

GURPS®

Fourth Edition

Hot Spots:™

RENAISSANCE VENICE™



VENIZIA
 La Repubblica di Venezia, fondata nel 427, è stata una delle repubbliche marinare più potenti e ricche del mondo. La sua capitale, Venezia, è una città unica, costruita su isole e canali, con un'architettura gotica e rinascimentale di straordinaria bellezza. La sua economia si basava sul commercio internazionale, e la sua influenza si estendeva su gran parte del Mediterraneo e del Nord Europa. Venezia è stata una delle città più liberali e tolleranti del suo tempo, e ha dato il suo contributo alla cultura, alla scienza e all'arte. La sua caduta, avvenuta nel 1797, è stata una delle più tragiche della storia italiana.



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ABOUT GURPS

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Rules and statistics in this book are specifically for the **GURPS Basic Set, Fourth Edition**. Page references that begin with B refer to that book, not this one.

INTRODUCTION

During the Renaissance, Italy (the heartland of the era's intellectual, artistic, and commercial revival) was defined not by large territorial kingdoms and principalities, as most of Western Europe was, but by independent or near-independent cities. One of the greatest was western-facing, banking-rich Firenze. Its only equal (and, in some ways, one which surpassed it) was a city on the opposite side of the peninsula: the trade-rich gateway to the East, the city of St. Mark, La Serenissima, the republic of Venice, or, as the natives call it, Venezia.

Venezia was an anomaly in almost every way compared to the rest of Western Europe. It retained ties to the Byzantine Empire long after that remnant of classical antiquity had become semi-legendary to the rest of the continent. It was a republic (though a very peculiar republic indeed) when other states were formal or *de facto* autocracies. It carried on pragmatic relations with the Muslim powers of the Eastern Mediterranean while the Crusades and later wars against the Turks raged. Even its construction was unusual: the city was a literal island rising above the waters of a lagoon, defended by difficult waters and the Mediterranean's most formidable fleet instead of stone walls.

This work describes the city of Venezia at its height from the beginning of the 15th century (when it disposed of one of its last major trading rivals on the Italian peninsula), through

a transition from a pure center of trade into a center of industry and artistic and intellectual activity, to late in the 16th century (when it began a long decline, outmaneuvered by the major powers of Western Europe for trade to the Far East and colonization of the New World).

GLOSSARY

This book uses a few Italian terms, mostly place names, but there are a few technical terms well worth knowing.

ca': A Venetian house; short for "casa."

calle: A Venetian street.

condottiero: Literally, a contractor, but in general use, a mercenary, particularly a mercenary officer.

doge: Native ruler of Venezia.

Firenze: Florence.

Milano: Milan.

Napoli: Naples.

Quattrocento: Literally, 400, meaning the 15th century, or the 1400s; preceded by the Trecento (1300s) and followed by the Cinquecento (1500s).

rio: Literally "river," but in Venice, a canal.

Roma: Rome.

Venezia: Venice.

ART ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

P. 13: "Doge Andrea Gritti (1455–1538)," by Workshop of Titian. From the Friedsam Collection, bequest of Michael Friedsam, 1931, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, metmuseum.org.

P. 20: "The arrival of Henri III of France at the Lido in Venice in 1574." Gift of Carolyn Bullard and Susan Schulman, in honor of George Goldner, 2015, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, metmuseum.org.

P. 24: "Wineglass." Gift of Henry G. Marquand, 1883, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, metmuseum.org.

P. 25: "The Malèrmi Bible, vol. II," by Niccolò Malèrmi (translator). From Harris Brisbane Dick Fund, 1933, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, metmuseum.org.

P. 27: "The Molo, Venice, from the Bacino di San Marco," by Luca Carlevaris. From Robert Lehman Collection, 1975, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, metmuseum.org.

P. 29: "Intartenimento che demo ogni giorno li Ciarlatani from Habiti d'huomeni et donne Venetiane." From Harris Brisbane Dick Fund, 1947, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, metmuseum.org.

