

The Venetian Conspiracy



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Source



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PERIODS OF HISTORY MARKED, LIKE THE ONE WE ARE LIVING THROUGH, by the convulsive instability of human institutions pose a special challenge for those who seek to base their actions on adequate and authentic knowledge of historical process. Such knowledge can come only through viewing history as the lawful interplay of contending conspiracies pitting Platonists against their epistemological and political adversaries.

There is no better way to gain insight into such matters than through the study of the history of the Venetian oligarchy, the classic example of oligarchical despotism and evil outside of the Far East.

Venice called itself the Serenissima Republica (Serene Republic), but it was no republic in any sense comprehensible to an American, as James Fenimore Cooper points out in the preface to his novel *The Bravo*. But its sinister institutions do provide an unmatched continuity of the most hideous oligarchical rule for fifteen centuries and more, from the years of the moribund Roman Empire in the West to the Napoleonic Wars, only yesterday in historical terms. Venice can best be thought of as a kind of conveyor belt, transporting the Babylonian contagions of decadent antiquity smack dab into the world of modern states.

The more than one and one-half millennia of Venetian continuity is first of all that of the oligarchical families and the government that was their stooge, but it is even more the relentless application of a characteristic method of statecraft and political intelligence. Venice, never exceeding a few hundred thousand in population, rose to the status of Great Power in the thirteenth century, and kept that status until the Peace of Westphalia in 1648, thanks to the most highly developed system of embassies, of domestic and foreign intelligence, and related operational potentials.

As the following story details, Venice was at the centre of the efforts to destroy the advanced European civilization of the eleventh and twelfth centuries, and bears a crushing burden of guilt for the ascendancy of the Black Guelphs and the coming of the black plague. The Venetians were the intelligencers for the Mongol army of Ghengis Khan and his heirs, and had a hand in guiding them to the sack of Baghdad and the obliteration of its renaissance in the thirteenth century.

The Venetians were the mortal enemies of the humanist Paleologue dynasty in Byzantium. They were the implacable foes of Gemisthos Plethon, Cosimo de' Medici, Leonardo da Vinci, Niccolo Machiavelli, and the entirety of the Florentine Golden Renaissance, which they conspired – successfully – to destroy. Venetian influence was decisive in cutting off the Elizabethan epoch in England, and in opening the door to the lugubrious Jacobean era.

Venetian public relations specialists were responsible for picking up the small-time German provincial heretic Martin Luther and raising him to the big-time status of heresiarch among a whole herd of total- predestination divines. Not content with this wrecking operation against the Church, Venice was thereafter the “mother” for the unsavory, itinerant Ignatius of Loyola and his Jesuit order. After the Council of Trent, Venice was also the matrix for the Philosophe-Libertin ferment of the delphic, anti-Leibniz Enlightenment. Venice beat Thomas Malthus and Jeremy Bentham to the punch in inflicting British political economy and philosophical radicalism on the whole world.

Although Napoleon Bonaparte had the merit of forcing the formal liquidation of this loathsome organism during his Italian campaign of 1797, his action did not have the effect we would have desired. The cancer, so to speak, had already had ample time for metastasis – into Geneva, Amsterdam, London, and elsewhere.

Thus, though the sovereign political power of Venice had been extinguished, its characteristic method lived on, serving as the incubator of what the twentieth century knows as fascism, first in its role as a breeding ground for the proto-fascist productions of Wagner and Nietzsche, later in the sponsorship of fascist politicians like Gabriele D’Annunzio and Benito Mussolini. The Venetians ran a large chunk of the action associated with the Parvus Plan to dismember Russia, and may well have been the ones who surprised everyone, including London, by unleashing World War 1 in the Balkans.

Most important, Venice is today through its Cini Foundation and its Société Européenne de Culture the think tank and staging area for the Club of Rome and related deployments. Venice is the supranational homeland of the New Dark Ages gang, the unifying symbol for the most extreme Utopian lunatic fringe in the international intelligence community today.

Get to know Venice. Then look back to the monetarist imbecility of Paul Volker, at the ideological fanaticism that radiates forth from the Bank of America, Chase Manhattan, the Bank for International Settlements and

the rest. You will recognize the unmistakable putrid stench of a Venetian canal, where the rotting marble palaces of generations of parasites are corroded by the greatest cynicism and cruelty the world has ever known.

The Origins

In the Middle Ages the Venetians were known as the archetypes of the parasite, the people who “neither sow nor reap.” For the Greeks, they were the hated “frogs of the marshes.” In Germany, a folk tale describes the merchant of Venice as an aged Pantaloon who makes his rounds robbing men of their human hearts and leaving a cold stone in their place.

Closer to the essence of Venice is the city’s symbol, the winged lion of St. Mark, bearing the misleading inscription, Pax Tibi Marce, Evangelista Meus (“Peace be with you Mark, my evangelist.”) The chimerical winged lion comes out of the East, either from Persia or from China. The symbol is thus blatantly pagan, with St. Mark being added as an afterthought because of his alleged visit to the Venetian lagoons. To buttress the story, the Venetians stole St. Mark’s body from Alexandria in Egypt, and Tintoretto has a painting celebrating this feat.

The point is that Venice looks East, toward the Levant, Asia Minor, central Asia, and the Far East, toward its allies among the Asian and especially Chinese oligarchies which were its partners in trade and war. This is reflected in a whole range of weird, semi-oriental features of Venetian life, most notably the secluded, oriental status of women, with Doges like Mocenigo proudly exhibiting a personal harem well into modern times.

Venice today sits close to the line from Lubeck to Trieste, the demarcation between NATO and Warsaw Pact Europe, roughly corresponding to the boundary between Turks in the East and Christians in the West, and still earlier between the Holy Roman and Byzantine Empires. Into this part of the northern Adriatic flow the rivers of the southern side of the Dolomites and the Julian Alps. The greatest of these is the Po. These rivers, around 300 A.D., made the northern Adriatic a continuous belt of marshes and lagoons about fifteen kilometres wide, and extending from

the city of Ravenna around to the base of the Istrian Peninsula, where the Italian- Yugoslavian border lies today.

In the centre of this system was Aquileia, starting point of an important north-south trade route across the Brenner Pass to the Danube Valley and Bohemia. Aquileia was the seat of a patriarch of the Christian Church, but its tradition was overwhelmingly pagan, and typified by rituals of the Ancient Egyptian Isis cult.

For a time after the year 404, Ravenna and not Rome was the capital of the Roman Empire in the West. After the extinction of the western empire, Ravenna was the seat of government of Theodoric the Ostrogoth, the court visited by Boethius. Later Ravenna was the capital of a part of Italy ruled by the Byzantines.

The islands of the lagoons provided an invulnerable refuge, comparable to Switzerland during World War II, for Roman aristocrats and others fleeing the paths of Goth, Hun, and Langobard armies. Already between 300 and 400 A.D. there are traces of families whose names will later become infamous: Candiano, Faliero, Dandolo. Legend has it that the big influx of refugees came during the raids of Attila the Hun in 452 A.D. Various areas of the lagoons were colonized, including the present site of Torcello, before the seat of administration was fixed at a group of islands known as Rivus Altus ("the highest bank"), later the Rialto, the present location of the city of Venice. The official Ab Urbe Condita is March 25, 721 A.D. Paoluccio Anafesto, the first ruler of the lagoon communities, called the doge (the Venetian equivalent of Latin dux or Florentine duca/duce, meaning leader or duke), is said to have been elected in the year 697.

The most significant fact of this entire period is that the whelp of what was later to become Venice survived and grew thanks to its close alliance with the evil Emperor Justinian in Constantinople, an alliance that was underlined in later years by intermarriage of doge and other leading Venetian oligarchs with the nobility of Byzantium, where a faction embodying the sinister traditions of the Roman Senate lived on for a thousand years after the fall of Rome in 476.

Venetian families are divided into two categories. First come the oldest families, or Longhi, who can claim to prove their nobility substantially before the year 1000. The Longhi include many names that are sadly familiar to the student of European history: Dandolo, Michiel, Morosini, Contarini, Giustinian (perhaps related to the just-mentioned Byzantine emperor), Zeno, Corner (or Cornaro), Gradenigo, Tiepolo, and Falier. These old families held a monopoly of the dogeship until 1382, at which time they were forced to admit the parvenu newcomers, or Curti, to the highest honor of the state. After this time new families like Mocenigo, Foscari, Malipiero, Vendramin, Loredano, Gritti, Dona, and Trevisan came into the ascendancy.

These families and the state they built grew rich through their parasitizing of trade, especially East-West trade, which came to flow overwhelmingly through the Rialto markets. But there is a deeper reality, one which even derogatory stories about spice merchants are designed to mask. The primary basis for Venetian opulence was slavery. This slavery was practiced as a matter of course against Saracens, Mongols, Turks, and other non-Christians. In addition, it is conclusively documented that it was a matter of standard Venetian practice to sell Christians into slavery. This included Italians and Greeks, who were most highly valued as galley slaves. It included Germans and Russians, the latter being shipped in from Tana, the Venetian outpost at the mouth of the Don, in the farthest corner of the Sea of Azov. At a later time, black Africans were added to the list and rapidly became a fad among the nobility of the republic.

