabitants, and was perfectly content to narrate the attempts of Venice to stifle the ultimately more successful port. However, like so many Venetian historians before him, his main interest lay with Istria and Dalmatia, highlighting their longstanding cultural, commercial and military links with

¹¹⁰ Antonio Battistella, *La Repubblica di Venezia ne' suoi undici secoli di storia* (Venice: Carlo Ferrari, 1921).

¹¹¹ Plant, *Venice*, 234-8.

¹¹² Battistella, *Venezia ne' suoi undici secoli*, 649-52, 700. Battistella had already developed his argument about the pernicious nature of the Austrians in a work published during the Great War. See Antonio Battistella, 'Venezia e l'Austria durante la vita della Repubblica', *Nuovo Archivio Veneto* nuova serie 62 (1916), 279-320.

¹¹³ Battistella was by no means the sole historian of Venice to emphasise the Austrians as the key enemy of the Venetian state or to identify the interests of the extinct Republic so closely with the new nation. Thus, for example, even before the outbreak of the Great War, Antonio Santalena took aim at both the Habsburgs and the French. 'La resistenza veneta contro la Lega di Cambray', *Rivista dell'Ateneo Veneto* (July-August 1909), 220-36. The final paragraphs of the article were particularly inflammatory, as Santalena commented on the new lion of St Mark inaugurated on the *Santi Quaranta* gate of Treviso. The winged lion, he proclaimed, 'in Istria [...] in Dalmazia, a Corfù, a Creta, a Cipro, dove risuona la nostra benedetta favella, segna il fulgido ricordo di Venezia marinara e guerriera. È il Leone che rugge in catene durante la dominazione dell'austriaco [...]; che all'eterno nemico si ribella, e resiste indomito col grido divinatore dell'antica Repubblica ITALIA e LIBERTÀ; e saprebbe ancora levar l'artiglio in difesa della patria comune. È il Leone che – Venezia riunita alla Gran Madre – [...] è come il vincolo sacro del passato glorioso del grande Stato che senti e oprò italianamente nei secoli, con l'avvenire di questa nostra Patria, augurata sempre più prospera e forte.' 'in Istria [...], in Dalmatia, in Corfu, Crete, Cyprus, where our blessed language is heard, it indicates the shining memory of a naval and warrior Venice. It is the lion that roared in chains under the Austrian domination [...]; that rebels against the eternal enemy, and resists unbowed with the prophetic cry of the former Republic 'Italy and Liberty', and which would still know how to use its claws in defence of the common fatherland. It is the lion that – with Venice reunited with the Great Mother – is as a sacred bond to the past of the great state that felt itself truly Italian and worked over the centuries in a truly Italian manner, for an always more flourishing and powerful future for our Fatherland.' *Ibid.*, 235-6.

the *Dominante*. Significantly, he felt more uncomfortable regarding far-away adventures involving the control of large territories. Even in the highly charged nationalist and colonial debates, Venetian historiographers tended to favour interventions around the Adriatic, and inclined towards scepticism over African enterprises: imperial ventures in the Adriatic offered the advantage of keeping Venice at the centre of the stage, nationally and internationally. Battistella's 1921 account of the history of Venice was thus very much of its time: imperialist ambitions in the Adriatic had a new resonance as Italy was denied Dalmatia at the Peace Conference, and as d'Annunzio briefly occupied Fiume, but they also meant much more to a city, which during the war had found itself on the frontline of attack by the Austrians, subjected to bombardment, with much of the population evacuated, especially in the aftermath of Caporetto, when the numbers living in Venice were reduced to little more than a quarter of those resident at the time of the 1911 census. The city also became increasingly militarised, subject to martial law, surrounded by barrage balloons, and with a significant presence from the armed forces.¹¹⁴ While many Venetians undoubtedly resented the authorities' handling of the impact of the war on their lives, the transformation of Venice into a frontline city kindled memories of resistance both to the League of Cambrai and to the Austrians in 1848-9. This helped 'nationalise' Venice; at the same time, the war aims – closely linked to the reacquisition of lands once held by the *Serenissima* – also emphasised the tight links between *venezianità* and *italianità*.

