

Aristea Gratsea

*Marriage alliances and socio-economic mobility in Venetian Crete (16th century)**

1. Introduction

Pre-industrial societies and most specifically Medieval societies have been characterized by a non-existent or very low level of social mobility, a myth that recent scholarship has demolished. Instead, it is believed that significant social stratification and the development of less permeable social boundaries actually culminated towards the end of the Middle Ages and into the early Modern period (Carocci 2011, 368). The thirteenth century saw merchants adopting new family practices that altered pathways of social mobility. Practices such as forming brotherhoods, marrying late, remaining unmarried, and practicing endogamy helped create cohesive and complex socio-political groups. These groups were well-suited to the new trade systems and were effective in managing and preserving their political power within the communes (Carocci 2011, 389). Towards this direction, several studies (Pirenne 1925; Cipolla 1997) have debated about the social mobility of the medieval merchant in relevance with the growth of the cities, the rise of mercantile groups to political power, the crisis of feudal society and the emergence of a proto-bourgeois urban class (Petralia 2010, 248).

Additionally, most recent research has also been devoted to the relationship between social mobility and family practices. The study of the European family in the Medieval and early Modern period reveals a complex and dynamic institution at the heart of societal development. Families were foundational to the economic, social, and cultural formation of Europe, navigating and shaping the transformation of their times. Understanding family life in these periods offers critical insights into the broader historical processes that has shaped the modern world (Goody 2000). Regarding the Venetian Republic, the literature for the social history and the history of the family has been an active scholarly field in the last decades, with a focus on identity, marriage practices, inheritance system and dowries. Nevertheless, the study of family and marriage strategies has focused on the nobility (De Giorgio, Klapisch-

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Zuber 1996; Dean, Lowe 1998; Chojnacki 2000; Pomata 2002; Cowan 2007). Concerning the Venetian dominions of the Eastern Mediterranean and specifically Venetian Crete, the research is also limited and focused on the upper classes (McKee 2000; Tsourapa 2010; van Gemert 2013; Markaki 2021). Additionally, there is no study that examines the family practices and marriage alliances in the maritime sector of Venetian Crete, despite the importance of the island in the Venetian Maritime State and the broader Mediterranean network.

Within this context, the present paper aims to contribute to the debate on pre-industrial social mobility and its relation to mercantile development and family practices during the early Modern period. Sixteenth century Venetian Crete is an ideal case study for the examination of socio-economic mobility. The island of Crete was a multicultural environment with diverse ethnic (Greeks, Italians, Venetians), religious (Orthodox, Catholics, Jews), and social groups (Venetian nobles, Cretan nobles, *cittadini*, popolo). Additionally, the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries were transformative in political, economic, and social terms: the creation of a new title of nobility (Cretan nobility), the acknowledgment of more political rights to the middle social stratum (*cittadini*), the rise of private maritime trade, the active participation of Greek subjects from the Venetian colonies in the long-distance trade, the changes in the geographical borders due to the Venetian-Ottoman wars and the massive arrival of Greek refugees as a result of these conflicts.

The study is organized into the following sections. Section 2 provides a brief historical overview of Crete and its role within the Venetian Maritime State (*Stato da Mar*) from the beginning of the Venetian occupation until its loss to the Ottomans. In this section the system of social hierarchy in Venetian Crete is also analyzed (section 2.1). The study then focuses on the theoretical framework related to family structure and the legal framework of marriage established both in Venice and its colony, Venetian Crete. This section also explores the implementation of this legal framework by the society (section 2.2). The third section of the paper provides a short outline of the archival documentation available for reconstructing marriage patterns and socio-economic mobility in Venetian Crete (section 3).

The core of the paper, Section 4, focuses on marriage alliances within the maritime sector of sixteenth century Venetian Crete. The emphasis is on a specific citizen-family, the Curcumeli family¹, who by taking advantage of the socio-political changes of their era managed to advance their socio-economic status and expand their maritime and business activities through the Mediterranean and the Black Sea. Drawing on the analytical framework of Charalambos Gasparis (2019) on Byzantine families

¹ The spelling of this particular family's name varies across the documents of the period, reflecting the linguistic and administrative practices of the time. While, in the Greek documents the surname appears as *Κουρκουμέλης*, in the Italian documents, the surname appears as *Curcumel(l)i*, *Corcumel(l)i*, *Corcomel(l)i*, showcasing its adaptation to the local linguistic patterns. Since the family had Greek origin, their surname is presented in its Greek form, transcribed into Latin characters in order to preserve its original linguistic and cultural context. For this reason, the surname of the male members of the family is written as «Curcumelis», while for female members, the final -s is omitted, as is the case in the Greek language (Curcumeli). The same pattern is applied to the given names of the family members (i.e. the Greek version of the name). For instance, one of the brothers, Alexandros, is recorded in the sources with various forms of his name *Alessandro*, *Alexander*, *Αλέξανδρος*. Similarly, in phrases such as «Curcumeli family» and «Curcumeli brothers» the final -s is also omitted to align with this convention.

in Venetian Crete, this section is divided into four sub-sections: firstly, the number of members and branches of the Curcumeli family is presented (section 4.1). Secondly, the marriages of the family members and the link between these marital unions and the development of the family's maritime business is analyzed (section 4.2). The last two sub-sections delve into the family's attitude towards the Venetian regime (section 4.3) and the family's wealth and economic activities, both in rural and urban contexts (section 4.4). This last sub-section draws particular attention to the dowries given to the female members of the family, since their examination can provide insightful data about the family's economic status, the wealth distribution, inheritance system and social hierarchies within the family. Subsequently, the study examines other practices used by certain family members to improve their socio-economic status. The study concludes with some final remarks (section 5).

2. Crete in the Venetian Maritime State (*Stato da Mar*)

The Fourth Crusade which ended with the conquest of Constantinople, the capital of the Byzantine Empire, contributed to the growth and power of the Venetian Maritime State enhancing Venice's commercial, political, and territorial influence across the eastern Mediterranean. After 1204, the vast Byzantine territories in the central and northeastern Mediterranean were divided among the conquerors according to a partition agreement made on the eve of the conquest. Crete, as part of these territories, was given to Boniface of Montferrat, who later sold the island to the Venetians for one thousand silver marks. Despite the official act of 1204, Venetian rule in Crete was not firmly established until after 1210, due to the military conflicts on the island between Venice and the Genoese pirate-Count of Malta, Enrico Pescatore, who was acting with the support of Genoa. The consolidation of Venetian rule resulted in a radical change in the administrative structure and the arrival of Venetians to the island (Gasparis 1993; Maltezou 2008; Papadia-Lala 2008).

Crete held immense importance for the Venetian Republic due to its strategic geographical position, abundant agricultural production, and significant cultural influence. Situated in the eastern Mediterranean, Crete served as a vital node within the Venetian maritime empire (*Stato da Mar*). Positioned at the crossroads between Europe, Asia, and Africa, the island acted as a strategic outpost facilitating Venetian control over crucial sea lanes and trade routes connecting Venice to the Levant, Egypt, and other parts of the Byzantine and Ottoman Empires. With the exception of Cyprus, whose Venetian dominance was relatively short (1489-1571), Crete stood as the largest and most populous Venetian territory in the Eastern Mediterranean from the early thirteenth century until the mid-seventeenth century (1669).

The Venetians implemented a colonial administration designed to consolidate their control and maximize economic gains. Initially, the island was divided in six provinces (*sestieri*), mirroring the administrative divisions of Venice itself, which latter merged into four distinct territories (Candia, Chania, Rethymno and Sittia). Venetian nobles were granted large estates, and a feudal system was established, with Cretan peasants often subjected to heavy taxation and feudal obligations. During the first

two centuries of the Venetian rule in Crete (thirteenth and fourteenth centuries), the island experienced numerous revolts as the native Cretan population resisted the foreign domination and the severe policies imposed by the Venetians (Papadia-Lala 2021, 91-96). After the cessation of these revolts, Crete entered into a period of relative peace, heralding its golden age from the late fifteenth century. During this transformative era, fueled by various geographic and political shifts, Candia (now modern Heraklion) evolved from a small Byzantine provincial port into a major Mediterranean emporium (Panopoulou 2017, 383).

The fourteenth through the sixteenth centuries marked a period of profound transition in the political, economic, and social realms of the Eastern Mediterranean. This period witnessed the dawn of Oceanic discoveries, the emergence of new commercial networks, Portugal's involvement in the spice trade, and northern invasions into the Mediterranean Sea. Influenced by the aforementioned changes, the Mediterranean entered a period of economic readjustment and re-orientation, impacting traditional maritime powers like Venice and Genoa. For the Venetian Republic, these changes manifested in several ways: the decline of state-organized merchant convoys and their substitution with privately organized shipping enterprises; the gradual disengagement of the Venetian nobles from trade and shipping, accompanied by their transition to alternative career paths and the participation of the Venetian colonies in the long-distance trade: these shifts were also linked to the significant social and political transformations of the late fifteenth century, which resulted in the recognition of political rights to the middle class (Venetian subjects and subjects from the Venetian colonies), alongside the concurrent consolidation of the bourgeois aristocracy at the pinnacle of the social hierarchy. Within this context Cretan commercial and maritime enterprises flourished during this period; the Cretan subjects participated in the long-distance trade and created commercial networks through the Mediterranean both in other Venetian, as well as, in Ottoman territories (i.e. Constantinople), and other regions (i.e. Black Sea and Egypt). In a nutshell, this participation provided them wealth and social recognition which subsequently aided to their socio-economic mobility (Pagratis 2013; Gluzman 2021; Gratsea 2021).

