

# As Calm as the Lagoon

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An analysis of the Venetian oligarchy from 1297  
to 1509

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## Summary

The Venetian oligarchy endured from its cementing in 1297 to 1797. This stability set it aside from other Italian city-states who shifted from one governmental method to the next. The Venetian oligarchy endured through two centuries of existential threats and yet, despite these crises, remained largely the same. It never allowed the people a voice in their government like Genoa or resort to the rule of one man, such as in Milan. This raises the question of how it managed to do so.

To answer this question, I will analyse the oligarchy of Venice using Darcy Leach's analytical model and definition. Leach states that minority governments are only oligarchical if they act outside of their mandate.

In the first chapter, I will analyse the ideals of the 'Venetian Myth' to determine what kind of behaviour was deemed illegitimate by the Venetians themselves in order to analyse the government in its own context.

In the second chapter, Leach's model is applied to the Great Council, the political body from which all members of legislative committees were drawn. The Great Council was the source of all power in the Venetian government and any excluded party would need to gain access to it to partake in the government. By identifying how the nobility maintained an image of legitimacy, I explain how they kept the Great Council closed off to outsiders without inviting an organized challenge by those excluded.

The last chapter will analyse the position of the *doge*, the head of state and his political reach. The *doge* was the most powerful actor in Venice and, in theory, in a good position to seize full control of the state, yet none of the *doges* ever did so successfully. In the last chapter, I describe how this was prevented and what limitations there were on his office.

These chapters will show how the Venetian oligarchy guarded itself against the rise of a single ruler and the involvement of the general population.

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# Introduction

Renaissance Italy was as divided as its cities were unique and this is reflected in its governmental structures. In a time where self-rule was praised, the people of the free city-states of Italy struggled to find a method of government to suit their needs.<sup>1</sup> These methods ranged from the rule of a noble elite to the rule of a foreign administrator who administered the city government instead of a local ruler.<sup>2</sup> The governing models varied throughout the numerous free city-states and they adopted new methods as the existing ones proved incapable of maintaining the peace within these cities. The powerful elites of the Italian city-states were prone to factionalism in which each faction tried to accumulate as much control in their respective city as possible.<sup>3</sup>

The free city-states experimented with several methods of government in order to control such infighting. The earliest method was the consul system which was used by several large city-states like Milan, Siena, and Genoa. The consul method was most prevalent in the late eleventh and early twelfth-century but would slowly be replaced by the *podestá*.<sup>4</sup> The *podestá* functioned as the executive ruler of a city and a mediator between the factions to maintain peace. *Podestas* always hailed from other cities, to ensure that they had no personal interest in power plays within the city. They were, in fact, served by maintaining the status quo because they were financially compensated for their services. The term of office for the *podestas* was usually around a year. After this term, they had to leave the city and were barred from returning for a predetermined amount of time, usually several years.<sup>5</sup> Other city-states, like Milan, picked a ruler from their own city-state to head their government, a *signore*. *Signores* were not bound to a term of office.<sup>6</sup> Venice used this method as well, though in a severely restricted fashion. Their *signore* was called a *doge* and he

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<sup>1</sup> Fabrizio Ricciardelli, *The myth of republicanism in Renaissance Italy* (Turnhout 2015) 15.

<sup>2</sup> Ricciardelli, *The myth of republicanism in Renaissance Italy*, 19.; Michael Knapton, "Venice and the Terraferma", in: Andrea Gamberini and Isabella Lazzarini (ed.), *The Italian Renaissance State* (Cambridge 2012) 132-155,136.

<sup>3</sup> Ricciardelli, *The myth of republicanism in Renaissance Italy*, 19.

<sup>4</sup> Ibidem, 15.

<sup>5</sup> Ibidem, 20.

<sup>6</sup> Ibidem, 25.

was appointed for life. In Venice, the doge headed a government fully comprised of nobles.<sup>7</sup>

Most cities experimented widely with their governmental model to meet their demands but one city seems to have been immune to such changes. Venice barely altered its governmental model for nearly 500 years after 1297.<sup>8</sup> This raises a question. How could Venice maintain its political model when other city-states decided to adopt new methods of government? What allowed its government to survive the multitude of crises that it faced when so many other city-states had to adopt new methods of government? The fourteenth and fifteenth centuries were full of existential threats to Venice but it never changed its method of government.<sup>9</sup> Could it be that they simply struck gold on their first attempt?

Venice's governmental method was an oligarchy where a few hold the power to control the masses. Within Venice, only a fraction of its population, its nobility, was eligible for a position in government.<sup>10</sup> The nobles had complete control of the election of the *doge*, the Great Council and the Senate. Wealthy citizens, or *cittidani* as they were called in Venice, were excluded.

A distinction should be drawn between the term *cittidani* and *popolo*. The *popolo* were a party of people, usually comprised of local guilds and wealthy merchants, whereas the *cittidani* were a group of families that had a long history of residing in Venice and were not performing manual labour, thereby ensuring that only the financial elite or educated achieved the rank of *cittidani*.<sup>11</sup>

Venice did not allow the *popolo* or *cittidani* to take part in governing like the people of Genoa did. In Genoa, government positions were open to the *popolo* and in fact, the Genoese *doge* had to be a member of the *popolo*, whereas nobles were

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<sup>7</sup> Avner Greif, 'Political organizations, social structure, and institutional success: Reflections from Genoa and Venice during the commercial revolution.' *Journal of Institutional and Theoretical Economics (JITE)/Zeitschrift für die gesamte Staatswissenschaft* 15, no. 4 (1995) 4, 734-740, 737.

<sup>8</sup> Monique O'Connell, *Men of empire, power and negotiation in Venice's maritime state* (Baltimore 2009) 286.

<sup>9</sup> O'Connell, , *Men of empire, power and negotiation in Venice's maritime state*, 286.

<sup>10</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>11</sup> John E. Law. and Bernadette Paton. *Communes and despots in Medieval and Renaissance Italy* (Surrey 2010) 7.; John J. Martin and Dennis Romano, *Venice reconsidered, the history and civilization of an Italian city-state, 1297-1797* (London 2000) 340.

banned from the office.<sup>12</sup> Venice never made such a concession to the *cittidani*, it never employed a *podestá* and it certainly never relinquished the highest office in the state to a member of the *cittidani* or the *popolo*.

