



Pope Julius II

# Venice and the enemies of the Renaissance: a new view

by David Goldman

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## *The Pope, His Banker, and Venice*

by Felix Gilbert

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Professor Gilbert's new book adds some important clues to the solution of one of the great problems of modern history, that is, how the enemies of the High Renaissance threw Europe back into chaos that finally bled itself out in the Thirty Years War. We are not done today with the Venetian problem. The modern *form* (if not the real origin) of all contemporary problems in counterintelligence dates to the turn of the 16th century, and nothing important can be done in intelligence analysis without reference to the continuity of what we tentatively call the Venetian problem.

Because most American policy-makers are illiterate with respect to the last 500 years of history, they are infinitely susceptible to "Venetian" forms of manipulation. Venice perfected, for the modern era, the art of persuading great powers to throw their weight against their own best interests. This finds expression in today's Alexander Haig problem. As *EIR* reported in its March 3, 1981 cover story, Haig's lie that *all* international terrorism is due to Soviet intrigue came initially from an Italian Socialist leader, President Sandro Pertini. The conduit was outgoing ambassador Richard Gardner, whose wife, Daniele Luzzatto, is from one of Venice's oldest families. Now that the White House has reportedly become aware that Haig set a trap on this and the related El Salvador issue, it should consider what sort of evil is capable of setting traps of this sort.

Venice was a high-priority counterintelligence concern for American leaders after the Revolution. Using Benjamin Franklin's dossier on the "Mesmerism" hoax, Friderich Schiller, Germany's greatest poet, published what is still the most comprehensive report on Venetian intelligence in the form of a roman à clef, *The Apparitionist*. An American author and counterintelligence specialist, James Fenimore Cooper, surfaced additional

finds in the form of a novel, *The Bravo*.

Since *EIR* has made frequent reference to the unbroken power of Europe's old financial oligarchy, and the importance in that light of the Bank for International Settlements, it is past time to identify some of the relevant background. Professor Gilbert's contribution is a good place to start.

Gilbert has found the check stubs showing how a Genoese pope, Julius II (Giuliano delle Rovere), and his Siense banker Agostino Chigi paid for the Venetian victory against the League of Cambrai—an alliance of all the great European powers formed in 1508, which sought to crush The Most Serene Republic for all time. Delle Rovere and Chigi—the forefather of the "Siena Group"—used the revenues of the papal salt and alum monopolies to buy Venice the Swiss mercenaries who held out against the League.

This evidence tends to confirm the published judgment of the period's greatest intelligence analyst, Niccolò Machiavelli, that Venice was the pivot of the ruinous foreign invasions into Italy between 1494 and 1527, the engine of ruin of the High Renaissance. More work is needed to establish that this Venetian-Genoese alliance was decisive, but what we have now is compelling.

## Venice against Italy

Consider what was at stake: in the 40 years after the Italian League formed in 1454 under Medici direction, Italy had its longest interval of peace. With Cusa's friends the Piccolomini family in sometime control of the papacy, the Italian Church intermittently collaborated with the great Cardinal Nicholas of Cusa in Germany and the "Spider King," Louis XI of France. The world saw the work of Leonardo, Raphael, Dürer, Titian, Erasmus, Reuchlin, and Cusa, among others—the greatest concentration of creative output in any period of human history.

By 1498, the fanatic Dominican Savonarola had exiled the Medici, the Venetians had brought Louis XII of Orléans into Italy, and the League had crumbled. The Borgia Pope Alexander VI kept up a grim kind of rearguard, by killing as many members of the factious

Roman nobility as he could. On his death the Sacred College installed another Piccolomini, Pius III, who died after only a month, presumably by poison. Julius II became Pope, in 1503, and was the butt of Erasmus's attacks for the next 10 years. He was able to use the Vatican's financial resources to frustrate the League of Cambrai—France, Germany, England, and Spain—in their effort to eliminate what Machiavelli at the time called the city “chiefly to be watched.”

