

**THE VENETIAN “FOUR SEASONS” IN THE BLACK SEA:
THE CHRONICLE OF AN UNSUCCESSFUL HEGEMONY
(1204–1484)**

OVIDIU CRISTEA

A history of sea and navigation in the Middle Ages making no reference to the Venetians is difficult to fathom. For hundreds of years, St. Mark's banner commanded respect in the Mediterranean, and merchants of *Serenissima* carried out their trading activities from the English Kingdom to the Far East. Although the Venetians must have sailed in the Black Sea as well, the exact moment in which the flag bearing the winged lion became common presence in the area is difficult to establish. The interest of Venice in the Pontic area developed slowly, to begin with 1204, to reach an apex in the fourth and fifth decades of the fifteenth century. Following the experience gained by the Italian maritime powers in the Holy Land in the 11th–13th centuries, Venice strove to develop emporia in the Black Sea, obtain privileges from the powers in the area, and defeat her rivals on sea. Venice mainly focused on three points of interest: Tana, a trading settlement in the territories of the Golden Horde, at the mouths of the Don; Trebizond, in the south-eastern area of the Black Sea; and, Constantinople, the capital of the Byzantine Empire, a compulsory relay on all the Levantine commercial roads. Occasionally, the Venetians showed interest in other areas as well – the west-Pontic coast of the Bulgarian Kingdom and the fortress of Moncastro (Cetatea Albă), lying at the mouths of the Dneestr – but the three aforementioned centers were the true points of antagonism in the Venetian-Genoese relations in *Mar Mazor*. This rivalry became apparent shortly after the Byzantines had recaptured Constantinople (1261) and subsisted until the conquest of the Black Sea by the Ottomans (1484). Between these two landmarks, the evolution of the Venetian policy can be seen as the succession of the four seasons of the year. One should note though that Venice, despite all efforts, was never able to achieve supremacy in the Black Sea, no matter how favourable her position was in various areas of the Mediterranean. This is attributable on the one hand to the particularities of the Venetian colonial empire and the evolution of the balance of power among the Venetian aristocratic factions, and on the other hand to the vitality and reaction capacity of her adversaries, most of all of the Genoese.

THE SPRING (1204–1319)¹

The conquest of Constantinople during the fourth crusade had a long-term influence on the Venetian policy in the East. Holding an important part of the former Byzantine capital and a string of possessions along the maritime route from Venice to the city of Constantine the Great, the Republic was able to exert control over the major commercial routes across the eastern Mediterranean. The Venetian bases were essential in assisting the fleet and providing valuable information on the political, military and economic developments in the Levant.

In 1204, when the fall of the Byzantine Empire occurred, the Black Sea was little known to the Western sailors or merchants. Most of the information provided by one of the rare portulans of the time can be traced to the Antiquity; distances between the various settlements are left blank, and the only important ports mentioned there are Trapezunt and Soldaia². This situation explains the Venetians' lack of interest in exploring or trading in the Pontic area. Documents related to trading activities in the region are scarce and they refer to minor transactions³. The bulk of the Venetian trade was carried out in the ports of Acre and Tyre (both belonging to the Kingdom of Jerusalem) and Lajazzo (in the Kingdom of Lesser Armenia), centers in which the Christian merchants purchased spices, silk and various other eastern commodities in high demand in Western Europe. Therefore, between 1204 and 1261 the Black Sea held a strategic position in the policy of Venice, seen as a means to ensure the defence of the Latin Empire of Constantinople against a possible threat from the Black Sea area. Owing to the overwhelming superiority of their fleet, the Venetians were quick to annihilate the attempts of the Greek Empire of Nicaea, and until 1261 the Latin Empire was able to survive, despite its precarious human and financial resources.

The fall of this empire was triggered by spectacular mutations in the eastern basin of the Mediterranean. After the crusades, the Italian maritime powers, Genoa, Pisa, and subsequently Venice were granted, in the main trading towns of the Holy Land, considerable privileges regarding the safety of traders and of their merchandise, and a preferential regime in their trading activities. Nonetheless, each

¹ Freddy Thiriet, *La Romanie vénitienne au Moyen Âge. Le développement et l'exploitation du domaine colonial vénitien (XII^e–XV^e siècles)*, Paris, 1959, pp. 141–161; Michel Balard, *La Romanie génoise (XII^e–début du XV^e siècles)*, I, Rome, 1978, pp. 38–66; Donald M. Nicol, *Venezia e Bisanzio due città millenarie protagoniste della storia*, trad. Lidia Perria, Milano, 2001, pp. 219–318; Frederic C. Lane, *Venise, une république maritime*, Paris, 1985, pp. 121–132.

² Patrick Gautier Dalché, *Carte marine et portulan au XII^e siècle. Le Liber de Existencia Riveriarum et forma maris nostri Mediterranei (Pise, circa 1200)*, École Française de Rome, 1995, pp. 139–141.

³ M.E. Martin, *The First Venetians in the Black Sea*, in "Arheion Pontou", 35, 1979, pp. 111–122; Idem, *The Venetians in the Byzantine Empire Before 1204*, in vol. "Byzantium and the West c. 850–c. 1200" ed. by J.D. Howard-Johnston, Amsterdam, 1988, pp. 201–214.

Italian republic struggled to obtain a more favourable position and to defeat competition. This led to the outbreak of bloody clashes. In 1256, a war broke out between the Genoese and the Venetians over supremacy in the port of Acre. The Genoese were defeated and evicted from the town, but the war continued. Wishing to avenge themselves, the Genoese signed at Nymphaion in 1261 an alliance with Michael VIII Palaeologus, the Greek emperor of Nicaea, by which they were pledging to assist the *basileus* with their fleet, in case of an attack on the capital of the Latin Empire. In exchange for this, the Genoese were promised prevalence over the Venetians at Constantinople, and huge privileges, including freedom of navigation and trade in the "Great Sea".

A happy turn of events placed Constantinople into the hands of Michael VIII in the same year in which the treaty of Nymphaion was being signed⁴. The conquest marked the end of the Latin Empire and caused Venice to lose the privileged position she had held for 57 years at the Straits. No less alarming was the fact that with the Genoese taking up quarters at Pera, a district of Constantinople, the superiority of the Venetians in the Aegean Sea was put under threat, since according to the treaty of Nymphaion, once the capital recaptured, the Byzantine-Genoese alliance would have targeted all the remaining positions of the Venetians in the area.

Under the circumstances, between 1261 and the end of the century the policy of Venice wavered between a minimal objective – to keep her positions in the Aegean Sea and the Peloponnese – and a maximal objective – to return to the situation of 1204–1261. The efforts made to attain these objectives took three directions: the first two were complementary, and means were employed in this respect for over half a century. Thirdly, a radical solution was adopted, when all the other means had proven inefficient.

