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**THE RELATIONS OF THE REPUBLIC  
OF VENICE AND THE MARQUISES  
D'ESTE IN THE MID-FOURTEENTH TO  
MID-FIFTEENTH CENTURY BASED ON  
THE LETTERE DUCALI FROM THE  
WESTERN EUROPEAN SECTION OF  
THE HISTORICAL ARCHIVE OF THE  
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**THE RELATIONS OF THE REPUBLIC OF VENICE AND THE MARQUISES D'ESTE IN THE MID-FOURTEENTH TO MID-FIFTEENTH CENTURY BASED ON THE *LETTERE DUCALI* FROM THE WESTERN EUROPEAN SECTION OF THE HISTORICAL ARCHIVE OF THE SAINT PETERSBURG INSTITUTE OF HISTORY OF THE RUSSIAN ACADEMY OF SCIENCES**

The present study is devoted to the research into a set of the Venetian *lettere ducali* to the Marquises d'Este of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries collected by N.P. Likhachev (1862-1936), Member of the Academy of Sciences of the USSR, stored in the Western European section of the Saint Petersburg Institute of History of the Russian Academy of Sciences and the preparation of their full-text critical publication. The *lettere ducali* are an excellent source to study the *Serenissima* and its continental and overseas domains. The source material of the Venetian *lettere ducali* have long and not without reason been considered and actively investigated by researchers as one of the most important sources on the economic, social, political, legal, environmental, cultural, and ethnic history of Venice. In addition, Venetian sources often provide researchers with important material on the history of other states of the Italian Peninsula, including, in our case, the domains of d'Este. This explains the exceptional importance of studying *lettere ducali* as the most important source on the history of the Western European Middle Ages and early modern times. This study revealed historical material on the specific cities and regions of Italy (Venice, Treviso, Ferrara, Verona, Padua, the Po Delta), as well as the Venetian colonies in the Mediterranean (Crete, Cyprus) and the Adriatic (Shkodra, Dalmatian Coast), history of international relations, history of economic relations, history of everyday life, history of state institutions and international law, history of a medieval document, history of Latin writing.

Key words: History of Italy, 14<sup>th</sup> – 16<sup>th</sup> centuries, Venetian Republic, Terraferma, Mediterranean Sea, Treviso, Ferrara, Doges of Venice, chancery, diplomatic, Latin paleography, international relations, trade, diplomacy.

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## I

The *lettere ducali* (or just *ducali* – *documenti in forma lettera*), solemnly decorated formalized decrees and privileges of Venetian doges previously known as *ducali minori* in contrast to *ducali maggiori* became one of the principal types of production of the chancery of the Venetian doges in the last quarter of the XIII<sup>th</sup> century. The study of the apostolic documentation, which was being carried out for already more than a century and a half, revealed that originally *lettere ducali* (especially in the case of the *litterae clausae*) contained information about current political events which was not connected with the confirmation of somebody's rights. Only three documents of this type coming from the doge's chancellery of the 12<sup>th</sup> century are extant<sup>7</sup>. Moreover, the oldest surviving *lettere ducali* are *litterae patentes*, since the form of the *litterae patentes* apparently originated from the *litterae clausae*, which means that the majority of the oldest doge's documents were lost.

During the rule of Jacopo Tiepolo (1229 – 1249), the open (*litterae patentes*) and sealed (*litterae clausae*) forms of the *lettere ducali* were first differentiated. The *litterae clausae* are characterized by

- the absence of *plica*, i.e. a bend along the bottom edge of the sheet, while in the *litterae patentes* a hanging seal was attached;
- placing of the address on the exterior side of the parchment fold into an envelope by double folding;
- special way of fastening the seal, where a hemp cord stitched together edges of the letter-envelope, so as the addressee had to incise paper in order to keep the seal intact.

Only four original letters and two copies are preserved from the 30 years rule of Jacopo Tiepolo.<sup>8</sup> Analyzing the structure of the oldest surviving *lettere ducali*, one discovers that the forms of protocol and eschatocol have not been yet formalized and fixed. According to preliminary estimates, the documents of 14<sup>th</sup> – 15<sup>th</sup> centuries stored in the Western European section of the Historical Archive of the Saint Petersburg Institute of History of the Russian Academy of Sciences demonstrate further standardization of the form of the letters, showcasing different varieties of protocol and eschatocol. Contextualized within similar source material, this data can provide us dating and attributive features, which are among the most crucial criteria of

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<sup>7</sup> Gli atti originali della cancelleria veneziana / A cura di M. Pozza. Vol. II: 1205-1227. Venezia, 1996. P. 18.

<sup>8</sup> Lazzarini V. Lettere ducali veneziane del secolo XIII. 'Litterae clausae' // Scritti di Paleografia e Diplomatica in onore di Vincenzo Federici / A cura di R. Morghen. Firenze, 1944. P. 225-239.

document authenticity in the case of identification of fragmentary, incomplete documents or even medieval fakes.

The attitude toward the *lettere ducali* had been changing during the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Initially, the *lettere ducali* were used as primary sources for political and socio-economic history; gradually their potential was investigated in the fields of history of diplomacy and history of international relations, history of notariate, institutional history, conceptual history, microhistory, *Alltagsgeschichte*, etc. Creating new methods of authentication of the documents and developing existed ones, study of visual features of such documents together with prosopographic and institutional analysis complement history of administration and institutions, fields of research which were not appreciated enough until now. Research into the language of the *lettere ducali* provides an opportunity to reconstruct rituals of power, reflecting representation of power relations or constituting relations of trust. The present study therefore aims at revealing the source potential of the *lettere ducali* from the Western European section of the Historical Archive of the Saint Petersburg Institute of History of the Russian Academy of Sciences, focusing on the correspondence of the Venetian doges addressed to Niccolò II d'Este (1338 – 1388) and Niccolò III d'Este (1383 – 1441). While the first part of this paper is dedicated to the history of making of the collection, the main body will show how questions of socio-economic, political, economic and environmental history can be studied based on the sources in question.

The *lettere ducali*, which are stored in the Western European section of the Historical Archive of the Saint Petersburg Institute of History of the Russian Academy of Sciences, date back to the period of stable peace in the relationships between Ferrara and Venice. Struggles between Venice and Ferrara originate in 1240 when Azzo VII d'Este Novello (1205 – 1264) became a new marquis. In the XI – XIII centuries Ferrara was a vibrant economic center. Located at the bank of Po (until the XIV century when river stream changed its direction) Ferrara represented the last significant urban center before the river flowed into the Adriatic Sea. Before the mid-13<sup>th</sup> century Ferrara served as a transit point for the transshipment of the goods from ships to the riverboats going upstream of the River Po to Lombardy. Nearby the city the two main tributaries of the Po River, Po di Volano and Po Morto di Primaro, merged and flowed into the sea forming a series of contiguous brackish lagoons named *valli*, that is, fish basins (of Comacchio). These marshy lands supplied Ferrara with fish and salt, the source of great importance, on which Ferrara possessed mining monopoly<sup>9</sup>. The issue of wetland was urgent both for Ferrara and Venice. As Braudel put it, ‘Mediterranean people always had to fight with

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<sup>9</sup> Dean, Trevor. *Land and Power in Late Medieval Ferrara: The Rule of the Este, 1350-1450*. Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1988. P. 19.

lowlands'<sup>10</sup>. Russian historian Elena Bernadskaya also claimed that struggles with overflowing could be seen through the whole history of cities located in Delta del Po<sup>11</sup>. It affected political history of this area ('Venice did not know the problem of towers and banks')<sup>12</sup>, that is, wetland did not fit the constructing of feudal castles<sup>13</sup>, and most likely forced nobility to settle in the city, not in rural areas. Such conditions were common for both Venice and Ferrara; otherwise, it gave birth to two different political systems, resulting in the Venetian aristocratic republican system and the Este's seignury. To the point, that could be seen as argument against all kinds of geographical determinism that of Braudel and Radkau<sup>14</sup> while the similar environment provided possibility of development of two fundamentally different types of political organization. Unfortunately, environmental aspects are only poorly shown in documents discussed<sup>15</sup>; their main subjects lay in the economic and political fields. These spheres of historical knowledge, especially political history, seem to be criticized as big narratives losing the human being who is the main and singular subject of the history. Otherwise, as recent inquiries have shown, political history may be narrated in different ways. At this point, *lettere ducali* provide opportunity to examine political and economic issues from below, starting at the level of individual cases and going from the micro-level to macro-level, from the local level to the global one.

Economic and political dimensions of the Venetian-Ferrarese relationships are frequently not succumbed to separation. The actors of *lettere ducali* are Venetian citizens and subjects of Marquis of Ferrara, who mainly argued about their trade rights and privileges, but their very existence and maintenance were the questions of political matters. In this way, documents from the Western European section of the Historical Archive of the Saint Petersburg Institute of History of the Russian Academy of Sciences provide opportunity to trace large-scale problems in everyday life of the people of the the XIV-XV centuries.

Struggles between Venice and Ferrara find its roots in 1240 when Azzo VII d'Este became the new marquis. He was supported simultaneously by the Pope and the Republic of Venice. As a "gratitude" the new Marquis of Ferrara became a vicar of Pope (it means that Azzo

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<sup>10</sup> Brodel, Fernand. *Sredizemnoe more i sredizemnomorskii mir v epokhu Filippa II*. T. 1. *Rol' sredy*. M.: Yazyki slavyanskoi kultury, 2002. P. 75.

