GURPS® Fourth Edition

Hot Spots:™
RENAISSANCE VENICE™

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Rules and statistics in this book are specifically for the ***GURPS Basic Set,*** *Fourth Edition*. Page references that begin with B refer to that book, not this one.

Introduction

During the Renaissance, Italy (the heartland of the era's intellectual, artistic, and commercial revival) was defined not by large territorial kingdoms and principalities, as most of Western Europe was, but by independent or near-independent cities. One of the greatest was western-facing, banking-rich Firenze. Its only equal (and, in some ways, one which surpassed it) was a city on the opposite side of the peninsula: the trade-rich gateway to the East, the city of St. Mark, La Serenissima, the republic of Venice, or, as the natives call it, Venezia.

Venezia was an anomaly in almost every way compared to the rest of Western Europe. It retained ties to the Byzantine Empire long after that remnant of classical antiquity had become semi-legendary to the rest of the continent. It was a republic (though a very peculiar republic indeed) when other states were formal or *de facto* autocracies. It carried on pragmatic relations with the Muslim powers of the Eastern Mediterranean while the Crusades and later wars against the Turks raged. Even its construction was unusual: the city was a literal island rising above the waters of a lagoon, defended by difficult waters and the Mediterranean's most formidable fleet instead of stone walls.

This work describes the city of Venezia at its height from the beginning of the 15th century (when it disposed of one of its last major trading rivals on the Italian peninsula), through a transition from a pure center of trade into a center of industry and artistic and intellectual activity, to late in the 16th century (when it began a long decline, outmaneuvered by the major powers of Western Europe for trade to the Far East and colonization of the New World).

Glossary

This book uses a few Italian terms, mostly place names, but there are a few technical terms well worth knowing.

ca': A Venetian house; short for "casa."
calle: A Venetian street.
condottiero: Literally, a contractor, but in general use, a mercenary, particularly a mercenary officer.
doge: Native ruler of Venezia.
Firenze: Florence.
Milano: Milan.
Napoli: Naples.
Quattrocento: Literally, 400, meaning the 15th century, or the 1400s; preceded by the Trecento (1300s) and followed by the Cinquecento (1500s).
rio: Literally "river," but in Venice, a canal.
Roma: Rome.
Venezia: Venice.

Art Acknowledgments

P. 13: "Doge Andrea Gritti (1455–1538)," by Workshop of Titian. From the Friedsam Collection, bequest of Michael Friedsam, 1931, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, **metmuseum.org**.

P. 20: "The arrival of Henri III of France at the Lido in Venice in 1574." Gift of Carolyn Bullard and Susan Schulman, in honor of George Goldner, 2015, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, **metmuseum.org**.

P. 24: "Wineglass." Gift of Henry G. Marquand, 1883, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, **metmuseum.org**.

P. 25: "The Malèrmi Bible, vol. II," by Niccolò Malèrmi (translator). From Harris Brisbane Dick Fund, 1933, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, **metmuseum.org**.

P. 27: "The Molo, Venice, from the Bacino di San Marco," by Luca Carlevaris. From Robert Lehman Collection, 1975, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, **metmuseum.org**.

P. 29: "Intartenimento che demo ogni giorno li Ciarlatani from Habiti d'huomeni et donne Venetiane." From Harris Brisbane Dick Fund, 1947, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, **metmuseum.org**.

P. 30: "Piazza San Marco," by Canaletto. Purchase, Mrs. Charles Wrightsman Gift, 1988, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, **metmuseum.org**.

P. 33: "Zecchino, Domenico Contarini (1659–75).“ Bequest of Joseph H. Durkee, 1898, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, **metmuseum.org**.

Publication History

Although some articles in the second edition of *Pyramid* magazine addressed Venezia, this is all new material.

Recommended Works

This work covers roughly the same time period as and an adjacent territory to ***GURPS Hot Spots: Renaissance Florence,*** which is strongly recommended. Rather than repeat certain topics, notably a general history of the Renaissance and a description of land-based armies in Italy during this period, this work refers the reader there. The city description format comes from ***GURPS City Stats.***

About the Author

Matt Riggsby is trained in anthropology and archaeology, and, like the rest of his generation, toils in computers. He works for an international medical software company and lives with his lovely and talented wife, above-average child, and a pack of doges.

CHAPTER ONE

GEOGRAPHY AND LAND USE

Venezia is peculiar in a number of ways, not the least of which is its geography. It sits on a cluster of tiny islands reinforced with landfill and stitched together with pedestrian bridges. This arrangement produced a city of narrow streets and extensive canals, where boats replace horses and carts. From its sheltered location in a lagoon behind a permanent sandbar, the island city came to control a pocket-sized empire.

THE CITY

Venezia is located at the northern end of the Adriatic Sea, where the coast of Italy begins to bend east toward the Balkan Peninsula (see regional map, top of p. 7). Venezia is an island, or more precisely over 70 small, close-set islands, shored up and extended with landfill, about a mile east of the mainland shore.

The city is shaped a bit like a stylized fish facing west, with a thick head at one end, narrowing to the east, and flaring out again at the eastern shore (see the city map on p. 5). The "fish" is underlined by an additional island curving in parallel with the "body" of the fish, about 300 yards to the south. At its widest, the city is a bit under two and a half miles across. It's up to a mile and a third north to south, but much narrower in most places, so the total area is only a little over a square mile. The Grand Canal, a sort of aquatic "main drag" 30 to 100 yards wide, forms a backward S-shape through the western half of the city. It is lined with some of the city's finest homes. Large pools and courtyards are maintained by the Arsenale, a massive shipyard at the eastern end of the city.

From time to time, the city's footprint expands slightly as someone sinks more pilings into the seabed and fills in a little more area with earth. However, the effect of such expansions is slight. As a practical matter, the city's area is sharply limited, but its wealth and power constantly bring people in, so it is densely packed. Through the period covered in this supplement, it has a population of 100,000 to 150,000, sometimes reaching even higher than that. Residences and warehouses go up to the water's edge and are built taller than is common for the era.

Most of the land is built up or paved, and very little of it is cultivated. Larger homes have small kitchen garden plots, and some very wealthy people have decorative gardens attached to second homes. The less built-up islands of the lagoon have more greenery.

> *. . . works and contrivances . . . could not be copied and made by others so that [the inventors] are deprived of their honour.*
>
> *– 1474 statute on patents*

THE SESTIERI

Venezia proper is divided into six neighborhoods called *sestieri* (see the map on p. 5). To the west of the Grand Canal are Santa Croce to the far west, San Polo inside the upper curve of the Grand Canal, and Dorsoduro along the south shore. To the east of the Grand Canal are Cannaregio in the northwest, San Marco occupying the middle third of the south shore, and Castello covering the east end.

Sestieri are further divided into a number of parishes, around 80 altogether. Each parish is centered on its own church (rarely being out of sight of a church may cause problems for some kinds of supernatural entities).

All neighborhoods hold a mix of classes and professions, so there's no "rich" or "poor" part of town. Broadly speaking, the western part of the city has more fishermen (and far more Jews; see *Ghetto*, p. 6) than the east, which is dominated by the Arsenale (p. 6). The central portion holds the lion's share of commerce and government.

A number of outlying islands are associated with the city but aren't part of the sestiero system. They can be thought of as suburbs, not in the city in the strictest legal and administrative sense but very much a part of civic life. Giudecca and San Giorgio Maggiore comprise the long stretch of islands immediately south of the city proper. Several smaller and less densely occupied islands are to the north, notably San Michele and San Cristoforo (home of a monastery during the period covered here, combined into a single island and turned into a cemetery in the 19th century) and Murano (the center of Venezia's glass industry from the end of the 13th century). Murano is a few hundred yards north of San Michele and not shown on the city map. Each of these associated islands, of course, has its own homes, workshops, and religious institutions.

TRANSPORTATION

Transportation is usually by foot along a series of often narrow, twisting streets, or by boat. A few streets are as little as half a yard wide, and a good many are narrow enough that a horse would have a hard time passing through and two or three men with shields could block the street. Horses and carts are almost unknown; indeed, horses were largely prohibited within the city after 1480.

The spaces between the city's constituent islands, shored up and squared off, form a network of canals, which take the place of major roads. Hundreds of small bridges arch high above them, allowing ground and water traffic to cross paths. Bridges are as likely to have steps as sloping surfaces, and many have an inverted V shape instead of an arch.

Heavy hauling and longer trips across the city are performed by water. Small, flat-bottomed boats are in common use for transportation, but modern-style gondolas had not yet been standardized. Providing water transportation for hire is a common job.

CLIMATE

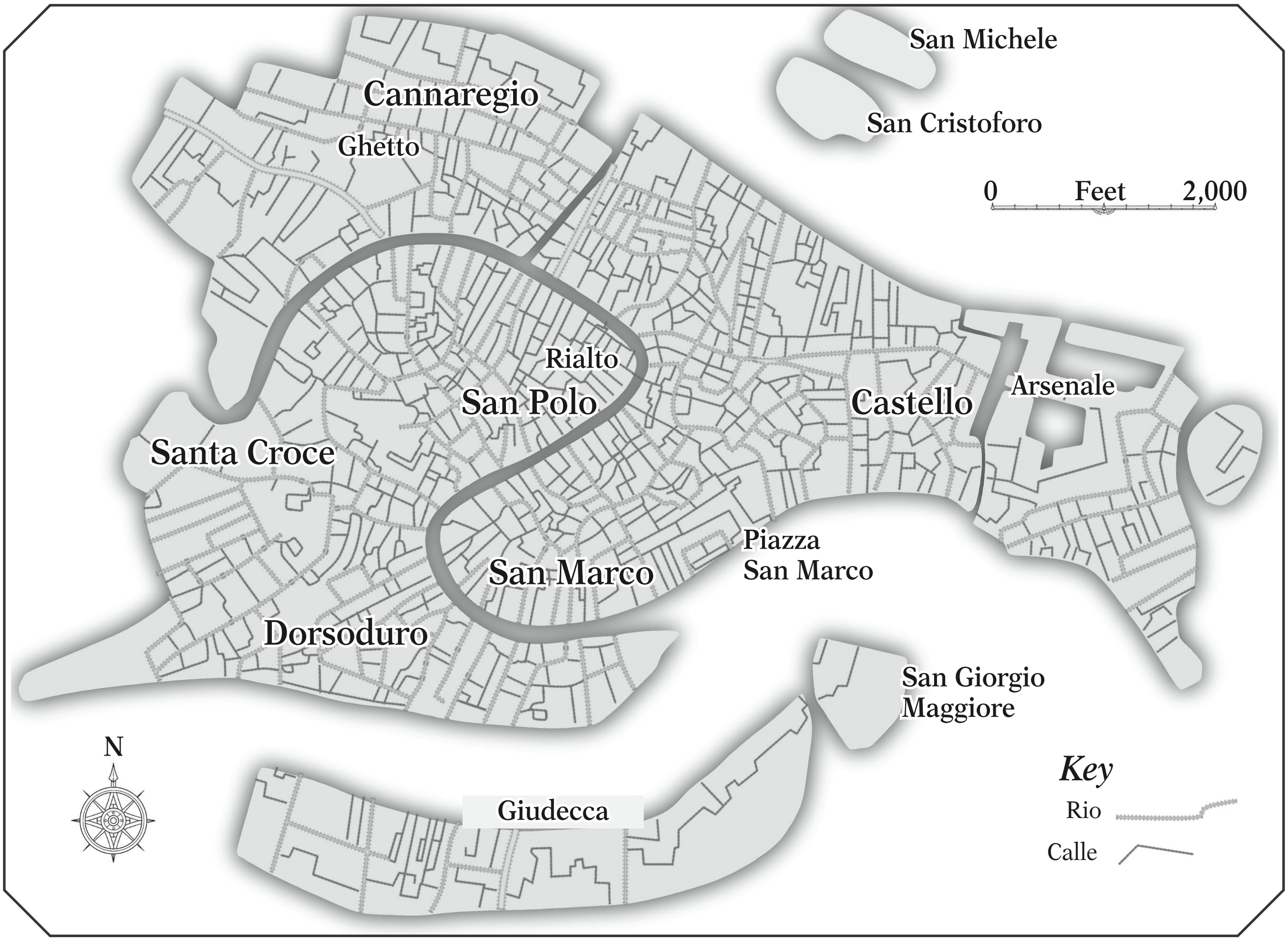
The Venetian climate is, obviously, Mediterranean, with hot but not punishing summers, and mild winters with temperatures rarely dipping below freezing. (Even so, a few winters were cold enough to freeze much of the lagoon and permit walking or riding carts from the city to the mainland.) The omnipresent sea further moderates temperatures. At the same time, though, the city is very wet, with frequent rain, a good deal of fog in cooler seasons, and constantly high humidity. Still, the dangerous high tides threatening the modern city are centuries away; some flooding is possible during extreme weather, but the Lido (see p. 6) protects the city from most storm surges.

LANDMARKS

The city has a number of notable landmarks and important neighborhoods which everyone knows about and may form the basis of navigation around town.

Rialto

Part of the San Polo neighborhood, on the inside of the upper curve of the Grand Canal's reversed S, this region has long been an important one. Initially, it was the seat of Venetian government. After a market was established there in the 11th century, it became the center of Venetian banking.



MAP OF VENEZIA

For the period in question here, it's Venezia's equivalent of Wall Street surrounded by shopping districts. The center of the marketplace demands the highest rents for firms that occupy space there – largely bankers, insurers, and similar businesses.

Piazza San Marco

This region on the south shore of the city is doubtless Venezia's best-known and most-recognized area; paintings of it are nigh inevitable in modern Italian restaurants. Where the Rialto is the heart of Venezia's business community, this is the heart of Venetian government and political life. Ships can dock in a great many places around the city and even along the Grand Canal, but the Molo (the stone-reinforced bank by the piazza) is where ceremonial embarkations and departures take place.

Entry to the piazza is to the north, between a pair of monumental columns. The piazza itself is shaped like a reversed L, rotated to the left. Along the eastern side of the piazza are the ducal palace and the Basilica San Marco, Venezia's leading church. The ducal palace is far more than a residence. It hosts meetings of the Maggior Consiglio (or Grand Council; see p. 12), many government offices, and even cells for important prisoners. A freestanding bell tower sits at the inside corner of the L. Further to the west, the piazza is surrounded by the Procuratie, a series of lesser government office buildings. The piazza has long had a clock tower in the northeast corner; there was one attached to the church until the 1490s, which was replaced by a more elaborate one attached to the Procuratie.

Other notable establishments in the area include the Zecca (the mint) and, starting in the 1530s, the Biblioteca Marciana (Library of St. Mark), one of the first major public libraries in early modern Europe, containing an important and ever-growing collection of manuscripts and printed books. (The Bridge of Sighs, the famed covered stone bridge in this area, won't be constructed until 1600.)

Ghetto

This neighborhood in the Cannaregio region, on the site of former metal foundries, is home to Venezia's Jewish population. It was informally the Jewish neighborhood until 1516, when it became their official home. (Jews were formally prohibited from living in the city, but with exceptions and loopholes.) There are actually two parts: the Ghetto Nuovo, which is completely surrounded by canals, and the adjacent Ghetto Vecchio, a strip of land between the Ghetto Nuovo and a major feeder into the Grand Canal. (Despite the name, the Ghetto Nuovo was inhabited earlier; it had been the home of a newer foundry.) The total area is about five acres. If the rest of Venezia is densely populated, the Ghetto is packed to the gills. Buildings up to seven stories high are common. It also has limited entrances, which may be closed off to enforce curfews. For religious reasons, synagogues are only found on the topmost floors.

San Michele

This island off the north shore of the city proper, about halfway between the city and Murano, is nearly as open as the city is built up. It houses a monastic community, which maintains pleasant gardens on most of the island. Fishermen often stop to rest there and at the adjacent San Cristoforo. The San Michele monastery is sometimes used as a prison. Although not in the city proper, it is more than close enough to be convenient.

Arsenale

The Arsenale is the industrial heart of Venezia's naval power. One of the earliest examples of assembly line-style construction, this shipyard and armory takes up over 100 acres in the center and eastern portion of the city, practically a city within the city. Consistent with its military and economic significance, the Arsenale is well-protected. Unlike Venezia itself, walls and fortified gates surround it, and it is constantly guarded to keep out spies. Within the walls lie a series of large pools and slipways for constructing ships in stages. There is also a variety of buildings for all stages of craftwork involved in making and arming ships, from distilling pitch for caulking to (by the late 16th century) foundries for making cannon, as well as bakeries and other facilities to care for the workers during their long days. The single largest building is the Corderie della Tana, a nearly 350-yard-long hall running east to west near the southern end of the Arsenale, for making rope.

