

Finlay, R.

The Venetian Republic as a gerontocracy: age and politics in the Renaissance

pp. 157-178

Finlay, R., (1978) "The Venetian Republic as a gerontocracy: age and politics in the Renaissance", *Journal of medieval and Renaissance studies*, 8, 1, pp.157-178

Staff and students of University of Warwick are reminded that copyright subsists in this extract and the work from which it was taken. This Digital Copy has been made under the terms of a CLA licence which allows you to:

- access and download a copy;
- print out a copy;

Please note that this material is for use ONLY by students registered on the course of study as stated in the section below. All other staff and students are only entitled to browse the material and should not download and/or print out a copy.

This Digital Copy and any digital or printed copy supplied to or made by you under the terms of this Licence are for use in connection with this Course of Study. You may retain such copies after the end of the course, but strictly for your own personal use.

All copies (including electronic copies) shall include this Copyright Notice and shall be destroyed and/or deleted if and when required by University of Warwick.

Except as provided for by copyright law, no further copying, storage or distribution (including by e-mail) is permitted without the consent of the copyright holder.

The author (which term includes artists and other visual creators) has moral rights in the work and neither staff nor students may cause, or permit, the distortion, mutilation or other modification of the work, or any other derogatory treatment of it, which would be prejudicial to the honour or reputation of the author.

Course of Study: HI3G9 - Venice in the Renaissance

Title: *Journal of medieval and Renaissance studies: "The Venetian Republic as a gerontocracy: age and politics in the Renaissance"*

Name of Author: Finlay, R.

Name of Publisher: Duke University Press

The Venetian Republic as a gerontocracy: age and politics in the Renaissance

ROBERT FINLAY, *Hartwick College, Oneonta, New York*

Marino Sanuto, the Venetian diarist and chronicler, noted in 1518 that he had come across a prophecy in an ancient volume: "When caps dance on heads, when gold rises, and when the young rule, the world will either advance or fall asunder." Sanuto thought that signs pointed to the prophecy being fulfilled in his own time:

First, caps in the French mode bounce on the head when one hurries . . . ; gold has grown in value, so that the ducat is worth more than ever. And the young reign: the pope is young; the king of France, the king of Spain, the king of England, and the king of Hungary are very young; Selim, the emperor of the Turks, is about 42 years of age. There are two old ones, Emperor Maximilian and our doge of Venice.¹

Whatever one may think of Sanuto's interpretation of the first two conditions of the prophecy, he required no fanciful exegesis for the third. Europe's princes were indeed a youthful group. Pope Leo X was 43 years old; Francis I, 24; Henry VIII, 27; Charles I of Spain, 18; and Lewis II of Hungary, 12. Maximilian I was 59 years old, and Doge Leonardo Loredan was 82. When Maximilian died within a year, Charles succeeded him as Holy Roman Emperor, and, with the exception of Venice's, the thrones of Europe were occupied by men under the age of 44. Loredan's great age set him apart from his fellow heads of state: Maximilian was sixteen years older than Leo X, but the doge was twenty-three years older than the emperor. Excluding Loredan, the average age of Europe's princes in 1518 was 33. This average is low partly because Leo X was elected at 38, an unusually young age. During the Renaissance, popes were elected at an average age of 54 and died at an average age of 64. However, it was rare for doges to be elected before the age at which most popes were already dead. Between 1400 and 1600, the average age of the doge at election was 72, an average of eighteen years older at election than the pope, the only other

1. Marino Sanuto, *I diarii di Marino Sanuto*, ed. Rinaldo Fulin and others, 58 vols. (Venice, 1879-1903), XXVI, 210 (henceforth cited as "Sanuto").

political figure of the period who assumed office at an advanced age.

The age of the doge looks even more remarkable when considered in the light of Renaissance notions of man's longevity. The Renaissance conceived of "old age" as commencing at 40; by contrast, the modern period thinks of it as beginning at 65.² These concepts of old age are clearly a reflection of the different life expectancies of the Renaissance and the modern period. Henry VIII died at 56, yet he outlived all but one of the eleven English monarchs of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Popes have died at an average age of 79 since 1800, while only three Renaissance popes reached the age of 70. Erasmus and Michelangelo were not speaking rhetorically when they referred to themselves as "old" at 40, although the former died at the age of 70 and the latter at 89.³ And, in each case, their old age was especially melancholy, for they had outlived virtually all of their contemporaries, as well as the cultural milieu in which they came to maturity. Of course, it is possible that their melancholy was somewhat relieved because of the respect accorded their many years, for in most societies a natural consequence of low life expectancy is that great value is placed upon the presumed wisdom of the elderly.

The advanced years of the doge indicate the enormous prestige of old age in the Venetian Republic. A youthful and heroic David stood before the Palazzo Vecchio in Florence, but an elderly and prudent Solomon sat near the entrance to Venice's ducal palace. The figure of Solomon became a part of the Republic's self-image and reputation, a complex of notions which modern historians call the "myth of Venice."⁴ As early as the fifteenth century, Venice was renowned for its political stability and civic harmony. It was widely believed even as late as the eighteenth century that Venetians had discovered the secret of a perfect constitution, that they had constructed a political system

2. For what follows, see Creighton Gilbert, "When Did a Man in the Renaissance Grow Old?" *Studies in the Renaissance*, 14 (1967), 7-32. Gilbert does not consider the age of the doge. See also David Herlihy, "The Generation in Medieval History," *Viator: Medieval and Renaissance Studies*, 5 (1974), 346-64. For a general discussion of age differences and generations, see Julián Marias, *Generations: A Historical Method*, trans. Harold C. Raley (University, Ala., 1970).

3. Gilbert, pp. 10-11.

4. There are numerous studies of the myth, but see especially Franco Gaeta, "Alcune considerazioni sul mito di Venezia," *Bibliothèque d'Humanisme et Renaissance*, 23 (1967), 58-75; Gina Fasoli, "Nascita di un mito (il mito di Venezia nella storiografia)," *Studi storici in honore di G. Volpe* (Florence, 1958), I, 455-79; and the discussion and bibliography in J. G. A. Pocock's *The Machiavellian Moment: Florentine Political Thought and the Atlantic Republican Tradition* (Princeton, 1975).

which reconciled the demands of power and justice, order and freedom. An important part of the "myth" was a conception of Venice's patricians as discreet and temperate managers, subtle and prudent diplomats, self-sacrificing and anonymous administrators. This view of the Republic and its patricians has come under increasing scrutiny in recent years, and Venice is no longer so facily idealized. Yet the sources of Venice's undeniable stability and harmony remain unexplored.⁵

The present discussion suggests that the Venetian Republic may be regarded as a gerontocracy, and that such a view may in part legitimize the "myth of Venice." Evidence for this view is drawn from the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, although Venice remained a gerontocracy until the end of the Republic in 1797. It is less clear when the gerontocracy took shape. It may tentatively be suggested that it emerged in the second half of the fourteenth century, for by that time the ruling class had crystallized and the government was no longer as loosely organized as in the previous century. Given great respect for age, the existence of a patrician caste founded upon a monopoly of officeholding may have been the essential precondition for the emergence of the gerontocracy.⁶

The Venetian Republic was governed by the old men (*vecchi*) of the hereditary patrician caste; the governing circle, those patricians who dominated the Senate, executive councils, and other high offices, numbered from 100 to 200 men. By custom, high office was generally closed to those considered "young men" (*giovani*). Patricians entered the Great Council—the sovereign assembly and principal electoral body—at the age of 25. There was a provision for early entrance, for every year a selection by lot was made of patricians who were at least 20 years old, and one-fifth of the total were allowed into the Great Coun-

5. For debunking of the "myth," see Donald Queller, "The Civic Irresponsibility of the Venetian Nobility," in *Economy, Society, and Government in Medieval Italy*, ed. David Herlihy and others (Kent, Ohio, 1969), pp. 223-36. Stanley Chojnacki, in his "Crime, Punishment, and the Trecento Venetian State," in *Violence and Civic Disorder in Italian Cities, 1200-1500*, ed. Lauro Martines (Berkeley, 1972), pp. 184-228, shows how Venice's relatively objective judicial administration may have given legitimacy to the "myth."

