

ne di tali privilegi, sebbene determinasse una parziale erosione dei diritti sovrani dei principi che li concedevano ai veneziani, creava le condizioni per il libero commercio e una più generalizzata diffusione dei beni provenienti dall'Oriente in Europa e viceversa⁵⁶. Non mancavano ovviamente i casi di conflitto fra i mercanti e i singoli ufficiali portuali e doganali, nonostante la precisa regolamentazione degli scambi in base ai trattati commerciali. In tutti i casi però il mutuo interesse nel mantenimento delle condizioni favorevoli ai rapporti economici portava alla risoluzione pacifica e sollecita delle contese, un'ulteriore prova della forza della diplomazia veneziana.

Abstract

Throughout the Middle Ages the Venetian economy was foreign to the feudal system of land exploitation through agriculture. As early as the 9th century the Venetians held commercial relations with the Eastern Mediterranean. Venice increased its political and economic importance investing in shipping and in distribution of goods within the mainland. At the beginning of the 13th century Venice reached the peak of its power, dominating the trade relations between Europe and Asia. The progressive consolidation of its economic power and of its commercial importance was the result of a long process based on a number of concessions granted by the various rulers who controlled the coasts of the Mediterranean (Byzantine emperors, kings of Jerusalem, sultans of Cairo, Arab princes of the Maghreb). With alliances, conquests or concessions obtained through diplomatic channels, Venice created a number of commercial settlements scattered throughout the Eastern Mediterranean, linked together by a network of communication lines and controlled directly by the Venetian authorities. The economic and social interests of the Venetian society emerged through their aspirations negotiated with their counterparts, while the extent of the granted privileges revealed the diplomatic importance of Venice in the geographical context where each treaty was discussed. Initially the concessions offered free access to ports and tax exemptions for the commercial activity throughout the coasts of the Eastern Mediterranean. However, where a more numerous Venetian community was created, the treaties would start containing articles regarding the government of justice and of the local Venetian property. In this way, rather than by military operations, Venice managed to acquire the almost absolute control of the trade routes from the lagoon to the most important centres of trade in the Eastern Mediterranean, conveying the circulation of material goods, knowledge and human resources.

Parole chiave: Mediterraneo orientale; trattati commerciali; Impero bizantino; musulmani; Crociati.

Keywords: Eastern Mediterranean; commercial treaties; Byzantine empire; muslims; Crusaders.

⁵⁶ Laiou, *Monopoly and privileged free trade*, p. 525.