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THE VENETIAN COMMUNITY IN BYZANTINE THEBES (1072–1204): A PROSOPOGRAPHICAL STUDY ¹

Gang Wu

Fudan University, Shanghai, People's Republic of China

Abstract. Thebes is among the best-documented Venetian colonies in Byzantium, with records dating back to 1072. While it is widely acknowledged that Venetians played a crucial role in the development of Byzantine Thebes, the details about the Venetian community of the city remain largely unexplored, which has hindered a deeper understanding of the true extent of the Venetian impact on Thebes. To address this scholarly gap, the article examines the community using Venetian documentary sources, focusing on the works of R. Morozzo della Rocca and A. Lombardo. The study adopted a prosopography methodology, reconstructing and analysing the biographies of individuals and families in groups. The investigation covers the community's leading families and individuals, as well as clergy and ecclesiastical establishments of special interest. Following this vein, the author of the article concludes with a more detailed picture of the Venetian community. It seems to have played a notable and persistent role in Thebes. Ecclesiastical establishments and the clergy constituted the basis of Venetian activities. Bolstered by reliable and sustainable sources of income, these institutions fulfilled the basic religious and administrative needs of the Venetian community. Apart from possible industrial and agricultural engagements, the community members predominantly emerge as active participants in commercial ventures, linking in particular to the renowned Theban silk textiles. While Venetians did form matrimonial and commercial alliances amongst themselves, their assimilation with the native Byzantine populace of the city seems to have been minimal.

Key words: Thebes (Boeotia), Venetian, prosopography, silk industry, da Molin, Voltani, Falier.

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ВЕНЕЦИАНСКАЯ ОБЩИНА В ВИЗАНТИЙСКИХ ФИВАХ (1072–1204 гг.): ПРОСОПОГРАФИЧЕСКОЕ ИССЛЕДОВАНИЕ ¹

Ганг Ву

Фуданьский университет, г. Шанхай, Китайская Народная Республика

Аннотация. Фивы являлись одной из венецианских колоний в Византии, наилучшим образом обеспеченных документальными свидетельствами, записи которых восходят к 1072 году. Хотя широко известно, что венецианцы играли решающую роль в развитии византийских Фив, подробности о венецианской общине города остаются недостаточно изученными. Это в значительной степени препятствует более глубокому пониманию истинного размаха венецианского влияния на Фивы. Восполняя этот пробел науки, статья представляет исследование городской общины, основанное на сохранившихся венецианских документальных источниках, в первую очередь опубликованных Р. Морозцо делла Рокка и А. Ломбардо. Выполненное исследование опирается на методологию просопографии, используемую для реконструкции и анализа биографий индивидуальных лиц и семейных групп. Изыскания охватывают занимавшие в общине лидирующие позиции семьи и лиц, а также вызывающих специальный интерес представителей духовенства и церкви. Следуя указанному направлению, автор статьи рисует более подробную картину венецианской общины.

Она, похоже, играла заметную и постоянную роль в Фивах. Церковные учреждения и духовенство составляют основу венецианской активности. Поддерживаемые надежными и устойчивыми источниками дохода названные институты восполняли основные религиозные и административные потребности городского общества. Помимо возможных ремесленных и сельскохозяйственных предприятий члены общины преимущественно проявляли себя в качестве активных участников в коммерческих акциях, в особенности связанных с известными фиванскими шелковыми тканями. В то время как венецианцы действительно заключали брачные и коммерческие союзы между собой, их ассимиляция с местным византийским населением города, кажется, оставалась незначительной.

Ключевые слова: Фивы (Беотия), Венеция, просопография, производство шелка, да Молин, Волтани, Фалье.

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Introduction. Venetians were attested as trading in Byzantium, especially from the 11th century onward [26, pp. 472-473]. As a result of this engagement, Venetian colonies were established across the empire, with Thebes (Boeotia) being among the most prominent ones. During this era, Thebes stood out as a prime example of the expanding urban economy in Byzantium [17, p. 635; 29, pp. 130-133; 49, pp. 476-477], largely owing to its prosperous silk industry. At its zenith, the Theban silk industry surpassed all its counterparts in other industrial centres within the empire and even overshadowed Constantinople [12; 43; 26; 45; 48; 51].

