

VENETIA

Benedetto Cotrugli

The Book of the Art of Trade

Edited by Carlo Carraro
and Giovanni Favero

With Scholarly Essays from
Niall Ferguson, Giovanni Favero,
Mario Infelise, Tiziano Zanato
and Vera Ribaudó

Translated by John Francis Phillimore



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Art of Trade

Carlo Carraro • Giovanni Favero
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Preface

A Brief History of An Extraordinary Project

A gondola slowly skimmed the dark waters of the Grand Canal on a winter's evening of 2010. Niall Ferguson and Fabio Sattin, dressed as Venetian merchants from the fifteenth century, spoke quietly, listening to the sound of the oars in the water, as the gondola brought them towards a large, brightly-lit, noble palace, where a beautiful and mysterious Carnival party was under way. Normally dressed as an awkward professor of the twentieth century, and overwhelmed by the beauty of the masks and costumes, I was waiting for them in the main hall of the palace, at the party to which I had also been invited. I didn't know Niall personally at that point, so I was interested in talking with him. Fabio had organized the meeting in order to discuss a project that he has already talked to Niall about, a project regarding a little-known but extraordinary book to make known to a broad international public. I was truly intrigued.

They slowly climbed the grand staircase, scheming just like real Venetian merchants—just like Benedetto Cotrugli must have done, as he was always dissatisfied with the way that business matters were managed. Amidst the Venetian masks, Fabio and Niall, simultaneously elegant and surprising, approached me in order to discuss translating a book by Benedetto Cotrugli into English, a little jewel then available only in its original language, difficult even for an Italian to understand, yet so full of outstanding, innovative ideas for the year it was written, and still so modern today.

The book that they presented to me is *The Book of the Art of Trade*, which you will read for the first time in English in the pages that follow. It is a fascinating book for the way in which, for the first time in history, modern accounting concepts were presented, as well as for the basic concepts of corporate social responsibility and many other economic issues. I was immediately enthusiastic about Fabio and Niall's proposal. At the time, neither Niall nor I was familiar with the book and, thus, we listened to Fabio's fascinating stories about Cotrugli's life and the contents of his book, of which he owned a copy from the last, no longer available, printing. The ambience of the grand hall resembled that of Renaissance-era Venice, which Fabio's tales made even more real.

Benedetto Cotrugli was neither an author nor a professor—he was a merchant, but one that possessed a great cultural depth and an awareness that allowed him to look behind his occupation in order to understand organizational inefficiencies, accounting approximations, and moral weaknesses that characterized the merchant class of his era. He didn't just present criticisms of the system but, most importantly, proposed solutions. And, thus, *The Book of the Art of the Trade* is a book filled with ingenious proposals and practical ideas.

Translating a rich, concise and very meaningful book is never a simple task, and it is even more complex in a case like Cotrugli's. First of all, due to the language in which it was written, which, for a translator, is difficult to decipher. Secondly, due to the explicative and exegetical work that was very necessary in this case. I decided then to construct a team that would work along with the translator in order to correctly adapt the original text into English. I thank my colleagues Giovanni Favero, Tiziano Zanato, Mario Infelise and Vera Ribaudò from Ca' Foscari University of Venice for their tireless work, which is insufficiently evident in the essays published in this book.

We decided together that a new critical edition, transcribed from the earliest and most recently found manuscript version of the book, was necessary. The outstanding edition by Vera Ribaudò is contained in the volume entitled *Benedetto Cotrugli, Libro del'arte dela mercatura*, published by Ca' Foscari University Press in 2016. The book is available online at <http://edizionicafoscari.unive.it/en/edizioni/libri/978-88-6969-088-4>. Vera Ribaudò was also asked to provide a paraphrase in modern

Italian of Cotrugli's critical text to make translation easier and more precise. Using that version, John Phillimore would then create the English version, which is published in this book. John Phillimore's translation is also extraordinary, as it was able to confer to the reader all of the subtleties and the sophistication of Cotrugli's original text.

The work of the Ca' Foscari team was both intense and difficult. It was a feat of rediscovery, that wholly renders Benedetto Cotrugli's intellectual greatness in a time when Venice was a capital of the world, a major business center, similar to modern day New York or London. The book, in its English version, slowly came to light, becoming more and more modern and interesting as it was being translated.