<sup>11</sup> Bernadskaya E. V. *Ferrara i ee sel'skii okrug (po knige notaria Bellino Pregostini) // Ital'yanskiiye communy XIV-XV vv.* Sb. dok. iz Arkhiva Leningradskogo otdeleniya Instituta Istorii AN SSSR. M.-Leningrad: Nauka, 1965. P. 238.

<sup>12</sup> Rutenburg V. I. *Ital'yanskiiye gorod ot rannego srednevekov'ya do Vozrozhdeniya*. Leningrad: Nauka, 1987. P. 34.

<sup>13</sup> Dean, Trevor. *Land and Power in Late Medieval Ferrara: The Rule of the Este, 1350-1450*. Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1988. P. 13.

<sup>14</sup> Radkau argues that the republic was built on necessities of organization of water supply systems and as it could not be developed in other way but individual responsibility for keeping canals and dams. In this way, civil society was sustained: Radkau, Joakim. *Priroda i vlast': Vsemirnaya istoria okruzhayushego sredy*. M.: Izdatel'skiy dom Vyshego shkoly ekonomiki, 2014. P. 162-164.

<sup>15</sup> There are other sources for this inspiring topic, for instance: Cornaro M. *Scritture sulla Laguna // Antichi Scrittori d'Iraulica Veneta*. Venezia: Premiate Officine Grafiche c. Ferrari, 1919.

d'Este had to send a lot of money to Rome)<sup>16</sup>. On the other hand, Venice expanded its trade privileges in Ferrara: Venetians got the right to freely trade salt, buy hemp and grain there, as well as easily import and export them from Ferrara. Citizens of *Serenissima* were liberated from the taxes on the transportation of goods through Ferrara. What is more, Lombard ships from now on were allowed to go to Venice directly without any stops in Ferrara<sup>17</sup>. As a result, long-distance trade – the most prosperous source of income in medieval times – was closed for Ferrara, while Venice strengthened its monopoly of trade in the Adriatic Sea. *Ogni merce che entra near Adriatico o esce dall'Adriatico deve toccar Venezia*<sup>18</sup>. None of the merchants going through the Adriatic Sea could hide from the power of Venice. History of the 13<sup>th</sup> century created the ground for future struggles between these two city states.

In the 15–16 centuries, the Adriatic appeared as a space of flourishing smuggling: a lot of goods were transported from Dalmatia and Istria to Ferrara's markets bypassing Venice<sup>19</sup>. Aside from trade issue Venice had a special privilege on mining salt, one of the main goods in the medieval world. Meanwhile, Ferrara as Venice had all opportunities to produce salt on their territories, so this field of production was another cause for conflict. Finally, privileged position of Venetians in the *distretti* of Ferrara was a matter for disputes and lawsuits. All these factors led to the War of Ferrara (also known as “*Guerra del Sale*” – War for Salt, 1482–1484). The common reason for this war was the salt produced by Ferrara in the estuary of the Po River which competed with Venice monopoly. During the war Venice won a lot of territories, but still there were a lot of disputes on territorial possession (historical part of Palezina)<sup>20</sup>. All these conflicts can be seen at the borderlands of Venice and Ferrara, and Palezina was one of these territories. This is a common issue in the context of forming borders between early modern states when various jurisdictions overlap each other on the same geographical space. In this region, economics and politics are so closely interconnected, that it is often impossible and impractical to separate them. That is why it seems perspective to look at the economics and politics on micro level and put it into the total context of the history of the. Here *lettere ducali* are crucial sources that give perspective “from above”, but still reveal the struggles between states through *cases*. Summing up, this paper is aimed to analyze the *lettere ducali* addressed to the marquises of Ferrara to understand the relevance of such sources in terms of microhistory approach.

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<sup>16</sup> Bernadskaya E. V. Ferrara i ee sel'skii okrug (po knige notaria Bellino Pregostini) // Ital'yanskiiye kommuny XIV-XV vv. Sb. dok. iz Arkhiva Leningradskogo otdeleniya Instituta Istorii AN SSSR. M.-Leningrad: Nauka, 1965. P. 240.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid. P. 239.

<sup>18</sup> Brodel, Fernand. Sredizemnoe more i sredizemnomorskii mir v epokhu Filippa II. T. 1. Rol' sredy. M.: Yazyki slavyanskoi kultury, 2002. P. 170.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Norvich J. Istoriya Venezianskoi Respubliki. Moscow: AST, 2010. P. 427.

The chronological frame of the work is chosen due to the very first (1372) and the last (1437) letters from the 186<sup>th</sup> box of the “Venice and its domain” collection of the Western European section of the Historical Archive of the Saint Petersburg Institute of History of the Russian Academy of Sciences. Notably, the documents related to Ferrara stored in the Archivio di Stato di Venezia mainly date back to the later times. The earliest among these documents (early XVIth century) are stored in the Archivio dei Capi del Consiglio dei X.<sup>21</sup> The collections No. 20 Possessi ecclesiastici and No. 11 Possessi ecclesiastici (registri) of the Savi agli Ordini contain mentions of Ferrara starting from 1561.<sup>22</sup> In the collection of the letters (Dispacci), the earliest ones date back to 1597,<sup>23</sup> and those from the reports (Relazioni) to 1575.<sup>24</sup> Thus, the documents stored in Saint Petersburg shed light on the earlier stage of the relations between Venice and Ferrara. The *lettere ducali* of this set were revealed and researched by the research and study group 'Bishops, Doges and Merchants: Texts of Medieval Italian Cities of the XIII-XV Centuries' of Higher School of Economics in St. Petersburg.

## II

In this study we analyzed just one part of the Likhachev`s huge collection, specifically one box No. 186. We picked up those letters which refer to the relationships between Ferrara and Venice in the end of the 14<sup>th</sup> – first half of the 15<sup>th</sup> centuries. *Lettere ducali* are original messages written on rectangular pieces of parchment (there are no paper letters among the analyzed documents), the seals have been lost, but traces of their attachment are visible. Most of the documents have attached antiquarian covers, which indicate that all documents were previously in the same collection. On the dorsal side, there are paper annotations from the past storage location which are often glued. Also, there are some remarks made by the antiquarians of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, as well as those made by Likhachev (mostly in pencil). In the second half of the 14<sup>th</sup> century, the form of the letters changes. From that time on, *intitulatio* appears as: «[Nomen ducis] dei gratia dux Venetiarum et cetera» (instead of «[Nomen ducis] dei gratia Venecie, Dalmacie atque Crohacie dux et dominus quarte partis et dimidiea totius imperii Romanie»). The date is always placed in “eschatocol”, *datum* (end of the letter), at the same time before the beginning of 15<sup>th</sup> c. there is only day, month and indiction. This circumstance creates certain source-study difficulties in dating and reconstructing chronology. Nonetheless, even if the year from the Incarnation is specified, the dating of the document may cause difficulties. For instance, the letter 15/186 is accompanied by an antique cover indicating 1385; together with

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<sup>21</sup> Organi Costituzionali e Principali Dignità dello Stato. Venezia: Archivio di Stato di Venezia, 2018. P. 34.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid. P. 8.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid. P. 19.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid. P. 27.

four other documents (8/186, 10/186, 12/186 и 13/186) it originates from the Luzziatti collection. The dates indicated on the cover, according to Likhachev<sup>25</sup>, were calculated according to indications, but the two messages were dated incorrectly. The 7<sup>th</sup> indiction specified in *datum* in *lettera* 15/186 does not coincide with 1385 which was actually 8/9 indicts (in Venice, indictions were calculated according to the Greek style, so the new indiction began on September 1). The wrong dating in this sense is pointed out by Likhachev and Klimanov as well<sup>26</sup>. The date, however, must be changed to 1383 or to 1398 because seven indictions in the long dogeship of Antonio Venier accounted for these years. Hence the problem of identifying the addressee of the letter, since when dating back to 1383, the letter should be addressed to Niccolò II (died in 1388), whereas the message of 1398 would have been addressed by Niccolò III (Marquis of Ferrara in 1393–1441). This problem requires further investigation on other historical sources.

Although the address of the selected letters as a whole remains unchanged (since both Marquis d'Este, mentioned in the studied letters, were namesakes), there are some interesting changes. Thus, the traditional appeal to the Marquis of Ferrara, located in the address, *amicus dilectus* in the rule Francesco Foscari (1423 – 1457) is replaced at some point by *filius noster*. The change in the circulation within the content part of the message coincides with it: *magnificus et potens* becomes *illustris et magnificus*. Along with this in the 1380s the title of the Marquis of Ferrara is also changing: *vir* turns into *dominus*. That is why, there is an issue whether this transformation reflects a change in the hierarchy between Venice and Ferrara, or whether it indicates the change in the chancellery tradition itself.

The content of the letters concerns the regions historically known as Rovigo (or Polesine) and Veneto. This region, located in the north of Italy in the estuary of Po River, is a wetland (*valle*), on the one hand, it protects its population from military threats, as well as provides valuable resources, such as fish and salt, on the other hand, causes a high incidence of malaria<sup>27</sup>. Notably, the study of the Venetian Terraferma was not sufficiently reflected in historiography, which is a consequence of the so-called "Myth of Venice" - a city that shuns land, a maritime republic, whose possessions proliferate in the Mediterranean. This led to the ignorance in the land trade of Venice, as well as a change in the appearance of the lagoon itself, insofar as amphibious world in which water, land, and marsh merged and people came and

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<sup>25</sup> Лихачев Н. П. Буллы // Климанов Л. Г. «Византийские отражения» в сфрагистике. СПб.: Алетея, 1999. С. 299-303.

<sup>26</sup> Климанов Л. Г. «Quod sunt cives nostri»: Статус венецианского гражданства в XIV в. // Культура и общество Италии накануне нового времени. М.: Наука, 1993. С. 28-38.