THE LAGOON AND TERRAFERMA

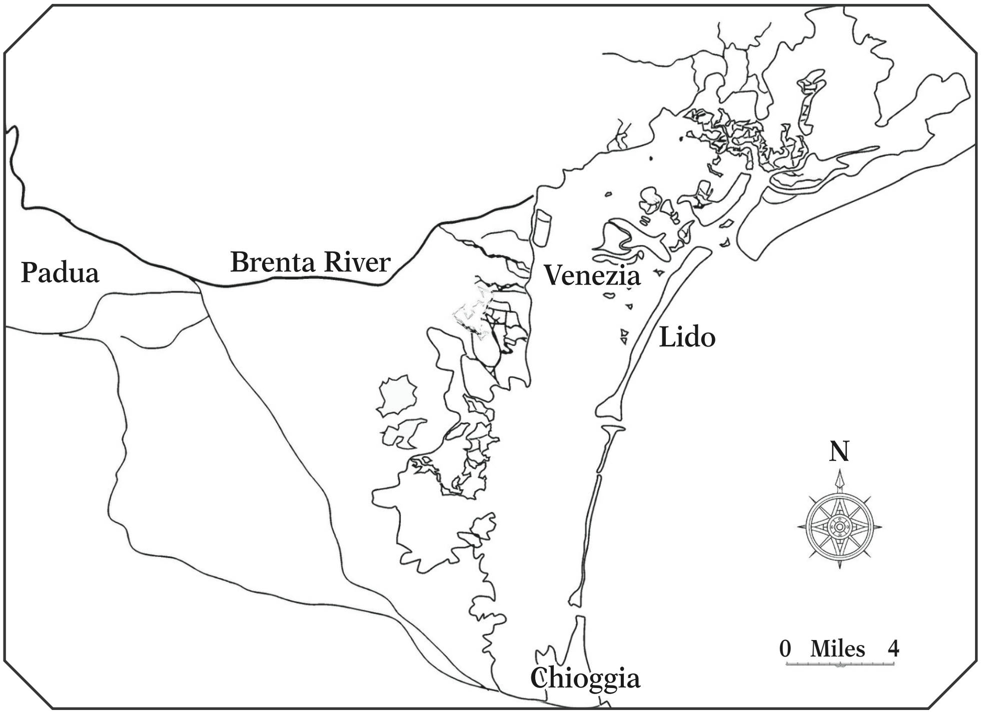
The city sits inside a vaguely crescent-shaped lagoon protected from the open sea by a substantial sandbar called the Lido. Unlike almost every other contemporary city, Venezia has no defensive wall. The water and a powerful navy protect it, so it never fell under direct attack during the period under discussion here and only rarely during other periods; the last significant threat was when the Genoese briefly took the nearby town of Chioggia in 1379.

Venezia's large navy of state-of-the-art (during this period, anyway) galleys manned by veteran sailors isn't the only obstacle to attack. There's also the underwater terrain. The lagoon is shallow, with many submerged sandbars. Small boats can move across it freely, but warships with deeper drafts are limited to deeper channels, which can shift over time. (A gondola or similar small boat has a draft of less than a foot, while even the lightest galley has a draft of over a yard.) This gives the Venetians a huge home-field advantage. If attacked, as happened once or twice during the Middle Ages, they can remove buoys marking channels for larger ships, strategically block some of them with sunken barges, rely on their own intimate knowledge of the underwater terrain to get their own ships around, and trap any invading force to harass or destroy later.

The Lido, other islands of the lagoon, and the nearby mainland (called the *terraferma*) are, naturally, dominated by the city. Areas of the marshy land around the shores of the lagoon have been converted to pans for a lucrative salt industry.

Agricultural produce comes from the hinterland of the terraferma and the nearby Brenta river valley. Until the early Renaissance, Venezia seemed to want little part of any land beyond its immediate shores, but the city eventually became more concerned with securing agricultural resources (Venezia has long had to import most of its food), the industrial capacity of nearby towns, and trade routes west.

Though the swampy regions of the coast are hotbeds of malaria (indeed, some of the outlying islands have been abandoned because of it), Venezia itself seems not to have suffered quite so badly from it. This is perhaps because, relative to similar-sized cities, it is so built up that there remains no more standing water for mosquitoes to breed in.



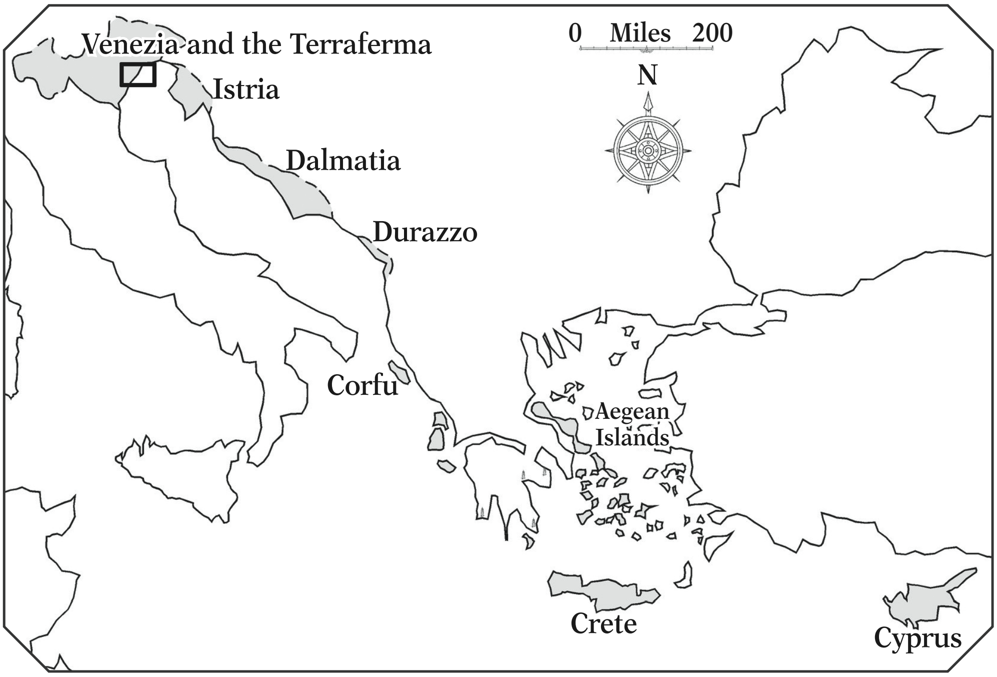
MAP OF VENEZIA AND THE TERRAFERMA

The Venetian Empire

Venezia maintains an overseas empire, of sorts (see map, below). It is quite modest as empires go, but provides Venezia with a variety of useful possessions for raw materials and trade with the interior of territories they don't control. These are notable Venetian possession held through most or all of the period covered by this supplement:

- Istria.
- Dalmatia: By the early 16th century, most of Dalmatia was lost to the Turks, leaving only the coastal city of Zara.
- Durazzo: This territory fell to the Turks in 1501.
- Corfu.
- Crete.
- Cyprus.
- Peloponnesian and Aegean fortresses: The Venetians controlled about a half dozen towns or fortresses in the southernmost regions of the Peloponnese and a great many islands around Greece. The ones on the mainland slowly fell to the Ottomans, with the last going under by 1540. However, Venezia retained most of the islands through the period in question here and beyond.

> *Venezia is beautiful, built on the sea,*
> *who cannot see it cannot appreciate it.*
> *– Venetian proverb*



MAP OF THE VENETIAN EMPIRE

For details on the inset, see *Map of Venezia and the Terraferma,* above.

CHAPTER TWO

HISTORY

From an unpromising beginning as a haven for refugees on a collection of swampy islands, Venezia rose to become an empire of merchants ruling the Mediterranean Sea. But in its later years, it found itself overtaken by events, and as its natural advantages were rendered obsolete, it fell into a long decline.

FOUNDATIONS

The environs of Venezia (that is, the coastline and the islands around the lagoon) were lightly inhabited by fishermen since at least the Roman imperial period. However, the traditional foundation date of the city is 421 A.D., when it is said that merchants from nearby Patavium (modern Padua) set up a trading emporium close to the lagoon. The region fell under Byzantine authority after the empire retook most of Italy in the early mid sixth century. During this period, a steady stream of refugees fleeing the various barbarian migrations – including the wealthier classes from Patavium – occupied the lagoon. (Perhaps, because the region offered malaria rather than loot, barbarian armies weren't interested in it.) The growing settlement was administered from the nearby city of Ravenna.

In the eighth century, the people of the lagoon threw off their appointed governor in a conflict related to the controversy over iconoclasm (see ***GURPS Hot Spots: Constantinople, 527-1204 A.D.,*** p. 23) and elected their first native ruler, the doge. However, the conflict was essentially religious rather than political, so they remained under Byzantine rule for a time, with their elected rulers being accepted and confirmed by Constantinople.

The Byzantine presence faded from Italy through the eighth century, notably with a Lombard invasion in the 750s. Venezia proved either too insignificant or too difficult for the Lombards to take, or possibly both. A direct attack on the region of the city in 810 failed, leaving it unoccupied by foreign powers. The seat of government moved around the lagoon for several decades, finally settling in the Rialto in the early ninth century. The city that would become Venezia was now truly taking shape.

MERCHANT EMPIRE

Though theoretically under Byzantine authority (the Byzantines left Italy but didn't renounce it), Venezia was for all practical purposes an independent city. Still, it enjoyed a close relationship with the empire. In its early centuries, it was a close neighbor and a logical point of entry into Europe for traffic from the east. This gave a strong incentive for the Venetians to become interested in commerce. Venetian merchants negotiated favorable trading conditions at eastern ports. This gave the city's merchants a near-monopoly on immensely lucrative trades in medicines, dyes, and spices from Asia. In an era when merchant galleys were almost indistinguishable from naval vessels, Venezia's concentration on trade made it a military power at sea as well. Merchants also brought home Byzantine styles; many older buildings, still in use during the Renaissance, bore a distinctly Byzantine look.

The Middle Ages were, to some extent, the age of merchant-adventurers. Mercantile expeditions would set out from the city to foreign ports, negotiate for goods without solid advance knowledge of what might be available there, and bring them back home for resale. Eventually, this became better organized, with seasonal convoys providing safety in numbers, and small colonies of local factors semi-permanently stationed in foreign ports to keep an eye on market conditions year-round and engage in longer-term negotiations.

For a rising power, Venezia's territorial ambitions were quite modest. Initially, Venezia's control only extended to the lagoon's immediate hinterland. By the beginning of the second millennium, the city began to exert influence over a number of ports around the eastern coast of the Adriatic, initially by buying or coercing the allegiance of local rulers, and centuries later, by assuming direct control. This provided Venetian vessels with safe ports along their routes and denied such ports to pirates and commercial rivals like Genoa. It gained a larger overseas empire through careful negotiation. Venezia arranged significant trade concessions for ferrying crusaders to the Holy Land, and leveraged that into a range of territories in the Eastern Mediterranean.

Overseas holdings became particularly extensive around the Aegean in the aftermath of the Fourth Crusade. As payment for transportation, the Crusaders became involved in a Byzantine dynastic struggle in support of Venezia's preferred candidate for the imperial throne. The Crusaders ended up conquering the empire. Venezia leveraged that into control over parts of the Peloponnese, most of the islands of the Aegean, and the island of Crete. Even then, its territories were relatively modest, largely limited to islands, mainland ports, and the surrounding territories necessary to support them. The Venetians' attention remained focused on trade.

At home during this period, society became significantly more rigid. In 1297, the government enacted the *serrata*, or the limiting of the Maggior Consiglio (Grand Council; p. 12). This body, which acted as a weak legislature and advisory body to the doge, was up to this point theoretically open to a broad cross-section of the city's population. In practice, it was limited enough to be dominated by smaller factions. With the restructuring of who could participate, the size of the council was increased from a little over 100 members to well over 1,000. This gave the council a much broader base of membership, making it much harder for a single group to control. At the same time, though, restrictions were placed on eligibility for membership. By 1316, membership in the council was restricted to a number of aristocratic families, who became a hereditary oligarchy.

TERRESTRIAL POWER

Through the 14th century, Venezia began to turn its attention west. It succeeded in a long conflict with shipping rival Genoa at the dawn of the 15th century, neutralizing the other city as both a military and economic threat. Venezia then began to expand into the Italian mainland. Within the first few decades of the 15th century, it established control over a sizable chunk of northern Italy nearly as far west as Milano (the territories roughly correspond to modern Veneto, Friuli, and parts of Lombardy and Emilia-Romagna).

The Arsenale also underwent tremendous growth to support the city's dominant naval position. It consolidated facilities and drew craftspeople from all over the city to live permanently in and around the worksite.

The Venetian empire was now at its height. It controlled significant cities such as Padua and Verona in Italy; the better part of the eastern coast of the Adriatic, giving it dominance over both overland routes across the Balkan peninsula and the shortest sea routes into Western Europe from the Levant and points east; and a number of territories farther east – Crete, parts of the Peloponnese, and most islands in the Aegean. It also had trading colonies all over the Eastern Mediterranean and Black Sea coasts.

In 1453, when Constantinople fell to the Ottoman Empire despite Venetian support, Venezia was one of the first stops for Byzantine scholars fleeing the fall of the city, giving it a wealth of Greek texts and scholarship. However, Venetian support for the last of the Byzantines and the concessions they had won from the now-vanished empire also put the Venetians in direct conflict with the Turks. Through the late 15th century, Venezia lost many of its possessions on the Balkan peninsula.

By 1475, the campfires of Turkish scouts in Dalmatia could be seen from Venezia itself. Venezia eventually negotiated peace and a return of its merchants to Constantinople in 1479, but with a loss of many of its old privileges and several of its Aegean and mainland Greek territories (the Ottomans didn't need Venezia nearly as much as the Byzantines did). Through the dynastic inheritance of one of its noblewomen, Venezia also took possession of Cyprus in the 1470s, making up for some of its other losses.

The year after the fall of Constantinople, Venezia also signed on to the Most Holy League established by the Treaty of Lodi. This treaty provided for extensive consultation and exchanges of resident ambassadors between its signatories (a novel practice; up to this point, ambassadors were sent for specific missions and then returned home). The signatories included all the major cities of the Italian peninsula, and the exchanges were intended to maintain a balance of power and end the ongoing wars that had plagued the peninsula for decades.

The increased diplomatic contacts kept Italy relatively peaceful for a generation, which also made the peninsula relatively prosperous. Even Venezia, which remained preoccupied abroad with Turkish wars through much of the second half of the 15th century, stayed reasonably prosperous, though not to the extent that it had been in the first half.

VENEZIA

Population: 125,000 (Search +3)

Physical and Magical Environment

Terrain: Island/Beach
Appearance: Attractive (+1) **Hygiene:** -1
No Mana (No Enchantment)

Culture and Economy

Language: Italian (Venetian dialect) **Literacy:** Accented
TL: 4
Wealth: Comfortable (×2) **Status:** -1 to 5

Political Environment

Government: Oligarchy
CR: 4 (Corruption -1)
Military Resources: $4M **Defense Bonus:** +2

Notes

Venezia is physically and politically much the same through the Renaissance, so these stats can stand for just about any time during the 15th and 16th centuries. Its population varies between 100,000 and 150,000, which changes the city's military resources but little else.

What vary over time are the search bonuses. Through most of the 15th century, the city provides +3 to search rolls for spices and other imports from the East. That declines to +2 by the end of the century, but is replaced by bonuses of +2 to +3 for manufactured goods. Search rolls for books are initially at no bonus at the beginning of the century, improve to +1 in the middle of the century, and rise to +3 by the end. Rolls for glassware and anything having to do with sea transport (maps, ship rentals, experienced sailors, etc.) are at +2 throughout.

EMINENT VENETIANS

Some names appear over and over again in Venetian history: Loredan, Tron, Zen, and others. The limited pool of patrician families (see p. 12) ensures a certain continuity in leadership over time. Nonetheless, the Venetian system of elevating the safest possible candidates to high office also ensures that there are few *great* leaders, though one may inadvertently slip through. Most memorable Venetians are found in other occupations. Here are a few notable people one might find in the city over the years.

Gentile Bellini (1429-1507): A member of an artistic family (his father was an early adopter of oil paints and his brother Giovanni was a noted painter in his own right), Gentile's lifelong interest in the East paid off in 1479. At that time, the Ottoman sultan Mehmed II requested the services of a Venetian painter, and the Venetians sent Gentile. He and the sultan got along remarkably well, though Gentile thought it safest to return home quickly; when debating with the sultan a point of the anatomy of a person whose head has been cut off, Mehmed casually had a slave decapitated to demonstrate his argument. The only surviving portraits of Mehmed are Bellini's, snapped up at bargain prices by Italian merchants in Constantinople when Mehmed's successor had them sold off as borderline-blasphemous images. Gentile remained influential in Venetian painting, including popular oriental themes in his work and eventually training the painter Titian.

Alvise Cadamosto (1432-1483): Born to a noble family (in a house on the Grand Canal, no less) later wiped out by a corruption scandal, Cadamosto was a particularly adventurous merchant sailor. At a chance stopover in Lisbon in 1454, he was hired by Portugal to assist in its explorations around the coast of Africa, where he discovered the Cape Verde islands and made it as far south as modern Guinea-Bissau. His fortune made, he returned to Venezia in 1463 to take up a career as an official, merchant, and diplomat.

Bartolomeo Colleoni (1400-1475): Though born in the Milanese sphere of influence, Colleoni became Venezia's most reliable condottiero. He served in the ranks of a number of mercenary armies, characteristically changing sides frequently, and was finally made captain-general (head of Venezia's land forces) for life in 1455. He was notable not for his tactical ability (though he was certainly a competent general) so much as for his ability to impose discipline and restrain his troops from excessively destructive looting. He occasionally freelanced for other clients while in Venezia's employ, but neither against his adopted city nor when the city required his services. He's best known now, though, for the legalistic implementation of his will. When he died, he left the city a vast sum of money on the condition a statue of him be erected near San Marco. The Piazza San Marco, the center of the city's government and ceremonial life, had no statues of *anyone* – general, politician, or even saint – and no one wanted to break precedent. The government, then, noting that the will didn't actually specify a particular San Marco, put a grand statue of Colleoni up in front of the Scuola Grande di San Marco, headquarters of a major civic organization in the northern part of the city.

