

# Venice after the Battle of Prevesa (1538)

## – The Smuggling of Greek Wheat and the Confiscation of the Cargos of Captured Foreign Ships –

Hiromi SAITO

### *Introduction*

In the 16<sup>th</sup> century, Mediterranean trade, but especially Levant trade, had not yet suffered a decline. In the 1530's, eastern spices had returned to the old Mediterranean routs because the Portuguese monopoly in the Indian Ocean had been broken. From the middle of the century onward, the golden age of the Adriatic commercial cities, that is, Ragusa (Dubrovnik) and Ancona had passed. Furthermore, in the middle of the century (especially in the 1560's), there was a resurgence in the volume of Venetian sea trade<sup>1</sup>. Additionally, from the late 16<sup>th</sup> century, England, France and Holland made their trading debut in the Mediterranean. However, in the middle of the century, an idea appeared in Venice that appraised agriculture higher than commerce, and land investment arose that fostered the public and private development of wetland cultivation<sup>2</sup> (often at the expense of commerce), which caused the decline of maritime trade, formerly the most important of Venice's economic activities. Thus, this change in the character of the Venetian economy was probably not caused by a slump in Mediterranean trade, but rather by a fall in the status of the city's commercial maritime activities.

---

This article is a translation of Part 2, Chapter 4 of the book, 齊藤寛海『中世後期イタリアの商業と都市』知泉書館、2002年、第2部第4章 (Written in Japanese: Saito, Hiromi, *Italian Commerce and Cities in the Late Middle Ages*, Tokyo, Chisenshokan, 2002).

<sup>1</sup> Romano, Ruggiero, La marine marchande vénitienne au XVI<sup>e</sup> siècle, dans, *Le Les sources de l'histoire maritime en Europe du Moyen Âges au XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècles – Actes du IV<sup>e</sup> colloque international d'histoire maritime*, Paris, 1962, p.64. Lane, Frederic Chapin, La marine marchande et le trafic maritime de Venise a travers les siècles, dans, *ibid.*, pp.12f. et 28f. (tableau VIII).

<sup>2</sup> 和栗珠里「1520-1570年におけるヴェネツィア人の土地所有ー・コルナーロの活動と思想ー」『地中海学研究』XX、1997年、103頁以下、118頁以下、121頁以下。(Written in Japanese: Juri, Waguri, La proprietà fondiaria dei veneziani, 1520-1570, l'attività e l'idea di Alvise Cornaro, in, *Mediterraneus (Annual Report of the Collegium Mediterranistarum)*, XX, 1997, pp. 103f., 118f. 121f.)

Were the factors which brought about this fall in her status purely economic, such as the high price of Venice's manufactured goods, the decrease in the competitiveness of her financial and shipping business, or her comparatively high agricultural profits<sup>3</sup> ? Politically and militarily, Venice began to lose her traditional prestige as a great power during the course of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, not only in Italy, but also throughout the Mediterranean region as a whole. In Italy, Spanish supremacy had been firmly established by the first half of the 1530's and, in the Mediterranean, Venice had already been put on the defensive by the late 15<sup>th</sup> century due to Turkish expansion<sup>4</sup>. This decline in prestige in the Mediterranean region could be one of the factors responsible for the gradual lessening in the importance of sea trade among her other economic activities. In this article, the author endeavors to examine the crisis that occurred in Venice immediately after the Battle of Prevesa (September 1538) from this standpoint.

Faced with a serious food shortage at the beginning of 1540, Venice was desperate to obtain wheat from the eastern coast of Greece, but The Ottoman Empire, which controlled this area, prohibited its export to states such as Venice, with which it was on less than cordial terms. Conversely, the export of wheat to Ragusa and Florence was permitted, as these cities had established friendly diplomatic ties with the Turks. Venice therefore attempted to acquire supplies of wheat in two ways, the first of which was to buy it directly from Florentine merchants who were permitted to export it. Naturally, any Florentine merchants willing to participate in this illicit trade had to disguise their activities, for if it became known that such wheat was destined for the Venetian market, its export would have been forbidden. In short, this was smuggling. The other method of obtaining wheat was to capture Ragusan ships bound for their home city, and to confiscate their cargo. The Venetians, therefore, were unable to obtain wheat by legal means, so they were forced to depend on foreign countries or merchants.

One Florentine merchant who chose to remain and trade in Venice in the 1530's and 40's, and thus must have participated in such smuggling operations, was Francesco di Domenico Lioni. Among the extant documents from his Lioni Company, there are two books of correspondence (copie di lettere) in which many records of the capture of ships and the confiscation of their cargoes may be found. Although the records concerning smuggling operations which he himself arranged are very comprehensive, the fact that records containing details of the confiscation of wheat are so complete must indicate that he took careful note of it, and of its effect upon the development of smuggling. While such limitations as the writer's subjectivity should be born in mind when using these documents,

---

<sup>3</sup> Cipolla, Carlo Maria, *The Economic Decline of Italy*, in Pullan, Brian, ed., *Crisis and Change in the Venetian Economy in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries*, London, 1968, pp.133ff.

<sup>4</sup> Tenenti, Alberto, *The Sense of Space and Time in the Venetian World of the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries*, in Hale, J. R. ed., *Renaissance Venice*, London, 1973, pp. 20ff. idem, *Nuove dimensioni della presenza veneziana nel Mediterraneo*, in Beck, Manoussacas e Pertusi, a cura di, *Venezia centro di mediazione tra oriente e occidente (secoli XV – XVI), Aspetti e problemi*, Firenze, 1977, pp. 2f.

they seem to contain very vivid accounts which do not occur in other types of documents concerning the state of smuggling and the expectations of the parties involved.

Through such records of smuggling and confiscation can be gleaned detailed information about the crisis that faced Venice, and ultimately contributed to her terminal decline as a maritime power. This predicament was the result of three separate crises which piqued virtually simultaneously: a military crisis, that is, a war with powerful Turkey; a commercial crisis caused by the rise of Venice's strong rivals, namely, Ragusa and Ancona; and a food crisis whose probable origin was a series of bad harvests in Italy. Faced with these crises, Venice became unable to sustain her traditional commercial activities.

The main focus of this article is, therefore, twofold: to gain a deeper understanding of the nature of this crisis through an examination of the process of smuggling and the confiscation of cargoes following capture, and a consideration of the decline of Venice as a sea power. Although this weakening became manifest in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, the author maintains that its principal causes were already extant in the crisis immediately following the Battle of Prevesa.

### *1 The Historical Background*

From the beginning of the 16<sup>th</sup> century onward, Turkey and Spain were in direct confrontation on opposite shores of the Strait of Otranto and, later, Carlos I of Spain (Karl V of the Holy Roman Empire) and the Ottoman sultan Suleyman were in conflict not only in the Mediterranean but also in the Balkans. Conversely, François I of France was caught on both sides by Carlos I, so he allied himself with Suleyman in 1535. On the 27th of September, 1538, the combined fleets of Carlos I, the Pope and Venice did battle with an Ottoman fleet near Prevesa, and the latter won. From this time until the 7th of October, 1571, when an allied Christian fleet defeated the Ottomans off Lepanto (Navpaktos), Turkey was the major power in the Mediterranean.

Ragusa<sup>5</sup> was a city state in Dalmatia that became an Hungarian protectorate after Hungary had extended its territory as far as Dalmatia in the middle of the 14<sup>th</sup> century. After Turkish preeminence in the Balkans had been firmly established, it also became a protectorate of the Ottoman Empire in the middle of the 15<sup>th</sup> century and, after the Hungarian defeat at Mohács in 1526, became a direct protectorate of Turkey. Ragusa, exploiting the extensive commercial privileges granted to Ottoman territories, developed its own trade links and boosted its business activities, especially after Venetian sea trade had been paralyzed by wars with Turkey. In fact, its customs income increased so significantly during 1538-41 and 1570-72 that the total tonnage of the Ragusan fleet was probably equal to that of Venice in its

---

<sup>5</sup> On Ragusa, vedi, 齊藤寛海「アンコーナとラグーザ」『イタリア学会誌』第35号、1986年。(Written in Japanese: Saito, Hiromi, Ancona e Ragusa - Il commercio levantino del Cinquecento -, in, *Stuidi Italici*, XXXV, 1986.)

heyday.

Ancona<sup>6</sup>, a city on the opposite shore to Ragusa, also developed as a commercial power. However, in contrast to Ragusa, its commerce was characterized by a tendency to encourage foreign merchants to come in the city and use it as a base of operations, rather than sending Anconan merchants overseas. Previously, Venice had suppressed Ancona and Ragusa's overseas trade but, after the Queen of the Adriatic began to weaken, these two cities seized the opportunity to capitalize on their rival's decline. In 1514, initially as a Christian city, Ancona granted commercial privileges to the Sultan's subjects and, in 1529, the Sultan reciprocated by encouraging Turkish merchants to trade there. The pope occupied the city with his troops in 1532, but protected its traditional commercial activities and, in 1534, granted freedom of residence and trade to every foreign merchant, thus allowing Ancona to become one of the places in which the Sephardim were most active. For these reasons, Ancona grew to be an international city and a crossroads for two trade routes, namely, Istanbul-Ragusa-Florence-Livorno, and the southern route to Antwerp. In the middle of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, Antwerp was the largest northern entrepot, and the greater part of all freight transported overland to Italy began its journey there. From the entrepot's customs records, the addresses of the recipients of 64% (in value) of the goods bound for Italy have been traced. From this 64%, the destination of 29% was Venice, 9% was to be delivered to Genoa, and 35% was bound for Ancona<sup>7</sup>, indicating that the value of Ancona's trade was higher than that of Venice.

