Il vino nella storia di Venezia
Vigneti e cantine nelle terre dei dogi tra XIII e XXI secolo
Venice and Viticulture

Vines and Wines:
the legacy of the Venetian Republic
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edited by
Carlo Favero
Using wine as one's theme in recounting the long and complex history of Venice offers the reader an original insight into the past of the city and the territories it once ruled, a new way of looking at the monuments of a glorious past whose traces are still to be found in churches, art collections, libraries, public squares … and in gardens and vineyards. This is a book to read and a reference work for future consultation, a book that recounts not only history but also developments in technology and customs.

The story told here covers the city’s links with the wine from its mainland and overseas possessions but also the wine produced within the lagoon itself. This is a relationship that dates back centuries, with the city’s magazzini and bacari serving at different points in history to satisfy the public taste for the different types of Malvasia and Raboso. And as the wine trade flourished, the Venetians showed all their entrepreneurial flair in serving markets throughout the known world. Indeed, it was in attempting to find even more distant markets for the Malvasia from Crete the Venetian nobleman Pietro Querini would end up shipwrecked on the Lofoten islands close to the Arctic circle, ironically discovering a new product himself: the stock fish (baccalà) that would then become very popular in Venice and the Venetian Republic.

The history of Venice and wine is an important one, revealing how much a role vineyards play in the identity of this region. And the places discussed include those in which Venice itself becomes DOC, its wines produced by a Consorzio which may be a young company but has a long history behind it, its wines being the fruit of the union of DOC Piave with the equally historic DOC Lison-Pramaggiore. With the eager backing of producers in Treviso and Venice, this is an enterprise that aims to promote both the quality of Venice’s wines and the skill of its vine-growers and wine-makers.

Giorgio Piazza
President of the Consorzio Vini Venezia
Preface

Aiming to serve as the basis for a modern history of oenology within Venice, this book brings together essays by some of the greatest experts on the history of the city’s relationship with wine. Historical events and changes in norms and regulations clearly mark the history not only of Venice but also of its wine. And it is the multi-faceted consequences of those changes which provide the key to interpreting the story which unfolds here. This explains the repetitions and apparent contradictions one might find within the essays; they have been maintained so as to highlight the wealth of strands which experts have to unravel as they examine the extraordinarily complex history of wine in Venice over the centuries.

Carlo Favero
Vineyards as far as the eye can see. That this panorama is an integral part of the Veneto is obviously the case in the hills of Valpolicella and the Treviso Marches, or the plain lands of Porto Garo; but there are also numerous other, less famous, areas where every field and road seems to be lined with vines. Such plants are a characteristic feature of the Veneto landscape; they form part of our identity. Notwithstanding catastrophes and epidemics, this has been the case since the dawn of history, when the first Veneti – people of skill and horse breeders – moved into this region of unpredictable rivers and watercourses, creating here a civilization which, over time, would form a close alliance with Rome and produce the wonder that is Venice itself.

The Roman historian Strabo talks of “tuns the size of houses” when referring to the wines exported by Veneti who, drawing upon the experience already acquired by neighbouring peoples, had been able to improve their product and then export it through such lively commercial centres as Adria and Aquileia. This trade would then continue after the foundation of Venice, or rather, the lagoon conurbation that preceded the city’s existence. The Veneti might ‘not reap not did they sow’ but they were certainly never short of wine and grain – something that was a source of wonder to a functionary sent here; and they threw themselves into this family expression, the Venetians were obliged by law to obtain a range of taverns and wine shops for the locals, particularly numerous during the Carnival period – there were a range of taverns and wine shops for the locals, each with their specific characteristics. The magazzini, a wine which still figures in the name of one of the city’s calli, were divided into bastioni and sanmarchi (or sanmarduetti) and were responsible for the sale of wine by the jug rather than by the glass. Then there were the malvasie that served rather more high-quality wine and were a little more up-market; it was here that the city’s gentlemen might stop for a glass of garbar, the best quality Greek wine. The most renowned of the malvasie was that of Ponte del Remedio, where young noblemen who were about to embark upon the carreaux bonorum (political/administrative career) reserved to the city’s aristocracy might celebrate with a drink or two.

During his time at Padua University – a period he subsequently referred to as the happiest in his life – Galileo Galilei often socialised with friends in Venice, foremost amongst whom was the Gianfrancesco Sagredo, who would be the dedicatee of his “Dialogue Concerning the Two Chief World Systems”. The “chilled and sparkling” wine which on such occasions bubbled in their “well-filled glasses” can easily be recognised as Prosecco from the hills of Conegliano and Valdobbiadene areas. A hundred years later it would be a less prestigious Galileo (Galilei often socialised with friends in Venice, foremost amongst whom was the Gianfrancesco Sagredo, who would be the dedicatee of his “Dialogue Concerning the Two Chief World Systems”). The “chilled and sparkling” wine which on such occasions bubbled in their “well-filled glasses” can easily be recognised as Prosecco from the hills of Conegliano and Valdobbiadene areas. A hundred years later it would be a less prestigious figures than Galileo, the physician Lodovico Pando, who sang the praises of the Friulian which the Widmann family produced on their Bagnoli estate, and it is worth mentioning that the enthusiasm he shows for this fine red wine is expressed with the same boisterous delight in dialect one finds in the work of another physician, Francesco Redi, when praising his own regional wines in his Bacco in Toscana. Yet though people lauded the wines from the Venetian mainland or from the city’s eastern possessions, no one seems to have mentioned those from the islands of the lagoon and estuary areas. Gian Francesco Busenello, for example, was undoubtedly a true son of Venice. However, while he wrote – and wrote – verse descriptions of the place in the seventeenth-century, singing the praises of “Dear, gallant wine, Wine for each hour of the day, / Wine blessed by both Heaven and Earth”, he has nothing to say on the local produce. Secretary to the Most Excellent Venetian Senate, he had no qualms about “losing himself in wine”, yet does not mention that produced within the lagoon.

It is, therefore, only fair that one undertake research into the matter, searching out those rare lagoon-produced wines that can, at times, turn out to be veritable discoveries. On the lagoon islands, the grapes grow plump and golden – it is no accident that one vine, lovingly nurtured back to productivity by a skilful grower, now bears the name Bovara delle Venezie – and thus attention to the wines of the lagoon and estuary is a necessary complement to our knowledge of the wines produced on the mainland. And this is all the more true as careful management of the lagoon’s wine-making heritage is resulting in ever higher qualities of wine. The taste of affairs can only be good news for lovers of wine, and of Veneto wine in particular – even those who do not follow Busenello’s lead and “lose themselves” in its delights.

Alvise Zorzi
Part I
VENICE AND ITS HINTERLAND:
The Identity of a Region

Carlo Favero

The natural morphology of a particular area and the course of historical events within it are decisive in the development of its people, the birth of its cities, the emergence of local industries and the modelling of landscape. In other words, they determine its identity. The appearance and layout of the area that stretches from the Dolomites to the Venetian lagoon is, therefore, the result of a series of factors that influenced its history and development. And foremost amongst these is geographical location itself, given that the place is a veritable gateway to the north and east of continental Europe. Geology, too, played its part, for the region has a number of important waterways and rivers, with various points of access to the valleys which lead north – two features that were of essential importance in the growth of trade. Another key feature was the presence of a lagoon dotted with small islands where local populations could take refuge from invading barbarians.

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The modern form of the region began to take shape with the arrival here of the Romans, who laid across it important road networks: the consular Via Postumia ran west-east, from Genoa through Aquileia as far as Lubiana, the Via Aeneta and the Via Claudia Augusta ran south-north, from the ports of the Adriatic through the alpine passes. Hence, the Venice area was linked with regions along the Danube and all of Central Europe. As road systems improved, the plains around Treviso and Venice were developed, in a process known as centuriatio, the Romans gradually divided the areas of Concordia Sagittaria, Altino, Oderzo, Asolo and Treviso into plots of land for settlement, thus stimulating the growth of those towns and the creation of new and important cities. Over the period from the first century BC to the first century AD, agriculture developed, with ample fields being given over to the cultivation of wheat and other cereal crops, whilst orchards and vineyards were planted (along with olive groves on hillsides). This is the situation described in the first century AD by Strabo, and confirmed two centuries later by Herodianus.

While the lower plain areas were given over to agriculture, there were still extensive woods and forests of oak, hornbeam, maple, ash and elm expanding across the wide flatlands that stretched further north into the higher areas. All of these were divided by bands of spring-supplied watercourses, and along the banks of rivers there were wide alluvial areas that were still visible and in use up to our own day. Here, the Romans produced large quantities of wine which then, at the trade centres of Adria and Aquileia, were mixed with those from Istria and the Marche region before being dispatched to the legions serving on the frontiers of the empire. It was around this period that the Romans began to transport such wine in casks and tuns rather than the amphorae previously used; even so, however, the whole business was very labour-intensive, and in 281 AD the emperor Probus would put an end to the costly transport of wine by abolishing an edict of 92 AD in which Domitian had

Venice and its mainland.
forbidden the creation of new vineyards. Instead, he ordered that vines should be planted throughout Roman Europe. Nearly all these agricultural achievements were then swept away by the first barbarian invasions, which also led the populations living nearest the coast to take refuge on the islands of the lagoon. This initiated a unique process of urban development which would produce a Venetian Republic that, until its demise on 12 May 1797, would exert a decisive influence upon the life, culture, agriculture and landscape of increasing expanses of the neighbouring mainland. Ever greater areas of land went under the plough, and these areas would expand in proportion to the food demands of Venice’s increasing population. The woodlands themselves supplied the Republic with the timber needed for the warships and other vessels produced in the city’s shipyards, the Arsenale; ultimately this would become a mammoth industrial complex covering 46 hectares of land and employing more than 2,000 men. In the first centuries of the Republic’s life, Istria and Dalmatia alone had been sources of timber, but from the mid-thirteenth century onwards, the slopes of Cadore, Cansiglio and Montello – along with plain-land forests – became a source of such material. Soon the main rivers – the Brenta, the Sile, the Piave and the Livenza – were travelled by vessels carrying timber or food-stuffs to the capital and returning upstream laden with the spices, textiles and numerous other products that flowed into Venice from not only the Adriatic ports but also from Asia and the Middle East. As the years passed, the Venetians would then consolidate links with the mainland, founding the Stato di Ter-
revival of local viticulture, which was put back centuries. Never- theless, Venice did, in 1769, promote the creation of an Accademia dell’Agricoltura in Treviso, followed the next year by a similar institution in Conegliano, and it was these bodies that would nurture awareness of the region’s potential in the field of wine-making. Then, in 1874, a School of Oenology would be founded, followed in 1823 by an Istituto Sperimentale per la Viticoltura, a sort of experimental farm for the cultivation of vines.

Conegliano thus became a centre for the scientific study of viticulture and oenology, with such activities ultimately having a decisive effect upon the economy of a large part of the surrounding area. However, almost immediately after the foundation of the Scuola Enologica in Conegliano, the scientists there had to face a threat to the very survival of viticulture: the arrival of the diseases powdery mildew, downy mildew and, above all, phylloxera. The infections would result in local vineyards losing a number of the varieties that had survived the frost of 1709. To replace these a number of hybrid vines were planted, later being supplanted by varieties of international renown.

From the point of view of landscape, one important factor was the development by the Belluschi brothers from Visnà of a particular way of laying out vines, known by the name of their inventors, these bellussera vineyards are still to be seen today and are eagerly preserved and protected for the cultivation of Raboso Piave grapes. Thus climate and natural characteristics – together with the determined efforts of scientists, researchers, technicians and growers – have modelled the current appearance of our region, where a green sea of oak, hornbeam, maple, ash and elm has become a green sea formed by the leaves of Glera, Tocai, Raboso, Verduzzo, Pinot and Cabernet vines.

The Wine-making Region

The area of viticulture within the Venetian mainland contains some striking stretches of landscape. From the Prealps at the foot of the Dolomites it expands over a vast plain criss-crossed by a number of large rivers and watercourses fed by the springs and snowmelt. The very characteristics of the soil mean that the grapes have different organoleptic properties, which are then skilfully exploited by growers. Passion, hard work and expertise thus produce great wines that are appreciated all over the world.

Over the last twenty years studies have attempted to define specific zones in order to identify the factors that enhance or limit the growth of different varieties. The aim is to provide growers with an instrument that enables them to focus efforts in order to produce wines of the highest quality. Such zoning, in effect, means that the innate qualities of grapes can be combined with those achieved through skilful exploitation of the potential of a specific terroir. The natural features and characteristics of an individual area only take on significance when filtered through the practice and know-how brought to bear by the vine-growers themselves; it is only in this way that one creates wines that cannot be produced anywhere else in the world. The knowledge obtained through these zoning studies has thus made it possible to re-interpret the whole history of our viticulture; maintaining historic vineyards, we have been able to modify processes of cultivation and vinification in order to obtain wines more suited to the contemporary palette.

A striking example of this is Malamotte del Piave, a great wine produced from the Raboso Piave grape that just a century or so ago was yielding nothing but poor-quality wine for sale in Venice magazeni, or for use in diluting better-quality wines.

Contrary to traditional belief, a terroir is defined by more than just the links between soil, climate and resultant wine. A number
of non-physical factors come into play as well, complex issues relating to both material needs and ideological choices. One might, with a certain freedom, say a terroir is a "sense of place" that finds expression in particular qualities and characteristics. In short, it is the total sum of effects that the local – physical and human – environment has upon the wine produced.

With regard to the physical environment, one should point out that the presence of the Prealps to the north and the sea to the south – at a distance that varies between 50 and 70 kilometres – produces the perfect climate for the cultivation of vines. A series of uplands extending east-west in the northern part of the territory serve as a barrier against cold winds from the north. Due to the very morphology of the terrain, these winds thus become breezes that blow over a series of declining uplands extending north-south down towards the plain. Our survey of the region’s wine-making areas hence begins with the hills that reach from the higher elevations around Asolo eastwards, passing through Valdobbiadene-Conegliano and on to Fegona and beyond. These areas are perfect for the cultivation of grapes given that they have a sizeable difference between day and night temperatures (sometimes as much as 14°C), mild spring weather and prolonged autumns; such conditions are ideal for the grapes used to make richly-scented sparkling wines.

As one then moves further downhill towards the sea, rainfall diminishes and the temperature increases (with a slight drop in the day-nighttime variation). At the same time soils become richer and heavier, thus perfect for the ripening of grapes used to make full-bodied, richly-flavoured red wines. And further east the combination of climate and terrain is perfect for the production of such fragrant, well-structured white wines as Pinot Grigio and Sauvignon.

Vines are amongst the plants that most readily respond to changes in climate. This is why, just a few kilometres apart, one can find ideal conditions for grapes used in making very different wines; each nuance of soil and climate can have a significant effect upon the wine produced. Clearly soil is a decisive factor here, but far from being an inert substance it forms a dynamic system, absorbing new material and energy; it is the locus of continual physical, chemical and biological processes.
The landscape, causing the formation of the lagoon and the coastal areas.

In the hill areas, terrain passes from types whose make-up is calcareous-sandstone-marl (in some cases, at higher altitude, with surface rock) to types of moraine origin and others that are of various compound conglomerates combined with sands that are of Pleistocene origin. Clearly, the nature of the soil and its gradient determines how much water re-emerges from it. The higher areas of the plain have well-drained gravelly soils that are often partially decarbonated. The very deep water table – together with insufficient rainfall – means that the roots of the vines here have to push far down into the soil; these are the perfect conditions for wine grapes – particularly for the production of fresh, fragrant white wines which are fruity and have a hint of floral aroma. Between this upper area of the plain and that further south lies a zone whose landscape has a very particular appeal, characterised by the presence of watercourses arising from springs. Here, the water carried underground from the Alps comes to the surface and forms what are called fontanili. The result is a vast network of natural rivulets, canals and veritable rivers – for example, the Muson Vecchio, the Zero, the Dese, the Sile, the Vallio and the Meolo, to name only the most important – each of which is characterised by constant flow and the almost complete absence of silt within the water. Whilst it may not play any important role in viniculture, this area is very important from an environmental point of view.

Doing more than merely provide a support for crops, soil and terrain have highly significant ecological functions: producing biomass, transforming organic material; filtering rainwater; acting as a buffer and absorbent. It is therefore essential to have precise and detailed knowledge of local soil when evaluating its potential and suitability for a particular purpose. Without this information, it is impossible to make correctly planned use of territory, not only in terms of agriculture but also in terms of urban development. This is why the entire vine-growing area around Treviso and Venice has been the subject of detailed wide-ranging study to define zones, subzones and geological characteristics. The entire plain of Veneto-Friuli was principally modelled by the action of the rivers Tagliamento, Piave, Brenta and Adige; each of these arises in wide hydrographic basins in the Alps which, during the Pleistocene period, were occupied by enormous glaciers. The action of these rivers during the Late Pleistocene and Holocene epoch led to the formation of extensive alluvial systems which, in an elongated cone shape, extended from the edges of the Alps to the lagoon. The glaciers and the watercourses eroded and were away at the rocky material of the terrain, carrying it downstream – action which resulted in the creation of an area close to the uplands that was rich in the worn carcasses of rocks. Below this was a second band of terrain with finer materials – clays and sands – which thereafter were deposited ever closer to the lagoon. But during the Holocene epoch, the sea too played its part in moulding the landscape, causing the formation of the lagoon and the coastal areas.

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of view, as well as containing some of the region’s most evocative views and landscapes.

In the lower plain, the action of the rivers flowing downwards results in deposits of ever finer silt, with the gravel of the higher plain becoming sand, mud and clay – particularly in the areas where the rivers overflow their banks. The resultant terrain has a good balance of organic substances and minerals, with clear evidence of decarbonisation in the upper levels and the precipitation of carbonates at a depth that varies between 40 and 80 centimetres (Caranto is one of the calcium-content strata formed as a result). Such terrain yields the grapes used to produce well-structured red wines that have a fruity taste, as well as fragrant whites that are equally well-structured and mature well.

The area closest to the sea is classified as that which was formerly occupied entirely by lagoon. Here, within the terrain itself one can see clear traces of the old channels along which tides flowed, as well as locations of ancient lagoons that were silted up by fluvial deposits. The texture of the soil here is generally fine and the ground forms a strip of territory some few kilometres wide, important land-reclamation projects in the past having created an environment fit for agricultural exploitation. However, this area has no trace of viticulture.

As for the Venice lagoon itself, it began to form around 6,000 to 5,000 years ago, when – at the end of the last great ice age – the sea level settled to roughly what it is nowadays. The end stretch of the old lagoon was occupied by marshland which, due to the depositing of fluvial silt, gradually rose higher. At the same time, repeated changes in water level – due to the tides and arrival of fluvial deposits – led to the formation of stratified terrain which, towards the mainland, primarily consists of silt and clay, and closer to the sea comprises sand and marine sediments.

The lagoon is protected from the Adriatic itself by a long tongue of sandy littorals: Cavallino, Lido, Pellestrina and Chioggia. These natural ‘dikes’ were formed due to the incessant deposit of materials by a current flowing from the north-east and running parallel to the coast. Over the centuries, of course, important works of consolidation and land reclamation have been carried out in the lagoon, for example, in the year 1000 the monks of the Benedictine monastery in the area were carrying out major work of this kind in the south of the lagoon. Furthermore, the continuing deposits of silt by the rivers which flowed into the lagoon meant that the Venetian Republic had continually to dredge existing canals or dig new ones. Another remedy was the re-direction of the rivers themselves, and this was done with the Bacchiglione, the Brenta, the Sile and the Piave, so that each of them henceforth emptied directly into the sea. Then in 1610 work began on the construction of the conterminazione lagunare, embankments which defined the internal boundaries of the lagoon, in it these which still separate this expanse of water from the mainland it abuts. Thus within the lagoon the perfect conditions for agriculture were created, with the city itself containing gardens that yielded substantial crops of grapes, fruit and vegetables. True, in the seventeen and eighteenth century this output fell off as more and more land was used to construct patrician palazzi, housing and trading premises, but things were rather different on the islands to the north of the lagoon: there, vineyards, orchards and vegetable gardens could occupy all the uninhabited land reclaimed from the salty water. The land register commissioned by Napoleon would, in fact, calculate that some 300 hectares were given over to ‘arable land, vegetable gardens, vineyards or orchards’, revealing that wherever there was land for vegetable patches or gardens, the islanders also planted vines – a sure sign of the powerful role the ‘fruit of the vine’ played in Venetian life. It was this felicitous combination of climate, soil conditions and passionate interest in viticulture that would subsequently provide the basis for the revival of what had once been an important area of wine production. And thus we come to the starting-point of the eventful story that will unfold within this book.

Angelo Emo, 1762. Plan of the conterminazione of the Venice lagoon from Brondolo to the lido of Cavallino Iesolo, with the mainland abutting these internal boundaries. ASVe, Savi ed Esecutori alle Acque, serie Laguna, dis. 167.

**Bibliography**


In retracing the history of a city one instinctively thinks first of its origins, of the events in its past that resulted in its fame and reputation. However, time is an inexorable machine; as memories get ever vaguer, anyone wishing to reconstruct distant events must have resort to commonplaces, to what has gradually become the stuff of myth and legend. And with regard to Venice, perhaps one of the most famous legends underlying the identity of the place refers to wine. Yet in tracing the role this had in the fortunes of the city, one must not restrict oneself to accounts of events, battles and famous characters. Instead, the historian must become an anthropologist; must try to capture the original ‘colour’ of Venice. It is from the physical and social reality of everyday life that ideas and thoughts emerge.

The “legend” of Venice, therefore, cannot be read without reference to the historical-social framework created by a Republic that was also a city-state, in which power was wielded by an assembly of citizens. This feature makes the Venetians our contemporaries and enables us to see ourselves in them. However, from another point of view, it distances them from us, revealing their society to have been very similar to those of the Levant from which they drew so much. Thus two complementary yet different processes were at work in Venice, and we must use them to assess the similarities and differences between the past and the present. On the one hand this brings us closer to the ancient inhabitants of the lagoon, on the other, it makes us aware of our differences, and of that dark background that also renders us strangers to ourselves. In one sense, therefore, the enigma of the history of Venice enables us to grasp the paradigm that modelled the humanity of the modern age.

Venice is not just the most eastern of the great European cities; it is an eastern city. If you question this, just look at the gilded cupolas of St. Mark’s at sunset. Even the conditions in which Venice took form during the early Middle Ages worked to consolidate forms of thinking and of culture that had originated in the special link that the city had with Byzantium. And it was these aspects of the place which made it a point of juncture between the great cultures of the time.

In the early Middle Ages, the West was a place of feudal lords and castles. But Venice was different; its entire economic structure was, from a very early date, predominately mercantile. And its trading ships did not only bring with them merchandise and money; they also carried ideas. The specific attitudes and notions influenced by those ideas then played a part in the emergence of a very original sense of the State, of the concept of a common good that worked to the advantage of all (plebeians and patricians alike).

Just like the Greek merchants whose galleys had sailed the Mediterranean two thousand years before the city’s own ships, Venice saw that wine was more than just a consumer product; it was to be viewed as an object of veneration.
an iconic substance. Whilst the Greeks had linked wine with the god Dionysus and put it to ritual use in their symposia, Venice imbued the wines of the eastern Mediterranean with more secular values in a Europe plagued by disease and famine as a result of the ‘Little Ice Age’, wine was presented as a remedy for both the body and the spirit. Eschewing both the Greek symbolism of death and resurrection (that is, the passage from grape to finished wine), or the notion of the mystical blood of the saviour that featured in Christian ritual, Venice opted to present wine in a more modern way: as a status symbol (repeating the Roman empire’s focus upon a wine’s place of origin and its rarity). Adopting the effective methods of modern advertising, they associated these wines with an elite clientele, presenting them as gifts to the rulers of the day or serving them up at official banquets where they could be enjoyed by ambassadors and diplomats from throughout Europe. By making these wines subject to the highest customs duties, they made sure only the richest could afford them; and at the same time they emphasised their origin in distant lands shrouded in mystery, the name of Byzantine domains being used to market the product. This latter feature was an absolute novelty at a time when the wine was normally identified by such generic indications as ‘mountain’ and ‘plain’, or else by reference to a specific type of vine. This is how the wealthy consumers of the West were presented with sweet and fragrant wines such as they had never tasted before.

Venice was also quick to take advantage of the specific conditions that applied during that particular phase of the Middle Ages. Most wine was consumed in cities, and most of the rapidly-developing cities of the time were in Northern Europe. Within the nascent market economy of the day, this meant great opportunities were available to those who could supply goods from distant lands to the emerging social elites in those cities. One highly prized commodity was wine, particular types of wine; and as it fetched high prices, such wine...
the interests of the Venetian state prevailed in the running of each and every colony. Of course, the Turks would then take every opportunity to try and destabilise this presence in the eastern Mediterranean, leading both Venice and Genoa to make unsuccessful attempts to shift the focus of their commercial interests towards the Atlantic.

In the wine trade itself, the cities of the Hanseatic League were a direct competitor, dealing in wines that came from other areas in Europe. Here, the figures to be gleaned from custom-house registers are very important if one is to understand the quantity and quality, provenance and destination, of the wine that was being transported from place to place; if one is to calculate just how much wine was being consumed in the different areas of mainland Europe. What emerges from their study is a regular archipelago of different attitudes and behaviours that might be taken as embodying what Aristotle refers to as a mental topos; such topoi, he argues in the second book of his Rhetoric, are mental constructs arising from shared ideas, bringing together different political and historical perspectives that may often be antithetical. The European wine market is just such a mental topos, which is to be charted by looking at the key trading cities of the day and the role played by the great Atlantic fleets, without however forgetting the role that Venice played in making wine – above all, Mediterranean wine – part of the dietary habits of the European nobility and upper bourgeoisie.

It was the global market and the network of trade it involved which made Venice into a city whose mixture of modernity and cultural influences was no less exotic than that to be seen in the Indian and Chinese ports that would be frequented by all the great commercial powers of Europe over the coming centuries. As an indication of the city's trading range one might cite the fact that the very same year that the English lost control of Bordeaux – and the Turks conquered Constantinople – the Venetians sent eight tuns of malvasia wine to the English court, thus gaining a foothold in that market.

Also acquired ever greater symbolic importance. Furthermore, there was another reason for the increasing demand for wine: this was a time when the drop in average seasonal temperatures meant that Europe was incapable of growing enough cereals, let alone producing sufficiently ripe grapes. The problem was that in the period of the so-called 'Medieval Climate Optimum' that had preceded the advent of the Little Ice Age in the fourteenth century, those who could afford it – the wealthy and the high-ranking clergy – had got used to drinking wines of high alcohol content. Now, as the quality of the local produce declined, they turned to the sweet wines from Greece that Venice was quick to make available. The notion of a "commercial revolution" within Italy's legendary "maritime republics" only makes sense when those cities are seen in relation to the territories with which they traded. In the case of Venice, for example, we see that by the end of the tenth century the city’s merchant fleets linked the Adriatic, the Balkans, the Greek world and Egypt with a rich regional hinterland that kept Venice in constant and profitable contact with the German-speaking world. And, unlike Genoa, in Venice this mercantile activity involved a whole string of families; as Braudel so effectively put it: "In Venice, everything was for the State; in Genoa, everything was for [the acquisition of] capital."

One can identify three phases in Venice’s economic expansion. The first is that initiated by the Byzantium chrysobull issued during the First Crusade (1082), which led to the establishment of settlements; the second is the so-called "imperial period", which after the Fourth Crusade (1204) enabled Venice to establish actual territorial dominion over the area of Greece through the creation of key trading stations; the third is to be associated with the Grand Council’s adoption, in 1297, of what we might nowadays call an "entrepreneurial policy", with the Arsenale shipyards becoming the linchpin of commercial initiatives that would ultimately lead to the establishment of control over a vast empire, throughout which the Turks would then take every opportunity to try and destabilise this presence in the eastern Mediterranean, leading both Venice and Genoa to make unsuccessful attempts to shift the focus of their commercial interests towards the Atlantic.

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Another factor that makes it undeniable that the history of viticulture and wine-making within the Venetian Republic formed a unified whole is that the Republic was an active presence in all of its territories – from Istria to the valley of Vallagarina in the Trento region. The so-called “Lion of War” that stands proud over the gateways of so many cities occupied by La Serenissima is a clear symbol of a culture that brought together each of these populations, who through a shared language were made to feel part of the European civilisation of the day.

But what the Venetians taught was not how to do things; they were, according to the anonymous author of the Honoranti ae Civitatis Papie, renowned in the Middle Ages for being a people who non arat, non seminat, non vindimiat [do not plough, do not sow, do not harvest]. Instead, Venice brought the example of international trade, offering an alternative to the bigotry of the prince-bishops who ruled in the Tyrol or the decline to be seen in the Duchy of Friuli.

As Forward-Looking as Venice

In his Les Memoires de la Mediterranee (1984), Fernand Braudel observes: “To get one’s bearings within the familiar space of the Mediterranean takes little effort. One simply has to close one’s eyes and the memories come flooding back: we are in Venice, Provence, Sicily, Malta or Istanbul. Setting out in search of time past, one must gradually reel out an endless thread … linking together all places whose past glories are echoed in the names of wines – above all, those sweet wines that were produced there and would mark the move from prehistory to history as we understand it.”

This “history as we understand it” is that of the first agrarian civilisations to be found not only within the Mediterranean area but the whole of Europe, those responsible for the revolution of the “fertile crescent.” Venice’s Mediterranean possessions formed a vast mosaic, its components connected by intense commerce that dated back to the trade in wine that had been a feature of Greek colonial settlements. The beginning of the link between the two worlds might be seen in the presence of the Etruscans at the emporia of Adria and Spina. Even nowadays linguistic borrowings show that a number of terms relating to viticulture and oenology came from Greek, Latin and Etruscan; however, this evidence shows how the actual cultivation of vines was of indigenous origin, whilst the language relating to the refined consumption of wine drew extensively upon input from Greece and the East.

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Venetian merchants were the heirs not only of the Etruscans and Phocaean Greeks who had first settled these places on the shores of the Adriatic, but also of the more astute Levantine merchants who had mastered all the more refined techniques of trading. In effect, the long history of the ancient wine trade can be said to culminate in what occurred due to the Little Ice Age that decimated wine production within continental Europe from the mid-fourteenth century to the beginning of the eighteenth, thus allowing Venetian merchants to control the market in quality wines: imported from the eastern Mediterranean, these were then traded over a region that ultimately extended as far as the rich lands of the North Atlantic seaboard. And these climatic phenomena also had another result: they stimulated the development of ‘imitation’ viticulture within Italy, that aimed to produce Malvasia and Verdicchio that could supplement – or substitute – those from further east in the Mediterranean.

In order to meet the growing request for quality wines – primarily in northern Europe – wine-growers began to focus with particular care on the period at which grapes were harvested (depending upon location and type of vine), at times publicly announcing when this was to take place. Similarly, great care was taken in the preparation of wooden barrels, whilst technical developments improved the efficiency of pressess and advances in methods of storage and transport were decisive for the quality of wine reaching market. As already mentioned, wines were no longer identified generically but by their place of origin; this was of no little importance as customs duties and prices began to distinguish wines on the basis of fashion; they were never a mere accompaniment for food. In fact, they became such valuable merchandise that they were raised to the status of luxury products, the object of a highly profitable trade. And whilst common wines were usually produced in areas near the cities where they were consumed, sweet wines were produced near the ports where they were traded for export. Furthermore, if soil conditions and local weather were decisive in determining the qualities of dry wines, in the production of sweet wines other factors came into play: technical developments in the care of vineyards (the choice of vines, the decision to delay the grape harvest) and wine cellars (techniques for making the produce more concentrated or more stable over time). Furthermore, the consumption of such wines always reflected the dictates of fashion, they were never a mere accompaniment for food.

One can see the maritime republics of Venice and Genoa anticipating future commercial strategies in their decision to focus, respectively, on wines of the Eastern Mediterranean (Malvasia and Verdicchio) or Southern France and Eastern Spain (Vernaccia), and then market them using the names not of the vine but of their place of origin (often rather distorted, as was the case with the names of Monemvasia, Santorini and Vernazza). In doing so, these merchants opted to provide their customers with a few wines of clearly defined organoleptic properties, products that were easily recognisable and – due to their high alcohol content – unlikely to suffer a change in flavour during transport. One matter of great interest that has been little studied is the change in flavour during transport.

The Wine Market within the City of Venice
The Venetian Guild of Wine Merchants was established in 1525, but – given that wine was the object of a state monopoly – the activity of its members was under strict legal control.
for example, innkeepers intending to buy wine would take samples (mostre) of the product to officials called giustiziere who then acted as middlemen, buying the wine from the merchants and selling it on at a higher price (the difference going into the State’s coffers).

Whether from the islands of the lagoon or from places such as Istria, the Marche, Puglia, Sicily or Romania, the wine brought into the city was mainly stored and distributed in the Rialto area, being delivered on barges to warehouses along what is now called the Riva del Vin [Wine Quay]. Nevertheless, in spite of tight controls of vessels by customs officers – and the requirement that all wine be delivered to the Riva del Vin – smuggling flourished, particularly during the nighttime hours.

Once the wine had been offloaded, the gangways that had been used to bring the barrels off the boats had to be removed, so that they could not serve as benches for those who wished to sit and drink the stuff. Those who were responsible for the bottling and transport of wine – the so-called portadori e trasmanieri da vin – were also forbidden to keep dogs, whose barking might warn them of the arrival of customs officers (the same ban applied to boats transporting wine).

The trade in the produce varied according to the provenance of the wine and its destination. For example, there was a special trade in wines from the mainland (especially the Bassano area) that was not destined for use in Venice itself but for sale in other markets, often abroad, another branch of the trade dealt with such wines destined for Venetian consumption. The dramatic alteration in climate that began in the fourteenth century would lead to a substantial change in the relations between the mainland – above all, the Treviso area – and the Eastern Mediterranean. As they reduced the quantity and quality (that is, the successful storage over time) of the wine available in the areas around Venice, these climatic phenomena resulted in an increase in the customs duties levied on produce leaving the territories of the Treviso Marches, an important source of supply both for Venice itself and for traditional mainland markets such as Feltre and Belluno. However, one place that was exempt from these duties was Conegliano; it was governed directly by Venice itself and thus enjoyed a special trade relationship. The so-called vina navigata – “shipped wine” – that came from the eastern Mediterranean and the Adriatic (primarily the region of Le Marche) covered only a small portion of the demand for wine within the city, given that most of it was then sent on to other cities in the region or elsewhere in Europe: sources dating from the end of fourteenth to the middle of fifteenth century show that eisum malvacetum [malvasia] accounted for no more than 0.5% of the wine consumed in the cities of the Veneto and Emilia, and was primarily the preserve of the wealthy and of high-ranking clerics. Even if not widely recognised, the most highly valued wine was that from Cyprus, three categories of which were imported: ordinary wine, Cipro Commandaria (aged for 15 years) and Muscatel.

The river Sile played a special part in the wine trade between the lagoon and the mainland: in autumn it saw people from the islands (wine-treaders, barrel caulkers, ropemakers and boatmen) travel up to Treviso to buy grapes (used in making their own wine within Venice itself) as well as wine for immediate consumption within the year. In the other months of the year, the Treviso market was primarily dominated by mercatores vini from Venice itself and from other mainland cities such as Bergamo. Then, towards the middle of the fifteenth century, imports of Verona wines began to increase (ranging from 15,000 to 40,000 hectolitres annually, depending upon the year), as did those of wine from the lower Trento area which had been occupied by the Republic for about fifty years (the main wine here was marmesino). At the same time there was an increase in production from overseas territories (Crete), whose wine was destined for European markets.
To avoid the payment of customs duties, a wine was often imported under false pretences – for example, as the raw material for the production of vinegar, which was on an industrial scale within the city. Another ploy was to import grapes which could then be used to make wine within Venice itself – a tactic which was very widespread amongst innkeepers. Such grapes were transported loose in the holds of boats and thus were of varieties with very thick skins – for example, the Pignola, Corvina, Pataresca and Viniperga, all known as "basket grapes". However, from the fifteenth century onwards, these loose grapes were subject to customs duties, with the exception of the grapes sold by weight for direct consumption. These so-called "scales" varieties included Moscatella, Marzemina, Lagunatica and grapes cultivated in bowers or in hillside gardens. Probably that group included the Schiava, the Bianchetta, the White Marzemina and the Lavissella or Cenerenta, similar to the Marzemina grape (the latter may not have been table grapes themselves but were mixed with the other varieties).