Cassandra Fedele (1465-1558): Probably the most celebrated female scholar of her day. She carried on philosophical correspondence with notable leaders in Italy and abroad, and even addressed the Venetian Senate on women's issues. Moreover, it appears that she participated in erudite conversation with other women, indicating an entire class of educated women in Venezia.

Franceso Foscari (1373-1457): Although his predecessor warned against electing this popular figure (and rumors of buying his election dogged him through his career), Foscari served as doge from the spring of 1423 to October of 1457, a few weeks before his death, making him the city's longest-serving ruler. His reign saw Venezia at its territorial height, reaching its farthest extent on the terraferma and still holding many overseas possessions. But thereafter, there was essentially nowhere to go but down; Constantinople fell on his watch, and only a few years later, ailing and compromised by the clearly corrupt actions of his son, he was forced to retire.

What it lost in trade to the east, it made back partially with greater trade to the west. Venetian galleys sailed the Atlantic coast as far north as Flanders, and the city controlled trade routes through the Alps to northern Europe.

The city's economy also went through a significant shift away from being solely a trading city to performing some manufacturing as well. Native industries expanded enormously in fields such as publishing, glassmaking, and textile manufacture. One of the results of this prosperity was a significant growth in the arts, though perhaps not for the Venetians as much as for the more flamboyant Medici in Firenze.

But after the peaceful, prosperous years of the late 15th century, the beginning of the 16th century was a time of crisis. The long peace resulting from Lodi collapsed in 1494, restarting the cycle of Italian wars. This time, there was greater involvement by the larger powers of France, Spain, and the Holy Roman Empire, to whom Italy was a theater for working out their own conflicts. Venezia's peace with the Turks also collapsed, with another war starting in 1499. By 1503, Venezia was forced to permanently cede significant territory on the eastern side of the Adriatic. Finally, also in 1503, Portuguese ships arrived in the Gulf of Aden, having gone the long way around Africa. Although these were merely exploratory voyages and trips around Africa would remain exceptionally risky for generations, they marked the rise of a long-term threat to Venezia's traditional dominance of trade with the East.

But worse was yet to come. Just a few years later, Venezia ended up on the wrong end of the League of Cambrai, an alliance of Aragon, France, the Holy Roman Empire, and the Papacy. Faced with that formidable opposition, it quickly lost essentially all of its possessions on the terraferma.

The rapidly shifting nature of Renaissance politics being what it was, the Papacy fell out with France and allied with Venezia, then Venezia switched its allegiance to France, all of which resulted in Venezia recovering its lost Italian possessions by 1512. (Adding insult to injury, the Ottomans conquered Egypt in 1517. Venezia had long had a trading relationship with the Mamluk sultanate and its predecessors, giving them markets and access to goods from the Far East separate from those of the Ottomans, but that was now cut off.)

While Venezia ended up only a little behind where it had been, these closely set catastrophes left a definite impression. After another decade, Venezia extricated itself from alliances with feuding major powers such as Spain, France, and the Papacy. Venezia managed to remain sufficiently strong to maintain relative independence from the major powers of Europe, to which the other important Italian cities had already succumbed. Nevertheless, the city was very gradually weakening from loss of territory to the Turks and loss of trade to the Portuguese. It staved off catastrophe through a combination of shifting to manufacturing from pure shipping and exchange, and good luck (the Portuguese took decades to establish stable trade with the Far East). For a few decades, the combined forces of the Ottomans and sultanates in Gujarat and Sumatra beat back the expanding Portuguese, returning to Venezia the lion's share of the spice trade. And despite constant threats abroad, the city reached a creative and intellectual peak. Presses in Venezia produced books read all over Europe, and painting and musical styles developing there would go on to set the course of arts through Europe.

LONG TWILIGHT

The battle of Lepanto in 1571 was possibly the city's last hurrah as a major power. In the last major engagement between fleets of rowed galleys, a combined Spanish-Venetian fleet defeated a formidable Ottoman force off the northwest coast of the Peloponnese, preventing Turkish naval dominance of the Mediterranean. (The Spanish marine contingent included a young Miguel Cervantes, who lost the use of his left hand in the battle.) This was also an important symbolic victory against an enemy whom Europeans usually regarded as nigh invincible. The number of Ottoman galleys seized at the battle was enough to depress the Arsenale's production for years.

Over ensuing decades, though, Venezia's influence shrank. Only the year before Lepanto, the Turks had conquered Cyprus, taking the last of Venezia's major eastern possessions. The war with the Turks likewise severely damaged the city's other connections to the eastern world. And only a year or two after Lepanto, a bout of plague decimated the city's population.

More importantly, trends that started in Venezia moved on to the rest of world. The impetus of the Renaissance passed to northern Europe, and the value of its trade routes steadily declined as Spain, Portugal, and eventually the Dutch and English developed Atlantic routes. Its Atlantic-facing rivals undercut Venetian shipping, and the city had no overseas colonies to enrich it. It was still a player in European diplomacy, but only one among many rather than a leading power. Land-based empires slowly absorbed its possessions, and rivalries with other Italian states became a significant issue again. The system still managed to creak on for another few centuries as Venezia became a tourist attraction for the gentry of other nations like Britain. The last doge was deposed in 1797 by Napoleon as he expanded his empire to the south. But the Venetian republic, which had survived for a millennium, had lived long enough to see new republics that it had indirectly inspired arise in France and America.

TIMELINE

421 – Traditional founding of the city.
726 – Ursus is elected first doge of Venezia.
c. 821 – Seat of government moves to the Rialto.
c. 1000 – Venetian acquisitions along Dalmatian coast begin.
1095 – First Crusade begins.
1122 – Venezia attacks and eventually conquers Tyre, giving it a foothold on the Levant coast.
1202 – Fourth Crusade. Venezia acquires many former Byzantine territories.
1297 – The serrata expands the Maggior Consiglio (Grand Council) but locks up membership in a small elite.
1405 – Venezia conquers Padua, marking a major move into the terraferma.
1428 – Venezia gains control of Crema, marking the westernmost extent of the city's authority.
1453 – Constantinople falls; Byzantine refugees flee to Italy, mostly through Venezia.
1454 – Treaty of Lodi marks the beginning of decades of relative peace.
1473 – Venezia gains direct control of Cyprus.
1479 – Venezia makes peace with Turks in the aftermath of the fall of Constantinople. Venezia establishes an embassy in Paris, the first permanent embassy in Europe outside of Italy.
1494 – French attack on kingdom of Napoli disrupts Italian balance of power, essentially ending the Peace of Lodi.
1503 – Venezia loses territories to Ottomans. Portuguese circumnavigate Africa.
1512 – Convoluted War of Cambrai (during which Venezia loses and regains most of the terraferma) ends. Permanent Jewish residents allowed in the Ghetto district.
1514 – Major fire destroys most of the Rialto.
1571 – Spanish and Venetian naval alliance defeats Turks at Lepanto.
1797 – Napoleon conquers Venezia, bringing an end to the republic.

CHAPTER THREE

THE APPARATUS OF POWER

Venezia styles itself a republic, and relative to the autocracies governing other states of the time, perhaps it is. The city's complex, interlocking institutions keep power within a rigidly defined ruling class, but prevent it from collecting in the hands of a single person or family.

AN ARISTOCRATIC REPUBLIC

The city's theoretically ultimate deliberative body and the source of power and legitimacy is the *Maggior Consiglio*, composed of adult male members of the ruling class, who number from 2,000 to 3,000 during this period. But since a body that size is supremely unwieldy, it isn't directly responsible for legislation or execution of policy. Rather, its main importance is to elect and provide members for other government bodies and ratify their decisions.

Probably the most important body selected from the Maggior Consiglio is the *Consiglio dei Pregadi*, often called the Senate. This group is essentially the legislature and chief regularly meeting deliberative body. It was originally a group of 60 members specifically selected for the job, but by 1500, a great many others were allowed to participate and vote. These include the members of the *Quarantia,* the city's 40-member appeals court; a secondary council of 60 additional senators selected by outgoing senators rather than directly by the Maggior Consiglio; the heads of a variety of other councils; and ambassadors and military commanders recently returned from foreign assignments. In all, there can be up to 300 people allowed to act as senators. On a day-to-day basis, only about half do so, and the body needs a quorum of only 70 in order to act.

These deliberative and executive bodies, along with a great many other committees, administer a variety of departments that oversee assorted civic functions. There are magistrates called *provveditori* and *sopraprovveditori* charged with matters such as regulating the city's salt industry, maintaining military readiness, enforcing sumptuary laws (see p. 16), auditing the accounts of other offices, supplying the city with meat, and so on. (The Arsenale has a variety of provveditori with specific responsibilities for galleys, sailors, gunpowder supplies, etc.)

Actual responsibilities can be far-reaching. For example, the public health ministry, created during this period to fend off recurring plagues, is one of the few bodies which can slow the pace of the city's commerce (foreign ships suspected of carrying plague could be restricted to an outlying island in the lagoon for 40 days, from which the word "quarantine" is derived). The public health ministry also has considerable power in regulating the poor, prostitutes, laundries, food supplies, and anything else which might be seen to impact the city's health.

For the most part, offices are very temporary, lasting from a few months to a couple of years. The constant churn through government bodies further serves to prevent factions and personal power bases from forming.

The Doge

The city also has someone at least nominally in charge. The city's leader, and very much a chief executive rather than a ruler, is the *doge*. The doge acts as the most important public face of the government, leading public ceremonies. More substantively, he also presides over the most important councils, setting agendas and acting as chairman. He is elected in a process that shows how Venetian institutions protect themselves from factionalism. The election of the doge is a 10-step series of choosing small bodies of electors by supermajority vote of another body of electors, winnowing them down by lot, and having the survivors select a separate body of electors which will be reduced in turn until one last body picks the doge. The process requires a total of 180 different people whose participation is at least partly up to chance. Even minor players in the process are subject to random selection. During the voting stages, it is standard procedure for an official to leave the building where the panel of voters is deliberating by a particular door and bring in the first boy under 15 he meets to count the ballots.

Such an election is exceptionally hard to fix (though certainly people tried). Still, that isn't regarded as enough protection, so other limits on the doge's activities are in place. For example, the doge cannot discuss business or open official correspondence without members of the *Minor Consiglio* present (a body of six advisors, one from each of the city's sestieri; see p. 4). The three chief members of the Quarantia also attend these meetings.

While there are few formal requirements for office other than membership in the patrician class, there are certainly informal ones. For example, one is more likely to be elected doge if one has few close relatives and none in positions of power. And ironically, popularity is likely to disqualify someone as a doge, with several natural candidates for the office passed over precisely because they were widely loved; Venezia's ruling class has a mortal terror of popular dictators. Higher office holders are also very old. The electoral boards in charge of selecting candidates for office choose men of long experience, so members of the Senate are typically at least 50, and the average age of a new doge is over 70. The dogeship is one of the city's few lifetime offices (subject to being deposed in extraordinary cases), but given the late date of appointment, it's usually a short term anyway.

Council of Ten

Lurking behind Venezia's institutions is the shadowy Council of Ten, a body that acts in secret. The name is misleading. It originally was comprised of 10 members elected by the Senate for non-consecutive one-year terms. By this time, it also includes the doge and the Minor Consiglio for a total of 17 members. The Ten are nominally responsible for the city's security and foreign affairs, though over the years, they've also become responsible for a number of important financial decisions. In practice, they form the leadership of a secret police, operating both domestically and abroad, and they have the power to override any other part of the government. Indeed, the Council are arguably the city's true rulers. They've got both the power to do nearly anything they want and small enough numbers to make it happen quickly. They don't and can't oversee everything the government does, but they are key in deciding important policies, and they're behind nearly all of the many shadowy moves the government makes.

FOREIGN RELATIONS

It's been said that the only thing that could unite Italy during the Renaissance was hatred of Venezia. That's an exaggeration, but when Italian politics and diplomacy of the early Renaissance were based on balancing powers so that nobody could gain an upper hand, wealthy Venezia, with its extensive trade networks and overseas territories, naturally found itself on the wrong side of alliances more often than most. The Treaty of Lodi in 1454 put resident ambassadors from all over the peninsula around the continent and created an emphasis on maintaining a balance of power. Venezia was blocked from further expansion, though its diplomatic corps was busy shifting its alliances to keep others from expanding as well. After the Peace of Lodi collapsed at the end of the century and external powers engaged themselves in Italian conflicts, Venezia extended its system of ambassadors to the rest of Western Europe. The republic managed, by the same strategy of shifting from one side to another, to keep those powers more or less at bay.

While Venezia cannot be said to be an ally of the Muslim powers of the East by any stretch of the imagination, its relations with the Turks, the Egyptian Mamluks, and other Muslims is at least tempered by pragmatism and a modest familiarity. Venezia sometimes finds itself at war with the Turks, usually as part of a coalition of other Christian nations. Even so, the Venetians are often ambivalent about such alliances and may arrange a separate peace to preserve their trading relationship. The Venetians are also not above forming alliances with Muslim powers. For example, they concluded an alliance with Persia to help contain the Ottomans, and the republic explored the possibility of arming the Mamluks to fight the Portuguese entering the Indian Ocean.

ARCHIVES

Venezia is home to a highly literate ruling class that is concerned that no part of the government operates without some kind of oversight. As a result, the government produces vast quantities of records: spending accounts, judicial verdicts, meeting minutes, signed contracts, treaties, documents taken in evidence of disputes, copies of official correspondence, and so on. Once created, records are compiled and maintained by a staff of up to 80 scribes and archivists, drawn from the cittadini (p. 15), the city's hereditary middle class.

These records are stored in large archives in suitable locations across the city. Treasury records are kept in the Procuratie, records on many economic matters and market regulation at the Rialto, naval records at the Arsenale, and so on. But the largest and most important archives are held at the ducal palace. These archives are themselves subdivided. The main ducal chancery holds most records of the major councils, while a secret chancery contains records pertaining to particularly sensitive topics (it is, naturally, subject to elaborate security procedures, and the guards themselves are illiterate so they can't learn its secrets), which is separate from the Council of Ten's own secret chancery.

By the end of the 16th century, these records comprise hundreds of thousands of bound volumes of documents, individually indexed and added to separate registers. These registers ultimately allow archivists to search for information based on such criteria as date, the government body in question, and the subject matter.

Police and the Courts

Venezia has a patchwork of people with police powers. Most are judges and other officials with the power to investigate and make arrests, though their ability to bring force to bear is unclear. The *Capi di Sestieri* (District Captains), for example, were originally commissioned to find and punish traitorous conspirators, wherever they may appear, but they soon established patrols to prevent general daytime crime as well.

At least two different customs officials have police powers. The *Signori di Contrabanni* (Lords of Contraband) are the primary force, with perhaps 50 men specifically charged with rooting out smuggling. The captains of the customs posts, overseeing legitimate commerce, have police powers as well.

There is a body of perhaps 50 to 100 night watchmen (not to be confused with the defunct "lords of the night"; p. 24), and a few other judges with their own small forces. Between them, Venezia may have employed up to 300 police in total, not counting paramilitary guards at the Arsenale and other important locations. Each group has its own laws to enforce, but there are ongoing squabbles over jurisdiction and attempts to increase "territory." For example, the Capi di Sestieri try repeatedly to expand from daytime into nighttime patrols.

What we think of as criminal law is initially aimed primarily at punishing the guilty, without imagining that the actions of the courts would actually reduce crime, though deterrents creep in over time. Rather than take state-sponsored vengeance with physical punishments, penalties for crimes from which one might profit (notably theft) are set with elaborate schedules and conditions in a way intended to make it impossible to gain a monetary benefit. Penalties for violent crimes are less well defined and often left to the conscience of the judge. There is no presumption of innocence, so a judge might punish a defendant who just *feels* guilty, with a lack of conclusive evidence mitigating but not eliminating penalties. Fines are very common punishments, followed closely by imprisonment (there is a notoriously dark, damp prison in the ducal palace, and other holding facilities elsewhere). Exile and physical punishments like mutilation and beatings are relatively rare but still carried out. Given a lack of prison space, the Quarantia often needs to issue *gratia* adjusting sentences downward and releasing prisoners early. Capital punishment is largely reserved for the worst crimes, including murder and violent robbery involving large sums of money or value.

Adventure Seed: Quis Custodiet Ipsos Custodes

Adventurers are engaged by a shadowy figure, wearing a mask and cloak but offering gold. This mysterious person claims to represent one of the Signori di Contrabanni (above), and asks the party infiltrate a conspiracy to smuggle arms into the city from abroad and assassinate several government officials. As the investigators make contacts in the alleged conspiracy (progress is slow; the conspirators are serious about security), another shadowy figure approaches one of the adventurers, claiming to represent one of the Capi di Sestieri (above), demanding information on the conspiracy *and* that they feed misinformation to their erstwhile employer, who is identified as a conspirator working against his own operation. Yet another shadowy figure approaches a different adventurer and makes similar demands, claiming to be a representative of the Council of Ten (p. 13). What is going on here? Is anyone not a conspirator? Could everyone, even the purported arms smugglers, actually be an undercover agent for the city?

