

Frederic C. Lane

VENICE

A Maritime Republic

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TO

Harriet Mirick Lane

Our Children

AND

Their Children

good purpose of making the Venetians more interesting. Other readers might be attracted by additional details on religious movements, military campaigns, and diplomatic maneuvers. I have not neglected such subjects entirely, but I hope the attention I have given to the industrial arts and crafts by which Venetians earned their livelihoods, to their commercial and financial dexterity, and to the more humdrum side of politics will serve at least as well in inducing readers to identify with the citizens and subjects of the Republic.

If some of my interpretations are sufficiently new and firmly rooted in original sources so as to interest devotees of Venetian history, I ask that they pardon passages that seem to them to belabor the obvious. In writing, I have had in mind compatriots whom I hoped would come to share a concern, not untouched by admiration, for the city of the lagoons. For them also I planned the maps, heeding the saying of George Lincoln Burr of Cornell University, my first master in historical studies, that events must be located to be understood: history has two eyes, chronology and geography. If my treatment of economic history achieves a balanced concern with techniques, statistical perspective, and human relations, it is thanks to Abbott Payson Usher, who was my teacher at both Cornell and Harvard. The pictures have been selected to illustrate and arouse curiosity, and for readers wishing to probe deeper I have added bibliographical notes as guides to my sources and to recent scholarly publications.

During many years I have been helped in Venice by the staffs of the depositories and museums which I mention, often too abbreviatedly, in the captions and bibliographical notes. I wish to make fuller acknowledgement here and to express my gratitude for their courtesies, namely: the Archivio di Stato di Venezia, the Civico Museo Correr, the Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana, the Biblioteca Querini Stampalia, the Gallerie dell' Accademia and other museums under the Soprintendenza ai Monumenti, and the institutes at the Centro di Cultura of the Fondazione Giorgio Cini at the Isola San Giorgio Maggiore.

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FREDERIC C. LANE

Westminster, Massachusetts
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The Trade of the Levant

CHAPTER SEVEN



Outside the Adriatic, Venice faced quite different problems in the utilization of its sea power. What "command of the sea" can mean has varied from one age to another. Britain had what could be called a cut-and-dried command from the Napoleonic wars to World War I. It was enforced during the age of sail by patrols which were able to keep the sea in all seasons and could be stationed at the strategic points along trade routes determined roughly by prevailing winds. With the coming of steam, the possession of strategically located coaling stations and their denial to the enemy enabled the British navy to sweep the seas of enemy warships and merchantmen alike, once the main enemy fleets had been defeated and bottled up, and to subject neutrals to search and detention or seizure. In contrast, a kind of command of the sea, called cut-and-run, was almost obtained by the Germans through the use of submarines in World War I. Such a cut-and-run command is purely negative; it cannot protect one's own shipping; it is successful if it denies to the enemy the use of essential trade routes.

In medieval Europe, no navy exercised a cut-and-dried command over any extended body of water, but the Venetians very nearly did so in the Adriatic. Their patrols on the rivers and off the mouths of the rivers were reinforced as need be by fleets of galleys strong enough and fast enough to suppress all opposition. The boost given Venetian naval power by the conquest of Constantinople made the Venetians feel more responsible for the suppression of piracy, especially in the Adriatic. Every year, not only in time of war but as a routine measure, they outfitted a fleet of galleys devoted to making the seas safe.

Naturally it accompanied the merchant ships going to Apulia and Romania and used the Dalmatian cities, especially Ragusa, as subordinate bases. A separate squadron for the protection of commerce in the Gulf was felt necessary in 1330. Frequently thereafter it was patrolled by a Captain of the Gulf, while the main war fleet was operating in the Aegean or Beyond-the-Sea.

To organize any cut-and-dried command over the Mediterranean as a whole, i.e., to deny the use of these waters to its enemies and to make navigation safe for its own citizens and friends at all times, was quite outside the range of possibilities. Neither Venice nor any of her rivals was able to sweep the enemy from the seas. They lacked the technical means of setting up effective blockades. Trade moved, or could move, by short hops through many alternate routes. Vessels were not built and rigged so that they could patrol off a port indefinitely in variable weather to the extent that the British did at the end of the eighteenth century. War fleets had even more difficulty finding an enemy who wished to avoid battle than Lord Nelson had when he crossed the Atlantic twice in search of Napoleon's fleet. And even after an overwhelming victory, the winner was unable to blockade effectively the enemy city. He could not prevent the defeated from sending out a new fleet, even if only a very small one, for a quick raid on an exposed point or an attack on merchant shipping.

Under these conditions, the kind of "command of the sea" at which the Venetians could aim consisted essentially in being able to protect its own convoys of merchant shipping and to send support to colonies while inflicting losses on the trade of an enemy or raiding his coasts or colonies. After the conquest of Constantinople, Venice organized this kind of maritime control in the eastern Mediterranean. Since merchant shipping was the main concern, the most strategic bases were the ports in which convoys could be organized or could stop for refreshment and refuge.

CARAVANS OVER SEA AND LAND The ports most important for these convoys were determined by two streams of trade: one which went to Romania, and the other to Beyond-the-Sea. Romania meant not only the Greek peninsula and the Aegean islands but all the neighboring lands which had been part of the Byzantine Empire. Beyond-the-Sea (*Oltremare*) meant the coasts east and southeast of the Aegean, or more specifically Cyprus, Syria, and Palestine (Maps 3 and 4).

The trade in Romania employed the larger number of ships and merchants. Privileges which the Venetians had gained by aiding the Byzantine emperors against the Normans gave them preferential treatment; indeed, the Golden Bull of 1082 freed them from all tariffs in most cities. The native Greeks themselves paid 10 percent, whereas the Venetians paid nothing. This competitive advantage assured the Venetians profits, since they were operating in established markets where prices were set by the costs of native merchants who were paying the tolls from which Venetians were exempt. For a while, Genoese and Pisans obtained preferential tariffs also, but not the complete exemption enjoyed by the Venetians. When the Latin Empire of Constantinople was established in 1204, the Venetian exemption was reaffirmed and extended over the whole Empire. The Genoese and Pisans obtained a confirmation of their former position only as a favor from the Venetians and subject to the express stipulation in the treaty between the Venetians and the Empire that any peoples who were

at war with Venice would be expelled from all Romania. Under these conditions it is easy to understand that the Venetians interested themselves not merely in finding in Romania wares that were in demand in Venice and the West, but also in moving merchandise from one part of Romania to another. They settled at Corinth, for example, to trade in the products going from the Peloponnesus, which the Venetians called Morea, to other parts of Greece. They exported wine, oil, fruits, and nuts from the Greek islands to Egypt and brought back wheat, beans, sugar, etc. They exported to many places the silk for which Sparta and Thebes were then famous. But the biggest element in the trade within Romania was the supplying of the city of Constantinople and the marketing of its products. Even after the sack of 1204, it was still a huge city by medieval European standards, with many productive industries and a large population to feed. Its normal grain supply came partly from Thrace and Salonica but largely from Black Sea ports in areas now parts of Bulgaria, Roumania, and the U.S.S.R. Previously excluded from the Black Sea by the Byzantine emperors, the Venetians became active there after 1204. Some settled at Soldaia on the eastern coast of the Crimea, from which they exported to Constantinople grain, salt, fish, furs, and slaves.

For the protection of all this trade, the best base was of course Constantinople. Its location made it seem for a time as desirable a center for Venetian power as Venice itself. The Venetian colony there was so large during the thirteenth century that it rivaled in size the settlements around the Rialto. There is a legend, originating much later, that immediately after the conquest in 1204, Venice's governing councils held a formal debate over the possibility of a mass migration and of moving the seat of government to Constantinople. The only truths back of the legend were that for a few years the Venetians in Constantinople, headed by the podesta they elected, continued to act, as Enrico Dandolo had, without waiting to consult the authorities in Venice, and that the Venetians within the former Byzantine Empire, at Constantinople and elsewhere, may for a while have been almost as numerous and as rich as those around Rialto.

While many Venetians settled within Romania and made their fortunes by trade within it or between the Black Sea and Egypt, the exchange between the West and the Levant became increasingly more important. Western Europe was producing more and more woolens and metals, which were in demand in the Levant and which enabled western Europeans to buy more of the products of the East. From Romania to Venice came raw silk and, above all, silk fabrics and other products of Constantinople's skilled craftsmen, alum, kermes (the red dye from the Morea), wax, honey, cotton, wheat from various ports according to the harvest, furs and slaves from the Black Sea, and sweet wines from the Greek islands.

Sailings between Venice and Romania were organized by seasons and those sailing in the same season kept somewhat together to form what was called a caravan. In the thirteenth century, such a caravan consisted typically of 10 to 20 tarettes or other rather small ships (*naves*), with one or two really big round ships or a few galleys for protection. One caravan left in the spring and returned in the fall; another left in August, wintered overseas, and returned in the spring. Their timing was regulated by law: the code of 1255 provided that shipmasters must conclude contracts with their seamen two days before the end

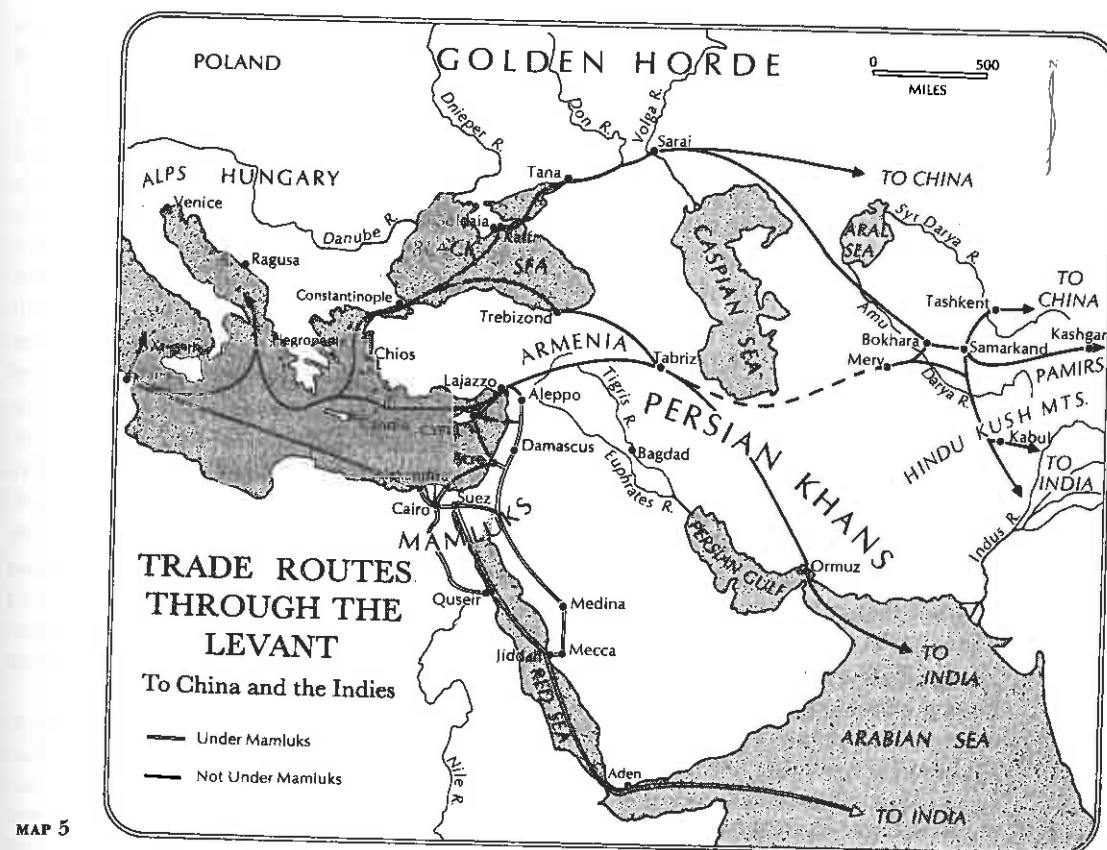
of July for the fall *muda*, a word that meant both ships in convoy and a loading period. They were to be outside the port of San Nicolò by August 15. These ships would not return until the following Easter, or even May, not because the voyage to Constantinople took that long (it could be done easily in a couple of months each way) but because winter storms were avoided and because the merchants needed a long stay at the terminus to dispose of wares and find return cargoes. They also took time to buy and sell at various way stations. The terminus of the fleet was Constantinople, where wares from the Black Sea ports were collected. The main regular stop in the Aegean was at Negroponte, where vessels which had been trading to lesser ports in Greece could join the ships returning from Constantinople. After passing Cape Malea and Cape Matapan at the southern end of Morea, the ships called at Modon or Coron to load the products of that region and be joined by local traders from the Morea before proceeding north to Ragusa and Venice (see Maps 4 and 7).

The second great stream of trade was that to the crusaders' states, Beyond-the-Sea. For this voyage also there were spring and fall caravans. The outbound routes of the ships to Romania and to Beyond-the-Sea did not diverge until after they had rounded the southernmost points of the Greek peninsula, Cape Matapan and Cape Malea, headlands that it was often difficult to pass because of contrary winds. The caravan going to Beyond-the-Sea then went to Candia, the capital of Crete, sometimes accompanied by the Romania caravan but not normally. Crete was thus even more important as the intermediate base for voyages to Beyond-the-Sea than for voyages to Constantinople. Moreover, Crete was no mere naval base; it was an important producer of grain, wine, oil, and fruits. The estates held there by Venetian nobles yielded them good revenues in the course of time. Many revolts had to be suppressed before the native population became submissive to Venetian rule; but when not absorbed in suppressing revolts, the duke through whom Venice governed the island was able to send out four to ten galleys to add to the Venetian fleets.

Sailing east from Crete, a merchant fleet was likely to call at Rhodes and Cyprus, but the terminus was St. Jean d'Acre, just north of Haifa, where the modern road takes off from the coast for Safed and Damascus. Of all the ports conquered by the crusaders, Acre underwent the most vigorous commercial development, and after the loss of Jerusalem it became the capital of what remained of the Kingdom of Jerusalem. Some shiploads of pilgrims disembarked further south and nearer Jerusalem at Jaffa when truces favored the pilgrims, but Acre was the center of all the business of crusading, the assembly point for convoys, and the meeting place of trade routes tapping the wealth of Asia and the spice islands.

Pepper, cinnamon, cloves, nutmeg, ginger were then even more in demand for seasoning than now, especially for seasoning meats in an age with little refrigeration. Europeans in Germany, Flanders, and England could buy more spices with which to satisfy their taste for highly seasoned foods because they were producing more of the wares in demand in the East, such as silver, copper, and woolen cloth. The Italians, who were the middlemen in this exchange, profited from being in a "growth industry" of the thirteenth century.

Some products in demand in the West came from the Levant itself, others came from the Far East. Bales of eastern drugs and spices were brought by Indian merchants to the Red Sea, which provided the most nearly all-water



MAP 5

route between the Indian Ocean and the Mediterranean. But, for merchandise of such high value per pound, the routes were determined less by freights than by taxes, less by the costs of transport than the costs of protection, less by physical conditions than by social conditions. On all counts, there were good reasons why the spices which entered the Red Sea from India should stop at Jiddah, the port of Mecca. The merchants were all Moslems, whose religion enjoined a pilgrimage to Mecca. North of Jiddah, the navigation of the Red Sea becomes increasingly difficult, especially in certain seasons. For these reasons, the route of the spices divided at Jiddah (see Map 5). Part went from Mecca on the backs of camels. These "ships of the desert" proceeded via Medina along the old caravan route running north through desert, wadi, and grasslands east of Jordan, to Damascus. Itself a fertile oasis on the edge of the desert, Damascus was an important center of industry, famous alike for its steel and its brocades, as well as the home port of camel caravans. Three or four days sufficed to cross from Damascus to any one of several Mediterranean harbors. Acre was the most important as long as it was in Christian hands.

The other spice route reached Acre from the opposite direction, from Egypt. One way from Jiddah, that which looks easiest, was up the Red Sea to Suez and then across to the Nile at Cairo, but a route more used because of the firmer control it gave to the Egyptian soldan went ashore near Quseir, crossed

to the Nile and descended the river from just below the first cataract. In either case, these Egyptian routes passed through Cairo to the ports of the delta, of which the chief was Alexandria.