Wine from the mainland enjoyed some preferential treatment with regard to the duties imposed. The lightest tariffs were those levied on the so-called terrani, the wines from Slavonia (Istria, Dalmatia and Albania). Higher duties were charged on wines from Corfu, Zante, Cephalonia and other areas in the Adriatic, whilst the most highly taxed wines were those from Trieste and from the territory between Cervia and the river Tronto. As mentioned, by the middle of the fifteenth century a common practice for avoiding such duties was the making of wines within Venice itself; this used grapes from Istria and Le Marche (as not all varieties of grapes could be brought into the city). In order to exercise effective control over the varieties that were being imported, the government allowed only one place for the unloading of such fruit – again the Riva del Vino. However, smuggling continued to flourish, and the Republic tried to combat it by farming out to private individuals the collection of customs duties.

In nineteenth-century Venice, the list of wines sold in Venice continued to include the three Cypriot categories (ordinary wine, Cipro Commandaria and Muscatel); a sizeable part of the wine from that island was also re-exported to Le Marche and the cities of Istria and Dalmatia. Furthermore, in this period Venice tried to promote the wines from the mainland by introducing a tax on wines from the East. This policy worked to the advantage of many Istrian and Dalmatian wines produced to resemble those from Greece – such wines were also often mixed with the less-alcoholic wines from the Fa- dova and Treviso area. At the same time, wines from the hills around Verona were highly appreciated. The seventeenth century was a time of conflict – the Thirty Years War and the War of Spanish Succession – but it also saw the development of alcoholic beverages that would begin to challenge the predominance of wine in this market. The distillation of cereals produced gin and whisky, whilst hops were used in brewing beer – and at the same time the non-alcoholic beverages of tea, coffee and chocolate became fashionable. On the one hand, the spread of these products revealed innovations stemming from the nascent bourgeoisie of Europe, but on the other it also reflected the enormous success of the Dutch and English trading fleets in linking Europe with colonies in America and the Indies.

Over the period from the end of the eighteenth century to the middle of the nineteenth century, several changes to the Mediterranean trading system took place due to the long-running maritime conflicts between France and Britain, but also to the irrevers- able decline in the standing of the Venetian Republic itself. Only when Austria once more took control of the Veneto and Lombardy were trade relations restored with the eastern Aegean, with malvasia being imported from Crete and muscatel wines from Cephalonia, Samos and Santorini. But then, in 1830, it was the Austrian government itself that prohibited the import of wines from Cyprus and the muscatels from the Levant, and even when Vienna relented...
in response to protests from merchants, it insisted on levying a 20% import duty. The entire policy was intended to create an advantage for wines from the Adriatic area – primarily Istria and Dalmatia, which were under Austrian rule. Such produce was known to travel reasonably well when transported by ship, and it was also used for mixing with the low-quality wines produced in the plain-land vineyards of the Veneto, many of which were directly owned by the Austrian nobility or their Italian relatives (the only mainland wines that were not of such low quality were those produced in the Euganean hills). It should perhaps be noted that this advantage was the same that the wines of the Venetian hinterland had enjoyed after the Turks had driven the Venetians out of Crete.

The First Wine Guide

Venice could also boast that, by the end of the fifteenth century, it had become the centre of Europe’s nascent printing industry. Printing was first introduced into the city in 1469 and by the end of the century 153 printers had printed a total of 4,500 works – that is, around 1,350,000 books in all (15% of all those printed in Europe). These publications included the first printed copy of the Koran, as well as various works on gastronomy which give us a clear insight into the food the Venetians were eating and the wines they were drinking. Concern about cuisine was of course a matter for the wealthy, and the gastronomy of the Renaissance was based on a text which would have a clear influence on the food served to the nobility of half of Europe: Platina’s De honesta voluptate et valetudine, the first official edition of which was published in Venice in 1475. Then, in 1535, Ottaviano Scotto would publish what is considered to be the very first treatise on oenology: G. B. Confaloni’s De vini natura disputatio, which marked the beginning of attempts to analyse the characteristics of wines and describe the various types thereof.

The Influence of Venice on Viticulture in the Triveneto

Voltaire’s Essai sur les Mœurs et l’Esprit des Nations coins a phrase – the “spirit of a nation” – which he uses to refer to the structural characteristics and the age-old legacies which, like some sort of genetic code, give a specific territory its unmistakable identity. Within this “spirit” of the area referred to as the Triveneto a very special part has been played by the rich tradition of viticulture and wine-making, which Venice nurtured by encouraging the production of wine not only on the Venetian mainland but also along the eastern shores of the Adriatic. Once again, the customs duties levied provide clear evidence: the Greek-Adriatic wines for which there was high demand among wealthier consumers (nobility and high-ranking clerics) were subject to substantial import duties.

Venice first began to show real interest in dominion over the territories of the mainland (terraferma) around the middle of the fourteenth century, the first expression of this being its expulsion of the Scaligeri from the area around Treviso. Over the next century increased military might on land would then enable the Republic to expand rapidly – towards Bergamo, the lower Trento area, Friuli and the Polesine territories along the Po, suffering only a temporary setback when it was defeated at the battle of Agnadello (1509) by the forces of the League of Cambrai.

The Republic’s economic policy on the mainland would also change as a result of what happened to key components of its network of overseas trade: the fall of Constantinople to the Turks in 1453, followed later by the loss of Cyprus and Crete (in 1571 and 1669 respectively). The city’s patrician class then reacted in a rather contradictory manner to the decline in international trade and the threat to Venice’s economic standing which resulted from this gradual loss of control over the Mediterranean. On the one hand, the Venetian nobility made massive investments in new estates on the mainland, true, they had been a major presence here since the second
The gradual decline of Venice was only partly to blame upon the inhabitants of the "Adriatic nobility", with Venice being a major market for its wheat and wine (the latter being mixed with those from Istria and Dalmatia, which were of higher alcohol content and better structured). However, Verona wine did not find a market in Venice, partly because population growth there meant it was consumed locally. It was only in the sixteenth century that red wines from Valpolicella would begin to arrive in any sizeable quantities at the Rialto's Riva del Vin. And even then, Padua and Treviso remained the closest and most certain sources of supply for the Venice wine market, even if their products were of modest quality and generally consumed by the lower classes. Venetian influence on the wine market of north-east Italy would then make itself felt in the valley of Vallagarina (which came under Venetian rule in 1439); subsequently, the Trento area would produce Malvasia alongside the local Marzemino.

However, sweet wines posed no real competition to ordinary wines: not only were they of higher alcohol content, but their price meant they were consumed only on special occasions. Usually, due to their concentrated levels of sugar and alcohol, such liqueur-like wines were mixed with water, an additive that also removed the taste of the resin that had been added before shipping in order to preserve them during transport. The cultivation of mulberry trees for silkworms expanded; the new crops of maize and potato – imported from the Americas – were planted; regulations governed the exploitation of animal pasture and woodland. Viticulture, too, underwent substantial development. In effect, the aforementioned motto of coltivare il mar e lassar star la tera – which had been the basis of Venice's previous success – was now reversed, and two centuries of fervent economic activity that would continue up to 1768 saw almost 600 villas constructed on the mainland. However, the cultivation of land was often left by absent landlords to tenant farmers or métayers, resulting in a level of productivity that could barely feed the labour force itself, let alone supply raw materials for manufacturing industries. In 1761 Marco Foscarini had argued that Venice should follow a policy predicated on "preventing harmful innovations and leaving things as they are". However, when the city saw the first arrival of a ship from Amsterdam laden with eastern spices, it was clear how completely the world had changed as a result of the discovery of America. Venice had failed to see the commercial importance of the colonies in the Indies that had been established by the Dutch and British, and it had been slow to perceive that when Spain, France and Britain became centralised monarchies, the Mediterranean was no longer the centre of the world. Most seriously of all, it had failed to grasp how the resources of its mainland might be exploited to maintain its former economic vitality.

Then came the last meeting of the Grand Council, which on 12 May 1797 actually voted the end of the Republic; and four days later, the stones of St Mark's Square, which had never before been trodden by an invading army, resounded to the marching of 5,000 Napoleonic troops. After the French would come the Austrians, then the French again and then – in 1814 – once more the Austrians, who would not be driven out until 1866. The fall of the Republic led to a breakdown in the state's administrative apparatus, and massive employment as service industries collapsed when many of the city's noblemen left Venice: the number of private gondoliers, for example, dropped from 2,854 to 297. And inclusion within the Napoleonic Kingdom of Italy (1806-1814) did not improve mat-
form of their fruit, these vines shared the sole characteristic of produ-
ing a grape that yielded a sweet, aromatic wine of high alcohol con-
tent. In effect, this is the first time we see vines take the name from the wine rather than the other way around.

Over the period 1500-1700 agronomists in both France and Italy offered copious advice to vine-growers who, at times in adverse
tners: heavy taxation was levied; the suppression of parish churches undermined the organisation of the sestieri into which the city is divided; and the presence of the Royal Navy in the lagoon cut off the trade which had been the life-blood of the Serenissima.

The Crisis of the Fourteenth Century: the start of it all
In the centuries around the end of the first millennium Eu-
rope enjoyed a warm climate, which meant that viticulture expanded ever more northwards (as far as Scotland!) and to even higher altitudes (up to 1,200 metres above sea level in the Alps). In this phase, known as the ‘Medieval Climate Op-
timum’, viticulture became a presence within alpine valleys – together with the cultivation of olive groves – and thanks to the work of monasteries spread throughout Europe. Then, towards the middle of the fourteenth century, the continent suffered the first effects of what would become known as the Little Ice Age, a phenomenon that would ultimately be responsible for the severe frost of 1709 that killed off a massive number of Europe’s vines, and which is officially said to have ended with the Irish Potato Famine of 1850.

Coinciding with the first signs of the end of feudalism, the ad-
vent of this dramatic change in climate led to the disappear-
ance of vines from alpine valleys and the British Isles. But wheat crops, too, suffered, and the ensuing famines played a part in the spread of the Black Death, whilst the low alcohol level in the wines that were produced meant that many of them had turned to vinegar by the spring of the following year. The nobility and high-ranking clergy refused to settle for such low-quality wines and thus turned to those produced in the eastern Mediterranean, renowned since the days of the Etruscans and Romans. In part thanks to the role played by Venetian merchants, Italy and northern Europe began to enjoy supplies of malvasia, vin santo and the sweet muscatels of Greece. These wines were a huge commercial success, encouraging various areas in Italy and the eastern coasts of the Adriatic to begin producing their own versions with simi-
lar organoleptic properties. This “poaching” was then further stimulated when the Turks conquered Crete in 1464 and thus denied the Venetians access to the vineyards that were the main source of malvasia wines. Determined not to forego the profitable trade in such produce, it was Venice itself that encouraged the production of these sweet, aromatic wines in a number of places using different varieties of vine; the end result was, however, still referred to as malvasia. This is the first example in Europe of a wine being identified by the same name despite the fact that it was the product of grapes from vines that were not genetically related, distinguished simply by an adjective referring to their place of origin or the

Abbey of Sant’Eustachio, Nervesa della Battaglia (Treviso).
climatic conditions, were striving to produce sweet wines. For example, they suggested various techniques to achieve the effects that would be obtained from fully ripened fruit (perhaps leaving the whole grapes piled up for a few days and then collecting the must that drained from them) and also had various tips for the process of vinification itself (for example, the addition of the must of vincotto). However, France and the Venetian mainland differed in their response to the great frost of 1709. In the Bordeaux area it was decid-
ed to undertake reclamations projects in the marshy areas of the palus and to introduce a low-yield viticulture involving late harvesting, selection of grapes, prolonged fermentation and the use of sulphuring, with the wine being frequently transferred between barrels of new wood. At the same time, careful attention was paid to a classification of the qualities of the grapes from different areas in order to better meet the demands of the English market (at the time the most refined in Europe). On the Venetian mainland, however, the opposite policy was followed: the higher quality vines were abandoned and the focus was upon productivity, with no innovations being made in the processes of vinification or the conservation of wine. The fact was that these wines were destined for the Venetian market and so exports provided no incentive for im-

The dramatic change in climate had spared the regions of southern Italy, which now became the chosen place for the production of quality wines but perfect for those which

For example, they suggested various techniques to achieve the effects that would be obtained from fully ripened fruit (perhaps leaving the whole grapes piled up for a few days and then collecting the must that drained from them) and also had various tips for the process of vinification itself (for example, the addition of the must of vincotto). However, France and the Venetian mainland differed in their response to the great frost of 1709. In the Bordeaux area it was decided to undertake reclamations projects in the marshy areas of the palus and to introduce a low-yield viticulture involving late harvesting, selection of grapes, prolonged fermentation and the use of sulphuring, with the wine being frequently transferred between barrels of new wood. At the same time, careful attention was paid to a classification of the qualities of the grapes from different areas in order to better meet the demands of the English market (at the time the most refined in Europe). On the Venetian mainland, however, the opposite policy was followed: the higher quality vines were abandoned and the focus was upon productivity, with no innovations being made in the processes of vinification or the conservation of wine. The fact was that these wines were destined for the Venetian market and so exports provided no incentive for improvement; the only wines Venice exported were costly products from the eastern Mediterranean, which were redirected from the Venetian market and so exports provided no incentive for improvement; the only wines Venice exported were costly products from the eastern Mediterranean, which were redirected towards the rich markets of northern Europe. The dramatic change in climate had spared the regions of southern Italy which now became the chosen place for the production of sweet wines. For example, the port of Tropea on the Tyrrhenian coast of Calabria would during this period export large quantities of wine, predominantly the produce of the Santa Severa area. These were actually referred to as “Greek wines” and were shipped to the markets of the north, where they competed with “sweet malvasia” and “full malvasia” from Venice and the so-called vins forts from southern France (which were sweet, aromatic and of high alcohol content).

The “Revolution in Drinking Habits”: the development of sweet wines in continental Europe and on the Atlantic seaboard, with the subsequent crisis in the Venetian wine trade. The so-called “Revolution in Drinking Habits” that began at the end of the seventeenth century and saw wine having to compete with distilled alcohol and such non-alcoholic beverages as coffee, chocolate and tea imported from beyond Europe, would result in certain wine-making areas of France going into crisis (for example, Bordeaux) whilst other – such as Cahors – enjoyed a boom: the latter produced a rich-coloured red wine that English consumers were increasingly preferring to claret. At the same time viticulture developed in areas unsuited to the production of quality wines but perfect for those which were then used in distillation (for example, Cognac and Armagnac); in terms of location, these also benefitted from the fact they were near Atlantic ports, from where produce was shipped north. However, the real innovations were the creation of new wines such as champagne and port, which were partly the result of consumer demand for novelty but primarily due to the fact that merchants had increasing problems in transporting and conserving over time the wines destined for an ever-growing market. Experiments to see how to prolong the life of wines had begun in the fifteenth century: larger barrels, for example, were less inclined to cause acescence in their contents. Another process that proved valuable was the addition of rizot cot- to (a typical product of Le Marche and Abruzzo), and it was around this time that the wines produced for the English in the Jerez region of Spain made their appearance on the market as “sherry-sack”. Due to the presence of certain types of yeast – called “Borgens” – which expanded over the surface of the wine and thus hindered acescence due to contact with atmospheric oxygen, these were relatively stable products. Later, in part due to the customs restrictions imposed by the French in the eighteenth century, the English would also stimulate the development of wine-production in the Opau region, capable of transport in bottles, these wines had a good sugar content thanks to the addition of alcohol to the fermenting must.

The innovation of bottled wine did not only have an effect upon transportation and the conservation of the product. It also introduced a new feature into the way wine was bought and sold. It was now possible to store wine more effectively because one could check on how it might be changing over time. This also meant one could maintain prices greater se-

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curity about how wine was keeping meant one did not have to sell it as soon as possible. Once again, these innovation in production and commerce went together with the emergence of customers with new economic resources, hence wines became symbols of wealth and distinction for those who consumed them. It is curious, for example, how the wine bottle immediately became a status symbol, and not solely because it was a convenient container. Around one hundred years before these changes Venice had seen the development of glass-making on Murano, and now it produced not only bottles in heavy glass but
also a range of stylish vessels in which to serve and consume wine: made in transparent glass, these meant that consumers used to pewter, tin and silver could for the first time fully enjoy the translucent colour of the wine they were drinking. Nowadays we take such things for granted, yet the importance of the innovation is clear when we look at a detail in Veronese’s Marriage Feast of Cana, painted in 1563. Henceforth wines – above all, sweet wines – would be served on important occasions in finely-wrought glass carafes described as “in the Venetian style.” Given that this meant the wine itself had to be equally clear, it also led to a refinement in oenological techniques and processes.

Towards the middle of the fifteenth century, a series of factors resulted in a geopolitical change within Europe: the Osman Turks conquered Constantinople, their “Most Catholic Majesties” united Castile and Aragon and Charles VIII ruled over a unified France. However, Italy remained as divided as before. Gradually Venice lost its ports in Thessalonica, Negroponte (Euboea) and Monemvasia, as well as its control over wide territories of Egypt and Syria – places that had been essential to the commercial vitality of the Republic. Over a number of years there was a series of victories and defeats, further losses and temporary reconquests. This would culminate in the battle of Lepanto which, in 1571, brought Venice back centre-stage within Europe, but only for a short period. By now, the continent was looking towards the Atlantic, and economic development turned away from the Mediterranean towards the Americas.

The sweet wines from France’s Atlantic seaboard regions were first produced towards the middle of the seventeenth century, in response to demand from Dutch merchants looking to supply the sizeable market in northern Europe; the nascent bourgeoisie just emerging from the bloody Thirty Years’ War (1618-1648) between Catholics and Protestants was about to imitate the above-mentioned “revolution in drinking habits”. The period also saw great innovations in wine making.
during this period that Venice lost its position of dominance in the quality-wine market within Europe: not only did it underestimate the importance of the revolution in drinking habits, but it also had to face competition from the revitalised wine industry of the Bordeaux region and the control exerted upon the Atlantic vineyards by both the Dutch and the English, who as we have seen encouraged the production of sweet wines of high alcohol content. Ultimately, even the eastern territories of the Mediterranean would abandon “Venetian-style” wines for their “English-style” rivals: not only were the latter strong – due to the addition of alcohol to the fermenting must – but they were also sold in glass bottles (now being produced in Britain on an industrial scale).

Throughout the eighteenth century, Britain and France may have been on the opposite sides in numerous wars, but the British market had continued to favour the wines of the Bordeaux region, first its famous clarets and then the darker-coloured wines from Cahors.

Venice and Britain: parallel histories in the European wine market

Just as in Venice, there were sharp differences in the market for alcoholic beverages in Britain between the aristocracy, the merchant bourgeoisie and the labouring classes. Yet if in Britain the populace drank beer and cereal-based alcohol, and the nobility enjoyed French clarets and Spanish sherries, in Venice the poorer classes drank the dark-coloured wine from the Padua area (and aquavit) while the nobles quaffed malvasia and other wines from Cyprus.

Just short of creating “great wines” through the mixture of wines from very different places, Venice would lose its place in the sweet-wine market of northern Europe because, in the “revolution of drinking habits”, it also failed to see the importance of the “wine spirits” produced from the distillation of wine and then used in the creation of fortified wines and of partially fermented musts, which were much cheaper than
those imported from the Mediterranean, Venice also made the error of responding to the success of fortified wines – in particular, the port which was produced and sold thanks to British investment – by producing vermouth to imitate the absinthe then fashionable in France. This change to the typical Venetian product of malvasia proved to be counterproductive: consumers took it to be nothing more than a cheap imitation. For more than one hundred years, therefore, control over the market in fortified wines would pass to the Dutch due to their maritime power. Then it passed to the British, thanks to the protectionist policies London pursued in order to replace fortified French wines (for example, fortified mulled wines from the south of France) with Spanish and Portuguese products. They too, based their trade upon the mixing together of alcoholic products of very different character. However, they avoided the risk of being dismissed as cheap counterfeiters thanks to two great innovations – one character. In particular, the port which was produced and sold thanks to the adoption of new forms of cultivation, and the emergence of a new, more specialised, viticulture that also made its first timid steps in the use of other new wines of French origin. But by the time all this happened, Venice’s role as the dominant emporium in the European wine market was only a memory.

Vin Santo: a metaphor of the sweet wines of the Middle Ages
Vin Santo is undoubtedly the most famous – and the most widely imitated wine – of medieval Italy. Whilst the nobility preferred malvasia, “Vino Santo” was the drink of choice amongst the high-ranking clergy. Various explanations for the name (literally “holy wine”) have been offered. Some say the adjective comes from the Greek ἱερός (yellow), in reference to the colour of wines obtained from dried grapes, whilst others say it was due to the liturgical use of such wine in Byzantine churches, or to the fact that the pressing of the dried grapes would – for the vin santo produced in the Trentino region – coincide with Holy Week.

The term santo might also refer to the fact that this was “righteous” wine, produced without additives or mixtures. During the Council of Florence in 1439, the Greek patriarch Bessarion said it to have exclaimed when drinking such wine “This is a wine of Santes”, in reference to the famous wines made from dried grapes in Thrace. Henceforward, it is said, any such pure or “righteous” wine was vin santo.

Perhaps the most evocative etymology of all is that which makes reference to the fact that, in the early days of the Christian Church in the East, the term santo [saint] was used to refer to any man who stood out amongst his fellows. By analogy, the sweet and fragrant wine obtained from dried grapes was one which, due to its precious properties, stood out amongst all other wines. But then there is the claim that santo derived from the Hebrew qades (origin also of the word jubilee), whose root is qādāh, meaning “to separate”, “to be different”, and is linked with the Akkadian term qaṣīdu (to be brilliant, sparkling), a physical sign of sanctity. More prosaically, some say the term vin santo derives from the name of Santorini, one of the Cyclades (islands which the Venetian referred to as their “stone feet” because they marked the main stopping-point on the route from Venice to Constantinople and Crete). In ancient Greece that island had been called Thera, but following the first Crusade of 1204 it would be renamed Santorini after the church there dedicated to Santa Irene (st Erini). Together with the malvasia from Crete, the Ariousios from Chios and Comandaria di Cipro, the Vinsanto from Santorini was part of the generic category of “Greek Wines” noted for the fact that they could “travel.”

More than Malvasia alone: Marzemino, a symbol of the Republic
In the fifteenth century one vine became particularly important because the wine it produced – marzemino – occupied a very symbolic role in the ceremonial hospitality Venice offered to its distinguished guests. Its existence bears witness to increasing attempts to produce wines more alcoholic wines that would keep longer and travel; one means to obtain such wines was the use of dried grapes, a practice followed throughout the Triveneto area, from Verona and Rovereto to Trevixo and Vicenza. References to marzemino begin at the start of the fifteenth century and continue right up to the end of the eighteenth and the fall of the Republic. The most frequently mentioned are those from Pallagrotta, Belluna, Vicenza and Padua (in the latter area it was also known as Berzemino), however, the oldest reference – in 1489 – is to a marzemino from Friuli.
razione del Tinello – the Guild of the Pantry – which, in organising the courses, always began meals in the same way as those served to the Grand Vizier in Constantinople: with small petit fours of marzipan served with sweet marzemino.

When Henri III of France was the Republic’s guest, the official banquet was held in the Sala del Maggior Consiglio [Great Council Chamber] itself and comprised dozens of different dishes; however, worried about the risk of poison, the king is said to have looked on, sipping nothing but a glass of marzemino. This sweet wine was part of Venice’s own homage to the source of its might: to the wines, spices, sugar and various other merchandise that arrived in the city from throughout the Mediterranean and then travelled northwards, an announcement of its wealth and power. Fittingly, therefore, as that power waned, what had been a symbol of commercial vitality became one of decadence.

A place that could boast 17 theatres, eighteenth-century Venice was an essential stopping-point on the Grand Tour. Significant evidence of the fame this wine enjoyed in the German-speaking world – and Europe as a whole – comes not only from the famous mention of it in Mozart’s Don Giovanni, but also from the renowned Ampelographia published by F. G. Sachs in 1661: in this, the first work to describe varieties of this vine, the author comments Ex Vicentinis nobilitate prestat Marzemino sed Bassanico ad Bassanorum oppidum prope radice Alpium. And shortly before it ceased to exist at the end of the eighteenth century, Vicenza’s Accademia dell’Agricoltura would publish a paper in which it recommended that the grapes of the marzemino should be left to dry out “up to the end of autumn”. The rigid etiquette for the official banquets of the Venetian Republic from the sixteenth to the eighteenth century combined dishes from all over the Mediterranean – including the sweet-sour flavours appreciated in Byzantium and various fish and meat dishes enhanced by the use of the most varied spices. Such occasions were the responsibility of the Corpo-
during which the scions of Europe’s aristocracy hoped to enjoy the relaxed morals of this “capital of frivolity”. Well-aware of this, the converted Jew Emmanuele Congeliano – better known to us as Lorenzo da Ponte – would, in his libretto for Mozart’s opera, have Don Giovanni literally sing the praises of “l’Eccellente Marzemino”, a wine which, together with Tokaj, was the fashionable drink amongst the Venetian aristocracy of his day. Da Ponte may also have been recalling the fact that Count Collalto, ambassador of the Venetian Republic to the Habsburg court, often served marzemino at his palace in Platz am Hof, the very place where Mozart, together with his sister, made his public debut on 9 October 1762.

One highly curious observation made about the wine also deserves mention here: Redolfi – in a comment quoted by Gallesio – claimed that “the special character that distinguishes [marzemino] and makes it so attractive is the fact that it has the same cool taste that one finds in a good and genuine Bordeaux.” But to go back to the beginning: when Vincenzo Manzoni, in his “La bouteille de vin: histoire d’une revolution” (1816), defines the main character of wine as “the romance of the soil”, he is referring to a time when Europe’s new middle classes were a problem: in Venice these were higher than elsewhere, ship-owners charged more for carriage and guilds opposed all innovation. Attachment to traditions also meant that merchants rejected the new wines that were in increasing demand among the nascent middle classes.

As Yves Hervier comments, the melancholy of the modern age arises from the “wonderfully perverse” gap between perception of the new and attachment to the old that is slipping from view. With its modern wine industry, Venice is attempting to look to its past in order to develop something for the future; to draw upon the memories of a Mediterranean once more: “It is this which will rejuvenate quality tourism, not only in fishing but also in farming the land and tending their vines. It is this which will satisfy the clerical palate had become.

The oenological Heritage of Venice and the Lessons of the Past

The decline in any economy is related to its failure to adapt to market changes – either in consumer requirements or methods of production. This was particularly the case with Venice, which in the seventeenth century not only had to deal with the loss of its Mediterranean ports but also face competition from the Dutch and the British, both of whom had responded readily to the new spending power and tastes of their clientele. Furthermore, just as today, labour costs were a problem: in Venice these were higher than elsewhere, shop-owners charged more for carriage and guilds opposed all innovation. Attachment to traditions also meant that merchants rejected the new wines that were in increasing demand among the nascent middle classes.

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THE HISTORY OF WINE SHOPS IN VENICE
From the old magazen to the modern sports bar

Ivan Buonanno

Venice, this city on water, was in the Early Modern age the unchallenged oenological capital of the world. The links between the city and wine went far beyond the commercial interests of this point of juncture between East and West, a place which could be viewed as either the gateway to the Orient or the point where western Christendom began. The importance of wine was integral to the very fabric of life within Venice.

An amphibious city full of contradictory and complementary facets, Venice was the home to a Republic which brought together the Levantine world of the stato da mare and the more European world of the stato da terra; its very flag showed the Lion of St. Mark with its rear legs in the salty waters of the lagoon and its front legs resting on the grassy hills of the mainland. Here, the traditions of the medieval city-state would, from the period of Venice’s great conquests, co-exist initially with the modernity of a unique commercial empire, then – as the republic went into decline and crisis – with the creation of the world’s first tourist city, a place where Carnival lasted for ten months a year and everything seemed to be permissible (except the discussion of politics). The contradictory nature of Venice was reflected in the everyday life of the city – first and foremost, in its wine trade. Though such commerce was undoubtedly international, within the city there was only one place where wine merchants could do their dealings: the Rialto market. It was there that three great European trade routes met: the important route that brought malvasia and other liqueur-like wines from the eastern Mediterranean into the city; the fluvial links that carried this wine northwards to the great markets of Germany and France; and the sea routes that linked Venice, across the western Mediterranean, to the Atlantic and the ports of England and Holland. The vast size of the trade made it of ever greater importance for the city’s tax revenues, with wine being one of the main sources of income for the Republic’s coffers. From the start, the State had tried to levy duty on every phase of the business, and the heaviest duties – and severest controls – were those relating to the retail rather than wholesale market in wine. The watchfulness here was not only due to the desire to protect tax income but also inspired by concerns for public health and morals, with the Republic’s lawmakers eager to limit the problems for both which were posed by drunkenness. In order to forestall the damaging consequences of
di Notte al Criminal [a sort of police nightwatch] and the Capti Sestiere [the heads of each of the city’s six sestieri].

As the oversight of the wine business became every more demanding, jurisdiction over the market would – on 25 May 1280 – become part of the duties of the Doge and his body of councillors [the Capi della Quarantia], together with the Avogadori di Comun [city advocate’s office] and the Consoli dei Mercanti [trade magistrates].12 These Venetian regulations applied everywhere within the city with the exception of the Fondaco dei Tedeschi [the German trading station]. Since the fourteenth century this latter had been where the German-speaking merchants within the city gathered, and it had been granted a sort of “extra-territoriality”. However, to prevent this privilege resulting in an unfair advantage over the other merchants present in the city, the commercial independence of the Fondaco went together with strict limits on those who could purchase from its merchants: with the exception of professional groups responsible for the correct functioning of inns and taverns, non-Germans were forbidden access to the structure and any who were found within it were fined 20 soldi.13

Yet not all the wine consumed in the city was subject to taxation, the exemption applying to that which was made and consumed within the lagoon. It may seem surprising to the modern-day tourist but “do-it-yourself” winemaking was then widespread in Venice, a tradition which stretched back to the very foundation of the place: after all, the islands in the lagoon had been settled by those fleeing barbarian invaders and thus the newcomers had at least to attempt to be self-sufficient in food. It was this that had inevitably led to the presence of vegetable gardens and vineyards between the houses.14 Subsequently, the growth of the salt trade meant people could purchase supplies elsewhere, thus such home production became more a question of folklore. Nevertheless, the custom survived; indeed, up until just a few cen-
turies ago, it flourished. To see this, one need only to look at the numerous gardens on the Giudecca or the extensive areas of green to be seen in the map of Venice in the Vatican's Gallerie delle Carte Geografiche. Amongst the various vineyards that extended along streets and campi—which up to the seventeenth century were still flattened earth, without any paving—the largest was that of San Francesco della Vigna, whose name actually translates as “St. Francis of the Vineyard.” An ancient farm once belonging to the Ziani family, this had been sold to the Franciscan Friars Minor in 1253 by Marco Ziani, Conte d’Albe and son of the doge Pietro Ziani, and it can be clearly identified on the Vatican map. Legend has it that the vines of San Francesco had been the first in the city to bear fruit, due to the fact that this area was also home to a small church dedicated to St. Mark himself, who was said to have come ashore here because of a heavy storm. During that tempestuous night, an angel would appear to the saint, blessing him with the words Pax tibi Marcevangelista meus and then prophesying the foundation here of the city of Venice, which would take St. Mark as its patron and his lion as its symbol. The development of the wine trade in Venice reflects the same growth of guilds to be seen elsewhere in the cities of Italy and Germany; in the Middle Ages, the terms for such professional associations varied, with them being called fraglie in the city commune of Padua, gilde in the German-speaking world and asciuolo within Venice itself. Guilds began life as religious confraternities, but over time became more commercial organisations, with their own registers of recognised professionals, their own regulations, their own systems of apprenticeship and, primarily, their own monopoly over a certain aspect of the city’s manufacturing industries or commerce. No city of the day was without its guild of innkeepers, which regulated the wine trade within the area of the commune. In Venice itself, this guild would then split—a division which reflected the Republic’s own division into a stato da mar and a stato da terra: the members of one guild were those who sold wine from the fluvial territories of the mainland, those of the other served the malvasia from overseas. Local wines could be bought in places known as mazzeni, bastioni or samarceti, and the decree from the Council of Ten recognising a Scuola dei venditori di vino [Guild of Wine Sellers] in such mazzeni was granted in 1355. As was the custom in the Middle Ages, the meeting-place for guild members was a church—in this case San Salvador, where there was an altar dedicated to their patron saint, St. Nicolas of Bari. Subsequently, in 1488, that meeting-place would be moved to a small building alongside the church of San Cassiano. But it was not only the sellers of wine who had their guild. There was also a Scuola dei portatori e trasvadatori da vin [Guild of Wine Transporters and Decanters], who held their meetings near the All Saints altar (All Saints being their patron) in the church of San Bartolomeo. The bastioniere who ran the bastioni, larger wine shops, also had their own association, but it was never recognised as a scuola; hence each bastioniere remained a member only for so long as he was running his business (as opposed to guild membership, which was for life). As for the refined wines from the east, they were sold in places that were actually called Malvasie, with the scuola of such traders being founded in 1572; its meetings were held at the altar of St. John the Baptist in the church of San Nicolò dei Frari. The rivalry between such guilds was keen, and in commercial disputes it was often the sellers of mainland wine who came off best, their patron saint must have been more powerful—or else they must have had better contacts in the Senate. The result was that over the centuries a series of limitations were imposed upon malvasie: they could not host card-playing, nor advertise their presence with a sign.
They could not sell the wine by the jug, and once they had completed delivery they had to draw in the walkways they had used for unloading (thus removing any temptation for passers-by to leap onto them and gain unauthorised access to the warehouses). Inside the premises, however, official customers could acquire wine wholesale (a plurale) or retail (dal mercato) from representatives of the guild.

As already mentioned, the malvasie were taverns where customers could savour the sweet wines of the Levant, which the Venetians also referred to as “shipped wines”. The name of these places reflected the expectation that this highly-appreciated product should be available in unadulterated form. In effect, malvasia was not the name of a variety of vine but rather of a specific technique of vinification, which produced a golden wine whose origins were in the terre da mar. A top seller for the city’s wine merchants, its name was thus a sort of registered trademark avant la lettre. However, within the category of wines covered by this name, the Venetians distinguished three types: Malvasia dolce, which was not very popular amongst the Venetians, who preferred to sell it on to foreigners; Malvasia Tonda, which contrary to its name [“Rounded Malvasia”] had a rather thin, weak flavour; and Malvasia Garba, whose strong and tart taste was, perhaps because of its association with unrefined machismo, very popular with the male population. There was, however, another reason for the popularity of Garba: it was widely believed to be the perfect remedy for stomach ailments. This belief, like so many other aspects of Venetian history, is reflected in a place name that still exists. Near Santa Maria Formosa, there is a Calle del Remedio, named after a widely-frequented malvasia whose original owner was called Remedio; with the passage of time – and the fact that commercial competition is the mother of invention, and those who ran malvasie simply began to identify their place of business with branches of laurel – which became their trademark – and filled their premises with the most varied kinds of wine barrels (which often served as elegant tables for their customers and confirmed the character of the establishment). In 1609 the Scuola dei Portatori e Travandori da vin merged with the Scuola dei Venditori di Vino. This new guild thus had to have a new altare/meeting-place: the first was in the church of San Silvestro, but subsequently the guild had its own premises on what had once been called Calle del Gambaro but was then called Fondamenta del Vin (now Riva del Vin). Outside these premises there were also mooring-places for peote, the flat barge-like vessels used in transporting wine barrels. Having tied up along the canal, these transports then had to wait for inspection by the customs officers, who gave the go-ahead for the unloading and storage of the barrels after they had assessed their contents. These figures were known as the agenti del Palo because of the wooden pole (palo) to which their own vessels were tied. The new premises for the guild were obviously very welcome to the customs officials, given that they were only a few metres from their own Ufficio del Dazio del Vin [Wine Duty Office]; hence, with just a short stroll, the customs men could inspect the boats and the unloading of the barrels. While the large warehouse on Fondamenta del Vin was the main storage point for wine within the city, it was not the only one: smaller tax revenue was also generated by two others, at San Luca and on the Giudecca. Again, severe restrictions were imposed upon those who transported wine barrels in those flat-bottomed barges.
that remedio is so close to remedio [remedy] – the Garba soloz sold in that wine shop was credited with all sorts of special properties, and the populace took it to be a sort of panacea. Furthermore, the Malvasia del Remedio also played a part in one of the main rites of passage for young Venetian noblemen entering adulthood. This was a solemn ceremony in which the young man – now a full and active citizen of Venice – presented himself to his earthly lord, the Doge, and to his heavenly lord, God. At the end of this ceremony there was another ritual, which ultimately became an integral part of it: “Once the official function was over everyone went to Remedio’s. There, over glasses of old malvasia and plates of good fried doughnuts, forecasts were made that envisaged a good marriage and early promotion for the young man. This fortifying liqueur was, at other times, eagerly appreciated because of its proven value in incurable cases of the worm. Hence, it finally made famous the place where it was sold – that is, the shop in what is called Calle del Remedio, between Santa Maria Formosa and San Giovanni Nuovo.” The malvasie were places where all social classes mixed, and thus were very different to the magazen – perhaps not through urban geography but through behaviour meted out and received. Social divisions were, nevertheless, no barrier to the spread of malvasia throughout Venice: for example, documents of public expenditure registered at the Magistrato della Giustizia Vecchia reveal that the traditional breakfast for those about to elect a new doge consisted of a glass of Garba accompanied by biscuits. And malvasia was also appreciated by the clergy, so much so that within the city it might replace vino santo in communion and the saying of Mass.