<sup>27</sup> Бродель Ф. Средиземное море и средиземноморский мир в эпоху Филиппа II. В 3 ч. Ч. 1: Роль среды. М.: Языки славянской культуры, 2002. С.72-75; Радкау Й. Природа и власть. Всемирная история окружающей среды. М.: Изд. дом НИУ ВШЭ, 2014. С. 160-161.

went<sup>28</sup>, since it was lost in historiography. In the 1970s, historians have finally turned to the study of Terraferma, and this topic remains popular among researchers with more and more influence being given by the microlevel approach<sup>29</sup>. The period represented in *lettere ducali* in this respect is crucial because exactly at the beginning of the 15<sup>th</sup> century (especially in the dogship Francesco Foscari) Venice changes the focus of politics: its expansion is now directed not only to the marine world, but also to the Italian peninsula. Partly this was probably influenced by environmental reasons, since in the 14–15<sup>th</sup> cc. the danger of waterlogging of the lagoon is exacerbated, and, as Elizabeth Crouzet-Pavan noted “until Venice actually conquered an empire of Terraferma Venetians could do nothing about river silt and were at the mercy of various decisions taken by their neighbors”<sup>30</sup>. However, according to Michael Knapton, these annexations served largely to guarantee security and support to trade flows benefitting Venice and involved significant voluntary choice by new subjects<sup>31</sup>. Simultaneously, the studies are mainly devoted to the northern part of the possessions of Venice on the peninsula, while the southern lands are not so researched, apparently, because the increase in territories in this direction was minimal. It is worth to consider, however, that the southern part of the Po delta was an ecological disaster, so Venice was forced to carry out hydraulic drainage work there (*Taglio di Porto Viro*), which after the end of the d'Este dynasty was in the possession of the Holy See, which led Venice to the conflict with Rome<sup>32</sup>. This was not the first change in the geography of the region.

The region in question has been changing for centuries both by the movements of nature and by the human activity. Many cities of Polesine were built by the Etruscans, predecessors of Romans. After Rome became weak, the territories of Rovigo along with Venice become a zone of Eastern Roman power. At the same time, the rivalry between the two trade centers of the region, the Roman Venice and the Lombard Comacchio took place. Comacchio finally lost in the competition for trade in the Adriatic, was destroyed by the Venetians and turned into a local village.<sup>33</sup> As well as Comacchio (*Comaclum*), there are other toponyms, such as Chioggia (*Clugia*), Corbolla (*Corbolla Superior*), Spina (*Spina*), Papozze (*locus/villa Papociarum*), and coast of Marche (*Reperie Marchie*). Other two toponyms are difficult to localize. Thus, it seems

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<sup>28</sup> Crouzet-Pavan E. *Toward an Ecological Understanding of the Myth of Venice // Venice Reconsidered: The History and Civilization of an Italian City-State, 1297-1797*. Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000. P. 39-66.

<sup>29</sup> Martin John, Romano Dennis, *Reconsidering Venice // Ibid.* P. 12.

<sup>30</sup> Crouzet-Pavan E. *Toward an Ecological Understanding of the Myth of Venice // Ibid.* P. 53.

<sup>31</sup> Knapton Michael, *The Terraferma State // A Companion to Venetian History, 1400-1797 / Ed. Eric R. Dursteler*. Leiden-Boston: Brill, 2013. P. 86.

<sup>32</sup> Zandrini Bernardino, *Memorie Storiche dello Stato Antico e Moderno delle Lagune di Venezia e de que' Fiumi che Restarono Divertiti per la Conservazione delle Medesime*. T. 2. Padova: Nella Stamperia del Seminario, 1811. P. 308 - 368.

<sup>33</sup> Ortalli Gh. *The Other Possible Venice: Comacchio and Control of the Upper Adriatic (AD 715–932) // Mare et litora: Essays Presented to Sergei Karpov for his 60th Birthday / Ed. R. Shukurova*. Moscow: INDRIK, 2009. P. 191–200.

that *capitaneus Riperie*<sup>34</sup> is the Capitan of river Piave, but this is not 100% true. In the 14<sup>th</sup> – 15<sup>th</sup> centuries most of these settlements were located on the border between Venice and Ferrara. At this stage of the study it is not possible to localize the *magnum sinistrum* (186/10) in the area of Corbolla. Sometimes as well as in the case of Corbolla the settlement was divided by river (Fig. 1). In this case, the Venetians could have property (its legal status remains uncertain) not only in Venetian land itself, but also in the territory of Ferrara. Thus, the legal regulation in this territory was complicated because of its border position and, as a result, by the partial overlapping of jurisdictions of the Marquis of Ferrara and the Venice Republic.

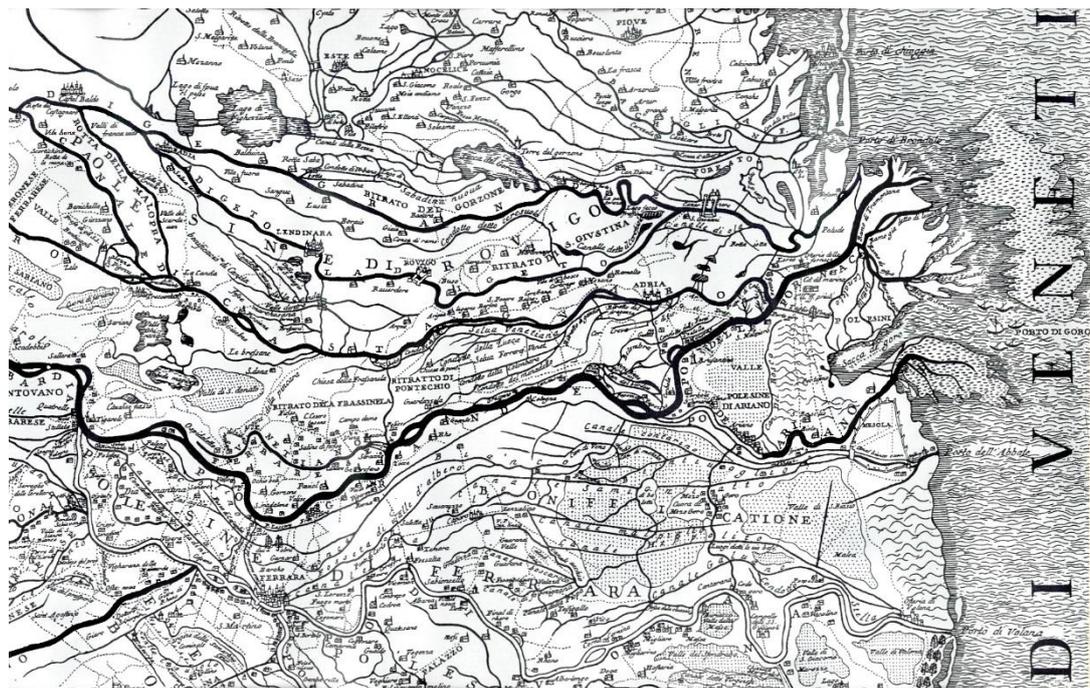


Fig. 1. Polesine and Delta del Po in 1603.

From all the lettere ducali that we studied, the very first four (1372–1382) are written by the doge Andrea Contarini (born in the early 14<sup>th</sup> century – 1382). Before 1352, only some very scarce sources tell us something about Andrea Contarini. In 1352, he was assigned as a *Procuratore de citra*, whose charge was charity deeds in the territories of San Marco, Castello and Cannaregio. This office was accepted as prime way to the position of the *dux Venetiarum*. After that he became one of the 20 nobles, elected by The Council of Ten, who took part in the trial against the accused doge Marino Falier (1355). 1356–1360 was the period of vibrant political activity for Andrea Contarini. Moreover, because of the war that broke out along the coast of Dalmatia, he took part in several embassies to the Kingdom of Hungary in order to make peace. An interesting episode happened in 1357 in rebellious Dubrovnik, where Contarini had to

<sup>34</sup> WES SPb II RAS. Venice and its domain. C. 186. No. 8.

organize defense against Louis I the Hungarian (1326 – 1382)<sup>35</sup>. In 1368 Andrea Contarini was elected as a Doge against his own will. He had to choose: to accept the position or to become a betrayer. In the period of his dogeship, long-awaited peace with Padua was signed (1373). However, the war with Chioggia (1378–1381), which had a lot of consequences for both sides, Venice as well as Genoa with its allies (Hungary and Padua). The luckiest one in this war was (surprisingly for all city states) Amadeus IV from Savoy. He received the Venice`s territories in Dalmatia for military support. On the other hand, this was had a negative effect on the domestic policy of Genoa that consequently had a very unstable period of administration weakening and economic recession<sup>36</sup>.

His contemporary and his addressee was Niccolò II d'Este (the marquis of Ferrara in 1361–1388). There are four letters written in the chancellery of Andrea Contarini to Niccolò II in the collection studied. There is also another one which was written during Antonio Venier reign (1382–1400), but there is an issue about the dating. The form of the dating of lettere ducali in the 14th – 15th centuries did not include the year, but only indiction (in this case – indiction VII). Moreover, the antiquarian cover says that the letter was written in 1385. This year is also used by N. P. Likhachiyov and L. G. Klimanov. However, the 7th indiction in the dogeship of Antonio Venier refers to 1384 and 1399. Consequently, although we have no serious reason not to trust to the dating of N. P. Likhachev, it is still possible that there are some inaccuracies regarding dates.