Intelligence and Espionage

Venezia is known for a profusion of spies, both at home and abroad. Part of this reputation may come from the fact that it cares about intelligence at all and takes a systematic approach to it, putting Venezia well ahead of other states of its time. Some of its sources simply collect what might be called public information. Venetian diplomats file regular reports with their government, providing up-to-date information on what is happening abroad. Even when they simply summarize the news of the day, they provide a significant benefit. Merchants likewise supply information on current events from places they visit.

But it goes beyond that. Diplomats and merchants working as agents for the Venetian government also function as spymasters, recruiting locals to provide them with less public information. Ambassadors are granted a secret budget specifically for this purpose. Aristocratic informers might be bribed with luxuries rather than cash; one Spanish nobleman was given a painting by Titian. And, of course, some spies are employed more or less directly by the government, usually by the Council of Ten or some subsidiary body thereof. Most of this espionage is political, but some of it is economic as well, the two so often going hand in hand in Venezia. Reports discuss market conditions, harvests, the activities of merchants, and other matters of economic significance, and Venetian spies are as likely to try to discover trade secrets as political ones.

Most of the work of Venezia's spies is information-gathering, but they do undertake more active operations from time to time. Spy networks are used to send covert messages, employing secret third parties to communicate with people who can't be seen talking to Venetians.

Some activities might be considered black-ops missions. A number of sudden deaths of otherwise healthy people – such as several people who were associated with Catarina Cornaro, the last queen of Cyprus – may plausibly be attributed to Venetian assassins. Likewise, the Council of Ten is known to have at least attempted a number of poisonings, in one case recruiting a professor of botany to formulate a poison (unsuccessfully, as it happens). There was even a project to gather a covert strike force of exiles to burn a Turkish fleet, with the right to return to Venezia as the reward.

Venezia's intelligence-gathering machinery isn't limited to foreign shores. It is just as active at home. Covert informants are used to prevent crimes from treason to smuggling, and courtesans are occasionally used in plots to unmask those conspiring with foreign governments.

The government also encourages the people of Venezia to inform on one another in the name of civic unity and general order, and the people do so enthusiastically. Lion-headed boxes are distributed around the city in which people can deposit written accusations against their neighbors, and it appears they are well-used. While most accusations are likely trivial and ignored, the government handsomely rewards those on whose accusations they act.

Code

Many doges use hidden messages passed among covert agents and their masters. Spies experiment widely with invisible inks. Objects like bouquets of flowers can be arranged to convey messages (for example, with specific colors representing letters or words). Shorthand systems obfuscate words and parts of words, greatly complicating decoding messages. Devices like the Cardan grille provide a template in which a writer can compose a note with words scattered over a page, then fill the rest with other text, making those initial words appear to be part of the overall text; a reader with a similar grille may then block out the irrelevant text and see the real message.

This era also sees the birth of real cryptography in Europe. Many people used some variation of a simple substitution cipher, as they had done for centuries. In an encoded message, one character would consistently be replaced with another (X for A, Q for B and so on). But spies had also already figured out frequency analysis by this period, letting them crack ciphers by determining the most often used characters in the cipher and substituting the most commonly used characters in the language. Ideally, people would change ciphers frequently, but in practice, it didn't happen often enough for real security.

In 1467, the cipher disk, the first encryption device, was invented. It consists of two concentric rings of characters, one of which rotates around the other. Someone encoding a message would pick a position on the disk and write part of a message in the resulting cipher. However, he could then change the position of the disk, usually indicating the new setting by a capital letter in the message, and continue with what is essentially a new cipher. This method still has weaknesses, but a more sophisticated use was developed by the early 1550s. Each letter in the encoded message uses a different setting on the wheel and therefore essentially a different cipher based on a key word or phrase transmitted separately. This cipher method was considered essentially unbreakable for centuries until someone finally figured out that if the length of the cipher key could be determined, it became much easier to crack.

SOCIAL CLASSES

Venetian society has been rigidly stratified since the early 14th century. The population is divided into three classes. The patricians (or *gentilhomini*), who make up less than 5% of the city's population, form the city's ruling class. Membership in this class is strictly hereditary, with names of members and their lines of descent painstakingly recorded in the carefully guarded *Libro d'Oro* (Book of Gold). There are a few exceptions to the rigid protection of membership in the patrician class, but new admissions are very rare. For example, new families are sometimes ennobled after plagues wipe out older ones. Glassblowers living on Murano have their own exception: Should one of them marry a woman of the patrician class, their sons become patricians as well. And individuals, such as the painter Titian, might be elevated on the grounds of exceptional merit.

Beneath the gentilhomini are the *cittadini*, comprising no more than 8% of the population. They are excluded from political offices but often serve in important bureaucratic positions as well as heading up scuole grandi (p. 21). Members of the cittadini lack executive power, but since they can hold long-term positions in the government bureaucracy, they can have significant influence over the patricians who quickly rotate through leadership positions above them. For example, judges are members of the patrician class. They serve terms typically measured in months, so they have little experience, and they often have no professional legal training. Meanwhile, the cittadini staff supporting the courts has long-term appointments, allowing them to act as professional advisors and institutional memory. Membership in the cittadini is primarily hereditary, but one might join if he can prove his father and grandfather had been residents of the city *and* none of them had been manual laborers.

Beneath them is the great mass of *popoli,* common residents without political rights worth speaking of. They may engage in trade, live in the city, and so on, but they have no political representation. Or, at least, no *formal* representation – public protests have been known to sway rulers' positions. However, certain subgroups of the popoli have a variety of privileges. For example, the *arsenalotti* (workers at the Arsenale) provide a ceremonial bodyguard for the doge and hold other prominent positions at public events. The admiral in charge of the Arsenale is a position for a worker who rises by merit rather than an official imposed from the upper classes.

Finally, the city has a small number of long-term residents, not formally citizens but allowed to stay or work in the city, at least temporarily. These include foreign merchants with permission to live in the city (much as Venetians were permitted to set up trading colonies elsewhere; foreign merchants include Germans, Greeks, Turks, and others), slaves (see p. 16), and Jews (see p. 22). All told, these groups together likely make up less than 3% of the population. These groups lack both formal political power and the numbers and popular appeal to be even informally influential.

Distinctions between classes are primarily legal and political rather than economic. Certainly, many patricians are wealthy, but there are poor ones as well, while the mostly poor members of the *popoli* can become rich without their status changing. However, there are notable social divisions. While marriages outside of one's class are not legally prohibited, they are rare and subject to official scrutiny. The most common exceptions are when poor patricians marry their sons to the daughters of wealthy cittadini to gain huge dowries.

Mechanisms are in place to keep up appearances for members of the upper classes who have fallen on hard times. For example, many offices carry substantial salaries, so destitute patricians support at least a minimum of expected expenses by taking government jobs. Patricians are also responsible for maintaining a number of galleys, but their basic expenses are reimbursed, so even the poorest patrician can uphold his minimum obligations. And generally speaking, members of higher classes who become poor have an easier time finding aid than members of lower classes; the Venetians find the fall from a great height a greater tragedy than just being poor.

Status

Here are suggested Status levels for members of Venetian society.

Rank/Title	***Status***	***Rank/Title***	***Status***
Popolo	0	Gentilhomino	3
Cittadino	1	Gentilhomino official	4
Cittadino official	2	Doge	5

Moors of Venice

Though the story of Othello is fiction, Venezia is nevertheless home to a number of Black Africans and their European-born descendants (this should surprise no one; Africa is nearby, trans-Mediterranean trade has been going on since the Bronze Age, and Venetian ships are frequent visitors at African ports). Though some are slaves, many are free men holding the same rights and participating in the same associations as other free Venetians. Africans have a reputation for swimming and boating skills, particularly valuable in maritime Venezia, and a number find employment as gondoliers. At least one became the head of the gondoliers' guild.

STATUS AND DISPLAY

The patricians of Venezia count as one of their chief virtues *mediocritas*, or moderation. Even the city's wealthiest and most powerful residents make a show of modesty, not being more ostentatious than their neighbors. At least, not in public. For example, a home, even a grand one, is often called a *ca'* rather than a *palazzo,* as it might be called elsewhere in Italy.

Sumptuary laws against conspicuous consumption support the ideology of moderation. Clothing styles and combinations of clothing, the size of gatherings (such as weddings), and the like are all regulated in various ways. In 1562, the ministry in charge of enforcing sumptuary laws, to demonstrate its seriousness, constructed two boxes where residents could leave confidential accusations. The first was for accusations against those breaking the law; the second was for officials failing to enforce it.

However, the sumptuary laws are widely evaded through clever use of loopholes (for example, if the law limits the number of jeweled buttons one might have on a shirt, a shirt might be made with that many buttons interspersed with jeweled studs which look exactly like the buttons but aren't actually fasteners), or simply ignored. Moreover, enforcement is lax, and members of the upper classes who are in the best position to extravagantly break such laws are also more than able to afford the modest fines levied against them without a second thought; *pagare le pompe* (to pay the fine), meaning to accept a *pro forma* punishment while carrying on as one desires, is a common colloquialism in Venezia. The city's sumptuary laws are themselves arguably all for show.

The Price of Marriage

For the upper classes, marriage is, among other things, a very expensive business partnership between the bride and groom. At the beginning of the 15th century, dowries were legally capped at a price equivalent to about 200 times the annual wage of a manual laborer, and those legal caps were likely bypassed on a regular basis. By the end of the 16th century, legal limits had increased to 800 times a laborer's annual pay. The considerable capital women bring with them and their lingering control over it make women at the very least powerful partners in the operation of a household and its business. (Should a husband die, his widow is legally entitled to the return of her dowry even if the man had made no further provision for her in his will.) Among the lower classes, dowries are naturally much smaller, but the dowry continues to serve as a sort of insurance policy against the husband's death, and a major investment in a household enterprise.

SLAVES

Slavery is practiced in Renaissance Italy, but on nowhere near the scale of its classical past. Venezia is probably Europe's biggest slave market, but given the greatly reduced scope of slavery, that's not saying much. The majority of slaves in Venezia and to a somewhat lesser extent elsewhere in Italy are imported from points east. Most are of Russian, Circassian, or Tartar (that is, of Turkic or Mongol descent in western Asia) origin, with tiny sprinkling of others. Indeed, "tartar" is sometimes used in Venetian documents as a synonym for "slave." Most slaves sold in Venezia are also women. On average, slaves are sold as late teens.

Early in this period, individuals go for a price in the neighborhood of five or six times the annual wage of a manual laborer, with prices increasing over time as deteriorating relations with the Ottoman east dry up supplies. The large investment necessarily means that slaves are usually traded individually rather than in large lots, and they are almost entirely owned by wealthy households, where they tend to be employed as domestic servants. While many die in bondage, some slaves are freed by arrangement with their masters or, following classical tradition, in their master's will.

Eventually, toward the end of the period in question here, the supply of slaves fades so much that the institution, while not outlawed, becomes largely moribund. Indentured servitude mostly replaces slavery for the cities of northern Italy.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Venezia's wealth is derived primarily from trade. Indeed, most of the city's domestic and foreign policies are driven by a desire for profitable trade abroad. At home, the city nurtures the Western world's foremost shipbuilding program (*Shipbuilding*, p. 20), while abroad, the government's primary concern has long been securing ports and concessions on tariffs and resident merchants by any means necessary.

For centuries, Venezia has been a major conduit for trade between Europe and Asia. While some independent speculative merchant ventures survive, trade is typically much better organized than during the medieval period. Merchant houses retain factors in foreign ports, who negotiate for goods in consultation with their principals and maintain local warehouses.

Large, regularly scheduled convoys, usually seven each year, then make voyages to ports around the Black Sea and eastern Mediterranean, and return with a minimum of fuss and wrangling. The government rents out galleys to wealthy merchants, who in turn rent out space on those ships to lesser traders. Sailors can supplement their income by engaging in trading on their own, using a small allowance for cargo (generally speaking, no more than they can carry), but even that small allowance can be quite valuable. Large Venetian galleys also ply the seas to the west, making their way along the European coast as far as Flanders and Britain. Overland trade to the north, following routes through the Alps, picks up considerably during this period.

TRADE GOODS

Venezia deals in a huge number of commodities across the Mediterranean and into Europe. These include many of the usual standbys from the East like dyes, medicines, and spices, as well as manufactured and craft items like decorated ceramics, paper, and soap, and even grain grown in the terraferma. However, Venezia also trades in a great many goods produced at home or in its dominions.

Salt

One of Venezia's first major native industries was salt. The shallow, swampy shores of the lagoon were relatively easy to modify into salt pans, where seawater can be let in and blocked off. The water evaporates, leaving behind increasingly concentrated brine and eventually salt. The lucrative trade continues through the Renaissance, even though it becomes comparatively far less important.

Textiles and Fibers

Venezia imports both raw wool and woolen fabrics from elsewhere in Europe. England was initially the most important source of wool, but that advantage slowly shifted to Spain. The city is itself a notable producer of serge, a durable woolen fabric with a subtle diagonal pattern. The city is also known for producing fabric with a vivid crimson color. Venetians import significant quantities of cotton from the Levant and Egypt, sending most of it north to Germany.

But the most important textile is silk. Up until the period in question here, Venezia imported its silk fiber from the East, with a bit coming from Spain and southern Italy as well. With the narrowing of routes to their main sources and the growth of its mainland empire, the Venetians expanded raw silk production on the terraferma. From minimal production in the 15th century, cities in Venezia's orbit like Verona were producing over 100,000 lbs. of silk a year by the middle of the 16th century and sending it to Venezia for processing. The city is particularly famous for its silk velvet, often produced with figurative patterns and threads of precious metals. As with many other industries, silk production is highly regulated. Weavers are required to include special borders in their fabrics indicating its quality. Also, production of some lesser fabrics (some cotton cloths and mixed fabrics involving cast-off remnants of the silk spinning process and other fibers) is left to the cities of the mainland.

Itinerary

Typical voyages to eastern ports like Constantinople or Alexandria take a little over a month, though the weather can make that time vary by a factor of two. The trip back usually takes about twice as long as the trip out. Such voyages are also punctuated by four or five stops along the way at Venetian possessions along the Balkans and the islands of the eastern Mediterranean.

Metalwork

One significant aspect of Venetian trade is shipping raw metal – mostly copper and copper alloys in the form of variously size ingots, wire, and even semi-finished items – to eastern ports, and reimporting finished goods. There is significant traffic in inlaid copper and bronze vessels, resold back into Europe. Lead moves around as well, but very little iron.

Sugar

During the Middle Ages and Renaissance, sugar is mostly a product of nations bordering on the Mediterranean, taking advantage of their hot weather and great exposure to sunlight. In particular, Venezia brings sugar in from its possessions in the Eastern Mediterranean, notably Cyprus. Sugar is traded in the form of "loaves," solid lumps that may be broken up and ground or grated as needed, like modern jaggery or piloncillo.

Glass

Venezia is a noted center of glass manufacture, though the glass industry was moved to the nearby island of Murano in the 1290s to reduce the risk of fire in the city proper. In the 1450s, Venetian glaziers figured out how to produce *cristallo* (transparent, colorless glass) in quantity.

The process uses quartz rocks (refined by repeated heating and cooling, then ground into powder) instead of mere sand, along with a number of other high-quality ingredients, like a flux made from carefully refined ashes of specific species of plants. Murano produces a variety of colored glasses as well, including gold-threaded and complex multicolored glass beads, and enameled glassware. Glass vessels are painted with pigmented compounds containing fluxes, giving the paints a lower melting point than the glass itself. Though highly honored, Venezia's glaziers are also prohibited from leaving the city in order to maintain the city's monopoly on its glass technology.

Books

During this period, Venezia is a major publishing hub, adopting the printing press early. Publishers sprang up through the Renaissance, mostly concentrated in the northern part of the city, not far from the Ghetto, or in the center, west of the Rialto. The number of publishers went from one in the 1460s to over 150 by 1500. Over 10,000 different titles were published there during the 15th century, more than in the rest of Europe combined. Nearly three times as many were published during the 16th.

Venetian publishers developed products for broader markets (see *Publishing*, p. 25) than the very expensive and rather narrow range of texts that had been hand-copied by monks up that point. Technical and commercial innovations occur as well, beyond the printing press and movable type.

- *Italic type:* Early publishing in Venezia saw the rise of italic type replacing blocky early types. Italic is narrower than its predecessors, so it allows books to be printed more efficiently, putting more words on less paper.
- *Small sizes:* While paper and book sizes are far from standardized, book-making techniques can divide them into rough size classes. Many early books are folios. They use a single large sheet of paper folded in half, making four sizable pages each. For example, the Gutenberg Bible, published in folio format, has pages about 12" by 18". The next size down is the quarto, with the paper folded twice and the edges trimmed, making eight pages. Publishers in Venezia popularized the octavo, with the paper folded three times to make 16 small pages per sheet. Octavos are far more portable than most medieval and early printed books, typically small enough to fit into a pouch or large pocket.
- *Minimalist contents:* Many early editions of classical literature contained not just the text, but commentary as well. Venetian publishers cut down on the extra pages by omitting the commentary.
- *Better illustrations:* This era sees the rise of copper-plate engraving. A flat metal plate is coated with wax, and an artist creates a drawing with a stylus by scratching wax off the surface. The plate is then treated with acids that etch grooves into the exposed lines on the plate where wax has been removed. The etched plate can then be used for printing, producing much finer detail than the previous standard of woodcut engraving, and on a more durable surface.

