

## THE OBSCURE PARTY: ANONYMOUS DENUNCIATIONS IN THE REPUBLIC OF VENICE

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### ABSTRACT

*This study analyzes the role of anonymous denunciations in the Republic of Venice as a third party in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries. First a secret allegation taken from the Archivio di Stato of Venice is presented as a case study and the key elements are introduced. Then the case is placed in its more general historical context, and an explanation of the institution of the anonymous denunciation is provided, along with a consideration of the relevant literature and studies on the subject made by contemporary scholars and the opinions and influential works of intellectuals and artists of the time. In conclusion, the study reconsiders the question of the anonymous denunciation as a third party, emphasizing its important social role by analyzing some of the key elements presented in the case study and in the paper. The anonymous denunciation can be seen as a third party because often they fuelled the machine of justice at times creating disruptive consequences.*

*Key words: secret or anonymous denunciation or allegation, stone mouths or casselle, policing systems, social order, justice system, Council of Ten*

## LA PARTE OSCURA: LE DENUNCIE ANONIME NELLA REPUBBLICA DI VENEZIA

### SINTESI

*Questo lavoro si focalizza sul ruolo della denuncia anonima come terza parte nella Repubblica di Venezia nel corso del Sei- Settecento. Il saggio inizia presentando un caso studio di una denuncia anonima presa dall'Archivio di Stato di Venezia. Successivamente la denuncia in questione viene calata nel più generale contesto storico, spiegando in modo più dettagliato in cosa consistessero e come funzionavano le denunce anonime a Venezia, considerando anche l'opinione degli intellettuali e artisti dell'epoca. Nell'ultima parte del saggio, lo studio riconsidera il ruolo della denuncia anonima come terza parte e analizza alcuni elementi chiave presentati traendo esempi dal caso studio, enfatizzando così l'importante ruolo sociale che rivestivano le denunce anonime all'interno della società veneziana. Le denunce anonime possono essere considerate una terza parte*

*perché spesso innestavano il sistema giustizia, talvolta creando delle conseguenze destabilizzanti per l'intera società e per il potere politico.*

*Parole chiave: denunce e delazioni anonime e segrete, bocche di pietra o casselle, sistemi di policing, ordine sociale, sistema giustizia, Consiglio dei Dieci*

On the 23<sup>rd</sup> of August, 1779 a message was found in one of the *casselle* that dotted the territory of the Serenissima<sup>1</sup>. The letter had been placed in the stone box of the *Esecutori contro la bestemmia*<sup>2</sup>, where usually only certain kinds of notes were found. Often they were allegations or denunciations in regard to crimes of a moral nature, concerning the honour and respectability of the community. They included crimes such as blasphemy, irreligious behaviours or sexual crimes like rape and sodomy, or else gambling, printing of unauthorized works, and so on. These denunciations were often secret and unsigned. They were anonymous. The particular anonymous denunciation under study here, written in an elegant form and learned language, concerned the behaviour of a man originally from Rome, a former barber in his youth, a certain Giuseppe Terrizzo<sup>3</sup>, better known in Venice as Giuseppe Cataldi after the family name of his wife<sup>4</sup>. With his wife he had lived in the area of Sant'Angelo for the past twelve years, in the house of a man from Genoa who may have been his wife's lover. According to the denouncer, Giuseppe Cataldi was to be considered the biggest and meanest *Ruffiano* (procurer) in Venice. The note went on to say that Cataldi may have been chased out of Rome twenty-two years before “perché vi ruffianeggiava la medesima” (ASV, ECB, b. 36, 23<sup>rd</sup> of August, 1779). The accuser tells us about Cataldi's and his wife's lives before they settled in Venice. Among many things, we learn, for instance, that they travelled around many cities of Italy and abroad and were involved in the theatre. The accusation gives us some information about the nature of the character and personality of Cataldi, who seems to have been a real trickster, as he tried to fool people by convincing them that he possessed special curative waters that could prevent venereal diseases and that he could restore virginity with syringes.<sup>5</sup> Ever since his arrival in Venice, the accuser said, Cataldi had decided to profess the art of *ruffiano*, and he did so in such a blunt and frank manner that in a short time he became the most “spiteful” *ruffiano* of Venice, well known by the citizens as well as by visitors to Ven-

