[00:00:00]

**Mark:** Welcome to The Endless Knot Podcast,

**Aven:** where the more we know,

**Mark:** the more we want to find out.

**Aven:** Tracing serendipitous connections through our lives

**Mark:** and across disciplines.

**Aven:** Hi, I'm Aven.

**Mark:** And I'm Mark.

**Aven:** And today we're gonna be talking about the Bellini. Woo-hoo.

So I think the first thing to say is the cocktail is obvious. We are drinking Bellinis today. We'll hear more about the Bellini, but would you like to quickly tell us what the Bellini is, Mark

**Mark:** The Bellini consists of two parts Prosecco to one part pureed, ideally Italian white peaches or

**Aven:** whatever peaches you want.

Frozen yellow peaches from the grocery store. If So that's what we're drinking. Cheers.

I'm not completely convinced by the purees any of the times we've done it. I don't think they puree enough. Yeah. A bit chunky

**Mark:** they may have a different idea of what they [00:01:00] mean by puree than

**Aven:** I just use a stick blender on frozen and

**Mark:** it's very chunky.I wonder if they like force it through a sieve or something like that.

**Aven:** Yeah. So that's more like a thick, like one of the peach nectars or something. I mean, it tastes nice. Just more chewy than I expected it to be for a drink.

**Mark:** Yeah. I mean, all the recipes I've seen, just say peach puree and don't go into any detail. About what

**Aven:** that means.

**Mark:** just have to go to Harry's Bar in Venice and do some research

**Aven:** spoilers. Yeah. Right. so before we turn to what the Bellini is and why you want to talk about it, I have one thing I need to do, which is to say thank you to a new Patreon supporter.

Yay. Which is, as you will soon hear, exceedingly appropriate for this episode. So, thank you very much to Allison S.

**Mark:** Thank you, Allison, for your. Patronage ,

**Aven:** that's gonna mean something, I swear, very

**Mark:** [00:02:00] soon, we'll soon give the etymology of the word patronage.

**Aven:** And on that note, tell us what we're about to talk about.

So we're

**Mark:** about to talk about this Bellini cocktail, which came about through an act of patronage in a number of senses. And that will tie us to the origin of the name of that cocktail, which is a story all about another format of patronage.

**Aven:** Yes. And the key here is we're going to listen to a video.

Yes. ?

**Mark:** Yes. So this is one of those episodes where we take the audio from an older video and we turn it into a podcast.

**Aven:** And the video is, it's about the Bellini, the story of the Bellini. All right. So with a little more ado than I think it needed, let's turn to listening to that, and then we're gonna come back and talk a little bit more about some details that you'd researched, but that didn't make it into the video.

And then I'm gonna talk about Rome and read Latin poetry to [00:03:00] people, right? Because that's what I do here. ,all right, let's listen to the video.

**Mark:** The Bellini is a cocktail made from Prosecco sparkling wine and peach purée, invented in Venice by Giuseppe Cipriani, and the story of its name is one of patronage of all kinds. In the 1920s Cipriani had worked his way up through the restaurant business, eventually finding himself as bartender at the high-class Hotel Europa bar in Venice. In 1929 he got to know one of the bar’s regular patrons, Harry Pickering, a young rake with a drinking problem from a wealthy Bostonian family. Pickering had been sent to Venice with his aunt--along with her lover and a Pekinese--in an attempt to dry him out. Obviously the plan failed. Then one day Harry stopped showing up at the bar. He had had a falling out with his aunt, who then left with her lover, leaving Harry with no money, a large hotel and bar bill, and the Pekinese. Wanting to help his friend, Cipriani asked how much he needed, and Harry replied that he needed enough for one last drink at the bar, to [00:04:00] pay his bills, and to buy his boat ticket home, about 10,000 lire, which was about $500 USD at the time or around $8000 today. Cipriani scrounged up the money, and Harry set off home. A few years later, in 1931, Harry Pickering returned to Venice, with not only the 10,000 lire to repay the loan, but with an additional 40,000 lire for Cipriani to open his own bar, saying “Let’s call it Harry’s Bar!” So Harry Pickering went from a bar patron to the wealthy patron of a bar—I’ll come back to the web of related meanings of the word ‘patron’ in a bit! Since then, Harry’s Bar has become an iconic Venetian landmark, with many famous patrons of its own, including Ernest Hemingway, Charlie Chaplin, Humphrey Bogart and Lauren Bacall, and even many crowned heads of Europe. Giuseppe even named his own son after the bar [and its patron], Arrigo [the Italian form of Harry], and he’s now the current proprietor of the much expanded family restaurant and hotel business. At the end of WWII, after the liberation of Venice, Harry’s Bar briefly became an unofficial officers’ mess for American and British soldiers, but soon [00:05:00] after it returned to its usual clientele of celebrities which more recently included the likes of Kim Kardashian and George Clooney.

Well some time between 1934 and 1948, Giuseppe invented the cocktail Bellini by mixing puréed white peaches with the Italian sparkling wine Prosecco, with the original recipe also containing a little raspberry juice for colour. Prosecco and peach, by the way, are both toponyms, that is they come from place names. Prosecco is named after the Italian town near Triest and close to the border with Slovenia, where the grape varietal and wine come from, and in turn the town’s name actually comes from a Slovene word meaning “path cut through the woods”. Peach comes from the name Persia, as the fruit was called Persikon malon “Persian apple” in Greek. Giuseppe named the resulting drink Bellini after the Venetian Renaissance artist Giovanni Bellini, because the colour of the cocktail reminded him, so the story goes, of the colour of a saint’s robes in a Bellini painting. Bellini’s name, by the way, comes from Italian bello “beautiful” from Latin bellus “beautiful” ultimately [00:06:00] from the Proto-Indo-European root \*deu- “to do, show favour, revere”. Cipriani was again inspired by Renaissance art in the naming of another signature recipe from Harry’s Bar, carpaccio, a dish of thinly sliced raw beef served with lemon juice, olive oil, and white truffle or Parmesan cheese. He named this dish after Venetian painter Vittore Carpaccio, again because the colour of the meat reminded him of the rich use of colour by the artist. Well, he wasn’t wrong. The Venetian school of painting is particularly known for emphasizing colour over line, as opposed to the Florentine school. The story goes that the beef dish was invented for the countess Amalia Nani Mocenigo, as her doctors had recommended she only eat raw meat. Another well-known recipe to come out of Harry’s Bar is the Montgomery Martini, named after British Field Marshall Bernard Montgomery, so called because of its 15 to 1 ratio of gin to vermouth, as Montgomery was purported to have liked a 15 to 1 ratio of his troops to the enemy on the battlefield. During WWII, Montgomery was involved in the Invasion of [00:07:00] Sicily, then continued to command the Eighth Army into mainland Italy, before being reassigned to northern Europe for the rest of the war. So he wasn’t in Venice in Harry’s Bar at the end of the war, but in north Germany. But let us return to Venice, in the Renaissance, to look more closely at those Venetian painters.

As I said, Venetian painting was known for its vibrant use of colour, as well as its subtlety of light. And one reason was its geography. You see tempera paint, which was water soluble, didn’t stand up well in the damp conditions of canal-filled Venice. So the Venetians were quick to adopt the new oil paints developed in the north in Flanders. The knock-on advantage of oil paint is it allows for those deep colours that Venetian artists became known for through the application of many layers of paint. Oil painting may have been brought to Venice by Antonello da Messina, who was himself influenced by early Netherlandish painting, and along with Leonardo da Vinci was an important influence on the Venetian style. But we’ll get back to Leonardo in a minute. At the heart of the Venetian style of painting was the Bellini family. Giovanni’s father Jacopo and brother Gentile [00:08:00] were also noted painters, as was his brother-in-law Andrea Mantegna. And from Giovanni Bellini’s workshop came the well-known Venetian artists Titian and Giorgione. Vittore Carpaccio, who as we saw was also a source of naming inspiration at Harry’s Bar, studied under Giovanni Bellini’s brother Gentile.

