On his last visit to Edinburgh for an academic occasion, Kenneth Hyde delivered a report on research which he had been pursuing on information and news in fifteenth-century Venice, highlighting the problems of defining a body of documentary materials which might be systematically exploited, and of identifying a coherent mentality which lay behind their compilation. Strikingly similar difficulties are encountered when one addresses the same subject for the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The documentation is more plentiful, but, while samples are promising, one never strikes a seam. Pierre Sardella's research, made famous by Braudel, offered an analysis of the rate of circulation, but we still know surprisingly little about what was circulating. The purpose of this essay is to characterize, at least in outline, some of the correspondence available in the Archivio di Stato. Rather than identifying particular correspondents or analysing individual documents – though these may offer leads to other specialists – one hopes to suggest that the very diversity of the material may yet conceal a fundamental consistency in the way Venetians used the written word, which in turn may tell us something in more general terms about Venetian culture.

The information is drawn from two sources. The Miscellanea Gregolin, and the ominously titled Miscellanea di Carte Non Appartenenti ad Alcun Archivio. The former takes its name from an ambitious archivist whose attempted reclassification of collections of letters was at once decisive, arbitrary and incomplete. The existing indices offer no obvious explanation of how this particular collection came into being, while the designations used – lettere da principi, lettere private in materia politica, lettere private di qualche interesse, lettere commerciali, fatture, conti ed itinerari, disegni diversi, and elenco di testamenti – are not always a helpful guide to the contents of individual

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files. The other collection manifestly does not ‘belong’ because it appears never to have been classified beyond an alphabetical list of contents.³ It is no criticism of the Archive and its excellent staff, past and present, to offer a reminder of the degree of chance involved in the survival and placement of certain types of historical document, and how this affects the perspective which historians have on a society in times past. Both the collections in question contain haphazardly organized files of documents entitled lettere commerciali, eight in the Miscellanea Gregolin (from the period 1348-1786), five in the Carte Non Appartenenti (fifteenth to eighteenth centuries). There are few leads which can be followed with confidence. One sheaf labelled lettere private del sec. xvii begins with a letter dated 1496, the uninviting description of another bundle is lettere private di nessun’ importanza, while one sheaf is to be found wrapped loosely in a sheet of paper on which is written ‘il progresso del fedele’ da Bunyan.⁴

The files of the Carte Non Appartenenti have already yielded one valuable and coherent series, a bound collection of letters from Andrea Berengo, meticulously edited by Ugo Tucci and published in 1957.⁵ In that same busta – as Tucci points out in his introduction to the letters of Berengo – there is another set of merchant letters, 164 bound folios from Giovanni Alvise Taiapiera, evidently a factor in Tripoli and Aleppo. There are approximately 237 letters written on 92 different dates between April 1550 and October 1552. They are sent to 31 correspondents in Venice, the most frequent recipients being Lorenzo Aliprando (55), Antonio Alberto (30) and Michiel Padoani (32). What a world is opened up by materials which conquer the impersonality characteristic of so many Venetian documents, a world which Tucci has begun to map in one seminal article on merchant mentalities in the sixteenth century.⁶ A scan – as opposed to a detailed survey – reveals a rich and detailed set of reports on the state of the market in amber, coral, kerseys, spices, pistachios, and even the problems of obtaining a parrot. This routine correspondence offers all sorts of insights into the condition of trade, the quality of merchandise, the date of the next caravan, and observations about the competition – ‘le caravelle di portogallo erano piele’ – as well as the occasional indication of the