1 A *cassella* was a box, or a stone mouth where people could put the denunciations.

2 The tribunal of the *Esecutori contro la Bestemmia* was established on the 20<sup>th</sup> of December 1537 as a special tribunal which operated in the terms and with the modality of secret procedures, to deal with the serious crime of blasphemy (Preto, 2003, 60–70). Over time the duties of the *Esecutori* increased, and they came to be concerned with many aspects of the ordinary lives of citizens. A study of the *Esecutori contro la Bestemmia*, their establishment, their responsibilities and their composition has been done by Renzo Derosas (1980). See also Scarabello, 1991, 141–151. On the crime of sodomy see Martini, 1988.

3 Larry Wolff briefly mentions the case of Giuseppe Terrizzo/Cataldi on his volume on sexual crimes and child abuse in Venice at the time of Casanova (Wolff, 2012, in particular 19–20, 29, 52).

4 In this essay Giuseppe Terrizzo will be addressed as Giuseppe Cataldi, or Cataldi.

5 Di aver certe acque da non far prendere mali veneri, e da far tornare vergini le fanciulle deflorate (ASV, ECB, b. 36, 23<sup>rd</sup> of August 1779).

ice. Through deception, he managed to convince many women to sacrifice their family's honour and to become prostitutes. Of the depravation of the man, the note explained, the mother of the singer Giovanna Gardi was well aware: the deceiver Cataldi had long harassed this woman, trying to convince her to enrol her daughters in the profitable business for which women, and not only, have been famous since the dawn of time. The unspeakable Cataldi, continued the note, was also a man of little faith, because in his neighbourhood of St. Angelo, he had rarely, if ever, been seen taking parts at religious functions. It was also known that he did not respect the precept to abstain from eating meat, and that he never went to confession, not even at Easter-time, as the parish priest of St. Angelo could well testify. In order to support the allegations, the denouncer indicated the names of several potential witnesses who were in the habit of meeting in Saint Mark's Square: a certain D. Vettore; another Roman, Conte Ricci; Antonio Dorighelli; a dancer, Domenico Morelli, who lately had also been involved in a case of *ruffianaggio*; a virgin from Padua; and many others in the world of music and theatre, as well as inn-keepers. At the bottom of the letter, in a different handwriting, there are a few lines noting when the message was found and giving the order to consider this note and to investigate the matter further (ASV, ECB, b. 36, 23<sup>rd</sup> of August, 1779).

In this message of accusation there are several elements worthy of reflection in considering the secret denunciation as a third party and the social dynamics it implied. But first, let us briefly examine what the institution of the secret denunciation in the justice system of the Serenissima represented and how it worked.

Great changes were taking place in the Europe of the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries. European society was becoming more complex and stratified, and sharpened social distinctions were emerging. Peter H. Wilson illustrates how wealth became more and more concentrated in the hands of few persons, and describes an urban population that was growing rapidly in many parts of Europe.<sup>6</sup> Crimes such as vagrancy became widespread, as did general disorders that created the need for greater control, especially in the cities. Furthermore, prolonged warfare went on in most of Europe between 1667 and about 1720, after the Thirty Years' War. This was a period of rupture with the past, as society and individuals came to be no longer seen as divided into fixed, eternal social orders and estates. The rapid growth of towns and cities complicated the medieval orders, creating a new order made up of urban citizens who were distant from the peasantry and their lifestyle and who could not fit in with medieval ideals of the stratification of society (Wilson 2009).

