



ENGLISH

# The Contarina Flag

*Second half of the 17th century*

**The most beautiful Venetian  
standard handed down to us**



*Independent Veneto Committee and for historical reconstruction*

***Cover page: A detail of the Contarina flag, completely redesigned by the illustrator Oliviero Murru, commissioned by the Independent Veneto Committee and for historical reconstruction, in collaboration with the Sindacato Libero (Free Trade Union) and the Committee for the celebration of the Veronese Easters. This spectacular standard has been reproduced in the minutest detail, supplementing and improving the patchy or worn parts and restoring the original glory of the warp and weft, the design and the colours.***

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VERONESE EASTER*

17-25 aprile 1797

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*Venetorum Fides inviolabilis.*  
*Unshakeable is Venetians' Faith*

These words, *Venetorum Fides inviolabilis, Unshakeable is Venetians' Faith* can be read on a coin, the *bisante* (formerly a gold coin of the Emperors of the Eastern Roman Empire, the name of which was taken from the city of Byzantium, later Constantinople, modern-day Istanbul). The Venetian *bisante* was minted by the Most Serene Republic in 1570, at the time of the war launched by the Turks to seize and Islamicize the large island of Cyprus, the Venetian pearl of the Aegean Sea, assailed by 200,000 of the Sultan's soldiers, an enormous military force, the equivalent today of an army of several million soldiers. That life-or-death combat culminated in the siege of Famagusta (22 August 1570 – 4 August 1571) the fortified city that overlooked the island's east coast, opposite the Syrian coast, defended by only 7,000 Venetians. In flagrant violation of all the conditions of surrender, once the siege had ended, Famagusta was subject to the horrors of the massacre of its inhabitants, the putting to death of the military officers (Astorre Baglioni of Perugia, Luigi Martinengo of Brescia among others) but, above all, the martyrdom of the heroic Venetian Commander, Marc'Antonio Bragadin, after twelve days of barbarous torture, who died without ever renouncing his Catholic Christian Faith. Bragadin's sacrifice encouraged the Holy League forged by Pope Saint Pius V to struggle with even greater determination and, finally, to rout the Turkish fleet in the waters of Lepanto, on 7 October 1571, in the greatest naval battle in history, where half of the Christian fleet was Venetian..



# The Contarina Flag

*Second half of the 17th century*



This marvellous gonfalon or ship's ensign, with its wealth of decorations and symbolic meanings, both civil and religious, was entirely redesigned in the minutest detail, based on the original, by an accomplished illustrator on the commission of the *Independent Veneto Committee and for historical reconstruction*, in collaboration with the *Sindacato Libero (Free Trade Union)* and the *Committee for the celebration of the Veronese Easters*.

The ensign flew on the galley of Domenico II Contarini (1585-1675) the hundred and fourth Doge of the Republic of St Mark from 1659 to 1675, who lies in the family tomb in Venice in the church of San Beneto (Saint Benedict of Nursia).

The former family palace of the Doge Domenico Contarini is today the seat of the Venice Municipality and, specifically, of





**Portrait of the Doge Domenico II Contarini, Most Serene Prince of Venice from 1659 to 1675.**

the Mayor's Delegate Advisor with responsibility for Popular Traditions. The building now known as Contarini Mocenigo Palace (St Mark 3980) overlooks Rio de San Luca.

Due to its history and grandeur, as well as its position on the Doge's ship, the Contarini standard possesses all the authority of officialdom and is probably the most beautiful Venetian flag passed down to us, on which the red and gold colours of the Navy, the legacy

of the Roman imperial and later Byzantine navies, predominate.

In addition to Venice's link with the Eastern Roman Empire, it must not be forgotten that classical Rome and the Venetians claimed common descent from the ancient Trojans, exiled to Italy, in Lazio and the upper Adriatic, after the fire and destruction that befell Troy at the hand of Ulysses and the Greeks (1184 B.C.); that the founder of Padua was the Trojan Antenor; that Venetians and Romans were allies and remained so at the time of Hannibal's invasion, when the Carthaginians crossed the Alps and invaded Italy (218 B.C.) just as many Gallic peoples were rising up against Rome; that the Paduans, descendants of Antenor, founded Venice following the barbarian invasions (421 A.D.).

All this explains a curious episode that shows how the Venetians considered themselves to be the heirs of the ancient Quirites, an early name for the citizens of ancient Rome. In September 1463, Pope Pius II, Enea Silvio Piccolomini, planned to call for a crusade by Italian and European States against the Ottomans, who were threatening the borders. Ambassadors from all of Europe came together in the Papal villa of Tivoli, summoned by





the Supreme Pontiff. On 22 September, with a certain amount of envy and great concern about the Venetians, the Florentine delegates suggested to the Pope, who nevertheless remained unmoved, that the Venetians, “*blinded by the determination to be the successors of the ancient Romans and convinced that the sovereignty of the world belonged to them, after the conquest of Greece [which was to be seized from the Turks] would then aim to also subjugate Italy* (Ludwig von Pastor, *History of the Popes since the Close of the Middle Ages*. Volume II, *History of the Popes in the period of the Renaissance from the election of Pius II to the death of Sixtus IV*. Desclée & C. Editori Pontifici, Rome 1932, pp. 238-239).

The red on the Contarini standard is the amaranth or deep red that was typical of the Venetian maritime ensigns and the uniform of the Slavonian troops (Schiavoni), very faithful to Venice, known as “*La Dominante*”, who manned both the ships and the mainland strongholds as well as the capital itself, Venice.



**The palace in Venice, in San Marco 3980, where Doge Domenico II Contarini (1585–1675) lived, is today known as Contarini Mocenigo Palace. The façade is on the Rio de San Luca.**



It should not be forgotten, however, that Venice's colours were blue and gold. But, in the Most Serene Republic, as in the other States of the *ancient Régime*, the various types of flags, that is, those flying on the fortresses, the regimental colours or hoist on the masts of ships, were never subject to uniform regulation, either in the maritime domains or those on the mainland.

The designer Oliviero Murru also supplemented and improved the incomplete parts on the standard and those that have become difficult to make out due to the wear and tear of the fabric, restoring the original splendour of the colours, which had been altered or tarnished over time (for example, the Dove of the Holy Spirit, darkened to the point of becoming black on the original cloth).

The original gonfalon, recently restored, is currently preserved and exhibited at Venice's Correr Civic Museum, where it covers an entire wall. In red silk, the cloth measures 6.5 metres long and 3.2 metres high, while each of the six tails is 2.5 metres long.

### *The three available formats of the Contarina flag, in each of the two versions, horizontal and vertical*

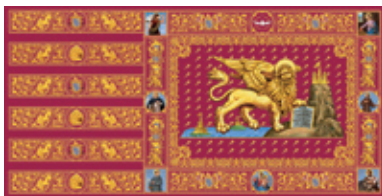
The Contarina flag is highly suitable for solemn ceremonial and celebratory occasions of the St Mark State or for important anniversaries of the Venetian Homeland, for hoisting on towers, bell towers, on the flagstuffs of Palaces and squares, but also for personal use, to furnish houses, balconies or other family rooms. This flag is currently offered in a limited number of copies, until sold out, both in the horizontal, more traditional version, and vertical, each of which has been produced in three different formats.

In the vertical or "labarum" version of the flag (*which can be admired on page 10*) the tails drop down from the rectangle that surrounds the Lion and this is probably - although more difficult to produce than the horizontal flag due to the special costs involved - the most suitable version for placing on a wall, on the battlements of monumental buildings or civic or bell towers of cities and castles. The vertical version is also provided with a convenient rear pocket that runs along the entire length of the cloth, inside which a crosspiece can easily be inserted by the user to support the flag. The crosspiece is not supplied as standard with the



flag, given its large size and bulk with regard to shipping, but it can ordered, shipped and billed separately. It is made of aluminium.