As we have already seen in the case of the Malvasia del Remedio, the main such wine shops in Venice took their names from that of their proprietor: other famous ones included the Malvasie dai Raffai, dai Lazzaroni, Leperini and Carra, all of them owing their fame to the size of their cellars, which contained a range of different wines (Malvasia, Cipriani, Malaga, Ebattois, Scipolo and Samos). As mentioned, a malvasia was also recognisable by a particular sort of interior: “Inside one could see a huge number of barrels – large, small, tiny – all placed on top of each other so symmetrically that it was a pleasure to see. Generally, the counter was in the middle of the shop. And at the end of that counter – near the carboys with a large number of glass vessels for serving the wine – you saw a sort of brass grating with highly-polished ornaments. Similarly, in each [malvasia] there was, high on one wall, an altar dedicated to Our Lady on a capital that initially looked like a wine jug. And this holy image within it was always illuminated by a lamp. Within these malvasie in winter time they also sold mats and other fabrics woven of reeds and rushes, just as they also sold small whetstones for sharpening blades, but not always.”

As for the lower ranks, they generally congregated in magazen, bastioni or samarèhi (the latter also called samarchèi), which were broadly divided into two types: “There were the magazen, also known as bastioni, and those known as San Marco or salubri shop because they

were subject to the former. To give an example, in a certain place stood a magazen or a bastione, a short distance away stood another, which would take the name of San Marco, or salubri, because it depended on the former.” Venetian law laid down that these businesses could have only one proprietor, who had to reside on the premises with his family and servants. The sale of wine was strictly controlled and so was the size of the glasses, to guarantee that the amount served corresponded to the price paid, each drinking vessel had, in fact, to be marked with the symbol of the Giustizia Nuova. As for opening hours, it was legal to sell wine up to the chiming of the third bell (that is, three in the morning) and transgressors were fined from 20 to 40 soldi di piccolo. Similarly, the wine intended for retail sale had to be entered in special registers that had to be submitted to the officers of the Giustizia Nuova. Given the social rank of their customers, magazen, bastioni and samarèhi were to be found all over the city, but primarily in the more popular quarters. They were also under the supervision of the Magistratura dei Sette Sarti, which – just as with nineteenth-century licences to sell “salt and tobacco” or the more modern taxi licences – imposed limits upon their numbers, the business could, in fact, only be passed on to a member of one’s family, unless it was sold at public auction. As freely as the inns found on the main.
land, these places were a key part of everyday life, serving both for relaxation and for business. The owners of such premises were also known to lend money to customers in difficulty, though, through a sort of pawn system that also existed on the mainland: the borrower surrendered household linen and received – part in cash and part in wine – a (small) loan which, however, had to be entirely repaid in cash.56 The range of products sold at magazeni was very restrict-
ed; each business generally specialising in one type of wine (thus making it easy for customers to choose). These were places where anyone who got down to business: they were there to drink and one type of wine was enough (only the more flamboyant innkeepers would offer a choice of two). Dis-
satisfied clients simply had to take their custom elsewhere, hoping to find what they wanted.

Nevertheless, the magazeni were a centre of local life, a place where everyone knew everyone and everything about everyone: exchanging gossip over glasses of the one type of wine available; if you wanted something more substantial to eat you had to go and search out one of the city’s locande.57

The Scuola degli Osti, where numerous groups of people are gathered together for relaxation and for business. The owners of such businesses not infrequently named after such businesses. As they became more numerous, a decree by the Council of Ten instituted a Guild of Hostelers in 1355, with its own altar and patron saint.58 The amount of business-dealings in the city quickly meant that these places were a centre of local life, a place where you drink wine, can eat and find lodging.59 In other words, in Venice, the ossteria was what on the mainland was more likely to be called a locanda [inn]. For example, around the Rialto area there were numerous ossterie which have left a mark on streetnames in the city: the Calli alla Torre, alla Scimmia, alla Donzella, alla Campana, al Sole and al Sturion are all named after such businesses.

As they became more numerous, a decree by the Council of Ten instituted a Guild of Hostelers in 1355, with its own altar and patron saint.58 The amount of business-dealings in the city quickly meant that these ossterie were not only prof-
it able but also necessary, offering accommodation to the merchants who were passing through the city. Over the centuries, the Scuola degli Osti would thus become ever more important places for people coming and going. One person is perhaps sleeping on a bench, another may be leading against the wall, with his clothes in disarray and his hat awry, a bantering remark ready as he listens to an old man reminiscing about days long gone, the good old days of his youth. Some are playing mora, other challenging each other to a card game of tret-
ti; at one moment a crusade is launched against someone’s neighbour, then suddenly everyone is singing. And they do so with such skill and charm that, although one recognizes them to be the very embodiment of unlearned musicians, the modulations in their voices give you real pleasure, you are caught up in the song.60

All aspects of the wine trade in the city reveal the unique character of Venice. And this applies to the language too: a term that had one meaning on the mainland gained another as it was adapted to life in the lagoon. A clear example of this is the very word ossteria [related to the English “hos-
telry”]. On the mainland, this was a local gathering-place, as important as the church or the doctor’s surgery. In Ven-

ice, it became more specifically, “a place where you drink wine, can eat and find lodging”61. In other words, in Venice, the ossteria was what on the mainland was more likely to be called a locanda [inn]. For example, around the Rialto area there were numerous ossterie which have left a mark on streetnames in the city: the Calli alla Torre, alla Scimmia, alla Donzella, alla Campana, al Sole and al Sturion are all named after such businesses. As they became more numerous, a decree by the Council of Ten instituted a Guild of Hostelers in 1355, with its own altar and patron saint.58 The amount of business-dealings in the city quickly meant that these ossterie were not only prof-
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turies, the Scuola degli Osti would thus become ever more

important for two main reasons – the vicinity of the ossterie to where goods were unloaded at Rialto, and the increasing numbers of those who stayed at them. At the beginning of the fourteenth century there were a good 16 ossterie in the Rialto area alone. These were not the best in the city but they were amongst the cheapest, being frequented by mer-

chants from all over Europe; the more aristocratic clientele used the more luxurious inns to be found in the San Marco and San Giorgio areas.67

The customers at the Venetian ossterie paid for food and board, the former including a fair ration of wine.68 However, out of concern for public health and law and order, it was forbidden for Venetians themselves to stay overnight – or consume alcoholic beverage – within such places.

Finally, in reviewing the places where wines could be bought within the city, one must also mention the taverne, which sold wholesale, and the cannerie or wine shops that sold re-
tail (and also served wine but not food).69 Then came the arrival of a fashion that seriously threatened the city’s wine business, particularly with regard to the sale of malvasia wines: the eastern custom of coffee-drinking, which would then be thoroughly “Europeanised” in Vienna and Paris.69 The first café in Italy opened under the Procuratie Nuove in St. Mark’s Square in 1683; in order to distinguish itself from a subsequent rival – the Caffè All’Amore – this place would be renamed Venezia Trionfante a generation later, only becoming Caffè Florian in 1720. The commercial suc-
cess of these businesses was so great that at the beginning of the eighteenth century they attracted the attention of the authority known as the Cinque Savi alla Mercanzia [the Five Trade Overseers], who were more than happy to place coffee-houses on the list of commercial activities subject to taxation. On 10 January 1786 the Senate itself then passed a decree regulating the minimum distance between one coffee house and another. This was followed in 1756 by another which limited their total number within the city to 206.62 Evidently, the number of people operating in the coffee business gave rise to a new guild, founded in 1775.63 Coffee even appeared to side-line wine, becoming the fashionable beverage of a new bourgeoisie which, in the years approaching the French Revolution, was increasingly active in political discussions. Then, a key role in the spread of Risorgimento ideas was played by such coffeehouses. In Venice, for example, Florian was where the bourgeoisie close to Daniel Manin gathered; and on 17 March 1848, the café would – as an improvised field hospital for the wounded – be at the centre of the fighting which saw the fall of the short-lived Republic of San Marco.64

Meanwhile the French and, above all, Austrian presence in the city had led to the opening of birrerie, whose beer competed for customers with the wine served in the magazeni, bastioni and samarcheti: "It was at the beginning of the last nineteenth century that Austrian rule had led to the creation of the first veritable birrerie in Venice, and the additions and addenda published in the 1846 Italian edition of Giulio Lecomte’s Venezia reveal their importance. ‘Nor can we omit mention of the three large beer shops – located in San Moise (next to the church), in Campo Sant’Angelo and in Campo San Polo. In the summer season these places are heavily frequented by those who love the bitter-sweet taste of hops. Another that is also much frequented is a fourth birreria in a remote part of the city known as Santa Chiara.’"
Of course, this would not be Venice if the legend did not have a rival. In this case it is the claim that the name bàcaro is derived from that of the boats which transported the wine along the Adriatic coast and then tied up at the Abbazia San Gregorio, the site of the city’s new wine warehouse. The term trabaccolo Buon Padre [Good Father’s sailing boat] having entered the language, trabaccolo itself became synonymous with the wine from Puglia brought by such vessels. Over the years, the simplification that occurs in any spoken language would make trabaccolo into the modern-day bacaro.72

The tourist boom of the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century then led to a redevelopment or re-thinking of areas within the old city centre.73 The result was a picture-postcard city and one that was still very working-class, and overcrowded. The poorest areas of Venice at the time were Castello, Dorsoduro, Cannaregio and Giudecca, where the sewage still flowed directly into the canals and the tall cramped buildings shut out light and fresh air.74 Given the widespread practice of subletting in these areas – together with the poor nature of the housing itself – people were forced to live in what were practically communal spaces. In the fine weather it was the streets themselves which became the focal point of social life, with children running hither and thither, seated old women knitting and gossiping about those who were not present, peddlars looking for somewhere to exhibit their wares. The male centre of this necessarily public world was the bàcaro, and it was often here that men ate their meals and spent their weekly wages. In this cramped world, payday was a time for over-in-

the East was filled by those from Italian vineyards. 1869 saw the opening of the first outlet selling the wines of Pantaleo Fabiani, a producer in Trani (Puglia). Its location was chosen in tribute to the city’s long history of wine-making, the place being sited in Calle Dogana di Terra – that is, close to the Fondamenta del Vin. The immediate success enjoyed by Fabiani attracted other wine-producers from Puglia, bringing about a commercial revolution: the figure of the innkeeper-wine-producer-entrepreneur made his appearance in the city, and various business dynasties of the future were founded, with families such as the Luce, De Feo, Ragno and Palmieri competing to dominate the Venetian market.44 The end of the old trade structure in the supply of wine also led to a simplification of the language used to refer to the places where it was sold. Once again, the new term whose advent put an end to certain terminological distinctions is the stuff of legend. It is said that one evening the wine shop in Calle della Dogana was visited by a group of old gondoliers – who else? this is a Venetian legend – one of whom was a renowned oarsman who anchored his gondola near San Silvestro. With a certain hesitation the man ordered a glass of the Trani wine and observed its colour before taking a knowing sip and then approving with a phrase that would make history: “Bon! Bon! Questo xe proprio un vin... un vin de bàcaro!” [“Good! Good... This is a real wine... a Bacaro wine!”]. The origin of the term he used is said to be the Venetian term bàcara, which means a lively – perhaps too lively – group of people.71

Of course, this would not be Venice if the legend did not have a rival. In this case it is the claim that the name bàcaro is derived from that of the boats which transported the wine along the Adriatic coast and then tied up at the Abbazia San Gregorio, the site of the city’s new wine warehouse. The term trabaccolo Buon Padre [Good Father’s sailing boat] having entered the language, trabaccolo itself became synonymous with the wine from Puglia brought by such vessels. Over the years, the simplification that occurs in any spoken language would make trabaccolo into the modern-day bacaro.72 The tourist boom of the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century then led to a redevelopment or re-thinking of areas within the old city centre.73 The result was a picture-postcard city and one that was still very working-class, and overcrowded. The poorest areas of Venice at the time were Castello, Dorsoduro, Cannaregio and Giudecca, where the sewage still followed directly into the canals and the tall cramped buildings shut out light and fresh air.74 Given the widespread practice of subletting in these areas – together with the poor nature of the housing itself – people were forced to live in what were practically communal spaces. In the fine weather it was the streets themselves which became the focal point of social life, with children running hither and thither, seated old women knitting and gossiping about those who were not present, peddlars looking for somewhere to exhibit their wares. The male centre of this necessarily public world was the bàcaro, and it was often here that men ate their meals and spent their weekly wages. In this cramped world, payday was a time for over-in-
dulgence in alcohol, which often led to arguments, fights and the settling of old scores. Just as in British port towns, men gathered in the bàcaro on Saturday, drinking away their wages until their wives or children appeared in the doorway to drag them home, grumbling and shouting.

However, the bàcaro within the city’s popular quarters was not just a place for such “recreation”; it also served to spread new ideas, to arouse political awareness. It was here that newspapers were read – or rather recited aloud – for discussion by all present; this was the same practice one might find in coffee-houses, but certainly performed with rather less arrogance. Taverns were also an important source of economic support for the working classes, with the emergence of the cassa peota being a modern development upon the old tradition of the wineshop-keeper lending money to his customers. Just like the multi-floored buildings in which people helped their neighbours, the cassa peota was a perfect reflection of the philosophy which inspired life within the popular districts of the city. It was a sort of communal loan bank into which a group of people opted to pay a fixed weekly sum to then enjoy the right of obtaining loans at interest, any profits made subsequently being shared out between the members at the end of the year. The cassa peota also attracted the lower middle classes, who saw it as a way of diversifying their investments; in such cases, it was more likely to be known as a peota-banca. And the most memorable and extravagant form of such an association was the peotina, into which the members paid so as to have the money necessary to realise some indulgent dream: in the hungry world of the poorer quarters of the city, this was often nothing more than a slap-up meal in some place outside Venice – in many cases, the participants only opportunity to visit the mainland.

By the late nineteenth century, socialist ideas had gained a firm foothold in the poorer areas, with the bàcaro providing a ready platform for their diffusion. But after the “Great Red Scare” following the First World War such freedom of discussion was squashed; the poorer areas saw regular raids by fascist gangs led by Gino Corre, their populist violence soon forcing all opposition into silence.

Of course, the working-class bàcaro was not the only sort of wine-shop or tavern to be found in nineteenth-century Venice. There were also ostertie that centred around a famous literary figure. This was the case, for example, with the Osteria di Nardo in Calle della Fava near Campo San Lio: founded by two soldiers who had served with Manin’s militiamen, it would every day see the presence of Giacinto Gallina, a local legend who in his plays often took inspiration from the passing humanity observed here. The modern version of such a literary osteria was Harry’s Bar, which became a regular port-of-call for those enjoying the Grand Tour as it existed between the two world wars. Opened by an American in the 1920s, the bar attracted a fashionable cosmopolitan clientele that included the globe-trotting Ernest Hemingway.

The twenty-year period of fascism was, however, one that undermined both the working-class life of the city and the life of its literary cafes. Instead, the fascists championed a crass belief in modernity that accompanied an equally crass belief in an unspoilt rural world. The damage they did was then completed by the advent of blind adoration for all things American, including aluminium tables and vast plate-glass windows. Thus came about the coup de grace: the very distinction between the bàcaro and the càffè disappeared, with all such premises becoming “sports bars.”
4) The contemporary equivalent of mostrare Venice, however, would break with the Roman tradition by selecting not on real but water, both for its oversea trade and its trade along the shores of the mainland.
6) Ibidem.
8) E. Zorzi, Osterie veneziane, la gastronomia veneziana nei secoli Veneto, Treviso 1995.
9) G. Boerio, Dizionario del dialetto veneziano, Venezia 2009.
10) G. Boerio, Dizionario del dialetto veneziano, Venezia 2009, pp. 76.
20) Ibidem.
27) V. Gattard, Osteri e tavernieri. Il vino nella Venezia medievale, p. 21.
34) A. Antonaros, La grande storia del vino: tra mito e realtà, l'evoluzione della bevanda più antica del mondo, Bologna 2006.
36) Ibidem.
40) Ibidem.
41) G. Rorato, Civilità della vita e del vino nel Trevigiano e nel Veneziano, Terzno 1999.
42) F. G. Morlino, Venezia ovvero quadro storico dalla origine dei suoi progressi e di tutte le sue costumanze, Venezia 1842, pp. 142-143.
43) E. Zorzi, Osterie veneziane, la gastronomia veneziana nei secoli, Venezia 2009.
44) P. G. Morlino, Venezia ovvero quadro storico dalla origine dei suoi progressi e di tutte le sue costumanze, Venezia 1842, p. 144.
45) G. Rorato, Oste e tavernieri. Il vino nella Venezia medievale, pp. 41-43.
47) Ibidem.
49) E. Zorzi, Osterie veneziane, la gastronomia veneziana nei secoli, Venezia 2009.
50) Ibidem.
51) Ibidem.
52) Ibidem.
54) P. G. Morlino, Venezia ovvero quadro storico dalla origine dei suoi progressi e di tutte le sue costumanze, Venezia 1842, pp. 149-150.
55) G. Boerio, Dizionario del dialetto veneziano, Venezia 1842.
57) Ibidem.
58) Ibidem.
65) Ibidem.
68) Ibidem.
69) Ibidem.
70) Ibidem.
71) E. Zorzi, Osterie veneziane, la gastronomia veneziana nei secoli, Venezia 2009.
72) Ibidem.
74) Ibidem.
80) Ibidem.
81) Ibidem.
82) Ibidem.
83) Ibidem.
84) Ibidem.
85) Ibidem.
86) Ibidem.
87) Ibidem.
The Venetian love of wine stretches back to the earliest days of the city, when vines were grown in gardens or even in special vineyards within the city. Traces of this practice can be seen in the name of such places as San Francesco della Vigna and the island of Le Vignole, whilst documents of the period refer to the existence of vineyards at San Mosè, San Benedetto, San Silvestro, San Tomà, Sant’Avise and San Samuele; we also know that wine was produced in monasteries and convents, some of which still have their old vines. Wine would begin to arrive in substantial quantities within the city after the triumphant campaign of doge Pietro Orseolo II at the end of the first millennium against the Narentine pirates who had plundered Venetian ships in the Adriatic. From then on the Republic’s vessels could reach Constantinople, and amongst the products they brought from the Levant was Greek wine, first and foremost malvasia; the name is, contrary to custom, not a reference to a specific wine or vine but rather to a city – Monembasia – where Venetian ships loaded up with barrels of sweet wine from the Peloponnese. Subsequently, the Republic’s merchants would also purchase such wine on Rhodes or other Ionian islands, as well as in Puglia, Istra and Dalmata, when in 1291 the Da Camino family donated the Castello della Motta and surrounding territories to the Republic. Friuli too became a source of wine. However, wines from the mainland would only begin to arrive in the city in large quantities after 1388, when the Republic expanded its power over the region. Subsequently, as patrician Venetian families began to acquire large estates from monasteries or feudal lords on the mainland, they not only built the wonderful villas that now adorn plain and hill but also set about producing their own wine, importing it into Venice both for their own consumption and for sale.

When was wine drunk?

There was never any lack of wine in Venice, and the fruit of the vine flowed freely at the four great official banquets which the Republic held every year within the Doge’s Palace. These were on: the feast day of the city’s patron saint (St. Mark, 25 April); the feast day of St. Vitus and St. Modest on 15 June (to commemorate the Republic’s lucky survival of the plot hatched in 1310 by Baiamonte Tiepolo); the feast day of St. Jerome (30 September, the occasion when new appointments were made to the city’s administrative/judicial magistrature); the feast day of St. Stephen (26 December, to commemorate the arrival of the saint’s venerated reliquiae, taken from Constantinople). Venice was also famous for the magnificent banquets laid on for important visitors, who included kings, popes and emperors. Records of these, plus the four regular banquets and other “minor” occasions, are still to be found in the State Archives, with the material giving complete lists of the

RITUAL, OCCASION AND VENUE:
The Consumption of Wine in Venice

Giampiero Rorato

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dishes served and the wines that were drunk. The most famous of these occasional banquets was certainly that given in 1574 for Henri de Valois, son of the French king Henri II and Caterina De’ Medici, having abandoned the Polish throne he had only just occupied, the young Henri stopped off in Venice on his way to be crowned in Paris. But there were also major religious and civic festivities, as well as family occasions, when meals of a certain importance were served. Many of the dishes prepared for these events have remained part of Venetian gastronomic tradition and they were eaten with a wide variety of wines. We know this from a document regarding the 1755 marriage of Alvise Zorzi Contarini to Caterina Civran, which gives the following “List of Wines served on the occasion: Tokai, Capo Buona Speranza, Borgogna, Sciampana, Graves, Canarie, Reno, Puzaret, Tintiglio de Rota, Malvasia di Canarie, Peralba, Setuva abboccato [medium sweet], Setuva anciutto [dry]; Monte Muro, Rum verno Giamalica, Birra d’Inghilterra, Balma, Angarzia, Madera, Ratafia di Grenoble, Moscato di Cipro, Vino di Citro Vecchio, Contralt dolce, Bianco abboccato, Rosazzo bianco, Contralt rosso, Picolit, Monte Libano, Eamel, San Lorans and Scopolo. Plus the following Rosoli [sweet dessert wines]: Vaniglia, Canellin, Marsechin and Elisirvita.” But along with officials and patricians, the populace too had abundant occasion to drink during the many public festivities and celebrations that were part of the city’s annual calendar. The most important such public event was – and still is – April 25, the feast of the city’s patron saint, St. Mark. On this occasion the doge had the official privilege of being the first to eat the traditional dish of *risi e bisi* [rice and peas] made with the first of that year’s peas. Nowadays *risi e bisi* is a sort of pea risotto, but contemporary documents tell us that on the feast of St. Mark the doge’s table was prepared with 15 dishes of rice and thirteen of peas “col persutto” [with ham]; each guest then mixed the two as he wished, ...
Though the theatre season continued throughout Carnival, the sumptuous entertainments characteristic of this period were mainly held in patrician palazzi. And, again, on such occasions there will have been no shortage of wine.

Another very popular feast day in Venice was Giovedì Grasso, “Fat Thursday” in the week before the start of Lent. This commemorated the victory won by Doge Vital II Michiel on the last Thursday of Carnival in 1161 against Ulrico, patriarch of Aquileia, who had attempted to conquer the patriarchate of Grado, loyal to Venice. After the defeat, Ulrico and 12 of his canons were brought in chains into Venice, but then pardoned on the understanding that thereafter the patriarch would every year send the city a stout bull and twelve pigs, to serve for entertainment for the populace and then as a source of meat. The ancient tradition of eating and drinking plentifully in the few days left before Lent was thus reinforced, to the great joy of the city’s population.

On the Sunday after Ascension Day a special dinner was offered by the doge to a delegation from the island of Poveglia, in commemoration of the occasion when the Genoese had been tricked as they tried to attack Venice from the sea. Accompanied by a local priest, the delegation was officially received by the doge and then sat down to a meal served on plates of silver and eaten with silver cutlery, the islanders being treated as if they were visiting royalty. At the end of the meal they could take home any remaining food, together with cakes and jams and a carnation flower which, on behalf of the doge, they were to present to their mothers or wives. Of course, even a brief survey of the Venetian festivities in which wine played an important part could not omit the feastdays of the city’s churches and par-
ing St. Mark to the Giudecca. That tradition is still a deeply
branched involving the construction of a votive bridge link-
ning down the rivers Brenta, Sile, Piave and Livenza.

July 1577 – it was decided that the votive church would, on
the occasion of the plague being finally over – the last traces being recorded in
Venice's entire population in just two years. When the
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to celebrate the liberation of the city from the plague that had
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of Venice’s entire population in just two years. When the
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July — it was decided that the votive church would, on
the third Sunday of every July, be the focus of special cele-
brations involving the construction of a votive bridge link-
ing St. Mark to the Giudecca. That tradition is still a deeply
felt one within the city: now as then, the church is visited
by numerous Venetians, and the night of the third Satur-
day-Sunday in July is a time for abundant meals in public
restaurants and private homes. The other feast mentioned above — that of Santa Marta — has disappeared because it centred around a community of
fishermen which no longer exists in the parish. Held on 29
July with great solemnity, the celebrations often involved the
participation of the patriarch and his retinue. However, the
feast that is of most interest to us here is the large open-air
supper that was served on the evening before the feast day,
with tables laid out around the church and along the parish’s
canals. To this meal were invited all the families and friends
of the local fishermen, with the women serving such things
as sfogeti in saor [a type of local fish]. Again
there was plentiful wine, perhaps including those which for
centuries had been arriving here from Dalmatia (a source of
very special red wines) and Coreth, together with the malvasia
wines from Greece and Il Redentore.

Magnificent Private Banquets

A complete overview of the occasions for the consumption of
wine should also include the magnificent private ban-
quets which, in terms of variety of dishes and wines and
the lavishness of the musical entertainment, often outdid
the festivities for the city as a whole — for example,
those for the parishes of Il Redentore and Santa Marta.
The Feast of Il Redentore [The Redeemer] commemorat-
ed the construction of the church, built as the result of an
edict issued by the Venetian Senate on 4 September 1576;
designed by Andrea Palladio, this was a votive offering to
the Vendramin house on the Giudecca to celebrate the wife
of General Alviano Vendramin; and on 6 January 1528 an-
other “beautiful concert of music and song” was held in
the house of the Corner Pisapia at San Luca in honour of
Livio Podacataro, archbishop of Nicostia. Another occasion
lavishly celebrated was Marco Foscari’s departure as Ven-
eto’s ambassador to Florence. Before he left, Foscari would,
on 8 January 1527, serve a “magnificent courtly banquet
on silverware for Cosimo De’ Medici, later duke of Flor-
ence, who at that time was seven years old, together with
his fourteen-year-old cousin, Lorenzo, the boy had been
brought to Venice by relatives in order to escape the perils
of war. As for the feast which the patriarch Marino Grimani
held on the island of Giudecca for Duke Ottavio Farnese
in 1542, it ended with a banquet for 100 hundred people
that lasted four hours, with ninety dishes being served. On
that occasion the guests were entertained by the antics of
jesters prior to the sudden arrival of four masked figures
in bizarre monastic habits — a tunic of white satin and a
scapular in cloth-of-silver — each holding a basket filled
with delicate pastries to be presented as gifts to the la-
dies. And when, towards the end of the meal, the guests
cut into the pastries, out flew numerous birds and swopped
around the room, causing joyous confusion as people com-
peted to catch them.
And at yet another banquet on the Giudecca – this time at Palazzo Trevisan – the dishes served include many pastry bundles, from one of these merged small marine crabs [schille], from another little sweetmeats, from others small birds, and from one a cockedrel; all plucked and with its crest cut, this went up and down the table knocking over wine. The citizens of the Venice did not want to fall behind its patricians in terms of magnificence. The Secretary to the Council of Ten, Gasparo della Vedova, would, in 1517, offer his numerous guests an “excellent” supper of partridge, peafowl and fried oysters, marzipan and sweetmeats. Many of those invited were the councillors themselves and they were also offered a musical entertainment – all, Sanudo notes wryly, because Della Vedova ‘wanted to receive the rank of Cavaliero Grando’.”

As one can see from these short comments, Venice had no lack of opportunities for eating and drinking: official banquets held by the Republic itself; feasts given to honour illustrious guests or to celebrate a diplomat’s promotion; the feasts of patron saints; fairs and popular gatherings. Nor should one forget the numerous feasts held in country villas during the long summer months. This style of life continued right up to the eighteenth century – that is, practically up to the very end of the Republic. State coffers might be ever emptier, but feasts remains as magnificent as always – a fact that Carlo Goldoni recalls in some lines of his short poem written “In occasion of the happy wedding of His Excellency Sig. Lodovico Rezzonico and the noble lady Contessa Faustina Savorgnan”:

‘Nowadays you spend for a supper, a meal, The same amount as once paid for the whole of Carnival. It seems one cannot eat in company Without a French cook and foreign wines.’

By this point, however, we are getting towards the end of a history that had lasted a full millennium, a period in which, despite famine and epidemic, the Republic had been a place of enterprise, endeavour and astute commerce. Yet if by the end of the eighteenth century Venice’s ships were standing idle in the Arsenale, that last century of the Republic’s life saw Venice hold its most spectacular Carnivals ever. How things had changed since the people whose descendants would be Venetians had settled in Cittanova Eracliana under the leadership of the Oderzo-born Paoluccio Anafesto! Yet even as the Friuli-born Ludovico Manin took his place as Venice’s last doge, one fact had remained unchanged: Venice had never gone short of wine – be it that grown in the vineyards of the city’s gardens and lagoon islands, that imported from Istria, Greece and Puglia, or that brought here from the patrician estates of the mainland. Venetian cuisine without wine is unthinkable. It was so throughout the history of La Serenissima; it is so nowadays.

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Grosseto (Asolo-Treviso), view of the Castle, prior to 1957, Mazzotti deposit at the FAST (Foto Archivio Storico Trevigiano).
THE “OMBRA”,
An institution that has outlived the Venetian Republic

Giuseppe Gullino

Nowadays wine is bought in bottles, perhaps with some heraldic device on the label. Strangely enough, though we all profess to be republicans, we become staunch monarchists in restaurants: if the wine we are served does not show some mark of aristocratic origin (an association with the estates of such families as the Collalto or the Frescobaldi, or perhaps some doge of the past), then it loses some cachet, even credibility. In the not very distant past things were rather different: wine was sold “loose”, and instead of drinking a spritz or another aperitif, people drank un’ombra. Ultimately becoming a proper measure of quantity (one eighth of a litre, a full glass), the term originated in Venice itself and then spread throughout the region. After all, the association of the Veneti and wine is proverbial: indeed, the local alpini regiments are identified with the stuff. There are two schools of thought as to how the term came about. One says that it originated from the days of the Venetian Republic, when people used to drink wine in the shade [ombra] of the large awning that was spread at the foot of St. Mark’s bell tower — the very awning that appears in a famous painting by Francesco Guardi of 1780. Others argue that the term ombra was first applied to the half glass of...
wine drunk while standing at the counter: the word “shadow” thus refers to the small quantity, the ‘hint’ of wine consumed. This latter theory seems to me to be a little forced, with its equation of ‘shadow’ and ‘small portion’. But who knows what the etymologists of the future will discover? For me, the situation depicted in Guardi’s picture offers the most likely explanation for the term’s origin. What further convinces me is the fact that country inns in the eighteenth century identified themselves by a “sign” of just a tree branch, which indicated to the weary traveller the existence of shade and repose where the inn’s proprietor sold wine he had produced himself.

With a huge population for the time (some 140,000), Venice’s wine needs were in part met by vineyards on the islands of the lagoon. This meant there was also a hierarchy of places which sold the different types of wine. At the top of that hierarchy were malvasie, which specialised in the sale of “Greek wines”. The populace, however, frequented magazeni, humble taverns that were themselves divided into bastioni and samarchi. A nineteenth-century addition to this picture was the bàcaro, which specialised in the sale of wines from Puglia – such as Manduria – that arrived here on large boats (trabàccoli) and was then mixed with local wines. So why, with all these different types of wine shops spread throughout the city, was there a need for the large awning that is practically the focal point of Guardi’s picture? When we look carefully at this depiction of St. Mark’s Square, we see that the canvas structure is located in a very strategic position: between the basilica, the bell tower, the Procuratie Nuove (on the right) and the Doge’s Palace (barely visible in the background). Backing onto the bell tower and set symmetrical to the Sansovino loggieta at its base, the awning offers shelter from the noonday sun that sharply divides the Square into two distinct areas; as for the people depicted, most of them are wealthy merchants or patricians.
The end of the Venetian Republic was sealed when, on 17 October 1797, General Napoleon Bonaparte, commander of the French Army of Italy, and Count Johann Ludwig Josef von Cobenzl, representative of the Austrian emperor, signed the Treaty of Campo Formio at Villa Manin di Passariano outside Udine. The state of agriculture in Republic’s mainland possessions was by then dire. In describing the situation in the decades immediately before and after the treaty, Angelo Vianello and Antonio Carpenè would, in their 1874 La vite e il vino nella Provincia di Treviso, write: “At the end of the last century [the eighteenth], and throughout the first half of this, agriculture here was much neglected. Most land was in the hands of the aristocracy (50.87% of all the land cultivated) and of religious houses. For example, in the city of Conegliano alone, with a population of 4,700, there were a total of 17 monasteries. With a few exceptions, the patrician class had lost its former vitality and abandoned itself to somnolent sloth, nobles squandering their patrimony either in Venice or abroad. As for the religious houses, a lot of their possessions had been expropriated during the early part of Napoleon’s rule; thereafter that land was for decades under the administration of a State that mismanaged these resources as badly – or perhaps worse – than had been the case when they were under mortmain. The land was exploited by means of tenancy-farmer agreements that were renewable after nine years, but with the understanding that the contract was not bidding should the State choose to sell the land. This lack of contractual guarantees obviously discouraged any attempt to make improvements, with those who held the contracts aiming to get what they could – to the last drop – out of land and workforce. And this situation was made even worse by the inefficiency of the public administration.” As had been the case for centuries, agriculture in the Venice hinterland and the area around Treviso was based upon the raising of cattle (as work animals and sources of milk) and farmyard poultry or pigs (to feed the household and also provide eggs for sale or barter at market), plus the cultivation of certain cereal crops (wheat and maize). However, not much space was given over to viticulture, with vineyards to be found primarily in the foothills around Treviso and the lands bordering the Piave (from Conegliano to San Donà di Piave); there was also a number in part of the administrative district of Portogruaro and a few scattered here and there across the territory as a whole. The lack of improvements to public infrastructures (primarily roads and the management of waterways and forests) – plus the fact that private income from the land was spent rather than reinvested – meant agriculture was in gradual decline, a state of affairs that had become particularly pronounced in the second half of the eighteenth century. Land was neglected and rows of vines left untended. The result was that agricultural resources declined, peasants – most of whom were
métayers — hardly had enough to live on, and there was a drastic fall in related commerce.

Well-aware of what was happening and of their own dire economic situation, the Venetian authorities tried to compensate for the absence of public investment by launching initiatives which it was hoped would breathe new life into agriculture. Thus, in the second half of the eighteenth century, one sees them encouraging landowners, parish priests and enlightened professionals to set up Academies of Agriculture, that in Treviso was founded in 1769, the one in Conegliano a year later. The aim was to stimulate reflection upon the parlous state yet rich potential of the region’s agriculture, and slowly — sometimes confusedly — suggestions and recommendations would emerge from these bodies that then found an audience.

The state of agriculture — and above all, viticulture — was at this point critical. For example, in the first half of the nineteenth century any reference to the wines of the Treviso area had practically disappeared from local publications and scientific studies; similarly, no Raboso was being exported from the port of Venice, though once it had figured on the manifest of nearly every vessel leaving. These were decades when the countryside verged on anarchy. As Antonio Calò points out in his 1990 Tradizioni nel Piemonte e nel Veneto: L’enotecnico, in order to increase their income, landowners planted rows of vines on soil that was unsuitable, or they replaced dead vines with the first they could find. Such practices resulted in “a lack of discrimination in consumption, with viticulture becoming an increasingly ‘peasant’ activity due to this decline and loss of cohesion. As a result, the predominant vines were those that yielded more even if of lower quality.” In a late eighteenth-century report to the Accademia di Agricoltura in Conegliano, Antonio Del Giudice had already denounced “the greed of peasants, free to act as they wish due to the negligence of their masters”
As if all of this were not enough, viticulture then faced another threat, which began to make itself felt when the Habsburgs still ruled Veneto-Lombardy: disease. Slowly but surely three devastating infections spread across the region. First, starting in the eastern Veneto during the 1860s, came the cryptogam *Uncinula necator*, responsible for powdery mildew, to be followed by *Phylloxera vastatrix* and then by downy mildew (caused by *Plasmopara viticola*), the latter two arriving in the last decade of the century. These diseases would bring about a radical change in the viticulture of the eastern Veneto (the areas around Venice, Padua and Treviso), causing the death of numerous vines that, in many areas, were replaced with hybrids that were the result of spontaneous crosses rather than grafting (*Isabella, Clinton, Bacò, Noax*, etc.). Subsequently, the intuition of the two Bellussi brothers, vine-growers in Visnà (near Treviso), would result in a new way of laying out vineyards that would henceforward be named after them. Then would come the slow but gradual introduction of internationally-renowned vines (*Cabernet Sauvignon, Cabernet Franc, Carmenère, Merlot, Malbech, Chardonnay, Sauvignon*, the various *Pignolet*, etc.); this took place primarily after First World War, to replace the vast number of old vines (more than one hundred different varieties) which, to the east of the river Piave, had been destroyed by the Austro-Hungarian army in the winter of 1917-1918.

