

Places in Shakespeare: Belmont and thereabouts

by Dr Noemi Magri

The purpose of the present paper is to show that Belmont is a real place, though differently called in Italian: its identification has been made possible by the precise geographical information and a specific historical reference given in the play: it is not geography of the imagination, and the historical allusion refers to a contemporary event: it is not Shakespeare's creation.

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Florence, Venice and Belmonte are the settings of Novella 1, IV in *Il Pecorone*, a collection of stories written by Ser Giovanni Fiorentino in 1378 and first published in Milan in 1558.

The Novella is generally considered to be the major source of *The Merchant of Venice*. No English translation of the Novella is known and various verbal parallels show that Shakespeare knew the Italian original.

In the Italian story, Belmonte is simply described as 'a beautiful port' ("uno bellissimo porto") on the Adriatic coast. Giannetto, the main character, on a voyage to the port of Alexandria, lands at Belmonte after several days' navigation from Venice ("navigando più e più di", 'navigating for days and days') having been attracted by the beauty of the place. And there, he will meet the rich Lady of the Port and will fall in love with her. After many vicissitudes, he will win her heart.

Shakespeare simplifies the Italian story and sets the play in Venice and Belmont: two places much closer to each other than in the Novella. Shakespeare retains the flesh-bond, the lady's disguise (as a lawyer in *The Merchant of Venice*, as a judge in the Novella) and the interchange of the ring, and adds the casket scenes with Portia's suitors.

Where was Belmont ?

The various attempts to identify Shakespeare's Belmont have brought tentative conclusions. In the second half of the XVI century, there were eight 'Belmonte' in Italy but none of them is a port.¹

Some commentators² take 'Belmont' as a variation of 'Montebello' but there were 15 places called 'Montebello'³ and none of them fits the description in *The Merchant of Venice* as to distances and surroundings, so the problem remains.

Any possible identification of Belmonte in the story does not help either because of the distance from Venice. The name Belmont is in the source and Shakespeare has kept it as it is: he only varied the spelling by omitting the final -e in the Italian name.

Instead, the point is which place Shakespeare had in mind for Portia's residence.

The geographical details

The action of *The Merchant of Venice* develops between Venice, Padua (though off-stage) and Belmont, an unidentified place in the mainland.

Act 3. At Belmont. After Bassanio has chosen the right casket, there comes the news of the shipwreck of Antonio's cargoes. At this point, the events follow rapidly: at once Bassanio marries Portia and Gratiano Nerissa, and the two gentlemen hasten away to Venice to save Antonio.

Portia immediately works out a plan: she dispatches Balthazar "in speed" to Padua with the instruction to get "notes and garments" from her cousin Doctor Bellario and bring them "with imagin'd speed / Unto the tranect to the common ferry / Which trades to Venice" (3.4.47-54).

In history, the people who travelled from Padua to Venice and back used to take a ferry to cross the lagoon. It was not a private or hired boat but a regular conveyance, a "common ferry" Shakespeare calls it, "which trades to Venice", that is, which traverses the lagoon habitually, back and forth. The ferry was taken at Fusina, also called Lizza Fusina, at the mouth of the river Brenta.

The distance between Padua and Fusina is about 20 miles⁴: an important detail for the identification of Belmont.

Lorenzo's words reveal that Portia's residence is on a river: "How sweet the moonlight sleeps upon this bank!" (5.1.54).

It is significant that most commentators agree that Belmont must be somewhere on the Brenta between Padua and Fusina⁵, thus recognizing Shakespeare's knowledge of Venetian social history.⁶

River Brenta

Why on the Brenta and not on one of the many other navigable waterways flowing in the Venetian mainland?

In the XVI century, the Venetian nobility and rich merchants had started to invest their money in farms in the mainland more than in mercantile trade: this was due to the growing competition of foreign trade in the Americas. At the same time they built residences on the banks of the Brenta: there, the climate was particularly pleasant. In a few years, gardens and parks were planned, and the villas built in imitation of the Quattrocento or early Renaissance palaces on the Grand Canal became small courts where the nobility used to invite literary men, musicians, companies of players as they were used to do in their city palaces.