As a result of population increase, a food shortage occurred in Italy, and a large quantity of wheat was imported from the Turkish territories, but especially from Greece. Therefore, in Venice, investment in agriculture increased and the self-sufficiency rate rose. However, the food shortage became more pronounced in the 1590's, and Venice was forced to import wheat from the Baltic till the 1620's<sup>8</sup>.

The following approximate fluctuations may be observed in the Venetian population<sup>9</sup>: 110,000-120,000 in 1338, 85,000 in 1422, 120,000 in 1509, 144,000 in 1540, 150,000 in 1548, 174,000 in 1552, 183,000 in 1563, 142,000 in 1581, 154,000 in 1586, 163,000 in 1593,

---

<sup>6</sup> On Ancona, vedi, *ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> Brulez, Wilfrid, *L'exportation des Pays-Bas vers l'Italie par voie de terre au milieu du XVI<sup>e</sup> siècle*, dans, *Annales, E. S. C.*, 14-3, 1959: *idem*, *Les routes commerciales d'Angleterre en Italie au XVI<sup>e</sup> siècle*, in, *Studi in onore di A. Fanfani*, vol. IV, Milano, 1962.

<sup>8</sup> Cf., Braudel, Fernand, *La Méditerranée et le monde méditerranéen à l'époque de Philippe II*, 2e éd., Paris, 1966, Partie 2, Chapitre 3, (Section) 2 (Translated in Japanese: 浜名優美訳『地中海』II、藤原書店、1992年、第3章、2)。

<sup>9</sup> On the population, vedi, following studies, especially Sardella. There is a small difference between each figure which based proper way to infer, but the outline of the population fluctuations is almost the same, so it should not be necessary to reexamine here each figure. Sardella, Pierre, *Nouvelles et spéculations a Venise au début du XVI<sup>e</sup> siècle*, Paris, 1948, pp. 15-17. Pullan, Brian, *Rich and Poor in Renaissance Venice*, Oxford, 1971, pp. 289, 634. *idem*, *Wage-earners and the Venetian Economy, 1550-1630*, in, *idem*, ed., *Crisis and Change in the Venetian Economy in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries*, cit., p. 150. Ginatempo, Maria e Sandri, Lucia, *L'Italia delle città*, Firenze, 1990, pp. 79-83.

150,000 in 1624, and 108,000 in 1633. From the second quarter of the 16<sup>th</sup> century onward, its population tended to increase, which meant that the city often suffered from serious food crises, such as the following: 1527-29, 1539-40, 1544-45, 3 times in the 1550's, 1569-70, 1586-87, 1590-91, and so on<sup>10</sup>. As well known, some of their miserable scenes were vividly described by Marin Sanudo<sup>11</sup>.

In Venice, it was not until the 1570's that the amount of wheat brought from the Terraferma finally began to surpass overseas imports<sup>12</sup>. The government ordered landowners of Terraferma who lived in Venice to convey their wheat crop to the city and, after deducting a certain amount for their families' consumption, to sell the remainder to the Grain Office. The Venetian overseas colonies, such as Crete and Cyprus, were not expected to export wheat since, by the 16<sup>th</sup> century, they had become specialists in the cultivation of grapevines, cotton, sugarcane and so on. The customs duty for overseas wheat was already extremely low, and it was even exempted in times of crisis. At the time of import, the merchants' primacy was usually respected, and if a crisis became serious, the government offered them certain benefits as subsidies. Occasions in which the government itself imported directly were strictly limited to times of extraordinary severe crisis<sup>13</sup>. Its overseas import markets were situated on both sides of the Adriatic: Romagna, Apulia and Dalmatia, "Levante" (especially the Greek regions of Thessaly, Macedonia and Thrace), and "Ponente" (especially Sicily). As well known, in Venice, all territory east of Otranto was called "Levante", and all territory to the west was known as "Ponente". Of the wheat produced in these areas, that of Sicily and Apulia was mainly exported to the Western Mediterranean. The wheat of "Levante", but especially that of the Marmora and the Black Sea was already being imported by Istanbul, whose population would reach 100,000 in 1478, 400,000 in 1520-30, and 700,000 in 1571-80<sup>14</sup>. After the Ottoman conquest of the "Levante," Venetian trading expeditions to those regions became fraught with risks. This caused an increase in the price of wheat in the Venetian market, for wheat had to be imported from markets where the transportation cost was higher. The Venetian grain year began on the 1<sup>st</sup> of July: Terraferma wheat arrived in July, August and September; wheat from both sides of the Adriatic appeared in November,

<sup>10</sup> On the food shortage, vedi, following studies. Pullan, *Wage-earners and the Venetian Economy*, cit., p.151. idem, *Rich and Poor in the Renaissance Venice*, cit., pp. 20, 86, 93, 245, 273, 288, 356, 360, 545, 606.

<sup>11</sup> Sanudo, Marin (Margaroli, Paolo, a cura di), *I Diarii (Pagine scelte)*, Vicenza, 1997, pp. 534-535. The date of this diary is 1496-1533.

<sup>12</sup> Aymard, Maurice, *Venise, Raguse et le commerce du blé pendant la seconde moitié du XVI<sup>e</sup> siècle*, Paris, 1966, pp. 112-113. In the following pages, concerning the general situation of Venetian wheat, the author basically adheres to the interpretation presented in this book. vedi, also the following rough sketch, 齊藤寛海「16世紀ヴェネツィアの穀物補給政策」一橋大学地中海研究会『地中海論集』第12号、1989年 (Written in Japanese: Saito, Hiromi, *The Venetian Food Supplies Policy in the Sixteenth Century*, in, *The Mediterranean studies Group-Hitotsubashi University ed., Mediterranean World*, XII, 1989).

<sup>13</sup> Aymard, op. cit., pp. 71-100.

<sup>14</sup> Cf., *ibid.*, p. 16.

December and January; and wheat from “Levante” or “Ponente” arrived in March and April<sup>15</sup>. With the deterioration of stable food imports, the purview of the Venetian Grain Office was extended, and it constantly intervened in the purchase and distribution of food. This office was managed by three grain officers, whose job it was to oversee one office, two grain warehouses, and many lower ranking officials. In 1526, the influence of the grain office was further solidified by the addition of two high supervisors (elected from the Ten). It now possessed the right to compel private persons to deliver their grain stocks to the grain office<sup>16</sup>. If a bad harvest or war caused a food shortage in the Terraferma, then any wheat shipped to Venice was first set aside for consumption by Venetians. If any remained, it was dispatched to her subordinate cities, but the amount was often insufficient. This meant that almost no wheat was given to the villages, whose occupants were left to starve. The peasantry, therefore, who could not afford to stockpile food, moved to cities—especially Venice—where there were food stocks and the chance to receive supplies.

## *2 The Capture of Ships and the Confiscation of their Cargoes*

### *(1) The Sources*

Francesco di Domenico Lioni was a Florentine merchant who ran a commercial company in Venice in the 1530's and 1540's. The following documents are management records from his company<sup>17</sup>. ASF is an abbreviation for Archivio di Stato di Firenze, BNF stands for Biblioteca Nazionale di Firenze, and the date (in Florentine style), the place of composition and the document type has been included in parentheses:

ASF, Libri di commercio, No.179 (1532-33, Venice, Diary-cum-Ledger)

BNF, MSS, Capponi, Libri di commercio, No.112 (1534-37, Venice, Ledger)

ASF, Libri di commercio, No.174 (1539, Venice, Letter-book)

ASF, Libri di commercio, No.182 (1540, Venice, Letter-book)

---

<sup>15</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 37-53, 118-119.

<sup>16</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 72-93.

<sup>17</sup> Hidetoshi Hoshino, late professor of the University of Bologna, chose these documents from his extensive old notebook and showed them to the author. Based on this information, the author examined their contents and analyzed ASF, Libri di commercio, No. 174 and No. 182 which are represented simply as No. 174 and No. 182 in the following references. The author has transcribed and translated some parts of Nos. 174 and 182 which are related to the theme of this article, and published some notes based on them. Among these works, 3 are quoted here: (1) Transcription and translation (into Japanese): 「ヴェネツィアにおける海外小麦の輸入取引—1539,40年—」1-6, 『信州大学教育学部紀要』第68—73号、1990—91年 (Written in Japanese: The Venetian Import Trade in Overseas Wheat -1539-40-, 1-6, in, *Bulletin of the Faculty of Education, Shinshu University*, Nos. 68-73, 1990-91)。 (2) Il noleggio delle navi a Venezia, in, Mediterranean Studies Group – Hitotsubashi University, ed., *Mediterranean World*, XI, 1988. (3) Il potere dello stato nel provviggiamento dei viveri, in, *Mediterranean World*, XIII, 1992. In this article, the author did not cite the original portions of the documents for, if he had done so, this article would inevitably have become more lengthy and complex. If one wishes to read the original document, one should refer to the work cited above) as (1).