The Vines Cultivated in the Nineteenth Century

The first survey carried out in the post-unification Kingdom of Italy (1871) showed that the hinterland of Venice (the modern day administrative districts of Venice and Treviso) produced more white wines than red. With regard to the vines cultivated here prior to the first decades of the twentieth century, Vianello and Carpenè provide a full list that shows most of these were accounted for by 50 – a greed which, it was claimed, “was the cause of our hills becoming infested with vines that are fruitful but of poor quality.”

For more than a century – that is, right up to the end of the Third War of Independence in 1866 – the members of the various *Accademie* which continued to function after the fall of the Venetian Republic would focus their attention upon knowledge of the existing state of affairs. What vines were grown? What areas suitable for viticulture? What were the characteristics of the wines produced? How much wine was consumed? This emphasis is clear from the very first sessions of the Conegliano *Accademia*. For example, a paper delivered by Francesco Maria Malvolti (1725-1807) described the types of wine being produced, with a particular mention of Pecolit. Praising the products of the Conegliano hills, the author would add: “Who is not familiar with the exquisite character of our different kinds of Marzemino, Bianchetto, Prosecco, Muscatel and Malvasia, Gius saro and others when, on the different hills where they are made, producers are attentive to the properties of the grapes used and the quality of the land on which they are cultivated?”

This praise for the hills’ wines was echoed by another academician, Giovanni Nardi, who observed: “On our hills vines of all sorts flourish and produce fruit. Before our very eyes we see rows of vines that produce the grapes for Tocai Malvasia, Prosecco and, most of all, Pecolit.” Turning his attention towards the plain crossed by the river Piave, he would then remark on how this entire area produced Raboso, “strong and robust” wine of the kind they liked in Venice. It is, however, worth noting the rider in Malvolti’s praise of viticulture in these hills: his emphasis on the need for “producers [to be] attentive to the properties of grapes used and of the quality of the land on which they are cultivated” suggests that such people were rather rare.
The 23 red/black grape varieties were:

The 27 white grape varieties were as follows:

The full total of cultivated varieties up to around 100.

varieties (27 white and 23 black grape), with others bringing the latest to become a noticeable presence.

was stronger, with the main red wine being Refosco.

Tocai and Raboso

As mentioned, the area of Lison near Portogruaro had – at some time during the nineteenth century – seen the introduction of a new unnamed vine whose grapes produced an exceptional white wine. The vine and wine would soon be known by the name of

Riceat, with the highly appreciated plant rapidly spreading to the left bank of the Tagliamento, the right bank of the Livenza and even further afield; within a few short decades, its Riceat would be the most widely produced – and highly appreciated – of the whites made in the Venice area, and, together with the local Ver- disos, be produced in the Treviso plain, in the area between the rivers Piave and Livenza. However, it still had not obtained the official recognition that would make it famous. The name itself

varieties (27 white and 23 black grape), with others bringing the full total of cultivated varieties up to around 100.

The 27 white grape varieties were as follows: Bianchetta, Sauvignonasse. As for the white grape varieties which still exist in these areas, they include: Bianchetta, Boschera, Marzemina bianca (called Champagne), Prosecco, Rabboni, Raboso veronese, Recandino, Rosone, Schiavo, Schiavone, Schittarolo, Valentino.

The less widespread white grape vines cultivated included: Cividin, Picolit, Ribolla, Tondredona, Tocai, Trestian (Trebbiano), Truda (or Trividia). The reds were: Cantante, Chasselas de Fontainebleau, Cordonnais, Fonfretta.

As one can see, this list makes no mention of: Chardonnay, Pinot, Riesling, Sauvignon, Cabernet, Malbech or Merlot.

The Unification of Italy
With a few rare exceptions, the entire period of Austrian rule saw a serious decline in viticulture, with slow improvements only coming after the Third War of Independence (1866), when the Veneto became part of the Kingdom of a United Italy. Perhaps the greatest stimulus to both viticulture and oenology in the region – resulting in wider attention to the problems faced by the sector and research aiming to solve them – was not the work of the Accademia dell’agricoltura but the arrival of the above-mentioned diseases. However, even before that certain things had happened. Two years after the Veneto joined a united Italy, the Società Enologica di Conegliano was founded, and its efforts would – in 1876 – lead to the establishment in the same town of a Scuola di Viticoltura ed Enologia (nowadays the Istituto Agrario “G. Cerletti”); this would henceforward be an important point of reference for efforts to rejuvenate the sector not only in the Veneto but throughout Italy, with important input from former students who had then scattered all over the world (to as far afield as South America, South Africa, Australia and New Zealand).

The work of this institution was then consolidated with the opening (on 23 July 1923) of the Sezione Sperimentale di Viticoltura ed Enologia (nowadays known as CRA-VIT – Centro per la Ricerca in Vitiicoltura e Enologia), again in Conegliano. The eminent figures who taught at the Scuola Enologica – some of them also active in the Sezione Sperimentale – included: Amuro Marecalchi (1869-1955), who was later a state senator and Under-Secretary for Agriculture; Giovanni Dalmasso (1886-1976), who later taught at the Turin Faculty of Agrarian Sciences and was the founder of the Accademia Italiana delle Vite e dell’Uva, Luigi Marzocchi (1898-1968) who would create the famous “Manzoni” hybrid vines and was also serve as mayor of Conegliano; Vittorio Ronchi (1892-1978) who would be High Commissioner for Food in De Gasperi’s governments and later President of the Consiglio Superiore dell’Agricoltura; Pippo Agostino (1900-1985), later a professor at Padua and Venice universities; Tullio De Rosa (1923-1994), who made important innovations to Prosecco and wrote many scientific textbooks that are still of fundamental importance.

Riceat and Raboso

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Riceat and Raboso

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with various spellings (Tocai, Tokai, Tokaj, etc.), can be found as early as 1771 (Agostino Fapanni), but we do not know if those first references are to the same vine as that which would become renowned over the period from the late nineteenth to the middle of the twentieth century.

The evidence is as follows. In 1933 Giovanni Dalmasso — then Director of the Scuola Enologica in Conegliano — would describe Tokai (using that spelling) as “an excellent white wine: the vine has some similarities to Sauvignon, but the two can be distinguished clearly.” In another article, he proposed that the wine should be known as Tocai friulano (this spelling), perhaps with reference to the fact that Lison, the place of origin of the wine he studied, was in Friuli (or rather had been, up to 1420). Thus, it was from 1933 onwards that vine and wine were known by the same name. Three years later, Italo Cosmo would write: “ampe-lography contains no trace of a vine to which one might ascribe the name Tocai friulano, allowing us to continue to use it for this vine.” Thereafter, due to an error in the qualifying adjective, the wine and vine became classified as Tocai di Lison, the place actually being in the Veneto and not Friuli.

Over this same period Primio Cerqueti, the oenologist running the vineyards of Arancide Zenami in Lison, would, after thirty years of careful selection and painstaking research regarding both viticulture and vinification, take the results of his work to Arturo Marescalchi. Having tasted this Tocai, Marescalchi would write to Cerqueti: “I feel I must tell you that your Tocai di Lison is a product of the highest quality. It has both a full, refined body, and a highly satisfying taste that is both rounded, lively and graceful. The full nobility of the vine is captured here, through the skill used in the making and storing of the wine.”

As mentioned, the vine had over the recent decades spread extensively in the direction of Friuli-Venezia Giulia and Treviso (above all, in the years after the First World War). At the same time, these areas — and that around Venice — had seen the arrival of numerous French vines of international renown, imported to replant vineyards of Tocai. The arrival of these vines, in addition to the proliferation of new vineyards, led to a significant increase in the production of this wine.
yards damaged by the Austro-Hungarian army as it advanced after the “rout of Caporetto”. However, the new arrivals would only marginally impinge upon the presence of Tocai, Refosco, Raboso and Prosecco, subsequently identified by the name of Glera, the vine that produces the grapes for the latter had been a presence in the Treviso hills since the eighteenth century, alongside others that are still to be found there (in particular, Bianchetta, Perera and Veneto vines). The true “invasion” by foreign vines came after the Second World War, when the regeneration of viticulture went together with an end to métayage farming (finally abolished by law towards the end of the 1950s). When, as a result of a dispute with Hungary over precedence, the Veneto Tocai had to change name, it was decided within the Portogruaro area to call it Lison and Lison classico (if made in the heart of the historical area of production). In the rest of the Veneto the chosen replacement name was Tai, which condemned their versions of “Tocai” to disappear almost completely.

At the beginning of the twenty-first century the wine, produced from the fruit of a vine of French origin introduced in the nineteenth century, would — under the name of Lison — enjoy a resurgence; the skill and devotion of the vintners in the Portogruaro area made it a product that was substantially better than the white produced from the vine that is its French cousin, Sauvignonasse. And if Tocai has become the most widely cultivated white-grape vine in this region over the course of the twentieth century (with points of highest concentration in the Portogruaro area, the Treviso plain vineyards and the whole of Friuli-Venezia Giulia), its black-grape equivalent — at least up until some time in the second half of the century — was Raboso.

Widespread in the Treviso plain area and the countryside around San Donà di Piave, that vine is a very ancient presence here; probably it was imported from the Near East by the early Veneti, and was definitely being cultivated by them...
long before the arrival of the Romans (in 181 BC, with the foundation of Aquileia). It is likely that the modern-day Raboso is a direct descendant of the Pucina omnium nigerrima mentioned by Pliny the Elder (23-79 AD) in his Naturalis Historia, where he describes it as being blacker than pitch. It is argued that, through grafting and hybridisation, that ancient native vine led to the emergence of the plants that produced wines similar to Raboso – the various types of Refosco and the Terrano made in Carso and Istria. We certainly know from documents that this vine was present in the Piave areas between Conegliano, Motta di Livenza, San Donà di Piave and Roncade from as early as the seventeenth century, when records began to be more precise about the names of vines and wines. Both – the vine and the wine it produced – have always been known thereafter as Raboso Piave or Raboso del Piave.

After Doge Pietro Orseolo II (961-1009) had – some time around the year 1000 – rid the Adriatic of the Narentine pirates who threatened commercial shipping there, Venice would begin to trade extensively with the Levant. Thereafter wine became an important part of the cargo carried by its ships – be it the resinous wines purchased in Greek ports or Raboso from the Piave areas; this latter was known as vin da viaggio [voyage wine] because it was so rich in tannin and acidity that, unlike other wines, it could withstand the effects of sea air and the other risks posed by shipping across saline water. Proof of the Venetian merchants’ preference for Treviso Raboso comes from Jacopo Agostinetti, who wrote his memoirs after retiring to his native Cimadolmo (outside Treviso) following a career as factor to various Venetian patricians. Entitled Cento e dieci ricordi che formano il buon fattor di villa, the work was published in 1679 and contains various comments on Raboso; for example, Ricordo XXIV of the 110 ricordi [pro-memoria, pieces of advice] promised in the title, states: “Here in our region
we generally produced red wines for Venice from a black grape that is called Recaldina, others call it Rabosa, because it is a strong-flavoured grape.”

After the fall of the Republic in 1797, Raboso would continue to be cultivated in the Piave areas, even if the wine was no longer exported; it would, however, remain the most important wine of the Treviso plain and survive not only the terrible diseases of the nineteenth century, but also the ravages wrought by the invading Austro-Hungarian army in the terrible year November 1917-October 1918.

When, after the Second World War, the abolition of all métayage brought about a veritable revolution in the region’s agriculture, the concomitant widespread adoption of foreign vines sidelined Raboso so drastically that it was threatened with disappearance. Then, in the 1990s, thanks to the efforts of certain “pioneers”, it began to be appreciated once more: not only for its historic value and its place in local traditions, but also because it produces a well-structured wine that ages well and is of noble character. Following various experiments, the felicitous intuition of a vine-grower in the town of Vazzola, who had for some time been allowing his Raboso grapes to dry a little before use, revealed that the taste of traditional Raboso wine might be smoothed out a little through the addition of a quantity of raisin wine obtained using the same grapes. The results were extraordinary and the achievement soon imitated elsewhere. This new wine, Malanotte, may have a niche market at the moment but it has certainly earned its place amongst the category of great Italian reds, and there is great potential for its production to expand.

The Agricultural Economy in a New Age

Throughout a large part of the nineteenth century, the entire area around the cities of Treviso and Venice had only one historically-established viticultural concern: that owned by the Counts of Collalto e San Salvatore, whose main vineyards were at Sussegana (Treviso). The second half of that century then saw the emergence of another important house – Carpenè Malvolti in Conegliano. Founded by the garibaldino Antonio Carpenè in 1868 after his return to his native town following the Third War of Independence, this vineyard would be a trail-blazer in modern oenological techniques and – together with the Gancia of Piedmont – initiate the fascinating story of Italy’s sparkling white wines. Subsequently, it was not until after the Second World War that new companies began to emerge in the area. But at that point there was a veritable explosion, with some of these vineyards perhaps developing from predecessors yet only knowing significant growth in the last fifty years or so.

Meanwhile certain important developments had occurred in the world of viticulture and wine-making. In the 1920s-30s Luigi Manzoni in Conegliano had produced some important hybrid vines through cross-breeding, the best-known of these being 6.0.13 (Rhineland Riesling x Pinot Bianco; also known as Manzoni Bianco, this is now widespread throughout Italy. However, Manzoni also produced: 2-15 (Glera x Cabernet Sauvignon, known as Manzoni Rosso, 1-50 (Trebbiano x Aromatic Traminer), also known as Man- zoni Rosè, 13.0.25 (Raboso Piave x Hamburg Muscatel), also known as Manzoni Muscatel. Then, in the 1960s, Char- donnay would be identified – that is, distinguished from the Pinot Bianco (or Pinot Dorato) with which it had previously been confused. Finally, at the beginning of the new century, Carmenere would be distinguished from Cabernet Franc.

Even more recently it has been established that the Verona Raboso is, in fact, a hybrid of Raboso Piave and Marzemino Blanc (in this area also known as the Champagne vine). By the last decade of the twentieth century numerous wine producers in this area had achieved an international reputation – in part thanks to the contribution of the many oe- nologists that graduate every year from the Istituto Cerletti in Conegliano and from the more recently created Faculty of Oenology also in Conegliano. Nor should one overlook the contribution to this development that came from the various institutions that work to protect the sector and facilitate commercial relations with other wine-producing regions both within Italy and abroad. The greatest wine fair in the world is now Vinitaly, held in Verona, and the wines produced in this region have earned a place alongside those of the highest quality. Through such advances in quality, a number of these wines have gained such international reputations that they are now marketed throughout the world.
Over a long period of time the sea served as a means of union; for many centuries, it linked together different regions, peoples and languages, bringing various nationalities, religious and political forces into contact with each other. Very early in the history of western civilization, the Mediterranean was a place of intense maritime traffic as ever safer and more robust vessels plied its coasts, identified natural harbours and locations for the foundation of cities. The seeds thus sown would grow quickly: the Adriatic – the “narrow sea” as Braudel calls it – offers a perfect example of this, uniting as it does north and south, east and west. Phoenicians, Greeks, Illyrians and Romans all sailed this sea and explored its coasts, with Byzantines, Venetians, Genoese, Ottomans, Turks, Austrians, Englishmen and Frenchmen doing so in subsequent ages. At times they would also clash here, in violent battles that would have a profound effect upon the development of civilisation both in Europe and the Levant; yet after each period of war, the Adriatic would return to its primary role – as a point of juncture, a thoroughfare for traffic.

As they sailed from the south northwards, the Phoenicians and Greeks brought knowledge and materials with them, travelling as far as the Danube (or Istrus, to give it its Greek name); the Abstrite Islands their myths associate with Medea and Jason are the modern-day Cres, Losinj and Susak. As they made their way up the Dalmatian coast – which was fairly challenging for the ships of the day, but certainly richer in natural harbours than the western coast of the Adriatic – these peoples also brought vines, initiating the cultivation of the grape on a number of islands off the dry calcareous terrain of the mainland (for example, Lastovo, Korcula, Lesina and Vis). And these Adriatic vineyards were soon producing good-quality wines: in the second century BC, Agatarchides of Cnidus was already praising that from Vis, saying it was surpassed by no other.

As the Greek presence here declined, the Romans rapidly expanded into the area, founding Aquileia and from there sending out fleets to crush the Istrian pirates. Gradually they would conquer the whole of the Istrian peninsula (by 177 BC) and then establish the basis for a long period of development and prosperity in the area.

The arrival of the Romans in Istria had profound consequences for the region: centuriatio – the process whereby areas of land were divided and marked out for development – gradually spread throughout the whole zone from Pola to Porec, profoundly affecting the layout of the territory and resulting in an agriculture whose levels of productivity were equal to (or higher than) those to be found anywhere else.

VITICULTURE AND WINE
FROM ISTRIA TO DALMATIA

Vineyards, Wines and Human Endeavour

Andrea Pitacco
in the empire. Istria became an exporter of olive oil, vine and wool, and the peninsula – together with the whole of the Dalmatian coast – would, due to its great natural beauty, attract numerous Roman patricians, who built here their villae rusticae. As a result, road links were consolidated, with the Via Flavia running from Trieste to Pola, Fiume and on to Dalmatia. The Romans also made every effort to stimulate viticulture in the region as the wines from Istria and Dalmatia were much appreciated in the capital (amphorae produced in Istria – some of the ‘Dressler 6’ type – have since been unearthed at Ostia). This is the period when Pliny wrote his famous description of the Pucinum wine, consumption of which is said to have been the reason why the empress Gailia (or Livia) lived to over 80 years of age. This fortunate period in Istrian wine-making would continue right up to the days of Cassiodorus, who in his Variae (507/511 AD) praised the wealth of the region, comparing its fertility and beauty to those of Campania and saying that it was capable of supplying Ravenna (then the capital of the Byzantine Adriatic) with cereal crops, wine and olive oil. However, this well-documented period of stability and prosperity – with Istria a supplier of much appreciated wines and other quality produce – would in the early Middle Ages be followed by a long phase of decline. Later, the speed with which the nascent Serenissima imposed its authority over the Adriatic quickly had dramatic effects upon the Istrian peninsula and the coast of Dalmatia. The advent of this new power not only had profound consequences upon the socio-political organization of the whole east coast but also resulted in a focus there upon certain agricultural activities, the production of grapes and wine being one of them. As early as 932 AD doge Candiano II signed an agreement of “commerce and friendship” with Capodistria (Koper), in which the Istrian city agreed to pay an annual tribute of one hundred amphorae of wine. Then, around the year 1000, doge Pietro II Orseolo would – after his defeat of the Narentine pirates – be rewarded by the Byzantine emperor with the title of Dux Venetiae et Dalmatiae. It was shortly after this that all the towns on the Istrian coast (and many of those on the Dalmatian) would sign pacts of reciprocal protection and loyalty – agreements that would remain in force until the fall of the Republic. Venice was, first and foremost, a major consumer of this area’s produce. At its height, the city had a population of 130,000-140,000 and thus was a huge market, attracting wines of all kinds and qualities to meet the needs of its different social classes. Furthermore, as had been the case for centuries, wine was also an important means of paying tribute: there is almost no treaty or agreement between Venice and the Istrian cities that does not envisage the supply by the latter of substantial quantities of local wine (a sure sign of its quality). In his Nova Descrittione della Provincia d’Istria, published in Venice in 1611, Nicolò Manzuoli observes that “Istria is a peninsula of average fertility, but it produces wines fit for a king – for example, Moscati Ribole – as well as oils, salt and precious fruits that pass via Venice to Germany and other parts of the world.” His comment thus confirms that Istrian wine-making not only had links with Venice, but also commercial outlets that extended as far as the markets of central Europe. But what was the state of viticulture in Istria during the time of the Venetian Republic? What techniques were used, what varieties of grape grown, and how extensive were the vineyards? How had the activity developed since the days of the first Greek – and, above all, Roman – settlements? Though we have little information with regard to the situation in Dalmatia, we can hazard an answer to these questions with regard to the peninsula. For example, there is no doubt that, by the early Middle Ages, viticulture within Istria was...
is a fine sight to see the vines beary with grapes and the trees with quinces.”

He also gives a careful account of the techniques used in propagating vines: “Both types of vines are planted to a depth of around one braccio [around 60 cm] so that they can resist the great heat that there is. Diligent farmers keep the vines low; first the soil around them is hoed and then around Christmas the plants are pruned, with many shoots being drawn under the soil – they call this [lay-tering] ‘to make ‘pronegne’ (from the adjective ‘pronus’ meaning ‘leading forward’). In April they hoe again and clear off grass and weeds; and from each vine they remove any roots the plants put forth above soil level. Then they add soil around the vines that have been planted at least two years earlier, so that they get stronger and grow stouter when cut back close to the ground, with a fine head of fruiting canes; the ground is already full of vines so they do not layer any of the canes.”

The terminology of viticulture that Tommasini records in the seventeenth century is the same as that which figures in the world of Horace and Columella: “Around the first days of July, they hoe and turn the soil a third time; they call this process ‘occare’ and this makes the grapes plumper, and the canes of the vines grow. They hoe three times in the areas around Buje and Piran; in other places they hoe only twice – once in May and once in July. Poor farmers hoe only once.”

It was their quality which made Istrian wines so attractive to Venice; compared to those produced in the areas around Padua or, later, in the Venetian hinterland and the Treviso area, they had a higher alcohol content and travelled better. Within Venice, the wines were unloaded at the Riva del Vin,
to supply both a thriving domestic trade and a substantial export market. One wine that was highly appreciated in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries was Tibidrago from the island of Vis, a robust red wine that may have been the ancestor of the modern-day Primitivo. Though it is difficult to imagine, the Venice of the day already had substantial facilities for stockpiling and ageing wine for later consumption, it is estimated that even at the end of the Republic this capacity was around 3,000 hectolitres. Yet it is also true that most of these wines were – in preference to prized wines from the Aegean – used for mixing with the wines from the estates of Venetian patricians; these latter were often of too low an alcohol content to be stable over time.

Prior to Tommasini, Pliny’s few observations on Pucinum, a wine probably produced in the region around the mouth of the river Timavo (close to Duino), are our only extant records on the characteristics of grapes cultivated in the north-eastern area of the Adriatic. The Roman says of this Pucinum that it was omnium nigerrima, that is a red wine of very dense colour, so perhaps a Refosco or Terrano – but certainly not the Prosecco that some have tried to claim was the preferred drink of Livia Augusta. For his part, Tommasini gives a fairly detailed account of the ampelographic range in seventeenth-century Istria: “As for the different grapes, three sorts of low vines are usually planted here. One is known as Pelosa. The people of Piran refer to it as Calcionessa, and planted in rich soil it thrives and produces a white grape. The other white grape is called Ribolla and grows in average soils, producing wine that is livelier than the other. The third white grape is called Pirella and exceeds the other two in quality; it prefers thin, stony soil, where other grapes do not want to grow, let alone bear fruit. Amongst the tall vines, the black-grape one they esteem the most is Refosco, which is also called Terran Grande; there is also the Cropella grape and the red Chernatizza. Amongst the trained vines bearing white grapes, the Cividin bears the smallest fruit, and there is also the Tribiano. However, one can also find an infinite number of other grapes such as the Muscato, which is now used a lot, and the different varieties of Malvasia and the Imperatoria, with a long fat grape, and others.”

The author’s detailed comments on the qualities and properties of local wines reveal close knowledge of the relations between vine, terrain and environment. “The best Moscats are those from low vines. The wine from these low vines is of rarer quality, especially if the vines grow in mountain areas or in whitish [flysch] terrain. The trained vines, which they also call meadow vines, generally bear black grapes.”

It would appear, therefore, that Tommasini recognises the widespread presence of Refosco and Malvasia vines but also the increasing establishment of Muscatel vines in the cooler areas of flysch terrain. Perhaps due to his own position at Cittanova, he also seems to stress the importance of viticulture in the countryside around Piran and Buje, which certainly contains areas where the soil is rather more robust and there are less drastic changes in rainfall and temperature than elsewhere in Istria, later in fact, the local Moscat di Momiano would be a regular feature at receptions offered by the Royal House of Savoy.

Tommasini’s era was one which suffered severe repetitions of plague and pestilence; and, as often happened in such cases, Venice would make good the drop in population numbers within its cities and rural areas by drawing on certain categories to replace those who had died: cities were repopulated by Venice’s own patricians and citizens, its countryside by people brought there from more inland areas. This meant that there was a substantial influx into Istria of those from Slavonia and Croatia, resulting in a gradual shift in the ethnic make-up of the region and a sharp
ethnic split between the inhabitants of town and country. This migration would also have its effects upon viticulture, given that the Slav peoples were traditionally more inclined to be shepherds and animal herders than farmers. As a result, the cultivation of vines became concentrated in the areas around the cities and towns on the western coast of the peninsula. However, it is interesting to note that some areas around the cities and towns on the western coast of the peninsula — the rural situation and the enterprise of farmers were little different to those described by Tommasi two centuries earlier. For example, Predonzani praises: “The skilful symmetry whereby all the hills and slopes of Piran have, to great practical purpose, been levelled out into perfectly flat areas of some width — that width depending on the sheariness of the slopes — creating the impression of grandiose steps, all supported by stout walls of stone (taken from the hills themselves) or, where this was preferable, with simple grassed embankments. In the flat areas thus formed are planted perfect, well ordered, rows of flourishing olive trees, and vines and other fruit trees; and, where possible, the ground is also sown with various kinds of corn.”

A native of Barbara (then a fiefdom of the Loredan family), Stancovich, who became a canon in his home region after studying theology at Padua University, was a man of great intellectual curiosity, his interests including the natural sciences, his research also involved the cultivation of olive trees and the processing of olives, as well as various fundamental aspects of agronomy as a whole. Recently, in fact, his work on sowing wheat “without ploughing, hoeing, digging or barrening the soil, and without the use of animal nature” has been reprinted, with this “Plutarch of Istria” being recognised as a forerunner of the technique of sowing on unturned soil.

In 1820 Predonzani published in Venice his Discorso ed istruzione agro-economica per uso de’ parrochi e de’ proprietari dell’Istria, a sort of practical handbook intended, as its title says, for both landowners and parish priests. The aim was to guarantee food supplies in an Istria that had been hit by several years of poor harvests and severe winters, being reduced to famine in 1817. Primarily, Predonzani’s goal was to promote the cultivation of potatoes, a crop of which both landowners and the general public were still suspicious, yet his account reveals that — at least in the richer areas of the peninsula — the rural situation and the enterprise of farmers were little different to those described by Tommasi two centuries earlier. For example, Predonzani praises: “The skilful symmetry whereby all the hills and slopes of Piran have, to great practical purpose, been levelled out into perfectly flat areas of some width — that width depending on the sheariness of the slopes — creating the impression of grandiose steps, all supported by stout walls of stone (taken from the hills themselves) or, where this was preferable, with simple grassed embankments. In the flat areas thus formed are planted perfect, well ordered, rows of flourishing olive trees, and vines and other fruit trees; and, where possible, the ground is also sown with various kinds of corn.”

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In his writings on viticulture and wine-making, Stancovich returns first to Pliny’s legendary Pucinum Istrian wine has been famous since ancient times, as history shows. Livy says that Julia Augusta prolonged her life to over eighty-two years of age by not serving any other wine than Pucinum (nowadays known as Prosecco), of which only a few amphorae were made, and which no other wine surpassed in medicinal properties. He also believes that this wine was the same as that which the Greeks so wonderingly celebrated under the name of Pytanon, and in his description of the places of Istria, he describes Castello Pucino as ennobled by the wine it produces. Turning to look at the more highly prized wines of the region, Stancovich continues: “In our day, too, the wine of Istria is not without its good qualities. One might divide it into three categories: bottled wine, distinguished wine; ordinary commercial wine. Amongst the few bottled wines there are; Monte Mors, which was once used extensively by the court in Turin, Pecoli and Arznoli, which — for those who are unprejudiced — are close to Tokai; San Tomà, San
Marzemino, and many other varieties of wines from forced vineyards. The second category includes: Marzemino and Refosco, which if made with a little diligence can resemble Clar- et et Bordeaux; Prosecco, Cridonio and Ribolla. And finally there is Moscato, which is a rose — what the Germans call a Rosenwein — that is much appreciated in Vienna and is very close to the wine of the Canaries. As for the third category, this includes numerous varieties that differ from place to place, and which are the wines of which most is sold. I myself will only discuss these ordinary wines, which — even though made using the commonest methods — are well able to resist shipping over long distances, indeed improve as a result.

The author then goes on to look at the commercial fortunes and difficulties of Istrian wine. Many of those problems now arising due to issues reaching more further afield than the Adriatic: “The memory is still fresh of those recent times when there was an active trade in these wines with the new world [outside the Adriatic], where they were enjoyed and appreciated as much as wine from Spain and France; over the years, the sale of this wine provided Istria with its finest prosperity and the most flattering hopes for future wealth. However, that prosperity was destined to be short-lived, the region being left high and dry by commercial events and political decisions. This precious gift of nature thus languished and was reduced to being sold at a very low price. As a result agriculture has lost its vitality and become a burden to the demoralised landowner.”

The goal Stancovich sets himself is now clearly outlined: “The task has come to break away from our usual ways of working, to profit from the insights of learned men — physicists, chemists, agronomists and oenologists — who, guided by both theory and practice, have provided this craft with norms and rules that we can, in all confidence, take to guide our efforts in these endeavours. One would, in fact, be neglecting common sense and one’s own interests if one failed to take advantage of their contribution. It would take too long to list all the worthy authors who have dealt with this topic, but amongst those names one cannot fail to mention the famous Le Gentil, Abbot Bezzer and Count Chaptal — all of them French — or Father Giovanni Battista da San Martino, a Capuchin friar, Fabroni and Count Dandolo, all of them Italian.”

Thus modern oenology had come to Istria, with Stancovich suggesting insightful improvements to the how the grapes were pressed (through prior removal of the fruit from the stalks) and also discussing the correct ways to clean and maintain barrels, methods of fermentation and decanting, the development of innovative new apparatus and equipment. However, in spite of his efforts, viticulture in the region still languished due to the general economic crisis there. With the fall of the Venetian Republic, Istria had — after a brief period of Napoleonic rule — slowly been absorbed by the vast Austro-Hungarian empire, now within Trieste’s sphere of influence, the region lost its skilled workforce to the city and its hinterland, without receiving any significant investment in its agriculture. Nevertheless, during this period a number of local landowners did launch initiatives to revitalise agriculture; these efforts culminating in the foundation of the Società Agraria Istriana in 1880. This association would play a major role both in promoting Istrian wines (which were gradually being redirected from the Venetian to the Austrian market) and in providing a response to the diseases of powdery mildew, phylloxera and downy mildew that shortly afterwards almost brought European viticulture to its knees.

The activities of the Società, regularly published in the fortnightly La Provincia dell’Istria, reflect both the hopes and concerns of the local winemakers. “Now is the time to act; to act knowingly and well. This requires special studies and special occupational skills. For example, it is no longer enough to write letters to agitate for wines to be made better — that is, for wines to be cultivated in a more rational manner. Nowadays what is needed are some capable oenologists to say: ‘you should do this and this, not what you are doing now.’”

Repeatedly citing the growing number of Italy’s institutes for education and research in the agrarian sciences, the minutes of the association’s meetings focused upon the need to obtain the sizeable funding (5,000 florins) required to found at Parenzo (nowadays, Portorož) a “model enterprise of viticulture and wine-making, with an additional function for pomology.” This Stazione Enologica e Pomologica Provinciale would finally be founded in 1875, being renamed the Istituto Agrario Provinciale two years later. Initially run by Emilio von Mayerbach, it quickly took on an important role in agrarian education within an Istria where the situation was critical and yet offered real reasons for hope. Linked with the Royal Imperial Oenological and Pomological Institute at Klosterneuburg, the Parenzo Stazione would also develop close contacts with a similar agrarian school at San Michele all’Idice, founded in 1874.

In this period of repeated emergencies within the field of viticulture, all the institutions concerned were highly active: powdery mildew arrived in Istria in 1852, and the promotion of phylloxera as the only possible way to defend crops became essential. However, phylloxera would make its first appearance in the region around 1880 — later than in the other areas of Europe — and this delayed actually offered Istrian wines a sizeable commercial advantage: they might no longer be the cini di San Marco but they were once again being exported to many countries in Europe. At the 1876 Marburg Wine Exposition, for example, they were a great success and — together with wines from Puglia — managed to penetrate even the French market (in crisis due to the fall in domestic production). In 1879 Istrian Terrano was even being shipped regularly to Mumbai!

As for downy mildew; that had been a relatively early arrival in Istria. The infection was already noted in the vines of the Klosterneuburg institute in 1874 and, despite all the Aus- trian authorities’ efforts to prevent its spread, would soon be in the fields of the Pisan area; the first devastating effects were to be seen in the fertile Secišane valley. This was the period when the direction of the Parenzo in- stitute was taken over by a agronomist of great importance, the Anti-bor Carlo Hugues. A pupil of Ottavi at Casale Mon- ferrato, Hugues had then taught at Perugia, Assisi, Spole- to, Rovereto and Gorizia before taking on the directorship at Parenzo in 1882. He would thereafter make a very im- portant contribution to both viticulture and winemaking in the region, initiating extensive research into: the use of American stocks for grafting; possible defences against the cryptogam responsible for mildew; methods of widening ampelographic variety in a region which had lost so many of the vines first planted centuries before by the Romans and Venetians. Hugues thus experimented with the intro- duction of varieties of Bordeaux, but also strove to improve traditional Istrian wines (for example, Terrano) in order to consolidate the reputation they had acquired outside Tri- este and the region itself. His writings on the subject are still strikingly modern, both for the viticultural techniques he proposes and the general awareness he shows of the problems facing the region (one of the first of them being sufficient water supplies for agricultural and civil uses). In this time of great economic, social and technological change, Istria at the end of the nineteenth century would increasingly find itself more attached to the Austro-Hungar- ian empire than to the Venice with which it had such close historical links. Steam ships replaced the old trabucco sail boats and the bragozzi that had for centuries connected its
coast with the Venetian lagoon and the shores of the Veneto; transported by rail, pressed Istrian grapes were made into wine in Austria; castellane [wine barrels] travelled by road to Styria. Thus the sea gradually lost its centuries-old role as a means of connection - a connection that was not even re-established when, after the First World War, Italy briefly governed the entire area from Venice to Dalmatia. The long period of harmony within the upper Adriatic was over, and suddenly other languages and voices would be heard in the long-abandoned vineyards. In fact, for a long time, the wonderful landscape described by Tommasini would be left neglected. The clay coronassi [embankments] of the landscape around Piran crumbled, and young oak saplings reclaimed land that had been worked for centuries. Who knows when the last traboccolo transported a few casketi [casks] of Istrian wine? Who can name the members of the crew that, having bid their cheerful farewells in the cool of a wine cellar, set about storing those casks in the hold? Certainly one of the last to sail such routes was Biagio Marin, the great early-twentieth century poet of the Adriatic, who – together with his father – used to visit Istria regularly, and has left us this evocative description of that noble land:

Land of red pulp
Under a cobalt sky,
With clouds high above
In an unquiet evening.
Houses overlooking deserted seas,
Their wide dark eyes
Watching ships
Pass slow and solemn.
O, warm, red soil,
The blood in our veins;
Olive trees in the shade
Moving to old lullabies.

Fires in the hearth
With the smell of cypress wood,
And flames reflected
In our cemeteries.
September wine harvests
With the sky already sickly,
With the warm breath of wine must
Between the vines.
This was a hard land,
Yet gave us smooth oil
And fresh evenings,
And embracing song.
A life without suffering.
A ship ready at the quay.
Rosemary growing in the garden,
Peace flowing in each vein.
O Istria, our cradle,
The torment of our hearts.
The sea beneath the moon
Sings our sorrow.
We hear your voice
Arriving from each port;
There, under the crosses,
Our dead still lie.

Nowadays we are all part of Europe. But will that Europe have a real Adriatic, capable of linking together the peoples on both sides of the sea in full respect of the place’s history? Who knows, perhaps Adriatic viticulture will be able to play its part, bringing to this sea and these lands the peace and prosperity they deserve.
Wine was an important business for the Venetian Republic, with the city imposing a style and taste that would continue for centuries. Fine connoisseurs, the Venetians would make the wines of Friuli one of the most prestigious parts of the produce they marketed, as well as using them for what we would now call high-level “public relations.” There is ample documentary evidence of the importance attributed to Friuli wines: dating from as early as 1365, it continues right up to the middle of the eighteenth century, a time when the Venetian market saw the ever greater presence of Picolit, a wine that can be said to have “made history.”

