



Council of the Republic of Venice 1182 *Background Guide*



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Introduction

Letter from the Chair:

Dear Delegates,

My name is Alex Hubschmidt, and I would like to welcome all of you to EagleMUNC VIII; I am so excited to be your chair for the Republic of Venice Crisis Committee! Just a little about me - I am currently a senior at BC, but I'm originally from Philadelphia. I am majoring in International Studies with a minor in Classical studies. Next year, I hope to be in law school studying international law focusing on the Baltic states. Outside of that, I love to swing dance and travel. I spent last year studying abroad in London so if anyone was thinking about spending some time there I would love to talk with you.

MUN has been part of my life since my sophomore year of high school and EagleMUNC since my first semester Freshman year at Boston College. These past four years, I've been involved mainly in developing EagleMUNC's Ad-Hoc committees such as Genghis Khan and the Rise of Mongolia, the Return of Atlantis, and last year's Nuclear Fallout. I really like the behind the scenes aspect of MUN and making the experience as fun for you as it is for me. This being my last year, I decided that I wanted the chance to see a committee in action, so I am proud to be serving as your chair for Venice!

To fully experience EagleMUNC VIII, and specifically this committee, I would highly recommend that you read and understand this background guide thoroughly. The setting of this committee, the early and high Middle Ages, is vast and filled with

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history. Between the Crusades, Plague, and the various competitions among empires, there are a lot of moving pieces to keep in mind when making policy decisions and forming alliances with your fellow council members. In order to make this simulation seem as realistic as possible, we will sometimes be using customs or terminology that match with the time period. Due to the smaller committee size, I promise this weekend will be so much more rewarding and fun if you remain proactive in participating. But don't let any of this scare you! It is my co-chair and I's goal to get everyone involved and feeling comfortable.

Best of luck in the coming months as you formulate your position papers and prepare to take Venice from a small merchant-state to a vast trading empire. If you have any questions at all or need help understanding something, please email me at hubschal@bc.edu. I'll do my best to assist you in any way I can!

Sincerely,

Alex Hubschmidt

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Earliest History

The city of Venice was founded in 568 by refugees fleeing from the Lombard invasion in northern Italy. The refugees formed a small settlement on the islands of the nearby lagoon, and the city became a part of the Byzantine exarchate of Ravenna in 584. This decision to occupy these somewhat remote islands ensured greater protection of its inhabitants from both barbarians and other major upheavals. ¹ In 641, Venice became the center of political authority in the region after the Byzantine city of Oderzo was captured by the Germanic Lombards. Despite increased authority, animosity began to develop between Constantinople and Venice, which culminated in the election of the first Doge in 727 as an anti-Byzantine declaration by the Venetians. However, Venice remained under Byzantine control until the end of the exarchate of Ravenna in 751, and came under the protection of the Franks due to an alliance between the Doge Obelerio and the Frankish King Pepin. Pro-Byzantine and Pro-Frankish factions in the city continued to clash with each other until the Franco-Byzantine treaty of 814, which guaranteed Venice independence from both the Western and Eastern empires.

Changes in the Republic

Following its independence, Venice quickly transformed into a center of trade between the Franks and the Byzantine Empire. Venice acted as a middle-man in trade, with its merchants selling wine and grain from mainland Italy, as well as wood and

¹Avventure Bellissime. "History". 2019. Tours-italy.com. Acc. 7/7/2019

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slaves from Dalmatia.² At the head of Venice sat the Doge, a powerful, nearly monarchical leader that held the position for life. While normally elected by noble elites, nearly every Doge between 800 and 1032 attempted to establish heretical monarchies, all of which failed. In an attempt to maintain the interests of the 'Republic of Venice' (A.K.A. the noble class), the overthrow of the Doge in 1032 was quickly followed by initiatives to check the Doge's power in the future.

