

ITALIAN LECTURE

Architectural Politics in Renaissance Venice

DEBORAH HOWARD

St John's College, Cambridge

WHAT IS THE ROLE OF ARCHITECTURE in the self-definition of a political regime? To what extent are the ideologies of state communicated in public space? Can public confidence be sustained by extravagant building initiatives—or be sapped by their failures? These issues are, of course, as relevant today as they were in the Renaissance. Venice, in particular, seems closer to our own times than most other Early Modern states because of its relatively ‘democratic’ constitution, at least within the ranks of the ruling oligarchy. It was a democracy only for noblemen, since voting rights and eligibility for important committees and councils were limited to members (men only, numbering about 2,000) of a closed, hereditary caste. Nevertheless, many of the problems over decision-making ring true to modern ears. Indeed, it could be argued that the continual revision of public building projects during their execution is an essential characteristic of the democratic process.

It has been claimed by architectural historians over the past few decades that ambitious programmes of building patronage in Renaissance Venice helped to communicate political ideals to the public.¹

Read at the Academy 10 May 2007.

¹ See, for example, Manfredo Tafuri, *Jacopo Sansovino* (Padua, 1969; 2nd edn., 1972); Deborah Howard, *Jacopo Sansovino: Architecture and Patronage in Renaissance Venice* (New Haven & London, 1975; rev. edn., 1987); Manfredo Tafuri, ‘“Renovatio urbis Venetiarum”: il problema storiografico’, in M. Tafuri (ed.), *‘Renovatio urbis’: Venezia nell’età di Andrea Gritti (1523–1538)* (Rome, 1984), pp. 9–55; Manfredo Tafuri, *Venezia e il Rinascimento* (Turin, 1985; English edn., trans. Jessica Levine, Cambridge, MA and London, 1989).

Historians have suggested that the remodelling of Piazza San Marco reinforced the power of the ruling nobility by framing its elaborate programmes of public ceremonial.² Scholars have sought to identify political affiliations in both executed and unexecuted designs.³ Meanwhile, the role of print culture in controlling the ideological meaning of public iconography has been highlighted. This lecture seeks to reinforce some of these views, but at the same time to show how unpredictable the processes of government could be. It will become evident that, as the sixteenth century progressed, religious perplexities on the one hand, and an increasing respect for technical expertise on the other, came to frustrate the ambitions of those who wanted to glorify the state with grand classical buildings. The argument relates specifically to architectural issues, but similar political processes governed the whole range of government policy.

Background to the constitution

The uniqueness of the Venetian constitution was continually reiterated: for example, in 1581 the elderly Doge Nicolò da Ponte declared that ‘the form of our government is extraordinarily different from every other government and state in the whole world’.⁴ In the same year, the first comprehensive guidebook to the city by Francesco Sansovino declared the constitution to be ‘fortified by its laws with marvellous prudence, founded on justice, and rooted in the solid ground of religion, for the salvation and preservation of liberty and of the honour that has been almost lost in [the rest of] poor Italy’.⁵ This rhetoric of state, known to historians as ‘The Myth of Venice’, helped to sustain the Republic as its

² Edward Muir, *Civic Ritual in Renaissance Venice* (Princeton, NJ, 1981); *idem*, ‘Manifestazioni e cerimonie nella Venezia di Andrea Gritti’, in Tafuri (ed.), *‘Renovatio urbis’*, pp. 59–77; Deborah Howard, ‘Ritual Space in Renaissance Venice’, *Scroope: Cambridge Architecture Journal*, 5 (1993–4), 4–11.

³ Especially Tafuri, *Venezia e il Rinascimento*, *passim*.

⁴ ‘... la forma del nostro governo è diversissima da tutti gli altri governi, et stati del mondo’. Address of the Doge to the Collegio, Archivio di Stato di Venezia (henceforth ASV), Collegio, Esposizioni Roma, registro 2, ff. 28v–32r, 9 Feb. 1581, cited in Silvio Tramontin, ‘La visita apostolica del 1581 a Venezia’, *Studi veneziani*, 9 (1967), 453–533, at p. 476.

⁵ ‘Fortificato dale leggi con maravigliosa prudenza, fermato su la giustizia, & stabilito su la saldissima base della religione, per salvezza, & per conservazione della libertà, & dello honor quasi perduto affatto della misera Italia.’ Francesco Sansovino, *Venetia città nobilissima et singolare* (Venice, 1581), f. 174v.

real power waned, both politically and economically, over the course of the sixteenth century.⁶

The mechanisms of decision-making in the public realm of Renaissance Venice were extremely complex. Whereas a dynastic ruler could employ his own court artists to fulfil his personal commands, in Venice every major decision had to pass through the Senate or Council of Ten, or even, in the case of a crucial policy initiative, through the whole adult male nobility in the Greater Council.⁷ Elected magistracies were given day-to-day executive responsibilities for specific building projects, but had to solicit funding from the relevant council.

Debates in the Venetian assemblies, the Greater Council, the Senate, the Council of Ten and the Collegio, were not recorded verbatim; the proceedings, beautifully inscribed in humanistic script on parchment by the council secretaries, only summarised the motions and recorded voting figures. We have to rely on the testimony of diarists and chroniclers to recover more fully the debates about architectural matters. Most of the projects to be discussed below were directed by the Senate and managed by its delegated committees. As originally constituted, the Senate consisted of sixty members elected by the Greater Council, but by the sixteenth century it also included the Council of Forty (the 'Quarantia Criminale'), as well as an addition (or *zonta*) of sixty elected by the outgoing Senators. In addition, many high-ranking holders of government posts had ex-officio membership, making a potential total voting membership of around 230, although the average number of votes was about 180. The existence of the *zonta* ensured a stable core of experienced statesmen, many of them renowned for their eloquence. Sometimes discussions were so heated that they had to be adjourned for a cooling-off phase. Nevertheless, powers of oratory, however much they were praised at the time, were often resisted by the machinery of government when it came to the decisive vote.

⁶ Muir, *Civic Ritual*, pp. 13–61. On the historiography of the 'Myth of Venice' see especially James S. Grubb, 'When myths lose power: four decades of Venetian historiography', *Journal of Modern History*, 58 (1986), 43–94.

⁷ For a simple summary of the Venetian constitution see Frederic C. Lane, *Venice: A Maritime Republic* (Baltimore & London, 1973), pp. 95–117, 250–73. On modifications to the constitution in the Early Modern period, see M. J. C. Lowry, 'The Reform of the Council of Ten 1582–3: An unsettled problem', *Studi Veneziani*, 13 (1971), 275–310; Giuseppe Gullino, 'L'evoluzione costituzionale', in Alberto Tenenti and Ugo Tucci (eds.), *Storia di Venezia*, vol. 4 (Rome, 1996), pp. 345–78.

The executive powers of the doge in the patronage of public buildings, as in other areas, were strictly circumscribed. Like popes, doges were often elected at a very advanced age, after a lengthy conclave. Nicolò da Ponte, for example, was 87 when he took the ducal throne in 1578 and he remained in office until his death at the age of 94. As Francesco Sansovino explained, the doge was the head (*capo*) of the body politic (*quel corpo*): ‘a prince in name and appearance, created not by hereditary succession or violence, but by the legal elective process’.⁸ Although direct ducal participation in government was prevented by strict constitutional measures, there can be no doubt that individual doges could make their mark on the face of the city through influence and charisma. Unlike dynastic rulers, doges rarely travelled outside the city, except occasionally in times of plague, but relied on experienced ambassadors chosen from the elite of the nobility. Thus the Doge’s presence on the ducal throne in government assemblies was always visible and his personality palpable, even if, like Nicolò da Ponte, he tended to doze off during long speeches.⁹

Architectural context

Sixteenth-century Venice was the scene of one of the most ambitious programmes of urban renewal in Early Modern Europe. The large-scale renovation of most of the buildings around Piazza San Marco, the so-called *renovatio urbis*, has been associated with the impetus of Doge Andrea Gritti.¹⁰ The main elements of this campaign are now very familiar. The designer was the Florentine sculptor and architect Jacopo Sansovino who was appointed *proto*, or chief building superintendent, to the Procuratia de Supra at the instigation of Doge Gritti in 1529. The eminent body of nobles known as the Procuratia di San Marco administered the church of St Mark’s and owned most of the buildings around the Piazza, apart from the Doge’s Palace.¹¹ Membership of the Procuratia di San Marco was the

⁸ ‘Nel nome, & nell’apparenza esteriore, forma di capo & di vero Principe, creato, non per successione di heredità, o per violenza, ma per ordine di leggi ciò disponenti.’ Sansovino, *Venetia*, f. 174v.

