No registers of the Venetian authorities listing the number of Netherlandish merchants exist and the nazione fiamminga has left no records such as members’ lists. Indirect evidence, however, can help ascertain the number of Netherlands active in Venice during this period. The names of the majority of Netherlandish merchants conducting trade in Venice appear in notarial records, even though not all commercial transactions were necessarily registered with a Venetian notary or authenticated in any way. Yet an early modern merchant could not trade over long distances without regularly granting powers of attorney to somebody to act in his place. Commercial disputes were preferably resolved out of court through arbitration by fellow merchants, and insurance claims needed to be settled when goods were damaged or an entire ship was wrecked. The impressive amount of notarial records mentioning Netherlandish merchants collected by Brulez and Devos for the period 1568–1621 shows that whether for powers of attorney, arbitration, renting a house, drawing up a marriage contract or a last will, the Netherlandish merchants in Venice had to turn to a Venetian notary regularly.

In general, sixty-six notaries were operative in Venice at all time, but only a small number specialized in mercantile affairs. These notaries’ offices could be found in the proximity of Rialto. Some notaries catered to a large foreign clientele, often because they paired extensive knowledge of international trade with a command of foreign languages. The Netherlandish merchants preferred certain notaries, especially Giovanni Andrea Catti, who was active between 1577 and 1621, Andrea Spinelli, active between 1591 and 1619, and Giovanni Maria Piccini, active between 1618 and 1650. Piccini was specialized in ‘Ponentine’ trade and was frequented by many Portuguese merchants.¹ The Netherlandish

¹ Pedani Fabris, Veneta auctoritate notarius, 141. Brulez and Devos examined the records of four Venetian notaries: Antonio Callegarini (1566–1604), Pietro Partenio
merchants often also called on these notaries to draw up their wills, sometimes even bequeathing them with a legacy. Gasparo della Faille, for instance, left twenty-five ducats to Piccini, as his notary and trusted friend.  

Samples of notarial records taken at intervals of ten years reveal the development of the population of Netherlandish merchants and apprentices resident in Venice as trade relations, described in Chapter 2 and 3, took on a different form (See Figure 3).  


2 ASV, NT, b. 756–758, with bequests to Piccini in, for example, b. 757, 14 November 1629. See also the last will of Adolfo van Axel, ASV, NT, b. 757, 3 January 1636 (m.v.).

3 The material collected by Brulez and Devos has been used here to determine the number of Netherlandish merchants in the years 1580, 1590, 1600, 1610, and 1620. Catti’s studio was taken over by Piccini in 1621 and his registers have been used to complete the cross section for the years 1630, 1640 and 1650.

4 It must be taken into account that Andrea Spinelli died in 1619, which means that for the year 1620 only Giovanni Andrea Catti was active. Giovanni Piccini had just started his career in 1618 and would take over from Catti only three years later. To see whether or not a decrease in the number of merchants set in after 1610, the year 1615 has also been studied. This resulted in a group of forty-four merchants, certainly fewer than in 1610, but still more than double the number of merchants in 1590 and also significantly more than in 1620. Of these forty-four merchants, nine did not turn up in the other sample years. Five figured only once, probably indicating that they either were in Venice only for a short period of time, or held a minor role as an apprentice.