For this reason, the Brenta was called 'the continuation of the Grand Canal', 'la continuazione del Canal Grande'.⁷

Belmont is a place of poetry, of the sweet music of the spheres, of classical literature: it recalls one of the small Venetian courts on the Brenta. Shakespeare gives a clue to the exact distance between Belmont and Venice.

'Twenty miles to-day'

In Act 3, after Bassanio and Gratiano have left, Portia says to Nerissa that they will soon see their husbands. She says, "my coach [...] stays for us / At the park gate, and therefore haste away / For we must measure twenty miles to-day" (3.4.82-4).

"We must measure twenty miles to-day" is the key-phrase to the identification of Belmont.

What has Portia devised to do? At this point of the play the audience or the reader only knows that she and Nerissa will go to Venice and that they will be disguised as men. The audience does not know what her plan is, but Portia does and Shakespeare does: disguised as a lawyer, Portia will go to Antonio's trial in Venice, and, soon after, she will speed back to Belmont.

She does not intend to spend the night in Venice or come back to Belmont the following day. It is essential for her to be back before the arrival of Bassanio and the others. In fact, as soon as the case has been decided, she leaves the trial scene in haste, refuses Bassanio's invitation to dinner at Antonio's house, dispatches Nerissa to Shylock's house to make him sign the deed, and says to her, "we'll away to-night" (4.2.2).⁸

It is unquestionable that she will travel from Belmont to Venice and back in one day. Therefore, when she says, "we must measure twenty miles to-day" she already knows where she is going, so she is not referring only to her outward journey to Venice but also to the return trip, that is, she means to refer to the total distance she will have to travel that day in order to go to Venice and back.

The phrase "twenty miles to-day" has led the commentators to believe that Belmont lies 20 miles from Venice.⁹ If so, in one day Portia should have travelled 40 not 20 miles to Venice and back. And it was a journey by coach and boat. Moreover, she was present at the trial at the law courts: in those times, it would have been hardly possible to do all this in one day.¹⁰

Instead, Shakespeare's specification of the distance, - "we must measure twenty miles to-day"-, indicates that 20 miles is the total distance Portia had to travel that day: ten miles to get to Venice and ten miles to get back to Belmont: 20 miles altogether, which is a possible distance to cover in one day by coach and boat, and this is confirmed by the stage action itself.

It may be objected that Shakespeare may not have given much attention to actual distances and length of journeys.¹¹ This may be true. But it is a fact that when he refers to the topography of Italy, Shakespeare always gives exact information, as will be seen. This 20-miles distance has not been chosen at random.

So, having Portia specified that she had to cover 20 miles that day, to Venice and back, there derives that Belmont is not 20 but 10 miles from Venice. Shakespeare worked out the exact distance, also knowing the actual length of the crossing of the lagoon.

In history, the crossing covered 5 miles; consequently, Belmont is situated 5 miles from Fusina. In a straight line the distance between Fusina and Venice is much shorter, but the ferry had to follow a winding route of navigable channels, between sandbanks and underwater streams: it moored at the Rialto where there was the post for the boats coming from Fusina. Shakespeare-Oxford knew all this.

'Monast'ry two miles off'

The following is another geographical detail. Before setting out, Portia entrusts Lorenzo with "the husbandry and manage" of the house 'until her lord's return', and says that in the meantime she and Nerissa will "live in prayer and contemplation", "there is a monast'ry two miles off / And there we will abide" (3.4.24-32).

Portia's retreat to a monastery will not take place: it is a stage device to allow her to be absent from Belmont and carry out her plan. For the Oxfordian authorship, this stage device, which the critics do not appear to have considered, is significant: Portia could have chosen a church as a suitable place for her prayers, but she does not. Here Shakespeare shows to be aware of the common

practice of Venetian gentlewomen to retire to a monastery or convent for short periods without necessarily intending to take vows and become nuns.