P. 30: "Piazza San Marco," by Canaletto. Purchase, Mrs. Charles Wrightsman Gift, 1988, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, metmuseum.org.

P. 33: "Zecchino, Domenico Contarini (1659–75)." Bequest of Joseph H. Durkee, 1898, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, metmuseum.org.

PUBLICATION HISTORY

Although some articles in the second edition of *Pyramid* magazine addressed Venezia, this is all new material.

RECOMMENDED WORKS

This work covers roughly the same time period as and an adjacent territory to *GURPS Hot Spots: Renaissance Florence*, which is strongly recommended. Rather than repeat certain topics, notably a general history of the Renaissance and a description of land-based armies in Italy during this period, this work refers the reader there. The city description format comes from *GURPS City Stats*.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Matt Riggsby is trained in anthropology and archaeology, and, like the rest of his generation, toils in computers. He works for an international medical software company and lives with his lovely and talented wife, above-average child, and a pack of dogs.

TRANSPORTATION

Transportation is usually by foot along a series of often narrow, twisting streets, or by boat. A few streets are as little as half a yard wide, and a good many are narrow enough that a horse would have a hard time passing through and two or three men with shields could block the street. Horses and carts are almost unknown; indeed, horses were largely prohibited within the city after 1480.

The spaces between the city's constituent islands, shored up and squared off, form a network of canals, which take the place of major roads. Hundreds of small bridges arch high above them, allowing ground and water traffic to cross paths. Bridges are as likely to have steps as sloping surfaces, and many have an inverted V shape instead of an arch.

Heavy hauling and longer trips across the city are performed by water. Small, flat-bottomed boats are in common use for transportation, but modern-style gondolas had not yet been standardized. Providing water transportation for hire is a common job.

CLIMATE

The Venetian climate is, obviously, Mediterranean, with hot but not punishing summers, and mild winters with