ASF, Libri di commercio, No.180 (1541, Venice, Cashbook)

BNF, MSS, Capponi, Libri di commercio, No.113 (1541-44, Venice, Diary)

ASF, Libri di commercio, No.183 (1542, Venice, Letter-book)

The letters which were copied in ASF, Libri di commercio, Nos. 174 and 182 were written immediately after the Battle of Prevesa by the Lioni Company. These letters contain detailed accounts of a food crisis that affected Venice in 1539 and 1540, years in which harvests were particularly poor in Italy. As the Ottoman Turks had prohibited the export of Greek wheat to Venice, the Venetian government tried to cope with this food crisis by adopting two countermeasures<sup>18</sup>: the smuggling of Greek wheat through Florentine merchants who were permitted to export it by the Turkish authorities, and the capture of ships from Ragusa which were under Turkish protection, in order to confiscate their cargoes of wheat. The Venetian fleet also captured a ship bound for Ancona loaded with goods from “Levante” (see below) and owned by Florentines.

Francesco di Domenico Lioni<sup>19</sup> was the person who negotiated with the Venetian government about smuggling. He was a very ambitious merchant, and not only dealt with the Venetian authorities, but also with the Somaia Company. This company consisted mainly of representatives from the Somaia family of Florence<sup>20</sup>, who had earlier spread throughout Italy and Greece: Guglielmo in Pera (the suburbs of Istanbul), Gianbattista in Volos (relocated from Thessaloniki), Raffaello in Naples, Ridolfo in Bari (relocated from Naples), and Girolamo, the leader of the Company, in Florence. As an agent of the Somaia Company in Venice, Lioni was the most prominent figure in this smuggling ring, thus making his letters the best sources for information about the smuggling process and any speculations regarding smuggling operations which the concerned parties might have entertained. Lioni also negotiated with the Venetian authorities as an agent of the Florentine merchants whose goods from “Levante,” including wheat and others, had been confiscated, so his letters are also the best sources of detailed information about the capture and confiscation of cargoes.

---

<sup>18</sup> Aymard, op. cit. is a basic work on the Venetian import and supply of wheat. However, this work only examines the second half of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, meaning that the Lioni documents kept in the Florentine archives are neither used nor introduced at all. Furthermore, in the following work which investigates the relationship between news and fluctuations in the price of goods (wheat, spices, public debts, maritime insurance money, etc.) in Venice during 1496 -1534, there is neither a description of nor an introduction to the capture in 1540 discussed above. Sardella, Pierre, *Nouvelles et spéculations a Venise au début du XVIIe siècle*, cit.

<sup>19</sup> There is no information in the genealogical documents in ASF and BNF about the genealogy of the Lioni Family.

<sup>20</sup> There is the following information about the Somaia Family: they ruled Somaia (Toscana), and produced 21 priori, 1 gonfaloniere di giustizia, 2 senatori, several members of the Maltese Order and St. Stefan Order. Vedi, Mecatti, Giuseppe Maria, *Storia genealogica dela nobiltà, e cittadinanza di Firenze*, Napoli, 1754 (ristampa anastatica, Bologna, 1971), p. 99. They were a distinguished family during the period of transition from republic to monarchy.

*(2) The Charter and Disguise of Venetian Ships*

There was a wheat shortage throughout Italy in 1539 and, in the autumn of the same year, every region was suffering from an extremely serious food crisis. Even in Venice, between a half and one third of the poorer citizens were compelled by November to eat emergency provisions, such as millet or chestnuts. The normal price of wheat was 4 1/2 lire (di piccioli, omitted in the following) per staio but, at this time when (1 ducat was valued at 6 lire and 4soldi), its cost rose to 15 1/2 lire<sup>21</sup>, which constituted the upper limit of the maximum price regulation<sup>22</sup>. Even at this price, wheat did not appear in the marketplace, so the Venetian government was forced to pay a subsidy of 4 lire per staio for imported wheat<sup>23</sup>. In spite of an ordinance stating that this subsidy would be paid until the end of January, Lioni believed that the term of the subsidy would be extended, and that any wheat that arrived in the city could be sold immediately for cash<sup>24</sup>.

All of the members of the Somaia family, but especially Guglielmo who stayed in Pera, believed that the food crisis in Italy would present them with the opportunity to make enormous profits by exporting wheat from the east coast of Greece, where its production was plentiful, for the family had received permission to export Greek wheat from the sultan through the French ambassador in Istanbul. Guglielmo accordingly prepared to purchase wheat in Greece and asked the other family members and their agents to charter ships in every shipping market, both near and far, while he himself attempted to charter ships in Pera and Chios. Chios was the center of trade and shipping in the Aegean and, at that time, was being managed by the Genoese “maona” under Turkish rule<sup>25</sup>. Lioni himself was also required to charter ships in Venice. At first, he probably assumed that Guglielmo was intending to export wheat worth some 150,000 staia, that is, a sufficient quantity to feed 50,000 men for a year. (1 staio is roughly equal to 83 liters, or about 62 kilograms<sup>26</sup>.) Following this supposition, the funds which had been collected by the Somaia family (the exact amount is unspecified) were insufficient not only for the purchase price, but also for the total expenditure, including the shipping fee and various operating costs<sup>27</sup>.

In a letter dated the 10th of November, 1539, Lioni reported to Guglielmo the news that he had received from each shipping market<sup>28</sup>. In Venice, ships prepared to carry wheat had already departed for Crete or Cyprus (both of which were Venetian territories), so there were only three ships which could potentially be chartered. In Ancona, the possibility of chartering a ship was slight. In Livorno (Leghorn), if there were any ships of “Biscaia” or “Ponente”,

---

<sup>21</sup> No.174, ff(folios). 256v(verso)-258v.

<sup>22</sup> The regulations on the maximum price were enacted in December 1527. vedi, Sardella, op. cit. p. 27.

<sup>23</sup> The fact that the price of wheat and its subsidy is “per staio” has henceforth been omitted.

<sup>24</sup> No.174, ff. 184r(recto)-189v, 190v, 195v.

<sup>25</sup> Vedi, Istituto della Enciclopedia Italiana, ed., *La piccolo Treccani*, II, Roma, 1995, voce “Chio”.

<sup>26</sup> Aymard, op. cit., p.17.

<sup>27</sup> No.174, ff. 215r, 184r-189v, 199v.

<sup>28</sup> No.174, ff. 184r-189v.

their crews were probably unwilling to travel to lands governed by Turkey, as their countries were at war with the Ottoman Empire. Additionally, if any Ragusan ships were carrying wheat through Levante (namely all Turkish territories including Greece), they were required to unload one third of their cargo at Ragusa, thus making their charter somewhat problematic. In Marseilles, some 10 ships had already departed for Greece, Syria and Egypt as a token of friendship between France and Turkey, and the other ships had gone to “Barberia” (Magrib) to receive a cargo of wheat, so a ship could not be chartered there. In Naples and Messina, both of which were governed by Carlos I, all available ships had already been chartered by merchants to carry wheat from Sicily to Naples, Civita Vecchia (the Papal state), Livorno (the Duchy of Florence), Viareggio (the Republic of Lucca) and Genoa (ruled by Carlos). It was also impossible to charter in any of the ports on the western coast of the Italian Peninsula, where Carlos’ political influence was felt to a greater or lesser extent. Besides those of Ragusa, the only ships which could voyage safely to the Turkish territories belonged to France, Ancona and Florence, all of which had received permission to trade from the Sultan<sup>29</sup>, but they were very difficult to charter. In the same letter, Lioni also reported on the Venetian galleys which were patrolling in the Adriatic<sup>30</sup>. The purpose of this fleet was to capture wheat carrying ships bound for ports which were not under Venetian influence, and to unload their wheat—by force if necessary—at Venice or at any other territory under Venetian control.