Venice was a strong oligarchy that managed to maintain control without letting the *cittidani* partake in the governing of their city, but it also never turned into a hereditary *signoria*. In this thesis, I will attempt to explain how it was possible for the Venetian oligarchy to remain closed to the *cittidani* and *popolo* and why it did not follow suit of most other city-states and become a *signore*-led state. For this, I will use the analytical model of American sociologist Darcy Leach, discussed below.

### **Theoretical Framework and Method**

Aristotle was the first to coin the term oligarchy. He specified an oligarchy as a division of power where a small minority rules over a majority. An oligarchy stands apart from an aristocracy, which Aristotle deemed just because members of an aristocracy were supposedly selected based on merit. Aristotle perceived an oligarchy as unjust because those in power are in control based on wealth. According to Aristotle, only the rich could be part of an oligarchy.<sup>13</sup>

Aristotle's definition of an oligarchy states that it is the rich who rule in an oligarchy. Robert Michels widens that definition to include anyone who is part of the minority in power. Members of this minority do not necessarily need to be wealthy to gain control of a bureaucratic structure.<sup>14</sup>

Michels' definition seems to fit best with the oligarchy of Venice. Venice's nobles were not in their position because they were the wealthy of the city; plenty of *cittidani* managed to acquire great wealth that matched or even outmatched the wealth of the nobles. The oligarchy in Venice was based on birth rather than financial standing.<sup>15</sup> Darcy Leach shares Michels' definition of oligarchies, in the sense that she believes that an oligarchy is not made up of the wealthy by definition. Her definition, however, is not as simple as a minority ruling of a majority. Leach defines

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<sup>12</sup> Christine Shaw, *popular government and oligarchy in Renaissance Italy* (Boston 2006) 221.; Christine Shaw, 'Principles and practice in the civic government of fifteenth-century Genoa.' *Renaissance Quarterly* 58, no. 1 (2005) 45-90, 66.

<sup>13</sup> Aristotle, *The politics*, trans. by Thomas A. Sinclair (London 1992) 252.

<sup>14</sup> Robert Michels. *Democratie en organisati.: Een klassieke theorie* (Antwerpen 1969) 175.

<sup>15</sup> Donald E. Queller, *The Venetian patriciate, reality versus myth* (Chicago 1986) 29.

an oligarchy as ‘a particular distribution of illegitimate power that has become entrenched over time.’<sup>16</sup>

Leach’s model is designed to be applicable to both formal and informal groups. By formal groups, she refers to groups that have a bureaucratic structure and a set hierarchy. Informal groups are groups without official hierarchies or bureaucratic structures. However, these groups can be oligarchical all the same. Michels’ ‘Iron Law’ was directed at formal groups but Leach argues that informal groups are also prone to becoming oligarchic because they do not have official safeguards in place to prevent or limit the forming of an oligarchy.<sup>17</sup> For the purpose of this thesis, I will focus on the formal aspect of the Venetian government since treating both the formal and informal in full detail would be beyond the scope of this thesis. It is not that there were no informal groups in Venice, or that they did not influence the governing of their city, but such groups would have left significantly less source material than the official records of the government. It is, therefore, more feasible to focus on the formal group.

Leach’s model makes a clear distinction between formal and informal behaviour and which behaviour is considered illegitimate or legitimate. The crux of her theory is that minority governments are only oligarchical if they use their power illegitimately. By legitimate use, Leach means that those in power use their power in a way that has been approved by the group.<sup>18</sup> Whether an act is legitimate depends on the context of the society or group in which it takes place. Some examples of illegitimate behaviour are the use of material sanctions, rewarding allies, and the selling of official offices. These kinds of behaviour are commonly regarded as being beyond the mandate of those in power.<sup>19</sup>

By using Leach’s model, I can determine how the Venetian nobles used their position to maintain their oligarchy and whether their use of power was deemed legitimate by Venetian standards. If I can determine how the Venetian oligarchy managed to keep up the façade of legitimacy, we can determine what part it played in the survival of the oligarchy. By examining the mandate of the various offices in Venice, we can determine what behaviour was deemed legitimate and what kind of

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<sup>16</sup> Darcy K. Leach. ‘The iron law of what again? Conceptualizing oligarchy across organizational forms.’ *Sociological Theory* 23, no. 3 (2005) 312-337, 316.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibidem*, 312.

<sup>18</sup> Leach, ‘the iron law of what again?’ 326.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibidem*, 323.

behaviour fell outside of the parameters. By looking at the legislation of such behaviour, we can determine how the oligarchy managed to maintain the image of a legitimate government. Such legitimacy, even if it was only perceived as such, could have deterred challenges to its power.

I will mainly focus on secondary literature and translated primary sources. By using a wide array of books and articles, I intend to encompass the majority of the historiography of Venice. The majority of the literature used will be in English. This, however, should not pose a significant handicap since there is a long history of English authorship on the subject in Venice.<sup>20</sup>

The primary sources I will use have been translated into English and a large part of this thesis will be based on secondary literature since this will be more readily available. Original sources will not be used since they are only available in Medieval Italian. The value of this thesis is in the application of Leach's model, not the use of primary sources.

## Historiography

Venetian history has been described by plenty of historians, ranging from German historian Leopold von Ranke to English historian Frederic Lane. The majority of the Venetian historiography has focussed on trade and culture within Venice. Lane mainly focusses on a descriptive account of Venetian history in his book *Venice a Maritime Republic* and his collected articles mainly focus on cultural and economic history, with only a small foray into political history.<sup>21</sup>

Robert Finlay has written extensively about the political workings of Venetian politics in his book *Politics in Renaissance Venice* in which he describes the workings of the Venetian government. He was among the first to write on this subject and to take the Venetian Myth into account when doing so. The Venetian Myth, in short, is the explanation the Venetians gave themselves for their stability, but I will elaborate on it below. This myth has persisted throughout the historiography of Venice until the 1980s.<sup>22</sup> After the 1980s, the Venetian Myth was under scrutiny from historians like Finlay and Lane.

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<sup>20</sup> Frederic C. Lane, *Venice a maritime republic* (London 1973).; O'Connell. *Men of empire*; Ricciardelli, *The myth of republicanism in Renaissance Italy*.; Shaw, *popular government and oligarchy in Renaissance Italy*.

<sup>21</sup> Lane, *Venice a maritime republic*, xix-xxi.

