HISTORICAL METAMORPHOSIS OF THE ATHENIAN AGORA:
CHANGING COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGIES
AND THE ENDURING QUEST FOR AN IDEAL PUBLIC SPHERE

A Dissertation in
Mass Communications

by

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Abstract

Ever since archeologists discovered the site of the ancient Athenian Agora in the 1930s, the term captured Western imagination. In its abstract form, the *agora* became a synonym of a perfect public space which was, by the sheer power of its existence, able to produce a democratic society of utopian qualities. But historical evidence shows that ancient Greek democracy was - similar to our own experience with the public sphere - riddled with partisan politics and personal interests. The normative ideal necessarily collided with social reality on the ground. Starting with classical Athens, this study explores different historical metamorphoses of the *agora* as its heritage was gradually passed to us through the urban communes of the High Medieval period, Renaissance Venice, and London in the golden age of its coffeehouses. The historical-empirical excursion ends in Philadelphia, tracing its transformation from a colonial town to an early industrial metropolis. In collecting historical-empirical evidence, this study relies exclusively on primary sources. In each studied case, the public sphere is conceptualized as the synergetic confluence of information flows mediated through evolving communication technologies and face-to-face encounters which take place within the physical container of various urban forms. In conclusion, the comparative analysis presents two archetypes of Western democracies and implicitly two corresponding archetypical public spheres as they gradually evolved in the West: (a) the classical republican ideal which was originally conceived in Athens and reached its full bloom in the historical reality of Renaissance Venice; and (b) mass democracy which was ushered in gradually through the experience of ‘early modern’ London, finding its fulfillment in the post-Revolutionary Philadelphia, and as an ideal still holds normative power over Western political imagination. In tracing the historical metamorphosis of the *agora*, this study focuses on the evolving concept of *public opinion*; examines the way different societies attempted to solve the conflict of private and public interests within the public sphere; analyzes spatial relationships between dominant urban centres and their local and global peripheries; sheds more light on the social determination of communication technologies; and reveals the historical roots of the articulation of democratic ideals with capitalism.
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To Beth, with love.

“...I HAD DELIBERATELY SET OUT TO WRITE OUTSIDE THE WORLD OF THEORY, OF ALL THEORIES, AND HAD INTENDED TO BE GUIDED BY CONCRETE OBSERVATION AND COMPARATIVE HISTORY ALONE. COMPARED BOTH THROUGH TIME, USING THE LANGUAGE, WHICH HAS NEVER DISAPPOINTED ME, OF THE LONG TERM AND THE DIALECTIC PAST/PRESENT; AND COMPARATIVE THROUGH AS WIDE SPACE AS POSSIBLE, SINCE I WANTED MY STUDY TO COVER THE WHOLE WORLD IF SUCH THING COULD BE DONE...”

FERNAND BRAUDEL
INTRODUCTION

Ever since the rediscovery of ancient Greek intellectual heritage during the High Middle Ages and the Renaissance, the West has been fascinated with the cultural beauty and philosophical depth of classical Hellenic society. Not surprisingly, models of social organization passed down to us mainly through the literary heritage of Plato and Aristotle took on a strong normative power in Western imagination. At various intersections of time and space they served different societies as catalyzers which helped to formulate conceptual principles of their own social utopias. Ensuingly, the Greek experience was used as a yardstick to measure the success of the practical implementation of such visions.\(^1\) In the course of this process, generations of Western social thinkers selectively borrowed the ideas - which they believed contained the answers to the challenges of their own times - from the writings of classical Greek scholars, creating syncretic social and political philosophical systems which often contradicted each other despite the fact that they shared the same intellectual roots. Implemented in real life, such philosophies may have offered solutions to temporary problems. Some of their implementations even evoked a semblance of lasting success, but in the long run, each attempt to build a social utopia found itself inevitably entangled in a web of growing internal contradictions inherent to any social system. Most of the time, it happened because those who were turning to the heritage of antiquity in search of the answers to contemporary problems overlooked the simple fact that the writings of Plato or Aristotle would certainly be much better described as social utopias of their own times, rather than as works of social historians portraying the real life of classical Greek communities at the peak of their democratic era. The Greeks themselves lived in a world

of republican city-states which were neither perfect nor permanent, and were far from democratic by any current meaning of the word.

In the course of the 20th century, generations of social historians envisioned at the heart of the classical Greek *polis* an idealized meeting place where all citizens, materially independent thanks to the support of their domestic economies and thus freed from the desire of any personal gain, met to discuss matters of common interest to the state. Public opinion which resulted from such face-to-face encounters was consequently translated into the deliberations of democratic assemblies and guided their decision-making processes. This was, we were told, the simple mechanism through which the Greek democracy worked.\(^2\) In 1934, when archeologists formally confirmed that they discovered the actual site of the Athenian Agora, the place was almost immediately articulated with such an ideal public space.\(^3\) The term *agora* became an iconic symbol of ancient, and implicitly also of modern democracy which derives its roots from the classical tradition. The actual Agora in Athens was supposed to be devoid of any covert personal interests or partisan manipulation, where the citizens met in the full light of the Mediterranean sun and where all social relations suddenly became transparent, every person was a rational human being whose actions were driven solely by the imperative of common good, and Marx’s mystical veil of obscured social consciousness wasn’t able to skew the rules of the game.\(^4\)

Such idealized space which was the focal point of any Greek *polis* could have produced a perfect democratic society by the sheer power of its existence. Habermas later transported all its

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fundamental qualities and attributed them to the 18th century London coffeehouse in order to emphasize the pivotal role of the Enlightenment in ushering in modernity.\textsuperscript{5} But was the \textit{agora} (and implicitly also the institution of a London coffeehouse) truly an ideal space, or was it rather one which became idealized \textit{ex post} by those who needed it as a beacon, a shining city on the hill, to give them strength and to show direction in their own sincere longing for the betterment of human society? Putting together bits and pieces of images scattered throughout Greek literary heritage, historian Paul Millett describes the classical \textit{agora} as a place where formal and informal, public and private blended all together. It was a setting for administration, publicity, justice and athletic displays; individuals might gather there to seek information or mere gossip, organize a protest, gamble, torture a slave, get hired as laborers, bid for contracts, accost a prostitute, seek asylum, get a haircut, beg for money and food, fetch water, watch a cock-fight, or find out the time on the public water-clock.\textsuperscript{6} And all this human havoc had as its backdrop the omnipresent process of buying and selling, strongly reminiscent of our own current, maybe a bit frustrating, experience of the public sphere.

Ancient Greeks, similarly to any other human society which was ever formed on the face of the earth, were constantly reminded of the tension between their own lofty normative ideals and social reality on the ground. By confronting the dominant trends of political philosophy and their normative tenets with the everyday experience of people living in different places and at different times - as the ideas of Greek republicanism and democracy slowly expanded and conquered the modern world - the aim of this study is to reconstruct, at least partially, the underlying structural tensions which were characteristic of the different historical metamorphoses of the Greek \textit{agora}, the original iconic public sphere which was at the roots of

\textsuperscript{5} Habermas, The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society, p. 31-43.

Western democracy. My exploration obviously starts at classical Athens and continues through examining the communes of the Medieval European urban revival; the next stop is Renaissance Venice with its own republican constitution; I peek into the London coffeehouses to shed light on the ‘Habermasian’ golden age which supposedly ushered in the bourgeois public sphere; and the historical excursion ends in Philadelphia - I enter its streets briefly after city’s founding and leave it at the time when it experiences early symptoms of industrialization in the 1830s.

There were several questions in my mind which motivated this research: Was there a period in the history of democracy capable of materializing a public sphere which came at least close to the Habermasian ideal? What were the dominant dialectic contradictions which shaped the public spheres at different times throughout Western history? How did those who lived in various intersections of time and space employ emerging communication technologies in the pursuit of their social needs, fulfilling their democratic or other ideals? To what extent were local, urban or national public spheres at different times interconnected into larger communication webs spanning across space? And ultimately, just as the agora simultaneously carried the function of public space and marketplace, can it be similarly implied that modern democracy and free market capitalism are interdependent and should be considered as being a mere two sides of the same coin?

**Methodological Outline and the Use of Historical Sources**

While in quantitatively-oriented research the formulation of hypotheses and research questions at the outset of the project is almost indispensable, qualitative methodology, applied in this study, routinely rejects this step in order to free the researcher from being ‘fixed’ by a pre-formulated agenda. On the contrary, qualitative-oriented inquiry shifts its attention from *ex ante* to *ex post* hypothesis - one which arises during the process of inquiry itself. As Meinefeld argues,
the formulation of a sociological theory should take place not at the beginning of the research process but at its final stage, because the overriding goal is not the testing but the generation of social hypothesis and theories. Indeed, there is a fundamental awareness in the qualitative field that any previous knowledge can influence the research process and skew its results. And while it is highly unrealistic to expect a scholar to restrain him/herself from any subjective influence, the mere awareness of this issue may avoid many erroneous assumptions, because in any scientific inquiry an \textit{ex ante} formulated hypothesis based on an existing body of knowledge often has the tendency to perpetuate erroneous assumptions made by previous researchers.\footnote{Cf. Meinefeld, “Hypothesis and Prior Knowledge in Qualitative Research,” In \textit{A Companion to Qualitative Research}, edited by Uwe Flick, Ernst von Karndorff and Ines Steinke (London, 2001), p. 154-55.} As I attempt to demonstrate in the first chapter of this work, Habermas’ theory of the genesis of the bourgeois public sphere could serve as a textbook example of such thesis-driven research, one in which the scholar intentionally downplayed all empirical evidence which did not support his \textit{ex ante} formulated hypothesis and consequently misinterpreted also the historical data and dynamics of the social phenomena he studied.

In order to avoid such a trap, my own research was guided by a purely inductive approach. The historical-empirical part of the study (Chapters 1-4) relies strictly on primary sources, through which I attempted to mentally recreate the historical realities of different societies as they evolved in time. The range and type of the sources used varies according to their availability for a given period: from medieval urban and religious chronicles, through personal diaries which appeared in the Renaissance, merchant letters and trade manuals, travelogues written in different periods, early newsletters, newspapers, pamphlets, engravings, political cartoons, paintings, maps, archeological findings and other remaining material evidence typical for each studied place and period. A special category in this group is the travelogues of foreigners. The untainted
eye of a stranger often captures what the locals don’t bother to mention because of its normalcy. Furthermore, the observations of foreign visitors sometimes reveal not only interesting information about the place they travel through, but also about the place they came from. “In my work on America… through I seldom mention France, I did not write a page without thinking of her, and placing her as it were before me,” admitted De Tocqueville in a letter to his friend while working on *Democracy in America*. 

While the primary focus of this study is on a social group which constituted the core of progressive democratic citizenship in a given period, I contrasted in the case of each studied place its dominant positions with the situation of marginalized social groups. Their eye-witness testimonies are, for the obvious reasons of the lack of access to material and immaterial resources, much scarcer. But taken all together, the overall historical-empirical evidence I assembled enabled me to reconstruct the everyday social reality in a given studied place-period as perceived from the standpoint of an average person - if the term *average* can be applied, for example, to a merchant or a rank-and-file senator who decided to keep diaries in Renaissance Venice. My analysis was guided by an attempt to contrast such everyday experience of the public sphere with the normative ideals of a given society, in order to point out the dominant structural tensions within a given social system. In doing so, I compared the writings of those who may have inadvertently captured an episode which reveals certain social dynamics with the works which intentionally organized and stylized reality in order to support their own philosophical or ideological claims. To discern between such two types of testimonies is not always easy, but in collecting the evidence for the dominant normative ideals of a given society I relied mainly on the contemporary works of social and political philosophers, officially sanctioned. 

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historiographies, as well as on personal correspondence, published writings and speeches delivered by public persons and elected political leaders.

In the first step of my research I reviewed maximum amount of accessible primary sources and collected all evidence which - in my judgment - was at least loosely related to the topic of my inquiry: the abstract concept of *public sphere* and its historical metamorphosis. In the next step, I organized such evidence chronologically and topically, launching the process of textual analysis until the social phenomena started to emerge gradually in my mind. I was constantly reminded about the necessity to interpret all my primary textual data within the widest possible context of cultural, socio-historical and spatial relations in which it originated. While analyzing the writings of a London merchant, this meant to understand his own social status, political and religious convictions, and places in which he lived his life. In the process of studying the Venetian Republican system, it meant to take into the account also the alternative republican system developed in Renaissance Florence. Only after obtaining a fairly consistent idea about the place and period studied, based on the analysis of primary sources, I engaged also secondary literature and confronted my own findings with previously made inquiries, analyses and hypotheses advanced by other scholars. In the ensuing process of triangulation of ideas, I accepted some hypotheses advanced by the secondary literature and challenged others which were not in line with my own findings, going back to primary sources in order to clarify the inconsistencies. This process was repeated in several iterations over and over again, shifting

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9 Such interpretation of collected documents will obviously pose a challenge which Giddens calls *double hermeneutics* - the interpretation of an interpretation - and illustrates it by the fact that the sociologist often has, as a field of study, phenomena which were already constituted as meaningful by their actors through their everyday experience. In Anthony Giddens, *The Constitution of Society: Outline of the Theory of Structuration* (Berkeley, CA, 1984), p. 284. Christians and Carey suggest to researchers that they at least figuratively “pitch their tents among the natives,” which the authors interpret as entering the situation so deeply that a scholar can practically recreate in his/her imagination the thoughts and sentiments of the social agents studied. Christians and Carey, “The Logic and Aims of Qualitative Research,” p. 347. Charles Horton Cooley called researcher’s empathy a *sympathetic introspection*, describing it as the way of putting oneself into “intimate contact with various sorts of persons and allowing to awaken in oneself a life similar to their own.” In Charles H. Cooley, *Social Organization: A Study of the Larger Mind* (New York, 1909), p. 7.
constantly back and forward between the concrete empirical evidence and emerging social hypotheses, between primary and secondary literature, until I was able to mentally recreate a coherent image of the place and period studied.10

**The Inclusive Concept of the Public Sphere: A Multidisciplinary Approach**

The ontological entry point of my study was a very generally defined category of the *public sphere*. In its conceptualization I adopted Habermas’ definition as one that “mediates between society and state, in which the public organizes itself as the bearer of public opinion.”11 A portion of it comes into being in every setting which has the power to mediate between individuals assembled in order to discuss public affairs. Under ideal circumstances, they lack any personal agenda and their deliberation is guided solely by the idea of common interest. The primary purpose of their coming together is to form *public opinion* which refers, according to Habermas, to the task of criticism and control which a public body of citizens consequently practices *vis-à-vis* the ruling structure organized in the form of a state.12

In its pure abstract form, the ontological category of the public sphere is reminiscent of the Weberian *ideal type*, and my primary task was to capture the degree of its presence (or absence) in a given society.13 Indeed, with some ambiguity, Habermas himself defined his public sphere as an ideal type.14 But contrary to Weber, who was aware that it is only a mental construct which in its conceptual purity cannot be found empirically anywhere in social reality, Habermas

12 Ibid.
14 At some point in his study, Habermas claims that the public sphere “cannot be abstracted from the unique developmental history…nor can it be transferred, idealtypically generalized, to any number of historical situations,” other times he himself argues that his “first goal had been to derive the ideal type of the bourgeois public sphere.” See Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, p. xvii; and Jürgen Habermas, “Further Reflections on the Public Sphere,” in *Habermas and the Public Sphere*, ed. Craig J. Calhoun (Cambridge, MA, 1992), p. 422.
consequently embellished and distorted history in order to draw his model directly from the social reality of the ancient Greek city-state, or from the late 17th century bourgeois public sphere which emerged in London coffeehouses. Yet despite of all of the methodological flaws and historical-empirical ambiguities of Habermas’ study, his conceptual category of the public sphere is still very stimulating and has an enormous advantage for my design, because it allows me to conceive the *agora* in its various historical metamorphoses as a conflux of physical worlds and mediated virtual flows through which public opinion is formed. In this study, its physicality is epitomized mainly by urban space which serves as a container for any face-to-face social interaction; its virtual dimension is represented by the information flows which are mediated through evolving communication technologies typical for a given period of inquiry. Both physical urban space and mediated messages are social products and as such inevitably reflect some of the basic structural tenets of the society in the midst of which they originated. At the same time, they constitute a medium which has the ability to transmit such values onto the next generations. John Dewey captured such a dual nature of the public sphere in his famous claim that human society “not only continues to exist by transmission, by communication, but it may fairly be said to exist in transmission, in communication,” adding that there is “more than a verbal tie between the word common, community, and communication.”

The accent on various interplays between the physicality of urban settings and abstractness of information flows is one of the pivotal moments of the design of my study which from the outset merges many of the traditional research strategies typical mainly for classical communications/

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15 Max Weber originally defined his ideal type as “formed by the one-sided accentuation of one or more points of view and by the synthesis of a great many diffuse, discrete, more or less present and occasionally absent concrete individual phenomena, which are arranged according to those one-sidedly emphasized viewpoints into a unified analytical construct.” In Max Weber, *The Methodology of the Social Sciences* (Glencoe, IL, 1949), p. 90. See also Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, pp. 3 and 24-26.

16 Giddens argues that the interpretation of urbanism as well as the general sensitivity to place and space plays a key role in social theory. In Giddens, *The Constitution of Society: Outline of the Theory of Structuration*, p. xxv.

journalism studies and urban geography. It further calls for an even more inclusive interdisciplinary approach with the potential pitfalls of spreading one’s forces too thin and entering some territories which may be ‘foreign’ to my own field of mass communications. Yet, being aware of this risk, I still decided to undertake it because I strongly believe that only by attempting to comprehend the complex web of synergies between the world of physical and mediated encounters within the broadly defined agora do we obtain a realistic image of the overall quality of the public sphere in its different metamorphosis as they materialized throughout the centuries.\textsuperscript{18}

**The Unit of Analysis: A World-System**

Advancing the heritage of the French Annales school, Fernand Braudel argued for total history - complex and cross-referenced in space and time, an approach which refuses to conceptualize life as a “mechanism that can be stopped at leisure in order to reveal a frozen image.” Indeed, Braudel persisted on the fact that the researcher must be able to place any studied social structure “both in itself and even more in relation to the movement of associated structures.”\textsuperscript{19} His own studies were consequently comparative both through time, using the language of the longue durée based on the dialectic of past-present; and comparative through as wide a space as possible, since he wanted his inquiries “to cover the whole world if such thing

\textsuperscript{18} Mosco argues that from the time Adam Smith wrote his *Wealth of Nations* (1776) which knew no disciplinary boundaries, “political economy has been taken up with the mutual constitution and multiple determination of social life.” Vincent Mosco, *The Political Economy of Communication: Rethinking and Renewal* (London, 1996), p. 29. In his essay “Unity and Diversity in Social Sciences,” Fernand Braudel argued “that all the human sciences are interested in one and the same landscape; that of the past, present, and future actions of man... With regard to this panorama, the human sciences could be seen as being so many observation points, each with particular views, its different perspectives, coloring, chronicles. Unhappily, the sections of landscape which each has cut out do not join together, do not refer to each other, in a way that the pieces of child’s puzzle demand the whole image and are valid only in relation to that preestablished image.” Braudel, *On History* (Chicago, 1980), p. 55.

\textsuperscript{19} Ibid., p. 78.
could be done.20 This resulted in an approach which intentionally ignored the traditional borders of nation states. Instead, the unit of analysis in his own research became a socially and economically self-contained supranational world-system.21 Following Braudel’s lead, in my case such a world-system is represented by the sum of autonomous political entities which, at a given period in history, formally adopted at least the basic structural tenets characteristic for Greek democracy: they conferred the status of citizens to a substantial group of their residents which entitled them also to the right of free speech and granted them the opportunity to participate in a relatively open process on the governing of the state.22 Free speech, which presupposes also the ability of rational argumentation in the public arena and the forming of public opinion, is seen as a necessary minimum for the public sphere to emerge at all, while the open, representative government becomes an indispensable condition for society to be able to articulate its positions with the agenda of the state.23

Adopting this definition of a democratic world-system, I feel the need to emphasize that neither the Greek, nor the early U.S. republican society were democracies based on the

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20 Braudel, Civilization and Capitalism, 15th-18th century (New York, 1982-84), vol. 1, p. 25. In his first influential opus The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II, Braudel outlined three different levels of unfolding human history: longue durée, moyenne durée, and histoire événementielle – the history of slow change over long time, the mid-range history and the event-dominated or episodic history. The most important in his view are the first two perspectives, yet he elsewhere admitted that “I have not refrained from passing from one [level of history] to another as the need arose.” In Braudel, On History, pp. 3-4.

21 Braudel was relying initially on concepts Welttheater and Weltwirtschaft, coined previously by German economic historians. In his early studies the Mediterranean space became a self-contained system, an autonomous world-economy (économie-monde) which only depended on the outside world for some luxury items. In Fernand Braudel, Civilization and Capitalism, 15th-18th century, vol. 1, p. 371. Wallerstein, advancing Braudel’s intellectual heritage, defined the world-system initially as “a unit with single division of labor and multiple cultural systems.” He later reiterated from this strict economic-deterministic position and redefined the world-system as an ‘historical social system,’ in which the economy may still play the upper hand, but in which he recognizes a much more prominent role to be performed by other social factors, mainly cultural and political. Cf. Immanuel M. Wallerstein, The Modern World-System, Text Edition (New York, 1976-88), vol. 1, p. 6; and Immanuel M. Wallerstein, The Essential Wallerstein (New York, 2000), p. xvii.

22 As Riesenberg points out, citizenship doesn’t necessarily need to be connected with democracy. The Spartan system was considered the epitome of virtuous classical Greek citizenship, yet its state institutions had more a character of military dictatorship than of an open liberal democracy. In Peter N. Riesenberg, Citizenship in the Western Tradition: Plato to Rousseau (Chapel Hill, NC, 1992), pp. xvi-xvii.

23 I adopt Habermas’ claim that “public opinion can by definition only come into existence when the reasoning public is presupposed.” In Habermas, “The Public Sphere,” p. 198.
recognition of universal full-fledged citizenship. They were for the most part aristocratic republics which granted electoral franchise and implicitly also the status of full citizens only to a limited social group, based on its presumed possession of republican virtues or on meeting certain standards of material ownership. In the U.S., we see the rise of democratic republicanism in the early 19th century with the gradual extension of voting rights to the free male population, but the all-inclusive democratic republican regimes formally materialized in the West only a hundred years later when universal suffrage finally granted electoral rights also to women.\textsuperscript{24} Meanwhile, both Athenian citizens meeting in the Agora or deliberating in the assemblies, as well as the U.S. founding fathers drafting the Constitution, did not formally represent their slaves, servants, and wives anymore than the German feudal lords who gathered at Worms in the Imperial Diet to discuss Luther’s theses represented their wives or serfs.\textsuperscript{25} Consequently, it will be sufficient for my analysis if the conditions of free speech and government representativeness applied to a (very vaguely defined) substantial, hegemonic group of the overall population, be it even a minority within a given social whole.\textsuperscript{26}

At the same time I would like to emphasize that the exclusion of slaves, serfs and women did not make them completely powerless, deprived of any form of personal agency.\textsuperscript{27} Indeed, as this study shows, the very survival of even the classical aristocratic republics depended on the ability of the ruling classes to win the consent of those who were excluded from the formal participation in the government. The most recent analysis of the dynamics within the Athenian or Venetian

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\textsuperscript{24} Cf. Riesenberg, Citizenship in the Western Tradition: Plato to Rousseau. pp. xvii-xviii.
\textsuperscript{25} Habermas claims that in his bourgeois public sphere “access is guaranteed to all citizens.” But the problem is with the definition of the term ‘citizen’ which in some cases \textit{a priori} excluded major part of state’s population. See Habermas, “The Public Sphere,” p. 198.
\textsuperscript{26} Habermas admits the existence of multiple public spheres in 18th century Britain or France, but he claims the only one of them, the bourgeois, enjoyed the hegemonic position: “Yet even this plebeian public sphere... [manifested in the Chartist movement and anarchist workers’ movements] remains oriented toward the intentions of the bourgeois public sphere.” In Habermas, \textit{The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society}, p. xviii.
\textsuperscript{27} Anthony Giddens, Central Problems in Social Theory: Actions, Structure and Contradiction (Berkeley, CA, 1979), p. 6.
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patrician families demonstrate that women actually played a much more important role in the decision-making process than was generally recognized by the traditional historiographies. In the case of other socially marginalized classes, their consent was usually achieved through a combination of ideological persuasion and paternalistic state policies reflected in welfare programs aimed at keeping their lives above the threshold necessary for the mere survival and social reproduction. While Hannah Arendt, and consequently also Jürgen Habermas position the rise of the social into the early 19th century and associate it with the beginning of the decline of the liberal bourgeois democracies, my attempt is to demonstrate that ‘the social’ did not emerge only with the advent of democratic republicanism; instead, it had been an intrinsic part of the public sphere even in the era of republics inspired by the classical aristocratic models.

The Study of Large Social Structures: A Dialectic Concept of History and Society

Claude Henri de Rouvroy, comte de Saint-Simon (1760 –1825) - the French proto-socialist philosopher who survived the ancient régime, the French Revolution, Napoleon, and the Bourbon restoration - claimed that in spite of the most contradictory political systems he lived through, they all contained some consistent, deeply rooted social tendencies which were completely impervious to political changes. Saint-Simon’s observation is basically reiterated in Braudel’s notion that societies, especially from the perspective of their underlying structural forces, evolve very slowly, over long periods of time. Even revolutions, which may produce

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29 Both Arendt and Habermas associate the universal extension of democratic rights with the ‘rise of the social’ – “where the activities connected to sheer survival are permitted to appear in public” - and the consequent emergence of the welfare state which they both see as the impetus for the decline of bourgeois public sphere. In Arendt, The Human Condition, p. 46. Habermas in this context uses the expression the ‘pressure of the street.’ ‘Laws which obviously have come about under the ‘pressure of the street’ can scarcely still be understood as arising from the consensus of private individuals engaged in public discussion.” For more see Habermas, “The Public Sphere,” pp. xix and 200.

some abrupt changes on the surface, are not complete breaks with the past. Society as a whole has a tendency to bounce back and returns to its traditional ways of doing things. Braudel argued that similarly social mobility, although it is accelerated in times of rapid economic progress, does not change the society overnight. Historically “the ‘rise of the bourgeoisie’ for instance does not mean a massive surge forward in serried ranks, since the proportion of privileged compared to the overall population always remained small.”

It is this relative stability of social structures which is not only helpful to historical observation, but constitutes the basic principle which allows for comparison of societies across space and time.

Giddens’ theory of structuration, which I adopt as one of the principal tenets of my research, asserts that social structures do not exist independently from social agents. Instead, they together constitute a dialectic duality in which “the structural properties of social systems are both medium and outcome of the practices [of individual social agents] they recursively organize.”

This assumption is of crucial importance for my study because it implies the possibility of understanding the underlying social structures through the study of the everyday life experience of common people. According to Bettig, the evidence of their actions and thoughts gathered at the empirical level could be consequently interpreted as “a surface manifestation of the structural forces that lie below.” Following this concept, Miles Ogborn explicitly recommends that scholars focus on the empirical actions of individuals who represent certain social groups as the best entry points to the understanding of the underlying social structures. In his critique of Wallerstein’s modern world-system, Ogborn recommends abandoning the macro-social and

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32 Adam Smith claimed that “we must compare the state of the country at periods somewhat distant from one another” to capture the real change because the evolution of social institutions is frequently gradual with many loops and temporary reversals. In Adam Smith, An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations (Oxford, UK, 1776/1998), p. 206.
macro-economic perspectives traditionally pursued by the followers of world-systems theory and instead suggests that scholars zoom in and ‘people’ their models of society with real human beings. This is because, he argues, the macro-structural approach to the history of society has problems recognizing some processes which are not reducible to the logic of grand social theories. To reiterate this point, Giddens points out that in spite of the upper hand that social structures tend to exercise over the actions of an individual or social group, we shouldn’t underestimate the power of human agency. The process of overall social reproduction involves “operation of causal loops, in which a range of unintended consequences of action feed back to reconstitute the initiating circumstances.”

My understanding of human history and social organization reflects all of the arguments above which lead me to conceptualize the world-system as applied in this study as an infinite sum of processes and relations. In order to study society as a dynamic entity, I focus on large social processes such as democratization, commodification, individualization, bureaucratization and spatialization. They all capture development over long periods of time and their study has a tendency to reveal the structural continuity despite the abrupt social events which posterity often labels as revolutions. In order to model the relational dynamics among different social groups in my world-system, I followed John Dewey’s advice to envision human society as the multiplicity of publics which are brought into existence at concrete cross-sections of time and space as reactions to the actions of other publics. Such multiple publics perpetually arise in time and space around different issues, from which Dewey deduced that society should never be

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36 Anthony Giddens, The Constitution of Society: Outline of the Theory of Structuration, p. 27. This is reminiscent of Marx’s claim: “Man makes his own history, but he does not make it out of the whole cloth; he does not make it out of conditions chosen by himself, but out of such as he finds close at hand. The tradition of all past generations weighs like an alp upon the brain of the living,” In Karl Marx, The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte (New York, 2007), p. 13.
approached as a static thing, because there will never be a perfect *status quo* in regards to social development. Similarly Braudel saw society as the *ensemble des ensembles* - set of sets, arguing that “any given social reality we may observe in isolation is itself contained in some greater set.” The result of such an approach is a complex dialectic concept which envisions the social body as an aggregate of mutually interconnected and often overlapping smaller subsets whose evolutionary trajectories are propelled by internal contradictions. And it is the focus on such dialectic tensions which necessarily develop in each society between its everyday social practices and its normative tenets that reveals also the underlying structural forces of a given society and offers the researcher the best opportunity to observe and analyze them.

**The Sequence of Dominant Cities and the Organization of the Study**

As a result of all that has been said so far, it is clear that the unit of analysis in my study progressively varies, following the expansion of Greek republican and democratic ideas throughout the Western world. Yet such a Braudelian project of total history is, from the outset, too ambitious to be executed in praxis and even if attempted, the researcher could very easily get sidetracked and lost in the labyrinths of marginal historical events and tangential trends. To avoid this trap, Braudel himself designed what he called *the classic sequence of dominant cities* - places which in a given period hold a hegemonic power-grip over the entire supranational word-system. Following his lead, I constructed my own alternative sequence of dominant cities –

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41 Braudel claims that a “world-economy always has an urban centre of gravity, a city, as the logistic heart of its activity. News, merchandise, capital, credit, people, instructions, correspondence all flow into and out of the city. Its powerful merchants lay down the law, sometimes becoming extraordinary wealthy. At varying and respectful distances around the centre, will be found other towns, sometimes playing the role of associate or the accomplice, but more usually resigned to their second class
Athens, the nascent European urban communities of the High Medieval period, Venice, London and Philadelphia - based not only on their economic or military domination of the world-system, but also on their overall political and cultural hegemony. Each city (or a group of cities in the case of the Medieval urban revival) is consequently a protagonist of one stand alone essay of my study. In designing the sequence of dominant cities for this project I envisioned them like pulse points on the human body through which one can capture the heartbeat of the entire system. Giddens calls such important urban centers *power containers* with an enormous concentration of assets, especially administrative resources. Giovanni Arrighi points out that lined up in historical sequence, they “refer to the system as a whole at different stages of its development.”

Chapter 1 contains two rather brief essays whose common denominator is the critique of Habermas’ version of the genesis of the bourgeois public sphere. The first essay is dedicated to classical Athens, a city which in the 5th century BCE gave birth to Western democracy and whose Agora became a representative symbol of an ideal public sphere. The main scope of this essay is to challenge some of the beliefs perpetuated by Weber, Arendt and Habermas who eulogized classical Greek democracy, portraying it as a static social thing close to perfection. The analysis points out that in doing so, they relied mainly on the philosophical utopias of Plato and Aristotle, while the study of more mundane sources - such as the speeches of Demosthenes or plays of Aristophanes - would reveal a much more plastic image of Athenian society which faced many internal conflicts typical for contemporary democracies. The second essay, also in Chapter 1, confronts Habermas’ thesis with the theory advanced in the early 1900s by Belgian role... Venice was never isolated; nor was Antwerp; nor, later, was Amsterdam.” In Braudel, *Civilization and Capitalism, 15th-18th century*, vol. 3, pp. 27 and 34.


historian Henri Pirenne, who argued that it was the urban communal movement of the High Medieval period - mainly the rising cities in Flanders and Northern Italy - which sparked the re-birth of Western democracy.\textsuperscript{45} Tracing the etymological roots of the word \textit{bourgeois}, one would necessarily come to conclusion that Pirenne’s thesis, notwithstanding it own shortcomings and blunt historical generalizations, captured more closely the dynamics of the real historical development than the version offered by Habermas.\textsuperscript{46} After establishing the importance of the High Middle Ages in the re-birth of the Western democratic tradition, I schematically trace its development to the advent of the Renaissance, which gives me the opportunity to prepare the ground for the analysis of the public sphere in the republican Venice.

The social and political developments in Renaissance Venice and its quest for a perfect republic are captured in Chapter 2. They are pivotal for our understanding of the genesis of the public sphere in the Western world for several reasons. The city was an economic superpower of its own times and as a byproduct of its merchant and military expeditions during the period of the Crusades, came in touch with the heritage of the ancient Greek social, cultural and political-philosophical tradition which was still alive in Constantinople. In the course of the 13\textsuperscript{th} - 15\textsuperscript{th} centuries, Venetians selectively adopted and implemented many of the teachings of Plato or Aristotle into their own social constitution, so that a contemporary philosopher exalted their Republic as better than Plato ever imagined. In 1453, after the fall of Constantinople, many Greek scholars chose Venice as a refuge for themselves, their families and their rich ancient libraries. By this time, Greek thinking permeated every aspect of Venetian society and was reflected to a large extent even in its physical urban settings. Aristotle’s idea that an ideal city


should have two separate *agoras*, one designed exclusively for civic functions and one as a marketplace, was in Venice represented by the spatial separation between Piazza San Marco and the Rialto. Under ideal circumstances, both squares were designed to keep the private and public interest from intermingling together and I argue that the degree of success with which this idea was implemented in praxis was the best indicator of prosperity and longevity of the Venetian republican society.

Venetians followed the Greek propensity to divinize *homonoia*, the concept of harmony and unity, while refusing any form of individualism and independence. A strong state with extensive regulatory powers was a natural form of social organization which corresponded with the basic structural tenets of Venetian society. In contrast to contemporary standards, their city did not have defensive walls. Yet it was surrounded by lagoon and it was the need to protect its frail ecology which contributed significantly to the molding of the common identity of its residents. Visitors often described Venice not as one city alone, but several cities placed together. Its urban spatial hierarchy was reflected in several dozen residential squares which functioned as small community centers with local stores, markets, communal wells and churches. But the ringing of the bells of each local church was subordinated to one central *campanile* in Piazza San Marco which synchronized the life of the entire city. Under classical philosophical influence, the city implemented a republican system balancing three types of government: aristocracy, democracy, and monarchy - with a strong emphasis on the first. The full citizenship was limited to a narrow social caste of the nobles who rationalized their entitlement to govern by the possession of civic virtues. On the outside, the nobles as a group used all possible means of propaganda to trumpet the greatness of their Republic, the *myth of Venice*, to the world. But on the inside, their government worked on the premise of what Rousseau described as democracy without
deliberation: ideally, each social group in Venice was supposed to have full access to the factual
information corresponding to its status, but all persuasive strategies at the individual level were
systemically suppressed from democratic deliberation and public opinion was denounced as the
most dangerous thing to the republican government. Public opinion and populist policies were
seen as a driving force behind the abandonment of the ideal of keeping the state small and
compact which brought upon Venice the 1509 catastrophic debacle at Agnadello. But despite the
proverbial secrecy and repeated government attempts to control the information flows, Venice
thrived on gossip and there was barely a secret which wasn’t sooner or later leaked to the public.
In the early 1500s, Venetian merchant groups mastered hand-written merchant newsletters
(*avvisi*) which dominated European information markets for the next two centuries, even long
after the introduction of printed newspapers elsewhere. Due to its economic success and
unprecedented social and political stability, the Venetian system of government, based on ancient
Greek utopias, became a matter of study and admiration in the West. In the incunabula period,
the city became one of the main printing centers of Europe and the new medium contributed
significantly to the spread of the *myth of Venice*, and implicitly also to the diffusion of classical
esthetic and republican political ideals into the Renaissance world (Figure 1.1.).

In the 17th century, Venetian political, military and economic hegemony was on an
irreversible course of decline. Yet in the meantime, the Lockean ideals of individual rights and
freedom of expression became a widely accepted norm in English society and if Voltaire had his
say, London was now generally seen as the ‘New Athens’. A relatively brief essay conveyed in
Chapter 3 serves as an intermezzo exploring the golden age of London coffeehouses (c. 1680-
1730).\footnote{Habermas equates the period of 1680-1730 with the golden age. See Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, p. 32.} Based mainly on the analysis of the prolific literary heritage of Daniel Defoe, its focus is
"...far greater splendors have shone forth from their [Venetian] constitution than Plato himself have ever imagined for his own republic..." George of Trebizond (1454)

"HISTORICAL METAMORPHOSIS OF THE ATHENIAN AGORA"

Figure 1.1. The Braudelian sequence of leading cities and the transmission of classical Greek republican ideals.
on revealing the real life of the ‘Habermasian’ coffeehouse, pointing out also the dark side of this ‘posthumously’ idealized public sphere. In Defoe’s London, we can on one hand clearly see the presence of all features which turned the coffeehouse into a small, tightly knit urban neighborhood - indeed, into a Londoner’s true home. But the same institution became also a breeding ground of corruption, a place where the emerging political factions, ‘free’ press, and financial interests came together to plot the grandmother of all stock market crashes - the South Sea Bubble of 1720. Defoe himself strongly criticized this development, but at the same time was often forced by circumstances to take an active part in it. London, due to its growing economic importance, was described by his contemporaries as the empire of the whole world and the news as the most vendible commodity in the entire Kingdom. All this was happening within a city which experienced an urban boom of gigantic proportions. The growing prominence of representative government and concentration of financial interests drew old landed English aristocracy as well as nouveau riches among the gentry to procure permanent seats in London. Defoe noted that to quell this increasing demand for fashionable housing, entire new cities were erected almost overnight not only in the immediate London suburbs, but also in the towns and villages within a ten-mile perimeter from the city. The new developments took on the form of fashionable squares and as such resembled modern-day gated communities which isolated their residents from all mayhem and confusion typical for the medieval city center. And all this development went hand in hand with the changes in the structure of English families, processes of gentrification, increasing pressure on the exploitation of the natural environment, and was obviously reflected also in significant improvements in transportation and communication systems.
For practical reasons which limit the time and space available to complete this study, the essay dedicated to London represents only a relatively brief intermezzo leading to the next pivotal essay focusing on the urban development of Philadelphia. The range of topics it covers and its depth are limited, yet I consider Defoe’s London to be an important stepping stone indispensable for a better understanding of the transformation of the aristocratic republican ideal - which was clearly dominating the public sphere in Venice - into the early stages of democratic republicanism which gradually emerges in the next essay dedicated to Philadelphia (Chapter 4). The study of William Penn’s city on the Delaware starts at a time when its founder in 1681 gave instructions to his surveyor general to draft Philadelphia’s master plan; it follows its development through colonial times, during the American Revolution and the Federal era, up until the 1830s when Philadelphia became the first North American city significantly touched by industrialization. I argue that Penn’s green country town was from the very beginning conceived as the materialization of the religious and social utopian dreams which came up short in the founder’s native London. Its most pronounced characteristic was the rigid urban grid of perpendicular streets and relative lack of spatial hierarchical structure. In combination with plain Quaker architecture, the city was described as the epitome of republican mediocrity personified in brick and mortar. But what was slowly brewing in Philadelphia from the moment of its founding was a different type of republicanism than the one was seen previously in Venice. An emerging egalitarian society whose main slogans were ‘freedom’ and ‘liberty’ - a British inheritance strengthened by removal to American soil - for the first time in modern history articulated the ideals of republicanism and full-blown democracy together. Consequently the study suggests that if there was a social revolution in North America, it did not happen in 1776 when independence from Great Britain was formally declared, but in 1800-1801 when Thomas
Jefferson and his Democratic-Republican Party scored important electoral victories both in Philadelphia as well as on the Federal level, defeating the ideas of classical aristocratic republicanism represented by the first two presidents George Washington and John Adams. Yet I ascribe to this ‘revolution’ even more of the qualities of an evolution and trace its roots to William Penn’s 1687 decision to put in print all legal documents containing positively framed liberties of his colonists, ensuingly encouraging them to become familiar with their own rights. This decision encouraged a democratic culture which had its roots in the 1215 publication of *Magna Carta*. It was further nurtured on one hand through the oratorical tradition epitomized in the Anglo-Saxon Protestant sermon, on the other hand it was fuelled by Philadelphia printers. Their newspapers were free of royal censorship, but their commercial survival and success was closely tied to the amount of advertisement they attracted. The essay offers enough evidence to support the claim that while Philadelphians idolized freedom, their Quaker heritage taught them to look at it mainly through the prism of their purses.

Contrary to the experience of Boston’s Puritans, who were driven out of the Old World by religious intolerance, Quakers were lured to the New World mainly by the desire for financial gain. Furthermore, they left England at a time when the freedom of expression and the acceptance of normative power of public opinion were already formally recognized as basic tenets of political culture. From the very beginning, their material interests strongly collided with the utopian visions of Philadelphia’s founder, William Penn, which had a significant impact on the nascent public sphere in Philadelphia, just as the mentality of a quiet but shrewd Quaker merchant permeated the city atmosphere to the marrow of its bones. At the same time, in a world in which the city was still defined mainly by its defensive walls, Philadelphia was the first modern metropolis which lacked such a limiting factor. Due to the Quaker influence, its urban
space was designed exclusively for work; all gaiety and leisure were systematically pushed out of town and gradually associated with its green suburbs. Furthermore, the colonists’ culture inherently fostered the ideas of abstract space and spatial mobility, and a combination of all those trends made it possible that the social need for large scale suburbanization - in which the city-center is seen solely as a business district - was clearly articulated in the minds of Philadelphians long before it became technically feasible in the mid-19th century with the arrival of the streetcar. Philadelphia’s colonial prosperity and social stability made many inquire about the secret for its success. Most of the observers agreed that there was a parallel between the plain Quaker character and the rigid system of straight perpendicular streets with their broad unobscured views. The transparent urban grid ensuingly captured American republican spatial imagination and together with the earthy wisdom of Franklin’s Poor Richard was adopted as the master plan practically for all future U.S. cities.

Up until the American Revolution, republican ideals were limited territorially to the size of a city state. Founding fathers gathered in Philadelphia were very well aware of this problem, grappling with the idea of how to create one imagined community - a new type of a nation - which had the ambitions to cover an entire continent. Being reminded of Franklin’s slogan ‘join, or die’, they were aware of the imperative for unity. They obviously understood that they needed to develop national infrastructure and promote the means of communication, but the inherent conflict was in the fact that (learning from the experience of the by then corrupted political system of the Republic of Venice) they refused to accept the idea of big government. Instead, in order to separate the private and public interest within the public sphere, they limited the government to a minimum from the outset. The initiative to interconnect the new nation was consequently left in the hands of private commercial interests which were not always compatible
with the vision of the public good. To wrap up my historical inquiry, after the success of their republican Revolution, Americans embraced the idea that they were now the true torchbearers of the heritage of antiquity. Indeed, if the United States was now the ‘New Greece’, Philadelphians saw their city as the ‘Athens of America’. But in doing so, they blended the nostalgia for classical Greece with the liberal economics of Adam Smith. The temples of their new civic religion were banks, whose white marble columns and airy porticos in the Grecian style disrupted the republican simplicity and democratic uniformity of the city previously associated with the monotonous rows of brick façades. By symbolically embracing the early 19th century Greek fight for independence from the Ottoman Empire, Philadelphians helped to articulate also the doctrine of *American exceptionalism* based on the promotion and spread of republican ideals elsewhere.

My analysis of the historical metamorphosis of the public sphere starts with the original pan-Hellenic union of city-states, follows the clusters of free European urban communities of the High Middle Ages and the established Renaissance city-states, and ends at the time of the crystallization of modern nation-states.\(^{48}\) It covers almost 2,500 years of social development within the Western democratic world system, focusing on its leading cities with their changing forms of government. Yet despite such a variety of political configurations, Giddens argues that there are two fundamental tensions which are inherent to any historical social system based on the capitalist mode of production. He calls them basic *structural* and *existential* contradictions. As my research points out, their presence is clearly articulated within the arena of the public life, indeed in many cases is central to the very existence of the public sphere and as such becomes a

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\(^{48}\) Tilly points out that in 1500 there were some five hundred more or less independent political units in Europe. By 1900 they were reduced to twenty-odd strong, centrally organized states. In Charles Tilly, ed., *The Formation of National States in Western Europe* (Princeton, NJ, 1975), p. 24. With the exception of a few surviving absolutistic feudal states, today most of the countries declare themselves at least formally democratic - one can consequently analyze the quality of their democracies by the presence/absence of the ideal-typical public sphere.
convenient entry point to its examination. In the final analysis (Chapter 5), I dissect all historical-empirical findings of the study in order to illustrate the inner workings of such contradictions during different stages of the metamorphosis of the ancient ideal of the *agora*. In doing so, the focus is on changing strategies used by different leading cities and their societies in their attempts to confront and solve such contradictions. I argue that the strategies they used always reflected the basic structural tenets of a social system of the leading city which, at a given point in time, holds hegemonic power over the entire democratic world-system. Consequently, as the torch was passed from one leading city to the next, the normative ideal of *agora* necessarily evolved, becoming an eclectic amalgamation of philosophical ideas and social values which fully reflected such a complex process.

In pulling together all the strings of my historical research, I trace the role of evolving transportation/communication technologies and their place in the overall workings of the public sphere. I admit that as I follow the current work of some of my colleagues in the field of mass communications, I observe sometimes with amazement the overall tendency to divinize the power of the global electronic networks and wireless technologies as something which has the power to change human society forever by completely rupturing its ties with the past. I don’t share this enthusiasm. On the contrary, multiple examples of historical precedents of the deployment of new technologies covered in this study are more in support of the idea of long historical continuities than abrupt changes, and of the parallel co-existence of ‘old’ and ‘new’ technologies instead of instant displacements of the ‘old’ by the ‘new’. As this study clearly demonstrates, any new communication technology always has its own historical precedence and predecessors, and is subsequently embraced and implemented by a given society in a way which
corresponds with its clearly articulated social structural frameworks.\textsuperscript{49} Schement and Curtis emphasize this claim when they point out the fallacy of a traditional approach to new technologies which is in the presumption that it is the technology itself which requires the response of the society. Instead, they suggest, we should focus on society and ask what social values and goals are reflected in the ways it implements the new technology.\textsuperscript{50} Saying that, I am very skeptical of the idea of technological determinism - regardless of whether the case in point is the 15\textsuperscript{th} century introduction of book print or today’s virtual electronic networks. In an article titled "Historical Pragmatism and the Internet," James Carey, shortly before his death in 2006, admonished scholars that only “if we adequately place the various technologies of communication in a historical context - not just the history and ecology of technology but the wider world of politics, economics and culture - we may be able to state meaningful and useful (although contingent) generalizations.”\textsuperscript{51} I couldn’t wish for a better motto to launch my study.

\textsuperscript{49} In his essay "Technology and ideology: The case of the telegraph," Carey remarks that whilst the telegraph was a watershed in communication, it only built on previous frameworks and infrastructure, it “twisted and altered but did not displace patterns of connection.” In Carey, Communication as Culture: Essays on Media and Society (New York, 1989), p. 203.


\textsuperscript{51} James W. Carey, "Historical Pragmatism and the Internet," New Media & Society 7 (2005): p. 452. Carey wrote extensively on this topic. See James W. Carey and John J. Quirk, "The History of the Future," in Communications Technology and Social Policy: Understanding the New 'Cultural Revolution', ed. George Gerbner, Larry P. Gross, and William H. Melody (New York, 1973) or some of his best essays published in Carey, Communication as Culture: Essays on Media and Society. See also Schement and Curtis who claim that “any lessons from previous episodes involving the tug between private and public, such as the development of the postal service, the telegraph, the telephone, remain unexplored due to the impression that the recent debate entails an all new society brought about by revolutionary technologies. In reality, the exclusion of history from the controversy creates invalid theory and makes for nearsighted public policy.” In Schement and Curtis, Tendencies and Tensions of the Information Age: The Production and Distribution of Information in the United States p. 142.
Chapter 1 / A CRITIQUE OF HABERMAS’ GENESIS OF THE BOURGEOIS PUBLIC SPHERE

On the occasion of the first U.S. publication of The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere in 1989, Jürgen Habermas re-visited his work in a short essay titled ‘Further Reflections on the Public Sphere.’ He admitted shortcomings of his original thesis and problematic issues which were in the meantime raised by its critics, arguing in his defense that the original study emerged from the synthesis of multiple academic disciplines “whose number even at that time almost exceeded what one author could hope to master.” Habermas added that sociological generalization, based on weighing historical trends, empirical examples and raw statistical data pose a problem for someone who, unlike the historian, relies on the secondary literature. Yet he added that he had been put somewhat at ease by Geoff Eley’s friendly assessment who welcomed the U.S. translation of Habermas’ thesis in 1989 stating that “it is striking to see how securely and even imaginatively the argument is historically grounded, given the thinness of the literature at the time.”¹

In the context of post-WWII Germany and the revolutionary 1960s, Habermas’ ideas resonated mainly among young people who were influenced by his critique of the 20th century creation of the mass public. Downie attributes the fact that also some social historians in the beginning were embracing, even defending Habermas’ thesis to the idea that it offered a very palatable explanation accounting for the flourishing of the Enlightenment and for the fast spread of its ideas to wider audiences.² But ever since Eley’s ‘friendly assessment’, many other socio-historical studies had examined Habermas’ bold claims in various contexts and from the vantage points of different

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academic disciplines. Most of them expressed serious reservations with Habermas’ thesis simply for its conceptual and factual inaccuracies. Calhoun points out that the most important part of the book are its opening chapters in which Habermas “constitutes the historical category of the public sphere and attempts to draw from it a normative ideal.” But in order to do so, he had to soften its criteria and judged the 18th century by the optimistic-idealistic meter of Locke and Kant, while with the 19th century he applies the much harsher standards of Tocqueville and Marx, and its presence is seen through the story of a typical suburban television consumer. Examining the argument in relation to 18th century developments in England, Downie points out that while Habermas antedates some of the key economic and social trends and events, he at the same time postdates others. “As a consequence, the conclusion he reaches about the emergence and development of the bourgeois public sphere in Britain can be recognized as one driven by a thesis rather than one drawn from the available evidence.” Similarly Gestrich, working in the context of German history, claims that Habermas’ historical argument is constructed to fit the needs of his ex ante formulated political analysis. Yet, most of those who criticize Habermas at the same time admit that as an abstract social category, the public sphere is immensely fruitful in generating new research, analysis, and theory. Mah, among many other voices, calls for its further “rhetorical and

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3 See for example the critical essays authored by Craig Calhoun, Thomas McCarthy, Sheyla Benhabib, Nancy Fraser, Michael Schudson, Keith Michael Baker, Geoff Eley, Nicholas Garnham and others, published in Craig J. Calhoun, ed., *Habermas and the Public Sphere* (Cambridge, MA, 1992). See also Harold Mah, "Phantasies of the Public Sphere: Rethinking the Habermas of Historians," *The Journal of Modern History* 72 (2000); Downie, "How Useful to Eighteenth-Century English Studies is the Paradigm of the 'Bourgeois Public Sphere'?.", Andreas Gestrich, "The Public Sphere and the Habermas Debate," *German History* 24 (2006); James Van Horn Melton, Politics, Culture, and the Public Sphere in Enlightenment Europe (Cambridge University Press, 2001); James Van Horn Melton, ed., *Cultures of Communication from Reformation to Enlightenment: Constructing Publics in the Early Modern German Lands* (Aldershot, UK; Burlington, VT, 2002).
5 Ibid., p. 33.
6 Downie, "How Useful to Eighteenth-Century English Studies is the Paradigm of the 'Bourgeois Public Sphere'?," p. 2.
7 Gestrich, "The Public Sphere and the Habermas Debate," p. 415.
8 Calhoun, "Introduction: Habermas and the Public Sphere," p. 41.
conceptual unpacking,” because the concept itself is one that challenges rather than is subservient to our conventional forms of historical understanding of social evolution.⁹

Under the pressure the evidence presented by Habermas’ critiques one important question arises to the forefront: Did the ideal public sphere ever materialized in social reality? This chapter attempts to shed more light into this quest first by analyzing the democratic and philosophical tradition of the classical Greek city-state, from which Habermas drew the key historical-philosophical categories used in his analysis.¹⁰ In the second part, I confront the Habermasian version of the early history of modern European democracy with the theory of the Belgian revisionist historian Henri Pirenne. Pirenne claimed that the roots of the bourgeois public sphere should be searched for in the urban revival movement of the high Middle Ages.¹¹ As Gestrich noted, there is hardly any aspect of Habermas’ thesis which has not yet been questioned by the early modernists, however, “no convincing alternative to his master narrative has been found by historians, and many critics seem to be satisfied with the basic line of his argument.”¹² The goal of this chapter - as well as that of the entire work - is to advance our knowledge in this direction.

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⁹ Mah, “Phantasies of the Public Sphere: Rethinking the Habermas of Historians,” p. 154.
¹⁰ Jürgen Habermas, The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society, Thomas Burger trans. (Cambridge, MA, 1989).
I. The Heritage of Greek City-State Democracies

In their analysis of the genesis of modern democracies, social historians traditionally start with an excursion to classical Greece, focusing mainly on the era spanning c.500 to 323 BCE. This may be explained by the fact that the very identity of societies which trace their roots to European socio-cultural tradition were formed by the “process of comparison and contrast with an image of classical Greece, and every study of subsequent European culture, taking culture in its broadest sense, is a study of response to that cultural past.”

Greek democratic tradition gave birth to basic philosophical categories whose normative power - passed down partially through Roman republican authors - shaped civic society in the West since the late Middle Ages.

According to Habermas, in the fully developed Greek city-state the political sphere of the polis, which was common (koine) to all free adult male citizens, was strictly separated from the domestic sphere of oikos, where all economic activities related to mere physical survival took place. Under ideal circumstances, this division made it possible for the social and political interests emphasizing the common good of Greek polity to be separated by a relatively thick firewall from the private interest of personal material gain. “The reproduction of life, the labor of slaves, and the service of women went on under the aegis of the master’s domination; birth and death took place in the shadow; and the realm of necessity and transitoriness remained immersed in the obscurity of the private sphere,” argues Habermas.

Such analysis basically echoes earlier writings of Hannah Arendt who maintained that at the root of Greek political consciousness was an unequalled clarity in drawing the distinction between the private and public, economic and political interests of individual members of society. No

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14 Cf. Pirenne, *Economic and Social History of Medieval Europe*.
15 Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, p. 3.
activity that served only the purpose of physical reproduction was permitted to enter the political realm. And this was done “at the grave risk of abandoning trade and manufacture to the industriousness of slaves and foreigners, so that Athens indeed became the ‘pensionopolis’ with a ‘proletariat of consumers’ which Max Weber so vividly described.”


The Social Role of the Athenian Agora

The locale in which the democratic process of Greek civilization took place was, in the Western imagination, traditionally associated with the Athenian Agora (Figure 2.1.). Millett asserts that the idealized image of a face-to-face society, with everyone knowing everyone else and their business, was probably not appropriate for most of the important city-states whose civic bodies grew simply too big to sustain such a form of communication. But the Agora was an area within Athenian urban space where “the concentration of activities maximized the chances of making unplanned meetings.” And all this was happening under the auspices of the statue of Hermes - messenger of the gods and patron of exchange who was the symbolical patron-deity of the Agora.

The texts of ancient manuscripts reveal that Athens was a city dominated by information. According to Lewis, it was impossible for a person moving within such a milieu to avoid finding

17 The buildings where citizens and their magistrates met were much more monumental than Agora. Especially the *bouleuterion*, where the council of citizens met, and also the theatre, where assemblies of the people were held. See Mogens Herman Hansen, *Polis: An Introduction to the Ancient Greek City-State* (Oxford, UK; New York, 2006), p. 133.

Figure 2.1 The Agora in Athens at the peak of the classical era in the 5th century BCE.
things out. Demosthenes (384-322 BCE) reported that during the time of impending war with Phillip of Macedonia “all sorts of conferences and discussions” were going on in the Agora. During peacetime, any Athenian citizen who wanted to propose a legislative initiative was expected to inscribe the text of the new law and exhibit it in the Agora in front of the memorial to the Eponymous Heroes:

Whosoever proposes a new statute shall write it on a white board and exhibit it in front of the Heroes on every day until the meeting of the Assembly. On the eleventh day of the month Hecatombaeon the people shall elect from the whole body of citizens five persons to speak in defense of laws proposed for repeal before the Legislative Committee.

The Agora thus became an idealized space in the heart of the city where public life (bios politicos) was constituted in free discussion (lexis) among peer citizens. According to Habermas, all citizens who gathered there were expected to leave their private interest behind the doors of their oikos (a term from which, ironically, the modern term ‘economy’ derives), their exclusive preoccupation as public persons was supposed to be only the common interest of the polis.

Did the Agora really function this way? Empirical evidence points to a different direction. The picture painted by Weber, Arendt and Habermas could have very well been only a normative ideal passed down onto us mainly through writings of Plato (c. 424-348 BCE) and Aristotle (384-322 BCE). The reality of everyday life in Greek city-states was more complex. In Apology, Xenophon (c. 431-355 BCE) asked his teacher Socrates who the people were who accused him of corrupting Athenian youth: “The traffickers in the market-place [the Agora] who think of nothing but buying

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21 Demosthenes, Against Timocrates, 24.23. The quote is taken from Ibid. According to Lewis, the Agora wasn’t the only place where the citizen body publically discussed proposed legislation. Most decrees at Athens were published also on the Acropolis and in other states in religious temples some distance removed from the city proper. For more see Lewis, News and Society in the Greek Polis, pp. 130-36.
22 Cf. Habermas, The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society, p. 3.
cheap and selling dear? For these are the people who make up the Assembly.”

Herodotus (c. 485-425 BCE) quoted the Persian king Cyrus as saying on behalf of Greeks that he “never yet feared men who set apart a place in the middle of their city [i.e., the agora] where they perjure themselves and deceive each other.”

Both Xenophon’s and Herodotus’ testimony give reason to believe that public life in ancient Greece may have been contaminated by private interest to a much larger extent than the idealized image of the Agora would lead us to believe. There are several classical Greek authors who tend to support this claim. The plot of Aristophanes’ comedy Knights (424 BCE) revolves around the character Sausage-Seller who is being recruited by one of the Athenian political factions to be its champion in the next Senate elections. What does he need for political success? “Nothing simpler. Continue your trade. Mix and knead together all the state business as you do for your sausages.” During the play, the character Sausage-Seller discloses also his real name - Agorakritos - which could ambiguously mean ‘the one elected in the assembly’, as well as ‘the one who sells in the Agora’. In the course of the climactic finale, Sausage-Seller wins the election by distracting the popular assembly with news about cheap anchovies being sold in the Agora. And he hands out to his electors free coriander and leek as seasonings to make the bargain more palatable. “It was marvelous!” the Sausage-Seller exalts. “They loaded me with praises and caresses; thus I conquered the Senate with an obol's worth of leeks, and here I am.”

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24 Herodotus, The Histories, 1.153.1-2. The quote is taken from Herodotus, Herodotus, A. D. Godley trans., 4 vols. (Cambridge, MA, 1920). Xenophon, who as a soldier visited Persia personally, explained in his Cyropaedia, 1.2.3-4, that Persian cities don’t have an ‘agora’ in the sense of the marketplace. Instead, they had a so-called ‘free square’ where the royal palace and other government buildings were located. “The hucksters with their wares, their cries, and their vulgarities are excluded from this and relegated to another part of the city, in order that their tumult may not intrude upon the orderly life of the cultured.” The quote is taken from Xenophon, Xenophon in Seven Volumes, vols. 5-6.

The Welfare State and Greek Democracy

Aristophanes’ fictional satires had with great certainty their inspiration in a series of real events which further emphasized the impossibility of separating the private interests of the Athenian household heads (οικοδεσπότες) from their public role as citizens. In his Third Philippic Oration, Demosthenes warned Greek city-states that their citizens, being obsessed with personal gain, don’t see the increasing danger of an expansive neighbor Philipp, ‘the knave from Macedonia’. He accused Philipp of undermining Pan-Hellenic solidarity by bribing some key public figures who in turn can persuade the masses. In the old days, Demosthenes nostalgically recalls, the voice of a proud free Greek citizen could have not be bought at a price from our politicians and generals. “Now, however, all these things have been sold in open market (άγορα), and in place of them we have imported vices which have infected Greece with a mortal sickness.”

The votes of impoverished Greek citizens were often bought cheaply by those better off who had political ambitions. Demosthenes himself admitted that his family is “at the present time involved in a misfortune so great that” that it forced his widow mother to sell ribbons at the market and thus they don’t “live in the manner we could wish.” In 399 BCE Lysias publicly denounced the Athenian oligarchic party for profiting from the fact that the population was in desperate straits due to the war with Sparta. He urged them not to adopt populist policies which would have, in the long run, hurt the interest of the State and undermined democracy. The activities which were connected with the physical survival of Greek citizens and their families were thus brought into the

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26 Demosthenes, Third Philippic Oration, 9.38-39. Similarly in his oration Against Phormio, 34.1, Demosthenes implied the corruptibility of the trial jury, accusing its members that as “long as we have been frequenting your mart, and many as are the merchants to whom we have made loans, we have never until now appeared in any suit before you either as plaintiffs or as defendants.” All quotes are taken from Demosthenes, The Orations.

27 Demosthenes, Against Eubulides, 57.31-33. The quote is taken from Ibid. Cf. Millett, "Encounters in the Agora," p. 223.

arena of public sphere of the *polis*, where they were allowed to significantly influence public policies.\(^{29}\) Similarly, some thirty years later, Xenophon challenged the leading politicians of Athens for their populism, which they rationalized by arguing that “owing to the poverty of the masses,” they were forced “to be somewhat unjust” in their treatment of their allies.\(^{30}\)

**The Emphasis on Republican Virtues**

Social programs driven by populism were the main reason why Aristotle insisted that “no citizen should be ill supplied with means of subsistence” in order to avoid that his actions (*praxis*) in the public sphere were not being influenced by material need. As he put it, citizens must not have lived a mechanic or a mercantile life (*agoraios bios*) because such occupations were “ignoble and inimical to virtue.”\(^{31}\) According to the philosopher, agriculture was the most honest of all such occupations because the wealth it brings is not derived from other men. “Herein it is distinguished from trade and the wage-earning employments, which acquire wealth from others by their consent; and from war, which wrings it from them perforce.”\(^{32}\) This was the main reason why Aristotle claimed that it was necessary for the owners of the land to employ “slaves or serfs of alien race” as the tillers who carry out the actual manual work on the soil.\(^{33}\) Such arguments are only a further elaboration on Plato, who in *Republic* promoted the strict separation of classes. His system of checks and balances in the state was based on the division of power between merchants, politicians


\(^{30}\) Xenophon, “Ways and Means,” *Minor Works*, 3.1. The author further claimed that this sets him “thinking whether by any means the citizens might obtain food entirely from their own soil, which would certainly be the fairest way. I felt that, were this so, they would be relieved of their poverty, and also of the suspicion with which they are regarded by the Greek world.” Yet instead of expensive governmental social programs, Xenophon suggested as a solution the modern concept of a PR campaign and a series of economic incentives which would attract foreign merchants. “The rise in the number of residents and visitors would of course lead to a corresponding expansion of our imports and exports, of sales, rents and customs” (ibid.). All quotes are taken from Xenophon, *Xenophon in Seven Volumes*.


\(^{32}\) Aristotle, *Economy*, 1343a. In *Politics*, 6.1719a, Aristotle added: “After the agricultural community the best kind of democracy is where the people are herdsmen and get their living from cattle.” Both quotes are taken from Ibid.

\(^{33}\) Aristotle, *Politics*, 3.1328b-3.1330a. The quote is taken from Ibid.
and military “I said, that there are three distinct classes,” argued Plato, “any meddling of one with another, or the change of one into another, is the greatest harm to the State, and may be most justly termed evil-doing.”

The Aristotelian ethos was later echoed in philosophy of the U.S. founding fathers and reflected both in Franklin’s Protestant frugality as well as in Jeffersonian republican ideal based on a society of gentleman farmers. According to Millett, the promotion of frugality as a virtue in Athens could be illustrated on the fact that the houses owned by wealthy citizens were modest and relatively undifferentiated by decoration and location. Even a purchase of an unusually expensive fish on Athenian market might have resulted in unfavorable, if jocular, comment. In *Laws*, Plato envisioned a society which was self-sufficient, yet not over-producing in order to prevent the accumulation of wealth in merchant hands. “For by filling the markets of the city with foreign merchandise and retail trading, and breeding in men’s souls knavish and tricky ways, it renders the city faithless and loveless.” Aristotle touched also upon the future Jeffersonian dream of an agricultural democracy stating that “where it also happens that the lie of the land is such that the country is widely separated from the city, it is easy to establish a good democracy and also a good constitutional government, for the multitude is forced to live at a distance on the farms.”

**Aristotle’s Two Agoras**

In his seminal work *Recherches sur l’agora grecque* (1951), French historian Roland Martin pointed out that the pre-Aristotelian Greek literary sources from the 6th and 5th century BCE never mention the agora in the context of buying and selling. From this claim, Martin draws the

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conclusion that the intrusion of commerce in late fifth and fourth centuries - corresponding with the lives of Plato and Aristotle - was a sign of the deterioration not only of the social role of the agora, but implicitly also of the Greek democracy. This concept, dominant among historians in the second half of the 20th century, had been recently problematized by some scholars of the Greek classical era who claim that the agora contained a market function from the very beginning and Aristotelian relentless attempts to remove the political sphere from the marketplace should, at the contrary, be interpreted as a sign of the climax of Athenian democracy.

It is important that both above-mentioned concepts - in striking contrast to Habermas’ static model - present the public space of Greek city-states as a dynamic organism which reflected a dialectic tension between private and public interests, personal financial gain on one hand and common good on the other. The Greek agora, analyzed from this vantage point, suddenly becomes an open arena where two essential processes - commodification and democratization - incessantly competed for the privilege to hold the upper hand in setting social agenda in the Greek poleis.

Trying to find a solution to this fundamental contradiction inherent to the classical Greek polis, Plato in Laws envisioned an ideal city in which the political process would be completely removed from the commercialized agora and take place elsewhere. Popular assemblies were to be held in religious sanctuaries and magistrates should have been elected in religious temples. Any commercial interaction should at the same time have been entirely removed from the polis proper and strictly regulated. In Politics, Aristotle expressed a similar idea, suggesting that an ideal city should have two complementary agorai. “An agora of the kind customary in Thessaly which they

39 Millett among others claims that what Martin “reads as signs of decadence in Athens I would interpret as an integral part of political process. Specifically, the blending of buying and selling with other Agora activities created a distinctively ‘democratic space’. In Millett, "Encounters in the Agora," p. 219.
40 Such suggestions are indirectly made in Plato, Laws, 738d and 848d. See Plato, "Plato."
call a ‘free agora’ (*agora eleuthera*), that is, one which has to be kept clear of all merchandise and into which no artisan or farmer or any other such person may intrude unless summoned by the magistrates.” 41 Elsewhere, Aristotle added that at Thebes there was a law that no one who had not kept out of trade for the last ten years might have been be admitted to public office. 42 The second agora, designated purely for commercial activities, Aristotle labeled as the ‘necessary agora’ (*anagkaia agora*), explaining that “for we assign the upper agora as the place in which to spend leisure [and implicitly, to discuss public affairs], and this one for necessary business”. 43 If implemented, this arrangement could have indeed led to the creation of an ideal public space in the heart of the Greek city-state.

**The Issues of Gender and Class in Classical Athens**

Habermas was often criticized for his omission in not including into his analysis also the existence of alternative public spheres – *counterpublics*, based on class, gender, ethnicity and/or sexual orientation. 44 Hansen points out that Aristotle’s insistence that only *politai*, defined as adult male citizens, excluding women, children, slaves and free non-citizens, were the full members of the *polis*, clearly demonstrates that *polis* in its political sense was kept apart from the social and physical polis in urban sense. 45 Such assessment draws its strength from the image painted by Xenophon’s *Economics* (*Oikonomikos*), his famous treatise on an ideal household, in which the author lectures a husband about his wife’s position in the house. “I showed her the women’s

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44 According to Fraser the problem is not only that Habermas idealizes the liberal public sphere but also that he fails to examine other, non-liberal, non-bourgeois, competing public spheres. She adds that “there were competing publics from the start, not just in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries, as Habermas implies.” In Nancy Fraser, “Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy,” in Habermas and the Public Sphere, ed. Craig J. Calhoun (Cambridge, MA, 1992), pp. 116-115. Warner uses the term ‘counterpublics’ to identify such non-hegemonic constituencies of the dominant bourgeois public sphere. See Michael Warner, *Publics and Counterpublics* (Cambridge, MA, 2002).
45 Hansen, *Polis: An Introduction to the Ancient Greek City-State*, p. 110.
quarters too, separated by a bolted door from the men’s, so that nothing which ought not to be moved may be taken out, and that the servants may not breed without our leave,” says proudly the newlywed husband to his teacher.46

Historians generally agree that the Greek household was characterized by a very high level of privacy - especially in comparison with the Roman house which never closed its doors,47 But there is also enough historical evidence to support the claim that neither the Greek oikos was completely sealed from public life. Xenophon’s husband represents only the normative ideal. The way he organizes his household did not fully corresponded with the social praxis of everyday life in Athens. Indeed, both gender and class were able to transcend the thick walls and bolted gates of Xenophon’s household.48 Aristophanes’ Lysistrata (411 BCE), who lead a nonconformist Pan-Hellenic female protest against the fratricide war between Athens and Sparta, may be dismissed as an extreme case of the rising female political self-consciousness in classical Greece. Yet, according to Lewis, a society which seeks both to keep women in a separate sphere, and at the same time to police their activities, must rely on other women to ‘police’ the behavior of their friends and neighbors who don’t conform. “The female role was thus a dual one: as wives and daughters they had a duty to prevent potentially harmful information from leaving the oikos; as

46 Xenophon, Economics, 9.5. The quote is taken from Xenophon, Xenophon in Seven Volumes, vol. 4.
47 According to Millett the outer and inner doors of the classical Athenian house “remained firmly shut against the wider world of the city.” In Millett, “Encounters in the Agora,” p. 207. Andrew Wallace-Hadrill claims that “the way the Roman house invites the viewer from the front door, unparalleled in the Greek world, flows from the patronial rituals so often described in the Roman sources.” In Andrew Wallace-Hadrill, Patronage in Ancient Society, Leicester-Nottingham studies in Ancient Society (London; New York, 1989), p. 64. Demosthenes in the oration Against Timotheus, 47.60, recalls that when his own house was pillaged by thieves his neighbors “did not enter the house (for he thought he ought not to do so in the absence of the master)”. The quote is taken from Demosthenes, The Orations.
48 Hansen, representing the voice of classical Greek scholars, fully supports Habermas’ concept stating: “As a political organization the polis was controlled by the adult male citizens, who isolated themselves from the rest of population when they discussed and made decisions about how the polis should be governed.” In Hansen, Polis: An Introduction to the Ancient Greek City-State, p. 145. Yet modern scholarship influenced by feminist contributions categorically parts with this position. Cohen explains that “[i]n focusing on the status of women, as well as related questions like seclusion, classical scholars have perhaps often fallen prey to the same trap, failing to distinguish between ideology and (sometimes conflicting) normative ideals on the one hand, and social practices on the other. Too often normative ideals are taken as objective structures which determine behavior.” In David Cohen, Law, Sexuality, and Society: The Enforcement of Morals in Classical Athens (Cambridge, 1991), pp. 136-137. For more see also Lewis, News and Society in the Greek Polis.
neighbors and fellow-citizens they needed to circulate information about others in order to impose collective moral standards."

An absolute separation of public life from the private sphere of the *oikos* was hard to achieve because of the simple fact that this would contradict the ideal of living one’s life in public. In a society which did not have any personal documentation, only the word of others could have attested to identity or right to citizenship. According to Demosthenes, every single citizen of Athens frequented the Agora “on some business (you may be sure), either public or private”. Saying that, the author implied that his rival Aristogeiton must have been leading a suspicious life because he “cannot point to any decent or honorable business in which he has spent his life… never calls at the barber's or the perfumer's or any other shop in the city.” ‘Private’ and ‘public’ were only relative terms in ancient Athens. Even Xenophon in *Oikonomikos* admitted that it was the urban space of Agora which became the most obvious melting pot where male citizens would necessarily have to deal not only with one another but also with women, slaves, and foreigners. David Cohen adds that a symposium taking place within the house which was seen as ‘private’ by its male participants in relation to their usual ‘public’ conversations in the Agora, must have seemed very ‘public’ to the women who spent most of their day in the ‘privacy’ of the household. Similarly, servants and slaves, the lowest class on Athenian social ladder, were not completely isolated. Xanthias, one of the main characters of Aristophanes’ comedy *Frogs* (405

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49 Lewis, News and Society in the Greek Polis, p. 12.
50 For more see Ibid.
51 Demosthenes, Against Aristogeiton I, 21.51-52. The quote is taken from Demosthenes, The Orations.
52 Xenophon, Economics, 8.22. The quote is taken from Xenophon, Xenophon in Seven Volumes. Vol. 4. See also Millett, "Encounters in the Agora," p. 220. There were three basic groups of inhabitants of Greek city-states which did not enjoy the full status as citizens and thus were a priori excluded from the official political process in the form of legislative and electoral powers. Yet resident foreigners (metics) were part of the community of artisans and shopkeepers among whom the public discussion took place; women had an important role to play in the dissemination of information, especially local news; and slaves were the ones who were the most marginalized in the community. See Lewis, News and Society in the Greek Polis.
53 Cf. Cohen, Law, Sexuality, and Society: The Enforcement of Morals in Classical Athens, p. 74. In Politics, Aristotle mentions the Syracusean dictator Hiero, who used female spies to suppress opposition: “to have spies like the women called ‘provocatrices’ at Syracuse and the ‘sharp-ears’ that used to be sent out by Hiero wherever there was any gathering or conference.” In Aristotle, Politics. 1313b15.
BCE), brags on stage that he “stains his paints” by the mere thought that he could be 
“eavesdropping on the masters when they gossip” in order to go “blabbing it all to outsiders.”

Slaves were indispensable for the functioning of the Greek household-based economy and they 
were almost omnipresent, even if their owners often did not acknowledge their physical presence 
and human agency. Yet, according to Giddens, power relations are always two-way, “however 
subordinate an actor may be in social relationship, the very fact of involvement in that relationship 
gives him or her a certain amount of power over the other.” What can better illustrate the power 
of the ‘powerless’ than the historian’s suggestion that Spartan armies were forced to make 
unpredictable maneuvers each night to cover up the exact locations of single units and thus prevent 
betrayal by helots, the enslaved Greeks from neighboring cities?

The Size of an Ideal Polity

Classical Greek authors expressed very clearly the idea that there are natural physical limits to 
the size of a democracy. In Republic, Plato claimed that the ideal polis should have about thousand 
citizens. The ideal colony of Magnesia discussed in his Laws was conceived as having 5,040 
households. In any case there is a clear quest for demographic regulation, in order to “keep the 
number of the citizens as nearly as may be the same, taking into account wars and diseases and all

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54 Aristophanes, "Frogs," (Boston, 2007), lines 738-752. There are minimal historical sources which fully capture the social position of a Greek slave. Yet, as Johnson shows in his study of a slave market in the Antebellum U.S., the power relationship between a slave and his master was much more nuanced than usually thought. Many slaves were able to exercise a very subtle power over their masters. For more see Walter Johnson, Soul by Soul: Life Inside the Antebellum Slave Market (Cambridge, MA, 1999).


56 Lewis, News and Society in the Greek Polis, pp. 19-20.

57 Plato, Republic, 4.423a. The quote is from Plato, "Plato."

58 Plato, Laws, 5.737e-5.738a. The quote is from ibid. Hansen adds that the figure given as an ideal in other original Greek sources is even significantly larger, namely 10,000 citizens. "The figure 10,000 is in Greek mirioi, and various sources say that a myriandros polis, i.e. one of 10,000 men, is the ideal size. That figure is first given in the ideal constitution written by Hippodamus of Miletos in the fifth century BC... in the constitution of Kyrene of c.322 BC the number of citizens is fixed at 10,000 men, all haven a property of more than 2,000 drachmas." In Hansen, Polis: An Introduction to the Ancient Greek City-State, p. 108.
such considerations, and that, so far as possible, our city may not grow too great or too small."\(^{59}\)

Plato in *Republic* presented a rational plan to achieve this goal, commensurable with Malthusian ideas or outright eugenics.\(^{60}\)

Taking into consideration the fact that both Plato and Aristotle - as opposed to Xenophon - were eager to limit foreign trade and imports, we can assume that one of the main limiting factors of city-state growth was the scarcity of food.\(^{61}\) Adam Smith claimed that when the people in any one of the Greek city-states “multiplied beyond what that territory could easily maintain, a part of them were sent in quest of a new habitation in some remote and distant part of the world.”\(^{62}\) Indeed, at its peak, Greek civilization counted about 1,035 *poleis* dispersed all around the Mediterranean basin, out of which 408 were colonies founded in the archaic and classical periods or Hellenized communities in the colonial regions.\(^{63}\) Yet, it is not easy to theorize what exactly led Greek city-states to imitate in their process of growth the logic of cells, which multiply by perpetually dividing. In his analysis of the texts of founding documents of Greek colonies, A. J. Graham comes to the conclusion that the reasons for their establishment widely varied. Sometimes, it was famine which led the mother city to draw a compulsory lottery and send a certain number of its own citizens abroad, under strict no-return policies for a period of several years. Other times, two city-states joined common forces in founding a new colony. There are cases when the colony was established with clear strategic intent to gain military or commercial advantage.\(^{64}\)

\(^{59}\) Plato, *Republic*, 460a. The quote is from Plato, "Plato."

\(^{60}\) Plato, *Republic*, 374d-375b.

\(^{61}\) Plato, *Laws*, 705a-b. The author claims that a state should be self-sufficient yet no-overproducing to avoid corrupting influence of foreign trade. “For by filling the markets of the city with foreign merchandise and retail trading, and breeding in men's souls knavish and tricky ways, it renders the city faithless and loveless.” If state was too productive “and supplied many exports, it would be flooded in return with gold and silver money - the one condition of all, perhaps, that is most fatal, in a state, to the acquisition of noble and just habits of life.” The quote is from Ibid.


\(^{63}\) Hansen, *Polis: An Introduction to the Ancient Greek City-State*. 4n, p. 151. The author adds that it is “striking that there is not a single source of the classical period that talks of a new polis arising naturally (p. 51).”

\(^{64}\) A. J. Graham, *Colony and Mother City in Ancient Greece* (Manchester, UK, 1964).
While none of the foundation decrees explicitly stated that a new colony was founded with the explicit goal to keep a limit on the number of citizens and thus protect the face-to-face community of the *polis*, this thesis became widely spread in the literature of 20th century. Hannah Arendt claims that the Greeks were aware of the fact that a polity relying on the process of common deliberation and action can survive only if the number of citizens remained restricted. “Large numbers of people, crowded together, develop an almost irresistible inclination towards despotism, be this the despotism of a person or of a majority rule,” claimed Arendt.65 James Carey offers an even bolder assessment, claiming that the numerical limit imposed by Plato was a direct expression of a democratic desire for universal participation.66

Again, the main evidence we have to support the ‘democratic imperative’ which lead Greek colonization policies, refers to the normative writings of Plato and Aristotle. According to Plato, to limit the size of polity was important so that “the people may fraternize with one another at the sacrifices and gain knowledge and intimacy, since nothing is of more benefit to the State than this mutual acquaintance.”67 Aristotle saw Plato’s ideal number of 5,040 citizens for Magnesia as too high, arguing “that a territory as large as that of Babylon will be needed… to support five thousand men in idleness and another swarm of women and servants around them many times as numerous.” He further elaborates this claim when he argues that “in order to decide questions of justice and in order to distribute the offices according to merit it is necessary for the citizens to know each other's personal characters,” since haphazard decision in this matter “must obviously prevail in an excessively numerous community.”68

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65 Arendt, The Human Condition, p. 43.
Partial Conclusions

The empirical evidence gathered above suggests that Habermas and implicitly also Arendt and Weber made two erroneous assumptions when analyzing the public sphere of ancient Greek city-states, especially Athens. First, they confused the normative ideal expressed chiefly in the writings of Plato and Aristotle with social reality. Secondly, they did not conceptualize democracy as a dynamic process; instead they approached it as a Durkheimian social fact. As a result, they obtained an idealized and static image of a Greek polis where each single member of a given class and/or gender dutifully performed the role assigned by society without ever challenging the social status quo. Instead, the analysis of more mundanely oriented ancient texts points to the conclusion that the constitution of the public sphere of Greek poleis was in many aspects probably very close to our own, contemporary experience with democracy. It is very telling that the Greek word agora came to signify in ancient texts both the place where public opinion should be formed in a deliberation of citizens freed from their private interests, as well as the commercial marketplace. In the Athens of the classical era, the self-proclaimed poster child of Greek democracy, the Aristotelian demand of putting a firewall between the free agora (agora eleuthera) and the necessary agora (anagkaia agora), was never fully implemented.

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69 Durkheim’s analysis was based on the assumption of social facts - a fixed system of social structures such as legal or moral rules, popular sayings which “exist permanently...and constitute a fixed object, a constant standard which is always at hand for the observer, and which leaves no room for subjective impressions or personal observations.” In Émile Durkheim, The rules of sociological method (New York, 1895/1964), p. 82.

70 Cf. Millett, "Encounters in the Agora."
II. Medieval Urban Revival - The Blind Spot of Habermas' Inquiry

Jürgen Habermas positioned the birth of the bourgeois public sphere and the rise of public opinion in Western Europe in the mid-17th and -18th centuries. Why? Because he simply misinterpreted the internal social dynamics of feudal society by putting too much emphasis on dominant relationships between feudal landlords and their vassals. To his credit, Habermas did recognize the power of nascent vibrant urban communities which started popping up all over Europe in the high Middle Ages as of the late 11th century, but at the same time he decided to downplayed their historical significance concluding that the political order remained unthreatened by the new process of urban revival which had no place in the existing feudal framework.

Why did Habermas take this approach? It is not always easy to trace the intellectual sources which guided his analysis, yet the bibliography of his works related to the feudal period reveal mostly seminal texts which sprang up from the Franco-German intellectual tradition of sociology, history and political economy. Aside from names like Max Weber or Werner Sombart, the approach mastered by the French co-founder of the Annales school of historiography, Marc Bloch, and the Belgian social historian, Henri Pirenne - two prominent voices of the first half of the 20th century - in their fusion of sociology and historiography, are closely reminiscent of the style adopted by Habermas in writing The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere.

Marc Bloch’s seminal work, Feudal Society, with its emphasis on the feudal relationship between the vassal and the landlord, seems to be the closest to Habermas’ own understanding of

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71 Habermas claims that there is “no indication European society of the high middle ages possessed a public sphere as a unique realm distinct from the private sphere.” Princes and the estates represented their power ‘before’ the people, instead of for the people. In Jürgen Habermas, “The Public Sphere,” in Communication and Class Struggle, ed. Armand Mattelart and Seth Siegelaub (New York; Bagnolet, France, 1980), pp. 198-99.

72 Habermas, The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere, p. 15.

73 For more on Annales school see Susan W. Friedman, Marc Bloch, Sociology and Geography (Cambridge, UK, 1996).
the medieval world. Telling is the fact that in a thick 450-page seminal monograph on feudalism, Bloch dedicated a mere three pages to the analysis of the nascent urban culture. Yet contrary to Bloch, the early 20th century Belgian historian Henri Pirenne popularized the idea that it was the urban revival of the high medieval period which laid foundations of the modern Western democracy. His early work, *Belgian Democracy: Its Early History* (1915), explicitly attributed the birth of modern Western civil society to the communal urban movements taking place roughly between the 11th to 13th centuries. The author concludes that they laid ground to the ensuing Renaissance which further nourished the historical democratic process.

Pirenne later extended his urban thesis on the entire European continent and presented it in his work *Economic and Social History of Medieval Europe* (1933). He claims that in the course of the 10th century, as a result of foreign invasions of the post-Carolingian era, Western Europe became covered with fortified castles, erected by the feudal princes to serve as the shelter for their families and entourages. They were called *burgs* and together with the surviving Roman towns - now depopulated and used mainly as fortified seats of bishops - lived from agriculture. Neither feudal *burgs*, nor episcopal *towns*, had any real economic life of their own. As such, they were perfectly compatible with a civilization based on feudal social hierarchy and land ownership.

With the revival of long-distance trade between the 10th and 12th century, groups of itinerant merchants found it advantageous for their own security to settle in the vicinity of such fortified

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75 Friedman, in her study of Bloch's intellectual legacy, points out that this was partially caused by rigid restrictions imposed by his publisher which intentionally emphasized the social tie between a vassal and his lord. From his personal correspondence it is clear that at one stage "Bloch intended to deal with such questions as the bourgeoisie and the clergy [which ruled the Episcopal cities] but later abandoned this idea in an effort to shorten his massive manuscript." But such a decision could also signal the fact that Bloch simply did not see very clearly "the very curve of the institution [of feudal society]" which was represented by the nascent urban culture. Because, as Friedman argues, "his picture remained more schematic than demanded by these [publisher's] restrictions, as he paid little attention to such contradictory elements as the growth of the bourgeoisie as a social class." For more see Friedman, *Marc Bloch, Sociology and Geography*, pp. 156-157, n28.
places. Pirenne claims that the actions of such groups were already guided by the ‘capitalistic spirit’ (*spiritus capitalisticus*) - the pursuit of profit based on the rational calculation triumphed over the feudal quest for simple reproduction of life and mere survival.\(^7\) Relying mainly on Reginald of Durham’s manuscript about the life of St. Godric of Finchale (c. 1065-1170) - a rebellious peasant boy who escaped serfdom in order to start a successful merchant career, only to give away all his wealth and serve God later in life - Pirenne demonstrates that merchants were forced for their own security to travel in groups and were bound by close solidarity which animated the whole group.\(^8\) Such spirit was later reflected in their communal oath, a distinguishing feature which was consequently translated into the constitutions of their own early settlements.\(^9\) As merchant colonies grew in size, their inhabitants eventually erected their own protective walls and gradually incorporated also the original feudal burgs around which they were built. This, according to Pirenne, explains the 11\(^{th}\) century French origins of the term *bourgeois*. It was given to people who “were driven to settle outside the walls and to build beside the burg a new burg, or, to use the term which exactly describes it, a *fauburg* (*forisburgus*).”\(^8\) In 1127, quite ironically from the perspective of modern reader, Galbert of Bruges labeled such merchant

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\(^8\) Pirenne, *Medieval Cities: Their Origins and the Revival of Trade*, pp. 84-85.

\(^9\) Bloch states that it was one act of outstanding significance which generally marked the entry on the scene of the new urban community - the communal oath of the burgesses. “Hitherto they had been only isolated individuals: henceforth they had a collective being. It was the sworn association thus created which in France was given the literal name of *commune*.” Bloch, *Feudal Society*, p. 354.

\(^8\) Pirenne, *Economic and Social History of Medieval Europe*, p. 42. See also Pirenne, *Medieval Cities: Their Origins and the Revival of Trade*, p. 107. Bloch claims that “none of the languages spoken in feudal Europe possessed terms which allowed a clear distinction to be made between the town and the village. *Ville*, town, *Stadt* applied differently to both types of community. *Burg* designated any fortified area. *Cité* was reserved for diocesan centres of, by extension, to some centres of exceptional importance. On the other hand, as early as the eleventh century the name *bourgeois* - burgess - French by origin, but quickly adopted to international usage, was employed in unequivocal opposition to the words knight, cleric, *vilain*.” In Bloch, *Feudal Society*, p. 353.
settlement *suburbanum* and its inhabitants called citizens (*cives*), burghers (*burgenses*), or tellingly *
*suburbani* - the residents of suburbia.82

A mediaeval German proverb tellingly claimed that urban air makes man free within a year and a day - *Stadtluft macht frei nach Jahr und Tag*. It captured the idea that cities of the high Middle Ages must have resembled to many contemporaries small islands of personal freedom in the ocean of the feudal world dominated by vassal relationships.83 Because serfdom, even in the feudal era, was not to be presumed, it had to be proven, according to Pirenne. Every serf who had lived for a year and a day within the city limits earned his freedom. After that period, the statute of limitations abolished all rights which his former lord exercised over his person and his belongings. “Birth meant little… Burgher and freeman had become synonymous terms.”84

At the same time as the *new burg* was absorbing into its structure the old one, it was expanding also outwards. Bloch called the early medieval cities ‘a foreign body in feudal society’.85 Pirenne emphasized the fact that the early towns - while making enormous profits on long-distance trade with easy-to-carry luxury merchandise like silk and spices - were profiting from the local feudal production of cheap everyday commodities. He sees here the roots of the ‘sacred egoism’ which was later translated into imperial policies of nation-states. For the burghers, the country population existed only to be exploited:

The peasants who dwelt round about them did not seem to them to be compatriots at all. The one thought was to exploit them profitably… the city of the Middle Ages, as it existed in the twelfth century, was a commercial and industrial commune living in a shelter of a fortified enclosure and enjoying a law, administration and a jurisprudence of exception which made of it a collective, privileged personality.86

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86 The quote is from Pirenne, *Medieval Cities: Their Origins and the Revival of Trade*, pp. 150-151. See also Pirenne, *Economic and Social History of Medieval Europe*, pp. 26-27. Pirenne was a Belgian citizen and his life overlaps with the life and
This quiet commercial and, at the same time, democratic revolution started originally in the two inland seas - the Mediterranean and the North Sea plus the Baltic - presenting by the end of the 11th century a spectacle which was in striking contrast with the agricultural economy of the Continent. 87 Yet, as Pirenne explains, the spirit of mercantile capitalism “is by nature so all-pervasive that it necessary imposes itself on the very people whom it exploits.” 88 As a result “democracy in the Middle Ages, as in modern times, got its start under the guidance of a select few who foisted their program upon confused aspirations of the people.” 89

**Pirenne’s Challenge to Habermas’ Thesis**

Similar to Habermas’ theory of public sphere, Pirennes’ concept of medieval cities and their role in the revival of western democracy sparked in ensuing years a wave of critique from many different academic disciplines. More importantly, it triggered many new strains of socio-historical research aimed at exploring empirical evidence which would support, or refute Pirenne’s bold hypothesis. As Fernand Braudel observed, a broad sociological model is like a ship: first built on land, only then launched on water. “Will it float? Can it sail? If it is seaworthy, perhaps its analytic cargo will be valid too.” 90

The claim that the cities were founded exclusively by colonies of itinerant merchants had been gradually undermined and blurred. In the case of the early Italian cities, historians point out the fact that there were also many smaller, local feudal landlords who very early on settled within urban communities, often embracing commerce themselves. 91 Vice versa, at the same time

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87 Pirenne, Economic and Social History of Medieval Europe, pp. 10-20.
89 Ibid, p. 172.
91 Lopez and Irving illustrate this claim by publishing the entire post-mortem inventory of assets of a higher Genovese nobleman from 1240. In Robert S. Lopez and Irving W. Raymond, Medieval Trade in the Mediterranean World: Illustrative
members of the new-born urban merchant bourgeoisie started to imitate feudal lords by investing in rural properties and building their little villas outside the walls of their cities. Chronicler Giovanni Villani tells us that there was no citizen in the 1330s’ Florence, whether popolano or grande, who “had not built or was not building in the country a large and rich estate with a very costly mansion and with many buildings, much better than those in the city - and in this they all were committing sin, and they were called crazy on accord of their wild expenses.”

Historical documents reveal an enormous variety of attitudes and relational arrangements between early bourgeois of the cities and the existing feudal power. French chivalric ballads typically extol feudal virtues while being contemptuous of burgers and merchants. Some of the medieval knights saw in the city an image of a mysterious woman which needed to be conquered. On the other hand, Galbert of Bruges in the early 12th century mentions a citizen who had married a sister of certain knight. Indeed, arranged marriages between impoverished noble women and merchants were advantageous to both sides - they replenished money in the treasuries of impoverished feudal lords, and at the same time, the noble title had an enormous advantage of a tax-free status for wealthy merchants. In the second and third generation, the nouveau riches


96 Merchants were pragmatic people. They did not seek noble status per sé, but only insofar as it granted them some rational advantage. Pirenne points out the case of Arras where merchants tried to have themselves classed as serfs of the Monastery of St. Vaast in order to enjoy the exemption from the market-tolls which had been accorded to the latter. In Pirenne, Medieval Cities: Their Origins and the Revival of Trade, p. 123. Bloch confirms this claim stating that “if he [merchant] became rich he acquired rural manors in his turn. But for the burgess the activities which thus seemed to approximate him to other classes were only secondary and, most often, the survivals, as it were, of former modes of existence which he had gradually discarded.” In Bloch, Feudal Society, p. 353.
inevitably tried to move upwards into the feudal elites. Many abandoned the risky trade of their fathers and started much more secure careers of royal lawyers or bankers.  

Taking into account the interconnectedness of the medieval burgs with their hinterlands, Hohenberg and Lees refuse the image of early modern cities as ‘foreign elements’ in the feudal body and instead argue that it is not possible to study urban histories separately from the histories of the economic, social and political systems of which they are part. Many medieval cities profited especially from the late 11th century Investiture Controversy between the Empire and Papacy, during which the Holy Roman Emperors often found it convenient to buy support of cities against the Church. Many lay princes soon discovered how advantageous the growth of urban communes was to their tax revenues. During the 12th and 13th centuries, after the urban societies already definitively proved their economic viability, we see many new cities mainly in the frontier regions of Europe being established directly by royal decrees, following basically the same logic which guides modern states to establish free economic zones. A chronicler, describing the 1255 foundation of Madrid by Alfonso X, states that the king ordered the construction of the roads and

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97 Braudel notes that in the second and third generation many 11th century Dutch merchants abandoned risky trade to become the bankers of Europe. See Braudel, *Civilization and Capitalism, 15th-18th century*. Arrighi describes this process as taking two different patterns in the 15th century Genoa on one hand, and Venice and Florence on the other. In Genoa the merchants elites gradually assimilated with the capital oriented feudal lords what he labels as capital-making process. In Florence and Venice they created a bond with the ruling feudal elites in what he describes as state-making process. For more see Giovanni Arrighi, *The Long Twentieth Century: Money, Power, and the Origins of our Times* (London; New York, 1994), pp. 110-11.


99 Barber, *The Two Cities: Medieval Europe, 1050-1320*, pp. 251-52. See also Galbert de Bruges, *The Murder of Charles the Good, Count of Flanders*, p. 204.

100 Pirenne, *Economic and Social History of Medieval Europe*, p. 54.

outlined the spots where the walls of the future city should be constructed. “And then he let build a
gate made from the stone.”

Hilton suggests, that in spite of all the critique on behalf of the origin of his early urban
communities, Pirenne’s thesis poses one fundamental question which is directly related also to
Habermasian thesis on the origins of the modern public sphere: Did the bourgeoisie, whatever its
origins, become an anti-feudal social force which, already in the central period of the middle ages,
laid foundations of modern western civic societies? Habermas had the tendency to answer this
question negatively claiming that “there is no indication European society of the high Middle Ages
possessed a public sphere as a unique realm distinct from the private sphere.” What existed at that
time was, according to him, only a public representation of power. Princes and the estates
represented their power ‘before’ the people, instead of ‘for’ the people. According to Habermas,
it was only in the second half of the 17th century when we see for the first time in the modern era
the rise of the ‘public’ which can associate and form its opinion in a free discussion taking place in
the coffeehouse, relying on the institution of critical press.

The aim of the remaining part of this chapter is to present empirical evidence that the high and
late medieval period, and subsequent Renaissance, were already familiar with the ancient Greek
and Roman concepts of citizenship, public deliberation and common wealth. In the most developed
medieval communes, there was a sense of common identity and belonging fueled by the necessity
of public works - the building of urban fortifications and cathedrals. Population in the most
advanced urban communes had relatively wide access to manuscripts and later also to printed

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102 As quoted in Bruno Adorni, Cesare De Seta, and Jacques Le Goff, La citta e le mura (Roma, 1989), p. xx.
of the Medieval Urban Patriciate,” Past and Present (1953). A complex critique of Pirenne’s works is in Alfred F. Havighurst, ed.,
The Pirenne Thesis: Analysis, Criticism, and Revision (Boston, 1958).
104 Habermas, ”The Public Sphere,” pp. 198-99.
105 Habermas, The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere, pp. xvi-xvii and 24-26.
books, which served as a vehicle to the rediscovery of the philosophical thinking of the Greek and Roman Antiquity. Not only urban civic institutions, but by the 12th century even the medieval Church was grappling with the concepts of rational argumentation and debate.

**The Rise of Municipal Governments**

“*Communio autem, novum ac pessimum nomen*” - now, commune is a new and bad name, lamented Guibert of Nogent (1053-1124) over the widespread municipal movement in northern France which so deeply marked his times. According to Coulton, Guibert offers to modern student of history more detailed and vivid information on this development than any other writer of his time.106 He denounced ‘the greed’ of the kings, nobles, and bishops who let the simple folk purchase their liberty. But the critical testimony of the Benedictine monk from Nogent needs to be interpreted by keeping in mind that he hated the whole world of the urban movement for the simple fact that it was upsetting the established order of his own world from the bottom up:

> The people seizing on this opportunity for freeing themselves gathered huge sums of money to fill the gaping mouths of so many greedy men. And they, pleased with the shower poured upon them, took oaths binding themselves in the matter. A pledge of mutual aid had been thus exchanged by the clergy and nobles with the people... The King too was induced by a bribe from the people to confirm the same by oath. O my God, who could say how many disputes arose when the gifts of the people were accepted, how many after oath had been sworn to reverse what they had agreed to, whilst they sought to bring back the serfs who had been freed from the oppression of their yoke, to their former state. At last there was implacable hate by the Bishop and nobles against the citizens, and whereas he has not the power to crush the freedom of the French, after the fashion of Normandy and England, the pastor is weak and forgetful of his sacred calling through his insatiable greed.107

According to Bloch, such popular urban uprisings captured in medieval chronicles were often violent punitive expeditions, flying the banners of churches and directed against the castles of the robber lords.108 Galbert of Bruges (d. 1134) described popular uprising in Flanders at St. Omer in 1127 stating that “it should be known that I, Galbert, a notary, though I had no suitable place for

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writing, set down on tablets a summary of events.” He wrote his account in the midst of burning houses set on fire by lighted arrows shot on the town from within the adjacent castle and also by brigands from the outside in the hopes of looting, “in the midst of so much danger by night and conflict by day.”

When the dust settled over the Europe, we see the rise of early urban governments which embodied executive and judicial power was evident. Pirenne emphasizes the fact that they were nominated for a very short time to prevent the usurpation of power, entrusted to them by citizens. He claims that the first urban governments were mere “executors of the collective will” and he illustrates this by the fact that they lacked one of the fundamental characteristics of every organized state bureaucracy - a central authority. The burgomasters and the mayors did not exist much before the 13th century. Bloch points out another outstanding characteristic which distinguished new urban community - the communal oath of the burgesses. “Hitherto they had been only isolated individuals: henceforth they had a collective being.” It was the sworn association thus created which in France was given the literal name of commune, and elsewhere was known also as friendship.

Urban communes became the most dynamic forces of 12th century Christendom despite the fact that even the biggest medieval cities contained usually less than 5 percent of the total population of their region. An exception was Tuscany where in the early 13th century, cities made up 10.8 per cent of the total, a figure which exceeded 26 per cent by the end of the same century.

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109 Galbert de Bruges, The Murder of Charles the Good, Count of Flanders, p. 164.
110 Pirenne, Medieval Cities: Their Origins and the Revival of Trade, p. 146.
111 Bloch, Feudal Society, p. 354.
112 ‘Friendship’ was a name commonly used from Flanders to Mediterranean for urban communes. The group of leading families of the maritime merchant republic of Ragusa (today’s Dubrovnik in Croatia) called itself ‘prijeteljstvo’, which in Croatian means ‘friendship’. For more see Susan Mosher Stuard, A State of Deference: Ragusa/Dubrovnik in the Medieval Centuries (Philadelphia, 1992), pp. 61-69.
113 Barber, The Two Cities: Medieval Europe, 1050-1320, pp. 251 and 269-70. See also Josiah Cox Russell, Medieval Regions and Their Cities (Bloomington, 1972). Even Pirenne admits that the influence of the bourgeoisie is all the more
Otto of Freising (c. 1114-1158), the chronicler of Frederic I Barbarossa’s expedition against rebellious communes in Lombardy and Tuscany, described their political organization as follows:

In the governing of their cities, also, and in the conduct of public affairs, they still imitate the wisdom of the ancient Romans. Finally, they are so desirous of liberty that, avoiding the insolence of power, they are governed by the will of consuls rather than rulers. They are known to be three orders among them: captains, vavasors, and commoners. And in order to suppress arrogance, the aforesaid consuls are chosen not from one but from each of the classes. And lest they should exceed bounds by lust for power, they are changed almost every year. The consequence is that, as practically that entire land is divided among cities, each of them requires its bishops to live in the cities, and scarcely any noble or great man can be found in all the surrounding territory who does not acknowledge the authority of his city.

According to Barber, Otto of Freising’s account captured three essential characteristics of early urban communes: they were governed by elected consuls who held office for a short duration; the centre of power was the entire urban populus; and the surrounding area, or contado, was in a dependent relationship with the urban government. Barber also notes that Otto probably intentionally exaggerated the egalitarian spirit of the early communes in his “anxiety to demonstrate how they had overturned the right order of things.” As a matter of fact, their democracy was not any better than the democracy of the Greeks by which it was directly or indirectly inspirited through fragments of Aristotelian thought, slowly permeating the political conscience of the continent. Pirenne claims that due to the vigor and relative rapidity of its development, the urban movement may be, without exaggeration, compared with the industrial revolution of the nineteenth century.

In medieval Ragusa, the power of republican government was concentrated in the hands of about 50-60 relatively equally wealthy merchant families and actual democracy was fully enjoyed surprising because it is in strong contrast with its numerical importance. “The towns contained minority, sometimes even a very small minority of the population... in the whole of Europe between the fifth and the fifteenth centuries the urban population never comprised more than a tenth part of the total number of inhabitants.” In Pirenne, Economic and Social History of Medieval Europe, pp. 57-58.

115 Barber, The Two Cities: Medieval Europe, 1050-1320, p. 258. Pirenne also emphasized that the most typical feature of communal magistracy was its yearly character, wherein it was in distinct contrast to the offices for life which alone the feudal régime knew. In Pirenne, Medieval Cities: Their Origins and the Revival of Trade, p. 126.
117 Pirenne, Economic and Social History of Medieval Europe, p. 47.
only by the 500-600 adult males who had the privilege of belonging to them. Yet, under their
guidance, the merchant city-state implemented some of the most progressive policies of their
times. Practically any decision the Ragusan Council took was guided by the idea of common
wealth. Obliti Privatorum, Publica Curate - forget private concerns, tend to public welfare - is the
Latin inscription carved in the marble lintel over the entry to the 15th century palace where at that
time the Council used to meet. The tradition of Greek ostracism was very strongly rooted in city’s
political culture. Consequently, if a single person tried to exceed the others in the amount of
political power or personal wealth, Ragusans were ready to adopt extreme measures to eliminate
his or her influence.118 Because contagious diseases, especially the plague, threatened the very
survival of the entire urban community, Ragusa decided early on to build public sanitary and fresh
water systems and implemented a form of universal healthcare - free and accessible to everyone
who lived in its urban precincts. The oldest surviving contract for a communal physician dates
from 1295. Poor and the noble Ragusans alike were treated by the same ‘wise and famous’ doctors
that their Great Council recruited, one at the time, mainly from Italy and at a very considerable
expense to city’s budget.119

**Medieval City Walls and Their Symbolic Unifying Function**

The continuing urbanization of Europe was obviously most visibly reflected in changing
architecture, which is nothing else than a physical manifestation of the way a given civilization
organizes its private and public life. The first public project a newly-founded medieval city
decided to undertake was usually construction of strong defensive walls. According to Pirenne, the
construction of ramparts was also the heaviest financial burden a nascent urban community had to

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118 See the case of Ragusan archbishop Elias de Saraca, or that of the wealthy widow Nicoletta de Goce. In Stuard, *A State
sustain. As a matter of fact, medieval cities were identifiable by their walls which were clearly reflected in early urban coats of arms. By definition, a city wasn’t a city in this period without defensive walls. 