Of the previously mentioned 3 ships at anchor in Venice, 2 subsequently became impossible to charter: the first, a Venetian-owned ship named *Dolfino* (Dolphin) had gone to Cyprus to collect a cargo of wheat and the other, owned by the duke of Ferrara, had immediately been dispatched to Greece to collect a cargo of wheat as soon as the duke had received permission to trade from the sultan through the French ambassador<sup>31</sup>. In order to charter the remaining ship, Lioni persuaded her Venetian owner, named Bernardi, to rent her out, while simultaneously attempting to resolve the long-standing antagonism that had existed between Bernardi and Girolamo, the representative of the chartering agent. Bernardi demanded a high shipping fee on the grounds that ships prepared to carry wheat had become very scarce, and that the danger posed to Venetian vessels by an encounter with the Turkish fleet or by the discovery of their nationality at any of the ports in the “Levante” was considerable. Girolamo nonetheless hesitated to charter the ship, for he feared that Gianbattista and Guglielmo (not Guglielmo of Pera), who organized the export of wheat from Volos, could be endangered if they accepted a Venetian ship, and he also thought that it might be possible to charter ships at a lower rate. Lioni asserted that the danger would be minimal, for the Venetian ship would be disguised as a Ragusan, and the sanjakbey (local governor) loved Gianbattista like his own brother. In this way, he tried to negotiate a

---

<sup>29</sup> No.174, f(folio). 199v.

<sup>30</sup> No.174, ff. 184r-189v.

<sup>31</sup> No.174, f. 195r-v.

financial compromise between the two parties<sup>32</sup>.

In a letter dated the 7th of January, 1540, Lioni, in his capacity as an agent of the Somaia family, had already made an agreement with Bernardi<sup>33</sup>. The deed of the charter contract, whose date is the following day or perhaps 2 days later, was copied and sent with letters, but these copies were not preserved in the letter-book, so the charter contract itself is not extant. However, based on information gleaned from several letters<sup>34</sup> written before and after the contract was drawn up, its contents were probably as follows: The basic shipping fee was 50 ducats (per 100 staia of wheat loaded), and the special fee (substituted for an insurance charge) was 5 ducats, so the total fee was 55 ducats. The fee was to be paid immediately upon returning to Venice through sale of the wheat cargo. Even if the ship was not loaded to capacity, the fee was also to be paid for an empty hold. The total number of lay days at the destination port had to be under thirty. According to the terms of this contract, the ship was to be disguised as a Ragusan vessel and sold to a Ragusan called Orsatto, in order to conceal its true identity. Lioni was then to charter it from Orsatto. The destination recorded in the disguised deed was Livorno, but the real destination was Venice. The contents of the letter that was dispatched with this deed served to reinforce the bogus record of ownership. Lioni and Bernardi agreed that, in the text of the deed, “Livorno” would mean “Venice” and “100 Livornian sacchi” would stand for “100 Venetian staia”<sup>35</sup>.

In a letter addressed to Gianbattista dated the 8th of January, it was mentioned for the first time that Bernardi owned not only one but two ships. The reason why the second ship is not mentioned until this time is not given. Of these, the larger ship had a loading capacity of 11,000 to 12,000 staia, while the smaller one, mentioned for the first time, had a capacity of about 4,000 staia<sup>36</sup>. The 2 ships were to sail together. As the charter contract of the small ship was included with that of the larger<sup>37</sup>, these 2 ships must have been chartered under the same terms and conditions. By the way, 4,000 staia are the equivalent of 400 Venetian botti or 240 tons<sup>38</sup>, so the small ship had a capacity of 240 tons, while the large one had a capacity of 720. The latter was, therefore, one of the biggest Venetian ships of its day<sup>39</sup>.

Thanks to the several extant letters<sup>40</sup> prior to and immediately after this date, the various nationalities of the crew of both ships are known: the captains were Ragusan, the greater part of the crews was Dalmatian (schiaivoni), and there was one Florentine cargo watchman. The most important crew members after the captain were the helmsman and the clerk. As the

<sup>32</sup> No.174, ff. 184r-189v, 195r-v, 201v-202r, 204r, 210v, 222r, 225r, 229r, 291r-292r.

<sup>33</sup> No.174, f. 244v.

<sup>34</sup> No.174, ff. 204r, 222r, 225r, 244v, 252r-261r, 256v-258v.

<sup>35</sup> No.174, ff. 256v-258v.

<sup>36</sup> No.174, f. 246v.

<sup>37</sup> No.174, ff. 256v-258v.

<sup>38</sup> Aymard, *op. cit.*, pp. 56f.

<sup>39</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 58f.

<sup>40</sup> No.174, ff. 184r-189v, 252r-261r, 256v-258v.

fluctuation of the price of wheat was regulated by the quantity of wheat on the market, a difference of one month, or even one week, in its arrival at the docks could cause the price of Greek wheat to vary greatly. For this reason, Lioni promised to pay 50 ducats to the captain of the big ship, and 300 to 400 ducats in total to the principal crew members, commensurate to their rank, on the condition that they would return by the last day of April. Furthermore, he gave explicit instructions to Gianbattista, who was to supervise the loading of the wheat at Volos. Specifically, Lioni advised Gianbattista to hire local people to transport the wheat to the port by wagon, and to expedite the loading process as quickly as possible. Lioni had earlier reached an agreement with the crews as to the quantity of wheat to be loaded, but he could not reach a settlement about whether or not the crews were obliged to load such an amount, so Gianbattista was urged to pay close attention to the amount of wheat that was finally loaded. Lioni further instructed that the crews should not be given shore leave, for there was the danger that they would be recognised as Venetian sailors by Jews (especially Sephardim who were well informed about Christian matters). Above all, he insisted that they should not be allowed to go to Thessaloniki (where there were many Jews), and that a cargo list should be drawn up that explicitly matched each ships' registration to the appropriate deed in the charter contract.

Bernardi's 2 ships eventually left Venice on the night of the 20th of January (in order to minimize the risk of detection). And they left Canea (a city in Crete) on the 17th of February, when they were surmised to arrive in Volos on the 25th of February<sup>41</sup>.

It was not only these 2 ships which were making for Volos, an important export market for Greek wheat. Indeed, based upon evidence provided by a letter dated the 23rd of March<sup>42</sup>, such ships were so numerous that, as Lioni jocularly wrote, there was not enough wheat to fill them all<sup>43</sup>. They were: (1) Bernardi's big ship; (2) His small ship; (3) A ship owned by Corese and chartered by Franchini that left Venice shortly after Bernardi's ships; (4) A ship owned by the Duke of Ferrara; (5) A ship named Rosa that was chartered by an agent of the same Duke; (6) A small ship<sup>44</sup> owned by Pagolo di Niccolo (Cicini) chartered by Rafaello in Naples; (7) One from a total of three ships chartered by Rafaello in Naples or in Sicily; (8) Rafaello's second ship; (9) Rafaello's third ship; (10) A ship (called Gerina) owned by Gerino that left Pera with a cargo of money; (11) A ship owned by Salviati that left Pera; (12) A ship owned by Luca d'Angiolo; (13) A ship named Palamota; (14) A ship named Cicinia; From this name, one might assume that this ship is identical to the one mentioned in (6), but it is difficult to say with certainty whether or not this is, in fact, the case. (15) A big ship of

---

<sup>41</sup> No.174, ff. 256v-258v, 300r, 304r.

<sup>42</sup> No.174, f. 308v.

<sup>43</sup> No.174, f. 250v.

<sup>44</sup> The ship of Pagolo (Paulo) di Niccolo was also recorded as ship of Niccolo Cicini (No.174, ff. 291r-292r, 301v). As Pagolo di Niccolo Cicini was its captain (No.174, ff. 292v-293v), his father Niccolo should have been its owner and Pagolo its captain. Perhaps, Cicinia (mentioned above as 14) should mean ship of the Cicini Family.

Ragusa (dispatched for account and risk of the archbishop of Ragusa); and (16) Same as the above (dispatched for account and risk of the commune of Ragusa). This makes a total of 15 ships, or 16, if (14) is indeed different from (6). Based on the same letter, other ships may also have been travelling toward Volos. None of the ships chartered by the Somaia family had yet arrived in Volos by the 3<sup>rd</sup> of January<sup>45</sup>.

From the previous evidence, it seems clear that six ships (1, 2, 6, 7, 8, and 9) were being chartered by the Somaia family, and that each of the other four ships (10, 11, 12, and 13) might also have been chartered by the same family. Of these, three ships (1, 2, and 6) actually arrived in Venice, that is, those which were definitely under charter by the family. Among the ships which may have been chartered by the family, one ship (10) unloaded wheat in Corfu on the way (a decision based on the captain's interpretation of the terms of the charter contract), and another (12) was captured by the Ragusans.

### *(3) The Negotiations with the Venetian Authorities and their Eventual Failure*

When Lioni heard that the Somaia family had received permission to export wheat and had begun preparations to charter ships, he became even more eager to make a large profit and to enhance his reputation by making the family import wheat to Venice and acting as the sole director of the transaction. In a letter dated the 29th of November<sup>46</sup>, Lioni requested Guglielmo to furnish him with the exact quantity of wheat, the name of the ship and its captain, and whether or not the family would be willing to export any part of its wheat to Venice. Based on Guglielmo's reply, he would decide whether or not to promise the Venetian government to import wheat by an agreed upon date and, therefore, assess his chances of receiving a subsidy from the authorities. Incidentally, there were at least 3 ways in which the Somaia family as a whole (or an individual member) could negotiate with the Venetian authorities: firstly, they could negotiate directly with the authorities, dispensing with Lioni as an intermediary<sup>47</sup>; secondly, they could give Lioni precise instructions as to how the negotiations should be managed; and finally, they could give Lioni complete freedom to negotiate on their behalf. Alternatively, perhaps the family could also have concluded an agency contract with a third party, and requested this new agent to negotiate with the authorities. Nevertheless, Lioni was highly ambitious and possessed such confidence in his ability to negotiate that he requested Guglielmo to give him a free hand in the affair<sup>48</sup>. If he had the authority to operate independently, his ability to act would only be constrained by circumstances, and he could have his own share or, indeed, a larger share of the transaction.

