

Sanudo, M.

Praise of the City of Venice, 1493

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Marquis of Bedmar, stressed less the internal weaknesses of Venice than its enduring external strength, and part of his account of the city's dominions – not wholly reliable on statistical detail – is included [I.5] as a reminder that Venice had a much wider significance than as just the lagoon metropolis. Bedmar was implicated in the mysterious conspiracy of May 1618 to submit Venice to Spanish rule, by means of a Spanish–Neapolitan naval invasion, and – drawing upon a network of secret agents and informers, some of them noble, from both Venice and the mainland – he may have wished to exaggerate the value of the prize seemingly there for the taking.

BIBLIOGRAPHY On Sanudo: Sanudo ed. Fulin et al. 1879, i.e. DMS i (preface); Sanudo ed. Aricò 1980; Cozzi 1970b; Chambers 1977; Sheard 1977; Finlay 1980. On pilgrims' accounts: Faber ed. Hassler 1843–9; Wey 1850; Newett 1907; Momigliano-Lepschy 1966. On saints' cults: Tramontin et al. 1965. On Francesco Sansovino: Grendler 1969a. On building and physical conditions relating to it: Cessi and Alberti 1934; Howard 1976; MacAndrew 1980; Concina 1989. On Wotton and Carleton: DNB; Smith 1907; Lee 1966–7, 1972. On Bedmar: Chiarelli 1925. On the Spanish conspiracy: Raulich 1893; H. F. Brown 1907; Coniglio 1953. D. C.

I PRAISE OF THE CITY OF VENICE, 1493

Marin Sanudo, *Laus urbis Venetae*: BCV ms. Cicogna 969, ff. 8v–19r (Sanudo ed. Fulin 1880, pp. 28–66; Sanudo ed. Aricò 1980, pp. 20–39).

This city of Venice is a free city, a common home to all men, and it has never been subjugated by anyone, as have been all other cities. It was built by Christians, not voluntarily but out of fear, not by deliberate decision but from necessity. Moreover it was founded not by shepherds as Rome was, but by powerful and rich people, such as have ever been since that time, with their faith in Christ, an obstacle to barbarians and attackers. And, having described its origin, with God's grace I will describe its site and things worthy of record.

This city, amidst the billowing waves of the sea, stands on the crest of the main, almost like a queen restraining its force. It is situated in salt water and built there, because before there were just lagoons, and then, wanting to expand, firm ground was needed for the building of palaces and houses. These are being constructed all the time; they are built above the water by a very ingenious method of driving piles, so that the foundations are in water. Every day the tide rises and falls, but the city remains dry. At times of very low tides, it is difficult to go by boat to wherever one wants. The city is about 7 miles in circumference; it has no surrounding walls, no gates which are locked at night, no sentry keeping watch as other cities have for fear of enemies; it is so very safe at present, that no one can attack or frighten it. As another writer has said, its

name has achieved such dignity and renown that it is fair to say Venice merits the title 'Pillar of Italy', 'deservedly it may be called the bosom of all Christendom'. For it takes pride of place before all others, if I may say so, in prudence, fortitude, magnificence, benignity and clemency; everyone throughout the world testifies to this. To conclude, this city was built more by divine than human will. But enough of these preliminary matters: let us turn to the main subject.

It is, then, a very big and beautiful city, excelling over all others, with houses and piazzas founded upon salt water, and it has a Grand Canal. You can go by galley from a place called Lido (where there are two fortresses at the port of Venice; it is about 2 miles away) to St Mark's; from there the Grand Canal, which is very wide indeed, takes you as far as Santa Chiara, which is almost where the city begins. And I have seen a galley going up the Canal. On either side there are houses of patricians and others; they are very beautiful, costing from 20,000 ducats downwards; as an example I give the palace belonging to the magnificent Messer Zorzi Corner, most worshipful knight and brother of the Queen of Cyprus;¹ he bought it in our time for 20,000 ducats. Another one of great value is the house which formerly belonged to our late most serene Prince, Francesco Foscari,² and now belongs to his heirs. There are many others, which it would take too long to record; I would say there are more than [. . .]³ worth upwards of 10,000 ducats, and the rest decreasing in value between 10,000 and 3000 ducats; there are also a few, but very few, of less value, which are being rebuilt. And the houses which overlook the said canal are much sought after, and are valued more highly than the others, particularly those near Rialto or St Mark's. Property is more valuable in one neighbourhood than another if it is near to the Piazza. It must be understood that these houses, or indeed palaces, are built in our particular way, in three or four lofty and beautiful storeys, on each of which a household can reside very comfortably, because there are living-rooms, reception rooms and all other amenities. Land is very expensive, and is worth a great deal of money. There is an infinite number of houses valued at upwards of 800 ducats, with rooms having gilded ceilings, staircases of white marble, balconies and windows all fitted with glass. There are so many glass windows that the glaziers are continually fitting and making them (they are manufactured at Murano as I will tell below); in every district there is a glazier's shop. Many of these houses are rented out to whoever

¹ Caterina Corner, widow of James de Lusignan; in 1489 she resigned the kingdom to Venice and received as compensation the fief of Asolo (near Treviso), scene of Pietro Bembo's Platonic dialogue *The Asolani*. See also below, VI.1(d).

² Doge, 1423-57, associated with the westward expansion of Venetian power in the Milanese wars [see II.14(a)].

³ A blank in Sanudo's own text. Such blanks are quite common in his compilations; he evidently neglected to check and fill them in later.

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wants them, from one year to a maximum of five years (because by law there can be no leases for a longer period than this) and they are rented out to present-day patricians, some for 100, some for 120 and more ducats a year. These houses, I emphasize, are only for longer terms of residence or occupation; I exclude the others, not available for long tenancy, which are rented out in great number. Almost all the houses, and especially those of a high value (because, as well as on the Grand Canal, there are many beautiful houses in every parish) have a watergate and also a land entrance; for there are innumerable waterways called *rii* which lead out of the Grand Canal and pass through different neighbourhoods. Above them are bridges; in olden times these were made of wood, but now they are being rebuilt in stone. There is also a very large wooden bridge over the Grand Canal; it is very high, strong and wide, and crosses the Canal at Rialto, as I shall describe later.