The personality of Niccolò II is worth some attention. In 1352, after father`s death, he inherited the lands of Ferrara and Modena with his brother Aldobrandino III d'Este. Aldobrandino died on 2 November 1361 and Niccolò consequently became the owner of lands. Ensuring the support of Pope Innocent VI and the Holy Roman Emperor Charles IV, Niccolò refused the traditional union of the houses of Este and Visconti, rulers of Milano. The main role in this conflict was dedicated to the alliance of Este and a papal legate in Bologna. Other actors were seigniorial clans (Gonzaga, Malatesta, and Carrara) and some members of the local nobility of the central Emilia (for example, Boiardi and Fogliani). They altogether withstood against the house of Visconti and their supporters, the Pio, Pico and Correggio families. On 16 April 1362 the first military clashes took place. They ended in 1364 when the peace between allies was signed on 13 of May. However, Niccolò d'Este knew that this peace would not last long so in 1366 he travelled to Avignon in order to ask Pope Urban V to get back to Rome and help in the conflict with Visconti family. As a result, Urban V headed to Rome and started the war against Visconti in 1367. Unfortunately, Pope`s return did not accumulate expected results, as many

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<sup>35</sup> Romanelli F. C. Contarini, Andrea // Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani. 1983. Vol. 28. URL: [http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/andrea-contarini\\_%28Dizionario-Biografico%29/](http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/andrea-contarini_%28Dizionario-Biografico%29/) (visited: 28.11.2018).

<sup>36</sup> Norvich J. Istoriya Venezianskoy Respubliki. Moscow: AST, 2010. P. 335-336.

cities that joined the Este's house did not trust Urban V and did not provide adequate support. After the death of Urban V, Gregory XI was elected as a new Pope, who also led the fight against Visconti. But the new military campaign did not give better results, and on 4 July 1375 a new peace was signed in Bologna.

In 1378 the conflict between the Genoese and the Venetians during the Chioggia war became considerably more intensive. The Este's house was officially neutral, but this fact did not prevent the Venetian Republic from recruiting mercenaries in the territories of Este, as well as sending large quantities of wheat to the cities besieged by the Genoese<sup>37</sup>.

Infinite wars, floods in Po river territories (1362, 1369, and 1385), famines (1369, 1370, 1374, and 1375) and the Plague (1382) slaughtered one third of the population of Ferrara. All these factors pressured the city which had been already covered with high taxes. The cadaster of 1385 increased the tax burden on the population more, and a revolt broke out on May 3 of the same year. The purpose of the revolt was to eliminate Tommaso da Tortona, Judge of Savi, and mastermind of the fiscal policy of Ferrara. The crowd besieged and invaded the Court Office, destroying it and demanding Tommaso's head. At the end of the day, d'Este was forced to give Tommaso to the rebels. After that, Niccolò abolished the old duties and ensured the creation of a new tax system. In addition, he dealt with the leaders of the revolt, accusing them of wanting to return the government to Ferrara. What is more, Niccolò ordered Bartolino da Novara to build a massive castle on the north side of the Palazzo Municipal, more fortified and protected. Castello Estense for a long time became the residence of the Este family<sup>38</sup>.

The main result of Niccolò II reign was the spreading of Este house possessions, the alliance with Church and the strengthening of seignior regime. Moreover, Giovanni Convertino stated that under Niccolò's reign Ferrara turned from a swampy and mediocre place into a clean and healthy city, with cobbled streets, beautiful stone buildings, fortresses and towers.

Other letters were sent to another marquee of Ferrara, Niccolò III, the grandson (and namesake) of Niccolò II. Niccolò's father died when the boy was about ten years old. Until Niccolò became old enough he was forced to rule under the rule of the Regency Council and the considerable influence of Venice and Bologna. Venice and the Council always controlled Niccolò's activity, but in July 1398, everything changed when Francesco Novello da Carrara invaded Ferrara with a large army, imprisoned Bartolomeo della Mella and replaced the city

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<sup>37</sup> Ippolito A. M. Este, Niccolò d' // Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani. Vol. 43. 1993. URL: [http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/Niccolò-d-este\\_res-c28fd5a3-87ec-11dc-8e9d-0016357eee51\\_%28Dizionario-Biografico%29/](http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/Niccolò-d-este_res-c28fd5a3-87ec-11dc-8e9d-0016357eee51_%28Dizionario-Biografico%29/) (visited: 12.12.2018).

<sup>38</sup> Dean T. Land and Power in Late Medieval Ferrara: The Rule of the Este, 1350-1450. Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1988. P. 18-19.

councils with his people. However, Niccolò with his men began to take all initiative. He limited the power of the Regency Council which had been existed till 1402 when Este made it his personal council. In September 1400, Este went to Milan to meet with the Duke of Visconti; simultaneously it provoked Venice and Padua anxiety. The point was that in the context of Visconti military initiatives (such as the capture of Bologna), Este had been always remained consistently neutral. However, Gian Galeazzo Visconti died in 1402. Pope Boniface IX, who wanted to return Bologna and other places taken from papal domination by the Milano, sent Cardinal Baldassarre Cossa to Ferrara to convince the Marquis to enter the Pope's league. In May 1403 Este agreed and became the general captain of the united forces: the agreement provided for the return of the lands of Nonantola and Bazzano to Ferrara, over which the marquis had lost his power in previous years, the reduction of the annual payments that Ferrara paid to the papal treasury, and the concession to Este Reggio and Parma, conquered by the armies of the League.

The agreement did not give any positive results: only the possession of Crevalcore in the Bologna region, which had recently rebelled against the Visconti and came under the authority of Ferrara, was legal. Cardinal Cossa, on the other hand, was not going to give back Nonantola and Bazzano to Este's house. In addition, the cities of Reggio and Parma were taken by Ottobono Terzi, protected by the Venetians and the terrible rival of the Este family. However, Este finally managed to conquer Reggio and Parma. Having overcome a serious threat and greatly expanded his possessions, in 1410 Este went to Bologna to meet with Pope Alexander V, who handed him the Golden Rose<sup>39</sup>.

However, the political conditions in Italy were still changing. After the death of Gian Galeazzo Visconti Padua rebelled and captured Verona. Venice started a war with rebellious city. In this dangerous situation Niccolò III tried to stay neutral, but the desire to expand the territory by Polesina was stronger. Expansion to the northern lands was a great mistake for Niccolò: considering the peace treaty of 1405 Ferrara was forced to abandon its ambitions in Polesina and also to stop the production of salt in *valle di Comacchio*<sup>40</sup>.

In the new conflict between Milan and Venice Ferrara took the side of *Serenissima*, but long conflict forced the Marquis Niccolò to seek peace with Milan. After discussion in 1420 Este handed Visconti Parma and the part of Reggio. On January 22 of the following year Filippo Maria freely transferred to him the lands of Castellarano, Rodegli Gavardo and Carpineto.

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<sup>39</sup> Ippolito A. M. Este, Niccolò d' // Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani. Vol. 43. 1993. [http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/Niccolò-d-este\\_\(Dizionario-Biografico\)](http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/Niccolò-d-este_(Dizionario-Biografico)) (visited: 12.12.2018).

<sup>40</sup> Dean T. Land and Power in Late Medieval Ferrara: The Rule of the Este, 1350-1450. Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1988. P. 25.

Meanwhile, the balance of power has changed: the army of Visconti took the whole Po valley, while Este had much less men in his army. Since then, Este tried to stay at the same distance from the two states, trying to maneuver between them, thereby guaranteeing the integrity of his possessions. Staying between two struggling states, Este was a mediator in peace agreements between Venice and Visconti in 1428 and 1433.

The result of the policy of Niccolò III was the territorial expansion of the March of Ferrara, while avoiding major military conflicts. In this sense, Luga returns under the authority of the Marquis in 1436–1437, and in 1440 the Roman pontiff transfers to him the possession of Bagnacavallo and Massalombarda. Two years earlier, in 1438 Venice had returned the part of Rovigo territory to prevent Ferrara to take part in the following conflicts between Milan and Venice. However, as a result of the new agreement between Visconti and *Serenissima* (1441), the influence of Venice on Terraferma noticeably increased, so that the Marquis came closer with Milan as if to maintain a delicate balance in the region, which, however, consequently alerted Venice. A new turn of policy ended with Niccolò's life in 1441. His biography shows what a difficult geopolitical situation was Ferrara in in the first half of the 15<sup>th</sup> century. It was the situation of increasing Venetian expansion to the mainland, as a result of which the territories of the March of Ferrara were also in danger. *Lettere ducali*, referring to the time of Niccolò III d'Este reign, tell mainly about the breach of boundaries (territorial as well as those connected with law) in the Po valley where Ferrara and Venice Republic contacted with each other<sup>41</sup>.

Among addressers there are also such names as Antonio Venier (1382–1400), Michele Steno (1400–1413) and Francesco Foscari (1423–1457). Let's look more precisely at their biographies as it seems that their activities reflect political and economic trends of the considered era.

The information about early life is scarce of on *Antonio Venier's* (about 1330 – 1400). In 1380 he was assigned as the commandant of the Tenedos fortress, and then in 1381 he became the commander of the armies in Crete. He originated from middle class merchants. Perhaps he could become a doge during serious struggles among aristocracy<sup>42</sup>. It should be noted that there was a high consolidation of the Venetian nobility due to their wish of maintaining the internal balance of power. That is why, nobility always tried to reach consensus. Notably, the well-known conflict between Guelphs and Ghibellines is also not characteristic for Venice, in which the church (the episcopal chair was located on Chioggia) was generally subordinated to the

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<sup>41</sup> Ippolito, Antonio Menniti, Este, Niccolò d' // Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani. Vol. 43. 1993. URL: [http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/Niccolò-d-este\\_%28Dizionario-Biografico%29/](http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/Niccolò-d-este_%28Dizionario-Biografico%29/) (visited: 07.12.2018).

