

**Sandro Skansi<sup>1</sup>**

## **Raize Venete: Culture of the Republic of Venice as an Integral Part of Croatian Culture and National Identity**

In this paper, we explore Venetian culture as a culturological foundation of Croatian culture, and how Croatian culture today, based on the shared forms of life, is more deeply rooted in Venetian culture than Italian culture is. We provide a brief overview of the history of the Republic of Venice from 697 to 1797, and the current situation in Veneto, where autonomist and separatist tendencies are gaining ground. We also explore the Venetian language and the forms of life it shares with the Dalmatian dialect of Croatia<sup>2</sup> which at the same time are not shared by the rest of Italy. Furthermore, we discuss how Croatian literature has its roots in Venetian Dalmatian cities and argue that the influence of Venetian culture on today's Croatian culture is greater than the influence on today's Italian culture. This will be summed up to show the paramount importance of Venetian culture for Croatian culture and Croatian national identity, to the point of concluding that Venetian culture is not just a culture of a national minority in Croatia, but it is, *par excellence*, Croatian culture.

**Keywords:** Republic of Venice, Croatian Culture, Venetian Language, Freschin, Forms of Life.

---

1 Assoc. Prof. Sandro Skansi, PhD, Faculty of Croatian Studies, University of Zagreb, Philosophy and Culture Department, Borongajska cesta 83d, 10000 Zagreb, Croatia. E-mail: [sskansi@fhs.unizg.hr](mailto:sskansi@fhs.unizg.hr).

2 By this we mean the colloquial idea of a Dalmatian dialect. Stricly speaking, the Croatian language does not have a „Dalmatian dialect” in a grammatical sense, but there is a rather well-defined common-sense meaning of this term based on the lexical preferences.

## 1. Introduction

We all know what a national identity is, and yet it is not clear what forms it. Some nations, like Australia, have the tragic privilege of being able to point to one moment in history when their national identity was born. For other nations, like France, there is no exact moment, but the complete absorption of rival and defeated nations like Burgundy took place so long ago, that there is only French culture. There are several monographs dealing with national identity and culture, ranging from philosophical discussions such as (Miller, 2000) and (Wodak et al., 2009, across to sociological (László, 2013), to political (Lampe and Mazower, 2004) and historical (Furtado, 2019), but none seem to capture the essence of the phenomenon. To study national identity in Europe is to study nation-building, which more often than not, as Hroch (2015: 46-47) argues, is something rooted in the past. This argument might be stretched to say that in Europe it is normal that a national identity and the existence of a nation long precede the emergence of the national state of that nation, and a key part of this struggle is the struggle for language (Hroch 2015: 193-196), with the nation understood as a *primarily* cultural construct (Hroch 2015: 227-253). In this paper, we are going to explore the cultures and national identities of Croatia and Venetia, and their significant interactions.

Even though Croatia as a modern state was formed only in the 1990 independence referendum, and culturally shaped during the Homeland War (1991-1995), the reality is that Croatia is culturally much older, and on that older culture, Croatian national identity is built. Tracing Croatia's cultural identity back to the Croatian dukedom, and later kingdom is a prospect that has been previously pursued by historians and culturologists, even though it is view that is rarely entertained in modern historiography. The main problem with this approach is that it actually lacks the cultural aspect, on which it essentially depends: if not culture, what connects a current nation with a nation that ceased to exist a millennium ago? Croatian dukedoms and kingdoms are so old that no tangible national culture existed on which we could base a connection, not even religion since they ceased to exist before the Catholic/Orthodox schism took real hold as a cultural element. Basing the national identity only on the name of the kingdom, which itself is derived from an ethnonym, is a fragile proposition. For a nation so strongly grounded in culture as Croatia, such fragility is detrimental and completely unwarranted. National cultures were forged through lit-

erature, art, music, cuisine, architecture, and most importantly, language, which developed later.

All languages have syntax, semantics, and pragmatics, and the latter two are much more deeply connected to how people live and how they actually use their language to live their lives. Similar forms of life, even on different linguistic substrates, always connect people and form a more unified culture. As Croatian history is highly complex, so is its culture, and in this paper, we argue that the culture of the Republic of Venice forms the one of the three<sup>3</sup> cores of Croatian littoral culture and that Croatian culture today is more closely connected to Venetian culture than current Italian culture. But before continuing to the main arguments, we explore our shared history.

## 2. A millennial history

An excellent exposition of the history of the Republic of Venice can be found in Alvise Zorzi's book *La Repubblica del Leone* (Zorzi, 2001). Alvise Zorzi is a descendant of one of the most prominent noble families of Venice, and his ancestors shaped the very history which he described centuries later. We use his exposition as the sole reference for the history of the Republic without any additional reference to keep the exposition fluent, unless explicitly noted otherwise. We also refer the reader interested in the history of the Republic to his major work, which this short section cannot fully do justice.

