

ISTITUTO ELLENICO
DI STUDI BIZANTINI
E POSTBIZANTINI DI VENEZIA

Convegni - 13

I Greci durante la venetocrazia: Uomini, spazio, idee (XIII - XVIII sec.)

Atti del Convegno Internazionale di Studi
Venezia, 3-7 dicembre 2007

a cura di
Chryssa Maltezou - Angeliki Tzavara - Despina Vlassi

VENEZIA 2009

ΕΛΛΗΝΙΚΟ ΙΝΣΤΙΤΟΥΤΟ ΒΥΖΑΝΤΙΝΩΝ
ΚΑΙ ΜΕΤΑΒΥΖΑΝΤΙΝΩΝ ΣΠΟΥΔΩΝ ΒΕΝΕΤΙΑΣ

Συνέδρια – 13

***Βενετοκρατούμενος Έλληνισμός:
Άνθρωποι, χώρος, ιδέες (13ος-18ος αί.)***

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BENETIA 2009

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MARINA KOUMANOUDI

*Fragments of an Island Economy:
The Venier Kytheran Estate Records (15th c.)*

Blasio Venier, son of the late Antonio, from the *contratta* of San Moisé was a typical fifteenth-century Venetian merchant and seaman. He was typical not in terms of the annual turnover of his commercial activities or the actual net worth of the fortune he amassed during his lifetime, but in that his investment choices and the diversification of his business affairs reflected the general trend of the mercantile establishment in Venice during this period.¹

From his marriage with Lucia Contarini, Blasio had four sons, Marco, who later become Captain of Crete, Moisé, Bernardo and Francesco.² Besides being at one time a galley master, both he and his sons engaged in international trade, exporting silver and importing spices –pepper in particular– as well as other commodities from Alexandria in Egypt, Syria and Crete. They participated in temporary joint ventures formed for a particular purchase or to finance the voyage of merchant galleys, and on various occasions acted on behalf of relatives and associates who were abroad, paying taxes due at Venice, and settling accounts and bills receivable. In addition to their commercial investments, the Venier invested in government bonds, availing themselves of the opportunities offered by the state to increase their wealth.³ To the family's diverse assets,

1. On the attitudes and qualities of fourteenth and fifteenth-century Venetian merchants, see Fr. Lane, *Andrea Barbarigo. Merchant of Venice, 1418-1449*, New York 1967, pp. 4-5, 11-15.

2. Marco Barbaro, *Arbori de' patritii veneti*, Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana, *cod. marc. It. VII*, 928 (8597), f. 183r-v.

3. Archivio di Stato di Venezia (hereafter cited as A.S.V.), *Procuratori di San Marco*, Misti, b. 3A contains, among other private papers of the Venier family, business records,

an estate was added in 1424, situated on the small island of Kythera (Cerigo), between Crete and the southern Peloponnese.

The estate was bequeathed to Blasio by Franghia Venier, a collateral relation who died without male progeny, on the following conditions: that he would discharge the legator's debts, that he would endow each one of his nieces and nephews with the sum of 1,000 hyperpers, and that the estate would remain in the Venier family in perpetuity.⁴ Franghia's decision to leave his island estate to this particular distant relation rather than to one of his closer relatives from the Kytheran branch of the Venier clan appears to have been influenced by an important personal service which Blasio had rendered him in the past. The vicissitudes of Franghia Venier's family, once lords of the island of Kythera, are too well-known to treat them here in detail. It is, however, necessary to briefly repeat some of the facts in order to establish the connection between the two men. Following the participation of the Venier in the revolt of Saint Tito in Crete (1363-1367), the family was dispossessed of their island lordship and Kythera was placed under the direct control of the Venetian Republic. When the political situation finally settled down, the surviving members of the family reclaimed their estates and returned on the island, with the exception of Franghia Venier who delayed to do so because he was a minor at the time and had not been informed of his rights.⁵ According to the genealogist Marco Barbaro, Blasio, a ship master at the time (*patrono d'una sua nave*), rescued Franghia from pirates, who had abducted him while sailing to Venice for the purpose of reclaiming his inheritance, and subsequently introduced him to his family, whose assistance, it is implied, was instrumental in regaining his patrimony.⁶ That Franghia was

referring to commercial transactions, various investments and services rendered which offer important insight into their money-making operations. On the office of the Procurators of San Marco and the importance of their archive for the study of the economic history of Venice, see R. C. Mueller, «The Procurators of San Marco in the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Centuries: A Study of the Office as a Financial and Trust Institution», *Studi Veneziani* 13 (1971), 105-220; Lane, *Andrea Barbarigo*, p. 138.

4. The content of Franghia Venier's testament is partly reproduced in a decision passed by the ducal court of Crete in 15 December 1435 on a controversy concerning the testator's legacies, A.S.V., *Archivio Duca di Candia* (hereafter cited as *ADC*), b. 26, f. 128r-v (18r-v). The testament was drawn up in April 1424 by *pre* Zan Torcello, notary of Venice.

5. For the period of the Venier rule over Kythera, see Marina Koumanoudi, «Illi de Ca' Venier: The First Venetian Lords of Kythera», *Venezia e Cerigo. Atti del Simposio Internazionale. Venezia, 6-7 dicembre 2002*, eds. Marina Koumanoudi - Chryssa Maltezou, Venice 2002, pp. 101-103 (with previous bibliography).