Although the impact of Venetians on Thebes' thriving economy has been generally acknowledged, there is a lack of in-depth research on the city's Venetian community². To address this gap, this article seeks to conduct a comprehensive study on the Venetian presence in Byzantine Thebes, aiming to explore several key questions: Who were the Venetians interested in Thebes? How did their community function and operate? Case studies on other Venetian colonies in Greece, such as Almyros and Sparta, have proved to be illuminating, providing valuable details into local societies and the broader Byzantine-Venetian interactions [19, pp. 239-248; 5]. With the better presence of Thebes than most other Venetian colonies in surviving sources, this study holds the promise of uncovering comparable or additional insights. Furthermore, Thebes' exceptional status as a centre of the silk industry adds significance to the study, whose conclusions could shed even more light on the industry's *modus operandi*, which remains inadequately

understood. Our investigation will encompass the years from the first attestation of Venetian presence in the city (1072) to the end of its Byzantine rule (1204).

Byzantine Thebes and Venetians. Thebes belonged to the theme of Hellas, which gradually joined with the Peloponnese into one integrated theme from the late 10th century onward [37, p. 22; 16, pp. 76-78; 18, p. 61]. During our research period, the joint theme of Hellas and Peloponnesos was administered by a civilian governor often referred to as a *praitor* while remaining under the supreme, though largely nominal, authority of the military governor *me gas doux* ([18, pp. 61-67; 30, p. 335]; cf.: [16, p. 77]). The theme's administrative centre was Thebes in the 10th century [8, pp. 90-93]. The role was possibly assumed by Athens in the first half of the 12th century [32, pp. 3-4, 21, 23], but shifted to Thebes and Euripos by c. 1200 [36, pp. 98*, 107-108; 20, pp. 129-131]. In terms of ecclesiastical administration, Thebes was the seat of its own metropolitan see. However, compared to neighbouring metropolises, including Corinth, Athens, and Naupaktos, it ranked far behind in the ecclesiastical hierarchy [9, pp. 361, 366]. This disparity could be indicative of Thebes having a relatively small population, estimated to be between 4000 and 5000 during the 12th century [42, pp. 96-97].

When it comes to the economy, Thebes and its surrounding Boeotia exemplified the ongoing economic expansion within the empire. Agriculture and pastoralism were certainly among the region's key economic sectors [11, p. 770; 12, pp. 56-57]. However, what truly set Thebes apart was its

flourishing silk industry. Starting from the 12th century, Thebes was increasingly known in literary sources as a prominent centre for the silk industry, a reputation corroborated by archaeological evidence [50, pp. 390-391; 51, pp. 71-72; 27; 33, pp. 635-637]. By c. 1110, Boeotia was already a major source of textiles presented at the annual St. Demetrios fair in Thessalonica, which attracted merchants across the Mediterranean [41, p. 54]. According to Niketas Choniates' (1155–1217), when Normans plundered Thebes in 1147, they took captive female weavers from the city [38, p. 74]. These weavers would have devoted themselves to silk weaving in Sicily for generations thereafter [38, p. 98]. Theban silk textiles and female weavers were praised by John Tzetzes (c. 1110 – the 1180s) in many of his literary outputs, including a letter addressed to his friend John Ismeniotēs in 1148, who sent him a Theban silk textile presumably derived from the aforementioned fair in Thessalonica [22, pp. 101-102]³. Benjamin of Tudela, who visited Thebes in the 1160s, testified that the city's Jewish inhabitants were the empire's finest craftsmen in silk and purple garments [1, p. 10]. In the mid-1180s, Michael Choniates identified Thebes as a major provenance of clothes used by Constantinopolitan citizens [36, pp. 69-70]. Also from Niketas Choniates, we know that by 1195, the imperial court had maintained an annual import of Theban silks. The same account also informs us that in 1195, the emir of Ankara specifically demanded the tribute of Theban silk textiles from the Byzantine emperor [38, p. 461].

The Venetians were the first Italians to trade in the Eastern Mediterranean. Their commercial engagement with Byzantium might be traced back to the 9th century. After the 11th century, their business expanded with the burgeoning Byzantine economy [25, pp. 471-473]. Thebes was a city of great importance to the Venetians. Within the surviving Venetian documents, Thebes was one of the most-featured Venetian colonies in Byzantium, only after Constantinople and Corinth [31, p. 156]. It was also among the few specified inland cities where Byzantine emperors granted the Venetians commercial privileges. First recorded in Alexios I's chrysobull in 1082⁴, the privileges were repeatedly renewed in the course of the 12th century. With these concessions, the

Venetians could trade all kinds of goods without taxes and beyond the jurisdiction of maritime officials [47, pp. 43-54, 95-98, 113-124, 179-189].