There are two ways of getting about in Venice: by foot, on the dry land, and by boat. Certain boats are made pitch black and beautiful in shape; they are rowed by Saracen negroes or other servants who know how to row them. Mostly they are rowed with one oar, though Venetian patricians and senators and ladies are usually rowed with two oars. In summer the cabins have a high covering to keep off the sun, and a broad one in winter to keep off the rain; the high ones are of satin, and the low sort green or purple. These small boats are dismantled at night because they are finely wrought and each one is tied up at its mooring. There is such an infinite number of them that they cannot be counted; no one knows the total. On the Grand Canal and in the *rii* one sees such a continual movement of boats that in a way it is a marvel. There is easily room on them for four people, comfortably seated within. The basic cost of one of these boats is 15 ducats, but ornaments are always required, either dolphins or other things, so that it is a great expense, costing more than a horse. The servants, if they are not slaves, have to be paid a wage, usually one ducat with expenses, so that, adding it all up, the cost is very high. And there is no gentleman or citizen who does not have one or two or even more boats in the family, according to household, etc.

The population of the city, according to a census which was made, is about 150,000 souls.⁴ There are three classes of inhabitants: gentlemen [nobles] who govern the state and republic, whose families will be mentioned below; citizens; and artisans or the lower class. The gentlemen are not distinguished from the citizens by their clothes, because they all dress in much the same way, except for the senatorial office-holders, who during their term of office have to wear

⁴ This round figure is certainly inflated as a total: on the basis of incomplete but more detailed figures recorded also by Sanudo, the population in 1509 has been estimated at about 102,000 excluding the clergy and religious orders. The highest figure recorded under any year up to 1630 is 168,627 in 1563 (Beloch 1961, pp. 5-13).

the coloured robes laid down by law. The others almost always wear long black robes reaching down to the ground, with sleeves open to the elbows, a black cap on the head and a hood of black cloth or velvet. Formerly they wore very large hoods, but these have gone out of fashion. They wear trimmings of four sorts – marten, weasel, fox or even sable – which are worn a lot in winter; also skins and furs of vair and sendal. Soled stockings and clogs are worn in all weathers, silk [under]shirts and hose of black cloth; to conclude, they wear black a lot. And when they are in mourning for a dead relative, they wear shoes and a long gown with a hood over the shoulders, but only for a few days before they change back. They also grow beards for some time: three years for the father, two years for the mother, one year for a brother, etc. The majority are merchants and all go to do business on Rialto, as I shall write below. The women are truly very beautiful; they go about with great pomp, adorned with big jewels and finery. And, when some grand lady comes to see Venice, 130 or more ladies go to meet her, adorned with jewels of enormous value and cost, necklaces worth from 300 up to 1000 ducats, and rings on their fingers set with large rubies [*balassi*], diamonds, rubies, sapphires, emeralds and other jewels of great value. There are very few patrician women (and none, shall I say, so wretched and poor) who do not have 500 ducats worth of rings on their fingers, not counting the enormous pearls, which must be seen to be believed. And there are more than 100 of such precious necklaces in the city, as I have said. These ladies of ours during their maidenhood wear veils and long tresses; then they wear a black cape. For the most part they wear silk, and formerly they wore gold cloth, but on account of a decree passed in the Senate they now cannot do so. And, if it were not for the provisions drawn up by the most serene Signoria with regard to their tastes and desires in adornment with jewels and other things, and the regulations enacted, they would be very extravagant. When ladies meet each other (excepting the Doge's wife and daughters, the wives of knights and doctors of learning) precedence is by age, and the same applies to the patricians. They do not uncover their heads except to the Prince, although they exchange polite salutations. At present a much-used form of address to any gentleman in the city is 'Magnificence', and all of them are addressed as 'Missier'. I wanted to write this down because usages vary from city to city and it is sometimes useful to know these things.

Venice is divided into six sestieri [i.e. six districts]: three on one side of the Canal, and three on the other. . . . On the near side, their names are Castello, St Mark's and Canareggio; on the other side are Santa Croce, San Polo and Dorsoduro. I will begin with the first-named, Castello, and write what seems to be worth recording about it.

Castello is the smallest sestier of Venice. It begins where the seat of the Patriarch is, the cathedral church, founded in the time of Doge Maurizio [Galbaio (764–87)], with the acclamation of clergy and people and confirmed

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by the privilege of the Roman pontiff Adrian.⁵ There our most reverend pontiff resides with his canons. There is a beautiful, large church; it has a bell tower covered with white marble and is called San Piero. It is on an island which is linked to Venice by a long wooden bridge. Approaching it by boat, you see the embankment close by, as one can go from St Mark's as far as Castello by a paved embankment overlooking the Canal, where the port is. Many ships are repaired there and new ones built, of immeasurable size. Not being a seafaring man myself, I will leave the job of writing about them to others, though I do know that there are some ships called state ships [*di Commun*] for heavy cargoes. The Arsenal is in this district, and I shall later write what occurs to me about it. In this district there are eleven parish churches named below, not counting monasteries and convents and other religious houses with churches.

