CHAPTER TWELVE

READING THE HISTORY OF THE ACADEMIA VENETIANA THROUGH ITS BOOK LISTS

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The Academia Venetiana (1557–1561)

Born into a patrician family of old lineage, traditionally involved with Venetian political life, the young Federico Badoer (1519–1593) took an active part in the cultural circle that met in the house of Domenico Venier (known as the Accademia Veniera) in sixteenth-century Venice. In February 1557 he returned to Venice after a three-year mission as an ambassador at the imperial court in Spain and Germany. Both the period spent abroad and the Venetian cultural apprenticeship were to have some influence on the new project he engaged with from 1557 onwards. This was the establishment of the Academia Venetiana.

The declared purpose of this society was to develop a fully comprehensive cultural programme, devoted to the universality of knowledge, in order to enhance the prestige of the Republic of Venice. Venice did not, at the time, have its own University. Following a common pattern of the Italian city-states, which preferred to place their universities in a satellite town, the Venetian Republic relied instead on the mainland University of Padua. The new academy was intended to play a substantial role in the education of young patricians and would-be politicians, attempting to create a centre for higher education and, more generally, an elite cultural institution right in the heart of Venice. The academicians also proposed

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themselves, albeit unsuccessfully, as managers of the Marciana library. The structure of the academy was gradually modified from the small, informal group of people personally chosen by Badoer in 1557, to its final form, reached by the end of 1559. It was then organised by classes, according to its members’ subject interests, and counted about one hundred academicians. Regular meetings were held at first at Badoer’s palace, but after 1560 they were transferred to the newly-built vestibule by Sansovino at St Mark’s. Lectures and discussions on disparate topics were held here and listened to by a wide audience.

These features made the Academia Venetiana quite similar to the other academies, perhaps a bit more ambitious considering the wide range of activities they intended to approach. But there was one truly original characteristic that made it special: it was primarily a publishing venture. The original core of the Academia was brought together by Federico Badoer with the project of becoming an academic publisher. This intention meant that its fate became interwoven with that of the renowned Aldine press, at the time run by Paolo Manuzio, the third son of Aldus’s marriage with Maria Torresano. All the other activities seem to have been planned and developed only later, following the metamorphosis of the Academy itself and its institutional programme. Some have seen in this peculiarity the continuation of the Aldine Neakademia, which surely must have nourished these new publishing ambitions to some extent. However, as will be discussed here, there were some substantial differences in the approach these academies had to their publishing programmes which separate them as manifestations of two very different cultural streams.

A second, fundamental model for the academy was the Academia Florentina in Florence, which to some extent acted as a cultural ministry for duke Cosimo I. This is what Badoer set out to reproduce in Venice; the first hint of this blueprint is to be found in the similarity between the names, something that immediately suggests the intention to establish an institutional relation with the state.

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7 Pagan, ‘Sulla Accademia’, p. 376, confirms the impression that the cultural aspect had been somehow superseded or at least strongly influenced by the publishing activity.