In 1082, Venice gained substantial ground with the Byzantines; a trade agreement between the two exempted Venetian merchants from excise taxes in exchange for helping the empire strengthen its navy.³ The wealth that trade brought into the city expanded the size of the ruling class of merchant families, and the resulting stability allowed powerful citizens of Venice to compete for the position of Doge through popular election. However, Doge Domenico Flabanico⁴ restructured the election of the Doge so that the electorate was limited to the nobles of the Rialto islands, which had become the heart of Venice. Under the much more monarchical Doges that followed Flabanico, Venice continued to grow its trade and power in Italy and the Mediterranean. Doges such as Domenico Contarini fought to keep Venice independent both politically and religiously from foreign powers and the papacy. The Republic of Venice remained neutral during the Investiture Controversy between Pope Gregory VII and the Holy Roman Emperor Henry IV.⁵

² Ibid.,

³ The World Economy. "The Venetian Republic". theworldeconomy.org. Acc. 6/25/19

⁴ Britannica. "Venice". 2019. Academic-eb.com. Acc.8/1/19

⁵ Britannica. "Investiture Controversy". 2019. Academic-eb.com. Acc.8/1/19

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Venice experienced another political reconstruction in 1143, nearly 100 years after the changes enacted by Doge Domenico Flabanico. In 1143, the Concio (the general assembly that had existed since 742) was formally restructured into the Consilium Sapientium. In 1172, the General Assembly was once again transformed when the Consilium was replaced by the Great Council of Venice. The Great Council originally consisted of 35 members, all of whom were from the patrician families of Venice and inherited their positions on the Great Council. From 1032-1172, a system of Ducal counselors, each representing a district of Venice, were installed to check the power of the Doge and squash any attempt at establishing monarchical rule. In 1172, the Great Council was formed consisting of 480 citizens with the duty to elect public officials. The Great Council was also responsible for indirectly voting for a new Doge by selecting 41 electors who in turn would directly decide on the next doge. The Council of Forty, or the Quarantina, acted as the judiciary body of Venice. After a Doge's nomination and eventual election, the Quarantina returned to a judicial role along with some legislative powers assigned to it by the Great Council.⁶

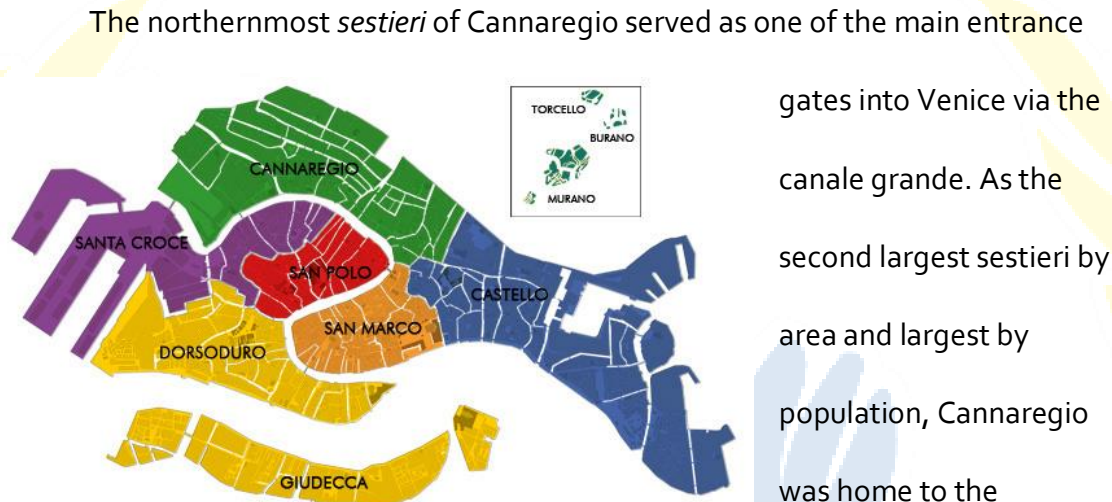
The Council of Six or the Ducal Council, as stated earlier, represented one of the cities six *sestieri*, or boroughs. As seen in diagram 1.1,⁷ each Ducal Counselor

⁶ Coggins & Perali. "Voting for the Doge". 1998. Public Choice. Acc. 8/15/19

⁷ The Venice Insider. Image "Overview".2016. Theveniceinsider.com. Acc. 6/20/19

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represented a distinct *sestieri*: Santa Croce, Cannaregio, San Polo, San Marco, Dorsoduro and Giudecca, and Castello.



