

MARIN BARLETI (C. 1460–AFTER 1512) AND THE SYSTEM OF PATRONAGE



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*The Albanian humanist Marin Barleti composed his works as an exile in Venice. With his first book, *De Obsidione Scodrensi*, 1504, he applied to the doge for patronage, but does not seem to have had success, perhaps understandably. An analysis of his work reveals how he omitted most of the flattery that would have been expected; while in general he praises Venice, much unexpressed criticism of the city is to be found between the lines.*

Marinus Barletius was for centuries well known among European readers for his biography of the Albanian hero Scanderbeg, who fought the Ottoman Turks successfully for a quarter of a century. This story of the fearless warrior from a small nation who again and again defeated the huge enemy armies was published in Rome c. 1508/10 and was pleasant reading for all those who feared the Turks. A long list of translations and new editions of the Latin original¹ bear witness to his renown with the starting point in 1533, when a German translation was published. Soon after, in 1537, Caspar Hedio's edition of the same work was published by Crato Mylius in Strasbourg. This was just the beginning; during the following decades a wealth of translations and new editions appeared.

The reception of Barleti's first work, *De Obsidione Scodrensi* (About the Siege of Shkodra), Venice 1504, however was different; nothing is heard of it before a new edition appeared in 1556, and few exemplars of the work have survived. Today Barleti is almost forgotten except among Albanians and specialists in Balkan history; literary trends have changed, and, more specifically, the Ottoman empire has dissolved and Turkish armies are no longer a threat to Western Europe.

Most scholars take for granted that Barleti was famous already in his lifetime, and he is thought to have risen to fame with *De Obsidione*. I shall

¹ Pall 1938, 17–27.

argue here that his first book was no success, and that his renown only established itself after his death.

Life and works

Until recently, all that was known of Barleti's life was to be found in an article by the Romanian scholar Francisc Pall from 1938. However, in 2008 important new information was published by the Venetian historian Lucia Nadin on the basis of painstaking research through both public and private archives in Venice. Her aim was to investigate the fortunes of a group of Albanian refugees who arrived in the city in April 1479 having left their hometown of Shkodra to the Ottoman forces. As a result of Nadin's research quite a few details of Barleti's life were also revealed. In a new book from 2012, which focused on the print publisher Bernardino de Vitali, who among other things printed Barleti's two great narratives, included important documents about Barleti. On some points I disagree with her interpretation of the data, and what follows should not be taken as wholly representative of her views. Still, she has provided scholars with marvellous and detailed new knowledge.

Barleti came to Venice in 1479 as part of the above-mentioned group of refugees. In recognition of the fact that the Albanian inhabitants of Shkodra had been very courageous in withstanding the besiegers, and that this had been an important contribution to the defence of the Venetian Republic against the threatening enemy, those who had survived were invited to make their new homes in the republic. A commission of five men – *i cinque savi* – was set up to find housing and work for the immigrants, and Nadin has underlined how this enterprise might be seen as a model example of how immigration should be handled in order to be successful.²

Young Barleti was first assigned a butcher's stall in the Rialto market, but later he studied theology at the university of Padova, and in 1494 he became a priest at the church of Santo Stefano in Piovene, an office he seems to have left before 1510. It must have been during his years as a parish priest that he composed his works. They are:

De Obsidione Scodrensi (About the Siege of Shkodra), Venice 1504,

Historia de Vita et Gestis Scanderbegi (The Story of the Life and Deeds of Scanderbeg), Rome 1508/10, and

Compendium Vitarum Summorum Pontificum (A Survey of the Lives of the Most Important Popes), Rome 1512?, known only from a second edition in 1555.

² Nadin 2008.

The first translation of *De Obsidione* was by Francesco Sansovino into Italian, published in 1564, and here the work is wrongly assigned to Marin Beçikemi, an error which I find interesting.