³ Archivio di Stato di Venezia (the source of all documentary references unless otherwise indicated). Miscellanea di Carte Non Appartenenti ad Alcun Archivio (henceforward MCNAA), indice 236; Miscellanea Gregolin (henceforward M. Greg.), indice 246.
⁴ See MCNAA, busta (henceforward b.) 20, lettere commerciali, sheaf marked ‘lettere private (sec. xvii)’, which begins with a letter headed ‘Jacobus de Mulini 1496’ to ‘Vicenzo Gregio ale 3 colombine in Ravenna’; MCNAA, b.21, lettere commerciali, sheaf marked ‘lettere private di nessun’ importanza, 1400–1500’; M. Greg. b.12 bis, lettere commerciali, sec. xvi, sheet marked ‘il progresso del fedele’ del Bunyan’, which contains a letter to Guiscard de Carminatis (see below, n.16) dated ‘agosto 1536’ from ‘Hierol. Spitiario ala luna d’argento in Padova’.
factor’s need to reassure his clients, given the suspicion ‘that one of you might be receiving preferential treatment’. \(^7\) The letters probably amount to some 200,000 words: and of course we must remember that these are duplicates. They are usually sent via Constantinople, but 22 per cent refer to a third copy sent via Cyprus. In all, therefore, the surviving copies represent some 450,000 words – 5,000 a day on the ninety-two dates recorded, a considerable feat bearing in mind that these are reports of time spent in bargaining, accompanying caravans and gathering information about prices. The slower pace of communication in the days before telephones and photocopying apparently increased the pressure on the merchant himself, for one has the impression of adventurous entrepreneurialism frustrated by the limits of what was possible: the speed of a transaction could never be matched by the written record conveyed by galley. The reader, like the merchant, must operate at two speeds, following the slow progress of the written word, but remembering that it records the frantic pace of dealing. The frustration which resulted for the merchant was noted despairingly by Berengo, who complained that his time was spent ‘shouting at Moors and Turks and collecting bad coin and writing all day and part of the night’. \(^8\) In some ways, perhaps it is helpful to read the letters as though they were transcripts of one side of a telephone conversation.

The two bound collections are unusual in that they form a coherent record of what a correspondent might send. Virtually all the other correspondence consists of letters retained by the recipient. Exceptionally, these may develop into a fleeting series. The kinds of demands which could be made upon a factor such as Taiapiera emerge in the letters received by Zuan Paolo Fausti in Aleppo in the early 1580s, though these come from Salo, not Venice. In 1582, Fausti had to take responsibility in guiding the career of Paula Povaglia’s son, for the worried mother wrote ‘begging you to advise him for his well-being and get him placed with a merchant with whom he can be sure of a steady income without spending his capital’. \(^9\) She is still fussing in the following year, but never loses sight of the particulars of her own requirements, requesting ‘three lady’s sheepskins, and let them be wide and broad as they should be, lambswool so that they aren’t too rough and that they should keep you warm when they need to but at a good price . . . and I could also do with three or four bedspreads that aren’t too expensive’, suggesting that the factor might be saddled with domestic supplies as well as business purchases. \(^10\) Nor could he expect

\(^7\) MCNAA b.20, lettere commerciali, registro lettere private. The correspondent Aliprando is mentioned by Braudel as active in Seville in mid-century: *The Mediterranean*, i. 391.


\(^9\) MCNAA, b.18/19, Paula Povaglia to Fausti, 11 April 1582.

\(^10\) ibid., 9 February 1583.
especially elaborate expressions of concern about his own well-being, for in 1582 there had been another letter from Salò, from Francesco Bertelli, saying ‘as for news of your death, yes, that’s what was being said, but not for certain, though we all felt very sad and miserable’, but which rapidly returns to business with an order: ‘I would like you to get hold of a camlet of the finest in a mixture of green and red, and serve me well in this with all the advantage that’s possible’. 11 On the other hand, if he faltered as a correspondent, as he appears to have done in 1584, his own uncle could complain: ‘I think that there’s no paper and ink to be found in Aleppo’. 12 The traffic of dissatisfaction was not all one-way, however. In 1559, Bartolomeo Zanoli writes from Antwerp in fury and frustration to Giovanni Ferro, his supplier in Venice, whose poor quality cloth has led to demands for discounts from prospective buyers:

of the ten people to whom I’ve shown them, nine said that such an assortment is no use at any price, more so because they are a bad colour and some of them are striped; the one who took them plans to brighten up the dye on nearly all of them because in the state they’re in you couldn’t even sell them when in taking them down and unfolding them he found some pieces covered in marks and full of holes and he wanted me to refund two scudi because of the damage, but I have done so much business with him that I won’t refund anything, promising [instead] to recompense him on another deal, so that you don’t have to suffer any harm on what you have: God forgive you for what you’ve done . . . 13