<sup>22</sup> Robert Finlay, *Politics in Renaissance Venice* (London 1980) 2.



But few were greater hardliners in this critique of the Venetian Myth than Donald Queller. In his book *the Venetian Patriciate, Reality versus Myth* Queller shows a contrast between the behaviour of Venetian nobility and the ideals of the Venetian Myth. He highlights the internal corruption of the Venetian nobility and draws an unfavourable image of them.<sup>23</sup>

The Venetian Myth has since been discarded as an explanation for Venice's stability and recent scholars have mainly focused on the political reality of Venice and analysing the effects of the myth itself on the Venetian historiography. The majority of focus is still on trade and none have applied Leach's method in the fashion I will in this thesis. Historians such as Michael Knapton have written on the political reality of Venetian politics, trying to pierce the veil of the Venetian Myth.<sup>24</sup> Through Leach's method, I intend to supply a new explanation of why the oligarchy in Venice endured. The application of Leach's theory in this context will prove that it is applicable to pre-modern contexts and can function as a valuable tool for the analysis of oligarchies throughout history.

## Structure

This thesis will focus on the period between 1297 and 1509. 1297 is a logical starting point since the *serrata*, the legislation which claimed the monopoly on governing for the nobility, is enacted in this year. 1509 is the end of the period I will address, since Venice lost the war with the League of Cambria and adopted a policy of neutrality, limiting the outside threats to the state.<sup>25</sup>

This thesis is divided into three chapters. In the first chapter, I will use Leach's model to analyse the perception Venetians had of their own state and two branches of the Venetian government, the Great Council and the office of *doge*. This will aid in determining what behaviour the population deemed legitimate or illegitimate. This analysis is necessary for a proper application of Leach's model, as explained above.

In chapter two, I will focus on these two aspects of government, the Great Council and the dogeship, themselves. The Great Council was the source of all government offices and power. To explain how the Venetian nobles managed to keep the *cittidani* from entering in their government, one needs only to consider how

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<sup>23</sup> Donald E. Queller, *The Venetian patriciate, reality versus myth* (Chicago 1986)

<sup>24</sup> Knapton, "Venice and the Terraferma", 132-155.

<sup>25</sup> Lane, *Venice a maritime republic*, 244-245.

they managed to keep the Great Council closed off from the *cittidani*. Since all offices are filled with members of the Great Council, this would be the point of access for the *cittidani*, if they had striven for participation in the government. The *serrata* of 1297, the legal reform that closed off the Great Council for anyone who was not already in it, will function as a starting point for this chapter.<sup>26</sup> Furthermore, I will look at the position of the *citidani* in Venetian society to try and explain why they never resisted this unfavourable division of power and lastly, I will examine how the illegitimate behaviour of nobles was regulated in order to determine how the oligarchy maintained a legitimate image, despite the illegitimate behaviour of its nobles.

In the final chapter, I will set out to explain how the Venetians prevented their *doge* from seizing power like so many other *signori* had. The position of *doge* was the only office that did not have a set term of office. Instead, the dogeship was for life, setting it apart from all other offices within the Venetian Republic.<sup>27</sup> All the other offices, including the Council of Ten, were only for a limited time. The term of office for a member of the Ten was only a single year.<sup>28</sup> This is hardly enough time to cement one's position or draw more power to himself. The only position that offered the prolonged period of time necessary to do so was the dogeship. And in effect, the position of *doge* only varied from the position of a *signore* in that a *doge*'s position is not hereditary.

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<sup>26</sup> O'Connell. *Men of empire*, 286.

<sup>27</sup> Lane, *Venice a maritime republic*, 97.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibidem*, 116.

# Chapter 1: The Venetian Myth

To understand how the oligarchy in Venice remained stable, we need to understand how it viewed itself. For Leach's theory, it is essential to understand what kind of behaviour was deemed legitimate. By looking at Venice's perception of itself, we can determine what behaviour they regarded as positive and what behaviour was considered incorrect or imprudent. To do so, I will look at the so-called Venetian Myth.

Venice stood aside from other city-states in Italy, not only by the location where it was built but by being seemingly immune to factional strife and remaining relatively stable, especially after the implementation of the *serrata* in 1297, which I shall discuss in chapter 2.<sup>29</sup> This would not only be noted by later historians but by the Venetians themselves as well. Naturally, the Venetians took pride in this stability and sought to explain and cultivate it to the outside world and those living within Venetian borders. They created an idolized version of their own past and present, for which historians have coined the term 'Venetian Myth.'<sup>30</sup>

The first signs of the myth occurred in 1380, during the fourth Venetian-Genoese war.<sup>31</sup> The early authors claimed that Venice was eternally stable, unlike other cities in Italy where infighting ran so rampant that they had to invite an outsider to oversee their own cities. The *podestá's* primary role was to curb any violence between factions. Venice, in contrast, stood as an island in the sea of infighting and instability. The Venetians attributed their own stability to three factors: God's favour, the Venetian constitution and the selfless nobility. Since the constitution and nobility are most relevant for this thesis, I will focus on these.

## The Constitution

The first pillar of the Venetian Myth was Venice's constitution. The Venetians believed that their form of government was the perfect execution of the ideas of Aristotle, who stated that just governance could take the shape of a monarchy, an aristocracy and a polis, whereas, unjust governments would be tyranny, oligarchy and democracy. Each of the three just forms was at risk of becoming an unjust form.

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<sup>29</sup> Lane, *Venice a maritime republic*, 112.

<sup>30</sup> Finlay, *Politics in Renaissance Venice*, 30.

<sup>31</sup> Joanne M. Ferraro. *Venice, history of the floating city* (Cambridge 2012) 125.

A king could turn into a tyrant, an aristocracy into an oligarchy and a polis into a democracy.<sup>32</sup> The thirteenth-century theologian Thomas Aquinas argued that the greatest form of government was a combination of the three just forms so that a government would enjoy their benefits without the risks.<sup>33</sup> The Venetians were of the opinion that their republic contained all three. In their *doge*, they had a just monarch, the idea of a just aristocracy was embodied in the Senate and the polis model took form in the Great Council.<sup>34</sup>

By Tolomeo of Lucca's standards, Venice was a constitutional government and all power was drawn from the people.<sup>35</sup> According to Tolomeo, constitutional governments hold their rulers accountable to the laws and people and Paolino of Venice would add to that.

