

ISTITUTO ELLENICO DI STUDI BIZANTINI E  
POSTBIZANTINI DI VENEZIA  
ASSOCIAZIONE UNIVERSITARI DI CERIGO

Convegni – 8

## Venezia e Cerigo



Atti del Simposio Internazionale  
Venezia, 6-7 dicembre 2002

A cura di  
MARINA KOUMANOUDI - CHRYSSA MALTEZOU

Venezia 2003

Marina Koumanoudi

*ILLI DE CA' VENIER*  
THE FIRST VENETIAN LORDS OF KYTHERA

The history of the island of Kythera, variously referred to in Venetian sources as *insula Cederici* or *Cerigo*, during the best part of the medieval and early modern period is closely bound up with the vicissitudes of the Venetian patrician family of the Venier. For well over five centuries, with two relatively brief intervals, the Venier dominated over the island and its population and exploited its natural resources, initially as independent lords and later on, after the island had been placed under the authority of the Venetian Duke of Crete, as powerful landowners. Their long-drawn-out rule, which was marked by their fluctuating relations with Venice, eventually came to an end with the fall of the Republic of St Mark in 1797-1798. This paper outlines the first three centuries of the Venier presence on Kythera, a crucial period for the island's subsequent fate, which helped to shape the distinctive cultural identity of the small insular community.

In her article on the prosopography of the Eudaimonianni and Venier families, Professor Chryssa Maltezou argued that the establishment of the Venetians on Kythera was the result of a peaceful transition of power from the Byzantines through a marriage contract, effectively refuting the assertion of the nineteenth-century German historian Karl Hopf that it was conquered in the years 1206-1207 during the naval campaign of Marco Sanudo and his companions, which led to the creation of the duchy of the Archipelago and other lesser insular lordships in the Aegean held by citizens of Venice.<sup>1</sup> Drawing largely from an anonymous sixteenth-

---

1. Chryssa A. Maltezou, «Le famiglie degli Eudemoniannis e Venier a Cerigo dal XII al XIV secolo. Problemi di cronologia e prosopografia», *Rivista di Studi Bizantini e Slavi* 2 (1982) = *Miscellanea Agostino Pertusi*, v. 2, Bologna 1982, 204-216 [repr. in eadem, *Βενετική παρουσία στα Κύθηρα. Αρχαιακές μαρτυρίες*, Athens 1991, H].

century text entitled *Antique Memorie dell'isola di Cerigo*, she showed that towards the end of the twelfth century the local Byzantine archon of Lakedaimon, whose jurisdiction extended over Kythera, granted the island to a certain Eudaimonoianis, scion of one of the three most powerful and influential noble families of Monemvasia.<sup>2</sup>

In about the same period, the Eudaimonoianis family extended its activities to Crete, where, already in the early thirteenth century, Nicholas Eudaimonoianis, a descendant of the first Byzantine lord of Kythera, is mentioned as the owner of extensive landed property. Like other powerful Cretan landowners, Nicholas reacted against the new situation that developed on Crete after the Venetian conquest of the island, and joined in a revolt led by the noble Melissinos and Skordilis families in 1230. During the revolt, the rebels sought the help of John Vatatzes, Emperor of Nicaea, but the reinforcements he sent proved inadequate and Venice prevailed. The revolt ended with the treaty of 1236, by which Nicholas Eudaimonoianis and Michael Melissinos swore allegiance to the Republic and received in return territorial concessions and privileges that put them on a par with the Venetian feudatories. Two years later, in 1238, presumably in order to further strengthen his position and safeguard his family's interests, Nicholas Eudaimonoianis married his daughter to a Venetian feudatory from Crete, to whom he gave the island of Kythera along with his Cretan holdings as a dowry.<sup>3</sup>

According to the sixteenth-century text, the Venetian noble who married the daughter of Eudaimonoianis was one Bartolomeo Venier, *gentiluomo et habitadore dell'isola di Candia*.<sup>4</sup> Bartolomeo is also mentioned by Marco Barbaro (1511-1575) in his *Arbori de' patritii Veneti* as the head of the Cretan branch of the Venier clan, whose name became linked with the island of Kythera. This is probably the same person who, as Barbaro mentions elsewhere in his study, owned a *cavalleria* on Crete in 1223.<sup>5</sup> However, historians who have at various times dealt with the subject ignore the evidence of these two texts and, on the basis of the much

2. Ed. C. N. Sathas, *Documents inédits relatifs à l'histoire de la Grèce au moyen âge*, v. 6, Paris - Athens 1884, pp. 299-311. Maltezou, «Eudaimonoianis e Venier a Cerigo», 206-208. On the Eudaimonoianis family see also Chryssa A. Maltezou, «Μονεμβασία και Κύθηρα. Ανακοίνωση στο Συμπόσιο Ιστορίας και Τέχνης με θέμα: Η Πελοπόννησος την εποχή των Παλαιολόγων (Μονεμβασία, 20-23 Ιουλίου 1989)», *Βενετική παρουσία στα Κύθηρα*, ΙΓ', pp. 3-5.

3. Maltezou, «Eudaimonoianis e Venier a Cerigo», 208-210.

4. Sathas, *Documents inédits*, v. 6, pp. 302 and 308 (genealogical tree of the Venier branch of Kythera).

5. Marco Barbaro, *Arbori de' patritii veneti*, Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana, f. 176r (= Cod. Marc. It. VII, 928, col. 8597).

later work of the Venetian genealogist Girolamo Capelari (1666-1748),<sup>6</sup> assert that he was named Marco and was the son of Marino Venier from the district of Castello, who had arrived on Crete with the first wave of Venetian settlers in 1211.<sup>7</sup>

The question of the identity of the first Venetian lord of Kythera is resolved once and for all, I think, by a decision issued by the court of the Duke of Crete in November 1425.<sup>8</sup> From the petition filed by the plaintiff, which is incorporated in the text of the decision together with the plea of the accused, we learn that in April 1424 Frangia Venier, one of the last descendants of the Venier branch of Kythera, bequeathed his share of the island to his collateral relation Blasio. In his capacity as Frangia's lawful heir, Blasio Venier pressed suit against George Levounis, son of *q. Jani de insula Citherici*, with a view to proving that the latter was a *villano* who had fled from his estate on Kythera. At first sight this seems to be yet another case regarding the revindication of a fugitive *villano*, such as the Duke's tribunal dealt with regularly, except that its scope extends beyond the geographical boundaries of Crete to the arid rugged rock of Kythera. This feature is precisely what gives particular interest to the case, because the litigants' testimonies provide invaluable information about the presence of the Venier on Kythera and their relations with the islanders, both before and after the dramatic events that led to the loss of their possessions; while at the same time revealing, albeit faintly, the different mindsets of the governed and the governing, as well as the ideological orientations of the former in the wake of the island's subjection to the direct control of Venice.

With reference to the circumstances in which his predecessors acquired the island of Kythera, Blasio Venier writes in his petition to the judicial authorities: «...*la dita isola in 1250 per uno Démonoiani fuo dada in dota a miser Bortholamio Venier, el qual se atrova capitano al Colfo, el qual capita qui in Candia, et ancor i fo dado in dita plui de casali 30 el [...] in el destreto di Chania. El qual miser Bortholamio Venier fuo el principio de quelli de cha Venier, e sia tegnuda e*

6. G. A. Capellari, *Il Campidoglio Veneto*, Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana, t. IV, f. 161v and f. 166v (= Cod. Marc. It.VII, 18, col. 8307).