---

<sup>45</sup> No.174, ff. 280v-283r.

<sup>46</sup> No.174, f. 211r.

<sup>47</sup> Cf., No. 174, ff. 248v-249r. Rafaello intended to negotiate with a secretary of the Venetian Government in Naples about the wheat trade.

<sup>48</sup> No.174, ff. 186v-187v, 211r.



Needless to say, having a share would not only entitle him to receive a commission, but also a portion of the eventual profits.

Following a letter dated the 12th of November, 1539, the Venetian authorities legislated that a subsidy of 4 lire until the end of December, and 3 lire until the end of January should be paid to importers of wheat from foreign countries<sup>49</sup>. As the Somaia family's wheat would arrive after April, Lioni attempted to persuade the authorities to guarantee subsidies for any future imports of wheat. The proposal concerning sales contracts that resulted from these negotiations, and the impact that the ratification of this proposal had upon governmental organizations—specifically, the College and the Ten (Collegio ed I Dieci)—can be outlined in terms of evidence gleaned from letters dated the 13th of January<sup>50</sup>, the 9th of February<sup>51</sup> (both of which were addressed to Guglielmo) and others<sup>52</sup>: through the use of a document containing information such as the quantity of wheat, the name of the ship on which it was to be transported, and the name of the captain, Lioni was able to win a contract from the Venetian authorities. As a result, he swore on the honor of the Somaia family to deliver the wheat that would be obtained through a commercial transaction in Volos or Thessaloniki within a fixed period. On the 12th of January, despite the fact that he had not yet received the authority to do so by the Somaia family due to a lack of time, he added his signature to the deed. This meant that he intended to obtain *ex post facto* approval from the family. In this deed, the concerned parties agreed to the following conditions: The quantity of the wheat to be delivered would be 25,000 staia, the price for a staio would be set at 21 lire (that is, the total sum including the subsidy) for delivery within April, or 20 lire (1 lira deducted as a penalty) for a delivery within May. A deposit of 4,000 ducats would be paid at the conclusion of the formal contract. On the 15th of January, the confidence motion of this agreement was passed in the College by a vote of 16 to 2, but unexpectedly rejected in the Ten. After further negotiations with the Corn Office, Lioni again signed the deed in acceptance of the following conditions: the quantity would be 25,000 staia as before; one third of the quantity would be delivered within April priced at 20 lire, and the remainder within May priced at 19 1/2 lire. No deposit had to be paid. If the delivery were delayed, then one third of the wheat would be accepted within May, and the rest within June, after the deduction of 1 lira for each staio as a penalty. This time, the confidence motion was passed in the College by a vote of 17 to 2 on the morning of the 19th of January. However, during the noon recess, officials from the Grain Office approached Lioni and requested that the clause accepting a delay should be removed. When Lioni refused, the officers said that they would oppose the motion in the Ten and, in fact, it was again rejected there on the afternoon of the same day. Once again, the negotiations had reached an impasse. In spite of such conditions, Lioni, perhaps just as he

---

<sup>49</sup> No.174, f. 190v.

<sup>50</sup> No.174, ff. 251v-254v, 259r.

<sup>51</sup> No.174, ff. 270r-271r.

<sup>52</sup> No.174, ff. 255v-256r, 256v.

had always intended, ordered Bernardi's two ships to depart from Venice on the following day (that is, the 20th of January). Having reported the details of this situation to Guglielmo, Lioni entreated him to ensure that the ships return to Venice at any cost, for if they were to unload their cargoes at any other port, the Venetian government would exile Bernardi and confiscate all of his property.

Later, when the Venetian authorities were hoping to import wheat from Apulia and Sicily, they did not wish to reopen negotiations with Lioni. However, after this hope had been dashed (before the 9th of February), they once again became eager to deal with him<sup>53</sup>. Lioni expected that a part of the delivery would be made within April, another part within May, and the rest within June, priced at 20 to 19 1/2 lire each and that, if these deliveries became delayed, a fine of 1 lira would be imposed (the quantity would be the same as before but without a deposit). Lioni seems to have believed that the closure of this agreement would be smooth and immediate, but Girolamo opposed these conditions, causing its resolution to be further postponed. Just as Lioni was accepting the terms of the subsequently nullified first contract in Venice, Girolamo was making an agreement in Florence with someone (supposedly a representative of the Venetian government) to deliver 2,000 moggia of wheat from Volos<sup>54</sup>. The quantity of wheat that Lioni had agreed to deliver was 25,000 staia, and the total quantity on Bernardi's ships was supposed to be 15,000 staia. This meant that, unless the Somaia family was intending to surrender to Lioni about 10,000 staia of the wheat to be loaded on other ships prepared by the family, it would be very difficult to honor the terms of the contract signed in Lioni's name, and he would be obliged to pay 1 lira per staio as a penalty. Girolamo blamed Lioni for failing to communicate far enough in advance the details of the contract that he had made, and was also angered by Lioni's request for an increase of 3 soldi (per 1 staio) above the international standard as his commission. Further, Girolamo was afraid that the lives of Gianbattista and Guglielmo might become endangered if the existence of such an agreement were ever revealed. Conversely, Bernardi urged Lioni to seek a rapid conclusion to the contract negotiations, saying that no definite plans could be made for the sale of his wheat until the closure of a formal contract with the Venetian authorities<sup>55</sup>. Therefore, as a letter dated the 12th of February seems to indicate, Lioni was being hounded by both Girolamo and Bernardi<sup>56</sup>. Moreover, according to evidence provided by a letter dated the 18th of February, the Venetian Signoria was pushing for the reopening of negotiations, and was beginning to accuse Lioni of deliberate time wasting<sup>57</sup>.

At this very time, the situation had taken a sudden and unexpected turn. News spread quickly throughout the city that Venetian galleys had captured 4 Ragusan ships loaded with

---

<sup>53</sup> No.174, ff. 270r-271r.

<sup>54</sup> No.174, ff. 270r-271r.

<sup>55</sup> No.174, ff. 270r-271r, 274r-275v, 280v-283r.

<sup>56</sup> No.174, ff. 274r-275v.

<sup>57</sup> No.174, ff. 277v-278r.

about 35,000 staia of wheat in the sea off Ragusa (according to the letter dated the 18th of February, cited above). The urgent food crisis was thus at an end, and it was impossible to continue the negotiations while the people were celebrating this good fortune. Lioni therefore planned to revive the talks after the celebrations had come to an end (according to the letter dated the 18th of February, cited above). Although a letter from Girolamo eventually arrived granting Lioni the authority to pursue the contract negotiations independently, it was already too late (according to a letter dated the 23<sup>rd</sup> of February<sup>58</sup>). He had already lost the initiative, and “it is certain that the larger part of the responsibility should belong to Girolamo in Florence who would not listen to his opinion” (a letter dated the 24th of February<sup>59</sup>). In subsequent letters, there is no further mention of futures trading with the Venetian authorities. In March, a lot of wheat shipments arrived in succession<sup>60</sup>, namely, wheat from Volos on a ship owned by Pagolo di Niccolo Cicini and chartered by Rafaello, 20,000 staia of wheat from Cyprus, and “a large amount of” wheat transported overland from German lands<sup>61</sup>. All of these factors seem to have persuaded the Venetian authorities to break off negotiations with Lioni.

The only work remaining to Lioni to finish in Venice was the sale of the wheat that the Somaia family had sent from Volos, that is, the wheat that had been brought to Venice on the ship owned by Niccolo Cicini (its captain was his son, Pagolo), and by 2 ships owned by Bernardi. The former was loaded with 1647 1/2 staia<sup>62</sup>, and its arrival was recorded first in a letter dated the 18th of March<sup>63</sup>. The latter left Volos on the 24th of April carrying a total of 4232 kili (not staia), and arrived in Venice on the 2nd of June<sup>64</sup>. The former deserves a further mention, as it was once captured by the Venetian fleet and then released.

The wheat carried by Bernardi's ships was to be sold at the market price, for Lioni had failed to conclude a futures trading contract with the Venetian authorities. The market price had already fallen upon their arrival due to increased optimism about the new harvest and the peace between Venice and Turkey. However, it remained unclear whether the harvest would be good or bad, so no one could predict the fluctuations in price and thus postpone large-scale trade enterprises<sup>65</sup>. However, Lioni was forced to sell a part of the wheat in order to pay the 4,000 lire charter fee specified by the deed and demanded by Bernardi<sup>66</sup>.

