

# Preface

This book is born from a detective story, an intricate philological mystery that has called for patient investigations in archives and libraries to untangle the enigma.

Among the manuscript funds of the Biblioteca Civica Queriniana of Brescia, I came across a seventeenth century manuscript titled: *Relatione della Corte di Francia fatta dall'Eccellentissimo Signor Nicolò Sagredo, ambasciatore della Serenissima Republica di Venetia appresso la Maestà Christianissima, l'anno 1655*. A nice calligraphic text consisting of 202 sheets, bound with analogous documents perhaps belonging to some noble Brescia family or traceable to the materials of Angelo Maria Querini, cardinal, bishop of Brescia, founder and patron of the library itself. Being the diplomatic report of a Venetian ambassador, it had probably already been edited among those published in the nineteenth century by Nicolò Barozzi and Guglielmo Berchet and re-edited in the past century by Luigi Firpo.

The text was interesting and even singular as a reading prospect, because set against the background of the Cretan war, it told the 'story' of France of the early seventeenth century, connecting them to the general events of the European states involved to a greater or lesser extent in the Thirty Years' War, and therefore all represented around the table for the 1648 treaties of Münster and Osnabrück.

Many matters, however, were left open.

From the frontispiece, the paternity of the writing was assigned to Nicolò Sagredo, a well-known name in the history of Venice, known, however, as doge, not as ambassador in France. But had Sagredo really been ambassador of the Republic of Venice in France?

Again from the frontispiece, the report was dated 1655 and summarized the main events in Europe of the previous three decades. But when had it really been drafted?

Once again, from the frontispiece the report was presented like the

account of a Venetian ambassador at the court of France. But then how could it have escaped the meticulous editorial work of Barozzi and Berchet, who in times of philological accuracy had had the chance to work with largess in the then Archivio Generale dei Frari of Venice, directly on the diplomatic series of the Serenissima?

When I looked deeper into the research to find some answers, my doubts increased.

Copies of the report are preserved in several Italian archives, from Rome to Genoa, from Venice to Florence, from Udine to Lucca.

I came across copies everywhere; at times incomplete, but copies nonetheless. Even in the *Collegio* fund of the Venice State Archive, where the official reports of the ambassadors of the Serenissima were kept, a nice clean copy was kept, with an anonymous handwriting, in short different from that of the dispatches of the potential authors. I grew convinced that Nicolò Sagredo could not have been its author, he who around the 1650s was ambassador in Rome at the court of Innocenzo X Pamphilij. Moreover, the same officials of the Republic had preserved the text of the report of France at the end of the 'official' one of Michele Morosini, ambassador at the court of Louis XIV from 1648 to 1652. And some of them, perhaps out of bureaucratic fussiness, had added in small lettering the Christian name to Morosini's name, well-centred in the elegant frontispiece in capital letters.

Even as regards the date of composition, after a great deal of painstaking research, doubts lingered. Some texts were dated 1653, the majority 1655. It is true that the ambassadors reported to the Senate around one year after their return to their country. But in the text some internal elements, referring to 1654 (the regimental office of Louis XIV, the years elapsing between the marriage of Anna of Austria with Louis XIII etc.), made the date of 1655 more credible.

At the end of a long investigation I thought it was likely to attribute to Michele Morosini the text of the *Relatione* of France and the date of 1655 acceptable. Barozzi and Berchet, who had known the text preserved in the Venetian Archive of the Frari in the name of Michele Morosini, had deemed it only to be a rough draft and thus had not published it in their precious collection.

Personally, I am unable to consider the Venetian text a rough draft for at least three reasons. As regards the contents, little or nothing coincides with the shorter official text. As regards the form, it presents with a good calligraphic appearance, without corrections or deletions. As regards the text, many clues make me think to a copy made under dictation, from which some gaps and various lexical misunderstandings would stem.

I would rather say that the *Relatione* of Franc is a historical memoir of Michele Morosini, posterior to his embassy by some time, thus released

from the traditional schemes of the diplomatic relations, of which it would only preserve the conclusion, dedicated to the eulogy of the two noble fellow citizens who had preceded and succeeded him in that office, Battista Nani and Giovanni Sagredo. And perhaps, precisely owing to the latter's succeeding Morosini, the mistaken attribution to Nicolò Sagredo, Giovanni's cousin, actual ambassador in Paris from 1652 to 1655, year of the drafting of the *Relatione* of France, was triggered. In none of his copies does the name of Giovanni Sagredo appear, moreover author of a report on display at the Senato Veneto in 1656, edited by Barozzi and Berchet, and completely different in terms of style and contents from the *Relatione* of France.

The text published here is a nice tapestry of Baroque Europe. Morosini fixes the history of the continents at a precise time, 1655, but puts in the foreground the characteristics typical of the century: the spirit of absolutism that was rising in the court of the Sun King, the punctilious ambitions of the aristocracy in search of prestige, power and fame; the instrumental use of marriages for the purpose of forging alliances, the clients of the pontifical court, divided between fragile financial balances and claims to representation; the aspirations of the principal German electors to downsize the imperial power: the competition over the seas that shifts the conflict between states from the battle fields to commercial competition, the enlargement of the continent's ideal boundaries as far as the Baltic with the entrance onto the European scene of countries that had previously been on the sidelines, like the Scandinavian ones: the progressive disappearance of the religious questions from the international diplomatic tables; the imprudent disinterest of the European courts *vis-à-vis* the continent's eastern boundaries, fatalistically abandoned to Ottoman domination.

A picture so vast and unwittingly problematic, traced by a witness of the time, whoever he may have been, and from a privileged observatory such as the court of France, could not continue to be hidden on the shelves of some archive or library, after having aroused the curiosity of dozens of chancelleries and commercial agents.