Now one really important thing to understand about Renaissance art is the role of patronage, to return to that topic. It’s hard to overstate the importance of the role of major patrons like the Medici family in Florence in driving Renaissance humanism by supporting the work of artists, writers, and philosophers. But Renaissance art patronage is a little different from today’s patron of the arts, who typically invests large sums of money in large institutions. In many ways, the creation of art during the Renaissance was a collaborative effort between patron and artist, with the patron requesting a certain content in, say, a painting, and the artist executing that request. This is rather different from the way art collecting tends to work today, in which the collector buys ready-made art, the content of which was solely up to the artist. Even back in the Renaissance, some bolder artists, as we’ll [00:09:00] see, might quibble with the patron’s requests or even outright refuse the commission if it didn’t suit their personal style, but mostly that’s how it worked. And patrons would often commission works for public consumption such as a sculpture for the city or frescoes for the churches, with their private collections often serving as backdrop to their diplomatic and political work. The mutual relationship between patron and artist would benefit the status of both: as an artist, to have your work in the collection of a notable figure would raise your profile, and patrons would wish to collect works from all the big name artists. And presumably some element of this Renaissance practise is what the modern company Patreon wants to evoke with its name—though in a more grass-roots way—by allowing anyone to financially support artists and creative people, and to become participants in the creative process. Now while the usual model of patronage in Renaissance Italy was the single commission, sometimes a wealthy family would hire a salaried court artist, as the Gonzaga family who ruled Mantua did. Ludovico Gonzaga had appointed Andrea Mantegna, who you remember was the brother-in-law of Bellini, as court [00:10:00] painter. Mantegna became quite close to the family and a good friend of Ludovico’s son Federico, and his connection continued as the dynasty was passed down to Federico’s son Francesco, being taken in particular under the wing of Francesco’s wife, Isabella d’Este. Appropriately, perhaps, the word dynasty may be related to Bellini’s name, through Greek dynasthai “to be able”, which possibly goes back to the same PIE root.

Isabella, whose name, by the way, is NOT, despite appearances, related to ‘Bellini’, being instead a version of the Hebrew name Elishebha [which comes into English as “Elizabeth”], was a remarkable woman, both as one of the premiere patrons and as a political figure. She seems to have gained much of her political acumen from her mother Eleonora of Aragon, who had governed Ferrara during the frequent absences of Isabella’s father Ercole d’Este, Duke of Ferrara, and was by some accounts a superior administrator to her husband. In turn Isabella was able to govern Mantua in Francesco’s absence, and when he was taken captive in Venice, Isabella took charge of Mantua’s military [00:11:00] and successfully defended the city. As she thus earned the reputation of being superior to her husband in administrative and political matters, he was humiliated and furious upon his release, and the two led mostly separate lives from that point. After his death, Isabella again took up the reins of power serving as regent until her son came of age, and achieved many notable political successes on behalf of Mantua. Isabella had received a good classical education as a child, which sparked her interest in antiquities, and she became an avid collector. In addition, her education and innate intelligence allowed her to take part in the humanist philosophy at the heart of the Italian Renaissance. She had court painter Mantegna produce large allegorical works based on classical mythological themes for her studiolo, basically her study where she got on with the business of all that Renaissance humanism. She also sought other major artists to paint for her studiolo, including Mantegna’s brother-in-law Bellini. The lengthy negotiations between Isabella and Bellini, sometimes direct and sometimes through intermediaries, have been preserved — Isabella was a prolific correspondent with many people [00:12:00] and her remarkable letters have fortunately survived. In her negotiations with Bellini, she wanted another large mythological painting, but Bellini was initially reluctant and didn’t want to have to work with such a detailed outline. The negotiations continued for nearly a decade, with Isabella forwarding a downpayment, Bellini continually delaying working on the painting, renegotiations of the subject, and even Isabella attempting to retrieve her money from the artist and cancelling the commission. In the end, Bellini talked her into settling for a smaller nativity scene, though she continued to suggest adding other figures to the painting such as John the Baptist [which Bellini balked at], but finally Isabella was satisfied with the outcome, which she hung in her bedroom. The painting is sadly now lost, though some have argued that the composition of the painting may have influenced this Adoration of the Shepherds, usually attributed to Giorgione.

Another artist Isabella actively pursued was Leonardo da Vinci. He did indeed draw a portrait of her, which seems to have been preliminary work for a painted portrait [mentioned in their correspondence], but if the painting was completed, it no longer [00:13:00] survives. However, it has been suggested that the figure portrayed in Leonardo’s most famous painting may have in fact been Isabella. The most widely accepted opinion among art historians is that the Mona Lisa depicts Lisa del Giocondo, the wife of a wealthy Florentine silk merchant, but argument over the possible subjects continues.

Speaking of Leonardo da Vinci, in addition to being one of the most important artists of the Italian Renaissance, he was also an ahead-of-his-time inventor and engineer, coming up with plans for things like the helicopter, various war machines, and hydraulic systems. Indeed at times he was taken on by patrons not only for his painting but also for his architectural and engineering work. This was the case in 1502, when he was under the patronage of the notorious Cesare Borgia. At the direction of his equally notorious father Pope Alexander VI, Cesare went about Romagna in northern Italy conquering territory for himself, and he brought Leonardo along to design fortifications and weapons. Also with Cesare was Niccolo Machiavelli, a civic official in Florence, who had been sent to Cesare for [00:14:00] diplomatic purposes and to spy on him to learn of any territorial ambitions he might have in Florence. One outcome of the contact between Leonardo and Machiavelli, both Florentines, was the daring scheme to steal the River Arno. Yes, steal a river. You see the River Arno runs through Florence and then on to their rival city Pisa, so the plan was to weaken Pisa by diverting the river away from the city. The plan was unsuccessful, but the conjunction of these two important Renaissance minds may not end there. Leonardo and Machiavelli seem to have been influential on each other, with one scholar suggesting that Leonardo’s scientific thinking inspired Machiavelli to essentially create modern political science in his most famous work The Prince [which by the way was read by Isabella d’Este]. It’s because of this work that we use the term Machiavellian to describe underhanded political machinations. You see Machiavelli, who was also inspired by Cesare Borgia’s brutal tactics, took a very pragmatic approach to wielding power, suggesting that a ruler shouldn’t keep his word if doing so would undermine his best interest, and that it’s better for a [00:15:00] ruler to be feared than loved. Another claim that is sometimes made of Machiavelli is that he saw patronage as an effective tool of political control as a kind of propaganda, and though I don’t think he’s quite that explicit, he does often write about how a ruler should seem to be good, seem to be generous, and so forth, making a distinction between seeming and reality. Furthermore, he wrote that “a prince should also show his esteem to talent, actively encouraging able men, and honouring those who excel in their profession.” It does indeed sound like an endorsement of carefully calculated patronage.

And when one thinks of Italian rulers who were good at using artistic patronage for political ends, one figure who certainly comes to mind is Rome’s first Emperor, Augustus, who is, by the way, probably the source of the term “Prince” to mean ruler, as in Machiavelli’s book title, because he styled himself “princeps civitatis”, “first man of the state”, and the term ‘princeps’, ‘first-taker’, from primus+capere, became the title of the Emperor for the first three hundred years or so of the Roman empire. Augustus [00:16:00] came to power through a civil war, and presided over a major change in government, from republic to empire, so he had a lot of PR work to do. He famously enlisted the support of a number of poets, in particular Virgil and Horace, whose works praising him and supporting his policies, subtly or explicitly, were crucial in shaping his public image. And he did this via his friend Maecenas, whose patronage of these famous poets, memorialised in their works, led to his name becoming an actual term for “patron” in several languages. Some classical scholars, writing just before and after the second world war, went so far as to call Maecenas Augustus’s “Minister of Propaganda”, comparing him to Goebbels, who held that role in Hitler’s government [taking us back to WWII and Montgomery & Harry’s Bar]. But Maecenas didn’t hold anything like an official role as ‘minister of propaganda’. Instead, he worked within the long-established Roman tradition of patronage, just focussing on poets and writers. Roman patronage was a system in which wealthier and more influential families helped out people from the lower rungs of Roman [00:17:00] society with loans, dowries, gifts, and legal representation, in return for political and military support. The more powerful person was the patronus meaning “defender, protector, advocate” [presumably this led J K Rowling to use the Latin word in her famous spell, “expecto patronum”, literally “I await my protector”], which is derived from pater “father”, going back to the Proto-Indo-European root \*pəter-, which through the Germanic branch also gives us father. There’s a complex web of meanings here that all have to do with the underlying relationship. As we saw before, a patron can not only refer to a wealthy benefactor, but also a customer of a bar or restaurant. And the verb form patronize can mean to be a customer, but also to act condescendingly towards someone, implying a power imbalance and pseudo parent-child relationship. The importance of this ‘father’ role to the way the Roman upper classes saw themselves is evident in a number of other terms derived from pater, like ‘patrician’ [noble], patres conscripti, another name for the Senators who made up the governing body of the Republic, and [00:18:00] pater patriae, Father of the Fatherland, an honorific awarded for notable service to the state, to people such as Cicero & Augustus. The governing class of Rome saw themselves as ‘fathers’ to the rest of the citizens. And the patron, in return for his father-like protection expected loyalty from his client. The word client comes from Latin cliens either from the verb cluere “to listen, follow, obey”, from the same Proto-Indo-European root as English listen, or from clinare “to incline, bend” from the same root as English lean; and ironically the word clientele, “group of regular clients of a business”, now means much the same thing as patrons, in the sense of people who regularly patronise--visit--an establishment. But it wasn’t just poor Romans who had patrons—even members of the upper classes would exchange favours for support; however, they didn’t like being called ‘clients’, or to call someone their ‘patron’, because that made them seem too low status, so a whole euphemistic language of ‘friendship’, amicitia, was developed. Amicitia is derived from the Latin [00:19:00] verb amare “to love”, from which we get the word amorous, and ultimately goes back to Proto-Indo-European \*am- the base of various relationship words including English aunt—like that Pekinese-wielding relative of Harry Pickering. It was that language of ‘friendship’ that Virgil and Horace used to refer to their “greater friend” Maecenas, and his ‘greater friend’ Augustus, who was by this time the principal benefactor, another word related to Bellini’s name, meaning literally “a doer of good” from the Latin adverb bene “well”, ultimately from that same PIE root, of the entire Roman citizenry. And this connection between friendship and patronage brings us back to Harry’s Bar, a product of a friendship that turned one kind of patron into a different kind of patron!

