

Noble in Spirit, Flawed in Action: The Less-Than-Ideal Venetian *Avissi & Gazette*

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The roots of journalism do not grow far from the waters of the Adriatic Sea. In fact, by technicality they grow in it — in Venice, Italy. The rapid spread of trade and development of postal networks helped information move faster. However, that information — in contrast to idealistic modern journalism — was not being produced in the interest of the everyday person. It was being produced to both improve trade business prospects and political goals, before later being used to drive profits for those who peddled it. Information was compiled to try and give readers as many angles as possible, but it was only accessible if readers could pay the hefty prices to access it. Information was manipulated, and writers were encouraged to protect those who kept their publication's income rolling. While objectivity was outwardly presented as being integral to the production of these publications, publishers and writers seemingly let their personal interests usurp their ability to objectively report and compile the news in its truest form.

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In February of 1401 Francesco Datini, a Venetian merchant and Qusai information broker, and his firm were circulating news of something big — Tamerlane's sacking of Aleppo in current day Syria. But the Datini Firm wasn't spreading this information for the sake of making news, rather out of necessity to conduct trade. Datini himself wrote that "it is impossible to trade without news," because he understood that significant changes such as the fall of a major city "would make great mutations to business" (in Kittler, 1401/2020, p. 1404). What Datini may very well not have understood was that he, and countless other renaissance traders, were subtly laying the groundwork for modern newswriting and information networks.

Mercantile correspondence as early as the 1260s was already sprinkled with news of political and economic relevance (Kittler, 2020, p. 1403). Any successful merchant would have had to be well versed in world affairs, and letters typically gave them that chance. However, the benefits of being aware of news across the globe did not exclusively benefit those involved in trade. "The Pen is so noble and excellent an instrument that is extremely necessary not only to merchants, but to all of the arts, liberal and mechanical," penned Benedetto Contrugli in an advice book for merchants in training circa 1450 (in Kittler, 2020/1450, p. 1403). As advancements were made in the commercial world, these letters went from being exchanged almost entirely by trading merchants to being circulated in the developing centers of trade (Lopez in Kittler, 2020/1976, p. 1404). Newly formed postal networks, the creation of double entry bookkeeping and the ability of paper to be increasingly manufactured in Italy all helped

information flow more smoothly (Kittler, 2020, p. 1404).

Politics were a key component of these letters because they often directly impacted merchants, although most of any given letter did not typically veer away from mercantile operations (Kittler, 2020, p. 1404). These letters, however, did not elegantly weave reports of relevant political events into the letters. Rather, reports were "haphazardly" inserted between paragraphs, making this early information difficult to decipher (Kittler, 2020, p. 14). This information was typically exchanged between business partners on the same trade routes, which naturally expanded the travel of the information with the scope of the network. The spread of news amongst traders was seen as essential, especially in Venice. In Venice's corner of the world, this early form of news was more of a business asset than a means of informing the public — much like Reuters, Bloomberg, and Business Insider all cater more to the London, Frankfurt, and Wall Street exchanges more so than the average citizen.

As merchant letters began to circulate across Europe at an accelerated pace, so did the news that came along with them. However, most of these early letters containing news were only kept around until their relevance faded (Kittler, 2020, p. 1405). That changed in Venice when news from letters began being compiled by writers in the 1300s (Kittler, 2020, p. 1405). Early compiled newsletters in Italy were called *nuove* or *novelle*. By the late 1400s, there were two predominant forms of news compilations, known as *avissi* and *gazette*, of which the primary difference came from which predated the other, in this case the *avissi* is mainly viewed as the predecessor to the *gazette*. The *avissi* originated 300 or so miles south of Venice, in Rome. "Rome,

as you know, is the place where all the news in the world is found,” wrote in the early 1600s Maiolino Bisaccioni, a Renaissance Italian author (in Infelise, 2002/c.1600, p. 213).