Prior to that, the wine from Friuli was basically Ribolla. In fact, it was Ribolla which the Commune of Udine would serve to their new Venetian governor when he first made his entrance into the city—a custom which documents record in the years 1365, 1368 and 1393. Clearly this was a much appreciated wine of some prestige: Sanudo records in his Diary that the Venetian Senate itself would (in October 1592) order that do bote de vin [two barrel of wine] from Rosazzo (that is, Ribolla) should be sent to the emperor Charles V, who was about to arrive in the territories of the Republic.

At the end of the eighteenth century the Venetian market was dominated by Burgundy wines. These were so famous—and so expensive—as to provoke this comment by Antonio Zanon, an Udine wine merchant with a shop in Venice (whose role in the history of Picolit we will come to shortly): “The moment will come when the fanatical taste for Burgundy will come to an end. When our descendants see the huge prices paid for this wine, they will think that it was not some ordinary wine to be served at table but rather some sort of celestial nectar. The difference in price [between Burgundy and Friuli wines] must be something like forty to one.”

This renown of Burgundy wines led the Friuli-born Lodovico Bertoli to issue a sort of oenological challenge. In 1747, the 59-year-old would publish in Venice a short book entitled Le vigne ed il vino di Borgogna in Friuli [Burgundy vines and wines in Friuli]. In his detailed analysis of the European wine market, he observed that “for a long time, the French alone have been the ones selling this profitable product throughout Europe. And to challenge this monopoly he would plant—at Biauzzo, in the lower Friuli area—a vine that the locals considered revolutionary: derived from those in Burgundy, it provided high yields per hectare. Bertoli then looked to France for the methods of vinification to be used with that crop, aiming for a colour that was delicate ruby (rather than the intense red generally preferred in Friuli) and therefore closer to the tastes of the Venetian consumer. The wine he ultimately produced was judged to be excellent. This verdict was confirmed by Bertoli’s own “market research” in Venice itself, where the few bottles he sold of his (unidentified) wine were considered so good that the contents were taken to be French. He comments “It would
have been wonderful if someone had then said ‘Discerning gentlemen, the wine that you have bought, and which you hold to be the best Burgundy, is not even Burgundy wine but wine from Friuli!’ You would have heard them yelling as if a wolf were after them!’

A contemporary of Bertoli’s was the Friuli-born count Fabio Asquini (1726-1818), whose vineyards were at Fagagna. Founder and then secretary (1765-1780) of Udine’s Società Agricola Pratica, he was a dynamic and astute figure whose commercial acumen was far above average, and it was he who would make Picolit the very symbol of Friuli winemaking. Thanks to his endeavours, the wine would, from the middle of the eighteenth century onwards, take advantage of Venice’s position in all the markets of Europe to conquer the affections of the continent’s wealthiest consumers. Right up to the end of the century and beyond, it would remain Europe’s most famous and celebrated sweet wine.

This was a period when Venice was a trendsetter, and thus for a winemaker to see his product served at banquets given by the most fashionable of the Venetian aristocracy was what seeing his wines included in the cellars of Florence’s Enoteca Pinchiorri or New York’s Le Cinque would be for a modern-day producer. Hence it was no accident if Asquini chose Venice as the centre of his marketing and promotion strategy. So, for example, his Picolit makes its appearance in the list of fine wines served at the wedding banquet for Sig. Alvise Contarini and Caterina Civran, held in Venice in 1755 – a list which makes it clear how all the finest wines in the world made their way to the Venetian market: "Tokai, Capo di Buona Speranza, Borgogna, Sciampagna, Graves, Canarie, Reno, Pazaret, Tintiglia di Rota, Malvasia di Canarie, Malaga di Spagna, Saragozza, Vermuth, Moscato di Canarie, Peralta, Setuva abboccato [medium sweet], Setuva asciutto [dry], Monte Moro, Palma, Ongaria, Madeira, Moscato di Cipro, Vino di Cipro Vecchio, Contralt dolce, Rosazzo bianco, Contralt rosso, Monte Libano, Lamel, San Lorenz, Scopolo and Picolit.”

Thereafter, Picolit earned a place in the most prestigious markets, with Asquini dispatching it to London, Paris, Amsterdam, Russia, various cities in Germany and, in Italy, to Genoa, Milan, Naples and Ancona (to name but a few). On a number of occasions he supplied the courts of the French monarch, the court of the House of Savoy in Turin and the Austrian emperor on a visit to Trieste; the latter
would, in fact, describe Picolit as “better than any other wine.” It would also seem that at the beginning of the nineteenth century a shipment was sent to the United States. The papal court at Castel Gandolfo was another appreciative customer. Looking at the history of Count Asquini’s business from a modern perspective, we see that his Picolit was one of the most interesting innovations in the wine market of the day: indeed, a number of Asquini’s insights are just as applicable nowadays as they were 250 years ago, providing a textbook example of marketing strategy.

Large-scale sales began in November 1762, with a total of 264 bottles being sold; 112 of these were of a size subsequently abandoned (0.82 litres), while the rest were the classic “half-jug” measure of 0.61 litres. The peak years for sales were 1777 (4,712 bottles) and 1785 (4,757 bottles), revealing how rapid growth had been. Over the period 1801-1805 annual sales might be as high as 1,500 bottles, but thereafter there was a sharp decline, to 147 bottles in 1811 (the last year for which we have figures). Nevertheless, there was a 43-year period (from 1762-1805) during which sales were 1777 (4,712 bottles) and 1785 (4,757 bottles), consequently abandoned (0.82 litres), while the rest were the 264 bottles being sold; 112 of these were of a size subsequently abandoned (0.82 litres), while the rest were the classic “half-jug” measure of 0.61 litres. The peak years for sales were 1777 (4,712 bottles) and 1785 (4,757 bottles), revealing how rapid growth had been. Over the period 1801-1805 annual sales might be as high as 1,500 bottles, but thereafter there was a sharp decline, to 147 bottles in 1811 (the last year for which we have figures). Nevertheless, there was a 43-year period (from 1762-1805) during which sales of a wine that would become a symbol of its region was Hungarian Tokay. This meant that, at the time of Asquini’s first major attempts to promote his Picolit, his main rival in this niche market was (Hungary was part of the Austro-Hungarian empire, then embroiled in the Seven Years War, 1756-1763). Asquini’s marketing strategy was clear: his wine had to capture the highest and most profitable market, where customers were the aristocracy and the upper ranks of the clergy. To achieve this goal, he adopted very precise tactics. For example, fully conscious of the importance of marketing and the need to have an outlet in Venice, one of contemporary Europe’s major cities, he granted exclusive sales rights there to his friend and fellow Friulian, the afore-mentioned Antonio Zanon (the only one of Asquini’s customers to have such a contract).

### Packaging

Asquini’s Picolit was sold in Murano-glass bottles, whose design and production was the work of the Alla Vera Amicizia glass-works owned by Antonio Seguso: “They were retouched in refined green glass, pinced in the middle and smooth on the surface.” His commercial acumen also led Asquini to create both a trademark and a label (to tell the truth, there were two marked “Picolit di Fagagna” and “Picolit del Friuli”) in order to defend his product against imitators attracted by its success.

### Distribution

As we have seen, Zanon was the only customer to whom Asquini granted exclusive sales rights. Elsewhere, the producer observed, “I thought it better to distribute my product through many outlets rather than bind myself to a single one. That might have been easier and even more advantageous, but decision was inspired by the desire to maintain the contacts I had built and not to risk being left isolated.”

No detail was neglected. For example, he maintained contact with customers in periodic letters through which he collected comments on the quality of the wine – essential for someone who, remarkably, was “teetotal from birth.”

The success of Picolit, however, not only stimulated competition from other vineyards in Friuli but also led to the appearance on the market of outright fakes. Asquini would complain: “In Venice Picolit is sold with my own label, falsified, damaging the reputation of my own wine, which was the first – and only one – to be on the market.” In 1777 he was thus obliged to print a poster in which customers were invited to apply solely to him or the firm of Antonio Zanon in Venice if they wanted to guarantee they were buying genuine Picolit.

After his death in 1818, Picolit would be forgotten about, and it would take another 150 years before it re-appeared its former splendour. The credit for this goes to the family of the Counts Perusini-Antonini of Rocca Bernarda (Friuli), who first nurtured back to productivity the original vines and then, in the period after the Second World War, successfully reintroduced Picolit onto wine markets. Their achievement was not only of viticultural-oenological importance but also of cultural significance. As Luigi Veronelli would write in 1959: “I do not think that Italy has a more noble wine than [Picolit]. It was the true gem of Friulian oenology, and could be the pride of Italian oenology as a whole if only one could manage to introduce complete consistency into the methods of cultivation and vinification. Its qualities would then make Picolit for Italy what Chateau Yquem is for France.” That comment was made in the first edition of his Vini d’Italia, and since then Veronelli’s hopes have been answered. Picolit is once more the Prince of Friulian wines. Now, as in Asquini’s day, it is made from raisin grapes whose must ferments in small wooden barrels, achieving a result that is very feminine in character. This is a wine of golden or amber hue, whose aroma enchant you, whose soft, elegant and refined accents are irresistible. Such a wine deserves one’s full and intense love – a love that appreciates all its nuances, its full range of tonalities. When this happens, the silent and penetrating strength of the wine makes itself felt to the full, enveloping you in its warm embrace. Enjoyed with oyster and sea truffles, it is divine; with pumpkin gnochi and truffles, sublime; with melting Gorgonzola on Car- nia Formaggi front cheese, almost disturbing. Foie gras marinated in Picolit can be matched by nothing on earth, whilst marconudel (a traditional type of Friulian sausage) eaten with Picolit is astonishing, and slices of foie gras cooked in Picolit – with a hint of raspberry vinegar – are the height of refinement. And with desserts? No, the wine would be wast- ed. But as a dessert wine on its own? Of course! But most of all as a wine of love.
Part III
RENASCENT VINEYARDS

Carlo Favero

Since its foundation, the Consorzio Vini Venezia has focused its attention upon viticulture within Venice and its lagoon, mindful of the role that wine had in the life and trade of the Venetian Republic. It is this city that saw the start of a major chapter in the history of wine in Europe, and then of vine-growing and wine-making within the territory of the Veneto. Aiming to bring new life to this glorious phase in our past, we have undertaken a far-ranging project of exploration and analysis in order to “recover” some of the lagoon’s old vineyards.

Together with Attilio Scienza, some years ago we began work on a large project of research in order to identify the forgotten vines and vineyards within Venice and its surrounding islands. Technicians from universities (Padua and Milan) and from the Centro di Ricerca per la Viticoltura in Conegliano, would – together with Tiberio Scozzafava from the University of Berlin and some friends in Venice – undertake investigation of the individual trellis vines and vineyards that are to be found within the lagoon’s monasteries and gardens, our hope was to discover some plants that had survived the phylloxera epidemics of the nineteenth century. Assistance here was provided by the Associazione Laguna nel Bicchiere, a group of enthusiasts dedicated to restoring old and neglected vineyards. The scientific results of this research are described in a chapter of this book. And, with the support of the Regional Government of the Veneto, some of the more interesting material acquired was used to “redevelop” a vineyard on the island of Torcello which dates back to the 1970s.

Why on Torcello? Research carried out by Christian Rossi showed that the Napoleonic land register described a total of 31.6 hectares on the island as being “arable land, vineyards and fruit orchards”, whilst Mazzorbo had 28.3 hectares, Burano 104 hectares and Sant’Erasmo as much as 188 hectares. Thus, on Torcello and the islands to the north of the lagoon there were farming concerns of some size – a sure sign that the fruits produced were not just for household consumption but intended for the market in Venice. Furthermore, the Baslini family welcomed the project with enthusiasm, making available to us a charming corner of the island – a gesture for which we are truly grateful.

At the time of the Romans the people on Torcello lived by fishing, hunting and, probably, salt-gathering. The real development on the island came in the seventh century, with the arrival on the mainland of barbarian invaders: in 639 the Longobards conquered Altino, whose fleeing inhabitants took refuge on the islands to the north of the lagoon, the population on Torcello and its neighbouring islands thus increased, with the building of houses, churches and monasteries. There followed centuries of great splendour. But then, in the fourteenth-fifteenth-century, came long and inexorable decline; the population being drawn away to the islands around Venice, which were more commercially vibrant and provided a healthier environment: as the northern lagoon silted up, large marshy areas had formed, meaning that malaria had become widespread. A significant return of agriculture activity here would only come after land-reclamation projects, which included the redirection
of rivers (so they no longer emptied into the lagoon) and the building of the *conterminazione lagunare* (consolidation of the inland boundaries of the lagoon). The Director of the Centro Studi Torcellani, Marco Molin, informed us that our vineyard occupies ground containing the ruins of the old church complex of San Giovanni Evangelista, which had been one of the island’s most important religious/economic centres throughout the Middle Ages. It was here that the young women from eminent Venetian families – for example, the Orseolo, Mocenigo, Querini and Dollin – received their education or took the veil, the abbesses and nuns of this Benedictine convent boasting some of the most ancient aristocratic pedigrees in the city. One very important date in the history of the vast complex was 1009, when Felicita Orseolo became abbess of the convent; she was the daughter of the doge Pietro Orseolo II and sister of Orso Orseolo, the bishop who would be responsible for the rebuilding of the cathedral of Torcello in the form we see now. It was during this period that the convent received the relic of St Barbara of Nicomedia – then, as now, patron saint of sailors, and subsequently of gunners and miners (or any of those whose work involves fire in any of its forms). The arrival here from the East of reliquiae that were venerated throughout Christendom would make this lagoon convent a veritable place of pilgrimage, attracting numerous visitors annually (some of them arriving in quite magnificent style). However, due to the aforementioned decline of Torcello in the fourteenth-fifteenth century, these places too would become a sort of backwater, with the religious houses finding it difficult to survive.

By the time of the fall of the Republic in 1797, ideas had changed completely, and the new government would suppress what survived of the San Giovanni Evangelista convent in 1810, applying the Napoleonic laws regarding the closure of religious houses; the possessions of these foundations thence became public property and might be used for military purposes (or sold to private buyers), whilst their art works were seized, sold or wantonly destroyed. Bare shells, the church and convent would then be demolished just a few years later. The only surviving traces of that past glory are a few archaeological remains and the villa in the Venetian Gothic style which now belongs to the Baslini family. It once housed the convent’s guests quarters and the St. Barbara school. Work on the restoration of the vineyard was predicated upon the desire to maintain biodiversity in full respect of the island’s environment, history and architecture; hence rows of white-grape vines alternated with rows of black grape vines, and rows of vines alternated with rows of other fruit plants. The terrain was analysed and the level of average high tides measured (in order to evaluate the risk of the vines being submerged by the rising water). As for the grafting stocks used, they were chosen on the basis of chemical analysis, in particular with regard to their reaction to salinity. The major part of the project was laid out during the winter of 2014, whilst the trellis vines and other rows will be completed as soon as the plants begin to propagate.

2014 also saw work on the vineyard of the monastery of Santa Maria di Nazareth in Cannaregio within the city of Venice, a religious house which belongs to the Veneto Province of the Discalced Carmelites. The monks of this religious order had first arrived in Venice in 1633, but it was only in 1649 that they settled in their present location in Cannaregio; on 23 August that year they purchased from the nobleman Francesco Venier a few houses and gardens extending as far as the lagoon in a location near the church of the Monastery of Santa Lucia. Five years later, after the demolition of the existing structures and construction work to designs by the architect Baldassare Longhena, the monastery, church and garden house complex were ready, with the Discalced Carmelites moving into the new premises at the beginning of 1654. It should be pointed out that it was common practice...
in Venice for religious houses to be complete with a nearby area of green that supplied the monks and nuns with vegetables, fruit – and vineyards. This was quite fitting in this case, given that the Discalced Carmelites take their name from one of the most beautiful hills in Palestine – Mount Carmel – which overlooks the city of Haifa and the Mediterranean beyond. The Hebrew word Karmel actually means “garden in flower”, and in the Latin translation of the Song of Songs, when the poet wishes to praise his beloved he compares the beauty of her head to that of Mount Carmel (Caput tuum ut Carmelus). Similarly, the prophet Isaiah, when describing the splendour and majesty of the future Messiah, speaks of him as surrounded with the glories of Mount Lebanon and clothed with all the beauties of Mount Carmel (Gloria Libani data est ei, decor Carmel et Saron). The great symbolic significance of this mount is made all the clearer when Isaiah adds that, with the coming of the Messiah, Justice will be set aside for the cultivation of medicinal plants – in particular, lemon balm (Melissa officinalis) for use in the making of melissa water and other related products. The project involves the nurture of existing vines and the planting of others obtained from Venice and around the lagoon. The vineyard will, therefore, have certain local varieties that have always been present in a city where, at one time, no garden was without its Marzemina, Recaldina or Rabosa vines.

For the completion of this fascinating work thanks go to the Order of the Discalced Carmelites, the architect Giorgio Furti and to Michele Savorgnano. As the above account reveals, this scheme bears witness to the combined goals of both the Consorzio Vini Venezia and the Order of the Carmelites. Working together, they aim for a historically accurate restoration of this valuable garden-vineyard which respects the demands of sustainable agriculture and acknowledges the health advantages of open recreational space. At the same time, the project fully recognises the spiritual and aesthetic character of this oasis of silence within the surrounding bustle of tourism.
Venice had a long tradition as a centre for the wine trade, but much less so as a centre for the production of wine; this was largely due to the fact that the Republic had chosen to focus on maritime trade rather than a mainland empire (coltivare el mar e lassar star la tera). However, vines were grown both in the city and on the lagoon islands – sometimes to provide decorative pergolas that offered cool shade, sometimes as a source of table grapes and the fruit used to make wine intended for family consumption or religious functions.

Various bodies have been involved in recent research into viticulture within the lagoon: the universities of Padua and Milan, the Consorzio Vini Venezia and the Centro di Ricerca per la Viticoltura (Conegliano, near Treviso). Their work was part of a wider framework of initiatives aiming to protect viticultural biodiversity which have been financed by the European Union, national and regional governments and local institutions. The goal of each of these was to identify, protect and properly exploit the diversity to be found in local vineyards, the material being both an object of study and a genetic resource that might be used in improving modern-day vines. The most interesting products of this research were here used to create samples for propagation in two vineyards – one on the island of Torcello, the other in the gardens of the monastery of the Discalced Carmelites in Venice itself.

On-site exploration and research would have been impossible without the kind collaboration of religious communities, companies and private individuals, each of which allowed their vines to be inspected and samples to be taken. Such work was headed by Tiberio Scozzafava Jagger, an expert on the ecological problems issues facing the lagoon, and resulted in the examination of areas previously unstudied, either because they were difficult to reach or because they were private property.

In order to identify the provenance, nature and scale of vine germplasm within the lagoon different to that of the vines already well known to us, the study took the form of blanket coverage over the entire area, with one survey in 2010 and one in 2012. The plants sampled were selected on the basis of certain criteria: the fact that the owners could not provide precise information as to their identity, and that their appearance did not fit with the morphology of known vines. The teams carrying out these study surveys comprised experts from the university of Milan and from Consorzio Vini Venezia, with samples being taken in 11 places; these ranged from the north of the lagoon (the islands of Torcello, Le Vigne and Sant’Erasmo), through the city of Venice itself to...
the southern area of the lagoon (Lido Alberoni, the island of San Lazzaro degli Armeni and Pellestrina). An example of how the sites were mapped is given in the information files attached, which cover the island of Torcello and the monasteries of San Lazzaro degli Armeni and Pellestrina. A series of laboratory analyses were used to extract from young leaves the DNA of some 70 plants sampled, listed in the table. These modern methods made it possible to establish the genetic “fingerprint” of the plant – that is, its molecular profile. Comparing this data for each of the samples with that for known cultures already available in genetic archives, the sampled plants could quickly be identified. The method used is, in fact, widely employed at an international level as a means of identifying vine varieties: such identification on the basis of morphology alone would be long, complex and require the particular skills and knowledge of expert ampelographers (professional figures who are increasingly rare). In our research, the molecular profile of each sample was compared with the information in the databank of the Centro di Ricerca per la Viticultura Veneto Alberoni, which is dual use. This was

short note on the techniques of molecular analysis

Genome DNA was extracted from young leaves pulverized through liquid nitrogen treatment using a commercially available kit (DNasea Plant Mini Kit – QIAGEN, Hilden Germany). The DNA was quantified using electrophoresis of 0.8% agarose gel for comparison with the DNA of lambda phage. The DNA extracted from the samples was used as a template for amplification via PCR (Polymerase Chain Reaction) of 11 SSR (Single Sequence Repeat) loci. The PCR was obtained using primers marked with fluorescence at 5’ extremities, constructed on regions flanking the respective SSR loci. The products of this amplification were analysed using a capillary electrophoresis system: ABI Prism 310 Genetic Analyser and ABI 3130xl (Applied Systems – Life Technologies, Foster City CA USA). This made it possible to determine the size of each allele in each locus. Each of the identified alleles was given a size in bp (base pairs) using the following software: GeneMapper 3.10 (Applied Biosystems – Life Technologies).
## Table - List of plants sampled in order of location

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>N.</th>
<th>Location of sample</th>
<th>Plant variety</th>
<th>Notes</th>
<th>Use</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Arsenale</td>
<td>Merlot</td>
<td>Vitis vinifera L.</td>
<td>wine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Arsenale</td>
<td>Moscato palbo</td>
<td>Vitis vinifera L.</td>
<td>wine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Arsenale</td>
<td>Vermentino</td>
<td>Vitis vinifera L.</td>
<td>wine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Arsenale</td>
<td>Vermentino</td>
<td>Vitis vinifera L.</td>
<td>wine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Carmelitani Scalzi</td>
<td>Albana</td>
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<td>wine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Carmelitani Scalzi</td>
<td>Nebbiolo/Flora Promesse</td>
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<td>wine/table</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Corte Sconta</td>
<td>Tocai friulano</td>
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<td>wine</td>
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<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Corte Sconta</td>
<td>Tocai friulano</td>
<td>Vitis vinifera L.</td>
<td>wine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Corte Sconta</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Giudecca</td>
<td>Garganega</td>
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<td>Garganega</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
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<tr>
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<tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>50</td>
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<tr>
<td>51</td>
<td>Torcello</td>
<td>Donna</td>
<td>Vitis vinifera L.</td>
<td>wine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>52</td>
<td>Torcello</td>
<td>Glera</td>
<td>Vitis vinifera L.</td>
<td>wine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>53</td>
<td>Torcello</td>
<td>Malvasia istriana</td>
<td>Vitis vinifera L.</td>
<td>wine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>54</td>
<td>Torcello</td>
<td>Malvasia istriana</td>
<td>Vitis vinifera L.</td>
<td>wine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>55</td>
<td>Torcello</td>
<td>Reggia dei vigneti</td>
<td>Vitis vinifera L.</td>
<td>table grape</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>56</td>
<td>Torcello</td>
<td>Tocai friulano</td>
<td>Vitis vinifera L.</td>
<td>wine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>57</td>
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<td>Vitis vinifera L.</td>
<td>wine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>58</td>
<td>Torcello</td>
<td>Tocai friulano</td>
<td>Vitis vinifera L.</td>
<td>wine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>59</td>
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<td>Vitis vinifera L.</td>
<td>wine</td>
</tr>
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<td>60</td>
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<td>Vitis vinifera L.</td>
<td>wine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>61</td>
<td>Vignole</td>
<td>Basco noir</td>
<td>interspecific hybrid</td>
<td>wine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>62</td>
<td>Vignole</td>
<td>Glera</td>
<td>Vitis vinifera L.</td>
<td>wine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>63</td>
<td>Vignole</td>
<td>Glera</td>
<td>Vitis vinifera L.</td>
<td>wine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>64</td>
<td>Vignole</td>
<td>Raboso veneto</td>
<td>Vitis vinifera L.</td>
<td>wine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>65</td>
<td>Vignole</td>
<td>Verduzzo trevigiano</td>
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<tr>
<td>66</td>
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<td>Verduzzo trevigiano</td>
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<tr>
<td>67</td>
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<td>wine</td>
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<tr>
<td>68</td>
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<td>Verduzzo trevigiano</td>
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<td>wine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>69</td>
<td>Vignole</td>
<td>unknown G1</td>
<td>interspecific hybrid</td>
<td>wine</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As perpound on Boreale
Molecular profile of the Verduzzo trevigiano variety obtained using 11 microsatellite markers.

The different colors of the peaks are the result of 4 fluorescent molecules combined to exploit the signals produced by each marker. The grey and pink bands in the background are the bins set up by the reference varieties used in recording individual data.
NOTES
Located to the immediate north of Burano, Torcello is in the middle of a sandbar area delimited to the S-W by the Borgognoni Canal, to the S-E by the Sant’Antonio Canal and to the north by the Torcello Canal. To its south is a small island linked by the famous Ponte del Diavolo [Devil’s Bridge], which – like the Ponte del Chiodo in Cannaregio – still has the original form of bridges in Venice (without parapet). A veritable corner of paradise on this small island is the property of the Baslini family: grounds occupied by the remains of an old church and convent which are now laid out as a beautiful vineyard and orchard alongside an old Venetian house. In the lower part of the garden there is a vineyard that was killed off a few years ago due to continually flooding with saline water as a result of a break in the protective embankment. Though well-kept and perfectly healthy, the main vineyard too shows clear signs of damage by such water. The cordon-trained vines grow to a height of 120 cm, with 230 cms between the rows and 120 cm between the vines in a row, with the yield per plant being very low: 0.5 to 1.5 kg. And only half the plants yield fruit. The varieties that can be identified are widespread at an international level. There is Moscato, Trebbiano, Raboso Tocai friulano, Glera and varieties of table grape. Obviously this is not the usual habitat for vines. Some plants show symptoms of various problems caused by salt water; there are also some weak vines and others that have more abundant vegetation.
MONASTERY OF THE DISCALCED CARMELITES

LOCATION
Cannaregio

GPS COORDINATES
45° 26’ 32.93” N 12° 19’ 14.10” E

ALTITUDE
1 metre above sea level

PEDOLOGICAL CHARACTERISTICS
Cleared muddy / sandy terrain

VINE FORMATION
Trellis and cordon-trained with spur

DATE OF EXAMINATION
20/08/2013

NOTES
The Monastery of Santa Maria di Nazareth is located alongside the Venice railway station of Santa Lucia. Within its grounds there is garden with a small vineyard, an orchard, a vegetable garden and a few beds used to grow lemon balm.

The property is owned by the regional Province of the Order of Discalced Carmelites, who take their name from Mount Carmel, the most beautiful hill in Palestine (in Hebrew the name Karmel means “garden in flower”).

When first visited, the garden vineyard and orchard showed clear signs of fungal infections. There are 11 rows trained in Sylvoz formation with 200 cm between each row and 100/130 cm between each vine in the rows; the vitality of the vineyard is uneven, given many of the individual vines are missing. All around the garden there are the remains of trellis work; at certain points maintenance of the surrounding walls has caused damage to the plants, many of which are dead.

Many varieties are clearly recognisable, some of them international and some of them local: Moscati, Glera, Rabosi. There are also numerous plants of table grapes, amongst which are some Promised Land vines.

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Essays
THE PALLADIAN VILLA ZENO AT CESSALTO

The Administration of a Wine-making Estate in the Sixteenth-Seventeenth Century

Andrea Peressini

"Here in our area one mainly makes red wines for Venice from a black grape called Recandina, others call it Rabosa because of its strong character. And the real way to do this is to collect the grapes as usual in barrels filled using baskets."

(G. Agostinetti, Cento e dieci ricordi ..., Venice 1697)

In January 1402 a comet appeared in the sky and was taken as a ‘herald of good news’, an auspicious omen for the Venetian policy of expansion into the terraferma. It was, in fact, in the fifteenth century that Venice would expand and complete its Stato da Terra [land empire], which ultimately ran from the river Adda in the west to the River Isonzo in the east, from the Prealps in the north to the river Po in the south. These possessions were to consolidate the fundamental links between land and water within a Republic that stretched from sea to mountains: it is no coincidence that Jacopo de Barbari’s great six-sheet perspective map of the city opts for a bird’s eye view, looking from the south towards the mountains in the background. However, in spite of these conquests on the mainland, Venice did not abandon the policy of maritime links with the Levant. The east, after all, was the source of the economic wealth and diplomatic prestige which, by the fifteenth century, had made La Serenissima into a European power, a place which the chronicles of the day referred to as ‘still the richest and most opulent city in the world’, where many enjoyed a “life of luxury”.

Both rapid and effective, Venice’s expansion onto the mainland was often due to the automatic submission of a number of the region’s main cities. However, such growth was not welcome to other powers in Italy and Europe, with Pope Julius II accusing Venice of striving to become “monarch of Italy”. It was this which led to the formation of the League of Cambrai in 1508, bringing together most of the states in Italy and the major nations of Europe (France, Spain and the Holy Roman Empire). Their forces would then defeat the Republic at the Battle of Agnadello (1509) and even advance as far as the shores of the lagoon, however, thanks to tireless diplomatic negotiations, Venice managed in the Peace of Bologna (signed in 1530) to re-acquire a Stato da Terra that extended as far as the river Adda. Thereafter the Republic had unlimited jurisdiction over the whole of its terraferma, and thus could control the course of the rivers that flowed into its lagoon – taking measures to safeguard
In this way the Venetian Republic adopted policies aiming to modernise the mainland’s agriculture through substantial capital investment. 

The Venetians who became landowners brought a new entrepreneurial spirit to agriculture, introducing new cycles of crops (such as maize and rice) which ultimately made this agricultural revolution into a dietary revolution as well. At the same time, great efforts went into encouraging the planting of vineyards.

In ceding their land to the tenants whose hard work would make it bear fruit, landowners drew up very detailed contracts; to this end they had to hire land-measurers and land surveyors, whose task was to increase land-reclamation and irrigation projects in order to meet the need for more crops and livestock. That decision can be seen in relation to an ongoing cultural debate in the first half of the century between Aloise Cornaro, an eager champion of such reclamation projects, and Cristoforo Sabbadino, the first “land surveyor” for the body would make the organisation. The correct reading of these land-surveyor documents required the information given in the accompanying key, together with the image’s scale (units of measurement were often local and varied from place to place) and geographical alignment (indicated by a wind rose). The manner in which this information was given obviously reflected the personnel involved in the survey.

With their depictions of terrain and buildings, these catastici were commissioned by private individuals and public bodies, and required on-site measurements using such instruments as the compasso agrimensorio or portagio [measuring compass] and the bossolo vivo [a ‘live compass’, so called because of its magnetised needle]. The surveyor might also draw on the services of one or more canneggia-tori [topographical surveyors] who served their apprenticeship under him. The data thus collected in a taccuino [notebook] would then be transferred to a visual image by the above-mentioned disegnatore, who employed the usual
Grapevines framing the list of properties in the cadastral register entitled ‘Catastico delle proprietà della Luminaria di Piavon’.

Draughtsman: Costantino Cortellotto, public surveyor, date 1608 (Archivio Parrocchiale di Piavon, Oderzo).

Frontispiece to the Libro de desegni et perticazioni della commissaria Foscarini.

Draughtsman: Panfilo Piazzola, public land surveyor and draughtsman in Venice, date 1567 (Private Collection).
drawing implements as well as a *bouvela morta* (probably a goniometric circle, used in giving visual form to topographical data). The final image, generally on paper glued to canvas, showed the details and elevations of the terrain; it might then be used to make various copies through a technique known as *spolvero* (pin pricks in a sheet of tracing-paper followed the lines of the original placed beneath, which could then be reproduced when fine ink dust was sprinkled over that copy placed on top of a fresh sheet of paper).

These drawings, together with the legally-attested surveyors' reports that accompanied them, are important documents because they highlight the, sometimes conflicting, features of a particular area of territory and its organisation. As examples of this one might cite those that depict an aerial view of the territory of Ceneda near Treviso and of Artegna in the **Patria di Friuli**. Whilst the former was clearly produced to define territorial boundaries, the latter focuses inward, upon the numerous areas of terrain that were used as *beni comunali* (see above). The Ceneda map, dating from 1690, was the work of the public surveyor Stefano Segato of Gaiarine, while the Artegna map, of 1659, was by Benvenuto Bardini, the public surveyor from Tezze di Conegliano. The town of Ceneda (now Vittorio Veneto) and its surrounding villages and districts are all shown harmoniously composed within the gently rolling hills and valleys of the landscape, which is located as a single whole between the areas of Conegliano, Tarzo, Serravalle and Valdobbiadene. With a certain skill, Segato uses dashed and broken lines to render the layout of fields in a landscape of gentle inclines and rounded depressions, with trees occasionally appearing between meadows, arable land and vineyards.

The landscape of the Friuli mountains is much tougher. Bardini renders it in striking colours and strong contrasts; as is common in his survey maps, he provides frames around both the drawing itself and the table within it. One detail that stands out in his map is the dense wood of “chestnut trees”;

![Territory of the town of Ceneda, bordering with Tarzo, Revine, Serravalle and Conegliano. Draughtsman of the copy, Stefano Segato, public surveyor. Drawing authenticated by the Ceneda notary Giacomo Marin on 6 December 1690 (ASVe, Provveditori sopra beni comunali, Disegni, b. 112). Water-coloured pen drawing on paper, 600 x 440 mm.](image-url)
The first areas to undergo agrarian improvements in the sixteenth century were those bordering on the lagoon drainage basin itself – in particular, the areas within the Treviso Marches. These would be mapped in cadastral surveys during the mid-sixteenth century and the improvements would lead to the widespread introduction of viticulture; this activity would then be promoted in the eighteenth century by the Accademia Agraria and, subsequently, by the Scuola Enologica of Conegliano, the first of post-unification Italy (founded in 1876).

As the Arsenale’s gastaldo dei marangoni (carpenters’ steward), Baldassarre Drachio, would mention in his Pensieri, it was from the vineyards of the Marches that Venice acquired the good wine for craftsmen working in its shipyards. Further evidence of the quality of this wine comes in a 1596 letter from the engineer Ottavio Fabri to his brother Tullio, then in Constantinople at the service of the bailo (Venetian ambassador): “It breaks my heart that they forgot to send you two barrels of Montello wine – one red and one white – that would have refreshed you on your journey, even if this year’s turned out quite garbi.”