Venice was founded by Paolo Lucio Anafesto in 697 and lasted for exactly 1100 years until Napoleon conquered it. Venice gained independence from Byzantium in 697, and for all its history was a republic, with the Doze (elected duke) as its leader. In the 9th century, the Republic spread its influence and gained territory on the eastern coast of the Adriatic, and in the 14th century onward it expanded almost up to Milan on the mainland. The city of Venice and the lagoon were known as Dogado, the mainland holdings as Stato da Tera<sup>4</sup>, and the eastern Adriatic cities and islands (mostly Croatian, but also Slovenian, Montenegrin and Albanian) as Stato da Mar.

Venice had a strong policy of avoiding alliances (Nicolle, 1989, 33), and in 1509 at the battle of Agnadello, this policy almost cost it dearly when it alone faced the League of Cambrai, led by France. It was a peculiar war with

3 The other two being the glagolithic tradition and the shtokavian, Ragusean tradition.

4 We use the Venetian language term, which is different from the Italian which would be „Stato da Terra”.

shifting alliances, through four different phases which ultimately resulted in a French-Venetian victory.

It is interesting that when the Republic lost the Kingdom of Candia (Crete) in 1669 some European monarchies put forth (among others) a very dangerous question: since Venice did not have any kingdom under its rule, it should not have the right to mint money, and that it should pay with gold. This was a potentially major problem for the Republic, which had already lost trade routes to the Ottomans, and naval trade had shifted to the Atlantic. The father of Croatian historiography Ivan Lučić came to its rescue by demonstrating that Dalmatia was a kingdom and that the Republic still had a kingdom under its rule. He published his research in 1674 under the title *Historia di Dalmatia* (Lučić, 1674).

Something that was seen as normal in the Republic, and in stark contrast to anywhere else, was the need for civilian oversight and control of the military (Nicolle, 1989, 11), and this, together with a policy of cultural and religious liberalism, was the very foundation of the Republic, which held the Republic of Venice stable for over a millennium, with no coup, revolt or revolution taking place, except for several small scale revolts in Crete, though, as we will discuss later, Crete was not a culturally integral part of the Republic. Yet, the civilian mindset was exactly what Napoleon exploited and, eventually, this was the Republic's downfall. La Serenisima fell on the 12th of May 1797.

Following the fall, the Republic was first reduced to the so-called "Venetian province", which was given to the Habsburgs, only to be taken back and included in Napoleon's client state named "Kingdom of Italy" in 1805, on whose coat of arms the Lion of St. Mark was mockingly featured wearing a red Jacobin hat. From 1814 until 1866, Venice and the whole Stato da Tera were under Austrian rule, and were named the "Kingdom of Lombardy-Venetia". The new coat of arms was designed according to Habsburg heraldry, featuring the Lion in a more tasteful fashion without the silly hat.

A final remark about the history of the Republic of Venice should be made at this point. Throughout its long history, Venice had always been a multicultural and multiracial republic, from its very beginning up until its end<sup>5</sup> (Nicolle, 1989,

5 One might be tempted to say that this end was premature, and in a sense it might be viewed from a modern perspective of a single united Europe, which would benefit from a greater number of smaller member states. The Venetian Republic, a state evolved from the medieval notion of city-state, which almost embodies the modern libertarian ideal of the state, might be a „perfect“ member of a modern 21st century European Union, in much the same sense as Croatia is, but this view would be ignoring the geopolitical issues of the 19th century and

21). It was largely due to the sacrifice of Venice, and more precisely Venetian Dalmatia, that the Ottomans were stopped from acquiring a stronghold on the eastern Adriatic from which they could conquer Italy (Nicolle, 1989, 21-22).

It might be argued that the multiculturalism and liberal politics of the Republic were an atavism from the medieval way of thinking, whereas modern states placed great emphasis on matters of standardization and homogenization, such as the normativization of the national language. This view is grounded in the liberal perception of the nature of the state, in which a state has a duty to act and codify all aspects of life, and for a long-time liberalism was contrasted solely with conservatism. But recently, a new political theory has gained significant public support, i.e., libertarianism. According to the libertarian view of the duties of the state, the state has no business meddling in the private affairs of her citizens, and older, overbearing laws are reexamined and sometimes annulled. Libertarianism maintains that is good practice for a modern state to leave areas of social conduct, including but not limited to language standardization, completely legally undefined, thus leaving more freedom to its people to speak and communicate as they wish. Whether the Venetian Republic embodied these modern ideas long before they were popular, or kept medieval ideas long after they ceased to be popular, we leave as an open question for future research.

