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OF VENICE AND THE MARQUISES
D'ESTE IN THE 1370S TO 1430S BASED
ON THE LETTERE DUCALI FROM THE
WESTERN EUROPEAN SECTION OF
THE HISTORICAL ARCHIVE OF THE
SAINT PETERSBURG INSTITUTE OF
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**THE RELATIONS OF THE REPUBLIC OF VENICE AND THE
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This study is devoted to research into a set of the Venetian *lettere ducali* to the Marquises d'Este of the 14th and 15th centuries, collected by N.P. Likhachev (1862-1936), a Member of the Academy of Sciences of the USSR, and stored in the Western European section of the Saint Petersburg Institute of History of the Russian Academy of Sciences (The Archive) 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 the Early Modern period. This study reveals historical material on the specific cities and regions of Italy (Venice, Treviso, Ferrara, Verona, Padua, the Po Delta), the Venetian colonies in the Mediterranean (Crete, Cyprus) and the Adriatic (Shkodra, the Dalmatian Coast), as well as the history of international relations, the history of economic relations, the history of everyday life, the history of state institutions and international law, the history of medieval documents, and the history of Latin writing.

Key words: History of Italy, 14–16th centuries, Venetian Republic, Terraferma, Mediterranean Sea, Treviso, Ferrara, Doges of Venice, chancery, diplomatic, Latin palaeography, 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 13th century. Only three documents of this type coming from the doge's chancery of the 12th century are extant⁷. 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. The study of the apostolic documentation, which has been carried out for more than a century and a half, revealed that originally *litterae* (especially in the case of the *litterae clausae*) contained information about current political events which were not connected with the confirmation of somebody's rights. That is why so few oldest original documents are extant.

The oldest extant original *litterae clausae* of the Republic of Venice date back to the rule of Jacopo Tiepolo (1229–1249), when the open (*litterae patentes*) and closed (*litterae clausae*) forms of the *lettere ducali* were first differentiated.

The *litterae clausae* are characterized by:

- the absence of *plica*, i.e. the fold along the bottom edge of the sheet, while in the *litterae patentes* a hanging seal was attached;
- the placing of the address on the exterior side of the parchment fold into an envelope by double folding;
- the special way of fastening the seal, where a hemp cord is stitched into the edges of the letter-envelope, so 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 year rule of Jacopo Tiepolo.⁸ Analysing the structure of the oldest surviving *lettere ducali*, one discovers that the forms of protocol and eschatocol had not been formalized and fixed. According to preliminary estimates, the documents of 14–15th centuries stored in the Western European section of the Historical Archive of the Saint Petersburg Institute of History of the Russian Academy of Sciences (The Archive) demonstrate further standardization of the form of the letters, showcasing different varieties of protocol and eschatocol. Contextualized within similar source

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

⁸ 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.

material, this data can provide dating and attributive features, which are among the most crucial criteria of document authenticity for the identification of fragmentary, incomplete documents or medieval fakes.

The attitude toward the *lettere ducali* changed during the 20th century. Initially, the *lettere ducali* were used as primary sources for political and socio-economic history; gradually their potential was investigated in such fields as the history of diplomacy, the history of international relations, the history of notariate, institutional history, conceptual history, micro-history, *Alltagsgeschichte*. Creating new methods of authentication and developing existed ones, the study of the visual features of such documents together with prosopographic and institutional analysis complement the history of administration and institutions, fields of research which have not been appreciated enough. Research into the language of the *lettere ducali* provides an opportunity to reconstruct rituals of power, reflecting the representation of power relations or relations of trust. The present study therefore reveals 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 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 a period of relative peace in the relationships between Ferrara and Venice. Struggles between Venice and Ferrara originated in 1240 when Azzo VII d'Este Novello (1205–1264) became the new marquis. In the 11–13th centuries Ferrara was a vibrant economic centre. Located on the bank of the Po (until the 14th century when river changed course) Ferrara represented the last significant urban centre before the river flowed into the Adriatic Sea. Before the mid-13th century Ferrara served as a transit point for the shipment of the goods from ships to the riverboats going upstream to Lombardy. Near the city, the two main branches of the Po, 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, the fish basins (of Comacchio). These marshy lands supplied Ferrara with fish and salt, goods of great importance, on which Ferrara possessed a mining monopoly⁹. The issue of wetlands was urgent both for Ferrara and Venice. As Braudel

⁹ Dean, Trevor. Land and Power in Late Medieval Ferrara: The Rule of the Este, 1350–1450. Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1988. P. 19.

put it, ‘Mediterranean people always had to fight with the lowlands’¹⁰. Russian historian Bernadskaya also claimed that struggles with flooding could be seen through the whole history of cities located in Delta del Po¹¹. It affected political history of this area (‘Venice did not know the problem of towers and banks’)¹², that is, wetlands did not suit the construction of feudal castles¹³, and most likely forced the nobility to settle in the city, not in rural areas. Such conditions were common for both Venice and Ferrara. It gave birth to two different political systems, the Venetian aristocratic republican system and the Este’s seigneur, to the point that could be seen as an argument against the kinds of geographical determinism of Braudel and Radkau,¹⁴ while a similar environment provided the possibility of the development of two fundamentally different types of political organization. Unfortunately, environmental aspects are poorly shown in the documents discussed¹⁵; their main subjects lie in the economic and political fields. These spheres of historical knowledge, especially political history, are criticized as big narratives losing the human being who is the main and singular subject of the history. However, as recent inquiries have shown, political history may be narrated in different ways. 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. The *lettere ducali* provide the 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 to the global.