Genoa's control over the Vatican broke in 1513 with the election of a Medici as Pope Leo X, but the damage was done. Charles V of Spain was already installed, extending Austrian Hapsburg power to the Iberian peninsula, and in 1519 he would become Holy Roman Emperor. The concordat of the European powers Cusa and the Piccolominis had sought collapsed. In 1517 Martin Luther issued his first theses. By 1527 Lutheran mercenaries had sacked the Vatican, French power in Italy was broken, and Julius II's Genoa had become banker to Emperor Charles. The Peasant Wars had scourged Germany of the great humanist revival of Cusa and Erasmus and ended in 100,000 deaths. Erasmus's friend Sir Thomas More had fallen from power in England, beginning Henry VIII's political and moral decline.

Venice and Genoa had already taken the loot of the third and fourth crusades two centuries earlier, but had been eclipsed during the 1400s by the trade and manufacturing power of the Medici. But the sudden, 1494 collapse of the Medici and their allies left the Venetian-backed Fuggers and Genoese bankers a clear way to the loot of the next century. Genoa's grip over the Spanish debt was such that the gold and silver output of the Spanish mines of the Western Hemisphere colonies went directly to Genoa and Genoa's Dutch offshoots.

Apparently, the commercially declining Venetians concentrated on intelligence and “cultural” operations of the type Schiller exposed in the cited work, creating what was for two centuries the most feared and biggest intelligence service in Europe. As Professor Gilbert notes, Venice degenerated from an oligarchical republic in which at least the forms of debate were preserved to the model of a totalitarian regime, ruled by the Council of Ten, Venice's equivalent to the KGB:

“The Great Council, originally the source of all power, had to concede part of its functions to the Senate; then the [smaller] Collegio and the Savi began to take over many of the activities of the Senate; and, in the 17th and 18th centuries, the Council of Ten became all-powerful. The years of the War of the League of Cambrai turned out to be a crucial step in this development,” Gilbert concludes. In 1508, Venice had imported leaders of the Florentine artistic Renaissance, and their efforts in the visual arts and music kept a foothold through the century. But by 1600 Venetian music fell to

the “new wave” miseries of Claudio Monteverdi, in a city where a full 20 percent of the 100,000 inhabitants were prostitutes or cutthroats.

Machiavelli has informed us that Venice manipulated the 1498 French invasion, the source of the great destabilization. What role did the Council of Ten play in the 1492 death of Lorenzo de' Medici and the ascension of the monk Savonarola, in the Fugger banking house's backing for the leaders of the Peasant Wars in Germany, in the Hapsburg takeover of the Holy Roman Empire? Professor Gilbert's find in the Venetian archives suggests that the archives will yield answers to these questions, too.

### The rise of Genoa

The story of Genoa's ensuing financial power is less obscure than the contemporary oligarchy likes to believe. Two of the world's great insurance companies, the Riunione Adriatica di Sicurtà and the Assicurazione Generale di Venezia remain in Venetian-Genoese hands. But the bulk of the Genoese fortune was exported via foreign investment and intermarriage, beginning with the 1602 formation of the Dutch East India Company and the sub rosa role of the Genoese Spinola family. The bulk of remaining Genoese money was already in Geneva when Napoleon destroyed the Genoese state in 1797, and thence to London—and eventually the United States.

As for surviving Venetian influence, we need only examine the role of the Pan-European Union leader Count Coudenhove-Kalergi, the descendant of a Greek-Byzantine family that settled in Venice in the 14th century. Kalergi created the Mont Pelerin Society, the agency which, as *EIR* has documented, is principally responsible for infiltrating remnants of the old oligarchy into Washington.\* In several ways which there is no room to go into here, the case of Kalergi makes sense of Alexander Haig.

It is both enjoyable and disconcerting to read Professor Gilbert's present book. Unlike most American leaders, who imagine they make policy on the basis of this morning's phone calls and daily newspaper, he is as much at home in 16th century politics as today's. Unfortunately he writes with sympathy and nostalgia for Venetian power, and his monograph does not tell enough of the contextual story for the American reader to grasp its very real importance. Professor Gilbert has nonetheless made a basic contribution to our understanding why the leaders of the American Revolution reserved a special hatred for the Most Serene Venetian Republic.

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\*For a fuller treatment see *Britain's New Dark Ages Conspiracy*, by Carol White, and *The Ugly Truth About Milton Friedman*, by Lyndon H. LaRouche, Jr. and David P. Goldman, both published by New Benjamin Franklin House.