

An Epilogue to The King of Silk

By

Joe Douglas Trent

Author of

The King of Silk



Michael reaches for the light switch and chides himself, again. There's no electricity in the 15th century. *But there could be.*

A midnight attack on a Manhattan street transports rising corporate finance star, Michael Patriate, to the backwoods of Renaissance Italy. Fearing the brand "witch," he conceals his identity and his understanding of 21st century business and technology. But he can't check his ambition, the drive which cost him love in the past and threatens to do it again.

He goes from laborer to successful provincial merchant, even moves down the coast to military and trade powerhouse Venice. And the knowledge in his head keeps nagging him.

When he takes shortcuts by introducing new concepts into the silk industry, he hits opposition from powerful elements of a culture which ruthlessly guards the status quo. And when he faces the ultimate adversary, he just may see himself.

**Historical Fiction**

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[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Italy\\_1494\\_v2.png](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Italy_1494_v2.png)

## An Epilogue to *The King of Silk*

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### Introduction

My novel, *The King of Silk*, introduces several historical figures and involves actual events in Europe and the Mediterranean. While I have tried to be accurate as possible in those depictions, the book is not a history text. I have put words in characters' mouths which were probably never said, and bent a fact or two to the story.

But these were real people, whose interactions were instrumental in the course of events and the history is interesting and instructive.

This is a recap of the major characters and what happened to them, and history of regions where the story takes place. It is not a peer-reviewed, scholarly document; portions may not withstand scrutiny. It is here for your enjoyment and perhaps will stir you to investigate and come to love the study of this period as I did during my research.

### Beginnings

In the early centuries of the first millennium, remnants of the Roman Empire retreated from barbarian attacks to a collection of islands in a sheltering lagoon off the northern coast of the Adriatic Sea. Protected on their islands, the inhabitants mastered maritime occupations and became merchants. They formed the city of Venice.

Under the suzerainty of the Byzantine Empire—the eastern division of the old Roman Empire ruled from Constantinople—Venice extended her operations from the eastern reaches of the Mediterranean west to the Atlantic ports of northern Europe. The government evolved into a republic, guided by a General Council of noble families who elected a senate, and headed by a

duke recognized by Constantinople. The duke, to become known as *doge*, ruled at first but in time became more a symbolic leader. The great families took elaborate precautions against the emergence of a dictator. One doge became separated from his head in an attempt to usurp power.

Venice so tied its fortunes to the sea that it came to believe itself married to it. Each year on Ascension Day the doge went out in his galley to perform a ritual wedding where, in a nuptial rite, he dropped a ring into the water.

Venice became more powerful than Constantinople. The Byzantine Empire faded and Ottoman Turks captured Constantinople, the city later renamed Istanbul. Venice faced the Ottoman Empire as nominal enemies and as trading partners.

The city grew rich as a result of its near monopoly on the trade of spice and other goods from the east. Great power encouraged great ambition. The Venetian senate and the powerful Council of Ten jealously and ruthlessly guarded against threats to the status of the republic—from without and within.

## End of the Middle Ages

The last decade of the fifteenth century saw pivotal changes in western society. The Middle Ages were ending and giving birth to the Renaissance; the clash of humanism and church doctrine produced a renewed interest in philosophy. Nations began to form from collections of unstable feudal states. Trade changed, imperceptibly as always, while transportation methods evolved and security improved. Ideas raced about the world when the introduction of the movable type printing press made information increasingly available to people in their own languages. Some names of the era are easily recalled: Christopher Columbus, Isabella and Ferdinand, Vasco da Gama, Leonardo da Vinci. Many more names less familiar to the masses worked their way through the interconnected regions of Europe. Real men and women

participated in and influenced the events of this setting, and helped shape our modern world.

### Luca Pacioli

Pacioli was typical of many of his day, accomplished in multiple disciplines. Luca, a monk and teacher, had interest in mathematics as it practically applied to exercises such as accounting and geometry and art. The bookkeeping concepts he compiled and made available in his *Summa de Arithmetica, Geometria, Proportioni et Proportionalita* form the basis of our accounting practices today.

After he published the *Summa* at Venice in 1494, he was invited to Milan to teach mathematics at the court of Ludovico Sforza. Ludovico may have been prompted to bring Luca there by Leonardo da Vinci, also in Ludovico's employ. Luca taught Leonardo geometry, proportions and perspective; Leonardo illustrated Luca's next book, *De Divina Proportione*. This book championed the "golden ratio"—a mathematical formula that found its way into works by Leonardo and, later, Michelangelo and other artists. Luca and Leonardo became fast friends, sharing a house in Milan and later traveling together.