### **3. Aftermath of the Annexation by the Kingdom of Italy**

In the aftermath of the war between the Habsburg Monarchy and Prussia, the newly formed Savoyard Kingdom of Italy joined the war as an ally of Prussia and in 1866 was given Veneto as a spoil of war (Zorzi, 2001), which it formally annexed. Fearing rebellion, the Italians devised a cunning plan in the form of a referendum, where the occupying Italian military put enormous pressure on the Venetian voters (di Revel, 1906), and failing that, the results were plainly rigged (Beggiato, 1998). The Italian language was imposed as official, and Venetian was suppressed by denying it the status of an independent language, and was subsumed under the “Italian dialect”. Even though there are subtle and highly applicable ways to manipulate language from within politics such as the question of *ausbau* or *einbau* (Fisher 2006: 89-104), the Venetian language faces out-

---

early 20th century, when Europe was divided among ever more belligerent and ever stronger powers, each of whom was trying to extend its sphere of influence to encompass the largest possible area. As a quick visual reminder of this (as it is turning out, unusual) time, we advise the reader to find a map of Europe in the year 1875.

right old-fashioned denialism by the masses and mainstream politics. Contrary to this populism, linguistic research gives a different take. Even Italian linguists consider Venetian to be an independent language from Italian (Devoto, 1972, 30-46) (Avolio, 2009, 46), but more often place it under the Italo-Dalmatian languages than under the Gallo-Italian languages favored by British and American linguists. One of the major reasons for this is the fact that Venetian developed directly from Latin, and not from standard Italian, as Tagliavini (1948) notes. The debate over whether Venetian and Italian are “mutually intelligible” remains open, and the question of the Venetian lexical elements in Croatian remains almost completely unresearched, and these can be seen as topics for future research. It is worthwhile to mention that Wikipedia considers Venetian native to both Italy and Croatia.<sup>6</sup> As an integral part of the Croatian language, linguists have devoted their studies towards analyzing Venetian influence on Croatian dialects. It has been shown that there is a vast number of loanwords as a constitutive part of the corpus of the Croatian language, exemplifying the previously mentioned shared forms of life, suggesting cultural integrity. See for example (Tamaro, 2015), (Tamaro, 2010), (Spicijarić Paškvan, 2018), (Spicijarić Paškvan, 2014), (Ljubičić and Spicijarić, 2008) and many more.

Ezio Toffano, writing for *Raixe Venete*,<sup>7</sup> notes the hatred of Mussolini and efforts to destroy the Venetian language, which ultimately proved unsuccessful since it is next to impossible to forget a millennium of history. Italian fascism was perhaps the worst enemy of Venetian culture, since it tried to cancel its national identity, and not only integrate the territories of the former Republic as a mere region, but also to destroy its reputation by using its symbols to promote Italian expansionism and crimes committed: Istria, Dalmatia, Albania, and parts of Greece were in fact Venetian for centuries, but they were never Italian. By using the Lion of St. Mark as a “justification” for pretensions, claims and crimes, it only tarnished the reputation of Venice as a different nation that, unlike Italy, was not the occupying force there, but parts of Croatia, Slovenia, Montenegro, Albania, and Greece formed together with Venice a single Republic who treated its subjects fairly and decently, as can be witnessed among other things by the greatest celebration of Croatian national identity today, the Alka of Sinj, which Croatian people celebrate as its own national victory – a victory

6 [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Venetian\\_language](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Venetian_language). Accessed: Jul 5, 2024.

7 <https://web.archive.org/web/20131004235719/http://www.raixevenete.net/documenti/doc47.asp>. Accessed: Jul 5, 2024.

achieved under the flag of St. Mark. This symbolically demonstrates that Venice and Venetian culture is in fact an essential and integral part of Croatian culture and that Croatia conserved this culture with pride, since Venetian culture is Dalmatian culture, and Dalmatian culture is Croatian culture. This stands in stark contrast with the efforts of the Kingdom of Italy, and later Mussolini, to deconstruct Venetian culture and reconstruct it as a regional culture of an Italian region, rather than allowing it to survive as a national culture of a conquered and annexed nation. Early Croatian literature, in Latin, Venetian, and especially in Croatian, forming the foundations of Croatian national identity, was nourished in Dalmatian cities, and flourished under the protection of Venice. Croatian language, under Venetian administration, was never suppressed, quite the opposite – under Venetian rule, there was more cultural freedom than virtually in any period of Croatian history up until 1991. It should be clearly noted that it was the Croatian language, not Venetian, which was the foundation of Croatian culture, but the Venetian culture as such served as a nursery for the then young Croatian culture of Dalmatia. There were of course early elements of Croatian culture outside the patronage of Venice, and, although very significant, they do not in any sense invalidate the fact that early Croatian culture in Dalmatia was in the largest part nurtured by Venetian culture.