**Mark:** So I just want to first of all add a couple of tiny, little details about the Bellini cocktail one of which we actually just looked up now cuz we were curious to know if Arrigo Cipriani is still [00:20:00] alive, alive and running the business. As far as I can tell, he's still alive, but he, he's quite old and is not primarily in charge of the family business anymore.

That is now his son Giuseppe Cipriani the younger, I guess, running the business. And he is also a race car driver. I mean, that's very quintessentially Italian Right. Running a a, a bar and and, and also a race car driver. Yep. So The other point is for those of you who know a little bit about kind of cocktail bar lore, you will know that there are a number of bars known as Harry's Bar.

They are otherwise not directly related. They're not run by the Cipriani family. But there's a Harry's Bar in London, which was specifically named after the Venice Bar. Okay? Right. There's a Harry's Bar in Rome and there is a Harry's New York Bar in Paris, , which is probably the most famous.

Well [00:21:00] that, and the, the one in Venice are the, probably the two most famous. The one in Paris, it is Probably falsely claimed that a number of cocktails were invented there including the Bloody Mary, the Sidecar, the White Lady, and the French 75. So right. Four very famous cocktails.

But who knows? , it's always hard to establish with these cocktail origins. Now moving on from the cocktail to the painter, and well actually more specifically the patroness, the patron, the, , I don't know if we still use the word patroness, usually they just seem to refer to her as a, I would just say

**Aven:** patron.

I think -esses are to be avoided if at all possible.

**Mark:** Well, so one of the main articles that I drew on for the story of Isabella D'Este was by Jaynie Anderson, it's an article more generally on women patrons in Renaissance Italy. It's called "Rewriting the History of Art Patronage".

so I just [00:22:00] wanted to read out a few choice quotations from this article just to give a bit more information about you know, female patrons in in that period. And so well, so one bit that she writes right in the introduction: "Indeed, with the exception of some superwomen, like Isabella D'Este and the abbess Gioanna da Piacenza, women patrons have suffered a particular form of death.

They have been ignored, not only by historians of patronage, but more curiously ,until recently, by feminists". And so, you know, part of the point of this article is to kind of rectify that. Yeah. And. She quotes another scholar Steven Kolsky, who wrote a work about a treatise called De Mulieribus, "About Women", written by Equicola, and I'll talk more about him in a minute. It was written in 1501, so , you know, right around the time that this, this all was happening, So Kolsky [00:23:00] writes and quoting as part of this the, the, that treatise, "Isabella is recognized as having a superhuman stature and is 'seen as the presiding deity, the patron who watches over the artist to ensure they produce an acceptable work'. The literature on famous women, which escalates slowly through the Renaissance as a consequence of female patronage, is one important factor in changing how women were seen as patrons".

So Anderson goes on to, to write "quantitatively what percentage of patrons were women? No such survey has ever been made in patronage studies. Two accounts of Renaissance workshops with receipts and orders for works of art commissioned in different regions in Italy are sources which are suitable for a statistical analysis of Italian patronage.

In each case, irrespective of region, at least [00:24:00] 10% of their patrons were women, almost all widows and nuns". And she goes on you know, in a lot of detail about, you know, the evidence and the the nature of these women who were patrons in their own rights. In their own right.

And you know, this 10% may be a low figure. So it may be, you know, rather higher than that.

**Aven:** Well, if there were mostly widows and nuns, then I would imagine there's a very good chance that a fair amount of the other patronage that is done in the name of the men is actually done by women. Could be, yeah.

So only when they don't have men in whose name to do it are you seeing them listed as the main patron. Yeah. It seems, I mean, also there's a certain status accorded to widows and nuns, that allows them independence. But I suspect, you know, if it was a married woman, she'd probably do it in the name of her husband, even if it was actually her. So, yeah.

**Mark:** Anyways, it's a fascinating article. And a fascinating topic. So, you know, if you want to know more about that, [00:25:00] we'll link

**Aven:** to it in the show notes. Yeah.

**Mark:** Now this guy, Equicola, is specifically connected to Isabella. And so I just grabbed a little bit of biographical detail about him from Wikipedia.

So his name is Mario Equicola. He was born around 1470 and lived till 1525. He was an Italian renaissance humanist, a neo Latin author, a Bibliophile and courtier of Isabella D'Este and Federico II Gonzaga.

The National Gallery of Art describes him as "one of the renaissance most admired classical scholars." Born at Alvito in or around 1470. Equicola was moved to Naples while still a boy. There he entered the Accademia Pontaniana as a young man. He later moved on to Florence, where he studied under Marsilio Ficino. And he's come up before in previous podcasts. [00:26:00] The the one we did about "Coach". Okay. As a Neo-platonist. Right.

And adopted his teacher's Neoplatonism. And then to Mantua to the court of Isabella and Federico. In 1511 Equicola wrote Isabella, that he was continuing to stay in Ferrara at the court of Duke, Alfonso, her brother in order to prepare in writing six Fabulae, fables, stories, stories. Or 'istorie', histories to be painted for the decoration of one of the Duke's rooms, the camerino d'alabastro , the alabaster chamber. Right. And as we'll hear in more detail in a minute this is the kind of plan, artistic plan that Isabella. Presented to Bellini for the initial concept of the painting.

Right. It transformed greatly by the time the work was done. [00:27:00] But she had in mind a certain historia that she wanted represented in. Right. In art. It wasn't as far as I know, by Equicola. But it's the same sort of thing that he was preparing. Right. So these paintings among them, the Feast of the Gods and Bacchus and Ariadne were executed by Giovanni Bellini and Titian.

Okay. Equicola's sources were exhaustive, both classical and contemporary. He may have been commissioned to Allegorize the marriage of Alfonso and Lucretia Borgia in 1501. Hmm. So Equicola expressed an interest in contemporary vernacular poetry. He was one of the first scholars to bring attention to the inventions of the troubadours and traced the origins of vernacular poetry to them.

He also was one of the first scholars to praise women as exceeding men in their excellence in his little treatise De Mulieribus, right, about women. [00:28:00] In 1517, he accompanied his patroness, well, there's patroness for you, he accompanied his patroness on a pilgrimage to Saint-Maximin-la-Sainte-Baume, which I, I assume how that's pronounced.

I've never heard of this place,

**Aven:** so I dunno. Yeah, I can't correct you specifically.

**Mark:** Which took them through Provence, where he availed himself of the archives of Aix.

**Aven:** Ikes Ikes. Aye? I've never, I don't know, I've never known how to pronounce that.

**Mark:** So he's, he's quite an interesting figure in his own right, and has, very, significant relationship with Isabella. Right. And so, you know, the last little bit that I want to talk about Isabella and Bellini is her negotiations with the artist. So the initial negotiations and at various points during the whole thing were done indirectly through various go-betweens. There are some letters written directly by her to Bellini.

**Aven:** Right. And her archive of letters survives. This is her archives of

**Mark:** letters survives. So we, we know all of this [00:29:00] So it, the initial stages were conducted by a man named Michele Vianello.

Okay. And one interesting very small detail that I didn't pick up on at the time, but it had, I done so I probably might have mentioned, but it's, it's kind of coincidental, but Isabella's Messenger, who is mentioned in the letters is coincidentally named Cipriano, presumably no relationship to the Cipriani family.

No. But I just thought it was quite, quite an interesting little coincidence. So what I wanna do is you know, just read some little bits about this negotiation. I'm not gonna read out the, original text of it. I don't actually have translations. I have summaries of each letter.

Okay. And I have some facsimiles of the manuscript, but that's in Italian in yeah. Renaissance book hand Italian. Yeah.That's not gonna work a little bit beyond my paleo graphical [00:30:00] experience

**Aven:** and linguistics. Yeah. I mean, even if you could transcribe it, you couldn't translate it.

**Mark:** Translate it. Yeah. But, you know, some of these descriptions are actually quite interesting on their own.

So in a letter dated 1501 5th of March from that guy Vianello to Isabella, he says Bellini has been told that Isabella wants a storia. Bellini told Villa that he had to continue working in the Ducal Palace and that he was forced to work there all morning, but that he would manage to find some time every day in order to please Isabella. Bellini has many other works to do, and he thinks that he will need one and a half years to do hers. He asks for 150 ducats but Vianello thinks that he will be willing to reduce it to 100. So there is a, you know, some haggling about the price in these letter. Of course that goes on. So in another letter 1501 10th of March, Isabella to Vianello she wants [00:31:00] Bellini's price reduced to 100 ducks 18 months seems too long to her as she wants Bellini's picture completed in a year.

