Notes on the Translation: The Latin of *De magistratibus et republica Venetorum*

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The Text

This translation is based on the Latin text as printed in Contarini's collected works (*Opera*, Paris 1571), edited and revised by Alvise Contarini and his assistants, and reprinted in Venice with small variations in 1578. This is the edition generally used by modern scholars who quote Contarini from Latin. We have intentionally overlooked earlier editions – the first Latin edition (1543) and its various reprints, the Italian translation by an anonymous hand (1544) – and Lewkenor's English translation (1599), which draws on multiple sources (including the Italian translation of 1544, deriving from the 1543 Latin edition), collated with the Latin text from the 1571/8 edition (as recently discussed by Florio 2010). We have thus avoided the tendency to group versions of the text before the 1571 edition as a single entity. There are significant divergences between the different versions of *De magistratibus* circulating before 1571, which include substantial interpolations, mistranslations, amplifications, stylistic simplifications, and at times (intentional) meaning alterations.

The most common type of alterations have a stylistic nature, and are motivated by a classicizing intent on the part of Alvise Contarini, aiming to make the language adhere more closely to the standards of Ciceronian Latin¹⁸ as regards lexicon and phraseology, syntax and word order, emphasis and *ornatus* (cf. Florio 2010, 90–101).

17 I am very grateful to Amanda Murphy for valuable comments and suggestions on several drafts of these notes.

18 On humanistic Ciceronianism see below. Cf. also Jensen 1996, investigating the origin of the "Ciceronian ban" advocated by "Ciceronianist" humanists and intended to "banish medieval neologisms and replace them with classical equivalents" (689). This ban is already traceable in the first edition of Contarini's treatise, but becomes

For instance, in the very opening of the treatise (1.1) the 1543 edition has:

[...] *inde evenit, ut complures civitates conditæ sint, aut in montium salebris, aspero difficilique accessu, aut locis palustribus.*

“For this reason, many cities were founded either **on mountain passes**, with rough and uneasy access, or **in marshy areas**.”

In contrast, this is the text found in the final edition of 1571 (262):

[...] *inde evenit, ut complures civitates conditæ sint, aut in editoribus et præruptis, aspero difficilique accessu, aut palustribus demissisque locis.*

“For this reason, many cities were founded either **in elevated and steep places**, with rough and uneasy access, or **in marshy and remote areas**.”¹⁹

Other changes are not (only) stylistic but significantly alter the original meaning of the text. For instance, at 1.9 the 1543 edition has:

[the law-makers] *neque odio tunc aut amicitia aliave animi perturbatione a veritate deduci queunt.*

“[The law-makers] cannot be diverted from truth by animosity, friendship, or any other passion of the mind.”

In contrast, the 1571 edition (265) has *a virtute deduci queunt*: if the alteration *queunt* > *possunt* is purely stylistic (the archaic form *queunt* is never attested in Cicero) the change *veritate* > *virtute* produces a different sense (cf. Florio 2010, 94–6). In this particular case the rationale for the change (perhaps a mere typographic correction) is not clear. There are, however, changes that betray a precise intention to modify the original sense. For instance, at 2.33 the 1543 edition has:

Huius [i.e., the doge] *nulla privata est functio, nulla etiam est in universa Republica cuius expers esse debeat.*

“He does not have any private function, and yet there is nothing in which he must not take part.”

In contrast, the 1571 edition has:

Huius nulla certa functio tamen est in universa Republica, cuius expers esse debeat.

a systematic criterion in the final revision of 1571. Ciceronianism originated in papal Rome, but became less fashionable in the context of the Counter-Reformation, and by the end of the sixteenth century was associated with Protestantism.

19 Cf. also ed. 1543 *praediti publica auctoritate* (2.34) vs. ed. 1571 *publica auctoritate ornati* (280–1); ed. 1543 *ut opes adipiscantur* (1.14) vs. ed. 1571 *ut opes accumulunt* (1.268), ed. 1543 *tum etiam ad molliorem quandam vitae luxum* (1.2) vs. ed. 1571 *tum ad molliorem atque elegantiorum vitae cultum* (261–2); etc.

