immagine didascalia  
Allegory of the League of Cambray. Palma il Giovane, Part., Palazzo Ducale, Venice  
  
immagine didascalia  
Treaty of peace, in Ottoman language, of the 1573. State Archives of Venice.  
  
immagine didascalia  
Flanghinis Palace, current seat of the Hellenic Institute of Byzantine and Post Byzantine Studies  
  
immagine didascalia  
Palace Zenobio degli Armeni in Dorsoduro.  
  
immagine didascalia  
Doge Nicolo Marcello in a golden cloth. State Archives of Venice.  
  
immagine didascalia  
The dogaressa Zilia Priuli. State Archives of Venice.  
  
immagine didascalia  
A Venetian noblewoman - Pietro Bertelli Femina veneta. 1589 - Diversarum nationum. State Archives of Venice.  
  
immagine didascalia  
Frontispiece of the first edition of the Amadis of Bernardo Tasso, 1560, Venice.  
  
immagine didascalia  
Cover of the Regole Grammaticali della Volgar Lingua of Messer Francesco Fortunio  
  
immagine didascalia  
Portrait of young boy, Titian, c. 1506, Berlin-Dahlem, Staatliche Gemäldegalerie  
  
immagine didascalia  
Judith and Holofernes. Paolo Veronese, Wien, Kunsthistorisches Museum.  
  
immagine didascalia  
Doge's audience to Ambassadors.  
  
immagine didascalia  
The Redimeer night. Venica  
  
immagine didascalia  
The forces of Hercules in equilibrium on two gondolas.  
  
LIFE IN THE 1500S  
  
The 16th Century was one of the most difficult periods in the one-thousand-year-old history of the Venetian Republic: the war against the League of Cambray (1507-08) , the conquest of Cyprus by the Turks (1570-73) and the Plague (1575-76).  
Nevertheless, the Republic recovered quickly and was in fact the only Italian city to remain free of the general crisis affecting the other Italian States.Venice is cosmopolitan city, which attracted and hosted subjects from its domain - the "Stato da Terra" (mainland) and the "Stato da mar" - but also foreigners. There were flourishing Greek , Armenian , Albanian, Jewish communities. The nation "todesca" – Germans plus Bohemians, Poles, Hungarians and people from the Trentino area - had built their own fondaco in the 13th Century in Rialto that was promptly rebuilt after a fire of 1505. Turkish, Albanian and Bosnian merchants had had a place of shelter since 1574 at the "Osteria dell’Angelo" in San Matteo di Rialto (the Turks were only granted the right to have a warehouse, the Fondaco dei Turchi, in 1621, in the former Palazzo Pesaro on the Canal Grande at San Stae).  
With trade and sea traffic once again prosperous in the 16th Century , Venice also "recreated" the urban-architecture of the city, where each social class found their own space to live and work.  
Culture was an important part of life in Venice.  
Printers were very active, leaving to posterity many literary , poetical and musical works.  
Science, too, was important (medicine, mathematics, plumbing, etc.) at Padua University and the “Scuola di Rialto”.  
Venice also patronised painters of the likes of Gentile and Giovanni Bellini, Giorgione, Tiziano , Lorenzo Lotto, Paolo Veronese ,   
All citizens – from the noble families to the lowest ranks – took part in representations of the power of the state (theatre and religious ceremonies). Major political and religious public holidays were renewed each year - in 1578 the magical Night of the Redeemer , on the eve of the third Sunday in July, was added to celebrate the city’s liberation from the plague – to the more modest, but no less sincerely enjoyed, popular events. In addition to the "freschi" (processions at sunset) along the city’s canals, there were the boat parties organised by the Compagnia della Calza , with sumptuous banquets , tournaments, naumachiae, balls and, of course, the regate: boat races organised during visits by important dignitaries.  
Even the "campi" (squares) became natural theatres for "bull hunts" - reserved for the corporation of "beccheri" (butchers) - or even bears.The factions of Castellani (inhabitants of the Sestieri of Castello, San Marco and Dorsoduro) and Nicolotti (sestieri of San Polo, Santa Croce and Cannaregio) fought each other in the “guerre con i bastoni” (wars with sticks) and "battagliole dei pugni" (fist fights) which often degenerated into bloody brawls with dead and wounded.  
Then there were the spectacular Forze d'Ercole (Herculean trials) : human pyramids, dangerous acrobatic exercises accompanied by music, not only in Piazzetta San Marco and in the [campi], but also on the Canal Grande, on rafts sitting on boats (known as "peate"). Not to mention human pyramids balancing on just two gondola oars .

VENICE. One of the first cities in Italy to engage in international commerce after the devastations of the early Middle Ages, Venice established a maritime empire by 1300 and a territorial empire from the early 1400s. Its unique form of government, although not as perfect as its apologists claimed, was a model of a "mixed" constitution for the early modern world. Adapting to changing circumstances, its economy remained vibrant into the seventeenth century. It experienced little social turmoil, while its literary and artistic achievements were rivaled only by those of Florence and Rome. For most of its thousand years of existence, Venice was free and independent. One of the most successful states in Europe, it fell at last to Napoleon in 1797.  
  