#### **4. A new Republic?**

One might wonder what constitutes a nation, and Hroch (2020: 6-7) reiterates the received view, according to which there are two distinct meanings the term „nation” might refer to. Firstly, it may denote a large group of people who share a sense of belonging. One might be tempted to dismiss this as a „loose” definition, since it requires only a simple declaration of belonging, without being rooted in historical and cultural substrates. Interestingly enough, this „loose” definition describes exactly the birth of the Italian nation in the 19th century. The second sense (Hroch 2020: 8-9) is the „stricter” one, which requires historical and cultural roots, as well a prior nation. By this definition, Venetians constitute a nation.

There is, however a view one can take that differentiates these two meanings in such a way that the second does not imply the first, and this would be by claiming that the first meaning actually requires active and current self-identification. For example, Burgundy used to be a powerful kingdom, but there is no

significantly large group of people today who identify as „Burgundians”, and therefore even if the requirements for the second definition are met, the first is not. As we shall see soon, this interpretation does not apply to Venetians.

An interesting turn of events happened on 13 December 2010, when a bureaucratic simplification law was signed that effectively annulled the annexation act of 1866.<sup>8</sup> As modern nations take “small-print legalism” seriously only when it suits them, this consequence was simply ignored, and the Venetian people’s hopes were ridiculed. The official argument from the Italian government was that with this law the annexation act of 1866 *was in fact canceled*, but it did not matter since it was superseded by the Italian constitution, which allegedly ensures “territorial integrity”. But as Raixe Venete and the Venetian National Liberation Movement pointed out, by the Treaty of Osimo of 1975, the Trieste Zone B was transferred to Yugoslavia with no change in the constitution, thereby suggesting that the constitution per se does not define what territory constitutes the Italian Republic, and that this is defined by other laws and treaties, such as the Treaty of Osimo and the annexation act from 1866. The official confirmation of its cancellation should have meant freedom for Venice.

One might think that Venetian nationalism is an anachronistic, even a ridiculous LARP-enthusiastic effort, but such sentiment is a normal occurrence for a nation that has not only been annexed by Italy but was also brutally suppressed by the fascist government. Venetian independence movements are as old as the annexation of the subjugated Republic by the Kingdom of Italy, but the most notable recent developments reflect the hopes and dreams of a nation. In 2014, a group named “P2013” organized an unofficial online independence referendum,<sup>9</sup> where 89% of more than 2.3 million Venetians voted for full independence. There was also an autonomy referendum in 2017, where voters were asked if they wanted autonomy for Veneto within Italy, and the turnout was again over 2 million, with 98% in favor.<sup>10</sup>

The question of self-determination for Veneto has complex ramifications in an unstable world, where the natural desire of a nation for self-determination takes second place to securing peace. According to Hobbes (1651), sovereignty

8 <https://corrieredelveneto.corriere.it/veneto/notizie/politica/2011/8-febbraio-2011/abrogata-errore-governo-l-anneessione-veneto-all-italia-181421237045.shtml>. Accessed: Jul 5, 2024.

9 <https://www.rainews.it/archivio-rainews/articoli/referendum-indipendenza-veneto-due-milioni-a-favore-a827fd1d-99d4-4b23-836c-c653559cc797.html>. Accessed: Jul 5, 2024.

10 <https://referendum2017.consiglioveneto.it/sites/index.html#!/riepilogo>. Accessed: Jul 5, 2024.



entails (among other things) the monopoly to apply laws and force within a territory. Under such a definition, a big distinction can be made between initial independence and territorial annexation. The initial independence of a stateless people is justified to a larger degree than a territorial change due to a plebiscite. A potential independence of Kurdistan from, say, Turkiye, is more justified than a subsequent referendum of the Kurds in say Iraq wishing to join the new state. This is due to the initial referendum expressing a legitimate will of a people/nation (defined by culture) to govern themselves, while a subsequent referendum in Iraq would not serve the same ideal, but merely expand the territory of the new nation, allowing it a monopoly of force over a larger area.

The opponents of Venetian independence often use a mutant bandwagon and red herring argument, comparing the case of an eventual future independence referendum of Veneto, with the 2014 referendum in Crimea. The comparison is completely misguided. The 2014 Crimean referendum *was* similar to the rigged plebiscite in Venice in 1866, and not to a future free referendum, which would be more similar to the Catalan case (although Veneto has a stronger national identity, truly comparable only to Scotland). To paint a more vivid picture: a hypothetical Venetian independence referendum held in 2024 *would* be comparable to a Crimean independence referendum to secede from Russia in 2172, but even this has to be done under a strong assumption that there is such a thing as a Crimean national identity.

