



“At a moment when social policies are under attack, Alexander More demonstrates that public health and welfare policies supported the emergence of the first major republic in the preindustrial world. These policies did not just supplement the republic—they sustained it. They remain essential to the survival of republics today.”

—Louis Hyman, Dorothy Ross Professor of Political Economy in History, Johns Hopkins University

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Commonwealth

Public Health, Climate Crises, and the Origins of the Modern Welfare State

ALEXANDER F. MORE

TIMELY LESSONS FOR TODAY'S HEALTH AND CLIMATE CRISES
ROOTED IN THE ORIGINS OF A GOVERNMENT'S PROVISION
FOR THE COMMON GOOD

The question of whether a government should take care of its people—preparing and investing in public health, welfare, and resilience policies—is arguably more important today than ever, as the world faces unprecedented climate and health crises.

Commonwealth's exploration of the Venetian Republic, one of the oldest and most enduring in history, establishes for the first time that Venice and its constituent republics developed welfare policies not in response to the plague, as is commonly thought, but two centuries earlier. Alexander More reveals that the lawmakers of Venice took advantage of its historic economic revival not to profit personally but to provide free medical care for their people. The Republic also inspected and guaranteed the quality and availability of food, water, and medicine, even when sudden climatic changes caused harvests to fail and supply chains to shift.

Through original archival research in multiple languages, More shows that the welfare state of the Venetian Republic, from which our modern system is derived, took shape through deliberate efforts to work toward the common good. Readers interested in the history of medicine and public health, food security, welfare, climate science, and law will benefit from new insights into the origin and nature of commonwealth in society.

ALEXANDER F. MORE, a Harvard-trained economist, scientist, and historian, is an associate professor at the University of Massachusetts–Boston, with research appointments at Harvard University's Initiative for the Science of the Human Past, the Climate Change Institute, and the Max Planck–Harvard Research Center.

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