I. From 1261 to 1324 Venice supported the idea of an anti-Byzantine crusade and insisted that the papacy should preach for a crusade based on the argument that the eviction of Schismatics from Constantinople would be profitable to the Catholic faith in general, and in support to the Holy Land in particular. The insufficient land forces prompted the Venetians into seeking an alliance with continental powers able to restore the Latin Empire. As a result, Venice became involved in all the crusade projects targeting Constantinople, none of which was ever put into practice.

II. Concomitantly with the efforts to set afoot an anti-Byzantine coalition, Venice kept a watchful eye on her possessions in the Aegean Sea. To this purpose, the signing of temporary truces with the Byzantine Empire seemed to be the ideal

⁴ Ov. Cristea, *La reconquête byzantine de Constantinople et l'action vénitienne à Daphnusia*, in "Il Mar Nero", IV, 1999–2000, pp. 137–142; Şerban Marin, *Veneția și căderea unui imperiu. Reprezentarea momentului 1261 în cronistica venețiană*, "Revista Istorică", XIV, 2003, 3–4, pp. 211–254.

solution, as they were ensuring the protection of the Venetian subjects and territories, and giving Venice the necessary respite for the crusade preparations.

III. These two tendencies yielded immediate results, but proved inefficient in the long run. Gradually, the Genoese were able to consolidate their position in the Byzantine territories, and the treaty of Nymphaion allowed them to trade in the Black Sea on a large scale. They set up headquarters in the key ports of Caffa, Pera and Trebizonde, and laid the bases of a system fostering unprecedented prosperity in the Pontic area. To this added a major diplomatic success: the treaty signed with the Mamluk Sultanate of Egypt in 1290. The treaty gave Genoa free access to Alexandria and to other commodity markets in Egypt, and its impact was only enhanced after the Mamluk sultan conquered in 1291 the last positions held by the Christians in the Holy Land. The disappearance of the Kingdom of Jerusalem and the fall of Acre into the hands of the sultan was actually triggering the eviction of the Venetians from Syria and from Palestine. It was also heralding the rise of Genoa in the Mediterranean. Under the circumstances, Venice resorted to an extreme solution, namely a war against Genoa and the Byzantine Empire, carried on her own⁵.

One may consider it an extreme measure. However, the premises did not seem unfavourable at the time. Sea clashes to begin with 1256 had all ended in a victory of the Venetians, who were now under the impression that the Genoese were not a real threat on sea. The Venetian chronicler Martino Da Canal was writing, "I would like you to know that the doge provides for the safety of the sea so well, with the galleys, that the Venetian ships sail to Acre, Alexandria and to various other places, and return safely; whereas the Genoese, sail about furtively, looting here and there."⁶

However, the ensuing military operations tempered the optimism of the Venetians. A war broke out in 1293 and lasted until 1299, in which the two adversaries employed considerable resources to demonstrate their superiority. Venice and Genoa applied a similar strategy. Each tried to strike a crushing blow at the trading positions of the enemy and annihilate the fleet. The Genoese squadrons struck Crete, whereas the Venetian naval forces set fire to Pera and Caffa, the major Genoese emporia in the Black Sea. Genoa's naval victories of Lajazzo and Curzola, albeit at the cost of great sacrifices, led to a compromise peace. Venice was forced to accept the situation established at Constantinople in 1261, and Genoa granted the Venetians free access into the Black Sea. However, the Genoese carried out a remarkable success: the Venetians were being prohibited from sailing into the Black Sea with their war fleet⁷.

⁵ Gh. I. Brătianu, *Les origines de la guerre de Curzola (1294–1299) entre Gênes et Venise*, in vol. *Mélanges d'histoire générale*, publ. par Constantin Marinescu, I, Cluj, 1927, pp. 87–100.

⁶ Martino da Canal, *Les Estoires de Venise. Cronaca veneziana in lingua francese dalle origini al 1275*, a cura di Alberto Limentani, Firenze, 1972, II, XXXVIII, p. 194.

⁷ Ov. Cristea, *Veneția și Marea Neagră în secolele XIII–XIV. Contribuții la studiul politicii orientale venețiene*, Ed. Istros, Brăila, 2004, pp. 99–116.

The Byzantine Empire emerged noticeably weakened from this confrontation. Abandoned in 1299 by his Genoese allies, Emperor Andronicus II had to face retaliation from the Venetians on his own, and in 1302, when a Venetian fleet attacked Constantinople he was eventually forced to sign a peace. The treaty marked the end of a period in which Byzantium had tried to act as a mediator between the Venetians and the Genoese, as well as the beginning of the agony of the empire⁸.

After the war, the Venetians resumed their policy of short term truce with the Byzantines and preparations for a crusade. A last attempt in this respect was made in the early fourteenth century by the French prince Charles of Valois, the brother of the French king Phillip IV the Fair. Despite extensive diplomatic efforts, the project fell through. Exasperated by the repeated failures, Venice brought a major turn in her eastern policy. This change was all the more called for as in 1317, according to Marco Minotto, the Venetian Bailo at Constantinople, "we are in constant decline in Romania (Byzantine Empire), whereas the Genoese are steadily on the rise."⁹ The warning of the Venetian official called for immediate action.

THE SUMMER (1319–1381)¹⁰

The Venetian goals were the same as before: to defend and consolidate the colonial empire in the Levant, and to exert maritime and commercial hegemony upon Genoa. The means to achieve these goals, however, were different. The hostile policy towards Byzantium was replaced with a policy of collaboration with the Byzantine emperors; and the attempt to defeat the Genoese arms in hand, with the attempt to defeat them through trading competition. The Venetian concept of crusade also suffered alterations. The idea of a large coalition of the western forces against Byzantium and its allies gave way to a policy of small-scale alliances able to gather together the Christian powers in the Mediterranean area (Venice, the Knights Hospitalers of Rhodes, the Kingdom of Cyprus, the Byzantine Empire) against the Turkish emirates of Asia Minor, seen as an emerging threat to navigation and to the Christian territories in the Aegean Sea and the Balkan Peninsula.

The years 1319–1324 can be seen as the starting point of the new Venetian policy. In 1319 the Venetians were granted by the emperor of Trebizond commercial privileges and the right to set up a merchant quarter. The agreement dealt a blow to the Genoese system, since the Venetians were now taking up quarters in a port at the crossroads of central Asian trade¹¹. Other successes were to

⁸ Șerban Papacostea, *Bizanțul și Strămurorile sub primii Paleologi*, RI, 11, 2000, 1–2, pp. 5–16.

⁹ *Diplomatarium Veneto-Levanticum sive acta et diplomata res venetas graecas atque Levantis illustrantia a. 1300–1550*, I, New York, 1965, pp. 103–105.

¹⁰ Fr. Thiriet, *La Roumanie*, pp. 162–178; M. Balard, *La Roumanie*, pp. 63–95; Frederic C. Lane, *Venise*, pp. 243–274; D. M. Nicol, *Venezia e Bisanzio*, pp. 295–435.