The Political Economy of Slavery

During the years of the Venetian overseas empire, islands like Crete, Cyprus, Corfu, Naxos, and smaller holdings in the Aegean were routinely worked by slave labor, either directly under the Venetian regime, or under the private administration of a Venetian oligarchical clan like the Corner, who owed their riches to such slavery. In later centuries, the harems of the entire Ottoman Empire, from the Balkans to Morocco, were stocked by Venetian slaves. The shock troops of the Ottoman Turkish armies, the Janissaries, were also largely provided by Venetian mer-

chants. A section of the Venetian waterfront is still called Riva Degli Schiavoni – slaves' dock.

Around 1500, the Venetian oligarch Cristoforo da Canal, the leading admiral of the Serenissima Repubblica at that time, composed what he described as a Platonic dialogue concerning the relative merits of galley slaves: the Italians the worst, Dalmatians better, the Greeks the best and toughest of all, although personally filthy and repulsive. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries Venice had treaty relations with other states, like Bavaria, by which convicts were delivered to the Serenissima to work as life-long galley slaves.

Indistinguishable from slave gathering operation were piracy and buccaneering, the other staples of the Venetian economy. Wars with Genoa or with other powers were eagerly sought-after opportunities to loot the enemy's shipping with clouds of corsairs, and victory or defeat usually depended more on the success of the privateering than on the direct combat of the galleys, cogs, and soldiers of the battle fleets.

Piracy shades over imperceptibly into routine commerce. Through decades of treachery and mayhem, the Venetians were able to establish themselves as the leading entrepot port of the Mediterranean world, where, as in London up to 1914, the vast bulk of the world's strategic commodities were brought for sale, warehousing, and transshipment. The most significant commodities were spices and silks from India and China, destined for markets in Central and Western Europe. Europe in turn produced textiles and metals, especially precious metals, for export to the East.

Venetian production from the earliest period until the end was essentially nil, apart from salt and the glass manufactures of Murano. The role of the Venetian merchant is that of the profiteering middleman who rooks both buyer and seller, backing up his monopolization of the distribution and transportation systems with the war galleys of the battle fleet.

The Venetian approach to trade was ironically dirigistic. Venice asserted a monopoly of all trade and shipping in the northern Adriatic. The

Serenissima's own functionaries organized merchant galley fleets that were sent out one or two times a year to key ports. The galleys were built by the regime in its shipyards, known as the Arsenal, for many centuries the largest factory in the world. They were leased to oligarchs and consortia of oligarchs at a type of auction. Every detail of the operation of these galley fleets, including the obligation to travel in convoy, was stipulated by peremptory state regulation.

In the heyday of Venice, galley fleets were sent to Tana and to Trebizond in the Black Sea, to Crete, Rhodes, and Cyprus on the way to Beirut in the Levant, to Tunis, Tripoli, Algiers, Oran, and Alexandria in North Africa, as well as to Spanish, French, and west coast Italian cities. Especially well-served was "Romania," the area roughly corresponding to modern Greece. Another galley route passed through Gibraltar on the way to Southampton, London, Antwerp, and Bruges.

Many of these galley ports correspond to continuing Venetian influence today. In every instance the Venetians sought to skim the cream off the top of world trade. Their profit margins had to be sufficient to cover a "traditional" twenty percent interest rate, the financing of frequent wars, and maritime insurance premiums, in which they were pioneers.

The Venetian State

The tremendous stability of the Venetian state has fascinated historians. How is it possible to maintain the great power of Venice for more than a millennium and a half without being conquered from the outside, and without significant upheavals from within?

Venice remained impervious to foreign invasion from the first settlement until 1797. The monolithic iniquity of Venetian state institutions was seriously disturbed no more than a half dozen times from within the city, and such incidents were speedily terminated by bloodbaths that restored stability rather than spurring more violence. This feature of the Venetian oligarchical system contrasts sharply with that of its rival, Genoa, where each regime from 1300 to 1500 had the life expectancy of an Italian government today. It contrasts sharply with the papacy, where the highest

office was up for grabs every dozen years or less, and where humanist factions could sometimes prevail.

In Venice, the bloody resolution of internal faction fights within the oligarchy was suppressed to a minimum, and these energies were effectively sublimated in the depredation of the outside world. The raging heteronomy of each oligarch was directed outward, not at his factional rivals. In the typology of Plato's Republic, Venice is an oligarchy, "a constitution according to property, in which the rich govern and the poor man has no share in government," "the rule of the few, constitution full of many evils." This oligarchy has a residue of timocracy, of rule based on honor. But at the same time the Venetian regime was perversely aware of Plato's description of the swift transition from oligarchy to democracy and thence to tyranny, and against this evolution the patriciate took measures.

Plato notes in Book VIII of The Republic that a "change in a constitution always begins from the governing class when there is a faction within; but so long as they are of one mind, even if they be a very small class, it is impossible to disturb them." The threat of factionalization is located in the "storehouse full of gold, which every man has," and which "destroys such a constitution." The oligarchs "lay a sum of money, greater or less, according as the oligarchy is more or less complete, and proclaim that no one may share in the government unless his property comes up to the assessment. This they carry out by force of arms, or they have used terror before this to establish such a constitution."

Venice lasted as long as it did because of the effective subordination of the oligarchs and families to the needs of the oligarchy as a whole, by the ironclad delimitation of noble status to those already noble in 1297 and their male descendants, and by continuous terror against the masses and against the nobility itself.

All male members of the approximately one hundred fifty noble families had the permanent right to a seat in the Gran Consiglio, or Great Council, which grew to 2000 members around 1500 and thereafter slowly declined. The seat in the Gran Consiglio and the vote it brought were thus

independent of which faction happened to be calling the shots at a given moment. The ins might be in, but the outs were sure of their place in the Gran Consiglio, and this body elected the key governing bodies of the regime.

The first of these were the one hundred twenty members, or Pregadi, of the Senate, the upper house which oversaw foreign affairs by choosing the Venetian ambassadors. In the middle of the fifteenth century, Venice was the first and only power which regularly maintained permanent legations in all principal courts and capitals. The Senate also chose five war ministers, five naval ministers (all called Savi), and six Savii Grandi, ministers of still higher rank.

The Gran Consiglio elected a Council of Forty, which was first devoted to budget and finance matters, later more to criminal prosecution. The Gran Consiglio chose three state prosecutors, who could and did sue any official of the state for malfeasance, although the doge was accorded the privilege of being tried after his death, with his family paying any fines levied.

The Gran Consiglio also elected the doge himself, through an incredible Byzantine procedure designed to assure a representative choice. First, thirty members of the Gran Consiglio were chosen at random, using colored balls whose Venetian name is the origin of the American word ballot. These thirty drew lots to cut their number down to nine, who then nominated and elected a new group of forty electors. These were then cut down by drawing lots to a group of twelve. This procedure was repeated several times, terminating with a group of forty-one electors of whom twenty-five could nominate a doge for the approval of the Gran Consiglio. Somewhat less complicated procedures were used to select a group of six advisors for the doge.

Most typical of the Venetian system is the Council of Ten, established in 1310 as the coordinating body for foreign and domestic political intelligence operations. Meeting in secret session together with the doge and his six advisors, the Ten had the power to issue a bill of capital attainder against any person inside Venetian jurisdiction, or abroad. If in Venice,

that person was generally strangled the same night and the body thrown into the Canale degli Orfani.

The Ten had at their disposal a very extensive foreign intelligence network, but it was inside Venetian territory that their surveillance powers became pervasive: the contents of any discussion among oligarchs or citizens was routinely known to the Ten within twenty- four hours or less, thanks to the ubiquity of its informers and spies. Visitors to the Doge's Palace today can see mail slots around the outside of the building in the shape of lion's mouths marked *Per Denontie Segrete* ("For Secret Denunciations") for those who wished to call to the attention of the Ten and their monstrous bureaucracy individuals stealing from the state or otherwise violating the law. Death sentences from the Ten were without appeal, and their proceedings were never made public. Offenders simply disappeared from view.

The Venetian regime is a perverse example of the "checks and balances" theory of statecraft, and there were indeed a myriad of such feedback mechanisms. The *Savii Grandi* balanced the powers of the doge, who was also checked by his six advisors, while more and more power passed to the state inquisitors and the chiefs of the Ten. The state attorneys acted as watchdogs on most matters, as did the Senate, and in times of crises the *Gran Consiglio* would also assert its powers. The Ten were constantly lurking in the background.

Almost all officials except the doge were elected for terms averaging between six months and one year, with stringent provision against being reelected to an office until a number of months had passed equal to the oligarch's previous tenure in that post. This meant that leading oligarchs were constantly being rotated and shunted from one stop on the *Cursus Honorum* to another: to *Savio Grande* to ducal advisor to state inquisitor and so forth. There was no continuity of the population of Venice; the continuity was located only in the oligarchy. In fact, the population of the city seemed unable to reproduce itself. Venice suffered astronomical rates of mortality from malaria and the plague – its canals, it must be remembered, were first and foremost its sewer system. The decimated natives were continually replenished by waves of immigration, so much

so that the Frenchman Philippe de Comynes, an adversary of Machiavelli, could report that the population was mostly foreigners.