<sup>58</sup> No.174, ff. 280v-283r.

<sup>59</sup> No.174, ff. 289r-v.

<sup>60</sup> No.174, ff. 297r, 310v.

<sup>61</sup> In No.174, f. 225v, there is a reference to “Vienna and other German lands”. Incidentally, according to Aymard, based on a report (dated the 16th of June) submitted by a man dispatched to buy wheat, a small quantity of wheat was imported into Venice from Austria and Germany for the first time in 1540. vedi, Aymard, *op. cit.*, pp. 52, 82.

<sup>62</sup> No.174, f. 309r.

<sup>63</sup> No.174, f. 301v.

<sup>64</sup> No.182, ff. 28r, 30v, 32v-33r.

<sup>65</sup> No.182, ff. 32v-33r.

<sup>66</sup> No.182, ff. 32v-33r, 37v, 56r.

Following Girolamo's instructions, he would sell the remaining wheat, dividing it into several portions to take advantage of price fluctuations in each of the Italian markets. He first sold (several days after the 7th of June) at 7 lire 5 soldi, then at 7 lire 10 soldi, 8 lire, 8 lire 10 soldi, 9 lire, and finally at 12 lire 4 soldi<sup>67</sup>. This rise in price was prompted by clear indications that the coming harvest would be bad<sup>68</sup>.

According to a letter addressed to Lioni, written in Volos and dated the 1st of June, Gianbattista had forced all ships to depart owing to an increase in the price of wheat to 80 aspri (per kilo). And, he had even permitted a ship owned by Marco di Rusco to depart without cargo. Zanatto Pomaro, who had carried this letter in person, said that the export of wheat had been prohibited at Volos by the sanjackbey because the next harvest was forecast to be bad, and that Gianbattista was to go to Thessaloniki and, once there, decide either to stay or to leave for Pera, depending on orders from Guglielmo<sup>69</sup>. This meant the end of wheat trading at Volos by the Somaia family.

When the work of unloading had been completed in Venice, a discrepancy in the quantity of wheat carried by Bernardi's ships came to light, when it became clear that there was a great difference in measurement between his big ship, his small ship, and a ship owned by Corese (mentioned above as 3) which arrived 2 days later<sup>70</sup>. At loading, 1 kilo (a unit of Volos) was measured as 2 staia and 8 libre on Corese's ship, whereas it was 2 staia minus 3 libre on the small ship, and 2 staia minus 11 libre on the big ship. Therefore, the minimum and maximum value of one kilo, as estimated by Lioni, could differ by as much as "8 %<sup>71</sup>, or 10 to 11 %<sup>72</sup>." The loss of cargo revenues for the big ship was especially grave. It was said that Piero Pomaro, an assistant of Gianbattista, and the ships' clerks were responsible for this<sup>73</sup>. Bernardi demanded that Lioni, as an agent of the Somaia family, should pay 500 ducats as a charter fee for a total wasted cargo capacity of 1,000 staia, that is, 800 staia for the big ship, and 200 staia for the small ship. He further demanded that Lioni should pay the watchmen's wages, the cost of an express letter (which had arrived by means of specially hired deliverymen and ship). Although Bernardi wished to solve this matter by an out-of-court settlement through a common friend, he was prepared to resort to legal action if this became impossible. Lioni refused the out-of-court settlement, because he thought that if

<sup>67</sup> No.182, ff. 56r, 75v-77r.

<sup>68</sup> No.182, f. 56r.

<sup>69</sup> No.182, f. 48v.

<sup>70</sup> No.182, ff. 36r, 42r.

<sup>71</sup> No.182, f. 36r (Addressed to Girolamo).

<sup>72</sup> No.182, f. 42r (Addressed to Girolamo). The descriptions of the different units of measurement are not the same, as No.182, ff. 43r-45r (addressed to Guglielmo: no reference is made to the unit of measurement used on the small ship) and No.182, ff. 46v-47r (addressed to Gianbattista: it was recorded that there was no shortfall in the units of measurement for the small ship). The unit of measurement in use was, therefore, unclear. The description found in No.182, ff. 46v-47r is probably a result of constraints placed upon the person in charge of accounting for this failure.

<sup>73</sup> No.182, ff. 36r, 42r.

these fees were paid privately, common sense dictated that he and Bernardi should share the burden equally. On the other hand, Girolamo thought that Bernardi's demands were exorbitant. Bernardi, a Venetian, filed the suit and, as Lioni had feared, won convincingly<sup>74</sup>. It was duly recorded in a letter dated the 25th of September that, according to an account bill included with the letter, the net profit of the Somaia family was only 234 lire 14 soldi 9 denari di grossi (not di piccioli here), after the deduction of all expenses including court costs<sup>75</sup>.

*(4) The Capture of Ships and the Confiscation of their Cargoes*

In a previously cited letter dated the 18th of February, 1540, the capture of four Ragusan ships by the Venetian fleet was mentioned. Let us examine this event in greater detail. The 4 ships were carrying wheat cargoes, 3 of them being from Volos and the other from Negroponte (Evia, Evvoia). They were all captured by a Venetian galley fleet (which was perhaps waiting in ambush) in the sea off Ragusa. The exact quantity of wheat which these 4 ships were carrying is unclear, for the quantity could be about 35,000 staia (the letter dated the 18th of February<sup>76</sup>), 28,000 staia (the letter dated the 4th of March<sup>77</sup>) or 30,000 staia (the letter dated the 12th of March<sup>78</sup>). Whatever the real amount might have been, it seems evident that this capture had an adverse effect upon Ragusan food supplies. In the letter dated the 4th of March (cited above), death by starvation was reported in Ragusa<sup>79</sup>. The Venetian fleet took the 4 ships to Parenzo (on the west coast of Istria), after having made them unload a part of their wheat in the Venetian territories of Corfu, Zante and Zara. Then, the fleet (which awaited orders from the Venetian government at Parenzo) escorted the ships to Venice where they were made to unload their remaining cargo<sup>80</sup>.

A Ragusan ambassador was hastily dispatched to Venice in order to negotiate with the government, but return of the wheat was out of the question, so the issue became the amount of compensation for the confiscated wheat, that is, whether it should be slightly higher than the cost price, or the same as the Venetian market price<sup>81</sup>. The Venetian government insisted that the captains of the Ragusan ships were willing to be captured, for profits from the sale of

<sup>74</sup> No.182, ff. 36r, 43r-45r, 75v-77r, 86r-v, 110r.

<sup>75</sup> No.182, f. 95r.

<sup>76</sup> No.174, ff. 278r-v.

<sup>77</sup> No.174, ff. 292v-293v.

<sup>78</sup> No.174, f. 297r.

<sup>79</sup> It is said that the population of the city of Ragusa was 6,000 to 8,000 in the middle of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, and that the non agrarian population of its entire territory was about 20,000. Aymard, op. cit., p. 28. However, on p. 14 of this book, Aymard wrote that the population of the city of Ragusa at an unspecified time was 8,000 – 10,000, while a subsequent book stated that, at the end of the 15<sup>th</sup> century, the population of Ragusa was 5,000 – 6,000, and that of its territory was 25,000 – 30,000.. Krekic, Barisa, *Dubrovnik in the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> Centuries*, Norman, 1972, pp. 54-55.

<sup>80</sup> No.174, ff. 278r-v.

<sup>81</sup> No.174, ff. 291r-292r, 292v-293v.

wheat in Venice were known to be higher than those in Ragusa. The Venetian government even went so far as to refer to an old, forgotten ordinance which set the maximum price at 13 1/2 lire for gross wheat, to which category the confiscated “Levante” wheat was said to belong. After all, the captains were to have sold the wheat at 13 lire, according to a letter dated the 3rd of April<sup>82</sup>. Sultan Suleyman calmly heard what had happened and permitted the Ragusans to export another 25,000 staia, whereupon they immediately dispatched three ships for Volos (the letter dated the 3rd of April<sup>83</sup>). After six months after this departure, the four Ragusan ships were released, according to a letter dated the 1<sup>st</sup> of September<sup>84</sup>.

The Venetian fleet not only captured these four Ragusan ships, but also a small ship owned by Cicini and chartered by Raffaello in Naples (mentioned above as 6). Its cargo was wheat from Volos, 892 1/2 kili of which belonged to the Somaia family, and about 500 kili to the captain and other crew members. Let us observe this event<sup>85</sup> as it unfolds through a letter dated the 3rd of March<sup>86</sup>. The ship was interned by the fleet at Parenzo where it was to await orders from the Venetian government, after being made to unload a part of its wheat (1208 staia in total) at the Dalmatian ports of Zara and Sebenico (controlled by Venice) by order of the “Capitano del Golfo” (Captain of the Gulf, that is, the Adriatic). Lioni acknowledged this matter through a letter written at Parenzo on the 1<sup>st</sup> of March by captain Pagolo (Paulo) di Niccolo Cicini and, on the morning of the following day, he went to the Signoria to open negotiations. As a result, he received a letter containing orders from the Signoria addressed to the fleet commander or, in the case of his absence, to the podesta (governor) of Parenzo. This order compelled the ship’s captain to bring his vessel to Venice, after making him swear that, if it went anywhere else, he would pay 4,000 ducats as a penalty. Lioni then sent a servant with the letter of order to the captain, and assumed that the ship would arrive in Venice within two days. However, the captain entrusted the ship to his clerk, and came to Lioni in person with a certificate that specified the amount of wheat unloaded at the 2 ports mentioned above.