While the Venetians could have engaged in the trade of agricultural and pastoral products from Thebes [11, p. 770; 3, pp. 24-26], their primary interest likely lay in silk textiles. We learn from an instruction of the Genoese government to its ambassador in 1171 that the Venetians possessed the privilege of trading Theban silk textiles, which the Genoese coveted ([39, p. 348]; cf.: [26, p. 466; 23, p. 682]). Hence, by that year, it is evident that the Venetians were likely the sole foreign merchants granted permission to trade Theban silk textiles, a privileged status undoubtedly stemming from the aforementioned imperial concessions.

Also in 1171, Manuel I initiated an anti-Venetian coup, resulting in the arrest of all Venetians in Byzantium and the confiscation of their properties. This ushered in a period of conflict between Byzantium and Venice, which persisted until c. 1183 [35, p. 104]. Manuel I's coup must have inflicted a heavy blow on the Venetian community in Thebes; several community members are attested as imprisoned or bankrupt. However, the activities of this community are still documented during and after the conflict, indicating its continuous and active presence throughout Byzantine rule.

The Venetians played a pivotal role in driving Thebes' flourishing economy through their investments and trade of the city's surplus products. The development of the silk industry, which hinged upon an efficient and far-reaching trading network, exemplified this impact. Although local inhabitants were important customers [38, p. 74], it was the industry's reach into interregional and international markets that truly elevated its prominence. Thessalonica and Constantinople represented the interregional outlets. Thessalonica held the annual fair that showcased Boeotian textiles [41, p. 54], while Constantinople's citizens and the imperial court were Theban textiles' primary consumers. With regard to the international markets, the aforementioned demand for Theban silk textiles by the emir of Ankara and the abduction of Theban silk weavers by the Normans indicate the existence of established outlets in both the East and the West by the 12th century. As also evidenced by our study below,

the Venetians, being the primary traders across all these destinations, must have actively engaged in channelling the Theban silk textiles with its interregional and international markets.

Sources and Methodology. The primary sources of this study are the collection of Venetian documents edited by Raimondo Morozzo della Rocca and Antonino Lombardo⁵. They will be complemented by a few scattered published documents relevant to the subject.

To extract direct information about the Venetian community in Thebes, we will focus on documents specifically mentioning Thebes (*Stives* in Latin). There are about twenty such documents pertaining to commercial matters [10, nos. 12, 13, 110, 137, 166, 234, 235, 239, 273, 274, 275, 308, 353, 378, 380, 403, 418, 426]. Except for later copies of the same documents⁶, these documents can be further divided into two groups: one focused on elucidating the details of commercial ventures, and the other concerned with implementing reparations for disrupted ventures. The first group could be written as contracts that establish occasional associations for commercial journeys and their accompanying obligations (e.g., *cartula memorialis*, *cautionis* or *manifestationis*). They can also appear in the form of receipts that discharge individuals from their obligations (e.g., *cartula securitatis*). Documents of this group usually contain the information of the participants of the ventures, that is, investors, merchant travellers and, on occasion, sailing masters (*naucleri*). The investment shares and the travelling routes are often specified as well [10, nos. 12, 13, 110, 137, 166, 234, 235, 239, 273, 308, 353, 426].

The second group of documents stems from reparations paid by Byzantine emperors to redress Manuel I's anti-Venetian coup in 1171. These documents record the execution of reparation money for individual ventures affected by the coup. For this reason, they usually give a basic overview of the ventures, as in documents from the first group. They were all written as creditors' receipts for the compensated part of the debts [10, nos. 378, 380, 403, 418].

Apart from commercial documents, there are also a few others covering subjects such as concessions, attestations and inheritance disputes, which can also be informative for our purposes [10, nos. 233, 243, 244; 13, no. 25; 44, no. 22].

In these documents, the contractors or litigants are recorded with their full names, followed by their parishes of origin. This information usually allows us to pinpoint the same person across different documents. In addition, the end of each document includes a session of signatures, where we can also find the names of the notaries and notarial witnesses, though without their parish information. The above materials serve as basic information about the Venetians based in Thebes. Using their names and parishes as identifiers, other relevant documents with no direct Thebes reference will be pinpointed and examined to gather additional information about the Thebes-based families or individuals. All these will be processed as data for a prosopographical study⁷: biographies of individuals and families will be reconstructed and analysed in groups to create a general picture of the Venetian community in Byzantine Thebes.

