

THE SOCIETY OF THE VENETIAN COLONY OF TANA IN THE 1430S BASED ON THE NOTARIAL DEEDS OF NICCOLÒ DI VARSIS AND BENEDETTO DI SMERITIS

Evgeny A. Khvalkov

In this article, I attempt to take a closer look at the society of the Venetian colony of Tana in the 1430s. The main source for this article was a set of notarial deeds produced in Tana by the Venetian notaries Niccolò di Varsis and Benedetto di Smeritis between 1430 and 1440. Currently, we know of 1,194 Venetian deeds drawn up in Tana by thirty-four notaries. Later acts, in contrast to earlier ones, survived not as *instrumentae* (original papers), but as *imbreviaturae* (copies left by the notaries). With some exceptions, di Varsis and di Smeritis drew up *imbreviaturae* which are now stored in the State Archives in Venice¹ (*Notarili Testamenti* and *Cancellaria Inferior*, *Notai* collections). They are divided into three sets:

- *busta* 917, with one register of Benedetto di Smeritis (*imbreviaturae*, wills drawn up in Tana from July 22, 1432 to April 6, 1436, followed by wills drawn up in Constantinople and Alexandria)²;
- *busta* 231, with one register of Niccolò de Varsis containing *imbreviaturae* of deeds written by him in Tana (May 2, 1436 to October 9, 1436), an *imbreviatura* of one document drawn up earlier in Constantinople (March 25, 1435) and a parchment *instrumentum* (August 17, 1445)³;
- *busta* 750⁴, with four registers of Niccolò de Varsis, but since they are united in the Venetian archive under one number and the boundaries of cartularies do not coincide with the chronological boundaries, I shall consider this set as a unit. The documents date back to different times (from August 19, 1428 to October 7, 1439).

For obvious reasons, it was impossible to write a completely comprehensive

¹ Archivio di Stato di Venezia, hereafter: ASV.

² Archivio di Stato di Venezia, *Notarili Testamenti*, *busta* 917 (*Benedictus Smeritis*). Hereafter: ASV, *NT*, b. 917.

³ Archivio di Stato di Venezia, *Cancellaria Inferior*, *busta* 231 (*Nicolaus de Varsis*). Hereafter: ASV, *CI*, b. 231.

⁴ Archivio di Stato di Venezia, *Notarili Testamenti*, *busta* 750 (*Nicolaus de Varsis*). Hereafter: ASV, *NT*, b. 750.

history of a medieval society based on a small and non-representative selection of the sources; moreover given that the nature of these sources (notarial deeds, most of which are testaments) imposes additional limitations, I had to focus on some particular aspects of the social life. Eventually, working with the sources, I came up with the following agenda:

- to estimate, based on the relevant parameters, the social differentiation and stratification of the society of Tana and the factors of prestige defining one's high or low social standing, while trying to answer the question of whether the social stratification was correlated with the distribution of wealth and property;
- to map the individuals' geographical mobility and, more importantly, attachment to the colony; to study permanent and renewed population of Tana and to identify how many Venetians constantly lived in Tana rather than visiting it for commercial purposes during the navigation season;
- to investigate the situation in religious life, including individuals' parish connections in Tana and in Venice, their regional attachments and sympathies;
- to study the matters of gender, marriage, age, family relations, and inheritance insofar as the sources allow me to do it, focusing on the behaviour of individuals within social structures and the legal framework as far as the relations of «parents and children» and the relations and order of inheritance are concerned.

Social stratification. The deeds are not very informative with respect to the overall property of the testators, although they may contain relevant data about the people themselves. However, here one faces a methodological problem: the formal identifiers do not always clearly reflect social reality. First, social descriptors like *vir nobilis*, *civis*, *burgensis*, *habitor*, *ser*, *magister*, *mercator*, *discretus*, *egregius*, *honestus*, *magister*, *trucimanus*, and *dragomanus* are used in the deeds occasionally – a person may or may not have applied them and this was not mandatory. For instance, a nobleman (*vir nobilis*) did not always feel it necessary to mark his social standing, and in this case the descriptor is omitted, leaving us to guess at noble standing based on other parameters like office or family name (keeping in mind that freedmen could equally hold the «noble» family names of their former masters)⁵. The descriptor *habitor* Tane is of some use, meaning that a person using it was a permanent resident, but many of those who clearly were permanent residents omitted it as well. The

⁵ See also: R.C. Mueller, *Espressioni di status sociale a Venezia dopo la «serrata» del Maggior Consiglio*, in *Studi veneti offerti a Gaetano Cozzi*, Venezia, Il Cardo, 1992, pp. 53-61.

same is true for other describers: as for citizenship, it is apparent that only a few Venetian citizens felt the need to mark it in their deeds. A merchant who was wealthy but not related to the authorities could identify himself as *civis* or *burgensis*, while a modest officer of the curia (like *bastonier*) could omit this identifier and specify only the office he held.

Since one cannot rely entirely on formal describers alone, the main parameters to be considered are the information value of mentioning of a person in particular deeds and the frequency of such mentions (at least more than once), thus reflecting one's social activity. Almost nothing else is known about *some* testators except that they existed, had names and family names, and drafted wills in Tana in a certain year. However, some wills are more informative than others, and there is more data about many persons than about those who are mentioned only once. This can be the basis for research into the social practice of these «known» people (meaning known to researchers to a larger extent than others). The group of such people is not so numerous, but the source material shows that they were more socially active and prominent than others. This is especially true of those mentioned several times as witnesses and *fideicommissari* – they seem to have been comparatively wealthy and reliable people. To say even more, everyone identified as a patrician because of his noble family name, and everyone bearing a marker of high social standing fell into this group: no consuls, nobles, priests or merchants are mentioned only once. These people were connected and constituted the elite.