No other writer expressed these views so forcefully as Antonio Fradeletto, who at the end of the war would be made the Ministro delle Terre liberate dal Nemico in the Orlando government. Fradeletto – who had the interesting distinction of introducing the young Margherita Sarfatti, future lover of Mussolini and fascist journalist, to the work of John Ruskin –,¹¹⁵ and is perhaps best remembered now as a driving force in the organisation of the *Biennale*.¹¹⁶ In 1916, however, Fradeletto published a brief and extremely polemical history of Venice.¹¹⁷ This work is remarkable in the way it almost completely ignores the Venetian constitution and structures of government, considered of such pivotal importance in almost every other historical narrative of the city. Instead, the book concentrates almost entirely on territorial aggrandisement and conflict. Beginning by pointing to the fact that the war that Italy had entered the previous year was 'la prima alla quale partecipi il popolo intero' ('the first in which the entire population participated'), he repeatedly drew lessons from Venetian history and drew parallels between the city's past glories and the patriotic struggle of Italy of the moment: 'L'Italia moderna rientra oggi nel solco segnato dall piccolo Venezia antica' ('Modern Italy is today re-entering furrow ploughed by little old Venice').¹¹⁸ Geographical determinism underpins Fradeletto's arguments for Adriatic expansionism,¹¹⁹ but at the same time he was clearly anxious to stress the longstanding and friendly relations with the people of Dalmatia and Istria.

Il paese viene mano mano pacificandosi; si stringe alla Repubblica con sentimenti di devozione che più non s'infrangeranno; le fornisce soldati, marinai, sopracomiti; e le sue città a mare assumono negli edifici, nelle strade,

¹¹⁴ Bruna Bianchi, 'Venezia nella Grande guerra' in Isnenghi and Woolf (eds), I, *L'Ottocento. 1797-1918*, 349-416.

¹¹⁵ Emily Braun, 'From the Risorgimento to the Resistance: One Hundred Years of Jewish Artists in Italy' in Vivien B. Mann (ed.), *Gardens and ghettos. The Art of Jewish Life in Italy* (Berkeley, Ca.: University of California Press, 1989), 137-190, 167.

¹¹⁶ Jan Andreas May, *La Biennale di Venezia: Kontinuität und Wandel in der venezianischen Ausstellungspolitik 1895-1948* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2009); Giuliana Donzello, *Arte e collezionismo: Fradeletto e Pica, primi segretari alle Biennali veneziane, 1895-1926* (Florence: Firenze libri, 1987); Daniele Ceschin, *La «Voce» di Venezia: Antonio Fradeletto e l'organizzazione della cultura tra Otto e Novecento* (Padua: Il Poligrafo, 2001).

¹¹⁷ Antonio Fradeletto, *La storia di Venezia e l'ora presente d'Italia* (Turin: STEN, 1916).

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 14.

¹¹⁹ 'Bisognava, anzi tutto, estendere la propria giurisdizione sull'altra sponda, perché soltanto da questa, frastagliata, orlata d'isole, portuosa, insidiosa, si può vigliare e dominare l'Adriatico.' ('Above all, it was necessary to extend its own jurisdiction to the other side of the sea, because its was precisely this rugged and treacherous coastline, hemmed with islands, and studded with ports, that permitted a watch to be kept over the Adriatic, and the mastery of that sea.') *Ibid.*, 20.

nelle costumanze, nel linguaggio, quella fisionomia intimamente veneziana che vi parla non tanto di soggezione quanto di fraternità.¹²⁰

Bit by bit the country was pacified; it rallied to the Republic with unbreakable sentiments of devotion; it furnished it with soldier, sailors, and galley commanders; its maritime cities assumed in their buildings, in the streets, in their customs, in their language, such an intense degree of *venezianità* that it speaks not of subjection but of brotherhood.