Thus, from the information given in the play, there should be a villa 10 miles from Venice with a monastery two miles away from the villa.

Villa Foscari

Research and investigation has shown that they did exist. At exactly 10 miles from Venice there was and is Villa Foscari, later called 'La Malcontenta', 'the Malcontent'.¹²

As to the monastery, two miles from Villa Foscari on the north side of the Brenta on the road to Fusina there was one, known as 'Ca' delle Monache', 'The Nuns' House'; on the south side of the river there was the famous benedictine Abbey and Monastery of St. Ilario.

It is possible to affirm that Belmont and the monastery in *The Merchant of Venice* find correspondence with real places in the Venetian mainland, and they have been identified through the detail of the 20-miles distance.

At this point it may be asked, 'why Villa Foscari and not another residence': there were many of them on the banks of the Brenta.

Villa Foscari was the country residence of one of the most illustrious aristocratic families of Venice. For many centuries the Foscari had held important offices and at the same time, like most patricians, they were engaged in trading and had accumulated a considerable fortune. Francesco Foscari was the Doge of Venice from 1423 to 1457.

In 1575 Villa Foscari was a unique architectural masterpiece. It had been designed by Andrea di Pietro della Gondola called Palladio (Padua 1508-Vicenza 1580) for Count Alvise Foscari.¹³

Early Palladian Villa

Soon after it was built in 1558, Villa Foscari became the destination of visitors. It was an innovative example of classical architecture, so different from all the other buildings on the Brenta. Rising on the bank of the most important waterway between Padua and Venice, it stood imposingly in the vast uninhabited area. It was the only building in the form of a temple with a hexastyle pronaos. (In 1575 it was the only villa on the Brenta at 10 miles' distance from Venice.)

In his treatise *I Quattro Libri dell'Architettura*, Palladio describes and illustrates his projects, including Villa Foscari. The plan is approximately square. The front door leads into a large room in the form of a cross: it is the hall. As for

most Venetian houses, the hall of Villa Foscari, too, extends from the front to the back of the house.

This villa will become the model of many others designed by Palladio himself and by Italian and foreign architects in the centuries to follow.¹⁴

A survey of the patrician residences on the Brenta built before 1575 may give an idea of the uniqueness of Villa Foscari. The villas are all in early Renaissance style: in the central part of the front, the three-light arched balustraded window lets the light into the hall. None of them is in classical style.

One detail in the play suggests that Shakespeare when writing *The Merchant of Venice* must have remembered what Villa Foscari looked like at night.

'The light . . . burning in my hall'

The people who travelled to the villa by boat disembarked right in the front where there was the landing, but those who travelled by coach or on horseback arrived at the back of the house where there was and is the road. The road is shown in an early XVI century ground-map of the area. (The map is now held in a private collection.)

We know that Portia and Nerissa return to Belmont late at night. On approaching, Portia says, "The light we see is burning in my hall" (5.1.89). She is likely to have travelled back by coach as on the outward journey. So now she is outside the house on the road in the park and she sees the light in the hall.

The hall of Villa Foscari has windows only in the wall overlooking the park and the road. The hall has no windows overlooking the river. If she had travelled back by boat, which is not likely, she could not have seen the light inside, unless the front door had been left open which is possible, but we know that she had her own coach ready at the park gate, not her boat at the landing.

Then a journey by boat would have taken her much longer time because at Fusina the boat was lowered into the lagoon or hauled up to the higher level of the Brenta by means of a complex mechanical device, called 'Carro', in use until 1615: the 'Carro' consisted in two slipways of wood and stone, one for the boats to be slipped down and the other for the boats to be pulled up by means of pulleys.

In Venetian palaces and in Palladio's villas, the most important room was the hall: in it the nobility entertained their guests with music, dances and performances of plays. It was undoubtedly lit up when the residents were there. It is possible that Shakespeare-Oxford chose to mention this detail of the light burning inside because he had been impressed by the beauty of the place in moonlight.

