

Mohammad Akhlaghi

Diary of Venice,

8th of August 2005

The train left Paris a little after 18:00, at first I cleaned my part a little, put the things needed on the bed and placed the things I didn't need under the bed. While in search for a place to copy the pictures on CD in Paris, I had bought two packets of biscuits, I opened one and ate one every once and a while that I got hungry. At first I read some of my Italy book, mostly insisting on the exact way of the Italian Language (the pronunciation and how it is) I should say I didn't learn too much but at least I got familiar.

Our cabin had 6 beds, I was on the left (when the entrance door was behind you) and on the second floor! (There was one bed on top of me and another under me). In my cabin there were two American sisters whose father visited them every once and a while, two French friends (both girls) and an Old Italian woman. Only the sisters and I could understand what we say! The two French friends didn't understand English too good and the Italian woman nearly nothing!

Any way, after reading a little I went out in the really small walk way and just looked outside (watching the green fields and how fast the train passed them) I then returned to my bed, lay down and tried to read when one of the staff came and got all our passports with tickets to check and give back to us tomorrow morning. After he went we turned the lights off, pulled the curtain down and everybody went to sleep.

The bed wasn't too comfortable but it was better than a chair! You could sleep, but with some trouble. I only woke up a few times and the last time was when that train staff came and gave us back our passports and tickets. Then I came out to see outside a little and eat some of my biscuits. I saw that staff and asked him, he said we will be in Venice in ten minutes! I was surprised a little since I wasn't expecting to be on land 10 minutes to Venice, but suddenly I saw the train enter a long bridge and in the end he said is Venice.

So I packed my things and was one of the first people to leave the train. I had programmed with Mr. Cecotti to see him in a news paper shop in the train station, but my cabin was one of the first on the Paris side and so it was one of the last when we got to Venice! By the time I reached the other end of the train (some thing around 5 minutes!) there was a high population of people I was mixed up in, and since I was expecting the newspaper shop to be inside the station or on the city side I began searching for one in the station but didn't find any, only outside the station I saw a book temporary book exhibition, and so I thought he must of meant that, so I waited there, The Grand Canal of Venice was in front of me and I was just waiting for Mr. Cecotti to come so we can go and see the place, but he didn't come! I got off the train at 9:00 and was waiting until 10:30 and I didn't see him, I had a ton of things I had brought for him from Iran and I was seriously worried on what I should do with them!

So I took this picture looking toward the train station with these building that are the first view of any one who enters Venice with train, then I went and bought a ticket from Venice to Florence for the day after (the 9th at 16:00) and using the map of my lonely planet guide book I found my way to a coffee net, a fairly long way. Mr. Cecotti had written his mobile phone number in a mail but since I didn't get to check my mails in the last day of my stay in Paris I didn't get to write it! So I got the number fast and



using the telephone of the shop owner (a nice and friendly man) I called Mr. Cecotti. He said he was waiting for me and now (two hours past) he was on a train returning to Trieste where he lived, but he said the train has just left and so he will get off and return in the next stop that is just on the main land. So I walked back to the train station for seeing him in front of the book shop which was our new point of meeting. I thought they will be in way for more then half an hour so I walked slowly! But when I got there I saw a women waiting, so I stood, then suddenly I saw her talking to a man and found out this is his wife! (I had seen his wife in Mashhad, but with a scarf) So I said: "Mrs. Cecotti" and she said yes and called Mr. Cecotti to come (who was searching for me in some other place!), even though all this trouble was my fault they acted kindly and said that since his wife has to return home, he will only be with me.

On the way back to find Mr. Cecotti I was a man selling Louis Viton Bags, exactly with its real look on the ground. I just asked him how much the price is to know, he said 25euros but I said 10 euros and he said OK, take it! I was so excited!!! Since the original Louis Viton wallets in Paris were 290euros! (Mehrdad had told me of this!)