Some of the earliest surviving avissi were used to inform Venetians about Tamerlane’s plundering of Damascus. Originally, reports of the siege were addressed to the Venetian government and came via a series of reports between 1400 and 1401 from likely military commissioner Aloisio da Canal (who stationed in Modon near present day Greece) and between 1401 and 1402 from Crete-based Venetian notary Francesco Avonal (Kittler, 2018, p. 206). However, these were not traditional reports on the events. These were supplemented with eyewitness accounts that confirmed what the reports said — an early version of implementing quotations for a news story (Kittler, 2018, 206). For example, the testimony of Florentine merchant Gherardo di Doni as reported from the shores of Syria helped the Datini firm confirm reports of Damascus’s sack. “They say here that all of Damascus is Levelled with the ground, the castle is destroyed, and the Jewish synagogue is torn down with all the Jews, adult and children, men and women, dead inside,” wrote di Doni (in Kittler, 2018/1402, p. 207). Di Doni’s account not only confirmed prior reporting but gave it a human element by describing the event rather than just saying it happened.

The Commerical Revolution and Sedimentary Merchants & Ambassadors

Much had to change before journalistic newsletters were possible. The commercial revolution in Renaissance Venice saw traveling merchants replaced by sedentary and resident merchants. Especially in western Europe and the Mediterranean, where traders commonly frequented the same ports, made lasting connections, and eventually set up trade agreements with the same buyers. Venetians had made connections all over their part of the world — there were many of them “at the eastern termini, at Tana, Trebizond, or Cyprus, who resided there for years” (Lane, 1973, p. 137) — which allowed them to remain at home.

Before the commercial revolution, trade was conducted exclusively by those who made journeys between Venice and foreign lands. One example was the famed Venetian explorer, Marco Polo. “Marco caught the eye of the Mongol emperor, entered his service, and traveled back and forth over China for most of the next twenty years” (Lane, 1973, p. 81). Following his two-decade-long trade-related travels, Polo returned to the Venetian palace he grew up in, only to not be recognized by anyone (Lane, 1973,

p. 81). Trading was a life-long commitment, and to make money, merchants had to travel to places on their own to establish relationships and ensure that their enterprise was operating correctly. The shift towards sedentary merchants was made possible by modernized techniques and services becoming more available across the Adriatic Sea. Double entry bookkeeping allowed the resident merchant to keep track of what his partners were doing without being there. “This kind of bookkeeping enabled a merchant operating simultaneously on many marketplaces to know the extent of his liabilities and the extent and nature of his assets” (Lane, 1973, p. 141).

Sedentary merchants collaborated with people other than themselves to conduct trade in foreign lands — making partnerships a necessity. These relationships are known as joint ventures. In Venice they primarily came in three forms: family partnerships, *maona*, and *colleganza* (Lane, 1973, p. 138). The most common was *colleganza*. This relationship is practiced by most sedentary merchants and their agents — it involves one party supplying labor and the other providing financial support (Lane, p. 1973, pp. 138). Traders also began to keep better track of their cargo. They wrote ledgers and manifests which eventually developed into the bill of lading, which sedentary merchants used to keep track of and ensure all cargo that their partners left with ended up in the buyer’s hands (Lane, 1973, p. 141).

The most important circumstance that allowed the Commercial Revolution to happen was the postal system. “There was a constant stream of letters in the fourteenth century, and a merchant in Venice was sufficiently well informed” (Lane, 1973, p. 140). Quick moving postal services allowed sedentary merchants at home in Venice to know the prices of products, as well as how “advantageously his agent had traded for him” (Lane, 1973, p. 140). The postal services also allowed the bill of exchange to exist, which functioned similarly to a modern line of credit. This allowed the resident merchant to send extra funds to his partner and receive the proceeds from any sale made by the partner. This allowed capital to flow more freely between parties without the risk of buying more products and bringing them back to the sedentary merchant (Lane, 1973, p. 141). The post was also the merchant’s primary source of news. Resident merchants relied on letters from other merchants to stay up to date on the happenings of Venice, specifically in the Rialto, the city’s financial district (Lane, 1973, p. 143). These

changes in trading practices meant it was desirable to know the dealings of regions traders operate in and the new access to parchment and consistent logs of information made that knowledge possible.