Along with the Treviso Marches, other sources of wine were the Abruzzo areas of Vasto and Ortona as well as the regions of Romagna and Casal near Ferrara. As Drachio points out, unlike in the past, these wines were now used in the same way as “malvasia wines from Crete, and Zante and all the other places of Romania” (a blanket term for the Levant).
Plan for Villa Zeno, known as Il Donegal, at Cessalto, from Andrea Palladio’s I Quattro Libri (1570).
The territory of the Podesteria (governorship) of Motta between the river Livenza and the Piavon Canal. Draughtsman: Giovanni Trevisan, public surveyor, date 5 September 1535 (ASVe, Savi ed Esecutori alle acque, Disegni Livenza, ris. 19, da 272, 1/2°). This page: 180 181.
areas for related activities – would seem to prove that this Villa was from the start intended as the centre of a viticultural concern.22

The structural features of the wine cellars were designed to make the most efficient use of working time and provide the sort of micro-climate that would yield good-quality wines. With regard these considerations, and the spaces’ functional connection with the outside porticoed areas, Palladio writes: “The cellars must be created below ground and in an enclosed space that is far from all noise, disturbance and smells. They must have light from the east or the north, because light falling from other directions could mean that the sun would heat up the wines which, due to this heat, would become weaker and might spoil. There will be a certain inclination in the floor towards the centre and the floor should be of tiles so that, if any wine is spilt, it can easily be cleaned up. The vats where the wine ferments will be placed under the roof coverings created for said cellars. And they will be so high that their taps will be somewhat higher than the upper hole in the barrels; this is so that, through the use of leather tubes or wooden channels the wine from said vats can easily run into the barrels.”23

According to the Redecima [Taxation Declaration] drawn up in 1566, Marco Zen’s fattoria consisted of 450 fields (around 230 hectares) divided into various farms, each with a farmhouse rented to tenant farmers. The crops were vines, wheat, millet, sorghum and legumes. The part due to the landowner himself was 200 staia of wheat (174 hectolitres), whilst his share of the wine produced was 10 carri (78 hectolitres); but harvests sometimes suffered due to flooding by the Piave.24 The next tax declaration (1571) shows the scale of increase in productivity: the landowner’s share of wheat had risen to 285 staia (246 hectolitres) and his wine share had actually doubled (to 20 carri = 156 hectolitres).25

In order to evaluate how the work of the cellar is organised in Palladio’s design it is interesting to compare this project with another Palladio project: the design and building of Villa Angaran outside Vicenza, whose eponymous owners would have those functional facilities built before work began on the villa in which they were to reside.21 In the present case, of a villa to stand on the site of the old Barbo house, Palladio’s project was inevitably inspired by knowledge of the scale of the agricultural concern concerned – for example, the total area cultivated, the amount yielded per hectare by each type of crop, the number of horses that had to be stabled, the spaces necessary to house farm vehicles and equipment, the number of draught animals, the storage room for cereal crops and the space necessary to house the different phases of wine-making. Furthermore, the design also had to consider the medium/long-term strategy of the farm, so that flexibility in its range and quantity of produce was taken into account. Considered in relation to the space dedicated for use as granaries, barns and stables, the 210 square metres the design envisaged for the wine cellar – with the same area given over to open porticoed

182
183
with that drawn up in 1588 by Vincenzo Scamozzi for proc- arator Giovanni Corner’s villa at Poisolo (Castelfranco) – a design subsequently published in that architect’s Idea dell’Architettura Universale. The later project contains two cellars with a total of 65 barrels, giving an overall capac-
ity of 1,081 hectolitres; and in the “place for the making of wine” there are fifteen vats which can hold 292 hectolitres. Clearly this was a sizeable administrative centre for a farming concern; according to the Redecima of 1582, it was made up of 350 fields (175 hectares), and from those purchased from nearby vineyards. Given this possible variety, one tip the agricultural facilities he envisaged, he also allowed for op-
imal use of space and efficient organisation of equipment. Overall, the cellar could contain 32 barrels, all of the same size and facing each other in two perfectly aligned rows; the cellar at Villa Zeno was specifically designed for this purpose. The open porticoed gallery could house a dozen vats (total capacity: 234 hectolitres), in each of which grapes were pressed by 3-4 men. The cellar was thus equipped for the making, stor-
ing and refinement of wine made from grapes grown on the estate (156 hectolitres) and from those purchased from nearby vineyards. Given this possible variety, one tip the Trevisan-born agronomist Giacomo Agostinetti gives in his handbook on agriculture that any “good factor” should number the barrels and vats, keeping a record of their contents in a notebook. Fully conversant with the working processes of an establish-
ment for the making and commerce of wine, Palladio had calculated the size of the cellar accordingly; as with all of the agricultural facilities he envisaged, he also allowed for adaptability and flexibility in the medium-long term. Nev-
evertheless, by the later years of sixteenth and early years of seventeenth century, this cellar – along with the granar-
ers and barns – would turn out to be inadequate for the needs of the fattoria because more land had been added to the estate and, compared with the 80 carri which the Venetian patricians Alessandro and Domenico (formerly Angelo) Trevisan de-
clared in the Redecima for the nearby Gastaldia (estate) of San Donà in 1566, whilst the landlord’s share of crops had increased. The Redecima of 1582 gives the number of fields as 550 (100 more than in 1566), whilst the landlord’s share of crops had grown to 320 statia of wheat and 28 carri of wine (480 hect-
ilitres). Certainly this was a good level of production if
ganoletic properties which meant that “the merchants of Venice appreciate the dark colour of our wines very high-
ly,” preferring them to other grapes that “though black are more tender – we called them gentle grapes; these Schiave, Farlane, Negroze, Bizzare and similar grapes make good wines but they tend to be gori [cloudy].” To meet market

Illustration with equipment for wine-making, from Agostino Gallo’s agronomical treatise Le vinti giornate dell’agricoltura (1572).
demands, farmer-entrepreneurs preferred to plant “these much appreciated Recandine grapes because of the great profit they yield: they bear a lot of grapes which make good fine wines and contain much more liquid than other grapes. Their wines rarely, if ever go off and when they feel the heat they develop a cherry taste. This is why in our countryside no wine is held in higher esteem. And when it is taken to Venice, it does not suffer ill effects due to the water, and it becomes ever more robust in the warm season, this is why the merchants are happy to take it — all the more so as the populace of that city drink strong red wine.”

Agnostinetti’s handbook also recommends that Marzemino grapes — destined for a niche market — should be grown in gardens that are well-protected by walls, given that this fruit attracted thieves. Within such gardens and vegetable plots there were also areas where new crops were tried out before wholesale cultivation in fields. Further evidence of the viticultural focus of the estate is evident in a drawing of 1658, and — with even greater detail — in a drawing of 1751. Unlike those designed by Palladio, the new barchesse reached as far as the wall around the villa, with direct access from the road which then — as now — runs along the Piavon canal, clearly such ready access made it easier to load and unload barrels from/to the boats bound for Venice.

However, one part of the wine made was destined for the inn (osteria) which Marcantonio Zen had built at Magnadola di Cessalto, the junction of the busy Cal Nova canal and the Piavon canal at a point not far from the Donegal inn (hosteria) which Marcantonio Zen had had built at Magnadola di Cessalto, the junction of the busy Cal Nova canal and the Piavon canal at a point not far from the Donegal estate. Other barrels would make their way to the cellars and the fattoria of the family palazzo in Venice itself, alongside those sent to the city for sale. Another source of wine was also to be found in the 33 barrels and 20 vats in the cellars of the farming estate that Marcantonio had bought at Torre di Mosto on the river Livenza, a place not far from the Villa Zeno itself. The entire concern, therefore, formed a “model farm” which in the first half of the seventeenth century had an overall capacity of 188 barrels (around 3,224 hectolitres) and 88 vats holding a total of 1,715 hectolitres, the producer being intended primarily for the Venetian rather than German market, the latter preferred non bolliti wines to the bolliti wines that were the result of a different process of vinification (the bollito refer to the amount of fermentation). This example of one fattoria serves to illustrate why the wine business was such an important source of income for the State, the duties on wine yielding 559,842 ducats in the years 1617-18 alone. As mentioned, most of the wine was purchased by Venetian merchants. Some inventories drawn up by notaries working for the Cancelleria Inferiore in the city bear witness to the flourishing trade Venice’s wine shops did in the late sixteenth/early seventeenth century. The shops which Francesco Donà — known as Francesco delle Malvasie — kept in the San Cassan areas had a total of 41 barrels of “good muscatel”, 7 barrels of “medium sort” wine and 15 of “bouzehrul malvasia”. And in his magazeni at the Zattere and San Basilio, Alvise Anastasia had 530 bigonzi (that is, 115 hectolitres) of “white wine from overseas” and 117 bigonzi (40 hectolitres) of “red terrano”, with a total of 90 barrels. The same merchant had four boats with a capacity of 68 ‘hold barrels’ for transporting the wine he purchased (or produced) in the countryside around Campo di Pietra in the Oderzo area, near Villa Zeno. As for Giovanni Maria Mascaroni, who lived at San Tomà in Venice, he owned four wine shops, including the Bastione dai Bassi in the San Simeon Profeta area and the Magazzino del Bastione degli Incurabili; on his premises, he sold white and red garbi [a type of malvasia] at a cost estimated at 25 lire per bigonzi, white and red Romania (42 lire per bigonzo), white and red wine from overseas (30 lire per bigonzo), white wine from Ortona (35 lire per conzo), another measure in which wine

was sold), and a sweet white wine from Vicenza (26 lire per conzo), all in all, his merchandise was valued at 4,800 ducats. The number of boats and barges transporting these wine barrels is vividly demonstrated by a coloured drawing of 1746, which shows in great detail the river port of Latisana sul Tagliamento. A boat ferry links the town of Latisana to the village of San Michele on the opposite side of the river, where one can see various timberyards and warehouses for merchandise. And, of course, this important wine trade did not involve only merchants but also bottiere [coopers], trasasadori [decanters], portatori [stevedores], stimatori [assessors] and osti [innkeepers] – all figures described in Pompeo Molmenti’s vivid *Storia di Venezia nella Vita Privata* (1880). It should also be remembered that, a native of Motta di Livenza, the author of that book is himself credited with being the first to produce Chiaretto, a rosé version of Bardolino. 48

I would like to thank Prof. Roberto Zago for his valuable suggestions and the architect Paolo Brescetti for his important comments on the analysis of Palladio’s designs for Villa Zeno.
19) Dieci savi sopra le decime in Rialto, Baciocchi, 1565 (M. S. Marco, reg. 307, n. 158; c. 13).
31) ASVe, Redecima 1582 (B. 36, n. 7).
32) ASVe, Dieci savi alle decime sopra Rialto (Cessalto), b. 40, n. 25.
33) ASVe, Miscellanea notai diversi, b. 36, n. 7.
34) ASVe, Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani, b. 40, n. 26 (28-29 Settembre 1856).
35) G. Agostinetti, Cento e diretti ricoveri ... pp. 24, 96.
36) G. Agostinetti, Cento e diretti ricoveri ... pp. 259-260.
37) ASVe, Miscellanea notai diversi, b. 36, n. 7 (27 Novembre 1954).
38) See the entry by M. G. Sarti in Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani, Roma, 75 (2012), pp. 453-457.

26) Conversione male use of the measurement standards in the territory of Venice: barrels 1: campo = 1/2 trefola = 3.204.64 m^3; dry substances: 1 campo = 866.812 litres, 1 quartier = 4 quarters = 3240.32 litres, 1 quartier = 4 quartieri = 12961.28 litres, 1 minimum = 5.541.12 litres, 1 minimum = 5.541.12 litres.
27) The usual size (for vats) was that each contained 25 quarterari (A. Scap, letter in the Cuvieri, Venice 1911, pi. 20).
28) The usual size (for vats) was that each contained 25 quarterari (A. Scap, letter in the Cuvieri, Venice 1911, pi. 20).
29) In calculating the number of barrels, reference was made to what Giuseppe Agostinetti says in his Rialto 1565, where he specifies that “... the usual size [for vats] was that each contained 25 quarterari”.
30) The main reason to choose these sizes can be explained by the repeated use of these sizes. The barrels were used for the transportation of wines and spirits, and they were made to be handled more frequently than the repeated customers. The barrels were made to be handled more frequently than the repeated customers. The barrels were made to be handled more frequently than the repeated customers. The barrels were made to be handled more frequently than the repeated customers.
31) The main reason to choose these sizes can be explained by the repeated use of these sizes. The barrels were used for the transportation of wines and spirits, and they were made to be handled more frequently than the repeated customers. The barrels were made to be handled more frequently than the repeated customers. The barrels were made to be handled more frequently than the repeated customers.
32) The main reason to choose these sizes can be explained by the repeated use of these sizes. The barrels were used for the transportation of wines and spirits, and they were made to be handled more frequently than the repeated customers. The barrels were made to be handled more frequently than the repeated customers. The barrels were made to be handled more frequently than the repeated customers.
There has always been a special relationship between glass drinking-vessels and wine. The ancient Romans appreciated how the transparency of the material brought out the colour of wine, particularly after the development of techniques for glass-blowing; hence their use of blown-glass drinking vessels and tableware. That this use was widespread is clear from the extraordinary number of Roman glass goblets, cups, jugs and small amphorae to be seen in our museums — and by the depictions of such vessels in still-lifes, banquet scenes or tavern signs that figure in the frescoes of Pompeii, Herculaneum and Ostia.

The Romans also appreciated that glass did not alter the organoleptic properties of the wine within it. Significantly, in the banquet described by Petronius — a veritable arbitrer elegantiarum — the rich and vulgar Trimalchio, a man always ready to boast of the rarity of the food he served and the cost of his tableware, had his one-hundred-year-old Falernian wine brought to the table in amphorae made of glass (rather than the terracotta usual for such containers). Trimalchio also boasted that instead of the usual tableware in “Corinthian bronze” – actually an alloy of gold, silver and copper – he preferred glass drinking-vessels: non olunt [they do not smell] he points out, meaning that they do not alter the taste or aroma of the wine. Indeed, he adds, if they were not so fragile, he would even prefer them to solid gold itself (Satyricon, XXXIV 6, L 7).

Roman tableware ranged from veritable masterpieces of craftsmanship to simple functional vessels, the former obviously intended for the higher and wealthier social classes — be they actual patricians or rich arriristi like Trimalchio. Nevertheless, more modest social classes — and even the customers of inns — might use glass goblets, cups, jugs and small amphorae. Developments in glass-blowing techniques on the shores of the Near East towards the middle of the first century BC had drastically reduced the expense and labour required to make simple undecorated glass tableware, and this accounts for the fact that such articles have been found in the graves of far from wealthy Romans buried at the time of the Empire.

After the fall of the Roman empire, the tradition of glass-making would continue to survive (and develop) in the East, whilst in Europe it went into rapid decline. However, the early Middle Ages was not totally without blown-glass tableware. For example, the glass found at certain Longobard sites in Italy which can be dated to a period from the end of the fifth to the beginning of the eighth century, is not totally devoid of originality of design and craft skill; it includes such objects as bowls, small goblets with fine stems, bottles and drinking horns. Drinking-glasses of identical type have also been found in the Venetian lagoon (at Torcello) even though this area did not fall under Longobard rule (Barovier Mentasti 1982, pp. 9-10). While we know that such pieces
from the territories of the Mameluk dynasty – a phenomenon and not – as is often claimed – the result of a decline in the products emerging from the Venetian glass industry would replace the previous tradition of quality glassmaking in Central Asia during the thirteenth century onwards – the furnishings in churches and tombs of the social elite – they were found in tombs whose contents included fine and extremely rare glass of eastern provenance, generally from the Islamic world. These pieces were usually of very thick engraved glass or thin blown glass decorated with polychrome enamels and gold. Brought to Europe either by crusaders and pilgrims returning from the Holy Land or by the trading ships of Venice and the other maritimes of the day (Whitehouse 2010, pp. 45-46), such objects were by their very nature exotic; difficult to get hold of and therefore replace – they were guarded with some care and thus considered ill-suited for social use. Then, as the Middle Ages gave way to the Renaissance, Venetian glassmakers’ kilns provided the market with ever more constant supplies of high-quality glassware, and the tables of the rich and affluent became settings for exhibitions of refined masterpieces of the decorative arts. It was around the year 1400 that Roman Altino and other cities in the upper Adriatic area had glass kilns in operation. The fact that the Venetian glass industry would exist for several centuries suggests that the Venetian glassmakers continued to exercise their skill in a more modest fashion in a kiln whose principle activities were salt-making (through the evaporation of sea water), fishing and trade. What is certain is that subsequent commercial and cultural links between Venice and the Byzantine and Islamic worlds would result in this modest glassmaking becoming much more refined, both technically and aesthetically. The Capitòlare di Murano [Statutes] of the glassmakers’ guild make it clear that by 1278 glass-works were already concentrated on the Murano; the document mentions that it was the ringing of the bell of the church of Santa Maria Assunta on that island which marked the obligatory end of the kilns’ working year. That concentration had been a spontaneous phenomenon and not – as is often claimed – the result of a decision made by the Republic’s Grand Council; the decree of 1291 cited in support of that argument was the recognition of a state of affairs that already existed, and its order that any remaining glass kilns within Venice itself should be dismantled was inspired by safety concerns for a capital that was increasingly more difficult to defend. The techniques of decorating glass with fusible enamels had been imported into Venice during the course of the thirteenth century – meaning ‘pot-bellied recipient’ – and referred to as inghistere, inghistere, and inghashtere, a term which derived from the Greek ᾠγγοσ γαστρα – meaning ‘pot-bellied recipient’ – and referred to their swollen, rounded body. Generally (but not always) complete with a conical heel and a long neck, inghistere possessed an elegance of form which means they would not be out of place alongside some of the most successful examples of contemporary design. Depicted in Venetian and Italian paintings and maps from the Middle Ages right up to the eighteenth century, they were used to contain water, oil, scented or distilled liquids and, above all, wine; this is why great masters and minor artists alike chose to include them in their paintings of The Last Supper. These inghistere were Murano’s main product, along with drinking-glasses for which the term used was at first either ciato or mosolo and later goto (that which still survives in Venetian dialect). Such glasses were either cylindrical or in the form of a truncated cone with smooth sides, however, there was also great demand for glasses described as de ghirlanda et imperlatos [with garland and beads], whose sides were decorated with small beads of glass and a ghirlanda formed by an undulating line making a ring around its base. There were also glasses that were incisati (ribbed with vertical lines). Furthermore, medieval documents contain references to numerous types of drinking-glass whose name is now difficult to interpret. It should also be pointed out that while Murano produced the usual greenish glass, it was renowned for the more highly-priced colourless etrum blanchum; this latter was obtained using a good-quality sodium flux – allume catiato, imported from the East – to which manganese dioxide was added to give a brownish or purple tinge. The techniques of decorating glass with fusible enamels had been imported into Venice during the course of the thirteenth century, and in the period around 1280 to 1350 the method was used to adorn drinking-glasses with various images (icons of saints, courtly scenes, foliage motifs, heraldic crosiers). Such vessels were often signed in enamel – by the artist who did the decoration, men whose names also appear in Murano documents of the day – and oil that supplied a burning wick; it was also essential for the urinali which doctors used when making diagnoses based on an evaluation of the colour and characteristics of a patient’s urine. Another use for glass was in making the carafes used in wine shops, a distinctive characteristic of those vessels being a thin blue line around the mouth, the carafes had to contain a fixed amount and the magistratures responsible for overseeing craft guilds exercised strict control over their manufacture – as well as establishing their price. However, fraud existed. In 1938, for example, the glassmaker Iaco bello di Biondo was found guilty of having – in return for higher payment – supplied some innkeepers with bottles smaller than the regulation capacity (Zecchin II, 1989, p. 18, III, 1990, pp. 137-148). Glass flasks enveloped in straw – for protection during transport – were not yet exclusive to Tuscany, for we know that right up to the end of the thirteenth century at least, straw coverings were being made for the bottles produced on Murano. Curiously, the oldest and most valuable of enamelled Renaissance glassware – the so-called Blue Cup of Bologna (dated 1450-1460), which depicts scenes of The Adoration of the Magi and The Rest on the Flight into Egypt – shows St. Joseph in the latter scene bearing, like any traveller of the day, a straw-wrapped flask hanging at the end of a stick over his shoulder (Trastevere e riflessi 2006, pp. 12, 44-50). The techniques of decorating glass with fusible enamels had been imported into Venice during the course of the thirteenth century, and in the period around 1280 to 1350 the method was used to adorn drinking-glasses with various images (icons of saints, courtly scenes, foliage motifs, heraldic crosiers). Such vessels were often signed in enamel – by the artist who did the decoration, men whose names also appear in Murano documents of the day. Work of this kind – sometimes intact vessels but more generally nothing but...
fragments – has been found over a vast area that stretches from the far north to the far south of Europe, from the Black Sea and the Orient to the Atlantic. The presence of crests reveals that such glassware was known and appreciated far and wide (Baumgartner-Krueger 1988, pp. 126-160; Zecchin 1990, pp. 116-120), the closest an extant piece comes to relating to an aristocratic family near Venice is the Verona cup bearing the crest of the Scaligeri family.

Depictions of feasts and banquets in such scenes as The Last Supper reveal that in the Middle Ages there was no concept comparable to our notion of a set of identical drinking-glasses. Yet while such pictures show tables laid with drinking-vessels of different kinds and shapes, it is true that the wealthier classes were beginning to aspire to a more regular and harmonious set of tableware, above all for use on socially important occasions. This hypothesis is supported by an archaeological find in London comprising a number of enamelled Venetian glasses all of the same type even if decorated with different motifs. These costly imported articles might be considered as making up what we now call a service of drinking vessels; they can be dated to the first half of the fourteenth century, a period when records in Murano show that thousands of similar articles were being made (Clark 1983, pp. 152-156).

It is also true, however, that right through the late Middle Ages and Early Renaissance, the guests at even a lavish banquet had to share a plate and drinking-cup with the person sitting next to them, little consideration being given to matters of hygiene. In his De Quinquaginta curialitatibus ad mensam, a handbook of table manners written around 1300, the Milanese author Bovesin de la Riva had observed: “Even if you do not want to drink, if someone offers you the cup then you must always accept it; once it is taken you can immediately put it down, or offer it to someone nearby.” (Bemporat 2001, p. 19).

Renaissance glassware can be said to have begun in Murano around the year 1450, when there was a swift revolution both in the taste and techniques of the objects produced – undoubtedly due, in part, to the fact that members of Europe’s artistic, cultural and aristocratic elite frequented the island. Such figures would often spend time in the “country” palazzi which Venetian noblemen had had built for themselves there; indeed, some of the most important figures visiting the city preferred to stay on Murano because it afforded them more freedom and privacy. Their presence stimulated the glassmakers’ interest in more current styles which responded to the taste of people who often turned out to be demanding but very generous customers. From a technical point view, however, we know that the revolution was the work of a local man: Angelo Barovier. A glassmaker and owner of his own kiln, Barovier had, in the first half of the fifteenth century, attended lessons given in Venice by the scientist and alchemist Paolo da Pergola. Thanks to contacts with these elevated cultural circles, he acquired the know-how for his own research in the making of glass, subsequently perfecting a technique for the full purification of soda ash flux (the imported allume catino). Barovier then combined this purified sodium flux with a powder made by crushing pebbles from the river Ticino (a fine vitrifying agent) and with the above-mentioned de-colourant manganese dioxide. This – and a very carefully executed firing process – enabled him to obtain perfectly colourless sparkling glass that was far superior to any of its medieval counterparts, indeed, given its similarity to rock crystal, this new glass was actually called cristallo (the first time the term had been applied to glass). Barovier would also invent a type of lattimo glass suitable for blowing; the name refers to the milky white colour of the glass (latte = milk) and the resultant objects were perfect surrogates for the Chinese porcelain that was so highly prized at the time.
...
Isabella herself would specify the combination of pieces that would include glasses and goblets of different size and shapes, suitable for different beverages, or different types of wine (Polak 1975, pp. 156-157, 185). Still, the presence of homogenous services of glasses and goblets on the tables of Renaissance Italy is documented from the end of the fifteenth century onwards. In the paintings of the day – not only those showing biblical scenes but also depictions of episodes from classical mythology (all in modern-dress). The evidence in these paintings confirms the chronological development of Renaissance glassmaking, and reflects what we know from the extant pieces in the glassworks of the Serina family – she admired a credenza (complete set of tableware) made for the Sultan of Turkey. Her last documented purchase from the island was made through the Mantuan ambassador Benedetto Agnello in 1535. It was fairly common for important figures to visit the factories of Murano. Isabella’s letters alone mention visits by: Cardinal Ippolito D’Este in 1507; Alfonso I d’Este, her brother, in 1550; and that same Duke of Ferrara – together with Cardinal Enrico Gonzaga – in 1554, when the two of them literally emptied the glass-works. We know that Isabella herself purchased glasses of various kinds (bocollati, scudellini and tazze) and sizes, together with zeichetti [little buckets], mastellette [little barrels], vasii and vasetti, am- polline and fiaschi (Brown 1982, pp. 2*-28, 53, 75-77, 107-111, 213-219, Malacarne 2000, pp. 59-65). The fiaschi she bought in 1522 were in glass crystal and of a type that was also available with a crest in enamel – thus were a long way from the straw-covered flasks then being made in Murano as well as Tuscany. Almost certainly they were a type of im- ghietera – perhaps with the body flattened back and front – that corresponded to the fiasca del pellegrino and were suitable for the addition of a crest in painted enamel.

Of course, the generic terms which Isabella and her corres- pondents use mean that one cannot identify her chosen purchases precisely indeed, the names used reflect only a part of the vast range of terms to be found in the invento- ries of Murano glass-works, often of oriental origin or lo- cal jargon, a large number of these are difficult to interpret nowadays because they fell into disuse long ago. What is missing is any reference to salt-cellar, even if these figures in the island’s inventories and are depicted in contemporary paintings: perhaps Isabella preferred these to be made in others materials, or such objects were in the crates of glass- ware whose contents are not specified. Sometimes even the drinking-glasses are not mentioned explicitly: but they must have been part of her purchases, given that by the begin- ning of the sixteenth century they were a staple feature of luxury glass tableware.

Isabella does not seem to have been very fond of added decoration (for example, that in applied enamels); but, as we have seen, this was of declining popularity in the more refined circles of sixteenth-century Italy (even if still in de- mand in Northern Europe). Nevertheless, her letters do mention glasses with gilded lips or with l’mani d’oro [handles finished in gold-leaf]. In 1521 she ordered bocaline di vetro cislatte [small jugs in cut glass], perhaps these had decoration in incised gold leaf which was mentioned in certain Murano inventories and can be seen in the drinking-glass that figures in Dossi Dos- si’s 1521-1522 painting Ebrezet [Drunkenness, now in the Galleria Estense in Modena]. As au fait with contemporary tastes as ever, Isabella would – even though now almost sixty years of age – appreciate the glassware in the new technique of filigrana a retortoli [twisted rod filigree] of cristallo glass within cristallino. In 1529 she would, through her ambassador Jacopo Malatesta, order 10 or 12 drinking vessels of various shapes, together with cups and glasses, which “are to be dec- orated with white strands, or clear, or with no gold”. Then, in 1535, through Benedetto Agnello, she ordered two elongat- ed jugs “with the addition of a few strands of white filigree”.

Though generally preferring clear glass that enhanced the colour of the wine, Isabella also purchased a few small drinking cups “in enamelled glass of different colours” – that is, in opaque glass. These included two cups “in green enamelled” (1507) and small bowls in “white enamelled glass” – that is, in opaque white lattimo (1521).

Opaque green glass was produced in imitation of the ce- ladon ceramics imported from the Far East, while – as al- ready mentioned – lattimo was a close approximation to Ming porcelain, which at the time was as sought after as pure crystalline glass. In 1506, for example, Lorenzo da Pa- via – another of Isabella’s faithful agents in Venice – would send her a single shipment of eighteen pieces in porcelain for which he had paid 20 ducats. These included: large bottles and a small flasks which has a fine odour and is made of porcelain; the rest are plates and bowls and small salat plates and a certain small boat that is very beautiful and is as thin as paper” (Lorenzo da Pavia, 20 June 1506). For some decades various important person- ages had been turning to Venice as a source of these exotic objects, which also appear in Venetian paintings of the day (Giovanni Bellini’s The Feast of the Gods is the most famous example). That such porcelain inspired lattimo glassware is all the clearer when one sees certain very early pieces made using that technique now to be found in museums throughout the world: though the main decoration on these consists of classical or religious scenes, of busts with oval frames or arabesque crests – all obviously European in inspiration – the decorative plant motifs alongside are in blue enamel and clearly inspired by Ming porcelain (Clarke 1974, pp. 22- 56). However, even the largest glass collections in the world contain only a few pieces of lattimo work, from which we can deduce that clear glass was much more popular with the European market.
After the second decade of the sixteenth century, Murano glassmaking would develop certain decorative techniques which served to enhance the qualities of cristallo. In 1527 the Serena glass-works would patent a new technique – the afore-mentioned filigrana a retortoli – which made it possible to produce blown crystal glass shot through with a filigree of thin twisted threads of lattimo (Zecchin 1987, pp. 210-215). This may well be the innovation referred to in the above-quoted letter from Aretino. What is beyond doubt is that this technique was used to make glass with “white threads” and with some “threads worked in white filigree” that were commissioned by the well-informed Isabella in 1529 and 1535 respectively. However, her use of the term reticella [filigree] is purely description. Filigrana a reticello in the purely technical sense – an idea developed by some unknown Murano glassworker just before the middle of the sixteenth century – is not mentioned in any known document until 1549 (Zecchin 1989, p. 346). Such glassware had a regular net of lattimo threads within the sides of clear cristallo, with a minuscule air bubble at the centre of each rhomboid formed by the pattern. A very complex process, the making of such glass required two half-finished pieces to be blown one inside the other. 1549 also saw Vincenzo D’Angelo, whose glass-works were “at the sign of the Cock”, obtain a patent for a method of diamond-point incised decoration of clear crystal glass. The technique would also be used, more rarely, on colour glass (Gallo 1953, pp. 754-755), in all cases providing very delicate decoration that enhanced the extraordinary lightness of Murano blown glass.

In the 1560s yet another technique was developed, producing vetro a ghiaccio [ice glass] through a procedure that involved plunging the still incandescent glass into a bucket of water; the thermal difference between the interior and exterior of the glass resulted in the multiple cracking that gave the outside surface its craquelure though the piece as a whole remained intact. The first Murano document to mention vetro a ghiaccio dates from 1569, but we know that in 1564 a good sixty-five pieces made using this technique – drinking-cups, tall cylindrical glasses and vases in the form of small barrels – figured in an inventory of the El Pardo palace in Madrid, the residence of Charles V and Philip II. The two sovereigns were, in fact, passionate collectors of Venetian glass, often using Titian as their intermediary in purchasing the finest pieces (Barovier Mentasti-Tonini 2014, pp. 20-26, ill. 9).

Aesthetic innovations also involved the shape of drinking-cups, goblets and jugs, which became slender in form, more closely reflecting the possibilities of the medium of glass itself and thus opened the way to what would become a style that has never gone out of fashion. The goblets with rounded cups of various sizes stood on elegant blown-glass stems that were often in the form of a baluster. As for jugs and vases, their body was rounded or oval in form, whilst the object became more slender thanks to a long neck of relatively reduced diameter. In all their various types, traditional inghistere adapted perfectly to the new style, whilst raised platters and plates were now made much bigger than they had been before. This was the period, therefore, that saw the birth of the drinking-vessels still present on our tables: goblets with a more or less hemispherical bowl, wide and shallow glasses and narrowed flutes. Vessels with shallow, widened bowls are to be seen in Venetian paintings from around 1560 onwards. For example, one figures in Veronese’s The Marriages Feast of Cana of 1562-63, now in the Louvre. But the most impressive example is in Caravaggio’s Bacchus dating from c. 1595, now in the Uffizi. Though the Lombard artist was at the time working in Rome, the goblet he depicts is unmistakably Venetian.
In another painting by Veronese in the Louvre – the Supper at Emmaus (1559-1560) – one can also see a splendid wine flute.

The drinking-glass with a widened bowl was for a long time used for sparkling wine – until, in the 1700s, it was replaced in that role by the flute. However, we do not know if during the sixteenth and seventeenth century specific forms of drinking-glass were made for specific types of wine: the various Sippers by Titian, Veronese, Tintoretto and artists from a number of different regions depict an extraordinary array of glasses and goblets. Nevertheless there is one constant feature: the vessels are always in clear glass, perhaps with gold-leaf trim around the lip or with elaborated knots in their stems. The almost complete absence of filigree glass, gold-leaf trim around the lip or with elaborate knots in their stems, the lack of gold-leaf or incised glassware in these painting was probably the result of the artists deliberately posing themselves the very difficult challenge of rendering the effect of liquid seen through clear glass. The inventories of the more aristocratic households do, however, reveal the presence of numerous pieces in decorated crystal. For example, on the occasion of his 1558 marriage to Isabella de’ Medici, Paolo Giordano Orsini ordered a ghiaccio – that is, a glass wine-cooler with a foot, like a bowl turned on its side. These Roman suites of tableware have not survived, but they must certainly have been part of the order, as is imaginable, glasses did not last long, being subject to breakage either by guests or by those responsible for washing and storing them.

Long and complex spectacles, the banquets of the day were put on to demonstrate the wealth and power of the host, and were under the skilful direction of a sacrest, responsible for orchestrating the whole affair. The most famous sacrest of the sixteenth century was Cristoforo Messisburgo, who worked in the household of the d’Este family. In 1549 he published his Bancomietti Composizioni di vitrare et apparenzecchio generale [Banquets: Composition of Courses and General Presentation], a guide to banquet-giving that drew upon numerous such events – both official and more intimate – which he himself had planned and organised during the course of his long career. The book lists the staff required; the kitchen equipment; the wide range of raw materials and ingredients needed for the refined recipes given in the second part of the text; the tableware to be used, including various pieces in glass. Thereafter, it describes the sequences of courses – and related tableware – in each of the banquets he cites as an example. During the meals the tablecloths (mantelli) were changed repeatedly, having been laid one on top of the other as the table was being prepared and thus easy to remove; obviously the napkins (salviet) were also changed at the same time. On the new tablecloth, the salt-cellars and individual cutlery were laid out, but only rarely were the plates (tovati) put on the table before the serving of a vivanda (a “course” made up of a mass of different dishes all served at the same time). As required, the credenzieri [table stewards] brought each guest an individual plate (perhaps of metal or decorated majolica) together with two categories of dishes: cold (di credenza) – that is served from the sideboard) and hot (di cucina, served from the kitchen). The bottiglieri poured wine into the glasses and goblets as needed, making use of special tables or shelves on which the drinking-vessels and “various sorts of precious wine” had been laid out beforehand (Messisburgo 1549, passim). It was the credenza di bottiglieria – as opposed to the credenza di servizio – that formed the suite of individual plates and other tableware that those serving on table provided to the guests; there was, however, another such suite – the credenza di mostra – which was only for show (mostrare) and comprised rich silver and gold ware that was an expression of the household’s wealth and prestige. In cities such as Florence and Venice, however, there were strict sumptuary laws governing the demonstration of wealth, in the former because the Medici, due to their rule of the place, did not want to offend the sensibilities of a city that was supposed to be a republic, whilst in the latter the State was very careful to prevent a single family asserting itself (even if only at the level of social opulence). The fact that the tables were not prepared beforehand with all the plates, cutlery and drinking vessel necessary for each guest – and that all the dishes of a single vivanda were served at once – accounts for the disorderly tables one sees in Renaissance paintings of biblical or mythological banquets (for example, the above-mentioned Marriage Feast of Cana by Paolo Veronese). Of course, sometimes painters depicted meals in a more humble manner – often Last Suppers or the Supper at Emmaus – and here one sees a single dish and drinking vessels for each guest; this reflection of evangelical poverty, with the absence of a swarm of servants waiting on table, seems to herald the customs of everyday life we ourselves are used to. But to return to the great banquets on those occasions, cup-bearers (coppieri) served the wine to each guest with a small drinking-glass or goblet and small tighiester on a tray; pouring the drink in his or her presence. Generally those trays were elegant circular dishes with a tall conical foot – rather like a modern cestakand – and would be made of silver, or sometimes Murano glass. This so-called sottocoppa design would enjoy a long life, with numerous decorated serving trays in glass surviving from the Baroque period (now to be found in almost all museum glass collections).

The table furnishings of all aristocratic households also had to include a wine cooler (rinfrescatio) – a round or oval bucket which was filled with cold water and then held wine bottles. The custom of using such objects is recorded as early as the Middle Ages. But if medieval rinfrescati were generally ceramic, many of the Sippers depicted in Renaissance paintings show that they might be in bronze, copper or brass, often decorated with vertical ribbing and two side handles, these objects – containing bottles or jugs of wine – are shown standing on the floor near the table (rinfrescati of this kind are to be found in various private and public collections). However, these wine-coolers might also be more precious, made of silver or Murano glass. In the latter case, they had no specific design but were usually large bowls (often with a conical foot) that could also serve as fruit bowls or flower vases; one early-seventeenth-century still-life even shows one serving as a goldfish bowl. This range of function – together with noteworthy elegance of form and richness of decoration (in the decades around 1500 often involving polychrome enamels and gold-leaf) – explains why large numbers of those produced in Murano were still in evidence and some were the half of the fifteen right up to the seventeenth century have survived. It also explains a certain dichotomy: in the inventories of glass-works they are referred to simply as “glass wine-cooler with a foot, like a bowl,” together
er with another that was gilded, and the 1504 inventory of the household of Cosimo Bucelli mentions two blue-glass wine-coolers with gold-leaf decoration and a foot, two in fettimo glass with a foot and one in glass similar to alabaster – all made in Murano (Spallanzani 1976, p. 138; Spallanzani 1977, p. 169; Barovier Mentasti/Tonini 2013, n. 14).

Two centuries after those Florentine inventories were drawn up – that is, towards the end of the eighteenth century – Venetian-glass wine-coolers were finally taking on a specific form and design, being registered as such within the inventories of the glassmakers themselves. Some larger rispescadoli in the form of a cylindrical bucket, which can be dated to the beginning of the eighteenth century, have very original handles modelled as flattened knots (nodo) which are a clear demonstration of the glassmakers’ skill (Barovier Mentasti/Tonini 2013, n. 82). In fact, it seems highly likely that objects of this kind were already intended to be collector’s pieces and not to serve for actual use. Real drinking-vessels continued to follow sixteenth-century designs, perhaps with some modifications in proportions: thinner and longer stems become hugely complex weaves of intertwined serpents or plants with polychrome flowers, whilst the handles of other objects might be adorned with filaments worked to form crests (morture) or little fins. It seems highly likely that this cup is so difficult to drink from that he who drinks from it will pour it [over himself] and will only with great difficulty manage to drink it.” (Heikamp 1986, p. 123, ill. 111).