This man was also a refugee from Shkodra, slightly younger than Barleti, but his life is much better known than Barleti's. For one thing, he composed the story of his life in a surviving hexameter poem,³ and besides, he is known from his published works and from mentions in works of other authors. He made a glamorous career as a philologist, teacher, and public speaker, and in 1500 he was granted citizenship in Venice. In 1517 he became a lecturer of rhetoric at the university of Padova. To me it is interesting that still half a century after Barleti's death Beçikemi could be taken to be the Marinus who had described the siege of Shkodra. The mistake signals that the famous Albanian Marinus in Venice was Beçikemi rather than Barleti.⁴

A reason for such a state of affairs is easily found in the fact that Beçikemi understood the intricacies of patronage which Barleti did not – or perhaps Barleti understood them but did not want to comply?

The importance of patronage

Behind much Renaissance art – painting, sculpture, and architecture as well as literature – stood a patron who supported the artist or perhaps even supplied him with his livelihood; in exchange the patron expected works which somehow were in his/her interest. The essence of the system has been described as follows:⁵ 1) reciprocal exchange of goods and services, 2) a personal relationship between patron and client, and 3) asymmetry of the relationship. In a literary work the author usually stated in a dedicatory letter why he offered this specific gift to the addressee. Perhaps he was already one of the patron's clients, perhaps he wanted to become one, or perhaps he just wanted to lean on the patron's authority.

In her great study of how Plutarch's *Lives* entered Italy during the 15th century by means of translations into Latin, Marianne Pade demonstrated how carefully various humanists chose which biographies to dedicate to which patrons, and how subtly they adapted their translations to their specific addressees. By presenting the differences and by analysing the dedicatory prefaces she brought these humanists and their patrons close to modern readers and exemplified how the patronage system worked in practice.⁶

³ Published in Nadin 2008, 207–223.

⁴ Shuteriqi 1987, 40–41, interprets Sansovino's error in the same way.

⁵ de Beer 2014.

⁶ Pade 2007.

Barleti added such introductory dedications to all his three surviving works, and the first of them will be the focus of interest here. He dedicated *De Obsidione* to the doge of Venice, Leonardo Loredan, and to the senate. However well respected the immigrant priest of Piovene may have been, this choice of dedicatee was breathtakingly ambitious. Venice was at the pinnacle of her glory at the time, and her leaders were well aware of their own status at the top of one of the most important empires in the world. Barleti addresses them with due respect: “To the most honourable prince Leonardo Loredan, doge of the Venetian aristocracy, and his holy senate,”⁷ and his presentation of himself and his work is very humble. Still, to address these special dedicatees was no humble act.

His preface begins with a general statement: when disasters occur, they are usually described in writing so as not to be forgotten. With their works, writers seek to cultivate compassion in their readers and remind them that humans were born to help each other [this point, that pity should generate support, is repeated with variations four times in the next few lines]. Such considerations led the author to think of the horrible accidents which struck the faithful inhabitants of Shkodra. Even though he is painfully conscious of the fact that he is unable to match the refined taste of his addressees, he feels compelled to make the attempt in order to celebrate the fidelity of the people of Shkodra and seek to win favour for them. Their achievements will serve as a model for other people so that they, too, will work faithfully for their superiors. The glorious victory they won over an overwhelmingly superior enemy and the horrors they withstood were exceptional, and afterwards they were taken care of with great humanity. He dedicates his work to the doge because just like Hercules once eased the exhausted Atlas of carrying the sky vault, Loredan is the person most able to support the author and protect his work against evil critics.⁸

Thus summarised it is clear that the address to the doge and the senate is an application for patronage on behalf of the people of Shkodra and the author himself. Not least when at the end Barleti says of the doge that to good men he has always been a sweet jewel and a strong defence, *dulce decus summumque praesidium*, the allusion to Horace’s famous approach to his patron Maecenas (*Carm.* 1.1.2) is manifest and should have left no doubt of the wish for patronage. However, Barleti’s somewhat labyrinthic style has veiled the intent, and as far as I know it has not been noted by readers that the

⁷ “Ad Serenissimum Principem Leonardum Lauretanum Venetæ Aristocratiae Ducem Illustrissimum, Eiusque Sanctissimum Senatam.”

⁸ Aurel Plasari thinks that Barleti is aiming at Beçikemi, according to Hosaflook 2012, 41 n. 7.

author offers his work to the addressees as an entreaty for support. He and his compatriots have fulfilled their parts of a patronage contract, he with his book and all of them with their courageous fight, and they are now entitled to expect a suitable reward. However, there is nothing to indicate that the entreaty was accepted, and when we look closer at how Barleti represented the events it is perhaps understandable if the doge was not enthusiastic.

