Papering Over Protest: Contentious Politics and Archival Suppression in Early Modern Venice

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PAPERING OVER PROTEST: CONTENTIOUS POLITICS AND ARCHIVAL SUPPRESSION IN EARLY MODERN VENICE*

On the afternoon of Saturday, 12 March 1569, hundreds of workers stormed out of the Venetian state shipyard, or Arsenal, shouting and brandishing hatchets and hammers. Angered by a salary cut announced that morning, they invaded the government palace, threatened their patrician rulers, and refused to leave until their demands were accepted. Their revolt effectively obstructed the state's functioning and, since the shipyard workers had a dual function as palace guards, posed a serious threat. While the workers occupied the hall of the College, the Republic's steering committee, hundreds of toga-clad patricians gathered for the scheduled meeting of the Senate. Unable to access the palace, younger senators prepared to liberate it by force.[1] An armed assault on the seat of government, workers threatening the highest-ranking patricians, and senators itching for a fight with commoners: little here conforms to the standard image of Venice as the 'most serene one', an exceptionally stable city state, immune to political contestation — and indeed in the records produced by that state, this image remains intact. Nothing described above is recorded in the government archives. On paper, this was a day like any other in the

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[1] Biblioteca Querini Stampalia, Venice (hereafter BQV), Ms. IV.16, fos. 281^{v}–281^{r}.

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political life of Venice.[2] Despite writing their records in the halls the workers invaded, government secretaries included no trace of the revolt. As a result, the revolt was an archival non-event.

In this article we use a variety of non-governmental sources to reconstruct the revolt of the Arsenal workers, and we investigate how and why it was written out of government records and hence of history. To analyse contentious politics in the early modern period, historians often have to start from hostile accounts contained in policing and judicial records that document the punishment of protesters.[3] This familiar methodological challenge is further complicated for Venice because government records of revolts are often missing altogether. For this reason, we need to mine such records for minimal and indirect traces of revolts, but also to examine archival suppression. If the absence of evidence is not evidence of absence, then what is it evidence of? What motivates the omissions: a strong government in a position of domination, or one anxious to hide its fragility in a society marked by conflict? What do archival silences say?

This article studies the intertwined processes of popular defiance and archival suppression in early modern Venice. On the one hand, we look at a series of acts of protest that began with the March revolt but continued over several months, including real and suspected sabotage, bread riots and anonymous placards. We thus uncover a cycle of protests in Venice, a city normally renowned for peace and concord.[4] To appreciate these events, on the other hand, we disentangle them from a second, simultaneous process, a form of archival politics by which the government suppressed protest not just in practice but also on paper. It carried out convictions in secret, obliterated the revolt from its records, and elided dissent from published histories, with major historiographical consequences to this day.

Historians have long debated the extent of ordinary people's agency in the history of early modern revolts and popular politics more generally. The earliest social histories viewed revolts as

[2] Archivio di Stato di Venezia (hereafter ASV), *Collegio*, *Notatorio*, reg. 38, fos. 34^{r-v}; *Senato*, *Terra*, reg. 47, fo. 53.

[3] Andy Wood, *The 1549 Rebellions and the Making of Early Modern England* (Cambridge, 2007), 208–9.

[4] Sidney Tarrow, *Struggle, Politics, and Reform: Collective Action, Social Movements, and Cycles of Protest* (Ithaca, NY, 1989).

precursors to the class struggles of the capitalist era.[5] As cultural history came to dominate the field, protests began to be studied more for their ritual character than for their political effectiveness — a dichotomy alien to those historians who emphasized the political meaning of riots and ritual violence.[6] Subsequently, revisionist historians questioned the extent and even the existence of popular agency in protests, which they viewed as inevitably led by elites.[7] In the last two decades, however, a renewed interest in the social history of politics sees riots and revolts as one end of a broader spectrum of bargaining acts.[8]

Inspired by James C. Scott's work, some have claimed that subordinate groups engaged in constant resistance, with deference no more than a facade.[9] While welcoming the 'micro-political' approach that uncovers contention in precise spatial and temporal contexts, Andy Wood has warned it may overestimate popular defiance.[10] Wood has invited social historians to re-evaluate the hegemonic nature of early modern politics and hierarchical society, which hampered resistance and made open revolt exceptional. Without downplaying the role of resistance, he reconsiders how deference and defiance are linked. Undergirding Wood's approach is an acute awareness of the interconnection of recording and power. As he shows, the earliest records and narratives stigmatized and simplified

[5] For example, Eric J. Hobsbawm, *Primitive Rebels: Studies in Archaic Forms of Social Movement in the 19th and 20th Centuries* (Manchester, 1959).

[6] E. P. Thompson, 'The Moral Economy of the English Crowd in the Eighteenth Century', *Past and Present*, no. 50 (Feb. 1971); Natalie Zemon Davis, 'The Rites of Violence: Religious Riot in Sixteenth-Century France', *Past and Present*, no. 59 (May 1973).

[7] Arlette Jouanna, *Le Devoir de rÕvolte: la noblesse française et la gestation de l'État moderne, 1559–1614* (Paris, 1989); Francesco Benigno, *Specchi della rivoluzione: conflitto e identità politica nell'Europa moderna* (Rome, 1999).

[8] Jan Dumolyn and Jelle Haemers, 'Patterns of Urban Rebellion in Medieval Flanders', *Journal of Medieval History*, xxxi (2005); Patrick Lantschner, *The Logic of Political Conflict in Medieval Cities:* Italy and the Southern Low Countries, 1370–1440 (Oxford, 2015); John Walter, *Crowds and Popular Politics in Early Modern England* (Oxford, 2014).

[9] James C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven, CT, 1990); see Michael J. Braddick and John Walter, 'Grids of Power: Order, Hierarchy and Subordination in Early Modern Society', in *Negotiating Power in Early Modern Society: Order, Hierarchy and Subordination in Britain and Ireland* (Cambridge, 2001), (editors' intro).

[10] Andy Wood, 'Subordination, Solidarity and the Limits of Popular Agency in a Yorkshire Valley, *c.*1596–1615', *Past and Present*, no. 193 (Nov. 2006).

rebellions in hostile terms to sustain hegemonic ideas of the social order.[11] The question of sources, then, is central to the debate on the extent of popular agency. To Scott, the bulk of the archives by definition portrays the official public transcript; to look for resistance, he turns instead to, for example, literary sources and oral histories. Wood's more subtle argument highlights the power at play in the archive itself.

Subaltern studies have taught us to see archives as extending processes of exclusion and violence. Marginalized voices therefore need to be reconstructed by reading sources against the grain.[12] Our case suggests that not only misrepresentation but also complete silence needs to be deconstructed. Some governments recorded defiance while enforcing the rule, but others proclaimed the rule while carefully disregarding its breach. The archival turn in history insists on the non-neutral creation and accumulation of records.[13] We have learned to see archives as serving power and as embodying how states viewed and organized their world.[14] But what about events that those states wished to repress? So far, when it comes to revolts and archives, historians have tended to consider them in violent opposition. Rebels destroyed archives, especially tax records.[15] And, in turn, the records of rebels were destroyed just as their

[11] Wood, *1549 Rebellions and the Making of Early Modern England*; Andy Wood, 'Tales from the "Yarmouth Hutch": Civic Identities and Hidden Histories in an Urban Archive', in Liesbeth Corens, Kate Peters and Alexandra Walsham (eds.), *The Social History of the Archive: Record-Keeping in Early Modern Europe* (Past and Present, Supplement no. 11, Oxford, 2016).

[12] Swati Chattopadhyay and Bhaskar Sarkar, 'Introduction: The Subaltern and the Popular', *Postcolonial Studies*, viii (Oxford, 2005); Antoinette Burton, *Dwelling in the Archive: Women Writing House, Home, and History in Late Colonial India* (Oxford, 2003).

[13] Ann Laura Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain: Epistemic Anxieties and Colonial Common Sense* (Princeton, 2009); Francis X. Blouin Jr and William G. Rosenberg, *Processing the Past: Contesting Authorities in History and the Archives* (Oxford, 2011); Liesbeth Corens, Kate Peters and Alexandra Walsham (eds.), *The Social History of the Archive: Record-Keeping in Early Modern Europe* (Past and Present, Supplement no. 11, Oxford, 2016).

[14] J. M. O'Toole, 'Cortes's Notary: The Symbolic Power of Records', *Archival Science*, ii (2002); Randolph C. Head, *Making Archives in Early Modern Europe: Proof, Information, and Political Record-Keeping, 1400–1700* (Cambridge, 2019).

[15] Amedeo de Vincentiis, 'Memorie bruciate: conflitti, documenti, oblio nelle città italiane del tardo medioevo', *Bullettino dell'Istituto storico italiano per il medio evo*, cvi (2004); David van der Linden, 'Archive Wars: Record Destruction and the Memory of the French Wars of Religion in Montpellier', *Sixteenth Century Journal*, li (2020).

memory was damned.[16] By contrast, we show that everyday processes of making and accumulating records can be viewed as strategies of repression, operated through selection, obliteration and obfuscation under a growing mass of records: in short, papering over protest.

A theoretical inspiration for the archival turn is Jacques Derrida's idea that accumulating records aids in forgetting and suppressing traumas.[17] While he formulated this as a postmodern critique on what he described as archival fetishism, archivists have read it as an encouragement to investigate archival layering as a historical process.[18] Constructivist and realist questions need not be mutually exclusive, and it is precisely the gap between what happened and what was recorded that we want to investigate. We draw on Michel-Rolph Trouillot's *Silencing the Past*. His analysis of the Haitian revolution as a 'non-event' demonstrated how power inequalities result in the silencing of voices that can be traced from the making of sources to the making of archives, narratives and, finally, history. As he underlined, 'any historical narrative is a particular bundle of silences, the result of a unique process'.[19]

What happens when we apply these notions to early modern European urban societies? How unspeakable was revolt when hierarchy defined the limits of accepted social and political discourse? How did the silencing work, and what does it say about real rather than discursive domination? Sixteenth-century Venice is an exemplary case. One of Europe's largest and most densely populated cities, its Arsenal employed perhaps the greatest concentration of manual labour on the continent, yet it is renowned above all for its strong ideology of social concord and enduring oligarchy. This fame starts in the archives themselves: the government systematically avoided mentioning social and political conflict or, if necessary, buried it under plentiful other records. We concentrate on a cycle of protest that lasted only a few months. The microhistorical approach enables us to deconstruct the silences in the archive by extending the

[16] Eric Ketelaar, *Archiving People: A Social History of Dutch Archives* (The Hague, 2020), 106.

