

Abstract

At the turn of the fifteenth century, the Senate was the center of Venetian foreign politics and one of the most important bodies of government. The records of the Senate constitute a discrete register of political communication, but they have not been studied in their own right, in the sense of unlocking the manner of their expressions as opposed to the factual data they contain. Scholars have pointed out that official responses and decisions were worded specifically to hide discord and minimize evidence of disagreements among patricians to erase any impression of a fragmented ruling class. Yet, there are instances where the presentation of several competing motions offers a glimpse of how the delivery of information took place. Detective work on telling passages shows that there were a number of strategies—sarcasm, dramatization, emotional appeals—that were part of discussions. Even though much work has been done on Venetian foreign policy and diplomacy, a more accurate understanding of what happened behind closed doors, of how in-group talk was articulated and stage-managed, is still missing.

The examples I will develop in my paper are part of a larger project studying the communicative strategies in Senate politics that had Albania as focus. Between 1396 and 1412, Venice held and lost control of a number of Albanian cities. Discussions over the affair show the communication tactics used by patricians in the Senate when they talked about what could be done with those cities and their local lords. Ultimately, my paper will invite a reading of State documents by which official gatherings may be conceived not only with the seriousness and gravity that the so-called “myth of Venice” has bestowed upon them, but also keeping in mind the numerous layers of cross-communication and strategies that made an intervention in the Senate a successful one.