Nevertheless, the loss of Cyprus during Fourth Ottoman-Venetian War (1570-1573) led to socio-political transformation in Crete, since the island stood as the last Venetian stronghold in the Eastern Mediterranean. Subsequently, the loss of Crete to the Ottomans in 1669, as a result of the Cretan War (also known as the Fifth Ottoman-Venetian War, 1645-1669) resulted in a radical change in both the Venetian Republic and the Mediterranean. The Venetians lost their last dominion in the Eastern Mediterranean, while the Ottoman conquest of Crete resulted in a vast amount of migration both to the Ionian islands and Venice. This migration affected the composition of the population and their socio-economic status.

2.1 The social hierarchy in Venetian Crete

The social hierarchy in Venetian Crete followed a medieval framework, with specific privileges and duties assigned to each social stratum based on inherited social standing. Initially, this structure was not tied to economic considerations and often diverged from them. The criteria for each social status were meticulously outlined by stringent legal regulations, and any possibility of upward mobility depended on decisions made by authorities through a thorough legal process (Papadia-Lala 1985, 61).

The elite in Venetian Crete initially comprised from feudal lords originating from Venice, many of whom later attained the title of Venetian nobility (*nobilità veneta*), the sole fully recognized social class both politically and legally. While the social category of Venetian nobility was closely tied to the origin of being Venetian, there was a notable exception to this rule. Alexios Kallergis was the sole Cretan nobleman to receive the title of Venetian noble (*nobilis venetus*). The Venetian nobility in Crete «closed» in relevance to the *Serrata* of the Venetian Republic. Thus, by the mid-fifteenth century (1463) a secondary title of nobility emerged, known as Cretan nobility (*nobilità cretese*). Despite its designation, this category was not exclusive to individuals of Cretan descent. Initially, it was granted to Venetian nobles who had lost their titles, illegitimate offspring of Venetian nobles, Venetian citizens (*cittadini originari*), and Italians, such as the families of Zacco, Clodia (Chioggia), Sanguizzano, Daferrara, Dapiasenza, Gribia and Lombardo. Additionally, it was extended to Greek refugees from former Venetian territories occupied by the Ottomans, with the intent of facilitating their integration into the island's social structure. Venetian and Cretan nobles constituted the dominant class and played pivotal role in public life, serving as members of urban communal councils, from which the vast majority of the island's population was excluded (Maltezou 1981, 7; Lambrinos 1996, 218; 2011, 222; 2014, 57).

The middle social class of Venetian Crete, known as *cittadini*, primarily consisted of indigenous residents of urban centers, who were more numerous than the nobles. By the late Venetian period (seventeenth century), they constituted the majority of the island's population. Engaged in respected non-manual occupations, they distinguished themselves from the lower social stratum, which included manual laborers from both urban (*popolani*) and rural (*contadini*) areas. Additionally, they were exempt from the obligations imposed on lower social classes, such as serving as rowers in Venetian galleys or participating in fortification work (Arbel 2013, 195-96; Lambrinos 2015).

This intermediate social category (*cittadini*) like the corresponding group in the city of the doges, began to take shape after the full determination of the ruling class (closure of Venetian nobility and establishment of Cretan nobility) and the exclusion of the non-nobles from the communal bodies and from higher local offices. Towards this direction, of great importance was the government decision of the year 1499, which significantly elevated the middle social stratum by granting them increased political influence and formal acknowledgment. The status of citizens was not defined on the basis of some potent legal attribute comparable to the titles held by the ruling class. On the contrary, their presence in the social fabric became increasingly

distinct owing to features of a socio-economic nature, such as the prosperity derived from the exploitation of real estate, trade, special literary or technical knowledge. Their education, especially from the late fifteenth century, was able to facilitate their access to salaried positions in the mid-level public bureaucracy. This transition meant that individuals from this social status, equipped with education, could now secure positions within the local bureaucracy, while those with economic influence could invest in long-distance trade, thereby achieving greater economic prosperity and social recognition. Throughout the sixteenth century, they actively sought to fortify their bureaucratic identity and consequently elevate their social status by monopolizing intermediate public offices (Lambrinos 2014, 58). Additionally, they began to participate in long-distance trade. By exploiting the above-mentioned political and economic conditions, they managed to expand the island's commercial, maritime, and ship-building activities, leading to both Cretan and Venetian commercial growth (Panopoulou 2017, 383). Consequently, their presence in the social fabric became increasingly distinct. This recognition paved the way for the formation of marriage alliances between individuals from the middle social stratum (*cittadini*) and the elite (Cretan nobles) and led to their socio-economic mobility.

2.2 Family and marriage in Venetian Crete

The family, in its various configurations and facets, has always been considered the organic basis of all forms of associational and relational life. It has often been described as a structure inherently capable of assuming a primary function not only in terms of social discipline, but also in terms of political stabilization and the definition of legal and associative structures (Orlando 2023, 89). Marriage, as a form of creating family, was the most immediate means of sealing alliances and cementing power relations not only at the economic level. Marriage for the upper social class represented an instrument capable, like few others, of influencing politics and controlling power centers. In this context, it pursued two main objectives: to rear children, preferably boys, so as to guaranty the continuity of the lineage or more simply to support the domestic household; to consolidate the parental and community network (Orlando 2023, 90-91).

A good marriage also encouraged and consolidated the community balance and strengthened civil ties. In Venice, family and marriage held a fundamental role; they were considered a main action in the political and economical administration, since they defined and perpetuated nobility as an inherited status. Regulations concerning marriage became a focal point for authorities, particularly after the transformation of Venetian nobility into a closed and hereditary system through the «closure» of the Grand Council (Serrata). The emergence of «*huomini civili*» (*cittadini*) prompted marriages between the middle social stratum and the nobles. These marriages were the outcome of political and economic shifts during the period. A significant portion of the *cittadini* class, whose fathers were predominantly lawyers, merchants, doctors, and high-level administrators, belonged to a distinguished occupational group characterized by economic prosperity. Patricians came to realize that they did not hold a monopoly on the qualities of «civility», even within their own society. This

recognition allowed them to view other families as ideologically sound and worthy of forming marriage alliances. The increasing occurrence of marital unions between nobles and non-nobles prompted legislative action, resulting to the meticulous documentation of noble marriages and births. The best-known measure of the period is the law passed by the Council of Ten in 1506 instituting the famous *Libro d'Oro*, registers of male noble births. Additionally, other procedures were also imposed to nobles by the Venetian State for proving their social status, specifically in cases, in which the mother did not belong in the higher social class. More precisely, Venetian nobles were required to produce a set of documents, including wills, administrative acts, and genealogies, that provided the necessary legal backing for the recognition of their social identity (Chojnacki 2000, 63; Cowan 2007, 5-6; 29; 67; Orlando 2023, 91).

In Venetian Crete, notable instances of intermarriages were evident from the last decades of the thirteenth century and mostly in the fourteenth century with the purpose of keeping or improving their social, economic and even political status. These marital unions were either between members of Greek families or between Greeks and Latins (Gasparis 2019, 18-19). Marriages between Greeks were not just a result of doctrinal, social or cultural homogeneity, but also a conscious strategy to keep the land they already possessed in Greek hands. On the other hand, mixed marriages, between Greeks and Latins, offered to Greek families many chances to improve their position among the Venetian leading class, and the opportunity to get benefits directly from the Venetian state or indirectly from their economic activities in a friendly environment. While these types of marriages were originally prohibited by Venice, they gradually came to be accepted (Gasparis 2019, 19). Furthermore, another category of marriages involved individuals of differing social status, which were also initially prohibited according to prevailing Venetian norms. At the beginning of the Venetian rule, marriages were primarily confined to noble families, but legislation later expanded to encompass unions between Venetian nobles and Cretan nobles. During the sixteenth century, the political recognition of the middle social stratum (1499), precipitated marriages between the elite (Cretan nobles) and the middle class (*cittadini*), largely motivated by economic and social factors (Papadia-Lala 2004, 92). The concern of these type of marriages led to the establishment of the «*prova di matrimonio*» in Venetian Crete in 1526.² According to this decision, marriages were mandated to be «appropriate» meaning that the bride (or her family members) should not have been involved in manual occupations (*arte meccanica et manuale*) for at least three generations. Her father and grandfathers must have had no criminal record, and both she and her mother had to adhere to the highest standards of morality (*vita civile*). The *arte meccanica et manuale* was a key criterion used to determine the dividing line between social acceptability and social unacceptability, and more specifically, it was crucial in defining the social status of a woman according to the activities carried out by her father and paternal and maternal grandfathers (Cowan 2007, 24; 91, van Gemert 2013, 788-790, Lambrinos 2014, 58, Markaki 2021, 148).