As this certificate seemed to lack legal weight, Lioni secured another favorable concession through the good offices of his friends, namely, that the price for the unloaded wheat should not only be paid according to the Venetian market price, but also with the inclusion of a subsidy, as if it were being imported into Venice. As a result, the price of this “Levante” wheat became 17 1/2 lire in total, consisting of a maximum market price of 13 1/2 lire, and a subsidy of 4 lire. It was subsequently decided that the ship’s clerk should go to Sebenico where he would collect payment for the 402 staia previously unloaded there. This was because Cicini’s ship had already anchored in Venice on the 18<sup>th</sup> of March, at which time

---

<sup>82</sup> No.174, f. 309r.

<sup>83</sup> No.182, f. 1r.

<sup>84</sup> No.182, ff. 76v-80v.

<sup>85</sup> This event is recorded in, No.174, ff. 291r-292r, 292v-293v, 297r, 301v, 309r, 310r-v, No.182, ff. 2v-3r, 15v.

<sup>86</sup> No.174, ff. 291r-292r.

the Venetian Corn Office had agreed to pay for the 806 staia unloaded in Zara. Indeed, the governor (rettore) of Sebenico had already told the Venetian Corn Office that he was prepared to pay the price stipulated by the Signoria for the wheat which he had caused to be unloaded there for the benefit of the commune. The clerk accordingly departed with a warrant of payment from the Signoria addressed to the governor, a letter written by Lioni which requested the governor to expedite its resolution, and letters of good offices written by his friends to the governor. Unfortunately, however, the governor did not pay in cash, and by way of compensation, gave the clerk all the cash receipts which he had paid at Sebenico on behalf of the Signoria. After all, the Venetian Corn Office had to pay the full price, and Pagolo Cicini therefore had no choice but to entrust Lioni with the remaining 1647 1/2 staia which he had brought to Venice. Further to this matter, Lioni succeeded with the assistance of his friends in making the Corn Office order bakeries to buy his wheat ahead of any other variety. In the first ten days of April, Lioni was able to sell all his wheat at 17 1/2 lire. Conversely, the maximum market price of the wheat carried by Cicini's ship was 13 1/2 lire with a 4 lire subsidy, while the market price of the Ragusan ships' cargo was only 13 lire. The individual share that each partner obtained from the sale of the wheat carried by Cicini's ship was as follows: 1,600 scudi for Rafaello, 1,000 scudi for Girolamo, and 500 scudi for Lioni<sup>87</sup>.

The Venetians captured four Ragusan ships and one ship chartered by the Florentines. Was there any way in which such an action could have been justified? In the documentary evidence, there are two situations in which such ostensibly questionable actions seem to receive tacit approval. The first is that the right of a government to capture foreign ships and confiscate their cargo was apparently tolerated during a food crisis. The second is that the Venetian propensity of regarding the Adriatic as their own territorial waters (*il nostro golfo*) was accepted to a certain extent by other nations.

Let us begin with an examination of the former assertion. A ship owned by Luca d'Angiolo and with a cargo of wheat (mentioned above as 12) left Volos for Venice on the 4th of February. In a letter dated the 4th of March<sup>88</sup> in which this departure was noted, Lioni feared that the ship, whose destination was not recorded, would either be captured by the merciless Venetian fleet, or be made to stay in Ragusa. As has been previously mentioned, people were dying of starvation in Ragusa due to the confiscation by the Venetian fleet of the wheat carried by their ships. Actually, though, the ship currently under discussion was captured and its wheat confiscated by the Ragusans, and not the Venetian fleet. Lioni cooperated with Zanobi Bertoli, who stayed in Ragusa to receive reasonable compensation for the confiscated wheat from the Ragusan government. This Bertoli, who was one of Lioni's agents, was perhaps also an agent of the Somaia family, for Ragusa was a very

---

<sup>87</sup> No.182, f. 49r.

<sup>88</sup> No.174, f. 292v-293v.

important market for powerful Florentine merchants at that time. Although it was unclear exactly who owned the wheat, it was certain that Gianbattista had ordered it to be loaded, so the owner entrusted Bertoli to receive the compensation for it, through the network of Florentine merchants. In a letter to Bertoli, Lioni said as follows<sup>89</sup>: Ragusa has caused us a lot of trouble, so it should pay us a reasonable price to the last penny, which should be 17 1/2 lire or 3 1/9 scudi d'oro, which the Venetian government paid me (Lioni) for the wheat loaded on Cicini's ship. I heard that the Ragusan government wants to settle the account with you without agreeing to pay such a reasonable price, so I shall send you a certificate proving that the Venetian government paid me 17 1/2 lire to enable you to exploit this agreement.

The capture of the ship *Palamota*, which was recorded in the same letter dated the 4th of March<sup>90</sup>, presents a similar case. This ship, loaded with wheat at Volos and bound for Livorno, was captured in Messina, where it made a scheduled stop. After having been made to unload a part of its cargo for the sake of the inhabitants of Messina, and a further 1,500 salme at various Sicilian ports for the sake of the Genoese, it was taken to Genoa. At that time, Sicily was under the rule of Carlos, and it is known that the Genoese admiral Andrea Doria served under him. It is therefore likely that the fleet that captured this ship may have been the Genoese fleet under his command. Lioni's sympathies seem to have been with the captors rather than the captured, because he insisted that it was imprudent for a ship to call at any (foreign) ports before reaching its destination<sup>91</sup>.

Let us now examine the latter situation. It was said that, in 1537, Venice enacted a law stating that Ragusan ships were not allowed to travel to "Levante." If a ship violated this decree, it was subject to capture and the confiscation of its cargo<sup>92</sup>. A galleon owned by Paquale bound for Ragusa which had left Alexandria loaded with lots of spices and linen cloths worth 25,000 scudi was captured by the Venetian fleet, perhaps in the first half of February 1540. The Venetian Superintendent of the Gulf (*Provveditore del Golfo*) had accused the ship of violating the aforementioned decree, so he confiscated its cargo and sent the ship to Venice, where the Signoria was to judge whether or not it had truly violated the terms of the law, and dispose of its cargo accordingly. In a letter dated the 18th of February<sup>93</sup>, Lioni stated that it would be difficult—if not impossible—to recover the entire cargo, and went on to say in a letter dated the 26<sup>th</sup> of February<sup>94</sup> that the owner was certain to lose 25 or 30 %, but might even lose as much as 40 % of the total value of the cargo.

Another such instance was the capture of a ship owned by Pasqualino dal Erba by the Venetian galley fleet on the 3rd of April, 1540<sup>95</sup>. This ship, which was bound for Ancona

---

<sup>89</sup> No.182, ff. 25r-v.

<sup>90</sup> No.174, ff. 292v-293v, 307r, No.182, ff. 8r-11v.

<sup>91</sup> No.174, ff. 292v-293v.

<sup>92</sup> No.174, ff. 278r-v.

<sup>93</sup> No.174, ff. 278r-v.

<sup>94</sup> No.174, f. 290r.

<sup>95</sup> On this ship, vedi, No.182, ff. 2v-3r, 5r-7v, 8r-11v.

carrying 126 botti of raisins, 14 balle of grana (kermes), 4 (casse) of sugar and various other goods, was captured under suspicion of violation, and taken to Zara by a galley. The captain of this galley entrusted the protection and care of the captured ship and its cargo to the governors (rettori) of Zara, whereupon he departed for Cyprus. According to this captain's instructions, the governors of Zara could not release the ship and its cargo without permission from the Venetian Signoria. Therefore, Pasqualino, having entrusted the ship to its captain at Zara, departed for Venice with one person to ask for this permission, and met with Lioni at the 23rd hour (midnight) on the 10th of April. The following day being a holiday, the Signoria was not in session, so Lioni, on the morning of the 12<sup>th</sup>, having communicated with the members of the College, presented himself at the Signoria, explained the matter fully, and requested that the ship be released. As the ship was Florentine, its cargo was not regarded as contraband goods by any Venetian ordinances, so he requested that the Signoria order the governors of Zara to release the ship and permit it to depart for Ancona, its original destination.