What Barleti did not mention

De Obsidione is an eyewitness-report of the Turkish siege, composed almost as a diary. We are told how the citizens first heard the rumours, next saw the smoke from burning villages, and finally witnessed how the huge enemy army arrived, one wave after another, and how finally the sultan himself arrived, the dreadful Mehmet [“the conqueror”, who 25 years earlier had conquered Constantinople]. Next follow negotiations, afterwards Turkish attacks and Albanian victory, finally siege and hunger. In the meantime, Venice made an armistice with the sultan. The Shkodrans were given the choice between sharing their town with the Turks or leaving for Venice, and they all preferred to leave.

Shkodra, which at the time like most of the other towns along the Eastern coast of the Adriatic was under Venetian rule,⁹ was an important fortress in the defence of the empire and had been forcefully supported by the Venetian fleet and army during a first Ottoman aggression in 1474, when the Turks had been warded off. In 1478, however, the citizens had received no help except for the garrison which was already there; instead, Venice had chosen diplomacy.

The first siege and the defeat of the Turks was a major event in Venice. Antonio Loredan, of the same family as Leonardo, had been the governor of Shkodra when the town was attacked, and he was celebrated as a war hero for his deeds and formally given the title of Knight of San Marco. This first siege of Shkodra is briefly mentioned in Barleti’s *De Obsidione*, and here the focus is on the Albanian citizens. He describes how “by intense fighting they defended themselves, their hometown, wives, and children. ... In this way, by means of this excellent and famous victory, won with Antonio Loredan as leader and governor, *duce rectoreque Antonio Lauretano*, they achieved eternal name and fame”.¹⁰ The four words quoted here constitute all that is

⁹ Schmitt 2001.

¹⁰ “... utque ciues Scodrenses se, patriam, vxores, liberos, acerrime pugnando protexerint. ... Ex quo Scodrenses ob tam egregiam & præclarissimam victoriam, duce rectoreque Antonio Lauretano, æternum sibi nomen et gloriam adepti sunt” (fol. 237v).

said of the great Venetian, whereas the Albanian citizens are the heroes. The phrase is so brief that it is almost an insult.

The other major Venetian hero of the first siege, captain of the fleet Pietro Mocenigo, is not even mentioned by Barleti. He was afterwards elected doge, but died already in 1476. He considered the liberation of Shkodra as one of his most important deeds which is clear from his tomb in *Basilica dei Santi Giovanni e Paolo*, one of the sculptor Pietro Lombardo's masterpieces. Here two reliefs at the bottom of the composition depict his victories in Famagusta and Shkodra. Admittedly, the second siege, not the first, was the subject of Barleti's book; besides, almost thirty years had passed since Mocenigo's death and twenty-five since the monument was finished (1481). Even so, the absence of Mocenigo in Barleti's work is astonishing. His tomb was visibly present and must have been one of the first thoughts to enter a Venetian reader's mind on meeting the name of Shkodra. Still a century after the events when Paolo Veronese was decorating the *Palazzo Ducale*, he chose the same topics for two paintings in the *Sala del Maggior Consiglio*.

The first siege was the subject of a monograph by Giorgio Merula, well known in Venice as a philologist and teacher. He published his work in September 1474, soon after the event. Just as Barleti did 30 years later, Merula praises the brave citizens of the town, but first and foremost his book is an overwhelming eulogy of Antonio Loredan, who deserved all the honour he afterwards received in Venice. Barleti knew this description as revealed by various verbatim references; all the more striking is the fact that he spends so few words on him.