7. Hopf, *Chroniques*, p. 346, n. 5, and p. 526 (genealogical table), makes no mention of Marco Venier's father; cf. S. Borsari, *Il dominio veneziano a Creta nel XIII secolo*, Napoli 1963, p. 47; Fr. Thiriet, «À propos de la seigneurie des Venier sur Cerigo», *Studi Veneziani* 12 (1970), 202-203, probably influenced by Hopf, chooses to ignore Barbaro; Maltezou, «Eudaimonoianis e Venier a Cerigo», 208 - 211, n. 22, notes the differentiation of the sixteenth-century text, but follows Capellari.

8. A.S.V. (= Archivio di Stato di Venezia), ADC (=Archivio Duca di Candia), b. 26 (Quaterni Sententiorum), fasc. 5, ff. 17r-27r.

*posseduta tuta l'isola de Cerigo fin al tempo de la rebellion.»*<sup>9</sup> The information supplied by Blasio tallies at all points with the anonymous text, apart from the date of the acquisition of the island by the Venier – which may very well be due to an error by the scribe who recorded the petition in the *Book of Decisions* of the ducal chancery of Crete.<sup>10</sup> Furthermore, a crosscheck of specific points indicates that Blasio was very well informed about events connected with his predecessors' history and may therefore be considered a reliable source. Consequently, we must accept that the name of the first Venetian lord of Kythera was Bartolomeo and not Marco.

Bartolomeo Venier was unable to hold on to his island for long. As a result of the anti-Latin policy initiated by Michael VIII Palaiologos after the recapture of Constantinople, the Byzantines were able to recover many parts of the Aegean, which had been occupied by Latins. Among the areas that returned to Byzantine control was Kythera. Around 1275, Monemvasiots led by members of the Notaras family mounted an attack on the island and managed to expel the Venier.<sup>11</sup> Immediately thereafter, the Byzantine emperor assigned the administration of Kythera to the leader of the expedition, Paul Notaras, to whom and two other Byzantine nobles, whose names are not known, he awarded the island.<sup>12</sup>

We have little information about the movements of the Venier in the years

9. A.S.V., ADC, b. 26, f. 17r.

10. Sathas, *Documents inédits*, v. 6, pp. 302 and 308

11. Maltezos, «Eudaimonoianis e Venier a Cerigo», 211-212, is the first to dissociate the operation that led to the reconquest of the island of Kythera from the activity of the Italian adventurer Licario in the Aegean; cf. eadem, «Μονεμβασία και Κύθηρα», pp. 5-7. The Monemvasiots were already actively involved in the struggle against the Latins by 1274; they inflicted many damages to Venetian ships sailing between Crete and Negroponte. On the importance of the naval base of Monemvasia during this period, see G. Morgan, «The Venetian Claims Commission of 1278», *Byzantinische Zeitschrift* 69 (1976), 425, 430-431.

12. The only source for the cession of the island to the three Byzantine nobles is a decision issued by the Venetian Senate in December 17, 1353, ed. by S. M. Theotokis, *Θεσπίσματα της Βενετικής Γερουσίας, 1281-1385*, v. 2/2, Athens 1937 [Ακαδημία Αθηνών – Μνημεία της Ελληνικής Ιστορίας], pp. 13-14. cf. Fr. Thiriet, *Régestes des délibérations du Sénat de Venise concernant la Roumanie*, v. 1, Paris - The Hague 1958, p. 75, n° 264 (summary); idem, «À propos de la seigneurie des Venier sur Cerigo», 202-203. Paul Notaras is mentioned as *homo domini imperatoris et capitaneus loci Cederici* in March 1275. In the years between 1275-1276 Notaras, using the island as his base, continued to attack Venetian ships sailing in the vicinity of Kythera and Monemvasia. His presence on the island is attested for the last time in 1301. On his identification with one of the three Byzantine lords of Kythera, see Maltezos, «Eudaimonoianis e Venier a Cerigo», 211-212.

following their dislodgement from Kythera. However, it seems that they did not make any attempt to recover their island, presumably because they were in no position themselves to organise and carry out such an enterprise. Besides, the general circumstances were prohibitive: on the one hand, because the situation on Crete, where the Venier were based and from where the operation would in theory have been launched, was unsettled owing to the revolt of the Chortatzis brothers;<sup>13</sup> and on the other, because they would have needed the prior approval of Venice, which had just entered a period of negotiations over a new treaty with Michael VIII and thus would not have been inclined to jeopardise the outcome by supporting a hostile operation against the Byzantines.<sup>14</sup> The uprising of Alexios Kallergis shortly after, in 1283, posed a serious threat to the interests of the Venier on Crete and kept their attention focused on the interior of the island for over a decade.<sup>15</sup> Nevertheless, even after Bartolomeo's death, they continued to take an active interest in their small island possession and to look for ways of regaining it.<sup>16</sup>

13. The revolt of the brothers George and Theodore Chortatzis from Rethymno broke up in 1272-1273, but it was not until 1278 that the Venetian forces were able to suppress it, see S. Borsari, *Il dominio veneziano*, pp. 52-53; cf. Chryssa A. Maltezoú, «Η Κρήτη στη διάρκεια της περιόδου της Βενετοκρατίας (1211-1669)», *Κρήτη Ιστορία και Πολιτισμός*, v. 2, Irakleion 1988, pp. 121-122.

14. As was the case with all Venetians who possessed estates in Crete, the Venier were bound by oath not to take up arms without the approval of the Republic. On the Veneto-Byzantine treaty of 1277, see D. M. Nicol, *Byzantium and Venice. A Study in Diplomatic and Cultural Relations*, Cambridge 1988, pp. 197-207.

15. The bulk of the Venier estates were situated in western Crete, and more specifically in the district of Chanea, which had passed under Kallergis's control in the early part of the isurrection. With the treaty of 1299, Venice – among other things – gave Kallergis the village of Ayia Barbara which belonged to Nicolò Venier, whom she compensated for the loss of his lands, see S. M. Theotokis, *Ιστορικά κρητικά έγγραφα εκδιδόμενα εκ του αρχείου της Βενετίας. Θεσπίσματα της Βενετικής Γερουσίας 1281-1385*, v. 2/1, Athens 1936 [Ακαδημία Αθηνών – Μνημεία της Ελληνικής Ιστορίας], pp. 20-21, n° 47 (decision issued by the Senate dated 27 September 1302 regulating the indemnification); see also Fr. Thiriet, *Délibérations des Assemblées Vénitiennes concernant la Romanie*, v. 1, Paris - The Hague 1966, p. 97, n° 68 (summary); cf. idem, «À propos de la seigneurie des Venier sur Cerigo», 207. On the uprising of Alexios Kallergis, see Borsari, *Il dominio veneziano*, pp. 54-64; cf. Maltezoú, «Η Κρήτη στη διάρκεια της περιόδου της Βενετοκρατίας», pp. 122-125. Marco Venier, participated as army captain in the military operations against the rebels in the area of Mylopotamos and Siteia, see Borsari, *ibidem*, pp. 57 and 145. In recognition of his services to the Republic, the *Maggior Consiglio* in 1305 made an exception and allowed his appointment to the post of castellan of Apokorona for two years, see Thiriet, *Délibérations des Assemblées Vénitiennes*, v. 1, p. 109, n° 110 (summary of the decision dated 16 March 1305); cf. Maltezoú, «Eudaimonoianis e Venier a Cerigo», 216.

