

2021-22 / LESSON 21 / 2021-12-09

Later Middle Ages -- ~1000-~1492 ce/13

1311

The Major Council deliberates that from then on the members of the Pregàdi must be elected within the Major Council itself, and no candidates from the people will be accepted.

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1312

Philip IV Capetian the Handsome, king of France, takes steps to control the spread of Roman law doctrine, a competitor to his hold on legislation. Within the text of a reform of law studies in the university of Orléans, he declares that *Regnum nostrum consuetudine moribusque precipue, non iure scripto, regitur* ("Our kingdom is mostly governed by custom and usages, not by written law"). The astute wording ("mostly") allows for his sovereign legislation, but not for direct application of Roman law, which was sometimes intended as the only true "written law".

1315

Jacopo Bertaldo, a cleric employed for many years in the Chancery, writes his *Breviarium* ("Summary"), often called *Splendor Venetorum civitatis consuetudinum* ("Brilliance of the usages of the city of the Venetians"). It is meant as a handbook for a young friend, who planned to enter judicial offices in the Curie, but it remained incomplete.

Bertaldo feels that the backbone of the Venetian law system is customary, and that this slowly evolving custom should be only modified by laws in statutory form: these are approved by the *placitum* and can be equated to what nowadays is called "instant custom". Instead, he sadly remarks, most of the legislation actually comes from the Councils and magistrates, with no saying by the people.

The names of the members of the Major Council, their deaths, the new generations and any cooptations of new members, are inscribed in a new Libro d'Oro ("Golden Book"), a sort of Who's Who of the ruling aristocracy.

1319

General revision of the Libro d'Oro by the Avogadori di Comun, who are now entrusted with updating it after control of the prescribed requisites in each case of new enlistments.

The committee of three who since 1297 could propose cooptations, subject to the vote of the Forty, is abolished.

The young nobles enter the Major Council and begin their political career at 25, after some experience of trade and of the ways of the world. Once a year however, on December 4, feast of Saint Barbara, thirty young nobles of 20-24 years are chosen by lottery to anticipate their membership and the beginning of their career.

Now the Major Council is complete as the plenary assembly of the hereditary aristocracy, and the holder of sovereignty.

~ 1330

Begins the Chancery series of the registers where international treaties are recorded: *Liber Albus* ("White Book", with the Byzantine Empire) and *Liber Blancus* ("Cream-coloured Book", with the Western Empire). The names refer to the colour of the vellum cover.

Early books of deliberations by the Major Council are also given suggestive names, like Zaneta (a woman's name) or Ballarinus (the name of the Chancellor), or descriptive names helpful in locating them on the shelves, like Luna, from the symbol on the spine, or *Pilosus*, from the unshaved vellum cover.

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1332

Andrea Dandolo, future doge and a rare member of the aristocracy to pursue a legal culture at the university of Padua, writes a summary of statutory laws: *Summula statutorum floridorum Venetiarum* ("Short précis of the flourishing statutes of the Venetian State").

1335

The Council of Ten is deliberated permanent by the Major Council, and will not need any more prorogations, but just the regular turnover by election. The presence of an Avogadore di Comun is required for the legality of each session.

1339

The city of Treviso with its territory, after many decades of hiring Venetians as foreign, impartial, politically knowledgeable podestà, is annexed by the Venetians through a spontaneous pact of dedition.

Construction begins on the Ducal Palace as we see it today. The hall of the Major Council is the largest room with a flat ceiling (built by naval carpenters from the Arsenale) in Europe, before the introduction of reinforced concrete in the late XIX century.

1342

Andrea Dandolo completes his *Chronica brevis*, a short history of Venice from 46 CE to 1342.

Information about the area in late Antiquity and the early Middle Ages was fragmentary and uncertain at the time; this allowed chroniclers and historians to build legends of glory about the beginnings of the State.

Public historians would follow, appointed by the State to write official histories for future memory.

Of course, recent events could not be as easily altered as origin myths could be constructed. However, even these myths reflect the medieval attitude which required cohesion and continuity rather than critical analysis. By the time humanism brought about a more scientific consideration and contextualisation of existing documents, the myths were already established, and the lack of exhaustive documents meant that they could not be uprooted after all. Some of them, like the foundation anticipated at the time of the Hun incursions of Attila (about 405), or the identification of the Paulicius in the *Terminatio Liutprandina* with a first doge, called by the Byzantine nickname of Anafestus, are regrettably still circulating in popular histories of Venice despite having been debunked by XX century historians of the era, archaeologists and philologists.

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