[17] Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression* (Chicago, 1996).

[18] Terry Cook, 'The Archive(s) Is a Foreign Country: Historians, Archivists, and the Changing Archival Landscape', *Canadian Historical Review*, xc (2009).

[19] Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Boston, 1995), 27.

evidence, comparing official records with chronicles, outsiders' reports, newsletters and private letters. In this way we analyse the mechanics of archival suppression, and make the silences speak. This article uncovers far-reaching levels of unrest and contention, while offering new thoughts on the mechanics of archival suppression and their long-lasting consequences.

I
CONSENSUS AND THE ARCHIVE

At its demographic peak of 1575, Venice reached 190,000 inhabitants. An oligarchic republic, the government was in the hands of a patriciate of some two thousand men who had exclusive access to all deliberative councils and executive offices. They were aided by scores of secretaries and clerks drawn from an equally closed group of *cittadini*, or citizens, charged with the physical production of the records and the maintenance of the chanceries and their archives. Government operated under strict rules of secrecy: the most important chancery was not coincidentally known as the *Secreta*. With entry to both the patriciate and the *cittadini* group limited, Venice was arguably the closest Europe came to a society of castes. The castes did not reflect wealth — there were poor patricians and rich commoners — but manual labour was incompatible with elite membership and, unlike in most other European cities, guilds played no role in government. The regime faced no serious challenge after the fourteenth century and prided itself on being a stable republic, *serenissima* because it was unperturbed by civil conflicts and impervious to outside aggression. The patriciate attributed this to its horizontal unity and downward benevolence, and carefully cultivated this image.

First formulated in the Renaissance to celebrate the government's endurance as conflicts toppled other Italian republics, this view of Venice survived the 1797 fall of the Republic in the studies of mostly conservative nineteenth- and twentieth-century historians.[20] Jacob Burckhardt pitted Venetian concord against Florentine turmoil, a contrast widely and uncritically accepted in subsequent intellectual histories.[21] The image is rightly

[20] Claudio Povolo, 'The Creation of Venetian Historiography', in John J. Martin and Dennis Romano (eds.), *Venice Reconsidered: The History and Civilization of an Italian City-State, 1297–1797* (Baltimore, 2000).

[21] J. G. A. Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment: Florentine Political Thought and the Atlantic Republican Tradition* (Princeton, 1975).

regarded as a myth. Political historians have uncovered conflict inside the political elite, and cultural historians have investigated how the serenity ideal shaped Venetian culture.[22] But until recently this historiographical debunking remained at the level of the elite. Venice's exceptionalism as a city defined by social peace endured almost as an ideal type.[23] Today, historians trace contentious elements in a series of sources: blasphemy and inquisition trials and cheap print.[24] Some challenge the idea of a society of static and hierarchical orders.[25] Others highlight political discussion and even protest.[26] Few have begun to notice that official accounts minimized revolts.[27] It is time to grapple with the rationale, mechanisms and consequences of archival silences.

The government chancery — described at the time as 'the heart of the state' — expressed Venice's civic ideology of social and political harmony.[28] Patrician councils regulated record-making, record-keeping and archival access to an extent unparalleled in late medieval and early modern Europe. Citizen secretaries were

[22] Gaetano Cozzi, *Il doge Nicolò Contarini: ricerche sul patriziato veneziano agli inizi del Seicento* (Venice, 1958); Robert Finlay, *Politics in Renaissance Venice* (New Brunswick, NJ, 1980); Edward Muir, *Civic Ritual in Renaissance Venice* (Princeton, 1981); Iain Fenlon, *The Ceremonial City: History, Memory and Myth in Renaissance Venice* (New Haven, CT, 2007).

[23] Peter Burke, *History and Social Theory* (Cambridge, 2005), 128–33; Samuel K. Cohn, *Lust for Liberty: The Politics of Social Revolt in Medieval Europe, 1200–1425* (Cambridge, MA, 2006), 159.

[24] Rosa Salzberg, *Ephemeral City: Cheap Print and Urban Culture in Renaissance Venice* (Manchester, 2014); Federico Barbierato, *The Inquisitor in the Hat Shop: Inquisition, Forbidden Books and Unbelief in Early Modern Venice* (Farnham, 2012); Elizabeth Horodowich, *Language and Statecraft in Early Modern Venice* (Cambridge, 2008).

[25] Claire Judde de Larivière and Rosa Salzberg, '"Le Peuple est la citÕ": l'idÕe de *popolo* et la condition des *popolani* à Venise, XV^e–XVI^e siècles', *Annales HSS*, lxviii (2013).

[26] Filippo de Vivo, *Information and Communication in Venice: Rethinking Early Modern Politics* (Oxford, 2007); Claire Judde de Larivière, *La RÕvolte des boules de neige: Murano face à Venise, 1511* (Paris, 2014); Maartje van Gelder, 'The People's Prince: Popular Politics in Early Modern Venice', *Journal of Modern History*, xc (2018); Maartje van Gelder and Claire Judde de Larivière (eds.), *Popular Politics in an Aristocratic Republic: Political Conflict and Social Contestation in Late Medieval and Early Modern Venice* (London, 2020).

[27] Dennis Romano, 'Popular Protest and Alternative Visions of the Venetian Polity, *c.*1260–1423', and Monique O'Connell, 'Memorializing Conspiracy and Unrest: Venetian Historical Writing at the Turn of the Sixteenth Century', both in van Gelder and Judde de Larivière (eds.), *Popular Politics in an Aristocratic Republic*. Also Judde de Larivière, *La RÕvolte des boules de neige*; and van Gelder, 'People's Prince'.

[28] Filippo de Vivo, 'Cœur de l'État, lieu de tension: le tournant archivistique vu de Venise, XV^e–XVII^e siècle', *Annales HSS*, lxviii (2013).

instructed to maintain the political facade of the government. They recorded all proposals and voting outcomes of councils, without referencing discussions. Moreover, they transcribed their minutes onto thousands of large parchment volumes. This expensive, time-consuming measure had a practical purpose, to help information retrieval in quickly rotating offices, but also a symbolic function.[29] Cleansed of erasures and disagreement, bound in identical wooden borders, the volumes doubled as monuments to government continuity and consensus. Finally, the oligarchy banned mentions of dissent even from the records of individuals and corporations. For example, a patrician who recognized factional divisions by stipulating that his heirs should only marry in certain families had his will seized and modified by the authorities.[30] Similarly, a confraternity capitular that recorded opposition to the government was carefully corrected, eliminating the offending words.[31] The oligarchy devoted extraordinary attention to crafting and supervising official histories for publication but it also sought to hide criticism from its own records, arguably because they were so crucial to its (self-)legitimation.

However, the gaps in this archive of consensus become obvious when we confront government records with other sources. First, chronicles by patricians and citizens amounted to parallel archives, helping authors and their families to function more effectively in politics, by remembering key events including developments outside the 'serene' norm such as riots and revolts.[32] We consulted all known chronicles for these years.[33]

[29] Filippo de Vivo, 'Archives of Speech: Recording Diplomatic Negotiation in Late Medieval and Early Modern Italy', *European History Quarterly*, xlvi (2016).

[30] Filippo de Vivo, Andrea Guidi and Alessandro Silvestri (eds.), *Fonti per la storia degli archivi degli antichi Stati italiani* (Rome, 2016), 446–7.

[31] Romano, 'Popular Protest and Alternative Visions of the Venetian Polity', 31–2.

[32] Dorit Raines, *L'Invention du mythe aristocratique: l'image de soi du patriciat vÕnitien au temps de la SÕrÕnissime* (Venice, 2006); Christiane Neerfeld, *'Historia per forma di diaria': la cronachistica veneziana contemporanea a cavallo tra Quattro e Cinquecento* (Venice, 2006); James S. Grubb (ed.), *Family Memoirs from Venice, 15th–17th centuries* (Rome, 2009).

[33] These include the chronicles by the patrician Francesco Molin (who does not mention the revolts); the citizen Girolamo Savina, of whom little is known; and the patrician Agostino Agostini (1542–75). The copy of the *Cronaca Savina* we consulted is British Library (hereafter BL), Add. MS 8581. For Agostini's *Istoria veneziana*, we use BQV, Ms. IV.16. On Savina, see Adriana Boscaro, 'Manoscritto inedito nella Biblioteca Marciana di Venezia relativo all'ambasciata giapponese del 1585', *Il Giappone*, vii (1967), 10–12; on Agostini, 'Agostini, Agostino', in *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani* (1960), i, s.v.

Second, foreign ambassadors, agents and news writers watched the Arsenal carefully because of increasing hostilities with the Ottomans in the eastern Mediterranean and so wrote detailed reports about the revolt and subsequent disturbances. We especially focused on the dispatches of the papal nuncio and the ambassadors of Spain, Tuscany, Ferrara and Urbino. Their aim was not to report the protesters' point of view, but to catch rifts in the patriciate with implications for foreign politics.[34] Chronicles and correspondences, then, have their own biases and were not sympathetic to protesters, but they were not wedded to the official consensual ideology and therefore offer useful alternative perspectives.

II

CONFLICT IN THE ARSENAL

The Arsenal was Venice's largest manufacturing conglomerate and crucial to its prosperity. A series of shipyards, storehouses, armouries, as well as rope and sail factories, it constructed and maintained both the military fleet and the commercial galleys that connected the Levant to Western Europe.[35] In the sixteenth century, the Arsenal employed on average between 1,100 and 2,500 workers from three major guilds of carpenters, caulkers and oar makers, as well as many others, such as foundry workers, porters and female sailmakers.[36] Most workers lived in the neighbouring parishes, forming a close-knit community. The highest number of workers — according to some as many as 4,600, or about 2.5 per cent of the total population — was reached in the years after 1569, at the time of the Ottoman–Venetian War.[37] Collectively the Arsenal labourers formed the largest workforce in pre-industrial Europe.

