

Venice, a Thousand Year Epopee

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Main references: **John Julius Norwich's** *A History of Venice*; and **Wikipedia**.

Venice, the Most Serene Republic...



- ◇ One of the newest cities in Italy... It did not exist in Roman times!
- ◇ Independent republic for over 1000 years.
- ◇ Mistress of the Mediterranean, crossroad between East and West.
- ◇ First blow by the Portuguese, even though they never came close!
- ◇ An anticlimactic and pitiful ending, at the hands of Napoléon.

The beginnings: fleeing from barbarian invasions

402: Alaric and his Goths sack Aquileia.

452: Attila the Hun.

People flee to the islands for safety; they progressively settle the place and start organising politically (meeting of Grado, 466).

476: Abdication of Romulus Augustulus, last Emperor of the Western Roman Empire.

Major upheavals in Italy; Gothic kingdom; etc... Lagoon communities trade salt and fish, and build ships.

VIth: Venetians help Justinian's general Narses in his fights against the Goths. Venice is a major naval power in Adriatic. They recognise the authority of the Eastern emperor.

568: Narses falls in disgrace from Empress Sophia. He invites Lombards to invade Italy.

More people settle on the islands of the lagoon. Byzantine governor in Heraclea (Istria); patriarch in Grado; main settlement in Torcello.

726: Emperor Leo III orders the destruction of icons. Revolts in Italy. The lagoon communities choose a “Dux” as head of the administration; he resides in Orso. The first of 118 doges!

751: The Lombards conquer Ravenna. Before they can move against Venice, the Franks invade Italy and crush them.

IIIth: Building in Rialto starts in earnest.

810: Victory against the Franks. Agnello Participazio becomes first doge in Rialto. He is succeeded by his son Giustiniano, who organises the providential discovery of the corpse of St Mark in Alexandria, which is brought to Venice.



PAX TIBI MARCE
EVANGELISTA MEVS

IXth century: Dalmatian pirates and the Saracen pirates of Sicily

841: A Venetian fleet of 60 ships, 12'000 men, reinforced by a Byzantine squadron, sails against the Saracens. Horrible defeat. The Saracens sail the Adriatic up to Venice. Big scare! They sack Ancona, but Venice is protected by her dangerous shallow waters.



Now the Magyars

899: The Magyars invade the Veneto. They are only stopped in the lagoon. Venice constructs fortifications.

A remarkable doge: Pietro Orseolo II, ruled 991–1006

- A statesman, warrior, diplomatist of genius.
- He calmed down bitter quarrels within the city. Many diplomatic successes, with the Byzantine Emperor Basil II (trade advantages in exchange of naval power), with German emperor Otto III, with the Spaniards, even with the Saracens.
- Venice trades in iron, wood, corn, wine, salt, silk, spices, and slaves.

1000: Military expedition in Dalmatia. Most coastal towns, under pressure from Croats, recognise Venetian authority and pay her tribute, while suzerainty remains with Constantinople.

The Orseolo family accumulates much political and ecclesiastical power. Son becomes Doge. This creates unease. After the Orseoloi, doges are elected, and no sons ever succeeded directly their father.

End of XIth century

Normans control South Italy. The extraordinary adventurer Robert Guiscard becomes Duke of Apulia and his power and ambition is such as to threaten Byzantium.

Battles between Venetian and Norman fleets. Two victories followed by a crushing defeat. Most fortunately for Venice, Robert dies of fever a few months later.

1095: First crusade. Venetians are not enthusiastic, but they send a fleet that battles the Pisan (upstart trading competitor) before helping the crusaders to conquer Haifa. They gain major commercial advantages.

1118: Doge Domenico Michiel (until 1129).

1123: Naval victory against the Saracens off Ascalon.

1124: With Outremer's Franks, conquest of Tyre.

- He forces Emperor John Comnenus to restore advantageous trade rights. Successes against Hungarians in Dalmatia.

Delicate course between enterprising neighbours: Norman Sicily and Frederick Barbarossa. Relations with Byzantium deteriorate, and there is increased competition from Pisa, Amalfi, and Genoa.

1171: Manuel Comnenus arrests all 80'000 Venetians in Constantinople and revokes all Venice rights. Venice is now at war with both empires, being part of the Great Lombard League against Barbarossa.

Doge Vitale Michiel sets sail against the East Empire, but he is tricked and the expedition ends in disaster. He brings back the plague in Venice. Murdered by angry mob.