Lastly, it should be mentioned that marriage itself did not lead to a change in social status (upward or downward). It is known that in cases of intermarriage between a *cittadino* and a Cretan noble, both individuals retained their social status after

² This legal framework was further enhanced in 1533 and 1606. See Lambrinos 2004, 86.

marriage. The children from such unions always inherited the father's social status. Nevertheless, this was not the case for descendants from illegitimate relationships. In Venice, as was the case in Medieval and early modern Europe illegitimate offspring children, even though they were taken care by their fathers, they suffered considerable economic and social disadvantages as a result of the circumstances of their birth (Brundage 1987, 543; Lambrinos 2004, 99; Chatzakis 2004).

3. The Archival documentation

The meticulous documentation of marriages and birth certificates among the upper class aimed not only at preserving nobility, their «purity» and thereby ensuring the unity of the regime. This approach facilitated the study of marriage practices within the ruling class, making data abundant and accessible. In contrast, information regarding marriages within the middle class is limited, and for the lower social strata is rare.

As was the case in the Venetian Republic, in Venetian Crete during the sixteenth century, there was a detailed recording of noble marriages and births. However, researching marriages between different social groups (nobility and the middle class) is challenging due to scattered records across various archival sources. Exploring marriage practices and their socio-economic implications in Venetian Crete necessitates delving into diverse archival sources, both administrative and private. These archival sources are kept in the Venetian State Archive (Archivio di Stato di Venezia).

The primary archival source for retrieving marriage contracts is the archive of notaries. The notarial records are valuable for their detailed documentation of marriage contracts, dowries, and familial alliances, shedding light on the socio-economic strategies and mobility of the families. Wills can also provide supplementary information, since they pertain information regarding property transfers. Concerning the marital unions of the family under examination (the Curcumeli family), records were discovered in the registers of Cretan notaries (*Notai di Candia*), reflecting the family's permanent residence in Crete. Additional information was found in Venetian notaries (*Notarile, Atti*), particularly since a member of the family relocated from Crete to Venice. The meticulous documentation found in both Cretan and Venetian notarial records underscores the significance of these unions in consolidating wealth, social status, and political influence across generations and geographical locations.

Additionally, information regarding their property and inheritance practices was also found in the administrative archives of Venetian Crete (*Archivio del Duca di Candia*). This archival source contains the official registers of the Duke of Crete and includes amongst other information about legal and administrative cases and inheritance disputes. Another important archival source for tracing socio-economic mobility is the archival series *Collegio, Risposte di fuori*, which includes requests from the inhabitants of Venetian-ruled areas to the Serenissima. These requests pertain to petitions for improving their socio-economic status, pursuing public offices, acquiring land, or achieving upward social mobility. This improvement was often related to services, that they had offered to the Venetian state during difficult periods, such as famines or wars. These requests included efforts to renegotiate their social standing,

which had also been affected by political and geographical changes of the period like the Ottoman-Venetian wars and subsequent migrations to other regions.

4. The case of a mercantile citizen family: The Curcumeli family

Recent scholarship has focused on the importance of the examination of specific case studies or collective biography in order to reach to wider conclusions regarding several historical aspects. Justyna Wubs-Mrozewicz emphasized the significance of analyzing maritime networks in the Mediterranean, focusing on specific cities and, whenever possible, individual traders within them, as starting points. Several examples of this phenomenon are the renowned Francesco Datini (1335-1410) and his network or the case of George Giese, who was a burgher of Danzig in the sixteenth century (Wubs-Mrozewicz 2019, 386).

Within this context, the focus of this study is on a citizen family of sixteenth century Venetian Crete originating from the social stratum of *cittadini*. The period under examination is marked by the extensive involvement of Venetian subjects in long-distance trade across the Mediterranean. Originating from regions in Greece under Venetian control, these subjects played significant role in shipping activities, maritime commerce, and trade. Their status as Venetian subjects during the sixteenth century afforded them the same legal rights and commercial opportunities as Venetian-born citizens (Pagratis 2013; Gluzman 2021, 268-171). Prominent examples of these entrepreneurs were the Verghis from Corfu (Pagratis 2007), the Episcopopulo family from Rethymno in Crete (Lambrinos 2014) and Samariari from Zante (Kolyvà-Karaleka, 2024). These individuals employed broadly similar strategies for organizing their shipping and commercial enterprises, as well as for cultivating robust trade networks. Within this context, the study of the Curcumeli family should be seen as an illustrative example rather than an isolated case; The Curcumeli family, and specifically the brothers Andreas and Alexandros Curcumelis were one of the most active merchants of their period. The study of the Curcumeli family offers a compelling example of how a middle-class family adeptly leveraged the political landscape of their time to build influence through shipping and commercial enterprises. Towards this direction of great importance is the analysis of the family's marriages, which were instrumentally used in order to retain and expand their socio-economic status.

The analysis and examination of marriage alliances and socio-economic mobility within the Curcumeli family, is based in the following factors that were used by Gasparis (2019, 20) in the study of Byzantine families in Venetian Crete. The number of members and branches of the Curcumeli family (4.1); The marriages of its members and the link between those marriages and the development of their maritime business (4.2); The family's attitude towards the Venetian regime (4.3); The family's wealth and activity in the local urban and/or rural economy (4.4). These factors decisively contributed to their mobility in the new political, social and economic context.

4.1. The number of members and branches of the Curcumeli family

The Curcumeli family exhibited a complex and expanding lineage with multiple branches. The family's growth is reflected in the number of its members, spanning several generations. The term «family» here encompasses individuals who bear the same surname. They are connected by kinship, which may not always be of the first degree, but they have strong actual or perceived common origins. Additionally, they belong to the same social class and share common interests (Gasparis 2019, 12). Abundant archival data, despite their fragmented nature, have facilitated the documentation of twenty members of the Curcumeli family, all with ties to Venetian Crete.

The origin of the family has been primarily linked to the Ionian Islands, where it continues to survive to this day. One of the first references relies in the *Libro d'Oro de la Noblesse Ionienne* (Rangabe 1926, 205), which was the Golden Book of the Ionian Nobility; a genealogical registry used to document and recognize the noble families of the Ionian Islands. This book served a similar purpose to the more widely known *Libro d'Oro* in Venice, which recorded the nobility in the Venetian Republic. According to this registry, the Curcumeli family had a Greek origin and was established in Cephalonia in 1490. By the sixteenth century, the family had splintered, with some members remaining in the above-mentioned island, while others moved to Corfu.

In relation to the under-examination family branch, scholars have linked the family to a Byzantine lineage (Kaklamanis 1989, 383). Additionally, Fani Mavroeidi (1976, 122) suggested that the family's distant origin might be traced back to Nafplio (Napoli di Romania). Nevertheless, the origin of individuals from other former Venetian dominions who resided in Crete is explicitly stated in the documents (e.g., the case of Michel Psara from Napoli di Romania).³ On contrast no archival evidence has been found to prove the origin of the family from Nafplio. Such migration from Nafplio (*Napoli di Romania*) to Crete primarily took place after the third Ottoman-Venetian War (1537-1540).

The residence of Curcumeli family in Venetian Crete is traced back at least to 1493.⁴ According to archival documents, the *pater familias*, Anastasios Curcumelis, son of Johannes, owned land in Crete and played an active role as a representative of the Orthodox population. These characteristics demonstrate their long-term presence on the island and highlight the prominent role of the *pater familias* in the Cretan society. Moreover, in later documents their origin from Crete is clearly mentioned.⁵

³ The origin of Michalis Psara and other subjects from Nafplio, who migrated to Crete after the Third Ottoman-Venetian War (1537-1540), are clearly mentioned in the archival documents. See for example Archivio di Stato di Venezia (ASV), Notarile, Atti, (NA), busta 10638 (not. Agostino Pellestrina), libro (lib.) 2, follio (f.) 6r (8 January 1544): «*ser Michali Psara dictus Dafni de Nafplio Romanie ad presens Crete habitus*».

⁴ ASV, Notai di Candia (NC), b. 31 (not. Giorgio Cummo), protocollo (prot.) 4 (1493), f. 99r (8 May 1493).

⁵ In an archival document of 1525, the city of Candia (modern Heraklion) is referred as Andreas Curcumelis' origin.