The difficulties that occasionally emerged during the course of the project were overcome by the enthusiasm and encouragement of Fabio Sattin, the diplomacy and friendly smile of Veronica Gusso, the support of Dante Roscini, the home cooking of Elena, Fabio's wife. I am truly grateful to them all.

This book was an extraordinary and massive project that required a considerable level of investment. Without the financial support of Ca' Foscari University of Venice and the steadfast support of its rectors, this project would not have been made possible. I am, thus, extremely grateful to Ca' Foscari for the enormous contribution it gave to this project. I thank my colleagues Giovanni, Tiziano, Mario and Vera for what they have done on the scientific and cultural end and my staff for having shared with me as much the best moments as the more difficult ones.

Benedetto Cotrugli probably did not enjoy being a merchant. He would have perhaps preferred to be a university professor. In the end, his book, due to his ability to look at the business world from different perspectives, is that mixture of theory and practice that modern business schools teach as the most effective way to train today's good managers, the modern-day merchants.

That day in which Niall, Fabio and I met in that majestic palace, we probably didn't expect the hardships that we would endure in completing such a large-scale project. In the pages that follow, reading the introduction by Niall Ferguson and the essays by Giovanni Favero, Tiziano Zanato, Mario Infelise and Vera Ribaudò, the reader will become immediately aware of the significance of Benedetto Cotrugli, the originality and the

relevance of his book and, thus, the inherent difficulty of the project. I can't help but to thank everyone, especially Niall and Fabio, for the success of this extraordinary book, which surely, even in its English translation, will not fail to intrigue many other readers.

Cotrugli's book is a little jewel that has remained hidden for centuries. Let's enjoy its splendour.

Carlo Carraro
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June 8, 2016

Contents

Part I Introduction	1
Benedetto Cotrugli, <i>The Book of the Art of Trade</i> (<i>Libro del'arte dela mercatura</i>)	3
<i>Niall Ferguson</i>	
A New Edition of Benedetto Cotrugli's <i>The Book of the Art of Trade</i>	9
<i>Giovanni Favero</i>	
Part II The Book of the Art of Trade	21
Preface	23
Part 1: On the Origins and Principles of Trade	27
Part 2: On the Religion Incumbent on the Merchant	85

Part 3: On the Civic Life of the Merchant	111
Part 4: On the Economic Virtues of the Merchant	141
Part III Essays	173
Benedetto Cotrugli, Merchant Writer <i>Tiziano Zanato</i>	175
The Printed Editions of Benedetto Cotrugli's Treaty <i>Mario Infelise</i>	213
A Note on the Text <i>Vera Ribaudó</i>	219
References	223
Index	233

Part I

Introduction

Benedetto Cotrugli, *Book of the Art of Trade (Libro del'arte dela mercatura)*

Niall Ferguson

Foreword

In any airport bookshop from Boston to Beijing you will find entire shelves of books on how to succeed in business, the more credible of them written by authors who have themselves done so. It is a sign of just how long capitalism has been around that one of the earliest such books was written over half a millennium ago. It is a sign of how little business has changed that Benedetto Cotrugli's *Book of the Art of Trade* should still repay reading.

That is not to say that Cotrugli's *Art of Trade* is the fifteenth-century equivalent of Donald Trump's *Art of the Deal*. For Cotrugli was no Trump. Amongst many pieces of wise advice, Cotrugli warns merchants against involving themselves in politics. "It is not expedient," he writes,

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“for a merchant to have to do with the courts, nor above all to involve himself in politics or the civil administration, because these are perilous areas.” Far from glorying in verbal vulgarity and ostentatious displays of wealth, Cotrugli was a highly educated humanist whose ideal merchant combined the classical virtues of the commoner-citizen as they had been conceived by the ancient Greeks and Romans and rediscovered by Italian scholars in the Renaissance.