St Mark's is the second sestier. It has a very beautiful and rich church, all covered with mosaics representing histories. It is paved with most beautiful stones, and fashioned and inlaid throughout with marble, which is a worthy thing to see. This is the principal church of Venice. It has a chief priest [*primicerius*] (who wears a mitre and carries a pastoral staff) and twenty-four canons.⁶ Three Procurators, who are among the foremost patricians of the city,⁷ are in charge of it. Every day many masses and religious offices are celebrated. The Doge with the Signoria and the Senate go there to hear divine service. There is a place where jewels are kept, which one can only call the jewel house of the Signoria of Venice; I will not enlarge on this, because the jewels are very well known and of infinite value. The Procurators have custody over them and they are shown to visiting lords or ambassadors, and on the eve and feast day of the Ascension and the eve and feast day of St Mark some of them are displayed for ornament upon the altar of St Mark's. These jewels were stolen in 1449 by a Greek called Stamati, and by God's will they were retrieved without having been damaged at all. Here, at St Mark's, there are two very large piazze, paved all over. Overlooking one of them at one end is the church of St Mark, with its splendid façade, and those four gilded bronze horses brought to this city from Constantinople – a very famous work of art, made in Greece and taken from there first to Rome, then to Constantinople by the Emperor Constantine, thence here; and at the other end of the Piazza is the church of San Gimignano. Beyond this in a small piazza is also the church of San Basso. The other piazza [i.e. the Piazzetta] is near the place where justice is meted out to all and the [law] officers hold session; it leads to the Grand Canal, where, at the mooring-place, there are two very high columns mounted upon several steps. On the top of one [column] is St Theodore and on the other St Mark. In the space between

⁵ The bishopric was allegedly founded c.774–7 on the island of Olivolo, when Adrian I (772–95) was Pope (Romanin 1853–61, I, 131).

⁶ See below, V.3.

⁷ See below, II.4.

them judicial sentences are carried out on all robbers, traitors or others, being burnt, hanged or otherwise according to the crime. Here overlooking the Piazza stands the Mint, where ducats and other coins are minted; it is hard at work every day. Here, overlooking the Canal, are the corn warehouses, where that vast crowd of Genoese prisoners were held until they were released and allowed to go free.⁸ Then, further back, is the Campanile, a marvellous work with its height, like a tall tower; you go up it by many winding stairs. It was built in 1145 or, according to others, in 1148. Here are the bells which are heard all over the city and also many miles away. In the evening the *marangona* sounds, meaning that all workers can go home at the end of the day; then at one hour after sunset the first bell rings, at one and a half hours the second rings, and at two hours the third; then midnight. And in the morning the *marangona* rings for the start of work, then half way to the third hour, at the third, and at the ninth hours, the *campana*, and the vesper bell. And when there is to be a meeting of the Great Council the bell rings. Enough about this. Overlooking the nearby Piazza [of St Mark] are the Procurators' offices, where there are many ducats deposited of the trust funds administered by the nine [Procurators], foremost among the city's patricians; these offices have recently been rebuilt; then come the houses of the Procurators. It should be noted that the Campanile of St Mark formerly had a gilded top, and in the evening of [. . .] August 1483 a thunderbolt burnt it, and at the same time [another one] hit the bell tower of the Friars Minor [Frari], which was shattered.

Leaving the Piazza, you go towards Rialto by a street called Merceria, with shops on each side. Here is all the merchandise that you can think of, and whatever you ask for is there. And when it is decorated – because all [visiting] lords want to see it – it is one of the finest streets in Venice. Thus you proceed towards the Rialto Bridge, which was first erected in 1458 and completed in May in the form it now has⁹ with shops upon it, which because of their good position are with chains, so that it can be raised and thus divide Venice into two parts. And always when a great lord visits the city the state barge [*bucintoro*] with the Prince and Signoria passes through it, because for the most part they lodge in the house of the Duke of Ferrara,¹⁰ which overlooks the Grand Canal in the neighbourhood of San Giacomo dell'Orio; because they must pass by this bridge, it is raised for the day. The present bridge is of wood and was built and completed on 11 July 1472, having been begun on 6 September 1471. That it took so long to build is a sign that it is a very great work. Near this bridge and overlooking the Grand Canal is the exchange house [*Fondaco*] of the German

⁸ 4670 Genoese prisoners were said to have been taken at the relief of Chioggia in June 1380. (Romanin 1853–61, III, 292).

⁹ The works in 1458 were only a repair operation to the wooden Rialto Bridge. By 1499 its state was again considered dangerous (Cessi and Alberti 1934, pp. 169, 171).

¹⁰ Eventually the Fondaco dei Turchi [see below, VIII.15].

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merchants, where the Germans live and carry on their business.¹¹ There are brokers appointed for this, and only they can deal with the Germans; and there are three patricians there who draw the money as we shall explain below. They pay 100 gold ducats a month in rent, from which can be understood the prominent position and the size and convenience of the place, being in the middle of Rialto. In this sestier there are sixteen parishes.

Canareggio is the third sestier, and has one of the largest *rii* of the city running through it. It begins at the church of San Gieremia, which overlooks the Grand Canal, and goes towards San Giobbe, thence towards Marghera on the mainland 5 miles away. On both sides of the said *rio* there are beautiful houses and pavements, so that on one side one can walk to where Canareggio begins. The said Canareggio is, as its name suggests, almost a regal canal; and it has a very high bridge, made only of wood, across it. In this sestier there is the newly built church of Santa Maria Nuova, on account of a very ancient Madonna that was on the street there and wrought miracles. And there are so many miracles daily that it is incredible to see all the silver and *ex votos* there and the throng of people, who have masses said there every day. Here, less than five years ago, the very beautiful church was built from voluntary offerings.¹² It is inlaid with marbles, worked in the ancient manner, with porphyry and serpentine and roofed with lead. There is also a convent of religious ladies of the Franciscan Order, drawn from the Clares' convent at Murano, and they are never seen. These ladies sing divine offices and live off the alms they are given, in thanksgiving for the said miracles which the Virgin Mary works there. And there are thirteen parish churches in the said sestier, excluding the houses of friars and nuns which will be described in the right place.

On the other side of the Grand Canal there are three sestieri to which you can cross by small ferries, and the fare is a small coin [*bagattino*]. Each will be listed below.¹³

Santa Croce, on the other side of the Canal, is the fourth sestier. It contains the church of Santa Croce, where there are priests and an adjacent convent of nuns; in this church there are perpetual indulgences for the souls of the dead. There are ten parish churches in the said [sestier], and it is not only confined to the further part of the Canal, but also spans it, for part of the parish of Santa Lucia is in the Santa Croce sestier. And Murano, which is an island separate from Venice, is counted as part of Santa Croce.