Egypt had much beside spices to attract the Venetians and other Europeans. In the twelfth century, it was a main source of alum, sugar, and wheat and a major market for wood, metals, and slaves. Alexandria had been one of the busiest ports of the world almost from its foundation, but it had two disadvantages from the point of view of Italian ship captains. One was political: Alexandria was a strongly fortified harbor in which the merchants, crews, and vessels felt at the mercy of the soldan. To make sure that no ship left without his permission, the Moslem commander of the port ordered that ships turn over to him on arrival their yards and rudders. The other was technical, derived from the direction of prevailing winds. All during the summer, winds blew from the northwest. They favored a voyage to Alexandria from the west but made departure directly westward impossible for round ships and difficult for galleys except in late fall or early spring. But in these seasons storms and clouds made navigation more dangerous. Merchantmen leaving Alexandria for the west in the summer began by heading northeast or north northeast, as had the Roman grain ships. They made port in Cyprus or Syria before finding winds with which to turn west. In the existing state of seamanship, a Venetian merchantman bound from Alexandria to Venice was not really going out of its way therefore when it went to Acre to join a convoy.

At Acre the Venetians could feel quite at home. In return for their help to the crusaders after the celebrated naval victory of Ascalon, the Venetians had complete control of an entire section in Acre and also in nearby Tyre. Here was everything necessary to enable them to live as a community apart; their own church, their consulate or governmental center, their warehouse, their own special oven, bathhouse, and slaughterhouse, and perhaps also grinding mills reserved for their use. In addition, there were many Venetian palaces or private homes large enough to house not only a Venetian family and their Venetian guests who came and went with the fleets but also to house natives of Palestine or Syria from whom the Venetians collected rent. Many of these "palaces" contained workshops where the Venetians employed native workmen skilled in fancy weaving and glassmaking. Around Acre and particularly around Tyre the Venetians owned many country estates that had been awarded to Venice as part of the division of booty agreed on with the crusaders when the city was taken with the help of Doge Domenico Michiel. This was a part of the coast famous for its lemons, oranges, almonds, and figs. Syria and Palestine also produced cotton, silks, and sugar to add to the exportable merchandise brought by the caravans from Damascus.

Most of the trade by which cargoes were concentrated at Acre was in the hands of Levantines, for few Venetians went inland to Damascus. In addition to the Moslem merchants, there were many Christian Arabs and Armenians, as well as Jews and Greeks, who had been accustomed to trading back and forth over the eastern end of the Mediterranean in spite of warring armies. Crusaders added a little to the risks of being robbed but did not stop the usual caravans coming across Syria and Palestine or up from Egypt. Except when crusading armies were directly attacking Egypt, the Venetians continued to sell Egyptians even wood and metals, which scandalized newly arrived crusaders but was

licensed by the kings of Jerusalem who needed revenues. Of course, selling arms to the enemy was illegal, but raw metals and plain planks were not always considered munitions of war, which was ill defined then as later.

The two caravans of ships, one through Romania to Constantinople, the other to Acre and Beyond-the-Sea (see Map 4, p. 39), brought to Venice not only the products of the eastern Mediterranean but also the most sought-after wares of the Indies. Their protection was the test of Venetian sea power. After 1250, Venice's control of these routes and her maritime supremacy generally was fiercely contested by Genoa.

GENOESE RIVALRY Starting their expansion later than the Venetians, the Genoese found plunder and profit first in the western Mediterranean, which continued to be of basic importance in their commerce, but they exploited the opportunities opened by the crusades to Beyond-the-Sea even more vigorously than the Venetians who were held back by their concern for Romania. Although the city of Genoa never had more than half the population of Venice, it grew rapidly between 1100 and 1250 and established at least nominal control over all of Liguria. It strove to be the staple for all the coast between the Rhone River and Tuscany, just as Venice was for all the northern Adriatic.

Whereas Venice was cut off from the mainland by its lagoons, the Genoese littoral was cut off by mountains which rise sharply from the sea. Yet Genoa was not as unified a city-state as Venice, for the Ligurian coast was not thoroughly absorbed into the Genoese commune. Genoese nobles, when out of power, were often able to defy the city government from some retreat along its mountainous shore. Rivalry between different factions was more implacable at Genoa than at Venice, and control of the communal government frequently passed from one group to opponents who sent the defeated into exile. These factional fights did not interfere with commercial expansion; indeed, exiles frequently went to the Levant to make fortunes. In mid-century, the Genoese were as well entrenched as the Venetians in Acre and Tyre and were more active in Syria as a whole since their initiative in helping crusaders had won them extensive rights in the more northerly cities.

Before 1250, the rivalry between Venice and Genoa was muted by their mutual fear of the Pisans who were more dangerous to the Venetians in Romania and to the Genoese in the western Mediterranean. Pisa was overwhelmingly Ghibelline, that is, it supported the German emperors against the pope. Genoa was mainly Guelf, that is, siding with the pope, as did Venice in mid-century. After the Ghibelline party throughout Italy was weakened by the defeat and death of Frederick II in 1250, Pisa became a distinctly secondary preoccupation for the Venetians, while the Genoese became more and more energetic as commercial competitors. In the wars that followed, profits were at stake, but the wars were kept going more by hate and vainglory than by economic calculation.

The first Venetian-Genoese war was touched off by a series of incidents in Acre. A Venetian murdered a Genoese, the Genoese attacked and pillaged the Venetian quarter, and there was a fight over a monastery on the border of the two sectors. In Europe, the pope and others tried to mediate; in Acre, all the various factions lined up on one side or the other; the Knights Templar,



FIGURE 4 *The Square Pillars from Acre next to San Marco (Photo Ferruzzi). These trophies, richly carved by Syrian artists, were believed to have been brought home in triumph by Lorenzo Tiepolo from the Genoese stronghold.*

the Pisans, and the Provençal merchants on the side of Venice, many of the local barons on the side of the Genoese. When the Venetian trading caravan left in the summer of 1257, the doge sent with it a war fleet judged sufficient to take care of the situation. In command was Lorenzo Tiepolo, the son of a doge and a warrior already renowned for his part in a reconquest of Zara in 1243. He broke through the chain by which the Genoese tried to keep him out of the harbor, burned their ships, and retook the disputed monastery. Next year, a big Genoese fleet arrived, but Tiepolo had been reinforced meanwhile, partly from Crete, mainly from Venice. When the Genoese appeared off Acre in June, 1258, he came out to give battle, and the Genoese, strangely enough, stood on the defensive so long that he was able to get to windward and form his battle line. The Genoese fleet was slightly larger, 50 galleys and 4 large round ships, against the 39 Venetian galleys, 4 large round ships, and 10 tarettes, but the Venetians had strengthened their armament by hiring from the very mixed population of Acre large numbers of men attracted by good pay and hatred of the Genoese. The Venetian victory was overwhelming; the Genoese lost half their galleys and about 1700 dead or taken prisoner. The rest fled to Tyre, and the Genoese who were still holding a strong tower in Acre fled also when they saw their fleet defeated. The Venetians carried home the columns from the Genoese great tower in Acre and set them up in triumph beside San Marco (see Figure 4).

Genoese prisoners were also carried to Venice in fetters. They were considered useful in peace negotiations but there was no thought of enslaving them. Wars against pagans, Moslems, and heretics helped supply the slave markets; indeed, wars and slave raids seemed in some cases indistinguishable. But citizens of the Italian cities did not enslave each other; captives were held for ransom or freed by the terms of a treaty. Those taken at Acre were released on the pleading of the pope, while the Venetian merchants in Acre lorded it over any surviving Genoese competitors and refused entry into the harbor to any ship showing the Genoese flag.

Three years after this victory Beyond-the-Sea, Venice suffered a severe setback in Romania. The Latin Empire, established in 1204, had always been a weak structure unable to overcome Greek rivals, several of whom set themselves up in parts of the former Byzantine Empire and claimed to be the true successors of the Roman-Byzantine emperors. Michael Paleologue, the Greek emperor whose lands lay closest to Constantinople, seized the capital in July, 1261, by treachery and a surprise attack through secret passageways, at a time when the Venetian fleet, which had always been a mainstay of its defense, was at sea. On the fleet's return, the best it could do was to rescue compatriots and the last of the Latin emperors and take them to Negroponte.

Michael Paleologue's capture of Constantinople was a big step towards his goal of restoring the Byzantine Empire as it had been before the Fourth Crusade. It threatened all Venice's colonial possessions in Romania. It might be expected therefore that the Venetians would have made a mighty effort to recover Constantinople and restore the Latin Empire, but two circumstances prevented clearcut action. One was the weakness which had always been shown by the Latin emperors at Constantinople and the fugitive emperor's lack of family resources. The other was the Genoese war which had started at Acre and was now transferred to Romania. Michael Paleologue might not have been able to hold Constantinople had not Genoa earlier that year concluded with him a

treaty of alliance. By this Treaty of Ninfeo he promised to expel the Venetians and grant to the Genoese within Romania the privileged status the Venetians were enjoying. The Genoese in return promised to put their navy at his disposal, at his expense, for war against Venice and for his campaigns to restore the Byzantine Empire. As events turned out, Michael Paleologue took Constantinople himself without Genoese aid and within a few years decided that the Genoese fleets were not worth the high price they were charging. But the Treaty of Ninfeo at least brought into the Aegean Genoese fleets strong enough to rule out the possibility of a direct Venetian assault on Constantinople.

The war fleets sent by the Genoese were not, to be sure, very successful in battle. In 1262, the Genoese sought refuge in the harbor of Salonica and there the Venetians found them barricaded so strongly that they dared not attack. After challenging them to come out and fight in the open sea, which the Genoese refused to do, the Venetians sailed away. In 1263, a Genoese fleet of 38 galleys convoying supplies to Monemvasia (Malvasia), a Greek stronghold in the Morea, encountered 32 Venetian galleys on their way to Negroponte. The resulting battle of Settepozzi was clearly a Venetian victory, for of the four admirals who were commanding the Genoese, two never fully engaged, and the two that did both lost their galleys. Apparently the Genoese fleet had been outfitted in part by contractors and was partly under the command of admirals interested in returns to their investors. In 1264, the Genoese deliberately misled and evaded Venetian galleys, and also in 1265 they avoided battle. In 1266, their fleet was attacked by the Venetians off Sicily at Trapani. As the Venetians bore down rowing hard, the Genoese crews panicked and tried to swim to the nearby shore, thousands dying in the attempt. The Genoese blamed the cowardice of their admiral, or said that the crews were not real Genoese but a ruffraff of all nations, hired for pay. In 1267, a Genoese fleet that was blockading Acre left without a fight when a Venetian fleet appeared. The Venetians clearly had the better of it in all the battles between main fleets: at Acre in 1258, at Settepozzi in 1263, and at Trapani in 1266.

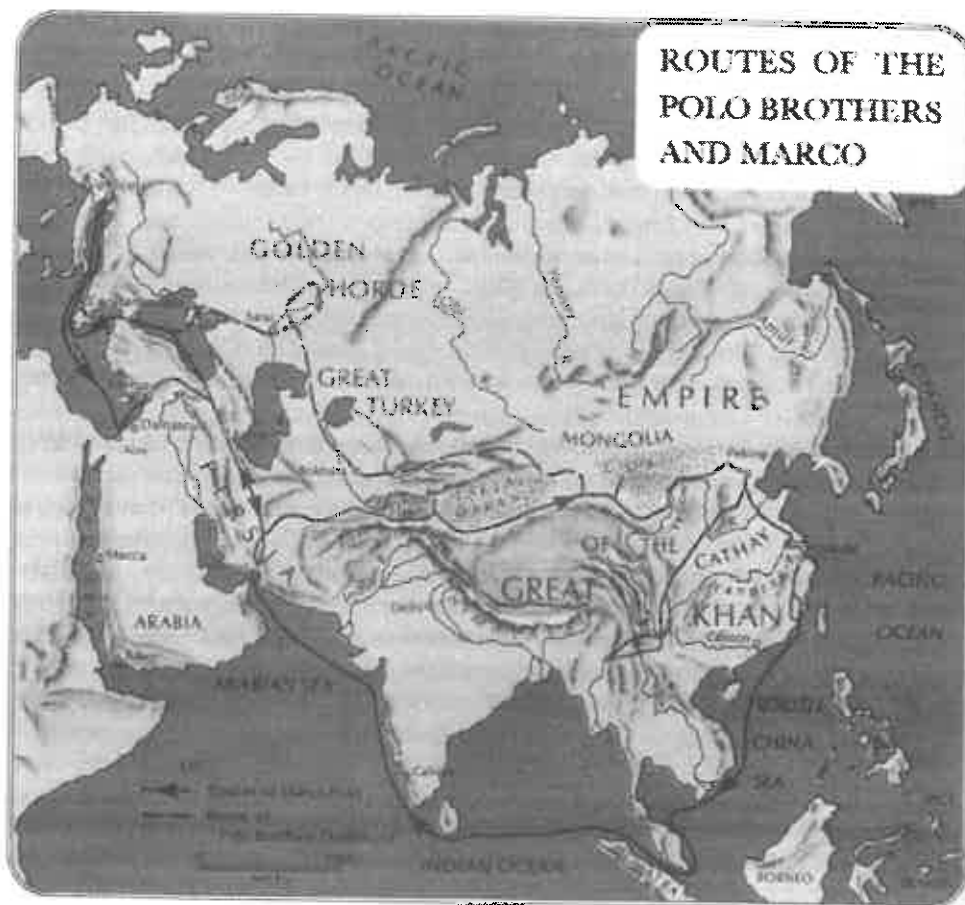
In spite of their naval victories, the war was proving very costly to the Venetians. Their privileged commercial position in Constantinople and other parts of the Latin Empire was lost. Michael Paleologue granted the Genoese an area across the Golden Horn where, settling in large numbers, they formed a suburb all their own, known as Pera. He did not, however, grant them all the privileges the Venetians had had, and he readmitted the Venetians in 1268 while their war with Genoa was still on. Venetian merchants resumed their trade in Constantinople, but they never again held as highly privileged a position as they had before 1261.

Venice was suffering also from Genoese raids on its shipping. Even in times of peace, there was a tendency for vessels to keep company for protection from pirates. During the war, they were required to keep together, although that must have been difficult as a practical matter considering the different sailing qualities of the galleys, the tarettes, and the big lateeners of two or three decks. In order to concentrate strength, only one convoy a year was sent to Acre, and the caravan of Romania went only as far as Negroponte, where it could be reinforced from Crete without too much difficulty if threatened. Times of departure and routes were carefully stipulated, and escorts of 15-30 war

galleys were provided. The system worked well enough, so that the contemporary Venetian chronicler, Martino da Canal, boasted that the Venetians sent out their caravans as usual, whereas the Genoese could cross the sea only by stealth like pirates. But that boast obscured the fact that the Genoese were really doing very well for themselves without escorted convoys. Some of their ships sailing singly or in small groups were taken by the Venetians — after Lorenzo Tiepolo's attack on the Genoese in Acre, Genoese and Venetians fought wherever their ships met — but many others got through safely. The Venetians did not have galleys available for raids on commerce since they were all tied up in escort duties. Many Genoese galleys, armed by private adventurers, were meanwhile out looking for booty. For example, three Genoese galleys and a scouting vessel, cruising together in the Aegean, pounced on a large Venetian ship which had become separated from its convoy and was keeping poor watch. They took a rich cargo and 108 prisoners, of whom 42, including Bartolomeo Zorzi, troubador poet, were Venetian nobles.

The convoy system used by the Venetians had the disadvantage not only of tying down the war galleys, but also of presenting a concentrated target. If the escorting warships could be defeated or lured away and the convoy captured, that inflicted on the enemy an even more serious material loss than the defeat of its battle squadron. The Genoese admiral Grillo achieved such a coup in 1264. The Venetian admiral to whom was assigned the protection of the caravan to Acre, wishing to clear the way for his convoy by finding and destroying the Genoese fleet, fell into a trap. Grillo called at south Italian ports, where he spread the word that he was leaving for Acre, and then sailed off — to Malta. When the Venetian galleys came seeking him, they believed the misleading reports and went east, leaving the Adriatic and Ionian seas open. Returning north from Malta, Grillo with sixteen galleys caught the unprotected Venetian convoy at sea near Durazzo and Saseno. It consisted of one very large round ship, the *Roccaforte*, a dozen tarettes, and a half-dozen other vessels. After defending their tarettes and other smaller vessels for some hours, the Venetians all withdrew with their most valuable merchandise in the *Roccaforte* and there defied the Genoese. The engagement provides a good example of the composition of thirteenth-century convoys and the military value of such a large vessel as the *Roccaforte* with its high castles. It enabled the Venetians to avoid complete disaster, but their loss was very heavy; not only were the smaller vessels and the bulk of their cargoes lost, but also a whole year's trade Beyond-the-Sea.