Important constitutional reforms towards oligarchy. The doge is now chosen by a large unelected "Major Council" and ratified by the people. His powers are reduced.

Enrico Dandolo and the glorious, infamous 4th Crusade

1193: On first January 1193, Enrico Dandolo is elected Doge, aged around 75, blind.

1202: The 4th crusade sails from Venice. 480 ships led by Dandolo and Marquis Boniface of Montferrat. They first conquer Zara from the Hungarians. Next they attack Constantinople, supporting the claims of Alexius, nephew of Alexius III.



And here was an extraordinary feat of boldness. For the Duke of Venice, who was an old man and stone blind, stood fully armed on the prow of his galley, with the banner of St Mark before him, and cried out to his men to drive the ship ashore if they valued their skins. And so they did, and ran the galley ashore, and he and they leapt down and planted the banner before him in the ground. And when the other Venetians saw the standard of St Mark and the Doge's galley beached before their own, they were ashamed, and followed him ashore.

Geoffrey de Villehardouin

Alexius III flees. The former emperor, Isaac Angelus (father of young Alexius), is restored to the throne. Tensions between the Greek and the crusaders. The war starts anew.

12th April 1204: Venetians and crusaders attack and succeed.

Appalling carnage. Venice gains 3/8 of Constantinople and empire, including Crete.

1205: Death of Enrico Dandolo. The greatest of all doges, who gave Venice her empire.

- Overall, his policies can be judged a disaster. The most infamous of all crusades, which considerably weakened Byzantium, and opened the way for the Ottomans.

XIIIth century

Emperor Frederick II (“Stupor Mundi”) visits Venice, but Venetians are cautious. They support a new Lombard League, although unofficially.

1255: State of war with Genoa.

1291: The last crusader town, Acre, is conquered by the Mamelukes. This considerably disrupts the spice road for Venice. An alternative is the Black Sea route, which is controlled by Genoa. The war rages between these cities.

1298: Major Genoese victory off Curzola (Marco Polo is taken prisoner).

Election procedure of a new doge 1/2

On the day appointed to the election, the youngest member of the Signoria (the inner council) was to pray in St Mark's; then, on leaving the Basilica, he was to stop the first boy he met and take him to the Doge's Palace, where the Great Council, minus those of its members who were under thirty, was to be in full session. This boy, known as the *ballotino*, would have the duty of picking the slips of paper from the urn during the drawing of lots. By the first of such lots, the Council chose thirty of their own number. The second was used to reduce the thirty to nine, and the nine would then vote for forty, each of whom was to receive at least seven nominations. The forty would then be reduced, again by lot, to twelve, whose task was to vote for twenty-five, of whom each this time required nine votes. The twenty-five were in turn reduced to another nine; the nine voted for forty-five, with a minimum of seven votes each, and from these the *ballotino* picked out the names of eleven. The eleven voted now for forty-one – nine or more votes each – and it was these forty-one who were to elect the Doge.

Election procedure of a new doge 2/2

So much for the preliminaries; now the election itself could begin. Each elector wrote the name of his candidate on a paper and dropped it in the urn; the slips were then removed and read, and a list drawn up of all the names proposed, regardless of the number of nominations each. A single slip for each name was now placed in another urn, and one drawn. If the candidate concerned was present, he retired together with any other elector who bore the same surname, and the remainder proceeded to discuss his suitability. He was then called back to answer questions or to defend himself against any accusations. A ballot followed. If he obtained the required twenty-five votes, he was declared Doge; otherwise, a second name was drawn, and so on.

1336: (Until 1339) war with Mastino II della Scala, despot of Verona.
This brings the first mainland possessions.

1344–48: Tensions with Genoa over the Black Sea, notably Trebizond and the Crimea (Sudak and Caffa). Venetian boats bring the Black Death (1348). Venice loses 60% of its population.



War with Genoa

1350: Genoa seizes Venetian ships in Caffa (Feodosya, in Crimea).

The Genoese admiral Filippo Doria is victorious in Negroponte (Eubea).

Another, terrible battle in Galata (Constantinople), which Paganino Doria wins over Nicolò Pisani, but with appalling losses.

29 August 1353: Battle of Lojera (Sardinia); major victory of Pisani over Antonio Garibaldi. This defeat forces Genoa to submit to the Visconti of Milan.

1354: While Pisani attacks again in Sardinia, Paganino Doria sails the Adriatic and threatens Venice. Pisani pursues him, but Doria surprises him in Portolungo (SW Peloponese). Disaster for Venice, their entire fleet is destroyed or captured.