Another key circumstance in the same period was the development of sedentary ambassadors who represented the interests of other states abroad. It was the role of such an ambassador to inform the Venetian government of news from abroad. This position was seen as integral to the function of Venetian governance, so much so that in the 1490s a Venetian resident ambassador was sung the highest of praise by Doge Leonardo Bellini “on account of the diligent notice of all news which according to your custom, you have given us” (in Kittler, 1490/2020, p. 1405). One of the earliest examples of this was Pietro Cornaro, a Venetian diplomat sent to Milan to report back to the War of Chioggia in Genoa in the late 1370s. Cornaro was sent to Milan to strengthen Venice’s relationship with their leadership, and leveraged developing postal networks to relay correspondence back to the Doge and Great Council back in Venice (Kittler, 2018, p. 201). It was of course at the time, much as it is still today, advantageous to have direct information coming from a source in foreign lands who wasn’t just passing through but stationed in their location of interest. Having an ambassador become entrenched allows them to become privy to important context for correspondence, as well as allowing them to advantage a broader range of sources they only garner because of their extended stay. The ambassador’s role was later defined by a 1500s Venetian politician as being “to search out the secrets of the universe, sending one’s mind in an instant to every single part of the world” (Chambers and Pullan, 1992, p. 271). The position of the sitting ambassador was an evolution of the sedentary merchant in the sense that his reporting would have been on matters of great importance to the state, not so much to the business sector.

How Merchant Letters Evolved into Political *Avissi*

Letters from merchants and ambassadors themselves were not necessarily *avissi* from the offset, although, those letters would become critical components. The problem with specific letters from merchants and ambassadors is that they are often personalized. They’re heavily reliant on context, which the average reader probably would not have since the letters were intended to be read by trad-

ing partners or politicians (Infelise, 2007, 39 p. 39). These letters often also mixed in personal news that would have only been relevant to the direct recipient, not the public at large. Thus, a new market for compiling and contextualizing these letters was born. Authors began to extract the hard news from these letters that they felt worthy of a wider audience, and “the process of selecting interesting passages and copying them onto other sheets of paper forms the basis of the development of the *avissi*” (Infelise, 2007, p. 38).

There were other stylistic elements that made these *avissi* notable as well. Most noticeable was the lack of attribution for the different pieces of news. Marino Sanudo, a Venetian chronicler often left authors’ names out of his diaries. The absence of these authors, according to Infelise, is indicative that this information was no longer so intimate that it needed to be shared by one individual, it was now news for the world (Infelise, 2007, p. 38). A network builder by the name of Benedetto Dei helped pioneer the style later used by many *avissi* in the 1470s, one that was concise and short and compiled on the most essential of information:

I have news from Pistoia from 15 December until 9 January 1478

I have news from Genoa that the Doge has knighted Batistino and sent away the [families of] Adorni and Raonesi

I have news from Lyon, the trade fair has been very, very good; a lot of textiles have been sold and a good deal of money gained too

I have news from France that nine ambassadors are coming to Italy with 200 horses to make peace for everyone. (in Infelise, 1478/2007, p. 39).

These were just a few of the dozens of points that he would transcribe each week. Dei was consistent in his writings and a bit of a braggart, saying that his papers contained “the news from Asia and from Africa and from Europe, always,” (in Infelise, 1490/2007, p.39) as he talked with his correspondents in other lands, often sedentary merchants and ambassadors. But that’s just the compilations and productions of one man, which given the difficulty and time required to produce copies inherently couldn’t reach that far. That is

until others began to relay Dei's writings. One of Dei's correspondents, Pandolfo della Stufa wrote to Dei in 1490 to tell him that upon his letter's arrival they were mass copied instantaneously (Infelise, 2007, p. 40). Those copies were then sent to every corner or the postal network and the same happened there, thus both the news and the style were being shared. Over the next 30 or so years headlines were added to these compilations that included the source of the news, for example: 'copy of letters,' 'summary of another avissi,' 'summary of news,' etc. (in Infelise, 2007, p. 40). They also started to include dates and locations to further specify where information was coming from. For example, a piece of news coming from Venice about the fall of Agnadello would likely read something along the lines of 'News from Venice, 14 May 1509.'