Nobles can be most often identified based on a social describer, a noble family name or a combination of both. To be appointed a consul, nobility was a requirement. The «feudalisation» of the Venetian elite in the Levant in the late Middle Ages did not change its main engagement, that is, commerce⁶. Seventy-four out of eighty-three Venetian merchants in Constantinople mentioned by Badoer were nobles⁷, as well as most of the merchants who participated in Barbaro's treasure hunting venture, not to mention that those people were very rich – see above about their expenses for this venture⁸. Besides, the young siblings of the noble families often began their careers as crossbow-archers (*ballistarii*, also known as *nobili da pope*) on the galleys of

⁶ L.G. Klimanov, *Обретение Венецией моря: право, политика, символы* [Venice Acquiring the Sea: Law, Politics, and Symbols], in «Prichernomor'je v srednie veka», III, 1998, p. 158.

⁷ М.М. Шитиков, *Константинополь и венецианская торговля в первой половине XV в. по данным книги счетов Джаскомо Бадозера* [Constantinople and the Venetian Trade in the First Half of the Fifteenth Century According to the Book of Accounts of Giacomo Badoer], in «Vizantijskij Vremennij», XXX, 1969, p. 52.

⁸ On Venetian merchants see: R.C. Mueller, *Mercanti e imprenditori fiorentini a Venezia nel tardo medioevo*, in «Società e storia», 1992, No. 155, pp. 29-60.

Romania and Tana, often later attaining the rank of captain. They frequently had to suffer many inconveniences – salaries were often delayed – but the process of choosing candidates for the appointments of *ballistarii* was still highly competitive, and good skills had to be demonstrated.

This period saw an increase in the number of *ballistarii* on the Venetian ships, which is evidence of increasing danger, but besides it is indirect evidence of increasing incomes, for otherwise the increased expense would have been senseless. In 1431, thirty additional *ballistarii* were sent to Tana and the salary was officially raised to four ducats⁹; however, the deeds of Varsis show that in 1430 it was in reality already five ducats per month¹⁰. *Ballistarius* Fabiano Desdiegna received his salary under the consuls Matino Pisani (30 ducats), Pietro Lando and Vice-consul Ermolao Pisani (56 ducats), that is, 86 in total¹¹. In the range between 4 and 6 there was no multiple value for this sum; therefore, during this period the salary was raised. In 1435, twenty-five *ballistarii* had to be sent to Tana urgently, and then the senate forbade all new expenses¹². Almost half of the testators in *Notarili Testamenti* 750 and 917 either mention their salary as received or to be received or describe themselves as *stipendiarii* (though *salaratus* or *stipendiarius* does not always mean that a person was a *ballistarius* or a nobleman; some soldiers could be recruited from among the commoners). As noted above, the salaries were often delayed, and some men made a kind of hidden profit because of it. Giacomo Salono was especially effective as a creditor¹³; he did not speak about either *usura* or *lucrum*, although others even found it suitable to mention this in deeds¹⁴.

The anxiety of the Venetian senate, the increasing salaries of the soldiers, the highly competitive recruitment procedure, permanent attempts to find new sources for funding the garrison, and the anxiety of the *ballistarii* and *stipendiarii*, who tended to draft wills more than any other group of population of Tana, although these people were young and healthy, have led me to the conclusion that the Venetians felt increasing danger, but the revenues from trade also increased and therefore they could afford new expenses.

⁹ ASV, *Senato, Misti*, reg. 58, f. 65. Four ducats per month meant 48 ducats per year. Braudel estimated an annual *per capita* in the Venetian republic as 50-100 ducats (F. Braudel, *Afterthoughts on Material Civilization and Capitalism*, Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977, p. 107) and doubted whether it could be real (the sum seemed too big to him). Considering the social stratification, the real income must have been much lower, so 48 ducats seems to have been a good salary.

¹⁰ ASV, *NT*, b. 750, f. 27r.

¹¹ ASV, *NT*, b. 750, f. 30r.

¹² ASV, *Senato, Misti*, reg. 59, f. 112.

¹³ ASV, *NT*, b. 750, ff. 21v-f. 22r; ASV, *CI*, b. 231, ff. 4r, 4v, 5r, 7v, 8r, 10r, 11v etc.

¹⁴ ASV, *NT*, b. 750, ff. 20r-20v, 22v.

Returning to the question of the elite, the analysis of «known» people (that is, active in terms of notarial practice) and comparing this information to other parameters led me to the conclusion that the elite of the society of Tana constituted an entity and demonstrated a considerable stability in the social hierarchy. I chose those persons who are mentioned in the deeds more than once, presuming that the frequency of mentions was correlated with the social importance of a person, whether he acted as a testator (and therefore had an average income or more, since the figures of the price of drawing up a deed fluctuated from 1 to 5 ducats), as a witness or a *fideicommissar* (and therefore had a certain good reputation and enjoyed social trust). The circle of such people appeared to be relatively narrow, and beyond any doubt, there was differentiation within it. The «known» people are 77 persons out of 303, that is 23.5%.

Ten of these men are mentioned by Barbaro, mainly as merchants or officers (14%), six are mentioned by Badoer as merchants (8%), and seven are mentioned in the documents of the Venetian senate (9%), mostly as merchants or Venetian officers. Nineteen have noble family names (26.76%), 48 have the prefix *ser* (62%), and twenty-three (32%) have a prestigious social describer (*consul*, *vizeconsul*, *vir nobilis*, *vir discretus*, *vir prudens*, *vir spectabilis*, *magister*, *merchator*, *patronus*)¹⁵; besides that, it is clear that a noble or other person of high standing did not introduce a describer into a deed. Outside of this group, one barely finds anyone who had a prestigious social identifier. As for professional differentiation, most of the members of this group were, as said above, either officers of the curia, clerics, merchants or *ballistarii*.

To spare a few words on other professions, the deeds mention a tailor¹⁶, and three coopers (*butarii*) in one will¹⁷. The profession is specified as well for a herald of the curia, Giovanni Greco, and an interpreter, Borano Taiapetra. Barbers merit special mention¹⁸. In fact, almost all of them were within the «privileged» group – they acted as medical men and were a necessary part of the crew on galleys. In the Venetian case the barbers' standing was not as low as elsewhere. Out of 10 *ballistarii* 2 had to be barbers. The Venetian senate refused to reduce this number to one¹⁹, and since the Venetian barbers did not want to be employed on the ships as common *ballistarii* [*sic*], with a sa-

¹⁵ One should add a certain *ser Manoli de Trappesondis de Palatis* (ASV, CI, b. 231, f. 9v), who could be a courtier at the court of Trebizond.