¹¹ *Diplomatarium Veneto-Levanticum*, I, pp. 122–124; Serghei P. Karpov, *L'Impero di Trebisonda, Venezia, Genova e Roma 1204–1461. Rapporti politici, diplomatici e commerciali*,

follow. The treaty signed by the Venetians in 1324 with Byzantium cleared all tension between the two powers and gave Venice the opportunity to compete with Genoa in the very capital of the Byzantine Empire. After Trebizond and Constantinople, a third stronghold was secured in 1332 at Tana, a commercial settlement lying at the mouths of the Don, owing to the privilege granted by the Khan of the Golden Horde, Özbek. Venice saw in it a triumph, as the position secured in the khan's territories was in direct competition with Caffa, the "capital" of Genoese trade in *MareMaius*¹².

The last in this series of privileges was the agreement of 1347 (reconfirmed in 1352), by which the Bulgarian Tsar Ivan Alexander was granting Venice a privileged position on the west-Pontic shore and in the Bulgarian territories. Armed with these privileges, the Venetians were now able to compete against their rivals in a sea that was apparently turning into a "Genoese lake" by the end of the thirteenth century.

For this policy to bear fruits, Venice launched a sustained offensive on other fronts of the Mediterranean as well. In the Aegean, the Republic's positions were strengthened as a result of the "crusades" against the Turkish emirates. Advocating the struggle for Faith and the necessity to ensure the safety of sea routes in order to be able to assist the Christians in the East, the Venetians eventually persuaded Pope Clement VI to back up a crusade project targeting not the Holy Land, but rather the Turkish emirates in Asia Minor. It was a small-scale crusade (*passagium particulare*), nonetheless indispensable within the effort to liberate Jerusalem (*passagium generale*). The naval leagues gathered under the banner of papacy included Venice, the Hospitalers of Rhodes, the Kingdom of Cyprus and, theoretically, Byzantium. These small-scale victories obtained in these crusades, the naval victory of Adramyttion of 1334 and the conquest of the port of Smyrna in 1344, were nonetheless of great consequence to Venice: they strengthened the ties with the Byzantine Empire; they underlined the importance of keeping a Crusader fleet in the Levant over a longer period of time, in order to counteract the looting raids of the Turkish flotillas; and, last but not least, they showed the strategic role of the Dardanelles and the Bosphorus Straits in undertaking operations in the Aegean Sea.

As a consequence, in the first half of the fourteenth century, Venice managed to secure key positions on the Black Sea shore and strengthen her preponderance in the Aegean. A third success added to the above, in the eastern area of the Mediterranean. Owing to their excellent relations with Pope Clement VI, the

transl. by Eleonora Zambelli, Roma, 1986, pp. 77–79; Virgil Ciociltan, *Mongolii și Marea Neagră în secolele XIII–XIV. Contribuția Cinghizhanizilor la transformarea bazinului pontic în placă turmantă a comerțului euro-asiatic*, București, 1998, pp. 119–123.

¹² Ș. Papacostea, "Quod non iretur ad Tanam" un aspect fundamental de la politique génoise dans la Mer Noire au XIV^e siècle, "Revue des Études Sud-Est Européennes", 17, 1979, 2, pp. 202–205; V. Ciociltan, *Mongolii*, pp. 179–180.

Venetians received permission to open in 1344 the commercial route to Alexandria, placed under interdiction by the Papacy after the conquest of the Holy Land by the Mamluk Sultanate of Egypt¹³. The inclusion of Alexandria among the routes of the Venetian commercial ships¹⁴ was rightfully seen at the time as a huge diplomatic triumph. No less rightfully, the Genoese viewed it as a serious threat to their positions; the Venetians had made their way into the Black Sea, they had strengthened their positions in the Aegean, and were now opening a new commercial trade line out of reach until then, at least theoretically, for the western merchants. The Genoese were quick to react. As a result, in the fifth decade of the fourteenth century, the relations between the Genoese and the Venetians grew ever more tense.

The war broke out only when Genoa tried to reactivate the old clause of the treaty of Nymphaion granting them exclusivity in the Black Sea region. The reason should be sought in the soaring trade of the Venetians in the Pontic area, especially at Tana, a position which hindered the Genoese trading activities at Caffa. Unable to dissuade their rivals from trading in the settlement lying at the mouths of the Don, the Genoese resorted in 1349 to an extreme measure: they blocked the access of the Venetian ships to the Black Sea, and by doing this they sparked up a new conflict.

Venice adopted a significantly different strategy on the occasion. Instead of waging war on their own, the Venetians sought to establish a system of alliances by which they would have forced the Genoese to disperse their military effort over the entire Mediterranean area. In the West, they secured the assistance of the Kingdom of Aragon, a power factor playing an ever more prominent role in the Mediterranean to begin with the early fourteenth century. Whereas in the East, the treaty signed with the Byzantine Emperor John VI Cantacuzenus gave the Venetians control over the Straits, expected to be a key position in the future developments. Once operational, the Venetian-Byzantine-Aragonese trident would have placed Genoa in a very difficult position. However, after the battle of Bosphorus (13 February 1352), won by the Genoese at a dear cost, disagreements surfaced among the allies. The Byzantine emperor withdrew from the alliance, and the Aragonese decided to participate no further in the war in the Aegean and the Black Sea, but rather concentrate their military effort on the western area of the Mediterranean. Clashes continued until 1355, with various results, on the background of a major economic crisis afflicting Western Europe in the mid-fourteens century¹⁵.

¹³ Frederic C. Lane, *The Venetian Galleys to Alexandria 1344*, in Idem, *Studies in Venetian Social and Economic History*, London, 1987, pp. 431–440.

¹⁴ Even though the territories under the authority of the sultan of Egypt were theoretically under embargo, several merchants continued to trade in Alexandria, albeit under the constant threat of being intercepted by the ships of the Knights Hospitaler, who were enforcing the interdiction. If caught, any such merchant would have incurred excommunication, jail, and seizure of ship and freight.

¹⁵ S.P. Karpov, *Black Sea and the Crisis of the Mid XIVth century: An underestimated turning point*, "Thesaurismata", 27, 1997, pp. 65–77.

A peace was signed, with neither victors nor defeated. However, such as in 1299, the stipulations of this new agreement reflected the superiority of Genoa. The Venetians were pledging not to trade in Tana for three years, which meant that Genoa had actually triumphed, even if temporarily¹⁶. Moreover, the Genoese had managed to gain control over the northern and western shores of the Black Sea, and thus develop considerably the area under their direct influence. The Genoese also took up quarters at Licostomo, a strategic trading center at the Mouths of the Danube, giving access to the routes linking Central Europe to the Black Sea¹⁷. Last but not least, the conflict marked the beginnings of the Genoese-Ottoman alliance, a lasting conjugation of forces in the international relations of the late Middle Ages¹⁸.

