



Societies of young aristocrats in the Renaissance (Venice-Italy, XV-XVI centuries)

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The study focuses on a subject of huge interest for the social history of the Italian Renaissance: the societies of adolescent nobles (the average age was between eighteen and twenty) formed to organize various kinds of games, festivities and performances; these societies were also commissioned by the political power of the moment to take part in civic rituals and other festive events. The *compagnie* also organized private parties amongst themselves; these were often explosive, even violent occasions, and provided an opportunity for ostentatious flaunting of wealth and class exclusiveness.

In Venice the phenomenon took root later than in other cities but with the so-called *compagnie della calza* (the members of the societies wore long coloured stockings) they became a presence of considerable and abiding importance. The research programme provided for consultation of a wide variety of source texts (chronicles, laws, diplomatic documents, literary and theatrical works and the visual arts), where material about the *compagnie* features numerous aspects of XV and XVI century Venetian society, including the attempt of the State to assign an appearance of political activity to certain social bodies; the preparation of the young for future government tasks; the possibility of establishing links between noble clans and factions; the desire of some families to stand out from the rest by ostentatious display of luxury and “courtly” airs and graces.

The study falls into two basic parts: the first shows how these societies of aristocratic adolescents were widespread in Northern Europe and Italy in the Early Renaissance and how they reached Venice only in the late 1400s; the second part looks in detail at the Venetian Republic and sets out to show the *compagnie della calza* were a leading force in the attempt to introduce new social, cultural and festive models into the city in the XV and XVI centuries, and that these models were, in part, alien to local tradition.