The Harbour of all this Sea and Realm
Crusader to Venetian Famagusta

Edited by
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Recent years have seen an increase in scholarship dealing with the Venetian empire and with the colonial towns and islands that Venice controlled through the Middle Ages and Early Modern period. Studying Venice’s protectorates beyond the confines of its lagoon furnishes a myriad of illuminating case studies where Venetian enterprises can be examined as precursive to later European colonial ventures. For a brief historical period, between 1489 and 1571, the Cypriot port of Famagusta was one of Venice’s most strategic and distant possessions. Despite this relatively brief, eighty-two-year tenure, the Venetians undertook dramatic modifications of the town’s rich architectural heritage and organized significant embodiments of *venezianità* ("Venetian-ness"), especially in the city’s mural defenses and in the city’s core, the piazza of the cathedral of St Nicholas, around which the various signifiers of Venetian hegemony were structured. A noteworthy vehicle of this process of colonial signification and the articulation of Venetian authority in this and other locations was the utilization of *spolia*: reused architectural fragments, in this specific case from the ancient Greco-Roman city of Salamis, the ruins of which lie just six kilometers north of Famagusta.

The Venetians were by no means exceptional in their redeployment of "historical" architectonic and sculptural fragments to embody ideological concepts. Many civilizations before them, and since, used remnants of subjugated or inherited cultures to develop iconographies of conquest or to visually supplement historiographic mythol-

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2. For a survey of the general visual culture of Venetian Cyprus, see the exhibition catalogue *Cyprus: Jewel in the Crown of Venice* (Nicosia: Leventis, 2003).
ogies. While it may have been convenient to reuse materials—for example, using columns that were ready-made as opposed to quarrying and carving new ones (a compelling pragmatic, rather than programmatic rationale for the use of spolia) there is every indication that such remnants were also very consciously curated to convey notions of triumph and/or of the inheritance of the grandeur of past civilizations and to reinterpret old iconographies to new purposes. Spolia were not simply convenient; they also carried with them powerful symbolic associations wherein artifacts of the past, and of prior peoples, were reassigned as trophies and as signifiers of a current regime’s potency and its continuity with an eminent former civilization. It is with these processes in mind that this paper makes some inferences about how the Venetians may have used spolia in Famagusta, or how spolia might have been understood in Famagusta during the Venetians’ brief time as colonial power. One particular aspect of power will be focused on: the articulation of authority through the threat of physical punishment. The procedure presumes a consistency of iconographies and meanings throughout the Venetian empire, with Venetians in particular being able to recognize local variations in the diverse, yet consistent, arte-factual improvisations.

In an earlier article I dealt with the question of the use of antique spolia in the Famagusta cathedral square and how the Venetians may have arrayed the assemblage into a programme consistent with humanist strategies surrounding the “Myth of Venice” and the appropriation of some signifiers of Greco-Roman civilization, in this specific case represented by the ancient city of Salamis. As inheritors of a renaissance humanist tradition, contemporary scholars often find it easy to move in humanist past culture where we find the intellectual environment comfortable.

We are, however, often less sure of ourselves when dealing with vernacular culture, sometimes because of the limitations of the archive, sometimes because of cultural prejudices about the paradigmatic superiority of high culture. This has also been the case when interpreting programmatic exhibitions of spolia. Nevertheless, Marilyn Perry demonstrated some time ago how many popular readings could grow up around the pieces of spolia in Venice. Similarly, Robert Nelson has recently shown, in the case of the so-called “Pillars of Acre”, how Venetian humanists from many eras could be involved in the construction and propagation of spurious but nonetheless ideologically useful popular myths. Since the appearance of Guido Ruggiero’s work on crime and

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punishment in renaissance Venice, we have been encouraged to consider more closely how Venice controlled its populace with the threat of corporeal violence, and how this threat was conducted as part of an early modern sensibility, that is, an ideological state apparatus that referred to a repressive state apparatus; an expression of the prerogative of the state to torture or kill those who broke its laws. What roles did spolia, architecture and related sculpture play in articulating the threat of punishment and in the formation of civic obedience? This question is addressed in Robert Nelson’s essay “High Justice: Venice, San Marco, and the Spoils of 1204”, which reconsidered spolia in the Piazzetta in Venice and proposed their relation to punishment. Nelson’s article will be used in the present study to generate a complementary reading of spolia in Famagusta.

