Proposal for the 3rd MMHN Conference

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A Venetian Merchant’s Business Records

Marco Bembo was no one extraordinary in Venice in 1480. He was a successful international merchant who had taken over an established family company. He had spent the previous years training for this position by residing in the ports where he would later have agents working for him. The company moved goods between some of the most important markets: Bruges and Longdon; Beirut and Famagosta; Crete and Constantinople; and the home office in Venice. In spite of the recent war between the Ottomans and Venetians, Bembo put his emphasis on trade around the Aegean Sea. His leadership was successful enough that he could begin building a new palazzo for the family and their ventures on the Grand Canal, just a few palazzi away from the Ponte Vecchio. When the construction proved fatal – he fell off the scaffolding in 1484 – the executors created a business entity typical of Venice. A commessaria ran the ventures a merchant had begun until his heirs came of age.

Bembo was not one of the most important merchants, nor was he unique in emphasizing commerce on the cultural frontier between Christian and Islamic cultures. His importance lies in the survival of his correspondence. Three “copy-letters,” where he recorded what he said in letters his agents survive. These ledgers are almost unique among documents surviving in the public archives. Making them even more unique and valuable is the ability to match entries with the approximately six hundred surviving letters from his agents.

This paper will use the Bembo documents to study how a Venetian company did business in the environment of periodic hostilities with the Ottomans. In the years between the Ottoman defeat of the Byzantines and their successful campaign to take over ports the Venetians controlled along the coasts of Greece and the Peloponnesus in the years around 1500, merchants did not shrink from doing business. The paper will look at how his agents worked as a network. It will also address how they interacted with the Muslims. This paper is part of a much bigger project that I will be working on during my sabbatical this year.
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Publications:
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Books Forthcoming or in Process
Istvan Petrovics, Sandor Lazlo Toth, and Eleanor Congdon, Hungarian Medieval History: Studies in Honor of Zoltan Kosztolnyik, University of Szeged Press, due to publisher November 15, 2009.

Venetian Mercantile Presence in the Western Mediterranean, c. 1400 (Under contract with E.J.Brill, Leiden, the Netherlands.) At revision stage. Target date Two chapters still under revision. Based on research using the letters of Francesco di Marco Datini and government records from Venice.

**Research in Progress**
Marco Bembo and Ambrogio Malipiero: to fight or to trade with the Turks in the 1480s. Using the letters received by the two merchants, an exploration of trade between Christians and Muslims during a time of active warfare. Also intended: complete transcriptions and translations of the primary materials. Preliminary verbal agreement to publish at least three volumes in American Philosophical Society’s Memoirs.

“Two men and a Ca: The Prosopographical Riddle of the Venetian merchant Antonio Contarini, c. 1400” Based on letters from the Datini collection of Prato and materials found in Venice in 2003 and 2005.


“Wool from San Matteo, Venetian ships, and Francesco di Marco Datini, c. 1400” being revised for Medieval Clothing and Textiles, by invitation of the editors

“Hungary and Venice at odds in the 1410’s and 1420’s” being prepared for Hungarian Medieval History: Studies in Honor of Zoltan Kosztolnyik University of Szeged Press.

“Francesco di Marco Datini’s Will” being prepared for Festchrift for Christine Meek.

**Short Articles, Translations, and Encyclopedia Entries**


**Book Reviews**
Olivia Constable’s Housing the Stranger in the Mediterranean World for Al-Masaq 19 (September 2007) No. 2: 200-204. By invitation of Editor.