6. Many men of advanced age can be found in Venetian political life of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, although birthdates for that time are generally uncertain. At least from the time of Doge Enrico Dandolo (over 80 in 1204), doges were elected at very advanced ages; but there were also the exceptional cases of Pietro Gradenigo, elected doge in 1289 at 38, and Andrea Dandolo, elected in 1343 at 36. On the history of the doges, see Andrea da Mosto, *I Dogi di Venezia nella vita pubblica e privata* (Milan, 1960).

cil. Patricians were eligible for election to the Senate—the central council of state—at 32, although it was unusual for a patrician to become a senator before he had passed 50. A patrician could enter the Council of Ten, the special committee for state security, at 40; but, again, it was rare for election to occur before 50. Election as a ducal councillor on the Signoria—the council which represented the Republic—could occur at the age of 25; but in practice only the “oldest and most important of the city” gained that post.⁷ In short, deference to the elderly pushed the age of *de facto* eligibility to councils some ten to twenty years beyond the legal requirement. This exclusion from power rankled among the “young men.” Girolamo Priuli, a patrician and diarist, criticized the doge and the rest of the governing circle in 1509 because, “They valued their own lives as though they would live forever, yet they had no certainty of living even one year longer, not to mention five—and all on account of their advanced age.”⁸ Gasparo Contarini, whose *De republica* (written when he was about 40) did much to establish Venice’s reputation for political wisdom, asserts that the only outstanding distinction within the patrician caste was that of age. Although Contarini considered that generational differences imparted a healthful tension to the constitution, he followed Aristotle in stating that the role of the young is to obey, that of the old to command.⁹ Nevertheless, the *giovani* were given a place in the Senate, an assembly of about 300 men. Members of the supreme court for criminal affairs (*Quarantia criminal*) were *ex officio* a part of the Senate, and since the judges of the forty-man court were usually younger than senators, *giovani* entered the central council by means of this constitutional back door. In this way, according to Contarini, “the natural coldness of the old comes to be moderated by the heat of the young. Still, these

7. On the Venetian constitution, see Giuseppe Maranini, *La costituzione di Venezia dopo la serrata del Maggior Consiglio* (Venice, 1931); for a recent and measured appraisal of the constitution, see Frederic C. Lane, *Venice, a Maritime Republic* (Baltimore, 1973), pp. 251–73. Before 1431 the age required to enter the Senate was 30; after that date it was raised to 32, and in 1639 to 35 years. Enrico Besta, *Il Senato Veneziano* (Venice, 1899), pp. 81–5. The minimal age required to enter the Signoria was raised to 40 in 1707 (Maranini, p. 305). On electing *vecchi* to the Signoria, see Sanuto, *Cronachetta*, ed. Rinaldo Fulin (Venice, 1880), p. 305.

8. Girolamo Priuli, *I diarii di Girolamo Priuli*, 3 vols., ed. Arturo Segre and Roberto Cessi, *Rerum Italicarum Scriptores*, vol. XXIV, part III (Bologna, 1912–38), IV, 24; unpublished volumes by Priuli (V–VIII) are in Venice, Museo Civico Correr (MSS. Prov. Div. 252-c).

9. Gasparo Contarini, *La Repubblica e i magistrati di Venezia* (Venice, 1564), p. 32. On Contarini, see Felix Gilbert, “The Date of the Composition of Contarini’s and Giannotti’s Books on Venice,” *Studies in the Renaissance*, 14 (1967), 183.

youths are not equal in number to the elderly but just sufficient so that in the Senate's judgments there may be, or appear to be, some sign of heat."¹⁰ In 1525, about the time that Contarini was writing his treatise, Marino Sanuto successfully opposed legislation which would have made it more difficult for young men to gain election to the court, a measure which its proponents maintained would place "better and more competent patricians" in the Senate. Addressing the Great Council, Sanuto drew a parallel between the generations necessary to the councils and a painting on the Senate's wall of three trees of different sizes. He argued that to approve the legislation would be contrary to the intentions of Venice's ancestors, who wished that the young, middle-aged, and old be in the Senate, "as cold, tepid and hot blood mingles and makes an excellent composite, greatly benefiting our Republic." To the charge that the *giovani* introduced an unseemly wrangling over proposed legislation, he replied that, "One wishes to have persons about who oppose motions because truth is found by arguing about subjects." Finally, he asserted that to exclude the young from the Senate would deprive them of the chance of learning how to govern the state.¹¹

It hardly needed another participant in the debate to warn that the legislation might "bring the old to blows with the young," for there was often open hostility between the generations within the councils. In 1500 Antonio Grimani wanted his trial for incompetence as captain-general of the fleet removed from the Great Council, "seeing the youngsters badly disposed towards him and wishing to be judged by the elders in the Senate, where he hoped to be absolved." Similarly, the relatives of Angelo Trevisan, another disgraced captain-general, opposed having his trial held in the Great Council in 1510 because they did not want him subject to an assembly dominated by "babies," where he would be "placed in danger of the judgment of juveniles and of a great medley of persons who won't be content to listen to reason and

10. Contarini, *La Repubblica*, pp. 104, 73.

11. Sanuto, XXXVIII, 377-78; XXXIX, 24-29. The judges of the *criminal* who had to be at least thirty years of age, were usually younger than senators because there was little prestige attached to serving on the court, a paid position involving eighteen months of service on two other courts before entering the *criminal* and Senate. Sanuto opposed legislation which would have had judges serve first on the *criminal* and then on the two other courts, thereby raising the prestige of the *criminal* (because the judges would immediately enter the Senate) and, hence, the average age of the men willing to serve on it. The argument over the legislation indicates the powerful assumptions regarding age which permeated the workings of the constitution.

who will judge by emotion."¹² The qualms of Grimani and Trevisan reflect an important political development of the early sixteenth century: the number of patricians attending the Great Council was larger than ever before—as many as 1700 on crucial issues—and many were young men whose involvement in politics caused the older generation considerable concern. Sanuto estimates that there were 2600 patricians in 1493, yet it was rare that more than 1400 came to the Great Council. Venice's need for money during the War of the League of Cambrai (1509–17) led the governing circle to permit *giovani* to enter the Great Council and Senate for payment of a fee before reaching the otherwise legal age. From 300 to 400 patricians bought their way into the Great Council, and assemblies of more than 1500 were not uncommon; dozens of men purchased entrance to the Senate.¹³ When 200 *giovani* were admitted to the Great Council in the late seventeenth century, an observer lamented that "bringing them from the schoolroom to the Council" to vote on important matters had resulted in "youth without discretion, nobles without quality, and a nation in degeneracy."¹⁴ In the early sixteenth century the reaction was similar. The tensions which existed between the principal councils were increased when, according to Priuli, "spirited youth of slight experience, born and raised in the shadow of an opulent state," entered politics. Despite occasional electoral support from *giovani*, Sanuto expresses the attitude of the *vecchi*, for he complains that when young men entered the sovereign assembly, "The laws are broken and everything goes topsy-turvy."¹⁵ *Giovani* were accused of "irrationally voting against good men" and of rejecting the hitherto revered *vecchi*. Young men began capturing offices not previously open to them, such as Lord (*patroni*) of the Arsenal. The

12. Priuli, I, 327 and 279; V, fols. 85^v–86^r. On Grimani's disgrace, see Frederic C. Lane, "Naval Actions and Fleet Organization, 1499–1502," in *Renaissance Venice*, ed. J. R. Hale (Totowa, N.J., 1973), pp. 146–73; on Grimani's trial, see Ester Zille, "Il processo Grimani," *Archivio Veneto*, 36 (1945–46), 137–94. On Trevisan's disgrace and trial, see Robert Finlay, "Venice, the Po Expedition, and the End of the League of Cambrai, 1509–1510," *Studies in Modern European History and Culture*, 2 (1976), 37–72.