Bellini still has to work in the Doge's Palace, but he is a good master and will be able to find the time. She will close the deal at 100 ducats and she will be satisfied if he finishes, it in a year. Then 1501, 1st of April, Vianello to Isabella. He has been to see Bellini several times and has told him what Isabella wants. They have agreed to a price of 100 ducats and that the work will be finished in one year. Bellini has promised to be as quick as possible. He insists on an advance of 25 ducats. He will begin work after the Easter holiday.

So remember that 25 Ducats.

Then a letter 1501 25th June Vianello to Isabella Bellini does not like the historia that he has been given, and he is not very willing to do it because he knows that Isabella is a good judge of painting, and that the work will be compared with that work [00:32:00] by Andrea Montegna. Remember him? The brother-in-law. The brother-in-law, yeah. Yeah. So he's worried about his work, not

**Aven:** That's the sort of thing says when he doesn't, I guess. Well, that's what you say when you don't wanna do something is, oh, I don't think I could do it well enough. Yeah. Rather than, that's a stupid story and I don't wanna do it.

Do it. Yeah.

**Mark:** Bellini wants to excel and he says that given the istoria, he cannot do a good painting because it has nothing good in it and he is most unwilling to do it. Vianello is sure that given the istoria, Bellini will not give Isabella what she wants. He advises her to leave Bellini free to do what he wants for, for, then she will be better served. He will do nothing further without her advice. All right. Next. 1501. 28th June. Isabella gives way over the subject, Bellini can invent his own. There's a little comment here by the writer of this article that [00:33:00] I'm getting this from. , and I'll put, I'll give all those details.

We'll, we'll put them in the the show notes. But he says, "the ease with which Isabella gives way is rather surprising as is her willingness to accept a painting only loosely related to Montegna's. Modern writers have tended to overemphasize the iconographic unity and paid less attention to the purely acquisitive collector instincts underlying the initial plan.

Isabella was certainly not insisting on an allegorical painting. She's willing to accept a painting illustrating a scene from classical history or from mythology". Skipping forward a a little while 1502 10th August Isabella to Vianello, if Bellini hasn't begun her painting, let him give her money back.

So this is the first sign of kind of trouble. Yeah. 1502 31st of August. this is Lorenzo Di Pavia, another kind of go-between figure. so Bini hasn't started her picture, but not because he [00:34:00] and Vianello haven't pressed him to do so. Lorenzo had always thought that Bellini wouldn't do it. He had recently told Isabella that Bellini wasn't the man. He says he will do them, but he never does.

Lorenzo has a friend who is a poet. He has asked him to find some istoria that would be easy. He encloses it, but it is clear to him that Bellini doesn't want to do anything. Vianello is trying to get the 25 ducats back and will keep her informed of everything.

1502 15th of October Vianello to Isabella. Bellini agrees to paint an excellent precepio. if she wishes he will do it on the canvas that was made for her Camerino picture. He will begin at once and asks for 100 ducats, the price that was fixed for the other painting. Will Isabella let him know if she agrees? Right. So this is when we move [00:35:00] to some kind of nativity like subject and away from some mythology piece or allegorical

**Aven:** historical piece

**Mark:** or something. Yeah. Yeah. 1502 20th of October, Isabella to Vianello. She is pleased that Bellini will paint a percepio in place of the Historia. She doesn't want the work to be the same size as the latter. She will give the measurements to her husband's secretary, who is also the bearer of the letter. She wants to put the Percepio in a bedroom. So originally she was looking for something for her study.

Now because of the change in subject, it's more fitting for a bedroom piece. And she wants it for cheaper therefore. It doesn't seem right to her that Bellini should have the same fee for the istoria which would've required more figures than a nativity. Vianello can offer him 40 or 50 ducats as this seems a fair price, reserving the right to give him more or less, according to his opinion of its merit.

If Bellini seems inclined to leave the [00:36:00] percepio to paint some other invention she would be happier with a nativity because she hasn't yet got a painting of that subject. so you can see the degree to which the patron, at least in this particular negotiation has in terms of the, like, not just the content, but the size and the purpose of the painting.

Like it's very specific.

1502 12th of November, Isabella, to Vianello. Bellini is resolved to paint a picture of the Madonna and Child and St. John the Baptist in place of the nativity. She would like him to include a Saint Jerome and other inventione that seems suitable to him. She agrees to the 50 Ducat fee impress on Bellini that she wants it quickly.

1504, 10th April Isabella to Alvis Marcello. Three years have passed since she gave 25 ducats to Bellini for Una Historia that was to be placed in her studio. Later he changed it to a Percepio [00:37:00] del Salvatore. Bellini hasn't the slightest excuse for not returning her money. Marcello must summon Bellini and demand her 25 Ducats.

He is not to accept any excuse or an offer to do the painting because she doesn't want it anymore. , he could men he could mention the affair to the Doge. So things are really breaking down. 1504 10th April Isabella to Lorenzo Di Pavia. She cannot stand any more Bellini's villainy. She wants her money back and unless the picture is finished, she will ask Alvis Marcello to get it returned so that she can escape from the clutches of such an ungrateful man

If Alvis is unable to obtain the money, he must appeal to the Doge. She sends her greetings to Vianello. So it

**Aven:** gets rancorous.

**Mark:** Yeah. Yeah. 1504 2nd of July, Giovanni Bellini to Isabella. On bended knee, he asks her forgiveness for the delay , which[00:38:00] was due to the pressure of work and not to any neglect of her orders, which are engraved in his heart.

If his work doesn't satisfy her great wisdom and experience, it must be attributed to the limitation of his ability.

**Aven:** Right. So he's finally writing directly because he, he's writing directly. Now he has to grovel. Yeah.

**Mark:** 1504. Sixth July Lorenzo De Pavia to Isabella. He has discussed Bellini's picture with Alvis Marcello on several occasions. Marcello cannot do anything about the 25 ducats. That morning Lorenzo had been to see Bellini. The painting is finished and it is beautiful and has turned out much better than he anticipated. He is sure that she will like it. In this painting, Bellini has exerted himself out of respect for Montegna.

It is true that he doesn't get anywhere near Montegna in inventione. He advises her to accept the work, but if she doesn't want it he has found a buyer so that she need not lose any money. [00:39:00] He will do nothing without her orders. Bellini has behaved very badly and he has plenty of excuses. Lorenzo wants her to have a work by Bellini, which is amongst the finest in Italy and there won't be much chance of obtaining another from him since he is old, and he will go into decline. If she wishes Bellini will make a most beautiful frame. He will take the measurements and send the picture. 1504 ninth July. Isabella to Giovanni Bellini. She hopes that the picture will live up to his reputation, and if it does, she will be satisfied and will forgive the wrong he has done her by his delay. She has asked Lorenzo Di Pavia to pay him 25 ducats. If she can be of any assistance to him, she will be glad to help.

And one last little coda to this one last letter. 1505. So we're already now at 1505. Isabella to Gianna Bini 1505 19th of October, I should say. [00:40:00] She has accepted the Percepio in exchange for the Historia which he had first promised her. She likes the former very much, and it is dear to her as any of her pictures.

So,

**Aven:** finally satisfied, satisfied, or at least polite.

**Mark:** Yes. And apparently she was not known for being needlessly praising things she didn't like, so just an interesting little window

**Aven:** Into the back and forth and Yeah. Yeah, for sure. And

**Mark:** then the final thing I wanted to touch on is kind of what happens next. So it's a little chain that takes us from the style of art after the Quattrocento, after this period of, you know, late 15th century, early 16th century Italy. And takes us to the word propaganda since we talked about propaganda.

Okay. So first of all, there's a style of art called mannerism that kind of followed this in the renaissance, this latter style. In, in the latter Renaissance. In the latter part of the Italian Renaissance, a [00:41:00] new style of painting emerged called mannerism. It's in some ways an extension of, and a reaction to the art of the high Renaissance instead of the harmony and balance of the high Renaissance. Mannerism is characterized by exaggeration and asymmetry.

Elements of mannerism can already be seen in the later works of painters such as the Florentine, Michelangelo but it is most evident in somewhat later artists in Rome and Florence between 1520 and the end of the 16th century. Though not so much amongst the Venetian painters.