I should say I found the newspaper shop around 10:00 and didn't see him; actually I was searching for a lonely man, not a man and a woman! Since his wife was leaving I thought of giving them the Iranian Souvenirs then so his wife takes home with her. They were really glad of the gifts and after she left we went and ate a slice of margereta pizza and a coke and then began going around Venice. But since my back pack was a little big and because of the London bombings, taking bags was trouble. We gave the bag to the baggage part of the Train station to get them in the after noon. So I only had my camera and tripod with me.

We went towards the bus stop! (Actually a boat that went along the Grand Canal), he got the tickets and we waited for the bus. When the bus came we got in and luckily we found a good pair of seats beside the window. During the way (that was actually going to the other side of Venice) he explained a lot of things about Venice; its architecture, its life stile and everything needed.

Regarding the architecture he pointed out a few really interesting points such as the fact that there is no construction in Venice these days and all the building belong to around 300 years ago (except the train station!) who ever buys a building can not do anything to it's outside view, he can do any change inside but not out side! He also showed me the special architecture of Venetian houses: the fact that the windows of the buildings are denser towards the center then the out side; you can easily see what I mean in this picture. If you ask me this building was the best looking of all the normal places in Venice.



The interesting thing and the fact that was hard for me to believe was that the house doors opened in water! You had to have a boat in front of the door to be able to walk out of the door! It was interesting. We passed the Grand Canal on the bus and I was busy taking pictures and films nearly all the time! As we got closer to the Saint Marco Square, the Grand Canal was getting bigger; near the Saint Marco Square the Grand Canal would actually finish and connect to the sea, after it you could see separate Islands in far distances and a big sea in the horizon.

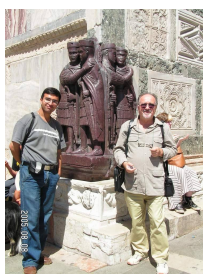


In the above you the Saint

picture can see Marco

Square from on top of the Saint Marco Tower the day after. The bus stopped towards the right of this picture (out of the picture) and we walked towards the two columns you see on the entrance of the square, you can see a lion with wings on one of the poles and a man on the other, this lion with wings is actually the sign of Venice and as Mr. Cecotti stated, in the past all the executions were done in between these two poles.

The square was really populated, there was such a population that you couldn't see the exact shape of the square properly at first. There were also a lot of pigeons on the ground between people, such that you had to look where you are putting your foot so you don't step on them. The place was so populated that Mr. Cecotti took me to one corner of the square so he can explain the things to me! On the way he bought a packet of corn that people bought to give to the pigeons, and they suddenly all came! They liked the corn so much that they would even stay on your hand when you got up!



The corner we stood was actually on the border of the Ducal palace of Venice and the Saint Marco Basilica, where there was a statue on a wall showing the eastern and western Romans and a really nice façade that at that time was the exit of the tourist way of the Ducal Palace. In each one of the two pictures we are standing opposite to the other!



Mr. Cecotti thought the entrance of the ducal palace was through this façade since it was like this before but now it was through the other side. So we went in the line that was not too long luckily and Mr. Cecotti paid my entrance price (as a student it was half price!) and his own and we went in.



There were a few workers who had dug the ground for doing something, the interesting thing was that since Venice is so small, they dug around 3 meters, done their work, finished it then went on front! The other interesting thing was that since the level of water is so high over there, the workers were working in a mixture of mud and water! They were all muddy and they were working in water!

Inside it was really nice, with paintings and really nice work done on the walls with golden color, the painting in each room were on the subject of

the things the people did in that room. Mr. Cecotti said that through out time, this city has been a really rich city due to its sea marketing. Because of that it was always a strong city and had control over nearly all norths Italy. Its political system was controlled by two douches that were chosen by 10 people who were chosen by the people, I had its own laws and was completely independent until Napoleon came and took the city over less then 200 years ago.