In Act 5, just before Portia's arrival, Lorenzo had said to Stephano, "bring your music forth into the air" (5.1.53), then follows the famous passage of the "sweet power of music". So the light may have been burning in the hall because the musicians were there.

By 1575, the inside of Villa Foscari was a work of art. All the rooms had been decorated with frescoes by Battista Franco and Gian Battista Zelotti showing episodes from Ovid's *Metamorphoses* and allegories.¹⁵

The monastery "two miles off" existed: it was known as 'Ca' delle Monache' or The Nuns' House: two annexes of it were still in existence in about 1940-50. Of the famous Benedictine Abbey of St. Ilario nothing remains today, only the name on old maps. The details above show that Shakespeare had real places in mind.

The historical event: Marquis of Montferrat at Villa Foscari

In the play there is a reference to an event which occurred at Belmont, and, in history, that event took place at Villa Foscari: therefore history confirms the identification of Belmont as Villa Foscari.

In Act 1, Nerissa, in reviewing Portia's suitors recalls "a Venetian (a scholar and soldier) that came hither in the company of the Marquis of Montferrat" (1.2.109-10). The Venetian gentleman is Bassanio, so a mention of him is consistent with the plot. But the allusion to the Marquis of Montferrat seems to be irrelevant: he is not one of the suitors and he is not one of the characters. Portia replies to Nerissa, "Yes, yes, it was Bassanio [...] I remember him well" (111-4), but Portia makes no mention of the Marquis of Montferrat: she appears to ignore him.

The commentators question that reference because historically the last Marquis of Montferrat, Gian Giorgio Paleologo, died in 1533: a long time before the writing of *The Merchant of Venice*. So this name had no relevance to an English audience or to a dramatist in the last decades of the century. What relevance could it have to Lord Oxford?

Montferrat was an Italian state that had no political relationship either with England or with the Venetian Republic. It was not involved in the wars in Flanders either, and it had no political influence or cultural importance in Renaissance Europe: it was not a centre of learning.

So, the mention of the Marquis of Montferrat seems to be completely out of place. Yet, here, on the basis of the two elements given in the name, Shakespeare shows to have a precise knowledge of Italian history: he defines this personage as a Marquis, the heraldic title being exact, then he makes him the Marquis of Montferrat, thus showing his

knowledge of Montferrat as a Marquisate. This historical allusion does not appear to have been made at random. However, no good reason has been found for it. But nothing is without sense in Shakespeare.

This detail of the visit of the Marquis of Montferrat to Belmont in *The Merchant of Venice* appears to have been suggested to Shakespeare-Oxford by an actual historical event of 1574 connected to the visit to Italy of Henry of Valois, Duke of Anjou, newly-elected King of Poland. The facts are the following.

On the news of the death of his 24-year-old brother, King Charles IX of France, Henry of Valois immediately left Poland to return to Paris. He took the route through Austria and Italy and arrived in Venice in July 1574. His visit was an event of extreme importance to the political affairs of such states as Spain, Savoy, Florence, Ferrara and Mantua.

The sovereigns of these states hoped to consolidate their rule over, or gain or regain possession of, various territories in Italy, through negotiation and alliance with the King. And they also feared that during the King's stay in Italy new coalitions were made.¹⁶ So, the event called to Venice princes, ambassadors, the Papal Legate and many Italian and foreign lords, all of them showing a disposition to a friendly relationship between one another.¹⁷

The celebrations organized by the Republic to entertain the King, the future Henry III of France, were so extraordinary that contemporary historians recorded them as an exceptional event of great splendour.¹⁸

Henri III at Villa Foscari

The King and his train were lodged at Ca' Foscari, the palace on the Grand Canal that was the town residence of Count Alvise Foscari, the owner of Villa Foscari on the Brenta.¹⁹

The king spent ten days in Venice in revelry and triumph. When he left the Doge and all the dignitaries accompanied him to Fusina where he took the Ducal boat to Padua, - the customary way to get to Ferrara and Mantua where the king was invited by the respective dukes, both present in Venice, to visit their court.