Internal order was entrusted to an intricate system of local control in each of the city's sixty parishes, meshing with an elaborate apparatus of corporatist guilds called the Scuole. This was supplemented by an unending parade of festivals, spectacles, and carnivals. Very few troops were usually stationed in the city.

So much for the phenomena. Reality was located in the fact that an elite of ten to fifteen families out of the one hundred fifty effectively ruled with an iron hand. Various Venetian diarists let the cat out of the bag in their descriptions of corruption and vote-buying, especially the bribery of the impoverished decadent nobility, called Barnabotti, who were increasingly numerous in the Gran Consiglio. The regime ran everything, and offices of all types were routinely sold.

This reality of graft was also known to Dante. The poetical geometry of Canto 21 of the *Inferno*, the canto of the grafters or Barattieri, is established by a reference to the Venetian Arsenal and the pitch used to caulk the hulls of the galleys:

**As in the Arsenal of the Venetians
Boils in the winter the tenacious pitch
To smear their leaky vessels over again,
For sail they cannot.**

The souls of the grafters are immersed in the boiling pitch, where they are guarded by the Malebranche, grotesque winged monsters armed with spears and hooks: a fitting allegory for the souls of the Venetians.

Dante visited Venice in 1321, acting in his capacity as diplomatic representative of the nearby city of Ravenna, whose overlord was for a time his protector. He died shortly after leaving Venice. The two explanations of his death converge on murder: one version state that he was denied a boat in which to travel south across the lagoon. He was forced to follow a path through the swamps, caught malaria, and died. Another version

says that a boat was available, but that to board it would have meant certain assassination. Venetian records regarding this matter have conveniently disappeared.

Petrarch Versus Aristotle

The Venetian method of statecraft is based on Aristotle – the deepest Aristotelian tradition in the West. Long before the era of Albertus Magnus (1193-1280) and St. Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274), Venice had established itself as the chief center for the translation and teaching of Aristotle's works.

In the year 1135, the Senate sent Giacomo da Venezia to Byzantium, where he was trained in post-Justinian Aristotelian orthodoxy, returning to Venice after two years to begin lectures on Aristotle and to prepare Latin versions of the Greek texts he had brought back with him. A school of Aristotelian doctrine was set up at the Rialto market, the heart of the business and commercial activity of the city. When Venice conquered Padua at the beginning of the fifteenth century, Aristotelian hegemony was imposed on the University of Padua, which became the only one where Venetian nobility were allowed international clientele, especially from Germany.

The inveterate Aristotelianism of Venice is the starting point for a major literary attack on that city by Francesco Petrarch, son of Dante's personal secretary, who took up the responsibility of servicing Dante's humanist networks during the disastrous years around the middle of the fourteenth century. Although these were the years of the Black Death, Petrarch ("Fraunces Petrak the laureate poet" as Chaucer knew him) was the soul of a tenacious humanist rearguard action, with spirited counterattacks at every opportunity, that made the later Italian Renaissance possible.

Petrarch was a contemporary of the Ciompi revolt against oligarchical rule in Florence; he was certainly involved in Cola di Rienzo's seizure of power in Rome in May, 1347. The real story of Petrarch's literary and political achievements has yet to be told. Nonetheless, the fact that he was a determined foe of Venice and its ideology is abundantly clear.

In 1355 Venice had just passed through one of its infrequent internal crises, usually explained as the attempt of the Doge Marin Faliero to overthrow the regime and establish a Signoria, or personal dictatorship, of the type common in Italy at the time. Marin Faliero was publicly decapitated by the Council of Ten.

Petrarch might have had a hand in this operation; during this period he was a frequent guest at the court of the Da Carrara rulers of Padua, about thirty kilometres from the Venetian lagoon. Petrarch may have developed plans for injecting a dose of Platonism into the intellectual life of the Serenissima. Petrarch proposed that he be allowed to take up residence in Venice and locate his library there; the books would remain as a bequest to the city after his death, forming the nucleus of what would have been the first public library in Europe. The Venice authorities accepted, and Petrarch, the most celebrated intellectual of his times, took up his residence on the Riva degli Schiavoni.

Soon he began to receive the visits of four Venetian Aristotelians, whom he later referred to as “my four famous friends.” These four oligarchs were Tommaso Talenti, Guido da Bagnolo, Leonardo Dandolo, and Zaccaria Contarini, the latter two of the most exalted lineage. After several discussions with Petrarch, these four began to circulate the slander that Petrarch was “a good man, but without any education.”

Petrarch shortly abandoned the library project and soon thereafter left Venice permanently. His answer to the slanderers is contained in his treatise “De Sui Ipsius et Multorum Ignorantia” (1367) (with a swipe at Aristotle in the title), his most powerful piece of invective- polemical writing.

Petrarch scored Aristotelian scholastic philosophy as “a prostitute who delights to worry about vain questions of words.” Real philosophy, with the clear purpose of advancing morality, he said, is to be found in St. Augustine. All that Aristotle is capable of doing is providing a delphic description of what the external attributes of morality might look like. To the authority of Aristotle, Petrarch counter posed the Platonism of the New Testament, saying that Christ, not Aristotle, was for him the decisive

guide. His “four friends,” he asserted, were not Christian, but preferred to follow their favourite philosopher in their sophistry, blasphemy, and impiety. They mocked Christ, and were so pretentious that they could not even understand their own arguments.

Petrarch pointed out that Aristotle provided his followers with all sorts of strange and curious lore, like the number of hairs on a lion’s head or of feathers in a hawk’s tail, how elephants copulate backwards, how the phoenix arises out of his own ashes, how the only animal that can move its upper jaw is the crocodile. But these facts are not only useless, he said, they are false. “How could Aristotle know such facts, since neither reason nor experience reveal them? Concerning the ultimate objects of philosophy, Aristotle is more ignorant than an old peasant woman.

Venetian nominalism went hand in hand with the most vicious avarice. In a play written in Venetian dialect by Carlo Goldoni in the eighteenth century, a Pantalone-type miser comes home to find wife and daughter busily engaged in needlework. The two women look up briefly and say hello. The miser flies into a rage screaming “What? You quit working to pay me compliments!”

An eminent witness of this typical Venetian vice was Erasmus of Rotterdam, who was to the years after 1500 what Petrarch had been in his own time: Leader of the Platonic humanist faction. Erasmus came to Venice in 1508, on the eve, interestingly enough, of the attempt to annihilate Venice in the War of the League of Cambrai. Erasmus came to get in touch with Aldo Manunzio, the Aldus who owned what was at that time the largest and most famous publishing house in the world.

Venice had reacted to the invention of moveable-type printing by Johannes Gutenberg of Mainz in a way that foreshadowed the reaction of the British oligarchy in this century to radio, the movies, and television. They had immediately attempted to seize control of the new medium. Dozens of Gutenberg’s apprentices from the Rhein-Main area were bought up and brought to Venice, where the production of books up to 1500 and beyond was frequently a multiple of the number of titles published in the rest of the world combined.

Aldus was the William Paley and Jack Warner of the industry. Martin Luther was one of that industry's later creations. Aldus brought out the works of Aristotle in Greek shortly after he began operations in 1495. Plato had to wait for almost twenty years.

One of Erasmus' goals in visiting Venice was to accelerate the publication of Plato. He stayed at the home of Aldus' brother-in-law. Erasmus writes about his Venetian sojourn some time later, in the dialogue titled "Opulentia Sordida" of the *Colloquia Familiaria*. The *Urbs Opulenta* referred to is of course the wealthiest of all cities, Venice. Aldus appears as Antronius ("the caveman"), described as a multi-millionaire in today's terms.



Erasmus (above) had been away, and is asked by a friend how he got so skinny. Has he been working as a galley slave? Erasmus replies that he has undergone something far worse: ten months of starvation in the home of Antronius. Here people freeze in the winter because there is no wood to burn.

Wine was a strategic commodity in Erasmus' opinion, as indeed it was in a time when water was often very unsafe to drink. To save money on wine, Antronius took water and faeces annorum decem miscebat (mixed

it with ten year old shit), stirring it up so it would look like the real thing. His bread was made not with flour, but with clay, and was so hard it would break even a bear's teeth. A groaning board on the holidays for a houseful of people and servants was centred around three rotten eggs.

There was never meat or fish, but the usual fare was sometimes supplemented by shellfish from a colony that Antronius cultivated in his latrine. When Erasmus consulted a physician, he was told that he was endangering his life by overeating. Erasmus' friend in the dialogue concludes that at this rate, all Germans, Englishmen, Danes, and Poles are about to die. Finally, Erasmus takes his leave, to head for the nearest French restaurant.

Venetian Intelligence

What was the Venetian political intelligence method? The classical Venetian predicament is that of the weaker power attempting to play off two or more major empires. This was the case when the Venetian power was in its very infancy, and survival depended upon playing off the Langobard Kingdom of Italy against the Byzantines. This ploy was later replaced by the attempt to play the Byzantines off against the Carolingian Empire in the West, an attempt that almost misfired when the army of Charlemagne under Pippin laid siege to Venice inside its lagoons. That siege, however, was not successful.

