Elevator Pitch: The Building of the Cathedral and Tower at Pisa

The city-state of Pisa in the year 1000 AD was a seafaring state and the Pisans were both traders and raiders. They were very successful in both endeavors. In the years from 1001 to 1063, Pisa fought seven major battles including one against neighboring Lucca. These battles and Pisa’s regular maritime efforts made them very rich. Pisa was also on a major trade route.

Pisa finally formed alliances with Corsica, Sardinia, Sicily and others. However, these alliances were fluid and Pisa was always the strongest of the alliance members. Pisa was cash rich – and vulnerable. Their alliance partners were a long way away in case of trouble. Other city-states were a constant threat.

What to do?

The decision was to form an alliance with the Church for protection, and build a Cathedral to confirm the union.

The narrative in the report is an account of the conversations between the parties involved by the scribe Roberto De Matteo and his decedents.

These conversations while fictionalized, could have happened.
AV: Good morning Giovanni, welcome home

GO: Good morning to you Alberto. It is good to be back home and safe among friends.

AV: You did well against the Saracen Pirates and have brought great wealth back to Pisa.

GO: Thank you Alberto.

AV: I have to ask, have you taken care of your men and those who supported them during your campaign? Also, have you given thought to the riches you have brought back from your triumphs?

GO: I believe you will find all the men who joined me in the fighting are well off and living well in their homes. However, there are those who have the lust in their souls to venture forth to seek further fortune and adventure. Alas, I may by one of them.

AV: Yes Giovanni, that is what we must discuss. These riches will be coveted by many, not the least of which may be the traders and merchants of Pisa but The Church and out neighboring cities as well.

And so the tale begins.

March 15 1061 Robert De Matteo

I have been called in to the offices of Sr. Visconti for a discussion of unknown matters.

AV: Ah, good morning De Mateo. Please sit, we have issues to discuss.

DM: Thank you sir. How can I be of service?

AV: Your service is what we are to discuss. You have been with me for a little over a year and I trust you find conditions well.

DM: Fine sir, it has been my pleasure to serve you.

AV: I have been looking in to your family background and see that you are from Lucca. Your parents and sister Angelica live on the Via Buiamonti, a safe area I might add. It is good to know that one’s family is safe in these uncertain times.

De Matteo, I will be entering in to some serious conversations and negotiations with members of the Pisa city council, merchants from the town, the Church and others concerning the future of Pisa and the recent riches the captains have appropriated from the Muslims. As you know, we are in a federation with Corsica, Sardinia and Sicily- with Pisa as the senior member of the alliance.

My charge to you is to keep accurate written records of these meetings so there are no misunderstandings of meaning at any time in the future. Additionally, the information you will be privy to will be of a highly confidential nature and must be treated as such. I will ask that you transcribe your meeting notes and give them to me at the end of every day your services are required.
Do I make myself clear on all of these points De Matteo? If not, this is the time to ask questions.

DM: No sir. I think things are quite clear. I will give you the meeting notes at the end of each day.

AV: Good. You can go now. I will call on you as needed. Keep yourself available.

March 15 1061 Robert De Matteo

Later that day as Roberto turns the conversation with the marquis over in his mind he wonders if the reference to his family and their safety are a veiled threat in any way? How to insure their safety and his own as well? Marquis have been to known to change their minds after all. Finally, he hits on a scheme that he hopes will keep him and his family safe as life’s fortunes change. He will keep two sets of books as he transcribes his notes. One set will be turned in to the Marquis at the end each day as ordered. The second set he will keep in a cedar box at his parent’s house in Lucca under the bed in his old room.

March 18 1061 Roberto De Matteo

Conversation between His Most Honorable Alberto Visconti and Lucius De Bernardi

AV: Good morning Lucius, my friend. Thank you for joining me here today. We have much to discuss and I appreciate your making time for me.

DB: Ah, Alberto, you thief. We are too old and have known each other for too long for pretty hellos and pleasantries. What is it you want, how can I help and what can I get out of it?

AV: Who are you to call me a thief, you thief? You are right we have known each other a very long time. Our families go back many years and if we cannot trust each other, who can we trust?

I have a plan and a proposition. As you know, the captains Ornando and Ciurini have been very successful in their endeavors of the past years. They have been victorious over the Muslims at the Battle of Palermo, Corsica and in North Africa. This coupled with our own efforts as merchant traders has made Pisa a very rich city- a very, very rich city.

DB: I am aware of this my friend, what is your point?

AV: We have too much money for our own good and may not be able to hold on to it and keep it from other larger cities.

DB: What do you propose?