The Venetian Community. More than 60 Venetians are recorded in documents with direct reference to Byzantine Thebes⁸, suggesting that they were either residing in the city, frequently visiting it, or had some form of remote connection to it. This observation indicates the presence of a substantial Venetian community in Thebes, despite the city's relatively small population. Apart from their commercial enterprises, the documents also attest to their engagements in clerical, notarial and possibly industrial work.

Several families and individuals are well presented in our sources. Their extensive documented activities and social network can serve as ideal entry points for our investigation.

The Family of da Molin. The da Molin family, consisting of Gosmiro, Matheus, Fantino and Pietro, probably originated from the parish of San Stae. Among them, Gosmiro is mentioned in a document dating back to 1073, serving as the sailing master of a commercial expedition to Thebes [10, no. 13]⁹. Matheus is known as a presbyter and notary in Thebes, responsible for notarising and transcribing some of our documents dated after 1176 [10, nos. 234, 273, 274, 275, 353].

Fantino is recorded in an attestation for the testament of Marco Succugullo. The attestation states that when Marco died in Thebes sometime before 1171, he detailed the amount of money Fantino owed him for purchasing a samite and a mantle [10, no. 243]¹⁰. Following this vein,

Fantino was certainly involved in trading Theban silk textiles, while Marco acted as an intermediary or entrepreneur of silk workshops. From other documents, we learn that Fantino had been in close commercial partnership with Domenico Centocori during the 1150s and 1160s, with trading activities in both Constantinople and Almyros [10, nos. 117, 151, 152]¹¹. In this case, the attestation shows that their trading network extended to Thebes. Fantino's failure to pay Marco on time was possibly linked to the anti-Venetian coup in 1171, which may have ruined Fantino's business and even led to his imprisonment. Fantino was dead by 1181 [10, no. 348]. Regarding his nuclear family, available information mentions his wife Teonata, who invested in a commercial journey undertaken by her son-in-law in 1173 [10, no. 251]. Additionally, two sons, Giacomo and Filippo, were in debt in 1181 [10, no. 348].

Pietro is the best-attested member of the da Molin family, primarily known for his roles as a travelling merchant and an occasional notarial witness in Thebes [10, no. 234]. His father, Gonzo, had served in the Byzantine imperial fleet in 1150 and appeared to maintain close ties with the Succugullo and Bembo families ([10, no. 98]; cf.: [31, p. 469])¹². In his Thebes-centred enterprises, Pietro collaborated with Pietro Venier and Frugerio Senatori, embarking on commercial expeditions bound for Constantinople in c. 1170 [10, nos. 235, 378, 380, 403, 418]¹³. Apart from Thebes, he engaged in trading cotton and clothes in Corinth and conducted shipping operations in Almyros during the late 1160s, notably in cooperation with Guidoto Gradenigo [10, nos. 192, 202, 336]. The coup of Manuel I in 1171 drew Pietro into imprisonment and financial ruin. He was apprehended in Constantinople aboard a vessel transporting clothing from Corinth. The sailing master, Domenico de Gregorio, and members of the Vitale and Badoer families accompanied him [10, no. 336]¹⁴. There are more than five reparation documents addressing the confiscated investments of the ventures Pietro was undertaking [10, nos. 369, 378, 380, 403, 418]¹⁵. He must have been eventually released and returned to Venice before 1180, when he commenced repaying his debts [10, no. 319]. Nevertheless, upon his return, Pietro redirected his business interests away from Byzantium, shifting his focus towards Alexandria and the

Levant instead [10, nos. 340, 376, 394, 395, 421]. As a result, his Theban enterprise seemed to have been abandoned. In the late 1180s, Pietro's sons and nephews started to inherit and take over his business [10, nos. 393, 423, 425, 446].