6. Barbaro, *Arbori de' patritii veneti*, f. 182r.

greatly indebted to Blasio for his support and kindness while he was in Venice is corroborated by the anonymous sixteenth century writer of the *Antique Memorie dell'isola di Cerigo*.⁷ It should be noted that Blasio later gained government permission to break the entail established by the will on condition that the funds from the sale of the estate be invested either in government bonds or in the acquisition of property on Crete. Nevertheless, neither he nor his descendants ever exercised their right to alienate the estate, evidently not so much out of respect for their benefactor's dying wish, as the writer of the *Antique Memorie* emphatically states, but because they considered this to be an asset worth holding on to.⁸ In this respect, their way of thinking was in keeping with the value judgments of many other contemporary merchant families who, having acquired their wealth through commerce, now opted for safer and less bothersome forms of investment.⁹

Among the private papers of Blasio's son Moisé I and his grandson Moisé II which are preserved in the *Procuratori di San Marco* series of the Venetian State Archive there are various documents directly or indirectly concerning the administration of the Venier family estate on Kyhtera. Of these the most informative are two account books recording the income and expenses (*intrate e spexe*) of the estate for the years 1434-1437, and 1444-1447 respectively,¹⁰ and a ledger containing overdue tenant payments for the latter period.¹¹ Our

7. *Documents inédits relatifs à l'histoire de la Grèce au moyen age*, ed. C. N. Sathas, vol. 6, Paris 1884, pp. 305-306.

8. *Ibid.*, p. 306.

9. On real estate investments by Venetian merchants, see Lane, *Andrea Barbarigo*, pp. 23, 33-44; see also idem, *I mercati di Venezia*, trans. in Italian E. Basaglia, Turin 1996², pp. 241-242. On investments in the Terraferma in particular, see M. Pozza, «I proprietari fondiari in Terraferma», *Storia di Venezia dalle origini alla caduta della Serenissima*, vol. 2, *L'età del Comune*, eds. G. Cracco - G. Ortalli, Rome 1995, pp. 661-680.

10. A.S.V., *Procuratori di San Marco*, Misti, b. 3A. The register covering the years 1434-1437 was kept by Blasio Venier (hereafter cited as reg. BV) on the basis of information supplied by his agent on the estate and his son Moisé. It consists of 3 unnumbered folios, in a crude attempt at employing the double entry system. The first entry is dated March 26, 1434 and the last May 26, 1437. The second register consists of 7 folios, also without pagination, bound in the middle with a string. The inscription on the cover reads *Conto de le intrate de Cerigo del 1444, 1445, 1446, 1447 ministrade per mi Moixe Venier con tute spexe fate come in questo apar, desegnado a Bernardo Venier mio fradello, adi 27 mazo 1448* (hereafter cited as reg. MV). A second, but incomplete, copy of this register exists in the same file. On double entry bookkeeping and accounting methods employed by merchants from the 14th century onwards, see Lane, *Andrea Barbarigo*, pp. 153-181.

11. *Ibid.* This is a much larger volume than the previous two; it is also in double entry style and the entries fill 68 folios (hereafter cited as reg. MV 1444-1447).

picture of the estate logistics is supplemented by an extract from the register of the castellan of Kythera recording rents in proportion of the harvest due to the Venier for the years 1449-1450,¹² and a number of small registers and loose pages from the years 1447, 1448, 1453, 1457 and 1465,¹³ listing receivables and various articles held in pledge for the purchase of wheat. In addition to these account records, there are three notarial acts: a) an act of emancipation dated May 8, 1438, by which Moisé I Venier was freed from his father's authority; b) a procuration, dated January 24, 1444 Venetian style, by which Blasio Venier empowered his son Moisé to deal with the affairs of the estate; and c) Moisé's testament dated July 26 1448. And last, a letter which Moisé wrote to a certain Nicolò Venier three days after he had drawn up his will.¹⁴

The material drawn from these documents sheds light on the estate administration and to a much lesser degree on the results of the Venier family managerial decisions. Furthermore, it contains indirect references to various other related economic and social issues such as the organisation of production and consumption on the estate, the forms by which peasant labour was exploited, the relationships which bound the tenants to the landlords, the condition and activities of the peasant group on the island of Kythera. It is true that owing to the fragmentary and diverse nature of the sources the picture which emerges is often distorted and blurred. But despite occasional frustrations, the significance of these documents for the study of a regional paradigm should by no means be underestimated, particularly in view of the scarcity of similar sources for Greek areas under Venetian rule other than Crete during the same period; more important still since, if combined with later evidence from the island, the information supplied affords for interesting comparisons over time.¹⁵ This having been said,

12. *Ibid.* The document (hereafter Terzarie) was first cited by Professor Chryssa A. Maltezou, «Cythère. Société et économie pendant la période de la domination vénitienne», *Balkan Studies* 21/1 (1989), 40 n. 23 [=Βενετική παρουσία στα Κύθηρα. Αρχαιολογικές μαρτυρίες, Athens 1991, n° 11].

13. *Ibid.* A bound register, dated November 22, 1447, consisting of 9 folios in double entry style, which records wheat sold from the Venier granary, is written in the hand of Moisé I. A list of debtors from the same year seems to be in the hand of Nicolò Venier. The rest of the documents dated 1447 and 1448 appear to be mostly later copies from Moisé and Nicolò Venier's registers, in various hands—at least one was made by Moisé's son Gerolamo. On Nicolò and his connection with the Venier family, see below.

14. *Ibid.*

15. On the society and economy of the island during the period of Venetian rule with

I should point out that the present paper does not purport to provide an extensive treatment of the agrarian economy of the island. My intention at this stage of the investigation is to broach the main themes arising from the examination of the material on hand.

The island of Kythera played a marginal role in the political and economic developments of the Eastern Mediterranean throughout the middle ages. Despite its privileged position on the crossroads of the maritime routes to the East, the island did not acquire strategic importance until the 16th century. Moreover, its exclusively agrarian economy, aimed at subsistence, produced very little surplus for the market in order for Kythera to ever become a commercial centre. Society on the island was divided into two distinct categories: the landowners and the peasant-«farmers». The latter constituted the great majority of the local population which had been relegated to the rank of villeins when the Venier came into possession of the island, regardless of their previous status. Settlers were invited on the island early on under the promise of exemption from servile obligations with a view to reinforcing the constantly decreasing manpower. To the same end, the Venetian authorities and individual landlords promoted the manumission of villeins from the second half of the 14th century onwards. Thus, by the second quarter of the 15th century, the peasant group was composed by individuals enjoying varied juridical and economic status.¹⁶