Thus while emphasising the need to emulate the Venetian Republic in dominating the Adriatic as a prerequisite for further eastern expansion, Fradeletto also insisted, in a fashion worthy almost of Tommaseo, on the benign and civilizing mission of the former imperial venture, as well as pointing to the exemplary heroism of Venetian commanders such as Francesco Morosini, even when ‘abbandonata dall’Europa’.¹²¹ Only in neutrality – ultimate sign of eighteenth-century decadence – was Venice to be condemned; yet even as the Republic fell, victim of its own ‘imbelle remissività’, both its *popolo* and its Slav subjects remained determinedly loyal.¹²² Fradeletto’s propaganda, therefore, combined a militaristic and expansionist rhetoric with a myth of benevolent imperialism. If this really was an accurate reflection of Venice’s rôle in the Mediterranean, those values would not persist when the Fascist state began its concerted plans for hegemony in the Balkans. The conduct of the Fascists would too often echo that of the arbitrary and bloodthirsty Venetian troops and auxiliaries described by George Finlay in *The History of Greece under Othoman and Venetian Domination* of 1857, rather than the sympathetic rulers portrayed by Fradeletto and his ilk. The arguments of Fradeletto, however, would continue to be deployed in justification of territorial expansion.

A comparative perspective: Genoa, historians and empire

Throughout the liberal era it was something of a commonplace amongst historians and political commentators to refer to Venice and Genoa as the eastern and western ‘lungs’ of the peninsula. Yet it is striking that while historians of Venice constantly emphasised its imperialist rôle, ultimately using this as one of the key arguments for inserting *venezianità* within the national narrative, this seems not to have been of such paramount importance to the writing of Genoese history, or at least insofar as attempts were made to integrate Genoa into the national narrative. One reason for this was the much earlier integration of Genoa into the Savoyard monarchy. Although, as we shall show, the Ligurian population quite often regarded the Piedmontese ruling house with suspicion, and sometimes downright hostility, the advantages of rule from Turin (and later Florence and Rome) were significant and tended to distract from a nostalgic engagement with the past. Moreover, historical research was inclined to focus on the internal instabilities that led to the gradual erosion of Genoa’s independence, rather than on its imperial grandeur, even if the latter remained an important subtext in general histories of the city.

After the collapse of the Napoleonic Empire, Genoa had been almost immediately annexed by the Kingdom of Sardinia-Piedmont. Although many Ligurians had been reluctant to accept reactionary Piedmontese rule, and had rebelled in May 1849 (the insurrection was brutally repressed by royal troops), the lands of the former Republic of Genoa had in fact been among the first to be fully integrated into the administrative and constitutional structures imposed by Turin. And Genoa benefited hugely from Savoyard rule, its wealth expanding dramatically in consequence of the commercial and economic policies imposed by Cavour and his successors. Unification brought further benefits, as Genoa, always the favoured port of the Lombards, found itself once again in a tight economic synergy with this most prosperous of Italian regions. Since the city had from the 1790s always been more fully part of the process of the *Risorgimento*, nationalists and municipalists alike felt happy to praise Genoa’s imperialist past, but it was not so essential to deploy the quest for empire as a means of attaching the city to the national cause.¹²³ The frequent internal disorders that made Genoa so vulnerable to invasion and foreign control – in a sense a sort of Italy in miniature – also made its past less attractive as a field for the manufacture of historical myths of stability,

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 23.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 52.

¹²² *Ibid.*, 56-7.

¹²³ Girolamo Serra, *La storia della antica Liguria e di Genova* (Turin: Giuseppe Pomba, 1834).

resistance and independence, which were so fundamental to the Venetian narrative.¹²⁴ Thus when the marchese Girolamo Serra's history of the city was published in 1834, it emphasised that 'Genova fece in tre secoli guerre memorabili, acquisti maravigliosi, e gran parte del commercio universale;' ('In three centuries of memorable wars, Genoa acquired stupendous possession, and a significant part of global trade')¹²⁵ yet it was 'nella perdita delle colonie orientali e nell'estremo periodo delle civili discordie' ('the loss of its eastern colonies and the awful period of civil discord') that there existed 'due forti cagioni, che la ridussero da una somma Potenza navale a un piccolo stato' ('two principal causes, which reduced this almighty naval power to the status of a small state').¹²⁶ Much the same emphasis was to be found in Carlo Varese's history of the Republic, which came out the following year. For Varese, the key topic was 'La lotta perpetua tra la nobiltà e il popolo, e quell'avvicinarsi di governo stretto e larghissimo conseguenza delle lotte' ('The perpetual struggle between the nobility and the people, and the shifts between narrow oligarchy and democracy that was the consequence of these struggles'), even if he was also anxious to underline the importance of Genoese history for all Italians, observing that it was impossible not to find fascinating 'le vicende di un popolo che è tanta gloria nella storia della nostra penisola' ('the fortunes of a people that is of such glory to the story of our peninsula').¹²⁷