As for the exports of Murano glass to Northern Europe, these remained successful, with each country continuing to have its own particular preferences. Thus: “The innovation of the Baroque period as far as wine-drinking and winemaking was concerned was the emergence of a new object – Venetian-glass wine-coolers were finally taking on a specific form and design, being registered as such within the inventories of the glassmakers themselves. Some larger rispescadoli in the form of a cylindrical bucket, which can be dated to the beginning of the eighteenth century, have very original handles modelled as flattened knots (nodo). It seems highly likely that objects of this kind were already intended to be collector’s pieces and not to serve for actual use. Real drinking-vessels continued to follow sixteenth-century designs, perhaps with some modifications in proportions: thinner and longer stems become hugely complex weaves of intertwined serpents or plants with polychrome flowers, whilst the handles of other objects might be adorned with filaments worked to form crests (morture) or little fins. It seems highly likely that this cup is so difficult to drink from that he who drinks from it will pour it [over himself] and will only with great difficulty manage to drink it.” (Heikamp 1986, p. 123, ill. 111).

As for the exports of Murano glass to Northern Europe, these remained successful, with each country continuing to have its own particular preferences. In his 1670 account of his visit to Italy, the Englishman Richard Lassels would observe that the glassmakers of Murano seemed to have “tasted the measure of every nation’s belly and temperament”, adapting their drinking vessels accordingly: “For the High Dutch, they have high glasses, called Flutes, a full yard long, which a man cannot drink up alone except his man, or some other, hold up the foot of this more than two handled glass. For the Italians that love to drink leisurely, they have glasses that are almost as large and flat as silver plates, and almost as uneasy to drink out of. And so for other nations.” (Lassels vol. II 1670, pp. 423-424). The truth is that this geographical division of glass types was far more rigid in Giambattista Tiepolo’s 1745-1746 painting of the Banquet of Antony and Cleopatra (National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne) there is a remarkably slender flute half full of white wine. The innovation of the Baroque period as far as wine-drinking was concerned was the emergence of a new object made in the material: the cannetta. The Tuscan name cannetta and its Venetian counterpart were diminutives of the words cantina and camera respectively, both of which mean “cellar”, the name of the new object being a generic reference to the fact that it was used to hold bottles. Most cannette or cantinette had originally been square-shaped and had wicker or wicker handles; they were – like the carriers we see today – equipped with internal divisions to hold bottles in place as they were transported (in this case from the cellar to the kitchen or diningroom). The term had, however, also been extended to name the small cases in precious materials intended to hold perfume bottles. Then, in the late decades of the seventeenth century, the term on Murano was applied to a very special object: a cylindrical container of a fair size in blown crystal glass with three spherical feet (again in blown-glass) and a lid that was often elaborately decorated. Such objects might be in clear glass (perhaps with applied polychrome flowers), in glass with reticulare filigree work, in coloured glass with modelled festoons in different colours, or in glass with diamond-point engraving. They were used to hold pestoncini or piastoncini, small cylindrical or pear-shaped wine bottles that came with a glass stopper. Within the cannetta, these were kept chilled in ice. Various examples of these can be seen nowadays – for example, in the Murano Glass Museum or in the collection of the Rosenborg Castle (Copenhagen). The latter piece was brought back by king Frederick IV of Denmark after his 1708-9 visit to Italy, which had included a stay in Venice; during his time in the city the Venetian State presented him with a collection of hundreds of pieces of Venetian glassware which included three comette decorated in different ways. The Republic would also present a large cannetta in filigree-decorated glass (plus twelve pestoncini) to Anna Cristina Luisa of Sulzbach on occasion of her marriage to...
Carlo Emanuele di Savoy, Prince of Piedmont, a further two canevette of the same size – one in filigree-decorated glass, the other in clear crystal with polychrome flowers – were given to Prince Gianfederico d’Este of Modena in 1722 (Boschen 1960, p. 82, nn. 14, 27, 87). Two years earlier such pieces had also been included in the saleable collection of glassware (more than 150 objects) made in Murano to a commission from pope Clement XI, who would then send them as a gift to the emperor of China (Byrne Curtis 2009, pp. 82-91, Zecchin 2009, pp. 19-20). The oldest extant record of a canevetta in a glass-work’s inventory dates back to 1689 (Trivellato 2000, p. 285); yet such objects are already listed in the city’s glass-works: listing bicchieri da acqua di vita (glasses for either acquavit or water) distinct from wine glasses – though there is no evidence these different types made up a homogeneous service. In fact, our museums have no sets of glasses dating from the seventeenth or early decades of the eighteenth century which would appear to belong to a service of tableware made up of comparable pieces of varying forms and sizes. The first examples of such services are those produced in Bohemia, and these would then be followed by Venetian glass-makers, who fell in line with the prevailing fashion for Bohemian crystal.

After centuries in which Venetian-style glass had reigned supreme, the eighteenth century saw tastes shift towards Bohemian and German glass. This was made from a potassium-based flux that produced particularly bright and thick glass suitable for decoration using a grinding-wheel, and it was in such materials that Bohemia made complete services of tableware (including bottles and carafes, in the same small size as those in the past). Unable to resist a fashion that was sweeping the European market, wealthy Venetian patricians themselves bought such Bohemian tableware, in spite of the laws the State had passed to protect the Murano industry. Not until the nineteenth century do we see the full codification of rules for complete place settings of different plates and glasses. Such settings were perfectly suited to the “Russian” manner of serving dinners which was then in vogue, replacing the “French style” that had been in fashion since the Renaissance (the name coming from the fact it emerged when the creative flair and exuberance of the Baroque were at their height, as was the technical mastery of Murano’s glass-makers. Until a few years ago such pieces were actually described as “compottieri” in museum catalogues, before careful examination of contemporary documents made it possible to identify their real function in the complex ritual of elaborate banquets.

After the 1720s there was a veritable revolution in glassmaking techniques and designs. Contemporaneous with this were changes in the way people received their guests and thus in the tableware they used. For example, at all levels of society it was now the norm for each person to have his or her own glass, with drinking vessels no longer being shared, and the more wealthy began to buy what are comparable to modern services of tableware, made up of glasses and goblets of different sizes and shapes intended for different beverages and different types of wine. Within these differences, each service was recognisable such as due to the use of the same materials and decorative motifs (even on such objects as carafes and salt-cellars), and the structural similarities noticeable in objects of different sizes. This change was the result of a gradual evolution, and shows Venetian glassmakers being influenced by what was produced in the North. As early as the seventeenth century, however, inventories in the city’s glass-works were listing bicchieri da acqua di vita (glasses for either acquavit or water) distinct from wine glasses – though there is no evidence these different types made up a homogeneous service. In fact, our museums have no sets of glasses dating from the seventeenth or early decades of the eighteenth century which would appear to belong to a service of tableware made up of comparable pieces of varying forms and sizes. The first examples of such services are those produced in Bohemia, and these would then be followed by Venetian glass-makers, who fell in line with the prevailing fashion for Bohemian crystal.

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In the midst of all these innovations, modes of dining remained largely unchanged. The manner of serving important dinners – which had become established during the Italian Renaissance – was still that known as servizio alla francese (because modelled on the practices of the prestigious French court). This meant that banquets still consisted of a series of rinvante [courses] made up of various dishes all placed at the centre of the table with guests serving themselves, though perhaps they might call upon one of the servants to get them something from a centre dish they could not reach. And, just as in the past, each guest had his wine served upon request from a small bottle borne on a tray. However, probably in Italy too there were meals which at the royal courts or Denmark and France were referred to as eating en ermitage – that is, without servants disturbing the privacy of the family (be it royal, aristocratic or well-to-do). In such cases the table was already laid with plates and glassware and the food arrived either via “dumbwaiter” or was brought in by discreet servants who then immediately retired. Individual – therefore small – bottles of wine were for such meals set before each of the diners (Wolstrup 1995, pp. 180-184).

Not until the nineteenth century do we see the full codification of rules for complete place settings of different plates and glasses. Such settings were perfectly suited to the “Russian” manner of serving dinners which was then in vogue, replacing the “French style” that had been in fashion since the Renaissance (the name coming from the fact it
was said to have been used at Versailles). *Service à la russe* would be introduced to France itself around 1810-1811 by Alexander Borissowitsch Kharkin, the Russian ambassador to the Napoleonic court, who was said to be annoyed by the shortcomings of *service à la française*. Subsequently, it would be made more popular by Urbain Dubois, who would sing its praises in his various books – starting with *La Cuisson Classique*, written in 1856 in collaboration with Émile Bernard (Dubois-Bernard 1856, pp. IX-XI). By the last decade of the century, this new way of serving meals – true pioneers in the resurgence of Murano glass – Salvatores – figures who made their appearance in the world of glassmaking in the 1920s. It was designers – some now famous, some less so – who would produce ranges of glassware that have made their mark on the history of both Venetian glass and international markets, largely due to the efforts of the businessman Antonio Salviati; after having traded in the industries in the lagoon – the victim of devastating economic and political crises, but European tastes had changed, with people preferring English or Bohemian glass. It would only be in the 1860s that Venetian glass made a powerful return to international markets, largely due to the efforts of the businessman Antonio Salvati; after having traded in the glassware produced by the Fratelli Toso and Lorenzo Ratti – true pioneers in the resurgence of Murano glass – Salvati would found his own factory in 1866, employing some of the greatest master-craftsmen on Murano (members of the Barovier and Seguso families, together with Vincenzo Moretti). The work produced during this nineteenth-century revival drew upon all the old techniques of the craft and was extraordinarily colourful. For the first time since the fifteenth century, therefore, sets of table dishes and even drinking-glasses were in coloured glass. Salvati was an astute observer of the English market and suggested that his craftsmen should produce clear-glass goblets with added decoration in polychrome glass for some types of wine, whilst Bordeaux glasses and liqueur glasses should have the full bowl in coloured glass. Given that it was the richest market of the day, England and its taste then inevitably influenced what was purchased by Italian customers (Zecchin 2007, pp. 191-205). The most famous service of glassware produced during this revival period – which lasted up to the First World War – was that made by the Venice and Murano Glass and Mosaic Company for the Queen Mother, Margherita, in 1901. In effect, this was made up of four identical services comprising a total of 1,100 pieces: jugs, carafes, bottles, bowls, and drinking-glasses whose bowl was in the form of an inverted eight-sided pyramid; such vessels were decorated with applied vertical threads of glass and incised gold-leaf running around the area just beneath the rim (Tagliapietra 1979, pp. 18, 20; I bicchieri di Murano dell’800 1998, p. 47). Though technically challenging, the ‘Queen Margherita’ wineglass – as the design is still known – is of great elegance. The twentieth century would then see various prestigious designs, often the work of important international designers – figures who made their appearance in the world of glassmaking in the 1920s. It was designers – some now famous, some less so – who would produce ranges of glassware that have made their mark on the history of both design and glassmaking itself. For example, in the 1920s – which saw the emergence of a taste of uncluttered glass design that drew inspiration from Renaissance models – the Venini glassworks would produce the *Ambasciata di gala* service; in *fumé* glass, this was intended for Italian embas-
Venice and types of Malvasia wine: a centuries-old relationship

Fully aware that non habemus campus nec vinca, ymos aportet quod recuperemus de estraneis et remotis partibus [As we have neither fields nor vineyards, we must get what we need from distant foreign places], cosmopolitan Venice had long focussed attention on its need for wines purchased elsewhere; as Carlo Goldoni would say with regard to food in general: “Nothing grows here and yet there is everything; in the blink of an eye you can find all that you want.”

“If we were merely to list all the vines that, more or less legitimately, bear the name of Malvasia, and then try to establish which should maintain this name and which not, we would cover pages and pages without any hope of achieving our goal.” This is how Giovanni Dalmasso, the great scholar of Italian oenology, would begin his fundamental study of Malvasia wines, published almost 50 years ago in the Rivista di Viticoltura e di Enologia, a work we will have frequent occasion to cite during the course of this essay. Dalmasso then continued: “Though now a widespread name, there is no trace of it in Italy prior to the thirteenth century.” From then onwards, he observes, there would be numerous passages “relating to wines known by this name (or that of Malvagia), but not to grapes or vines. And it is noteworthy that so many of these passages come from documents concerning the Venetian Republic.”

As Dalmasso would then point out, Malvasia is a term that now covers a range of vines that differ in various aspects: plant morphology, the colour, taste and biochemical composition of the grapes, the more or less early season at which the fruit ripens, crop yields and suitability for vinification. Hence it would certainly be more appropriate to speak of Malvasias rather than Malvasia.

Author of a fundamental Saggio sull’ampelografia universale [Essay on General Ampelography], published by Ermanno Loescher in 1877, Count Giuseppe di Rovasenda would admit this openly: “I have done nothing but offer winegrowers in the various countries an orderly presentation of the many varieties of ‘Malvasia’ that are cited by writers on the subject. Deciding the identity of and differences between these varieties would involve examinations and discussion that do not belong in this survey. Furthermore, I do not think I have the knowledge and experience to manage this task with success.” He would then add: “In my opinion, the name Malvasia should only apply to those aromatic grapes that have the special taste of slightly sharp muscatel. Unfortunately, however, there are just too many grapes of ordinary flavour boasting the name Malvasia for...”

MALVASIA

Wine, Legislation, Commerce and the Expansion of the Venetian Republic

Michela Dal Borgo and Danilo Riponti
it to be possible to strip that name from those which do not deserve it." In effect, alongside numerous 'Malvasia' grapes which do have an aromatic flavour there are many others which did not possess this characteristic.

The monumental Ampélographie by P. Viala and V. Vermorel would also reiterate the point. ‘The name ‘Malvasia’, ‘Malvasier’ or ‘Malvonic’ has been given to a large number of very different vines, and the qualifications that are added to this name in most cases have no decisive meaning. Those which, linked with the names beneath, do specify a real vine will be identified later, for the others, it has not be possible to establish their reference to an actual vine.’

Given the absence of even a single factor shared by all ‘Malvasia’, research has looked outside the strict field of ampelography for the ‘common denominator’ that determined the use of the name. True, there have been cases of mismatches, etc. However, it is clear that one should explore the history of these vines in order to understand the factors which led to them sharing a name, and this is what we shall try to do in this brief study.

That history begins in the Middle Ages. Almost all ampelographers, ancient and modern, agree that some Muscatel vines (particularly the white-grape varieties used in making wine) must have been cultivated in the days of Classical Antiquity – perhaps as far back as the time of Cato (that is, as early as the second century BC). Almost certainly such vines can be identified with the Apiciae mentioned by Varro and Columella or the Apiniae mentioned by Pliny the Elder. However, things are very different with Malvasia wines, with no serious evidence to support claims that they existed in the classical world. Not that such claims have not been made. One of the most authoritative researchers into these vines – Basil Krimbas, Vice-President and Professor of Viticulture at the Athens School of Agronomy – would in an excellent monograph on ‘Wine and Malvasia Vines’ published in 1943 argue that it is possible to see allusions to them in those Greek and Roman authors who talk of what we would see as ‘raisin wines’ or, more generally, as liqueur or dessert wines. However, although Krimbas is a figure repeatedly cited by Dalmasso, one has to dismiss his hypothesis as unfounded. It has, nevertheless, surfaced more recently in studies by Basil Logothetis, a professor of Viticulture at Salonika University and a man who has dedicated great skill and passion to his research into this subject. The truth is that one can find no trace of a name anywhere similar to Malvasia in the works of Hesiod, of the physician and botanist Dioscorides (first cent. AD), of Democritus or in The Geoponica of Cassianus Bassus (sixth century AD). Logothetis himself mentions how in the thirteenth century Demetrius Pepogomenox and Nicephorus Choumnos were speaking explicitly of ‘the wine of Monobasia or Monembasia’, the product of the hinterland of a small city which was a fortress of highly strategic location; the place was on a high rock over a natural harbour (monembasia means ‘port with a single opening’).

The Origin of a Name
It became the stuff of legend how, in the year 1000, Pietro II Orseolo would, at the head of a naval expedition that left Venice on Ascension Day, come to the defence of the Roman cities located on the Istrian and Dalmatian coast. Thereafter, Venetian supremacy would rapidly extend through the whole of the Adriatic, its unchallenged might leading to the doge assuming the title of Dux Venetiae, Dalmatiae et Croatae (or Dux Dalmatiorum). This military power was accompanied by a commercial predominance that extended from the Adriatic throughout the whole of the Eastern Mediterranean, with ‘heroic mercantilism’ becoming a defining characteristic of the Venetians.
Inevitably, this roused the jealousy of Byzantium, leading to a serious crisis in the relationship between the two cities. Determined to limit the ever-growing power of Venice, the Byzantine emperor Manuel I Comnenus would, in 1171, expatriate the Venetians in his city, imprisoning or banishing a number of them. The protests of doge Vitalie Michiel were to no avail, and these disputes created the tensions that ultimately led to the events of the famous Fourth Crusade. This had been called in 1202 by Pope Innocent III, the forces bound for the Holy Land being led by Baldwin of Flanders and Boniface of Monferrato. The real commander of the Crusade, however, was the commander of the fleet in which it travelled: the indomitable ninety-year-old doge Enrico Dandolo, who at the time of the 1171 seizures had been doge Michiel’s special envoy to Byzantium. The old man clearly nourished a desire for revenge over an episode that had resulted in him being imprisoned, tortured and left almost completely blind (he had lost total sight in one eye).

The very term Malvasia derives from a contracted form of the name of that Greek city Monembasia, Monemvasia or Monovascia that was the capital of Morea and, as mentioned, located on a rocky promontory in the Peloponnese. The name subsequently degenerated into Malvasia, becoming Italianised to Malvasia. As the glottologist Prof. G. Alessio shows in a brief yet interesting note on viticultural etymology, the Italian term Malvasia would then pass into Spanish (Malvagia), Portuguese (Malvazia), French (Malvoisie, Logothetis had assumed the derivation had worked in the opposite direction), English (Malviste and the old term Malmsey), Croatian (Malvasije) and Slovenian (Malvelzevec). As we are told by Andrea Bacci di San Elpidio, this etymological origin was also argued by the humanist Celio Rodigino (1469-1525), whilst another humanist also mentioned by Bacci – Cesaro Scaligero of Riva di Garda – argued that the etymology of the name of Monobaticum wine was to be found in the word Monobates, a term which the grammarians and rhetor Graachus Athenaeus (who lived in Rome in the third century AD) used to describe a particular wine which was “the sole basis and foundation of the goodness in all wines.” Hence one can argue that the name, not to be found in any documents that date from before the thirteenth century, was almost always used to refer to wines from the eastern Mediterranean (known by this name or that of Malvagia), and that only later would it be used to refer to grapes or vines. One can also see why so many of these mentions appear
in documents concerning Venice or the Venetian Republic, where the name was used to indicate not only highly-prized sweet wines of high alcohol content that came from the eastern Mediterranean (and perhaps – though there is no conclusive documentary evidence here – from Malta prior to the Arab conquest of 870) but also the places within Venice which had the exclusive rights to sell such wine.

The fortress of Monembasia in the Laconia region of the Peloponnese had been founded around 588, and the first known reference to Monemvasios wine is to be found in a 1214 letter from Nicolas Mesarites, bishop of Ephesus, who mentions it alongside wines from Chios, Lesbos and Euboea. Then, from the thirteenth century onwards, the name appears in many documents in a variety of forms: Monobassa, Monobasica, Malvavasis, Malvasia, Malvaque, Malvbaugh, Malvagia, Malaxia, Monovaxia, Malfasia and Malfatico.

The very first reference to Malvasiae wine is in a law passed by the Great Council of the Venetian Republic on 9 October 1326, where it is mentioned along with two other wines Cretae pannello and Romaniae (ASVe, Maggior Consiglio, Deliberazioni, Spiritus, re. 3, c. 10: ‘Quod non fiant littere de vino aliquo extraendo usque at Natalem Domini proximum excepto vino Cretae pannello, vino Malvasiae et vino Romaniae’).

It was from the twelfth century onwards that Italy had developed a taste for sweet liqueur-like raisin wines (generally white) produced in Greece, which had the advantage that they were suitable for long storage. Such wines were often referred to as criticos (because from Crete) and made were from a sweet muscatel grape itself known as moscato greco; they might also be referred to as thireon (because from Thera).

Amongst them, those that were particularly appreciated were Cyprus Malvasias, described as “strong, aromatic wines”. Confirmation of the great fascination these wines – and all the produce of the Eastern Mediterranean – had within Venice comes from the fact when elected doge upon the death of Enrico Dandolo, Pietro Ziani would actually propose to the Great Council that the seat of government should be transferred to Constantinople, which – as we have seen – had fallen in 1204. His argument was that the “country enjoys all of God’s gifts and blessings,” while “everything that is eaten and drunk in Venice … has to be brought from outside.” Discussed on 19 August 1214, the proposal was defeated by just two votes (352 to 350).

Gradually Venice became the main emporium for such wines, serving not only the Mediterranean but also northern Europe, where Malmsey must have been present in some quantities if Shakespeare’s Richard III has George, Duke of Clarence, being drowned in a vat of Malmsey in 1478. The trade was so important that the city passed a range of legislation covering imports, controls of provenance, hygiene and retail and wholesale commerce, with special focus upon the customs duties and taxation to which the wine was subject (that revenue being collected by the Provveditori sopra dazi).

The entire wine trade was under a specific body – the Magistrato del Vino – which through a system of “invoices and shipping bills” governed imports and the collection of customs duties, the wine being divided “into nine types subject to different tariffs depending on the different places and regions from which they come.” Such a complex system of customs duties was needed to combat the various forms of contraband or fraud: there were even sagomatori [literally “shapers”] whose job was to verify that the barrels in which wine was being imported were sagomato [shaped] to the capacity being declared.

A ruling by the Grand Council on 11 February 1279 which imposed restrictions upon the movement of wine within the Republic reveals this market to have been a sort of state monopoly, with customs dues varying in accordance
with different factors, including the quantity of supply for a single anfora (around 600 litres) the customs duty for ordinary wine might be as much as 15-20 lire, whilst for Malvasia it could go as high as 25 lire and 12 soldi. But by the first half of the fourteenth century there were already difficulties in distinguishing between wine of ‘Malvasia’ type produced in Crete and that produced in the region that had been the original source of supply. A ducale [ruling] by the Venetian Senate of 2 July 1342 pointed out that ‘given Monoblasia wine pays 10 ducats per anfora in import duties, whilst Crete wine pays only 6 ducats, and a lot of Malvasia is made in Crete and then exported to Venice paying the duties for Crete wine, thus causing a great loss to this city, and given that Malvasia from Monoblasia can also be transported as Malvasia from Crete, as it is impossible to distinguish one from the other, it is decided that in order to eradicate this abuse – with everyone declaring that they are selling Crete wine, causing resultant losses for the State – from henceforth all Malvasia wine, whatever its origin, will upon export to Venice pay customs duties of 8 ducats on each anfora.’ This and other rulings (for example of 24 September 1381) show the Venetian State exercising its usual careful attention to fiscal matters in governing the mass of imported wine from the eastern Mediterranean that it had occupied since the 1204 Crusade, hoping to taking advantage of the suitability of the island’s climate and terrain for such crops. The city of Monoblasia itself would come under Venetian rule at the beginning of the fifteenth century; the Republic could be said to have exerted hegemony in the area from 1419 onwards, taking full control in 1463 and maintaining it until the city was ceded to the Turks in a treaty between doge Alvise Badoer and Suleiman the Magnificent. As Venetian rule over Crete and other Aegean islands, this would continue into the second half of the seventeenth century – a period during which the production and commerce of Malvasia became flourishing activities, which then went into decline and practically ceased altogether under Turkish rule. The fact that the Turks had conquered first Cyprus (August 1571) and much later Crete (in 1669, after a 23-year-old siege) meant that the Venetians looked elsewhere in the Mediterranean/Adriatic for places to cultivate their Malvasia vines, with Istria and Dalmatia being particularly suitable because they were on the routes taken by Venetian shipping.

Though it is difficult to believe that the wine produced on Crete was the same as that originally produced around Monoblasia, we do know that the fifteenth-century Swiss traveller Felix Faber, who visited both Greece and the Levant, praised the wine of Crete, saying there were three categories “sweet” and liqueur-like, which kept well and was suitable for transport by ship, “tomba” [rounded] and smooth-tasting, garba and dry (Venetians would call this latter Malvasia garba [acidulous] probably because – as Pietro Belon would argue in 1589 – it had a tendency to be rather tart). A significant quantity of the wine was also imported into Venice from the island of Chios, which some mistakenly considered to be the place where the Malvasia vines had originated. As Krimbas showed, the confusion may have arisen from the fact that the island had long produced an excellent liqueur wine comparable to Malaga and that its vines in general were considered to be finer than the Malvasia from Crete.

Thanks to the entrepreneurial acumen and commitment of the Venetians, Malvasia would become the most important wine in Europe over the period from the sixteenth to the end of the eighteenth century. And in Venice itself there were inns that sold that wine exclusively. Malvasia was at this point a sort of appellation contrôlée, with all the economic advantages of such a status. The close and long-standing relationship between the wine and Venice is beyond doubt; the appellation controlée point a sort of adze del sin [to the collection of wine duties].

The Spread of Malvasia

As Longman points out, in the thirteenth century Demetrius Papagomos and Nichephoros Chouman make specific reference to “the wine of Monoblasia or Monemvasia” as a product of the hinterland of that formidable fortress. As early as 1205 the area had been involved in the partition of territory that had followed the fall of Constantinople (1204) and thus been occupied by two French barons: Geoffrey de Villehardouin – nephew of the other Geoffrey de Villehardouin, an important chronicler of the 4th Crusade – and Guillaume de Champlitte. These two set up a network of 12 feudal baronies with the aim of creating a strategic power that could counterbalance – and replace – a Byzantium that was in irreversible decline. In 1248, the Venetians – who had previously helped Geoffrey de Villehardouin, prince of Achaea and nephew of the famous Geoffrey, to take control of Monoblasia – would themselves occupy large swathes of the region that produced wine which had proved so valuable. Then, due to this wine’s extraordinary success, they would transport some vine to Crete (which they had occupied since the 1204 Crusade), hoping to taking advantage of the suitability of the island’s climate and terrain for such crops. The city of Monoblasia itself would come under Venetian rule at the beginning of the fifteenth century; the Republic could be said to have exerted hegemony in the area from 1419 onwards, taking full control in 1463 and maintaining it until the city was ceded to the Turks in a treaty between doge Alvise Badoer and Suleiman the Magnificent. As Venetian rule over Crete and other Aegean islands, this would continue into the second half of the seventeenth century – a period during which the production and commerce of Malvasia became flourishing activities, which then went into decline and practically ceased altogether under Turkish rule. The fact that the Turks had conquered first Cyprus (August 1571) and much later Crete (in 1669, after a 23-year-old siege) meant that the Venetians looked elsewhere in the Mediterranean/Adriatic for places to cultivate their Malvasia vines, with Istria and Dalmatia being particularly suitable because they were on the routes taken by Venetian shipping.

Though it is difficult to believe that the wine produced on Crete was the same as that originally produced around Monoblasia, we do know that the fifteenth-century Swiss traveller Felix Faber, who visited both Greece and the Levant, praised the wine of Crete, saying there were three categories “sweet” and liqueur-like, which kept well and was suitable for transport by ship, “tomba” [rounded] and smooth-tasting, garba and dry (Venetians would call this latter Malvasia garba [acidulous] probably because – as Pietro Belon would argue in 1589 – it had a tendency to be rather tart). A significant quantity of the wine was also imported into Venice from the island of Chios, which some mistakenly considered to be the place where the Malvasia vines had originated. As Krimbas showed, the confusion may have arisen from the fact that the island had long produced an excellent liqueur wine comparable to Malaga and that its vines in general were considered to be finer than the Malvasia from Crete.

Thanks to the entrepreneurial acumen and commitment of the Venetians, Malvasia would become the most important wine in Europe over the period from the sixteenth to the end of the eighteenth century. And in Venice itself there were inns that sold that wine exclusively. Malvasia was at this point a sort of appellation contrôlée, with all the economic advantages of such a status. The close and long-standing relationship between the wine and Venice is beyond doubt; the appellation controlée point a sort of adze del sin [to the collection of wine duties].

The Regulation and Organisation of Distribution

Venice had a long-standing tradition of places that afforded board and lodging to travellers. Most of these were located in the Rialto and St. Mark’s areas, and the most famous included the taverns known as Taverna or Camer [cellar] del Cappello, del Selvadego (after the name of the first owner), del Pettigrotto, del Cavalettto, dello Storion (which gave its name to the street) and La Regina d’Umbria, the latter appears in documents as early as 1291 and was in San Bartolomeo. One other inn which deserves mention is that which the Order of the Knights Templar had set up for the pilgrims who came to Venice to take ship for the Holy Land. Called the Osteria della Luna, this was annexed to the main premises of the Order in Venice – Santa Maria in Capite Broli, near St. Mark’s, later, as a result of the bulls by pope Clement which suspended the activities of the Templars – in particular, the bull Ad providam Christi Vicari ad providam Christi Vicari ad providam Christi Vicari of 1312 – the property would be transferred to the Order of St. John of Jerusalem.
As for the serving of wine, this was governed by strict reg-
ulations, with the Great Council laying down during the opening hours for wine shops and the distance they had to be from each other. Hygiene was inspected by the Prov-
editori alla Santità [Health officers], with the State rec-
ognising that when wines were “natural and without any
addition they are good for the health of the body.” (Bulling of 27th September 1498). The Republic, therefore, was par-
cularly prompt to prohibit all kinds of adulteration or ma-
nipulation of wine – and even the addition of water (unless
this occurred at the moment the wine was sold over the
counter; the virtual law of 1175 signed by doge Ziani
laid down expressly that Neque cum illo aquam vel aliud
vitam miscere). Finally, there was a body called the Gesù-
tizia Nova which oversaw sales, both the quality of the
product and the size of the units in which it was sold. The
usual containers were botti [barrels] equal to 75.17 litres,
which comprised a total of 10 mazzole (thus around 75
litres each), which in their turn could be divided into sev-
eral secche [buckets] of 10-73 litres; as for the
bastioni’s inhabitants (that is, men, women, children and teeto-
takers) there was 600.936 litres and was divided into 4
magazzini or [places]. Given that both of them
were so named because they sold “Malva-
sia, a very delicate wine pressed from that grape, which is
known under the name of malvasia or grechetto. There are
two sorts of this wine: simple malvasia and what was
garba, which certainly has a rather tart taste.”
As mentioned, a malvasia might also sell others wines. Cip-
ro (from Cyprus), Malaga, Aleatico, Scopulo and Samos,
and “those wines which, whatever the manner in which they
were made, left a sweet aftertaste in the mouth, almost
all of them came from the Greek islands.” In other words,
what we would describe as liqueur wines.
Given the cost and quality of their wines, the malvasie
were mainly frequented by noblemen, but – as we have seen –
not exclusively. Those who appreciated these wines might
come from all social categories, so malvasie also became
places where those from different backgrounds exchanged
information and opinions. The Anonimo Viniziano
writes: “They served Malvasia to all social classes, and it was
a fine thing to see the varieties of people who passed through there,
pleasure to watch the comings and goings that there
were in such places. Noblemen, especially in wintertime,
did not disdain to sip into a malvasia, order their glass of
garba, drink it down quickly, and then go about their busi-
ness. And while they left the place it was not uncommon
for them to meet a gondolier, who would respectfully doff
his cap as he entered.” And often a nobleman might offer
everyone, irrespective of their social class, a round “of that
drink which is so welcome amongst all Venetians”, leaving
the change to the innkeeper and receiving the deferential
thanks of all those present.

The term ostoria in its modern meaning of “wine shop/
restaurant” only became established in Venice during the
eighteenth century, before that, the word had referred to
a place that provided food and board. As for the bastioni
and magazzini, they were places of average-low standing
that served wine retail – as did the samarchi or samar-
chets of even lower standing (their name refers to the fact
that their signs bore the Lion of St. Mark). Canove were
wine细胞s proper or warehouses, whilst malvasia were
generally places of a higher social standing with a clientele
of a certain status; as their name suggests they were where
one could buy Malvasia wines (the only place), but they
also sold wines from Cyprus and other prized wines from
Greece. The city also had some very specialised wine shops that
were known as banderuola. A state edict of 1514 limited
the number of these to a maximum of 20, given that the
banderuola enjoyed a specific tax regime for the sale of
wine by the glass (equivalent to 0.16 litres); in 1567 that
number was increased to 28. In 1514 a limit of 20 had also been placed on the maxi-
mum number of malvasia within the city, with those places
devoted to wine sold by the glass, again in 1567, that
number was increased to 28, and subsequently to 56. These
developments so a wide range of sweet wines: “They served
Malvasia for all social classes, and it was a fine thing to see
the variety of people they offered and to watch the com-
ings and goings that there were in such places.”
The greatest increase was imposed on Malvasia wines and on all wines passing through the city.
The greatest increase was imposed on Malvasia wines and on all wines passing through the city.
and extended to include ostorie (from which the minimum distance of a malvasia had to be 60 passi), however, the number of malvasia permitted
was increased to 56.

The Guild of Malvasia Merchants
In January 1572 malvasia merchants in the city applied to the Council of Ten for permission to form their own guild, which was to be associated with the religious fraternity dedi-
cated to St John the Apostle. Before making a decision, that
Council called for the opinion of other magistrature
[city authorities] that had a say in the matter: the Provvedi-
tori di Comuni [which policed streets, walls and guilds] and the Uffici alla Giustizia Vecchia. Given that both of them
were in favour, the Council would, on 13 July 1572, grant
the merchants the right to form that guild. Unfortunately
the marrigola [statutes] of the professional organisation
have not survived, only those for the fraternity responsible for religious celebrations and for the assistance to be of-
to guild members who were old or disabled and to the
widows and orphans of dead guild members. Approved by
the Provveditori di Comuni in 1575, that second marrigola
shows that all malvasiofetti had drawn up an agreement with the monks of San Nicolò della Lattuga, linked to the church
of Santa Maria Gloriosa dei Frari, to say masses in honour
of their patron saint and for the souls of their dead mem-
bers. In return they undertook to pay each year the sum of
36 ducats and also supply three secchi of wine [one arc-
chio=10.75 litres], presumably to be used in saying Mass.
Then, in 1580, the State reviewed the customs duties on
Malvasia wines and on all wines passing through the city.
And in 1641 the Senate would close any malvasia
that was not at least 100 passi (around 175 metres)
from a bastione or magazine, such a ban would then be
reiterated in 1671, and even extended to include ostorie
(from which the minimum distance of a malvasia had
228
229
1645 saw the beginning of the war between the Venetians and the Ottoman Turks over Crete, a conflict that would last 24 years and which ultimately – even though it took a heavy toll on Turkish naval forces – resulted in the Venetians losing control of the island in 1669, for all that Francesco Morosini made a valiant “last stand”.

In 1674 and 1677 the malvasiotti would obtain a three-year licence for the retail and wholesale commerce of their wine thanks to a fixed annual payment of 2,500 ducats directly into the coffers of the Giustizia Nuova. But then, in 1684, the Senate would decide to put up for public auction the right to sell Muscatel and Malvasia for a year – a decision which created no few problems for the members of the guild who were anxious to retain such an exclusive. Throughout the seventeenth century one would see highs and lows in Venetian control of the Peloponnese. Then Francesco Morosini would reconquer the territory, thereafter being known as Morosini Il Peloponnesiaco when doge over the years 1688 to 1694. However, though those gains were reconfirmed by the 1699 Peace of Karlowitz, the land would be lost to Istanbul forever with the Peace of Passarowitz (12 July 1718). And inevitably the loss of both Crete and the Peloponnese had serious consequences for Venetian imports of wines from the Levant. Even so, from the period 1708-1765, the malvasiotti had managed to obtain the contract for the dazio malvasia, granting them the exclusive right to sell Muscatel and other liqueur wines in the Venetian Republic. Meanwhile, overall consumption as a whole was dropping (even amongst the lower class) due to the fashion for coffee. Yet this drop in sales amongst the local population was counterbalanced by increasing consumption by the numerous foreigners either passing through or staying in the city. Furthermore, foreign countries were also purchasing “much greater quantities of exported Muscatsel and other liqueur-like wines from...
and bile. So it was rare for His Holiness not to use this for one of its three effects some time in the morning. And this kind of malvasia was brought from Venice by the Reverend Cardinal Andrea Cornaro and Mounsignor Archibishop of Corfu, who gave it to His Holiness.” The expert cellar man also recommended the use of quinces, cloves and nutmeg “to remove the sad taste of the wine.”