⁹ Because of his tendency to fall asleep during sessions of the Collegio, a special padded wooden support was added to the throne to prevent Doge Nicolò da Ponte from falling over. See Andrea da Mosto, *I Dogi di Venezia* (Venezia, Ongania, 1939), p. 197.

¹⁰ Howard, *Jacopo Sansovino*, pp. 2–6; Tafuri, ‘Renovatio urbis’, pp. 31–5; Manuela Morresi, *Jacopo Sansovino* (Milan, 2000), pp. 443–51.

¹¹ On the Procuratia de Supra, see below, pp. 48–50.

highest office of state apart from the doge himself—as the architect’s son Francesco remarked, the Doge usually emerged from the ‘lap’ of the Procurators.¹²

Sansovino’s designs for three new buildings, begun in successive years, the Zecca (Mint), Library and Loggetta, created a coherent hierarchy of function, from the industrial (the minting of coins), through the intellectual (the Library of St Mark’s with its rich collection of Greek and Latin codices), to the representational (culminating in a rich marble triumphal arch opposite the main entrance to the Doge’s Palace).¹³ In the Piazza, Sansovino combined the role of architect with that of the traditional Venetian *proto*, or superintendent of buildings. As we shall see, however, following his death in 1570, these roles—*proto* and architect—once again became separated. The lecture focuses on four major state building initiatives of the later sixteenth century, in an attempt to track the political background to the architectural decisions. Two of these revived dormant schemes, and two were new projects provoked by unforeseen disasters.

The church of the Redentore

The decade following Sansovino’s death in 1570 was the scene of a seemingly endless series of catastrophic events, which eventually drove the Republic to address its building programme directly to God Almighty. After a disastrous fire in the Arsenal in 1569, there followed the loss of Cyprus in 1573, a fire in the Doge’s Palace in 1574, and a major flood in the same year, culminating in the great plague of 1575–6 which was to kill about a third of the population of the city.¹⁴ When practical medical precautions imposed by the Magistrato della Sanità failed to halt the terrifying mortality, the Venetian Senate resolved on 4 September 1576 to erect

¹² ‘Ellegendosi nel creare il Principe il piu meritevole, è necessario che il Doge esca le piu uolte dal grembo de Procuratori.’ Sansovino, *Venetia*, f. 107v.

¹³ The Zecca was begun in 1536, the Library in 1537 and the Loggetta in 1538. See Howard, *Jacopo Sansovino*, pp. 14–47; Bruce Boucher, *The Sculpture of Jacopo Sansovino*, 2 vols. (New Haven and London, 1991), 1. 73–88; 2. cat. no. 27, pp. 334–5; Morresi, *Jacopo Sansovino*, cat. nos. 30–2, pp. 182–227.

¹⁴ For eye-witness accounts of these disasters, see Biblioteca Marciana di Venezia (henceforth BMV), cod. Marc. it. VII 2585 (=12477), Stephano Tiepolo, ‘Cronaca veneta, 1546–1576’, ff. 224–55; BMV, cod. Marc. It. VII, 553 (=8812), ‘Memorie del N.H. S. Francesco da Molin’, ff. 11–80; BMV, cod. Marc. it, 134 (=8035), ‘Cronaca veneta di Girolamo Savina sino al MDCXV’, ff. 343–52.

a votive church dedicated to Christ the Redeemer.¹⁵ The new church was to be visited by the Doge and his successors annually in perpetuity on the anniversary of the day when the city would be declared free of the plague.

In the debates over the choice of model for the new church, the two opposing factions in the nobility known as the 'giovani' and the 'vecchi' began to crystallise.¹⁶ These were never formal political parties, and they did not correspond with the traditional division between 'case vecchie', the oldest Venetian noble families, and the 'case nuove', those almost as old but admitted soon afterwards. Allegiances shifted constantly, and from the point of view of architectural debates their respective stances seem contradictory. The 'giovani' were both politically radical and culturally conservative, while the 'vecchi' were politically conservative yet culturally ambitious. The 'giovani' were puritanical in their tastes, yet opposed to any kind of Protestantism as well as to the Papacy and deeply attached to local traditions, while the 'vecchi', sometimes called 'papalisti', had closer links with the church of Rome and their cultural horizons were broader. Reforms to the Council of Ten in 1582–3 attempted to control the power of the rich and powerful 'vecchi', although in practice they continued to be elected, with impressive regularity, to the highest magistracies of state.¹⁷

The decision-making process was both heated and long drawn-out. The first decision concerned the site of the new votive church, and in the climate of public guilt after such a painful series of divine 'punishments' the interests of splendid ducal ceremonial hardly entered the discussion. A proposed site at the nunnery of Santa Croce at the upper end of the Grand Canal was rejected in three successive ballots of the Senate, without mention of a possible processional route through the heart of the city. Meanwhile, reluctant support was given by just 39 votes to 35 to a site at San Vidal, on which a church and college would be built for the Jesuits.¹⁸ As frequently occurred in the case of controversial issues, the debate was adjourned.

¹⁵ ASV, Senato Terra, registro 51, f. 111v. The document has been published in Flaminio Corner, *Ecclesiae Venetae*, 18 vols. (Venice, 1749), 11. 37–8; Giangiorgio Zorzi, *Le chiese e i ponti di Andrea Palladio* (Vicenza, 1967), pp. 130–1, doc. 1; and Wladimir Timofiewitsch, *La chiesa del Redentore* (University Park and London, 1971), p. 65, doc. 1.

¹⁶ For a very brief introduction to these factions see Lane, *Venice*, pp. 393–5. A fuller account is given by Gaetano Cozzi, *Il doge Nicolò Contarini: Ricerche sul patriziato veneziano agli inizi del Seicento* (Venice and Rome, 1958), pp. 2–52.

¹⁷ The fundamental study of these reforms is Lowry, 'The Reform'.

¹⁸ ASV, Senato Terra, registro 51, f. 133v. The document is transcribed in Zorzi, *Le chiese*, p. 132, document no. 5. For recent accounts of the Redentore debates, see Deborah Howard, 'Venice between East and West: Marc'Antonio Barbaro and Palladio's church of the Redentore', *Journal*

After a week of reflection and lobbying, the debate was resumed, and once again the Santa Croce site was rejected. The account of the Senate speeches by Agostino Valier, Bishop of Verona, allows us to sense the mood of the debate. Two eminent senators, Paolo Tiepolo and Marc'Antonio Barbaro, both regarded as 'vecchi', eloquently supported the site at San Vidal. Tiepolo extolled the virtues of the Jesuits as defenders of the true Catholic faith and as exemplary teachers of the young.¹⁹ On the other hand, Barbaro's concerns focused on the form of the church rather than on religious doctrine. As a patron of Palladio and an amateur stuccoist of some renown, he had well-informed artistic views.²⁰ Barbaro supported the architect Palladio's preference for a centralised design 'because buildings commissioned by the full Senate should be magnificent and reflect the dignity of the Republic'.²¹ This overt defence of *magnificenza* as a mirror of the virtues of the state directly follows in the tradition established in Doge Gritti's *renovatio urbis* of the 1530s.

of the Society of Architectural Historians, 62 (2003), 307–25; Vittorio Pizzigoni, 'I tre progetti di Palladio per il Redentore', *Annali di Architettura*, 15 (2003), 165–77; Tracy E. Cooper, *Palladio's Venice* (New Haven and London, 2005), pp. 229–39.