Both sieges were described by the historian Marcantonio Sabellico in his history of Venice (undated, but finished after 1487), and briefly also in his history of the world (1496). Again it is certain that Barleti knew the passages. In his report of the first siege Sabellico praises both Loredan, Mocenigo, and the fearless civilians. In his description of the second siege Sabellico specifies that on the arrival of the Ottoman army the town housed 1600 male inhabitants, 260 females [most women and children had been evacuated], 600 soldiers, and the governor Antonius Legius¹¹. He admires the courage and endurance of the citizens: "Since the beginning of the world no locality was ever attacked more fiercely than Shkodra or defended with more determination; twice the enemy attacked the walls, and twice he was beaten back from the fortifications under enormous bloodshed."¹² At the 1474 siege

¹¹ Sabellicus [undated] 1718, 799.

¹² "Nullus a condito ævo locus est maiore mole quam Scodra oppugnatus: nullus magis strenue defensus: bis hostis subiit muros: bis cum ingenti strage est a moenibus repulsus." Sabellicus [1496] 1509, vol. 2, fol. AAA iiii.

the Venetian fleet had come to the rescue, but in 1478 no support was given from Venice except the permanent garrison. When, finally, the siege was ended, about 450 men and 160 women had survived, and their toughness was admired even by the enemy. The survivors were brought to Venice where the authorities took care that they found suitable jobs according to their qualifications and former situation, and all were given public benefits.¹³

In Barleti's description as well, the governor plays a positive role; he was the one who evacuated the women and children; and on the morning of the crucial battle he was present and gave orders. In short, he lived up to his responsibilities and fulfilled his duties in the best possible way; however, his name is never mentioned by Barleti. In general, if a Venetian is named at all it is only in connection with his death. Another strange fact is that even though there are many elegant speeches in *De Obsidione*, they are always given by either Albanians or Turks, while no representative of Venice is ever allowed to speak.

In short, the role of the Venetian heroes of the first siege, Antonio Loredan and Pietro Mocenigo, is played down by Barleti, and even though the governor during the second siege, Antonius Legius, is praised, he is anonymised. The story is told as a war between Turks and Albanians in which Venetians played a minor role. *De Obsidione* is from beginning to end a glorification of the citizens of Shkodra, in which the doge and the senate would look in vain for the kind of praise themselves or their relatives would expect in a text dedicated to them as an application for patronage.

In 1503, a year before Barleti offered his description of the siege to the Venetian authorities, Beçikemi had given a speech in the senate which, just like Barleti's work, was dedicated to the doge and senate. In his speech, Beçikemi praises them and thanks them for their generosity towards the people of Shkodra and himself. He opens with a long eulogy of the doge, followed by praise of the senate, the Venetians, and the city, in that order. Next, the Loredan family are highlighted as special patrons of Shkodra, and 24 important Loredans are listed and praised; Antonio Loredan, the governor during the first siege, is no. 18.¹⁴ Beçikemi follows Merula in glorifying this Loredan, who on the morning of the crucial battle had been the one to stimulate the tired and discouraged citizens to fight. The last pages concentrate on the grace that the Beçikemi family were met with from Venice

¹³ Sabellicus [undated] 1718, 802: "Scodrensibus, qui Venetias venere, aliis perpetuum ex publico salarium, aliis arcium aliorumque locorum præfecturæ cum publico stipendio, pro conditione & pristina fortuna, cuique decretæ: ita ut nullus fuerit, qui non publico beneficio sublevatus sit."

¹⁴ Becichemus [1505?] 1506. Praise of the doge fol. IVv–XIIr, of the Lauretani XXr–XXIIr.

and the merciful reception the refugees had received. When the commission of the five was set up, Leonardo Loredan himself had been one of the members.

Now, this is how a gracious authority should be approached! Compared to Beçikemi, Barleti was strikingly reluctant in his praise. He left Antonio Loredan without a name, let the other Venetians play a minor role, and, more shockingly than all that, he expressed no explicit thanks to his main dedicatee, the doge, for his personal contribution to the care of the refugees as one of the *cinque savi*. Admittedly, Beçikemi and Barleti moved in different genres, Beçikemi's speech was a *panegyricus*, Barleti's book a work of history. Even so, *De Obsidione* could easily have found room for some flattering acknowledgement of the support the immigrants had received from Venice.