## 5. Freschin or friškin

Should the Republic of Venice ever become independent again, its claims as successor to the historical Venetian Republic would be clear and well-founded (assuming political and administrative fidelity to the Serenisima). But in a world where the Republic of Venice does not exist, does Italian or Croatian culture have a more valid claim as a cultural and spiritual successor to Venetian culture? It is quite clear that, judged solely (and superficially) by the similarity of language, Venice should appear closer to Italy. But even this similarity breaks down when closely scrutinized. Venetians often point to a simple Venetian word, “freschin” as completely foreign and incomprehensible to Italians, and even see some humor in their puzzled faces. Often regional words have a life of their own, but in this case, such a simple explanation might be misleading. By taking an approach in line with the arguments of Ludwig Wittgenstein (1953), we will

assuredly find the same form of life that gave rise to the Venetian “freschin” in Dalmatia, as “friškin”. We deliberately omit the meaning, but invite the Venetian or Dalmatian reader who vividly understands the meaning in a split second to think about the finesse and notice how deep this form of life connects even today’s Venice and today’s Dalmatia, and how it truly forms a single form of life.

A skeptic might be tempted to say we are overinterpreting a single word, and that the common history was bound to produce some purely accidental linguistic and cultural similarities. While all this is true, we claim that this word represents much more to the Venetian mind. In philosophical jargon, it is not accidental, it is essential. It forms a pillar of specificity and by extension of cultural identity. *Freschin* is not the only word that brings out this connection, but it is perhaps the most quintessential one. A second very interesting word is “mulac”/“mulo”, meaning “child”. What makes it interesting is also the fact that in Italian, the same meaning is expressed with “bambino”, a completely different word, while “mulo” is used to refer to a stubborn crossbred donkey (in addition to the regular noun “asino”). Whether this is an insult to Venetians enshrined in common Italian we leave open. A third interesting example is “bravo” which in Venetian can mean “young ram” or “rich brat causing trouble”, while in Croatian (in particular in Istria, Kvarner and Dalmatia) “bravac” only means “young ram”.<sup>11</sup>

These are not the only interesting words, for similar cases could be made for a number of words. We consider the evidence to be the existence in Miotto’s dictionary (1991) and Boerio’s dictionary (1867) as well as their absence from Zingarelli’s dictionary (1922) to be evidence that a given Dalmatian word is Venetian.<sup>12</sup>

A small selection of the words that are mentioned in both Miotto and Boerio but not in Zingarelli are: *friškin/freschin* (Miotto 1991: 85, Boerio 1867: 288), *mulac/mulo* (Miotto 1991:128, Boerio: 432) *perun/piron* (Miotto 1991:155, Boerio 1867: 512), *furešti/foresti* (Miotto 1991: 83, Boerio 1867: 281), *fritule/fritole* (Miotto 1991: 85, Boerio 1867: 288), *barakokule/baracocole* (a nice

11 It would be interesting to propose to a Dalmatian audience, especially ones who know how reckless young rams actually are, to use “bravac” as a metaphor for a rich brat causing trouble. Even though there is no strict criteria for a correct use of a new metaphor, a giggle from that audience would go a long way in confirming a shared form of life.

12 Most current Italian dictionaries tend to abide by the nationalist agenda and incorrectly subsume Venetian words as Italian ones, in the hope of enshrining the myth of Venetian as a (mere) dialect of Italian, but the post-Risorgimento and early fascist era dictionaries had a different agenda, since back then the tendency was to purify the Italian language from foreign influences, and Venetian was viewed as such second-grade foreign language, which could only be allowed to exist as an Italian dialect. Due to this, old dictionaries such as Zingarelli offer a nice methodological fulcrum for our argument.