By the time the *Congresso degli Scienziati italiani* met at Genoa in 1846 it had become normal for the organisers of these annual meetings of scientists and scholars to produce an official book on the host city. The work on Genoa contained a substantial historical sketch. Once again what is striking about this sketch is the relatively peripheral rôle played by Genoa's colonial past. Stressing from the outset the martial qualities of the Ligurians not least in their resistance to Roman domination in ancient times, he the author, Michele Giuseppe Canale, above all else emphasised domestic instability, changes in régime, and how these ultimately left the city open to foreign domination.¹²⁸ In Canale's historical sketch even Genoa's last remaining colonial possession, the island of Corsica, was presented as essentially problematic. This was not an equivalent to Venetian Dalmatia – a source of soldiers and solidarity in the face of the Turk – but rather as a rebellious and vulnerable territory, the rule of which that had the added disadvantage of bringing Genoa into conflict with both France and the House of Savoy. Indeed, Canale went further, justifying the cruel repression of Corsican insurgents by the Genoese authorities as the legitimate action of colonial masters over rebellious subjects.¹²⁹ The views expressed by historians after the dramatic events of 1848-9 and during the course of unification did not alter much. It was the domestic situation in Genoa's stormy history from which most lessons could be learned. Thus Mariano Bargellini in his substantial *Storia popolare di Genova* of 1857 could not, of course, avoid engaging with Genoa's at times vast seaborne empire, commenting, for example, of the loss of much of it three hundred years beforehand that 'A Genova, con la perdita delle colonie, erano state tagliate le braccia' ('With the loss of its colonies, Genoa had its arms hacked off'),¹³⁰ but his principal interest was with the internal organisation, constitution, and power-

¹²⁴ The greatest patriotic moment in Genoa's history was perhaps the famous rebellion sparked by a street urchin, 'Balilla', who threw a stone at occupying Austrian soldiers in 1746. What Italian patriots were less eager to recall that at the time of the Genoese revolt, the Habsburgs were in alliance with the Piedmontese.

¹²⁵ Serra, *Liguria*, viii.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, ix.

¹²⁷ Carlo Varese, *Storia della Repubblica di Genova dalla sua origine sino al 1814* (Genoa: Yves Gravier, 1835), x.

¹²⁸ Michele Giuseppe Canale, 'Storia civile', *Descrizione di Genova e del genovesato* (2 vols, Genoa: Tipografia Ferrando, 1846).

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, 38-9.

¹³⁰ Mariano Bargellini, *Storia popolare di Genova: dalla sua origine fino ai nostri tempi* (2 vols, Genoa: Enrico Monni, 1856-7), vol.i, 566.

struggles of Genoa itself.¹³¹ Indeed, on the one hand, Bargellini presented successful imperial expansion largely as a product of domestic harmony and order; on the other hand, failure of empire, while contributing to domestic problems was also above all a symptom of these shortcomings.¹³² As Bargellini's work was appearing, so too was a new, multi-volume, and never completed study by Canale. The basic themes remained much the same, although it is perhaps particularly striking with what virulence he lambasted the parasitic and oppressive nature of the Roman Empire. Indeed, while Venetians tended to present themselves as direct heirs to a Roman tradition, Genoese historians were more inclined to write of themselves as victims or resisters of a decadent and burdensome ancient imperial domination, even preferring barbarian rule to that of the caesars.