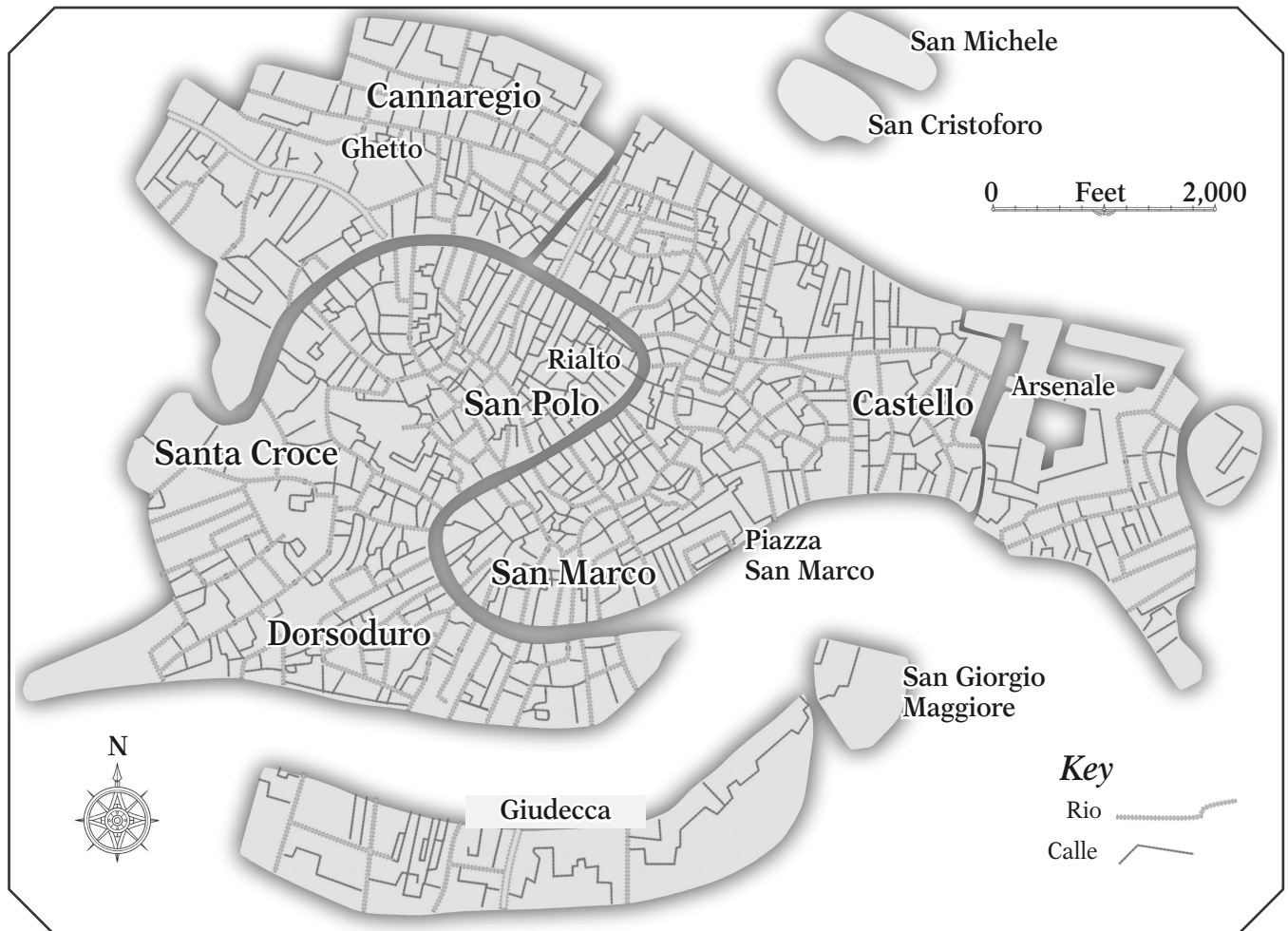
temperatures rarely dipping below freezing. (Even so, a few winters were cold enough to freeze much of the lagoon and permit walking or riding carts from the city to the mainland.) The omnipresent sea further moderates temperatures. At the same time, though, the city is very wet, with frequent rain, a good deal of fog in cooler seasons, and constantly high humidity. Still, the dangerous high tides threatening the modern city are centuries away; some flooding is possible during extreme weather, but the Lido (see p. 6) protects the city from most storm surges.

LANDMARKS

The city has a number of notable landmarks and important neighborhoods which everyone knows about and may form the basis of navigation around town.

Rialto

Part of the San Polo neighborhood, on the inside of the upper curve of the Grand Canal's reversed S, this region has long been an important one. Initially, it was the seat of Venetian government. After a market was established there in the 11th century, it became the center of Venetian banking.



MAP OF VENEZIA

At home during this period, society became significantly more rigid. In 1297, the government enacted the *serrata*, or the limiting of the Maggior Consiglio (Grand Council; p. 12). This body, which acted as a weak legislature and advisory body to the doge, was up to this point theoretically open to a broad cross-section of the city's population. In practice, it was limited enough to be dominated by smaller factions. With the restructuring of who could participate, the size of

the council was increased from a little over 100 members to well over 1,000. This gave the council a much broader base of membership, making it much harder for a single group to control. At the same time, though, restrictions were placed on eligibility for membership. By 1316, membership in the council was restricted to a number of aristocratic families, who became a hereditary oligarchy.

TERRESTRIAL POWER

Through the 14th century, Venezia began to turn its attention west. It succeeded in a long conflict with shipping rival Genoa at the dawn of the 15th century, neutralizing the other city as both a military and economic threat. Venezia then began to expand into the Italian mainland. Within the first few decades of the 15th century, it established control over a sizable chunk of northern Italy nearly as far west as Milano (the territories roughly correspond to modern Veneto, Friuli, and parts of Lombardy and Emilia-Romagna).