16. The exact date of Bartolomeo's death is not known. An act from the protocol of the Cretan

In July 1301, when peace and stability had finally been restored on Crete, but the war between Byzantium and Venice was still raging, corsairs from Crete, with the encouragement of the Venetian authorities launched an offensive against Kythera and captured the son of the Byzantine governor, Michael Notaras Sebastos.<sup>17</sup> A few months later, whilst – according to a decision of the Senate dated December 1353 – two of the three lords of Kythera had meanwhile died, Bartolomeo Venier's grandson and namesake found himself on the island. While there, he struck up a friendship with the surviving Byzantine lord, who agreed to cede the island to him on condition that he married his daughter. And so it came to pass, after Bartolomeo II had briefly returned to Crete to settle his affairs there.<sup>18</sup> Although the Venier would certainly have been aware of Notaras's capture, the presence of Bartolomeo II on Kythera should be linked not with that event, but rather with the recent developments on the island. In fact, if Hopf is correct in stating that he married the daughter of Nicephoros Eudaimonoianis, then we may reasonably conclude that Bartolomeo lost no time in exploiting his family connection with that Byzantine family in order to take back his ancestral domain.<sup>19</sup> This also explains his decision to

---

notary Benvenuto de Brixano informs us that he was already dead by December 16, 1301, see *Benvenuto de Brixano, notaio in Candia (1301-1302)*, ed. R. Morozzo della Rocca, *Fonti per la Storia di Venezia. Sez. III – Archivi Notarili*, Venice 1950, p. 180, n° 503; cf. Thiriet, «À propos de la seigneurie des Venier sur Cerigo», 203.

17. For the war of the years 1296-1302, see Angeliki E. Laiou, *Constantinople and the Latins, The Foreign Policy of Andronicus II, 1282-1328*, Cambridge, Massachusetts 1972, pp. 101-114; cf. R. -J. Loenertz, *Les Ghisi, dynastes vénitiens dans l'Archipel, 1207-1390*, Florence 1975, pp. 100-103. During the Veneto-Byzantine war, the Republic through its representatives in Crete and Negroponte encouraged all those who were willing to organize and finance private expeditions against Byzantine territories in the Aegean, either by granting loans with favourable terms or promising a share of the booty, as well as more long-lasting gains, see Eutychia Papadopoulou, «Πειρατές και κουρσάροι στο Αιγαίο τον 13ο αιώνα», *Δίπτυχα* 6 (1994-1995), 101f., where previous bibliography. The piratical attack against Kythera is known to us from a series of acts dealing with the sale of the prisoner in Crete, registered in the protocol of the notary Benvenuto de Brixano, see *Benvenuto de Brixano, notaio in Candia*, pp. 79-80, 89, 103-104, 112, n°s 215, 216, 218, 242, 281-282, 305. For the identification of Michael Notaras, see Maltezou, «Eudaimonoianis e Venier a Cerigo», 213-214.

18. The episode of Bartolomeo's marriage to the daughter of the Byzantine noble is mentioned by his son Marco Venier in his petition to the Venetian authorities, in 1353, by which he requested that he should be accepted to the Council of the Feudatories of Chania, see above n. 12. Maltezou, «Eudaimonoianis e Venier a Cerigo», 215, dates the marriage after July 1301; cf. Thiriet, «À propos de la seigneurie des Venier sur Cerigo», 203, who places the marriage between the years 1295-1300.

19. Hopf, *Chroniques gréco-romanes*, p. 346, n. 5, and p. 526.

travel to Kythera at a time when the island's relations with Venice were strained. For his part, the Byzantine noble, realising that the island was bound to fall into Venetian hands sooner or later, opted not to risk losing it altogether, but to give it to Venier along with his daughter's hand in marriage. However, Bartolomeo II's attempt to follow in his grandfather's footsteps did not have the same happy outcome. After the birth of their son Marco, his wife found out that he was already married, and, furious that he had deceived both her and her father, wanted nothing to do with him, and thus Bartolomeo was forced to leave the island.

Kythera is not mentioned in the Veneto-Byzantine treaty of 1302, which suggests that the island remained under Byzantine jurisdiction after the end of the war with the Republic.<sup>20</sup> However, it had returned to Venetian control by 1308 at the latest, for in that year the Senate ceded the island to the son of Bartolomeo I, Marco Venier.<sup>21</sup> The precise terms of the cession are unknown; however, a close examination of the available material shows that the Senate recognised the Venier family rights over Kythera and granted Marco full ownership of the island, but with restrictions regarding its transfer. The aim of these was to prevent the strategically important island from passing out of the sphere of influence of Venice at any future date, as Marco and his heirs were not allowed to sell or otherwise alienate the entire island or part of it to any third party without the Republic's approval.<sup>22</sup> Although the Venier were not obliged to render any specific service – military or other – to the Venetian state in return for the land they received, it goes without saying that, as Venetian subjects, they were expected to defend and protect the interests of the metropolis in the region.

After the death of Marco Venier in around 1310, his four sons (Nicolò surnamed *maior* (the elder), Bartolomeo II, Piero, and Gabriel) partitioned the island into twenty-four lots (*carati*), taking six each, and marked out the boundaries of each property. The plain of Palaiopoli and the valley which runs south-east from

120. G. M. Thomas – R. Predelli, eds., *Diplomatarium Veneto-Levanticum, sive Acta et Diplomata res Venetas, Graecas atque Levantis illustrantia a 1330-1454*, v. 1, Venice 1880 [Monumenti storici pubblicati dalla Reale Deputazione Veneta di Storia Patria, serie prima. Documenti, V], pp. 12-16, 16-19, n<sup>os</sup> 7-8. Cf. Laiou, *Constantinople and the Latins*, p. 111ff.

21. Theotokis, *Θεσπίσματα της Βενετικής Γερουσίας*, v. 2/1, p. 37, n<sup>o</sup> 1; *Le deliberazioni del Consiglio dei Rogati (Senato) serie «Mixtorum»*, ed. R. Cessi – P. Sambin, v. 1, Venice 1960 [Deputazione di Storia Patria per le Venezie: Monumenti Storici. Nuova serie, XV], p. 131, n<sup>o</sup> 5.

22. See Thiriet, *Délibérations des Assemblées Vénitiennes*, v. 1, p. 160, n<sup>o</sup> 334 (decision of the *Maggior Consiglio*, dated 1315, rejecting a petition submitted by the Venier for the sale of the island). In the codicil of his will, Frangia Venier states: *quod predictus Blasius non possit vendere nec alienare dictam partem insule, sed vadat semper in illis de cha Venerio* (A.S.V., ADC, b. 26, fasc. 5, f. 128r-v). Cf. Maltezou, «Eudaimonioannis e Venier a Cerigo», 215-216; and S. Borsari, *Studi sulle colonie veneziane in Romania nel XII secolo*, Naples 1966, p. 83.



modern-day Chora to the Bay of Kapsali, including the castle, were left out of the partition, remaining undivided and jointly held by the co-proprietors.<sup>23</sup> Since both areas combine fertile land with access to the sea, specifically to the island's two natural harbours, the Bay of Ayios Nikolaos and Kapsali respectively, it may well be supposed that the co-owners kept them undivided so as not to fragment the agricultural land and to facilitate the export of surplus produce from the island.<sup>24</sup> The castle, which overlooks Kapsali Bay and surveys the maritime zone between the islands of Kythera and Antikythera, and Crete, and according to the sources was strongly fortified, was the administrative seat of the island and the place of residence of the Venier whenever they were there.<sup>25</sup> It was precisely for this reason that the co-owners retained it jointly. Owing to their commitments as Cretan feudatories, which obliged them to remain on Crete, the Venier brothers entrusted the management of their Kytheran estates to one of their number.<sup>26</sup> This position was held by Nicolò Venier until the time of his death in the mid-fourteenth century.<sup>27</sup> He was succeeded by Frangia's father, Piero II Venier, until the spring of 1364, when the latter was compelled to surrender the island to the Venetian fleet.<sup>28</sup>