The authorities celebrated the Arsenal as a symbol of maritime excellence and social stability: foreign dignitaries were invited to marvel at the seamless organization of production, while textual and visual descriptions praised the workers' loyalty.[38]

[34] Van Gelder, 'People's Prince'.

[35] Frederic Chapin Lane, *Venetian Ships and Shipbuilders of the Renaissance* (Baltimore, 1934); Robert C. Davis, *Shipbuilders of the Venetian Arsenal: Workers and Workplace in the Preindustrial City* (Baltimore, 1991).

[36] Lane, *Venetian Ships and Shipbuilders of the Renaissance*, 161–3.

[37] *Ibid.*, 182–6, 243.

[38] Francesco Sansovino, *Delle cose notabili che sono in Venetia* (Venice, 1562), 32^{r-v}.

Controlling the workforce, however, was a perpetual concern, entrusted to six patricians, the *Patroni e Provveditori* (Lords and Commissioners), assisted by numerous guards, bookkeepers, paymasters, doorkeepers and a bell ringer who signalled the start and end of the workday.[39] The *Patroni* kept lists of Arsenal employees and oversaw the workers' weekly payment on Saturdays. They reported directly to the College, whose meeting hall the protesters stormed in 1569.

Most historians have treated the Arsenal as a microcosm of Venice's paternalism, with the lower orders serving the state in return for its benevolence. Confirming the so-called myth of Venice, this view also fits broader trends in twentieth-century social and economic history. Frederic Lane's history of Venetian shipbuilding presented the Arsenal as a site of increasing economic rationalization and worker–employer collaboration. The shipyard demonstrated the productive interaction of early republicanism and capitalism, suited to American conservatism seeking precedents in medieval Italian republics. Lane rejected Marxists' insistence on class struggle and saw the Venetian state's 'coordination of social life' as its main contribution.[40] To the Arsenal workers, the state granted certain employment rights, a form of 'social insurance'; in turn, the workers lacked 'any real spirit of revolt'.[41] Thirty years later, Robert Davis focused on the workers themselves but came to similar conclusions. According to him, Venice found a 'solution to the potentially destabilizing situation of running a large-scale manufacturing operation within a premodern, urban society'. The Arsenal workers' 'making' was not that of a working class, but that of a loyal body of state employees.[42] Shifting away from Lane's language of employment rights and social insurance, Davis foregrounded the workers' seemingly irrational privileges, such as the permanent access to

[39] Lane, *Venetian Ships and Shipbuilders of the Renaissance*, 146–75, 189–234; Davis, *Shipbuilders of the Venetian Arsenal*, 198–201; Marin Sanudo, *I Diarii*, ed. R. Fulin *et al.*, 58 vols. (Venice, 1879–1903), v, 928–30.

[40] Frederic C. Lane, 'At the Roots of Republicanism', in *Venice and History* (Baltimore, 1966), 526; and Frederic C. Lane, *Venice: A Maritime Republic* (Baltimore, 1973). See also Melissa Meriam Bullard *et al.*, 'Where History and Theory Interact: Frederic C. Lane on the Emergence of Capitalism', *Speculum*, lxxix (2004).

[41] Lane, *Venetian Ships and Shipbuilders of the Renaissance*, 188.

[42] Davis, *Shipbuilders of the Venetian Arsenal*, 6, 176.

(watered-down) wine at work.[43] Davis portrayed the workers as thoroughly invested in the social order and their fights with other commoners as ritual safety valves — in short, as hegemony incorporated.[44] Both Lane and Davis collected a large amount of evidence of changing labour conditions but never investigated the negotiations, let alone the conflicts, behind those changes. Instead, they emphasized the workers' collaboration expressed through ceremonial roles and other civic duties. The *Annales* historian Maurice Aymard, instead, underlined a high degree of conflict over labour relations and wages, but the idea never caught on in English-language scholarship.[45]

Critical to Venice's economy, the Arsenal workers had a strong bargaining power and sense of solidarity. They carried out extensive civic duties, from firefighting to auxiliary militias, but these duties potentially served a purpose beyond expressing adherence to patrician hegemony: militia training and experience as fighting groups prepared them for mobilization and made them into a fearsome force, all the more so because they carried weapon-like work tools such as hammers, hatchets and long hooks called 'evil beasts'. Other occupational groups in late medieval and early modern Europe supplied citizen militias yet also recurrently revolted, acting simultaneously as forces of policing and vehicles of popular agency.[46] In sixteenth-century Venice too, Arsenal workers revolted; yet their revolts have attracted little more than brief footnotes by modern historians, who usually highlight the restoration of peace and focus on patrician paternalism, following the perspective of official records.[47]

[43] Robert C. Davis, 'Venetian Shipbuilders and the Fountain of Wine', *Past and Present*, no. 156 (Aug. 1997).

[44] Robert C. Davis, *The War of the Fists: Popular Culture and Public Violence in Late Renaissance Venice* (Oxford, 1994).

[45] Maurice Aymard, 'L'Arsenale e le conoscenze tecnico-marinaresche: le arti', in G. Arnaldi and M. Pastore Stocchi (eds.), *Storia della cultura veneta*, 6 vols. (Vicenza, 1976–86), iii, pt 2; also Giovanni Caniato, 'L'Arsenale: maestranze e organizzazione del lavoro', in A. Tenenti and U. Tucci (eds.), *Storia di Venezia: dalle origini alla caduta della Serenissima*, v: *Il Rinascimento: società ed economia* (Rome, 1996).

[46] Maarten Prak, 'Citizens, Soldiers and Civic Militias in Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe', *Past and Present*, no. 228 (Aug. 2015), 103–4.

[47] Ruggiero Romano, 'Economic Aspects of the Construction of Warships in Venice in the Sixteenth Century', in Brian Pullan (ed.), *Crisis and Change in the Venetian Economy in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (London, 1968), 62 (1501). Archivio di Stato di Firenze (hereafter ASF), Mediceo del Principato (hereafter MdP), Venezia, reg. 2976, fos. 137$^{r–v}$ (1563). David Chambers and Brian Pullan (eds.), *Venice: A Documentary History, 1450–1630* (Oxford, 1992), 289–91 (1581).

By reconstructing one of these revolts out of archival silences, we show that the Arsenal workers participated in a range of political roles, including contestation. They rioted like manual labourers and guildsmen elsewhere; if anything, their protests predate those in other large-scale shipyards in Amsterdam and London.[48] If most social historians have underestimated the extent of hegemony, as noted in our introduction, for Venice they have only recently begun to question it. Yet, as we argue, patrician control was much more successful on paper than in the streets.[49]

While government records depict the workers' labour conditions as paternalist concessions, guild records point to bargaining processes. For example, government records describe the workers' old-age employment as a concession, but the caulkers' statutes claim it was an 'obligation' on the part of the authorities.[50] The statutes also show that the workers retained the initiative in negotiations, since the guild claimed the right to put forward proposals.[51] What neither government nor guild acknowledge is the action of the workers themselves in this bargaining process.

The economics of Venice's all-important shipbuilding industry determined the workers' bargaining power. The state-controlled Arsenal competed for manpower with smaller independent yards. The state paid lower salaries but offered a number of advantages: flexibility, allowing the Arsenal workers to take unpaid time off to work in private shipyards; and security, guaranteeing them paid employment whenever they had no work outside the Arsenal. These arrangements are generally described as pillars of social peace, but they were subject to constant disputation following the fluctuations of the economy. The workers won their rights over the course of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, when the government had to compete with

[48] Pepijn Brandon, *War, Capital, and the Dutch State, 1588–1795* (Leiden, 2015); Roger Knight, 'From Impressment to Task Work: Strikes and Disruption in the Royal Dockyards, 1688–1788', in Kenneth Lunn and Ann Day (eds.), *History of Work and Labour Relations in the Royal Dockyards* (London, 1999).

[49] Aymard, 'L'Arsenale e le conoscenze tecnico-marinaresche', 314. See also Davis, *Shipbuilders of the Venetian Arsenal*, 176.

[50] Bartolomeo Cecchetti, *La Mariegola dei calafati dell'Arsenale di Venezia* (Venice, 1882), 8.

[51] *Ibid*., ix, 14.

an expanding private sector.[52] Following a contraction of the maritime sector, in 1502–4 the government backtracked on labour rights and reduced wages against workers' resistance.[53] In the 1530s, wars and renewed expansion in the private sector caused the restoration of old rights, but sharp inflation soon diminished real wages.[54] By the 1560s the Senate again complained that expenses were excessive and tried to disqualify a large number of workers from the Arsenal rolls.[55] But every attempt to cut costs provoked conflict.

III

WORKERS IN THE PALACE, SILENCE IN THE ARCHIVES

On 10 March, a Senate committee in charge of 'eliminating superfluous public spending' proposed a law to halve the Arsenalotti's Saturday pay and abolish the flexibility to work half-days during the rest of the week.[56] Every Venetian law includes a long preamble detailing rationale and precedents. In this case, the committee cited a 1504 law, claiming that their proposal restored the 'pristine . . . ancient and laudable regulations of our Arsenal'.[57] This language, typical of Venice's legislation, inscribed government measures in long narratives of continuity and presented new laws as restorations, literally 're-forms'. The committee claimed it meant to correct unlawful abuses.

Official records elide all references to debates within councils, but we know senators disagreed, because of a counter-proposal. Girolamo Grimani, who had served as Arsenal *Provveditore*, proposed to maintain the customary arrangements ('sia servato il consueto'), thus effectively legalizing the paid Saturday afternoon, the opposite of the committee's intention. The

[52] Aymard, 'L'Arsenale e le conoscenze tecnico-marinaresche', 312–15.

[53] Caniato, 'L'Arsenale', 665–7.

[54] Romano, 'Economic Aspects of the Construction of Warships in Venice'; Brian Pullan, 'Wage-Earners and the Venetian Economy, 1550–1630', *Economic History Review*, xvi (1964).

[55] Lane, *Venetian Ships and Shipbuilders of the Renaissance*, 244 (1560), 176 (1565).