As a young man, Cotrugli had in fact attended the University of Bologna, but (as he ruefully observes): “Destiny and ill-luck contrived it that right in the midst of the most pleasurable of philosophical studies, I was seized from studying and made to become a merchant, a trade I was obliged to follow, abandoning the sweet delights of study, to which I had been utterly dedicated...” Returning to run the family business in Ragusa (present day Dubrovnik), Cotrugli was disgusted by the low intellectual level of his new milieu. In the absence of any kind of formal business education, there was nothing more than an “inadequate, ill-organised, arbitrary and threadbare” system of learning on the job, “to the extent that my compassion was aroused and it pained me that this useful and necessary activity had fallen into the hands of such undisciplined and uncouth people, who carry on without moderation or orderliness, ignoring and perverting the law.” In many ways, *The Art of Trade* was Cotrugli’s attempt not just to raise the standard of business education but also to elevate the standing of business itself. Though it is best known to scholars as the earliest work to describe the system of double-entry bookkeeping—more than thirty years before Luca Pacioli’s better known treatise *De computis et scripturis* (1494)—*The Art of Trade* is most remarkable for the breadth of its subject matter. Cotrugli offers much more than just practical advice on accounting. He offers an entire way of life. This is not a dry textbook but an exhortation to his fellow merchants to aspire to be Renaissance businessmen, in the manner of Cosimo di Medici.

Cotrugli’s book also gives the modern reader a fascinating glimpse of a vanished world. Born in Ragusa (present-day Dubrovnik), Cotrugli and his brother Michele were importers of Catalan wool as well as dyes, paying in Balkan silver or, more commonly, bills of exchange. In the course of his business life he spent time in Barcelona, Florence, Venice

and, finally, Naples, where he lived from 1451 to 1469. This was truly a Mediterranean life; indeed, Cotrugli knew the sea well enough to write another book in the subject, *De navigatione*, which he dedicated to the Venetian Senate. He also served Ferdinand, king of Aragon, as ambassador to Ragusa and master of the Naples Mint. Life in the fifteenth century was precarious even for a successful merchant. In 1460 Cotrugli was accused of, and tried for, allegedly exporting bullion illegally. *The Art of Trade* was written in rural Sorbo Serpico while he was escaping an outbreak of plague in Naples. Life was shorter in those days. Cotrugli was in his early fifties when he died in 1469.

Yet the reader gets a keen sense from this book of a life well lived. Cotrugli might have missed the libraries of Bologna, but he took considerable pride in his commercial calling. Indeed, parts of *The Art of Trade* read as a defense of merchants against the frequent charges—of usury, of greed, of avarice—leveled at them by religious zealots at the time. Cotrugli declared himself “astonished that exchange, being so useful, easy and entirely necessary to the conduct of human affairs, should be condemned by so many theologians.” He was careful to show his respect for members of the nobility, who were prohibited from sullyng their hands with filthy lucre, but not to the extent of disparaging the upright bourgeoisie to which he clearly belonged. We find here an early and eloquent celebration of what would later be thought of by Max Weber (wrongly) as a Protestant work ethic. “To turn a profit, or to accomplish the aims of the art of trade,” writes Cotrugli,

it is essential to set aside every other concern, and to dedicate oneself as diligently as possible to all the things that may prove useful to or advance that occupation. This means sometimes putting up with privations day and night, travelling on foot or on horseback, and by land and sea, working one's hardest at buying and selling and in making attractive the goods bought and sold, and applying as much diligence as possible to these and similar matters. And every other consideration, as I have said, must take second place, and not only superfluous things but even those necessary to the maintenance of human life. It may well be required sometimes that eating and drinking and sleeping be postponed to another occasion, indeed that one endure hunger and thirst and white nights and other similar inconveniences deleterious to the normal equilibrium of the body, which

were it not an instrument prepared for these eventualities and trained for such hardships, could not sustain them, and undergoing them could cause such suffering as to lead to sickness and even death.

In short, a career in commerce was not for the weak.