“I saw a regal city set against a mountainous hill, superb in walls and men,” Petrarch allegedly described his first impressions of Genoa around 1360.Keegan suggests that so many fortified towns of the Middle Ages are actually a sign of a weak central government. “Wherever a strong central government emerged, its presence is almost inevitably reflected in the building of strategic defenses at the frontiers.” Conversely, the decision to build a whole series of walled towns usually indicated a military problem for which walls seem the only answer. Politically it meant that there was a social configuration in which towns were able and willing to pay for their own fortification. From the ruler’s standpoint, a walled town was better than a walled castle, because of the simple fact that the burghers paid for their own fortifications which eased him of responsibility for building and maintenance costs. Yet, what at the moment seemed as wise policy had long-reaching unintended consequences. Royal charters granting to cities rights to build their own fortifications meant also further reinforcement of the early seeds of their self-government. To build walls, urban communes needed first to establish their own tax systems to raise revenues, and Tracy claims that merchant or craft guilds were particularly willing to bargain in this way for greater autonomy.

120 Pirenne, Economic and Social History of Medieval Europe, p. 53.
121 I couldn’t find any evidence that Petrarch is actually the real author of those words. Yet the quote is widespread in popular parlançe and often quoted by various authors. Cf. Anna Ferrari-Bravo, ed., The Italian Riviera: A Complete Guide to Liguria, Including Portofino, Cinque Terre, Portovenere, Genoa and Sanremo (Milano, 2001), p. 40.
122 John Keegan, A History of Warfare (New York, 1993). Tracy suggests as an example that in Spain the success of Christian rulers in planting fortress-towns, and the inability of Muslim rulers to do the same, has been called the ‘driving force’ in the Reconquista. See Tracy, “To wall or not to wall: Evidence from medieval Germany,” p. 77.
123 Tracy, “To wall or not to wall: Evidence from medieval Germany,” p. 73.
126 Tracy, “To wall or not to wall: Evidence from medieval Germany,” pp. 76-77.
Taxation emphasized the public character of urban governments, an element which was practically non-existent in the feudal era.\textsuperscript{127} New problems, stemming from urban administration, further challenged the innovative spirit of merchant classes which didn’t miss one opportunity to implement their private business experience in the management of public affairs. In 1458, Ragusan diplomat and merchant Benedetto Cotrugli in \emph{Il libro dell’arte della mercatura} outlined early contours of double-entry bookkeeping, emphasizing that “only managing well your written accounts makes you truly a merchant.”\textsuperscript{128} And Pirenne asserts that the “city economy was worthy of the Gothic architecture with which it was contemporary.” It created an urban organization whose rules and regulations were more complex than that of any other period in history.\textsuperscript{129}

The physical layout of urban space was dictated mainly by two fundamental needs of medieval commerce: ease of communication and security.\textsuperscript{130} Yet, besides the security against outside enemies, the wall provided urban populations with another important attribution. It had the power to mold its common identity by dividing the universe on those who lived ‘inside’ and ‘outside’ of the city walls. Itinerant Dominican preacher Giordano of Pisa (ca. 1260-1311) evoked in his sermons the image of Jesus as being born “in a small and lowly town, nor was he born inside it, but outside,” to emphasize the fact that Christ was an outcast.\textsuperscript{131} Pointing out the old Egyptian hieroglyphic sign which represented city as a cross in the circle - or a crossroad surrounded by the protecting wall - Lopez argues that in its essence the medieval city could be interpreted as a place

\textsuperscript{127} Pirenne, Economic and Social History of Medieval Europe, p. 53.
\textsuperscript{128} Benedetto Cotrugli Raguseo, \emph{Il libro dell’arte della mercatura}, ed. Ugo Tucci (Venezia, 1990), p. 174. Ugo Tucci in “Introduction” to Cotrugli’s work discusses the genesis of double-entry bookkeeping. While the ‘official’ historiography for a long time attributed double-entry system to Luca Pacioli, today is clear that in his \emph{Summa de Arithmetica} (1494) Pacioli only described a system which was already in use by Venetian merchants. For more on early merchant manuals see Robert S. Lopez, "Stars and Spices: The Earliest Italian Manual of Commercial Practice," in Economy, Society, and Government in Medieval Italy, ed. David Herlihy, Robert S. Lopez, and Vsevolod Slessarev (Kent, OH, 1969).
\textsuperscript{129} Pirenne, Medieval Cities: Their Origins and the Revival of Trade, pp. 147-49.
\textsuperscript{130} Ibid, p. 99.
\textsuperscript{131} Chiara Frugoni, \emph{Day in a Medieval City} (Chicago; London, 2005), p. 23.
of communication and togetherness, a place with “a special aptitude for change combined with a peculiar feeling of identity.”

Besides the city walls, other important elements which significantly shaped urban identities was the warship of city’s patron saints, the architectural beauty of their cathedrals, their founding legends and myths surrounding their military victories. Barber points out that Venice, for example, did not miss any occasion to exploit the legend of St. Mark, and Milan similarly nurtured the cult of St. Ambrose. Siena began to build its cathedral in 1196 and the construction immediately became an object of pride to the city. The decision to enlarge it in 1285 was partly provoked by rivalry with other cities in central Italy. “The state of the cathedral therefore was largely a political concern controlled by the commune through a board of works, the Opera di Santa Maria di Siena. It followed that the commune should see its fate as closely bound up with its patron saint, which in Siena meant the promotion of the cult of the Virgin.”

**Leonardo Bruni’s Renaissance Florence**

The writings of illustrious Florentine chancellor, humanist and historian Leonardo Bruni (1369-1444) left us testimony that, at least in a normative level, concepts such as the common opinion of men, citizenship or even dual citizenship, harmonized systems of government checks and balances (“since different points of view prevent errors of decision”), and state sovereignty,

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132 Robert S. Lopez, "The Crossroads Within the Wall," in *The Historian and the City*, ed. Oscar Handlin and John E. Burchard (Cambridge, MA, 1966), p. 28. The cross in the circle was actually only a fragment of the entire ideogram and arguably represented the sun positioned above what seemed to be an urban silhouette. For more on the ‘cross in the circle’ urban metaphor, see also Lewis Mumford, *The City in History: Its Origins, its Transformations, and its Prospects* (New York, 1961), p. 81. Friedrichs offers an interesting sociological argument, relating modern urban crisis to the breakup of the protecting wall surrounding the urban crossroad due to suburbanization. In Robert W. Friedrichs, “A Historical View,” in *Will the Church Lose the City?*, ed. Kendig B. Cully and F. Nile Harper (New York; Cleveland, 1969). For comparison, the Chinese Shang ideograph for city (yi) combined the symbol for a man kneeling in submission with the symbol for an enclosure suggests that the emperor at least had to give his blessing for the fortifying of cities that date from this period. For more see Kwang-chih Chang, *Shang Civilization* (New Haven, 1980).

were already alive and well in public discourse in the late 14th century Italian Renaissance. Bruni’s *Laudatio Florentinae Urbis* (1403), a praise to Florence inspired by Aristides’ panegyric of Athens, lauded the city on the Arno River for its outstanding civil institutions and laws designed to secure justice and freedom “without which this great people would not even consider that life was worth living.” As of the 1920s, historian Hans Baron popularized the thesis that a catalytic moment for Florentine’s *civic humanism* was the fact that in 1402 the city narrowly escaped an attempt to annihilate its civic institutions by Milanese duke Giangaleazzo Visconti. Under this threat, Florentines became aware that they needed to create a strong parliamentary structure, relying on broad public support and public deliberation, as well as a system of checks and balances which would prevent the corruption of power. According to Bruni, Florence has recognized that “what concerns the body of the people ought not to be decided except by the will of that body itself.” Ensuingly, he claimed, in the city’s early republican system “nothing can be resolved by the caprice of any single man acting in opposition to the judgment of so many men.”

For our analysis it is important to remember that Bruni was part of the system which he lauded; everyday life in Florence didn’t correspond fully with his idealized image of the city. But from his literary heritage it is also clear that the basic concepts related to the public sphere, whose emergence in Western Europe Habermas places in the mid-17th century, were already discussed in

Italian Renaissance circles two hundred and fifty years earlier. The late medieval and early Renaissance urban universe had already a quite clear concept of class. In 1160, Otto of Freising pointed out that “cities, those who have no property and cannot pay their debts invariably covet the goods and the tranquility of others.” They were seen as ready to seize the opportunity to upset the status quo, and their very presence was thus the cause of the internal instability of urban communes. “In times of sedition they do not suffer, since, as is said, ‘poverty is easy to bear; it has nothing to lose’,” argued Otto of Freising. Habermas’ concern that the 19th century welfare-state mass democracy - reflecting the rise of the social - contributed to the gradual decline of the bourgeois public sphere, affronted Bruni’s Florence by systematic ‘positive discrimination’ of the poor classes especially in judicial affairs, arguing that “the higher classes are protected by their power, the lower by the republic.” Because, the author added, the city of Florence “has judged it consistent with its ideals that those who have the most need should be helped against those who attempt to abuse their status.”

Rational-Critical Argumentation and the Growth of Literacy

An early urban economy based on the interests of itinerant merchants required a more expeditious judicial system. Its gradual evolution became part of profound administrative reforms triggered by urbanization. According to Pirenne, English law courts received a picturesque name piepowder (pied poudré) in the 11th century, because the feet of the merchants who resorted to

137 Habermas, The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere, pp. 25-26.
138 Freising, The Deeds of Frederick Barbarossa, p. 207.
139 “Cum enim potentiore, suis opibus confusi, tenues ledere aspemnarique viderentur, causae eorum qui minus poterant ipsa res publica suscepit, maiorique pena res illorum personasque munivit. Rationi quipped consentaneum arbitrate est ut disparem condicionem hominum dispar pena sequeretur...” A quote from Leonardo Bruni, Laudatio Florentinae Urbis, as published in Latin original in Baron, From Petrarch to Leonardo Bruni: Studies in Humanistic and Political Literature, p. 262. Cf. also the translation of the same text in Bruni, In praise of Florence: The Panegyric of the City of Florence and an Introduction to Leonardo Bruni’s Civil Humanism. p. 119 Jean-Jacques Rousseau later claimed that social justice and stability of the state are interdepenent: “Do you want coherence in the state? Then bring the two extremes as close together as possible; have neither very rich men nor the beggars, for these two estates, naturally inseparable, are equally fatal to the common good.” In Jean-Jacques Rousseau, The Social Contract (New York, 1762/2006), pp. 58-59.
them were still dusty from the road. In 1127, Galbert of Bruges noted in his chronicle that the Count of Flanders granted legislative power to the citizens of St. Omer. “In order to make our citizens well disposed towards himself, the count granted them in addition the right freely to correct their customary laws from day to day and to change them for the better as circumstances of time and place demanded.” Elsewhere in the text Galbert inadvertently divulged that by the 12th century, judicial courts facilitated the emergence of public deliberation and as such became the catalytic force promoting “eloquence and rational methods of inference and argument”:

Thanks to this boon of peace, men governed themselves in accordance of law and justice, deserving skill and study every kind of argument for use in the courts, so that when anyone was attacked he could defend himself by the strength and eloquence of rhetoric, or when attacking, he might ensnare his enemy, who would be deceived by the wealth of his oratory. Rhetoric was now used both by educated and those who were naturally talented, for there were many illiterate people, endowed by nature herself with the gift of eloquence and rational methods of inference and argument.

Through the Latin, mainly Ciceronian tradition, the ancient art of Greek Aristotelian rhetoric and rational argumentation found its ways into the thinking of the late medieval Church. Even such conservative spirit as Bernard of Clairvaux (c. 1090-1153) declared in his Canticles that heretics must be taken by arguments, not by the arms - “Capitantur, dico, non armis, sed argumentis” - because the power of the word is more efficient than that of the sword. By the end of 11th century, during the brief period called by some historians the renaissance of Middle Ages, illuminated abbots were writing philosophical treatises imitating Greek and Roman philosophers, and introducing readings of ancient texts into the curricula of monastic schools. John of

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140 Pirenne, Economic and Social History of Medieval Europe, p. 52.
141 Galbert de Bruges, The Murder of Charles the Good, Count of Flanders, p. 204.
142 Ibid, p. 84. Note how Galbert’s description of medieval courts closely corresponds with Shakespeare’s court scene from The Merchant of Venice, situated in the early Renaissance and written between 1596-98. Just as Shakespeare’s “learned doctor” Bellario from Rome argues the case between Shylock and Antonio in the court of Venice, Bruni’s Florence was inviting ‘foreigners’ to legislate in its courts – reflecting the ancient Greek ideal of a foreigner-legislator. In William Shakespeare, The Merchant of Venice (New York, 1992), p. 151. Bruni asserts that “a judge, however righteous, is in the eyes of people a dirty crook. Therefore we invite judges from afar.” In Bruni, In praise of Florence: The Panegyric of the City of Florence and an Introduction to Leonardo Bruni’s Civil Humanism, p. 116.
143 James J. Murphy, Rhetoric in the Middle Ages: A History of Rhetorical Theory from Saint Augustine to Renaissance (Berkeley, CA, 1974), pp. 3-10.
144 Bernard of Clairvaux, On the Song of Songs, Kilian Walsh and Irene M. Edmonds trans., 3 vols., vol. 3 (Kalamazoo, MI, 1979), p. 175.
Salisbury’s (c. 1120-1180) *Metalogicon*, a twelfth-century defense of dialectics - verbal and logical arts of persuasion - can serve as one example of many. In a famous quote attributed to his teacher, Bernard of Chartres (d. 1124), John pointed out that by appropriating the ancient body of knowledge, humanity resembles dwarfs who now stand on the shoulders of the giants:

> Bernard of Chartres used to compare us to [puny] dwarfs perched on the shoulders of giants. He pointed out that we see more and farther than our predecessors, not because we have keener vision or greater height, but because we are lifted up and borne aloft on their gigantic stature.\(^{145}\)

The late Middle Ages rediscovered the work of Isidore of Seville (d. 636), considered one of the last learned scholars of the declining Roman era.\(^{146}\) His twenty topically organized volumes of *The Etymologies* became one of the most widespread reference books all throughout the upcoming Renaissance. According to Grafton, *The Etymologies* give us the best idea of what the literate man on the street knew of ancient thought.\(^{147}\) In the 1260s, a Florentine diplomat Brunetto Latini, was inspired by Isidore’s work when he wrote *Li Livres dou Trésor*, a late mediaeval treasury of general knowledge “extracted from all branches of philosophy in a brief summary.”\(^{148}\)

Writing and knowledge became indispensable to every business operation of any importance. A clerk was part of the crew of every merchant ship.\(^{149}\) Lopez claims that illiteracy was practically unknown in late 13\(^{\text{th}}\) century Genoa which had a capitalistic economy complete with business cycles.\(^{150}\) Between 1310-40, Florentine banker Balducci Pegolotti compiled the merchant manual on the art of trade *La practica della mercatura*, one of a dozen similar surviving pieces of practical

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\(^{146}\) Lopez calls him the ‘shaky torchbearer in the Dark Ages.’ In Lopez, "The Crossroads Within the Wall," p. 29.


\(^{148}\) Brunetto Latini, *The Book of the Treasure (Li livres dou tresor)* (New York, 1993), p. 1. Latini served as Florentine ambassador to the court of Alphonso X The Wise, and later was exiled in Paris. This may explain his knowledge of Isidore’s work and also the fact that his book was originally written in French.

\(^{149}\) Pirenne, *Economic and Social History of Medieval Europe*, pp. 10-20.

\(^{150}\) Lopez, "The Crossroads Within the Wall," pp. 32-33. Lopez based his analysis on 20,000 commercial contracts from the late medieval period which are part of the Genoese notarial archives. For more see also Lopez and Raymond, *Medieval Trade in the Mediterranean World: Illustrative Documents.*
how-to literature, indispensable in carrying out long distance trade.\textsuperscript{151} The relatively high degree of literacy and numeracy required in the commercial world were simultaneously translated into civic life and reflected in the fact that cities started organizing their archives, laws were written down, and increasingly more aspects of public life were regulated.\textsuperscript{152}

Petrarch (1304-1374) and his circles in Florence revived interest in classical Roman and Greek literature. In 1444, the first public library opened its door in Florence, containing 400 Greek and Roman manuscripts. Most of them came from the collection of humanist Niccolò Niccolì who left his books to the city for the purpose that they can be “brought to the common good, to the public service, to a place open to all.”\textsuperscript{153} The influence which the revived Hellenic thought increasingly exercised on the Western mind became evident in every aspect of human activity in this period. Another enormous boost of interest in ancient Greek culture was experienced by Venice in 1453 with the fall Constantinople, when it was flooded with a stream of refugee Greek merchants and scholars. Harnessing their intellectual energy, Aldus Manutius opened a printing shop in Venice in 1495 and in the next two decades his Aldine Press published practically the complete body of ancient Greek literature as we know it today.\textsuperscript{154} “We have in Latin at best some small books and turbid pools; while the Greeks have the purest fountains and rivers flowing in gold,” wrote Desiderius Erasmus in 1501, articulating frustration of Western scholars of medieval and early

\textsuperscript{151} Francesco Balducci Pegolotti, \textit{La pratica della mercatura}, Allan Evans trans. (Cambridge, MA, 1936). Robert Lopez wrote extensively about early Italian merchant manuals from 14\textsuperscript{th} to 16\textsuperscript{th} century. For more see Lopez and Raymond, \textit{Medieval Trade in the Mediterranean World: Illustrative Documents}.

\textsuperscript{152} Barber, The Two Cities: Medieval Europe, 1050-1320, p. 258.

\textsuperscript{153} The quote is from the funeral eulogy delivered by Niccolì’s friend, humanist Poggio Bracciolini. In B. L. Ullman and Philip A. Stadter, \textit{The Public Library of Renaissance Florence: Niccolo Niccoli, Cosimo de’ Medici and the Library of San Marco} (Padova, Italy, 1972), p. 9. It is worth noting that by 1362 Petrarch wrote a similar testament stating his intention to leave his exceptional private library to the city of Venice for the purpose of starting a public library built upon private and public donations. He later changed his mind and his books were dispersed throughout the Europe. For more on the early history of public libraries see Ullman and Stadter (ibid.).

\textsuperscript{154} Deno John Geanakoplos, \textit{Greek Scholars in Venice: Studies in the Dissemination of Greek Learning from Byzantium to Western Europe} (Cambridge, MA, 1962). Commenting in \textit{Adages} about the activities of Aldian Press in Venice, Erasmus writes: “I can promise one thing to the studious, and it would all happen in a very few years: they would possess all the works of good authors in four languages, Latin, Greek, Hebrew, and Chaldean, on very kind of subject, complete and with emendations… There will be nothing wanting in the whole field of literature.” In Margaret Phillips, \textit{Erasmus on his Times} (Cambridge, 1967), p. 9.
Renaissance period with the often confused, taken out of context, and misrepresented Arabic and Latin translations of original Greek texts circulating throughout the western part of Europe. His lament basically echoed the words of Florentine humanist Leonardo Bruni, who a hundred years earlier noted that mainly Aristotle’s scripts “suffered such transformation that if anyone brought them to Aristotle himself he would no more recognize them for his own than Actaeon’s dogs knew him after he was changed into a deer.” But now, thanks to Hellenistic scholars and Manutius’ circle in Venice, Western civilization had full access to the knowledge of classical Greece for the first time in the modern era.

Habermas claimed that only as of the last third of the 17th century were journals complemented by periodicals which went far beyond the primary information, focusing on pedagogical advice and even criticism and review. A learned article became, in his opinion, the ‘training ground’, a literary precursor of the public sphere in the political realm. Yet one can argue that such a ‘training ground’ was already fermenting in the Renaissance via publications of annotated copies of Roman and Greek manuscripts. Flodr found 370 editions of different commentaries on

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155 The quotes are from a letter Erasmus wrote to his patron Anthony, the abbot of St. Bertin. In Desiderius Erasmus, *Epistles of Erasmus: From his Earliest Letters to his Fifty-First Year*, Francis Morgan Nichols trans. (New York, 1962). Epistle 143, p. 313. Erasmus’ intentions to go to Italy in order to learn Greek are very clear from his correspondence. He explains that those who have translated the sacred books have in their scrupulous interpretation so rendered the Greek phrases that not even that primary meaning which our theologians call literal can be perceived by those who are not Greek scholars. Later in life Erasmus attempted to diminish the influence of Italian experience on his intellectual maturation, which Gaenakoplos documents was due to some personal issues not directly related to his overall three-year long Italian period. For more on this subject see Geanakoplos, *Greek Scholars in Venice: Studies in the Dissenmination of Greek Learning from Byzantium to Western Europe.*

156 As quoted in Eugenio Garin, *Prosatori latini del Quattrocento* (Milano, 1952), p. 58. Bruni’s original text follows as: “…quos Aristotelis esse dicunt, tam magnam transformationem passi sunt, ut si quis eos ad Aristotelem ipsum deferat, non magis ille suos esse cognoscat quam Actaeonem illum, qui ex homine in cervum converses est, canes suae cognoverint.” The English translation I use is from Paul Oscar Kristeller, “Humanism,” in The Cambridge History of Renaissance Philosophy, ed. C. B. Schmitt, et al. (Cambridge, UK, 1988), p. 106. The problem of translation was a notorious and old one. Already by the 12th century John of Salisbury wrote to Ralph of Lisieux to send him a good translation of Aristotle. “I ask again, as I have often asked before over a long period, that you will have a copy made for me of the books of Aristotle which you have, and of those of Mark, at my expense (and no cost spared here on my account, I beg). And once again I ask you to provide glosses on the more difficult points in Aristotle’s works, since I don’t trust the translator.” In John of Salisbury, *The Letters of John of Salisbury: Volume Two*, the Latter Letters (1163-1180), ed. W. J. Millor Jr. and C. N. L. Brooke (Oxford, UK, 1979), p. 293.

157 Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, pp. 26 and 29.
fragments of Aristotle’s text published in Europe before 1500. If a Renaissance scholar was baffled by the meaning of some passage in Aristotle, he already had the possibility to confront it with other Greek or Latin versions of the same text, or simply rely on the help of different commentaries.

Learned disputes and publications with practical advices were quite common. As early as in 1404, Giovanni di Conversino da Ravenna published a manuscript in a form of a learned critical dialogue between a Venetian and his neighbor from Padua, which, among other topics, took on such modern subjects as the environment:

Paduan: …From the impurity often a pestiferous plague afflicts the common people, who would fall fainting in the streets [of Venice] if frequent voyages did not take them abroad. In fact, idleness, unhealthful food, polluted air, and impure water all bring forth disease.

Venetian: Being ignorant of the quality of air I do not have any convenient reasons from physics to put up against your argument. But I refuse to blame the water, since it is called healthful, and the authority of physicians approves of rainwater…

The popularity of merchant manuals was already mentioned above. Xenophon’s *Economics*, with its practical advice for the husband of how to organize his household, was one of the most often read practical how-to texts in Renaissance Europe. It is echoed by Florentine architect-humanist Leon Battista Alberti, advising his reader in 1441 that he “must first do what that good husband told Socrates, according to Xenophon.” Machiavelli’s *Prince*, published posthumously

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161 The *Oeconomicus* was printed at least eighteen times between 1503 and 1603 in the version by Raphael Maffeius Volateranus (Raffaele Maffei) and was also translated to Latin by Lampus Biragus, Bernardinus Donatus, Joachim Camerarius, Jacobus Lodicus Strebaeus, and Johannes Levenklaus. Most of the vernacular translations of Xenophon date from the sixteenth century. A ‘Tuscan’ version of the *Oeconomicus* by Sienese archbishop Alessandro Piccolomini (1508-78) appeared in 1540.” David Marsh, "Xenophon," in *Catalogus Translationum et Commentariorum: Medieval and Renaissance Latin Translations and Commentaries*, ed. Virginia Brown, F. Edward Cryan, and P. O. Kristeller (Washington, DC, 1992), pp. 80-83.
in 1532, had all attributes of a critical socio-political analysis par excellence.\textsuperscript{163} Open political controversy carried on across the whole continent through the medium of print was nothing new in the late 15\textsuperscript{th} and 16\textsuperscript{th} centuries. Savonarola’s tracts printed between 1494-98 in order to promote his social reforms in Florence had already harnessed the polemical power of the press. They were originally written in Latin, yet Savonarola ensuingly translated them into lingua volgare, the Tuscan dialect, understanding that this was the best way to reach the widest possible audiences:

\begin{quote}
I am forced by their [public] demand to turn into vulgar [language] what I earlier wrote in Latin, knowing very well that if not done me, someone else will do… Our intention is therefore not just to translate the original text into vulgar [language] word-by-word, nor sentence-by-sentence, but to translate the message contained in the book following the original order, chapter-by-chapter.\textsuperscript{164}
\end{quote}

Aside from theological controversies, issues of foreign policy and social justice found their way into print right from the beginning. In Mainz, Guttenberg printed the first of the series of popular Turkish calendars (\textit{die Türkenkalendern}) as early as in 1454. Their mission was to rally all of Christendom against the Turkish invaders of Constantinople.\textsuperscript{165} A hundred years later, in 1542, the Swiss linguist Theodorius Bibliander published an entire book in Antwerp with a similar mission, offering “the reasons wherewith a firm and sure concord and peace in the Church, and the Christen publick will may be constituted” in the war effort against “the cruel power of the Turks.”\textsuperscript{166} In the same year the rebellious English preacher, Thomas Becon, released a book with strong social criticism of the practices of many rich merchants, whom he accused of behaving like

\begin{footnotes}
\item[163] Niccolò Machiavelli, Il principe. Al magnifico Lorenzo di Piero de Medici (S.l., 1550).
\item[164] “Sono costretto dalla instantia delle preghiere loro a far volgare, quello che prima havevo fatto latino, sapendo maxime che se non faccio io, sara fatto da altri… Nostra intensione dunque non e di tradur il libro in volgare, ne di parola in parola, ne di sentential in sentia. Ma di dir tutto quello che nel libro si contiene in quello medesimo ordine procedendo di capitol in capitol.” The quote is from the original Savonarola’s introduction. Girolamo Savonarola, \textit{Triumpho della croce di Christo: della verita della fede Christiana} (Venezia, 1547). For more see Grendler, "Printing and censorship," pp. 40-41. The author points out a problem typical for medieval translation which often followed the original text word-by-word, often missing or misrepresenting the original meaning. Cf. Botley, \textit{Latin Translation in the Renaissance: The Theory and Practice of Leonardo Bruni, Giannozzo Manetti, and Desiderius Erasmus}.
\item[166] Theodorus Bibliander, A godly Consultation unto the Brethren and Companyons of the Christen religyon By what meanes the cruell Power of the Turkes… (Basill [i.e. Antwerp], 1542), title page.
\end{footnotes}
“greedy cormorants, those locusts and caterpillars of common wealth” by artificially creating the scarcity of food, only to consequently profit from increased prices. Bibliander condemned such practices for causing “utter impoverishment and extreme undoing of the poor commoners.”

The sixteenth century witnessed an entire sequence of controversial events which attracted European-wide audiences, starting with Johann Reuchlin’s defense of Hebrew literature in the early 16th century. Desiderius Erasmus, whose own never-ending battles with his ideological opponents were often perpetuated through the medium of press, complained in 1524 that religious disputes unleashed by Luther’s Reformation affected the book trade in German-speaking parts of Europe to the point that it was hardly possible to sell books on any other topic. “These things written either for Luther or against him have put all thought for other kinds of literature out of the heads of the reading public, such is the pleasure they get from watching this struggle,” complained Spanish humanist Juan Louis Vives in a letter to Erasmus sent from London. Ultimately, it was also the struggle over the heliocentric theories of Nicolaus Copernicus, Galileo Galilei, and Giordano Bruno, that spanned the entire 16th century. The fact that Wenceslaus Hollar printed in London an engraving in 1641 which he titled The World is Ruled & Governed by Opinion (Figure 2.2.) further illustrates that by that time, Europe had already fully developed literary public sphere where opinion was formed.

167 Thomas Beccon, The new Pollecye of Warre wherin is declared not only how [ye]mooste cruell Tyraunt the great Turke may be ouer come, but also all other enemies of the Christen [H]publique Weale, lately devised by Theodore Basille. (London, 1542), p. 116-118. Beccon published his most polemic pieces also under the pen name Theodore Basille.


170 In a letter dated 13 November, 1524, and addressed to Desiderius Erasmus Erasmus, The Correspondence of Erasmus, pp. 417-419.

Figure 2.2. Wenceslaus (Václav) Hollar, *The World is Ruled and Governed by Opinion*, 1641. An engraving accompanied by verses of Henry Peacham. Opinion with the world in her lap, sits on the tree which is watered by folly, the leaves are pamphlets which “in every street and every stall you find.” The chameleon on opinion’s arm “can assume all colors saving white” she is blinded by her hat which is a turret representing the tower of Babel.
through the channel of print. Even more important, such public sphere was Pan-European in its nature, it did not have any respect for the borders of linguistic enclaves or state territories.  

**News Publications and the Early Modern Public Postal Service**

When a huge, 260 pound meteorite fell from the skies on November 7, 1492 near the Alsatian town of Ensisheim, renowned German humanist Sebastian Brant, the dean of the faculty of Law at the University of Basel, composed and printed a broadside (*das Flugblatt*) conceived half as factual information about the event and half as a political metaphor which Brant interpreted to be a sign from heaven for Emperor Maximilian I to take action against Charles VIII of France. The print was commercially successful; it had at least one official reprint and two pirated editions. In his study of the late 15th century Incunabula, Eisermann lists at least forty preserved editions of similar broadsides, published between 1472 and 1492 exclusively in the German lands.  

An enormous amount of 16th century news-letters survived in the archives of the Fugger banking family from Augsburg (the Rockefellers or Morgans of their time), a portion of their 1568-1604 eclectic collection of news clips covering important events and marginal gossip in Europe, Africa, both Americas and Asia. Part of the Fugger literary heritage are dispatches of a press agency operated in the late 16th century Augsburg by two citizen-entrepreneurs - Jheremias Crasser and Jheremias Schiffle. Klarwill, who edited the 1920s selections from the Fugger news-letters, described their operation as “the exact equivalent of the telegraphic agencies to-day.”

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174 Victor Klarwill, ed., *The Fugger News-Letters, Second Series: Being a Further Selection From the Fugger Papers Specially Referring to Queen Elizabeth* (New York; London, 1926), p. x. I couldn’t find any further information about Crasser and Schiffle in academic literature. Klarwill himself is very sketchy in addressing their business. He explains that the Fuggers, in an attempt to organize all clippings, hired Crasser’s and Schiffle’s firm to transcribe the original dispatches in a uniform manner. The result is a 36,000-page manuscript which survived, but the originals were in the meantime lost or destroyed. Only different styles, topics, and contexts of reports suggest which news story originated from broadsheets, which from Fugger’s personal
Habermas argues that merchants who were first to organize such early long-distance exchange networks of information limited them to the private needs of their businesses; one can speak of mail service only when the regular opportunity for letter dispatch became accessible to the general public. Similarly, he claims, the term ‘press’ in the strict sense appears only once the regular supply of news is accessible to general public. Yet Trivellato argues that such clear-cut and hierarchical opposition between ‘private’ and ‘public’ information and its means of dissemination is fundamentally inadequate. The 1496-1533 chronicles of Marin Sanudo, which are one of the principal sources of information I used in researching the next chapter on Renaissance Venice, contain numerous instances in which the content of confidential dispatches written by the Republic’s ambassadors and read in the city’s Senate or Great Council, became almost immediately a matter of public domain. According to Trivellato, news of interest to merchants often overlapped with information relevant for diplomats, missionaries, and others. And merchants themselves were often simultaneously missionaries, diplomats, adventurers, or pilgrims.

In 16th century, such exchange of messages still depended mainly on private couriers, but as Dallmaier shows, the main commercial centers of Europe started to be increasingly connected by public postal service. In the early 1500s, the mountaineers of Tasso Family from near-by Italian city of Bergamo - later elevated to Princely House of Thurn und Taxis - were put gradually in charge for financially struggling papal, imperial and republican postal services in major European financial and political capitals. In order to finance their costly operations, the new management opened up postal service to the wide public for fixed prices of delivery, and negotiated franchises

correspondence with his banking houses around the world, and which are the contribution of Crasser’s and Schiffl’s press agency. See also George Tennyson Matthews, The Fugger Newsletters, 2nd ed. (New York, 1970).

175 Habermas, The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere, p. 16.
with innkeepers all over the continent who, in practice, operated the first post offices. By 1516, it took a little more than 10 days for a private letter sent from Rome to reach the addressee all the way across the continent in Brussels. Behringer points that it was “the first public communication system in Europe” available for a fixed price to regular people as well as for use in the public/state interest - *pro communi hominum et reipublicae utilitate*. Furthermore, this system wasn’t driven by any revolutionary technical innovation; instead, it relied on very precise organization of labor devised by the post’s mainly Italian management (thus the dominance of Italian terms used in today’s postal service). Even private business news correspondence of the Fugger banking house relied on this public service: the datelines of single dispatches written by Fugger’s business representatives abroad correspond for the most part with ancient schedules of regular postal delivery. From the functioning regular postal service it was only a small step to the periodical press, as Weber shows in the example of one of the earliest European newspapers launched in 1605 in Strasburg by Johann Carolus.

Partial Conclusions

As Dorothy Sayers pointed out in her introduction to *The Song of Roland* (1957), the modern age has so lost touch with the heritage of the Middle Ages that we have fallen into using words *feudal* and *medieval* as mere epithets of utter darkness, ignoring the fact that this period laid the foundations of our own civilization. Yet, she adds, the era “which we call the Middle Age (as though it were middle-aged), has perhaps a better right than the blown summer of the Renaissance

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178 Martin Dallmeier, *Quellen zur Geschichte des europäischen Postwesens 1501-1806* (Kallmünz, Germany, 1977).
180 According to Weber, the birth of regular newspapers was conditioned by two things: regular postal service and the birth of professional news producers who came out of the ranks of private business correspondents, taking as their model the *scrittori d'avisii* from the Rialto - the heart of the business district in Venice. Weber, "Strasburg 1605: The Origins of the Newspaper in Europe." While Carolus' newspaper still enjoys 'primacy' in most of the media histories, Habermas points out also the study of Fischer who problematizes this assertion. In Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, pp. 253-54, n34. See Helmut Fischer, *Die ältesten Zeitungen und ihre Verleger* (Augsburg, 1936).
to be called the Age of Re-birth.” Following the reductionist view of medieval history, which at the time when *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* was first published in Germany in 1962 still dominated Western intellectual discussion, Habermas himself fell into this trap. This occurred in spite of the fact that at one point of his work he actually acknowledged familiarity with Pirenne’s medieval urban revival thesis, but - either by mistake or intentionally - misrepresented the message, concluding that “according to Pirenne’s observation - the town was only a base of operations for long-distance trade.” Habermas’ argumentation at this point becomes very ambivalent. He fully understands that one of the fundamental social contradictions of the High Middle Ages was in the fact that nascent urban communities, whose success depended on long-distance trade in luxuries, profited highly because they were surrounded by the feudal world which supplied them with cheap commodities of everyday consumption. But at the same time, he negates the dialectic nature of such relationships, declaring that “the political order remained unthreatened by the new process [of urbanization] which, as such, had no place in the existing [feudal] framework.” A thorough etymological inquiry of the adjective *bourgeois*, which he famously attributed to his early modern public sphere, would have revealed to him the crucial role of the urban ferment of the High Middle Ages with its full blossoming during the Renaissance.

On the other hand, in spite of all its weaknesses, Pirenne’s theory of urban renewal must catch the eye of anyone who sees social evolution as being driven by the constant dialectic struggle of contradictions. Its true power is in the juxtaposition of two residential centers of different origins and nature - the new merchant burg (*novus burgus*) counterpoised to the old feudal burg (*vetus burgus*) - pointing out the gradual absorption of the ‘old’ by the ‘new’. The *new burg* itself does

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182 Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, p. 15.
183 Ibid.
not remain unchanged in this process which consequently repeats itself in several iterations on an increasingly larger scale: the merchant town gradually absorbs its immediate suburbs, creating a metropolitan area which in the next step brings into its orbit the entire region, preparing the ground for the emergence of a cohesive nation-state. As a result, the new spirit of urban communities gradually permeated and dismantled feudal society from the inside out, producing an entirely new set of its own internal contradictions. While Pirenne traces the deep roots of this process, Habermas’ analysis starts at the moment when the bulk of such changes was already accomplished or underway.

Following the idea that it was the social environment of the mid-17th century Britain and 18th century France and Germany which facilitated the emergence of the ‘public’, Habermas in his excursion through history systematically downplayed all evidence which did not go along with his thesis. Yet, many important findings ‘survived’ in his footnotes, some of which are actually very interesting. As a result, I fully agree with those who claim that the weakest point of Habermas’ study was its methodological design: its whole argument was not guided by empirical findings relying on primary sources, instead it was a pre-formulated hypothesis erected on secondary academic literature. Carried astray by this strong methodological handicap, the study discovered what it was aimed at discovering from the outset: It echoed the spirit of its own intellectual era with a strong urge to emphasize the central historical role of the Enlightenment. Instead, the existing empirical evidence from original sources makes for a very strong argument that the foundations of modern Western democracy were in place long before London’s coffeehouses,

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185 Giddens claims that the “interpreters of Marx have not always agreed about how the primary contradiction of capitalism is to be characterized... there is, I think, only one candidate for the job: the contradiction between private appropriation and socialized production.” Giddens, The Constitution of Society: Outline of the Theory of Structuration, p. 136, see also pp. 196-206.  
186 See especially the footnotes no. 8, 32-35 in Habermas, The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere, pp. 251-54.  
187 See for example Downie, "How Useful to Eighteenth-Century English Studies is the Paradigm of the ‘Bourgeois Public Sphere’?" or David Zaret, Origins of Democratic Culture: Printing, Petitions, and the Public Sphere in Early Modern England (Princeton, NJ, 2000), pp. 4-5.  
188 Cf. Calhoun, "Introduction: Habermas and the Public Sphere," p. 4.
French salons and German Tischgesellschaften emerged on the urban social scene between 1650 and 1750.\textsuperscript{189} It was the communal urban movement of the high Middle Ages - whatever its origins - which resurrected the social and political philosophy of Antiquity and facilitated this change. Like the Biblical metaphor about a small amount of yeast being able to leaven the entire batch of dough, the medieval cities were laboratories where new ideas (though some of them with very ancient pedigrees) about human society and man’s place in it were tested. It should be remembered that those early urban communities were shaped from the very beginning by the interests of profit-driven merchants who stood by their cradle. This may be the ultimate reason why the Western mind has such difficulty in separating the two fundamental concepts which were born to the same parents and made their first steps together - modern democracy and capitalism.

\textsuperscript{189} Habermas, The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere, p. 30.
Chapter 2 /

LA SERENISSIMA: THE VENETIAN QUEST FOR A WELL-ORDERED REPUBLIC

During the Renaissance, Venice became one of the critical entry points through which Europe rediscovered classical Greek intellectual heritage. While Florentine humanism relied mainly on the cultural and philosophical legacy of ancient Rome, the Venetians, thanks to their intense commercial contacts with Byzantium, first came in touch with the original texts of Plato and Aristotle in the 12th century. Confronted with their teachings, they selectively incorporated many ancient Greek normative ideals into the social and political structures of their own evolving republican constitution, defining their own concept of good government. Margaret King emphasizes that such eclecticism wasn’t superficial. Instead, it was a result of profound philosophical meditation on the ancient, mostly Aristotelian texts.¹ By the end of 15th century, Venetians saw themselves consequently as the true inheritors of the torch passed on by ancient European civilizations. “Greece was the seat of learning and powerful in arms; now the Venetians are the learned ones, now the lion [of Saint Mark] is strongly armed,” noted in 1492 Marin Sanudo, the most prominent chronicler of Venetian Renaissance (Figure 3.1).²

Thanks to Venice’s unmatched material prosperity and unprecedented political stability, the classical ideas of political philosophy were brought to the attention of the rest of Europe where many started to respect the city on the lagoon as the incarnation of an ideal republic, even better than Plato himself had ever imagined.³ The *myth of Venice* was born and consequently, the city became a political laboratory in which other nations tested their own visions about the

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¹ Margaret King, *Venetian Humanism in an Age of Patrician Dominance* (Princeton, NJ, 1986), pp. 182 and
² An unattributed ancient slogan reported by Marin Sanudo, "Laus urbis Venetae," p. 16. For more on this topic see Rosand, *Myths of Venice: The Figuration of a State*.
Figure 3.1. Vittore Carpaccio, The Lion of St Mark, 1516.
organization of a state. Some may have looked at her with uncritical admiration, others with skepticism and disdain, but all principal book markets of early modern Europe were soon saturated with political studies and historiographies analyzing Venetian society, written both by Venetians as well as by erudite visitors.4

This essay explores the channels through which classical Greek thought influenced those aspects of Venetian life which directly shaped the city’s public sphere. It traces the political culture of the merchant republic, and examines the ways in which it projected its political hegemony and communicated rational information indispensable for the success of its merchant enterprises both at home and abroad. In doing so, the essay confronts the normative ideals of classical republicanism with the social reality of everyday life in Venice during the High Renaissance (c.1492-1550), a period in which the myth of Venice gradually crystallized and ensuingly took its final literary shape.5 In conclusion, the essay analyzes the literary channels through which this experience was further mediated not only to the rest of Europe, but later influenced republican thinking also in North America.

I. Making a Case for Venice: Ex Oriente Lux

The proverbial ex oriente lux - light in the form of knowledge which in this case the early modern Europe received from the East - can be attributed to the unintended consequences of the Crusades, launched in 1095.6 As one of the Italian maritime city-states, which overall contributed


5 The period of 1492-1550 is, by some historians, designated as the High Renaissance in the context of Venetian cultural, philosophical and political life. Cf. Lane, Venice: A Maritime Republic, p. 220.

6 Though, as Kitzinger points out, the first intensified cultural exchange between Byzantium and the West can be traced to the period between the great Schism (1054) and the First Crusade (1095). It is documented by the presence of Byzantine artists in Venice, Monte Cassino, and elsewhere in Italy. See Ernst Kitzinger, “The Byzantine Contribution to Western Art of the Twelfth
little more than logistical naval support for Christian armies, Venice profited the most from the series of reckless military expeditions undertaken by Western Christendom. According to Pirenne, the “profits raised by army contractors have been immense in all ages, and it cannot be doubted that the Venetians, Pisans, Genoese and Provençals, finding themselves suddenly rich, hastened to put new ships on the stocks.”

Aside from a series of ephemeral Christian kingdoms set up in the Holy Land, the only lasting ‘success’ of the Crusades was the establishment of the maritime merchant republics’ trading posts across the eastern part of the Mediterranean basin, reaching deep into the Black and Caspian Seas. In an ensuing series of mutual wars among new trading rivals, Venice gradually defeated them all and in 1381 definitively secured uncontested naval dominance which lasted for more than a century.

The byproduct of the increasing trading contacts between the West and the Byzantine world was also the European rediscovery of Greek intellectual heritage. Alongside the Arab and Jewish scholars who were re-introducing classical knowledge to Europe through Spain, it was the 60,000 strong enclave of Christians of the Latin rite in Constantinople which created a parallel supply line. Yet compared to the often confused and fragmentary Arab and Hebrew re-interpretations of classical Greek text, the polyglot communities of Italian merchants, residing on

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7 Henri Pirenne, Economic and Social History of Medieval Europe (New York, 1937), pp. 31-32.
8 Cf. Giuseppe Canestrini, "Il mar Nero, e le Colonie degl'Italiani nel Medio Evo," Archivio Storico Italiano No. 9, Nuova Serie, Tomo 5 (1857). According to Pirenne, “the political and religious results of Crusades were ephemeral. The kingdom of Jerusalem and the principalities of Edessa and Antioch were reconquered by the Moslems in the twelfth century. But the sea remained in the hands of Christians.” In Henri Pirenne, Medieval Cities: Their Origins and the Revival of Trade (Garden City, NY, 1925/1956), p. 64.
9 According to Lane, the Venetian navy was invincible from the time it defeated the Genoan fleet at Chioggia in 1381 until it lost at Zonchio to the Turks in 1499. Frederic Chapin Lane, "Nautical Actions and Fleet Organization, 1499-1502," in Renaissance Venice, ed. J. R. Hale (Totowa, NJ, 1973), p. 146. At the time of the defeat at Zonchio, Venetian trade hegemony was simultaneously challenged by the Portuguese circumnavigation of Africa. For more, see the summary of Priuli’s reports about Portuguese maritime success in Girolamo Priuli, "I Portoghesi nell'India e i Veneziani in Egitto," in Diarii e diaristi veneziani, ed. Rinaldo Fulin (Venice, 1881).
10 According to Setton, the Italians were “the economic as well as the cultural heirs of Byzantium, and if they assimilated their cultural legacy rather slowly, they did so surely.” In Setton, "The Byzantine Background to the Italian Renaissance," p. 31.
11 According to Eustathius of Thessalonica, in 1180 there were more than 60,000 Latins in Constantinople. As cited in ibid.
the territory of Byzantium, were able to bypass the problem of multi-step translations simply because the intellectual heritage of Plato and Aristotle was still alive and their writings used by teachers in Constantinople as fundamental texts in the educational process. Their ideas were an intrinsic part of the Byzantine thought which permeated all aspects of social life.\(^\text{12}\)

The earliest Latin versions of the Aristotelian texts translated directly from the original Greek are attributed to an early 12\(^{\text{th}}\) century scholar known as James of Venice - an obscure identity - probably a cleric or merchant clerk connected to the academic circles in Constantinople.\(^\text{13}\) While Petrarch’s 14\(^{\text{th}}\) century humanist circles in Florence relied on the revival of the Roman Latin literary and philosophical heritage, Venetian Renaissance drew directly from the classical Greek legacy.\(^\text{14}\) This trend obviously reflected city’s close ties with the Byzantine metropolis, which, in the contemporary imagination of the West “still floated like a vision above the waters of the Bosporus, still inviolate, still powerful, the biggest, richest, and the most sophisticated city in the world.”\(^\text{15}\) Venice soon became the principal center of international trade in Greek manuscripts, collected mainly via its numerous merchant and military bases in the eastern Mediterranean.\(^\text{16}\)


\(^\text{13}\) Lorenzo Minio-Paluello, "Giacomo Veneto e l'Aristotelismo latino," in Venezia e l'Oriente fra tardo Medioevo e Rinascimento, ed. Agostino Pertusi (Venezia, 1966), p. 61. Minio-Paluello claims that James was probably already familiar with fragments of Aristotle’s Politics - one of the last Aristotelian texts ‘discovered’ in the West around 1260 by William of Moerbeke (ibid., pp. 62-63). According to Setton, the core of Byzantine education was the study of ancient texts: “the Bible, the pagan poets, orators, and historians, the church fathers, and finally the philosophers, especially Aristotle and Plato, were all studied.” In Setton, "The Byzantine Background to the Italian Renaissance," p. 10. An idealized portrait of James of Venice is offered in Frederic Chapin Lane, Venice: A Maritime Republic (Baltimore, 1973), p. 215.

\(^\text{14}\) To illustrate this point, Lane uses Francis Petrarch’s complicated relationship with Venice. In Lane, Venice: A Maritime Republic, pp. 217-18.


\(^\text{16}\) D’Amico notes that late medieval merchants traded with manuscripts just as they traded with spices, armor or clothing. In John F. D’Amico, "Manuscripts," in The Cambridge History of Renaissance Philosophy, ed. C. B. Schmitt, et al. (Cambridge, UK, 1988), p. 13. For more on the supply of manuscripts through Greeks who settled in Venice see Marino Zorzi, Collezioni veneziane di codici greci: Dalle raccolta della Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana (Venezia, 1993), p. 7. There were also special scouts who searched for manuscripts in the service of important collectors, often their patrons. Cardinal Bessarion, the owner of
Marc Bloch assesses that it was no accident that among the first translators were several members of the multilingual Italian merchant colonies established in Constantinople.\(^{17}\) Another important source of manuscripts were Greek merchant families which, in the meantime, started to settle in Venice.\(^{18}\) Flamboyant intellectual Cyriac of Ancona (who in the early 15\(^{th}\) century crisscrossed the Mediterranean on boards of Venetian merchant galleys) was a pioneer in the systematic archeological research of the classical heritage.\(^{19}\) Paradoxically, the Venetian intellectual world - and through it also the rest of Europe - profited immensely from the Turkish conquest of Constantinople in 1453, when a multitude of disenfranchised Greek intellectuals looked to the city on the lagoon as a refuge for themselves, their families and for their libraries.\(^{20}\) Consequently, the Venetian state-sponsored University of Padua, which in 15\(^{th}\) century played an increasingly important role in educating Venetian intellectual and political elites, developed into the most prominent academic center of Aristotelian thought in Europe.\(^{21}\)

\(^{17}\) Marc Bloch, *Feudal Society*, L. A. Manyon trans. (Chicago, 1939/1961), vol. 1, p. 103. This claim makes lot of sense; however Bloch doesn't support it with any empirical evidence and I did not find any concrete example to illustrate it either.


\(^{20}\) Cf. Geanakoplos, *Greek Scholars in Venice: Studies in the Dissemination of Greek Learning from Byzantium to Western Europe*. Kristeller adds that prior to 1350, the number of classical Greek manuscripts in western libraries was very small. It was during the period from 1350 to 1600 that most of the Greek manuscripts that are now in the West and that have been the basis of all modern editions were brought from the Greek East - both before and after the Turkish conquest of Constantinople - by scholars who fled to the West. In Kristeller, "Humanism," p. 119.

\(^{21}\) Venice conquered Padua in 1405 and two years later it incorporated the University of Padua into its government payroll system. As of the 1460s, all children of Venetian nobles were compelled to study exclusively in Padua. See the section dedicated to the history of the University of Padua in Paul F. Grendler, *The Universities of the Italian Renaissance* (Baltimore, 2002), pp. 21-40. According to Geanakoplos, Renaissance Padua "had no peer among the universities of Western Europe" in the fields of pure Aristotelian philosophy, medicine, and Hellenistic studies. In Geanakoplos, *Greek Scholars in Venice: Studies in the Dissemination of Greek Learning from Byzantium to Western Europe*, p. 276. The first comprehensive Latin translation of Aristotle was printed in Venice in 1472-74 - at the same time when those texts were required by syllabi in Padua. In Grendler, *The Universities of the Italian Renaissance*, pp. 274 and 403. For more on the role the University of Padua played in educating Venetian elites see Martin Lowry, *Nicholas Jenson and the Rise of Venetian Publishing in Renaissance Europe* (Cambridge, MA, 1991), pp. 1-25.
important center of classical culture and learning that Cardinal Basilius Bessarion, the single most influential Greek expatriate living in the West, called it *quasi alterum Byzantium* - almost another Byzantium.\(^{22}\) Platonic and Aristotelian spirit permeated Venetian humanism which was clearly present in the way Venetians thought about themselves, their form of government and their social institutions.\(^{23}\) And it was again the presence of merchants from all corners of Europe who were trading in Venice which fostered the spread of this knowledge further north and west. Pier Paolo Vergerio bragged in the early 1400s that “merchandise sought in every corner of globe is brought here, making this city an emporium of the entire world.”\(^{24}\)

At the time when the birthplace of the Renaissance, Florence, constantly struggled between strong oligarchic regimes, periods of popular democracy and populist demagogy, one of the main challenges standing in front of the emerging humanistic philosophy was to address the problem of political stability.\(^{25}\) And Venice at some point proudly declared that it discovered the secret formula which would guarantee its state institutions virtual immortality.\(^{26}\) What was the Venetian answer to the quest for a well-ordered republic? The city’s ruling classes - probably at first inadvertently, but as of the early 15th century, very intentionally - imported and incorporated into the constitutional frame of their society many ideas formulated by ancient Greek philosophers in

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\(^{22}\) Bessarion on the Greek refugees from Constantinople: “...as they sail in from their own regions they make their first landfall in Venice, and have such a tie with you that when they put into your city they feel they are entering another Byzantium.” From Cardinal Bessarion's letter accompanying the donation of his Greek and Latin manuscripts collection to Venice in 1468. As reprinted and translated to English in David Chambers, Brian S. Pullan, and Jennifer Fletcher, eds., *Venice: A Documentary History, 1450-1630* (Cambridge, MA, 1992), pp. 357-58.

\(^{23}\) Margaret L. King, *Venetian Humanism in an Age of Patrician Dominance*, p. 182.


their own search for an ideal republic. As a result, Venetian political ideology became a syncretic hodge-podge of ideas borrowed selectively from Aristotle, Plato or Xenophon - often filtered through Roman experience conveyed in the texts of Cicero, Pliny or Titus Livius - and mixed with Christian piety and morality. There was barely an aspect of the Venetian public (and private) sphere which did not bear a clear imprint of ancient Greek thinking. It was reflected in the overall political organization of the Republic, its expansionistic policies, the social norms which regulated the public and private lives of its citizens, as well as in the physical layout of the city proper.

II. A State Better Than Plato Ever Imagined

In many aspects, the social and political organization of Venetian society as of the 12th century gradually assumed features of an ideal Hellenistic polity. The constitutional reform of 1297, known generally under the name of serrata, practically ‘locked’ about two hundred noble families in perpetual power creating three principal social castes: nobles (nobili) with full citizenship; ordinary citizens (cittadini or cives populares) in good material standing but lacking political rights; and marginalized popular masses (popolari). Such social stratification was very

27 For more on syncretic interpretations of Plato and Aristotle during the late Medieval period and the Renaissance see Burgess Laughlin, *The Aristotle Adventure: A Guide to the Greek, Arabic, and Latin Scholars who Transmitted Aristotle’s Logic to the Renaissance* (Flagstaff, AZ, 1995), p. 175. Bouwsma points out Paolo Paruta’s selective adoption of Aristotle’s and Plato’s ideas. In Bouwsma, *Venice and the Defense of Republican Liberty: Renaissance Values in the Age of the Counter Reformation*, p. 200. On the marriage of Venetian humanism with Christianity see King, *Venetian Humanism in an Age of Patrician Dominance*, p. 185. In *On the Republic*, Querini (1450) admits that he constructed his argument by “reorganizing Aristotle’s statements at will... adding also many of my ideas and those of others” particularly in the part of his book in which he proposes an ideal social organization. As cited in King, *Venetian Humanism in an Age of Patrician Dominance*, p. 124. Cicero, Pliny, Plutarch and Titus Livius are only few of many Roman authors mentioned by Venetian philosophic texts about the nature of government. In his memoirs, the French ambassador to Venice, Philippe de Commines (1447-1511), wrote that Venetians “understand by Titus Livius what imperfections were in the state of Rome; for they have his histories [i.e., monumental Roman history *Ab Urbe Condita*], and his body laying buried in their palace at Padua.” In Philippe de Commynes, *The historie of Philip de Commines Knight, Lord of Argenton*, Thomas Danett trans. (London, 1596), p. 307.

28 The claim that Aristotle’s and Plato’s ideas were alive and well in Renaissance Venice may be illustrated by the fact that 1,025 copies of Marsilio Ficino’s translation of Plato were printed there in 1484 - four times more than the average edition at that time. In L. D. Reynolds and Nigel Guy Wilson, *Scribes and Scholars: A Guide to the Transmission of Greek and Latin Literature* (Oxford, UK, 1974), p. 155.

29 Etymologically, serrata has roots in Italian serrare which means ‘to lock’. For more on Venetian social stratification see Chambers, Pullan, and Fletcher, eds., *Venice: A Documentary History, 1450-1630*, pp. 261-62.
similar to the one found in the works of Plato and Aristotle, in which the “insistence that only full citizens are members of the *polis* shows that *polis* in its political sense is kept apart from *polis* in urban sense.”

An anonymous 17th century Venetian diarist described *serrata* with a bit of irony as “an idea which came to mind” to Doge Pierazzo Gradenigo, “to lock the Council, which is to reduce the Republic to a specific government of [noble] families.” According to the diarist, all was done very quietly and the result was a “city, inhabited mostly by strangers (*forestieri*)” in their own town.

Similarly to the Hellenistic ideal, the Venetian constitution only guaranteed full rights of democratic participation in the state government to the adult male members of the noble families whose names were listed in the *libri d’oro*, the legendary golden books containing noble birth registrations. “This Republic is commonly called *di ottimati* [of the best or most virtuous citizens], because its government is in the hands of a hundred and thirty families *in circa*,” wrote Gualtero Scotto in the foreword to Pietro Bembo’s *The History of Venice* (1552). “All of them are people educated in letters and eloquence, nourishing certain level of equality and uniformity among themselves… they can instead be called all members of one body than many people of…\footnote{Plato, *Republic*, 2.371-2.374 and 4.434b-c. According to Hansen, citizenship was an essential characteristic of the Greek city-state where privileged citizens lived side by side with free but unprivileged persons and slaves. “The word community (*koinonia*) shows that for Aristotle, the *polis* is not primarily a settlement but a society: it is a community of *politai*, i.e. adult male citizens, excluding women, children, slaves and free non-citizens. The insistence that only full citizens are members of the *polis* shows that *polis* in its political sense is kept apart from *polis* in its urban sense.” In Mogens Herman Hansen, *Polis: An Introduction to the Ancient Greek City-State* (Oxford, UK; New York, 2006), pp. 110 and 145.}


one Republic.” Following the Hellenistic ideal, the entitlement to govern was derived from the possession of *civic virtues*. Venetian philosopher Lauro Querini argued that such virtues were innate and not acquired, belonging exclusively to the nobles. Consequently, the rest of Venice’s population - both the citizens and the popular masses - indeed became ‘strangers’ (*forestieri*) in their own country.

After the *serrata*, Venetian political architecture reflected the classical idea of three types of governments discussed by Plato and Aristotle: democracy, aristocracy, and oligarchy. Vergerio pointed out that the city was “ruled by a government composed of the best men, the type of regime that Greeks call an ‘aristocracy’, which takes a middle course between monarchical and democratic name.” This was true especially in regards to the Venetian Senate, the main legislative body elected from amongst the elder members of the Great Council, which was a general assembly of all adult noble males who usually met once a week and formally constituted the entire body politic of the Republic. But Venice also had an office of a doge who was


34 Querini, in his treatises *On Nobility* and *On the Republic* (both ca. 1450). Their analytical summaries are in King, *Venetian Humanism in an Age of Patrician Dominance*, pp. 117-32.

35 The Italian term *forestiero* - stranger or foreigner - is used often with great ambiguity, because there were indeed many foreign merchants, sailors and craftsmen living in Venice. As an example see Comynes’ famous observation that “the greatest part of their people be strangers.” In Comynes, *The historie of Philip de Commines Knight, Lord of Argenton*, p. 307. The idea of non-nobles as ‘foreigners’ is discussed also in Filippo de Vivo, *Information and Communication in Venice: Rethinking Early Modern Politics* (Oxford, UK, 2007), p. 87.

36 See for example Aristotle’s dispute about the advantages and disadvantages of democracy, aristocracy and oligarchy in *Politics*, 1273a.

37 Vergerio, “The Venetian Republic: Selections,” p. 118. Vergerio’s study was written around 1400.

38 Cardinal Contarini described the Great Council as an institution “into which all the gentlemen of the CItie being once past the age of 25 years, are admitted: and sundry of them not yet come to that age, so that they be full twentie, which privilege thy obtaine by the benefit of lotteries [sic].” In Gasparo Contarini, *The Commonwealth and Gouvernment of Venice*, Lewes Lewkenor trans. (London, 1599), p. 16. The Senate according to Contarini “hath a hundred and twenty lawfull senators, besides many other magistrates that do also obtaine the privilege and right of Senators, so that now in this time of ours there are above two hundred and twentie that have the authority of using their suffrages in the senate [sic].” In Contarini, *The Commonwealth and Gouvernment of Venice*, p. 66.
elected for life and who was the living symbol of the state, representing its historical continuity. Venetians argued that the real greatness of their city was in the fact that it was able to fuse all three types of government. Their Republic was governed by an oligarchic doge, whose every decision was controlled by an aristocratic Senate, which in its turn was elected by a democratic assembly of all noble citizens, the Great Council. “So saith Plato are the extreme elements, the earth and the fire, ioyned and bound together with the middle elements, as in a well tuned dayapason the extreme voices are concorded together,” argued Gasparo Contarini. According to George of Trebizond, this system of checks and balances made Venice an incarnation of an ideal Platonic state, indeed it was way better than Plato himself ever imagined. “You Venetians have not left any room for improvement,” boasted the author in a dedication of his 1454 Latin translation of Plato’s Laws:

...if anyone carefully and thoroughly examines the laws which Plato ordained for his city in order to ensure its permanence and liberty, he will not be able to deny, I believe, that the original founders of Venetian liberty took from Plato the first glimmerings from which they established the government of their city and that they did so in such a way that from the Platonic rivulets much greater rivers have flowed and far greater splendors have shone forth from their constitution than Plato himself have ever imagined for his own republic.

The constitution of Venice guaranteed full political representation to only a very limited circle of nobles. But in order to achieve social stability, the ruling class had to create an impression that the non-nobles were compensated for their loyalty to the state with certain privileges from which the nobles were excluded. Thus, following Aristotle’s position taken in Politics, the nobles framed their citizenship not through their rights, but through their duties, arguing that “it is not the duty of the man that is capable of ruling to surrender office to his

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39 On the constitutional role of the doge see Finzi’s introductory note to Domenico Morosini, De bene istituita republica, ed. Claudio Vita-Finzi (Milano, 1969), p. 25.
41 George of Trebizond, "Preface to Plato's Laws," pp. 129 and 131. Monfasani explains that the author was expecting a rich personal reward for the fact that he dedicated his translation to Venice (ibid., pp. 128-29).
neighbor, but rather to take it from him.” In the strict economic sense, Venice was a society not divided by classes, if the classes would be defined by their relationship to the means of production. At least in theory, everyone in the state enjoyed the same basic liberties - especially the economic freedom to engage in trade. The nobles, however, because of their unique possession of civic virtues, had to take upon themselves - along with their civic freedoms – also the burden of the government. Aristotle claimed that in fact the most skilled workers often become rich, but this does not automatically make them full-fledged citizens because they lack requisite civic virtues which sustain the state as a community. “Hence those who contribute most to such fellowship have a larger part in the state than those who are their equals or superiors in freedom and birth but not their equals in civic virtue, or than those who surpass them in wealth but are surpassed by them in virtue.” Similarly Venetian nobles were, under ideal circumstances, expected to bear not just most of the honors, but also most of the burdens connected with day-to-day running of the state and its defense.

Following this logic, most of the top-ranking elected government positions in Venice were unpaid. In time of war, even nobles who drew state salaries often decided to give up a

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46 See Aristotle, Politics. 3.1278a and 3.1281a.
47 Elisabeth G. Gleason, Gasparo Contarini: Venice, Rome, and Reform (Berkeley, CA, 1993), p. 39. In 1524 Sanudo stated that it was about time that Venetian non-nobles start to carry the burden of the prolonged series of costly wars to defend Venetian interests: “azio tutta la terra sente la Guerra, perché gli forestieri et il popolo, dico rico, non gli pare [che] sia guerra non pagando nulla” – that the entire republic would feel the impact of the war because the foreigners and non-nobles do not even realize that there is a war since they do not contribute anything. In Marino Sanudo, I diarii (1496-1533): Pagine scelte, ed. Paolo Margaroli (Vicenza, 1997), XLII, 317-319.
48 “All the savi have no emoluments, serving without salary,” noted the author of an anonymous Description ou tracité du gouvernement ou régime de la cité et seigneurie de Venise (ca 1500). As partially reprinted in translated form in Chambers, Pullan, and Fletcher, eds., Venice: A Documentary History, 1450-1630, p. 43. While a successful merchant was able to make up to 20,000 ducats, the Doge, who had to give up all private business, was remunerated with a ‘mere’ 3,000 ducats a year. Cf. Sanudo, Venice, Città Excelentissima: Selections from the Renaissance diaries of Marin Sanudo, p. 542.
significant portion of their remunerations to support military effort.\textsuperscript{49} Paying taxes was considered a civic duty in Venice and French ambassador De Commynes observed with astonishment the nobles lined up in front of the tax offices waiting to pay their share.\textsuperscript{50} Sanudo recorded that in 1513 Doge Loredan caused a scandal when he called a secret meeting of the Great Concil, asking nobles to contribute to support the war, but he himself did not proposed to send his own son or offered any money. This was seen as a novelty in Venetian politics and had a very demoralizing impact.\textsuperscript{51}

Those who served in high-ranking offices in Venice were often expected to incur financial losses by having to put aside their lucrative private merchant careers.\textsuperscript{52} A refusal to serve in an office almost always carried a significant financial fine.\textsuperscript{53} Consequently, there was at least a kernel of truth in the Senator Antonio Loredan’s argumentation that while nobles “more often than not become poor” because of the expense tied to their government duties “which we, because of the custom, have to incur,” the non-nobles “simply enjoy” the benefits of the government, many surpassing the nobles themselves in personal riches.\textsuperscript{54}


\textsuperscript{51} “E tamen la Sua Serenita non ofese ne mandare gli suoi figlii, come si aspettava [che] dovesse fare, ne prestare qualche summa di danari, che a tutto Consiglio parse di nuovo; dicendo sotto voce: exemplum enim dedi vobis quemadmodum ego feci, ita et vos faciatis.” In Sanudo, \textit{I diarii (1496-1533): Pagine scelte}, XVII, 120.

\textsuperscript{52} See Finzi’s introduction to Morosini, \textit{De bene istituita republica}, p. 32. The petition of the Tiepolo family further illustrates this issue. It claims that the service of their brother as Venetian ambassador to Spain almost ruined their estate. They emphasize that he “has used up a large part of the portions [of dowries] destined for two poor daughters, whom he has still to marry off.” The petition was considered by the Senate on 29 September, 1561: ASV Senato, Terra, filza 34. Reprinted and translated to English in Chambers, Pullan, and Fletcher, eds., \textit{Venice: A Documentary History, 1450-1630}, pp. 254-45. In the 1520s, Ambassador Gasparo Contarini was similarly forced to spend 4,000 ducats of his own money to subsidize his embassy in Spain. In Gleason, \textit{Gasparo Contarini: Venice, Rome, and Reform}, p. 39.

\textsuperscript{53} In September of 1500, the Senate elected three nobles to go to Rialto every day to auction properties of their peers who owed money to the public treasury for unpaid taxes. The refusal to accept such an office incurred a one-thousand ducat penalty. In Priuli, \textit{I diarii di Girolamo Priuli (1494-1512)}, vol. 2, p. 61.

Through its unique constitutional design, which at least in theory assured social peace and justice for all, Venice claimed that it was able to find the fine balance of power between the interests of the different social classes. This fact assured its social stability which gave its republican regime the potential to exist in perpetuum. “The Greek republics have not passed 450 years, the one of Romans roughly 700; the one of ours has lasted already a thousand years, still counting,” declared in 1517 Lorenzo Venier, adding that it will endure till the end of the ages, “usque ad consumationem saeculorum”. Consequently, the city proudly boasted its nickname la Serenissima, the most serene one, claiming that its social constitution achieved a grade of perfection which was by no exaggeration superhuman. After all, as the myth of Venice incessantly reminded those at home and abroad, the peculiar site in a marsh on which the city was built was selected by a group of refugees escaping the barbarian hordes of Attila the Hun - the flagellum Dei. They were guided there by Divine Providence in order to save their true, Christian faith. The city thus came into being “not by human counsel but by the will of God,” and, drawing on its founding myth as a refuge of the persecuted, Venice promised to keep her arms open forever to all who were in need of refuge and shelter. During the lengthy conflict in which European Christian powers confronted the Ottoman Empire, Venetians presented their city as the walls of Christianity, or the last bastion in its fatal struggle with the infidels.

55 Lorenzo Venier’s speech as reported by Sanudo in his dairy, entry dated 1 March, 1517. In Sanudo, I diarii (1496-1533): Pagine scelte, XXIV, 5-8.
56 From the Christmas sermon of Fra Zuan Maria d’Arezzo delivered in the Church of Saint Mark, 25 December 1514. As reported by ibid. XIX, 331-2.
57 The quote is by George of Trebizond (c 1460), but it is commonly repeated in Venetian literature. In George of Trebizond, "Preface to Plato's Laws," p. 132. See also Sanudo’s claim that “this city was built more by divine than human will.” In Marin Sanudo, "Laus urbis Venetiae," p. 5.
A Republic Run by Merchants

Both Plato and Aristotle stipulated that in their ideal state, the merchant class would play only a marginal political role because its lifestyle was “ignoble and inimical to virtue,” a quality which they both saw as the most important prerequisite of good government. In the case of Venice, most of its leading politicians were merchants. The question of whether merchants should be actively engaged in managing public affairs was indeed one of the cardinal issues for the Renaissance philosophy of government to answer. In Spain, a nobleman engaged in trading could not even enter a tournament because he was not seen to be fit to be company to other cavaliers. At the same time, the Spanish ambassador in Venice observed that local noblemen “show more skill in amassing money and acquiring great possessions” than any other merchants in the world. Venetian native son Paolo Sarpi demanded that merchants be excluded from the government of the republic, arguing that “a merchant is of a necessity in some measure a foreigner, while his trade and interest lies abroad.” Merchants, according to Sarpi, would do everything to follow their own interests, “because that profit and gain which has made men venture through a thousand difficulties, to discover new worlds, will still carry the merchant, if he cannot have it at home, to seek it abroad, though he go to the Antipodes for it.” Yet, he added, a person engaged in governing the commonwealth “ought to have no interest nor affection but at

59 Aristotle, Politics, 7.1328b. The quote is from Aristotle, Aristotle in Twenty-Three Volumes, vol. 21. In Laws (11.918-19), Plato wants to socially marginalize the merchant classes of his ideal state of Magnesia and heavily regulate their trade, which he looks upon with suspicion.
60 Priuli observed in his diary that in large part the Venetian Senators were merchants - “bona parte dei Senatori Venetti heranno marchandanti.” In Priuli, i diarii di Girolamo Priuli (1494-1512), vol. 2, p. 197.
61 For more on this discussion see Finzi’s introductory note to Morosini, De bene istituita republica, p. 30.
63 From a report from Venice attributed to the former Spanish ambassador, Don Alonso della Cueva, Marquis of Bedmar, c. 1608: BL Additional ms. 5471, ff. 147-53. As reprinted and translated to English in Chambers, Pullan, and Fletcher, eds., Venice: A Documentary History, 1450-1630, pp. 257-60. The Marquis of Bedmar added that the Venetian nobles “are not forbidden to engage in commerce, not is it thought unseemly for them to do so” (ibid.).
home." And indeed, Benedetto Cotrugli in his merchant manual *Libro dell’arte di mercatura* (1458) pointed out the growing spatial independence of merchants by claiming that the flexibility they acquired on the seas due to improved navigation techniques allowed them to move their entire household at will from place to place, liberating their business interests from the constraints of territorial sovereignty.

But for Venetian nobles, to choose between their Republican government and long-distance trade was an impossible task, simply because trade was not a matter of option for Venice, it was an issue of destiny derived from the *necessitas loci*. Consequently the city, whose riches, glory and international prestige were historically built by generations of its merchants who engaged in long-distance trade, needed to reconcile its structure of government and the political philosophy of Plato and Aristotle which it gradually embraced. Without using the term ‘hegemony’, Venetian elites understood very well that there was a direct link between the widely accepted social norms and practices and political legitimacy. “Thus doth nature always adapt mens [sic] minds to those arts which they are to exercise themselves in, or else custom doth inform the habit, and turns it into nature,” pointed out Venetian political philosopher Paolo Paruta.

In his 1490s treatise on government, *De bene istituita re publica*, Domenico Morosini offered an original, yet in its fundamental philosophy a truly Venetian solution to the problem of merchant participation in the government. Since other classes were not in possession of adequate civic virtues, the author was not able to envision the full exclusion of noble merchants in the

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64 Sarpi added: “What shall we say of those nobles, who, being engaged in trade, may have many thousands of crowns in an enemie’s country?” All quotes are from Sarpi, *Advice Given to the Republick of Venice*, pp. 15 and 24-26.


government in Venice. Yet, according to an old Venetian tradition, every time the Senate voted upon any issue related to the church, all those whose families were receiving any kind of ecclesiastic benefits were supposed to abstain from the ballot. According to Morosini, such a rule could simply be applied also to those with commercial interests; the Senators would be excluded from ballots regarding countries in which they had commercial interests. However simple and ingenious, this solution was not very practical and as such was never adopted in Venice, simply because the majority of its noble merchants had very complex, literally global trade interests. Gaining enormous mobility on the seas during the 15th century, their trade web often spanned from Crimea to London. Each of them was not only a part of complex trade networks involving other merchants, but their attention span was also shifting quickly - following the ever-changing conditions on the ground and ready to seize any opportunity to make a quick profit.

With the failure of Morosini’s proposition, Venetians were forced to rationalize the persisting conflict arguing that most of their nobles engaged in trade mainly in their youth up until they reached their forties by which time they were expected to have accumulated enough personal wealth and experience to engage in public service. Indeed, the abandonment of trade by young nobles was seen by older generations as the biggest threat to the survival of the republic. Especially when in the second half of the 15th century many Venetian nobles were gradually leaving the life of merchants, becoming more settled and acquiring properties on the mainland.

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69 Morosini, De bene istituita republica, pp. 178-82.  
70 Frederic Chapin Lane, Andrea Barbarigo - Merchant of Venice, 1418-1449 (New York, 1967), p. 135.  
71 Ibid., p. 336. Priuli pointed out the effectiveness that Venetian diplomacy showed negotiating with the Ottoman Empire thanks to the appointment of Benedetto Sanuto whom he describes as a “man very knowledgeable of [that] country who spent a long time as a merchant in Damascus.” In Priuli, I diarii di Girolamo Priuli (1494-1512), vol. 2, p. 218.  
72 Diarist Girolamo Priuli offers a colorful description of the process through which the Venetians in the second half of 15th century gradually purchased two-thirds of landed properties in neighboring Padua. Local residents looked at their rich neighbors with increasing disdain, yet they were voluntarily selling off their houses for the good prices offered by the Venetians. In Priuli, I diarii di Girolamo Priuli (1494-1512), vol. 4, pp. 7-8. English Ambassador’s Dudley Carleton wrote: “They former course of life was merchandising: which is now quite left and they looke to landward buieng house and lande furnishe themselves with coch and horses, and giving themselves the goode time with more shew and galantrie that was wont.” From the notes of English
As the merchant-diarist Girolamo Priuli stated in 1509, “terraferma calls for luxuries, such as estates and great houses, with other expenditure, and much of the income is consumed in such pleasures.” The older generations of Venetian nobility did not want to see their sons turn into “country bumpkins”; they wanted their heirs “to apply themselves to commerce and become merchants instead, following the most ancient customs of the city of Venice.”

The State-Corporatist Nature of the Venetian Government

A very distinctive feature of Venetian capitalism was its state-corporatist character, an idea which had a clear analogue in the Greek literary tradition. In Ways and Means, Xenophon suggested that “it would be a good plan to take a hint from the state ownership of public warships, and to see whether it be possible to acquire a fleet of public merchant vessels and to lease them under securities, like our other public property.” Venetians (as well as other medieval maritime republics) indeed built such fleets in their shipyards, laying structural foundations to the nowadays European Continental capitalist economies based on significant participation of the state. According to Lane, it often seemed that the merchant nobles in Venice all operated together as one enterprise, of which the board of directors was the Senate.

The state was involved at least at four different levels: (1) it pursued domestic regulatory policies.
which were encouraging long-distance trade;\textsuperscript{77} (2) it directly owned the ships whose cargoes were regularly publicly auctioned to private merchants for different trade voyages; (3) it maintained military complexes all around the Mediterranean and sponsored fitted-out battle ships which provided security for such trade expeditions;\textsuperscript{78} and (4) it maintained an enormous diplomatic apparatus whose role was to create a politically favorable climate for private merchant enterprise.\textsuperscript{79}

The traditional destinations of Venetian state galleys were the ancient Greek and Roman trading posts in the Mediterranean. Yet as of 1314, Venetians started to send at least one fleet every year to Bruges. A single journey lasted at least 50 days and on the way, the galleys to Flanders made stops in all important French, Spanish and Portuguese ports.\textsuperscript{80} In the second half of the 15\textsuperscript{th} century, a typical Venetian great galley carried almost 300 tons of cargo and required

\textsuperscript{77} This is clearly demonstrated in the state’s involvement in trade with German lands, particularly in the building and maintaining of the Fondaco dei Tedeschi. In Henry Simonsfeld, Der Fondaco dei Tedeschi in Venedig and die Deutschen Handelsbeziehungen: Urkunden von 1225-1653, vol. 1 (Stuttgart, 1887). See also the document establishing the board of trade - Cinque Savi all Mercanzia, 15 January 1507. As reprinted and translated into English in Chambers, Pullan, and Fletcher, eds., Venice: A Documentary History, 1450-1630, pp. 168-69.

\textsuperscript{78} Buenge Robbert traces one of the earliest records about state-financed naval expeditions whose missions were to protect private merchant interests in the early 13\textsuperscript{th} century. In Louise Buenge Robbert, "A Venetian Naval Expedition of 1224," in Economy, Society, and Government in Medieval Italy, ed. D. Herlihy, R. S. Lopez, and V. Slessarev (Kent, OH, 1969).

\textsuperscript{79} According to Nicol, “from the thirteenth century onwards the whole machinery of the Venetian state was involved in the administration, defense and exploitation of its colonies and the promotion of their trade.” In Donald MacGillivray Nicol, Byzantium and Venice: A Study in Diplomatic and Cultural Relations (Cambridge, UK; New York, 1988), p. 284. For more on state assistance to private trade interest, see also Gleason’s analysis of Ambassador Gasparo Contarinis’s assistance to Venetian merchants during his stay in Spain. In Gleason, Gasparo Contarini: Venice, Rome, and Reform, pp. 33-34. The most important Venetian ambassador was in Constantinople and was traditionally called bailo - the ancient Venetian term for an ambassador. In Lane, Venice: A Maritime Republic, pp. 99-100. Even for wealthy Venice, to maintain its diplomatic service was not inexpensive. In January 1500 the Venetian Senate reprimanded its six highest ranked ambassadors for their enormous expenses, cutting down the number of horses they could use for their entourages from twenty to twelve. See Priuli, I diarii di Girolamo Priuli (1494-1512), vol. 1, p. 246. In September of 1500, the Senate scolded its ambassadors in Rome and Naples for spending 4,000 ducats a year – “a thing which is not sustainable.” Consequently, it limited the expenses of all Venetian ambassadors in the Mediterranean area to 100 ducats a month; those who served across the Alps had a monthly spending limit of 120 ducats. In ibid., vol. 2, p. 50. In 1509, the Senate deliberated about the enormous expense of the Venetian military-diplomatic mission in Cyprus where the governor in Nicosia and the captain in Famagusta each had a yearly salary of 1,800 ducats; it was reduced to 1,000 ducats. In ibid., vol. 4, p. 200.

a crew of about 200 oarsmen. Diarists Priuli and Sanudo captured details of several public auctions of such fleets of state galleys (le mude). After the Senate cleared the number of ships which would be sent to a particular destination and established their date of departure, a group of leading Senators went to the merchant quarter in the Rialto to auction the ships’ cargo services publicly. The Senate imposed strict limitations on the kinds of merchandise the ships could carry to and from their destinations. Each ship was first sold to a single patrone, who was always supposed to be one of the noble patricians, and subsequently its cargo space was subcontracted to any Venetian who wanted to purchase a small share of it. “For some of these galleys 3,000 ducats and more are paid, and for others only 1 ducat, according to different times and the particular voyage,” noted Sanudo, adding that “sometimes the Signoria itself pays those willing to accept a galley.”

In 1501, the Venetians sent their annual state merchant fleet of five galleys to Alexandria, carrying about 300,000 ducats in cash as well as textiles and glass made in Venice; it returned home with 2.5 million pounds of spices. In the meantime, another fleet destined to sail to Beirut did not find any patrons when publicly auctioned at the Rialto. The Signoria, recognizing the need to maintain employment for hundreds of sailors and workers whose livelihood depended on merchandise exported and imported to and from the Middle East,

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82 There were also special licenses for galleys carrying pilgrims from Venice on their journeys to the Holy Land. Such ships were traditionally auctioned in Piazza San Marco. For more see Newett's "Introduction" to Pietro Casola, *Canon Pietro Casola's Pilgrimage to Jerusalem in the Year 1494*, Margaret M. Newett trans. (Manchester, 1907), p. 79.

83 Marin Sanudo, "Laus urbis Venetiae," p. 11.

84 Each were auctioned for prices ranging from 610 to 850 ducats. In Priuli, *I diarii di Girolamo Priuli* (1494-1512), vol. 2, p. 142; and Sanudo, *I diarii di Marino Sanuto* (1496-1533), IV, 38-9. For the usual export articles which Venetian galleys carried to Alexandria and Beirut see ibid., vol. 2, pp. 254-55. Lane estimates that 2.5 million tons were the average Venetian yearly import of spices from Egypt around 1500, before the Portuguese undermined their monopoly on the European spice trade. In Lane, *Venetian Ships and Shipbuilders of the Renaissance*, p. 26.
decided to subsidize the galleys’ trip to Beirut by imposing an extra tax on other, more lucrative state mercantile expeditions.\textsuperscript{85}

Venetian capitalism was heavily regulated and depended on the assistance of the state. As of 1507, the government established its own Board of Trade - \textit{Cinque savi alla mercanzia}, whose role was to boost commerce during hard times when Venetian interests were hit by a perfect storm in a form of series of foreign wars in combination with the effects of the Portuguese circumnavigation of Africa. At the time when foreign trade dwindled, the Savi were supposed to “adopt every possible counter-measure for the benefit and increase of the commerce and revenue of our government.”\textsuperscript{86}

**Maintaining Social Stability**

Social stability was one of the main reasons why Venice boasted of its nickname \textit{la Serenissima}. Pretended or real, it became one of the main pillars of the myth of Venice. “And the order with which this holy Republic is governed is a wonder to behold; there is no sedition from the \textit{populo}, no discord among the patricians, but all work together to [the Republic’s] increase,” Sanudo wrote.\textsuperscript{87} Long before Hannah Arendt pointed out the repercussions of the \textit{rise of the social} on the nature of government, Venetians had a full grasp of the problem.\textsuperscript{88} They carefully studied history, learning from the mistakes made by their predecessors.

Venetian historiographer Paolo Paruta (1540-1598) summarized this knowledge in the posthumously published \textit{Discorsi politici}, analyzing the ways in which different states

\textsuperscript{85} Priuli, \textit{i diarii di Girolamo Priuli} (1494-1512), vol. 2, p. 142. In their commentary to Sanudo’s texts, Labalme and Sanguineti White points out that there were two major routes through which spices arrived to Mediterranean ports: one was through Suez, Cairo and Alexandria and the second was through Jeddah, Damascus to Acre or Beirut. In Sanudo, \textit{Venice, Città Excelentissima: Selections from the Renaissance diaries of Marin Sanudo}, pp. 258-59.
\textsuperscript{86} From the Capitolare no. 1 of the Cinque Savi all Mercanzia, 15 January 1507. As reprinted and translated in English in Chambers, Pullan, and Fletcher, eds., \textit{Venice: A Documentary History}, 1450-1630, pp. 168-69.
\textsuperscript{87} Marin Sanudo, “Laus urbis Venetiae,” p. 21.
throughout western history attempted to maintain social peace.\textsuperscript{89} In doing so, Paruta clearly dismissed the idea of a wide popular democracy, seeing it as easy prey to a populist leader with tyrannical ambitions. He argued that such a tendency was clearly demonstrated by the demise of republican Rome, as well as on the tumultuous history of Florence - a city-state whose political system was often coupled with Venice by Renaissance philosophers in an antagonistic political dualism.\textsuperscript{90} According to Paruta, a state in which the populist decrees of the people, and not the strictly and impartially enforced laws carry all the command, did not deserve the name of a commonwealth or republic.\textsuperscript{91} Venetian elites felt that historical development clearly vindicated their claim that only a state lead by a narrow aristocratic elite, in which “the noblemen had the greatest part in honors, but the people were equal to them in wealth”, was able to secure long-term stability. For Paruta, the contrast between Florence and Venice spoke for itself:

\begin{quote}
[Florence.] otherwise noble and magnificent, being much infected with parties, and corrupted by popularity, all endeavors of preserving it in the form of a Commonwealth, and in true liberty, proved vain. And on the contrary, the Commonwealth of Venice, by reason of her excellent form of government, which though it be mixt, hath little in it of popular government, and much of the Optimati, not having given way to such corruptions as use to trouble the quiet of civil life...\textsuperscript{92}
\end{quote}

Fra Paolo Sarpi (1552-1623) agreed with Paruta’s claim, adding that the entire body politic - in the case of Venice, the noble electorate which met in the Great Council - was still too numerous to remain \textit{aristocratic} in its nature. Only a much smaller governing body of seasoned leaders whose judgment was independent from the changing moods of the masses could have effectively defended republican virtues, even at a time when unpopular decisions needed to be

\textsuperscript{89} Paruta, Politick Discourses.
\textsuperscript{90} Renaissance philosophers often saw Venetian and Florentine political regimes as two polar opposites when it came to the discussion of republicanism. See Bouwsma, \textit{Venice and the Defense of Republican Liberty: Renaissance Values in the Age of the Counter Reformation}, p. 52.
\textsuperscript{91} All quotes are from Paruta, \textit{Politick Discourses}, p. 94. For Paruta, a good example of an ideal form of government was to be found in Sparta. According to Hansen, up until the 19th century, it was Sparta that was seen as the most important society in antique Greece, whose social form was typical for the entire Greek civilization. “From the Renaissance until the beginning of the nineteenth century people were far more interested in Sparta than in Athens, and the sources that people relied on were principally Plato, Aristotle, Polybius and Plutarch.” In Hansen, \textit{Polis: An Introduction to the Ancient Greek City-State}, p. 123.
\textsuperscript{92} Paruta, Politick Discourses, p. 94.
taken. In the case of Venice, such a body was represented by the Senate. Its 220 elected members were supposed to be completely isolated from outside pressure, following only their personal conscience and the benefit of the commonwealth when deliberating the matters of state. “We should see more vigorous resolutions in the Senators, if they were not continually obliged to court the favors of the Piazza,” argued the author. 93

Yet at the same time, Venetian nobles understood that, for the sake of the stability of their government, the rest of the city’s population must have felt that it had a stake in the Republic. Sarpi only summarized a set of old Venetian approaches to government when he wrote:

Employ as many of the people as may be in the service of the publick, that so drawing their livelihood from the government, they may have affection for it, and the numbers of the necessitous will thereby be lessened: for if hunger and want can make strong towns yield, it will likewise incite men to venture their lives in desperate attempts, rather than linger in misery. Yet still I would not advise to take any into office that had not first gained wherewithal to subsist in a mediocrity; for else it will be but giving him a kind of leave to cheat, to the great damage of the publick. 94

The Venetian approach to this argument may shed more light on the roots of the strong tradition of European social states lead by paternalistic governments which developed on the Continent. The city developed a complex system of social programs whose role was to prevent potential social unrest. “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,” bragged Sanudo in his Laude on the City of Venice. 95 As of 1490, Venice had its own Health Office ruled by the Provveditori alla sanità, whose mission was to hire public doctors and to take measures to prevent infectious diseases such as plague, and later to care for the poor and needy. 96 During the famine of 1504, the Venetian government spent 30,000 ducats

93 Sarpi, Advice Given to the Republick of Venice, pp. 18-19.
94 Ibid., pp. 22-23.
96 There were fourteen outbreaks of plague in Venice between 1456 and 1528, usually with devastating consequences for the community in the Lagoon. In 1540, Alvise Cornaro praised the public health service, arguing that “those deadly outbreaks of plague which used to carry off one fifth of the population every eight to ten years have ceased on account of the measures
to purchase grain to avoid civic unrest. The city continuously provided fresh water for its residents and in the time of drought financed digging and cleaning of public wells. At the time when the Venetian naval trade suffered because of Portuguese exploration and wars with the Ottoman Empire, the government often subsidized state galleys to import spices from the Middle East or raw wool from Gallia in order to keep thousands of sailors, vendors and textile workers employed. As Priuli observed, Venetian fathers did such things “for the necessity and desire to conserve the State.”

In time of war, those among the popolo who showed heroism in the defense of the Republic were rewarded with small pensions and offices with hereditary rights to their holders, in order to nourish patriotism. Spanish ambassador Marquis de Bedmar pointed out during his stay in Venice that the government systematically promoted among the popular masses the idea that Venice with its republican system and values was the best place on earth to live in spite of its own problems. “The more other regimes are depicted as tyrannical and insufferable, and the more the Venetian government is presented as mild, good, pious and charitable, the more the love of the people grows,” added the ambassador.

But the question of poverty was not limited to the working popular classes. As Papal ambassador Girolamo Aleandro observed in 1533, the number of Venetian nobility was so large that it included both rich and poor, even if the second group was rather an exception. In order to

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98 Francesco Sansovino, Venetia, citta nobilissima et singolare: descritta in XIII (Venezia, 1581), ff. 140r-141v.
100 Priuli recorded that certain Marco Pelizaro, a popolare who bravely defended Venice during the war in 1509, received a pension and an office for life which was to be inherited by his children. In ibid., vol. 4, p. 284.
keep their impoverished nobles in acquiescence, the government needed to take care of their basic material needs to make sure that "they will not entertain evil thoughts, as persons in strained circumstances are prone to do."102 One of the means used to alleviate material hardship among poor nobles was artificially creating jobs in the state bureaucracy.103 Poor nobles had the chance to earn a decent living also as supervisors on state galleys. “This rule was laid down by our reverend ancestors, to the end that those [nobles] who cannot hold offices of governorships, and are without incomes and unable to practice any skilled art, should have this income of 60 ducats and more a year from St Mark,” underlined Sanudo.104

The third Venetian social group, cittadini or cives populares, similarly had their own stake in the stability of the government. From 1478, they were entitled to be considered for posts of great trust in the Ducal Chancery. Their sons were often appointed to hold the key clerical posts at Venetian embassies. The highest rank any cittadino was allowed to reach in Venetian bureaucratic hierarchy was the position of the Grand Chancellor, called also the Doge of the popolo - the Doge of the people.105 While the nobles were elected to hold their offices only for short period of time, the civil service jobs were for life and as such became the backbone of continuity for the Republic. “For as the Council changes among the nobles every year, and the secretaries stay for life, it is necessary for the new Council, and for the Heads especially, to acquire from them full information about past events,” Venetian nobleman Luigi Da Porto

102 A letter of Girolamo Aleandro, papal ambassador in Venice, 5 November, 1533. Aleandro mentioned the extreme case of a family of an impoverished Venetian nobleman whose daughters were forced to stay the entire day in bed - on filthy mattresses covered with rags - because they had no clothes to leave the house. As reprinted and translated to English in ibid., p. 222.

103 Sanudo in this context pointed out that it is said that it costs only 250 ducats a year to create a new office. “Si dice che la spesa di fare un nuovo ufficio e solo ducati 250 al anno…” But in the time of war, such artificial employment became a big problem for Venice. In Sanudo, I diarii (1496-1533): Pagine scelte, XXIV, 656-59.

104 Sanudo added that such offices could have been sold further by their holders, provided that the position was filled. In Marin Sanudo, "Laus urbis Venetae,，“p. 12.

105 This social group grew up out of the populari who enriched themselves through trade. By 1662, it was established that everyone who aspired to be included in the class of the cittadini must have been able to prove that for three generations their family abstained from manual labor. In ibid., pp. 261-62. Commynes noted that “all their [Venetian] officers were noblemen, save their secretaries.” In Commynes, The historie of Philip de Commines Knight, Lord of Argenton, p. 307.
argued in 1509, adding that “hence our most secret occurrences are known to them, better than to any noble.”

One cannot avoid asking to what extent the proverbial social stability attributed to Renaissance Venice realistically reflected the city’s everyday life, and to what extent it was only a product of the carefully constructed myth? Venetian political writers were always ready to point out that partisanship and populist policies were two malaises which destroyed the republican spirit of Florence, yet their own republic was not completely shielded from social unrest and partisan politics. Among the nobles who met in the Great Concil, there were often competing groups, each following its own interests. The Council was traditionally divided between the competing clans of the Longhi, the twenty-five family clans of founding nobility which were established in Venice before 800 BCE, and the Corti, or noble families who established themselves in the city afterwards. Morosini lamented that the coalition of young nobles and impoverished ones greatly outnumbered the ballots of leading nobles - optimates - in the Great Council. There were constant tensions between Venetian nobili and cittaini classes, accusing each other of carrying an unequal share of the burdens and advantages they derived from their participation in the government. Yet, in comparison to other Renaissance societies,

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107 During the 1503 dispute about the territorial expansion, Priuli noted “grandissimi contrasti” which split the Senate along the sides of the different interests. In Priuli, I diarii di Girolamo Priuli (1494-1512), vol. 2, pp. 312-13.
108 The Longhi (the long ones) were called also case vecchie – old houses, and the Corti (the short ones) bore also name case nuove – the new houses. In an upsurge around 1450, the Corti pushed the Longhi out of power and dominated Venetian politics until 1610. In Finlay, Politics in Renaissance Venice, p. 92. Venetian chroniclers often used the word giovani - the young ones - in a very ambiguous way in which could mean both the young nobles as well as the representatives of the case nuove – new, or young houses.
109 Morosini, De bene istituita republica, pp. 118-19.
110 For the attitude of the nobili towards cittaini see the letter of Luigi Da Porto, 1 October, 1509. As reprinted and translated to English in Chambers, Pullan, and Fletcher, eds., Venice: A Documentary History, 1450-1630, pp. 168-71. Marquis de Bedmar observed that cittaini are “not well disposed towards nobility, for many of their families think themselves just as ancient and honorable as the noble houses, and some of them are actually richer and better dressed than noblemen.” From a report on Venice attributed to the former Spanish ambassador, Don Alonso della Cueva, Marquis of Bedmar, c. 1608: BL
Venice may have been rightly seen as an island of stability. The concerted strategy of material assistance and ideological persuasion worked surprisingly well. After the crucial battle of Agnadello in 1509, Priuli emphasized that “the Venetian popolari showed more enthusiasm in defending their city than the nobili themselves,” regardless of the fact that it was the nobles who “enjoyed the most the benefits of the state.”

Even the workers of one of the first industrial complexes in the history of Europe, the Venetian Arsenal, which employed in varying periods between 800 to 2,200 pairs of hands, revolted very rarely.

A Democracy Without Deliberation?

All political power in Venice was symbolically concentrated in the Ducal Palace. But despite the dominant atmosphere of secrecy, so typical for the highest echelons of the republic’s government, the Palace was open to the public and Venetians proudly invited their visitors to tour its richly decorated rooms, loggias and courtyard. Santo Brasca, who spent several days in Venice in 1480 on his pilgrimage to the Holy Land, wrote that he visited it “from top to bottom,” describing the “splendid and marvelous” decorations of its internal spaces which definitely


111 Priuli, I diarii di Girolamo Priuli (1494-1512), vol. 4, p. 273. Agnadello is a village near Milan where the French-lead coalition of the League of Cambrai defeated Venetian forces on May 14, 1509. For more see Lane, Venice: A Maritime Republic, pp. 242-44.

112 King, Venetian Humanism in an Age of Patrician Dominance, p. 178. Sanudo noted that in 1493 there were 800 workers in the Venetian Arsenal. Marin Sanudo, “Laus urbis Venetae,” p. 12. Davis estimates that the work force there in the 16th century oscillated between 1,000 and 2,200 masters, plus numerous apprentices. But their social revolt was channeled mostly through gang-organizations and smuggling practices. The Republic also ‘let off steam’ during traditionally organized big public fights – battagliole sui ponti. See the Chapter 4: “Arsenalotti as Agents of Disorder in Venice” in Robert C. Davis, Shipbuilders of the Venetian Arsenal: Workers and Workplace in the Preindustrial City (Baltimore, 1991), pp. 118-49. Chronicler Alvise Michiel described the 1581 short-lived uprising of the Arsenal craftsmen who demanded higher salaries and in their rage attacked the public granary. Their rebellion was immediately suppressed by force and its leaders publicly executed to dissuade others who were willing to take similar paths. Alvise Michiel, Memorie pubbliche della Repubblica di Venezia: BMV ms. Ital., cl. VII, 811 (7299), f. 175v, 27 November, 1581. As reprinted and translated to English in Chambers, Pullan, and Fletcher, eds., Venice: A Documentary History, 1450-1630, pp. 289-90.
influenced his strong overall impression of Venice. Another pilgrim, Pietro Casola, viewing the heroic scenes from Venetian history on the walls of the Great Council, observed that they were “represented with such richness and naturalness in the figures that I think little could be added.” A Florentine admirer of Venice, Donato Giannotti, pointed out that the enormous hall where the Great Council met was arranged to evoke awe in anyone who entered:

...the eye is drawn first to the seat of the Dodge, which, as we had said, is in a very eminent position; then it travels around the rest of the Hall, honored by the presence of the aforesaid magistrates... Thus, wherever he [the visitor] looks, he sees grandeur and magnificence.

Such were the physical settings in which the Venetian Great Council met once a week on Sundays, after mass. The Council’s primary role was to elect noble representatives to a complicated system of governing structures of the city. Venetian bureaucracy had numerous elected positions (hence the adjective ‘Byzantine’, which the city merited in more than one aspect). Their terms were very short in order to create the appearance of universal participation as well as to limit the potential for corruption, with the result that the Great Council was practically in a permanent electoral session. Each multi-step act of election started with all nobles present standing in orderly long lines, moving toward several urns placed in front of the assembly hall, and pulling out the ballots (Figure 3.2.). During his lifetime, Sanudo noted that

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113 The Diary of Santo Brasca (1480) as translated and reprinted in Chambers, Pullan, and Fletcher, eds., Venice: A Documentary History, 1450-1630, pp. 21-23.
114 Casola, Canon Pietro Casola's Pilgrimage to Jerusalem in the Year 1494, pp. 126-27.
116 Milanese pilgrim Casola wrote in his diary that one of the Doge’s pages “showed me everything, beginning with the bed where he [the Doge] sleeps, and proceeding even to the kitchen; and in my opinion nothing could be added.” In Casola, Canon Pietro Casola's Pilgrimage to Jerusalem in the Year 1494, p. 127. According to Sanudo, the Great Council meetings took place “domenica dopo la messa.” In Sanudo, I diarii (1496-1533): Pagine scelte, XLVI, 549.
117 Finlay counts 831 elected positions in 1493. In Finlay, Politics in Renaissance Venice, p. 59. Labalme and Sanguineti White in their commentary on Sanudo’s work note that most of the Venetian offices rotated fairly rapidly, lasting from six months to one year. In Sanudo, Venice, Citá Excelentissima: Selections from the Renaissance diaries of Marin Sanudo, p. 6.
118 The electoral process is described in detail in an anonymous Description ou traiicté du gouvernement ou régime de la cité et seigneurie de Venise (ca 1500). As partially reprinted in translated form in Chambers, Pullan, and Fletcher, eds., Venice: A Documentary History, 1450-1630, pp. 43-45. For more see also Finlay, Politics in Renaissance Venice, p. 90.
Figure 3.2. The electoral process underway in the Venetian Great Council. The Doge and Signoria are sitting in the forefront. Ballots are placed in front of the assembly. The illustration is from Pieter De la Court, *Politike Weegshaal*, c. 1660.
the attendance at Sunday’s Great Council meetings oscillated between 1,200-1,800 nobles, reaching its lows in the aftermath of the historical defeat at Agnadello in 1509 when he complained that “this country never had more nobles than now, more than 2,000 who can attend the Council, but many of them never come.”\footnote{The quote is from Sanudo, I diarii (1496-1533): Pagine scelte, VIII, 496. Sanudo noted that about 1,800 nobles attended the meeting of Grand Council immediately after election of Doge Andrea Gritti in 1523: “Eramo a Consiglio da numer 1800…” (ibid., XXXIV, 229). In 1523 Sanudo observed that the council was attended by 1,800 nobles (ibid., XXXIV, 229); in 1527 he estimated the attendance at about 1,600 (ibid., XLV, 569-72). For more see Finlay, Politics in Renaissance Venice, p. 174.} With such large participation, the meetings of Great Concil must have been a big logistical challenge. It required very strict rules which Venetians mastered to perfection. One of the characters of James Harrington’s utopian book, The Commonwealth of Oceana (1656), described the centuries-old voting process in Venice almost as a mechanical military exercise taking place in an atmosphere of absolute silence:

I must needs [sic] say, that it is for a dumb show the goodliest that I ever beheld with my eyes…for a council, and not a word spoken in it, is a contradiction. But there is such a pudder [sic] with their marching and countermarching, as, though never a one of them draw a sword, you would think they were training; which till I found that they did it only to entertain strangers, I came from among them as wise as I went thither.\footnote{James Harrington, The Commonwealth of Oceana (London, 1656), p. 115. Historians of political thought often describe the procedural model developed in Venice as ‘mechanized virtue’. See more on this topic in De Vivo, Information and Communication in Venice: Rethinking Early Modern Politics, p. 27.}

Indeed, this was the same democratic process which Jean-Jacques Rousseau observed in Venice as secretary to the French ambassador and later recommended in The Social Contract (1762). It has been described as democratic participation without public deliberation. Venetians deplored the concept of public opinion, understood as a result of public discussion in which different persuasive strategies could have been deployed to support partisan interests. Instead, the democracy of the Venetian type fostered the idea of a general will - a rational sum of individually informed judgments which Rousseau later described as follows:

From the deliberations of a people properly informed, and provided its members do not have any communication among themselves… a general will and decisions will always be good. But if groups, sectional associations are formed at the expense of the larger association, the will of each of these groups will become general in relation to its own members… it
is imperative that there should be no sectional associations in the state, and that every citizen should make up his own mind for himself.\textsuperscript{121}

Venetian institutions of representative government strictly followed such a dictum. They had rules limiting any form of personal or factional persuasion in the Senate and Great Council. In 1516, 50-year old noble Marin Sanudo bragged about the fact that during his life he spoke three times in the Great Council!\textsuperscript{122} Finlay claims that oratory skills went against the very nature of the quiet Venetian temperament, and public speaking consequently did not reach the level of a highly developed art in the city’s assemblies. All speeches had to be to the point, avoiding deviations and generalities, especially when they preceded the voting.\textsuperscript{123} The range of topics discussed, even the opportunity to speak publicly in front of the assembly was intentionally limited by the Senate leadership (Collegio) - a group of presumably virtuous elder nobles whose role was to set the agenda before any plenary meeting.\textsuperscript{124} One of the speeches which Marin Sanudo proudly claims he delivered in the Great Council was against the attempted ban of congratulatory handshakes among the nobles after a successful election.\textsuperscript{125} Such restrictive practices had clear ideological support in Venetian humanism which - contrary to the Florentine model - considered any form of individualism disruptive.\textsuperscript{126} Following the ancient Greek propensity to divinize homonoia, the concept of harmony and unity, and their innate contempt for autonomia, any form of individualism and independence, Venetians similarly believed that

\textsuperscript{122} “I who have spoken three times in the Great Council!” Sanudo, Venice, Citá Excelentissima: Selections from the Renaissance diaries of Marin Sanudo, p. 33. It was more common even for a regular member to speak in the Senate. During his first year in the Senate in 1517 Sanudo itemized all of his ten speeches, claiming that no one had spoken from the podium more often than he did. Cf. Sanudo, Venice, Citá Excelentissima: Selections from the Renaissance diaries of Marin Sanudo, p. 16.
\textsuperscript{123} Finlay, Politics in Renaissance Venice, p. 201 and 229; and De Vivo, Information and Communication in Venice: Rethinking Early Modern Politics, pp. 25-26.
\textsuperscript{124} De Vivo, Information and Communication in Venice: Rethinking Early Modern Politics, p. 30.
\textsuperscript{125} Reported in an entry from 14 January, 1526. In Sanudo, I diarii (1496-1533): Pagine scelte, XL, 664-666. For more on Sanudo’s speech see Finlay, Politics in Renaissance Venice, p. 271.
\textsuperscript{126} King, Venetian Humanism in an Age of Patrician Dominance, pp. 175 and 190.
individualism is the first step towards factionalism and as such must be restrained before it destroys the state.\textsuperscript{127}

Just as the numerous columns supporting the outside façade of the Ducal Palace in Venice each have originally designed decorative capitals carved in marble, but from a distance all look the same, Venetian nobles were expected to create a united body politic which alone would allow them to successfully carry the entire weight of the state. In this context Gasparo Contarini pointed out that Venetians rarely built statues and monuments to glorify their great political and military leaders.\textsuperscript{128} They refused any excess, believing that the best government comes from the “middling citizens who are the health of the republic.”\textsuperscript{129} Consequently, Venetian history resembles a long list of repeating noble surnames; the individual names of her famous sons had been for the most part fused into one amorphous mass.\textsuperscript{130}

Venetians refused the outright \textit{ostracism} as practiced in classical Greece, yet they certainly did everything to prevent an individual rising too high above his peers. “We may then conclude that the custom of the Athenians concerning ostracism ought neither to be praised nor practised in relation to the act itself; but may admit of commendation and imitation as far as the intention thereof reacheth, viz. to provide that the ambition or malice of a few, rob not many of their quiet, nor do perturb or confound the whole State,” argued Paolo Paruta.\textsuperscript{131} As the French ambassador Commynes added, one of the reasons for the Venetian republic’s longevity was that by

\textsuperscript{127} Hansen claims that for the citizens of ancient Greek city-states, unity was much more important than independence. For more on this topic see Hansen, \textit{Polis: An Introduction to the Ancient Greek City-State}, p. 126.
\textsuperscript{128} Contarini, \textit{The Commonwealth and Gouvernment of Venice}, p. 6.
\textsuperscript{130} Conversini in 1404 challenged Venetians: “Your commonwealth flourishing and magnificent, which equal by none in Europe in felicity and abundance of goods, is well known only by the name of the city. Although it has shone brightly with splendid men and excellent examples through many centuries, who knows their illustrious deeds in war and peace? Who reads them? Who remembers them? Well-known in their own times, but now shrouded by a cloud of oblivion, they have no praises.” In Ravenna, \textit{Dramalogia de Eligibili Vite Genero}, p. 117.
\textsuperscript{131} Paruta, \textit{Politick Discourses}, p. 110.
suppressing individualism “they avoid all factions in the citie, which sure is a great point of wisedome.”