“He does not have any specific function, and yet there is nothing in which he must not take part.”

The change *privata* > *certa* aims to clarify the ambiguity of the original text, in which the adjective *privatus* could be construed as evoking the (potentially unpleasant) notion “that the doge’s duty of supervision extended to anyone’s ‘private’ sphere” (Florio 2010, 99). Lewkenor collates the two versions and produces yet another sense:

“This Duke of ours hath not any certaine private//office allotted him, yet nevertheless ther is not in the whole commonwealth any thing done.” (2.40–1)

This is not the place for a systematic overview of the variations between the 1543 and 1571 editions and their cultural, political, and theological implications (see Florio’s [2010] analysis). Here I only stress that our translation, unlike Lewkenor’s, is not based on an arbitrary collation of the different versions of the text but on the 1571 edition generally viewed as definitive. In this way we aim to connect modern readers directly to the final codified version of Contarini’s work and the one that most widely circulated in later ages.

Contarini and the Classical Tradition

Gasparo Contarini’s treatise is anchored to the “classical tradition,” that is, the idealized cultural world created and nourished by the reception of Greco-Roman antiquity, which served as the canonical backbone of European education from late antiquity to the (early) twentieth century. This tradition received an important (and distinctive) boost in Contarini’s times, thanks to the work of humanistic writers, who constitute the ideal readership of *De magistratibus et republica Venetorum* and with whom Contarini aspired to be associated (see also Florio 2010, 19–21, 35–6).²⁰

Classical antiquity and its tradition not only provide the linguistic paragon for the elegant classical Latin of *De magistratibus* but represent an important cultural archetype for its narrative and political discourse. This is shown, for instance, by the many classical anecdotes Contarini cites as historical exempla for his Venetian narrative,²¹ and even more by his constant reference to ancient political systems, as handed down in classical

20 On Venetian humanism see King 2014 and Branca 1998.

21 Cf. book 1:15, “The same thing happened to the Romans for almost the same reason, and the foremost Roman senators were conscious that this was going to happen,” and 3:51–2, 3:58, 3:59, 5:94.

historiographies. Indeed, for Contarini the political parallels to which Venice's institutions are compared are not found among contemporary sixteenth-century (Christian) states, but rather among the ancient Greek and Roman "illustrious republics" (cf., e.g., book 3:57). Moreover, in Contarini's narrative the "wisest" founders of Venice are said to have modelled the political structure of their government on ancient polities (especially Sparta, Athens, and Rome) or to have adhered to ancient political theories (book 1:17; 3:51–2, 60, 64, 68; 4:6; and 5:99).

Not only did the founding fathers of Venice imitate ancient laws and customs, but they often *improved* them. One illustration suffices: "This was an ancient custom of the Spartans and Cretans, whose republics were illustrious, which our ancestors adopted in a *less ostentatious* form [*moderatum*]" (book 2:38; see also 3:65–6). In doing so they either fulfilled the ideal aspirations of ancient philosophers (1:15, 17) or, in some cases, even surpassed them (e.g., 1:11).

Venice's government is described according to classical models (historical, political, or moral), which, in truth, belong more to an idealized classicized world than to the historical realities of ancient Greece and Rome. The ancient exempla are literary rather than historical: Contarini brings in the classical tradition in order to anchor Venice's enduring institutions to an idealized cultural tradition, with a noble ancestry and a shared European identity. The primary interlocutors of *De magistratibus* are thus the Renaissance humanists,²² Venetian, Italian, or European, keen readers of Greek and above all Roman writers, who were the first creators of that cultural tradition.