The first book of *The Art of Trade* is the one most concerned with business itself. Chapter V, for example, deals with barter, while chapter IV discusses cash payment. (“Make sure that the other side declares the price first,” advises Cotrugli. “Get used to always asking what he expects for his goods: it is all too easy to be outwitted here.”) A key issue discussed in the next chapters is credit. At a time when religious prohibitions on usury (lending at interest) still remained on most European statute books, Cotrugli was careful to spell out his view that, as a general principle, “selling on credit is itself legitimate, indeed reasonable and necessary.” Credit contracts were “legal, useful and indeed necessary to the sustenance of individuals and their families and cities.” But not all lending was good. “You must consider the expiry date of the credit,” warns Cotrugli, “which we should always try to make after as short an interval as possible. ... you need to be very prudent about this and not do as many foolish men do and agree a timescale of eighteen months and more, time for four popes to perish and who knows what unforeseen events to occur.” Moreover, you should beware of bad debtors. “A debt has this characteristic that it deteriorates with time,” he notes, “and after a year has passed from its settlement date it has lost 50 % of its value, and continues to do so proportionately, because for the merchant losing time and losing money are the same thing.” In Book Two, however, Cotrugli defines usurers as “those who, on the maturation of a debt, will not extend it without interest to borrowers unable to pay immediately.” As is clear from the accounts of banks like the Medicis’, debt finance remained a grey area so long as usury was formally illegal. Italian lenders at this time did not explicitly charge interest, but instead collected commissions or even charged insurance premia to compensate themselves.

Cotrugli was an early believer in diversification as a way of managing and reducing risk. He imagines a Florentine merchant entering into various partnerships with merchants in Venice, Rome and Avignon, investing some of his capital in wool, some in silk. “Having in a safe and orderly

way put my hand so many transactions,” he observes, “I will gain nothing but advantage from them, because the left hand will help the right.” And again: “You must never risk too much on a single throw, by land or by sea: however rich you may be, at the most five hundred ducats a shipload, or a thousand for a large galley.” But here, too, there are caveats: “Be careful not to take on too many or too large transactions: do not try to net every bird that passes, because many have failed for taking on too much, but no one for exposing himself too little.”

It is in Book One, chapter XII, that Cotrugli explains the importance of double-entry bookkeeping, perhaps unintentionally switching the conventional location of credits and debits:

Thus, every item that you write in the book must be written down twice, once as a debt from who must pay out, and in the other case a credit to the receiver. ... In the same way, every item must be written on both sides of the sheet, that is, on the right-hand side of the book under “sums owed” and on the left “sums owing.”

Elsewhere he strongly condemns “those that keep only one column of accounts, that is how much is owing to themselves and not how much others are expecting from them,” urging his readers “to repudiate them and condemn them publicly, and eventually take them to court. For these are the worst type of merchant, the basest and most iniquitous.” Yet this is only one of the relatively novel business skills of the era that Cotrugli emphasizes. He explains the importance of bills of exchange in long-distance trade. He explains the essential role of insurance for ship-borne commerce.

Nevertheless, *The Art of Trade* would be a rather full book if these were its sole contents. Its most engaging passages are in fact to be found in Books Three and Four, where Cotrugli turns from business tips to what we would now call questions of lifestyle. He dismisses businessmen “who are proficient at chess, board games, cards, dice, and at fencing, wrestling, playing instruments, dancing, hunting, fishing, etc.” as “indiscreet and uncivilised.” Nor should a man of affairs be over-dressed. “Do not get yourself up in silk,” he advises his reader, “or you will look like a monkey in fancy dress or a king bee. Make it your choice to dress cleanly, simply

and elegantly.” Cotrugli’s ideal merchant has his mind on higher things, and with good reason: “A merchant should be the most universal of men and one that has the most to do, more than his fellows, with different types of men and social classes.” Consequently, “everything a man might know may be helpful to a merchant,” including cosmography, geography, philosophy, astrology, theology, and law. Cotrugli’s ideal Renaissance businessman was truly a polymath.

Finally, Cotrugli turns to the private sphere, offering all kinds of intriguing suggestions about marriage, sex, the siring and raising of children and the management of servants. Each page reveals how profoundly Western social attitudes to the family, and especially to women, have changed over five hundred years. And yet still the questions are the perennial ones. How can one raise a child to appreciate the hard work that is necessary to run a business? When should a businessman retire from the counting house to cultivate his garden? How much time and money should one devote to philanthropy? To religion? The notion of “work-life balance” was not an invention of our modern age. In many ways, it is Cotrugli’s central theme.

