



*Daughter in Venice: Caterina
Corner, Queen of Cyprus and
Woman of the Renaissance*

Holly Hurlburt

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*Caterina Cornaro: Last Queen of
Cyprus and Daughter of Venice*

**Candida Syndikus and
Sabine Rogge (eds)**

Münster: Waxmann, 2013

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Caterina Cornaro: Last Queen of Cyprus and Daughter of Venice. Edited by Candida Syndikus and Sabine Rogge. Münster: Waxmann Verlag, 2013. ISBN 978-3-8309-2907-9. 480 pp. €49.90..

In recent years, there has been a revived interest in both Caterina Cornaro's career, and the long-lasting legacy she has left as the last queen of Cyprus, the 'daughter of Venice,' and the Lady of Asolo. Early biographies have tended to romanticise the dramatic aspects of her career; the events of Caterina's life, however, were indeed striking. She was married to the last Lusignan King, James II by proxy and given the title 'daughter of Venice'; she was widowed young and took over the throne of Cyprus under the Venetian protectorate; she witnessed the horrific murder of her uncle; she lost her infant son; she was forced to abdicate after having ruled Cyprus for nearly sixteen years; and on her return to her homeland, she was offered residence in Asolo, where she established a famous court.

Both books serve to reveal the complexity of the roles Caterina played as 'daughter' (both pretended and real), queen, and courtly lady. *Caterina Cornaro: Last Queen of Cyprus and Daughter of Venice* is an edited collection of papers presented at a conference held in September 2010 to commemorate the five-hundredth anniversary of Caterina Cornaro's death. Seventeen contributors offer chapters in Italian, French, and English, presenting viewpoints from a broad range of disciplines, including literature, musicology, art history, archaeology, architecture, and numismatics. This multi-disciplinary approach works well: some of the chapters look at the roles Caterina played in the political and cultural history of Venice and Cyprus, while others explore her legacy and focus on the interpretations of her image under various influences, ranging from Venetian state propaganda to Romanticism. Not all the chapters focus on Caterina directly, but instead explore topics related to the broader context of her career in Venice and Cyprus.

The editors have divided the collection into four main parts (this decision is explained in the introduction, but not signposted in the contents page). The first section reviews the construction of Caterina's public image within the Venetian literary and artistic context. Chapters by Monica Molteni and Candida Syndikus explore the ways that Caterina's image became conspicuous in the sixteenth-century through the efforts of her family and the Venetian state, and the reasons behind its appeal to nineteenth and twentieth century audiences, respectively. Chapters by Martin Gaier and Ursula Schädler-Saub trace her image in sculpture and architecture. Gaier views

Caterina's funerary monument as a reflection of the rising status of the Corner family, and Schädler-Saub looks at the construction and preservation of Caterina's hunting lodge, the *Barco della Regina*, in Altivole.

The chapters in the second section examine Caterina's influential place in contemporary literature. Lina Bolzoni and Rotraud von Kulesa both concentrate on Pietro Bembo's treatise *Gli Asolani*, while Tobias Leuker's work looks at the poetry of Giovanni d'Arezzo that was dedicated to Caterina. Daria Perocco adopts a broader view and examines evidence from travellers/pilgrims, contemporary historians (such as Bembo and Colbertaldo), and poetry.

The chapters in the third section are related to Cyprus. Catherine Otten-Froux looks at Venetian activities during the Genoese occupation of Famagusta (1373-1464), with an emphasis on the role of the Venetian consul as an intermediary. Benjamin Arbel covers the early years of the Venetian protectorate, highlighting the Republic's attempts to establish control over Cypriot finances and the production of salt and grain. Gilles Grivaud reviews Caterina's reign within the context of Cypriot queenship, comparing the construction of her image in Cypriot narrative and visual sources with those of former queens. Chryssa Maltezou's chapter follows Caterina back to Venice, with an interesting emphasis on her entourage and the diverging life stories of two of the 'maidens' in her company, Maria Chalipa and Fiammetta Buchari.

The fourth section includes chapters on art history, architecture, numismatics, and musicology. Tasos Papacostas's article focuses on the structure of the Katholikon of St Neophytus, and Lorenzo Calvelli's article traces the history of the porphyry sarcophagus of Caterina's husband, James II, in the Cathedral of St Nicholas. David Michael Metcalf's study sheds light on the practice of countermarking coins during the Venetian period, which resulted in the need to revalid most of the Lusignan currency. Chapters by Arnold Jacobshagen and Angel Nicolaou-Konnari take the analysis of Caterina's image into the nineteenth century and present a wealth of interesting detail on operatic representations of Caterina, exploring the reasons behind the audiences' enduring fascination with her life and career. There is good use of visual material throughout the book, and coloured plates are included at the end of the volume. Researchers may find separate chapters or sections useful depending on their area of specialisation. As this is such a richly varied collection, a more detailed introduction would have helped to strengthen the overall rationale and hold the articles together, and an index would have been very useful in navigating the inter-related arguments.