The estate which Blasio inherited from Franghia Venier in 1424 corre-

emphasis on and the last two centuries, see Maltezos, «Cythère. Société et économie», 33-43; eadem, «A Contribution to the Historical Geography of the island of Kythera during the Venetian Occupation», *Charanis Studies. Essays in Honour of Peter Charanis*, New Jersey 1980, pp. 151-175 [= *Βενετική παρουσία στα Κύθηρα*, n° 9]; eadem, «Ο χώρος και οι άνθρωποι: Συγκρότηση του πληθυσμού στα Κύθηρα της βενετικής περιόδου», *Πρακτικά Ζ' Πανιωνίου Συνεδρίου. Λευκάδα, 26-30 Μαΐου 2002*, vol. 2, *Ο χώρος και τα δημογραφικά μορφώματα. Οι κύριοι συντελεστές της οικονομίας* [Εταιρεία Λευκαδικών Μελετών], Athens 2004, pp. 290-299. For the 13th through the 15th centuries, see Koumanoudi, «Illi de Ca' Venier», pp. 87-106 (with previous bibliography). For an overview of the economy of the island and a historical outline of the period of Venetian rule, see Ch. Gasparis, «Cerigo sotto il dominio veneto: problemi economici di un'isola di importanza strategica», *Venezia e Cerigo*, pp. 107-116; K. G. Tsiknakis, «Una lanterna nell'Arcipelago. Profilo storico di Cerigo durante il periodo veneto», pp. 73-85 in the same volume. On some aspects of the economy of the island in the third quarter of the 16th century see the introduction to the edition of the acts of *Εμμανουήλ Κασσιμάτης: νοτάριος Κυθήρων (1560-1582)*, ed. Em. Drakakis [Εταιρεία Κυθηραϊκών Μελετών], Athens 1999, pp. 23-42.

16. Gasparis, «Cerigo sotto il dominio veneto», pp. 107-116.

sponded to almost half of the island. Franghia's patrimony consisted of 6 lots out of the 24 into which the island had originally been divided by his ancestors in the beginning of the fourteenth century. He later, however, purchased portions of land from his cousins and thus by the time of his death he had come to possess 11 and $\frac{1}{4}$ lots. The estate also carried with it certain seigneurial prerogatives. For, although Venice had stripped the Venier family of their rights of jurisdiction when it had taken control of the island, it had maintained the feudal practices which they had introduced at an earlier date. With the exception of a relatively insignificant part held by Franghia's relations and various other owners, the remaining territory –corresponding to 11 lots– was the property of the Venetian state since 1363; this was held as feudal land, on the same terms as the land of the other estate holders, and administered by the local Venetian governors, the castellans.¹⁷

Blasio was to all intents and purposes an absentee landlord. There is no evidence that he was ever directly involved in the cultivation of the land or that he resided on his estate; what is more he seems to have visited the island only on rare occasions. It is, nevertheless, true that he had taken a keen interest in the affairs of the estate from the very beginning and that he was overburdened by long-drawn-out lawsuits. As early as 1425 he had brought action against Georgio Levuni, a wealthy man alleged to be a fugitive villein; he was involved in litigation, proceeding pending against him, the claimant being Antonio de Mezzo, one of Franghia Venier's legators, who contended to have rights on the estate revenues; and in the meantime he had appealed in Venice against an earlier decision of the castellan of the island which reduced the dues of the peasants.¹⁸

The estate was managed by a *fattore*, an administrator or overseer, whose primary duty was to collect dues, rents and outstanding debts. He was also responsible for the payment of taxes to the castellan, and jointly they conducted an annual inventory of plots of land held as *agonica* and of all the livestock on the island. The position of administrator was held from 1434 to 1445 by a certain Zorzi Carlo, who received an annual salary of 120 hyperpers, payable in two instalments. An entry in Moisé I Venier's *intrata e spexe* account book for the years 1444-1447 informs us that on June 25, 1445 he chartered a boat from Kythera to Chania in order to capture Zorzi Carlo who had fled the island

17. Koumanoudi, «Illi de Ca' Venier», pp. 103-104.

18. For these lawsuits, see *ibid.*, pp. 87-106.

(*per retegnir Zorzi Carlo ira schampado*).¹⁹ Whether Moisè found and brought back the fugitive employee is not known, but his name doesn't appear in the estate account books after that date. Blasio Venier was probably having trouble with his administrator for quite sometime, because six months earlier he had given proxy to his son, authorizing him to manage the affairs of the estate.²⁰ It is worth noting that Blasio assigned limited powers to his son,²¹ explicitly forbidding him to enfranchise villeins and requiring to be consulted on all decisions outside his son's competence. Moisè had visited the island once briefly some ten years before.²¹ This time he stayed for four years accompanied by his brother Francesco, but he occasionally traveled to Chania or Candia to take care of legal matters and other affairs of the estate. From the codicil which he added to his will on July 26 1448, we learn that he was back home by that date and that his father had died sometime earlier.²² Before leaving for Venice he entrusted the management to Nicolò Venier, who was probably a relation from the Kytheran branch of the family, residing on the island.²³ According to the instructions which Moisè left in his will, at the time he and his brothers were at odds with one another over financial issues, but they do not appear to have taken any steps to separate their inheritances. Blasio Venier had named his son

19. A.S.V., *Procuratori di San Marco*, Misti, b. 3A, reg. MV, f. 2 (will of Moisè I Venier).

20. *Ibid.*, procuration dated January 5, 1444 m.v.