The Book of the Art of Trade survived by sheer good luck. Only the discovery of the original text in two Florentine manuscripts revealed that the printed edition of 1573 had been badly abridged. Cotrugli’s third book, *De Uxore Ducenda*, was not so fortunate. That is a matter for regret. Cotrugli tells us that it “discoursed at some length, in the Latin tongue, of all the matters in which a wife should obey, of her duties, of the education of her children, and of all the instructions that ought to be followed by each member of the household.” Still, these are probably the subjects on which we and the men of *quattrocento* Naples are least likely to see eye to eye. What has survived is a marvelously illuminating self-improvement manual that reminds us not only that the world has changed very much since the 1400s, but also that the ethos of capitalism has changed very little. The ascent of money began longer ago than most of us think.

A New Edition of Benedetto Cotrugli's The Book of the Art of Trade

Giovanni Favero

A Changing Book

Benedetto Cotrugli's *The Book of the Art of Trade* (as we may translate the title of the manuscript, *libro del'arte dela mercatura*) is a particularly clear case of relevant changes in the historical interpretation of a text following new archival discoveries.

Cotrugli's humanistic treaty on commerce was written in 1458 yet published in print only in 1573. As a consequence, it was for centuries neglected as a handbook dealing with the mercantile practices of a previous age. The historians of accounting rediscovered it in the nineteenth century as the first book citing the practice of double-entry bookkeeping, pre-dating in composition Luca Pacioli's famous treatise *De computis et scripturis*, included in the 1494 Venetian printed edition of his *Summa de Arithmetica*. It is true to say, however, that the thirteenth chapter of the first volume of Cotrugli's 1573 book dealt with bookkeeping very

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summarily, stating in the end that it was almost impossible to explain it, as it was difficult to learn without practical experience.

In 1990 Ugo Tucci published a new edition of Cotrugli's book based on two Florentine manuscripts of the late fifteenth century (the earlier dated 1484), demonstrating that the 1573 Venetian editor had heavily altered the original version both in its language and contents, transforming it from a book for merchants' education into a humanistic treaty. In particular, he abridged the thirteenth chapter eliminating all practical examples, extracting the procedure of bookkeeping and adding the above mentioned conclusion.¹ Reading Tucci's edition, it is clear that Cotrugli had described in detail the practice of double-entry bookkeeping some decades before Pacioli. Despite of his priority, as Tucci (1990, 12–13) highlighted, Cotrugli was neither the inventor nor a theorist of double-entry accounting, and Pacioli's merit for spreading this method is not in question. Cotrugli's book is rather of interest as a pivotal link between the medieval handbooks of mercantile technique and early modern accounting treaties following Pacioli's (Doni 2007, 70–74).

Yet the question was not finally closed. Paul Oskar Kristeller (1989) in his *Iter Italicum* mentioned a 1475 copy of Cotrugli's book, made in Naples but preserved in the National Library of Malta. This manuscript was briefly described in a biographical sketch of Cotrugli in Tafuri (1760; Sangster 2014a). Tiziano Zanato (1993) was then able to reconstruct by way of linguistic analysis a *stemma codicum* of the three known manuscripts. Žarko Muliačić (1995a) studied in detail the differences between the Venetian edition, the Florentine manuscripts and the new Maltese version. Miroslav Buzadzic, Mladen Habek and Vladimir Stipetic (1998) used the latter to build a stronger argument in favour of the priority of Cotrugli over Pacioli in the description of double-entry bookkeeping. In the same year, indeed, Joanna Postma (Postma and van der Helm 2000, 148) discovered that the eleventh chapter of the first volume of Cotrugli's book on letters of exchange "is identical" with the first part of Pacioli's chapter on the *tariffa mercantesca* of his *Tractatus*

¹ According to Muliačić (1995a), Patrizi abridged chapter 13 of Cotrugli's book because at the time better instructions on double-entry bookkeeping were available. The interest aroused by publishing the book in the late sixteenth century would not be in its priority in describing this accounting technique, but in its more general value as an humanistic treaty on the virtues of commerce.