¹⁹ Agostino Valerio (Valier), *Dell'utilità che si può ritrarre dalle cose sperate dai Veneziani: libri XIV*, trans. Antonio Giustiniani (Padua, 1787), pp. 393–4. See also the extract from the same speech in Latin in Corner, *Ecclesiae venetae*, 11. 15. A brief account of the life of Paolo Tiepolo (1523–85) is given in Eugenio Alberi, *Le relazioni degli ambasciatori veneti al Senato durante il secolo decimosesto*, series II, vol. 10 (Florence, 1857), pp. 163–4. According to Alberi, Tiepolo was universally regarded as a 'gran senatore, uomo veramente di fino giudizio, di matura prudenza, di perfetta intelligenza delle dottrine, di eloquenza distinta'.

²⁰ The classic biography of Marc'Antonio Barbaro is Charles Yriarte, *La vie d'un patricien de Venise au seizième siècle* (Paris, 1874). See also Angelo Ventura, 'Marc'Antonio Barbaro', *Dizionario biografico degli italiani*, 6 (Rome, 1964), pp. 110–13. In 1648, Ridolfi recorded that the stucco figures in the Nymphaeum at Maser were made 'per ricreazione' by Marc'Antonio Barbaro. See Carlo Ridolfi, *Le meraviglie dell'arte*, 2 vols. (Venice, Gio. Battista Sgava, 1648), 1. 289–90. In her posthumous study of the stucco sculptures of the Nymphaeum of the Villa Barbaro at Maser, Carolyn Kolb attributed the execution of all the statues to Marc'Antonio Barbaro himself, and the authorship of the iconographic program to his brother Daniele. See Carolyn Kolb, 'The Sculptures on the Nymphaeum Hemicycle of the Villa Barbaro at Maser', *Artibus et Historiae*, 35 (1997), 15–33. (The stuccoes, like the villa itself, are datable to c. 1554–8.) Marc'Antonio Barbaro's design for a cantilever spiral stair with curved treads was illustrated by Andrea Palladio, *I quattro libri dell'architettura* (Venice, Domenico de' Franceschi, 1570), Book I, Chap. XXVIII, pp. 61–2.

²¹ Valerio, *Dell'utilità*, p. 394: 'Marc'Antonio Barbaro procuratore di S. Marco egli ancora diffusamente procurò di persuadere il Senato, che questo Tempio fosse fatto in forma rotonda, dovendo le fabbriche decretate dall'ampissimo Senato essere magnifiche, e farvi risplendere la dignità della Repubblica; ed a lui pure, come a molti altri, piaceva il luogo vicino a S. Vitale, purchè non si differisca, e sia in nobile rotonda forma'. See also the Latin rendering in Corner, *Ecclesiae venetae*, 11. 16.

It fell to Leonardo Donà, a generation younger and then just 40 years old, the most outspoken of the ‘giovani’, to put the opposing view.²² Donà adopted a deliberately extreme position: ‘Why are you looking for magnificent buildings? There is no need of a Temple, whether round or not. I think God would not support this. All that is needed is your obedience, to please God with your devotions.’²³ Since the vow had already been taken to build a church, this was obviously a ridiculously provocative statement. But Donà went on to attack the Jesuits, not for their papal connections (although this was surely a sub-text, for the ‘giovani’ were bitterly opposed to Roman intervention) but for the extravagance of having to build a Jesuit college, even though it was to house only four priests and two lay-brothers.²⁴ Instead he defended a third site, newly proposed by the Collegio (the doge’s closest advisory body), on the Giudecca, at the friary of the austere Franciscan Capuchins. The Giudecca site was duly chosen, but it is worth remembering that the Jesuits did not yet fall from favour.²⁵ A year later they were allowed to take over half of the upper part of the Republic’s salt warehouses in order to extend their accommodation, right opposite the site of the new Redentore church, because of their contribution ‘to Venice and to all Christianity’.²⁶

Three months were to pass before the matter of the Redentore was again raised in the Senate in February 1577.²⁷ By now the Giudecca site

²² On the life of Leonardo Donà, see, in particular, Federico Seneca, *Il Doge Leonardo Donà: la sua vita e la sua preparazione politica prima del dogado* (Padua, 1959); Gaetano Cozzi, ‘Leonardo Donà’ in *Dizionario biografico degli italiani*, vol. 40 (Rome, 1991), pp. 757–71.

²³ Valerio, *Dell’utilità*, pp. 394–5 (in Latin in Corner, *Ecclesiae venetae*, 11. 16–17): ‘[Per]che cercate fabbriche magnificentissime? Non si cerca qui un Tempio, il quale sia di forma rotonda, o no: penso che Iddio nol curi: cercasi soltanto la vostra ubbedienza, si compiace Dio del vostro ossequio.’

²⁴ ASV, Senato Terra, registro 51, ff. 133v–134r. The letter from the Jesuits referred to ‘il carico di mettergli sacerdoti no. 4 et fratelli no. 2’ (ASV, Senato Terra, filza 70, 17 Nov. 1576). As Cooper has pointed out, Donà tactically went on to declare his respect for the Jesuits (Cooper, *Palladio’s Venice*, pp. 232–3).

²⁵ ASV, Senato Terra, registro 51, f. 134r. The document is published in Zorzi, *Le chiese*, p. 132, doc. 5, and a short extract is in Wladimiro Timofiewitsch, *The Chiesa del Redentore* (University Park and London, 1971), p. 66, doc. 4. A copy of the motion of the Senate is transcribed in ASV, Collegio, Cerimoniale, registro I, ff. 48v–49r. The Jesuits were expelled from Venice after the papal interdict of 1606, during the *dogado* of Leonardo Donà, and were not allowed to return until 1657.

²⁶ ASV, Consiglio dei Dieci, Parti comuni, registro 33, f. 106v–107r, 21 Dec. 1577. On the early history of the Jesuits in Venice, see Silvio Tramontin, ‘Le nuove congregazioni religiose’, in Giuseppe Gullino (ed.), *La chiesa di Venezia tra riforma protestante e riforma cattolica* (Venice, Edizioni Studium cattolico veneziano, 1990), pp. 113–30, at pp. 100–1.

²⁷ ASV, Senato Terra, registro 51, ff. 155v–156r, 9 Feb. 1576 m.v. (=1577); transcribed in Zorzi, *Le chiese*, pp. 132–3, doc. 6, and in part in Timofiewitsch, *The Chiesa*, doc. 5, p. 67.

had been decided, but Barbaro was still pressing for a centralised design. Three options were considered: the longitudinal plan gained 103 votes, while the centrally planned alternative attracted only half as many adherents. Just nineteen senators supported the compromise solution to make three-dimensional models and costings of both options. It was only at this point that the commission was formally awarded to Palladio, but no evidence suggests that any other architect was considered for the design.