## THE HORIZONTAL FORMAT OF THE CONTARINA FLAG



**HORIZONTAL FORMAT SMALL 150 X 75 cm**  
with loose tails (but some copies are available on request with joined tails)

**HORIZONTAL FORMAT MEDIUM 300 X 150 cm**  
with loose tails (but some copies are available on request with joined tails)

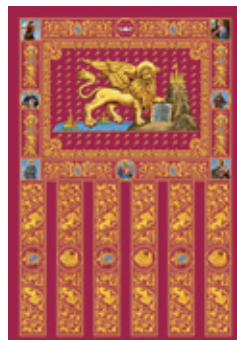
**HORIZONTAL FORMAT LARGE 600 X 300 cm**  
only available with loose tails

## THE VERTICAL FORMAT OF THE CONTARINA FLAG

**VERTICAL FORMAT SMALL 96 X 150 cm**  
only available with loose tails

**VERTICAL FORMAT MEDIUM 149 X 230 cm**  
only available with loose tails

**VERTICAL FORMAT LARGE 390 X 600 cm**  
only available with loose tails





# Description of the flag and its religious and civic symbols

## I - The winged Lion



The Lion of St Mark portrayed on the Contarini flag is positioned clockwise, that is, it faces right in the direction of the naval flagstaff or mast that supports the flag (as was most common) and with the muzzle turned towards the observer. Three-quarters of St Mark Lions are usually shown moving towards the left, that is, anticlockwise. Therefore, the orientation of this Lion is, in itself, a rarity.



The beast displays the tail upright in the form of an S, so as the Lion in majesty, to underline the sacred nature of the emblem and the personification in it of the Most Serene Republic. Indeed, the Lion symbolises the Evangelist St Mark and is intended to signify that the real head of the Venetian State is St Mark, of whom, and of Christ, the Doge is only the earthly representative. In this way, the classical-Christian concept of the derivation from God of the kingship and all legitimate Authority is reaffirmed: “*Non est potestas, nisi a Deo; quae autem sunt, a Deo ordinatae sunt*”, “*There is no Authority (legitimate) except from God and those that exist have been established by God*” (Saint Paul, *Epistle to the Romans* 13, 1).

The Kings and the political Authorities are therefore merely the earthly ministers and lieutenants of God.

Precisely because of this territorial and religious sacred nature, the St Mark Lion is winged. Its head is surrounded by a nimbus or golden halo, the prerogative of Saints, symbolising St Mark, the main Patron Saint of “La Dominante”. It is depicted in gold on a red background, strewn with little flames (and not stars), also golden, little flames that are the direct emanation of the Dove of the Holy Spirit, depicted at the centre of the flag’s upper border. Red and gold are the colours of Royalty *par excellence*: it recalls the gold brought by the Three Wise Men (together with incense and myrrh) to the Baby Jesus Christ in Bethlehem, at the feast of the Epiphany. It also recalls the scarlet tunic and the crown of thorns of the Redeemer during his Passion.

The Lion was adopted as the sacred symbol of St Mark, because his gospel begins with the preaching by St John the Baptist in the desert and with his call to conversion and penitence, in preparation for the coming of Christ. The roar of the Baptist was indeed similar to that of a Lion, King of the desert. In the Holy Scripture, the Lion is the figure of Jesus Christ, of whom the Baptist was the Precursor.

We are in the presence of a banner of peace and representation, as can be seen both by the absence of a sword-bearer (*ensifer* in latin)



or cross-bearer Lion, which were typical of battle flags; both with closed or semi-open jaws, without warlike or threatening intent.

The mane is flamelike, in accordance with late Gothic models, notwithstanding the context and the baroque decoration of the friezes and the gilded embroidery that embellish the flag. The reproductive organs are modestly not on display (gendered lions only appear occasionally on the Venetian mainland but, in these cases, their meaning is more political than religious).

Under the front left paw, the Lion holds an open book, silver and bordered with gold, an allusion both to St Mark's Gospel and the appearance of the Angel to the Evangelist, to whom he addressed the famous words: *Pax tibi, Marce, Evangelista meus* (*Peace be with You, Mark, my Evangelist*). According to Tradition, in fact, an Angel appeared to St Mark after the Evangelist had been shipwrecked in the Gulf of Venice, which was crossed by him during his apostolic mission, pronouncing in his address these Latin words, which were then placed on the flag and that also constituted the prediction that there, in Venice, his remains would one day lie ("*hic requiescet corpus tuum*", "*here will rest your body*"), concluded the Angel) as indeed happened.

In 828, the body of the Saint, saved from the profanations of the Muslims, who had meanwhile occupied Egypt, was taken in a daring raid from the infidels and carried on a ship from Alexandria to Venice, not without miraculous events, by the sailors Buono of Malamocco and Rustico of Torcello.

The wings of the Lion are in fact those of the Angel, in the episode just mentioned.



## II - The landscape behind the Lion



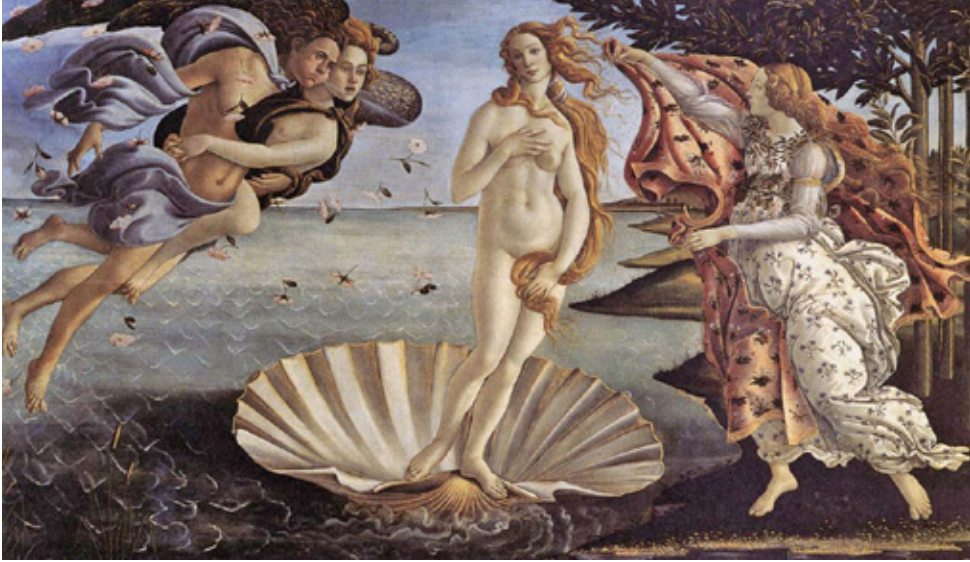
The paws of the Lion indicate the dual Venetian domain over the mainland and the sea (*State on Land, State at Sea*). The front right paw of the beast claws the plain, the other (resting on the book) a mountain, albeit highly stylised. At the summit, there is a fortress, which recalls that of Dalmatia and, even more so, the Latin Cathedral bell tower of Candia, named after St Mark, on the Greek island of Crete, which belonged to Venice for almost 500 years, from 1204 to 1669.

The fortress that stands on the high mountain and on which flies a flag with two or more tails or oriflamme, represents Venetian dominion over north-east Italy.

The waters, only slightly rippled by a gentle sea breeze, signify the peaceful rule of the







***The birth of Venus*, Sandro Botticelli’s masterpiece, dating from between 1482 and 1485. Florence. Uffizi Gallery. According to the myth, Venus rose from the waters in the Greek island of Cyprus, which became a Venetian possession in the 15<sup>th</sup> century. The Botticelli painting is filled with references to neo-Platonic allegories and those of the classical-Christian civilisation.**

Venetian Government from the Adriatic to the Aegean Sea and the eastern Mediterranean.

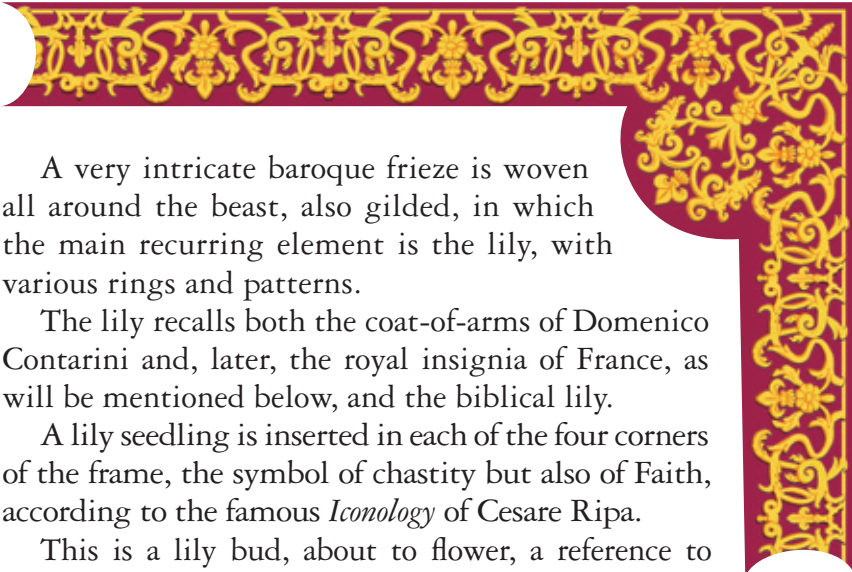
This fresh rippling of the sea, a sign of youthful boldness, is also found in the famous painting (1482-85) by Sandro Botticelli, preserved in Florence, in the Uffizi Gallery, which depicts the birth of Venus, which took place – according to the myth – on the island of Cyprus (held by Venice in those years of the 15<sup>th</sup> century).