Now what comes at this point in time is the Reformation and counter Reformation. So the Protestant Reformation and the Catholic church's response to this known as the Counter Reformation had an important influence on artistic styles going forward. Many reformers were concerned about the idolatry of religious art, so there was an element of iconoclasm

**Aven:** here. , only a a millennium [00:42:00] later than in the East, but yes,

**Mark:** Well, and so this is the point. This is a different iconiclasm, but it's kind of

**Aven:** similar in a lot of ways. Based in some ways on the same idea. Yeah.

**Mark:** So the word iconoclasts comes from Greek eikonos, image and klastes, breaker.

It originally referred to the destroyers of religious icons in the Eastern church in the eighth and ninth century. But subsequently, it was applied to Protestants in the 16th and 17th century who vandalized Catholic churches. By the 19th century, the word iconoclasts could be used metaphorically to refer to someone who attacked any traditional or orthodox beliefs.

Well, the response to the reformation was the Counter Reformation, which was the Catholic church basically doubling down on the core values of Catholic.

**Aven:** And what set it apart from the Protestants

**Mark:** yeah. Yeah. So the core Catholic beliefs, so in particular it [00:43:00] related to religious art.

In the final session of the Council of Trent in 1563, it was decreed that veneration should be directed at the person depicted in the art, not, not in the art, the image itself. And to that end, they wanted to clamp down on the excessiveness in the artworks focusing instead on clearly understandable subjects.

**Aven:** Right. So that you were paying attention to the story that was biblical. Yeah. Not the beauty of the dress or whatever. Exactly.

**Mark:** So they rejected the use of nudity and pagan elements drawn from classical mythology. So in other words, art was supposed to promote those core Catholic values. It was kind of propaganda for the church.

And indeed both sides of the reformation engaged in aggressive propaganda wars. As it was right around this time that the printing press was developed, making mass media propaganda possible for the very first time. Pamphlets were being the thing distributed.[00:44:00] All over the place.

And so for the word propaganda itself. Well, in 1622, Pope Gregory the 15th established the Sacra Congregatio de Propaganda Fide, the holy Congregation for the propagation of the faith. Whose job it was to oversee missionary work of the church. . And in particular, the church was worried that the new colonial expansion around the world was mainly in the Protestant hands of the Dutch and the English.

And they hoped to contain the spread of Protestantism through their missionary efforts. , you know so here are all these Protestants going around the world, making more Protestants. We gotta do something. And it is from this congregation that we get the word propaganda. So propaganda fide, the propagation of the faith is the gerundive of the Latin verb propagare to spread or increase. Mm. The word propaganda gained its modern political sense in World War I, which featured the first [00:45:00] large scale use of propaganda by governments to unify their own populace and demonize the enemy.

And bring it right up to the mostly present. Today the word propaganda has gained a pejorative sense of governments indoctrinating the people with false information. Though the sense is perhaps continuing to widen beyond just government and is being joined by newer terms such as fake news.

And alternative facts,

And there we go. From the Italian Renaissance styles of arts to propaganda.

**Aven:** Okay, good. Well I don't have any good segue from that, so I will just go on to what I wanted to add to it, which in the video you cover, as I recall, I was involved in writing of it. You cover Roman patronage , the basics of it fairly well. But I wanted to return to that because that is an important part of this whole story and of the idea of patronage.

And it does [00:46:00] tie into the propaganda a little bit with the way Maecenas was characterized by some scholars.

**Mark:** And indeed you dissertated on this.

**Aven:** Well, yes. So my dissertation was on liberalitas in poets of the Late Republic and early empire. And Liberalitas is the word liberality. It means generosity, but it's one of the terms that is used to sort of by the Romans themselves to sum up this, what we call patronage. So yes, obviously if I wrote my dissertation on it, I could talk about it at great length, but I won't. but I thought I'd just talk a little more about literary and artistic patronage in particular, and a bit of the history of that, because I think it is, you, you know, you raised the point in the video about the difference between the, what we think of as a literary, artistic patrons now as you know spending money on institutions or buying works of art once they have been produced.

Or [00:47:00] giving money to foundations that then distribute money through grants. Right? The sort of generalized support for artists doing their thing. And then what they get in return for that is, the good reputation and the prestige and presumably satisfaction, personal satisfaction connected with doing good in the world and producing more art and having their name be known and the sort of fame of it.

And all of those things are certainly relevant to the, to the ancient form. But just like in the Renaissance, it's a bit of a different dynamic and a different situation. And a lot of that has to do with who were the artists and what their relationships were to people. So let me just start first with just a little quick recapitulation of Patronage at Rome. So Patronage is this vertical relationship that kind of crosses and connects the horizontal classes, right? So you've got a very stratified society at Rome with people at different statuses and [00:48:00] financial levels and these sort of horizontal classes that are very well defined.

And then the relationships of patronage cross that in a vertical way so that they, people at one level are connected to people at other levels. It also functions in many ways, as a sort of basic social safety net. So it allows for, in a world that has no, you know, help for the poor and doesn't have institutionalized charity in the way that the Christian Church then later on developed and that doesn't have retirement savings

**Mark:** and

So for, for an older client, they could be they, they would've some measure of security that their patron would. Maybe be able to help them in, you know, once they were beyond working years or whatever.

**Aven:** Maybe it's not impossible, it was no guarantee, but it was a level of potential financial help or connections or [00:49:00] support beyond the basic commercial transactions of, you know, how do you get your money, you work for it.

So I'm not, I don't want to say that it was sort of a, a definite pension plan or anything like that. There was nothing that formalized, but it at least allowed for a potential network of support that went beyond, you just have to work and if you don't work, you have nothing. I don't want to oversell it in terms of how well it functioned on that.

The primary function of patronage in the republic in particular and later, but was for political purposes. And so the basic system was that clients who were the lower classes clients provided most crucially votes. So they'd vote for their patron or for whomever their patron told them to vote for, wouldn't necessarily be their patron, but they were a reliable voting block. And audiences.

So they would go, when their patron or somebody they were supporting made a speech, they would go and they would clap and they would yell and they would be supportive. And

**Mark:** so this is [00:50:00] the situation where the, the patron would go around with a nomenclator to remind him of who his Yeah. Who his clients were.

Who his clients were. Yeah. And also potentially some muscle to make sure the clients did what they were

**Aven:** supposed to do. Well, , you really ought not need muscle to make your clients do what you wanted. Okay? What you did was you used your clients as muscle for people who weren't your clients, okay?

If you had to use muscle to make your clients do what you wanted, they weren't your clients and it was a very non-functional relationship. But they might indeed, they might provide you with a bodyguard, for instance. They, in situations, certainly, I mean, normally you'd have a bodyguard who was a enslaved person or something, but, but in situations of volatility, shall we say, which certainly happened in the Republic and the late republic in particular, when the streets weren't safe, your clients would come and form a sort of group to, to protect you, right?

But in, in more functional times, they simply were the crowd, your, your the claque is what it was known as. In other periods of more recent [00:51:00] history, they clapped for you. They shouted down your opponents, they heckled your opponents. They they went campaigning. So they went to other people and, to persuade.

So they'd persuade other members of their guild or of their, streets or neighborhoods, like the entourage of

**Mark:** modern day

**Aven:** celebrities.Yeah. Well, yes, absolutely. And, but, but even more so. , like they were really functional, but they also gave you prestige. So one of the main jobs of a client, especially if their patron was running for something, was to simply turn up in the morning every day and accompany them everywhere.

A man in Rome who was of high status, who did not have a group around him at all times it just wasn't done. And the bigger the group, the more prestige you had. Right. Pretty straightforward. So that was what they could do. And that was the job of a client. And then the patrons would provide one of the things they often provided was something called a sportula, which was a little amount, originally, a little amount of food.

So the clients would come in the morning and they'd be given a sort of little, napkin filled with some bread and cheese, and then they'd be told what their tasks were for [00:52:00] the day, and then they'd go off and do that, because of course, clients would often have to work as well.

So it was a sort of complicated process. Later on that amount of food got replaced with money, so they'd be given a little bit of money. But it's important to understand that this is not just payment for services rendered, right? Like, even though that's what it looks like, it's really important to, and this is true in societies all over the world, that just because money changes hands does not mean it's a simple financial transaction.

Okay? Right. It's a gift. It's a more like a gift. All gift. It's a gift and it's a gift that, and so yes, it's money, but you could get money from somebody else and they wouldn't be your patron. And I mean, it's sort of hard to put in to, to pin down what the difference is, but it really mattered that it was your patron and the amount of money wasn't necessarily very much at all.

Anthropologically

**Mark:** speaking. Yeah. It's like a gift

**Aven:** economy. It's, it is a gift economy. It's, it's an a gift and obligation. So, I mean, my, my dissertation was all about the asymmetrical relationship of gift giving. When you are in a position to give a gift to [00:53:00] somebody, you impose an obligation upon that person.

And so the reason it's not a financial transaction is if that client turns up the next day and gave that money back, it would be irrelevant. Right. Right. Doesn't change their obligation. They can't, in fact, it would be an insult. , they can't dispense with the obligation by simply repaying the money.