¹⁶ ASV, NT, b. 750, ff. 3-3v, 20r-20v, 22v; two carpenters (ASV, CI, b. 231, ff. 12r; ASV, NT, b. 750, ff. 27r-27v).

¹⁷ ASV, NT, b. 750, f. 29r.

¹⁸ ASV, NT, b. 750, ff. 2, 19v(4)-20r, 23v-24r, 44r.

¹⁹ ASV, Senato, Misti, reg. 44, ff. 90v-91r.

lary of 6 ducats per month by that time [*sic*], the senate raised their salaries to 8 ducats²⁰. Thus, barbers were a group of well-paid professionals, and at least some were nobles.

Social activity correlates somewhat with commercial activity and wealth – all the main proprietors whom I identified above fell within this group of «known» men and mention more or less considerable sums of money and real estate in their wills (which again one barely finds outside this group) in the form of land, buildings, factories²¹. Moreover, within this group, those who are mentioned twice are rare; most of them appear in the deeds 5 or 6 times. To say even more, this group was characterized by a strong internal cohesion. The members tended to contact other members of the group more often than outsiders, inviting each other to be witnesses, appointing each other as *fidei-commissari* etc. Thus, there was a certain border between this elite group and the others, and the members of the elite group demonstrated more intensive social practice, which correlated with their social standing.

«*Domiciled in Tana*»: *geographical mobility and stability*. The deeds mention around 300 persons. Therefore, if one recalls the story about Gulbeddin's treasure related by Barbaro, it seems more than strange that the author of this source and his companions gathered 120 workers paid at three ducats per month for their venture in treasure-hunting²². Such a number of workers would not have been easy to gather at one time even in a modern town. Further, such a salary for diggers' work seems to be too high: this equalled the salary of a *ballistarius* [*sic*] with the slight difference that the salary of the diggers, contrary to that of the *ballistarii*, was not delayed (see below). Moreover, 360 ducats per month is a large expense (to which we should add what was paid to 150 more diggers during the second attempt at treasure hunting), which means that either they were really sure that they would find the treasure, or Barbaro simply exaggerated. However, this is not the main concern here. Barbaro's source data (provided one believes it) shows that 120 (later 150) people were available in Tana to be detached from their everyday duties in the low season – people who ventured to dig frozen soil first in December 1437, and then in March 1438. If one believes Barbaro, one should presume that the permanent population of Tana must have been several thousand people. It is possible, however, that Barbaro did not describe real events, but this question is well beyond the objectives of my work.

²⁰ *Ibidem*.

²¹ ASV, NT, b. 750, ff. 8, 25r, 29v, 30v-31r.

²² *I viaggi in Persia degli ambasciatori veneti Barbaro e Contarini*, a cura di L. Lockhart, R. Morozzo della Rocca, M.F. Tiepolo, Roma, Libreria dello Stato, 1973, p. 70.

What was the percentage of the people permanently domiciled in Tana among those mentioned in the deeds, and how did it vary in terms of ethnicity? (The term «domiciled» stands here for the permanent ties and residence of a person in Tana, rather than for the period s/he spent there; although these two issues correlate to some extent, I assume by default that if a person is mentioned several times as related to Tana on a long time scale s/he must have been either a permanent resident or a frequent visitor, which is technically the same in this case). The first question can be answered provisionally by comparing the data from the 1430s with the sources of the previous and the next period. The second question implies analyzing this prosopographic data with respect to a particular parameter.

One finds a family of Fagni domiciled in Tana in the 1410s (Fagnus de Fagnis²³) and in the 1430s (Clara Pelieta Fagni²⁴ and Matheus de Fagnio²⁵). One could possibly add to the list a ship *patronus*, Giacomo de Girardino²⁶, who is mentioned as a barber in the 1430s²⁷. Michelino Zeno is mentioned in 1413 as owning a house in Tana²⁸, and again in the 1430s as a resident²⁹. Manoli de Mudazzo from Candia is mentioned in 1413³⁰ and in the 1430s, when he drafted his will³¹. Although he seems to have been of Greek origin and called a Greek man as a *fideicomissar*, he was of Venetian origin, and his brothers Niccolò (1449³²) and Marco (1451³³), sons of the late Pietro, were crossbow-archers on the galleys of Romania (a post reserved for Venetian nobility). Pietro Loredan, a former consul of Tana, is mentioned in 1414³⁴, and again in the 1430s³⁵. Andrea Contarini, also a former consul of Tana, ap-

²³ A.A. Talyzina, *Венецианский нотариус в Тана Кристофоро Риззо (1411-1413)* [*Venetian Notary in Tana Cristoforo Rizzo (1411-1413)*], in «Prichernomor'je v srednie veka», IV, 2000, pp. 27-28.

²⁴ ASV, NT, b. 750, f. 24r.

²⁵ ASV, CI, b. 231, f. 1v; ASV, NT, b. 750, f. 8.

²⁶ Talyzina, *Венецианский нотариус* [*Venetian Notary*], cit., pp. 28-29.

²⁷ ASV, NT, b. 750, ff. 2, 3, 19v(4), 20v.

²⁸ Talyzina, *Венецианский нотариус* [*Venetian Notary*], cit., pp. 29-30.

²⁹ ASV, NT, b. 750, f. 18v(1).

³⁰ Talyzina, *Венецианский нотариус* [*Venetian Notary*], cit., pp. 26-27.

³¹ ASV, NT, b. 750, f. 4.

³² ASV, AvCom, Prove (2), b. 178, f. 250r.

³³ ASV, AvCom, Prove (2), b. 178, f. 259r.

³⁴ N.D. Prokofieva, *Акты венецианского нотариуса в Тана Донато а Мано (1413-1419)* [*Acts of Venetian Notaries in Tana Donato a Mano (1413-1419)*], in «Prichernomor'je v srednie veka», IV, 2000, pp. 36-174, pp. 57-58.