mathematicus ad discipulos perusinos (1478). It is likely then that Pacioli may have been in possession or well acquainted with Cotrugli's book long before the publication of the *Summa* in 1494, as Vladimir Stipetić (2002, 128) concludes. Postma and van der Helm (2000, 148) suggest also that both may have drawn on an earlier common model. In any case, they also discovered that the Maltese manuscript contained, bound together with the copy of Cotrugli's book, the transcription of a set of earlier bookkeeping instructions (not by Cotrugli) including a short theoretical part. This would make these instructions more than merely a set of examples, but themselves the oldest known bookkeeping textbook that was used outside the workplace, probably together with Cotrugli's book (Sangster 2014b). The contents and structure of the instructions are different from Pacioli's but can be found in quite similar form in subsequent treatises (Tagliente 1533[1525]), suggesting that a parallel tradition of bookkeeping textbooks accompanied the diffusion of Pacioli's. Yet such instructions are not the subject of the present edition, which focuses on Cotrugli.

Following the latter discoveries, we can say that the issue of authorial priority in describing double-entry bookkeeping, if not to be discarded altogether as unrealistic, is no longer crucial in justifying the historical interest of Cotrugli's book. Its importance lies rather in the description of the late medieval mercantile techniques and practices, widespread in the Mediterranean world, in his defence of their legitimacy and in the enunciation of principles reflecting the prevailing ethics of the time.

This Edition

This introduction aims at offering the English-speaking reader an overview of the current state of historical knowledge on Cotrugli and his book on the art of commerce. A more detailed study of the author's biography, of the origin of the book and of its content is provided in the essay by Tiziano Zanato, which follows Cotrugli's text. A further essay by Mario Infelise focuses on the early modern printed editions of Cotrugli's book, analysing the characteristics of the 1573 Venetian *editio princeps* (then reprinted in 1602 in Brescia and translated into French in Lyon in 1582) and on the

life and business activities of its first publisher, Francesco Patrizi. A final note by Vera Ribaudo summarizes the tradition of the manuscript text of the book and the criteria followed to elaborate its critical edition.

The reader will find here the first available translation in English of Cotrugli's book made by John Phillimore, complete with indexes. This translation is based on the critical edition of the original text, curated by Vera Ribaudo on the basis of the 1475 Maltese manuscript and its comparison with other existing versions. The critical edition is published by Edizioni Ca' Foscari—Digital Publishing, and is available at the following link: <http://edizionicafoscari.unive.it/it/edizioni/libri/978-88-6969-088-4/>

The Author: Benedetto Cotrugli (Benedikt Kotrulj/Benedictus de Cotrullis)²

The author of the book, Benedetto Cotrugli (ca 1416–1469), was a merchant from Ragusa (Dubrovnik) who spent part of his life in the Kingdom of Naples then under Aragonese rule.

The Cotrugli family originated from Kotor, but around 1350 the merchant Zivo (Johannes) Kotrulj moved to Ragusa, where one of his three sons, Rusko, became a member of the St. Antun confraternity of merchants and traders, named after St. Anthony the Great. Benedetto was born around 1416 from Nicoletta Ilic (from a family of the same confraternity) and Giacomo (Jakov) Cotrugli, one of Rusko's sons, together with Giovanni (Ivan) and Nicola (Runjić 1989, 515; Luzzati 1984, 446).

Giacomo was active as a merchant and contractor in Angevin Naples (the Kingdom of Naples was contested by the Aragonese and the Angevins for much of this century), where the queen Joanna II put him in charge of the mint. Meanwhile the whole Cotrugli family was deeply involved in the import trade of wheat and other cereals, salt and saltpeter from the Kingdom of Naples to Ragusa (Luzzati 1984, 446). Around 1430 Benedetto moved to Italy, probably to Bologna (Tucci 1990, 31), to study law and philosophy. Yet after Giacomo's death in 1436 he was forced to go

²These short biographical notes on Benedetto Cotrugli are mostly based on Luzzati (1984), Spremić (1986), Tucci (1990) and Janeković-Römer (2009).

back to Ragusa to take charge of the family trading business. He became in his turn a member of the St. Antun confraternity, from 1436, and got married in 1444 to Nikoleta Dobric-Bozic (Nicoletta Natale Bondenaliao: Kheil 1906b, 240), from another merchant family of the confraternity. It is possible to presume that from the death of his father to when he got married, Benedetto was learning trading techniques and travelling, while most of his father's business was managed by other members of the family, in particular by his uncle Giovanni.