The only notable achievement of the Venetians was to prevent the introduction of the clause of Genoese exclusivity in the Black Sea, stipulated in the treaty of Nymphaion. A mirthless victory, since the outcome of the war was putting to question all the Venetian successes of the fourteenth century. The peace marked – as coined by an inspired Venetian chronicler – the deposition of arms, but not the end of the hatred between the two Italian Republics¹⁹. Moreover, in addition to her rivalry with Genoa, Venice was to face in the second half of the fourteenth century new challenges, putting at risk the very survival of her citizens:

1. A serious threat came from the Hungarian Kingdom. During the reign of the dynasty of Anjou, Hungary raised claims over the Dalmatian coast, a true bone of contention in the Hungarian-Venetian relations. Louis of Anjou (1342–1382) formed the project to turn Venice from a great maritime and commercial power into a satellite town of Hungary. After a short war (1356–1358), Louis seized the Dalmatian coast from the Venetians and managed to secure Hungary's access to the Adriatic. It was a double victory, commercial (the falling under the authority of Hungary of two major trading centers, Ragusa and Zara) and strategic (the end of Venetian monopoly in the Adriatic and the creation of premises for a direct attack on Venice). In the years to follow, Hungary pursued her policy of placing Venice in isolation, politically and commercially. The kingdom's expansion towards the Danube Mouths was followed by considerable privileges granted to the Saxon merchants of Sibiu and Braşov, with the purpose to establish a trading link between the Adriatic and the Black Sea through the two aforementioned Transylvanian towns. Furthermore, Louis of Anjou settled an alliance with the Genoese and, with

¹⁶ Gh. I. Brătianu, *Marea Neagră. De la origini pînă la cucerirea otomană*, trad. de Michaela Spinei, ediție îngrijită, studiu introductiv, note și bibliografie de Victor Spinei, Iași, 1999, p. 366.

¹⁷ Ș. Papacostea, *De Vicina à Kilia. Byzantins et Génois aux bouches du Danube au XIV^e siècle*, "Revue des Études Sud-Est Européennes", 16, 1978, 1, pp. 65–79.

¹⁸ V. Ciocîltan, *Bazele alianței otomano-genoveze din 1352*, in Ovidiu Cristea (coord.), *Marea Neagră. Puteri maritime, puteri terestre*, București, 2006, pp. 102–121.

¹⁹ Marc'Antonio Sabellico, *Historia Rerum Venetarum ab urbe condita libri XXXIII*, in *Degli Istorici delle cose veneziane*, 1, Venezia, 1718, p. 250.

their assistance, strove to create a fleet apt to compete with Venice in the Adriatic. Moreover, he worked towards an alliance among all the enemies of the Venice in the Italian Peninsula, in order to isolate her and force her to capitulate²⁰.

2. The Turkish emirates of Asia Minor were another serious threat to the Venetians²¹. The treaties with these emirates came out of effect concurrently with the end of the war with Genoa, and long negotiations were required for renewal. Even if the Venetians had their privileges reconfirmed in the territories of Asia Minor eventually, the issue became complicated due to the geopolitical developments of the mid-fourteenth century. The main threat to Venice's interests was coming now not from the central Aegean, but rather from the north, with the emergence of the Ottoman emirate. The major reasons of concern included the Genoese-Ottoman alliance, newly settled at the end of the "Second War of the Straits" (1350–1355), and two other events, turning the Ottomans into a power factor in the region: occupation of the peninsula and of the port of Gallipoli, which enabled the interception of ships sailing into and out of the Black Sea, and the conquest of the region of Pergamus, through which the Osman dynasty had gained access to the Aegean Sea²².

3. Serious social and political tensions at home added to these external challenges. An attempt by Doge Marco Venier to seize the power had occurred during the war with Genoa. Although the attempt was unsuccessful, the internal crisis could not be overcome. The need for additional financial means in order to defend the interests of the Republic led to a series of measures causing great discontent within the city and affecting the relations between the metropolis and the colonies. The revolt of Crete and the difficulty of the Republic in suppressing it illustrate the delicate position of Venice in the second half of the fourteenth century²³.

To this extremely difficult backdrop added the situation in the Black Sea. The interdiction to trade in Tana for three years was followed by stagnation in the trade with Trebizond²⁴ and tense relations with the Byzantine Empire. The resuming of

²⁰ For the policy of Louis and its impact on the relations with Venice, see Zsigmond Pal Pach, *La politica commerciale di Luigi d'Angio e il traffico delle "mercanzie marittime" dopo la pace di Zara, in Rapporti veneto-ungheresi all'epoca del Rinascimento*, Budapest, 1975, pp. 105–119; Ş. Papacostea, *De la guerre*, pp. 341–352; O. Cristea, *Venezia, la politica balcanica dell'Ungheria e l'espansione degli ottomani in Europa alla fine del secolo XIV*, in the vol. *Dall'Adriatico al Mar Nero: Veneziani e Romeni, tracciati di storie comuni*, a cura di Grigore Arbore Popescu, Roma 2003, pp. 41–55.

²¹ Jules Gay, *Le pape Clément VI et les affaires d'Orient (1342–1352)*, Paris, 1904, pp. 32–54; Paul Lemerle, *L'émirat d'Aydin, Byzance et l'Occident. Recherches sur "La Geste d'Umur Pacha"*, Paris, 1957, pp. 89–101, 179–203; Elizabeth Zachariadou, *Trade and Crusade Venetian Crete and the Emirates of Menteshe and Aydin (1300–1415)*, Venice, 1983, pp. 21–40.

²² Elizabeth Zachariadou, *Trade and Crusade*, p. 64.

²³ Frederic C. Lane, *Venise*, pp. 243–263.

²⁴ Fr. Thiriet, *Régestes des délibérations du Sénat de Venise concernant la Roumanie. I (1329–1399)*, Paris-La Haye, 1958, I, doc. 413, p. 107; Eliyahu Ashtor, *Levant Trade in the Later Middle Ages*, Princeton, 1981, p. 76; S.P. Karpov, *La navigazione*, p. 80.

trading activities at Tana in 1358, albeit with a reconfirmation of the old privileges, was made in sensibly different circumstances. Ten years after the renewal of the agreement with the Golden Horde, a clear discrepancy in position and profit between the Genoese and the Venetians is evidenced in the documents of the time²⁵. The obligation to pay higher taxes and the pernicious circumstances under which they were carrying out their trade counted among the complaints of the Venetians.