The gift. was the important thing. And so the only way to repay the obligation is to do whatever you're asked to do. But even in so doing, you don't end the relationship. Right. You know, if you, you can't give them services equal to the amount of money they gave you, and now it's over with. That's buying a service.

, every task you do imposes a new obligation on your patron. Every gift your patron gives you, imposes a new obligation on you. It doesn't end. They, they build up over time rather than canceling out. When I pay something to somebody at the drive-through, that cancels our relationship. We now no longer have a relationship.

Whereas if I give money to a friend, if I [00:54:00] pay for a drink at the bar with my friend, when they pay for a drink the next time when we're out, that doesn't cancel the relationship. If it does, we are not friends.

**Mark:** And, and, and this is

**Aven:** a thing, it's a major anthropological Yeah. Talk about at length. In, in, in many ways, it's one of the things that was the foundation of anthropology right?

Was the discussion of the gift Marcel Mauss with The Gift and like, yeah. This whole idea of, of gifting is, is a huge part of anthropological research. And a lot of the work was done in these sort of primitive, big air quotes on that societies, but it's, it's a hundred percent true of every society.

People put different kinds of, you know, gifts are different things, but our gift relation. Yeah. There's a real difference between a financial transaction and a gift.

Often an intangible one, but an important one.

**Mark:** And that word sportula is where the, the name for that micro grant. So just speaking of, pat Yeah. Patronus becoming Patreon. Yeah,

**Aven:** yeah. There's a, there's a group that [00:55:00] formed four or five years ago at least now maybe more of classics graduate students and undergraduate students actually who set up a micro grant establishment to help other students.

And the, I, yeah, they named it sportula for that exact reason, was the idea that it was little bits of money that helped. Then the idea was to ask more established members of the classics profession to contribute money that could then be donated. Not with the, I don't think, with the intention of making everybody clientships.

No of making people obliged, especially because it was, you know, anonymized and, and re distributed. But with that idea that it's a little bit of money that gives you what you need. Right. And the, the relationship is the relationship of the discipline in a sense. The people who have more power in the discipline are spreading.

Right. That good fortune. and, and helping connect people to the discipline. So the other things that they would do, so that was sort of a very basic ongoing thing, was the sportula. But the other things they could do were they could give loans to their clients, [00:56:00] patrons could; dowry was a very traditional thing.

So when a client was marrying off a daughter the patron might provide a, contribute to a dowry. They might also help arrange a marriage. They would act as a, you know, a connection to other people. They might require a certain marriage arrangements too, if it was useful to them. They could help them get jobs, you know, give them a loan to start a business, this sort of thing.

And, and you can imagine the many different ways in which they could be mutually beneficial. But the main job of a client was political. In this original situation. It was informal, there were no laws covering it. If it was regulated by tradition. Though very firm tradition by the Middle Republic, like there was, if you were known to be a client of someone and you did something bad against that patron, that was a line you didn't cross, which is what I mean by would, should not have to enforce anything on your, your clients.

There were some legal guidelines developed over time, but mostly only in one very particular relationship of patron client, which was formalized by law, which was the [00:57:00] relationship between a freed woman or freed man and their former master. So when an enslaved person was freed, they became the freed men or freed woman of their previous owner.

And that was regulated by law because they were a client. So this is the place where patron and client is used. The terminology is used the most directly. A freedman is the cliens of his patronus. They owed their former master a certain amount of days of work, a year, five or 10 or something like that.

There's some amount of days of work that they had to work for free. if they were found guilty of sort of disrespect, it was impiety, basically. Because they had a duty to their master. So there were, they really couldn't do anything against them. If a woman had been freed for the purposes of marrying her owner, which was quite a common reason to free a female slave.

She had to marry her owner and she could not divorce him. Normally divorce was actually quite easy for women and men, but she could not divorce him. So she [00:58:00] was tied to that marriage because that was the purpose for which she was freed. Right. And there was a whole other set of, set of legal commercial re relationships so that fairly often people would free enslaved men.

in order to set them up in business because then they would have this sort of quasi-legal sort of, it's almost like a franchise relationship. , right? There was Roman law's very, very complicated and very, very specific about these sorts of things. And my brain can't handle it. So I can't tell you any more than that.

Let me just tell you, there was a lot of laws about it where they could use Freedman. So Freedman were very useful and we see later on in the Imperial household with once we have emperors, the bureaucracy such as it is in the Roman world, is staffed to a very large extent, especially through the Principate by Freedman because they have explicit loyalty to their former master, a legally constrained loyalty, but also a socially constrained loyalty.

because they have an obligation. What, what more obligation could you have than having been [00:59:00] freed? I mean, some might suggest that you have no obligation cuz the man enslaved you, but , you know, in a world which accepted and normalized slavery, they did not see it that way.

And then you had this like, real plus of Freedman because of their stigma of former slavery, could never aspire to be an emperor. Or to have a really high position because they would never be accepted in it. So all their success rested on their patron being successful.

Right? Right. The more their patron had, the more they would have. So they have every incentive to be loyal and helpful and no incentive to do it for themselves. How much

**Mark:** does this relationship get passed down generations?

**Aven:** It does, it absolutely, it's hereditary.

**Mark:** So, so like the son of a freedman would still have some sort of relationship?

Yeah. With

**Aven:** his former, with, with the, his father's. His father's client. And in fact, not just the freedman relationship. All clientage work that way. Okay. So this is where you see things like most of southern Italy were clients of Pompey, for instance. [01:00:00] Pompey's father had, had large estates and had been in like the big guy in southern Italy. And so he ended up with this huge. Set of clients. That's one of the reasons Pompe was able to turn up. during the war between Sulla and Marius with his own army, right?

He raised a legion of his father's clients at 25. Later Pompey, then went to Spain, and created a lot of citizens and new cities in Spain and settled a bunch of his soldiers. And of course your soldiers who had fought for you, if you gave them land and set them up when they retired. Now your veterans, obviously they're your clients, right?

So now you've got your veterans as clients. So like all of Spain was Pompey's land too because of this. And the same relationship works as far as the Romans were concerned. all of these relationships always work at every level, right? At the small, like micro level and at the macro level. So this is how they thought of the relationship between the Romans state and other states.

Right? So the term client king, you've probably heard of, right? Yeah. What is a client king? A king. Or another, the leader of another state who owes [01:01:00] obligations to Rome just like a client would to a patron. there may or may not be treaties. There may or may not be laws, they may be independent, just like a Roman citizen is independent.

Of course he's independent. He just has a patron. The problem here is that those kings didn't always understand this particular relationship. Right? Because it was a very specific Roman I mean, of course there's obligation in every culture, but this particular relationship was very Roman. And so this is one of the problems they had in, in Greece when they kind of came in and liberated Greece multiple times.

They were like, well, now obviously you're our clients and therefore you'll do what we tell you to even though we have no treaty with you. And then the Greeks were like, okay, we're independent. And the Romans were like, no, you are our friends. And they're like, yeah, we're friends. It's great. No, no you are our friends.

Why are you doing something I didn't tell you to do? And, and there was just, and so they had to like conquer them multiple times because they, and it was this sort of, assumption that the, that the, the relationships that they were used to in this kind of vertical situation and the hereditary longstanding [01:02:00] nature of them, where every obligation, everything you did as a favor, it strengthened that bond instead of releasing them.

Was not necessarily reciprocated by people in other groups who had different, customs.

**Mark:** So, was there there ever a point at which a family that had been from a former slave would have that sort of taint, kind of diluted enough that they could be their own success?

**Aven:** Oh, absolutely. Technically the son of a Freedman, had no political stigma. They had absolutely the same position as a son of a free man. Now, socially, they still had some stigma, I mean, the Romans remembered who your ancestors were back 45 generations. So obviously, like there's always gonna be a difference between somebody who's descended from Romulus and somebody who's descended from, you know, a slave four generations ago.

But it didn't mean you couldn't become, you know, of office or Oh yeah. You had no political restrictions. , if you could, if you could get yourself elected, you could hold office and you could certainly get rich and you could certainly get to the point where you're a patron of other people. Hmm. And this is another important [01:03:00] point.

You could be a patron of some people and a client of others, right? there's such wide gaps between the groups in Rome that the upper classes, sure, they were only patrons, the very upper classes, the Senate. But you know, if you were an equestrian, you would certainly be a patron of people, but you would have patrons among senators.

You might not call them patrons because as you alluded to, you'd call them your friend. That was too, too blatant. You know, this whole gift obligation thing relies on a certain amount of euphemism, a certain amount of indirection, a certain amount of not really saying what you know, not pinning down the terms of the relationship.