The northernmost *sestieri* of Cannaregio served as one of the main entrance gates into Venice via the canale grande. As the second largest *sestieri* by area and largest by population, Cannaregio was home to the

metalworking class, supported mainly by a few large *geti* (metal foundries). This made Cannaregio responsible for producing a majority of Venice's metal works such as weapons and armor. This district also included the islands of Murano, Burano, and Torcello, home to some of the most skilled glass blowers in the world. This glass was highly sought after all around Europe and the Mediterranean, and it played a large role in stimulating Venice's economy. Cannaregio was administered by Bertucci Contarini, a noble from an old patrician family that served as a commander in the Venetian Fleet.⁸

Santa Croce, found on the other side of the Canale Grande, housed the poorest of Venice's citizens. Despite that, Santa Croce had the highest concentration of Catholic churches of any *sestieri*. Most importantly, Santa Croce was the only spot in Venice where raw silk was processed into luxury goods, which were later resold in Venice or exported to the mainland. Therefore, a majority of the silk was sold in San

⁸ The Venice Insider. "Cannaregio".2016. Theveniceinsider.com. Acc. 6/24/19

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Croce, while a smaller percentage made its way to San Marco. After the First Crusade, administration of Santa Croce was granted to Giovanni Rinoldi, a famous crusader knight who descended from Hungarian nobility.⁹

San Polo, found in the center of Venice, is the smallest of the six *sistieri*. San Polo is the oldest part of Venice and the first area in which the land began to be developed back in the 6th century. Since 1097, San Polo has been home to the city's banking industry in the San Giacomo Square. Many of the city's goldsmiths and jewelers were also based in San Polo. While low in population, many of the wealthy bankers resided there, as well as a handful of lesser yet still wealthy nobles.¹⁰

South of San Polo lies San Marco, home of Piazza San Marco and the home of Venice's government. Built between 800 and 1100, Piazza San Marco became the most important spot in the city for both religion and government, which were often run hand in hand. Saint Mark's Basilica, as it currently stands, was built, burned, and rebuilt after a series of rebellions in the 9th and 10th centuries. In 1060, construction began on the current structure, incorporating both Byzantine and Italian architecture. The basilica was intended to link the Doge with a religious basis of power, and also served as a large treasury. Right next to it is the Doge's palace, built around a fortress in 1160. The structure overlooks the lagoon and served to host various foreign diplomats as well as Venetian nobles. Similar to the basilica, it was a physical display of the Doge's power and the glory of Venice. San Marco was also home to the Rialto Market. Seated on the

⁹ FIND

¹⁰ Venice Apartment. "District of San Polo". 2019. Veniceapartment.com. Acc. 6/24/19

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bank of the Canale Grande, the Rialto Market was the center of commerce within Venice.¹¹

Next to San Marco lies Castello, the largest of the six *sistieri* by area. This district was most significant as a naval dockyard used to house Venice's fleet of ships. Considering the immense interest in maintaining maritime supremacy in the Mediterranean, Venice also constructed a fortress in the area to protect its ships. The Arsenal (the combination of the shipyards and the fortress) is administered by the Arsenal Admiral, who holds a lot of power in Castello.¹²

Finally, the *sistieri* of Dorsoduro was the home of the city's noble class, extending on both sides of the Giudecca canal. Compared to the rest of the city, Dorsoduro and Giudecca sit atop comparatively higher ground, making the land the most stable. This made the area less likely to experience extreme flooding, unlike the poorer districts such as Cannaregio or San Croce. Many of the wealthy citizens of Dorsoduro and Giudecca made their fortunes from the salt-works located just south of the city. One of the wealthiest and most powerful of these families is the Foscari, a patrician family that held a lot of political power in the Great Council.¹³

The most senior member of the Minor Council was the Vice-Doge, and he assumed the role of Doge during the leader's absence. In addition, the Doge could only discuss a hearing if at least four of the ducal councilors were present. Together, the

¹¹ Your Venice. "San Marco District". Venice-tourism.com. Acc 6/24/19

¹² Veneto Inside. "Castello". 2019. Venetoinside.com. Acc 8/29/19

¹³ Veneto Inside. "Dorsoduro". 2019. Venetoinside.com. Acc 8/29/19

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Minor Council, the three heads of the Quarantina, and the Doge formed the Venetian Signoria, which was the most powerful executive body of the Republic of Venice.