The economic and political dimensions of the Venetian-Ferrarese relationships are frequently not separable. The actors of the *lettere ducali* are Venetian citizens and subjects of the Marquis of Ferrara, who mainly argued about their trade rights and privileges, but their very existence and maintenance were political questions. 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 an opportunity to trace large-scale problems in the everyday lives of the people of the 14–15th centuries.

Struggles between Venice and Ferrara find their roots in 1240 when Azzo VII d’Este became the new marquis. He was supported simultaneously by the Pope and the Republic of

¹⁰ Brodel, Fernand. Sredizemnoe more i sredizemnomorskii mir v epokhu Filippa II. T. 1. Rol’ sredy. M.: Yazyki slavyanskoi kultury, 2002. P. 75.

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

¹² Rutenburg V. I. Ital’yanskie gorod ot rannego srednevekov’ya do Vozrozhdeniya. Leningrad: Nauka, 1987. P. 34.

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

¹⁴ 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 okruzhayuschei sredy. M.: Izdatel’skiy dom Vysshei shkoly ekonomiki, 2014. P. 162-164.

¹⁵ There are other sources for this inspiring topic, for instance: Cornaro M. Scritture sulla Laguna // Antichi Scrittori d’Idraulica Veneta. Venezia: Premiate Officine Grafiche c. Ferrari, 1919.

Venice. In “gratitude” the new Marquis of Ferrara became a vicar of Pope (which meant that Azzo d’Este had to send a lot of money to Rome)¹⁶. Meanwhile, 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 were now allowed to go to Venice directly without any stops in Ferrara¹⁷. As a result, long-distance trade – the most prosperous source of income in medieval times – was closed for Ferrara, while Venice strengthened its monopoly on trade in the Adriatic Sea. *Ogni merce che nell’Adriatico o esce dall’Adriatico deve toccar Venezia*¹⁸. None of the merchants going through the Adriatic Sea could hide from the power of Venice. The history of the 13th century created the ground for future struggles between these two city states.

In the 15–16th centuries, the Adriatic was a space where smuggling flourished: a lot of goods were transported from Dalmatia and Istria to Ferrara’s markets bypassing Venice¹⁹. Aside from the trade issue Venice had a special privilege on mining salt, one of the main goods in the medieval world. Meanwhile, Ferrara, as Venice, had opportunities to produce salt on their territories, so this field of production was another cause for conflict. Finally, the privileged position of Venetians in the *distretti* of Ferrara was a matter of disputes and lawsuits. All these factors led to the War of Ferrara (also known as “*Guerra del Sale*” – the Salt War, 1482–1484). The reason for this war was the salt produced by Ferrara in the estuary of the River Po which competed with the Venice monopoly. During the war Venice won a lot of territory, but there were still many disputes on territorial possessions (the historical part of Palezina)²⁰. All these conflicts were at the borderlands of Venice and Ferrara, and Palezina was one of these territories. This was a common issue in the context of forming borders between early modern states when various jurisdictions overlap geographically. In this region, economics and politics are so closely interconnected, that it is often impossible and impractical to separate them. That is why it is promising to look at the economics and politics on the micro level and put them into the context of the history of the region. Here the *lettere ducali* are crucial sources, which give a perspective “from above”, but still reveal the struggles between states through individual cases. Summing up, this paper analyses the *lettere ducali* addressed to the marquises of Ferrara to understand the relevance of such sources in terms of a micro-historical approach.

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

¹⁷ Ibid. P. 239.

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

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Norvich J. Iстория Venezianskoi Respublikи. Moscow: AST, 2010. P. 427.

The chronological framework is chosen because it includes the very first (1372) and the last (1437) letters from the 186th 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 later times. The earliest among these documents (early 16th century) are stored in the Archivio dei Capi del Consiglio dei X.²¹ The collections No. 20 Possessi ecclesiastici and No. 11 Possessi ecclesiastici (registri) of the Savi agli Ordini contain mentions of Ferrara starting from 1561.²² In the collection of the letters (Dispacci), the earliest ones date back to 1597,²³ and those from the reports (Relazioni) to 1575.²⁴ Thus, the documents stored in The Archive shed light on the earlier stages 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 13–15th Centuries' of Higher School of Economics in St. Petersburg.

II

In this study we analysed just one part of Likhachev's huge collection, specifically box No. 186. We picked those letters which refer to the relationships between Ferrara and Venice at the end of the 14th to the first half of the 15th centuries. *Lettere ducali* are original messages written on rectangular pieces of parchment (there are no paper letters among the analysed documents), the seals have been lost, but traces of their attachment are visible. Most of the documents have antiquarian covers attached, which indicate that all documents were previously in the same collection. On the dorsal side, there are paper annotations from past storage locations which are often glued. Also, there are some remarks made by antiquarians of the 19th and 20th centuries, as well as those made by Likhachev (mostly in pencil). In the second half of the 14th 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 dimidie totius imperii Romanie”). The date is always placed in the eschatocol, *datum*, before the beginning of 15th century there is only day, month and induction. This circumstance creates certain source-study difficulties in dating and reconstructing the chronology. Nonetheless, even if the year from the Incarnation is specified, the dating of the document may cause difficulties. For instance, letter 15/186 is accompanied by an antique cover indicating 1385; together with four other documents (8/186, 10/186, 12/186 and

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

²² Ibid. P. 8.

²³ Ibid. P. 19.

²⁴ Ibid. P. 27.

13/186) it originates from the Luzzietti auction company. The dates indicated on the cover, according to Likhachev²⁵, were calculated according to indications, but the two messages were dated incorrectly. The 7th 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 was pointed out by Likhachev and Klimanov as well²⁶. 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 in other historical sources.