These publication's sources and their compiler's intents were just as important as their innovative aesthetics. Avissi coming from Rome, like the prior mercantile letters, contained political, military and economic information. Cities like Rome and Venice were critical to information networks because of their locations near frequented trade routes, both over water and by land. Avissi were handwritten, and upon those who wrote them, there was an immense pressure to be accurate. With that pressure came a shift to professionalism. Between 1570 and 1580, Pope Pius V became one of the first world leaders to threaten authors with punishment should their work be deemed inaccurate. According to Pius V's personal biographer, the pontiff believed that a lot of writers claimed to be objective on the grounds of the "vivacity of [their] spirit," but that they were often corrupted by "greed and gain," reported Maffei (in Infelise, 1571/2002, p. 214).

Pius V also believed that the avissi and their authors' true goals were to profit off sales, not spread objective information. "In everything malice is involved, coupled with lies, neither saying nor reporting what is true, but just enough to spread scandal and to ruin others, so as to find more readers for those unworthy sheets of paper and to reap even greater profits from this iniquitous trade," (Maffei in Infelise, 1571/2002, p. 214). An example of the repercussions one could face for being complicit in such a scandal was hanging. The exact punishment Pius V passed down to Niccolo Franco, a Roman pamphleteer accused of producing "defamatory broadsheets" in 1570 (Infelise, 2002, p. 214).

Objectivity was a great idea to have in theory, however, even those in positions of power soon realized the power authors wielded in their quills. A writer named Girolamo Frachetta first toyed with that idea in his 1613 book *Il seminario de' governi di stato et di guerra*. He felt that falsifying information, specifically in the avissi, could be a great advantage during times of war (Infelise, 2002, p. 216). Frachetta suggested that providing enemies with false information through newsletters and newspapers would allow for the falsifiers to stay one step ahead of their enemies tactically (Frachetta in Infelise, 1613/2002, p. 216). The weaponization of information in war times against foreign enemies became commonplace — naturally, the weaponization of information by politicians against domestic political opponents soon followed.

This was mostly seen as politicians trying to remain in the favor of the writers to be covered in a good light. However, the relationships between political figures and writers were more complex than one bootlicking the other. Around the turn of the 17th century, politicians began to act differently in public when they knew writers were around. Cardinal Decio Azzoloni recognized the benefits while warning other politicians not to get too close. "Flattering novellanti [news writers] and men who serve and practise in the houses and waiting rooms of princes, because they will praise you, and it is important to be praised in public places," he wrote (in Infelise, 1624/2002, p. 216). "But because people like that are never much respected, you shouldn't get too close to them, just keep them friendly in order to reap the rewards" wrote Azzoloni (in Infelise, 1624/2002, p. 216). Azzoloni alluded that those politicians being close with writers only helps favorability so long as the politician is not directly associated with them, because the writer is not viewed favorably in Roman society.

Not all avissi were the same, even when produced by the same compiler. There was a more expensive tier of avissi known as secret avissi. This version of the information was typically less filtered. As previously mentioned, avissi were not immune to containing false information, something that Venetians of a higher pedigree were willing to pay to avoid. They usually contained negative news that Venetian elites would prefer was not made available to the wider population (Infelise, 2002, p. 217). The information within secret avissi was not obtained easily. The work those

early journalists did was more akin to the spies of other nations than the reporters of today (Preto in Infelise, 1994/2002, p. 218). Normal avissi were produced by public copiers, while secret avissi had to be produced in private to mitigate leaks (Infelise, 2002, pp. 218-219). As a result, secret avissi were typically produced within political embassies. Over time, the connections between embassies and writers grew out of mutual benefit (Infelise, 2002, p. 225).

Information obtained by writers from these embassies was typically accurate. However, at times either party was able to fact check the other. This relationship provided a safeguard for both writers and politicians because any incorrect leak could be harmful to Venice, especially if it pertained to foreign leaders. One such example comes from a Basadonna, a Venetian ambassador who was concerned with the circulation of falsified information about Venetian attitudes towards the Pope in the 1660s. "This type of people are always wide of the mark because, with no basis, they merely collect the news from the piazza and have no other aim than to fill their sheets," he wrote of avissi compilers (in Infelise, 1663/2002, p. 225). Basadonna warned that because the rest of world supposedly respects Venetian journalistic integrity that readers would be likely to believe what was written. He also warns that Venetian writers should remember to serve the interests of their state. "It doesn't matter if they tell lies about Flanders, Germany or Turkey, but let them abstain from comments on Venetian affairs!" he wrote (Basadonna in Infelise, 1663/2002, p. 225).