The bitterness of peace

There is, of course, no explicit criticism of *Venice* in *De Obsidione*; that would have been unthinkable. The negative evaluation consists in omissions of the praise that might have been expected. Besides, in one important passage towards the end of the story the rhythm is remarkable, shifting back and forth between slow, detailed reporting and brief phrases coming down almost as blows. When the sultan realised that he was unable to conquer the town, he returned to Constantinople and left his commanders to exhaust the citizens by starvation. Barleti describes in horrid detail how the citizens gradually were compelled to eat whatever edible they could find, still without wavering in their decision not to surrender. Immediately after comes the following passage:

And look! on Sunday 20 December some Italians arrived under the walls. They greeted the citizens of Shkodra and announced to them that a Venetian diplomat was present. He was on his way back from the Ottomans in Constantinople where he had negotiated for peace. They invited them to cheer up since they would not remain under siege much longer.¹⁵

For the reader this *ecce*, look! comes as a shock. In Sabellico's *History of Venice* it is related how a secretary called Ioannes Darius had been negotiating with the sultan during the siege, but Barleti tells the story from inside the fortress, and his readers are not told what the eyewitness did not know. The description has concentrated so much on the awful conditions under which

¹⁵ “Et ecce decimo tertio Kalend. Ianuarias die Dominico Itali quidam sub moenibus apparuerunt qui Scodrenses salutantes, eis nunciauerunt Oratorem Venetorum adesse, qui pro pace impetranda ab Ottomano Constantinopoli proficiscebatur, hortabanturq; eos, vt bonum animum haberent, quòd non diu in obsidione futuri essent” (268v).

the poor, but proud, citizens had lived that the *ecce* is unbearable: the Venetians had solved the problem without any consultation with the Shkodrans. They were not even properly informed, but just told the news by “some Italians”. Later a message was delivered to the Venetian governor, containing the conditions of peace. This is reported in a few lines, after which an important Albanian citizen delivers a wonderful long speech to his compatriots explaining why they cannot possibly accept to share their town peacefully with the Turks. The speech takes up more than four pages, after which the author spends just half a page on relating how the Turks took over and the Albanians departed. The very last words are as follows:

For the dignity and holy power of this city [Venice] they had fought bitterly for so long and sacrificed their belongings, blood, parents, children, hometown, and lives; under its auspices they had defeated the most threatening enemy; in its shade they would spend fortunate and happy days until death; and finally, staying with them they would end their lives laudably to the best of their abilities.¹⁶

The praise of Venice is balanced by the description of how dearly the citizens of Shkodra had paid for the safe haven they were now approaching.

Let us return to the dedicatory letter that introduces the work and some noteworthy aspects of it. Barleti compares the siege of Shkodra with two famous sieges during the second Punic War as told by Livy, the events around Saguntum and Casilinum. There is nothing special about that; Merula had made the same point in his description of the first siege of Shkodra, and in his work this appears just as one of the usual references to ancient Roman parallels. However, whereas Merula used the comparison to assert that the suffering of the citizens of Shkodra was just as fierce as what the ancient populations had experienced, Barleti’s point is different: Shkodra caused Mehmet just as difficult problems as Saguntum and Casilinum did Hannibal. Besides, it is worth considering for a moment the story Livy tells of Saguntum (21.7). The geographical layout of the besieged towns, Saguntum and Shkodra, make them similar: both are in a coastal area while the city for whose interests the war was fought is placed on the other side of the sea. In both Saguntum and Shkodra the citizens expected help from the superior power, but in vain. In the case of Saguntum, Livy tells, the reason was that the senators in Rome discussed the case for so long that Hannibal conquered the town in the meantime. As for Shkodra, Venice did not even consider

¹⁶ “Pro cuius dignitate, sanctissimoque imperio tamdiu acerrimè pugnaverant, opes, sanguinem, parentes, liberos, patriam, vitamque deuouerant: cuius auspicio infestissimum hostem deuicerant, sub cuius vmbra ad mortem vsque dies faustos lætosque ducerent, apudque illos tandem laudabilem pro viribus suis vitam finirent” (271r).

sending help; instead, they negotiated with the enemy behind the back of the starving citizens. Here, again, I find a silent, bitter criticism of Venice.