### **The Nobility**

The last pillar, and for my purpose most relevant one, is the Venetian nobility. The humanist Gian Francesco Poggio Bracciolini wrote in 1459 that Venice was immune to many of the internal threats that other cities faced because its nobility was united in one goal, the protection of the republic.<sup>36</sup> According to Poggio, the concern with the state's security curbed any disruptive behaviour among the nobles. For Poggio, there was no sign of factionalism or dissent in Venice.<sup>37</sup>

Poggio was a Florentine but the sentiment he puts out is echoed by many Venetians. In the early fifteenth century, Lorenzo de Monacis wrote that the Venetian nobility was in its position based on merit rather than birth and that these men had risen to their position due to their own virtues. The Venetian nobility was supposedly tied together by their concern for the wellbeing of the Republic and was applauded for it by its own contemporaries.<sup>38</sup> The nobility advocated for prudent behaviour while setting aside personal financial and prestige-related interests.

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<sup>32</sup> Lane, *Venice and History*, 289.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibidem*, 289.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibidem*, 297-298.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibidem*, 299-300

<sup>36</sup> Queller, *The Venetian patriciate*, 8.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibidem*, 4.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibidem*, 7.

## **Conclusion**

The Venetian Myth should not be regarded as a factual account of how the nobility functioned. As we will see in the following chapters, they were quite prone to selfish behaviour. But we can determine what the Venetians thought was the cause of their stability and success. Factual reality is secondary to perceived reality when one wishes to apply Leach's model.

Leach's model is based on behaviour perceived as illegitimate and we can use the Venetian Myth to determine what kind of behaviour would be considered illegitimate by the Venetians. The myth specifically mentions the nobility and the constitution of Venice, both of which are instrumental in understanding why the form of government did not change from 1297 until 1797. Behaviour capable of destabilizing the balance of power would need a strong legitimisation; otherwise, it would risk being labelled as illegitimate.

With regards to the nobility, I have determined that they were expected to be selfless and in service to the state without a hunger for prestige or personal gain. Behaviour that falls outside of these lines would be deemed incorrect and illegitimate and incite a response, either from the government or the people. The next chapter will be partly devoted to analysing how the Venetian government handled nobles who stepped outside of the norm.

## Chapter 2: The Bedrock

The Great Council stood as the bedrock of the Venetian government. The Senate, Council of the Ten and electors of the *doges* were all drawn from the Great Council as were all the committees, councils, and legislative offices in Venice and its territories. Being on the Great Council became the defining characteristic of a nobleman in Venice.<sup>39</sup> The second chapter will focus on the Great Council, how it was closed off to anyone but the Venetian nobles and how this oligarchy managed to maintain their stronghold on Venice without giving any ground to or facing any major opposition from the common people.

### **The *Serrata***

The terms for being allowed a seat on the Great Council were imposed in two stages, with the initial legislation enacted in 1297 and the following reform passed in 1323. Prior to that reform, members of the Great Council were mostly drawn from those who held an official office or were appointed by a small committee, which selected a hundred new members each year.<sup>40</sup>

The need to change this system arose due to two major concerns which the reform of 1297, which would become known as the *serrata*, tried to address.<sup>41</sup> The first concern was that, due to a growing population, the hundred who were appointed each year were insufficient to meet the demand for seats in the Great Council. The second concern that the Venetians had was that, with a small committee which sometimes only numbered four, there was the risk of unfit people being nominated. The committee members could appoint people they simply admired or who they were indebted to but who had no experience or family ties with an older family.<sup>42</sup>

These problems were resolved in 1297. By implementing new reform, the limit on how many people could sit on the Great Council was entirely removed, allowing everyone who wanted to sit on the council to have a seat. The reform also saw to it that those who had sat on the council in the four years prior could retain their seat.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Knapton, "*Venice and the Terraferma*", 136.

<sup>40</sup> Lane, *Venice a maritime republic*, 112.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibidem*, 112.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibidem*. 111-112.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibidem*. 112.

New members could be admitted and voted in by the Forty.<sup>44</sup> This practice ended in 1323 when it was declared that prospective members needed to prove that an ancestor had held high office before. After 1323, membership of the Great Council became hereditary and became the very defining trait of a noble male.<sup>45</sup> *Cittidani* families could no longer become noble by marriage since nobility was only passed on through the male line.<sup>46</sup>

The *serrata*, which translates to closure, effectively blocked any non-noble or newcomers from holding any political office. Gaining control of the Great Council meant gaining control of the dogeship, courts, legislature and in effect the entire city.<sup>47</sup> If any year in Venice's history should be picked to determine when the Nobles cemented their oligarchy, 1297 would be the right pick, with 1323 a close second.

But despite seizing control for themselves and officially pushing the majority of the Venetian people out of the government, there was no organized opposition against this reform. Only one noteworthy incident could be mentioned: the execution of some men on suspicion of plotting to assassinate the *doge*, which never succeeded. The main conspirator, Marino Boccono, and his co-conspirators were executed for the plot in 1300.<sup>48</sup>

### **Placating the *Cittidani***

The wealthy *cittidani* families were placated, at first, by being elevated into nobility.<sup>49</sup> This practice ended after 1323, but was revived on some occasions to elevate families that had proven themselves in wars like the Fourth Genoese War in 1381. The thirty families that were admitted into the nobility were the wealthiest and had done their part in the war effort against Genoa.<sup>50</sup> These families were elevated on the pretext of a reward for their patriotic service, but an ulterior motive might have played a role in the decision to elevate these thirty families. They had aided Venice in the war at a massive personal expense, strengthening their own reputation and

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<sup>44</sup> Lane, *Venice a maritime republic*, 112.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibidem*. 113-114.

<sup>46</sup> Finlay, *Politics in Renaissance Venice*, 45.

<sup>47</sup> Laura I. Stern, 'Politics and Law in Renaissance Florence and Venice' in *The American Journal of Legal History* 46, no 2 (2004) 209-234, 212.

<sup>48</sup> Lane, *Venice a maritime republic*, 113.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibidem*, 196

<sup>50</sup> *Ibidem*.

position in the city.<sup>51</sup> By pre-emptively allowing the most powerful and prestigious families of Venice to join in the nobility, the nobility deterred the threat of these families rising up against the nobles and opening up the government for all citizens.