So you might probably not call them a patron that you only use that language when there was a really big separation between the classes when obviously if you're some poor, Roman, it doesn't degrade you, just call somebody else patron because everybody knows that you're just far enough apart. But you would still have a patron, and then I'll come back to that. So there's this whole system, patronage just, and it works from, as I said, from the state level down to. soldiers, everyone. So artistic [01:04:00] patronage is simply a subset of that, and it really isn't. I don't think the Romans would've ever thought of it as being a separate or distinct category.

Hmm. They wouldn't have thought of artistic patronage as being different than patronage. It just happened to be an artist who was being patronized. He had a particular set of skills that he could contribute to his patron. That's all. And if you think about the primary function of, political of clients was to aggrandize their patrons, to get them elected, to give them prestige, to enhance their status.

That's what an artistic patronage was about, too. So a client who was an artist would be expected to use his abilities to enhance the prestige, increase the reputation, enhance the standing and status of his patron. That's the whole purpose of it. And they could do that directly. So poetry, like early on, especially poetry, would be praise poetry, straightforward praise poetry that enhanced the reputation.

Or it could be [01:05:00] indirect by associating them with high status stuff. So if you make good statues and you make good art, then it's enhances the reputation of somebody who's associated with that, who has a nice house, who has good, you know, pretty stuff. Or through euergetism, which is the Greek word for liberalitas, which is literally means good works.

contributing pretty statues to the public or literary works or something like that. So that is another way of enhancing your prestige.

**Mark:** So who was Ovid's

**Aven:** patron? Okay, we'll come back to that. Early on, and this is really important, artists and poets were craftsmen and artisans, and they were low status.

Right? So early on, when I'm talking about sort of mid Republic Rome, the earliest that we kind of hear about this kind of stuff in detail they were often enslaved or they were foreign, and so had non-citizens. They were people to be hired. So they weren't initially actually part of this client.

You know, it was just somebody you paid to do the work for you. Right. But [01:06:00] if they were exceptional, they could be freed or granted citizenship and then sort of become part of this patronage relationship rather than being hired. So they would be taken on as clients, but they'd still be very low rank and they'd be very dependent on their patron.

And so some of the first names we have in literature, specifically Plautus and Terence and Ennius, for instance. Mm. All three of those. So Plautus was as far as we can tell, very low status. We don't know a lot about him. Terence we're told he was enslaved from Africa and then he was freed. So he was a freed slave.

And those are playwrights, they wrote the early comedies. And Ennius, who's the first epic writer, the sort of father of Roman poetry was a foreigner. Now he was from southern Italy, but at the time, Rome didn't rule over a southern Italy. He was Latin was his third language.

He was Oscan, Greek, and then Latin. And so, he wasn't an enslaved person, but he as a non-citizen, he had no real status at Rome. So all three of them were dependent on patrons, when we have stories [01:07:00] about their patrons, for very basic things like money and for work. Plautus and Terence were technically hired usually by the state because for festivals, for dramatic festivals, but it was through their patronage that they would get hired. And then Ennius became a member of a household of prominent Romans and so Plautus and Terence gave general prestige by doing good plays for the people. Ennius he was patronized by the Scipio Africanus family, for instance. And he wrote stuff about how wonderful they were and how good they were at being Romans. He didn't write direct praise poems, he may have, but they don't survive. But he, he wrote them into his histories of Rome and stuff like that. And he praised their family and he burnished their reputation. Now over time, and in the next few generations, higher status people, mostly men.

And that's what we'll talk about for the moment. Started to get involved in poetry. And I'm gonna focus on poetry cuz that's what I know better. And so the mechanism of patronage changed because now they're not that kind of lower class that are obviously clients. They still were in [01:08:00] this vertical relationship.

They still had patrons, but no longer did they rely on them for, you know, money. Right. And food and jobs because they were essentially independently wealthy. They wanted patrons instead for prestige, for publicity, for sort of aesthetic cachet, so we have two prominent names that are Lucretius and Catullus in this generation.

And they were at least of equestrian class, maybe senatorial class. So they didn't need anybody's money. They were independently wealthy, but they want, both of them seemed to have sort of wanted patrons or, established patrons through the poetry for prestige, for publicity. to get their poetry in front of more people to, to do this, ongoing status building that was key to Romans.

So, Lucretius, for instance, in his famous epic or didactic poem, depending on what you wanna call it "On the Nature of Things", he has an opening about. Venus and Mars. But then he turns to Memmius "and to my dear friend, Memmius address, a friend whom you have always wished, [01:09:00] Goddess, to be supreme, you'll be accessory.

So give my words, lifelong urbanity." and then it turns again to Memmius afterwards, "Famed Memmius, neglect the Roman cause and listen to my poetry instead, withdrawn from every care, prepare to find true judgment." So this translation is rhyming couplets, and I'm finding that upsetting and I don't wanna read it out. But basically he in his introduction, he seems to essentially say, "Hey, Memmius, wanna be my patron. I'm like, dedicating this poem to you. Isn't it great?" We don't know for sure exactly what came of it, but it's not clear that Memmius ever was, but Lucretius didn't need him for material support. So in those previous generations, the same thing that we're talking about in the Renaissance period was definitely happening.

The patron would tell the artist what they wanted. And the artist would execute their commission. Occasionally, maybe the poet might come with something and say, do you like this? But they were expected to do what their patron wanted. They were being paid for a job. And even when it moved into patronage, it was still pretty much, but Lucretius [01:10:00] is writing what Lucretius wants to write, and then he's seeking out a patron for what he's written.

And you can see how that's a, a real change in what that, and that's more like what we think of now. Right. In artistic patronage. Catullus, same thing. He was writing what he wrote, but he has the, the Dedicatory poem that makes it look like he's kind of looking for a patron, but the patron is another literary figure.

So he's looking for his literary acceptance and patronage rather than being for some material purpose. Then the next generation of poets continued to be that sort of fairly elevated. however this doesn't mean that there weren't still sort of lower class and artisan class people who were artists and poets, right? Like that continued too. We know of one, for instance his name is Archias, we know of him because Cicero preserved a speech that he presented on his behalf.

Archias was a Greek, so he is non-citizen and he wanted to get Roman citizenship. or he had been granted Roman citizenship. That's what C was arguing anyway, he'd already been granted Roman citizenship by a patron who loved [01:11:00] his poetry. And so there we see this idea that he needed material support in order to become a Roman citizen and that he was gaining through his poetry.

And we see that Cicero We have letters about how he wanted him to write a poem about himself. Cicero was always looking for poets to write about his year of triumph, his consulship. In the end, he wrote it himself. But there seems to have been, he was like, I, you know, I defended you in court.

I expect something back for that. Since of course, lawyers weren't allowed to be paid. That was important. That's the other word that Patronus can mean, by the way, was lawyer. Ah, that's the other place in which it's a technical term, is the patronus is the lawyer who defends you in court. So Cicero was the Patronus. Right.

And that the very literal Catullus calls him that in a, in a poem at one point. And that's a technical term. That's not a, it, I mean it's obviously related, but it's not quite the same relationship when you defend someone in court. But because you're not allowed to charge money for it, because it's [01:12:00] just a favor you do, it does establish this relationship, right?

And so he wanted Archias to write him a poem. And so that now Archias never did, but you can see there, that's kind of that commission. So that, that continued to happen just because we had a elite Romans now writing poetry too doesn't mean that there weren't other people doing that at a different level. But in the next generation we have a little bit more ambiguous situations.

We have people like Tibullus and Propertius and Ovid, the elegists, who all of them seem to be at least equestrian level, perfectly well off. They have patrons, but they don't need them for material success. Both Tibullus and Ovid start off with the patron Messalla and Propertius and Ovid end up with the patron n of Maecenas. It's a little bit unclear because Ovid doesn't need anybody. He's well off. He's prominent. What he needs is political support and aesthetic and sort of literary cachet.

So what's important to him is that he's admitted [01:13:00] into Messalla and then maybe Maecenas's group, so that he gets to know all the other poets and that he's part of what we think of as a literary circle, like a salon or something like that. , that's important. And so that becomes the thing that patrons can now provide is access to other poets, and to good audiences.

They, they host poetry readings and they force all their friends to come to their poetry readings. You know, they give, they give their poets an audience. They give their poets the ear of Augustus, for instance.

**Mark:** So, and yet Ovid somehow blew

**Aven:** it. Well, because, so this is the thing, and this is where it gets complicated.

So we've seen two different kinds of models for patrons and poet. one where the patron commissions something and the poets do it. And the other, where the poets are pretty independent and they come to the the patron with something and say like, do you wanna be my patron? But once they're accepted that that latter group, what then becomes the relationship between their work and their patron.

Hmm. Right. And this is, you know, this is one of the great questions of Roman poetry in this [01:14:00] period: are Tibullus and Propertius and Ovid writing to order. Well, with Ovid it seems unlikely. Yeah. Given what he writes. And same with the other elegists, right? Like Tibullus and Propertius. Why do they have the freedom to write love poetry?