In the eleventh century, the Venetians successfully incited the Norman barons operating out of Sicily under Robert Guiscard to attack Byzantium, and then moved in to offer the desperate Byzantines protection. The price for that protection was indicated by the famous Golden Bull of 1082, a decree of the Byzantine Emperor by which Venice acquired tax customs-free access to the whole of the eastern empire, where the Greeks themselves had to pay a tax of 10 percent on their own transactions. Thus began a hatred for Venice among the Greek population which persists down to the present day.

In the sixteenth century, Venetian strategic doctrine was to play the Ottoman Turks against the Spanish and Austrian Hapsburgs, and then to correct any residual strategic imbalance by playing the Hapsburgs off in

their turn against the French. Sometimes Venice attempted to play the Portuguese rival power off against the Dutch. Later this was expanded to include playing the Dutch against the English, and the English against the French.

The Venetians also goaded forces out of the East to attack Christendom. Venice was the manipulator of Saracens, Mongols, and Turks, and got along with the slave-trading factions in each of these groups about as well as a power like Venice could get along with anybody. In particular, the Venetians were more willing to see territory – excepting Venetian territory – be occupied by the Turks than any other power. Venice was thus the past master of the more exotic permutations of the stolid old British *divide et impera*, “divide and conquer.”

But the essence of their strategic doctrine was something more abstruse, something sometimes described as the “collapse of empires” scenario. Venice parasitized the decline of much larger states, a decline that Venice itself strove to organize, sometimes in a long and gradual descending curve, but sometimes in a quick bonanza of looting.

Venice was repeatedly confronted with the problem posed by a triumphant enemy, at the height of his power, who would be perfectly capable of crushing the *Serenissima* in short order. This enemy had to be manipulated into self-destruction, not in any old way, but in the precise and specific way that served the Venetian interest. Does this sound impossible? What is astounding is how often it has succeeded. In fact, it is succeeding in a very real sense in the world today.

The most spectacular example of Venetian manipulation of the dumb giants of this world has gone down in history as the Fourth Crusade. At a tournament in the Champagne in 1201, the Duke of Champagne and numerous feudal barons collectively vowed to make a fighting pilgrimage to the sepulcher of Our Lord in Jerusalem. Here they were to reinforce a French garrison hard-pressed by the Turk Saladin. For many of them, this involved penance for certain misdeeds, not the least of which was a plot against their own sovereign liege, the king.

Reaching the Holy Land required transportation, and the French knights sent Geoffrey of Villehardouin to Venice to negotiate a convoy of merchant galleys with an appropriate escort of warships. Geoffrey closed the deal with the Doge Enrico Dandolo, blind and over eighty years old. Dandolo drove a hard bargain: for the convoy with escort to Jerusalem and back, the French knights would have to fork over the sum of 85,000 silver marks, equal to 20,000 kilograms of silver, or about double the yearly income of the King of England or of France at that time.

When 10,000 French knights and infantry gathered on the Lido of Venice in the summer of 1202, it was found that the French, after pawning everything down to the family silver, still owed the Venetians 35,000 marks. The cunning Dandolo proposed that this debt could easily be canceled if the crusaders would join the Venetians in subjugating Zara, a Christian city in Dalmatia, across the Adriatic from Venice. To this the knights readily agreed, and the feudal army forced the capitulation of Zara, which had been in revolt against Venice.

At this point Dandolo made the crusaders a “geopolitical” proposal, pointing out that the emperor of Byzantium was suspected of being in alliance with the Saracens, and that an advance to the Holy Land would be foolhardy unless this problem were first dealt with. As it happened, the Venetians were supporting a pretender to the Byzantine throne, since the current emperor was seeking to deny them their trading privileges. The pretender was the young Alexios, who promised the knights that if they helped him gain power, he would join them on the crusade with an army of 10,000 Greek soldiers.

Thus, from 1203 to 1204, Constantinople was besieged by the joint Franco-Venetian expeditionary force, which finally succeeded in breaking through the fortifications along the Golden Horn, the bay on the north side of the city.

Byzantium was sacked in an orgy of violence and destruction, from which the Venetians brought back as booty the four bronze horses which generally stand on the Basilica of St. Mark, but which are often exhibited in other cities. Count Baudoin of Flanders was placed on the throne of a

new concoction titled the Latin Empire of Constantinople. The doge of Venice received a piece of the action in the form of the title Lord of Three Eighths of the Latin Empire. Venice took over three-eighths of Constantinople, a permanent Venetian colony with its own battle fleet. Lemnos and Gallipoli came into Venetian hands. Crete was annexed, and were Naxos and related islands, and the large island of Euboa, which the Venetians called Negroponte. On the Ionian side, the Venetians appropriated Modon and Koron and several islands up to and including Corfu. All Venetian trading privileges in Greece were restored.

The loot brought back from the sack of Constantinople was greater than anything Europe would see until the Spanish treasure fleets from the New World several centuries later. Venice had acquired a colonial empire of naval bases, and was hegemonic in the eastern Mediterranean. To top it all off, the sultan of Egypt had paid a substantial bribe to Dandolo to keep the Crusaders out of Palestine in the first place.

For the human race, the Fourth Crusade was an unmitigated tragedy. The hypertrophy of Venetian power in the Mediterranean was one of the decisive factors ensuring the later defeat of Emperor Federigo II of Hohenstaufen, King of Sicily. The Venetian puppet “Latin Empire” was overthrown by the Paleologues in 1261, but by that time Federigo was gone. By 1266-68, Federigo’s two sons and their Ghibelline supporters were defeated by Charles of Anjou, and the last representative of the Hohenstaufen dynasty was beheaded in the public square of Naples. The triumph of the Black Guelphs had become irreversible.

A further contributing factor in this tragedy was doubtless the Mongol hordes. At about the time the Venetians were sacking Constantinople, Ghengis Khan ruled over an empire that extended from Korea all the way to Iran, and which was rapidly advancing to the West. Batu, a nephew of Ghengis, defeated the Bulgarians in 1236, captured Kiev in the Ukraine in 1240, and swept into Poland. In Silesia in 1241 the German and Polish feudal army, including the Teutonic Knights, was annihilated. Later in the same year the Mongols defeated the Hungarians. The Mongols did not, for reasons that are not clear, advance further westward, but the Mongol Golden Horde that imposed its hegemony over Russia was the

beginning of Russia's economic and cultural backwardness. For some loosening of the Mongol yoke, the Russians would have to fight the titanic battle of Kulokovo Field on the Don in 1380.

In these Mongol victories, there was something more than mere numerical superiority at work. as one historian sums up the case:

The Mongols did not sweep in wildly and suddenly, like reckless barbarians. No indeed, they advanced according to careful plan. At every stage, the Mongol generals informed themselves ahead of time about the state of European courts, and learned what feuds and disorders would be advantageous to their conquests. This valuable knowledge they obtained from Venetian merchants, men like Marco Polo's father. It was thus not without reason that Polo himself was made welcome at the court of Kublai, and became for a time administrator of the Great Khan.

So the great Marco Polo, and the Venetian family from which he came, was responsible for directing the destruction of Ghengis Khan against Europe. The omnipresent Venetian intelligence was also a factor in the Mongol destruction of the Arab cultural center of Baghdad in 1258.

Friedrich Schiller and William Shakespeare both analyze the manipulative methods employed by the Venetian secret intelligence establishment; both considered Venetian intelligence one of their most formidable enemies. Much of Schiller's writing is dedicated in various ways to fighting the Venice- Genoa- Geneva combination that had held the financial reins of King Philip II of Spain.

Schiller's direct treatment of Venice is a fragment of a novel titled *Der Geisterseher* ("The Ghost Seer"). Its central character is a Sicilian charlatan, expert at bringing the spirits of the departed back into the world for the thrill-seeking nobility at seances. This Sicilian charlatan is a figure for a whole class of Venetian intelligence operatives, like Count Cagliostro, the mountebank who claimed to be the reincarnation of the leading Mason of ancient Egypt. Another of this breed was Emanuel Swedenborg. After Schiller's time, this category swelled considerably with theosophists like Madame Blavatsky, Annie Besant, Henry Steel Olcott,

and with that archapparitionist Rudolph Steiner, founder of the Anthroposophy movement and the Waldorf schools.

In Schiller's tale, a young German prince in Venice for the grand tour is subjected to a series of manipulations by a sinister, masked Armenian, who informs him, before the fact, of the death of a close relative hundreds of miles away. At a gambling den, a young Venetian patrician picks a quarrel with the prince, who fears for his life until he is ushered into one of the chambers of the Council of Ten, where the offending patrician is strangled before his eyes. He comes into contact with the Sicilian mountebank, and then spends weeks attempting to ascertain the identity of a mysterious beauty he has seen at church.

He begins to frequent a semi-secret free-thinking club, called the Bucentoro after the golden ship used by the doge on occasions of state. At least one cardinal is also a member of the Bucentoro. He takes to gambling, loses heavily, and contracts immense debts. In the meantime, rumors are spread at his Protestant court that he has become a Catholic, which leads to his repudiation by his entire family. At the end of the fragment, his life has been ruined, and his death is imminent.