The Venetian Broglio and the Selling of Offices

In theory, Piazza San Marco was designed as an ideal public space, serving state representation. The area immediately adjacent to the Ducal Palace, called the Piazzetta or Broglio, was reserved exclusively for activities pertaining to civic life. An anonymous 1620s chronicler described the Broglio as a public space where all Venetian patricians and citizens traditionally met to socialize and discuss public affairs (Figure 3.3.). Even foreign ambassadors used to send their best spies to listen to the conversations held here by Venetian nobles and citizens. Sanudo depicted a summer evening when the whole city spontaneously rallied in Piazza San Marco in a patriotic outburst during the 1500 naval battle of Modon; or another scene from 1521 when an impromptu crowd gathered there to celebrate the death of Venice’s sworn enemy - the Florentine Pope Leo X. Pietro Casola observed that the adjacent porticos of the second floor of the Ducal Palace hosted legal criminal courts of Quarantia, adding that at the time of the hearings “many cries are heard there, as also happens at Milan at

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133 The rest of Piazza San Marco was used for commercial purposes. On regular days it served as a marketplace and the porticos and the houses lining the square traditionally housed taverns and inns. Casola admired the abundance of fish and vegetables sold every morning at Saint Mark. In Casola, Canon Pietro Casola’s Pilgrimage to Jerusalem in the Year 1494, p. 131. For more commercial activities practiced in Piazza San Marco see also The Diary of Santo Brasca (1480) as translated and reprinted in Chambers, Pullan, and Fletcher, eds., Venice: A Documentary History, 1450-1630, pp. 21-23; Sanudo, I diarii (1496-1533): Pagine scelte, XX, 183; and Bembo, Della Historia Vinitiana di M. Pietro Bembo Card., p. 6b.
136 The Pope was Florence-born and Venetians accused him of siding with the Turks in order to undermine the political and trade hegemony of Venice. Sanudo called him “il capitan generale di Turco e uno che minacciava la Christianita.” In Sanudo, I diarii (1496-1533): Pagine scelte, III, 688 and 732-3; XXXII, 207-8.
Figure 3.3. The Venetian Piazzetta, also called the Broglio. It was considered a center of civic life. Source: Pierre de L'Estoile, *Mémoires-journaux:1574-1611*, Livre VIII, pp. 145-46.
the *Broletto* at the time of the trials.”\(^{137}\) The two columns topped with the symbols of Saint Mark and Saint Theodor which still dominate the Piazzetta on the side of the Grand Canal, delineated the place where capital punishment for the most severe crimes “on robbers, traitors or others, being burnt, hanged or otherwise” were carried out *per exemplo de altri* - as an admonishment to others.\(^{138}\)

But the Venetian *broglio* did not become a synonym for an ideal public space. Instead, the term *bròglio* or *imbròglio* entered into the modern Italian dictionary as a metaphor for political corruption.\(^{139}\) As numerous historical sources show, lobbying and public relations stunts were strategies not unknown in Venetian politics. In theory, every new doge was required to take a pledge that his entire family would abstain from active commercial practices during his reign.\(^{140}\) Yet, in spite of official restrictions, Doge Agostino Barbarigo (1486-1501) was broadly perceived as a corrupt man.\(^{141}\) “Nobody dared to oppose him when he managed with offices and benefices as he pleased,” lamented Priuli. “It was charged that he allowed some to kiss his hand. The greatest accusation was regarding his taking gifts from everyone, an unprecedented

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\(^{137}\) Casola, Canon Pietro Casola’s Pilgrimage to Jerusalem in the Year 1494, p. 126. Brolo in the Milanese dialect, and *Broglio* or *Brogio* in the dialect of Venice, means a garden (ibid., n12). Sabellico adds that in the portico there was *quarantia* - 40 judges hearing civic causes. In Marcantonio Sabellico, *Del Sito di Venezia Città* (1502) (Venezia, 1957), p. 31.

\(^{138}\) The quotes are from Marin Sanudo, “Laus urbis Venetae,” p. 9; and Priuli, *I diarii di Girolamo Priuli* (1494-1512), vol. 4, p. 361. Both Sanudo and Priuli describe numerous instances when capital punishment was carried out “in mezzo le do collone” – between the two columns in Piazza San Marco (ibid., vol. 1, p. 91). A person convicted of blasphemy was publicly blinded and his tongue was cut out in the same place. In Sanudo, *I diarii* (1496-1533): *Pagine scelte*, XXVII, 536. In the case of important state crimes involving high state bureaucrats - such as espionage - the sentences were often carried out in the Piazzetta hurriedly and secretly during night (ibid., I, 917-9). In 1519 a priest who was accused of blasphemy was exposed in an iron cage hanging from the Campanile (and successfully escaped with the assistance of his mother) (ibid., XXVII, 322 and 342).

\(^{139}\) Cf. Finlay, Politics in Renaissance Venice, p. 197.

\(^{140}\) Dodge Moro who was sworn in the office on May 12, 1462 pledged in paragraph 71 of his *promissione* that “we cannot nor ought we to be engaged in trade, nor arrange for it to be done in any person in any way, or in any kind, either in the outside Venice, nor must we invest in any partnership; and we shall make our Dogaressa and our sons and nephews, whether or not they are living with us, swear that they will not engage in trade.” A selection from the 127 paragraphs of *promissione* is partially reprinted and translated in Chambers, Pullan, and Fletcher, eds., *Venice: A Documentary History, 1450-1630*, pp. 46-47.

\(^{141}\) Priuli added that the Doge had limited power only regarding significant state matters such as treason or state secrets. In everything else his power was almost unlimited: “Vero e che, se l’ Principe volesse fare chossa contraria ala Republica, non seria soporatato, ma del resto veramente in minimis puol fare quanto li piae, purché la cossa non excieda lo honore et il dechoro del Statto.” In Priuli, *I diarii di Girolamo Priuli* (1494-1512), vol. 2, p. 394.
Sanudo added that people mocked the defunct Doge at his funeral and the Great Council decided to investigate his scandals post mortem, while imposing strict limitations on the power of future doges to prevent further corruption. But Barbarigo’s successor, Leonardo Loredan (1501-21), wasn’t any better. It was a public secret that his son Lorenzo had the ear of the father and everyone who needed the attention of the Doge had to first win the son’s favor.

In the aftermath of the defeat at Agnadello in 1509, when all foreign trade stalled and public offices became the only source of income for many noble families, the space of the Piazzetta as well as the interior courts of Ducal Palace became infested with nobles campaigning for different government positions. In order to improve their election chances, the relatives of Venetian ‘war heroes’ often actively publicized patriotic legends surrounding the heroic fights, deaths or imprisonments of their fathers and brothers. And because the public offices in Venice were numerous and periods of service relatively short, “the city was so infected by those damned bribing practices that there was no remedy to this situation,” pointed out Priuli. What was seen as an even bigger evil was the fact that the electors had to take an oath on a crucifix, pledging solemnly that their vote was motivated exclusively by the interest of the commonwealth. But everybody knew that “all or almost all were taking a false oath,” offending the crucified Christ and bringing God’s wrath on the entire city of Venice. Seeing all its attempts to fight corruption as being futile, and not wanting to risk also the loss of the favor of the Heavens, the Venetian

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142 Ibid., vol. 2, pp. 176-78.
145 Sanudo, I diarii (1496-1533): Pagine scelte, XXIV, 656-659. See further discussion on this topic in Finlay, Politics in Renaissance Venice, p. 173.
146 This practice was so pervasive that in 1501 the Senate adopted a law forbidding the attachment of any other title to a candidate running for state office or other official appointment than the one officially registered in the Chancery. For more see Priuli, I diarii di Girolamo Priuli (1494-1512), vol. 2, pp. 176-77.
fathers reached out for a radical solution and in the end decided to eliminate the oath on the crucifix from the electoral process.\textsuperscript{147}

In the beginning, the Venetian \textit{broglio} did not necessarily involve any financial bribe. In the early 1500s Priuli noted that the candidates were mostly ‘greeting’ the electors on their way to the Ducal Palace while ‘pleading’ for their support - \textit{pregavano e salutavano}. Yet during the period of lengthy wars with the Ottoman Empire and the League of Cambrai, as the public treasury emptied fast, the State decided to appoint only those of the candidates elected by the Great Council who would pledge to loan a substantial sum of money to the public budget.\textsuperscript{148}

Marcantonio Michiel described a 1515 situation in the Senate when at the end of the day 47,000 ducats were raised by such “selling the offices” to the highest bidders in order to finance an army of mercenary soldiers needed to defend Venetian possessions on the mainland.\textsuperscript{149} According to Michiel, when the nominations for a particular office were made in the first round of election, those whose names were on the list “immediately ran to the tribune of the Signoria to offer money; and when their competitors outbid them, they would turn back to add on more by yelling, as is done at auctions.”\textsuperscript{150}

\textsuperscript{147} In July 1509, the Council of Ten approved a decree to eliminate the oath on crucifix from electoral procedures in order to prevent nobles from living in perpetual sin. All quotes are from ibid., vol. 4, pp. 33 and 174.

\textsuperscript{148} See the discussion on the auctioning of offices in Sanudo, \textit{I diarii (1496-1533): Pagine scelte}, IV, 201-4.

\textsuperscript{149} Venetians had a powerful navy, but they did not have an army and as a consequence paid enormous sums of money - up to 50,000 ducats a year at the time of war with the League of Cambrai - to each \textit{condotiere}, foreign mercenary captain - to defend their city against the invaders who came from the land. In Sanudo, \textit{Venice, Città Excelentissima: Selections from the Renaissance diaries of Marin Sanudo}, p. 542. As Doge Loredan complained in 1509, “if we do want to defend ourselves against them, we are obliged to furnish ourselves with armies at intolerable expense and be placed in the hands of foreign captains, who involve with ourselves more for gain than anything else... But this does not happen with affairs at sea, since there we are masters over all, and we conduct our own affairs alone, with true zeal.” From the speech of Doge Loredan as reported in a letter of Luigi Da Porto, 20 July, 1509. As reprinted and translated to English in Chambers, Pullan, and Fletcher, eds., \textit{Venice: A Documentary History}, 1450-1630, pp. 396-98. In the fall of 1494 Venetians hired an army of thousand \textit{staratki} from Greece (probably Albanians, because they are described as the soldiers of Skenderbeg) to stop the French invasion. In Priuli, \textit{I diarii di Girolamo Priuli (1494-1512)}, vol. 1, p. 42.

\textsuperscript{150} Marcantonio Michiel, \textit{Diarii}, BCV. MS. Cod. Cicogna, 2848, fol. 189r. As translated and reprinted in Finlay, \textit{Politics in Renaissance Venice}, p. 179.
The practice was strongly criticized, yet as time went by it became very common.\textsuperscript{151} In 1524, Sanudo claimed that “our fathers did not make war by selling offices and positions, but we are selling out our government now.”\textsuperscript{152} Many poorer nobles who traditionally lived mainly from the incomes of their offices were now not able to compete with higher bidders and consequently lost the main source of their earnings.\textsuperscript{153} This put in danger the entire mechanism which ensured social stability, one of the cornerstones of Venetian political longevity. “In this war, everything went into ruin because we don’t show charity towards our neighbors,” warned senior senator Zuan Antonio Minio in the Great Council.\textsuperscript{154} Poor nobles, who did not have the chance to ever be elected themselves, were now openly selling their votes to those who offered them the most money and the practice of office selling grew into outright political corruption. Rich candidates, clearly marked by a stole laid across one shoulder were chasing the support of their poor colleagues in the Ducal Palace and in the Piazzetta. “Everybody knows it. It is very obvious that he who doesn’t have a list of poor nobles - whom he pays in advance and then continues to pay during the entire time being elected - doesn’t have any chance to hold an important office,” lamented Sanudo in 1530.\textsuperscript{155}


\textsuperscript{152} “Gli nostri padri non facevano Guerra con vendere degli uffici e reggimenti, e noi venderemmo il governo dello Stato.” In \textit{ibid.}, XLII, 317-319.

\textsuperscript{153} On September 13, 1516 Sanudo delivered a speech in the Grand Council in which he criticized the selling of offices to the highest bidders - \textit{ad plus offerentes} - arguing that this completely eliminates honest but poor nobles from public life: “\textit{ne mai uno gentilhuomo da bene, che non ha tanto numero da prestar, potra sperar avere officio alcuno.”} In \textit{ibid.}, XXII, 561-563.

\textsuperscript{154} Minio’s entire speech which offers an analysis of the problem of office selling is summarized in Sanudo’s entry from 2 January, 1502. In \textit{ibid.}, IV, 201-202. Sanudo himself delivered a very similar critical speech in the Grand Council 22 years later on April 23, 1524. In Sanudo, \textit{I diarii} (1496-1533): \textit{Pagine scelte}, XXXVI, 250-252.

\textsuperscript{155} Sanudo, \textit{I diarii} (1496-1533): \textit{Pagine scelte}, LIV, 7-8. According to Sanudo, such groups of poor nobles willing to sell their votes were called \textit{sguizari} – probably an analogy to mercenary soldiers from Switzerland – \textit{svizzeri} (\textit{ibid.}, XXI, 70). See also Gleason, \textit{Gasparo Contarini: Venice, Rome, and Reform}, p. 124.
Social Clubs in Venice and their Influence on Politics

Another widespread practice through which political support networks were established and maintained in Venice was god-fathering. This became so widespread that in 1505 the government proposed legislation banning nobles entirely from becoming godfathers to each other’s children. In the mean time, we can see the rise of other parallel type of associations of nobles in Venice based on the idea of a social club. Such clubs never gained the form of proper political parties, but some of them openly pursued political goals. Their early roots can be traced to late 15th century when young members of Venetian noble elites started associate in the compagnie della calza - the companies of the hose - which were founded originally as cultural institutions providing a dignified platform for entertainment and socialization for their members. Many features of such compagnie indicate that formally they may have been modeled after the ancient Greek symposium. The 1478 founding statutes of one club, the Modesti - the moderate ones, declared that “the binding force in society is reasoning and speech, which, by means of teaching, learning, communicating, debating and judging, reconcile men with each other and join them together in a certain natural society.” Finlay sees in such companies an important mediating mechanism which helped to fine tune the way the entire political system worked.

Yet in the changing post-Agnadello political climate, many companies of the hose were transformed into outright lobbying clubs. Priuli compared them to political ‘sects’ which entertained poorer nobles by organizing lavish dinners and theatrical spectacles in order to gain

156 The preamble of the law criticized the practice by which one noble child in Venice could have had not just one, but a multitude of godfathers. In Priuli, I diari di Girolamo Priuli (1494-1512), vol. 2, pp. 385-86.
159 Finlay, Politics in Renaissance Venice, p. 203.
their electoral support. Mantuan ambassador Agnello reported back home that in 1531 Venetian censors investigated some obscure meetings of noblemen whose participants were trying to fix the elections, adding that “all this was done for money.” The history of political clubs is traditionally associated with 17th century London and its culture of coffeehouses, a matter which will be further discussed in the following chapter. Yet Venetian compagnie della calza may be seen of the earliest seeds of the growing antagonism within the classical Republicanism which was a priori strongly opposed to the concept of political factions and partisan politics.

**The Danger of Popular Opinion**

With the expansionistic policies undertaken throughout the 16th century, Venetian possessions on dry land - terraferma - became one of the major issues passionately discussed in domestic political circles. In the following passage, I would like to use this issue as a study case to illustrate not only the Venetian policies pertaining to territorial expansion, but also basic social attitudes towards public opinion, which was the driving force behind the entire process. As mentioned elsewhere in this study, Plato’s and Aristotle’s ideal state was territorially compact and its geography limited so that the citizens could create mutual bonds and were all able to meet and deliberate in the agora. This was in stark contrast with ever-expanding Rome, which at the end collapsed under its own weight. And Venetians carefully studied Roman history which made

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160 Priuli, I diarii di Girolamo Priuli (1494-1512), vol. 4, p. 33.
163 This subject is discussed in Chapter 1 of this study, in the part pertaining to the public square in classical Athens.
them well aware of the problem they were creating. The sumptuous villas and estates built outside the city-walls, warned the author of a 15th century merchant manual, often bring ruin upon city-states which are consequently pressured to spend enormous resources on their defense.

“I say that blessed are the states which by law prohibit building outside of their walls, unless the edifices are built of hay.” The traumatic debacle at Agnadello in 1509, when the Venetian stato di terraferma was “lost and ruined in 15 days,” was interpreted by many as a warning from heaven. A few days later in an exceptionally dramatic speech, Doge Loredan reminded his compatriots that they voluntarily gave up their dominance of the seas (stato di mar) where they were masters, betraying the very principles which made their country great. “What stupidity ever drew us away from the sea and turned us to the land,” exclaimed the Doge.

Venetians traditionally believed that the merchant exploitation of overseas markets was much more noble and peaceful than the coercive practices used by feudal landlords on terraferma. “The kings of Portugal also, and the Seignory of Venice, have beene great traders by merchandize, but it hath bee in an honester fashion, at sea, and not to the grinding of their poore subjects,” observed Giovanni Botero. Also, according to Paolo Paruta, through its original customs and orders Venice “related more to peace, and merchant affairs, then to war.”

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164 French ambassador Comynnes noted that Venetians “understand by T. Livius what imperfections were in the state of Rome; for they have his historie, and his body lieth buried in their palace at Padua.” In Comynnes, The historie of Philip de Commynes Knight, Lord of Argenton, pp. 305-307.


166 Cf. Priuli, I diarii di Girolamo Priuli (1494-1512), vol. 4, p. 15.

167 Among others, Loredan reminded Venetians that to maintain their terraferma possessions they needed to maintain an increasingly expensive mercenary army whose soldiers did not have any affection for Venice and its republican government. From the speech of Doge Loredan as reported in a letter of Luigi Da Porto, 20 July, 1509. Reprinted and translated to English in Chambers, Pullan, and Fletcher, eds., Venice: A Documentary History, 1450-1630, pp. 396-98.


169 Paruta, Politick Discourses, pp. 111-23.
Plato’s description of the constitution of Sparta, set by Lycurgus in a way that the state could not expand too much territorially, was often elevated by the architects of the myth of Venice as an example to be followed. For Paruta, the historical lesson was clear. A well-ordered and stable republic was to be achieved not by “placing the chiefest glory in extent of Empire, or in the praise of other men; but in the good government of the City.”\textsuperscript{170}

Diariest Priuli used the failed expansionistic policies, which Venice undertook in the course of the 15\textsuperscript{th} century, to demonstrate what happens when the power to govern is hijacked by personal aspiration nourished by the political pressure coming from the street. According to him, the ambitious politicians in the Senate, pushed by inexperienced young nobles as well as precipitous voices of those among the non-nobles who were becoming increasingly rich, were oblivious to the long term consequences of the populist policies they pursued. Priuli pointed out that they acted blinded by ambitions and popular opinion - \textit{opinione vulgare}, the two things which are “very dangerous in governing the state or republic.” In his judgment, the defeat at Agnadello in 1509 was a harsh lesson imparted on Venice, for many leading nobles in a selfish desire to advance their personal careers abandoned the long-term interests of the state and followed the opinions of the masses expressed in the public square, imposing them on the Senate:

\textit{...many words, much opinion, many various talks, chatters, expressions of will and reasoning were made in these days in the city of Venice... by the noblemen, as well as citizens and populars in the squares, the loggias, the Rialto, the benches, the churches, barber shops and taverns... all wanted to show their wisdom, prudence and intelligence... Such words pronounced by the Venetian nobles as well as by the common people in the Logia of San Marco and in the same public square were causing enormous damage and detriment to the Venetian Republic, because many times the Venetian Fathers and Senators, who were governing the Republic, guided their decisions accordingly to such public opinion, which was a very bad thing... And the Fathers and Senators, in their desire to advance their careers, were following such public opinion and they imposed it on the Senate.}\textsuperscript{171}

\textsuperscript{170} Paolo Paruta, \textit{The History of Venice} (London, 1658), book 1, part 1, p. 3. For the Venetian comparison of the governments of Sparta and Rome see Paruta, \textit{Politic Discourses}, pp. 47 and 71-72.

\textsuperscript{171} Priuli, \textit{I diarii di Girolamo Priuli} (1494-1512), vol. 4, p. 246.
In his text Priuli undoubtedly used the term *public opinion* almost in the same context in which it has been used by modern political philosophy. Because, as Zaret points out, as an expression of everyday social practice, *public opinion* functioned long before it was formally recognized - about century later - as an analytical category by European political philosophers and consequently adopted and promoted also on a normative level by the political elites. In the Venetian political culture dominated by secrecy, it obviously still had a very derogatory meaning. Embracing classical Greek republicanism, Venetians strongly believed that the deliberation of issues of the commonwealth should be limited to the noble class. As shown above, they refused the idea of *ostracism* as practiced in the strict sense of the word in Athens, yet they did everything to prevent the rise of a single powerful leader or a political faction which would have been able to ascend to power by manipulating popular opinion. At the same time, they were aware that to maintain its social stability, the State needed to get actively engaged, creating social programs and policies which would enable the impoverished nobles as well as the popular masses to secure adequate material means of existence and consequently to dissuade them from an attempt to revolt against the current redistribution of power within the State.

As will be further shown elsewhere in this essay, Venetian ruling circles assigned to all residents of their State different levels of access to information, and indeed encouraged the communication of particular information which corresponded with the status of a given group through different channels. In this system the nobles were destined to become super-informed citizens, which supposedly equipped them to make important decisions pertaining to the life of

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the entire Republic. But understanding the power of persuasive techniques, Venetians took deliberate measures to restrain individuals from practicing propagandistic and lobbying methods while deliberating important issues of the public interest. They often failed in this attempt, but the fact that they tried proves that they perceived propaganda and lobbyism as social ills which were harmful to the common interest. Importantly, Venetian political culture associated *age* with the most important virtues necessary for good government. An ideal republic ought to be governed solely by wise elder statesmen who were beyond the age when men crave fame and prestige. According to Morosini “the dividing line ought not to be less than the age of forty, or, if the ‘multitude’ is huge, forty-five or fifty.” Morosini added that in his claim he only echoed Cicero who traced the very term *senator* to the Latin *senex*, which means ‘old’.  

**III. Official State Propaganda and Venetian Hegemony**

When Venice declared war on the Duchy of Milan in 1499, the decision was published not only in the Rialto and Piazza San Marco, but simultaneously also in all lands and places subjugated to the Venetian state, as well as to all Venetian naval forces and infantry stationed at home and abroad. In 1495 and in 1511, the city signed two important international treaties under the auspices of the Pope, known as *Holy Leagues*. They were both broadcast simultaneously in the capitals of all participant states and accompanied by massive public processions and festivities. The timing of their solemn publication was always intentionally

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174 Morosini, *De bene istituita republica*, f. 20v, pp. 118-19. While Cicero in his literary heritage discusses the role of the Senate, I was not able to further substantiate this attribution. More on the topic of the *giovani* – young nobles being admitted into the Great Council see Finlay, *Politics in Renaissance Venice*, p. 182. According to Lowry, in the political environment of Venice the terms ‘good’, ‘old, and ‘wise’ were basically synonymous. The author points out that a new, young and ambitious generation of Venetian leaders rose up from amongst the students at the University of Padua in the second half of 15th century and gradually assumed important positions in Venice. In Lowry, *Nicholas Jenson and the Rise of Venetian Publishing in Renaissance Europe*, p. 11.

175 According to Priuli it was published “sopra le publiche scale di Venetia et tutti terre et lochi subditi al stato Veneto.” In Priuli, *I diarii di Girolamo Priuli* (1494-1512), vol. 1, p. 154.
synchronized with major religious festivities (Figure 3.4.). As Sanudo pointed out, in such days all businesses on the entire territory of the State were closed and Piazza San Marco was so crowded that it was impossible to cross it. There were long, elevated podiums for dignitaries; the façades of houses and the Campanile were adorned with flowers and flags of allied powers. The main ceremony was deliberately choreographed in a way that it exploited whole range of overt and covert symbols. At the Pope’s special request in 1495, all allied ambassadors held olive branches to emphasize the peaceful nature of their military alliance. The traditional procession was headed by the Doge and featured dozens of precious reliquaries which the Venetians collected all over the world over the course of centuries and preserved in their churches. What could have served as better proof that the Heavenly powers were firmly standing on the side of Venice than the wood of the Holy Cross or a silver box containing an ampoule with the blood of Christ?\footnote{The descriptions are based on the observations of both Commynes, \textit{The historie of Philip de Commines Knight, Lord of Argenton}, pp. 311-12; and Sanudo, \textit{I dianii (1496-1533): Pagine scelte}, XIII, 130-144.}

Phillip de Commynes, the French ambassador in Venice, emphasized that in the 1495 procession “a great number of pageants and devises were shewed, representing first Italy, and then all these Kings and Princes, and the Queene of Spaine.”\footnote{Commynes, \textit{The historie of Philip de Commines Knight, Lord of Argenton}, pp. 311-12.} Alegorical displays carried by men or pulled by animals were not an invention of the Renaissance. Their roots were in medieval religious processions and their presentations traditionally mixed religious themes with current political allegories.\footnote{According to Husband, such events were often deliberately formulated into complex, symbolic ceremonies with propagandistic intent. For more on medieval pageant see Timothy Husband’s \textit{Introduction} to Bryan Holme, \textit{Medieval Pageant} (London, 1987), pp. 9-15. Francesco Petrarca in \textit{Epistolae Seniles} (IV, 3) captured similar public celebrations in Piazza San Marco taking place in August 1364.} But in the case described by Commynes, each of the figures representing the Pope and other European royalties was holding a big poster with short written messages attributed to their characters - mocking Venetian enemies and praising the strength of the
Figure 3.4. Giacomo Franco, *The Procession at the Occasion of the Publication of the Holy League of 1571 in Venice.*
 League.\textsuperscript{179} Overall, they were nothing else than life-size political cartoons, very similar to the drawings often accompanying early handwritten or printed political pamphlets, which will be discussed further below.\textsuperscript{180} At the end of such a solemn public procession, the bells rang and at the sound of military trumpets, the full texts of the Holy League treaties were ‘published’ in the Piazza San Marco by declamation from \textit{la pietra del bando}, a fragment of a porphyry column which still stands in its original place between the Basilica and Ducal Palace.\textsuperscript{181} As Casola observed, during such public events “a great silence was maintained” in spite of so many people who attended them, so that every sound could be heard. “One single person appeared to me to direct everything, and he was obeyed by every man without a protest.”\textsuperscript{182} Ensuingly, the texts of treaties were immediately put in print and were often accompanied by elaborate political cartoons and a brief commentary in verse, making their content easier to memorize for the illiterate public or semi-literate readers.\textsuperscript{183}

**Subversive Message Publishing and the Birth of the Political Cartoon**

Despite of the fact that government secrecy, spying and covert denunciations were the basic \textit{modus operandi} of the State in Venice, there were multiple channels open through which the

\textsuperscript{179} In his discussion of the transformation of medieval public pageants into the Renaissance, Guarino covers several precedents (i.e., the 1493 festival in honor of Beatrice d’Este). Comynes’ tale is the first mention of the posters with written messages being used during such occasions. For more on this subject see Chapter II: “L’antico e il moderno. Lo spettacolo degli humanisti” in Raimondo Guarino, \textit{Tetro e mutamenti: Rinascimento e spettacolo a Venezia} (Bologna, 1995), pp. 71-118.


\textsuperscript{181} Sanudo, \textit{I diarii} (1496-1533): \textit{Pagine scelte}, XIII, 130-144. In Venice, the most important announcements were always made in Piazza San Marco from \textit{la pietra del bando} and from stairs in the Rialto – \textit{sopra le scale di Rialto}. The term \textit{la pietra del bando} reflects the fact that from this stone (\textit{pietra}) the official declarations and banns (\textit{bando}) were made public. Called also \textit{the porphyry stone}, it is a fragment of a column whose origins Venetians attributed to the Holy Land, to the church of St. John in Acre. Today, it is still standing at the same place at the corner of the Basilica of Saint Mark. Cf. Comynes, \textit{The historie of Philip de Commynes Knight, Lord of Argenton}, pp. 311-12. See ibid., p. 199, 85n.

\textsuperscript{182} Casola, Canon Pietro Casola’s Pilgrimage to Jerusalem in the Year 1494, p. 147.

public sphere communicated oppositional and subversive messages. It was quite common that
the unpopular doges or military leaders became the target of popular political satire. In 1498
Sanudo noted the words of a publically circulated - probably printed - sonnet mocking militant
religious friars who built their popularity on promoting military expeditions against the ‘infidels’
in their sermons, yet themselves were not willing to go to war. Year later he saw the walls of
Venetian houses and storefronts covered with slogans ridiculing the disgraced naval admiral
Antonio Grimani. An early morning pedestrian passing through the streets of Venice was
occasionally able to see the hand written graffiti mocking also bankers in the Rialto or an anti-
government message in Piazza San Marco before they were whitewashed by the authorities.

While modern historiography questions the evidence proving that Luther actually nailed his 95
theses on the door of the church in Wittenberg in 1517, the Venetian experience shows that this
form of public protest may have been quite a common practice at that time in Europe. Political
pamphlets criticizing government officials were often attached overnight to the doors of public
buildings. It required great courage of the person who in January 1504 carried one right into the
lion’s den and posted it on the door of the powerful and secretive Council of Ten.

In 1505, an elaborate political cartoon portraying Doge Loredan as a tyrant was posted
overnight on the columns of the Church of San Giacomo in the Rialto and caused lot of uproar in
the city. Sanudo inferred that “whoever put this policy must have been a very brave, very
talented, excellent writer, good poet and decent painter.” The next morning, the public crier

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184 “Fratochi de la schena prosperosa, Sotto el vexil di Christo militanti… A me parebbe pur licta cosa, Per far andar la fede
nostra avanti, Che voi pigliaste l’arme tutti quanti…” In Sanudo, I diarii (1496-1533): Pagine scelte, II, 867-868. See also the
song mocking the unpopular navy admiral, Antonio Grimani, after his two crucial defeats in 1499: “Antonio Grimani, Ruina de'
cristiani, Rebello de' venitiani, Puòstu esser manzà da’ canni, Da’ canni, da’ cagnolli, Ti e toi fíulli!” In ibid., III, 5.
186 Cf. Erwin Iserloh, The Theses Were not Posted: Luther Between Reform and Reformation (Boston, 1968).
187 Priuli, I diarii di Girolamo Priuli (1494-1512), vol. 2, p. 334. See a similar posting described in Domenico Malipiero,
"Annali veneti dall’anno 1457 al 1500," in Archivio storico Italiano, ed. F. Longo and A. Sagredo (Firenze, 1843-44), pp. 281-83,
an entry from June 23, 1498.
announced an astronomic sum of money to anyone who would come forward with information about the author.\textsuperscript{188} The hefty reward, offered in cases like this, only further underscores how jealously the Venetian authorities guarded the façade of their Serene Republic and the semblance of its internal harmony being conscious that its commercial and military strength depended also on the \textit{soft power} of its appearance.\textsuperscript{189} During the funerals of Doge Barbarigo in 1500, the main Venetian orator boldly offended the French King which immediately provoked loud protests by his ambassador who was present at the ceremony. In order to curb the potential for an international scandal, “it was ordered that the oration will not be put in print,” observed Sanudo.\textsuperscript{190} Yet in spite of all government efforts, in a situation like this it was the foreign merchants who rapidly spread the news all over the Europe through their business correspondence. At the outbreak of the War of the League of Cambrai in 1509, when the Doge was seen during the traditional \textit{Corpus Christi} procession at Piazza San Marco in the company of bodyguards, Priuli worried that such thing, without precedence in Venetian history, could be interpreted as a weakness of the Venetian state because “the foreigners who were present to see such spectacle will write outside of the city, that the Doge was afraid to walk through Piazza San Marco without protection.”\textsuperscript{191} A government decree by which the Venetian government in 1539 established a three-member office of Inquisition explained in its rationale that despite of all the effort “it has still proved impossible to prevent the most important matters dealt with our in

\textsuperscript{188} The reward consisted of 3,000 ducats with an additional life-long dividend of 200 ducats a year plus a public office for the son of whoever denounces the author (ibid., VI, 258-59 and 264). Cf. Priuli, \textit{I diarii di Girolamo Priuli} (1494-1512), vol. 2, p. 394.

\textsuperscript{189} The term \textit{soft power} – used often almost as an equivalent of the Marxist term \textit{hegemony} in conservative academic circles when dealing with foreign policy issues - was coined in the 1980s by Joseph S. Nye who defined it as the ability to attract and persuade – as opposed by \textit{hard power} of coercion which relies on economic and military might. In Joseph S. Nye, \textit{Soft Power: The Means To Success In World Politics} (New York, 2004). Cf. the definition of ‘hegemony’ in Raymond Williams, \textit{A Vocabulary of Culture and Society} (Oxford, UK, 1983), pp. 144-46.

\textsuperscript{190} Sanudo, \textit{I diarii} (1496-1533): Pagine scelte, V, 113.

\textsuperscript{191} Priuli, \textit{I diarii di Girolamo Priuli} (1494-1512), vol. 4, p. 63.
secret councils from being known and published, as we are readily informed from every quarter,” adding that “one cannot imagine anything more harmful and damaging to our state.”

It seems that the gradual decline of Venetian hegemony, caused by a series of military defeats and economic challenges in the early 1500s, encouraged political dissent at home. “In this land a practice is spreading which I don’t laud,” observed Sanudo in 1532. In an attempt to imitate the custom of a free speech zone which developed around the statue of Pasquino in Papal Rome, the chronicler noted an increased frequency of critical pamphlets being posted on the columns of buildings in the Rialto, mocking everyone from prominent public figures to famous courtesans. During his morning walks, Sanudo personally witnessed such postings, adding that they always attracted a crowd of observers among whom were always many to copy the message and spread it further around the city.

Abroad, Venice itself became the target of many of such pamphlets, ridiculing the city’s opulence and expansive policies especially in the aftermath of important military and political defeats. The humiliating debacle inflicted by the Franco-Papal alliance at Agnadello in 1509 resulted in many such celebrations of ‘Venetian ruin’. Among their authors were prominent European intellectuals whose publications flooded the Continent from Paris and Lyon to Mainz, from Milan to Rome. They were “put in print and sold in every town and castle,” lamented Priuli. Relying on the popular form of political cartoons, they typically depicted the triumphant

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192 The institution of three Inquisitori di Stato by the Council of Ten on September 23, 1539. As reprinted and translated in Chambers, Pullan, and Fletcher, eds., Venice: A Documentary History, 1450-1630, p. 81.

193 In Sanudo, I diarii (1496-1533): Pagine scelte, LVII, 288. Sanudo’s observation is confirmed by the Mantuan ambassador who wrote that “pur quando intendo, mai pur dappoi che Venetia fu edificata non furono attacati scritti di simil sorte” - to the best of my knowledge ever since Venice was built, there were no such scripts posted. Original in ASM, busta 1466, f. 135. As partially reprinted in Chambers, “Benedetto Agnello, Mantuan Ambassador to Venice, 1530-56,” pp. 140-41. The classical statue of Hercules/Pasquino in Rome became a traditional place where Romans demonstrated their social dissent by posting critical pamphlets. The statue was discovered in 1501 and installed in its current place where it started ‘talking’ about a decade later. In Anne Reynolds, "Cardinal Oliviero Carafa and the Early Cinquecento Tradition of the Feast of Pasquino," Humanistica Lovaniensia 34 (1985).
Pope and French king on one side, and the Venetian leadership on the other, with short messages in call-outs attributed to each of the main characters:

And they even put in print such sonnets, ballads and songs mentioned above, the image of Venetian Doge and of the counselors and senators dressed in their full glory in Venetian style, who were crying and lamenting the ruin and the bad fortune to which they had been reduced, with the most elegant verses and prose and the most ornate words in Latin as well as in vulgar language, with the best skill and by the most knowledgeable people composed... And in their orthography, calligraphy, elegy and poetry, they all were saying that Venetians should go back to fishing once they lost their state... and in Lyon and Paris in France, and in Urspruch and Mainz and in other places in Germany, but especially in Rome, Milan, Ferrara they organized many festivals in such places which lasted many days, celebrating the Venetian ruin while they played many various comedies there.194

The situation as described by Priuli illustrates Grendler’s claim that in the course of the 16th century, Renaissance Europe became accustomed to the controversies which attracted wide international audiences.195 Indeed, different power players were already skillfully using a wide variety of techniques to generate visual, oral and aural symbolic messages which allowed them to stir public opinion not only in local context, but increasingly also within the international arena. And while communication scholarship conventionally limits its focus almost exclusively on the power of printed word in this context, there were some other forms of printed message in which Venetian craftsmen traditionally excelled.196

Even before the introduction of the movable typeset, the city gained international fame as a center of production of playing cards. The use of woodcut matrices for their manufacture was documented in Venice in the first half of the 16th century. Technically, the printing of playing cards did not differ from the printing of political cartoons: both were based on a combination of

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194 Priuli, I diarii di Girolamo Priuli (1494-1512), vol. 4, p. 424. Priuli promises to attach few examples of such pamphlets to his diary but they were apparently lost.
196 For all work which was done in this field I would like to mention at least Marshall McLuhan, The Gutenberg Galaxy: The Making of Typographic Man (Toronto, 1962), Elizabeth L. Eisenstein, The Printing Press as an Agent of Change: Communications and Cultural Transformations in Early-Modern Europe - Volumes I and II (Cambridge, UK, 1979). Sarton points out the notion of ‘double invention’ of the Renaissance in the form of typography for the text, engraving for the images. In George Sarton, The Appreciation of Ancient and Medieval Science During the Renaissance (1450-1600) (Philadelphia, 1955), p. xi. While Eisenstein mentions in passim this claim, she puts all her emphasis on printed text in analyzing the impact of print on early-modern Europe.
an elaborate figurative image accompanied by a few printed words. In the case of political cartoons, they were usually set into verses, imitating easy to remember popular forms of communication such as songs and ballads. At the time when literacy was still limited to a relatively small class of social elites, such cartoons were the most effective form of printed political communication capable of reaching wide illiterate or semiliterate popular masses.

At the dawn of the 16th century, the technical skills of Venetian masters printers demonstrated in their use of woodcuts and engravings attracted the best European talents including Albrecht Dürer, who came here to learn the art of perspective and printed also some of his earliest engravings. In 1500, German merchant Anton Kolb, who financially backed the printing of Jacopo de’Barbari’s impressive 4 x 7 ft. engraving of a panoramic view of Venice, petitioned the Senate with a request for privileges connected to production and sales of such work. His letter to the Senate clearly emphasized the power of such mechanically reproduced artistic work to contribute “to the fame of this most excellent city of Venice” and spread it abroad through the “new medium of print.”

Historians point out that the result of de’Barbari’s and Kolb’s groundbreaking enterprise was a representational triumph acclaimed by

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198 According to Engelsing even the ideological battle between the Reformation and Counter-Reformation movements in the 16th century took place simultaneously within the oral, aural and visual forms of communication. In that period only about five percent of Germans were literate. For more see Rolf Engelsing, Der Bürger als Leser: Lesergeschichte in Deutschland 1500-1800 (Stuttgart, 1974). For more on this topic see also Robert W. Scribner, For the Sake of the Simple Folk: Popular Propaganda for the German Reformation (Oxford, UK, 1997).


200 The petition of German merchant Anthon Kolb to the Venetian Senate asking for exclusive rights to print and sell de’Barbari’s panoramic view of Venice: ASV, Collegio, Notatorio, reg. 15, f. 28r, ca 1500. As reprinted and translated to English in Chambers, Pullan, and Fletcher, eds., Venice: A Documentary History, 1450-1630, p. 373.
contemporaries both for its monumental size as well as for its meticulous topographical detail (Figure 3.5.). In many cases, similar works of Venetian engravers and printers helped to promote not just the hegemonic image of the Serene Republic of Venice, but became also an effective vehicle for further spread of the images of classical Greek and Roman antiquity. By articulating Venice with antiquity visually, the early prints which circulated throughout Europe promoted both Venetian aesthetic ideals as well as the Republic’s hegemonic message.

IV. The Early Roots of an Information Society

As already illustrated earlier in this essay, instead of emphasizing passionate deliberations and persuasive techniques, the Venetian institutions of representative government aimed at equipping their members at different levels of the hierarchy with the largest possible amount of factual information which their leaders judged was necessary in order to make a good decision. This experience may have been echoed in later Rousseau’s claim in the opening passages of *The Social Contract*: “Born as I was as a free citizen of a free state and a member of its sovereign body, the very *right* to vote imposes on me the *duty* to instruct myself in public affairs, however little influence my voice may have in them.”

The meetings of the Venetian Senate were based upon reading of letters regarding the affairs of state which were arriving almost incessantly from all corners of the world through networks of ambassadors and merchants. During his service in the Senate, Sanudo noted from time to time in his diary that a particular session was completely dismissed “because there were no letters to be read.”

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201 Wilson’s study focuses on the role de’Barbari’s panoramic view had in further emphasizing the myth of Venice Bronwen Wilson, *The World of Venice: Print, the City, and Early Modern Identity* (Toronto, 2005).
204 The reading of the diaries of Marin Sanudo gives the best idea about the amount and provenance of informative letters received daily by the Venetian government. In Sanudo, *I diarii di Marino Sanuto* (1496-1533).
Figure 3.5. Jacopo de' Barbari, Venice, 1500. Woodcut produced with six blocks, 135 x 282 cm
Venetians believed that in order to defend the interest of their Republic they had “to search out the secrets of the universe, sending one’s mind in an instant to every single part of the world.” Following such a claim, between 1440 and 1460 the city pioneered a system of permanent diplomatic missions, and by the end of the 15th century it had dozens of ambassadors in all important trading ports and centers of political power from Constantinople to London. Venetians traditionally “identified good government with strong government, and strong government with well informed government,” and the new intellectual elites educated in the Aristotelian spirit at the state-sponsored University in nearby Padua realized the growing importance of a fast and reliable network of international informers. Not surprisingly, the fundamental role of Venetian ambassadors was to write reports about everything they observed first-hand or learned through networks of their informers and paid spies. In a sense, they were the first regular professional investigative reporters whose dispatches were read out loud to the members of the Venetian noble class at different level of government, depending on the level of secrecy. An anonymous French source described the daily business of the city’s supreme governing bodies - la Signoria and il Collegio - as follows:

Every day, including holidays, the Councilors and Heads of the Forty go to the Palace at daybreak [where they join the Doge... and] for an hour or thereabouts they hold public audience and receive the petitions presented to them, and expedite the business contained in the said petitions... afterwards all the Savii enter the Collegio and take their seats...

209 Infelise quotes the 1490 description of a diplomat’s service in Papal Rome by the Bishop of Modena, Boccaccio. The ambassador was somebody who was “constantly on the move with pen in hand to inform his master... constantly on the horse visiting cardinals and [other] ambassadors for learning everything.” In Mario Infelise, Prima dei giornali: Alle origini della pubblica informazione (secoli XVI e XVII) (Roma, 2002), p. 11.
210 De Vivo points out that the Venetian ambassadors usually wrote three different versions of the same dispatch catering to the needs of different branches of government. In De Vivo, Information and Communication in Venice: Rethinking Early Modern Politics, p. 35. In the second half of the 15th century, Ermolao Barbaro summarized the duties of a Venetian ambassador in his philosophical treatise De Coelibatu, De Officio Legati. Cf. Lowry, Nicholas Jenson and the Rise of Venetian Publishing in Renaissance Europe, p. 11, n 28.
After the Savi have entered the doors are closed and all the letters are read which have been brought in the previous night. The Dodge and some Councilors first always read most of the letters secretly in the Doge’s chamber... if the Doge does not have at least one councilor with him he may not open any letter addressed to him.\textsuperscript{211}

In time of war, Venetians nobles often nervously waited for ‘breaking news’ contained in the dispatches from the battlefields which were delivered in an incessant stream by special couriers to the Ducal Palace.\textsuperscript{212} Priuli noted that in 1509 there were always two to three messages delivered daily by runners (\textit{cum le poste, che corevanno}) with fresh news from Padua, and the Signoria made sure that there was a fast boat with five rowers waiting for any Venetian messenger at the coast in Lisa Fusina.\textsuperscript{213} During the battle of Melegnano in 1515, Sanudo stayed at the Ducal Palace almost until midnight with a group of his peers when the courier finally brought letters from the battlefield. The Doge was already in his bedroom and after he read the dispatches, they were passed outside to be read and discussed by those with Sanudo in the courtyard.\textsuperscript{214} Formally, each such report from the battlefield started with a dateline containing the date, exact hour, place, and the way it was sent to Venice.\textsuperscript{215} Infelise points out that the style

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\item \textsuperscript{211} The quote is from an anonymous treatise titled \textit{Description ou traiçité du gouvernement ou régime de la cité et segneurie de Venise} (ca 1500). Partially reprinted and translated in Chambers, Pullan, and Fletcher, eds., \textit{Venice: A Documentary History, 1450-1630}, pp. 43-45. The Doge, the members of the secretive and powerful Council of Ten, and the heads of the judicial tribunals of the Forty (\textit{Quarantia}) together constituted the official representation of the state called the \textit{Signoria}. But the term \textit{Signoria} was often used interchangeably, meaning also the Republic of Venice itself. With the addition of the \textit{Savi}, \textit{Signoria} was transformed into another important governing body called the \textit{Collegio}. The \textit{Savi} were high elected officials who were supervising different aspect of the everyday functioning of the state (Ibid.). Cf. Finlay, \textit{Politics in Renaissance Venice}, pp. 39-40. Felix Fabri described one of the public audiences which he attended as a pilgrim on the way to Jerusalem. His group was received by the Doge without any previous formal appointment. When they were introduced "the Doge arose, and through an interpreter offered his services to the pilgrims, and calling each of them to him severally, gave his hand to each man, drew him towards him, and kissed him in the Italian fashion. After this my lords begged for letters commendatory to the Captain-general of the Sea, and to the governors of the islands, in order that, if need were, they might invoke the protection of these persons aforesaid. This request was straightway granted, and the letters were written and delivered to us." In Felix Fabri, \textit{The Book of the Wanderings of Felix Fabri} (Circa 1480-1483 A.D.), Aubrey Stewart trans., 2 vols. (London, 1896), vol. 1, Part 1, f. 36b.
\item \textsuperscript{212} See the extraordinary frequency of reports from Venetian field liaisons (\textit{provveditori}) which Sanudo captured in his chronicle between 12-14 May, 1509. It is noteworthy that all of them are marked also by an exact hour. In Sanudo, \textit{I dianii} (1496-1533): \textit{Pagine scelte}, VIII, 226-269 and 257.
\item \textsuperscript{213} Priuli, \textit{I dianii di Girolamo Priuli} (1494-1512), vol. 4, p. 264.
\item \textsuperscript{214} Sanudo, \textit{I diani} (1496-1533): \textit{Pagine scelte}, XXI, 99-100.
\item \textsuperscript{215} Cf. the dispatches from Melegnano as reprinted in Girolamo Savorgnano, "Lettere sulla guerra nel Friuli dal 1510 al 1528 - Tomo Quarto," in \textit{Archivio Storico Italiano - Nuova Serie}, ed. Vincenzo Joppi (1856).
\end{itemize}
the authors used was “quasi rudimental, completely alien to any literary nuance.”\textsuperscript{216} To today’s reader, it may be reminiscent of the \textit{cablese}, the language of the telegraph cable which four hundred years later so fascinated Ernest Hemingway.\textsuperscript{217}

It is important to point out that official dispatches of the Venetian ambassadors were often supplemented by private letters of merchants and the final version was a result of triangulation from multiple sources. Since most of the noble families were directly or indirectly involved in trade, the channels of private and public information were naturally blurred.\textsuperscript{218} The ambassadorial report from Lisbon which definitely confirmed that the Portuguese caravels successfully circumnavigated Africa reached Venice in July, 1501. It arrived with the regular mail (\textit{aposta}) and, as merchant-diarist Girolamo Priuli noted, it was immediately put in print and publicly circulated.\textsuperscript{219} In the ensuing weeks and months more details emerged from the same ambassadorial source in Lisbon as well as by way of Venetian merchant letters arriving from different trading ports of Europe, which ensuingly reported the arrival of Portuguese merchant ships with spices. They recorded every detail, both quantity and quality of spices traded by the Portuguese as well as the intelligence information about their further plans. Priuli emphasized

\textsuperscript{216} Infelise, Prima dei giornali: Alle origini della pubblica informazione (secoli XVI e XVII), p. 9.


\textsuperscript{218} Francesca Trivellato points out the fallacy of Habermas’ claim that only the appearance of economic newspapers starting in the late 17th century launched a new stage of western capitalism that superseded the period dominated by the exclusive use of private correspondence. In Francesca Trivellato, “Merchants’ Letters and the Legal and Social Sources of Business Cooperation in the Early Modern Period,” in \textit{a paper presented during Economic History Seminar - Duke University} (Durham, NC, 2007), p. 31. Cf. Habermas, \textit{The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society}, pp. 16-21. In spite of the natural drift of young Venetian nobles from trade towards more comfortable ways of living, the Spanish ambassador in Venice in 1608 was still able to report: “I am told that pretty much the greater part of the business on the Rialto market is transacted on account of noblemen, whether they are openly involved or engaging in commerce under other people’s names.” From a report on Venice attributed to the Spanish ambassador Don Alonso della Cueva, Marquis of Bedmar, c. 1608: BL Additional ms. 5471, ff. 147-53. As reprinted and translated to English in Chambers, Pullan, and Fletcher, eds., \textit{Venice: A Documentary History}, 1450-1630, pp. 257-60.

\textsuperscript{219} Priuli, I diarii di Girolamo Priuli (1494-1512), vol. 2, pp. 153-57.
that the contents of such letters were in consonantia - they complement each other.\textsuperscript{220} Another good example of private and public channels working in unison is the 1504 letter mentioned by Sanudo, discussing further Portuguese naval progress. It was sent from Lisbon by Venetian merchant Gian Francesco Affaitato to the Venetian ambassador in Spain, and from him forwarded to Venice in diplomatic mail where it arrived on June 27 and was read in the Collegio two days later.\textsuperscript{221} One can only imagine the great interest with which such dispatches were read not only in the Ducal Palace, but especially by merchants in the Rialto who were enormously interested in learning details of the Portuguese achievements which, if true, would have been the ultimate ruin of Venice.\textsuperscript{222}

**The Aristocratic Republic and its Obsession with Secrecy**

It is not an exaggeration to claim that Venetian political elites were obsessed with secrecy, and the ability to keep a secret was undoubtedly considered one of the fundamental virtues indispensible for the functioning of a well-ordered aristocratic republican government. The meetings of the Collegio, which was de facto the Senate steering committee presided by the Doge, became the place where even the most sensitive reports were read and thus its agenda consequently required significant measures of secrecy.\textsuperscript{223} At a time when the Senate or the Great Concil deliberated an extremely sensitive topic, all non-noble secretaries and ushers had to leave

\textsuperscript{220} In September 1501, diarist Priuli noted that the news tracing the development of new Portuguese trade routes to India came simultaneously from a special Venetian envoy to Portugal as well as from alternative, probably private sources in Bruges and Antwerp. In ibid., vol. 2, p. 175. In December 1502, Priuli recorded further advances of the Portuguese in India through letters from Valencia, Genoa, Lion and Bruges – “da diverse bande, tute consonante insieme” - from different sources, but all confirming each other. In Priuli, I diarii di Girolamo Priuli (1494-1512), vol. 2, p. 242.

\textsuperscript{221} Sanudo, I diarii di Marino Sanuto (1496-1533), VI.26.


\textsuperscript{223} De Vivo claims that the Collegio was “the central mechanism in the transition of information inside the political system,” in De Vivo, Information and Communication in Venice: Rethinking Early Modern Politics, p. 37. For more on the Collegio see Finlay, Politics in Renaissance Venice, p. 39-40.
the room and the doors were locked. As Paulo Sarpi reminded his compatriots, “every Venetian nobleman ought to teach his children the use of secrecies with their Catechism; but the better way was to forbid all talking of public concerns out of the place where they are properly to be deliberated on, and much less among those who are partakers of the secret.” Yet a big portion of Sanudo’s voluminous chronicle, even at the time when the author was not a member of the Senate, was composed from direct transcripts, paraphrases or summaries of such ‘secret’ reports written by Venetian ambassadors, naval or military liaisons which were sooner or later leaked to the public despite the measures taken to protect their confidentiality. On 8 April, 1498, Sanudo recorded that the session of the Collegio was unexpectedly interrupted by the arrival of a messenger with the dispatch about the death of the French king. “This news, which is so big, was immediately divulged throughout the whole town,” added the chronicler. The Collegio was also the place where Venetian ambassadors, returning from their foreign missions, delivered more elaborated _relazioni_ - summarizing reports about countries in which they served, discussing everything from the personal character of foreign leaders, political systems of their countries to popular customs. Similarly such reports were sooner or later leaked, sometimes even put in print and publicly circulated.

Thus in spite of its official mask of secrecy, Venice was also a city which thrived on gossip. According to De Vivo, the neighborhood barbershops and pharmacies played a social role of

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224 Sanudo observed that before the Doge addressed the Grand Council on 2 October, 1513 regarding the bad financial situation of the State due to the protracted war, all who could not vote had to leave the room and the doors were locked: “fu mandata fuori tutti quelli che non metevano balotta, e serate le porte, il Principe si levo.” In Sanudo, I diarii (1496-1533): Pagine scelte, XVII, 119-120.
225 Sarpi, Advice Given to the Republick of Venice, p. 29.
227 De Vivo notes that the _relazioni_ were usually delivered in the Collegio. In De Vivo, Information and Communication in Venice: Rethinking Early Modern Politics, pp. 57-70. The 16th century historian Scipio Ammirato already highly valued the Venetian _relazioni_ for their informative value, arguing that they contain information about “the customs of the prince, of the site, the riches, the fertility, and other qualities of places of men.” In Donald E. Queller, “The Development of Ambassadorial _Relazioni_,” in Renaissance Venice, ed. J. R. Hale (Totowa, NJ, 1973). For an example of a 16th century Venetian _relazione_ see Alvise Mocenigo, _Relazione di me Alvise Mocenigo K. ritornato oratore de la Cesarea Maestà di Carlo V_ (1548), vol. 8 (Torino, 1965).
community hubs where friends and strangers mingled together and exchanged talk comparable to ‘Habermasian’ coffeehouses.\textsuperscript{228} Garzoni described the character of a typical Venetian do-nothing (\textit{ozioso di piazza}) as someone who “at times wanders around town aimlessly, stops at the barber shop to tell and to make jokes, at times reads the news[letters] at the stalls.”\textsuperscript{229} In his chronicle, Priuli at one point wrote that for not being a member of the Senate, he did not have access to all documents related to the negotiations with the Ottoman Empire and thus had to rely solely on what was said in the piazzas.\textsuperscript{230} Yet elsewhere the same author added that there was no secret issue deliberated in the highest government echelons which, within two or three days, would not have been divulged in the streets: “tutto se intendeva et hera publicato.”\textsuperscript{231}

\textbf{Recordkeeping and the Bureaucratization of the State}

In 1499 when the Venetian government needed money to finance its continuous war efforts against enemies on land and at sea, it was suggested that unpaid public tax debts worth about 300,000 ducats be collected. Priuli pointed out that the list of debtors was first read in the Great Council “so that the entire town would know names of citizens who don’t love their country.”\textsuperscript{232} The properties of those who did not pay their duties within a month were ensuingly supposed to be sold at public auctions.\textsuperscript{233} The Senate established a three-member committee which went every morning to the Rialto to auction the private properties of outstanding debtors to whoever

\begin{footnotes}
\footnotetext{228}{De Vivo, Information and Communication in Venice: Rethinking Early Modern Politics, pp. 98-106.}
\footnotetext{229}{“...hora vagando per mercato in mezzo de’ villani vanamente, hora posando in qualche barbieria a contar frottole, & fan falucche, hora leggendo le nove di banco.” In Thomaso Garzoni, La piazza universale di tutte le professioni del mondo (Venice, 1589), p. 809.}
\footnotetext{230}{Priuli, I diarii di Girolamo Priuli (1494-1512), vol. 2, p. 268.}
\footnotetext{231}{Ibid., vol. 4, p. 33.}
\footnotetext{233}{Priuli, I diarii di Girolamo Priuli (1494-1512), vol. 1, pp. 287-88.}
\end{footnotes}
Le scale di Rialto, an elevated platform in the Rialto square - as well as a similar venue, a porphyry stone in Piazza San Marco - were two main locations from which the city officials traditionally informed Venetians about all important decisions taken by their government (Figures 3.6. and 3.7.). At the sound of the trombe e piffari, people of all walks of life hastily gathered in order to hear the verdicts in criminal trials, to learn about new laws, bank failures, and elected positions in the Great Council; from this spot the auctions of cargo space on state-owned galleys or of the lucrative monopoly on wine production also took place. The Venetian government employed a public crier - trombetta - whose voice was strong enough “to be clearly understood even by the magnificent elderly citizens.” According to Garzoni, his role was “to publish official resolutions and edicts, to call them from the pulpit, to announce judicial processes and their sentences: to call during public auctions going once, going twice, and going three times…” There were other criers in each quarter of the city whose duty was to spread the news around town if, for example, a supply of fresh fish or meat had just arrived at the market. Historians associate the emergence of modern public recordkeeping in Europe with the rise of urban communities in the High Medieval period and their first big public projects of defensive wall building. Venice did not have walls, but its recordkeeping was still very closely linked

234 Ibid., vol. 2, p. 61.
235 Around 1500, both Priuli and Sanudo recorded that such public announcements were made “sopra le scale di Rialto” - above, or from above the stairs in the Rialto. The notion is always very allusive and ambiguous, they never describe the place. In 1541, Venetians erected an elevated pulpit sculpted from marble and accessed by marble stairs supported on the shoulders of a statue of Titan. It soon was nicknamed ‘the hunchback’ - Gobbo di Rialto. It was the place from which announcements were made public - ‘published’ - by declamation. Its vicinity became soon a place where popular protest was expressed in the form of posted written pamphlets, poems or illustrated cartoons. In Peter Burke, “Early Modern Venice as a Center of Information and Communication,” in Venice Reconsidered: The History and Civilization of an Italian City-State, 1297-1797, ed. John Martin and Dennis Romano (Baltimore, 2000), p. 396.
236 For an example of the publication of criminal sentences see Sanudo, I diarii (1496-1533): Pagine scelte, IX, 358-359; for elected positions see Lane, Venice: A Maritime Republic, p. 259; for examples of auctions of cargo space on state galleys and the wine monopoly see Priuli, I diarii di Girolamo Priuli (1494-1512), vol. 2, p. 250-55 and vol. 4, p. 266; for an example of bank failures see ibid., vol. 1, p. 286. For more on musical instruments used to announce Venetian public events – such as trombe e piffari – see Sanudo, Venice, Cità Excelentissima: Selections from the Renaissance diaries of Marin Sanudo, p. 551.
237 Garzoni, La piazza universale di tutte le professioni del mondo, p. 796.
Figure 3.6. Canaletto. *The Campo di Rialto*, c.1758-1763.
Figure 3.7. Lazzaro Bastiani (attributed), *The Piazzetta*, c.1488.
with financial records, especially those related to taxation. In 1513, Sanudo lamented that the fire destroyed almost all of the Rialto quarter, burning many state offices with their tax registers, "a big damage to the republic because the debtors were a pot of gold." Yet, relying on the diarist’s own minute notes of any kind of public announcement, be it read in the Great Council or posted in the Rialto and San Marco, the tax office was able to at least partially reconstruct the lost lists of debtors. From this episode it is clear that despite the secrecy involving political issues, in a merchant city-state the information pertaining to public finances was much more open and accessible. Similarly in 1503 Priuli included in his dairy an itemized list of cargo of eight state galleys sent to Beirut and Alexandria which was again, in all probability, posted or circulated publicly in written form in the Rialto and where he as a merchant who had a natural interest in such matters copied it for his own records. All significant private contracts were registered by dozens of public notaries, who were called also librarì, "because their duty is to put on books and asses all commercial exchanges which pass through their hands, justly and faithfully."

A state whose internal order relied on a system of laws and regulations must have similarly had a great interest in communicating its new legislation and in publicizing any change of its old one to all who resided on its territory. And the Venetian government had a tendency to cope with any emerging problem by adopting a new regulatory policy and then appointing a committee to

240 Finlay, Politics in Renaissance Venice, pp. 11-12.
242 Garzoni, La piazza universale di tutte le professioni del mondo, p. 127. Pilgrim Felix Fabri and his group signed a contract with the owner of the ship which carried them to Jerusalem and went to register the agreement with one of the notaries at the Doge’s Palace. In Fabri, The Book of the Wanderings of Felix Fabri (Circa 1480-1483 A.D.), f. 35b. Cf. Casola, Canon Pietro Casola's Pilgrimage to Jerusalem in the Year 1494, p. 124. About 20,000 commercial contracts from the late medieval period survived in the notarial archives of Venice’s commercial rival, Genoa. Lopez claimed that by the 13th century "men and women of all ages and condition, from the archbishop to the bath attendant, from the aged widow to the orphans under warship, were the clients of one or another of two hundred notaries who kept records of credit transactions, drafting tens of thousands of contracts every year. The time factor was so important that each contract was dated not only by the day but also by the hour." In Robert S. Lopez, "The Crossroads Within the Wall," in The Historian and the City, ed. Oscar Handlin and John E. Burchard (Cambridge, MA, 1966), p. 37.
supervise its implementation. As a result, the Republic had a complicated set of rules regulating practically every aspect of public as well as private life: marriages and baptisms, weights and measurements, wages and prices, conspicuous consumption and luxury, print and blasphemy, prostitution and monastic life, as well as the elaborate building codes and laws protecting the unique ecology of the lagoon on which the very survival of Venice depended. Many laws adopted at different levels of Venetian government included a clause that if a servant or slave accused his/her patron of some wrongdoing, he or she would be granted a financial reward or freedom. But how would a servant or a slave learn about such legislative measures? Most importantly, when they were first announced in Piazza San Marco or in the Rialto by the public crier from where chatter and gossip usually carried the news swiftly around town. Marble letter slots in the Ducal Palace as well as public offices and parishes throughout city served as places where such denunciations were usually made (Figure 3.8.), and their personnel was able to give basic legal advice to anyone who inquired. Furthermore, the government felt obliged to

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243 For examples of tax codes see Senate decrees regarding the new real estate tax estimates reprinted in Chambers, Pullan, and Fletcher, eds., Venice: A Documentary History, 1450-1630, p. 136. The regulation of marriage dowries is mentioned in Sanudo, Venice, Città Excelentissima: Selections from the Renaissance diaries of Marin Sanudo, p. 295; regulation of baptismal practices is mentioned in Priuli, I diarii di Girolamo Priuli (1494-1512), vol. 2, pp. 385-86; for more on weights and measurements see Francesco Balducci Pegolotti, La pratica della mercatura, Allan Evans trans. (Cambridge, MA, 1936), pp. 137-54; and Marin Sanudo, "Laus urbis Venetae," p. 13; for regulations of salaries see the 1565 resolution of the governors of the hospital of Santi Giovanni e Paolo regulating the wages of orphans: ASV Ospedali a Luoghi Pii, b. 910, ff. IV, 2v. As reprinted and translated to English in Chambers, Pullan, and Fletcher, eds., Venice: A Documentary History, 1450-1630, pp. 310-11; the sumptuary laws banning luxury are mentioned in Bembo, Della Historia Venitiana di M. Pietro Bembo Card. Volgarmente Scritta - Libri XII; the 1616 laws regarding the print of blasphemy are reprinted in Chambers, Pullan, and Fletcher, eds., Venice: A Documentary History, 1450-1630, pp. 128-29; the excerpts from the 1460 regulation of prostitution are reprinted in Chambers, Pullan, and Fletcher, eds., Venice: A Documentary History, 1450-1630, pp. 120-123; for regulation of monastic life see Priuli, I diarii di Girolamo Priuli (1494-1512), vol. 4, p. 115. Priuli often discusses also state policies aimed at preserving unique architecture and ecology of the lagoon. See ibid., vol. 2, p. 169, 379-80 and 390-91.

244 In September 1502 Priuli noted a decree attempted to suppress illegal wine-making which included a clause that if male or female slaves accuse their patron, they shall be immediately given freedom. In Priuli, I diarii di Girolamo Priuli (1494-1512), vol. 4, p. 226.


246 Montesquieu later observed that "a mouth of stone is open to every informer at Venice, a mouth to which one would be apt to give the appellation of that of tyranny." In Charles de Secondat Montesquieu, The Spirit of Laws, Mr. Nugent trans. (London, 1752), vol. 1, p. 76. In the oath taken by the members of the Council of Ten as of 1578, it is mentioned that such denunciations could be made "in the Ducal Palace, in a church or in any other part of the city." Reprinted in English translation in Chambers, Pullan, and Fletcher, eds., Venice: A Documentary History, 1450-1630, pp. 56-57.
Figure 3.8. Marble slot for secret denunciations. Venetians were solicited to make secret denunciations through numerous marble slots placed in government buildings and around town. Montesquieu observed that “a mouth of stone is open to every informer at Venice, a mouth to which one would be apt to give the appellation of that of tyranny.”
communicate its decisions to a particular group of residents, Venetians or foreign nationals, whose lives were directly affected by a given decree. The 1470 legislative order by which the practice of the Orthodox Christian rite was restricted to the church of San Biagio in Castello carried a clause that its text “shall be made known to the Greek community” which constituted the core of the Orthodox population in Venice. This should have been done, explained the decree, “that no one may plead ignorance” of not being familiar with the new order. All new legislation was ensuingly archived by the State Chancellery in Piazza San Marco whose office “minutely and with diligence” recorded and made “easily accessible to anyone” not just the laws regulating city’s public and private life, but also the publicly announced texts of important international treaties.

The maintenance of a growing state bureaucracy required an elaborate archival system, a practice which Venetians mastered thanks to their contacts with Byzantium. An anonymous 1500 treatise on the Venetian government claimed that regiments of state secretaries registered everything “on parchment, well written and kept in such order that without difficulty one can find written down all that has happened in the past 400 or 500 years.” But it did not mean that everyone had full access to all recorded information. Sensitive transcripts of Senate deliberations or classified ambassadorial dispatches were stored separately in state secret archives (Secreta).

To prevent their servant personnel from copying and selling important documents, Venetians had


248 Priuli, I diarii di Girolamo Priuli (1494-1512), vol. 2, p. 268. Commenting in 1504 on the new law promoting ostracism, Priuli wrote that those who wanted to learn more details about the deliberation could do so through public announcements in the Rialto and Piazza San Marco – the customary places where the legislation was ensuingly “put in print for knowledge of all, and also in the Chancery of the Dominium can be well studied” (ibid., vol. 2, pp. 391-92).

249 See the section titled The Court and its Officers: The Civil Bureaucracy in Constantinople in Deno John Geanakoplos, Byzantium: Society, and Civilization Seen through Contemporary Eyes (Chicago, 1984), pp. 46-56. According to Cormack, paper was introduced into the Byzantine world by the Arabs around 800, but did not become common until the 11th century, when its primary purpose was the archiving of official documents and imperial charters. In Robin Cormack, Byzantine Art, Oxford History of Art (Oxford, UK; New York, 2000), p. 117.

a policy of choosing custodians who were illiterate and the same practice was recommended to their ambassadors abroad. This was not easy to achieve and the practice itself became target of many jokes in Venice.251

As pointed out above, the legal system of the Republic was not an ossified set of rules set in stone, but a constantly evolving system of laws and regulations, reflecting new challenges faced by the city. But the addition of new statutes and regulations without a simultaneous shedding of old ones often created chaos, resulting in an overall low respect of the law.252 Both Priuli and Sanudo were always skeptical when a new regulation was adopted. Priuli’s sarcastic comment on 1504 legislation curbing extravagance and luxuries is typical: “all in all, for some month it will be observed, and then nothing, as is the case of other deliberations taken by the Senate, which are not respected at all.”253 In 1549, the clerk to the Privy Council of Edward VI, William Thomas, indirectly confirmed this claim, noting that “this is cleere, there can be no better ordre of justice in a commonwealth than theirs, if it were duey observed.”254

Globally-Connected Markets

As of the Late Medieval period, Venice was firmly integrated into an elaborate global network of commercial exchange, complete with its own financial cycles and price fluctuations of basic commodities.255 It spanned the distance from London and Bruges to Constantinople, and via the Bosporus, penetrated deep into Central Asia; through the Middle East it was connected

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252 According to Chambers and Pullan, such practice complicates any attempt to describe the Venetian constitutional system over a long period of time, even for contemporary scholars. In Chambers, Pullan, and Fletcher, eds., Venice: A Documentary History, 1450-1630, pp. 39-40.
253 Priuli, I diarii di Girolamo Priuli (1494-1512), vol. 2, pp. 391-92. Priuli notes such attitudes manifested when the Senate in 1500 attempted to prevent the illegal production of wine without a public license (vol. 2, p. 51); in 1506 after it banned indecent dressing among young men (vol. 2, pp. 399-400); or in the case of the 1509 laws against sodomy (vol. 4, pp. 35-36) an scandalizing sexual behavior in Venetian monasteries (vol. 4, p. 34 and 115).
with India and the Spice Islands. In 1295, recounting his long journey to China, Venetian native son Marco Polo considered the talk about the Central Asian region of Tana and regions surrounding Black Sea preposterous, arguing that Italian merchant communities already explored this part of the world and “everybody knows what is to be found there.” 256 In 1499, the German Stamler brothers, who traded in Venice and other cities, asked the Senate to help them settle their local debts “on account of the hard times, the fluctuations of trade, the collapse of many of our schemes and projects, and the failure of many of our debtors outside this city.” 257 To further illustrate the complexity and interconnectedness of trade networks, Chambers and Pullan reprint a letter from a Venetian merchant writing about an elaborate exchange scheme involving two Christian merchants living in Venice and Aleppo (Syria), and two Jewish men from Tripoli (Libya) and Damascus (Syria). The Venetian merchant from Aleppo asked his Christian friend from Venice who, as he heard, was to soon embark on a business trip to Tripoli, to collect the credit he bestowed recently upon a Jewish merchant from Damascus, whose principal guarantor was a Rabbi living in Tripoli. “Hence I beg you, when you have reached Tripoli, to find the above-mentioned [Rabbi] Samuel Alegre at once, telling him to make ready to pay the bill when it falls due, and saying that you will return him his note of exchange,” wrote the Venetian merchant from Aleppo. 258

256 Marco Polo, The Travels of Marco Polo, p. 344.
258 The letter of a Venetian merchant residing in Aleppo, 1551: ASV Miscellanea di Carte, b. 20, Registro Lettere Private. As reprinted and translated in Chambers, Pullan, and Fletcher, eds., Venice: A Documentary History, 1450-1630, p. 174. In 1549, William Thomas, a clerk of the Council to Edward VI, on his visit to Italy described the country “as an hert or knotte of these partes on our halfe of the world, is the principal place of recourse of all nacions that occupie any thyng of importance farre from home. For like as with vs in Engelande the most merchantes of the realme resort to London, to utter ther owne wares, and to bie suche other as make for theyr purposes: even so thei of France, of Spaine, of Germanie, and of all other westerlie places, that covet the merchandise of Soria, Aegypt, Cyprus, Candia, Constantinopol, and those other easterly partes, as iewell, drugges, spices, perfumes, silkes, cotton, suger, malmesies, and other lyke: resorte moste commonly into Italie with thei woulles, clothes, linnen, leather, metalles and suche other, to Genoa, Mylaine, Venice, Ancona, Missena, Naples, or to some of
In his diaries, Priuli carefully recorded every significant price change of spices, the most important commodity sold in Venice, as well as that of the publicly traded state bonds and obligations. He did it “for the knowledge of future merchants so that they see and know the mutation the [price of] merchandise makes in a small window of time.” Political events, especially international treaties and outcomes of important military battles were able to turn around fortunes of merchants in the Rialto in the course of a few days. In January 1500, Priuli received news from London that local prices of pepper soared as a consequence of too many Venetian galleys being employed in the war against the Turks, thus unable to import spices from Egypt, Lebanon, and Syria. In December 1502, the news of a temporary peace reached with the Ottoman Empire pushed the price of Venetian state bonds up by 50 percent. But often, Priuli noted, the market went up or down based on pure speculation - even intentional manipulation - because merchants were inherently susceptible to gossip and mass psychosis. During the Easter fair of 1501, the price of pepper in Venice suddenly plunged from 132 to 70 ducats per cargo in the course of a few hours without any rational explanation. The merchant-chronicler explained such irrational market behavior by the fact that “when one starts to buy, all wont to purchase, and when one starts to sell, all follow his example without any middle ground; everything in extremity, once touching the heavens, another time falling to the ground.”

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259 Priuli, I diarii di Girolamo Priuli (1494-1512), vol. 2, p. 117. For a long time, such data was compiled and distributed in the Rialto in hand-written form. Only as of the 1580s did Venice see the first regular weekly printed publications of the exchange rates and prices of main commodities. For more see Infelise, Prima dei giornali: Alle origini della pubblica informazione (secoli XVI e XVII), p. 80.

260 According to Priuli “dala città veneta dependeva il montar et il callar de le spezie, perched a quell si forniva’ tut il ponente et diversi altri lochi.” In Priuli, I diarii di Girolamo Priuli (1494-1512), vol. 1, p. 255.

261 According to Priuli, the shares of Monte Nuovo “per questa nova subito salto” - because of this news, they immediately jumped - from 50 ducats to 75 ducats. In ibid., vol. 2, p. 242.

262 Ibid., vol. 2, p. 117.
A series of bank failures caused by panic in the Rialto in 1499-1501 reminded Venetians how vulnerable international market networks were in regard to information. “And it was great damage to the city of Venice and even bigger shame,” argued Priuli in 1499 after the first failure of the most prestigious Venetian bank owned by the Garzoni family, adding that “the whole world learned the news.” Venetian commercial rivals, particularly the Florentines, tried to use this information to their advantage arguing that the entire city of Venice was insolvent.\textsuperscript{263} When three months later the second bank, that of Lipomani, announced bankruptcy, the situation in the Rialto was on the verge of panic. The crowd also stormed the third important Venetian bank, that of Andrea Pisani, and people demanded back their savings.\textsuperscript{264} But the Pisanis were prepared and immediately notified the entire family clan. The Venetian government, aware of the far-reaching consequences if Venice lost its last big bank, intervened on behalf of the Pisanis, posting on its behalf an assurance of 100,000 ducats. The Pisanis and their friends matched the sum. Suddenly, when it became clear that the tide was turning, even foreign merchants, encouraged by their countries’ ambassadors, pledged financial assurances to the Pisani bank using this as a public relations stunt - an “opportunity to generate some goodwill” with Venetians:

...the entire Rialto was in movement, one after another, everyone wanted to contribute according to his means. At the end of that morning the assurances posted for the mentioned bank arose to 320,000 ducats. When the people [who previously attacked the bank demanding their savings] saw such a big amount of assurances and money they comforted themselves and stopped demanding their savings, so that only for divine miracle this bank saved itself... And because such a thing had never been seen in our times, I considered it proper to describe it in detail.\textsuperscript{265}

Yet a year later the Pisani bank announced its closure anyway. Priuli again noted in his diary that “this morning, as usually at the sound of trombe and pifari, from the steps of the Rialto they

\textsuperscript{263} Ibid., vol. 1, p. 111. Cf. Sanudo, I diarii di Marino Sanuto (1496-1533), I, 96-98.
\textsuperscript{264} Priuli, I diarii di Girolamo Priuli (1494-1512), vol. 1, pp. 122-24. In the meantime also a smaller bank owned by brothers Andrea and Hieronimo Rizzo announced bankruptcy (ibid., p. 112).
\textsuperscript{265} Ibid., pp. 122-24. Reciprocally, Venetians did everything to maintain good PR with the cities with which they traded. In July 1509, at the outbreak of the war with the League of Cambrai, the Signoria wrote letters to all Germans cities with which they traded and on which their spice trade depended to assure them that they had high respect for their Emperor (ibid., vol. 4, p. 159).
let everybody know that they wanted to close their bank and asked everyone to come and withdraw their money.”\textsuperscript{266} Such developments clearly demonstrate that Venetian bankers were fully aware that their credit depended not just upon the tangible capital they kept in their treasuries, but increasingly also upon their public image. In order to survive, they had to invest in cultivating their public image because, as Francesco da Molin observed, “this market and the city of Venice are naturally very much inclined to love and trust in appearances.”\textsuperscript{267}

**Venetian Couriers and the Early Postal System**

At a time when any long-distance communication was synonymous with transportation, reliable sea routes and roads traveled by couriers were essential for the spread of information.\textsuperscript{268} The regular Venetian mail exchange system probably had roots in the late 13\textsuperscript{th} century when the city was already connected by naval service with the important Adriatic port of Kotor where the local Montenegrin couriers picked up Venetian mail and carried it overland across the Balkans to Constantinople.\textsuperscript{269} The earliest known document pertaining to government regulation of mail delivery in Venice dates from 1305.\textsuperscript{270} After the fall of Constantinople in 1453, the single most essential postal connection for Venice became the one with Papal Rome.\textsuperscript{271} While the communication axis between the two cities was travelled frequently by couriers since antiquity, it was only on March 11, 1490 when a group of highlanders from Bergamo who traditionally


\textsuperscript{268} As Carey observed, it was only in the 19\textsuperscript{th} century when the telegraph “freed communication from the constraints of geography” by separating communication from transportation. In Carey, *Communication as Culture: Essays on Media and Society*, p. 204.


\textsuperscript{270} Foppolo, "Mariegola della Compagnia dei Corrieri Veneti: Saggio introduttivo," p. 16.

\textsuperscript{271} Ibid., p. 41.
serviced this route established the legendary Company of Venetian Couriers.\textsuperscript{272} It became one of the nuclei from which a compatible and reliable European postal system developed in the course of the following century. Most of the postmasters, who organized and managed the system of interconnected state post offices from different European capitals, were members of the Tasso family from Bergamo which was part of the Venetian \textit{stato di terraferma}.\textsuperscript{273} To make the costly postal operations profitable, they opened the service to private persons who were as of the early 1500s able to send and receive letters or packages between most of the important European capitals. As Boehringer points out, there was no revolutionary technological innovation behind the success of early modern postal networks. The triumph of Tasso family was in designing and enforcing a good organizational system, as well as an international labor coordination.\textsuperscript{274}

The first regular postal routes operated by the Company of Venetian Couriers connected Venice with Rome and Milan. In the beginning, the service was built on a reciprocal basis. Each city had its own post office on the territory of the other city-states which may explain why Venetians used to call them in plural \textit{le poste} - the posts. On his way to Jerusalem in 1494, Pietro Casola of Milan wrote that he stayed at the house of the master courier of the Milanese merchants in Venice. The next day, in the company of one of his men, Casola himself delivered some merchant letters he carried from his home town.\textsuperscript{275} Sanudo noted that during the summer season of 1497, a letter sent from Rome needed only four days to reach Venice - a speed competitive even with the modern Italian postal system!\textsuperscript{276} The major customer of the postal service between Venice and Rome was in the beginning the State and according to the statutes of the Company of Venetian Couriers, a fresh courier was always supposed to be waiting in the

\begin{thebibliography}{9}
\bibitem{272} Bon. Foppolo, ed., \textit{Mariegola della Compagnia dei Corrieri della Serenissima Signoria} (Camerata Cornello, IT, 2001).
\bibitem{273} Foppolo, "\textit{Mariegola della Compagnia dei Corrieri Veneti: Saggio introduttivo}," p. 15.
\bibitem{276} Sanudo, \textit{I diarii} (1496-1533): Pagine scelte, I, 653.
\end{thebibliography}
courtyard of the Doge’s Palace, ready to leave immediately for one of the European capitals. In the case of an anticipated journey, merchants in the Rialto were notified in advance and private persons could have added their letters to the state mail as well, making the trip more profitable. During the War of the League of Cambrai in 1509, Priuli complained that the regular, twice-a-week postal service between Venice and Milan, used mainly by merchants to communicate with their business agents, was often interrupted. Elsewhere he recorded that “it has been already ten days since we haven’t heard from Venetian representatives in Rome, which makes everybody wonder, because they usually write two times a week, orderly,” timing their dispatches so that they would coincide with the regular schedule of the postal service.

Papal Rome was obviously an important hub through which the mail from Naples and Sicily traveled to Venice. Similarly, in Milan all mail from the Italian peninsula was picked up by couriers from the French mercantile capital, Lyon, and it was forwarded further west to Paris and Bern. By the mid-16th century, regular postal routes connected Venice also with the headquarters of the Fugger banking and trading house in Augsburg, and with the Hapsburg Imperial court in Vienna. The services offered by the post went far beyond the simple delivery of letters. In the 1580s Garzoni described the profession of messengers, couriers and postmen as those who “walk by foot, or run the post by horse, by boat, or by coach, and deliver letters, packages, writings, packs of money, suitcases, travel chests or saddlebags.” The work of long-distance messengers was notoriously dangerous, and their services were correspondingly costly. In the first half of the 16th century, a Venetian courier charged about 25 ducats for one roundtrip

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279 Priuli, I diarii di Girolamo Priuli (1494-1512), vol. 4, p. 168.
280 Ibid., vol. 4, p. 235.
281 Caizzi, Dalla Posta dei re alla posta di tutti, pp. 224 and 231.
283 Garzoni, La piazza universale di tutte le professioni del mondo, p. 447.
to Rome. Garzoni wrote a long list of dangers he faced on the journey, adding that this was the reason why they demanded so much money for their deliveries. Aside from the Company of Venetian Couriers, which had monopoly on international postal delivery, there were many smaller courier companies on the territory of the Republic of Venice which handled mail between its major urban centers such as Padua, Bergamo, Brescia or Verona, not counting the simple mailmen (portalettere) who delivered messages within the limits of the city proper.

The long-distance mail was usually carried by horse, relying on postal stations redistributed equidistantly along major travel routes. In many cases the new postal system simply incorporated abandoned buildings, which in antiquity used to serve the Roman Imperial post. Aside from horsemen who delivered letters and small packets, the post as of the early 16th century also used open carriages (calessì) which enabled the first passenger transport. In his autobiography Benvenuto Cellini (1500-1571) mentioned several times that he traveled by post - _mi montai in poste_ - on the main route connecting Rome and Venice through Florence. During one such journey in the 1520s, the sculptor was in a hurry and used the opportunity to rent a fresh horse at the postal office, leaving it with the next postmaster at his station with explanation to the reader that such a rent-a-horse service was not an uncommon practice in his times.

The significant improvements in postal systems and increasing possibilities of international travel enabled the further spread and cross-pollination of ideas among the intellectuals of

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284 Caizzi, _Dalla Posta dei re alla posta di tutti_, p. 227. To send a special courier was considered a significant expense even by Venetian ambassadors in Rome during war time in 1509. In Priuli, _I diarii di Girolamo Priuli_ (1494-1512), vol. 4, p. 353. Sanudo mentioned that the Venetian government sent a special courier to Rome in 1525 for a reward of 22 ducats if he made the journey in two days. In Sanudo, _I diarii_ (1496-1533): _Pagine scelte_, XXXVII, 656-657.
285 "Per laqual cosa si fanno pagar la lettera caro..." Garzoni, _La piazza universale di tutte le professioni del mondo_, p. 448.
286 See the chapter ‘i corrieri minori e locali’ in Caizzi, _Dalla Posta dei re alla posta di tutti_, p. 214.
287 As of 1584 Venetians introduced the _posta a stafetta_ – each courier ran only a short distance between two post stations about two hours distant from each other where the mail was picked up by a fresh courier. In Foppolo, "Mariegola della Compagnia dei Corrieri Veneti: Saggio introduttivo," p. 36.
290 Benvenuto Cellini, _Vita_ (Roma, 2003), electronic document - no pagination. From the perspective of a modern reader, what Cellini described was basically a rent-a-horse service, an early prototype of today's rent-a-car business.
Renaissance Europe. Grand Tours of European capitals, of which Venice became a mandatory stop, were fast becoming almost a must-do for any wealthy young men who usually travelled with their private tutors. Francis Bacon’s essay *On Travel*, published in the 1590s, addressed exactly this type of young person, advising him on how to learn the most about the customs of the visited country. In the conclusion, Bacon added that when such a sojourner “returneth home, let him not leave the countries, where he hath travailed, altogether behinde him; but maintaine a correspondence, by letters, with those of his acquaintance, which are the most worth.” In spite of the fact that the concept of *the republic of letters* is traditionally associated mainly with the period of the Enlightenment, Bouwsma challenges this notion by inserting it into the context of the Renaissance. A mere glimpse at the vast and often interlocking correspondence networks of the intellectuals who lived permanently or sojourned in Venice in the early 16th century leaves no doubt about the justification of such a claim.

**From Private Merchant Letters to Commercially Traded Avvisi**

Intellectuals were certainly not the only ones who used the postal service to maintain their widespread information networks. In the previous centuries, Venetian merchants developed their own correspondence webs spanning the entire Mediterranean and reaching deep inland. But such

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a private exchange of merchant letters was still very sporadic and irregular. It was only with the advent of the postal service that merchant houses achieved the advantage of relative reliability and regularity in the exchange of messages. Nevertheless, it would still be inappropriate to claim that there was a direct causal link between the introduction of regular postal services and the appearance of the earliest periodical merchant newsletters in Venice. But their parallel emergence certainly wasn’t a mere coincidence.

The transition from private hand-written merchant letters and diplomatic dispatches - which were gathered in important political and economic centers like Venice - to the first periodically printed European newsletters/newspapers took place over the course of the 16th century. It was so slow, with so many loops and deviations, trials and errors, that most of the Venetians did not even notice the gradual change. Infelise points out that writing around 1500, Venetian merchant-chronicler Priuli started to clearly distinguish in his diaries between the different sources of his information, attributing it still mainly to private merchant or official diplomatic letters (lettere), but at some point the term avixi/avvisi starts appearing with increased frequency in his texts. While the lettere represented personal accounts of events captured by merchants and diplomats and were addressed to concrete persons, the avvisi were with great probability the earliest attempts to copy and edit such accounts - often by putting them in the neutral third person and making them to address unspecified abstract readers - with a clear aim to sell them for profit. The perishable nature of information required that Venetian avvisi were hand-written, often edited and reproduced in haste in scriptoria (scrittorie) offices whose clerks earned their daily bread by make manuscript copies of government or private documents. The most important

296 Priuli, I diarii di Girolamo Priuli (1494-1512).
297 Infelise, Prima dei giornali: Alle origini della pubblica informazione (secoli XVI e XVII), pp. 38-40. Originally, the entire content of an avviso was based on a single merchant or diplomatic letter. The earliest survived publications of multiple letters edited into one avviso bear titles such as Advisi dal campo de 15 marzo 1514, or Advisi di Venetia de 30 marzo 1514. Ibid., p. 9.
scriptoria were clustered in the parish of St Moisè, strategically located between the main post offices and state bureaucracy in Piazza San Marco. In one of his entries from 1504, Priuli recorded a package of copied merchant letters from Lisbon which arrived in Venice by way of Genoa. They were originally written by those who were sailing with Magellan’s ships, containing a recollection of their successful journey to India. Priuli’s note may well be one of the earliest documented moments in modern European history when private information became packaged and successfully traded on an international scale as a commodity per se in the form of a commercially published merchant newsletter.

Venice was indisputably a major hub where news from different parts of the world was gathered through multiple parallel channels, and it was also home to a relatively wide audience of merchants and ambassadors who were hungry for information and were able to pay for it handsomely. At the same time, the city was indisputably one of the prominent centers of the European print industry. Yet, and this may appear as an historical paradox, Venice was among the last important European commercial and political centers to have its own regular printed newsletter/newspaper. Why? Infelise argues that it happened because Venetians perfected the circulation of handwritten information. Locally produced printed news was simply not able to break through the hegemonic position of previously well-established hand-written newsletters which dominated the city’s information system from the early 1500s for the next two

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299 “Per via da Genoa furono mandate a Venetia la copia de alcune lettere scripse per quelli merchandanti, quail heranno sopra le charavelle di Portogallo et gionte in India...” Priuli, I diarii di Girolamo Priuli (1494-1512), p. 353.
300 According to Dr. Mario Infelise, Università Ca’ Foscari di Venezia, an annual subscription of a top-notch weekly 7-page personalized Venetian newsletter in the 17th century was 186 lira. In the same period the rent of a medium-size palace in Venice was about 120 lira a year. From personal correspondence, January 8, 2009. By comparison, in the 1630s, the most successful publishers of newsletters in London were able to earn a similarly astronomical sum of about £500 a year. A single annual subscription for a weekly newsletter was £20. By the end of the century the subscription prices in London dropped to £3 to £6. For more see Zaret, Origins of Democratic Culture: Printing, Petitions, and the Public Sphere in Early Modern England, p. 127.
301 Chambers and Pullan asses that Venice produced roughly one sixth of all the books printed in Europe before 1500. In Chambers, Pullan, and Fletcher, eds., Venice: A Documentary History, 1450-1630, p. 369. The role of print in Venice in regards to book circulation will be discussed later in this essay. On the history of the first printers in Venice see Carlo Castellani, La stampa in Venezia: Dalla sua origine alla morte di Aldo Manuzio (Venezia, 1889).
to the international information market, that even many of the early printed newspapers in Europe - such as the famous Dutch and English *Corantos* - depended heavily on the stories generated by Venetian manuscript publications. The second reason why Venice was amongst the last European metropolises without its own printed newspaper was government censorship. The principle of secrecy was paramount in Venice whose government several times attempted to suppress the activities of those who “dare to write news of any kind, be it those which are discussed in the piazza.” By no surprise, in such atmosphere only the semi-clandestinely produced handwritten *avvisi* were able to manage to stay under the radar screen of officially appointed state censors.

The speed with which handwritten newsletters were produced by Venetian copyists, the ability of their publishers to circumvent government censorship, and their flexibility in fine-tuning the content of such newsletters to the interests of particular subscribers constituted a handicap which proved insurmountable to anyone who would have wanted to launch a printed newspaper in Venice up until the early 1700s. In their content and in the way of their distribution and circulation, Venetian *avvisi* were reminiscent of modern virtual electronic

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302 According to Infelise, Venice got its first periodically printed newspapers only around 1700. For more see Infelise, *Prima dei giornali: Alle origini della pubblica informazione (secoli XVI e XVII)*, p. 81. The author notes that in the 1740s there was still only one printed newspaper in Venice - but besides it there were several handwritten periodical publications. See Mario Infelise, “‘Europa’. Una gazzetta manoscritta del ’700,” in *Non uno itinere. Studi storici offerti dagli allievi a Federico Seneca* (Venezia, 1993). In the 1720s, Cesar De Saussure, a Swiss visitor to London, counted about a dozen different regular newspapers which were printed in the city - some issued daily, others twice a week or only once. In Cesar De Saussure, *A Foreign View of England in 1725-1729: The Letters of Monsieur Cesar De Saussure to his Family*, Madame Van Muyden trans. (London, 1995), p. 102.


305 According to Infelise, Venetian censors were used to revise books. There was no office which would be able to secure the rapidity requested by the printers of newspapers. In Infelise, “Roman Avvisi: Information and Politics in the Seventeenth Century,” p. 226. Cf. De Vivo, *Information and Communication in Venice: Rethinking Early Modern Politics*, p. 81.

306 Infelise quotes 1730s complaints that the “newswriters publish their news the same week, indeed the same day in which the mail arrives” while the publishers of printed gazettes are often lagging an entire week behind their competition in their content. In Infelise, *Prima dei giornali: Alle origini della pubblica informazione (secoli XVI e XVII)*, pp. 80-81 and 120.
networks in which information was edited and released into circulation almost instantaneously after it was received by a source which often remained obscure. It immediately took on a life of its own, was copied, combined and recombined with other pieces of information. The result must have been a media environment evoking an enormous echo chamber in which it was quite difficult to assess the originality, correctness and sources of individual contributions.\footnote{307} 

The semi-clandestine nature of their production was probably the main reason why the lives of many Venetian writers and publishers of *avvisi* remained obscure. They were living on the fringes of the society, and never organized into guilds typical for many other professions in Venice.\footnote{308} In 1568 Pope Pius V still called the practices of newsletter writers *arte nuova*, a new art, despite the fact that Rome, together with Venice, were two places where it flourished the most.\footnote{309} Venetian writer Thomaso Garzoni, when composing his *Universal Piazza of all Professions of the World* in the 1580s, listed the profession of news writers - *novellini* - in the table of contents of his encyclopedia, but the author later apparently had second thoughts and as a result the entry itself is missing in his 958-page thick volume.\footnote{310} But there is enough historical evidence that the art of news-writing was by that time well established in Venice. In 1572 the government claimed that “there are many in this city who are publicly employed as the writers of news; they are paid by diverse [people] who maintain scribal counters, houses and copyists for this purpose.”\footnote{311} And their business apparently thrived, if we judge according to the enormous


\footnote{308}It must be pointed out that clandestinity was not the only reason. Other important professions in Venice - such as merchants, sea captains or printers - did not have their own guilds - as may have been the case in other trading cities. For more on Venetian guild organization see Lane, *Venice: A Maritime Republic*, pp. 104-109; and Chambers, Pullan, and Fletcher, eds., *Venice: A Documentary History, 1450-1630*, pp. 280-94.


\footnote{310}Garzoni, La piazza universale di tutte le professioni del mondo.

respect which Venetian-produced news enjoyed all across Europe. In 1571, a tiny booklet entitled *Letters Sent from Venice* was printed by Henry Bynneman in London. It consisted of a compilation of dispatches summarizing the account of the battle of Lepanto. As the publisher acknowledged on the front page, his edition was a translation of an earlier French version of *Letters* printed the same year in Paris. But the title itself reveals that even the text of the Parisian *Letters* was with great probability only a verbatim translation of the hand-written *avvisi* which previously originated somewhere in Venice.  

This case well illustrates that in Renaissance Europe information became a lucrative international commodity. The very name of Venice was regarded in the circles of news-mongers as an internationally recognized trade mark. But in the absence of copyright laws, those who earned their living by selling information quickly learned that it needed to be handled carefully and sold quickly.

**V. The Cityscape of an Ideal Republic**

Even by the standards of the early modern world - in which the most successful merchant cities like Bruges or Amsterdam were crisscrossed by networks of canals enabling cheap transportation - Venice was still seen as a very unusual place built on a cluster of salty marshes in the Adriatic lagoon, completely isolated from dry land. The fact that the city grew out of a cluster of small fishing villages may explain why deep under surface, it preserved its polycentric structure through the centuries. At the same time, those who settled each of these small islands in the lagoon understood right from the beginning that in order to successfully hold off the raids of their common enemies, they must see themselves as a part of the whole. This dichotomy between the parts and the whole was imprinted into the Venetian urban organization. Lewis

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313 For more on the birth of Venice see Lane, *Venice: A Maritime Republic*, p. 110.
Mumford saw in it a stroke of congeniality which later allowed for “the reproduction on a smaller scale of the essential organs of the bigger, all-embracing city, with maximum possibilities of meeting and association on every human level.”

Venice was historically organized in six *sestieri*, each of them subdivided in about a dozen *contradas* - parishes, which were the basic organizational units of the city’s administrative structure. The most prestigious palaces in Venice faced the Grand Canal. Commynes argued that there were at least 200 of them so splendid that they would have able to host a king. Most of them were built alongside the Grand Canal which the French ambassador described “so large that the gallies passe to & fro through it, yea I haue seen hard by the houses ships of foure hundred tun and aboue.” The Grand Canal was the main artery of Venice and with the exception of the working-class quarter of Cannaregio, it interconnected all the city’s remaining five *sestieri*. Humanist-writer Pietro Aretino, whose windows faced its waters, bragged that he “enjoyed the most cheerful view of the nicest street of the world.” Every time he looked out during market hours he saw thousands of people and as many boats crisscrossing the adjacent markets and canals.

But if the Grand Canal was the main watershed for the whole city, similarly each neighborhood had its little centers of power around its *campo* or residential square. It was basically a small neighborhood center with a parish church, shops, taverns, a marketplace and

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317 In a letter dated from Venice, 27 October 1537, Aretino called Grand Canal “il patriarca d'ogni altro rio, e Venezia la papessa d'ogni altra cittade, posso dir con verità ch'io godo de la più bella strada e de la più gioconda veduta del mondo. Io non mi faccio mai a le finestre ch'io non vegga mille persone e altrelante gondole su l'ora dei mercatanti.” In Pietro Aretino, *Lettere*, ed. Paolo Procarcioli, vol. 1 (Roma, 1997), pp. 300-303. Even in Commynes’ opinion, the Grand Canal was “the goodliest street in the world.” Commynes, *The historie of Philip de Commines Knight, Lord of Argenton*, p. 305.
communal wells supplying fresh water for residents.\(^{318}\) Up until the 17\(^{th}\) century when Paris and London started to build their first urban residential squares, the *campo* was one of the most distinctive features of the Venetian urban structure. “By its territory and number of inhabitants, Paris is much larger than Venice, but it doesn’t have squares, it is all houses,” the outgoing Venetian ambassador to France, Zuan Antonio Venier, emphasized in his 1533 final report.\(^{319}\)

If the most valuable palaces in the city were built alongside the Grand Canal, the most valued real estate in each parish usually faced the open space of its *campo* (Figure 3.9.). This made it possible that the wealth and influence was not geographically concentrated in one or two single neighborhoods, but relatively equally dispersed around the city.\(^{320}\) The majority of the Venetian craftsmen, who were one of the constituting parts of its middling classes, had their shops on the first floor of the houses adjacent to the *campo* and with their families occupied the upper floors.\(^{321}\) Their daily life was regulated by the sounds of city bells. Almost every *campo* had its own tower whose bells supplied order and rhythm to the daily activities of the parish’s residents. Overall, they were emulating the big campanile in Piazza San Marco whose sounds dominated them all, bringing the bells of each single urban quarter into one grandiose urban unisong choir:

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.\(^{322}\)

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\(^{318}\) Porcahi wrote that “the churches of this City, mainly the parish churches, all have their squares.” In Tommaso Porcacchi, “L’Isola più famose del mondo,” in *Biblioteca Italiana* (Roma, 2006), Electronic text – no pagination.


\(^{320}\) Marin Sanudo, "Laus urbis Venetae," pp. 4-21.

\(^{321}\) “E vo’ che sappi ciascun di costoro / ha sopra suo bottega l’abituro / di sua famiglia, colle donne loro” – “I would like you to know that each of them has above the shop his own dwelling, where his family with their women live”, observed Guidi in his 1442 laude on Venice in verses. In Iacopo d’Albizzotto Guidi, *El sommo della condizione di Vinegia*, ed. Marta Ceci (Roma, 2003), electronic document – no page numbers.

Figure 3.9. Canaletto, Campo Santi Apostoli, 1735. In the 18th century Canaletto immortalized the atmosphere of the Venetian campo which hardly changed since the Renaissance.
Pietro Casola, passing through Venice in 1494 on his way to Jerusalem, noted that “I cannot give the dimensions of this city, for it appears to me not one city alone but several cities placed together.” Casola’s description of Venice evokes a holographic image in which every fragment contained the essential qualities of the entire urban universe. If the city as a whole worshipped Saint Mark, every parish also had its own religious patrons and celebrated their local festivities with great pride. Similarly, each parish had a representative council headed by a ‘little doge’, following the example of the big central government. Hundred years later, the famous Venetian architect Sansovino echoed the idea of many separate cities all joined together in his own description of the city:

Because, whoever looks at a plan in which the bridges are not marked will see that the city is divided into many large, fortified places and cities, each surrounded by its own canals; and people pass from one to the other by means of bridges - whether of stone, as they are for the most part, or of wood - which bind the whole city together. The shops also, which are scattered over the whole body and circumference of the said city, also make it appear to be made up of many cities joined into one. Every contrada has not one church alone, but several churches. There is also a piazza with wells; and it has bake houses, wine shops, the arts of the tailors, the fruit sellers, the grocers, the chemists, the schoolmasters, the carpenters, the shoemakers, and everything else necessary for the use of human beings in great abundance. The result is that on going out of one contrada and entering another, you will say without doubt that you have gone out of one city, and entered another.

Even at the most conservative estimates, the population of Venice in 1509 was about 110,000 and it may well have reached 175,000 by the 1560s. As Sanudo pointed out, in spite of being one of the biggest urban centers in Europe, Venice “has no walls, no gates which are locked at night,” which made it certainly an exceptional place in a world where the city was still defined first of all by its walls. Venice obviously had a very particular advantage in its unusual geographic situation - being defended by the lagoon. Chronicler Sanudo left us an amazing
account from 1517, when he accompanied the Turkish ambassador Ali Bei to see Venice from the top of the campanile in Piazza San Marco. The opportunity to see the entire lagoon from this vantage point was rarely allowed to foreigners. Sanudo pointed out that during the visit Ali Bei had many questions which clearly betrayed his intention to learn how the city could be conquered militarily. He was assured by his guides that in a recent war with the League of Cambrai, “in which all the kings joined to defeat Venice,” the city resisted without any problem and “not a single man of this city died.”

The lagoon constituted Venice’s natural defense system. This fact is symbolically represented in many of the surviving Renaissance paintings, woodcuts and engravings with bird’s-eye views of Venice in which the lagoon and the islands of Lido are spatially rearranged and stylized as if they were the city’s protecting walls (Figure 3.10.). But that was not the only protection. In the 1360s Petrarch described Venice as a city “built on marble but standing more solid on a foundation of civil concord, ringed with salt waters.”

Echoing ancient Greek authors, Venetians were constantly reminded by their political leaders and philosophers that the ultimate ramparts which best protected their city were their own laws, institutions and respect for them.

As Crouzet-Pavan points out, everywhere else in Europe the territorial growth of cities was largely determined by their ability to expand their defending walls. In the case of Venice, it was the ability to reclaim new ground from the water. The dialectic nature of such relationship was

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328 Sanudo, Venice, Cité Excellentissima: Selections from the Renaissance diaries of Marin Sanudo, p. 215. Paruta claimed that “if we have respect to safety; what City can be compared to this, which without any bulwarks of walls, or garrisons of soldiers, defended by her natural situation, is of her self safe from all injuries, and inexpressible?” In Paruta, Politick Discourses, p. 114.

329 See for example Paolo Fortani’s Venetia (1566); Georg Braun’s Venetia – Civitates orbis terrarium (1572); Bernardo Salvioni’s and Donato Rasciocotti’s Venetia (1597); Giacomo Franco’s Venetia (1597); Giovanni Nicolo Doglioni’s La citta di Venetia (1594); Francesco Vallegio’s Map of Venice with the Doges (1623). All in Wilson, The World of Venice: Print, the City, and Early Modern Identity, pp. 7, 53, 55, 61, 64, 176-7, 192.