No other attack on a convoy was equally successful, but Grillo's success made other Venetian admirals excessively cautious about leaving the merchantmen they were escorting. After years of war, convoying was proving much less profitable than privateering. The Venetians were ready for peace, for their honor was satisfied and their commerce suffering. But the Genoese were not, for they were smarting from defeats and were making out better with their cut-and-run warfare than were the Venetians with their attempt at a kind of cut-and-dried command of the sea. Peace was made in 1270 only because King Louis IX of France insisted on having a fleet for the crusade he was planning. He threatened that, unless the Genoese stopped capturing and pillaging Venetians, he would arrest the Genoese in France and confiscate their wares. At the same time, he offered the Genoese attractive prices if they would put their



MAP 6

ships at his disposal. The resulting treaty was in effect only a truce between embittered enemies.

During the next twenty-five years, the Genoese continued their sensational economic and naval expansion. In the western Mediterranean, they decisively crushed Pisa, which never recovered from the defeat of its navy at Meloria in 1284. Genoa was then the undisputed leader in the Tyrrhenian Sea in both naval power and commercial shipping. Sailing through the straits of Gibraltar, the Genoese merchant ships carried Levantine spices and silks to Bruges and England and brought back cloth and wool. In the East they were particularly expansive in the Black Sea and Asia Minor. Although the clauses in the treaty of Ninfio expelling the Venetians from Romania were reversed within a few years, the restoration of the Greek empire had ended the period in which the Venetians held a predominant position in all Romania. Their colonies at Negroponte, Crete, Coron, and Modon and their alliances with the Latin princes who had possessions in the southern part of the Greek peninsula gave the Venetians a superior position in the south and west of Romania, but the Genoese overtopped the Venetians in its northern and eastern parts. Their colony at Pera in the harbor of Constantinople flourished, and they built up another shipping center on the northern shore of the Black Sea. Picking Kaffa because of its

excellent harbor, well protected from the north winds which prevail in that region, they made it the base for penetration into the Crimea and up the rivers of southern Russia. Other Genoese commercial centers were the island of Chios, famed for its mastic, and the very valuable alum mines at Focea near modern Smyrna (Ismir). These colonies made Genoa a far greater naval power than the size of Genoa itself would suggest.

Venice also was growing in the decades 1270-90. Her shipping profited from the opportunities open to it as a neutral when the two other main naval powers, Genoa and Pisa, were at war and from the general growth in Europe's wealth and population in those years. The textile industries of Flanders and the mines of Germany were still increasing their output and providing a means of paying for oriental wares, such as silks and spices, for which the European appetite seemed insatiable. At the same time, Venetian industrial output was growing, and Venice was just then making the most of enforcing her position as the staple of the northern Adriatic.

The Levantine trade was also changing in character. Less than formerly were Venetian ships employed in supplying other metropolises such as Constantinople and Alexandria. They concentrated more on the trade that passed through Venice itself. It was not their exclusive concern; much money was still to be made by transporting products from one part of the Levant to another, but gradually Venice was replacing Constantinople as the chief market for the raw materials from many parts of Romania, such as wine, wax, oil, honey, cotton, wool, and hides, and also as the manufacturing center from which they received supplies.

THE MONGOLS AND NEW TRADE ROUTES *In thys Booke I do mind to give knowledge of strange and maruelous things of the world, and specially of the partes of Armenia, Persia, India, Tartaria, and of many other prouinces and Countrys, whiche shall be declared in this worke, as they were seene by me, Marcus Paulus of the noble Citie of Venice; . . .*

PROLOGUE TO ELIZABETHEAN TRANSLATION OF *THE TRAVELS OF MARCO POLO*

In seeking oriental wares to satisfy their western customers, both Venice and Genoa found especially satisfying opportunities on the shores of the Black Sea. The commercial importance of what is now the southern part of the Soviet Union increased when it was united with China under the rule of the Mongols. The conquests of these horsemen-bowmen were sensationally destructive in their first stage, which carried them to a victory over Poles and Germans in western Poland in 1241 and to the sack of Bagdad in 1258. But once their supremacy was established, the Mongol emperors organized very efficiently armies, roads, posts, tribute collection, and trade from the borders of Hungary to the Sea of Japan, the vastest empire ever created down to that time. The Great Khan, whose capital was at first in Outer Mongolia and later in China, ruled over lesser khans; furthest west was the Khanate of the Golden Horde (the Kipchak Empire), supreme over the rivers of southern Russia which were visited by Venetians, as well as Greeks, Armenians, Jews, and others, seeking supplies for the city of Constantinople. In what is now Iran and Iraq was formed the Khanate of Persia (Ilkhan Empire). Mongol expansion southward into the Arab world was stopped by the defeat inflicted on the Persian khan in 1260 by new

rulers of Egypt, the Mamluks. The Mamluks remained the masters of Syria, Palestine, and the routes through the Red Sea; but the Mongol Khanate of Persia developed an overland trade between the Persian Gulf and the West. One terminus of this route was at Lajazzo, just north of Syria. A second western terminus was the city of Trebizond at the eastern end of the Black Sea. The Persian capital of Tabriz became a flourishing link in the chain of trade from Lajazzo and Trebizond to Ormuz at the head of the Persian Gulf (see Map 5).

The opportunities opened by the Mongols are illustrated by the story of Nicolò and Matteo Polo. They were among the Venetians who, after setting up business in Constantinople, extended their commerce across the Black Sea to Soldaia on the southern tip of the Crimea. In 1260 they decided to explore commercial possibilities further inland. Taking jewels and some other wares they rode from Soldaia to Sarai (near modern Saratow) on the Volga River, the capital of the Golden Horde. It proved to be a very good time indeed to be away from Constantinople and out of the Black Sea, since it was precisely in July, 1261, that the Greeks retook Constantinople and encouraged the eager Genoese to seize all the Venetians they could. Some fifty Venetians were captured trying to escape from the Black Sea and treated by the Greek emperor as pirates, being punished by blinding and having their noses cut off. How much the Polo brothers heard of this, possibly exaggerated in the telling, can only be imagined, but it seems an adequate reason why they should not try to go back by the way they had come, although it is not the reason given by Nicolò's son, Marco Polo, who wrote of their travels. Even Sarai may have seemed unsafe if the Polo brothers were sufficiently informed, for the Greek Empire became for a few years the connecting link in an alliance with the Golden Horde on the one side and the Mamluks on the other, an alliance directed partially against the Khanate of Persia and partially against Venice. It is ironic but typical of the commercial conditions of the period that the coup at Constantinople in 1261, a commercial disaster for the Venetians, should have set in motion the finding of a new route and the most celebrated of all Venetian journeys.

If Nicolò and Matteo were well-informed about commercial conditions, as seems likely, they knew about the routes through the lands of the Mongol khan of Persia. At least they must have heard about the rich city of Tabriz and of merchants that went there either through Trebizond or Lajazzo. To reach Tabriz from where they were, in Sarai, there was a route going south on the west side of the Caspian Sea, which one western traveler before them had used, but this way was closed to the Polos by the war being waged for possession of the Caucasus between the khans of Persia and of the Golden Horde. Therefore, they journeyed east from Sarai to Bokhara, in Great Turkey which was under a third Mongol khan (Chagatai Empire). From Bokhara they hoped to find a route, as yet unknown to westerners, that would lead from Bokhara to Tabriz and so back to the Mediterranean. If they had succeeded in reaching Tabriz, they would have found one Venetian already living there, Pietro Viglioni, and if they had arrived in time, they might have been called on to witness his will, which he had to have witnessed by persons not Venetian, for in Tabriz there were no other Venetians, although there were other Italians. The Polo brothers could hope to go home to Venice from Tabriz by the same route over which Viglioni had come, provided they could find "the unknown route" between Bokhara and Tabriz.

Instead, they found wars going on also between khans in Great Turkey,

blocking the roads west. But they were ready to take whatever opportunity knocked, and after about three years in Bokhara, during which they learned Mongol and Persian, they met a high Mongol official traveling with a formidable caravan eastward from the Khan of Persia to the Great Khan in China. Invited to accompany him because the Great Khan had never seen Latin Christians and would be interested, so they were told, Matteo and Nicolò made the three thousand mile trip over or around the mountains called the "roof of the world" (the high Pamirs), through the populous oases of central Asia, skirting some of the earth's largest deserts until they came to the Mongol capital at Peking. Other westerners had been to the Mongol capital when it had been in Mongolia, but the new Great Khan, Kublai Khan, had moved it southward, and the Polo brothers were the first from the Mediterranean to cross the Great Wall of China.

The Great Khan knew the Moslems as difficult enemies (the defeat by the Mamluks rankled), but he knew little of Christians, and after the Polo brothers had spent some time at his court, he sent them west as his ambassadors to the pope, asking that missionaries be sent to instruct his people concerning Christianity. On this return journey, the Polo brothers finally found a route which brought them through the Khanate of Persia to the Mediterranean at Lajazzo, and so home.

When they set out again for China in 1271, they had collected only two missionaries, who fearfully turned back almost as soon as they started, but they took with them Nicolò's son, Marco, a young man of twenty-one. Marco caught the eye of the Mongol emperor, entered his service, and traveled back and forth over China for most of the next twenty years, becoming familiar with a civilization quite different and in many respects more admirable than his own, with bigger cities, a larger, highly organized state, and a different world of refined art, science, and courtly custom. When the Polos finally returned to the west, they traveled by sea from China to the Persian Gulf, and then across Persia to Trebizond (see Map 6). Back in Venice, Marco Polo recounted his travels and the wonders he had seen until he became a legendary figure. By that time, to be sure, many other western merchants had found the route to Cathay. In the 1260's, Marco's father and uncle had been pioneers in pushing east from Sarai to Bokhara. In the 1290's, other Venetians and many Genoese were taking advantage of the relatively safe roads kept open by the Mongol khans. Other Venetians who had trips of their own to talk about may have listened with less than enthusiasm to Marco Polo's tales of his travels; one legend about him is that his book was named "Marco's Millions" by those wearied with what they called his exaggerations.

Another legend is that, on his return at the age of forty to the palace in Venice which he had left as a youth, no one recognized him or his father and uncle. No one believed their story until they slit open the seams of their clothes to let piles of jewels tumble out. In fact, his uncle and father seem to have made their journeys primarily as traders in jewels and precious stones, making rich gifts to the rulers of new countries on their arrival and receiving gifts appropriate to the magnificence of the ruler on their departure, a procedure more profitable than haggling trade. Jewels were an ideal commodity for such long and arduous routes.

The most important among the routes opened by the Mongols and described by Marco Polo was that through Persia to the Indian Ocean. The



FIGURE 5 *Travel Posters from Marco Polo (Photo Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris).*

Marco's account shaped for centuries Europe's impressions of Asia, as shown in the miniatures adorning the narrative of his travels which was presented by the Duke of Burgundy to another member of the French royal family about 1400.

(a) Polo brothers riding to Bokhara; (b) Their reception by the Great Khan; (c) On their second trip, entering an industrial town in Armenia; (d) The merchants they met in Ormuz; (e) The pepper harvest in southern India; (f) Gathering diamonds from a riverbed in mountains guarded by poisonous serpents.

much wanted spices from India and the East Indies found there an alternative means of reaching the Mediterranean in case the routes through the Red Sea were closed. While the access to this route through Trebizond contributed to enhancing the commercial importance of the Black Sea, the branch leading through Lajazzo had many advantages. It passed through the Christian Kingdom of Lesser Armenia and enabled traders to avoid both the lands under the control of the Greeks and those under the Moslem Mamluks.

Bypassing Moslem territory became of crucial importance when the Mamluk Soldan of Egypt wiped out the last remnants of the Kingdom of Jerusalem. In 1291 Acre fell, and Tyre and Tripoli also. The pope placed a ban on any trade with lands under the rule of the soldan, even trade in wares not contraband. Cyprus might serve as an intermediary for surreptitious trade, but Lajazzo was the only port on the mainland legally open to Christians, and it immediately became the destination of the Venetian fleets to Beyond-the-Sea. Marco Polo was there on a trading voyage when war broke out between Venice and Genoa, and he was taken back to a Genoese prison, still full of tales about the days in China. In prison he found someone willing to listen, a fellow prisoner, Rustichello of Pisa, who gave Marco's narrative the literary style which was fashionable in that day and which ensured it wide circulation.

THE SECOND GENOESE WAR The fall of Acre made Lajazzo a natural center of conflict in a new Genoese War. The truce of 1270 had been renewed several times, although frequent acts of piracy as well as commercial rivalry kept mutual hatred inflamed. Both Venice and Genoa were ready to turn a casual incident into a war because each wished to expel the other from the Black Sea, more important than ever after the fall of Acre. The Venetians had been readmitted to trade in the Black



Sea after the First Genoese War, and had made their own commercial treaty with the Khan of the Golden Horde in 1291.

After an unplanned clash in which some Venetian galleys were plundered, the Venetians sent a large escort of war galleys with the caravan leaving for Cyprus and Armenia in 1294, expecting apparently to repeat what they had done at Acre in 1258. On the way the Venetians captured or destroyed Genoese possessions in Cyprus. When the news of this reached the Genoese at Pera, they armed their ships and, enlisting all those they could gather in Romania, they headed for the lands Beyond-the-Sea. By the time they caught up with the Venetians, the latter were off Lajazzo. Since the Venetians had more ships, they hardly expected to be attacked and had their sails up, which made it harder to maneuver the vessels, especially as they had not unloaded their mercantile cargoes. Many got in each other's way and ended up broadside against the enemy prows. The Genoese won a complete victory, capturing nearly all the ships and much merchandise.

Enthusiastic over this success, The Genoese conducted this second war very differently from the first one. Like the Venetians in the 1260's, they went looking for more victorious battles. In 1295, they armed the biggest fleet yet, 165 galleys with crews totaling 35,000 men! The Venetians also conscripted men and ships for a large armament but did not seek the enemy. The Genoese fleet sent a challenge to the Venetians and sailed as far as Messina. Then it sailed home again. In the letdown after that excessive effort, the Genoese began fighting among themselves and sent out no fleet in 1296. The Venetians dispatched a war fleet which collected some plunder at Pera, Focea, and in Kaffa. Neither side concentrated on the protection of convoys; both used their fleets to raid the colonies of the other. As pirates, the Venetians this time did as much damage as did the Genoese, and the Venetian government showed more concern with making their armaments pay.

After several attempts, the Genoese in 1298 induced the Venetian again to risk a battle between war fleets. The Genoese commander, Lampa Doria, forced the Venetians to meet his challenge by ravaging the Dalmatian coast where the two fleets met off the island of Curzola. This was the largest battle ever fought between these two contestants, about 90 Venetian vessels against 80 Genoese, with heavily armed war galleys on both sides. Contemporary accounts differ excessively in describing the action, but agree that it was very hard fought, with heavy losses on both sides, and that the Genoese had the better of it in seamanship, maneuver, and combat. They captured most of the Venetian galleys and thousands of prisoners.

Victory in battle was of no more benefit to the Genoese in this war than battle victories had been to the Venetians in the earlier contest. Doria's losses were such that he did not feel able to push on and attack the lagoons. Venice was not blockaded and was able to outfit new fleets the following year. Indeed, Domenico Schiavo, a Venetian pirate who had commanded some ships which survived Curzola, revived the spirits of his countrymen by a surprise raid on Genoa itself and boasted of having struck coins with the insignia of St. Mark on Genoa's own breakwater. The following year, peace was made between Venice and Genoa on terms of comparative equality.

If Domenico Schiavo was really able to coin ducats on the breakwater in the harbor of Genoa, it was because he could use nearby Monaco as a base. Monaco had been taken over in 1297 by Francesco Grimaldi, who was the leader of the Guelfs in Genoa. The Doria and Spinola families, leaders of the Ghibelline faction which had gained power earlier, drove the Guelf nobles to open rebellion by confiscating and selling their property. After its defeat at Curzola, Venice allied with the Genoese Guelfs at Monaco, and it was fear of its internal enemies, the Guelfs, quite as much as respect for Venice's unbroken power that motivated the Genoese rulers in accepting the terms agreed upon in 1299.