This shifting period produced unstable conditions in society as a whole and in the ordinary lives of people. The consequence was a growth in official efforts to monitor social disorder and poverty, and to regulate unacceptable behaviours through specific suitable punishments. This regulation, known as "policing", had the general purpose of safeguarding the ideal hierarchy of the social estates, dealing with their problems and, ultimately, making sure that every estate was able to implement its authorized sanctioned liberties (Wilson 2009, 116–120).

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6 However things were different in Venice and in its territory, where the increase in the population appeared to be more and more concentrated in the countryside see (Brusantin, 1980).

At the beginning of the Eighteenth century, past ideals and the former division into estates were still present in Europe, as were concepts of honour and respectability in their medieval meaning, with all the legal and social consequences implied (Povolo, 1997).

But, the drive to redesign society and to sever ties with the past were growing: ways of thinking were in rapid transformation, and the world where our *ruffiano* Cataldi lived was quickly fading. Before the advent of fully organized police systems, to perpetuate policing, modern states had to rely more on the cooperation of the local population to make the justice system work and keep social control and order.

In this regard, we need only to think of the complex policing system of London and in Britain in general. Here, before the introduction of the police in 1829, the justice system could rely on constables, night watchers, thief-catchers, or on private individuals and the “bow street runners”, who for one reason or another decided to cooperate with the justice system. Policing systems also included the attempt to obtain information through statistics, personal papers, passports for travel and begging licenses<sup>7</sup> (Wilson, 2009, 117–119).

In the Republic of Venice the need for policing and social control was extremely important. The central body of government was in a lagoon isolated from its vast and various dominions. In the course of time there were growing threats both from within the Republic, with an increase of deviance and crimes connected to social order<sup>8</sup> and outside it, from the great powers that surrounded it, which were evolving and organizing themselves into modern absolute state systems. The Serenissima, which was slowly being excluded from the international chessboard and becoming relegated to its own territories and dominions, adopted a defensive attitude marked by concern for its preservation rather than a dynamic, inventive role.<sup>9</sup> Furthermore, in the course of the 17<sup>th</sup> century internal political problems began to emerge in Venetian society, and the pestilence of 1630-31, together with the War of Candia, created a serious crisis both in the economy, particularly in maritime traffic, and in the stability of the system as a whole. Finally, with the Peace of Passarowitz in 1718, Venice lost its prestigious territories in Morea for good. In this chaotic and instable context, secret denunciations became essential to the justice system and to society in general. Denunciation was easy for an accuser, who had only to place an unsigned letter in a box or a stone mouth, which s/he knew would then be picked up by the authorities. However, these secret allegations were also deemed to be ambiguous and often unreliable, because the motives behind them could be various, including personal revenge, and so the accusation could turn out to be false.

As Paolo Preto points out, in the Republic of Venice the employment of secret denunciations appears to have been more frequent and various and used for more diverse

7 In 1662 the English Act of Settlement of 1662 ruled that migrants had to carry certificates with them.

8 As Claudio Povolo describes, at the end of the 16<sup>th</sup> and throughout the 17<sup>th</sup> centuries the condition of public order began to worsen both in the territory of the *Dominio* and in the Terraferma, with an increase in riots and delinquency and a mounting difficulty in the capture of the numerous bandits and outlaws. In this period institutions such as *voci liberar bandito*, bounty killers increased (Povolo, 1997 and 2007a).

9 Povolo, 2007b. In regards to France and England in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries see Mandrou, 1977, 33–109, 121–226, and for a general introduction to the changing that took place in that period in Europe Mandrou, 1977, 11–31, 117–120, 231–344.

crimes than in other states. Its employment was constant, without substantial changes throughout the course of the Republic, but the modality of the use changed. In fact, as our case study illustrates, secret denunciations were still being collected and used in 1779.<sup>10</sup> The attitude that the state power of the Serenissima had in their regard was ambivalent: while at times the reliance on secret allegations was almost discouraged, at other times, when pragmatism prevailed, they were used and accepted, even if with a certain caution (Preto, 2003, 22–90).

