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Venetian Trading Networks in the Medieval

Mediterranean To understand the system of business relations within the commercial network of the Republic of Venice, this article adopts a network analysis that differs from a standard narrative based on a privileged subset of actors or relations. It allows us to examine the socially mixed group of entrepreneurs, brokers, and shippers at the heart of Venice's economic system, as well as the various conditions under which they operated. Venice's overseas mercantile relations, shaped by the ruling patriciate, were riddled with restrictions upon foreigners and colonial subjects. The Venetian trading community centered in Alexandria from 1418 to 1420 exemplified this far-reaching Venetian system during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. It featured a number of lower-rank characters negotiating, flaunting, and frequently breaking the rules, all to the greater profit of the empire.

THE VENETIAN PATRICIANS AND THEIR COMMERCIAL ALLIES The nature of the sources has usually led historians to focus on predominant figures, whose family names can be easily noticed in the documents as charge holders and whose family lines and more orthodox careers can be easily reconstructed in the long run. Venice's overseas trade was undoubtedly in the hands of its patricians (a similar domination may well have applied to other strategic sectors, such as the banking system or the salt monopoly). Scholars stress the importance of Venice's noble families in the major trading cities of the Middle East; patricians held a large share of Venice's total investment in spices and oriental goods. Annales-style research on the major trade in spices usually underlines the predominance of noblemen, particularly those belonging to the old nobility (*case vecchie*), in the main commercial institutions, such as the consulates and their ruling councils. Indeed, recent works on fifteenth-century Aleppo and Alexandria show that patri-

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cians held the biggest share in the total investment. The nobles' grip on investment and on the overseas trading guilds remains unimpeachable.¹

Yet, this information does not tell us much about the actual composition and the functioning of Venetian networks. Apart from their economic domination, could Venetian noblemen alone have implemented an efficient system of mutual support and business collaboration? This study of a particular network—that of the merchants in Alexandria from 1418 to 1420—attempts to assess the role of such lower-rank participants as Jews, Greeks, colonial subjects, and foreigners within the exclusive commercial networks of the Serenissima.²

Given the growing historical interest in trading diasporas and cross-cultural forms of economic organization, the network approach adopted herein privileges the importance of social linkages instead of social status, focusing on patterns of human interaction. Scholars working in other areas of the Mediterranean have paid attention to the interactions of colonial subjects and other local merchants along the main long-distance networks of Genoa and Venice. But the view of merchant networks in the Mediterranean as mixed and collaborative remains marginal in the literature. Although the Venetian nobility became dominant in the Alexandrian business community during the late 1410s, members of the patriciate had a limited presence in Egypt until the beginning of the fifteenth century, after which they necessarily had to cooperate with many individuals of lower status. In the medieval Mediterranean, uprooted individuals seldom left meaningful traces of their alliances and strategies. To cope with this problem, the network approach adopted in this article aims at placing everyone—rich and poor, noble and common, et al.—on the same level.³

1 For the dominance of nobles in the maritime trade of Venice, see Bernard Doumerc and Doris Stockly, “L'évolution du capitalisme marchand à Venise: Le financement des galères du mercato à la fin du XV^e siècle,” *Annales*, L (1995), 133–157; Stockly, *Le système de l'incanto des galées du marché à Venise (fin XIII^e–milieu XV^e siècle)* (Leiden, 1995); Claire Judde De Larivière, *Naviguer, Commercer, Gouverner: Économie Maritime et Pouvoirs à Venise (XV^e–XVI^e Siècles)* (Leiden, 2008).

2 For more specific studies about the Venetians in Aleppo and Alexandria, see Eric Vallet, *Marchands vénitiens en Syrie à la fin du XV^e siècle: pour l'honneur et le profit* (Paris, 1999); Georg Christ, *Trading Conflicts: Venetian Merchants and Mamluk Officials in Late Medieval Alexandria* (Boston, 2012). These two studies focus primarily on Venetian noblemen, describing overseas networks as defined by metropolitan social values and political institutions.

3 For other areas of the Mediterranean, see Nevra Necipoglu, “Byzantines and Italians in Fifteenth-Century Constantinople: Commercial Cooperation and Conflict,” *New Perspectives*

The large majority of the merchants operating in Alexandria, Egypt, between 1418 and 1420 came from either the Venetian metropolis or from its colonies. Since in those years, other communities were temporarily banned or discouraged for political reasons from trading with Egypt, the resulting picture allows us to glimpse the interaction between all members of the Venetian trade diaspora, within which an important distinction should be drawn. Apart from Venetian noblemen and citizens, this diaspora also included a number of Greeks, Jews, naturalized foreigners, Christian and Jewish renegades, migrants, and exiles, all of whom are defined herein as *lower-rank* Venetians.

The complete series of seventy-eight notary records from the casebook of Vittore Bonfantin that this article scrutinizes to describe and analyze the 1418 to 1420 network mention 185 different people, who appear 414 times in the documents. Although more than 80 percent of them were Venetians, either from the metropolis or from its colonies, they had twenty different places of origin.⁴

The disadvantage of depicting the interconnections within such a group of people through a set of contracts and notarial deeds becomes immediately evident: Unlike merchant correspondence and private letters, notary records provide no psychological insight about individual choices, background experiences, or motivations. The advantage, however, is that these notarial acts allow us to treat all of the participants' relationships—regardless of differences in ethnicity, status, and wealth—equally. To counter the criticism that a network analysis of this kind fails to account for the formation and evolution of social linkages, we complement our network analysis with a cultural, microhistorical examination of the origins, as well as the cultural and political circumstances, of the Mediterranean trade that took place between 1418 and 1420.⁵

on Turkey, XII (1995), 129–143; Sergej P. Karpov, “Grecs et Latins à Trébizonde (XIIIe–XVe siècle): Collaboration économique, rapports politiques,” in Michel Balard (ed.), *Etat et colonisation au Moyen Age et à la Renaissance* (Lyon, 1989), 413–424; Angeliki E. Laiou-Thomadakis, “The Byzantine Economy in the Mediterranean Trade System; Thirteenth–Fifteenth Centuries,” *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, XXXIV (1980), 177–222; Maria Fusaro, “Les Anglais et les Grecs: Un réseau de coopération commerciale en Méditerranée vénitienne,” *Annales*, LVIII (2003), 605–626. This article owes much to the combined use of historical databases. The Cives database permitted new citizens to be traced in the network (<http://www.civesveneciarum.net/>), and the Online Catasto of 1427 provided material about the Florentine citizen in the network (<http://www.stg.brown.edu/projects/catasto/>).

4 Names and abstracts of Bonfantin's deeds can be consulted in an online application (upon registration) at <http://notaires-venitiens.com/notaries/users/login>.