On the Contarini flag, the rear paws of the wild animal, unlike the front ones, rest on the water (rather than being submerged); and the stylised islets, with castles and flags fluttering in the wind, which rise from the sea, underline the maritime power of Venetian rule and its overseas domains.

As was said by Lorenzo De Monacis, Chancellor of the Venetian Republic in Crete and author of a famous history (*Chronicon*) in three books on the war of Candia (1644-1669) against the Turks, this was a “*Standard that strikes fear in unjust men, but that, for the righteous, is the Flag of salvation and freedom*” (“*Hominibus improbis terror; probis vero salutis et libertatis Vexillum*”).



### III - The inner frame around the Lion



A very intricate baroque frieze is woven all around the beast, also gilded, in which the main recurring element is the lily, with various rings and patterns.

The lily recalls both the coat-of-arms of Domenico Contarini and, later, the royal insignia of France, as will be mentioned below, and the biblical lily.

A lily seedling is inserted in each of the four corners of the frame, the symbol of chastity but also of Faith, according to the famous *Iconology* of Cesare Ripa.

This is a lily bud, about to flower, a reference to the famous biblical episodes of the Aaron's rod (*Numbers*, chapters 16 and 17) which miraculously burst into flower, even though enclosed within the tabernacle of the Covenant, in the Ark of the Temple, together with another 11 staffs, each representing one of the Houses of Israel; flowering that was the proof given by God of his blessing on legitimate Authority, both religious and civil, to which all must be obedient, with the consequent punishment of every rebel. All those who resisted – states the Old Testament – were swallowed up by the earth, which opened up beneath their feet, a punishment reserved by God to blasphemers and traitors of the legitimate Authority. Especially to the leaders, promoters, followers and imitators of the Revolution.

*“And Moses said: «By this you shall know that the Lord hath sent me to do all things that you see, and that I have not forged them of my own head. If these men die the common death of men, and if they be visited with a plague, wherewith others also are wont to be visited, the Lord*





*The punishment of rebels against legitimate civil and religious Authority.* By Sandro Botticelli, dating from 1480-82. Rome. Sistine Chapel. Detail. This depicts the Israelites who, rejecting obedience to Moses and Aaron and, therefore, respectively, the legitimate temporal and spiritual Authority, were swallowed up by the earth in divine punishment and consumed with their families by the flames, according to the Bible story (*Numbers*, chapter 16).



*did not send me. But if the Lord do a new thing, and the earth opening her mouth swallow them down, and all things that belong to them, and they go down alive into hell, you shall know that they have blasphemed the Lord». And immediately as he had made an end of speaking, the earth broke asunder under their feet: and opening her mouth, devoured them with their tents and all their substance” (Numbers, chapters 16, 28-32).*

The rod is also an allusion to the rod of St Joseph, the withered almond branch that miraculously flowered in his hands, when he presented himself to the Madonna to ask her to be his wife, in preference to the other suitors, a flowering branch that remained in the iconography of the Saint, and which is the prefiguration of the birth of Jesus Christ (the prophecy written in Isaiah 11, 1). The birth of the Redeemer, heralded here, follows and is closely linked to the mystery of Incarnation and the miraculous conception of our Lord Jesus Christ by the Holy Spirit in the bosom of the Most Holy Mary, a mystery explicitly recalled in the flag's upper border (see V, § 2 below).

## IV - The outer edge, horizontal and vertical, around the Lion

Friezes and little images entirely surround the flag. It is edged in red with inner and outer gold threads, that meet at the corners.



On the outer horizontal edge around the Lion, the rectangle of which forms the main part of the cloth, the coat-of-arms of the Doge Domenico Contarini appears four times (two on the upper band and two on the lower), which combines the fam-





***On the previous page: The coat-of-arms of the Doge Domenico Contarini, with yoked Muslim slaves at its sides.***

***Above: The horizontal border around the Lion.***

***Below: The panoplies or military trophies that adorn the vertical borders, to the left and right of the St Mark Lion.***

ily coat-of-arms (blue bands on a gold background) with the three French royal lilies, included in the noble crest due to a privilege that was granted to this branch of the Contarini family by the King of France, Francis I, in 1527.

Each Contarini crest is surmounted by the Doge's horn, the cap of the Prince of the Venetian State, and is supported by two cherubs, which step on and keep yoked with bands two slaves, restrained at the foot of the crest of the Contarini.

They were probably Turkish or Muslim prisoners of war, covered only at the loins, on their knees, their hands tied behind their backs, turned with their backs to each other and facing the observer. This is an allusion to the military victories against the Turks during the period as Doge of Domenico Contarini, notwithstanding the final setback of Candia's capitulation. During the twenty-five year siege of the war of Candia or Crete, which raged from 1644 to 1669, the island and the fortresses were continuously resupplied from the sea by the Venetians,





**War of Candia or the fifth Turkish-Venetian war (1645-1669). The Commander of the Venetian fleet, Admiral Francesco Morosini, defeated the Turks and conquered their fortress of Cisme. June 1659. Anonymous. Correr Civic Museum Venice.**

thanks to their naval supremacy.

The war was fought, however, between unequal forces. Doge Contarini was the driving force of the battle against the infidels and father of the Homeland, to the point that Venice inflicted terrible defeats on the enemy but, in the end, was forced to yield

and give up the island of Crete to the Ottomans, after 30,000 men and 134 million ducats had been lost.

In this way, the fifth Turkish-Venetian war came to an end: but a sixth and final victorious war would follow, known as the *war of Morea* (1684-99) which saw St Mark conquer the Greek Peloponnese and was conducted at sea by Admiral Francesco Morosoni, known as the *Peloponnesian*, and on land by Commander Otto Wilhelm, Count of Königsmarck.

On the Contarini flag, at the left and right edges of the horizontal frieze, winged cherubs appear among floral motifs (leaves and vine shoots). They support oriflamme or ships' pennants, hoist on masts. The cherubs, winged and otherwise, are a motif taken from classical Greco-Roman art. Indeed, pagan religion considered them to be emissaries and ministers of the gods. Here, and throughout the Christian era, they have a purely decorative function.

On the other hand, the symbol of the vine, the vineyard and wine is replete with meaning. Tradition and the Holy Scriptures regard them as symbols both of material prosperity and spiritual salvation.



In the Old Testament, the scouts sent by Moses to reconnoitre the Promised Land return from Canaan bearing vine shoots and bunches of grapes (*Numbers* 13, 25-26) as evidence of its fruitfulness. The Patriarch Jacob blesses his son Judah, from whose tribe Christ the Saviour would be born, heralding future well-being, affirmed by the flowering of the vines (*Genesis* 49, 11).

But it is in the New Testament that the vineyard appears as the figure of the Celestial Realm, usurped by the High Israelite priests, as shown by the parable of the murderous wine makers, the Hebrews, who killed the servants (the prophets) and the son of the master (who is Jesus Christ) with their consequent punishment of divine anger (*Gospel according to St Matthew* 21, 33-44); or in the parable of the master who spent an entire day hiring workers for his vineyard (that is, Paradise and the Church) paying all the same amount, even those who arrived last (*Gospel according to St Matthew* 20, 1-16). In other passages, God the Father is the vine-dresser who prunes the withered shoots at the appropriate time (*Gospel according to St John* 15, 1). It is Jesus who says of himself and the Christians:

*"I am the vine: you the branches. He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same beareth much fruit: for without me you can do nothing. If any one abide not in me, he shall be cast forth as a branch and shall wither: and they shall gather him up and cast him into the fire: and he burneth. If you abide in me and my words abide in you, you shall ask whatever you*



**Siege of Candia, painted by the Dutch artist, Jan Peeters (Antwerp, around 1627–1680). London. Christie's Auction House.**



will: and it shall be done unto you” (*Gospel according to St John*, chapter 15, 5-7).

The first miracle performed by Jesus Christ in his public life was the transformation of water into wine at the marriage at Cana, where there is the allegory of the turning of water - the Old Testament - into wine (which is the New Testament, see *Gospel according to St John* 2, 1-11).