The ducal palace was really nice; its tourist track passed through all the really nice rooms, and then came up to a really big and nice saloon that had pictures of the double douches of the city one by one. Let me just say that these douches were both the highest political and religious people in the city. They lived, judged and were executed incase of a fault in the ducal palace, who ever was suppose to be sent to jail was brought to the court part of the palace and incase he should have been sent to jail he would have been taken over a covered bridge from the ducal palace to the prison, which was actually the second path of the tourist track. By passing this bridge (that is somehow the most famous of Venice's more then 200 bridges) you entered the prison that unlike the palace was dark, had two layers of thick fences on each window, and was scary! You could enter some of the cells and in some there were signs the prisoners had put on the walls and things they had written, they were interesting. On the way to the prison Mr. Cecotti joked by saying that in the past the people hated prison, but now, everybody is paying money to go there!



I took this picture of the bridge when we were out of the palace. The bridge in front of this that people used to take picture of the bridge from was really populated and I just squashed my self in the population to take this picture!



We passed the bridge again to come out, and left the ducal palace. But before leaving we passed a restaurant and in that Mr. Cecotti showed me how the doors that open in to the water are and how the



Venetians don't let any thing get wrecked when the water level rises; they put some things under all electrical things or things sensitive to water. The water level did rise unbelievably; in a post card, later I saw that in winter, the beginning of the Saint Marco Square (the part you can see in the big picture on the second page) went completely under water to a depth of around 10cm! If you notice in the picture some parts of it were under water even now (to the left of the two poles). In the post cards part I also bought two post cards for Mona and Golnar.

After coming out of the ducal palace, we saw some of the shops selling the best souvenir of Venice: Glass work. There were some really nice works done with glass in these shops and as Mr. Cecotti said his wife all ways came here for buying glass things. From there we went to the other side of the Saint Marco Square where there was a big museum of the history and art of Venice (Museo Correr) we were both really tired and so in the ends of the museum none of us talked too much and just passed! It was nice and in the paintings Mr. Cecotti



analyzed some of the painting styles of the different artists and gave me some insight in to painting!



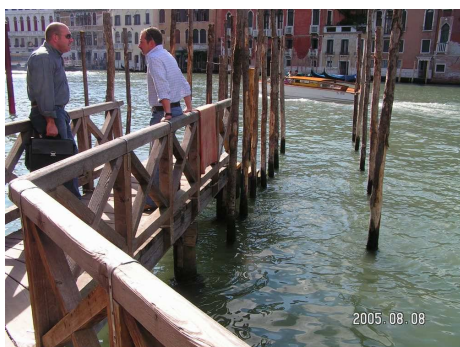
After the museum Mr. Cecotti guided me through the really small streets of this city! I was really surprised that how he finds his way through such small walking ways (in average they were around 2 meters), but later I found out that on every turn it had signs showing the final destination this way goes to! After applying this the second day in Venice it was so easy to find my way in these tiny walk ways that I really felt proud of knowing this. Any way all the streets were old and the buildings were all older! Walking through these tiny walk ways gave me the exact feeling of walking in the really old traditional parts of Iranian cities! If you ask me only the

touristy parts of this tiny city were really beautiful, the walkways were all old, really old!

But the thing that made these roads different from the tiny walk way of old Iranian cities was that suddenly in the middle of these old walk ways you came up to really chic shops! Selling really chic things! Imagine an old out side look and a really nice and modern inside! This is exactly how most of Venice was. Another interesting thing about Venice was the masks they sold everywhere! As Mr. Cecotti said the Venetians (those who lived in the city) celebrations every once and a while, in these celebrations they done stupid and funny things but since they were all rich people and didn't want to be recognized they wore these masks that all had colors and figures of clowns. Later on I saw some people wearing such clothes and masks, it was interesting. Also in the museum you could see drawings showing these times.