5 For the century and a half from the establishment of the Alexandrian galleys in 1344 to the

THE 1418 TO 1420 NETWORK The analysis herein focuses on links between individuals, and their structural position along the network, as they appear in Bonfantin's records. When a client used the notary's services, for instance, to appoint somebody as his agent through a power of attorney or a commission agency, the client has a link with the agent, as well as with the witnesses to the deed. If the power of attorney implies, for instance, the rescue of debts from a third party, the client is also socially linked to the debtor. In order to stress agency rather than mere involvement in business deals, no other links are taken into consideration (for example, between agents and/or the witnesses themselves, who may not have known each other). Hence, key actors in the network are those who were most required by others as partners or witnesses, and/or were most active themselves. The overwhelming majority of social relations can be traced from either commission contracts or powers of attorney (fifty-three out of seventy-eight documents), both of which merchants used to delegate power to a partner in order to make business decisions. As a means to bestow ample autonomy on a commissioner's actions, a general commission or a power of attorney was generally underwritten with a reputable partner.

The analysis herein is based on two simple concepts in network theory—degree centrality and betweenness centrality. Degree centrality derives from the number of ties that bind a particular person to others in a network; betweenness reflects the capacity of a person to connect people or groups of people who would otherwise be isolated from each other in a network. Degree is often interpreted in terms of a person's exposure to whatever is flowing through the network. It thus applies as much to the probability of finding good business opportunities as it would to that of catching a virus (in fact, three of the people in the degree ranking died during the plague epidemics in Egypt). Betweenness measures brokerage

Ottoman conquest of Egypt (1517), Venetian notaries comprised the only active Latin notarial institution in Alexandria, providing services to all of the foreign merchants. Indeed, no similar material has been found outside Venice. Bonfantin, the only active notary in the city from 1418 to 1420, worked for Biagio Dolfin when he was consul in Egypt. See B. 22, Notary V. Bonfantin, Archivio di Stato di Venezia, Cancelleria Inferiore, Notai (hereinafter ASVe, CI, N). For the everyday life of the Venetian community in Alexandria, see Christ, *Trading Conflicts*. For the interruption of Catalan and Genoese activities, see Eliyahu Ashtor, *Levant Trade in the Later Middle Ages* (Princeton, 1983), 22–26.

capacity, indicating individuals that are in a good position to mediate between others.⁶

The serial and complete documentary sample, the relational nature of the records, the criteria employed to define relationships, and the concepts underpinning the network analysis herein all contribute to understanding the weight of both noblemen and commoners in the network, but particularly the latter's relevance in the system of relations. Table 1 shows the core of the network, listing the eighteen most central people by degree and betweenness, from a total sample of 185 people.

A glance at the 1418 to 1420 network clearly shows its heterogeneous character. In addition to Venetian noblemen, the top positions are occupied by Greek merchants from Crete, together with several naturalized foreigners; Venetian subjects working for the sultanate's authorities as tax farmers; informers in Cairo; and even one Jewish merchant. Among the patricians, the most relevant commercial lineages are represented by the Michiel, Dolfin, Zorzi, Bernardo, Querini, Capello, Bembo, Corner, and Contarini families. The degree and betweenness ratings are similar in this network. However, as well-positioned in degree centrality (that is, well connected with the rest of the merchant community through numerous ties) as lower-ranked Venetians were, they were even more important as brokers. A glance at the degree-centrality figures shows that patricians shared the highest positions in the network with second-rank Venetians, but a betweenness viewpoint makes clear that they followed their lower-ranked colleagues as brokers.

By grouping people according to social status, religion, or trading nation, the literature on Mediterranean merchants tends to

For the divide between qualitative and quantitative—or social-scientific and narrative—forms of history, as it relates to the criticism of network analysis, see Charles Tilly, “Observations of Social Processes and Their Formal Representations,” *Sociological Theory*, XXII (2004), 595–602. For a seminal discussion of the interrelationship between social-structural and cultural analysis, see Mustafa Emirbayer and Jeff Goodwin, “Network Analysis, Culture, and the Problem of Agency,” *American Journal of Sociology*, XCIX (1994), 1411–1454; Bonnie H. Erickson, “Social Networks and History: A Review Essay,” *Historical Methods*, XXX (1997), 149–157.

6 Bartolomeo De Soris had died of plague by June 25, 1420, Filippo Malerbi by May 28, 1420, and Dolfin by the end of April the same year. Many Venetian merchants in Alexandria were ill during March and April 1420 when the plague hit Alexandria. See B. 22, Notary V. Bonfantius: June 25, 1420, May 28, 1420, ASve, CI, N; Christ, *Trading Conflicts*, 279.

Table 1 The Eighteen Individuals in the I418 to I420 Network Rated Highest in Centrality

	BETWEENNESS CENTRALITY		DEGREE CENTRALITY			
1	Michiel, Angelo d. Luca	Venice	1	Michiel, Angelo d. Luca	Venice	noble
2	Sclavo, Manolis	Crete	2	Dolfin, Biagio d. Lorenzo	Venice	noble
3	Dolfin, Biagio d. Lorenzo	Venice	3	Zorzi, Francesco q. Paolo	Venice	noble
4	Cazilli, Andrea d. Costa	Crete	4	Bernardo, Pietro d. Francesco	Venice	noble
5	Cumulo, Nicola	Crete	5	Arcangeli, Clario	Venice	
6	De Soris, Benedetto q. Soro	Venice	6	Cumulo, Nicola	Crete	
7	Londachi, Giorgio	Crete	7	De Soris, Benedetto q. Soro	Venice	
8	Bernardo, Pietro d. Francesco	Venice	8	Capsali, Liaco q. Rubini	Jew of Crete	
9	Arcangeli, Clario	Venice	9	Jalina, Iohannes	Crete	
10	Zorzi, Francesco q. Paolo	Venice	10	Sclavo, Manolis	Crete	
11	Dolfin, Lorenzo q. Antonio	Venice	11	Querini, Stefano q. Filippo	Venice	noble
12	Capsali, Liaco q. Rubini	Jew of Crete	12	Piloti, Emmanuel d. Emmanuel	Crete	
13	Jalina, Iohannes	Crete	13	Cazilli, Andrea d. Costa	Crete	
14	Jalina, Tomas	Crete	14	Malerbi, Filippo q. Nicola	Venice	
15	Malerbi, Filippo q. Nicola	Venice	15	Capello, Albano	Venice	noble
16	Lazaro	Jew of Crete	16	Dolfin, Lorenzo q. Antonio	Venice	noble
17	Bembo, Bartolomeo q. Andrea	Venice	17	Londachi, Giorgio	Crete	
18	Piloti, Emmanuel d. Emmanuel	Crete	18	Bembo, Lorenzo q. Leonardo	Venice	noble

stress differences rather than commonalities. Network analysis, with its focus on relations, flattens these categorical divisions, allowing us to group people via a relational criterion—engagement in the Venetian merchant network. Thus, network analysis reveals for the first time that a nurtured group of merchants who may not have been Venetian-born or politically important were nonetheless crucial in the web of business relations. Ten lower-rank Venetians and even two Jews—the category of Venetian subjects who suffered the most discrimination—are at the top of the 1418 to 1420 list. The people in this reduced sample deserve attention because, first, they represent the most active part of the network and, second, unlike their lower-rated peers, they are traceable in a wider range of sources.