The Family of Voltani (Vultani). The Voltani family comprised Vido and several Vitales. Vido is only known as a notarial witness in 1171 [10, no. 239]. The case of Vitale is more intricate, as the name appears in several documents with multiple parishes of origin. If we take into account all surviving Venetian documents, it is plausible to suggest that the Voltani family originated from Ammiana [10, nos. 22, 79, 129, 273]. This idea gains support from their partnerships with the Sisinulo family, which also originated from Ammiana but operated primarily in Constantinople¹⁶, hinting at a shared Ammiana origin [10, nos. 129, 273, 305, 308, 379]. Based on this premise, considering the lack of further information on parish changes, at least three Vitales can be identified as active in Thebes between the 1160s and 1180s: one from the parish of San Cassiano who later relocated to Santa Maria Zobenigo [10, nos. 166, 305, 308], another from San Moisè [10, nos. 234, 239, 273], and the third from San Fantino [10, nos. 353, 379, 441].

The Voltani family established strong connections through marriages with other Venetian families sharing a common interest in Thebes, including the families of Sisinulo, Morosini, and Pasqualigo [10, nos. 234, 308, 353]. The anti-Venetian coup in 1171 also devastated the business of the family. The investment entrusted to the Vitale from San Fantino for a venture was confiscated, leaving him in debt to Domenico Sisinulo [10, no. 379]. Even in 1185, about two years after the resolution of the conflict between Byzantium and Venice, potential political risks were still carefully considered when the same Vitale invested in another venture [10, no. 353]. However, the Voltani family seems to have fared much better than the da Molins during the conflict between the two powers. Despite interruptions, the family did not suspend their business in the years following 1171. An extant document reveals that the Vitale from San Moisè and his cousin Giacomo Sisinulo, son of Domenico, were still engaged in a joint commercial enterprise in 1175 [10, no. 273]. It has been reasonably argued that this unusual case underscores the indispensability of Venetians to the

Byzantine authority, which endorsed the venture regardless of ongoing antagonism [4, p. 304]. Since the Voltani family had been committed to the Thebes-Constantinople trading route [10, nos. 166, 234, 308, 353], there is a possibility that they were involved in transporting the annual ration of the silk textiles ordered by the imperial court from Thebes [38, p. 461].

The Family of Falier (Faletro). The Falier family, consisting of two Enricos, Pietro, Giovanni and Frislanda, likely originated in the parish of San Giovanni Battista. This family is attested primarily by a series of five documents concerning an inheritance dispute in the 1160s caused by a joint commercial venture involving family members. It appears that an unnamed male member of the family and his brother Enrico started a *collegancia* with the ship of the Mastropiero family¹⁷. While the Falier family seemed to be based in Thebes, the Mastropiero family resided in Venice but frequently travelled between the two cities. Sometime before 1166, the ship of Marco Mastropiero suffered a shipwreck. Among the casualties were Enrico, possibly the unnamed Falier and Marco. As a result, the daughter of Enrico, Frislanda, sought the court of Doge Vitale II Michiel (1156–1172) to claim the inheritance of what her father had invested in the *collegancia*. In response, the doge sent a letter to the three sons of the unnamed Falier – Enrico, Pietro and Giovanni – in Thebes, who had inherited their father. The letter demanded their appearance in court to resolve the dispute. Having received the letter in Thebes, the three brothers entrusted Orio, another member of the Mastropiero family, in 1166 to act on their half and negotiate with Frislanda. Seemingly after some exchanges between the parties with the intermediary of Orio, Enrico finally arrived at the court of the doge in Venice in 1168, representing the three brothers to settle the dispute [13, no. 25]. The specific details of the court's decision have not survived to the present day.

From other documents, we learn that Pietro and Giovanni were making a commercial journey in 1167, travelling through Corinth, Constantinople and Venice. This explains why they had to entrust Enrico to resolve the inheritance dispute on their behalf. We are also informed about the existence of another brother, Bonofiglio, who was a participant in the same journey [10, nos. 185, 186].

He probably did not have a continuous presence in Thebes like his three brothers. Besides, we find information about an offspring of this Falier family, Stefano. He was in Constantinople in 1190, investing in a commercial venture between Almyros and Constantinople.

Beyond Thebes, there was a contemporary Sparta-based Falier family, which originated from the parish of San Pantalon, of which the well-documented Viviano is a representative. However, there is no solid evidence indicating any interaction between this Falier family and its Theban counterpart [10, nos. 135, 205, 206, 226, 233, 286, 302, 311, 314, 315, 316, 320, 332, 338, 360, 361, 358, 365]. These two branches of the Falier family appear to have pursued separate paths without significant intermingling.