The partition of the island among the heirs of Marco Venier essentially marks

23. For the partition of the island, see Sathas, *Documents inédits*, p. 302.

24. A deed of purchase from the register of the Cretan notary Francesco Avonal highlights the procedure that was followed for the export of goods from the island of Kythera: in 1451 Francesco Venier sold to Manoli Kalotari and Giorgio Grimani from Candia 25 miliaria of Kytheran cheese and *recotta* (= recooked cheese) *de firmo*, and 15 miliaria cheese and myzethra *de respectu*, free from *dacio*, *bonum et mercadantibile de deto loco, extra ruptum et spuçolentem*, and undertook to deliver the merchandise to the buyers in six months *ad locum de Capsali et ad locum de San Dimitri*: A.S.V., *Notai di Candia*, b. 2, f. 22r (November 27, 1451); see also A.S.V., *ibidem*, f. 24r-v (December 21, 1451). Cf. Ch. Gasparis, *Γη και αγρότες στη μεσαιωνική Κρήτη, 13ος-14ος αι.*, Athens 1997, pp. 112, 297. On the production of cheese in Venetian-held territories, see D. Jacoby, «Cretan cheese: A Neglected Aspect of Venetian Trade», *Medieval and Renaissance Venice*, eds. E. E. Kittel – T. F. Madden, Chicago 1999, pp. 49-68.

25. *...el qual castello i era fortissimo*: A.S.V., *ADC*, b. 26, f. 17v.

26. Cretan feudatories were obliged to reside permanently in the towns which were situated in the same area as their fiefs and to provide military and administrative support to the state, see Gasparis, *Γη και αγρότες*, pp. 33-34, 57.

27. Nicolò Venier drew his will on October 17, 1351, see Sally McKee, *Wills from Late Medieval Venetian Crete, 1312-1420*, Washington, D.C. 1998, pp. 235-236, n° 183. According to a letter of attorney dated November 11, 1357, his death should be placed sometime before the 8th of that month, see A.S.V., *Notai di Candia*, b. 101 (not. Giovanni Gerardo), f. 122v (Cecilia, widow of Nicolò Venier, gives power of attorney to Pietro Sancarolo and Andrea Barozzi to appear on her behalf before the brothers Tito and Marco Venier).

28. Piero II was the son of Marco and the grandson of Piero I Venier. On these events see below, p. 12.

the beginning of the feudalisation of Kythera.<sup>29</sup> Although being Venetians the Venier came from a different background from the other Latin conquerors who were responsible for the introduction of western feudalism in the territories formerly belonging to the Byzantine empire, they had become well acquainted with the feudal mode of production and its institutional framework through managing their lands on Crete.<sup>30</sup> Consequently, the regime they imposed on Kythera was based on the experience they had gained from Crete, but adapted to the particularities and specific needs of their small island possession.

Once the partition of the land was completed and the various properties were marked off, the brothers proceeded to divide the population up. The anonymous sixteenth-century text gives the following description: «...*detti fratelli hebbero insieme a partire tutti gli abitanti isolani fra loro per famiglie, et per capi, in quattro parti, ciascuno de detti fratelli havendone tolto una parte, la quale era obligata a riconoscere in signore et padrone quello uno di essi, al qual era tochato in parte, et per differenza et numero de tanti padroni, vennero ad acquistar anch'essi abitanti nome di particolar servitù, la qual passa in interpretazione et nominatione di Paricho, che vuol dire servo particolare.*»<sup>31</sup> From the above it may be inferred that the division of the population was preceded by a census, which recorded all the inhabitants of the island by 'families', together with the head of each household. The phrase *per famiglie et per capi* probably indicates that the census was conducted on the one hand to collect fiscal information, and on the other to ascertain the actual size of the labour force, since the objective was to gather all the necessary financial data in order to divide the population into four groups of equal capability.

The entire population of the island, which must have been predominantly rural, was incorporated into the class of the *paroikoi*. Despite the continuity in the terminology, the personal condition of the *paroikoi* under the Venier was

29. Chryssa A. Maltezou, «Cythère: Société et économie pendant la période de la domination vénitienne», *Balkan Studies* 21/1 (1989), 34 [repr. in eadem, *Βενετική παρουσία στα Κύθηρα*, IA].

30. See D. Jacoby, *La féodalité en Grèce médiévale. Les «Assises de Romanie» sources, application et diffusion*, Paris - The Hague 1971, pp. 225-226, 295-297; idem, «Les états latins en Romanie: phénomènes sociaux et économiques (1204-1350 environ)», *XV<sup>e</sup> Congrès Internationale d'Études Byzantines. Rapports et co-rapports*, Athens 1976, p. 16 ff. [repr. in idem, *Recherches sur la Méditerranée orientale du XII<sup>e</sup> au XV<sup>e</sup> siècle. Peuples, sociétés, économies*, Variorum Reprints, London 1979]. Cf. Élisabeth Santschi, *La notion de "feudum" en Crète vénitienne. (XIII<sup>e</sup>-XV<sup>e</sup> siècles)*, Montreux 1976.

31. Sathas, *Documents inédits*, p. 302

appreciably different from that of their Byzantine counterparts. Unlike the latter, the Kytheran *paroikoi*, or *villani*, as they are termed in the Venetian documents of the fifteenth century, were not regarded as legally free.<sup>32</sup> They were completely dependant upon their lord. They were tied to his land on which they lived with their families, and had to seek his permission to leave the island, as well as giving him a written guarantee that they would return.<sup>33</sup> If they fled the island, he had the right to pursue them and bring them back.<sup>34</sup> Owing to their limited legal rights, the *paroikoi* were not allowed to enter into purchase and sales agreements nor contract loans involving sums of more than six *grossi*;<sup>35</sup> whilst they needed their lord's consent even to marry.<sup>36</sup> The status of *villano* was hereditary and passed on from father to child. The striking similarities between the status of the Kytheran *paroikoi*, as

32. For the status of the Byzantine *paroikoi*, see Jacoby, «Les états latins en Roumanie», 11-14; cf. Angeliki E. Laiou, *Peasant Society in the Late Byzantine Empire. A Social and Demographic Study*, Princeton 1977, pp. 142-158.

33. One of the arguments Levunis used in 1435 to disprove Blasio Venier's allegations with regard to his legal status, was that although Frangia Venier knew that his grandfather resided in Crete, he did not force him to return to Kythera or ask of him *qualche scrittura a cautela soa*: A.S.V., ADC, b. 26, f. 24v. Cf. Sathas, *Documents inédits*, p. 302

34. In 1384 the *camerlengi* of Crete discovered on the island a number of serfs from the estates of Tito and Thodorello Venier who had been registered as *villani del comun*, and forced them to return to Kythera: A.S.V., ADC, b. 26, f. 22r. Although many more had fled the island of Kythera and sought refuge in Crete, the Venetian authorities were only concerned about the fate of these individuals in particular because they came from the estates of the two brothers, which had been confiscated by the Republic in 1364, see below. On the treatment of escaped peasants, see D. Jacoby, «Une classe fiscale à Byzance et en Roumanie Latine: les inconnus du fisc, éleuthères ou étrangers», *Actes du XIV<sup>e</sup> Congrès International des études byzantines*, v. 2, Bucharest 1975, pp. 139-152 [repr. in idem, *Recherches sur la Méditerranée orientale du XII<sup>e</sup> au XV<sup>e</sup> siècle*, Variorum Reprints, London 1979].