Apart from this addition after the war with Genoa, new elevations to nobility were rare. Venice's nobles numbered in the hundreds and were therefore never at risk of losing their oligarchy. The loss of one family would hardly endanger the hold of the nobility on the Great Council. Its numbers swelled consistently, starting out with 1100 male members in 1323, which made supplementation of the nobility by elevating common families was unnecessary to maintain control.<sup>52</sup> In the fifteenth century, this would cause a new problem for the Venetians. There were far more nobles than there were offices to fill.<sup>53</sup>

It would be incorrect to assume that Venetian citizens had no role in the government. The nobles filled the executive posts in the government but citizens, or *cittidani*, filled a number of roles as well. The ducal chancellery, the bureaucratic arm of the Great Council, was exclusively filled with *cittidani*.<sup>54</sup> These positions were reserved for Venetian born citizens, much like the nobility was reserved only for families with a long Venetian lineage. The families that held positions in the ducal chancellery were the wealthiest of the *cittidani* and gained plenty of prestige from their positions, especially if they gained the position of great chancellor. Most of the families only sent a few members to serve on the chancellery which can lead to the assumption that the post was unpopular. It should be noted that these families based the majority of their prestige on their mercantile proficiency; the position on the chancellery was not their only source of prestige but rather one of many. The focus of most families was primarily directed at trade and where possible, they took part in the chancellery.<sup>55</sup>

But the *cittidani* were not limited to the ducal chancellery. They could also gain the position of manager (captain of the port) but most importantly that of a dignitary to foreign courts. *Cittidani* often brokered peace on Venice's behalf on several occasions and they were dispatched as envoys to foreign courts.<sup>56</sup> These

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<sup>51</sup> Lane, *Venice a maritime republic*, 113.

<sup>52</sup> Knapton, "Venice and the Terraferma", 136.

<sup>53</sup> Stern, 'Politics and law in Renaissance Florence and Venice', 212.

<sup>54</sup> Martin and Romano, *Venice reconsidered*, 91.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibidem*. 342.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibidem*, 91.



roles did not only offer prestige. More importantly, these roles led to connections in foreign lands which would prove lucrative in a mercantile minded city like Venice. Lesser *cittidani* served in the government itself as notaries, scribes and similar functions.<sup>57</sup> They outnumbered the political offices of the nobility of three to one on average and were not bound to terms of office like their superiors, who usually left their post after a year.<sup>58</sup> In this sense, the *cittidani* provided the government with a measure of stability that was lacking considering that officials served for such a short tenure.<sup>59</sup>

The *cittidani* were perhaps barred from governing but the public opinion of the population was frequently taken into account by the legislature.<sup>60</sup> There were several ways for the common populace to voice their concerns, ranging from gossiping to the far less subtle method of raising a crowd to let their opinion be known. Therefore, popular opinion was also utilised to justify new legislation.<sup>61</sup> The popular opinion was not just given by the *cittidani* but by the entire Venetian population.<sup>62</sup> What is remarkable is that the Venetian government often overturned new legislation if it solicited a significant outcry from the populace. In 1510, for example, the Council of Ten overturned legislation they themselves had imposed on gambling to avoid public outcry.<sup>63</sup> This awareness of popular opinion also deterred any call for reform to include those currently excluded. One of the main arguments for opening up the government was effectively dismantled by taking the opinion of the entire population into account. People effectively had a way to influence politics in a broad sense, they simply lacked the right to formulate legislation themselves.

So while the *cittidani* were excluded from the legislative and executive offices of government, they were not excluded from the lower bureaucracy and gained as much prestige from serving in this bureaucracy as the aristocracy gained from serving in the government. Public opinion also played a major part in the decision making process of the government. This inclusion of the *cittidani* served as a pacifier for those who were excluded from governing. The possibility of holding office in the

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<sup>57</sup> Finlay, *Politics in Renaissance Venice*, 47.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibidem*, 46.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibidem*, 46

<sup>60</sup> *Ibidem*, 49.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibidem*, 49.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibidem*, 56.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibidem*, 55.

ducal chancellery and most other government posts would, at least partly, pacify later generations.

### **Prosecuting the Elite**

While the inclusion of the *cittidani* is one explanation for the lack of resistance from the common people against the rule of the nobility, it is not the only one. According to Leach's theory, a minority government is only oligarchical if it acts outside of its mandate.<sup>64</sup> Crimes such as bribery and embezzlement were not uncommon among the Venetian officials and would, therefore, be in conflict with the ideals of the Venetian Myth and outside of the social norm and thus the mandate. These crimes only serve to enrich the culprit and mark Venetian model as an oligarchical government. But Venetian unlawful behaviour was not left unanswered. Venetian nobles did not enjoy immunity from the law and were often prosecuted for their transgressions.<sup>65</sup>

A practice that seemed to occur frequently among nobles in office was embezzlement; the theft or misappropriation of the *commune's* funds. These practices were common in both the *commune* and its territories abroad.<sup>66</sup> However, a large part of the embezzlements was not intended as such. Nobles performed their duties at personal cost and expected to be compensated for their services. They drew those funds from the state's coffers and a large part of the embezzlement cases simply came down to a difference of opinion on how large their compensation should be.<sup>67</sup>

Bribery was another widespread problem for the Venetians. Venetian officials sold all matter of things to the highest bidders, ranging from official posts to testimony and secret government information.<sup>68</sup> Sentences for bribery were as varied as they were for embezzlement. Officials could be fined, imprisoned and even exiled for these offences, especially when the culprits sold their services to foreign powers.<sup>69</sup> Nobody in Venice was above the law and, with regards to bribery, one of the best examples of this would be the bribery conviction of Carlo Zeno. Not only

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<sup>64</sup> Leach, 'the iron law of what again?' 316.

<sup>65</sup> Queller, *The Venetian patriciate*, 174.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibidem*, 175.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibidem*, 174.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibidem*, 192-194.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibidem*, 195.

was Carlo Zeno a member of one of the oldest noble families in Venice, he was also a renowned war hero. He fought against the Genoese at Tenedos in 1376 and managed to secure the island for Venice, effectively giving Venice control over the trade in the Black Sea.<sup>70</sup> But despite this, he was still convicted of bribery in 1405. He lost his political office and had to spend a year in prison for his crime.<sup>71</sup>

Embezzlement and bribery are just a few examples of unlawful behaviour and abuses of these offices, and yet the ideas of the Venetian Myth endured. Despite these selfish acts that mostly lined the pockets of guilty nobles, people still believed that the nobility at large was dedicated to the state and selfless in its servitude. The convictions were public and common and yet did little to shake the belief in the myth, and it is exactly because of these convictions that the myth endured.