Ecclesiastical Establishments and the Clergy. Our document group is also informative about the notable and persistent role of the Venetian church in Thebes. Regarding ecclesiastical establishments, a decree issued in 1168 by Doge Vitale II Michael suggests that the convent of San Giovanni Evangelista in Torcello was granted with certain measures, which the Republic owned in Thebes [44, no. 22]. This points to the existence of the convent's dependencies or representatives in Thebes, who could utilise this concession as a stable source of income. In addition, a church of St. Nicolas is mentioned in a document dated 1159, whose presbyter Giovanni Rustico was investing in a commercial journey via Thebes and Thessalonica [10, no. 137]. This church could be associated with either the dependencies of the convent of San Giovanni Evangelista in Torcello or could function as a separate ecclesiastical asset of the Theban Venetian community. Possible remains of this church have been found in Thebes, which suggests that it could have belonged to a monastery [6, p. 153; 28, pp. 430-431].

The Venetian clerics are mostly known from these documents as notaries. Those notarised documents made in Thebes were clerics of the local community; they are all recorded as presbyters. Among them, Matheus da Molin seems to have held the longest tenure, spanning from 1176 to 1185 [10, nos. 234, 273, 274, 275, 353]. A certain Marino was incumbent between 1170 and 1172 [10, nos. 234, 239], while Marco Bolani was documented only for October 1170 [10,

nos. 233, 235]. Giovanni Rustico was known in Thebes only from the above document dated August 1159, notarised by himself. It is worth noting that he also acted as a presbyter and notary in Almyros between 1169 and 1170 [10, nos. 216, 217, 219].

Among the clerics noted in documents composed in Venice, the case of presbyter Bonus Senior Saturninus is relevant to our investigation. He seems to have been associated with the church of Saint Cassian in Venice, where Bonus Senior Saturninus was frequently attested as a notary or notarial witness between the late 1160s and 1190s [13, no. 25; 10, nos. 244, 266, 278, 279, 297, 338, 341, 342, 343, 391, 398, 403, 412, 419]. Interestingly, there is an attestation revealing that Bonus Senior Saturninus was in Thebes before November 1171, when he performed the last rites for Marcus Succugullo before the death of the latter [10, no. 243]. The timing of his presence coincided with the tenure of the above-mentioned presbyter Marino.

Altogether, these cases show that the Venetian clergy had maintained a continuous existence in Thebes for an extended period, likely dating back to the inception of the city's Venetian community. There were clerics like Matheus da Molin, whose presence was likely more permanent. Meanwhile, there were also clerics who were visiting or had shorter stays, such as Bonus Senior Saturninus. Equipped with sustainable ecclesiastical properties, these clerics played a vital role in meeting the spiritual and administrative needs of the Venetian community in Thebes, thereby forming the very foundation of the community itself.

Native Byzantines? There has been a discussion regarding the possibility of native Byzantines being recorded in Venetian documents. J. Herrin has reasonably used the family name *Greco* as an indicator [19, pp. 248–250]. Within documents with direct reference to Thebes, M. Chairete speculated that *Iohannes Cetocori*, who appears as a notarial witness in a document copied in 1172, could be a local Byzantine [7, p. 583; 10, no. 239]. However, variants of the family name *Cetocori* actually appear multiple times in extant documents, which suggest that the Cetocori family was Venetian, originating from the parish of Santa Trinita [10, nos. 117, 151, 152].

Pursuing this line of inquiry, we may use the abundant prosopographical data available from contemporary Byzantine sources related to Thebes to conduct a sensible comparative examination. Only one possible correlation can be proposed. In the *Cadaster of Thebes*, which records the ownership of some landed estates near Thebes between the late 11th and early 12th centuries¹⁸, we encounter a current landowner named Nikolaos Marianos Mousilenos (Μουσιληνοῦ) [46, p. 11.A7]. The family name *Mousilenos* resembles that of Iohannes Muisolino, a notarial witness in Thebes in 1170, as recorded in a Venetian document [10, no. 235]. However, it is important to note that the Muisolino family is confirmed to be Venetian rather than Byzantine. The family (written in Latin also as *Musulino* or *Muysolino*) is attested from 1072 onward as conducting shipping business from Venice via Alexandria, Corinth and Almyros [10, nos. 11, 35].

If the identification can be established, it would imply that the Venetians in Thebes indeed held legal ownership of land. However, considering that the *Cadaster* recorded many absentee owners rather than peasant producers [46, pp. 142–143], it is likely that the land only served as a supplementary source of income for the commerce-oriented Venetian community. Moreover, the challenges in identifying Byzantine individuals in these documents suggest that the Venetians' communal life in Thebes was notably exclusive to Venetians.