But the culmination of the symbolism of wine comes with the Last Supper, when Jesus, taking the Chalice with the wine, states that it is his Blood, the seal of the New Covenant, offered in remission of the sins of mankind. His sacrifice on the Cross therefore opens, not indiscriminately to all, but to those who want it, the doors to the eternal life. “*And taking the chalice, he gave thanks and gave to them, saying: «Drink ye all of this. For this is my Blood of the New Testament, which shall be shed for many unto remission of sins. And I say to you, I will not drink from henceforth of this fruit of the vine, until that day when I shall drink it with you new in the Kingdom of my Father»*” (*Gospel according to St Matthew*, chapter 26, 27-29).

On the outer vertical edge, on the other hand, both on the left, near the mast, and the left, nearest to the tails, there are panoplies or war trophies, interspersed respectively with the tondi of Saint Dominic of Guzmán (on the left) and Saint Francis of Assisi (on the right): walking sticks of officials, archery bows, armour, Roman loricae, swords and scimitars, adzes, battleaxes, Neptune’s marine tridents, war standards. Also, tools ordinarily used by artillerymen and town bombardiers, on the galleys of the fleet with banks of oars (*flotta sottile*) and the terraces of the bastions of the *Mainland State* and the *Maritime State*, in Italy and in Europe, as in the Levant: swabs, tapers to light the fuses of ballistic ordnance, worm gears or hollow wads to remove the detritus from inside rifle chambers and cannons crossing each other and with these tools, all of which speak of triumphs, glory and military valour.





## V - The Dove of the Holy Spirit, the Herald Angel, the Madonna and Saints portrayed in cameos of the upper and vertical borders that surround the Lion

§ 1 - The **DOVE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT** is clearly seen in the tondo at the centre of the upper border.

As the figure of the Third Person of the Holy Trinity, this Dove appears at the start of the Gospel of St Mark, when St John the Baptist administers a simple Baptism of Purification to Jesus Christ, the prefiguration of the sacramental Baptism that would be instituted by the Redeemer. The Heavens and the Holy Father are then revealed and the Holy Spirit appears to indicate Christ as the Second person of the Holy Trinity, incarnated on earth to redeem mankind from sins. *“And it came to pass, in those days, Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in Jordan. And forthwith coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens open and the Spirit as a Dove descending and remaining on him. And there came a voice from heaven: «Thou art my beloved Son; in thee I am well pleased»”* (Gospel according to St Mark, chapter 1, 9-11).



The location of the Dove on high, at the centre of the upper border of the Contarini flag, is not by chance; placed between the Herald Angel and Our Lady of the Annunciation, the Dove, above all, evokes the virgin conception of Jesus, as a man, by the direct work of the Holy Spirit. Indeed, it was in the mystery of the Incarnation, on the Annunciation of the Angel, that the Second Person of the Holy Trinity assumed human nature. This is of enormous importance for Venice, established on the same day that the Annunciation is celebrated (25 March 421 A.D.).



Not only that: the Holy Spirit rains on the Lion, which represents the St Mark Republic, and on the Venetian dominions, the graces of the heavenly blessings and the appropriate aid to preserve them and govern them well. They are the sevenfold gifts of the Holy Spirit (wisdom, understanding, counsel, fortitude, knowledge, piety and fear of the Lord) in the form of flames that surround the Lion from all sides.

These graces are revealed in the form of tongues of fire, similar to those that appeared at Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit (as Jesus had promised before his Ascension to heaven) descended on the Apostles and the Most Holy Mary, when they are gathered in Jerusalem in the Cenacle, this being the founding act of the Church, also instilling in those present the gift of speaking in tongues, in order they should take the good news of Christ to the ends of the earth. *“And when the days of the Pentecost were accomplished, they were all together in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven, as of a mighty wind coming: and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. And there appeared to them parted tongues, as it were of fire: and it sat upon every one of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost: and they began to speak with divers tongues, according as the Holy Ghost gave them to speak. Now there were dwelling at Jerusalem, Jews, devout men, out of every Nation under heaven. And when this was noised abroad, the multitude came together, and were confounded in mind, because that every man heard them speak in his own tongue. And they were all amazed, and wondered, saying: «Behold, are not all these that speak Galilean? And how have we heard, every man our own tongue wherein we were born?»”* (Acts of the Apostles, chapter 2, 1-8).

§ 2 – **ST GABRIEL THE ARCHANGEL AND OUR LADY OF THE ANNUNCIATION** are depicted in the respective rectangles (one on the left and the other on the right) of the border around the Lion, in the standard’s upper band. The Archangel, with index finger raised to heaven, points to the work of the Holy Spirit and





the divine design of redemption of humankind, which is about to occur.

As is well-known, the Church celebrates the Annunciation on 25 March, when Jesus Christ, the Second Person of the Holy Trinity, after the angelic annunciation and after the agreement of the Most Holy Mary, assumed human nature and was incarnated in her virginal bosom for the redemption of mankind.

*“And in the sixth month, the Angel Gabriel was sent from God into a city of Galilee, called Nazareth, to a Virgin espoused to a man whose name was Joseph, of the House of David: and the Virgin’s name was Mary. And the Angel being come in, said unto her: «Hail, full of grace, the Lord is with thee: blessed art thou among women». Who having heard, was troubled at his saying and thought with herself what manner of salutation this should be. And the Angel said to her: «Fear not, Mary, for thou hast found grace with God. Behold thou shalt conceive in thy womb and shalt bring forth a son: and thou shalt call his name Jesus. He shall be great and shall be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of David his father: and he shall reign in the House of Jacob for ever. And of his Kingdom there shall be no end». And Mary said to the Angel: «How shall this be done, because I know not man?». And the Angel answering, said to her: «The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee and the power of the Most High shall overshadow thee. And therefore also the Holy which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God. And behold thy cousin Elizabeth, she also hath conceived a son in her old age: and this is the sixth month with her that is called barren. Because no word shall be impossible with God». And Mary said: «Behold the handmaid of the Lord: be it done to me according to thy word». And the Angel departed from her” (Gospel according to St Luke, chapter 1, 26-38).*

According to Saint Louis-Marie Grignion de Montfort (1673-1716), the great apostle of the Vandean lands and Brittany, the most



impervious to the revolutionary spirit of 1789, the Annunciation and the Incarnation were the greatest mystery of Jesus Christ. “*The Incarnation*”, wrote the Saint in his *Treatise on true devotion to the Blessed Virgin* (no. 248), his masterpiece and probably the most important Marian book ever written, “*is the first mystery of Jesus Christ; it is the most hidden; and it is the most exalted and the least known. It was in this mystery that Jesus, in the virginal womb of Mary and with her cooperation, chose all the elect. For this reason the Saints called her womb, the throne-room of God’s mysteries. It was in this mystery that Jesus anticipated all subsequent mysteries of his life, by his willing acceptance of them*”.

The day that Venice was founded coincides precisely with the feast of the Annunciation. The *Chronicon Altinate* (*Altino Chronicle*) records that, in Rialto, on 25 March 421, “*at midday on Holy Monday, this Most Illustrious and Sublime and marvellous Christian City arose, Heaven at that time (as often calculated by the Astronomers) being in singular disposition*”. In the extraordinary intertwining of religious and astrological meanings at that time, the ancient authors perceived a mysterious disposition of Heaven, a providential event of the theology of history, of which the Contarina flag is also testimony. On that day and at that time, the Paduan political Authorities and people, who had decided to build a new city at Rivo Alto (that is, Rialto) laid the foundations and the first Venetians were, therefore, Paduans. Still today in Venice, on 25 March every year, at the church of Santa Maria del Giglio, itself dedicated to the Annunciation, the birth of the city is celebrated and a ceremony is held at the Doge’s Palace.

Not can it be surprising that Our Lady of the Annunciation, along with the Evangelist St Mark and St Lawrence Justinian (1381-1456) – the first Patriarch of Venice when, in 1451, the office of Patriarch was transferred from Grado – figures among the main Patron Saints of the city of Doges.

On the Contarini standard, the Most Holy Virgin holds a book in her right hand, an allusion to her being in prayer and meditation on the mysteries of God as a model for the nuns and co-redeemer in the plan of salvation of humankind.



Through the window, a ray of divine blessing can be glimpsed that descends from the clouds of heaven, a sign of the intervention of God in human affairs and history, through the incarnation in the Most Holy Mary of the Second Person of the Holy Trinity and the start of the salvation plan. That celestial ray is the Holy Spirit, which is lain on the Mother of God to effect the virgin conception of Jesus Christ as a man.