1355: Peace is signed with the Visconti. Genoa then struggles for independence from Milan, while Venice flourishes.

1358: Lajos of Hungary attacks mainland possessions. Venice is forced to give up Dalmatia.

1372–1381 War with Genoa 1/4

1372: Genoese force the rulers of Cyprus (Lusignan) to give them major advantages.

- Because he cannot pay his debts, Emperor John V Paleologus gives Tenedos to Venice (this is where the Greek waited while their horse was brought in Troy). The Genoese arrange for the deposition of the emperor and his replacement by his son Andronicus.
- Both cities look for allies:
 - Genoa: Francesco da Carrara in Padua; the king of Hungary.
 - Venice: King Peter of Cyprus; Bernabò Visconti of Milan.

1378: On 22 April, Doge Contarini gives the banner of St Mark to Vettor Pisani.

1372–1381 War with Genoa 2/4

- 1378: On 30 May, under violent storm, the fleets meet off Anzio. The Venetians seize five Genoese galleys. They sail to the Levant then return to the Adriatic. They are not allowed to return to Venice, but must winter in Pola.
- 1379: (7 May) A 25-sail Genoese fleet appears. The Venetians force their commander to attack, although their fleet is in no condition to fight. This is a heroic battle, in which Pisani manages to sink the vessel of Genoese admiral Luciano Doria (who dies), but it is a crushing defeat. Only six galleys eventually return to Venice; Pisani is sentenced to 6 months in prison.

Venice has another fleet under Carlo Zeno in the East, but she is now defenceless.

In the next few weeks, the whole population prepare the defence. A Genoese squadron is off the Lido, which the Venetians cannot force back. They remove all signs in the lagoon that help navigation.

1372–1381 War with Genoa 3/4

6 August 1379: A Genoese fleet of 47 galleys appears, commanded by Pietro Doria. 10 days later, after heavy fighting, Chioggia falls to the Genoese and to Francesco da Carrara. This is the worst situation since Pepin le Bref!

The public pressure forces the Senate to release Vettor Pisani from prison and give him command. He succeeds in generating enthusiasm and energy.

Genoese and Carrara blockade Venice. The Genoese fleet winters in Chioggia's harbour.

21 December 1379: The Venetians bring three hulks to the approaches of Chioggia. After fierce fighting, they manage to sink them at suitable locations, thus blockading the Genoese.

In the beginning of 1380, the 18 ships of Carlo Zeno are back. Venice can recapture Brondolo in February, thus allowing some supplies to reach the city.

1372–1381 War with Genoa 4/4

In April, a new Genoese fleet appears; they make it difficult for Venice, which suffers famine, to maintain the blockade. But they succeed, and the second Genoese fleet eventually retreats to Dalmatia.

24 June: the 4000 beleaguered Genoese in Chioggia surrender.

Pisani then leads a fleet to pursue the Genoese; he dies during a fight off Apulia. Zeno is now in command. Operations are inconclusive.

1381: Exhausted, Venice and Genoa accept the offer of mediation of Count Amadeus VI of Savoy.

The ensuing Treaty of Turin (August 1381) is basically *status quo ante*. The main victors are the king of Hungary, and the duke of Austria whose help Venice needed against Carrara.

But Venice recovers amazingly fast, while Genoa is full of political strife and declines. She would never threaten Venice again.

1386: Venice convinces Corfu that they need her as protector against potential aggressors (chief among them... Venice!) Followed by Scutari and Durazzo (Dalmatia), Nauplia and Argos (Morea), the Cyclades, the Dodecanese. This expansion is due in large part to Ottoman advances (1389: Battle of Kosovo).

1380–1405: Wars with and against Gian Galeazzo Visconti, Francesco Carrara, and his son. Venice eventually obtains large mainland dominions.

1400: Venice has 3300 ships and 36'000 seamen.

Dark spot: the slave trade, mainly Christians from Russia, Armenia, Georgia. They are captured by the Tatars, transported by the Venetians from ports in the Black Sea, and sold to Ottomans (Janissaries), to Egypt (Mamelukes), and to North Africa. Slaves are also employed in Venetian mines and farms, notably in Crete and Cyprus.

Economy in Venice around 1400

By now, economic life is state-organised. Ships are standardised and mainly belong to the state. Large administration, heavy taxes.

