

The Venetian *Relazioni* from England: a small republic looks at the kingdom that becomes an Empire

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The *Relazioni* of the Venetian ambassadors from England cover three centuries, from 1489 to 1763, just few years before the end of the *Serenissima*. A wide range which allows to see how the continental idea of England changes, from the specific point of view of a small republic – that by the end of the 16th century had lost the majority of its oriental colonies – that had a political regime different but with some analogies with the parliamentary monarchy of England and that in these centuries suffered a decadence directly proportional to the rise of the English Empire.

I propose to analyze two main aspects. First, the style: they are not written following the taste of the ambassadors; they are a specific literary genre. There is, for example, a manuscript guide in Venice's archive about how to write a good *Relazione* and, especially from the second half of the 16th century, these texts begin to have a wide diffusion not limited to the Senate for which they were originally conceived: other diplomats (venetian and not), bishops and cardinals in order to have news from the schismatic isle and curious people for whom these texts are a source similar to the modern infotainment. For all these reasons from a stylistic perspective the *Relazioni* constitute a genre hard to define but with some regularities.

The second and main aspect on which I intend to focus is the continental idea of England that emerges from these documents. It is fascinating to see how a Republic which was slowly dying regarded a kingdom that was gradually becoming the dominant empire, shifting the axe of power from Europe to the Ocean and founding its power on commerce and finance rather than on military force. Venetian ambassadors understood this evolution – that incarnates the new *Zeitgeist* – before others, because they had been a people of merchants before the English were, they had founded their city's strength and reputation especially on trade before the English did, and they also had adopted an anti-absolutistic regime before the English did.

My contribution wants to portray the continental idea of England by the perspective of a loser who shares with the winner some peculiar traits.

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