In the landscape (barely featured in the original and highly simplified in its essential features) a tree and a house appear on a high mountain. The tree is the tree of life, which existed in the Garden of Eden, that is, the Earthly Paradise, and which symbolises the salvific wood of the Holy Cross, through which God attains the Redemption of humanity, as opposed to the tree of original sin, the fruit of which was eaten by Eve, who also offered it to Adam. The branches of the tree are the Saints and the Christian faithful who reach the Kingdom of Heaven and thereby attain salvation. In the background, a house founded on rock, the symbol of Faith, the same Faith that enables the new Eve, Mary, to generate the new Adam, Jesus Christ, thereby redeeming mankind from the cruel enslavement by the devil and eternal damnation. The house is, of course, the figure of the Holy Church, established by Jesus Christ and which will continue until the end of time to lead souls to Paradise. Inasmuch as *“every one therefore that heareth these my words, and doth them – it is Christ himself who assures us – shall be likened to a wise man that built his house upon a rock. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and they beat upon that house, and it fell not, for it was founded on a rock”* (Gospel according to St Matthew, chapter 7, 24-25).

But the house on the rock is also the figure of Our Lady herself, in whom, on Holy Saturday, when Christ still lay in the tomb and the scattered disciples were cast into doubt and hid themselves fearing the violence of the Judeans, all the Faith of the Church was encompassed. For this reason, Our Lady is invoked in the Loreto Litanis as an inaccessible and impregnable rock (*turris davidica* and *turris eburnea*) in a clear allusions to her royal origins, similar to those



of St Joseph, from the House of Kind David (and, indeed, Jesus is often invoked in the Gospels by the people with the title of “*Son of David*”). Our Lady of salvation and extreme succour of Christians is therefore also invoked with the title of “*auxilium christianorum*” (“*Help of Christians*”).



§ 3 – **SAINT DOMINIC OF GUZMÁN AND SAINT FRANCIS OF ASSISI** are depicted at half-length on the border of the standard around the Lion, in two ton-di, both in a central position, one in the left vertical band, the other in the right vertical band.

The Spaniard **Saint Dominic of Guzmán** (1170-1221) founder of the renowned Order of Preachers of Friars, with white robes and scapulars under a black cape, those who “*spoke either with God or of God*”, is not one of the twenty six Patron Saints of Venice.

Here, he is depicted in the robe of the Order, the lily and the book in his hand, attesting to the purity of his life and his knowledge and doctrine: *Ordo Praedicatorum*, *Ordo Doctorum* (*Order of Preachers*, *Order of Doctors*) as Dominican friars were called, due to their profundity. Sometimes the Franciscans but, much more often, Saint Dominic and his followers were given the role of Consultors of the Inquisition concerning heretical depravity.

But Saint Dominic was not only the Patron Saint of the Doge Domenico Contarini, one of the great protectors and admirers of the Dominicans, openly supporting the reform, in the strictest sense, of the Order and the return to the original rule of Saint Augustine, adopted by Saint Dominic, whose remains lie in the Basilica dedicated to him in Bologna.

The founder of the Dominicans was also tireless apostle of devotion to the Holy Rosary, handed to him in an apparition by the Most



Holy Virgin as an instrument for the conversion of the Albigensian heretics and which was the most important weapon that enabled the Christian fleet to defeat and subdue the Ottomans at Lepanto, in the battle that ended the fourth Turkish-Venetian war.

It is in Venice that the Dominican Basilica of Saints John and Paul stands, a memorial to the glories of Venice, with its Doges' tombs and its chapel of the Rosary, alongside which lies Commander Marc'Antonio Bragadin, mutilated when betrayed, tortured for twelve days and finally martyred by being flayed alive on 17 August 1571 at Famagusta (Cyprus) by the Turkish Pasha, in flagrant breach of all the agreements, for refusing to recant his Christian faith. In the Basilica of Saints John and Paul, the funerals of the Doges were conducted and it was not by chance that Napoleon assailed it in 1810, converting the



**The church of San Beneto (Saint Benedict of Nursia) which overlooks the square of the same name, in the district of St Mark in Venice. Originally displaying Romanesque features, dating at least from the year 1013, the church was rebuilt in the baroque style and reconsecrated in 1695. Contarini Palace in Rio de San Luca was also part of the ancient parish of San Beneto. And, in San Beneto, in the floor beneath the high altar, the mortal remains of the Doge Domenico II Contarini are preserved.**





**Tomb of the Doge Domenico II Contarini on the floor of the high altar of the ancient church of San Beneto (Saint Benedict of Nursia) in Venice (top). The tombstone is made of a square of black marble, framed by stones of various colours, with bronze clasps at each of the four corners. Each clasp bears the three lilies of the Contarini coat-of-arms, also found on the pillars of the balustrade (on the right). The bands and the lilies of the coat-of-arms are the same as those on the historic flag that took his name and that flew on his galley.**





Dominican monastery into a hospital and throwing all the friars into the streets, who returned only in the Austrian period.

Other historic Dominican churches in Venice are: the church of St Dominic in the Castello district, eliminated by Bonaparte to make way for the Napoleonic gardens and the base in Venice for the Roman Inquisition; the monastery on the islet of San Secondo, towards Mestre, now lost; and the churches, still in existence, of St Mary of the Rosary, in the Zattere district (known as the Gesuati or Apostolic Clerics of Saint Jerome) and the one dedicated to Saint Peter of Verona, also known as Saint Peter Martyr, on the island of Torcello, the second Saint of the Dominican Order and Inquisitor General for the whole of northern Italy, martyred by the Cathar heretics in 1252 at the gates of Milan.



**SAINT FRANCIS OF ASSISI** (1181-1226) is the secondary Patron Saint of Venice, founder of the other great Order of mendicant friars, together with the Dominicans, that of the Friars Minor, followed by all the various Franciscan families.

Depicted here with the habit and the Stigmata, Saint Francis was granted the unique gift by Christ of sharing in his sufferings during the Passion for the salvation of humanity: the Holy Stigmata visible on the hands, feet and side of the poor man of Assisi were a sign of this.

Always venerated by the Venetian people, the churches of San Francesco della Vigna and San Francesco del Deserto were raised in his honour and stand on the island of the same name in the Venetian lagoon, near Burano. Here, the monastery of the Friars Minor was founded personally by St Francis, on his return from the meeting with the Sultan and the preaching of the Fifth Crusade in support of the Christian Army, as recorded by the *Fonti Francescane*.

Unfortunately the most misunderstood and misinterpreted Saint



by radical propaganda, St Francis was not at all the foolish pacifist, relativist or proto-ecologist that modern and modernist ideologies like to paint him: indeed, he offered to brave the firing line to demonstrate to the Sultan that Christ is God and Christianity the only true Religion in order to induce him to abandon Islam, but none of the Islamic devotees accepted his challenge and so he proclaimed to the Sultan's face that "... *Christians act justly when they invade your lands and fight against you because you blaspheme the name of Christ and try to drive from his Religion as many men as you can. If, instead, you wish to come to know, confess and adore the Creator and Redeemer of the world, they would love you as themselves*" (Fonti Francescane 2690-2691).

The church of San Francesco della Vigna was built to a design by Palladio in 1562 on land where vines flourished, hence the name; the monastery was promptly demolished in 1810, following the Napoleonic suppressions and the friars were only able to return many years later. It was among these vineyards (and this is the most important fact for deciphering the Contarina flag and its symbolism) that a small church was built dedicated to Saint Mark, in the very spot where he had sheltered from a storm at sea. Here he had received the angelic apparition and the greeting *Pax tibi, Marce, Evangelista meus* (*Peace be with You, Mark, my Evangelist*) later adopted as the Republic's motto, and it was also here, at the same time, that the birth of Venice was predicted, as the place where the Saint's remains would lie, as mentioned above.

Among the city's Franciscan churches, there is also the Basilica of Santa Maria gloriosa dei Frari (the largest ecclesiastical building in Venice) with its many sepulchres of Doges, Sea Captains, military Commanders and holders of very high rank in the Republic, making it a contender with the Dominican church of Saints John and Paul for the rank of Pantheon of the Venetian aristocracy. This all makes clear the dual value, religious and civil, of the Franciscan movement in the land of St Mark and why the Assisi Saint found a worthy place on the Contarini flag.



## VI - The Madonna of the Rosary with the Child, Saint Anthony of Padua and Saint Mark the Evangelist in the cameos of the lower border that surrounds the Lion



§ 1 - **THE MADONNA OF THE HOLY ROSARY WITH THE CHILD JESUS** stands out in the tondo at the centre of the lower border of the Contarini flag, in the part that surrounds the Lion.