I vizi e le innumerevoli libidini degl'imperatori erano un'ampia voragine ove il pubblico danaio traboccando si seppelliva; i municipi, le province, le colonie non godendo da principio alcun diritto di cittadinanza, fremevano che quella romana cloaca s'inghiottisse i loro tesori. Spesso indispettiti i popoli si levavano a tumulto quando avari ed iniqui proconsoli e governatori faceano colla crudele esazione peggiore e più intollerabile l'odiato comando.¹³³

The vices and the infinite lusts of the emperors were a vast chasm into which excessive public monies were cast; the municipalities, the provinces the colonies, enjoying no rights of citizenship, seethed that the Roman sewer swallowed up their wealth. Often deeply galled, the subject peoples rose up en masse when greedy and unjust proconsuls and governors made a hated rule even worse and more intolerable through their cruel exactions.

Meanwhile, Canale continued to reiterate his earlier reservations about colonies, most especially Corsica, 'un possesso legittimamente acquistato, cupamente insidiato, ingiustamente perduto':¹³⁴

L'isola di Corsica conservata dalla Repubblica [...] grande e continua cagione di guerre e calamità sin dal nascere della conquista, recò affanni e turbolenze.¹³⁵

The island of Corisca held by the Republic [...] great and continual reason for wars and calamities from the moment it was conquered, brought worries and upheavals.

When the great historian of Genoa and the Genoese – biographer of both Columbus and Mazzini – Federico Donaver, wrote his two volume work on his home town, once again the focus was domestic rather than imperialistic. The aim of his work was to focus on:

¹³¹ As one German reviewer wrote 'Die Geschichte kann nicht so viel Gutes von der Aristokratie der ehemaligen Republik Genua sagen, welche durch die Intriguen derselben von ihrer Grösse herabfiel.' ('History cannot say much that is good about the aristocracy of the former Republic of Genoa, which through the intrigues of the powerful brought about its own downfall.') The reviewer continued to remark the principal focus of the study '[...] sich hauptsächlich mit den inneren Unruhen und Partheiungen beschäftigt' ('is principally concerned with internal unrest and faction'). No mention was made of Genoa here as a past imperial power at all. Neigebauer, 'Literaturbericht aus Italien', *Heidelberger Jahrbücher der Literatur*, 35 (Aug. 1857), 545-60, 557.

¹³² As Bargellini remarked in his introduction, 'Sotto le auspicio di questa fratellvole concordia dell'elemento popolare e dell'elemento aristocratico, furono inaugurate le prime conquiste in Oriente che aprirono la strada alla futura potenza della nazione.' ('Under the auspices of this brotherly harmony between the popular and aristocratic elements of society were begun the first conquests in the east that opened the road to the future power of the nation.') Bargellini, *Storia popolare.*, ix.

¹³³ Michele Giuseppe Canale, *Nuova istoria della repubblica di Genova, del suo commercio e della sua letteratura dalle origini all'anno 1797* (4 vols, Florence: Le Monnier, 1858-64), vol. i, 274-5. It should be noted that Canale's fourth volume only took the narrative to 1528.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, vol. ii, 582.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, vol. i, 109.

[...] avvenimenti importanti, ch'ebbero influenza assai larga nella vita politica e commerciale del medio evo [...] eroismi e [...] atti virtuosi di abiezioni senza nome, intarsiata di rivolte ora demagogiche ora sublimemente patriottiche [...] la storia della nostra repubblica è varia, aneddotica, educativa, monito ai popoli e agl'individui.¹³⁶

[...] important occurrences, which had a fairly extensive influence on the political and commercial life of the Middle Ages [...] acts of heroism and [...] virtuous acts of unnamed self-sacrifice, interwoven with revolts, sometimes demagogic and sometimes sublimely patriotic [...] the history of our republic is varied, rich in anecdote, educational, an admonition both to peoples and to individuals.