This intellectual, humanistic approach is also shown, for instance, by Contarini's references to the *auctoritas* of ancient theorists: the authorities cited by Contarini in support of his statements are the great classical writers, above all the *princeps philosophorum* Aristotle (book 1:14, 24; 2:37; 3:52; 5:98–9, 101; see also Gleason 1993, 8–9, and Florio 2010, 17–19) and also Plato and Xenophon (1:24; 3:52, 66; 5:93). In sum, for Contarini the classical world does not (just) provide the historical exemplum for Venice's government; rather, it represents the ideal cultural framework through which that government is described and assessed. This effort of anchorage within an idealized classical framework contributes to the creation and promotion of a certain view of Venice, the myth of Venice, which is traceable at all levels of his work, including above all language.

22 Alluded to, for instance, at book 1:11: "[...] seeing that none of the many learned men of these times, who excel in intellect, knowledge of things, and eloquence, have undertaken this task in writing."

Contarini's Classical Latin

In Contarini's times "Latin" was not a monolithic notion, and could refer to a multiplicity of linguistic entities. This includes, first of all, medieval Latin, that is, the *lingua franca* of European culture in a broad sense from the fifth to the sixteenth century AD. This variety had remained "alive" for centuries, being used both as a language of literature, science, and theology and as a documentary language for records, chronicles, and the like; across the centuries it had been enriched (or spoiled) by a vast number of borrowings from vernacular or other languages, and often featured a number of grammatical and syntactical "irregularities" (according to classical standards) (see Waquet 2001, 41–79).

Second, under the umbrella of "Latin" was also the Latin of the Catholic Church, used and, especially after the Council of Trent (1545–64), imposed as the common language of the liturgy, against the promotion of vernacular advocated by the Protestants:²³ this variety of Latin was modelled on the *Vulgata* and characterized by Christian lexicon and biblical style.

Third, Latin also came in the standardized variety of classical writers (Cicero, Livy, Virgil, etc.), imitated by poets and scholars: although this variety of Latin was also constantly used throughout the Middle Ages, it had recently been championed by many humanist writers, in polemic contrast with the "barbarities" of medieval Latin. It featured a standardized grammar and syntax (similar to the one still learnt by students in Latin primers) as well as a degree of lexical filter (on this variety and Latin in the age of humanism, see Leonhardt 2013, 198–244).

Finally, as an extreme version of the preceding, the idealized Ciceronian Latin was strictly modelled on the rhetorical and philosophical writings of Cicero, "purified" of all vernacular or Christian borrowings, and characterized by elaborate syntax and style: this puristic variety was advocated by the so-called Ciceronians, originally members of the papal curia (see Jensen 1996), for whom Erasmus himself had severe words of reproach in his *Ciceronianus* (1528). In this work, Erasmus argued that Cicero himself would have incorporated lexical borrowings if he had lived in a different age.

There are traces of all of the above varieties in Contarini's work,²⁴ but it is clearly the last two varieties, classical Latin and the idealized Latin

²³ On this cf. Waquet 2001, 41–79.

²⁴ Cf. book 3:64: "Therefore, it would not be unreasonable to call them [the magistrates of the *Avogaria*] the tribunes of the laws [*legum tribuni*]. However, to avoid ambiguities (which is a great concern of ours), we will not depart from the common and accustomed terms."

of Cicero in particular, in which *De magistratibus* was written, especially in its final “Ciceronianist” revision by Alvise Contarini. This is first of all revealed by the abundance of Roman terminology, even when it denotes anachronistic notions and institutions. Dates, for instance, are provided according to the Roman calendar (cf. 282G²⁵ [= book 2:40] *duodecimo Calendas Iulias die* [15 June]; 291A [= book 3:52] *ad tertium Calendas Octobris* [29 September]) rather than the modern system (cf. the exceptional 269D [= book 1:19] *diem quartam mensis Decembris* [4 December]). More significantly, Venice’s magistracies are indicated by their Roman (anachronistic) counterparts, to which they are analogically assimilated. For instance, the *pioveghi* (urban officers) are referred to as *aediles* (310E [= book 4:82–3]), the *podestà*, *capitan(i)o*, and chamberlain as *praetor*, *praefectus*, *quaestor* (316F–G [= book 5:91]), the grand chancellor as *scriba magnus* (274F [= book 1:22]), and so on.