21. According to his father's account book, Moisè had left the island on October 18, 1435 (*Ibid.*, reg. BV, f. 3). In January 1438, three years after his return to Venice, he married Chataruzza Vituri, daughter of Lorenzo Vituri qd. Nicolò and received a dowry of 1000 ducats (*Ibid.*, reg. MV 1438-1441, f. 1). Five months later, he was formally emancipated from his father's authority (see *ibid.*, emancipation act dated 8 May 1438). Emancipation accompanied by endowment of sons was used by merchants as a means of protecting portions of the family's wealth from liabilities; the emancipated son retained the right to renounce his share in his father's inheritance, both in his assets as well as in his debts, see D. Herlihy «The Florentine Merchant Family of the Middle Ages», *Women, Family and Society in Medieval Europe. Historical Essays 1978-1999*, Oxford 1995, pp. 193-214. In Florence, the average age of emancipation was 20.09, but of all groups in society merchants freed their offspring at the youngest age. On emancipation in Venice and Venetian-ruled Greek territories, see off-hand M. I. Manousakas, «Ελληνικά νοταριακά έγγραφα (1374-1446) από τα "Atti Antichi" του Αρχείου του Δούκα της Κρήτης», *Thesaurismata* 3 (1964), 73-102.

22. A.S.V., *Procuratori di San Marco*, Misti, b. 3A, will of Moisè I Venier (copy) drafted in Venice on July 26, 1448.

23. *Ibid.*, letter to Nicolò Venier dated July 29, 1448 containing various instructions.

Francesco executor of his will, and in this capacity he was already back on the island by the end of October of the same year.²⁴ The fact that he was well acquainted with the island, its inhabitants, its needs and problems, probably weighed heavily with his selection for the position of castellan in 1450.²⁵ There is some evidence that financial disputes caused tension between Moisè I Venier's sons and their uncles in the following years. Be that as it may, the estate remained in the possession of the Venier family well into the next century.

Seignorial rights constituted the chief source of the estate's income. The Venier collected annually from every adult male villein by virtue of their proprietary rights *telo* and *caneschi*, both reckoned in money. While *caneschi* (from the Greek word *καρίσκια*, gift offerings) evidently corresponded to the traditional contributions in kind which dependant peasants were required to give to their landlord, the exact nature of the *telo* (τέλος) is not clear. In all likelihood it should be identified with the head tax (*dazio de villanadego*) which was levied on adult villeins before Blasio Venier's time.²⁶ Apparently, not all dependant peasants were required to pay the same amount of tax. The evidence suggests that younger members of villein families who were probably still economically attached to their father's household paid about 2/5 of the original tax, to wit 2 hyperpers and 11 grossi, instead of the full amount which was 5 hyperpers and 5 grossi.²⁷ In addition to personal taxes, villeins were required to pay the *decatia*, a tax on livestock amounting to six *grossi* per head. For the right to pasture their animals on the estate, free tenants were obliged to give two hyperpers per hundred head.²⁸ The sources also mention an indirect tax levied on the sale of kermes (*grana*), the *decatia dela grana*. The revenues from this tax were subsequently divided among the Venier, the Venetian state and the other estate holders in proportion to their share of the island.²⁹

24. *Ibid.*, list of names and articles lying in pledge dated October 23, 1448.

25. *Documents inédits*, p. 310.

26. A.S.V., *Procuratori di San Marco*, Misti, b. 3A, reg. BV, *passim*; reg. MV, *passim*; reg. MV 1444-1447, k. 1-31. On the duties levied on dependent and free peasants, see Koumanoudi, «Illi de Ca' Venier», pp. 98-99.

27. A.S.V., *Procuratori di San Marco*, Misti, b. 3A, reg. MV 1444-1447, k. 7 (Manoli Sotercho son of Zorzi), k. 8 (Manoli Micheletto son of Dimitri), k. 11 (Manoli Megalochonomo son of Jani pizolo), k. 12 (Michali Notara son of Jani), k. 12-13 (Nichola Bambacari son of Stratighi), k. 18 (Nicola Jerano q. Leo), k. 27 (Manoli Sifi son of Zorzi).

28. A.S.V., *Procuratori di San Marco*, Misti, b. 3A, reg. BV, *passim*; reg. MV, *passim*.

29. See for example A.S.V., *Procuratori di San Marco*, Misti, b. 3A, reg. BV, [k. 1]: *per decatia dela granna di 1435 vendudo per Zorzi, ave el dito Zorzi me tocha per i mie carati*

The economic revenues of the estate derived from rent in proportion of the harvest paid by dependant and free tenants alike, and rents from leases of landed property and other types of real-estate. Rent in proportion of the harvest, the *terzaria*, was in fact a fixed amount of wheat based on the amount of grain sown: 28 measures of wheat for every 28 measures of seed that was sown. Table 1 lists the quantities of wheat per year collected in the form of *terzaria* from each part of the Venier estate during the period 1435-1450. The picture emerging from the table is far from complete since the data for the years 1437-1443 and 1448 is lacking altogether and we have only the sum total of the rent for the years 1444 through 1447. Nevertheless, it is indicative of the trends of cereal production on the island.

TABLE 1³⁰
TERZARIE (in measures of wheat)

Year	Blasio Venier*	Gabriliana**	Communanza**	Total
1435	684.50	189.00	201	1074
1436	477.50	143.50	146	776
1444				781
1445		425.5	81	506.5
1446				768
1447				840
1449	468.00	368.00	193.5	1181.5
1450	1169.00	358.50		1527.5

* This part of the estate is designated in the sources after Blasio's death as commissaria because it was managed by the executors of his will.

**Gabriliana corresponded to the share of one of the original co-proprietors of the island, Gabriel Venier. By the first half of the 15th century it had passed into the hands of

--- yp. 179, gr. 9, s. 24; *ibid.*, reg. MV, [k. 1]: *e per decato dela grana 1444 fo vendudo a mi peri isuo carati 11 ¼* --- yp. 23, gr. 4, s. 16; *ibid.*, reg. MV 1444-1447, k. 32: *Miser Bortolamio Contarini [chastelan] al inchoontro die dar di 27 zugno ... e di dito i qual me tocha per el dechato dela grana per la mia parte* ---- yp. 24, gr 4. The importance of kermes (*grana* or *prinokokkion*) can be deduced from the fact that its collection and sale formed the object of imperial monopolies and imperial grants in the southern Peloponnese during the 14th century, see Angeliki E. Laiou, «The Agrarian Economy, Thirteenth-Fifteenth Centuries», *The Economic History of Byzantium*, ed. eadem, vol. 1, Washington D.C. 2002, p. 323.