The fact that normally voiceless people, such as the ten lower-rank Venetians mentioned in Table 1, can be traced in historical sources is remarkable. A plausible explanation is that since they were more active than the 165 individuals that follow them on the rating scale, they had to face more constraints; their careers were punctuated with such issues as exile, political persecution, or commercial conflict. Furthermore, their very conspicuousness in the sources that complement the notary records also suggests that the analysis of centrality is fundamentally correct when it points to them, rather than the 165 who lag behind them in the network and virtually disappear elsewhere, as worthy of distinction.

PEOPLE OF HIGH AND LOW RANK IN THE VENETIAN NETWORKS The modern idea, inspired by the values of the French Revolution, that every individual is entitled to the citizenship of the state to which he belongs by birthright is fundamentally wrong for the medieval city-state of Venice with regard to its colonial dominion. Venetian citizenship remained confined to the metropolitan city itself, never extended to its subjected territories, as in a modern territorial state. Moreover, Venetian economic policy was permeated by the fundamental principle of social privilege by hereditary right, which made a rigid distinction between the natives of the metropolitan city and those of the colonial dominion (known as the Maritime State). The logics of free trade do not apply to Venice—a maritime republic ruled by nobles, committed to safeguarding its foreign markets and shipping monopolies from the economic competition of foreigners (*forenses*). As a general rule,

Venetian citizens could not enter into partnerships with non-Venetians to trade with Venice. Lower-rank Venetians somehow had to navigate these citizenship and trade regulations to do business; the galley system, the keystone of the Venetian Mediterranean enterprise, was an obvious starting point.⁷

The Galley Service and Venetian Citizenship The galley service was a regular system of government-run convoys, taken on lease in public auctions by noble-owned companies. Circa 1320, the Venetian government established a model for the financing of the galleys that strongly privileged patricians. According to the regulation issued in 1305, only citizens with full rights (*de extra*) could deal in long-distance trade. Foreigners were required a minimum residence of twenty-five years to acquire full citizenship and to engage in wholesale commerce.⁸

The heyday of the galley system and the process of constitutional reform that shaped the legal definition of nobility took place at the same time (1297–1323). The legal reform defined the Venetian ruling class on the basis of kinship and hereditary rights and, according to Jacoby, resulted in a threefold division of free people in the Venetian empire—citizens, subjects, and protected people. The elite segment amounted to no more than 5 percent of the metropolitan population. In the period under study, these noblemen enjoyed citizenship with the full complement of rights, including access to high office. Just beneath this status was “original” citizenship, held by native-born Venetians. According to a more fine-grained and practical categorization, *de extra* citizenship implied the right to engage in maritime, wholesale commerce, whereas *de intus* citizenship, often conferred on naturalized Venetians, granted limited access to retail, local trade.⁹

7 Reinhold C. Mueller, *Immigrazione e cittadinanza nella Venezia medievale* (Rome, 2010), 56–57.

8 Doumerc and Stockly, *L'évolution*, 137; Mueller, “Greeks in Venice and ‘Venetians’ in Greece,” in Chryssa Maltezou (ed.), *Ricchi e poveri nella società dell’Oriente Grecolatino* (Venice, 1998), 168–180.

9 David Jacoby, “Citoyens, sujets et protégés de Venise et de Gênes en Chypre du XIIIe au XVe siècle,” in *Recherches sur la Méditerranée orientale du XIIe au XVe siècle: peuples, sociétés, économies* (London, 1979), 159–188. The 5% figure is provided by E. Natalie Rothman, “Between Venice and Istanbul: Trans-Imperial Subjects and Cultural Mediation in the Early Modern Mediterranean,” unpub. Ph.D. diss. (Univ. of Michigan, 2006), 20–21. Gerhard Rosch, “The Serrata of the Great Council and Venetian Society, 1286–1323,” in John Martin and Dennis Romano (eds.), *Venice Reconsidered: The History and Civilization of an Italian City-State, 1297–1797* (Baltimore, 2000), 67–89; Mueller “‘Veneti facti privilegio’: stranieri nat-

Since historiography has focused mainly on the socially privileged, we lack a clear understanding of Jacoby's two other main status categories, subjects and protected people. If a normative framework ever existed in Venetian chanceries and courts to deal with colonial subjects, it was much a matter of ad hoc adjustment and negotiation. Instead of attempting to clarify the murky legal definitions applying to most of the natives of the maritime dominion (*fidelis*, *burgensis*, *subditus*, and various ethnic categories), this analysis reveals how merchants negotiated their status with the authorities, particularly when access to trading and citizenship rights was at stake.

In Venice, deciding who qualified for full citizenship was a subject of legal debate until the sixteenth century. When the city became the center of a maritime and commercial empire in the early thirteenth century, it attracted many immigrants and incorporated many native minorities. This motley population rendered the issue of citizenship much more complex; populations incorporated from the Byzantine world and refugees from the extinct Crusader kingdoms required new status categories to be created.

Citizenship policies, particularly in the colonies, revolved around, first and foremost, commercial rights. The general legal framework excluded Greek, Jewish, and other subjects of the colonies from administrative posts, including the councils and other bodies of the overseas nations. It also sought to limit their involvement in trade, particularly the lucrative commerce of the galleys, in which their participation was relegated to minor, peripheral activities. Greek subjects could neither trade with Venice nor use the galleys. Colonial subjects, designated by the Venetian legal terms *burgenses* or *fideles*, were not considered Venetian citizens, though certain ad hoc policies mitigated the application of these principles in the daily life of the colonies. The Venetian citizenship policy underwent several changes during epidemics, de-population, and war with Genoa. Under these circumstances, local citizenship was granted to the dwellers of colonial cities, but it was *de intus* citizenship, which in practice was useless outside since it implied the prohibition to engage in overseas trade. Nuances to the general legal framework barely had any demographic effect.¹⁰

uralizzati a Venezia, 1300–1500,” in Paola Lanaro and Donatella Calabi (eds.), *La città e i luoghi degli stranieri: Italia XIV–XVIII secolo* (Bari, 1998), 41–51.

10 For a discussion of the everyday application of trading restrictions, see Silvano Borsari,

Regulations were even more restrictive regarding Jews; as *infideles*, they could not become citizens. The privileges granted to a few Jews for services rendered to the state were rare exceptions. One of the Jews in the 1418 to 1420 network applied for citizenship of some kind, and another had a trading privilege granted. However, as a general rule, Jews were denied citizenship and major trading rights. Jews of Crete attempted to obtain phony citizenship decrees multiple times during the 1420s.¹¹

Foreigners who resided in the city of Venice for an extended period were sometimes able to acquire citizenship through naturalization (*per privilegium* or *per gratiam*), but only a few of them were permitted trade overseas. Indeed, most naturalization decrees included explicit clauses limiting the right to engage in overseas trade.