[56] ASV, *Patroni e provveditori all'Arsenal*, reg. 11, fo. 53^{v}, 11 Dec. 1568. The workers received full wages on Saturdays despite only working mornings and spending the afternoon queueing for their pay; this was one of the government's roundabout ways to avoid granting pay increases: Romano, 'Economic Aspects of the Construction of Warships in Venice'.

[57] ASV, *Senato*, *Deliberazioni Mar*, reg. 39, fos. 45^{v}–46^{r}, 10 Mar. 1569.

senators must have discussed the issue at length, since two voting rounds followed, but in the end Grimani lost.[58] Perhaps growing Ottoman belligerence in the Eastern Mediterranean focused the senators' minds on increasing Arsenal productivity.[59] Geopolitical reasons, though, clashed with the socio-economic balance between low yet guaranteed salaries, job security and flexibility. Moreover, at a time when food prices were rising throughout Italy, the pay cut was a serious blow to workers.[60] Although the content of the council debates is unknown, the counter-proposal and voting rounds indicate disagreement within the political elite about what was a fair basis for labour and, perhaps more broadly, social relations: legal precedent or custom.

As for the workers, they clearly saw the new measures as infringing on hard-earned rights. On the next pay day, Saturday, 12 March, the Senate had the decree posted at the Arsenal 'in a place where everyone there can see it so that it will be carried out'.[61] The Arsenal workers revolted. The chroniclers Girolamo Savina and Agostino Agostini both reported that, when the bell signalled pay time, instead of queuing for their wages, the workers stormed out and, in the words of Savina, 'ran tumultuously, yelling inconvenient and disrespectful words and shouts'.[62] Agostini added that the workers — some three hundred of them — wielded 'axes and hammers and their other work tools'.[63] Foreign observers provided further details, but disagreed on numbers: a news writer who sent his letters to the Duke of Urbino only talked of 'great numbers of those of the Arsenal';[64] the Florentine Cosimo Bartoli reported some seven hundred protesters;[65] while the papal nuncio Giovanni Antonio Facchinetti wrote, no doubt exaggerating, that all Arsenal

[58] ASF, MdP, reg. 2979, fo. 133^{r}, 16 Mar. 1569; ASV, *Senato*, *Deliberazioni Mar*, reg. 39, fo. 46^{r}, 10 Mar. 1569.

[59] Archivo General de Simancas (hereafter AGS), *Papeles de Estado*, *Venecia*, leg. 1326, 5 Mar. 1569.

[60] Maartje van Gelder, *Trading Places: The Netherlandish Merchants in Early Modern Venice* (Leiden, 2009), 47–8.

[61] ASV, *Senato*, *Deliberazioni Mar*, reg. 39, fo. 46^{r}.

[62] BL, Add. MS 8581, fo. 126^{v}.

[63] BQV, Ms. IV.16, fo. 279^{r}.

[64] Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Urb.Lat.1041.pt.1, fo. 32^{v}, 14 Mar. 1569.

[65] ASF, MdP, reg. 2979, fo. 133^{r}, 16 Mar. 1569. On Bartoli, see Judith Bryce, *Cosimo Bartoli, 1503–1572: The Career of a Florentine Polymath* (Geneva, 1983), 95, 120.

workers participated.[66] The workers went straight for the seat of government, the Ducal Palace. The patrician chronicler Agostini wrote that to see men 'so determined and armed' gave the city 'the greatest terror'.[67] After all, these were the same men who were supposed to safeguard the palace.

Strong communal identity enabled the Arsenal workers to mobilize quickly, like rebellious workers elsewhere.[68] As militia members and experienced fighters, they were prepared to show their collective force; their familiarity with the government building's layout enabled them to mount effective protests. What made the Arsenalotti examples of popular support for the regime — their strength, civic roles, and close ties to the political elite — also potentially made them the greatest threat. By marching on the Ducal Palace and storming the courtyard, the workers drew on well-rehearsed 'repertoires of contention', routine actions developed over time with maximum communicative and pressurizing effects.[69] In Venice, workers and soldiers often expressed their discontent by occupying the monumental stairs leading from the palace courtyard to the upper floors of the political councils.[70]

This time, the protesters went further: inside the palace and up the 'Golden Stairs' reserved for dignitaries and magistrates. They first confronted the Heads of the powerful Council of Ten. None of the Ten's records mentions the incident even though they were responsible for state security and for guarding the Arsenal. Chronicles report that the workers demanded their full pay with 'shouts and inconvenient words', or else they 'would do and say, with irreverent words'. Agostini's elliptic description of the workers' words reminds us that chroniclers were not interested in the protesters' perspective. Like government records, chronicles are unsympathetic, but do report the intensity of the conflict. Agostini goes on to remark that one of the Heads of the Ten threatened to have 'six or eight [workers] hung by the neck'.

[66] Dispatch of 12 Mar. 1569, in Aldo Stella (ed.), *Nunziature di Venezia*, viii, *marzo 1566–marzo 1569* (Rome, 1963), 508.

[67] BQV, Ms. IV.16, fo. 279^{r}.

[68] Davis, *War of the Fists*, 39; see Dumolyn and Haemers, 'Patterns of Urban Rebellion in Medieval Flanders', 388–9.

[69] Charles Tilly, *Contentious Performances* (Cambridge, 2008), 14–15.

[70] Finlay, *Politics in Renaissance Venice*, 48–9; ASV, *Senato*, *Deliberazioni Mar*, reg. 37, fos. 67$^{r–v}$, 6 Aug. 1565; Sanudo, *I Diarii*: for example, vol. ii, 27, 51, 718.

Unintimidated, the workers declared that they would 'go where they would be listened to'.[71] They then ran 'tumultuously' straight to the College, the centre of government.[72]

Only foreign diplomats reported on what happened inside: they knew this hall well as the location of their formal audiences and relied on inside informants to obtain intelligence. Bartoli described how two *Savi di Terraferma*, mid-ranking College officials, first went to 'reprimand [the workers'] insolence and find out their demands while toning them down'. Behind this ambivalent phrasing, we surmise the patricians' predicament: they wanted to rebuke the workers but lacked the force to do so, with the palace guards themselves in revolt. The *Savi* failed and the College brought into play one of its senior members, Girolamo Grimani (Bartoli: 'undoubtedly the most renowned senator'), who had opposed the pay cuts two days earlier.[73] Thus, the College changed tactic and, recognizing the workers' strength, tried to negotiate with them — something the official accounts would never include.

Grimani's language differed sharply from the threats voiced earlier by the Head of the Ten and the two *Savi di Terraferma*. According to Bartoli, he greeted the workers, calling them 'sons' ('figli') and using 'good words' ('buone parole').[74] We do not know what Grimani offered: again the elite sources elide the bargaining and instead highlight vague paternalist language. But Bartoli also reports that the protesters chose two of the 'oldest leaders' ('capi') to speak for them. It is unclear whether they were informal 'heads' or gang bosses in the Arsenal hierarchy, or both. They 'stated strong grievances, vividly expressing their reasons, and their toil, their merits and good customs' ('vivamente allegando le loro ragioni, et le lor fatiche et meriti et buone usanze, si dolsono assai prontamente di tal cosa').[75] These words constitute one of the few times we hear the workers' voices, filtered through Bartoli and his informants.

While elite sources about popular revolt in England tend to amplify and ventriloquize individual rebels' speech in order to

[71] BQV, IV.16, fo. 279^{r}.
[72] BL, Add. MS 8581, fo. 126^{v}.
[73] ASF, MdP, reg. 2979, 16 Mar. 1569, fo. 133^{r}. On Grimani, see Michela Dal Borgo, 'Grimani, Girolamo', in *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani* (2002), lix, s.v.
[74] ASF, MdP, reg. 2979, fo. 133^{r}, 16 Mar. 1569.
[75] *Ibid*.

stigmatize it, here the language is terse and the rebels are anonymous.[76] Bartoli's report sublimates the workers' anger and simplifies the complexity of their position. However, it does show leaders appointed to voice complaints on behalf of the armed collective and hints at their arguments: their protest was based on 'their reasons', probably referring to the long-established pay and work arrangements; the spokesmen reminded everyone of their track record of hard labour, 'toil' and 'merits', demanding their just reward in the same language that petitioners customarily used, especially in their reference to 'good customs', language that mirrored the words of the patrician lawmakers. The workers asked the authorities to uphold their part in a contractual relationship, rescind the pay cut, and restore the flexible working arrangements. Perhaps the workers knew those arrangements were based on fragile precedents; if so, then they were effectively demanding a change in law.

The event shows that Arsenal workers were ready to protest with impressive force. With hundreds inside the Ducal Palace and physically in control of the Republic's highest officers, the absence of further violence is unsurprising. As in many cases in early modern England, the threat of violence alone was effective, so long as it was backed up by the readiness to act.[77] In this case, the workers' declaration, weapons in hand, that they had always kept 'good customs' was a reminder that this could change. Grimani's mediation and the *capi*'s intervention partly defused the situation. The College responded with 'good words' ('buone parole'), in line with Grimani's tone, and ambiguously assured the workers that it would 'not fail to do all that was convenient'. In Bartoli's eyes, once the government admitted defeat, 'the furore diminished'.[78] The workers left: they had not intended to overturn the established order but to protest an unjust decision and demand a correction, in line with most medieval and early modern workers' revolts.[79]

[76] Wood, *1549 Rebellions and the Making of Early Modern England*, 91–108, 227–41.

[77] Thompson, 'Moral Economy of the English Crowd in the Eighteenth Century', 120.

[78] ASF, MdP, reg. 2979, 16 Mar. 1569, fo. 133^{r}. The ambassador for Ferrara agreed: Archivio di Stato di Modena (hereafter ASM), 30 Mar. 1569, fo. 3.

[79] Dumolyn and Haemers, 'Patterns of Urban Rebellion in Medieval Flanders', 372.

