Abstract: In 1812 the French authorities decided to clear out the greater part of the trial fund of the Council of Ten, transferring it from the Ducal Palace to a provisional seat where the judiciary documents produced by the Serenissima over the centuries were deposited. Surprisingly, among the very few surviving 17th-century trial records there is the one prepared against Paolo Orgiano and other noblemen from the Veneto hinterland. It is likely that its singularity caught the eye of those in charge of reordering the centuries-old archives of the Serenissima in those years. And that one of them got the idea of indicating the file to the young but already famous Milanese intellectual, who had shown interest in 17th-century legal proceedings. This curiosity must have made a breach in the secrecy and inaccessibility in which the archives of the old regime were still wrapped.

Keywords: 17th-century history; Council of Ten; Criminal trials; Judiciary Archives; Paolo Orgiano; Venice and Milan

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The journey of a document

The trial against Paolo Orgiano can be found today in the Archivio di Stato di Venezia, in the section dedicated to the important magistracy of the Council of Ten. It is located, together with a few other fascicles, in the series entitled *Processi delegati a rettori*. Nothing distinguishes this series from the much larger one, also located in the section of the Council of Ten, called *Processi Criminali*, which contains some 600 boxes. In both cases, the trials were conducted by the rectors of the Praetorian Courts in the main cities of the Terraferma and the Stato da Mar on the order of the highest Venetian magistracy.

However, while the *Processi Criminali* series contains almost without exception trials dating to the second half of the 18th century, the three folders in the series entitled *Processi delegati ai rettori* are from the period between the end of the 16th century and the beginning of the 17th century. The small volume of this group of documents and its older date suggest that the trial against Paolo Orgiano and the handful of other documents that accompany it were conserved separately from the much larger series of trials in the *Processi Criminali*, which begin in the 1750s.

These circumstances are important for understanding the history of the document in question, and more generally, of all of the judicial records of the Council of Ten. And they beg the question of why were only a few trials from the beginning of the 17th century saved from a calamity that resulted in the dispersion of most of the records in this archival series.

The need to reorder and classify the archive of the Council of Ten first arose during the final years of the Republic. In 1785 the Council of Ten decided that all of its records should be examined and put in order. The patrician Zaccaria Vallaresso was given the task of supervising this project with the assistance of an official of the chancellery, Giuseppe Francesco Olivieri, who drew up a catalogue of all of the registers and fascicles belonging to the Council of Ten. In 1792, enormous amount of judicial documentation belonging to the council underwent a similar organisation, and in the years that followed its records were divided chronologically, according to the decade in which they were produced, and subdivided into three categories. The first documents to be reordered were those from the 16th and 17th centuries, which were placed in five cabinets.