These linguistic choices, some but not all ascribable to Alvise Contarini’s revision, were not the only ones available in sixteenth-century Latin, which could in fact dispose of a plethora of Latinized vernacular forms (e.g., *chancellarius*, *capitanus*, *camerlengus*). An emblematic example is *cives*, which Contarini uses to refer to the patrician members of Venice’s Great Council, and which could have been easily (and more lucidly) substituted by *patricii* or *nobiles* (also classical Latin): however, *cives* programmatically assimilates Venetian nobility to the citizens of the Roman republic, thereby putting forward a republican construction of Venice’s government, which is a primary goal of *De magistratibus*. These linguistic choices are not stylistic or antiquarian pedantries, but betray the effort to anchor Venice, its history and institutions, to the idealized world of the classical tradition as conceived by Renaissance humanists, often in polemic contrast with the “corruptions” of the (Christian) Middle Ages.²⁶

At times, Contarini explicitly comments on his linguistic program, defending the preference for “ancient neologisms,” that is, unusual words yet ones anchored to classical authorities. For example, in book 5:98 one reads: “Our ancestors, however, added to them, like a crown or a top, magistrates we usually call syndics [*sindici*], a vernacular word derived from a Greek noun. We refer to them as ‘recognitors’ [*recognitores*], a name that is perhaps new, but appropriate to clarify the function of that office” (cf. also book 3:55–6 on his use of the term *preconsultores* for *savi*). Here the contrast is not between Latin and vernacular – both *sindici* and *recognitores* are Latin(ized) words) – but rather between different

25 All references to the Latin original are from the 1571 Parisian edition (see above).

26 On humanistic Latin see Jensen 1996.

varieties of Latin: the “corrupt” post-classical Latin versus the idealized classical Latin of Cicero.

Indeed, the Latin vocabulary of *De magistratibus* is blatantly pruned of Christian and vernacular borrowings, which even Erasmus might have used: all words used in *De magistratibus* are recorded in the Oxford Latin Dictionary, only covering Latin lexicon attested in sources up to the second century AD. I have found fewer than ten exceptions, of late, Christian, or medieval words (e.g., *temporaneus*, *charitas*, *sanctitas*, *schedula*, *quadragesimalis*, *iurisconsultor*); to these one might add some classical terms used in non-classical senses (e.g., *syngraphus* as “signed note,” *cancellatus* as “gated,” *praerogativus* as “pre-emptive,” *emolumentum* as “emolument,” *auditor* and *gubernator* in a legal sense). In some cases the classical Latin form has been introduced in the revision of the work (see above). For instance, in the first edition of *De magistratibus* (1543) the term “city” is normally rendered as *civitas*, a standard sense of the word in medieval Latin but rarely attested in classical Latin (where it instead means “citizenship”); in contrast in the final edition of 1571/8, *civitas* has normally been substituted by the standard classic term *urbs*, perhaps also to evoke Rome, the *Urbs par excellence*.²⁷

The rendition of Christian terminology is also indicative: saints are referred as *dei* (*immortales*) or *divi* (evoking analogically the deified *divus Iulius*, *divus Augustus*) rather than *sancti* (their standard epithet in ecclesiastical Latin);²⁸ *Deus* is often qualified as *optimus maximus* (just like the Roman Jupiter);²⁹ a church is a *templum* or *aedes*, never an *ecclesia*,³⁰ years are never identified with the *anno Domini* formula, but always with a relative reference (cf., e.g., 297C [= book 3:62] *anno ab hinc decimo supra ducentesimo*; 309B [= book 4:79] *anno ab hinc XV accidit*). Again, this is not a linguistic pedantry but a deliberate choice, with interesting theological implications.

The adherence to classical standards is also shown by the explicit declarations of (Latin) literary inadequacy, themselves modelled on classical (and humanistic) precedents. In book 1:11, the writer notes: “And although I know for certain that the weakness of my style cannot add any radiance, the topic is so splendid that it will bestow more than enough brightness and dignity on itself and my style alike.”³¹ And again in the same book, “I am aware that it is extremely difficult to explain these

27 Cf. Florio 2010, 91–2.

28 Cf., e.g., 264E (= book 1:11) *iuxta templum Divo Stephano dicatum* (and passim); 282E (= book 2:39) *in aedem divi Marci*; 298G (= book 3:63) *in deos immortales*.