By these terms Venice recognized Genoese primacy over all its Riviera and Genoa recognized Venetian lordship over its "Gulf" by agreeing that, if there was war of any kind in the Adriatic, no Genoese ship would enter the Adriatic except to go to Venice. Venice abandoned any support of the Guelfs of Monaco, an act which made the Grimaldi feel free to prey on Venetian commerce as well as that of Genoese Ghibellines. Neither Pisa in the west nor the Byzantine emperor in the east were included in the treaty. Venice was left free to continue its war against the Greek ruler, really a series of plundering raids which they had begun as part of the Genoese war. The question as to which was to take the lion's share of the expanding trade through the Black Sea was left quite unresolved, as was their rivalry Beyond-the-Sea. Judging from these terms one might almost say that again the side which won the battles lost the war. In 1270, the Genoese had not wanted to conclude a truce because their "honor" was unsatisfied and their purses were profiting. In 1299, victories had sated their pride and profits were suffering.

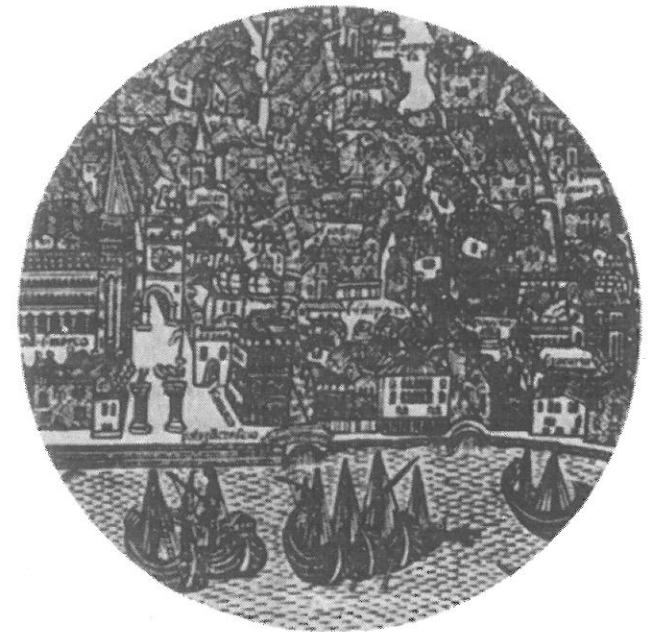
So much was left unsettled by the peace treaty that everything depended on how the rivals used the opportunities it offered. The weaknesses of Genoa's internal political organization, which had interfered with her deriving any real profit from her naval victories, appeared in more glaring form during the next century. Over the long run, the outcome of Venetian-Genoese rivalry was not to

depend on superiority in seamanship or naval operations; after 1270, Venice had no such superiority. It was decided by their relative skill in arts of another order — those of social organization, in which the Genoese and the Venetians had very different talents.

ARISTOCRATIC POLITY·I

From Dukedom to Commune

CHAPTER EIGHT



The myths of Venice have enduring vitality. "Time dissipates to shining ether the solid angularity of fact," as Emerson boasted, but myths enthrall the imagination and defy trial by documentation. Some myths have even been makers of reality and moulded Venice's history.

MYTH AND REALITY IN THE DUKEDOM The oldest powerful myth proclaimed Venice's sovereign independent birth. A feeling for the integrity of the state, for its ultimate authority over all persons and groups, strikingly distinguishes Venice from such other Italian city-states as Genoa or Florence. No doubt it was derived in large part from habits of political behavior formed when Venice was part of the Byzantine Empire, for there was no sudden break with the Byzantine tradition. But, paradoxically, this feeling of state sovereignty was enhanced by a myth of original independence and self-government. Other Italian city-states of the Later Middle Ages acknowledged a theoretical sovereignty of the emperor or pope, but the Venetians looked to no such high authority to legitimize their government. They believed it legitimate and possessed of final authority because it expressed the will of the Venetians, a people who had always been free, that is, independent of outside control. Andrea Dandolo, a doge and the authoritative fourteenth-century chronicler, ignored the fact that the first doge of Venice was a Byzantine official, created when Venice was part of the Byzantine Empire. He pictures the Venetians gathering in 697 on their own initiative from the various settlements in which they then lived scattered over the lagoons and deciding, nobles and

common people together, on the creation of a single leader, the dux or doge, to replace the officials called tribunes by whom their settlements had been hitherto separately governed. (See Chronological Chart preceding Chapter 1.)

The cult of Saint Mark strengthened this feeling of sovereign independence. Italian cities generally affirmed their autonomy and power by adoring a chosen saint as their patron. For example, Genoa extolled Saint George. Venice identified with Saint Mark the Evangelist. Dandolo began his chronicle with the story of how Saint Mark was carried by a storm to the Venetian lagoons and there founded the church at Aquileia, from which was derived the Patriarchate of Venice. Legend elaborated on how he found refuge one night on the site where the church San Marco was to be built and how he dreamed of the building to be erected there in his honor. When two Venetians returning from trade in Alexandria reported to the doge that they had brought back the body of Saint Mark, their possession of the body strengthened the Venetians' conviction that the Evangelist was their special protector and patron. His cult became a symbolic expression of their loyalty to each other, of their unity.

Significantly, on its arrival in Venice, the precious relic was taken to the doge, not to the bishop or to the patriarch. Although, like other medieval Christians, the Venetians thought of themselves as a religious community, tracing their original identity, as the legends of Saint Mark showed, to the Christian community formed by the Apostle himself within the Roman Empire, they looked to the doge rather than to any ecclesiastic as the head of that community. The doge built as his private chapel the church called San Marco in which the sacred relic was placed. It was not the cathedral of the local bishop; his cathedral was the church in the Castello district called San Pietro in Olivolo. Important among early centers of settlement, Castello later became an out-of-the-way seaman's quarter, while San Marco and Rialto became the centers of Venetian life (see Figure 2). Even in ecclesiastical affairs, the bishop at Castello was secondary, overshadowed by the patriarch. As explained in Chapter 1, the seat of the patriarchate was not at Venice at all but at Grado, away at one end of the lagoon, because there it could claim rights as a continuation of the old patriarchate of Aquileia. In most cities of the Middle Ages, a bishop was the center of government before the development of communal institutions. It was not so at Venice, partly because of the strength of the Byzantine tradition of subordinating the clergy, and partly because the patriarch neither was Venice's bishop nor was San Marco his church. The doge and civic officials administered the wealth attracted by veneration for the saint's relics, and it was the power and glory of the Venetian state which was symbolized by the Lion of Saint Mark.

Another myth which, when fully formed, contributed to the solidarity of the state was a belief that Venice was free of factions, that all worked together for the glory of their city. This myth flourished in the sixteenth century, when the contrast between Venetian unity and recent civil strife elsewhere was sufficiently striking to make it believable and to outweigh the record of open violence in the first five or six centuries of Venetian political history. When doges of the Candiano family were battling for Venetian control of the northern Adriatic in the ninth and tenth centuries, they were also seeking power for their family and trying to make the Venetian lagoons an hereditary dukedom. Pietro IV Candiano put away his first wife in order to marry the sister of the richest prince in Italy,

the Marquis of Tuscany. He sent Venetians as soldiers to fight in various parts of Italy for the lands that were her dowry. He brought foreign soldiers to Venice to reinforce his authority, and looked to Otto, the German emperor, for support. He was opposed by powerful families which leaned on Byzantium. His rivals roused a mob to storm the ducal palace in 976; when beaten off by Candiano's guards, they started a fire in adjoining structures. The fire spread through all that island of the city, destroying the church of San Marco as well as the ducal palace. When the doge was driven by fire and smoke to seek a way out, he was waylaid by his enemies and killed, as was his infant son, a babe in arms. This was the most savage outburst of rivalry between ducal families, but in the early centuries many of the doges were assassinated or deposed. Pietro IV Candiano was succeeded by the first of the Orseolo, who rebuilt San Marco. The second Orseolo, Pietro II, who led the brilliant expedition to Dalmatia in the year 1000, strengthened his position by marriage alliances with imperial families, but during the dogeship of his son, his dynasty also was violently overthrown.

Meanwhile, murderous feuds flourished. A member of the Caloprini family murdered one of the Morosini. For a time, the Caloprini sought and obtained a kind of protection from the German emperor, Otto II, but after his death, three Caloprini brothers were killed by the Morosini. These episodes show that, in the tenth and eleventh centuries, Venice suffered from feuds and ambitions among its great families similar to those which so conspicuously plagued other Italian city-states, both then and in later centuries. The orderly subordination of individual ambition for which Venice was later much admired was an acquired characteristic, not an inheritance of original virtues. It was not true that Venice had never known the bloody strife of factions; it was true that she found means of taming them.

Another kind of myth about Venetian government developed very much later, in the last centuries of the life of the Republic, a kind of countermyth which had historical influence not in strengthening the republic but in contributing to its downfall. It pictured Venetian government as a tyrannical oligarchy maintained by a terrifying efficiency in the use of spies, tortures, and poisons. This countermyth began among Venice's Spanish enemies during the Counter Reformation, but it matured in the eighteenth century, when there was some truth in it, and reached full flower in the propaganda by which the Jacobins and Napoleon justified their destruction of the Republic. Abandoned in its extreme form, in a mild version it still dominates many accounts. In fact, Venice did in later centuries come to be governed by less than a hundred families that closed ranks and came to believe firmly in their sole right to govern by reason of their birth. But to attribute to earlier centuries the aristocratic and democratic beliefs of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries is a modern kind of mythmaking.

What we would call a democratic principle has been ascribed to their selection of the doge by a popular assembly and the submission of basic laws for approval by the people. But when early chronicles or legal formulas refer to "the people" (*populus*), they have in mind the whole community, or at least all the laity of the community (as in referring to the election of the bishop by *clero et populo*); they do not necessarily have in mind "people" as distinct from "nobility." There were families which were considered noble because of their wealth, military services, ecclesiastical connections, and style of living. Although they

had no well-defined legal or political privileges separating them from commoners, they were the leaders of political life and were at first accepted as representing the people, that is, the community.

In the Middle Ages, there were two schemes of thought and emotion by which power was made to seem legitimate and right. One was the descending theory which held that all rightful power was handed down by God to the pope and emperor and passed on by them to those below. The other was the ascending theory which held that lawmaking and similar political powers resided in the community and could be handed over by it to those it designated. Rightful rulers were in this sense representatives of the community and were responsible to it. Of these two contrasting theories, the Venetians wholeheartedly embraced the second. They used it to justify their strong belief in their sovereign independence. While emphasizing it to defend their freedom from any emperor, they used it also to justify imposing restrictions on their doges and even deposing them.

On the other hand, they believed the Biblical teaching that all power came from God. The doge avowed in his oath of office that he attained his position through election not out of his own strength and wisdom but "by clemency of the Creator on whom all depends." He received the rod or the standard which was the symbol of his office from Saint Mark, as was clearly depicted on the Venetian coins (see Figure 12), and as was symbolized in the ceremony by which he was installed when he received the standard from the altar at San Marco. Thus elements of the descending and ascending theories were combined. Only the people, the community, could designate who was to be doge and define his powers; but the governmental authority which he exercised was thought of not as a mere human device but as a divine institution.

In the ninth, tenth, and even the eleventh centuries, the doge was a monarch of unlimited power. Later, after he had been hemmed around with advisory councils, he still remained the symbol of the unity and authority of government. He was also at the center of the practical problems of commanding the armed forces, conducting foreign affairs, dispensing justice, and supervising administrative officers. In this situation, his moral authority as representative of both the community and of Saint Mark added to the forcefulness and effectiveness of the executive branch of the government.

A beginning of the process of hemming him in with advisers appears on the occasion of the revolution which overthrew the Orseolo dynasty in 1032. Along with the new doge, two ducal councillors were elected to prevent any attempt at the kind of monarchic rule which had been practiced by the Candiani and the Orseolo. These safeguards were not immediate needs, however, for the new doge, Domenico Flabianico, was of a different stripe. He was a "new man," of a family which had not previously held high office, but he had gained great wealth as a silk merchant. He showed his shrewdness also in a peaceful term of office.

Men like Domenico Flabianico became more and more numerous in Venice during the next two centuries. Agricultural growth and general economic expansion in the Po Valley on the one side and increasing Venetian naval power and commercial privileges within the Byzantine Empire on the other side enabled many new men to rise into the ranks of the nobility. While trade, or perhaps piracy, was a main source of wealth, fortunes were also made by those who invested in real estate within the neighborhood of Rivoalto. Rich families claiming descent from the tribunes called all other nobles "new families," but really old,

pretended old, and frankly new families all had much the same sources of wealth. They were all active in maritime commerce and warfare, they all bought land when they could, and they all had an interest in competing for the dogeship and for influential positions among the doge's advisers.

In accordance with the ascending theme in government, the highest authority in early Venice was in theory the General Assembly (*Concio* or *Arengo*). In this general gathering of the people occurred the selection of the doge and the approval of new laws, but it seems clear that its proceedings were dominated by the powerful families. A contemporary description of an early ducal election assumes the initiative of the leading nobles and stresses the divine inspiration which was felt to be an essential part of the process of choice. On word of the doge's death in 1071, countless boats bringing Venetians from all over the lagoons gathered between the church of the bishop at Castello and the monastery of San Nicolò at the Lido. Within church and abbey resounded fervent prayers that God give to the Venetians a capable and universally acceptable doge. Suddenly, there was a general cry through the multitude: "We wish and elect Domenico Selvo." Promptly a throng of nobles brought him forward in a bark which moved toward San Marco at the head of a procession of boats which made the water white with their oars, while the people shouted approval, the clergy chanted *Te Deum Laudamus*, and the bells of the Campanile rang triumphantly. Humbly entering the church of San Marco, the newly elected doge took from its altar his staff of office and then went to the ducal palace to receive an oath of obedience from the assembled people.

The throng of nobles around the doge when he took office were men accustomed to acting as judges and as his councillors. The growth of population and traffic made it necessary for every doge to have such a group to assist in the government. Before the councillors were organized into well-defined bodies with specified numbers and terms of office, they appeared as prominent and experienced persons whom the doge was expected to consult, sometimes a few only, but on important matters fairly large numbers. Then, in the mid-twelfth century, these men acted as the representatives of what was called the Commune. They competed with the doge for the leadership of the community, they acted particularly as spokesmen of the rapidly growing Rivoalto — the city we know as Venice — and asserted its supremacy over all the other settlements in the lagoons. Some earlier doges had tried to treat their office as a king might treat his crown, namely, as a personal or family possession; from the second half of the twelfth century on, they were called on to treat it as a public trust and to consider themselves in a position not essentially different from that of their councillors, namely, as one of the officers of the Commune, although its head.

DOGES WITHIN A COMMUNE In becoming a commune, Venice was doing what other north Italian cities were also doing in the same period, but Venice was able to create a more solid communal allegiance. In Padua, Milan, and Florence, communes were formed as new organizations fighting to take powers away from bishops or feudal lords. The Commune of Venice was a continuation of the dukedom under a new name and with a gradually transformed structure. Long after the name of Commune was adopted and used officially, the doge continued to act as the personification of the state, giving justice and negotiating treaties. The feeling of group

loyalty and the sense of state sovereignty which had been focused on him and on Saint Mark enabled the Commune to command solid loyalties.

The turning point in which this solidarity of allegiance was essentially preserved came in 1172, after Doge Vitale II Michiel brought home the fleet he had been leading against Byzantium, not rich with plunder as hoped, but decimated by a pestilence.

The ducal office or throne had then been occupied for most of a century by members of the Michiel family — for sixty-two out of the last seventy-six years, if we count in one son-in-law. Vitale II Michiel had quarreled with his councillors over his effort to advance his sons and nephews. After the disastrous outcome of his naval expedition had turned the populace against him, he faced a General Assembly without the support of his councillors, for he had not followed their advice in his dealing with the Byzantine emperor. The assembly was so hostile that he fled for refuge towards the church of San Zaccaria. He was assassinated at its doorway.