In order to better understand this point, let us start by examining the nature of these denunciations. As pointed out above, the habit of recurring to secret denunciations had been a steady feature of the justice system of the Serenissima.<sup>11</sup> Already in the 14<sup>th</sup> century these denunciations were accepted and used for specific crimes. The Council of Ten reported that *cedule sine nomime* had been launched in the Palazzo Ducale, in Saint Mark's and in other places (Preto, 2003, 46–48). The acceptance and use of the anonymous denunciation was at first connected to reasons of state; it then became linked to the development of the ritual of the Council of Ten, after its establishment in 1310, and later on to the State Inquisitors in 1539 (Preto, 2003, 43–46).

As time went by, with mounting difficulties both inside and outside the Republic, the *lettere orbe* began to be used for many different crimes. They were placed in specific boxes, first wooden then stone, addressed to the magistrates and competent institutions according to the nature of the crime involved. There were several magistracies, which regulated every aspect of the life of the population. The following describes some of them, and their specific responsibilities. Along with the *Esecutori contro la Bestemmia*, one of the magistracies instituted in the 16<sup>th</sup> century was the *Provveditori alle pompe*, established in 1512 with the purpose of prosecuting and investigating crimes of “luxury”, such as going to church wearing or showing off too many jewels or wealth in general, as well as counterfeiting. Though this institution continued to operate throughout the Republic, it appears quite clear from the declarations of the *Provedditori* themselves, as Preto points out, and from the scarce number of denunciations found in their *cassella* every week<sup>12</sup> that the war against crimes related to luxury and counterfeiting was lost from the start.<sup>13</sup> This was underscored in a declaration of the *Provveditori* of 1705, in which they were forced to admit that though the laws related to the *pompe* were just, they were not followed “le leggi sono certamente santissime, ma non sono obbedite” (ASV, PP, b. 2, reg. IV).

Things were quite different for the Santo Uffizio. This office already began to be ef-

10 For the use and employment of the secret denunciations in Genoa, see Grendi, 1989.

11 Of course as it has been pointed out earlier they weren't only a peculiarity of the justice system of the Serenissima, however here the use of *lettere orbe* was much more articulated and they were employed for many crimes of various nature.

12 In the six months between 1704 and 1705 only nine secret denunciations were placed in the stone mouth (Preto, 2003, 68–69).

13 Furthermore, the *provveditori* suspected that the assistants were corrupted and did not deliver the denunciations, and were forced to recur to firing them and the Captain after opening the *cassella* and finding so few denunciations, as in 1713. On the case see Preto, 2003, 68–69.

fective after 1289, but even before that three *Savi* (Sages) had been charged with the task of indicting heresy. After 1547 their duties and power increased. The Sant'Uffizio in Venice received several letters which denounced offences concerning heretics, witches, people who converted to other faiths, above all to Judaism, and so on (Preto, 2003, 66–67).

Significantly enough, the number of these kinds of denunciation, such as those about suspicion of witchcraft, increased in times of calamity and pestilence.

Other magistracies operating for a while were the *Giudigi* (judges) *di Piovego*, who among the many other things controlled streets, river banks, channels and smuggling. And again, there were the *Cattaver*, fully operating from 1280 with tasks that went from controlling vessels travelling from Venice to Histria, to hidden treasures, vacant wills or objects and lost or abandoned property. After 1516 the *Cattaver* were also in charge of the financial activity and lives of the Jews. (Preto, 2003, 69–71; see also Pullan, 1983, 3–177).<sup>14</sup>