Hurlburt's study achieves its stated aim, which is to offer a holistic assessment of Caterina's life, very well. Hurlburt examines the political background to Caterina's marriage to James II of Lusignan (initially by proxy)

within the context of the Republic's and the Corner family's interests in the eastern Mediterranean, tracing the development of the title 'daughter of the Republic.' After the death of James, Venice played a contentious role in the government of Cyprus, treading "a fine line between protecting Caterina's kingdom and directly annexing it" (72). To counter these pressures, Caterina created networks inside and outside Cyprus. She not only retained her husband's loyal advisors, but also offered patronage to others; at the same time, she elevated members of her own extended family to positions of authority in order to cement her rule. Through an analysis of her letters, Hurlburt demonstrates that Caterina tried to ascertain and defend the boundaries of her authority: she sought the royal respect and status she believed she deserved, and where she could, tried to operate independently. To this end, she employed various strategies, which included rewarding loyalty and punishing conspirators (77); addressing letters and complaints to Doge Pietro Mocenigo (86); arranging marriages (94); offering protection to her dead husband's illegitimate children, and even to one of his mistresses (94); and exchanging gifts with the Sultan of Egypt, who recognised her authority (95). Perhaps the most crucial exercise of power was Caterina's granting of titles and fiefs to noblemen on the island (79).

Despite having successfully deflected various challenges to her rule—which included the not-insignificant claims of her half-sister-in-law Charlotte of Savoy to the crown of Cyprus, various plots by Naples, threats from enemies such as the Mamluks and the Ottomans, and civil unrest from within the island—Caterina was forced to abdicate, and returned to Venice in 1489. Hurlburt shows that Caterina's abdication did not sever her links to her former subjects: on the contrary, she successfully championed their interests in Venice and Cyprus for many years. Interestingly, the Venetian state responded to her petitions and granted her wishes, which ranged from land grants to members of elite Cypriot families, to grants of freedom to Cypriot serfs. These petitions provide a very intriguing insight into the new strategies Caterina adopted to remain politically active and relevant: Cypriots sought her help because they saw her as a source of influence with the Venetian state, and she clearly wanted to foster this perception.

Once in Asolo, Caterina swiftly became the champion of the Asolani too: in 1505-1507, she asked the Council of Ten to import grain from Cyprus in order to feed the local population (134). Caterina upheld a courtly existence in the town and governed through an efficient delegation of power to her loyal supporters. At this point in her life, a shift can be observed in her 'queenly' image. Hurlburt argues that in many of the literary works by Pietro Bembo and Giovanni d'Arezzo, the scenes featuring Caterina's courtly life in Asolo emphasise the virtues of chastity, loyalty, and duty, perhaps also reflecting the ways Venice and the Venetian audiences preferred to see her.

Until the end of her life, Caterina remained well informed about political events (possibly via her brother Zorzi and his sons), corresponded with the Council of Ten in order to elevate the position of her family members in Cyprus, and also continued to act as an agent for the interests of other parties. The final chapter of the book explores Caterina's legacy, and stresses the ways that the Corner family continued to cultivate her image and to benefit from her legacy long after her death.

Hurlburt's book relies on a thorough examination of published and archival sources and makes excellent use of richly varied visual material, which includes paintings, seals, maps, documents, and coins. Hurlburt masterfully underlines the manipulation of visual imagery in shaping Caterina's perceived role and agency in events. A brilliant example comes from Admiral Pietro Mocenigo's funerary monument, where he is depicted as Caterina's 'saviour' during the coup attempt of 1473. While the monument depicts her as a 'queen in distress,' who was rescued through the joint efforts of Mocenigo and Venice, contemporary narrative sources reveal that by the time Mocenigo arrived the unrest was already over (68). Caterina's political agency had not previously received in-depth treatment, but in Hurlburt's assessment, Caterina plays a central political role. At the heart of the book are various power struggles: Venice aiming to gain control over Cyprus and its resources, the Corner family struggling to assume and consolidate their power in Cyprus and Venice, and the elite and non-elite native population of Cyprus negotiating an existence in a period of political turmoil. In this complex scene, it is likely that the Venetian government would have preferred Caterina to accept the role of a pawn/puppet, or at the very least, an obedient 'daughter.' Hurlburt's study highlights Caterina's actions as an active agent who negotiated the boundaries of her influence and, where possible, used her constructed familial relationship with Venice to pursue her own agenda.

Syndikus and Rogge's edited volume and Hurlburt's monograph complement one another well. For researchers interested in the period or in Caterina's career, the holistic treatment offered by Hurlburt provides the chapters in the edited volume with a sound background, and in turn, the chapters provide further context and continuity, especially in pursuing the analysis of Caterina's cultural legacy into the modern times. The Renaissance queen that emerges is an able political actor who balanced her personal and familial interests with those of the *Serenissima*, and who is still culturally relevant. Caterina Cornaro now takes her well-deserved place among the other powerful women of the time.

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