Venice tried to derive compensation through a more aggressive policy in certain areas of the Mediterranean. Thus, an unsuccessful attempt was made to have the Genoese ousted from the Kingdom of Cyprus, a major relay on the sailing routes towards Alexandria or Beirut. Venice also tried to secure herself a base in the Aegean as close as possible to the Straits. This ideal base was the island of Tenedos, a small piece of land near the Dardanelles, under the authority of the Byzantine Empire. In 1376, after long and tedious negotiations, Emperor John V Palaeologus handed the island over to the Venetians, on condition that a Byzantine-Venetian condominium should be created and that the Greek population should be allowed free practice of their Orthodox faith.

The decision generated considerable tension at the Straits, since a Venetian fleet based at Tenedos could sever the link between the Aegean Sea and the Sea of Marmara at any time. The Genoese were quick to react. They tried to have the concession annulled but were unable to do so, which led to a new Genoese-Venetian war, also known as the War of Tenedos or the War of Chioggia.

The outbreak of hostilities occurred in extremely difficult circumstances for the Venetians. There were at least three factors posing a serious threat to the Republic of St. Mark. In addition to the Hungarian-Genoese alliance and the possibility of a direct attack from the Adriatic Sea, there were also several other enemies in the Italian Peninsula ready to join the Hungarian-Genoese alliance against Venice (the most fearsome of them being Francesco da Carrara, the lord of Padua). Severe internal strife added to the external danger. Although the Venetian leaders were quite aware of the difficulty of the circumstances, they eventually choose the military way, since "when it comes to defending or increasing the circulation of goods, no one should question the Venetian power and judgement in the eastern trade," as noted by a chronicler²⁶.

The inauspicious circumstances in which the war broke out may very well explain the military results. In a very short time, the Venetians suffered two major defeats: the fleet in the Adriatic was destroyed by the Genoese, and the allies gained the naval superiority enabling them to block Venice from the sea. Soon, a land blockade added, after the capture of Chioggia. Venice was thus cut off from all sides. It called for exemplary mobilization in order to overcome this situation.

²⁵ *Diplomatarium Veneto-Levanticum*, II, pp. 47–51; Fr. Thiriet, *Régestes*, I, doc. 476, p. 121; V. Ciociltan, *Mongolii*, p. 203.

²⁶ Anonymous chronicle, Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana, mss.it. cl. VII (= 559), f. 6r.

The outrageous peace terms offered by the allies contributed to stimulating the patriotic effort. The Venetian chronicles mention those of Louis of Anjou: the flag of the Kingdom of Hungary was to be put up in San Marco square for all celebrations; the doge was to be confirmed by the king, and thus assimilated to any other high ranking official in Hungary; the Venetians were to pay 500,000 ducats in damages, and the thesaurus of the basilica of San Marco was to be placed as security until full payment of the sum; and, the defeated were to pay the king an annual tribute of 50,000 ducats²⁷. These terms, to which those of Genoa and of Padua would have undoubtedly added, made the Venetians conclude that Louis of Anjou did not wish to negotiate, but rather turn them into slaves²⁸.

Due to the failure of negotiations, the Venetians had to seek other means enabling them to pursue the war. The Republic offered to raise to nobility all families willing to contribute to the war effort, with money or military equipment. Measures were taken to ensure fortification; the fleet operating in the eastern Mediterranean under the command of Carlo Zeno was recalled; and, defence was entrusted to Vettor Pisani, a character blamed and thrown into jail after the defeat of the fleet in the Adriatic, who was nonetheless enjoying huge popularity. Owing to the outstanding mobilization effort and to the fact that disagreements had surfaced among the allied, Venice was able to recapture Chioggia and thus break free. The decisive blow was dealt by Carlo Zeno who, sailing back from the Levant, broke through the blockade in the Adriatic and was able to ship home a large booty from the eastern campaign.

The peace signed in 1381 in Turin, under the arbitration of Count Amadeus of Savoy, included none of the terms advanced by the king of Hungary. Moreover, it largely reconfirmed the pre-war situation, with one exception. The Venetians were to withdraw from the Isle of Tenedos, the very factor which had sparked up the conflict, and fortifications were to be torn down. The application of this clause met with opposition from part of the Venetian aristocracy, and Zanachi Mudazzo, the Venetian Bailo of the isle refused to comply with the orders. Eventually, the terms of the peace of Turin were observed, most probably because Venice could not afford a new war, had the stipulations of the recently signed peace treaty been infringed upon.

The wounds incurred during the war of Tenedos were deep and slow to heal. Until the end of the fourteenth century, the fleet went through a dramatic decrease

²⁷ Pietro Dolfín, Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana, mss. it. VII, 2558(=12450), f. 108 r; the chronicle employs older sources, among which Zorzi Dolfín's chronicle; the terms were mentioned for the first time by Charles du Fresne seigneur Du Cange, *Illyricum vetus & novum sive Historia Regnorum Dalmatiae, Croatiae, Slavoniae, Bosniae, Serviae atque Bulgariae, locupletissimis accessionibus aucta atque a primis temporibus usque ad nostram continuata aetatem*, Posonii, 1746, p. 165; according to other accounts, the allies had declared that they would not embark upon negotiations until they had put the harness on the horses of San Marco, see Frederic C. Lane, *Venise*, p. 268.

²⁸ Pietro Dolfín, f. 108 r.

in effective, which had a serious impact on the volume of trade. As a result, the Venetians' policy in the Aegean Sea and the Black Sea was excessively prudent, both in relation to their old rivals – the Genoese – and to the Ottoman Empire, whose steady rise caused a considerable change in the power balance. One may even assert that gradually, from 1381 to 1402, a fundamental change of focus can be seen in the external policy of Venice, from the rivalry with Genoa (a dominant feature throughout the thirteenth-fourteenth centuries) to the conflict with the Ottoman Empire, an extremely aggressive and dynamic adversary.

THE AUTUMN (1381–1430)

The anarchy in the Golden Horde, the Ottoman expansion in Asia Minor and in Europe, as well as the irreversible decline of Byzantium, triggered unfavourable conditions of navigation and trade in the Black Sea at the end of the fourteenth century. However, the interest of the Italian maritime powers in exerting control over this area remained intact, and the Genoese-Venetian rivalry subsisted, despite the continual expansion of the Ottoman Empire. A significant turn in these relations occurred under the imminence of the fall of Constantinople into the hands of Sultan Bayezid I. Thus, in 1396, Genoa and Venice seemed to be willing to collaborate in order to ensure the survival of the Byzantine Empire, and implicitly free access to the Black Sea through the Straits. However, the rivalry between the two Italian naval powers did not desist until 1396, under the circumstances in which, after the peace of Turin (1381), Genoa continued to strengthen her positions in the Black Sea. Almost concomitantly with the aforementioned treaty stipulating the return to the state of things from before the war and the obligation of the Venetians to withdraw from the island of Tenedos, the Genoese were settling in 1380–1381 a treaty with the Golden Horde and obtaining from Khan Toktamâş considerable territorial concessions and the recognition of the autonomy of Caffa. Even if hindered by a conflict with the Ligurian merchants (1383–1387), this political orientation of the khan was eventually reconfirmed by a new treaty (12 August 1387), which marked the success of the Genoese in their relations with the Golden Horde²⁹.