Some collections have been dispersed. One of the most frequent names to appear as a recipient of correspondence is Guiscard de Carminatis, apothecary at the sign of the Cavaletto for at least three decades in the early sixteenth century, but such letters might appear in the Miscellanea Gregolin or in the Carte non Appartenenti. 14 Sometimes these are orders for goods, sometimes acknowledgements of their receipt. Taken together, they indicate the range of the shop’s stock, one client asking for ‘fine sugar, unrefined incense, fine arsenic, raisins’, another requesting medical books. 15 Customers were not always satisfied. In 1536, Gerolemo, a grocer at the sign of the Silver Moon in Padua, complained that he had sent for good quality merchandise, and instead

it was very poor quality cinnamon, half of it mouldy and dry, I didn’t wish to return it but to pay for good stuff and receive it in so sorry a state, that I’m pretty fed up about because you might well bear in mind that at the moment of ten lots of medicines, we need eight lots of cinnamon, and for it to be poor, I’m ashamed to have it seen in the

11 ibid., Francesco Bertelli to Fausti, 27 June 1582.
12 ibid., Agnol Vidal to Fausti, 6 April 1584.
13 M. Greg. b.12 ter, lettere commerciali, sec. xvi–xvii, Bartolomeo Zanoli to ‘Johanni Ferro’, 20 March 1559. Here as in later quotations the lack of punctuation follows the original.
14 Letters to Guiscard may be found in M. Greg. b.12 bis, lettere commerciali sec. xvi, 1514–62; MCNAA, b.18 19, 20, 21, lettere commerciali.
15 MCNAA b.18/19, lettere commerciali, Zuanne de Zello to Guiscard, 16 December 1528; MCNAA b.21, lettere commerciali, ‘lettere private’, anonymous correspondent to Guiscard on an unspecified date in 1510 for ‘certi libri di medicine’
shop. I would ask that you use a bit of care and see that I’m supplied as I have always been in the past and that I have no further cause for complaint.\textsuperscript{16}

Perhaps Guiscard had been lax in his shop as a result of time spent on the mainland, for there is a reference in another letter to his \textit{possessione} on the Terraferma.\textsuperscript{17} And quite clearly he was not the only person involved in the metropolitan economy of the city of Venice who also had some land, for Francesco dalla Nave, who had a shop at the Bridge of the Cappers in 1555–56, was receiving news from Campo San Piero concerning the rents of his fields and their sowing, the condition of cattle and the quality of beans.\textsuperscript{18}

However, such correspondence does more than undermine the stereotype which juxtaposes increasingly lazy aristocratic rentiers with enterprising businessmen in the city itself. Its real value lies in its revelation of the vigilance and fastidiousness – yes, the sheer effort – involved in maintaining an economy based on the marketing of inessentials. The letter of complaint which Carminati received also contained an order for 35 pounds of sugar, a pound and a half of cloves, 2 pounds of pepper, 5 pounds of confectioned aniseed – to be distinguished from 5 pounds of unconfectioned aniseed – salammoniac and ginger.\textsuperscript{19} It was understandable that an apothecary should need to order two dozen boxes made of nut wood for his shop, something which, according to a letter of 1530, Guiscard’s shop could also arrange to supply.\textsuperscript{20} We can see the same concern for quality in operation in other spheres of economic activity. In 1594, Lucca Fossato wrote from Venice to Nicolò Fede in Alessandria, to accompany a consignment of gold and silver lamé worth 440 ducats, specifying no fewer than twelve different types of cloth, including green and gold, pink and gold, crimson and gold.\textsuperscript{21} Such orders were clearly placed only after careful study of samples such as those sent to Giovanni Battista Bragadin with a letter of 1612:

Giello has given me these three samples, two of which are of the same cloth and one of another [type], and there are two the same because you see very well from the weave that the cloth was made from dyed wool because if it [sic] had been dyed after the weaving, they would not be of this brightness, but these are things which don’t last and they mark as well, but not so easily . . . .\textsuperscript{22}

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item[16] M. Greg. b.12 bis, lettere commerciali sec. xvi, 1514–62, inside paper marked ‘il progresso del fedele’ del Bunyan’, ‘Hierolemo spitiario ala luna d’arzento in Padova’ to Guiscard, August 1536.
\item[17] M. Greg. b.12 bis, lettere commerciali sec. xvi, 1514–62, Zuan Cavani to Guiscard, 21 February 1538.
\item[18] MCNAA, b.18/19, bundle marked ‘lettere private sec. xv e xvi’, anonymous correspondent to Francesco dalla Nave, 14 October 1555 on ‘i fitti delli campi vostri’ and ‘il seminar dele terre’, 16 May 1571 on cattle and beans.
\item[19] above, n.16.
\item[20] M. Greg. b.12 bis, lettere commerciali sec. xvi, 1514–62, Ierolemo Gobati to Zuanpiero Carminat, 3 August 1530, enclosing 6 {\textquoteright}scudi{\textquoteright}.
\item[21] MCNAA b.18/19, ‘Per il Mag. co Nicollo Fede laus deo 1594 adi 30 april in venetia’.
\item[22] MCNAA b.21, lettere commerciali, sheaf labelled ‘Lettere private a Domenico Tedeschi di verona’ (letter to Bragadin dated 24 December 1612).
\end{enumerate}
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At least pieces of cloth would have been easier to send than a bunch of asparagus sent to the bookseller Damian Zenaro. What is so striking about these letters is the tireless attention to standards. This is sometimes presented as a criticism of guild organizations, yet Venetian merchant letters show that the same characteristic was an integral part of commercial enterprise, demonstrating the coherence of the commercial ethic in Venice in both manufacture and marketing.

The materials examined so far would be readily identifiable as lettere commerciali. As we shall see, they would have shared a sack or a saddle-bag with official correspondence concerning the business of government. This was probably not mere coincidence, and we find an enormously wide range of subjects covered by the term negotio. A very early example of the way in which economic and political considerations were linked in the minds of the Venetians is recorded in a letter of 1396 from Andrea Foscolo in Constantinople. Problems in penetrating foreign markets were clearly not confined to the sixteenth century or to a process of ‘decline’. Foscolo informed the Procurators Pietro Corner and Michele Steno – who was later to become doge – that it was proving difficult to sell cloth ‘both because of the weak condition of this empire and because these colours aren’t suitable in this country’ and he has been unable, it seems, to mediate between the Turk and the Emperor. Another extraordinary item dealing with the maritime empire is described as a ‘Diario, 1467–9’, a single sheet which turns out to be a captain’s report on campaigns in Greece around Mistra and Monemvasia. In May 1467, the captain plundered Lacedaemon, in September he refortified Kalamata, in April of the following year he laid the cornfields of Mistra to waste, and then fought the Turks near Leontari, losing a hundred men, but in the end ‘I freed those lands: and I took great booty’ (liberai quelle terre: et havi bona preda). In July the mills of Mistra were put to the torch, the fields burned again. On 14 August at Kalamata the Venetian forces took on 4,000 Turkish cavalry: all your stradiots fled to the mountains, except for a few of the principal Greek and Albanian gentlemen who stood with me. We were hand to hand with them for nine hours, and we wounded and killed a good number of them before they had the grace to withdraw. Miser Giacomo Loredan was there at the shore. And if the stradiots had held firm we would have smashed them for sure.

