



### **Venice's Secret Service: Organizing Intelligence in the Renaissance**

Ioanna Iordanou.

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Aykut ÇAĞLAK\*

Ioanna Iordanou's book deals with the Venetian intelligence in political, socio-economic and organizational aspects and aims to prove that the Venice Secret Service is one of the world's earliest central and systematic intelligence services. In the introduction part of the book, basic information is given about the Council of Ten and the State Inquisitors which had an important role in the functioning of the Venetian intelligence. Also in this part, the author states that the date range of 1500-1630, in which the Council of Ten played a pivotal role in the creation of the Venice Secret Service, is the main chronological focus of the book.

In the first chapter, it is emphasized that secret services were on the rise in Europe in the 16th century and the Venetian state had an intelligence structure worth considering with its distinctive intelligence organization and with diplomatic and central intelligence activities. In the second chapter, it is explained that secrecy regarded as a supreme virtue in Renaissance Venice and that secrecy was also given importance in social relations. As a result of this understanding, secrecy spread widely and the Venetian intelligence could benefit from many different communication channels in intelligence activities.

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The third chapter, which is the most important chapter of the book, focuses on the central organization of Venetian intelligence during the Renaissance. Council of Ten's role in the internal and external security issues, in the management of the state intelligence and in the systematic encrypted correspondence is explained in this chapter. Also, keeping the documents under protection in the Cancelleria Ducale, the classification of the documents, separating these documents according to their confidentiality level and transferring them to a separate unit called Cancelleria Secreta are handled in this chapter. Moreover, the contribution of the documents in the Secret Chancellery to the intelligence production of the state and come of the Secret Chancellery under the control of the Council of Ten from the second half of the 15th century are among the topics discussed in this chapter.

In the fourth chapter, the structure of the Department of Cryptology, which is the password creating and password cracking unit of the Venetian intelligence and the professional functioning of this department are explained. According to the author, by means of this department, cryptology became an art and a respected profession in Venice. In the fifth chapter, the composite network of professional and amateur informants and spies who have official or unofficial duties is described. In the sixth chapter, counterintelligence works, one of the main responsibilities of Venetian intelligence, and the increase in assassinations, torture in interrogations and conspiracy activities are discussed. The book ends with an epilogue in which the author outlines Venetian intelligence.

Iordanou identifies the concepts of intelligence and organization as the central concepts of the book. (p. 2). According to Iordanou, intelligence in the early modern period was both a state duty and a private enterprise. She also states that intelligence was both a professional and a civic duty. Iordanou strongly emphasizes that the versatility of intelligence should always be taken into account. Regarding the explanation of the concept of organization the author says that organization is both an 'establishment' and a 'process' in the context of the delivery of intelligence to its recipients in the early modern period: In Venice, the collection, transmission and evaluation of 'sensitive' information organized systematically and this 'organization' is administered by the Council of Ten which is responsible for state security. The intelligence network affiliated with the Council of Ten spread to regions far from Venice. The most important feature of the network was that civilians and public officials charged with the providing of news and information were in constant contact with each other within the 'network'. The Council of Ten was in the supervisory position and controlled the 'organization' consisting of such networks.

According to Iordanou, the Council of Ten which conducted intelligence analysis, involved in operational works such as covert actions and focused on encrypted communication, created and systematized one of the world's earliest centrally organized state intelligence services. For this reason, the Council of Ten is defined as a 'proto-modern intelligence organization' by the author. (p.3, 7, 21). The Council of Ten was highly influential in administration of the state, especially on security-related issues. The author emphasizes that the Council of Ten was one of the most powerful state apparatus

not only in the Renaissance period but also in the whole of Venice's political history (p. 8).

Iordanou has the following view that there was no intelligence structure similar to the Venetian intelligence among European states in the Renaissance period, and the working style of the Venetian intelligence is much more similar to the modern intelligence organizations (p. 223). Iordanou says that other organizations that carried out intelligence activities in Renaissance Europe were mostly those that looked after the interests of reputable people and these organizations kept the state in the second place. In spite of this the Venetian intelligence had a central and organized structure that gave importance to the state and the people as a whole. (p. 123). The author mentions the rise of intelligence in Spain, Britain, France, the Ottoman Empire and in some Italian city-states in the early modern period, but she says only Spain chose to establish central intelligence devices. Also the author argues that intelligence activities in other countries except the Venetian state were monopolized by high-level state officials and protected their own interests (pp. 53-54)

The comparison parts that Iordanou compares the Venetian intelligence with the intelligence structures of other European states of the early modern period are the parts that seems to need to be strengthened because it is seen that the author reached generalizations without making a comprehensive literature review about other European states' intelligence structures. For example, while Iordanou evaluates Ottoman Empire's intelligence structure in the three-page part (pp.52-54), she chose to use only a small number of sources. On the other hand the book emphasizes that early modern intelligence activities are crucial in the development of 'organized intelligence' and proves that 'intelligence' is not a 'modern' phenomenon, and thus the author makes an important contribution to the history and international relations literature. The fact that the author used the documents obtained from the Venice's secret archive, as well as the archives in Rome and London in a way to strengthen her thesis with an analytical approach, makes the book exclusive. In addition to all these, Iordanou demonstrates that Venetian citizens could also be involved in operational processes in terms of the security of Venice, and in this context, she proves that intelligence 'from below' is one of the fundamental points in understanding early modern intelligence.