AV: I have spoken to some of the other successful merchants in Pisa and my proposal is to build a large cathedral complex.

DB: Hah

AV: Listen before you condemn the idea. Archbishop Guido (3)is travelling through Pisa within a month to inspect the Church’s assets further north. He will be staying at my villa of course.
Pisa is a natural site for a Cathedral as it is on a major trade route and many pilgrims in transit pass through the city. If we have a cathedral, think of all the opportunities we would have trading with the visitors, housing them, feeding them and seeing to their needs as they remain in town to visit the Cathedral. Also, we will be under the protection of the Church.

DB: You may have something here Alberto, but how do we convince the Archbishop to put a cathedral in Pisa?

AV: Easy my friend. We make him think it was his idea.

April 18 1061 Roberto De Matteo

Conversation between His Most Honorable Alberto Visconti and His Eminence Archbishop Guido

AV: Good morning Your Eminence. I hope your travels have gone well and your stay in my home comforting to you.

AG: Yes Marquis Visconti, your hospitality has been most generous and your home and grounds are lovely. Your successes as a merchant and trader had enabled you to live in fine splendor. The success of your captains against the Saracens has also added to your standard of living here in Pisa. But you should remember that the possession of worldly goods is no guarantee to the redeeming of your mortal soul.

AV: Yes Your Eminence, I heartily agree, and I would speak to you about that very thing. As you know, Pisa is a leading trading city and has alliances with the other states of Sardinia, Sicily and Corsica. We have many traders, merchants, pilgrims and visitors from other lands, but no place grand enough to reflect the power and dignity of the Church. I propose that the Church select Pisa as the next site of a grand cathedral fitting the Glory of the Church for all.

AG: Interesting thought Marquis Visconti. Certainly this area could be considered as a location for a structure in keeping with the Church’s vision.

AV: Please keep in mind Your Eminence that the structure we both envision should be magnificent in nature reflecting God’s glory and the Church’s influence on our daily lives.

AG: If His Holiness in Rome agrees to this plan, who will pay for it and how? Who will design and build this edifice?

AV: We have a man named Buscheto who is capable of designing such a cathedral. He is has a fellow workman by the name of Rainoldo who will see to the actual building. As far as the cost, we will donate the land for the complex and will levy taxes to help offset the expenses. After the complex is finished the property will sub vent to the church. I think this should be satisfactory to both sides. The Church’s holdings in Pisa will keep any with greedy intentions at bay for a considerable period of time and will provide another Church foothold on the trade route.
AG: Your proposition may have some merit Marquis Visconti. I will consider it and review the details with His Holiness Pope Alexander II and advise you of our decision. You should hear from us by in a few months.

AV: Thank you for your consideration Your Eminence.

April 20 1061 Roberto De Matteo

Conversation between His Most Honorable Alberto Visconti and Buschetto and Renaldo

AV: Good morning cousins, how are you both?

BU: Fine, what do you want?

AV: We are going to build a magnificent cathedral here in Pisa and you are going to design and build it.

BU: Come Renoldo, our cousin has been in bad wine again. We have work to do.

AV: Sit down the both of you! We are going to build a magnificent cathedral here in Pisa. We must do this to protect ourselves from the greedy city states that surround us. The other states in our alliance Corsica, Sardinia and Sicily are far from our shores and would not be able to come to our aid in a timely manner should trouble occur. Our only protection has to be the Church and we will need a magnificent Cathedral here in Pisa to establish and confirm that alliance. I have proposed a plan to the Archbishop and he will advise us of Rome’s decision soon. I have every confidence that we will hear in the affirmative. We will call the place Campo dei Miracoli (Field of Miracles)

BU: Where do you plan to build this “magnificent Cathedral”? And, what do you plan to build it with?

AV: I will donate some land that I have outside the city wall to the west of the stadium.

BU: I was right; you have been in the bad wine again. Campo dei Miracoli, bah, Campo Dei Mosquito. That land is only good for-growing the ingredients in rice fritters. Building on that site will be very difficult. Also you have not answered the question of where we will get the building materials?

AV: Ah Cousin Buschetto, I will leave the details of the actual building of the edifice to you and cousin Renoldo. I am sure the bills you submit will reflect the difficulties you encounter during the project. I am also sure you will share your largess with those who have selected you as the prime contractors.

BU: What about the materials?

AV: Leave that to me.

October 20 1061 Roberto De Matteo
Conversation between His Most Honorable Alberto Visconti and Admirals Giovani Orlando and Jacopo Ciurini

AV: Thank you for coming gentlemen. It is a pleasure to see you both in good health.

GO: Good morning to you sir. I hear you have good news.