Benedetto Cotrugli's activity as a merchant has been reconstructed from archival evidence by Zdenka Janeković-Römer (2009). It spans the central decades of the fifteenth century, when the Aragonese Kingdom extended from Catalonia to the South of Italy and Athens, and maintained a privileged relationship with the Republic of Ragusa as the gateway to the Balkan route to the Levant and as its main ally against the Venetian hegemony in the Eastern Mediterranean (Del Treppo 1973; Spremić 1986).

Cotrugli is the first Ragusan whose name appears in archival records in Barcelona, where he was officially sent from 1444 to 1446 to follow a legal dispute concerning the right of the "Italian customs" to impose duties on Ragusan merchants' activities (Janeković-Römer 2009). Together with his brother Michele (Mihoc), Benedetto traded Catalan wool to Ragusa and Florence, from where he also imported dyes, paying for the goods with Balkan silver which he had sent from Ragusa to Florence and Southern Italy. Most of the business consisted in small and rapid trading operations using credit financing (Tucci 1990, 27–28). The trading network of the young Cotrugli brothers involved the Ragusan patricians Nikola and Sigsmund de Giorgi and the Florentine merchant company of Francesco Neroni, whose main business relation in Ragusa was still Benedetto's uncle, Giovanni. From Benedetto's letters to Neroni kept in Florentine archives, it is clear that the Cotrugli brothers were trying to make their company independent from Giovanni's protection (Boschetto 2005).

In 1450 Benedetto and Michele split their company and possessions: Benedetto made Michele his proxy to manage his business in Ragusa and moved to Naples in the early months of 1451. Despite the lack of official appointments, Cotrugli was probably able to exploit his family

connections to gain access to the court of the King of Naples Alfonso of Aragon. In 1452 he was back in Ragusa to negotiate with the Republic the purchase of a credit to be claimed from King Alfonso in compensation for the damages caused by the assaults of pirates on Ragusan merchants. He rapidly sold the bulk of the credit to two Ragusan patricians and to his brother, and took on another credit that he was able to get reimbursed from the King but never paid back to the Republic. In 1454 he was then officially sought after by the Ragusan authorities, who were however unable to prosecute him in Naples, where he enjoyed the protection of the King, who according to some sources appointed him as auditor of the Royal tribunal³ and urged the Republic to make him its consul in Naples, as it perhaps finally did in 1458, only to immediately annul the appointment.

When Alfonso of Aragon died in the summer of 1458, the succession to the throne of Naples of his illegitimate son Ferrante (Ferdinand) was opposed by the Pope, Calixtus III, who however died some months later, in August: his successor Pius II recognised Ferrante's rights. Although appointed by Ferrante as his ambassador to Ragusa, Cotrugli was forced to settle temporarily in the castle of Serpico to escape a plague epidemic in Naples,⁴ and there, as stated in the closing section of the *Book on the Art of Trade*, he wrote his treatise.

In the meanwhile, the Ragusan Republic, following the complaints of other Ragusan merchants in the Kingdom of Naples, and perhaps taking advantage of the occasion of King Alfonso's death, ordered him to appear in court in Ragusa. The banishment following his non-appearance was however repeatedly suspended on Ferrante's request (Luzzati 1984, 447). Cotrugli was even able to pass through Ragusa without consequences at least twice, as an ambassador of Ferrante to Bosnia in 1462⁵ (Spremić 1986, 100) and in 1466 to establish official

³ Cotrugli is cited as auditor of the Royal tribunal in the dedication by Giovanni Giuseppi to the Ragusan merchant Francesco Radagli (Frano Radaljevic) that appears in a limited number of copies of the 1573 Venetian edition (see below the essay by Mario Infelise on the printed tradition).

⁴ Privitera (2010) argues that no plagues are recorded in Naples in that period. However, Corradi (1972, I, 296) records an epidemic lasting six months in 1458 (Tucci 1990, 37).

⁵ The interpretation of this appointment as 'prime minister' of the Kingdom by Appendini (1803, II, 98–100) is due to the equivocation of the term used by the Ragusan Senate granting Cotrugli a safe-conduct as "plenipotentiary minister", actually meaning ambassador.

relations between the Kingdom of Naples and the King of Hungary Matthias Corvinus (Matyas Hunyadi), who had just retaken Bosnia from the Ottomans who had occupied it in 1463.