All these institutions, and many others, handled secret denunciations and had specific regulations on how to employ them. Some denunciations were written by the denouncer himself; others by a third person or a notary so as to preserve their secrecy even more, or in the case of uneducated people. The need to preserve anonymity seemed to be a concrete necessity, particularly in cases of well-known personages or of fear of reprisal: “*persona, che per timor della sua vita vuole esser tenuta segreta*” (ASV, CDC, filz. 43, 4<sup>th</sup> of August, 1616). In cases where the denouncer could receive an award for his/her allegations, a prize in money or of other nature, such as one or more *voce di liberar bandito*<sup>15</sup> (Povolo, 2007b; Povolo, 1980), a distinctive mark could be found on the letter of denunciation, a *contrassegno*, often a matching piece of paper that had been cut off before placing the note in the box. It must be stressed, though, that not all the denunciations placed in the *casselle* were secret or unsigned. Signed denunciations included the *Raccordo* or *Aricordo*, a memorial personally subscribed by the interested party or in behalf of someone else (Preto, 2003, 36–46).

Apart from personal gain, there were many reasons why a person might decide to make a denunciation, ranging from revenge to respect for the Republic, or even a felt need to preserve the social order and equilibrium. Often an allegation could be based on rumours and gossip that were going around the community and did not have any factual basis. Because of the very real possibility that the allegations could be false, the Council of Ten, and the magistrates of competence, had to be careful about how they used them. Normally a list of witnesses was required, usually three, who would testify to the allegations before the machine of justice would start up. However, when it did start, these denunciations became essential to the justice system.

14 As Paolo Preto underscores, the goods and the wealth of those who died without leaving testament or legitimate heirs belonged to the State, and the citizen who through a denunciation revealed their existence received a third of the wealth. Similarly for those who denounced goods usurped by private persons, lost money and objects and so on. In regard to the Jews, the reasons behind many denunciations came from envy and commercial rivalry and often the award for the denouncer who exposed the illicit activities of a Jewish rival consisted in the suspension of the economic activity of the Jew.

15 The authors point out the role and the phenomenon of vagrants, bandits and the policies to control them that the Republic enacted.



The type, length and language of the denunciations could vary, depending on the social class of the denouncer, and on whether it had been written by a notary or a lawyer or a man with legal knowledge. The letter could be long and detailed, as in the case of the accusation against Giuseppe Cataldi, or merely a couple of lines to denounce the crime. The way the letter was written also depended on the nature of the offence and, of course, on the need to preserve anonymity, which could lead the denouncer to try to counterfeit his or her writing (Preto, 2003, 113–120).

The denouncers came from every social class: they could be rich patricians, merchants or butchers. Each one had a part in perpetuating the justice system and the social control of the Serenissima – though often enough the denouncers themselves were not well-regarded by the community. Their language was frequently very strong, even if at times it maintained the elegance and eloquence of cultured discourse, and the handwriting varied from the extremely refined to a virtual scribble. The words chosen were often harsh and inflamed, and the adjectives used to describe the supposed felon were normally extreme (Preto, 2003, 113–123).

To return to our former barber, Giuseppe Cataldi: in the message denouncing him he is called the biggest *ruffiano* of Venice “/.../ not just a villain but the biggest one! /.../” and we should not forget that the denouncer assumed that Cataldi had been chased out of Rome. His character and personality is defined in the most negative ways possible: he is “impudentissimo e scandalosissimo” (ASV, ECB, b. 36, 23<sup>rd</sup> of August, 1779), and aided in his corrupted way of life by his natural leanings. Honour is mentioned several times, the honour of the women and the families of Venice, thus ultimately the honour of the Republic itself. Cataldi is described as lacking completely in religious faith: “mostra chiaramente di aver poca Religione, o di non averne affatto per niente” (ASV, ECB, b. 36, 23<sup>rd</sup> of August, 1779). The denunciation against Cataldi goes even further: due to his dishonest behaviour and disregard of religion, he is universally considered the greatest scandal of almost the whole of Venice.<sup>16</sup>