Famagusta is located on the east coast of Cyprus, facing the shores of the Middle East from whence it gained its wealth—especially in the fourteenth century—and, of symbolic importance for the Venetians, very near ancient Salamis, where virtually all the Famagusta spolia came from. For Venetians, the proximity of the legendary medieval city of Famagusta with the equally renowned ancient Greco-Roman city of Salamis lent considerable historiographic charge to Famagusta’s status. This illustrious civic progenitor (it is likely that Famagusta was founded by citizens from Salamis who were seeking a better port and higher, healthier ground) was better known to renaissance-era Venetians than it was to the medieval Lusignans, from whom there is little evidence of any fascination with the ancient pedigree of Famagusta/Salamis, except perhaps insofar as it pertained to the local cult of St Catherine, which, in any case, was early Christian rather than classical. Salamis was important not only in ancient Greek times—especially honoured among ancient Greek cities during the reign of its famous King Evagoras (411 to 374 BCE)—but in Roman times as well, when it received imperial patronage from emperors such as Augustus, Trajan, and Hadrian. Ancient writers, including Strabo, listed Salamis first among the most illustrious cities of the eastern Mediterranean. In early Byzantine times, the emperor Constantius II (r. 337 to 361 CE) rebuilt

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8 The local cult of St Catherine of Alexandria, who was said to have been born and raised in Salamis, centered on the famous “Tomb of St Catherine”. The medieval cult of the saint has been studied in detail in Lorenzo Calvelli, Cipro e la Memoria dell’Antico fra Medioevo e Rinascimento. La percezione de passato romano dell’isola nel mondo occidentale, Memorie: Classe di Scienze Morali, Lettere ed Arte 133 (Venice: Istituto Veneto di Scienze, Lettere ed Arte, 2009). The “Prison of St Catherine” is still there, but was unlikely to have ever been a prison, let alone one for St Catherine. It was originally a Bronze Age tomb that was modified in Roman times as a barrel vaulted mausoleum or religious sanctuary. Only in later times did it acquire the association with St Catherine. It was one of the most important pilgrimage sites of medieval Cyprus. For the background and architecture of Salamis, ancient and Byzantine see A. Langdale, In a Contested Realm. An Illustrated Guide to the Archaeology and Historical Architecture of Northern Cyprus (Glasgow: Grimsay Press, 2012): 54–87; for St Catherine’s tomb see 48–52.
the city after the catastrophic earthquake of 342 CE, and the city was renamed Constantia in his honour. In these early Christian centuries Salamis/Constantia contracted in size, but could still boast of major works of architecture, including two large and venerable basilicas: the early Basilica of Epiphanios and the later Basilica of Campanoporta.9

An indication of the centrality of Salamis as a general signifier of Cyprus’s glorious past, as perceived by the Venetians, is found in an inscription accompanying a statue of the God of Time, Chronos, ensconced on the façade of the Ca’ Bembo in Venice:

DVM. VOLVITVR. ISTE IAD.
ASCR. IVSTINOP. VER.
SALAMIS. CRETA. IOVIS.
TESTES. ERVNT. ACTOR. PA IO. SE. Mv

As long as this [the sun] rotates, the cities of Zara [Iadra],
Cattaro [Ascrivivum], Capodistria [Iustinopolis], Verona, Cyprus [Salamis], Candia [Creta Iovis] will
give testimony to his actions.10

Note that “Salamis” is used in the abbreviated Latin inscription instead of “Cyprus”, so central was the identification of that ancient city with the island’s celebrated past. Salamenian spolia were the physical embodiment of that illustrious history, which the Venetians artfully redeployed in Famagusta to signify their inheritance of Cyprus and to parallel their own empire with that of the ancient Greeks and Romans, who had preceded them long before as rulers of the island and of Salamis in particular.