The Arsenale also underwent tremendous growth to support the city's dominant naval position. It consolidated facilities and drew craftspeople from all over the city to live permanently in and around the worksite.

The Venetian empire was now at its height. It controlled significant cities such as Padua and Verona in Italy; the better part of the eastern coast of the Adriatic, giving it dominance over both overland routes across the Balkan peninsula and the shortest sea routes into Western Europe from the Levant and points east; and a number of territories farther east – Crete, parts of the Peloponnese, and most islands in the Aegean. It also had trading colonies all over the Eastern Mediterranean and Black Sea coasts.

In 1453, when Constantinople fell to the Ottoman Empire despite Venetian support, Venezia was one of the first stops for Byzantine scholars fleeing the fall of the city, giving it a wealth of Greek texts and scholarship. However, Venetian support for the last of the Byzantines and the concessions they had won from the now-vanished empire also put the Venetians in direct conflict with the Turks. Through the late 15th century, Venezia lost many of its possessions on the Balkan peninsula.

By 1475, the campfires of Turkish scouts in Dalmatia could be seen from Venezia itself. Venezia eventually negotiated peace and a return of its merchants to Constantinople in 1479, but with a loss of many of its old privileges and several of its Aegean and mainland Greek territories (the Ottomans didn't need Venezia nearly as much as the Byzantines did). Through the dynastic inheritance of one of its noblewomen, Venezia also took possession of Cyprus in the 1470s, making up for some of its other losses.

The year after the fall of Constantinople, Venezia also signed on to the Most Holy League established by the Treaty of Lodi. This treaty provided for extensive consultation and exchanges of resident ambassadors between its signatories (a novel practice; up to this point, ambassadors were sent for specific missions and then returned home). The signatories included

all the major cities of the Italian peninsula, and the exchanges were intended to maintain a balance of power and end the ongoing wars that had plagued the peninsula for decades.

The increased diplomatic contacts kept Italy relatively peaceful for a generation, which also made the peninsula relatively prosperous. Even Venezia, which remained preoccupied abroad with Turkish wars through much of the second half of the 15th century, stayed reasonably prosperous, though not to the extent that it had been in the first half.

VENEZIA

Population: 125,000 (Search +3)

Physical and Magical Environment

Terrain: Island/Beach

Appearance: Attractive (+1)

Hygiene: -1

No Mana (No Enchantment)

Culture and Economy

Language: Italian (Venetian dialect) **Literacy:** Accented

TL: 4

Wealth: Comfortable (x2)

Status: -1 to 5

Political Environment

Government: Oligarchy

CR: 4 (Corruption -1)

Military Resources: \$4M

Defense Bonus: +2

Notes

Venezia is physically and politically much the same through the Renaissance, so these stats can stand for just about any time during the 15th and 16th centuries. Its population varies between 100,000 and 150,000, which changes the city's military resources but little else.

What vary over time are the search bonuses. Through most of the 15th century, the city provides +3 to search rolls for spices and other imports from the East. That declines to +2 by the end of the century, but is replaced by bonuses of +2 to +3 for manufactured goods. Search rolls for books are initially at no bonus at the beginning of the century, improve to +1 in the middle of the century, and rise to +3 by the end. Rolls for glassware and anything having to do with sea transport (maps, ship rentals, experienced sailors, etc.) are at +2 throughout.

LIFE OF THE MIND

Venezia has no university. It exercises considerable control over the nearby University of Padua, noted for its faculties in law and medicine, but has no institutions of higher learning of its own. Nevertheless, it is one of the intellectual and artistic capitals of Europe. Many of the great artists and creative minds of the period at least passed through the city at some time or another: Albrecht Durer, El Greco, Leonardo da Vinci, Michelangelo, and many Greek scholars fleeing Constantinople.

Most schooling is private. The wealthy hire private tutors for their children, while the somewhat less wealthy often club together to hire teachers to instruct groups of their children at once. Churches and scuole sometimes offer rudimentary education to the poor.