Much of Pacioli's work was not original but rather a coherent compendium of knowledge assembled into something resembling a modern textbook. His gift to the world was a presentation of this knowledge, not in scholarly Latin, but in the Italian language and translations used by businessmen and artists. If you visit the Metropolitan Museum of Art—or only its web site, [www.metmuseum.org](http://www.metmuseum.org)—notice the "M" logo. It is the geometrically designed capital from Luca's *De Divina Proportione*.

### Girolamo Savonarola

Savonarola was born into an Italy struggling with its wealth. His grandfather was a

physician at the court of the dukes of Ferrara—Borso d'Este and his successor Ercole d'Este I, father-in-law to Ludovico Sforza. The excesses Girolamo saw in that setting turned his heart away from the pleasures gained at the expense of the populace and turned him toward God. He grew increasingly critical of the ruling class and church officials after joining the Dominican order and began to write and preach against the depredations of the rulers of Italy, both temporal and ecclesiastical.

Girolamo found himself posted in Florence, possibly the most decadent Italian city after Rome. His prediction/prophesy that the French king would sweep through Italy came true; Girolamo and others seized the opportunity to resurrect the old republic and base it loosely on the Venetian model. The unlikely, and unofficial, leader of Florence was able to push through changes in law of the kind that made homosexuality a capital crime, albeit on the third offense. He also encouraged citizens to renounce their lavish lifestyles and rid themselves of the trappings of self-indulgence. He organized events which saw books, jewelry, make-up, and lewd paintings tossed upon the fire. He called one of these events the “bonfire of the vanities.”

In addition to haranguing local leaders, he preached against corruption rampant in the church. In particular, he targeted Pope Alexander VI, the former Cardinal Rodrigo Borgia. The pope naturally took exception and finally excommunicated him, forbade him to preach, and ordered him to Rome. Girolamo complied with the order to cease preaching, but begged out of going to see the pope on his well-founded fear of being killed. In 1498, when Alexander threatened to excommunicate the entire city, a faction took Girolamo and two of his associates, including his friend Fra Domenico da Pescia, from the monastery and hanged and burned them in the *Piazza della Signoria*. They gathered up and crushed Girolamo's burned remains, then dumped them in the Arno to deny his followers any relics.

Savonarola shared many sentiments with a future German monk, Martin Luther. Both

men abhorred corruption in the church typified by the forgiveness of sins in exchange for money, otherwise known as the sale of “indulgences.” They differed in two important aspects, though. Savonarola did not disagree with official doctrine; he wanted only to correct abusive behavior within the church. And Luther lived far from Rome, protected by German princes who longed for independence from the pope.

Even today, there is disagreement in the church about this reformer’s status. Some call him a despot. Many, in particular those of the Dominican order, have named Girolamo Savonarola a martyr and begged sainthood for him. He is commemorated by a statue in Ferrara and by a plaque at his place of death in Florence.

## Charles VIII

Charles, son of French king Louis XI, was thirteen when his father died. Louis had built the nation and strengthened the monarchy at the expense of feudal lords and lesser nobles. When Louis died, Charles’s older sister, Anne, and her husband, the duke of Bourbon, acted as regent for Charles until he married at twenty-one.

Free from his sister’s regency, Charles now relied on his courtiers for advice. He was encouraged to make his claim on the kingdom of Naples from several sources, each of whom had their own agenda. Charles’s advisors wanted aggrandizement, Venice wished to weaken a rival, Ludovico in Milan craved legitimization, Savonarola in Florence prayed for the cleansing of Italy. The Pope had his own designs over territories in southern and central Italy.

Charles made disastrous concessions and took out burdensome loans to finance his army. When he returned to France without the booty he had captured from Naples, he was practically bankrupt and attempted for over two years to raise money to finance another undertaking. One day in 1498, he struck his head on a low doorway and died several hours later. Since his young

children had all preceded him in death, the kingdom went to his cousin, the duke of Orleans who reigned as King Louis XII.

Although the campaign of 1494-1495 gained nothing for Charles personally, it demonstrated the lack of unity and opportunity for conquest in the rich Italian peninsula and set the stage for the “Italian Wars” which would plague the region for the next sixty years.