The Baby Jesus holds the crown of the Holy Rosary in his left hand and points to it with the right; his face is turned towards the Rosary and the mysteries evoked in it (especially the sorrowful) and towards the Holy Cross

at the end of the crown. The gaze of the Holy Child is remarkably absorbed and thoughtful in contemplating the mystery of his future passion and death for the salvation of men who wish to respond to this immense offering of Divine Grace. Passion and death symbolised by the cross.

Both the Holy Virgin and the Divine Infant are in the act of offering the observer the crown of the Holy Rosary as a pledge of salvation. *“I earnestly beg of you [...] to say the Rosary too, and if time permits, all its fifteen decades, every day. Then when death draws near, you will bless the day and hour when you took to heart what I told you”*, wrote Saint Louis-Marie Grignion de Montfort in the *Treatise on true devotion to the Blessed Virgin* (no. 254). And that great Saint added: *“I beg of you to beware of thinking of the Rosary as something of little importance — as do ignorant people, and even several great but proud scholars. Far from being insignificant, the Rosary is a priceless treasure which is inspired by God. Almighty God has given it to you, because he wants you to use it as a means to convert the most hardened sinners and the most obstinate heretics. He has attached to it grace in this life and glory in the next. The Saints have said it*



*faithfully and the Popes have endorsed it. [...] Even if you are on the brink of damnation, even if you have one foot in hell, even if you have sold your soul to the devil as sorcerers do who practice black magic, and even if you are a heretic as obstinate as a devil, sooner or later you will be converted and will amend your life and save your soul, if — and mark well what I say — IF YOU SAY THE ROSARY DEVOUTLY EVERY DAY UNTIL DEATH, for the purpose of knowing the truth and obtaining contrition and pardon for your sins”* (Saint Louis-Marie Grignion de Montfort, *The admirable Secret of the Rosary*, no. 1 and 4).

As our fathers well knew – and confirmed recently by the impressive cycle of Marian apparitions at Fatima, dating back to 1917, the authenticity of which is the most fully certified by the Supreme Ecclesiastical Authority – *“there is no problem, however difficult, of a material or especially spiritual nature, in the private lives of everyone of us or of our families, in the families of the whole world, of religious communities or even in the life of peoples and Nations that cannot be resolved by the prayer of the Holy Rosary. There is no problem, I tell you, however difficult, that cannot be resolved by reciting the Holy Rosary”*, so said the visionary of Fatima, Sister Lucia, to Father Agustin Fuentes, on 26 December 1957.

And to judge the value that this means of piety has for Venice, both on the spiritual and temporal levels, and to confirm the very close bond of the Republic and its history with the Holy Rosary, the dissemination of which is owed primarily to Saint Dominic (in the fight against the Cathar heresy of the Albigensians) and the Order founded by him, but which has become a practice common to all religious families and the whole Church, the following should be sufficient: that Venice remains indebted to the Holy Rosary for the resounding victory of the Christian fleet against the Turks in the waters of Lepanto, in Greece, on 7 October 1571, in the greatest naval battle in history, where half of the warships of all Europe (204 galleys) were Venetian, in addition to the six formidable Venetian galleasses, laden with canons, that were so effective during the battle.

The blessed crown of the Holy Rosary, the pledge of victory, was ever present on the wooden ships of the Christians, among the Com-



manders and simple sailors and soldiers, even the rowers, and later in the territories of the Duchy and on the mainland, in the hands of the great Dominican Pope, Saint Pius V, who forged the Holy League against the infidels who threatened Europe.

So it was that the Venetian Senate proclaimed and ordered to be painted, in thanksgiving, in the chamber of its assemblies: “*Non virtus, non arma, non duces, sed Maria Rosarii victores nos fecit*” (“*Not virtue, not weapons, not military Commanders, but the Madonna of the Rosary made us victorious*”).

Pope Saint Pius V, who, learning by divine revelation of the victory long before the heralds arrived to proclaim it, in 1572 established, in thanksgiving, on 7 October, the feast of Our Lady of Victory, which Pope Gregory XIII renamed the following year as the feast of the *Madonna of the Rosary*, extending it to the universal Church.



§ 2 - **SAINT ANTHONY OF PADUA** (1195-1231) appears in the small rectangle on the left, in the lower border of the Contarina flag. The Portuguese Saint – he was a native of Lisbon – who came to Padua, is one of the secondary Patron Saints of Venice. Here he is depicted with the traditional symbols of the lily and the book in his hand, attesting to the purity of his customs, knowledge and intransigent defence of

the Catholic doctrine that earned him the epithets of “*Doctor of the Church*” and “*hammer of heretics*”.

He was universally and deservedly famous for the miracles of bilocation, prophecy, the resurrection of the dead (such as when, having travelled overnight to Portugal, he proved his father’s innocence of the crime with which he had unjustly been accused, by reawakening the murdered man and interrogating him before the Court); so much so that even animals without powers of reason (the hungry mule of



Rimini that kneeled before the Eucharist, refusing hay, the fishes of the sea, during his famous sermon on the shore of the Adriatic) confirmed the veracity of his preaching, confounding the heretics.

The Saint also indicates the lily as an admonishment on the importance of a morally righteous, blameless life, abiding constantly by the Ten Commandments.

The devotion of Doge Contarini for the miracle-working Saint *par excellence* is also shown by other commissions on his part, such as a manuscript intended for the Captain of Brescia, Taddeo Morosini, and decorated with portraits of Saint Dominic and Saint Anthony.



§ 3 – **SAINT MARK THE EVANGELIST** (around 20 A.D. – second half of the 1<sup>st</sup> century) is depicted in the small rectangle on the right, in the lower border of the Contarini flag, with the traditional attributes of the Gospel, the pen and the unfailing Lion at his side, adopted as the symbol of the Evangelist and the Republic.

The wild animal gently places its paws on the lap of the Saint, attesting to the docility and subjection by divine disposition of the animal world and all creation to the man not blighted by original sin, of which the Saints have recovered the prerogatives to a certain extent.

So it was that even the most ferocious beasts were tamed and subdued by the man in the original state of Grace (bringing to mind the similar case of Saint Francis and the wolf of Gubbio) as the acknowledged Lord of creation. And, indeed, at the beginning of the Holy Scripture, in the book of *Genesis*, God leaves Adam to give names to each creature, as a symbol of the human rule over them: “*And the Lord God having formed out of the ground all the beasts of the earth, and all the fowls of the air, brought them to Adam to see what he would call*



*them: for whatsoever Adam called any living creature the same is its name”* (Genesis, chapter 2, 19).

The Lion is a metaphor of Saint Mark, certainly, but also the biblical symbol of Christ, which recurs in various passages of the Holy Book. Indeed, here the lion turns its head towards the observer. He looks straight into the eyes with majestic dignity. He rests both paws on the Saint’s lap, a sign of docility, certainly, but also of protection and possession, to indicate that what belongs to him, belongs to Christ-God and which is under the protection of the Most High.

St Mark is the main Patron Saint of Venice, together with Our Lady of the Annunciation and Saint Lawrence Justinian (1381-1456). Moreover, as many as two Evangelists out of four – it is well to remember – lie on Venetian soil: the other is Saint Luke, in the Basilica of St Justina in Padua.

A native of Palestine, Saint Mark was the evangelizer of Alexandria in Egypt, where he was martyred at the hands of pagans. The links between Venice and the affairs of the Saint, in life and in death, are prodigious: from the prophecy of his burial in this city, when he was shipwrecked at Rialto, to his glorious Martyrdom for Christ in Alexandria in Egypt and his miraculous transfer to Venice, as well as his no less miraculous discovery in the Basilica of St Mark, where he had been hidden in a secret place (to avoid the profanations of the barbarians) with the risk of forgetting the exact place of his burial.

The same thing happened with St Zeno, Patron Saint of Verona (whose remains were discovered in the Basilica of the same name on 28 May 1838) and for various other Saints.

This is why there are three St Mark feast days: on 25 April, the most important; on 31 January, the feast marking the transfer from Alexandria in Egypt to Venice of the Saint’s body; and 25 June, feast of the invention (in the Latin meaning of the word *inventio*, that is, rediscovery) of the Saint’s urn, which had been hidden inside the Basilica. Sailing from Aquileia to Alexandria in Egypt, on the orders of the first Pope, Saint Peter, the boat carrying the Evangelist, caught in a storm, landed at Rialto. St Mark found hospitality in the hum-



ble hut of fishermen. Falling asleep, an Angel appeared to him in a dream and predicted: *“On this islet, Mark, one day a great and wonderful city will stand and you will find in it your last resting place and will be at peace. Pax tibi, Marce, Evangelista meus”*.