Shakespeare's "Othello, The Moor of Venice" is a more finished analysis of the same technique. It was written and performed shortly after 1603, when the Venetians and Genoese had acquired vast powers in England through the accession of their puppet James I to the throne.

Othello is a Moor, hired out to Venice as a mercenary, and at the apex of his power, having just won a victory over the Turkish fleet attacking Cyprus. He enjoys the full confidence of the Senate, and has just married Desdemona, the daughter of a patrician. Othello, the "erring barbarian," is however something of a dumb giant: his proficiency in the arts of war is unmatched, but his emotional makeup tends decidedly toward the naive and infantile. He has no real insight into affairs of state, or into psychology. Above all, he is superstitious and has a propensity for jealousy.

All of these weaknesses are systematically exploited by "honest Iago," a member of Othello's staff who is determined to destroy him. Iago is the

figure of the Venetian intelligence officer, an expert in what he calls “double knavery” – the art of manipulation. He sets out to destroy Othello using an accurate psychological profile of the Moor, and exploiting above all Othello’s naive willingness to trust his “honest Iago.” Iago’s *modus operandi* is to:

Make the Moor thank me, love me, and reward me,
For making him egregiously an ass
And practicing upon his peace and quit
Even to madness.

Iago uses his throwaway agent, the dupe Roderigo, for financing and services. He sets up scenes where he cons one participant with one story, briefs another participant with a different story, brings them together in a controlled environment, and exploits the resulting fireworks for his overall strategy. He sets up a fight between Roderigo and the drunken Cassio that leads to the wounding of Montano by Cassio, who is ousted as chief lieutenant by Othello. After this, he manipulates Desdemona’s naive desire to help Cassio regain his post into *prima facie* evidence that Desdemona is an adulteress. Iago is then able to goad Othello all the way to killing Desdemona and, finally, himself.

At the center of the play are epistemological questions of truth and proof. In Act 3, Iago drives Othello wild with innuendoes about Desdemona’s alleged adultery, and makes him commit to the murder of Cassio, all without the slightest shred of proof. What Othello then regards as definitive proof of adultery, sufficient to motivate the murder of Desdemona, is a handkerchief which Iago obtains and plants on Cassio. This handkerchief is an object of deep emotional and superstitious importance for Othello, as it had been given by his father to his mother. It had been his first love token for Desdemona. When he sees it in the hands of Cassio, he is ready to kill.

Iago is well aware of Othello’s epistemological weakness. When he first obtains the handkerchief, he gloats:

I will in Cassio’s lodging lose this napkin,

And let him find it. Trifles light as air
Are to the jealous confirmations strong
As proofs of holy writ; this may do something.

Shortly thereafter, Othello demands certainty that Desdemona is betraying him. What would be definitive proof, Iago asks?

Would you, the supervisor, grossly gape upon –
Behold her tupp'd?

This kind of certainty, he says, is impossible to obtain, but he offers an inductive- deductive substitute:

But yet, I say,
If imputation and strong circumstances,
Which lead directly to the door of truth,
Will give you satisfaction, you might have't.

In the final scene, we can agree with Iago's wife Emilia that Othello is a gull and a dolt, a "murderous coxcomb ... as ignorant as dirt." But the lesson is that not only Othello, but all those who love not wisely but too well, who, "being wrought" and "perplexed in the extreme," are potential victims of Venetian intelligence.

DESTRUCTION OF THE RENAISSANCE

Since the Venetian oligarchy relied for its survival on the secret weapon of political intelligence manipulation, its primary strategic targets were first and foremost dictated by epistemological rather than military criteria. Fleets and armies, even in the hands of a powerful and aggressive enemy state, could well redound to Venetian advantage. The real danger was a hostile power that developed epistemological defenses against manipulation and deceit. In the face of such a threat Venice did – and does – kill.

The Italian Renaissance of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, perhaps the greatest outpouring of human creativity in history, represented such a threat to the Serene Republic, and in a more concentrated form than it had

ever faced before. The threat arose from the epistemological warfare and alliance system of the great Cosimo de' Medici of Florence and his successors. Venice mobilized every resource at its disposal to destroy the Renaissance. After decades of sabotage, going so far as to arrange the ravaging of Italy by foreign armies, Venice succeeded.

The potential political and epistemological power of the Italian Renaissance are best identified in the ecumenical council of the Church convened in Florence in the year 1438. The council, first convened in Ferrara, was moved to Florence at the urging of Cosimo de' Medici, who held power from 1434 to 1464. Cosimo was the major financial and political sponsor of the proceedings.

Cosimo was a self-declared enemy of Venice. On one occasion he wrote, "Association with the Venetians brings two things which have always been rejected by men of wisdom: certain perdition and disgrace."

The council had to deal with the ongoing crisis in the western church, which had been exacerbated by the struggle between the Council of Basel and Pope Eugene IV, who had been driven out of Rome by a revolt. In the East, the Ottoman Turks were beginning to recover from the crushing defeat that the Turkish Emperor Bajazet had suffered in 1402 at the battle of Ankara at the hand of Tamerlane the Great. The first, unsuccessful, Turkish siege of Constantinople had already been mounted in 1422.

The hope held out by the Council of Florence was to implement Nicolas of Cusa's program of the *Concordantia Catholica* – a community of principle among humanist sovereign states for cultural and economic development, against Venetians, Turks, and all enemies of natural law. To Florence came the Emperor of Byzantium, John VIII Paleologue, accompanied by his advisor Gemisthos Plethon and Plethon's student, Archbishop Bessarion of Nicea. The Latin delegation was titularly headed by Pope Eugene IV, heavily dependent upon the support of Cosimo de' Medici at that time. This delegation was dominated in outlook by men like Nicolas of Cusa, Leon Battista Alberti, Leonardo Bruni, Cardinal Capranica, and Aeneas Piccolomini of Siena, later Pope Pius II. The Greek and Latin delegations were each profoundly vitiated by powerful

Aristotelian factions, but this was still one of the most impressive assemblies in history.

The culmination of the council was an impassioned oration by Plethon on the antithesis between Plato and Aristotle, a speech which went far beyond anything ever heard in the West. Marsilio Ficino, himself a participant at the council, tells the story of how Cosimo de' Medici, while listening to Plethon, made up his mind to create the Platonic Academy in Florence.

The most immediate question to be addressed was the reunification of the Roman and Greek churches, abrogating the mutual excommunications issued by the pope and the patriarch of Constantinople in 1054. The contending theologians debated the question of the "filioque" in the Latin credo, attempting to resolve the question of whether the Holy Spirit proceeds only from the Father, as the Greeks argued, or from the Son as well, according to the Roman view. The Greeks eventually agreed to recognize the correctness of the Latin position, although they declined to modify their own credo accordingly. The Paleologue emperor intervened repeatedly in these discussions, stressing that there were no real differences in doctrine, and that anyone who let nonexistent divergences stand in the way of common action against the Turks was a worse traitor than Judas. In the end a purely formal reunification of the two churches was attained, but it remained a dead letter.

Even so, Cosimo and his cothinkers came close several times to welding an alliance capable of dominating the world, and the first to pay the price of their success would have been the Venetians. Medici Florence was at the center of a network of trade and finance that was beginning to rival Venice, with the crucial difference that the Florentines were the producers, thanks to Cosimo's dirigism, of the textile products they offered for sale. The Duchy of Milan would shortly come under the domination of the condottiero (mercenary commander) Francesco Sforza, installed in power with the help of the Medici, and an enemy of Venice. In 1461 the humanist Louis XI would take the throne of France. This new king was determined to apply the concepts of statecraft developed in Italy, and considered the Venetians "insolent merchants." In 1460, the humanist

Aeneas Silvius Piccolomini would be elected Pope Pius II; in the meantime he was in a position to influence Frederick III of Hapsburg, the Holy Roman Emperor.

The Venetian reaction to this potential for the implementation of an ecumenical Grand Design on the platform of the Italian Renaissance humanists was, predictably, to bring on the Turks once again. During all these years the Turks possessed a combined warehouse- residence- safe-house in Venice, the Fondaco dei Turchi, which facilitated dealings between the doge and the sultan. Spurred on by Venetian financing and Venetian- procured artillery, the Sultan Mohammed the Conqueror laid siege to Constantinople and captured it in 1453. The Turks were aided by the Greek patriarch, who had pronounced the defense of the Paleologue dynasty a heretical cause. Finally, it was the Genoese troops who opened the gates of the city to the forces of the sultan. Hardly a coincidence was the burning of the library of Constantinople with its matchless collection of Ionian and Platonic codices, most unavailable anywhere else since the library of Alexandria had been destroyed some fifteen centuries earlier. In their own sack of Constantinople in 1204, the Venetians had declined to appropriate these manuscripts.

The destruction of Byzantium by the Turks gave the Venetians a slogan with which to organize their war against the Renaissance. Since the Roman Empire had finally ended, it was left to the Venetians to arrogate to themselves the task of building a new Roman Empire. The foundation of a new Roman Empire became, in Venice, from the middle of the fifteenth century on, the leading obsession of the oligarchs.

