

The Suitability and Integration of Albanians in Venice in the Post-Mediaeval Period

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Abstract

By examining the way in which the Albanian minority has settled in Venice, their attitudes, their behavior and how Venice - a city of hospitality - has responded, we have made with this study, a glimpse of the difficulties that the minorities have encountered before facing a foreign culture and society. The pragmatic, Malthusian politics of the Republic of Venice allowed some to become citizens of Venice. But were they completely assimilated? The purpose of this paper is to provide a complete historical panorama of the Albanian cultural identity in the city of Venice in the Post-Medieval period as an important part, where every human being brings with it. Likewise, many Albanian immigrants to Venice came from rural areas and cultural contact was less dominant than that of Muslim, Tatar, or Slavic immigrants. Although in a developed country, Albanians have managed to keep their traditions and customs, passing them on to the second and third generations, thus conserving the linguistic, cultural, and sometimes even religious characteristics that have led to the creation of fraternal associations. In addition to the preservation of the culture of origin, the study also analyzes other cases where many Albanians have completely adapted to the Venetian culture. Adaptability and sometimes even integration have made them the perfect "civis originarius" Venetians.

Keywords: Venice, Albanian immigrants, cultural identity, adaptability, integration.

INTRODUCTION

Grouped in neighborhoods, frequenting almost only their compatriots, fighting and always helping within the same cultural group, immigrants have heard around the middle of the fortieth century, the need to unite in ethnic groups. This is how the Albanian and Dalmatian brotherhoods were born, which was followed by cases of the Greek diaspora.

For many of these foreign Albanians, emigration was permanent and brought "de facto" the need for social but not cultural assimilation. We sometimes seek to distinguish between the concept of cultural identity and assimilation. Cultural identity is what every human being carries with him. The formation of a cultural identity is a long, ethnic, cultural process and, like any social process, it is the result of interaction, of individual decisions, more or less perceived by reactions.

For Albanians, the cultural impact has been less violent than for Muslims, Slavs and Tatars.

Immigrants often came from rural areas. Entering an urban culture, the problems of cultural antagonisms inevitably arose because, as we all know, rural communities are becoming more united, more hierarchical than urban communities.

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Merchants of the Albanian coast are more frequent in the ducal city, and even before the annexation at the end of the century, the presence of permanently settled Albanians is noted. These cases are difficult to interpret, because the sources often do not give us the names and hometowns of the characters in question. As a result, except in the cases of traditional Albanian names, we can often hit their true nationality by mentioning as a surname the name of the cities they came from, as for example, (Ducellie, 1987) Nicola Vendelino, Durazzino, resident for fifteen years in Venice, in 1410 received citizenship "de extra", eleven years later he is granted the right to be a citizen of Venice "Gracie civilitatis originale" (Privilegi, I, c. 168, 1410; c. 192, 1421).

During the thirtieth century, ethnic minority communities have preserved within themselves the memories of their country even though they were located in highly developed urban areas at that time. This may partly explain the fact that second- and third-generation immigrants have maintained distinct linguistic, cultural and religious characteristics, which have sometimes led to the formation of fraternities. We must bear in mind that ethnic minority communities can be perfectly integrated in the "urban villages" of Venice, in the micro-society of their parish, but they always remain marginalized in the society of the host country. On the contrary, there are cases of total assimilation, to the point that these people are completely integrated into the Venetian society who have forgotten any traces of their origin.

Albanian Giovanni Nigro "civis originarius". These clear examples show that over the centuries, assimilation, and sometimes even integration, has been verified for certain immigrants who, since the beginning of the Renaissance, have become perfect Venetians. It is enough to consult a telephone book in Venice to see that Blanco, Catapan, Vassallo, Sergi ... etc. They are "real" Venetians. However, many would be surprised if you were to remind you of their Albanian, Greek and Dalmatian roots.

But in contrast to Albanians, for Muslim foreigners, integration in the host country was much more difficult, however even the latter had become Venetian citizens but with the difference that they may have accepted the rules of the local culture. We may mention here Giovanni, the son of Petro Siriano, who became a Venetian citizen, has a Christian name like his father. He had therefore accepted the Catholic religion (at least from a bureaucratic point of view).

