

Venice claims no importance from ancient history: it boasts no connection with the Roman empire, and whatever its annals offer worthy of the attention of mankind, is independent of the prejudice which scholars feel for the Roman name.

The independence of Venice was founded on the first law of human nature, and the undoubted rights of man. About the middle of the fifth century, when Europe exhibited one continued scene of violence and bloodshed, a hatred of tyranny and a love of liberty prompted the Venetians, and some few of their neighbours, to seek an asylum from the fury of Attila, among the little islands and marshes at the bottom of the Adriatic gulph.

Before this time, a few fishermen had erected their huts on one of these islands, called the Rialto. The city of Padua, with a view to draw commercial advantages from the establishment, encouraged some of her inhabitants to settle there; and when Attila had taken and destroyed Aquileia, great numbers fled to Rialto, whose size being augmented, assumed the name of Venice, from the district that was the native place of the earliest refugees.

Such was the beginning of this celebrated republic, and though Padua at first seems to have claimed some jurisdiction over it, the Venetians speedily threw off all dependence on this neighbouring state.

The irruption of the Lombards into Italy, drove many new settlers to Venice; and the conquerors thought proper to leave this little state at liberty, and even entered into treaties with it.

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