Despite the obvious need for any history of Genoa to address the city's involvement in the Black Sea and Mediterranean, it is clear that the focus of historians of the Ligurian capital was almost invariably on foreign invasion or domestic affairs. Its colonial past could not be overlooked but its place within the Italian nation was never dependent upon it. It was only under the Fascist régime, with the development of an even more aggressively expansionist attitude toward the Mediterranean, that, on the eve of renewed European-wide conflict, Roberto Lopez wrote the first systematic study of Genoese expansion.¹³⁷

Venetians, empire, and the rhetoric of Fascism

The lines of continuity between the imperialism of the liberal Italian state, and that of the Fascist régime are extremely strong. Thus the final process of pacification of Tripolitania and Cirenaica under Volpi, Pietro Badoglio and Italo Balbo can be seen as little more than a continuation and intensification of the policies initiated in Libya by San Giuliano and Giolitti.¹³⁸ Much the same can be said of the expansion of power, based on superior military strength and technology, in what came to be known as Africa Italiana Orientale. Nor did the writing of history radically alter. Claims on the Adriatic, at least until the increased Fascist emphasis on race in the late 1930s, also changed little after 1922. Of course, the emphasis on *romanità*, underscored by repeated appeals to 'Roman' symbolism, grew stronger under the Fascist régime.¹³⁹ But when Mussolini, and his generals and admirals, ministers and advisors sought to pursue their policy of *spazio vitale* in the Mediterranean with a view to transforming it into a *mare nostrum*, it was still possible to legitimate imperial expansion through appeals to *venezianità*. As Stefano Cavazza has shown, the Fascist state was not above annexing the local as a means of attaching Italians to the nation state.¹⁴⁰ Just as the festivals and traditions studied by Cavazza were appropriated for this end, so too was essentially municipal history. Consequently Venice continued to be able to relate to the nation in large part through the history of its *stato da mâr*. As Filippo Maria Paladini has remarked it was the notion of the Adriatic as 'Golfo di Venezia' that was

¹³⁶ Federico Donaver, *La Storia della Repubblica di Genova* (2 vols, Genoa: Liberia Editrice Moderna, 1913; first published 1890), vol. i, xiii.

¹³⁷ Roberto Lopez, *Storia delle colonie Genovesi nel Mediterraneo* (Bologna: Zanichelli, 1938). However, it is noteworthy that when this work was commissioned for the *Collana di studi giuridici e storici* edited by Pier Silverio Leicht (academic historian and lawyer, president of the *Società alpine friulana*, and Fascist – serving as a deputy from 1924 and a senator from 1934), it was because apparently no other such survey existed on the subject. See Antonio Varsoni, *Roberto Lopez. L'impegno politico e civile (1938-1945)* (Florence: Università di Firenze, 1990), 356.

¹³⁸ There is a large literature on the Italo-Turkish war and the conquest of Libya. See, for example: Timothy Winston Childs, *Italo-Turkish Diplomacy*; Francesco Malgeri, *La guerra libica (1911-1912)* (Rome: Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 1970); Sergio Romano, *La quarta sponda: la guerra di Libia 1911-1912* (Milan: Bompiani, 1977).

¹³⁹ See, for example, Romke Visser, 'Fascist Doctrine and the Cult of *Romanità*', *Journal of Contemporary History* 27 (1992), 5-22; Laura Malvano Bechelloni, 'Le mythe de la romanité et la politique de l'image dans l'Italie fasciste', *Vingtième Siècle – Revue d'histoire* 78 (2003), 111-120.

¹⁴⁰ Stefano Cavazza, *Piccole patrie. Feste popolari tra regione e nazione durante il fascismo* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2003).

[...] uno dei temi più ossessivi della propaganda nazional-fascista per la penetrazione italiana verso l'Oltremare, l'Oriente balcanico, il Levante e il Mediterraneo quale spazio vitale italiano.¹⁴¹

[...] one of the most obsessive themes in national-fascist propaganda was Italy's penetration of overseas' territories, the Balkan East, the Levant and the Mediterranean as Italian 'spazio vitale'.