An example of the differences between regular and secret avissi was the 1597 dispatch sent by Papal ambassador Francesco Barbaro to Venice. The normal, public version of the avissi was shared with Barbaro by a common merchant. However, the secret version detailed reports about the cardinals in Rome and, more importantly from Venice, exposed confidential information about the deliberations of the Venetian Senate (Infelise, 2002, p. 220). Barbaro investigated the potential sources that writers used in the secret avissi and determined that it came from a Roman agent who bought it in the capital. Barbaro saw the leaking of

this information as the emergence of a new type of writer. He believed that careers could be made of such work. "From this [example]," said Barbaro, "one can understand the extent to which people who earn their daily bread by this art are able to penetrate to the hearts of princes, given that they think of nothing else but that" (in Infelise, 2002/1597, p. 220). He believed that power writers which wield in their quills, especially in the circles that could afford secret avissi, had the ability to impact the thoughts of even the most important and powerful members of society.

Negative information, like the confidential Senate deliberations, that was correct and meant to be in secret avissi also caused problems when leaked. Although compilers and ambassadors were very protective of the information, the number of hands that came in contact with any given piece of writing, especially if couriered over a long distance, left the writing vulnerable to leaks. For example, in 1623 Rome, Bishop Cristoforo Caetani ordered Secretary of State Lorenzo Magalotti to read and respond to a Venetian avissi (Infelise, 2002, p. 219). The eventual response was first read by the pope, then by the secretary of state, and then the cardinal-nephew before being taken via courier to Venice (Infelise, 2002, p. 219). At any point during this process, which happened regularly, information could be divulged. This related to a widespread idea that information being spread too freely, in any context, can have a negative effect on the institution in question. One such occurrence happened in 1657 when Angelo Correr, a Venetian ambassador to the Roman court, was upset about leaked information about peace negotiations with the Sultan in Levant. "I reckon that the root of the evil lies in what is said too freely, what you hear from some people in the Senate who are perhaps unable to realize by themselves when they should shut up," he wrote (in Infelise, 2002, p. 219). He argued that when people speak freely, they open their words to be misconstrued, which can in turn harm the republic. "The details are written down by hearers who mix some truth in among the lies; the gazetteers have always recounted everything with scandalous indecency," wrote Correr of the leaks (in Infelise, 2002, p. 219).

The Shift to Profit-Centrism

In the late sixteenth century, the way that publishers viewed news was beginning to shift. They realized they could profit from selling their compilations — especially the *gazzette* — which evolved writing from a passion to a professional career. It was also around this time that the view of producers of *avissi* and *gazzette* shifted. In his 1598 Italian-English dictionary Giovanni Florio defined the *gazzette* as the “the daily news or intelligence written from Italie” and “[the] tales [of] running news” (in Infelise, 2010/1598, p. 54). It was also in this dictionary that the terms *gazzetiere* and *intelligencier* were introduced, which references the individuals who compiled the publications. The definition changed from designating the individuals who simply gathered information to the person who wrote it himself.

Between 1652 and 1668, Giovanni Quorli documented what the early profession was like in Venice, especially for those working in *studio di reporti* (report studios) and became one of the best examples of profiting from publishing (Infelise, 2010, p. 55). On average, Quorli’s reporting office would serve about 60 subscribers with 245 newsletters compiled from those of Venice, Milan, Paris, Rome, London, Vienna and Cologne. More than half of Quorli’s customers wanted access to all the newsletters produced over any given year, for which they would pay 30 ducats yearly. Those who were not as interested in receiving the full run of Quorli’s *gazzette* would in rare cases purchase just one edition for at least 5-11 ducats (Infelise, 2010, p. 56). This model was so profitable for Quorli that at its peak it produced 1,179 ducats of gross income, however, some subscribers paid in alternative ways such as making gifts or granting favors. The cost to run the office was about 11 ducats per week, equal to 572 yearly.