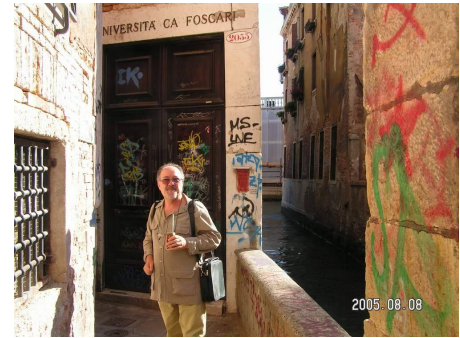
We went through the walk ways and finally came up to cross the Grand Canal, but for crossing we didn't use any of the three bridges on the canal, but we used a special way named "traghetto" which is actually a boat that passes the canal. These traghetto have special stops (shown on maps as dashed lines) and they take people from one side of the canal to the other. There is usually one going and coming back, as Mr. Cecotti said this is the easiest and cheapest (it was 1 euro) way to get on "Gondola" (the special Venetian boats), let me just say that there are gondolas that you can get personally, they look really nice also, but for every 50 minutes they take something around 70 euros!!! You can see pictures of the traghetto stops and us leaving on one under this paragraph.



In the way Mr. Cecotti talked about his university and how the University of Venice (the place he studied eastern languages in) is distributed randomly between the buildings of Venice. Since there no one is allowed to build in this city the university has bought separate buildings and turned them to universities.

The interesting thing was that since the rooms are mostly small for classes more than 40 people they had to use the city cinema!

The place we got off the traghetto was really close to the Rialto Bridge, Mr. Cecotti told me that the only reason we used a traghetto was so I get on a gondola! We passed the bridge again and after passing a few quiet walk ways suddenly Mr. Cecotti told me we got to his university. But it was closed at that time of day so we didn't get to go in. on the way out we passed all the quiet walk



ways and got to the Rialto Bridge again (the sign of the city) and walked towards the train station and Mr. Cecotti's time for getting to the final Trieste-Venice train was finishing. On the way to the train station he showed a few places to visit tomorrow and in the train station he bought me a small book of Venice (with nice pictures and texts) as a souvenir of the city he also gave me a map of the Venice made by his university, he also gave me

an old map of Florence and showed me the ways to go to it's main touristy places. We also got my backpack and the plastic I had with me from the baggage's part of the station, he left Venice with the 19:00 train and after he left I walked slowly to the Venice bus station, where an hourly bus for the hostel I had reserved would come at 19:30. Before going Mr. Cecotti told me that if some how I am not able to get to my hostel I can call him and go to their house. Mr. Cecotti was really kind to me trough out the day...

I had reserved Camping Alba d'oro in Venice which was actually a camping site around 30km out of the islands of Venice. It had an hourly bus that left the hostel every hour and left Venice on all half an hours. I was there a little early and just sat with all the others in the stop waiting for the bus to come. When the bus came suddenly all the population went towards the bus (a population more then the seats of the bus) and while waiting in this population I suddenly saw nearly everybody has tickets!!! I asked where I should get tickets from and they said they give these in the hostel and for those who are going for the first time it is free! Since I was worried I pushed my self front and got on! But the funny thing was that those kids that I asked hadn't got on! They didn't have enough places; they thought everybody will go in so they hadn't tired to get on!

The way was long, and the bus really took half an hour to get to the hostel, but I should say that after one day in the middle of such small walk ways and squashed people and everything, it was a little strange for me to see big highways and green fields! The bus stopped and nearly everybody just went in the hostel but me and a few others went towards the reception. I gave them the voucher they had given me in the STA travel office in Aberdeen and they got my passport and 5euros (to give me back tomorrow) and they gave me a key to a cabin, cabin 40 as long as I remember. The place was a camping place, it was in a big field, beside the Marco Polo airport of Venice, on the entrance at the beginning you saw the reception on one side and the restaurant, the café, a pool and a few other places, then you saw tents that either people put them selves or they rented, then came the cabins. I searched until I found my number and I went in.