Fig. 1. The Genealogical family tree of the Curcumeli family

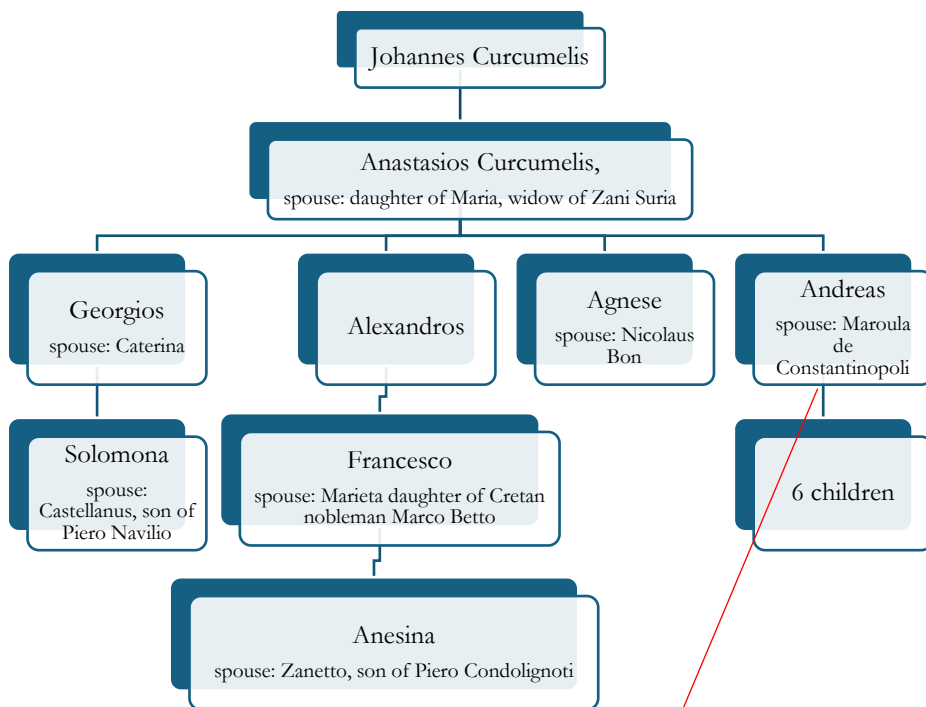
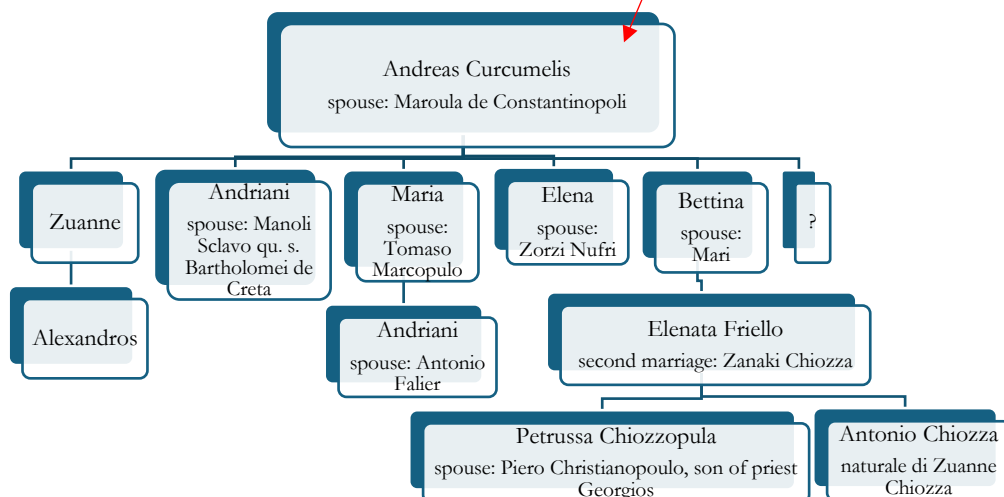


Fig. 2. The Genealogical family tree of Andreas' Curcumelis family



Among the twenty members mentioned in the archival documents with the surname «Curcumelis», seventeen of them have been safely identified and linked together (See Figures 1 and 2). Detailed archival records are available for these individuals, enabling accurate tracing of their roles and activities within their family history or societal involvement. Additionally, the majority of these individuals has also been linked to other families in Venetian Crete through marriage. This identification has facilitated the reconstruction of the Curcumeli family tree spanning over five generations (Fig. 1 and 2).

Anastasios Curcumelis, son of Johannes, is the first known member of the family for whom information is well documented in the archival records. In contrast, no archival records have been found for his father, Johannes Curcumelis. Additionally, the name of Anastasios' wife has not also preserved. The only known information is that she was the daughter of Maria, who was the widow of Zani Suria. Anastasios' wife belonged to the same social standing, and together they had four children: Andreas, Alexandros, Georgios, and Agnese (Fig. 1).

Andreas married Maroula de Costantinopoli, daughter of Alexandros (Fig. 2). Fani Mavroeidi (1976, 122) argued that Andreas had a total of four children: three daughters, whose names she does not provide, and a son named Alexandros. Regarding the number of Andreas' children, the previously mentioned number is not accurate. According to a letter sent by Alexandros Curcumelis, Andreas' brother, to the Venetian Republic, Andreas had six children in total. Unfortunately, none of their names are referred in the letter.⁶ However, archival records of various types have aided in identifying five of his six children (Fig. 2). It is certain that Andreas had four daughters (Andriani, Maria, Elena, and Bettina) and a son (Zuanne). Regarding the identity of the sixth child, only a hypothesis can be made. Fani Mavroeidi (1976, 122) suggested that Andreas Curcumelis had a son named Alexandros, though no archival records substantiate this hypothesis. During the period under examination, there is no documented individual named Alexandros Curcumelis aside from Andreas' brother, who is the only Alexandros clearly referenced in archival sources from that period. The only individual named Alexandros Curcumelis, aside from Andreas' brother appears in records from 1622. According to these archival documents, this later Alexandros was actually Andreas' grandson, as his father was Zuanne Curcumelis, son of Andreas (Fig. 2).⁷ It is possible that Fani Mavroeidi confused this later Alexandros with Zuanne's son, as no other reference to an Alexandros Curcumelis, son of Andreas, has been found in the archival records from the sixteenth century.

Alexandros Curcumelis, son of Anastasios, had five children according to his own letter to the Venetian Republic. Their names are not mentioned in the letter.⁸ From them only his son has been identified, named Francesco (Fig. 1). His wife's name has not also survived. For the remaining four children of Alexandros only a hypothesis can be made regarding a certain individual named Anastasios Curcumelis,

⁶ ASV, Collegio, Risposte di fuori, b. 312 (1557-1558), f. 219r: «qu. Andrea Curcumeli mio fratello nuovamente morto... lasciato sei suoi figli». This documented is first referred by Ploumidis 1985, 7.

⁷ ASV, NC, b. 260 (Giorgio Sanguinazzo), lib. 4 (1621-1625), f. 58r.

⁸ ASV, Collegio, Risposte di fuori, b. 312 (1557-1558), f. 219r: «con altri mei cinque». This documented is first referred by Ploumidis 1985, 7.

who participated in a marital contract in 1553.⁹ While his name is the same as that of the pater familias, it is certain that these two references pertain to different individuals, since the pater familias passed away in 1543.¹⁰ Thus, it could be assumed that this individual was another son of Alexandros. Another possibility is that this individual could be the sixth child of Andreas Curcumelis, as archival evidence does not conclusively identify all of Andreas' offspring. Alternatively, he could have been the son of Georgios Curcumelis, the third son of Anastasios, and his wife, Caterina. However, a key archival document found after Georgios' death makes no mention of any additional children within this family line. In this document, Anastasios Curcumelis, father of Georgios and father-in-law of Caterina, is identified as the family representative, further suggesting that there were no other heirs or direct descendants of Georgios at that time. If any did exist, they were most probably underage and as a result not involved in legal matters. Due to these uncertainties and the inability to conclusively trace this individual's lineage, he has not been included in the genealogical tree depicted in the figures.

For the other two children of Anastasios Curcumelis, Georgios and Agnese, more limited information has been found. Georgios Curcumelis' wife was named Caterina, but there is no additional information about her. Most probably she belonged in the same social status (*cittadina*). Together they had a daughter named Solomona (Fig. 1).¹¹ For Anastasios daughter, Agnese, the name of her husband has been traced (Nicolaus Bon), but no descendants have been found.

Lastly, there is an archival document of another Georgios Curcumelis from Cydonia in Chania during 1543.¹² While the timing of the contract suggests the possibility that he could be linked to the family, it is also possible that he was an unrelated individual or from a different branch of the Curcumeli family. Without additional records his identification remains obscure and thus he is not included to the genealogical trees in the figures.

4.2. The marriages of its members and the link between those marriages and the development of their maritime business

The analysis of marriages within the Curcumeli family will explore their connection to the development of their maritime and shipping activities. This includes investigating how marital alliances may have influenced their access to trade networks, resources, and commercial opportunities. It also proves how marriages were mainly arranged for strategic and economic reasons and were in relation to the family's commercial enterprises. Before analyzing these marital unions, an overview of the family's wealth and activities is given.

⁹ ASV, NC, b. 127 (not. Michel Geriti), lib. 10, f. 255v-256v (5 February 1553).

¹⁰ Anastasios Curcumelis died between April and October 1543. In the partnerships formed by his son, Andreas in Venice he is first mentioned as *quondam* in 15th of October of that year. See ASV, NA, b. 10638 (not. Agostino Pellestrina), f. 243r.

¹¹ ASV, NC, b. 194 (not. Pietro Pellegrino), lib. 1528-1570, f. 228v-229r (18 April 1534).

¹² ASV, NC, b. 282 (not. Zorzi Vasmullo), lib. 7, f. 93r (1543).

The commercial enterprises of the Curcumeli family commenced during the late fifteenth century with the involvement of Anastasios, the pater familias, who as seen by the archival documentation of the late fifteenth century (1493), belonged to the social group of wealthy and educated *cittadini*. He participated in commercial partnerships (*compagnia*) for the transportation of goods (*mercandantia*) in regional and small-scale shipping.¹³ Moreover, in 1510 Anastasios represented the Orthodox community before the ducal secretary for the reconstruction of a church (Church of Christ in Karteros). He also contributed to the restoration of this church with his own funds.¹⁴ His role and actions demonstrate that he had the qualifications (education and wealth) to take advantage of the socio-political changes that took place in the end of the fifteenth century (1499) in order to improve the socio-economic status of himself and his family. This formal recognition of the middle social stratum (*cittadini*) led to their subsequent participation in long-distance trade and acquisition of public offices.