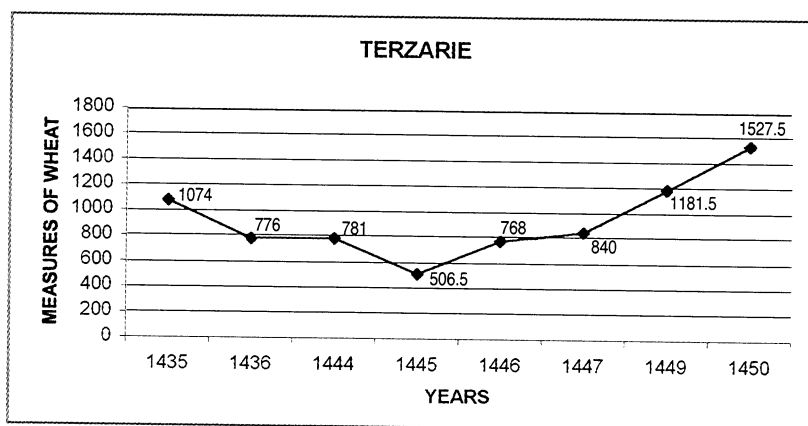
30. For a comparison with the 18th century, see Maltezou, «Cythère. Société et économie», 39-40.

various owners, including Franghia and later Blasio Venier, but it was considered indivisible. Similarly, the territory termed *Communanza* had been kept indivisible since the partition of the island and was now held jointly by Venice and the other estate holders, hence its name.³¹

Sources: A.S.V., *Procuratori di San Marco*, Misti, b. 3A, reg. BV, for the years 1435-1436; *ibid.*, reg. MV, for the years 1444-1447; *ibid.*, Terzarie, for the years 1449-1450.

After a period of relative stability, in 1445 the estate revenues from the *terzaria* appear to have plummeted 35%. This development should probably be attributed to a decline in cereal production on the island which is consistent with the increase in the price of wheat during the same period. More specifically, from 16 soldi per measure in May 1444, the price of wheat sold from the Venier granary had risen to 32 soldi per measure in January 1447.³² What caused this sudden and steep decline in production is not revealed by the sources. It should be noted, however, that the island had experienced cereal shortage on several occasions in the past, and especially during the first half of the 14th century, which had necessitated the import of wheat from Crete in order to cover the needs of the population.³³ Be that as it may, the continuous upward trend which is detected the next five years indicates that the crisis was short-lived (see Chart 1). On the other hand the figures for the years 1449 and 1450 could be misleading, because it is not clear whether they represent actual or anticipated quantities of wheat.

CHART 1



31. For the division of the island, see *ibid.*, 34-35.

32. A.S.V., *Procuratori di San Marco*, Misti, b. 3A, reg. MV 1444-1447, *passim*.

33. Gasparis, «Cerigo sotto il dominio veneto», p. 114.

A secondary source of income was the revenues of the land rented out to peasants. Two types of leases are mentioned in the account books, both for an annual fixed rent: *fiti* and *fiti de agonico*. Although the terms of these leases are not defined in the sources, it could be assumed that the first type (*fitto*) referred to temporary land tenure, whereas the second (*fitto de agonico*) to perpetual leases, similar to hereditary grants termed *gonico* which are found in Crete and other Greek areas during the same period.³⁴ The most common type of land leased out for short periods of time seems to have been vineyards, followed by cotton fields, olive groves, gardens and, last, orchards and arable land. Though the majority of these plots of land were located in the more fertile, central parts of the island (*Potamos, Mitata, Prado*-Λιβιάδι) as was to be expected, certain place-names found in the documents denote that waste and uncultivated areas were also taken on lease (*falchoni, (alle) salvadege*).³⁵ Apart from land, the Venier rented out houses and mills to villeins and independent tenants, also for a fixed amount of money (7 and 2 hyperpers a year, respectively). The only other building listed as owing rent to the estate holders was a church dedicated to Saint Theodore. The church was held by a villein for 8 *librae* of wax a year, valued at 2 hyperpers.³⁶

There is indirect evidence attesting to the existence of partnerships created for the joint exploitation of arable land, but they do not appear to have been employed on a large scale. Of the 244 persons registered as paying rent in proportion of the harvest to the Venier in 1449, only 16 were in partnership with others (*in compagna*). The same applies for the following year out of a

34. Ch. Gasparis, *Η γη και οι αγρότες στη Μεσαιωνική Κρήτη 13ος-14ος αι.*, Athens 1997, pp. 132-143; Angeliki Laiou, *Η αγροτική κοινωνία στην ύστερη βυζαντινή εποχή*, transl. in Greek by Aglaia Kasdagli, Athens 1987, pp. 245, 247, 287.

35. A.S.V., *Procuratori di San Marco*, Misti, b. 3A, reg. MV 1444-1447, *passim*. Other place-name mentioned in the ledger are: *Calamizi, Calamos, campo di San Tuodoro, Damonari, Filin, Frazze, Magune, Mangunades, Milapidea, Paximadi, luogo Sepie*. On the earliest references to Kytheran place names so far, see Maltezos, «A Contribution to the Historical Geography of the island of Kythera», pp. 159-161.