MONEY

The most common coins in Venezia are a series of small billon coins. The smallest is the *piccolo* (worth about $1), sometimes called a denaro. Twelve of these make a *soldo*. There are at various times other denominations, like half-soldi, two-soldi, and four-soldi coins. Through the early part of the Renaissance, these were accompanied by a single denomination of gold coin, the *ducat,* worth 124 soldi ($1,488). In the 16th century, the city started issuing multiple denominations (half-ducats, quarter-ducats, etc.). The coin came to be known as a *zecchino* or *sequin*.

Through the Middle Ages and into the early Renaissance, the city also issued a pure silver coin, the *grosso*, worth about 10 times as much as the piccolo. However, issues with the supply of silver led to the coin shrinking and vanishing by the 16th century, and silver coins are issued sporadically at best through the period in question here.

Venetian coins are notable for *not* displaying a picture of the head of state. While other states in Europe are happy to stamp their coins with the face of their king, duke, or other ruling aristocrat, Venezia doesn't want the doge to take on the airs of a monarch. With a few short-lived exceptions (such as the late-15th-century silver *tron* issued by a doge of the same name), Venetian coins bear figures of Christ, St. Mark, and other civic symbols.

THE MILITARY

Like other Italian cities of this period, Venezia mostly uses mercenaries for fighting on land. On the sea, however, it has a huge merchant fleet which doubles as a powerful navy.

ARMIES

Venezia keeps no native standing army. Instead, it relies on *condottieri,* mercenary troops, to fight its wars on land. By this period, cities engage senior officers who bring with them armies consisting of primarily of heavy cavalry, pikemen, and musketeers. They possibly have supporting troops, such as artillerists, combat engineers (improvised earthworks and diverted rivers are common in Renaissance warfare), and swordsmen for attacking fortified positions. Like most cities, with the notable exception of Firenze, Venezia prefers long-term relationships with its mercenary officers. This reduces the odds that a condottiero will turn on his employers to make a fast buck. See ***GURPS Hot Spots: Renaissance Florence,*** pp. 15-18, for more on Italian Renaissance armies.

Nevertheless, the business of dealing with mercenaries is a constant problem. Venezia's handling of a war with Milano in the 1420s is a case in point. In 1425, the duke of Milano had come to distrust one of his mercenary commanders, Francesco Bussone, usually called Carmagnola. So, Carmagnola went to Venezia to offer his services in a war everyone knew was coming. Between his in-depth knowledge of Milano's forces and his own demonstrable skill as a general, he was the right man for the job of Venezia's top general, and the Venetians hired him.

The conduct of the war, though, was not all that they might desire. Carmagnola won several notable battles, but rarely pressed his advantages in order to take and hold new ground. Moreover, his victories tended to produce large numbers of prisoners rather than large numbers of enemy casualties, and those prisoners were often released in short order. This was, unfortunately for those who hired mercenaries in Renaissance Italy, par for the course. Battles were won by maneuver, with one side often surrendering when their position became untenable. Despite casualties among the rank and file, nearly everybody worth speaking of survived to fight another day, and the never-ending, back-and-forth fighting ensured the mercenaries actually in the field would make a lot of money.

Despite his ability, Carmagnola played this game too openly. His endless excuses to refuse to engage in new campaigns unless granted more money and titles resulted in failure to advance very far, and a Venetian flotilla sent upriver into the terraferma (and manned by committed Venetian sailors rather than foreign mercenaries) was eventually defeated because Carmagnola was unwilling to advance in order to support them.

He also received letters from his old employer, the duke of Milano, who was feeling him out about hiring him back. Although Carmagnola regularly presented letters from Milano to the Venetians, when spies recovered the original, unedited messages between Milano and Carmagnola (in which the general appeared far more inclined to be bought off by the other side), the Venetians finally had enough. Once the most recent round of fighting with Milano had died down, Carmagnola was lured to Venezia on the pretext of planning another campaign. He was arrested, tried, and executed in 1432. As for the war with Milano, it continued in inconclusive fits and starts until the Peace of Lodi.

THE NAVY

On land, because of the condottiero system, Venezia is wealthy enough to be a force on par with other Italian cities. At sea, however, Venetian power is in a class of its own. Venetian ships are made at home, staffed by natives, and not sold to other countries. The total size of the Venetian fleet at any given time is highly variable, but the Arsenale is known to put out over 100 ships in a good year, most of which are smaller galleys. The city mustered over 100 warships for Lepanto. Also, something like 300 pure merchant ships sailed the Adriatic at any given time, suitable for transport but not fast or maneuverable enough for fighting.

Medieval and early Renaissance vessels can be divided roughly into two classes: round ships and galleys. Round ships, three or four times as long as they are wide, are round only by comparison to long, narrow galleys. They are relatively lightly crewed (perhaps one or two dozen men) and driven entirely by sail. They're slower, less maneuverable, and lack enough crew to put up a good fight if attacked. Thus, during most of this period (before the development of cannon suitable for naval engagements), they're suitable only for shipping, not fighting. However, they're quite good as bulk cargo ships and passenger vessels. Round ships vary in size, but a capacity of 500 tons isn't unusual, and very large ones can get up to 1,000 tons. Instead of cargo, they can carry hundreds of passengers.

Like most Mediterranean nations of its time, Venezia uses galleys for serious business in long-distance trade and in war. Galleys are long vessels propelled by both oars and sails, with a pedigree stretching back into classical antiquity. The combination of sails and large banks of oars provides speed and maneuverability, but at the cost of considerable manpower needs, and poor suitability for deep-sea sailing.

Adventure Seed: Demon Ship

A Venetian legend concerns a ship full of demons approaching the lagoon, bringing massive storms with it. The ship was driven back when a fisherman was ordered to take his boat out against the demons by three men who turned out to be some of Venezia's patron saints. When a new demonic vessel approaches, shipping is blocked, and waves threaten to swamp the city. The saints are nowhere to be seen, and it's up to a group of adventurers to take on the demons. Do they gather up relics of saints, hoping for a similar outcome, or do they go head to head against the Devil's navy?

The lightest Venetian galleys, frequently used for war, are about eight times as long as they are wide, with a deck about 40 yards long and six to seven yards across. (They're narrower at the waterline; substantial "balconies" run along the sides to hold the rowers.) A Venetian galley has a fighting platform in front and a high castle in back. The majority of the length of the ship is taken up by benches for the rowers, about 30 on each side. (With additional sailors to work the sails and three rudders, they have a total crew of about 70.) Rowers are typically arranged in sets of three, but unlike classical triremes, which had three vertically separated banks of oars, Venetian galleys have all of their rowers on a single level. Three rowers share a bench, but each uses a different oar; benches are slanted, with the rower sitting closest to the outside of the ship forward of the one sitting farthest inside. Oars are about 30' long and weight around 120 lbs., weighted on the rower's end for balance. The light galley also has two masts holding large triangular sails.

Light galleys move quickly and maneuver well with oars, but have poor performance with sails (for example, they can't tack against the wind) and are easily swamped in heavy seas. They're useful as warships for their agility and their ability to put men and weapons in place quickly, but they're not great cargo ships. Being single-decked ships, they have little room for cargo beyond a small castle in back and an aisle between the rowers' benches. They also sit low in the water. Additional weight just complicates the problems they already have.

For moving goods, Venezia builds larger vessels. Great galleys can carry from 150 to 250 tons of cargo, and are somewhat blunter in construction, being about six times as long as they are wide (rather than eight). They have a sizable compartment beneath the rowing deck and running the length of the ship. This space may be used for cargo or passengers, and may be subdivided into sections such as an armory, a kitchen, and cabins.

Larger size, including greater height, makes them somewhat more suitable for open-sea voyages. Venetian galleys make trips along Europe's Atlantic coast nearly as far as Germany. They're sometimes divided into size classes based on their intended destinations. For example, Constantinople galleys of the early 15th century carry 150 tons, while Flanders galleys, which must be bigger to withstand the heavier seas of the Atlantic, carry 200 tons.

Great galleys have crews of around 200 men, not counting any passengers who might be on board. Frequently, around 20 of them are designated bowmen or arquebusiers, depending on the dominant technology of the time, but the remainder of the crew is expected to fight as well should the ship enter combat.

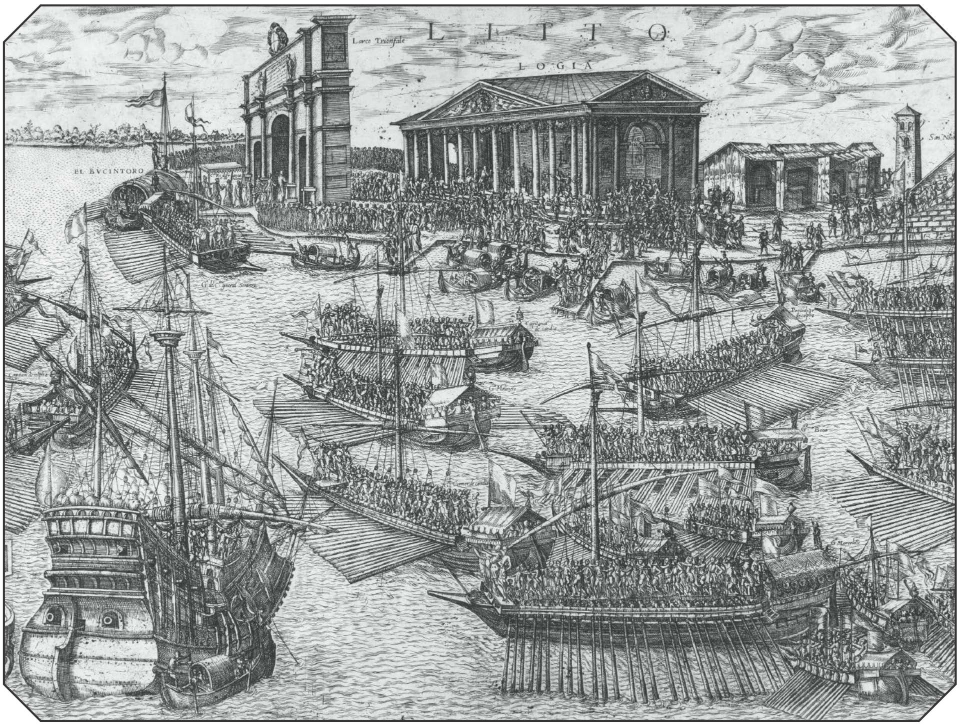
While the light galleys move well with oars and poorly under sail, the great galleys move better under sail and not as well when driven by oars, particularly when heavily laden with cargo. Rigged for war, a great galley does well enough. On mercantile expeditions, oars are rarely used as primary propulsion except to take a ship in and out of port. Still, not being at the mercy of wind and current during the critical stages of the beginning and end of a journey means that even clumsy galleys can shave days or weeks off of the time it might take a round ship to encounter the right conditions to bring it into port.

During the 16th century, the Venetians experimented with mounting cannon on their ships. Because the long banks of rowers provide no space to mount guns, the cannon were typically fixed to the front of the ship. During the second half of the century, the Venetians invented a new class of ship, the galleass. This was a ship with three masts, 15 or so oars on each side, and a separate deck with cannon. While it was relatively slow – with the oars providing the heavy ship with little but extra maneuverability – it created the naval broadside. It was sufficiently novel that a handful of galleasses were able to wreak havoc among the Turks, who thought they were ships which had simply fallen out of line at Lepanto.

For most of this period, the rowers are free men. In peacetime, serving on a galley is a business opportunity for the common person. In times of war, the Venetians prefer to rely on citizens with a stake in the outcome of the battle rather than disinterested or downright hostile prisoners and slaves. Service is further encouraged by medical care for veterans, pensions, and preferred employment. A brave sailor missing a limb or an eye might, for example, be granted a secure job somewhere in the Arsenale as a reward for service. This begins to change somewhat toward the end of the period, as the decline in the value of the city's trade makes crewing a ship less lucrative; prisoners pressed into service instead.

SHIPBUILDING

One of the major sources of Venetian naval power is the Arsenale, a large shipyard near the eastern end of the city. From a modest facility for building and repairing private ships, the Arsenale has grown into an assembly line-style institution for building and maintaining warships and their weapons, possibly the first such facility in the world. Employing as many as 12,000 people at a time and encompassing 15% of the city's area behind fortified walls, the Arsenale uses carefully planned processes to manufacture sails, rope, wooden structural members, and other necessities of shipbuilding. The facility turns them into finished ships with astonishing speed. Ships under construction float down stations along the Arsenale's canals where different parts of the construction process are performed. In this way, the Arsenale can turn out a large galley on a daily basis. The facility once even went from starting to build a ship's frame to sending out a finished ship in a single hour while an observing dignitary ate his lunch, though quality may have been lacking in that case. Part of the Arsenale's operation includes timekeeping. Bells in clock towers ring out hours when workers should report to the Arsenale, break for meals, and end the day.



In addition to ships, the Arsenale produces weapons and other items necessary for shipping and naval warfare. It was even a home to technical development. Over the centuries, workers at the Arsenale developed superior handguns, cannon, and the earliest European ships meant as platforms for artillery.

The *arsenalotti*, the craftspeople working at the Arsenale, are closely observed and regulated to prevent espionage and sabotage, but they also enjoy a number of privileges. To encourage loyalty, they are well-paid and typically given pride of place in civic ceremonies. They also provide a semi-ceremonial bodyguard for the doge.

CHAPTER FOUR

DAILY LIFE

In addition to being financially wealthy, Venezia is a city with a rich civic life. Nearly every resident belongs to at least one civic club, daily life is full of pageantry promoting a common Venetian identity, the food partakes of a broad range of traditions, and the city is bursting with art and intellectual activity. Even the homes of the poor are models of domestic architecture, bearing the arms of the aristocrats who built them.

SCUOLE

Outside of government, most of Venezia's important civic institutions have a distinctly religious character. Religious fraternities called *scuole* provide most social services. They're divided into *scuole grandi,* a handful of large organizations (six by the mid-16th century) run by cittadini, and *scuole piccole,* much smaller and more numerous groups (over 200 during this period) that represent a wide range of specific interests and consist mostly of common people. They might be formed by members devoted to a given saint, concerned about a particular affliction (for example, blindness), or of a common national origin (for example, German or Greek). A number of scuole piccole are associated with individual crafts and trades. Though guilds are theoretically legally separate from scuole (that is, a craft guild might perform its business separately from the business of a scuola dedicated to that craft), no guild is not associated with a scuola, and membership of a guild and its associated scuola is typically identical.

Depending on their size and wealth, scuole provide such social services as dowries for impoverished women, funeral expenses including burial and a Mass, hospitals (that is, free or inexpensive accommodations for travelers and the temporarily indigent, not necessarily medical facilities), even licenses to beg for alms in preferred locations. Scuole of a national character might offer diplomatic services for their members, like a modern consulate. Depending on their charters, the services may be given to members and their families, members of groups of interest, or anyone in need. Scuole are associated with churches, to which they often contribute lavishly, but the wealthier ones maintain separate headquarters, which are typically exceptionally well decorated.

Compagnie Delle Calze

Not all civic organizations are as long-standing or as serious as the scuole. The city also has *compagnie delle calze*, bands of fashionable young aristocrats who wear distinctive *calze*, or stockings. Shapely legs are, during this period, considered a particularly important feature of male beauty, so tight-fitting, colorful legwear are the muscle shirt of the day. Compagnie are approved by the civic government for a period of a year or so at a time, during which they sponsor and participate in a variety of public spectacles, from processions to plays to semi-private receptions for foreign dignitaries. They might be thought of as fraternities of Venezia's wealthiest young men which use civic duty as an excuse for showing off.

RELIGION

Venezia is as staunchly Catholic as any city in Italy. There's a church for about every 100 to 200 people. However, Venetians have a saying that they are Venetians first, Christians second. The government makes sure it retains as much local control over religious matters as possible in the Catholic context, sometimes leading to clashes with the Papacy. For example, in the 1500s, Venezia was, at least for a while, home to a number of Protestants, though they eventually had to flee north to Germany. When a papal decree was issued forbidding Christians from importing alum (an important industrial material) from the Ottoman Turks on the grounds that it enriched infidels, the Venetians simply ignored it. The Venetians happened to know that the Papacy owned the largest alum mine in Europe, managed by their Medici bankers, and would profit tremendously from reduced imports, so they had all the more reason not to take the religious justification particularly seriously.

The city is tolerant of religious preferences of residents of foreign origin, so long as they keep it to themselves. For example, the Scuola di St. Georgio maintains a Greek Orthodox church, while resident Germans and English were eventually permitted to hold Lutheran and Anglican services. Some Muslims are resident, if only as slaves and servants imported from the East and as visiting merchants and diplomats.

They are allowed to pray as they see fit and otherwise follow their religion, though Venezia doesn't have a mosque.