Topics:

Topic 1: Relationship with the Byzantine Empire^{14, 15}

By the 9th century, the Byzantine Empire was the largest player in the Mediterranean trade network, followed closely by Venice. A deeper banking system meant merchants could take out credit towards larger expeditions as well as sell their goods for precious metals like silver and gold, which was more universal and only enhanced trade. For the next two centuries, Venetian merchants amassed immense wealth by transporting luxury goods between North Africa, Italy, and the rest of the Mediterranean. During the second half of the 11th century, the Byzantine Empire was facing enemies in both the east and the west. The Turkish Sultanate of Rum had conquered vast territories in Anatolia, and by 1180 the Byzantines had lost nearly all of their holdings in Asia Minor. At the same time, Norman warriors from northern France had begun working as mercenaries for the Lombards in southern Italy against their Byzantine rivals. In 1057, Robert Guiscard took control of the Duchy of Apulia in southern Italy, and his campaigns against the Byzantines concluded with their expulsion from southern Italy after his conquest of Bari in 1071. Conflict between Robert and the Byzantines renewed in 1180 after the Byzantine Emperor Michael VII was deposed by Byzantine nobles. In 1082, Robert launched an invasion of Byzantine

¹⁴ Cartwright, Ancient History Encyclopedia. "Trade in Medieval Europe" 2019. Ancient.eu. Acc. 8/15/19

¹⁵ Cartwright, Ancient History Encyclopedia. "Manuel I Komnenos" 2018. Ancient.eu. Acc. 8/15/19

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territories on the Adriatic coast of Greece, but his forces were defeated thanks to the assistance of the Venetian navy.

As a reward for their help in defeating the Norman invasion, Emperor Alexius I Komnenos granted Venice exclusive trading rights across the Byzantine Empire.

Venetian ships now had access to ports, such as those in the Balkans, Aegean Sea, as well as Constantinople, that most western European ships were barred from entering. Venetian merchants paid much lower dues than other foreigners in these Byzantine ports. Venice also gained access to the Black Sea trade and ports in Anatolia as the successors of Alexius reconquered territory from the Turks in the east.

However, the relationship began to deteriorate under the reign of Alexius's grandson, Emperor Manuel I Komnenos. After 1126, Venice maintained their trading rights by providing the Byzantine fleet with ships, and in 1149, the Venetian navy helped Manuel I reconquer the island of Corfu from another Norman invasion from Sicily. However, the Venetians' arrogance following the victory insulted the emperor. The alliance between Venice and Constantinople suffered again in 1156 when Venetian forces assisted the Holy Roman Emperor Frederick I Barbarossa in driving the Byzantines out of southern Italy once again. Following his defeat at Brindisi in 1156, Manuel I began to reconsider Venice's dominance of trade in the eastern Mediterranean. In 1171, the emperor arrested 10,000 Venetian merchants across the Byzantine Empire, and confiscated property including goods and ships. Manuel I followed this by promoting trade with Pisa and Genoa, two Italian city-states that rivaled Venice for control of Mediterranean trade. While this didn't greatly impact

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Venice's stranglehold on trade in the east, Venice and Constantinople ceased official relations for nearly a decade.

Topic 2: Trade Expansion in the Mediterranean

With increased developments in financing as well as the financial opportunities provided by the first few crusades, medieval empires such as the Byzantines increasingly engaged in international trade. More formal roads as well as faster ships meant that a greater number of goods could travel farther distances more efficiently than ever before. Trade was no longer limited to the wealthiest, as even smaller merchants could now afford to transport their goods nearly all across Europe. Luxury goods such as slaves, horses, and jewelry were predominant.

Venice's unique geography prevented it from developing the feudal economy that was predominant in most of the European kingdoms of the middle ages. The republic lacked the land to produce its own agriculture, and without a base of agricultural peasants, Venice did not have the ability to create the feudal hierarchy of knights and nobility that fueled the economies of larger European states. As a result, Venetians turned to maritime trade to import necessities such as food and water. Eventually, the skills of Venetian mariners allowed the import of a vast array of goods from across the Mediterranean.