If one bears in mind that often all these wines were generally referred to as “Greek” – even though they came from different vines whose sole link was that they originated in the eastern Mediterranean – it is easy to understand the ambigographic confusion that surrounds them; a confusion so great that even nowadays it is difficult to distinguish between legitimate and spurious malvasia. This state of affairs had already recognised by Andrea Bacci di Sant’Elpidio, the learned physician to pope Sixtus V who in his monumental De Naturali Vinarum Historia (Rome, 1596) would repeatedly refer to wines made from Malvasia grapes that were produced in various regions of Italy and the Mediterranean, acknowledging the oenological importance of all of them. And that importance was also clear to Cristoforo da Messisburgo, head cook in the sixteenth-century household of the d’Este family, lords of Ferrara: in his curious work Libro nuovo nel qual s’impara il modo di ordinare bancetii etc. (New Book that teaches how to Organize Banquets etc.), published in Venice in 1552, he argued that no court could maintain a cellar unfurnished with such wines if it wanted to be “properly equipped for the visit of any great prince.” And as we know from the wines drunk at the famous wedding of Aribis Zorzi Contarini and Caterina Corran in 1755, aristocratic households did not celebrate any great occasion without bottles of Malvasia.

Thus the links between Venice and the various types of Malvasia is a centuries-old one, with the history of these wines and vines being interwoven with that of the city itself in a fertile interaction of influences. The cultural legacy of this relationship is one that does honour to our land and, even in the difficult days in which we live, perhaps offers a hope for a shared future.
Documents
WINE DUTIES charged in the Venetian Republic
Michela Dal Borgo

Set up by the Great Council as early as May 1268, the Officiali al Dazio del Vin was the office responsible for collecting customs duties on the import and export of wine sold in the Venetian Republic, on grapes, on retail sale by the glass jug (a spina) in the city’s various types of wine shop (bacinoni, mulattone, bandeaurome and sammarcheti). In 1453 these customs officials came under the control of the Guvernatori delle Entrate [Tax Overisers], which became the general body governing all forms of state revenue. To put an end to the confusion found in the collecting of customs duties – particularly those on wine (whose collection was often farmed out) – the Great Council would, on 5 March 1617, set up the Reverenti e Regolatori infra Dazi, who were also made responsible for putting an end to contraband.

As a document issued by the lire Savi all Mercanzia [Trade Overisers] in 1692 makes clear, wines might well be identified by their place of provenance. The text lists: “Terrani wines, also known as Vini veneti, that is, wines from the mainland, from Friuli, from Istria, from Slavonia, from Dalmatia and Albania, as well as some wines from foreign states such as Ferrara-ruled Lombardy, the kingdom of Naples, and especially the wines from Puglia and Abruzzo. Wines referred to as ‘F’, foreign, from outside the gulf of Venice. Various wines, which per anfora pay half the duty levied in the islands and are imported after the four months given above… These two branches are subject to the same rules and regulations as foreign liquor wines.

Finally the seventh branch is for the importation of spoilt wines, which per anfora pay half the duty levied in the Small Rating bracket, which means 15 lire, 15 soldi and 6 grossi, in current money. These spoilt wines are imported for the makers of vinegar and must come only from the mainland and in open, calibrated containers, and not in closed casks or other barrels. There are also the Macarcani who for a limited annual quantity per anfora pay only 8 lire 9 soldi and 5 grossi, in current money. For the privilege they enjoy, these can import per year 500 anfore of wine from the territory of Makarska, the coast area and Kefalonia with this limited tariff. If they want to import more they must pay the same tariff as the third branch and then are subject to the same regulations. Various monasteries of Mendicant Monks have an annual quantity of wine that is exempt duty. Similarly the osteria of Lizza Feusina [at the lagoon mouth of the river Brenta] is also allowed 18 anfore and 3 bigonze [total: about 11,250 litres] per year exempt from the Large Rating duty.”

THE CUSTOMS DUTIES ON WINE IN VENICE COVER ALL THE WINES INTRODUCED INTO THIS CITY AS WELL AS INTO CHIOGGIA, BARANO, Mazzorbo, Torcello, Murano, Malamocco and the Bastion del Lido that make up its territory.

These duties are levied for Venice in seven branches, each one of which has a different tax or tariff.

The first branch is known as the Low Rating, and the duty for each eight mastelli that make up a single anfora [81.75 litres] is 21 lire 11 soldi, in current money. This first branch involves the wine imported by private families for their own use, and can be granted to each family only at the Wine Office… with a levy on a maximum of 12 casks… and these casks brought in by private families cannot exceed six bigonze and 13 secchi in capacity, which makes a total of 13 mastelli e six secchi [around 10,300 litres] each.

Second Branch, this is known as the High Rating with licence, and it is levied at the rate of 41 lire 12 soldi and 6 grossi per anfora, in current money. This second branch covers the wine imported by hostellers, the keepers of hostières and merchants who trade in the Riva del Vin… However, one cannot grant the above-mentioned invoices with payment for imports for more than 150 anfora per shop or business; wishing to import more, they must cover the surplus with a bailment in gold or silver.

Third Branch. This is entitled High Rating without licence and is levied at 42 lire and 10 grossi per anfora, in current money. This third branch is for those who are importing wines from Dalmatia, Istria and the mainland for resale with the decks linked to the public quays at St. Mark’s and Rialto, and they must be sold wholesale – that is, by the secchio [10.73 litres] or more and never retail.

Fourth Branch. This is called the ‘30 and larger’ and for each anfora there is levied 55 lire, 18 soldi and 8 grossi, in current money. This tariff is paid by those importing Cyprus wines and all other sorts of foreign liquor wines and vinegars.

Fifth Branch. This is called Muscatel with Sediment [fezza] and is levied at 40 lire, 5 soldi and 4 grossi per anfora, in current money. These muscatel wines come from the islands of Zante, Cephalonia and Corfu, and they can be imported only in the four months of September, October, November and December.

Sixth Branch is called Muscatel without sediment and the duty levied per anfora is 16 lire, 7 soldi and 7 grossi, in current money. These wines come from the above-named islands and are imported after the four months given above… These two branches are subject to the same rules and regulations as foreign liquor wines.

As a mere indication of what was involved one might cite the fact that as imports increased over the course of the eighteenth century; it would be pointless and repetitive to try to chart those changes here, but one can get some idea of the variations from Antonio Stella’s Il Dazio sul Vino e sull’Uva nella Dominante (Turin, Tipografia Salesiana, 1891). As a general body governing all forms of state revenue. To put an end to the confusion found in the collecting of customs duties – particularly those on wine (whose collection was often farmed out) – the Great Council would, on 5 March 1617, set up the Reverenti e Regolatori infra Dazi, who were also made responsible for putting an end to contraband.

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In order to avoid fraud, as early as the fifteenth century a ban had been placed on the import of grapes used solely for pressing – for example, Pignole, Corvine, Patarsche, Garbine, Varrone and Vinipergher grapes (1449, 18 September, Ufficiali al dazio del vin). The document reports: “from the grapes that are brought into Venice every year a large quantity of wine is made on which no duty is paid, to the great harm of our State… Henceforward, it is not possible to sell grapes in Mestre, except those in baskets of 30 lire [here libbre, each equivalent to 0.47 kg] or less.” It was, however, permitted to import uve da bilancia – that is, grapes weighed on scales (bilancia), in other words for eating at table; these included Moscatelle, Marzemine and laghiatiché, as well as grapes from trellis or pergola vines and those from hillside vines (Biancetta, Schiave and Marzemine bianche). A document of 31 August 1502 published by the Ufficiali al Dazio del Vin reiterates: “Let no one, whoever they are, dare or presume to bring into this city loose or basket grapes unless they are of the following categories: Marzemina, hillside grapes, trellis-vine grapes or others that grow along our shores or in Chioggia.” There was, however, a ban on Cenerente or Lividelle grapes, similar to Marzemine (1518, 24 July, Ufficiali al Dazio del Vin: “It is not allowed to bring from the Vicenza hill areas a black grape known as Cenerente; this sort of grape is entirely prohibited”). A similar ban was extended to Uve Corbine (1568, 28 August, Ufficiali al Dazio del Vin: “Besides the Cenerente grapes it is not allowed to bring Corbine grapes into this city; because these are not good as table grapes and therefore are only used to produce wine, of which great quantities are made”). In other words, such grapes served to make what was used in the city to dilute other varieties of properly imported wines.

Bibliography
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The following is a list of the wine merchants in the Rialto and St. Mark’s areas, with the number of their boats.

Overall, there appear to have been 8 merchants with a total of 10 boats in St. Mark’s and 12 merchants with a total of 16 boats at Rialto.

Note on the wine merchants who sell from their boats on the quays of St. Mark’s and Rialto

St. Mark’s Quayside
Zuanne Calvi with two boats
Zuanne Zambonel, Gio. Batta Lucia with two boats
Domenico Zanella, Giuseppe Zard with two boats
Vicenzo Tabacchi with two boats
Zuanne Pangravio, Gio. Batta Lazaroni with two boats
Rialto Quayside
Gio. Batta Magnati, Zuanne Baseggio with two boats
Zuanne Todeschini, Antonio Todeschini with two boats
Gio. Batta Ballico, Simeon Ballico with two boats
Demetrio Coletti with two boats
Antonio Angeli with two boats
Giacomo Calvi with two boats
Antonio Ferrarin with two boats
Antonio Gregoletto, Zuanne Sibilatto with two boats

ASVe, Revisori e regolatori sopra dazi e Inquisitor sopra dazi, b. 60.
SHOPS SELLING MALVASIA

1 JULY 1762

Michela Dal Borgo

1762 July 1st

Alessandro Soratrosi, guardian of the Malvasia merchants in Venice, sends the officers of the Giustizia Nuova a list of the wine shops in the city selling that type of wine.

An inventory drawn up by myself, Alessandro Soratrosi, present guardian, of all malvasia wine shops which are open on the above-mentioned date, with the names of those running them:

1. Allessandro Soratrosi S. Trovaso
2. Lorenzo Pisani in Calle della Testa
3. Above named in Calle della Fabri S. Gimignan
4. Above named at Zattere S. Basilio
5. Andrea Antigazzi Calle de Fabri
6. Antonio Donadelli S. Cassan
7. Above named S. Maria Mater Domini
8. Bortolo Scarii S. Sofia
9. Bortolo Nicolini S. Tomà
10. Cristoforo Rossi Calle del Redoto S. Moisè
11. Domenico Artzzi at the Barche di Padova
12. Leporini e Turra S. Giacomo di Rialto
13. Domenico Artzzi at S. Stefano Bridge
14. Above named S. Fantin
15. Francesco Lazaroni in Frezzaria
16. Above named in Campo S. Moisè
17. Francesco Maggia in Corte del Form S. Zulian
18. Above named in Calle S. Domenico
19. Fratelli Canialli in Campo SS. Filippo Giacomo
20. Above named in Calle de Savonuri S. Polo
21. Fratelli Negrizzi at Carmini
22. Giovanni Maria Paganoni Barbarea delle Tolle
23. Gasparo Carrara S. Martina
24. Giovanni Antonio Astori at S. Silvestro
25. Giacomo Paganoni at Ca' Dolfin Bridge
26. Giacomo Lazaroni Casetarla S. Maria Formosa
27. Giovanni Maria Benetolo SS. Apostoli
28. Giovanni Maria Astori S. Felice
29. Above named S. Fosca
30. Giacomo Artzzi S. Maria Zobenigo
31. Above named Calle Longa at S. Moisè
32. Above named in Rio Terà at the Madalena
33. Giovanni Battista Sagedotti in Calle della Pietà
34. Giacomo Molinari in Campo dei Meloni
35. Giovanni Battista Peicoli in Calle della Balotte S. Salvador
36. Giacomo Bastazin in Calle della Bissa S. Bortolamino
37. Iseppo Leporini in Calle del Cinque
38. Iseppo Marchesan S. Antonin
39. Giustina Brotto at Ca' Balbi Bridge
40. Benetolo and Adami in Calle de Fuseri
41. Osgualdo Bomo at the Barri
42. Above named Calle del Dose S. Giovanni in Bragola
43. Pietro Antonio Priina in Calle del Remedio
44. Girolamo Gregoletto S. Simeon Picolo
45. Pietro Carrara S. Giovanini Grisostomo
46. Pietro Lobbia in Calle Longa S. Maria Formosa
47. Zuanne Vistmian in Campo S. Provedo
48. Above named S. Bugnetto
49. Foresti and Curti in Calle de Boteri S. Cassan
50. Sebastian Brunoro in Pecaria Canareggio
51. Ventrà Moralli at S. Barnabà
52. Above named at S. Pantalon
53. Raffa and Scotti in Campiglidella Casson S. Canzian
54. Above named Fondamenta S. Marcello
55. Pietro Terzi at the Zecca
56. Fratelli Canialli in Calle Valaressà

The wine shop of our nonzolo [gravedigger] is not included in the list.

The above named shops, 56 in total at 12 lire a year make a total of 672, and of these they must pay 67 lire to the Advocate Fiscal.

The above named shops, 56 in total at 6 lire a year make a total of 336, and of these they must pay the Fanti [lower-ranking officials of government authorities] 3 lire.

ASVe, Giustizia Nuova, b. 15.
THE WINE CELLAR OF PIETRO DONÀ,
Venetian ambassador to Pope Pius VI (1786-90)
Michela Dal Borgo

The Venetian nobleman Pietro Donà di Antonio was appointed Venetian Ambassador to Rome in 1786. From his palazzo on Riva di Biasio on the Grand Canal he would organise the dispatch to Rome of more than 300 boxes and crates of furniture, pictures, household objects, linen, tableware and silverware, together with the wines that would be served at the official banquets held at the Venetian embassy (the imposing Palazzo Barbo-Venezia, now the Museo Nazionale di Palazzo Venetia).

Detailed lists of the goods sent are now to be found in the Venice State Archives (under Archivio Donà di Riva di Biasio, in Archivio Marcello Grimani-Giustinian, b. 352). Along with two caratelli (small elongated barrels) of vinegar (articles 26 and 27 in the shipment), the ambassador also shipped direct to the port of Civitavecchia two barrels and two caratelli of vino Cipro (numbers 28-31) which had been purchased from the merchants Rossini and Battistella and then forwarded by the Venetian Consul Vassallo; total capacity 176 secchi (1,888.48 litres).

The rest of the bottles were sent via Pesaro, in boxes numbered from 1 to 24 and in crates numbered 83, 84, 105 and 106. The following is the list of the prize wines, with the exact terms used in the shipping document and the total numbers of bottles for each.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Wine Type</th>
<th>Total Bottles</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Borgogna</td>
<td>14 bottles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Red Borgogna</td>
<td>349 bottles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Old red Borgogna</td>
<td>44 bottles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White Borgogna</td>
<td>101 bottles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S. Lorent</td>
<td>50 bottles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bordò</td>
<td>208 bottles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reno</td>
<td>54 bottles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monte Mora</td>
<td>36 bottles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Capo di Buona Speranza</td>
<td>40 bottles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S. Petronio</td>
<td>24 bottles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tokaj</td>
<td>60 bottles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Madera</td>
<td>24 bottles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malvasia Madera</td>
<td>36 bottles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sambuca</td>
<td>50 bottles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Petro Kimesno Ximenes</td>
<td>52 bottles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vin de Keres</td>
<td>49 bottles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pucareit</td>
<td>32 bottles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vino vino de Malaga</td>
<td>31 bottles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vino tinto de Alicante or Alicante</td>
<td>31 bottles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vino tinto de Rota</td>
<td>50 bottles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spagna</td>
<td>2 bottles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hermitage</td>
<td>1 bottle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Atniza</td>
<td>30 bottles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moscato di Cipro</td>
<td>16 bottles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Old Moscato di Cipro</td>
<td>35 bottles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Muscat named “I”</td>
<td>1 bottle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limonado</td>
<td>40 bottles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>For some wines, the bottles are actually identified by year, this is the case with Picolit, of which various types are mentioned: Picolit</td>
<td>152 bottles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Picolit to be used for Tokaj</td>
<td>36 bottles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Picolit terego</td>
<td>24 bottles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Picolit d’Istria</td>
<td>25 bottles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Picolit 1772</td>
<td>5 bottles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Picolit 1776</td>
<td>5 bottles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Picolit 1778</td>
<td>6 bottles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Picolit primo</td>
<td>3 1780: 2 bottles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There is also a wine generically described as Cipro</td>
<td>(Cyprus):</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cyprus 1782</td>
<td>23 bottles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cyprus 1783</td>
<td>28 bottles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cyprus 1784</td>
<td>32 bottles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cyprus 1785</td>
<td>84 bottles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cyprus 1786</td>
<td>38 bottles</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Thereafter come a 1781 Refosco (6 bottles), a 1784 Moscato di Barbarum (20 bottles) and a 1782 Fregapardo (20 bottles). The Venetian ambassador’s wine supply is then completed by 25 bottles of Rosolino da Corfù and 40 bottles of Rosolino da Zara, all variously flavoured with mint, sage, rose petals, lemon balm, cinnamon, violet, strawberry, vanilla, cloves, Marasca cherries (specified to be “from Sebenico”) and bitter almond. Overall, therefore, Donà’s cellar comprised 1,870 bottles. But not all of them would be drunk during the time he was ambassador: the inventory drawn up in 1791 by his “master of the household”, Giovanni Mainardi, lists a good 207 bottles (and 13 different types of rosolio) to be sent back to Venice, Pietro Donà himself giving strict instructions that they were to be returned to the wine cellar of his palazzo on Riva di Biasio.
On 1 October 1768, the Venetian Senate ruled that two Deputati all’Agricoltura were to be appointed as part of the Proveditori sopra Beni Inculti [the agency responsible for as yet unexploited land], the specific task of the two figures being to stimulate and improve farming and livestock-breeding. The two Deputati could draw upon the information provided by the various Agrarian academies which, following the example of the first – created in Udine in 1762 – now existed in all the main cities of Venice’s land and sea empire.

Some of the learned papers presented by members of those academies were published in II Giornale d’Italia, whilst others are still to be found, in manuscript form, in the Venetian State Archives (Deputati all’Agricoltura, bb. 14-23). The following is a selection of the most salient points in those years when a shortage in other less good vines. But one should only plant choice varieties of both the white- and black-grape kind. For example, Picolit, Prosecco, Bianchetta and Moscadella (this latter has almost disappeared from our countryside), together with Peverella secca, Bianchetta and Moscarda (this latter has almost disappeared from our countryside), together with Peverella secca, Bianchetta and Moscarda (this latter has almost disappeared from our countryside), together with Peverella secca, Bianchetta and Moscarda (this latter has almost disappeared from our countryside), together with Peverella secca, Bianchetta and Moscarda (this latter has almost disappeared from our countryside), together with Peverella secca, Bianchetta and Moscarda (this latter has almost disappeared from our countryside), together with Peverella secca, Bianchetta and Moscarda (this latter has almost disappeared from our countryside), together with Peverella secca, Bianchetta and Moscarda (this latter has almost disappeared from our countryside), together with Peverella secca, Bianchetta and Moscarda (this latter has almost disappeared from our countryside), together with Peverella secca, Bianchetta and Moscarda (this latter has almost disappeared from our countryside), together with Peverella secca, Bianchetta and Moscarda (this latter has almost disappeared from our countryside), together with Peverella secca, Bianchetta and Moscarda (this latter has almost disappeared from our countryside), together with Peverella secca, Bianchetta and Moscarda (this latter has almost disappeared from our countryside), together with Peverella secca, Bianchetta and Moscarda (this latter has almost disappeared from our countryside), together with Peverella secca, Bianchetta and Moscarda (this latter has almost disappeared from our countryside), together with Peverella secca, Bianchetta and Moscarda (this latter has almost disappeared from our countryside), together with Peverella seccaa in the hills. I can therefore never praise highly enough those wealthy landowners who have undertaken to cultivate Picolit, creating vineyards thereof which are no small size.

The second condition to be respected is that, however many vines are planted, there should also be space for fruit trees and other trees (such as mulberry). And in particular one should replant olive trees here which, as I said, should occupy an amount of land which is second only to that used for wheat. Olives grow well both on hillsides and in valleys, as long as they are sheltered from the sharp Bora wind. In plain land, which is an unusual site for vines, one must also moderate both the quantity and quality of vines cultivated. With regard to quality and type, one must first of all regulate the cultivation of vines in plain-land areas. One must choose only the best, be they white- or black-grape vines – for example, these might be an ordinary fine Bianchetta, white Marzemina, Grossera or Cagnina, and some Pignola, Dall’Occhio, mild Verdisse etc. As for black grapes, these could be Marzemina, especially in dry and stony terrain, Pignola, Groppella, Recaldata, Schara and Rabosa, which serve added weight to wine, and because the acid from these grapes makes the wine keep better, but this latter should not be the only grape, or not even the greatest part, as it is in many places.

Now what shall I say of those gentlemen (who are few and far between) who lay out Picolit vineyards in flat areas? Count Asquini’s famous Picolit grows in Fagagna, a low-lying and marshy place. However, this wine when compared with what by my estimated fellow academicians Sig. Ottavio Cristofoli – both by myself and by others who have a finer palate than I do – is like plain-land Marzemino compared to hillside Marzemino. So, even in flat areas, the esteemed gentlemen can very well plant choice vines, especially in well-selected sites of thin or stony soil, as is the case at Monticella, Collalbrigo, Maren, Visnadello, etc. However, one should be warned that Prosecco grape here does not ripen every year. In plain-land areas, too, there should remain space for mulberry trees and some types of fruit tree. Such a regulation of the cultivation of vines will more easily be introduced over time rather than all at once.

V Gentlemen, I hope that the contents of this article will be taken into account and considered. First, however, before examining the way such a trade can be introduced, one must demonstrate as briefly as possible how wines can be fortified to become more liqueur-like in quality, how this is already done, and how in this way the wines can withstand transport by both road and ship.

First of all, there is no doubt that these wines can be made more liqueur-like, given that experience shows this to be the case with our Picolit, Prosecco, Bianchetto and Marzemino, etc, which many gentlemen are already concentrating into this more liqueur-like state. Who is not convinced of this? Thus all I have to do is show you how and in how many ways this can be done.

Our wines are of two kinds or qualities, depending either on the location (hill or plain-land vineyard) or the colour of the grape (white or black). And every one of these can be made more fine and liqueur-like in different ways.

Whether from hillside or plain-land vineyards, Picolit can be made liqueur-like both using the old method or, even better, the new. The Picolit of Collalbrigo and of Fagagna (a place which is very low-lying) demonstrate the fact.

Ordinary Prosecco from hillside vineyards but aged for a few years was, when taken to Naples and Turin, much more appreciated if it had been made in the manner of Picolit. The Prosecco from plain-land vineyards cannot be made in this way because the grapes never completely ripen, except for some very hot years and in certain hot terrains (such as Monticella, Visnadello and Maren).

Bianchetto, made from a finer grape, is very similar to Picolit if made in this manner, whether the grape comes from hillside or plain-land vineyards (but the latter must

REPORTS ON THE WINES OF THE VENETO Submitted to Venice’s Deputies of Agriculture (18th century) Michela Dal Borgo
be of the areas above-mentioned). And it is even more remarkable if one third of the grapes used are of another type.

Tosc is scarcely known in the plain land and I do not know if any comes from there. But the fact that, if made in the Picolit manner, this wine is excellent is testified to by his Excellency Abbot Vinciguerra of Collalto and the noble gentleman Ottavio Cristofoli, an Agrarian Councillor.

Using Moscadel grape one can make a wine perfectly similar to Fontignac. The 1781 almanac for the farmers of Vicenza, published by the learned doctor Turra, perpetual secretary to the Accademica Agraria in that city, gives the way of making this wine, which is very simple. The problem is that this Moscadel grape has become rare because the plant does not yield enough fruit. But, I respond, one is looking for quality not quantity, of which there is already too much.

As well as with these individual wines one can also make mixed wines, that is with all types of grape, but in the Picolit manner; be they all from hillside vines, plain-land vines, mixed wines, that is with all types of grape, but in the Picolit manner. The best is from hillside grapes, the one of plain-land vines is very poor. Those who are older than myself know the rarity of bottles from the parish of San Venedemiano Cargnelli, when the wine was made solely with Grossera or Cagnina grapes from the plain-land vineyards!

As a rule, we can satisfy the tastes of each different nation thanks to our very fortunate climate. If one wants a very pale white wine that is rather more sweet than not, etc. We can make the taste of each different nation thanks to our very fortunate climate. Our wines can be made into liqueur wines and thus withstand shipping and improve in quality. We know from experience that all – or almost all – of them travel, even if made in the old manner Picolit, Prosecco, Marzemino have been sent throughout Italy and into Germany and even France; but that does not amount to much because the trade by land is almost nothing.

But if one trades by sea, it is reasonable to believe that some wines will withstand shipping as long as they have been pu- nged, and that there will not be any loss or adulteration in the casks. And such wines will be made in the Picolit manner. Impurities, sediments and ill-handling are the only causes that can make them change and lose their goodness. Furthermore, experience – which stands above any rational arguments – shows beyond doubt that Picolit, Tosc and all white-grape wines do not only withstand shipping by sea but actually improve thereby considerably. And therefore one might rationally judge that all other wines will with- stand shipping and improve in quality.

Would it, therefore, be so strange to propose that before drinking our wines we should send them to sea on a safe trade. “Once the farmer has examined the position, nature and constitution of the terrain on which he intends to plant his new vineyards, he should then, through diligent study, identify the species of vines that are most suited to the local climate, and use only those which can most easily and profitably be aligned and yield copious fruit. With regard to the choice of vines for our climate, I can only suggest a few species and kinds, and these are not to be sought out in the islands of the archipelago, nor on the shores of the islands of the Ionian or Aegean which produce such perfect and appreciated wine. Similarly, they are not vines of Tuscany or Friuli, which yield such tasty fruit, nor are they the vines of the neighbour regions just beyond our Alps, for exam- ple those which are aligned so wonderfully in the Treviso and Conegliano areas. All of these, if transplanted to our climate, would degenerate completely and would not give the expected fruit. Warning of this is even to be found in the poet when he speaks of vines from foreign climes transport- ed elsewhere… The same document is even cited in Colu- mella, Book III, Chap. X. So, the diligent farmer must only choose those plants for his vineyard which are suited to his climate, because it is only plants of this kind which he can confidently hope will thrive. Hence, one can only recom- mend a few – a very few – types of vine for vineyards in our region, and, in my opinion, these might be: the simple Bian- chetta, the Pignola Bianca and also the black-grape Pignola. It is with these three sorts and no more that I would exhort each person to plant vineyards in this climate of ours, and it seems to me that every person here who settled for these three species alone in his vineyards would be someone who
was well-advised. And if one wanted to undertake a careful study of the fruit yielded by other vines, we would quickly see that they are very different in character, both in the time in which they ripened and the quality of their juices. As experience proves, even Marzemina itself does not grow here as sweet and juicy as the three vines named above: it does not yield any sweetness even if harvested from the vines in November, allowing, that is – something of which I am far too persuaded – that the grapes can in this area survive on the vines until that season without being spoiled. This is why I would recommend that this grape should not be used in planting vineyards in this climate. The same is to be said of Versigna – both white- and black-grape varieties – of Groppella and of Cinciacalza, none of which would ripen in this area, thus their fruit would be very bitter and distasteful, and hence would only produce poor qualities in any wine that is pressed from them. So, in planting any new vineyard in this region one should keep to the simple Bianchetta or to the white- or black-grape Pignola. Those new vineyard in this region one should keep to the simple Bianchetta or to the white- or black-grape Pignola. Those three vines alone generally produce fruit that ripens fully here. And their fruit is also of better flavour than that of the other vines when planted in the vineyards we are talking about here."  

ASVe, Deputati all’Agricoltura, b. 19

26 March, 1772  
A dissertation on the manner of improving the quality and production of vines in the Belluno area by Don Antonio Carrera, Archpriest of Castiglione, and member of the Pubblica Società Georgica degli Aristamici in Belluno.  

...With regard to the type of vines to be planted one should refer to custom and experience. Tauracchi distinguishes 21 species of entirely different vines, but the common vine is that usually called Vitis vinifera, of which different sorts exist, from all of which one can gather a copious harvest depending upon the quality of the terrain and climate in the area where they are planted. In the Belluno area one only sees white grapes, of the kind that in the Treviso area are called Bianchetta. Given that black grapes ripen much later, they are not suited to our climate: however, some are found within our vineyards, perhaps with the intention of giving a little colour to the wine, which ordinarily is the colour of water when made from grapes that are weak and are cultivated in heavy soil... VIII [It is said:] "The Belluno climate can only produce wines that are bitter and distasteful. So it is not worth taking on the responsibility of a lot of vines because there will be no market for the product, and the harvest will be a burden rather than a source of profit for landowners." My response to this is that it is certainly true that the inhabitants of Treviso or Vicenza areas will not want to drink the wine from the Belluno area. So far we can agree... If our wine is not perfect, perhaps we drink a third less, but that still leaves us enough to supply all the wines in our region. And anyway, these same wines, which are held to be so mediocre by certain fine-palated drinkers, are not of so bad a quality as they make out. In certain parts of our region we make wine that is in no way inferior to the wine of the lowlands, when one excludes the so-called ‘vin di riva’ which comes from the hills of Serravalle, Conegliano and other similar places – and even that wine may be sweet to the plate but is harmful to the stomach. Most of the wines from our parishes of Oltrardo and San Felice – and those of Sagognia, Salè, Sarc, Prapavei, Col Cavalier, San Pietro in Milonz and other places – are wines that have a very pleasant taste and keep for a long time and, as people say, are good for the digestion. As for other locations where vines are not yet cultivated – for example, the hills and slopes that face to the east and south which are now simply pasture – if they were planted with vines would they not yield an excellent wine? So one might hope that the people of Caioare and those of other mountain areas, seeing the advantages thereof, would get their wine here in the Belluno area. It is to be noted that in these locations grapes grow better, as long as the vines are well-tended. Fields with rich soil produce a wine that is weak, of bad odour and that does not last long. In such places, the vines must be hoed more regularly and the canes left to grow longer and heavier with fruit, or else the vines are earthed up around the base with river sand or ashes. In this way, the wine obtained is better. But, after all these rules regarding the cultivation of grapes have been respected, the measures most necessary for improving the quality of Belluno wines are as follows..."  

ASVe, Deputati all’Agricoltura, b. 19

ROVIGO  
22 April, 1770  
A paper by the Canon Count Girolamo Silvestri, member of the Pubblica Accademia Agraria dei Concordi in Rovigo.  

...To say a few words about the vines from which we obtain drink, one cannot deny that the province does not fully supply needs. But given that many areas have as yet no – or very few – vineyards, the increase in such plantations would be no small benefit to our commerce... We have endless amounts of poor grapes that give us a sad wine of no or slight value. This is our fault not the fault of the land... The ground at Pontecchio, Selva, Cognoan, Villamarzana, Anquà is of estimable quality but, one has to confess it, next to no care is taken of it.  

ASVe, Deputati all’Agricoltura, b. 20

VICENZA  
16 May, 1771  
A paper by Count Antonio Paolucci, President of the Pubblica Accademia Agraria di Vicenza.  

"Vines are cultivated here very well, and the wine produced is plentiful and good. This field of production is stimulated by the ease of river transport along the Bacchiglione to Venice, which facilitates sales. A more conscientious method in the production of our wines would increase its reputation and profitability. The people we supply like sweet wine, their tastes should be accommodated and the care taken to do so should go along with increases in quantity."  

ASVe, Deputati all’Agricoltura, b. 19

Bibliography


PICOLIT FROM FRIULI
PICOLIT FROM CONEGLIANO

Michela Dal Borgo

The Picolit vine was present in Friuli for centuries but yielded very little fruit. Its subsequent fortune was due to the entrepreneurial acumen and agronomical skill of Count Fabio Asquini, whose family had since the fifteenth century been lords of the fiefdom of the castle of Fagagna, a small agricultural community of 1,500 souls located on the flat banks of the river Tagliamento between Udine and San Daniele. On his 408-hectare estate, Asquini brought to bear his vast knowledge of new agricultural procedures and new methods of vinification, with the goal of making the family business more profitable. By 1755 his Picolit was already highly prized in Paris, thanks to the good offices of the Venetian ambassador, Giovanni Mocenigo, who had tasted the wine when Lord of the Patria del Friuli.

But the Picolit “boom” in Europe would only really come in 1758, thanks to a carefully constructed network of commercial outlets. Around 100,000 decilitres of the wine were made annually, with the product being sold in delicate bottles of green Murano glass that held only 20 oz. or at most, 25 decilitres. Thus Picolit found a place in the courts of Paris, Amsterdam, London, St. Petersburg, Vienna (where the Habsburg emperor described it as “the best wine in the world”) and Rome: in summer 1765, the fine palates of pope Clement’s XIII’s noble guests preferred it to all the other prized wines served.

In 1761 Count Asquini would write a short treatise that is a veritable handbook on the making of the wine; entitled Della maniera di piantare, allevare e condurre una vigna a pergolato e del modo di fare il vino Picolit e di schiarirlo [On how to plant, tend and manage a vineyard of trellis vines and how to make and clarify Picolit wine], this is still in the private Asquini archive in Fagagna.

In a report to the Venetian Senate in April 1764, the podestà [governor] of Udine, Nicolò Contarini, would judge this to be a wine for the rich and few, given it was made only “by the industry of a few inhabitants”, but one which had a high profit yield: 300% per field. The wine was primarily destined for the foreign market, yet the podestà wisely recommended that it should be introduced into the Venice area – via Portugaluo – with growers being encouraged through the application a low customs tariff (ASVe Collegio, Relazioni, b. 4) Depicted in Gallesio’s Pomona Italiana, a book that covered all the fruit plants in Italy, Picolit would then be introduced into the Conegliano area (in the years 1770-75), thanks to Ottavio Cristofoli, an authoritative member of the Accademia Agraria degli Agricoltori in that town.

In a paper he presented to that Academy, subsequently forwarded to the Deputati all’Agricoltura in Venice, he offers a very illuminating account of this “liqueur-like” wine:

“Therefore, most respected gentleman, I, an agrarian member of your Academy, have the honour and pleasure of offering you a (small) taste of Picolit, the product of a vineyard I myself planted a few years ago. Thus [the wine being sampled] is the product of the harvest of the year 1781. I present the wine to you in sealed and straw-wrapped bottles so that you can see how easy and simply it is to prepare these bottles in such a manner that they can be transported anywhere. I would entreat you to try the wine here and then give me your dispassionate opinion on its quality. I have obtained the same wine since I began to harvest grapes from the vines four years ago, indeed, as the vines get older, the quality of the wine improves. The rules followed in making it I took from the best oenologists in Italy and north of the Alps, of whom there are many nowadays. Unless I am blinded by love for what is my own, I am certain that it will please your palates; and of this I am confident because of certain experiments that I have made, with research as far as the island of Malta, which I have repeated three times to date. This wine not only withstands shipping but actually improves greatly thereby, as I myself have been able to judge by experience. In 1779 I sent some as far as Constantinople and had it thence returned to me, and found that in comparison it had improved greatly. And of that wine I kept some, which is known to some of you because I had the pleasure of getting you to taste it at the time.”

Picolit, a veritable handbook on the making of the wine; entitled Della maniera di piantare, allevare e condurre una vigna a pergolato e del modo di fare il vino Picolit e di schiarirlo [On how to plant, tend and manage a vineyard of trellis vines and how to make and clarify Picolit wine], this is still in the private Asquini archive in Fagagna.

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In a paper he presented to that Academy, subsequently forwarded to the Deputati all’Agricoltura in Venice, he offers a very illuminating account of this “liqueur-like” wine:

“Therefore, most respected gentleman, I, an agrarian member of your Academy, have the honour and pleasure of offering you a (small) taste of Picolit, the product of a vineyard I myself planted a few years ago. Thus [the wine being sampled] is the product of the harvest of the year 1781. I present the wine to you in sealed and straw-wrapped bottles so that you can see how easy and simply it is to prepare these bottles in such a manner that they can be transported anywhere. I would entreat you to try the wine here and then give me your dispassionate opinion on its quality. I have obtained the same wine since I began to harvest grapes from the vines four years ago, indeed, as the vines get older, the quality of the wine improves. The rules followed in making it I took from the best oenologists in Italy and north of the Alps, of whom there are many nowadays. Unless I am blinded by love for what is my own, I am certain that it will please your palates; and of this I am confident because of certain experiments that I have made, with research as far as the island of Malta, which I have repeated three times to date. This wine not only withstands shipping but actually improves greatly thereby, as I myself have been able to judge by experience. In 1779 I sent some as far as Constantinople and had it thence returned to me, and found that in comparison it had improved greatly. And of that wine I kept some, which is known to some of you because I had the pleasure of getting you to taste it at the time.”

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Bibliography


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Il vino nella storia di Venezia
Vigneti e cantine nelle terre dei dogi tra XIII e XXI secolo