331 Morosini, De bene istituita republica, f. 103v. See also Finzi’s introduction to Morosini (ibid., p. 19). Pindar called Themis and Eunomia, the goddesses of good order and justice, a secure foundation of the cities. In Pindar, Olympian, 9.15-16 and 13.5.
Figure 3.10. Bolognino Zaltieri, *Venice*, 1565. Venetian artists traditionally represented the lagoon and the islands of the Lido as defensive walls of their city, consciously distorting the geographic reality.
reflected in the fact that the lagoon, originally seen as a sanctuary which gave birth to this peculiar city, was at some point increasingly perceived as a hindrance which impaired its future growth. In the course of the 15th century, Venetians put in place a series of regulatory rules and sophisticated technical hydraulic projects whose objective was to preserve the frail ecological equilibrium of the lagoon on which the very survival of the city depended. The three-member institution of the Savi sopra le acque, a council of wise men supervising the complex ecosystem of the lagoon, was responsible for the maintenance, health and navigability of the canals. Its portfolio was quite large because the direct cause of the silting of the lagoon was from the deforestation of coastal land, building activities, positioning of pilings and wharves or the amount of waste which was deposited in the canals. According to Crouzet-Pavan, the complexity of issues connected with the management of the lagoon further emphasized the secular power of the state, its institutions and regulatory practices, as well as feelings of common destiny and necessity of source management. Paraphrasing F. J. Turner’s famous dictum about the American frontier, in the case of la Serenissima it was the lagoon which, to a large extent, historically shaped the Venetian mindset by calling out new institutions and activities.

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333 Sanudo’s and Priuli’s entries offer many instances when different regulatory policies were discussed at various levels of the Venetian government. The problems with pilings and wharves are discussed Sanudo, Venice, Cité Excellentissima: Selections from the Renaissance diaries of Marin Sanudo. XXIX, 561-62, pp. 86-87. For the problems with deforestation see (Ibid., LIV, 262-3, pp. 87-88); for the complaint about the residents of the ghetto throwing their trash into canals see (Ibid., XXIV, 45, p. 86). Priuli points out the attempt of many private residents as well as religious monasteries to extend their land to build gardens, orchards or build houses “so that Venice was about to become firm land.” In his judgment, this was “a very dangerous thing for the freedom of the city.” In Priuli, I diarii di Girolamo Priuli (1494-1512), vol. 2, p. 169, 379-80, 390-91 and 416. An outspoken champion of such projects was Alvise Cornaro (1464-1566) who openly promoted the idea that Venice should let the entire lagoon to be silted in order to gain enough land which would make it independent from the import of agricultural products. For more on Cornaro’s agricultural projects see Lane, Venice: A Maritime Republic, p. 307. Alvise Cornaro (Luigi Corner) became known as the supporter and mentor of Andrea Palladio (1508-1580), a famous architect who designed many villas for Venetian families on the disputed territories of the terraferma James S. Ackerman, Palladio: Architect and Society (New York, 1974), p. 21. Cf. Sanudo, I diarii (1496-1533): Pagine scelte, p. 355, n3.


The Quest for Permanence in Spatial Organization

To a newcomer, the never-ending labyrinth of narrow and curvy lanes, bridges and canals must have evoked chaos and confusion. Yet, in its overall layout, Venice was a cosmologically organized space where communal life was seen as paramount to any building effort and every piece of stone had its historically fixed place. Sabellico’s treatise *Situs Venetae Urbis*, a prototype of modern tourist city guides composed in 1502, can be still used by visitors of Venice because most of the streets, canals, churches, palaces and piazzas described by the author five hundred years ago still occupy the same spaces and bear the same names. Just as the city itself claimed that its political system was stable and immortal, the notion of permanence and stability was reflected also in its spatial organization.

During wartime in 1509, the Senate attempted to collect unpaid taxes by revoking the status of *stabili or beni condicionati* - property titles pertaining to some urban prime real estate which was traditionally tied to noble family clans. The main goal of such a provision was to assure that each noble family permanently occupied the same place in the Venetian urban universe. The titleholder was, in the eyes of the law, seen more as a life-long steward than a real owner, being deprived of the right to sell such property and obliged by law to pass it on the closest relatives even if he himself was childless. At the same time, the titleholders were protected because not even the tax office had the right to touch such properties in the case of unpaid dues. In 1509, the Senate wanted to change this status, which would have undoubtedly made the real estate market in Venice more fluid and the concentration of wealth more pronounced, opening doors to potential speculation as pointed out by Priuli in his chronicle. Such a proposal naturally created a big uproar within noble circles; it was approved by the Great Council only after an initial failure.

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and with many limitations. Priuli made clear in his diary “the difficulty with which was this deliberation [taken], breaking the ancient rules of *beni condictionati*.”

In the course of Renaissance rebuilding of the city, pains were often taken to conserve not just the famous architectural landmarks, but also more mundane elements which tied Venice with its past. The quest for stability and permanence can be clearly discerned in any similar discussion involving a major intervention in the urban structure. A two-decades-long debate surrounding the new architectural design of the bridge at Rialto after it burned in 1514 very well illustrates this point. Sanudo dismissed one of the proposed projects arguing that its author “does not understand the location.” The government considered the spot *un sacrario* - a sacred place within the urban fabric because of the cardinal role it played in connecting the main commercial and political centers of the city. This put pressure on proposed projects which were expected to meet not only basic technical criteria, but also high esthetic standards, making a significant contribution to city’s overall architectural concept, and at the same time strengthening its cultural and political prestige. In 1530 the diarist successfully protested against the plan to move two stone lion statues from the baptistery and place them next to the two columns from Acre in Piazza San Marco, arguing that “it is a very shameful thing to move those ancient pieces.”

**Getting Around the City**

There were two ways of getting around in Venice: by foot, which was very comfortable in a city where all sidewalks were paved; and by boat - being carried in one of the black gondolas. The French ambassador Comynes estimated that there were 30,000 of them, which was

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339 Marin Sanudo, “Laus urbis Venetae,” p. 6. Sabellico felt the need to emphasize that “all Venetian public streets are paved,” which was unheard in most of the European cities around 1500. In Sabellico, *Del Sito di Venezia Città (1502)*, p. 32.
probably an exaggerated number. Yet, as Sanudo noted, on the Grand Canal and in the smaller rii “one sees such a continual movement of boats that in a way it is a marvel.” Gondoliers were obliged to cry out when they approached corners and intersections to avoid collisions. The elegant boats emphasized the overall atmosphere of success and prosperity. The basic cost of a plain gondola was ‘only’ 15 ducats, but with all the required ornaments, the final price came up very high. Yet there was “no gentleman or citizen who does not have one or two or even more boats in the family, according to the household.” Montaigne hired a gondola during his stay in Venice for two liras a day. For the French nobleman, who used to compare everything to the reality of late mediaeval Paris, Renaissance Venice was a cheap place to live simply because of its social informality: one didn’t need to be surrounded by a train of valets, instead “everyone goes around by himself.” As he pointed out, men in Venice were plainly dressed in their dark robes and there was neither a need for a horse, nor for a carriage.

One could fully grasp the advantage which the numerous canals provided for a city in the context of transportation costs. Around 1500, Braudel estimated that the charge for moving one ton of merchandise 20-30 miles inland almost equaled the cost of moving the same amount of wares all the way from Italy to Spain by sea. While the Adriatic Sea provided for Venice a connection with the important long-distance trading ports from the Black Sea to Northern Europe, the river Brenta connected the city with its own hinterland, which supplied Venice with

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343 According to an assessment made by Fernand Braudel, Spanish merchants who around 1500 were buying wheat in Tuscany paid 10 Castilian reals per fanega (ca 55.5 liters/12 gallons of dry capacity), transport to the coast cost them 3 reals, export duty 5 reals, and the overseas transport on a good Ragusan ship to Alicante or Cartagena was only 3.5 reals per fanega, plus an insurance fee. In Fernand Braudel, *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II*, Siân Reynolds trans. (New York, 1972), vol. 1, p. 578. The cheapest naval insurance premium recorded by Priuli equaled 2.5 percent of the estimated cost of the merchandise (the ships were insured separately). At the time of war with the League of Cambrai in 1509, naval insurance sky-rocketed to 15 percent. In Priuli, *I diarii di Girolamo Priuli (1494-1512)*, vol. 4, p. 77.
most of its goods of everyday consumption. Sanudo compared the markets at the Rialto to a vegetable garden, “so much green stuff is brought from nearby places, and such varieties of fruits on sale, and so cheap, it is marvelous.” But this observation reveals also persisting tension between the commercial urban center and a feudal-world periphery, pointed out originally by Pirenne in the context of medieval urban revival. While the prices of the luxury goods of long distance trade were open to speculation and market fluctuations (to the advantage of the ruling class of Venetian merchants), the prices of local products, on which the livelihood of peasants and local workers depended, were strictly regulated. And regulation worked almost exclusively to the advantage of merchants. Thus, lauded his city Sanudo, in a place where nothing grows, one was still able to find everything in abundance.345

The Rialto and San Marco: A Manifestation of the Basic Structural Contradiction

Aside from the many local campi, Venice had two main squares which served as backdrops for the most vital activities shaping city’s political and economic life. It was again as if the founders of Venice were following Aristotle’s description of an ideal city which ought to have two piazzas - one of necessity (anagkaia agora) in which the commercial life of bragging and cheating goes on - and one which the philosopher called ‘free’ (agora eleutera), where the

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344 Sanudo described a 1483 inspection journey he undertook to the Venetian stato di terraferma and to Istria. Most of the first part of his visit – to the terraferma - was undertaken by boat, using the network of rivers and canals, “seeing here and there villas alongside the water, many of them are homes of Venetian noble families.” In Marin Sanudo, "Dell'itinerario in terra ferma (frammento inedito)," in Diarii e diaristi venetiani, ed. Rinaldo Fulin (Venice, 1881), p. 15. The French ambassador Commynes arrived in Venice in 1494 through Padua. In Commynes, The historie of Philip de Commines Knight, Lord of Argenton, p. 305. Similarly Montaigne in his 1580 travel journal offers some technical details on how the boats were carried in Lisa Fusina on a wheeled chassis pulled by two horses between the canal connecting Venice and Padua, and the lagoon. “They transport these boats, with wheels that they put underneath, over a wooden flooring, and launch them into the canal which goes into the sea, in which Venice is situated.” In Montaigne, The Complete Works of Montaigne: Essays, Travel Journal, Letters, p. 920.

345 “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... there are officials who weight the meat which has been sold... a barber’s charge for hairdressing is the standard 4 soldi; a cartload of wood at all times cannot be more than 28 soldi... the Giustizia Vechia, who are the 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 been; everything is well ordered, and this is why the city has survived and grown.” In Marin Sanudo, "Laus urbis Venetae," p. 13. Cf. Henri Pirenne, Medieval Cities: Their Origins and the Revival of Trade, pp. 26-27 and 172.
political deliberation takes place shielded from the havoc of the marketplace. In the Venetian urban universe, such functions were ideally assigned to the Rialto and Piazza San Marco. A mere glimpse of Jacopo de Barbari’s 1500 magnificent bird’s-eye view of Venice may reveal the secret hologram encoded right into Venice’s cityscape: delineated by an enormous s-shaped curve of the Grand Canal, its two main parts resemble a gigantic yin and yang sign - two counterpoised elements of public life which dialectically complement each other. It may well be that the ability of the Venetian fathers to maintain the frail equilibrium between them was the ultimate answer to their Republic’s longevity (Figure 3.11.).

Tommaso Porcacchi described the Rialto, the commercial heart of Venice, as the place where “the needs of the entire city, indeed, of the whole world are taken care of,” It was formed by a not very large rectangle which was from each side enclosed by porticos with a multitude of stores. But the Rialto wasn’t just the small square in front of Venice’s oldest church dedicated to Saint Jacob. It included also the network of adjacent narrow streets with small shops dedicated usually to one single craft, stores and warehouses, numerous taverns and brothels. Twice a day - every morning between six and eleven and then later in the evening between five and eight o’clock - “almost the entire city” rushed to do business in the Rialto with a frequency so great that Thomas Coryat suggested it should be called the square of the world instead of that of the city - “rather Orbis then Urbis forum.” A great turnover of merchandise bought and sold here

349 Thomas Coryat, Coryat’s Crudities: In Two Volumes (Glasgow, UK, 1905), p. 314. Coryat’s work was originally published in 1611. Yet more than a century earlier Sanudo offered almost the same description of the Rialto. He explained that even rent for a small piece of commercial space in the Rialto may cost about 100 ducats – for a shop scarcely two paces wide or long. His own family owned a tavern and inn called La Campana at Pescharia Nuova: “from this one building we get about 800 ducats a year in rent, which is a marvelous thing and a huge rent... the inn itself brings in 250 ducats, more than the foremost palace in the city. See Marin Sanudo, “Laus urbis Venetiae,” pp. 12-13.
Figure 3.11. Matthaeus Merian, Venice, c. 1650. The location of several of the squares and institutions mentioned in the essay.
guaranteed that “money was made quickly.” There was a large number of brokers who, noted Sanudo, were trustworthy, “because if not, they were reprimanded.” Also the insurers of the naval trade and the four major certified Venetian banks - the Pisani and Lipomani, both patricians, and the Garzoni and Augustini (citizens) - had their permanent stands in the loggias.\(^{350}\) Marcantonio Sabellico emphasized the fact that in spite of so many people who twice a day flooded the Rialto, raised voices or open quarrels were rarely heard. Instead, all buying and selling was made with a single word ‘yes’ or ‘no’ - all talk done “with soft voice as if to confirm the common saying that the straight way of doing business doesn’t need too many words.”\(^{351}\)

Aside from being a place to do business, the Rialto had its own school of philosophy at the nearby Church of St. John the Almsgiver, whose single lecturer was traditionally paid from public funds.\(^{352}\) Lauro Quirini recalled a passionate discussion which took place here in the 1440s in reaction to a public lecture in which the professor challenged the hereditary rights of nobility.\(^{353}\) In 1493 the chair of philosophy in the Rialto was held by the noble patrician Antonio Corner who, every morning and afternoon, lectured on logic, philosophy and theology.\(^{354}\) There was another similar, publicly-funded school of philosophy in Piazza San Marco (Figure 3.12.). In a large under-passage leading to the hospital of Saint Mark students held in 1493 their daily lessons with the famous humanist Giorgio Valla, “a very good grammarian and perfect in


\(^{351}\) Sabellico, *Del Sito di Venezia Città (1502)*, p. 18. The notion of a single ‘yes’ or ‘no’ is taken from Marin Sanudo panegyric "Laus urbis Venetae," p. 11.


\(^{354}\) “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 in Venice,” Sanudo explained the public funding for the school in the Rialto. In Marin Sanudo, "Laus urbis Venetae," p. 14.
Figure 3.12. Antonello da Messina, *Saint Jerome in His Study*, c. 1475. An image of a typical Venetian professor studying in his open-air university chair in the Rialto or Piazza San Marco.
Greek,” and Marcantionio Sabellico, “a great man of letters.” In his analysis of the 15th century Venetian culture Nardi argues that while the school of the Rialto focused more on pragmatic Aristotelian natural philosophy, the lessons delivered in Piazza San Marco were traditionally much closer to a well-rounded humanistic understanding of the man and society. The author explains this spatial arrangement as “a conflict between two diverse mentalities which will remain present in Venetian culture well after the 15th century.” They reflected and further reinforced the notion of Aristotelian two squares: one dedicated to practical matters of everyday necessities and the other reserved for high ideals of humanistic philosophy.

The stately architecture of the wide-open area of Piazza San Marco was in striking contrast to the narrow and intricate spaces of the Rialto. In this aspect, Venetians intentionally emulated the standards set by the Imperial Roman government, which did not see any expenditure on design and decoration of public buildings as being too high, intentionally using architecture as an important symbolic expression of their material and ideological superiority. For this purpose, the state intentionally maintained a structure of salaried positions for skilled craftsmen, artists and engineers, attached to different departments. Each little stone in Piazza San Marco was designed in a way to contribute to the larger mosaic promoting the myth of Venice. “The splendor of the edifices, especially the public buildings, may be described by one who has examined them carefully, but it is hard of belief for anyone who has not seen such a quantity of

355 Marin Sanudo, "Laus urbis Venetae," p. 14. Sanudo added that aside from the two public schools in the Rialto and Piazza San Marco there was one school for clerks who worked for the state bureaucratic machinery in the Doge Palace’s Cancelleria. There were “also teachers in various neighborhoods, not counting those in private houses, who teach moral philosophy and grammar to patricians’ children” (ibid., p. 15). For the exact location of the San Marco school see Sabellico, Del Sito di Venezia Città (1502), p. 31.


357 According to Sanudo, the 1490s rebuilding of the Ducal Palace cost an astronomical sum of 100,000 ducats. See Marin Sanudo, "Laus urbis Venetae," pp. 16-17. Malipiero claimed that in spite of the expensive war with Naples in 1496, the government decided to carry on the 6,000 ducat project of the clock tower at the place where Mercerie meets Piazza San Marco “so that it should not seem that this city is completely without money.” In Malipiero, "Annali veneti dall’anno 1457 al 1500," p. 699. The clock tower was inaugurated on February 1, 1499. See Sanudo, I diarii di Marino Sanudo (1496-1533), II, 396.

marble of every kind and color, and so well carved that it is a marvel,” observed astonished Milanese pilgrim Casola during his 1494 passage through Venice.\(^{359}\)

**Xenophobic Tendencies Imprinted into the Urban Layout**

In spite of the fact that its economic prosperity depended on the presence of foreigners, the Republic of Venice was a xenophobic society. Declaring its social and political system as a one close to perfection, it saw in any foreign influence a potential to undermine the republican virtues of its citizenry and consequently went to great lengths to regulate their presence on its territory.

In doing so, it was for the most part implementing the teachings of Plato and Aristotle regarding foreigners. In 1589 Thomaso Garzoni summarized their views in a claim that “in a well ordered Republic the tastes of foreign nations shouldn’t be permitted to be brought into the cities; and that no citizen minor of forty years should undergo pilgrimage abroad; and that the foreigners were to be sent back home because they are source of every kind of corruption.”\(^{360}\)

Venetian government, obsessed with secrecy, had a long tradition of prohibiting its citizens, especially those who were actively involved in political life, to meet with foreign dignitaries outside of all officially sanctioned public contacts. In 1481, it felt that this practice needed to be reinstated with renewed rigor, adopting a new resolution:

> Some time ago arose a very great malpractice, whereby our citizens serving in the Senate, Collegio and secret Councils talked with ambassadors and foreigners in their own houses, and in the churches and squares and on [street] corners...
> Be it therefore determined that no gentleman of ours of the Senate, Collegios and the secret Councils, no matter what his

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\(^{359}\) Casola, Canon Pietro Casola's Pilgrimage to Jerusalem in the Year 1494, p. 132.  
\(^{360}\) Garzoni, *La piazza universale di tutte le professioni del mondo*, p. 547. In *Laws*, Plato argues that “no man under forty years old shall be permitted to go abroad to any place whatsoever; next, no man shall be permitted to go abroad in a private capacity, but in a public capacity permission (12.950)” On behalf of foreign merchant visitors, he suggested to the city authorities to “hold such intercourse as is necessary with them, but to the least extent possible (12.952).” In Plato, *Plato in Twelve Volumes*, R.G. Bury trans., vol. 10 & 11 (Cambridge, MA, 1967-68). In *Politics* Aristotle suggested that a special committee be created to supervise the presence of foreigners in the city (2.1268 and 7.1331). Similarly to Plato’s position, he too claimed that a special marketplace where foreign merchants can trade their goods should be completely removed from the city proper and all trade should be mediated through servants, so that the foreigners would not intermingle with the citizens at all. See Millett, “Encounters in the Agora,” pp. 218-19.
During his visit in Venice, Michel de Montaigne met with the French ambassador who complained to him that he had no contact with any man of the city, explaining that Venetians were “so suspicious sort of people that if one of their gentlemen spoke to him twice, they would hold him suspect.”

Similarly the new Mantuan ambassador to Venice in the 1530s admitted to his Duke that it was almost impossible for a foreigner to penetrate the thick walls of Venetian noble circles. (Yet, two decades later, we see the same ambassador already navigating comfortably in Venetian waters, bragging that there were always people ready to leak even the deepest secrets. He saw the long religious ceremonies as a good opportunity to make a contact and get some valuable information.)

The distrust towards foreigners and their influence was clearly recognizable in the city’s everyday life. Felix Fabri, who had to pass through Venice on his two pilgrimages to Jerusalem in the 1480s, bitterly noted that “German men can never agree with Italians from the bottom of their hearts, nor Italians with us, because each nation has a hatred of the other rooted in its very nature.”

In the early 1500s, chronicler Priuli often lamented that French and Spanish cultural trends kept corrupting Venetian youth. Several times the Senate attempted to curb provocative ‘foreign ways’ of dressing in public which, according to the Venetian fathers, supported growing

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361 The resolution adopted by the Council of X – July 12, 1481. From the Capitulari dell Inquisitori di Stato, as reprinted and translated in Chambers, Pullan, and Fletcher, eds., Venice: A Documentary History, 1450-1630, p. 80. See also Romanin, Storia documentata di Venezia, vol. 6, p. 116.
lascivious behavior amongst women and rampant homosexuality amongst men. They claimed
that by imitating the perverted customs of the *oltramontani* - all nations living on the other side
of the Alps, but especially of the French - young Venetian nobles and other citizens “tricked
themselves out with so many ornaments, garments that openly showed their chest, with so many
perfumes… with dishonest and venereal acts inciting the libido, that they resembled more
women than men.”

Yet Venetian trade depended on presence of foreign merchants and Venetian craft shops
were also in need of constant infusions of fresh blood to replenish the city’s working population
which was subject to a high infant mortality rate and perpetual outbreaks of pestilence. As a
result, Venice welcomed foreigners but, true to its basic *modus operandi*, the foreign
communities became subject to strict government regulation. Clearly recognizable in its
approach are many pragmatic ideas which one can find in Xenophon’s treatise *Ways and Means*.
The author, in line with Aristotle’s pragmatism, suggests that a state should lure foreign
merchants by giving them little perks such as front seats in theatres, but at the same to keep them
under the surveillance of the appointed guardians of aliens. Xenophon wanted the state to build
lodging-houses and convenient places of exchange for visiting merchants which “would be an
ornament to the state, and at the same time the source of considerable revenue.”

Building on ancient Greek tradition, most of the Byzantine towns had mitatas, special hostels
in which foreign merchants were allowed to live for a limited period of three months. Lopez and

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366 Priuli, *I diarii di Girolamo Priuli (1494-1512)*, vol. 4, p. 35. See also ibid., vol. 2, pp. 399-400. The xenophobic tendencies
in Venice are discussed also in Ennio Concina, Ugo Camerino, and Donatella Calabi, *La città degli Ebrei: Il ghetto di Venezia -

367 Cf. the alarm caused in 1501 in Venice by the very idea that European merchants would be lured by new Portuguese
year German merchants did not show up for the traditional *Fiera de Quadregesima*. Instead, they were buying spices from
Portuguese shipments in Genoa and Lyon – so the price of pepper in Venice dropped from 132 ducats *el cargo* to mere 70
ducats (ibid., vol. 2, p. 117). On the need to replenish the population due to high mortality rates see Chambers, Pullan, and

Raymond point out that Venetians must have seen, indeed be subjected to this institution during their frequent trade missions in the Eastern Mediterranean. Simonsfeld traces to the 1220s the earliest surviving documents pertaining to the attempts to gather all German merchants in Venice under one roof under constant surveillance. Sixty years later, the Senate decided to erect a special exchange house for all German merchants - Fondaco dei Tedeschi, in a prime real estate location at the foot of the Rialto Bridge, overlooking the Grand Canal. A regulation from 1475 reminded Venetians that “as had been decreed on other occasions, no German merchant may on any pretext take lodgings in any place outside the exchange house.” Venetians had special brokers who were appointed to deal with German-speaking traders. During the great fire in 1504 when most of the Rialto was burned overnight, the rebuilding of the Fondaco became one of the top priorities of the Venetian government. As Priuli pointed out, it used all possible means in order to make the new building “magnificent and pompous.” The Fondaco dei Tedeschi was de facto a ‘golden cage’, or a secular convent, where foreign merchants lived in relative luxury,

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369 Lopez and Raymond, Medieval Trade in the Mediterranean World, pp. 84-85. The authors emphasize that the Byzantine mitata was adopted also by the medieval Arab world and was reflected in the institution of funduq. The etymological tie between Arab funduq and Venetian fondaco is more than obvious.

370 Tedesco in Italian means German (derived from Teutonic). See reprints of original documents published in Simonsfeld, Der Fondaco dei Tedeschi in Venedig und die Deutschen Handelsbeziehungen: Urkunden von 1225-1653, pp. 1-2. For more historical background see also Lane, Venice: A Maritime Republic, pp. 62-63. As of 1308 there are many autobiographical testimonies of young German merchants who were learning their trade in the Rialto. The autobiography of Lucas Rem (1481-1544) from Augsburg stands out among them. In Roeck, “Venice and Germany: Commercial Contacts and Intellectual Inspirations,” p. 44.

371 From regulations of the Fondaco dei Tedeschi approved by a Senate Committee on Customs and Duties, 31 August, 1475. As reprinted and translated to English in Chambers, Pullan, and Fletcher, eds., Venice: A Documentary History, 1450-1630, pp. 328-29. Note that the Fondaco served only to host male merchants. There were a few German traders who lived in Venice with their families who had special permission to rent a house in the city. Alberto Bolognetti, papal ambassador in Venice observed that “aside of those who have wives most of them dwell in the exchange house... there are nearly 200 living in that great building.” On the top of that the most visible merchant community, there were about 700 German artisans, craftsmen and servants whose influence was not seen as noteworthy by city authorities. From the report of Alberto Bolognetti, papal ambassador in Venice, c. 1580. As reprinted and translated to English in Chambers, Pullan, and Fletcher, eds., Venice: A Documentary History, 1450-1630, pp. 330-31.


yet all their movements were monitored by the Venetian supervisors. By no surprise, Venetians took a similar approach in regulating the presence of other ethnic minorities. In 1575, the Senate decided to find an adequate building to accommodate all Turkish merchants, which led to the creation of the Fondaco dei Turchi. By their culture and religion, Greeks, Slavs and Armenians were much closer to the Venetian mentality, yet even they were encouraged to settle in distinct quarters and the places for their religious worship were subject to government regulation.

According to the legend, the founding fathers of Venice were refugees and as centuries passed the city deliberately cultivated its image as the ultimate safe haven of all who were persecuted elsewhere. Such a notion very early on became an intrinsic part of the nascent myth

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374 Romanelli used the term ‘secular convent’ in describing the life of German merchants in the Fondaco. In Domenico Romanelli, "The Fondaco dei Tedeschi," in Renaissance Venice and the North, ed. Bernard Alkema and Beverly L. Brown (New York, 1999), p. 77. Sanudo states that the merchants “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 the Rialto.” In Marin Sanudo, "Laus urbis Venetiae," p. 10. Yet any movement of its residents was constantly under the scrutiny of the appointed supervisors. See for example the House Rules for the new Fondaco dei Tedeschi approved by the Council of Ten on 12 May, 1508: Evangelical-Lutheran Parish Archives in Venice, A. Cap. Nat. Alem. 1, f. 257. As reprinted in original Italian in Simonsfeld, Der Fondaco dei Tedeschi in Venedig and die Deutschen Handelsbeziehungen: Urkunden von 1225-1653, pp. 263-64.


377 To some extent, Venice acted on its belief in the times of crisis or when it was convenient for its ruling classes. In order to emphasize its independence from Rome, the city was often seen as a refuge for Roman Church dissidents. See the report of Alberto Bolognetti, papal ambassador in Venice, c. 1580. As reprinted and translated to English in Chambers, Pullan, and Fletcher, eds., Venice: A Documentary History, 1450-1630, p. 206-8. In the aftermath of the defeat at Agnadello (May 1509), Venice was flooded with people escaping from its stato di terraferma. Priuli recorded that many barcaruoli - ferry boatmen who connected Venice with the coastal land, refused to carry poor refugees who did not have any means to pay for their service. The city fathers punished everyone who did so. Many nobles and citizens sent their own boats to help to transport refugees in town and lodged them in their own houses. – copy vol. IV, pp. 309 and 315] Priuli, I diarii di Girolamo Priuli (1494-1512), vol. 4, pp. 309 and 315. Yet, the immigrants were often object of populist politics every time they were perceived as ‘stealing jobs’ from the locals. The guild of mercers complained that many foreigners from various countries sell merchandise ‘on the Rialto bridge, on the Piazza San Marco and throughout the city, on stalls, on stands, and on the ground, and from makeshift shops [botege e postize], both on holydays and on working days; and because of this our trade of mercers is being destroyed, although mercers pay high rents and heavy imposts. From the Mariegola, or the mother rule, of the guild of mercers (1471-1787). As reprinted and translated to English in Chambers, Pullan, and Fletcher, eds., Venice: A Documentary History, 1450-1630, p. 281-4.
of Venice.\footnote{In 1404, Conversino da Ravenna's dialogue of his Venetian character claims that "we are a refuge and shelter for strangers and others who are wandering about in search of gain and fortune, and city receives them all courteously and kindly. And not anywhere in the world is money paid out more generously for the benefit of the poor..." Ravenna, Dramalogia de Eligibili Vite Genere, p. 229.} During the war with the League of Cambrai (1509-1517), the city received a huge influx of Jewish refugees who were fleeing the territories occupied by French and German armies in masses. Before the war, itinerant Jewish merchants were allowed to remain in Venice only for a brief period of 15 days a year.\footnote{From the preamble to Senate decree dated 29 March, 1516 establishing the 'Geto at San Hieronimo'. As reprinted and translated to English in Chambers, Pullan, and Fletcher, eds., Venice: A Documentary History, 1450-1630, p. 338-9.} But because of the occupation, many Jewish refugees were bringing with them entire families, settling mainly in the vicinity of the Rialto.\footnote{See the map of the early Jewish settlement in Venice. In Concina, Camerino, and Calabi, La città degli Ebrei: Il ghetto di Venezia - architettura e urbanistica, p. 24.} According to Priuli, "all of them were escaping to Venice, because they were not secure in any other place."\footnote{Priuli, I diarii di Girolamo Priuli (1494-1512), vol. 4, p. 96.} But their increasing numbers created tension on Venetian streets, radical preachers warned from church pulpits that their presence will lead to ‘perversion’ of a city which they saw as the “the bulwark of Christianity.”\footnote{Ibid., and Sanudo, I diarii (1496-1533): Pagine scelte, XXII, 162.} Also, they objected, most of the Jews in Venice lived from the practice of usury, in reality selling time; yet time was traditionally seen by theologians as a thing common to all creatures. Nobody had right to sell it (especially the time of the days dedicated to religious festivities was interpreted as a direct offense to God and the saints).\footnote{Garzoni, La piazza universale di tutte le professioni del mondo, p. 550.} At the same time, Venice was leading expensive wars and Jews were an important part of its financial stability because they not only paid handsomely for the very privilege to live in Venice, but as the future Doge Antonio Grimani argued in the Senate, they were the only ones willing to loan money to Venetian lower classes, preserving city’s social stability.\footnote{This was crucial especially in the aftermath of the series of bankruptcies of Venetian banks discussed above. In Sanudo, I diarii (1496-1533): Pagine scelte, XXVIII, 61-64.} For this very reason “even the Pope keeps them in Rome,” added laconically Sanudo.\footnote{Sanudo captured in detail the tense discussion surrounding the establishment of the ghetto. In ibid., XXVIII, 250-251.}
compromise was reached in 1516, when the Venetian Senate allowed Jewish families to settle in an old foundry (geto/ghetto), on an isolated island in a remote part of the city.\textsuperscript{386}

In spite of the restrictions, outsiders were able to amass significant wealth in Venice, but it was almost impossible for them to gain full-fledged citizenship. In the aftermath of the battle of Agnadello in 1509, the government decided to reward Hieronymo Savorgnam from Friuli, one of the dependent territories of the Venetian stato di terraferma, for the high spirit of patriotism he expressed in fighting the enemy. Savorgnam was awarded the title of Venetian noble and a seat in the Senate. But he did not enjoy this privilege for long. The majority of Venetian nobles immediately challenged the decision, arguing that as a senator, he would “get access to the ultimate secrets and the most sensitive disturbances and practices of the Venetian Republic.” Even opponents recognized his “undoubted loyalty,” yet he was still described as somebody “of an alien provenance, not born in the salty waters” of the Venetian lagoon. To calm the quarrel, Savorgnam was offered a castle outside of Venice and a handsome annual pension which he, understanding the Venetian mentality, wisely accepted. In this way, the Venetian fathers saved face and “made sure that he would never put his foot in the Senate,” concluded Priuli.\textsuperscript{387}

VI. The State and Religion

According to Bouwsma, one of the most fundamental political ideals which Venice communicated to the rest of Europe was its ubiquitous secularism.\textsuperscript{388} But nothing would be

\textsuperscript{386} Only the German or Ashkenazi Jews were originally permitted to stay in town - the Spanish or Sephardic Jews were seen as converts from Christianity, which made them in Venetian eyes traitors to the Christian faith. Jewish bankers and merchants were allowed to keep banks and stores in the Rialto and in the Mercerie (the main shopping district); Jewish bankers were limited to loaning at a maximum 15-percent interest rate; their community had to pay 8,000 ducats a year to the city for its protection; and their residences were restricted to the ghetto. From the Senate decree of 29 March, 1516 establishing the ‘Geto at San Hieronimo’. As reprinted and translated to English in Chambers, Pullan, and Fletcher, eds., \textit{Venice: A Documentary History, 1450-1630}, p. 338-9.

\textsuperscript{387} Priuli, I diarii di Girolamo Priuli (1494-1512), vol. 4, pp. 418-19.

\textsuperscript{388} Bouwsma, “Venice and the Political Education of Europe,” p. 446.
further from the truth than to deduce from this statement that the Venetians were hostile to religion *per se*. On the contrary, they saw the long history of their city as a manifestation of God’s will and did not miss an occasion to exploit Christian symbols and beliefs for the purpose of reinforcing state hegemony at home and abroad.\(^{389}\) Long before the French political philosopher Jean Bodin formulated the concept of *state sovereignty* in his 1576 *Six livres de la république* (reflecting on the gradual disappearance of the universal structures of the medieval church), Venetian ruling classes managed to separate the power of church and state, subordinating the role of religion to the interest of secular authority.\(^{390}\) Marsilius, a scholar from neighboring Padua, already claimed in 1324 that when Aristotle used the Greek term *ekklêsia*, which during the Middle Ages was translated as *the Church*, he meant the “gathering of people under one single government,” not the universal hierarchical structure presided over by the Pope and his bishops.\(^{391}\) As Englishmen James Howell pointed out in *A Survay of the Signorie of Venice* (1651), the Venetian ruling classes understood very well that clerical power was the main danger to the sovereignty of a Renaissance state. Thus Venice had “a special care for the pulpit (and presse) that no churchman from the meanest priest to the Patriarch dare tamper in their sermons with temporal and state-affairs, or the transactions and the designs of the Senat [sic].”\(^{392}\)

In Venice, centuries’ worth of traditions and beliefs resulted in a complex ideological superstructure supported by oral and visual forms of expression, creating what Marvin and Ingle

\(^{389}\) For example the shout “Marco, Marco!” which invoked the name of the city’s patron saint was widely recognized as one of the most important expressions of Venetian patriotism. It was heard in Piazza San Marco in August 1500 as a sign of defiance after Venice lost an important trading outpost in Modon; a patriotic Venetian boatman was executed for shouting “Marco, Marco!” during the occupation of Padua in 1509. For both examples see Sanudo, *I diarii* (1496-1533): *Pagine scelte*, III, 688 and IX, 358-359.


call a *civil religion* which totally lent itself to the service of the State.\textsuperscript{393} Even the numerous relics of saints preserved in the city’s churches were primarily seen as Venetian, and only secondarily as universal Christian patrons. To emphasize independence and rising power, Venice gradually abandoned its original holy patron - a Byzantine martyr-saint named Theodore - and ensuingly rejected the attempts to replace him with Saint Peter, who was too strongly associated with Papal Rome. Instead, it chose the evangelist Mark whose body it had in its custody - they did not have to share his celestial patronage in a franchise with any other competing worldly or ecclesiastical power.\textsuperscript{394} In the ensuing centuries, Venetians saturated the streets and piazzas not only of their own city but of every other town or military fortress which ever came under their control with the winged lion of St Mark (Figure 3.13.). This image became the main *totem* around which the entire Venetian civic cult revolved.\textsuperscript{395} “All Venetians have *San Marco* on their chest,” Sanudo noted in his chronicle.\textsuperscript{396}

The supremacy of the state over the church was clearly demonstrated in an episode from June 1482 when Rome put an interdict on Venice. Pope Pius IV sent a letter to the Patriarch of Venice, ordering him to communicate his decision to the Doge upon the pain of excommunication.\textsuperscript{397} Chronicler Domenico Malipiero recorded that the Patriarch immediately “feigned illness” and privately informed the Doge whose office ordered him “to keep everything secret, and in no way to act upon the [Pope’s] orders.” In the meantime, Venetians prepared an answer, sent to Rome via their most loyal courier. They instructed him to deliver their answer to...

\textsuperscript{393} Marvin and Ingle, *Blood Sacrifice and the Nation: Totem Rituals and the American Flag.*

\textsuperscript{394} According to legend, the remains of St. Mark were stolen from Egypt and brought to Venice in the 9\textsuperscript{th} century. On the legend as well as on Venetian attempts to separate the influence of the church from its domestic politics see Lane, *Venice: A Maritime Republic,* pp. 12 and 88. Cf. John Julius Norwich, *A History of Venice* (New York, 1989), pp. 28-29.

\textsuperscript{395} Cf. the notion of the totem in a system of civil religion as discussed in Marvin and Ingle, *Blood Sacrifice and the Nation: Totem Rituals and the American Flag.*


\textsuperscript{397} This interdict happened during the war on Ferrara. See Lane, *Venice: A Maritime Republic,* p. 237. Venice gave a lesson to all of Europe in defending its sovereignty against the Pope, especially during the famous interdict of 1606-07. For more see Bouwsma, "Venice and the Political Education of Europe," p. 452.
**Figure 3.13.** The totem of Venetian civil religion – the winged lion of Saint Mark. Venetians used its image to mark the territory of their expanding state and its military forts around the Mediterranean. From upper left corner clockwise: (1) Zadar, Croatia, (2) Padua, Italy, (3) Palamidi, Greece, (4) Crete, Greece, (5) Corfu, Greece, (6) Verona, Italy.
the Pope and simultaneously to post one copy overnight secretly on the door of a church near the Vatican for the public to read. The next morning when the Pope woke up “the whole city of Rome was in uproar,” many Romans expressing sympathy with the Venetian cause.\textsuperscript{398} Similarly in the winter of 1518-19, the Patriarch ordered that two poor Venetian women accused of witchcraft be first publicly processed in a boat through the Grand Canal and then put in the pillory. A few days later, the Patriarch extended his accusations also to a doctor practicing medicine in Venice, ordered him to be similarly processed around town in shackles. Consequently, the Patriarch had the official condemnation letter read in the Rialto and Piazza San Marco, demanding from Doge’s office the license to persecute persons suspected of witchcraft. The Ducal Palace was evidently growing weary of the intrusion of churchmen deep into its realm of power and authority. “Thus the Doge with the Signoria sent to let the Patriarch know that he should not proceed against lay persons without previous notification of the Government, which was a good thing,” concluded Sanudo in his dairy.\textsuperscript{399}

During the Reformation, Venetians did not allow Protestants to preach in their churches and banned Luther’s works, yet they tolerated many disenfranchised Catholic priests who demonstrated their independence from Rome. The Papal ambassador Alberto Bolognetti described the city as the refuge of renegade monks and friars (sfrattati) who in Venice often found the favor of the most prestigious Senatorial families. For Bolognetti, “it was deeply shocking to see a great crowd of them walking every morning and evening upon the Piazza San Marco.” Many tutored the children of Venetian nobles who “were learning their letters and

\textsuperscript{398} Malipiero, "Annali veneti dall’anno 1457 al 1500," pp. 281-83, an entry from June 23, 1498.
\textsuperscript{399} Sanudo, I diarii (1496-1533): Pagine scelte, pp. 340-341.
manners from them, together with the first elements of divine worship, thus receiving to their detriment at a tender age a secret dose of that deeply polluted milk.”

The division between the Church and State was manifestly represented in the urban landscape by the fact that the seat of the Venetian Patriarch was in the most remote part of the city, confined to the Cathedral of San Pietro which was built on a small island in the fringes of the working-class quarter of Castello. The most famous Venetian religious building, the Church of Saint Mark officially carried the status of a ducal chapel and was deliberately presented as a state institution, which was emphasized by its physical interconnectedness with the adjacent Ducal Palace. The French ambassador Comynes observed that the Doge “out of his chamber may hear mass at the high altar of the chapel of Saint Mark, which is the goodliest and richest church in the world, bearing but the name of a chapel.” The Patriarch himself was traditionally elected from the Venetian nobility by the Senate and only then confirmed by the Pope. Marin Sanudo emphasized the priority of the state over the church, noting that during public ceremonies the Patriarch “takes precedence over everyone except of the Doge, who always goes first” (Figure 3.14.).

The Church and Venetian Civic Structure

Since antiquity, Venetian parishes had been conceived as the most basic organizational units of municipal government. Contrary to the prevalent practices of the Roman church, Venetian

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400 From the report of Alberto Bolognetti, papal ambassador in Venice, c. 1580. As reprinted and translated to English in Chambers, Pullan, and Fletcher, eds., Venice: A Documentary History, 1450-1630, p. 206-208.
402 Marin Sanudo, “Laus urbis Venetae,” pp. 15-16. Prodi asserts that with the decline of Venetian hegemony and the strengthening counter-Reformation, the state started gradually blending with the church, which was clearly manifested in the fact that the Church of St. Mark assumed first the informal and later also the formal status of a Basilica - the seat of the Patriarch of Venice (as of 1807). In Paolo Prodi, “The Structure and Organization of the Church in Renaissance Venice: Suggestions for Research,” in Renaissance Venice, ed. J. R. Hale (Totowa, NJ, 1973).
403 Sestiere derives from the Italian sei – six. See the description of the city in the 1502 visitor guide book: Sabellisco, Del Sito di Venezia Città (1502).
Figure 3.14. Matteo Pagan, *Procession of the Doge and Patriarch of Venice*, 1560. Pagan’s engraving aptly conveys the concept of Renaissance state sovereignty — the idea of the subordination of the church to the interest of the state in Venetian official hierarchy.
parishes had great autonomy in electing their own priests. The precedence was traditionally given to the candidates who were born in a given neighborhood. The electoral right was determined by ownership, because only the persons who owned a property in a given parish were able to participate in the election. Ensuingly, the parish as an organizational unit played an important role in Venetian civic life. In 1505, after a great fire destroyed most of the Rialto, the city ordered a special tax collection to be used for purchasing fire-fighting tools which were to be stored in parishes and supervised by parish priests - to be at the ready in the case of future fires. In 1529, Venice enacted its own law for poor relief. The Venetian Senate sanctioned that the poor of the city “must be divided and distributed among the parishes in such way that each parish has a number of poor appropriate to its wealth and standing.”

The lay religious confraternities, scuole, played an important role in the Venetian civic structure, their richly decorated buildings serving as a platform for gatherings mainly for Venetian non-noble middle classes in their pursuit of charity and cultural patronage. As Milanese ambassador Battista Sfondrato observed in 1497, four famous big confraternities - and many small ones - were “the best things that Venice has.” Each of the four important scuole grandi had about 700 members, most of whom were artisans and boatmen. And while they were

404 Constitution of the Patriarch Andrea Bodumier (early 1460s), in Constituciones et privilegia patriarchatus et cleri veneti: BMV ms. Marciana 84d, f. 28. As partially reprinted and translated to English in Chambers, Pullan, and Fletcher, eds., Venice: A Documentary History, 1450-1630, p. 187. Alberto Bolognetti, Papal Ambassador in Venice in the 1580s noted that the election of priests - a thing which was considered rather exceptional in the Roman church at that time - proceeds “according to ancient customs of Venice.” His report is partially reprinted and translated to English in Chambers, Pullan, and Fletcher, eds., Venice: A Documentary History, 1450-1630, p. 223-5.


406 Priuli, I diarii di Girolamo Priuli (1494-1512), vol. 2, p. 396. Sanudo in his 10 January, 1513 diary entry wrote that there was again fire in the Rialto but no one could find either ladders or buckets. In Marin Sanudo, I diarii (1496-1533): Pagine scelte, XVII, pp. 458-467.

407 In the course of the 16th century, similar programs were similarly launched in many other European countries and city-states Chambers, Pullan, and Fletcher, eds., Venice: A Documentary History, 1450-1630, p. 297.

408 Senate decree pertaining to poor relief, 3 April, 1529: ASV Senato, Terra. Reg. for 1529, ff. 125v-127r. As reprinted and translated to English in ibid., pp. 303-306.

409 For more on this topic see sections titled “Fraternities of the Laity: the Scoule Grandi e Piccole” as well as “Art for Confraternities and Churches” in ibid., pp. 209 and 410.
often criticized for spending enormous sums of money on adorning their estates, a fair share of their budgets went towards the charity. “There are always many infirm among them, who are cared for, fed and clothed, along with their families, until they get well or die,” explained Sfondrato, adding that their members “never complain about giving alms, and do so generously many times each year, since they know that the aid provided by the Scuola is mutual, and it is as though each were helping himself.”

Civic authorities saw church pulpits as convenient outlets through which the government was able to effectively communicate its message into even the tiniest capillaries of the urban body.

The subordination of church to the interest of the state meant that one of the main roles assigned especially to the parish priests was to rally the masses in support of government policies. They played an important role in schemes aiming at the prevention of social unrest. By law, parish priests were put in charge of coordinating poor relief and summoned to incite charity towards the poor in their sermons on every festival day under a very severe fine of 10 ducats. During hard times, all parish priests were asked by central authorities to boost the city’s morale by praying to “those saints, to which the Venetian Empire is recommended.” At the time of war with the ‘infidels’, the sale of indulgences and religious processions were often conceived as fundraising events whose ultimate goal was to support the state mercantile interests.

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411 In August, 1500, Priuli noted an unusual policy to curb widespread abuse of offices: The Doge’s office spread an anonymous (and probably fake) letter containing a prophecy threatening Venice with God’s ire if it didn’t change its habits. All parish priests and monasteries were ensuingly echoing the message, the Patriarch declared seven days of fasting and his decree was publicly displayed in all churches. A big religious procession – devotissima processione - in Piazza San Marco with the presence of all political leadership culminated the campaign on the feast of the Assumption of Virgin Mary. In Priuli, I diarii di Girolamo Priuli (1494-1512), vol. 2, pp. 31-32. Cf. Sanudo, I diarii (1496-1533): Pagine scelte, III, 628-31.


413 The quote from Bembo pertains to the war with the League of Cambrai (1509-1516). In Bembo, Della Historia Vinitiana di M. Pietro Bembo Card. Volgarmente Scritta - Libri XII, p. 105A.

414 In two years the indulgence campaign of the Jubilee year of 1500 brought Venice a net profit of 150,000 ducats "aside of the money which was stolen without any account." In Priuli, I diarii di Girolamo Priuli (1494-1512), vol. 2, pp. 121 and 207.
The pulpits of Venetian churches were often used also by itinerant preachers to spread their message from town to town across the region of Northern Italy and beyond (Figure 3.15.). While the local parish priests were seen mostly as civil servants whose voice rarely brought agitation into the community, itinerant preachers often enjoyed the status of true celebrities who managed to draw large crowds. Even the Doge and the diplomatic corps went to see such spectacles on a regular basis. Some of the preachers had very little education yet they had the power to provoke people’s passions, benefiting sometimes also materially from their fame. Churches with their elaborate architecture served as ‘loudspeakers’, their excellent acoustics made it possible for a large crowd to listen comfortably to the message, being shielded from the summer heat, and the cold and rain in the winter. After one such discourse, Sanudo pointed out that “the church was full, it was impossible to find a place even to stand, there were about 4,000 people” all of whom evidently enjoyed the sermon because the preacher had “eloquent language and a clear voice which is easy to understand.”

Fra Timoteo from Lucca was a star preacher in Venice during the Christmas season of 1497 and his message clearly echoed Savonarola’s message with its plea for the radical transformation of decadent morals. In 1511 on Good Friday, another itinerant preacher, Fra Rufin Lovato, publicly attacked the Jewish practice of usury and encouraged his Christian listeners to “with a clear conscience take everything they [the Jews] have and drive them away.” When two Jewish

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415 For more on late Medieval and Renaissance preaching see Hughes Oliphant Old, *The Reading and Preaching of the Scriptures in the Worship of the Christian Church* (Grand Rapids, MI, 1998), vol. 3.

416 Sanudo mentions an itinerant monk who preached in Venice during Lent in 1517 saying that this “man without letters who is otherwise a good person and has a good command of language says a thousand follies” claiming that God’s patience with Venice is wearing thin because of city’s sins and that to punish it he “unleashed three million Devils.” In Sanudo, *I diarii* (1496-1533): *Pagine scelte*, XXV, 338-9. Describing the profession of a preacher, Garzoni wrote that they “should preach first of all for charity and not for the cupidity of earning money and material profit as some of them are doing.” In Garzoni, *La piazza universale di tutte le professioni del mondo*, p. 79.


Figure 3.15. Domenico Morone, *St. Vincent Ferrer Preaching in Front of the Church of St. Eufemia in Verona*, c. 1490. Before Agnadello (1509), Verona was, for almost a hundred years, part of the Venetian stato di terraferma. Venetian pulpits were an important medium used to communicate basic ideology as well as the practical policies of the state.
bankers ensuingly raised a complaint to the Doge’s office, the government quickly silenced the preacher in order to suppress any potential for possible outbreak of social unrest between the Christian and Jewish communities. 419 Venetian civic authorities were always quick to intervene in situations when the message of a religious preacher was in breach with their political or commercial interests. 420 At the same time, they encouraged those preachers whose messages resonated with its own. In 1527, Sanudo noted in his chronicle a 4-hour long Lenten sermon in which the preacher lauded Emperor Charles V for the Sack of Rome, explicitly targeting Venice’s political enemy Pope Clement VII. 421

Numerous religious convents were another intrinsic part of the Venetian social fabric. Commenting on Aristotle’s suggestion that eugenics and abortion can be used as an important tool in maintaining an ideal size of the state, Florentine academic Bernardo Segni in 1551 pointed out the superiority of the Christian institution of male and female monasteries which make possible “that a significant portion of population abstains [from procreation] with virtue.” 422 The existence of seventy convents in Venice was beyond any doubt clear evidence of their regulatory demographic role especially among the noble class, shaping its size and

419 Sanudo, I diarii di Marino Sanuto (1496-1533), XII, 114 and 122.
420 According to Sanudo, in one such case that “without doubts he [the preacher] will be at the end sent away by the Signoria as were sent away the others before him.” In Sanudo, I diarii (1496-1533): Pagine scelte, XXV, 338-9. In 1584 chronicler Alvise Michiel noted that the Franciscan brother Theodoro from Bologna angered Venetian government by condemning its corrupt practices. “On March 13 the Council of Ten determined to summon the leading friars of the community of San Francesco and ordered them to tell their preacher that within four days he must leave the city.” In Alvise Michiel, Memorie pubbliche della Repubblica di Venezia: BMV ms. Ital., cl. VIII, 811 (7299), ff. 277r-278v. As reprinted and translated to English in Chambers, Pullan, and Fletcher, eds., Venice: A Documentary History, 1450-1630, p. 84. In 1596 the Signoria similarly censored a preacher who attacked the Greek community in Venice, erroneously associating them with Luther’s Reformation. The information is conveyed in a letter of Monsignor Gratiani, papal ambassador to Venice, 13 April, 1596: ASVat. DN, filza 32, ff. 215r-252v. As reprinted and translated to English in Chambers, Pullan, and Fletcher, eds., Venice: A Documentary History, 1450-1630, pp. 336-37.
422 For more on Aristotle’s ideas about the ideal size of the state, and how to achieve and maintain it, see chapter 7 of his Politics. The quote is from the introduction to a 1551 edition of Aristotle’s Politics written by a self-described “gentilhuomo & accademico fiorentino” Bernardo Segni. In Aristotle, Trattato dei governi di Aristotele: Tradotto di Greco in lingua vulgare fiorentina Bernardo Segni trans. (Venice, 1551), p. 58B.
wealth. Even Papal ambassador was outraged by the “wicked sentences” often pronounced by noble fathers over their daughters, who “cannot marry them to their equals because they are not rich enough to do so, and will not marry them to lesser men for fear of tarnishing the prestige of their families.” To ease their consciousness, noble families made sure that their daughters closed in monasteries lived in luxury and lascivity, enjoying the best food, dance and music. As a consequence, Priuli’s and Sanudo’s diaries are full of scandals of a sexual nature happening behind the monastery walls. Both diarists often label Venetian nuns as “communal whores” and convents as “public bordellos.” At some point, their reputation sparked a kind of sexual tourism, being considered one of the main attractions in town by many visitors. To add insult to injury, the Patriarch in 1511 publicly complained that he received a petition from Venetian prostitutes who could no longer make a living because no one went to them, so rampant was the immorality in monasteries. Yet any attempt to reform monastic life immediately became a very sensitive issue in Venice, touching the lives of the most powerful noble families, especially their male members - the Papal ambassador Bolognetti considered that such reform was very improbable.

423 French ambassador Commynes wrote around 1500 that “about the citie (I meane within the compas round about of lesse than halfe a French league) are 70 houses of religion, as well of men as women, all in lands sumptuously built, richly furnished within, and hauing goodly gardens belonging to them.” In Commynes, The historie of Philip de Commines Knight, Lord of Argenton, pp. 305. The English Ambassador Dudley Carleton sharply denounced “theyr custome being of a race of many sisters to marrie one or two onely and to thrust them into Convents... and their bastard children doe in like manner fill the cloysters.” From the notes of English Ambassador Dudley Carleton (ca 1612): PRO SP 99-file 8, ff. 340-4. As reprinted in Chambers, Pullan, and Fletcher, eds., Venice: A Documentary History, 1450-1630, pp. 26-31.


426 Sanudo, I diarii di Marino Sanuto (1496-1533), XII, 84-5.

427 From the report of Alberto Bolognetti, papal ambassador in Venice, c. 1580. As reprinted and translated to English in Chambers, Pullan, and Fletcher, eds., Venice: A Documentary History, 1450-1630, p. 206-8. Priuli argued that “the noble daughters of the most prestigious families” were often sent to monasteries. They were daughters, sisters, or relatives of the most powerful politicians and the politicians themselves were often personally involved in such scandals of a sexual nature. In Priuli, I diarii di Girolamo Priuli (1494-1512), vol. 4, p. 34.
The Venetian Spirit of Capitalism

Max Weber famously pointed out the natural link between protestant ethics and the birth of Western capitalism. Yet Venetians - while being beyond any doubt able to create a very successful system of capitalist exchange - would have with great probability strongly objected to being associated with any form of Protestantism. And most of the Protestant visitors to Venice agreed with this position themselves. William Bedell, a personal chaplain to the English ambassador, admitted that he found himself better satisfied with the preaching of Jewish rabbis than with the sermons he heard in Venetian churches. “Such a multitude of idolatrous statues, pictures, reliquias in every corner, not of their churches only, but houses, chambers, shops, yea the very streets, and in the country,” complained a zealous missionary Bedell, dismissing any possibility that the Venetians, despite being constantly at odds with Papal Rome, would ever embrace Protestantism. “Children almost creep of their cradles, but they are taught to be idolaters,” he added. Bedell’s ambassador, Dudley Carleton, similarly claimed that the vices and excesses he saw in Venice “can be supported by no religion other than Roman, and they are so natural that there is no hope of change.” John Chamberlain mocked the Venetians, claiming that “those Pantalons will sooner turne Turkes than Protestants.” Venetians themselves banned from their city everything remotely reminiscent of the Reformation. While the Ashkenazi, or German Jews - Ebrei Tedeschi were allowed to build their public places of worship in Venice,

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429 A letter of William Bedell, chaplain to English ambassador in Venice, 1 January, 1608. As reprinted in Chambers, Pullan, and Fletcher, eds., Venice: A Documentary History, 1450-1630, pp. 195-96. Bedell’s claims were substantiated. Pilgrim Felix Fabri had to wait a month for his galley to Jerusalem in Venice and in the meantime visited a different church every day which preserved some relics of the Saints. “There was a great crush of people to see and kiss the holy relics,” wrote Fabri about the mass at the Church of the Holy Apostles St. Philip and St. James. In Fabri, The Book of the Wanderings of Felix Fabri (Circa 1480-1483 A.D.), vol. 1, part 1, f. 36a.
431 John Chamberlain in a letter to English ambassador to Venice, Sir Dudley Carleton (October 5, 1606). As quoted in ibid., p. 27. Pantalons was the old nickname for Venetians. It was derived from St. Pantaleone and the character of Pantaloon became a stock type in Italian comedy representing the foolish old Venetian.
neither churches nor burial grounds were ever permitted to German or English Protestants. An influential Jesuit preacher, Father Jacomo, warned that Venice was “nurturing a viper on its bosom” by even allowing the Lutherans from amongst the German merchants to reside in the precints of the city proper.

At the same time, Venetian culture fostered some of the attitudes pointed out by Weber as constituting moments of capitalism. Yet they were not Protestant, but rather ancient Greek and early Christian in their origin. Some of them were attributed to the revival of Aristotelian rational philosophy, others drew on the heritage of medieval Christian piety and morality. According to Millett, frugality as a virtue was intentionally cultivated in classical Greece. Spartan culture almost became a synonym of it, but even in Athens rich citizens did not parade their wealth in public. Plato’s ideal republic was self-sufficient but not over-productive in order to prevent abundance and luxury which “renders the city faithless and loveless.” Venice, in spite of its flourishing wealth, did everything to remind its citizens quite often of this principle. Yet, according to Sabellico, the city “came close to the point where new houses would be covered by gold if luxury was not banned by laws.” And Sanudo estimated that there were very few patrician women in Venice who did not have “at least 500 ducats worth of rings on their fingers,

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432 “The English have no burial allowed them, but the Sea,” observed Johnson in his commentary to Botero’s work. In Botero, Relations of the Most Famous Kingdomes and Common-Wealths, p. 104. For the German situation see Chambers, Pullan, and Fletcher, eds., Venice: A Documentary History, 1450-1630, pp. 325-27.


434 For more on syncretic and selective interpretations of Plato, Aristotle, and church fathers during the late Medieval period and Renaissance in Venice see Laughlin, The Aristotle Adventure: A Guide to the Greek, Arabic, and Latin Scholars who Transmitted Aristotle’s Logic to the Renaissance, p. 175; Bouwsma, Venice and the Defense of Republican Liberty: Renaissance Values in the Age of the Counter Reformation, p. 200; and King, Venetian Humanism in an Age of Patrician Dominance, pp. 124 and 185.


436 In Laws, Plato claimed that “if the State was to be on the sea-coast, and to have fine harbors, and to be deficient in many products, instead of productive of everything, in that case it would need a mighty savior and divine lawgivers, if, with such a character, it was to avoid having a variety of luxurious and depraved habits.” Instead, his ideal state is hilly and as a result “cannot be highly productive as well as all-productive; if it were, and supplied many exports, it would be flooded in return with gold and silver money—the one condition of all, perhaps, that is most fatal, in a State, to the acquisition of noble and just habits of life.” The quote is from Plato, *Plato,* 4.704d-705b.

437 Sabellico, Del Sito di Venezia Città (1502), p. 32.
not counting the enormous pearls,” adding that if there were no restrictions on their tastes and desires, “they would be very extravagant.”438 But especially in hard times the city always issued new sumptuary laws banning excesses in dressing, lavish expenditures on food, jewels and gambling, because of a widespread belief that a “frugal, moral and orderly society, free of extravagance and unnatural vice, was good in itself, and it was also likely a prosperous one, for it would earn the favor of God, or at least avoid provoking his wrath.”439 There are four things which conserve the republics, the respected Lorenzo Venier reminded his fellow nobles from the pulpit of the Great Concil in 1517, recalling the authority of Saint Thomas Aquinas: obedientia civium, concordia, justitia et divitiarum abstinentia - civic obedience, concord, justice, and abstinence from riches.440

In 1515, the Venetian government created a special magistrate of the Provveditori sopra le Pompe whose role was to enforce the sumptuary laws.441 And despite of all continuing excesses, foreign visitors often reasoned that one of the roots of Venetian wealth was indeed in their frugality, reflected mainly in the fact that they did not have to spend profusely on the way their men dressed and traveled around, because they were all seen in public wearing plain suits, without any lavish expenditure on their personal entourages.442 To Pietro Casola, the Venetian

439 The quote is from ibid., p. 105. Cardinal Pietro Bembo gives a detailed account of the sumptuary laws regulating luxurious foods, household accessories, jewels and games of chance which were banned in Venice during the lengthy war with the League of Cambrai. In Bembo, Della Historia Vinitalia di M. Pietro Bembo Card. Volgarmente Scritta - Libri XII. 6b. Similar bans on male and female ways of dressing as well as gambling were approved in 1505-6 and described by Priuli, I diarii di Girolamo Priuli (1494-1512), vol. 2, pp. 391-92, 399-400, and 408. Sanudo discusses the ban on gambling approved in 1522. In Sanudo, I diarii (1496-1533): Pagine scelte, XXXII, 500-1 and 505. The 1562 laws regulating the wearing of pearls and private banquets are reprinted in Chambers, Pullan, and Fletcher, eds., Venice: A Documentary History, 1450-1630, pp. 178-80.
440 The quote is from Sanudo, I diarii (1496-1533): Pagine scelte, XXIV, 656-659. Sanudo, who wrote a lengthy report of the speech, added that Venier paraphrased Aquinas’ book De regime principium – a work with great probability written by Aquinas’ student, Bartholomew of Lucca.
441 Senate decree establishing the Provveditori sopra le Pompe, 8 February, 1515. As reprinted in Chambers, Pullan, and Fletcher, eds., Venice: A Documentary History, 1450-1630, p. 178.
442 Milanese Pietro Casola wrote during his 1494 visit: “They are frugal and very modest in their manner of living at home; outside the house they are very liberal.” In Casola, Canon Pietro Casola's Pilgrimage to Jerusalem in the Year 1494, p. 143. See
piazzas and streets full of people in their black robes were reminiscent of the gatherings of doctors of law:

The city of Venice preserves its ancient fashion of dress - which never changes - that is, a long garment of any colour that is preferred. No one would leave the house by day if he were not dressed in this long garment, and for the most part in black. They have so observed this custom, that the individuals of every nation in the world - which has a settlement in Venice - all adopt this style, from the greatest to the least, beginning with the gentlemen, down to the sailors and galeotti. Certainly it is a dress which inspires confidence, and is very dignified. The wearers all seem to be doctors in law, and if a man should appear out of the house without his toga, he would be thought mad.

Venetians tended to invest in things which lasted for generations, such as their palaces or jewels for their wives, not in the perishables of everyday consumption. During his 1608 visit to Venice, Thomas Coryat observed that even gentlemen worth perhaps two million ducats go to the market themselves to purchase food for their families, “a token indeed of frugality” which he commended to his own countrymen in Protestant England. “Since little spending and much heaping-up of treasure come together in the Venetian nobility, it is easy to imagine the extent of their wealth,” inferred Spanish ambassador Marquis de Bedmar.


443 Casola, Canon Pietro Casola’s Pilgrimage to Jerusalem in the Year 1494, p. 143.

444 Chambers, Pullan, and Fletcher, eds., Venice: A Documentary History, 1450-1630, p. 177. There are multiple rich observations surviving in literature regarding the ways in which Venetian noblemen dressed. Sanudo described a typical Venetian male dress as “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.” Marin Sanudo, “Laus urbis Venetae,” pp. 397-98.

445 Coryat, Coryat's Crudities: In Two Volumes, pp. 396-97. “As for expences, I am sure some Citizens of London are at more annuall charge of diet, than the Dukes of Venice, Florence, or Genoa,” wrote Johnson in his commentary to Botero’s work. In Botero, Relations of the Most Famous Kingdomes and Common-Wealths, p. 92.

446 From a report on Venice attributed to the former Spanish ambassador, Don Alonso della Cueva, Marquis of Bedmar, c. 1608: BL Additional ms. 5471, ff. 147-53. As reprinted and translated to English in Chambers, Pullan, and Fletcher, eds., Venice: A Documentary History, 1450-1630, pp. 257-60. Desiderius Erasmus later in his life bitterly complained about the meagerness of meals he had during his 9-month stay at the house of the wealthy Venetian printer Aldus Manutius, run by his father-in-law and shrewd business partner Andrea Torresano d’Asola. One of his adages Opulentia Sordida (Wealthy Miser) is widely considered to be a recollection of Venetian avarices, claiming that “for by this sordid way of living, they that have little or nothing to begin the world with, scrape together so much wealth.” In E. Johnson, ed., The Colloquies of Erasmus (London, 1878), vol. 2, p. 266. See also similar observations contained in Montaigne’s Travel Journal, October-November, 1580. In Montaigne, The Complete Works of Montaigne: Essays, Travel Journal, Letters, p. 920. Montesquieu later observed that in Venice, “they are compelled by laws to moderation. They are so habituated to parsimony, that none but courtesans can make them part with their money.” In Montesquieu, The Spirit of Laws, vol. 1, p. 141.
In Venetian social culture, the distinction between a contemplative Christian life - *vita contemplativa*, and a worldly vocational life - *vita activa*, was gradually erased.\(^{447}\) If practiced with zeal and virtue, both vocations were recognized as equivalent life paths for a person who was striving for eternal life, which was another of the features clearly emphasized by Weber in *The Protestant Ethic*.\(^{448}\) In his treatise *On the Republic* (c.1450), Lauro Quirini brusquely refused Plato’s and early Christian egalitarian ideas of common ownership, arguing that it would blunt the spirit of industry. Quirini, embracing Aristotle’s positions favorable to private ownership, argued that there should have been no limits on the amount of wealth one was able to accumulate through his own effort - but the natural propensity for greed should be restrained through systematic education about virtues and manifested in charitable giving.\(^{449}\) Benedetto Cotrugli portrayed his ideal Renaissance merchant as a frugal *pater familiaris*, methodical in the pursuit of his business, laborious, self-reliant and a diligent entrepreneur. The main objective of any enterprise he undertook was financial gain.\(^{450}\) The pursuit of a worldly vocation for men as a form of life which refines personal virtue was a principle agreed upon in Renaissance Italy:

For just as iron is rubbed and grows bright with the rubbing, but rusts from disuse, so the mind itself shines and decays when neglected. Hence idle time, in the opinion of all wise men, is adjudged a thing especially to be shunned. Even more, the spirit, not knowing how to be motionless, when not raised to better things by doing or planning, slips into wicked thoughts and actions.\(^{451}\)

In a Foucaultian move, Venetian fathers were as of the 16\(^{th}\) century encouraging public schools so that the youth “do not waste in idleness but serve and bring credit to the Republic

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\(^{447}\) Gleason, Gasparo Contarini: Venice, Rome, and Reform, pp. 16-17.


\(^{449}\) See the analysis of Quirini’s texts in King, *Venetian Humanism in an Age of Patrician Dominance*, pp. 130 and 184.

\(^{450}\) Cotrugli defined the trade as an “art or true discipline practiced between the legitimate persons, justly ordered in mercantile things, [practised] for the purpose of the conservation of human race, with the aim of nothing less than financial gain.” In Cotrugli Raguseo, *Il libro dell’arte della mercatura*, p. 139, f. 6. See also Sarpi, *Advice Given to the Republike of Venice*, p. 15.

\(^{451}\) In a fictitious dialogue between a Venetian and a Paduan, both sides – presented as antipodes of two different political cultures – agree upon this principle. In Ravenna, *Dramallogia de Eligibili Vite Genere*, pp. 193-94.
while growing up in a well disciplined manner."\textsuperscript{452} It was typical for Venetian humanism that it cared less about developing original thinking than to the disciplining of character, preparing individuals to meet the needs of the system.\textsuperscript{453} Doubtlessly, the system was very successful in pursuing this goal. In 1552, Venetian publisher Gualtero Scotto observed that even small kids in Venetian streets play on deputies and magistrates, discussing how to cast ballots, instead of just aimlessly wasting their time in childish games:

It may be said that the children here are born more for their Country, than for their Fathers.Aside of the propensity to strive for common good, which they receive through the genes from their fathers, they are led to this objective also through their education. And it is certainly a marvel to see - and I personally had been astonished by this many times - that even the smallest of the kids often play on the streets as deputies, they discuss how to cast ballots for so and so in the [Great] Council.\textsuperscript{454}

The practical mindset was reflected in every public and private enterprise the Venetians undertook. Foreigners often caricatured this trait, contrasting Florentine-style humanism and its lofty philosophical ideals with the Venetian alternative dominated by the merchant spirit. In a fictitious dialogue between a Paduan and a Venetian nobleman, Conversino da Ravenna pointed out that “everyone who is driven by a greedy nature and eagerness for wealth rushes here to Venice and gladly remains.” But for those who were pursuing lofty philosophical ideals in life neither the customs nor the place was right. “You Venetians deal with learning as a business just as you do the pepper or saffron trade.”\textsuperscript{455}

\textsuperscript{452} The term “Foucaultian” is used here in the context of Michel Foucault’s claims that schools are part of the disciplinary system through which the state assures its ability to govern over its own citizens – governmentality. The quote used in text is from the Senate decree of 23 March, 1551 which decided to extend the public lectures into each of the six sestieri: ASV Senato, Terra, reg. 37, f. 105. As reprinted and translated to English in Chambers, Pullan, and Fletcher, eds., \textit{Venice: A Documentary History}, 1450-1630, pp. 362-64.


\textsuperscript{455} Ravenna, Dramalogia de Eligibili Vite Genere, pp. 226-27.
VII. Book Print: Evolution Rather Than Revolution

Thanks to Marin Sanudo, we know the exact day when, in 1469, Venetians started to write their own chapter in the history of book print: “The day of 18 October the print of books was started in Venice: [the] inventor is one maestro Zuane de Spira, German, and printed the epistles of Tullius and Pliny and died,” noted the author laconically. Since then, a lot was written about early Venetian book print, its business organization and its role in facilitating the social and cultural transformation which gave birth to what some social historians call early modern Europe. For the most part, the catalytic role of print in this process had been justified through its ability to lower the cost of books, which made their content available to a wider population. But this did not happen overnight. It should be remembered that one did not need to purchase a book in order to read it. Lowry emphasizes that private Renaissance manuscript collections were remarkably accessible and “the habits of lending, copying and exchanging washed over many of the barriers of ownership, class and intellectual bias.” At the same time, improvements in the organization of copyists’ work and a partial mechanization of the illustration process due to the increased use of woodcut blocks lowered the cost of manuscript book production even before the

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456 Tullius is in reference to Marcus Tullius Cicero. Before he died, Spira printed two editions of Cicero, one of Pliny and also one of Livy. The quote is from Sanudo's Lives of the Doges. With more information on the life of Zuane de Spira - Giovanni da Spira - it was quoted in Castellani, La stampa in Venezia: Dalla sua origine alla morte di Aldo Manuzio, p. 13. Castellani argues that the Venetian Senate originally granted an absolute monopoly to Spira on book print for the period of five years. His sudden death, which according to Castellani cancelled this “odious monopoly”, may have changed the path taken by the early Venetian press forever (ibid., p. 14).


458 Lowry, Nicholas Jenson and the Rise of Venetian Publishing in Renaissance Europe, p. 43.
invention of movable typeset.\footnote{Ibid., pp. 42-43.} With its advent in the 1450s and 1460s, Grendler estimates that it still took about two decades until the prices dropped to the level where even those social classes for whom the purchase of a book had been previously a luxury, started benefiting from print. By 1500, about one half of the book price still depended on the high cost of paper, not counting the additional expenses for binding and illustration.\footnote{Cf. Grendler, "Printing and Censorship," pp. 25 and 31. For more on paper cost see Lowry, The World of Aldus Manutius: Business and Scholarship in Renaissance Venice, p. 11. According to Bloom, the oldest Italian paper mill was set in 1264 in Fabriano – a town near the Adriatic port of Ancona.} Thus it should not come as a surprise that some early Italian booksellers, especially those who catered to university students, were offering also ‘paperback’ versions of their production printed on lower-quality paper and sold in cheaper binding or perhaps even in loose form without it.\footnote{It is often forgotten that the early printers had to first prove to the reading public that their manufactured texts were esthetically as fine as the ones produced by scribes in their manuscript copies.\footnote{Lowry, The World of Aldus Manutius: Business and Scholarship in Renaissance Venice, p. 15. Works of some scribes with particularly nice handwriting were sought after and their authors gained almost international fame. Cardinal Bembo mentions a particular version of Homer’s Iliad copied by Eustachio “tenuto molto caro” – considered very valued. In a letter dated 31 July, 1544 from Rome. In Pietro Bembo, Delle Lettere di M. Pietro Bembo - Primo Volume (Venezia, 1575), p. 61B.} As a consequence, leading incunabula printers in Venice were equally worried about protecting their specific typeset from plagiarism as they were about the content of their books. In 1502, Aldus Manutius petitioned the Venetian Senate asking for a 10-year protection on his Greek and Italic types, arguing that they were “of surprising beauty which seems as written by the very hand.”\footnote{The English translation of the original petition is in Aldus Manutius, The Petition of Aldus Manutius to the Venetian Senate on the Seventeenth of October, Fifteen Hundred & Two, Imploring legal Protection for his Types, afainst base Imitations of False Conterfeiters (Chicago, 1927). The original Latin text of Manutius’ petition as well as Doge Leonardo Loredan’s positive answer, together with a collection of other original privileges which the Venetian Senate granted in the Incunabula period to}
Venice for many decades in a symbiotic relationship. As was previously pointed out above in the case of the Venetian avvisi, the printer did not completely eliminate the scribe, who was undoubtedly more flexible and faster in creating personalized copies of single works for individual customers. Grendler points out also an interesting reverse trend - from print to manuscript - illustrated by the fact that some poorer students in Padua or Bologna started copying books which were already printed in Venice, Rome or Florence by hand. Some snobbish traditionalist readers simply dismissed print at all, and continued to rely on manuscripts. The Venetian monk Filippo di Strata harnessed their sentiments when he used his pulpit to rumble against printers in Venice, depicting them as vulgar men driven mainly by the vision of profit who were debasing intellectual life and high artistic quality of illuminated manuscripts by selling their much cheaper works to their social peers. At the same time, the increasing output of print shops would not have had any significant social impact without a parallel growing pool of readers, itself a result of public schooling and rising literacy, but also of improved transportation technologies which enabled printers and booksellers to reach wider geographic areas. The Florentine bookseller and manuscript dealer Girolamo Strozzi, who had distributors also in Rome, Siena, Pisa and Naples, as early as 1474 placed an order with Venetian printers to produce specific editions of books requested by his clients from England. Strozzi regularly contracted with Venetian merchant galleys to deliver shipments of his books to customers in London and Bruges. All in all, in the process of ushering
in age of modernity, the role of movable typeset, however important, was just one of the interlocking social and technological innovation processes which were recursively feeding on and reinforcing each other. It certainly wasn’t the advent of book print which triggered the Renaissance in Venice. Quite the contrary is true: it was the growing social demand and the cultural milieu of the Renaissance which prepared the ground for the success of printing.

Overall, according to Lowry, Venice wasn’t the first European city to introduce book print “but the amazing expansion of that industry, once established, leaves no doubt that Venice was the first city in the world to feel the full impact of printing.” Paradoxically, it seems that the Venetians themselves were quite unaware of this change. Marin Sanudo, the most prolific of the Venetian Renaissance chroniclers, was also one of the city’s biggest book collectors. By 1533, his library contained about 6,500 volumes of early printed material and handwritten manuscripts and drawings. Not surprisingly, Sanudo soon befriended Aldus Manutius who settled in Venice in 1490, and became the city’s foremost printer. Being from an important noble family, Sanudo sponsored the bill which granted important printing privileges to Manutius. In exchange, the printer dedicated to Sanudo several of his well-known books of Latin classics. Consequently, it must be puzzling for anyone who goes through thousands of pages of Sanudo’s diaries contained in fifty-eight thick volumes, spanning from 1496 to 1533, to realize that the man “who never stops writing and compiling whatever is worthy to be read” and notes dutifully various aspects of manuscripts containing the Epistles of Saint Paul preserved at the monastery of San Salvator in Nicosia, in order to print it in Rome. A letter from Rome dated 4 December, 1546. In Bembo, Delle Lettere di M. Pietro Bembo - Primo Volume, p. 195A.

This claim is fully compatible with Giddens’ basic concepts used in defining his structuration theory. In Anthony Giddens, The Constitution of Society: Outline of the Theory of Structuration (Berkeley, CA, 1984).

According to Grendler “the intellectual, civic, economic and political circumstances that nurtured the ‘revival of learning’ in Italy long preceded the date on which printing began to make an impact (not before 1470).” In Grendler, “Printing and Censorship,” p. 37.

Its estimated worth was about 4,000 ducats which equaled the cost of a smaller Venetian palace. In Finlay, Politics in Renaissance Venice, p. 255.

Venetian life, barely mentioned the presence of Manutius nor did he write about another two hundred other printing shops in his city. The only possible explanation of such ‘negligence’ could be that by the 1490s when Sanudo started his chronicle, the print industry was already established and perceived by Venetians as an intrinsic aspect of their city’s busy life. The introduction of movable type represented only a small step in the gradual but steady and omnipresent technological progress, spurred on by the operations of Venetian Arsenal.

Generally considered to be one of the first modern industrial (and military) complexes, the managerial practices of the Arsenal have been the object of several studies. It was one of the places where systematic scientific research was recognized early on as a useful tool for industry. In the mid 1520s, an obscure university professor, Vettor Fausto, who previously translated Aristotle’s *Mechanica* but had no practical experience with shipbuilding, successfully proposed new ship designs based purely on his historical research of ancient Greek fonts and his mathematical calculations, gaining prestige and the respect of Venetian noble circles. Humanist Pietro Bembo claimed that Fausto’s example was a definitive triumph of reason and learning over those who were traditionally denying the practical value of science. “All educated people have a big debt towards him,” claimed Bembo, “because nobody will be able to dismiss them anymore saying: ‘go back to your study and to your writings,’ when the discussion of more serious topics than books and ink pots comes up.”

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474 The quote describing Marin Sanudo is from one of Aldo Manuzio’s dedications. For more see ibid., pp. 432-33. Castellani pointed out that by 1500 in Venice approximately 200 printers opened their shops, while in Rome he counted by that time only 37, in Florence 22, Bologna 42, and Milan 60 printers. The two other important international centers of print - Lyon and Paris – had altogether about 150 printers. In Castellani, *La stampa in Venezia*, p. 29.

475 As discussed above. Cf. Davis, *Shipbuilders of the Venetian Arsenal: Workers and Workplace in the Pre-industrial City*; and Lane, *Venetian Ships and Shipbuilders of the Renaissance*.

476 Lane, *Venetian Ships and Shipbuilders of the Renaissance*; and Davis, *Shipbuilders of the Venetian Arsenal: Workers and Workplace in the Pre-industrial City*.

477 For more on Fausto see Lane, *Venetian Ships and Shipbuilders of the Renaissance*, pp. 64-70.

478 In a letter dated 29 May, 1529 Bembo wrote: “Per qual cosa dico, che tutti i letterati huomini gli hanno ad hauere un grande obligo. Che non si potra piu dire a niun di loro. Come per adesso si solea; Va & fatti nello strittoio & nelle tue lettere:
Bessarion, Erasmus, Aldus Manutius and the Spread of Greek Thought

In 1500, Venice had about 570 editors, printers and booksellers.\textsuperscript{479} Many of them settled close to the city’s commercial and civic centers in the parishes of San Zulian and San Paternian. By the 1490s, numerous stores of booksellers were luring passersby as they walked through the adjacent Mercerie, the main shopping artery connecting the Rialto and Piazza San Marco.\textsuperscript{480} As emphasized by many media historians, their businesses were often just short-lived speculative operations depending on the momentary vibes of domestic and international venture capital.\textsuperscript{481} Yet, the book had a quality which differentiated it from other commodities traded by Venetian merchants. Its content could be shared by many without losing its substantial value. And in Renaissance Italy, the institution of the public library was increasingly seen as an indispensable part of a well-founded city.\textsuperscript{482} The first Venetian public collection of books had its roots in the 1468 donation of a Greek expatriate, Cardinal Basilios Bessarion, who left about a thousand valuable manuscripts, half of them of ancient Greek origin, to the city “for the general good of all readers, be they Greek or...
Latin.

In his dedication, Bessarion declared that since the fall of Constantinople he devoted all his life and resources to the rescue of classical Greek and Byzantine intellectual heritage:

For I feared - indeed I was consumed with terror - lest all those wonderful books, the product of so much toil and study by the greatest human minds, those very beacons to the earth should be brought to danger and destruction in an instant...so I assembled almost all the works of the wise men of Greece, especially those which were rare and difficult to find...

The fame of Venice as one of the centers of the revival of classical knowledge spread quickly all over the Europe and attracted the best minds of the times. This claim is well illustrated by the fact that, as a center of gravity, Venice attracted and brought together, even if only for a brief period of a few months, the most prominent humanistic philosopher of Northern Europe, Desiderius Erasmus of Rotterdam (c.1469-1536), and the most famous printer of Italian Renaissance, Aldus Manutius Romanus (c.1449-1515).

Manutius decided to move to Venice from Rome in 1490 with the clear intention to harness the intellectual energy of the community of educated Greeks who took refuge in the city after the 1453 fall of Constantinople. Five years later, he opened a printing shop there and in the next two decades his Aldine Press, besides many Latin classics, published practically the complete body of

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483 Lowry, Nicholas Jenson and the Rise of Venetian Publishing in Renaissance Europe, p. 16. Sanudo estimated the number of books in Bessarion’s collection at 800. Labalme and Sanguinetti White in the commentary to Sanudo’s texts talk about 752 manuscripts, 482 of which were Greek. In Sanudo, Venice, CitaExcelentissima: Selections from the Renaissance diaries of Marin Sanudo, XX, 181-2, pp. 447-48. A century earlier, in 1362, Petrarch already intended to leave his collection to the city of Venice. Yet he later became bitter towards the city, scraped his last will and his collection got split and spread all over the Europe. In B. L. Ullman and Philip A. Stadter, The Public Library of Renaissance Florence: Niccolo Niccoli, Cosimo de’ Medici and the Library of San Marco (Padova, Italy, 1972), p. 6. Aside from Bessarion, Pope Nicholas V had the second largest Renaissance collection of Greek manuscripts in Italy, containing about 350 works. See Geanakoplos, Greek Scholars in Venice: Studies in the Dissemination of Greek Learning from Byzantium to Western Europe, p. 266.

484 From Cardinal Bessarion’s letter accompanying the deed of donation of his books to Venice. As reprinted and translated to English in Chambers, Pullan, and Fletcher, eds., Venice: A Documentary History, 1450-1630, pp. 357-58. The collection was valued at the incredible sum of 15,000 ducats. On average, it equaled 150 ducats per manuscript, or the 6-month salary of the Venetian Grand Chancellor. See Lowry, Nicholas Jenson and the Rise of Venetian Publishing in Renaissance Europe, p. 16. The average salaries in Venice are reported in Sanudo, Venice, Cita Excelentissima: Selections from the Renaissance diaries of Marin Sanudo, p. 542. In spite of their value, Bessarion’s books were for many years first stored in the Ducal Palace, in the hall where the courts of the Forty (Quarantia) met. Cf. Sabellico, Del Sito di Venezia Città (1502), p. 31. According to Chambers and Pullan, some crates were opened, and some books stolen or even sold in the meantime. See Chambers, Pullan, and Fletcher, eds., Venice: A Documentary History, 1450-1630, pp. 355-56. Only in 1515, by Senate decree, was the government obliged to build a library in Piazza San Marco - today’s Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana (designed by Sansovino). Cf. Sanudo, Venice, CitaExcelentissima: Selections from the Renaissance diaries of Marin Sanudo, XX, 178, p. 448. But the construction took many years and in 1530 the books were still in storage boxes in the Ducal Palace (ibid., LIV,184, p. 36).
classical Greek literary heritage as we know it today - in its original language, accompanied with numerous ‘modern’ Latin commentaries. At the same time as Manutius was getting ready to launch his printing shop in Venice, Erasmus was living mostly between Paris and Oxford, launching a successful career as a professor at Queens’ College. Yet in 1501, he wrote a frustrated letter to his mentor, complaining that without access to original Greek sources and proper knowledge of Greek language, Latin scholarship, however elaborate, is reduced by half. “For whereas we Latins have but a few slim streams, a few muddy pools, the Greeks possess crystal clear springs and rivers that run with gold.” Consequently, five years later we find him on the Apennine Peninsula, determined to learn Greek and to gain access to the original versions of classical and Byzantine texts, not distorted by the notoriously inadequate translations. A twist of destiny brought him to Venice in January 1508 where he spent a nine-month ‘apprenticeship’ with Aldus Manutius. Having access to the rich Venetian collections of Greek books and surrounded by thirty-odd Greek editors and typesetters in Manutius’ printing shop, Erasmus published his first elaborated edition of Adagia (1508) - a collection of Greek and Roman proverbs accompanied by the author’s elaborate commentaries.

485 The first printed Greek editions of classical works were published in Venice in 1486, but their number was a mere symbolical contribution in comparison to the Aldine Press. In Zorzi, Collezioni veneziane di codici greci: Dalle raccolta della Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana, p. 8. Commenting in Adages on the activities of the Aldine Press, Erasmus wrote: “I can promise one thing to the studious, and it would all happen in a very few years: they would possess all the works of good authors in four languages, Latin, Greek, Hebrew, and Chaldean, on very kind of subject, complete and with emendations... There will be nothing wanting in the whole field of literature.” In Margaret Mann Phillips, Erasmus on his Times (Cambridge, UK, 1967), p. 9.


487 Erasmus’ intentions to go to Italy in order to learn Greek are very clear from his correspondence. He argued that those who have translated the sacred books have “in their scrupulous interpretation so rendered the Greek phrases that not even that primary meaning which our theologians call literal can be perceived by those who are not Greek scholars.” All quotes are from a letter Erasmus wrote to his patron Anthony, the abbot of St. Bertin. In Mann Phillips, Erasmus on his Times. Epistle 143, p. 313. “I came to Italy mainly in order to learn Greek,” wrote Erasmus in a letter to Servatius Rogerus, dated 16 November, 1506 from Bologna. In Erasmus, The Correspondence of Erasmus, p. 125. Surprisingly, later in life Erasmus completely dismissed the influence of his Italian experience on his intellectual maturation, which Gaenakoplos explains was due to some personal issues not directly related to his overall three-year long Italian period. For more on this subject see Geanakoplos, Greek Scholars in Venice: Studies in the Dissemination of Greek Learning from Byzantium to Western Europe, p. 277.

488 One version of Adagia was already published previously in Paris, but it was very limited for the lack of original sources. Erasmus describes his work with Aldus Manutius in one of the most famous adages included in the Venetian edition, titled
Yet, even Manutius’ operation was unthinkable without his network of patrons, collaborators and commercial contacts all over Europe. Erasmus claimed that not only Venetian private and public libraries, but also the wealthy humanist collectors from Hungary and Poland supplied Aldus with rare manuscripts to be printed in his shop.\textsuperscript{489} Manutius’ personal correspondence reveals that his books were often edited and sold over a great distance by booksellers and knowledge-hungry individuals, relying on the expanding postal service. In 1505-1506, the printer received requests to send books for high school students and humanists from Krakow, Poland; in 1508 an expatriate from Paris wrote him to ship a ‘bag of books’ (\textit{una capsa}) for his pupils with Venetian merchants who would soon travel to the fair in Lyon, or to simply mail them by post; in 1509, a Camaldolese abbot, Pietro Candido, secured manuscripts and edited several classical books for Aldus, via the regular postal service between Florence and Venice.\textsuperscript{490}

During his stay in Venice, Erasmus clearly understood that the content of the books was way too precious to be left purely to the merchant-printers. He saw that there were many speculators among them who “fill the world with books, not just trifling things (such as I write, perhaps), but stupid, ignorant, slanderous, scandalous, raving, irreligious and seditious books, and the number of them is such that even the valuable publications lose their value.” Instead, he argued that for book


\textsuperscript{489} In \textit{Festina Lente} Erasmus wrote that “often old manuscripts have come, sent unasked for by Hungarians and Poles, accompanied by a gift of money” so that Aldus might print them for the benefit of public knowledge. In Mann Phillips, \textit{Erasmus on his Times}, pp. 13-14. Yet Lowry, in his monograph on Aldus, could not confirm this outright claim, thought he points out many links between Aldus, Hungary and Poland. In Lowry, \textit{The World of Aldus Manutius: Business and Scholarship in Renaissance Venice}, pp. 287-89. Aldus later became famous for not treating the borrowed manuscripts with great respect. The custodians of Bessarion’s library later denied him access to their collection and he had to rely more on smaller private and public Greek manuscript collections in Venice. For more on this topic see Zorzi, \textit{Collezioni veneziane di codici greci: Dalle raccolta della Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana}, p. 9; and Geanakoplos, \textit{Greek Scholars in Venice: Studies in the Dissemination of Greek Learning from Byzantium to Western Europe}, p. 266.

\textsuperscript{490} Letter no. 59 from Krakow signed by Sylvius Amatus in the name of the rector of the local gymnasium (high school); letter no. 60 signed by the citizen and bookseller Jean Haller. In Nolhac, ed., \textit{Les Correspondants d’Aide Manuce} (1483-1514), pp. 218-19. Letter no. 57 from Girolamo Aleandro dated 23 June, 1508 reprinted in ibid., pp. 213-17. Letter no. 79 from Pietro Candido, dated August 1509 reprinted in ibid., p. 238.
publication to maintain its high standard, it should have been sponsored by “grants from princes, or from the bishops and abbots, or from the public funds.” At the same time, Manutius recognized that the Venetian market was big enough to allow him to invest in high quality. Parallel to his printing activities, he founded an informal New Academy (Neakademia) inspired by Plato and promoting Greek language and scholarship, which helped him to collect and edit ancient manuscripts, and further cultivated his potential markets. Such venues as the New Academy were becoming typical for the climate of Italian Renaissance urban culture and may be seen as precursors of literary salons, which in the course of the 16th century became known in Venice as ridotti. Reynolds and Wilson estimate that before the Aldine Press started systematically churning out ancient works, scarcely more than dozen volumes of Greek authors had been printed

491 The quote is from Festina Lente (Haste Slowly). Erasmus added that it may be “too much to expect any such thing from the merchant class, who have mostly dedicated themselves to the worship of Mammon.” In Mann Phillips, Erasmus on his Times, pp. 12-13. Garzoni later sarcastically echoed this claim, noting that the quality of many books printed in Venice suggests that the muses supposed to inspire their authors were instead making love with crabs while the poets were working on their books – “le cui muse facevano l’amor co’ granchi mentre essi poetavano.” Garzoni added that the only thing such authors were looking for was the cheap worldly fame and money: “l’applauso dalla plebe, honor dal vulgo, utile da stampatori, premio da mecenati, guadagno da signori, gratia dalle Madonne, e cortesie da tutte le bande.” In Garzoni, La piazza universale di tutte le professioni del mondo, p. 288.

492 Aldus died as a financially well-established man as seen from his testament reprinted in Castellani, La stampa in Venezia: Dalla sua origine alla morte di Aldo Manuzio, pp. 96-99.

493 See the statutes of Nuova Accademia - Neacademia - as reprinted in ibid., pp. 100-102. Federigo Badoer in 1560 stated that the New Academy brings together “professors of the sciences, the arts and faculties, such as are customarily held all over the world, embracing matters of both public and private interest… this meeting of so many professors of virtuous ability brings profit, delight, and great prestige [ornamento] to the city.” From the petition of Federigo Badoer to the procurators of San Marco: ASV Procuratia di San Marco de Supra, Atti, reg. 129, ff. 34-7. As reprinted and translated to English in Chambers, Pullan, and Fletcher, eds., Venice: A Documentary History, 1450-1630, pp. 364-66.

494 For more on Neacademia see Geanakoplos, Greek Scholars in Venice: Studies in the Dissemination of Greek Learning from Byzantium to Western Europe, pp. 128-29. Paolo Sarpi’s bibliographer Fra Fulgenzio recorded for posterity the famous 1580s meetings of the ridotto which gathered in the palace of Andrea and Niccolò Morosini (a.k.a. ridotto Morosini). Fra Fulgenzio described it as “the most celebrated conventions that have ever been consecrated to the Muses… it was allowed every man to make his discourse of whatsoever pleased him best, without restriction of passing from one subject to another, provided it were always of new matter, and the end of their disputation was for nothing else but to finde [sic] out truth.” Similarly, there were meetings at the store under the sign of ‘The Golden Ship’ in Mercerie where “used to meete a sort of gallant and vertuous gentlemen to recount their Intelligences, one with another; among which the good Perrot the Frenchman… thither also came Merchants that were strangers, and such as had not only beene over all Europe, but in the east and west Indies, and the father [Sarpi] among others found meanes to be among them.” A fragment from Fra Fulgenzio’s life of Sarpi. As reprinted and translated to English in Chambers, Pullan, and Fletcher, eds., Venice: A Documentary History, 1450-1630. 267-8. Cf. Lane, Venice: A Maritime Republic, p. 393.
in their original form in all of Europe.\footnote{Reynolds and Wilson, Scribes and Scholars: A Guide to the Transmission of Greek and Latin Literature, p. 155.} At the time of Aldus’ death, European private and public libraries contained 94 first editions of classical Greek and Byzantine texts printed in Greek. Most of them had been previously practically unknown to European readers outside of the Greek-speaking territories. The total output of the Aldine Press until the death of its founder in 1515 is estimated to be 100,000 to 120,000 copies.\footnote{Lowry, The World of Aldus Manutius: Business and Scholarship in Renaissance Venice, p. 257-58. Cf. Geanakoplos, Greek Scholars in Venice: Studies in the Dissemination of Greek Learning from Byzantium to Western Europe, p. 265.} Erasmus compared Aldus’ collection to the fountainhead from which “all other good libraries all over the world are coming to birth and increasing.”\footnote{Erasmus in the adage titled *Herculei Labores* (1508) published in Mann Phillips, *Erasmus on his Times*, p. 28.}

The city on the lagoon, with its living classical heritage, was crucial to launching the international careers of both men, Desiderius Erasmus and Aldus Manutius. According to Nicol, Manutius’ decision to move from Rome to Venice was undoubtedly driven by realization that no other Italian city could provide all the requirements to make his enterprise feasible. “Venice alone had the raw material in the form of Greek manuscripts, a rich and leisured class who could afford the money to buy, and the time to read the classics in print - and above all the native Greek copyists, editors and typesetters.”\footnote{Nicol, Byzantium and Venice: A Study in Diplomatic and Cultural Relations, p. 420.} Geanakoplos matches this claim asserting that no other place in Europe would have launched Erasmus’ career as an internationally renowned philosopher and author better than Venice, one of the biggest centers of European print with its concentration of Greek scholarship.\footnote{Geanakoplos, Greek Scholars in Venice: Studies in the Dissemination of Greek Learning from Byzantium to Western Europe, p. 265.} The life paths of both men and their brief encounter in Venice clearly emphasize one of the main arteries, if not the single most important one, through which the Renaissance Europe rediscovered the intellectual heritage of the classical world.\footnote{For more on Manutius’ influence on the intellectual development in Europe, see Chapter VII: “The Great Diffusion” in Lowry, *The World of Aldus Manutius: Business and Scholarship in Renaissance Venice*. On Manutius’ contribution to the Spanish Renaissance and consequently also in Latin America see Clive Griffin, “Aldus Manutius’ Influence in the Hispanic World,” in *Aldus Manutius and Renaissance Culture*, ed. David S. Zeidberg (Florence, 1994).}
VIII. Venice and the Political Education of the Western World

As I attempted to emphasize in this essay, the idea of Venetian exceptionalism, or the myth of Venice, which was carefully constructed by city’s ruling elites, portrayed the Republic as the perfect state. The myth was gradually incorporated into the Venetian physical landscape, reflected in numerous sculptures, mosaics and paintings, reinforced through the display of sacred relics and embodied in secular or religious rituals. But it was also actively promoted abroad, first through the works of Venetian engravers, but increasingly through published works of early political scientists and officially sanctioned historiographers. “For letters and books constitute a fixed record of things and are the communal repository of all things knowable,” argued Pier Paolo Vergerio long before the invention of book print. And Vergerio was also amongst the first who, around the 1400, started to fix the myth of Venice in literary form. Domenico Morosini’s treatise De bene istituita re publica, published a hundred years later, was another important milestone in this process, and Cardinal Gasparo Contarini’s study, De magistratibus et republica Venetorum libri quinque, written between 1523-1524, is generally considered to be the definitive canonical work on the political organization of the Venetian republican system.

501 This subtitle is a clear allusion at the one used in Bouwsma, "Venice and the Political Education of Europe."
502 In his 1552 dedication to L'istituzione dell'uomo, Cardinal Piccolomini claimed that "to be called Venetian is the same as to be called perfect." In Alessandro Piccolomini, L’istituzione dell’uomo, Biblioteca Italiana (Roma, 2004). Document in electronic form - without pagination. The myth of Venice was the subject of numerous studies and publications. See Gilmore, "Myth and Reality in Venetian Political Theory.‖; David Rosand, Myths of Venice: The Figuration of a State (Chapel Hill, NC, 2001); Charles J. Rose, "Marc Antonio Venier, Renier Zeno and 'The Myth of Venice'," Historian 36 (May, 1974); and Eco O. G. Haitsma Mulier, The Myth of Venice and Dutch Republican Thought in the Seventeenth Century (Assen, NL, 1980).
503 Comparing the ideology of U.S. exceptionalism to a civic religion symbolically represented by the national flag, Marvin and Ingle claim that the "American culture is holographically saturated with the flag." A claim may be made that Venice was similarly ‘holographically saturated’ with the symbol of St. Mark – the winged Lion. Cf. Carolyn Marvin and David W. Ingle, Blood Sacrifice and the Nation: Totem Rituals and the American Flag (Cambridge, UK, 1999), p. 5.
analyzing the reasons for its success and longevity. Composed in Latin, Contarini’s study was published for the first time in Paris in 1534, with French and Italian translations appearing a year later. In 1599, it was translated to English and sold with great success in London. Political philosophers agree that in Contarini’s work, the myth of Venice achieved a historically fixed form in spite of the fact that it more-or-less only summarized arguments made long before him by various authors. Paradoxically, the book became popular in Europe at the time when the Venetian institutions themselves were already on the path of what later developments proved to be an irreversible decline.

According to Bouwsma, Contarini’s portrayal represented to the nascent modern world the central political values of Renaissance republicanism based on constitution and respect for laws, patriotism, and secularism. Venice demonstrated the latter especially in her triumph over the great Papal Interdict of 1606-07, helping to “strengthen the cause of the Moderns against the Ancients,” and thus played an important role in “the gathering self-confidence of modern Europe.” Consequently, the Venetian political system became an important object of study. But as Bouwsma points out, each of the scholars saw in the city what they wanted to see, some embracing, others totally repudiating its republican model. In doing so, they reflected their own cultural backgrounds and personal biases, yet they still heavily depended on the Venetian experience which helped them to catalyze their own ideas.

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506 Morosini, De bene istituita republica and Contarini, The Commonwealth and Gouvernement of Venice.
507 Gleason, Gasparo Contarini: Venice, Rome, and Reform, pp. 110-111; Finlay, Politics in Renaissance Venice, p. 222; and Gilmore, “Myth and Reality in Venetian Political Theory.”
Venetian Republicanism and English Political Thought

Lewis Lewkenor, in the foreword to his edition of Contarini’s work published in London in 1599 as *The Commonwealth and Government of Venice*, emphasized that he had many discussions about Venice with knowledgeable Englishmen, Frenchmen, Spaniards, Poles and Italians while preparing his translation. Some of them traveled to the most remote parts of Asia and Africa, yet in comparing the Venetian political system to whatever else they saw at home or abroad, “they would enforce their speech to the highest of all admiration, as being a thing of great worthinesse, and most infinitely remarkable, that they had seen in the whole course of their travels.” According to McPherson, Lewkenor’s translation became one of the key documents through which the myth of Venice had been transported to Elizabethan England, a country where it had one of its most profound effects. Long before its publication, William Thomas, a clerk of the Council to Edward VI, in *The Historie of Italie* (1549) dedicated a prominent spot to the Republic of Venice, discussing its unusual geographic position as well as its social and political system. Similarly Thomas Coryat’s 1611 famous travelogue, *Coryat’s Crudities*, contained a chapter titled “Observations of the Most Glorious, Peerlesse and Mayden Citie of Venice,” which helped kindle interest in the myth of Venice on the British Isles. The author elevated Venice’s beauty and social order above other famous European cities he described in his book.

Italian pilgrim and travel literature, either focusing on Venice or authored by famous Venetian

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511 Thomas, William, *The Historie of Italie*, pp. 73A-113A.

explorers, became very popular in Elizabethan England. In her research of original Italian works printed in London between 1549-1660, Scott lists more than 400 publications. Besides Nicolò Machiavelli and Gasparo Contarini, among the most popular Italian names of political writers published in Britain were Paolo Sarpi, Paolo Paruta and Giovanni Botero - each of them dedicated their most important works to the study of Venice.513

Consequently, in 1644 a group of English parliamentarians requested their Venetian ambassador to send them a copy of the city’s constitution.514 Symbolic of the high esteem Venetians enjoyed in Renaissance Europe was the title James Howell used for his 1648 anonymously published critical analysis of the political situation in England: *Venice Looking-Glasse* built on the premise that the politically savvy Venetians had the authority to correctly analyze the situation on British Islands.515 *La Serenissima* apparently further inspired Howell, who three years later published a study *Survay of The Signorie of Venice*. Proposing the Republic of Venice as a political model to be followed by England, the author argued that its institutions “were the fittest pattern on Earth both for direction and imitation.”516

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513 Mary Augusta Scott, "Elizabethan Translations from the Italian, with Annotations (IV)," *PMLA* 14 (1899): pp. 469-485. Sarpi and Paruta were Venetians whose works analyzed the city’s political system. Botero was an admirer of Venice from the Piedmont. Fra Paolo Sarpi’s anti-Papal writings were especially popular in Protestant England. His most important work, *History of the Council of Trent*, while banned in Venice, was for the first time printed in Italian under the pen name Paolo Soave as *Historia del Concilio Tridentino* (publisher Giovanni Billio, London, 1519); in 1526 his *Inediti Veneti Historia de motu Italici sub initio Pontificatus Pauli V* (written in 1606) was published in London; in 1639 *The History of the Inquisition* appeared on the market (published originally post-mortem in Venice, 1638). Botero’s *The Travellers Breviat, or an Historical Description of the Most Famous Kingdomes in the World* was printed in London in 1601 (it is a partial translation of his *Relationi universali*, originally printed in Venice, 1591); Botero’s *A Treatise Concerning the Causes of the Magnificencie and Greatnes of Cities* was printed in London in 1606 (original edition: Venice, 1596). Paruta’s *Political Discourses* dedicated to Venice’s history and political system were published in London in 1657 (original edition: Venice, 1599); his *The History of Venice* was printed in London a year later (original edition: Venice, 1605). Most of the above-mentioned works had consecutive reprints. Cf. Scott, "Elizabethan Translations from the Italian, with Annotations (IV)."


515 This work was officially attributed to an anonymous “Venetian Clarissimo” - Howell is listed only as a translator. It is generally assumed that he indeed was the author. There is no mention of Venice in the letter whatsoever - its name was used only in the title, to bolster the credentials of the author. See James Howell, *A Venice Looking-Glasse*, or, *A letter Written Very Lately from London to Rome, by a Venetian Clarissimo to Cardinal Barberino* (London, 1648).

It is noteworthy to mention that the most influential utopian works written in this period in England placed their ideal republics on an island, emulating the unusual geographic situation of Venice. A study about the Venetian republican system written by Florentine admirer Donato Giannotti, *Dialogi de Republica Venetorum* (1540), which served as direct inspiration for James Harrington’s *Oceania* (1656). His work was dedicated to Oliver Cromwell and was intended by Harrington as a feasible political program inspired by the Venetian experience. It was only a twist of destiny which later accorded it the label ‘utopia’. Harrington emphasized that the Venetian system had many faults, yet he still saw it as worthy of being emulated for the simple fact that it represented the best answer to the Renaissance quest for social and political stability:

>To come unto experience, Venice, notwithstanding that we have found some flaws in it, is the only Commonwealth, in the make whereof, no man can find a cause of dissolution; for which reason wee behold her (albeit she consist of men that are not without sin) at this day with one thousand years upon her back, for any internal cause, as young, as fresh, and free from decay, or any appearance of it, as she was born, but whatever in nature, is not sensible of decay by the course of a thousand years, is capable of the whole age of nature: by which calculation for any check that I am able to give myself; a Commonwealth rightly ordered, may for any internal causes be as immortal, or long-lived as the World.