As was seen in the case of Lioni's attempted futures trading, any proposals presented to the Signoria had also to be deliberated in the College. While some members of the College thought that Lioni's request was reasonable, one member of the Signoria insisted in the College that the galley captain's original reason for judging the ship to be in violation should be heard before the ship and its cargo could be released. Lioni demurred, saying that it would take three months to receive an answer, as the captain had gone to Cyprus, and that it would not only be a question of expenses but also of potential damage to merchandise if the ship were to remain in Zara for such a length of time. Another member of the Signoria proposed that the ship should come to Venice, where its cargo could be sold at a higher price than in Ancona, and where the question of its future could be resolved properly. This proposal was approved by all the members. Lioni responded that the ship's progress should not be impeded, for its destination was Ancona and it was not engaged in any smuggling activities. Eventually, the Signoria concluded that Lioni should either recall the captain or his representative, or make the ship come to Venice on the condition that the matter would be resolved immediately upon its arrival. Lioni, Pasqualino and Lioni's friends, who had extensive knowledge and experience of Venetian law and matter, decided that it would be better to make the ship come to Venice, after considering the waste of time, potential damage to the goods and the market price in Venice. Following a careful examination of all pertinent laws and circumstances, Lioni was convinced that the ship would be released on arrival, for there was no reason to suspect otherwise.

### *Conclusion*

In the late autumn of 1539, the Venetian government directly intervened in the distribution of food upon realising the serious nature of the food shortage. Through

negotiations with its representative Lioni, the authority wished to make the powerful Florentine Somaia family import wheat from Thessaly, offering favorable conditions which were almost at the maximum permitted by law. Although the cities of Ancona and Ragusa were favored by the sultan, Venice stood in opposition to them while maintaining friendly relations with Florence. This could be the reason why the Venetian government chose not to negotiate with Ragusan or Anconitan merchants, but with Florentine merchants instead. These Florentine merchants, who feared discovery by the Turkish authorities, had to disguise Venetian ships bound for Venice as Ragusan ships bound for Livorno. Neither merchants nor ships could enter Turkish territory if their home state was hostile to the Ottoman Empire. It is, therefore, not difficult to imagine that demand for Ragusan ships rose sharply in Mediterranean ports. At that time, of course, almost the whole eastern coast of the Mediterranean, including Syria and Egypt, was controlled by the Ottoman Empire, except for the Venetian territories of Crete and Cyprus. By 1524, Venice had agreed upon a reciprocal arrangement with the Sultan, whereby the Sultan's subjects had commercial privileges in Venice, and Venetians possessed similar privileges in Turkish Territory<sup>96</sup>. This constituted a fundamental change to the traditional policy that only the Venetian privileged classes (nobles and citizens) were permitted to take part in its sea trade. The expansion of the Ottoman Empire throughout the Mediterranean and the rapid development of the commercial cities under its protection irrevocably damaged Venice's status as a sea power.

Among the ancient Greeks, it was an accepted practice during times of food shortage to capture ships from neutral countries loaded with wheat and confiscate their cargoes<sup>97</sup>. This practice was still tolerated in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. This was because the confiscators paid an agreed price for wheat according to a proper procedure, and any ship owner whose cargo was confiscated was criticised for his carelessness. Venice captured the four Ragusan ships and a ship owned by Cicini and chartered by the Somaia family, while Ragusa captured Luca d'Angiolo's ship, and a fleet (whose commander was reputed to be Doria) under the control of Carlos captured the ship Palamota bound for Livorno. Furthermore, Venice also captured a ship loaded with a cargo other than wheat, namely, a Ragusan ship loaded with spices and various other goods in Alexandria and bound for its home city. In this case, though, the ship was taken because it had violated the Venetian ordinance of 1537 prohibiting Ragusan ships from travelling to "Levante," so its cargo was considered to be contraband and duly confiscated. However, in the case of wheat, compensation was to be paid according to an agreed upon legal procedure. Venice also captured a Florentine ship, as it was suspected of smuggling. Its cargo consisted of raisins and various other merchandise (perhaps "Levante"

---

<sup>96</sup> Ravid, Benjamin, *A Tale of Three Cities and their Raison d'Etat*, in, Ginio, Alisa Meyuhas, ed., *Jews, Christians and Muslims in the Mediterranean World after 1492*, London, 1992, pp. 140f.

<sup>97</sup> Garnsey, Peter, *Famine and Food Supply in the Greco-Roman World – Responses to Risk and Crisis*, Cambridge, 1988, Chapter 9 (Translated in Japanese: 松本宣郎・阪本浩訳『古代ギリシア・ローマの飢饉と食糧供給』白水社、1998年、第9章).

goods meant for sale in Ancona) which were forcibly sold. This pushed Lioni to deny any involvement in smuggling activities. In both cases, force was apparently employed. It seems that Venice deemed it necessary to forestall a goods shortage that might cause a decline in her status as an international market, so she captured ships bound for Ragusa or Ancona carrying “Levante” goods. A similar logic was applied in the capture of wheat bearing ships during a food shortage, or of ships carrying other types of merchandise during a goods shortage. The ordinance of 1537 can thus be understood as a legal codification of this Venetian logic applied to the Adriatic region. The Florentine merchant Lioni did not attempt to refute this brand of Venetian morality, but rather accepted the decree as a precondition, and made himself familiar with all of its ramifications. Although Venice’s prestige as a sea power was widely recognized, her sphere of influence became limited to an area roughly comprising the Adriatic and the Ionian as far as the cape of Malea<sup>98</sup> (in Peloponnesus). It was in the Adriatic or its immediate environs that the Venetian fleet captured either wheat bearing ships or goods carriers. In other words, the Venetians were not present in the Mediterranean where Turkish or Spanish fleets were active, but rather in a limited area where Venice could defend her interests to the death. This was the beginning of the transformation of Venice from an international power which had once held sway over the whole Mediterranean into a local power whose sphere of influence was practically confined to the Adriatic.

In 1540, a Venetian agriculturalist, Alvise Cornaro, drafted a petition for governmental high officials<sup>99</sup>. Of the several points at issue, the main contention had to do with the food problem. Until that time, Venice had been dependent mainly upon overseas food imports, but her enemies had severed her maritime supply lines, thus forcing her people to face starvation<sup>100</sup>. In this way, said Sanudo, she was finally brought to accept unfavorable peace conditions, not through battle but through starvation. Her ability to import products from overseas had been greatly damaged by an increase in the price of wheat, caused by such factors as population growth, a rise in the charter cost of available Venetian cargo carriers (whose number had dropped from 40 to 18), and a rise in the taxes or fees associated with export markets. In order to overcome this economic and social difficulty, it was decided to improve food self-sufficiency through the cultivation of the wetlands found abundantly around Venice. In a letter of 1542 addressed to one of his friends, Cornaro wrote that agriculture should be more valuable than commerce, and referred to it as “Holy Agriculture<sup>101</sup>.” It seems that land improvement in the Terraferma witnessed an increase from the 1530’s or 1540’s onward, thus prompting a kind of boom in land speculation and

---

<sup>98</sup> Aymard, *op. cit.*, p. 174.

<sup>99</sup> Wguri, *op. cit.*, pp. 109 – 117.

<sup>100</sup> In No.182, f. 30v, there is a description of the peace conditions: Venice was supposed to cede Monensvasia (Malvasia) and Neapolis (Napoli di Romania) to the sultan, and was also expected to pay 300,000 ducati, while the sultan was to give Venice 100,000 staia of wheat every three years.

<sup>101</sup> Wguri, *op. cit.*, p.117.

agriculture<sup>102</sup>. From 1560 onward, several agricultural manuals appeared in print, and it is said that these Venetian publications were outstanding both for their quality and number<sup>103</sup>. As has been previously mentioned, there was a trend for the wheat of Terraferma to surpass that of overseas imports in quantity from the 1570's onward. Despite this agricultural boom, however, Venice's growing population soon exposed a fatal weak point in her food supply for, although she depended on overseas wheat, she nonetheless stood in opposition to the Ottoman Empire, which not only ruled the granary regions, but also many of the Mediterranean trade routes. The time when the Venetians could freely export from their economic colonies had already passed. The powerful Ottoman Empire utilised food as a strategic and diplomatic tool, while the Kingdoms of Naples and Sicily, which had become dependencies of Spain, charged high fees for their export licenses<sup>104</sup>. Venice could not, therefore, eradicate her fear of a severed food supply until she had achieved food self-sufficiency.

After the Battle of Prevesa, Venice's status as a sea power began to decline. She was no longer the most potent state in the Mediterranean region, but had begun to be a minor power who lived in fear of any interruptions to her food supply<sup>105</sup>. On the other hand, the capital that had once been invested in overseas trade could now be devoted to land development, the woolen industry or the publishing-printing industry. In conclusion, it does not seem unreasonable to speculate that, while this crisis after the battle certainly revealed the Venetian weakness as a sea power and brought about a downfall in her status, it nonetheless decided the direction of her economic activities for many centuries to come.

---

<sup>102</sup> *vedi, ibid.*, p. 103.

<sup>103</sup> *ibid.*, p. 120.

<sup>104</sup> Cf. No.182, ff. 84v, 88r, 93v.

<sup>105</sup> There was a recovery in Venetian sea trade between May 1540 (when she and the Ottoman Empire ceased hostilities) and May of 1570 (when she and the Ottomans were at open war).