One of Charles’s contributions to Europe did endure. Some of his men contracted a new, virulent form of syphilis while in Italy. Perhaps it was a strain brought back from the New World by Columbus or merely a mutation of an existing form. In any event, the army spread the malady as they went back home. It was called, outside of France, “the French disease.”

#### Ludovico Sforza

After the fall of the Roman Empire, the Italian Peninsula evolved into a collection of city-states. Aided by ready access to the Mediterranean Sea, trade with the orient flourished by the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. Venice, Milan, Genoa, Florence, Rome, and Naples became major centers of wealth, envied by outsiders and by their Italian neighbors. Lacking armies of their own, these cities began to hire mercenaries from the leftovers of invading armies or groups invited from other countries.

In response to a specific need, nobles from a city would hire a company on the basis of a contract, or *condotta*. Soon, the word *condottiere* referred to these hired bands of mercenaries.

By the end of the fifteenth century, a code of conduct evolved, becoming known as the “Italian Rules.” Grandiose battles often resulted in limited bloodshed. The mercenaries saw little gain in killing one another. Machiavelli wrote that in one conflict, only one man of note was killed—by falling from his horse.

One famous *condottiero*, Francesco Sforza, broke out of the sword-for-hire mold and

snared the title of duke to Milan and its territory of Lombardy. Gian Galeazzo Sforza, Francesco's grandson, inherited the title at age seven after his father's murder, and his mother received the title of regent. But Gian Galeazzo's uncle, Ludovico Sforza, usurped the regency and never gave rule back to the rightful duke, even at the young man's age of majority. At twenty three, Gian Galeazzo had been married for several years to the granddaughter of Ferdinand I, King of Naples.

Ludovico, popularly called "*il Moro*" or the "the Moor," perhaps for his dark complexion, considered himself a patron of the arts and acquired many beautiful things. But he wanted more.

As part of his attempt to show himself the real ruler of Milan, Ludovico sponsored many artists, among them Leonardo da Vinci who worked for Ludovico for eighteen years. Ludovico's nephew died during Charles's campaign through Italy, ending their dispute over control of the duchy. The rumor that Ludovico poisoned Gian Galeazzo spread widely.

After Charles and his army left Italy, Ludovico reigned as the legitimate duke for a short time before experiencing major setbacks. His wife Beatrice, the daughter of Ercole of Ferrara, died after childbirth in 1497 and in 1499 Louis XII of France invaded and dispossessed Ludovico of his territory. When Leonardo da Vinci awoke one day to find French archers using the huge clay model of Ludovico's horse statue in target practice, he and his friend Luca Pacioli packed and fled to Venice.

In 1500, Louis XII captured Ludovico at the town of Novara and sent him to a prison in France, where he died in 1508.

Rodrigo Borgia/Pope Alexander VI

The papacy of Pope Alexander VI is fascinating in the same way one's attention might be

drawn to a spectacular car wreck or celebrated murder trial. The complete story is far too complex to recount in detail here, but Alexander and the Borgia family were central players on the Italian stage at the turn of the sixteenth century and must be mentioned.

Born in Spain, Rodrigo Borgia was introduced to church affairs when his uncle was ordained as Pope Calixtus III in 1455. Nepotistic appointments gave him rise to bishop, cardinal and vice-chancellor of the church. When Pope Innocent VIII died in 1492, it seems there were three candidates to the papacy: cardinals Rodrigo Borgia, Ascanio Sforza (brother of Ludovico), and Giuliano della Rovere. As none of the three had sufficient votes for victory, deals were in the making. It was rumored Rodrigo paid Ascanio four mule-loads of silver for the votes in his bloc, but he probably sent much more the way of his new ally. Cardinal della Rovere left town in fear for his life.

Rodrigo brought with him from Spain his mistress and children, adding more of each along the way. He favored the children, making places for them in civil and church government, even dispossessing or killing the previous holders to make room for them. Two of his children, son Cesare and daughter Lucrezia were particularly notorious.

Cesare Borgia received the cardinal's hat at age eighteen. Soon, he was known as duke; murder and conquest were his specialties. At one point in his assaults on fiefdoms in Romagna, he employed Leonardo da Vinci as consultant. Niccolò Machiavelli spent time at Cesare's court in Romagna and used his exploits as examples in the famous book, *The Prince*.

Lucrezia Borgia was first given in marriage to Giovanni Sforza, a relative of Ludovico. After Giovanni's importance to Alexander waned, he was persuaded to sign a statement of impotence, clearing the way for an annulment. The next husband, Alfonso of Aragon, was less fortunate. He was strangled amidst intrigue and jealousy, to the apparent sorrow of Lucrezia. Eventually, Alexander arranged her marriage to the new duke of Ferrara, Alfonso I, son of

Ercole. She died after a difficult pregnancy in 1519 at age 39.

The Borgias' deeds have been widely reported over the years. Alexander Dumas, the author of *The Three Musketeers* and *The Count of Monte Cristo*, detailed them in his eight-volume collection of essays, *Celebrated Crimes*. A television drama series has recently portrayed them as a crime family.

The legacy of Rodrigo Borgia/Alexander VI is mixed. The corruption during his term as pope seems to be unmatched, before or after his reign, but he was also a great patron of the arts. He brought Donato Bramante, the architect, to Rome from Milan following Ludovico Sforza's defeat. Bramante would go on to design the rebuilding of Saint Peter's Basilica. Alexander also employed the likes of Raphael, Michelangelo, and Pinturicchio.

Alexander VI died in August 1503, possibly of malaria, although an oft-repeated rumor purports that Alexander and his son Cesare were accidentally poisoned with a mixture meant for one of his cardinals. Cesare also fell ill at the same time, but was lucid enough to have his men seize Alexander's treasure before the death was announced. He recovered from his illness.

Without papal support, Cesare was on his own. He was killed in battle in 1507 at age thirty-one.

#### Cardinal Giuliano della Rovere/Pope Julius II

Giuliano della Rovere was elevated to high status in the church after his uncle, Francesco della Rovere, was confirmed as Pope Sixtus IV in 1471. As cardinal, he helped ally Giovanni Battista Cybo to become Pope Innocent VIII in 1484. Ready for the tiara himself, he challenged Rodrigo Borgia and lost.

Fearing for his safety, Giuliano left Rome, returning briefly with Charles VIII of France in the French king's abortive conquest of Italy. He hoped to persuade Charles to hold a council

and arrange for the deposition of the pope, but Alexander adroitly offered one of the king's advisers a cardinal's hat in exchange for his favorable advice to Charles. Cardinal della Rovere left again, to return only after the death of Alexander.

Entering himself once more in the contest for the papal seat, he was defeated by Cardinal Francesco Piccolomini, who ruled as Pope Pius III. After a twenty-three day reign, Pius died under mysterious circumstances. Cardinal della Rovere became Pope Julius II.

Julius took interest in consolidating papal territories and, known as "the warrior pope," began a series of machinations and shifting allegiances. He played the major powers against one another for the consolidation of his hold on the Papal States. These games further exposed the weak defenses of the Italian territories and encouraged outside intervention.

On the other hand, Julius continued the art patronage of his predecessors. It was under his reign that the cornerstone of the new Saint Peter's Basilica was laid and the Sistine Chapel frescoes painted. Julius died in 1513.

#### Agostino Barbarigo

The election in 1486 of Agostino Barbarigo as Doge of Venice was remarkable in that he succeeded his deceased brother in an environment of extreme prejudice against dynastic rule. Several members of his rich and influential family held important posts in city government. Agostino proved himself in several military positions, eventually becoming procurator of Saint Mark's Basilica, as had his father and several brothers. Even though the ultimate power lay in a secretive ten-member council, the doge did hold much sway in the politics of Venice. As doge, Agostino often clashed with authorities and evidently abused some of his powers, accused at his death of arrogance and greed.

During his fifteen years in office he authorized great works of art and building projects. A

Bellini altarpiece he commissioned depicts Agostino presented to the Madonna and Child by Saints Mark and Augustine, humbly submitting himself for expiation of family sins. The magnificent Saint Mark's Clock Tower was commissioned and built in Agostino's term. Near the end of his life, he begged to be released from his duties, citing the infirmities of old age. Perhaps out of spite, the city fathers refused his requests. He died in 1501 at about eighty-one years of age.

### Knights of Rhodes

The failure of the Turks' efforts to dislodge the Knights from the island of Rhodes in 1480 did not deter them from trying again. From a Turk perspective, the Knights' mission to harass Muslim army supply lines was seen as piracy—they preyed upon Turkish merchant ships. After a six-month siege in 1522, the Hospitaller survivors were allowed to leave; seven years later, Holy Roman Emperor Charles V gave them as residence the island of Malta. They paid an annual fee for the privilege: one Maltese falcon.