John Milton’s essay *Ready and Easy Way to Establish a Free Commonwealth* (1660) proves that the influential political philosopher was well acquainted with Harrington’s *Oceania* and while dismissing the Venetian experience, Milton himself inadvertently modeled his ideal state after the political system of Venice. A key role in his free commonwealth was assigned to the

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system of checks and balances based on a mixed form of government, and to the separation of church and state, which Milton saw as an important guarantee of civil liberty.\footnote{John Milton, \textit{The Readie & Easie Way to Establish a Free Commonwealth} (London, 1660). On the first reading, it seems that Milton refused the Venetian model when he asked his compatriots that, in the process of looking for the best way to organize English government, they keep themselves “from the fond conceit of something like a duke of Venice, put lately into many heads.” Yet Fink argues that Milton himself inadvertently adopted many features characteristic to the Venetian political system. In Fink, \textit{“Venice and English Political Thought in the Seventeenth Century,”} pp. 165-72; and Z. S. Fink, \textit{“The Theory of the Mixed State and the Development of Milton's Political Thought,” PMLA} 3 (1942): p. 708.}

**Venice and Political Thinking across the Alps**

England was not the only country where the Venetian myth found its admirers. By the end of the 15\textsuperscript{th} century, Venice became a mandatory pilgrim stop on the way to and from Jerusalem. Those who returned from long journeys were telling incredible stories back home about the peculiar city built on water, its immeasurable wealth and remarkable institutions.\footnote{German Felix Fabri traveled through Venice twice, in 1480 and in 1483-84. Milanese pilgrim Pietro Casola visited the city in 1494. In Casola, \textit{Canon Pietro Casola's Pilgrimage to Jerusalem in the Year 1494}; and Fabri, \textit{The Book of the Wanderings of Felix Fabri} (Circa 1480-1483 A.D.).} In the intellectual circles of Europe, the commercial and political success of Venice kindled the belief that ancient virtues and political ideals could find their effective expression also in the rising modern world.\footnote{Bouwsma, \textit{“Venice and the Political Education of Europe,”} p. 453.} A key figure of 17\textsuperscript{th} century Dutch political life, Johan De Witt (1625-72), supported the idea that individual city-states of the United Provinces should emulate the political constitution of Venice.\footnote{In his February 1, 1551 speech to Dutch Grand Assembly, the future head of the United Provinces, Johan De Witt, among others, invoked the internal stability of Venice, attributing it to its mixed form of government: “Which blessing we are longing for, …to see imparted likewise to this our dear Father-land and famous Republick.” The whole speech is reprinted in Lieuwe van Aitzema, \textit{Notable Revolutions: Beeing a True Relation of What Hap'ned in the United Provinces of the Netherlends in the Years MDCL and MDCLI} (London, 1653), p. 255. Similarly Pieter de la Court pointed out the reasons of Venetian political independence (p. 302) and internal social stability (p. 375), the separation of Church and State (p. 405), and prosperity in spite of precarious geography similar to Holland (p. 433). All in Pieter de la Court, \textit{The True Interest and Political Maxims of the Republick of Holland and West-Friesland} (London, 1702). For more on this topic see also Mulier, \textit{The Myth of Venice and Dutch Republican Thought in the Seventeenth Century}.} Intense merchant and artistic contacts with Venice sparked interest in classical philosophy in southern Germany, triggering its own cultural and philosophical
In France, interest in Venetian affairs undoubtedly has its deep roots in the lengthy military conflicts which, during the High Renaissance, put Venice in the position of a sworn enemy. An immediate intellectual impulse to study the Venetian system of government may have been the success of Ambassador Philippe de Commines’ memoires published in 1528 in Paris, containing vivid descriptions of the city and its politics. This curiosity was later cultivated mainly through the writings of political philosopher Jean Bodin (c. 1529-96), and the secretary to the French ambassador to Venice, Amelot de la Houssaie (1634-1706). Bodin and Houssaie were very critical towards the Venetian system, which they overall portrayed as decadent. Yet they were both inspired by the Republic’s ability to assert her independence from the Roman Church. “Though the State of Venice is at this day in its declension, even in the condition it is, it retains something of its Majesty,” noted Houssaie in the dedication to his study *Histoire du gouvernement de Venise* published in Paris in 1675. Bodin pointed out the fact that as in England, Venetian nobles could have participated in trade and to marry non-noble women, which secured a certain degree of social mobility also for non-noble classes.

Before he started working on his *Spirit of the Laws* (1748), Montesquieu set out for a lengthy study trip visiting, among others, all important Italian city-states. As a result, he dedicated a

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525 Roeck outlines the complex scheme of personal contacts involving merchants who resided at the Fondaco dei Tedeschi: The German printers working in Venice; book dealers and venture capitalists who invested in Venetian book print; Albert Dürer’s two study trips to Venice; his correspondence with Willibald Pirckheimer who himself studied in Padua and is considered the father of German Renaissance; as well as the important collections of Greek manuscripts acquired through Venice by the city of Nurnberg and later by the Fugger family from Augsburg. In Roeck, "Venice and Germany: Commercial Contacts and Intellectual Inspirations."

526 This sentiment is clearly recognizable in the memoires of Commines, Priuli and Sanudo. See for example the signing of the first Holy League in 1495, described by Commines, *The historie of Philip de Commines Knight, Lord of Argenton."


529 Bodin, *Les six livres de la Republique*. For more on this topic see Bouwsma, "Venice and the Political Education of Europe," p. 460.
significant portion of his major work to the analysis of the Venetian system, relying on his own observations as well as on Houssaie’s work. 530 Jean-Jacques Rousseau recalled reading Venetian histories in his early childhood together with his father. 531 In the autobiographical work Confessions, Rousseau admitted that the desire to write philosophical works about politics was born during his stay in Venice as secretary to the French ambassador (1743-44), which gave him the opportunity to compare the idealized image of Venice from his childhood with the corrupt and outdated regime of the declining Republic. At the same time, comparing it to the authoritarian, yet efficient Calvinist government of his native Geneva, Rousseau came to the realization that “everything is rooted in politics, and that, whatever the circumstances, a people will never be other than the nature of its government.” 532 An important issue which Rousseau raised in The Social Contract was whether the republican governments, which proved their historical viability at the level of European city-states, could be implemented on the much wider scale of nation-states like France or Russia. 533 Consequently, his work had an important impact on the U.S. founding fathers in their attempt to put into operation a republican government on the continental scale, a subject which will be discussed in detail in one of the next chapters. 534


533 Rousseau argued that “the more the social bond is stretched, the slackler it becomes; and in general a small state is relatively stronger for its size than a large one.” In Rousseau, The Social Contract, p. 51.

534 John Dewey described the central dilemma of early American democracy as “how to reach a free common intelligence like the Greeks, and yet make it cover a much wider territory.” As cited in Jean B. Quandt, From the Small Town to the Great Community: The Social Thought of Progressive Intellectuals (New Brunswick, NJ, 1970), p. 53.
The U.S. Founding Fathers and the Heritage of the Venetian Renaissance

It is clear that Renaissance Venice became one of the key entry points through which the basic categories of classical Greek philosophy reemerged in the political thinking of early modern Europe. From there they made their way into North America. There is a paradox and irony contained in this claim, because by the time of the drafting of the U.S. Constitution in 1787, the very name of Venice became “shorthand for despotic tyranny and political corruption,” well deserving its reputation of being the gaudiest stop on the grand tour for European and American upper class youth.\textsuperscript{535} As if that was not enough, Thomas Jefferson declared Plato’s work confused and boring, and dismissed the validity of Aristotle’s ideas for the U.S. republican government arguing that “so different was the style of society then, and with those people, from what is now and with us, that I think little edification can be obtained from their writings on the subject of government.”\textsuperscript{536} Yet the intellectual leaders of American republicanism such as John Adams, Thomas Jefferson, and James Madison were also keen admirers of the works of Harrington, Milton, Montesquieu or Rousseau.\textsuperscript{537} Even Alexander Hamilton in his writings


\textsuperscript{536} The quote pertaining to Aristotle is from Jefferson’s letter to Isaac H. Tiffany, a resident of New York, who sent him a comprehensive chart of the evolution of different governments. Dated 26 August, 1816 from Monticello. In Thomas Jefferson, \textit{The Essential Jefferson}, ed. Jean M. Yarbrough (Indianapolis, IN, 2006), p. 246. On July 5, 1814, Jefferson wrote to John Adams from Monticello: “Having more leisure there than here for reading, I amused myself with reading seriously Plato’s \textit{Republic}. I am wrong however in calling it amusement, for it was the heaviest task-work I ever went through. I had occasionally before taken up some of his other works, but scarcely ever had patience to go through a whole dialogue.” In Thomas Jefferson, \textit{Letters}, ed. Merrill D. Peterson (New York, 1984), p. 1341.

\textsuperscript{537} In 1771, Jefferson recommended that Milton, Locke, Montesquieu and Rousseau should be part of a gentleman’s library. In Jefferson, \textit{Letters}, pp. 743-45. In a letter to Joseph C. Cabell from Monticello, dated 2 February, 1816 Jefferson wrote: “Doctor Smith, you say, asks what is the best elementary book on the principles of government? None in the world equal to the \textit{Review of Montesquieu}, printed at Philadelphia a few years ago. It has the advantage, too, of being equally sound and corrective of the principles of political economy; and all within the compass of a thin octavo.” In Jefferson, \textit{Letters}, p. 1378. According to Sheldon, Harrington and Montesquieu were among the most important ‘modern’ republican thinkers who inspired Jefferson. In Garrett Ward Sheldon, \textit{The Political Philosophy of Thomas Jefferson} (Baltimore, 1991), pp. 7-8. The 19th century US historian Dwight claimed: “Our statesman knew the thought of Harrington and Hobbes and Milton, as we to-day know those of Washington, Adams, Hamilton, and Jefferson. John Adams was perfectly familiar with Harrington’s \textit{Oceania} and much influenced by his
echoed Greek and Venetian philosophical thoughts about the nature of republican governments.\footnote{538} Carrithers claims that while designing their ideal republic, the U.S. founding fathers “borrowed right and left, and so made up the splendid mosaic, called the United States constitution.”\footnote{539} John Adams’ famous phrase about the “government of laws and not of men,” which became part of the Massachusetts Constitution, was taken directly from Harrington’s \textit{Oceania} who, in turn, modeled his ideal state on Venice and was paraphrasing Aristotle.\footnote{540}

While reading works of the English and French political philosophers, the U.S. founding fathers were often oblivious to the fact that they were learning also about the Venetian social and political system, and through Venice, they were confronting their own social and political ideas with ancient philosophies generated by classical Athens.\footnote{541} In the meantime, Venice, engulfed in lengthy wars with the Ottoman Empire and European powers, lost its most lucrative naval trade to Portugal and became more and more economically dependent on its holdings on the Italian mainland.\footnote{542} At the dawn of the Enlightenment, the Republic of Venice was definitely

\footnote{538} The Venetians believed that the nature of republican government is pacific and trade is a much more virtuous way of earning a living than the feudal system of servitude. Hamilton echoed this claim when in \textit{The Federalist Papers} (no. 6, titled “Concerning Dangers from Dissensions Between the States”) he wrote: “The genius of republics (say they) is pacific; the spirit of commerce has a tendency to soften the manners of men, and to extinguish those inflammable humors which have so often kindled into wars. Commercial republics, like ours, will never be disposed to waste themselves in ruinous contentions with each other. They will be governed by mutual interest, and will cultivate a spirit of mutual amity and concord.” In Alexander Hamilton, James Madison, and John Jay, \textit{The Federalist Papers}, ed. Clinton Rossiter and Charles R. Kesler (New York, 1999), p. 25.

\footnote{539} Dwight, "Harrington and His Influence upon American Political Institutions and Political Thought "; p. 3. John Adams opened \textit{A Defense of the Constitutions of Government of the United States} with a treatise entitled “History of the Principal Republics of the World,” examining the ancient republics but also the political systems of Venice, Bern, and Dutch cities. See John Adams, \textit{History of the Principal Republics of the World} (London, 1794).


\footnote{541} As an example, Lane points out that the fact that the U.S. founding fathers wanted to avoid partisan politics and political parties almost certainly had its roots in Venice. In Lane, \textit{Venice: A Maritime Republic}, p. 110.

\footnote{542} See the selection from Priuli’s diaries dedicated to the Portuguese challenge to Venice’s spice trade monopoly published in Priuli, \textit{I Portoghesi nell'India e i Veneziani in Egitto} . The spice trade was extremely lucrative for private merchants as well as for the state. Priuli noted that the spices purchased by the Portuguese in Calicut for one ducat were sold in Lisbon for 60-120 ducats, including state taxes (Ibid., p. 160). It is clear that the Venetians were upset when they learned that the Portuguese ships on their route East in order to reach the islands of which “era patron il Colombo” - were seen in ‘Cholocut’ and in ‘Adem’ (Calcutta and Aden?). “Questa nova et effecto mi par grandissimo, se è vero. Tamen io non li presto autenticha fede” - this news
downgraded to the level of a secondary European power, while England gradually became seen as the beacon of utopian dreams. Both Voltaire and Montesquieu looked upon London with the same admiration Europe used to reserve for *la Serenissima*:

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Rival of Athens, London, blest indeed
That why thy tyrants had the wit to chase
The prejudices civil factions breed
Men speak their thoughts and worth can win its place
In London, who has talent, he is great.  
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Like the Republic of Venice, early modern England was admired as a free nation in which the power of the state and the influence of the church were clearly separated, and where the danger of tyranny was prevented by the balance of powers between the Royal Court and the Parliament. Like Venice, it seemed to be ruled by the letter of law instead of the vices of men, fostering free trade and personal liberties. Bouwsma concludes that even the distortions of the English model had their origins in the Venetian experience. They were passed down together with the generational torch from one city which used to dominate the entire modern Western world system to another.  

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Chapter 3 /
DEFOE’S LONDON: THE CHANGING WORLD OF AN ENGLISH MERCHANT

As Daniel Defoe’s (c. 1649-1731) biographer Jack Lindsay observed, no other writer more fully chronicled and discussed his City and his Time. The material conveyed in almost four hundred books, treatises, pamphlets, as well as countless newspaper articles, yields a complex mosaic of the profound changes which took place within the late 17th and early 18th century urban fabric of the English metropolis. The life of the city, as captured in Defoe’s writings, was full of internal contradictions. The same London coffeehouses which had been celebrated by Habermas as the birthplace of modern democracy are portrayed by the author also as “places of new invention for a depravation of our manners and morals” where “the brokers, those vermin of trade,” gather to conduct their financial schemes. It was in coffeehouses where they conceived the South Sea Bubble, the earliest known stock market crash of 1720, with the assistance of fabricated news stories spread also through the newly established medium of the free press. In the writings of Defoe, an attentive reader can capture the early signs of dialectic tension between the forces emphasizing, on one hand, the democratic function of the emerging bourgeois public sphere, and on the other, the relentless efforts of private interests for its commodification. To add one more layer to this complex picture, the entire urban structure of London transformed right in front of Defoe’s eyes, reflecting the wider social changes within British society, the ascendency

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of the role of the Parliament, changes within English families, abstraction of values and the rise of a consumer society, as well as new means of transportation. And again, Daniel Defoe masterfully captured them all in his literary undertakings.

I. Making a Case for London: The Monstrous City

“Sir, as I am now in the center of this work, so I am to describe the great center of England, the City of London and the parts adjacent,” Defoe begins a part of his travelogue, *A Tour Thro' the Whole Island of Great Britain*, dedicated to what he calls ‘a monstrous City’ which during his own lifetime saw an unprecedented growth in both its volume and its riches. Reaching about 600,000 inhabitants by 1700, London became not only the largest, but also the fastest growing metropolitan urban area in Europe (Figures 4.1. and 4.2.). Not even the plague of 1665, when the city was so depopulated that grass grew in its streets, nor the Great Fire of 1666, which destroyed almost all of its buildings, had enough power to derail London from its path to success. On the contrary, that which did not kill the city made it even stronger. “London only became worth living since it was reduced to ashes,” argued Voltaire century later.

Many of the Elizabethan reforms, which in the late 16th century kicked off England’s unprecedented economic growth, were about to bear significant fruit during Defoe’s lifetime.

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6 Lindsay points out that Defoe’s own wild estimates in the *Tour* were much higher, reaching about million and a half people who lived in London in the mid-1720s. See Lindsay, *The Monster City*, p. 7.
7 In *A Journal of the Plague Year* Defoe wrote “the great streets within the city, such as Leadenhall Street, Bishopsgate Street, Cornhill, and even the Exchange itself, had grass growing in them in several places.” In another passage Defoe mentioned a critical period “in the beginning of September, when, indeed, good people were beginning to think that God was resolved to make a full end of the people in this miserable city.” In Daniel Defoe, *A Journal of the Plague Year: Being Observations or Memorials, of the Most Remarkable Occurrences, as Well Publick as Private* (London, 1722). Cf. T. F. Reddaway, *The Rebuilding of London* (London, 1940).
9 More on this topic see Jan de Vries and Ad van der Woude, *The First Modern Economy: Success, Failure, and Perseverance of the Dutch Economy, 1500-1815* (Cambridge, UK; New York, 1997).
Figure 4.1. Unknown Author, Map of London, c. 1580.
Figure 4.2. Jan Kip, Map of London, 1724.
The open confrontation with France, which the country entered in the aftermath of the Glorious Revolution of 1688, stimulated new developments in England’s commerce and industry. In order to finance the conflict, the State needed to secure immense loans, resulting in the foundation of the Bank of England (1694), the establishment of the national debt, and an extensive system of public credit.\(^\text{10}\) Public expenditures rose nearly threefold overnight, running around £5-6 million a year between 1689 and 1702.\(^\text{11}\) There was an enormous increase of joint-stock companies, set up to manufacture not only armaments, but also commodities such as paper, fabrics, glass, coal, copper, lead and salt, previously imported from the Continent. In this context, Wilson argues, to apply the term ‘money market’ to seventeenth-century England is to suggest a subtle ‘refinement’ of its financial procedures that did not yet exist. After 1720 one cannot avoid using the term.\(^\text{12}\) As credit became the king of English society, Defoe lamented that “we see very considerable families who buy nothing but on trust; even bread, beer, butter, cheese, beef, and mutton, wine, groceries.”\(^\text{13}\) As a tradesman, he appreciated credit for “the easiness of terms on which the merchant may have money,” giving him the opportunity “to venture further in trade than otherwise he would do.”\(^\text{14}\) But as a man of strict Calvinist morals, he warned his peer merchants that borrowing money upon interest is “one of the most dangerous things a tradesman is exposed to.”\(^\text{15}\)


\(^{11}\) See Owens, "Introduction."


\(^{13}\) Defoe, The Complete English Tradesman, in Familiar Letters; Directing Him in all the Several Parts and Progressions of Trade, vol. 1, p. 340.

\(^{14}\) Defoe, Essays Upon Several Projects: or, Effectual Ways for Advancing the Interest of the Nation, pp. 36-37.

\(^{15}\) Daniel Defoe, The Complete English Tradesman, in Familiar Letters; Directing Him in all the Several Parts and Progressions of Trade, 2nd ed., 2 vols. (Dublin, 1726), p. xii. Note that all remaining quotes used in this essay are taken from the 1727 edition of Defoe’s Tradesman published in London. Defoe was brought up among the Dissenters, an English religious faction which advocated strict adherence to Calvinist Protestant reforms and refused any compromise with the popish Catholic Church. Their radicalism resulted in a split also from the Church of England. In the treatise Augusta Triumphans Defoe defended
There was another important development which later enabled Habermas to locate his idealized public sphere into late 17th century London. The political discourse of Republican Venice was still dominated by the paradigm of secrecy and privilege, regardless of the fact that even the most secret state documents were leaked and became the subject of public discourse. In Britain, the right of parliamentary debate was already established by the end of the Tudor era (1485-1603), but disclosure and public discussion of parliamentary debate was still considered a crime. It was only in the mid-17th century when social historians noted the shift from norms of secrecy to open appeals to public opinion emerging as the normative ideal of communicative practice in England. This development is the focus of David Zaret’s book *Origins of Democratic Culture* (2000), which fills an important gap between the secretive practices of political discourse discussed in my previous essay on Venice, and the atmosphere of Defoe’s London in which we can already see the tendencies of political philosophy to elevate, and even fetishize public opinion as the cornerstone of a well-governed society. And it was this development which ushered in the generation of liberal political philosophers headed by John Locke (1632-1704) with their attempt “to uphold democratic conceptions of political order that presuppose the existence, rationality, and normative authority of public opinion.” All in all, this is a rough outline of some of the profound changes in English society which set the stage for the era when Daniel Defoe published most of his seminal works.

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17. Note that as an author, Defoe matured only in his forties. The last thirty years of his life became the most prolific publishing period. Defoe died in 1731 at the age of 72. For more see Ward, Waller, and Trent, eds., *The Cambridge History of English and American Literature*. 

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Daniel Defoe: A True Londoner

Defoe was indeed a Londoner by birth. His birthplace was probably the populous parish of St. Giles in Cripplegate, right outside the walls on the northern outskirts of the City where his father probably had a small butcher shop. But by 1667, his family was already living inside the City walls in Jones’s Rents, off Swan Alley. Shortly after his marriage in 1684, Defoe opened a small trading business in Freemen’s Yard, next to Lythe’s coffeehouse, in a small court adjacent to the Royal Exchange. His residence had a disposition typical for a merchant’s house of those days. On the ground floor was his warehouse, on the second floor was the counting house and all remaining space above it was occupied by Defoe’s family. Later he started a brick factory in Essex and possibly imported wines from Spain, Portugal, or France. But his entrepreneurial career wasn’t without struggle. After a 1692 bankruptcy and ensuing financial troubles, Defoe spent time in jail and often changed residences while hiding from his prosecutors. His family belonged to a radical movement of the Dissenters - Protestants who opposed the ‘liberalism’ of the established Church of England, and a satirical pamphlet The Shortest-Way with the Dissenters which he published in 1702 resulted in severe punishment in the form of public

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19 By 1720 Jones’s Rents became “a ruinous place, the houses ready to fall down.” In John Stow, A Survey of London and Westminster ed. John Strype - an edited and updated 1633 publication (London, 1720), p. 64.
20 For a description of central London streets rebuilt after the 1666 fire see Vanessa Harding, "City, Capital, and Metropolis: The Changing Shape of Seventeenth-Century London’s Geography, 1600-1750," in Imagining Early Modern London: perceptions and Portrayals of the city from Stow to Strype, 1598-1720, ed. J. F. Merritt (Cambridge, UK; New York, 2001). Harding claims that “the high property values of the city centre meant, however, that the quality of accommodation was fairly high: the demand for substantial houses at high rents, not multiple dwellings at lower cost.” This resulted in building upwards, houses rose to four, five, or six stories yielding more rooms per family and fewer families shared houses (ibid., p. 124).
21 “All my prospects were built on a manufacture I had erected in Essex...I employed a hundred poor families at work and it began to pay me very well...I began to live, took a good house, bought me a coach and horses a second time...But I was ruined the shortest way...” wrote Defoe to his political protector - Speaker of the House of Commons and later Chancellor of the Exchequer - Robert Harley on May 16, 1704. In Daniel Defoe, The Letters of Daniel Defoe (Oxford, UK, 1955), p. 17.
pillory and ensuing imprisonment.\textsuperscript{23} To ease his personal troubles, Defoe had to at least partially sacrifice his moral integrity, entering into confidential service for House Speaker Robert Harley. This moral compromise, which is quite recurrent in his life and work, makes Defoe in the eyes of his biographers a kind of an enigma. Ward et al. argue that “it seems impossible for the close student of Defoe’s political writings, despite the sympathy he must feel for a kindly, brilliant and hardly used man, not to agree, in the main, with the contemporaries who denounced him.”\textsuperscript{24} Harley understood the power of the word and famously employed not only Defoe, but also his famous contemporary Jonathan Swift, in his service for covert government propaganda.\textsuperscript{25} This assignment gave Defoe further opportunities to travel as a spy mainly through England and Scotland, which gave him more opportunities to get to know also the most remote parts of the country.\textsuperscript{26} By 1704 the writer’s family was living at his in-laws house at Newington Green about 5 miles north of London. Consequently, Defoe had a firsthand experience with the suburban boom which the city underwent in the early 1700s.\textsuperscript{27} His tomb is in neighboring Islington, where he with great probability also died in 1731.\textsuperscript{28}

\textsuperscript{24} Ward, Waller, and Trent, eds., The Cambridge History of English and American Literature, p. 20.
\textsuperscript{25} For more see Harold F. Graves, "Daniel Defoe, Director of Propaganda: A Study of Defoe's Methods for Promoting the Union of Scotland and England" (Pennsylvania State University, 1934). and Anne McKim, Defoe in Scotland: A Spy Among Us (Dalkeith, UK, 2006).
\textsuperscript{26} Defoe’s Tour is a direct result of this service. See Daniel Defoe, A Tour Thro' London about the Year 1725. Being a Letter V and Parts of Letter VI of A Tour Thro' the Whole Island of Great Britain. Divided into Circuits or Journeys, ed. Sir Mayson M. Bee ton and E. Beresford Chancellor (London; New York, 1969). In 1706 Defoe published in London a propagandist study called An Essay at Removing National Prejudices against a Union with Scotland. In the aftermath of Anglo-Scottish Union of 1707, during his extended visits of Scotland on behalf of Harley, Defoe gained the trust of local Scottish leaders who did not suspect him of working as a spy for London governments. For more see McKim, Defoe in Scotland: A Spy Among Us.
\textsuperscript{27} Peterson, "Defoe and Westminster, 1696-1706."
\textsuperscript{28} Lysons claims that “Defoe, the well known author of Robinson Crusoe, and many other works, received his education at Newington Green. He died at Islington, in 1731.” In Lysons, The Environs of London: Being an Historical Account of the Towns, Villages, and Hamlets, Within Twelve Miles of That Capital, p. 139.
II. The Rise of the New Aristocracy: News, Money and Politics

In spite of his own dubious success as a merchant, Defoe was very proud of the role that tradesmen - this nascent class of urban aristocracy - played in English society. In his judgment, it was pretty obvious that “our traffic has increased our riches,” driving up the manufacturing, domestic and the foreign trade. 29 “This being the case in England, and our trade being so vastly great, it is no wonder that the tradesmen in England fill the lists of our nobility and gentry.” And the comparison to aristocracy was not just a metaphor. Defoe himself gradually ‘upgraded’ his name from simple Foe, through De Foe, to finally Defoe. 30 He observed the enriched English tradesmen “coming every day to the Herald’s Office, to search for the coats-of-arms of their ancestors, in order to paint them upon their coaches, and engrave them upon their plate, embroider them upon their furniture, or carve them upon the pediments of their new houses.” 31

Contrary to the customs prevailing at that time in most of the other European countries where the traditional landed aristocracy did not mingle with the merchant class, in England “the gentlemen of the best families marry tradesmen's daughters, and put their younger sons as apprentices to tradesmen.” 32 Indeed, in England, the ascending aristocracy of money was publicly celebrated. Joseph Addison confessed in his coffeehouse newsletter The Spectator that there was no place in the town which he so much loved to frequent as the Royal Exchange. “It gives me a secret satisfaction, and in some measure, gratifies my vanity, as I am an Englishman, to see so rich an

29 Defoe, The Complete English Tradesman, in Familiar Letters; Directing Him in all the Several Parts and Progressions of Trade, vol. 1, p. 319.
30 By 1695 he started to use the prefix “De,” signing his name as “De Foe”. Out of this very soon came the final form of his last name “Defoe”. For more see Bastian, Defoe’s Early Life, pp. 189-190.
31 Defoe, The Complete English Tradesman, in Familiar Letters; Directing Him in all the Several Parts and Progressions of Trade, vol. 1, p. 311.
32 Ibid., vol. 1, p. 310. A Swiss visitor to London, Cesar De Saussure, noticed that “merchants come after the clergy, and in England commerce is not looked down upon as being derogatory, as it is in France and Germany, Here men of good family and even of rank may become merchants without losing caste. In Cesar De Saussure, A Foreign View of England in 1725-1729: The Letters of Monsieur Cesar De Saussure to his Family, Madame Van Muyden trans. (London, 1995), p. 133.
assembly of countrymen and foreigners consulting together upon the private business of mankind, and making this Metropolis a kind of *Emporium* for the whole Earth... Trade, without enlarging the *British* Territories, has given us a kind of additional Empire.”

**Traditional Commodity Traders and the Flow of Information**

For most of the second half of the 17th century there were only official royal *gazettes* printed in Britain and the public had to rely for independent information mostly on imported Dutch and Portuguese-Spanish newspapers. “We had no such thing as printed newspapers in those days, to spread rumors and reports of things, and to improve them by the invention of men, as I have lived to see practiced since,” wrote Defoe in the opening paragraphs of his memoirs of the plague year of 1665. “But such things as those were gathered from the letters of merchants and others who corresponded abroad, and from them was handed about by word of mouth only; so that things did not spread instantly over the whole nation, as they do now.”

London’s first uncensored daily newspaper, the *Daily Currant*, was launched in 1702 - seven years after the Licensing Act of 1662 lapsed and was not renewed. In the 1720s, Cesar De Saussure, a Swiss visitor to London, counted about a dozen different regular papers which were printed in town - some issued every day, others twice a week or only once. He noted that in them

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34 In 1663 the government set up a paper called *The Public Intelligencer*, which came out on August 31, and continued to be published twice a week until January 19, 1665 when it was superseded by the scheme of publishing the *London Gazette*, the first number of which appeared on February 4 of the same year. Parallel *Gazettes* were published in Belfast for Ireland and in Edinburgh for Scotland. The content of those newspapers was often mentioned by Pepys in his diaries. See Samuel Pepys, *The Diary of Samuel Pepys, M.A., F.R.S., Clerk of the Acts and Secretary to the Admiralty*, ed. Mynors Bright, Richard Griffin Braybrooke, and Henry Benjamin Wheatley, Bohn’s historical library (London; New York, 1893).


36 Lindsay, *The Monster City*, p. 86. Owens notes that on 3 May 1695, the Licensing Act of 1662 lapsed and was not renewed. Under the terms of this act, the press in England had been restricted in three important ways: (1) the number of master printers was limited to twenty; (2) all published works had to be entered in the Registers of the Stationers’ Company; and (3) it was illegal to publish any material which had not been licensed by the Lord Chancellor, the Archbishop of Canterbury, or one of the Secretaries of State. For more see Owens, "Introduction."
“you read news from foreign countries, generally copied from the Dutch gazette,” but also amusing announcements of ladies who offer five guineas for their lost dogs worth five pence, or of an angry husband warning merchants not to sell any more to his wife on credit.37

As a merchant, Defoe fully understood the power of information. The tradesmen’s meetings were for him like the merchants’ exchange, where they manage, negotiate, and, indeed, beget business with one another because it is “in conversing with men of trade, [that] they get trade.” He made it clear enough that by ‘conversing’ he didn’t mean the gossip and chatter proverbially practiced in coffeehouses, but the personal encounters with other merchants at Royal Exchange or traditional meetings at the company halls where fellow members of a particular guild took “suitable occasions to discourse with their fellow tradesmen, meeting them in the way of their business, and improving their spare hours together.”38 Defoe warned his tradesman “to be absent from ‘Change, which is his market… at the times when the merchants generally go about the buy.”39 According to John Macky, that period of the day was from half past one till three in the afternoon.40 Thus, it was mostly the information channeled by business correspondence and private intelligence letters through which Defoe the merchant became a global citizen, who, sitting in his counting house, could have at once conversed with whole world:

Every new voyage the merchant contrives is a project; and ships are sent from port to port, as markets and merchandises differ, by the help of strange and universal intelligence—wherein some are so exquisite, so swift, and so exact, that a merchant sitting at home in his counting-house at once converses with all parts of the known world. This and travel make

38 Defoe, The Complete English Tradesman, in Familiar Letters; Directing Him in all the Several Parts and Progressions of Trade, vol. 1, p. 45.
40 Macky wrote that “the Royal Exchange is the resort of all the trading parts of this city, foreign and domestic, from half an hour after one till near three in the afternoon: but the better sorts generally meet in Exchange Alley a little before at three celebrated coffee houses, called Garaway’s, Robin’s, and Johathan’s.” In John Macky, A Journey Through England: In Familiar Letters From a Gentleman Here, to His Friend Abroad (London, 1714), p. 112.
a true-bred merchant the most intelligent man in the world, and consequently the most capable, when urged by necessity, to contrive new ways to live.41

While Defoe the merchant saw the information only as the means to increase his trade, the owners of Lloyd’s coffeehouse were amongst the first in London to recognize the commercial value of the information per se, and already in the mid-1690s introduced a three-times-weekly newsletter with shipping news of the ports at home and abroad. After the first six months the government attempted to suppress it, but Lloyd’s followed up with a samizdat newsletter focusing on shipping and trading intelligence which was passed from hand-to-hand or read out loud at the coffeehouse from the pulpit.42 Morley points out the pains which were taken by merchants to get early ship news at Lloyd’s. But the same coffeehouse was used also by underwriters and insurers of ships’ cargoes for their business meetings, laying the foundation for one of the most prestigious insurance company of modern times. 43 A poem titled The Wealthy Shopkeeper, printed originally in 1700, captured Lloyd’s growing prestige among merchants:

…Now to Lloyd’s Coffee-house he [merchant] never fails,
To read the Letters, and attend the Sales…44

According to 19th century British historian Thomas Babington Macaulay, in the absence of regular newspapers, the coffeehouses became “the chief organs through which the public opinion of the metropolis vented itself.” Every such establishment had one or more orators “to whose

42 Lindsay, The Monster City, pp. 61-62.
43 Morley added that Lloyd’s coffee-house was “afterwards removed to Pope’s Head Alley, as the New Lloyd’s Coffee House; again removed in 1774 to a corner of the Old Royal Exchange; and in the building of the new Exchange was provided with the rooms now [1891] known as 'Lloyd's Subscription Rooms,' an institution which forms part of our commercial system.” See Henry Morley’s footnotes to 19th century reprint of Addison’s and Steele’s The Spectator, April 23, 1711. In Addison and Steele, The Spectator: A New Edition Reproducing the Original Text…1711-1712.
44 The Spectator, Monday, April 23, 1711. As reprinted in ibid.
eloquence the crowd listened with admiration, and who soon became, what the journalists of our own time have been called, ‘a fourth estate of the realm’.

In his early days, especially in the context of his own experience at the pillory, Defoe defended the freedom of press mainly as a guarantor of religious freedom. He understood that there were hack-authors whose material interests “entirely oblig’d [them] to prostrate their pens to the town, as ladies of pleasure do their bodies,” but the freedom of the press in his eyes was so fundamental that he was willing to pay this price. This was because, he argued echoing Milton’s *Areopagitica* (1644), that it is “chiefly owing to writing that we have our most valuable liberties preserved.” Later in life Defoe himself became a very successful author, which turned him into an even more staunch defender of the freedom of the press, and as such embraced the commercial value of printed information. He argued that as “getting money is the chief business of the world,” and there are “several ways of accumulating wealth introduced in Exchange Alley,” so the writers and printers “should be permitted the liberty of writing and printing of either side for bread, free from ignominy.” But not everyone agreed with him. There were enough voices of those who saw the limitless freedom of the press, with all the false stories and personal attacks for which it served as a platform, as a danger to the public interest. “Tho’ nothing is so precious to us as our liberties, yet me-thinks [sic] it would be of service to the publick quiet, if there were some bounds set to the press, and to the tongues of our coffee-house politicians,” argued in 1728 a former member of Parliament.

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From the Commodity Trade to Stock Exchange

Defoe’s *The Complete English Tradesman*, published in two volumes in 1726-27, was one of the earliest merchant manuals which originated in England, a fact which further emphasizes the dominant position that the commodity exchange still enjoyed in London. During his own lifetime “the numbers of mercers… instead of about fifty to sixty, which they were in the year 1663, may now be called about three or four hundred,” observed Defoe. And his ideal tradesman could have sat as a model for Max Weber while writing *The Protestant Ethic*. A frugal husband and methodical bookkeeper, his “pleasure is in his business, his companions should be his books… his letters never come in and are unanswered.” If he was married and had a family, “he makes his excursions upstairs, and no farther,” because a bell can ring at his door and he could miss an important opportunity. “Business neglected is business lost,” pointed out Defoe, who himself ran a family enterprise out of his home. He recommended that a merchant should also involve his wife in the business. “I am not for a man setting his wife at the head of his business,” cautioned the author, he just suggested to “make her assisting and helpful.”

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52 Defoe, Daniel. *The Complete English Tradesman, in Familiar Letters* (London, 1727), vol. 1, p. 294. Yet his vision of a women’s role was much more complex than that. Elsewhere Defoe argued for the establishment of a special academy for women. “I have often thought of it as one of the most barbarous customs in the world, considering us as a civilized and a Christian country, that we deny the advantages of learning to women.” In Defoe, *Essays Upon Several Projects: or, Effectual Ways for Advancing the Interest of the Nation*, p. 282.
Defoe’s first successful book was *Essays Upon Several Projects*, published in London in 1702. It fully reflected the author’s personal frustration as an old-styled commodity trader facing the emergence of new forms of the market based on the exchange of abstract values. He pointed out that the late 17th century London commercial boom gave birth to ‘projects’ - complicated financial schemes involving any kind of commercial activity from foreign trade speculations to technical innovation patents, but increasingly also wagering and lotteries. Defoe traced the origin of “projecting humor that now reigns no farther back than the year 1680, dating its birth as a monster than,” by which time “began the art and mystery of projecting to creep into the world.” He acknowledged that many of the projects - such as London’s waterworks - resulted in practical innovations which significantly improved the life of Londoners. But others - such as the South Sea Bubble which burst in 1720 - brought on the ruin of many credible people (Figure 4.3). “In the good old days of trade, which our fore-fathers plodded on in, and got estates too at, there were no bubbles, no stock-jobbing, no South-Sea infatuations, no lotteries, no funds, no antiquities, no buying of navy bills, and publick securities, no circulating Exchequer bills,” lamented merchant Defoe, understanding that something important in the very nature of business was changing. And he described this change through a metaphor. In his youth, he argued, “trade was a vast great river, and all the money in the Kingdom ran down its mighty stream; the whole wealth of the Nation kept in its channel.” But with the advent of stock market

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53 Ibid.. Defoe’s career as a writer started in the 1697 with the publication of *Essay Upon Project*, which seven years later became a basis for *Essays Upon Several Projects*. See Bastian, *Defoe’s Early Life*, p. 162.

54 Defoe wrote that “some very happy projects are left to us as a taste of their success; as the water-houses for supplying of the city of London with water, and, since that, the New River - both very considerable undertakings, and perfect projects, adventured on the risk of success.” In Defoe, *Essays Upon Several Projects: or, Effectual Ways for Advancing the Interest of the Nation*, p. 24. Cf. Michael Cooper, *A More Beautiful City: Robert Hooke and the Rebuilding of London After the Great Fire* (Stroud, UK, 2003).

55 Gradually, more and more projects were based on pure speculations, promising technically impossible solutions equivalent to the invention of *perpetuum mobile* or sorcerer’s stone. “So have I seen shares in joint-stocks, patents, engines, and undertakings, blown up by the air of great words.” In Defoe, *Essays Upon Several Projects: or, Effectual Ways for Advancing the Interest of the Nation*, pp. 12-13.
Figure 4.3. Anonymous, *The Bubbler’s Medley, or A Sketch of the Times: Being Europe’s Memorial for the Year 1720*. The engraving was published in Jonathan Swift, *The Bubble: A Poem*, London, 1721.
speculations, the flow of this mighty river was artificially distorted by private interest, there are suddenly “new channels or side-drains laid open to abate its waters, to divert its current, and to carry its stream off from the ordinary course.”⁵⁶ During the height of the South Sea Bubble, Ned Ward published a poem which warned Britons who invested in the stock market not to count their ‘airy millions’ before the day is over:

Five Hundred Millions, Notes and Bonds,
Our Socks are worth in Value,
But neither lie in Goods nor Lands,
Or Money let me tell you…
…When all the Riches that we Boast
Consist in Scrips [sic] of Paper.⁵⁷

As an old-school London tradesman, Defoe saw his entire world with its values crumbling right in front of his eyes. “The face of trade has its new turns in the heads of the people to such a degree, that it is worth our reflection,” argued the author in The Complete English Tradesman.⁵⁸ Among such new turns of the trade was also the one which he called “by a new name, stock-jobbing,” which was at first only an occasional “transferring of interest and shares from one to another, as persons alienated their estates.” But as the brokers realized that there was money to be made on speculations with stocks, they “got the business into their hands and turned it into a regular trade, managed with the greatest intrigue, artifice, and trick, that ever anything that appeared with a face of honesty.”⁵⁹

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⁵⁶ Defoe, The Complete English Tradesman, in Familiar Letters; Directing Him in all the Several Parts and Progressions of Trade, vol. 2, part 2, pp. 7-8.
⁵⁹ Defoe, Essays Upon Several Projects: or, Effectual Ways for Advancing the Interest of the Nation, p. 29.
Financial Interest and Manipulation of Information

Intrigue and false rumors were among the most prominent tools the stock-jobbers used to trick their potential customers into fatal investments. In *The Anatomy of Exchange-Alley*, published in 1719 - just year before the South Sea Company bubble crushed, Defoe explained the exact mechanism by which the combinations of stock-jobbers manipulated the markets through information:

If they meet with a cull, a young dealer that has money to lay out, they catch him at the door [of a coffeehouse], whisper to him, Sir, here is a great piece of news, it is not yet public, it is worth a thousand guineas but to mentioned it: I am heartily glad I met you, but it must be as secret as the black side of your soul, for they know nothing of it yet in the coffeehouse, if they should, stock would rise 10 percent in a moment, and I warrant you South-Sea will be 130 in 2 week’s time, after it is known.60

Originally, the jobbers disseminated their intrigues only by word of mouth. But with the end of censorship they understood very quickly that the ‘free press’ could become an important working tool fostering their interest. As Defoe explained, “the putting false news upon us” became business as usual among the skillful managers of the University of Exchange-Alley who were now working with a combination of sham reports disseminated by the word of mouth, false news planted in the newspapers, and phony letters of intelligence.61 In the early 18th century, some of the most powerful brokers were able to build entire international networks of informers which were sometimes superior to the diplomatic service of the State. They became a source of the incessant flow of intelligence from Holland, Flanders, Germany and Ireland, which gave their patrons power to know results of “battles fought, victories won, towns taken, etc. before the

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60 Daniel Defoe, *The Anatomy of Exchange-Alley: or, a System of Stock-Jobbing* (London, 1719), p. 4.. An even more detailed image of stock-jobber practices is in Morgan and Thomas. The authors quote from John Houghton’s journal *Collection of Letters for the Improvement of Husbandry* published in 1794: “The manner of managing the trade is this; the monied man goes among the brokers…and asks how stocks go? And upon information bids the broker buy or sell so many shares of such and such stocks if he can at such and such prices: Than he tries what he can do among those that have stock, or power to sell them; and if he can, makes a bargain.” In Morgan and Thomas, *The London Stock Exchange*, p. 20.

swiftest expresses of the king’s own servants and generals, could arrive.” Entire fortunes of stocks depended on the results of such events and any broker was well-versed in how to “run down true news as if it had been false, and run up false news as if it had been true by the force of his foreign intelligencers.” To illustrate his point, Defoe analyzed several examples of “exquisite frauds” which were “executed in such manner as to cheat not the town only, but all Europe.”

Consequently, he complained that manipulation of the news practiced by stock-jobbers left “so little regard to intrinsic value, or the circumstances of the company, that when the company has a loss, stock shall rise; when a great sale, or rich ship arrived, it shall fall.” But in the meantime, the price of stocks became a universal “rule by which we are to guide our judgment in public affairs.” Thus the destiny of the entire Kingdom was in the hands of few hundred speculators, and Defoe concluded that Exchange Alley became “as dangerous to the public safety, as a magazine of gun powder is to a populous city.”

To plant false news in London newspapers did not require too much money or ingenuity. Some hack-writers could have been bought, others were tricked. Each London paper had one or two ‘investigative journalists’ on its payroll, whose role was “to haunt coffee-houses, and thrust themselves into companies where they are not known; or plant themselves at a convenient distance, to overhear what is said in order to pick up the matter for the papers.” Those ‘sons of Mercury’ took down all the gossip they overheard in public places and “to the great wonder and edification of the whole town,” through their reports “the greatest falsehoods and the idliest fictions are often published for matters of fact” claimed an outraged coffeehouse patron. Such

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62 Ibid., pp. 10 and 16.
63 Ibid., p. 53.
64 Ibid, pp. 57 and 59.
‘reporters’ reminded him of thieves who constantly “loiter about the publick offices, waiting for an interview with some little clerk, or a conference with a door-keeper.”65

London’s Grub Street in Moorfields was where writers of this stripe lived and worked, and as such became the earliest symbol of British journalism. The men from Grub Street were usually stereotyped in literature as feckless drunkards who were scribbling furiously in their garrets by rush-light to earn enough money for a bottle of gin or to bail their belongings out of the pawnshops.66 In 1698 Ned Ward compared the life of a typical hack writer to a strumpet. “And if the reason be required, why we betake ourselves to so scandalous a profession as whoring or pamphleteering, the same answer will serve us both, viz. that the unhappy circumstances of narrow fortune, hath forced us to do that for our subsistence, which we are much ashamed of.”67 Similarly satirist Joseph Browne ironically equated journalists to parrots, “for none of’em say anything but what they are taught by their masters.”68 In a series of fictitious dialogues among typical coffeehouse clientele, one of Browne’s characters, a news-writer named Harlem, claimed that “I do not mean that I never reported in my paper anything that was false, but that I never confirmed anything to be true, that I knew in reality to be a lie.” Yet, Harlem’s character proudly boosted that in spite of all accusations on behalf of journalists, “news is a great advantage to

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trade; an improvement of means knowledge; a diversion to the publick; and the most vendible commodity in the whole Kingdom."

But the practices of deception were not limited to cheap hack-writers from Grub Street. As a journalist in the service of House Speaker Robert Harley, Defoe himself arduously promoted, for example, the Union with Scotland in his articles and pamphlets, which were planted into the London and Edinburgh newspapers. An outraged author of a pamphlet from the 1730s claimed that since “almost all authors of news-papers and pamphlets write either for pay or malice,” a printer or publisher “having found a declension in the sale of his newspaper” is often forced to fabricate scandals in order to make sure that his paper will sell sufficiently “to make us amends for our trouble.” The alternative was to ally the newspaper with a strong political or business interest which would have assured its financial viability. As a result, comparing the coverage of the same event in two competing newspapers, the author concluded, that “you would not think it came from the same quarter of the world.”

The Stock Exchange and the System of Representative Government

Historians quite consistently express belief that the earliest roots of traditional political factions of British politics - ‘liberal’ Whigs and ‘conservative’ Tories - may be traced to the controversial marriage of Henry VIII to Anne Boleyn in 1533. Keith Feiling compares them initially to the loosely organized clans of Florentine Guelfs and Ghibellines. Gradually both

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69 Ibid., p. 230.
70 Cf. McKim, Defoe in Scotland: A Spy Among Us. and Graves, "Daniel Defoe, Director of Propaganda: A Study of Defoe's Methods for Promoting the Union of Scotland and England".
71 Anonymous, A Letter From a Gentleman in the Country to a Friend in London: Giving his Reasons for Deserting What is Called the Country Interest (London, 1735), p. 25-27. In a pamphlet published in 1701, Defoe denounced the practice of British newspapers masking the ‘sources’ of fabricated stories under the formula “we hear…” He uses the case of the exiled Prince of Wales who was supposedly kidnapped as a child in France in order to be raised Protestant and later put on the British Throne. “The author of this news wou’d be very helpful in the discovery, if he wou’d honestly inform the world how and where he heard the news… for ‘this certain that nobody else can hear anything of this [sic]. If he will own with more honesty than he wrote [sic], that he really invented it of his own head, to help fill up his own paper.” In Daniel Defoe, An Argument, Shewing, That the Prince of Wales, Tho’ a Protestant, Has No Just Pretensions to the Crown of England (published anonymously) (London, 1701), p. 3.
Whigs and Tories started to represent certain distinctively opposed ideals, beliefs, and traditions which between 1660-1714 facilitated self-identification of not only the upper classes, but to a large extent also of the wide masses of London’s working classes, with one of the two blocs. Yet during Defoe’s lifetime, this allegiance was still only loosely defined, reminiscent of wide political movements. Only as of the 1780s can one start talking in Britain about actual political parties in the modern sense of the term, with a coordinated political program and centralized organizational structure.  

In spite of not having yet formed political parties in a strict sense of the term, during Defoe’s lifetime Britain already have a quite advanced parliamentary system with two chambers representing nobility and gentry. Echoing Lockean theories of natural rights and social contractualism, the writer summarized the principles of the representative parliamentarian system under the conditions of the British constitutional monarchy by pointing out that, besides the nobility and high clergy - Lords Spiritual and Temporal - who represented more-or-less themselves in the Parliament, all freeholders also originally had “a right to sit there with you, but being too numerous a body, they have long since agreed” that they will “chose a certain few out of their body to meet together with your lordships.” And Defoe reminded the Commons, who were the elected representatives of the freeholders, that they were the true “conservators of our liberties, the expositors of our laws, the levyers [sic] of our taxes, and the redressers of our grievances, the King’s best counselors, and the people’s last refuge.”  

It was considered common wisdom in Defoe’s time that a man of estates will be more cautious about what he spends of the state budget, “because he is to pay the more of it himself.”

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72 Keith Feiling, *A History of the Tory Party, 1640-1714* (Oxford, UK, 1924), p. 13. Feiling puts the creation of party system in Britain in the period which was historically marked by the ascension of Charles James Fox as the leader of the Whigs and his rival William Pitt taking over leadership of Tories.

But the author warned that this should not be the only criterion based on which a member of parliament was selected. It was much more important that a representative was equipped with the good sense to know when there was a necessity to give, and that sense was backed with honesty, so that spending the nations’ money, he behaved the same way as he would have managed his own purse. Defoe emphasized the management of public money because he fully understood the ramifications of the growing power the stock-market exercised over the entire political system, with the increasing power of central government, rising state budgets and deficits. Yet a stock-jobber in his insatiable hunger for profit wouldn’t have hesitated to corrupt the Parliament or to spread false news around town if this was favoring his financial interest. Therefore, Defoe bitterly remarked, “our public credit is at his mercy, by the agency of Exchange-Alley and the brokers,” whom he described as “a few needy mercenaries, who can turn the trade into a lottery, and make exchange a gaming table.” Consequently, he strongly denounced also the fixing of elections and the selling and buying of votes in Parliament as “a new trade of parliament-jobbing” and linked it directly to the powerful financial interest groups and stock-jobbing combinations. “Thus let them job, trick, and cheat one another,” warned the author his readers, “but for God’s sake, Gentleman, do not let the important affairs of the state come under their wicked clutches.” Because, as he added elsewhere, “when statesmen turn jobbers, the State may be jobbed.”

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74 Ibid., pp. 23-24.
75 Defoe was particularly afraid that the strange confluences of false information and the stock market could be used by the exiled Catholic King James II – known as the Pretender – who can, with the help of France, attempt to seize the power back. Defoe, The Anatomy of Exchange-Alley: or, a System of Stock-Jobbing, pp. 58-59. Browne offered a concrete example of a manipulation of the results of the battle about French Mediterranean port of Toulon during the war of the Spanish succession in 1707. In Browne, State Tracts: Containing Many Necessary Observations and Reflections on the State of our Affairs at Home and Abroad; with some Secret Memoirs, Dialogue III, p. 196.
76 Defoe, The Anatomy of Exchange-Alley: or, a System of Stock-Jobbing, pp. 52 and 58.
In the 1690s, merchants who dealt with stocks got their first own walk among the other commodity traders in the Royal Exchange (Figures 4.4. and 4.5.). Their business increased but at some point they abandoned this position and moved into the adjacent coffeehouses in the Exchange Alley where “the brokers, those vermin of trade, got hold of it, and then particular offices were set apart for it, and an incredible resort thither was to be seen every day,” recalled Defoe in 1702. The author doesn’t mention when and under which circumstances the stock-brokers left the Royal Exchange, which was traditionally associated with commodity trade, but the current official London Stock Exchange website states that it happened in 1698. They were “expelled for rowdiness” and as a result started to operate in the streets and coffee-houses nearby. This corresponds with Defoe’s famous 1719 description of the “center of the jobbing” which at that point was already firmly established “in the kingdom of the Exchange-Alley” (Figures 4.6. and 4.7.):

The center of the jobbing is in the kingdom of the Exchange-Alley, and its adjacencies; the limits, are easily surrounded in about a minute and a half stepping out of Jonathan’s [coffee-house] into the Alley, you turn your face full south, moving on a few paces, and than turning due east, you advance to Garraway’s [coffee-house]; from thence going out of the door, you go on still east into Birchin-Lane, and then halting a little at the Sword Blade Bank to do much mischief in fewest words, you immediately face to the north, enter Cornhill, visit two or three petty provinces there in your way west. And thus having boxed your compass, and sailed around the whole stock-jobbing globe, you turn into Jonathan’s again; and so, as most of the great follies of life oblige us to do, you end just where you began.

79 Defoe, Essays Upon Several Projects: or, Effectual Ways for Advancing the Interest of the Nation, p. 173.
80 www.londonstockexchange.com/en-gb/about/cooverview/history.htm This issue is widely discussed also in Smith, "The History of the London Stock Exchange." and Morgan and Thomas, The London Stock Exchange. Yet none of the authors offers an exact date nor reason, except of the widely known animosity between the commodity trades and stock-jobbers, so transparent in the writings of Defoe.
The Government made several attempts to minimize the influence of stock-jobbing, but as Defoe noted, many of these steps actually encouraged the practice.\textsuperscript{82} There are indications that the author himself was involved in some of the early financial schemes and speculations, but later abandoned such practices and it wouldn’t be an exaggeration to say that for the rest of his life he despised stock-jobbers from the bottom of his heart.\textsuperscript{83} Not surprisingly. Joseph Addison portrayed a typical ‘projector’ as a ‘species’ who could be easily recognized by “shabbiness of his dress, the extravagance of his conceptions, and the hurry of his speech.”\textsuperscript{84} John Macky, describing the atmosphere at Jonathan’s, compared stock-jobbers to the “set of sharp faces” he previously experienced at Little Mann’s coffeehouse, a notorious gathering place of petty criminals and gamblers:

> When I entered into this last [Jonathan’s], I was afraid I had got into Little Man’s coffee house again, for busy faces run around here and there, with the same sharp intent looks, with this difference only, that here it is selling of Bank stock, East India, South Sea, and lottery tickets, and there is all cards and dice. You will see fellows in, in shabby cloths, selling ten or twelve thousand pounds in stock, through perhaps he may not be worth at the same time ten shillings, and with as much zeal as if he were a director, which they call selling a bear’s skin; and these men find bubbles enough to get bread by it, as the others do by gaming; and some few of them manage it so as to get pretty large estates.\textsuperscript{85}

In Ned Ward’s assessment, a stock-jobber was usually a man of little means with a sense for adventure, who saw in this murky business a unique opportunity to break the vicious circle of his social class. He was “led on by the mighty hopes of advancing himself to a coach and horses,

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\textsuperscript{82} Defoe, Essays Upon Several Projects: or, Effectual Ways for Advancing the Interest of the Nation, p. 173. In his dialogue with an imaginary friend abroad, Macky wrote: “I am told that while policies were allowed to be made on taking of towns, and gaining in battles, during the last war, this Exchange Alley was the sharpest place in the world; but the abuse of intelligence, sham letters spread upon Exchange, and private letters coming before mails, made that practice so notorious, that Queen and Parliament wisely thought fit to put a stop to it, by a seasonable provisional Act against it, as they have endeavored to do by another Act against effective gaming, being both equally looked on as a cheat... However, some great men have not disdained to be deeply concerned in both, and have got good estates; for tricking is not yet here reckoned so despicable quality as abroad when it’s clearly done.” In Macky, A Journey Through England: In Familiar Letters From a Gentleman Here, to His Friend Abroad, p. 114.

\textsuperscript{83} After 1693 historians notice the first lotteries inspired by the Venetian model emerging in London. Bastian considers the possibility that Defoe was personally involved in one of them. In Bastian, Defoe’s Early Life, pp. 187-89.

\textsuperscript{84} See Addison’s editorial in The Spectator, April 5, 1711. In Addison and Steele, The Spectator: A New Edition Reproducing the Original Text Both as First Issued and as Corrected by its Authors, 1711-1712.

Figure 4.4. Thomas Rowlandson, *London's Royal Exchange*, c. 1809.
Figure 4.5. The Royal Exchange floor-plan with the various merchant walks.
Figure 4.6. Exchange Alley - the City of London.
Figure 4.7. James Carter, *The South-Sea Bubble*, c. 1720. The painting depicts the jobbers selling stock in Exchange Alley in London before the bubble burst.
that he may lord it over his neighboring mechanics. He is a great lover of uncertainty, as some fools are of the Royal Lottery.” Yet from the hundreds who tried to walk the path of the stock brokerage, only a few lucky ones were able to advance themselves materially and socially. Ward concluded that a stock jobber was a compound of knave, fool, merchant and gentleman: “when he cheats another he’s knave; when he suffers himself to be outwitted, he’s fool.”

The Londoner’s True Home

Defoe detested stock-jobbers and thus is not surprising that he was not a big friend of London’s coffeehouses either. “The tea-table among the ladies, and the coffee-house among the men, seem to be places of new invention for a depravation of our manners and morals, places devoted to scandal,” the writer cautioned his aspiring merchant in *The Complete English Tradesman.* Yet an anonymous pamphlet published in 1704 claimed that during the time when Defoe worked for House Speaker Robert Harley, he was seen “frequently, but privately at a coffee-house in St. James’s,” one of the upscale establishments near Westminster frequented by Whig politicians where they could privately discuss their party affairs. Defoe must have been a known entity also at Jones’ coffeehouse in Finch Lane near the Royal Exchange, whose personnel mediated his correspondence with Harley during his clandestine service.

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87 Defoe, *The Complete English Tradesman, in Familiar Letters; Directing Him in all the Several Parts and Progressions of Trade,* vol. 1, p. 188. Coffee-houses were, in mid-17th century in their beginning in London, seen more as a nuisance. In *A New View of London,* Hatton noted that “I find it recorded, that one James Farr, a barber, who kept a coffee house which is now the Rainbow, by the Inner Temple Gate, (one of the first in England) was in the year 1657 presented by the inquest of St. Dunstans, in the W. for making and selling a sort of liquor, called Coffee, as a great nuisance and prejudice of the neighborhood. And who would then have thought London would ever have near 3,000 such nuisances, and that coffee would have been (as now) so much drank by the best of quality, and physicians.” In Edward Hatton, *A New View of London; or, an Ample Account of that City in Two Volumes, or Eight Sections* (London, 1708), p. 30.
88 Defoe’s family at that time already resided in the London suburbs at his in-laws house in Newington Green, but Defoe himself had to stay close to Westminster. See Peterson, “Defoe and Westminster, 1696-1706,” p. 316.
89 “Sir, if you please to let a note be left... at Jones’s coffee-house in Finch lane near the [Exchange],” wrote Defoe to Robert Harley on May 12, 1704. The message from Harley was delivered to Jones’s and Defoe in the next letter dated May 16 noted that the House Speaker sent his servant to confirm at Jones’s that he, Defoe, picked up the letter. In Defoe, *The Letters of Daniel Defoe,* p. 13.
Foreigners often remarked that the peculiar institution of a coffeehouse was what differentiated London from all other cities.\textsuperscript{90} With the ascendancy of the role of the Parliament in the English constitutional system, leaders of political factions and their followers naturally gravitated to taverns and coffeehouses, subsequently giving birth to social and political clubs. And the clubs, firmly associated with coffeehouses, became another important social venues typically associated with London.\textsuperscript{91} In 1659, the author of \textit{Oceana}, James Harington and his friends were accustomed to meet at Miles’ coffeehouse in Westminster. Their club, the Rota, was known for passionate discussions about the various forms of government and possibilities of its reform.\textsuperscript{92} In 1711, after a failed attempt to assassinate his political patron Robert Harley, Defoe anonymously published a pamphlet against the members of a secretive club of political opposition which used to meet at Bell Tavern in Westminster and became known as the October Club.\textsuperscript{93} There were specific coffeehouses famous for attracting either Tories or Whigs. “I must not forget to tell you that the parties have their different places, where however a stranger is always well received,” advised John Macky to his fictitious friend abroad, adding that “you may talk politics at the Smyrna and St. James’s… but a Whig will no more go to the Cocoa Tree or Ofinda’s, than a Tory will be seen at the coffee house of St. James’s.”\textsuperscript{94} Young Dudley Ryder, the future attorney general and Tory supporter, joined the company at John’s coffeehouse in Bow Line near the Royal Exchange in 1715 - which ensuingly became also his club.\textsuperscript{95}

\textsuperscript{90} Macaulay, \textit{The History of England from the Accession of James II}, p. 361.
\textsuperscript{91} For more on the genesis of London clubs see Robert J. Allen, \textit{The Clubs in Augustan London} (Cambridge, 1933), p. 15.
\textsuperscript{94} Macky, \textit{A Journey Through England: In Familiar Letters From a Gentleman Here, to His Friend Abroad}, p. 108. Cf. Henry Morley’s footnote’s to Addison’s entry in \textit{The Spectator}, March 1, 1711: "The Cocoa Tree was a Chocolate House in St. James's Street, used by Tory statesmen and men of fashion as exclusively as St. James's Coffee House, in the same street, was used by Whigs of the same class. It afterwards [Morley writes in 1891] became a Tory club." In Addison and Steele, \textit{The Spectator: A New Edition Reproducing the Original Text Both as First Issued and as Corrected by its Authors}, 1711-1712.
Macaulay claimed that the coffeehouse was de facto “the Londoner’s true home,” and those who wished to find a gentleman commonly asked not whether he lived in Fleet Street or Chancery Lane, but whether he frequented the Grecian or the Rainbow. Such venues were often open from the six in the morning till midnight and served as convenient post boxes for their stable customers. Gradually, London coffeehouses assumed a wide variety of social functions, some of which are enumerated in a newspaper advertisement by St. James’s coffeehouse, frequented, among others, by Defoe:

To prevent all mistakes that may happen among gentlemen of the other end of the town, who come but once a week to St. James’s Coffee-house, either by miscalling the servants, or requiring such things from them as are not properly within their respective provinces; this is to give notice, that Kidney, keeper of the book-debts of the outlying customers, and observer of those who go off without paying, having resigned that employment, is succeeded by John Sowton; to whose place of enterer of messages and first coffee-grinder, William Bird is promoted; and Samuel Burdock comes as shoe-cleaner in the room of the said Bird.

By 1714, John Macky counted “by modest computation” about eight thousand coffeehouses in London - which was quite sure a little inflated number - and they were all jammed during evening hours. Cesar De Saussure, a young Swiss adventurer who lived in London between 1725 and 1729, described most of them as “not over clean or well furnished owing to the quantity of people who resort to these places, and because of smoke, which would quickly destroy good furniture.” What attracted people to the coffeehouses were mainly the gazettes and other public papers, because as several observers noted a typical Englishman, regardless of

97 See Steele’s editorial in The Spectator from Thursday, April 26, 1711. In Addison and Steele, The Spectator: A New Edition Reproducing the Original Text Both as First Issued and as Corrected by its Authors, 1711-1712.
98 The Spectator, March 28, 1711. In ibid.
99 Macky, A Journey Through England: In Familiar Letters From a Gentleman Here, to His Friend Abroad, p. 208. Only six years earlier, Hatton estimated that there were 3,000 coffeehouses in London. See Hatton, A New View of London; or, an Ample Account of that City in Two Volumes, or Eight Sections, p. 30.
100 De Saussure, A Foreign View of England in 1725-1729: The Letters of Mons. Cesar De Saussure to his Family, p. 101. Macaulay noted that “the atmosphere was like that of a perfumer’s shop. Tobacco in any other form than that of richly scented snuff was held in abomination... strangers sometimes expressed their surprise that so many people should leave their firesides to sit in the midst of eternal fog and stench.” In Macaulay, The History of England from the Accession of James II, p. 361.
Figure 4.8. Anonymous, *The Interior of a Coffeehouse*, ca. 1700.
class, had a huge appetite for news (Figure 4.8.). According to Ward, he was “a great news
monger, and all public reports must occur to his knowledge, for his business lies most in coffee
houses, and the greatest of his diversion is in reading the newspapers.”\(^{101}\) Thus in a typical
coffeehouse one could have found “not only the foreign prints, but several English ones with the
foreign occurrences [\textit{sic}] besides papers of morality and party disputes,” elaborated John
Macky.\(^{102}\) “You often see an Englishman taking a treaty of peace more to heart than he does his
own affairs,” observed amused Swiss visitor De Saussure.\(^{103}\)

In 1711 two of the most prominent British journalists, Joseph Addison and Richard Steele,
founded \textit{The Spectator}, a special coffeehouse journal whose mission was to imitate Socrates who
“brought philosophy down from heaven, to inhabit among men.” Addison claimed that similarly
his ambition was “to have it said of me, that I have brought philosophy out of closets and
libraries, schools and colleges, to dwell in clubs and assemblies, at tea-tables, and in coffee-
houses.”\(^{104}\) In one of his editorials, Steele explained in detail the daily rhythm of the coffeehouse
with its changing clientele. From six in the morning when the men “who rise early for no other
purpose but to publish their laziness” started to read their newspapers and discuss politics,
through quarter of eight at which time they were “interrupted by the students of the House…
dressed for Westminster,” then the first well-to-do customers appeared “in their night-gowns to
saunter away their time.” When the day drew on, they gave place to men of business. Their
entertainments, Steele claimed, are “derived rather from reason than imagination.” A typical
coffeehouse was open till midnight and as such became “the place of rendezvous to all that live

\(^{101}\) Ward, The London Spy Compleat, in Eighteen Parts, p. 186. Cf. also De Saussure, A Foreign View of England in 1725-
\(^{104}\) Addison’s editorial in The Spectator, on Monday, March 12, 1711. In Addison and Steele, The Spectator: A New Edition
Reproducing the Original Text Both as First Issued and as Corrected by its Authors, 1711-1712.
near it.” Steele concluded that as such, London coffeehouses are “little communities which we express by the word neighborhoods.”

IV. An Alternative Public Sphere of London Workers

Habermas was often criticized for the fact that his idealized public sphere as it emerged in the late 17th century in London did not include social categories of class and gender into the overall analysis. The author himself admits the parallel existence of a plebeian public sphere, manifested, for example, in the 19th century Chartist Movement and anarchist workers’ traditions on the Continent, yet he claims that as such those alternative publics remained “oriented toward the intentions of the bourgeois public sphere” which from the very beginning enjoyed almost absolute social hegemony. As a member of the merchant class, Defoe never attempted to hide his disdain for the economically less fortunate members of London society. After all, the stock-jobbers whom he detested so much were themselves mostly sons from working-class families. Many were Jewish refugees escaping the Spanish Inquisition. They were generally tolerated, but their civic rights were curtailed and they were suspected, if not openly hated, by Londoners. For many of them, stock-jobbing represented a unique opportunity to escape their social ordeal.

Defoe’s class position was very clearly formulated in the 1725 pamphlet Every-body’s Business which openly ranted against the demands of London maids to increase their wages. “Thus have these wenches, by their continual plotting and cabals, united themselves into a formidable body, and got the whip-hand of their betters; they make their own terms with us,”

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105 Steele’s editorial in The Spectator from Thursday, April 26, 1711. In ibid.
106 Cf. Nancy Fraser, “Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy,” in Habermas and the Public Sphere (Cambridge, MA, 1992).
108 Defoe wrote that the Exchange-Alley “thروع [sic] with Jews, jobbers and brokers, their names are needless, their characters dirty as their employments.” In Defoe, The Anatomy of Exchange-Alley: or, a System of Stock-Jobbing, p. 41.
claimed the outraged author. From his words is clear that the maids were organized and quite conscious of their social position. Furthermore, as women, they were the driving force of social protest in London in the mid-1720s. “They set an ill example to our children, our apprentices, our covenant-servants, and other dependents,” lamented Defoe. “The great height to which women servants have brought their wages, makes a mutiny among man-servants, and puts them upon raising their wages too.”

The scarcity of original sources, especially those written from the perspective of lower classes themselves, forbids constructing a more plastic picture of an alternative public sphere of London workers. Yet De Saussure noted that they habitually began their day by going to coffee-houses in order to read the latest news. “I have often seen shoeblacks and the persons of that class together to purchase a farthing paper,” pointed out the author. Defoe confirms this observation, pointing out that “you will find very few coffee-houses in this opulent City, without an illiterate mechanic, commenting upon the most material occurrences, and judging the actions of the greatest councils of Europe.”

V. Transportation Networks

With the extension of trade networks and introduction of free newspapers, the world started moving faster and London merchants had no other choice than to adjust to its new speed. “My bills of exchange oblige me now and then to take a turn to Royal Exchange, in a hackney coach, to meet my merchant,” wrote in 1714 John Macky in a letter to his imaginative friend abroad:

These coaches are very necessary conveniences, not to be met with anywhere abroad: for you know that at Paris, Brussels, Rome, or Vienna, you must either hire a coach by the day, or take it at least by the hour; but here you have

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111 Defoe, A Vindication of the Press, p. 17.
coaches at the corner of every street, which for a shilling will carry you anywhere within a reasonable distance, and for two from one end of the City to the other. There are seven hundred of them licensed by the act of Parliament and carry their number on their coaches; so that if you should chance to leave anything in a coach, and know but the number of it, you know presently where to lay your claim to it; and be you ever so late at a friend’s house in any place of this great City, your friend by taking the number of the coach, secures you safety home.

Cesar De Saussure complemented Macky’s observation pointing out that London hackney coaches were a great convenience in spite of the fact that “most of them, to tell the truth, are ugly and dirty.” The Swiss visitor certainly preferred to take one of the three hundred officially licensed sedan chairs, which he found “very convenient and pleasant to use, the bearers going so fast that you have some difficulty keeping up with them on foot. I do not believe that in the whole Europe better and more dexterous bearers are to be found.” He appreciated especially the fact that “about a thousand of these vehicles are to be found day and night in the public places and principal streets of the City and the town.”

Complaining about the chaos of increasing traffic, the City’s bard, John Gay, nostalgically reminisced about the quiet ‘streets’ of Venice:

…O happy streets to rumbling Wheels unknown,
No Carts, no Coaches shake the floating Town!
Thus was of old Britannia’s City bless’d
E’er Pride and Luxury her Sons posses’d
Coaches and Chariots yet unfashione’d lay,
Nor late invented Chairs perplex’d the Way…

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112 In *A New Review of London*, Burridge offered an extract of the rules of Hackney Coachmen and Chairmen, with their Rates, as set by the Act of Parliament. “An act made in the ninth year of her Majesty Queen Anne, the commissioners appointed for licensing hackney coaches, etc. are authorized under great seal to license eight hundred of those hackney coaches, to take up fares and carry them to the places and parishes comprised within the weekly bills of mortality. According to that said act, each coach is to be marked with a number, painted on tin plates six inches and a quarter broad, and nine inches and a half long. Every proprietor of a figure is to pay 5 s. per week... No hackney coachman shall demand more than 1 s. for his fare for any distance not exceeding one mile and a half, and 1 s. 6 d. for any greater distance not exceeding two miles. And by the said Act, hackney chairman has not take more than 1 s. for any distance not exceeding one mile, and 1 s. 6d. for any distance not exceeding a mile and a half.” In Richard Burridge, *A Review of London* (London, 1722).


114 One of the early indicators of the increase of traffic in the streets of London are the little dots lining out the Ludgate and Newgate Streets in the City’s map designed in 1676 by John Ogilby and William Morgan, symbolizing the sidewalks outlined on both sides of streets by wooden posts erected by city council to protect pedestrians. See Philippa Glanville, *London in Maps* (London, 1972), plate 14.

But De Saussure’s absolute favorite among the numerous means of public transportation available in London were the boats on the Thames which he described as “very attractive and cleanly kept.” He assessed that there must had been about fifteen thousand of them in London and its vicinity, all of them “are numbered, and the boatmen likewise posses an office where you can apply should you have a complaint to lodge against one of their number.”

London’s wharfs on the Thames - the thirteen Custom House keys in the part of the river called the Pool - were the main interface connecting the city with the rest of the world. In one single day Defoe counted in the Pool “above two thousand sail of all sorts, not reckoning barges, lighters or pleasure boats, and yachts,” only the ships which “really go to sea.” According to Edward Hatton, there were about 600 warehouses in the part of the City adjacent to the river. Defoe himself, during the time when he was involved in the importation of wine, couldn’t avoid the Custom House through which every pound, gallon, or yard of anything coming or leaving the town must pass (Figure 4.9.). He reflected this daily experience in *The Complete English Tradesman*, arguing that “almost all the shopkeepers and inland traders in seaport towns, or even in the water-side part of London itself, are necessarily brought in to be owners of ships, and concerned at least in the vessel, if not in the voyage.”

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116 De Saussure, *A Foreign View of England in 1725-1729: The Letters of Monsieur Cesar De Saussure to his Family*, pp. 103-104. Macky also claimed that “we are carried to the places in chairs (or sedans) which are very cheap, a guinea a week, or a shilling per hour, and your chairmen serve you for porters to run on errands as your gondoliers do in Venice.” In Macky, *A Journey Through England: In Familiar Letters From a Gentleman Here, to His Friend Abroad*, p. 108.


118 Hatton, *Comes Commercii: or, the Traders Companion*, p. 272. Among others, Hatton instructed the aspiring merchant that “after your goods are entered in the Custom House, you are then to take care to ship off (if outward bound) or else land your goods… you must know that there are lawful keys… with cranes and other tackle, whereby prodigious weights can be let down from, or drawn up to, the wharf. A wharf is the land or ground on which crane stands… whereon merchant goods are laid, till such time as they are viewed and examined by the searchers (if they are to be exported) or by the landwaiters, if they are imported. Of these keys there are thirteen to which ships are appointed in the Custom House book…” (ibid., p. 268).

119 Defoe, *The Complete English Tradesman, in Familiar Letters; Directing Him in all the Several Parts and Progressions of Trade*, vol. 1, p. x.
Figure 4.9. Unknown Author, London's Custom House, c. 1753.
To further ease the life of London merchants - but also to profit from the ever-increasing hunger for information - Richard Burridge published *A New Review of London* in 1722. It contained the exact spelling of all London streets, addresses of aristocrats living in the city, as well as the regulations of public transportation, rates of foreign and domestic letters and the list of stage coaches connecting London with other cities, including their schedules and charges. Burridge emphasized that all this was done in an alphabetical order and was “particularly adapted for trade and business” in a manner that “a mere stranger may easily find the place.”

Among the important public edifices of London was the Post Office, which until today stands right in the heart of the City, almost across the street from the Royal Exchange, “for the convenience of the merchants of trade.” Macky assured his reader that “it is the finest of its kind in Europe,” delivering a vast extent of letters all over the Continent, the Plantations in America, as well as Britain and Ireland. Defoe, too, appreciated its service, noting in 1724 that it was “a branch of revenue formerly not much valued, but now, by the additional penny upon the letters, and by the visible increase of business in the Nation, is grown very considerably.”

Yet his main preoccupation was the improvement of English roads, because as a merchant he very well knew that most of the English rivers were not navigable. It was thus clear to him that the prosperity of domestic manufacturing depended on good communication, which would have made possible the “general circulation of trade, both to and from London, from and to all the

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120 Burridge, *A Review of London*, p. 1. The Review was updated and reprinted at least three times between 1722-1728.
121 Macky, *A Journey Through England: In Familiar Letters From a Gentleman Here, to His Friend Abroad*, p. 145. De Saussure places among the main advantages of London the penny post. The original independent Penny Post was in 1682 incorporated into Royal Post Office and according to him it was “the most useful institution…a large number of small offices have been established in every quarter of the town and in the principal streets. You may, if you wish it, write twice a day to anyone living in the town or suburbs, and once in a day to about one hundred and fifty small towns and villages in the vicinity of London and its suburbs. The person who sent it, in giving it to be posted, will have to pay one penny, and the receiver will also have to pay the same sum; but if the letter is addressed to the town or suburbs the sender alone pays the penny.” In De Saussure, *A Foreign View of England in 1725-1729: The Letters of Monsieur Cesar De Saussure to his Family*, p. 95.
parts of England” because, he argued, “every manufacture is sold and removed five or six times, and perhaps more, before it comes at the last consumer.”

Writing in 1702, Defoe suggested that in any principal direction from London ten miles of a high post-road should be built, paved with stone, chalk or gravel, “full 40 feet in breadth and 4 feet high.” To assure the feasibility of the project, private ‘undertakers’ should have had been selected and “we must allow them to gain, and that considerably, or no man would undertake such a work.” It is not clear to what extent Defoe’s ideas pertaining to road design were original, or if he only echoed the opinion of other persons who may have been much more skilled in their building. Yet when two decades later De Saussure resided in London, he described the high-roads of England as “most enjoyable”. Especially the ones in a ten-mile diameter around London were covered with fine gravel. “It is not custom here, as it is in France, for the poor peasants to be forced to make and keep up the high roads at their own expense and care.” He noted that English called their roads turnpikes, they had barriers evenly spaced apart where a traveler was charged a penny per horse. “The keepers of these turnpikes give you a ticket and a leaden mark, so that you need not to pay a second time on your way back the same day.”

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123 Defoe, The Complete English Tradesman, in Familiar Letters; Directing Him in all the Several Parts and Progressions of Trade, vol. 1, p. 344. Defoe further explains that “[t]he carriage of goods in England...is chiefly managed by horses and wagons... In other countries, and indeed, in most countries of Europe, all their inner trade, such as it is, is carried on by convenience of navigation, either by coasting on the sea, or by river navigation. It is true, our coasting trade is exceedingly great... But as to our river navigation it is not equal to it” (p. 326). In The Wealth of Nations, originally published in 1776, the father of laissez-fair economics, Adam Smith, recognized that good roads, canals, and navigable rivers, built by the government and publicly accessible by all, have the capacity to improve the conditions of free competition by “diminishing the expense of carriage” and by putting the remote parts of the country on the same footing as its cities: “They are upon that account the greatest of all improvements. They encourage the cultivation of the remote, which must always be the most remote of the country. They are advantageous to the town, by breaking down the monopoly of the country in its neighborhood. They are advantageous even to that part of the country. Though they introduce some rival commodities into the old market, they open many new markets to its produce.” See Adam Smith, An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations (Oxford, UK; New York, 1776/1998), p. 170.

124 Defoe, Essays Upon Several Projects; or, Effectual Ways for Advancing the Interest of the Nation, p. 90.

VI. A City on Steroids

In the early 17th century, John Stow observed that due to the rising prominence of the Parliament in the political system and overall centralization of political power in London many of the traditional British landlords and high clergy had to establish at least seasonal residences near Westminster. “Most part of the bishops, abbots, and great lords of the land have houses there, whereunto their resort, and bestow much when they are called to Parliament,” noted Stowe.126 Hundred years later, Defoe added one more important reason for “the prodigious conflux of the nobility and gentry from all parts of England to London” - the increasing dependence of the monied classes on the ups and downs of the stock exchange. By the end of the 17th century even the traditional English landed aristocracy realized that in order to keep up with the growing wealth of the merchant class, it needed to invest its fortunes in trade and stock:

...many thousands of families are so deeply concerned in those stocks, and find it so absolutely necessary to be at hand to take the advantage of buying and selling, as the sudden rise and fall of the price directs, and the loss they often sustain by their ignorance of things when absent... that they find themselves obliged to come up and live constantly here [in London], or at least, most part of the year.127

During Defoe’s active trading period in the 1680s and 1690s, many of his colleagues-merchants still had to frequent the Royal Exchange in person on daily basis, and thus were constrained to live in the city. Their houses, “especially about half a mile in compass around the

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126 John Stow, A Survey of London: Conteyning the originall, antiquity, increase, moderne estate, and description of that city, written in the yeare 1598 (London, 1603). The gradual centralization and transformation of feudal power as of the high medieval period is discussed also by Henri Pirenne, Economic and Social History of Medieval Europe (New York, 1937). For more on this topic see also John Dewey, The Public and its Problems (Athens, OH, 1954). or Habermas, The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society. Defoe confirms this claim stating that at the time of ‘visitation’ – the Plague of 1665 - “the city and suburbs were prodigiously full of people... [who, because] the wars being over, the armies disbanded, and the royal family and the monarchy being restored, had flocked to London to settle in business, or to depend upon and attend the Court for rewards of services, preferments [sic], and the like... All the old soldiers set up trades here, and abundance of families settled here. Again, the Court brought with them a great flux of pride, and new fashions. All people were grown gay and luxurious, and the joy of the Restoration [early 1660s] had brought a vast many families to London.” In Defoe, A Journal of the Plague Year: Being Observations or Memorials, of the Most Remarkable Occurrences, as Well Publick as Private, p. 22.

127 Defoe, A Tour Thro' London about the Year 1725. Being a Letter V and Parts of Letter VI of A Tour Thro' the Whole Island of Great Britain. Divided into Circuits or Journeys, p. 32.
Royal Exchange, particularly and therefrom [sic] are so numerous and magnificent with courts, offices and all other necessary apartments enclosed to themselves,” observed in 1707 Edward Hatton.128 The Swiss visitor, Cesar De Saussure, found the main downtown arteries like Cheapside or Cornhill “the finest in Europe.” Every merchant dwelling there had a sign of copper, pewter, or wood painted and gilt, every house had one or two shops facing the street where “the choicest merchandise from the four quarters of the globe is exposed to the sights of the passers-by.” One may spend whole days “examining these wonderful goods.”129

As a radical Protestant, Defoe refused all vices of increasing consumerism which became a logical consequence of the enormous growth of wealth among London nouveau riches. “Some will have it that this expensive way of living began among the tradesmen first, that is to say, among the citizens of London; and that their eager resolved pursuit of that empty and meanest kind of pride, called imitation, namely, to look like the gentry, and appear above themselves, drew them into it.”130 To make his point, Defoe claimed that by the mid-1720s there were no less than 30,000 barbers in London, adding that “all this is occasioned by that one excess of wearing periwigs, a thing little known in England fifty years ago.”131 He was fully aware that speculation, luxury and extravagance, the vices of his age, were becoming “the virtues of commerce” which as such “propagated trade, labor, manufacture, and had the power to increase of employment of the poor in all parts of England, and even abroad.” Thus the “flourishing of pride has dictated new methods of living to the people, and while the poorest citizens strive to live like the rich, the rich like the gentry, the gentry like the nobility, and the nobility striving to outshine one

128 Hatton, A New View of London; or, an Ample Account of that City in Two Volumes, or Eight Sections, pp. 119 and 627.
130 Defoe, The Complete English Tradesman, in Familiar Letters; Directing Him in all the Several Parts and Progressions of Trade, vol. 1, p. 118.
another.””132 As Defoe stated elsewhere, any plain country-Joan now pretended to be a fine London-Madam, “can drink tea, take snuff, and carry herself as high as the best.””133 Indeed, he argued that the tradesmen’s tables became “the emblems, not of plenty, but of luxury, not of good house-keeping, but of profusion, and that of the highest extravagance.””134 Instead of a dozen coach makers, who used to live in the city, “we have the company of coach makers incorporated, and whole streets of them set up together.””135

As a result, Defoe’s London resembled a city put on steroids. All the rebuilding in the aftermath of the Great Fire of 1666 was, in his eyes, a small matter compared to the new foundation in what he called ‘out parts’. “Extent of ground taken in, and now becomes streets and noble squares of houses, by which the mass, or body of the whole is become so infinitely great, has been generally made in our time, not only within our memory, but even within a few years,” wrote Defoe in the mid-1720s (Figure 4. 10.).136 In 1714 John Macky already counted eight newly erected fashionable noble squares built in the former fields which used to lie between the City of London and the Liberty of Westminster: Lincoln Inn Fields, Covent Garden, Soho, St. James’ Square, Leicester Square, Golden Square, Red Lion Square, and Bloomsbury Square (Figures 4.11.a-b).137 Cesar De Saussure explained to his readers back home on the Continent that such new urban developments were “called squares, because they are of that shape.” Their centers were shut in by railings of painted wood, and contained gardens with flowers, trees, and paths. St. James’ Square, in his opinion, was a fine place, “surrounded with

132 Ibid., vol. 2, part 2, pp. 167 and 169.
133 Defoe, Every-body’s Business, is No-Body’s Business; or, Private Abuses, Publick Grievances: Exemplified in the Pride, Insolence, and Exorbitant Wages (originally published under pen name Andrew Moreton, Esq. London), p. 5.
137 Macky, A Journey Through England: In Familiar Letters From a Gentleman Here, to His Friend Abroad, p. 119.
handsome houses belonging to wealthy noblemen.” In its centre was a fountain, surrounded by equidistantly placed lanterns and iron balustrades.\footnote{De Saussure, A Foreign View of England in 1725-1729: The Letters of Mons. Cesar De Saussure..., pp. 103-04.} Besides them, there was infinity of little courts paved with stone, where people were lodged free from noise of the great streets, which was a convenience one rarely met abroad (Figure 4.11.c).\footnote{Macky, A Journey Through England: In Familiar Letters From a Gentleman Here, to His Friend Abroad, p. 123.}

Most of the London squares were developed as single pieces of real estate. In 1706 Edward Hatton argued about the importance of house insurance because of the fact that most of the new houses in the City of London were “let [sic] out by lease.” Insuring thus secured both the landlord and also the tenant. “By insuring houses they are made as good a security to lend money upon in case of mortgage, as that of land.”\footnote{Hatton, A New View of London; or, an Ample Account of that City in Two Volumes, or Eight Sections, p. 300.} In his Survey of London, Sheppard described the 1720s inhabitants of one such development, The Golden Square, as being a fair blend of old money and nouveau riches.\footnote{Francis H. W. Sheppard, ed., Survey of London, Volumes 31 & 32 - The Parish of St. James, Westminster, North of Piccadilly - Part 2 (London, 1963).} To Defoe, the developers of new squares resembled the builders of biblical Nineveh, a town by ‘three days journey long’. For they, too, were building their new developments as if they intended to make entire new towns. In 1724, in an editorial for his Applebee’s Journal, Defoe reminisced how on a walk through London he observed “an amazing scene of new foundations, not of houses only, but as I may say of new cities.” At the same time he noted early signs of urban decay in the city proper as its inhabitants were quitting the old noble streets and squares, where they used to live, and were removing into the fields and into the country.\footnote{Defoe actually stated that they are “removing into the Fields for fear of infection.” It is possible that the Plague of 1665 and ensuing Great Fire of 1666 played both a pivotal role in triggering the process of suburbanization in London. In A Journal of the Plague Year the author claimed that “vast many people fled, as I have observed, yet they were chiefly from the west end of the town, and from that we call the heart of the city: that is to say, among the wealthiest of the people.” In Defoe, A Journal of the Plague Year: Being Observations or Memorials, of the Most Remarkable Occurrences, as Well Publick as Private, pp. 21-22.} He noticed many empty and decaying houses in central London with bills upon their
Figure 4.10. London Squares.

Legend:
- Built before 1650
- Built between 1650-1700
- Built after 1700
Figure 4.11.a Sutton Nichols, *The Prospect of Lincoln Fields*, c.1750.
Figure 4.11.b Unknown Author, *St. James Square in London*, c.1754.
Figure 4.11.c Sutton Nichols, *Devonshire Square*, c.1750.
doors, wanting tenants, some of them were “the most considerable in the place.” In the London suburbs, in a sharp contrast, Defoe was amazed at observing the world of bricklayers and laborers “who seem to have little else to do, but like gardeners, to dig a hole, put in a few bricks, and presently there is a house.”

The Early Symptoms of Suburban Sprawl

Cesar De Saussure claimed that one of the peculiarities of English merchants was that “after obtaining wealth they are often satisfied to retire from business, and to live the quiet life of the English gentleman.” Defoe, who himself resided the last thirty years of his life somewhere between the suburban villages of Hackney, Newington Green and Islington, observed the influx of London middling classes into the small towns and villages adjacent to London. This trend was facilitated by the fact that new types of traders, who, as he noticed elsewhere, “alienated their estates” and instead of trading in commodities depended now on abstract financial capital, did not need to live anymore in the city-houses similar to one he himself used to live during early merchant years in Freeman’s Yard, employing also his wife and children.

In The Complete English Tradesman, Defoe illustrated this tendency on the example of his friend merchant who kept a house in the City and another in the country about two miles from London “for the air of his wife and children,” and where “he maintained them very comfortably.” But in order to keep up with his business, he himself still lived in the city near the

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144 De Saussure, A Foreign View of England in 1725-1729: The Letters of Monsieur Cesar De Saussure to his Family, p. 135. Defoe confirms this claim stating that the new developments built in the towns adjacent to London are “being chiefly for the habitations of the richest citizens, such as either are able to keep two houses, one in the country and one in the city; or for such citizens as being rich, and having left off trade, live altogether in these neighboring villages, for the pleasure and health of the latter part of their days.” In Defoe, A Tour Thro' the Whole Island of Great Britain. Divided into Circuits or Journeys, p. 6.

145 Defoe, Essays Upon Several Projects: or, Effectual Ways for Advancing the Interest of the Nation, p. 29.
Royal Exchange. Thus “every afternoon he walked out to see them, and to give himself the air too; but always so ordered his diversions, that he was sure to be at home [in the City] before nine at night,” to keep an eye on his apprentices “and see that they observed orders.” Many London merchants preferred to have two households also for the simple fact that it made it easier for them to maintain a mistress in the city. Defoe’s Moll Flanders complained that “nothing but money now recommends the woman,” and that the marriages among Londoners were the consequences of calculations for forming political interests and carrying on business. Love had “no share, or but very little, in the matter.”

The mid-1720s excursions through small towns in the London suburbs gave Defoe an additional opportunity to watch how the increase of wealth in the city was fast spreading into the country. In the village of Stratford in Essex, which, according to him, increased its buildings “to a strange degree, within the compass of about twenty or thirty years past at the most,” the writer observed many symptoms of such a process, from gentrification to the early problems with suburban traffic. Every lot was now filled up with new houses, driving out the adjacent forest and marshlands:

This is indeed most visible, speaking of Stratford in Essex; but it is the same thing in proportion in other villages adjacent, especially on the forest side; as at Low Leyton, Leytonstone, Walthamstow, Woodford, Wanstead, and the towns of West Ham, Plaistow, Upton, etc. In all which places, or near them (as the inhabitants say), above a thousand new foundations have been erected, besides old houses repaired, all since the Revolution [of 1688]; and this is not to be forgotten too, that this increase is, generally speaking, of handsome, large houses, from 20 pounds a year to 60 pounds.

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146 Defoe, The Complete English Tradesman, in Familiar Letters; Directing Him in all the Several Parts and Progressions of Trade, vol. 1, p. 155.
147 During his 1725-29 stay in London De Saussure observed a very liberal relationship between English spouses. “A wife is not generally unhappy when she discovers her husband has a mistress; on the contrary, it sometimes happens that if her husband’s desires it she will be polite towards her rival, but at the same time she will probably console herself with a friend, and thus both husband and wife are happy.” In De Saussure, A Foreign View of England in 1725-1729, p. 128. In Augusta Triumphans Defoe accuses London’s upper class men from often locking their wives in the madhouses in order to enjoy their mistresses and to keep also their wives’ dowries. In Defoe, Augusta Triumphans: Or, the Way to Make London the Most Flourishing City in the Universe, pp. 30-31.
148 Defoe, A Journal of the Plague Year: Being Observations or Memorials, of the Most Remarkable Occurrences, as Well Publick as Private, pp. 16 and 65.
149 Defoe, A Tour Thro’ the Whole Island of Great Britain. Divided into Circuits or Journeys, p. 6.
Defoe’s attitude was typically too snobbish to care about the destiny of the poor peasants who originally inhabited those places and who were now gradually being displaced by the increasing rents and overall values of real estate. On the contrary, he celebrated the demographic change stating that “I must take notice of here, that this increase causes those villages to be much pleasanter and more sociable than formerly, for now people go to them, not for retirement into the country, but for good company.” Important for Defoe, an arduous Dissenter, such towns were without the mixture of assemblies, gaming houses, and other similar “public foundations of vice and debauchery” which were intentionally kept out of these precursors of a suburban gated communities. What may be surprising for today’s reader is Defoe’s remark that “there are no less than two hundred coaches kept by the inhabitants within the circumference of these few villages named above, besides such as are kept by accidental lodgers.” He also noted that some of the hamlets around London completely changed their organic town structure, which was gradually replaced with a strict grid of ‘modern’ urban planning. Describing the new developments in the village of Hammersmith in Middlesex, Defoe noted that “we see not only the wood of great houses and palaces, but a noble square built as it were in the middle of several handsome streets, as if the village seemed inclined to grow up into the city.”

Daniel Defoe was situated in the middle of a perfect storm and may thus have failed to fully grasp and understand the far-reaching implications of all the changes he lived through with their consequent impact on Western civilization. Yet, as a keen observer of London’s daily life, he noticed and described in detail many of their symptoms which can help us to reconstruct the dynamics of the slow tectonic shifts within English society on its way towards modernity. While

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150 Ibid., pp. 6-7.
151 Defoe, A Tour Thro’ London about the Year 1725, p. 89.
Habermas captured the rise of the bourgeois public sphere in an uncritically idealized and abstract form, the writings of Defoe and his contemporaries gave us an opportunity to mentally recreate an actual daily experience of the ‘ordinary’ people. From their vantage point, the process which ushered the birth of the bourgeoisie was less straightforward, often confused and marked by many internal contradictions. As Jack Lindsay points out, Defoe “lived in a period of extreme change, the significance of which, because of its pivotal nature as the first stage of the modern world, was largely hidden from the men who confusedly brought it about.”

152 Cf. Habermas, The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society.
153 Lindsay, The Monster City, p. vii. This statement is reminiscent of Marx’s quote from Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte: “Man makes his own history, but he does not make it out of the whole cloth; he does not make it out of conditions chosen by himself, but out of such as he finds close at hand. The tradition of all past generations weights like an alp upon the brain of the living.” In Karl Marx, Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte (New York, 2007), p. 13. Giddens uses a similar formulation when he claims that human history is shaped by intentional activities but is not an intended project. According to him, the process of social reproduction involves “operation of causal loops, in which a range of unintended consequences of action feed back to reconstitute the initiating circumstances.” In Anthony Giddens, The Constitution of Society: Outline of the Theory of Structuration (Berkeley, CA, 1984), p. 27.
Chapter 4 /

THE ATHENS OF AMERICA: CLASSICAL REPUBLICANISM ENCOUNTERS
DEMOCRACY IN THE STREETS OF PHILADELPHIA

An urban historian observed that unlike France which has its Paris or Britain’s London, the United States does not have a similar ‘resonant example’ of a dominant metropolis with the exclusive position of consistently shaping national culture and social identity over the course of centuries. Instead, the U.S. has several dominant cities and its urban development may be rather seen as a historical relay in which each metropolis takes its turn in setting the rhythm of the entire nation for a limited period of time. Thus it would be inappropriate to call Philadelphia ‘the mother of all U.S. cities’, but it would certainly deserve the title of the oldest of the sisters.1 As the first significant urban center in North America, Penn’s city of brotherly love played a prominent role in the transformation of U.S. society from its simple colonial origins, through a heroic republican Revolution to the early 19th century ascent of popular democracies - opening the door to the unprecedented urban growth and to the processes of industrialization. The goal of this essay is to trace the changes within the public sphere which accompanied this process. As in previous chapters, I focus mainly on the tension between the normative ideal and social reality in the context of changing communication technologies. In building an argument within a very limited space, I intentionally downplay the tumultuous events of the American Revolution in which Philadelphia played a pivotal role and which has been explored in depth by other scholars.2 Such a bold editorial decision is fully in line with the core tenets of my methodological

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approach, built on the premise that neither abrupt changes nor revolutions can significantly change the underlying social structural forces which are the main object of my inquiry.³

I. Making a Case for Philadelphia: A Republican Ideal in Brick and Mortar

A few months after receiving the charter from Charles II on March 14, 1681, the Proprietor of Pennsylvania, William Penn, appointed Captain Thomas Holmes as surveyor general of his new colony. Many of its first settlers, mostly Penn’s fellow Quakers, still remembered the plague and Great Fire which almost devastated London fifteen years earlier. Thus Penn nurtured an exact vision for the colony’s future capital, Philadelphia. The layout of the city reflected his desire to mitigate the ills typical of Old World settlements, resulting in an open and airy design which was clearly emphasized in his instructions to Holmes: “Let every house be placed, if the person pleases, in the middle of the plat, as to breadth way of it, so that there may be ground on each side for gardens or orchards, or fields, that it may be a green country town, which will never be burnt, and always be wholesome.”⁴ Philadelphia’s main artery, High Street - later known as Market Street - was to be 100 feet across, larger than any street in London. Its auxiliaries were to be half that size, everything arranged in a strict rectangular grid. One main square of ten acres and four smaller squares in each corner of the city would have guaranteed additional open green spaces to its future inhabitants (Figure 5.1.).⁵

By the time of Philadelphia’s founding, the urban design grid had already been successfully applied in many Spanish and English settlements in the New World. But striking similarities between Holmes’ plan for Philadelphia, and Robert Hooke’s proposal for London’s rebuilding in

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the aftermath of the Great Fire of 1666 make a good argument for those who claim that the city was, from the very beginning, conceived as ‘New London’ (Figure 5.2.). It was supposed to be the materialization of the religious and social utopian dreams of Quaker dissenters which came up short in Penn’s native England. His ‘green country town’ was to inspire ideas of civic and religious freedom while tempering the negative effects of financial and political speculation as well as growing urban poverty, so pronounced in London by the time of Philadelphia’s founding. Penn strongly believed that profits made from farming were more morally defensible than those made from manufacturing and trade. Each settler who purchased tracts of land in the new colony was to be assigned a city lot proportionate to the extent of his holdings. In 1682, the long-distance sale of land in bulk, which took place mostly in the London offices of Penn’s business associates, was so successful that it was oversold by some 13,000 acres.

The original Holmes master plan is still recognizable in the layout of the city in spite of the fact that the settlers early on abandoned the idea of wide airy lots and green squares distributed equidistantly between the banks of the Delaware and Schuylkill rivers. In 1748 Peter Kalm noted that “settlers could not be induced to come in sufficient numbers to fill a place of such size.” And those who came never embraced farming. “Their chief employ, indeed, is traffick

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6 Reps, The Making of Urban America: A History of City Planning in the United States, p. 163. Reps offers an interesting comparison of the three most famous plans for rebuilding of London after the Great Fire of 1666, designed respectively by Sir Christopher Wren, John Evelyn and Robert Hooke (Ibid, pp. 15-19). In the end, the City of London adopted none of those proposals simply because Londoners rebuilt their houses much faster than the urban designers drew their plans. With the rebuilding, the original volume of the original wooden homes were simply recast in brick. In John Summerson, Georgian London (New York, 1946), p. 40. For more on Holme’s plan see also Michael Alan Ralph Cooper, "A More Beautiful City": Robert Hooke and the Rebuilding of London After the Great Fire (London, 2003).

7 See some of Penn’s and Holme’s descriptions of Philadelphia published in John Reed, An Explanation of the Map of the City and Liberties of Philadelphia (Philadelphia, 1774). For more on the social situation in London at the time of Philadelphia’s founding see the previous chapter dedicated to English metropolis.


Figure 5.1. Thomas Holmes, *A Portraiture of the City of Philadelphia*, 1682.
Figure 5.2. The City of London at the time of Great Fire in 1666 and Robert Hooke’s proposal for rebuilding the city.
and mercantile business,” observed another visitor in 1744.\textsuperscript{12} The original inward-oriented settlement, as designed by Penn and Holmes, gradually took the shape very similar to a mercantile triangle, typical for most of the British colonial coastal trading posts (Figure 5.3.).\textsuperscript{13}

Yet the urban layout of Philadelphia was specific in the sense that the spatial distribution of single crafts, trade and industries was very homogeneous across the entire urban space. With the exception of the riverfront - which naturally hosted all shipping-related services - none of the particular streets or quarters was recognized for the concentration of a single profession similar to most European cities of that period, reflected often in the names of their streets.\textsuperscript{14}

But the grid survived, physically imprinted into the city’s layout, as well as figuratively into the minds of its inhabitants. Indeed, the physical grid was so pronounced and distinctive that there was barely a visitor who failed to mention it in his/her letters or diaries.\textsuperscript{15} In 1842, full hundred and sixty years after its founding, Charles Dickens called Philadelphia a handsome city,


\textsuperscript{14} Though it may be argued that most of the printing businesses were located in the vicinity of the intersection of Front and High (Market) Streets. But they were always mixed with other crafts and services.

Figure 5.3. John Birch, *Plan of the City of Philadelphia*, c.1800. Hornsby claims that in a coastal colonial city, the urban form would have a natural propensity to assume the shape of a triangle, with warehouses on its base, facing the waterfront, and political, administrative, and religious institutions based deeper inland in its peak. In-between would be financial institutions, hotels, taverns, and retail.
but distractingly regular. “After walking it for an hour or two, I felt that I would have given the world for a crooked street.”

For Thomas Hamilton, Philadelphia was a city “laid down by square and rule, a sort of habitable problem - a mathematical infringement on the rights of individual eccentricity - a rigid and prosaic despotism of right angles and parallelograms.”

Indeed, with the ascent of the age of reason and its propensity to elevate system, logic and symmetry, the straight line reflected an entire new philosophical system, and many of its proponents saw a direct correlation between the straight line and the hidden potential of social engineering. In 1764 Voltaire compared the legal systems of leading European nations to the crooked streets of their medieval cities. “People made them up as they went haphazardly, irregularly, just like they built towns,” argued the author.

Philadelphia’s native son, Quaker merchant Thomas P. Cope, similarly contrasted organically-formed cities with their ‘crooked streets’ on one hand, and modern urban habitats based on the austere rectangular grid on the other, and speculated in his diaries on the potentially different impacts which both of them have on the character of people who populate their streets:

The Philadelphians, from their infancy accustomed to straight and regular streets, are people of steady habits in morals and business, while the New Yorkers, where the streets are crooked, their corners more diversified and terminations more abrupt, are more adventurous, less chaste in their principles and more perverse.

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16 Dickens, American Notes (1842), p. 129. Dickens only echoed dozens of other visitors who visited Philadelphia in the 18th and early 19th century. “There is a want of variety, a likeness runs through every street in the town...” In Mylne, Travels in the Colonies in 1773-1775: Described in the Letters of William Mylne, p. 74. Levasseur, who accompanied General Lafayette on his 1824-25 American journey, noted that all beautiful buildings and monuments which form this regular city “in the course of time, tire the eye by excessive uniformity.” In Levasseur, Lafayette in America in 1824 and 1825: Journal of the Voyage to the United States, p. 164.


20 Thomas P. Cope, Philadelphia Merchant: The Diary of Thomas P. Cope, 1800-1851, ed. Eliza Cope Harrison (South Bend, IN, 1978), p. 346. Obviously, when comparing his native Philadelphia with New York, the author was talking about a city which was still mirroring its original Dutch pattern of settlement. Cope here paraphrased his friend, Joshua Edwards, but he himself noted, maybe less poignantly, the difference between the urban layout of New York and Philadelphia elsewhere. As an orthodox Quaker, he certainly preferred the regularity of his native city (Ibid., p. 65). A similar comparison, but with an opposite result, was made by Dr. Robert Honyman, a British settler from Virginia who in 1775 passed through Philadelphia twice on his way to and from Maine: “The streets [of New York] are by no means regular, and the ground is very uneven, nor are the houses
But it was not just the straightness of the streets which reflected the character of Philadelphians. Many other observers likewise pointed out a direct link between the social values of city’s inhabitants and the very design of its buildings. Venezuelan revolutionary leader Francisco de Miranda argued that there was a direct connection between the city’s architecture and philosophical tenets of its Quaker founders, adding that “their architecture is plain and simple, like the dress and habits of the first inhabitants.” And Philadelphia did remain ‘Quaker all over’ even long after its founders and proprietors lost their firm grip over the city’s affairs. “All things, animate and inanimate, seem influenced by a spirit of quietism as pervading as the atmosphere,” noted Thomas Hamilton in the early 1830s. All in all, Philadelphia’s residential and public buildings pleased visitors’ eyes, yet none of them stuck out of the crowd for exceptional architectural beauty, nor originality. It was “the most uniformly built beautiful city, not only of the United States but of the entire world,” claimed the secretary of the legendary General Lafayette.