Byzantine word, Miotto 1991: 17, Boerio 1867: 62), *fortunal/fortunal* (Miotto 1991: 83, Boerio 1867: 284), *bevanda/bevanda* (Miotto 1991: 24, Boerio 1867: 77), *barba/barba* (Miotto 1991: 17, Boerio 1867: 62), *kala/cale* (Miotto 1991: 41, Boerio 1867: 118), *pegula/pegola* (Miotto 1991: 150, Boerio 1867: 485), *teća/tecia* (Miotto 1991: 208, Boerio 1867: 739), *tuga/tuga* (Miotto 1991: 214, Boerio 1867: 771), *parangal* (Miotto 1991: 145, Boerio 1867: 471), *mući/mucciare* (Miotto 1991: 128, Boerio 1867: 431). The words *barba*, *pegula*, *tuga* and *mući* exist in Italian, but with different meanings. In Dalmatian/Venetian *barba* means *uncle*, while in Italian it means *beard*, *tuga*<sup>13</sup> means *sadness*, while in Italian it is the name of a ship's quarters, and *mući* means *to be quiet* while the related Italian word *mucciare* means *to hide*. Since Boerio is quite tuscanized, a selection of interesting words appears only in Miotto, and not Boerio nor Zingarelli, delineating the fact that it is a Venetian/Dalmatian word with ample use in today's Croatia: *pantagana/pantegana* (Miotto 1991: 144), *maestral/maestral* (Miotto 1991: 112), *fleka/fleca* (Miotto 1991: 81), *pidoča/pedocia* (Miotto 1991: 149), *pašticada/pastizada* (Miotto 1991: 148), *beton/beton* (Miotto 1991: 24), *baraba/baraba* (Miotto 1991: 17), *škovaca/scovaza* (Miotto 1991: 185), *pasara/pasara* (Miotto 1991: 146), *ćakula/ciacola* (Miotto 1991: 50). Of course, these words are just a small selection, and we leave a more complete comparative study as a topic for further research.

We should reiterate, the argument here is not that Venetian is more similar to Croatian than Italian (which is certainly not the case), but that certain words, which are *fundamental* to a specific way of life, are in fact shared in the very same way the form of life was shared, and some of those words are absent in Italian, suggesting a different form of life in Italy proper than the one conducted in the territories of the Republic. Relinguification (Fisher et al. 1985: 62) is a necessary defining component for Venetian nationhood, and belonging to the Venetian nationality in a world where there is no Venetian state.

## 6. Divide et impera: Abuses and misuses of “colonialism”

The Republic itself was divided into Stato da Tera (including the Dogado) and Stato da Mar, where the former comprised of the territories on the Italian peninsula, while the latter was situated on the eastern coast of the Adriatic and

13 „Tuga” is actually a loanword from Croatian, and this is not a lone example. In fact, Miotto (1991) documents a large number of Croatian loanwords in Venetian-Dalmatian.

the Ionian. The Republic acquired the island of Crete for 15 kilograms of gold (Nicolle, 1989, 14) from Boniface of Montferrat in 1204, and also established a presence on Cyprus in 1489 and Peloponnesus (Kingdom of Morea) in 1688, but neither kingdom (Candia and Cyprus) was seen as culturally integral to the Republic, nor to the *Stato da Mar* (which itself was integral to the Republic).

The cities of the *Stato da Mar* are often mistakenly and maliciously called “colonies”, though in fact that term applies only to Crete and Cyprus, and only to a degree. The cities and territories of the *Stato da Mar* were left with their traditional forms of government, led, more often than not, by a Venetian noble or even a *sovracomito* (Nicolle, 1989, 14-15), and this is where the similarities with “colonies” in the modern sense end, since the population thought of themselves as Venetians, at a time when the idea of a nation was still very young and not as well-defined as it is today.

The *Stato da Mar* was mostly Istria and Dalmatia (along with parts of Slovenia, Montenegro, and Albania). In addition, the Republic held Crete and Cyprus, but Crete was never considered civilized, and Cyprus had an even worse reputation of being nothing more than a frontier military outpost (Nicolle, 1989, 37). They were never culturally integral to the Republic.

It is also worthwhile to mention that Croatian cities stayed loyal to the Republic even when the French overthrew it in Venice, culminating in the loyal citizens of Šibenik assassinating the French consular agent (Zorzi, 2001). The last territory to surrender to the French invaders was Perast<sup>14</sup>, where the town was commanded by Josip Visković, a Venetian count, whose speech, *Discorso de Perasto*<sup>15</sup> is legendary to this day, and showcases how much the *Stato da Mar* considered itself truly Venetian.

There is a major issue we have avoided so far, and that is the question of Italian fascist pretensions<sup>16</sup>. Most of the justification for territorial claims by certain marginal political figures in Italy is grounded solely in the previously mentioned cultural crimes of Mussolini’s Italy towards Veneto. The fact is that the *Stato da Mar* was an integral part of the Republic of Venice, but it was never

14 Today in Montenegro, back then Venetian Albania.

15 <https://web.archive.org/web/20060318201850/http://www.colonialvoyage.com/viaggi/montenegroperasto.html>

16 Today this is sometimes called benevolently „irredentism”, but irredentism ends in 1918. The connotation irredentism works on is repatriation, but this has been supplanted by fascism. As such, modern claims of such nature can only be described as (neo)fascist, especially when considering demographic changes.

a true part of the Kingdom of Italy until it was occupied starting in 1918 and completed in 1941. The rule of Italy was always seen as foreign rule, while the rule of Venice was seen by the people of the Stato da Mar as their own government, even at a time when the idea of a nation had not yet taken hold.