It was really tidy, clean and with everything exactly like a hotel. It had three beds, a double bed and one bed, there was already some suitcases on the double bed so I took the alone one. Then I just sat down a few minutes and after that I went to bath, in the bath it came to my mind that for the lowest amount of washing clothes as possible the easiest way is to only wash my under wear and socks everyday and wear the same sleeping clothes (I had brought two sets and in Paris I wore one and washed the other!) every night. It was excellent and I didn't even use the other set of sleeping clothes I had with me.



After the bath I wrote the two post cards for Mona and Golnar and then I had a walk around the place (mainly to see if I can find anything worth eating!) but I saw the prices are a little high and I was the only person alone and I was really tired, so I just came back, finished the biscuits I had bought in Paris with the coke I had from London (I had forgot to drink it in Paris!) as dinner and I was nearly ready to go to sleep when the two people who had the other beds came. They were a Syrian pair, that I think had recently married and this was their honey moon trip! They were both young and students in Canada. The English accent of the girl was just excellent, she had a complete Arab look, but if you only heard her voice you would say she is American! But for the boy, you could tell he is Arab.

Any I put my clock for around 8:00 so I can go with the 9:00 bus back to Venice, I packed my things is well so in the morning all I had to do was to put sleep cloths in my bag and go.

9th of August 2005

I woke up at 8:00 as I had put my clock and packed my things fast and left the cabin, when I left, they were just getting up. When I went for checking out there were a few people in the line and I was worried a little that I might not reach the bus, but luckily I finished around 5 minutes before the buses (there were 2 buses) came and I got on the bus with the ticket they gave me in the reception.

I got off in the bus station and walked to the train station, there I put my back pack in the baggage part of the station, paid the money and only had the camera, the tripod, my guide book and my hat with me, then using my guide book map (that I had found out to be the best in the few that I had) to find my way to Chiesa di Santa Maria Gloriosa dei Frari, on the way I saw a few other churches, and I had in mind to visit the Saint Mark's Basilica is well. Let me just say that Mr. Cecotti had told me that in the past there weren't so many bridges between the islands and even some islands didn't have any bridges so nearly in every island there was a church for the people of that island! That is why nearly after passing every three or 4 roads you came up to a church!

I found Chiesa (church) di (of) Santa Maria Gloriosa dei Frari easily, since most of the way was exactly the ways that I had passed yesterday to find the internet center for finding Mr. Cecotti's phone number! But the interesting thing in Venice (and later on I found all Italy is like this) was that in the streets there were pumps of water that always had water coming out of it, so if you got thirsty you could drink from them. In Paris and the Britain there was no such thing! It helped me a lot in saving money! Later on I found out that you can put your hand in the way of the water (block it) and then the water would come out of a hole on top of the pipe that would let the water come out towards up with a higher speed



so you can drink comfortably! It was really interesting!

I found the Saint Mary's Church easily and went in, inside it was really nice, there were some really beautiful statues and the walls where all covered by paintings and



different things really nicely! This was the first place I saw an Italian church and I should say it really attracted me, the churches here were much more beautiful than those in Paris or Britain, all over the place you saw statues and frescos and all the walls were decorated so beautifully that attracted anybody.

After seeing inside the church I came out and had a look around, I took a picture with the nice water way in front of the church, as you can see here. There was a nice group playing classic music outside the church and I listened to them a little (I had absolutely no rush!!!) and then went behind the church and found some nice food shops that had good prices (the prices here were around half of those near the Rialto



bridge!) so I programmed to eat lunch here before going to the train station. On my way to the Campo S. Polo (a square) I found a good internet place which could copy pictures on CD and had a good price for internet, I asked them that are you open at 15:00 so I can come and use internet and copy a CD, they said yes, so I programmed to be there on that time to check my mails and copy the pictures and eat lunch and go to the bus station.

The Campo S. Polo was just nothing special!!! It was a square that had a lot of souvenir stops around it. I rested a little there and after taking this picture I walked (using the signs on every walkway) towards the Rialto Bridge. Venice is really small! If you want to walk continually with normal pace it will take you 20 minutes to go from the Saint Marco's Square to the Train station (two sides of the city).