35. .... *che i [villani] non può comprar ne vender alcuna cossa che sia de plui de valor che grossi 6* : A.S.V., ADC, b. 26, f. 20v; cf. Sathas, *Documents inédits*, v. 6, p. 302. In his plea Lenounis reasoned that Frangia Venier regarded his grandfather and his father, Ioannis, as a free man, because when the latter proposed to buy his share of the island for the price of 1000 hyperpers ...*eo non diseva in quella fiada: «mo se mie villani e non pode contraser si fato mercado»; ma cognosandoli per homeni aprexadi, elo consentiva vender quello perché saveva quelli la poteva comprar sença algun dubio...* Moreover, according to Levunis, Frangia had taken two consecutive loans from Ioannis, in 1419 and 1422, amounting to more than 300 hyperpers: *ibidem*, ff. 24v-25r. Blasio Venier presumably anticipated that Levunis would use this argument in order to disprove his accusations, because in his petition to the court he stated that Frangia had taken the money from Ioannis *per cambio a Zerigo de le so intradi e non cum utilidade*, that is to say not as a loan at interest but as repayment for the dues the latter owed him the past fifty years: *ibidem*, f. 22v.

36. See Sathas, *Documents inédits*, v. 6, p. 302

outlined above, and that of the *villani* of Crete suggest that the legal framework regulating their social and economic life was modelled upon the example of Crete.<sup>37</sup>

At the beginning of the fourteenth century, the island's population consisted mainly of settlers, who had come from the nearby Peloponnesian coast in the years following the recapture of Crete by the Byzantines. The demographic data for the period under discussion are lacking, but it appears that the available work force did not suffice to cultivate the land. To remedy the problem the Venier invited settlers from Crete with the promise that they would be exempt from all bonds of servitude.<sup>38</sup> The initial nucleus of free peasants (*franchi*) gradually expanded over the next few decades with the addition of a number of enfranchised *villani*. According to George Levounis's testimony, a *villano* could either be enfranchised by his lord as an act of good will or purchase his freedom for seventy hyperpers.<sup>39</sup> An official public document (*publico privilegio*), similar to that held by the new settlers, was subsequently drawn up to confirm the act of enfranchisement.<sup>40</sup> The free peasants risked losing their rights and being reduced to the status of *villano* if they were found guilty of a crime; though this could, and often did, happen for no particular reason, for the Venier *como tirani podevano condenar a so bon piacer*. The same fate apparently also awaited any freeman who married a *villana*, in accordance with an old custom that dated to the time of Nicholas Eudaimonoianis.<sup>41</sup> Certain details in Levounis's statement about the Kytheran custom raise problems. For example, could this custom date to Eudaimonoianis's time, that is, to the first half of the thirteenth century? The description of the custom accords ill with Byzantine practices; there is, on the other hand, evidence from twelfth century

37. For the status of the *villani* in Crete, see Élisabeth Santschi, «Quelques aspects du statut des non-libres en Crète au XIV<sup>e</sup> s.», *Θησαυρίσματα* 9 (1972), 104-136; cf. D. Jacoby «Les états latins en Roumanie », *passim*, for the status of dependant peasants in Latin-dominated Greece.

38. Among the first to accept the invitation of the Venier was a certain Leo Kassimatis, who left the village of Schilù in Crete and settled on Kythera with his family, see Sathas, *Documents inédits*, p. 302-303.

39. *...la custuma del ditto ser Frangia era che da tempo in tempo ello andava a Çerigo e dava recalo ali so villani e tal de lor se feria franchar tal per ypp. 70, tal per bon fin et ato...* (A.S.V., ADC, b. 26, f. 24v).

40. Sathas, *Documents inédits*, p. 303.

41. *...Apresso digo che l'isola de Çerigo fuo suzeta al despoto, fio de uno griego, el qual aveva nome Sevastos Eudemoianis o [Nicolas], lo qual Sevasto [f.] griego e revello de questa Signoria, e tutte cosse che se soto al despoto ha per usanza [che] se algun homo franco tole una villana con le soe cose reman villan, e questa si fata usanza se observa a Coron e a Modon.* (A.S.V., ADC, b. 26, f. 24r; Blasio Venier on the other hand denies the existence of this custom, *ibidem*, f. 20v.).

France, the land of the crusaders, that marriage to a person of lesser status did destroy one's free status.<sup>42</sup> It is, however, very unlikely that western practices had been introduced on the island prior to its occupation by the Venier. Levounis says that the custom was still observed in Coron and Modon. In fact, the only known regulation from the two cities dealing with the subject is a statute which prohibits the *villani de comun* from marrying their daughters to Latins – free men by definition – without the permission of the authorities, under pain of a steep fine; but it is nowhere stated that such unions endangered the latter's status.<sup>43</sup> It is worth noting that this idea is found in a royal ordinance from Cyprus, dating to 1297, which stipulated that anyone who married a female serf of the king without his permission would be reduced to serfdom. Here the king's authorization was tantamount to an act of enfranchisement, since it usually involved the payment of a sum of money from the interested party.<sup>44</sup> The marriage of a female serf and a free man normally led to the children being recognized as free, which explains why the Venier, the Venetian authorities of Coron and Modon, and the king of Cyprus were so determined to control these unions.<sup>45</sup>

The dependent peasants bore a heavier tax burden than the *franchi*, because, apart from the various taxes associated with agricultural production, they also had to pay personal taxes.<sup>46</sup> An annual head tax amounting to five hyperpers, called *daço de villanadego*, was levied on every adult *villano*. In addition to this they were obliged to do unpaid personal labor (*angarie*) for the landlord, and to give him certain contributions in kind (*canischia*), which by the second half of the fifteenth century had taken the form of money. In the fiscal registers of that period the *canischia* are always recorded together with the *telo*, whose nature is not

42. G. Duby, *Medieval Marriage, Two Models from Twelfth Century France*, trans. by E. Forster, Baltimore 1991, p. 124, n. 65. I wish to thank Professor Angeliki Laiou for her very helpful suggestions.

43. C. N. Sathas, *Documents inédits relatifs à l'histoire de la Grèce au moyen âge*, v. 4, Paris 1882, p. 20; cf. Christine Hodgetts, *The Colonies of Coron and Modon under Venetian Administration, 1204-1400*, London 1974 [unpublished PhD thesis], pp. 302-305.

44. This prohibition was extended in 1396 to female serfs of seigniorial domains, see J. Richard, «Freedom and Servitude in Cyprus and Rhodes: An Assize Dating from 1369», *Mediterranean Historical Review* 10/1-2 (1995), special issue in honor of David Jacoby [= *Intercultural Contacts in the Medieval Mediterranean*, ed. by B. Arbel, London 1996], 272-283.

45. Santschi, «Quelques aspects du statut de non-libres», 118.

46. On the financial obligations of the Kytheran peasants, see A.S.V., *ADC*, b. 26, f. 20v (Levounis case) and f. 128v (decision of the ducal court of Crete dated December 15, 1435, authorizing the seizure of the revenues that Frangia Venier had bequeathed to Blasio and Marco Venier). For the obligations of peasants in Crete, see Gasparis, *Γη και αγρότες*, pp. 183-200.

defined.<sup>47</sup> Both free and dependant peasants paid the *decatia*, a tax on livestock amounting to six *grossi* per head. Also connected with stockbreeding was the right to pasture livestock, for which the *franchi* had to pay two hyperpers and the *paroikoi* ten *grossi* per hundred head. Lastly, the peasants were obliged to pay the *terçaria*, which was rent in proportion of their harvest. Although the *terçaria* was theoretically proportional, representing one third of the yield, on Kythera at the beginning of the fifteenth century, it was fixed: for every twenty-eight measures of seed sown, the peasant had to give the feudatory twenty-eight measures of the produce.<sup>48</sup> Thus the landlord's share was assured, regardless of the actual harvest.