The Salamenian spolia in Famagusta’s cathedral square consist of six grey granite columns, four of which were used in the façade of the triple arched gateway, which in the Venetian period fronted the Palazzo del Proveditore, the main institutional building signifying Venetian authority (Fig. 1). Two additional columns were set up free standing in front of the cathedral in the main part of the city square. Currently, these columns are situated in front of a medieval Lusignan-era structure—perhaps once part of the bishop’s residence—that was modified by the Ottomans to function as a medrese or

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9 The cult of St Epiphanios was to survive at Salamis up to around the 9th century until the saint’s relics were moved to Famagusta. Famagusta’s continuity with Salamis/Constantia is also reflected in the Greek name for Famagusta, Ammochostos. As Salamis waned after the ninth century and the last of its inhabitants left, the ancient city was claimed by sand dunes and earned the nickname “hidden in sand” (“Ammochostos”), and this name was transferred to the current site of Famagusta.

Koran school after 1571 when St Nicholas Cathedral was converted into a mosque (Fig. 2). Evidence that these columns once stood in front of the cathedral can be found in a detail from Stephano Gibellino’s late sixteenth century print of the siege of Famagusta (Fig. 3; the number 1 on the figure indicates St Nicholas Cathedral), where the columns flank a rectangular object, which, evidence suggests, was the Greco-Roman sarcophagus that came to be known as the *Tomb of Venus* (Fig. 4). This object also currently resides in the main square of Famagusta, though repositioned to an area behind the triple arch gateway of the *Palazzo del Proveditore*. Additional Venetian-era uses of *spolia* include a long marble frieze of running animals in a vine motif, also very likely from Salamis, which was set up as a bench or *panca* along the south side of the cathedral square, abutting the cathedral façade (Fig. 5). Another part of this *panca* was constructed of classical capitals and entablatures (Fig. 6), and seems to have been an expression of civic patronage by the Venetian Bembo family. The structure that the *panca* runs along, much modified if not constructed by the Venetians, is referred to as the *Loggia Bembo* since coats of arms of that noble family decorate it.  

The *Tomb of Venus*, like the columns, is probably also an example of Salamian *spolia*. Venetian humanists and poets made much of the homophony between “Venezia” and “Venus”, who was yet another of the sacred benefactors of the city. Thus Cyprus, Venus’s birthplace, could be framed as a gift of the goddess to Venice, her poetic namesake (Italian: Venezia/Venere), providing divine predestination for Venetian rule on the island. There are other possibilities for creative confluence between Venice and Salamis, as Salamis (and by extension, Famagusta) could be constructed as a sister city to Venice as both cites shared Trojan foundation myths, extending their pedigrees back into the Heroic Age.

The two free-standing granite columns, also from Salamis—though with Doric style capitals and bases added by the Venetians to complete the ensemble and make it more monumental—are consistent with the double columns erected in town squares throughout the Venetian realm, from the *terrafirma* to Dalmatia, the Peloponnese and beyond. The model for these many clones was the massive pair of columns on the Bacino waterfront of Venice, which functioned partly as a monumental gateway into the city (Fig. 7). Atop one of them is the bronze lion representing St Mark, the patron

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11 See the discussion in Vincenzo Lucchese, “Famagusta from a Latin Perspective: Venetian Heraldic Shields and other Fragmentary Remains”, in *Medieval and Renaissance Famagusta: Studies in Architecture, Art, and History*, ed. M. J. K. Walsh, P. W. Edbury, & N. S. H. Courcas (Farnham: Ashgate Publishing, 2012), 170–175. Camille Enlart, in his monumental late nineteenth century study of the medieval and renaissance architecture of Cyprus, believed that the structure was medieval and hypothesized, not very convincingly, that the building was the cathedral grammar school.

12 It is of course possible that the sarcophagus may have come from another Greco-Roman city, such as Kition, Kourion or Paphos. The sarcophagus is strikingly similar to one found at the Bellapais Abbey on Cyprus’s northern coast near Kyrenia.
saint of Venice, and on the other a statue of St Theodore, who had been an earlier civic patron. Even these columns and the statues that decorate them are spolia, probably originating from Venice’s sack of Constantinople in 1204.