But rigid morals, simplicity and plainness weren’t as virtues praised only among the Penn’s Quakers. At the time of the American Revolution, they were still seen as the core republican values, while any form of indulgence, luxury and pomp were labeled as decadent vices attributed to the detested aristocracy of the Old World. If this was indeed the case, Philadelphia was a city of republican mediocrity “personified in brick and mortar”, argued Thomas Hamilton. The

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22 Hamilton, Men and Manners in America (1830-1831), p. 183.
23 Levasseur, Lafayette in America in 1824 and 1825: Journal of the Voyage to the United States, p. 164. The Scottish architect William Mylne in the early 1770s noted that there was “a want of variety, a likeness runs through every street in the town.” In Mylne, Travels in the Colonies in 1773-1775: Described in the Letters of William Mylne. German medical doctor and biologist Johann Schoepf in 1783 noted that “there is nothing but streets all alike, the house of brick, of the same height mostly, and built by plan that seldom varies.” In Schoepf, Travels in the Confederation (1783-1784), part 1, p. 59. Mrs. Trollope, who visited Philadelphia in the summer of 1830, noted that there were “many handsome houses, but none that are very splendid.” In Trollope, Domestic Manners of the Americans (1827-1831), p. 205.
24 Hamilton, Men and Manners in America (1830-1831), pp. 180 and 183.
mediocrity, so typical for the design of its buildings, went hand in hand with the \textit{a priori} democratic qualities of its grid design. Urban space which resulted from this synthesis lacked any natural center of gravity where social and political power would naturally converge. “In America centralization is not popular,” De Tocqueville reminded his French readers. “Hence the beams of human intelligence do not emanate from a common center but crisscross every direction. Nowhere have the Americans established any central direction over their thinking, any more than they have established any central direction over affairs of state.” \textsuperscript{25} In the case of Philadelphia, such social philosophy was clearly reflected in a monotonous urban landscape in which “street answers street, each alley has a brother, and half the city just reflects the other,” assessed Thomas Hamilton. \textsuperscript{26}

Yet the overall progress and prosperity of Quaker Philadelphia by the time of the Revolution proved clearly to all critiques of its austere climate and monotonous design “how much influence the simplicity of customs has in promoting the welfare of a newly populated country,” noted a young Milanese count who visited the city in the 1780s.\textsuperscript{27} Indeed, all aspects of cultural progress and material welfare which Philadelphia achieved in the first decades of its republican government were ample compensation for the “absolute lack of frivolities to which we unfortunately attach so high a value in Europe,” added in the 1820s the secretary of General Lafayette.\textsuperscript{28} In this context, the urban layout of Philadelphia proved clearly superior to the

\textsuperscript{26} All quotes are from Hamilton, \textit{Men and Manners in America (1830-1831)}, pp. 183-84. It was only the erection of the City Hall in 1871 which attempted to impose a form of spatial hierarchy on this democratic space by restoring the key position of the large central square which was supposed to dominate Penn's original urban plan. See Weigley, ed., \textit{Philadelphia: A 300 Year History}, p. 16. Because of the lack of a city hall which would dominate the urban space, a confused European visitor was ready to claim - erroneously - that Philadelphia did not even have its own municipal government: “Until recently Philadelphia had not felt the need for a public governing body or of a city hall,” wrote the French revolutionary Brissot de Warville in the 1780s. In J, p. Brissot de Warville, \textit{New Travels in the United States of America, 1788}, Mara Soceanu Vamos and Durand Echeverria trans. (Cambridge, MA, 1964), p. 254.
\textsuperscript{27} Castiglioni, Luigi Castiglioni's Viaggio: Travels to the United States of North America, 1785-87, p. 269.
\textsuperscript{28} Levasseur, Lafayette in America in 1824 and 1825: Journal of the Voyage to the United States, p. 164.
overcrowded European cities with their growing social malaises - a problem which almost reached the level of a phobia among some of the founding fathers. Consequently, Americans fervently embraced transparent grid which became the poster child of an ideal republican urban society where vigilant neighbors mutually fostered moral and civic virtues by safeguarding each other from the temptation of evil vices. Strengthened by “the vigilance of the guards, posted at each corner to maintain security and good order,” this system of urban organization rendered Philadelphia “one of the most pleasant and well-ordered cities in the world.” Not surprisingly, the combined qualities of urban grid soon conquered the spatial imagination of the young Republic.

The ideas of republican egalitarianism and practical utilitarianism were reflected even in the nomenclature of Philadelphia’s streets, which either bore names of trees or were simply numbered. And almost all urban arteries were skirted by regularly placed wooden poles which, together with straight rows of Lombardy poplars, delineated the sidewalks. “For what reason I don’t know,” wrote Thomas Hamilton concerning the selection of poplars. “They certainly give no shade, and possess no beauty.” The decision to plant poplars within urban space was probably driven by the fact that their narrow crowns were less of a fire hazard. Another unquestionable

29 Jefferson said that “the mobs of great cities add just so much to the support of pure government, as the sores do to strength of the human body.” In Thomas Jefferson, Notes on the State of Virginia (New York, 1984), p. 291. For more on this topic see Frank Freidel, “Boosters, Intellectuals, and the American City,” in The Historian and the City, ed. Oscar Handlin and John Burchard (Cambridge, MA, 1963).


33 Benjamin Franklin founded the fire insurance company, The Philadelphia Contributorship, which notoriously refused to insure urban houses build near big trees. Its competition, the Mutual Assurance Company, was established in 1784 on the premise that it would - for an extra premium - insure houses if the neighboring trees were low and narrow. For more on this topic see Harry M. Tinkcom, “The Revolutionary City, 1765-1783,” in Philadelphia: A 300-year History ed. Russell F. Weigley (New York, 1982), p. 151.
advantage of their narrow silhouettes was that they did not obscure the view and as such fit very well into the urban panopticon (Figure 5.4.). During her visit in 1790, Judith Sargent Murray, the wife of the first Universalist preacher in America, was literally enchanted by the uniformity of Philadelphia’s streets, illuminated at night by streetlamps placed equidistantly. “Many object to Philadelphia on account of its uniformity, but I confess myself so great a Lover of order, as to be enamored to its beauties in whatever order they strike my admiring gaze - yes, to the charms of regularity, every faculty of my soul delights to do homage… for surely order may shape, and discipline the numerous train of versatility.”

As a consequence of this success, the overwhelming majority of American cities and towns which were founded or further expanded in the early republican period - New York City with its original Dutch system of ‘crooked streets’ notwithstanding - adopted the grid plan, overtly or covertly reproducing the hegemonic position which Philadelphia still exercised over the American imagination (Figure 5.5.). For a century or more since its founding, the city was the most common point of departure for settlers on their way towards the Western frontier and as such served as a natural model of urban planning which was replicated over and over again in the process of building of other towns. Philadelphia graciously shared with them its DNA in the form of its spatial order, as well as the core ideological concepts. Indeed, urban form and the values it represented became inseparably interwoven. It was not by chance that during his 1835

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34 All quotes are from Hamilton, *Men and Manners in America* (1830-1831), pp. 183-4.
Figure 5.4. John Birch, *High Street, from Ninth Street*, c. 1800.
Figure 5.5. J. Bachman, *Bird’s-Eye View of Philadelphia*, 1850.
visit of Cincinnati - the poster child of a frontier urban settlement of the Jacksonian era - Frenchman Michel Chevalier observed that its inhabitants not only built their settlement on a grid, but chose the archetype of Philadelphia’s republican spirit, Benjamin Franklin, “as the patron saint of their city and adopted Poor Richard’s maxims as a fifth gospel.”

**Urban Paradox: A City Without Defending Walls**

Unlike Boston, New York, or other colonial towns, Philadelphia had no natural or man-made fortifications which set the city apart from the very beginning from any other sustainable urban settlement ever built by modern Western civilizations. Peter Kalm, a Swedish-Finnish botanist who visited the city between 1748 and 1750 noted in his diary that “the Quakers opposed all fortifications, as contrary to the tenets of their religion.” Historians agree that Penn’s enlightened Indian policy provided all the protection necessary on dry land. The only danger to the city were the ships of Spanish and French privateers, whose threat became imminent in the winter of 1747. It was the ingenuous Franklin who took the opportunity presented to him when even some Quakers, seeing their commercial interests suddenly put in danger, were able to put aside their pacifism and contributed financially to the city’s defense. Furthermore, his approach


41 In 1744 Alexander Hamilton wrote that there was “no publick magazine of arms not any method of defense, either for the city or province... This is owing to the obstinacy of the Quakers in maintaining their principle of non-resistance.” In Hamilton, *Gentleman's Progress: The Itinerarium of Dr. Alexander Hamilton*, 1744, p. 22. During his 1788 visit, naïve French revolutionary Brissot de Warville argued that “brothers who live together need for their defense neither soldier, nor forts, nor police, not any
very well illustrates not just the issue of Philadelphia’s defensive fortifications, but also the 
dynamics of a public debate and principle of self-reliance characteristic for the colonial 
government of the city. “Several papers were then handed around for and against the opinion,” 
noted Kalm, who visited the city shortly after.\textsuperscript{42} Franklin himself printed and circulated amongst 
Phileadelphians one of his most famous pamphlets titled \textit{Plain Truth}, in which he explained the 
necessity for building the city’s defense. Ensuingly, he called a meeting of citizens where he first 
“harangued them little on the subject” and since nobody raised any significant objections, all 
participants were then asked to sign a printed pledge that they were willing to join or support the 
militias. At the end of the day Franklin counted “above twelve hundred hands” of those who 
supported his initiative. The copies of the pledge were circulated all around Pennsylvania where 
another nine thousand people joined the effort. Franklin subsequently organized a public lottery 
“to defray the expense of building a battery below the town” (Figure 5.6.).\textsuperscript{43} While his militia 
survived centuries and eventually was transformed into the National Guard, the fortifications did 
not have a long life. In 1759 Andrew Burnaby observed that “at the south end of the town, there 
is a battery mounting thirty guns, but it is in a state of decay. It was designed to be a check upon 
privateers.”\textsuperscript{44} Thus Kalm’s laconic observation that “the town is not enclosed” and contrary to 
the guarded city-gates which were regulating the access to European cities, Philadelphia had only 
one customhouse for the ships.\textsuperscript{45} As a result of this development, Penn’s town on the Delaware 
remained an ‘open city’ with latent potential to explode spatially.

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\textsuperscript{42} Kalm, Peter Kalm’s Travels in North America (1748-1750), p. 26. 
\textsuperscript{92-3.} The full title of the 22-page pamphlet was \textit{Plain Truth: or, Serious Considerations on the Present State of the City of 
Philadelphia, and the Province of Pennsylvania.} Franklin signed it as “a Tradesman of Philadelphia.” The story is also recorded 
by Kalm who came to Philadelphia a year later Kalm, Peter Kalm’s Travels in North America (1748-1750), pp. 26 and 31. 
\textsuperscript{44} Burnaby, Burnaby’s Travels Through North America (1759-1760), p. 90. 
\textsuperscript{45} Kalm, Peter Kalm’s Travels in North America (1748-1750), p. 31.
Figure 5.6. After a view made by George Heap, *The East Prospect of the City of Philadelphia*, 1754. The image of The State House appears in the upper left corner and the Battery in the upper right corner.
II. A City of Work, Not Leisure

In the 18th century, where many of the overpopulated European cities were getting ready to explode within their walls as a result of growing social problems, America offered a different model of urban organization. During his American journey in 1743, Edward Kimber observed that the colonists have “no ambition to fill a metropolis, and associate together.”46 Jefferson’s famous comment that “the mobs of great cities add just so much to the support of pure government, as the sores do to strength of the human body,” reflected the dominant social thinking among the generation of founding fathers.47 Europeans themselves were becoming increasingly aware of the threat their growing cities presented for overall social stability. “When the population of the city becomes large, it is necessary to have almshouses, prisons, soldiers, police, and spies,” argued visiting French revolutionary De Warville.48 His compatriot, military commander Abbé Pierre, expanded further on this theme:

Our European cities and towns, for the most part, afford us to this day striking proof of the calamities, ignorance, misery and barbarity of our ancestors, in their unpleasant, unhealthy situations, in their walls planted around with battlements, their formidable turrets of defense, their close and compact buildings, almost without air or light, and their crooked muddy streets, equally incommodious and disgusting; but the American towns are built upon a different plan; not walled in, as if mankind were to live in eternal distrust of each other. They are build on agreeable salubrious spots of land, washed by pure and navigable waters, surrounded by fertile fields, laid out in spacious streets crossing each other in direct lines, and ornamented with buildings everywhere beautiful, convenient and regular.49

Yet even the most zealous European admirers of the new social order which they found in America after a while missed some of the amenities which were so common in their Old World cities. The first officially licensed public theatres in Philadelphia were built only after the

46 Although Kimber travelled mostly in Virginia and Maryland, his observations were implicitly confirmed by those who visited Philadelphia. In Edward Kimber, Itinerant Observations in America (1743) (Newark, NJ, 1998), p. 46.
49 Robin, New Travels Through North America (1781), p. 80. “The larger and smaller cities of America have this advantage,” noted German medical doctor and biologist Johann Schoepf in 1783, “that they have not grown from villages by chance but were planned from the beginning and have enlarged by a plan.” In Travels in the Confederation (1783-1784), part 1, pp. 57-8.
Pennsylvania antitheater act was repealed in 1761, but for many years they were still looked upon with suspicion even by some educated and otherwise open-minded members of local society.\(^50\) In 1766, *The Pennsylvania Gazette* published an editorial letter signed by ‘the Censor’ who blamed the vices promoted by theatres for the downfall of Classical Athens.\(^51\) Judith Sargent Murray, the New England spouse of the first Universalist preacher in America, had to sneak into one of the Philadelphia’s theatres in 1790 in disguise through the back door in order not to injure the high social status enjoyed by her husband.\(^52\) She noted with bitterness that despite her attempts to promote “the morality of a good play, and the advantage to be derived from reducing a system of ethics to practice,” the response of her Philadelphia friends was uniform: “The Play house is a school of vice. The lives of performers are generally infamous, and by taking a seat at the theatre we countenance, as far as in our power, idleness and debauchery.”\(^53\)

Wintertime in Philadelphia was dedicated to dance assemblies.\(^54\) Aside from some private balls given by the French and Spanish ambassadors during the Federal era,\(^55\) Philadelphians strived to imitate the famous English spa of Bath with their “places appropriated for the young people to dance in.” Those, who did not dance, played cards, “but at Philadelphia the games of

\(^{50}\) Edwin B. Bronner, “Village into Town, 1701-1746,” in *Philadelphia: A 300-year History* ed. Russell F. Weigley (New York, 1982), pp. 90-1. Spanish revolutionary De Miranda observed that since the theatres were unconstitutional to the Quaker system, during his visit in 1780-82 “a short play was presented here in a small theater fashioned for this occasion.” Yet to avoid sheriff’s persecution a “stratagem was used of every actor’s holding a sheaf of papers, which they pretended was the play being presented, in order to evade the literal meaning of the law, considering the performance a reading, not a representation...” De Miranda, *The New Democracy in America: Travels of Francisco de Miranda in the United States, 1783-84*, p. 52. In 1790 Murray complained that not even such liberal spirits as Benjamin Rush, “that celebrated Doctor Rush who provides the female Academy... a man of letter, a philosopher, a writer... had not, for twenty years, been found in theatre.” In Murray, *From Gloucester to Philadelphia in 1790: Observations, Anecdotes, and Thoughts from the 18th Century Letters of Judith Sargent Murray*, p. 112.


\(^{53}\) Ibid, p. 112.


commerce are not allowed,” observed Marquis de Chastellux.\(^56\) In the winter of 1773-74, dance assemblies were held at the City Tavern. They began shortly after sunset and lasted till two or three in the morning. Male participants were asked to pay their entry by subscription which was arranged at the beginning of the winter. The ladies and notable strangers who sojourned in the city were invited and admitted free.\(^57\) Yet even such a diversion was structured strictly according to ‘Quaker rules’. Every dancer had a partner assigned for the entire evening by a lottery. De Chastellux nicknamed such dancing parties ‘methodical amusements’, recalling a situation when the master of ceremonies, Colonel Wilkinson, reprimanded a lady who evidently forgot her turn: “Miss, take care what you are about; do you think you come here for your pleasure?”\(^58\)

As a result, Scottish settler Alexander Hamilton in 1744 complained that he had never been “in a place so populous where the gout for public gay diversions prevailed so little.” He asserted that especially since George Whitefield preached among Philadelphians in 1739-40, they bonded even closer to the philosophy of secular asceticism which was one of the tenets of the Quaker religion. “Their chief employ, indeed, is traffick and mercantile business which turns their thoughts from these levitys [sic],” pointed out Thomas Hamilton, adding that what he saw in the city was a “strange influence of religious enthusiasm upon human nature” which excited aversion to the innocent amusements of life.\(^59\) After dark, the streets of the city were deserted and their profound silence was interrupted only by the cries of the few watchmen patrolling the

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\(^{57}\) De Miranda, *The New Democracy in America: Travels of Francisco de Miranda in the United States, 1783-84*, p. 54.

\(^{58}\) Chastellux, *Travels in North-America (1780-1782)*, vol. 1, p. 314-16.

\(^{59}\) Hamilton attended “a tolerable concerto performed by a harpsichord and three violins” in the Musical Club. He added that the Club was started in 1738 until Whitfield’s opposition forced it to close temporarily. In Hamilton, *Gentleman’s Progress: The Itinerarium of Dr. Alexander Hamilton, 1744*, pp. 22-3 and 189. George Whitefield preached in Philadelphia in 1739-40. For more see Whitefield, *George Whitefield’s Journals*. 
streets.⁶⁰ “This darkness, this stillness is so great that I almost felt it awful,” noted Mrs. Trollope in her diary.⁶¹

Sundays in Philadelphia were dedicated almost exclusively to the church.⁶² An anonymous French visitor complained in 1777 that “you cannot imagine how far they carry their fanatical respect for the Sabbath. Beginning Saturday evening, they cannot sing, laugh, work, or do anything, in short, that the Catholics forbid only on Sunday morning.” All caffeehouses and taverns were at that time deserted to the point that Sundays in Philadelphia reminded him of a French city in the throes of the deepest mourning. Any form of gaiety was forbidden even in the privacy of one’s own home. Those who did not respect this rule were facing “new-style inquisitors” appointed by the judiciary, authorized “to remove you from your home and throw you charitably into prison.” The French visitor concluded that such a scrupulous approach resulted in the fact that leisure-seeking Philadelphians were deserting the city en masse on the weekend, leaving for the suburbs.⁶³ On Sundays, the streets bound out of town were “filled with the carts and coaches of pleasure-seeking Philadelphians.”⁶⁴ In the summer, they formed parties on the banks of Schuylkill. The most prestigious of such gatherings was The Schuylkill Fishing Company, a closed social club of local elites which met every two weeks. “They have very pleasant room erected in a romantic situation upon the banks of the river, where they generally dine and drink tea,” remarked Rev. Andrew Burnaby in 1759. “The first and most distinguished people of the colony are of this society; and it is very advantageous to a stranger to be introduced to it.”⁶⁵

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⁶¹ Trollope, Domestic Manners of the Americans (1827-1831), pp. 212-3.
⁶² Bölöni Farkas noted in 1831 that “strolling in the streets, I visited a few more churches because Sunday is completely devoted to church affairs.” Bölöni Farkas, Journey in North America, 1831, p. 212.
⁶⁴ Schoepf, Travels in the Confederation (1783-1784), part 1, p. 127.
⁶⁵ Burnaby, Burnaby’s Travels Through North America (1759-1760), pp. 97-8.
By the end of the 18th century, not only the upper classes but also many established Philadelphia craftsmen started building weekend retreat houses in the Northern Liberties, along the Schuylkill or in neighboring Germantown where they “happily blended” the advantages of the city and the country.\textsuperscript{66} Plotting the residences and workplaces of several dozens of Philadelphia merchants throughout the 19th century, Kenneth Jackson pointed out that up until the mid-19th century the urban community was relatively compact. According to Warner, it was only the arrival of the streetcar in the American cities in the 1860s which triggered suburbanization.\textsuperscript{67} Yet it may well be argued in the light of what was said above that as of the late 18th century, many Philadelphians already had double residences - one in the city and one in the suburbs - and the 1860s arrival of the new transportation technology only tapped into the existing social need articulated much earlier. As pointed out in the previous chapter of this study, a similar development was already observed by Daniel Defoe in his description of the 1720s suburban expansion in London, where merchants maintained two residences - one in the city for work and one in the countryside for their families. In the case of Philadelphia, this movement was undoubtedly reinforced by the fact that the urban space was from the very beginning associated mainly with work. Quaker austerity pushed all activities connected with leisure into suburbs. An open grid without any constraining walls and narrow gates certainly proved helpful in the later process of suburbanization.

\textsuperscript{66} Murray noted that “we were gratified upon our way, by a view of a number of elegant seats, scattered upon the banks of the Schuylkill, where, during the heat of summer, the opulent citizen of Philadelphia repairs.” She added that the best testimony of the wealth of Philadelphia was the fact that “it is no uncommon thing for the mechanic, such as shoe makers, tailors, etc. to possess, in addition to their own houses, elegant country retirements.” In Murray, From Gloucester to Philadelphia in 1790: Observations, Anecdotes, and Thoughts from the 18th Century Letters of Judith Sargent Murray, pp. 192 and 196. Northern Liberties were the outlying part of the city which Penn originally allocated as a premium for those of the First Purchasers whom he suspected would not settle in Philadelphia. In Dunn and Dunn, “The Founding, 1681-1701,” pp. 16-25.

\textsuperscript{67} Jackson, Urban Deconcentration in the Nineteenth Century: A Statistical Inquiry. For more on the impact of streetcar on the American city see Warner, Streetcar Suburbs the Process of Growth in Boston, 1870-1900.
Philadelphia’s Public Squares and Gardens

Gardens were seen by Philadelphians purely through a purely utilitarian prism for quite some time. By the Revolution, the city had neither pleasure gardens nor public walks which made it in the eyes of European visitors “deficient in an essential article of comfort and enjoyment.”68 To enjoy the breeze on hot summer days, Philadelphians would sit on benches in front of their houses or on their balconies.69 Visitors observed that there were no fountains where people would gather to enjoy their ‘water cooler discussions’ while waiting for their turn when getting water. It was this social function which made public wells and fountains some of the most important points of socialization in the old European cities. Instead, each street in Philadelphia had a great number of pumps interspersed every 30-40 yards where no one had to wait. Despite their practicality, they were seen by foreigners as “rather odd embellishments to the city.”70

Up until the Revolution, the closest equivalent to an open public square in Philadelphia was a small enclosure behind the State House, which had “well kept gravel walks” and many “beautiful flowering trees.” When the city finally filled out Penn’s original plan, the first two of the original five large squares slowly emerged and were gradually incorporated into the urban structure. One of them, Washington Square, was in Mrs. Trollope’s judgment the closest resemblance to a typical London square that was to be found in Philadelphia. Yet she never saw its benches occupied, because, as she explained, “the Americans have either no leisure, or no inclination for these moments of délassemanet that all other people, I believe, indulge in.” A German lady she met there strolling with her little nephew confirmed her impression when she stated that the

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68 Chastellux, Travels in North-America (1780-1782), vol. 1, p. 333. Cf. Schoepf, Travels in the Confederation (1783-1784), part 1, p. 93.
people of this country “never amuse themselves... they have no ease, no forgetfulness of
business and of care - no, not for a moment.”

Yet as of the late 18th century another type of garden began to emerge in Philadelphia:
suburban amusement parks whose inventors capitalized on the tendency of so many residents
to escape the boring Quaker city on the weekend, as well as their deeply anchored quest for
orderliness and personal security. For four dollars per season, Philadelphians were able to enjoy
the splendidly illuminated Harrowgate Gardens with their evening concerts, genteel company,
decent but simple lodgings and baths with two kinds of mineral water. To make sure that the
visitors enjoyed their stay in this enclosed and commodified space, rules were conspicuously
posted “conformity to which is required,” noted Judith Sargent Murray. An even bigger
attraction were Schuylkill Gardens, which Murray called ‘the American Vauxhall’ after the
fashionable London pleasure garden opened in the 1730s and soon imitated throughout the
Western world. The main attraction of Schuylkill Gardens was the original construction of the
Federal Temple which - during the celebration of the ratification of the Constitution - was carried
through the streets of Philadelphia. It was supported by thirteen pillars - each representing one of
the founding colonies - and the view of Philadelphia from this “enchanting little building” in
Classical Greek style must have evoked in many visitors the view of Athens from the
Acropolis.

71 Trollope, Domestic Manners of the Americans (1827-1831), pp. 208-9.
72 Murray, From Gloucester to Philadelphia in 1790: Observations, Anecdotes, and Thoughts from the 18th Century Letters
of Judith Sargent Murray, p. 114. See also the advertisement published under the title “Medicinal Waters, for Drinking and
Bathing at Harrowgate, within Four Miles of Philadelphia, Near the Frankfort Road,” published in The Pennsylvania Packet, and
Daily Advertiser on May 6, 1788, p. 4.
73 Philadelphia’s Vauxhall Gardens were between South Broad Street, Walnut Street, South Juniper Street, and Sansom
Street. See also chapter 4 dedicated to Vauxhall Gardens in London in Miles Ogborn, Spaces of Modernity: London’s
74 Murray, From Gloucester to Philadelphia in 1790: Observations, Anecdotes, and Thoughts from the 18th Century Letters
of Judith Sargent Murray, p. 152.
Despite its assurance of order and security, the most distressing experience Murray had during her stay in Philadelphia was associated with this place. It happened during the Independence Day celebration, when upwards of six thousand persons crowded Schuylkill Gardens. That evening “the unlicensed mirth, the prevalent anarchy, boisterous manifestations of unbridled joy, and rude elbowing of the promiscuous throng” distressed her from the very moment she and her husband reached the grounds. When later the orchestra, “that beautiful seat of harmony, was taken by the mob… every idea of enjoyment was of necessity banished.” In an ensuing attempt to escape from this chaos a friend “took compassion upon our sufferings” and led them through a flight of rooms, into “a subterranean passage through which, winding our way, we once more found ourselves safely conducted into a spacious street,” leaving behind the illuminations, fireworks, heathen gods and goddesses. Murray’s narrative is reminiscent of a Freudian dream in which she and her husband are re-born while escaping the uncontrollable mob through narrow subterranean passages, leading into a spacious street. This short tale may well convey the latent desire of the growing American middle classes to escape the crowded, dangerous and promiscuous metropolis and exchange it for the safety of the open spaces in tranquil suburbia.\(^75\) Murray returned to this theme again elsewhere in her diary; in the course of 19\(^\text{th}\) century it was recurrent in the U.S. literature.\(^76\)

\(^75\) Ibid, pp. 175-78. In another situation, Murray talks with disgust about the visit to the market in Philadelphia where “persons of every description, whether from necessity, convenience, or curiosity mingle…and we are under the necessity of literally shouldering each other.” In Murray, \textit{From Gloucester to Philadelphia in 1790: Observations, Anecdotes, and Thoughts from the 18th Century Letters of Judith Sargent Murray}, p. 109.

\(^76\) “Think of a baby in a flat! It’s a contradiction in terms; the flat is a negation of motherhood!” exclaims Mr. March in Howells’ novel \textit{A Hazard of New Fortunes} (1871). “The Anglo-Saxon home, as we know it in the Anglo-Saxon house, is simply impossible in the Franco-American flat, not because it it’s humble, but because it’s false.” In William Dean Howells, \textit{A Hazard of New Fortunes} (New York, 2002), pp. 67-68. Morton and Lucia White claim that the America’s “most celebrated thinkers have expressed different degrees of ambivalence and animosity toward the city… We have no persistent and or pervasive tradition of romantic attachment to the city in our literature or in our philosophy, nothing like the Greek attachment to the polis or the French writer’s affections for Paris.” Morton White and Lucia White, \textit{The Intellectual Versus the City: From Thomas Jefferson to Frank Lloyd Wright} (New York, 1970), p. 13. A similar idea is expressed in James H. Pickering, \textit{The City in American Literature} (New York, 1977), p. 1. In her study of the writings of the Chicago School protagonists, Quandt pointed out the “small-town fetish”
III. The Protestant Mindset Imprinted on the Urban Landscape

After his arrival to Philadelphia in 1748, Peter Kalm wrote that everyone who acknowledged God as the Creator and didn’t conspire against the state and the common peace was “at liberty to settle, stay and carry on his trade here, be his religious principles ever so strange.”\(^\text{77}\) During his visit, the city already had about a dozen Christian temples, but also a “good assembly room” belonging to the Free Masons.\(^\text{78}\) A surprised visitor from Germany noted that even the Jews, this “everywhere oppressed and burdened nation”, enjoyed full citizenship in Philadelphia. They were free to pursue “any civil business” and provided they owned enough property, they could participated in elections just as any other citizen.\(^\text{79}\) There was no established religion in Pennsylvania, “but Protestants of all denominations, Papists, Jews, and all other sects whatsoever, are universally tolerated,” summarized Andrew Burnaby, a visiting minister of the Church of England.\(^\text{80}\)

During his stay in 1774, John Adams boasted that he made an effort to visit all the religious sects and denominations in town. One Sunday he even crossed the threshold of a Romish Chapel and was scandalized by the noblesse of its architecture and ceremony. “Here is everything which can lay hold of the sight eye, ear, and imagination. Everything which can charm and bewitch the simple and ignorant.” Adams confessed to his wife Abigail that he felt pity for “the poor

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\(\text{77}\) Kalm, Peter Kalm's Travels in North America (1748-1750), p. 33.


\(\text{79}\) Schoepf, Travels in the Confederation (1783-1784), part 1, p. 67.

\(\text{80}\) Burnaby, Burnaby's Travels Through North America (1759-1760), p. 95.
wretches fingering their beads and chanting Latin, not a word of which they understood.”

Curiosity brought Judith Sargent Murray to attend a Catholic mass in Philadelphia and she admitted in her diary that the ceremonies were as new to her “as any that I could have witnessed in a Turkish Mosque.” The high Latin liturgy with air permeated by incense and full of kneeling, plus the sermon delivered in German, caused even more confusion in her mind. Yet, she admitted, “had I understood the order, and design of their ritual - it perhaps would have appeared appropriately significant.”

But an anonymous Catholic visitor from France, who in 1777 attended Protestant services in Philadelphia, was similarly confused. The centerpiece of a somber liturgy was a powerful sermon inspired by the Bible and its moral teachings which lasted “three quarters of an hour or more without [the pastor] pausing, coughing, or blowing his nose.” The French visitor was scandalized by the absence of decoration in Protestant churches; the plainly dressed pastor reminded him more of an attorney. For the temple, argued the observer, be it Catholic, Lutheran, Protestant, Jewish, should have the appearance of what it is - just as a grocer’s shop doesn’t looks like a silk-mercer’s or a hosier’s. “But no; the hatred or scorn of images makes Americans carry this new bigotry so far that if one of them were to go by chance into a French court-room, he would mistake it for a church; and a Frenchmen would rightly take one of their churches to be a temple of pettifoggery.”

In comparison with the Quaker service, the difference between Catholic and Protestant warship was even more evident. A Quaker meetinghouse was not only completely devoid of any religious symbols, but the young Hungarian count Bölöni Farkas was

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82 Murray, From Gloucester to Philadelphia in 1790: Observations, Anecdotes, and Thoughts from the 18th Century Letters of Judith Sargent Murray, pp. 190-1.

astounded also by the tomb-like silence in which one could almost hear his own breathing. “Each worshiper is preoccupied with his own self. The newly arrived pass unnoticed,” he added.  

During his 1830s North American tour, French scholar Michel Chevalier anticipated Max Weber’s famous thesis by seven decades when he claimed that Catholicism and Protestantism each resonate with a diametrically different social order. Catholicism, according to Chevalier, was essentially monarchical and in the countries where it constituted the dominant religion, a regular democracy was impractical. On the other hand, Protestantism, republicanism, and individualism were almost synonymous and Chevalier saw them just as a surface manifestation of the set of the same social values. “With the people of the United States, an offshoot of the English stock and imbued with Protestantism to the marrow of their bones, the principle of independence, of individualism - of competition in fine - could not but be successful.”

Put side by side, the elaborate pomp of the Catholic masses performed in Philadelphia churches and the sober Protestant services revolving around a rational sermon, are a perfect illustration of two archetypal modes of communication which James Carey labeled as the *ritual* and the *transmission*. The Catholic mass downplays the role of the instructive sermon in order to emphasize the ceremony and communal attributes of religion such as sharing and participation. It understands communication not as the transmission of intelligent information but as “the construction and maintenance of an ordered, meaningful cultural world that can serve as a control and container for human action.” The Protestant tradition, which reached its full blossom

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84 Bölöni Farkas, Journey in North America, 1831, p. 211.
in the conditions of the New World, put its full focus on the individual and his/her own methodical walk through life.87

The embracing of Lockean political philosophy with its tendency to privatize religious life resulted in the American colonies in a situation where “each man was pleased to hew out his own religion, in such form and proportions as were suited to the measure of his taste and knowledge.”88 Growing individualism was reflected not only in the forms and practices of religious worship, but also in the urban landscape. By the time of the Revolution, Philadelphia had more than thirty houses of religion.89 During George Whitefield’s successful tour through the city in 1739-40, Philadelphians built a wooden meeting house for visiting preachers and philosophers of the size of Westminster Hall, “so that even if the mufti of Constantinople were to send a missionary to preach Mahometanism to us, he would find a pulpit to his service,” argued Franklin.90 Religious groups of any kind found good soil in which to grow and multiply. In 1831, the city hosted 23 different religious denominations and had 93 places of worship.91 In his letter On the Presbyterians (1733), Voltaire concluded that “if only one religion were allowed in England, the government would very possibly be arbitrary; if there were two, the people would

87 James W. Carey, “A Cultural Approach to Communication,” in Communication as Culture: Essays on Media and Society (New York, 1989), pp. 18-9. By the time of the Revolution, the influence of the Quakers in Philadelphia was gradually replaced by the overall growth of the Methodist movement. Bölöni Farkas noted that while Quakers were silent, Methodists promoted emotional outpourings during their services Bölöni Farkas, Journey in North America, 1831, pp. 105-6. But even the Methodist’s ‘strange’ behavior, observed by Bölöni Farkas, was still centered around an individual experience and the methodical planning of their lives. “The world, and not themselves, gave them the title of Methodists, I suppose, from their custom of regulating their time, and planning the business of the day every morning,” wrote preacher John Whitefield, who visited Philadelphia several times in 1739 and 1740. The quote is from Whitefield, George Whitefield's Journals, p. 48.


89 An anonymous French author estimated that “there are thirty-four different sects” in Philadelphia in 1777. In Anonymous, On the Threshold of Liberty: Journal of a Frenchmen’s Tour of the American Colonies in 1777, p. 29. Cf. McCullough, John Adams, p. 84.

90 Franklin, The Autobiography and other Writings on Politics, Economics, and Virtue, p. 88. Whitefield, who describes the yet unfinished building, was one of the first to preach there on November 9, 1740. Whitefield, George Whitefield's Journals, pp. 489-90.

91 Bölöni Farkas, Journey in North America, 1831, p. 212.
cut one another’s throats; but as there are such a multitude, they all live happy and in peace.”

But what Voltaire saw as the temporary advantage of the Anglo-Saxon world, became historically more of a challenge for U.S. society and its social cohesion. Today, the United States is said to be never so much segregated as it is on Sunday mornings. A French visitor noted in 1777 that the many religious cults present in Philadelphia were all coexisting together “tolerably well as far as government is concerned; but in their rivalry with respect to so-called superior doctrine… it is clear that they hate and despise one another.”

The Quaker Spirit of Capitalism

Philadelphia owed its founding to Quakers, and the Quaker spirit became an intrinsic part of its underlying structural qualities. Despite the undisputed geographical advantages of a city on a fertile plain connected by a navigable river with the ocean, De Warville in 1788 expressed the firm belief that Philadelphia, and Pennsylvania in general, owed their prosperity to the private morals of their inhabitants, which he attributed mainly to the spirit of Quakerism. Quakers singlehandedly dominated Philadelphia’s social and political life up until the mid-18th century. Reverend Burnaby, who visited the city in 1759-60 on behalf of the Church of England, remarked that they had the greatest influence in the Pennsylvania Assembly where they usually created alliances with the Dutch and Germans who were “as adverse to taxes as [the Quakers]

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themselves.”95 They brought to the New World their industriousness and frugality - two features which were later recognized as the “unmistakable character of the Philadelphians and in great part of all those inhabiting Pennsylvania.”96 Even later, when their firm grip over city affairs eased up and the Presbyterians, Episcopalians and Methodists dominated Philadelphia’s spiritual life, the city’s social structures were still deeply permeated with the austere Quaker spirit.97 “The drab Quaker influences social life and imparts to it a certain dour uniformity,” states an 1831 diary entry of Bölöni Farkas, adding that the pleasure-seekers, interested in the glitter of saloons, would quickly tire of Philadelphia. “Those on the other hand, who seek the pleasures of the mind will find inexhaustible inspiration sources in Philadelphia.”98

Using modern terminology, Philadelphia’s Quaker merchants would certainly qualify to be labeled as micromanagers who run their companies from their own houses with the same meticulousness they manage their own households. In the 1780s De Warville noted that “here you can still see the heads of families going to market as our fathers used to do. In France, women first replaced the men, and now they too, thinking this task beneath them, are sending their servants instead, a change which is neither economically profitable nor morally beneficial.”99 Their focus on their own affairs fostered a stereotype of Quakers as shrewd businessmen who “concern themselves but little, except about getting money.”100 Their brains

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95 Burnaby, *Burnaby's Travels Through North America* (1759-1760), p. 99. German Johann Schoepf added that “without boasting, I daresay it is the fact that, in conjunction with the Quakers, the German-Pennsylvania nation has had the largest share in the forming of this praiseworthy folk-character.” Schoepf, *Travels in the Confederation* (1783-1784), part 1, p. 102.

96 Schoepf, *Travels in the Confederation* (1783-1784), part 1, p. 102.


98 Bölöni Farkas, *Journey in North America, 1831*, p. 212. Levasseur in 1824-25 argued that all available social and cultural institutions “must offer in this city food sufficient for the most active mind and can, in my opinion, compensate very amply for the absolute lack of frivolities to which we unfortunately attach so high a value in Europe.” In Levasseur, *Lafayette in America in 1824 and 1825: Journal of the Voyage to the United States*, p. 164.


functioned like a watch mechanism, methodically translating every experience and social relationship into numbers and terms used in the columns of their accounting books. They were known for their methodical, almost mechanical approach to life. The hours of work, breakfast, dinner, and supper were marked by the sound of a bell. “Our clock, which keeps time extraordinary well, struck 10 with both the town clocks; such trifles pleases me,” Quaker merchant’s wife Elizabeth Drinker confided in her diary. But the ‘Quaker spirit’ was not limited to Quaker circles in Philadelphia. Under the guise of Poor Richard’s earthy wisdom, Franklin trumpeted the values of Quakerism every year to thousands of rural and urban households. During her visit to the boarding school in Bethlehem where the children from non-Quaker Philadelphia well-off families received their early education, the wife of the Universalist preacher John Murray was pleased to observe the attempt of this institution to instill “an early habit of order and regularity, without which I sincerely believe, no one important object was ever obtained.”

Quakers were behind many charitable initiatives which made their city famous. “In Philadelphia the large Hospital and the Workhouse are standing examples of their benevolent views,” noted a visitor from Germany. Their fierce independence as well as opposition towards government taxation were reflected in the way such institutions were funded. European visitors, especially those coming from the big, centrally run monarchies of the continent, were astounded to realize that all philanthropic, educational, and scientific venues in the city were

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101 “If they find one comes there upon an account of trade or traffic, they are fond of dealing with him and cheating [sic] with him if they can. If he comes for pleasure or curiosity, they take little or no notice of him unless he be a person of more than ordinary rank,” noted the visiting colonist from Maryland. In Hamilton, *Gentleman’s Progress: The Itinerarium of Dr. Alexander Hamilton*, 1744, p. 28.


105 Schoepf, *Travels in the Confederation* (1783-1784), part 1, p. 62.
maintained by private donations and lotteries rather than by the initiative of the government.\textsuperscript{106} The Quaker community in Philadelphia had a general fund “from which they lend money to their poor, at little or no interest, according to the circumstances,” but it had also “overseers who go and see how the brothers live,” strictly enforcing their code of discipline.\textsuperscript{107} Voltaire candidly admired Quakers for their religious tolerance and simplicity of their manners.\textsuperscript{108} But as one of his compatriots laconically remarked, the famous French philosopher who was “consumed with pride and lived on adulation” wouldn’t have lasted long in Philadelphia among his fellow Quakers whose “seriousness” and “gloomy pedantry” did not leave much space for the \textit{joie de vivre} - joy of life.\textsuperscript{109}

It was one thing to be a persecuted Quaker in Anglican London and another to be a representative of the dominant religious cult in Penn’s Philadelphia. The experience of everyday life soon taught Pennsylvania’s Quaker community that “universal love may be easily imagined and preached, but, in a growing colony, may not so easily be practiced.”\textsuperscript{110} Historian Carl Bridenbaugh summarized the early 18\textsuperscript{th} century atmosphere of Philadelphia in a laconic claim that there was “little gaiety and less elegance.” Instead the city was permeated with “dreary commercialism, clothed in the austere garb of Quaker principles.”\textsuperscript{111} Penn’s Deputy Governor, Captain John Blackwell, complained as early as 1688 that a Quaker “prays for his neighbor on the first days and then preys upon them the other six.”\textsuperscript{112} Yet even those who were not exactly

\begin{footnotes}
\item[106] Levasseur noted that among many Philadelphia’s institutions “there isn’t one that is not funded by or supported by donations or private subscriptions and administered by citizens who dedicate their time and their attentions without remuneration.” In Levasseur, \textit{Lafayette in America in 1824 and 1825: Journal of the Voyage to the United States}, p. 163. See also Bölöni Farkas, \textit{Journey in North America, 1831}, p. 210.
\item[107] Kalm, \textit{Peter Kalm’s Travels in North America (1748-1750)}, p. 652.
\item[108] Voltaire, \textit{Letters Concerning the English Nation}. Voltaire’s four introductory letters are dedicated to Quakers, their customs, religion and history.
\item[110] Schoepf, \textit{Travels in the Confederation (1783-1784)}, part 1, pp. 56-57.
\end{footnotes}
fond of the Quaker religion had to admit that its followers were laborious ants who opened their shops at five o’clock in the morning and there was “no interruption of business for six days in a week, except during the three meals, the longest of which occupies hardly ten minutes.”

Quakers were known for their habit of performing not just their religious services, but also their everyday business quietly, without attracting too much attention. “Be simple in your exterior, but at home you may have the richest carpets, plate in abundance, the finest linen of Ireland and Saxony; externally your house will be on the same model with all others of the town,” wrote Michel Chevalier in summarizing the double standard of the Puritan merchant mentality. This approach was evident in the atmosphere of the city’s main market - two, later three blocks of covered arcades in the High, later Market Street (Figure 5.3.), which French revolutionary De Warville compared to “the meeting place of a nation of philosophers, of disciples of the silent Pythagoras.” He loved to watch the disciplined crowd buying and selling in absolute silence and moving around in an orderly manner without any excessive police supervision which, De Warville argued, would have been necessary back in Paris. “See how free men conduct themselves!” pointed out General Lafayette to his secretary during his 1824 visit, erroneously ascribing orderliness to the fruit of freedom. Instead, as the events of the French Revolution illustrated, it would have been much more appropriate to present the ‘causal

113 Hamilton, Gentleman’s Progress: The Itinerarium of Dr. Alexander Hamilton, 1744, p. 19; and Chevalier, Society, Manners, and Politics in the United States: Letters on North America (1834-35), p. 167. The quote was written by Chevalier in the context of Pittsburgh, but it generally pertained to all of Pennsylvania and the U.S. industrial northeast.

114 Chevalier, Society, Manners, and Politics in the United States: Letters on North America (1834-35), p. 272. Judith Sargent Murray illustrated this idea using the image of “an elegant carriage, superbly finished, and ornamented in the height of the present taste drawn by beautiful horses, which are glittering with the richness of their trappings – which carriage is attended, by servants, its complete livery... while the lady issuing there from, exhibits in her dress, a perfect pattern of simplicity... so that it is only by their personal habiliments, that the Quaker can now be distinguished... I confess there is elegance - in a plain garment to which the motley vagaries of fashion would in vain pretend.” Murray observed the same contrast between the simply dressed Quakers and their adorned houses with rich and highly ornamented furniture. In Murray, From Gloucester to Philadelphia in 1790: Observations, Anecdotes, and Thoughts from the 18th Century Letters of Judith Sargent Murray, p. 163. Kalm regarded Quakers as ‘semi-Epicureans’, arguing that “no people want such choice and well-prepared food as the Quakers. The staunchest Quaker families in the city are said to live the best.” In Kalm, Peter Kalm’s Travels in North America (1748-1750), p. 651.


dependence’ in a reversed order: republican freedom was not sustainable without a deeply anchored inner sense of order and system.

The Quaker spirit was fully compatible with the Lockean ideas of self-reliance, self-determination and self-interest. Liberty and property became two terms which as of the mid-17th century dominated the social and political thinking in England, and ensuingly were exported also to America. Peter Kalm compared Philadelphia houses to the castles of royalties in the measure of freedom their inhabitants enjoyed. The busts of John Locke and John Milton became a cherished ornament which the best Philadelphia Chippendale cabinetmakers incorporated into the designs of their bookcases and writing desks. The Lockean triumvirate of life, liberty, and estate were imported into colonial imagination from a young early age through primers, readers, fables and fairy tales which accompanied each new generation of colonists through their childhood. During his visit in 1783, German biologist Johann Schoepf contended that the spirit of freedom, so omnipresent in Philadelphia, was “a British inheritance strengthened by removal to American soil and still more by the successful outcome of the [Revolutionary] war.”

**IV. The Semi-Public Space of Philadelphia’s Taverns and Coffeehouses**

Aside from traditional drinks such as beer, ale and wine, early 18th century Philadelphians enjoyed the taste of coffee, tea and chocolate. Consumption of these beverages in Pennsylvania

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117 Schoepf, Travels in the Confederation (1783-1784), part 1, p. 65.
118 Kalm, Peter Kalm’s Travels in North America (1748-1750), p. 33.
119 Kelley, Life and Times in Colonial Philadelphia, p. 78. John Milton’s Areopagitica: A Speech of Mr. John Milton for the Liberty of Unlicensed Printing to the Parliament of England was aimed at the Licensing Order of 1643 in the defense of the freedom of print and was first published in London in 1644. John Locke’s influential Two Treatises of Government were first published anonymously in London in 1689 and among others discussed the natural rights of man, and contributed to the theory of social contractualism.
120 Brown, The Consent of the Governed: The Lockean Legacy in Early American Culture, p. 3.
121 Schoepf, Travels in the Confederation (1783-1784), part 1, p. 98.
was closely tied to the arrival of British colonists and thus not surprisingly, Philadelphia’s coffeehouses inherited many cultural practices closely associated with the coffeehouses in London. Colonial coffeehouse prospered thanks to the *macaronis*, young Philadelphians from wealthier families who had made their *grand tour* of Europe and were influenced by new continental styles. But the primary factor in coffee’s social acceptance in the colonies was the high British tax imposed on tea importation. While tea was tied to the British trade with India and China, by the 1720s coffee was grown by English and Dutch planters in the West Indies, which made its import much cheaper and easier. In pre-Revolutionary America, the selection of a beverage conveyed an important political statement and in the bitter war between tea and coffee, the latter became a fashionable symbol of patriotism.

By the mid-18th century, there were about one hundred establishments licensed as coffee houses, taverns, alehouses or inns within the urban precincts of Philadelphia. Many were nestled in the private family houses of their owners, in the spaces which were not originally designed but later adapted for this purpose. After the death of its owner, Robert’s Coffee House became known as Widow Robert’s, and Indian Queen was known also as ‘the house of John Little’. The interiors of Philadelphia’s coffeehouses were narrow and crammed, which further enhanced the intimacy among those who patronized them. According to Thompson, rich and poor in the city frequently enjoyed one other’s company in such establishments. From the very beginning the Quaker-dominated city authorities imposed strict standards guarding not only public morals in such establishments, but also the quality and prices of served beverages. As a result, tavern-

122 During his 1748-50 sojourn in Philadelphia, Peter Kalm noted that “tea, coffee and chocolate, which are at present universally in use here,” were imported in North America by the British - before their arrival they were “wholly unknown” among the original Swedish settlers in this part of the world. Kalm, *Peter Kalm's Travels in North America (1748-1750)*, p. 272.
124 “The creditors of John and David Rhea, are desired to meet, at the house of John Little, at the Indian Queen, on Friday, the ninth of this October, at six o'clock in the evening…” In *The Pennsylvania Gazette*, October 7, 1772.
going in Philadelphia was seen as a powerful form of socializing, “the very marrow of the culture of the eighteenth-century colonial city.”

The 19th century U.S. historian John Bach McMaster offers us a glimpse into the atmosphere of Philadelphia’s famous London Coffee House (Figures 5.3. and 5.7.) which, on the eve of the Revolution, played a key role in all local activities pertaining to business:

The London Coffee House... was the center of commercial life. To it each day came the merchants, traders, business men, to exchange gossip and discuss affaires of the day. There was kept the book to which captains, just home from foreign ports, entered such maritime news as they thought of interest. There, on file, were the newspapers from Boston, New York, Baltimore and Charleston, and such foreign journals as the captains or supercargoes brought home. There were posted notices of ships to charter, or of freight wanted. There political meetings were held, there arbitrators settled matters of dispute between merchants, and there dinners were given on great occasions.

John Adams, who resided in Philadelphia during Revolution, confirmed in a letters to wife Abigail that the London Coffee House was the place where much of the city’s private business was transacted, while the new City Tavern, “the most genteel one in America,” became a gathering place for the members of Congress (Figure 5.7.). Platt points out that the subscribers of The City Tavern from the very beginning cultivate its non-profit image. It was advertised under the premise that “the proprietors have built this tavern without any view of profit, but merely for the convenience and credit of the city.” As another observer pointed out, the establishment wasn’t big enough to host all the Founding Fathers for dinner at once, so “they divide themselves into two sets, and as we see, very geographically, the line of demarcation being from east to west.” By the end of the 1780s, there were seven inns in the city “for convenience of strangers and those artisans who still had no residence,” but there were also many

130 The Pennsylvania Journal and the Weekly Advertiser, August 11, 1773.
131 Chastellux, Travels in North-America (1780-1782), vol. 1, pp. 218-9.
private rooms for rent, offering bed and breakfast, which were generally preferred as temporary dwellings among the generation of the founding fathers.\footnote{Castiglioni, \textit{Luigi Castiglioni's Viaggio: Travels to the United States of North America, 1785-87}, p. 224. Cf. \textit{“Fifth Congress - Third Session: A List of the Names, and Places of Residence, of the Members of the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States,”} in \textit{The Archives of Americana, Early American Imprints, Series 1, no. 36516 (a broadside)} (Originally Published in Philadelphia, 1790).}

Alexander Hamilton, a Scottish medical doctor who settled in Annapolis and visited Philadelphia in 1744 on his way to Maine, left in his travel journal several vivid images in of the daily life at Philadelphia coffeehouses, inns and taverns. The inns often served as the first interfaces between the visitors and the city. A barber who came in the morning to shave him provided Hamilton with \textquote{a harangue of politicks and news.}\footnote{Hamilton, \textit{Gentleman's Progress: The Itinerarium of Dr. Alexander Hamilton}, 1744, p. 189.} Overall, coffeehouse culture reminded him of the typical coffee houses back in London. Every time he was introduced to somebody new \textquote{the ceremony of shaking hands, an old custom peculiar to the English, was performed with great gravity and the usual compliments.}\footnote{Ibid., pp. 18-9.} After few days in town, Hamilton noted among the people who patronized particular coffeehouses \textquote{the same faces I saw before.}\footnote{Ibid., pp. 24-5.} The evening company usually lasted till eleven o’clock. One night he dined at a tavern with a group of men among whom was also a trader from Jamaica, a man of \textquote{inquisitive disposition} who flooded Hamilton with his questions. His meetings of merchants from Barbados or Jamaica in city taverns shouldn’t be surprising at all, given Philadelphia’s extensive trading contact with the West Indies.\footnote{Ibid., p. 26. In 1748 Kalm noted that Philadelphia \textquote{reaps the greatest profits from its trade with the West Indies.} In Kalm, \textit{Peter Kalm's Travels in North America (1748-1750)}, p. 27.} Another night, Hamilton joined a company of twenty five merchants of different nations and religions: Scots, English, Dutch, Germans, and Irish, among whom there were \textquote{Roman Catholicks, Church men, Presbyterians, Quakers, Newlightmen, Methodists, Seventh day men, Moravians, Anabaptists, and one Jew.} The entire group was \textquote{planted around...
an oblong table in a great hall well stoked with flys [sic].” While everybody in the room was excitedly discussing the political implications of the impending war with the French, Hamilton observed a “knott of Quakers” who separated themselves from the company and were interested in talking “only about the selling of flour and the low price it bore.” The next day Hamilton’s coffeehouse company was suddenly interrupted by the arrival of an express courier from New York with the instructions to declare war on France. “There was an express immediately dispatched to Annapolis in Maryland for the same purpose,” added the author.

In Philadelphia, a city which did not have the equivalent of the Venetian square where common people would gather and socialize, such sheltered private establishments as coffeehouses and taverns literally substituted for an open arena in which most of the city’s private and public business took place. Just as in the modern shopping mall, a typical colonial coffeehouse was perceived as a public space, assuming a quality which significantly enhanced also its private commercial potential. The perception of ‘publicness’ increased coffeehouse traffic, turning it into a convenient marketing vehicle. Their owners quickly learned new ways of exploiting the synergy resulting from one’s control of several business outlets which had the ability to cross-promote each-other’s end products. The case of the printer William Bradford may serve as one example for all. In 1754, he opened the famous London Coffee House on the corner of Front and Market Streets. But Bradford’s family operated also the city’s oldest print

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137 Hamilton, Gentleman’s Progress: The Itinerarium of Dr. Alexander Hamilton, 1744, p. 20. During Hamilton’s visit in Philadelphia in 1744, the royal message dispatched through New York ordered colonists to declare war against France (ibid., pp. 24-5).

138 Ibid., pp. 24-5. 19th century summer visitors to Philadelphia complained about the unbearable summer heat. The contemporary English translator of Marquis de Chastellux’s Revolutionary War diary noted that the heat rendered summer walking in Philadelphia almost impossible: “for it is no uncommon thing to see a laborer, after quenching his thirst at the pump, drop down upon the spot.” Chastellux, Travels in North-America (1780-1782), vol. 1, p. 333. The absence of public squares in Philadelphia is discussed elsewhere in this essay.

shop, located next door to the coffeehouse. Ensuingly, the coffeehouse served also as a bookstore where Bradford advertised and sold his publications. In 1762, he became a co-founder of the shipping and merchandise insurance company, whose ‘headquarters’ were again conveniently located in the coffeehouse which was known as being patronized by merchants and sea captains (Figure 5.7.).

A coffeehouse’s image of being a public space was nurtured mainly through the cultural events and club meetings it hosted. They were usually announced beforehand in the city newspapers or posted around town on placards. In the summer of 1733, Pennsylvania Freemasons met in Tun Tavern on Water Street to elect their new Grand Master. “A very elegant entertainment was provided upon the occasion,” which was attended by all important civic authorities including the Proprietor, the Governor and the Mayor. In the 1740s, the same tavern was patronized by the gentlemen of the Governor’s Club, who had a standing appointment to meet there every night. “The Governor gives them his presence once a week, which is generally upon Wednesday,” noted Alexander Hamilton who attended club meetings twice when he passed through the city, though he did not appreciate the dirty jokes and “gross, smutty expressions” which peppered the language of some of the members. In 1769 the entrepreneur-musician John Gualdo announced to the city’s “philharmonical merchants” his intent to organize a series of nine winter concerts of vocal and instrumental music. The subscription for the entire

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141 “Monday last a Grand Lodge of the Ancient and Honourable Society of Free and accepted Masons in this Province, was held at the Tun Tavern in Water-Street, when Humphry Murray, Esq, was elected Grand Master for the year ensuing...” In The Pennsylvania Gazette, June 28, 1733.

142 Hamilton, Gentleman's Progress: The Itinerarium of Dr. Alexander Hamilton, 1744, pp. 21 and 189-90.
Figure 5.7. The London Coffeehouse on the corner of Front and Market Street at the time of the slave auction (artist's rendition). Its owner, Andrew Bradford, also operated one of the city’s most famous printing shops which was located in a small house visible on the extreme right.
series was one guinea and the concerts were to be held at Josiah Davenport’s tavern, Bunch of Grapes, “the most convenient house for this purpose.” Similarly, the organizers of public lotteries and those who collected aid for social groups in distress profited from the high customer traffic the coffeehouses enjoyed, to promote their projects. In the early 1770s, a group of literati was meeting every Thursday at the Golden Fleece tavern and in 1772 The Pennsylvania Gazette published an announcement addressing all young gentlemen who were interested in discussing “any matter or topic in any of the arts and sciences” to meet at the Indian Queen, in Fourth Street to form a Free Debating Society for the purpose of the “advancement of knowledge.”

But aside from their public role, the commercial success of a typical Philadelphia coffeehouse depended also on its ability to become a facilitator of business transactions. Colonial newspapers were full of announcements featuring real estate or merchandise of any kind to be auctioned, sold or purchased directly in the premises of taverns and coffeehouses. Upon request, their owners were prepared to show the title of advertised real estate, blueprints of a

143 John Gualdo, “To The Philharmonical Merchants, and Others,” in Archive of Americana, Early American Imprints, Series 1, no. 11280 (a broadside) (Originally Published in Philadelphia, 1769). Cf. Thompson, Rum Punch & Revolution: Taverngoing & Public Life in Eighteenth Century Philadelphia, pp. 86-7. De Miranda observed in the early 1780s that such cyclical musical events with such different names as the Bentley Concert or The German Concert were often performed by the same musicians who shared the same hall.” In De Miranda, The New Democracy in America: Travels of Francisco de Miranda in the United States, 1783-84, p. 54.

144 “The contributors of the Society for the Relief of poor and distressed Masters of Ships, their widows and children, are desired to attend their annual meeting, on Monday, the seventh of January, at five o’clock in the evening, at the London Coffee House.” In The Pennsylvania Gazette, January 3, 1771.

145 Palinurus Peeper (John Dunlap), “The Pennsylvania Spy No. 1,” Pennsylvania Packet, or, the General Advertiser, October 25, 1773. The second event was announced in The Pennsylvania Gazette, March 5, 1772. The report from the meeting was printed in the next issue of the newspaper published on March 12, 1772. Cf. Thompson, Rum Punch & Revolution: Taverngoing & Public Life in Eighteenth Century Philadelphia, p. 86.

146 “Just imported from London, in the ship Speedwell, Capt. Stevenson, and to be sold by John Cappes, At his store, in James’s Coffee house, in Front street, next door to Mr. John Reynolds, A Neat assortment of European and East India goods, very cheap, for ready money, or short credit.” In The Pennsylvania Gazette, July 12, 1750. “Philadelphia, March 12, 1771. On Saturday, the thirtieth instant, at twelve o’clock, at the London Coffee House, will be sold by public vendue, the famous grey horse Northumberland.” In The Pennsylvania Gazette, March 14, 1771. “Any person who will bring a number of ground squirrel skins to the London Coffee House, before the first of August next, shall be paid for each skin six pence, provided it be stretched smooth, and is in season.” The Pennsylvania Gazette, June 21, 1764.
house to be auctioned, or a detailed inventory of a boat for sale. Occasionally, a slave trade took place directly in the coffeehouse or on the sidewalk adjacent to it. In 1747, at the peak of trade hostilities with France and Spain, an entire privateer ship with full armament was auctioned at Widow Roberts's establishment. The journeyman plasterer William Otter used city taverns to negotiate his new jobs. In 1807, he made an appointment in the Black Horse tavern with a farmer who came to Philadelphia in search of a good plasterer. They first bargained, and then wrote and signed the contract. Also debtors of any stripe were regularly called upon by newspaper announcements to come to a particular coffeehouse in order to settle their accounts. In 1745 William Dames informed readers of The Philadelphia Gazette that before an intended journey to Europe, he would like to meet his widespread business partners in five different inns and taverns across Maryland and Pennsylvania. In a given day, he would stay at Philadelphia’s Three Tuns tavern in Chestnut Street, ready to meet “those who are indebted to him” as well as “those who have any just demand on him.” The name of a concrete establishment was often so closely associated with a particular trade in which it specialized, that the newspaper announcing

147 “Peel Hall, to be sold by public vendue, at the coffee-house, on Thursday, the 22d inst. six o'clock in the evening, forty-eight acres of rich land, including Peel Hall and the neighboring grounds... For further Particulars apply to Mr. John Field, in Chestnut Street, or to Mr. Richard Wells, in Front Street. Plans of the above lots, as divided, may be seen at the coffee-house, and the two places above mentioned.” In The Pennsylvania Gazette, July 21, 1784.

148 “A lively negro wench, that can cook and wash, and has had the small pox, to be sold at public vendue, at the London Coffee House, on Saturday the 20th Instant, at Twelve o’Clock.” In The Pennsylvania Gazette, December 11, 1760.

149 “On Thursday, the 26th of this instant November, will be sold at publick vendue, the privateer snow Warren, with 16 carriage guns, 7 pounders and 16 swivels, and all her armament, &c. an inventory of which may be seen at the Widow Roberts’s Coffee House.” In The Pennsylvania Gazette, November 12, 1747.


151 “All persons who are indebted to Henry Flower, late postmaster of Pennsylvania, for postage of letters or otherwise, are desired to pay the same to him at the old coffee house in Philadelphia.” In The Pennsylvania Gazette, May 29, 1735. “The creditors of Luke Keating, are desired to meet at the new city coffee-house, near the Draw-bridge, in Front Street, on Thursday evening, at 7 o’clock.” In The Pennsylvania Gazette, July 21, 1784.

an auction there did not even need to specify it by name. This was specifically true about the London Coffee House.153

Up until 1832, when Philadelphia merchants finally got their own Exchange, the commercial role of local coffeehouses remained almost unchanged. A 1783 German visitor in the city noted that instead of the bourse, by this time so typical for most of the European trading centers, Philadelphia merchants were still relying on the coffee house, “where most people engaged in business affairs meet together at midday to get the news of entering and clearing vessels, and to inform themselves of the market.”154 When V. M. Pelosi decided to open the Merchant & Exchange Coffee House in 1790 at the corner of Market and Water Streets, he advertised it to attention of “the merchants, traders, foreigners, and the public in general.” The owner promised the highest standard of service to those who would patronize his venue, but in exchange requested “that those gentlemen, who may honor his coffee house with their presence, will communicate such articles of intelligence, received from their correspondents, as they shall think proper.” Every day at two o'clock, when “the public business of the coffee house is over,” the owner guaranteed the provision of cheap but plentiful food and refreshments for his patrons.155

V. Newspapers, the Postal Service and the Spread of Information

The success of the American Revolution had been widely attributed also to the key role the American newspapers played in the process of promoting social values which lead to the final

153 The example of an ad which doesn’t specify the name of a coffeehouse: “Peel Hall, to be sold by public vendue, at the coffee-house, on Thursday, the 22d inst. six o’clock in the evening, forty-eight acres of rich land, including Peel Hall and the neighboring grounds...” In The Pennsylvania Gazette, July 21, 1784. Cf. Schoepf, Travels in the Confederation, part 1, p. 115.
154 An example of an ad which doesn’t specify the name of a coffeehouse: “Peel Hall, to be sold by public vendue ...” In The Pennsylvania Gazette, July 21, 1784.
155 The Pennsylvania Gazette, December 22, 1790.
revolt against the British monarchy.\textsuperscript{156} This fact, as well as the picturesque character of Benjamin Franklin, the most famous colonial publisher, is probably also the main reasons why the colonial press had been object of so many socio-historical inquiries in the past. Especially in the last three decades, we can see a clear tendency of scholars to emphasize that the prosperity of colonial newspapers from the very beginning depended mainly on a good relationship with the office of the local postmaster.\textsuperscript{157} They argue that up until the invention of the telegraph, post offices were colonial clearinghouses of information. Metropolitan newspapers and correspondence which flowed through the hands of post riders, captains of special postal ships (packets) and local postmasters yielded news stories to be re-printed by local publishers, and post offices were places where townspeople congregated to share gossip.\textsuperscript{158} New postal routes were regularly announced in Philadelphia’s newspapers and the knowledge of times and places of stages’ departure were matter of common knowledge.\textsuperscript{159} On October 10, 1754, deputy postmaster

\textsuperscript{156} The dominant role of newspapers in colonial America was one of the significant differences between the nature of the French and the American Revolutions, pointed out mainly by U.S. historian Robert Darnton. The ensuing ‘Darnton debate’ centers around his claim that in the absence of a free press in France in the period leading to the Revolution, the ferment of revolutionary ideas relied more on the influence of books than newspapers. For more see Hannah Barker and Simon Burrows, Press, Politics and the Public Sphere in Europe and North America, 1760-1820 (Cambridge, UK, 2002), p. 12. Cf. Jeremy D. Popkin, Media and Revolution: Comparative perspectives (Lexington, KY, 1995), p. 18. The only exception to this rule in America may have been Paine’s famous pamphlet. See Thomas Paine, Common Sense: Addressed to the Inhabitants of America... Written by an Englishman (Philadelphia, 1776).

\textsuperscript{157} For more on this subject see for example Richard B. Kielbowicz, News in the Mail: The Press, Post Office, and Public Information, 1700-1860s (New York, 1989); and Richard R. John, Spreading the News: The American Postal System from Franklin to Morse (Cambridge, MA, 1995).

\textsuperscript{158} Kielbowicz, News in the Mail: The Press, Post Office, and Public Information, 1700-1860s, pp. 1 and 24.

\textsuperscript{159} This claim is well illustrated by the array of announcements which throughout the 18th century appeared in The Pennsylvania Gazette. “Post-Office, Philadelphia, Jan 3. 1737. The northern post sets out tomorrow morning for New York...” (the issue from January 3, 1737 – pages not numbered); “The New York Post not come in...” (September 15, 1748); “The Post Office is now removed to a house in Third Street, next but one above Church Alley...” (July 5, 1753); “General Post Office Philadelphia, February 11, 1755. It having been found very inconvenient to persons concerned in trade, that the mail from Philadelphia to New England sets out but once a fortnight during the winter season...” (February 11, 1755); “General Post Office, Philadelphia. Notice is hereby given, that the southern post will, for the future, perform his stages once a week in the summer, and once a fortnight in the winter season...” (August 21, 1760); “Nicholas Heniek, acquaints the public, that a post will ride from Lancaster to Lebanon, by whom people living between the said two places, may have their newspapers, letters, &c. readily brought up in the country...” (November 12, 1761); “Post Office, Philadelphia, July 18, 1764. Notice is hereby given, that a regular post is now established between Philadelphia and Shippensburgh, through Lancaster, York and Carlisle; to go every week...” (July 26, 1764); “Philadelphia Constitutional Post Office, October 10, 1775. Notice is here given, that a post will leave this Office...” (October 11, 1775); “A New Post-Road. Having been desired to establish a post-road from Reading, in the State of Pennsylvania, to Williamsburg, at the Great Forks of the Genessee River, in the State of New York...” (January 23, 1793).
William Franklin announced to his customers that “until Christmas next, a post will set out every Monday, Wednesday and Friday, precisely at eight a clock in the morning, from Philadelphia, for New York, and from New York for Philadelphia and will come in, at both those stages, every Tuesday, Thursday, and Saturday, about five a clock in the afternoon.” To be ‘out of the postal road’ was a significant handicap, comparable with the modern day disadvantage of being in an area with no cellular signal coverage. The anxiety with which land-locked communities expected their postal stages was paralleled in coastal cities by the anticipation of the arrival of regularly scheduled news-carrying packet boats. In the 1830s, Thomas Hamilton captured such an atmosphere of expectation upon his arrival to New York:

Owing to the prevalence of wind, an unusual period had been elapsed without an arrival from Europe, and the whole population seemed agog for news... we [i.e., the author and his friend] were both anxious to receive the earliest intelligence, he proposed our walking into the news-room... On approaching the house, we found some thousands of people collected about the door, and in the window was exhibited a placard of the following import: 'Duke of Wellington and Ministry resigned; Lord Grey premier; Brougham Lord Chancellor, etc.' It was impossible not to be struck with the extreme interest this intelligence excited.

The close relationship between the postal service and information flows was clearly reflected in the newspapers’ nameplates. All colonial metropolises - Boston, New York and Philadelphia - eventually had their Evening Posts, openly boasting of their connection to the post as a matter of prestige and reliability to their readers, and especially to their advertisers. The first

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161 Judith Sargent Murray, who stayed in Philadelphia several months in 1790, was shocked when her husband presented her with a letter from her father because, she argued, “I knew it was not post day.” Upon their departure from Philadelphia she wrote to her parents in New England that they will travel back to Boston “generally out of the postal road, and the probability is, you will not hear from us, so religiously as therefore.” Murray, From Gloucester to Philadelphia in 1790: Observations, Anecdotes, and Thoughts from the 18th Century Letters of Judith Sargent Murray, pp. 126 and 188.
162 Packets were usually lighter and faster boats. Their captains kept logs in journals which were, after their arrival to the port, publicly accessible at the Post Offices. Milanese Count Dal Verme in 1783 reprinted the ‘Journal from Falmouth to New York on the Packet Roebuck, Capt. Richard’. In Dal Verme, Seeing America and Its Great Men: The Journal and Letters of Count Francesco dal Verme, 1783-1784, pp. 4-6 and 38.
163 Hamilton, Men and Manners in America (1830-1831), pp. 148-49. Milanese Count Dal Verme wrote in 1783 from Boston to his parents back in Italy that on his “arrival in New York I hope to find letters from you since I know that the June packet has reached that port. A few days later he indeed found letters from home upon his arrival to New York. Dal Verme, Seeing America and Its Great Men: The Journal and Letters of Count Francesco dal Verme, 1783-1784, pp. 42 and 44.
Philadelphia newspaper, *The American Weekly Mercury* (1719) was indeed published by Pennsylvania postmaster Andrew Bradford. His main competitor, Benjamin Franklin, complained that because Bradford kept the post office, it was widely assumed that he had better opportunities of obtaining news. Consequently, “his paper was thought a better distributor of advertisements than mine, and therefore had many more.” Franklin clearly understood that in any kind of business, perception was often more important than the reality.\(^{165}\)

In the beginning, North American newspapers were filled almost exclusively with international news and stories from other North American colonies. All stories and rumors generated locally were spread by word of mouth before the printer set them to print. Local information was limited mainly to reprints of important legislation, public announcements, and most importantly, by shipping news summarizing the arrival and departure of boats with the description of their cargos.\(^{166}\) “This true I take no pains to please, those who nigh news inquire,” Andrew Bradford warned his readers. His *Mercury* was much better equipped to have an overview what distant nations like Italians, Persians, Moors and Turks were doing. “Tho’ distant far, we bring the news of all their wars and works, and which affect our king.”\(^{167}\) In 1739, Franklin summarized the dynamics of two principal Philadelphia news cycles in a poem *The Spreading of News*. The first news cycle originated on the streets of the city and ended up discussed in the tavern, where it was “scrutiniz’d, discus’d and modell’s… sometimes goes with

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\(^{166}\) The first issue of Bradford’s *Mercury* epitomizes this approach. On the first page it featured stories from Hamburg and Paris. The second page was dedicated to information the publisher obtained from Messina, London, and Havana. The rest of the newspaper was filled with shipping news from Boston, New York and Philadelphia, as well as Bradford’s own advertisement. In *The American Weekly Mercury*, December 12, 1719.

\(^{167}\) Philadelphia newspaper printers regularly inserted into their New Year’s issues leaflets with poems praising the fidelity of their customers and their own business. This quote is from Bradford’s leaflet distributed with great probability with the issue of *The American Weekly Mercury* published on January 7, 1735. In Andrew Bradford, “There is not an Ear that is not Deaf but Listens to the News…” in *Archive of Americana - Early American Imprints, first series* - no. 40086 (Philadelphia, 1934-35). Franklin expressed a similar idea in his newspapers’ New Year poem in 1739: “…If home occurrences, that are well known, / And which concern but few, are let alone: / The printer sure deserves no blame for this; / While in the foreign news he is not remiss…” In Benjamin Franklin, “*The Spreading of News: The Yearly Verses of the Printer’s Lad,*” in *Archive of Americana - Early American Imprints, Series 1*, no. 40182 (Philadelphia, 1739).
more of truth and sense,” the author claimed. The second news-cycle was tied to the arrival of
the merchant ships, but especially to the mail carrying packets:

When ships arrive, Jack-tar has much to tell,
Advises foreign every man likes well;
They crowd the wharf, they throng th’encumber’d deck,
And tiptoe stand to hear the stranger speak.
Then the post-office, has the greatest resort;
A ship from London, is arriv’d in port,
Have I sir any letters? Quickly see;
Or what’s printed news? Pray hand it me.
But Masters, last of all, the Gazette comes;
The total of th’accounts it justly sums;
As just as can be, where the truth’s in doubt,
And leaves all manifest romances out.168

In the early days, Philadelphia printers would sometimes even delay their regularly scheduled
weekly publications in order to wait for the arrival of the overseas mail delivered directly to
Philadelphia or to other American ports. Other times they would blame the scarcity of printed
news on the fact that several ships came to Philadelphia or New York, “but bring no news.”169

The earliest document to regulate the colonial press was The British Post Office Act of 1711,
known also as Queen Anne’s Act, whose provisions remained in effect on the territory of the
United States practically unchanged until 1789.170 The act established the postage for private
letters between the colonies and the motherland, which was to be paid by the receiver.171

168 Franklin, "The Spreading of News: The Yearly Verses of the Printer's Lad."
169 “Since last post Coden arrived here in a sloop...,” in The American Weekly Mercury, December 7, 1721, p. 4. The issue
was published two days behind regular schedule.
170 The Post Office Act of 1711 was printed together with all other agendas of the Parliament approved during its session
which started on November 25, 1710. In Anno Regni Annae Reginae Magna Britannia, Francia, & Hibernia, Nono... (London,
the time of Philadelphia’s founding, there were already in place certain informal rules regulating the flow of international mail
between Britain, Continental Europe and North America. The exchange of letters is vividly described in several instances by
Dutch Labadist explorer Danckaerts, who came to New Amsterdam/New York with his companion looking for a place to establish
Jameson (New York, 1913), pp. 11, 27, 41 and 46.
171 Shortly after taking over as post-master in Philadelphia in 1737, Franklin warned his constituencies that “no letters will be
delivered hereafter to any person whatever, without the money immediately paid.” The reason of his predecessor’s resignation
was financial mismanagement. In “Post-Office, Philadelphia,” The Pennsylvania Gazette, January 3, 1738.
Captains were instructed to deliver the mail to the nearest post office or other reliable public edifice after their arrival into the port on both sides of the ocean.\textsuperscript{172} While in London, the mail was as of 1680 delivered to the addressees’ homes; in Philadelphia it had to be picked up personally and the lists of unclaimed letters were time to time advertised by newspapers affiliated with the post offices.\textsuperscript{173} As Peter Kalm noted at his arrival to Philadelphia in 1748:

As soon as we had come to town and cast anchor, many of the inhabitants came on board to inquire for letters. They took all those which they could carry, either for themselves or for their friends. Those which remained the captain ordered to be carried on shore and to be brought into a coffee-house, where everybody could make an inquiry of them, and by this means he was rid of the trouble of delivering them himself.\textsuperscript{174}

By the mid-18\textsuperscript{th} century, the city averaged one or two ships every day bound in or out, with the usual destinations being the British Isles, West Indies or South Carolina, and boasting total yearly imports exceeding £80,000.\textsuperscript{175} In the 1780s Brissot de Warville described Philadelphia’s port as the place where “flags of all nations can be seen floating over the Delaware, and ships are sailing to all parts of the world.”\textsuperscript{176} It was estimated that foreign trade employed about 400 local ships and 350 British vessels, giving employment to 7,500 Philadelphia seamen. “The warehouses, the quays, and wharfs are excellent, with water sufficient for ships of five hundred tons to load and unload close to them,” wrote a British soldier in his diary.\textsuperscript{177} Similarly Baron von Clossen, a German revolutionary commander, observed that in spite of the War of

\textsuperscript{174} “Kalm, Peter Kalm’s Travels in North America (1748-1750), p. 16.
\textsuperscript{175} In 1760 Burnaby noted that “the trade of Pennsylvania is surprisingly extensive, carried on to Great Britain, the West Indies, every part of North America, the Madeiras, Lisbon, Cadiz, Holland, Africa, the Spanish Main, and several other places; exclusive of what is illicitly carried on to Cape François and Monte Christo.” In Burnaby, Burnaby’s Travels Through North America (1759-1760), p. 93.
\textsuperscript{176} Kalm, Peter Kalm’s Travels in North America (1748-1750), pp. 29-30.
\textsuperscript{177} Brissot de Warville, New Travels in the United States of America, 1788, pp. 260-1.
Independence which was still in full swing, the warehouses and shops in the Philadelphia port were “full of merchandize of every description, and some of them are not second to ‘Petit Dunkerque’ in Paris in opulence and good taste.”

At a time when the oceans were still dominated by sail, the transatlantic crossing took at least 6-7 weeks. When the wind died and the boats were stuck several days in one place, their captains never missed an opportunity to meet other nearby boats and to exchange information, sometimes even mail or food. Reverend Andrew Burnaby noted that during his crossing from London to Philadelphia in 1759, his ship met and ‘spoke’ with a sloop bound from Antigua to London in the middle of the Atlantic. A few days later they met a ship from South Carolina which warned them about a French privateer frigate cruising off the capes of Virginia. Similarly, in 1788, Brissot de Warville mentioned several vessels which his boat encountered on the way to North America, among which was belonging to the East India Company on its way from Bengal to London. Its captain was anxious for news about the trial of the Company’s former governor, Warren Hastings, accused in Britain of corruption. “He asked us if we had any English newspapers and we answered that we did.”

Another English vessel which De Warville’s ship met while crossing the Atlantic was returning from whale fishing off the coast of Brazil and offered to take their private letters back to Europe. The author praised the comfort given to him by “such meetings in the midst of the terrifying solitude of the ocean!” Thanks to such meetings in the middle of the ocean, the ships arriving to Philadelphia brought often intelligence and mail which wasn’t necessarily limited to

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178 Petit Dunkerque was a shop in Paris at Pont Neuf where fine toys and trinkets could be bought. In Von Closen, The Revolutionary Journal of Baron Ludwig von Closen, 1780-1783, p. 117.
180 Warren Hastings was the former first Governor-General of Bengal, accused of corruption in 1787 and consequently put on trial. In Brissot de Warville, New Travels in the United States of America, 1788, pp. 79-80.
181 Ibid., pp. 76-7.
the port of their departure. Such encounters end exchanges continued till the advent of steam engine which - by making sailing speed independent from the mercy of nature - cut down significantly the time of crossing.

**Early Media Moguls: The Economic Interest behind Colonial Newspapers**

While *Queen Anne’s Act* of 1711 established policies for personal and merchant letters, it did not create any rules regarding printed materials, so throughout most of the colonial period newspapers were carried informally. Individual post masters were creating *ad hoc* rules, which often exposed rival newspapers to discriminatory treatment.\(^{182}\) When Samuel Keimer started to publish *The Pennsylvania Gazette* in 1728, his only competition was *Mercury*, published by Philadelphia’s postmaster, Andrew Bradford. In the ensuing years, the city saw one of the first newspaper wars led by emerging ‘media moguls’ in their attempt to exploit the commercial potential of their enterprises. In launching his new paper, Keimer called Bradford’s *Mercury* a “nonsence in folio, instead of a serviceable news paper” which had been lately “so wretchedly perform’d, that it has been not only a reproach to the province, but such a scandal to the very name of printing.” To lure customers from Bradford, Keimer promised free advertisement space to everyone who would become a subscriber.\(^{183}\)

In 1737 Andrew Bradford was forced to resign as the postmaster general for mismanaging postal funds, and Benjamin Franklin, who in 1729 purchased Kaimer’s *Gazette*, was offered the job.\(^{184}\) Franklin understood that the position paid little, and in fact made him liable for the debts of his customers. Yet, as he explained in his autobiography, he accepted it “readily”, and found it

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\(^{182}\) Kielbowicz, *News in the Mail: The Press, Post Office, and Public Information, 1700-1860*, p. 17. Franklin announced in 1735 that he was again “allow’d to send the Gazettes by the post, postage free, to all parts of the post-road from Virginia to New-England...as usual before the late obstruction.” In *The Pennsylvania Gazette*, January 23, 1735.

\(^{183}\) A broadside announcing the launch of *The Pennsylvania Gazette*, October 1, 1728.

\(^{184}\) Franklin’s newspaper announced to his readers: “Notice is hereby given, that the post-office of Philadelphia, is now kept at B. Franklin's in Market-street...” In *The Pennsylvania Gazette*, November 3, 1737.
of great advantage “for tho’ the salary was small, it facilitated the correspondence that improv’d my newspaper, encreas’d the number demanded, as well as the advertisements to be inserted, so that it came to afford me a very considerable income. My old competitor’s newspaper declin’d proportionably [sic],” concluded Franklin. 185

It was only in 1753 when two publishers - Franklin and William Hunter from Williamsburg - shared the office of deputy postmaster general for the North American colonies, that there was an attempt to create the first transparent rules for newspaper distribution. They codified the custom of the free exchange of newspapers among publishers, but imposed very small tariffs on privately subscribed copies in order to calm the continuous protests of stage coach drivers who refused to carry the growing amount of newspapers for free. The tariff on private newspaper delivery was supposed “to remedy these inconveniences, and yet not to discourage the spreading of news papers [sic], which are on many occasions useful to government, and advantageous to commerce, and to the publick,” Franklin explained to his readers. 186

In the mid 1770s, Philadelphia had 23 printing shops and 7 newspapers - even more than London. 187 Yet many pre-revolutionary newspapers were short-lived enterprises which were perceived by printers more as the means to advertise other services their businesses provided, than the noble vehicles for the advancing of knowledge of their compatriots. 188 By the 1750s a successful paper carried up to two or three pages of ads, out of the usual four to six in total, and needed at least 800 to 1,200 subscribers for its survival. At the time of his retirement in 1748, the

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185 Franklin, The Autobiography and other Writings on Politics, Economics, and Virtue, pp. 55 and 86.
186 The annual payment for any distance not exceeding 50 miles was the sum nine pence sterling; for any distance between 50 and 100 miles the sum of one shilling and six pence, etc. See “Additional Instruction to the Deputy Postmasters of North America. General Post Office, March 10, 1758.” In The Pennsylvania Gazette, April 20, 1758. For more information see also ibid, pp. 107-8. Cf. John, Spreading the News: The American Postal System from Franklin to Morse, p. 37; Kielbowicz, News in the Mail: The Press, Post Office, and Public Information, 1700-1860s, pp. 17 and 31.
187 McCullough, John Adams, p. 81.
188 See the example of William Bradford, mentioned earlier in this chapter, whose business strategy relied on mutual synergy between his printing, coffeehouse and insurance businesses.
scrupulous account keeper Benjamin Franklin counted that during his 16 years as printer he made a £16,000 profit - about £4,000 of which came from advertisements and the rest from sales and subscriptions.\textsuperscript{189} William Bradford, the first printer in Philadelphia, tellingly valued the printing of newspapers at the same level as the making of shoes.\textsuperscript{190} Symptomatically, Franklin defended the ‘politically incorrect’ messages which from time-to-time appeared in his newspaper and were upsetting certain groups among his readers by claiming that just as “the merchant may buy and sell with Jews, Turks, hereticks and infidels of all sorts, and get money by every one of them, without giving offence to the most orthodox, of any sort,” similarly it would be unreasonable to expect from printers to “approve of everything they print.”\textsuperscript{191}

**Join, or Die: The Imperial Management of Information**

Up until the 1750s, the British imperial system bound each of the single colonies to England. Occasionally, even news from Philadelphia to New York or Boston and vice-versa had to pass first through the British Islands. Kielbowicz points out that this fact inherently fostered the colonists’ identity as British subjects, underscoring the dominant position of London as the cosmopolitan center of the entire British Empire. In spite of the fact that Philadelphia enjoyed mercantile exchange with numerous ports of Europe and America, “none but English ships are allowed to come into this port,” noted in 1748 Peter Kalm.\textsuperscript{192} Consequently, mercantile elites living in the colonial coastal cities such as Philadelphia had a tendency to develop much stronger ties with their counterparts in Britain than with their neighbors in the American hinterland.\textsuperscript{193}

While British attitude towards colonies reflects the old Roman imperial slogan *divide et impera*

\begin{footnotes}
\item[189] Kelley, Life and Times in Colonial Philadelphia, p. 204.
\item[191] “Being Frequently Censur'd and Condemn'd by Different Person,” *The Pennsylvania Gazette*, June 10, 1731.
\item[192] Kalm, Peter Kalm’s Travels in North America (1748-1750), pp. 27-8.
\end{footnotes}
divide and rule - Franklin challenged such strategy by drawing his famous cartoon *Join, or Die*, which was later adopted as a symbol of the American Revolution. Displayed on its banners, its memory may have later played crucial role in founding fathers’ urge to create an infrastructure network which would have bound the country into one common enterprise.\(^{194}\)

In the 1730s, Boston averaged 11 news-bearing ships from the overseas in a month, New York City had four, and Philadelphia two.\(^{195}\) But it got much worse for Philadelphia in winter when navigation usually stopped entirely. During his stay in the city in 1748, Kalm observed that the “only disadvantage which trade labors under here, is the freezing of the river almost every winter for a month or more.” He saw it as an important comparative disadvantage for Philadelphia because this “does not happen at Boston, New York and other towns which are nearer the sea.”\(^{196}\) Yet the arrival of the first news-bearing ship from Britain with cargo in the early spring had the power to revive the entire local economy. Robert Honyman, a British settler from Virginia briefly visit in Philadelphia in the spring of 1775 and captured one such moment in his diary. “Just now at 4 o’clock afternoon in the [London] Coffee House, news is brought of a ship coming up, from Bristol after a six week’s passage: so everyone is most eager to hear the news,” reads his diary entry for Wednesday, March 8.\(^{197}\) Elizabeth Drinker, the wife of a wealthy Quaker merchant, scribbled the same day into her diary a brief note that the name of the ship was the *Chalkley*, and it “arriv’d here with servants.”\(^{198}\) Her husband Henry had a significant stake in the lucrative trade with indentured servants, mostly German and later Irish peasants who paid for


\(^{197}\) Honyman, Colonial Panorama 1775: Dr. Robert Honyman’s Journal for March and April, pp. 18-19.

\(^{198}\) Drinker, The Diary of Elizabeth Drinker (1758-1807), vol. 1, p. 207.
their passage to the New World by voluntarily selling their freedom for a period of two to four years. By turning around one ‘parcel’ of about 30 to 40 newly arrived indentured servants, Henry Drinker could have expected to make up to 400 pounds of net profit.\textsuperscript{199}

The arrival of the \textit{Chalkley} was welcomed also by the community of Philadelphia printers. The next day, on March 9, the regular issue of \textit{Pennsylvania Gazette} proudly boosted two extra pages filled with the stories supplied by the \textit{Chalkley’s} Captain Spain. For the most part, they were verbatim transcripts of articles published previously in British newspapers which arrived with the \textit{Chalkley}. Most such articles, especially those pertaining to foreign news, were recycled copies of anonymous merchant letters, starting often with formulas like “From the letters from Lisbon we learn…”, “Private letters from Paris say…”, or simply by a subhead announcing “Extract from a letter from Paris, Dec. 20”. They already passed through the hands of British editors and in their coverage of different international issues reflected almost exclusively the imperial point of view. Stylistically, such stories reveal the same choppy telegraph-like syntax pioneered by the anonymous authors of Venetian merchant \textit{avvisi} in the early 1500s. The cadence of each sentence with its monotonous regularity may have been due to the fact that the texts were dictated to the copyist by someone walking up-and-down the room of the scribe’s office. The dry language they are composed of is the same which can be found in early merchant \textit{avvisi}, devoid of any pathos and unnecessary nuance. The extract of a letter from The Hague, dated December 27, 1774 and reprinted verbatim by at least two Philadelphia newspapers after the arrival of the \textit{Chalkley} is a good example:

\textsuperscript{199} Sharon V. Salinger, \textit{‘To Serve Well and Faithfully’: Labor and Indentured Servants in Pennsylvania, 1682-1800} (Cambridge, UK, 1987), pp. 74-6. In 1750 Kalm noted that many Germans prefer to be sold after their arrival even if they have enough money – this way they learn the language and customs of their new country. In Kalm, \textit{Peter Kalm’s Travels in North America (1748-1750)}, p. 205. Castiglioni observed that “the inhabitants of Philadelphia are divided, as in other American cities, into landholders, merchants and artisans, and there are also some of those German and Irish immigrants who sell their liberty for two or more years. They are obliged to work for their master who paid the expense of their transportation to America; but when this time is over they are free again.” In Castiglioni, \textit{Luigi Castiglioni’s Viaggio: Travels to the United States of North America, 1785-87}, p. 226.
A war on the continent is, according to the present circumstances, almost unavoidable; to which end the continental princes actually have 1,625,000 disciplined troops in readiness; but it is certain that Great-Britain will be in the least concerned in it; for we are informed by the undoubted authority, that a new alliance has been treated in between Great-Britain, France and Spain, and which was the real cause of Lord M———'s trip to Paris...200

The news stories supplied by the Chalkley covered key European events ranging from early November 1774 up to mid-January 1775, when the ship apparently left Bristol. The places covered by reports range from London, Hague, Warsaw, Hamburg, Petersburg, Prague, Danzig, Paris, Vienna, to Lisbon and Seville.201

Gradually Philadelphia’s printers developed reliable contacts with other colonial cities, to secure a regular exchange of news between their principal port cities. As Kielbowicz points out, contrary to general belief, it was the mud which presented a bigger challenge to the spreading of news in the colonies than British censorship. Due to an almost nonexistent road system, most of the communication between colonial towns - with the exception of the main route between Philadelphia, New York, Boston, and later Williamsburg - continued to flow over sea and river routes.202 The average time it took for Bradford’s Mercury to get news from New York in the 1730s was one week, and from Boston 20 days.203 In 1776 the information about the Declaration of Independence appeared in Baltimore newspapers the fifth day after its passage on July 4 in Philadelphia, the New York City papers had a six day delay and it took 14 days for the news to be published in Boston.204 Even when the postal route between Philadelphia and Pittsburgh

200 This story is reprinted verbatim in the same length and in unchanged form on March 9, 1775 by Pennsylvania Gazette and a week later, in its issue from March 13, 1775 also by Pennsylvania Packet, or, the General Advertiser.
201 “Postscript to the Pennsylvania Gazette, NO. 2411. Last night, the ship Chalkley, Captain Spain arrived here in a short passage from Bristol...” Pennsylvania Gazette, March 9, 1775, two extra pages. Dunlap’s Pennsylvania Packet reprinted part of the stories week later. “Further advices, by Captain Spain from Bristol.” In Pennsylvania Packet, or, the General Advertiser, March 13, 1775.
203 Sloan and Williams, The Early American Press, 1690-1783 p. 56.
204 On the time delay for publication see Kielbowicz, News in the Mail: The Press, Post Office, and Public Information, 1700-1860s, pp. 24-25. The message was with great probability delivered by the newly established the Constitutional Post created in 1775, when the Royal Post refused to carry certain republican newspapers. It was later transformed into the federal U.S. Postal Service. Its routes and departure times were announced in Philadelphia's newspapers. See "Philadelphia Constitutional Post Office, October 10, 1775. Notice," in The Pennsylvania Gazette, October 11, 1775.
finally opened in 1788, it took more than two weeks to connect the cities. By that time the crossing of Atlantic was possible in 30 days.  

**The Printed Word and Early Notions of ‘Media Effects’**

Some historians point out that while the revolutionary movement in France was intellectually fuelled by books, American social and political thinking had been formed mainly by newspapers since the time of the colonial era. The growing cult of the printed word had a very strong impact on American psyche. Thomas Hamilton claimed that newspapers had a quality which set them apart from other political literature. They had the power to take control over “the very business of life” of their readers. “The opinions of men are yielded willingly to their influence,” leading to the creation of parallel realities which Hamilton labeled “empathically present existences.”

During his extended North American visit, Swedish-Finnish botanist Peter Kalm confided to his diary how distressed he suddenly became one evening in February 1750 while reading in the freshly printed Philadelphia newspapers a story about the advances of the Russian Czarina against his native country. “I became so angry, I must confess, and my blood circulation so violent, the every limb in my body shook for an hour as if I had had an argument and I could not read nor write a word,” confessed Kalm. Interesting was the fact that the report which so much upset Kalm originated in German Danzig (today Poland’s Gdansk), and was dated October 31, 1748. Kalm noted that his summer crossing of Atlantic took 6 weeks, while the winter crossing employed 14-19 weeks. The passage from Europe to America was usually longer than the opposite direction due to the prevailing winds and ocean currents. In Kalm, Peter Kalm's Travels in North America (1748-1750), pp. 4 and 16. Brissot de Warville observed that the captain of his ship estimated the crossing in 1788 at 30-36 days. In Brissot de Warville, New Travels in the United States of America, 1788, pp. 79-80. In 1824 Lafayette was able to return to France from his U.S. tour in 24 days, which was “considered very fast.” In Levasseur, Lafayette in America in 1824 and 1825: Journal of the Voyage to the United States, p. 565.

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206 Missing source

207 The quotes are from Hamilton, Men and Manners in America (1830-1831), p. 245.
1749 - which means that the real event had happened at least four months earlier. Similarly Elizabeth Drinker, the wife of a Quaker merchant, mentioned in her diary in 1797 that her friend Sally read a story to her from *Gazette of the United States* about Albert Gallatin. Drinker admitted that while listening to Sally’s voice “I really thought Gallatin was the person present.” Thomas Hamilton himself observed “the pervading excitement, and the sensation produced” in New York by the arrival of the first news about the fall of the British government and concluded that the commotion could scarcely have been greater in Britain than in America.

Philadelphia merchant Thomas P. Cope noted a similar impact of the increasingly popular Gothic novels, with their ability to capture the imagination of those who became their avid readers. His friend, whose character was, according to Cope, up until recently impeccable, had been suddenly involved in the turmoil of an affair, seducing a 14-year old girl with such “maniacal rashness” that it became subject of public talk around the town. Without the slightest hesitation Cope attributed this scandal to the “pestiferous influence of novel reading.” His friend’s wife had been apparently “long in the habit of taking this trash from the circulating libraries” while his friend “at first looked at them carelessly over for more relaxation but has gradually imbided [sic] a relish for their poison.” During his visit to America, Charles Dickens grumbled about the non-existence of copyright for British authors. This deficit led to the proliferation of cheap, pirated copies of British books - especially novels - which as of the mid-18th century dominated Philadelphia’s book market and significantly hampered the development

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209 A diary entry from June 18, 1797. Swiss-born Albert Gallatin, who later became famous as Jefferson’s Secretary of the Treasury, was at that time serving in the U.S. Congress. In Drinker, *The Diary of Elizabeth Drinker (1758-1807)*, vol. 2, p. 933.
of original American literary works. Elizabeth Drinker wrote in 1795 that her friend Molly started reading *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, at that time a very popular Gothic novel by Ann Radcliffe, published originally in Dublin and within a year reprinted in America. Drinker did not like this new literary genre which was captivating audiences on both sides of the ocean and nostaligically recalled the old fashioned novels she used to read in her youth. Referring to the fact that the books were still read out loud in family circles, Drinker added that “seldom I listen to the romance, nor would I encourage my children doing much of that business.”

VI. The Oratorical Tradition and the American Republican Culture

Oratorical skills were at the heart of the great ancient societies such as Athens or Rome whose luster colonial Philadelphia aspired to match some day in the future. As pointed out by Zaret, the ability to persuade others through rational arguments became throughout the 17th century one of the basic tenets of the Anglo-Saxon Protestant social and political culture. Philadelphians got acquainted with it from their early childhood in their churches, listening to the long sermons of their preachers. Similarly the early institutions of their representative government promoted the method of verbal rational argumentation in the process of persuasion and decision-making. Resurrecting the ancient art of Aristotle and Cicero, public speakers soon learned how to deploy different persuasive strategies. Compared to printed word, the immediacy of public delivery gave them also the advantage of immediate feedback.

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212 For more on Charles Dicken’s complaints about the lack of copyright in the U.S. see Fred Kaplan, *Dickens, A Biography* (New York, 1988), pp. 124-5. On the absence of original works see comments in Hamilton, *Men and Manners in America (1830-1831)*, p. 201. Schoepf noted that British laws prohibited the export of unbound books. But bound books imported from Britain to the American colonies were very expensive which turned the cheap domestic reprints into a very lucrative business. In Schoepf, *Travels in the Confederation (1783-1784)*, part 1, p. 88.


On March 15, 1744 France declared war on Britain. London responded two weeks later, but it took almost two more months until the news reached Philadelphia. On June 10, Scottish settler Alexander Hamilton was at a coffee house when at about 6 o’clock in the evening an express messenger came from New York with the news. The rumor spread quickly and the next day, about 4,000 people gathered to hear the official declaration of war. In the presence of Lieutenant Governor Thomas, who was accompanied by 200 dignitaries, sailors carrying battle flags and a makeshift military band of questionable quality, the official letters were read from the elevated balcony of the Court House (Figure 5.8.). Hamilton noted many people in the windows of their neighboring houses listening to the speech. Talking “with a very audible voice” the lieutenant governor invoked all men able to carry arms “to provide themselves with a good firelock, bayonet, and cartouche box, and with a sufficient quantity of powder and ball.” At the end of the ceremony a bold fellow in the crowd with a ‘stentorian voice’ challenged the speaker by asking him a poor man without credit could put together enough money to procure a musket. This moment exemplified two dominant features present in the city’s public life: the absolute freedom of even the poorest folks to speak their mind without any restraint, but also the growing pressure put on the lower classes to bear the financial burden of defense which later escalated during the Pennsylvania Mutiny in 1783. Hamilton concluded his account pointing out that the official did not reply, but just smiled as he and his company left the Court House in a carriage.

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215 Hamilton, Gentleman’s Progress: The Itinerarium of Dr. Alexander Hamilton, 1744, pp. 25-6. Stentor was a Greek messenger at the time of the Trojan War noted for his loud voice. For more see William Smith, A Dictionary of Greek and Roman Biography and Mythology 3vols. (New York, AMS Press). The lieutenant governor’s speech was reprinted in local newspapers. See “A Proclamation,” The Pennsylvania Gazette, June 14, 1744, p. 1.

216 Schoepf wrote on behalf of Philadelphians: “People think, act, and speak here precisely as it prompts them; the poorest day-laborer on the bank of the Delaware holds his right to advance his opinion, in religious as well as political matters, with as much freedom as the gentleman or the scholar.” In Schoepf, Travels in the Confederation (1783-1784), part 1, p. 99.

Figure 5.8. High (Market) Street with the Greater Meeting House, built in 1755, on the left; and the Court House, which served also as City Hall, built 1708, on the right (artist’s rendition).
The Philadelphia Court House was erected in 1708 and similar to other colonial cities, it became the main stage where all important public events took place up until the Revolution. Johannes Schoepf observed that on both ends of the court house were balconies “of which that at one end is the place where newly elected governors are introduced to the people, and at the other end are the pillories for rouges.” In 1739 George Whitefield came to town and on one occasion used the balcony of the Court House to address a crowd of his followers. Franklin, driven by his proverbial curiosity, wanted to know how many people a good preacher can reach at once. The streets adjacent to the Court House were all jammed, but Whitefield had “a loud and clear voice, and articulated his words and sentences so perfectly that he might be heard and understood at a great distance.” His audiences, however numerous, always observed “the most exact silence.” So Franklin started walking away from the preacher until his voice was still clearly audible, then measured the distance, made a semicircle and calculated how many people could have been standing within a given space. “I computed that he may well be heard by more than thirty-thousand,” noted Franklin, adding that this simple experiment gave in his eyes more credibility to the ancient histories of generals haranguing whole armies, of which he previously had some doubts.

Verbal duels in public between distinguished gentlemen were a common way to settle scores in Philadelphia and by the end of century the city had several spacious public halls which could have been used for this purpose. With the ascent of popular republican democracy in the early

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221 Murray, From Gloucester to Philadelphia in 1790: Observations, Anecdotes, and Thoughts from the 18th Century Letters of Judith Sargent Murray, pp; and 204.
1800s, which will be addressed later in this essay, the art of persuasive argumentation became one of the most indispensable skills for anyone aspiring to hold public office. “In America, the power of persuasion constitutes the only lever of political advancement,” wrote in the 1830s Thomas Hamilton in his comparison of the British and American political systems. While in his native Britain ones’ social advancement was determined not by mere talent, but also by rank, wealth, family connections, hereditary claims, “and thousand other influences”, in the United States oral eloquence and the press constituted “the only instruments really available” in acquiring influence over the masses of constituencies, “this many-headed and irresponsible arbiter of merit and measures.” Emulating the republican oratorical heritage of antiquity, Americans embraced the idea of forming “a race of orators, patriots, and philosophers.” In the despotic monarchies and aristocracies, simple eloquence may have been seen as a potent tool to confront guilt and to vindicate innocence, but in a free commonwealth, whether it was Athens or America, “oratory is a sort of governing genius, moulding [sic] the mind of man,” argued the editor of the Philadelphia magazine *The Port Folio*, Joseph Dennie, in 1809.

European observers pointed out that the entire U.S. educational system was designed to promote eloquence and oratorical skills. “An American boy, from the very first year of his going to school, is accustomed to spout. At college he makes public orations. On emerging into life he frequents debating societies, numerous everywhere.” This created a political culture in which the constituencies became accustomed to measure the quality of their elected representatives through the prism of their oratorical skills, and the deputies knew that the best way to assure their

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222 Hamilton, Men and Manners in America (1830-1831), pp. 244-5.
223 In 1772 an announcement signed by “Philomath” proposed establishing a club where young people would be able to practice public speaking. Franklin used the same pen name as a publisher in the 1730s. In “The Following Outlines of a Scheme, Are Submitted to the Consideration,” *The Pennsylvania Gazette*, March 5, 1772.
225 Hamilton, Men and Manners in America (1830-1831), p. 246.
home voters about their political effectiveness was to give frequent public addresses, with each such event being reported in local newspapers. Thomas Hamilton noted in the 1830s that orations of eighteen or twenty hours were nothing uncommon in the U.S. Congress. “The style of speaking is loose, rambling and inconclusive; and the adherence to the real subject of discussion evidently forms no part, either of the intention of the orator, or the expectation of his audience.”

The mere comparison of modern televised broadcasts of the sessions of the U.S. Congress and British Parliament reveals two diametrically different oratorical cultures which have their deep roots in the formation of their respective governing bodies. Hamilton came to the conclusion that the American approach would have never been tolerated in a body like the British Parliament, “compelled by the pressure of business to be economical of time.”

VII. The Triumph of Mass Democracy over Classical Republicanism

The quietness and secrecy with which Quakers ran their businesses was akin to the spirit of the classical aristocratic form of republicanism epitomized by the first two U.S. presidents, George Washington and John Adams, and their Federalist followers. Both men would have certainly strongly objected being compared to aristocrats, but the fact that America did not have traditional forms of aristocracy did not mean that it lacked the basic elements of elitism. “In England there are various aristocracies which act as mutual correctives... In America, there exist but one,” argued Thomas Hamilton, pointing out the aristocracy of money.