“The Venetians are called new Romans,” confided the patrician Bernardo Bembo to his diary. Francesco Sforza of Milan wrote that the Venetians were:

“obstinate and hardened, always keeping their mouths open to be able to bite off power and usurp the state of all their neighbors to fulfill the appetite of their souls to conquer Italy and then beyond, as did the Romans, thinking to compare themselves to the Romans when their power was at its apex.”

Machiavelli wrote that the Venetians had “fixed in their souls the intention of creating a monarchy on the Roman model.” This is corroborated by a dispatch of the ambassador of Louis XII of France at the court of the Emperor Maximilian I some years later, which described the Venetians as:

“traders in human blood, traitors to the Christian faith who have tacitly divided up the world with the Turks, and who are already planning to throw bridgeheads across the Danube, the Rhine, the Seine, and Tagus, and the Ebro, attempting to reduce Europe to a province and to keep it subjugated to their armies.”

These megalomaniac plans of the Venetians were no secret. In 1423, the Doge Tommaso Mocenigo had urged upon his fellow oligarchs a policy of expansionism which would make them the overlords “of all the gold and of Christendom.”

The most penetrating indictments of the Venetians during this period were issued by Pope Pius II Piccolomino, who tried in vain to force Venice into joining a crusade against the Turks. A Venetian saying of this period was *Prima son Vinizian, poi son Cristian*. (I am a Venetian first, then a Christian.) In his Commentaries, Pius II excoriates the Venetians for their duplicitous treachery, and establishes the fact that they are a pagan, totalitarian state. The Venetians, he says, have acted in their diplomacy:

“with the good faith characteristics of barbarians, or after the manner of traders whose nature it is to weigh everything by utility, paying no attention to honor. But what do fish care about law? As among the brute beasts aquatic creatures have the least intelligence, so among human beings the Venetians are the least just and the least capable of humanity, and naturally so, for they live on the sea and pass their lives in the water; they use ships instead of horses; they are not so much companions of men as of fish and comrades of marine monsters. They please only themselves, and while they talk they listen to and admire themselves.... They are hypocrites. They wish to appear as Christians before the world, but in

reality they never think of God and, except for the state, which they regard as a deity, they hold nothing sacred, nothing holy. To a Venetian, that is just what is for the good of the state; that is pious which increases the empire.... What the senate approves is holy even though it is opposed to the gospel.... They are allowed to do anything that will bring them to supreme power. All law and right may be violated for the sake of power.”

During many of these years Venetians were in a tacit alliance with the Turks. When, for example, a revolt against Venetian rule in Albania was started, threatening the Venetian naval base at Durazzo, the Venetians made a deal with the Turks to crush the revolt. On one occasion Pius II received the Venetian ambassador to the Roman court and condemned Venetian policy with these words:

“Your cause is one with thieves and robbers.... No power was ever greater than the Roman empire and yet God overthrew it because it was impious, and He put in its place the priesthood because it respected divine law.... You think [your] republic will last forever. It will not last long. Your population so wickedly gathered together will soon be scattered abroad. The offscourings of fishermen will be exterminated. A mad state cannot long stand.”

In 1464 Pius II, despite a serious illness, traveled from Rome to Ancona to personally lead a crusade against the Turks. He wished to force the hand of the Venetians, who had promised him a battle fleet. He died shortly after the Venetian warships arrived, and Venice thereupon pulled out of any serious fighting against the Turks. But his attack on “the mad state” was on target, then and now.

During the first half of the fifteenth century, much Venetian energy was devoted to a rapid expansion up the Po Valley toward Milan. They seized Padua, Vicenza, Verona, Brescia, and Bergamo, reaching the Adda River, just a few miles from Milan. With Milan under Venetian control, the “new Romans” could bid fair to dominate northern Italy and then the entire peninsula.

Cosimo de' Medici, as we have seen, secured a Florence-Milan alliance by supporting the claims of Francesco Sforza, fighting a war against Venice to do it. Basing himself on this Florence-Milan axis, Cosimo then proceeded to create an uneasy peace in Italy that was to last forty years. This was the Italian League, formed at the Peace of Lodi in 1453, which united the leading powers of Italy, the pope, Naples, Milan, Florence, and Venice, ostensibly in an alliance against the Turks, who had for a time held a toe-hold in Apulia. In reality, the Italian League was a Florence-Milan-Naples combination designed to check Venetian expansionism. In this it proved effective, giving the Renaissance almost half a century of time to develop under the longa pax of the Medici.

During these years, stymied in Italy, the Venetians concentrated on overseas expansion, including the conquest of Cyprus. But on the death of Cosimo's successor, Lorenzo the Magnificent, they began their systematic campaign to destroy the civilization of the high renaissance. Their basic premise was that, given their own inability to devastate the centers of Renaissance culture and economic development, they must concentrate on duping the overwhelming military forces of European states like France, Spain, and the other Hapsburg dominions into accomplishing this task for them.

The most competent contemporary observer of these matters was Niccolò Machiavelli, active somewhat later in the post-Medici Florentine diplomatic service, and a factional ally of Cesare Borgia, Duke of Valentino. Machiavelli noted that the two most dangerous forces in Italy around the turn of the century were the Venetians and the pope. His own hatred was directed especially against Venice, firstly because of the stated Venetian intention to subjugate Italy in a new Roman Empire. Secondly, Venice more than any other state relied on armies of mercenaries, and thus embodied precisely that practice which Machiavelli knew had to be extirpated, in favor of citizen-soldiers, if Italy was to be saved from humiliating subjugation to the likes of the Hapsburgs.

Machiavelli pointed out that the disintegration of Italy began when the Venetians succeeded in turning Lodovico il Moro, successor of Francesco as Duke of Milan, making him their agent of influence. Lodovico was

responsible for the first major invasion of Italy in many years when he agreed to support the claims of Charles VIII of France to the Kingdom of Naples. This was the French king whom his father, the great Louis XI, considered a hopeless imbecile. In 1494 the French army crossed the Alps, accompanied by a Genoese advisor we will meet again later: Giuliano della Rovere.

This was enough to bring about the fall of the Medici regime in Florence, to the advantage of the Pazzi, Albizi, and related oligarchs of that city. These oligarchs immediately sought to crush the Florentine Renaissance using the regime of the demented Dominican monk Girolamo Savonarola, who set up a theocracy a la Khomeini. Savonarola proudly trumpeted that his rule was based on sound Venetian principles; his family was closely related to the Padua Aristotelian community. As for Charles VIII, he went on to establish a tenuous hold on Naples.

Several years later, in 1498, the Venetians repeated this maneuver, with the variation that this time it was they who blatantly invited the French to cross the Alps. This time the pretext was the French claim to the Milanese dukedom, and the dupe was a new French king, Louis XII. The French army knocked out Milan in 1500, a fatal blow to the Renaissance cultural ferment associated there with Leonardo da Vinci. Shortly thereafter, Louis XII decided to compensate the Hapsburgs with Naples. Naples accordingly became the first beachhead of what would shortly become a totally destructive Hapsburg hegemony in Italy.

VENICE AND GENOA COMBINE

For Venice, so far so good: Florence, Naples, and Milan had been ruined. But ironically, the same dumb Valois and Hapsburg giants which had taken out three dangerous rivals were now to turn like Frankenstein's monsters on the wily new Romans. Venetian manipulations were about to boomerang in the form of an alliance of all of Europe against Venice.

This was the famous crisis of the War of the League of Cambrai, which was assembled in 1508-1509. The opposing coalition was made up of the pope (by then the Genoese Giuliano della Rovere, as Julius II), the Holy Roman Emperor Maximilian I, France, Spain, Savoy, Mantua, and Ferra-

ra. The announced purpose of this alliance was to expunge Venice from the face of the earth.

It nearly worked. At Agnadello, near the Adda River, the Venetian mercenary army was crushed by an army composed predominantly of Frenchmen. The Venetians were driven all the way down the Po Valley to Padua, and they soon lost that as well. Machiavelli exulted that on the day of Agnadello, the Venetians lost everything that they had conquered in more than 800 years. Machiavelli was himself engaged in operations against Venice, bringing a grant of Florentine cash to the aid of the Franco-Imperial forces holding Verona.

With nothing left but the lagoons, the Venetian position was desperate. The doge sent a message to the pope asking for mercy, and announcing that Venice would vacate territory taken in the past from the Papal States.

Inside Venice, Agnadello brought on an orgy of hysterical self-flagellation among the terrified patricians. The banker Girolamo Priuli wrote in his diary that Agnadello had been a punishment for the sins of the Venetian nobility, among which he numbered arrogance, violation of promises, lechery in nunneries, sodomy, effeminate dress, and luxurious and lascivious entertainments. Antonio Contarini, newly appointed patriarch of Venice, gave a speech to the Senate in which he characterized the Serenissima as a thoroughly amoral city. The defeat was a punishment for the city's sins, he said. Nunneries were catering to the sexual needs of the rich and powerful. Homosexuality was so widespread that female prostitutes had complained to him that they had earned so little during their youth that they had to keep working far into their old age.