MARITIME EMPIRE  
Venice's unusual location and circumstances permitted its enterprising merchants to build a maritime empire by 1300. It was founded in the sixth and seventh centuries by refugees from the mainland, who had been forced by the invasions of the Germanic Lombards to flee northern Italian towns. They settled on a cluster of low, sandy islands in the Adriatic, where they were protected by the sea yet had access in their boats and barges to the river mouths that led to inland cities. Primarily fishermen, they also traded locally in fish and salt, which they manufactured from seawater. During the era of the Crusades (eleventh through fourteenth centuries), Venice (as well as Genoa, on the western coast of the Italian Peninsula) entered into Mediterranean commerce, establishing merchant depots on islands and seacoasts along the route to the Levant (Near East). In the late fourteenth century the rivalry between Venice and Genoa exploded into war. Venice was victorious and retained mastery of its maritime empire.  
  
The Ottoman conquest of Constantinople in 1453, however, signaled the beginning of the decline of Venice's maritime enterprise. Despite the victory by Venice and allies at the Battle of Lepanto (1571) against the Turkish fleet, the city's seaborne commerce was gravely injured. It was a commerce, moreover, based on the import of luxury goods from Asia, especially spices. By 1600 the tastes of European consumers were shifting. Sugar, tea, and tobacco became, more than pepper, the staples of world trade. In those markets Venice had no role.  
  
TERRITORIAL EMPIRE  
In the meantime, however, Venice had won a territorial empire, beginning with the conquests of nearby Padua and Verona in 1405. By 1454 Venetian conquests reached far west on the Lombard Plain of northern Italy to Bergamo and Crema, almost to Milan, and northeast along the arc of the Adriatic Coast to Friuli and beyond to Dalmatia (modern Croatia). These territories included wealthy trading centers, drawing on the fertile lands bordering the Po River, and gateways to the passes over the Alps and the commercial possibilities of the north. These conquests were made possible by the admirable military organization Venice developed. Heretofore, with only a maritime empire, Venice had provided both commanders and sailors, who also served as armed marines. On land Venice did not attempt to raise a citizen militia. Instead, it hired the best of the mercenary commanders (condottieri) then available but coordinated and systematized their efforts through a network of supervisors (proveditori) drawn from the governing elite. Venice was thus a pioneer of the rethinking of military organization that, in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, is sometimes considered a "military revolution."  
  
The Peace of Lodi (9 April 1454) put an end, for the moment, to the rivalries among the great Italian powers, Venice, Milan, Florence, Naples, and the papacy, that had emerged from the crucible of warfare. The Italian League of the following year sought to maintain peace for a renewable twenty-five-year term by establishing a balance of power. Some historians note that this agreement foreshadows the peace sought by the Congress of Vienna in 1815. Venice continued to seek commercial and political advantage where it could and fell into a damaging war with Ferrara (in the Papal States) from 1481 to 1484 that confirmed the impression of the larger city's aggressive behavior. When French, imperial, and Spanish armies began their long invasion of Italy in 1498 (with a pause in 1530 and no final resolution until the Treaty of Cateau-Cambrésis in 1559), Venice shifted its allegiance from side to side, attempting at times to maximize its advantage, at others simply to preserve the state.  
  
In 1508, at the nadir of these conflicts, Venice faced the League of Cambrai. All of its sometime friends and enemies—France, Spain, the pope, and the empire—were united against the crafty republic. During a war that lasted from 1509 to 1517, Venice lost but then regained all of its mainland territories. It was saved by the commitment of its own people and the loyalty of mainland subjects. When the fog of war lifted at mid-century, Venice alone of the Italian states was capable of proceeding briskly to assume its accustomed preeminence. Venice withstood the Reformation and Counter-Reformation alike, weathering a papal interdict in 1606–1607. It remained an international power, although a waning one, until its 1797 demise.  
  
Venice's success was due in part to its unique location and its energetic people. But it was the result as well of its system of government, which was sufficiently inclusive and sufficiently just to win the broad support of the citizenry.  
  
GOVERNMENT  
By 1000 c.e. Venice's island communities had united into a single state ruled by an elected doge, whose election was a central part of Venetian political ritual. Soon thereafter the nominal obedience the Venetians paid to their presumed overlord, the Byzantine emperor, dropped away. By the thirteenth century the Maggior Consiglio, or 'Great Council', of prominent families made major decisions and limited the doge's effective power. In 1297 those families declared the serrata, or 'closing', of the Great Council. By that move, which took decades more to take full effect, they instituted a hereditary nobility of about 1,200 adult males (from some 150 families) with exclusive access to political power. With the exception of some eighty families admitted for exceptional service in 1388, there were no additions to the roster of noble families until the seventeenth century (when nobility could be obtained by purchase).  
  