Conclusions. Drawing from documentary sources and employing a prosopographical approach, our investigation paints a more detailed picture of the Venetian community in Byzantine Thebes. Undoubtedly, the community constituted a sizable portion of the local population. Since its emergence in 1072, the community's presence seems to have endured uninterrupted, persisting even during periods of intensive antagonism between Venice and Byzantium. The Venetian community probably operated distinctively, with limited interaction and assimilation with the native Byzantines. Families within the community like da Molin, Voltani, and Falier strengthened their bonds through marriages and commercial partnerships.

The ecclesiastical establishments formed the basis of the community. There were Venetian

churches or monasteries with sufficient and sustainable sources of income derived, for example, from ducal concessions. The clerics, apart from being religious leaders, also fulfilled the community's basic administrative needs, acting, for example, as notaries. While some clerics had a more permanent presence in Thebes, those who only visited the city or had shorter stays are also attested.

Beyond the ecclesiastics, Venetians were primarily recognised as active participants in various commercial ventures, assuming roles as investors, merchant travellers, or sailing masters. Their extensive network facilitated connections between Thebes and prominent trading hubs across the Eastern Mediterranean, most notably Venice, Constantinople and Corinth. The principal goods traded from Thebes seem to have been primarily silk textiles. In this regard, Venetians might have also been involved in transporting the annual silk ration ordered by the Byzantine imperial court. Apart from commercial engagements, Venetians possibly served as entrepreneurs, operating textile workshops, and also acted as absentee landowners.

Another member of the Aurifice family, Leo, is known as the sailing master of a commercial venture a year before following the same route, see [10, no. 12].

¹⁰ Other members of the Succugullo family: Stefano was going from Constantinople to Acre in 1150. He was also in Constantinople as a notarial witness in 1156. Domenico was in Venice as a notarial witness, see [10, nos. 98, 122, 139].

¹¹ A relative of Domenico Giovanni lived in Thebes, see [10, no. 239].

¹² Gonzo was the uncle of Giovanni Bembo. A member of the Bembo family lived in Thebes, see [10, no. 233].

¹³ Frugerio Senatori also appears in [10, no. 233], which suggests that he was in Sparta sometime before 1170 with a group of Venetians.

¹⁴ Several members of the Badover family lived in Thebes, see [10, nos. 233, 235, 244, 353].

¹⁵ A commercial venture invested by his cousin Giovanni Bembo seems to have been ruined as well, see [10, no. 319].

¹⁶ Some of the family members later moved from Ammiana to Rialto and the parish of Santa Giustina; see [10, nos. 202, 305]. A member of the family, Marco, was possibly a permanent resident in Thebes, see [10, no. 239].

¹⁷ It is unclear whether this family is related to the later doge Orio Mastropiero (1178–1192).

¹⁸ For a recent discussion on the dating of this document, see [15].

NOTES

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² The study of M. Chairete on the Venetian merchants in Thebes from the 11th century provides a useful introduction but without much detailed examination of sources, see [7].

³ John Ismeniotēs was most likely in Thessalonica managing imperial properties, see [2, p. 241].

⁴ The exact dating of Alexios I's chrysobull remains debated, see [14; 34; 24].

⁵ [10]; as to [40], it is not informative in the case of Byzantine Thebes.

⁶ [10, nos. 274, 275] are copies of [10, nos. 273]; some documents survive only in later copies: [44, no. 22; 10, nos. 234, 235, 239, 353].

⁷ For a recent collection of prosopographical studies in the field of Byzantine studies, see [21].

⁸ The notaries and witnesses named in documents produced outside Thebes are not included in the count.

⁹ One of the investors in this commercial venture was Sevastus Aurifice, the son of a Venetian noble.

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Information About the Author

Gang Wu, PhD (King's College London), Assistant Professor, Department of History, Fudan University, Handan Rd., 220, Yangpu District, Shanghai, People's Republic of China, wug@fudan.edu.cn, <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1981-2888>

Информация об авторе

Ганг Ву, доктор философии (Королевский колледж Лондона), доцент, Отделение истории, Фуданьский университет, Ханьдань шоссе, 220, Янпу р-н, г. Шанхай, Китайская Народная Республика, wug@fudan.edu.cn, <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1981-2888>