San Polo, the fifth sestier, is so called after the name of the church there, which has a very big, wide and beautiful *campo* where on Wednesday mornings a

¹¹ See below, VIII.1-3.

¹² Santa Maria dei Miracoli, built 1481-9, the work mainly of Pietro and Antonio Lombardo.

¹³ Here, as at other points in the description, Sanudo refers to his many miscellaneous lists, which are copied in a companion manuscript: BCV ms. Cicogna 970 (Sanudo ed. Aricò 1980; on ferries see pp. 49-55). On *bagattini* see VIII.11, n. 10.

market is held, selling everything you could want. Because it is held so frequently, it is not much esteemed by us; it would be quite otherwise in any other city or village were such a beautiful and rich fair held even once a year. On Saturdays there is also a market on St Mark's Piazza, which is much finer than this one. In this sestier is the island of Rialto, which I would venture to call the richest place in the whole world. First of all, overlooking the Canal, is the grain warehouse, large and well stocked, with two doorways and many booths; there are two lords appointed to supervise it, as I shall relate below. Then you come to Riva del Ferro, so called because iron is sold there; where it ends at the Rialto Bridge is the public weighhouse, where all the merchandise for sale has to be weighed, and the reckonings are made of customs and excise duty. Here is the Rialto itself, which is a piazzetta, not very large at all, where everyone goes both morning and afternoon. Here business deals are made with a single word 'yes' or 'no'. There are a large number of brokers, who are trustworthy; if not, they are reprimanded. There are four banks: the Pisani and Lippomani, both patricians, and the Garzoni and Augustini, citizens.¹⁴ They hold very great amounts of money, issue credits under different names, and are called authorized bankers [*banchieri creti*]; their decisions are binding. They have charge of the moneys of the Camerlenghi.¹⁵ Furthermore, throughout the said island of Rialto there are storehouses, both on ground level and above, filled with goods of very great value; it would be a marvellous thing were it possible to see everything at once, in spite of the fact that much is being sold all the time. Every year goods come in from both east and west, where galleys are sent on commission from the Signoria; they are put in the charge of whoever wants this [responsibility], provided he is a patrician, by public auction. It should be noted that the Venetians, just as they were merchants in the beginning, continue to trade every year; they send galleys to Flanders, the Barbary Coast, Beirut, Alexandria, the Greek lands and Aigues-Mortes. All the galley [fleets] have a captain elected by the Great Council, and the Signoria appoints the galley patrons by auction at Rialto, i.e. according to whoever bids highest for the galleys. Thus we have the galleys for these voyages built at the Arsenal, and then, at the time of sending them forth, according to the Senate's orders, they are auctioned at Rialto. For some of these galleys 3000 ducats and more is paid, and for others only 1 ducat, according to different times and the particular voyage. And in order that galley masters should be found, sometimes the Signoria itself pays those willing to accept a galley. And when, to take an example, there are three galleys, and two of them have found a galley master for

¹⁴ See Lane 1966, esp. pp. 71–80 concerning the failure of the Garzoni in 1499–1500 and of the Agostini (*sic*) in 1508.

¹⁵ The two Camerlenghi di Comun or Treasurers of the Republic were elected for a sixteen-month term, with senatorial rank (Sanudo ed. Aricò 1980, pp. 110–11, 247–8).

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more than a thousand ducats each, then the third is given for only 1 ducat; it is laid down that, if no one bids more, it is given [for this sum]. And then the said galley masters present their sponsors at the office of the Avogadori di Comun¹⁶ and are voted upon in the Senate: that is, whether they are suitable and have invested their full shares. Then their appointments stand, and at once they start business, the captain having been elected. If it seems to the Senate that they are not suitable, and they fall in the voting, a new auction is held at their expense. Noble patricians are put in charge of the said long-distance galleys, called great galleys, after election for each galley by ballot in the Council of the Criminal Court of the Forty¹⁷ from the list of all who want their names to go forward, provided they are over the age of eighteen. They are impoverished gentlemen; there are eight of them to each galley every year. They are paid by the galley master, some more, some less, according to the [particular] voyage, before the fleet departs. They go with the galleys, have their expenses and their cabins (which they rent) and their pay; they are called galley nobles. In addition every ship of 400 to 600 botte capacity takes one of them, and those above 600 take two; every narrow galley usually has two patricians [on board]. This rule was laid down by our revered ancestors, to the end that those who cannot hold offices or governorships, and are without incomes and unable to practise any skilled art, should have this income of 60 ducats and more a year from St Mark, if they remain in this service of bowmanship [*ballestraria*]. And the said *ballestrarie* can be sold, and other patricians sent, provided the place is filled. Enough on this subject. These galleys go on long-distance voyages, they carry merchandise which they exchange and then bring back other goods, and they are hired for both the outward and return journeys; they have their special judges called the Office of the Ten Offices.¹⁸

On the island of Rialto, these stores and warehouses, of which there are such a great number, pay rent for the most part to [the Procurators of] St Mark's; a high rent is paid for every small piece of space on Rialto, not only for these properties, but for those belonging to various private persons who rent out shops. Such a shop at Rialto may cost about 100 ducats in rent and be scarcely two paces wide or long. Property here is very expensive. Our own family, the Sanudi, can bear witness to this, having an inn called the Bell at the New Fishmarket [*Pescharia Nuova*]. The ground floor is all let out as shops; it is a small place, but from this one building we get about 800 ducats a year in rent, which is a marvellous thing and a huge rent. This is because it is on such a good site; the inn itself brings in 250 ducats, more than the foremost palace in the

¹⁶ See below, II.5.

¹⁷ See below, II.6.