But more significantly, the shock of Agnadello set into motion a strategic review in the Venetian intelligence community which led to very far-reaching conclusions, some of which were not obvious before several decades had gone by.

The first Venetian ploy was to attempt to dismember the Cambrai coalition. They started with Pope Julius II. This pontiff was, as already noted, Genoese. Genoa and Venice had engaged in a series of highly destructive

wars up till about the end of the fourteenth century, but after that, Genoa gravitated toward the status of junior partner and close associate of the Venetians. The Venetians had bested the Genoese by virtue of superior connections in the East, but otherwise their was a broad area of agreement.

The symbol of Genoa was St. George the dragon-slayer, in reality no saint at all but a thinly disguised version of Perseus saving Andromeda by slaying the sea monster, a legend that is centered on the coast of Lebanon. The “George” is said to come from the Gorgon Medusa, whose head Perseus was carrying.

Perseus is in turn nothing but a westernized variant of Marduk, the Syrian Apollo, a deity associated with the most evil forces of ancient Assyria and Babylon. The Venetians had their own Marduk cult, although subordinated to St. Mark, on the island of San Giorgio Maggiore, home of a Dominican monastery and today of the Cini Foundation, one of the highest level think tanks in the world. The modern British preference of Gorgons is too well known to need comment.

What probably accounted more directly for Julius II’s decision to reverse his alliances was a deal mediated with the Venetians by Agostino Chigi, the Siena Black Guelph banker from whose financial empire the infamous Siena Group of today derives. He proposed that the Venetians stop buying alum, needed in textile and glass manufacture, from the Turks, but contract for a large shipment at higher prices from the alum mines at Tolfa in the Papal States – mines for which he, Chigi, was acting as agent. To sweeten the pot, Chigi offered the Venetians tens of thousands of ducats in much-needed loans.

The Venetians, fearing a rapid French offensive, accepted. Their own state finances were in total shambles. Only the Chigi loan allowed them to hire enough Swiss mercenaries to hold out against the French and the Imperial Landsknechte.

To provide a plausible cover for his move, Julius II suddenly discovered that the real issue was not Venice after all, but the need to expel the barbarians (primarily the French) from Italy. Julius stipulated an alliance

with Venice. He then set up the slogan of *Fuori Barbari!* (Kick the Barbarians out!) which is still recorded by credulous writers of Italian school books as the beginning of the struggle to unify Italy. Even the Venetian mercenaries, mostly Swiss, began using the battle cry of “Italy and Freedom!”

Thus the post-Agnadello crisis was overcome. Some years later the Venetians tried the same tactic in reverse, this time with more lasting success. By 1525 the prevalent barbarians in Italy were the forces of Emperor Charles V, who had defeated the French at Pavia, capturing King Francis I. The French lost their hold on Naples and Milan. At this point Doge Andrea Gritti, whose portrait by Tiziano speaks volumes about his personality, decided to agitate once again the banner of Italian freedom. This took the form of the Holy League of Cognac “for the restoration of Italian liberty,” uniting France, Venice, Milan, Florence, and the Papal States under Pope Clement VIII Medici. After having set up this alliance, designed to play the French against Charles V once again to destroy Medici-controlled Rome, the last intact Renaissance center, the Venetians retired into defensive positions to await the outcome.

Venetian capacities to manipulate Charles V were formidable indeed. The emperor’s bankers and intelligencers were the Fuggers of Augsburg, a banking house and a city that must be regarded as Venetian satellites, within a context of very heavy Venetian control of the cities of the Danube valley. Virtually every young male member of the Fugger family, and of their colleagues the Welsers as well, was sent to Venice for a period of apprenticeship at the *Fondaco dei Tedeschi*. This was the case with Jacob Fugger the Rich. Venice was the pivot for Fugger metals trading, especially toward the East.

Thus, the Venetians stayed in their phony war posture against Charles V, while the imperial army of Lutheran Lanzis under Georg Frundsberg devastated Italy. The sack of Rome in 1527 was the direct outcome of this combined Venetian diplomacy and manipulation. To make Charles V’s triumph complete, the Genoese Admiral Andrea Doria, commanding the French fleet, defected to the imperial side. A Doria coup in Genoa then established a permanent *de facto* alliance with Venice.

In 1530, Charles V was crowned as Holy Roman Emperor and King of Italy in a ceremony at Bologna. Garrisons of imperial troops were shortly stationed in every major city. Thanks to the tenacious policy of the Venetians, the main centers of the Renaissance had been subverted or destroyed. Venice was the only major Italian state which had retained real sovereignty. With the end of the Renaissance, Venice could feel free to start a delphic Renaissance among the throngs of intellectuals seeking asylum in the lagoons.

THE CREATION OF THE JESUITS

The “long autumn of the Italian Renaissance in Venice” during the rest of the sixteenth century was only one deployment among several. Another was the promotion of the Protestant Reformation. The more immediate controllers of Martin Luther have yet to be identified, but this is something of a secondary matter. Luther’s agitation in Wittenberg was merely one more example of protests against the papacy and the Curia that had been chronic and endemic for decades. What gave Luther and the rest of the Protestant reformers real clout was a publicity and diffusion of their ideas that owed much to the Venetian publishing establishment. The Venetian presses quickly turned out 40,000 copies of the writings of Luther, Calvin, Melancthon, and the heresiarch Juan Valdes, especially popular in Italy.

Pope Leo X publicly denounced the University of Padua as the hotbed of inspiration of the German disease of Lutheranism. Clearly, Venetian interest was well-served by a schismatic movement that would embroil Germany, France, and the rest of Europe in a series of easily profiled conflicts. In addition, a conflict between reformers and counter-reformers, all owing allegiance to Aristotle, would severely undercut the influence of Erasmus and others like him.

Venetian influence on both Reformation and Counter-Reformation can be seen most clearly in the remarkable career of Gasparo Contarini, who did not let the fact that he was a Protestant in theology, well before Luther, prevent him from founding the Society of Jesus.

Contarini was the scion of one of Venice's most prestigious LONGHI families. The Contarinis had produced seven doges, and Gasparo had his sights set on being the eighth, before he was tapped to serve Venice as a member of the College of Cardinals. He served the Serene Republic as ambassador to the court of Charles V, and as ambassador to the Vatican, where he took a role in setting up the Medici Pope Clement VII for the 1527 sack of Rome. Toward the end of his life, Contarini was sent as papal legate to the Imperial Diet at Regensburg, where he represented the Roman point of view in debates with schismatics like Melancthon. There, he had a hand in destroying any compromise between the Lutherans and the Emperor Charles, which would have helped to end the bloodshed and dissension of the Reformation years.

What does this sublime Venetian patrician have to do with the founding of the Jesuit order by that itinerant and deranged mystic, Ignatius of Loyola? Ignatius was the creature of Venice, and of Contarini in particular.

In 1521, Ignatius was wounded while fighting the French in one of the wars of Charles V. During his convalescence, he underwent his much-touted mystical crisis, after which he took up the life of a hobo. Making his way around Europe seeking funding for a pilgrimage to the holy land, Ignatius found his way to Venice, where he camped out in St. Mark's Square and lived by begging.

One evening the Venetian oligarch Marcantonio Trevisan was sleeping in his golden palace, and had a vision. An angel came to him asking, "Why are you sleeping so soundly in your warm bed, while in the square there is a holy man, a poor pilgrim who needs your help?" Trevisan rushed downstairs to find Ignatius, who became his house guest, fleas and all.

After that, Ignatius was given an audience with the doge, Andrea Gritti, who offered him passage to Cyprus on a Venetian warship as first leg of his pilgrimage to Jerusalem. Ignatius continued his travels, but soon returned to Venice to develop relationships with other members of the oligarchy. These included Gasparo Contarini's nephew Pietro, who be-

came a recipient of Ignatius' patented brainwashing treatment, the *Exercitationes Spirituales*.

Then Ignatius made his way to Rome. Here he became the protégé of Gasparo Contarini, who had been appointed to the College of Cardinals by Pope Paul III Farnese. The cardinal took the *Exercitationes Spirituales*, and appointed Ignatius his personal confessor and spiritual advisor. By 1540, Contarini had personally interceded with the pope against Ignatius' enemies within the church hierarchy to ensure the founding of the Society of Jesus as a new Church order. In June 1539, Contarini personally traveled to the pope's summer residence at Tivoli, and prevailed on the pontiff to let him read aloud the statutes of the new order composed by Ignatius. The pope must have been favorably impressed by something. His approving comment *Hic est digitus Dei*, ("Here is the finger of God"), has become a feature of the turgid Jesuit homiletics.

BIRTH OF THE ENLIGHTENMENT

An ironic postscript to this story is that later the Venetian oligarchy decided that it simply would not do to be too closely identified with the benighted excesses of the Spanish and the papacy they so thoroughly dominated. In the years around 1570, accordingly, Venice became the site of the first example in Europe of what the French later termed "salons" for socializing and literary discussion: the *Ridotto Morosini*, sponsored by the ancient family of the same name. Here the seeds were sown that would later produce free-thinking, *l'esprit libertin* and the *Philosophes* – in a word, the Enlightenment. The *Ridotto Morosini* salon was in favor of tolerance and science, against everything doctrinaire and narrow. They sheltered Galileo against the Inquisition. Out of the *Morosini* salon came one of the rare public factions in Venetian political history, the so-called *Giovani*.