The Blessed Jacobus de Varagine wrote: [Saint Mark returned to Alexandria of Egypt and] *“found then there the town full of christian men, and the bishops of the idols awaited for to take him. Now it happened on Easter day, when Saint Mark sang mass, they assembled all and put a cord about his neck, and after, drew him throughout the city [...]. And the blood ran upon the stones, and his flesh was torn piecemeal that it lay upon the pavement all bebled. After this they put him in prison, where an angel came and comforted him, and after came our Lord for to visit and comfort him, saying: «Pax tibi, Marce, Evangelista meus. Peace be to thee Mark, mine Evangelist! Be not in doubt, for I am with thee and shall deliver thee». And on the morn they put the cord about his neck and drew him like as they had done tofore [...] and when they had drawn, he thanked God and said: «Into thy hands Lord, I commend my spirit», and he thus saying died. [This happened under the Reign of Nero]. Then the paynims would have burnt his body, but the air began suddenly to change and to hail, lighten and thunder, in such wise that every man enforced him to flee, and left there the holy body alone. Then came the christian men and bare it away, and buried it in the church, with great joy, honour, and reverence”* (Blessed Jacobus de Varagine, *The Golden Legend or Lives of the Saints*. April 25. English translation by William Caxton. Edited by F.S. Ellis, Temple Classics 1900, volume III, p. 134).

Further miracles surrounded the transfer of the Evangelist's body to Venice: *“A persistent aroma was dispersed as the holy remains passed; Buono's and Rustico's ship quickly rowed alongside another, whose occupants mocked them, saying that a mummy had been given to them and not the body of the Saint, and did not come away until the latter acknowledged the truth; the rescue from the storm; the islanders who came to meet the ship, miraculously told of the transport; the devil who took possession of the most obstinate denier. [...] And the precious relic arrived at Rivo Alto [Rialto]. The religious and civil Authorities came in a procession to meet him and other miracles marked*





*the holy transport. As it approached the staircase leading to the Doge's Palace, there was not even the slightest breath of wind, yet the cloak that covered the holy body stirred as if moved by a strong and mysterious force and the bearers, for whom the body had been very heavy, no longer struggled to carry it. It was placed in a room close to the Palace, to await the building of the church" [the future Basilica of St Mark]. So wrote Silvio Tramontin, San Marco, in Culto dei Santi a Venezia, «Biblioteca Agiografica Veneziana 2», Studium Cattolico Veneziano, Venezia, 1965, pp. 54-57.*

*"During the fire that broke out in 972, following a popular revolt against the Doge Pietro Candiano IV [...], all recollection was also lost of the place where the precious relic [the body of the Evangelist] had been placed, also because it was kept hidden and known to only a few out of fear of theft. [...] The Venetians were desperate over this fact, even more so since the new Basilica has already been rebuilt and it would really be a shame to have lost the one for whom that palace had been built. After various, fruitless searches, in June 1094, the Doge Vitale Falier ordered a fast of three days with a solemn procession on the fourth, so that Venice could have its treasure again. The fervour of the people was reported in the local documents as they invoked a miracle with prayers and tears. And the miracle occurred. The stones of a «calloprecia» column [in other words, made with several stones] gradually shifted, fell over and revealed the ark where the body was located [and the Saint appeared adorned with the vestments of the Holy Mass]. Other miracles came to pass around this; a wonderful aroma filled the Basilica, a possessed woman was cured on touching the ark, the shipwrecked escaped certain death etc." (ibid. pp. 62-63).*

## **VII - The six fringes or tails or beards of the flag**

There are six fringes or tails or beards of the Contarini flag, in honour of the six districts (*sestieri*) in which the city of Venice is divided; each fringe displays gilded embroidery, with floral patterns and volutes on an amaranth red background, probably vine shoots,





as in the upper and lower borders around the Lion. Horses and cherubs are interspersed with the floral motifs and the gilded lilies of France appear on the left and right edges.

The cherubs on the sides of the central tondo of each fringe support it with one hand and, at the same time, with the other, keep the horses yoked with bridles. The darting gilded Equidae that burst out of the foliage are expressions of strength and vitality, vigour and warlike virtue, but also of nobility (the Christian cavalry). Moreover, the animals are held in the grip of simple cherubs, so are therefore docile and obedient even for children, a symbol of the passions restrained through the gift of Grace and, indeed, the cherubs yoke the horses to the central tondi, where the St Mark Lion *in moleca*, with its wings opened like a fan (propitiator of divine Grace) alternates with the Contarini Doge's coat-of-arms, representing the exercise of temporal power "*for he [God's Minister, the Authority] beareth not the sword in vain*" (Saint Paul, *Epistle to the Romans* 13, 4). Subjection, therefore to God (to the true Christian-Catholic God) and to the legitimate Authority (that of the Doge, for the territories of "*La Dominante*") this is the allegorical meaning that is seen represented in these symbols.

Moreover, for the legal system of the Venetian State (as for all those of the *Res Publica Christifidelium* or family of Christian States, which made up the Europe of the *ancien Régime*, destroyed by the fury of the French revolutionaries of 1789 and their successors) the guiding principle was obedience to God and His Laws, to the Church, to



the doctrine and rules of natural moral law, as well as that of loyalty to Tradition, including in the literal sense of the handing down of a legacy of Faith and Wisdom by our Fathers and Elders to us.

A legal system, as Chesterton said, in which a vote or a voice – and what a voice! – would be given even to the dead, present among us in spirit, those who with their works and their example preceded us and who tackled and defeated the same storms that existence reserves for all of us and the States in their life and the conduct of public affairs. A legal system in which we behaved, in the present, as the Fathers had done in the past and how they would do today, if they were physically present here and now amongst us, were they able to talk, advise us and decide from the same chairs on which we sit, according to the golden maxim taken from Cicero (*Oratio pro Roscio Amerino*, § 70) of the “*quod sapientissimi Majores nostri fecerunt*” (“*what our very wise Ancestors did*”).

It should be added (to return to our naval ensign) that, for the ancient pre-Christian Venetians, the horse was a sacred presence: so much so that this animal accompanied the dead in the afterlife, pulling the cart of the dead. Indeed, in certain graves, the horse accompanied its master and it is the animal most often reproduced in the *Venetia* and, in any event, in Veneto area, in antiquity. The use of horses is historically documented in Venice itself, but never as much as on the mainland (and this is logical) as the existence still today of a *Calle delle carrozze* (*Road of the carriages*) demonstrates.



In the upper corners, on the extreme left and right of each tail, faces with anthropomorphic features can be seen amidst the foliage, differing from fringe to fringe: these are probably masks, with typical grotesque features (in homage to the baroque style) of perhaps they are fauns – also a reference to the classical world – ancient Italian minor deities, protectors of woods, agriculture and pastoral farming. But also revealers of the future by means of dreams, nightmares and visions.

The fauns recur frequently in high art, especially



in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, an expression of the yearning for the simplicity of the land, the return to nature, living in idyllic symbiosis with it. The Arcadian myth would, moreover, receive definitive consecration with the foundation in Rome, in 1690, of the Academy of Arcadia. But it is a literary evergreen that, from Virgil and his *Bucolics* or *Eclogs*, through the Renaissance, reached modern Europe.

At the centre of the first, third and fifth fringe is a circle with the noble coat-of-arms of Doge Contarini, described above, surmounted by the Doge's horn or cap, flanked above by *flabella* (ceremonial fans) surrounded by a scroll and crossed by two tridents of Poseidon, the god of the sea, to signify Venetian dominion over the seas, its thalassocracy; while in the second, fourth and sixth tails, the squatting lion is in the central circle with its head facing the front and its wings opened like a fan, known as



Lion “*in moleca*”, that is, in the position of the crab (*moleca*, in Venetian vernacular language) at the time of moulting, in Autumn, when it displays softer armour (its integument) with its claws outspread, becoming more appetizing.

The Lion *in moleca* represents the city that rises from the waters, the territories of the Duchy strictly considered, that is, Venice and its lagoons, and is, in fact, the most common depiction of St Mark in this region, while the moving Lion, more courtly, better expresses the representation of the State.

