H-Net Reviews
in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Filippo de Vivo. *Patrizi, informatori, barbieri: politica e comunicazione a Venezia nella prima età moderna.* Milano: Feltrinelli, 2012. 466 pp. ISBN 978-88-07-10479-4.

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Published on H-Italy (September, 2012)

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Filippo de Vivo's first book on information and communication in Venice, published in English in 2007, was praised for its original use of a broad range of sources and for the new perspectives it offered.[1] The current book in Italian, on the same subject is, according to De Vivo, a further elaboration of his reflections on the complex relationship between politics and communication. He states that this book is essentially a new one. Although the two books are quite similar, the recently published Italian book places the interdict crisis more at the center of the narrative and offers a new conclusion.

Secrecy was central in keeping the Venetian Republic peaceful and harmonious. Contemporaries and later historians all marvelled at the level of secrecy preserved by the Venetian state. However, as De Vivo points out, the Venetian government had great difficulties in maintaining the desired level of secrecy. The first part of the book deals with the papal interdict crisis (1606-07), an important moment in Venetian history that perfectly illustrates the difficulties of keeping political debates out of the public arena. At the beginning of the interdict, the Venetian government saw itself confronted with a paradox. Although the government prohibited the publication of the interdict in Venice, it simultaneously authorized the publication of a protest against the papal decision, thereby making the interdict publicly albeit implicitly known. As its initial strategy of denial and further attempts to control the communication in the city failed, the Venetian senate ultimately changed tactics. In a brief period of time, enormous quantities of pamphlets on the interdict were produced by Venetian printers. De Vivo has compiled a new bibliography of all the libels, 155 titles in 321 different editions that were published during that year. This bibliography is a very useful addition to his study of political communication in Venice.

In the book's second part, De Vivo, leads the reader into a city full of news, talk, and political discussions among patricians, informants, and barbers. Patricians, informants, and barbers represent, according to De Vivo, the three different

social groups engaged in political communication in Venice. De Vivo writes in this context of three different levels of communication. First he describes the functioning of the Venetian council and the management of political information by the Venetian state. Moving away from the official government, De Vivo then draws attention to the corridors of power (level two), where patricians and informants of all sorts, ranging from secretaries to ambassadors, exchanged information. A case in point is De Vivo's description of the disclosure and wide circulation of one ***relazione*** in particular, the official report of the Venetian ambassador to France, Ottoviano Bon, in 1619. From the political arena, the analysis moves into level three, the city itself, looking at the various locations, bookshops, barbershops, and pharmacies, where all sorts of people from different social groups regularly met to exchange news. It would perhaps have been better to place this part at the beginning of the book, as it provides a general framework, almost necessary for understanding the first part on the interdict crisis.

The third part of this book describes the multiple interactions between the three levels. It gives us a glimpse of a dynamic mix between oral and written forms of communication by tracing the circulation in the city of a ***paternoster*** (a specific type of poem containing mostly parodies) on the French wars of religion in 1591. De Vivo returns to the interdict crisis to consider the relationships between the libels and the context in which they appeared by analyzing the pro-Venetian libels. He emphasizes, as he does in other instances throughout the book, that we have to rethink the relationship between politics and different types of media, moving away from the dichotomies present in historiography. De Vivo has shown that most people, including those excluded from politics, had some political knowledge and participated in political debates. He thereby implicitly criticizes Jürgen Habermas's model of the public sphere by showing that this public participation did not function in the ways described by Habermas. De Vivo adds that the notion of propaganda is unable to describe the different reactions various social levels would have had upon hearing or reading a manuscript letter or pamphlet. Furthermore, according to De Vivo, "propaganda" is an inadequate term, as none of these three levels controlled all means of communication. De Vivo argues for a model of political communication as a creative dialogue between the different levels in society.

In his conclusion, De Vivo discusses the wider relevance of his study of Venice for the relationship between communication and politics in early modern Europe. He argues that although Venice had some particular characteristics, they were not unique. Revising the three levels of communication, he concludes that these are equally present in other early modern European countries. While he frequently refers to examples from Italy, France, and England, De Vivo does not mention the United Provinces in his comparison. This is rather disappointing, as the United Provinces were, like Venice, considered to be somewhat unusual in terms of early modern European polities. Of course, pointing out the many parallels between the two republics is not new, but I think that reconsidering them in terms of political communication would have made an interesting addition to De Vivo's stimulating conclusion.[2] The regents of the Dutch Republic were confronted with problems that were very similar to those of their Venetian counterparts. The regents wanted to prevent political matters from being discussed publicly. It was the rule to keep government debates and decisions secret; however, the regents often expressed their amazement on how widely government decisions and secret documents circulated in the Dutch Republic.

This flow of information was partly due the political constellation of the Dutch Republic, with a decentralized system of government, where consent was needed from the seven different provinces.[3] The provinces in turn had to have con-

sent from the rather independent cities. So, there were many different levels in the political structure where information could deliberately be made public. While Venice was praised for its secrecy, the Dutch Republic was known for its internal discord, quarrels, factionalism, and corruption. It was known to foreign ambassadors and diplomats that regents or civil servants could be bribed in exchange for the news of the day and copies of government documents. To an extent, the functioning of the government and the political arena in these two cases, was thus quite similar, although it seems that it was even more difficult in the United Provinces to keep political matters secret than it was in Venice. Due to its ambiguous political system, and this is quite different from the Venetian situation, more people were involved in government and it was harder to ban political debates. Furthermore, the regents did not have the capacity to ban or to censure the huge flow of pamphlets, printed songs, and libels on political affairs and wars during the seventeenth century. Moreover, the regents were sometimes openly confronted with opposition, mostly led by the civic militia and guildsmen. Burghers used the printing presses to formulate their demands and ventilate their opinions, as they did in petitions and pamphlets.[4] Compared to Venice, there was even more active public participation in political communication in the Dutch Republic. These observations aside, De Vivo's monograph is a highly valuable and a stimulating piece of work, as it reaches a new understanding of the complex world of Venetian government and early modern information and communication in general.

Notes

[1]. F. De Vivo, ***Information and Communication in Venice: Rethinking Early Modern Politics*** (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

[2]. For the circulation of information in seventeenth-century Amsterdam, see C. Lesger, ***The Rise of Amsterdam Market and Information Exchange*** (Farnham, Surrey, UK: Ashgate, 2006).

[3]. M. Prak, ***The Dutch Republic in the Seventeenth Century*** (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 166-185.

[4]. F. Deen, M. Reinders, and D. Onnekink, eds., ***Pamphlets and Politics in the Dutch Republic*** (Leiden*:* Brill, 2011).

Citation: Nina Lamal. Review of Vivo, Filippo de. *Patrizi, informatori, barbieri: politica e comunicazione a Venezia nella prima età moderna.* H-Italy, H-Net Reviews. September, 2012.

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