<sup>42</sup> Venier, Antonio // Enciclopedie on line. URL: <http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/antonio-venier> (visited: 02.12.2018).

interests of the city governing aristocracy or rather merged with it since many bishops came from families ranked in *Consiglio Maggiore* and *Consiglio Minor*.

His successor became *Michele Steno* (about 1331 – 1413). It seems that he had participated in the battles during the war with Chioggia, and he also had attended the return of Chioggia in 1381 where became a *podestà* later. He took a very active role in the living of the Republic and became consequently one of the *procuratori di San Marco*. There is a common opinion that with his assignment the Golden Age of Venice started. During his working Venice took part in the conflict caused by the death of duke in Milano, Gian Galeazzo Visconti, who was the only one who maintained a delicate balance in the region. In this conflict Padua separated from Venice and attacked Verona. Consequently, the city of Padua was besieged by the Venetian armies which blocked the water source, river Brenta. After the fall of the city the senior with his sons were executed in Venice (1406). Despite Padua Venice also captured Treviso, Vicenza and Rovigo<sup>43</sup>. These territories became first Venetian acquisitions on the Terraferma which signified the shift of *Serenissima's* politics towards land – the tendency which would be forced in the dogeship of Francesco Foscari.

Twelve letters of the collection are sent by Francesco Foscari (1423–1457),<sup>44</sup> six of them were destined to Niccolò III d'Este, Marquis of Ferrara. Francesco Foscari (June 19, 1373 – October 30, 1457) served as 65<sup>th</sup> Venetian doge in 1423 – 1457. Although Francesco's father Nicolò was mainly engaged in the overseas trade; however, his son did not follow his path in commerce, rather preferring to use the family wealth to reach his ambitious political goals, the very purpose of his own existence. In 1400, he was elected into the criminal Quarantia, although he was not yet of the age prescribed by law, and in December 1401 he became a *giudice del proprio*.<sup>45</sup> In 1402, significant changes in the world opened new horizons to the *Serenissima*. Firstly, in the battle of Ankara, Tamerlan defeated the Ottomans under Bayezid I Yıldırım, crushing the Ottoman power and prolonging for about half a century the life of the Byzantine Empire and the privileged Venetian Black Sea trade. Secondly, the first Duke of Milan, Gian Galeazzo Visconti (1351 – 1402), died because of the plague. The second point resulted in the Venetian expansion up to Mincio and Lago Del Garda and, eventually, the shaping of the Terraferma. Francesco was an active promoter of this expansion, thus, being a *savio agli Ordini* in 1403, he insisted on the war with Francesco II Novello da Carrara (1359 – 1406), signore of

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<sup>43</sup> Brunetti M. Steno, Michele // Enciclopedia Italiana. 1936. URL: [http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/michele-steno\\_%28Enciclopedia-Italiana%29/](http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/michele-steno_%28Enciclopedia-Italiana%29/) (visited: 28.11.2018).

<sup>44</sup> Gullino G. Foscari, Francesco // Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani. 1997. Vol. 49. URL: [http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/francesco-foscari\\_\(Dizionario-Biografico\)](http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/francesco-foscari_(Dizionario-Biografico)) (visited: 28.11.2018).

<sup>45</sup> *Giudici del proprio* had significant authority in cases both pertaining to the civil law and to the criminal law, although it gradually ceased parts of its competences to other assemblies, finally limiting themselves to the cases of dowry and some property relations within the family.

Padua, and pushed forward a decision to attack Padua and Verona. In 1409, Foscari had an experience of confrontation with d'Este – he was sent to guard Brescello with 70 spearmen. In the 1410s, he was often employed in the diplomatic service, and in October 1412, he became a part of *Savi del Consiglio*, being thus in charge of foreign politics. Foscari used to distribute large amounts of money to the poor or disadvantaged noblemen, creating his own clientele, who supported his military expansionism, being interested both in the bounty of the war and in the new civil positions created by the conquest; conversely, the current doge, Tommaso Mocenigo, who openly disliked Foscari, presented the interests of the old and rich patritian houses involved in the Levantine trade and preferred isolationist politics in Italy. In fact, in the 1420s the Venetian political elite were divided into two parties struggling fiercely – a rather exceptional situation in Venice with its consolidated elite. Thus, in 1422 Foscari called for support of Florence against Milan; Mocenigo's response in early 1423 was his political testament, where he praised *Serenissima* as the center of the Mediterranean, presenting an impressive image of its wealth and power, advising to be in good terms with Milan and warning against election of Francesco Foscari, who would draw the Venetians into military conflicts on the Italian Peninsula and destroy prosperity. Following the death of Mocenigo, however, Foscari was elected a Doge of Venice, exactly in the times when the Republic had to wage war against Milan under Duke Filippo Maria Visconti, who intended to dominate the whole Northern and Middle Italy. In 1426, after the Milanese attack on Florence, Foscari again sided with the latter, praising Florence as the bulwark of the *libertas Italiae*. Despite the victories, the war was extremely costly for *Serenissima*, and, finally, Milan won under Francesco Sforza. In 1454, Sforza established the borders between the Duchy of Milan and the Republic of Venice. A year earlier, on May 29, 1453, Constantinople fell to the Ottomans, which meant blocking the Straits for the Venetian ships. In 1445, the Council of Ten condemned Francesco Foscari's son, Jacopo Foscari, on bribery and corruption and expelled him from Venice. Further Jacopo was imprisoned on Crete and died there. Depressed by the news of the death of his son and the opposition in the Grand Council, the Doge left his office in 1457 and died a week later after his resignation. In fact, Francesco Foscari was one of few doges who did not rule till their death.

### III

As far as the content of the *lettere ducali* is concerned, they give either the decisions of a separate incidents, *casus* (for example, the arrest of a ship that worked in a forest of Ferrara in the Venetian territories), or *rogatio* for a certain right of Venetian citizens. In this case, the reason for making a document can be a private precedent, but the decision will be extended to all rights in general (for example, the method of establishing Venetian citizenship and privileges

dependent on it). In the same way, the message can describe the content of a private law transaction, but the decision on it will also apply to all such cases. This section of the paper discusses the topics and the perspectives of the studying of *lettere ducali*. Further study of these topics would encompass a number of other sources, both narrative and legislative documents (speeches, reports, diaries etc.). Most of the cases are placed on the Venetian Terraferma, including its least studied part – the territory of the Po delta located on the border with Ferrara. The main aim of this study is to demonstrate how individual cases reflect the historical trends of the end of the 14<sup>th</sup> – first half of the 15<sup>th</sup> centuries between three actors: Ferrara, Venice and their environment.

*Citizenship*. The study of medieval citizenship has its own long historiography<sup>46</sup>. In the Anglo-Saxon historiography there are a lot of examples of *case-studies* research<sup>47</sup>, as well as works about general analysis of the status of city population in Italy<sup>48</sup>. The work of L. G. Klimanov was also dedicated to the question of citizenship of Venice<sup>49</sup>. The Venetian citizens by birth (*cives originarii*) were considered residents of Rialto, Grado, Chioggia, and Cavarzere. Those who wanted to get citizenship privileges of the *Sernissima* must have had property in Venice and observe all the duties of a citizen. After fifteen years the person becomes a citizen *de intus* and could enjoy trade privileges within the Venetian polity. If the man remained loyal to the city for 25 years, his status allowed him to use the privileges of citizenship outside Venice (*cives de intus et extra*)<sup>50</sup>. A medieval citizen was quite concerned with the benefits of citizenship which advanced his family's social status as well as his own one, facilitated his entrepreneurial activity, gave him an edge over the resident noncitizen within the walls and protected him as he maintained banking or commercial operations abroad<sup>51</sup>. Klimanov L. G., following the idea of William Bronsky, draws attention to the process of turning the institution of citizenship into an administrative tool. So, in the the 14<sup>th</sup> century in Siena and in Venice there is a tendency to “professionalize” new citizens, in other words, people of “valuable” professions are accepted into the commune: notaries (who had no relatives in the city, so they were less politically engaged), physicians etc.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> The influential work was written by well-known Max Weber: Weber M. *Citizenship in Ancient and Medieval Cities*. Minneapolis, MN: The University of Minnesota, 1998.

<sup>47</sup> Bowsky W. M. *Medieval Citizenship: The Individual and the State in the Siena, 1287-1355* // *Studies in Medieval and Renaissance History*. 1967. No. 4. P. 193-243; Kirshner J. *Civitas Sibi Faciat Civem: Bartolus of Sassoferrato's doctrine on the making of a Citizen* // *Speculum*. 1973. Vol. 8. P. 694-713.

<sup>48</sup> Riesenbergh P. *Citizenship at Law in the Late Medieval Italy* // *Viator*. 1974. Vol. 5. P. 333–346.

<sup>49</sup> Климанов Л. Г. «Quod sunt cives nostri»: Статус венецианского гражданства в XIV в. // *Культура и общество Италии накануне нового времени*. М.: Наука, 1993. С. 28-38.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.* P. 31.

<sup>51</sup> Riesenbergh P. *Citizenship at Law in the Late Medieval Italy* // *Viator*. 1974. Vol. 5. P. 335.

<sup>52</sup> Климанов Л. Г. «Quod sunt cives nostri»: Статус венецианского гражданства в XIV в. // *Культура и общество Италии накануне нового времени*. М.: Наука, 1993. С. 33, 36.