The pattern of pillage and devastation continued through 1469, as did the unreliability of the stradiots (light cavalry). In June the capitano di

25 MCNAA b.18/19, lettere commerciali, Foscolo’s letter is headed ‘1396 aprile 25 da Constantinopoli’
mare (captain of the sea) and the proveditore (commissioner) witnessed a siege, and the report ends with the triumphant separate line, ‘So you know I have not been at peace or in quarters’.26

In the same file, we find an anonymous letter dated 1504 from a spy in London – perhaps an agent of the ambassador Nicolò Giustinian – to Zuanfrancesco Pisani and it suggests the degree to which the Venetian government sought international sanction for its own actions, interfering if necessary in the relations between other states. Pisani is assured that ‘I am, and have always been, and shall be for my lifetime, the most devoted and committed servant with all my heart’, and that any correspondence between the pope and the King of England concerning the laberinti d’Italia and in particular any attempt by the papacy to recover Rimini and Faenza will be passed on.27 And there are other items of formal and informal diplomatic communication. In the 1560s, Paolo Paruta wrote to Gierolemo Lippomano, the ambassador in Vienna, of the negotio di galeotti, perhaps an allusion to an arrangement for the acquisition of galleymen from Habsburg territories. Lippomano will have learned of this ‘from the latest public despatches’, but Paruta then alludes to ‘that main business which is of most importance to Your Lordship’, which is proving problematic: ‘the matter is quite intricate in its very nature, and extremely intricate because of the changes of parties’.28 The next letter is from Renier Zen, contacting the Heads of the Council of Ten in 1628 to comment on a visit to Venice from the son of the political writer, Traiano Boccalini, ‘nothing inferior to his father . . . I think that he has come to Venice to sort out this particular business concerning the writings of his father’.29

Affairs of another sort are discussed in a surprising sheaf of lettere amorose which suggest that, however remote and detached the Venetians may sometimes appear, some of them grappled with problems familiar to any generation. Zanantonio Bragadin was clearly a scoundrel, and has left letters from two women to prove it. One of them, Orsetta Rotta, handles the end of the affair in a cool and level-headed manner, passing from matters of the heart to matters of the rent in the space of a few lines:

I am sorry to think that your Most Illustrious Lordship has found himself another lover and that you should have left me, but I’ll just have to put up with it, but at least come and see me now and again if nothing else. I’m forced to beg your Most Famous Lordship that you do me a very great service and please don’t say no. On the 15th of this

26 MCNAA b.21, lettere commerciali sec. xv e xvi, ‘Diario 1467-69 (for da un capitano) circa fatti d’arme in Levante’ I am most grateful to Dr Michael Angold for all his help in locating the places mentioned in this document.
27 MCNAA, b.21, lettere commerciali sec. xv e xvi, anonymous correspondent to Zuanfrancesco Pisani, 8 May 1504. For formal exchanges on the question of Rimini and Faenza, see Calendar of State Papers Venetian, i: 1202-1509, ed. Rawdon Brown (London: Longman, 1864), 298–301.
28 MCNAA b.21, lettere commerciali sec. xv e xvi, Paolo Paruta to Gierolemo Lippomano (precise date illegible).
29 ibid., Ranier Zen to the Heads of the Council of Ten, 4 July 1628.
I've the rent to pay and at the moment I've no money. I beg Your Most Famous Lordship that you lend me ten ducats, which I'll repay as soon as I can, and I think Your Most Famous Lordship will not fail to do me this service. 30

Orsetta apparently writes and signs it herself on 8 March 1615. In July of the following year, there is a more passionate response, albeit dictated (fece scrivere per non saper), from someone more conscious of her station, someone called Catarina who specifically rejects any comparison with Orsetta, an indication perhaps that Bragadin spoke of his former lover, or that his liaisons were the subject of gossip:

I would have lost myself body and soul but it was God's will and it pleased Him to torment me in this way, and you have been the real cause of it. But God forgive you for what you have done. This will be a reminder to me, but I pray the Lord that He gives me my sanity so that I can remember you, because the anger has quite transported me, but you know very well who it was, and that I have never been the wife of porters, nor am I Orsetta. Just remember from what house you had taken me, so that no one could speak ill of my affairs, but your servant should keep his tongue behind his teeth and not speak ill of my state, because I shall have no regard for the fact that he's your servant if I decide to remedy the matter ... 31