Although the address of the selected letters as a whole remains unchanged (since both the Marquises d'Este mentioned in the letters were namesakes), there are some interesting changes. 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 changes: *vir* becomes *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 a change in the chancery 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 the River Po, is a wetland (*valle*), which protects its population from military threats and provides valuable resources, such as fish and salt. On the other hand, it causes a high incidence of malaria²⁷. The study of the Venetian Terraferma was not sufficiently reflected in the historiography before the mid-twentieth century, 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 and a change in the appearance of the lagoon itself, insofar as the amphibious world in which water, land, and marsh merged, and people came and

²⁵ Лихачев Н. П. Буллы // Климанов Л. Г. «Византийские отражения» в сфрагистике. СПб.: Алетейя, 1999. С. 299–303.

²⁶ 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.

²⁷ 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; Радкай Й. Природа и власть. Всемирная история окружающей среды. М.: Изд. дом НИУ ВШЭ, 2014. С. 160-161.

went²⁸, was lost to historiography. In the 1970s, historians finally turned to the study of Terraferma, and this topic remains popular among researchers with more and more influence being given to a micro-level approach²⁹. The period represented in the *lettere ducali* in this respect is crucial because exactly at the beginning of the 15th century (especially in the dogeship of Francesco Foscari) Venice changes the focus of politics: its expansion is now directed not only to the sea, but also to the Italian peninsula. Partly this was probably influenced by environmental reasons, since in the 14–15th centuries, the danger of the waterlogging of the lagoon was 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 neighbours”³⁰. However, according to Michael Knapton, these annexations served largely to guarantee the security and support of trade flows benefitting Venice and involved significant voluntary choices by new subjects³¹. Research is mainly devoted to the northern possessions of Venice on the peninsula; the southern lands are less studied, apparently, because the increase in territories in this direction was minimal. As that the southern part of the Po delta was an ecological disaster, 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 into conflict with Rome³².

This was not the first change in the geography of the region. The region in question had been changing for centuries both by the movements of nature and by human activity. Many cities of Polesine were built by the Etruscans, the predecessors of the Romans. After Rome became weak, the territories of Rovigo along with Venice become part of Eastern Roman Empire. At the same time, the rivalry between the two trade centres of the region, Roman Venice and Lombard Comacchio took place. Comacchio, having finally lost the competition for trade in the Adriatic, was destroyed by the Venetians, and turned into a local village.³³ As well as Comacchio (*Comaclum*), there are other toponyms, such as Chioggia (*Clugia*), Corbola (*Corbola Superior*), Spina (*Spina*), Papozze (*locus/villa Papociarum*), and coast of Marche (*Reperie Marchie*). Two other toponyms are difficult to localize. Thus, it seems that *capitaneus Riperie*³⁴ is the Capitan of the river Piave, but this is not 100% certain. In the 14–15th centuries most of

²⁸ 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.

²⁹ Martin John, Romano Dennis, Reconsidering Venice // Ibid. P. 12.

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

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

³² Zendrini 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.

³³ 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.

³⁴ WES SPb II RAS. Venice and its domain. C. 186. No. 8.

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 Corbola. Sometimes, as in the case of Corbola, a settlement was divided by a river (Fig. 1). In this case, the Venetians could have property (its legal status remains uncertain) not only on 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.

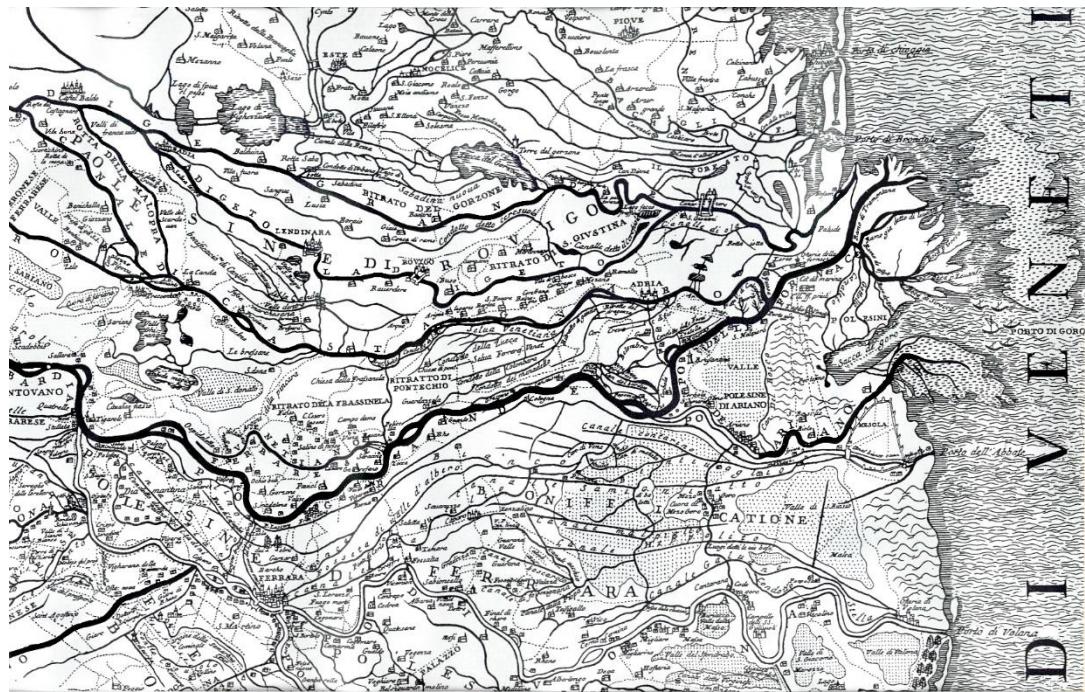


Fig. 1. Polesine and Delta del Po in 1603.