The historiography also raises the issue of inclusiveness/exclusivity of Venetian citizenship. On the one hand, the division between *cives originarii* and *cives per privilegio* appears in narrative sources rather late (in the works of Marcantonio Sabellico, Gasparo Contarini, Poggio Bracciolini, Niccolò Machiavelli and some other authors the Venetian society is represented as a two-part model consisting of *cittadini* and *popolo*)<sup>53</sup>. On the other hand, it is obvious that in the political topography of Venice these two categories of citizens occupied a different position, defined in historiography by their relation to the administrative structures of the city. In the course of the 15<sup>th</sup> – 16<sup>th</sup> centuries, the citizens by privilege, *cives per privilegio*, were gradually losing the opportunities to participate in politics and to enter the administrative institutions.

After 1410, the offices of the *scuole grandi* were assigned exclusively to the native citizens of Venice. After 1419, citizens could only be the representatives of Venice in the newly acquired territories, though it was the case when the nature of citizenship (by birth or by privilege) was not initially considered<sup>54</sup>. As a result, access to administrative positions was assigned mainly to *cives originarii*.

Otherwise, *letteri ducali* allow us to look at the citizenship issue from another perspective, namely, the process of implementation of civil rights outside of the Venetian commune and consequent difficulties. The letter No. 15/186 has been already published (with some mistakes) by L. G. Klimanov in the cited article<sup>55</sup>, but possibly he did not fully unleash the potential of this document. This letter of Antonio Venier to Marquis Niccolò II d'Este (1384/85) reveals the case of *Dionisius de Rebufatis*, whose status was questioned by the officials of Ferrara. On the one hand, according to Ferrara officials, the certifying letter of Dionysius did not coincide with the accepted form of *privilegii civilitatis* which is common to all *cives originarii*. Here, by the way, the issue of personal identification problems in the premodern period can be considered. On the other hand, this letter refers to relationships between Venice and Ferrara: Venetian residents, as can be seen from the letter, regardless of whether they were *cives originarii*, *de intus* or *de intus et extra*, could use the privilege of free trade in Ferrara of the most important agricultural goods in the Middle Ages. It says that: *quia pacta clarissime loquuntur, et absque exceptione non distingvenis cives originarios a civibus privilegiatis alicuius temporis, sed generaliter dicendo omnes homines Veneciarum* (“as pacts clearly state, not differentiating

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<sup>53</sup> Crubb, James S., *Elite Citizens // Venice Reconsidered: The History and Civilization of an Italian City-State, 1297-1797*. Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000. P. 340.

<sup>54</sup> O'Connell, Monique, *Legitimizing Venetian Expansion: Patricians and Secretaries in the Fifteenth Century // Venice and the Veneto during the Renaissance: The Legacy of Benjamin Kohl / Ed. Michael Knapton, John E. Law, Alison A. Smith*. P. 74.

<sup>55</sup> Климанов Л. Г. «Quod sunt cives nostri»: Статус венецианского гражданства в XIV в. // *Культура и общество Италии накануне нового времени*. М.: Наука, 1993. С. 28-38.

citizens by birth and citizens by privilege, gained not matter how long before, but saying about all people of Venice in general”)<sup>56</sup>. As a result, there is a strong similarity with Siena where the difference between *cives originarii*, *de intus* or *de intus et extra* in the 14<sup>th</sup> century was diminishing or this classification was inessential, just as with the expansion of the community, stimulated from above, the value of *cives antiqui veri et naturales* became unimportant too<sup>57</sup>. In Venice, however, both the political and economic privileges of citizens were limited over time: in 1492 the Council of Ten decided that only those citizens whose three generations were Venetians could use Venetian privileges outside the immediate territories of the Republic of St. Mark<sup>58</sup>.

*Trade Regulation - Borderland Regulation.* There is another broad issue represented in *lettere ducali* – the borderland regulation. For the Middle Ages, in general, the geographical representation of the borders is not typical, but rather we can talk about the overlapping of jurisdictions. It seems, however, that the Ferraro-Venetian border, in the 14<sup>th</sup> – 15<sup>th</sup> cc. taking place in the Po delta, was relatively formed: from the Venetian and Ferrara sides, there were some *officiales* that performed customs functions, i.e. overseeing the turnover and the collecting of duties. However, the delineation of territories in practice caused certain problems. Among the investigated acts there is only one evidence regarding the establishment of boundaries between two city-states. Judging by the families from which the representatives of Venice (*Paulus Maurecenus, Nicolaus Geno et Bertucius Contarenus*)<sup>59</sup> came, the case was of great importance for the Republic. However, further study of this case requires the involvement of other documents from the "state" perspective, which may be the subject of a future study. Our attention is mainly focused on local cases related to trade relations at the territory of Terraferma.

In the closely related trade relations problems concerning the trade or the transportation of goods often arise. Sometimes one finds behind them hidden larger-scale problems of the economy and Venetian expansion into the peninsula. For example, in June 1372, the Captain of *Reperie* (presumably, the captain of the coast of Piava) arrested «navigium cum lignaminibus necessariis ad laboreiam villium vestrarum de Comaclo» («a ship with wood needed for some works in your [e.g. Niccolò II d'Este's] valleys of Comacchio»)<sup>60</sup>. If our assumption about the localization of the place of arrest of the vessel is true, this makes it possible to touch on an

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<sup>56</sup> WES SPb II RAS. Venice and its domain. C. 186. No. 15.

<sup>57</sup> Bowsky W. M. *Medieval Citizenship: The Individual and the State in the Siena, 1287-1355* // Studies in Medieval and Renaissance History. 1967. No. 4. P. 200-203.

<sup>58</sup> Crubb, James S., *Elite Citizens // Venice Reconsidered: The History and Civilization of an Italian City-State, 1297-1797*. Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000. P. 343

<sup>59</sup> WES SPb II RAS. Venice and its domain. C. 186. No. 13.

<sup>60</sup> WES SPb II RAS. Venice and its domain. C. 186. No. 8.

important area of the Venetian economy, directly related to *Terraferma* – forestry, the study of which has relatively recently intensified<sup>61</sup>.

Forest is a strategically important resource for Venice as a *Stato da Mar*, ensuring its superiority in the Mediterranean with the existence of a strong fleet. Venice itself as an island city naturally did not have the essential forest lands, which allows some scientists to see in the Venetian expansion on the peninsula, among other contributing factors, a desire to conquer forest areas<sup>62</sup>. The main sources of forest for *Serentissima* were the coast of the Piave River and Dalmatia. The banks of the Piave and other rivers of Lombardy provided Venice with a constant influx of valuable types of wood: sessile oak, European beech, silver fir, and European larch<sup>63</sup>. The first vaults of Arsenal were located along the coast of the Piave (Belluno and Montello). Thus, the control of Lombardy would allow Venice to better organize and direct the flow of wood for its own benefit. In 1458 the office of *provveditori ai boschi* was created to regulate deforestation and reforestation in the newly acquired areas of Terraferma; their duties included collecting taxes on forest trade and supervising the observance of prescriptions to various communities about the forest (for example, forbidding cattle grazing and burning forest for subsequent plowing)<sup>64</sup>. However, up to this point, there is no evidence for the centralized forest policy. Summing up, the aforementioned case can be considered in the context of the Venetian regulation of exchange of timber and the desire of the Republic to control important forest resources for it.

It is essential that Michael Beaudoin connects struggle for control over natural resources with the competition between Venice and Comacchio in 8<sup>th</sup> – 12<sup>th</sup> cc. Comacchio is a settlement in the valley of river Po appeared approximately in 2 thousand B.C. It is probably connected with Etruscans because to the south from Comacchio archeologists investigated Etruscan sunken city that is known today as Lido di Spina and is included into Comacchio region<sup>65</sup>. The origins of the name are still debatable: from Latin *cumaculum* – small sea wave, from Etruscan – “a series of bumps”. Today the city is situated on 13 islands and its history was always tightly connected with water sources. After the Lombard conquest, the city maintained its status as a trading point that connected Italy with the Eastern Roman Empire. Later the city was conquered by king

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<sup>61</sup> See, for example: Appuhn, Karl, *Inventing Nature: Forests, Forestry, and State Power in Renaissance Venice* // *The Journal of Modern History*. 2000. Vol. 72. No. 4. P. 861-889; Idem. *A forest on the sea: environmental expertise in Renaissance Venice*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 2009; Beaudoin, Michael S., *Lawyers and Sawyers: Venetian Forest Law and the Conquest of Terraferma (1350–1476)*. [Master’s thesis]. 2014.

<sup>62</sup> Beaudoin, Michael S., *Lawyers and Sawyers: Venetian Forest Law and the Conquest of Terraferma (1350–1476)*. [Master’s thesis]. 2014. P. 10.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.* P. 51.

<sup>64</sup> Appuhn, Karl, *Inventing Nature: Forests, Forestry, and State Power in Renaissance Venice* // *The Journal of Modern History*. 2000. Vol. 72. No. 4. P. 870.

<sup>65</sup> Tosi M. Spina. *Storia di una città tra Greci ed Etruschi*. Ferrara, 1993.

Liutprand (712–744)<sup>66</sup>. After this period the territory was given to monastery of St. Colombano. Monks created a river port and developed salt production that is considered as a *longue durée* structure in the economics of this region. There are also some references showing that inhabitants had their own fleet. Venice was still far from the trading empire into which it would evolve by the XIV-XV centuries, but it did not tolerate competitors. Thus, from 866 onwards the Venetians periodically ruined the city, but finally in 1299 it came into the possession of the Marquises d'Este. In the 1480s, the development of the Ferrara salt industry in Comacchio led to the War of Ferrara, also known as the *Guerra del Sale*, War of Salt (1482–1484).