13. On the number of patricians in 1493, see Sanuto, *Cronachetta*, p. 122; cf. James C. Davis, *The Decline of the Venetian Nobility as a Ruling Class* (Baltimore, 1962), p. 135. On purchasing entrance to councils, see Sanuto, XIX, 68–70, 419; XX, 95, 136, 287, 370; XXI, 156, 191, 192–93. An indication that the number of young patricians increased from the late fifteenth century is the appearance of fraternal orders of young patricians at that time. Cf. Lionello Venturi, "Le Compagnie della Calza (se. XV–XVI)," *Nuovo Archivio Veneto*, 16 (1908), 161–221; 17 (1909), 140–233.

14. Francesco della Torre (?), "Relazione della Serenissima Republica di Venezia," Venice, Bibl. Naz. Marciana, MS. It. Cl. VII, 1553 (8826), c.27.

15. Priuli, IV, 141; Sanuto, XIX, 323.

relegation of the five Ministers of the Marine (*Savii ai Ordeni*) on the Collegio, the steering committee of the Senate, to mere training posts for "men of downy beards," as Contarini calls them, only took place when underage *giovani* began paying for nominations to the Collegio during the war.¹⁶ According to their elders, the young men introduced a greater measure of corruption, wrangling and incompetence to government when the prerequisites of old age were temporarily shunted aside by the needs of war.¹⁷

Some historians have cast this hostility between the generations into ideological terms, contrasting a reformist, expansionist, and anti-papal *giovani* party with a conservative, oligarchic, and pro-papal *vecchi* party.¹⁸ At least for the early sixteenth century, there is no indication that the *giovani* as a group shared anything but relative youth, restlessness, and exclusion from high office, though it is possible that, like youth in many turbulent ages, some questioned the traditional values of their elders. The *vecchi* apparently did not share anything other than advanced years, suspicion of the young, and monopoly of power. On specific issues and for brief periods, the adventuresome spirits of the *giovani* did lead some of them to a measure of united action. In

16. On voting against *vecchi*, see Sanuto, XVIII, 328, 387, 417, 418, 453, 469; XX, 126; Priuli, VII, fol. 110^r. On the Lord of the Arsenal, see Sanuto, *Cronachetta*, p. 120, n. 2, and cf. Sanuto, XV, 484; XVII, 389. On the Ministers of the Marine, see Contarini, *La Repubblica*, p. 80. The Ministers of the Marine had already declined in prestige before the war, but that decline became precipitous when *giovani* paid to enter the office (cf. Sanuto, IX, 184; XVIII, 22, 25; XX, 68). Ministers of the Marine originally had to be at least thirty years old; in 1534 the minimal age was lowered to twenty-five. Other members of the Collegio had to be at least forty (Maranini, pp. 331, 341-42).

17. Sanuto, XII, 92; XV, 484; XIX, 35, 380, 396; XX, 219, 361, 469; XXI, 215; Priuli, IV, 33.

18. Federico Seneca, in his *Venezia e papa Giulio II* (Padua, 1962), pp. 36-38, 134-35, sees a split between the two groups over the issues of expansion in the Romagna, reconciliation with Pope Julius II, and the nature of church-state relations. For Aldo Stella, *Chiesa e stato nelle relazioni dei nunzi pontifici a Venezia* (Città del Vaticano, 1964), pp. 3-6, 8, 11, the *giovani* from the mid-sixteenth century supported a pro-French, philo-Protestant policy. For William Bouwsma, *Venice and the Defense of Republican Liberty: Renaissance Values in the Age of the Counter Reformation* (Berkeley, 1968), pp. 162-293, the late sixteenth century witnessed the triumph of the *giovani*, an event which led to the Interdict of 1606; see also Gaetano Cozzi, *Il doge Nicolò Contarini* (Venice, 1958); Federico Seneca, *Il doge Leonardo Dona: la sua vita e la sua preparazione politica prima del dogado* (Padua, 1959). Martin Lowry's "The Reform of the Council of X, 1582-3: An Unsettled Problem," *Studi Veneziani*, 13 (1971), 275-310, indicates that an interpretation of ideological conflict between generations does not hold for the late sixteenth century; this is also the point of view of William Archer Brown, "Nicolò da Ponte: The Political Career of a Sixteenth-Century Venetian Patrician" (Ph.D. diss., New York Univ., 1974), pp. 139-40, 147-58. Lowry (p. 277 n. 5) suggests that "the lack of any comprehensive study of these terms [*giovani* and *vecchi*] and their various uses is a serious and even dangerous gap in Venetian historiography."

1496 some *giovani* were in favor of Venice attacking Ferrara; in 1498 some supported Venetian subsidies for the Pisan rebellion against Florence; in 1500 they wanted Grimani tried in the Great Council; and in 1503 some *giovani* urged Venetian expansion in the Romagna.¹⁹ But neither the young nor the old had a common program or political philosophy; neither had a common policy toward the church, government or foreign affairs. Hostility between the young and the old was over place and position and had no ideological dimension. Conflict was inherent both in the structure of government, which admitted all of the patriciate to the Great Council yet left authority in the hands of relatively few, and in the Venetian reverence for age, which placed the powerful offices in the care of those with the greatest experience and maturity. "Spirited youths" were left to look on while the "hoary and old Fathers" of the Republic dictated affairs.²⁰

Of course, it is usually the old who command and the young who obey. To understand why the conflict of generations was perennial in Venice, the nature and significance of age differences in the political system must be examined in greater detail. It will be clear from this consideration that the *political* definition of old age in Venice was identical with modern conventional notions which assign the advent of old age to the mid-sixties. Outside a Venetian political context, pre-modern standards came into play, and a man of 40 was thought to be entering the winter of his years. Thus, Sanuto classed 59-year-old Maximilian with 82-year-old Doge Loredan as one of Europe's *vecchi*; but at 59 a Venetian would have been considered "too young" (*troppo zovene*) to be politically eligible for the dogeship. Sanuto expressed concern at 50 that his great age might prevent him from continuing his diary much longer, yet at that age he was not old enough to be a serious contender for State Attorney, an office for which he yearned. Pietro Bembo lamented in 1529, when he was 60, that he was too old to assume the post of official historian; however, he was still twelve years short

19. On 1496, see Archivio di Stato di Modena, Archivio Segreto Estense, Cancelleria Estera: ambasciatori a Venezia, b.8, c.61: Aldobrandino Guidoni to the Duke of Ferrara, 1 Sept. 1496 (henceforth cited as "A.S.Mo."); examined on microfilm at the Istituto di Storia della Società e dello Stato of the Fondazione Giorgio Cini, Venice. On 1498, see Domenico Malipiero, *Annali veneti dall' anno 1457 al 1500*, ed. T. Gar and A. Sagredo, 2 vols. (*Archivio storico italiano*, ser. I, vol. VII) (Florence, 1843-44), II, 512. On 1500, see Pietro Dolfín, *Annalium Venetorum (pars quatto)*, ed. Roberto Cessi and Paolo Sambin (Venice, 1943), p. 87; Priuli, I, 327. On 1503, see Sanuto, V, 617.