What made the events of 1172 decisive were the actions of the Ducal Council which then took charge and, more basically, the attitude of the whole group of remarkable men who exercised power for the next two generations: Sebastiano Ziani and his son Pietro, Enrico Dandolo and his son Ranieri. They accepted the principle that the doge should never act contrary to the advice of his councillors. Vitale II Michiel had tried to treat the dogeship in traditional manner as a kind of personal monarchy, though elective. His successors treated it as a republican magistracy, working together in a team even when one of them was called on to step aside and let a rival be elected to the highest office. In the transformation of the dogeship into a magistracy, the institutional changes in 1172 were less decisive than were the successes of the leading personalities of the next century and their exhibitions of restraint.

If any one constitutional reform was crucial it was the creation in 1172 of an official nominating committee to name the new doge. A body of wise men (*sapientes*) had functioned as ducal councillors at least as early as 1143 and presumably had consulted or maneuvered among themselves so that, when the people were summoned to choose a new doge, the leading men had nominations ready. But after 1172, there was just one official nominating committee and it made a single nomination, which was equivalent to election. Through this committee, the leaders of the Commune, placed in control by Michiel's debacle, made sure that the man named as doge would thereafter be one of their own members whom they thought they could trust to act as a member of the team, that is, to abide by the decisions of his councils.

The first two men chosen by this official nominating committee were two of the richest, probably the two richest, men in Venice, Sebastiano Ziani and Orio Mastropiero. A few years earlier, when the Commune pledged all the revenue from the Rialto market in order to borrow a huge sum from a dozen leading citizens, Sebastiano Ziani and Orio Mastropiero had each contributed a sixth of the total. Most of the members of that consortium of creditors belonged to the old tribunician families, but Ziani and Mastropiero were relatively new names. The fabulous fortune of the Ziani had been built up by Sebastiano through many years of trade in the East and by investment in *colleganze* such as those handled by Romano Mairano. It was further multiplied by loans on real estate, some of them of a character that in a later period would certainly have been regarded as

usurious. He can be considered the founder of the glorious Piazza di San Marco, for he bequeathed to the city a cluster of structures, which he had acquired piecemeal, that were then torn down to make an open space in front of the church. In 1172 he was already in his seventies and had served in many important embassies, while his son Pietro was busy adding to the family fortune.

In consolidating the new regime, Sebastiano Ziani proved as successful in politics as he had been in business. He vindicated the prestige of his office by executing the assassin of his predecessor, whom chroniclers wrote off as a madman, obscuring the political shift which it punctuated. And although Ziani was the first doge formally chosen by the official nominating committee, he was also the first one to add to the role of the populace in the inauguration ceremonies by being carried around the Piazza on the shoulders of workers from the Arsenal while he scattered coins among the crowd. He added to the international prestige of the Venetian doge and the Venetian Commune by conducting intricate foreign affairs in such a way as to enjoy the confidence of both pope and emperor, in spite of their being at war with each other for years. He arranged for them both to come to Venice to conclude a truce. This famous meeting of the German emperor Frederick Barbarossa and Pope Alexander III in 1177 with the doge of Venice in the role of a sovereign independent power acting as peacemaker was the climax of Sebastiano Ziani's career. He died the following spring in a monastery to which he had retired a few days before.

His successor, Orio Mastropiero, also resigned the dogeship before his death, either because of ill health or because "the Venetians wished it," as the chronicler says, although his service, while not as brilliant as that of Sebastiano Ziani, had yet been on the whole successful.

The choice of the electors fell next on a member of one of the most securely established old families, Enrico Dandolo, who as doge then led the Fourth Crusade and won for himself and his successors the title of Ruler of One Fourth and One Half of the Empire of Romania. The way in which he dominated events showed that, although the doge of Venice could not go against the views of his councils, he could be as powerful a ruler as any king, especially if he personally commanded the fleet and led it to victory. Enrico Dandolo's leadership was economic as well as military. He minted the first of the famous Venetian coins, the big silver penny or *grosso*, taking advantage of the silver bullion paid by the crusaders. He thus created a means of paying for supplies and for imports from the East. Since it was maintained at unchanged weight and fineness, the *grosso* added to Venice's reputation and attracted business.

The conquest of Constantinople by the crusaders in 1204 increased the wealth and power of the Venetian nobility enormously. With the Byzantine Empire "up for grabs," they were in a good position to seize lucrative lands to hold as vassals either of Venice or of the Latin emperor at Constantinople. The 200 knight's fees created in Crete were allotted to Venetian nobles and the sergentries to commoners. Larger fiefs were gained by the Venetians who undertook the conquest of the islands of the Aegean and then held them in fee from the Latin emperor. The leader there was Marco Sanuto, son-in-law of Enrico Dandolo. A dozen other Venetian families held Aegean islands, mostly as Sanuto's vassals. Any growth in the prestige of the ducal office because of Enrico Dandolo's magnificent use of it was counterbalanced by growth in the prestige of many Venetian noble families.

Also significant at this juncture of Venetian history was the role played by Enrico Dandolo's son, Ranieri. When leaving with the crusaders and the Venetian fleet, the doge persuaded the Venetians to accept his son as vice-doge, serving in his absence. As vice-doge, Ranieri was by no means a nonentity; he was responsible for compiling an improved code of Venetian law. But, at his father's death, he stepped aside and presided over the election of Pietro Ziani. Ready to take second place under the new doge, Ranieri was given command in the fleet sent to effect the conquest of Crete. He was killed in the ensuing campaign. Overshadowed by his father, Ranieri Dandolo is not generally considered one of the heroes of Venetian history. His name is not on the list of doges, but should be on a list of those who established the tradition of behavior which gave viability to the Venetian political system. In that list, the non-doges, those who gracefully accepted second place, are as important as those who filled the highest office successfully.

Pietro Ziani had added much wealth to the fortune he had inherited from his father Sebastiano and was able to make gifts to various churches and monasteries. His generosity contributed to his popularity and, in the years between his father's death in 1178 and his own election in 1205, he had held many high magistracies. During his long term of twenty-four years as doge, he consolidated the Republic's hold on its territories in Romania: regulating to mutual satisfaction the bonds between the huge colony in Constantinople and the mother city, getting a firm foothold in Negroponte, conquering and colonizing in Crete, yielding in Corfu, but securing Coron and Modon and upholding Venetian power in Dalmatia. His many successes gained him much prestige among contemporaries, and many embassies came to seek his good offices or Venetian alliance. He had a facility for listening to many long speeches with his eyes closed and then summarizing clearly afterwards all that had been said. Like his father, he did not die in office; he retired in his last years to his family palace.

Pietro Ziani had been chosen almost unanimously, but the choice of his successor in 1229 led to a tie vote in the nominating committee, which now numbered forty. There were twenty votes for Marino Dandolo, a nephew of Enrico Dandolo who had been with his uncle at the conquest of Constantinople and then became the ruler of an Aegean island, and twenty also for Giacomo Tiepolo, who had carried on the conquest of Crete and then been the governor (*bailo*) of the colony in Constantinople. The dispute was decided in Tiepolo's favor by casting lots and Marino Dandolo accepted that result. But when the new doge went to pay his respects to old Pietro Ziani, the latter refused to see him. This episode, or the report of it handed down in family chronicles, contributed to a growing split in the Venetian nobility between a faction headed by the Tiepolo and a group composed mainly of the older families centering around the Dandolo.

Giacomo Tiepolo made his name famous by codifying Venetian law into five books of Statuti. He also issued a separate code of maritime law, that which shows most clearly the high status then enjoyed by merchant seamen.

Both Pietro Ziani and Giacomo Tiepolo used the prestige attached to being Doge of Venice to arrange marriage alliances with neighboring princes, such as the King of Sicily or the King of Rascia (part of what is now Yugoslavia). Giacomo Tiepolo's successor as doge came from the Morosini family which was allied by

marriage with the Kings of Hungary. Such marriages caused alarm and were forbidden by an addition to the doge's oath of office.

It was impossible to prevent a successful doge from enhancing the status of his family through the glory which reflected on them from his notable achievements, but the Venetians attempted to restrain his use of the position for either personal or family gain by adding restrictions to the oath of office of each new incumbent. These oaths (*promissioni*) record a continual limiting of the doge's powers and freedom of action. At the death of each doge, a committee was appointed to consider additions to the oath before it was taken by the new doge to be elected. Later, another committee was appointed to examine the record in office of the dead doge and to prosecute him so that his heirs might be forced to pay compensation if he had wrongly received any gifts and to pay fines for any derelictions of the duties specified in the doge's oath.

Such inquests emphasized that the dogeship had lost all of its quasi-regal character. It became merely the most distinguished among several magistracies. Gradually, the additions to the doge's oath diluted the power of the position excessively. The series of exceptionally able men who were elected during the century after 1172 are notable for having loyally accepted the restrictions on the office as well as for the vigor and wisdom with which they exercised the very considerable power which in that century was still retained by the doge as the leader of the Venetian Commune.

THE CONSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK Venice had no single written document like the Constitution of the United States embodying a basic law with which all other laws had to conform. The nearest to it in early times was the doge's oath, the *Promissione*. Later basic laws are also to be found in the statutes sworn to by other magistrates such as the Ducal Councillors. We may speak of a Venetian constitution, however, in the same way that we refer to the British constitution, although it is embodied in no single document but is found partly in scattered statutes and partly in customs long adhered to. Custom was equally important in defining the powers and procedures of the various organs of government in Venice. Although these powers and procedures changed, they did so a little at a time during about six centuries. With a few additions and one deletion, the main lines of structure clearly discernible already in the thirteenth century were kept until 1797.

The central organs of government formed a pyramid (see Figure 6) with the General Assembly at its base and the doge at its apex. In between them were the Great Council, the Forty and the Senate, and the Ducal Council. Distrust of individual power made the Venetians depend on committees and councils. Even in their judicial system, sentences were not imposed by an individual judge but by several judges acting together. Each committee or council was checked by some other committee or council so as to assure the rule of law, even at the cost of losing some executive efficiency. While thus insisting on a division of power among the different elements in the pyramid of councils, the Venetians made no effort to separate executive, legislative, and judicial functions.

The General Assembly usually met not in boats as described for the election of Doge Domenico Selvo in 1071, but within San Marco. It was summoned only to ratify basic legislation and to acclaim a nominating committee's choice of doge.

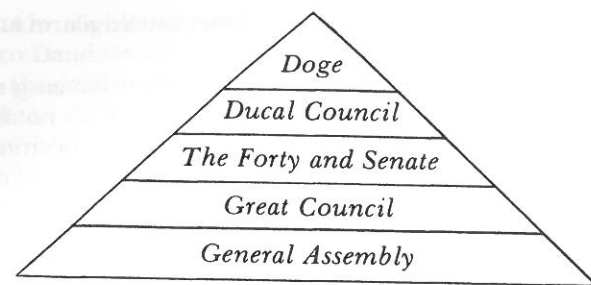


FIGURE 6 *The Constitutional Pyramid.*

Later elaborations and modifications are shown by Figure 40.

More carefully composed and regulated in its proceedings was the Great Council, which in the thirteenth century was the center of power. It elected all magistrates and the members of all the other councils and settled disputes between them. It passed laws, decreed punishments, and granted pardons. Important officials such as the Ducal Councillors were ex-officio members and together with its regular members made a total of three or four hundred. Roughly speaking one can say that the Great Council contained all the most important people who were available in Venice and a sprinkling of others named to it because someone thought they were potentially important.

So large a council was too big for frequent deliberation and debate. Those functions were performed by councils of intermediate size, of which the most important at first was the Forty (*Quarantia*). It formed the court of appeals at the top of the judicial system and at the same time was charged with preparing for approval by the Great Council legislation concerning coinage and finances. Later the Council of Forty was overshadowed by the Senate (*Consilium Rogatorum* or *Consiglio dei Pregadi*), which originated as a committee of sixty men charged with preparing decrees concerning commerce, the sending of embassies, and the movement of fleets. The Forty and the Senate acted jointly when that seemed appropriate, but in the thirteenth century the Forty was the more authoritative council and the three Heads (*Capi*) it elected to be its presiding officers rivaled in importance the Ducal Councillors.

At the top was the Ducal Council, which initiated most of the work of all the other councils while being at the same time bound to obey their decisions. After 1178, the Ducal Councillors were six in number, one for each of the *sestieri* into which the city was divided. They held office generally for a year but sometimes for six months and were not eligible for reelection until two years had elapsed since their previous term. They met under the presidency of the doge and the attendance of the three Heads of the Forty, who had a vote on many issues and could substitute in exercising councillor functions if one of the Ducal Councillors had to be absent.

These ten men — the doge, the Ducal Councillors, and the Heads of the Forty — constituted what was called the *Signoria*; in a narrow sense, they were the government. With the doge at their head, they were responsible for meeting crises as they arose, for formulating proposals and summoning the appropriate council to consider them, for seeing that various subordinate officials were duly

elected and performed their duties. Justice also was their responsibility. The doge personally, accompanied by Councillors, was required by his oath of office to visit the law courts periodically and give ear to any complaints of denial of justice.

At the beginning of the thirteenth century the Signoria named the commanders of galleys and fleets, and in the Great Council made nominations for membership on councils and administrative boards. Later this latter function was assigned to special nominating committees, and fleet commanders were elected in the Great Council. As the volume of business to be done increased, many functions once performed by the Ducal Council were assigned to others, but it remained the central unifying executive authority. At the death of a doge, the six Ducal Councillors initiated proceedings for the choice of a new doge and for proposing any reforms in the process which they thought desirable. The senior Ducal Councillor was in the interim the head of the Republic and it was he who placed on the head of the newly chosen doge the final symbol of his office, the ducal beret which took the place of a crown.

One function of the Ducal Council was to force the doge to act in accordance with the decisions made by a majority of its members or by a majority of the Great Council. The oath of office of the Councillors required explicitly that, whenever they found the doge not executing a decision of the councils, they must say to him that he must do so. If a doge showed any intention of overriding his councils, they might feel that they had to oppose him constantly, lest he become too powerful. But so long as the doge avoided that kind of opposition by accepting the principle that the will of the majority should prevail in case of disagreement, the structure of the Signoria was such as to make it likely that the doge would be its most influential member. The other members came and went, some every two months, others every year, while the doge was there as long as he lived. Between 1172 and 1354, doges were in office eleven to twelve years on the average. They had the authority that went with being the presiding officer in the Signoria, the Senate, and the Great Council and during many functions and ceremonies in which they represented the Republic.

If we compare the Venetian constitution with that of other Italian communes of the Middle Ages, we find that the most prominent difference is in the nature of their chief executive. In the twelfth century, communes such as Genoa, Milan, or Florence were generally governed by a small group of "consuls" who formed a body similar in many ways to the Ducal Council at Venice. To give more unity and impartiality to the administration, nearly all the Italian communes created at the beginning of the thirteenth century a one-man executive and judicial head entitled the podesta. Like the doge in Venice, the podesta in other cities was bound by an elaborate oath and was subject to prosecution at the end of his term. But he was a very much weaker executive than the Venetian doge. The podesta held office for only a year or a few years; the doge held office for life. Moreover, the podesta was always a foreigner, never a political leader of the city in which he held that office. The other Italian communes felt it necessary to employ a foreigner in order to have a supreme judge and an executive in whom impartiality could at least be hoped for. The Venetians had more confidence in themselves and in each other. Never having been subject to the Western emperor, they had that feeling of sovereign independence that precluded bringing in any foreigner as chief executive. The doges were all men thoroughly experienced in the special Venetian way of running a government and well known to the leading men of the

city, by whom they were selected and with whom they had to work. The basic difference between Venice and the other Italian city-states was the greater unity and solidity of allegiance at Venice. The doge was the expression of this unified allegiance.

Such unity, with an experienced executive officer able to appeal to it effectively, was all the more desirable because administration was very loosely organized. There was almost no bureaucracy, no especially trained officials named by superiors to perform specialized tasks. The management of the Arsenal, of the mint, of the grain warehouse, the collection of taxes, and the inspection of ships — all such functions originally the responsibility of the doge and performed by *gastaldi* and a few other subordinate officials whom he appointed — were one after another assigned to elected committees of from three to six nobles who held office for only a few years at most and were not eligible to succeed themselves. They were elected by the Great Council, at least formally; in practice, in many cases they were chosen by nominating committees. Although the doge and his Council were in a general sense responsible for seeing that these officers did their jobs — and in a crucial matter, such as the ships and weapons in the Arsenal, the doge did for a while inspect personally — the doge could not remove or directly punish the members of these administrative committees. Those charged with enforcing regulations were inspired to diligence by receipt of a portion of the fines they levied, and often two or three were given overlapping jurisdiction so that they competed in collecting penalties. If they were overzealous and unfair, their victims could appeal and ask an exemption or pardon from one of the higher councils.