In 1476 Duke Ercole I d'Este of Ferrara, with the help of Venice, defeated his nephew who attempted to occupy the throne. However, by 1480 Venice was distracted by the war with the Ottoman Empire, and the Duke of Ferrara began to conduct a provocative policy towards Venice.

First, Ercole built salt mines around the mouth of the Po River. Venice had a monopoly on the salt production for seven or eight centuries and jealously guarded it, so the actions of Ferrara challenged Venice. Then the Duke of Ferrara raised peculiar questions on the definition of the boundary line, which also did not help make political relations better. Finally, when the Venetian consul arrested a local priest for not paying debts, and the priest excommunicated the consul from the church, Ercole took the side of the priest, although he was later condemned by the bishop. Even though the bishop offered his apologies to Venice (since Sixtus IV was shocked by the news of excommunication), Ercole refused to accept the consul.

In September 1480, Girolamo Riario, the nephew of Pope Sixtus, became the lord of Forli. Since he had wanted to expand the territory under his control at the expense of Ferrara, Pope Sixtus began to incite Venice on a military campaign.

Comacchio was taken first. Then the siege of Ferrara started. However, the Pope, an ally of Venice, suddenly signed the peace and began to persuade Venice to do the same. Doge Mocenigo politely declined this offer noting that, since these weapons had recently received a personal blessing from the pontiff, victory was assured. As a response, on May 25, 1483, the pope imposed an interdict on Venice, but Venice simply did not accept it: the representative of Venice in Rome refused to transfer the bull to his government, and Sixtus was forced to send a special envoy to the patriarch, who, in turn, talked out that he is very sick and cannot transfer the bull to doge and the senate. Turning weapons against the former allies, the pope allowed the Neapolitan troops to pass through its territory. However, the Venetians defeated the Neapolitan

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<sup>66</sup> Comacchio // Encyclopædia Britannica. Vol. 6. 1911.

forces at sea which resulted in the signing of a peace treaty. Venice took away all the troops from the territory of Ferrara and took Rovigo. Comacchio, however, remained in the possession of Ferrara, and only after the extinction of the dynasty, along with other possessions of d'Este, the settlement became part of the Papal State<sup>67</sup>.

Salt, however, was not the only resource for Comacchio. The very location of the settlement on the fuzzy border of land and sea, smoothly turning from one to another, provided another source of income – fishing. This obvious component of the economy of the northeastern coast of the Apennine Peninsula is usually lost on the background of other sectors of the economy: the production of textiles (mainly wool and silk), glass, mining, military and books etc.<sup>68</sup> However, at the micro level, fishing provided a valuable source of protein, so it is clear that fishing was an important part of the economy outside the city walls. The regulation of the fish trade between Venetian citizens and Ferrara subjects also was the responsibility of the Doge's office. In this context, the toponym "Comacchio" appeared again in 1436. Apparently, the trial was very long, but there is only one document in the Archive of the Institute of History in St. Petersburg. In the letter there is a description of a contract signed between Venetian citizens and residents of Comacchio, Marquis's subjects, regarding the purchase of fish, which were not only caught in the village, but had been apparently also bred there. Venetians paid in advance for a certain amount of fish which, however, they did not receive. The main reason for it is the lack of fish: citizens of Comacchio had to transfer part of it to the Marquis of Ferrara. The interpretation of the question by the Venetian side is notable: in their opinion, a private transaction cannot be violated, just as the fundamentals of trade cannot be violated, whereas in respect of their incomes, the Marquis is free to lower and raise fees: «Et quidquid vestra Illustrissima Magnificentia et hominum, et vallium dominium habeat, sicut scribit, conventiones tamen, que inter eos et nostros facte sunt soleniterque promisse, locum habere debent et vestra Illustrissima Magnificentia contra subditos vestros, si erraverunt, ratione domini procedere poterit, ac sicut voluerit habere regressum» – «And whatever your Illustrious Magnificence has from people and valleys of dominion, otherwise as it is said in the conventions, completed between you and us, which should be followed and kept, and your Illustrious Magnificence can act against your subjects, if they are wrong, and it (I. M.) is at will to make a rebate»<sup>69</sup>. Indemnification of the Venetians is unacceptable in this context, since ideals of trade are more important for them. There is detailed quote reflecting the kind of economic thought of the Venetians at the household level: «Nec sufficit, quod vestra Illustrissima Magnificentia offerat restitui facere per subditos

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<sup>67</sup> Norvich, John, *Istoriya Venezijskoi Respubliki*. Moscow: AST, 2010. P. 468-470.

<sup>68</sup> Demo E. *Industry and Production in the Venetian Terraferma (15th–18th Centuries)* // *Companion to Venetian history*, 1404-1797. Ed. E. R. Dursteler. Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2013. P. 303-313.

<sup>69</sup> WES SPb II RAS. Venice and its domain. C. 186. No. 30.

vestros civibus nostris pecunias suas. Esset enim maximum inconveniens ac nullatenus tollerabile, tam hic, quam alibi, ubi huiusmodi comertia mercationum ac emptiones et venditiones fiunt quandoque de presenti, quandoque ad tempus, sicut rerum et mercationum qualitates exigunt, ut si hodie unus emerit aliquas mercationes et res sibi dandas ad certum tempus ac de precio et reliquis conditionibus concordēs fuerint, postmodum veniente tempore venditor dixerit non habere tot ex illis mercationibus, quot credebat, aut eas esse in precio cariori et proinde vellet se a venditione et conventionē retrahere, et pecunias datas reddere, nam sicut notissimum est, huiusmodi negotiationes et facta mercationum fortune eventibus sunt supposita, nec semper in eodem esse consistunt» – «It is unacceptable that your Illustrious Magnificence offers to make restitution caused by your subjects to our citizens by your own money. For it would be increasingly reproachful and no way tolerable, here or elsewhere, that the exchange of goods, along with purchases and sales which were made now or whenever, ceased, like if today one bought some goods and things dedicated to transfer to him after some time, and there was unanimous convention about prices and other conditions, but if after some time vendor would argue that he does not have enough goods which he would hope to have, and [that he has] he would sell on higher prices and want to cancel the deal and the convention, and money paid to return, as how it is known, such deals and trade depend on the fortune and not always could be kept»<sup>70</sup>. Summing up, the document contributes to research in the history of economic relations at the micro level in the border region, but also in the context of cultural history, revealing issues such as the fact that a person of medieval times (and, specifically, Venetians) had some ideas about private property and the priority of trade over senior privileges.

*Valle di Comacchio* was strategically important for Venice and Ferrara, not only thanks to the resources provided by this area, but also as a territory of possible trespassing from both sides and of the smuggling. In the letter dedicated to this problem (186/20) it is no longer Comacchio that is mentioned, but Spina, the village located not far to the south of Comacchio. The toponym “Spina” had been known since 540 AD. Although Diogenes of Halicarnassus says that the first settlers were Pelasgians, later they were gone under pressure from neighboring tribes; archaeological research shows that the city should be considered Etruscan. Being coastal region, Spina was a flourishing commercial port, one of the points where the culture of Hellas and Ancient Rome were in touch. The main goods here were ceramics, corned beef, wine, cereals and other agricultural products. Pliny the Elder reports that a canal built by the Etruscans connected Adria and Spina<sup>71</sup>. The growth of the Rome power and the Celtic invasion of Etruria had a negative impact on the city's economy and its ability to grow. Finally, as a result of

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<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

<sup>71</sup> Atlante del territorio costiero, lagunare e vallivo del Delta del Po. Parco Regionale Veneto del Delta del Po. P. 46

hydrological processes, the city plunged into the water<sup>72</sup>. In the southern part of the Spina there is Lido di Spina, part of the Comacchio region. There is also a point on medieval maps, defined as Spina. Apparently, in the Middle Ages, he was one of the islands of the delta, possessing a port (it is unknown whether it was river or sea port). In examined *lettere ducali* it is considered that smuggled goods were transported through Spina and were taken out at the *Gavri* port («ad Spinam in terra in portu Gayri»)<sup>73</sup>.

The subject of smuggling was wine, but from where exactly it was brought to the peninsula through the Spine remains completely unclear. Moreover, Ferrara has claims on smuggling too, so it means that illegal transportation of goods went in two directions and was not an exclusive problem of Venice<sup>74</sup>. In the same document another problem appears, particularly the problem of water territories. «Ad contenta autem in litteris capitanei vestri Adriani nobis transmissis...respondemus ... per piscatores Clugie, qui piscati sunt in aquis vestre Magnitudinis contra formam pactorum existentium superinde» - “Regarding the content letters, transmitted by your captain Adrian...we answer...about our subjects who are fishermen from Chioggia fishing in waters of your Magnitude that is against existed pacts”. This statement again leads us to the problem of interstate water borders in the Middle Ages and early new time. Hugo Grotius, one of the main thinkers of the early modern period in the beginning of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, believed that the sea, due to its abundance, cannot be defined as the property of any state, since there is enough water for all people for sailing and for fishing<sup>75</sup>. At the beginning of the 15<sup>th</sup> century there are evidences that the coastal waters, into which the fishermen of Chioggia swam, already belong to the territorial possession of the state (in this case, Ferrara). How the boundary was established in the water area remains an issue that still must be solved.

The content of the Doge's letters also concerns the areas in the valley of the Po river that created both economic and environmental problems for the Venice Republic. Two villages in which disputes broke out between the citizens of Venice and the subjects of the Marquis of Ferrara – (Upper) Corbolla and Papozza.