Despite its size (277 square kilometres), the island of Kythera is mainly mountainous, with a precipitous rocky coastline and limited arable land. If to this one adds the limited human resources and the imponderable factor of the weather, it does not come as a surprise that the agricultural production of the island sometimes failed to cover the needs of the inhabitants. Over a period of forty years, the Venier appealed to the Republic at least three times for permission to export grain from Crete to save their subjects from the spectre of famine. However, the Venetian authorities did not always meet their demands. The first shortages occurred only a few years after the four brothers had taken over the island. Thus, in 1313 the Great Council gave them permission to export fifteen *staia* of corn annually from Crete, on condition that the price of a hundred measures did not exceed twenty hyperpers. However, the Venier apparently found the solution unsatisfactory, for they appealed again to the Great Council two years later with a proposal to sell the island. In their petition they stated that they had made great sacrifices in their efforts to sustain the island and asked Venice either to buy it at a reasonable price or to permit them to sell it to a third party; failing this they requested permission to export 2,000 *staia* of Cretan corn. The Great Council rejected both proposals regarding the sale of the island, but gave them permission to export 14,000 measures of corn from Crete annually for a period of three years.<sup>49</sup> The silence of the sources over the next few years suggests that this solution effectively combated the food crisis. Although we

47. In 13th and 14th- c. Peloponese, the *τέλος* was the basic tax levied on the household of each *villano* and it was equivalent to the Byzantine *ακρόστιχο*. The term is also found in Naxos during the 16th c., and very rarely in Crete, see Gasparis, *Γη και αγρότες*, p. 188, n. 1. The fifteenth-century fiscal registers will be discussed elsewhere.

48. In Crete the annual rent for land cultivated by one ox was 30-40 measures of grain in 1328, and it represented 1/3 of the production, see Gasparis, *Γη και αγρότες*, pp. 194 -195. For the meaning of the term *mensura*, see *ibidem*, p. 43.

49. Thiriet, *Délibérations des Assemblées vénitiennes*, v. 1, p. 153, n° 294 (August 28, 1313) and p. 160, n° 334 (October 28, 1315).

have no information whatsoever about the profits of the Venier from the exploitation of their lands in the period before the mid-fifteenth century, we may assume that productivity increased to a fairly satisfactory level after the arrival of the settlers, since the co-owners did not again express the desire to be rid of their island. We do not know whether the great plague reached Kythera. Shortly after, however, in 1354, a new food crisis struck the island forcing the Venier to turn once more to the metropolis for aid. But instead of the 2,000 *staia* they had originally requested, the Venetian Senate allowed them to export only 1,000 from Crete.<sup>50</sup>

From 1331 onwards, Kythera was included in all the treaties concluded between the Duke of Crete and the Turkish emirates of Menteshe and Aydin.<sup>51</sup> But even so, the Turks continued to make occasional raids on the island throughout the fourteenth century, devastating the countryside and carrying many inhabitants into slavery, thus disrupting agricultural life and aggravating the existing problems. In August 1347, the Council of the *Rogati* in Crete resolved to give Nicolò Venier a force of a hundred men for a month to drive out fifty-six Turks who were ravaging Kythera.<sup>52</sup> The case of the Monemvasiot Andreas Levounis, who was abducted by Turkish pirates and taken to Asia Minor, is illustrative of the insecurity that reigned on the island in the mid-fourteenth century. Admittedly, his capture turned out to be a blessing in disguise, for he managed to escape and flee to Crete, where he became involved in trade, engaging in considerable commercial activity in both the Levant and the West. Still, he maintained his ties with Kythera, especially with Frangia Venier, who, we learn, held him in affection and esteem *como homo virtuoso e zintilomo dela patria soa*.<sup>53</sup>

50. Theotokis, *Θεσπίσματα της Βενετικής Γερουσίας*, v. 2/2, p. 16; Thiriet, *Régests des délibérations du Sénat de Venise concernant la Romanie*, v. 1, n° 268 (July 29, 1354).

51. Elisabeth A. Zachariadou, *Trade and Crusade, Venetian Crete and the Emirates of Menteshe and Aydin (1300-1415)*, Venice 1983, pp. 93-102.

52. The Council also undertook to cover in common with the Council of the Feudatories the soldiers' expenses, see *Duca di Candia, Quaternus Consiliorum 1340-1350*, ed. Paola Ratti Vidulich, Venice 1976 [Comitato per la pubblicazione delle fonti relative alla storia di Venezia], pp. 90-91, n°s 168 (August 19, 1347) and 169 (August 20, 1347).

53. *...Et anchor narar la condition de ser Andrea Levuni, che fuo mio avo, ello fo dele contrad[e] de Malvasia e trovandosse esser a Zerigo el fuo prexo de turchi, za fa gran tempo, et ello se fe recatar del so proprio e vene qui in Candia de Turchia e remax[e] citadin proprio, e [...] e compra possession in questa terra scrite sula soa persona, e dixte la scrittura ab Andrea Malvasioto, le qual possession, dapuo la morte del ditto mio avo, mio pare possedete quelle et io Zorçi Levuni al presente tengno e possedo quelli come desedente dal predeto Andrea Malvasiotti, per le qual paga libello ala camera de Crede; lo qual mio avo se marida in questa terra e fuo gran mercadante; e teniva e galdeva la soa richeza a so bon piaser; et era in so libertade et usava*

After the death of Bartolomeo II Venier, his share of the island passed to his sons, Tito, Thodorello, Cyril, and the illegitimate Marco;<sup>54</sup> while Piero I and Gabriel Venier bequeathed their shares to their sons, Marco and Zanachi respectively. In 1345, by order of Nicolò Venier and the heirs of his three brothers, a new record was made of the lands and the *villani* living on them with a view to resolving practical issues, such as the apportionment of the property among the heirs, and to consolidating the individual rights of the co-proprietors.<sup>55</sup> Nicolò Venier, the last of the four original lords of Kythera to die, arranged in his will in 1351 to give his share to his nephew Tito and Tito's half-brother Marco, sons of his brother Bartolomeo.<sup>56</sup> Two years earlier, Nicolò had come to an agreement with his nephews that he would leave them his entire estate, movable and immovable, on condition that they paid off his debts.<sup>57</sup>

In the summer of 1363, disgruntled with the ever-increasing demands of the metropolis, the Venetian feudatories of Crete, led by Marco Gradenigo and Tito Venier, joined forces with the Kallergi brothers and overthrew Venetian rule on the island.<sup>58</sup> Having tried and failed to restore order by peaceful means, Venice decided

---

*la mercadantia et in Levante et in Ponente, senza molestia e contrasto de alguna persona como homo libero; e non fuo mente humana che maginasse ne disese che ello fosse villan; e ser Frangia in stesso lo honorava, e quando lo deto mio avo passa de questa vita, ser Frangia Venier haveva plu de [...], lo qual ser Frangia trovava lo ditto mio avo et amava et apresava quello come homo virtuoso e zintilomo dela patria soa...: A.S.V., ADC, b. 26, f. 24r-v. The raid on Kythera occurred shortly before 1345, because in the census of that year Andreas Levounis was registered as missing – seized by the Turks, see below and A.S.V., *ibidem*, f. 18v. On the Levouni family and its connections with Crete, see Chryssa A. Maltezos, «Κρητοκυθηραϊκά. Η κρητική οικογένεια Κλαδούρη και το Συμβούλιο των ευγενών στα Κύθηρα», *Θησαυρίσματα* 12 (1975), 257-291 [repr. in eadem, *Βενετική παρουσία στα Κύθηρα*, ΣΤ'].*

54. According to the anonymous text, Bartolomeo's estates passed to his sons Thodorello, Cyril, Marco and Polo, see Sathas, *Documents inédits*, p. 303. In fact Marco and Polo were not Bartolomeo's sons, but his grandsons, the children of his illegitimate son Marco. On Marco and Polo Venier, see Thiriet, *Régestes des délibérations du Sénat*, v. 1, p. 134, n° 539 (June 3, 1374). In his account Blasio omits by mistake the name of Marco Venier : A.S.V., ADC, b. 26, f. 17r and f. 21v.