The Royal train travelled up the Brenta and stopped at Villa Foscari, the Palladian residence of Alvise Foscari, where King, ambassadors and lords had been invited to dinner. (A Latin inscription was placed above the front-door to commemorate the event.)

Among the illustrious guests there was the Duke of Savoy Emanuele Filiberto, the Duke of Nevers Ludovico Gonzaga, Henry Duke of Angoulême Grand Prior of France and half-brother of the King, the Duke of Ferrara Alfonso II d'Este.

There was also the Marquis of Montferrat.

It is true that the last Marquis had died in 1533, but in Shakespeare's time there was an Italian lord who bore the title of Marquis of Montferrat and in 1574 the Marquis of Montferrat was at Villa Foscari. And Shakespeare appears to have been acquainted with this historical fact.

Therefore, the visit of the Marquis of Montferrat to Belmont in *The Merchant of Venice* is not Shakespeare's invention: it finds its source in a real historical event. And even though the allusion may at first appear inconsistent with the plot, it becomes a relevant element to Oxfordian authorship on the basis of the historical evidence: the visit was a real event.

But who was the Marquis of Montferrat? He was Guglielmo Gonzaga, Duke of Mantua and Marquis of Montferrat (1538-1587), second son of Duke Federico II.²⁰

On the basis of documentary evidence it is possible to establish that the Marquis of Montferrat really was at Villa Foscari. This is a piece of Mantuan history. The many contemporary records and the correspondence held in the Archivio di Stato di Mantova (Public Record Office) have allowed tracing the Marquis's sojourn in Venice and the route he took to Mantua.

The Marquis arrived in Venice on Friday, 23rd July. On the 27th, he and the Royal train left from Ca' Foscari in the direction of Fusina. The King and the Doge in the Ducal boat, the Duke of Ferrara, the Duke of Nevers and the Marquis in a gondola. At Fusina everyone disembarked. The Doge returned to Venice and the others went as far as Villa Foscari.²¹

After dinner, the Royal train left for Padua. There, the group parted: the King went south to Rovigo and Ferrara, the Marquis proceeded westward to Este, Montagnana and Mantua. The route Venice-Padua-Este-Montagnana was not taken by the Marquis that day only: it was customary for travelling to Venice and back.²²

It may be doubted whether the Marquis stopped at another villa on the Brenta. On the basis of the records it has been possible to establish that he did not. The Royal train did, but after dinner the Marquis left with his own train and proceeded in haste to Padua and Montagnana²³: he wanted to be in Mantua as soon as possible in order to make the last preparations for the arrival of the King.²⁴

The King instead stopped at Villa Contarini called 'dei Leoni' where he had been invited by Giacomo Contarini²⁵, and arrived in Padua in the evening.²⁶

(The visit of the King was so important to the family that two centuries later, in 1750, their

descendants, Contarini-Pisani, had a fresco painted by Gian Battista Tiepolo to commemorate the event. The fresco has been removed and is now exhibited at the Jacquemart-André Museum in Paris.)

De Vere and Villa Foscari

The question whether De Vere saw Villa Foscari is easy to answer. People travelling from Padua to Venice or back, either by boat or coach, did have to pass the villa: the villa is situated on a bend, and boats have to slow down and sail around it. The road ran on one side of the river all along the bank.

One of De Vere's letters is dated from Padua 27 November 1575: in history, the visit of the Marquis of Montferrat took place on Tuesday July 27th, 1574, some 10 months before De Vere's arrival in Venice. De Vere had met King Henry III in Paris: from him or some French courtier he might have heard of the Foscari and the hospitality they had given to the King a few months before. Once in Venice, De Vere may have become associated with the aristocrats of the town: it was customary to foreign noblemen to visit or meet Italian rulers, nobles or any famous personages (literary men, artists, scientists) in the towns where they sojourned. In going to Padua De Vere passed Villa Foscari. The King himself had expressed his admiration for its charming location, the loggia and the beautiful park and the grove.²⁷

Villa Foscari was the only villa built on the Brenta at a distance of 10 miles from Venice before 1575. Two miles from the villa there was a monastery. The Marquis of Montferrat had recently been a guest at the villa: they are details too exact to be explained as coincidences. They could have been known only to someone who had travelled to Italy and to the Venetian State.