³⁵ ASV, CI, b. 231, f. 11v.

pears in the deeds of Donato a Mano³⁶ and again in the deeds of the 1430s³⁷. Caterina, the wife of Giorgio Giustiniani, drafted her will in the 1410s³⁸, but was still living in Tana in 1436³⁹. Giovanni Pietro, who was active in Tana in September⁴⁰ and October 1413⁴¹, appears again in 1436 in Constantinople (presumably on his way to Tana)⁴². The same applies to Bartolomeo Lombardo, who appears in 1417 in Tana⁴³, and in 1435 in Constantinople with the consul of Tana, his notary, and Giosafato Barbaro⁴⁴. Domenico Bedolotto, *drugomanus*, was a witness to the purchase of a house by Iolmelich a Candelis⁴⁵, then he sold a cellar in Tana in 1414⁴⁶; he appears twice in 1417⁴⁷, and he still lived in Tana in 1436-1438⁴⁸.

The deeds of the 1410s and 1430s mention an Orthodox married couple several times. Iolmelich a Candelis owned real estate, her husband Michalli Mitrioti was a *habitor* of Tana⁴⁹, and there was litigation between them⁵⁰. Iolmelich drafted her will as late as 1436, mentioning mainly Greeks, Orthodox Tatars, a priest, Tatuli⁵¹, who had also resided in Tana in the 1430s, when he served in the parish of St. John⁵², and a Greek Orthodox metropolitan, clearly, the one from Alania; the direct connections of Iolmelikh with a high Church official can say much about her own social standing.

Borano Taiapetra, an interpreter (*turzimanus*) of the consul's curia, is an interesting case⁵³. His family lived in Tana as early as the early fifteenth century⁵⁴, and at least one member of the family – Niccolò Taiapetra – was also an

³⁶ Prokofieva, *Акты* [*The Acts*], cit., pp. 45-46, 55 and further.

³⁷ ASV, NT, b. 750, f. 23v.

³⁸ Prokofieva, *Акты* [*The Acts*], cit., p. 137.

³⁹ ASV, NT, b. 750, f. 20v.

⁴⁰ Prokofieva, *Акты* [*The Acts*], cit., p. 45.

⁴¹ *Ibidem*, pp. 51-52.

⁴² ASV, CI, b. 231, f. 1r; ASV, NT, b. 750, f. 18v(1).

⁴³ Prokofieva, *Акты* [*The Acts*], cit., pp. 112-113.

⁴⁴ ASV, CI, b. 231, f. 1v; ASV, NT, b. 750, f. 3.

⁴⁵ Prokofieva, *Акты* [*The Acts*], cit., pp. 54-55.

⁴⁶ *Ibidem*, pp. 58-59.

⁴⁷ *Ibidem*, pp. 112-113, 131-132, 150-151.

⁴⁸ ASV, NT, b. 750, ff. 3v, 9v, 22r.

⁴⁹ Prokofieva, *Акты* [*The Acts*], cit., pp. 54-55, 68-69, 92-93.

⁵⁰ *Ibidem*, pp. 67-68.

⁵¹ ASV, NT, b. 750, f. 21r.

⁵² ASV, NT, b. 750, ff. 21r-21v.

⁵³ ASV, CI, b. 231, ff. 5r-5v; ASV, NT, b. 750, ff. 21r, 25r, 28v; ASV, NT, b. 917, f. 4.

⁵⁴ Moretto Bon, *notaio in Venezia, Trebisonda e Tana (1403-1408)*, a cura del Comitato per la pubblicazione delle fonti relative alla storia di Venezia, Venezia, Ed. de' Colli, 1950, prot. 2, doc. 22, p. 34.

interpreter⁵⁵; both of the Taiapetra knew several languages (Russian among them)⁵⁶. Another, Francesco Taiapetra, is mentioned as being in Tana in 1415⁵⁷. Borano Taiapetra is first mentioned in relation to Tana around 1421 to 1423 with connection with litigation⁵⁸, and later in 1436, as an interpreter for the curia and a witness to the purchase of a slave⁵⁹. He had a daughter, Menechina, who lived with him⁶⁰. Borano also appears in Barbaro's narrative in 1438⁶¹, when he went with Giosafato and *bastoniere* to the Tatars' camp with gifts and caused the Tatar prince to laugh, because he and two others out of the whole company of four were blind in one eye.

However, more can be said about Borano and this dynasty of interpreters. The lists of the taxpayers of Lvov mention a certain «Baranczuk Tolmacz» (*tolmacz* means «interpreter») in the entries of April 19, 1405. At that time Baranczuk resided in the Galich suburbs of Lvov⁶². The diminutive «-czuk»⁶³ could be added to foreign names, so one can assume that interpreter Baranczuk from Lvov and interpreter of the Venetian curia of Tana, Borano Taiapetra, were one and the same person. His ethnic origin (as well as origin of the «dynasty» as a whole) therefore becomes problematic. The family name is clearly Italian and widespread even in today's Venice: the stem *tagliare* («to cut») combined with *petra* («stone») leads to the conclusion that his paternal ancestors lived in an Italian-speaking social environment for at least one generation, and some of them were stone-cutters; but they apparently had strong connections with Eastern Europe. It would be tempting to suggest that his given name derives from the name of the island in Venice (Burano), but asserting this seems too bold. The name well could be Tatar in origin – one of the chiefs (*bej*) of the four main Crimean Tatars' kin groups was called Baryn. Nevertheless, there is one more option. Borano could have been an Armenian, and this appears the most plausible, since Armenians were the ones to maintain the trade connections between Lvov, the Black Sea coast (with both the Italian trading

⁵⁵ ASV, *CI*, b. 121 (*Notaio Donato a Mano*), f. 4, doc. 20.

⁵⁶ S.P. Карпов, *Латинская Романия [Latin Romania]*, St. Petersburg, Aletheia, 2000, p. 188.

⁵⁷ Prokofieva, *Акты [The Acts]*, cit., pp. 92, 132-133, 140-141, 148-149, doc. 83.