Venezia has an ambivalent relationship with Jews. Christendom has a long history of anti-Semitism limiting Jewish access to and residence in many cities. However, a Jewish presence provides a workaround to long-standing laws against Christians loaning money to one another at interest, a vital need in the rapidly expanding economy of the Renaissance. Jewish doctors also have a reputation for superior medical skills and are in great demand. Thus, through the early Renaissance, Venezia grudgingly allowed limited Jewish residence in the city. Jews were prohibited from staying in the city for more than a few months, and all but doctors were required to identify themselves by wearing a distinctive yellow hat.

In 1512, Jewish residence in Venezia was regularized by the assignment of a small neighborhood in the northern part of the city, the Ghetto Nuovo, in return for additional tax payments, retention of Christian watchmen ensuring that the Jews kept to a curfew in their sealed quarter, and the establishment of pawnbroking services on attractive terms for the benefit of the poor. Soon, the city had Jewish residents from across Europe and the Mediterranean: Germanic Jews primarily involved in banking, Levantine Jews keeping trading contacts in the Ottoman empire, and Jews of Spanish descent looking for a new home after fleeing forced conversion. The city eventually became a major center of Jewish scholarship, hosting a notable Hebrew publishing industry.

Jews are welcome to convert to Christianity, but an official eye is kept on them for signs of apostasy. Something as minor as eating kosher food can get a former Jew hauled into court on serious criminal charges.

Adventure Seed: Buffianna, L'ammazzavampiri

Venetian convents are, in a very real way, secret societies. They're communities that are almost completely closed off from the outside world and operate under their own supervision. It only stands to reason, then, that they use their low profile to train generations of secret warriors to fight monsters. Libraries of religious institutions are ideal repositories of information about how to defeat unholy creatures, and young women can spend all their time training for combat, freed of domestic responsibilities and the demands of society. Of course, their mission to rid the world of, or at least defend the city from, supernatural threats is greatly complicated by the fact that they can't be *seen* doing so.

CONVENTS

Marriage is an institution in some crisis, at least among the ruling class. Since sons carry membership in their class with them, they are a vital political commodity and are married off only with greatest care. This in turn has led to inflation in the price of a suitable dowry for a bride to bring with her, so even families which can find appropriate political matches for their daughters often can't afford to have them all marry. By one estimate, as many of half of Venezia's upper-class adults never marry. Many of these women end up cloistered in the city's three dozen or so convents, whether they want to go or not (and, despite a certain cultural appeal, many did not). Perhaps three-quarters of the inmates of the city's convents are members of the patrician class.

The maintenance of convents serves the dual purpose of furnishing an honorable occupation for women who would otherwise have difficulty finding an acceptable social role and standing as a symbol of Venezia's supposed piety. Convents provide a very narrow scope for women's self-determination. Many are answerable only to the pope himself; priests visit to celebrate Mass and hear confessions, but have no say in the convent's policies or operations. Still, even if the dominion of men doesn't follow women into the convents, class distinctions do. The daughters of the wealthy are given substantial endowments (though nowhere near the staggering magnitude of a dowry) and live lives of relative leisure, while women of the lower classes, who can't contribute nearly as much to the convent's financial upkeep, are typically assigned menial tasks.

With a few exceptions at most convents, nuns are cloistered; that is, they can't leave their convents, and visitors, with exceptions for certain clergy and necessary craftspeople, can't enter the spaces the nuns inhabit. However, convents usually have a large parlor where outsiders can come and converse with the sisters, separated by windows and barred gates. These parlors are popular social venues. In theory, only relatives of inmates can visit, but in practice, this isn't a notable restriction for patricians. Most upper-class Venetians can count at least one relative among the inmates at any given convent. In any event, such regulations are widely ignored. The sisters, eager for contact with the outside, also find ways to encourage visitors. Many have become notable for their delicious baked goods – distributed to visitors and justified on grounds of charity, despite what some officials regard as an alarming cost of the ingredients.

ART

Venetian painters are enthusiastic users of and innovators with oil-based paints, and frequently work on canvas and other portable media rather than make fresco paintings directly on walls. This is perhaps because of the humid Venetian climate. Frequently damp walls aren't a good place to apply the water-based colors widely used elsewhere, and they're not suitable for oils either. Venezia's great painters, like Tintoretto and Titian, are noted for their work with color and light. They are also known for a distinctive technique of starting by applying paint to the canvas and not doing a preliminary charcoal sketch on the canvas and filling in with paint later.

Venezia is a very musical city. Nearly every home has at least one musical instrument, and excellent composers are rife during this period, particularly in the 16th century.

Popular instruments include violins and similar string instruments, flutes and recorders, reed instruments, and horns. Keyboard instruments are still relatively expensive and therefore rare. Private concerts are a common occurrence. Venetian ecclesiastical choral music, notably compositions for opposing choirs in the San Marco cathedral, is among the most remarkable and innovative of the period.

Pets

Venetians, like many other people, keep pets. Dogs and cats are common. Dogs became more popular in later years and were common in art as symbols of loyalty. Large dogs are particularly popular among the nobility, though they are largely kept at villas on the terraferma, where they can be used for hunting. Songbirds, whose small cages are easy to keep in Venezia's tiny living spaces, are also quite popular.

COATS OF ARMS

Coats of arms, after the style of chivalric devices from the north, have become popular, but they follow few of the rules of the emblems used by feudal lords. In Venezia and its territories, any family can have a badge identifying itself, not just noble ones. The badges are rarely if ever quartered and combined with other coats.

CLOTHING

Venetians have a reputation as snappy dressers. Indeed, even members of the middle and lower classes can be found wearing clothing clearly beyond their means. This is made possible by a thriving clothing rental industry. Ordinary citizens often appear marvelously dressed for grand processions and other public ceremonies, wearing garments they only have for the day.

Typical man's costume includes a long undershirt, doublet (a jacket or vest made from two layers of fabric), and hose. Sleeves are attached to the torso of the doublet by laces, allowing the wearer to "balloon" the material of the undershirt out through the gaps at the shoulders and create a contrast of colors. Venezia is also at the leading edge of a change in the design of hose. Instead of a pair of tight hose from toes to waist, hose in Venezia are, like doublets, composed of multiple parts that are laced together. The upper part resembles a pair of baggy shorts tied to the doublet at the waist. Over the course of the Renaissance, these come to extend down to the knees. The tight lower part comes more and more to resemble modern socks. Different hose in contrasting colors and patterns are popular. Over this basic costume, men may wear capes (either around the shoulders or fastened above one shoulder but going under the other arm) and robes.

Women's basic costume likewise has a layered structure, with an under-dress and at least one gown over that, with gaps and low cuts revealing lower layers. Fancier outfits involve multiple layers of gowns. Women frequently go veiled in public. Unmarried women tend to wear white or pale-colored veils, while married women and widows usually wear black. These veils are typically large, loosely woven pieces of fabric resembling a shawl, thrown over the head and sometimes extending well down the back and sides, but possibly leaving the bottom of the face bare.

Well-dressed women wear platform shoes to make them appear taller. Some make them appear *much* taller, acting as something between platform shoes and stilts. One surviving pair lifts their wearer over 18". Such extreme footwear is typically hidden under the wearer's long skirts.

Early in the period, men tend to wear their hair long, up to shoulder length and often with bangs or in a sort of angled bowl cut to keep hair out of the eyes and off the face. Hair becomes shorter through the period, with very short cuts common by the middle of the 16th century. Beards become more common starting around the same time. Women wear their hair long throughout, but display it more later in the period. Caps and bag-like cauls give way to smaller cauls, nets, and headdresses that allow hair to flow freely.

One other garment is all but unique to Venezia: the mask. While their origin may lie in elaborate Carnival celebrations, masks are commonly worn for nearly half the year by this period (Christmas to Lent, and parts of late spring and early summer) and may be found from time to time even out of season. These masks are far less elaborate than modern ones, usually limited to a piece of cloth covering half the face or less, though some ornate, stylized shapes are made from stiffened paper, fabric, or leather. Men typically wear white masks, while women wear black ones. They provide a bit of anonymity and egalitarianism in a city known for a rigid class structure, and etiquette demands that even if the identity of a mask wearer is obvious, no one should admit to recognizing him. Various laws prohibit masked people from entering convents, gambling, and so on, but they're about as effective as the city's other sumptuary laws (see p. 16).

THE DEMIMONDE

Many foreign men comment at great length on the city's courtesans, of whom there are thousands. As with everything else in the city, there are class distinctions. In addition to lower-class prostitutes, the upper classes have the *cortigiana onesta*, or honest courtesan. The cortigiane oneste provide not just sex, but companionship and educated conversation. They are known for their elaborate dress, rivaling that of noblewomen, and are sometimes treated as minor celebrities.

Indeed, they're as fashion-forward as women of the patrician class, though there are notable differences in dress. For example, while courtesans may wear veils just like anyone else, they may also identify themselves by having bare breasts supported by a corset.

Though not blind to the chastity-related moral issues, the government tolerates prostitution for two reasons. One is that, given their low incidence of marriage, having ready female companionship for all of those unmarried upper-class men without dishonoring the unmarried upper-class women – most of whom are locked away in convents anyway – is believed to prevent homosexuality. A more practical consideration is that Venezia's courtesans make a lot of money, and they are a significant source of tax revenue. Oddly, courtesans are frequent visitors at convents, where the inmates receive them warmly. They and the nuns apparently have a great deal to talk about.

Naturally, the grudging allowance of prostitution as a means of preventing same-sex relations between men is of limited effectiveness because same-sex relations are exactly what some men want. Homosexuality is technically illegal, as it is through much of Christendom. Indeed, in the 1400s, there was some debate about reducing the punishment for sodomy from burning at the stake to decapitation followed by burning.

However, enforcement is beyond lax. Indeed, Pietro Aretino (a noted 16th-century poet, satirist, and gossip-monger) fled to Venezia from Roma so that he could live safely, with his bisexuality an open secret in his social circle of nobility and artists. At the beginning of the Quattrocento, the "lords of the night," a council charged with rooting out sodomy, were judged too zealous and disbanded, with their functions taken over by the Council of Ten. The Council usually has better things to do with its time than to enforce moral laws, and it has a definite interest in *not* prosecuting the wealthy and powerful, whom the lords of the night often pursued. Such prosecutions are now rare, and potential targets usually have sufficient advance warning that they have time to flee the city. Venezia has, therefore, something of an underground gay subculture centered on certain taverns, barbers, and pastry shops.

Food

The staples of the poor are bread and a porridge made from ground grain or beans. It resembles modern polenta, but is usually made from at least one of broad beans, chickpeas, farro, millet, or spelt. Cheese, both recognizable versions of asiago produced locally and other cheeses imported from Venezia's colonies, is a common source of protein, as are eggs (produced by domestic chickens found in many households) and nuts (such as almonds). Herbs are widely used for flavoring. Many ingredients available to the poor are often combined in the form of savory pies. Fruit is very common and of high quality.

Wealthier people, of course, eat a lot more meat. Pork and lamb are preferred, but chicken and rabbit, which can be raised in a small enclosure in a kitchen garden, are more common; game is often consumed in the countryside, though less so in the city. Many meat dishes involve multiple treatments, such as boiling and then roasting or frying. One common dish, for example, involves chicken that is first poached, then shredded and cooked with almond milk and bread as a thickener. Though pasta is available, it's not cheap since it requires expensive hard wheat, and it isn't nearly as popular in Venezia as it is becoming elsewhere in Italy. Instead, rice, though a relatively rare and expensive grain, is preferred. Risotto is a popular dish.

Unsurprisingly for a maritime power completely surrounded by water, seafood is often consumed in Venezia by all classes. This includes not just a variety of saltwater and freshwater fish, but also mussels, clams, shrimp, octopus, squid, and so on. Waterfowl such as herons and geese are a common form of poultry.

With the city's connections to the East, Venetian cooks have unusually good access to spices, so ginger, cinnamon, and the like are relatively popular. Since the city controls Cyprus, it has sufficient imports of sugar from the cane fields there. It's quite common to mix sweet and savory flavors, like finishing a savory dish with a sprinkling of sugar or garnishing it with marzipan, often colored and sculpted.

Although wine is a major trade item, and wines from all over travel through the city, Venezia and its environs are terrible places to grow grapes. The high humidity means lots of problems with fungal infections. The one vine which does do well – the Dorona – produces both large green grapes and a prized golden-colored wine which is enjoyed by the rich. It is grown mostly on surrounding islands, but a few gardens within the city grow it as well.

With so many of its residents involved in long-distance trade, and the city's advantageous position on trade routes, Venetians can develop exotic tastes. The output of Venezia's publishers includes cookbooks containing not just native dishes, but some in Moorish, Arab, and German styles. The Ghetto provides an opportunity to try foods made in the kosher tradition, though converts from Judaism are well-advised to stay away from their old cuisine to avoid persecution.

Near the very end of the period in question here, a variety of new foods begin to appear in Italy. Most of them are New World crops. Notably, maize, first brought to Europe by Columbus at the end of the 15th century, starts to be grown as an economic crop rather than a curiosity in private gardens, though it doesn't really start to take off for another 50 to 100 years. Other crops, like tomatoes and potatoes, also start to creep in, though during this period, they're curiosities and novelties, not common foods (certain well-known Italian dishes like caprese and gnocchi become theoretically possible at this time). The other notable introduction is coffee, which starts to be imported from the Ottoman Empire to Venezia late in the 16th century.

LIFE OF THE MIND

Venezia has no university. It exercises considerable control over the nearby University of Padua, noted for its faculties in law and medicine, but has no institutions of higher learning of its own. Nevertheless, it is one of the intellectual and artistic capitals of Europe. Many of the great artists and creative minds of the period at least passed through the city at some time or another: Albrecht Durer, El Greco, Leonardo da Vinci, Michelangelo, and many Greek scholars fleeing Constantinople.

Most schooling is private. The wealthy hire private tutors for their children, while the somewhat less wealthy often club together to hire teachers to instruct groups of their children at once. Churches and scuole sometimes offer rudimentary education to the poor.

This period sees a shift in the primary subject matter of a complete education. Initially, Venetian students tended to have a purely practical education. Merchants need at the very least basic literacy and math skills. These could be expanded on somewhat with things like a modicum of legal training and additional languages, the better to draw up contracts and win over customers. This changed through the Renaissance, as the classical trivium (grammar, logic, and rhetoric) and quadrivium (arithmetic, astronomy, geometry, and music) were revived as part of the Renaissance's return to classical models. Additionally, increasing quantities of classical literature were taught.

This period also sees the rise of some kinds of specialized education, such as the beginning of systematic education for the deaf. Though usually done in monasteries, where vows of silence had already led to the creation of forms of sign language, one of the earliest secular thinkers on education for the deaf was a polymath who graduated from Padua.

Venetian mathematicians made significant advances, such as calculations for ballistics based on parabolas. Before this period, most people believed that missiles went in a straight line until they ran out of momentum and then dropped to the ground. Mathematicians in Venezia's orbit also formulated elementary descriptions of probability.

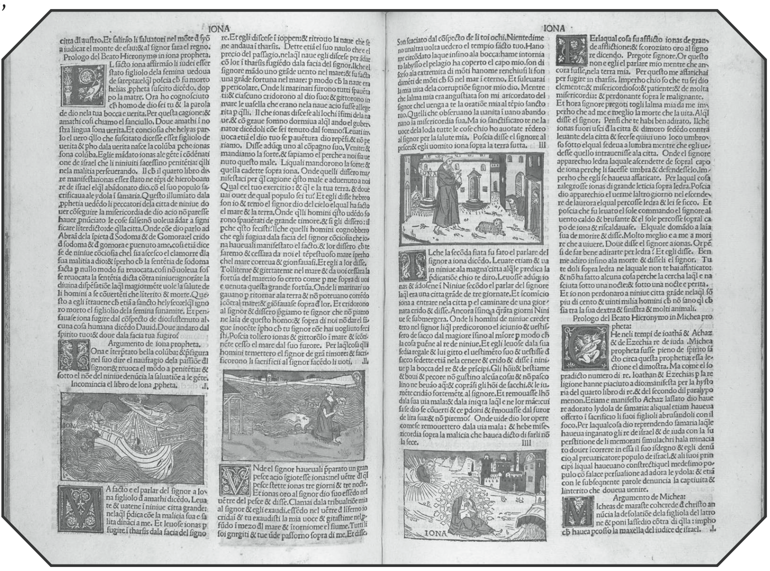
One unusual social phenomenon of the period – an outgrowth of public scholarly disputes of the Middle Ages, with fame, honor, and a substantial dinner at stake – is a series of duels between mathematicians. Mathematics is becoming more sophisticated during this period, with mathematicians making new discoveries or learning about techniques from increasingly available international sources. Mathematicians demonstrate their skills by solving problems posed by others.

PUBLISHING

While Venetian publishers started offering books largely in Latin, Italian dominates Venetian publishing for most of this period. But books in any major European language can be found. In the early 16th century, there was even a short-lived industry of printing Qurans for the Ottoman market, though the Turks eventually prohibited the sale of Qurans printed by non-Muslims. Publishers' moves in the direction of small, cheap books soon reach their logical conclusion in broadsheets, inexpensively produced pamphlets which can be sold for pennies. These might contain anything from popular ballad lyrics to pornography to religious instruction. They also include Europe's first newspaper, the monthly *gazeta de la novita*.