The Great Council elected members from the same noble stratum to a senate, and the council or the senate elected members to a number of other councils, including the "Forty" of justice and the "Ten" for state security. They also elected the avogadori di comun (state attorneys), ambassadors, and military and other proveditori. Venetian government had many branches. A large part of the nobility spent a significant part of its time on the business of government, while a smaller elite of perhaps one hundred to two hundred exceptionally powerful men rotated in high office.  
  
This government structure was by no means democratic. Yet it was admirable in many regards. It included elements of monarchy, of aristocracy, and of republican process. In the 1490s, when Florence was redesigning its government, it imitated the Venetian Republic, which also inspired English statesmen in the seventeenth century and even some of the American founders in the eighteenth century. Exaggerated statements of the justice and serenity of the Venetian state were made by proponents of the "myth of Venice" beginning in the fifteenth century. At the same time there prevailed a countermyth, voiced by the enemies of Venice, about that state's unique duplicity and cruelty.  
  
VENETIAN SOCIETY  
A unique state was based on a unique society, of which no feature is more striking than the role of the nobility. From 1300 to 1500 the number of adult male nobles ranged from twelve hundred to twenty-five hundred and constituted 6 to 7 percent of the city's population. The population of Venice dipped to 50,000 after the plague of 1348 and reached a high of 190,000 around 1570, after which further rounds of epidemics took severe tolls. A secondary elite of cittadini originari ('original citizens', either native-born or so ranked by grant of privilege) provided the huge numbers of bureaucrats and secretaries (as well as merchants and professionals) that a city of the complexity of Venice required. The artisan stratum was grouped in guilds that were less powerful than in some other cities but that were an important force for social cohesion. In addition the scuole, a uniquely Venetian version of the confraternity, provided charity and consolation for both members (of all social classes) and outsiders. A large pool of workers was employed by the Venetian state shipbuilding industry of the Arsenale (Arsenal). Below the strata of ordinary workers were the groups of prostitutes, beggars, and the poor found in most early modern cities. In addition Venice had a large population of resident foreigners, merchants in transit, visiting scholars, travelers, and refugees.  
  
Women in Venice, as elsewhere in Italian society, were expected to obey their fathers and their husbands and dedicate themselves to childbearing, charity, and piety. Women of the middle and lower social ranks had more freedom than those of the nobility and high bourgeoisie. They were able to own property, participate in the public life of the marketplace, and defend themselves in court. Prostitutes and courtesans were numerous in a city with a large and mobile population, a large group of foreigners, and an elite of unmarried noble males (who remained bachelors so family wealth would flow to the next generation undivided). Venice also had a large number of women, committed nuns (including many forced as children into the convent as a cheaper alternative to marriage), abandoned children, widows, and former prostitutes, who lived in convents.  
  
In this heterogeneous society there were also present those who dissented from the majority established religion, Catholicism. During the sixteenth century Venice was in many ways tolerant of heterodoxy. Its bookshops and taverns were homes to forbidden ideas. Venice cooperated with the Inquisition yet insisted on retaining its own investigators of religious dissent. In sum, in a diverse society the repressive hand of the Counter-Reformation was seen in Venice but could not act unrestrainedly.  
  
INTELLECTUAL AND ARTISTIC ACTIVITY  
During the same centuries of religious exploration, economic innovation, and empire building, Venice also was a center of intellectual and artistic activity. Historians, philosophers, mathematicians, and even humanists flourished from the fifteenth through the seventeenth century, although it was a humanism less critical of traditional structures of power than elsewhere. Venice became the major printing center of Italy, which means the most important printing center anywhere in the early years of that technological explosion. The work of Aldus Manutius (also Aldo Manuzio) (1449–1515), who opened his print shop in Venice in the 1490s, is especially notable. Among the many elegant Aldine editions are those of Greek and Roman authors thus printed for the first time anywhere in formats that made them accessible to scholars and amateurs. Venice participated in the artistic Renaissance in its own way, blending Gothic and classical styles in architecture and remaining loyal to traditional genres until fairly late. From the late fifteenth century to the sixteenth century, however, the Venetian masters Giovanni Bellini (c. 1430–1516), Giorgione (c. 1477–1511), Titian (1488 or 1490–1576), Tintoretto (c. 1518–1594), and Paolo Veneziano came to the fore with their characteristic sensitivity to color and light. In music, where Italy generally was laggard in the fifteenth century, needing to import composers and musicians from the Netherlands, Venice took a leading role from the sixteenth century. The city itself was a work of art. Its unique cityscape of breathtaking beauty, its ritual displays, and its inter-play of costume and performance during the season of Carnival were magnets for all of Europe.  
  
.“The earliest settlements were twelve: Grado, Bibbione, Caorle, Jesolo (now Cavallino), Eraclea, Torcello, Burano, Rivoalto (now Venice), Malamocco, Poveglia, Cluges Minor (actual site now unknown, but not Sotto Marina, as sometimes stated), Cluges Major (now Chioggia). Of these, Grado was occupied by the Aquileians; Rivoalto and Malamocco by the Paduans; Eraclea by the Bellonsese; Torcello and Burano by the Altinese. To the pious imagination of chroniclers these migrations were not without divine”  
  
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