36. *Ibid.*, ff. 14-15 (houses), 24, 52 (mills), 19 (church). The church of Saint Theodore should be identified with the small family monastery which, according to the Chronicle of the Kytheran monk Cheilas, was situated on the Venier estate. In fact, the villein Plematicho Dicheo who is registered in Moisé Venier's ledger as lessee of the church in 1444 and Cheilas' uncle, at one time prior of the monastery, whom he describes as «δίκαιος και πνευματικός», are one and the same person, see Chryssa Maltezos, «Το Χρονικό του Χειλά. Κοινωνικά και ιδεολογικά προβλήματα στα Κύθηρα τον 15ο αιώνα», *Σύμμεικτα* 8 (1989), 16-17 [= *Βενετική παρουσία στα Κύθηρα*, n° 12].

total of 222 cultivators recorded.³⁷ Although the terms of these collaborations escape us, it is known from contracts which have reached down to us from the sixteenth century and earlier evidence from Crete that they took a variety of forms and were limited to one or two harvests.³⁸ The persons who had entered into these partnerships came from a varied socio-economic background. Some were villeins, others independent peasants, while others belonged to the upper *strata* of the local society, as was the case with ser Nicholeto Venier, who was probably a member of the Kytheran branch of the family.³⁹ Regardless of their social standing, they seem to have been involved in different contracts at the same time and often in opposing roles, as the partner who lent the capital (*primo*) or the one who worked the land. Partnerships were also employed in livestock and dairy farming. In Moisè I Venier's ledger for the receivables of the estate (1444-1447) there are allusions to at least four such partnerships in connection to the production of cheese, three involving a villein on one side and an independent peasant on the other, and a fourth between two independent peasants who shared the profits 60-40.⁴⁰

Animal rearing was an important sector of the local economy throughout the middle ages and the early modern period. In 18th century Kythera, for which there is abundant information, livestock consisted mainly of small animals –goats and sheep, and there is no reason to assume that this wasn't true for the earlier period. The total of animals inventoried on the island in 1437 was 13,320 head, of which 3,420 were owned by villeins and 9,900 by independent peasants. Charts 2 and 3 show that there were fluctuations in the num-

37. A.S.V., *Procuratori di San Marco*, Misti, b. 3A, Terzarie.

38. This form of partnership is termed *κοληγία* in the sixteenth century Kytheran contracts (*Εμμανουήλ Κασμάτης*, ed. Drakakis, pp. 24-29) and in Crete *συντροφία* or *societas* (Gasparis, *Η γη και οι αγρότες*, pp. 168-175). On short-term partnership contracts for the exploitation of land and livestock in Italy during the late middle ages, see the article of Ph. Jones, «Italy», *The Cambridge Economic History of Europe*, vol. 1, *The Agrarian Life in the Middle Ages*, ed. by M. M. Postan, Cambridge 1966, pp. 340-431.

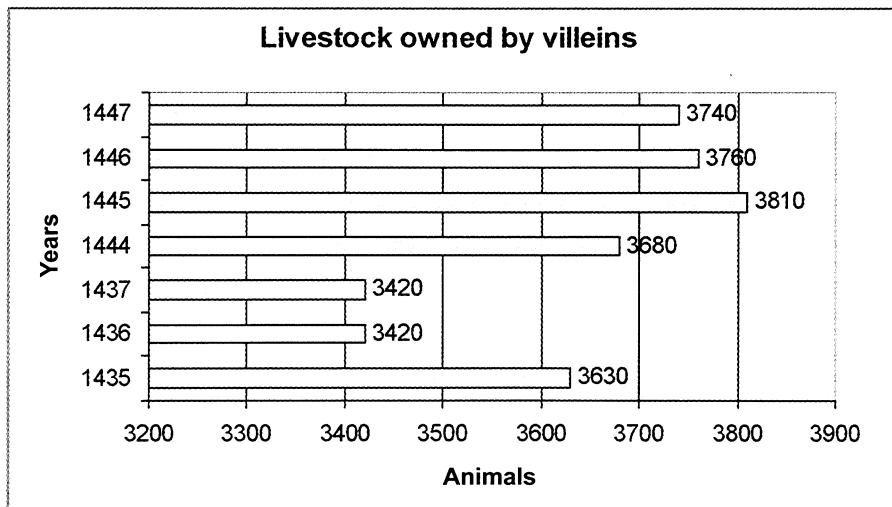
39. Michali Christoforo, Jani Maiero, Manoli Maiero, Michali Maiero, Jani Notara, Manoli Pissano (Pixano) and Zorzi Rossi are all listed in Moisè's ledger as villeins belonging to the Venier. A.S.V., *Procuratori di San Marco*, Misti, b. 3A, reg. MV 1444-1447, k. 1, 3, 12, 16, 29.

40. A.S.V., *Procuratori di San Marco*, Misti, b. 3A, Priv. Venier Moisè I, reg. MV 1444-1447, k. 7 (Zorzi Sotercho, villein, and Dimitri Cassimati), 10 (Zorzi Politi, villein, and Zorzi Massello), 37 (Tuodoro Fazea and Manoli Megalochonomo, villein), 37 and 58 (Nichita Chiriachi and Manoli Triandi).

ber of animals during the next decade, but of no particular importance. On the other hand, significant variance is observed in the number of animals owned by each villein household, suggesting economic disparities among the villeins. Moisè I Venier lists in his ledger 39 villeins who owned flocks of between 20 to 440 head: 26.6% of the villeins owned under 50 head, 36% up to 100, 28.2% up to 200 and only 10.2% over 200 head.⁴¹ Unfortunately the respective *data* for independent peasants is wanting.

There is also evidence that work horses and mules were bred on the estate during the period under consideration. In fact Moisè Venier seems to have been personally involved in the breeding of mules and probably in their marketing as well. At least this much can be inferred from the letter he wrote to Nicolò Venier shortly before his death, in which he asks after the animals and instructs Nicolò to take good care of them. On the local market, a mule could reach between 20 and 50 hyperpers, obviously depending on its breed.⁴²