The church of San Marco gave rise to a special kind of magistracy, the Procurators of San Marco. Their original function was the administration of the endowments of the church, which included much revenue from Venice's colonial possessions in the Levant, the upkeep and embellishment of the building, and the supervision of its chaplains. Their duties emphasized that San Marco belonged more to the Commune than to the bishop. In addition they acquired very extensive functions in administering wills and in the guardianship of minors and persons not of sound mind. At first they were paid a substantial salary; later they were told to expect only "divine rewards" for such pious labors. These posts brought more certain this-worldly honor, however, and gave their holders many opportunities to do favors to their friends, so that the post and title of Procurator was much sought after by aspiring politicians. Once elected Procurator of San Marco, a man held the post for life; it was the only Communal office other than the dogeship in which a noble could have life tenure. A man elected Procurator was assured of a place of honor on all ceremonial occasions for as long as he lived, and this was one reason why ambitious men desired the honor. The number of Procurators increased from one in the twelfth century to four in the thirteenth century. After they ceased to draw any salary, their number was generously raised to nine.

Local government was only slightly more bureaucratic than the central government. Venice contained 60 to 70 parishes (*contrade*), each of which had its cohesion as a small community. Each had of course its priest, who was chosen by the houseowners of the parish before being installed by the bishop, and each had also a parish chief (*Capo di Contrada*). These *capi* were named and super-

vised by the doge and his Council; to that extent, their position was bureaucratic; but the choice of the doge was limited to the inhabitants of the parish, in practice to one of the great families living there. These *capi* made tax assessments for forced loans and registered all the adult males of their district and supervised their selection for military-naval service. They were also charged with keeping a special eye on taverns and on foreigners.

At first, police was entirely the responsibility of these *capi*, who had the powers of a police magistrate in judging minor offenses. Later, special officials were created, the Lords of the Nightwatch (*Signori di Notte*) who had special responsibility for the marketplace at Rialto and for executing orders of the courts and of the Ducal Council. Although their authority extended over the city as a whole, the 100-120 men they hired as police officers were required by law to be inhabitants of the quarter (i.e., the *sestiere*) in which they served, a symptom of how much local policing was identified with the people being policed. For some centuries, the parish chiefs and the Lords of the Nightwatch competed in enforcing such regulations as those concerning taverns or the carrying of weapons.

Outside of Venice, the other settlements in the lagoons, such as Chioggia and Murano, had their own statutes and councils, but had as their chief executive a *podesta* chosen by the doge or Commune of Venice. *Podesta* or *rettori* were sent also to the chief cities of Istria, where they frequently had to fight to maintain Venetian authority. When Venice extended its power over Dalmatia, it allowed local institutions to continue but insisted that the counts, who were the chief officials, should be Venetians or men from local families distinguished as strong partisans of Venice. In all cases, the counts had to be approved by the Venetian Commune and take an oath of loyalty to it.

Outside the Adriatic, Venetian colonies originated in two quite distinct ways. Some were formed by merchants enjoying grants of self-government from the local rulers, such as those gained through the crusades at Tyre and Acre. These settlements were at first informally self-governing much as was a ship's company under the maritime statutes. There was one clear difference: on land, a church and its priest provided an initial focus of organization. Later colonies of purely commercial character were under consuls elected in Venice. Quite different in origin were the colonies acquired in the partition of the Byzantine Empire. They were immediately placed under governors sent out from Venice. The most important among these had the title Duke of Crete. The Venetians who received fiefs on the island and the few Greek landlords who kept their land reported to the duke for the defense of the island. Venetian governors and feudal relations were established also in other parts of Greece, such as Coron and Modon. All these colonial governors were elected by the Great Council and had relatively short terms of office, usually two years. Each had his council which he, like the doge in Venice, was bound to consult.

Constantinople was a special case: in 1204 what had been a merchant colony became, temporarily and in conjunction with the crusading Venetian fleet, co-ruler of an empire. When the death of Enrico Dandolo in Constantinople left them leaderless, the Venetians there elected their own ruler, Marino Zeno. In Venice, Dandolo's successor, Pietro Ziani, accepted that action and confirmed Zeno in office. But Zeno's successor was sent out from Venice, as were later local

governors, who had the title of bailo. The bailo had a position of great power and responsibility, for he combined the functions of a local governor, a commercial consul, and an ambassador to whatever emperor ruled in Constantinople.

All the Venetian officeholders — those within the city itself, in the lagoon settlements, and in distant colonies — were liable to prosecution for abuse of office by a distinctly Venetian group of officials, the State Attorneys (*Avvogadori di Comun*). These Attorneys had the general duty of prosecuting all cases involving the interests of the Commune, both to recover property and to inflict punishments. They were charged specifically with bringing suit against officials who failed promptly to turn over funds due to the State Treasurers (*Camerlenghi di Comun*), with prosecuting for violations of the maritime code reported to them by crewmen or shippers, and with investigating charges of bribery in the courts. They imposed on minor officials a variety of penalties for such offenses as failing to report to their offices, that is to the places assigned them, on days when they were told they should be there by the bells in the Campanile.

The most striking function of these Attorneys was the enforcement of what we would consider constitutional law. If a council or magistracy was proceeding contrary to the rules laid down for it (for example, acting on a motion made by someone who had no right to make such a motion), the State's Attorneys could intervene. They could suspend proceedings and call for a meeting of the Great Council to hear their charges. If they believed a Ducal Councillor was not doing what the statutes of his office required, they could bring a suit against him which would be judged by The Forty. They in turn could be sued for dereliction of duty by the Heads of The Forty and in last resort the case would be heard by the Great Council. Having no single document which could be pointed to as its constitution, Venice also had no institution such as our Supreme Court undertaking to enforce it. For enforcement of the basic laws distributing political power among the various magistracies and councils it depended on the fact that every official from a parish chief to the doge could be sued and fined by some other official, most notably, by the State Attorneys.

The multiplication of elected officials in councils, fleets, and administrative boards was an essential part of the transformation of Venice from a dukedom to a commune, that is, from a monarchic form of government to one which can best be called aristocratic. It gave occasion for about 500 men to be engaged in administrative posts and voting in the various councils (out of a total population of around 100,000 inhabitants). Those actively participating in the government belonged to some hundred different families, of which between 20 and 50 might be considered great families, having both commercial and landed wealth and being able to boast of ancestors who had endowed churches and had held such high positions as Ducal Councillor, Duke of Crete, Bailo at Constantinople, Captain General of the Sea, or even Doge of Venice. Although none of these positions except the dogeship could be held very long by the same man, many of the same men held first one and then another high office so that a group of leading men rotated through such posts and through important diplomatic missions abroad or special commissions at home. The doge could not oppose the will of this group effectively, but many a doge was the most influential individual within the group, formulating its will. And these leaders owed their position to their ability to command the confidence of the hundreds who formed the Great Council.

Calling the Venetian government in the mid-thirteenth century an aristocracy classifies it as one form of government by the Few, distinct from either government by the Many or government by One. For that purpose it might also be called an oligarchy. But, in referring to Venice, "oligarchy" is usually used to designate control by a smaller group within the aristocracy, generally with the implication that this small group governed oppressively. Aristocracy refers to the rule of the whole body of the nobility, conveying at the same time the favorable implication that they were the part of the population best able to rule well. The extent to which in practice they ruled in the interests of the whole community or considered only benefits to themselves is to be seen in the history of the Republic.

A REORGANIZATION OF SEA POWER · II

The Commercial Revolution of the Resident Merchants

CHAPTER ELEVEN



Compared to commercial changes in later centuries when trade vaulted from one side of an ocean or continent to another, the shifts occurring about 1300 may seem minor, but they have been characterized as a "Commercial Revolution." Especially striking geographically were the changes in western Europe, when the new routes to Bruges replaced those that had tied northern and southern Europe together through the fairs of Champagne. But the most significant aspect of the commercial revolution of about 1300 lay not in the geographic shifts but in changes in commercial practices. The ways of doing business which became current in the fourteenth century persisted until long after Europe had expanded into America.

BUSINESS ORGANIZATION Resident or sedentary merchants took the place of traveling merchants in much of western Europe and in the Mediterranean. When voyages became more regular and colonies were established in distant centers, traders no longer had to travel with their wares. With trade concentrated at familiar ports, it was no longer necessary to send special agents who would wander around looking for buyers and sources of supply. There were many Venetians at the eastern termini, at Tana, Trebizond, or Cyprus, who resided there for years on end, receiving wares consigned to them and sending shipments in return. In the west, there were groups of Venetians residing in Bruges, the western terminus of the galley voyages. Not only Venice but other leading European commercial cities developed such colonies abroad. As long as each shipment meant a separate

journey, fairs moving from one town to another as did those of Champagne were practical; but such movable fairs declined when merchants began shipping without going with their merchandise. They found it more practical to ship again and again to the same city.

A major problem of the resident merchant was to know people in the distant market places whom he could trust. One solution was a family partnership in which one brother lived in Venice and other brothers overseas. Partnerships of this kind were so common in Venice, especially among the rich families, that at a father's death his sons became automatically members of such a partnership, unless they took specific legal steps to separate their inheritances. An example is the partnership of Venice's richest man at mid-century, Federico Corner, with his two brothers. One brother in Cyprus shipped spices, cotton, and other Levantine wares to Venice; another marketed them there and sent back cash for further purchases, or sent such manufactured articles as a 1,600 pound copper kettle for use on the sugar plantation the Corner acquired in Cyprus. In such a partnership, each brother was fully liable for his brother's debts.

Full partnerships between persons not of the same family were also common enough at Venice by 1300. Although less enduring than family partnerships, these "terminal partnerships" lasted for a term of years specified in the contract, usually about three or five. But Venetians did not contract together to form huge partnerships embracing many persons of various families for long periods as did the famous Florentine firms of the period, such as the Bardi and Peruzzi. A Venetian family which felt it needed more capital or more personnel for its ventures was likely to employ agents on salaries or on commissions, or to form a temporary, limited kind of partnership which is best called a joint venture.

Among the most ordinary kind of joint ventures were those of the tax farmers; for example, several men contributed to a fund used to pay in advance for the right to collect the tax on wine sales. Frequent also was the pooling of funds to make a large purchase, as of pepper from the soldan of Egypt. In that case, what was jointly owned could and often was distributed physically among the participants in the venture. A jointly owned ship could not of course be thus distributed; it bound the joint owners together to share liabilities and profits during the life of the ship.

A kind of joint venture peculiar to Venice developed when the government began auctioning galleys for a particular voyage. Companies called galley companies were formed to pay the expenses and receive the freights of a galley for that voyage. Sometimes all the share owners of all the galleys in a convoy formed a single pool, what the Venetians called a *maona*, in order to make purchases that would assure them enough cargo, or the right kind of cargo, or some extra profits from buying and selling as a unit. The rapid changes in international trade and shipping gave the Venetians reason to prefer temporary and limited joint ventures of this character.

Another kind of temporary partnership was the *colleganza*, already described in connection with twelfth-century shipping. These contracts, by which one party contributed capital and the other labor, continued to be used in the fourteenth century for those branches of trade in which conditions still resembled those that had faced earlier traveling merchants. A striking example of a colle-

ganza combined with a joint venture is provided by the tragic affairs of a Giovanni Loredan, who sailed with five other nobles on the galleys of Romania to Tana in 1338 to start a trip to Delhi. After the Polos, a number of Venetians had gone across Central Asia to China, but striking out east from Tana and then turning south around the edge of the Pamirs to cross the Hindu Kush mountains to India was trying something new (see Map 5). Giovanni Loredan had just come back from a trip to China. His wife and one of his brothers tried to dissuade him from the new venture, but he believed there was a fortune to be made by a visit to an Indian prince who had a wide reputation for cruelty but also for generosity to foreign merchants. Five other Venetian nobles joined in the venture: they pooled funds in order to take with them gifts they hoped would please the Indian prince, mechanical wonders: a clock and a fountain. Each also took some wares on his own account, Giovanni taking Florentine cloth, of which he sold some along the way to pay expenses. In order to raise his share of the pooled funds, Giovanni Loredan accepted money in *colleganza* from his father-in-law. The Indian prince must have been pleased by the gifts, for he gave the Venetians a rich present. They invested it in a joint purchase of pearls. The expedition turned out badly, however, for Giovanni Loredan and two of the other Venetians died in the course of the journey. On the way home, the pearls were divided among the partners, but Giovanni was not there to make the most of the opportunities he had dreamed of. His father-in-law sued the guardians of Giovanni's young sons to recover not only his investment in the *colleganza* but also the usual three-fourths of profits, asking in this case three-fourths of all the profits on Giovanni's share of the joint venture in pearls. The one-fourth left to his heirs proved small compensation for the risks of such a voyage.

For voyages in relatively unknown territory, the *colleganza* was still the best arrangement from the investor's point of view because it assured the stay-at-home of his claim but put the traveling merchant in charge of the enterprise, negotiating in his own name, and it made his rewards depend on the profits realized. On the relatively safe trips, however, to well-known market places such as Constantinople or Lajazzo, there was so much money seeking investment that already in the thirteenth century a sharp operator could take advantage of the less wary investors. He could accept funds from several parties, partly friends and relatives and partly small investors, then pad his expense account, charge an undue proportion of his expenses to one investor instead of another, hand over to other merchants wares he had agreed to handle himself, and perhaps even delay making a report and settlement promptly on his return to Venice. Late in the thirteenth century, a whole series of laws were passed to prevent such practices, either because the financial markets were really in such condition that the unwary investor needed protection (as he was to need it later, in the days of stock markets and the Securities and Exchange Commission), or simply because stay-at-home investors had more influence in the councils than the traveling merchants.

During the fourteenth century, the merchants who stayed at home in Venice turned increasingly from the *colleganze* as a means of investing in overseas trade to the use of commission agents. Instead of receiving a share of profits, a commission agent received a percentage of the turnover that he handled. His reward was the same regardless of whether the man for whom he bought and sold was making a profit. In fact, he did not need to know whether the principal was

making a profit or not. He bought and sold on the account of men who sent him wares to sell and orders to buy, and he was bound to act according to the instructions sent him.

Obviously, a Giovanni Loredan could not make a trip like that through inner Asia to India as a commission agent because it would have been quite impossible for his father-in-law who was financing him to give him instructions about the opportunities or difficulties he would face. But between Constantinople and Venice or Cyprus and Venice, there was a constant stream of letters in the fourteenth century, and a merchant in Venice was sufficiently well informed about prices so that he could send instructions to his agent and could check up afterwards to see how advantageously his agent had traded for him. Because a commission agent's earnings depended on the volume of his business, he strove to satisfy his customers and gain such a reputation that many would send him more consignments and orders. In the *colleganza*, the agent was paid by receiving a percentage of the profits (one-fourth); in a commission agency, he was paid by receiving a percentage of the turnover he handled (3 to 5 percent). If actually the average rate of profit was 12 to 20 percent per venture, his rewards were about the same; but as a commission agent, he had less freedom of action.

The *colleganze* and various kinds of joint ventures continued in use but a transition to commission agents was hastened by measures restricting the *colleganze*, especially by a law designed primarily to exclude foreign capital. After the enlargement of the Great Council about 1300, the rulers of Venice tightened the regulations concerning admission to citizenship, as well as those concerning admission to the Great Council. They passed much legislation designed to reserve to native born or legally naturalized Venetians the profits of trade between Venice and the Levant. Venetians were forbidden to act as stand-ins for foreigners or in any way to loan their names to foreigners so that the latter could avoid taxes or participate in business reserved for Venetians. But while the *colleganze* was being widely used to raise money with which to buy in the East and import to Venice, how could one be sure that the importer was not really working for foreign capitalists who had given them money in *colleganze*? To stop that, a party among the Venetian nobles who may be called "protectionists" put through a law forbidding anyone to import from the Levant merchandise of more value than the amount of personal worth for which he was assessed for fiscal purposes. Special officials forming an *Officium de Navigantibus* were created to enforce this law, but it was in force only a few years at a time. The *Officium de Navigantibus* apparently received general support only when the vicissitudes of the trade routes resulted in a glut of Levantine wares in Venice. Even then it did not affect men content to act as commission agents, for they shipped not on their own accounts but in the names of those for whom they acted. But it must have galled many ambitious merchants on the make, even if they depended more on collecting *colleganze* from fellow Venetians than from foreigners.