The remarkable feature of this intense and protracted debate is that, although Barbaro was praised for the eloquence of his speeches, the Senate did not succumb to oratory. In a personal memoir Leonardo Donà dismissed the value of rhetoric as a political tool in the Greater Council and the Senate; instead, he claimed, speakers should employ 'charity and truthfulness, not fine words which are useless, but with an opening of the heart, with genuine and sincere ideas, and with devotion to the public good and the happiness of all'.²⁸ Donà detested pomp and finery. Having taken a vow of chastity in his youth, he presented a public image of semi-religious austerity, apparently modelling himself on ancient stoics such as Cato.²⁹

The anomaly of the Redentore project is that controls fell away once the work began and even after Palladio's death in 1580 expenditure was never questioned. Because the commitment was intended to display the religious devotion of the state and to protect the city against the plague, funds could not be refused. Even though two nobles, Agostino Barbarigo and Antonio Bragadin, both 'vecchi' and Palladio supporters, were put in charge of the project, controls on site were few (Fig. 1).³⁰ The original pledge resolved to build a 'solid building without ornament or marbles, as befits a votive church', but it is well-known that the budget for the

²⁸ '... con charità et con verità più d'una volta, non con bellezza di parole, che non servono a nulla, ma con apertura di cuore, con concetti veri et sinceri, et con pietà verso il pubblico bene et la contentezza di tutti.' Cited in Cozzi, *Il doge*, pp. 27–8, from Mario Brunetti, 'Da un carteggio di Leonardo Donà ambasciatore in Roma col fratello Nicolò (1581–1583)', in *Miscellanea di studi storici in onore di Alessandro Luzio*, 2 vols. (Florence, 1933), 1. 135.

²⁹ Cozzi, *Il doge*, pp. 32–3, 37–40.

³⁰ The two Provveditori sopra la fabbrica were elected on 18 Sept. 1576 (ASV, Senato Terra, registro 51, f. 114v, published in Zorzi, *Le chiese*, pp. 131–2, doc. 3; Timofiewitsch, *The Chiesa*, p. 66, doc. 3). See Angelo Ventura, 'Agostino Barbarigo', in *Dizionario biografico degli italiani*, VI, Istituto dell'Enciclopedia Italiana, Rome, 1964, pp. 49–50; and Ugo Tucci, 'Antonio Bragadin', in *Dizionario biografico degli italiani* (Rome, Enciclopedia Italiana, 1971), 8. 663–4; Cooper, *Palladio's Venice*, pp. 230–1. By 1591, both men had died, so the final stages of completion of the church were entrusted to the three Provveditori in charge of the restoration of the Palazzo Ducale. See Senato Terra, registro 61, f. 75r, 10 Sept. 1591.



Figure 1. Andrea Palladio, Venice, Church of the Redentore, begun 1577, interior.
(Photograph: Cameraphoto, Venice.)

Redentore exceeded the estimated cost of 10,000 ducats by more than seven times.³¹ Although the estimate was soon raised to 12,000 ducats, by November 1579 this sum had already been exceeded by 3,000 ducats.³² From that point on, twice a year the Senate voted sums of 4,000 ducats until the building was finished.³³

Palladio's design was infused with just the sort of classicising *magnificenza* that both the Capuchins and Donà detested. Paradoxically, though, once he was elected Doge in 1606, Donà was to show a surprising enthusiasm for Palladio's work, asking for the removal of the buildings that obscured his view of the church of San Giorgio Maggiore from the Palazzo Ducale, and erecting his own funerary monument on the entrance wall of the same church.³⁴

Restoration of the Palazzo Ducale³⁵

Whereas funds for the Redentore came from the state treasury, the Palazzo Ducale, like the commercial buildings at the Dogana and the Rialto, was

³¹ '... sia speso fino alla summa de ducati dieci mille' in ASV, Senato Terra, registro 51, f. 111v, 4 Sept. 1576; published in Corner, *Ecclesiae Venetae*, 11. 37–8; Zorzi, *Le chiese*, p. 130–1, doc. 1; Timofiewitsch, *La chiesa*, p. 65, doc. 1. On 26 April 1577, it was explained that the funds should be routed through the Salt Office; by this time the estimated cost had risen to 12,000 ducats. See ASV, Provveditori al Sal, busta 10, fascicolo 12, Restauri di fabbriche pubbliche 1571–92, Parti del Consiglio dei Dieci, f. 17v.

³² ASV, Senato Terra, reg. 52, f. 217r., 7 Nov. 1579. The original sum of 10,000 had been raised to 12,000 by a motion of the Council of Ten on 26 April 1577; see ASV, Provveditori al Sal, busta 10 (reg. 12), Restauri di fabbriche pubbliche 1571–92, Parti del Consiglio di X, f. 17v.

³³ Sums of 4,000 ducats each, to be paid to the Redentore's budget from the treasury through the Salt Office, were authorised by motions of the Senate as follows: ASV, Senato Terra, registro 52, f. 217r, 7 Nov. 1579; Senato Terra, registro 53, f. 20v, 30 May 1580; f. 76r, 12 Nov. 1580; f. 163v, 28 Sept. 1581; f. 200v, 20 Jan 1581 *m.v.* (=1582); Senato Terra, registro 54, f. 19v, 21 Apr 1582; f. 40, 11 Aug. 1582; ff. 80v–81r, 10 Jan. 1582 *m.v.* (=1583); f. 127v, 24 June 1583; ff. 167v–168r, 11 Nov. 1583; Senato Terra, registro 55, f. 62r, 23 July 1584; Senato Terra, registro 56, f. 4r, 9 Mar. 1585; f. 108v, 19 Dec. 1585; Senato Terra, registro 57, f. 48v, 22 Dec. 1586; f. 231v, 15 Dec. 1587. In 1588 smaller payments were authorised for the completion of the decoration: e.g. Senato Terra, registro 55, f. 30v–31r, 400 ducats on 8 Apr. 1588; f. 54r, 600 ducats on 16 May 1588; f. 57r, 600 ducats on 28 May 1588. 4,000 ducats was granted on 3 March 1589, Senato Terra, ref. 59, f. 1v; and again on 24 March 1590 for the floor, two bronze statues for the high altar, and 'alcune altre poche cose', Senato Terra, registro 60, f. 7r. Further small payments followed: 500 ducats for the floor and other costs on 11 Nov. 1591, Senato Terra, registro 61 f. 98r; and 1,000 ducats on 21 May 1592, Senato Terra, registro 62, f. 24r.

³⁴ Tracy E. Cooper, 'La facciata commemorativa di S. Giorgio Maggiore', in André Chastel & Renato Cevese (eds.), *Andrea Palladio: nuovi contributi* (Milan, 1990), pp. 136–45, at pp. 140–2.

³⁵ Subsequent to my British Academy lecture I discussed the restoration of the Palazzo Ducale in my paper 'Attitudes to the Gothic in Renaissance Venice' at the conference *Le Gothique de la*

funded by the Salt Tax, which enjoyed an annual income of around 200,000 ducats.³⁶ When a second disastrous fire struck the Doge's Palace in 1577, once again vigorous public debate ensued over how to proceed. Like the recent plague, the calamity was attributed to 'the wrath of God', a view reinforced by strange astronomical phenomena including a comet that remained visible for two months and a bolt of lightning in the form of a torch which struck the Campanile.³⁷ After the fire, tearful spectators lamented the erasure of public memory, especially the loss of the cycles of history painting and the destruction of the chancery's notarial archives.³⁸ Luckily, however, although the roof of the Sala del Maggior Consiglio had been destroyed, the external walls were left standing (Fig. 2).

In contrast to the Redentore project, a decision on how to proceed had to be taken urgently. This time a different procedure came into action. Whereas at the Redentore Palladio had been selected as architect from the outset, in the case of the Palazzo Ducale an elaborate process of consultation was put into motion, involving the widest possible range of technical experts.³⁹ The Salt Office, the body that funded works in the palace, had its own *proto* or superintendent of buildings, Antonio da Ponte, but he was just one of a series of fifteen *periti* or experts who were interrogated by a special committee of three advisors or *Provveditori* established by the Senate.⁴⁰ These included not only Venetians but also

Renaissance, Institut National de l'Histoire de l'Art, Paris, Quatrième rencontre d'architecture européenne du Centre André Chastel, Paris/Sorbonne-Paris IV), 12–16 June 2007.

³⁶ The net income of the Salt Office in 1587 was 190,982 ducats; and in 1594 252,074 ducats. See David Chambers and Brian Pullan, *Venice: A Documentary History 1450–1630* (Oxford and Cambridge, MA, 1992), p. 150.

³⁷ BMV, Cod. Marc. it. VII, 553 (=8812), 'Memorie del N.H. S. Francesco da Molin', f. 68 (referring to 'l'ira del Signor Dio'); Cod. Marc. it. VII, 134 (=8035), Cronaca Savina, f. 354 (on comet and lightning).

³⁸ BMV, Cod. It. VII, 134 (=8035), Cronaca Savina, f. 354v.; Cod. Marc. it. VII, 553 (=8812), 'Memorie del N.H. S. Francesco da Molin', f. 65.

³⁹ For fuller accounts of the process leading up to the post-fire restoration, see Antonio Foscari, 'Un dibattito sul foro marciano allo scadere del 1577 e il progetto di Andrea Palladio per il palazzo ducale di Venezia', in *Saggi in onore di Guglielmo De Angelis d'Ossat*, special issue of *Quaderni dell'Istituto di Storia dell'Architettura*, ns 1/10 (Rome, 1987), 323–32; and Cooper, *Palladio's Venice*, pp. 205–11, with further bibliography.

⁴⁰ The three *Provveditori* were Alvise Zorzi, Giacomo Foscarini and Piero Foscari, elected on 20 Jan. 1578. (This was the second committee of three elected in the post-fire period, replacing the three elected in Dec. 1577 to choose a temporary site for the meetings of the Greater Council. In the initial phase of consultation, just five *periti*, including both Palladio and Antonio da Ponte, had been consulted.) The reports were published, with some biographical details of each *proto*, by Giuseppe Cadorin (ed.), *Pareri di xv architetti e notizie storiche intorno al Palazzo Ducale di Venezia* (Venice, 1838). Cadorin added the opinion of Francesco Sansovino from his *Del Segretario libri vii* (Venice, 1584), pp. 215–18. Several of the reports were published in



Figure 2. Ludovico Toeput, called 'il Pozzoserrato', *Fire in the Palazzo Ducale, Venice, 1577*. (Treviso, Museo Civico.)

prominent masons, builders, *proti*, and architects from elsewhere in the Veneto, Palladio among them.

Those who were literate wrote their own reports, while others were interrogated and their replies transcribed in detail. There were various points of agreement. Most noticed that the ‘paradise wall’, that is to say, the east wall of the Sala del Maggior Consiglio, was cracked, and that many of the capitals of the arcades had split open, although opinions diverged over whether these cracks were recent and whether they mattered. Those who thought the damage was of little significance used graphic analogies—the architect and treatise-writer Giovanni Antonio Rusconi compared the damage to the old walls to the effect of ‘an insect bite on an elephant’.⁴¹ Because the fire had destroyed the roof, the walls were in danger of leaning outward, but even on this question some experts thought the walls leaned out and others that they leaned in. Some complained that the upper walls were thicker than the lower walls, and others disagreed, their views depending on whether the wall thickness was taken to be the width of the capitals or the width of the columns (Fig. 3). Some, including Andrea Palladio, criticised the excessive thickness of the upper walls by comparing the structure unfavourably to the natural world, where tree trunks are thicker at the bottom.⁴² Others, by contrast, noted that men, who are obviously superior to trees, have thin legs and stouter bodies, but Palladio dismissed this argument on the grounds that men have to be mobile.⁴³ Cristoforo Sorte, the celebrated map-maker, totally rejected the very idea of restoration of the old building because he could not contemplate the idea of this most serene government occupying a palace ‘built in the air’.⁴⁴

Giambattista Lorenzi, *Monumenti per servire alla storia del Palazzo Ducale di Venezia*, part I (Venice, 1868), docs. 851–3, 856, pp. 423–38. The opinions of the *proti* have also been discussed by Wolfgang Wolters, ‘Riflessioni sulla riconsruzione di edifici gravemente danneggiati’, in Giandomenico Romanelli (ed.), *Palazzo Ducale: Storia e restauri* (Verona, 2004), pp. 195–204, previously published in German in V. von Flemming and S. Schütze (eds.), *Festschrift für Matthias Winner* (Mainz am Rhein, 1996), pp. 327–33.

⁴¹ ‘... sarà conforme alla beccadura di una mosca fatta ad un elefante’, Rusconi in Cadorin (ed.), *Pareri*, pp. 20–32, at p. 21.

⁴² Palladio in Cadorin (ed.), *Pareri*, pp. 52–61, at p. 57. Palladio’s writings on the restoration are discussed in detail by Giangioorgio Zorzi, *Le opere pubbliche e i palazzi privati di Andrea Palladio* (Vicenza, 1965), pp. 151–67.

⁴³ Palladio in Cadorin (ed.), *Pareri*, pp. 52–61, at p. 58, supported by Francesco Sansovino, in *ibid.*, pp. 111–16, at p. 114.

⁴⁴ ‘... dice, che non lauda per alcun modo di metter questo Serenissimo Dominio in tanto pericolo d’habitar un palazzo fabricato in aria’, Sorte in Cadorin (ed.), *Pareri*, pp. 103–4, at p. 104.

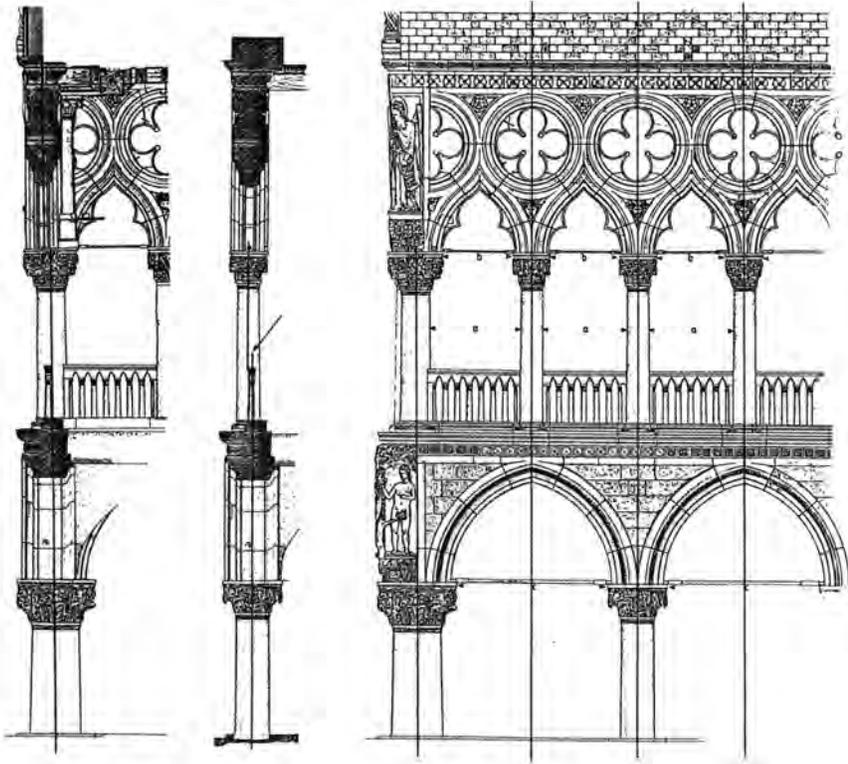


Figure 3. Venice, Palazzo Ducale, (left) section through south facade, begun 1341, taken through the central balcony of 1404; (right) detail of elevation. From Manfred Schuller, 'Il Palazzo Ducale di Venezia: Le facciate medioevali', in Francesco Valcanover and Wolfgang Wolters (eds.), *L'architettura gotica veneziana* (Venice, Istituto Veneto di Scienze, Lettere ed Arti, 2000), p. 430, fig. 92.

Some bold and radical solutions were proposed. One consultant, Guglielmo Grandi, the deputy *proto* to the Magistrato alle Acque (the magistracy responsible for the management of the lagoon and its waterways), suggested wrapping the lower columns in a row of square piers with Ionic capitals. His second alternative was to add a second Corinthian order above, and his third most ambitious proposal was to rebuild both the two outer facades with round arches according to his own design, in order to provide a building that was not only 'safe but also decorated as befits a Serenissima Repubblica' such as Venice.⁴⁵ In other

⁴⁵ '... nel quale appare una forma et un modo di fabricare sicuro et ornato come appartiene ad una Serenissima Repubblica, tale quale quella della sublimità vostra'. Grandi in Cadornin (ed.), *Pareri*, pp. 37–40, at pp. 39–40.

words, he considered a classical design to be more fitting to the dignity of the Republic.

At the other extreme, Francesco Zamberlan from Bassano was eloquent about the merits of Gothic vaulting, which, he claimed, exerted a downward force rather than an outward one. He went on to make an ingenious defence of the structural merits of the tracery on the *piano nobile*: ‘the roundels rest in the upper curve of the arches, and they cannot spread sideways because then the arch would have to become narrower, which would squeeze the top upwards, which is obviously impossible, since a wall cannot rise, and therefore they [the roundels] can carry a greater load’.⁴⁶ His suggestion was simply to reinforce the structure by adding an extra pier between each of the ground-floor columns. He advised against rebuilding the Gothic facades because this would require a classical design ‘with all those proportions and measurements that good architecture requires and all the other rules’.⁴⁷ A surprising supporter of the structural strength of Gothic architecture was Francesco Sansovino, son of the architect Jacopo who had master-minded Doge Gritti’s *renovatio*. Francesco pointed out that over the centuries the structure had resisted earthquakes and explosions, remaining ‘uncorrupted by the fury of past accidents’.⁴⁸

Palladio’s report did not offer a constructive alternative, but a drawing at Chatsworth attributed to his hand has been identified by Howard Burns as the proposal for the complete renewal of the Palazzo Ducale (Fig. 4).⁴⁹ Although the identification of the intended site has been contested, it may yet be Palladio’s project, since one contemporary chronicler noted that Palladio planned to ‘demolish and move’ the whole building.⁵⁰ It is worth

⁴⁶ ‘Che li occhi, che sono sopra le colonne dell’ordine secondo sono parimenti fortissimi, et non possono a niuna banda allargarsi, perchè li piedi di essi sono la cima delli volti, et l’allargarsi per il peso essi occhi, saria un stringer li volti, nè possono stringersi essi volti senza alzarsi, et l’alzarsi è molto contro la natura del peso, perchè non può star che la muraglia vada all’insù, et perciò stanno per forza nel suo loco, et sono atti a portar molto maggior peso.’ Zamberlan in Cadorin (ed.), *Pareri*, pp. 96–9, at p. 97.

⁴⁷ ‘... poichè ruinando le fazzade bisogna mettersi in obbligo di farle con tutte quelle proporzioni, et misure che seco apporta la buona architettura allegando altre ragioni in tal proposito.’ Zamberlan in Cadorin (ed.), *Pareri*, pp. 96–9, at p. 98.

⁴⁸ ‘... incorrotto dalla furia di tanti accidenti passati’, Francesco Sansovino in Cadorin (ed.), *Pareri*, pp. 111–16, at p. 116.

⁴⁹ Howard Burns, Lynda Fairbairn and Bruce Boucher, *Andrea Palladio 1508–1580: The Portico and the Farmyard*, exh. cat. (London, 1975), pp. 158–60.

⁵⁰ ‘... sol Andrea Paladio [*sic*] celebre e famoso Architetto teneva conclusione che non vi era restata cosa niuna di sicuro, et che la facciata verso S. Giorgio tutta si dovesse distruggere, e spianare, e in sostanza muovere tutta la Fabbrica.’ BMV, MS Marc. it, VII, 110 (=8612), ‘Memorie del N.H. S. Francesco da Molin’, f. 67r. Tafuri claimed that the drawing is intended to represent a new ducal residence on the site of the present prisons. See Manfredo Tafuri, ‘Il disegno

considering this design in its European context. The most prominent recent town-hall was that of Antwerp, completed just over a decade earlier in 1565 (Fig. 5).⁵¹ Although Palladio cannot have known the Flemish precedent at first-hand, the design of a grand facade with three superimposed triumphal arches in the centre may indeed represent his attempt to rival the greatest northern European seaport, visited regularly by Venetian galleys on the Flanders convoy.

Historiography has devoted a great deal of attention to the ideological reasons for the rejection of Palladio's arguments, but the consultation process revealed a clear majority of the 'experts' in favour of restoration of the existing structure, which was both quicker and cheaper.⁵² With the entire male nobility forced to assemble in temporary accommodation in the Arsenal, this was not the time for ambitious displays of magnificence.⁵³ Once again, oratory fell on deaf ears. The diary of Francesco da Molin records that Palladio's principal supporter in the Senate was once again Marc'Antonio Barbaro, 'most valiant Procurator of St Mark's and most renowned orator, who even though the whole Senate thought the idea [of rebuilding the Palace] to be excessively extravagant, remained on his feet for days bravely arguing [his case]'.⁵⁴ Interestingly, it seems that the Chatsworth drawing was acquired by Lord Burlington at the Villa Barbaro at Maser, which was then in the hands of Marc'Antonio Barbaro's heirs, the Nani

di Chatsworth (per il palazzo Ducale di Venezia?) e un progetto perduto di Jacopo Sansovino', in André Chastel and Renato Cevese (eds.), *Andrea Palladio: nuovi contributi* (Milan, 1990), pp. 100–11; Tafuri, *Venezia e il Rinascimento*, pp. 272–8. For a summary of recent views on this drawing see Douglas Lewis, *The Drawings of Andrea Palladio*, rev. edn. (New Orleans, 2000), pp. 262–3, cat. 121.

⁵¹ See Christa de Jonge and Konrad Ottenheim, *Unity and Discontinuity, Architectural Relations between the Southern and Northern Low Countries 1530–1700* (Turnhout, 2007), pp. 45, 226–9.

⁵² The six most trusted experts were asked for further reports: see Cooper, *Palladio's Venice*, pp. 208–9. On the unanimity of the group's recommendation of the restoration of the old palace, despite variations of detail, see Molin, who stresses the isolation of Palladio's position. BMV, MS Marc. it, VII, 'Memorie del N.H. S. Francesco da Molin', 110 (=8612), ff. 67r–67v.

⁵³ A great deal of debate in the immediate aftermath of the fire focused on where the temporary accommodation for the Maggior Consiglio assemblies should be located. A range of sites was considered, including the state Granary at the Terra Nova, on the Bacino to the west of the Zecca, the interior of San Marco, the Palazzo Patriarcale, and the oar-makers' building at the Arsenal. Cooper, *Palladio's Venice*, p. 208, mistakenly locates the Terra Nova warehouses at the Dogana.

⁵⁴ '. . . [Palladio] era fomentata così questa sua opinione da Marc'Antonio Barbaro Procurator di San Marco valentissimo et principalissimo Oratore, che ancor che a tutto il Senato paresse stravagantissima, pure col suo valore disputando per molti giorni la sostenne in piedi.' BMV, MS Marc. it, VII, 110 (=8612), 'Memorie del N.H. S. Francesco da Molin', f. 67r.

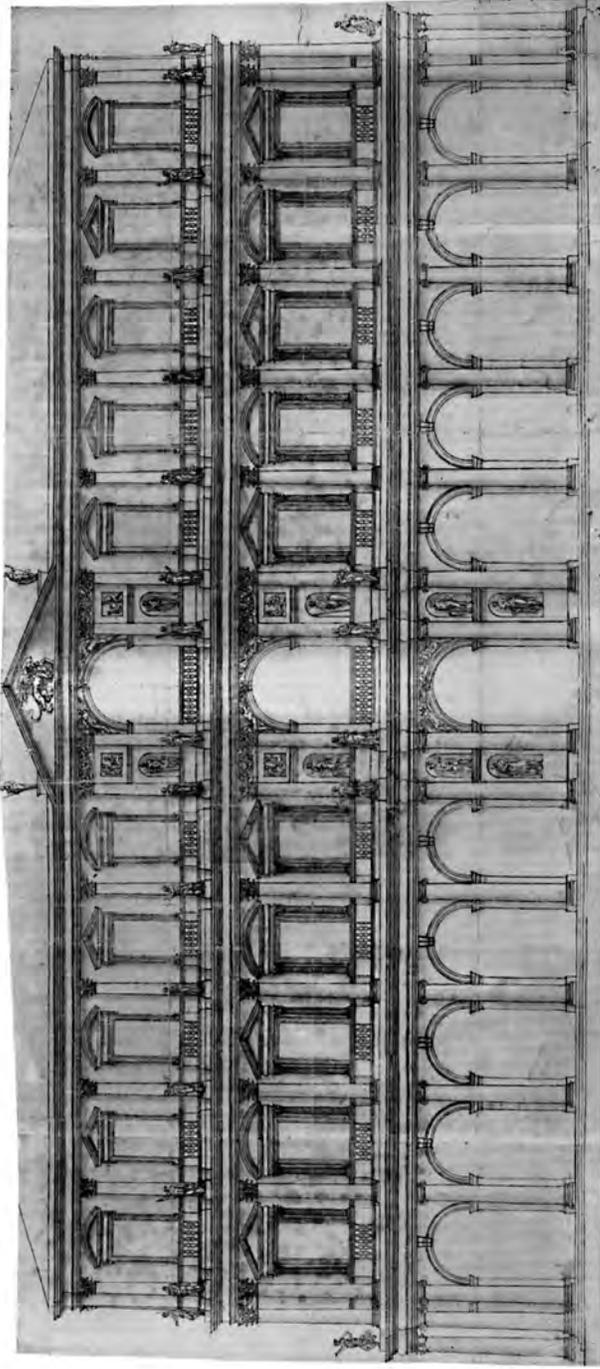


Figure 4. Andrea Palladio (attrib.), *Elevation drawing of a public palace, possibly for the Palazzo Ducale, Venice, c.1577 (?)*. (Chatsworth, the Devonshire Collection, SOS/B.)

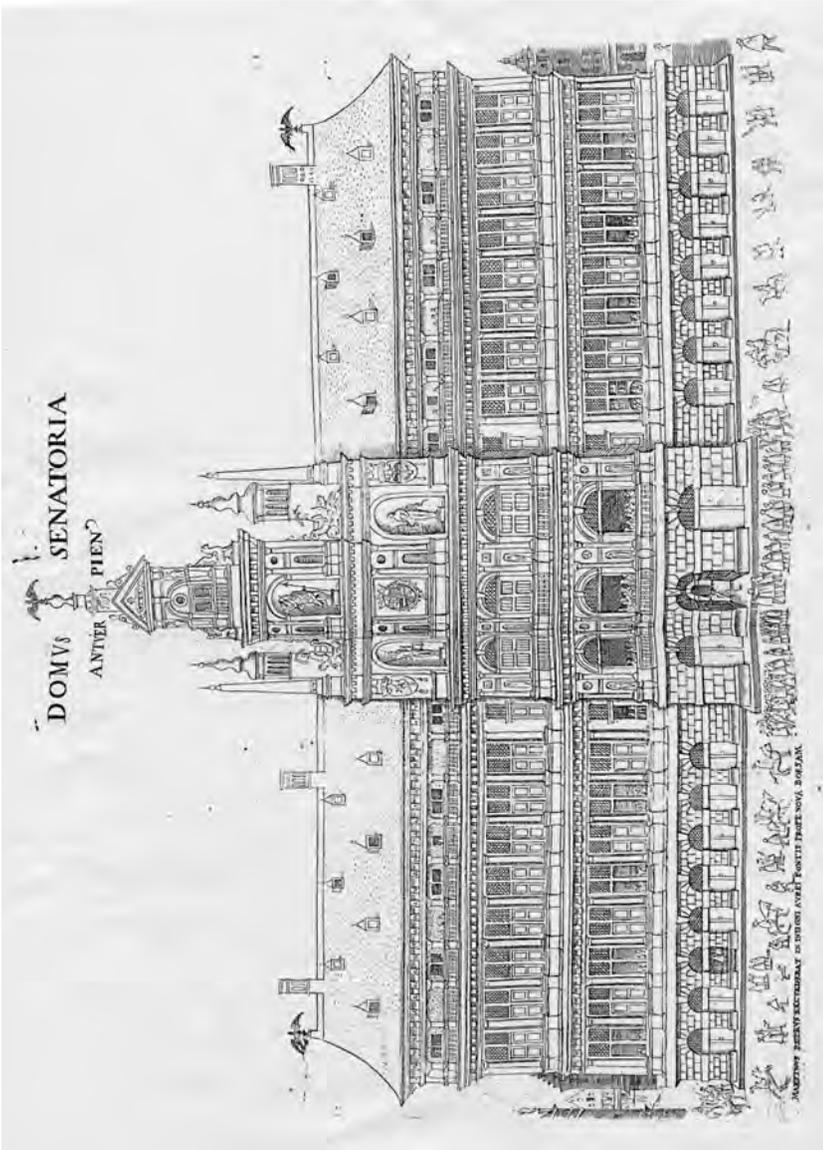


Figure 5. Cornelis Floris de Vriendt, Antwerp Town Hall, 1561–5, from L. Guicciardini, *Descriptione di tutti i Paesi Bassi*, Antwerp, 1567. (British Library, 568.k.5, plate before f. 82. © The British Library. All rights reserved.)

family.⁵⁵ Despite Barbaro's filibustering efforts, the decision to restore and re-roof the old palace 'no more and no less than it was before' was approved overwhelmingly by the Senate in 1578 by the huge majority of 146 votes to 6, with 38 undecided.⁵⁶

If Barbaro and Palladio considered a classical design imperative for the glory and international reputation of the Republic, the arguments for the restoration of the old palace rested not on any attachment to the symbolic or sentimental value of the medieval building, but on the speed and economy of a simple restoration. The restoration of the old palace duly began under the supervision of the experienced *proto* to the Salt Office, Antonio da Ponte. From this time on, funds were provided from the Salt Office chest by order of the Senate and the Council of Ten until the restoration and redecoration was completed.

The Procuratie Nuove

The conspicuous exception to this process of decision making in elected assemblies was the Procuratia de Supra, the branch of the Procuratia de San Marco responsible for most of the buildings in Piazza San Marco, apart from the Doge's Palace. Income flowed in from centuries of endowments and the rents of valuable properties in the Piazza, providing generous funding for building initiatives.⁵⁷ The Procurators were elderly patricians chosen for their long and distinguished record in public service, and unlike most elected magistrates, they held office for life.⁵⁸ (The two other divisions, 'de Citra' and 'de Ultra', administered private trust funds on either side of the Grand Canal.)

⁵⁵ John Harris, 'Three unrecorded Palladio designs from Inigo Jones's collection', *Burlington Magazine*, 113 (1971), 34–7, at p. 34 and n. 4.

⁵⁶ 'non più ne meno com'era avanti' in BMV, MS Marc. it, VII, 110 (=8612), 'Memorie del N.H. S. Francesco da Molin', f. 67v. For the Senate resolution and vote see Senato Terra, filza 72, 21 Feb. 1577 *m.v.* (=1578). Barbaro is recorded as absent, and Foscarini, though named as a 'Consiglier', is also declared absent 'per indispositione'.