Two of his sons, Andreas and Alexandros Curcumelis, like many other examples of their era, were dynamic participants in the Venetian maritime and commercial enterprises. Abundant data from administrative and notarial records, illustrate that the pater-familias, Anastasios Curcumelis, and mainly his sons, pursued opportunities arising from the above-mentioned shifting political and economic landscape, systematically striving to improve their socio-economic status. The Curcumeli brothers, Andreas and Alexandros, stood among the most affluent merchants of their era, engaging vigorously in ship ownership and trading activities, a sector that required flexibility in dealing and entailed financial risk. Their commercial and shipping activities were based on the distribution of Cretan wine throughout the Mediterranean and the Black Sea and export/import of other agricultural products and goods. They were also engaged in ship ownership and land and real estate property (Mavroeidi 1976, 122-24; 1989, 59).

According to the esteemed values of the Venetian Republic, engagement in wholesale trade – traditionally Venice's primary source of wealth – held decisive social significance, serving as a clear indicator of non-involvement in manual work, which was disdained by the dominant ideology (Lambrinos 2014, 59). The Curcumeli family, particularly Andreas, were pioneers among citizen-status families to embark on long-distance trade as early as 1527, aiming to bolster their economic and social standing. Their initiative was echoed by others in the mid-sixteenth century, like Costantino Episcopopulo from Rethimno, who also ventured into commercial activities for the first time in 1543 (Lambrinos 2014).

The commercial and shipping activities of the Curcumeli family can be divided in three periods: i) The period of growth of their commercial network (1524-1536) ii) The period of prosperity (1537-1548) and iii) the period of decline (1549-1570). The first period (1524-1536) is characterized by the involvement in regional trade with medium sized vessels (i.e. grippo). During this initial period, Andreas Curcumelis owned several ships with his brother Alexandros, and engaged in partnerships

¹³ ASV, NC, b. 31 (not. Giorgio Cummo), prot. 4 (1493), f. 99v.

¹⁴ ASV, Archivio del Duca di Candia (DC), b. 33, Memoriali Serie II, registro (reg). 1bis 1508-1510), f. 133v (18 July 1510).

to transport wheat to Crete (Kaklamanis 1989, 384; Mavroeiði 1989, 50). Participation in large-scale maritime trade, if successful, could ensure significant revenues and a high level of social prestige. Similar to other Greek merchants residing in Venetian territories in the Eastern Mediterranean, Andreas relocated to Venice in 1526 and became a member of the Greek Confraternity of Venice. Within this Confraternity, he swiftly assumed different administrative roles (*vicarius, gastaldo, governatore*) from 1527 until 1555, demonstrating his esteemed status and education (Mavroeiði 1976, 123-24).

The period of prosperity is characterized by the development and the flourishing of the commercial and economic activities. During this period the brothers owned a large number of vessels (more than thirteen) and participated in long-distance Mediterranean trade (West, East and Black Sea) by exporting Cretan products (mainly wine and cheese) and importing goods from these destinations to Venice and Crete. The wealth and education of the family are further evidenced by intermediate public offices held by both Georgios and Alexandros Curcumelis in Crete. Georgios Curcumelis was a banker (*banchiere*). Information about the banking system, particularly the private sector, in Venetian Crete during this early period is limited. It is highly likely that Georgios operated as a private banker, underscoring the wealth of the family.¹⁵ On the other hand, Alexandros was a secretary (*cancelliere*) in the public treasury (Camera Fiscale) of Candia from 1538¹⁶ and a leaser (*conductor*) of the properties of the diocese of Kissamos between 1541 and 1546 (Kaklamanis 1986, 173).

During the period of the decline (1549-1570) the presence of Andreas Curcumelis in the mercantile enterprises decreases significantly. In the 1550s, their commercial structure collapsed due to their extensive ship ownership and trading activities, leading to an inability to settle their debts. This financial strain was further exacerbated by the eight thousand ducats debt that Andreas left to Alexandros after his death (Kaklamanis 1989, 382).

The use of marriage alliances to promote their business activities and achieve social distinction is prominently illustrated in the family of Andreas and Alexandros Curcumelis. The study of the family's marital alliances confirms that marriage was controlled by wider kin in the economic and social interests of the family. While it was not used as a factor of upward social mobility, these strong marital unions served as strategic measures to sustain and enhance their business ventures, ultimately fostering economic growth and social acknowledgment: a practice also observed among salaried agents of English trading companies or the Levant Company (Fusaro 2012, 703).

During the initial period of their enterprises, Anastasios Curcumelis, arranged in 1521 the marriage of his daughter, Agnese Curcumeli, with Nicolaus Bon (Fig. 1).

¹⁵ ASV, NC, b. 135 (not. Nicolo Longo), lib. 30, f. 345r (1516)· ASV, NC, b. 136 (not. Nicolo Longo), lib. 35, f. 42v (1521).

¹⁶ ASV, NC, b. 274 (not. Marco Trivisan), lib. 1, f. 61r (23 March 1538).

The latter was actively involved in the maritime sector and became a partner in the mercantile activities of Andreas and Alexandros Curcumelis.¹⁷

Andreas Curcumelis' commercial ventures were significantly built on interpersonal connections. From the beginning of his career as a merchant and shipowner, and throughout his life, he cultivated lasting collaborative networks in ship ownership and commercial partnerships. These networks primarily involved individuals from Venetian Crete, although there were instances where he collaborated with individuals from other Venetian-ruled territories as well.¹⁸ This decision highlights the preference of Andreas to collaborate with Greek seafarers, despite residing in Venice, from where he could have chosen «local» captains. It also underscores the dominant role of Greeks in trade and maritime activities during the sixteenth century.

Regarding the marriage alliances, Andreas Curcumelis formed marital connections with families distinguished for their maritime engagement. Specifically, Andreas married Maroula, daughter of Alexio de Constantinopoli (Kaklamanis 1989, 389).¹⁹ While Andreas was in Venice and throughout the peak of his commercial enterprises, he arranged the marriage of his daughter, Andriani, to his associate Manoli Sclavo in 1546. The latter originated from Crete and was also engaged in commercial and shipping activities. It is probable that Andriani lived in Venice throughout her lifetime, as suggested by her will. There is no indication of her having any children, as her will does not mention them. At the time of her will, her husband had also passed away, leaving her brother, Zuanne, as the sole family member entitled to a portion of her inheritance.²⁰

Andreas Curcumelis died unexpectedly in 1556, leaving a great debt behind (Kaklamanis 1989, 379). Following Andreas' passing his wife, continued this strategy and wedded two of her daughters with collaborators (or their sons) of her husband: Tomaso Marcopulo and Zorzi Nufri. Both individuals were from Venetian Crete and had collaborated with Andreas Curcumelis for years, engaging in ship ownership and commercial activities. In terms of social mobility, these marriages were characterized by homogamy, since both parties belonged to the same social status (horizontal mobility) driven by strong economic and career factors. Carocci (2011, 385) has pointed out the importance of internal (horizontal) mobility in the medieval world: this mobility not from one social group to another, but within the same class, doubtless

¹⁷ ASV, NC, b. 15 (not. Giovanni Bonasser), lib. 2, f. 280r-v (19-11-1521): The dowry of Agnese was 6000 yperpera.

¹⁸ Among those were Andreas (A)licudi, Manoli (Manolachi) Comita, Zanni Sclavo, Nicolo de la Cania, Georgios (Zorzi) Nufri, Georgios Postichi, Constantino Fundoschiadi, Antonio Lidiaco, Zuan Sfachioti, Manea Calopoda, Manoli Sclavo, Tomaso Marcopulo, and Ioanni Sfakioti. All of them originated from Crete. Furthermore, Tomaso Avloniti from Corfù, and Markos Samariari from Zante often emerged as his associates and collaborators.

¹⁹ Fani Mavroeiði (1976, 122) and Kaklamanis (1989, 389) argued that Andreas Curcumelis married in 1548/1549 based on a patriarchal letter of the year 1549 (Manousakas 1968, 11-14). Nevertheless, this letter does not clearly mention Andreas' marriage nor his wife. The reference to the marriage may be in relation to his daughter's marriage, Andriani, who married in Venice in 1546. Furthermore, the timeline of Andreas' children and their marriages do not align with the hypothesis that he married in 1548/1549. There is also no indication that he married twice.

²⁰ The will of Andriani Curcumeli and information about her presence in Venice will be published in an article in *Thesaurismata* (forthcoming).

played a more important role than it does in today's societies and therefore any study of medieval social dynamics must not fail to take into account this type of mobility.

The study of the Curcumeli family highlights the importance of horizontal mobility in early modern societies. While obtaining a higher social status could benefit individuals, marital strategies that led to internal mobility were equally important. In the dominant ideology of the Serenissima, marriage did not provide social mobility, but was a means to achieve social recognition and retain or enhance the family's economic situation and wealth. Legal and lawful marriage, non-involvement in manual work (*arte meccanica*), and an honorable life (*vita honorabile*) spanning through the three previous generations were closely tied and equally important for any attempt to improve the financial standing (obtaining public offices) or changing the social status (through a strict legal framework). The failure to meet even one of these conditions, or the mere suspicion of non-compliance, could prevent individuals from achieving socio-economic advancement.