Where the elite Venetian chroniclers focused on the danger and disrespectful nature of the revolt, Bartoli described a workers' successful bid to influence Venetian decision-making. The patriciate was divided, and the protest may have worsened the situation. In the following days, the Senate again debated the pay cut — as we know not from Senate records but from foreign diplomats. They reported that many senators now objected, pointing out that the cut would result in only minor cost reductions. However, they predicted that the authorities would not yield (the wrong choice according to them).[80] Indeed over the following days the government backtracked on whatever promises it made and tried to subdue the workers. Neither negotiation nor promises nor their breach are mentioned in the government records. But they marked the beginning of a confrontation that continued for months.

IV

REPRESSING AND SUPPRESSING REVOLT

In the aftermath of the protest the authorities' actions began to leave some (limited) traces in the government records. After no mentions for five days, on 17 March, the powerful Council of Ten opened an inquiry 'into those who incited the Arsenal masters to come to the palace in the way they did' ('nella maniera che fece') and who used 'inappropriate words against the expediency and honour of our state' ('parole non convenienti contra l'utile et honor del stato nostro').[81] This language is vague in describing the workers' actions, as if the secretary could not bring himself to use the word revolt.[82] As in other sixteenth-century cities, the government branded the labour protest as a political crime — but instead of convicting protesters of treason (as was done in German and Swiss cities), it accused them of speaking against the state in an unspecified form of *lèse-majestÕ*.[83] Repressing the revolt meant also suppressing its extent and objectives.

[80] ASF, MdP, reg. 2979, fo. 133^{v}, 16 Mar. 1569; AGS, *Papeles de Estado*, *Venecia*, leg. 1326, n. 217, 19 Mar. 1569.

[81] ASV, *Consiglio di Dieci* (hereafter *CD*), *Parti Criminali*, reg. 11, fo. 78^{v}, 17 Mar. 1569.

[82] Guido Ruggiero, *Violence in Early Renaissance Venice* (New Brunswick, NJ, 1980), 129; also Judde de Larivière, *La RÕvolte*.

[83] Peter Blickle, 'The Criminalization of Peasant Resistance in the Holy Roman Empire: Toward a History of the Emergence of High Treason in Germany', *Journal of Modern History*, lviii (1986).

However, the intervention of the Council of Ten reveals the seriousness of the workers' action. Created in the fourteenth century after an attempted coup, the Ten were responsible for state security. Notoriously, they tried defendants in secret, and their records too were secret even from the majority of patricians.[84] In the act of punishing the protesters, the Ten could not avoid producing records, but these employed standardized language and included no reference to the specific findings of the enquiry; the lacuna is compounded by the destruction of many of the Ten's trials by seventeenth- and eighteenth-century archivists.[85] In Venice as elsewhere, historians know that a defendant's speech cannot be extracted uncritically from the records even when it was transcribed verbatim, because layers of transcription stemmed from unequal power relations.[86] But unlike, for example, with the Venetian Inquisition, records of most political trials administered by the Ten are missing altogether: power here was exercised not through transcription, but through abridging and later destructing — or possibly through not recording anything at all.

The Ten's register shows that their agents quickly arrested eight men. Their names and professions are the closest we get to the protesters: two caulkers, Checco and Girolamo Brunetto; a carpenter named Jacomo; and five others whose jobs we are not told, perhaps because they were not guild members or were merely unskilled labourers: Zuanne Mezavolta, Antonio dalla Stopa, Marco Sasso, Menin Donado and Lorenzo Ciprioto (that is, of Cypriot background). The records refer only to written and oral evidence presented on 29 March, when the Ten debated opening trials 'for the things said and read', again without specifics: no formal trials were opened. They voted to free all but one, the caulker Brunetto, whose trial is not extant; the record only states that he was sentenced to three years on the galleys.[87] He was a man of 'middling height', probably in his late twenties.

[84] Gaetano Cozzi, *Repubblica di Venezia e Stati italiani: politica e giustizia dal secolo XVI al secolo XVIII* (Turin, 1982).

[85] Amelia Vianello, *Gli archivi del Consiglio dei Dieci: memoria e istanze di riforma nel secondo Settecento veneziano* (Padua, 2009).

[86] John H. Arnold, *Inquisition and Power: Catharism and the Confessing Subject in Medieval Languedoc* (Philadelphia, 2001); Natalie Zemon Davis, *Fiction in the Archives: Pardon Tales and their Tellers in Sixteenth-Century France* (Redwood City, 1987).

[87] ASV, *CD*, *Parti Criminali*, reg. 11, fos. 78^{v}–80^{r}, 17 and 29 Mar. 1569.

We only know these details from a later, unconnected trial for brawling during his time on the galleys, a minor offence, which triggered no archival suppression.[88] For an armed invasion of the Ducal Palace that the Ten insisted amounted to *lèse-majestÕ*, the fact that only one man was convicted — probably not one of the older leaders — seems light punishment. Perhaps another tactic to deflate the revolt? Knowing that they could not prosecute all protesters, the Ten opted for the repression that attracted the least public attention: arresting a few ringleaders and holding one trial in secret.

On the pay day following the revolt, as they prepared to hand out the reduced wages, the Lords of the Arsenal called the workers to their office in small groups and, as the chroniclers noted, convinced 'some with good words and others with reprimands and threats, to stay quiet', while also 'promising that [the workers] would be compensated in other manners'.[89] Two points are noteworthy about this mixture of cajoling and threats. First, the authorities evidently wished to divide the workers into small groups, which indirectly illustrates the effectiveness of their previous collective mobilization. With eight men in prison awaiting trials, no doubt the authorities hoped to intimidate the other workers. Both Lopez and Claudio Ariosti, ambassador of Ferrara, reported that as a result, some masters left for Genoa, despite laws forbidding skilled workforce migration.[90] Second, suppressing the revolt was done orally, inside the *Patroni*'s offices, where the authorities could afford to mix their reprimands with vague promises that they could always retract later. The authorities' actions, meant to deflect the workers from protesting, have left no trace in the archives. Thus they also succeeded in deflecting the attention of historians.

The strategy worked: the few modern scholars who mention these events stop here and interpret the whole episode as confirming the government's paternalist self-assurance.[91] The

[88] ASV, *Avogaria di Comun*, 4176/13, 2 Jan. 1573.

[89] BL, Add. MS 8581, fo. 126^{v}; BQV, IV.16, fo. 279$^{r–v}$.

[90] *Ibid.*, and ASM, *Archivio Segreto Estense*, *Cancelleria*, *Ambasciatori, agenti e corrispondenti all'estero*, b. 53, 30 Mar. 1569; Aymard, 'L'Arsenale e le conoscenze tecnico-marinaresche', 312.

[91] Lane, *Venetian Ships and Shipbuilders of the Renaissance*, 188; Romano, 'Economic Aspects of the Construction of Warships in Venice', 62–3; Davis, *Shipbuilders of the Venetian Arsenal*, 16, 175–6.

authorities inscribed precisely this view in their records. However, in the following weeks they continued to adopt laws that reveal their apprehension. The Senate introduced new chiefs at the head of teams of shipwrights, the largest group within the Arsenal, and removed the old chiefs, perhaps because of their participation in the revolt. The new chiefs were to ensure that teams worked for the entire day, thus blocking the workers from switching between the Arsenal and private shipyards, a practice at the centre of the protest.[92] On 19 March, the day the Lords of the Arsenal reprimanded the workers, the College also proposed demoting the *proti*, the foremen overseeing the masters, from permanent positions to fixed-term jobs with reappointments subject to the College's approval.

The objective stated in the Senate decision's preamble was increasing productivity: to obtain 'all the work that from such a large number of workers one would expect'.[93] The official explanation was taken at face value by historians: both Lane and Davis describe these measures as part of the rationalization in Arsenal management.[94] But seen in the context of the March revolt, the primary objective of these measures was also political, an attempt to reassert patrician surveillance over the workforce.

The tensions revolving around the Arsenal labour conflict did not subside, and neither did the related archival politics. At the end of April, the caulkers recorded in their guild book that they had won back the right to work in private shipyards, something that appears in no government record and only in one laconic chronicle passage.[95] Still, even government records show that the new measures opened a rift inside the patriciate. The Senate voted on the foremen measure three times, in March, July and August before approving it in September with a narrow majority.[96] We do not know what motivated the opposing patricians: perhaps they followed Grimani's earlier pro-worker

[92] ASV, *Patroni e provveditori all'Arsenale*, *Capitolare delle parti*, reg. 11, fo. 56^{r}.
[93] ASV, *Senato*, *Deliberazioni Mar*, reg. 39, fo. 100^{v}–101^{r}.
[94] Lane, *Venetian Ships and Shipbuilders of the Renaissance*, 207–9; Davis, *Shipbuilders of the Venetian Arsenal*, 55.
[95] Cecchetti, *La Mariegola dei calafati dell'Arsenale di Venezia*, 15; BL, Add. MS 8581, fo. 126^{v}.
[96] ASV, *Senato*, *Deliberazioni Mar*, reg. 39, fos. 100^{v}–101^{r}.

proposal and feared that the measure would stoke further dissent amid an increasingly unstable political situation. Over the summer, the combination of intensifying Ottoman naval pressure, harvest failures and mounting workers' unrest became literally explosive.

V
FEAR, SUSPICION, CRITICISM

During the night between 13 and 14 September, three days after the measure concerning the Arsenal foremen had finally been approved, a series of consecutive blasts woke the city and partially destroyed the shipyard and its massive walls: the Arsenal's gunpowder storage had exploded. Part of the fleet was damaged; six people died, with the falling rubble and fire injuring many more. The material damage was extensive and reached far beyond the city. Windows shattered in Venice and on the nearby island of Murano; two houses collapsed in Mestre, across the lagoon. The physical damage, strategic importance of the Arsenal, and reconstruction costs resulted in substantial documentation of the explosion and its aftermath, including government records, chronicles, private letters, newsletters and diplomatic dispatches.[97] Collectively they point to widespread fear and a volatile situation in Venice, but they differ in attributing responsibility for the explosion and in describing the workers' reactions and involvement.