20. Cf. Priuli, IV, 141.

of the average span at which Renaissance doges were elected.²¹ It is likely that the well-to-do patricians who formed the bulk of the governing circle enjoyed a longer average life-expectancy than the rest of the population. These *primi di la terra* ("the first ones of the city"), as Venetians called them, could expect to occupy high office as long as they were able, willing, and acceptable to their peers. Veneration for old age found institutional expression in the Great Council, where patricians deferred to and elected their elders, the senior members of the clans which composed the ruling class. Venetian patricians were unique in that they formed an officeholding caste in a republic which consistently placed control of the government in the hands of the elderly. In other states the dynastic principle and monarchical institutions precluded any political expression of deference to the old.

A brief survey of age and politics in Renaissance Florence will highlight the peculiarity of the Venetian gerontocracy. In 1434 Cosimo de' Medici began his rule of Florence at the age of 45; he was succeeded by Piero di Cosimo at 48; Lorenzo di Piero ("the Magnificent") at 21; and Piero di Lorenzo at 21. The Medici gave important offices to and were influenced by men who were close in age to themselves.²² In their thirties Bernardo Rucellai and Piero Capponi were major oligarchs and close to Lorenzo the Magnificent; in their mid-forties they helped in 1494 to overthrow his incompetent son and restore the Republic. In 1502 their families supported an attempt to give an aristocratic turn to the Republic with the creation of a Florentine "doge," the *gonfaloniere* for life, an office to which the 50-year-old Piero Soderini was elected. Thirty-seven-year-old Cardinal Giovanni de' Medici restored his family's rule in 1512, six months before his election as pope, and he later dispatched his 24-year-old nephew to attend to Florence. In the

21. On Sanuto's concern for his age, see Sanuto, XXI, 485. On Bembo, see Carlo Lagomaggiore, "L'Istoria Viniziana di M. Pietro Bembo," *Nuovo Archivio Veneto*, 7 (1904), 15.

22. This statement is based on information drawn from Francis William Kent's *Household and Lineage in Renaissance Florence: The Family Life of the Capponi, Ginori, and Rucellai* (Princeton, 1977), pp. 164-226, 306-8. Among those who were eligible for or had been members of Florence's three principal magistracies (*Tre Maggiori*), there were numerous examples of men who were relatively young. The "second most powerful Florentine after 1434" was forty-four years old and had been prominent ten years before (p. 223); one of the "great men" of the Capponi family in 1455 was 39 (p. 203); a Capponi was *gonfaloniere* of an administrative district in 1440 at 27 (p. 172). The six humanists discussed by Lauro Martines, in *The Social World of the Florentine Humanists, 1390-1460* (Princeton, 1963), pp. 145-98, first gained high office between the ages of 32 and 49.

Republic of 1527–30, the man in charge of the city much of the time was the *gonfaloniere*, 54-year-old Niccolò di Piero Capponi. The restoration of Medicean rule meant the domination of Florence by Pope Clement VII, aged 52, acting through Duke Alessandro, aged 20. Seven years later, 17-year-old Duke Cosimo I had slight difficulty setting aside his leading mentors, 54-year-old Francesco Guicciardini and 63-year-old Francesco Vettori, in order to rule in his own name. All these Florentines assumed power or wielded influence at an age that was *troppo zovene* in Venetian political terms; most died before they would have been politically eligible for high office in Venice. For example, Lorenzo the Magnificent (1449–92) ruled for twenty-three years and died at 43, an age in Venice that would have marked the onset of a long apprenticeship in state service prior to gaining a position of power. The gap between Florence and Venice in the matter of age in politics may be measured by the statement of a Florentine humanist, Alamanno Rinuccini, who wrote a dialogue in 1479, when Lorenzo was 30, complaining that in his city all are “driven round and round by the lusts of a young man.”²³

Clearly, with an average age at election of 72 years, the doge was extraordinarily old for his time. But what made the Venetian Republic a gerontocracy was the extent to which government was in the control of old men; the advanced age of the doge was by no means exceptional in Venetian politics. Three men were separately elected as ambassadors to Constantinople in their early seventies. Pietro Lando, a future doge (1538–45), was elected *podestà* of Padua at the age of 73. Christoforo Moro in 1517 was elected *podestà* of Verona at the same age, and he died while serving as a ducal councillor two years later. Francesco Falier was 79 in 1509 when he refused a post in the overseas colonies, but at 80, three years before his death, he was a chief of the Council of Ten. Francesco di Filippo Foscari was a chief of the Ten at 84, and Francesco Bragadin held the same position at 72. In August 1514 all three of the chiefs of the Ten were over 80 years of age. Both Alvise

23. On Rucellai and Capponi, see Kent, *Household and Lineage*, pp. 80, 84, 86, 174–75, 199. On the *gonfaloniere*, see Nicolai Rubinstein, “Politics and Constitution in Florence at the End of the Fifteenth Century,” in *Italian Renaissance Studies*, ed. E. F. Jacob (London, 1960), p. 181; Sergio Bertelli, “Pier Soderini ‘Vexillifer Perpetuus Reipublicae Florentinae’ 1502–1512,” *Renaissance Studies in Honor of Hans Baron*, ed. Anthony Molho and John A. Tedeschi (Florence, 1971), pp. 335–46. On Niccolò Capponi, see Kent, p. 223. On Duke Cosimo, see Eric Cochrane, *Florence in the Forgotten Centuries, 1527–1800* (Chicago, 1973), pp. 39–40. Rinuccini’s statement is quoted by Martines, *The Social World*, pp. 299–300.

Priuli and Sebastian Giustiniani were members of the Collegio at 74; Marcantonio Barbaro died while serving on the Collegio at 77. Marcantonio Morosini was 89 when he sat on the Collegio in 1506. Marco Bolani was 86 and the oldest patrician when he was elected to a special commission of the Ten in 1517. Paolo Capello was 82 when he served on the same commission in 1532.²⁴

Military commands, with all their physical difficulties, were not reserved for younger men. Sanuto pointedly notes that the enemy commander of Spanish forces in 1514 was only 32 years old; the opposing Venetian commanders at the time were 59 and 64. Domenico Malipiero, the diarist, died at 85 while commanding forces at Treviso. Doge Andrea Gritti persuaded 75-year-old Domenico Contarini to accept election as general in 1526. Antonio Grimani was captain-general of the fleet in 1499 when he was 66 years old. Exiled for defeat by the Turks, he returned to Venice in 1509 and gained the dogeship twelve years later at 88. Grimani's replacement as captain-general was 67-year-old Marchio Trevisan.²⁵ He was succeeded by Benedetto da Ca' Pesaro, whom Priuli considered "exceptionally libidinous" for "always wanting a woman" at the age of 72. Captain-general Angelo Trevisan, brother of Marchio, was 70 years old when he led his fleet to destruction on the Po river. He fled to Venice, where he was prosecuted for neglect of duty by the State Attorney, 78-year-old Bernardo Bembo, the father of Pietro. Antonio Tron was elected to replace Trevisan, but he refused the dubious honor because of his lack of experience in maritime affairs and not because of his seventy-one years. The election of such elderly men to arduous commands may partially explain Venice's frequent misfortune in wartime. Priuli notes with some exaspera-