The use of resident agents instead of traveling merchants was facilitated by a number of improvements in commercial technique. One was the system of double-entry bookkeeping. This way of grouping and checking the records of every transaction made it easier for a resident merchant to keep track accurately of what his partners or agents were doing. Tradition has assigned its invention to Venice: but the evidence is against that. Earlier examples have been found in

Genoa and Tuscany. The Venetians seem to have been responsible for a number of features of arrangement and of style, however, which were later widely adopted, for example, the placing of all debits on the left, credits on the right in parallel columns. Bookkeeping and arithmetic, using Arabic instead of Roman numerals, were taught in Venice by pedagogues called "masters of the abacus." They disseminated rules for beginning each entry the same way and for making cross references from Journal to Ledger and from one Ledger account to another (see Figure 11). More closely connected with business management was the organizing of entries under various "Ventures," and the closing of venture and merchandise accounts into a "Profit and Loss Account." This kind of bookkeeping enabled a merchant operating simultaneously on many market places to know the extent of his liabilities and the extent and nature of his assets.

An essential for the resident merchant was assurance that wares entrusted to a ship could be recognized and claimed by the agent to whom he was sending them. The foundation for such assurance was laid in the provisions of the thirteenth-century Venetian maritime codes regarding the ship's scribe, who was required to keep a careful record of all the cargo, a sort of ship's manifest, and to give official copies of extracts from it on demand. From this practice developed the bill of lading, which the merchant sending the wares received from the ship's scribe and could send to his agent overseas who would use it to claim the wares consigned him.

Another important commercial technique which became common during the fourteenth century was marine insurance. In return for a premium payable in advance, the insurer promised to compensate for loss due to shipwreck or piracy. Many merchants thought insuring wares on the galleys was a waste — these vessels were so secure — but they used insurance to cover cargoes on round ships and the ships themselves.

Of yet more importance was the bill of exchange, which enabled a resident merchant to send funds to his agent, or to receive quickly the proceeds of a sale without having to run the risks either of making a new investment in merchandise or of shipping bullion. In addition to giving more flexibility to importers and exporters, the bill of exchange facilitated all kinds of political payments in distant parts, such as the expenses of a fleet or an embassy.

These techniques enabled a variety of different kinds of business organizations to exist side by side. At one extreme were the men of great wealth, heading powerful partnerships. They usually mixed politics and business, as did the Federico Corner already referred to. He affords an example of how Venetians could make money in territories which might be called colonial even if they were not politically subject to Venice. Cyprus was ruled by French nobles who had inherited also the title of King of Jerusalem — an empty title, except that it inspired them to continue the crusades in some form. When the King of Cyprus made a trip through the West in 1361, seeking allies against the Moslems, he lodged in the massive palace of Federico Corner on the Grand Canal at San Luca, and he received from Federico thousands of ducats in loans that were spent on wars. The most solid recompense that the Corner received in return was the grant of the village of Episcopi and surrounding plantations. They were watered by one of the few Cypriot rivers flowing the year round. The river was so thoroughly used by the Corner for both power and irrigation that neighbors suffered, especially the

FIGURE 11 Mercantile Records. A Cargo List and Double Entry (courtesy of [a] the Archivio di Stato and [b] Museo Corner, Venice).

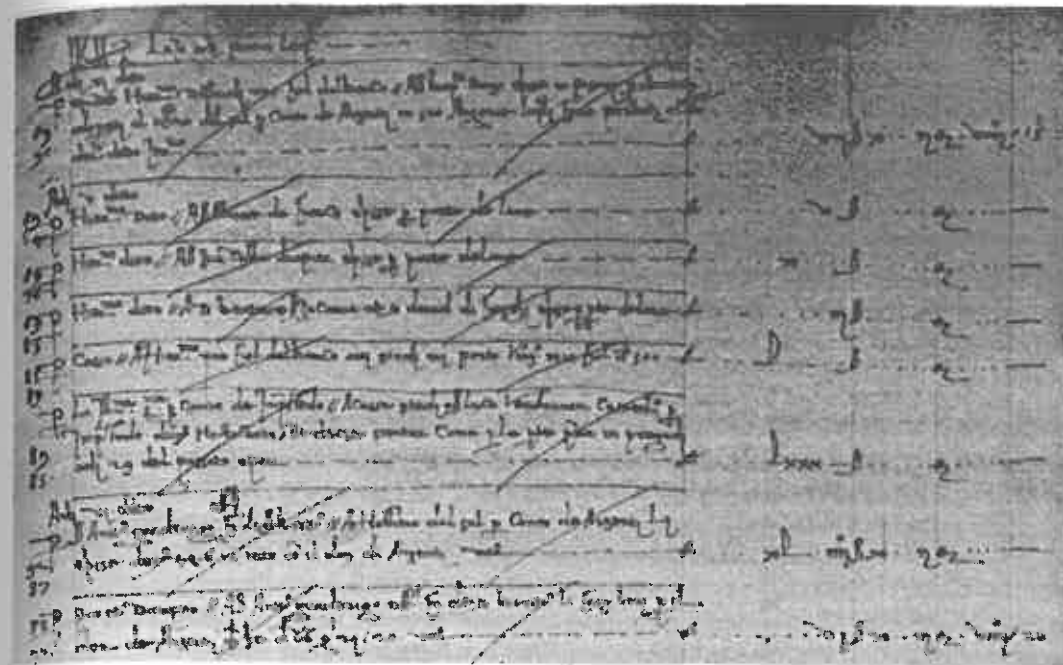
(a) Distinctive marks were used to identify each merchant's shipment, as is shown in this portion of a cargo list of the galleys reaching Alexandria in 1418. Then came the names of the consignees, the commodity—for example, cloth (pani), quick-silver (arzeno vivo), honey (mieli), copper wire (fil di rame), lead (piombo)—and then the quantities.

(b) Venetian styling of double entry is illustrated by the double crossing-out of each entry in the Journal, as in this page from the Journal for 1505–35 of Lorenzo Priuli, father of the diarist and banker Girolamo Priuli. The same style is more fully illustrated, although in more difficult handwriting, by the Journals and Ledgers of Andrea Barbarigo a century earlier. Described in the treatise on mathematics published in 1494 by Luca Pacioli, who had taught accounting at Venice, it was widely followed for centuries.

Every transaction was analyzed into a debit and a credit and entered day by day in a Journal with Per (P) before the name to be debited and, after two strikes //, an A before the name to be credited. For example: in the very simple second entry for July, 1510 (p. 143), the debit is to the account of "Hier," that is, Girolamo Priuli, his bank; the credit is to the account of an Alvisio de Franco, who made payment for a purchase of wool (lane) by a transfer from his account at the bank to Lorenzo's account.

After each transaction was thus analyzed and recorded chronologically, each debit and credit was recorded also in a larger book, the Ledger (Quaderno), in order to group together for analysis transactions concerning the same person or the same venture. When the debit was thus posted in the Ledger, the first of the two strokes was made across the Journal entry and the number of the page in the Ledger on which the debit was recorded was written in the left-hand margin. The second stroke showed that the credit had been similarly posted and the cross-reference to the appropriate page entered also in the left-hand margin.

Although the cross-references are in Arabic numerals, as are sums in ducats within an entry, sums paid and received are recorded at the right in the more traditional Roman numerals in lire di grossi, each worth 10 ducats.



Knights of St. John, whose nearby castle and sugar mill at Kolossi can still be visited by tourists (about 10 kilometers from Limosol). The lush plantations nearby still testify to the choiceness of the Corner grant. Its produce, mostly refined on the spot, made Federico Corner a fourteenth-century sugar king.

Federico Corner, with his huge plantation and huge loans to the King of Cyprus, and Giovanni Loredan, journeying with borrowed funds to little known lands, were less typical of the kind of business organization favored by the new techniques than a merchant of later date, Andrea Barbarigo, the first from whom we have account books complete with Journal and Ledger. The moderate fortune which he left at his death in 1449 was accumulated by using the institutions favorable to resident merchants that had developed during the previous century. He bought standard commodities, such as cotton, wool, spices, copper, or cloth, shipped mainly on the regulated galley fleets, and employed a score of different commission agents, some relatives and some not. He kept his books carefully in double entry and invested up to the hilt, buying or selling bills of exchange to make the best use of his money. He had been abroad in his youth, but for decades he never went further than the Rialto. He had to go there to make and receive payments and, above all, in order to collect the news. Whether or not he made profits depended largely on what instructions he wrote to his many agents. With no newspapers giving quotations, a resident merchant relied on receiving letters from the merchants to whom he gave business and on what his ears could pick up. Without access to the Rialto, he was cut off from the flow of the information on which to base his decisions. A court sentence forbidding a merchant to go to the Rialto was the equivalent of putting him out of business.

CARTELS AND COMMON CARRIERS Venetian government was frankly and efficiently capitalistic in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries in the sense that its decisions were aimed at enabling Venetians to make profits by commercial investments. At the same time, the contrasting kinds of merchants within the mercantile community created conflicts of interest. Rich, well-established merchants were sometimes able to use antagonism towards foreign competition so as to restrict the activities of up-and-coming Venetians, especially of those ready to use foreign capital in expanding their activities. On the other hand, some of the policies adopted seem designed to favor middling or minor merchants, so long as they were Venetian born, or achieved naturalization by twenty-five years of tax-paying residence in the city.

One expression of these policies was in the attitude of the government towards monopolistic cartels. It tried to distinguish between combines which were open to all Venetians and those that excluded some Venetians for the benefit of others. Venetians were encouraged or even compelled to join cartels in purchasing Levantine wares. In 1283, all wishing to buy cotton at Acre were required to pool their funds in such a cartel if 80 percent of the merchants voted in favor. And all Venetians in Acre were given a right to contribute to the pool and receive a share of the cotton purchased if a cartel was decided on. A cartel was usually formed also for large spice purchases in Egypt from the Mamluk soldan, who used his customs officials to organize a selling monopoly on the other side.

In contrast to these inclusive, all-Venetian cartels which were favored were those formed by a few Venetians in order to sell some commodity to other Venetians at high prices. When two producers succeeded in controlling the production of cement, tiles, and similar building materials, the government acted with a thoroughness which might arouse the admiration of the Antitrust Division. It sequestered all the kilns and then auctioned them off for operation by bidders, but no more than one furnace to a bidder. Each operator had to post bond to assure his obedience to rules that forbade having an interest in more than one kiln and that specified the prices at which he was required to sell to all comers.

Some combines were not so easily classified. For example, a group of Venetians headed by Federico Corner formed a consortium which gained a strangle hold on the export from Cyprus to Venice of sugar, salt, and cotton. A Senatorial commission of three was appointed in 1358 to inquire and formulate remedies. It did not even consider disturbing the contracts or concessions which Corner's combine had obtained from the King of Cyprus in regard to salt and sugar, but the commissioners recommended curbing the cartel's limitation on the cotton exports from Cyprus. Apparently, Corner's combine was forcing ships to accept its allocation of cotton quotas by denying any salt or sugar cargoes to those who would not obey its rules. But a proposal to simply abolish the cotton cartel was defeated. The most the anti-monopolists could gain was a general injunction that Corner's combine must furnish cargoes of salt and sugar to anyone who asked for them, and that the cartel must not be used to raise prices in Venice. Obviously, in so far as the cartel permitted cheaper purchases in Cyprus, it was considered unobjectionable, probably indeed highly desirable.

Merchants maneuvering for profits could hardly fail to appreciate the advantages of being the only buyer or the only seller, or having a representative in that position. One way to achieve it was to control all the shipping between the place where a commodity was in supply and the place it was in demand. Ap-

parently, the Corner combine was at least close to that position in 1358 in regard to Cypriot cotton. Because his concessions from the King of Cyprus gave him control of the salt which was essential to ship captains wishing to balance their cargoes, he sought to dictate how much cotton they could load. This cartelization threatened to raise the price of cotton in Venice. And when in 1358 Federico Corner bid in three of the galleys auctioned to go to Cyprus, he may have hoped to use control of the galleys to form a similar cartel in sugar. In some years, control of the Flemish galleys was the basis for efforts to control the commodity of which these galleys had a transport monopoly for a season — English wool. The possibility may have occurred to Marino Cappello who, as head of a combine, registered as many as 7 of the 8 galleys destined for Flanders in 1333-34. They were privately owned galleys; the system of auctioning government-owned galleys was not applied to that voyage until later. Organizing a cartel, if he had such ideas, must have been made easier for Marino Cappello by the government having elected him to the post of capitano of the whole fleet.

At first glance, it may seem that the way the Senate organized the merchant galley fleets increased the chances for monopolies. Since the Senate's decisions limited the number of ships that could make a specified voyage during a stipulated period, it restricted the number of competitors. Indeed, there must have been many occasions in the fourteenth century when monopolists took advantage of these restrictions but there would probably have been more monopolization of transport facilities if shipping had been left entirely to private enterprise. In that case, the family partnerships which were rich enough would have owned their own fleets of galleys and operated them year after year. While some might have gone bankrupt now and then trying to monopolize too much or miscalculating the mercantile opportunities or the political dangers of a voyage, they would, on other occasions, have been in a good position to make big profits by shipping their own wares only, or the wares of their business allies.

In fact, the regulations under which the government auctioned galleys included many provisions hampering efforts at monopoly. They reflect the force of broad egalitarian tendencies within the Venetian nobility. Their professed aim was to provide secure transport to all Venetian citizens equally. The regular scheduling of these voyages supplied predictable service which an individual merchant, such as Andrea Barbarigo, could use without having to take any initiative or to make any commitments of his personal capital in organizing it. The terms of the auction obligated the galley master to act fairly as a common carrier. Specified commodities had preference over others, spices generally having the highest priority. The galley master was ordered to load these in the order presented. The collection of freights on return to Venice was in the hands of customs officials, although of course for the account of the operators. Freights collected overseas, in Bruges for example, were paid to the capitano appointed by the Commune to manage the whole fleet. This was supposed to assure that all would be charged equally.

In practice, the rules did not prevent galley masters from either giving rebates in some form or from arranging the loading of wares in ways more advantageous to some shippers than to others. If more merchandise with priority was offered than could be lawfully loaded, the capitano was supposed to see to it that all shippers had a fair proportion loaded on the merchant galleys and that provision was made for the rest (the left-over shares, called *rata*) to be loaded on

some other vessel, usually a round ship which might or might not be able to sail in convoy with the galleys. Whether the capitano were able to enforce these and other rules on the galley masters, especially when the galley master might be as rich and powerful as Federico Corner, is doubtful. Some certainly tried. They could levy heavy fines, 1,000 ducats or so, on disobedient galley masters. The latter could then appeal, and might or might not get absolved by the State's Attorneys, the Forty, or the Great Council. Clearly, the laws were evaded many times, but their existence shows an effort by the Venetian Commune to assure to all its merchants a fair chance to ship on the main routes of trade. It acted in the same spirit as did many guilds in making rules designed to give every guild master an equal chance.

USURY AND FINANCE In the twelfth century, the Venetians showed no concern about usury; they collected 20 percent on well-secured loans and called it "old Venetian custom." Later, as the Church made its prohibition of usury more specifically applicable to laymen as well as clerics, the Venetians partially fell in line and passed laws against it. At the same time, they developed their own standard of what was legitimate gain and what was usury. Their own standard was notably different from the official doctrine of the Church. Theirs might be called a businessman's standard, not very different from that generally accepted today. It approved as non-usurious the payment on commercial investments of a rate of return determined by market conditions.

In accord with this spirit the Venetians developed a kind of loan contract, not found in the same form elsewhere, and called the "local colleganza." After the colleganza became rare in overseas trade, a contract similar in form was used to invest in local shops, industries, and banks. These contracts no longer specified that the investor was taking the risks of shipwreck and pirates. Neither did they specify what proportion of profits he should receive. Often it was stated only that the rate would be that which would be paid by some well-known shop or bank. According to the stricter church lawyers, these contracts were usurious, but the Venetian courts enforced collection so long as the rate of interest was moderate, 5 to 8 percent. Because the rate of return was uncertain, there was room to argue about whether they were a form of participation in equity or a straight-out loan, and only in the latter case usurious. Whatever the quibble over that legal question, the Venetians did not regard the loan as really usurious unless the borrower was charged an unusually high, predetermined rate of interest or was required to put up security which was sold to his great loss and the gain of the lender.