Many inhabitants described the blast as a sign that Judgement Day had come.[98] Urban fires, a recurring phenomenon, were often interpreted as divine punishments.[99] But, like epidemics, they also prompted conspiracy theories revealing entrenched fears and prejudices, with the blame frequently falling on outsiders, such as vagabonds (sometimes in the pay of rebels),

[97] Stella, *Nunziature di Venezia*, ix, 124–6, 126–7; Bartoli, ASF, MdP, reg. 2979, 17 Sept. 1569, fo. 223^{r}–224^{r}; Carlo Odoardo Tosi, 'Dell'incendio dell'Arsenale di Venezia nel 1569: due nuovi documenti', *Pietro Dazzi*, xii, 6–7 (1905); F. Seneca, 'L'incendio dell'Arsenale di Venezia (1569) in una lettera di Leonardo Donà', *Studi forogiuliesi in onore di C. G. Mor* (Udine, 1983).

[98] Seneca, 'L'incendio dell'Arsenale di Venezia', 196; Fugger newsletter in Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, Vienna (hereafter ÖNB), Cod. 8949, fo. 101^{r}, 17 Sept. 1569; Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana (hereafter: BNM), Venice, Cod. Ital. VII.553 (=8812), fo. 12.

[99] Marie Luisa Allemeyer, 'Profane Hazard or Divine Judgement? Coping with Urban Fire in the 17th Century', *Historical Social Research*, xxxii (2007).

religious enemies, or Jews.[100] Earlier fires in Venice had produced similar dynamics, for example in 1509 during the war of Cambrai, when the French were suspected of setting fire to the Arsenal.[101] In 1569, the government suspected Jewish spies in Ottoman service and, according to Bartoli, the Florentines.[102] The haste to blame outside enemies is indicative of both the authorities' anxiety and their reluctance to consider, at least explicitly, internal causes. But a number of non-government sources allow us to reconstruct something that the official records tried to suppress, namely the authorities' fears of internal sabotage and distrust of the Arsenal workers following the salary conflict six months earlier.

The Arsenal workers' inaction was the first sign that tensions still existed. As their workplace burned, a majority of workers failed or refused to help extinguish the fire, despite being the city's designated firefighters. In a letter to his brother, the patrician Leonardo Donà described running to the Arsenal and there finding 'noblemen of every age and every rank'.[103] Donà's focus on his fellow patricians reflects his own elitist perspective but also implies something that non-Venetian observers reported explicitly: relatively few commoners, particularly Arsenal workers, helped fight the fire. The papal nuncio, always keen to stress Venetian troubles, wrote to Rome that the authorities were especially worried by the 'great tepidness of the people to go and assist . . . and that aside from the nobility, few others went'.[104] Bartoli reported that prominent senators 'ran, weapons in hand to the Arsenal', adding that they needed to 'call and push' the Arsenal workers to help quell the fire.[105]

We have no evidence that the Arsenal explosion was started intentionally, let alone that the workers were responsible. If so,

[100] Penny Roberts, 'Arson, Conspiracy and Rumour in Early Modern Europe', *Continuity and Change*, xii (1997); Samuel K. Cohn, *Popular Protest in Late Medieval Europe: Italy, France, and Flanders* (Manchester, 2013), documents 99, 108, 121, 122, 199.

[101] *Venice, Città Excelentissima: Selections from the Renaissance Diaries of Marin Sanudo*, ed. Patricia H. Labalme and Laura Sanguineti White (Baltimore, 2008), 246–8.

[102] Benjamin Arbel, 'Venezia, gli Ebrei e l'attività di Salomone Ashkenasi nella guerra di Cipro', in Gaetano Cozzi (ed.), *Gli Ebrei e Venezia, secoli XIV–XVIII* (Milan, 1987), 168–72; ASF, MdP, reg. 2979, fo. 232, 1 Oct. 1569.

[103] Seneca, 'L'incendio dell'Arsenale di Venezia', 196.

[104] Stella, *Nunziature di Venezia*, ix, 126–7.

[105] ASF, MdP, reg. 2979, fo. 223^{r}, 17 Sept. 1569.

this would be an early urban manifestation of protest by arson, widely practised a century or two later in rural areas from England to Russia but seldom studied as such for the sixteenth century.[106] But even if the workers had nothing to do with the explosion, the fact that they withheld help in fighting the fire does suggest 'calculated carelessness' or sabotage, itself an effective form of protest.[107] Thus, three days after the Senate finally passed its measure curbing the foremen's power, a large number of Arsenalotti signalled that tensions had not dissipated.

For their part, the authorities did not mention the workers' reluctance and instead went to great lengths to document and reward those who assisted. Five days after the explosion, the Senate overwhelmingly voted to reward those workers who had helped extinguish the fire. The record is brief and at first glance straightforward. It opens by pointing out that 'it was convenient' to acknowledge with 'the usual gratitude' those workers who had helped at great personal risk and 'offered their *servitù* with promptness and courage, as the occasion required'. The emphasis on service testifies to the patriarchal order.[108] The reward itself, and its implementation, is also significant. The Senate carefully recorded the total number of workers: 346, including 237 shipwrights, 30 oar makers and overseers, and 79 caulkers. Each of the listed workers was to receive a salary increase of 2 *soldi* per day (a 5 to 10 per cent increase on average) 'notwithstanding any decision taken to the contrary', a reference to the March pay cut.[109] Listing the men and their professions was in part a practical administrative measure to manage the payments. It was also, by default, a way of identifying those who had withheld help prior to disciplining them. Yet the list also served another, more symbolic, purpose: at some 15 per cent of the roughly 2,500 workers registered on Arsenal rolls, the total number seems small yet must have offered the authorities some

[106] Most scholarship discusses arson in the sixteenth century as the object of conspiracy theories with no basis in reality; for the eighteenth century, see E. P. Thompson, *Whigs and Hunters: The Origin of the Black Act* (London, 1975), 140–3; John E. Archer, *'By a Flash and a Scare': Arson, Animal Maiming and Poaching in East Anglia, 1815–1870* (Oxford, 1990); Cathy A. Frierson, *All Russia Is Burning! A Cultural History of Fire and Arson in Late Imperial Russia* (Seattle, 2002).

[107] Pierre Dubois, *Sabotage in Industry* (Harmondsworth, 1979).

[108] ASV, *Senato*, *Deliberazioni Mar*, reg. 39, fo. 102^{r}, 19 Sept. 1569.

[109] Davis, *Shipbuilders of the Venetian Arsenal*, 59.

relief. The document memorialized the workers' loyalty, in contrast with the unspecified crowd of workers protesting in March, whose names and even numbers were suppressed from the government's archives. Put in practice at the next pay day, finally, the measure emphasized internal divisions in the workforce, a typical device of hostile framing.[110]

The salary conflict continued, though, albeit indirectly. Whether moved by the loyalty of a minority of workers or worried by the indifference of the majority, by paying out the reward the authorities surrendered what the workers had demanded in March. What the Senate described as a generous handout for loyal servants, the Tuscan and Spanish diplomats interpreted as a way of backtracking without losing face: 'it was a way of compensating [the workers] — without showing to concede — for that which [the Senate] took away the last few months'.[111] The Senate tried to preserve honour even in its own records.

What worried the authorities even more than the Arsenalotti's inaction in the wake of the fire, though, was the suspicion that the workers themselves had caused the explosion. The Ten immediately started investigations, promising a substantial reward for information on the arsonists.[112] Once again non-government sources provide insight on the real cause of their suspicions. An anonymous account collected by a patrician reported rumours that Arsenal workers started the fire.[113] Foreign diplomats concurred. The nuncio reported rumours that a worker had set fire to barrels of powder because of the government's pay cut. A week later, he wrote that two Arsenal masters had been arrested.[114] Bartoli also reported the arrest of a foreman of the gunpowder warehouse, adding that the authorities 'suspected some of the ordinary workers of the

[110] Sidney G. Tarrow, *Power in Movement: Social Movements and Contentious Politics* (Cambridge, 1998), 106–22; Hank Johnston and John A. Noakes (eds.), *Frames of Protest: Social Movements and the Framing Perspective* (Lanham, 2005).

[111] ASF, MdP, reg. 2979, fo. 220^{r}, 24 Sept. 1569; also, Facchinetti's dispatch of 21 Sept. 1569 in Stella, *Nunziature di Venezia*, ix, 126–7.

[112] ASV, *Capi del CD*, *Lettere secrete*, filza 7, 17 Sept. 1569.

[113] 'Cenni sull'incendio dell'Arsenale', Biblioteca del Museo Civico Correr, Ms. Gradenigo Dolfin 193 II, c. 149^{v}, quoted in Paolo Preto, 'Le grandi paure di Venezia nel secondo Cinquecento: le paure naturali (peste, carestie, incendi, terremoti)', in Vittore Branca and Carlo Ossola (eds.), *Crisi e rinnovamenti nell'autunno del Rinascimento a Venezia* (Florence, 1991), 190.

[114] Stella, *Nunziature di Venezia*, ix, 124–5 (14 Sept. 1569).

Arsenal disgruntled by the pay reduction on Saturdays'.[115] Six months after the protest, suspicion that the workers had sabotaged their workplace revealed the unsettled state of social relations.

Suppressed in the official records, these tensions were expressed in a flurry of placards that described the explosion as just retribution for how the government treated the Arsenal workers. Known as *cartelli*, handwritten anonymous bills attacking policies or insulting high-profile individuals were common in early modern Venice, part of an underground written culture of dissent and criticism similar to the pasquinades of Rome. They were often found in St Mark's and Rialto, in the same places the authorities used to communicate official announcements.[116] Two days after the explosion, one was discovered inside the Ducal Palace, on the door of the magistracy appointed to investigate the fire: 'You [plural] have seen what has happened with the ruination of the Arsenal, and all because of your injustices and tyrannies. And this has only been the first instalment of that which soon will happen'. The *cartello* ended with a vague threat translated roughly as 'Understand me if you can, or I'll make myself understood'.[117] The Council of Ten had guards take it down but could not prevent the message from circulating and making a profound impression. The Duke of Ferrara's agent transcribed the text into his dispatch; the nuncio described it as *libello famoso*, a public form of radical disrespect directed against the 'bad government of those who rule here'; Savina saw it as criticizing 'the unsatisfactory justice that is administered in Venice'.[118] The government could erase offensive speech from its own records, but not prevent written notes posted in public.