⁵⁸ ASV, *Avogaria di Comun* (Hereafter: *AvCom*), *Raspe*, 3647, an. 1417-1428, ff. 38v-43v, 10.1.1424; also see: ASV, *Senato, Misti*, reg. 65, ff. 174[173]r, 10.1.1424.

⁵⁹ ASV, *CI*, b. 231, ff. 5r, 5v; ASV, *NT*, b. 750, f. 21r.

⁶⁰ ASV, *CI*, b. 231, ff. 8v; ASV, *NT*, b. 917, ff. 4, 5-6.

⁶¹ *I viaggi in Persia*, cit., p. 75.

⁶² *Pomniki dziejów Lwowa z archiwum miasta. Vol. 2: Księga przychodów i rozchodów miasta. 1404-1414 [The Memorials on the History of Lvov from the Archive of the City, 1404-1414]*, ed. A. Czołowski, Lvov, 1896, p. 15. The author expresses kind thanks to Prof. Alexander Osipian for the references and relevant suggestions about the origin of Taiapetra.

⁶³ In modern times, this became a conventional ending of many Ukrainian surnames.

stations and nomadic Tatars), and Asia Minor. The fifteenth century is precisely the era of Armenian penetration and commercial expansion into Eastern Europe. Besides their high geographic mobility, Armenians were more often employed as translators than anyone else in these regions. The fact that the family of Taiapetra resided in Venetian Tana by the early fifteenth century (and actually acquired a Latin cognomen), while at the same time one of the members lived in Lvov, does not seem confusing at all given the tremendous mobility of Armenians. Thus, positing an Armenian origin for an Italianized and Catholicized group whose family business was being interpreters, and which enjoyed the advantages of the demand for multilingual subjects in a flexible and mobile society, seems the most realistic explanation⁶⁴.

In the later deeds of Pietro Pellacan (1440s-1450s) one also finds some persons who had been living in Tana as early as the 1430s. Constantine de La Chustiza⁶⁵ was a *stipendiarius* in 1436. He was a Greek; among the deeds of Pellacan there is a unique deed drafted in Latin, but with a Greek signature of said Constantine (with its Latin duplicate): «Κωστατης ο δε λα Βοτζιστα» and «Constantinus de la Chustizza» (one can find similar cases in Crete or Cyprus, but not in the Black Sea region)⁶⁶. Francesco Cornaro, a nobleman and merchant, was involved in the treasure-hunting venture of Barbaro in the 1430s. Although Barbaro mentions him as «deceased» as early as 1438, he appeared in Tana in 1445 with his brother, Giacomo⁶⁷. Caterina, wife of Giorgio Giustiniani, is mentioned in the 1410s⁶⁸ and in 1436⁶⁹; in 1451 she is reported as living in the Venetian citadel of Tana and as owning land nearby⁷⁰, which she had sold to Tatuli (see above), the local priest of St. Nicolas church (*ecclesia sancti Nicolai grecorum eiusdem loci Tane*)⁷¹. Tatuli, mentioned in the 1430s, was absent because in 1451 he left Tana for Trebizond, where the archbishop of Alania resided. Thus, Caterina was married and legally capable and wealthy between 1413 and 1419, and she lived at least until 1451,

⁶⁴ One should add that provided this was really one person, and by 1405 he was clearly an adult and a practicing interpreter, Borano must have been rather old (no less than fifty-five years) by the time of the events reported by Barbaro and by the time he appears in the deeds of the 1430s.

⁶⁵ ASV, *CI*, b. 231, f. 12r; ASV, *NT*, b. 750, f. 20v.

⁶⁶ S.P. Карпов, *Греки и латиняне в венецианской Тане (середина XIV – середина XV вв.)* [*Greeks and Latins in Venetian Tana, Mid Fourteenth-Mid Fifteenth Centuries*], in «Prichernomor'je v srednie veka», VII, 2009, p. 167.

⁶⁷ ASV, *CI*, b. 231, f. 01.

⁶⁸ Prokofieva, *Акты* [*The Acts*], cit., p. 137.

⁶⁹ ASV, *NT*, b. 750, f. 20v.

⁷⁰ Карпов, *Греки и латиняне* [*Greeks and Latins*], cit., p. 170.

⁷¹ Also in: ASV, *CI*, *Notai*, b. 148 2, n. 31, pp. 64-67.

presenting an outstanding example of longevity and business activity in the Middle Ages.

Thus, first, at least 11 persons out of the sample resided in Tana from the 1410s to the 1430s; six from the 1430s to the 1450s, and two from the 1430s to the 1450s. Second (provided the sample is representative in reflecting the quantitative correlation of groups), one can compare the percentages of the ethnic and religious groups in each decade. The key factor for identification here is confessional affiliation, so we have six groups: Latins (Catholics either coming from the West or local converts; neither a Latin personal name or a Latin family name is absolute evidence of a Western origin), Greeks (all professing Greek Orthodox Christianity), Armenians (all belonging to the Armenian Gregorian Church), Muslims, and Jews⁷². Mostly, our deeds mention Latins. However, there is a discrepancy among the percentages of Latins and Greeks (including Orthodox Tatars) in the overall sample and this group of «old residents». For the whole sample, Greeks are 4.95% (one can possibly add at least some of the Tatars, 3.63%, most of whom were Christians). The group of «old residents» were 4 in total (24%) – 2 from the 1410s to the 1430s (18%), and 2 from the 1430s to the 1450s (33%). The figures seem to be realistic, which means that among the permanent population the Latins were around three-quarters, and Greeks and Tatars – around one quarter. This is a strong contrast with the data of the overall sample (all the persons mentioned in the deeds). This demonstrates that the deeds reflect the group of Latins better than other groups, but this also shows that in reality the locals *within* the trading station were much more numerous than earlier thought. On the one hand, the locals (especially Greeks) were surely more active, wealthy, and engaged in commerce than previous historians assumed. On the other hand, the locals were mostly merchants. Therefore, it is likely that statements about a decline in the number of Greek merchants because of the activity of the Italians⁷³ and the impoverishment of the Black Sea towns because of the Italians' international trade⁷⁴ deserve reconsideration.