Towards the end, Barleti states that “these faithful souls were not left without reward, but they were all taken care of with great humanity”.¹⁷ This is, of course, an important note to end on, but Barleti’s wording is strangely brief. In his statement of the same fact, Sabellicus had been precise and detailed, telling how the various refugees were each given jobs which suited their special abilities. Not least considering that Barleti was addressing the doge who had been one of those in charge of the reward, a more rhetorically decorated expression of gratitude would have been natural.

Barleti highlights the fact that the small fortress of Shkodra was not conquered, but won a glorious victory over the Ottoman army. Besides, even though these citizens deserve pity they are not called pitiful. The catastrophe they were hit by is called *miserabilis calamitas* / *sæuissima fortuna* / *acerbissima casus* (a pitiful calamity / cruel fortune / bitter disaster), while for the citizens themselves only positive adjectives are used: four times in the brief text they are called *fidelissimi* (faithful) and once *innocentissimi* (innocent), and both in the preface and in the following description of the events, Barleti dwells upon the unbelievable fact that the citizens of Shkodra won over Mehmet. The overall message of *De Obsidione* is that the Shkodrans are not poor victims, but proud victors and should be respected as such.

The reaction

The sources do not mention how the addressees reacted, and we do not know where Barleti spent the next years of his life. Nadin thinks that he went to Rome, where his next book was published. Her studies of the Albanian exile community in Venice show that the nobleman Girolamo Donà was very active in supporting the intellectual Albanians, especially Beçikemi.¹⁸ The publisher Bernardino de Vitali was in Rome at least from 1506, and Nadin thinks that both he and Barleti came there as part of Donà’s entourage when in April-July 1505 he was sent on a diplomatic mission to the pope, and that they both stayed on there.¹⁹ I remain unconvinced. Nadin has no documentation of any connection between Donà and Barleti, which does not, of course, show that such a connection did not exist. Still, if *De Obsidione* had been a success and Barleti had been accepted as a client by Donà, would he not have

¹⁷“...non sine premio fuisse fideles huiusmodi animos derelictos, quibus omnibus tanta humanitate consultum est.”

¹⁸ Nadin 2012, 39, 57.

¹⁹ Nadin 2012, 53.

been mentioned? Except for his published works, Barleti seems to disappear completely from the sources; the last mention of him is from 1495, if I read Nadin correctly. In comparison, Beçikemi's name pops up often.²⁰

These must have been the years when Barleti composed his major work, the biography of Scanderbeg. His sources were mainly oral, and I find it probable that he found them among his most familiar compatriots, the Albanians in Veneto. He mentions one of them, Petrus Angelus, a nobleman who was living a modest life in Padova, he, too, a refugee; his home was the cultural centre of the Albanian exile community in Venice.²¹ In the preface to his *Compendium* Barleti tells that he and Angelus often talked of Scanderbeg, and that Angelus had been the one to suggest that he should write the biography. Besides, I imagine that Barleti was eagerly cultivating his network among the other exiles. Almost four decades had passed since the hero's death, and Barleti must have felt in a hurry to talk with those who still had a first-hand memory of him. How would he have had time for travelling to Rome? In my imagination he was leading a quiet life in Piovene, spending all his free time working on the biography.

However that may be, Barleti found another dedicatee for the biography of Scanderbeg. Donferrante, grandchild of the hero and his oldest living descendant, lived in the kingdom of Napoli and was the duke of San Pietro in Galatina, and Barleti offered his book to him. He was, of course, an obvious choice, but also in this case the preface is unusual, for except for the very first words in which Donferrante is presented the author does not mention him. Not a word is spent on the relationship between Ferrante and Scanderbeg, no moralising remark of the duties inherent in having such a glorious ancestor, and absolutely no hint of a wish for patronage. The dedicatory letter is impersonal, a lament for the state of affairs in what once was a proud and free people under the leadership of the great Scanderbeg. Why this is so, I do not know. Perhaps Barleti had never met his dedicatee?

In both prefaces, to the story of Shkodra as well as to the biography of Scanderbeg, the author excuses that he has taken on a task that is too heavy for him, and claims that there are others who would have been better suited for it; in the preface to the biography he dwells a little on how these unnamed others are publishing speeches and philological works in a steady stream, and it is evident to think that Beçikemi is the one to be criticised.²² Barleti himself asserts that rather than leaving the task undone he prefers to risk being ridiculed as uncouth; the adjective used is *subrusticus*, which characterises a

²⁰ Shuteriqi 1987, 49–51.