This period sees a shift in the primary subject matter of a complete education. Initially, Venetian students tended to have a purely practical education. Merchants need at the very least basic literacy and math skills. These could be expanded on somewhat with things like a modicum of legal training and additional languages, the better to draw up contracts and win over customers. This changed through the Renaissance, as the classical trivium (grammar, logic, and rhetoric) and quadrivium (arithmetic, astronomy, geometry, and music) were revived as part of the Renaissance's return to classical models. Additionally, increasing quantities of classical literature were taught.

This period also sees the rise of some kinds of specialized education, such as the beginning of systematic education for the deaf. Though usually done in monasteries, where vows of silence had already led to the creation of forms of sign language, one of the earliest secular thinkers on education for the deaf was a polymath who graduated from Padua.

Venetian mathematicians made significant advances, such as calculations for ballistics based on parabolas. Before this period, most people believed that missiles went in a straight line until they ran out of momentum and then dropped to the ground. Mathematicians in Venezia's orbit also formulated elementary descriptions of probability.

One unusual social phenomenon of the period – an outgrowth of public scholarly disputes of the Middle Ages, with fame, honor, and a substantial dinner at stake – is a series of duels between mathematicians. Mathematics is becoming more sophisticated during this period, with mathematicians making new discoveries or learning about techniques from increasingly available international sources. Mathematicians demonstrate their skills by solving problems posed by others.

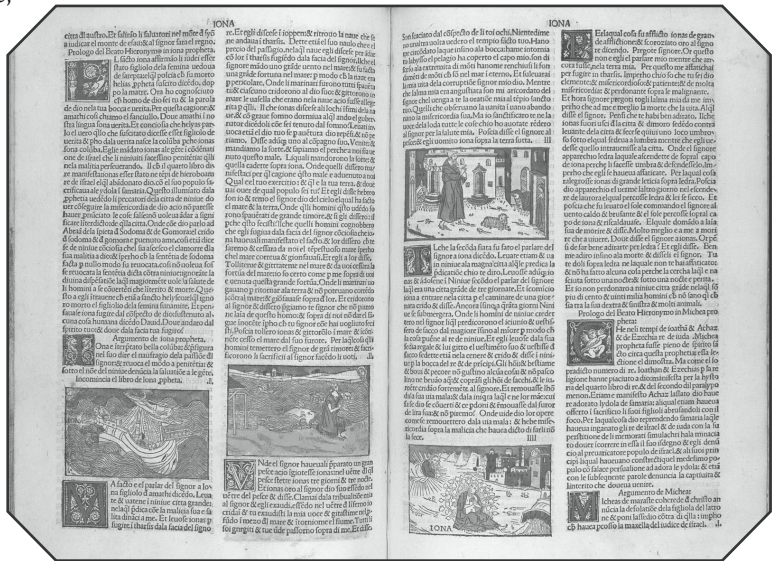
PUBLISHING

While Venetian publishers started offering books largely in Latin, Italian dominates Venetian publishing for most of this period. But books in any major European language can be found. In the early 16th century, there was even a short-lived industry of printing Qurans for the Ottoman market, though the Turks eventually prohibited the sale of Qurans printed by non-Muslims. Publishers' moves in the direction

of small, cheap books soon reach their logical conclusion in broadsheets, inexpensively produced pamphlets which can be sold for pennies. These might contain anything from popular ballad lyrics to pornography to religious instruction. They also include Europe's first newspaper, the monthly *gazeta de la novita*.

Publishing in Venezia even contains concepts resembling modern copyright and public domain. Publishers may be granted exclusive rights to publish specific new works, and booksellers may be granted exclusive rights to import new books not published in Venezia. But unlike modern copyrights, it's a "use it or lose it" proposition. If a publisher doesn't publish a book he has the exclusive rights to, he may lose those rights.