⁷² On Jewish usurers in Venice see: R.C. Mueller, *Les prêteurs juifs de Venise au Moyen Age*, in «Annales. Économies, sociétés, civilisations», XXX, 1975, pp. 1277-1302; Id., *The Jewish Moneylenders of Late Trecento Venice: A Revisitation*, in «Mediterranean Historical Review», X, 1995, pp. 202-217.

⁷³ A. Laiou-Thomadakis, *The Byzantine Economy in the Mediterranean Trade System, Thirteenth-Fifteenth Centuries*, in «Dumbarton Oaks Papers», XXXIV-XXXV, 1980-1981, p. 211.

⁷⁴ С.Р. Карпов, *Итальянская торговля в Трапезунде и ее воздействие на экономику поздневизантийского города [Italian Trade in Trebizond and Its Impact on the Economy of the Late Byzantine City]*, in «Vizantijskij Vremennij», XLIV, 1983, p. 85.

Parish life. In the first half of the fifteenth century there were several Catholic churches in Tana. Seemingly, the church of St. Mark⁷⁵, which existed at the beginning of the fifteenth century or even earlier⁷⁶, was the only one located inside the Venetian trading post. The church of St. Mary and St. Anthony⁷⁷, which controlled the *scuola*, existed at the beginning of the fifteenth century⁷⁸, as did the church of St. Francis, also located in the Genoese quarter⁷⁹. Such «religiosity» among the Genoese leads me to certain reflections. There is some additional evidence that the Genoese quarters were more «religiously attractive» than the Venetian ones. Firstly, as mentioned above, most of the churches (at least two Latin, one Greek, and possibly one Armenian) were situated within the Genoese trading station. Secondly, Venetians hardly ever paid any attention to their «national» church of St. Mark, while the mentions of the Genoese churches (offerings, requests for burial, requests for masses and prayers, etc.) are frequent. The church of Sts. Mary and Anthony was especially popular; also, fair amounts of money were given «for the mass of St. Gregory». A popular figure as a «religious expert» was Friar Antonio de Leonardo Zerdone, who lived in the Genoese quarter and had a house there; the fact that he, being a mendicant⁸⁰, had a wife in Venice⁸¹ did not seem to perplex anyone. Fra Antonio de Lunardo Zerdone was for some unknown reason a highly respected person. Thus, a will of a Genoese, Nicoloxio de Portu, son of Pietro Antonio (deceased), was drafted in the house of Fra Antonio, who is especially called *venerabilis*⁸². In theory, this honorific could have been used for any of the priests mentioned, but as one can see, only Fra Antonio enjoyed this privilege.

Thirdly, and most surprisingly, in their wills many Venetians asked to be buried in the church in the Genoese quarter. One of them even specifically mentions his donation to be given to the Genoese friars⁸³. One Venetian *stipendiarius* (a native of Parma) also asked to be buried in the church located

⁷⁵ ASV, NT, b. 917, ff. 5-6, 7; b. 750, ff. 7, 21r-21v, 26r, 27r, 28r-28v, 29v, 30r-30v, 30v-31r.

⁷⁶ Prokofieva, *Акты* [*The Acts*], cit., doc. 131, 133.

⁷⁷ ASV, NT, b. 917, ff. 2-3; CI, b. 231, ff. 5r-5v; NT, b. 750, ff. 7, 8, 19v(4)-20r, 20r-20v, 22r, 24r-24v, 25r, 26r, 30r-30v, 30v-31r.

⁷⁸ Moretto Bon, *notaio in Venezia, Trebisonda e Tana (1403-1408)*, cit., prot. 2, doc. 37, p. 46; Prokofieva, *Акты* [*The Acts*], docc. 133, 135, 141; ASV, NT, b. 750, ff. 19v-20r, 20r-20v; ASV, NT, b. 917, f. 4. The churches of St. Mary and St. Anthony (and probably other churches) had factories; perhaps for the production of candles.

⁷⁹ ASV, NT, b. 750, ff. 8, 22r, 24r-24v, 29v.

⁸⁰ ASV, CI, b. 231, ff. 5v-6r.

⁸¹ ASV, NT, b. 750, ff. 6-6v.

⁸² ASV, NT, b. 750, f. 4.

⁸³ ASV, NT, b. 750, ff. 19r(3)-19v(4).

in the Genoese quarter⁸⁴. A Circassian, Sudon, son of the deceased Tokars, bequeathed 10 bezants to the Venetian church of St. Mark and 30 bezants to the Church of St. Francis in the Genoese quarter⁸⁵. Antonellus from Parma asked in his will to be buried in the church of St. Mary in the Genoese quarter⁸⁶ (surely he had in mind the frequently mentioned Genoese church of St. Mary and St. Anthony)⁸⁷. However, the deteriorating relations between the citizens of these two trading republics were sometimes reflected in their religious life. A certain Giovanni asked to be buried inside the Genoese church choir, to which he offered a donation in his will. However, if the Genoese did not wish to bury him there, he wanted to be buried in the usual place for Venetians, and bequeathed money to the Venetian church of St. Mark in Tana⁸⁸. Still, what was the cause of such unpatriotic behaviour by the Venetians (who often ignored the church of St. Mark in their wills)? And why were the Genoese churches and clergy so popular? This is a problem I cannot solve based on the available sources.

Benedictine monasteries existed in Caffa and Tana, and both Franciscans (Antonio Pelizario)⁸⁹, and Dominicans (another Friar Antonio, *dell'ordine dei Predicatori*)⁹⁰ often appear in fifteenth-century documents. The very presence of the Dominicans as well as a considerable number of churches and clergy are clear evidence of active missionary work. However, evidence is lacking for their proselytizing activities and Latinization of the locals in this period (see below). This is another question that remains open.