Doric was a style that Venetian architects used increasingly in the late fifteenth century and through the sixteenth century as their dominion over Greek lands and archipelagos expanded. Jacopo Sansovino used many Doric elements in his architecture and the style thus began to define the Venetian built environment in an age of imperial expansionism. The Famagusta Roman columns from Salamis, then, with the Greek-style Doric additions, signified Venetian rule not only over this distant extremity of the ancient Greek world, Famagusta, but also its inheritance of the authority of the earlier civilization that had also controlled the eastern Mediterranean. One assumes, though there is no direct evidence, that the lion of St Mark and a statue of St Theodore also sat atop the Famagusta pair of columns. While the *Tomb of Venus* sarcophagus intimated the blessing of the pagan goddess Venus, the ubiquitous lion of St Mark indicated that Venetians, even at the furthest edge of their empire, were under the evangelist’s protection. Indeed, the first thing one saw when sailing into Famagusta’s harbour was the Sea Gate entrance with this universal emblem of Venetian dominion and saintly benefice.

The deployment of *spolia* fragments, both sculptural and architectural, in Famagusta’s main square echo similar components in Venice, where *spolia* from Venice’s sack of Constantinople in 1204 provided material for a public exposition of Venetian imperial rhetoric. However, in Venice the iconographic program, far more sophisticated than at Famagusta, can be interpreted more specifically as strongly relating to the theme of Justice as a component of Venetian civic mythology. Robert Nelson has shown that corporal punishment was a significant ingredient of the equation of “Justice” with “Venice”. The Venetian twin columns at the Bacino waterfront, for example, were nicknamed the *Columns of Justice* because criminals were put to death between them, both by hanging and decapitation.¹³ Similarly, the so-called *Pillars of Acre* or *Pilastri Acretani* in the nearby Piazzetta (Fig. 8) were known also as the *Doge’s Gallows*, for here offending doges suffered corporal castigation.¹⁴ Indeed, the small area of the Piazzetta immediately outside the *Porta della Carta* seems to have been assembled to convey the concept of Justice and the threat of punishment, which also fused with the same theme articulated in the Foscari wing of the *Palazzo Ducale* and the *Porta della Carta* itself. For example, on the façade of the Foscari wing of the *Palazzo Ducale*, on the upper story, is a roundel depicting an allegorical figure of Justice seated on a lion throne (Fig. 9). Under her feet are personifications of Anger and Pride vanquished. She holds in one hand a scroll that reads: “Just and Strong, I am enthroned, I vanquish by the sea and furies”, while in the other she holds a sword, the weapon with which punishment will

¹⁴ Ibid., 148.
be meted out. A sword also once appeared in the relief of the Judgment of Solomon (Fig. 10), on the corner of the Palazzo Ducale overlooking the Pillars of Acre. Here, too, the theme of institutional justice and its wisdom is articulated. Solomon seems to oversee not only the soldier who raised his sword to cut the child in half, but also the decapitations or other punishments that took place between the Pillars of Acre just below. The theme of Justice and judgment is carried through in a statue on the southwest corner of the Foscari wing, where the archangel Gabriel carries the trumpet he shall blow for the Last Judgment day. Divine and secular judgment and punishment are thus brought together in iconographic collusion. A statue of Justice appears, too, at the apex of the Porta della Carta, the gothic web that conjoins the church of San Marco with the Palazzo Ducale, making the connection between Church and State, and the Doge and the Evangelist, concrete. Thus the theme of Justice is expanded whereby the Doge, as supported by St Mark, metes out punishment, with the wisdom of his decisions divinely inspired and sanctioned.