The punishment for a small transgression was often a simple fine, but greater crimes were often punished with exile or imprisonment, such as befell Carlo Zeno. Partly, these convictions were issued to maintain the image of the nobility at large and sinners were therefore banned from office.<sup>72</sup> The removal from office played a significant part in maintaining the image of the Venetian nobility as benevolent rulers who only cared for the state.<sup>73</sup> Bad cells were removed to keep the body of the nobility healthy and bolster the ideals of the Venetian Myth.

The sheer amount of legislation against this behaviour, however, shows that this was a continuous struggle between the nobility at large and the nobleman.<sup>74</sup> The legislation shows that lining your own pocket was not perceived as a perk of the job but as improper behaviour that fell outside of the mandate of the offices that these nobles held and abused.<sup>75</sup> Within the model of Leach, corrupt behaviour should be classified as illegitimate and, therefore, oligarchical. The sheer amount of legislation against such behaviour shows that the nobility at large at least tried to curb such behaviour. The behaviour as such was not an accepted part of the privileged position of the oligarchy in charge. In Venice, nobody was above the law, not even a war hero like Carlo Zeno.

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<sup>70</sup> Lane, *Venice a maritime republic*, 189-190.

<sup>71</sup> Queller, *the Venetian patriciate*, 193.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibidem*, 193.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibidem*, 7.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibidem*, 7.

<sup>75</sup> Leach, 'the iron law of what again?' 323.

## Conclusion

Governments invite challenge if they are considered illegitimate and the Venetian government managed to mitigate this risk through several means. The majority of the initial hostile attitude towards the *serrata* in 1297 was defused by elevating a large group of the richest and most powerful non-noble Venetian families into the nobility, thereby mitigating the risk of an active opposition to the reform. This method was employed again after the Fourth Venetian-Genoese war, to prevent post-war discontent from escalating. Thirty of the most prominent families were elevated into the nobility to prevent such an outcome.

After these periods of tension, the *cittidanti* that were excluded from the Great Council were allowed to serve the government in other ways. They had a monopoly on the ducal chancellery, served as public servants and supported the governing elite in office. These offices provided them with income and prestige and they, in turn, supplied stability and continuance in a government where only one term lasted longer than a year, that of the doge. The *cittidanti* were therefore not completely excluded from government and enjoyed plenty of benefits themselves from the government.

The main issue of an oligarchy is that they tend to legislate in their own favour and not the favour of the entire community. Again, the Venetian oligarchy managed to mitigate this problem by paying heed to public opinion on legislative measures, which sometimes went against their own interests, it at least partly mitigated the resentment of being excluded from legislative office.

Another threat to the perceived legitimacy of the oligarchy was the behaviour of its members. If they acted outside of the mandate of their office, their behaviour would be deemed illegitimate and reflect poorly on the nobility at large and invite challenge. Unlawful behaviour was a continuing problem but the threat to the legitimacy of the rule of the nobility was limited by prosecuting those that fell out of line. By condemning the actions of the individual, the oligarchy distanced itself from these acts and further legitimised itself by showing that it would not tolerate such behaviour, not even from war heroes such as Carlo Zeno.

By including the *cittidanti* in the bureaucracy, taking their opinions into account and elevating them after the *serrata* and the Fourth Venetian-Genoese War, the oligarchy placated the *cittidanti*. By prosecuting its own members, it maintained

an image of a legitimate government which would not tolerate selfish acts that hurt the community.

## Chapter 3: The Pinnacle

If the Great Council was the bedrock of Venetian politics, then the *doge* was its pinnacle. The *doge's* office was the highest in the Republic and the only office that was for life.<sup>76</sup> The *doge* was the most potent political actor in all of Venice and had access to every council and presided over the Senate, Great Council and Council of Ten.<sup>77</sup> If any official in Venice was going to seize power and install a monarchy or *signorie*, it was the *doge*. In this chapter, I will analyse the position of the *doge* and how this office was limited and secured from tampering.

### Responsibilities and Limitations

The *doge's* role was of paramount importance for the functioning of the Venetian state. In times of war, he was the symbol of Venetian bravery and self-sacrifice. In times of peace, he presided over a government that was as massive as it was intricate, and all that at the average age of 70.<sup>78</sup> The *doge's* role was mostly bureaucratic, presiding over meetings of the Council of Ten, Senate and the Great Council, functioning as the swing vote in deadlocked legal procedures and overseeing the ducal chancellery. The *cittidani* were appointed and could be removed by the *doge*, giving him immense control over the office.<sup>79</sup> The *doge* had a central position in all the councils and was therefore instrumental in its functioning. More than one *doge* abdicated due to health concerns, rather than leaving the state without a leader. In 1457, *Doge Foscari* was deposed because he could not tend to his duties due to illness and refused to abdicate.<sup>80</sup>

The *doge* was bound to certain rules; he could not go against the advice of his councillors, he could not voice his own opinion given permission by his councillors, he could not leave Venice's territory and he had to wait on his council before he could open correspondence from foreign courts.<sup>81</sup> The restrictions on the *doge's* office evolved with each *doge*. After the death of a *doge*, a revising committee was formed to adapt the ducal oath. This revision usually addressed behaviour that the

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<sup>76</sup> Finlay, *Politics in Renaissance Venice*, 117.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibidem*, 117.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibidem*, 123.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibidem*, 114.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibidem*, 116.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibidem*, 123.

deceased *doge* had displayed that was deemed inappropriate and should, therefore, be banned for the following *doge*. The ducal oath was more a guideline than a law set in stone, however, and *doges* enjoyed a great liberty to behave as they saw fit.<sup>82</sup>

### **Electing a *Doge***

The Venetians were fully aware of the threat a *doge* posed to the stability of the republic. With his unlimited access to councils, he had a massive amount of influence on the government and could apply his influence to direct politics in his preferred direction, often for a long period since *doges* served for life.<sup>83</sup> Such a position was a hotbed for factional strife. *Doges* could influence politics for years, sometimes decades and factions would support those *doges* that served their interests, inevitably leading to conflict. Venetians endeavoured to limit the risk of such factional infighting by creating an elaborate voting method that depended on a 2/3 majority approval and severely constraining the *doge's* powers.<sup>84</sup>

The election of *doges* had always been a public affair, allowing the *popolo* to partake. But in 1172, a naming committee was selected for the task. This committee would take increasingly complicated forms until reaching its final state in 1268.<sup>85</sup> After 1268, the election of the eventual naming committee demanded several rounds of voting and lotteries and usually took several days.