Particularly the denunciations concerning crimes against morality contained language that was often crude and vulgar, because they reported literally the blasphemy or the impropriety they exposed.<sup>17</sup> These letters offer us a fascinating window on the ordinary language, the dialectical idioms and in general the linguistic usages of Venetian society of the time. Language, also in its written form, is always one of the first and foremost elements for understanding a society. The freshness and frankness that can be found in these letters and the lack of self-censorship, probably due to the fact that they are anonymous and needed to be extremely incisive, is striking. The status of anonymity gave the denouncers the chance to speak freely without fear of retaliation, which was essential, for instance, when the accusation involved important people or state officials, rectors, or

16 E mangia sempre carne anche ne'giorni, ne'quali è vietato dalla Chiesa, con grandissima ammirazione di tutti, stando egli sempre bene di salute: tanto che è tenuto universalmente lo scandalo di quasi tutta Venezia” (ASV, ECB, b. 36, 23<sup>rd</sup> of August, 1779).

17 Often the allegations contained adjectives and definitions that show the imaginative ability of the writer, who frequently quotes or makes reference to biblical or classical texts. See Preto, 2003 and Derosas, 1980.

churchmen.<sup>18</sup> This use of direct, unfiltered language allows us to better understand the social dynamics that existed in the community. This point should not be disregarded, and is one that merits further investigation in the future.

As mentioned previously, the denunciations were often put into specific *casselle*, which varied according to the crime they were concerned with. It is easy to see how the number of these stone mouths increased and spread all over the territory of the Serenissima in accordance to the development of the different institutions of the justice system. The stone mouths that replaced the earlier wooden boxes were at times extremely sophisticated: they sometimes took the shape of wild animals or grotesque faces (though not as often as is thought that of a lion), whereas at other times they had only engraved phrases that explained what they were and their purpose (Preto, 2003).

Many of these stone mouths can still be found in the territory of the former Republic, though most have been destroyed in the course of time, especially after the arrival of Napoleon. With their fearful appearance and wide diffusion, the stone mouths soon became an emblem of the justice system of the Serenissima, a reminder that the Council of the Ten and the Inquisition always kept a watchful eye on the ordinary lives of individuals and communities to safeguard them, keeping order and maintaining social control.

That the stone mouths were meant to have the function of deterrence is a possibility, and perhaps the meaning behind the solemn signs beneath them, their great numbers, and their grotesque and fearful shapes had this very purpose. However, if this was partially their aim, whether they actually worked to deter crime is another matter. It is true, though, that thanks to the great number and visibility of the *casselle*, Venetians who wanted for one reason or another to give their contribution to implementing justice in the Serenissima knew very well to whom they should address their allegations and where they should place their message. In this way, the population itself performed an active role in insuring justice and in keeping social order and control in a time before a full policing system was organized, as they became the most effective policing system for the community they lived in.

As has been pointed out previously, there was a certain ambiguity towards this institution: while it was often very functional, it was also deemed unreliable and dangerous, and the denouncer was often considered as bad as the criminal him/herself. One way for the authorities to address this issue was to try to regulate the legislation regarding secret allegations. Under certain circumstances strict restrictions were made as to when and how people might have recourse to *lettere orbe*. On other occasions, for example in times of serious social instability or when there was a strong climate of suspicion, for example after the War of Candia, restrictions were quite loose and the employment of anonymous denunciations increased, especially in regard to suspicions of espionage.<sup>19</sup>

18 Sometimes the denunciations came from more people or even supposedly in the name of an entire community

19 On risks of espionage see Preto, 1994. As well underlined already in the work by Preto already on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of December, 1578 the critics of the Council of Ten of the 31<sup>st</sup> of October, 1387 were confirmed once more “Se alcuna polizza sarà buttada, o messa in palazzo, in chiesa o in qualche altra parte della città senza nome, la qual tocchi o possa o possa toccar al Dominio et stato nostro, li consiglieri di Venetia, havuta la detta polizza, siamo tenuti farla leggere alli capi di dieci acciò che, se sarà necessario, si possa per detto consiglio