Notaries and Traders Like their counterparts in other Mediterranean port cities, the Alexandrian notaries favored legal practice over norms, and juridical considerations over cultural ones. They almost systematically qualified patricians as *nobilis*, using *cives veneciarum* for all other forms of citizenship. They never resorted to such administrative categories as *de intus* or *de extra*. Hence, the notaries tended to recognize only two legal categories, full citizenship, which entailed consular protection and trading rights, or colonial (or Jewish) status, which did not. Thus, as most historians agree, Greeks and Jews were free to engage only in the subsidiary trade between the colonies and the ports of the Middle East. The notaries labelled second-rank Greeks only by their community of origin (for example, *de Candia*; they never described any of them as *graecus*); similarly, they referred to Jews as *Jew de Candia*, *Jew de*

“Ricchi e Poveri nelle comunità ebraiche di Candia e Negroponte (sec.XIII–XIV),” in Maltezou (ed.), *Ricchi e poveri*, 211–222; Benjamin Arbel, “Jews in International Trade: The Emergence of the Levantines and Pontentines,” in Robert Davis and Benjamin Ravid (eds.), *The Jews of Early Modern Venice* (Baltimore, 2001), 73–96. See also Jacoby, “Social Evolution of Latin Greece,” in Norman P. Zacour and Harry W. Hazard (eds.), *A History of Crusades: The Impact of the Crusades on Europe* (Madison, 1989), 175–221; Ashtor, “Jews in the Mediterranean Trade,” in Jürgen Schneider (ed.), *Wirtschaftskräfte und Wirtschaftswege. I. Mittelmeer und Kontinent: Festschrift für Hermann Kellenbenz* (Stuttgart, 1978), 441–454. Mueller, “Greeks in Venice and ‘Venetians’ in Greece,” 172–173. Mueller summarized his views in *idem, Immigrazione e cittadinanza nella Venezia medievale* (Rome, 2010), 17–59.

11 Mueller, *Cittadinanza*, 32; Jacoby, “Venice and the Venetian Jews in the Eastern Mediterranean” in Gaetano Cozzi (ed.), *Gli Ebrei a Venezia, secoli XIV–XVIII, Atti del Convegno Internazionale organizzato dall’Istituto di Storia della Società e dello Stato Veneziano della Fondazione Giorgio Cini, Venezia, 5–10 giugno 1983* (Venice, 1987), 29–59.

Rethimnon, etc. As long as Greeks and Jews remained in the periphery of the Venetian commercial networks, they were tolerated, but they were never welcome to engage in maritime trade with the metropolis. Many of them were involved in short-range shipping and credit activities, particularly in Negroponte, Constantinople, and Crete.¹²

During this period, Venice enacted discriminatory policies against Jews to increase fiscal pressure on them. The primary goal in the beginning of the fifteenth century was to prevent Jews from access to land, to restrict their investments in real estate, and to force them into serving as credit generators. New senate regulations issued in 1402 prevented Cretan Jews from owning houses and shops outside the ghetto and curtailed their real-estate transactions. In 1423, Jews were further obliged to sell their real-estate properties. At one time, Latin property owners in Crete could pawn their lands as warranty for credit advanced by Jews, but by 1426, the Venetian authorities had forbidden this practice. Yet, Jews had a favored role in the circulation of credit; they could trade with the metropolis for money at the special duty of 2 percent. While squeezing the Cretan Jews economically, Venice exacted a series of public loans from them, six of which are documented between 1410 and 1425. The upshot is that Jews were forced into money-lending activities in Crete more than in any other contemporary Christian state. The presence of Cretan Jews in Alexandria, which peaked in these years, resulted from Venice's legal strategy of seeking their involvement in the draining and circulation of capital in the Venetian colonies.¹³

Responses to this situation varied. In Venice, foreigners tried to be recognized as citizens, whether by good faith or by fraud. Minority merchants, as we shall see, tried to circumvent legislation by obtaining special privileges from the authorities.

12 For the rise of notaries and scribes as legal agents in the late Middle Ages, see Daniel Smail, "Notaries, Courts and the Legal Culture of Late Medieval Marseille," in Kathryn L. Reyerson and John V. Drendel (eds.), *Urban and Rural Communities in Medieval France, Provence and Languedoc, 1000–1500* (Boston, 1998), 23–51.

13 Joshua Starr, "Jewish Life in Crete Under the Rule of Venice," in *Proceedings of the American Academy for Jewish Research*, XII (1942), 59–114; Elisabeth Santschi, "Contribution à l'étude de la communauté juive en Crète vénitienne au XIV^e siècle, d'après des sources administratives et juridiques," *Studi Veneziani*, XV (1973), 177–211; Frédéric Thiriet, *La Romanie Vénitienne au Moyen Âge: le développement et l'exploitation du domaine colonial vénitien, XIII^e–XV^e siècles* (Paris, 1959), 300. Borsari, "Ricchi e Poveri," 220.

During the fourteenth century, Alexandria was in a peripheral position in the Indo-Mediterranean system of trade. Cairo was still a major exchange center, as well as a large consumption market for Indian goods, particularly before the Black Death. The Venetian and Greek majority of permanent residents shared the city with many Latins of unknown origin, perhaps the remnants of the post-Crusade European diaspora in the Middle-East. From 1361 to 1363, noblemen appear only thirteen times in the Alexandrian notary records within a group of 165 people appearing a total of 390 times.¹⁴

Between January 1393 and September 1394, a Venetian notary in Alexandria registered in his deeds only eight patricians within a group composed of one person from Alexandria, one from Caffa, seventeen people from Crete (five of them Jews), five from points unknown, and thirty-one Venetian commoners. Specialists in the Levant trade place the rise of Venetian trade with Egypt after 1403. Only after 1405 did the auctions for galleys in Alexandria reflect a continued interest by investors.¹⁵

At the turn of the fifteenth century, major geo-political developments contributed to the ascendance of the Venetian patriciate in Alexandria. During the last decades of the fourteenth century, the flow of trade between the Mediterranean and the Indian Ocean found several obstacles. The otherwise undistinguished polity of Rasulid Yemen controlled the spice fleets because Indian ships had to call in its harbors. But after the emergence of Mecca as a regional power, later allied to the Mamluk sultans of Egypt, the east-west trade routes changed. During the first two decades of the fifteenth century, the spice trade entered the Red Sea in an unprecedented scale, but no longer under Yemeni control. The Mamluk government eventually engineered a commercial shift away from Yemen

14 B. 36, Notary G: Michiel Campione, August 11, 1363; Bollani, July 7, 28, 1362, August 12, 1363; Contarini, June 2, 1362, May 18, 1362; Michiel, August 17, 1362; Cocho, August 17, 1362; Malipiero, March 15, 1363; Bembo, October 27, 1362; Loredan, October 28, 1362; Molino, October 28, 1362; and Querini, February 12, 1362, ASVE, CI, N.