While their rivals were strengthening their positions, Venice was carrying out a prudent policy, seeking to avoid a war with Genoa and conciliate the khan. To this effect, the Senate of the Republic ruled in 1386 that the subjects of the khan trading at Tana should no be longer liable for tax, since “this might be highly displeasing to the Tatar emperor and to his officials”³⁰. Trade at the mouths of the

²⁹ Virgil Ciociltan, *Mongolii*, pp. 212–213, 220, 223.

³⁰ N. Iorga, *Veneția în Marea Neagră. Dobrotici*, “Analele Academiei Române Memoriile Secției Istorice”, 1914, I, doc. XX, p. 1070; cf. Fr. Thiriet, *Régestes*, doc. 708, p. 171.

Don continued annually³¹, even after the devastating raid of made by Timur Lenk in 1395. Moreover, on the occasion, Venice took the opportunity to ask for permission from the Golden Horde to fortify the colony³².

In order to counterbalance the positions of the Genoese in the north of the Black Sea, the Venetians tried to develop trade with other areas. Their interest was aroused by the western coast, held by Dobrotici, an area in which the Venetians merchants had obtained privileges from the Bulgarian Tsar Ivan Alexander in 1347 and 1352³³. Again, they met with opposition from the Genoese, and were forced to carry out negotiations in 1384–1385 in order for their right to trade there to be acknowledged³⁴.

Concurrently, in order to reconsolidate her positions in the east, Venice carried out a policy of territorial acquisition³⁵. *Serenissima* bought Corfu from Charles III of Naples, took under direct administration the islands of Tynos and Mykonos, until 1390 held by the Venetian family³⁶, and occupied on the continent Durazzo and Scutari (Albania), Lepanto, Patras, Argos, and Nauplion (Peloponnese). This effort of expansion was looked upon with suspicion by Genoa, who could not suffer her rivals to strengthen their positions in an area controlling the sea routes from the Adriatic to the Aegean and the Black Sea. Thus, the Genoese tried to check off the projects of *Serenissima*. They carried out in their turn negotiations with the king of Naples in order to purchase the Corfu Island³⁷, and tried to occupy Zonchio (Navarin), a settlement 12 km north of Modon and Coron, the vital centers of the link by sea between Venice and Constantinople³⁸.

³¹ Fr. Thiriet, *Régestes*, doc. 676, p. 164 (2 June 1384); doc. 709, p. 171 (24 May 1386); doc. 728, p. 175 (1 June 1387).

³² N. Iorga, *Veneția în Marea Neagră*, II, doc. LII, pp. 46–47; one should note the incertitude in relation with the Golden Horde. As to who the khan was, the document states: "we believe him to be Toktamâș". Which shows that developments after the defeat on the Terek (April 1395) were unclear to the Venetian observers.

³³ For the dating of the agreement of 1347, see Vasil Gjuzelev, *I rapporti bulgaro-genovesi nei secoli XIII–XIV*, in "Genova e la Bulgaria nel Medioevo", Genova, 1984, p. 106; Elisabeta Todorova, *The Black Sea interests of the Italians and the Bulgarian ports (13th–15th centuries)*, "ByzantinoBulgarica," 7, 1981, p. 232. N. Iorga, *Studii istorice asupra Chilie și Cetății Albe*, București, 1899, p. 50, only mentions the treaty of 1352.

³⁴ As suggested in a document of 15 February 1385. See N. Iorga, *Veneția în Marea Neagră*, pp. 1068–1069; Fr. Thiriet, *Régestes*, I, doc. 689, p. 167. One should note that it was not a definite success. Even though the metropolis granted the request, the Genoese colonies failed to apply the measure, and the Genoese of Pera continued to block the Venetians' access to the west-Pontic area.

³⁵ For a detailed presentation, see Nicolae Iorga, *Veneția în Marea Neagră*, II, pp. 5–10.

³⁶ David Jacoby, *Les gens de mer dans la marine de guerre vénitienne de la mer Egée aux XIV^e et XV^e siècles*, in Idem, *Studies on the Crusader States and on Venetian Expansion*, Northampton, 1989, p. 193.

³⁷ Fr. Thiriet, *Délibérations des assemblées vénitiennes concernant la Roumanie. I (1160–1363)*, Paris, 1966, doc. 848, p. 54.

³⁸ Fr. Thiriet, *Délibérations*, doc. 871, p. 63(regest) and p. 297 *in extenso*.

The Venetian-Genoese rivalry desisted only by the end of the fourteenth century, with the rising threat of the Ottoman Empire. The two Italian republics saw their interests affected by the blows sultan Bayezid I the Thunderbolt (1389–1402) dealt to the Christian powers in the Balkans, the Aegean and the Black Sea, and to the Turkish emirates in Asia Minor. The interdiction to trade in grain, more exactly to purchase grain in the territories under the authority of Bayezid I³⁹ was seen as most detrimental to the interests of Venice. Even though the Venetians tried to negotiate and offered to pay excessively high tax for every measure of grain purchased, the sultan abided by his decision. This situation, to which added the fact that the Venetian towns of Negroponte, Coron, Modon, Nauplion, and Crete were being under constant threat, called for defence and reaction. Things were only worsened by the fact that the sultan had strengthened the military force of his land army with a fleet. This latter aspect was all the more alarming, as an important Ottoman fleet could put to danger the safety of the Black Sea routes. The worst predictions came true in 1393, when 60 Ottoman ships of various types blocked access to the Dardanelles and severed the link between the Aegean and the Black Sea.

Faced with the situation, Venice started considering taking military action against the Ottomans. In June 1388, a first unsuccessful attempt was made to gather Genoa, Venice and the Hospitalers⁴⁰ into an anti-Ottoman league. Several years later, Venice joined Hungary in the negotiations preceding the “Crusade of Nicopolis”. The existence of a common enemy was forcing the two countries to leave aside their mutual distrust and collaborate. Negotiations for the anti-Ottoman crusade were due to take place in Venice in January 1395, with the participation of Venice, France, England, and Hungary⁴¹. A large land army was to be called up, and a fleet of 25 galleys was to be formed, one fourth of which equipped by Venice. Because of the excessive delay in the arrival of the Hungarian messengers, negotiations were called off, which had a direct consequence on the subsequent participation in the expedition of 1396. France and England were replaced by an important Burgundian contingent under the command of John the Fearless, the son of Duke Philip the Bold. The projected fleet of 25 galleys could not be gathered, since only Venice and the Knights Hospitalers responded to the call.