In order to have Venetian citizenship, the basic condition was his stay for 10 years in Venice and during these years to have participated in the city's army, to have paid taxes, signed "loans" and owned (Senato Misti, 1408) house and property in "decima" (Cecchetti, 1864) and did not have to have the name registered for crimes in the police. We register 12 Albanians with Venetian citizenship where the social categories that benefited the most were the merchants working in the city of Venice, among whom we can mention the artisan Giorgio di Durazzo (Privilegi, 1407) who practiced the profession of painter.

We continue that the alternative of particularism - assimilation or integration was of more interest to the second and third generation, rarely to the first, at least in terms of cultural assimilation.

Regarding the first generation, those who had benefited from Venetian citizenship happened because Venice, being in economic and demographic decline after the epidemic of 1382, was looking for new citizens to overcome this crisis.

The first characteristic of these foreigners is that they were not considered a potentially marginal group. Apart from the naturalized Venetians, they were not part of the host society, which was based on its consciousness of belonging to its own nationality and culture. It should be noted that the term "nationality" means "awareness of sharing an identity and a common fate".

Many sociologists call it the threshold of tolerance, seeing that the natives cannot stand without reacting to be as far away from these foreign groups as possible from their way of life, their environment, their work and their beliefs. Even though integrated Albanians and foreigners from other countries were looked down upon, it is enough to recall the quarter of San Moisè, which was not looked upon favorably at all.

It can be thought that the Eastern minorities aimed to demand greater rights and this is what brought about the formation of the national brotherhood.

Thus, Albanians and Dalmatians ask the Council of Tens for permission to establish their school where on October 22, 1442 (Manoscritti Rosssi, Classe VII, Cod. MDV (9396), n. 83) the school's statutes are established, we remember the similarity with other schools: as prayer, mercy and obligation to participate in some other functions.

Gathering the new citizens, the Dominant could not thereby be afraid of weakening his cultural identity. The people who found refuge did not spread fundamentally different values from those of the Venetians. The traditions of the Christians are the same among almost all foreigners, (though the orthodox Greeks present trouble to the Lordship, and as regards the Moslems, they are few in number,) relatively similar customs could not be considered an outbreak violent in a Western Christian coexistence. The lagoon society did not feel threatened at all. We can also consider the brotherhood as the beginning of a Venetian social policy towards foreigners (Pullan, 1971). Through the schools, the state favored the social solidarity they offered.

The emigrants' time in Venice made them absorb the culture of the host country. The geographic and legal creation of a national bond, which were the schools, served as a counterbalance to the unstable society and temporarily filled the void they felt.

But beyond any integrated policy, recognizing foreign schools was also a way for the government to keep apart the main foreign ethnic groups, seen as potential forces of social, if not political, unrest. It was also easy to control the national fraternities. It is surprising to note that in order to preserve the identity of Albanians or Dalmatians, these immigrants knew how to choose and use a typical Venetian grouping model, namely schools.

For the Albanians and Dalmatians who settled in Venice, it is the end of a period of instability and sometimes difficult to understand. For the Greeks, in fact, who seek to take advantage of the same advantages, it is only the beginning of a war.

All this shows that adaptability does not only depend on immigrants, but also on the host society. It was enough to utter just one word against the "honorable" "of the state to be called a bandit in the city. Immigrants from Eastern countries, Albanians in particular, excelled in this kind of stunts. In 1365, the Tenth Council called an Albanian, a leshko, who, seized by megalomania, pretending to be the Byzantine emperor took the opportunity to insult the Lordship (Misti dei Dieci, Reg.6, c.25, 1365). Pietro Albanese, a native of Lezha, a baker in San Paterniano, had uttered profane words against the Republic. The law of revenge was applied against him: his tongue was cut out between two columns in the Piazza San Marco, he was kidnapped from San Marco to the Rialto, and moreover he had to serve a sentence of one year in the lowest prison. (Misti dei Dieci, Reg.6, c.15, 1365) Suitability becomes possible only if the country of destination is a civilization and not a culture, namely an open universal society and not ethnocentric. You can only adapt if you agree to consider particularism as a reality among other realities.

But as we mentioned above, when minorities claim a faith different from that of the host country, the problem of their suitability can be very difficult. The formation of the national brotherhood had a political, social and religious dimension.

For the Greek Orthodox - and for the few Albanians of the Orthodox faith, the main obstacles that the Lordship placed for the recognition of their cultural identity were not so much of a political nature as of a safety nature.