As a final remark, it is worthwhile and interesting to mention that the Republic had no fear of revolt, demonstrating not just the peacefulness of *La Serenissima*, but also the sentiment of its subjects who felt loyalty and belonging to the multicultural Republic. This is best seen in its unique and progressive view of weapons. Not only was every citizen armed and allowed to carry weapons at his leisure, but competitions with generous state-sponsored prizes (a large crimson cloth or a brand-new crossbow) were frequently held (Nicolle, 1989, 7-11). The Republic trusted its own people with arms (Nicolle, 1989, 35), something that is rare even today, let alone in the 16th century, and that might be one of the reasons why the Venetians loved and still love the Republic, which treated them with respect and granted them freedoms that even the modern states of today rarely give.

## 7. Conclusion

As we have showcased, Venetian culture is different from Italian culture, and Venetian culture is integral and highly visible in Croatian culture as a whole, more so than in Italian culture. Whether this is due to the relative richness of Italian culture, with more unique features, which in turn overshadow the Venetian elements, or due to the forms of life shared across the Adriatic for centuries, does not really matter that much for our conclusion that Croatian culture today embodies more visible and recognizable Venetian elements than Italian culture. This should not be interpreted as hegemonism of any kind, quite the opposite: it should showcase how old-world values, traditions, and ideals, even when actively suppressed as was the case with the Kingdom of Italy, find a way to survive and find meaning in the new world. Venetian culture is not native just to the Venetian Lagoon (Dogado), but it is native to the old lands of the Republic as a whole, and its citizens, our ancestors, considered it *their* culture, and this of course does not extend to the whole Croatian culture as we see it today, but it does cover a large portion of its oldest and most prominent constituent, Dalmatian culture.

One of the most visible and symbolic representations of our claim is the

Alka of Sinj, which is the most iconic celebration of a Croatian military victory, which was in fact, a victory achieved under the banner of St. Mark, and it was, as a historical fact, a Venetian victory achieved by Croats. The fact that most Croats today would be perplexed by this historical fact just shows how integral Croats consider Venetian culture to Croatian culture. It is very hard to see where Venetian culture ends, and Croatian culture begins, something that cannot be said in the same sense for Venetian and Italian culture. For most Italians today it is quite clear that Veneto is different – if not for anything else, then for cuttlefish ink in spaghetti or risotto.

Croatia should not behave toward Venetian culture as if it were a culture of a national minority. Venetian culture is much more than that, it is authentic Croatian culture *par excellence*, forming its integral part, in much the same way as Celtic culture (originating from Ireland<sup>17</sup>) forms an integral part of Scottish culture. Celtic culture does not make Scots Irish, but it is a common cultural root, and neither Scotland nor Ireland can claim it to be theirs and not of the other, even if its roots are in Ireland. It is their shared legacy. Venetian culture is not a culture of a national minority in Croatia. It is the culture of Croatia. The scarlet flag with the Lion of St. Mark is not a foreign flag, it is the flag of Marulić, Šišgorić, Zoranić, and Hektorović. It is the flag under which Croatian culture was born.

---

17 [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Goidelic\\_languages](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Goidelic_languages). Accessed: Jul 5, 2024.