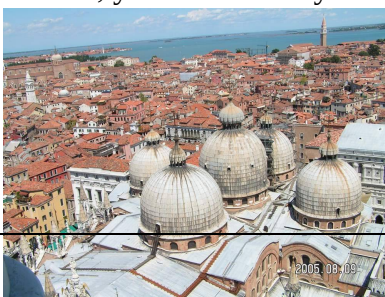
Even though the walkways were populated but I was in the Rialto Bridge in around 10 minutes. It was really, really populated there! You had to squeeze your way through. On the Rialto Bridge there were shops on both sides and down in the street it wasn't much different, all the shops were selling different kinds of souvenirs, I really wanted to buy some of the small Gondolas in the shops but I thought of buying them on the way to the train station. I was really hot and thirsty and in one of these shops before the Rialto Bridge I saw a slice of watermelon for 1 euro, so I got one and it was excellent in that weather! On the other side using



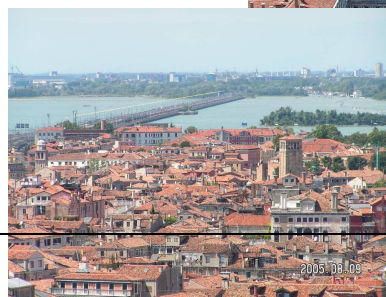
my map I found the post office with a ton of trouble, because it had no signs and it just killed me to find it! I got two stamps there and stuck them on the post cards and dropped them in their places.

From the Rialto Bridge I walked to the Saint Marco's Square, using the signs on the walk ways it was so easy I just wanted to shout out that I know where to go!!! Because finding your way through this maze like structure of the walk ways was crazy! In the square first I wanted to go inside the Basilica but after seeing the really long line I changed my mind and decided to go to the tower to see Venice from a height of around 99 meters, it was built in the 10th century but suddenly on the 14th of July 1902 the whole thing suddenly spread on the ground in the night! But they built it again and now it looks just like before. The line of the tower wasn't too short either, I was waiting around 50 minutes to get in, there were some Australian guys behind me that listening to their accent was interesting for me, they were busy talking so I thought if I don't bother them it is better!

Inside they took 6 euros and took you up to the top with an elevator. The elevator had two doors, one opening north and the other west. From up there Venice was just like an big island in the middle of the sea, you could hardly see the Grand Canal and the other ways in the



water
the city,



dominant thing in the view of the city was the red roof tops that covered the whole Island, you saw no tree or land or water, all you saw was red roof tops! It was a nice view up there, but if you ask me it wasn't worth 6 euros!!! On the left you can see a picture of the back part of the Saint Marco Square and under you can see two pictures from the eastern and northern sides of Venice respectively. On the north side picture you can see the long way that is built for trains, buses and cars to get to Venice.

It was around 14:00 when I came down, So I walked to get to the place I should of copied my pictures on CD, on the way while I was passing the Rialto Bridge I bought a big and small Gondola statue (for our selves and Marjan in order!) then I went to find the internet place, but after I got there I saw it's closed and it had written it will open at 16:00 I really wanted to drop 50 bombs on the shop, specially after exactly the same thing that had happened in Paris! You can't believe how angry I was. But luckily the situation wasn't as bad as Paris because I knew that the same on I copied the Paris pictures on CD and checked my mails in yesterday was open, so I went there fast and after writing the pictures I checked my mails and went for the Train station, around 10 minutes to the leaving time I got my bag from the baggage part, found my train and got on it...

As a general view I should say that Venice is a really special city, it is beautiful in some places (mainly the Saint Marco Square) and a nice city in general, but I don't believe it to be the most beautiful city in the world! I would say Rome is much more beautiful. But I do agree on it being the strangest city in the world!!!



*Mohammad Akhlaghi
September 19th, 2005*