In the aftermath of the Great War, such appeals to Venice's historical importance as the dominant power of the Mediterranean assumed a special significance. As we have noted above, the acquisition of Trieste by the Italians posed a major threat to Venice's position. To safeguard its significance and to encourage economic expansion, it was essential to push Venice's claim to a hegemonic status within the 'Golfo'. This led to a renewed emphasis on links between Venice and Dalmatia – widely perceived as the essential bridgehead for any Balkan expansion – which stood to benefit both broader Fascist plans for territorial expansion, and more focused Venetian defence of local interests. This would receive articulation through the foundation in the early 1930s of the *Istituto di Studi Adriatici*, which went hand-in-hand with the Fascistisation of key cultural Venetian institutions, such as the *Deputazione di storia patria per le Venezie*, and the *Istituto Veneto di scienze, lettere ed arti*.¹⁴² The *ISA* became a key propaganda tool for promoting Venice through an emphasis on the study of the Adriatic, and rapidly attracted the patronage and involvement of key figures. In its early stages, the Rovigo-born, academic at the University of Padua, Roberto Cessi – a left-wing scholar with no nationalist credentials, who in 1908, aged 23 had joined the *Partito Socialista Italiano* – played a key part in stressing the significance of Venice's maritime past as a thalassocracy. Cessi grew less happy with the brief of the *ISA* when Volpi took over its direction, replacing Mussolini's first Ministro della Marina, Admiral Paolo Thaon di Revel. Nevertheless, the fact that Cessi never distanced himself entirely from the project is symptomatic of the extent to which the Venetian intelligentsia was prepared both to collaborate with the régime, not least with a view to ensuring the centrality of their city within its expansionist projects.¹⁴³ Of course, many Venetians were utterly unconvinced by such propaganda. If Italians nationally celebrated the successful war in Abyssinia in 1935 with enormous and almost universal enthusiasm, they were less excited by the annexation of Albania in 1939. Nevertheless, this triggered renewed Venetian interest in laying claim to historical rights in the Adriatic, Balkans and Mediterranean, cementing Venice's place in the national-Fascist, imperial scheme, with, for example, the proposal to produce *Le fonte veneziane per la storia albanese*.¹⁴⁴

The increasingly aggressive Italian policy in the Adriatic and Balkans following the successful conquest of Abyssinia led some among the Fascist hierarchy to justify expansion on the grounds of the racist ideology that became *de rigueur* following the *Manifesto sulla purezza della razza* of July 1938. However, in general the Venetian perspective on imperial expansion continued to stress cultural and economic legacies as legitimating involvement in areas once ruled by the *Serenissima*. In 1927, Francesco Pullé in his anthropological and linguistic study of the peninsula had asserted the inherent unity of the Adriatic peoples; by extension this was the rationale for Venetian/Italian expansion on the eastern coastline.¹⁴⁵ Writing in September 1941, six months after the Italian annexation of the bulk of the Dalmatian coastline (a smaller area was left in the hands of a German-controlled Croatian satellite state), the Sicilian historian, folklorist, philologist and ethnographer, Giuseppe Cocchiara – himself an extremely prominent supporter of the Fascist régime's move towards racism – argued in *La Difesa della Razza* that 'La Dalmazia è in fondo un prolungamento delle Venezia, così come Malta lo è delle Sicilie' ('Dalmatia is fundamentally an extension of the Venezia, as Malta is of the Sicilies'). Yet Cocchiara echoed Molmenti when he pointed to the way in which monuments demonstrated the fundamentally Venetian nature of Dalmatia, but more importantly

¹⁴¹ Paladini, 'Propaganda talassocratica', 147.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, 152.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, 153-66.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 150, 161.

¹⁴⁵ Francesco Pullé, *L'Italia, genti e favelle. Profilo antropologico-linguistico* (4 vols, Turin: Bocca, 1927) cited in Sandra Puccini, 'Le immagini della razza balcaniche nell'antropologia italiana tra le due guerre', *La Ricerca Folklorica* 34 (1996), 59-70, 62.

Venezia è stata presente in Dalmazia colle sue feste, coi suoi costumi, con la sua letteratura popolare. Ma in questa letteratura, con Venezia, in Dalmazia c'era dunque l'Italia.¹⁴⁶

Venice was present in Dalmatia through its festivals, its customs, its popular literature. But with this literature it was not just Venice but Italy that was present in Dalmatia.