CHART 2

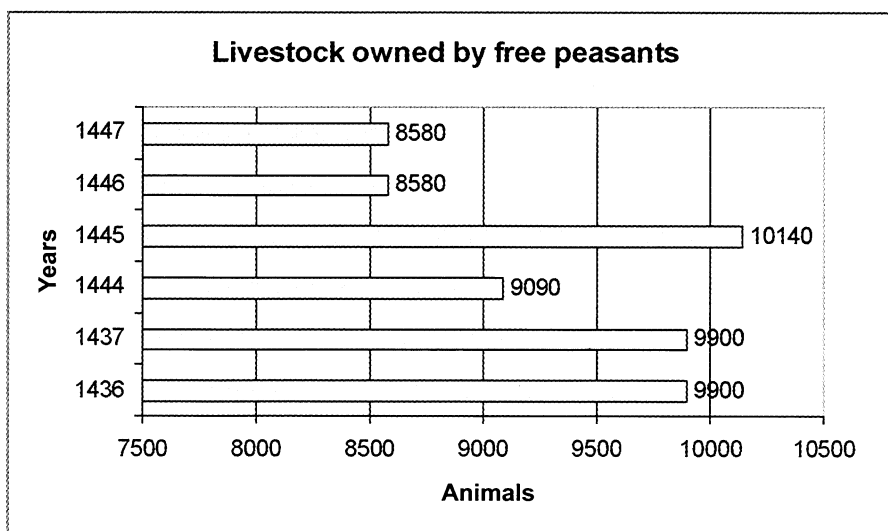


Sources: A.S.V., *Procuratori di San Marco*, Misti, b. 3A, reg. BV and reg. MV.

41. A.S.V., *Procuratori di San Marco*, Misti, b. 3A, reg. MV 1444-1447, k. 1-30.

42. A.S.V., *Procuratori di San Marco*, Misti, b. 3A, letter dated July 29, 1448. On the price of mules, see *ibid.*, reg. MV 1444-1447, k. 10, 22 and reg. BV, [k. 1, 2].

CHART 3



Sources: A.S.V., *Procuratori di San Marco*, Misti, b. 3A, reg. BV and reg. MV.

Connected to animal husbandry was the production of cheese, leather and wool. Moisè I Venier in his account books invariably refers to cheese as *formazo*, without giving any further details about its distinctive features.⁴³ Two commercial contracts drafted in Candia in 1451 reveal, however, that at least two types of cheese were produced on the island and that they were marketed by the landlords. On November 27 of that year Francesco Venier, Moisè's brother, sold 25 *milliaria* Kytheran *caseus* and *recocta de firmo*, and 15 *milliaria caseus* and *recocta de respectu*, about 12,818 and 7,691 kilograms, respectively, to two Candiote merchants at the price of 10 ducats per *milliarium*.⁴⁴ It

43. A.S.V., *Procuratori di San Marco*, Misti, b. 3A, reg. MV 1444-1447, k. 7, 8, 11, 16, 58.

44. A.S.V., *Notai di Candia*, b. 2 (Francesco Avonal), f. 22r. *Caseus* was a hard cheese and *recocta* was a moist or dry cheese produced from whey (*myzithra* in Greek or *ricotta* in Italian). The terms *caseus* and *recocta* used to describe these types of cheese are known to us from 13th and 14th century Venetian documents referring to the production and marketing of Cretan cheese, see D. Jacoby, «Cretan Cheese: A Neglected Aspect of Venetian Medieval Trade», *Medieval and Renaissance Venice*, ed. by Ellen E. Kittel - Th. F. Madden, Chicago 1999, pp. 50-51. The terms *de firmo* and *de respectu* refer to freight tariff agreements, see E. Ashtor, *Levant Trade in the Later Middle Ages*, New Jersey 1983, p. 392. I wish to thank Professor D. Jacoby for kindly providing me with this reference.

was agreed that Francesco or his agent would deliver the cheese to the merchants in six months' time at the castles of Capsali and San Dimitri.⁴⁵ Almost a month later, Francesco concluded yet another deal for the same amount of cheese with Giorgio Caradino, an inhabitant of Candia, at the price of 11 ducats per *milliarium*. As was the case with the former contract the cheese was expected to be in good condition, marketable, and rid of cracks or bad odours.⁴⁶ Coarse woolen rugs (*carpeta*) and dyed pelts (*pelada morela*), mentioned in the account books as items given in payment of debts or held in pledge, are of particular interest because they are an indication of artisanal activity on the part of the peasants.⁴⁷

The fiscal obligations of the estate holders consisted of tax in money, *paga in comun* or *paga in dener*, and tax in wheat, *paga in formento*. The former amounted to 186 hyperpers and 4 grossi, payable in two equal installments, in February and August, and the later was a fixed quantity of wheat (170 measures).⁴⁸

According to Moisé Venier's calculations, after the deduction of taxes owed to the Venetian state, wages of salaried personnel, extraordinary and household expenses, the net profit of the estate for the years 1444-1447 amounted to 2,566 hyperpers.⁴⁹ It is not clear, however, whether the revenues that Moisé recorded in his account book represented income realised or before it was received. The corresponding ledger he kept for receivables shows that a great number of the estate tenants had, in fact, been remiss in their obligations for several years: 79 villeins and over 150 free tenants with outstanding debts ranging from 6 grossi to 162 hyperpers.⁵⁰ It is true that by the end of 1447 most tenants had settled

45. On the castles of Capsali and San Dimitri, see Maltezou, «A Contribution to the Historical Geography of the island of Kythera», pp. 151-154. There is no evidence attesting to the existence of local markets. The two castles most probably served as relay stations.

46. A.S.V., *Notai di Candia*, b. 2 (Francesco Avonal), f. 24r-v.

47. A.S.V., *Procuratori di San Marco*, Misti, b. 3A, reg. BV, [k. 1] (*pelada morela*); reg. MV 1444-1447, k. 16, 17, 23, 27, 29 (*carpeta*). A *carpeta* was valued at 5 hyperpers and at 5 yperpers and 3 grossi. For the meaning of the word *carpeta* see *Grande dizionario della lingua italiana*, ed. S. Battaglia, vol. 2, Turin 1964 (reprint 1971); *Il libro dei conti di Giacomo Badoer (Costantinopoli 1436-1440). Complemento e indici*, ed. G. Bertelè, Padua 2002, p. 245. For the meaning of the word *pelada* see G. Boerio, *Dizionario del dialetto veneziano*, Venice 1856 (reprint Florence 1998).

48. A.S.V., *Procuratori di San Marco*, Misti, b. 3A, reg. BV and reg. MV, *passim*.

49. *Ibid.*, reg. MV, k. 7.