29 Cf. e.g. 286G (= book 2:46), 287C (= book 2:47).

30 Cf. e.g. 315B (= book 4:88).

31 Cf. also book 2:33: “So far, we have described diligently (however inadequately, considering the dignity of our topic and our [sc. stylistic] insufficiency [tenuitate] to the task).”

details in writing, since they are very remote from the practice of the ancient Romans. Still, I would rather run the risk of being charged with incompetence than carelessness. I will thus dutifully report every last detail, so that no diligent man could want more.” In this passage, *litteris* is not simply “writing” but specifically denotes “classical (literary) Latin,” that is, the language that young Venetians would learn from tender age³² and that is indeed the language of *De magistratibus* (see also book 1:11 where he notes “[...] have undertaken this task in writing [*hanc rem litteris illustravisse*].”

Syntax and phraseology are also modelled on classical Latin, and especially on the prose of Cicero, whose most elaborate periods serve as paradigms for the treatise’s florid syntax, abundant in complex subordination and syntactic *variatio* (with prolific use of absolute ablatives). The same Ciceronian paradigm explains the treatise’s linguistic *abundantia* and *copia verborum*, featuring a profusion of discursive connectives,³³ explicit correlation,³⁴ long-winded phraseology,³⁵ emphatic pleonasm,³⁶ and resumptive or resuming formulae.³⁷ For a modern reader unaccustomed to the “copiousness” of Ciceronian standards, the style of *De magistratibus* may be taxing and at times irritating; and yet Contarini’s prose is a carefully constructed artifice, with plenty of ancient models and contemporary parallels, and above all deeply engrained in his (“humanistic”) program in *De magistratibus*: to construct a view of Venice through an authoritative idealized framework.

The Translator’s Challenge

It is impossible for a modern translation to maintain the linguistic and stylistic complexity of the Latin of *De magistratibus* without significant detriment to clarity and accessibility. Since these are the main goals of this

32 Cf. book 5:95 “The education of gentlemen has always been, from a very tender age until puberty, to spend time under the tutorship of school masters, learning Latin according to one’s capacity.”

33 E.g., *uero, nam, quodsi, enim, sed but also ideo, quocirca, quamobrem, idcirco*, etc.

34 Cf., e.g., 317C *et belli et pacis*.

35 Cf., e.g., 268H *nam frequenter evenit ut [...] qua ratione fit ut [...]*; 303D *ex his cuilibet compertum esse potest*; 314H *qua de causa effectum est ut [...]*; 319B *lege cautum fuit ... ut [...]*; 319D *quare facile intelligi potest ... ut [...]*.

36 Cf., e.g., 263C *quo effectum esse perspicimus, ut neque adeo diuturna ulla unquam perstiterit*.

37 Cf., e.g., 268E *nunc a nobis illud primum omnium statuatur [...]*; 272H *sed eo revertatur unde nostra divertit oratio*; 286G *nunc ad rem redeo*; 302 *hoc in loco mihi videor non ab re facturus*; cf. also 274E, 276E, 277B, 277C, 279A, 280E.

translation, we have preferred to prioritize clarity over linguistic exactness whenever this would significantly affect intelligibility. This choice, although necessary, is not without consequences, which it is good for the reader to keep in mind. Two examples will suffice to illustrate the point.

At 310E (book 4:80) the original Latin states: *urbani hi quaestores eam pecuniam ex Senatus decreto in usus publicos impendunt, eamque in codices accepti et expensi referunt* (By decree of the Senate, the treasurers of the city disburse money for public use, keeping track of what they receive and expend). A Latin reader would be struck by the classical Latin word *quaestor* instead of medieval Latin *the(n)saurarius*, *camerlengus* or similar. This use implies that the writer is striving to equate the government of Venice to the government of ancient Rome, and implicitly suggesting that Venice's political system is that of a republic (in the ancient sense). In the present translation this information is lost because, for the sake of clarity, we translated *quaestores* as "treasurers," thereby obscuring the reference to the Roman Republic.