24. On the three elections for ambassador, see Sanuto, XXIII, 126-27, 295-96. On Lando, see the genealogical material in Girolamo Capellari, *Il Campidoglio Veneto*, 4 vols., Bibl. Naz. Marciana, MSS. It. Cl, VII, 8306, II, fols. 204^v-205^r (henceforth cited as "Capellari"); M. Barbaro, *Genealogie delle famiglie patrizie venete*, Bibl. Naz. Marciana, MS. It. Cl, VII, 8595, fol. 209^r (henceforth cited as "Barbaro"). On Moro, see Sanuto, XXIII, 531; XXV, 238. On Falier, see Priuli, IV, 361; Sanuto, XXV, 473; XXVII, 5; XXXIII, 466. On Foscari, see Sanuto, XLV, 556. On Bragadin, see Sanuto, LIII, 223, 467. On the chiefs of the Ten, see Sanuto, XVIII, 410. On Alvise Priuli, see Sanuto, XLIII, 658. On Giustiniani, see Sanuto, LVII, 410, 582. On Barbaro, see Charles Yriarte, *La Vie d'un patricien de Venise au XVI^e siècle* (Paris, 1874), pp. 337-38. On Morosini, see Sanuto, VI, 323, 411. On Bolani, see Sanuto, XXIV, 400, 470. On Capello, see Sanuto, LVI, 845; LVII, 62, 144.

25. On the Spanish commander, see Sanuto, XIX, 51. On Malipiero, see Sanuto, XVII, 268, 269; Malipiero, *Annali veneti*, I, xix-xx. On Contarini, see Sanuto, XLIII, 332, 326. On Grimani, see Lane, "Naval Actions" and Zille, "Il processo Grimani." On Marchio Trevisan, see Sanuto, II, 1305; Capellari, IV, fols. 133^v-134^r; Barbaro, 8595, fols. 138^r, 141^r-141^v.

tion that common sense alone should dictate the selection of younger men, who could better bear the fatigue and danger of war.²⁶

With men of such advanced age still active in state service, it is not surprising that one could be *giovane* in politics and yet be considered *vecchio* by conventional standards. Francesco Bolani was declared "exceedingly young" in his mid-forties to gain election to the Senate, even though he was more than a decade older than the minimal age required to enter that council. When Paolo Trevisan died at 53, Sanuto mourned that Venice should lose so able a man, and perhaps a future doge, at so "very young" an age. Another man regarded as a potential doge, Francesco di Alvise Foscari, died at what was considered the premature age of 58. Francesco Donato, who won the dogeship in 1545 at 78, was elected ducal councillor at the noteworthy age of 51 in 1518; and perhaps his youth was even more evident on the Ten in the next year when his fellow chiefs were 80 and 76 years old respectively.²⁷ It was highly unusual for Marino Morosini to win election in 1509 as a State Attorney at the precocious age of 46. Alvise Pisani was elected to the Ten at the same age in 1514, and Sanuto notes that such an event "never before has happened." Pisani's career, which began with such promise, was cut short in 1529 when he died of a fever at the age of 60 while commanding Venetian forces near Naples. Vincenzo Capello was made a fleet commander by the Senate in 1511 when he was "zovene di anni 43." Four years later Girolamo da Ca' Pesaro, son of the captain-general, was elected captain of Padua, "even though he is not yet 44," and he was soon after the youngest patrician in the annual procession of the government on the feast day of St. Mark.²⁸ Since Pesaro came from an illustrious family, it is not surprising that he began his political career not many years before his signal success. The assumption that a politician was still young in his mid-40's influenced the age at which one entered politics. It was common for patricians to begin seeking offices only in their late thirties. For a man to begin office seeking at 25

26. On Pesaro, see Priuli, II, 287; Capellari, III, fols. 209^v-210^r. On Angelo Trevisan, see Sanuto, XXVII, 324-25; XXVIII, 26; and Finlay, "Venice, the Po Expedition, and the End of the League of Cambrai," supra n. 12. On Tron, see Sanuto, IX, 417; XXIV, 128; Priuli, V, fol. 57^r. On selecting younger men, see Priuli, V, fol. 36^v.

27. On Bolani, see Malipiero, *Annali veneti*, I, 185; Capellari, I, fol. 167^v; Barbaro, 8594, fol. 150^r. On Paolo Trevisan, see Malipiero, *Annali veneti*, II, 697; Sanuto, VI, 243; Capellari, IV, fol. 137^r; Barbaro, 8597, fol. 35^r. On Foscari, see Sanuto, XXV, 351. On Donato, see Sanuto, XXVI, 65; XXVII, 5.

28. On Morosini, see Sanuto, VIII, 422. On Pisani, see Sanuto, XVIII, 73, 250; XLVIII, 207, 223, 232, 234, 237. On Capello, see Sanuto, XIII, 25. On Pesaro, see Sanuto, XVIII, 452; XX, 328, 514; LVI, 192; Capellari, III, fol. 207^r.

when he entered the Great Council was probably a sign that he lacked the status and resources necessary to advance far in politics. In all likelihood, his career would not go much beyond the posts he gained in his youth. Conversely, for a patrician to enter politics at a late age—the ideal time was perhaps in the early fifties, upon retirement from business—was usually an indication of his stature and self-confidence.²⁹

The ultimate ambition of many *primi di la terra* was to gain the office of doge. Speculation about future ducal elections centered on the nine men who held posts as procurators of San Marco, an office of considerable responsibility usually given to elderly politicians as a reward for lengthy state service. The doge was almost always elected from among the procurators, thereby insuring that the head of state was both highly experienced in government and very advanced in years. Between 1400 and 1500, the average age of the doge at election was 69; 1500–1600, 75; 1600–1700, 72; 1700–1797, 67. One doge, Francesco Foscari in 1423, was elected at the age of 49; fourteen doges were elected between the ages of 60 and 66; thirty-three between 67 and 77; and nine between 78 and 88.³⁰ In general, a politician was not thought of as a likely prospect for the dogeship until in his mid-sixties.³¹ Tommaso Mocenigo at 65 was regarded as a strong candidate in 1501, but Antonio Tron was “too young at 60.” Giorgio Corner was a “youngster of 48” in 1503 when elected *podestà* of Padua; his age of 66 in 1521 helped to make him one of the important contenders for the dogeship. Domenico Trevisan was “too young at 58” as a ducal aspirant in 1504, but he was a favorite in the election of 1523 at the age of 77, an election won by the relatively youthful 68-year-old Andrea Gritti. In the elec-

29. Sanuto was not a late starter in politics at 32—cf. Rinaldo Fulin's “Prefazione” to Sanuto's *Diarii*, p. 45; nor Gasparo Contarini at 36—cf. James Bruce Ross, “The Emergence of Gasparo Contarini: A Bibliographical Essay,” *Church History*, 41 (March 1972), 34 and n. 90; nor Domenico Malipiero at 37—cf. A. Sagredo's preface to *Annali veneti*, I, xix. On patricians entering politics at an advanced age, see the discussion below of Giorgio Corner, Antonio Grimani, Andrea Gritti, and Domenico Morosini.