The *cartello* attacked a fundamental component of the Serenissima myth: namely, the impartial administration of

[115] ASF, MdP, reg. 2979, fo. 224^{r}, 17 Sept. 1569; ÖNB, Cod. 8949, fo. 102^{r}, 18 Sept. 1569.

[116] De Vivo, *Information and Communication in Venice*, 136–41.

[117] ASV, *CD*, *Comuni*, reg. 29, fo. 70, 28 Sept. 1569: 'Vui havete visto quello che vi è intervenuto di queste ruine dell'Arsenale, e tutto per le vostre ingiustizie, e tirannie e che questo era stata una caparra di quello che doveva venire e presto. Intendami chi può, che m'intend' io'.

[118] ASM, *Archivio Segreto Estense*, *Cancelleria estero*, *Venezia*, b. 53, 17 Sept. 1569; nuncio's dispatch of 21 Sept. 1569, in Stella, *Nunziature di Venezia*, ix, 126–7; BL, Add. MS 8581, fo. 129^{r}.

justice. Indeed, its wording may well have referred to 'distributive justice', rewarding members of each social order according to their due, an indirect reference to the March pay cut.[119] Perhaps the Senate's emphatic reward to the firefighters a few days later was a direct response to this anonymous challenge. Other *cartelli* appeared in the political heart of the city in the subsequent days: on 29 September, one criticizing the 'lack of justice' was found close to another government building.[120] Around the same time, another was found in Piazza San Marco, which threatened that the damage to the Arsenal was nothing compared with the 'public damage' that was being prepared.[121] The criticisms had a large echo. Three months later, people were still talking about placards describing the Arsenal explosion as 'roses and flowers compared to what might happen next'.[122] Given the connections between the March protest and the suspicions about Arsenal workers in the aftermath of the explosion, the *cartelli* can be interpreted as a reference to the conflict over the *maestranza*'s proper pay, but they inserted one group's economic grievance into broader discontent about the fairness of social and political arrangements.

VI

RIOTS AND NEW SECURITY MEASURES

While the tension in the Arsenal persisted, over the following months other threats increasingly complicated matters: in the Mediterranean, the Ottomans increased naval pressure on Cyprus, and throughout Italy the summer of 1569 was marked by harvest failure.[123] Food shortages hit Venice and its territories in July; by September the authorities were very worried.[124] Days before the Arsenal explosion, the government approved measures to prevent hoarding, control the price of bread, and

[119] James E. Shaw, *The Justice of Venice: Authorities and Liberties in the Urban Economy, 1550–1700* (Oxford, 2006), 9–16.

[120] BL, Add. MS 8582, fo. 240^{r} (Add. MS 8551, fo. 129^{r} mistakenly says 20 Sept.).

[121] ASF, MdP, reg. 2979, fo. 232^{v}, 1 Oct. 1569.

[122] ASV, *Capi del CD*, *Ricordi*, b. 2, 18 Dec. 1569.

[123] Kenneth M. Setton, *The Papacy and the Levant, 1204–1571*, 4 vols. (Philadelphia, 1976–84), iv, 923–73.

[124] For the first references to food shortages: ASV, *CD*, *Deliberazioni segrete*, reg. 9, fo. 13^{v}, 21 July 1569.

provision public warehouses and bread shops.[125] A steady food supply was central to the paternalist ideal — and has long been hailed as a reason for Venice's stability.[126] Yet the measures proved totally inadequate. In late September and October, serious unrest broke out, yet by then the authorities no longer trusted the Arsenal workers to fulfil their policing duties. In fact, Arsenal workers participated in the unrest: Savina described a series of tumults by the 'crowd' (*calca*) and specifically mentioned that 'some men of the Arsenal (around eleven)' participated in sacking bread shops.[127]

By early October public warehouses and bread shops had no more bread or flour. Venetians were used to periods of scarcity, but such complete absence was exceptional. Riots and protests broke out throughout the city. According to Agostini, four hundred poor men and women ran 'furiously' in search of food from one baker to the next, a 'disorder' that lasted four days. This is the only time that women are mentioned as participants in the upheaval: of all archival suppression, that of protesting women was the most successful in both government and other records. Meanwhile, in a typical development of food riots, rumours of landowners and merchants hoarding grain aggravated the situation.[128] In the space of roughly half a year, between March and October 1569, the Venetian authorities had gone from facing a labour conflict with a specific group of workers to the (real or perceived) threat of internal sabotage to large-scale riots.

Predictably, the sources vary in the emphasis they give the riots. News writers made only passing allusions, being more focused on military and diplomatic news; they mention one episode of plundering, at the state grain warehouse.[129] Chroniclers focus on the famine, prices and the government measures, but, as we have seen, they also describe the riots in detail as irrational chaos resulting from desperation: 'fury', running, the pressure of the crowd, people crushed to death while searching for bread. As Judith Pollmann has pointed out, chroniclers across Western Europe recorded disturbing

[125] ASF, MdP, reg. 2979, fo. 219^{r}, 4 Sept. 1569.
[126] Fabien Faugeron, *Nourrir la ville: ravitaillement, marchÕs et mÕtiers de l'alimentation à Venise dans les derniers siècles du Moyen Âge* (Rome, 2014).
[127] BL, Add. MS 8581, fo. 133^{r}.
[128] BQV, Ms. IV.16, fo. 164^{v}.
[129] ÖNB, Cod. 8949, fo. 221, 18 Sept. 1569.

occurrences, including political upheaval, to highlight their concern for order.[130] Diplomats too reported the riots, not least as they became increasingly concerned for their own safety. Bartoli bought weapons to defend his house, while writing disparagingly about the 'plebs' and the danger of their 'shouts and bad words'.[131]

As for the institutional records, they include no references to the riots at all. If the authorities proceeded against those who had broken into bread shops, they would have produced records, but we have none: neither trials (as in March) nor, now, indirect references to prosecutions. The records may have been lost together with a large part of the archive of the policing magistracy, or perhaps the authorities chose not to proceed, just as they had not proceeded with seven of the eight March protesters. Anxious to see order restored, Savina mentions a Council of Ten's proclamation threatening the gallows for 'anyone who dared steal bread' — the proclamation is absent from the Ten's registers, but a similarly draconian one remains, issued in April 1570, to be read out and affixed throughout the city.[132] Perhaps they failed to apprehend any culprits, which would suggest a degree of popular support for the rioters. The records produced by the government in great quantity all portray measures stressing the maintenance of order without ever referring to its breakdown. They show no social upheaval, only institutional control.

On 22 September the Council of Ten passed extraordinary security measures that reveal the authorities' fear of widespread social unrest. Three days after the Senate rewarded those workers who had helped fight the Arsenal fire, the Ten made radical changes to the security apparatus, with two objectives: to reinforce policing and to exclude the Arsenal workers from the civic militia.[133] The preamble described the new laws as aimed at 'preserving order and security', and referred to 'fires and similar things' as well as mounting human threats: 'the temerity and evilness that are growing daily in people', which offended

[130] Judith Pollmann, 'Archiving the Present and Chronicling for the Future in Early Modern Europe', in Corens, Peters and Walsham (eds.), *Social History of the Archive*, 243–4.

[131] ASF, MdP, reg. 2979, fo. 232^{v}, 1 Oct. 1569; fo. 234^{v}, 8 Oct. 1569.

[132] ASV, *CD*, *Proclami*, b. 5, 10 Apr. 1570.

[133] ASV, *CD*, *Deliberazioni comuni*, reg. 29, fos. 58^{v}–65^{r}, 22 Sept. 1569.

'God and the law as well as public dignity'. But these preoccupations were to be kept secret: the Ten published no proclamation, instead issuing only excerpts to relevant officials without the preamble. A note in the margin of the original draft states: 'not to be given outside the Council of Ten without a licence of the Heads of the Council'.[134] Even in these internal records, the authorities invoked the opposite of upheaval and strife: the three patrician officials put in charge of overhauling the city's security forces were given the title 'Executive officers over the quiet and peaceful life' (*Provveditori sopra il quieto e pacifico vivere*).[135]

For all the secrecy, however, contemporaries were quick to understand the authorities' anxiety and the importance of the Ten's adjustments to the security forces. Chroniclers summarized the new laws at length, perhaps hopeful that order would be restored.[136] Foreign diplomats commented that the security overhaul meant to prevent 'the danger of some discontented person trying to set fire to the Ducal Palace', thus connecting the Arsenal explosion with the earlier revolt.[137] Despite this wealth of sources (both official and unofficial in this case), it is striking that historians have never studied these measures: perhaps because they contradict the main historiographical view of Venice.

The security measures had three main aspects.[138] The first was a significant increase in the professional police. Indicating insecurity and distrust, the Ten more than doubled the number of its own professional guards but subjected them to heightened cross-checks and greater patrician control. Guards were assigned a room next to the Mint, in St Mark's Square, fully provided with weapons; new turns were approved for patrolling the Square, Rialto and the Arsenal, the area usually policed by the Arsenal workers. The Ten also doubled the embarked night-time patrols, and entrusted the boats to new captains, appointed no longer for life but for four-year terms,

[134] ASV, *CD*, *Deliberazioni comuni*, b. 106, fo. nn.

[135] Gaetano Cozzi, *Repubblica di Venezia e stati italiani: politica e giustizia dal secolo XVI al secolo XVIII* (Turin, 1982), 159; Paolo Preto, *I servizi segreti di Venezia* (Milan, 1994), 52–3.

[136] BL, Add. MS 8581, fos. 130^{r}–132^{v}; BCV, Ms. Cicogna 2853, fos. 159^{v}–163^{r}.

[137] ASF, MdP, reg. 2979, fo. 220^{r}, 22 Sept. 1569.