It is clear that there existed some uncertainty on how to regulate the institution of the secret denunciation; there were problems concerning both its effective legitimacy, which required not only the consensus of the authorities but also and above all the acceptance of the community at large, and the concrete necessity of its use for the purposes of justice. On the whole, the exigencies of security for the Republic led the authorities more or less to accept the use of secret allegations, especially from the late 17<sup>th</sup> century onwards. However, the precaution of the requirement of presenting a certain number of witnesses normally remained for most crimes. And at times the system tried to regulate itself by including limitations and effective mechanisms of control to balance the potential danger of an inherently unreliable institution (Preto, 2003, 47–90).

Furthermore, if the allegations were proven to be false and the denouncer came to be known, s/he would be charged with the crime of calumny and would experience the inquisition on him/herself. Such deterrence to false accusations was obviously essential to make sure the population preserved a timorous respect for legal institutions while maintaining their cooperation to aid the efficiency of the justice system. In the course of time, more and more voices were raised against this practice. With the unfolding of the Enlightenment, it was increasingly criticized, as the sensibility of intellectuals began to change and new ideas of justice, citizenship, and the relation between the people and the state came to be formulated. Stereotypes began to be constructed around the Venetian justice system: while the Republic itself became a symbol of tyranny, its justice system came to represent one of the worst heritages of the Ancient Regime. Indeed, the stone mouths seemed to have become a peculiar feature of the iconography and architecture of the Serenissima. They were present all over the territory, leaving those who came to visit the Republic stunned, particularly from the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> and throughout the 18<sup>th</sup> centuries. Striking accounts of the stone mouths, or lions' mouths that were said to appear on every corner of the Serenissima began to circulate, creating the basis for the future dark legend of the Republic. The tale that became popular during the late 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries described a terrifying justice system, unfair and inquisitive, full of spies and informers, where innocent persons had to be afraid of their own shadow. The stone mouths dotted over the territory became the symbol of this system. One of the earliest accounts, destined to become extremely influential in the future, came from the French ambassador in Venice: *L'Historie du gouvernement de Venise* by Amelot de la Houssaye printed in 1676, in which the Council of Ten is described as a terrible organ with limitless power, and Venice as a place where everything is a source of fear and people must be wary and fearful because of the countless spies employed by the state to keep control (Preto, 2003, 176–190).

Negative opinions regarding anonymous allegations increased over the following century: among the influential critics there were Monstequieu, Gaetano Filangeri, Samuel Sharp and John Moore, to mention only a few. In an unfavourable comparison with the newborn United

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in quello che appartenesse ad esso far provizione. Non si impazzeno però nelle polizze ovvero lettere che saranno buttate o veniranno nella mani delli Avogadori di Commun, le qual toccassero a special persone, et non saranno presentate per quelli che le haveranno buttate, perché quelle deveno essere abbruggiate del tutto". (ASV, CDMC, reg. 48, capitolare, c. 14r; already in Preto, 2003, 49).

States, John Adams described Venice as a state that “discloses scenes of tyranny, revolt, cruelty and assassination, which excite horror” (John Adams quoted in Preto, 2003, 178).

Cesare Beccaria, in the famous chapter XV of his *Dei delitti e delle pene*, openly and harshly attacked these denunciations, inasmuch people cannot defend themselves from secret allegations, which can be found as an instrument of justice only when the government is weak and distrustful. Even after the fall of the Republic and throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century the dark legend continued to evolve, thanks to the work and accounts of intellectuals like Pierre Antoine Noel Daru, who in his *Histoire de la Republique de Venise*, published in 1819, told of a Venice sleeping in a *long repos*, a sleep which preceded the final fall, “le sommeil précurseur de la mort” (Del Negro, 1998, 1).