Ferrante in 1460 appointed Cotrugli as chief of the Mint in Naples, the same position his father had held before him, although he was in court the same year following an accusation of illegal exportation of bullion. However he kept the position until 1468, when he was moved to the Mint of L'Aquila, where he died in 1469. His son Iacopo (Jakov) succeeded him until 1474, and continued the family's merchant activities. A daughter, Caterina, got married in L'Aquila, and another, Eleonora, in 1483 became a nun in the San Girolamo monastery in Naples. A younger son, Girolamo (Jeronimo), remained in Ragusa.

The Book: il Libro del'arte dela mercatura

Of the four works attributed to Cotrugli, only two are known to have survived up to the present. A bio-bibliographical repertory (Farlatus and Coletus 1800, 17) cites a book in the Italian vernacular on the nature of flowers (*Della natura dei fiori*) that Cotrugli may have written in 1460, but its existence and attribution are very dubious. Another book written before 1458 is cited in the opening of the sixth chapter of the fourth volume of the Art of Trade, "*Dela muliere*" (to be interpreted not as "on the woman" as in Latin, but as "on the wife" from the Venetian): the title was *De uxore ducenda*, and its possible content is discussed in Tiziano Zanato's essay, included in the present edition.

However, the *Book of the Art of Trade* (*Libro del'arte dela mercatura*) is no longer the only surviving literary work of Cotrugli. Two editions were in fact recently published of a treatise on navigation (*De navigazione*), written in the Italian vernacular in 1464–65 and dedicated to the Venetian Senate: the first edition is based on a manuscript from the Yale University Library⁶ and includes a Croatian translation by Damir Salopek

⁶The first manuscript of Cotrugli's book on navigation was found by an antique dealer in Naples and offered in vain to the Marciana library in 1913–14, to be then purchased by the American collector Henry C. Taylor, who finally donated it to the Yale University Library, where it is now catalogued as Ms. 557 (Trovato 2009). Another manuscript is kept in the private collection of

(Kotruljević 2005a); the second includes a commentary in Italian and compares the Yale manuscript with another manuscript from the private collection of Lawrence J. Schoenberg with a commentary by Piero Falchetta (2009). Interestingly, Falchetta (2012, 59) has shown that in this work Cotrugli aims at establishing a proper “science” of navigation, by mixing or alternating practical notions deriving from the actual experience of sailors with philosophical and moral considerations drawn from other texts or from personal reflections. In his essay, Tiziano Zanato discusses here this interpretation in relationship with the *libro dell’arte de la mercatura*, where the same approach to the foundation of a proper “art of commerce” can be detected.

The book on trade was then Cotrugli’s second literary work. It is dedicated to the Ragusan merchant Francesco di Stefano (“di Rizzato” is added in one of the Florentine manuscripts), who, following Janeković-Römer (2009), was Cotrugli’s brother in law, having married the sister of Nikoleta Dobric-Bozic. As stated above, it was written, according to the author’s own statement, in the castle of Serpico (today Sorbo Serpico, not far from Avellino) during the summer of 1458 when a plague epidemic hit the city of Naples. The choice of the Italian language (“volgare et materna”—vernacular and mother tongue) instead of the Latin is justified by Cotrugli in the introduction as more commonly used and understandable by merchants, for whose benefit the work was written. The explicit aim of the book was indeed to explain to merchants how it was possible to earn money honorably and without offense to God and to their fellow men. On the relationship between the definition of morally legitimate trading behaviour and the idea that commerce should be practiced following its own principles see again the essay by Tiziano Zanato below.

The book is divided into four volumes (called “books”) and an introduction (*prefatio*). The first volume is the closest in content to a technical handbook, dealing not only with the origin (ch. 1) and the definition of commerce (ch. 2), and with the qualities required in a

Lawrence J. Schoenberg as Ms. 473: it was described as anonymous by de Polo Saibanti (1985) but is clearly a copy of Cotrugli’s *De navigatione*. Falchetta (2012, 54) cites also a third manuscript Ma. 334 at the “Angelo Mai” Library in Bergamo.