15 Apart from the Michiel and Bembo families, the following cognomina for the 1399 to 1401 period made only sparse, fleeting appearances: Gritti, Barbaro, Venier, Zane, Da Mula, Malipiero, Trevisan, and Donato. See B. 22, Notary V, Bonfantin: Michiel, Francesco, October 29, 1399, February 5, 1400, December 29, 1400; Bembo, Leonardo, October 29, 1399; Gritti, Antonio, October 29, 1399; Grillo, Paolo, January 18, 1400; Barbaro, Antonio, Venier, Marco, February 5, 1400; Da Mula, Antonio, May 10, 1400, August 26, 1400; Zane, Giovanni, August 26, 1400; Malipiero, Lorenzo, October 4, 1400; Trevisan, Zaccaria, December 29, 1400; Donato, Maffeo, December 29, 1400, ASVE, CI, N.

and old merchant groups, such as the Karimi, in favor of Jeddah (Mecca's harbor), and its own preferred entrepreneurs, the Khawajas. When both the Genoese and the Catalans temporarily come into conflict with the Mamluk sultanate, the Venetians, with their Greek and Jewish subjects, gained control of the lucrative Alexandrian market from 1418 to 1420.¹⁶

Venice's new legal definition of nobility, its subsequent economic regulations, and its restrictive policy toward foreigners accompanied this geo-political trend. After 1390, several patrician families installed representatives in Alexandria with the express purpose of furthering their commercial interests; thirty years later, they were heavily involved in the spice trade. The uninterrupted presence of these Venetian entrepreneurs resulted in Levantine careers of long standing, and to the accession of prominent merchants to the consular charge. As it emerges from the notarial records, the community that had commandeered the trade with Egypt by the late 1410s included 185 people, who appeared 414 times. These contracts mention individuals of unknown origin thirty-seven times; Cretans appear 103 times (26 of them involving Jews), and Venetians 239 times (136 of them involving nobles).¹⁷

During the first decades of the fifteenth century, the Venetian citizenship policies had a twofold effect. In the first place, many of the Greek merchants who continued to operate in the extremities of the Venetian networks began to establish themselves as mediators. Although the average number of patricians in the network was much higher than before, the Greek presence did not diminish numerically during the first third of the fifteenth century. In the second place, many Jewish merchants, hitherto not involved in overseas trade, became active in Alexandria when conditions in Crete became unbearable. Greeks, Jews, and patricians now found

16 Apellániz, *Pouvoir et finance en Méditerranée pré-moderne: Le deuxième Etat mamelouk et le commerce des épices (1382–1517)* (Barcelona, 2009), 47–115; John L. Meloy, *Imperial Power and Maritime Trade: Mecca and Cairo in the Later Middle Ages* (Chicago, 2010), 66–75, 94–95; Ashtor, *Levant Trade*, 106–199 (survey of major geo-political developments), 219–226 (the privileged Venetian market).

17 Dolfín, appointed several times as consul in the 1410s and the 1420s, was in Egypt at the beginning of the 1390s, as was Francesco Michiel (consul from 1420 to 1422), and Antonio da Mula (consul from 1399 to 1401). B. 22, Notary V. Bonfantin: April 28, 1393 (Dolfín), June 2, 1393 (Da Mula); B. 222, Notary A. Vactaciis, October 29, 1393, February 5, 1400, December 29, 1400 (Michiel), ASVE, CI. Consul Niccolo da Molin (1434/35) was already active in Egyptian business in 1415. See B. 174, Notary Cristoforo Rizzo: December 22, 1415 (N. Da Molin), ASVE, CI, N.

themselves as partners in a flourishing trade that linked the Venetian domains with the sultanate for many decades.

THE ROLE OF LOWER-RANK VENETIANS The analysis of centrality acquaints us with the most active people in the 1418 to 1420 network. Without such analysis, the core group that emerges from the notarial records would otherwise have dissolved in the almost 200 individuals actually quoted in the deeds. Half of this subset, as we have seen, is comprised of lower-rank Venetians. Who were they and how were they able to infiltrate a world dominated by their social superiors?

Sketchy biographies of these merchants can be reconstructed from a variety of sources—chancery and court records, personal statements, and even autobiographies—and micro-analysis can be used to discover their personal connections and the crucial skills that they brought to the Venetian business community. The reconstruction of their stories unveils a few surprises: First, the Venetian citizens (Venetian but not noble) in the network came from a small minority of naturalized foreigners. Second, these lower-rank businessmen were able to insinuate themselves into the network by finding ways to circumvent the legal restrictions imposed by Venice on Greeks, foreigners, and colonial subjects. This article's combination of network analysis with biography helps to conciliate what Tilly termed the “qualitative-quantitative divide” between social-scientific and conventional forms of history. The aim of this study is to challenge two assumptions: (1) that an exclusive focus on the structure of networks cannot detect true social interaction, and (2) that non-nobles remained secondary in the Venetian system of business cooperation.¹⁸

Together with colonial subjects and ethnic minorities, naturalized Venetians represented the smallest group of the doge's subjects. However, three new citizens hide among the fourteen most active merchants in the 1418 to 1420 network. Because of the obstacles that they encountered, forcing them into a constant renegotiation of their rights, they present striking similarities with the other lower-rank Alexandrian traders.

Filippo Malerbi Filippo Malerbi's career as a merchant in Egypt was the result of a two-generation family strategy. His case

18 Tilly, “Observations,” 598.

illustrates how Venetian citizenship regulations could open a path for social mobility, allowing skilled newcomers to enter into Venice's overseas networks. Malerbi's father and uncle came from Verona in the Veneto. They obtained Venetian citizenship *de intus*, temporarily, in 1368, taking advantage of the new regulations of 1358, when, due to the high mortality and de-population of the Black Death, Venice became more flexible toward petitioners. Attaining Venetian citizenship was a daunting matter for poor foreigners; those who managed it represented the "elite of immigrants." Economic motivations—particularly the desire to engage in long-distance trade—lay behind most of the petitions. The Malerbi's 1368 privilege was an exceptional one (*de gratia*), because the petitioners did not comply with all of the Venetian regulations. Since it was temporary and explicitly forbade the exportation of merchandise to the northern European markets, Malerbi's father renewed his citizenship in 1385, this time gaining access to foreign trade. Malerbi and his brother took the further step of beginning trade activities in Alexandria. In the notarial records of 1418 to 1420, Malerbi's personal network included numerous deals with Pisans, Jews, Greeks from Candia, and Venetians.¹⁹

The De Soris Family The number of the "immigrant elite" who obtained a *de gratia* privilege was extremely small. Only seventy-two petitioners obtained this kind of citizenship between 1338 and 1490; at least two of them were present in the network under study—the Malerbi and the De Soris families. Soro, the forefather of the De Soris family, became Venetian through marriage. As a youth, he moved to Venice with his family from Bologna, applying for Venetian citizenship in 1377. Five years later, a new *de extra* privilege opened the doors of foreign trade for him. Soro's sons, Benedetto and Andrea, who were active in the network, appeared in Alexandria several years later. In Egypt, Benedetto developed the third largest personal network, ranging from the few Catalans present in the city at that time to Cretan Jews, Dalmatians, Venetian noblemen, Cretan feudatories, and Greeks from minor islands. However, when he died, a number of patricians refused to act as his estate executors.²⁰

19 B. 22, Notary V. Bonfantin: July 20, 1419, December 1, 1419, February 27, 1420, March 1, 12 (2), 20 1420, May 28, 1420, ASVE, CI, N; Riccardo Predelli, *I libri commemoriali della Repubblica di Venezia: Regesti*, III, 70, reg. 414, Senato, misti, reg.40, fol. 11r, ASVE.