In addition to the donations to churches in Tana and other places, and private donations for masses, to the priests and the laity, there were frequent orders to spend some (often quite large) amounts of money on charity. It could be donations just for the poor (*dispensentur in pauperibus*)⁹¹, for orphans (*in pauperibus orphanis*)⁹², on the charitable distribution of bread, wine, and meat to the poor (*helemosina de pane, vino et carnibus pauperibus*)⁹³, on a pilgrimage on behalf of the soul of the testator (*mitatur ad sanctum Antonium in Viena pro anima mea; detur uni vel une qui vadet ad Sanctem Franciscum de*

⁸⁴ ASV, NT, b. 750, ff. 20r-20v.

⁸⁵ ASV, NT, b. 750, f. 29v.

⁸⁶ ASV, NT, b. 750, ff. 20r-20v.

⁸⁷ ASV, CI, b. 231, ff. 6v, 7r, 7v; ASV, NT, b. 750, f. 8.

⁸⁸ ASV, NT, b. 917, f. 4.

⁸⁹ ASV, NT, b. 750, f. 28r.

⁹⁰ Prokofieva, *Акты* [*The Acts*], cit., docc. 130, 131, 133, 146, 151, 152.

⁹¹ ASV, NT, b. 750, f. 2.

⁹² ASV, NT, b. 750, ff. 3-3v.

⁹³ ASV, NT, b. 750, ff. 7, 30v-31r, 31r bis.

*Sisio; ad sanctum Iacobum in Galizia*⁹⁴, one testator also asked for a pilgrimage to Rome⁹⁵), to the ill and needy (*in pauperibus infirmis*)⁹⁶, for the poor of the hospice of St. Lazarus in Venice (*in pauperibus Sancti Lazari*)⁹⁷, or to poor orphans and girls of marriageable age (*in pauperibus egenis orphanis et virginibus maritandis*)⁹⁸. In addition, some of the testators did not restrict themselves to the conventional mass «to St. Mary and St. Gregory». One of them commanded the celebration of five masses to different saints (the Holy Apostle James, John the Baptist, St. John Chrysostom, Anna, and Susanna)⁹⁹. Sometimes, the donations of money, movable property, and real estate were made in compensation for evil things done (*pro male ablatiis, per mal tolesto*¹⁰⁰, sometimes this formula could be expanded: *pro male ablatiis et acquisitis si forte acquisivissem seu pro anima mea illorum a quibus talia acquisivissem tempore vite mee*¹⁰¹), or merely for prayers for the soul of the testator without any particular motivation¹⁰².

All of the testators clearly distinguish between the amount given to a notary for his work (and in such cases he is referred to in an impersonal way: *notarius suprascriptus*) and the amount given to him to pray for the soul (in this case his notarial position remains unmentioned, but his priesthood and personal relationship with the testator are emphasized: *domino presbytero Nicolao, patrino meo, ut oret Deum pro anima mea*). It is interesting that 10 [*sic*] testators (consequently, residents or visitors to the trading station) mention Varsis as their godfather¹⁰³ (two more called the Genoese monk Solomon Teremo «godfather»)¹⁰⁴. The cases when the two endowments were connected (in this case it is still stipulated that one amount is given for the compilation of the deed and another for the prayers and masses), probably represent visiting people. Interestingly, an oath is sometimes inserted in the notarial act. Baldassare, the son of the deceased Marco from the parish of St. Peter de Castello, vows: *Deus sit non tetegi unum asprum et pro dicta societate expendi multos denarios ut apparet aliquibus scripturis*¹⁰⁵.

⁹⁴ ASV, NT, b. 750, ff. 7, 20r-20v, 27r-27v, 27v-28r.

⁹⁵ ASV, NT, b. 750, ff. 27r-27v.

⁹⁶ ASV, NT, b. 750, ff. 19r(3)-19v(4), 26r; NT, b. 750, f. 8.

⁹⁷ ASV, NT, b. 750, ff. 19r(3)-19v(4), 26r.

⁹⁸ ASV, NT, b. 750, ff. 26r-26v.

⁹⁹ ASV, NT, b. 750, f. 22r.

¹⁰⁰ ASV, NT, b. 750, ff. 23v-24r, 27r-27v, 28r-28v, 44v-45r.

¹⁰¹ ASV, NT, b. 917, ff. 3-4.

¹⁰² ASV, NT, b. 750, ff. 19v(4)-20r.

¹⁰³ ASV, NT, b. 750, ff. 4, 18v-19r, 22v, 26r, 27r-27v, 29r, 29r bis, 30r-30v, 30v-31r, 31r.

¹⁰⁴ ASV, NT, b. 750, ff. 6-6v, 24r-24v.

¹⁰⁵ ASV, NT, b. 750, ff. 23v-24r.

In general, all the testators gave money for masses and the repose of their souls. Conversely, the decision not to give money for charity (despite the offer of the notary to do it) is specifically mentioned and attracts attention¹⁰⁶. Lorenzo de Giuliano declined the offer of Varsis to give charity money to him. However, in the text written in the vernacular, this testator, Lorenzo de Giuliano, actually bequeathed *more* than other testators. He declined a particular notary's proposal which was mentioned in the text. Even more interesting is that the testator demanded his will to be rewritten from the draft written by him ahead of time in the vernacular – word by word. Did he want to save money in this way (as it turned out, Varsis got only one ducat instead of the conventional 3 or 4)? Or did he wish to make the document more understandable? Of particular interest is the fact that Lorenzo left money for masses to St. Gregory and the Madonna, but explicitly insisted that they should be celebrated by a certain Messir Toma Lo Piova and not by Varsis. Did this mean that the moral standing of the notary was dubious, or simply that in 1454 Varsis did not hold the office of chaplain in Tana and was unable to do it for technical reasons? The following issue makes the question even more intricate: at the end of *imbreviatura* there is no mention of the place where the will was drafted, and on the manuscript the *datum* after the *indiction* is corrupted. To confuse things even more, Lorenzo de Giuliano reproduces the entire Latin notarial formula *Residuum vero* in the vernacular. Did this mean that he was legally educated to some extent, or at least aware of the notarial practice?