¹⁸ Sanudo ed. Aricò 1980, pp. 112, 149. These were three patrician officials, who held office for sixteen months.

city; I daresay it is the best property of its sort in Venice. On Rialto, moreover, are all the skilled crafts; they have their separate streets, as I shall write below.¹⁹

Here, on the Canal, there are embankments where on one side there are barges for timber, and on the other side for wine; they are rented as though they were shops. There is a very large butchery, which is full every day of good meat, and there is another one at St Mark's. The Fishmarket overlooks the Grand Canal; here are the most beautiful fish, high in price and of good quality. The fish are caught in the Adriatic sea by fishermen, for there is a neighbourhood in Venice called San Niccolò where only fishermen live, and they speak an ancient Venetian dialect called *nicoloto*. It is remarkable to see, that they live in Venice and speak the way they do. Also from various other places, such as Murano, Burano, Torcello, and Chioggia too, fishermen come with their fish to sell it here in the Fishmarket. The names of the fish which are caught and brought here will be listed below.²⁰ There are also oysters in very large quantities. They bring as much fish here as can be sold in a day and in the evening none is left, the cause of it being that everyone spends, and every one lives like lords. And in this city nothing grows, yet whatever you want can be found in abundance. And this is because of the great turnover in merchandise; everything comes here, especially things to eat, from every city and every part of the world, and money is made quickly. This is because everyone is well-off for money. Here at Rialto it is like a vegetable garden, so much green stuff is brought from nearby places, and such varieties of fruits are on sale, and so cheap, that it is marvellous. But I shall just repeat what I heard from somebody else, who said 'where business is good, good stuff can be had.' And on Rialto the prices of some things are controlled, so that those who buy are not cheated. Mutton, sold at the butchery, cannot be sold for more than 3 soldi a pound, and if short weight is given the butchers are penalized by the lords in charge of them, because there are officials who weigh the meat which has been sold; the fixed price for lamb is [. . .] soldi, for veal [. . .] soldi, for kid goat [. . .] soldi. Item: oil is fixed at 4 soldi to the pound weight, candles at 4 soldi a pound; a barber's charge for hairdressing is the standard 4 soldi; a cartload of wood at all times cannot be more than 28 soldi, and there are loading-officials of the commune so that justice is done fairly to everyone. And for other goods the saying is 'right weight and high price'. Other comestibles are sold as they want, but the Giustizia Vecchia,²¹ who are lords with special responsibility, are free to fix a just price on things to eat. Thus the city is governed as well as any city in the world has ever been; everything is well ordered, and this is why the city has survived and grown. Here on Rialto, beneath several inns, is the public brothel²² of the city, where

¹⁹ Sanudo ed. Aricò 1980, p. 172.

²⁰ Sanudo ed. Aricò 1980, p. 172.

²¹ Sanudo ed. Aricò, pp. 136-7, 266-7.

²² See below, III.6(a).

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the prostitutes are, although there are more in various other places: at St Mark's, San Luca and San Cassano in Carampane; there are brothels to some extent in a number of different neighbourhoods, but as they are not the ones I am describing I will write no more.

On this island of Rialto, near to the church of St John the Evangelist, where there is the relic of the wood of Christ's most holy Cross, there is a bell tower where instead of a bell that is rung [by being pulled] there are two male figures bearing hammers who alternately strike a bell, by a system of counterweights; in this manner, the hours strike, which is a beautiful thing to see.²³ Here lectures are given in philosophy and theology, both in the mornings and afternoons, to whoever wants to go and listen; they are paid for from the funds of St Mark's. At present the lecturer is our own patrician Antonio Corner, a most excellent philosopher, whose fame in various fields of learning is celebrated.²⁴ Every day he endures a very great burden in the large number of lectures he gives in logic, philosophy and theology, on which account he has been honoured by the Senate with a considerable number of magistracies and offices. This worthy institution the Venetians wanted to have in their city so that whoever wants to acquire the virtues of learning and make himself very scholarly could do so here at Venice without going to study at Padua, where there is such an excellent university, full of scholars from all over the world, maintained at great expense to our Signoria.²⁵ For those wanting to become doctors, there is a college of physicians at San Luca, and they have authority to confer doctorates in medicine.²⁶ Also at St Mark's near to the Campanile, there are two very learned humanists who are paid by St Mark's, who give public lectures to whoever wants to hear them without paying any fee. They are men of great fame; at present one of them is Giorgio Valla from Piacenza,²⁷ a very good grammarian and perfect in Greek, who has translated many works and also written some himself; the other is Marcantonio Sabellico, a great man of letters, who wrote the *Ten Books on Venice*,²⁸ a great, worthy and copious work; he also lectures. And there is another government stipendiary who gives lectures to the notaries of the Chancery, so that they may become learned; his name is Benedetto

²³ See below, X.2(g).

²⁴ Antonio Corner (c.1445–c.1500) was also politically active, serving in the Zonta of the Senate 1493–5; after his appointment as a Provveditore of the Salt Office (1498) he seems to have stopped lecturing (*DBI*).

²⁵ See Arnaldi and Stocchi 1981–3, III; and below, headnote preceding IX.1.

²⁶ This body, which did not provide organized teaching, received a privilege to grant degrees from the Emperor Frederick III when he visited Venice in 1469 (Palmer 1983).

²⁷ See below, III.2(a).

²⁸ Marcantonio Coccio, known as Sabellicus (c.1436–1502), had written on the model of Livy his *Rerum venetarum ab urbe condita*, Venice 1487 [see below, IX.2, 9]. Sanudo omits to mention Sabellicus's *De venetis magistratibus* (1488) and *De venetae urbis situ et vetustate* (1492), to which his own work is a sort of vernacular response.

Brognolo from Legnago, a very learned man, well grounded in learning.²⁹ There are also teachers in various neighbourhoods, not counting those in private houses, who teach moral philosophy and grammar to patricians' children and others. Here in the said sestier are nine parish churches, not counting monastic houses, and there are no nuns, i.e. convents of nuns, in this district. I have described all the above matters for two reasons: first, that they may be remembered for all time; and, second, to inform those who have not seen our city of Venice. Although there might be many writers, it would not be possible for them to tell everything about the said city and its site.