There are other significant artifacts on the corner of San Marco that faces the Piazzetta, such as the porphyry statue once thought to depict the Tetrarchs (Fig. 11; identified as the Sons of Constantine by Verzone).15 Here again sword iconography is found, as all four figures hold swords, thus indicating their willingness to use them to defend their common interests. Even these figures, which have been variously read in the scholarship, were associated in the popular mind with a story of four men who killed each other, each one greedy to keep a treasure that they had collectively discovered.16 They received their just reward for criminal behavior: death. Along the wall of which they are a part, a frieze runs below, forming a low bench or panca of spolia fragments (Fig. 12). On part of it, on the left just below the statue of the “Tetrarchs”/Sons of Constantine, two putti-like figures hold aloft a banner which reads, in essence, “Think twice before you do anything contrary”, that is, against the law.17 Beside the Pillars of Acre is the Pietra del Bando, the stump of a porphyry column drum, which was used to display the heads of decapitated criminals.18 If the point of the ensemble was not made clear enough, the Carmagnola head, ensconced in an upper corner of San Marco above the Pietra del Bando (Fig. 13), was popularly thought to represent Francesco Bussare, a mercenary soldier who had betrayed Venice and had been decapitated at this very spot, a lapidary reminder of the long-ago decayed head that was once displayed here.19 The actual heads of decapitated Ottomans were displayed here as well, after the Battle of Lepanto, and it was also here where death sentences and other edicts were read

17 Ibid.
18 Ibid., 150.
19 Ibid., 151.
from the platform of the *Gobbo di Rialto*, right beside the *Pietra del Bando*. The preponderance of sword imagery, the allusions to both divine and secular justice and punishment (appropriate for a space that conjoins the secular power of the doge and Senate—the *Palazzo Ducale*—with the Doge’s church, San Marco), the public proclamation of sentences, and the actual instances of capital punishment—all of these allusions to Justice append to the judicial function of many of the rooms in the Ducal Palace itself, especially the Foscari wing, where the activities that took place in the rooms inside were mirrored and justified by the iconographies on the most public façade of the structure.

One can find consistencies with these themes in other Venetian colonial towns. For example, in Korčula, in modern Croatia, the truncated pillar in the main square, while it may have supported some sculpture on top, may also have been a pillory (Fig. 14). It was set up by Doge Leonardo Loredan and bears his coat of arms. If this monument did have a role to play in punishment, it, too, is an eloquent public marker of Venetian civil violence and a reminder to both us, and to sixteenth century Korčulans, of Venetian dominance and enforcement. So, too, at Cattaro (Kotor, Montenegro), where the pillory was the first thing people saw when entering the city through the Sea Gate. One can easily imagine the message to any visitor, greeted by a penalized body chained to this monument to Venetian hegemony and indicator of the empire’s intolerance of disobedience or treachery.

The preponderance of *spolia* fragments that convey the concepts of justice and punishment in Venice encourages us to reconsider the twin columns in Famagusta. If we place them back to what was their original location in front of St Nicholas, they would have been the first thing that confronted someone entering the cathedral square through the south archway of the *Loggia Bembo* or, alternatively, from the main road coming into the square from Famagusta’s Sea Gate. Could these columns have marked a place for punishment? We might do well to reconsider the happier humanist reading of the *Tomb of Venus* that sat between the pillars. Could the tomb itself have retained signification as a place of punishment or execution? There are no records of such, but I’ve always been intrigued by these notches cut from the tomb on the short sides (Fig. 14) and I wonder whether the Venetians undertook the alterations for some retributive function of this redeployed piece of *spolia*. Given the function of the twin columns in Venice, it seems reasonable to infer that the columns at Famagusta may also have marked a site of civic retribution. While we may talk of Salamis and of Venice’s inheritance of the authority of ancient empires and of their use of the aura-filled fragments of the physical remains of those empires, we might also consider that, in the case of Famagusta, the pillars may well have had punishment and domination as their primary meaning. And if the pillars here were also, as in Venice, “Pillars of Justice”, then it might also be significant that, unlike Cattaro, where anybody entering the city would have been confronted with a monument to punishment, here in Famagusta the arched entryway of the *Loggia Bembo* faces the Greek quarter of the city and the metropolitan church of St
George of the Greeks, merely 100 meters away. Thus the reminder of Venetian corporal punishment might well have been particularly dramatized for the indigenous population of Greeks, especially those who were antagonistic to Venetian rule.