That seems kind of countercultural. Well, because they aren't dependent on a patron in the same way. Even if they have patrons, it's not a dependency. That said, Propertius ends up writing his fourth book of poetry, kind of not about love stuff, but about origins of Roman customs and. You know, Ovid ends up with the Fasti, for instance, which is a very pro Roman kind of about the origins of calendar.

You know, to what extent is there pressure on them to do what their patrons want? And that's the big question. And then the two names that I have not yet mentioned, where this really gets complicated are Horace and Virgil both of whom seem to have been less highly placed than Tibullus, [01:15:00] Propertius and Ovid. Horace says he's the son of a freedman.

A little bit of a doubt as to whether that's true or not, but let's assume it is. That means he's in a, you know, he may be well enough off, but he was kind of not, not upper class. , he does need a patron. He also fought with Brutus against Octavian . So that's a bit of an issue. Now, Octavian was very generous in pardoning everyone, but of course that kind of generosity.

Is what patrons do, right? Generosity puts you in the position of obligation. So ever since Augustus, pardoned Horace, now he's his patron essentially, even though Maecenas is his direct patron, right? And, you know, Maecenas gives him a farm and asks him to dinner and take some on trips. Like these are all things that Horace says in his own poetry.

So he does seem to get material advantage from him. Virgil seemed to be a little bit more highly placed, but he, his family suffered during the civil wars, perhaps lost some lands. It's not quite clear. So again, what did he need, how much dependence did he [01:16:00] have? Because that becomes really the crucial question.

Are Horace and Virgil writing to order or are they writing what they want? And then also getting patrons. Are they writing what they want? And because that pleases Maecenas and Augustus, they are given patronage or are Maecenas and Augustus directing what they want either really directly like write this poem about this stuff or in a more, I think most people would suggest in a more subtle, like I'm not sure I come off so great in that.

Could you rewrite that kind of way? Or just even without ever saying what they want, but just the poets knowing that they can't write something that's gonna upset them. And that's where you get to these, scholars in the 20th century calling Maecenas the minister of propaganda.

Right? Because in the world where propaganda had, like you said, it was so important in the first World war, and then hugely important in the second World War. And state run and you know, there was a lot of views of Augustus as being fascist. [01:17:00] And there's a lot of sort of looking back on Roman history through the lens of the terrifying things that had happened in the, 20th century.

They went to the extreme of saying like, they were just writing to order, they were told what to write. The Aeneid was "write a poem that makes me out, like to be a God" said Augustus. And then Virgil wrote it to order, "write poems that say that Rome under Augustus is the bestest thing ever, Horace". And then he wrote them to order.

I, that's not my view of it. I think it's much more complicated than that, I think. But at the same time, it did matter that they were, what I've trying to outline is how like integral this patronage relationship was to how Romans just functioned. Like, I don't think it was easy for a Roman to imagine.

Pissing off their patron, even if their patron never told them not to piss them off. Right. Like it's just a, politeness. It doesn't quite really cover it strongly enough, but it's part of that's just politeness. It's, it's, it's how you function. These relationships matter. And I don't think you have to be [01:18:00] cynical and think of it as minister of Propaganda to acknowledge that, these, these vertical relationships directed what happened. Why does Ovid write stuff that gets him exiled? Well, because he isn't as bound in that verticality because he's so high up himself. And because his most, clearly his biggest concerns were for other poets' acceptance and literary, fame. And when he had achieved enough of that, he felt himself to be able to do what he wanted to.

I'm psychologizing. I don't know for sure, but that's sort of that, that fits the trajectory of what he wrote. So you can see how trying to figure out what that relationship is is important to a lot of people to try to interpret the poetry. You know, the question that I've talked about before about is the need Pro Augustus or anti Augustus. Well, a lot of that obviously has to do with what you think the relationship between Maecenas, Augustus and Virgil was.

Are the Odes of Horace flattering and terrible? Because, and there's this modern perception that if something is written to order, it [01:19:00] is less good art. And I think that the whole Renaissance discussion of patronage is important for thinking about that. do we not think Michelangelo's work is good because it was commissioned.

and he made money from it. Do we not think that Bellini's work, whether for Isabella D'Este or anybody else is it not proper art because he was told what to do by his patrons? Nobody says that about Renaissance art. And yet now, if you had somebody who told an artist what to, to paint or told a poet what to write in return for money or gifts or something I think a lot of people, you know, that's, selling out, right?

Like there's this whole premise that if you do that, it's not pure art anymore. And that whole idea of this pure art, it's, it's Romanticism, right? It's all, it all goes back to the Romantics. It's all their fault. Everything's their fault. Romantics ruined it for everyone. Damn you, Byron. and all these rich men.

Yeah. Ruined it for everyone. They could afford to write whatever the hell they want. So they said, anybody [01:20:00] who. For anyone else, anyone who's constrained by practical needs is not pure art. , it really is like I have a real bone to pick with that whole thing. So now we have this premise that art is only art if it's freely, you know, if it's unconstrained by any practical considerations or anybody else's, but It hasn't been, was not like that for a very long time. I'll just say that much. That was, you know, that was not how art worked. Art for art's sake didn't exist as a concept until essentially the 20th century. So what my, I'll just, I'll, I'll close by just saying that what my dissertation was about was essentially talking about how this, what I said earlier, which is when a, somebody gives you a gift, it places you under obligation to them.

But you can't get rid of it by just giving them an equal gift back. But if you give them a bigger gift, you can kind of put them under obligation or at least sort of negotiate that position of power. And we see this [01:21:00] when people are on a fairly similar level of status, right? You don't, you can't really negotiate that, like the patron clients of with a wide range between them.

There's no, there's no changing that power dynamic. But if you're sort of on equal footing, then you get the kind of competitive giving, competitive gift giving the

**Mark:** arguments over who gets to

**Aven:** pay the bill giving, who gets to pay the bill at the end of dinner, for instance. Yeah. Who, who's on the hook Who's more lavish in their generosity, these kinds of things become an issue. And so my dissertation was really about how the poets seem to negotiate that in their poetry. These particular poets in this particular period when they're kind of becoming patrons in a less obviously hierarchical set up than had been happening in the past.

And so I suggest that one of the ways they did that, for instance, is when they would dedicate their, among other things, when they dedicated their poems and their poetry collections to their patrons, they were saying, well, you're my patron. You're wonderful. Which obviously suggests [01:22:00] that their patron is above them and they're showing their gratitude.

So showing gratitude puts you below right, puts you below your, the person who gave you something. But if their poetry is really, really good, and they can claim that their poetry is really, really good. And if, say, mentioning somebody in your poem, immortalizes them forever, if your poetry in fact, is going to enhance the reputation of your patron really a lot, then maybe they're not so much the one giving.

Maybe your poem that you're giving is actually the one that is a, a better gift. May not be money, may not be politics, but maybe there's a different set of criteria by which your poem, your poetry, your mentioning of them in your poetry is a more important gift. Or if it's not more important, maybe it at least offsets the power imbalance that they have established or that you are establishing.

So in a, in a dedication poem, you can both elevate your patron. [01:23:00] While also elevating yourself and kind of, so you sort of set up the power imbalance, but then restore the power imbalance to some degree but to do so, you have to establish a new set of criteria by which poetic excellence matters as much as you know, political excellence by which immortality in poetry matters as much as having a triumph, you know, all the things that the Romans had always considered, the things that made a reputation, that made somebody important.

Now there's this movement in the late Republic to say that poetry is a whole new way of judging importance and status and reputation and position, and that these poets who otherwise don't have this kind of power, and this is particularly true when it's someone like Horace or Virgil, but even with Catullus, when he's interacting with people who are of higher political station, even if not socially saying, well, maybe I don't care about your politics. Maybe I've got this [01:24:00] whole different set of values and by them I'm actually more important. That's a bit of a crude sort of simplification of what my arguments were. But I looked at some of the, the dedication poems and, and talked about that.

**Mark:** So I think that the question that our listeners really want to have answered now is, , what do you do if someone at a bar buys you a bellini ?

**Aven:** You write them a

**Mark:** poem. What if it's a really good bellini? You write

**Aven:** them a really good poem,

and I'm not going to read any poems to anybody. Now I was going to, but I've talked for a long time, so I'll just tell you to go read Horace Ode 1.1, which is to Maecenas. If you wanna sort of get a sense of what these dedication poems looked like and Catullus 1 as just sort of an example and I'll leave it at that.

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**Mark:** and we'll make a really good podcast , which will somehow immortalize you.

**Aven:** Immortalize. Well, why do we, why, why is it a common thing for Patreon supporters to, to read out names and to, to make that a reward. IT's part of the relationship. So, yeah. Anyway, thank you for the opportunity to talk about my little pet subject, , and I'm finished chewing my bellini. So I think we can call it a night.

**Mark:** Alright then. Ciao! Bye-Bye.

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**Mark:** Bye.