Dorsoduro is the sixth sestier. Its name is very ancient and it was one of the first islands of Venice to be inhabited, as I have said above. It has eleven parishes, not to mention the monks and friars. Included in this sestier is the Giudecca, which is a part of Venice separated by half a mile on an island where there are very beautiful palaces, churches and monasteries. It is long and not very wide, and has a paved way on the waterfront, so that you can go from one end to the other, i.e. from St John the Baptist's church to San Biagio Catoldo [in Castello], a nunnery. There are various *rii* with bridges over them; you go to and from by ferryboats as I shall tell below.³⁰ At the beginning of the sestier there is a place called the Punta, opposite St Mark's; here is the overseas customs office, where there are very large warehouses. All galleys, roundships and other types of vessel unload into these warehouses all their merchandise, with the exception of wine, which goes to the control point to be assessed for duty, and salt, which goes to its own warehouses, and corn, which is unloaded in other warehouses of the merchants' choice. If any ship does not unload its goods, the penalty is very severe. These regulations have been made by our government so that the payment of duties shall not be avoided by deception; there are special officials in charge.

This must suffice as a brief description of the sestieri. There are many churches served by priests here in Venice, and religious houses for monks and nuns. The parish priests are elected by the parishioners by ballot, i.e. by those who have property in the parish, and then the election is reported to Rome and confirmed by the Pope. The appointment is for life and the superior authority is the most reverend Patriarch. At the present time this is Thomaso Donato, a Dominican friar or preacher. He was elected by the Senate and confirmed by His Holiness the Pope in place of Maffio Girardi, Patriarch and Cardinal of the Roman Church with the title of St Sergius and Bacchus, who died of old age on the way from Rome, he being exceedingly old.³¹ And it has always been the

²⁹ Benedetto Brugnoli (1427-1502) had been teaching in the Chancery school since 1466; he was buried with honour in the Frari (*DBI*).

³⁰ See below, VI.10.

³¹ Maffeo Gherardi, a Camaldolese monk, Patriarch since 1468, had been the sixth incumbent

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custom to appoint a patrician who is a member of a religious order; likewise in many bishoprics patricians have been appointed bishops or worthy citizens of our subject towns. Enough about that. Besides the priest in charge of a parish church, there are other priests and their assistants. The number of them varies according to the parish. One thing is common to all parishes, that in all of them a High Mass is sung every day and there are many other Masses, so that all the priests perform a Mass daily unless they are prevented from doing so by some legitimate reason. They also celebrate other offices. And the Patriarch's income is about [. . .] ducats; he has a vicar; he holds his ecclesiastical court at Castello and dispenses justice there to the clergy. He also has jurisdiction over nuns, except in the case of certain convents which have exemption from the Patriarch's jurisdiction, as do the Virgins [*Verzene*], who are under the Doge; the Celestines, who are exempt; and Santa Chiara, which is under the General of the Franciscans. The Patriarch has no authority over friars because they have their generals, but he can enforce the rule. This Patriarch can go about in a friar's habit, as the present one does, with a cross carried before him. He takes precedence over everyone except the Doge, who always goes first, whether on ceremonial occasions or not.

It only remains to mention the Ducal Palace, where our most serene Prince resides. It is at St Mark's and is a most beautiful and worthy building. First of all, [the part of] the Palace where he lives has recently been renovated, the work being finished in 1492, and the Doge has taken up residence there. It overlooks the canal called the *rio* of the Palace. The rebuilding took ten years, because the old Palace, dating from the time of Doge Giovanni Mocenigo, was burnt down in the night.³² The present one was then begun, which has cost more than 100,000 ducats up to now. The outside walls are all worked over and inlaid with white marble and with stones from all over the world. Inside, the walls on the ground floor are all gilded and inlaid with panelling so that it is a very beautiful sight. There are four gilded chambers – I never saw any more beautiful – which took a very great time and elaborate workmanship apart from the gold and the labour. Excellent rooms are the Hall of Public Audience [*Collegio*] and the Hall of the Senate, which they are working on at present and will be very worthy. One can therefore compare the Venetians to the Romans (who raised such stately edifices) on account of the buildings, both private and public, being erected at the present time. Indeed it can be said, as another writer has done, that our republic has followed the Romans in being as powerful in military

since 1451, when the bishopric was raised to the status of a patriarchate. He died on 14 September 1492 (*HC*, II 290).

³² 14 September 1483. It is an exaggeration to suggest that the whole Palace, as rebuilt in the 1420s, was destroyed. Sanudo refers to the east wing, redesigned by Mauro Codussi and including the Doge's apartments, into which Agostino Barbarigo moved in March 1492. He also exaggerates the cost. See Wolters 1983, pp. 19–20.

strength as in virtue and learning. He writes moreover, 'Greece was the seat of learning and powerful in arms; now the Venetians are the learned ones, now the lion is strongly armed.' Here is the very large hall of the Great Council, renovated throughout with paintings by the hand of most excellent masters, among the best and most famous painters to be found today in the whole world: the brothers Gentile and Giovanni Bellini.³³ Their works demonstrate how highly they are to be esteemed. In further proof of this, Mohammed the Ottoman, King of the Turks,³⁴ sent to Venice some time ago for Gentile, to commission him to do some paintings for him and paint his portrait from life, and he went there and after the Turk's death returned to Venice. And this hall is under constant renovation. On the upper part of its walls are paintings on canvas of the history of Alexander III, the Pope of Rome, and the Emperor Frederick Barbarossa who persecuted him; how he came to this city in disguise and was recognized. This was in 1177, in the time of Doge Sebastiano Ziani, who, in order to help the Pope, set out with the fleet against Otto, son of the forenamed Emperor. He found him in Istria, with a larger and more powerful fleet than ours, and at the Cape of Salbua, near Pirano, he attacked it, broke it up and brought back Otto captive to Venice. The peace was proclaimed, and Frederick himself came to Venice to beg the Pope's forgiveness, and thus at one and the same time the Pope and Emperor were in Venice. And on this occasion the Pope bestowed upon the Prince and his successors certain ceremonial dignities, which will be listed below.³⁵ He returned to his see of Rome, thanks to the help of the Venetians, who had for so long been waging war, but of others too as one reads in the chronicles. Here in this hall, to return to my original subject, the Great Council meets, as I shall relate below; it has a panelled ceiling all done in gold, which cost more than 10,000 ducats.