20 B. 22, Notary V. Bonfantin: October 28, 1418, February 23, 1419, March 3, 1419,

Clario Arcangeli Clario Arcangeli, like others, was an outsider who joined the Venetian network after suffering persecution that compelled him to change his political affiliation. Florentine sources reveal that his father, who was banned from the city of Florence after the popular revolt of 1382, settled in Venice. Because of his father's past in Florence, Clario did not have safe conduct there (exile often applied to the whole family). During the 1418 to 1420 interval, he was believed to enjoy some form of Venetian citizenship. Otherwise, he would not have been accepted as a Venetian merchant and as a member of the Venetian guild in Alexandria.

His contribution to the network, like that of every other uprooted merchant in Table 1, is beyond question. During the mid-1410s, he formed a company in Egypt with some Venetians, investing huge sums of money in the Cairo spice market. He may have pooled resources from third parties to raise as much as 50,000 ducats for a deal with Shaykh 'Ali al-Kilani, one of the most important Muslim merchants of his time. The amount of this transaction makes Arcangeli one of the most prominent brokers in the Levant for the whole time span under study. Although he favored contacts with new citizens like Benedetto De Soris, his financial services were frequently in demand by Venetian patricians, for whom he brokered deals with Catalans, Jews, and Mamluk officers. Like Malerbi and De Soris, he was a foreigner who offered his skills as a negotiator and businessman to patrician investors in the metropolis.²¹

Arcangeli's story raises the issue of how those of lower-rank could circumvent the restrictive Venetian citizenship policies. Felice Brancacci, a Florentine ambassador to Egypt in 1422, described Arcangeli as an impostor, reporting that Arcangeli passed himself off as a Venetian for a long time in Egypt because "it was convenient to be considered as such."²²

July 20, 1419, October 29, 1419, November 1, 16, 1419, December 2, 1419, January 1, 1420, February 12, 27, 1420, June 25, 1420, July 8, 17, 1420; B. 174, Notary Cristoforo Rizzo: December 22, 1415, January 1, 1416 (dated 1415, according to the *more veneto*), ASVE, CI, N; Grazie, reg. 17, fol. 90v, 115r, Senato, Privilegi, reg. 1, fol. 38v, 97r, ASVE.

21 For Shaykh 'Ali al-Kilani, see Apellániz, *Pouvoir et finance*, 76; Ashtor, *Levant Trade*, 276. For the exile of Arcangeli's father, see Marchionne di Coppo Stefani, *Istoria Fiorentina* (Florence, 1783), XII, 15.

22 For Brancacci's report, see Brancacci, "Diario di Felice Brancacci, Ambasciatore con Carlo Federighi al Cairo per il Comune di Firenze (1422)," *Archivio Storico Italiano*, VIII (1881), 164. The identical expression can be found in Luca Molà and Mueller, "Essere

In line with this matter of convenience, Arcangeli appears to have adopted a strategic ambivalence about his status, declaring to Brancacci that he did not want to renounce either Florence or Venice as a homeland (*patria*). But this duplicity could be troublesome, as it was during his later stay in Rhodes, where he had to avoid being seen in public with Florentines. Poor investment decisions seem to have driven Arcangeli out of the exclusive Venetian business milieu of Egypt. Two patricians sued him at the end of 1419, sometime before he disappeared from the notarial documents. His career exemplifies the plight of the Mediterranean merchant, forever dodging the legal authorities. When he finally surfaced in 1426 to close old debts, he was vaguely reported to be “of Venice, inhabitant of Rhodes” but not a Venetian “*cives*,” as the notary invariably called holders of full Venetian citizenship.²³

Giorgio Londachi Unlike the three previous merchants, Giorgio Londachi was not a new citizen but an experienced trader, financier, and navigator from the Greek *dominio*, in close contact with the Muslim administration. During the late 1410s, Londachi’s business dealings were between Crete and Alexandria. He exported Greek wine to Egypt, fueling his trade through the credit and navigational resources of his fellow Greeks. His personal network for the years 1418 to 1420 was comprised almost exclusively of Greeks, but it also had a few Jews of Candia and even Byzantines. While in Alexandria, he served as a tax farmer for the Mamluk authorities. In contrast to Venetian citizens and patricians, the most active Greeks and Jews in Candia at the time acted as leaseholders of the Mamluk taxes on wine, courting Venetian exporters while dealing with the Muslim authorities on a daily basis.²⁴

straniero a Venezia nel tardo Medioevo: accoglienza e rifiuto nei privilegi di cittadinanza e nelle sentenze criminali,” in Istituto Internazionale di Storia Economica F. Datini (ed.), *Le migrazioni in Europa sec. XIII–XVIII: atti della “ventinquesima Settimana di studi”* (Florence, 1994), 841. For a famous text on the Florentines in Tunis using the same expression, see Giovanni Villani (ed. Giovanni Porta), *Nuova Cronaca* (Parma, 1991), 7, 53. The Italian expression—*spacciarsi per*—which can be found in several similar instances, clearly implies that, voluntarily and by fraud, Arcangeli pretended to be a Venetian citizen.

23 B. 22, Notary V. Bonfantin: October 28, 1418, December 2, 1418, May 29, 1419, September 15, 1419, October 4, 29, 1419, November 16, 1419, January 1, 1420, February 12, 1420, March 12, 1420, October 28, 1419 (for the lawsuit); B. 211, Notary N. Turiano: fol. 5v, April 23, 1427, fol. 18r, January 23, 1426, ASVE, CI, N.

24 B. 22, Notary V. Bonfantin: May 15, 1419, June 28, 1419, March 26, 1420, May 21, 1420, ASVE, CI, N; Cives database.

Working for the Mamluks: Intrigue, Religious Conversion, and Opportunism Together with Londachi, other Greek members of the 1418 to 1420 network worked for the Mamluk authorities. Nicola Cumulo, Manoli Sclavo, and Johannes Jalina held the secondary status of *burgenses de Candia*. The position of leaseholder for the wine tax seems to have been reserved for non-Muslims, though many documents suggest that the leaseholders were expected to hold accounts and administrative records in Arabic. Although Sclavo managed to survive in the troublesome Egyptian business milieu for decades, his role as a Mamluk functionary brought him into conflict with Venetian commercial agents. When, on one occasion, he prohibited the entry of Venetian wine into Alexandria because the shipment did not comply with Mamluk tax regulations, the Venetian consul fined him for “neither having any god nor reverence for the Doge of Venice.”²⁵

Although Greeks and Jews from Candia, like Sclavo, were not allowed to benefit from Venetian commercial institutions, their role had a dynamic effect on business activity. Under al-Ashraf Barsbay, Iohannes Jalina, another member of the Venetian network, was sent to Rhodes *pro servitio sultani*. A patrician could hardly have been expected to undertake such a risky and unrewarding mission. The nobleman Angelo Michiel, a private merchant and an informer for Venice in Cairo—a service that he performed “for the country”—was the only patrician to report about government officials and Red Sea traders arriving in Egypt. Once, when complaining to the Venetian consul about the dangerous and