From all the *lettere ducali* we studied, the first four (1372–1382) were issued by the doge Andrea Contarini (early 14th century–1382). Before 1352, only some very scarce sources tell us anything about Andrea Contarini. In 1352, he was appointed *Procuratore de citra*, whose responsibility was charitable deeds in the territories of San Marco, Castello and Cannaregio. This office was accepted as stepping stone to the position of the *dux Venetiarum*. Then 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 a period of intense political activity for Andrea Contarini, 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. In 1357, in the rebellious Dubrovnik, Contarini had to organize the defence against Louis I the Hungarian (1326–1382)³⁵. In 1368 Contarini was elected Doge against his will. He had to choose: to accept the position or

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

to become a betrayer. During his dogeship, the long-awaited peace with Padua was signed (1373). However, the war with Chioggia (1378–1381), which had serious consequences for both sides, Venice and Genoa (with its Hungarian and Padua allies). The luckiest one in this war was (surprisingly) Amadeus IV from Savoy. He received the Venetian territories in Dalmatia for his military support. This, however, had a negative effect on the domestic policy of Genoa which entered a very unstable period of administrative weakening and economic recession³⁶.

His addressee was Niccolò II d'Este, Marquis of Ferrara (1361–1388). In the collection we studied, there are four letters written in the chancery of Andrea Contarini to Niccolò II. There is also another one which was written during Antonio Venier's rule (1382–1400), but there is an issue about the dating described above. 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. Likhachev 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 Likhachev, it is still possible that there are some inaccuracies regarding dates.

The personality of Niccolò II is worth some attention. In 1352, after his 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 became the sole owner of the 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 the alliance of Este and the 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). Together they stood 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 peace was signed on 13 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 return to Rome and help in the conflict with the Visconti family. As a result, Urban V headed to Rome and started a war against Visconti in 1367. Unfortunately, the Pope's return did not achieve the expected results, as many cities which 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 the new Pope and he 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.

³⁶ Norvich J. Iстория Венецианской Республики. Moscow: AST, 2010. P. 335-336.

In 1378 the conflict between the Genoese and the Venetians during the Chioggia war became considerably more intensive. 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 it did not prevent d'Este from sending large quantities of wheat to the cities besieged by the Genoese³⁷.

On-going wars, floods in the Po river territories (1362, 1369, and 1385), famines (1369, 1370, 1374, and 1375) and the plague (1382) killed one third of the population of Ferrara. These factors pressured the city which had been already paying high taxes. The cadaster of 1385 increased the tax burden on the population even more, and a revolt broke out on 3 May 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 was, for a long time, the residence of the Este family³⁸.

The main result of Niccolò II's rule was the spreading of Este house possessions, the alliance with the Catholic Church and a strengthening of the seignior regime. Giovanni Convertino stated that under Niccolò's rule 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 marqueses of Ferrara, Niccolò III, the grandson of Niccolò II. Niccolò's father died when the boy was about ten years old. Until Niccolò III became old enough he was forced to rule under 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 councillors with his people. However, Niccolò with his men began to take the initiative. He limited the power of the Regency Council which had existed until 1402 when d'Este made it his personal council. In September

³⁷ 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/ (visited: 12.12.2018).

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

1400, Este went to Milan to meet with the Duke of Visconti; which provoked anxiety in Venice and Padua. The point was, that in the context of Visconti military initiatives (such as the capture of Bologna), Este had always remained consistently neutral. However, Gian Galeazzo Visconti died in 1402. Pope Boniface IX, who wanted to regain Bologna and other places taken from papal domination by the Milanese, 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 the previous years, the reduction of the annual payments that Ferrara paid to the papal treasury, and a concession to Este Reggio and Parma, conquered by the armies of the league.

The agreement did not produce 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 great 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 Rose³⁹.

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 the rebellious city. In this dangerous situation, Niccolò III tried to stay neutral, but the desire to expand the territory near Polesine 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 Polesine and also to stop the production of salt in *valle di Comacchio*⁴⁰.

In the new conflict between Milan and Venice, Ferrara took the side of *Serenissima*, but the long conflict forced Niccolò to seek peace with Milan. After discussion in 1420, Este handed Parma and the part of Reggio to Visconti. On 22 January of the following year, Filippo Maria freely transferred to him the lands of Castellarano, Rodegli Gavardo and Carpineto. Meanwhile, the balance of power had changed: the army of Visconti took the whole Po valley, while Este had much fewer men in his army. Since then, Este tried to stay at the same distance from the two states, trying to manoeuvre between them, thereby guaranteeing the integrity of his possessions.

³⁹ 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).

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

Staying between two warring states, Este was a mediator in peace agreements between Venice and Visconti in 1428 and 1433.

The result of the policies of Niccolò III was the territorial expansion of the March of Ferrara, while avoiding major military conflicts. In this sense, Luga returned under the authority of the Marquis in 1436–1437, and in 1440, the Roman pontiff transfers to him possession of Bagnacavallo and Massalombarda. Two years earlier, in 1438, Venice had returned part of Rovigo territory to prevent Ferrara from taking part in the 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 to Milan 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 Ferrara was in during the first half of the 15th century. It was a situation of increasing Venetian expansion on the mainland, as a result of which the territories of the March of Ferrara were also in danger. The *Lettere ducali*, referring to the time of Niccolò III d'Este's rule, mainly describe breaches of the boundaries (territorial as well as those connected with law) in the Po valley where Ferrara and Venice Republic bordered⁴¹.

