



**The Public Defense of the Doctoral Dissertation of**

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**on**

**A MODEL TO DECODE VENETIAN SENATE DELIBERATIONS:  
*PREGADI* “TALK” ON ALBANIAN TERRITORIES (1392–1402)**

will be held on

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**Central European University (CEU)**

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## Summary of the Doctoral Dissertation

In this dissertation, I propose a model to classify the entries preserved in the volumes of the miscellaneous and secret *Deliberazioni* of the Venetian *Consiglio dei Pregadi* (“the Council,” later called Senate). During this period, the Senate was Venice’s most important organ of power, yet no attempt has been made to produce a systematic account of the conventions whereby scribes codified the discussions resulting from the *pregadi*’s meetings. I propose that, irretrievable in any other way, some aspects of the *pregadi*’s “talk” (the Senate’s decision making-process) became codified in the *Deliberazioni*. The critical importance which the *pregadi* assigned to any given issue is one of those aspects and the central focus of my study. Scholars have singled out a limited number of entry types (primarily commissions, provisions, and —occasionally— elections) to reflect on the kind of information contained within the *Deliberazioni*. Such view of recorded entries may derive from the tacit assumption that headers served as the scribes’ primary classification mechanism. Instead, the model I propose suggests that scribes consistently used the entries’ incipit as classification tool. According to patterns I identified in the entries’ incipit, the model is made out of fourteen distinct realms of Council activity. More than 99.9% of the total of 4,871 extant individual entries for the period between 1392 and 1402 can be placed into one of those categories. I analyze entries belonging to three discrete realms of Council activity, all of which codified the most important matters of state. I use the Venetian progressive control of four Albanian cities (Shkodra, Drisht, Lezhë, and Durrës) from 1392 to 1402 as main case study to exemplify how recording practices codified such importance.

I rely on the “contextual approach” of John Pocock and Quentin Skinner to address the relationship between Venetian socio-cultural conventions (“langue”)

and the entries within the *Deliberazioni* (“parole”). In the **Introduction**, I offer a critical summary of the scholarly traditions which have weighed into the study of Venice’s political culture: the “myth of Venice,” the humanist movement, and the historiographical tradition of chronicles and political diaries. While I consider that the influence of the myth and of the humanist movement have partially hindered the understanding of the Council’s *Deliberazioni* as political texts, I view Venice’s historiographical tradition at the turn of the fourteenth century as appropriate ground to understand the state developments taking place during the period I analyze. In the Introduction, I also offer an overview of “Albanology” as a field of studies. In **Chapter 1**, I detail the theoretical considerations which allow me to present recorded entries as “linguistic acts”: they embody the scribes’ intention to convey specific meaning. Additionally, I explain the aspects of Pocock and Skinner’s “contextualism” which help me account for what individual entries *do* in relation to any given realm of Council activity. I describe the process by which Senate discussions were turned into recorded entries and, lastly, this chapter contains my proposed model. Rather than aiming at completeness, this model hopes to be a starting point for further research. **Chapter 2** analyzes the *pregadi*’s cultural realities of their environment outside the Senate. I focus on three fundamental aspects of Venetian society: Venice’s rigid social classification, the intersection of politics and merchant activities, and Venice’s record-keeping tradition. These “languages” allow me to describe social realities (relating to age, prestige, economic interests, and familiarity with the production of state documents), all of which, albeit indirectly, surfaced in Senate discussions. **Chapter 3** offers a summary of Venice’s rationale behind its interest in controlling Albania. I propose that, during this period, the nature of Venice’s domination in Albania can be understood as a polycentric system of “power units” which combined semi-autonomous decision-making agents: Albanian noble families, the local