While such letters as these tend to stretch the definition of 'commercial', there are many other items which cannot be classified as 'letters'. One file contains the expenses on clothing and furnishing of Andrea Zorzi during his stay in Crete in 1567-70, which amounted to 650 ducats, some of it to an apothecary per la mia malattia di flusso, 104 ducats per il mio fierarol, 53 for material for shirts. 32 And in addition one should draw attention to the tantalizingly illegible 'Registro di note e copia d'atti privati della famiglia Longo', which stretches from the fifteenth to the seventeenth century, a document which strengthens the idea that some Venetians kept records similar to the Florentine ricordanze. 33 We can certainly find other materials relating to the Locatelli family. 34 There is also a good deal of material on the book trade, and of special interest is the inventory of books 'left in Padua in the authority of Ser Domenego da San Germano' in 1480, nearly 800 books, some 150 titles. 35 One document of particular value demonstrates the pervasiveness of the commercial ethic. This is a declaration

30 MCNAA b.21, lettere commerciali sec. xv e xvi, sheaf of 'Lettere amorose', Orsetta to Bragadin, '8 marzo 1615'.
31 ibid., Caterina to Bragadin, 24 July 1616.
32 M. Greg, b.12 ter, 'spexe per il vestir et allozo, 1567–70 in Candia'.
34 MCNAA, b.21, lettere commerciali sec. xv e xvi, 'Registro di note e copia di atti privati della famiglia Longo sec. xv-xvii'; 'Locatelli, Martin e Maria Fosca Zambela contratto di nozze (sec. xvi)'; 'Locatelli Laura e Bernardo contratto di nozze 1546'; 'Locatelli Angelo copia di testamento 1529'.
35 ibid., 'Quaderneto de libri lassati a padua in custodia di ser domenego da san germano'. These were apparently supplied by Antonio Moreto, and a letter to him is to be found in M. Greg. b.12 bis, lettere commerciali sec. xvi, 1514–62, 'de M. Vincenzo de benettit ditto de plato da bologna adi 31 luio 1516'.
by the tenants of a property in the parish of San Zulian, where many of the wealthiest members of the mercers’ guild had their shops.36 The cousins Gabriel and Andrea, who held the sign of the Sant’Andrea, submit a declaration to the Procuratori di Sopra (the procurators of St Mark who dealt with such matters in that part of the city) concerning their ‘small shop with mercery, that is twine, veils, a bit of serge and a few pots’, on the basis of which they buy on credit at the Fondaco dei Tedeschi and in Bergamo. They have no other property or resources beyond the shop, which is also a home, and which costs 45 ducats a year in rent payable to the Procurators. There are fifteen mouths to feed, including an assistant and seven children, the oldest of these being thirteen. They do not operate as capitalist manufacturers in silk (non femo lavorar seda di sorte alcuna) yet they hold tenaciously to a ‘mestier’ or craft, which is emphatically commercial: ‘we know no other trade but buying and selling’, which might serve as a motto for the huge guild of which they were part.37

Records such as these and the other materials examined in this brief essay are patchy, disorganized, often anonymous. Can they offer more than frustration to the historian? Does their value go beyond the anecdotal? Lamé and love letters, parrots and pistachios, asparagus and espionage – such documents can hardly provide us with evidence for individualism or humanism, which some Florentine letters are said to yield, though one touching letter of condolence shows an elegance of style and range of reference based on an education in the classics.38 Perhaps there is a more positive reading of such disparate material: it is almost invariably vernacular – which is the justification for quoting at such length from texts written in dialect – and there is a consistently strong preoccupation with commercial matters, with negotio, epitomized in the declaration of the tenants of the Sant’Andrea. In the later sixteenth century, business correspondence involving heretics or people in heretical countries could be dangerous, as we know from the correspondence used by Inquisitors against merchants such as Paolo Avanzi, Niccolò Pelizari and Giovanni Zonca.39 Political correspondence and business mail regularly travelled in the same saddle-bags. Underlining the importance of correspondence in holding together the fabric of the Venetian state, one document records the expenses on postage for the London embassy in 1603–04, which amounted to 640 ducats.40 Such letters, along with business mail, would probably have