Among the doges there are also such names as Antonio Venier (1382–1400), Michele Steno (1400–1413) and Francesco Foscari (1423–1457). Information about Antonio Venier's (ca. 1330–1400) early life is scarce. In 1380 he was appointed the commandant of the Tenedos fortress, and then in 1381 he became commander of the armies in Crete. His family were middle class merchants. Perhaps he could have become a doge during the serious struggles among the aristocracy⁴². There was consolidation of the Venetian nobility due to their wish to maintain the internal balance of power. That is why the nobility always tried to reach consensus. Notably, the well-known conflict between Guelphs and Ghibellines was not characteristic for Venice, in which the church (the episcopal chair was located on Chioggia) was generally subordinated to the interests of the city's governing aristocracy or rather merged with it since many bishops came from families ranked in *Consiglio Maggiore* and *Consiglio Minor*.

His successor was Michele Steno (ca. 1331–1413). It seems that he had participated in the battles during the war with Chioggia, and he had also attended the return of Chioggia in 1381 where he later became a *podestà*. He took a very active role in the life of the Republic and consequently became one of the *procuratori di San Marco*. There is a common opinion that with

⁴¹ 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/ (visited: 07.12.2018).

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

his assignment the Golden Age of Venice started. During his rule Venice took part in the conflict caused by the death of the Duke of Milano, Gian Galeazzo Visconti, who was the only one who maintained the delicate balance in the region. In this conflict, Padua separated from Venice and attacked Verona. Consequently, the city of Padua was besieged by Venetian armies which blocked the water source, the river Brenta. After the fall of the city the signore with his sons were executed in Venice (1406). In addition to Padua, Venice also captured Treviso, Vicenza and Rovigo⁴³. These territories became the first Venetian acquisitions on Terraferma which signified the shift of *Serenissima*'s politics towards land – a tendency which would be strengthened in the dogeship of Francesco Foscari.

Twelve letters of the collection were sent by Francesco Foscari (1423–1457),⁴⁴ 6 were to Niccolò III d'Este, Marquis of Ferrara. Francesco Foscari (19 June 1373–30 October 1457) served as the 65th Venetian doge 1423–1457. Although Francesco's father Niccolò was mainly engaged in overseas trade, his son did not follow him into commerce, preferring to use the family wealth to attain his ambitious political goals, the very purpose of his own existence. In 1400, he was elected to the Quarantia, although he was not yet of the age prescribed by law, and in December 1401 he became a *giudice del proprio*.⁴⁵ 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 from the plague. The second point resulted in the Venetian expansion up to Mincio and Lago Del Garda and, eventually, the shaping of Terraferma. Francesco was an active promoter of this expansion, being a *savio agli Ordini*, in 1403, he insisted on a war with Francesco II Novello da Carrara (1359–1406), signore of Padua, and pushed a decision to attack Padua and Verona. In 1409, Foscari had a 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 in charge of foreign policy. 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 war and in the new civil positions created by the conquest; conversely, the current doge, Tommaso Mocenigo, who openly disliked

⁴³ Brunetti M. Steno, Michele // Enciclopedia Italiana. 1936. URL: http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/michele-steno_%28Enciclopedia-Italiana%29/ (visited: 28.11.2018).

⁴⁴ 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).

⁴⁵ *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.

Foscari, presented the interests of the old and rich patrician 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 the support of Florence against Milan; Mocenigo's response in early 1423 was his political testament, where he praised *Serenissima* as the centre of the Mediterranean, presenting an impressive image of its wealth and power, advising to be on good terms with Milan and warning against the election of Francesco Foscari, who would draw the Venetians into military conflicts on the Italian Peninsula and destroy their prosperity. Following the death of Mocenigo, however, Foscari was elected Doge of Venice, exactly at the time when the Republic had to wage war against Milan under Duke Filippo Maria Visconti, who intended to dominate the whole of Northern and Central 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 29 May 1453, Constantinople fell to the Ottomans, which meant blocking the Straits for Venetian ships. In 1445, the Council of Ten condemned Francesco Foscari's son, Jacopo Foscari, for bribery and corruption and expelled him from Venice. Jacopo was imprisoned on Crete where he died. Depressed by the news of the death of his son and opposition in the Grand Council, the Doge resigned his office in 1457 and died a week later. In fact, Francesco Foscari was one of few doges who did not rule till their death.

III

As far as the contents of the *lettere ducali* are concerned, they give either the decisions in separate incidents, *casus* (for example, the arrest of a ship that transported wood 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 precedent, but the decision will be extended to all rights in general (for example, the method of establishing Venetian citizenship and the privileges dependent on it). In the same way, the letter can describe the content of a private legal 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 studying the *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 take place on the Venetian Terraferma, including its least studied part – the territory of the Po delta located on the border with Ferrara.

This study demonstrates how individual cases reflect the historical trends of the end of the 14th to the first half of the 15th centuries between three actors: Ferrara, Venice and their environment.