Gender, marriage, «parents and children», inheritance. As for regional connections, I noticed that many testators showed a considerable attachment to some part of Italy or Romània outside Tana, even though it is hard to trace this with any regularity (besides the obvious attachment of the Venetians to their parishes). Many notaries' clients bequeathed funds to send some belongings or money to their fatherland, to their relatives (to Venice, or to the area of Italy from which they originated). For the majority, the ties with their home were much stronger and more important than the ties with Tana¹⁰⁷. A clear piece of evidence is that many (if not most) of the women mentioned in the deeds are non-Latins. This surely did not mean that this society was more «male» than any other; in fact, most often, the Venetians had concubines – either slaves, or «temporary» wives. Venetian deeds call such a temporary wife by the Russian word *kuma*. Such a woman was a concubine of an inhabitant

¹⁰⁶ ASV, NT, b. 750, f. 44r; ASV, NT, b. 917, f. 8.

¹⁰⁷ As was shown above, many of the permanent residents of Tana were non-Latins.

of the factory; there was a special contract and legal framework for these connections. The phenomenon of *kuma* was widespread in Latin Romania¹⁰⁸. Most of the Venetians coming to the trading station as *ballistarii*, merchants or sailors were young single men: almost 50% of the total number of deeds includes the formula *interogatus a notario infrascripto de postremis respondi non habere uxorem neque filios*. However, local women (Greek, Tatar, and those from the Caucasus) were always at the disposal of Westerners. Many inhabitants of the trading stations had illegitimate children either from their slaves or from their «temporary wives». The deeds often mention adoptive children¹⁰⁹; most likely this was a loophole to make the illegitimate sons and daughters to full-fledged members of the society. The topic of mixed marriages is of particular interest as well¹¹⁰, and here one finds nearly all kinds of combinations among the representatives of the different ethnic groups.

The deeds of Niccolò Varsis contain an interesting and quite eye-catching case on the problem of «fathers and children», as well as on the problems connected with inheritance. A certain Bartolomeo de Serigo (his family name connects him somehow with the silk production or trade) from the parish of St. Apostles ordered that his wife should be given her dowry back immediately after the death of her husband and that she should govern and manage all his property on behalf of her underage son¹¹¹. Here, the problem of relations across generations arises. Had Bartolomeo not felt doubt about the future good behaviour of his son, Federico, he would have bequeathed him his property without any conditions, as all other testators did. He would not have insisted and twice stressed in the documents that if his son misbehaved or did not obey his mother he would be disinherited. The words of Federico's will testify indirectly that his sibling had already shown his obstinate character. How could Venetian sons annoy their fathers? Based on the available material one can only ask this question, but not answer it.

The order of inheritance at the trading station generally followed Venetian laws and customs, and one can generally reconstruct it based on the deeds. This order is quite uncomplicated. If a testator owned considerable property (including real estate), he bequeathed it by distributing his funds among his closest relatives (wife, children, parents, brothers, sisters), companions, close friends, or otherwise partially gave it to the church or charitable institutions.

¹⁰⁸ S.P. Karpov, *Mixed Marriages in a Polyethnic Society: Case Study of Tana, 14th-15th Centuries, in Tolerance and Repression in the Middle Ages. In Memory of Lenos Mavrommatis. Int. Symposium 10, Athens, Nov. 1998*, Athens, 2002, pp. 207-214.

¹⁰⁹ ASV, NT, b. 750, f. 44v.

¹¹⁰ Karpov, *Mixed Marriages*, cit., pp. 207-214.

¹¹¹ ASV, NT, b. 750, f. 44v.

The direct and indirect lines of inheritance are equally present, and the indirect line sometimes even seems to prevail; as was mentioned above, most of the visitors to the trading station were single young men, and if they did not have a concubine and illegitimate children in Tana they could not bequeath their belongings to their direct descendants. In the cases of more or less wealthy testators, their deeds seem to be more expanded and detailed.

In other cases, the testators do not seem to own much. If the property was not considerable (no real estate, small sums of money), or otherwise if the testator had one apparent heir and did not intend to divide or distribute his property, the scheme was as follows: the testator briefly mentioned all the money he had lent or borrowed, all debts to be paid, small sums of money to freedmen or gifts to a few friends, charitable endowments, etc.; after that, by the formula *Residuum vero* he bequeathed all other property (not specified, therefore one cannot estimate it) to the one main heir or (and this is a clear indication of a poor person) to his *fideicommissarius*.

Some personal belongings (clothes, weapons, household utensils) could be bequeathed personally to the notary, to the priests of the trading station, to friends. Testators often took care to secure that the heiresses received their dowries (*pro suo maritare*), but most often this is done under the condition that she would marry. Occasionally, a testator's wife received some part of the inheritance under certain conditions as well – various obligations to the children or the parents of the testator. In the cases when the part of the inheritance was to be received under certain conditions, his *fideicommissarius* received the license to govern the property in the meantime. He could give it to the heirs (including the relatives of the testator) in parts after they fulfilled the requirements, refuse if they failed to, and so on¹¹².

To summarize, one may say that although it is sometimes impossible to rely on the formal describers doing research in the field of social history, it is still possible to find indirect ways of researching the social structure, social differentiation, and stratification of the society.

Although the describers defining one's high or low social standing were used by the notary sporadically and inconsistently, based on the frequencies of mentions of certain people and contacts among them we can infer that the society of Tana was fairly rigidly ranked. There was room for social mobility, but those who were on the top surely had better chances.

Geographical mobility was high, but apparently there were some families closely linked to the colony and were what we may call «domiciled in Tana» or «permanent population». Most Venetians, however, belonged to the renewed

¹¹² ASV, NT, b. 750, f. 8.

population that visited the colony for commercial purposes in the navigation season.

Parish and network connections were key factors building the social ties. Sometimes, surprisingly, the Genoese clergy received in the testaments more attention from the testators than the Venetian clergy did. Further, I concluded that a big part of the Venetian population were bachelors (almost 50% of the total number of deeds includes the formula *interrogatus a notario infrascripto de postremis respondi non habere uxorem neque filios*), and studied forms of domestic partnership and an eye-catching problem of «fathers and children». To sum up, this social reality was objective; the social stratification correlated with the distribution of wealth and property; it was a money-oriented, stabile, corporate society serving the interests of commerce.