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229 Hamilton, Men and Manners in America (1830-1831), pp. 194-5.
Adams referred to them as the ‘nobles of Pennsylvania’ who, in the privacy of their salons, negotiated important matters of state over a dish of good food and a glass of Madeira:

I shall be killed with kindness in this place. We go to Congress at nine, and there we stay, most earnestly engaged in debates upon the most abstruse mysteries of state, until three in the afternoon; then we adjourn, and go to dine with some of the nobles of Pennsylvania at four o’clock, and feast upon ten thousand delicacies, and sit drinking Madeira, Claret and Burgundy till six or seven, and then go home fatigued to death with business, company, and care.\(^{230}\)

Despite their revolt against the British rule, Philadelphians adopted many traditional ideas of their former rulers, among them the institution of social clubs. As in London, this tradition as it developed in Philadelphia grew out of the public coffeehouse and only later assumed the character of a private institution where most of the city’s political and business deals were first negotiated quietly and only then presented to the public, creating the illusion of democratic deliberation. The Quaker tradition of a city where “everything goes on quietly” was very conducive to this development.\(^{231}\) Town meetings in the 1800s were described as theater where the public was invoked only to give its sanction to the names privately agreed upon beforehand “by the knot of worthies who hold conclaves to apportion out the honors.” Thomas Cope sarcastically noted that the whole business was managed secretly by “these kind directors of public will” and “the common herd” was completely ignorant of the matter.\(^{232}\)

The Philadelphia aristocracy of money never missed the opportunity to remind the world that The Schuylkill Fishing Company, founded in 1732 and mentioned earlier in this essay, was the oldest ‘formally organized’ social club in the world, surpassing even the most famous institutions

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\(^{231}\) Hamilton, *Men and Manners in America (1830-1831)*, p. 204.

from London - the very birthplace of clubbing.\textsuperscript{233} As of 1799, the Wistar Parties were held every Saturday evening and became one of the most prestigious social events in the city, matched later by meetings of The Philadelphia Club founded in 1833.\textsuperscript{234} The elitist character of the city’s social life earned Philadelphia the nickname ‘the Bath of the United States’ (in addition to the ‘Athens of America’).\textsuperscript{235} Visitors pointed out that many individuals who had amassed riches in other places started to select the city as their residence, while their fortunes continued to be invested elsewhere:

The truth is, that the large portion of the capital of the Philadelphians is invested in New York, where there is ample field for its profitable employment. The extent of their own traffic is limited, and, in this respect, I should imagine it to be inferior even to Boston. But, in the point of opulence, Philadelphia is, undoubtedly, the first city of the Union... [In New York] the vicissitudes of trade, the growth and dissipation of opulence, are far more rapid. Rich men spring up like mushrooms. Fortunes are made and lost by a single speculation... In Philadelphia, on the other hand, the pursuits of commerce are confined within narrower limits. There is no field of speculation on a great scale, and the regular trade of the place is engrossed by old-established houses, which enjoy a sort of prescriptive confidence, against which younger establishments, however respectable, find it in vain to contend.\textsuperscript{236}

There was no other American city, at least not in the industrialized North, in which the system of exclusion was observed so rigidly as in Philadelphia. “The ascent of a \textit{parvenu} into the aristocratic circle is slow and difficult. There is a sort of a holy alliance between its members to forbid all unauthorized approach.”\textsuperscript{237} But contrary to the experience of European monarchical societies, the American aristocracy was far from an air-tight social group. Indeed, its boundaries were loosely defined and its gates kept partially open by intention. Noted visitors, especially

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\item \textsuperscript{234}Wistar parties were organized as of 1799, at first informally, on Sunday evenings by Dr. Caspar Wistar and later became a tradition, held every Saturday evening. After Wistar’s death in 1818 their hosting rotated among different members of ‘the club’ informally associated with the Philosophical Society. For more on the genesis of Philadelphia’s three most popular clubs – The Wistar Parties, The Philadelphia Club and The Schuylkill Fishing Company - see Horace Mather Lippincott, \textit{Early Philadelphia: Its People, Life and Progress} (Philadelphia, 1917), pp. 295-308.
\item \textsuperscript{235}Hamilton, Men and Manners in America (1830-1831), p. 204.
\item \textsuperscript{236}Ibid., p. 206.
\item \textsuperscript{237}Ibid., pp. 205-6.
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foreigners, always had an open door in Philadelphia’s elite salons. Even more significantly, when “an operative or mechanic attracts notice by his zeal for improvement in any branch of science, he is almost uniformly invited to the Wistar meetings.” Thus a “modest and deserving man” was sporadically introduced into this inner circle to nurture the idea of social mobility in the ranks of the mainstream society. At the same time, Philadelphia’s aristocracy instinctively understood that the decline of its European older cousins was caused by the closeness of their social circles, leading inevitably to the degeneration of both genes and ideas, and intentionally kept the door of its saloons semi-open.

During its short Federal period in the 1790s, the atmosphere of aristocratic Philadelphia helped to precipitate the growing tension between classical republicanism of the Venetian type based on the idea of elitism and secretive cabinet politics, and its modern, democratic forms fostering the ideas of openness and inclusive participation. Not by coincidence, this conflict reverberated with another important development which Arendt labeled as the rise of the social – a set of recursive social and psychological changes which ushered in the birth of the modern class consciousness of the laboring masses. In aristocratic Philadelphia, the final victory of democratic republicanism over its classical form was marked symbolically by the stroke of a new century and the 1800 removal of the federal government to Washington, DC. Anecdotally, the change of guard can be very well illustrated in the way the aristocratic republican, George

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238 Thomas Hamilton was one of them. In Ibid, pp. 182-3. Richard Rawlins, the 20-year old son of a British businessman was another foreigner who described the Wistar Parties: “These meetings, which are held every Saturday evening at some member’s house... No native or citizen of Philadelphia is admitted unless he is a member of the Philosphic Society, but a member may introduce as many strangers as he chooses. When members of Congress are passing through Philadelphia on their way to sessions, these parties are very crowded.” In Rawlins, An American Journal, 1839-40, p. 36.

239 Hamilton, Men and Manners in America (1830-1831), p. 183.


Washington, and the democratic populist, Andrew Jackson, treated their visitors during presidential public audiences.

During his Philadelphia presidency in 1789-1797, Washington resided in Robert Morris’ house at 190 High Street (today’s Market Street), receiving the ‘public’ at regularly scheduled audiences for gentlemen which took place every Tuesday afternoon from three to four o’clock. It was a strictly ritualistic procedure, reminiscent of the court etiquette of the European monarchies. A group of selectively invited guests was standing in a semicircle, a secretary would first introduce each of them, the formally dressed President then walked around and exchanged a few words with every invited person separately. Completing the full circle, Washington returned to his original position, the gentlemen approached him one at the time, bowed and departed. The patrician image of George Washington was enhanced also by his inability to engage in personal conversation. Holding his hands behind his back during the audience, he discouraged any attempt at a handshake.  

Similarly to a Venetian Doge, George Washington conceived the role of the U.S. President as a living symbol of the State, representing its continuity in the eyes of the outer world. He maintained his extreme popularity among the common people in Philadelphia because they knew him mainly as a general and statesman. As a private man, Washington remained an enigma. De Miranda, who in 1783 saw one of the general’s triumphant entries to Philadelphia, compared it to the Biblical scene of the redeemer entering Jerusalem. But fortunately for the country, Washington did not show any interest in exploiting the enormous power which was given to him

243 Official state dinners, offered every Thursday at four o’clock, were similarly short and formalistic. Washington rarely spoke more than several sentences and when he stood up and went upstairs for coffee, everybody knew that the time of departure was approaching. For more see Miller, "The Federal City, 1783-1800," pp. 178-9.
by “the high and low multitude.” Instead, added De Miranda, his “manner is circumspect, taciturn, and has little expression, but tranquility and great moderation make him tolerable.”

In strong contrast to Washington’s reserved and passive concept of a classical presidency was the ‘democratic’ approach epitomized mainly in the 1829-1837 populist presidency of Andrew Jackson. In 1831, a group of Hungarian visitors did not have an appointment with the President, but they took a chance and knocked at the door of the White House, easily obtaining one for the next morning. When the excited Hungarian delegation showed up the next day, Jackson received them in an informal black suit, cordially shook their hands and seated them around in his study. “His direct statements and polite manners quickly made us forget we conversed with the first elected servant of thirteen million people,” Bölöni Farkas wrote in his diary. In the meantime, several other persons entered the room “and he greeted them as plainly as if he were in a private home.”

The triumph of the Democratic-Republican Party in Philadelphia in the elections of 1800-1801 and the ensuing ascendency of Thomas Jefferson to the presidency may have had a more profound impact on the nature of the U.S. political system than the Revolution itself. This shift in the balance of power definitely transformed George Washington’s aristocratic republic into a populist, democratic-republican state. American elites were carefully watching the events of the French Revolution and they understood that the extension of the electoral franchise to people whose education and material status did not prepare them to rule could have very frightening consequences. The main argument used by classical republicans against the democratic republican system was that “the people of a republic may and at certain times will

245 Bölöni Farkas quotes a similar anecdotal story pertaining to the presidency of Thomas Jefferson and his reception by the Danish Ambassador Bleker Olsten. In Bölöni Farkas, Journey in North America, 1831, pp. 188-91.
enact an injustice if it is to their profit.” In the U.S., the closest parallel to general chaos was the early 1830s clash over the Second Bank of the United States in Philadelphia, or *the Monster Bank* as it became popularly known, which soon turned into the main battlefield between two leading political factions - the Federalists and the Democratic-Republicans. In this context De Tocqueville coined the term *the tyranny of the majority* which has ever since become an indispensable category in the political vocabulary. His compatriot, Michel Chevalier, who happened to be in Philadelphia as the fight culminated, observed the enormous vulnerability of the new democratic system, concluding that only “the good sense of a well-informed people” could have saved American mass democracy from a popular caprice.

**Partisan Politics and the Vanishing Dream of Republican Unity**

Partisan politics was nothing new to Philadelphia, a city which was bitterly divided between proprietary governmental and antiproprietary Quaker interest almost from the moment of its founding. The Quakers were the richest people in the Colony, dominating Pennsylvania politics through their majority in its Assembly. “They have the character of an obstinate, stiff necked generation and [they are] a perpetual plague to their governors,” wrote in 1744 Alexander Hamilton. But the late 18th century republicanism was still hostile to modern partisan politics, implying the unity of interest. Consensus was seen as the fundamental precondition to the common good. Leading republican philosophers, reflecting Classical Greek intellectual heritage filtered through Venetian experience, still believed that partisan politics would inevitably result in the ruin of any republican system of government. They fully espoused the deep-seated fear of

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251 Hamilton, Gentleman's Progress: The Itinerarium of Dr. Alexander Hamilton, 1744, p. 22.
parties as the seedbeds both of demagoguery and of consolidationism.\textsuperscript{252} In an 1754 editorial \textit{The Pennsylvania Gazette} warned its readers that “of the great variety of things which men are apt to engage with, there is scarce any that leads them on with greater speed to act beyond the bounds of just reason than that of party zeal; as it frequently buries those of good disposition into great absurdities, and divests them of that charity and civil deportment which, at other times, they have been possessed of, and had justly entitled them to esteem.”\textsuperscript{253} In his 1796 farewell address, George Washington clearly emphasized the role of a president as a \textit{patriotic chief}, which to many of his listeners was reminiscent of the concept of a \textit{Patriot King} coined half a century earlier in England by Viscount Bolingbroke.\textsuperscript{254}

Instead of promoting the spirit of unity, the young American Republic saw its political elites from the very beginning bitterly divided: territorially between the South and the North, and ideologically between the Federalists and the Democratic-Republicans. The Federalist, observed in 1830s Thomas Hamilton, “is disposed to regard the United States as one and indivisible, and the authority of the United government as paramount to every other jurisdiction.” The Democrat saw the Union as “a piece of mosaic, tessellated with stones of different colors, curiously put together but possessing no other principle of cohesion than of mutual convenience.”\textsuperscript{255} The political wars of the Jacksonian era with its growing populism reminded Hamilton more of an anarchy driven by “the ambition and avarice of a few men in both parties” who were following their selfish personal interests, despite the fact that “a spacious story about the good and interest


\textsuperscript{253} “To the Freemen of the City and County of Philadelphia,” \textit{The Pennsylvania Gazette}, September 26, 1754, p. 1.


\textsuperscript{255} Hamilton, Men and Manners in America (1830-1831), p. 154.
Young British entrepreneur Richard Rawlins in 1839 stood in awe in Independence Hall and imagining the Founding Fathers signing the Declaration, he was overwhelmed by the lofty spirit of their intellectual glory and moral courage. But suddenly his mind contrasted this dream with the bitterly divided political public sphere he found during his visit to the U.S., concluding that its leading politicians “lose, in the spirit of party, the welfare of their country.” Many American intellectuals realized that the originally designed constitutional system was rapidly changing under the pressure of the growing masses of poor electors. Their influx was attributed to a synergy of three powerful social forces: industrialization, urbanization and immigration. “I conversed with no enlightened Americans, who did not confess, that the constitution now, though the same in letter with that established in 1789, is essentially different in spirit,” Scottish journalist Thomas Hamilton wrote in the 1830s. The original idea presented by Washington and his Secretary of the Treasury Alexander Hamilton was “to counterpoise, as much as circumstances would permit, the rashness of democracy by the caution and wisdom of an aristocracy of intelligence and wealth.” Yet the spreading American cities of the 1820s saw parallel growth of the organizations of ‘the workies’ with their own newspapers, and the buildings in the city were plastered with their political pamphlets making no secret of their radical demands. Thomas Hamilton concluded that the original Republican ideal based on “an aristocracy of knowledge, education and refinement,” was definitely inconsistent with “the true democratic principle of absolute equality.”

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256 Hamilton, Gentleman’s Progress: The Itinerarium of Dr. Alexander Hamilton, 1744, p. 29.
259 Hamilton, Men and Manners in America (1830-1831), p. 161.
VIII. A Communication Revolution?

Paul Starr argues that even if we acknowledge the reservations of some social historians and admit that the American Revolution wasn’t a genuine social revolution, we can certainly claim that it was a communication revolution which transformed the conditions of the public sphere. Starr bases his view on the idea that contrary to its mother country, Britain, the United States produced a written Constitution which was ensuingly published, widely circulated and discussed among the popular masses.\footnote{Paul Starr, The Creation of the Media: Political Origins of Modern Communications (New York, 2004), p. 48.} But was this truly such a revolutionary experience for the former colonial world? By 1687 William Penn commissioned Philadelphia’s first printer William Bradford to produce an 80-page compendium containing five fundamental documents which framed the constitutional rights of his colony: from the full text of the \textit{Magna Charta} (1215) to the \textit{Charter of Liberties} which Penn himself granted to the freemen of Pennsylvania in 1682. Introducing the work, Penn emphasized that he “sent and recommended” such documents to colonists for their “information and understanding… of that inestimable inheritance that every \textit{free born subject of England} is heir unto by birth-right” of what he described as “that unparalleled privilege of \textit{liberty} and \textit{property}, beyond all nations in the whole world.” In France and other European nations, Penn argued further, the mere will of the prince was the law, but in England the law was “both the \textit{measure} and the \textit{bound} of every subject’s duty and allegiance, each man having a fixed fundamental right born with him, as to \textit{freedom of his person} and \textit{property to his estate.” This implies a limit on the power of a king, “whose government is politick, for he can neither change laws without the consent of his subjects, nor yes charge them with impositions against their wills.”\footnote{All quotes are from the unnumbered introductory part. The compendium contained (1) the \textit{Magna Carta}; (2) The Confirmation of the Charters of the Liberties of England; (3) A statute made of Edward I commonly called \textit{De Tallageo non}}
Back to Starr’s argument, the author claims that the Quakers were constantly censoring Bradford, asking him “not to print anything but what shall have lycense from ye Council.” But the Council, just as the Assembly, were two bodies of representative government, dominated by Quakers but notoriously in discord with each other and as of 1684 united in opposition to the Penn’s proprietary interest. Thus before he definitively left Philadelphia in 1693, Bradford did publish a wide array of polemical works defending the Quaker religion, but with the same zeal also promoting the political rights and liberties of free-men in Pennsylvania and elsewhere against their colonial governments. According to Frederick Tolles, if Penn the Proprietor was later annoyed by the partisan strife among colonists who jealously defended their own privileges, he could as well have thanked Penn the publicist who made them know and consequently insist on their own rights. Paul Starr sees the fundamentally new quality of the American Revolution in the fact that it was “legally based, institutionally entrenched, and capable of providing people with the communicative instruments of self-government.” But I argue that we can clearly see the roots of such a ‘revolution’ in Penn’s 1687 decision to publish and circulate principle legal documents, and to encourage colonists to become familiar with their positively framed rights.


262 As quoted in Starr, The Creation of the Media: Political Origins of Modern Communications, p. 54.
264 Some of the books printed by William Bradford during his stay in Philadelphia between 1782-1793: (1) defending Quaker faith - Anonymous, A General Epistle Given Forth by the People of the Lord, Called, Quakers (Philadelphia, 1686); Thomas Budd, An Expostulation... Against George Keith and the Rest of his Friends (Philadelphia, 1692); and George Keith, The Plea of the Innocent Against the False Judgment... (Philadelphia, 1692). (2) defending political rights of colonists - Anonymous, To the Representatives of the Free-Men of this Province of Pennsilvania and Counties Annexed (Philadelphia, 1692); and Gershom Bulkeley, The People's Right to Election, or, Alteration of Government in Connecticut (Philadelphia, 1689).
This action itself was rooted in the English tradition of the publishing of the *Magna Carta*.\(^{267}\) Wouldn’t this make the American communication revolution of 1776 look more like an evolution than a sudden abrupt change? The only substantial difference between those two events was quantitative, not qualitative, deriving from the fact that Penn’s public sphere was created on the much smaller scale of a colonial town and its immediate surroundings, while the social, political and technological developments following the 1776 declaration of American independence made possible its extension at the level of a continental nation-state.

The developments between 1687 and 1776 further enhance the evolutionary argument, because Penn’s precedent with the printed constitution had a strong follow up in Philadelphia. In 1714, Bradford’s son Andrew was commissioned by the Governor and the Assembly to publish a 180-page compendium of *The Laws of the Province of Pennsilvania*.\(^{268}\) As of 1719, when Bradford launched *The American Weekly Mercury*, the city’s newspapers carried all important legislation pertaining to the life of the city and the colony on a regular basis. Foreign visitors later noted that “all the laws that regard directly the welfare of the state are published in the gazettes for a whole year before they get into effect, so that the people can examine them.”\(^{269}\)

And Philadelphians understood that any law, once put in print, assumed a fundamentally different quality than words spoken by any worldly or religious authority. As a clerk of the Pennsylvania Assembly, Franklin often observed the embarrassment with which Quakers were forced to defend their original pacifist positions formulated at the time when they were persecuted in England, despite the fact that they were the rulers now and were facing increasing

\(^{267}\) After its signature in 1215, the *Magna Carta* had been copied and read publicly by cryers in all important English cities. There are four surviving transcripts from this period which were used for this purpose. The document was also one of the most often printed titles in early 16th century England. Databases such as *WorldCat* (Online Computer Library Center, Inc.) or *Early English Books Online* (ProQuest) list dozens of versions printed as of 1508.


\(^{269}\) Castiglioni, Luigi *Castiglioni's Viaggio: Travels to the United States of North America, 1785-87*, p. 222.
attacks on their own ships by French and Portuguese privateers. The problem, in Franklin’s judgment, was that having previously printed their constitution which clearly stipulated pacifism as one of the fundamental principles of Quakerism, it was very difficult for them to back out. The apparent problem with the law fixed in a tangible medium was that it turned the *subjective* judgment of a ‘wise legislator’ who based the verdict upon an understanding of all complexities of a concrete situation, into a rigid and universally applied prescription which had a tendency to *objectify* social reality and mechanize the judgment. The quarrels among the followers of the religions based on scripture, or current problems with the interpretation of the U.S. Constitution are very good illustrations of this problem. Penn himself had to face many troubles for putting the *Charter of Liberties* of Pennsylvania in print.\(^{270}\)

Franklin captured another aspect of the differences between the spoken and printed word in an anecdote connected to the 1739-40 series of George Whitefield’s sermons in Philadelphia. He had already heard Whitefield preaching in London and now saw the difference between the new themes addressed by the famous preacher and his old sermons. “His delivery of late was so improved by frequent repetitions, that every accent, every emphasis, every modulation of voice, was so perfectly well turned and well placed that without being interested in the subject, one could not help being pleased with the discourse.”\(^{271}\) Just as the modern media gurus test the reaction of the recipients to their messages, it is beyond doubt that Whitfield carefully studied the reactions of his audiences and had numerous opportunities to fine-tune his delivery in order to maximize the impact of his sermons. Franklin argued that Whitefield’s Achilles heel was in the fact that he often let his famous sermons be published in print, which gave his opponents the opportunity to point out even the most nuanced inconsistencies in his preaching. What the

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enormous masses of listeners who accompanied Whitefield everywhere he went graciously overlooked, the few ‘experts’ who read his texts in the silence of their studies mercilessly analyzed and used for their ‘violent attacks’ against the preacher. His words assumed a definitive, objective meaning when they were put in print. Single phrases could be taken out of context and still maintain their original value. Consequently, it was almost impossible for any person of public stature not to contradict themselves from time-to-time. Observing this, Franklin argued that if Whitefield “had never written anything he would have left behind him a much more numerous and important sect.” The written word remains - *littera scripta manet* - the famous Philadelphian added sarcastically.  

**IX. The Athens of America**

Epithets attributed to cities reflect, and often hype, the basic tenets of their founding myths, created to justify the historical *raison d’être* of their bearers. In the early 19th century, Philadelphians often addressed their city ‘the Athens of America’. What was in the name? It was an amalgam of ideas in which the metropolis attempted to answer some of its deepest existential challenges. The epithet clearly reflected the claim that if the young American Republic was seen as a continuation of the Classical Greek republican ideals, its cultural and ideological center, Philadelphia, was implicitly the reincarnation of Athens at the peak of the city’s cultural and political hegemony. By adopting the straight lines, rectangular floor plans and the overall simplicity of the airy Grecian architectural style, Philadelphians also acknowledged a

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272 Ibid, pp. 90-91. Franklin himself printed some of Whitefield’s journals and sermons in installments by subscription. “The Rev. Mr. Whitefield having given me copies of his journals and sermons, with leave to print the same; I propose to publish them with all expedition…” In *The Pennsylvania Gazette*, June 14, 1739, p. 3.


much deeper psychological struggle to assert themselves, to renew the spirit of republican moral virtues at a time when their young republic was deeply divided by a bitter dispute of emerging political factions. Last but not least, by associating their city with Athens, Philadelphians symbolically embraced the fight of the ancient Greek motherland for independence and inadvertently helped to articulate the doctrines of American exceptionalism and manifest destiny, based on the promotion and spread of republican ideals elsewhere.

The earliest comparisons with classical Athens emerged in Philadelphia soon after the city’s founding. “May your Philadelphia be the future Athens of America: may plenty of her sons arise, qualified with learning, virtue and politeness,” the subscribers of the Franklin-initiated Library Company of America wrote in 1733 in a public address to the proprietor, Thomas Penn. Between the Quakers’ philanthropic initiative and Franklin’s ingenuity, the city developed numerous social and cultural institutions which were admired by many visitors from other colonies as well as from the overseas. In 1767, the anonymous author of A Panegyrick, a classical style eulogy on the city and its inhabitants, imagined that he was sitting on the shady banks “by Schuylkill’s limpid streams” while composing his poem, “to sing the charms of Philadelphia’s boast.” During the War of Independence, the eyes of the republican

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275 Roger G. Kennedy, Greek Revival in America (New York, 1989), pp. 3-4.
276 Kennedy claims that in the final account, Greece as an inspiration was certainly more useful to the U.S. than vice versa. See Ibid., pp. 177-182. For more on the process of formulation of the ideology of American exceptionalism, the Monroe Doctrine and manifest destiny see John M. Murrin, “The Jeffersonian Triumph and American Exceptionalism,” Journal of the Early Republic 20 (2000). also Amy S. Greenberg, Manifest Manhood and the Antebellum American Empire (Cambridge, UK, 2005).
277 “On Monday the 7th instant, the subscribers to the library in this city had their yearly meeting...,” The Pennsylvania Gazette, May 31, 1733.
revolutionaries of the entire Western world were on Philadelphia. 280 “Who in the fatherland has not heard of Philadelphia?” asked visiting German biologist Johann Schoepf in 1783. 281 For them, Philadelphia was “one of the wonders of the world.” 282 Franklin’s residence in Paris was besieged day and night by visionaries and adventurers who wanted to join the revolution, begging for recommendation letters. Philadelphia represented their life’s chance to realize the utopia of their republican dreams. 283 When they later celebrated the final victory, they toasted ‘to Greece reborn’, with Washington as a chief and Lafayette as its best friend. 284

In 1806, Philadelphia publisher and later its most famous (or infamous, depending on the point of view) banker Nicholas Biddle, whose spirit dominated the city’s public life for decades, was the first American antiquity aficionado to visit Greece on a private trip. 285 Biddle immediately fell in love with country’s architectural and philosophical heritage and this was clearly reflected in a series of seminal essays which appeared under his editorship in the prestigious journal The Port Folio. One of them was signed by Benjamin Henry Latrobe, the famous architect whose design of the Bank of Pennsylvania is considered one of the most

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280 Aside from the most famous names such as Lafayette, Pulaski or Kosciuszko, there was French political thinker Brissot de Warville, German military leader Baron Ludwig von Closen, or the predecessor of Simón Bolívar, Venezuelan revolutionary Francisco de Miranda. De Warville described Philadelphia in 1788 as “the metropolis of the United States. It is certainly the most beautiful and the best-built city in the nation, and also the wealthiest, though not the most ostentatious. Here you will find the more well-educated men, more knowledge of politics and literature, more political and learned societies than anywhere in the United States.” In Brissot de Warville, New Travels in the United States of America, 1788, p. 253. Cf. Von Closen, The Revolutionary Journal of Baron Ludwig von Closen, 1780-1783; De Miranda, The New Democracy in America: Travels of Francisco de Miranda in the United States, 1783-84; Levasseur, Lafayette in America in 1824 and 1825: Journal of the Voyage to the United States; and Bölöni Farkas, Journey in North America, 1831.

281 Schoepf, Travels in the Confederation (1783-1784), part 1, p. 55.
285 Biddle’s primacy has been disputed. He himself admitted that he was the second American travelling to Greece to study its architecture and history. For more see Kennedy, Greek Revival in America, pp. 169-170; and Nicholas B. Wainwright, “The Age of Nicholas Biddle, 1825-1841,” in Philadelphia: A 300-year History ed. Russell F. Weigley (New York, 1982). In 1807 a Philadelphia magazine published an anonymous traveler’s account of Athens which may be reasonably attributed to Biddle. See “Present State of Athens,” The Literary Magazine, and American Register, October 1807, Vol. 8, Issue 49; pp. 194-7.
important edifices built in Greek revival style in Philadelphia. He expressed the hope that “the
days of Greece may be revived in the woods of America, and Philadelphia becomes the Athens
of the Western World.”

As of the 1792, Europe was engulfed first in French Revolutionary Wars, which were but a
short prelude before Napoleon entered the stage dragging the entire continent into a series of
exhausting military conflicts. The Americans suddenly felt that their struggle for independence
was vindicated by the mere fact that they were now protected from “the jarring elements” which
disturbed the mother continent. “Already the resort of all nations, our country will speedily
become the Emporium of the world,” The Pennsylvania Gazette proclaimed in 1795 as it hailed
the arrival of a group of prominent Dutch merchant exiles to American shores. The anonymous
author wrote that the arts, the muses, and the sciences, scared by the rattle of war in Europe, had
already “commenced their flight for our happy shores; and without enthusiasm, we may
anticipate the period when the states of Columbia shall unite the commerce of Carthage with the
literature of Athens.” Emboldened by the success of the War of Independence, Americans
were looking for an ideology which would give meaning to the existence of their young
Republic. In Philadelphia this thirst was gradually quelled by a syncretic amalgamation of the
nostalgia for Classical Greece with Scottish liberal economics. Quite emblematic for this trend
was the fact that it was the construction of new banks which introduced the whiteness of carved
marble stone into the dull mass of the brick façades, so typical for colonial Philadelphia.

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286 In Latrobe’s “Anniversary Oration to the Society of Artists,” delivered in May 1811 and ensuingly printed by Biddle’s Port
Folio. Fully reprinted in Benjamin Henry Latrobe, The Correspondence and Miscellaneous Papers of Benjamin Henry Latrobe,
Revival in America, pp. 187-190. For more on the key social role The Port Folio played in the early 1800s Philadelphia see Elias

287 “The Dutch exiles in England are preparing to embark for this asylum...,” The Pennsylvania Gazette, May 6, 1795.

288 Kennedy, Greek Revival in America, p. 187.

289 According to Levasseur, Strickland’s Second Bank of the United States “is generally considered to be the most beautiful
piece of architecture in the Union. It offers, on a small scale, a rather exact image of the Temple of Minerva at Athens.
towering columns and airy porticos were soon imitated by the builders of religious temples, universities, edifices of public utilities, and ultimately found their expression also among residential buildings.\footnote{\textit{Levasseur, Lafayette in America in 1824 and 1825: Journal of the Voyage to the United States}, p. 164. For Mrs. Trollope the Second Bank of United States and the Pennsylvania Bank were “the most striking buildings, and are both extremely handsome, being of white marble, and built after Grecian models.” In \textit{Trollope, Domestic Manners of the Americans (1827-1831)}, p. 208. Bölöni Farkas also admired Second Bank: “It is modeled after the Athenian Parthenon... similarly the Corinthian-columned Girard’s Bank [the building of the First Bank of the United States was later bought by Girard] portico and the Ionic-columned Pennsylvania Bank... The other nine banks are just as impressive.” In Bölöni Farkas, \textit{Journey in North America, 1831}, p. 208.}

In 1803, after returning from a six-year stay in Europe, Philadelphia paper manufacturer Joshua Gilpin found his city utterly changed. “Our public buildings follow the public wealth... so that we are fast becoming a city of marble,” wrote Gilpin to his friend back in London, adding that the Greek god of generosity, Pluto, had been very propitious to his city and “we repay him in temples, vulgarly called banks” (Figures 5.3 and 5.9.a).\footnote{\textit{Elizabeth Drinker noted the increase of Grecian buildings in Philadelphia in her diary - entry dated June 21, 1795. In Drinker, \textit{The Diary of Elizabeth Drinker (1758-1807)}, vol. 1, p. 694. For more on this subject see Chapter 4: “The Greek Revival in Philadelphia” in Talbot Hamlin, \textit{Greek Revival Architecture in America} (London, 1956), p. 63.}


In the 1830s, the outspoken Mrs. Trollope and her companions walked home one “fine moonlight evening” around the Second Bank of the United States, looking at its white marble columns by the subdued light which was said to be so advantageous to them. “The building did indeed look beautiful; the incongruous objects around it were hardly visible, while the brilliant white of the building, which by daylight is dazzling, was mellowed into fainter light and softer shadow.”\footnote{\textit{Trollope, Domestic Manners of the Americans (1827-1831), pp. 212-3.}} Charles Dickens later lodged at a hotel just across the street from the same bank and before going to bed, he looked out of the window and saw “a handsome building of white marble, which had a mournful ghost-like aspect, dreary to behold.” Indeed, the next morning Dickens learned that this was ‘the memorable’ Second Bank of the United States - “the tomb of many fortunes; the great catacomb of investment” – which, during the presidency of Andrew Jackson (1829-1937), became the symbol

\footnote{\textit{Trollope, Domestic Manners of the Americans (1827-1831), pp. 212-3.}}
Figure 5.9.a John Birch, *The First Bank of the United States, in Third Street*, c.1800.
The Jacksonian “Monster Bank” - The Second Bank of the United States in Philadelphia was chartered in 1816 and its building designed by William Strickland.
Figure 5.9.c President Andrew Jackson brandishes an "Order for the Removal of the Public Money deposited in the United States Bank" (a contemporary political cartoon). In 1832, Jackson symbolically destroyed the marble pillars of the portico of the Second Bank of the United States when he withdrew federal financial resources from the bank. Author: Edward W. Clay.
of a bitter fight between the U.S. aristocracy of money and the promoters of popular mass democracy (Figures 5.3. and 5.9.b-c).293

Philadelphians were especially proud of their waterworks, claiming that this magnificent improvement was the fruit of their republican liberty.294 A system of engines first pumped water into a highly decorative reservoir in Fairmont Park on the Schuylkill River and then pushed it into the 105-feet tall tower built in Grecian style on Centre Square where today City Hall stands (Figure 5.10.). “Daily the waterworks pumps 76 million cups of water into the reservoir, whence pipes lead to the city,” noted Bölöni Farkas. Because of its elevation, the Centre Square reservoir was able to supply water up to the third floor of the houses.295 In its conception, the waterworks were a quintessential ‘machine in the garden’. Their highly decorated steel engines were nestled in magnificent Grecian buildings adorned with white marble columns, and all this was set in the romantic beauty of a classicist gardens. “The vast, yet simple machinery by which this is achieved is open to the public, who resort in such numbers to see it, that several evening stages run from Philadelphia to Fair Mount for their accommodation,” observed Mrs. Trollope (Figure 5.11.). Young ladies who came here in the company of gentlemen to admire this fruit of freedom and liberty could have been heard to utter words such as ‘marvelous’ and ‘machine’ in the same sentence.296

Judith Sargent Murray wrote in 1790 that Boston, New York, and Philadelphia were the climax of American urban civilization, of which Philadelphia was the ascendant. It was an

293 Dickens, American Notes (1842), p. 129.
294 Hamilton, Men and Manners in America (1830-1831), p. 181.
295 Bölöni Farkas, Journey in North America, 1831, p. 211.
“opulent and beautiful city… the Metropolis of America.” The awed Hungarian count Bölöni Farkas described it as “the queen of cities,” adding that he felt there as if he was in ancient Rome or Athens. By 1831 the city had about two hundred public buildings and churches and “while commerce and politics dominate other American cities, Philadelphia is renowned for its educational and philanthropic institutions.” The city of Franklin boosted circa 160 societies which were “devoted to the dissemination of useful knowledge and promoting charitable and other humanitarian causes.” There were sixteen public libraries; the most important one, the Philadelphia Library, held 160,000 books, and formidable collections of newspapers and reading rooms. “About fifty newspapers and magazines are published in thirty-two printing shops alone,” Bölöni Farkas concluded his account of the Athens of America.

In the early 1830s, there were at least a dozen banks in Philadelphia built in the Grecian style and whose proud marble façades reflected the growing optimism of a young nation. Philadelphians became used to their presence just as they got used to interpreting the historical role of their own country as a civilizing mission, carrying liberty and knowledge to the utmost limits of the world “until ignorance exists no more, until knowledge universally prevails, until in every untutored haunt of savage beast, or man, the polished villa, and towering city shall arise.” If the United States was indeed supposed to be the new Greece, Philadelphia certainly was its Athens. Yet along with growing self-confidence, Americans started to reevaluate the direct comparisons with former republics from antiquity. “In making our government

297 Murray, From Gloucester to Philadelphia in 1790: Observations, Anecdotes, and Thoughts from the 18th Century Letters of Judith Sargent Murray, p. 106.
298 Bölöni Farkas, Journey in North America, 1831, p. 209.
300 Murray’s paraphrase of one of the eulogies delivered during commencement in the Philadelphia College in 1790. In Murray, From Gloucester to Philadelphia in 1790: Observations, Anecdotes, and Thoughts from the 18th Century Letters of Judith Sargent Murray, p. 199.
301 In this context Kennedy points out the propensity of Samuel Adams to call Boston the ‘Christian Sparta’. See Kennedy, Greek Revival in America, p. 81.
Figure 5.10. John Birch, *High Street, with the First Presbyterian Church*, c.1800.
Figure 5.11. Fenderich and Wild, Fairmont Waterworks Near Philadelphia, c.1830.
Democratical, in extending the right of suffrage to every freeman, in diffusing information, in
annulling the titles of nobility, destroying the titles of primogeniture and abolishing church
establishments, we have made ourselves a distinct and peculiar people,” argued Philadelphia
mayor James Nelson Barker in his 1817 Independence Day oration delivered in the city’s
Vauxhall Gardens. Just as Venice in the 1500s believed in its own myth of immortality, Barker’s
America also was convinced that it surpassed everything ever achieved in the history of human
organization and had discovered the secret formula to make its republic eternal. “Our enemies
have, indeed, exultingly cited the examples of other republics, as auguries of our downfall,”
claimed the mayor, but the United States was diametrically different because its constitution was
built “on the will, the good sense, the well understood interest of the governed.” Thus, there was
nothing perishable in it. Indeed, like a Phoenix, it will be able to renew itself constantly from its
original elements, concluded the speaker, exhorting all present to pray fervently “that the
Republic may be perpetual.”

X. A Republic on a Continental Scale

For the generation of the Founding Fathers, the building of national infrastructure was an
essential task necessary for the very survival of the young Republic, both economically and
politically. In the 1890s John Dewey described the dilemma of early American democracy as
“how to reach a free common intelligence like the Greeks, and yet make it cover a much wider
territory.” This statement obviously reflected the discourse about the ideal size of a republic

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303 Cited in Quandt, From the Small Town to the Great Community: The Social Thought of Progressive Intellectuals, p. 53.
contained already in the works of Plato and Aristotle. In *The Social Contract* (1762) Rousseau echoed the same argument by stating that there were geographic limitations to the size of a functioning republic which “it is to be neither too large to be well governed nor too small to maintain itself.” Drawing on the historical experience of his native city-state of Geneva, the author doubted the possibility of establishing a viable republican system on a large scale, arguing that “the more the social bond is stretched, the slacker it becomes.” Montesquieu, whose work was widely read in revolutionary America, assessed in *The Spirit of Laws* (1748) that a confederacy was the best system of political organization of a state, pointing out the longevity of ancient Greek city-state unions which combined the democratic advantages of small scale republican governments with the defensive abilities of great monarchies. This idea was echoed by John Adams, who at the end of his diplomatic mission in Europe in the 1780s published a voluminous study surveying constitutional models of various republics throughout history. Adams emphasized the advantage of confederate arrangements among city-states in ancient Greece, Switzerland and the Netherlands. Marquis de Chastellux - a French military leader who fought in the War of Independence - observed during his stay in Philadelphia that a potential split of the Union on account of its geographic size was a matter of frequent discussion. “Indeed it seems to be a measure which sooner or later must take place, from the obvious difficulties

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304 In *Republic*, Plato claims that the ideal *polis* should have about thousand citizens (4.423a); the ideal colony of Magnesia discussed in *Laws* is conceived as having 5,040 households (5.737e-38a). In *Politics*, Aristotle recommended that “in order to decide questions of justice and in order to distribute the offices according to merit it is necessary for the citizens to know each other's personal characters” (7.1326b).


306 “If a republic is small, it is destroyed by a foreign force; if it be large, it is ruined by an internal imperfection,” the author argued further. In Charles de Secondat Montesquieu, *The Spirit of Laws*, Mr. Nugent trans. (London, 1752), pp. 183-4. Voltaire in 1764 echoed similar claim: “The larger that homeland becomes, the less you love it, for a love that is divided is a love that is weakened. It is impossible to love a family that is too large and whom you hardly know,” Voltaire. *Political Writings*, p. 28.

attending the management and operations of a confederacy extending from Florida to Nova Scotia, a country every day increasing in population and branching into new states.\textsuperscript{308}

From this brief outline it is quite obvious that the founding fathers had a full understanding that, in creating the Union, they were transferring a historical-political system of a republican government which had thus far proved its viability only at the micro level of the city-state to a new, much wider scale of a national macro-state whose ambition was to cover an entire continent.\textsuperscript{309} In doing so, the Jeffersonian generation counted on the idea that new transportation and communication technologies can create a qualitatively new, \textit{imagined national community} whose members will be able to establish and maintain a social bond on egalitarian republican principles, relying on the mediating power of representative democracy and communication technologies.\textsuperscript{310}

The medieval world did not understand the idea of \textit{abstract power}, which could be given up voluntarily by someone and delegated to another person.\textsuperscript{311} Although the concept of \textit{representative democracy} was gradually introduced in the Renaissance, it was practiced only at the local level of a city-state.\textsuperscript{312} However ironical it must seem to a current reader, the young count, Bölöni Farkas, still felt a need in the 1830s to explain the concept of a nation-wide electoral process to his readers back in Hungary, adding that this is done “to reduce the cost of travelling” and “to speed the election returns.”\textsuperscript{313} The indispensable role of communication technologies in this process was touched upon by Benjamin Franklin who in 1782 pointed out

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item[\textsuperscript{308}] Chastellux, Travels in North-America (1780-1782), vol. 1, pp. 218-9.
\item[\textsuperscript{309}] Hansen claims that the U.S. founding fathers in this context often relied on examples set by the Achaian and Aitolian/Aetolian Leagues founded in 280-279 BC in Greece, the Swiss Confederacy from 1291, and the Dutch federal republic established by the League of Utrecht in 1579. In Hansen, \textit{Polis: An Introduction to the Ancient Greek City-State}, p. 15.
\item[\textsuperscript{311}] Bloch illustrates this claim through episodes from the lives of Frederick Barbarossa and Otto I. In Marc Bloch, \textit{Feudal Society}, L. A. Manyon trans. (Chicago, 1939/1961), p. 409-10. See also Habermas’ definition of ‘representative publicness’. In Habermas, \textit{The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society}, pp. 5-14.
\item[\textsuperscript{312}] Cf. the chapter of this study dedicated to Venice.
\item[\textsuperscript{313}] Bölöni Farkas, Journey in North America, 1831, p. 164.
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\end{footnotesize}
that ancient Greek and Roman orators were limited by the reach of their voices, because most of the people could not read, adding that “now by the press we can speak to nations.”

De Tocqueville saw “a force for creating powerful intellectual bonds” in the U.S. postal system, able to counterbalance the challenge imposed on American society by its vast geography.

In the 1830s his fellow countryman, Michel Chevalier, who came to the U.S. to study its communication systems, estimated that when New York would only be a few days’ journey from New Orleans, and every citizen, every laborer would have the means to afford using long-distance communication, disunion of the United States would be impossible. “Distance will be annihilated, and this colossus, ten times greater than France, will preserve the unity without an effort.”

And indeed, at the time of the ratification of the Constitution in 1787, the U.S. had a population of about three million people, but only about 2,400 miles of roads and 75 post offices. By 1801 the population exceeded five million, but the country already boasted 21,000 miles of roads and 900 post offices and their reach growth every day. Thus Jefferson concluded that the U.S. experience will prove Montesquieu’s - and implicitly also Rousseau’s - fears about the size of the republic unsubstantiated by demonstrating that “the larger the extent of country, the more firm its republican structure, if founded, not on conquest, but in principles of compact and equality.”

James Carey later summarized this argument by asserting that if republican unity, or compact, was to be technologically achieved through the space-binding potential of

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315 De Tocqueville, Democracy in America, p. 444.
communication, republican equality and other virtues were to be achieved by the time-binding power of public discourse.\textsuperscript{319}

**Growing Urban Communities and the Binding Power of Communication**

While the space binding power of communication is usually discussed only in the context of large empires and growing modern nation-states, newspapers became indispensable for the maintenance of social bonds even within growing urban communities. De Warville noted in 1788 that Philadelphia was still lacking street signs and had no house numbers. “It is inconceivable that the Quakers, who are so fond of order, have not borrowed these two practices from the English, from whom they have adopted so many other things,” he wondered.\textsuperscript{320} Yet De Warville’s own city, Paris, instituted the use of street numbers only a decade earlier. As European and American cities grew, they were creating more complex social realities in which the word of mouth was not anymore able to convey news from all corners of the town; it was beyond ones’ mental capacities to remember all the street names and family residences.\textsuperscript{321} On May 30, 1795 Philadelphia newspapers printed an account of a fight in the working class quarter of Southwark between French crewmen of the privateer Brutus and some local ropewalk workers. A few men lost their lives and the subsequent riots had to be contained by the militia.\textsuperscript{322} Yet a surprised Elizabeth Drinker learned about the mishap only from the press, confiding to her diary that “had such an affair happened 30 or 40 years ago, the whole town would have been in


\textsuperscript{320} Brissot de Warville, New Travels in the United States of America, 1788, pp. 254-5. De Warville’s Paris got street numbers in the summer of 1799, by the initiative of Martin Kreenfelt, the publisher of the new Almanach de Paris - an 18\textsuperscript{th} century version of Yellow Pages. See David Garrioch, The Making of Revolutionary Paris (Berkeley, 2002).

\textsuperscript{321} Paris instituted the use of street numbers in the summer of 1799, through the initiative of Martin Kreenfelt, the publisher of the new Almanach de Paris - an 18\textsuperscript{th} century version of the Yellow Pages. See Garrioch, The Making of Revolutionary Paris.

\textsuperscript{322} “We are sorry to inform the publick that yesterday afternoon...,” Gazette of the United States and Daily Evening Advertiser, May 30, 1795, p. 3. “In the consequence of the riot yesterday, in the district of Southwark...,” The Philadelphia Gazette & Universal Daily Advertiser, May 30, 1795, p. 2.
an uproar, but we heard nothing of it ‘til we saw the account in the newspaper.”

Drinker’s diary reveals the fact that not just the nation state, but also the growing urban metropolis becomes at some point dependent on the mediating power of communication technology. Philadelphia printers, who in the 1730s refused to print local gossip (arguing that by the time they put the story in print everybody knew it anyway) were now gradually introducing in their newspapers some local reporting. And as the traditional urban face-to-face society itself assumed the qualities of an imagined community, the influence of media in the everyday lives of its residents grew, gradually reflecting all prerogatives which the 1970s authors of *media systems dependency theory* discussed in the context of contemporary societies and their communication technologies.

### The Nation-State as an Imagined Community

In 1787 Thomas Jefferson claimed that the citizens of the American republic should gain “full information of their affairs thro’ the channel of the public papers,” adding that were it left to him to decide between having a government without newspapers, or newspapers without a government, he should not hesitate a moment to prefer the latter. But in the same statement Jefferson implied the importance of universal access to the means of communication when he added “that every man should receive those papers and be capable of reading them.” George Washington in his 1796 farewell address similarly emphasized that a form of government which gives such priority to public opinion should make sure that that opinion is enlightened. “Promote

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324 Cf. Bradford, *"There is not an Ear that is not Deaf but Listens to the News..."*

325 Media systems dependency theory is based on following premises: (1) it analyzes the relationship between a large social system and the media’s role in this system; (2) it assumes that the degree of audience dependence on media information is a key measure of the media’s potential to influence beliefs, feelings and consequently also behavior; (3) it believes that the more complex the society is, the bigger the dependency of its members on mediating technologies; and (4) it stipulates that the greater the need to rely on media for information and escape, the bigger role they play in human lives. Cf. Stanley J. Baran and Dennis K. Davis, *Mass Communication Theory: Foundations, Ferment, and Future* (Belmont, CA; London, 2002), pp. 324-9.

then, as an object of primary importance, institutions for the general diffusion of knowledge,” the first president urged his compatriots in his last public speech.\footnote{Delivered in Congress on September 17, 1796. In Washington, \textit{George Washington's Farewell Address}, p. 23.}

All foreigners who visited the American republic in its infancy were astounded to observe the unprecedented growth and power of the U.S. press. By 1800, upwards of 90 percent of the population residing in some of the north-western metropolitan centers was literate, and the overall number of newspapers reached 234, including 24 dailies.\footnote{In 1790 the country had 91 regular newspapers, including 8 dailies with a total circulation of 50,000. All data is from David Copeland, "America, 1750-1820," in \textit{Press, politics and the public sphere in Europe and North America, 1760-1820}, ed. Hannah Barker and Simon Burrows (Cambridge, UK, 2002), pp. 141 and 149.} Fourteen years later, there were already 374 newspapers in the U.S. - 28 of which were dailies - with a total yearly output of over 23 million single newspaper copies.\footnote{Cope, Philadelphia Merchant: The Diary of Thomas P. Cope, 1800-1851, p. 301.} “The influence and circulation of newspapers is great beyond anything ever known in Europe,” Thomas Hamilton noted in the 1830s.\footnote{Hamilton, Men and Manners in America (1830-1831), p. 245.} Bölöni Farkas claimed that “no matter how poor a settler may be nor how far in the wilderness he may be from the civilized world, he will read a newspaper.”\footnote{Bölöni Farkas, Journey in North America, 1831, p. 165.} English sociologist Harriet Martineau illustrated the vitality of the publishing business by observing that “it could happen nowhere out of America, that so raw a settlement as that at Ann Arbor, where there is difficulty in procuring decent accommodations, should have a newspaper.”\footnote{Harriet Martineau, \textit{Society in America}, ed. Seymour Lipset (New Brunswick, Canada, 1962), p. 161.} In his memoirs Bölöni Farkas captured for posterity the pivotal role postal stagecoaches played in the distribution of newspapers:

> When our coach emerged into a clearing from the woods, our driver would blow his horn, signaling to the settler that we were approaching. There was a box full of newspapers at the foot of the driver and he threw the settler's paper on the side of the road without stopping. This scene was repeated all day long, the driver throwing the papers left and right, on whichever side the settler might be.\footnote{Bölöni Farkas, Journey in North America, 1831, p. 165.}
The Jeffersonian idea of a nation bound together by the mediating power of the press was seemingly accomplished. Yet Jefferson found very little reason to celebrate the outcome. Soon after the Revolution, bitter rivalry characteristic for the early colonial periodicals was transformed into partisan bickering. Newspapers by their very nature served much better for the diffusion of political party principles than as a vehicle for the attainment of individual ambition. “In this vast country where people cannot know each other personally the individual portrayed in the newspaper will always stay allusive,” argued Thomas Hamilton, “a sort of airy and invisible being, ‘a voice, a mystery,’ which it requires an effort of abstraction to impersonate.”  

Consequently, the leading Philadelphia newspapers were edited by John Fenno or William Cobbett (a.k.a. Peter Porcupine) in the service of Federalist Party on one side, and Philip Freneau or Benjamin Franklin Bache promoting the Democratic-Republican interest on the other. Their vitriolic style full of personal insults practiced by those ‘mainstream’ newspapers had hardly any historical precedence. When George Washington bade farewell to Philadelphia in 1797, Franklin’s grandson, Bache, greeted his retirement on the pages of his Aurora as a departure of a man “who is the source of the misfortunes of this country,” but now has luckily no more power “to multiply his evils” anymore. “If ever there was a moment of rejoicing, this is the moment,” added Bache.

During his stay in revolutionary Philadelphia, German Johann Schoepf weighed the ability of the uncensored press to shed light on public affairs against its negative side. He concluded that its abuse of freedom almost outweighed its overall social benefits because of “so many upright and innocent characters [which] are roughly and prejudicially treated under this shield of

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334 Hamilton, Men and Manners in America (1830-1831), pp. 245-6.
335 Aurora, March 6, 1797. As cited in Kelley, Life and Times in Colonial Philadelphia, p. 228.
freedom of the press.” ⁴³⁶ Fifty years later Thomas Hamilton posed a similar question about the effectiveness of negative personal attacks in which “the strongest epithets of a ruffian vocabulary are put in requisition.” Despite the fact that ninety-nine percent of all published accusations were either exaggerated or completely false, “they evidently obtain credit somewhere, or they would not be made,” speculated the author adding that “where so much mud is thrown, the chances are, that some portion of it will stick.” ⁴³⁷

The Tyrant-Printers and Roots of Media Localism

Jeffrey Pasley links the early Republican period with the emergence of a tyrant-printer, arguing that at the time when nascent political parties still lacked any form of permanent organization, the printer became the first professional politician. Most of them were simple craftsmen who established their shops in small towns and frontier communities and ensuingly hijacked the political agenda of their own parties by radicalizing it in their editorial comments in order to boost the circulation of their newspapers. ⁴³⁸ In the early 1790s, Congress decided to replace the 80-year old Queen Anne’s Act with a new law which would regulate postal service. The leaders of both main emerging political parties - Alexander Hamilton and Thomas Jefferson - saw in the enforcement of free newspaper delivery a tool for spreading their message from the center of political life which was still in Philadelphia to their rural constituencies, creating a nation-wide audience. ⁴³⁹ Both politicians had a surrogate in two of the city’s newspapers - Fenno’s Gazette of the United States and Freneau’s National Gazette - which were both expected to become the first U.S. national media outlets, each in charge of spreading a particular partisan agenda. With this goal in mind, in an ensuing Congressional debate about the new postal act,

⁴³⁶ Schoepf, Travels in the Confederation (1783-1784), part 1, p. 88.
⁴³⁷ Hamilton, Men and Manners in America (1830-1831), pp. 402-03.
James Madison labeled even modest postage on newspaper delivery as a “tax on newspapers”\(^\text{340}\). But for the local printers, who saw their economic interest threatened by such development, this became an excellent opportunity to exercise their political muscle. In the end, they prevailed over the will of the national political elites and as a result, the final provisions included in *The Post Office Acts* of 1792 and 1794 further reinforced the U.S. principle of localism, which is still clearly recognizable in the country’s overall media system.\(^\text{341}\) The tariffs imposed on newspaper delivery were relatively low, but high enough to protect the business interests of local printers.\(^\text{342}\) High postage imposed on printed material significantly slowed down the development of American popular magazines, which depended on national markets for their financial support. As a result, the female members of the Drinker family in Philadelphia lost two of their favorite titles - *Columbian Magazine* and *American Museum* - which ceased their publication due to the newly imposed postage rates.\(^\text{343}\)

In the 1830s De Tocqueville noted as one of the indicators of the major strength of the American democracy the fact that the U.S. did not have any influential national political newspaper. “It is an axiom of political science in the United States that the only way to neutralize the influence of the newspapers is to multiply their number. I cannot imagine why such an obvious truth has yet to become commonplace in France,” he wrote.\(^\text{344}\) Yet De Tocqueville’s optimism was not shared by Scottish journalist Thomas Hamilton, who pointed out that in the

\(^{340}\) Ibid., p. 35.


\(^{342}\) The tariffs on newspaper delivery were one cent up to 100 miles and 1.5 cents above it, while to mail a much smaller letter ranged from 6 cents per sheet up to 30 miles to a maximum of 25 cents per sheet for any distance beyond 450 miles. In 1800 the copy of a city daily newspaper was sold for about 2.5 cents – an annual subscription of $8.00. The cost of frontier weeklies, which usually offered a once-a-week summary of big cities’ newspaper content, was 7 cents per copy. But their annual subscription was only $5.00. In Kielbowicz, *News in the Mail: The Press, Post Office, and Public Information, 1700-1860s*, pp. 31-5. See also John, *Spreading the News: The American Postal System from Franklin to Morse*, p. 37.

\(^{343}\) Drinker, *The Diary of Elizabeth Drinker (1758-1807)*, vol. 1, p. 459, n3.

fragmented U.S. media environment, each of the local newspapers “serves as an arena in which the political gladiators of the neighborhood may exercise their power of use and abuse.” In such publications, “strong words take the place of strong arguments, and every vulgar booby who can call names, and procure a set of types upon credit, may set up as an editor, with a fair prospect of success.” Many of the local printers aspired to emulate the ideal of a self-made man set a century earlier by Benjamin Franklin, but most of them remained throughout their lives un-educated mechanics rather than self-educated gentlemen. They had a tendency to connect everything with their own interests, and as a result were “exceedingly indifferent to all matters which have no discernible relation to their own pockets or privileges.”

Philadelphia merchant Thomas Cope in 1814 complained in his diary about “many printers who prostitute their papers to the propagation of falsehoods which poison the public mind.” Yet their political power was so significant that by the 1830s, journalists were the second most overrepresented professional group in the U.S. Senate, right after the lawyers. By the end of his presidency even Jefferson, who helped to release the powerful genie of the partisan press from the bottle, grumbled that “the man who never looks into a newspaper is better informed than he who reads them, inasmuch as he who knows nothing is nearer to truth than he whose mind is filled with falsehoods and errors.” According to Charles Dickens, there were undoubtedly some honest publishers among

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345 Hamilton, *Men and Manners in America* (1830-1831), pp. 245 and 447. Even such fervent admirers of the U.S. democracy as Alexis de Tocqueville admitted that in America, passion arises mainly when material interests are compromised, which he saw clearly reflected in the content of newspapers. De Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, p. 209.


American printers, but their name was *Few*, while the other’s name was *Legion*: “and the influence of the good is powerless to counteract the moral poison of the bad.”349

**The Implications of Newspaper Mass Circulation**

During his 1830s American journey, Alexis De Tocqueville noticed the rise of the penny press and concluded that “democracy not only infuses a taste for letters among the trading classes, but introduces a trading spirit into literature.”350 European visitors saw the biggest paradox of early Republican American newspapers in the fact that they were so cheap that generally even the lowest orders could afford to purchase them. Their publishers financially “depend for support on the most ignorant class of the people.” And with such base readers, whoever “peppers the highest is surest to please,” argued Thomas Hamilton. Consequently, the content of U.S. newspapers had to be accommodated to the taste of uneducated masses which - because they didn’t read anything else but newspapers - became “mentally inaccessible by any other avenue.”351 During his first American visit in 1842, Charles Dickens confirmed this observation writing that the newspaper in America was “the standard literature of an enormous class, who must find their reading in a newspaper, or they will not read at all.” The hype and sensationalism pioneered by the U.S. press resulted in the overall atmosphere of *universal distrust* which dominated the public life. For an average reader accustomed to the standards of leading European journals, argued Dickens, it was almost impossible to understand “this frightful engine,” which exercised such power over the American mind.352 The irony which one can find among the observations of Thomas Hamilton is his claim that the principle of the Stamp Act, which Americans so vehemently rejected, had paradoxically a very beneficial long-term

349 Dickens, American Notes (1842), p. 325.
351 Hamilton, Men and Manners in America (1830-1831), p. 403.
352 Dickens, American Notes (1842), pp. 322 and 326.
influence on the quality of the British press. “Remove the stamp duty, and the consequence will inevitably be, that there will be two sets of newspapers, one for the rich and educated, and other for the poor and ignorant.” As a result, the political check of the enlightened opinion of the press, which Hamilton saw as the only efficient tool capable of preventing corruption of the system, would be annihilated. “I am confidently persuaded that the government which shall permit political journals to circulate in England without restraint, will inflict an evil on the country, the consequences of which will extend far beyond the present generation,” concluded the author.353

XI. The Alternative Public Spheres of Philadelphia Working Classes

During his London sojourn, Benjamin Franklin claimed that there were very few people so miserable as the poor of Europe in America, but there were also very few that in Europe would be called rich. “It is rather a general happy mediocrity that prevails,” claimed Franklin who himself was often described as a prototype of an ideal republican citizen, artisan and self-made man.354 Building on the ideals of classical republicanism, American founding fathers at least verbally recognized the need to preserve a rough equality of wealth.355 Montesquieu called equality the soul of state, and Rousseau demanded that no citizen shall be so poor as to be forced to sell himself to his rich neighbor. “Do you want coherence in the state? Than bring the two extremes as close together as possible; have neither very rich men nor the beggars, for these two estates, naturally inseparable, are equally fatal to the common good.”356 Consequently, Jefferson

353 Hamilton, Men and Manners in America (1830-1831), pp. 401-4. For more on the reaction to Stamp Act of 1765 in Philadelphia see Tinkcom,”The Revolutionary City, 1765-1783,” p. 110.
356 Montesquieu added that “in a democracy, although real equality is a soul of the state, it is nevertheless so difficult to establish that exactitude on this point ought not to be carried to the extreme. It is enough to place citizens by a census within
saw a potential danger to social stability in the increase of manufacturing. To prevent it he promoted the idea that each free citizen should possess enough land to cover the basic material needs of his family. “Every person of full age neither owning nor having owned (50) acres of land shall be entitled to an appropriation of (50) acres or so much as shall make up what he owns or has owned (50) acres in full and absolute dominion, and no other person shall be capable of taking an appropriation,” Jefferson suggested in 1776 in his *Proposed Constitution of Virginia*.

In the 20th century there were many attempts to re-evaluate the historiography of the American Revolution and to replace the popular image of an elitist project led by a few enlightened leaders from the mercantile urban centers of Philadelphia, Boston and New York, as well as from the slave plantations of Virginia, with the bottom-up idea of a broad social movement. Such works emphasized class formation and the development of class consciousness of the laboring people in colonial America and their impact on revolutionary events. Yet even the followers of this trend admit the specificity of the situation in Philadelphia, where the prevailing individualism and liberal egalitarian spirit of small enterprise on one hand, and the numerous Quaker charitable institutions on the other ameliorated the sharp edges of a potential social conflict. In generally, the economic forces operating in the city “tended to deemphasize

categories that reduce differences or fix them at a given level. After that it must be a specific law that inequalities are compensated for by taxes imposed upon the rich, and by relief given to the poor.” In Charles de Secondat Montesquieu, “The Spirit of the Laws,” in *Montesquieu: Selected Political Writings*, ed. Melvin Richter (Indianapolis, IN, 1748/1990), pp. 142-143. See also Rousseau, *The Social Contract*, pp. 58-59.


the extremes at the top and the bottom and to magnify the middle,” which made Philadelphia an ideal place for a republican revolution to take the place.360

Up until the Revolution, most of the city’s families depended on the male head of the household, who would usually be a self-employed artisan, shopkeeper or merchant. His workshop was situated on the first floor of his home and in comparison with the industrial era, the pace of work was rather relaxed and varied with the season.361 Class solidarity was undoubtedly promoted by the fact that even those who were better off still lived in socially-mixed wards and shared with their neighbors the burdens of natural disasters as well as impending threats of contagious diseases. This was the main reason which allowed Franklin to break through staunch Quaker opposition towards taxation, and in the 1730s to establish the Union Fire Company “for the more ready extinguishing of fires, and mutual assistance in removing and securing of goods when in danger,” as well as to convince Philadelphians to pay the sixpence of extra tax for the purpose of paving the streets and thus improving not just the esthetic, but also the public health conditions of their town.362

But there were some deeply planted seeds of social inequality in Philadelphia in the way the colony was founded - through land speculation schemes. Since its establishment in 1682, the city’s real estate was controlled by a few dozen wealthy families. “The houses are very expensive and will sell for 1,000 pounds sterling,” observed Andrew Burnaby in 1759. At the time of the Revolution, eighty percent of Philadelphia’s residents were renters, and almost 90 percent of the city’s real estate was in hands of the top 10 percent of the taxpaying population.363

In colonial Philadelphia, the wages of simple manual laborers were often regulated by law to

avoid “inconveniences and obstructions [which] have arisen to the trade and commerce of the city of Philadelphia, and [by which] great extortion and injustice [has] been done the merchants and traders thereof.”

A German visitor noted that in colonial times, Philadelphia upper classes boasted of their city’s “special good police” and consequently “knew nothing about tumultuary [sic] and mutinous gatherings of the people which were not seldom the case with their more northern neighbors.”

During the Revolution itself, it was the “class of men who live from day to day on the produce of their industry: mechanics, tenants and laborers” who in Philadelphia carried the major physical and financial burden, especially during the winter campaign of 1776 and the encampment in Valley Forge the next winter. Returning from the battlefield, many revolutionary soldiers were outraged to see the price-gouging and speculation of merchants, especially the pacifist Quakers, who stayed behind and profited from the scarcities generated by the war. On May 24, 1779, a broadside signed by ‘Come on Coolly’ was posted all over Philadelphia, in which the revolutionary soldiers complained that “in the midst of money we are in poverty, and exposed to want in a land of plenty.”

Elizabeth Drinker, wife of a wealthy Quaker merchant, confided in her dairy that “many are apprehensive of a mob rising on second day next - with a view of discovering monopolizers.” Just as Drinker predicted, on May 25 men with clubs were seen threatening several store owners to bring down their exorbitant prices and a town meeting held the same day resulted in a decision to impose the regulation of the cost

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365 Schoepf, Travels in the Confederation (1783-1784), part 1, p. 101-2. Milanese count Castiglioni observed that “after nine in the evening guards went out around the city keeping people from walking about the streets and lingering after that time in public places.” Castiglioni, Luigi Castiglioni’s Viaggio: Travels to the United States of North America, 1785-87, p. 224.
367 As partially reprinted in Ibid., pp. 257-58.
of coffee, tea, rum, brandy, salt, flour, etc. The simple revolutionary soldiers, most of whom were carpenters, porters or caulkers in civil life protested that while their own wages had been regulated for decades, they never heard "the merchants exclaiming that the principle, thus applied to their advantage, was unjust." Their understanding of a republican government was based on subordination of the interest of few to the broader concept of a common good:

We further hold that the social compact or state of civil society, by which men are united and incorporated, requires that every right of power claimed or exercised by any man or set of men should be in subordination to the common good, and that whatever is incompatible therewith must, by some rule or regulation, be brought in subjection thereto.370

On August 29, another broadside signed ‘Come on Warmly’ appeared on the streets of Philadelphia, accusing “a few over-bearing merchants, a swarm of monopolizers and speculators, an infernal gang of Tories” from exploiting the common man.371 As already mentioned earlier in this essay - in the context of the war of 1744 - it was the lower classes which had to bear the heaviest burdens of military service, while material profits of war were traditionally enjoyed by the upper classes. Calls for patriotism on one hand and war profiteering on the other became one of the essential conflicts interwoven historically into the fabric of the U.S. public sphere.372 The growing tension burst in the summer of 1783 during the Pennsylvania Mutiny when the anger of the ‘betrayed’ soldiers of the Continental Army forced Congress to flee Philadelphia for Princeton.373 It was this growing dissatisfaction which in 1800-1801 brought to power the

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370 The extraordinary issue of The Pennsylvania Packet or the General Advertiser, September 10, 1779. The merchant’s statement is reprinted on pages 1 and 4; the worker’s protest is carried on pages 2 and 3.
371 (‘Come on Warmly’) Anonymous, "Gentlemen and fellow-citizens. The time is now arrived..." in Archive of Americana - Early American Imprints, first series - no. 43027 (Philadelphia, 1779).
373 Tinkcom, “The Revolutionary City, 1765-1783,” pp. 153-4. Tinkcom adds that the removal of the Congress had already been contemplated by some of the founding fathers and the mutiny was used only as a pretext. Oliver Ellsworth from Connecticut reported that “it was generally agreed that Congress should remove to a place of less expense, less avocation and less influence than are to be expected in a commercial and opulent city” (ibid., p. 154).
Democratic-Republicans in Pennsylvania, effectively ending the brief period of classical republicanism in North America and facilitating the ascension of modern popular democracies.

Despite the social tensions, Philadelphia, and Pennsylvania in general, was still what Lemon called the best poor man’s country in the world. In 1783, a German visitor pointed out that even poor Pennsylvanians were “well clothed and well fed, and comparatively, better than their betters in Europe,” adding that “the poor man who is industrious finds opportunities enough for gain.” The journeyman plasterer William Otter and his friend escaped from their master in New York in the search of a better life and came to the city in 1807. Here, Otter was earning 8 dollars a week and scribbled into his diary that after working one single month he was “handsomely fixed” and so was his companion who made about 25 dollars a month.” The journeyman expended a reasonable share of his earnings in good clothing and spent the rest in pubs and taverns with his friends. Later, when he found a better job in the country and gave a one day notice to his old employer, the boss “did not throw any blame upon me,” because he simply recognized that “it was fair sailing for everybody to do the best for themselves they could.” Consequently, working for a farmer in the countryside Otter boasted that “I never lived better in my life, than in Chester County.”

**Industrialization, Immigration and the Urban Jungle**

With the advent of the 19th century, what used to be celebrated as the best poor man’s country gave way to industrialization. Philadelphia - which for more than a century lived from the work of individual craftsmen and depended for most of its industrial products on imports

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375 Schoepf, Travels in the Confederation (1783-1784), part 1, pp. 103 and 113.
376 Otter, History of My Own Times (1789-1835), p. 58.
377 Ibid., pp. 65-6 and 58.
378 Ibid., pp. 57 and 66.
from Europe - was fast becoming the first industrial city in the New World.\footnote{18th century visitors to Philadelphia observed the lack of industry in the city. Cf. Kalm, \textit{Peter Kalm's Travels in North America} (1748-1750), pp. 32-3; Honyman, \textit{Colonial Panorama 1775: Dr. Robert Honyman's Journal for March and April}, p. 27; and Schoepf, \textit{Travels in the Confederation} (1783-1784), part 1, p. 117.} In 1783, a German visitor argued that so long as land was plentiful in America, “there will be few persons willing to subject themselves to the heavy, tedious, and regular labor necessary for manufacturers, when by farming they may earn their bread with more freedom and on the whole with less work.”\footnote{Bölöni Farkas, \textit{Journey in North America}, 1831, p. 215.} But five years later another traveler already saw factories rising in Philadelphia and in its countryside, “everywhere there is activity, industry, and competition.”\footnote{Drinker, \textit{The Diary of Elizabeth Drinker} (1758-1807), vol. 1, p. 517.}

As the city grew, it became more socially stratified. Increasing immigration made possible that Southwark, the lower part of Philadelphia, soon earned the nickname “Irish-town.”\footnote{Otter, \textit{History of My Own Times} (1789-1835), p. 56-64.} “As a general rule, America-bound ships are crowded with passengers, while the returning ones sail virtually empty,” observed Bölöni Farkas.\footnote{Brissot de Warville, \textit{New Travels in the United States of America}, 1788, p. 260.} Journeyman William Otter described working class immigrant Southwark as the place “where all the lads with specks in their characters lived.” Otter openly boasted in his diaries about gangs of young butchers, ropewalkers, carpenters, plasterers, and bakers he joined in 1807 and together, they harassed Philadelphia’s black population and led wars with the Irish immigrants.\footnote{Schoepf, \textit{Travels in the Confederation} (1783-1784), part 1, p. 117.} A decade or two later, Philadelphia was engulfed by social ills which Americans traditionally associated with the malaises of European society. “It is fashion to call the United States the land of equality,” argued Scottish journalist Thomas Hamilton in 1830. But his American experience showed him that there was as much inequality in Liverpool as in New York.\footnote{Hamilton, \textit{Men and Manners in America} (1830-1831), pp. 64-5.}

\footnote{18th century visitors to Philadelphia observed the lack of industry in the city. Cf. Kalm, \textit{Peter Kalm's Travels in North America} (1748-1750), pp. 32-3; Honyman, \textit{Colonial Panorama 1775: Dr. Robert Honyman's Journal for March and April}, p. 27; and Schoepf, \textit{Travels in the Confederation} (1783-1784), part 1, p. 117.}  

\footnote{Bölöni Farkas, \textit{Journey in North America}, 1831, p. 215.}  

\footnote{Drinker, \textit{The Diary of Elizabeth Drinker} (1758-1807), vol. 1, p. 517.}  

\footnote{Otter, \textit{History of My Own Times} (1789-1835), p. 56-64.}  

\footnote{Hamilton, \textit{Men and Manners in America} (1830-1831), pp. 64-5.}
anarchy and violence.\textsuperscript{386} Such an urban jungle was to be conquered by a new generation of Ben Franklins. But while Horatio Alger’s Ragged Dick and his friends come to the city as unspoiled prototypes of rural simplicity, in the end they are interested much more in the conquest of fame and riches than in the cultivation of republican virtues.\textsuperscript{387}

\section*{XII. Art, Luxury, Conspicuous Consumption and Republican Virtues}

Epitomizing the frugal spirit of radical Protestantism, Benjamin Franklin in his early life banned anything which would distract his mind or transgress the simple rule of utility from crossing the threshold of his house. He expressed outrage when his wife spent 23 shillings on a fancy china bowl and silver spoon to serve him breakfast.\textsuperscript{388} For young Franklin, “paintings, statues, architecture and the other works of art that are more curious than useful” had no place in the egalitarian republican society created by the American colonists.\textsuperscript{389} If the printing of books and their reading were the only useful arts recognized by Franklin, Thomas Jefferson added one more discipline - architecture. Painting and statuary were “worth seeing,” yet they were “too expensive for the state of wealth among us,” wrote Jefferson in recommendations for an American delegation traveling in 1788 through Europe. On the other hand, architecture was “worth great attention” on his to-do list with an explanation that “we build of such perishable


\textsuperscript{387} Fired by ambition and endowed with a complete set of Franklinian virtues – resolution, frugality, punctuality, industry, sincerity, and humility, together with a goodly portion of old fashioned Puritan piety and cleanliness – the young man undergoes a series of trials and adventures which eventually bring him to the threshold of fame and fortune. In Pickering, The City in American Literature, p. 57. Cf. George Lippard, Quaker City; Or, the Monks of the Monk Hall (1844); Horatio Alger’s Rugged Dick Series: i.e., Ragged Dick; Or, Street Life in New York with the Boot-Blacks (1868); Ben, the Luggage Boy; Or, Among the Wharves (1870).

\textsuperscript{388} Later in life, Franklin admits that luxurious things became part of his household. He is sincerely horrified when his wife serves him on a "China bowl, with a spoon of silver!" (Franklin, 1757/2005). But he offers a rational explanation: “They had been bought for me without my knowledge by my wife, and had cost her the enormous sum of three-and-twenty shillings, for which she had no other excuse or apology to make, but that she thought her husband deserve’d a silver spoon and China bowl as well as any of his neighbors. This was the first appearance of plate and China in our house, which afterward, in a course of years, as our wealth increas’d, augmented gradually to several hundred pounds in value” (ibid.).

\textsuperscript{389} Franklin, Two Tracts: Information to Those Who Would Remove to America. And, Remarks Concerning the Savages of North America, p. 5.
materials, that one half of our houses must be rebuilt in the space of every twenty years.” Just like Franklin, Jefferson too was driven by the imperative of practicality. He did not object that his University of Virginia in 1818 considered including in the syllabus the “arts which embellish life, dancing, music, and drawing,” but the recommendation included the clause that such arts should be studied only by those who have free time on their hands and thus “might less inoffensively employ it.”

The utilitarian spirit was also reflected in the text of the Constitution of the United States which gave Congress the power to promote “the progress of science and useful arts.” French military commander Abbé Pierre during his 1781 sojourn in Philadelphia noted that Americans were acting rather from an impulse of cool reason than sentiment, and were consequently “taken upon with useful rather than agreeable things.” This was clearly evident in the system of U.S. education which measured progress by the amount of available knowledge a student was able to deploy in the common business of life. American society did not have a “leisure for anything so unremarkable as abstract knowledge,” observed in the 1830s Thomas Hamilton. While law and politics, natural and mechanical philosophy made considerable progress in America, up until the revolution the fine arts remained almost unknown.

In 1776, the London-trained painter Charles Willson Peale moved to Philadelphia and in five to six years his little gallery became one of the must-sees among all who visited the city. Aside from animals and natural history, Peale also painted the leading citizens and foreigners who

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390 From the Report of the Commissioners for the University of Virginia, drafted and approved under Jefferson's leadership on August 4, 1818. The report emphasizes that drawing must be seen "more especially, as an important part of military education." As fully reprinted in Nathaniel Francis Cabell, ed., Early history of the University of Virginia, as Contained in the Letters of Thomas Jefferson and Joseph C. Cabell (Richmond, VA, 1856), p. 442.
393 Hamilton, Men and Manners in America (1830-1831), pp. 192-4.
contributed to the American Revolution. By the time his museum opened its doors to the public in 1784, his collection consisted of some one hundred portraits “of middling merit”. Patriotically-oriented visitors admired it as an important educational tool which “sheds light on history and forms patriotic and virtuous ideas in the youth, to whom it presents the worthiest monument which could be erected to the glory of the people!” Yet Peale’s main selling point were natural and manmade curiosities which he advertised in local newspapers to attract audiences (Figure 5.12.). Drinker’s family often returned to see strange electric machines, a stuffed orangutan, or an enormous skeleton of a mammoth, which in 1801 they found “worthy and comfortable lodging” in the museum where this “ninth wonder of the world” could have been seen “for a trifling sum of 50 cents.” The afore-mentioned exhibition, featuring the largest ever discovered animal which was “never seen on any part of this globe excepting America,” was more than just a curiosity. Peale’s mammoth was a resolute ideological answer to the supporters of Comte de Buffon’s theory of the inferiority of the New World’s nature and man.

Charles Willson Peale fully understood the educational role which such ‘rational amusement’, as he himself called his museum, played in the life of a new nation. Thus more frustrating were his attempts to gain government patronage and to turn his collection into a national museum despite the fact that one of his staunch supporters, Thomas Jefferson, was in

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396 All Drinker’s diary entries are from the period 1799-1801. In Drinker, *The Diary of Elizabeth Drinker (1758-1807)*, vol. 2, pp. 1137, 1155 and 1475-6.
397 Georges-Louis Leclerc, Comte de Buffon (1707-1788) was a famous French naturalist whose contribution to natural history had been historically tarnished by his claim that the New World nature is inferior to that of Eurasia. Some of the European visitors to Philadelphia were trying to confirm this claim and were discussing it in their diaries. See Robin, *New Travels Through North America (1781)*, p. 15; and Castiglioni, *Luigi Castiglioni’s Viaggio: Travels to the United States of North America, 1785-87*, pp. 265-7.
Figure 5.12. Charles Willson Peale, *Self-Portrait*, 1822.
1791 elected as the president of the museum’s Board of Visitors. Indeed, Jefferson and his political allies were convinced that government should avoid meddling in any projects of public utility which could be better managed by individuals. “The government has not yet done anything for me,” complained Peale in 1795 to his friend in London.

Judith Sargent Murray visited the exhibition of the paintings of John Trumbull during her 1790 stay in Philadelphia, probably the most famous painter of the American Revolution. “The members, who constituted the Congress which signed our Independence, live upon his canvass,” observed Murray standing in front of Trumbull’s famous work Declaration of Independence. “I imagine this piece will be truly acceptable to posterity.” Similarly to Peale’s, Trumbull’s ideas about the mission of art in society were influenced by his prolonged study trip to England and France. Inspired by the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts which was co-founded in 1805 by Peale in Philadelphia, Trumbull became one of the founding members and later president of the American Academy of Fine Arts in New York in 1817. He too saw fine art as an ideological tool able to advance a new nation “not only in political, naval, and military greatness, but also in those arts of peace which embellish and adorn even greatness itself.” This vision was articulated in a letter Trumbull sent in 1826 to president John Quincy Adams. He proposed that every time an event of national importance occurs, the most eminent American

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399 This sentiment was also clearly expressed in the letter Jefferson sent to William C. C. Claiborne in 1808. In Jefferson, The Writings of Thomas Jefferson, vol. 12, p. 97. On March 27, 1790 the Pennsylvania Packet or Dunlap's General Advertiser published on its third page a letter signed by 'A Lover of Nature' who bluntly refused Peale's calls to get 'the Public' involved in his project, turning it into a national museum.

400 From a letter to Robert Leslie, dated July 26, 1795. Peale Papers, American Philosophical Society. As cited in Sellers, Mr. Peale's Museum: Charles Willson Peale and the First Popular Museum of Natural Science and Art p. 81. In 1794 Peale's museum moved from his own house on the intersection of Third and Lombard Street to the Philosophical Hall for an annual rent of £130.00 (ibid., p. 76).

401 Four of Trumbull's most famous paintings are in the Rotunda of the United States Capitol: Surrender of General Burgoyne; Declaration of Independence; Surrender at Yorktown; and Washington Resigning his Commission.

402 Murray, From Gloucester to Philadelphia in 1790: Observations, Anecdotes, and Thoughts from the 18th Century Letters of Judith Sargent Murray, p. 156.

painter of its time be commissioned by the government to depict it, and the painting would be exhibited in public spaces of national importance. At the same time, an artist of secondary importance would be asked to make multiple copies of the image which would be ensuingly used by the government as a tool to promote national greatness at home and abroad. Muses, deployed in public service may be thus finely redeemed from “the disgraceful and false imputation… of being only the base and flattering instruments of royal and aristocratic luxury and vice.” In concluding his letter, Trumbull did not pretend any kind of originality in his ideas, adding that Athenians and Venetians, in the best days of their republican eras, already acted on these principles. “All civilized nations have made the arts useful auxiliaries of history.”

Peale’s and Trumbull’s demands for the public patronage of arts were strongly rebuffed by playwright William Dunlap who, pointing out the example of British artists patronized by their mighty sponsors, exclaimed that something similar “would in this country, at this time, be thought degrading to any of the lowest and most ignorant members of our happy republican society.” Dunlap claimed that artists should be just as independent in their work as the farmers, the mechanics or the chimney-sweeps. In a free society, artists should be able to exchange freely “the product of their skill and labor for the money of the rich, and receive kindness and hospitality ‘in the bargain’.”

The quest for the public patronage of arts, which was originally formulated by Mr. Peale in Philadelphia, reemerged again and again throughout U.S. history, and any attempt to get the Government more involved was repeatedly met with the stiff opposition of those who believed

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405 Ibid., vol. 1, pp. 9-11.
that art was a product just as any other item destined for consumption.\textsuperscript{406} Such ‘de-politicized’ art was sooner or later reduced to a mere commodity. Using the language of the Frankfurt School, the ideological superstructure and material base mutually collapsed into each other and became one and the same. During his visit to America, De Tocqueville questioned whether the fine arts were antithetic to a democratic-republican society at all. He pointed out the propensity of U.S. society, in which the “taste for the useful predominate over the love of the beautiful,” towards “all the imitative arts.” In an aristocracy, the French observer argued, the craftsman “would seek to sell his workmanship at a high price to the few,” but in a democracy he became aware “that the more expeditious way of getting rich is to sell them at a low price to all.”\textsuperscript{407}

\textbf{Virtuous Homespun Makes Way for Luxury}

The widening gap of social inequality which supported conspicuous consumption and luxury by the upper classes further undermined some of the most fundamental principles of the American republican tradition, based originally on independent tradesmanship in the cities and yeoman husbandry in the countryside.\textsuperscript{408} Montesquieu, whose work was studied by the founding fathers, echoed classical authors when he claimed that frugality was one of the basic virtues indispensable for the survival of republican government. He claimed that in an agricultural society, the piece of land each citizen owns should be big enough to provide him with a comfortable subsistence, but small enough to prevent the growth of luxury. According to Montesquieu, history proved that a republican government based upon commerce was similarly

\textsuperscript{406} All quotes are from the chapter titled “In what Spirit Americans Cultivate the Arts” in De Tocqueville, \textit{Democracy in America}, pp. 530-5.
possible, but the corruption of morals had to be protected by frugality, moderation, labor, order and restraint. The daughter of Benjamin Franklin, Mrs. Bache who “seems to have drunk deeply from the fountain of Republicanism,” once told her visitors a story which clearly illustrated the impasse reached by American republicanism in the 1790s. One day she took a stage with her oldest son, who despite family fame and wealth just finished an apprenticeship with a printer. They were sitting next to a young, upper-class macaroni. Her son behaved like a gentleman, and the fop inquired into the nature of his pursuits. “I am a printer, Sir,” proudly declared the young descendant of Franklin. “What Sir, a printer!” exclaimed the dandy and “instantly ordered into his features the most contemptuous expression,” Mrs. Bache concluded her account.

In pre-Revolutionary America, the term ‘homespun’ symbolized the essential virtue of frugality as well as a clever strategy which allowed colonists to maintain their commercial parity with Britain. “They live handsomely and are all going in a degree into homespun woolens [sic] and linens, which seem to be a natural consequence of restraining that branch of trade by which alone they got specie, enabling them to make remittances for British manufacturing,” Adam Gordon noted in 1765. At the time of commercial wars with Britain, the term also assumed a political dimension. During his stay in London, Benjamin Franklin used the pen name ‘Homespun’ to sign some of the letters published in British newspapers, defending the interest of the Colonies. It reflected the resoluteness with which the colonists resisted the temptation of

\[\text{Citations:}\]


\[410\text{ Murray, From Gloucester to Philadelphia in 1790: Observations, Anecdotes, and Thoughts from the 18th Century Letters of Judith Sargent Murray, p. 168.}\]

traditional British luxuries such as fine woolen clothing or tea in order to preserve their independence.412

Yet in 1783 the Venezuelan revolutionary Francisco de Miranda observed that “with the revolution in the government, the customs, like true daughters, manifested the change immediately.”413 A French military commander confirmed this claim adding that with growing prosperity “luxury was introduced, the manners of the people insensibly changed, and that golden age, which was here realized, was soon considered as nothing more than a brilliant meteor which blazed out a moment to the astonished world, and disappeared forever.”414 For his inaugural in 1789, George Washington appeared dressed in homespun clothes but as the newspapers pointed out, it was made “of so fine a fabric, and so handsomely finished, that it was universally mistaken for a foreign manufacture.”415 One of the European visitors called revolutionary Philadelphia the “last refuge of virtue pursued.”416 But the new nation was on the brink of new era, ready to re-articulate its previous refusal of luxury as a decadent vice of tyrannical monarchies, and to embrace it now as clear evidence of the success of its republican revolt.417 The ‘luxury of the body’ was amongst the first compromises the victorious Revolution was willing to make with the very values which legitimated its ascend to power. The vice which the founding fathers wanted to avoid was now openly paraded in city’s streets and homes. The ladies proudly boasted their new hats and bonnets, as fine and varied as the ones worn by their

413 De Miranda, The New Democracy in America: Travels of Francisco de Miranda in the United States, 1783-84, p. 60.
416 Schoepf, Travels in the Confederation (1783-1784), part 1, p. 100.
417 Zakim masterfully illustrates this process. See Zakim, Ready-Made Democracy: A History of Men’s Dress in the American Republic, 1760-1860. Castiglioni was “astonished to observe in the winter of the year 1786 the lavishness of their tables, the elegance of their private dancing parties and social gatherings.” In Castiglioni, Luigi Castiglioni's Viaggio: Travels to the United States of North America, 1785-87, p. 228.
gentle contemporaries in Paris and London.\textsuperscript{418} “Every year dressed dolls are brought to them from Europe, which, silent, give the law to the mode,” observed Johann Schoepf during his stay in Philadelphia in 1783.\textsuperscript{419} Now even some young Quakers, mostly those who have travelled overseas, began to find pleasure in the joys of the world. Their Quaker coat was often “hung on a nail for a while,” but later with advancing age was “at times hunted out again.”\textsuperscript{420} Those who understood how profoundly such trends were changing the very nature of classical republicanism were scandalized. Many European reactionaries, notably in England, looked with satisfaction at this trend, predicting that with growing wealth the American Revolution would be reversed and the country would return to the monarchy. “Virtue is said to be the basis of a republic. If so, I fear ours is approximating towards its grave,” Thomas Cope warned his compatriots.\textsuperscript{421} In 1831 Bölöni Farkas similarly assumed that American democracy would parallel the destiny of classical Athens and Rome, definitely burying the dreams of all other nations which saw in its republican experiment the inspiration for their own societies.\textsuperscript{422}

\textbf{XIII. Transportation Technologies and the Binding Power of Infrastructure}

Addressing Congress in December 1806, Thomas Jefferson used the metaphor of \textit{cement} to underscore the importance of roads, rivers, canals and other public improvement projects by which the “new channels of communication will be opened between the States; the lines of separation will disappear, their interests will be identified, and her union cemented by new and

\textsuperscript{419} Schoepf added that Philadelphia was still better off concerning how virtues were upheld than were the cities in Europe. In Schoepf, \textit{Travels in the Confederation (1783-1784)}, part 1, pp. 99-100. De Warville confirmed this claim arguing that “despite the fatal consequences that might be expected from this luxury, we may say with assurance that there is no city in which morals are more respected than in Philadelphia” Adultery was almost unknown and no dowries were expected from spouses. Brissot de Warville, \textit{New Travels in the United States of America}, 1788, p. 257.
\textsuperscript{420} Schoepf, \textit{Travels in the Confederation (1783-1784)}, part 1, p. 66.
\textsuperscript{422} The author constantly compared American democracy with the reality of the harsh police regime of Count Metternich who was ruling at that time in his native Hungary. In Bölöni Farkas, \textit{Journey in North America}, 1831, p. 126.
indissoluble ties. In 1808, Jefferson’s Secretary of the Treasury, Albert Gallatin, presented a comprehensive plan of internal improvements, which further emphasized the urgency to interconnect the new country with roads and canals. Yet the War of 1812 “found the United States without canals and almost without good roads,” noted Frenchman Michel Chevalier who in the 1830s studied U.S. communication systems on behalf of his country’s government. Once the English fleets blockaded important Atlantic ports, the Americans could not communicate with their potential European allies or even among themselves. As proof of this point, the final battle of the war took place on January 8, 1813 in New Orleans, two weeks after both sides signed the peace treaty in Belgian Ghent. But at that time it still took more than a month to communicate an urgent government message from the White House to Louisiana. The inability to govern such a vast country may have been the ultimate reason why in 1817 even such staunch supporter of individual states’ rights as the Southern Senator John C. Calhoun said: “We are greatly and rapidly - I was about to say fearfully - growing. This is our pride, and our danger; our weakness and our strength… Let us, then, bind the Republic together with a perfect system of roads and canals.”

The U.S. Constitution didn’t address the role of the federal government in building roads, maintaining ports and digging canals. On the contrary, Jefferson’s policy was one of “not embarking the public in enterprises” such as public improvements which were in his view “better

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427 Stower, American Railroads.

managed by individuals.”

The sharpest disagreement between the third president and his closest political ally, James Madison, arose in 1796 when Madison proposed to survey the national post road from Maine to Georgia for an expanding federal postal service. Jefferson viewed the development with alarm, and reprimanded Madison that the power “to establish post offices and post roads” vested by the Constitution in the Congress merely involved the designation of roads already in existence, not the construction of new ones. “I view it as a source of boundless patronage to the executive, jobbing to members of Congress and their friends, and the bottomless abyss of public money,” warned Jefferson, all but foretelling today’s practice of earmarking or pork barrel spending. At the same time, the execution of any public project would have meant that taxes collected in one place were used to improve the infrastructure somewhere else, which was irreconcilable with the American libertarian mindset. Thus the major national communication infrastructure was from the very beginning built mainly by private investors, reflecting their own interests. The result was a patchwork of roads, water canals, and later even non-compatible railroads which did not follow common technical standards. “Men who can afford to lay a little while out of their money, are laying the foundation of the greatest returns of any speculation I know of in the world,” wrote George Washington in 1785 about his own investment and personal involvement into Potowmack Company whose goal was to improve the navigability of the Potomac River.

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429 This sentiment was also clearly expressed in the letter Jefferson sent to William C.C. Claiborne in 1808. In Jefferson, The Writings of Thomas Jefferson, vol. 12, p. 97.

430 Article I, Section 8 of The Constitution of the United States mandates that the Congress “shall have power… to establish post offices and post roads.” For more on the dispute between Jefferson and Madison, including reprints of their letter-exchange on this topic in March-April 1796, see James Morton Smith, ed., The Republic of Letters: The Correspondence between Thomas Jefferson and James Madison 1776-1826, 3 vols. (New York, 1955), vol. 1, p. 32 and vol. 2, pp. 923-4 and 929.

431 Castiglioni pointed out the difficulty of Congress to enforce common laws in the young Republic. In Castiglioni, Luigi Castiglioni’s Viaggio: Travels to the United States of North America, 1785-87, p. 263.


433 As cited in Achenbach, The Grand Idea: George Washington’s Potomac and the Race to the West, p. 130. George Washington played a large part in the creation of the Potowmack Company in 1785 and invested 2,400 pounds into its undertakings. Its main goal was to make improvements to the Potomac River in order to increase its navigability. Washington’s
The Vehicles of Republican Citizenship

In 1723, the young Ben Franklin covered the distance between New York and Philadelphia partly by boat and partly by foot. There was no regular dry-land transportation between the two towns and the young printer feared the ocean. Twenty years later, the Swedish-Finnish botanist Peter Kalm covered the same route by a system of wagons which set out every day between Trenton and New Brunswick and were connected to boats on either side. But the journey still required at least three days in the summer and much more in the winter or rainy season. By the 1780s, summer travel time between New York and Philadelphia was reduced to a single day. The new express line introduced in the second half of that decade owed its speed to the organization of labor. Passengers had to switch coaches with fresh horses seven or eight times during the trip, which eliminated the time-consuming changes of horses. “The stage line is not run by one man alone but is maintained by several different private citizens who live in various towns along the route and who have made arrangements among themselves to supply horses and coaches.” Despite the poor state of the roads, the ardent French revolutionary De Warville praised this method of transportation as far superior to everything he had so far seen in his native country. The fact that rich and poor, workmen and the members of Congress, man and

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434 He sent his belongings by merchant ships which were operating between coastal ports. In Franklin, *The Autobiography and other Writings on Politics, Economics, and Virtue*, pp. 18-20.

435 Transportation of people and goods was main reason for the growth of Trenton and the main employment of its residents. In Kalm, *Peter Kalm's Travels in North America (1748-1750)*, p. 117. On the length of journey, see Hamilton, who traveled by wagon between Kingstown and Brunswick and observed that they could travel about 40-50 miles a day. In Hamilton, *Gentleman's Progress: The Itinerarium of Dr. Alexander Hamilton*, 1744, pp. 30-41.

436 Milanese count Castiglioni noted during his 1785-7 visit that “the trip from Philadelphia to New York across New Jersey is ordinarily accomplished in a single day during the summer. There are coaches with six horses that leave each day from both cities, and cover the distance of 92 miles, the horses being changed every 8 to 10 miles. I happened to make this trip several times, both by coach and also with my own horses.” In Castiglioni, *Luigi Castiglioni's Viaggio: Travels to the United States of North America, 1785-87*, p. 237. It took almost two days for Francisco de Miranda to cover the same distance by a stagecoach equipped as a sled in January 1784. In De Miranda, *The New Democracy in America: Travels of Francisco de Miranda in the United States, 1783-84*, p. 69.
woman were passing the long time of the journey in mutual conversation while sitting shoulder-to-shoulder, turned American stagecoaches in his eyes into true political vehicles of democracy:

In the stages you meet people of all walks of life, one after the other. A man who is going only fifteen miles yields his seat to another who is going farther; a mother with her daughter takes a ten mile trip to dine with friends and will return home by another stage... The frequencies with which the stages run, the availability of seats even for short distances, and the low fixed prices (threepence per mile), all are reasons which encourage Americans to travel. There is a special advantage of these stages: they maintain the idea of equality. A member of Congress sits side by side with the shoemaker who elected him and fraternizes with him; they talk together on familiar terms... [in France] a man of quality would blush to travel in a common vehicle like a stage... The son of Governor Livingston was among the passengers. I should not have known it, so civil and simple was his bearing... ...I was told that the governor himself often uses the stages...The American stagecoaches are truly political vehicles...437

In the 1780s, America discovered the power of steam. During his stay in Philadelphia in 1788, Brissot de Warville became a witness to the trial on the Delaware of John Fitch’s first commercially used “boat which was designed to ascend the river against its current.”438 When two years later Judith Sargent Murray traveled to Philadelphia, she and her Universalist preacher husband were already able to take the steamboat and they were amazed by its speed and elegance. “It hath neither mast, nor sail, it makes its way against both wind, and tide, and obtaineth [sic] the best, the most speedy passage, in a perfect calm.” Mrs. Murray quite unexpectedly added that such a new mode of transportation “requires no hand to work it, except the man on the steerage.”439

Murray’s comment, however surprising, reflects the fact that technological progress was able to conceal the complex web of social relations, presenting the machine as the liberator which

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439 Murray, From Gloucester to Philadelphia in 1790: Observations, Anecdotes, and Thoughts from the 18th Century Letters of Judith Sargent Murray, p. 203. The distance between New York and Philadelphia was further significantly reduced by the train. During his 1842 tour, Charles Dickens noted that “the journey from New York to Philadelphia, is made by railroad, and two ferries; and usually occupies between five and six hours.” Dickens, American Notes (1842), p. 128.
freed the most humble human beings from their everyday toil for mere survival. The ease and
elegance with which steamboats were propelled through the system of rivers interconnected with
canals suddenly overshadowed all the labor of those who dug them, built the boats and mined the
coal which fed their engines.\textsuperscript{440} British sociologist Harriet Martineau some years later could not
conceal her surprise at how ignorant the proud republican upper classes in New York and
Philadelphia were, especially the ladies she met, about the suffering of the lower classes and the
socially marginalized segments of their society.\textsuperscript{441}

The arrival of the steamboat ended also the ‘democratic period’ of U.S. transportation.
Bölöni Farkas observed that American steamboats “resemble a smaller frigate built in a
luxurious style and comfort that are completely unknown in Europe.” Superimposed on the main
deck was an upper deck, which he described as a unique American invention, on which twenty
five passengers could promenade with ease, and the steamboat’s interior “would do credit to any
fashionable European salon.” The young Hungarian count admired how the constant “exchange
of passengers at villages and towns unfolds a fascinating portrait gallery of faces and
characters.”\textsuperscript{442} Yet the increasing traffic enabled ship owners to develop sophisticated strategies
which started to divide their customers according to the amount of money they were able to pay
for the voyage. Class stratification was clearly visible in the differentiation of decks in the case
of steamboats. With the advent of the railroad, travel became separated into different classes.\textsuperscript{443}

\textsuperscript{440} On the late 18\textsuperscript{th} century social protests against Philadelphia ship builders see Ronald Schultz, "Small-Producer Thought:
Billy G. Smith (University Park, PA, 1995).


\textsuperscript{442} Bölöni Farkas, \textit{Journey in North America, 1831}, pp. 94 and 98.

\textsuperscript{443} The 1830s business strategies developed by the owners of steamboats is discussed in Kenneth John Myers, "Art and
The Frontier Myth, Industrial Outsourcing and Land Speculation

Up until the 1790s, Philadelphia built its financial prestige and prosperity on maritime trade. But the turn of the 19th century represented an important change in the business philosophy of the city’s merchant elites in their attempt to tap into the rich resources of the hinterlands. This battle was fought in the first stage with turnpikes and canals, and later with railroads and the telegraph. Land speculation was nothing new in Pennsylvania, a colony whose very birth was closely tied to long-distance purchases of large tracts of real estate. Some of the leading figures among the U.S. founding fathers, George Washington and Benjamin Franklin notwithstanding, were involved in speculative purchases of land. It was a common practice among Philadelphians to take credit and purchase vast territories on the frontier. They then sold it in parcels, paid back their creditors and still made quite handsome profit. The 1790s real estate scandals and land jobbing which involved the Philadelphia financier of the Revolution, Robert Morris and his business partner John Nicholson, became precursors of modern day Ponzi schemes. Their inevitable crash shook up the entire economy of the young nation.

In the early 19th century, even such rich and prosperous Philadelphia merchants as Stephen Girard gradually shifted their attention from the naval trade, and started purchasing large tracts of land in northeastern Pennsylvania. In order to extract the natural wealth, they became

446 Quaker merchant Henry Drinker, with his business partner John Watson, were involved in such schemes Drinker, The Diary of Elizabeth Drinker (1758-1807), vol. 2, p. 1010. Similarly Cope was almost constantly on the road to oversee land he purchased for speculation in the remote parts of Pennsylvania. Cf. Cope, Philadelphia Merchant: The Diary of Thomas P. Cope, 1800-1851, pp. 82-83.
actively involved in building railroads and canals. Taking as a case in point the garment industry in New York, Zakim illustrated how improved transportation enabled the simple idea of putting-out the work to seamstresses in their homes turned into the first large scale industrial outsourcing. Thomas Cope observed the same trend on his travels through Reading, an industrial town which stole most all the business from Philadelphia’s hat makers. “Their production is so cheap and their work is in such credit that no person in Philada. attempts the same business,” wrote Cope. Historian Richard Slotkin makes a compelling case arguing that ‘the West’ had historically been fetishized in American mythology and the broad masses of the U.S. population were systematically made to believe that there was enough wealth for everyone on the rough frontier. Slotkin’s writings reveal that the interests of the growing corporate powers in the period of industrialization were more and more interwoven with the interests of newspaper publishers in the propagation of the frontier myth. This alliance intentionally concealed the fact that “this vast reservoir would now be tapped by industrial means.”

Even Michel Chevalier, who came to the U.S. in 1833 and spent the following two years studying infrastructure and communication systems of the U.S, admitted that while the Saint-Simonian proto-socialist philosophy, which he embraced, generally promoted the machine as a “source of inexhaustible prosperity and well-being to mankind,” this “beautiful order of things” is yet to come because for the time being, the manufacturing systems “involve the most terrible consequences, which it would be useless to enumerate.”

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452 Chevalier, Society, Manners, and Politics in the United States: Letters on North America (1834-35), p. 136. In 1840, Chevalier summed up his knowledge of U.S. communication infrastructure in a large two volume opus, Lines of Communication and Public Works in the United States, accompanied by a separate atlas. As his American colleague and long-time friend, Moncure Robinson, wrote in the 1880 Chevalier’s obituary, it was a work “which has never been translated in English but which
technological optimism was fully shared by Matthew Carey, an Irish journalist, printer and bookseller who settled in the city in 1786 and became one of city’s prominent political and economic activists.\textsuperscript{453} In the early 18\textsuperscript{th} century, Carey published numerous pamphlets and flooded the streets with broadsides promoting the construction of roads, bridges, canals and railroads in order for Philadelphia to survive the stiff competition with Baltimore and New York.\textsuperscript{454} In 1824, a group of activists around Carey founded \textit{The Pennsylvania Society for the Promotion of Internal Improvements in the Commonwealth}, pointing out the triumph of the neighboring state of New York with its involvement in the building of internal improvements.\textsuperscript{455} For Chevalier, the enormous success of such projects as the Erie Canal, opened in 1825, indisputably proved “that the spirit of individual enterprise does not suffer when the government subjects [internal improvements] to its control and its authority.”\textsuperscript{456} Carey’s pleas for major public involvement created one of the most passionate public debates in the early 19\textsuperscript{th} century.

\footnotesize{made the internal improvements of the United States, at that time, better and more accurately known to Europeans than they were to ourselves.” In Moncure Robinson, "Obituary Notice of Michel Chevalier," \textit{Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society} 19 (1880); p. 36.  
\textsuperscript{454} See for example Mathew Carey, "Sir, By direction of a respectable meeting of citizens... ,” in \textit{Archive of Americana - American Broadside and Ephemera, Series 1, no. 2718} (Philadelphia, July 16, 1823); Mathew et al. Carey, "Sir, We beg leave to announce to you, the establishment in this city of an association...,” in \textit{Archive of Americana - American Broadside and Ephemera, Series 1, no. 2910} (Philadelphia, December 18, 1824). In 1822, Carrey himself edited and printed the most important essays. See Matthew Carey, \textit{Essays on Political Economy or the Most Certain Means of promoting the Wealth, Power, Resources and the Happiness of States} (1822) (New York, 1968). Despite the general belief that New York surpassed Philadelphia mainly due to the opening of the Erie Canal in 1825, Richardson claims that this trend was already underway several decades earlier. In Richardson, "The Athens of America, 1800-1825," p. 218. The growing rivalry between Baltimore and Philadelphia was observed by several foreign visitors already in the 1780s. Brissot de Warville noted in 1788 that “Baltimore, on the Susquehanna, which was only a village a few years ago, has drawn some trade away from Philadelphia.” But he added that any loss to Baltimore was at that time “scarce not noticeable”. In Brissot de Warville, \textit{New Travels in the United States of America, 1788}, pp. 260-1. Cf. also Schoepf, \textit{Travels in the Confederation} (1783-1784), part 1, p. 116. On the entire history of the rivalry between Philadelphia and Baltimore see James Weston Livingood, \textit{The Philadelphia-Baltimore Trade Rivalry 1780-1860} (New York, 1970).  
\textsuperscript{455} The founding of the society was announced in Carey, "Sir, We beg leave to announce to you, the establishment in this city of an association...” Another broadside, published month later, argued that the Society hoped that it will be able “to revive the spirit of energy which formerly distinguished this state, and excite the laudable emulation of the noble career of our sister state, New York.” In John Connelly, "Address to the citizens of Pennsylvania,” in \textit{Archive of Americana - American Broadside and Ephemera, Series 1, no. 3006} (Philadelphia, January 19, 1825).  
Philadelphia. The epitome of this struggle was the 1820s building of the Chesapeake and Delaware Canal. The powerful local financial interest groups which Carey faced were not opposed to big infrastructure improvements per se, they only wanted to build them on their own terms, leading through towns and connecting the lands where they had their own investments. This theme became a very familiar one in 19th century America where “everything has become an object of speculation.” In his novel Main Street, Sinclair Lewis later claimed that entire towns “had been staked out on barren prairie as convenient points for future train-halts; and back in 1860 and 1870 there had been much profit, much opportunity to found aristocratic families, in the possession of advance knowledge as to where the towns would arise.”

In spite of all speculation surrounding the 19th century building of communication infrastructure, Chevalier, reflecting the Saint-Simonian utopian hopes projected into modern technology, believed that by improving the means of communication a country was promoting “a real, positive, and practical liberty.” He found it “difficult to believe that a government could be

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458 See Chapter 4 entitled “The Canal Across the Isthmus” in Livingood, The Philadelphia-Baltimore Trade Rivalry 1780-1860, p. 81. Despite the fact that the canal had been discussed since 1769 and as such enjoyed the unofficial status of “the parent of all canal projects in this country,” it took decades to finally complete the project in 1829. Armroyd claims that its construction set the standard for building of other U.S. waterways George Armroyd, A Connected View of the Whole Internal Navigation of United States, Natural and Artificial: Present and Prospective - With Maps. (Philadelphia, 1826). Only a year after its completion, in August 1830, Fanny Trollope and her companions travelled from Baltimore to Philadelphia through the Chesapeake and Delaware Canal: “We embarked at six in the morning [on a steamboat from Baltimore], and at twelve reached the Chesapeake and Delaware canal; we then quitted the steamboat and walked two or three hundred yards to the canal, where we got on board a pretty little decked boat, sheltered by a neat awning, and drawn by four horses. This canal cuts across the state of Delaware... it has been work of great expense, though the distance is not more than thirteen miles... We reached Philadelphia at four o’clock in the afternoon.” In Trollope, Domestic Manners of the Americans (1827-1831), p. 204.