By the start of the first crusade in 1095, Venice had also agreed to supply transport of troops across the Mediterranean. In exchange for delivering the crusaders to the Holy Land, Venetian merchants were awarded a permanent presence in the cities

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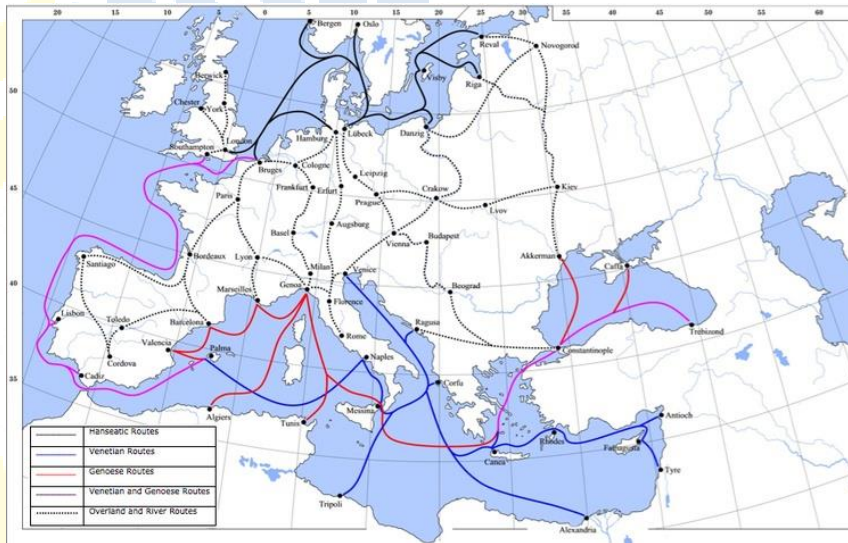
of the Levant that were conquered by the Christian warriors. The formation of the Crusader States by the Europeans after the success of the First Crusade gave Venice access to goods from the Middle East through ports in Tripoli, Antioch, and the Kingdom of Jerusalem. Venice became the center of European commerce because of its ability to transport a variety of goods in addition to the vast array of ports that Venetian ships had nearly exclusive access to. Venetian merchant fleets brought in all types of raw and processed goods from the East, which were then processed and sold again to merchants bound for Northern Europe, Italy, the Byzantine Empire, and even back to the East.

However, Venice was not the only Italian state to benefit from this new trade from the Holy Land. Genoa also transported many of the crusaders across the Mediterranean, and Genoese traders were granted access to the ports of the new Latin kingdoms just as the Venetians were. Genoa had already established a lucrative trade empire in the Western Mediterranean, but access to goods from the Middle East allowed them to encroach on Venice's near monopoly in the East. Increased competition led to more hostilities between Venetians and the Genoese across the

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Mediterranean, which erupted in the destruction of the Genoese quarter of Constantinople by Venetians in 1170.

One of the most important goods to come from the East was raw silk. Venetian merchants imported raw silk from their ports in the Crusader States, and dyes were brought in from other parts of Venice's trade empire. Venice also encouraged skilled



silk workers from the rest of Italy to immigrate to Venice. With a skilled workforce and plenty of raw silk, Venice developed a

lucrative silk industry that exported luxury fabrics back to the East and to the kingdoms of Europe.

Venice also had more local industries that were essential to their economy and trade empire. Salt had been an important industry in the Venetian Lagoon since before the city was founded in Roman times. Early settlers in the lagoon used salt to barter for goods such as wheat from the mainland, and by the 9th century Venice was exporting salt to most of the cities of the Po Valley in Northern Italy. Much of the Venetian salt was produced in salt-works in the southern part of the lagoon around the town of Chioggia. Another important part of the Venetian economy was glassmaking.

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Venetians starting producing glass in the 8th century, but the industry expanded quickly after merchants brought advanced glass-blowing techniques home with them from the East. As glass manufacturing expanded, most of the furnaces were moved to the island of Murano in the northern part of the lagoon. The concentration of the glass industry in Murano protected Venice from the occasional fires, and allowed officials to regulate the industry more and ensure the secrets of their valuable glass-blowing technique did not leave the island.

The most essential industry in Venice was shipbuilding. The Venetian shipyards, known as the Arsenal, was the life force of Venice's maritime empire. In 1104, construction began to convert a number of private shipyards in the Castello sestieri into a large state-run shipyard, and it eventually grew to take most of the borough. Thanks to the mass production of standardized parts and the use of assembly lines, the Arsenal was able to produce thousands of naval and merchant ships for the Venetian fleet. The industrial center was overseen by the admiral, but the heart of the Arsenal's shipbuilding capabilities were the master shipwrights. Shipwrights passed down their techniques through generations so that each new era of galleys were more efficient and more lethal. Under the shipwrights, thousands of carpenters, caulkers, oar makers, and rope spinners worked daily, and they formed into guilds that oversaw training and quality assurance. The Arsenal also performed maintenance on all of the ships that returned to port in Venice, and it served as a fortress with its high walls and constant guards.