Nevertheless, the Lion *in moleca* is certainly the richest in religious references, recalling the Lion of the Apocalypse, or the Lion of the tribe of Judah, that of the figure of Jesus Christ, conqueror of death, the world and the devil. The only one in St John's Apocalypse, placed amidst the four Evangelists (including St Mark, symbolised in his turn by the Lion) who was able to open the seven seals that kept the book closed and that kept secret the prophecies of the Old and New Testaments, as well as the book of the Apocalypse itself,





unattainable to the Angels. “*And I saw, in the right hand of him that sat on the throne, a book, written within and without, sealed with seven seals. And I saw a strong Angel, proclaiming with a loud voice: «Who is worthy to open the book and to loose the seals thereof»? And no man was able, neither in heaven nor on earth nor under the earth, to open the book, nor to look on it. And one of the ancients said to me: «Weep not: behold the Lion [the Christ] of the tribe of Juda, the root of David, hath prevailed to open the book and to loose the seven seals thereof»*” (*Apocalypse of Saint John the Apostle*, chapter 5, 1-5).

This Lion *in moleca*, at the centre of the fringes, also has a golden halo and holds between its front paws, to its chest, the closed book, red, sealed with studs and clasps; it holds it on the right, again differentiating itself here from the majority of the other Lions, which usually hold the book on the left.

The Lion, the figure of Jesus Christ, is still the guardian of legitimate Authority, both in the spiritual and religious order and in the temporal and political. However, as we have seen previously (III *above*) the Contarini flag also makes specific allusion to the punishments that God visits upon wicked rebels.

The Lion is also an allegory of the Christ that will come, after death, in particular judgement; and in universal judgement, at the end of times, in glory to judge the living and the dead (“*et iterum venturus est cum gloria judicare vivos et mortuos*”, according to the words of the Catholic Credo, taken in part from the Symbol of the Apostles).

The Lion that is merciful to the good, inflexible with the wicked, as the bible verse warns, taken from the book of Psalms and so dear to Venetian Justice: “*Injusti punientur, semen impiorum peribit*” (“*The unjust shall be punished, and the seed of the wicked shall perish*”). “*For the Lord loveth judgment, and will not forsake his saints: they shall be preserved for ever*” (*Book of Psalms*, chapter XXXVI, 28)





The Doge's hat or cap.





**Contarini Mocenigo Palace, in Venice. The inner courtyard and grand staircase.**



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Only plain, anonymous colours, in various combinations, appear on the flags of contemporary States, mass produced by the French Revolution or that originated from the subversive forces of Masonic or Para-Masonic inspiration: these are the transalpine tricolour flag, such as those of Italy or Germany or the stars and stripes of the United States, to give just a few examples.

Once, however, sacred symbols, linked to the history of the Nations and their conversion to Christianity or to their Noble Houses or dominions were emblazoned on the ancient and noble standards of the traditional States. Sacred symbols, it was said, for which it was worth dying on the battlefield, *pro aris et focis* (that is for the altars and for the hearths) to the glory and exaltation of the true Religion and to guard its altars; in sacrifice for the authentic Homeland, as the land of the fathers and guardians of Tradition; and in defence of the domestic hearths, at which mothers, wives and children watched in prayer and trepidation over the fate of their soldiers.

Such, then, is the Roman imperial eagle; the Christian eagle of the Evangelist St John and of the Holy Roman Empire, with two heads to incorporate the memory and legacy both of the Roman Empire of the West and that of the East, after the fall of the latter in 1453; the similar Tsarist eagle; the golden lilies of the King of France; the cross of Saint Andrew of Scotland, that of St George of England, Switzerland, Denmark and Sweden; the shield surmounted by the cross of the House of Savoy (at least as long as the dynasty was maintained in observance of Catholicism and tradition, that is, until the death of King Charles Felix in 1831) as well as the many Italian Municipalities that glory in the symbol of the Passion of Christ; and the coat-of-arms, made complex by the intertwining of Houses and territorial acquisitions, of the Kingdoms of Naples and Sicily, thereafter of the Two Sicilies; and of the Realms of Spain, amidst ancient red gnarled crosses, the lion of Castille and Léon and the symbols of the other ancient Kingdoms, flanked by the two columns of Hercules, marking the domains of the old and new worlds on which the sun never sets; or the Aragonese and Catalan flag, with the red bars symbolising Christian blood, spilled in Christianity's fight against the Moors during the *Reconquest*.

Last, but certainly not least, the thousand-year old Lion of the Evangelist Saint Mark for Venice, flying over all the seas, feared and respected even by the Turks. An ancient and sacred symbol, to which this book is dedicated.



The *Independent Veneto Committee and for historical reconstruction* and the other associations jointly taking part in this initiative wish to thank our mutual friend Albano Tassani of Vicenza, ardent patriot of St Mark's Republic and tireless champion of the reproduction of the Contarina flag since as long ago as 2000. And the very reverend Monsignor Antonio Meneguolo, formerly patriarchal delegate for the Basilica of St Mark in Venice.

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*Iterum rudit Leo  
The Lion roars again*

Printing completed on 12 April 2019,  
Feast day of St Zeno, main Patron Saint of Verona



## ANEMA CONTARINA

*La provenienza mia xè sacra e nobie,  
Conti, prelati, alte cariche fin al Doge!  
Venessiana, de antica stirpe Contarina,  
ogni mortal al cospeto mio se inchina!*

*Gabriele Arcangelo e la Vergine Maria,  
el vintisinque de marzo porta in gloria,  
zorno beato che in prodigiosa simonia  
nunzia Cristo e inissia nostrana storia!*

*Fiera sfogio i sacri simboli, come zojelo  
in soasa nostro Lion Marco col Vangelo,  
dal Spirito Santo gà profession celeste  
che in piovra de vibranti fiamme lo investe!*

*Atorno l'adorna tuto un ghirigori,  
nodo d'amor, da mariner un dileto,  
gran monito par ogni Re dei Mori:  
"In to moschea i mii Santi meto!"*

*Bambin Gesù e so Mare la Madonna,  
come i nostri eroi de trionfal crociata,  
strenze in man del Rosario la Corona,  
veri Regnanti de la tera conquistata!*

*Tuto intorno, in mezo ai tanti fregi  
mostro dele armi tuto el mio arsenal!  
I tre gigli de Francia, regali privilegi,  
brila sul stema de schiata mia Dogal!*

*Stoica so a Candia, co Menego Doge:  
ancora 'na volta el Leon de Marco  
ponta 'na sata in tera e n'altra a moge,  
a sugelar el dominio del so sbarco!*

*Francesco, Domenego e Antonin  
de la mia Casada Santi protetori  
dal Paradiso vigila, co ocio divin  
e tuti ne preserva da ferali dolori!*

*Le mie coe compagna tanta grassia,  
in numero pari ai serenissimi sestrieri,  
el dominio va ben oltre la Dalmassia,  
Dio benedissa i comerci e i marineri!*

**CINZIA DONÀ, ALIAS  
MARANTEGA DIRCE**

## THE SPIRIT OF CONTARINA

*My provenance is sacred and noble:  
Counts, high prelates, up to the Doge!  
Venetian, Contarina of ancient lineage,  
every mortal being pays me homage!*

*Archangel Gabriel and the Virgin Mary  
lead into the glory the twenty fifth of March!  
A blessed day that in prodigious synchrony,  
announced Christ and our story began!*

*Proudly I display all my sacred symbols:  
Lion Marco with the Gospel is a framed jewel!  
The Holy Spirit touches him like divine rain,  
he receives protection from vibrant flames!*

*A gorgeous flourish adorns him all around,  
as a knot of love by a sailor fashioned!  
For every King of the Moors a warning sign:  
"In your mosque I shall place all my Saints!"*

*Jesus Child and his mother, the Madonna,  
like our heroes of triumphant crusade,  
the Crown of Rosary hold in their hands,  
true Monarchs of the conquered land!*

*All around, among the many friezes,  
I display the weapons stored in my arsenal!  
The three Lilies of France, royal privileges,  
shining on my Doge's coat-of-arms!*

*With Menego Doge, in Candia, stoic I stay!  
A paw on the land and in the sea the other,  
places the Lion of Saint Mark once again,  
sealing the dominion of his naval power!*

*Francesco, Domenego and Antonin,  
my noble ancient house's Patron Saints,  
from Paradise watch with benevolent eyes,  
preserving us all from fatal pains!*

*Like the Serenissima's districts, my tails  
are six and accompany so much grace!  
My dominion extends far beyond Dalmatia!  
God bless all my sailors and my trade!*

**CINZIA DONÀ, ALIAS  
MARANTEGA DIRCE**

Translation from the Venetian vernacular into English by the poem's author.

In honour of the reborn Contarina flag.  
Saturday, 24 March 2018, in Venice, Ca' Pier.