Finally, novelists and artists also contributed to creating this myth, above all the popular novel *The Bravo* by James Fenimore Cooper, which came out in 1833 and was destined to become extremely influential.

It is in this period that our *Ruffiano* lived: a time of transition between an old and a new world, when the birth of a novel idea of state and the role of the citizen was emerging. Cataldi lived in a society where new synergies existed side by side with institutions that had changed very little over the centuries, in a state surrounded by neighbours where the innovative spirit of the Enlightenment was beginning to take over and to shape the future modern state. Considering the general climate and the rapidly changing situation, it is striking to realize that, in 1779 anonymous denunciations were still such an important feature of the Venetian justice system, even more so when we consider that this institution, as we have seen, was coming under increasingly harsh criticism as time went on. The case of the anonymous denunciation against Giuseppe Cataldi thus provides an illustrative example of the function of this institution as a third party, because in this case the secret denunciation did actually set the machine of justice into motion, as the note added at the bottom of the letter shows. In that it contributed to the success of the Republic’s justice system, we see here how the anonymous denunciation, which had often been regarded with scepticism while being accepted as necessary, acted effectively as a third party. It remained, however, a secret and ambiguous party, like an invisible hand pulling the curtains of the stage of the theatre of justice and life.

Having considered the role of the anonymous denunciation as a third party, there are still many issues on this subject that need to be addressed. The types of social relations that passed between the secret denouncer, official state institutions and the community require further investigation from the perspective of a study of the dynamics of this kind of social control.

What is more, in the context of a time of transition such as the 18<sup>th</sup> century, when new values still coexisted side by side with medieval orders and ideals, there needs to be more research done on the effective legitimacy that the *lettere orbe* and the official state system had among the population at large, where a denouncer could be judged negatively and where crimes once exposed could lead to the collapse of the fragile stability and balance that held the community together.<sup>20</sup>

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20 The study on women and justice in the late Eighteenth century Venice of Madile Gambier (1980) where she looked into some of these issues.

## TEMAČNA PLAT: ANONIMNE OVADBE V BENEŠKI REPUBLIKI

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## POVZETEK

*Prispevek obravnava vlogo anonimne ovadbe in anonimnih ovaditeljev v Beneški republiki v 17. in 18. stoletju. Anonimna ovadba je preučena tako glede kakovosti tega izključno pravnega instrumenta kot glede njene vloge za nadzor nad družbo in prostorom. Preučena je zlasti različna raba anonimnih ovadb glede na kontekst in specifičen zgodovinsko-politični trenutek v Beneški republiki. Namen prispevka je prikazati ključno vlogo podpisanih in nepodpisanih tajnih ovadb v obdobju Serenissime, brez katerih je težko razumeti pravosodni sistem in izvajanje pravosodja v Benetkah ter postopek, ki ga je izvajal Svet desetih (Consiglio dei Dieci). Avtorica obenem ugotavlja zanimivo dvojnost pri obravnavi tega instituta, saj je bil včasih v celoti sprejet in so ga preiskovalni organi celo spodbujali, drugič pa ga je na videz kritiziral in zaradi njegove nezanesljivosti celo zavračal sam Svet desetih. Avtorica je uporabila raziskovalni pristop, ki skuša obravnavati anonimne ovaditelje kot tretjo stran v pravosodju, saj ne gre za eno od pravnih strank, temveč za nekoga tretjega, za katerega je značilno, da ostaja njegova identiteta prikrita. Avtorica preučuje anonimne ovadbe tudi z vidika dojemanja s strani razumnikov in pravnikov tedanjega časa, zlasti v razpravah razsvetljenskih mislecev ter glede na to, kako so jih uprizarjali v književnosti in gledališču.*

*Ključne besede: pritožbe ter anonimne in tajne obtožbe, kamnita usta ali casselle, policing sistemi, družbeni red, pravni sistem, Svet desetih (Consiglio dei Dieci)*

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