The Council had not proposed solutions to solve the problems of religious practices. Freedom of belief had long been tolerated (Corner, 1749). At the beginning of the fourth century, the Greek minority began to develop, and the Republic began to take restrictive measures against the Orthodox cult.

The Council of Ten made this decision on May 25, but the cleric "had no right to officiate in any country..." (Misti dei Dieci, Reg.9, c.85v, 1412) And it was the first time that the state officially prohibited the ritual practice of the Orthodox in Venice.

However, in November 1948, the Council of Ten overruled the wishes of the Orthodox, allowing the establishment of St. Nicholas School.

But it will take a century before the Greeks can practice the Orthodox cult in complete freedom in their church (Fedalto, 1967).

The creation of these schools was quite positive for the Albanians and other foreigners in Venice because they kept the language of their country pure. But on the other hand, this had a negative impact on the integration of these communities because through the religious rites that the communities had in their language, it did not allow integration into the host society.

Every state has the right to wish that immigrants, through a process of assimilation, become an integral part of that state. But in this case foreigners have the right to remain who they are and Albanians, apart from integration and assimilation, have preserved their tradition and culture not only in Italy but in every country where they have immigrated.

Despite the difficulties it encountered based on these problems, the Republic put the integration mechanisms into operation. Thus, he established in Venice a mosaic of culture that characterizes the beginning of the Renaissance. It was not a matter of focusing on a single culture (such as that of the origin or the host country), but also considering emigration as a cultural fact.

A very large evolution of Albanians in various professional fields such as teachers, doctors, notaries, artists, etc. is observed. Where with their talent they were best integrated into the host country. But also, sailors, scribes, helmsmen, ship masters, where we can mention Albanians: Domenico (Raspe, 3644, c.56,1383) and Michele (Notatorio del Collegio, Reg.2, c.83v, 1387) from Durrës, scribe with Donato Blanco (Grazie, XVII, c. 34v,1390), Giorgio and Pietro di Viviano in the leather works where they sew furs (Raspe, 3694, c. 216,1449. Privilege, II, c. 40, 1467. Raspe, 3655, c. 105, 1482).

One of the jobs practiced in Venice were the servants, but it is very important to distinguish between the free householders and those slaves brought from various eastern countries, including an Albanian, Maria from Shkodra who was under the orders of Orsatto Morosini for seven consecutive years at a price of twenty ducats (Vicentini, 1877).

But a part of the council of Pergat on November 22, 1386, confirmed by another on April 29, 1455, prohibits all human sales made from abroad and specifies that all purchases made in the territory of Durrës and in other places must to be set free and forbids them to be exported from Venice (Cibrario, page 215).

Another craft was that of the courier who brought messages over short distances. In this craft there were many Albanians among whom we can mention Pietro di Scutari, Nicoloa di Durachio and Andrea d'Alessio (Notatorio del Collegio, VI, c.191v. *ibid.*, VII,cc. 78,83v, 1443.*ibid.* , VII, c. 81, 1442. Misti dei Dieci, 14, c. 112, 1452. *ibid.*, 16, c. 96, 1431). There are also doctors such as Giovanni Domenico Nigros (C.I., b.74/75, Not.

Elmit Francesco. Notatorio del Collegio, XIV, c.54, 1491. C.I., b.28, Not. Borgi, 1496. Privilegi, II, c.6, 1431).

Another profession worth mentioning was: miniatures, designs, and paintings, which were used with great skill even by Albanians. One of these was Domenigo, a mask maker, he was a gastaldo from the Albanian School in 1574 (Nadin, 2008).

Returning to the professions, there are still other professions such as that of builders who produced various types of ornaments, for domestic and above all bridal uses that were often decorated with decorative paintings. This type of work was typical of the Balkans and especially from the tradition of the Albanian mountains.

Glass masters was another profession, we remember the master Stefano dal Dagno and at the beginning of the 1400's the furnace "alla pigna" was appointed in Murano, run by an Albanian family at the end of the 1400's, Nicolò di Biagio from Drishti, Albanian and who continues this tradition. In 1511 he was registered as the owner of the oven (Nadin, 2008).

A truly innovative measure provides that any naturalized foreign citizen can work in: "veluta, camoca, panni damasceni, brocati, et cuiscumque sortis laboreria sete auri et sete argente cuiscumque latitudinis menseure..." (Senato Misti, Reg 48, c. 15v, 1410).

Since 1350, the Merchant Consuls deemed it not necessary to increase the number of artisans (Consoli dei Mercanti, Capitolare, b. 55, 1350. Maggior Consiglio, Novella, c.5).