37 MCNAA b.18/19, lettere commerciali, the declaration appears on a single sheet headed simply ‘Laus deo 1554 X’. On the mercers’ guild: Mackenney, *Tradesmen and Traders*, cap. 3.
40 MCNAA, b.21, lettere commerciali sec. xv e xvi, ‘spesa di posta pagata per conto dell’Ambasciatore Veneto a Londra (Molin Nicolo 1602)’.
been distributed in the city by an official dispensador, and the Venetians sent their official and mercantile correspondence through a corps of corrieri, which dates from at least 1305. There is a sense in which neither Venetian business nor the Venetian state could afford to suffer interference with its channels of communication. News was indeed a 'luxury commodity' which circulated with the inessentials which abounded in the commercial economy of Venice.

Yet it was comertio di heretici and commercium litterarum which the Inquisition sought to control. The letters examined in this essay are a reminder that, in dismantling the myth of the constitution, we must not piece together a myth of the economy. The Venetian economy did not run like clockwork and was not sustained by magic but by the vigilance of individuals striving to obtain the best prices for the best products. Venetian letters demonstrate the importance of news at all levels of commercial exchange, news travelling through a wide network of channels both formal and informal. Perhaps this may yet offer some clue as to what was at stake in the Interdict crisis. The connection between the day-to-day business of running the Venetian economy and the great clash with the papacy in 1606 is not as remote as it might at first appear. After all, it seems likely that 'Francesco dalla Nave', who was mentioned earlier in connection with his interests on the Italian mainland, was the grandfather of another of that name, Zechinelli, whose shop, the Golden Ship, hosted the discussions of Sarpi and his circle. Paolo Paruta, who wrote to Gierolemo Lippomano about the negottio di galeotti, and quel negottio principale che piu importa a V.S., was also the ambassador who was to explain to the pope why Venice had been so quick to recognize Henry IV as King of France, and in his history of Venice he left no doubt of the inescapable importance of commerce to the Venetians, for 'the site of the city invited this way of life and activity' and the inhabitants could never be self-sufficient producers of food. But we must take 'commerce' in a broad sense

41 Cinque Savi alla Mercanzia, nuova serie, b.138, porta-lettere – privilegi, filza 'porta-lettere' includes a document of 4 May 1670 summarizing the process of distribution; ibid., b.47. Corrieri, contains six filze, one of which is foliated and records (1r) the decision of the Maggior Consiglio to place the corrieri under the jurisdiction of the Proveditori di Comun, who ratify the mariegola of 1490 which follows a decision to establish a scuola under the protection of Santa Caterina in 1489. In filza marked '184', a supplica of 8 January 1627 records the appeal of the corrienti to the Proveditori that they might have two separate saddle-bags, one for dispacci pubblici, the other for correspondenza from tutti li negotianti.


44 Bernardo di Francesco Sechi is registered dalla Nave as a wholesaler in 1586, the shop located in the sestier di San Marco: see Arti, b.397, marzeri, nomi di fratelli, 1586–1692, 1586 booklet labelled 'capomaestri in lettere rosse', 1594 booklet under 'Sestier di San Marco'. On the meetings at the shop, F Micanzio, Vita del Padre Paolo in P Sarpi, Istoria del Concilio Tridentino, ed. C. Vivanti (Turin: Einaudi, 1974 i. ii. 1307 and n.4.

which goes beyond dealings in goods and which takes account of the integral importance of the exchange of news and opinions to Venetian economic life. Thus, the diversity of the materials classified in the Venetian Archive, apparently despairingly, as lettere commerciali in many ways defies systematic analysis, but that same diversity is a reminder of the amount of news and the range of opinions freely exchanged and preserved in the unpolished language of everyday life. From that perspective, the defence of republican liberty might also be seen as the defence of vernacular commerce.