Corbolla situated on the territory created by the river silt accumulation. The name originates from the measures of grain or land, like flock or bushel, or from a basket of grain<sup>76</sup>. Both Corbolla and Papozza are in a region that has been transformed for centuries by both

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<sup>72</sup> Ducati, Pericle, Spina // Enciclopedia Italiana. 1936. URL: [http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/spina\\_res-5cb4f064-8bb7-11dc-8e9d-0016357eee51\\_%28Enciclopedia-Italiana%29/](http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/spina_res-5cb4f064-8bb7-11dc-8e9d-0016357eee51_%28Enciclopedia-Italiana%29/) (visited: 08.12.2018).

<sup>73</sup> WES SPb II RAS. Venice and its domain. С. 186. No. 20.

<sup>74</sup> Бродель Ф. Средиземное море и средиземноморский мир в эпоху Филиппа II. В 3 ч. Ч. 1: Роль среды. М.: Языки славянской культуры, 2002. С. 170.

<sup>75</sup> Гроций Г. О праве войны и мира. М.: Ладомир, 1994. С. 204.

<sup>76</sup> Atlante del territorio costiero, lagunare e vallivo del Delta del Po. Parco Regionale Veneto del Delta del Po. P. 64.

natural processes and the human activity. Etruscan hydraulic systems are well known, and there is also some archaeological evidence of agricultural development in the region<sup>77</sup>. In the III–II centuries BC through Corbolla a Roman road was laid parallel to the coast to San Basilio (Adria), which became the post station and the center of agricultural development of the area by the Romans. In the first centuries of the Roman Empire, the importance of San Basilio increased; this is fact because of the construction of a new road. San Basilio had an impressive system of canals and moats which allowed traveling both by land and by water<sup>78</sup>. As the settlement Corbolla first appeared in 1054 as the possession of the d'Este family. In the 12th century the village was destroyed by river flows, and then Corbolla was successfully recreated under the administration of Niccolò III d'Este. In the 16th century the settlement experienced another flood. Consequently, it was divided into three separate settlements (Corbolla, Botrigo, Belombra - Lower Corbolla, that is Venetian one). One document that is linked to Corbolla reports the case of a Venetian citizen *Dominicus Mazagallo* (who was engaged in trading on the terra) and his litigation with Chioggia<sup>79</sup>. Trade relations on the Venetian Terraferma are slightly reflected in historiography, since scholars have long been interested in the *longue durée* structures and the trade of Venice in the Mediterranean and in its eastern part, the Black Sea region. However, the mass material, which is *lettere ducali*, as well as notarial deeds, allows us to look at the micro level of trade relations on the *Terraferma* region and on the features of regulation of trade relations between the two city-states. The case of Dominicus Mazagallo tells also about small volumes of goods (*omnia premissa erant modici valoris*), namely about two vessels of oil (*duos vassellos olei*), ten *staria* of bread (*staria decem frumenti*), and some amount of eggs and other goods (*quadam ova et aliquos caseos*). The reason for writing the letter was the transportation of these goods through the Upper Corbolla (*Corbolla Superior*) without a document or permission (*pure et absque bulleto*). This case requires detailed consideration of the legal regulation of trade between Ferrara and Venice because since the beginning of the 14<sup>th</sup> century Venetians had had trade privileges according to which grain and some other goods could be freely imported into the territory of the Ferrarese March and exported to Venice. In the case of Dominicus Mazagallo, his ship was also freely let by the Ferrara officers on Chioggia. Summing up, further consideration of this case requires the involvement of other sources, such as, for example, treaties and agreements on the rights and privileges between Ferrara and Venice.

In neighboring Papozza a conflict also arose over the legal status of the Venetians in the Ferrara territories. Papozza borders with Corbolla on the west. It is a settlement in the valley of

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<sup>77</sup> Ibid. P. 48-50.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

<sup>79</sup> WES SPb II RAS. Venice and its domain. C. 186. No. 10.

river Po which now had no access to sea. The first note referring Papozza was in 1255 when some Tebaldo from Papozza, citizen of Ferrara, sold the Papozza village in the possession of venetian citizens Marco and Matteo Quirini for 1150 Ferrarese livres<sup>80</sup>. During the 13<sup>th</sup> century the Venetians remained the owners of the settlement. However, after it became part of the March of Ferrara (in the early 1300s). The descendants of Quirini (*nobilium civium nostrorum de prole Quirina*), however, continued to own property in Papozza in the first half of the 15<sup>th</sup> century, which follows from the documents analyzed<sup>81</sup>. The legal regulation of this property gave rise to several disagreements in which the more global problems of the relationship between the city-states of Venice and Ferrara were manifested. The Likhachev collection contains four documents telling about the conflict (1431–1432), which seems to be quite widescale, about the rights of Venetian citizens and their *coloni*, whose position differs depending on whether they come from Venetians (*coloni Veneti*) or Ferrarans (*coloni Ferrarienses*)<sup>82</sup>. According to letters, under existing agreements, the Venetians (both citizens and *coloni*) should not pay any taxes or incur losses to restore the mounds in the settlement (*occasione reparationis certorum aggerum*)<sup>83</sup>. Since the first three messages of the Doge of 1431 had no effect, in 1432 the *ambassador* of the Ferrara marquis *Iohannes a Forficibus* arrived in Venice to resolve the issue. The issue, however, was not resolved after that<sup>84</sup>. The unilateral actions of the Venetian side also had no effect. It seems that Papozza was a complex case due to overlapping jurisdictions: being part of *distretto* of Ferrara (*villam Papociarum esse de districtu Farrarie*)<sup>85</sup>, it was still, nevertheless, in the possession of noble venetian citizens, whose privileges did not allow them to collect taxes and to force servants in the Venetian economy to labor (*ab omnibus oneribus, gravaminibus, angariis, factionibus et cetera*)<sup>86</sup>. Consequently, the privileged legal position of the Venetians violated the jurisdiction of the Marquis d'Este in the borderland, which, as the future shows, would become an area of Venetian expansion into the delta of Po river (mainly due to ecological reasons: *Taglio di Porto Viro*).

As a brief review showed, the subject of *lettere ducali* open prospects for research in the field of economic and political history as well as in the sphere of social and environmental history. What is more, Doges' letters despite its proto-governmental origins contain decisions on private cases, therefore, provide an opportunity to look at the micro level of economic and social interaction between the citizens of Venice and the subjects of Ferrara in medieval times.

<sup>80</sup> Papozze nel Delta del Po: Breve Guida / C. A. D. Manzolli. I Quaderni dell'Accademia del tartufo del Delta del Po. URL: <https://digilander.libero.it/cris.rl/quaderni/guida.pdf> (visited: 28.11.2018).

<sup>81</sup> WES SPb II RAS. Venice and its domain. C. 186. No. 27.

<sup>82</sup> WES SPb II RAS. Venice and its domain. C. 186. No. 28.

<sup>83</sup> WES SPb II RAS. Venice and its domain. C. 186. No. 25.

<sup>84</sup> WES SPb II RAS. Venice and its domain. C. 186. No. 28.

<sup>85</sup> WES SPb II RAS. Venice and its domain. C. 186. No. 26.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid.

According to one extraordinary scholar in medieval studies, it returns Human into History<sup>87</sup>. This article only anticipates a deeper study of documents, most of which have not yet been used as historical sources.

### Conclusion

A preliminary analysis of the documents allowed us to identify a number of major problems, for which the *lettere ducali* can be used as sources for historical research. Among these problems there are questions of the legal status of a citizen in Venice and beyond its borders, issues of establishing and regulating borders on land and on sea, issues of border trade in the Middle Ages and Early Modern period, as well as a number of topics related to the relations of Ferrara and Venice.

As it has been already stated in the beginning of the article, the transformation of the structure of *lettere ducali* and the change of *intitulatio* require further study with the involvement of other historical sources. This will help to determine what this change was about: whether it is related to changes in the hierarchical relations between the Republic of Venice and the March of Ferrara, or just some transformations in the clerical tradition of the chancery work influenced the writing style. In a broader perspective, a study of the connections between hierarchical relations and clerical style and its subsequent results may be applicable to a wide range of documents on similar subjects.

In the short term, it is necessary to study the legal dimension of the issue and correlate the cases presented in *lettere ducali* with the Venetiano-Ferrarese agreements relevant to the end of the 14<sup>th</sup> – the first half of the 15<sup>th</sup> centuries. This would allow us to state how the diplomatic relations between the two powers shaped the lives of their inhabitants from the Po Valley.

Another essential task is a search for personalities from the St. Petersburg documents in other sources or electronic databases, such as *The Rulers of Venice, 1332-1524*<sup>88</sup>, which gives access to 70 thousand documents of the *Segretario alle Voci*, the Senate, Council of Ten, and Great Council. In this sense it will be possible to reconstruct (at least partially) the social portrait of the characters of *lettere ducali*, their role in the society of their time.

As a result, the publication of *lettere ducali* and their analysis by the historical community reveals a large number of opportunities for further research on the history of both specific regions of Italy and the Mediterranean, as well as for broader areas of historical science:

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<sup>87</sup> Февр Л. Бои за историю. М.: Наука, 1991. С. 26-27.

<sup>88</sup> The Rulers of Venice, 1332-1524. URL: <http://rulersofvenice.org/main> (visited: 10.12.2018).

political, social, economic history, Alltagsgeschichte, history of state institutions and international law, the history of the medieval document and the Latin writing.

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The period in question is the time of the most active territorial expansion of the Venetian Republic and its increasing role in the international relations.