Citizenship. The study of medieval citizenship has its own long historiography⁴⁶. In the Anglo-Saxon historiography there are many examples of case study research⁴⁷ and the general analyses of the status of urban populations in Italy⁴⁸. The work of Klimanov was also dedicated to the question of citizenship of Venice⁴⁹. Venetian citizens by birth (*cives originarii*) were considered those born in Rialto, Grado, Chioggia, and Cavarzere. Those who wanted to get citizenship privileges of the *Sernissima* must have had property in Venice and observed all the duties of a citizen. After fifteen years the person becomes a citizen *de intus* and could enjoy trade privileges within the Venetian state. 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*)⁵⁰. Medieval citizens were concerned with the benefits of citizenship which advanced their family's social status as well as their own, facilitated entrepreneurial activity, giving an edge over the resident noncitizens within the walls and protecting them as they maintained banking or commercial operations abroad⁵¹. Klimanov, following the idea of William Bronsky, draws attention to the process of turning the institution of citizenship into an administrative tool. In the 14th 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 (without relatives in the city were less politically engaged), physicians etc.⁵²

The historiography also raises the issue of the inclusiveness/exclusiveness 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, Venetian society is represented as a two-part model consisting of *cittadini* and *popolo*)⁵³. On the other hand, it is obvious that in the political topography of Venice these two categories of citizens occupied different positions, defined historiographically by their relations to the administrative structures

⁴⁶ 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.

⁴⁷ 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 Sassoferato's doctrine on the making of a Citizen // Speculum. 1973. Vol. 8. P. 694-713.

⁴⁸ Riesenber P. Citizenship at Law in the Late Medieval Italy // Viator. 1974. Vol. 5. P. 333-346.

⁴⁹ 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.

⁵⁰ Ibid. P. 31.

⁵¹ Riesenber P. Citizenship at Law in the Late Medieval Italy // Viator. 1974. Vol. 5. P. 335.

⁵² 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.

⁵³ 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.

of the city. In the course of the 15–16th centuries, the citizens by privilege, *cives per privilegio*, were gradually losing the opportunities to participate in politics and to enter administrative institutions.

After 1410, the offices of the *scuole grandi* were assigned exclusively to native citizens of Venice. After 1419, citizens could only be the representatives of Venice in the newly acquired territories, although the nature of citizenship (by birth or by privilege) was not initially considered⁵⁴. As a result, access to administrative positions was assigned mainly to *cives originarii*.

The *letteri ducali* allow us to look at the citizenship issue from another perspective, namely, the implementation of civil rights outside of the Venetian commune and consequent difficulties. Letter No. 15/186 has been already published (with some mistakes) by Klimanov in the cited article⁵⁵, but he may not have fully realised 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 officials of Ferrara. 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 for the most important agricultural goods in the Middle Ages. It says that: *quia pacta clarissime loquuntur, et absque exceptione non distingvitis cives originarios a civibus privilegiatis alicuius temporis, sed generaliter dicendo omnes homines Veneciarum* (“as the pacts clearly state, not differentiating citizens by birth and citizens by privilege, gained no matter how long before, but saying about all people of Venice in general”)⁵⁶. 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 14th 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 too⁵⁷. In Venice, however, both the political and economic privileges of citizens were limited over time: in 1492 the Council of Ten decided

⁵⁴ O'Connell, Monique, *Legitimating 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.

⁵⁵ 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.

⁵⁶ WES SPb II RAS, Venice and its domains, box 186, No. 15.

⁵⁷ 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.

that only those citizens whose three generations were Venetians could use Venetian privileges outside the immediate territories of the Republic of St. Mark⁵⁸.

Trade Regulation and Borderland Regulation. There is another broad issue represented in *lettere ducali* – borderland regulation. For the Middle Ages in general, the geographical representation of the borders is not typical, but rather we can talk about an overlapping of jurisdictions. It seems, however, that the Ferraro-Venetian border, in the 14–15th centuries in the Po delta, was relatively well formed: from the Venetian and Ferrara sides, there were some *officiales* that performed customs functions, i.e. overseeing the turnover and collection of duties. However, the delineation of territories in practice caused certain problems. Among the investigated acts there is little evidence regarding the establishment of the boundaries between two city-states. Judging by the families from which the representatives of Venice (*Paulus Maurecenus, Nicolaus Geno et Bertucius Contarenus*)⁵⁹ 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 subject of future study. Our attention is mainly focused on local cases related to trade relations on the territory of Terraferma.

In the closely related trade relations, problems concerning the trade or the transportation of goods often arise. Sometimes larger-scale problems of the economy and Venetian expansion into the peninsula are hidden behind them. 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”)⁶⁰. If our assumption about the localization of the place of arrest of the vessel is true, this makes it possible to touch on an important area of the Venetian economy, directly related to *Terraferma* – forestry, the study of which has relatively recently intensified⁶¹.

Forests are a strategically important resource for Venice as a *Stato da Mār*, ensuring its superiority in the Mediterranean with the existence of a strong fleet. Naturally, Venice itself as an island city did not have forest lands, which allowed some researchers to see in the Venetian expansion on the Italian peninsula, among other factors, a desire to conquer forest areas⁶². The

⁵⁸ 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

⁵⁹ WES SPB II RAS. Venice and its domain. C. 186. No. 13.

⁶⁰ WES SPB II RAS. Venice and its domain. C. 186. No. 8.

⁶¹ 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.

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

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 larch⁶³. 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 the grazing of cattle and burning forest for ploughing)⁶⁴. However, up to this point, there is no evidence for a centralized forest policy. This case can be considered in the context of Venetian regulation of the exchange of timber and the desire of the Republic to control important forest resources.