Within this context, both Andreas and later his widow, Maroula Curcumeli, felt the need to forge stronger alliances with other renowned merchants and shipowners of the period in order to firstly expand and later preserve the family's business enterprises and possibly reduce their debts. After Andreas' death (1556), the first marriage alliance was formed in 1558 between Maria Curcumeli and Tomaso Marcopulo.²¹ This marital strategy is further underscored by the age of the groom, who at the time of the agreement was sixty years old.²² Their daughter married Antonio Falier, a wealthy *cittadino* (Fig. 2).²³ The second marital union was of Elena Curcumeli, who was also daughter of Andreas and Maroula. She married Zorzi, son of Zuanne Nufri in 1561.²⁴ Zorzi was not only a captain of Andreas' vessels, but also a renowned shipowner. The interesting part about these two marital unions except the establishment of collaborating networks, regards the dowry of the brides and the correlation with the family's land property in Xerocamara (area in the village named Venerato in Heraklion-Crete), an aspect that will be analyzed in the next section of the paper (section 4.4).

The effort to form marriage alliances in order to preserve their maritime enterprises is also evident within Alexandros's family. The wife of Alexandros Curcumelis remains unknown. They had five children, of which only his son named Francesco Curcumelis is identified.²⁵ Francesco married Marietta, daughter of the Cretan nobleman Marco Betto. Francesco stands out as the first member of the Curcumeli

²¹ ASV, DC, b. 5, reg. 64, f. 50r-51r (23 July 1563).

²² The reference of the age is an extremely rare archival information of the period. It has survived in a catalogue with the names and ages of the captains (*patroni*) of ships (*nave*) in Venice in 1558. See Museo Civico Correr, Donà dalla Rose, b. 217 (Mercanzie e Dazii), f. 39r. This document was first found and published by Kaklamanis 1991, 302.

²³ ASV, NC, b. 198 (not. Antonio Pantaleo), lib. 11 (1575-1582), ff. 210r-211r (23 July 1581). Antonio Falier was a descendant of one of the Venetian families that had settled in Crete during the thirteenth century. Throughout the Venetian rule, numerous members of this family (Falier) had transitioned from Venetian nobility to either the Cretan nobility or the middle class (*cittadini*).

²⁴ ASV, DC, b. 5, reg. 64, f. 50r-51r (23 July 1563).

²⁵ ASV, Collegio, Risposte di fuori, b. 312 (1557-1558), f. 219r: «con altri mei cinque». This documented is first referred by Ploumidis 1985, 7

family, who had married a woman from an upper social status, that of Cretan nobility. Although the marriage of a *cittadino* to a noblewoman did not lead to social advancement, it nevertheless entailed social recognition and prestige. This is directly related both to the wealth of the family, especially during the period of flourishing and development of their commercial enterprises, and to the assets of the family: land holdings (renting and exploitation of agricultural areas), real estate ownership in the city of Candia, and contributions to the Venetian state.

The last attempt of preserving some of their former commercial activities or ship ownerships', was perhaps the marriage of Anesina Curcumeli, daughter of Francesco, with Zanello, son of Piero Condolignoti *detto Velona*.²⁶ This marital union was initiated by Alexandros Curcumelis, the grandfather of Anesina, in 1561, during a particularly difficult period. The groom's father, Piero Condolignoti, originated from Nafplio (Napoli di Romania), but resided in Chania (Crete). He was a merchant of various commodities, a shipowner, and also captained his own and foreign vessels. Additionally, he was a partner in commercial ventures and a moneylender. He conducted transactions with Crete and Zakynthos, where he maintained representatives. Like Andreas Curcumelis, he was a member of the Greek Confraternity in Venice from 1528. During the 1560s, when the marital union was formed, Piero was actively involved in the commercial and maritime sectors. In 1560, he collaborated with Marco di Giacomo da Venezia, a mariner on the Barbarossa ship for the load of goods from Crete to Western Europe. In recognition of his services to Serenissima, the Venetian State conferred Cretan nobility upon him and his descendants (Mavroëidi 1976, 128-129).²⁷ This meant, that while this marital union of Anesina Curcumeli and Zanello Condolignoti was most probably between two people of the same social standing (*cittadini*), as no reference of nobility is made in the marital contract, their descendants belonged to the Cretan noble class.

4.3 The family's attitude towards the Venetian regime

A common practice in many Mediterranean societies for achieving upward social mobility was by the provision of services to the State. In the Venetian Republic, due to the growing Ottoman threat and the ongoing Ottoman-Venetian wars, the Serenissima faced an increasing need to safeguard its maritime territories in the Eastern Mediterranean. In this political climate, the authorities welcomed any private initiative that could help address the various challenges. Such services were the contribution of a large amount of money to the public coffers, participation in military operations against the Ottomans, donation of a horse to reinforce the feudal cavalry and successful service as important state functionaries (Lambrinos 2014, 60, 62).

²⁶ ASV, NC, b. 170 (not. Zorzi Maganari), f. 22r-v (21-04-1561).

²⁷ Piero Condolignoti, also known as Velona, had seven children. He served the Venetian State during the Third Ottoman-Venetian War (1537-1540). In 1537, he transported wheat to Chania, Crete, and captured an Ottoman ship (*zurma turchesca*) carrying wheat, animals, and eighty people, all of whom were delivered to Nafplio. In 1538, he transported water to the same city three times. Throughout the war, he contributed by capturing Ottoman subjects and rescuing Venetian ones. During these operations he was injured in the ear. See Sathas 1890, 26; Ploumidis 1998, 45.

Within this context, the Venetian Republic, by adapting its social values to the needs of the times, had modified her earlier austere policy toward the local population in order to ensure the support of individuals outside the circle of nobility. These individuals, if their services were exceptionally important, in addition to seeking positions that would enhance their economic status, also sought social mobility. This had been a tried and tested political practice, and it was intensified in the decades after a war (Lambrinos 2014, 61).

In Venetian Crete during the sixteenth century the title of Cretan nobility was given to indigenous people as a reward for significant economic or military services rendered to the Venetian State, or granted after consideration of certain elements of social prestige, such as respectable origin, descent from a lawful marriage, wealth and absence of manual labour (Papadia-Lala 2004, 86). The privilege of Cretan nobility was particularly attractive due to the economic, social, and administrative advantages it provided, as well as the possibility of being elected to important public offices (Lambrinos, 1996, 219; 2015, 41-42; Papadaki 1998, 305; 314; 317). In this context, the socio-economic mobility of the individuals is closely tied to their attitude towards the Venetian regime. A distinctive example is Piero Condoglianiotti from Nafplio who actively participated in the third Ottoman-Venetian War (1537-1540). For his services, the Venetian Republic bestowed upon him and his descendants the public office related to the collection of the cheese tax (*«ufficio del deputato sopra la decima di formaggi in Candia»*), as well as the Cretan nobility.²⁸

The Curcumeli family and especially Andreas and Alexandros actively participated in the third Ottoman-Venetian war by providing assistance to the Serenissima (financial aid and ships). While by assisting the Venetian State during war, they could elevate their social status and claim the Cretan nobility, the family employed it primarily as a means to expand their property holdings, thus enhancing their financial position. Particularly, Alexandros applied for the allocation of land (*bovine*) in the region of Lasithi (Agios Nikolaos, Crete) for exploitation.²⁹

Nevertheless, the social status and prestige of the family is highlighted in the later family descendants of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, who for improving their socio-economic status, made specific reference to their ancestors. Towards this direction, a petition of a later descendant of the family in Venetian Crete is documented. In 1641, Tomaso Musalo, *«avvocato et colonello delle cernide di Candia»*, whose mother originated from the Curcumeli family requested to be elevated in the status of Cretan nobility. In his petition he made specific reference about the character of his mother (*«per parte de madre tengo honorato carattere et parimenti verso heredi di un lungo giro di meriti della famiglia Curcumela»*). In the strict system of the Venetian Republic adhering to the highest standards of morality (*«vita civile et honorovole»*) was of primary importance for obtaining an upper social status. Moreover, it is well known that a woman's or her family's humble professional background could negatively impact

²⁸ See note 27 for references. For the cheese tax in Venetian Crete see Panopoulou 2005.

²⁹ ASV, Collegio, Risposte di fuori, b. 312 (1557-1558), f. 219r. This document is first referred by Ploumidis 1985, 7.

the candidacy of her son, son-in-law, or grandson for a title or admission to the ruling class (Lambrinos 2004, 58; 87).³⁰

On the other hand, another way of improving one's social status was through immigration particularly as a result to major political events. This mobility is characterized by Carocci (2011, 386, 393) as exogenous or conflictual. It arises from factors external to normal workings of society, such as political conquest, the migration of people, a devastating war, or an epidemic such as the Black Death. Even a channel of mobility such as migration, which has been common in every era, could lead to a horizontal shift or even a decline in social standing. Countless studies have shown how migration, usually to cities, often marked the starting point of a fortunate pathway toward social ascent.