Now, until that time, foreigners did not have the right to practice certain crafts or at least had to, before making use of certain materials, ask for permission from the government (Comune, I, c.143, 1251-1382).

Marriage in Venetian land was one of the main factors of the assimilation of Albanians. It was chosen between residents of the same parish, but it did not always happen between two people from the same colony. Inter-marriage has allowed ethnic groups to be individualized. We can say that marriage between two people of the same colony was more frequent than between Venetians and foreigners. Also, marriages between Albanians and Dalmatians were more frequent than with Greeks (C.I., b, 243, 1465, Not. Antonio Zio).

Perhaps out of need for each other in emigration, the refugees had also created fraternal associations. We can highlight, as mentioned above, the most frequent fraternal ties between Dalmatians and Albanians.

Regardless of communication in a foreign language, the mother tongue was very much used in the family with relatives and friends. Then family and friendly ties were very strong among the Albanian refugees.

A high cultural formation has influenced the Albanians through the schools they have created. As mentioned above, many Albanians were Orthodox, where they can be distinguished quite well by their baptismal names such as Theodor, Demetrio, Basilio, but the Orthodox did not make up the majority of the community. Thus, around the middle of the quarter, the Albanian and Dalmatian colonies grew in number and asked the Council of Tens for permission to establish the school. The Albanians had to face many difficulties to have the authorization for the creation of this school. In fact, the number of "small schools" was increasing, so the Council of Tithes decided:

"quod non possit concedi quod fiat aliqua scola nisi captum fuerit per tres partes Consilii de Decem" (Consiglio dei Dieci, Misti, Reg.5, c. 44, 1349).

This order forces the Albanians to fight more for the establishment of the school.

Until 1442, the Albanians gathered in the Church of San Severo near the monastery of San Gallo, protected by the Lady of Good Counsel also called the Lady of Shkodra. Then the Albanian colony takes the name of the school of Santa Maria and San Gallo.

The school continued to exist until February 27, 1447, the day on which the Council of Ten allowed the School of the Albanians to be transferred to the Church of San Maurizio where its existence was officially recognized (Consiglio dei Dieci, Misti, Reg. 13, c. 91,1447).

In addition to the schools that helped in the cultivation and preservation of Albanian culture, a group of Albanian intellectuals who fled their homeland to escape the Turkish occupation stood out, where with their knowledge and works they made a great contribution to the host country. The brothers Giovanni and Paolo Gazulli, the poet Michele Marulli, the chronicler Marino Barlezio, the philosopher Leonik Tomeu, the painter Vitore Carpaccio and many others who shone with their talent and works, left their mark on the country of emigration, being known all over the world.

Despite the integration of foreigners in the Venetian land, the concept of "foreigner" remains an extremely mobile concept. The terminology is based on the word "forestier" or "foreste", which does not indicate that you are not Italian, but that you are not Venetian. It is a political term where the Venetian state referred to another absolute criterion, that is, "venezianità" by virtue of which a Venetian citizen, a sailor or a craftsman, born in Venice was more respected in the eyes of the authorities than a foreigner, no matter how cultured he was (Fedalto, 1977).

Despite the difficulties that Albanian immigrants had to integrate into the host country after 1500, there will be less talk about their settlements because among the four hundred, the documents in public or private archives are much less accurate than before. The place of residence is not always specified, the professions come and go and are ignored. It seems as if the place comes and evolves as mentalities change. This happens because the Albanian immigrants as well as foreigners have been integrated and best adapted to the culture of the country where they live. It is about a social, mental and cultural transformation that gives less importance to the particulars to stop only at the person.

CONCLUSIONS

By presenting these researches and analyzing the history of Venice, we have been able to see how it has been one of the most evolving renaissance states of the time. Its evolution includes all areas and it is one of the countries which evolved faster than other countries.

The Republic of St. Mark or the Republic of Venice was a democratic state which allowed Albanian immigrants to practice their professions in complete freedom even though in the interest of the Republic.

Although the Albanians encountered many difficulties in the city of the lagoon but also in other cities, they managed to integrate in the best way in the Venetian society, where apart from the economic development they have given to the host country, through their intelligence they have also given a very high contribution.

These artists gave their contribution not only with their works but by reflecting their intellect in the universities of Padua, Venice and in various universities in Italy.

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