## List of sources and literature

- Avolio, Francesco (2009). *Lingue e dialetti d'Italia*. Roma: Carocci.
- Beggiato, Ettore (1998). *1866: la grande truffa*. Padova: Editrice Universitaria.
- Boerio, Giuseppe (1867). *Dizionario del Dialetto Veneziano*. Venice: Reale tipografia di Giovanni Cecchini Editori.
- Devoto, Giacomo (1972). *I dialetti delle regioni d'Italia*. Firenze: Sansoni.
- Fisher, Joshua (2006). *Do not Leave your Language Alone: The Hidden Status Agendas Within Corpus Planning in Language Policy*. London: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates Publishers.
- Fisher, Joshua, Gertner, Michael, Lowy, Esther and Milan, William (1985). *The Rise and Fall of the Ethnic Revival*. New York: De Gruyter.
- Furtado, Peter (2019). *Histories of Nations: How Their Identities Were Forged*. London: Thames & Hudson.
- di Revel, Genova Giovanni Thaon (1906), *La cessione del Veneto. Ricordi di un commissario piemontese incaricato alle trattative*. Florence: Lumachi.
- Hobbes, Thomas (1651/2017). *Leviathan*. London: Penguin Classics.
- Hroch, Miroslav (2020). The Nation as the Cradle of Nationalism and Patriotism. *Nations and Nationalism* 26(1), pp.5-21.
- Hroch, Miroslav (2015). *European Nations: Explaining their Formation*. New York: Verso.
- Lampe, John; Mazower, Mark (2004) *Ideologies and National Identities: The Case of Twentieth-Century Southeastern Europe*. Budapest: Central European University Press.
- László, János (2013). *Historical Tales and National Identity: An introduction to narrative social psychology*. London: Routledge.
- Lučić, Ivan (1674). *Historia di Dalmatia*. Available from (digital archive, accessed 4.7.2024): [https://archive.org/details/bub\\_gb\\_Zv1VRc8avowC/page/n14/mode/1up](https://archive.org/details/bub_gb_Zv1VRc8avowC/page/n14/mode/1up)
- Ljubičić, Maslina; Spicijarić, Nina (2008) Pridjevi mletačkoga podrijetla : prilaženice i izvedenice. U: Srdoč-Konestra, I. and Vranić, S. (ed.), *Riječki filološki dani 7: zbornik radova*, pp. 849-870.
- Nicoll, David (1989). *The Venetian Empire 1200-1700*. London: Osprey.
- Miller, David I. (2000). *Citizenship and National Identity*. Cambridge: Polity.

- Miotto, Luigi (1991). *Vocabulario del Dialecto Veneto-Dalmata*, Trieste: Edizioni Lint Tieste.
- Spicijarić Paškvan, Nina (2018). Fonološka prilagodba mletačkih posuđenica u čakavskim govorima Svetoga Vida Miholjice i Njivica na otoku Krku: Od fonologije do leksikologije. U: Lukežić, I. et al. (ed.), *Zbornik u čast Mariji Turk*, pp. 313-326.
- Spicijarić Paškvan, Nina (2014). Dalmatski (veljotski) i mletački utjecaji u govorima otoka Krka. *Krčki zbornik* 70, pp. 71-88.
- Tamaro, Sandra (2015). Mletačke posuđenice u boljunskim govorima: glagoli govorenja i njihova etimologija. *Filologija*, (64), 121-136.
- Tamaro, Sandra (2010). Etimološki prilog proučavanju mletačkih posuđenica u sjevernočakavskom govoru Boljuna. *Rasprave: Časopis Instituta za hrvatski jezik i jezikoslovlje*, 36(2), pp. 329-344.
- Tagliavini, Carlo (1948). *Le origini delle lingue Neolatine: corso introduttivo di filologia romanza*. Bologna: Pàtron.
- Zingarelli, Nicola (1922) *Vocabolario della Lingva Italiana*. Milano: Bietti e Reggiani editori.
- Zorzi, Alvise (2001). *La Repubblica del Leone. Storia di Venezia*. Milan: Bompiani.
- Wittgenstein, Ludwig (1953). *Philosophical Investigations. 50th Anniversary Edition*: London: Blackwell Publishers
- Wodak, Ruth, de Cillia, Rudolf, Reisigl, Martin, Liebhart, Karin (2009). *The Discursive Construction of National Identity*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.



## **Raize Venete: Kultura Mletačke Republike kao sastavni dio hrvatske kulture i nacionalnog identiteta**

### **Sažetak**

U radu ćemo istražiti mletačku kulturu kao jedan od kulturoloških temelja hrvatske kulture, te kako je hrvatska kultura danas, temeljem zajedničkih oblika života, dublje povezana s mletačkom kulturom nego što je s njome povezana današnja talijanska kultura. S tim ciljem, dat ćemo kratak pregled povijesti Mletačke Republike od 697. do 1797. godine te današnju situaciju u Venetu, gdje sve više jačaju autonomističke i separatističke tendencije. Također ćemo istražiti venetski jezik i oblike života koje dijeli s dalmatinskim dijalektom hrvatskog jezika koji u isto vrijeme ne dijele s ostatkom Italije. Bit će prikazana rasprava o tome kako hrvatska književnost vuče korijene iz mletačkih dalmatinskih gradova te kako je utjecaj mletačke kulture na današnju hrvatsku kulturu veći od utjecaja na današnju talijansku kulturu. Ovime će biti demonstrirana iznimna važnost mletačke kulture za hrvatsku kulturu i hrvatski nacionalni identitet, do te mjere da se može zaključiti kako mletačka kultura nije samo kultura jedne nacionalne manjine u Hrvatskoj, već je ona upravo hrvatska kultura, *par excellence*.

**Keywords:** Mletačka Republika, hrvatska kultura, venetski jezik, friškin, oblici života.