Plentiful examples from the Venetian Archives have shown how immigrants tried to regain their previous social standing in the new areas to which they migrated. The most representative examples include several cases of Nafpliot subjects in Crete (Kolyvà-Karaleka, Moatsos 1979-1985) and Cypriots in Venice (Papadamou 2019). During the Fifth Ottoman-Venetian War, commonly known as the Cretan War (1645-1669), Crete came under Ottoman rule, marking the significant loss of Venice's largest and wealthiest overseas possession in the Eastern Mediterranean. This event triggered a substantial wave of migration, as residents of Venetian Crete, fearing Ottoman rule, sought refuge in other Venetian territories such as the Ionian Islands, Dalmatia, and Venice itself. This migration had profound social and cultural impacts (transfer of identity, customs, religious beliefs, and artisanal skills), influencing both the migrants and the regions they resettled in. It contributed to the spread of Cretan culture and reshaped social dynamics in their new communities.

After the loss of Crete to the Ottomans, a major number of refugees relocated to the Ionian islands, a choice strongly in relation to the socio-economic possibilities, that were given from the Venetian Republic to its citizens, specifically with the decision of September 2nd 1669. According to this decision, Cretan nobles, who would settle in a Venetian domination could claim admission to the city communal councils and participation in public offices. However, this decision was not accepted by the local councils, and the community of Corfù tried to keep the Cretan refugees out of its body (Karydis, Tzivara 2022, 189).³¹ Within this context, in 1716, Spiros Curcumelis from Corfù sought a higher-ranking public position (*Campo bombista*), in return to the military contribution of his father (Zuane Curcumelis) during the Cretan War and for the slavery of him and his family (mother and sister).³² This last petition

³⁰ ASV, Collegio, Suppliche commesse ai Savi, b. 539 (21 August 1641). This document is first referred by Ploumides 2016, 39.

³¹ For this decision see Antoniadi 1967, 46: «*Totalmente conoscemo di convenienza che in qualunque città maritima del Serenissimo Dominio ove s'alloggeranno di questi Nobeli Feudati e Cretensi habbino da godere l' ingresso nel Consiglio di dette Città e le Cariche officii e dignità che li Nobeli e Gentie huomini d' esse godono, eccettuato quelle de Nobili Veneti, et habitando nell' inclita Città di Venetia habbino a conseguire le cariche de cittadini Originali nel modo ch' essi fruivano quelle de nobili Cretensi et attinenti a Feudati in questa Città et s'intendi di dover esser approvato dall' Eccellentissimo Senato, come pure quanto contiene.*»

³² ASV, Collegio, Suppliche commesse ai Savi, b. 580 (17 August 1716). This document is first referred by Ploumides 2016, 151.

indicated that after the Cretan War and the loss of Crete by the Ottomans (1645-1699), this specific family has relocated in Ionian islands (Corfù).

4.4 The family's wealth and activity in the local urban and/or rural economy

In the political and ideological system of the Venetian Republic, land ownership could be perceived as a symbol of a quality of life aligned with aristocratic ideals (Lambrinos 2022, 338). Land ownership and even the exploitation of large areas of free or feudal land was a strong indication of a comfortable and respectable life that could yield wealth and social prestige. Especially, the possession of a feudal land and the consequent military obligations to the Serenissima implied greater prestige for a *cittadino* at a time when the landowning aristocracy was experiencing economic decline and several feudal lands had passed into the hands of the rising middle class. The major social and ideological aspiration was to possess enough wealth to avoid personal involvement in agricultural work (*arte manuale et meccanica*). Towards this, urban or agricultural property was a decisive factor that distinguished the middle social stratum from the lower class, which included both city and rural inhabitants (*popolani* and *contadini*). It also served as proof that the family did not engage in manual labor (Lambrinos 2015, 125).

As was the case with many entrepreneurs of this period, who engaged in unstable financial environments (Lambrinos 2014, 59), some members of the Curcumeli family, held administrative positions (i.e Georgios Curcumelis, Alexandros Curcumelis, Francesco Curcumelis). Furthermore, like many other citizens of the period, the family had additional income from urban and/or agricultural property, which they sought to expand in different ways, such as buying real estate property in Candia, leasing several vineyards, such as those that belonged to Saint Thomas of Burgognoni of Torcello in 1545³³ and those of the diocese of Kissamos (Mavroceidi 1976, 122-24; Kaklamanis 1989, 387).

During the initial period the wealth of the family and their land property is demonstrated in the dowry of Solomona Curcumeli, Georgios' daughter. After Georgios' death, likely at a young age, his wife arranged a marriage for their daughter with Castellanus, son of Piero Navilio (April 1534). Solomona took a dowry (*repromissa, dote et donis*) of an extremely high value, including fourteen thousand yperpryra, land (*metochio*) in the village Selopulo and real estate property in Candia (*domus et magazenis*). Anastasios Curcumelis, grandfather of Solomona and father-in-law of Caterina, was present during this marital arrangement and acted as guarantor.³⁴

Andreas Curcumelis had at least from 1538 land property in the region of Xerocamara, which is part of the village named Venerato, a location near the city of Candia. This land most probably was part of his wife's dowry and Andreas expanded it in 1554. The acquisition of feudal lands was also a common practice of wealthy citizens in this period. This land was previously owned by Zorzi Franchini, and

³³ ASV, NA, b. 10640 (not. Agostino Pellestrina), lib. 2, f. 30v-31r (22 March 1545).

³⁴ ASV, NC, b. 194 (not. Pietro Pellegrino), lib. 1528-1570, f. 228v-229r (18 April 1534).

Andreas acquired it through a public auction.³⁵ This property was used as a form of dowry by Andreas' wife to their daughters after his death.

The analysis of the dowries given to the female members of the Curcumeli family in different time frames, which are closely tied to the above-mentioned phases of their commercial enterprises, demonstrate their wealth and activity in local and urban economy. Usually during the marital contracts, the dowry was divided in two parts: the *dote*, which primarily constituted real estate property, movable property in the form of clothes, linen, and sometimes liquid capital. The second part of the dowry was the gift (*donis*) to the spouse, which was mainly given in cash. The analysis of these elements and their comparison with other data of the period aid in identifying the socio-economic status of the families. The strongly patriarchal structure built on the control of the assets and its transmission only to male heirs had well excluded women from the paternal inheritance system. Only the male children inherited the family patrimony, while daughters were excluded from the inheritance. In this context the dowry served to release the patriarchal and patrilineal family from any potential claims by women on paternal assets (Orlando 2023, 34). This idea is strongly demonstrated in Anastasios Curcumelis will, where he emphasizes that the land he leaves behind must remain strictly within the family's descendants.³⁶

Archival records document the dowries provided to three of Andreas' daughters (Andriani, Maria, and Elena), as well as to one of his granddaughters (Andriani Marcopula) and one of his great-granddaughters (Petrousa Chiozza). During the first two periods of the family's enterprises (growth and prosperity), the marriage strategies were linked to the establishment and expansion of their commercial and shipping activities. The grooms originated from Venetian Crete and were actively involved in ship ownership and long-distance commercial activities (grooms: Manoli Sclavo, Tomaso Marcopulo, Zorzi Nufri).

Andriani, who married in 1546, while Andreas was still alive, received a dowry of two hundred fifty ducats, whereas both Maria and Elena Curcumeli, who were married after his death, received a dowry of one thousand ducats.³⁷ Since Andreas' wife, Maroula, did not have liquid capital to provide to the grooms, she allowed them to derive financial benefit from her property in Xerocamara. This land property was part of her dowry, which was now transmitted to her daughters. Otherwise, it would likely have passed to Andreas' son, Zuanne. Tomaso Marcopulo, husband of Maria Curcumeli, received as part of the dowry the third fifth of the property in Xerocamara. He also had the authority to utilize the entire property and specifically the vineyards, for a period of three years until the amount of one thousand ducats was settled. Additionally, as part of her daughter's dowry, Maroula Curcumeli bestowed upon Marcopulo a house situated in Candia, in the Agia Kyriaki area, along with a furnished bed (*letto fornito*) and clothing (*vestimenti*).³⁸

³⁵ ASV, DC, b. 5, div. loc., ff. 132rv-133r (23 February 1554).

³⁶ ASV, DC, b. 36bis, lib. 25 (1558-1559), f. 153r-v (28 March 1559): "*quod dicta stabilia non possint eundi alienum... procliderne de heredibus in heredibus in perpetuo*".

³⁷ ASV, NA, b. 10641 (Agostino Pellestrina), lib. 3, f. 34v-35r (31 August 1546).