AV: Yes indeed. We heard from Rome yesterday and they are partnering with us in building a magnificent cathedral here in Pisa.

JC: How does this news concern us?

AV: I have a plan that will make you rich in your advancing years and let you retire in splendor. The plan is simple, but I need you to make one more expedition in the future against Mahdia. Between now and that raid, you will be tasked to convert your war ships to freight vessels.

GO&JC: Never! We are not freighters. Let the meek carry goods to and fro like obedient cattle ready to be slaughtered.

AV: Look at yourselves today. You sally forth and sometimes you win a small battle or even a large battle and what is your return? Perhaps some pieces of gold? Some silks? What about the risks? You lose men. You lose ships. You may even lose your own lives.

I have an alternative. Suppose I could guarantee you a profit on every leg of your trips both outbound and inbound. Additionally, you could plan for your final battle against the Muslims and the sacking of Mahdia when the time comes.

GO: Tell us more about profit on both legs of our trips.

AV: Easy. On the outbound trips you carry the goods produced by our merchants here in Pisa for distribution abroad and you charge for the transport. On the inbound or return legs you carry, instead of ballast in your holds, the building material for the new cathedral. All of the columns and building blocks that will be needed for the cathedral will be delivered in the holds of your ships! Payment for both ways. You both are naturals for this. You know the trade routes, the currents and the ports.

GO: What about the raid on Mahdia?

AV: In about two years we will need more funds to complete the cathedral project. Mahdia is a ripe plumb ready to be picked and you two are well suited for that harvest.

And the Cathedral was built

October 30 1171 Luca De Matteo

Conversation between His Most Honorable Orlando Visconti and his scribe and secretary Luca De Matteo
OV: Luca, why is this woman coming to see me again? All she talks about is the campanili, the campanili, the campanili. What am I to do with her?

DM: Sir, I think you should hear her out. After all she does have a point. There are many campanili in town of Pisa and surrounding towns but none for our magnificent Cathedral.

OV: Oh well, let her in. Don’t let me get impatient with her. Scratch your quill or spill your ink if I do. It will be a signal to me to calm down.

October 30 1171 Luca De Matteo

Conversation between His Most Honorable Orlando Visconti and Madam Donna Berta Di Bernardo

OV: Good day to you madam. It is so good to see you, I hope you are well.

DB: Good day to you sir. I am well and I am not sure you are looking forward to seeing me as we will be discussing my favorite subject: a campanili for the Cathedral.

OV: De Matteo, you are scratching your pen! Please be quiet!

OV: Now madam, as you know these are hard times and raising money for such a project is problematic. I have spoken to the city council and there is no money in the budget for such an expenditure. Besides, there are plenty of campanili throughout the town and other parts of the region, why do we need another one here? De Matteo please stop scratching your quill!

DB: We have a most magnificent Cathedral, but it is lacking as it does not have a fine campanili. Our city pales when compared to other cities in the land that do have campanili.

OV: Madam I appreciate your efforts in this matter, but there is no way possible for us to build a campanili for the Cathedral, the Church will not provide the funds and the city cannot. Now I have other business to attend to, so I must move on to my next appointment.

De Matteo now you have spilled your ink!

Later that day as Luca turns the conversation with the Marquis over in his mind he wonders if he has done the right thing for his employer. He is the forth in line to hold the position of secretary and scribe to the Marquis of Pisa. He has inherited the position from his father as his father and grandfather have done before him. And as they have done before him, one set will be turned in to the Marquis at the end each day as ordered. The second set he will keep in a cedar box at his parent’s house in Lucca under the bed in his old room.

On January 5, 1172, Donna Berta di Bernardo, a widow and resident of the house of dell’Opera di Santa Maria, bequeathed sixty soldi to the Opera Campanilis petrarum Sancte Marie. The sum was then used toward the purchase of a few stones which still form the base of the bell tower. The builder was Gerardo di Gerardo.
And the tower was built

April 1, 2016

Just before lunch Umberto De Matteo, is sitting at his desk reading about the recent football game between Florence and Rome when he is interrupted by his Administrative Assistant.

AA) Umberto, there is a woman calling from Los Angeles, California who calls herself Donna di Bernardo and she claims she possesses written documentation that proves her ancestor paid for the Leaning Tower of Pisa. She is coming to Italy next week to claim her inheritance. Do you want to speak to her?

Another tale?
Pdf Entry Information

Exhibitor Name:  Bob Hills
WEN:  A697D3
Division:  FA - 351 - Genre Novelist First Ch
Class:  01 Genre Novelist First Chapter
Title:  The Building of the Cathedral
Description:  Speculative Fiction

Notes:

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