30. This information is drawn from da Mosto, *I Dogi di Venezia*. On the responsibilities of the procurators, see Reinhold C. Mueller, “The Procuratori of San Marco in the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Centuries: A Study of the Office as a Financial and Trust Institution,” *Studi Veneziani*, 13 (1971), 105–221.

31. It is interesting to note that age considerations in competition for the Renaissance dogeship were precisely the same as those for the modern papacy. A recent analysis of the five probable contenders in the next papal election states that four are the right age to be *papabile* (sixty-four to sixty-eight years old) but that one is regarded as a dark horse because he is “too young” at 62 (Andrew M. Greeley, “The Next Pope,” *New York Times Magazine*, 4 April 1976, pp. 38–39).

tion of 1578, Giacomo Soranzo was judged to have insufficient grey hair at 61, while Paolo Tiepolo was a stripling of 55, "which made his aspiration seem a little presumptuous." The victor was 87-year-old Nicolò da Ponte, whose age helped him overcome his undistinguished family background—as one elector sneered, he "did not want to make a doge of someone from a shithouse" (*cha merda*). Finally, in the hotly contested election of 1618, Agostino Nani was the youngest competitor at the age of 63. Sir Henry Wotton, England's witty and cynical ambassador to Venice, reports that Nani tried to overcome the twin handicaps of youth and good health in the week before the election: Nani "was noted by some vacant searching wits to tread softly, to walk stoopingly, and to raise himself from benches where he sat, with laborious and painful gesture, as arguments of no lasting man. Such a counter-feiting thing sometimes is ambition."³²

The political definition of old age not only effectively limited competition for the dogeship to very elderly patricians; it necessarily involved consideration of the contender's male heirs as well. To be "without sons" (*senza fioli*) when competing for the dogeship was a distinct advantage. If a patrician had sons, they would have neared a conventional old age by the time he was elderly enough to be politically eligible for the Republic's highest office. The sons might then exercise power by virtue of their influence upon their father. Priuli asserts that "Venice's ancestors didn't wish that the doge should have sons, because they recognized that the doge would not be able to maintain proper judgment [in public affairs] when influenced by his sons."³³ One of Agostino Barbarigo's advantages in the election of 1486 was that he lacked male heirs; in contrast, his principal opponent, 78-year-old Bernardo Giustiniani, had a son who was an elector in the election. The favorite after the death of Doge Barbarigo was Filippo Tron, who was *senza fioli*. Leonardo Loredan overcame the liability of a large family—four daughters and four sons—by the happy chance of Tron's death just before the election and by his own delicate health, which

32. On Mocenigo and Tron, see A.S.Mo., b.11, c.121: Bartolomeo Cartari to the Duke of Ferrara, 27 Sept. 1501. On Corner, see A.S.Mo., b.15, c.51: Giacomo Tebaldi to the Duke of Ferrara, 22 June 1521. On Trevisan, see A.S.Mo., b.12, c.54: Bartolomeo Cartari to the Duke of Ferrara, 29 April 1504; Sanuto, XXIV, 128. On the election of 1578, see "Naratione delle electiona di M. Nicolò Da Ponte al principato di Venetia, 1578," Bibl. Naz. Marciana, Ms. It. Cl. XI, 67 (7351), cc.180-203, discussed by Brown, "Nicolò da Ponte," pp. 126-42. On the election of 1618, see Logan Pearsall Smith, *The Life and Letters of Sir Henry Wotton* (Oxford, 1907), II, 136.

33. Priuli, IV, 40-41.

seemed to betoken a short tenure in office. To everyone's amazement, Loredan lived for twenty more years; and to no one's surprise, his oldest son, Lorenzo, emerged as a power behind the scenes while still in his early forties by virtue of "always having the ear of his father."³⁴ When Loredan died in 1521, apprehension about the power of sons helped to defeat Giorgio Corner, for many patricians feared that "he has three sons, and each will wish to hold separate courts, so that it won't be possible to put up with them." The leading favorite in the election of 1523 was 83-year-old Antonio Tron, who had no children. Domenico Trevisan's six sons were a decisive drawback to his ambitions, and Andrea Gritti's chances were vastly improved by his only sons being illegitimate and resident in Istanbul.³⁵ In short, ducal electors were faced with the task of selecting a doge who was neither sickly and senile nor overendowed with "youth" and sons. It is easy to see, then, how remarkable it was for Francesco Foscari to win the dogeship in 1423 when he was only 49 years old and when it was feared, as one opponent argued, "His [new] wife will bring forth a son every year." And Foscari went on to confirm his enemies' worst fears by siring a troublesome son and by remaining in office for thirty-four years, until he was deposed at the age of 83. Patricians never forgot Foscari's long and turbulent reign, and they avoided placing such a youngster in the ducal palace again. Yet three doges were regarded as having barely entered their political maturity at the time of their elections: Agostino Barbarigo (1486-1501) was elected at 66; Andrea Gritti (1523-38) at 68; and Leonardo Loredan (1501-21) at 65. Omitting the reign of Antonio Grimani (1521-23)—elected at 88, he served as doge for one year and ten months—the average term of the doges between 1486 and 1538 was seventeen years. By contrast, the average ducal reign in 1400-1486 and 1538-1600 was six years; the six doges before Barbarigo (1471-86) held office for an average of only two and one-half years. Venetians, both patrician and commoner, resented a doge who remained in office for a long time. The celebration which broke out when Barbarigo died was in part due to his lengthy stay in office. Only eight

34. On Barbarigo, see Sanuto, *Vite dei Dogi: dal 1474 al 1494*, Bibl. Naz. Marciana, MS. It. Cl. VII, 801 (7152), fols. 270^v-271^r. On Giustiniani, see Sanuto, *Vite dei dogi*, fol. 269^v; Patricia H. Labalme, *Bernardo Giustiniani: A Venetian of the Quattrocento* (Rome, 1969). On Filippo Tron, see Sanuto, IV, 144. On Loredan, see Capellari, II, fols. 235^v-237^v; Barbaro, 8595, fols. 247^v-248^r; Priuli, II, 40, 394; IV, 92.

35. On Corner, see Sanuto, XXX, 458. On the election of 1523, see the essay by Robert Finlay, "Politics and the Family in Renaissance Venice: The Election of Doge Andrea Gritti," in *Studi Veneziani*, forthcoming.

years after Loredan's election, Priuli comments: "A doge who remains in office for a long time tends to bore the city and will be hated by everybody." The death of Gritti was greeted with joy after his more than fifteen years' tenure.³⁶ Apparently one of the anticipated advantages of electing elderly men was that one would not have to put up with them for long.