The process started after a *doge* had died or abdicated due to ill health, which was not uncommon for ill *doges* to do. The oldest member of the ducal council would serve as a temporary replacement and the Great Council was convened in its entirety. The purpose of the first meeting was to select three committees, the naming committee, a committee to tend to the *doge's* financial affairs and a committee to revise the ducal oath.<sup>86</sup> I will elaborate on the last committee later in this chapter.

As mentioned, lottery was an important part of the selection of the naming committee. By leaving the naming of members of the committee to fate, it was impossible to scheme or plot to get allies appointed to the committee.<sup>87</sup> The first round of lot-picking used 30 gold balls and as many silver balls as there were

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<sup>82</sup> Finlay, *Politics in Renaissance Venice*, 111.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibidem*, 117.

<sup>84</sup> Jay S. Coggins and C. Frederico Perali, '64% majority rule in ducal Venice: voting for the *doge*', *public choice* 97, no. 4 (1998) 709-723, 714.

<sup>85</sup> Finlay, *Politics in Renaissance Venice*, 94, 111.

<sup>86</sup> Coggins and Perali, '64% majority rule in ducal Venice', 714.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibidem*, 714.

members of the Great Council. The nobles each drew a ball from an urn and if they drew silver, they had to leave. If anyone drew a gold ball, his family members had to leave the council chamber, for only one member of each family could serve on the naming committee to prevent any family from gaining an advantage.<sup>88</sup>

Following the selection of the 30, they were reduced to 9 by lot. These 9 then selected 40 new members, which could be part of the current 9, who had to be approved by 7 of the 9 members. The Great Council was reconvened and these 40 members were presented and reduced to 12 by lot. These 12 then selected 25 new members with at least 9 votes each, which were in turn reduced to 9 by lot. These 9 nominated 45, again with a majority of 7 votes in favour, and these 45 were reduced to 11, who then picked the 41 electors. These 41 electors would eventually select the new candidate for *doge*, who would be accepted by the Great Council.<sup>89</sup>

The election method for *doge* was a complicated and lengthy affair and the convolutions of the process show how much regard the Venetians had for the office of *doge* and how concerned they were with its possible corruption. It was impossible for any faction to predict who would be on the council, making it unfeasible for any family to try and influence it. The number of people to woo would be insurmountable.

That is not to say that *doges* were picked from the entire noble population. Venetians had a high regard for age, associating it closely with skill and expertise and the *doges* were usually among the oldest men in the city. In an age where the life-expectancy was significantly lower than now, people of 40 were regarded as old, and *doges* were often in their early seventies.<sup>90</sup> The position was not just a culmination of a career but of a lifetime. According to a visiting pilgrim in 1462, the members of the Great Council were under oath to 'choose the man who was the wisest, the best provided by circumstances, the staunchest in defence of the faith and the most experienced in the affairs of the world to serve the city and its dominions.'<sup>91</sup>

It was expected of the naming committee to elect the fittest, which, together with the customary advanced age, severely limited the options. Most *doges* were

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<sup>88</sup> Coggins and Perali, '64% majority rule in ducal Venice', 714.

<sup>89</sup> Ibidem, 714.

<sup>90</sup> Finlay, *Politics in Renaissance Venice*, 125.

<sup>91</sup> William, Wey 'Death and election of a Doge noted by a visiting pilgrim' (1462) trans. by John Law, in: David Chambers and Brian Pullan (ed.), *Venice a documentary history, 1450 – 1630* (Oxford 1992) 45.



selected from the procurators. These procurators were in charge of the state's treasury and enjoyed a lot of prestige from their position, making them the obvious replacement of the *doges*.<sup>92</sup> So while the extensive selective procedure made conspiring nearly impossible, the eventual options were quite limited.

### Challenges to the Office

Though a *signore* never seized power in Venice, that does not mean that there were no attempts. After the *serrata*, there were two attempts to overthrow and reform the dogeship as a *signorie*, the sole ruler of Venice.<sup>93</sup> Both these attempts failed and its conspirators were exiled or executed. The uprisings were both led by noble families and sought to replace the ruling elite with an elite of their own. Neither uprising had the goal of opening up the Great Council for the *cittidani* or *popolo*.<sup>94</sup> The uprising of 1310 failed due to an informant who warned the *doge*, allowing him to prepare for the assault and rally his allies.

This uprising was led by the Querini and Tiepolo families, who had grown hostile towards *Doge* Gradenigo. They gathered their allies but did not seek popular support from the *popolo* or *cittidani*, relying on their own strength instead. Their attack failed and the family members were exiled from Venice.<sup>95</sup> Following this uprising, the Venetians created the Council of Ten, which received extraordinary powers to prevent any future uprisings and safeguard the state.<sup>96</sup> It met with the *Doge* to discuss secret matters and soon became the most powerful committee in Venice, second only to the *doge*, and even that is debatable. By the beginning of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, the Venetian historian Sanudo would refer to the Council of Ten as 'a very terrifying magistracy, and the Council is highly secret.'<sup>97</sup>

The crowning achievement of the Council of Ten and the basis for its terrifying reputation stemmed from the execution of *Doge* Marino Falier in 1355.<sup>98</sup> *Doge* Falier was elected to his post during the Third Venetian-Genoese war, a war that Venice was losing. Falier was the perfect *doge* for a nation at war; a former general, an

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<sup>92</sup> Finlay, *Politics in Renaissance Venice*, 117.

<sup>93</sup> Lance, *Venice a maritime republic*, 115, 181.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibidem*, 183.

<sup>95</sup> Lane, *Venice a maritime republic*, 115.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibidem*, 117.

<sup>97</sup> Marin Sanudo 'A very severe magistracy' (1493) trans. by David Chambers, in: Chambers, David and Brian Pullan (ed.), *Venice a documentary history, 1450 – 1630* (Oxford 1992) 56.