Another example is at 300E (= book 3:65): *consilio coacto magistratus hic Advocatoius accusatoris vice fungitur eosque qui in eo sunt magistratu maxime decet ut accusatores acerrimos agant qualis, dummodo id assequi possint, fuit Cicero in Verrem et in Marcum Antonium, ita tamen ut maledicta caveant, neque extra causam maledicendo vagentur*. Here the syntax of the original Latin is extremely complex, reminiscent of Cicero's more convoluted sentences. This is presumably intentional: in the passage the writer is citing Cicero as a model of rhetoric, and the copious syntax parades the actual ability to write in Ciceronian style. This intentional syntactic complexity contributes to presenting Contarini as the eloquent champion of the Venetian Republic, just as Cicero was in the Roman Republic, as well as associating himself with the great humanist writers. A literal translation of the passage would read something like this:

Once the Council has assembled, this officer of the Avogaria takes on the role of the prosecutor, and it is most appropriate that those who are in that Office act as most severe prosecutors in a similar way to Cicero against Verres and Mark Anthony (provided that they are able to do so) yet with the provision that they refrain from insults and thus stray beyond the case.

This version would have preserved the syntactic complexity of the original and its allusive potential, but would have been much less accessible to modern readers than the one contained in these pages:

Once the Court of the Forty has assembled, the state attorney takes on the role of the prosecutor. It is fitting for those in that office to act as severe

prosecutors, in a way similar to Cicero against Verres and Mark Anthony – provided that they are able to do so. Yet they refrain from insults and do not stray beyond the case.

For these reasons, the copious syntax and phraseology of the original have generally been pruned or toned down: repetition and pleonasm have been reduced, as well as complex syntax and unidiomatic phraseology. Similarly, vernacular terms or English equivalents have normally been preferred over Latinized forms (e.g., *podestà*, *capitano*, and *chamberlain* instead of *praetor*, *prefect*, and *questor*), especially when they belong to the standard terminology of modern scholarship on the Republic of Venice. This also includes the problematic use of *civis* for “member of the Great Council,” which we have consistently translated as “patrician” in order to avoid confusion with the non-noble population of Venice, and to maintain the classical imprint of the original.

Despite these choices, the present translation has not completely obscured the treatise’s lexical sophistication and complex syntax. This is not only because any claim to modify or, worse, “improve” on the original style is absurd and dangerous, but above all because lexical sophistication and complex syntax are indeed important features of *De magistratibus*’s programmatic effort at being embedded in the classical tradition, as idealized by humanist writers and thinkers.

Consequently, at times the reader will find lexical choices that aim to preserve the classical patina of the original. An example is from the fourth book (76 [=307B]): “After the institution of the Republic, the dominion of the Venetians began to expand into the region of Venetum, which willingly and voluntarily went back to its old masters in a restoration of sorts [*postliminium*]” The word *postliminium* and its Roman concept have been preserved in the final version, instead of being substituted with some neutral periphrasis. Similarly, the original *copia verborum* has been reduced, although not as much as could have been done. An example is from the closure of the first book: “Let us now proceed to that constituent part of the Republic which, having a sort of monarchic appearance, is in full accord with the popular component, not unlike a well-tuned diapason, where the low note corresponds to a high one according to a certain interval, and eventually coalesces, with the mediation of other magistracies, into the single choir of our excellent Republic.” Given the emphatic tone of the “grand finale,” we have preferred to maintain the paragraph as a single sentence, as in the original Latin, rather than break it into two or three sentences (as we have done in several other passages).

In conclusion, this translation is a rendition of Contarini's *De magistratibus* in modern English but not a complete rewriting of it in a simple modern style. The present translation will therefore require a certain degree of effort from the reader – though assuredly be less than the effort the original treatise would have required (and expected) from its contemporary readers.