459 A pamphlet published by the opponents of Carey’s group claimed that “no one objects to a [Chesapeake-Delaware] Canal in a proper situation,” but proposed a different route “running through a beautiful, well cultivated, and populous country... and debauching into the Christiana Creek, where there is a natural harbor, and where a flourishing town is in readiness to carry on a considerable trade.” In Anonymous, “To the stockholders of the Chesapeake & Delaware Canal.”


tyrannical which would devote itself zealously to the task of opening roads through the country and diminishing the time and expense of transportation.” By 1830, the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania had 325 miles of railroads, while their total length in France was a mere 95 miles.\footnote{Chevalier, Society, Manners, and Politics in the United States: Letters on North America (1834-35), pp. 76 and 204-5.} Hungarian count Bölöni Farkas compared the numerous projects of internal improvements he saw in the U.S. with the situation in his own country where the cut-off inland provinces “literally suffocate in their own fat, without any prospect of development.”\footnote{Bölöni Farkas, Journey in North America, 1831, p. 100.} Similarly an obscure American poet-printer from New York welcomed the opening of the Erie Canal in 1825 by emphasizing the parallels between the freedom of print and freed movement, lauding the “unshackled press” which nurtured in the sons of Columbia the “freedom and glory” and as a consequence made possible such heroic enterprises as the connection of Lake Erie with the waters of the Atlantic Ocean.\footnote{Samuel Woodworth, “Ode for the Canal Celebration,” in Archive of Americana - American Broadsides and Ephemera, Series 1, no. 17056 (Originally printed in New York, November 4, 1825).}

The Deep Social Roots of the ‘Postmodern’ Space of Flows

In Michel Chevalier’s observations, Americans did not need to be gradually introduced to the power of the steam engine in order to reconcile the Jeffersonian pastoral vision of their country with the ideas of industrialization, as claimed in the 1960s by Leo Marx.\footnote{Cf. Leo Marx, The Machine in the Garden: Technology and the Pastoral Ideal in America (Oxford, UK, 1964).} On the contrary, he argued, “that waterfalls which we [the French colonizers] admired” the Anglo-American settler “shut up for the use of mills and factories, regardless of the scenery.”\footnote{Chevalier, Society, Manners, and Politics in the United States: Letters on North America (1834-35), p. 265.} Himself an admirer of a machine, Chevalier was excited observing the “perfect passion” the American had for the railroad, “he loves them…as a lover loves his mistress.” The speed of the engine strongly resonated with the mindset of a nation whose “supreme happiness consists in that speed which
annihilates time and space.” But the American love affair with the railroad was driven by the rational realization “that this mode of communication is admirably adapted to the vast extent of this country.”

What was difficult to comprehend, especially for European Continental visitors, was the individualism so omnipresent among the Anglo-Americans in the New World. Already in 1788 De Warville described them as men who with ease turn their backs upon the pleasure of cultivated society - the houses in which they drew their first breath, churches where they were baptized, and the friends of their youth - launching themselves voluntarily into the hardships connected to the establishment of a new existence in the wilderness. The French revolutionary argued that this must strike every European philosopher as “a picture of human nature that runs counter to the usual habits and principles of action of man.” Similarly Chevalier in the 1830s pointed out that “in all things a Frenchman must feel his neighbor’s elbow as in a line of battle” because it is necessary for him to carry alongside “a society ready-made, social bonds already established.” But to colonize a new territory, “one could throw Americans there in isolation” because, the author explained, “the full-bloodied American has this in common with the Tartar, that he is encamped, not established, on the soil he treads upon,” always ready to move on, “to start with the first steamer which comes along.”

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467 All quotes in this paragraph are from Ibid, p. 297.
The image of North America captured by the early European visitors in their diaries strongly evoked the ideas of a vast space in which people, merchandise and ideas constantly flowed, being liberated from the friction of social custom and constraints of geography. But contrary to Manuel Castells who connected the birth of his *space of flows* to the technological advancements of the late 20th century, some of the early observers recognized it as being clearly articulated through the most elementary social needs and only then, gradually, found their different historical expressions in the progressive means of technology.\(^{471}\) In 1783, Johann Schoepf offered one of the first glimpses into what later became the automobile society, arguing that “to go a-foot is an abomination to the American, no matter how poor or friendless.”\(^{472}\) By the 1760s, the increasing demand for vehicles turned Philadelphia into an important center of the carriage-making industry.\(^{473}\) In the 1830s De Tocqueville compared the nature of American society to a state of ‘perpetual fluidity’ - a quality which he associated with democracy.\(^{474}\) At the same time, the European mind strived for stability and permanence as the most important qualities of social life and urban space. It was psychologically expressed through people’s attachment to the houses in which they were born and churches in which they were baptized, and materially in the durability of brick, stone and mortar used for the construction of urban buildings. But the American urge to build cheap and fast, without respect for either age or location, produced what Henri Lefebvre in the 1970s labeled as the *abstract space* in which nothing is permanent and where tradition and sentiment had to bow down before rational calculation.\(^{475}\) On his 1780s walks through Philadelphia, an astounded Schoepf observed entire buildings being moved from one place to a more convenient location (Figure 5.13.). Building in

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472 Schoepf, *Travels in the Confederation* (1783-1784), part 1, p. 55.
473 Bronner, "Village into Town, 1701-1746," p. 96.
Figure 5.13. John Birch, *Goal, in Walnut Street Philadelphia*, c.1800.
America was “carried rapidly and lightly, so that now and then there may be seen two storied houses conveniently on promenade on rollers, brought from one end of the city to the other, according as it seems best to the owners to live in this quarter.” Not even churches had a permanent place in the city’s urban universe. The simple building of the First Presbyterian Church on Market Street, known as Old Buttonwood, was torn down and in 1794 replaced by Philadelphia’s first public structure in Greek revivalist style, its portico boosting four pillars with Corinthian capitols (Figure 5.14.). “The appearance is something grand, tho the situation not so,” commented Elizabeth Drinker on the fact that the façade was somehow obscured by the near-by stalls of the expanding main market. In 1822, the congregation decided to relocate the church completely to Washington Square, where it was later replaced by an apartment building.

Other visitors noted pre-fabricated sections of whole new wooden buildings being loaded on ships in the ports of Philadelphia or New York and transported hundreds of miles away to satisfy the needs of planters in the West Indies. Peter Kalm was utterly scandalized by the state of decay in which he found the most ancient building in Philadelphia - a simple farm house from the original Swedish settlement near the river. The antiquity of this dwelling, in which the hum of a spinning wheel was probably heard when William Penn landed on American soil, gave it “a kind of superiority over all the other buildings in town” in his eyes. A century later, John E. Watson echoed in his Annales a desperate call “to rescue from the ebbing tide of oblivion” the

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476 Schoepf, Travels in the Confederation (1783-1784), part 1, p. 72.
478 Adam Gordon in 1765: “…many timber frames for the West India planters' houses are shipped from thence, their intercourse with Jamaica and all the Leeward and Windward Caribbee Islands [sic] being very considerable…” In Gordon, "Journal of Lord Adam Gordon," pp. 262-3. Cf. Milanese Count Dal Verme who wrote in 1783 from New York: “I have seen not only furniture but also entire sections of wooden houses being placed on board ship.” Dal Verme, Seeing America and Its Great Men: The Journal and Letters of Count Francesco dal Verme, 1783-1784, p. 45.
479 Kalm, Peter Kalm's Travels in North America (1748-1750), p. 34.
Figure 5.14. John Birch, *High Street, with the First Presbyterian Church*, c.1800.
city’s vanishing past.\textsuperscript{480} Similarly, James Fennimore Cooper based one of his 1830s novels, \textit{Home as Found}, on a caricature of the American tendency to see one’s home through the prism of personal gain versus the European attempt to conserve the past at any cost.\textsuperscript{481} Unfortunately for Philadelphia, Kalm’s and Watson’s nostalgic calls remained unanswered. Modern day visitors to the post-industrial metropolis must try very hard if they want to transcend time and space, and under the layers of steel, glass and asphalt, attempt to mentally recreate the atmosphere of the place which used to be called ‘the Athens of America’.

\textbf{XIV. A ‘Telegraphic’ Postscript to Philadelphia}

On November 17, 1794 \textit{The Gazette of the United State} published a brief notice informing its readers that the French have discovered an instrument they named \textit{telegraphe} which allows them to convey dispatches from hundred miles away in a matter of hours. “It may appear to you almost impossible, but you may depend upon this being true,” emphasized the newspaper to its readers, adding that the parliament in Paris has sent dispatches to a 120-miles distant Lille in the morning and the deputies had the answer the same day even before they separated for dinner.\textsuperscript{482} However surprising this news may have been to Philadelphia readers, the idea of long-distance communication was an old one. Ancient tribal organizations, their own native-Americans notwithstanding, were able to communicate at a distance with the help of smoke signals or low-

\footnotesize\begin{itemize}
\item\textsuperscript{481} One of Cooper’s characters, Aristabulus Bragg, a successful American lawyer, claims that “a human being is not a cat, to love a locality rather than its own interests... The house I was born in was pulled down, shortly after my birth, as indeed has been its successor,” while his ideological opponent, a Europhilic baronet John Effingham, categorically refuses to make financial speculation concerning his family estate. In James Fenimore Cooper, \textit{Home as Found} (New York, 1961), pp. 24-5. For more on this topic see Robert Allan Gates, \textit{The New York Vision: Interpretations of New York City in the American Novel} (Lanham, 1987).
\item\textsuperscript{482} “Extract from a Letter from an American in London, Dated September 14, Received by the Sanjom,” \textit{The Gazette of the United States}, November 17, 1794, p. 3. Technical aspects of the operation of the French telegraph were summarized in “Description of the Telegraphe” published in \textit{The Philadelphia Gazette and Universal Daily Advertiser}, December 5, 1794, p. 2. The French semaphore system developed by Claude Chappé and tested practically in 1794 is further described in Kenneth G. Beauchamp, \textit{A History of Telegraphy: Its History and Technology} (London, 2001), pp. 6-7.
\end{itemize}
frequency drum beats. Later the European armies took the initiative in developing this technology and as of the late 18th century and - combining telescope with mechanical signaling equipment - came up with different variations of shutter and semaphore systems which allowed them to send and receive even more nuanced and complicated messages.

James Carey described this moment as a definitive freeing of communication from the constraints of geography and transportation technologies. Despite the fact that it was the military and mercantile interests which were driving such innovations, the early U.S. republican society had a tendency to see in such progress “the energy of freedom” which was spreading from revolutionary France and would soon conquer the entire Old World. “The Revolution of Europe is but just commenced,” argued The Pennsylvania Gazette in 1794, and its power “begins to be displayed in discoveries and improvements in science and machines.”

As of 1795, the word telegraph started to appear in Philadelphia newspapers with increased frequency in different contexts. There was a British brig named Telegraph which popped up in the shipping news section. The word telegraph was a new term used by the editors to emphasize news stories that were exceptional, urgent and accurate despite the fact that they were still broadcast through traditional ‘snail mail’ technologies. Similarly to the term post which was so frequently used in newspaper nameplates in the early 18th century to emphasize the close

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484 The Pennsylvania Gazette predicted that even Great Britain was on the brink of a republican revolution, “although her insular situation, and the combination of her powerful landed and mercantile interests may sustain the tottering fabric of her government longer than most of her Continental neighbours.” In “The State of Europe, at the Date of our last Accounts, was nearly as Follows,” The Pennsylvania Gazette, November 19, 1794.


486 An article entitled “From the Western Telegraph” published in The Pennsylvania Gazette on August 1, 1798 conveyed a prophecy about the outcome of the French Revolution originated among an Indian tribe on Lake Champlain, NY.
link to the post office, the late 1790s saw a proliferation of newspapers using the word *telegraph* in their names. As a result, Philadelphians became used to the term long before the real electric telegraph reached the city. In 1802, merchant Thomas Cope traveled to Baltimore and visited the telegraph lookout platform installed on Federal Hill which was conveying the signals from the 15 miles distant telegraph station on the Potapsco River to the local merchant exchange situated in Bryden’s Coffee House. “By this means it is frequently known to the consignee or owner that his vessel is in the bay 2 or 3 days before she comes to the point where large vessels discharge, as there is no sufficiency of water for any other than small craft in the basin,” Cope explained the advantage of the telegraphic apparatus.

For the first half of the century the use of the mechanical telegraph was limited mainly to the relatively narrow merchant and state-military purposes. Only after Morse’s invention of electric telegraphy in 1844 and its ensuing commercialization did the system serve also for transmission of more prosaic messages of civic communication, demonstrating a much deeper impact on public life in general.

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487. *The Gazette of the United States* informed its readers on December 5, 1794 that “in the *London Morning Chronicle* of October 3rd, proposals are published for a new daily paper, under the title of *The Telegraph*” (p. 3). Among the early newspapers bearing the word *telegraph* in their nameplate were: *American Telegraphe* (published since 1795 in Newfield, CT), *Telegraph* (1795, Charleston, SC), *Baltimore Telegraph* (1796, Baltimore, MD), *Moral and Political Telegraphe* (1795, Brookfield, MA), *Wiscasset Telegraph* (1796, Wiscasset, ME), and *Constitutional Telegraph* (1799, Boston, MA). The early 18th century saw an even bigger proliferation of the term *telegraph* in the newspapers’ nameplates.

488. James Bryden, who operated Baltimore’s merchant coffee house, moved in 1808 to New York to take charge of the Tontine Coffee House which was the immediate predecessor of today’s New York Stock Exchange. Bryden’s departure for New York was announced on February 28, 1808 in Baltimore’s *Federal Gazette*. For more on the history of the origins of the New York Stock Exchange see Abram Wakeman, *History and Reminiscences of Lower Wall Street and Vicinity* (New York, 1914).

489. This note assumes that the cargo from big ships had to be reloaded on the smaller ones, which took 2-3 days. Cope, *Philadelphia Merchant: The Diary of Thomas P. Cope, 1800-1851*, p. 103-04. The only other information about the “Baltimore telegraph” I was able to trace was on the web-site of the Baltimore Maritime Exchange which conveys the history as follows: “During the 1790’s, some enterprising businessmen devised an advanced arrival notification system called the “Baltimore Telegraph”. A lookout platform was constructed atop Federal Hill and, using the technology of the day, a powerful telescope was mounted there. Spotters working for “the Telegraph” would keep watch for vessels as they made their way up the Patapsco River. When a positive identification of the owner’s colors or vessel name could be made, signal flags would be displayed from the tower providing several hours advance notice to the businessmen working along the waterfront.” For more see www.balmx.org/aboutus.aspx.

490. For more on this topic see Carey, "Technology and Ideology: The Case of the Telegraph."
of the state voluntarily giving up its priority to the forces of commerce, with a consequent predominance of private interest in the overall public sphere.\textsuperscript{491}

During the first half of the 19\textsuperscript{th} century, the American mind firmly associated the progress of mankind with the advancement of technology. Emblematically, John Gast in his 1872 iconic painting represented \textit{American Progress} as a white clad woman leading the settlers towards the Western frontier, surrounded by the attributes of technological progress - the telegraph and railroad.\textsuperscript{492} Philadelphia merchant Sidney George Fisher wrote in his diary on August 6, 1855 that the newspapers that day were full of the accounts of the “great achievement, pregnant with important results to the world” - the successful lay down of the transatlantic cable and the first exchange of messages between North America and Europe. In the words of Stefan Zweig, humanity started to live “simultaneously from one end of the earth to the other, divinely omnipresent through its own creative power.”\textsuperscript{493} American towns greeted the news by illumination, ringing of bells and firing of cannons. “Every day, almost now, brings with it some new victory of man over nature, of mind over matter, changing the course of civilization and increasing the \textit{accommodations of life},” concluded Fisher.\textsuperscript{494}

\textsuperscript{491} After the 1844 establishment of the first successful telegraph line between Baltimore and Washington D.C., its inventor, Samuel Morse, urged the U.S. government to buy all his patents for “the very moderate price” of one hundred thousand dollars and turn them into a public domain. Yet the U.S. Postmaster General dismissed the offer, arguing that “[a]lthough the invention is an agent vastly superior to any other ever devised by the genius of man, yet the operation between Washington and Baltimore has not satisfied me that, under any rate of postage that can be adopted, its revenues can be made to cover its expenditures.” In Alonzo B. Cornell, “Invention of the Telegraph,” in \textit{The Great Events by Famous Historians}, ed. Charles F. Horne and Rossiter Johnson (New York, 1926), pp. 6-7. Alonzo B. Cornell was the director of Western Union (1832-1904) and the son of Ezra Cornell, the founder of Cornell University who was also one of the founders of Western Union. John argues that Morse’s patents were ensuingly purchased by people connected with Western Union which by the 1860s had established a very lucrative nationwide telegraph monopoly. In Richard R. John, “Citizens, Clients, and Consumers: Rethinking the Advent of American Telecommunications,” \textit{Antenna} 15 (2003).

\textsuperscript{492} For more see Greenberg, Manifest Manhood and the Antebellum American Empire, p. 1.

\textsuperscript{493} The quote is from the essay “The First Word to Cross the Ocean.” In Stefan Zweig, \textit{Decisive Moments in History: Twelve Historical Miniatures}, Lowell A. Bangerter trans. (Riverside, CA, 1999), p. 174.

Chapter 5

FINAL ANALYSIS: THE LONG JOURNEY FROM ATHENS TO PHILADELPHIA

Habermas’ thesis promoting the idea of the 18th century ‘rise of the public’ was the product of an era which eulogized the Enlightenment, presenting it as the critical period in Western history which ushered in the birth of *modernity*. Ambiguous as it is, the term has been consequently used, abused, and arduously disputed by social philosophers for the past several decades.\(^1\) According to Stuart Hall, the Enlightenment articulated the idea of *modernity* by separating the *social* as a distinct form of reality in an attempt to rationalize and analyze its inner dynamics and mechanisms.\(^2\) Obviously, such ‘discovery’ of modernity happened on a rhetorical level, but was this fact ensuingly reflected also in some deep qualitative changes observable in social praxis, or was it itself only a reflection of gradual structural shifts which were already underway for centuries and only in the 18th century caught the eye of social philosopher? David Zaret argues that the acceptance of the rhetorical advancements of the Enlightenment on face value is one of the big epistemological failures of traditional approaches to the study of social history. He compares the result of this approach to looking through the wrong end of the telescope - because the very notion of the *modern* presupposes also the existence of the *pre-modern*, as well as the *post-modern*, implying also relatively clearly defined tectonic gaps which demarcate its beginning and end on the long trajectory of social development.\(^3\) Yet by focusing on the historical metamorphosis of the broadly defined social category of the *public sphere*, and relying more on the attempts for mental reconstruction of the practices of everyday life than on the writings of the luminaries of the Enlightenment, I did not find either a *Great Divide* or a *Big

\(^{1}\) Summary of this debate is in Miles Ogborn, *Spaces of Modernity: London’s Geographies 1680-1780*, pp. 2-22.


Ditch which would divide the modern from the pre- and the post-modern. Instead, what appeared in the mirror of my historical telescope resembled parallel long continuities rather than a few abrupt changes, social and technological evolutions rather than revolutions. There are many causal loops in which one hegemonic society picks up the ball from the other, leads the game for a time while bringing in its own ideals and consequently articulating new institutions, only to lose steam and to be taken over by another leading city. The rules of the game contained many ambiguities and the players were on one hand constantly supplied with new, faster and more reliable technologies, but at the same time they seemed to be trapped in a relatively immutable web of innate contradictions which blocked them from dramatically changing the overall rules of the game. As a result, the same elemental script of the public sphere was, and still is being replayed over and over by the Greek tradition inspired Western democracies, with only slight modifications. My experience led me to conclude that when I decided to analyze a particular period in history, I would always find a deeper layer which set the stage for the consequent epoch, advancing the entire story of humanity without implying any notion of teleology or progress in absolute terms.

Overall, the basic set of tensions characteristic of various social utopias as they were implemented in different place-periods corresponds very well with what Giddens claims are the two primary contradictions characteristic for a society built on the premise of capitalist exchange and accumulation. One is manifested on the structural and the other on the existential level. Structural contradiction reflects the tension between the public interest of the commonwealth and the private interests of the citizens which constitute its public sphere. The existential

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contradiction conveys the tension between the *man-made world* of the city and the *natural environment* of its hinterlands.\(^5\)

Following the development of the public sphere over a long period of time (*longue durée*) gave me a unique vantage point from which to observe such fundamental contradictions as they were teased out and reflected in social processes such as *democratization*, *commodification*, *individuation*, *bureaucratization* and/or *spatialization*. Such processes usually act in various synergetic permutations and variations, sometimes reinforcing and other times undercutting each other. Each society covered in this study was fundamentally aware of the two basic contradictions, or at least of their main symptoms, and the strategies it deployed in the attempt to mitigate or solve them necessarily reflected its own underlying structural tenets. This development resulted in the fact that the normative ideal of the public sphere evolved over time, reflecting the structural properties of different leading cities as they gradually assumed hegemonic positions within the entire democratic world-system, assuming the role of a ‘new Athens’. Yet, the change was never abrupt but rather evolutionary - each leading city necessarily contributed its own ideas to the overall normative ideal, adding a new layer to an already existing set of principles which it inherited from the previous leading city. Technology often enabled the implementation of such ideas, but was never a determining factor in this process. Indeed, any technological innovation is seen in the study as value neutral from the outset. It can serve multiple purposes and it depends mainly on social factors whether a given technology will be deployed at all at a particular point in time, and if, then with what purpose.

On the following pages I will topically dissect the historical essays which constitute the empirical part of my study, and summarize the most important findings into a series of cohesive arguments with an attempt to shed more light on the inner workings of both principal

contradictions as they are reflected in the public sphere. I must emphasize the fact that in the historical-empirical evidence which I collected, both contradictions often resemble Siamese twins joined at the hip. Consequently, the intensification of the existential contradiction has often direct impact in exposing also the tension at the structural level and vice-versa. In the last part of this chapter, I will use the same strategy to expose and analyze the role of new technologies and their ramifications for the evolution of the public sphere.

I. The Primary Structural Contradiction and its Reflection in the Public Sphere

Giddens describes the primary structural contradiction as one which is to be found between the private sphere of civil society and the public sphere of the state. It results mainly from the constant tension between the two parallel processes of democratization and commodification, which have accompanied Western society since the introduction of the concepts of private property and representative government. From the very definition it is clear that such a contradiction should be of principal interest for this study because it implies an inherent tension which is located directly in the agora. Patricia Aufderheide raised the question of how much contamination can be absorbed in an ideal public sphere before it turns into pure market or into clear-cut state space? Indeed, if we conceive public sphere as a Weberian ideal type and analyze its historical presence and/or absence in a given society, the evolutionary dynamics of the processes of democratization, commodification or individuation, as reflected in the public sphere, could serve as a very good indicator of the degree to which such ideal type came into being in different places at various points in time.

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6 Ibid., p. 197.
Historical Roots of the Struggle between the ‘Private’ and the ‘Public’

The very definition of an ideal-typical public sphere implies that there was never a period in human history when it materialized in social praxis in its conceptual fullness and purity. Despite traditional claims that the foundation of Athenian democracy were independently wealthy private citizens - whose material needs were fully supported by their domestic economies which enabled them to meet in the Agora to freely deliberate the issues of common interest without any concern for their own partial gain - the reality was much more complicated. Aristophanes’ character of the sausage-seller may be a picturesque epitome of a classical entrepreneur-politician who doesn’t hesitate to corrupt the system in order to achieve personal advantage. One of the points of Aristophanes’ play, Knights, is encoded directly in the sausage-seller’s real name Agorakritos, which is intentionally ambiguous and could mean both, ‘the one who was elected by the assembly’ as well as the ‘one who sells in the Agora’.9 Trying to prevent such conflict of interests, the Greek city of Thebes banned merchants from being elected to its democratic assembly.10 Persian king Cyrus allegedly ridiculed Athenians for having a space in the center of their city where they cheated and deceived each other.11 Xenophon contrasted the Persian and Greek understanding of the agora and from his observation, it is clear that the need to shield the public sphere from commercial interest and the discussion about the direct relationship between such separation and good governance was not limited to the boundaries of Greek civilization. Persian cities featured a space in their midst with strict exclusion of commerce where the elders met and discussed public affairs, yet they lacked a system of representative government.12 Aristotle consequently demanded that his ideal city had two separate agoras - one commercial

9 Aristophanes, Knights.
10 Aristotle, Politics, 3.1278a.
12 Xenophon, Cyropaedia, 1.2.3-4.
and one conceived as an ideal public space - in order to put a firewall between private and public interests.\textsuperscript{13}

Just as the most of the European urban centers which rose to power during the High Middle Age period, Venice was indebted to the mercantile interest for its prosperity. Thus not surprisingly, Venetians refused the Theban solution of completely excluding merchants from the public sphere and similarly dismissed Plato’s idea of a republic based on the equal redistribution of wealth among its citizens.\textsuperscript{14} In a city built in the midst of inhospitable marshes, trade was not a matter of choice, but of destiny. While economic freedom was granted to all, the political right to participate in the decision-making process was limited to a narrow group of hereditary nobility whose members were presumed to possess civic virtues. Their leading role was framed not as privilege, but as obligation, and they were consequently expected to bear the burden of the government. Venetian ruling elites were constantly aware of the potential conflict of interest within the group of its nobles, who were citizens and merchants at the same time, but instead of solving this tension on a personal level by excluding merchants from the public sphere, they decided to adopt the Aristotelian model based on the spatial distancing of those two interests.\textsuperscript{15}

Piazza San Marco - especially the area immediately adjacent to the Ducal Palace called il Broglio or Piazzetta – was, under ideal circumstances, dedicated purely to civic activities; while the Rialto, located in another part of the city, was cultivated as Venice’s commercial center. Each square had its own open-air university which symbolically reflected this division through two

\textsuperscript{13} Aristotle, \textit{Politics}, 7.1331a.

\textsuperscript{14} King argues that Aristotelian thought was much more convenient because it offered “legitimation for Venice’s highly stratified, rigid, and authoritarian system.” In Margaret L. King, \textit{Venetian Humanism in an Age of Patrician Dominance}, p. 184.

\textsuperscript{15} For more on the dispute on the conflict of civic and commercial interests see e.g. Morosini, \textit{De bene istituita republica}, pp. 178-82; Sarpi, \textit{Advice Given to the Republick of Venice}, pp. 15 and 24-26.
different philosophical approaches pursued by their respective teachers. While San Marco was dominated by Plato’s humanistic philosophy, the Rialto resonated with Aristotelian rationalism.\(^{16}\)

As I argue in the essay dedicated to Venice, the extent to which the city’s ruling elites were able to enforce the division between the interests of the public square and the marketplace became the main indicator of the success with which the overall quest for a well-governed state was met in praxis (Figure 3.11.). Indeed, the early 1500s decline of the Republican government could be measured by the gradual erosion of the boundaries between private and public interests. Nepotism, electioneering and the growing material dependence of noble citizens on the financial benefits tied to public offices symptomatically turned the Venetian Broglio into a synonym for political fraud, clientelism and corruption. Five centuries later, the Italian political system struggled with the same problems and the term ‘broglio’ is still widely used with the same meaning in the country’s political parlance, reflecting the enormous resilience of the entire social mechanism.\(^{17}\)

**Classical Republicanism and the Ideals of Privilege and Secrecy**

The Venetians refused outright *ostracism* as practiced in classical Greece, yet on the normative level they did everything to suppress individualism and factionalism, seeing them as a major danger to the prosperity of their commonwealth. The practices of secrecy were supposed to evoke the appearance of unanimity of the narrow governing body before the governed masses. *Public opinion* was openly detested as the breeding ground of cheap populism and the result of the persuasive techniques of eloquent demagogues who had no regard for the long-term interest of the State. Overall, the Venetian state bureaucracy produced enormous amount of information


and created an elaborate system for its delivery as well as for its recording in the state archives, but its elites believed that each person should have full access only to the matters which corresponded with his or her social and political status.

Yet Venice at the same time thrived on gossip and its politics were increasingly riddled with partisanship. Its ruling elites were never able to fully control the information flows perpetuated not only through the chatter on the piazzas, but diffused also through the famous Venetian handwritten avvisi - the earliest commercially traded form of information put in a tangible form - and thus assuming all the material attributes of a true commodity. Inspired by the idea of the classical Greek symposium, we see the emergence of associations of young nobles, compganie della calza, whose mission gradually shifted from the realm of cultural entertainment towards politics, turning them into electioneering cells and early lobbying organizations. At the same time the cult of literary salons emerged in Venice - first in the form of the Aldian New Academy inspired by Plato - and known in the second part of the 16th century as ridotti - a form of civic meeting much closer to Habermasian ideal of private persons coming together in order to articulate their positions toward the current social problems and corresponding policies of the State.

**The ‘Invention’ of Public Opinion**

With the partial rediscovery of Aristotelian philosophy, rational argumentation and dialectics returned into the public arena by the High Medieval period. It happened not only in the sphere of civic life, but also within the dominion of the spiritual world of the Medieval Church. Both as a philosophical category and as widespread social praxis, public opinion was widely discussed in Renaissance Venice, but it became finally recognized on a normative level as being central to good government only in the course of the 17th century. David Zaret calls this change the ‘invention of public opinion’ and captured its unfolding in post-Elizabethan London in his work
Origins of Democratic Culture. The emergence of public opinion gradually undermined almost all practices of government secrecy and privilege which were so essential to the Venetian style of government. Indeed, as Hollar’s 1641 seminal engraving reveals, the world was suddenly “ruled and governed by opinion” (Figure 2.2.). Transparency and openness of decision-making processes at the level of the government became a new social norm which slowly conquered different aspects of political thinking.

On one hand, the political system in 17th century England was still very similar to the Republic of Venice in that in its head was a monarch whose power was controlled by a group of hereditary aristocrats. But the main structural difference between the two political systems, if compared across time, was in the formal acceptance of public opinion in 17th century England as a key element in the decision-making process. As the writings of John Locke and John Milton reflect, the English population was increasingly aware of its natural rights and fundamental liberties. The ancient Greek values of harmony and unity, typical for the Venetian republican system, were gradually replaced in London with a focus on the rights of the individual. Defoe’s famous literary hero, Robinson Crusoe, is interpreted by critics as the epitome of Anglo-Saxon individualism. Foreign observers noted that the language of Englishmen became dominated by two single words: liberty and property. The two terms became so closely tied together that those among the non-nobles who gained wealth in trade or through market speculation gradually made their way also into the structures of the State. Success in private business became the new litmus test for participation in the management of public affairs. Citizen rights were no longer based on the hereditary passing of civic virtues from father to son, regardless of economic

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20 Schoepf, Travels in the Confederation (1783-1784), part 1, p. 65.
success. Instead, those who were able to manage their own estates were expected to become good stewards of the public purse as well.  

The normative recognition of public opinion was formally recognized in the realm of the public sphere in 1695 when the Licensing Act of 1662 lapsed and was not renewed. In the span of a few years, London was flooded with uncensored newspapers. Some of them aimed at the lofty goal of bringing philosophy “out of closets and libraries, schools and colleges, to dwell in clubs and assemblies, at tea-tables, and in coffee-houses”, but most were hijacked from the very beginning by the financial interests of those who turned information in the most “the most vendible commodity in the whole Kingdom.” The same ambiguity was reflected in the overall social role of the lauded coffeehouses which became, at the same time, little neighborhoods where Londoners socialized and discussed matters of private and public life. They were also breeding grounds of fraud, vice and speculation. The triumvirate of the Exchange Alley stock-jobbers, the Westminster politicians, and the writers from Grub Street - which turned coffeehouses into their primary offices - eroded the social institution of the emerging bourgeois public sphere in London from the very moment of its birth. Coffeehouses gave birth to the club culture in 17th century England and while in their golden age (1680-1730) political parties in the strict sense of the term were not known, the Tories and the Whigs were already two recognized brand-names representing different factions which openly competed for public support in the political arena. Partisan politics required strong political leaders for its success, which further reflected the process of individuation, turning the classical principle of republican unity of the government on its head.

22 The first quote is from Addison’s editorial in The Spectator, on Monday, March 12, 1711. In Joseph Addison and Richard Steele, The Spectator: A New Edition Reproducing the Original Text Both as First Issued and as Corrected by its Authors, 1711-1712. The second quote is from Joseph Browne, State Tracts: Containing Many Necessary Observations and Reflections on the State of our Affairs at Home and Abroad; with some Secret Memoirs, p. 230.
As German biologist Johann Schoepf observed during his 1783 visit to Philadelphia, the spirit of freedom and liberty, so omnipresent in the New World, was “a British inheritance strengthened by removal to American soil and still more by the successful outcome of the [Revolutionary] war.”²³ In the general scheme of my argument, London indeed plays a crucial role for understanding the development of the public sphere in Philadelphia. Reflecting the intellectual heritage of Locke and Milton, in 1687 William Penn commissioned the printing and circulation of all constitutional documents which positively framed the rights and liberties of his colonists in Pennsylvania.²⁴ As of 1719, with the introduction of newspapers in Philadelphia, the press became the basic vehicle of civic disputes. It kindled the ideals of self-determination and self-reliance which later so effectively fuelled the American Revolution. But the same newspapers depended financially on the amount of advertisement they were able to attract. Despite Habermas’ efforts to idealize early periodical print, by the mid-18th century about half of the content of an average Philadelphia newspaper consisted of advertisement.²⁵ Benjamin Franklin noted that during his lifetime, the revenues from advertisement represented one quarter of his overall income as a printer, a ratio which was probably much higher if we only take into account his newspaper-related income.²⁶ In order to assure the financial prosperity of their enterprises, printers often conceived newspapers not as end products, but as a mere means to advertise other enterprises in which they were engaged. A coffeehouse, a post office franchise, book importation activities or an insurance company owned by a local printer were often part of

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²³ Schoepf, Travels in the Confederation (1783-1784), part 1, p. 98.
²⁴ William Penn, The Excellent Priviledge of Liberty and Property Being the Birth-Right of the Free-Born Subjects of England. It is important to add that the Magna Carta, which as of 1215 limited the power of the English King and laid the foundations of the British political system of constitutional monarchy, was one of the most frequently printed documents in London in the early 1500s.
²⁶ It should be remembered that his main financial success was The Poor Richard’s Almanack which did not contain advertisement; all income was from direct sales or subscriptions, which makes advertisement revenues even more prominent for the economic prosperity of his newspaper.
this scheme. The publishers already relied on the concepts of *synergy* and *cross-promotion*, and instinctively understood their power in boosting the potential of their enterprises.  

Philadelphia taverns and coffeehouses imitated the social role of their famous London namesakes, but they widely surpassed them in both the amount and variety of commercial activities which took place on their premises. Despite their increasing commercialization, the owners systematically promoted the image of the coffeehouse as a public space, just as the modern suburban shopping malls organize petty non-profit or cultural activities to enhance their perception as authentic community centers. To do so, they encouraged debate societies, organized concerts and fundraisers for charities, but - using the language of a modern shopping mall manager - the main goal was to *increase the traffic* and to attract more customers who corresponded to the desired demographic profile.  

The most commercially successful Philadelphia coffeehouses often sold books, almanacs and newspapers, served as real estate or insurance brokers, and organized auctions not only of merchandise but human cargo as well.

**The Rise of Mass-Democracy**

As I claim in the essay dedicated to Philadelphia, if there was a genuine social revolution in the events surrounding the U.S. Revolutionary War, I see it in the final crystallization of the slow evolutionary process which started in Athens and finally turned the tide of classical aristocratic republicanism - based on collective values - in favor of *partisan politics* competing in the arena of *mass democracy*, which reflected the growing self-awareness and social recognition of the

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rights of the individual. The first objective - the formal entry of political parties into the public sphere - was realized by the 1790s almost simultaneously in Britain and the United States with the parallel establishment of bi-partisan political systems represented respectively by the Tories and the Whigs in Britain, and the Federalists and Democratic-Republican in the United States. The second objective - the advent of mass democracy - was symbolically marked by the 1800-1801 series of electoral victories of Thomas Jefferson’s Democratic-Republican Party.29

Venetians attempted to prevent the conflict between the public and private interests of their citizens - merchants by spatially separating Piazza San Marco and the Rialto. We can see a similar trend in Philadelphia, where the founding fathers during the Revolutionary Era contemplated the removal of both the state and federal governments from this opulent city to more moderate locations, which would better correspond with their republican virtues. Not surprisingly, the capital of Pennsylvania was in 1799 moved first to Lancaster and ensuingly in 1812 to Harrisburg, while the federal capital moved in 1800 to Washington, D.C.30 Yet in the eyes of the Jeffersonians, the absolute best protection against the abuse of public funds and government power was in not allowing the government to grow at all, keeping it limited in power and small in size. While the Venetians reacted to any new challenge by creating another state regulatory body, becoming entangled in the web of contradictory laws and regulations, Jefferson’s most important conflict with his closest political ally James Madison concerned the federal government becoming involved in the construction of postal roads.31 The clash between the aristocratic republican vision represented by Alexander Hamilton on one hand, and Jeffersonian

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29 I feel the need to emphasize here that despite the introduction of the principle of mass-democracy into the U.S. political system on a national level, Philadelphia itself preserved the spirit of its traditional ‘aristocratic’ culture in which decisions are taken quietly in the couloirs, and only then presented to the public for formal acclamation. But its overall significance in the U.S. national politics diminished by the removal of political power to Washington in 1800 and by losing its economic dominance to New York City in the ensuing decades.

30 James Madison explained the reasons for moving the federal capital in The Federalist Papers - No. 43.

mass democracy on the other was epitomized in the 1830s in Andrew Jackson’s symbolic
destruction of the Second Bank of the United States (Figure 5.9.c).

Jürgen Habermas, echoing Hannah Arendt, associated the ascent of mass democracy with the
advance of welfare state and the *rise of the social*. Habermas argues that any decision of the state
made “under the ‘pressure of the street’ can scarcely still be understood as arising from the
consensus of private individuals engaged in public discussion.”32 Yet as the analysis of the
dynamics of the Athenian and Venetian public spheres clearly demonstrates, the ‘social’ element
was always present in the decision-making process at the state level. While the degree of
influence of the social may have varied historically, the consent of the governed was necessary
for the stability of power at any time in history. As this study illustrates, the Venetian elites very
skillfully used a combination of social welfare programs and ideological propagandistic tools in
order to avert the crystallization of class consciousness of the masses, and to win their support in
defending the existing social *status quo* in the time of peace as well as war. The deployment of
brute physical force was seen not only as an extreme, but also as the least efficient measure in
assuring the stability of the state. As a matter of fact, there are many parallels between the ways
the *myth of Venice*, represented by the winged lion of St. Mark, and the basic tenets of *American
exceptionalism*, embodied in the U.S. national flag, were both used for this purpose. Displayed in
public, both symbols could be interpreted as holographic images conveying all basic elements of
complex myths which became bulwarks of the hegemonic power of their perspective states at
home as well as abroad.33 The one fundamental difference is in the fact that in the case of
Venice, it was the state which commissioned official historiographies, organized and maintained
legions of artisans, architects and artists in order to systematically add new elements to

32 Habermas, “The Public Sphere,” p. 200.
33 Marvin and Ingle, Blood Sacrifice and the Nation: Totem Rituals and the American Flag, p. 5.
reinvigorate the overall ideological message represented in artistic masterpieces in the public square. In the case of the early American Republic, such initiatives were left to the forces of the market which - following its own logic and interest - tapped into the ongoing processes of industrialization and mass production, and relied mainly on the more financially profitable forms of imitative arts. It resulted in the development of what Enzensberger calls the consciousness or the cultural industry, often associated with the implosion of material base and ideological superstructure and their mutual collapse into one another.\textsuperscript{34} It is symptomatic that De Tocqueville, observing this trend in the 1830s, expressed serious doubts whether art could coexist with democracy, though his own experience with a democratic regime was limited to North America. Consequently he mistakenly articulated the very idea of democracy with the libertarian spirit of laissez-faire capitalism which ideologically dominated early republican thinking in the United States. All in all, while the Venetian public sphere became subsumed by the state and gradually collapsed under the weight of the mushrooming state bureaucracy, in the case of Philadelphia it never got chance to truly develop because it was hijacked by commercial interest from the outset.\textsuperscript{35}

**The Era of Representative Publicity and Propaganda Society**

Habermas’ definition of the public sphere presupposes an ideal speech situation in which the assembled private persons share information which is true to the best of their knowledge, and ensuingly form a collective opinion based on the rational processing of the ideas exchanged. Any persuasive technique has to be excluded from this process. While propaganda was widely

\textsuperscript{34} Enzensberger’s series of critical media essays was published in English as Hans Magnus Enzensberger, *The Consciousness Industry: On Literature, Politics and the Media* (New York, 1974). The notion of the implosion of the material base and cultural superstructure is commonly attributed to Horkheimer and Adorno. See Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments*, (Stanford, CA, 2002).

practiced in Venice at the level of the state, its aristocratic elites, aware of the power exercised by legendary orators of antiquity (the demagogues), systematically prevented any individuals from rising above their ranks simply because they possessed the gift of eloquence. This attitude led to such strict measures as the attempted ban on the handshake in the Great Council. James Harrington, researching the topic for his utopian *The Commonwealth Oceania* (1656), was in awe observing the proverbial quietness with which the elections were exercised in the Venetian Great Council. A similar experience was later reflected in Rousseau’s idea of a democracy without deliberation, which may have been formed during the author’s personal sojourn in Venice as the secretary of the French ambassador. Rousseau believed that the best way for the public to form its opinion - and consequently for its *general will* to emerge, which will always be ‘good’ - was through the “deliberations of a people properly informed, and provided its members do not have any communication among themselves.” The goal was obviously to supply each citizen with the greatest amount of facts untainted by personal opinion or outright propaganda. Translated in the terms of current language, this would correspond to the modern fetish of objective media reporting, with the media completely devoid not only of the editorial page but also of all advertising, carrying only bare-bone information in the form of ‘objective’ news dispatches. Venetian elites attempted to create just such an ideal distribution system with the aim to supply the ‘proper information’ to each class based on its social status and corresponding duties and privileges. But what Rousseau overlooked in praising this arrangement was the fact that there was still the problem of the *gatekeeper* and the *agenda setter*. In the case of the Republic of Venice, it was the Senate steering committee which decided who should get the access to which information and in what order. In the case of today’s media, it is the editorial

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staff and the publisher who, intervening in different capacities at different levels, influence the final coverage. In both situations, such steering committees and editorial boards are composed of real people who could not escape either their personal biases or the overarching hegemonic systems of social values which in the end shape the coverage.38

As Thomas Hamilton later observed in North America, even in the British system which already legitimized public opinion as an important instrument to shape the policies of the state, the ability to persuade was not the only skill which determined one’s ascendance in the political hierarchy. There was a complex system of checks and balances which the ruling aristocratic elites in Britain had at their disposal to protect their collective interest and to prevent an undesired ‘demagogue’ to usurp the power. But under the conditions of U.S. democratic-republicanism, the oral eloquence and newspapers suddenly became the single most important lever of political advancement, argued Hamilton.39 And U.S. politicians, increasingly aware of the importance of their public appearance, started to pay more attention to the media coverage of their actions. The true purpose of their lengthy speeches - full of lofty rhetorical expressions but often lacking any substantive value - was to be reported in the newspapers which were read by their constituencies. Such practices were certainly used to some extent in the past, but with the advent of mass-democracy and party politics they gradually came to dominate political life. Thomas P. Cope observed that in early 19th century Philadelphia, politics became a mere theatre staged by political parties and private clubs representing financial interests. The whole business was managed secretly by the “directors of public will” and “the common herd” was completely

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39 Hamilton, Men and Manners in America (1830-1831), pp. 244-5.
ignorant of the matter.\textsuperscript{40} Habermas calls such orchestrated events and media stunts \textit{representative publicity} and compares them to the staged displays typical in the past for feudal lords. Consequently, Habermas claims, such a tendency led to the \textit{refeudalization} of the public sphere which was left at the mercy of public relations experts who manipulate the constituencies through staged news-events, press releases, media leaks, and opinion polls.\textsuperscript{41}

\textbf{The ‘Frightful Engine’ of the Profit-Driven Press System}

The Venetians followed the ancient Greek tradition of territorially compact city-states with political systems based on the intimate, face-to-face interaction of their citizens, and argued that the final collapse of the Roman Empire was brought on by its incessant territorial expansion.\textsuperscript{42} They saw the abandonment of these principles in the late 15\textsuperscript{th} century as the beginning of the demise of their republican society. With the advent of the American Revolution and the creation of the Union which from the very beginning nourished the ambition to further expand territorially, the U.S. founding fathers grappled with the idea of how to enable their new country to span the entire continent while maintaining a republican system similar to the one which they admired in ancient Greece.\textsuperscript{43} They saw the solution in the building of infrastructure, mainly canals, roads, and later railroads, as well as in improving the postal service and in the fostering of newspaper circulation. But the government born out of the libertarian spirit which rallied the colonists in their protest against the British system of taxation was limited ideologically and materially to getting actively engaged in such enterprises. Thomas Jefferson’s and Alexander Hamilton’s attempts to create a duopoly of strong party newspapers with circulation on a

\textsuperscript{40} A diary entry from Sept. 30, 1801. In Cope, Philadelphia Merchant: The Diary of Thomas P. Cope, 1800-1851, p. 89.
\textsuperscript{41} Cf. Habermas, The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere, pp. 137 and 200.
\textsuperscript{43} Indeed, the slogan “All-Mexico”, promoted by those who wanted to incorporate the entire territory of Central America and of the Caribbean islands into the United States, was very popular. For more on this topic see Amy S. Greenberg, \textit{Manifest Manhood and the Antebellum American Empire} (Cambridge, UK, 2005), p. 69.
national level ended up as a failure. Instead, the initiative to connect the country’s cities and wide open spaces was left to private enterprise which logically put first its own interest, not that of the public. As of the 1790s local tyrant-printers took advantage of the week central government and hijacked party politics for their own benefit, establishing the roots of what later became known as *media localism* and still constitutes one of the basic structural principles of the U.S. media system.\(^{44}\) Scottish journalist Thomas Hamilton called them the “political gladiators of the neighborhood.” They were “shrewd but uneducated men” who were “exceedingly indifferent to all matters which have no discernable relation to their own pockets and privileges.”\(^{45}\) Under their direction the emerging U.S. national media system became inherently fragmented and utterly commercialized. The principle of media localism, justified historically in the U.S. as an attempt to foster local news and interest in the audiences’ own communities, became a convenient façade to hide the commercial interests of the printers. In reality, what they were creating resembled imagined communities of passive consumers rather than engaged and educated citizens.\(^{46}\)

The early 19\(^{th}\) century media still depended on transportation systems, and consequently the fragmentation of the national media market, driven by tyrant-printers, was determined mainly by the constraints of geography. But as a structural principle which was later to shape the U.S. media system, it was already put firmly in place. With the 20\(^{th}\) century introduction of electronic communication and digitalization, the focus shifted towards more sophisticated demographic fragmentation, allowing for segmentation of the population based on its purchasing power, tastes, and spending patterns. Joseph Turow examined this trend in *Breaking up America: Advertising and the New Media World* (1997). The author compares the current, advertiser-
driven wave of demographic fragmentation of the national media markets to the creation of *image tribes* and *electronic gated communities*, which ties the problem of the fractured and commodified mediated public sphere to the parallel urban reality experienced by millions of Americans in their everyday physical world.\(^{47}\)

The writings of European visitors, mainly those of Alexis De Tocqueville, Thomas Hamilton or Charles Dickens, offer a comparative perspective on the social role of the press in their respective countries and the way the U.S. public sphere was shaped by newspapers. My previous work allows me to claim that by the 1830s we can already clearly see the basic structural differences between traditional European (especially Continental) and U.S. media systems being put in place as they were relatively recently identified mainly by Daniel Hallin and Paolo Mancini - with a more centralized, statist, and democratic corporatist model on the European side and a commercial model following the logic of localism on the U.S. side.\(^{48}\) Such basic structural traits survived several waves of global standardization of tastes, genres and technologies. In 1783 Johann Schoepf made note of the dressed model dolls which were brought every year to Americans to promote the latest metropolitan fashion styles from Paris and London, and in 1806 Thomas Cope was upset about seeing the devastating effects of cheap British gothic novels which were ‘poisoning’ the minds of his fellow Philadelphians.\(^{49}\) Obviously, the last century of this global cultural exchange was dominated by the U.S.-led ideology of economic liberalism, which especially in the Cold War period, had a vested interest in articulating press freedom solely with its political independence, while the enormous influence of the economic forces on

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media system were intentionally obfuscated in this process.\textsuperscript{50} It may sound like a large historical paradox which turns one of the main causes of the American Revolution directly on its head, but Thomas Hamilton in the 1830s praised the British government for staying actively involved in shaping media policies through a series of Stamp Acts. As Hamilton claimed, this involvement prevented the country’s newspapers from embracing the principles of pure commercialism early on. Charles Dickens during his 1842 visit of North America fully supported this observation, when he described the sensationalism-driven U.S. media as a “frightful engine”, with the profit driven penny press becoming “the standard literature” of nine-tenth of the American people, making them mentally inaccessible to any other form of information and knowledge.\textsuperscript{51} If the ruling elites of the Republic of Venice had to utilize a combination of welfare programs and ‘high art’ state propaganda to keep the masses from upsetting the existing status quo, the new model which took off in 18\textsuperscript{th} century United States press centres such as Philadelphia did this much more efficiently by subsuming the ideological propaganda with commercialism.\textsuperscript{52}

\textbf{II. The Primary Existential Contradiction and its Reflection in the Public Sphere}

While the analysis of primary structural contradiction mainly covered the problems related to the mediated public sphere, it is the primary existential contradiction which much better captures the issues pertaining to its physicality, illustrated in this study by the transformation of the urban space and the relationship between the city and its close and remote hinterlands - the center of power and its local or global periphery. As mentioned earlier, in many instances both contradictions are overlapping, even inseparably intertwined. The expansive territorial policies of


the state often take center stage in the public square and help to reveal to what extent its social praxis corresponds with its normative ideals. At the same time, the relationship between the center and the periphery becomes the basic mechanism through which the principal elements of Western democracy diffuse beyond the few nuclear urban centers of Medieval Europe. Yet even before I analyze the dialectic relationship between the city and its local and global periphery – the ‘proximate’ and the ‘remote’ - I would like to make a brief excursion into how the urban space itself was historically created and interpreted in the leading city-states, and how it reflected and reinforced their political culture.

**Urban Space as a Material Representation of Social Values**

In strong opposition to its countryside, the urban space is an artificially created environment which naturally reflects the values of a society that erected its walls and designed its streets. At the same time, any man-made urban environment has the power to reinforce the same values, inscribed into its walls and streets, and communicate them also to the generations of those who will populate the city in the future. Communications studies often overlook the fact that urbanism is one of the most important stabilizing social elements through which the entire social body is reproduced over time with minimal structural changes - which makes it the ultimate medium of transmission of cultural norms and social values. Robert Friedrichs captured this dialectic in a laconic claim that the “mentality which created the wall was in turn formed by it.”

One of the peculiar aspects of classical Greek society was that it never created a monolithic unitarian state. Instead, the Greeks preferred the confederations of city-states as the best way to protect themselves against the external enemy while preserving their nuclear democratic

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They paid surprisingly close attention to the ideal size of their polities, which is reflected in their literary heritage. If a city grew too populous, instead of expanding its territory, the community selected, often forcibly, a group of citizens and set them off to establish a new colony. Some of the motivations which led Greeks to do so were undoubtedly very prosaic, connected to building strategic outposts and new trade bases, but there was also the lofty goal of maintaining the proverbial face-to-face society which was considered the cornerstone of a well-administered democratic city with respect for order and law.

To reinforce the sense of orderliness, the Greek polis itself was a cosmologically organized space, designed architecturally and conceptually to reflect ancient traditions and beliefs. In Critias Plato claimed that at the beginning of time, the gods divided the universe and arranged the landscape of the earth. Most of the classical poleis reflected such divine order; indeed they were a direct image of the kosmos, a term which stood for space but was also the synonym of harmony. As a result, a polis was usually built around the agora and its urban space was delineated by the temples and buildings which hosted civic institutions. In Athens there were no particular quarters where the wealthy and influential lived. Their houses were interspersed throughout the city, and neither the riches nor social status of the owner were overtly emphasized in the architecture of their façades.

Interestingly, the etymology of the term polis derives from ‘the fortified place’, which may imply some important parallels between the historical development of ancient Greek cities and

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54 Cf. Hansen, Polis: An Introduction to the Ancient Greek City-State, p. 15.
55 For a comprehensive discussion about the ideal size of the polis see Hansen, Polis: An Introduction to the Ancient Greek City-State, pp. 107-109.
56 Plato, Laws, 5.738.d-e; and Aristotle, Politics, 2.1265a and 7.1326b.
medieval European urban communes. If we accept at least the basic tenets of Pirenne’s urban revival theory, the cities of Medieval Europe were erected chaotically by groups of wandering merchants who established their permanent dwellings in the vicinity of fortified feudal castles - *burgs*. As their communities grew in size and riches, they slowly incorporated the ancient feudal settlements into their own defending walls. The very necessity of building the ramparts and negotiating their collective rights with feudal lords was seen by Pirenne as a key moment that gave birth to elementary democratic structures and urban administrations which started to emerge mainly in Flanders, Baltic and Northern Italy in the course of the 11th century. The enclosed space reminded its inhabitants - especially at the time of war or the threat of infectious disease - how interdependent were their destinies, forcing cities to build common sanitary infrastructures, and in some cases even providing an early form of universal healthcare. The very image of a medieval city was associated with its defensive walls, and its residents identified with the particular Holy Patron to whom their church was dedicated. City walls with their protecting towers and monumental gates dramatically separated the inner urban world of personal freedom from the outer world dominated by the feudal rule.

It was the discovery of the ancient Greek philosophical heritage which gave this medieval urban movement new vigor and intellectual energy. The Italian Renaissance brought a new element into the medieval urban maze of narrow streets: the urban square, strongly reminiscent in its form and urban function of the ancient Greek *agora*. A pilgrim described Venice not as one city alone, but as numerous little urban neighborhoods organized around six dozen residential squares or *campos*. Each one of them lay at the heart of a neighborhood which corresponded territorially with the local parish, the basic unit of the organizational urban structure. Not unlike in the ancient Greek *polis*, the most valued attributes of such urban space was its stability and

58 Hansen, Polis: An Introduction to the Ancient Greek City-State, pp. 39-40.
permanence. And Venetians went to great pains to enforce it. As a result, today’s tourist can still get around Venice relying on Sabellico’s city guide composed in 1502!59

There were definitely some typical working-class neighborhoods in Renaissance Venice, but each campo also had its own little palace or upscale housing and the main urban artery, the Grand Canal with its splendid façades, interconnected five out of overall six principal urban quarters. Furthermore, dozens of campos - around which were clustered urban neighborhoods – imitated many aspects of centrally-located Piazza San Marco. Mumford argues that such spatial arrangements reproduced on a smaller scale all of the essential elements of the bigger, all-embracing city, maximizing the potential for association on every human level.60 Overall, this powerful symbolism mediated each single quarter of the city into one urban whole, and further emphasized the ideas of harmony and unity which were the core principles of Venetian social philosophy.

Venice’s defensive wall was its lagoon. Since earliest memory its frail ecosystem and the fear of losing this precious defensive barrier shaped many of the city’s social and legal institutions. Just as the Venetians jealously protected their lagoon, other Medieval and Renaissance cities systematically prevented their residents from building outside of the city walls. Strict regulation was driven mainly by the fact the any permanent structure erected on the outer side of the walls made the entire community vulnerable at a time of military attack. Yet such rules were habitually abandoned during longer periods of peace, reflecting the dilemma as to whether the ‘good life’ is in the country or in the city, which is as old as mankind. Early on Petrarch and later also Erasmus grappled with finding a balance between the two.61

Villani complained that in early 14th century Florence there was no citizen who wouldn’t have built a suburban villa, usually much nicer and costlier than his urban residence.\textsuperscript{62} This type of early pressure towards suburbanization was seen as undermining the cohesiveness of urban communities and in the case of Venice also as a way of introducing luxuries, which were alien to its classical republican spirit. In 1458 Benedetto Cotrugli pointed out the enormous sums of money the Renaissance city-states were forced to spend to defend such costly ‘suburban’ estates.\textsuperscript{63} Indeed, one of the main items in the Venetian state budget was the cost of mercenary armies which the city needed to defend its expanding territories on the mainland. But Cotrugli’s lament can be stretched to refer to the modern pressure on building waste and costly infrastructure connecting the city with its suburbs in order to ‘defend’ the way of life of its residents. Venetians learned this simple truth the hard way at Agnadello in 1509, when they lost a large part of their territorial possessions on the mainland in a matter of a few days. The modern Western city experiences this same situation in the form of decaying roads and bridges, and the overall cost of increasing commuter traffic including the hidden charges which its residents have to pay for the dependency on foreign oil.

French ambassador Venier in his 1533 final report to the Senate noted that one of the most important differences between Venice and Paris was that the French metropolis did not have urban squares. In Venier’s eyes this fact was so significant that he listed it in the opening passages of his voluminous report, as if it were one of the main entry points which could help Venetians understand the French mentality.\textsuperscript{64} Indeed, the city on the Seine built its first squares only after 1605 with the construction of the early Baroque structures of the Place Royale (today


\textsuperscript{63} Benedetto Cotrugli Raguseo, \textit{Il libro dell'arte della mercatura}, p. 161.

Place des Vosges) and Place Dauphine. But they were different kinds of residential squares than the ones seen previously in Venice. In a sense, they were the earliet predecessors of modern gated communities offering upscale housing, because practically every other public function was excluded from their landscape. Yet the two Parisian squares were rather an exception and as such did not change the overall medieval urban structure of the city. Instead, it was London where residential squares really took off and during Defoe’s lifetime (c. 1649-1731) became a fashionable answer to the concentration of the population in the English metropolis, reflecting an unprecedented influx of nobility and _nouveau riches_ from among the gentry into the city. English landed aristocracy was compelled to settle in London due to the increasing role of Parliament and the representative government as of the late 17th century. With the introduction of the stock market, Defoe observed that many aristocrats as well as the former London commodity traders now “alienated” their physical property by investing into stocks, and had to be daily present in London in order to react quickly to the fluctuations of the market. By switching from the trading of actual commodities to the stock market, the merchants did not have a need for their spouses and children – who previously helped run the family business – to live with them in the cramped city proper anymore. Instead, they moved their families to luxurious suburban developments. Those three parallel trends - the democratization of the government, the growing prominence of the stock market, and the changes in the lives of merchant families - reinforced each other, and together put enormous pressure on suburban housing development. The new traders in stock still kept one house in the city, in order to be close to the Exchange and their own stock-brokers, but also purchased one in the countryside where they kept their families in a much

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healthier and safer environment. In the 1720s, Defoe observed that entire new cities grew overnight not only in the immediate surroundings of London, but he also pointed out that the developers were changing the adjacent villages and displacing their original population, draining swamps, cutting down forests and exerting pressure for the building of new roads to accommodate the increasing commuter traffic. The organically-formed crooked streets of the small town within a ten mile distance from London were being replaced by the regular grid and perpendicular logic typical of ‘modern’ urban planning.

London was the first European metropolis which experienced the suburban boom. While the 1860s reconstruction of Paris guided by Baron Haussmann or the ensuing rebuilding of Vienna were both executed under the auspices of the state - led by the desire to turn the convoluted medieval urban center into a new residential space which would accommodate the tastes and growing demands of the bourgeois upper classes - the urban changes in London were driven mainly by the financial interests of private developers and speculators.68 One of the early promoters of liberal trade, Nicholas Barbon, argued that London housing should indeed be considered a mere commodity like anything else, and that the market would set the best policies for new urban developments.69 Consequently, the engagement of the state on one side and its absolute absence on the other were the main reasons why Paris and Vienna exploded inwards, creating the most prestigious real estate in the city center, while London’s urban boom was driven mainly outwards, toward the suburbs.

The suburban trend which began brewing in London reached its full maturity in the conditions of the New World. When founding Philadelphia in 1682, William Penn undoubtedly had in mind all the ills and misfortunes of the urban life in inner London. Thus, his ‘new

69 Barbon, The Apology of the Builder: Or a Discourse Shewing the Cause and Effects of the Increase of Building.
London’ had to be built of brick and had wide streets to avoid fires and contagious diseases which almost destroyed the ‘old London’ in the 1660s. All this was set on a perpendicular urban grid, which reflected the dominant spirit of the rational Cartesian logic at the time. Reps’ observation of the similarities between Penn’s plan for Philadelphia and Robert Hooke’s proposal for the rebuilding the City of London after the Great Fire in 1666 only further enhances this claim. Yet Philadelphia never became Penn’s green country town with wide lots, single houses and lot of greenery. The logic of the market soon overruled the original intent of the founder and squeezed the entire urban population into 5-6 blocks of parallel streets on the banks of the Delaware. But the grid survived, imprinted into the urban layout as well as into the minds of those who lived in the city. Many European visitors objected to Philadelphia on account of its uniformity, but the American ‘puritan mind’ fully resonated with its values. The wife of the first American Universalist preacher quite symptomatically confessed that every faculty of her soul was delighted to do homage to the charms of regularity. She as well as many others believed that the environment which basically resembled an enormous urban panopticon “may shape and discipline” the lives of those who reside in such logically organized space.70

The urban grid was not only congenial to the rational protestant mentality which thrived on order and regularity, but it also possessed qualities which were essentially republican in their nature. While the Venetian urban structure was based on a hierarchically organized system of public squares which corresponded with the dominant spirit of aristocratic republicanism, Penn’s Philadelphia was pregnant with the ideas of republicanism infused with democratic thinking. Its system of perpendicular streets bearing abstract names was filled with lookalike simple houses, devoid of any extravagance or natural center of gravity in the form of a representative public square or a palace where the power symbolically resided. All this resulted in an urban

70 Murray, From Gloucester to Philadelphia in 1790, p. 107.
environment in which “street answers street, each alley has a brother, and half the city just reflects the other,” claimed Thomas Hamilton. For him, Philadelphia was an icon of republican virtues “personified in brick and mortar.” Indeed, it seemed that its founders were able to devise an ideal urban structure which gave a definite answer to all the social ills of the Old World, and as such, the urban grid was replicated throughout the United States, becoming the single most distinctive feature of American cities. Adopting the grid, the new nation was also adopting many of the values which were attached to it in the form of Franklin’s earthy wisdom.

The austere Quaker mentality, which permeated the life in Philadelphia to the marrow of its bones, associated urban life almost exclusively with work. On the weekends, all leisure was strictly suppressed and literally driven out of town. Suburban social clubs, spas and amusement parks were places where Philadelphians started looking for an escape from the Quaker-dominated city. By the end of the 18th century, the city’s upper and middle classes began purchasing second houses in the suburbs where they “happily blended” the advantages of the life in the city and the country. The traditional U.S. urban historiography locates the process of urban sprawl in the mid-19th century and ties it mainly to the arrival of the streetcar. I argue that the Philadelphians were spreading into suburbs almost century earlier, anxiously leaving behind them the city which was, in the near future, destined to became what the frugal Quaker mentality always wanted it to be: a mere business district. Kenneth Jackson and Norman Johnson claim that up until the arrival of the streetcar, Philadelphia boasted a compact urban community with the more expensive real estate in city-center. They support this claim by tracing the official

71 Hamilton, Men and Manners in America (1830-1831), pp. 180 and 183-84.
73 Murray, From Gloucester to Philadelphia in 1790, pp. 192 and 196.
residences of the city’s merchants, artisans and members of different parishes. But - similarly to
the situation captured by Defoe in 1720s London - what they plotted on the map of Philadelphia
may have been solely the primary residences of city’s merchants and artisans, which were
undoubtedly still downtown, while their families gradually spent an increasing amount of time in
weekend houses in the suburbs around the Schuylkill, in the Northern Liberties and in the
direction of Germantown. Importantly, Philadelphia was the first major modern urban settlement
in the West which was never constrained territorially by any form of defending walls. Unlike
typical Old World cities, it did not worship any common patron saint and similarly lacked an
annual cycle of colorful religious festivities which would have reinforced the common identity of
its residents. In Venice, the state simply subordinated the church, and used it to support its own
policies. The parish is still recognized as a basic organizational unit in the city’s religious as well
as administrative structure. In Philadelphia, the monthly, quarterly or yearly Quaker meetings
resembled sober gatherings of businessmen more than lively religious celebrations. City’s
religious urban landscape was fragmented by the presence of two dozen cults which often
competed and even openly detested one another.75 As such, the city on the Delaware was prone
to spreading into its suburbs almost from the time of its founding. It was only a matter of time
when new transportation technologies would tap into this latent desire, enabling it to happen.

It should be also remembered that the original settlers of Philadelphia purchased land from
Penn for speculation and it was sold over the distance of 3,500 miles in his London offices. In
this aspect, the colonization of the Americas was accompanied by some of the greatest
speculative private land transfers in the West. The confluence of such processes of abstraction
and commodification resulted in what Lefebvre later labeled as the abstraction of space, on a

75 Sándor Bölöni Farkas, Journey in North America, 1831, p. 212.
scale unprecedented in the earlier history. While Venetian urban space was permanent in time and cosmologically organized, reflecting the spirit of the ancient Greek quest for harmony and unity, in Philadelphia the space was de-contextualized, normalized into square lots and measured mainly through the prism of financial gain. This tendency was pointed out in the 1740s by Swedish-Finnish botanist Peter Kalm who noted that the settlers did not have any special attachment either to their native house, or to the church where they were baptized.

As the medieval German saying goes, in the feudal world the urban air had liberating power. Any serf who spent year and a day living within the city walls automatically gained the privilege of personal freedom. This idea is still deeply rooted in the European mindset and may well explain why Europeans traditionally have a much more positive attitude towards their cities than their North American cousins. Judith Sergent Murray captured the latent North American distrust towards the crowded and promiscuous metropolis in her almost Freudian account of the flight - via a subterranean passage - into the safety of the open spaces of tranquil suburbia. Morton and Lucia Write point out that despite the abhorrent social conditions experienced at any point in history by the urban poor in Europe, there were generations of writers like Victor Hugo, Honoré de Balzac, Charles Dickens, James Joyce or Émile Zola whose work reflected deep emotional affection for the metropolis. At the same time, the American intellectuals consistently expressed their deep antipathy and innate distrust towards the city which was clearly reflected in their personal writings as well as in their published literary works.

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76 Lefebvre, The Production of Space, p. 53.
77 Henri Lefebvre, The Production of Space. Translated by D. Nicholson-Smith (Malden, MA, 1991), pp. 49 and 120.
78 Murray, From Gloucester to Philadelphia in 1790, pp. 175-78.
Dialectic Tension between the Center and its Local and Global Periphery

It was Karl Marx who observed in *Grundrisse* that capital has a natural tendency which drives it beyond every spatial barrier. “Thus the creation of the physical conditions of exchange - of the means of communication and transport - the annihilation of space by time - becomes an extraordinary necessity for it.”\(^{80}\) The process which Henri Lefebvre calls *spatialization*, was from the very beginning closely intertwined with the development of the early cities.\(^{81}\) In his medieval revival thesis, Pirenne claims that the whole urban movement in Medieval Europe was triggered by merchants engaged in long distance trade. Consequently, the conditions of such an exchange reveal a lot about the inner workings of urban communities because, despite some tendencies to see the cities as ‘foreign elements’ or ‘islands of freedom’ in the medieval feudal universe, they certainly did not exist in complete isolation from the outer world.\(^{82}\) Indeed, Hohenberg and Lees argue that it is not possible to study and analyze urban histories separately from the larger context of the contemporary economic, social and political systems which surrounded them.\(^{83}\)

I looked at the medieval cities from this perspective and realized that at the time when they finally established their political sovereignty and became legally independent from the will of the feudal lords, there were two main spatial arrangements on which their physical survival and economic prosperity depended. On one hand, it was their ability to maintain long distance trade in luxuries, and on the other, their relationship with their immediate feudal hinterland. Both had a direct impact on the development of the public sphere: they influenced the way it worked in the

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\(^{81}\) For more on the concept of *spatialization* see Mosco, *The Political Economy of Communication*, pp. 173-211.

\(^{82}\) As an example of this trend see Karl Polanyi, *The Great Transformation* (New York; Toronto, 1944), p. 63.

‘domestic’ conditions of core communities, but at the same time also enabled the further spread of the ideas of representative government ‘abroad’.

The Impact of the Relationship with the ‘Proximate’

As was already said earlier, medieval cities were not isolated islands in the ocean of the feudal world. While their own residents focused mainly on long-distance trade and crafts, their very physical survival still depended on the supply of cheap food and labor from their immediate hinterlands. Chronicler Marin Sanudo quite symptomatically boasted about Venice as a place where nothing grows, yet everything is to be found in abundance in its markets for ridiculously low prices. The power relationship in a medieval city always favored its merchant elite, persisting on the principle that the luxury items of long distance trade should remain open to speculation and market fluctuations, while the prices of local products and labor should be strictly regulated. The idea of such a spatial dichotomy is not unlike the image of modern urban landscapes depicted by Mike Davis in City of Quartz (1990) or Stephen Graham and Simon Marvin in Splintering Urbanism (2001), which contain on one hand layers of premium spaces interconnected through electronic networks with other remote worlds, but at the same time have also neighboring spaces of intensifying marginality, which serve solely as reservoirs of cheap manual labor.

The Impact of the Relationship with the ‘Remote’

By its very definition, the Western urban society was born out of long-distance trade and as such was always global and globalizing. There was barely a period in its history when the forces

of globalization were not at work. Long distance trade with easily transportable luxuries such as spices and silk also facilitated cultural exchange and geographic exploration, but at the same time became the driving force of European exploitation and later also of the colonial conquest. Robert Lopez claims that the early Italian merchants ran their city-states as chambers of commerce, encouraging trade all over the continent by “transforming yesterday’s luxury into today’s treat and tomorrow’s necessity.”

Renaissance Florence carried its trade and banking systems “into every accessible province and had drawn profits from the four quarters of the known world,” constantly searching for “better sources of raw materials, for more profitable, more extensive markets to which the products [of its own industries] may be distributed.”

Venice, Genoa, and Pisa profited from providing naval support to Frankish armies during the Crusades. This gave them the opportunity to build a mercantile empire which spanned through the entire Mediterranean and went deep into the Black Sea. Military expenditures supported the improvement of transportation technologies which were crucial to this effort. In his 1458 merchant manual, the Ragusan consul in Naples, Benedetto Cotrugli, emphasized the flexibility traders suddenly enjoyed in choosing their city of residence thanks to the mobility that they acquired on the seas. It not only gave them an opportunity to select a healthy climate and a peaceful place to live, the mobility offered merchants also the means to escape the constraints of territorial sovereignty and to select places favorable to mercantile exchange - those with low taxes and favorable government policies, not unlike the search for today’s fiscal paradises and outsourcing strategies.

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87 Lopez, “The Crossroads Within the Wall,” p. 36.
88 Evans in the foreword to Balducci Pegolotti, _La pratica della mercatura_, pp. ix and xv.
89 Pirenne, Economic and Social History of Medieval Europe, pp. 31-32.
between the double-edged interests of their citizens-merchants. In many aspects the debate about their status resembled the discussion typical for the current public sphere about the role of abstract and anonymous financial capital which moves around the globe without any sentimental attachment, driven solely by the search of profit. Paolo Sarpi demanded that all persons engaged in international trade be completely excluded from the public sphere, arguing that a merchant “is of a necessity in some measure a foreigner” whose interest lies abroad, while a person engaged in governing the commonwealth “ought to have no interest or affection but at home.”

At the same time, foreign trade was seen also as an important means to maintaining internal social stability. Venice, echoing the ancient advice of Xenophon, built a state corporatist capitalism which was embodied in its fleet of merchant galleys. The greatest beneficiaries of such a fleet were undoubtedly the Venetian mercantile elites, but more importantly, it also provided employment for thousands of men from the working quarters as well as for the impoverished nobles. During hard times, the state did not hesitate to impose extra taxes on the more lucrative expeditions to support the ones which were less profitable, in order to keep their population employed. “Employ as many of the people as may be in the service of the publick, that so drawing their livelihood from the government, they may have affection for it,” argued Sarpi, because hunger and want often push people to stand up against their governments.

This logic was later emulated by the French and British promoters of colonial policies as a way to assure social stability. In 1711, Joseph Addison confessed in his coffeehouse newsletter The Spectator that trade, even without physically enlarging the territories of British Islands, gave

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91 Sarpi, Advice Given to the Republick of Venice, pp. 15 and 24-26. For the Theban policies see Aristotle, Politics, 3.1278a.
93 Sarpi, Advice Given to the Republick of Venice, pp. 22-23.
the country an additional empire.\textsuperscript{94} Imperial policies were embraced by European politicians of both stripes - by conservative promoters of free trade and capitalism, as well as by the early socialists - who, echoing the Venetian experience, saw in them the possibility to better the life of their own working classes without understanding the price to be paid by other oppressed nations.\textsuperscript{95} John A. Hobson in this context pointed out the “economic parasitism, by which the ruling state has used its provinces, colonies, and dependencies in order to enrich its ruling class and to bribe its lower classes into acquiescence.”\textsuperscript{96} For Cecil Rhodes, the ardent 19\textsuperscript{th} century promoter of the British colonial scheme, colonialism was a matter of avoiding civil war in Britain.\textsuperscript{97} In the early republican United States, such a tendency was expressed in the public square through ubiquitous discussions related to the colonization of the Western frontier, as well as through the attempts to ‘export’ democracy in the form of filibuster expeditions whose target was mainly Central America and the islands of the Caribbean region.\textsuperscript{98}

The interests which were behind long-distance trade, and not the lofty goals of freedom and democracy, were also the driving forces which ushered in the development of the early European newspapers. Defoe’s merchant, sitting at home in his counting-house in 1702, proudly claimed that he was “able to converse with all parts of the known world.”\textsuperscript{99} But it was already the Venetians who believed that in order to defend the interest of their Republic, they had “to search out the secrets of the universe, sending one’s mind in an instant to every single part of the

\textsuperscript{94} The Spectator, May 19, 1711. As reprinted in Joseph Addison and Richard Steele, The Spectator: A New Edition Reproducing the Original Text Both as First Issued and as Corrected by its Authors, 1711-1712.

\textsuperscript{95} A complex analysis of this issue is summarized in Lenin's Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism (1917/1969). On the early development of socialist position see also the 1830s philosophy of Saint-Simonian movement in France. In Chevalier, Society, Manners, and Politics in the United States: Letters on North America (1834-35), pp. 144 and 313.


\textsuperscript{97} As quoted in Lenin’s Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism (1917/1969). The German translation quoted in Lenin’s text used was originally published in Die Neue Zeit, XVI, I, 1898, p. 304.

\textsuperscript{98} Slotkin, The Fatal Environment: The Myth of the Frontier in the Age of Industrialization, 1800-1890; and Greenberg, Manifest Manhood and the Antebellum American Empire.

\textsuperscript{99} Defoe, Essays Upon Several Projects: or, Effectual Ways for Advancing the Interest of the Nation, pp. 7-8.
To do so, merchants developed their own information networks which supplied them with hand written dispatches which were, in the early 1500s, quietly transformed into the earliest known periodically published commercial newsletters, known in Venice as the *avvisi*. On top of this development, in the second half of the 15th century, the Venetian state-corporatist system developed a parallel system of ‘informers’ - the earliest permanent corps of ambassadors to foreign governments. Under ideal circumstances their reports served to inform the decision-making process of the citizens assembled in the governing bodies, thus benefitting the public interest.

Venetian *avvisi* are commonly portrayed as the predecessors of European newspapers, but I would suggest that we also recognize in them the prototype of modern wire services whose publishers were collecting the news from all corners of the known world. After editing and transforming these news stories into a standardized form, they sold them to individual subscribers. Their customers were relatively few in number, mostly ambassadors and rich merchants who could have afforded costly subscriptions. It was through them that such hand-written stories spread all over the continent, and in the early 1600s gradually found their way into nascent printed newspapers. Joseph Browne’s character, journalist Harlem, quite symptomatically boasted that in 18th century London, the news was “a great advantage to trade; an improvement of means knowledge; a diversion to the publick; and the most vendible commodity in the whole Kingdom.”

In light of this development, I would again emphasize that the Western periodical press - traditionally celebrated as the guardian of basic civic freedoms and democracy - was born out of

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the need to satisfy mainly the merchant’s hunger for information. Thus it wasn’t primarily driven by the need of civic communities to enhance the democratic potential of their local public squares. If the newspapers historically did fulfill this role, this was one of the unintended consequences of their further development. Instead, I see the dispatches supplied by the Venetian diplomats, which were read out loud each Sunday at the meetings of some two thousand noble citizens assembled in the Great Council, as the predecessors of the state/publicly run media systems in modern Europe. They were financed from the state budget and their primary mission was to give to all full-fledged citizens-electors enough substantial information which would enable them to make informed decisions when deliberating the matters of their Republic.

Another question we may ask, analyzing the impact of long-distance trade on the public sphere, is that when - if at all - would the newspapers have been developed without the long-distance interest of merchants? Up until the mid-18th century, printers in colonial Philadelphia did not even attempt to print local news and gossip simply because they could not compete with ‘word of mouth’ which spread stories faster than they were able to set them in print. It was the interest in the news from remote places which originally drove their publications. Only after the American Revolution, when the urban reality of Philadelphia became more complex, Elizabeth Drinker noted that she became more dependent on newspapers to learn also about local events.  

At the same time, foreign news and gossip often served more as means of distraction than a way to create an informed citizenship. Swiss visitor Cesar De Saussure observed with amazement in the 1730s that poor shoeblacks read and discussed newspapers in London coffeehouses and took the affairs of foreign kings and their countries more to heart than they did their own affairs. In this scene, we can clearly see Marx’s mystical veil at work, blurring the consciousness of the

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masses. By having the opportunity to learn about the remote, the strange and the bizarre, the overall horizon of their knowledge was expanded, and the working class may have even had a better understanding of the complex world in which they lived - but there was a dialectic price to be paid for such opportunities - a loss of focus on their own social reality.

**Spatial Relations and the Spread of the Democratic Ideal**

The analysis of the dialectic nature of the relationship between the free city and its ‘countryside’ - between the urban center as and its local and global periphery - reveals also the mechanism through which the ideas of democracy spread from nuclear Renaissance city-states through the rest of the Western world and beyond. Henri Pirenne observed that from the very beginning, medieval merchants cared much more about maximizing their profits than about the democratic nature of governments in the urban communities in which they lived. Some married daughters of impoverished nobles in order to inherit their aristocratic titles which granted tax exemptions; others willingly got themselves classified as the serfs of a monastery, an act which again secured them lower taxation. But the commercial success of the early city-states taught the merchant very soon that it was the personal freedom which maximized human productivity and created the best conditions for his trade. Thus, by the end of the medieval period, we can see the emergence of the earliest forms of the articulations of personal freedom and freedom of the marketplace, capitalism and democracy. I already pointed out this relationship earlier when discussing the shift from hereditary citizenship in aristocratic Venice, relying on the passage of civic virtues from father to son, to the one based on personal economic success which we see emerging in London.

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104 Pirenne, Medieval Cities: Their Origins and the Revival of Trade, p. 123.
Giddens sees the early city-states as *power containers* with enormous concentration of assets, especially administrative resources. But as they grew in might and size through the Renaissance, they were gradually expanding not only their defending walls but also their zones of interests.\(^{105}\) Rosa Luxemburg brought her own original contribution to the debate about the dynamics between the center of power and its periphery claiming that the capitalist society is historically the first mode of economy which is unable to exist by itself. It needs other ‘primitive’ economic societies as a medium and soil first to forcibly appropriate their wealth and later to turn them into its markets in order to realize the surplus value.\(^{106}\) But this process is neither linear nor unidirectional. Its dialectic nature led Pirenne to claim that the mercantile capitalism “is by nature so all-pervasive that it necessarily imposes itself on the very people whom it exploits.”\(^{107}\) Pirenne’s historical research on the medieval trade illustrates this dynamic by pointing out that the original ideas of the free market, and with them also those of representative government and democracy, progressively spread from the initial few small urban dots on the map of medieval Northern Italy, Flanders and the Baltic, permeating every piece of land which was ever touched by the foot of their merchants. At the beginning, their influence reached mainly into their own backyards, turning them into regional states which progressively grew into nation-states. The American Revolution gave birth to a nation-state with the aspiration to cover an entire continent. Nowadays, this trend is reflected in the emergence of the first multinational confederations and free trade unions such as the European Union or North America Free Trade Agreement.\(^{108}\)

Observing this gradual expansion, Luxemburg concluded that capitalism “strives to become universal, and, indeed, on account of this tendency, it must break down - because it is

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imminently incapable of becoming a universal form of production.”¹⁰⁹ The capitalist world-system came very close to such a global meltdown relatively recently, when the growing consumer societies of China and India pushed up the prices of prime materials and energy which seriously endangered the economic interests of the very countries which originally ‘infected’ them with the virus of the free market (and democracy). Yet, despite such doomsday scenarios, capitalism historically proves to be a very resilient and flexible system, able to use different strategies to adjust, and temporarily even retreat from its positions only to bounce back again even more invigorated. Its spatial interest is balanced between the ‘local’ and the ‘global’, understanding that it needs to maintain reserve armies of cheap labor. But those armies are also its potential consumers which cannot become too poor - so that they keep on consuming. The cyclical booms and busts of capitalism are the direct reaction of the eternal struggle between the private and common interests within the public square. The irrational behavior of the markets in Venice or the devastating South Sea Bubble crash clearly demonstrates the deep historical roots of this tendency as well as a human tendency not to learn the lessons from the past.

III. Technological Advancement and the Public Sphere

Brian Winston argues that to believe that it is technology which determines the fate of human society is to believe that it is the movement of the leaves which produces wind. Instead, the author argues that “in the dance of history society always leads technology.”¹¹⁰ As stated in the methodological introduction of this study, I reject the idea of technological determinism and ensuingly I conceptualize human history as being shaped by a series of long-term processes, rather than by abrupt revolutions. Those two statements imply that the final analysis is a priori

opposed to the notions of technological, information, or information technology revolutions as driving forces of social evolution from the perspective of communications science. Instead, the examination of the evolutionary processes which shaped the public sphere in different places and times in Western history offers countless empirical arguments which can further illustrate the fallacy of the technological-determinist approach to social history.

First of all, my historical excursion clearly shows that what we label as information society and traditionally associate mainly with the rise of electronic communication and digitalization has its roots in antiquity, and is very closely tied to the development of state bureaucracy, long-distance trade and military history. Even limiting this discourse strictly to the past thousand years would yield enough arguments to illustrate the point that if there were any information revolution, it was a permanent process intrinsic to social history, rather than an abrupt change facilitated by the ‘invention’ of new technologies. As Pirenne points out, the 11th century European urban revival was led by merchants who used the skills they learned in drafting exchange contracts while putting in place the early urban bureaucratic machinery. Medieval Genoa had about 200 notaries who produced circa 10,000 contracts a year, each marked not only by date but also by hour. They were all carefully stored and about 20,000 of such contracts still survive, dating from 1150-1435, organized in the city’s archives. In the 1260s, a Florentine diplomat Brunetto Latini was inspired by the work of Isidore of Seville (560-636 CE) in composing his *Li Livres dou Trésor*, a sum of all general knowledge “extracted from all branches of philosophy in a brief summary.” At the same time, merchant manuals containing tables with

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111 Lopez, "The Crossroads Within the Wall "; and Quentin Van Doosselaere, Commercial Agreements and Social Dynamics in Medieval Genoa (Cambridge, UK, 2009).
exchange rates of various currencies and measurements used in all important Mediterranean ports became indispensable for anyone engaged in international trade.¹¹³

The idea of the first public Renaissance library dates back to Petrarch and it finally opened its doors in the 1440s in Florence.¹¹⁴ In 1500, an anonymous observer noted that Venetians employed regiments of state secretaries who registered everything “on parchment, well written and kept in such order that without difficulty one can find written down all that has happened in the past 400 or 500 years.”¹¹⁵ The city’s famous Arsenal was an early industrial complex which at its peak in the 16th century employed up to 2,200 masters and their countless apprentices. Due to constant attempts to improve its production and management, the division of labor, technical innovation and abstract theoretical scholarship had already earned full social recognition as important skills.¹¹⁶ In the early 1500s the Italian Tasso family was put in charge of creating the earliest public communication system in Europe on a continental scale. It was based on a sophisticated system of postal exchange between its capitals, partially re-creating the ancient Roman Imperial postal network. Behringer claims that behind Tassos’ enormous success was not some revolutionary technical innovation; the Renaissance post relied exclusively on an excellent organization of labor.¹¹⁷ Regular postal delivery consequently played an enormous role in the increase of letter exchange among intellectuals and artists. Its gradual boom in the first half of the 16th century resulted in the creation of a true Renaissance republic of letters. Postal stages

¹¹⁶ Davis, Shipbuilders of the Venetian Arsenal: Workers and Workplace in the Preindustrial City, pp. 118-49; and Bembo, Delle Letttere di M. Pietro Bembo, vol. 1, pp. 53B-54A.
also facilitated personal travel across the continent and in his bibliography, Benedetto Cellini mentioned that the offices of the postmasters functioned occasionally as a rent-a-horse service.  

I don’t want to overwhelm the reader with a tedious enumeration of arguments but from this brief account it is clear that some ideas associated with what became known as the information revolution, such as attempts to organize ‘all available knowledge’ into comprehensive summaries using different systems of classification; the need for permanent archiving of public and private data and the rise of archivist and librarian as a profession; creation of public libraries as a necessity for a civilized urban community; coordination of labor not only locally, but on a large international scale; international information exchange networks in the form of merchant newsletters, diplomatic and postal services - all this was already in place by the time of the Renaissance. Indeed, the Medieval and Renaissance ‘inventors’ of such novelties looked often for inspiration to antiquity, where lay the true roots of most of their improvements.

The parallel existence of Venetian book print and manuscript production can teach us another important lesson about the social determination of technological progress. During the incunabula period, Venice became one of the European capitals of print, yet it took more than two hundred years till it had its own printed newspaper. Indeed, the city was one of the last, if not the last important political or economic center to have its own paper in print! Infelise argues that this was partially due to censorship, but most importantly because the publishers of Venetian avvisi brought handwritten information to such a state of perfection that the printers were simply not able to compete with them. They created news-gathering and distribution networks conceptually very similar to modern wire services and electronic exchange networks. Their

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118 Cellini, Vita (electronic document - no pagination: the episode is related to Cellini’s stop in Siena).
119 Infelise, Prima dei giornali: Alle origini della pubblica informazione (secoli XVI e XVII), pp. 80-81 and 120.
120 Klarwill describes a similar ‘wire service’ operated by Jheremias Crasser and Jheremias Schiffe in late 16th century Augsburg. In Klarwill, ed., The Fugger News-Letters, p. x.e
end products were extremely flexible, able to offer personalized content to each particular customer. Furthermore, they already mastered and put in place some basic journalistic forms and styles which could be found practically in unchanged form some two-and-a-half centuries later in Franklin’s newspapers in Philadelphia. Many basic elements - such as the dateline, impersonal clear-cut language, straight-forward sentences and monotonous cadence - survived until today.

The introduction of the printed book itself was not immediately recognized by everyone as a sign of progress. In some conservative and wealthy circles in Venice, the print was considered kitsch, diminishing the overall value of knowledge by degrading its formal and esthetic presentation. Early printers had to work hard to prove to the reading public that their typesets were at least as good as the handwriting of a copyist. Print technology undoubtedly lowered the overall cost of a book, but its dramatic decrease depended also on the parallel mass production of cheap paper. Poor university students preferred to buy their books unbound, which again substantially cut costs, eventually making their own manuscript copies of the books which were already in print. Furthermore, communications scholars often overlook the fact that in a world in which literacy was still relatively low, the printing of images in the form of sophisticated engravings, social and political cartoons, was as important to the spread of knowledge and cultural values of the Renaissance as the printed word itself. Paradoxically, in few affluent traditionalist circles, the introduction of book print actually sparked the revival of manuscript - this was their form of resistance to such new forms of ‘cultural decadence’. In 1606, Pierre de L’Estoile, the Grand Chancellor of the French Royal Court, emphasized in his diary that among the dozen books he was taking to read on his vacation, there were two among his favorites which were still in manuscript - escrits à la main.121 Thus the history of communications in the terms of

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"longue durée" teaches us that the ‘old’ and the ‘new’ forms of technology can often coexist for a century or two before one of them definitely takes over and ‘displaces’ the other.

The city *per se* is in my study considered a form of socially constructed technology which has the power to enable or impede human communication. The Athenian *agora* or Venetian *campo* were the archetypes of public spaces which facilitated exchange at multiple levels between people of different walks of life. In the case of the London coffeehouse, the idea of urbanism as means of exchange is reinforced by the fact that people met there to socialize and to read newspapers. Some coffeehouses had a pulpit from which the news was read out loud. It is important that such information was ensuingly discussed among the participants, creating a synergy between the public square in the mediated form of print and that in the physical form of urban structure. Structurally, we may similarly examine the difference between the U.S. newspaper which is traditionally home-delivered through subscription and consequently read in the solitude of a suburban house, and the typical Italian or French urban newspaper which is still predominantly purchased in the morning at the news stand, to be read and discussed in a coffeehouse or other public space. In this case two societies use a set of the same technologies in order to meet two different sets of social needs, which in both cases clearly reflects the broader web of their basic structural tenets.

On one hand, technology enables the attainment of certain social goals, but at the same time has important obfuscatory effects. Those who admired the speed and beauty of Venetian ships did not have slightest clue in what conditions they were constructed and manned. The thick walls surrounding the Venetian Arsenal completely concealed from the rest of the world everything that was going on in its precincts. Senator Marin Sanudo admitted that he had minimal knowledge of what was going on there, despite the fact that the fame and richess of his own city
relied on the Venetian shipping industry. The early 19th century generation of Saint-Simonian proto-socialists similarly saw in the machine a “source of inexhaustible prosperity and well-being to mankind.”\(^\text{122}\) And Philadelphia upperclasses, admiring the beauty of the Fairmount waterworks or the speed and elegance of steamboats on the Delaware, were completely oblivious to the social conditions of those who enabled this progress by digging canals, mining coal and making iron. Judith Sergant Murray, admiring one of the first steamboats, quite symptomatically exclaimed that such a new mode of transportation “requires no hand to work it, except the man on the steerage.”\(^\text{123}\) Such naïveté may evoke a smile on the face of today’s reader. But the same reader may be similarly oblivious to the ecological consequences and social conditions of those who toil so that he or she may enjoy the freedom of modern electronic networks.

The acceleration of development of certain technologies and suspension of others is driven by social demand. Yet this does not mean that after its deployment, the use of a given technology could not lead to consequences which were not intended by its ‘inventor’. The emergence of early European printed newspapers is a clear point in case. It was driven by the interest of merchant groups, yet the periodical press later undoubtedly played a key role in the rise of modern mass democracies. Brissot de Warville captured another aspect of social determinism when he celebrated the U.S. post-Revolutionary stage coaches as the true vehicles of democracy, in which one can see a member of Congress sitting next to a poor journeyman while discussing the state of their country.\(^\text{124}\) Yet few years later, the same means of transportation were already divided into different classes, segmenting their passengers demographically based on their wealth and social status. This tendency is a clear demonstration of the fact that communication

\(^\text{123}\) Murray, From Gloucester to Philadelphia in 1790: Observations, Anecdotes, and Thoughts from the 18th Century Letters of Judith Sargent Murray, p. 203.
and transportation technology is value neutral. In the case mentioned above it is neither centripetal nor centrifugal, society making nor segment making by definition. It contains in itself both qualities in the form of latent potentials, and it is only up to society as to which of them will be emphasized in daily use. Similar to any literary text, each new technology may already contain a certain way of ‘preferred reading’ imbedded in it, i.e. the way a given society would tend to deploy it, echoing its own hegemonic structural tenets, but this is not something which is carved in stone. There is always space for oppositional interpretations of technologies and their ensuing use. In 1790s Philadelphia, Thomas Jefferson and Alexander Hamilton were trying to establish centrally produced national newspapers, yet they were not able to break through the dominant centrifugal tendencies in a society where the interest of localism and individualism had the last word, represented by local tyrant-printers. Similarly, while U.S. television networks used to bring society together during primetime up until the 1980s, the same medium is today seen as social divider, segmenting nuclear families and the entire nation into little image tribes and electronic gated communities.\(^{125}\)

If the public space in Venice is the epitome of hierarchy, permanence and stability in my study, Philadelphia is its polar opposite. Philadelphia and North America in general represents space where such values are an abomination. Its mindset is epitomized in an egalitarian urban grid, constant movement and perpetual change from the very moment of its founding. In the 18\(^{th}\) century, European visitors are amazed to see entire houses rolling through the city in the search of a more convenient location (Figure 5.13).\(^{126}\) In the port, whole modular homes are built and

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\(^{126}\) Schoepf, *Travels in the Confederation* (1783-1784), part 1, p. 72.
loaded onto boats to be shipped thousands miles away to the planters in Jamaica or Barbados.\textsuperscript{127} As if that is not enough, entire churches or established coffeehouses are torn down and rebuilt elsewhere. And amazed foreigners further notice that nobody is walking in Philadelphia, the locals go everywhere by horse or by carriage. The unprecedented social and spatial mobility prompted De Tocqueville to describe U.S. society as one which was in ‘perpetual fluidity’. Michel Chevalier laconically compared the American to the Tartar, arguing that while the French settlers cannot exist without hierarchical social structure and support of their neighbors, the Americans thrive in isolation. In his eyes, a typical American is encamped, not established, on the soil he treads upon, always ready to move on, embark on the first steamer to start a new life.\textsuperscript{128} How does this pertain to technology? If the technology is the product of a society, such bold underlying characteristics should be inevitably reflected in its design. There is more than verbal affinity between Castell’s ultimate \textit{space of flows} - the Internet - and De Tocqueville’s concept of \textit{perpetual fluidity}. The same structural characteristics observed by several European visitors in the streets of Philadelphia as of the mid-18\textsuperscript{th} century can be found in Paul Baran’s 1960s conceptual framework of the Internet, conceived as an open grid without an internal hierarchy, in which information was transferred in modular packets.\textsuperscript{129} The electronic network as a space of constant flows was clearly articulated in the American psyche two hundred years before it was enabled by the technology.\textsuperscript{130} What would have happened were the French, not the Americans, to attempt the design of their own electronic communication network? Well, they

\textsuperscript{129} Cf. Paul Baran, On Distributed Communication Networks: Introduction to Distributed Communications Networks, vol. 1 (Santa Monica, CA, 1964).
\textsuperscript{130} Gitlin makes similar point in his "Foreword" to Riesman’s \textit{The Lonely Crowd} claiming that Alexis de Tocqueville in the 1830s already instinctively understood the fact that “Americans were ready for the [commercially driven] mass media even before the mass media were ready for them.” In David Riesman, \textit{The Lonely Crowd: A Study of the Changing American Character - With Nathan Glazer and Reuel Denney} (New Haven, CT, 2001), p. lxiii.
actually did. It was launched in the 1970s under the name Minitel, and it was a hierarchically organized structure developed under government supervision, enabling access to information through a centralized share system.\textsuperscript{131} In the 1990s, \textit{Business Week} explained the French reluctance to embrace the world-wide web to its U.S. readership by quoting Senator René Trégouët’s complaint that “the Internet runs counter to a hierarchical society.”\textsuperscript{132}

Ultimately, in the essay dedicated to Philadelphia, I similarly argue that many of the modern marketing concepts such as cross promotion and synergy were already used by the city’s printers long before the terms themselves were coined and analytically defined by media scholars and marketing experts in the late 20\textsuperscript{th} century. This corresponds with Zaret’s claim that social categories such as public opinion was a factor in the political life of society long before it was ‘invented’ by social philosophers in the Enlightenment. Similarly, the telegraph as an idea of long distance communication eased from the constraints of transportation was practiced by ‘primitive’ tribal societies long before it was technically mastered by the French military in its mechanical form in the 1790s. At this time the new fashionable term ‘Telegraph’ suddenly started replacing the old term ‘Post’ in the nameplates of American newspapers, despite the fact that their supply of news and ensuing distribution still depended on the land-bound postal service. When Samuel Morse successfully tested his electric miracle fifty years later, he was only fulfilling the dreams of two generations of Americans who already grew up with the word ‘telegraph’ being part of their vocabulary.


Chapter 6 /  CONCLUSIONS

When I started the long journey which took me through the centuries to the roots of ancient republican ideals, my goal was to shed more light on the complex historical development of what became recognized and celebrated as the icon of Western-style democracy - the agora, understood as an idealized public space where constituencies have the opportunity to articulate their positions towards the basic social problems and respective policies of their representative governments. I traced the historically evolving interpretations of the agora as an ideal, a symbol of social utopia, and in each instance confronted it with the corresponding social reality constituted through the experience of everyday life. In doing so, I was driven by the need to answer many of my own personal questions which reflect the feelings of increasing frustration with the status of our current public sphere and of our democracy. At the end of this historical excursion I can say that while I did not find a magic formula nor a set of suggestions which would allow for improving the existing status quo, the analysis of the historical metamorphoses of the agora enabled me to gain a complex, historically-rooted understanding of the dynamics which are epitomized in the ubiquitous tension between the normative utopias of our own times and the existential experience of our everyday lives.

The title of my thesis, Historical Metamorphosis of the Athenian Agora, reflects the fact that my excursion starts in Athens, and each subsequent leading city in which I decided to stop on the exploratory journey - whether it is Venice, London, or Philadelphia - identifies itself and is importantly recognized also by others as a ‘new Athens’. For a limited period of time it becomes the next hegemonic torchbearer, significantly shaping and advancing the classical Greek democratic ideal. In my narrative, the original Greek term agora continues to represent the
normative vision of the public sphere, yet it is clear that each generation of torchbearers comes up with its own definition of the term. In doing so, it inevitably enriches the model which it inherited from the previous generation with its own social and cultural experience. The new ideal also reflects its own geographic location and other material conditions. As a result, the social utopia changes as it travels through time and space. In each leading city, I examined it at the moment when it hits the ground and is confronted with social reality. Looking at it over a protracted period of time through the experience of everyday life, through the eyes (but mainly the writings) of ordinary people, I had an excellent vantage point to observe the structural properties of a given social system and to capture their internal dynamics as well.

In the final analysis, I dissected the historical-empirical experience, rearranging it into a cohesive analytical narrative which follows two principal contradictions inherent in a society based on the capitalist mode of production as identified by Giddens: the structural contradiction which captures the tension between the private and the public interest within the public sphere; and the existential contradiction between the leading city and its local, but also global periphery, which exposes important spatial relations that shape the urban public sphere and reveals the exchange mechanism through which the ideas of democracy are diffused ‘abroad’. As a closer examination clearly shows, both contradictions are twins connected at the hip and can be used interchangeably as two alternative entry points to the study of the public sphere.

In discussing the various historical metamorphoses of the Athenian agora, I focused on evolving transportation and communication technologies and their role in shaping the public sphere in a given society. The conceptualization of society as a recursive mechanism which reproduces itself over time with very limited structural changes, and the view of technology as a social product, led me to refuse any notion of technological determinism. Technology in my
understanding can enable society to meet certain needs; its practical deployment can lead to the consequences which were unintended by its ‘inventors’, yet it is always society which, in the end, holds the upper hand over how a technology will be used in the long run. What became one of the main points of my study is the understanding that while being central to any discussion involving public sphere, mass media and mediating technologies are not able to capture the entire complexity of the problem of social communication. Before the advent of electronic communication, it was the transportation technologies which played a crucial role in the diffusion of information. Even more importantly, the visual arts and overall urban structure constitute the container for any social action within the public sphere, and their presence must be taken into account by communication science. We need to gain a deeper understanding of the synergies between the man-made physical world and the mediated world of communication technologies in order to fully capture the processes which articulate the overall quality of the public sphere. Consequently, I treat architecture and urbanism as the ultimate communication technology: they are social products which have the power to reinforce elementary values and esthetic ideals not only within those who populate the urban space now, but their durability gives them enormous potential to communicate the same messages also to future generations.

In the overall design of this study, the chapters dedicated to Venice and Philadelphia play a pivotal role, each representing two distinct prototypes of republican societies and consequently also two prototypical public spheres. The first model, revealed in the social reality of Renaissance Venice, represents the dynamics of a society based on the classical aristocratic republican ideal. It is shaped by the Greek philosophical heritage with its propensity to value unity, permanence, and harmony. Its principles are reflected in a public sphere which is hierarchically organized, stable in time and space, presupposes a high level of involvement of the
state, and at least at the normative level repels the idea of commercialization. It is elitist in the sense that it refuses to accept public opinion as the best indicator of the long-term interest of society. Instead, it relies on the counsel of a group of ‘wise men’. It fosters paternalistic policies and statism, which means that by default it always expects the intervention of the state as an arbiter when approaching any kind of social crisis or when entering into uncharted territory. The second prototypical model represents the mass democratic republican ideal and is epitomized in the study of Philadelphia. It is a product of underlying social norms which reflect the ideals of self-reliance, self-determination and self-interest as historically developed within the Anglo-Saxon cultural context in Europe, and were ensuingly transferred to the North American colonies where they reached full maturity. The public sphere which was created within this structural framework has very little affinity for hierarchy, fosters mobility, is driven by private initiative and instinctively relies on the forces of the market which are seen as the best regulatory mechanism to solve social problems. It promotes egalitarianism and at least on a normative level declares that each member of society has the same opportunities for self-improvement and self-advancement.

Obviously, both models are only Weberian ideal types, constructed through a process of distillation from two complex historical realities and thus reductionist by definition. Yet the basic structural features epitomized in both models are still clearly present in all modern Western-style democracies. They can be found in different degrees and permutations, depending on the particular social and cultural historical experience of a given society and material limitations - such as geography or access to natural resources - which inevitably shaped its overall social system. While Philadelphia lost its hegemonic position in the democratic world-system almost two hundred years ago, its own leading role was taken over by a centers of power which were all
deeply inspired by the same intellectual heritage. As a consequence, the normative ideal of a well-ordered society - reflected in the persisting hegemony of the mass democratic model - remained practically unchanged during the past two hundred years.\(^1\) Yet, such a prolonged *status quo* on the normative level of democratic theory created enough space for the accretion of the fundamental internal contradictions which are present in any social organism from the time of its inception. Just as the Venetian model of public sphere at some point became a symbol of corruption and decay, being completely subsumed by the state, the current global crisis of economic and political leadership puts increasing pressure on the democratic model epitomized by the historical heritage of Philadelphia, revealing the degree of its massive commercialization. Consequently, it is possible that with the strengthening of democracy (and capitalism) in the countries such as China or India, we may see another leading center of power in the near future which takes over the hegemonic role within the entire global democratic world-system, advancing its own normative ideal of a well-ordered society. Such a ‘new Athens’ would, without any doubt, carry on the democratic tradition as it has been developed in the space of the past 2,500 years since the time of classical Athens, but would inevitably bring to the table its own set of social and cultural norms, and reflect in such a new vision its own geographic and material potential. An ecletic amalgam of the old traditions and new ideas would consequently usher in the articulation of the next metamorphosis of the *agora*, which will become the normative ideal of the democratic public sphere for generations to come.

\(^1\) The only serious challenge to its temporal dominance was the rise of the communist regimes in Eastern and Central Europe and Asia. In the structure of their governments, they were very similar to aristocratic republicanism as practiced in Venice. The central role of the nobility was entrusted to the members of their respective Communist Parties who were - according to the official ideology - entitled to carry the burden of government because of their presumed civic virtues (i.e., the avant-gard role of the Communist Party). But all such regimes historically failed to create space for any form of deliberation even among the party-members themselves. Despite the pretended unity, the result of any vote in the Venetian Great Council or in the Senate was never unanimous. The communist system of ‘representative government’ resembled a rubber-stamp machine which was blindly approving any resolution formulated by the narrow party leadership.
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Curriculum Vitae

Education:

Ph.D., Mass Communications, Pennsylvania State University, University Park, PA, 2009.

Professional Career:

Lecturer, Pennsylvania State University, School of Humanities, Harrisburg, PA 2003 – 2005.


Teaching Assistant, Department of Applied Physics, Slovak Technical University, Bratislava, Slovakia, 1987 - 1991.

Academic Awards:

Top Student Paper, ICA, Montreal, Philosophy of Communication Section, 2008.
Interactive Scholar to Scholar Paper/Poster Session Award, 2nd place, ICA, Montreal, 2008.
Rector's Prize (summa cum laude/valedictorian), Slovak Technical University, 1987.

Selected Publications:
