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The Architectural History of Venice

Revised and enlarged edition

with new photographs
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93  Piazzetta di San Marco from the south-east
Chapter 6

‘Roman’ Renaissance

The effect of the League of Cambrai wars on Venetian architects of the period was not only to cause lack of employment and financial hardship, but also to stifle artistic imagination. In the state of economic uncertainty that prevailed for almost two decades after the Venetian defeat at Agnadello in 1509, only the most essential schemes could be implemented, using the most conservative models. But less expensive creative outlets could still be found. Some stonemasons and builders survived on repair jobs and smaller scale sculptural commissions (although Scarpagnino, one of the lucky ones, was forced to sell his stonemason’s workshop in 1517 because he was so busy with the rebuilding of the Rialto market after the fire). One of the few significant architectural achievements of the war years came not from a stonemason but from a Veronese Dominican friar, Fra Giocondo, whose audacious design for the new Rialto market (mentioned in the previous chapter) was rejected in favour of Scarpagnino’s cheaper alternative. Fra Giocondo, a learned humanist, proficient engineer and respected architect, turned his creative impulses to preparing a beautiful illustrated edition of the Latin text of Vitruvius’ De architectura which was published in Venice in 1511. This was the first scholarly printed edition of the only architectural treatise to survive from antiquity. It preceded Cesariano’s Italian translation, published in Como, by a decade. Fra Giocondo was well qualified for the task. He was not only a classical scholar, but had also spent some years studying the antiquities of Rome as a young man. The preoccupation with the theories of Alberti among Codussi’s circle of patrons had prepared the ground for the reception of Vitruvius’ ideas in Venice, and Fra Giocondo’s edition helped to sustain an interest in architectural theory during the hiatus in building activity caused by the Cambrai wars. More important, it allowed Venetians to give thought to ways of reviving ‘authentic’ ancient Roman forms of building, as codified by Vitruvius, in their own city.

The Venetian Republic had long aspired to be the true successor to ancient Rome, a claim known to historians as ‘the Myth of Venice’. The constitution, modelled on that of the Roman republic, was considered
to be a direct continuation of the civilization of antiquity, because of the
city's supposed foundation by refugees at the time of the barbarian over-
throw of the Roman empire. Moreover, the apostolic church of San
Marco was thought to be a worthy equivalent to the basilica of Saint
Peter's in Rome. As we have seen, in the late fifteenth century Venice
was again turning to Byzantium (Emperor Constantine's new imperial
capital) for artistic and cultural inspiration. But the search for a visual
manifestation of the Serenissima's claim to be the 'New Rome' was to
lead eventually to a desire to emulate Rome itself.

The Sack of Rome by imperial troops in 1527 catalysed this trans-
formation in more ways than one. First, the devastation and political
humiliation in Rome itself after 1527 provided a psychological incen-
tive to create a 'New Rome' elsewhere. Second, the fact that the Papal
State had long been political rivals of Venice meant that Rome's decline
indirectly boosted Venetian self-confidence. Third, the Sack coincided
with the revival of Venetian fortunes after the Centauro war, to be im-
scribed at the Peace of Bologna in 1530. And finally, the Sack of Rome,
scattering the papal city's artisans and architects throughout Italy, brought
to Venice the renowned sculptor and architect Jacques Sanmicheli. At about
the same time the Venetian architect Michele Sanmicheli returned to his
hometown from central Italy, and Sebastiano Serlio arrived in Venice from
his home town of Bologna. These three architects had the credentials to
provide Venice with the new Roman idiom that would symbolize the
city's recovery from the traumatic war years and from the epidemics and
famines of the late 1540s. Supported by the culturally ambitious doge
Andrea Gritti (1439-1509), they were to formulate the architectural expres-
sion of the 'Myth of Venice'.

Sebastiano Serlio (1475-1554)

The cheapest, quickest means of communicating knowledge was, of
course, printing, and Serlio immediately began to publish engravings of
the classical orders, for which the Senate granted copyright in 1518.
Meanwhile he started work on his own architectural treatise. By this
time Venice not only had a tradition of producing beautifully illustrated
printed books, but also boasted an intelligentsia who read architectural
texts avidly. Serlio's first book, book 1 on the orders of architecture,
was published in Venice in 1537. The next volume, book 2 on the build-
ings of the ancients, appeared three years later. Serlio then moved to
France, where the following volumes of his work were issued, but he had
already provided Venice with the essential rudiments of ancient Roman
architecture. Serlio's copiously illustrated treatise offered the city a com-
pletely new range of visual ideas as well as his own version of the classical 'grammar'
of architecture. In the volume on the orders, in addition to providing
details of his recommended proportions for columns, bases, capitals
and architraves, he illustrated examples of imaginary doorways, facades,
arcades and fireplaces using the various different orders. The book is not,
however, a textbook in what we now see as classical orthodoxy, for the
designs are distinctly Mannerist in style. Bizarre touches such as cham-
fered cornices supported by canyons with huge claws, boldly rusticated
columns and flaming urns are interspersed with the more conventional
classical vocabulary. As he acknowledged in the introduction, Serlio
was heavily indebted to the ideas of his master Perruzzi, himself a notable
Mannerist architect. Nevertheless, some of the schemes, such as the
Venetian palace façades with their intricate arrangement and intentionally
chimneys, were obviously inspired by Serlio's own personal experiences
in the city (fig. 94). These Venetian projects in turn were to be extremely
influential in Venice - the 'serliana' window, for example, central to the
turned into a favourite motif in sixteenth-century architecture.
Serlio's volume on the buildings of antiquity gives plans, sections and elevations, as well as architectural details, of the principal monuments of both ancient and modern Rome. The main arches, tombs and temples of antiquity are shown alongside Bramante's Tempietto and Cortile del Belvedere, various projects for Saint Peter's, Raphael's Villa Madama and Giuliano da Sangallo's palace for the king of Naples. Serlio concludes with an intriguing passage on Egyptian architecture, introduced by the following observation on ancient Greece:

It is true that to our eyes the things of the ancient Romans are wonderful. However, anyone who could have seen the buildings of the Greeks – which have by now all disappeared and many of whose spoils adorn Rome and Venice – would perhaps say that they surpassed those of the Romans.\(^8\)

Serlio says that he gleaned his knowledge of Egyptian architecture from conversations with Cardinal Marco Grimani. His comment reminds us, however, that despite their trading activities in the eastern Mediterranean and their deep-rooted respect for Greek culture, Venetians were still largely ignorant of the ruins of ancient Greece.\(^9\) It was to Rome that their sights now turned.

Sansovino (1486–1570) and Sanmicheli (c.1487–1559)

Serlio himself built almost nothing in Venice, but his contemporaries Jacopo Sansovino and Michele Sanmicheli were both soon so fully employed that they spent the rest of their working lives in the Veneto. Like Serlio, both had studied the antiquities of Rome at first hand and were well acquainted with recent developments in architecture in central Italy. During the first two decades of the sixteenth century the centre of gravity of the artistic life of Italy had shifted from Florence to Rome. The munificent and imaginative patronage of Pope Julius II (1503–13) and Pope Leo X (1513–21) had drawn the most gifted painters, sculptors and architects of Italy to the papal court. Meanwhile archaeological excavations in Rome proceeded apace. In this stimulating atmosphere both Sansovino and Sanmicheli reached their artistic maturity.

Sansovino, whose real name was Jacopo Tatti, was born in Florence. In his youth he was apprenticed to the sculptor Andrea Sansovino and took his name. Around 1506 he went to Rome for the first time and was introduced into papal circles by his compatriot Giuliano da Sangallo.\(^10\) There he came into contact with such great artists as Bramante, Raphael and Michelangelo. Although he began two churches in Rome and built a palace for the wealthy banker Giovanni Gaddi, he was still primarily a sculptor when he fled to Venice after the Sack in 1527.\(^11\) In that year
the painter Lorenzo Lotto described him respectfully in a letter as 'second only to Michelangelo'.

Sanmicheli's artistic origins were rather different. He was born in Verona into a family of professional architects. Both his uncle and his father were architects, and although one of his brothers became a scholar and the other a priest, his cousin Polo and his nephew Gian Girolamo also entered the building profession. Like the Sangallo family in Florence, but unlike such great architects as Bramante, Raphael and Michelangelo — or indeed Sansovino — Sanmicheli did not turn to architecture from painting or sculpture, but had a highly professional technical training.

Because their backgrounds were so different, Sansovino and Sanmicheli channelled their energies in different directions in the Veneto. Although they had been subjected to similar artistic influences in central Italy, their approaches to architectural problems remained quite distinct throughout their careers. They certainly knew each other and were to some extent influenced by each other's work. They even shared patrons — for instance, the Venetian patrician Zuanne Dolfin, who was podestà or chief administrator in Verona in 1532-3, commissioned a new portal for the Palazzo del Podestà from Sanmicheli, and later, after his return to Venice, employed Sansovino to rebuild his family palace.

A clear line of demarcation divided their areas of specialization, however. Following the death of Bartolomeo Bon in 1529, Jacopo Sansovino was employed as proto, or chief superintendent of buildings, to the Procuratoria de Supra, the body that owned most of Piazza San Marco and was responsible for the upkeep of the church. In the same year Sanmicheli entered the employment of the Venetian Republic to fortify Legnago, the mainland town on the River Adige south-east of Verona. Like his fellow Veronese, Fra Giocondo, who had worked for the Venetian government on the fortification of Treviso and Padua during the Cambrai wars and on the defence of the lagoon, Sanmicheli had a high reputation as a military architect. He had already been employed by Pope Clement vii on improving the defences of Parma and Piacenza. Vasari recounts that, because of his special interest in fortifications, Sanmicheli went to Treviso and then to Padua soon after his return to the Veneto to inspect the new fortresses. But the Republican authorities were suspicious of his behaviour and arrested him. Only when assured of his good faith did they begin to make use of his know-how themselves. Sansovino, by contrast, seems to have been rarely consulted on military matters. He lacked the technical expertise of Sanmicheli, and tackled engineering problems by a combination of instinct and trial and error. Sometimes he was brilliantly successful, as on his arrival in Venice when he fortified the great domes of the church of San Marco by encircling them with iron rings. On other occasions the results were
disastrous. For example, when the first bay of his new Library collapsed in 1545, he was even imprisoned overnight and had to repair the damage at his own expense. Later the roof of the church of San Giuliano collapsed while he was having the façade rebuilt.37

Sanmicheli was put in charge of the military defences of the whole Venetian Republic in 1535.38 In this capacity he was employed by the Waterways authority until 1542, when a special magistracy was set up to take charge of the fortifications. Although he was based in his native city of Verona, he travelled extensively throughout the Venetian Republic, attending to defences as far away as Corfu and Crete. The true ‘State’ architect of Venice was the proto to the Salt Office, which financed government building projects, such as the work in the Palazzo Ducale, using revenues from the salt tax. At this time the post was held by the local architect Antonio Scarpagnino, who died in 1549. As we have seen, the State always tended towards conservatism in its patronage. They even turned down Palladio when he applied for the same job in 1554.

As Serlio pointed out in the dedication of book iv of his treatise, published in 1537, the revival in Venetian architecture during the reign of Doge Andrea Gritti (1523–38) had been carried out chiefly by Sansovino, Sanmicheli and Scarpagnino together.39 Sansovino and Sanmicheli were not the first architects working in Venice who knew Roman architecture at first hand. Fra Giocondo had studied the antiquities of Rome, and his fellow Veronese, the architect and painter Giovani Maria Falconetto, had made several trips to Rome, as his buildings in Padua show clearly; but the opportunities of both these older architects were badly restricted by the effects of the war years. Doge Gritti’s reign provided the perfect atmosphere for architectural innovation. An enthusiastic patron of music and literature as well as the visual arts, Gritti was also a decisive leader who set Venice firmly on the road to recovery.40 His team of architects, united by a felicitous alliteration as well as by their common aim to restore the grandeur of ancient Rome on Venetian soil, was warmly supported not only by the doge himself but also by an inner clique of enlightened and influential patricians. In particular, two members of the Procuratia de Supra, Antonio Cappello and Vettor Grimani, were loyal supporters of both architects.

As military architect to the Venetian Republic, Michele Sanmicheli had many tasks. As mentioned, he was responsible for the defences of the terraferma, of Venetian possessions in the eastern Mediterranean such as Corfu, Crete and Cyprus, and, of course, of the city of Venice itself. He also worked for Francesco Storza, duke of Milan, for some months in 1531, inspecting fortifications in various parts of Lombardy.

This was a period of rapid development in the art of fortification. The typical medieval defences - crenellated walls with towers over the gateways - deterred invaders by dropping missiles on them from above.
95. Fortezza di Sant'Andrea, by Michele Sanmicheli, designed 1535, begun 1543

96. Fortezza di Sant'Andrea, plan (from L. Cicognara, A. Diedo and G. Selva, Le fabbriche e i monumenti cospicui di Venezia, II, Venice, 1840)
This type of fortification, still visible in Venice in parts of the Arsenal, was made redundant by the introduction of gunpowder artillery, which could attack from much further away and demolish high vertical walls. As Vasari points out, Sanmicheli was one of the pioneers in the introduction of the angle bastion, a lower corner projection shaped like an arrowhead, from which modern weapons could be used to attack invaders at a considerable distance, while protecting the walls on either side by covering fire.

One of Sanmicheli’s most impressive achievements in this field was the construction of a new fortress on the island of Sant’Andrea at the entrance to the Venetian lagoon, opposite the castle of San Nicolo di Lido (fig. 95). This fortress surrounded an earlier castle on the site, built in the reign of Doge Michele Steno (1400–13). In 1535 the Council of Ten approved Sanmicheli’s recommendation, warmly supported by Antonio Cappello who was sa aio affe acque at this time, to rebuild both castles. Sanmicheli duly provided models for the fortress of Sant’Andrea, but the Council of Ten vacillated, and it was not until 1543 that the go-ahead was finally given. Meanwhile Sanmicheli was dispatched to the Levant to attend to the defences there.

Although the Council of Ten was characteristically indecisive, the architect received loyal encouragement from the newly instituted magistracy in charge of fortifications, one of the two prouveditori (magistrates) being Vettor Grimani. Considering the scale of the undertaking, the work proceeded with amazing speed. Sanmicheli himself must have visited the site regularly, for in 1545 he was awarded a special allowance to pay for his boat rides. The new Fortezza was largely completed by 1549 when the Council of Ten formally suspended work as an economy measure.

As Vasari explained at length, the technical difficulties were formidable, but Sanmicheli overcame them with dazzling virtuosity. Only in recent decades has constant erosion by the sea begun to cause serious damage to the structure. A typical Vasarian anecdote describes how some critics predicted that the structure would collapse under the weight of its own artillery. To prove its safety a huge quantity of heavy artillery was brought from the Arsenal and fired simultaneously in the fortress: “The building, however, remained firm, establishing the reputation of Michele and confounding the objectors, who had caused such general alarm that pregnant women had left the city.”

The plan of the Fortezza di Sant’Andrea shows how carefully the design was controlled by functional considerations (fig. 96). On the seaward side a low wall of rusticated Istrian-stone blocks forms a five-sided projection, the central side curved outwards. Casemates are distributed at intervals around the periphery, like caves at the water’s edge, reached by tunnels from the heart of the fortress. Sanmicheli incorporated the old castle into the new fortress to serve as a lookout tower,
the rest of the structure being as low as possible to increase its stability. An embankment at the back protected the fortress along the edge of a channel for bringing in supplies and ammunition. At the centre of the curved projection stands a massive rusticated Doric gateway, with imperious keystone heads over each of the three arches, standing guard like the lions' heads over the casemates. The Istrian-stone blocks are left in their rough-hewn state, so that, in Vasari's words, the fortress 'seems cut from a single stone out of the solid rock'. Of course, this illusion is highly deceptive, for the Fortezza was not built on solid rock, but on lagoon sand and mud.

In the Renaissance, military architecture was not purely functional. It was also a vehicle for the imaginative use of conventional classical elements to express the might and status of the territory within. Sanmicheli succeeded in this in the Fortezza di Sant'Andrea, at least for Vasari, who wrote that it 'equals in majesty, the most famous structures of the Romans'. The design of the triple-arched entrance combines the roughness of the Doric order with the roughness of raw stone. The metopes of the Doric frieze contain symbols of Venetian naval superiority, such as warships, and the winged lions of Saint Mark. At the corners, hefty square piers reinforce the half-columns, protecting the dark, cavernous entrance, lapped by the waves like the haunt of a mythical giant.

Sansovino received his first major commission in Venice for the rebuilding of the Zecca or mint in 1536, the year after Sanmicheli made his designs for the Fortezza di Sant'Andrea (fig. 97). These two buildings were curiously similar in function, and thus brought the styles of the two architects unusually close together. Both buildings had to be secure, fireproof and efficiently organized. Both symbolized aspects of the Venetian recovery — military in the case of the Fortezza, and economic in the case of the Zecca. Both were administered by the State, so that, although funds were ample, there was an element of instability caused by regular rotations of officers in the magistracies concerned and changing attitudes in the Council of Ten.

The new Venetian Zecca was financed in the most original manner, by the freeing of serfs in Cyprus at 50 ducats a head. The building was begun after the risk of fire and the huge demand for new coins caused by the economic boom had made the old mint almost unserviceable. The original design was for a two-storey building, in which gold was to be minted on the piano nobile for greater security, and silver on the ground floor. In 1539 an agreement was reached with the Procuratia de Supra, which owned a row of cheese and salami shops on the lagoon side of the mint, to incorporate these shops into the new structure, in order to allow more space for the gold foundries above. A courtyard at the back was surrounded by small workshops for minting, casting dies and storing coal, while the foundries were located in the front section of the
The Venetian Zecca, or mint, by Jacopo Sansovino, begun 1536; additional third storey begun 1558.

Building. A long hall separating these two parts joined the land and water entrances on each side, for the presence of the cheese shops made a front entrance impossible. A third storey was begun in 1558 to provide extra space and to protect the furnaces from the effects of direct sunlight on the roof, which made the heat inside intolerable. The building appears in its original state in two mid-sixteenth-century engravings (figs 98 and 100). Circumstances make it unlikely that Sansovino was consulted on the design of the weaker third storey, but certainly the two lower storeys form one of the architect's most powerful and confident works. The problem he faced was how to convey a sense of impregnability while providing large windows on the piano nobile to ventilate the furnaces, and a row of open arches on the ground floor to house the Procuracy's cheese shops. He resolved the dilemma by his brilliantly expressive use of rustication. The row of shops is built in the plainest type of rustication, appropriate to the prosaic function. On the piano nobile the Doric order, associated with male strength, is boldly rusticated as in the Fortezza di Sant'Andrea, to add an element of robustness. Menacing heavy lintels over the windows are clutched precariously between the ringed half-columns.

The rustication of the orders - an intriguing mixture of the sophisticated and the crude, rather like Shakespeare's Midsummer Night's
"ROMAN" RENAISSANCE

Dream — was a favourite Mannerist device. Giulio Romano, in particular, enjoyed using the combination in his buildings in Rome and Mantua. It also had a respectable classical ancestry in monuments of the Claudian era such as the Porta Maggiore in Rome. Variants of the idea had even appeared long before in Venice, in the Ca’ del Duca and Codussi’s façade of San Michele in Isola. But for Sansovino, as for Sanmicheli, the rusticated order had a far tougher message to convey. As Serlio wrote in his book IV, the mixture of rustication and the classical orders ‘is very pleasing to the eye, and represents great strength. For this reason I consider it more appropriate to a fortress than anything else’.33

Contemporary accounts indicate that the Zecca was much admired. Vasari called it the ‘finest, richest and strongest of Sansovino’s buildings’.34 But it was also frequently likened to a fortress — for instance, Francesco Sansovino in 1561 called it ‘a worthy prison for the precious gold’.35 Thus it is not surprising to find that Antonio da Ponte’s design for the city’s prisons, designed around 1580 on the far side of the Palazzo Ducale, was strongly influenced by Sansovino’s Mint.36

Sansovino’s most famous Venetian building was the Library of Saint Mark’s. According to Palladio it was ‘the richest, most ornate building

98. Il Volo del Turco (a tightrope act that formed part of the Giovedì Grasso festivities), anonymous woodcut with arms of Doge Francesco Donà (1545–55) (Museo Correr, Venice). The woodcut shows the unfinished Library and the two-storey Zecca
The Zecca and the Library of Saint Mark’s, both by Jacopo Sansovino. The south end of the Library was completed by Scamozzi between 1588 and 1591.

since Antiquity’, showing the Venetians how to build in the ‘beautiful style’. This long structure on the west side of the Piazzetta, facing the Palazzo Ducale, ‘collides’ with the Zecca on the other side with such apparent rudeness that one cannot help being struck by the difference in style and function between the two buildings (fig. 99). The Library was begun in 1537 to house the famous collection of manuscripts bequeathed to the Venetian Republic by Cardinal Bessarion of Trebizond in 1468.

The Procurators of Saint Mark’s, who commissioned the new building, already owned the existing structures on the site – a row of hosteleries and taverns dating from the late twelfth century, with a meat market at the lagoon end and a row of lean-to bakers’ stalls in front. These untidy buildings, visible in a late-fifteenth-century painting attributed to Lazzaro Bastiani in the Museo Correr in Venice, added nothing to the dignity of the Piazzetta, and in any case were nearing the end of their useful life.

As we learn from Vasari’s biography and from contemporary records, the first task that Sansovino tackled when he was appointed proto to the Procurators in 1529 was to remove the food stalls and latrines at the feet of the two great columns in the Piazzetta. Thus, from the very beginning, he was dedicated to improving the centre of the city of Venice and removing undignified eyesores. In the event it proved a long and difficult task to find alternative nearby sites for the hosteleries, which
had to be demolished to make room for the new Library. Because of the delays, only sixteen bays were completed before Sansovino’s death in 1570. The remainder was completed afterwards by Vincenzo Scamozzi. The Library appears in its incomplete form in two sixteenth-century woodcuts, which also show the two-storey Mint. Jost Amman’s view gives a vivid impression of the sort of use to which the inns were put (fig. 100).

The Library reading-room occupies the seven bays of the piano nobile nearest the Campanile, those that were completed first (fig. 103). The entrance in the central arch of the twenty-one-bay arcade leads by an impressive staircase, its barrel-vaulted ceiling richly decorated with gilded stucco and paintings, to a square vestibule which was used as a school for teaching classics to young nobles. The vestibule opens into the magnificent reading-room, brightly lit by the row of large, east-facing windows. It is surely no coincidence that Vitruvius recommends that libraries, like bedrooms, should face the east. The coffered ceiling
Piazza San Marco, plan showing the layout after Sansovino's remodelling (from L. Cicognara, A. Diedo and G. Selva, *Le fabbriche e i monumenti cospicui di Venezia*, i, Venice, 1838). A: San Marco; B: Palazzo Ducale; C: Procuratie Vecchie; D: Campanile; E: Torre dell'Orologio; F: Piazzetta dei Leoncini; G: Palazzo Patriarcale; H: prisons; I: Loggetta; J: Library; K: Zecca; L: Procuratie Nuove; M: Giardini Reali; N: Ala Napoleonica.
contains seven rows of circular paintings by the best artists of the day. The Procurators held a competition to choose the best painting, to be judged by Sansovino’s great friend Titian. The prize of a gold chain was awarded to Paolo Veronese for his roundel depicting Music. The room originally had rows of reading desks, arranged like church pews on either side of a central aisle, rather like the desks that are still preserved in Michelangelo’s Laurentian Library in Florence. The piano nobile apartments at the other end of the Library building, completed after Sansovino’s death, contained office accommodation for the Procurators. On the ground floor the arcade opened on to a row of shops.

The elevation of the exterior was designed to be continued around the whole of the south side of Piazza San Marco as far as the church of San Geminiano. Thus its design was less strictly related to its function than that of the Zecca, or indeed Sanmicheli’s Fortezza. Indeed, the project had been commissioned in principle in 1536, before the decision to house Bessarion’s library inside. From the exterior the spectator is unaware of precisely where in the long façade the library itself is located. The design was conceived as much to mould the open spaces around as to contain the rooms within. Sansovino showed his awareness of the importance of the Piazza and the Piazzetta by the orientation of the new buildings, making the existing campanile a free-standing monument on the corner between the two adjoining open spaces. As Gentile Bellini’s painting of the Procession in Piazza San Marco shows, the Campanile was originally flanked by buildings rather than free-standing (fig. 17). According to Sansovino’s design, the south side of the piazza was realigned to make the space trapezium-shaped. Thus San Marco became the central feature of the eastern prospect, and the Palazzo Ducale became visible from anywhere in the Piazza (fig. 101). (Bellini had contrived this artificially in his painting by altering the relative positions of the buildings.)

What was it that made the Library façade so famous, both in Venice and elsewhere (fig. 102)? The basic elements of the design – large piano nobile windows with balconies over an arcade below – were not revolutionary in Venice. In fact they reproduce the essential features of the previous building on the site. Nor was the use of richly carved Istrian stone unprecedented in Venice, where there was a tradition of high quality stone-carving. The newly built Scuola Grande di San Rocco, for example, was just as ornate (fig. 96). Moreover, Codussi in Venice and Falconetto in Padua had already shown how to use the classical orders to organize a façade and add an air of classical dignity.

It seems that to Venetians the Library embodied exactly what they were seeking – a transposition of the ancient Roman style of building on to Venetian soil. Classical reminiscences abound – obelisks, keystone heads, spandrel figures and the rich frieze with putti bearing garlands.
The correct use of the Doric and Ionic orders with their appropriate friezes, cornices and bases made the classical allusion yet more convincing to Venetian eyes. The column-arch arrangement derives from well-known ancient Roman buildings such as the Colosseum and the Theatre of Marcellus.

In reality, however, Sansovino’s Library can hardly be considered ‘Roman’ in either the antique or the High Renaissance sense. The contrast with Michelangelo’s Capitoline palaces, designed for the ancient centre of Rome around 1538, is revealing. Both projects were for two-storey buildings with arcades below and apartments above, crowned by balustrades bearing statues. Both façades were conceived chiefly to articulate and define the open spaces in front. Both designs were conditioned by the Mannerist tendencies of their age, revealed in the window-tabernacles of the Capitoline palaces and the daring clash with the Zecca at the south end of the Library. Yet the vibrating chiaroscuro of the Library is very different from the hard lines of the yellow travertine palaces on the Capitol. While Sansovino emphasized the breadth of his façade by means of its two bold entablatures, Michelangelo used a giant order of pilasters to counteract the width of his elevation. In the Library
the half-columns are made to appear to support the whole structure, and the wall surface is hardly visible, in contrast to the Capitoline palaces. Though Michelangelo and Sansovino were both great sculptors, Michelangelo’s severe linear design made little use of his sculptural abilities. Sansovino, on the other hand, rightly realized that a building richly decorated with all’antica sculpture would make a deep impression on the sensibilities of the Venetian nobility, with their long tradition of collecting classical sculpture. It was his capacity to articulate façades in high relief that was perhaps Sansovino’s most important contribution to Venetian architecture. The projecting cornices and half-columns of the Library give the building a new massiveness and sense of grandeur. The rhythms are slower and more emphatic than, say, those of the Palazzo Ducale opposite. In contrast to the Procuratie Vecchie on the far side of the Piazza the whole façade is not conceived as a wall surface pierced by windows, with the classical orders, as it were, engraved on the plane of the wall. Instead it is a three-dimensional structure, with the deep shadows of the windows and arches enhanced by the play of light on the richly carved Istrian stone. This sense of volume was not in itself new in Venice – consider,
for example, the weighty three-dimensionality of the church of San Marco and the rich sculptural ornament of the Scuola di San Rocco. But as we have seen, San Marco was viewed in Venice almost like a work of antiquity, and during the Gothic period the wall surface had re-emerged as an expressive architectural component in its own right.

Sanzio himself designed some buildings of a more sober, two-dimensional character. The Library may be his most famous work, but it is not exactly typical. Indeed, it is difficult to pinpoint Sanzio's contribution to the architecture of Venice, for he was a supremely adaptable architect. Always sensitive to the needs of his patrons, he varied each design according to the specific circumstances of the commission.

Thus, the new Loggetta at the foot of the Campanile was as sculptural and richly coloured as his Fabbriche Nuove, the new Rialto warehouses, were two-dimensional and monochromatic. The Loggetta was begun in 1536 for the Procurators of Saint Mark's as a meeting place for nobles (fig. 104), replacing the smaller loggia visible in Botticelli's painting. The Fabbriche Nuove were commissioned by the Council of Ten, and began in 1534 (fig. 105). The Loggetta was expected to provide an eye-catching piece of stage scenery for public processions, like the little coloured marble pavilions in the paintings of Carpaccio. The Fabbriche

Nuove, on the other hand, were erected in order to add a more respectable air to an already crowded Rialto market. No expense was spared on the Loggetta, which was built of the richest materials. In contrast, the Council of Ten hoped to recover the cost of the Fabbriche Nuove from the rent of the new shops and store-rooms. The Loggetta was the vehicle for an elaborate sculptural programme glorifying the Venetian Republic, while the Fabbriche Nuove have no sculptural decoration whatsoever. The Loggetta, with its red, white and dark-green marble and its bronze statues, was perhaps the last important richly coloured exercise in Venice. The Fabbriche Nuove display the Renaissance preference for the whiteness of Carrara stone and pale marbles, which was to suppress the Venetian love of colour in the city's architecture for at least two centuries. The Loggetta was begun at the end of the reign of Dogaressa, while Venetian spirits and expectations were still high, but the Fabbriche Nuove were conceived at a time of greater caution and realism. Above all, these two schemes were determined by the Renaissance concept of decorum - in other words, that the style of a building should be appropriate to its function, just as the behaviour of a person should reflect his position in life. For the Loggetta Sanzio chose the most elaborate of the orders, the Composite, with its columns boldly
free-standing, like those of a Roman triumphal arch. But the Fabbriche Nuove revealed their more prosaic function through their simplified Doric and Ionic pilaster orders over a rusticated waterfront arcade.

In addition to their public commissions Sansovino and Sansmicheli also worked for private and ecclesiastical patrons. In this their work was divided geographically. From the time of his unbuilt design for a palace for Vettor Grimani as early as 1528, Sansovino held a virtual monopoly of the principal domestic and religious commissions in Venice until his position of supremacy was challenged by Palladio in the 1560s. The two fine palaces designed by Sansmicheli for sites in Venice were both late works, probably began only a few years before his death in 1559. Meanwhile Sansmicheli dominated the scene in his home town, Verona, not only as an expert in the art of fortification and designer of imposing city gates, but also as a gifted, all-round architect. Thus four of the principal towns on Venetian territory each received the stamp of a great sixteenth-century architect — Sansovino in Venice, Falconetto in Padua, Sansmicheli in Verona and, later, Palladio in Vicenza. And as we shall see, Palladio was soon to make his mark on Venice itself.

Sansovino's first Venetian family palace was the Palazzo Dolfin, situated on the Grand Canal near the Rialto bridge (fig. 106). The patrician who commissioned the palace, Zuanne Dolfin, was one of those more fortunate nobles who were still successfully engaged in shipping and commerce. Following the old Venetian practice he combined this with a successful career in public service. He was also lucky in having no brothers with whom to share his father's inheritance. Furthermore, his wife was a member of the wealthy Vendramin family. Thus he had sufficient reserves of capital behind him to trade adventurously and profitably.

His new palace was begun in 1538. As in Sansovino's Zecca, the façade was moved forward to provide more space on the upper floors, in this case incorporating a public street through a sottoportego below. The waterfront arcade across the whole façade must have seemed especially appropriate to the mercantile status of the owner, because of its associations with the Veneto-Byzantine casa fondaco. In order not to obstruct the street, the water entrance was at the side on a narrow rio, and the land entrance was at the back.

Nothing survives but the façade of this palace, for the rest was rebuilt for the last doge of Venice, Ludovico Manin, by the neo-classical architect Giannantonio Selva. The style of the façade must have seemed to Venetians like a demonstration piece in Roman 'correctness' with its Doric, Ionic and Corinthian orders and its row of all'antica lions' heads in the uppermost frieze. But the design is also firmly rooted in native conventions of palace building with its tripartite façade and its large windows more closely spaced in the centre. The unclassical use of an
even number of bays, with a solid element in the centre (echoing the Gothic Palazzo Bembo next door), affirms the absence of a waterfront entrance.

The position of supremacy that Sansovino rapidly achieved in Venice is clear from the fact that by 1537 he had been asked by the Corner family, the richest in the city and one of the most distinguished, to rebuild their palace on the Grand Canal at San Maurizio, destroyed by fire in 1532 (fig. 107). The old Gothic palace on the site had been bought by the Procurator Zorzi Corner, brother of Queen Caterina of Cyprus, before his death in 1527. The Corner family owned vast estates in Cyprus, yielding huge crops of cotton, sugar and wheat. They were one
of the so-called case vecchie, the original noble families who believed
themselves descended from the first refugees from Roman cities on the
mainland. Like other case vecchie, they maintained close ties with the
papal court, and members of the family held high ecclesiastical office –
two of Zorzi’s sons and three of his grandsons were cardinals.

Because of the legal problems involved in dividing Zorzi’s huge estate
among his four surviving sons, the new palace was not actually begun
until about 1545. Having provided Venice with a Roman manifesto in
the Palazzo Dolfin, Sansovino was now prepared to treat classical
elements more daringly. In particular, the imaginative detailing of the
rusticated Doric window aedicules on the ground floor shows his readi-
ness to create Mannerist effects, as his contemporaries were doing else-
where in Italy. Sanmicheli in his Palazzo Canossa in Verona had already
demonstrated how effectively paired orders, like those used in Roman
High Renaissance palaces such as Bramante’s House of Raphael, could
be adapted to Venetian palace types. The double order allows more of
the wall surface to be concealed, giving greater significance to the
columns as structural, rather than decorative elements. As in the Palazzo
Dolfin, Sansovino used the tall, round-headed window type that was so
popular in Renaissance Venice. Here, however, instead of narrowing and
doubling up the central bays he made all the bays of uniform width, with
the three central windows subtly widened to admit more light to the long
salone or portego within. This device gives the building a more classical
air, while preserving the practical advantages of the local building type.

The ground-plan is typically Venetian. A long androne in the centre,
with store-rooms on either side, leads to an inner cortile. This courtyard
contains the cistern, but not the main staircase, which is here incorpo-
rated into the interior, where it is better protected from the elements.
Before his arrival in Venice, Sansovino had already had the useful expe-
rience of designing a palace for a long, narrow, urban site in his only
Roman palace, the Palazzo Gaddi.

Sanmicheli’s most prominent Venetian palace, designed for the procur-
ator Gerolamo Grimani shortly before the architect’s death in 1559 and
built under the supervision of Gian Giacomo de’ Grigi, was smaller than
the Palazzo Corner, yet emphatically grandiose in style (fig. 108). This
seems to reflect a certain need for self-assertion on the part of the
Grimani family, who, though an old-established noble family, did not
belong to the so-called case vecchie. Antonio Grimani, founder of the
family fortune, made his money by cunning commodity dealing at a time
of violently fluctuating prices. He subsequently had a disastrous period
as captain of the Venetian navy, but recovered from his disgrace and was
doge from 1521 to 1523.

Whereas Sansovino took care to make his palace façades seem an inte-
gral part of the structure, the façade of Sanmicheli’s Palazzo Grimani juts
out from the top of the palace, making a bold statement in its own right. The effect of grandeur is heightened by increasing the size of the individual classical elements. By the ingenious use of mezzanines Sanmicheli fitted all the necessary rooms and their windows into three lofty storeys of just five huge bays each. Indeed, as originally designed, the palace would have been even taller, but the height of the upper two storeys was reduced after Sanmicheli’s death. With its three Corinthian orders, paired on each side of the outer bays, the Palazzo Grimani façade looks back to Codussi’s Palazzo Loredan (Vendramin-Calergi). However, the triumphal-arch rhythm of the three central bays gives it a distinctly Roman air and adds to the sense of sober dignity. Whereas Sansovino’s Palazzo Corner shows a sculptor’s enjoyment of varied surface textures, Sanmicheli’s is severely architectonic, dominated by its grid of heavy horizontal and vertical components.
Ironically, Sanmicheli's palace is actually far smaller than it appears, for the site becomes rapidly narrower towards the back (fig. 109). In consequence, the position of the long, central androne does not correspond with the centre of the façade. As the ground-plan shows, its displacement is masked by the colonnaded entrance hall at the water entrance. Like the Palazzo Corner, the Palazzo Grimani has a grand interior staircase. Because of the narrow site the courtyard is at the very back, for in this case there was less need to admit extra light to the heart of the building by means of an inner court.

In his guide to Venice in 1581, Francesco Sansovino declared that four patrician palaces in the city surpassed all the others in size, grandeur, expense and Vitruvian discipline. These were his father's two palaces for the Dolfin and Corner families, Sanmicheli's Palazzo Grimani and Codussi's Palazzo Loredan, all of which, he claimed, had cost more than
200,000 ducats (figs 82, 106-8). Yet we should not forget that the families who commissioned these magnificent buildings represented a tiny minority of the population of the city. The nobility itself was more numerous than at almost any other period, representing about 6 per cent of the total number of inhabitants in the mid-sixteenth century, but already by this stage great wealth was becoming concentrated in the hands of fewer and fewer noble families, while the other patricians were becoming steadily poorer.

Together with the Corner family, the Grimani were perhaps the most active private patrons of art and architecture in sixteenth-century Venice. Both families not only enjoyed great wealth, but also maintained close ties with Rome through their possession of high ecclesiastical offices. Thus both were eager to embrace the new ‘Roman’ style of Sanmicheli and Sansovino. On the whole the Grimani seem to have been readier to accept radically new artistic developments from central Italy than the older-established Corner family, who were more deeply rooted in Venetian traditions. But it was Sansovino’s design for the Palazzo Corner – so sensitively attuned as it was to Venetian tastes and expectations – that was to prove more influential in Venice in the long run.

Both Sansovino and Sanmicheli are known primarily as secular architects, unlike other great Renaissance masters such as Brunelleschi, Alberti and Bramante. In Venice and the Veneto political and economic power was concentrated as far as possible in secular hands, and the State tried constantly to inhibit the passage of wealth from secular to ecclesiastical ownership. The doges were not, on the whole, enthusiastic patrons of religious art, except in San Marco, their own private chapel. The Republic tried to keep religious affairs under State control, and had authority over both the nunneries and the parish churches. Only the male religious orders were free from government intervention, and indeed were often the most imaginative patrons of architecture in the city.

Despite the State measures to keep the Church in its place, both Sansovino and Sanmicheli received interesting religious commissions in the Veneto – Sanmicheli in and around Verona, and Sansovino in Venice. Sansovino’s most important religious work – though one of his most undemonstrative designs – was the new church of San Francesco della Vigna, begun for the friars of the Observant Franciscan order in 1534 (fig. 110). The cost of the building was supported by a clique of some of the wealthiest and most influential noble families in the city, who each acquired family chapels in the new church, Doge Andrea Gritti himself bought the right to be buried in the chancel. This was therefore a commission that brought great prestige to the architect. But as we saw in the case of San Giobbe, rebuilt in the mid-fifteenth century by the same order, the Observant Franciscans exerted strict control over the architecture of their churches. Indeed, Sansovino’s
San Francesco della Vigna, interior, by Sansovino, begun 1534

San Francesco della Vigna, plan (from L. Cicognara, A. Diedo and G. Selva, Le fabbriche e i monumenti conspicui di Venezia, 11, Venice, 1840).
design was substantially modified by one of the friars at San Francesco della Vigna, the humanist scholar Fra Francesco Zorzi. The revisions were made in the light of his views on proportion, acoustics and the need for austerity. Zorzi’s ideas on harmonic proportion reflected his interest in neo-Platonic philosophy. For instance, he reduced all the important dimensions to multiples of the number three, which according to Plato was the most perfect number – and also, conveniently, symbolized the Trinity in Christian thought. Like the Camaldolese monks who had commissioned San Michele in Isola from Codussi, the friars of San Francesco were eager to embody up-to-date Renaissance theories in their new church. Though the most influential figures in Venetian monasteries were generally members of prominent noble families, their patronage was at the same time characteristically more enlightened than either the State or individual patricians, who were traditionally conservative in their tastes. Just as San Giobbe had close links with the church of the Osservanza in Siena, so the design of San Francesco della Vigna was modelled on Cronaca’s church of San Salvatore al Monte in Florence, begun for the same order at the end of the fifteenth century. Thus Sansovino was strictly constrained, both by Zorzi’s intervention and by the decision to base his design on this Florentine prototype.

The Observant branch of the order was so called because it attempted to observe the Franciscan ideals of poverty and humility more strictly than the Conventual branch. (In Venice the Conventual friars, or Frati Minori, were based at the church of the Frari.) The search for austerity is obvious in Sansovino’s design. Its style is far removed from that of his other buildings of the same period, such as the Library and the Zecca. The flat, whitewashed wall surfaces of the interior are adorned only by simple Istrian-stone Doric pilasters, with fluted capitals like those of San Salvatore in Florence. The bright, even lighting, unusual in Venetian churches at this time, emphasizes the linear clarity of the interior.

The plan (fig. 111) adheres to the Observant Franciscan convention of a single nave with side chapels, like those of the Osservanza, San Salvatore al Monte and San Giobbe. As a result, the pulpits and the high altar are clearly visible from anywhere in the nave. The only mysterious element is the long friars’ choir, hidden behind the high altar. The location of the choir behind the high altar may have been anticipated in some form at San Giobbe, but it also followed well-known precedents such as Michelozzo’s Santissima Annunziata in Florence and Bramante’s choir at Santa Maria del Popolo in Rome. The large windows on the end wall, which illuminate the choir, actually make it appear dimly lit from other parts of the church because of the contrejoureffect. This subtle device was to be taken over by Palladio in his two great Venetian churches, San Giorgio Maggiore and the Redentore. Palladio himself built the façade of the church of San Francesco della Vigna, as we shall see later.
112 Church of the Ospedale degli Incurabili, by Sansovino, begun 1565. Section by Francesco Lazzari, early nineteenth century (Museo Correr, Venice)

113 Church of the Ospedale degli Incurabili, plan by Francesco Lazzari, early nineteenth century (Museo Correr, Venice)
Sansovino's religious commissions were not always so tightly bound to an established tradition. In the case of the church of the Incurabili hospital, begun to his design in 1565, there was no obvious prototype on which to base the project. By the middle of the sixteenth century the four big state-assisted hospitals of the city had acquired a very special reputation for their choirs of orphan girls. In Venice a new kind of religious music — the coro spezzato, or split choir — was beginning to take over from the medieval Gregorian chant, and it soon became fashionable for nobles and foreign visitors to go to one of the four hospitals, or to San Marco, on feast days to hear long masses performed by such choirs.

The Ospedale degli Incurabili — in fact the syphilis hospital, which had an orphanage attached — was the first to build a new church especially designed for polyphonic choral music. Sansovino chose an oval plan, or rather a rectangle with rounded ends, for which there was no precedent in Venice (fig. 113). By adopting such a compact form he hoped to avoid confusing echoes, which were such a problem in the cavernous spaces of San Marco. The flat wooden roof was intended to absorb echoes, like the sounding board of a musical instrument, and to project sound back into the church (fig. 112). The choirs sang from three raised galleries, on either side of the nave and over the entrance, hidden from the public gaze by iron grilles. The church was built within the courtyard of the hospital, and the little girls reached their places in the church by means of raised passages from their living quarters. The church was built on a very small budget; only 600 ducats were provided by the State and the rest had to be made up from private donations. Unfortunately the church was demolished in 1831, and its contents dispersed, but the hospital still exists on the Zattere, and two of the nave altars are now in the church of San Giovanni di Malta. This efficient and highly original design, one of the elderly Sansovino's last works, became a model from which future orphanage-choir churches in the city would have much to learn.

Andrea Palladio (1508-1580)

It was not until the last decade of Sansovino's life that Palladio began to receive prominent commissions in Venice. By now the Florentine architect was an old man — he was already 74 in 1560 when Palladio began his first Venetian building, the refectory of the Benedictine monastery on the island of San Giorgio Maggiore. Significantly, in line with the pattern that we find repeated so often in Venetian architectural history, it was the religious institutions rather than the organs of State or the nobility that proved most willing to accept Palladio's bold innovations.
Andrea Palladio was born in Padua and spent most of his working life in the Veneto. From the late 1530s onwards he was erecting magnificent buildings in and around Vicenza. His Vicentine palaces and Veneto villas were greatly admired, but although he had influential Venetian patrons on the terraferma, the conservative Venetian establishment long resisted the idea of seeing such pioneering architecture in their own city. Jacopo Sansovino had ensured his success in the very special context of Venice by incorporating many aspects of the Venetian architectural tradition into his own style. But Palladio adopted a less compromising approach. In a sense it is more surprising that so small and provincial a town as Vicenza was prepared to accept buildings designed according to such fundamentally new principles, than that the city of Venice viewed Palladio's innovations with suspicion.

After the death of the little known Zuan Antonio Rosso in 1554, Palladio was one of those who applied to succeed him in the position of proto to the Salt Office (that is, the architect responsible for the public buildings of the city, especially the Palazzo Ducale). Yet his application was unsuccessful, and instead the insignificant Pietro de' Guberni was appointed to the post. Such was the Venetian attachment to the buildings that symbolized the permanence of the Republic that the predictable skills of a local builder were preferred to the radical ideas of an architect of true genius. Shortly afterwards, Palladio's project for the Scala d'Oro in the Palazzo Ducale, which he submitted in 1555, was turned down in favour of a design by Sansovino; and among the schemes for the new Rialto bridge produced by various great architects in the same decade, Sansovino's rather than Palladio's seems to have been the one that received most support. (In the event, neither of these schemes was to be the one chosen.)

In the early 1560s Palladio received several important commissions from religious orders in Venice. Vasari, who visited the city in 1566, was particularly impressed by his project for the Convento della Carità. This new monastery building for the Lateran branch of the Augustinian Regular Canons, begun in 1561, was never completed. It was badly damaged by fire in 1610 and has since been much altered. Moreover, since it has a sober, unremarkable exterior, and the more imposing interior is now little visited, it has been under-rated or neglected by many modern writers. The site of the Convento della Carità, much as it must have appeared in Palladio's lifetime, is evocatively recorded in Canaletto's early masterpiece known as The Stonemason's Yard (fig. 124). In this picture the entrance to the monastery can be seen on the far bank of the Grand Canal between the fine Gothic church of the Carità and the scuola grande of the same name. The whole group of buildings is now the seat of the Accademia di Belle Arti.
The elaborate project for the new convent was recorded with evident pride in Palladio's *Quattro libri dell'architettura*, published in Venice in 1570 (fig. 115). As the text explains, the monastery was intended as a recreation of the houses of the ancients. Palladio's reconstructions of Greek and Roman private houses were already well known in Venice through the illustrations that he provided for Daniele Barbaro's edition of Vitruvius, published there in 1556. Probably the close links that the Lateran Canons maintained with their superiors in Rome led them to accept so strictly classical an idea, and one so apparently alien from medieval conventions of monastic building. The account of the project in the *Quattro libri* makes much of the practical advantages, which would also have encouraged the monks to accept the design.61

Only the portions on the top right of the published plan (confusingly printed in reverse) were ever built. These consisted of an open colonnaded atrium, the sacristy or tablinum, one of the oval staircases, and the east wing of the cloister. The Gothic church flanked the north side...
115 (left) Andrea Palladio's project for the Convento della Carità, from his I quattro libri dell'architettura, Venice, 1570. The plan is printed in reverse.

116 (below) East wing of the cloister of the Convento della Carità by Palladio, begun 1561; detail of terracotta ornament.
of the tablinum (that is, the right-hand side of the reversed, printed plan). As depicted in the Quattro libri, the atrium could only have served as the entrance hall from the church. In reality Palladio had to rely on the existing entrance to the cloister for direct street access. As elsewhere in the treatise, however, he illustrated an idealized version of his scheme, disregarding the restrictions of the cramped site.

The atrium, with its huge Corinthian columns, was much admired at the time, but was completely destroyed by fire in 1635. Fortunately the rest of the executed parts of Palladio's project has survived. The east wing of the cloister has a two-story loggetta, originally open, with a row of monks' cells above (fig. 116). The frieze, Ionic and Corinthian orders, superimposed one above the other in orthodox succession, are soberly classical in style. The use of materials, however, is highly original, with brick even for the columns and arches, and the ornament in cast terracotta. This gives the elevation a characteristically Venetian warm red hue, while at the same time recalling the skillful way in which the ancient Romans used brick in their constructions. The interior parts of the monastery are even more striking. The dramatic oval staircase, with its open well in the centre and its wide cantilevered out from the wall, became justifiably famous, and led to a fine series of imitations both in Venice and in England. The sacristy, called the tablinum by Palladio to underline his classicizing intention, has an almost neo-classical sobriety and purity of form. Hefty free-standing columns support the heavy vault and help to articulate the otherwise severe interior. The austerity is relieved, too, by the pair of elegant apses, and by the rich Doric entablature — daringly omitting the frieze — that runs around the whole room.

It was surely Palladio's gift for uniting simplicity with grandeur, so evident in the buildings of the Convento della Carità, that gave new life to the architecture of Venice. Sansovino's knowledge of the buildings of Rome had provided the city with a wealth of new motifs as well as a greater understanding of how to handle classical forms coherently and correctly. But the sculptural and chromatic richness of buildings such as the Library and the Loggetta served rather to enliven the surfaces than to emphasize the monumental scale of the structures or the volume of the spaces within. Sansovino's most successful works relied on the dramatic use of surface chiaroscuro for much of their impact. Palladio, on the other hand, could create imposing effects with the sparsest of decoration.

In the same years, Palladio was employed to design the façade of Sansovino's most important Venetian church, San Francesco della Vigna (fig. 117). The fact that this commission, financed by the Grimani family, was awarded during the lifetime of the older architect showed convincingly that Palladio's reputation was at last becoming established in Venice. A comparison between Sansovino's design, illustrated on the
foundation medals of 1534, and the executed façade, begun around 1562, reveals how Palladio transformed the basic elements of Sansovino’s model into something far more grand and commanding. In Palladio’s façade the four half-columns of the main order are elongated into a giant order, which is compressed into the central section as if buttressed by the lower side portions. Both orders are raised on a continuous high plinth, so that the bases of all the columns stand dramatically high above head height." The smaller order indicates the presence
of the row of lower side chapels on either side of the nave, although in reality it rises considerably higher than the chapels behind. As the side view shows, Palladio’s structure is not coherently integrated with the rest of the church. He was clearly more interested (like his patrons) in creating an imposing monument in its own right, than in compromising his design unduly to fit the existing structure. The unprecedentedly huge scale of the classical forms on the façade of San Francesco della Vigna must have been astonishing in Venice at this time, especially in its peripheral location. In the early 1560s there were still hardly any prominent Istrian-stone church façades in the city, with the notable exception of Codussi’s San Michele in Isola. Even grand Gothic churches such as the Frari and Santo Stefano were faced relatively simply in brick, while Santi Giovanni e Paolo and San Salvador still lacked their stone façades. Most parish churches, like their monastic counterparts, had brick exteriors, with Istrian stone confined to the architectural detail. The exteriors of San Marco and, on a smaller scale, the Miracoli derived their effectiveness from the use of rich, colourful materials, rather than from the dignity of their classical elements. Even Sansovino’s Istrian-stone façades for the parish churches of San Geminiano and San Giuliano, both begun in the 1550s, were less impressive, for their two-order elevations failed to rival the nobility of Palladio’s huge giant order.

The particular quality of Palladio’s artistic imagination that allowed him to create majestic effects with such economy of means is vividly illustrated in the new Benedictine church of San Giorgio Maggiore, which he began in 1565 (fig. 118). As early as 1520 the monks had considered rebuilding their old church and monastery. Indeed an anonymous drawing, which seems to be an early project for the same complex of buildings, survives in the Venetian State Archives. Francesco Sansovino’s guide to Venice, published in 1581, states that Palladio’s design was based on ‘a model made some time before’. In other words, Palladio may even have been instructed to use an earlier project, such as this one, as his starting point. His wooden model for the church of San Giorgio was built during the winter of 1565–6. By this time the new refectory, which he had begun for the monastery in 1560, was already finished. Meanwhile the monks asked permission from the Senate to fell 1,000 oak trees on their terraferma property for the new foundations. (Usually the shipbuilding industry had priority in the use of the now badly depleted mainland forests.) The foundation stone of the church was laid in March 1566, and from then on construction proceeded rapidly. By 1576 the building was virtually completed, apart from the façade. This was not erected until 1607–11, a quarter of a century after the architect’s death, although the wording of the stonemasons’ contract issued in 1607 implies that Palladio’s model was followed strictly.
This was the first complete church that Palladio built, yet it shows a remarkable sureness of aim. In his treatise he demonstrated his familiarity with the temples of antiquity, but he was fully aware that these antique models were not entirely suitable for the Christian liturgy. His recommendations on church building distinguish clearly between ideal and reality. ‘Since the round [form]... is the only one amongst all the figures that is simple, uniform, equal, strong and capacious, let us make our temples round’, he writes. But after a long explanation of the advantages of the circular plan he adds: ‘Those churches are also very laudable that are made in the form of a cross... because... they represent to the eyes of the beholders that wood from which depended our Salvation. And of this form I have made the church of San Giorgio Maggiore at Venice.’

Obviously Palladio had thought carefully about more recent traditions of church building as well as about ancient temple architecture. At San Giorgio he had to take special account of Benedictine architectural conventions. In particular he could hardly disregard the huge new church of the most famous Benedictine abbey in the area, Santa Giustina in Padua, which was begun in 1521 and was more or less complete by 1560.
This splendid building must at least have inspired the earlier model that Palladio inherited when he took on the commission. From Santa Giustina he borrowed the triple-naved plan with apsed chancel and transepts and great central dome over the crossing (fig. 119). What is interesting is the way in which he consistently avoided all those features of Santa Giustina that looked back to San Marco in Venice. For example, he omitted domes from his nave, transepts and chancel. He also replaced the triple apses of the choir and transepts of the Paduan church by single apses. Despite the fact that San Giorgio faced the great ducal church on the opposite side of the Bacino, he made few concessions to the city's rich Byzantine legacy. We have seen how local architects of the early Renaissance used Veneto-Byzantine monuments as sources of classical ideas; and even Sansovino did not scorn such precedents. But Palladio's artistic vision was uncompromising.

This is not to say that he was insensitive to the Venetian context and its special qualities and needs. One of the most important lessons that he learned from indigenous Venetian building practices was how to make effective use of Istrian stone. Codussi's façade of San Michele in Isola, built for another branch of the Benedictine order, must have been the most vivid source of inspiration. In its dazzling whiteness the façade of San Giorgio makes a dramatic impression. Unlike the Scuola di San Rocco or Sansovino's Library, the whiteness is not broken up by arcades acting as wells of deep shadow or by the chiaroscuro of rich sculptural decoration. The situation of the church, as if floating like a ship in a huge expanse of sky and water, emphasizes the frosty whiteness of the façade. In Palladio's lifetime the view of San Giorgio from Piazza San Marco was partly obscured by a row of small houses on the waterfront of the island, which were not removed until after 1609. In that year Doge Leonardo Donà complained that they interfered with his view of the church from the windows of the Palazzo Ducale. There can be little doubt that Palladio himself would have wished to have them demolished. After all, his church provides a magnificent extension to the triumphal processional scenery of Piazza San Marco. He even adopted the Composite order of the Loggetta with its swags between the capitals, here on a gigantic scale and purged of colour.

A drawing from Palladio's workshop, preserved in the Venetian State Archives, shows a plan of the completed church with a free-standing portico in front. In the event this ambitious idea – now considered to be a project dating from after Palladio's death – was never taken up.71 Only in his tiny chapel at Maser near Asolo, built for the Barbaro family, did Palladio ever build a free-standing temple front on a church. None the less, the alternative system that he used in his Venetian churches – projecting the elements of the portico on to the plane of the façade wall – was one of his most brilliant inventions. It was probably inspired by his
own drawings of classical temples depicted in orthogonal projection, which gave a similar result. The effect was equally impressive, yet the construction was both simpler and cheaper than a true portico. What is more, no wells of shadow could interrupt the gleaming whiteness of the prospect. At San Giorgio, where Palladio designed both the façade and the body of the church, he was able to avoid the stylistic discordance between the exterior and interior that is so marked at San Francesco della Vigna. Here the façade fits more neatly on to the nave, and the large and small orders – the former raised on high bases and the latter resting on the ground – reproduce faithfully the system of the interior.

Inside the church the luminosity is perhaps even more striking than outside (fig. 120). The combination of Istrian stone and whitewashed stucco had already been used in the interiors of recent Venetian monastic churches such as San Salvador and San Francesco della Vigna. What was new in San Giorgio was the use of stronger illumination, perfectly
churches, and were also involved in many other ones to improve the lighting.

As in San Zanipolo's church of San Francesco della Vigna the monks' choir behind the high altar is set not from above, but by windows in the end wall, so that a strong, almost heavenly light seems to spring from this source. In Venice the Observantine Franciscans of San Francesco della Vigna had already shown the liturgical advantage of the long monks' choir, namely, that this arrangement did not obstruct the view of the high altar from the nave. Palladio, like Sansovino, must also have known Roman precedents such as Bramante's choir in the church of Santa Maria del Popolo. In San Giorgio he adopted the arrangement in spite of the fact that in the new Benedictine church of Santa Giulia the monks' choir was still in front of the high altar. After this time, however, in Venice as elsewhere in Italy, choirs were moved from nave to less obstructive positions - usually to behind the high altar, from where the sacred music could be more easily as if from a mysterious, antiphonal source.

The monks' choir in San Giorgio was probably a large one (there are forty-eight choir stalls), and according to Benedectine practice the divine office was sung as many as seven times a day. The importance of their sacred music is expressed in the form of the low apsidal choir, designed to project sound into the church. It is possible that, on the occasion of the annual visit to the doge to San Giorgio Maggiore on Saint Stephen's day, the choir of San Marco that accompanied him occupied the new transept, although ceremonial books suggest that the singers may in fact have been positioned in the choir or elsewhere. The church had to provide an effective setting, acoustically speaking, for the coro spezzato, or divided choir, performing the polychoral church music which San Marco was so famous, as well as for the monks' choir. This may have given Palladio an incentive to refine and simplify the arrangements of the transepts of Santa Giulia, with their multiple apses and domes, since these would have caused confusing echoes. Until this time, flat wooden ceilings, which had the property of absorbing echoes, had been thought to provide the most effective acoustics in church interiors. Sansovino's wooden ceilings of this type for all the Venetian churches, including that of the famous hospital, began in the same year as San Giorgio Maggiore and designed with the specific needs of the oratorio church in mind. In Rome in the same years, however, the idea that a simple barrel vault might produce sound more satisfactorily was being tried out in the church of the Gesù, begun in 1568 as Vignola's design, and the notion soon began to take root elsewhere in Italy. In the end it was the low vault, rather than the flat wooden ceiling that prevailed in Venice. The later oratorio-choir churches of the Mendicanti and the Pietà were constructed with vaulted ceilings rather than flat roofs, and a low vault was constructed in San Francesco della Vigna in 1545, instead of the flat wooden ceiling that had originally been intended.

The second major church that Palladio erected in Venice was that of the Redentore (fig. 121). Like San Giorgio, it may be counted among the architect's greatest masterpieces. Although it has much in common with the earlier church, the very different nature of the commission inspired Palladio to refine and develop his ideas.

The Redentore, dedicated to Christ the Redeemer, was not commissioned by a monastic order, but by the Venetian Senate. It was the outcome of a vow taken in 1576 at the height of the terrible plague of 1575-76, in which about 10 per cent of the city's population perished. The Senate resolved to spend 10,000 ducats on the construction of a church in honour of the Redeemer. As part of the vow it was also decided that the doge and the Senate, together with the choir of San Marco, should visit the church every year on the anniversary of the city's final deliverance from the plague, later established as the third Sunday in July. Thus the chief function of the church was that of a votive temple, the final destination of the annual dial procession. Although it was entrusted to the care of a group of Capuchin friars, it was not built specifically to suit their requirements but, rather, to serve as a place of pilgrimage and as a setting for magnificent state ceremonies. Indeed the Capuchins, who belonged to a particularly astringent branch of the Franciscan order, complained bitterly that the church was too lavish.

Because of the commission of the Senate the church was quickly built. The foundation stone was laid in 1577, three years before Palladio's death, and the church was completed within fifteen years. The original budget of 10,000 ducats was exceeded by the huge sum of 50,100 ducats, but the advantage of state patronage was that extra expense could usually be met from public funds without long delays for further fund raising.

Like San Giorgio (but unlike San Francesco della Vigna), the Redentore has such a conspicuous position that it has become one of the most famous landmarks of the city. This was not fortuitous. The Senate considered various possible sites before they finally chose the spot on the island of the Giudecca, facing the rest of the city. By tradition, in Italy and elsewhere, oratories and votive churches were placed on prominent sites outside city boundaries, for such processional routes more spectacular. The Venetian sense of spectacle and drama must have guided the Senate in their deliberations. The doge's annual visitation passed through a labyrinth of narrow crooked alleys, before emerging on the Zattere (or raton) on the edge of the Giudeca canal, facing the new church. This route gave dramatic emphasis to the contrast between the dark, confined passageways and the light and space of the
Zattere, with the shimmering vision of the brilliant white temple on the far side of the water. A specially erected bridge of boats carried the participants across the Giudecca canal.

It has been persuasively observed by Tornavesta that the façade of the church, when seen from far away, almost gives the illusion that a centrally planned structure lies behind. It is also coordinately planned. Indeed, the façade merges nicely into the choice between the centralised and longitudinal plan for the new church. In the event a Latin-cross plan was selected, for it must have seemed most suitable for the final stages of the procession, as well as for the church's dedication. Yet the emphasis that the façade gives to the soaring dome above, with the statue of Christ the Redeemer standing triumphantly on the lantern, preserves something of the character of a more conventional, centralised hilltop sanctuary.

This was the first time that Palladio was able to place a church entrance above the level of the street in front. Following Veronese and Alberti, Palladio himself recommended in the Quattro Libri that temples should be raised on steps, but so far he had only achieved this in temple-like villas. The flight of steps would have heightened the drama of the final stages of the procession. Exaggerated before that of San Giorgio, but probably designed later, the façade is a yet more elaborate variation on the theme of overlapping temple fronts (fig. 143). The rhythm of the repeated triangular pediments gives vigorous visual support to the dome, as well as marking the nave and its lofty buttressing walls. It would need many pages to explore fully the complexities and subtleties of this façade design, with its play of half-columns and piers (or pilasters), of triangular and segmental pediments, of plant and denticled cornices, and large and small orders. The upper pair of minor pediments conceals the frieze buttresses between the clerestory windows that support the lofty barrel vault. Palladio's inspiration for the complete repetition of pediments leading up to a great dome seems to derive from his own rendering of the Pantheon in Rome, as he had depicted it in orthogonal perspective in his Quattro Libri of 1570.

The interior of the church, like that of San Giorgio, is brilliantly lit by large clerestory windows and by the apertures in the dome (fig. 145). As in the case of San Giorgio, the interior, like the façade, is entirely of whitewashed marble and terracotta; Palladio ignored the Venetian love of colour, but in so doing he was able to stress the seriousness and grandeur of the architecture itself. The interior is rich in references to the monuments of Rome, both ancient and modern. More than twenty years had elapsed since Palladio's last visit to Rome in 1554, and during this time the city's wealth of artistic ideas had become absorbed into his own personal repertory of forms. Thus there is nothing derivative about the way in which he renders the system of the dome of Bramante's...
Tempietto inside out, as it were, for the inside of the great dome over the crossing of the Redentore; or about the way in which the colonnaded apse behind the high altar recalls the wall articulation of the interior of the Pantheon. Once again, as in San Giorgio, the lessons of the Roman baths were fundamental to the design. The way in which the apsed niches emphasize the thickness of the walls, the regular rhythms of the nave elevation, and the linking of varied spatial sequences into a symmetrical, unified coherent whole, are all inspired by Palladio’s studies of ancient bath complexes (fig. 122). As Ackerman demonstrated, the single-naved church with side chapels was prominent in Counter-Reformation church design because of the acoustic and practical advantages of this arrangement for preaching. In this period Vignola’s church of the Gesù in Rome and Alessi’s San Barnaba in Milan were constructed with similar layouts. Yet, as we have seen, the type had already been established in Venice, long before the Council of Trent, in the earlier Observant Franciscan churches of San Giobbe and San Francesco della Vigna. Despite its ref-
erences to Observant Franciscan traditions, however, we cannot wonder that the Capuchin friars at the Redentore, with their extreme regard for humility and austerity, were dismayed by the magnificence of Palladio's church. In deference to their feelings, Palladio made their own choir, behind the high altar, as simple as possible. The friars were provided with new conventual buildings at the back of the church; and Palladio ensured that the exterior apses of the transepts and choir, visible from the cloisters, were also completely plain. Yet Palladio's own intentions were not irreligious. As he explained in the Quattro libri, he believed that temples should be made as fine as one could possibly imagine, in honour of the Almighty, and 'so disposed in every part that those who enter are stunned by their beauty'.

By this time Palladio had acquired respectability in Venice, with the help of influential friends and patrons such as Daniele and Marc'Antonio Barbaro, and was recognized as the city's finest architect. After each of the two great fires in the Palazzo Ducale in 1574 and 1577,
he was employed to give technical and artistic advice about the repair of the old palace. Even in this capacity his ideas were as bold as ever. After the more serious fire of 1577 he explained in his report how he believed the Gothic structure of the Palazzo Ducale to be fundamentally unsound – even before the fire damage – since the uppermost walls were twice as thick as the columns that supported them. He therefore submitted an ambitious, radical scheme for the complete rebuilding of the palace in the classical style. His chief supporter was Marc'Antonio Barbaro, who argued Palladio's case in the Senate with great tenacity, but in the end he failed to convince his fellow senators, just as he had failed to persuade them to choose a centralized plan for the Redentore. It was resolved instead to restore the old structure, which had long represented to Venetians the ancient traditions and durability of the Republic. This was not the moment to discard such a potent symbol. Public confidence had been badly shaken during the recent, ill-fated war against the Turks in the eastern Mediterranean, which had led eventually to the loss of Cyprus in 1573, despite the famous Venetian victory at the battle of Lepanto two years earlier. Once again it was the radical anti-Roman element in the nobility that dominated.

However, Palladio's artistic legacy in Venice could not be ignored. Within a generation his impressive contribution to the architecture of the city had itself become absorbed into the Venetian heritage. No church builder could in future forget his restrained, yet compelling classical style, or disregard his brilliant solutions to liturgical and practical problems. To the vocabulary and grammar of Roman architecture, already introduced to Venice by Serlio, Sansovino and Sansmicheli, he added a sense of the scale and grandeur of the buildings of the ancients. He showed that majestic effects could be achieved without expensive materials, chromatic richness or elaborate decoration, which would only have obscured the unity and coherence of his masterful conceptions.
Chapter 7

Baroque

The Beginnings of the Venetian Baroque

Sansovino died in 1570, and Palladio a decade later in 1580. Between them, these two architects had provided Venice with a completely new range of visual ideas. While Palladio’s activities in Venice had been concentrated in the field of religious architecture, Sansovino had worked mainly for secular patrons. Thus the legacies of the two architects were broadly complementary. The extent and durability of Sansovino’s influence was a measure of his special ability to assess the particular tastes and needs of his Venetian patrons. Palladio, on the other hand, was more daring. He inspired Venice, above all, by his capacity to create striking, memorable and satisfying visual effects. Both were sensitive to the theatrical character of the city, integrating their buildings into the urban fabric of Venice like pieces of scenery on a stage. Both based their designs on local building types and used the materials best adapted to the physical setting. Gradually their ideas filtered down through the whole spectrum of the city’s architecture, to inspire humbler patrons and lesser builders. Most of their imitators understood little of their precepts of design, but simply applied selected motifs to standard local models. The more talented of their successors, however, proved more independent, and began to steer Venetian architecture gently towards the more spacious, rhythmic, flamboyant style known by the convenient, if imprecise, label of baroque.

Alessandro Vittoria (1524–1608) was Sansovino’s most gifted pupil. Best known for his sculpture and stucco decorations, he is usually considered a Mannerist artist because of his liking for bizarre touches such as fireplaces in the form of huge, open-mouthed, monstrous faces. But in his Palazzo Balbi on the Grand Canal, built between 1582 and 1590, he adopted a more relaxed baroque style, decorating a traditional Venetian tripartite palace façade with exuberant broken pediments and cartouches (fig. 124).

While Vittoria was a former pupil of Sansovino, Vincenzo Scamozzi (1552–1616) was a native of Vicenza and a follower of Palladio. Though