Belmont as Villa Foscari

To conclude, when writing or revising *The Merchant*, Shakespeare-Oxford may have meant to describe Villa Foscari and had in mind the Brenta with its villas, the lagoon and its ferry, and he wished to remember the Marquis of Montferrat Guglielmo Gonzaga Duke of Mantua, the ruler of one of the greatest centres of learning in Renaissance time.

Belmont is Villa Foscari.

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Notes

- 1 One in the North, in the province of Turin; four in Central Italy, in the provinces of Florence, Rieti, Ascoli Piceno, Campobasso; three in the South, in the provinces of Frosinone, Foggia, Cosenza.
- 2 E. Grillo, *Shakespeare and Italy*, p. 138. Lytton Sells, *Englishmen in Padua*, p. 4
- 3 Eight in the North, in the provinces of Alessandria, Pavia, Piacenza, La Spezia, Bergamo, Parma, Forli, Vicenza; six in Central Italy, in the provinces of Lucca, Florence, Viterbo, Perugia, Pesaro, Pescara; and one in the South, in the province of Reggio Calabria.
- 4 F. Moryson, *An Itinerary*, (1617) "In the spring of the yeere 1594, [...] I began my journey to see Italy, and taking boat at the East gate of Paduoa, the same drawne by horses along the River Brenta; and having shot two or three small bridges, and passed twenty miles, we came to the Village Lizzafusina", quoted in V.M. Jeffery, *Shakespeare's Venice*, p.33. M. Sanuto, *Itinerario*: "Liza Fusina [...] et qui è uno caro va di qua di la [...] et di qui a Padoa è mia 20", p. 22 (Trans. 'Lizza Fusina [...] and here a 'carro' goes up and down [...] and from here to Padua it is 20 miles').
- 5 V.M.Jeffery, p.31. H. Bridgewater, *Shakespeare and Italy*, p.7.S. Perosa, *Impressioni sul Veneto di Shakespeare in: Shakespeare a Verona e nel Veneto*, p. 20.
- 6 L. Simpson, *Shakespeare and Italy*, p. 91. Este, *Notes and Queries*, VII, 1959, p.336, reports that C.Armitage Brown in his *Autobiographical Poems of Shakespeare* mentioned "much minute correctness shown in Merchant of Venice".
- 7 T. Coryat, *Coryat's Crudities* : "When I passed down the river to Venice, I saw many goodly faire houses and palaces of pleasure on both sides of the River Brenta, which belong to the gentlemen of Venice" quoted in Jeffery, p. 28.
- 8 What Portia does in the meantime can be inferred from her announcement that Antonio's argosies are safe in harbour (5.1.275-9): at the same time when Nerissa goes on her errand, Portia manages to get the letter with the good news for Antonio. Here Shakespeare makes the play actions perfectly fit together at the right time.
- 9 E. Grillo, p. 138. V.M. Jeffery, p. 31. M.J. Levith, *Shakespeare's Italian Settings and Plays*, p.18.
- 10 In order to establish the distance that could be usually covered in one day by coach and boat in the Venetian State in those times, cfr. the correspondence held in the Archivio di Stato of Mantova, Archivio Gonzaga, (b.1507; b.1508) and D. Sogliani, *Le Collezioni Gonzaga. Il Carteggio tra Venezia e Mantova (1563-1587)*: in it there is evidence that in order to cover the 24 miles from Venice to Catajo Palace in Battaglia (south of Padua) by coach and boat it took a whole day.
- 12 The name derives from 'la fossa dei Malcontenti', 'the canal of the Malcontent people', built in 1431 in order to regulate the waters of the Brenta which had for years flooded the area. The inhabitants were so called owing to the repeated complaints submitted to the Government of the Republic.