²¹ Pall 1938, 99–105; Schmitt 2000, 159–161; Nadin 2008, 34–35.

²² Shuteriqi 1987, 59.

person from the countryside who lacks urbanity. I read this as a reference to his experience of how *De Obsidione* had been received by his potential Venetian readership.

What a change when we turn to the preface of Barleti's third and last work, *Compendium*! The aim of it is to document the royal ancestry of Petrus Angelus. All his life he had modest support from the Venetian state in acknowledgement of his brave resistance against the Turks.²³ He was no wealthy man. Barleti's dedicatory letter describes the warm friendship which exists between him and Petrus Angelus and the preface develops into a wonderful eulogy of the addressee, his courage, wisdom, discipline, modesty, scholarship, and sense of justice. In this connection Barleti actually calls himself his dedicatee's client. His wording highlights the personal feelings; he speaks of himself in diminutive, but still as a kind of equal, as Angelus' small client and good brother (*tuus clientulus, bonusque frater*). In this case, where no benefits were involved, Barleti had no reservations against flattery.

Scanderbeg's final words

Barleti is considered to give a very positive account of Venice's role in the events,²⁴ and that is certainly true as long as one reads only the written lines, not what is said between the lines. Just like *De Obsidione, Historia de Vita et Gestis Scanderbegi* ends with a scene full of unspoken bitterness. The hero is on his deathbed, his allies and commanders are with him, and so are some diplomats from Venice. He has given a long and emotional speech to them, making accounts of his life and deeds, stimulating them to continue the fight, and recommending his young son Johannes to them. To him he gives detailed advice about what to do. After his father's death he will be in a very dangerous situation, and therefore he and his mother must go to Italy, to the towns which the king of Naples once gave them. He shall remain there until he has grown up and then proceed to Venice. Now follows a statement of the excellent relations Scanderbeg has always had to the city, how the wise and pious senators have promised to save his realm for his son, and how they have always been the defenders of widows and orphans. Johannes shall approach them full of trust, and they will give him back his father's towns, communities, kingdom and realm. He shall always take their advice, they are strong, wise, and victorious, and they have never failed a friend.

On the surface this is a fantastic eulogy of Venice, dwelling on the special traits which were dominant in the self-understanding of the city. However, four decades after the hero's death both author and readers knew what had

²³ Pall 1938, 63.

²⁴ Schmitt 2009, 56, 299–300; Nadin 2012, 89.

happened in the meantime. Venice had not taken care of Scanderbeg's kingdom, but made armistice with his enemies in 1479 and peace in 1503. There was no Albania for Johannes to take over, and the attempts both he and his eldest son had made to reconquer what they had lost, had been supported only half-heartedly by Venice²⁵. Rather than laudation, the speech is a revelation of the hypocrisy of the city.

What had Barleti hoped to achieve when in his first book he appealed to the doge and signoria for patronage? In my reading, what he applied for was the kind of contract in which the patron allows the client to lean on his authority. I imagine that he expected his argumentation to convince the senate to use its status and power to support the faithful Shkodrans so that finally they would receive the respect their glorious achievement deserved, and that the doge himself should recommend Barleti as an important historian. If so, it turned out that he had been *subrusticus*.²⁶

²⁵ For these events, see Petta 2000, 27–38.

²⁶ I am very thankful to Angelos Sakkopoulos, who revised my English.

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The first editions are complicated to use because of their many abbreviations, and *De Obsidione* 1504 is very rare. I use *De Obsidione* 1578 and *De Vita Scanderbegi* 1537. Lonicerus, however, omitted the prefaces; I have read the preface to *De Obsidione* at the Royal Library of Stockholm.

I am deeply grateful to Johann Ramminger, who at an early stage supplied me with scanned versions of *De Obsidione* 1578, *Historia de Vita Scanderbegi* 1508/10, *Historia de Vita Scanderbegi* 1537, and even hand-copied parts of *Compendium Vitarum Pontificum* 1555.

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