50. *Ibid.*, reg. MV 1444-1447, k. 1-69.

their debts. In order to do so some had received help from better-off relatives and friends. Others had come to terms with Moisé, who had agreed to remit part of the debt.⁵¹ Payments were usually made in kind, or part cash part kind. The most common products given in payment of outstanding debts by the peasants were cheese, wax, and kermes.⁵²

Accumulated debts in corn added a further encumbrance to the already excessively burdened peasantry. The peasant household reserve was very often exhausted by the month of January, forcing many to buy wheat from the landlords –sometimes twice a year, in January and again in April or May. Devoid of cash and surplus products that could be exchanged for the grain, the peasants pawned what little jewelry or other valuables they possessed, gold earrings and wedding rings, silver cups, belts, buckles, chains, and on one occasion even their linen. Many of these articles were subsequently sold a *bon marchado* by the Venier, since their owners were unable to come up with the necessary money to retrieve them.⁵³

The heavy pressure that customary and rent obligations brought to bear on the peasantry did not go unnoticed by the local Venetian authorities. As was mentioned elsewhere, an attempt made by the castellan of Kythera Nicolò Permarin in 1420 to alleviate the burdens of the peasants by reducing the rent paid in proportion to the harvest and the *decatia* by one third, and grape-harvesting

51. Fra Manfredo, capelan, gave a ducat for the villein Manoli Christoforo, Zorzi Levuni paid in the name of the villein Stratigi Stratigho and his two sons, Tuodoro Jerano acquitted his son's debt, the wife of the villein Plematicho Dicheo paid for the rent of the church of Saint Theodore with her jewelry. *Ibid.*, ff. 8, 12, 18, 19. After giving a quantity of wax and cheese in partial repayment of his debts, Dimitri Micheleto, a villein residing in San Dimitri, was found to owe 27 hyperpers and 7 grossi. Seeing that he was too poor to pay, Moisé remitted part of his debt, reducing thus the amount he owed to 20 hyperpers. Moisé apparently sympathized more with the misfortunes of Nichita Chazimarda, who had been taken captive by the Turks, for he reduced his debt by 38 hyperpers. *Ibid.*, ff. 8, 24, 64.

52. *Ibid.*, ff. 7, 8, 11, 16, 31, 58 (cheese), ff. 7, 17, 19, 24 (wax), ff. 7, 8, 31, 33, 38, 42 (kermes). Indebtedness and insolvency were widespread in the peasant group in Western Europe from the 13th century onward, see G. Duby, *Rural Economy and Country Life in the Medieval West*, English transl. by Cynthia Postan, Philadelphia 1998², pp. 251-254, 281.

53. To give only one example, according to an undated list of debtors and pledged goods that had been sold in payment of debts, 36 cups (*taze*) were valued at 553 hyperpers; 8 cups, one of which was slightly broken, at 123 hyperpers, the selling price of a cup varying from 14 to 24 hyperpers. Also, 11 belts, 3 candles, 1 golden and 3 silver wedding-rings, 3 golden rings, 13 pairs of earrings (*cerzeli pera* 13), 15 *cuslier*, 26 forks (*pironi*), 1 pair of silver *cortiloni*, *pecoli copolote e altre cosse* fetched 285 ducats, A.S.V., *Procuratori di San Marco*, Misti, b. 3A.

to once a year met with the opposition of the Venier, who succeeded to overturn his decisions and to obtain retroactive restitution for lost profits.⁵⁴ Some twenty years later, another castellan, Bartolomeo Contarini, attempted a similar reform but to no avail.⁵⁵ The extant account books contain allusions to a number of legal disputes involving the local authorities, other landlords, individual tenants or particular peasant groups (*agonicari*) on one side and the Venier on the other. These attest to the difficulties of estate management and more importantly to the growing awareness of the peasants that there was possible remedy for their problems in the judicial system. In this respect, the appointment of Francesco and Moisé II Venier to the position of castellan in 1450 and 1474, respectively, could only further reduce the prospect of improvement of the economic condition of the estate tenants in favor of the owners.⁵⁶

To sum up, the Venier estate on Kythera was in many ways typical of the type of investment sought by many Venetian merchants in the late middle ages. It differed, however, from these investments in one important respect: the acquisition of the property was not the result of economic calculation for it had been transmitted in the family by way of inheritance. The landowners were not directly involved in cultivation. They farmed out arable land to cultivators in return for a share of the crops, and rented out small parcels on a hereditary basis or for a limited period. The estate income was supplemented by revenues from personal taxes and grazing rights. Studies of later periods of the island economy have shown that production from agriculture and livestock rearing was primarily intended for auto-consumption, and that the surplus was stored or commercialized. Careful reading of the estate accounts has confirmed that this holds good also for the earlier centuries. The tenants were of a varied juridical and economic status. If Moisé Venier's book of debtors for the years 1444-1447 could be regarded as indicative of the composition of the tenant population, then the proportion of villeins on the estate was only 35%, the majority being

54. A.S.V., *ADC*, b. 26, ff. 128v-129r. See also Koumanoudi, «Illi de Ca' Venier», p. 104.

55. In addition to the *terzaria* and the *decatia*, Contarini also reduced the personal taxes paid by the villeins. The attempted reform can be deduced from the entries in Moisé Venier's account books regarding retroactive restitution of revenues from rents and taxes, A.S.V., *Procuratori di San Marco*, Misti, b. 3A, reg. MV; reg. MV 1444-1447, *passim*.

56. *Documents inédits*, p. 310. Moisé II Venier's name is not included in the list but we know that he was appointed to this post from the account book he kept during his term of duty. See A.S.V., *Procuratori di San Marco*, Misti, b. 3A. The account book consists of 41 folios and covers the period from April 24 to June 24, 1474.

independent peasants. The former suffered more from heavy liabilities as they were subject to servile obligations. Besides being the landowners, the Venier were also their tenants' main creditors, thus one way or another most of the surplus production eventually transferred to them, and they in turn propelled it to markets outside the island.



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