- 13 Alvise Foscari (1521-1600) held the highest offices of the State. In 1595 he was balloted for Doge. In 1567, at the age of 46 he married Elisabetta Loredan, a young and highly cultivated gentlewoman, the granddaughter of the then Doge Pietro Loredan, 1567-70. Alvise Foscari's cultural involvement includes his appointment to Keeper of the 'Accademia degli Uniti', Academy of the United, the realization of his Palladian villa and the choice of two great artists of the time, B. Franco and G.B. Zelotti, to decorate the rooms of his villa. The Foscari family and its collateral branches were patrons not only of artists but also of theatre companies: in 1565, Pietro Foscari (1517-1581) had a theatre built in wood and papier mâché in the form of the 'Colosseo' by Andrea Palladio; the theatre was decorated with frescoes showing the 'histories of Joseph' by Federico Zuccari: it stood in the orchard at the back of Pietro's palace on the Grand Canal in the 'sestiere' (borough) of Santa Croce. Girolamo, Pietro's son, was 'Prior' of the theatre company called 'Compagnia degli Accessi' formed by young learned patricians. Palladio had planned the theatre for the performances of this company. Cfr. A.Foscari, *Ricerche sugli 'Accessi'* etc. 1979.
- 14 V. M. Jeffery, too, recognizes the uniqueness of Villa Foscari: "They [houses and palaces on the Brenta] were indeed worthy of mention, some, such as the Malcontenta, having been designed by Andrea Palladio", p. 28.
- 15 Battista Franco (Venice 1498-1561) studied in Rome. He was influenced by Michelangelo and Giulio Romano.
- 16 Philip II feared a league between France and Venice against Spain and the State of Milan, as revealed in the contemporary correspondence. Archivio di Stato di Firenze. Riformazioni. Carteggio Urbani, f. 2983. Letter dated 1 July 1574 (Trans.) "[...] various comments are made on this journey that the King is taking through Italy, and the Catholic [i.e.Spanish] Ambassador, more that everyone else, would like to find out the true reason, [...] it is not to believe that he [i.e.the King] makes it to see Italy and Venice in particular, now that so many important things are happening [...] it does not seem likely that this is the wish of His Majesty [...]". "[...] Intorno a questo camino che fa il Re per l'Italia passano diversi discorsi: e l'Ambasciatore Cattolico particolarmente è quello che pur vorrebbe andar investigando la vera cagione [...], e il pensare che ella lo faccia per vedere l'Italia e particolarmente Venezia, non par da credere che ora in questa occasione dove corrono tante importanti cose [...] possa essere pensiero di Sua Maestà [...]". Archivio di Stato di Modena.
Cancelleria Ducale. Carteggio di Monsignor Claudio Ariosti. Letter dated 11 July 1574. (trans.) 'the Ambassador did all possible thing to prevent the Venetians from making an alliance with the King'. "[...] avesse a fargli precipitare, a stringerli, massimamente con la presente occasione della venuta qua del Re di Francia, seco in qualche lega." Archivio di Stato di Modena. Cancelleria Ducale. Carteggio di Monsignor Claudio Ariosti. Letter dated 28 July 1574: The Duke of Nevers accused the Duke of Ferrara that (Trans.) 'during the various and confidential interviews that he [the Duke of Ferrara] had every day with His Majesty [King Henry III] he tried to diminish and belittle the expenses and triumphs that the Most Serene State [Venice] was trying to make in honour and glory of the mentioned Majesty' ["ne i diversi e famigliari ragionamenti che tenea alla giornata con S.M. cercava de indebolir et detrarre le spese et trionfi che il Ser.mo Dominio si sforzava di far in onor et gloria di detta Maestà"].
- 17 The Marquis of Ayamonte Governor of Milan invited the King there, and the Spanish Ambassador notified that King Philip II was ready to grant the French King safe passage through the State of Milan. The Republic of Genoa sent ambassadors to Venice in order to offer the King the passport and galleys for his return to France.