Publishing in Venezia even contains concepts resembling modern copyright and public domain. Publishers may be granted exclusive rights to publish specific new works, and booksellers may be granted exclusive rights to import new books not published in Venezia. But unlike modern copyrights, it's a "use it or lose it" proposition. If a publisher doesn't publish a book he has the exclusive rights to, he may lose those rights.

By the last quarter of the 16th century, Venezia's publishing industry went into a sharp decline. In addition to an economic downturn, the rise of publishing elsewhere ate sharply into the city's export market. By 1600, an explosion of printers through Europe had reduced Venezia's printing market from continental domination to a nearly local business.



LANGUAGE

Venetians speak Italian, of course, but a single "standard" dialect has so far not evolved from the many spoken on the Italian peninsula. The Tuscan dialect spoken in and around Firenze has yet to become the dominant form of the language. Venetian Italian is certainly mutually comprehensible with neighboring dialects, but it retains a particular accent. The letter Z, usually pronounced as a zh, is relatively common in Venetian Italian, where other dialects might use a G or J. For example, the name Giorgio was sometimes spelled Zorzo.

There are also peculiarities of usage. Where other wealthy, powerful Italians might build a *palazzo*, Venetian patricians would build a mere *casa* (sometimes abbreviated *ca'*). Other local terms are special names for Venezia's peculiar thoroughfares, including *calle* for street; *ramo* for a dead-end alley branching off a calle; and *rio* for canal.

WOMEN IN PUBLIC LIFE

The public roles of women in Venezia are, at least nominally, rather restricted. However, they go far beyond the stereotypical roles of virgins (*Convents,* p. 22) and whores (*The Demimonde,* pp. 23-24).

Class is, as with so much else in Venezia, a deciding factor. Many social restrictions fall most heavily on women of the patrician class, who are expected to be exemplars of propriety. These women are most likely to go about veiled and to have fathers or husbands who could insist on their not leaving the house without some kind of escort (of course, it's a rare member of the upper class who would consider going out without at least a servant or two anyway). However, patrician women wield considerable power within their households. The substantial dowry a noblewoman brings with her is in many ways still hers, not something her husband controls, so she has a great deal of say in how it is used in business, for political ends, or in any other way. Women of the upper classes are the people who negotiate alliances between noble families. They, ultimately, decide who marries whom, and how much money moves around when they do. They also have a considerable say in inheritance. They, in essence, control the long-term destinies of families.

Women of the other classes typically operate under looser restrictions. Like their patrician sisters, they might be excluded from political office and trading expeditions, but their behavior and appearance isn't policed as vigorously. They are an active part of their household's enterprise and public life, with few if any overt restrictions on their dress and movement. They act as business partners to their spouses if married or the rest of their family if not. A number of women are craftspeople in their own right. The Arsenale employs hundreds of women, mostly dealing with the production of sails. Some very skillful women artists (notably Marietta Robusti, the eldest child of the noted painter Tintoretto) appear during this period.

One aspect of this is that while education isn't emphasized as something women need, it is nevertheless something available to a number of them. Though separated in many ways from male academic society, women carry on intellectual pursuits in parallel. The women of the middle-class cittadini are the most likely to be engaged in such activities. They don't carry the weight of social expectations that are laid on patrician women, but they're more likely to be wealthy enough to afford extensive instruction. Foreigners also don't carry the same expectations. For example, the first Greek printing press in Venezia was set up by a woman, Anna Notaras, daughter of the last Byzantine chief admiral.

Another peculiar class-based distinction among women concerns wills. Patrician men often write wills encouraging their wives not to remarry after they are gone. This is seen as important to keep together a family fortune. In poorer families, women are often encouraged to remarry, with husbands understanding the difficulty of a widow surviving on her own.

ARCHITECTURE

Broadly speaking, Venezia's architecture would not be unfamiliar in any other Mediterranean city of the period. Most buildings are multi-storied and built around courtyards for light, privacy, and ventilation. The courtyard might include a small garden for herbs and vegetables, and possibly a chicken coop or rabbit hutch. However, there are many local adaptations. For example, brick and stone are the main materials to the exclusion of dried earth, even in poor homes. In Venezia's damp climate, hard earth is a completely unsuitable material. Though wood is used, it's not as common as it is elsewhere.

A few distinctive styles exist in Venetian architecture. The earliest is Byzantine, using round arches, cloverleaf-like crosses as a decorative motif, and, in churches, positioning domes over square areas. The San Marco basilica is in this style. The style was popular during the early Middle Ages, and sees a revival during the Renaissance. During the later Middle Ages, Gothic architecture became more popular, with pointed and foliate arches and vaults. However, Venezia doesn't host the soaring cathedrals of other great European cities; the soft ground under the city won't support the weight of, say, Firenze's Duomo. Finally, with the rise of humanism and a revival of ancient learning and culture, classical styles of architecture enjoy a vogue during the Renaissance, using relatively unadorned pillars and round arches. However, classically styled buildings in Venezia are all brand-new, since the city wasn't founded until after the end of antiquity.

Because real estate is at a premium in the densely packed city, buildings in Venezia can get quite tall relative to other cities of the age. Most have at least three very tall stories, and it's not uncommon to see buildings four or five stories tall. Venetian buildings frequently have mezzanines, shorter and sometimes partial stories like a loft built in between two main floors. Irregularly shaped lots also mean that, while a home might present a symmetrical façade to the street, the structure behind the façade may fit the area, with odd extensions or rooms with peculiar angles.

Places to Stay

For very short-term visitors, Venezia has an ample supply of inns. For longer-term residents, the city also has an active real estate rental market. Something like half of the patrician class lives in buildings they don't own, and the proportion is significantly higher for the lower classes. Being a visitor isn't necessarily an obstacle to finding a rental, though some groups planning a very long-term stay may go ahead and buy or build on a purchased lot. Both German and Turkish merchants have combined warehouses and residences in the city.

A typical arrangement in a larger home is to have a broad space called a *portego* running down the spine of the building like a wide hallway. The portego is used for the household's "public" events, like parties and private concerts. Ideally, the portego would have rooms along it on either side, but, again, irregularly shaped lots may disturb the pattern, and many homes have rooms only on one side. The portego may terminate in a large *sala,* a windowed room facing the outside.

In addition to a main entrance along a sidewalk, buildings facing a canal may have a direct entrance from the water, such as a broad set of steps leading to a colonnade and entrance. Very few people live on ground floors. Those are usually given over to shops, warehouses, and storage rooms. Living spaces are upstairs.

While a number of wealthy Venetians might have a country villa somewhere on the terraferma, most are more likely to have a *casino* (literally, "small house") in the city itself or on one of the surrounding islands. Rather than a residence or place of business, the casino is a place for gatherings and recreation. In addition to large, open rooms, most have an enclosed garden for outdoor activities. Ideally, they are used for literary and philosophical events and family gatherings, but over time, they become associated with less reputable activities, notably gambling.

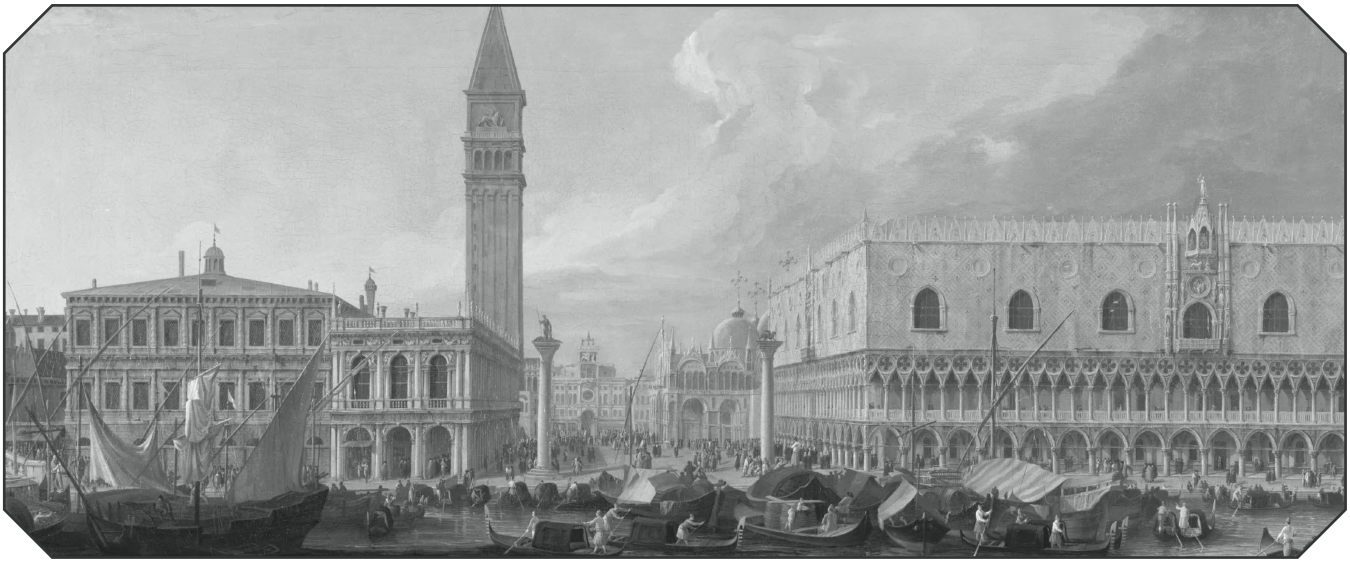
The homes of the poor are far less elaborate. They live in what would be recognized as townhouses today. A typical home for the lower and middle classes consists of a pair of rooms per floor with windows on opposite sides. The living space is most often two or three floors of paired rooms, sometimes with shops or small industrial establishments on the ground floor. Series of these tall, narrow homes are built together as a single structure, with the whole group sometimes presenting a unified façade like that of a larger ca'. Indeed, the wealthy sometimes build housing complexes on this model, wrapping a few rows of apartments around a courtyard, decorating them with altars and coats of arms, and renting them for below-market rates as a charitable enterprise, giving the poor homes with a more impressive appearance (outwardly, anyway) than they might usually afford.

On the Block

The map on p. 28 illustrates some typical aspects of Venetian architecture.

The structure at the bottom is a substantial ca', probably with a wealthy owner. A portego runs left to right with a doorway facing a calle. In addition to two stairways inside the portego, there's an external stairway on the inside of the courtyard, and there are steps up from the canal. The ca' likely has a somewhat different arrangement on upper stories, with a sala over the main door and other rooms to either side.

The structure in the upper part of the map is part of a complex for poorer people, composed of a good many small homes, two or three stories tall, around a private courtyard and common well.

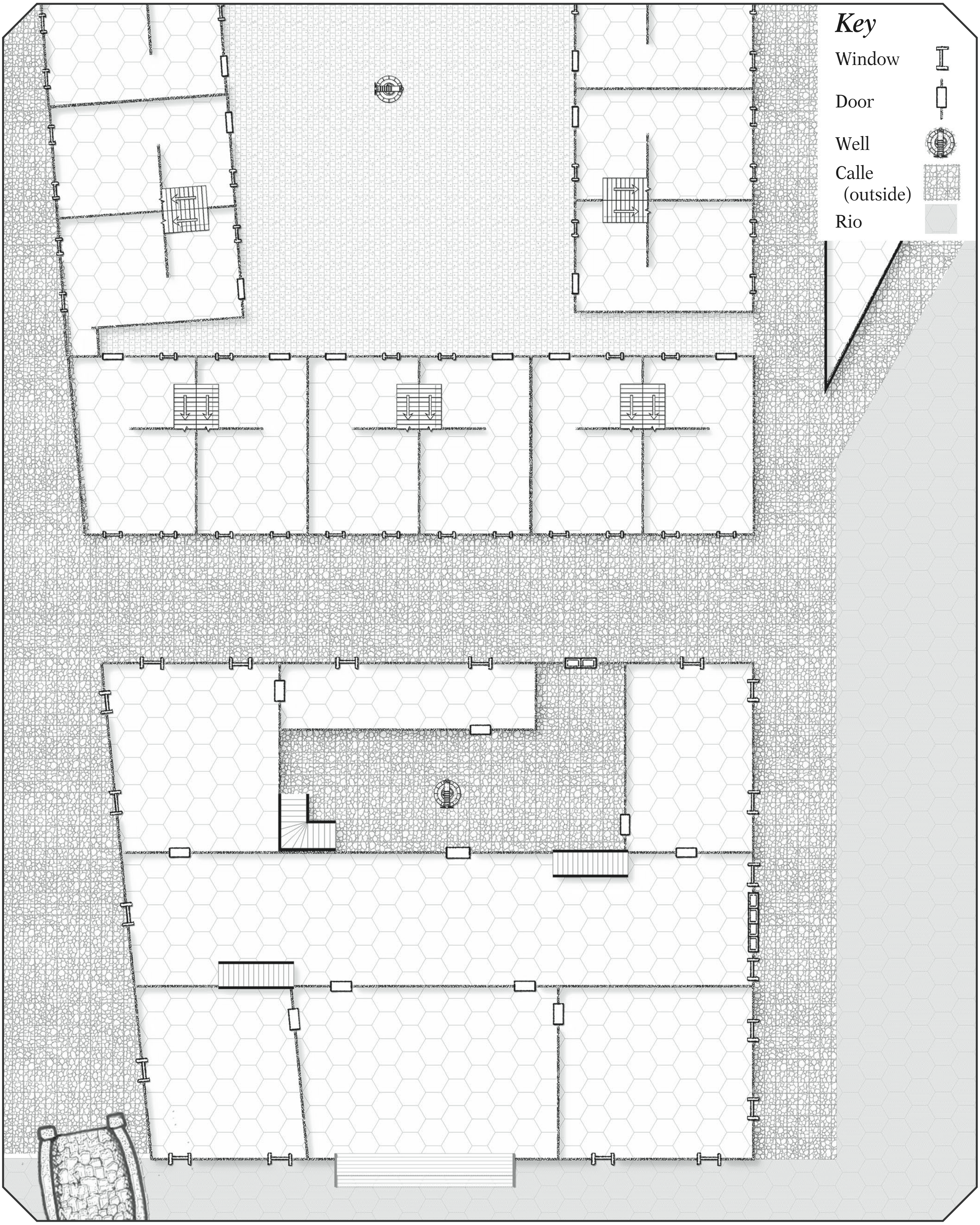


Recreations

Wealthy and well-connected, the Venetians have many, many ways of amusing themselves.

Public Entertainment

With its narrow streets, prohibitions on draft animals, and republican ideology, Venezia doesn't see the kinds of horse racing that many other Italian cities do, nor the chivalric tournaments of the north, but it isn't without sporting events. Mock combats known as *guerra di canne* (stick wars) are staged with wooden weapons and, sometimes, armored combatants, like the SCA but with more bruises and less anachronism. The objectives vary, but might involve driving opponents from a bridge or taking (or keeping) a small mock castle.


Key
Window
Door
Well
Calle (outside)
Rio

FLOOR PLANS OF VENETIAN HOMES

Scale: 1 hex = 1 yard. For more details, see *On the Block,* p. 27. *Top:* Complex of small homes for less-wealthy people, centered on a common courtyard and well. *Bottom:* Single-family *casa.*

Mock naval battles are sometimes staged as well. While, like modern combat sports, the goal is simply to drive away or exhaust the enemy, injuries are inevitable. Venetians also play a variant of the popular Italian game of *calcio,* a brutal sport resembling a cross between modern rugby and soccer. Apart from these team sports, boxing is also popular. Venetians prefer punching to grappling and don't enjoy wrestling.

Factionalism is a factor in most of these contests. Sides are typically drawn from different and often opposed neighborhoods, guilds, or other organizations. Participants fight in large part for the glory of their group defeating a rival, and particularly heated contests can rouse loyalist spectators to violence themselves. Members of the upper classes rarely participate. As neutral parties, they are sometimes instrumental in calming the crowds that become too rowdy.

Not all of Venezia's sports are so bloody, though. Less violent games include ball games resembling tennis or handball. Implements such as paddles and scoops are used to catch or hit back a ball struck or thrown by an opponent.

Far gentler public spectacles also occur. Countless processions and festivals throughout the year celebrate civic unity. These include events such as parading noted saints' relics around and the annual marriage to the Adriatic, still celebrated today with a flotilla of boats making their way to the Lido. Various civic groups (the arsenalotti, members of different scuole, and so on) have specific duties and places of honor in different ceremonies. Street entertainers – like jugglers, sleight-of-hand magicians, and musicians – typically accompany these civic events. (Venetians are smart enough to know that making a handkerchief seem to vanish doesn't put one in league with the Devil.) Vendors sell foods like sweet dumplings and roasted chestnuts. The largest of these festivals is Carnival, which saw notable celebration well back into the Middle Ages and is still lavishly celebrated today (though only after a long hiatus starting with the city's conquest by the French). The season of Carnival runs from around Christmas to Lent.

Weddings are typically private affairs. Even so, celebrations around marriages of very wealthy families can spill out into public celebrations.