After taxes Quorli raked in about 590 ducats, a small fortune at the time, proving the publication’s economic viability. Although that number was still well beyond the average salary in the city, even that of the Venetian glassmaker, not everyone at Quorli’s office truly believed in the profitability of the *Gazette*. Paolo Angelelli, who partnered Quorli, was one of them. He claimed that even though there were plenty of clients, their tardiness to pay up hindered the publications true potential — which Angelelli believed

could be increased by 350 ducats if a stricter payment deadline had been enforced (Infelise, 2010, p. 56). This itself was a problem with the industry. “We meet resistance in collecting debts,” wrote Angelelli while attempting to end his partnership, a problem that all gazetteers faced. (in Infelise, 1668/2010, p. 56). One predominant example of a client dodging payment happened when count von Pötting in Madrid refused to pay for about 20 different newsletters that he received over the course of 6 years in the 1660s, one of which was Quorli’s. Quorli could do little aside from pester the count’s family in Vienna, which ultimately was unsuccessful in persuading von Pötting to pay. Quorli, as a last resort, was forced to threaten to withdraw his services (Infelise, 2010, p. 57).

Not all publishers were as lucky as Quorli as 60 subscribers was a fairly large number. Plenty of other reportisti were able to survive with far less (Infelise, 2010, p. 57). However, the less reliable subscribers available for any one publication, the more important each subscriber became to the publisher. This led to competition between reportisti to see who was able to best meet the needs of the most subscribers, something that their handwritten nature allowed them to do with ease. Because of this intense competition, reportisti began accusing one another of copying each other, but more notably of stealing each other’s clientele. The fear of losing subscribers was so prominent in the profession that when publishers felt backed into a corner, they were forced to take drastic measures, including arguments based on pathos.

Years after Quorli in the 1670s, a publisher named Girolamo Brusoni learned that Cardinal Flavio Chigi no longer intended to read his papers. “That occupation is the sole provider for my poor dwelling with mother and sister,” Brusoni pleaded to Chigi (in Infelise, circa 1700/2010, p. 56). The profitization of these publications was important to both those looking to make a profit and those who depended on the job to get by in life. Hanging on to subscribers was one of the most important parts of that job — especially since subscribing was not cheap. Subscribers to Quorli’s *gazzette* were willing to pay around 30 ducats a year to access the publication. That price was nearly ten times higher than the rent for a dwelling in the city (Infelise, 2010, p. 58). Information can be seen as a luxury in early post-renaissance Venice.

A reason to keep certain details locked away behind a paywall was subscriptions. Publishers felt that it was in their best interest to prevent information that could harm subscriber's business. As alluded to earlier, *avissi* and *gazzette* were expensive, meaning subscribers had to have some financial good fortune, which likely came from either a trade or privilege as a cardinal or ambassador. Should any information published harm that trade, there is less money for the trader to spend on buying papers. This could of course lead to bias, which prevented the newsletter from being completely uninfluenced.

One such example of a publisher choosing to keep a customer over reporting straight facts comes when Quorli warns his writers against exposing a loyal customer. The Vice Chancellor of the Empire, or the Count of Windisch-Graetz purchased, seven copies of his paper each week for 30 ducats. This was an income that Quorli was not willing to jeopardize. When the question came up of whether to publish an article that supposedly went against the count in the Milan edition, the answer seemed rather clear. "One must be warned against writing anything prejudicial against those we serve," wrote Quorli (in Infelise, circa 1670/2010, p. 62). Naturally, this trend existed elsewhere in similar situations.

Avissi and *gazzette* were produced and updated as new information became available to the writers, typically in the form of *capitolos*, or letters. These individual letters were typically produced by single editorial teams, which explains dates of the event may differ if the reports came from somewhere else (Infelise, 2010, p. 64). For example, when King Henry IV of France was assassinated in 1610, the writer who was assigned the topic was likely used to writing just one newsletter a week. For this occasion, he constantly updated his story even as five additional letters detailing the events came into his possession. He worked until the *reportisti* closed on Saturday night so that the most updated version of the story could be published (Infelise, 2010, p. 64).