25 The notarial record explicitly mentions the appointment of Greeks as tax farmers or *Damin* (Latinized as *damene*) by the Muslim authorities and provides details about the financial agreements with the customs' officers (the *qadi*): B. 22, Notary V. Bonfantin: June 21, 1419, ASVe, CI, N. Wine exports—including kosher wine—are well known for medieval Alexandria, appearing numerous times in the casebook—B. 22, Notary V. Bonfantin: February 23, 1419, May 15, 1419, June 28, 1419, November 16, 1419, February 27, 1420, April 10, 1420, May 21, 1420, ASVe, CI, N. For wine consumption, see Paulina Lewicka, *Food and Foodways of Medieval Cairenes: Aspects of Life in an Islamic Metropolis of the Eastern Mediterranean* (Boston, 2011), 493–499. For exports, see Ashtor, “New Data for the History of Levantine Jewries in the Fifteenth Century,” *Bulletin of the Institute of Jewish Studies*, III (1975), 67–102. For a general survey of *Daman*, or tax farming, see *Encyclopaedia of Islam* (Boston, 1979), I, 1144. B. 22, Cristo del Fiore, fol. 12v, December 14, 1425, ASVe, CI, N. Notary V. Bonfantin: November 2, 1418, December 2, 1419, February 27, 1420, March 1, 12, 1420, May 21, 1420, July 17, 1420, ASVe, CI, N; B215, Notary S. Peccator, fol. 8v, 9/27/1448, ASVe, Notarile Testamenti. Rossi, *Servodio Peccator, notato*, 37–38. Cives database.

expensive nature of his duties, he threatened thenceforth to mind his own business and to send any news that he had by unprotected mail if he was not paid in full for his intelligence activities. Presumably, no lower-rank Venetian could have made such a demand.²⁶

Andrea Cazilli played a crucial role in the 1418 to 1420 network as an agent in Cairo, coordinating the Venetian galleys with the arrival of Indian spices. In the Mamluk capital, he transmitted information from Muslim merchants to the Venetian consul, and he was an important diplomatic mediator, in close contact with staff members of the sultan's most important diwans. Through his Arab contacts in Cairo, he sold African slaves to prominent members of the patriciate. He also conducted trade in wine through Crete and Venetian entrepôts further to the north. His vast personal network extended from Cairo to Alexandria and from Damietta in the Nile delta to Crete and Venice.²⁷

Emmanuel Piloti, who had a commercial and diplomatic background similar to that of Cazilli, operated in Egypt for decades with Arab, Sicilian, and Greek partners. He had contacts in Syria, Cyprus, Salonika, and the Peloponnese. Piloti was one of the major exporters of Cretan wine to Egypt. Though a protégé of the sultan Faraj Ibn Barquq, he put his diplomatic skills at the disposal of the Republic, acting as a Venetian mediator in a bilateral crisis. Piloti is better known for the detailed proposal of a Crusade that he offered to the Venetian pope Eugenius IV. Piloti took advantage of his commercial expertise and knowledge of the region's geography to compose the text for it, in which the conquest of Alexandria played a pivotal role.²⁸

Jews in the Network As mentioned above, the extent to which Jews could apply for Venetian citizenship is undecided. Historical inquiry has focused on a few particular cases, mostly ad hoc privi-

26 B. 211, Notary N. Turiano, July 9, 1435; fol. 25v, ASVE, CI, N; B. 22, Notary V. Bonfantin: June 21, 1419, October 4, 1419, December 2, 1419, May 21, 28, 1420; *Procuratori di San Marco, Commissarie miste*, b. 181, fasc. 15, int. d, f. [13], September 15, 1419, ASVE; Christ, *Trading Conflicts*, 83.

27 B. 22, Notary V. Bonfantin: November 2, 3, 1418, February 12, 1420, March 20, 1420, ASVE, CI, N; letter of Cazilli to Dolfin, December 16, 1418; *Procuratori di San Marco, Commissarie miste*, b. 181, "Commissaria Biagio Dolfin," fasc. 15, int. d, f.16, ASVE.

28 Piloti, *Traité d'Emmanuel Piloti sur le passage en Terre Sainte (1420), publié par Pierre-Herman Dopp* (Paris, 1958), xi, xviii–xxii. B. 222, Notary A. Vactacis: October 20, 1404, December 15, 1405; B. 22, Notary V. Bonfantin: June 21, 28, 1419, ASVE, CI, N.

leges granted to single families or individuals. A notarial deed indicates that Liaco Capsali, the most active Jewish merchant of the 1418 to 1420 network, attempted to obtain the legal rights of citizenship. Contrary to claims based on his case that active Jewish entrepreneurs could apply for the citizenship of the colonies, accurate analysis shows otherwise. Capsali probably sought the title of *fidelis*, a status inferior to that of Venetian citizenship.²⁹

The careers of merchants ranked lower on the network scale were often similar to those of the core members (though, as mentioned above, complementary information about lower-rated merchants in the network is scarce). As a case in point, Grissono d. Salomone, one of the few Jewish ship owners of the period, was active in long-distance trade. Apparently of Sicilian origin, he settled in Rethymnon in Crete, where he was active between 1411 and 1429. His career demonstrates that the legal status of Jews was subject to negotiation to some extent. Unlike Capsali, who struggled in court to win citizenship, Grissono tried to bypass restrictions by obtaining a special commercial dispensation. Although already connected to Alexandria via Cretan Jews in 1418, he did not make an appearance in Egypt before 1424, when he acquired the requisite privilege. The license extended his trading jurisdiction from the periphery to the metropolis itself (*tractere et expedire pro veneto*), the most controversial issue in the Venetian regulations. Apparently, Jews' involvement in long-distance trade was not out of the question, but even when permitted, it did not necessarily have favorable consequences. We know about Grissono's privilege only because it brought him trouble. As happened to many Jews of the colonial *dominio*, he was accused of using his *littera ducalis* to trade on behalf of non-Venetians.³⁰

NETWORK EVOLUTION IN THE LONG RUN Network analysis can uncover a set of contributors to a Venetian commercial network, whereas a micro-approach stresses the social, cultural, and business skills that these people exemplified. Centrality analysis is inher-

29 Ashtor, "Ebrei Cittadini di Venezia?" *Studi Veneziani*, XVII–XVIII (1975–1976), 143; Jacoby, "Venice and the Venetian Jews," 34–35.