55. A.S.V., ADC, b. 26, f. 17r.

56. See above n. 27

57. This is why Nicolò cancelled a previous act by which he gave his share to the island to his nephew Marco, the son of his brother Piero Venier. For the settlement of Nicolò's debts, see Theotokis, *Θεσπίσματα της Βενετικής Γερουσίας*, v. 2/1, pp. 179-181, n° 33 (June 2, 1374).

58. Tito Venier's troubles with Venice and the Cretan authorities pre-dated the rebellion. In 1355 he was involved in a controversy with Francesco Muazzo that disrupted the political life of the colony. All we know is that the Senate considered their actions subversive and consequently confiscated their property. However, with the intervention of the Council of Feudatories they



to quell the rebellion in the colony. At the same time, it took steps to prevent the revolt from spreading to the rest of the Venetian-held territories, including Kythera, which owing to both its geographical position and its connection with the Venier, the Republic sought to bring under its own control as soon as possible.<sup>59</sup> In the spring, probably, of 1364, the Venetian fleet en route to Crete sailed into the Bay of Kapsali. The first step taken by the captain of the fleet, Domenico Michiel, and the two provisors accompanying the military forces was to win the islanders over. Having secured their co-operation and given them a written assurance that they would be enfranchised once Venice had asserted its rule over the island, the provisors sent an embassy to Piero II Venier – who had shut himself in the castle – demanding his surrender. In exchange for his co-operation, they promised him the entire island, together with land on Crete. Piero asked for twenty days' grace in which to notify his father, Marco, on Crete, and then handed the island over to the Venetian provisor Nicolò Soranzo, who had meanwhile returned to Kapsali with two galleys.<sup>60</sup>

Immediately thereafter, Piero Venier left Kythera and joined the Venetian fleet. As the captain of an armed galley, he undertook the negotiations for the surrender of Chania, Apokorona (*Bicorno*), and Rethymnon, and later participated in the campaign to recapture the castle of Mirabello. For this reason, he and his son Frangia were spared the fate of the rest of the Venier, who were exiled to Venice, where they remained under surveillance for some ten years. However, in May 1365, in the course of an attack against the rebel forces in the village of Bonifaccio, Piero II contracted the plague and died a week later.<sup>61</sup> Frangia was a minor at the time of

---

were absolved from all accusations and they regained their lands. Although this incident is not directly linked to the rebellion of 1363, it is indicative of the tension that existed between the Cretan feudatories and the mother city. For the disputes between the Republic and the feudatories of Crete during the 13th c., see Fr. Thiriet, «Sui dissidi sorti tra il Comune di Venezia e i suoi feudatari di Creta nel Trecento», *Archivio Storico Italiano* 114 (1956), 699-712 [repr. in idem, *Études sur la Romanie gréco-vénitienne X<sup>e</sup>-XV<sup>e</sup> siècles*, London 1977, n° VI]; cf. idem, «À propos de la seigneurie des Venier sur Cerigo», 205-210. For the revolt of St Tito, see Maria Maddalena Sarnataro, «La rivolta di Candia del 1363-65 nelle fonti veneziane», *Studi Veneziani* 31 (1996), 137-153; see also Sally McKee, «The Revolt of St Tito in Fourteenth-Century Venetian Crete: A Reassessment», *Mediterranean Historical Review* 9/2 (1994), 173-204; and eadem, *Uncommon Dominion. Venetian Crete and the Myth of Ethnic Purity*, Philadelphia 2000, pp.133-167.

59. Thiriet, *Délibérations des Assemblées vénitienes*, v. 1, pp. 261-262, n° 709 (October 8-9, 1363, summary), pp. 326-328 (full text); and pp. 262-263, n° 712 (October 20, 1363).

60. For these events, see A.S.V., *ADC*, b. 26 ff. 17r-18r; cf. Sathas, *Documents inédits*, v. 6, pp. 303-304.

61. His body was taken to Candia where it was buried with honours in the church of St Francis. On Piero Venier's activity against the rebels, see A.S.V., *ADC*, b. 26, ff. 17v-18r; cf. Sathas, *Documents inédits*, v. 6, pp. 304-306.

his father's death, and since he had already lost his mother, he was placed in the care of his aunt, the wife of his father's brother. But she was unable to look after his interests and, thus, all the promises made to his father with regard to the island of Kythera as well as the fact that he had remained loyal to Venice during the rebellion were forgotten.<sup>62</sup>

In 1374, six years after the suppression of the revolt of St Tito, the Republic allowed the Venier to return home (*a casa soa*). Shortly before leaving the city of the lagoons for Crete, the Venier petitioned the Senate to restore Kythera to them.<sup>63</sup> In October of that year, by order of the doge, Andrea Contarini, the Duke of Crete invited all those with a claim to the island to come forward and produce the necessary titles. At the same time, he asked Rafael Baseio, the castellan of Kythera, to make inquiries as to whether there were any others with an interest in the island and to gather information about the former owners and their property. The castellan's findings were recorded in the Register *dei testimonii* of the Duke of Crete a few months later, but it was not until 1384 that the Venetian authorities finally decided on the fate of the island.<sup>64</sup>

Of the twenty-four lots into which the island had been partitioned, Venice retained  $9\frac{3}{4}$ , corresponding to the shares of Tito Venier and his brothers Thodorello and Cyril, who had been decapitated and had their property confiscated because of their part in the revolt. The remaining 14 and  $\frac{1}{4}$  lots were restored to the Venier. Ten years later, however, the Cretan authorities reclaimed  $1\frac{1}{4}$  as part of the estate of Cyril Venier. Frangia was awarded the six lots due to him from his father's share; he later bought a further 5 and  $\frac{2}{5}$  from his cousins Marco and Polo Venier, so that by the time of his death in 1424 he had come to possess a total of 11 and  $\frac{2}{5}$ , that is, almost half of the island.<sup>65</sup>

Venice's decision, to allow the Venier to return to Kythera was not followed by the restoration of their political powers, which they were never to regain. From 1368 onwards, the island was administered by a castellan, placed under the Duke of Crete. The castellans were appointed by the metropolis and their tenure of office lasted one to two years; at the beginning of the sixteenth century their salary amounted to 200 ducats. Their main duty was to oversee the collection of the taxes and other revenues due to Venice from the exploitation of its lands on the island. These, together with the various expenses, they were required to list in detail in two

62. A.S.V., *ADC*, b. 26, f. 18r-v.

63. Theotokis, *Θεσπίσματα της Βενετικής Γερονσίας*, v. 2/1, p. 184, n° 36 (decision issued by the enlarged Senate on August 17, 1374); cf. A.S.V., *ADC*, b. 26, f. 18v.