The undertaking and outcome of the expedition are well known. Less clear is the action taken by the naval squadron. Most likely, the Venetian fleet cast anchor at Tenedos. There are also several unclear aspects as to the sailing of the Knights Hospitalers into the Black Sea and on the Danube. No matter where or how the fleet took action, the disaster of the land expedition could not be avoided. The defeat of Nicopolis aggravated the situation of the Venetian possessions, which were now

³⁹ Elizabeth Zachariadou, *Prix et marchés des céréales en Roumanie (1343–1405)*, “Nuova Rivista Storica”, 51, 1977, 3–4, pp. 298–300.

⁴⁰ Fr. Thiriet, *Régestes*, I, doc. 739, p. 178; Michel Balard, *La Roumanie*, I, pp. 95–97.

⁴¹ J.J.N. Palmer, *England, France and Christendom (1377–1399)*, London, 1972, pp. 181–203.

facing possible retaliation from Bayezid I. A deadlock was reached during the initial negotiations; the sultan was inclined to grant Venice peace at sea, but had no intention of warranting security on land. Venice in her turn was interested in this latter aspect and unwilling to grant peace at sea to the Ottomans and thus ease the way for a campaign against Constantinople. The protection of the Byzantine capital was the major strategic objective of Venice after the defeat of Nicopolis. The exceptional measures taken by Venice to defend Constantinople and Pera, as well as the reopening of negotiations with Genoa for the fortification of Tenedos, clearly show the interest of the Venetians in keeping the link with the Black Sea open. Far from believing that "considerable military and naval efforts in the Black Sea region, to protect trading interests in decline, were no longer necessary,"⁴² *Serenissima* pursued quite contrary goals in her eastern policy, namely to maintain free access to the Black Sea at any cost, and to ensure that Constantinople would continue to be held firmly by the Byzantine Emperor. This later objective was vital to the Venetians, since the falling of the Byzantine capital into the hands of Sultan Bayezid I would have severed the commercial links to Tana and Trapezunt, two major centers of commodity exchange between Asia and Europe.

Tension in the Aegean and the Black Sea subsided only in 1402, after the defeat and capture of Sultan Bayezid I in the battle of Ankara, when Bayezid's successor signed with Byzantium, with Genoa and with Venice a treaty extremely favourable to the Christian powers and prone to give a new impulse to trade in the related areas⁴³. However, the treaty only yielded a short respite. The struggles for succession among the sons of Bayezid ended in victory of Mehmed I, and the Ottoman Empire reassumed the position of major power in the area. The evolution was favoured by the Genoese-Venetian rivalry, rekindled shortly after the battle of Ankara, and the difficulties Venice was experiencing in keeping the pace with political developments in the East.

The first decades of the fourteenth century were marked by a number of successive crises in the relations with Genoa and with the Ottoman Empire, and by two major naval victories of the Venetians: in 1403, at Modon, against Genoa, and in 1416, at Gallipoli, against the Ottoman Empire. These two victories enhanced the position of Venice but yielded minor political consequences. The conflict with Genoa brought no change in the power balance between the two maritime powers, whereas the terms of the peace signed with the Ottoman Empire in 1419, all except one, were detrimental to Venice: the Republic was agreeing to pay the sultan a tribute of 300 ducats, and was dropping all claims for damages. The only compensation was the clause prohibiting the Ottoman war fleet from sailing out of

⁴² Michel Balard, *La lotta contro Genova*, in *Storia di Venezia dalle origini alla caduta della Serenissima*. III *La Formazione dello Stato Patrizio*, Istituto della Enciclopedia Italiana, 1997, p. 117.

⁴³ George T. Dennis, *The Byzantine-Turkish Treaty of 1403*, "Orientalia Christiana Periodica", 33, 1967, pp. 72-88.

the Sea of Marmara into the Aegean. Although the clause had been included in the treaty of 1403, the Ottomans had failed to observe it. In fact, the war of 1415–1419 had been caused by a raid of the Ottoman fleet against the Island of Negroponte⁴⁴.

The battle of Gallipoli was a bitter lesson to Venice, since although victorious the Republic lost the peace. The reason for this loss of balance was the discrepancy in means between the two rivals. Even though superior at sea, the Venetians were no match for the military force of the Ottomans on land, which eventually proved decisive. The war ending in 1419 showed that in order to defeat the Crescent the Republic of St. Mark had to rely either on a strong land army or on strong allies. As either of the requirements was difficult to meet, the Venetians decided to adopt a prudent stand and avoid solving their political differences with the Ottoman Empire by the force of arms until 1430⁴⁵.

THE WINTER (1430–1484)

In the final stage of her Black Sea policy, Venice had to reckon with two power factors that more than once joined forces against her: Genoa and the Ottoman Empire. The Genoese assisted Sultan Murad II on two critical occasions during his reign. In 1421, during the revolt of pretender Düzme Mustafa, they enabled the crossing of the Ottoman army from Asia Minor into Europe, and did the same in 1444 during the “Crusade of Varna”. This favoured the success of the Crescent and placed the capital of the Byzantine Empire and the Venetian possessions in the Aegean and the Peloponnese in a critical position. As a result, the Genoese-Venetian rivalry continued to prevail, and relations between the two republics became ever more complex. When the conflict broke out between Venice and Genoa, a change of focus from the Black Sea to the Italian Peninsula occurred. One may even speak of radical divergence between Genoa and the Genoese colonies in the East, the latter showing concern about the Ottomans strengthening their positions in the Pontic area⁴⁶.

The relations between the Venetians and the Turks were characterized by a “cold war” interrupted by critical episodes, such as the capture of Thessaloniki by

⁴⁴ A work of reference for the war of 1415–1419 is the early study by Camillo Manfroni, *La battaglia di Gallipoli e la politica Veneto-turca (1381–1420)*, in “Ateneo Veneto”, 25, 1902, bundle 1, pp. 3–34, and bundle 2, pp. 129–169.

⁴⁵ *Ibidem*, pp. 157–158.

⁴⁶ François Dupuigrenet Desroussiles, *Vénitiens et Génois à Constantinople et en Mer Noire en 1431 d'après une lettre de Martino da Mosto baile à Constantinople au baile et aux conseillers de Negrepoint*, “Cahiers du Monde Russe et Soviétique”, 20, 1979, 1, pp. 111–122; Enrico Basso, *De Boucicaut à Francesco Sforza. Persistance et changements dans la politique orientale des seigneurs étrangers de Gênes au XV^e siècle*, in vol. *Le Partage du Monde. Échanges et colonisation dans la Méditerranée médiévale*, edited by Michel Balard and Alain Ducellier, Paris, 1998, pp. 63–77.

Murad II (29 March 1430), the Crusade of Varna (1444), the fall of Constantinople in 1453, and the Venetian-Ottoman war (1463–1479). The steady consolidation of the Ottoman Empire in the Balkan and Anatolian areas caused a gradual restriction of liberty of trade for the Venetian merchants, and laid the premises for the turning of the Black Sea from a theatre of rivalry between the Venetians and the Genoese into an area of hegemony for the sultan.