Many progressive laws, e.g. regarding children labour. Industries are controlled by guilds, which also provide social care. Venice has the first national health service in the World. In 1335, twelve surgeons are fully paid by the state.

IVth: Many Jews settle in Venice. They are expelled in 1395, but they can gradually return. They form an important part of Venice, demographically, culturally, and economically.

Political organisation in 1400

The doge is the only politician to be elected for life.

Doge & 6-member **Signoria**: heads of state.

Collegio of 6 members: the ministers.

Senate of 120 members & **Council of Ten** (the latter meets always with the doge and the signoria): legislative councils.

Great Council of 1500 members: mainly for elections.

The Republic is an oligarchy. All citizens have rights, but only noblemen have political power.

Mid-XVth century



Italian whirlwind history

- 1425: Victory at the Battle of Maclodio of Carmagnola (commander of the Venetian army) against Milan; western border from the Adige to the Adda.
- 1446: Fights against an alliance, formed by Milan, Florence, Bologna, and Cremona. After the death of Filippo Maria Visconti, the Serenissima occupies Lodi and Piacenza, but is halted by Francesco Sforza.
- Sforza and the Doge ally to allow Sforza to rule Milan, in exchange for the cession of Brescia and Vicenza.
 - Venice again changes side when the power of Sforza seems to become excessive: the intricate situation is settled with the Peace of Lodi (1454), which confirms Bergamo and Brescia to the Republic.

Second half of XVth century: Ottoman progress

- 1453: Fall of Constantinople. Despite fighting on the Byzantine side, the Venetians negotiate a trading agreement with the Ottoman (1454).
- 1463: Ottoman ravage the Venetian fortress of Argos.
- 1470: Venice loses Negroponte.
Ottomans advance in the Balkans, reaching Udine.
- 1473: Venice gets Cyprus back.
- 1476: Treaty with the Ottomans; Venice has to cede Argo, Negroponte, Lemnos and Scutari, and to pay an annual tribute of 10'000 golden ducati.

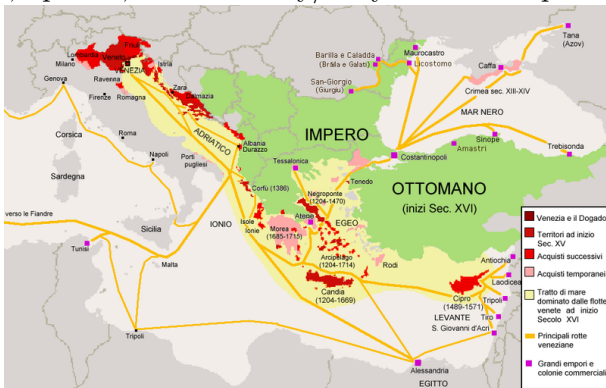
In Italy, Venice and the Papal state are smashed at the battle of Campomorto, by an alliance of Florence, Naples, Milan, and Ercole d'Este; the Pope changes sides and Venice is alone. But Ludovico Sforza of Milan now comes on the Venetian side.

Late 1480s, Venice fights against Pope Innocent VIII and Sigismund of Austria. Venetian troops are present at the Battle of Fornovo, which features the Italian League against Charles VIII of France.

Situation around 1500

Venice has 180,000 inhabitants and is the second largest city in Europe after Paris and probably the richest in the world.

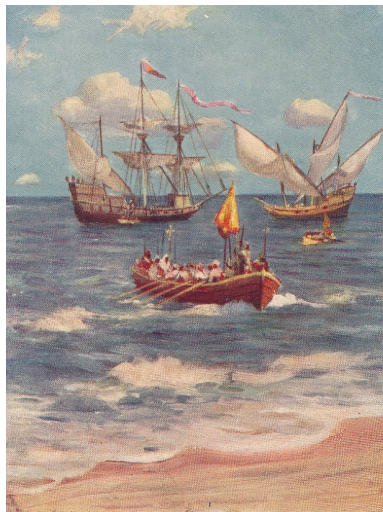
The Republic of Venice has 70,000 km² (27,000 sq mi) with 2.1 million inhabitants (England has 3 million, the whole of Italy 11, France 13, Portugal 1.7, Spain 6, and Germany/Holy Roman Empire 10).



Portuguese involuntary blow

1498: Vasco da Gama reaches Calicut (India).

It would take another century for the Portuguese, Dutch, English, and French to establish naval trade routes to Asia. But the spice road, and commerce in the Eastern Mediterranean, will decline.