64. A.S.V., *ADC*, b. 26, ff. 18r-v, 21r-v.

65. A.S.V., *ibidem*; cf. Sathas, *Documents inédits*, v. 6, pp. 304-306.

sets of books, one of which was to be kept at all times by the scribe to prevent irregularities. Part of the money they collected was subsequently sent to the treasury of the commune in Crete. As was the case with all Venetian officials handling public funds, the castellans were accountable to the department of the *officiales rationum veterum*. And they were also subject to periodic inspections by the Syndics of the Levant. On matters of civil and, after 1417, criminal law, the castellans were dependent upon the Cretan authorities. Lastly, they supervised the governors of the island's three castles, who were normally elected every year. Defence expenses and the cost of maintaining the island's fortifications were jointly borne by Venice and the Venier.<sup>66</sup>

In keeping with its standard practice of preserving the pre-existing regime in the territories it occupied, in so far as this posed no threat to its sovereignty, Venice «maintained the feudal system introduced by the Venier on the island of Kythera and became a part of it, not as a suzerain, but as a feudatory».<sup>67</sup> Through its representatives on the island, it continued to exploit the land and the peasants living on it in exactly the same manner as the Venier had done a century earlier. But although the islanders still had to endure the oppressive taxation and the corvées imposed by the feudatories, now, perhaps for the first time, they felt safe under the protective wing of Venice.<sup>68</sup> George Levounis, in his statement to the ducal court of Crete, provides an important insight into the sentiments of his contemporaries toward the old versus the new regime. He describes the Venier as tyrants and accuses them of highhandedness in their treatment of the Kytheran people. First and foremost with regard to the partition of the island, for they «...partiva le cosse

66. For the duties of the castellans, see Fr. Thiriet, *Régestes des délibérations du Sénat*, v. 2, Paris - The Hague 1959, p. 151, n° 1636 (January 19, 1417); p. 152, n° 1639 (January 31, 1417), pp. 171-172, n° 1722 (January 4, 1419). For their salary, see S. M. Theotokis, *Ιστορικά έγγραφα εκδιδόμενα εκ του Αρχείου της Βενετίας. Αποφάσεις του Μείζονος Συμβουλίου Βενετίας 1255-1669*, Athens 1933, pp. 185-186, n° 1 (April 14, 1504).

67. Maltezou, «Cythère: Société et économie», 36.

68. In 1420 by order of the castellan of Kythera Nicolò Premarin the rent paid by the peasants in proportion to their harvest was reduced from 28 measures of grain for every 28 measures of seed that was sown to 20 measures of grain (-28,6%), and the *decatia* from 6 to 4 *grossi* (-33,35%). Premarin also ordered that grapes were to be gathered once a year instead of twice. However, the castellan's attempt to alleviate the burdens of the peasants met with the opposition of Frangia Venier, who appealed against his decision to the ducal court of Crete. Frangia died in 1424, shortly before the pronouncement of the court, and thus, two years later, his heir Blasio appealed to the Council of Forty in Venice which declared the castellan's fiscal reforms null and void, and ordered that the feudatory be paid in restitution the lost profits of the past six years: A.S.V., *ADC*, b. 26, ff. 128v-129r.

*che non fuo soe; e si fata la division non prezudega la raxon de alguna persona, perché quelli de cha Venier come tirani feva le division a so bon piaser, e parlava in soa propria utilità, e meteva leçe e preteva leçe a so modo e non era qui le corezzesse. ... Perché quelli tirani non era sotomesi ad alguna Signoria ... perché era signori e feva quello che i voleva, perché non sotozazeva ad apelacion de algun Reçimento...»<sup>69</sup> By contrast to the Venier, who concentrated all legislative and judicial powers in their own hands and were answerable to no-one, the new administration was subject to the regimen of Crete which in turn was liable to Venice; and what is more, justice was now the prerogative of the state and not of private individuals.*

If for Levounis the Venetian Republic constituted a barrier to the feudatories' arbitrary conduct, for the Orthodox monk Cheilas it represented the security that was so vital to the survival and welfare of his fellow-countrymen. When the Venier took over Kythera, he writes, insecurity continued to reign on the island, and the inhabitants lived in constant fear. Until God visited the island, «...καὶ ἐξάνειλεν ἡ ὑπέρλαμπρος Αὐθεντία ἡμῶν, ἡ θεοφρούρητος, τὸ Κομόνιον, λέγω, τῆς Βενετίας... καὶ ἐκράτησε τῆς χειρὸς ἡμῶν τῆς δεξιᾶς, καὶ ἔστησεν ἐπὶ πέτραν στερεὰν τοὺς πόδας ἡμῶν, καὶ κατεύθυνε τὰ διαβήματα ἡμῶν εἰς ὁδὸν εὐθεῖαν .... καὶ ἐπῆραν ἄνεσιν οἱ ὀλίγοι ἄνθρωποι ἐκεῖνοι καὶ ἤρξαντο κατὰ μικρὸν αἰσθάνεσθαι ἀνέσεως, ἤπλωσαν πάντες καὶ ἐπίασαν τὸν τόπον τοῦτον... καὶ πάλιν καὶ κάστρα καὶ ναοὺς ἐποίουν» (... and thereafter came the illustrious Signoria, the Commune of Venice... and she took us by the hand, and gave us solid ground to stand on, and guided us to the right road... this brought relief to the people, and little by little they began to feel safe and secure, and they spread and occupied the land... and they began building castles and churches again).<sup>70</sup>

In this climate of newfound security, new settlers would begin to arrive on the island from Crete and the nearby coast of Monemvasia. Mostly craftsmen and artisans, they would form the nucleus of a new social class that would gradually increase both in number and in influence until its existence was officially recognised by the Venetian authorities: the class of the *cittadini*. However, Cheilas does not limit himself to merely singing the praises of Venice, but, as Professor Maltezou tellingly points out, he goes one step further and contemplates the

69. A.S.V., ADC, b. 26, ff. 25r-26r.

70. I. Veloudos, *Χρονικόν περί του εν Κυθήροις μοναστηρίου του αγίου Θεοδώρου νυν πρώτον εξ ανεκδότου χειρογράφου μετά σημειώσεων δημοσιευθέν*, Venice 1868, pp. β', ε'; Hopf, *Chroniques gréco-romanes*, pp. 347-348; cf. Chryssa A. Maltezou, «Το Χρονικό του Χειλά. Κοινωνικά και ιδεολογικά προβλήματα στα Κύθηρα τον 15ο αι.», *Σύμμεικτα* 8 (1989), 22-23 [repr. in eadem, *Βενετική παρουσία στα Κύθηρα*, IB].

historical needs of his time. He sees Venice as the only state capable of assuming its obligations toward Christendom, which was menaced by the infidels.<sup>71</sup>

With the turn of the century, the castellan of Kythera was replaced by a *proeditore e castellano*, who essentially had the same duties. These changes in the administrative nomenclature reflect Venice's new interest in the island of Kythera after the fall of Modon and Coron to the Turks.

71. Maltezos, «Το Χρονικό του Χειλά», 23.

ΕΛΛΗΝΙΚΟ ΙΝΣΤΙΤΟΥΤΟ ΒΥΖΑΝΤΙΝΩΝ  
ΚΑΙ ΜΕΤΑΒΥΖΑΝΤΙΝΩΝ ΣΠΟΥΔΩΝ ΒΕΝΕΤΙΑΣ  
ΟΜΙΛΟΣ ΚΥΘΗΡΙΩΝ ΠΑΝΕΠΙΣΤΗΜΙΑΚΩΝ

Συνέδρια – 8

## Βενετία και Κύθηρα



Πρακτικά τοῦ Διεθνoῦς Συμποσίου  
Βενετία, 6-7 Δεκεμβρίου 2002

Ἐπιμέλεια  
ΜΑΡΙΝΑ ΚΟΥΜΑΝΟΥΔΗ - ΧΡΥΣΑ ΜΑΛΤΕΖΟΥ

Βενετία 2003