Another way of borrowing, more free from any taint of usury, was by selling a bill of exchange. Essentially, the bill of exchange was an order to pay in one place in one kind of money because of a payment received in a different place in a different kind of money. There was always a time lag between receipt and payment (for example, sixty days on bills between Venice and Bruges), so that one of the parties was extending credit to the other in the meantime. If a merchant in Venice had sufficiently good standing with an agent in Bruges (if, for example, they were together in a family partnership) and if he was hard up for cash, the Venetian partner might draw a bill on his partner in Bruges. He would sell that bill for cash to someone in Venice who would send it to Bruges for col-

lection. When the bill arrived in Bruges, the partner there, in order to get the money to pay it, might sell in Bruges a new bill drawn on Venice. When that new bill arrived in Venice, the Venetian partner had to pay considerably more than he had received by selling the first bill, but he had the use of the money for 120 days in the meantime.

The bill of exchange was used in all western Europe to borrow money in this fashion, and each big commercial center such as Genoa and Florence developed other credit devices also, different in form but very similar in effect to Venice's local colleganza. For example, the famous bankers of Florence accepted funds on deposit and gave the depositors "gifts."

In Venice, banking developed a distinctive style which we associate with the name giro-bank. The main function of a Venetian banker was not making loans but making payments on behalf of his clients. Even if a merchant had plenty of coins in his treasure chest, it was a bothersome and dangerous business to get them out and count them every time he made a purchase, making sure each coin was genuine and in good condition. Nor did he want to go through a similar process every time he made a sale. He was happy to receive payment by being given credit on the books of a well-known banker. He could use that credit to pay for his next purchase. These credits were not transferred by writing checks, as is done today, but depended on the person who was making a payment appearing in person before the banker, who sat behind a bench under the portico of a church at Rialto, with his big journal spread out in front of him. The payor orally instructed the banker to make a transfer to the account of the person being paid. The banker wrote as directed in his book, which was an official notarial record, so that there was no need of receipts. There were normally four or five such bankers with booths on the campo next to the Rialto bridge. Everyone of any consequence in business had an account so that he could make and receive payments through the banks. They were called *banche di scritta* or *del giro* because their main function was to write transfers and thus to rotate (*girare*) credits from one account to another at the command of the merchants.

As a general legal principle, bankers could not permit anyone to overdraw his account, not even a friend or a partner, but the temptation was irresistible. Many who had deposited coins in the bank were content to leave them in the banker's hands year after year, while the size of their account grew or declined according to the payments received or made for merchandise. There was nothing to prevent the banker from using that cash in the meantime to make payment of some kind that required coins, for example, the paying off of a galley crew on behalf of the government. That would in effect be a loan to the government and many such loans were made by bankers. There were other loans that the banker could make by simply crediting the borrower with a deposit which he had not really made. Ordinarily, the borrower would not withdraw cash. The credit given him on the banker's books could be transferred to some other merchant to pay for purchases. So long as all the transactions were within the relatively small group of wholesale merchants who gathered at the Rialto, the banker could create deposits in bank credit. To be sure, if he made too many loans in this way, he would find himself over-extended when some untoward event shook confidence and caused depositors to wish to withdraw cash. And, of course, he could over-extend himself in other ways, as by buying bills of exchange and paying for them in credits on his bank.

GROSSO AND DUCAT One set of circumstances which occasioned many bank crises but on other occasions meant profits for bankers was the frequent change in the coinage or in the values of gold and silver. The large silver penny or groat minted extensively by Enrico Dandolo in financing the Fourth Crusade was kept at its original weight (2.18 grams) and the same fineness (.965 pure silver). Government obligations and international transactions were recorded in a "money of account" based on the grosso. A *lira di grossi* meant 240 of those big silver coins. Because it was kept at uniform weight and fineness, the Venetian grosso gained wide currency throughout the eastern Mediterranean. Venetians paid for eastern imports by sending out bags of grossi and silver bars refined to the same degree of fineness and so stamped by the mint.

For retail transactions within the city smaller pennies (*piccoli*) were minted, containing less silver (see Figure 12). A second money of account was formed by calling 240 small pennies a *lira di piccoli* and 12 small pennies a *soldo di piccoli*. Since successive issues of small pennies contained less and less silver, the grosso, originally worth only 26 piccoli, came to be worth 32 piccoli.

Gold as well as silver came to Venice from German, Hungarian, and Balkan mines, and the crusades yielded much golden booty, but gold flowed into western Europe mainly from the North African trade which passed through Genoa, Pisa, and Florence. Genoa and Florence were the first western cities to coin gold, and the florin issued in 1252 achieved wide acceptance as the standard gold coin before Venice in 1284 minted its ducat with the same weight and fineness as the florin. Until then, Byzantine mints had provided the gold coins used in Venetian trade. While Byzantine issues deteriorated, varying in weight and fineness, the Venetian ducat or *zecchino* was kept at 3.5 grams of almost pure gold (.997 fine) from its first issue in 1284 until after the fall of the Republic in 1797. Gradually, it became more widely known and trusted than any other coin, but during the first decades of the fourteenth century, many Venetian conservatives distrusted gold. Ducats were merely an alternative or supplementary means of making payments. Wholesale prices, all the obligations of the state, and the credits on the books of the bankers were stated in a money of account based on the grosso.¹

Banking had developed in connection with money changing, and one of the functions of the bankers was to have large quantities of coins available for such operations as hiring galley crews. Although they did not have strongboxes at their banks, they kept cash in the strong rooms of the State Treasurer's palace which was beside the Rialto bridge right next to bankers' booths. A sudden change in the relative value of gold and silver might catch them with too many of the wrong kind of coin, but more often they managed to profit amid shifting values. So long as the value of gold compared to silver was rising (it went from below 1 to 10 in 1252 to almost 1 to 14 in 1305 or 1310), bankers profited from accepting deposits in gold ducats and making payments in silver grossi, as they had a right to do. Sometimes they could make payment in the smaller silver and copper coins which were widely used in retail trade and in paying wages.

A sudden drop in the value of gold began in Venice about 1326. Gold fell until it again was worth only about 1 to 10. For about twenty years (1305-25),

¹In addition to the *lira di grossi*, there was a second money of account based on the grosso, namely, the *lira a grossi*: 1 *lira di grossi* = 26 *lira a grossi*.



FIGURE 12 Venetian Coins (courtesy of the Smithsonian Institution, Washington).

(a) Actual size of a small Venetian penny (*piccolo*), issued under Doge Enrico Dandolo. Its design was similar to the penny of Charlemagne from which it took its Latin name (*denarius*), but it was much smaller, weighed only .362 grams (about 1/100 of an ounce), and was only 25 percent silver. Later *piccoli* contained much less silver.

(b) This well-worn specimen of the groat (*grosso*) was minted under Doge Bartolommeo Gradenigo, 1338-42. It was among the last minted with the same weight (2.18 grams), size (as pictured), fineness (96 percent pure silver), and design as those issued by Enrico Dandolo about 1200. The design echoed that of Byzantine coins, which had been used earlier at Venice for large payments, in that there were two figures in the principal design on the obverse, and one figure on the reverse. On the obverse, instead of an emperor and an archangel, the Venetians pictured the doge receiving the symbol of his office from Saint Mark. On the reverse is Christ enthroned.

When a groat of inferior weight and fineness was coined in 1379, it was distinguished by a star on the reverse to the left of the enthroned Christ.

(c) The ducat, later called the *zecchino*, always contained 3.55 grams of pure gold. It was the same size as the *grosso* and imaged the same themes more skillfully. Its obverse showed the doge kneeling to receive the standard from Saint Mark. Behind the doge was his name, in this specimen Andrea Dandolo. Behind the saint one reads S. M(arcus) Veneti. On the reverse is Christ the Redeemer, erect, holding the Gospels, and giving benediction.

one gold ducat had been worth 24 silver grossi on the market place and had been given and received by bankers on that basis. Suddenly, gold seemed plentiful and silver relatively scarce, so that a merchant offering ducats might receive only 20 or 22 grossi. Since debts were recorded in grossi, the decline of the ducat and the scarcity of the grossi made it harder for debtors to pay their creditors, banks to pay their depositors, and the government to pay its bondholders. Not surprisingly,

the government stepped in and declared gold ducats to be legal tender for 24 grossi. All debts recorded in grossi could thereafter be paid in ducats at that rate. Grossi promptly went to a premium and soon ceased to be minted, at least in the old form. Thus the Venetian Commune shifted from a silver standard to a gold standard in the middle of the fourteenth century.

THE PUBLIC DEBT A funded debt had been established in Venice in 1262 and was thereafter a vital factor in Communal finances. Like other governments of the time, Venice financed wars by borrowing and depended on indirect taxes to cover peace-time expenditures and interest on loans. Income taxes and direct taxes on property were not tolerated, unless the Commune made a pretense of intending to repay. One important indirect tax was collected at the Rialto and at the Fondaco dei Tedeschi on every wholesale transaction. Although it was less than 1 percent, the flow of goods through Venice made its yield large. Even more important were the taxes on wine, salt, meat, oil, etc. Since these taxes on consumption were most burdensome to the poor, the rich did very well indeed under such a system, especially if their loans to finance wars paid 12 or 20 percent, as was common for short-term loans.

Extensive borrowing at 20 percent, or higher rates such as were paid by many medieval cities, not only enriched the wealthy, it weakened the Commune. Venice strengthened the state by its consolidation in 1262 of all outstanding loans into what was later called the *Monte Vecchio*, on which it paid only 5 percent. But it paid that 5 percent without a break for more than one hundred years, as we shall see. All Venetians having a minimal amount of property were required to subscribe proportionally whenever more was borrowed. Repayments were similarly made proportionally whenever taxes on transit and consumption yielded a surplus. Short-term loans were made from time to time through the banks and such government bureaus as the Mint, the Grain Office, and the Salt Office; but these were later liquidated by receipts from taxes or by new forced loans added to the *Monte Vecchio*. Venice was the first European state to fund its debt so that interest was regularly paid from one fund to all bondholders equally.

Until the Second Genoese War, the debt was small or relatively quickly repaid, but at the end of that war, the *Monte Vecchio* totaled over 500,000 ducats, and at the end of the War of Ferrara in 1313, it was well over 1,000,000 ducats and obviously would not be repaid for decades — if at all. But its payment of 2½ percent every half year made it an attractive investment, and holdings could readily be bought and sold. Investments in *Monte Vecchio* added an element of stability to the income of resident merchants and provided a desirable means of providing for a widow or endowing a charity. The pennies collected by the sawyers guild from its members in order to make payments to those out of work because of accidents were kept in a chest with multiple locks; but the larger funds accumulated by the carpenter's guild so as to provide dowries to daughters were invested in the government bonds. Bankers were allowed and even encouraged to buy them. Venetian bonds were bought also by rulers of neighboring cities who wished to put money aside where they might enjoy it in the not too unlikely event of being chased from power, but most of the *Monte Vecchio* belonged to Venice's upper class and the charities they endowed.

WEALTH AND STATUS By the end of the fourteenth century, Venetian society was much more clearly and elaborately stratified than it had been a couple of centuries earlier. The reforms in the composition of the Great Council, the changes in ships and seamanship, and the dominance of resident merchants all tended to diminish the ease with which men could move up the social scale, especially when in the mid-fourteenth century there was a contraction of the economy, accentuated by the Black Death.

At the very top were some twenty or thirty great families that enjoyed a combination of traditional prestige, political power, and outstanding wealth. They were largely the same families which had been prominent for centuries. Another hundred families also ranked as noble because their members were accepted as members of the Great Council. They had a monopoly of membership in all the other governing councils, of magistracies, judgeships, and top naval commands, and of all the highest posts in the administration. Some spent nearly all their adult lives in legal and political activities, but most nobles were merchants and ship captains familiar with distant market places and they became office holders, if at all, only after they had passed middle age and had made an economic contribution to the family fortune.

Not all nobles were rich, nor were all rich Venetians noble. Our best information on the distribution of wealth is from the assessments made to control the levying of the forced loans. The list of assessments survives for one year, 1379. Only the relatively well-to-do were listed as obliged to make loans, namely those assessed at about 120 ducats or more, which meant, in view of the system of assessments used, those with known property worth more than 300 ducats. The value of 300 ducats at that time may be roughly indicated by comparison with the earnings of a really skilled craftsman. It was unusual for a foreman shipwright to earn as much as 100 ducats a year. Yet 2,128 persons were considered rich enough to be assessed. Since this was during the plague-stricken decades, the total population was certainly below 100,000, probably little more than 60,000, so that the assessed were about one-eighth of all heads of households. Out of this total, that is, out of 2,128, 1,211 were nobles and 917 were commoners. Outstandingly rich were 91 nobles and 26 commoners, with assessments indicating that their real wealth ranged from 10,000 to 150,000 ducats, the latter figure reflecting the assessment of the richest of all, Federico Corner. Obviously, "wealthy" and "noble" were distinct categories, although they overlapped considerably. Of the moderately rich with between 300 and 3,000 ducats, 817 were nobles and 755 non-nobles. These figures show that many nobles, indeed a majority of them, were not really wealthy. In addition, there were some nobles too poor to be assessed at all, and some rich nobles who were not assessed because they had no home in Venice but lived overseas.

Among the non-noble Venetians who were comfortably well-off, additional distinctions developed during the fourteenth century. A middle class distinguished itself from the general populace and acquired the rank of "citizens" (*cittadini*). They held themselves above manual employments considered merely "mechanical." Within this middle class, the highest status, although not necessarily the largest fortunes, belonged to those called "native-born citizens" (*cittadini originari*). From their ranks were recruited the clerks of the Ducal Chancery, notaries, and many practitioners in the law courts. Although there was no

lawyers' guild at Venice as there was in Padua, Florence, and many other cities, native-born lawyers below the rank of noble acquired status as a select group within the *cittadini*.

Others of the native-born citizens engaged in international trade with the same rights as the nobility or directed a local business, such as a glass furnace. An equally rich although less esteemed section of the *cittadini* were immigrants. If they made their homes in Venice, as by marrying a Venetian, and if they did not engage in "mechanical" labor, they received after ten years a grant of half-citizenship (*de intus*), permitting them equal rights with Venetians in trading within the city. Twenty-five years of residence were required for full rights of citizenship (*de extra*), enabling them to rank as Venetians in shipping merchandise and paying customs in international trade.

The common people below the rank of the citizen enjoyed economic rights according to the guild to which they belonged and their rank in it. One aspect of these guilds (or *scuole*) was their provision of religious fellowship and some degree of social security. Those *cittadini* who did not belong to guilds, and some who did, found similar aid in misfortune and an outlet for their religious yearnings and desire for fellowship through the many fraternities which had no occupational or professional requirements for membership.

One group of these non-professional fraternities stood out in social importance. They were the four, later six, *Scuole Grandi*, so called because they were officially entitled to admit between 500 to 600 members. They were also called *Scuole dei Battuti*, for at their origin the members scourged themselves on ceremonial occasions. Self-flagellation, widespread in the thirteenth century, was soon replaced by other expressions of religious enthusiasm; in the processions for which these *Scuole* were celebrated in later centuries, they carried not whips for their backs but jeweled incasements containing sacred relics. To devotional exercises, they added very extensive dispensation of charity and built themselves magnificent meeting halls. Their membership included both nobles and commoners; some members were givers, other receivers of charity. They were managed entirely by laymen and were not subordinated either to the bishop or to the magistrates who governed the craft guilds. They were regulated directly by the Council of Ten, which ruled that no new fraternity could be formed without its permission. Although nobles were admitted to membership, they were not allowed to hold office in the *Scuole Grandi*. These posts of honor were reserved for the *cittadini*. Their rights to office in the *Scuole Grandi* and in the Ducal Chancery were privileges which made "citizenship-by-birth" appear a supplementary kind of nobility.

The major concerns of the nobles and citizens — politics, administration, finance, and the distant routes of international trade — will fill many chapters; but let us look first at everyday concerns of humbler folk. Among them also, class lines were becoming more elaborate and more pronounced in consequence of the Nautical and Commercial Revolutions.