- 1499: Venice allied with Louis XII of France against Milan, gaining Cremona. The Turks attack Lepanto (Gulf of Corinth); they sack Friuli (near Slovenian border). Venice surrenders Modon and Coron, near Corinth.
- 1508: War of the League of Cambrai (until 1516). Main participants are France, the Papal States, and the Republic of Venice. It also involves Spain, the Holy Roman Empire, England, Scotland, the Duchy of Milan, Florence, the Duchy of Ferrara, and Swiss mercenaries.
- 1509: Crushing defeat at the Battle of Agnadello. French and Imperial troops occupy the Veneto, but Venice managed to extricate herself through diplomatic efforts: Venice's weakness makes France and the Ottomans so dangerous that Venice finds new allies, and regains Brescia and Verona from France.

- 1515: Battle of Marignano, where a Venetian army tips the balance in favour of Francis I of France against Swiss mercenaries.
- 1537: (until 1540); Venice is allied with Charles V (Holy Roman Emperor and King of Spain) against Suleyman the Magnificent (and Francis I). Naval defeat of Preveza (1538) at the hands of the Turkish admiral Barbarossa. Ottomans now control the Eastern Mediterranean.
- 1571: Battle of Lepanto, major victory over the Ottoman Empire by a coalition of the Republic of Venice, the Kingdom of Spain (incl. Naples and Sicily), the Papal States, the Republic of Genoa, the Knights of Malta, the Grand Duchy of Tuscany, the Duchy of Savoy.



The Venetians do not gain lasting advantage; they must give up Cyprus in 1573.

XVIIth century

For the first time in almost 100 years, Venice intervenes militarily in Italy:

1628: On the death of Ferdinando I Gonzaga, duke of Mantua and Montferrat, the succession devolves to the French Charles of Gonzaga-Nevers. The Spanish Habsburg, who control Milan, cannot tolerate that and a war breaks out. Venice is allied with France against the Habsburgs and Savoy. Defeat of the Venetian army. Even worse, the war brings the plague in 1630; 50'000 people die in Venice, one third of the population.

Cretan War (1645–1669)

The Turks quickly conquer most of Crete, and lay siege to Candia (Heraklion). After long and heroic resistance, with help from other European states, Francesco Morosini and the Venetian garrison are forced to negotiate the surrender of the fortress.

The war with the Ottomans also raged in Dalmatia, where Venice is more successful and triples its possessions.

Overall, the Ottoman Empire gains territory, but is also exhausted by its efforts. It reaches the zenith when besieging Vienna in 1683. Following their defeat there, Morosini attacks in Morea (Peloponnese) and conquers it.

XVIIIth century

1714: The Turks declare war on Venice,
which loses the Morea.

The decline of the Ottomans mainly
benefits Austria and Russia. Venice faces
increased competition from Genoa,
Livorno, Ancona, and Trieste.



1797: a distinguished, most inopportune guest

1796: French revolutionary general
Napoléon, age 27, attacks Piedmont,
then the Austrians in Italy.

Napoléon flows into a rage with Venetian
envoys, complaining that Venice has
treacherously given Peschiera to the
Austrians, that he will burn Verona to
the ground, and deal with Venice
afterwards.



The envoys are terrified, they write to the doge that they expect to die,
that Venice is lost. Here is what Napoléon wrote to the Directory:

I have purposely engineered this quarrel, in case you wish to get five or six millions out of Venice . . . If you have more decided intentions, I think it will be in our interest to continue the *brouillerie*; just let me know what you wish to do, and we will await the favourable moment, which I will make use of according to the circumstances . . .

The truth about the Peschiera affair is that Beaulieu [the Austrian commander] basely deceived them; he requested passage for fifty men, then seized the town.

End of more than 1000 years of independence

1797: The **Treaty of Campo Formio**, between France and Austria, transfers the Austrian Netherlands (Belgium) to France, and divides Venetian possessions between France (Corfu) and Austria (Venice, Istria, Dalmatia). It also creates the Cisalpine and Ligurian Republics.

Conclusion

- An improbable, beautiful city.
- A rich history.
- Painters: Bellini, Canaletto, Carpaccio, Tintoretto, Titian, Veronese.
- Musicians: Albinoni, Monteverdi, Vivaldi.
- Mathematicians: Angeli, Benedetti, Borgi, Castelnuovo, Fubini, Padoa, Poleni, Riccati.
- Casanova, Marco Polo.
- ...