It was a time when Venice struggled for survival, and the major objective of her policy was to preserve the possessions in the Aegean, the Peloponnese and Albania. The only notable initiative in the Black Sea targeted the establishing of direct trading relations with Cetatea Albă. The project became operational only in 1435, as a result of a request made two years earlier by the Prince of Moldavia, Iliiaș. The Senate had decided initially that one of the galleys sailing once a year into the Black Sea should lay anchor at Cetatea Albă. Subsequently, it was decided that Francesco Duodo should be appointed there as a permanent consul⁴⁷. One may see in it the economic interest of Venice in the fortress lying at the mouths of the Dnestr, and the intention of the Moldavian prince to revive the Moldavian road, turning to good advantage the crisis experienced by the Pontic Genoese system at the time⁴⁸. The commercial link paved the way to a political alliance. The existence of a mutual enemy, the Genoese of Caffa, could only favor a Moldavian-Venetian rapprochement. However, the presence of the Venetian merchants at Cetatea Albă was ephemeral and ended in 1439.

A final attempt to revive the Venetian presence in the Pontic area was the result of another project of collaboration with Moldavia, in the time of Stephen the Great. The project also targeted the attraction of the Golden Horde into an anti-Ottoman coalition⁴⁹. The role devolved upon the Tatars in the Venetian strategy can be seen in the advices sent on 18 July 1476 by Dodge Andrea Vendramin to Giovanni Battista Trevisano, the Venetian messenger to Khan Ahmed: "to the best of your abilities, ask that the khan should come or at least send over part of his hordes in assistance to Voivode Stephen, so that the latter should not be overridden by the enemy (...) And if they cannot come to the Danube and cross southward into the lands of the Turk, either because the khan does not agree or because Voivode Stephen objects, or again for some other reason, then tell the khan and ask him to march on Caffa and conquer the fortress, as well as any other places in the land under

⁴⁷ Nicolae Iorga, *Noi descoperiri privitoare la istoria românilor*, in Idem, *Studii asupra evului mediu românesc*, ed. by Șerban Papacostea, București, 1984, p. 224.

⁴⁸ Matei Cazacu, *Venise et la Moldavie au début du XV^e siècle*, "Studii și Materiale de Istorie Medie", XXI, 2003, p. 137; Șt. Andreescu, *Din istoria Mării Negre (Genovezi, români și tătari în spațiul pontic în secolele XIV–XVII)*, București, 2001, p. 30, where the hypothesis of Byzantine mediation is put forward.

⁴⁹ Nagy Pienaru, "Proiectul scitic". *Relațiile lui Ștefan cel Mare cu Hoarda Mare*, in "Revista Istorică", XIV, 2003, 5–6, pp. 121–135.

Turkish rule that would be closer to the khan's possessions."⁵⁰ Therefore, there was a large scale project, according to which Khan Ahmed's Tatars would have attacked the Balkan provinces of the Ottoman Empire, and a small-scale one, with the Golden Horde attacking Crimea, which would have enabled the Venetians to seize the trading centers of Caffa and Tana. Neither could be put into practice, but the concept persisted, and its dying echoes can be heard in the message sent by Stephen the Great to Venice in 1477. The Moldavian prince was making here direct reference to the recapture of Crimea. It was an allusion to the Venetian "Scythic project" and clear indication that Stephen was fully aware of the importance of the Black Sea to the trading activities of the *Serenissima* in the Levant⁵¹.

The end of the Venetian-Ottoman war of 1463–1479 also marked the end of the Pontic policy of Venice. The ships of the Republic continued to sail in the "Great Sea", but quite significantly, the clause of freedom of navigation and trade in the Black Sea – a term upon which the Venetians had insisted during negotiations throughout the war – was no longer included in the treaty of 1479. Moreover, Venice was a passive witness to the fall of Chilia and Cetatea Albă into the hands of the Ottomans in 1484. "In the Black Sea, <the sultan> has no further conquest to make," noted a Venetian subject in Constantinople, thus implying that the Pontic basin had been turned onto an Ottoman lake. A similar conclusion had been reached several decades earlier by the Flemish of Genoese origin Anselmo Adorno, according to whom no Christian ship could sail into or out of the Black Sea without the sultan's permission⁵².

CONCLUSIONS

The Black Sea was a major point of interest in Venetian policy in the thirteenth-fourteenth centuries. However, despite all the human and financial resources employed, *Serenissima* was unable to impose her hegemony in the area, except in the years 1204–1261. The expulsion of the Venetians from Constantinople after the fall of the Latin Empire in 1261 deprived St. Mark's Republic of a land base indispensable to the control of the Pontic area. The Venetians eventually returned to the Byzantine capital, but were unable to catch up

⁵⁰ Eudoxiu de Hurmuzaki, *Documente privitoare la istoria românilor culese de...*, VIII (1376–1650), București, 1894, VIII, doc. XIX, pp. 14–15; *Războieni. Cinci sute de ani de la campania din 1476. Monografie și culegere de texte*, București, 1977, doc. 30, pp. 180–182; N. Pienaru, "Proiectul scitic", p. 132.

⁵¹ Ștefan S. Gorovei, *Principatul de Theodoro (Mangop) și Moldova lui Ștefan cel Mare. Observații și ipoteze*, in O. Cristea (coord.), *Marea Neagră*, pp. 199–225; cf. O. Cristea, *Acest domn de la Mizănoapte. Ștefan cel Mare în documente inedite venețiene*, București, 2004, p. 54.

⁵² *Itinéraire d'Anselme Adorno en Terre Sainte (1470–1471)*, trad. et annoté par Jacques Heers et Georgette de Groer, Paris, 1978, p. 46.

with the Genoese, who in the meantime had enjoyed exclusivity of trade in the Black Sea area and had attained a superior position. Throughout the fourteenth century, the Venetians tried to compete with their rivals, through diplomacy or war, but their efforts were fruitless. The clashes between the two republics only strengthened the superiority of the Genoese in the Pontic basin and counted among the factors favoring the Ottoman expansion in the area.

In the fifteenth century, the Venetian policy showed a gradual change of focus from the rivalry with Genoa to the rivalry with the Ottoman Empire. In relation to the latter power factor, a fluctuation between excessive caution and open hostilities could be seen. The latter solution was adopted whenever the threats to Venetian interests were becoming too serious for the Venetians not to resort to the force of arms. Even so, Venice's means proved inefficient. Although enjoying maritime superiority, Venice had insufficient land troops, and was therefore unable to dictate peace terms. Thus, the Venetians were able to delay but not to prevent the fall of Constantinople into the hands of the sultan or the transformation of the Black Sea from "a turning plate of European-Asian trade" into an "Ottoman lake".