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Venice and Piracy Revisited: the Voyage of the Rizarda

50 years ago, Alberti Tenenti famously linked Venice’s maritime decline to the rise of piracy, 1580-1615. In this paper I would like to revisit Tenenti’s thesis, but situating over a larger area, in a shorter time frame. From 12 April to 11 July 1605, the Venetian merchant vessel Rizarda sailed from Alexandretta to Venice, via Cyprus and Zante. On board was the Portuguese converso traveler, Pedro Teixeira, who described the trip. The voyage was not unusual, beyond some run-ins with corsairs of various religions, but just for its very ordinariness it provides some insight into the everyday nature of Venice’s mercantile network during the era of Tenenti’s “decline.” By extending beyond the upper Adriatic where Tenenti’s research was focused, the micro-study in this paper will illuminate more sharply the commercial challenges faced by Venetian captains in the Aegean and Ionian seas, the ethnic and religious complexities in these largely lawless regions, and some of the social and economic curiosities that Teixeira came across on his trip from East to West.
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