Michael Beaudoin connects the struggle for control over natural resources with the competition between Venice and Comacchio in 8–12th centuries. Comacchio is a settlement in the valley of the river Po, which appeared approximately in 2000 BCE. It is probably connected with the Etruscans because to the south of Comacchio, archeologists investigated a sunken Etruscan city that is known today as Lido di Spina and is included in the Comacchio region⁶⁵. The origins of the name are still debatable: from Latin *cumaculum* – “a small sea wave”, from Etruscan – “a series of bumps”. Today the city is situated on 13 islands and its history has always been tightly connected with water sources. After the Lombard conquest, the city maintained its status as a trading point which connected Italy with the Eastern Roman Empire. Later the city was conquered by King Liutprand (712–744)⁶⁶. After this period the territory was given to monastery of St. Colombano. Monks created a river port and developed salt production which 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 14–15th 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*, the Salt War (1482–1484).

⁶³ Ibid. P. 51.

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

⁶⁵ Tosi M. Spina. Storia di una città tra Greci ed Etruschi. Ferrara, 1993.

⁶⁶ Comacchio // Encyclopædia Britannica. Vol. 6. 1911.

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 had a monopoly on salt production for seven or eight centuries and jealously guarded it, so the actions of Ferrara challenged Venice. Then the Duke of Ferrara raised questions on the exact position of the boundary line, which did not improve political relations. Finally, when the Venetian consul arrested a local priest for not paying debts, and the priest excommunicated the consul, 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 the excommunication), Ercole refused to accept the consul.

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

Comacchio was taken first. Then the siege of Ferrara started. However, the Pope, an ally of Venice, suddenly signed a peace treaty 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 25 May 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 IV was forced to send a special envoy to the patriarch, who, in turn, said that he was very sick and could not transfer the bull to doge and the senate. Turning weapons against the former allies, the pope allowed Neapolitan troops to pass through its territory. However, the Venetians defeated the Neapolitan forces at sea, which resulted in the signing of a peace treaty. Venice removed 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 State⁶⁷.

Salt, however, was not the only resource for Comacchio. The very location of the settlement on the fuzzy border of land and sea provided another source of income – fishing. This obvious component of the economy of the north-eastern coast of the Apennine Peninsula is usually lost in the background of other sectors of the economy: the production of textiles (mainly

⁶⁷ Norvich, John, *Istoriya Venezianskoi Respubliki*. Moscow: AST, 2010. P. 468-470.

wool and silk), glass, mining, military and books etc.⁶⁸ 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 regarding the fishing and fish trade was very long, but there is only one document in The Archive. In this 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 had not only been caught in the village, but had been apparently bred there. Venetians paid in advance for a certain amount of fish which, however, they did not receive. The main reason for this was a 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 dominii procedere poterit, ac sicut voluerit habere regressum*" – "And whatever your Illustrious Magnificence has from the people and the valleys of your dominion, 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"⁶⁹. The indemnification of the Venetians is unacceptable in this context, since the ideals of trade are more important for them. There is a detailed quote reflecting the kind of economic thought of the Venetians at the household level: "*Nec sufficit, quod vestra Illustrissima Magnificentia offerat restitu facere per subditos vestros civibus nostris pecunias suas. Esset enim maximum inconveniens ac nullatenus tollerable, 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 concordes 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 conventione 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

⁶⁸ 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.

⁶⁹ WES SPb II RAS. Venice and its domain. C. 186. No. 30.

caused by your subjects to our citizens with 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 hoped to have had, and [that if he had] he would sell at 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”⁷⁰. This document contributes to research on 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, a Venetian) had some ideas about private property and the priority of trade over seigniorial 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 for smuggling. The letter dedicated to this problem (186/20) no longer mentions Comacchio; it rather mentions 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 left under pressure from neighbouring tribes; archaeological research shows that the city should be considered Etruscan. Being a 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 Spina⁷¹. The growth of Roman 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 hydrological processes, the city plunged into the water⁷². 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, it was one of the islands of the delta, possessing a port (it is unknown whether it was river or sea port). In the examined *lettere ducali* it is considered that smuggled goods were transported through Spina and were taken out at the *Gayri* port (“ad Spinam in terra in portu Gayri”)⁷³.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

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

⁷² Ducati, Pericle, Spina // Enciclopedia Italiana. 1936. URL: http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/spina_res-5cb4f064-8bb7-11dc-8e9d-0016357eee51_%28Enciclopedia-Italiana%29/ (visited: 08.12.2018).

⁷³ WES SPb II RAS. Venice and its domain. C. 186. No. 20.

Wine was among the key objects smuggled, but from where exactly it was brought to the peninsula through Spina remains completely unclear. Moreover, Ferrara had claims on smuggling too, which meant that the illegal transportation of goods went in two directions and was not exclusively a Venetian problem⁷⁴. 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 pescatores Clugie, qui pescati sunt in aquis vestre Magnitudinis contra formam pactorum existentium superinde” – “Regarding the content of the letters, transmitted by your captain Adrian...we answer...about our subjects, fishermen from Chioggia, who were fishing in the waters of your Magnitude that is against existing pacts”. This statement again leads us to the problem of interstate water boundaries in the Middle Ages and Early Modern period. Hugo Grotius, one of the main thinkers about the Early Modern period at the beginning of the 17th 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 fishing⁷⁵. At the beginning of the 15th century there is evidence that the coastal waters, into which the fishermen of Chioggia sailed, already belong to the territorial possession of the state (in this case, Ferrara). How the boundary was established in the water remains an issue to be solved.

The content of the doge's letters also concerns the areas in the Po valley which created both economic and environmental problems for the Venetian Republic. Two villages in which disputes broke out between the citizens of Venice and the subjects of the Marquis of Ferrara were (Upper) Corbola and Papozze.