The Hospitallers were dispersed after Napoleon took Malta in 1796. Several divisions of the Order are still extant.

### Venice

After the inconclusive battle at Fornovo in 1495, Venice continued a policy of adding to their possessions in northern Italy. In 1499, it allied itself with France and gained some territories, but at the same time lost important bases in the Mediterranean to the Turks. Pope Julius wanted the lands of Romagna and in 1508 allied Rome against Venice with Emperor Maximilian I, Spain, France, and Hungary who each wanted their own piece of Venice's territories.

After initially defeating Venice with this large alliance in 1509, Julius, like Ludovico Sforza before him, realized he had endangered his own position by inviting foreign forces into Italy and that Venice was the only power in Italy strong enough to face these outside armies. That same year, in typical fashion, Julius switched sides again and helped Venice win back most of the areas she had lost. This series of events marked the end of Venice's expansions.

In 1503 Vasco da Gama returned to Portugal from his second voyage with ships full of spice, silk and other goods from the east. Spice prices plummeted. Although they regained a good portion of the spice trade over the next fifty years, the Venetians never again held a near-monopoly as they had for several hundred years. They did possess many resources, however, and used their manufacturing capabilities in industries such as silk and glass production to maintain their prosperity through the eighteenth century.

The vitality of Venice, at the summit of power earlier in her existence, waned in a "golden decline" over the centuries after Fornovo. In the eighteenth century, she had already become a tourist town, famous for her operas and theater.

In 1796, when Napoleon's army came through Veneto to fight her ally, Austria, Venice feigned neutrality. When it looked as if Austria would be victorious, Venice cut off Napoleon's supply lines. But Austria made peace with Napoleon. With treaty in hand Napoleon returned, furious. In May of 1797, Napoleon took Venice without firing a shot. The doge abdicated; the senate voted to surrender. The republic, the *Serenissima*, ceased to exist.

## Italy

Following the easy seizure of Naples by Charles VIII in 1495, it was evident to world leaders that the riches and land of Italy were open for plunder and conquest. For the next half-century and more, the "Italian Wars" rearranged the political landscape as Spanish, French and

German armies occupied and then gave up various regions. Italian dukes and popes aggravated the situation by calling one outside force to counter another, often resulting only in the introduction of a different occupier. In reaction to the opposition of Pope Clement IV, Holy Roman Emperor Charles V of Spain sacked Rome itself and forced Clement to flee for a time. Only Venice remained independent throughout this period.

After the Italian Wars ended around 1560, Italy experienced about two hundred years of relative peace under mostly Spanish rule and protection. The period toward the end of the eighteenth century saw much of northern Italy slip into Austrian hegemony, although some regions, in particular Venice, were technically and functionally independent. Then came Napoleon Bonaparte.

As France and Austria fought for control of Europe, the territories lying between them were contested. France conquered most of northern Italy and in 1796 its armies were in Veneto, the province of Venice, advancing toward Austria. Italy came under French authority for some time, although eventually reverting to its splintered patchwork map of years previous.

But Napoleon had ignited nationalistic passions in Italy. The next fifty years brought several attempts at insurrection and unification, until at last they began gaining traction. In 1860, Italians controlled large sections of the peninsula. By 1866, almost all foreign troops had left Italy, leaving the Papal States under the pope's rule. In 1870, Italian forces took Rome and annexed the Papal States into the new country. From Milan to Venice and Naples to Sicily, Italians were for the first time united under King Victor Emmanuel II in the Kingdom of Italy.

### **About Joe Douglas Trent**

Joe Douglas Trent moved away from his family's West Texas cotton farm, married, went to school and work, raised kids, and found an artistic outlet in song writing. He regaled his wife with brilliant book ideas until she retorted, "Well get off your rear and start writing." So he did.

Joe joined writers' organizations Write Right Critique Group and Panhandle Professional Writers to hone his craft. A short story, *Time to Go*, won first place in the West Texas Writers and Panhandle Professional Writers contests, and his novel, *The King of Silk*, topped the PPW list for historical fiction.

He shares a good life with his sweetheart, kids, and grandchildren on the plains of West Texas and at an outpost in Colorado.