- 18 The many records, both in manuscript and in print, written in Italian, French and Latin, dated 1574 and onwards, are held in the Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris, in the Biblioteca Marciana and in the Biblioteca del Museo Correr, Venice, in the Biblioteca Universitaria, Padua, and in the British Library, London
- 19 The question of the accommodation for the King had been debated and voted by the Senate: after several ballots, the choice fell on the Palace of the Foscari because it was a most splendid residence and because Alvise Foscari was ready to meet the expenses for the hospitality of the King and his train.
- 20 The Marquisate of Montferrat had been inherited by the Gonzaga through the marriage of Federico II Duke of Mantua to Margherita Paleologo, daughter of Guglielmo VII Marquis of Montferrat. Margherita was related to the French King Francis I so the Gonzaga were related to the Royal House of France. Federico II married Margherita in 1531 and in 1536 Emperor Charles V authorized Federico to call himself 'Marquis of Montferrat'. The Gonzaga were related also to the Habsburg of Austria: Duke Francesco III (d. 1550), Federico II's elder son, had married Catherine, daughter of Emperor Ferdinand I (1556-64) and sister of Maximilian, later Emperor Maximilian II. In 1561, Duke Guglielmo Gonzaga Marquis of Montferrat, Francesco III's brother and successor, married Eleonor of Austria, Catherine's sister.
- 21 P. De Nolhac – A. Solerti, p. 157-8. Cfr. Relazione fatta al Senato nel giorno 29 luglio 1574 dal Doge Alvigi Mocenigo dei colloqui da lui tenuti col Re Enrico III di Francia et di Polonia nel tempo del suo soggiorno in Venezia, in: Due documenti inediti di Storia veneta del secolo decimosesto, a cura di Sebastiano Rizzi. Venezia. 1842, pp. 31-47.
- 22 See D. Sogliani, *Le Collezioni Gonzaga. Il Carteggio tra Venezia e Mantova (1563-1587)*. Cinisello Balsamo (Milano). 2002, pp.187-211.
- 23 Archivio di Stato di Mantova. Archivio Gonzaga, b. 1508, f. II, cc. 635-636. Letter of Ottavio Pietrasanta from Catajo [near Padua] to Castellano in Mantua dated 27 July 1574. "Hoggi sua maestà si parti di quella città per venir questa sera a Padova. Sua eccellenza, dopo haver desinato, s'invierà per quello che si dice alla volta di Montagnana ove si fermerà questa sera [...]". (Trans.): "[...] Today His Majesty has left from that town [Venice] in order to be in Padua in the evening. After dinner, His Excellency [Guglielmo Gonzaga, Marquis of Montferrat], as it has been notified, will leave for Montagnana where he will stay for the night [...]". Montagnana was one of the places where Guglielmo Gonzaga used to spend the night when travelling to or from Venice.
- 24 P. De Nolhac – A. Solerti, *Il Viaggio in Italia di Enrico III Re di Francia*, p. 172.
- 25 Giacomo or Iacopo Contarini of the Parish of San Samuele, a member of one of the many Contarini families in Venice, the Supervisor of the Fortresses in Venice, was the Venetian gentleman appointed by the Signory to make provisions for the security of the King throughout his sojourn in the Venetian State. He was also responsible for the building of the triumphal arch on the Lido. (The arch was designed by Palladio and Sansovino.)
On request of the King, who wished to know how elections were made, the 'Great Council' was summoned: at the presence of the Doge Alvise Mocenigo, the Signory, the Forty Judges of the Criminal Court, all the Senators, and the Italian and foreign dukes and ambassadors, Giacomo Contarini was elected Senator of the Republic. The King himself took part in the election by drawing the gold ball from the ballot-box.
- 26 P. De Nolhac – A. Solerti, p. 160.
- 27 P. De Nolhac – A. Solerti, p. 159 - 160.

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