communes, and Venetian officeholders. I also offer a description of the geographical setting of the Albanian territories I discuss in chapters 4 and 5, and present the Albanian main protagonists. **Chapters 4 and 5** scrutinize in detail the recording conventions of the three entry types which recorded important matters of state. I survey entries dealing with a number of geographically distant locations, but focus on Venice's involvement in Albania as case study. Based on my methodology, I follow a strict chronological order, and account for events day by day, month by month, and year by year. **Chapter 4** analyzes in detail entries belonging to the realm of Council activity referring to crisis management (category 14 of the model). I use *newsworthiness* as a means to classify events defined as crises. Entries which described these events (N-entries) contain "noua" or "nouitates" in their incipit. While "propter noua" signals an event of salient importance with serious, long-lasting outcome were the matter not resolved immediately, "nouitates" refer to troublesome events with a "secondary degree" urgency. Within the recorded entries examined in this study, these expressions had a technical meaning which differ considerably from the meaning they took on generations later. *Noua* and *nouitates* in an entry's incipit were not intended to convey reception of information, but rather the presence of a crisis situation. Out of the total of 4,871 recorded entries, only 58 entries (1.2%) include the words *noua* or *nouitas* in their incipit. Although I favor Albania as the story's protagonist, I account for all occurrences of what the *pregadi* perceived to be situations of crisis from 1392 to 1402. N-entries allow me to show that during pivotal political events in 1392, 1395-1396, 1399, and 1401, discussions about Albania became crucial to the state because the region's significance was inextricably linked with that of Venice's main foe—the Ottomans. With a stronger focus on Albania, **Chapter 5** analyzes entries which recorded official pronouncements directed to "outsiders," codified in a twofold manner according to two situations: as responses (R-entries)

following proposals and petitions from ambassadors (category 13 of the model), and as instructions (I-entries) whenever a development abroad demanded an executive pronouncement by the *signoria* (category 6 of the model). First, I present the standard template of R-entries (which scribes used whenever an issue was considered straightforward). R-entries recorded controversy and critical importance in the following way: if a proposition caused controversy or disagreement among the body of *pregadi*, scribes (for the most part) followed the standard template, but preserved those opposing motions to record the memory of the disagreement. If, however, ambassadors presented issues deemed critical to the state, the formulation of those R-entries was either turned on its head or incorporated sections (such as executive decisions or instructions) which flouted the standard template entirely. Secondly, I explain why the presence of a lengthy instruction section is in itself a mark of state importance. According to these conventions, I determine that in 1396 and 1400, ambassadors from Albanian cities confronted the Council with proposals and decisions deemed critical. On the other hand, aside from some I-entries in 1392 and 1393, the *pregadi* did not consider that developments in Albanian territories merited further official pronouncements. **Chapter 6** functions as an epilogue: I rely on Antonio Morosini, who was a contemporary to the events described in chapters 4 and 5, to test whether the *pregadi*'s discussions had a resonance which ventured beyond the closed and secretive rooms in which the Council met. I focus on Morosini's role as curator (rather than as author) based on the fact that, for this period, Morosini's work was composed with the help of relatively short chronicles relating to specific events. Yet Morosini's selection of events to describe the decade from 1392 to 1402 attests to the impact of the *pregadi*'s "talk": Morosini described Venice's history from 1392 to 1402 in fifteen events, and 93.3% of them are reflected on entries within the *Deliberazioni*. The events Morosini echoed are the same high points of the

*pregadi*'s talk which the recording conventions I uncovered also marked as important. The **Conclusions** summarize the findings of Chapters 4, 5, and 6 (above). Here, I also emphasize that the recording conventions performed by scribes were well-established and consistent. These conventions did not suddenly appear in 1392, and thus I briefly point at possible areas of further research. More importantly, I hope that the contextual approach which, to the extent of my knowledge, has never been applied to this source material, will serve as starting point to uncover additional aspects of the Council's secretive discussions.

## Curriculum Vitae

### Education

- 2015– *PhD in Medieval Studies*, Central European University, Budapest, Hungary
- 2013-2015 *MA in Comparative History: Interdisciplinary Medieval Studies*, Central European University, Budapest, Hungary
- 2010–2011 *Academic Interdisciplinary Program in Greek and Latin Language and Literature*, University of the Andes, Mérida, Venezuela/University of Buenos Aires, Argentina
- 2006–2011 *Licenciatura: Political Sciences (Summa cum Laude)*, University of the Andes, Mérida, Venezuela

### Selected Fellowships, Grants, Awards

- 2019 CEU Doctoral Research Grant, University of Valencia
- 2015 Erasmus Mobility Grant, University of Vienna, Austria

### Conference Papers and Talks Relevant to the Dissertation

- 2019 *Ut melius, et maturius possit deliberari: Venetian Senate Languages of Strategy at the turn of the Fifteenth Century* – University of Lleida, Spain – June, 2019
- 2017 *Oltramare, Altra Gente? Rhetorical Strategies for the Representation of One's Community* – Society for the Medieval Mediterranean, University of Ghent, Belgium – July, 2017

### Selected Publications Relevant to the Dissertation

- 2020 “Space: A Proposal for the Interpretation of *Albanenses* in Shkodra's Medieval City Statute.” *Annual of Medieval Studies at CEU* (2020): 150–160.