<sup>98</sup> Lane, *Venice a maritime republic*, 183.

admiral, a skilled diplomat and a former council member of the Ten. But his dogeship was immediately marked by a disastrous defeat, causing many to blame the cowardly nobility for this defeat.<sup>99</sup> Doge Falier believed that the only solution for Venice was a strong leader, a *signore*, and set about imposing himself as such a ruler. His conspiracy was however discovered by the Council of Ten before it could be enacted and Doge Falier and his co-conspirators were seized and, after due process, executed for their betrayal.<sup>100</sup>

These two incidents were largely unsupported by the *popolo*, *cittidanti* or nobility. Any such major reform would have required a large basis of support. The *serrata*, for example, only succeeded because it received broad support from the nobility and the families that were elevated into the nobility. A *signore* in power with full control of the government, even if not hereditary, would go against the ideals of the Venetian Myth and would consequently need broad support from the nobility or the people to succeed and endure. The violent imposing of a *signore* would have lacked the legitimacy of an election or political reform and these two attempts did not have broad popular support. As the ideals of the Venetian Myth took form in the course of the fourteenth and fifteenth century, it would become increasingly harder to find such support.

## Conclusion

The Venetian *doge* was, despite the limitations on his office, the most powerful actor in Venice. His influence reached into every council and the ducal chancellery. Due to his lifelong term, he could influence Venetian politics for years, sometimes even decades. The Venetians were aware of his power and the threat it could pose to the state. If the election of a *doge* could be rigged, then the position would be open to factionalism, with each faction attempting to impose their own candidate. The *doges* were by definition ambitious: if such ambition were to be turned into a desire for hereditary power, the *doge* was in the best position to seize it.

The Venetians installed safeguards to ensure that the dogeship would not be compromised. The selection method of the naming committee made it nearly impossible to rig the election in anyone's favour and the Council of Ten kept an eternal vigil on the state, deterring any attempts at overthrowing the dogeship and

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<sup>99</sup> Lane, *Venice a maritime republic*, 181.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibidem*, 182.

ensuring that the Venetian constitution survived in its current form. The first attempt at overthrowing the *doge* left Venice with a council to prevent future conspiracies and Falier's execution left the Council of Ten with a very daunting example of what would happen to anyone, even a *doge* if they attempted it.

# Conclusion

The Venetian political model endured for 500 years after the *serrata* in 1297. In the 200 years following, it faced war and internal struggles but maintained its form, with additions to its model, rather than change the entire model itself. Venice managed to deter both ambitious *doges* and encroachment on the monopoly of the nobility from the *cittidanti* or *popolo*.

The first chapter focused on the moral fabric of the Venetians to determine what behaviour they deemed legitimate. Leach's theory states that any illegitimate behaviour is oligarchical. I have determined what behaviour the Venetians deemed legitimate and illegitimate by analysing the expectations the Venetians had of their government and governing class, the ideals of what later historians would refer to as the Venetian Myth. The ideals of the Venetian Myth outlined desired and expected behaviour for the nobility and behaviour that conflicted with these ideals would be deemed unfitting. In the context of governing, it would be considered illegitimate, fitting in Leach's model. The Venetian Myth is not a factual account of noble behaviour but an ideal to be aspired to. Leach's model does not function on factual accounts but perceived behaviour. If a society does not see the illegitimate behaviour of its elite, it does not perceive it as illegitimate.

In the second chapter, I attempted to show how the Venetian nobility kept its monopoly on the legislative and executive branch of the government. The Venetian oligarchy maintained its legitimate image by placating the *cittidanti*, heeding public opinion on matters and prosecuting behaviour that fell outside of the mandates set for offices. The *cittidanti* were the biggest threat to the nobility's monopoly on power since they would be first in line to demand a role in the government based on their financial position. After the *serrata*, a large number of *cittidanti* families were elevated into the nobility to mitigate any outrage among them. By allowing them a place of prestige within the government, the *cittidanti* were placated further.

The discontent over being excluded from the legislative process was mitigated by taking popular opinion into account and adhering to the desires of the people when legislating them. The greatest problem an oligarchy creates for the population at large is that they tend to legislate in a fashion that is beneficial for them and not necessarily the entire community. Venice mitigated this problem by taking public opinion into account and withdrawing legislation if the public outrage was too great.

The last problem oligarchies carry with them is that members of an oligarchy tend to step outside their mandate for personal gain. This was certainly a problem the Venetian oligarchy faced, but managed to mitigate. The Venetian oligarchy prosecuted those that stepped outside of the norm for self-enrichment extensively and banned them from the political offices they had abused. By prosecuting culprits, they showed that the illegitimate behaviour was not tolerated by the nobility at large. Transgressions were attributed to the individual, not the oligarchy, and it effectively cleansed itself by removing those who stepped outside of their mandate from government and office.

In the last chapter, we saw that the *doge* posed a threat to the peace in Venice in two ways. First, the *doge* was the most powerful actor within the government, influencing every council and serving for life. In theory, this made the dogeship a hotbed for factionalism, with each faction wanting to install its own candidate to serve their own interests. Such factionalism would inevitably lead to conflict like it had in so many other cities.

The Venetians managed to neutralize this problem by making the election method of a *doge* so complicated and extensive that it was nearly impossible to direct it into any direction without absolute certainty.

The second threat the *doge* posed was to the Venetian model itself. The candidates for the dogeship were by definition the most ambitious men of the city and this very ambition made them very dangerous to the Venetian model. Other cities had installed a *signore* who ruled the state, *doges* could very well want the same power. But the Venetians were aware of this threat and limited the power of *doges*. He was bound to the advice of his councillors, he swore an oath that outlined unwanted behaviour clearly and while he was influential, he could not turn this influence into seizing more power without drawing the attention of the Council of Ten. The Venetians, in effect, muzzled their head-of-state.

This thesis shows that Leach's model can be valuable in analysing oligarchies in their historical context and can still be applied to Venice further. This thesis focused on the formal aspect of the Venetian government but Leach's model can also be applied to the informal aspect of the Venetian oligarchy. Venice knew plenty of informal groups that also influenced each other and the government which are worthy of in-depth analysis. If anyone were to set out on this endeavour, he would

need to use primary sources to a greater degree than I have but the results could be just as illuminating as mine.

And let us not forget that I have proven that Leach's model can be applied in a historical context as long as the context of the period and group in question is taken into account. Leach's model can, therefore, be applied to other oligarchies as well and provide a new avenue of research.

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