It was not just in the conquest and 're-Italianisation' of Dalmatia that *venezianità* was exploited.¹⁴⁷ As both Davide Rodogno and Marco Cuzzi have observed, the history of Venetian economic penetration was also used to legitimate intervention in Slovenia.¹⁴⁸ In this climate perhaps the clearest statement of the link between Venice's historical imperialism and the implementation of plans to dominate a Mediterranean *spazio vitale* was to be found in a work written by the Dalmatian Italian, Bruno Dudan, published under the auspices of the *Istituto nazionale di cultura fascista* in 1938.¹⁴⁹ Dudan's was an extensive, reasonably comprehensive and *longue durée* survey, which ended rather abruptly with Campo Formido and the collapse of the Republic in 1797. Dudan's identified in Venetian energy, determination, and in

[...] la sua intransigente, anche egoista inflessibile direttiva di concentrare per una serie di secoli ricchezza e potenza in un punto dello spazio [...]

[...] its intransigent and inflexibly egoist determination to concentrate wealth and power at a single geographical point for centuries on end.

confirmation of the lesson

[...] che all'azione duratura sono affidati i destini dei popoli che vogliono procedere nel loro cammino e costruirsi una strada nel mondo.¹⁵⁰

[...] that it is to enduring action that are entrusted the destinies of peoples wishing to continue their course and to construct a path through the world.

But while he saw in Venetian expansion a certain degree of *sacro egoismo*, which chimed no doubt with both liberal and Fascist policy, he also stressed the notion that Venice was both bastion against the threat from the east and 'erede della sovranità dell'Impero romano d'Oriente'. Despite the book appearing in a series that was expressly Fascist, that bore the imprint of the *fascio littorio* on its cover and frontispiece, and that was edited by the die-hard *PNF* supporter Pier Silverio Leicht (who was one of relatively few academics actually purged by the allies after the collapse of Mussolini's régime), the message it carried was not so very different from that of authors writing in the years before the Great War.

Conclusion

In 1943 as Italy spiralled towards defeat, Gino Damerini, nationalist journalist and author of wide-ranging cultural and historical interests, who was often seen as the unofficial spokesman of Giuseppe Volpi, published his study of the Ionian Islands under Venetian domination. In this work, he argued that Campo Formido and the fall of the Republic would never be avenged or forgotten until all Venice's imperial

¹⁴⁶ Giuseppe Cocchiara in *La Difesa della Razza* 4 (Sep. 1941), 6-9, cited *ibid.*, 60.

¹⁴⁷ Rodogno, *Fascism's European Empire*, 73-6.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 82; Marco Cuzzi, *L'occupazione italiana della Slovenia (1941-1943)* (Rome: Stato maggiore dell'esercito, 1998).

¹⁴⁹ Bruno Dudan, *Il dominio veneziano di Levante* (Bologna: Zanichelli, 1938). Dudan's other historical works included a study jointly authored with Antonio Teja, *L'italianità della Dalmazia negli ordinamenti e statutes cittadini* (Varese & Milan: ISPI, 1943).

¹⁵⁰ Dudan, *Il dominio*, 271.

possessions were once again under Italian rule.¹⁵¹ Not only did Venice have to be redeemed, so did the whole *stato da mâr*. Given the precarious military position of the Italians when Damerini was writing, such a position was, at best, profoundly unrealistic. In defeat Italy was stripped of her imperial possessions (generating perhaps surprising protests from left as well as right); Italians fled in large numbers from Tito's Yugoslavia and returned from other outposts of empire. Yet there is little doubt that, by the end of the Fascist régime, empire had played a far from insignificant part in the formation of the Italian nation. Strikingly, however, this process of making the nation could be extremely localized. Pursuit of an Italian empire, of Italian *spazio vitale*, again and again emphasised the contribution of a particular city; and élites within that city saw the advantage of supporting such a project because it served their own very local interests. Paradoxically, while both the liberal state and the Fascist régime periodically expressed their frustrations at the *municipalismo* of the *cento città*, *venezianità* could be harnessed as a key tool in legitimating empire, which was in turn designed to strengthen the nation. In the Venetian case, the *piccola patria* helped make Italians by justifying a short-lived and fundamentally unsuccessful imperial experiment.

¹⁵¹ Gino Damerini, *Le isole Jonie e il sistema adriatico dal dominio veneziano a Buonoparte* (Varese & Milan: ISPI, 1943), 186.