³⁸ ASV, DC, b. 5, reg. 64, f. 50r-51r (23 July 1563). It is mentioned that the house in Agia Kyriaki was given to Maria from her father in 1540: *«una casa posta in Candia nella contra de Santa Chiriacki la qual*

Three years later, in 1561, Maroula Curcumeli made a similar marital agreement with Zorzi Nufri. A part of Elena's Curcumeli dowry was also the same amount of one thousand ducats: Nufri would be granted six hundred ducats worth of land property, amounting to one-fifth of the property in Xerocamara. Additionally, he would receive two hundred ducats in movable assets, and another two hundred ducats which he could obtain by utilizing half of the above-mentioned land property.³⁹ As was the case with many active businessmen, wholesale merchants, shipowners and tax farmers who operated in unstable financial environments, Nufri's wealth collapsed leading to debts.⁴⁰ During the marriage, the dowry remained property of the wife, while the spouse could benefit from it and invest in it. Also, it represented the bride's contribution to the expenses of the common household (*dos sustineat onera matrimonii*) and after the husband's death it would provide support for the widow or facilitate her remarriage (Kirshner 2015, 9). Within this context, in 1570, Zuanne Curcumelis, tried to protect his sister's dowry (Elena Curcumeli-Nufri) both from Zorzi Nufri and his creditors. In his petition to the local authorities, he claimed that according to the law, Elena had the right to claim her property, as it was part of her dowry, even though it was sold from Zorzi Nufri to Tomaso Marcopulo.⁴¹ The same land property was bestowed, almost a decade later, to Antonio Falier for his marriage to Andriani Marcopula, daughter of Tomaso Marcopulo⁴².

On the contrary, in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth century, the geographical character of these marriages was further redefined to individuals hailing from the same region in the city of Candia (Xerocamara and the village of Venerato). This strategy was used by the family as a last attempt to preserve their socio-economic status from a different perspective: rather expanding their commercial relations, they focused on securing and/or expanding their land holdings. This shift can be strongly related not only to the collapse of their commercial enterprises, but also to the changing political and economic realities the period. The loss of Cyprus (1570) changed once again the political dynamics of the period and strongly affected Venetian Crete and shifted its maritime enterprises.

In the Curcumeli family, representative examples of this marital practice are later descendants of Andreas Curcumelis. Andreas' last daughter, Bettina Curcumeli, married a man named Macri (Fig. 2). Although no further information about this marriage or her husband has been found, evidence exists regarding their daughter, Elenata. The latter wedded a certain Friello, whose name does not appear in the archival documents found. After her husband's passing, Elenata entered into a second

casa fu dona a ditto sposa dal suprascritto m. Andrea suo padre come appar per instrumento publico fatto del 1540/ 14 april de man de m. Lunardo Sanson».

³⁹ ASV, NC, b. 195 (Antonio Pantaleo), lib. 3 (1566-1568), f. 181v-183r (September 1567).

⁴⁰ Same was the case not only of Andreas and Alexandros Curcumelis, but also of Nicolò Episcopopulo and Manusso Theotocopulo, brother of Domenico Theotocopulo (El Greco). See Panagiotakis 1999, 80-90; Lambrinos 2014, 63.

⁴¹ ASV, DC, b. 36bis, reg. 44, f. 154r-v (1570): «territorio che la predetta donna Helena Nufri si possi assicurer della sua dote conforme alla citation sua senza per inditio delle raggione de signor Tomaso».

⁴² ASV, DC, b. 40bis, mem. 50 (1580), f. 215v (14 July 1580). ASV, NC, b. 198 (Antonio Pantaleo), lib. 11 (1575-1582), ff. 210r-211r (23 July 1581).

marriage with Zuanne Chiozza (Fig. 2). The Friello family, with numerous members, owned property in the village of Venerato, close to the abovementioned location of Xerocamara. Her second husband, Zuanne Chiozza, also hailed from the village of Venerato. Petrousa Chiozzopoula daughter of Elenata and Zuanne Chiozza, married Piero Christianopoulo, son of priest Georgios, from the same village of Venerato in 1635 (Fig. 2).⁴³ Her dowry pertained movable assets (dresses, pillow-cases, under-shirts) worth of eight thousand hyperpyra. The above-mentioned amount exceeds the typical dowries given in that region (the village of Venerato) during this period (first half of seventeenth century). Specifically, out of the thirty-two dowry records preserved by this notary during the period 1637-1650, the above-mentioned sum represents the second-largest amount, while the usual dowries ranged between two hundred fifty-five and five thousand one hundred thirty-six hyperpyra⁴⁴.

This strong correlation between marital unions of people originating from the same region has been pointed out by several other recent studies regarding Venetian Crete. For instance, the study of Eleni Tsourapa (2010), has shown that in sixteenth century Venetian Chania the majority of the marriages of a noble family (Premarin) were with individuals from the same abovementioned region and mainly within the same status of nobility. This strong phenomenon of marriage alliances and land ownership is also highlighted by Maria Mondelou (2016) in her study about sixteenth century Venetian Sitia (Crete).⁴⁵ According to her research, Sitia, a small town with a predominantly settled population, demonstrated a strong preference for intermarriage. Male residents of the town commonly chose brides from either the town itself or the villages within the Sitia district, accounting for 51% of marriages. Marriages between a resident of Sitia and an «outsider» were much less common, comprising only 26.9% (13.5% for men and 12.9% for women) of unions (Mondelou 2016, 8-9).

The same marriage strategy is also applied in several descendants of Andreas' Curcumelis family. The majority of these marital unions was important for the horizontal mobility of the family and social recognition, even after their debts and the collapse of the family's mercantile enterprises. The analysis of the dowries reveals that the family had access to liquid capital and retained a diverse array of land properties and real estate in the area of Candia. These resources helped the family to maintain their social status and recognition. The importance of the family's land property and the wealth that derived from it aided to socially acceptable marriages (i.e unions with other wealthy *cittadini* or Cretan nobles). It also provided an amount of wealth to the family, even during the period when their commercial enterprises declined.

These elements (land property, wealth derived from its exploitation and socially acceptable marital unions) helped to uphold and maintain the Serenissima's criteria for social standing. Such criteria (marriage, the avoidance of *arte meccanica* and an

⁴³ ASV, NC, b. 140 (Zuanne Lubina), lib. 1, f. 217v (15 October 1635).

⁴⁴ These sums have been concluded after the analysis of the dowries preserved in the notary Zuanne Lubina, who was active in the village of Venerato and its nearby territories. See ASV, NC, b. 140 (not. Zuanne Lubina), lib. 1, ff. 5r, 5v-6r, 49r, 173r, 217v-218r.

⁴⁵ Her study pertained 155 dowry contracts of the Sitia region in Crete during the sixteenth century regarding couples of the newlyweds, at least one of whom was a resident of Sitia.

honorable life) were essential for facilitating the upward social mobility of a family's descendants within Venetian society. In this context, Elenata Friello, granddaughter of Andreas Curcumelis, made a significant transition during the seventeenth century – from the status of *cittadini* to the elite class (nobile). Archival documents reflect her elevated position by designating her with the title «evgenestati» (ευγενεστάτη).⁴⁶ Her husband also originated from the above-mentioned region of Xerocamara.

5. Conclusion

The study of the Curcumeli family reveals that marriage was controlled by wider kin in the economic and social interests of the family. Through the period under examination marital unions were used to strengthen their enterprises. Nicolaus Bon, Manoli Sclavo, Tomaso Marcopulo, Zorzi Nufri and Zanetto Condolignoti, all married within the Curcumeli family were engaged in the commercial activities and ship ownership. They were also collaborators of the commercial enterprises of the Curcumeli brothers, proving that family was a default mechanism of business partnerships.

The examination of these marriage practices shifts through the decades in correlation to the decline of their commercial enterprises. Nevertheless, family continued to be used as a form of strategy, but in another context. During the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, these marriage alliances had a stronger geographical character and were connected to the family's landownership. Following the collapse of their commercial enterprises and their debts, marriage strategies were formed with individuals who owned land and/or originated from the region of Venerato, where the Curcumeli family had land property. The grooms (Friello, Chiozza, Falier, and Christianopoulo) who entered into marital unions with descendants of the Curcumeli family were all connected to the village of Venerato and the region of Xerocamara; a phenomenon already presented in other families of Venetian Crete (Chania and Sitia).

According to the Venetian norms, marriage itself could not lead to upward or downward social mobility, but it aided to the social recognition and economic prosperity of the family. Legal and legitimate marriage, avoidance of manual labor (*arte meccanica*), and maintaining an honorable life (*vita honorabile*) across three preceding generations were all closely interconnected and held equal importance in efforts to enhance financial standing (such as securing public offices) or to elevate social status in a strict legal framework. Within this context of major importance was marrying through the same social stratum with families that had socio-economic recognition.

The study of the Curcumeli family highlights the importance of horizontal mobility in the Medieval and early Modern societies. In the dominant ideology of the Serenissima, marital strategies that led to internal mobility were equally important, since it was a means to achieve social recognition and retain or enhance their economic situation and wealth. While the majority of the members of the Curcumeli family were married within their social group, there are some exceptions. Francesco

⁴⁶ ASV, NC, b. 140 (not. Zuanne Lubina), lib. 1, f. 203v (2 April 1635).

Curcumeli and his daughter both married with individuals from an upper social status (Cretan nobles). The family member who transitioned from the *cittadini* status to the elite (nobile) class was Andreas' Curcumelis granddaughter, Elenata Friello. Also, the grandchildren of Francesco Curcumeli belonged to the Cretan noble class, since Cretan nobility was granted to their father (Zanetto Condolignoti) and his descendants. This upward social mobility was mainly achieved through strategically arranged marriages, which contributed to their social recognition, and facilitated their financial advancement, both in the maritime sector and through landownership.

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