By the last quarter of the 16th century, Venezia's publishing industry went into a sharp decline. In addition to an economic downturn, the rise of publishing elsewhere and sharply through Europe had reduced Venezia's printing market from continental domination to a nearly local business.



LANGUAGE

Venetians speak Italian, of course, but a single "standard" dialect has so far not evolved from the many spoken on the Italian peninsula. The Tuscan dialect spoken in and around Firenze has yet to become the dominant form of the language. Venetian Italian is certainly mutually comprehensible with neighboring dialects, but it retains a particular accent. The letter Z, usually pronounced as a zh, is relatively common in Venetian Italian, where other dialects might use a G or J. For example, the name Giorgio was sometimes spelled Zorzo.

There are also peculiarities of usage. Where other wealthy, powerful Italians might build a *palazzo*, Venetian patricians would build a mere *casa* (sometimes abbreviated *ca'*). Other local terms are special names for Venezia's peculiar thoroughfares, including *calle* for street; *ramo* for a dead-end alley branching off a calle; and *rio* for canal.

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Brown, Patricia Fortini. *Private Lives in Renaissance Venice* (Yale University Press, 2004). Lavishly illustrated, and packed with useful information on the day-to-day lives of the people of the city. It does lean toward treatments of the upper classes, since they've left us with the most physical and written evidence, but the poor and middle classes are addressed as well.

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Lane, Frederic. *Venetian Ships and Shipbuilders of the Renaissance* (Johns Hopkins Press, 1934). This classic study on Venetian shipbuilding, revised several times over Lane's long career, provides a wealth of detail on the technical aspects of Venetian ships.

Lane, Frederic. *Venice, A Maritime Republic* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973). A solid narrative history of the city from its earliest years. Some may find it a bit dry, but if you're looking for an overview of changing rates of return from investment in the city's public debt, the *monte*, this is the one to read.

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Mattingly, Garrett. *Renaissance Diplomacy* (Dover, 1988). The first half of this book concentrates on the origins of diplomacy in the Renaissance, which essentially means the diplomacy of Italy, in which Venezia was deeply involved.

Muir, Edward. *Civic Ritual in Renaissance Venice* (Princeton University Press, 1986). A deep consideration of

the many processions and other public rituals practiced in the city, examining not just the events themselves but also their meaning to Venetian society.

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Varriano, John. *Tastes and Temptations: Food and Art in Renaissance Italy* (University of California Press, 2009). Not specific to Venezia, but addressing the relationship between food and art, from regional and "national" food preferences and specialties, appearance of food in period art, and the artistic symbolism of food.



DISCOGRAPHY

Concerto Palatino. *Venetian Music for Double Choir* (Accent, 1999). Contains works by Giovanni Gabrielli and Adrian Willaert demonstrating Venetian polychoral styles. The inclusion of Gabrielli takes this recording a bit past the period in question here and toward the Baroque, but Willaert is solidly a composer of this era.

O'Dette, Paul. *Alla Venetiana: Early 16th Century Venetian Lute Music* (Harmonia Mundi, 2005). Music from some of the city's most active and interesting years by one of this generation's foremost lutenists.

Pritchard, Ian. *L'Arpicordo: 16th Century Venetian Keyboard Music* (Morphic Resonance Music, 2009). Like the lute recordings, this is music that would have been heard in private homes, but in wealthier ones that could afford an expensive keyboard instrument.

Singer Pur. *Musica Nova: The Petrarca Madrigals* (Oehms Classics, 2009). While Adrian Willaert is best known for his distinctively Venetian polychoral works, most of his output was madrigals and motets, and it does not get more Renaissance Italian than these madrigals based on poems by Petrarch.

Wilson, Christopher. *Early Venetian Lute Music* (Naxos, 2000). A selection of mostly short pieces for one or two lutes, largely predating the ones in O'Dette's recording above.

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that heaven bestowed so abundantly on Venice.*

– Veronica Franco, *Capitolo XII*

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