When deciding what information from the letters should be highlighted in the publication, publishers would insert information in order of importance. This allowed for original reports to be cut without losing too much of the story when they took up too much space on the paper. Apart from the infor-

mation being sorted by importance, information obtained from the *capitoli* was also changed in the stylistic sense. Spelling was updated to better reflect the Venetian dialect, words were changed that were misunderstood by copyists and some *capitoli* may be glossed over all together because their style was inconsistent or not as good as the others (Infelise, 2010, p. 64). Information organization based on the order of importance acts like an early version of the inverted pyramid structure that journalists use today — which also puts less important information at the end of stories so that they can be cut should more space be needed.

This was another point in the process, besides the handing back and forth of information, where leaks were possible. However, besides the information being leaked, publishers had to be worried about the lists of clients that received the newsletters being leaked as well. This meant having no confidence that anyone you worked alongside would be able to keep a secret. Quorli once told the manager of his copy office "do not trust anybody" (in Infelise, circa 1670/2010, p. 59). To safeguard against the names of clients being leaked, the owner of the print shop would be the only one to put names and addresses on the final copies. The lack of trust also prevented copying, which helped maintain profitability especially since customers were often picky about the exclusivity of the information that they received due to the price they paid for it. The gazetteers also helped appease picky readers by catering to the individual subscriber's desired style, usually employing specific graphic and stylistic choices (Infelise, 2010, p. 60). Some subscribers were so particular that even a change in handwriting could cause them irritation. One of which was Francis V, the Duke of Modena, whom gazetteer Antonio Minummi had to explain his copyist's illness to after the duke picked up on the subtle change in handwriting that vexed his reading ability (in Infelise, circa 1670/2010, p. 60).

It was also in these compilations that an early news writing style was born. The writing style — as to not take up too much space — was bland and intentional. Quorli wrote that he had no intention to "delight [readers] with poetic license" but to convey information concisely "with sentences in brief" (in Infelise, circa 1670/2010, pp. 60-61). This style made it easier

for copyists to make specific copies of the paper to fit the parameters outlined by the subscriber.

While publications tried their best to spread the truth, or at the very least their truth, there were naturally going to be some differences between them considering so many existed. These differences, due to the prominence of public opinion and debate in Venetian society, were often cause of public fights. Venetians would meet, discuss and compare the information they had consumed in the public piazzas, especially if there was some major controversy at hand. In December of 1676, two elderly people got into an argument over the differences in the accounts of the capture of Melisso. This scene went from being a debate to “conventicles and entanglements among the hotheads” followed by insults and capped off by “blows with a stick” (di Stato in Infelise, 1676/2010, p. 66). These “uproarious scuffles” occurred after every battle and event that was scribbled down onto gazette and avissi. A critic named Abbot Frugoni who focused on critiquing social life felt that the information given to the public by papers pulled them in different directions that was ultimately divisive. “Everyone had their own ideas and when a gazetteer’s article took a particular line it became a riotous excuse to come to blows for each test his mettle,” he wrote. “It was war upon war; they skirmished more with their wheeling tongues than the soldiers had done with their sharpened swords” (in Infelise, 1687/2010, p. 66). No one wanted to believe that the publication they bought — that they spent their hard-earned income on — was somehow incorrect.

Conclusion

While Venetian news systems had come a long way from mercantile letters to something that resembled a newspaper by the turn of the 18th century, they still lacked important aspects of current journalism. They were designed to help businesses profit, not to help citizens be informed. Rather than giving readers objective information they often fell short of such goals, rather at many times they served their own interest, which was to profit by selling subscriptions. While strict objectivity goals may not have been met and profits and political goals were at times the driving force behind them, early journalism in Venice appears to have been a direct predecessor to its current

iteration, despite its shortcomings.

Future research into Venetian avissi and gazette should investigate the relationships between writers and political figures more closely as it can provide insight into the methods that writers employed to obtain information. It can also investigate the relationships between publishers in Venice and leaders in foreign countries — focusing on the ways that relationship building in foreign lands could affect sourcing news in Venice. While Venetian journalism may not have been a perfect system, its ink-stained fingerprints are present all-over modern journalism. From the limited writing style to the interweaving of information and the inverted pyramid format — it is impossible to ignore Venetian influence.

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