Here there are two rooms full of arms for the needs of the city; there are enough to arm a great number of persons. They are called the rooms of the Council of Ten, who have guard over them. Then, going on from here you reach the Palace where justice is administered and the offices are, situated round a central courtyard. Here sit the magistrates deputed to hear cases: you will read about them in my section on the magistrates. Then, below them, are the prisons, very strong and varying according to the prisoner's crimes. They have names, such as 'The Lion', 'The Fresh Jewel', 'The Stronghold', 'The Cramped Rooms' [*camerotti*], 'The Armoury', and so on. I daresay they are the

³³ Commissions to repaint the historical scenes in the Hall of the Great Council were given in 1474 to Gentile (active c.1460; d. 1507) and in 1478 to Giovanni Bellini (active c.1460; d. 1516). See Lorenzi 1868, pp. 86, 91; tr. in Chambers 1970b, pp. 79–80. These and other painters' works were destroyed in the fire of 1577. See also below, I.2; X.2(a), (e).

³⁴ Mohammed II the Conquerer, Sultan 1451–81; his portrait in the National Gallery, London, was painted by Gentile in Constantinople in 1479–81 (Thuasne 1888).

³⁵ See also below, II.3(d).

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strongest prisons in Italy, and there is a captain put in charge of them with warders. There is also a prison at Rialto, but not so strong, called 'The Shack' [*caxon*] and in other neighbourhoods in the sestieri there are lock-ups or places where somebody who has been caught wrong-doing can be held overnight until the morning. And Venice has this marvellous custom, that when a malefactor has confessed his crime and deserves to be put to death, according to the sentence passed either by the Giudici di Proprio³⁶ or by the Councils (though excepting the Council of Ten), it is usual for everything first to be ratified in a hearing before the Prince. And on the day of execution the Prince sends the condemned person the same dinner as he is having himself; then, when the malefactors' bell sounds, the victim comes out accompanied by two friars who comfort him, and by the members of a confraternity dressed in black called San Fantin, who carry a crucifix in front of him. Executions are carried out on all except patricians; for them, there are within the Palace two pink columns between which they are executed, although it very rarely happens, except in some exceptionally serious case. For the most part they are exiled or imprisoned in various cities and strongholds of the Signoria.

At Rialto is the office of the Camerlenghi di Comun, newly built and all inlaid with white marble, worked in the shape of diamonds. Here is the treasury of St Mark; that is to say, the cash from government revenues, kept in a large number of iron chests. Our officials bring the money here every evening, and, if they fail to deliver it, or are robbed in their own offices, then they are obliged to make good the payment. But, if after it is brought here the money is stolen (which would be impossible), the expense and loss is borne by St Mark. Note that here in Rialto two non-noble [*popolari*] captains are appointed who take turns to sleep here each night (each for one night at a time) with many officials; during the night some of them are always sent round on patrol with lanterns, to see that no one is breaking in or doing any damage on the said island, on account of the great wealth stored there. The same is done every night round the Piazza of St Mark, and round the Palace and the Procurators' offices.

The Arsenal is truly one of the finest sights imaginable. It covers a great area, about 20 stadii all round. It is situated in the parish of San Martino, surrounded by very handsome walls, and here great galleys for the war fleet are continually being built, with other *fuste* and *gripi*.³⁷ There is enough space to build a total of [. . .] galleys; there are ready wooden frames, almost completed, the total of which is [. . .], and other *fuste* and *gripi*. Almost a thousand workmen labour here every day and every skill to do with the building of galleys and other ships is to be found here. There are covered building-yards for galleys with water

³⁶ See below, III.1(a).

³⁷ Respectively smaller, lighter galleys used for patrols etc. and small merchant vessels which combined sail with oars (Lane 1934, pp. 13, 53).

surrounding them, so that they can be launched and floated. They can then leave the Arsenal and join the Grand Canal at St Mark's, whence they can be rowed by one deck of oarsmen, etc. Here there are a great number of carpenters or shipwrights for the galleys; smiths also work here, making all the iron fittings; in conclusion, whatever is required of every skill is here. There are enormous bombards and catapults of inestimable force, which no city or castle would be strong enough to withstand; recent witness to this are the [strong] places of the Duke of Ferrara, i.e. Figarolo on the Po.³⁸ And every bombard has its name, such as 'No More Words', 'The Lion', 'The Venetian Woman who Casts down Every Wall and Spike', 'The Little Man', and various other names. Also there are an enormous quantity of hand guns [*spingardi, schiopeti, passavolanti*] which are cast every day, and masters are paid there to cast bombards and suchlike instruments of war. There are eight rooms here all filled with armaments of every sort, and every day new supplies are being made for the defence of fortresses and for arming galleys and other ships. Altogether it is beautiful and marvellous thing to see our Arsenal so well equipped. There are women who make sails, some spinning, others in another set of rooms, sewing; others making ropes. Some do one skilled job, some another; and anyone who is willing to go and work at the Arsenal is taken on and paid at least 10 soldi a day, and this is because there is always work there. It costs our Signoria more than 10,000 ducats a year. The workers are paid every week on Saturdays. They have refreshment breaks in turn, [. . .] times a day; that is, tubs are carried round to provide everyone with a drink. There are guards in charge, and at night there are watchmen to guard against fire, principally on account of the gunpowder. Three patricians are elected by the Great Council to govern the Arsenal, and live in houses there for a term of thirty months. Nearby there is also another arsenal, called the New Arsenal, which has very beautiful and thick towers and walls; it is not yet finished. And here in the Arsenal is kept the *bucintoro*, a marvel, in which the Prince and Senate go to pay honour to any great lord visiting the city; they go to San Clemente or elsewhere, depending on the direction from which the visitor is coming. It is covered with crimson satin, and is rowed from a lower deck. In conclusion, the first master craftsman who planned it was worthy and excellent in ability, because there is no more beautiful structure afloat. It has a gilded prow of the seated figure of Justice, bearing the sword and scales, symbolizing that the Venetians administer justice to all without distinction. On the deck upwards of 200 people can be seated with comfort; sometimes, when a visiting lord comes to Venice, it is adorned with ladies. But about the Arsenal an epigram by Gregorio Typhernas comes to my mind:

³⁸ Sanudo refers to the successful Venetian bombardment of the fortress of Figarolo in May-June 1482, about which he had written (Sanudo ed. anon. 1829, pp. 17-19, 29).

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The illustrious Senate of the Venetians founded this Arsenal.
Here the fleet and its armaments will be secure.
And you, visitor, who have travelled many coasts,
Say, in what place have you seen greater marine power?

Here in this city of Venice there is a regulation that warehouses should be stocked with grain, so that the city may not suffer any hardship. Likewise there are stores of wood, in case of need. Thus there is an abundance of everything except sometimes of fresh water. There are wells in private houses and in all the open spaces of the parishes, but they are used up in times of drought. Hence there are barges taken round full of water for sale, brought from the river Brenta at Lizza Fusina, 5 miles away on the mainland. The water is contained in large chests on the said barges, and they go round shouting 'Water! Water here!' and it is sold at eight buckets a soldo. And it is truly a joke, living in water and having to buy it; were it possible to make fountains here, I think no city in the world would equal Venice. It is conveniently and pleasantly guarded, with certain marshes at the mouths of the rivers and waterways, where places are appointed for the collection of customs duties and issue of receipts. And these are the gateways of Venice. Besides these customs posts, there are along various routes patrol boats of officials who search out smugglers, and this is done because there is no other way of guarding Venice. However, it is wonderful that there is no crime so great or deed so cruel in Venice that it does not come to light without discovery of who has done it. And this is because of the great sums that the Signoria sets on the heads of those who commit some wrong, and it is known if more than one person has been involved. Not only are there rewards fixed for delivering the wanted person alive to the Signoria, but also for delivering him dead, or for killing him on the spot, they can claim the reward from the funds of St Mark.

Here around the city of Venice are the following notable rivers: the Brenta, going to Padua; the Sil, going to Treviso; the mouths of the Po, going to Ferrara, and the Adige, going to Verona, so that it is very convenient for everyone. And the district of Venice is as follows: between Grado and Cavarzere, between which boundaries are the following places: Grado, Caorle, Iesolo, Citta Nuova, Lido Pizolo, Lido Mazor, Lido di Pigneda, Lido di San Nicolò, Malamocho, Torcello, Burano, Mazorbo, Murano and Rialto.

To conclude about the site of Venice: it is a marvellous thing, which must be seen to be believed; its greatness has grown up only through trade, based on navigation to different parts of the world. It is governed by its own statutes and laws, and is not subject to the legal authority of the Empire as everywhere else is. This is because in the year 806 Charlemagne had the Western Empire and another ruler had the Eastern, and [Charlemagne] conceded to the Venetians that they could live under their own laws and obey whichever empire they pleased, and gave them a privilege which, moreover, Pope Leo III confirmed.

And the order with which this holy Republic is governed is a wonder to behold; there is no sedition from the non-nobles (*populo*), no discord among the patricians, but all work together to [the Republic's] increase. Moreover, according to what wise men say, it will last for ever, as appears from this epigram found in the *Supplementum chronicarum*:

So long as the sea contains dolphins, so long as clear skies contain stars; so long as the moist ground gives forth her pleasant fruits; so long as the human race carries on its generations upon the earth, the splendour of the Venetians will be celebrated for all eternity.

D. C.

2 A PILGRIM'S IMPRESSIONS, 1480

Brasca, Santo, ed. Momigliano-Lepschy 1966, pp. 48–50.

I stayed at Venice until 5 June because the pilgrim galley was not yet fitted out, and during this interval I went sightseeing all over the city. I saw the great church, St Mark's, very beautiful and decorated in mosaic at both upper and lower levels and on the outside. There, on the night of Ascension Day, they show about a palmful of blood, which they say flowed miraculously out of a crucifix. The story is that a gambler had lost his money at play, and in desperation stuck his knife many times into the breast of Christ on a crucifix, and this blood gushed out. When this is shown, all the people and all the Scuole of Venice flock to it, bearing wax candles. And this crucifix is still displayed in the middle of the church, where everyone can clearly see it with the wounds gaping. Part of the treasure is also on display there, and on that day there was a plenary indulgence.

I also visited the church of Santi Giovanni e Paolo and the Scuola di San Marco and the church of San Francesco [*sic* for Santa Maria dei Frari], which are two very large and beautiful churches. In San Francesco are the tombs of the Doges Francesco Foscari³⁹ and Niccolò Tron,⁴⁰ facing each other, and they are the most beautiful tombs in the whole of Venice. I visited the church of San Bartolomeo, where the Sunday sermon is in German, the church of San Francesco della Vigna, and many other churches where they worship with great devotion.

Then I visited from top to bottom the palace of the Signori [*sic*], very splendid and marvellous. On the top floor there is a very large and ornate room, with the seat of the Doge facing towards the sea; it is painted, the relief done in gold, with the history of the victory the Signori had [in 1177] against the Emperor

³⁹ See below, II.14(a).

⁴⁰ Doge from November 1471 to July 1473.