The *Giovani*, in contrast to their rivals, the *Vecchi*, were in favor of profound innovations in Venetian foreign policy. They wished above all to cement alliances with the countries to whom they felt the future belonged: France, England, and the Netherlands. The *Vecchi*, they said, were paralyzed by too much fear of Spanish power, and not ready enough to tangle with the people.

The *Giovani* were able to implement their program in 1606, when the Pope (now Paul V, Camillo Borghese) strenuously objected to the arrest by Venice of several ecclesiastics in its territory. The Borghese pope placed Venice under the interdict, and proceeded to excommunicate government officials. The main supporter of Venice internationally was James I, the Stuart ruler of England.

At the same time, the powerful Venetian propaganda apparatus swung into action, under the leadership of a Servite monk named Paolo Sarpi, whose lack of noble birth kept him from public office. Sarpi was the Venetian contact man for Sir Francis Bacon.

Sarpi had been in Rome, where he had been associated with Nicholas Bobadilla, one of St. Ignatius' original hard core. He had been a friend of Bellarmino, later the Jesuit-general, and his direct adversary during the Interdict affair. He was close to Galileo, who called him "my father." Sarpi had lent a hand in the construction of Galileo's telescope. Sarpi was lavish in his praise of Gilbert's treatise on magnetism. He was also the author of an *Arte di Ben Pensare*, which is curiously similar to the writings of John Locke. Sarpi admitted in private to being "a Protestant."

He engaged in a long pamphlet war with Bellarmino, and topped this off with a muck-raking *History of the Council of Trent*, which needless to say whitewashed the role of Venetian intelligence in the Counter- Reformation. The noise created around the whole affair was so great that some people forgot that it had after all been the Venetians, specifically Zuane Mocenigo, who had consigned Giordano Bruno – also of Ridotto Morosini – into the hands of the Inquisition just a few years before.

METASTASIS

The policies of the *Giovani*, propagandized by Sarpi and Doge Leonardo Dona' during the struggle around the Interdict, corresponded to a metastasis of Venice's power and influence through the world. The Venetians and their Genoese Doria-faction associates were busily shifting their family fortunes into more profitable locations, not tied to the fate of what was rapidly becoming a third-rate naval power.

The Venice-Genoa partnership is in evidence first of all in the banking side of the Spanish looting of the New World. Venice got control of the silver coming from the Americas, shifting to a silver standard from the previous gold standard in the middle of the sixteenth century. This silver was used to pay for the spices and other products from the East.

Venice was extremely liquid at this time, with about 14 million ducats in coins in reserve around 1600. At about the same time, incredibly, the Venetian regime had completed the process of paying off its entire public debt, leaving the state with no outstanding obligations of any type. This overall highly liquid situation is a sure sign that flights of capital are underway, in the direction of the countries singled out by the *Giovani* as future partners or victims: France, England, and the Netherlands.

The Genoese around the St. George's Bank received virtually the entire world's circulating gold stocks. The two cities teamed up starting around 1579 at the Piacenza Fair, a prototype of a clearing house for European banks, which soon had a turnover of 20 million ducats a year. This fair was a precursor of the post-Versailles Bank for International Settlements.

In 1603, Venice and Genoa assumed direction of the finances of Stuart England, and imparted their characteristic method to the British East India Company. It is also this tandem that was present at the creation of the great Amsterdam Bank, the financial hinge of the seventeenth century, and of the Dutch East India Company. Venice and Genoa were also the midwives for the great financial power growing up in Geneva, which specialized in controlling the French public debt and in fostering the delphic spirits of the Enlightenment.

The Venetians, in cooperation with the restored – that is, degenerated – Medici interests, began a major move into maritime and other types of insurance. These ventures live on today in the biggest business enterprise associated with Venice, the *Assicurazioni Generali Venezia*, one of the biggest if not the biggest insurance and real estate holdings in the world.

On May 12, 1797, the Gran Consiglio obeyed Napoleon's ultimatum and voted itself out of existence. Four thousand French infantrymen paraded on St. Mark's Square, where foreign troops had never before in history been seen. The golden Bucentoro was burned and the gold carted off. The Venetian "Republic" was finished, but it continued most emphatically to exist in less visible but highly effective forms.

One particular of the last years of Venice is of special interest to us: During the American Revolution about 3000 Venetian naval personnel, corresponding to about one-third of the total available strength, were serving with the British Royal Navy.

Commenting on the liquidation of Venice, the great Neapolitan Neoplatonic Giuseppe Cuoco wrote:

"I don't know what will happen to Italy, but the fulfillment of the Florentine secretary's prophecy in the destruction of the old, imbecilic Venetian oligarchy will be a great boon for Italy always."

The reference, of course, is to Machiavelli.

On the other side, William Wordsworth lamented the demise of "a maiden city," the "eldest child of liberty."

POST MORTEM

Unfortunately, all the obituaries were premature: Venice has continued to be very much alive. During the nineteenth century and up to our own time it has been the most important single incubator for fascist movements. With its military and financial power largely emigrated elsewhere, Venice's importance for political culture is now greater than ever.

Examples of this are inexhaustible. Richard Wagner wrote part of *Tristan und Isolde* while living in the Palazzo Giustinian on the Grand Canal. One story has it that the leitmotif of the *Liebested* was inspired by the mournful call of a gondolier. At the end of his life Wagner moved to Palazzo Vendramin Callergi, where he died. This building, presently a gambling casino, was also the home of Count Coudenhove-Kalergi, the

founder of the Pan-European Union. Friedrich Nietzsche loved Venice, returned there incessantly, and dedicated certain poems to the city which today can still be used in lieu of a powerful emetic. Venice was an inspiration for Lord Byron, for Thomas Mann, and so on.

Other examples abound of how the Venetian oligarchy's cultural and political influence has reached down into the modern era:

* When British East India Company retainer Thomas Malthus published his *Essay on Population* he was plagiarizing from the Venetian Giammaria Ortes, who produced, around 1750, a fully developed version of the argument that geometric population growth outstrips the much slower arithmetic progress of food production.

* John Ruskin, the leading ideologue of the British Dark Ages faction, began his career with a raving treatise on architecture, *The Stones of Venice* (1851). This volume popularised the notion that a "Venetian Gothic" style had been developed in the better times of the city's history (which for Ruskin ended in 1418) and it was used systematically to discredit the Golden Renaissance.

* A turn-of-the-century new Roman Empire faction led by Venetian Count Volpi di Misurata, who was known as the doge of his era, sponsored the fascist Mussolini supporter Gabriele D'Annunzio to drum up enthusiasm for a new crusade into the Balkans and the East.

* Volpi became finance minister in Mussolini's cabinet, along with a very large number of other Venetians. D'Annunzio incited the Italians to take back Trieste, the rest of Italia Irredenta, and the Dardanelles, bringing on to centre stage the so-called Parvus Plan for dismemberment of the Ottoman and Russian empires, which is generally recognized as the detonator of World War I. It is possible that the

The Venetian Conspiracy Against Oligarchy - Webster G. Tarpley, turn-of-the-century super spook Alexander Parvus was ultimately employed by Venice.

* The Societe Europeenne de Culture, a think tank created in 1950 through the efforts of Venetian intelligence operative Umberto Campagnolo, has for the past three decades pulled intellectuals from both East and West into organizing for an “international culture,” based on rejecting the existence of sovereign nations.

*The SEC counted among its members the cream of the postwar intelligencia: Adam Schaff of Poland, Bertolt Brecht of East Germany, Georg Lukas of Hungary, and Boris Pater-nak of the Soviet Union, as well as Stephen Spender and Arnold Toynbee, Benedetto Croce and Norberto Bobbio, Julian Huxley and Thomas Mann, Francois Mauriac, and Jean Cocteau. Later, the SEC launched the Third World national liberation ideology.

Today, the Club of Rome is the institution that represents the most concentrated essence of Venetian influence and the Venetian method. The Club of Rome wants to convince the great powers and peoples of the world to commit collective suicide by accepting the genocidal doctrine of zero growth. It also hopes to abolish the sovereign nation as a vehicle for economic growth and scientific progress.

Club of Rome founder Aurelio Peccei has just written a new book titled One Hundred Pages For the Future, a global review of the impact of the Club of Rome, and particularly since its 1972 release of the zero-growth model Limits to Growth was published, a series of social movements has sprung up under the sponsorship of the ideas in the book.

These – the women’s movement, the peace movement, Third World national liberation movements, gay rights, civil liberties, ecologists, consumer and minority rights, etc. – must now be welded together into one movement for a single strategic goal: the implementation of a zero-growth international order.

The Venetian Conspiracy Against Oligarchy - Webster G. Tarpley,

The Venetian problem remains with us today. Truly, the most urgent task of this generation of mankind is to definitively liquidate the horror that is Venice.



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