[138] ASV, *CD*, *Deliberazioni comuni*, reg. 29, fos. 65^{v}–66^{v}, 22 Sept. 1569.

and not drawn from the Arsenal. Second, the Ten annulled the Arsenal workers' responsibility for mobilizing in case of danger and instead established a new civic militia of fifty men for each parish, each to be selected by one patrician and one citizen on the basis of 'personal acquaintance' — a shift from working class to more affluent networks. Far from sustaining peace, the Arsenal workers' civic duty now seemed a threat. At a total of 3,500 men, the new militia could effectively put the city under a state of siege. The ambassador of Ferrara captured the paradox: the Ten's proposed changes were a sign of 'the no small fear of these lords, [who are] naturally opposed to arming their city; yet between two evils' — namely, revolt and arming a militia — 'they choose the smaller'.[139]

Finally, the Ten reminded the Arsenal workers of their firefighting obligations within the Arsenal and threatened immediate dismissal for those who failed to help. For additional security, however, they instituted professional guards to fight fires in the rest of the city. Only in one respect did the Ten confirm the *Arsenalotti*'s policing role: the ceremonial guarding of the Ducal Palace during Great Council meetings on Sundays. Perhaps they determined that rescinding this task, conspicuously performed in the palace and on the steps of the *loggetta* building in St Mark's Square, would have been too obvious a sign of distrust. And they instructed the Lords of the Arsenal to draw a new list of fifty trusted men for the job.[140] The men would be compensated — two additional *soldi* for their half-day of guard duty — again retracting the earlier pay cut, as Bartoli pointed out.[141] So the measures maintained the traditional facade of social peace even as they implied that peace was too fragile to be upheld by traditional methods.

These sweeping measures reveal the government's predicament. But instead of solving it, they only created further opposition. All observers reported mounting objections to the measures; as a chronicler summed up, 'the entire city was

[139] ASM, *Archivio Segreto Estense*, *Cancelleria*, *Ambasciatori, agenti e corrispondenti all'estero*, filza 53, 8 Oct. 1569; Stella, *Nunziature di Venezia*, ix, 129–30. Other urban militias in Europe were carefully chosen from propertied citizens: Prak, 'Citizens, Soldiers and Civic Militias in Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe', 114–18.

[140] ASV, *CD*, *Deliberazioni comuni*, reg. 29, fos. 65^{v}–66^{v}, 22 Sept. 1569.

[141] ASF, MdP, reg. 2979, fos. 220^{r-v}, 23 Sept. 1569.

rumbling'.[142] Once again, popular discontent caused disagreement among the ruling councils themselves. Just as internal opposition had delayed government action against the Arsenal foremen from March to September, so the special security measures also proved divisive. Approved in the small Council of Ten, they encountered opposition in the Great Council, Venice's largest assembly. Consisting of all adult male patricians, this council had little institutional power but did elect or ratify the election of many officers and members of other councils. Many Great Council members were not particularly wealthy, often had frequent contacts with commoners, and may have been sympathetic to or scared by the protests. The records omit the motives of those who opposed the security measures; the Great Council held no debates and was supposed to vote in silence. But it had one way of expressing its opposition against more powerful assemblies like the Ten: namely, by voting against the election of their most prominent members.[143] Hence, when the Ten were due for re-election at the end of September 1569, the Great Council failed to elect those candidates who supported the security measures, and in fact elected as one of the three new 'Executive officers over the quiet and peaceful life' Grimani, the man who had argued against the intitial pay cut and mediated with the workers in March. Crucially, the Great Council also failed to ratify the nomination of the three new boat captains, chosen by the Ten from outside the Arsenal workforce: these three men were, according to the chronicler Agostini, 'hated by the entire city', causing 'grumblings'; 'even the nobility opposed this move'. Three others were appointed instead, all Arsenal masters.[144] A majority of patricians may have been sympathetic to the workers or at least prepared to yield to their demands under popular pressure. Both the nuncio and Bartoli, in fact, commented that the Great Council intended to appease the Arsenal workers. Bartoli also reported that the workers had gone again to the Ten and the College to protest against the Ten's

[142] BL, Add. MS 8581, fos. 129^{v}–130^{r}. Foreign diplomats also noted this: for example, Bartoli in ASF, MdP, reg. 2979, fo. 242^{r}; Facchinetti in Stella, *Nunziature di Venezia*, ix, 139–40.

[143] Martin Lowry, 'The Reform of the Council of Ten in 1582–3: An Unsettled Problem?', *Studi veneziani*, xiii (1971).

[144] ASV, *Maggior Consiglio*, *Deliberazioni*, fo. 9, 25 Sept. 1569; BNM, Ms. It. cl. VII n. 827 (=8906), c. 232; BL, Add. MS 8581, fo. 130^{r}, cf. ASV, *Segretario alle voci*, *Universi o misti*, reg. 12, fol. 17^{r}, 1 Oct. 1569.

changes.[145] Needless to say, there is no government record of this confrontation, but it may well have impacted the Great Council's decision.

In the following months escalating tensions with the Ottomans reinforced the workers' bargaining position. Ultimately, international tensions trumped all internal economic considerations. By January 1570 it was clear that the Ottomans would attack Cyprus.[146] In March, the Senate passed special orders to recruit more workers and reversed its policy by allowing workers from private shipyards to work half-days in the Arsenal and by rescinding the Saturday pay cut. Thus, a year after the workers stormed the Ducal Palace, the authorities backtracked, soon going on to raise wages.[147] The dramatic developments in the Eastern Mediterranean and the victory at Lepanto in October 1571, with the decisive role played by the Venetian fleet, have deflected attention from the social struggles in the city. But Venice would not have been able to fight without its workers. For months part of the patriciate had tried to keep the upper hand amid rising tensions. It eventually capitulated to the workers, not just because of external events but also because of internal resistance. Though the government suppressed protests from its records, it failed to prevent them in the streets. Until now, the patrician politics of archival suppression had made it impossible to capture the full extent and impact of Venetian contentious popular politics.

VII
CONCLUSION

And so we go back to archival suppression and its functions. Venetian society was strongly shaped by hierarchy, with one group holding power by birthright to the exclusion of all others until the end of the Republic in 1797. There is no doubting the continuity or solidity of political institutions, but the question is whether they rested on real social peace as most historians have contended. Our research on the events of 1569 suggests that the

[145] ASF, MdP, reg. 2979, fo. 242^{r}; Stella, *Nunziature di Venezia*, ix, 139, 8 Oct. 1569.

[146] Setton, *Papacy and the Levant*, iv, 945–7.

[147] ASV, *Patroni e provveditori all'Arsenale*, *Capitolare delle parti*, reg. 11, fos. 72^{v}–73^{v}, 20 and 30 Mar. 1570; Lane, *Venetian Ships and Shipbuilders of the Renaissance*, 209.

reason why papering over protests was so important is that behind a carefully cultivated façade of harmony, Venice witnessed a wide variety of contentious politics ranging from revolts to a rich written and oral culture of political criticism. The workers' revolt, the Arsenal explosion, and the food riots succeeded because they coalesced in a long cycle of contention which targeted the patriciate's structural divisions and exposed its reliance on the work of commoners. The methods used by protestors had evolved over generations; and the workers participated in months of contentious action and ultimately achieved real results. Our conclusions raise questions about the frequency, shape and impact of other similar cycles of protest in Venice. Passing glimpses in the sources show that this was far from an isolated event, with moments of collective protest recurring every few years.[148]

All observers noted that the events of 1569 produced fear among the ruling class. As one diplomat concluded, it was a 'year of fear'.[149] Unable to repress the criticisms, powerless to stop workers from invading the Ducal Palace, let alone get them to fulfil their civic duties, and divided over whether and how to mount a new militia, the patricians were unable to carry out the harsh measures they had planned; ultimately they gave in to the workers' demands. The authorities, too, must have been frightened, yet their records say nothing about this or the many other revolts that punctuated the sixteenth century. By looking at the gaps in the government archives, a different picture emerges. It was precisely because these events were so frightening that the authorities needed to suppress them from the places where they would most threaten their cherished identity. Official records omit the revolt, burying all mentions of conflict under other papers registering order and consensus. Printed histories, written by official historians or clients of patricians and under close government scrutiny, reinforced the process of silencing. None even mentioned the revolt or the food riots; when describing the Arsenal explosion, they all point to foreign saboteurs and underline the workers' help in extinguishing the fire; the only account to (briefly) describe the famine does so

[148] For a non-exhaustive list based on published scholarship alone, see n. 47 above, and also Finlay, *Politics in Renaissance Venice*, 48–9; and Pullan, 'Wage-Earners and the Venetian Economy', 420.

[149] Agatone writing to Cardinal Giulio della Rovere, 5 Nov. 1569, in Tosi, 'Dell'incendio dell'Arsenale di Venezia', 7.

to celebrate the government's decisive action.[150] That fear haunted the authorities is obvious precisely because government records deny it so keenly. The silences speak volumes. The reality of popular participation in politics had to be denied in the official sources because admitting it would undermine the legitimacy of aristocratic power, but ordinary Venetians made themselves heard in a variety of ways and, when necessary, revolted. While the oligarchy was in power, it had to confront and engage with hard and sometimes violent demands from broader social groups. Dynamic bargaining, rather than static serenity, made the state; what made it seem serene was the papering over of this dimension of contentious politics.

To understand the nature of contentious politics we need to understand the principle of archival suppression. As Trouillot put it, 'when reality does not coincide with deeply held beliefs, human beings tend to phrase interpretations that force reality within the scope of these beliefs'.[151] In some states the records labelled revolts negatively in order to stigmatize them.[152] In others the authorities refused to mention revolt at all. Modern social movement studies describe hostile attitudes as ways of framing protest negatively.[153] The case of early modern Venice is so extreme that we could say that the authorities wished less to frame protest than to 'de-frame' it: to exclude it completely from the picture. Manipulating archives was always easier than subduing people: the more power was contested in reality, the more it was crucial to assert it in the archive.

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[150] Emilio Maria Manolesso, *Historia nova nella quale si contengono tutti i successi della guerra Turchesca* (Padua, 1572), 8[r]; Giovanni Pietro Contarini, *Historia delle cose successe dal principio della guerra mossa da Selim Ottomano a' Venetiani* (Venice, 1572), 2[r]; Paolo Paruta, *Della historia vinetiana, parte seconda* (Venice, 1605, written 1580–98), 18; Andrea Morosini, *Historia veneta ab anno MDXXI ad annum MDCXV* (Venice, 1623, written 1598–1618), 346–7.

[151] Trouillot, *Silencing the Past*, 72.

[152] Wood, *1549 Rebellions and the Making of Early Modern England*, 216–41.

[153] Johnston and Noakes, *Frames of Protest*.