We might also, in this light, reconsider the *panca* or bench along the flank of the *Loggia Bembo* that afforded a perfect view of the columns in Famagusta in their original Venetian-era position. Punishment was a public event in Venice, and any such retribution would have been witnessed by the authorities. As Edward Muir and others have shown, Venice defined itself by public display and procession perhaps more than any other early modern city. The *spolia* bench in Famagusta—clearly in an honorific position, like the *spolia* bench in Venice that extends from the *Porta della Carta*—was evidently not merely a convenient place for weary pedestrians to sit, but also provided a seating area for officials to witness the carrying out of sentences. The Venetian *panca*’s crucial place in the processional occasions of the city are well illustrated by Gentile Bellini’s famous late fifteenth-century painting of a procession in the *Piazza San Marco*. In it the *Pietra del Bando* and *Pilastri Acretani* are both visible as Venetian senators walk in procession from the *Porta della Carta*. In the case of the *spolia*-laden *panca* in Venice, we see that it is proximate to these monuments and the main sites of public punishment. Certainly these seating arrangements would have also been used during happier ritual occasions such as festivals and celebrations, but the idea of punishment would never have been very far from the public’s sense of the place, the site of the most severe expression of Venetian rule. Both the *spolia* benches in Venice and in Famagusta, then, were related to public punishment and afforded officials a place to witness the carrying out of sentences.

Famagusta’s cathedral square was thus a distant but resonant echo of the Piazzetta in Venice. In both places the signifying operations of the built environment, incorporating antique sculpture and *spolia*, articulated manifold themes of conquest, predestination, and the inheritance of the authority of past civilizations and ancient empires. Part of the exercise of this authority was the continual reminding of the citizenry—both colonizer and colonized—of the determination of the state to mete out public corporeal and capital punishment.

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Figure 1. The Triple-arched Gateway of the *Palazzo del Proveditore*, Famagusta, with Four Granite Spolia Columns from the Greco-Roman City of Salamis – Langdale

Figure 2. The Two Granite Columns from Salamis with Doric-style Pedestals and Capitals, Set up in Front of the Ottoman Period *medrese* in Famagusta’s Cathedral Square – Langdale
Figure 3. Detail from Stephano Gibellino’s Print of the Siege of Famagusta, 1571.

Figure 4. The so-called Tomb of Venus in Famagusta – Langdale
Figure 5. Relief of Animals in Vine Motif, Spolia from Salamis along the North Side of the Loggia Bembo in Famagusta’s Main Square. Used to Make a Panca or Bench – Langdale

Figure 6. Classical Entablatures and Capitals from Salamis Used to Continue the Panca or Bench along the North Side of the Loggia Bembo in Famagusta’s Main Square – Langdale
Figure 7. The Twin Columns of the Bacino Waterfront in Venice

Figure 8. The so-called Pillars of Acre or Pilastri Acretani, beside the Church of San Marco in the Piazzetta in Venice, Just outside of the Porta della Carta – Langdale
Figure 9. Allegorical Figure of 'Justice' on the Palazzo Ducale in Venice, Overlooking the Piazzetta – Langdale

Figure 10. Relief of the Judgment of Solomon on the Corner of the Palazzo Ducale beside the Porta della Carta and Overlooking the 'Tetrarchs', the Pillars of Acre, and the Pietra del Bando
Figure 11. The so-called ‘Tetrarchs’, probably depicting the ‘Sons of Constantine’, outside the Porta della Carta and beside the Pillars of Acre and the Pietra del Bando in the Piazzetta in Venice – Langdale

Figure 12. The Panca or Bench running along the exit way of the Porta della Carta in the Piazzetta in Venice – Langdale
Figure 13. The Porphyry 'Carmagnola' Head. A Piece of Spolia Set on the Upper Section of the Southwest Corner of the Church of San Marco, Just above the Pillars of Acre and the Pietra del Bando in the Piazzetta, Venice.

Figure 14. A Venetian Monument Erected by Doge Leonardo Loredan in the Main Square of the Town of Korčula, Croatia. Possibly a Pillory – Langdale.
Figure 15. Side View of the *Tomb of Venus*, Famagusta – Langdale