One of the disadvantages of electing elderly men was that their infirmities sometimes kept them from their duties. Sanuto complained that "it is bad to elect these old ones," because they could not always attend to the affairs of the city. Priuli maintained that Venice benefited from government by the old, but that some "doddering and decrepit" *vecchi* could not bear the burdens of state service. The regulation allowing men over seventy to leave the Senate when debate was in progress—a provision which must have sometimes occasioned a noticeable exodus—is a hint that the elderly were not always equal to the tasks given them.³⁷ But the Venetian Republic was not led by dotards. The needs of government were obviously too crucial for the patriciate in the Great Council to elect senile men to office, even when those offices generally involved terms of no more than one year. Further, the ducal council willingly accepted illness or extreme old age as an excuse for declining an office, as when Antonio Tron came to the ducal palace in January of 1524, a week before he died, to refuse election to the Collegio: "I have always carried out the tasks given to me, but now I am old, 84 since last April, and I have a chill in my bones that cannot be cured." Since the doge had life tenure in office, it was especially important that he be able to do his job. Priuli asserts: "The Republic without a doge . . . is like a fly without a head, and everything becomes disordered." When Doge Barbarigo was ill in 1495, "The city lamented his absence from the Collegio, so great are the needs of the Republic. . . . And this illness arose from great exhaustion, because he never ceased to work: the Collegio in the morning and, after dinner, the Collegio, the Council of Ten, the Senate, or the Great Council. Thus he never had one hour's repose and wished to do everything." During the last

36. On Foscari, see Sanuto, *Cronica Sanuda*, Bibl. Naz. Marciana, MS. It. Cl. VII, 125 (7460), fol. 244^r. On Barbarigo, see Priuli, II, 174. On Loredan, see Priuli, IV, 372; Sanuto, XXXIV, 128. On Gritti, see A.S.Mo., b.20, c.3: Giacomo Tebaldi to the Duke of Ferrara, 7 Jan. 1539.

37. Sanuto, III, 87; Priuli, II, 52-3. On men over 70 in the Senate, see Maranini, *La costituzione di Venezia*, p. 247.

months of Doge Antonio Grimani's brief reign, he was too ill to attend the councils. When it was clear that he would not be able to resume his duties, the Collegio urged him to abdicate. But the 90-year-old doge refused because his grandsons did not wish to relinquish the income of his office nor their own billets in the ducal palace. Soon after, Grimani's death was applauded as much as if he had inflicted upon Venice a reign as lengthy as those of Barbarigo, Loredan, and Gritti: "Because of his senility," notes Sanuto, "he died with a bad reputation."³⁸

The leaders of the *giovani* were young only by a Venetian political yardstick. Filippo Tron, the principal proponent of aid to the Pisan rebellion, was 61 years old in 1498; Nicolò Michiel, the reputed "head of the young men" agitating for Grimani's conviction by the Great Council, was about 50 in 1500; and Giorgio Emo was 59 when he was one of the bellicose *giovani* who wanted Venetian expansion in the Romagna in 1509.³⁹ No doubt most of the *giovani* were young, that is, less than forty years old; and many occupied their time by serving in the lesser magistracies of the city, collecting taxes and duties, patrolling the canals, issuing licenses, sitting on minor courts.⁴⁰ Certainly, the *giovani* often evinced a desire for more excitement than that afforded by the staid councils of Venice. But many of the "young" were men already into their fifties. In conventional terms, then, the most influential *giovani* were decidedly *vecchi*. Both those patricians within the governing circle and those awaiting their turn to enter it were old men. Still, the two groups were separated by more than a number of years: the *vecchi* monopolized the high offices of government, while the *giovani* could only chafe at their impotence. Naturally, the *vecchi* thought that the *giovani* should patiently bide their time, just as they had done for so long. Ramsay MacMullen's comments about the nobility of the Roman Republic are equally true for Venice's: "It was wise to be conventional. Influence was in the hands of careful old men, who enjoyed

38. On Tron, see Sanuto, XXXV, 314. On Priuli's comment, see Priuli, II, 173. On Barbarigo, see Sanuto, *La spedizione di Carlo VIII in Italia*, ed. Rinaldo Fulin (Venice, 1883), p. 408. On Grimani, see Sanuto, XXXIV, 128; 116.

39. On Tron, see Capellari, IV, fol. 139^v; Barbaro, 8597, fol. 143^v. On Michiel, see Dolfín, *Annalium Venetorum*, p. 87; Capellari, III, fol. 82^v; Barbaro, 8596, fols. 87^v, 89^v. On Emo, see Sanuto, "Miscellanea di Cronica Veneta di Marino Sanuto," Museo Civico Correr, cod. Cicogna 970, fol. 74^r; Capellari, III, fols. 53^v-54^r; Barbaro, 8595, fols. 99^v-100^r; Seneca, *Venezia e papa Giulio II*, pp. 19, 38-39, 51.

40. Cf. D. S. Chambers, *The Imperial Age of Venice, 1380-1508* (London, 1970), p. 84.

deference, understood caution, and expected of the younger generation only that it might in the course of fifty years or so produce its own crop of careful old men."⁴¹

The remarkable concord which existed within the governing circle, as well as within the ruling class as a whole, owed much to the shared experience of the *vecchi*, who spent decades together in political activity, voting on and negotiating with one another, moving from office to office, shaping policy, quelling squabbles, arranging marriages, surviving scandals. A crucial by-product of electing the senior members of the patrician clans to office was that a high degree of consensus was thereby maintained within the ruling class. This consensus was never seriously threatened by conflict between the generations, in part because the *giovani* were given numerous minor offices, as well as a voice in the Senate, mixing the "hot" with the "cold." Furthermore, time was on the side of the *giovani*: the advanced age of those in power meant that there was a fairly rapid turnover of leadership at the very top.⁴² Most important of all, by the time a patrician gained access to power, he had a formidable commitment to a political system which had put him through an apprenticeship of fifteen to twenty years after he had reached the beginning of a conventional old age. Acceptance of such an apprenticeship by men of mature years required them to subordinate themselves—their personalities, ambitions, and resources—to making their way in service to the Republic. In a letter of 1355, Petrarch enjoined future doges and, by implication, all patricians to consider themselves "leaders not lords, nay not even leaders, but honored servants of the State."⁴³ That was not always easy to do. Some highly successful and powerful merchants, such as Giorgio Corner, Antonio Grimani, and Andrea Gritti, began their political careers only in their late forties or early fifties. They entered a new world; they became timeservers. Fifty-four-year-old Corner, one of the city's wealthiest men and brother of the Queen of Cyprus, was humiliated in June of 1509 when he returned to Venice after the disastrous defeat of Agnadello. The doge and Collegio refused to let him justify his actions, and "almost crying, he went back to his own seat" in the Senate. Twelve more years in

41. Ramsay MacMullen, *Enemies of the Roman Order: Treason, Unrest, and Alienation in the Empire* (Cambridge, Mass., 1967), p. 6.

42. The forty-one men who elected the doge may be regarded as a cross section of the governing circle. Six years after Loredan's election, almost half of them were dead and a number had retired from politics (Sanuto, VII, 156-57).

43. Lane, *Venice*, p. 180.

various offices were not enough to ingratiate himself with the patriciate, and he was denied the dogeship in 1521 at least in part because he could never dispel the air of superiority that hung about him. At the age of 66, Grimani was the acknowledged leader of Venetian commerce, and Priuli observed in 1499 that, "a good part of Venetian merchants are governed by him—what he sells, they sell, and what he buys, they buy." Yet Grimani had just become politically eligible for the dogeship, which he would only attain after twenty-two more years, ten of which were spent in bitter exile for having performed incompetently as captain-general. Gritti entered politics in 1503 at the age of 48, when he returned from his grain business in Istanbul, and great things were expected of him. Those expectations were wholly fulfilled only twenty years later when he was unexpectedly elevated to the dogeship despite the suspicions of many that he retained some of the unseemly pride of a wealthy merchant and friend of royalty.⁴⁴ These men—influential, experienced, assured—had to learn to insinuate their ambitions in a political system which deplored arrogance, ostentation, and personal power. They had to find their way through the interstices of a complicated constitutional structure where accommodation and conciliation were necessary to accomplish the slightest task. Too, they had continually to submit themselves to the electoral judgment of the patriciate in the Great Council to retain the offices which gave them power and prestige.