30 B. 245, Notaio Andrea Sebasto, October 26, 1411, ASve, Notai di Candia; B. 1, data of January 26, 1425, received (in Crete) March 26, 1426, fol. 75v; data of August 25, 1424, received (in Crete) October 15, 1424, fol. 67v–68r, ASve, Duca di Candia. For Grissono's activities, see Ashtor, "New Data," 78–79.

ently circumscribed by the chronology of the notarial deeds, falling short of capturing long-term dynamics. However, it can be useful, at least indirectly, for understanding such phenomena as network transformation or disintegration. In that connection, further investigation reveals that half of the lower-rank merchants, or their descendants, studied in this article eventually abandoned the Venetian network altogether, even though renunciation of obligations to Venice—even if only peripheral and not based on full trading rights or citizenship—was a serious offense of which a few instances are recorded.³¹

Cazilli crossed religious boundaries after more than ten years of collaboration with the Venetians. Between 1425 and 1427, he appears in the notary records as the Muslim Jamal al-Din. Yet, despite his intriguing conversion to Islam, he lobbied to have his excommunication abrogated and to regain his Christian status.³²

Londachi's story makes clear that under Venetian regulations, an individual's ambitions and expectations might not come to fruition. The careers of Malerbi and De Soris were cut short by plague in Egypt, but Londachi moved to Rhodes in the 1430s to continue his trade with Egypt. His desertion from Venice resulted in a complex legal problem, especially after he set sail from Rhodes to Damietta as a commander of a Genoese round ship, since the Venetian senate explicitly forbade its subjects from working for other principalities. Was Londachi still a Venetian? The Venetian consul in Alexandria depicted Londachi as "a man of Rhodes" and a "rebel to the Venetian government." When the Genoese consul tried to intervene on Londachi's behalf, the Mamluk authorities objected on the grounds that Londachi was for all intents and purposes a Rhodian. Years later, at the height of his career as a businessman, Londachi acted again as a financier in Rhodes, where he

31 For the inability of network analysis to explain the reproduction and transformation of networks, see Emirbayer and Goodwyn, "Network Analysis," 1413; Erickson, "Social Networks and History," 157. For the conflict within, and the subsequent break-up of, a socially bounded group, see Wayne Zachary, "An Information Flow Model for Conflict and Fission in Small Groups," *Journal of Anthropological Research*, XXXIII (1977), 452–473. Mueller, *Immigrazione*, 54.

32 Cazilli's conversion seems linked to the Mamluks' decision in 1424 to punish the piracy sponsored by the Cypriot government, in which he acted as a diplomatic broker and financed ransoms. See Mohamed Ouerfelli, "Les relations entre le royaume de Chypre et le sultanat mamelouk au XVe siècle," *Le Moyen Age*, CX (2004), 328, 338–340. B. 83II, Notary Cristoforo del Fiore, July 11, 1425, f. 8v–10v, in Cairo, ASve, CI, N; B. 211, Notary N. Turiano, October 16, 1427, f. 37v–38r, ASve, CI, N.

was granted, of all things, the very citizenship that Venice routinely denied to its Greek subjects.³³

In this context, the move to rival hubs such as Rhodes in search of better economic opportunities was another feature common to *parvenu* or second-class members of the network. Rhodes acted as a trading post where spices could be imported and exported without the heavy Venetian duties and where Greeks could become citizens and trade more freely. At least two of the network's stalwarts finished their careers in Rhodes, four if the focus is on families rather than individuals. Originally from Bologna before becoming naturalized Venetians, Andrea and Marco De Soris based their activities in Alexandria during the mid-1420s, but they transferred the family enterprise afterward to Rhodes. They lived on the island, where the family group seems to have infiltrated the Hospitaller ruling class during the 1440s, while keeping their Venetian citizenship.

As a major center for smuggling and piracy, as well as a competitor to the Venetian galley trade, Rhodes was far removed from the patrician center of operations. Establishing offices there probably implied a definitive shift from Venetian to Rhodian citizenship, as seems to have been the case with Malerbi's descendants. They began to appear in the records as citizens of Rhodes during the 1470s. The different family generations embraced no fewer than three political affiliations (Verona, Venice, and Rhodes) during a 100-year timespan.³⁴

33 Venetian subjects were not permitted to act as agents on behalf of foreigners. See Ashtor, *Jews in the Mediterranean Trade*, 449–450; B. 211, Notary N. Turiano: April 12, 1435, fol. 44r–v, April 14, 1435, fol. 45r–v, ASVE, CI, N. Jürgen Sarnowsky, *Macht und Herrschaft im Johannerorden des 15. Jahrhunderts: Verfassung und Verwaltung der Johanniter auf Rhodos (1421–1522)* (Münster, 2001), 490. For Londachi's citizenship, see Section 5, 354, f. 247v, 2/2/1439, *Libri Bullarum*, Archives of the Order of St John, National Library of Malta, Valletta (hereinafter AOM).

34 For the status of the Greeks in Rhodes, see Nicolas Vatin, *L'Ordre de Saint-Jean-de-Jérusalem, l'Empire ottoman et la Méditerranée entre les deux sièges de Rhodes (1480–1522)* (Paris, 1994), 29, 88, n. 28. For Rhodes as a commercial and diplomatic alternative to Venetian trade and navigation, see Ashtor, *Levant Trade*, 234–235, 245, 294, 340–341, 364–365, 386, 391. “Cives venetos et mercatores in Roddo,” B. 211, Notary N. Turiano: March 27, 1427, f. 14v–15v, ASVE, CI, N. Giacomo de Soris, prior of Hungary during the 1440s, was originally *commandeur* of Bologna. See Pierre Boyssat, *Histoire des Chevaliers de l'Ordre de l'Hospital de S. Iean de Hierusalem* (Lyon, 1611/12), I, 182. A “Johannes De Seris” (sic) appears as “consul rhodianorum in alexandria” in B. 215, Notary S. Peccator: May 21, 1448, ASVE, Notarie Testamenti. He is probably the same “Iohanni de Soris” quoted, as a relative of Benedetto, in B. 22, Notary V. Bonfantin: June 25, 1420, ASVE, CI, N. AOM 382, f. 236r, 7/7/1475, AOM 395, f. 191v, July 16, 1504.

Arcangeli's story also closed with an unexpected turn. His Florentine tax declaration of 1427 indicates that thirty-five years after his father's exile, and a few months after his last trip to Egypt, he was allowed to return to Florence. Most likely, he liquidated his affairs in the Levant and left Rhodes. Whatever motivations lay behind this decision, he certainly made it in the context of serious difficulties both in Egypt and in Venice.³⁵

Contrary to implications, traditional micro-scale methodologies, such as biographical analysis, do not necessarily clash with large-scale observations of human behavior. The analysis of network centrality highlights the activities of an otherwise neglected collection of people, stressing their relevance to the Venetian system of business relations. Without it, we might never have known about the significance of these lower-rank Venetians. The examination of social ties undertaken in this article shows that even when patricians became dominant in a particular sector—in this case, the 1418 to 1420 commercial network—they had to rely on lower-class Venetians to coordinate and complete transactions and to keep their networks functioning.

A common behavioral pattern emerges from the biographies of the lower-rank Venetians in the network before 1420. Against a common background of legal constraints, they all had to conduct themselves in a particular manner to join the network. They manipulated the legal definitions that Venice imposed upon them and took advantage of the very categories that made them “foreigners” and non-Venetians. Their language, their business acumen, and their knowledge of the markets targeted by Venetian noblemen enabled them to integrate into an otherwise-exclusive business milieu.

The data also afford a look at the network's evolution after 1420. Five personal and family stories show that the members of the network continued to bargain for rights even after their situations had changed. The lower-rank Venetians who clustered at the core of the 1418 to 1420 commercial network were by no means averse to pursuing opportunities outside the Venetian orbit to improve their stations and prospects. In fact, Venice's official policies of exclusion and inequality often encouraged lower-rank Venetians to cross cultural and political boundaries.

35 Catasto 1427, v. 66, c. 221, Chiaro Arcagnoli, Archivio di Stato di Firenze; Online Catasto of 1427.