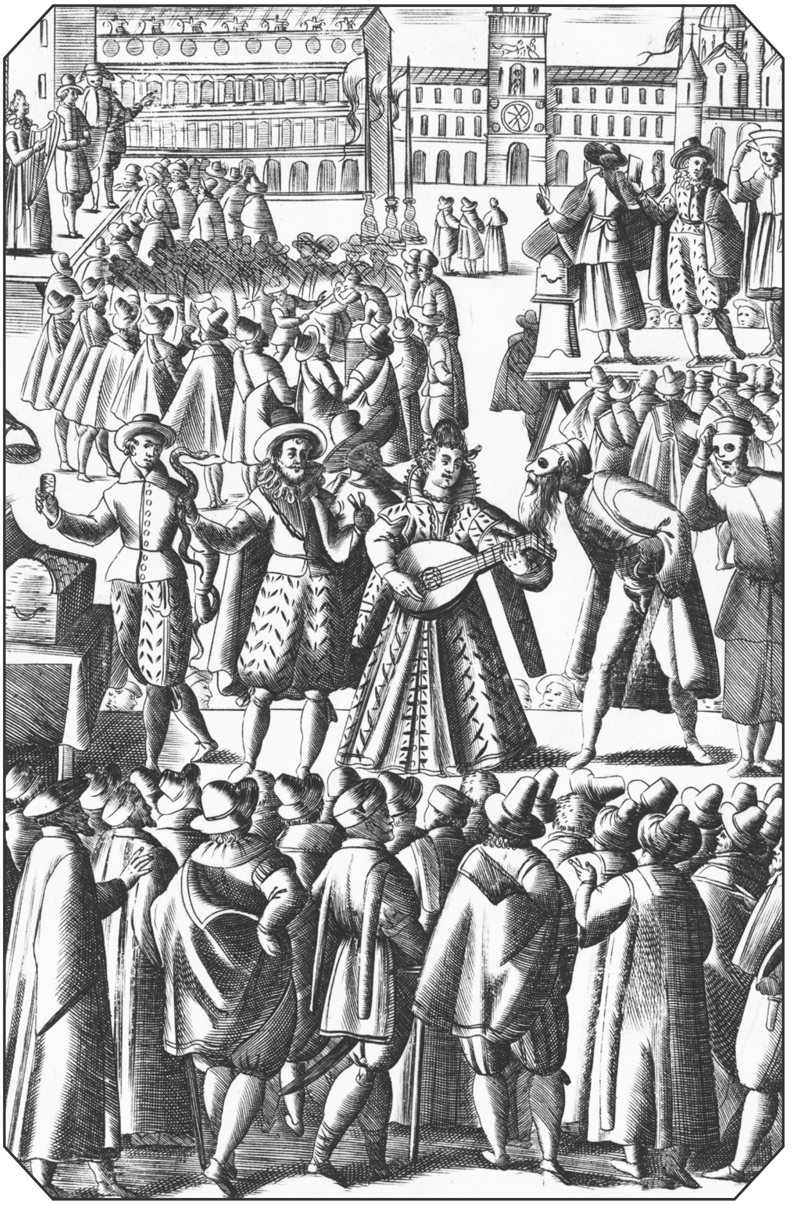
Theater also enjoys a revival during this period. Initially, plays are usually performed outdoors. Later in the 16th century, Venezia sees the first construction of a purpose-built theater in Europe since the fall of the Roman Empire. It is soon followed by others, sparking a boom of theater building throughout Italy.

Private Diversions

Perhaps as a consequence of a relative lack of large open spaces, Venetians have a wide range of private amusements for the home beyond near-universal recreations like dances, feasts, gambling games, and music recitals. Recognizable variants of chess and checkers are played, and wealthy Venetians sometimes have very expensive sets of pieces made from stone and exotic woods.

By the Renaissance, cards have become popular as a game as well as a device for divination. For most of the period, cards are still produced by hand and therefore quite expensive, though printed cards do eventually become available, reducing the price significantly. Venezia has import restrictions on playing cards to protect the local card-making industry.

The wealthy also enjoy a genre of game books. Readers flip back and forth between passages based on answers to questions, solutions to puzzles, or the results of dice rolls (frequently 3d6; ***GURPS*** has a longer pedigree than one might imagine) or random selections of playing cards. Many of these games are presented as fortune-telling or advice-giving. For example, they frequently use astrological symbolism, and purport to teach useful lessons on various topics such as how to find love or construct a building, but their structure resembles modern choose-your-own-adventure books in many ways.



CHAPTER FIVE

CAMPAIGNS

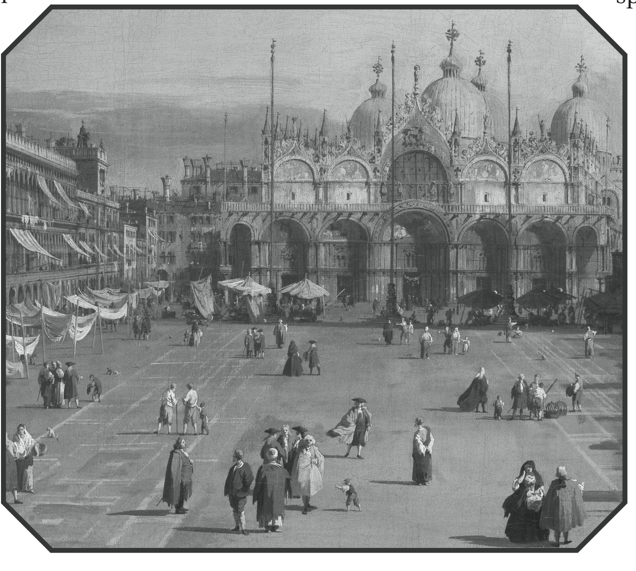
Venezia is in many ways the most modern of ancient cities. It has strong institutions where officials move through offices for limited terms while depending on a professional civil service. Leaders are chosen by consensus rather than by birth. The leadership is mostly concerned with the economic well-being of the polity, and administrations are entirely willing to ignore national and ideological lines in order to make a profit. It is also a center of manufacturing and technological development in everything from national defense (the Arsenale and its workers) to intellectual and scientific development (for example, its printing industry). Players could find the city a bit *too* modern for their tastes, though the music, architecture, and long civic processions can take the edge off of that.

VENEZIA AS HOME

If the city is the center and setting of a campaign, any sort of urban campaign can find a natural home there: career criminals (though there's no hint of *organized* crime), political intrigue, criminal investigation by one of the city's several police organizations (with accompanying turf wars with other police organizations), and so on. However, the most natural kinds of campaigns involve either buying and selling or pursuing secrets upon secrets.

MERCHANT PRINCES

In Venezia, it seems that everybody is involved with trade. Merchant ventures can operate on a number of levels. They can be a sideline for those whose main interests are elsewhere. Just a pouch of pepper, a bundle of silk thread, or a sheaf of marbled papers picked up overseas can find a buyer in the markets of Venezia, so a group of adventurers whose main preoccupations are political, military, or ideological can also make a profit on the side. If they're truly Venetian, oarsmen on a galley, bodyguards for an ambassador, or scholars making long journeys to find lost manuscripts are likely to engage in this kind of trade nearly by reflex. Their major limitation, though, is finding transportation to where they want to go.



A step above the opportunistic peddler is the middle-class merchant. For these people, trade is their main occupation. They research markets, scour government policy and incoming rumors for every possible hint on trends, and cut deals for a living. However, they've got limited means to actually direct shipping, so they need to buy space on other people's ships. There's heavy traffic on the Adriatic, but trips to more distant and exotic ports are less frequent.

At the top of the heap, patricians control shipping, renting vessels from the government and in turn subletting space to lesser merchants. The biggest trading voyages are the large, regularly scheduled convoys to major ports. However, a wealthy patrician can command a galley out of season if he needs to, and a poverty-stricken one can doubtless gather enough lesser merchants to pay for a crew. Once under way, the voyage may be dull, but there's always the chance of pirate attacks or being blown off course and closer to hostile ports.

SECRET AGENTS

Venezia didn't produce a lot of armies or knights errant, but it did generate one adventuring profession in quantity: spies. One of the city's major resources was people who covertly gathered information and, if they had to, took direct action, both domestically and abroad.

A Venetian spy campaign can be run over the full range of genre conventions that would be applicable to a modern spy campaign. A realistic campaign might strongly resemble a Le Carre novel, only with much fancier clothes. There are endless series of secrets, layers of hidden decision making, and a security apparatus that may act rarely, but will do so in a completely ruthless and amoral fashion when it kicks in for the good of the state. The flexibility of Venetian foreign policy, where yesterday's mortal enemies are today's close allies, requires a certain moral flexibility as well.

On the other end of the spectrum, one could do worse than an over-the-top thriller in the James Bond or even Matt Helm mode, with suave agents enjoying the finest luxuries and technology the 16th century can provide while defending Venezia's interests from Italian rivals, the less sophisticated but much larger states of western Christendom, and the ever-looming apocalyptic threat of the Turks.

VENEZIA AS DESTINATION

The modernity which players can find comforting can disorient characters, particularly if they come from somewhere else. The city doesn't have proper lords, but it isn't really a democracy, either. It doesn't have walls. Still, the luxuries available can draw the interest of any visitor. It's the best place in the Western world to find any book, and it's one of the best possible places to find an incredible variety of other goods. It's also a point of transition between worlds. In its era, it's the point of departure from the West to the East, and the first port of call when traveling from the East to the West. For visitors from any direction, it contains elements of the familiar and the unfamiliar.

Rather than a friendly if somewhat disorienting place to go, Venezia may also appear as an enemy. But given the difficulty inherent in attacking the city directly, it would need to be the target of intrigue, not just the source. There's the stereotype of Venezia disproportionately attracting the ire of surrounding cities in Italy, and the Council of Ten has long had an unsavory reputation as a dark conspiracy with tentacles around the known world. Visitors – under cover as merchants, craftspeople, or clergy – might come to infiltrate the city's secret places to gather information or carry out assassinations. Or, in a lighter vein, they might just be there to carry out a heist, stealing the relics of a saint or the Libro d'Oro.

CROSSOVERS

Venezia can be used in combination with a variety of other ***GURPS*** books. Here are some specific suggestions.

DUNGEON FANTASY

Venezia doesn't have dungeons. It doesn't even have basements. The city is built on landfill at sea level. Anyone trying to adventure underground will drown.

It is, however, the ultimate town. Nearly anything that might be commercially available can be found there. Anything valuable can find buyers with ready money (and Venetians have on more than one occasion put aside moral considerations for profit). The government acts like something between a very rich merchant house and a hermetic cabal (***GURPS Dungeon Fantasy 17: Guilds,*** pp. 15, 18), ready to shell out buckets of ducats to hire adventurers willing to carry out their shadowy missions. Adventurers can explore ruined classical temples and abandoned churches and graveyards on the terraferma, or they can sail off to distant, exotic locations before returning home to sell their loot.

HORROR

With its narrow and twisting streets, masks as everyday wear, and centuries upon centuries of dark secrets, Venezia is a good place for scary stories. Jack the Ripper-like serial killers could walk the streets, vanishing quickly after they strike and perhaps even being protected by the highest levels of government. For a more supernatural tinge, there are plenty of reasons why ghosts of the murdered and betrayed might stalk the living, and several horror authors have made Venezia the abode of vampires, certain types of which thrive in the city's environment of secrecy. The city also works very, very well as a series of glittering facades concealing deep moral corruption, making it excellent for Gothic horror. Venezia is the sort of place where everybody can be suspicious, and you can never really know whether those you trust the most are really trying to destroy you. Even if the Council of Ten aren't vampires or evil wizards (and they very well may be), there can always be something creeping up behind you.

INFINITE WORLDS

Venezia, forming the main link between East and West through most of the Middle Ages and into the Renaissance, is a useful point for introducing any outside innovation into Europe, or slowing some of them down. Without Venezia as a point of entry into the West for Byzantine scholars in the empire's last days, some aspects of the Renaissance would have been blunted, and without an influx of alternative versions of the Bible from the Orthodox world, the Reformation might have been delayed or reshaped.

Centrum is conflicted over Venezia. On one hand, the remarkable stability of the Venetian system, which went for centuries without a hint of internal revolt, is the kind of thing that makes Centrum agents positively giddy. On the other hand, there are hardly any worlds where the Venetian empire scaled up well.

LOW-TECH

A lot of TL4 happens in Venezia. Venetians didn't invent the printing press, but they took it from an early, experimental technology to a commonplace one. Glassblowers on Murano invented clear glass, paving the way for spyglasses, eyeglasses, and all kinds of other optics. The Arsenale arguably perfected the rowed galley and took the first steps toward broadsided ships of the line, to say nothing of inventing centuries-before-their-time assembly-line techniques. Venezia is an excellent place for a would-be inventor to set up shop, because most allied specialists one would want are available nearby. It's also an outstanding place to do industrial espionage.

And there's always room for somewhat more fanciful inventions. ***GURPS Fantasy-Tech 1: The Edge of Reality*** contains any number of ideas for developments from the Renaissance, including a few developed specifically for the defense of Venezia.

A Man, a Plan, a Canal

Early in the 16th century, there was some discussion in the Venetian government of working with the Sultan of Egypt on building a canal connecting the Nile or the Mediterranean with the Red Sea. The idea was far from original, and a short-lived canal had been constructed by Darius during antiquity, though it had silted up. The Venetians were willing to try again, but the Ottoman conquest of Egypt soon put a stop to that.

In the worldline Moro-2, discussion started in the mid-15th century between the Mamluks and Venetians about reestablishing the canal which Darius had created. The new canal opened in 1472, linking the base of the Nile delta with the Red Sea. In a diplomatic coup, Venezia convinced Persia and Egypt to form an alliance against the Ottomans, stopping their expansion south.

The year is 1562. Venetian ships regularly sail to Goa and Mumbai. On the terraferma, the borders of Venezia's empire stretch nearly to Genoa and Firenze. The Ottoman-Mamluk-Persian triangle has seen countless small conflicts, but remains stable as the Ottomans, blocked to the south and east, slowly stretch their reach around the Black Sea. Increased trade around the Mediterranean and into Africa has propped up the declining Songhai Empire for now.

The greatest threat to Venezia is that its newfound wealth and power are dependent on the good graces of the Mamluk sultan. Should one turn away from secular pragmatism into religious fervor, the city's lifeline to the Far East could be cut off in an instant.

The second greatest is the gathered powers of Europe. So far, Venezia has managed to buy itself enough allies at the right times to prevent a dedicated alliance against them, but the cost has sometimes been punishing. Although the Spanish crown turned down a crackpot proposal to find a western route to Asia a lifetime ago, it is starting to reconsider based on accounts of large islands to the west, rich in gold, discovered by a Songhai ship blown far off course.

Renaissance Florence

The only city in northern Italy that comes close to Venezia's wealth and influence (and the only other comparable city in all of Italy save for Roma) is Firenze. Firenze is an excellent location to visit in any Venezia-centric campaign and vice versa. It can be a long-term rival and shadowy additional hazard in any campaign involving political intrigue and mercenary warfare, particularly during the complicated years of the Peace of Lodi. The relationship between the two cities, ruled as they are by some of the most pragmatic men of their age, constantly shifts back and forth between violent enmity and close alliance. Diplomats, along with their guards and other hangers-on, will likely come to respect their opposite numbers well over time as thorough professionals in the same business, but will never, ever be able to entirely trust them.

Firenze may also serve as a potential refuge for Venetians who are wealthy enough. Cosimo de Medici stashed considerable resources in Venezia and so could ride out exile from his homeland until his allies managed to turn things around for him. Foresighted Venetians would do well to make similar preparations.

Finally, many of the suggestions for campaigns involving Firenze in Chapter 6 of ***GURPS Hot Spots: Renaissance Florence*** apply to Venezia as well.

Elsewhere in History

A few other ***GURPS*** books suggest links to Venezia, but not for the period in question here. Here are some tips for tying them together.

The Silk Road

During the time of ***GURPS Hot Spots: The Silk Road,*** Venezia doesn't exist, or is at best a nascent shipping town, far from what it became a few centuries after the fall of the Tang. However, by the 13th century, Central Asian land routes had reopened enough for two generations of Polos to make their way from Venezia to China and back, and Venezia engaged in direct negotiations with Mongols late in the century as they took over ports around the Black Sea. The city didn't have its overseas empire yet, and the Arsenale only existed in embryonic form, but the aristocratic republican government was taking recognizable shape.

Constantinople

The period of ***GURPS Hot Spots: Constantinople, 527-1204 A.D.,*** sees much of Constantinople's glory transferred to Venezia. Venezia starts the period in its earliest formative stages, becomes the imperial capital's junior partner in the region, and ends the period by leading Constantinople's conquest during the Fourth Crusade, with the legendary blind doge Enrico Dandolo personally commanding the Venetian contingent. One of Venezia's most memorable symbols, the Roman bronze horses adorning the San Marco, was looted from the Hippodrome during the Fourth Crusade. During this period, Venezia is an up-and-coming power. Its merchants enjoy special privileges in Constantinople and do not hesitate to take every advantage of their status.

Crusades

In its own way, Venezia is a major player in the Crusades, but not one that actively engaged in fighting. It didn't dominate Mediterranean shipping as it did during the Renaissance, but the medieval city was still one of a handful of powers that could move large quantities of men and material from Western Europe to the Holy Land. Venezia is, if not the place to go, then at least a place to go for would-be Crusaders who want to go east. For their part, the Venetians are mostly just looking to turn a profit. See ***GURPS Crusades*** for more about this era.

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Nowhere else in the world is used to the joy
that heaven bestowed so abundantly on Venice.
– Veronica Franco, ***Capitolo XII***

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