In contrast to these men, Sanuto spent most of his life as a politician and chronicler. A friend and admirer of both Corner and Grimani, he was far beneath them in influence and social standing. He lacked their advantages of wealth and family, but he also did not have their willingness to compromise. He held his first office in 1498 at the age of 32, a minor police magistracy, and he was elected to the Collegio seven times as a Minister of the Marine, the last time at the age of 44. After suffering numerous electoral defeats, he gained entry to the Senate only at the age of 50 by payment of a fee in time of war. He never succeeded in achieving his two great ambitions, to become State Attorney or official historian. He was a political failure primarily because of his persistent and undiplomatic criticism of the governing circle, as when he won acclaim in 1524 in the Great Council for opposing a motion

44. On Corner, see Sanuto, VIII, 435-36; 429-30, 444. On Grimani, see Priuli, I, 220-21. On Gritti, see Sanuto, IV, 244, 254; Priuli, II, 198-99; James C. Davis, "Shipping and Spying in the Early Career of a Venetian Doge, 1496-1502," *Studi Veneziani*, 16 (1974), 97-108.

passed by the Senate: "The Council wished to do me honor, especially the *giovani*; however, the *vecchi* did not wish me [elected] because I oppose them."⁴⁵ He died at the age of 70 without ever holding high office, and his career could well have served as a warning to the typical patrician of the price of dissent and self-righteousness. Competent and intelligent—no one knew Venetian law and administration better—he never accommodated himself to the reality of his city's politics. He destroyed his own chances for advancement by an adherence to principle and probity that ran counter to the pressures that formed the character of most patricians.

Sanuto would have done better to follow the example of Domenico Morosini, called "the Wise" by his contemporaries. Morosini entered politics in 1472 at the age of 55, apparently after a career as a merchant in the Levant. For the next thirty-seven years, he was almost continually a member of the Collegio and Council of Ten. His strength as a politician evidently lay in his amiable and conciliatory character. Indeed, in 1496 Doge Barbarigo sponsored legislation designed to permit Morosini's entrance to the Collegio in place of another patrician who "wished to dispute everything." Morosini apparently blended perfectly into the governing circle. He attracted attention only because of his loquacity—his intervention in debate, Sanuto records, was lengthy—and his learning. In 1497 he began work on his *De bene instituta re publica*, a prolix and confusing analysis of constitutional structure, with particular emphasis on Venice. Ten years later he became the city's oldest patrician at 89. He attended the Senate up to the day of his death in 1509 at the age of 91. His study of constitutions, which he never completed, is an unimaginative and anodyne work. It is appropriate, then, that one of the few strongly expressed opinions in *De bene instituta re publica* should deviate from Venetian constitutional provisions only insofar as it is a distillation of four decades of experience by a Venetian gerontocrat. In a republic, Morosini argues, the council of elders (*consilio seniorum*) should be completely separate from the popular, that is, youthful, assembly (*consilio iuniorum*). Further, election to the *consilio seniorum*, which rules the republic, should be for life and should be permitted only to men of at least forty years of age. Unlike Gasparo Contarini, Morosini could see no value in drawing relatively young men into the governing council. According to Morosini, the young, who lack judgment because of the shallowness of their

45. Sanuto, XXXVI, 149–50; cf. XXXIX, 481; XL, 562; Lane, *Venice*, pp. 262–63.

experience, bring disorder and risk to affairs of state. The elders of the republic are moderate, cautious, and agreeable: having seen so much and lived so long, they make the wisest and safest governors.⁴⁶

The psychological qualities fostered by the Venetian political system were those which favored patience, conformism, and compromise. Patricians pursued their ambitions through an exceedingly lengthy *cursus honorum*. From the age of 25 to about 45, a patrician found high offices closed to him; from 45 to about 55, he slowly entered the outer edges of the governing circle, gaining election to governorships, the fleet, ambassadorial posts, middle-level financial and judicial magistracies. From about the mid-fifties, he was an increasingly important member of the governing circle, routinely gaining entrance to the Ten, Collegio, Signoria, and Senate, although his access to the dogeship could not be taken for granted until into his mid-sixties. By his mid-sixties a successful patrician was clearly a political *vecchio*, one of the veterans of government who kept an eye on younger men as they accumulated years and experience. Of course, at any stage in this process of advancement, a politician's progress might be halted, especially if his personality or opinions proved uncongenial to the *vecchi* whom he aspired to join. A patrician's concern for his own political future throughout his long apprenticeship, as well as for the political welfare of his heirs when they reached maturity, led him to moderate his opinions and seek agreement with his opponents.⁴⁷ A highly conservative temperament was thus shaped. Alexis de Tocqueville's analysis of the conservative mentality in the new American Republic can be appropriated to describe the personality formed by the Venetian political environment:

all men are at last constrained, whatever may be their standard, to pass the same ordeal; all are indiscriminately subjected to a multitude of petty preliminary exercises, in which their youth is wasted and their imagination quenched, so that they despair of ever fully attaining what is held out to them; and when at length they are in

46. On the character and career of Morosini, including a list of his offices, see Claudio Finzi's introduction to his edition of *De bene instituta re publica* (Milan, 1969), pp. 1-70. On the legislation of 1496, see Malipiero, *Annali veneti*, I, 437-38. On Morosini in debate, see Sanuto, III, 660; VI, 8; VII, 164-65. On Morosini's death, see Sanuto, VIII, 27. On young and old in government, see Morosini, *De bene instituta re publica*, pp. 118-19; 107, 123-24, 155-56, 197-98. On Morosini's book, see Gaetano Cozzi, "Domenico Morosini e il 'De bene instituta re publica,'" *Studi Veneziani*, 12 (1970), 405-58.

47. Priuli, IV, 35; V, fols. 168^r-168^v.

a condition to perform any extraordinary acts, the taste for such things has forsaken them.

Under the impact of such pressures, ambition would lose its greatness, and the passions of men would abate.⁴⁸ The Venetian Republic may be said to have achieved this condition by the commitment of its patrician caste to a political system which was a republic in form and a gerontocracy in fact. At the end of his apprenticeship, a patrician was bound to favor the *status quo*, to honor a process which had brought its reward in due time. Having played it safe for so long, he was hardly likely to change after becoming one of the Republic's senior citizens. Stability and harmony were virtues to be placed before the uncertain attractions of novelty and contention. Those virtues, along with the qualities which were seen to typify the patrician character, found expression in the "myth of Venice." In effect, the "myth" proclaimed what the political system promoted: it was wise for a patrician to be deferential, conventional, self-sacrificing, and anonymous. Venice's governors enjoyed a justified reputation for being temperate, prudent, and unimaginative. The politics of the city were generally unexciting, even drab—endless rounds of elections, tedious debate, bureaucratic muddling, and discreet bickering. This was, perhaps, something of which to be proud, and the "myth of Venice" is both an expression of patrician self-congratulation and a reflection of the achievement of the ruling class. Judged in terms of tranquillity and longevity, the Venetian Republic was undeniably highly successful. Venice's careful old men insured the survival of essentially the same political order from the Era of the Commune to the Age of Napoleon. The older generation governed, while the younger, for century after century, produced its own crop of careful old men. It is surely no coincidence that this most long-lived of republics was also history's most successful gerontocracy.

I am indebted to Professor William H. McNeill of the University of Chicago and to Professor Frederic C. Lane for their advice and criticism in the writing of this essay.

48. Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, trans. Henry Reeve, ed. Phillips Bradley (New York, 1945), II, 259 and 261.