Topic 3: Venice and the Crusades

By 1095, Muslims had ruled over Jerusalem and the Holy Land for over 400 years. Despite this, a large degree of religious freedom existed between Western Christians and the various occupying Muslim empires. Christians could make religious pilgrimages to Jerusalem without fear of persecution. In 1073, Jerusalem was overtaken by the Seljuk Empire, consisting of Sunni Turks. Under this new regime, the Sultanate began to reclaim areas of Anatolia held by the Byzantine empire, ruled by Alexius I Komnenos. In desperation, Komnenos sent out letters all throughout Europe, pleading for help in support against the invading Muslim Turks.

At the same time, Pope Urban II was dealing with a tumultuous Europe. The Great Schism of 1054 had split Christianity into the Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church. Europe was now divided along religious lines that threatened to result in chaos. In 1095, word reached Pope Urban II of Byzantium's struggles, and he immediately called for a gathering of the French nobles; this became known as the Council of Clermont. During this meeting, Urban II spoke of the remission of sins for fighting under God, the crimes against fellow Christians in Anatolia and Jerusalem, and the need for a unified peace. In the end, Urban II announced a call to arms for anyone willing to fight with God against the Turks. It is also worth noting that at this time, Urban and Komnenos had exchanged a few letters discussing the reunification of the two churches.

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For the first year, Venice stayed relatively neutral in the whole affair, mainly due to Doge Vitale Falier being doubtful of the Pope's motives and Venice's interest in it. However, upon his death in 1096, Doge Vitale Michiel was elected to office. Unlike his predecessor, Michiel was much more inclined to strengthen relations with the Pope, and may have been more religiously inclined as well. Regardless, he immediately called upon his citizens and the surrounding territories to begin to make preparations. After 3 years, Venice had amassed an armada of around 200 warships, making it the largest contribution to the crusade of any empire or city. In 1100, the Doge himself led the fleet across the Mediterranean carrying 9,000 armed crusaders. By June the fleet arrived in Jafa, just west of Israel. This greatly improved Venice's relationship with the Catholic Church back in Italy, and exemplified to the rest of mainland Europe that it too was a power to be respected.

By 1122, trade relations between the Byzantines and the Venetians soured as Constantinople refused to uphold its promise to grant Venetian merchants special trading privileges. In retaliation, Venice sent a fleet east and by 1123 had laid siege to the Byzantine controlled Corfu. However, the Venetian fleet departed for the Holy Land after learning that King Baldwin of Jerusalem had been captured by the Fatimid Caliphate. Under the command of Doge Domenico Michelle, the Venetian Fleet defeated the Egyptians off the coast of Ascalon in 1123. In 1124, the Venetian army assisted in the Siege of Tyre, and Venice was rewarded with control of Tyre. By 1126,

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King John Komnenos broke down and granted Venice special trade privileges once again.¹⁶



¹⁶ Erenow. "Venice" 2015. Erenow.net. Acc 8/29/19

Questions to Consider

Topic 1: Relationship with the Byzantine Empire

1. Given their shared history, what kind of relationship should Venice have with the Byzantine empire going forward?
2. What economic trade nodes are important to maintain in the Mediterranean?
3. How can Venice best compete with other Italian mainland states for optimal trading rights?
4. How important is naval military strength in securing Venice's economic interests?

Topic 2: Trade Expansion in the Mediterranean

1. What perspective on both domestic and international policy best suits a Doge of Venice?
2. How much power should be given to the emerging merchant class?
3. What interests and goals are uniform across all six *sestieri*? Which are unique?

Topic 3: Venice and the Crusades

1. What benefits does a strong relationship with the Pope provide? Does this relationship demand a level of subservience and to what degree?
2. What economic or relative power, if any, can be gained by participating in future crusades?
3. Should Venice act as a services-for-hire military power or be a forefront leader in the Holy Wars? Is staying completely neutral a better option?

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4. How does the relationship with the Pope affect relationships with other kingdoms and states throughout Europe and the Near East?



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