Corbola is situated on the territory created by the accumulation of river silt. The name originates from the measures of grain or land, like flock or bushel, or from a basket of grain⁷⁶. Both Corbola and Papozze are in a region which had been transformed for centuries by both natural processes and the human activity. Etruscan hydraulic systems are well known, and there is also some archaeological evidence of agricultural development in the region⁷⁷. In the 2nd–3rd centuries BCE a Roman road was laid through Corbola parallel to the coast to San Basilio (Adria), which became the post station and the centre of agricultural development in the area by the Romans. In the first centuries of the Roman Empire, the importance of San Basilio increased because of the construction of a new road. San Basilio had an impressive system of canals and

⁷⁴ 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.

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

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

⁷⁷ Ibid. P. 48-50.

moats which allowed traveling both by land and by water⁷⁸. As a settlement, Corbola 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 Corbola 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 (Corbola, Botrige and Belombra or Lower Corbola, that is, the Venetian one). One document which is linked to Corbola reports the case of a Venetian citizen *Dominicus Mazagallo* (who was engaged in trading on the terra) and his litigation with Chioggia⁷⁹. 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 written material, which are *lettere ducali* and notarial deeds, allow us to look at the micro level of trade relations in the *Terraferma* region and at the features of the regulation of trade relations between the two city-states. The case of Dominicus Mazagallo also tells us about the small volumes of goods (*omnia premissa erant modici valoris*), namely about two vessels of oil (*duos vasellos olei*), ten *staria* of bread (*staria decem frumenti*), and eggs and cheese (*quadam ova et aliquos caseos*). The reason for writing the letter was the transportation of these goods through Upper Corbola (*Corbola Superior*) without a document or permission (*pure et absque bulleto*). This case requires detailed considerations of the legal regulation of the trade between Ferrara and Venice because from the beginning of the 14th century Venetians had had trade privileges according to which grain and some other goods could be freely imported into the territory of the March of Ferrara and exported to Venice. In the case of Dominicus Mazagallo, his ship was also freely let in by the Ferrara officers on Chioggia. Further consideration of this case requires the involvement of other sources, such as treaties and agreements on the rights and privileges between Ferrara and Venice.

In neighbouring Papozze, a conflict also arose over the legal status of the Venetians in the Ferrara territories. Papozze borders Corbola on the west. It is a settlement in the Po valley which now had no access to sea. The first note referring to Papozze was in 1255 when Tebaldo from Papozze, a citizen of Ferrara, sold the Papozze village in the possession of Venetian citizens Marco and Matteo Quirini for 1150 Ferrarese livres⁸⁰. During the 13th century the Venetians remained the owners of the settlement. However, it later 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 Papozze in the first half of the 15th century, which

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ WES SPb II RAS. Venice and its domain. C. 186. No. 10.

⁸⁰ 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).

follows from the documents analysed⁸¹. 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. Likhachev's collection contains four documents about the conflict (1431–1432), which seems to be quite widespread, about the rights of Venetian citizens and their *coloni*, whose position differs depending on whether they come from Venice (*coloni Veneti*) or Ferrara (*coloni Ferrarienses*)⁸². 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*)⁸³. Since the first three letters of the doge of 1431 had no effect, in 1432 the *ambassador* of the Marquis of Ferrara *Iohannes a Forficibus* arrived in Venice to resolve the issue. The issue, however, was not resolved⁸⁴. The unilateral actions of the Venetians also had no effect. It seems that Papozze was a complex case due to overlapping jurisdictions: being part of *distretto* of Ferrara (*villam Papociarum esse de districtu Farrarie*)⁸⁵, it was still, nevertheless, in the possession of noble Venetian citizens, whose privileges did not allow them to collect taxes or to force servants in the Venetian economy to labour (*ab omnibus oneribus, gravaminibus, angariis, factionibus et cetera*)⁸⁶. 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 this brief review has shown, the subject of the *lettere ducali* opens prospects for research in the field of economic and political history and in the sphere of social and environmental history. The doges' letters, despite their proto-governmental origins, contain decisions on private cases, therefore, they 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. According to one scholar in medieval studies, it returns Human to History⁸⁷. This article only anticipates a deeper study of documents, most of which have not yet been used as historical sources.

⁸¹ WES SPb II RAS. Venice and its domain. C. 186. No. 27.

⁸² WES SPb II RAS. Venice and its domain. C. 186. No. 28.

⁸³ WES SPb II RAS. Venice and its domain. C. 186. No. 25.

⁸⁴ WES SPb II RAS. Venice and its domain. C. 186. No. 28.

⁸⁵ WES SPb II RAS. Venice and its domain. C. 186. No. 26.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Февр Л. Бой за историю. М.: Наука, 1991. С. 26-27.

Conclusion

A preliminary analysis of the documents has allowed us to identify a number of major issues, for which the *lettere ducali* can be used as sources for historical research. Among these are questions of the legal status of citizens in Venice and beyond its borders, issues of establishing and regulating borders on land and at 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 stated at the beginning of the article, the transformation of the structure of the *lettere ducali* and the change of *intitulatio* require further study with the involvement of other historical sources. This will help to determine what these changes were about: whether they are 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 which influenced the writing style. From a broader perspective, a study of the connections between hierarchical relations and clerical style and the 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 the *lettere ducali* with the Venetian-Ferrarese agreements relevant to the period from the end of the 14th to the first half of the 15th centuries. This would allow us to state how 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 Archive in other sources or electronic databases, such as *The Rulers of Venice, 1332-1524*⁸⁸, which gives access to 70,000 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) a social portrait of the characters of the *lettere ducali*, their role in their society.

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

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

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