⁵⁷ Sanudo commented on the sacks of ducats protected in strong-rooms in the Procurators' offices. See Marin Sanudo il Giovane, *De origine, situ et magistratibus urbis Venetae ovvero La città di Venezia*, ed. A. Caracciolo Aricò (Cisalpino, 1980), pp. 104–5; English translation in Chambers and Pullan, *Venice*, pp. 51–2.

⁵⁸ The best introduction to the Procuratia di San Marco is still Reinhold C. Mueller, 'The Procurators of San Marco in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries: a study of the office as a financial and trust institution', *Studi veneziani*, 13 (1971), 106–220.

In times of war, however, Procurators could also be elected for money in an attempt to refill the public coffers, and in such cases much younger, less experienced figures could enter the Procuratia. For example, during the Turkish wars, Federico Contarini, a member of one of the city's wealthiest families, began his political career at the top when he was elected to the Procuratia de Supra in 1571 at the age of just 33, in return for a payment of 20,000 ducats.⁵⁹ Similarly, Andrea Dolfin, scathingly described by a contemporary as 'a new man in government and the richest man in the city', was elected to the Procuratia de Supra in 1573 at the even younger age of 32, again for 20,000 ducats.⁶⁰

Such appointments could even be used to raise funds for public building. In 1580, Doge Nicolò da Ponte proposed the election of a new Procurator in order to raise funds for the reconstruction of the Procurators' houses on the south side of Piazza San Marco 'because our very wise ancestors have always been vigilant in adorning the public places of this city with important buildings, as we see in our church of San Marco, the Palazzo [Ducale], the Campanile and other most distinguished buildings nearby, which do not achieve their full splendour on account of the age and unsightliness of the dwellings of the Procurators'.⁶¹ This measure allowed the election of his young grandson of the same name to the Procuratia de Ultra for the huge sum of 22,000 ducats, thus, in effect, making a direct gesture of ducal sponsorship, as well as ensuring a dignified office for his chosen heir.⁶²

Over the past half-century, historians have extolled the Procuratia de Supra as a selfless body of erudite and distinguished nobles, dedicated to

⁵⁹ ASV, Misc. Cod., Serie I, no. 47, Cronica de' procuratori veneziani dall'an. 812 sin all'an. 1689, 14 Jan. 1570 *m.v.* (=1571). See Gaetano Cozzi, 'Federico Contarini', *Dizionario biografico degli italiani*, 28 (Rome, 1983), pp. 158–60. On Contarini's collection of works of art, see Michel Hochmann, *Peintres et commanditaires à Venise* (Rome, 1992), pp. 183–5.

⁶⁰ ASV, Misc. Cod., Serie I, no. 47, 'Cronica de' procuratori veneziani dall'an. 812 sin all'an. 1689', unnumbered ff., 15 Nov. 1573. See Gino Benzoni, 'Giovanni Dolfin', *Dizionario biografico degli italiani*, 40 (Rome, 1991), pp. 504–11, at p. 510. The comment on 'Andrea Dolfin procurator, nuovo nel governo et in ricchezza primo della città' is taken from Nicolò Contarini's 'Problemi monetari della Repubblica', published in Cozzi, *Il doge*, Appendix III, pp. 351–60, at p. 354.

⁶¹ 'Hanno sempre invigilato li nostri sapientissimi Progenitori di adorer li lochi publici di questa città con fabriche de importantia, come si vede nella chiesa nostra di San Marco, del Palazzo, Campaniel, et altre fabriche honoratissime che vi sono, le quali tutte mancano del compito suo spendor per la vecchiezza et brutto veder che fanno le case dove habitano li Procuratori nostri'. ASV, Senato Terra, registro 53, ff. 84r–84v, 10 Dec. 1580; copy in Senato Terra, filza 81, 10 Dec. 1580.

⁶² ASV, Misc. Cod., Serie I, no. 47, 'Cronica de' procuratori veneziani dall'an. 812 sin all'an. 1689', unnumbered ff., 11 Dec. 1580.

the service of state, but at least in the later sixteenth century, this myth does not stand up to close scrutiny.

Sansovino's unfinished Library building in the Piazzetta, begun under Doge Andrea Gritti in 1537, had to be continued in two directions.⁶³ Towards the Bacino to the south, offices were to be built, while along the south side of Piazza San Marco new dwellings for the Procurators were planned. The first moves towards the building of the new Procurators' houses began in 1581, when, once again, discussions were held with a series of unnamed 'architects and experts' (Fig. 6).⁶⁴

Any project of this kind needed firm supervision. In theory, all the Procurators were supposed to live in Piazza San Marco, and should therefore always be at hand to supervise the building work, but in practice the houses were old and many of them preferred to live elsewhere.⁶⁵ The Procurator Giacomo Foscarini, for example, had built a magnificent palace at the Carmini, some distance from Piazza San Marco, where his close friend and fellow Procurator de Supra, Marc'Antonio Barbaro, occupied the upper floor.⁶⁶

Scholars have assigned to Barbaro a crucial role in the project for the extension of Sansovino's buildings. At the end of May 1581 he was, indeed,

⁶³ There has been some confusion in the secondary literature between these two linked but separate projects, especially in Tafuri, *Venezia e il Rinascimento*, pp. 252–71. A similar approach to the present argument is found in Tracy E. Cooper, 'Expert opinion: *proto* and *perizia* in the case of the Libreria Marciana and the Procuratia Nuova', *Annali di architettura*, 7 (1995), 111–24. See also Gabriele Morolli, 'Vincenzo Scamozzi e la fabbrica delle Procuratie Nuove', in *Le Procuratie Nuove in Piazza San Marco* (Rome, 1994), pp. 11–116; Andrew Hopkins, 'Completamento della libreria sansoviniana (1581–1588) e portale e atrio della Zecca (1582–1588)', and 'Procuratie Nuove in piazza San Marco (1581)', in Franco Barbieri and Guido Beltramini (eds.), *Vincenzo Scamozzi 1548–1616*, exh. cat. (Venice, 2003), cat. nos. 11–12, pp. 202–20.

⁶⁴ ASV, Procuratia de Supra: Chiesa, Atti, registro 135, ff. 24v–25r, 15 Jan. 1580 *m.v.* (=1581).

⁶⁵ Decrees of the Senate on 5 Nov. 1562 and 22 Sept. 1569 attempted to persuade the Procurators to inhabit their houses in the Piazza. See ASV, Senato Terra, registro 44, f. 68, 5 Nov. 1562; Procuratia de Supra, Restauro Stabile, busta 65, processo 142, 'Scritture pella costruzione delle Procuratie nuove et altre fabbriche in Piazza dal 1574 al 1686', ff. 7r, 8r. In 1580 and 1581 the Procuratia itself tried to improve the adherence to this requirement. See ASV, Procuratia de Supra: Chiesa, Atti, registro 135, f. 10r, 30 July 1580; and ff. 24v–25r, 15 Jan. 1580 *m.v.* (=1581).

⁶⁶ Foscarini's testament confirms that the house at the Carmini was 'da me fabricata'. See ASV, Archivio Notarile, Testamenti, Nicolò Doglioni, busta 344, no. 399, drawn up on 8 March 1595, at f. 4r. He states more than once that Marc'Antonio Barbaro lived on the upper of the principal two living floors (ff. 1v., 4r). The house must have been built by 1574 when a reception was held there for the entertainment of the visiting king Henry III of France. See BMV, MS Marc. it, VII, 'Memorie del N.H. S. Francesco da Molin', 110 (=8612), f. 46v. On Foscarini's life, see Bartholomeo Ridolfi Sforza, *Vita di Giacopo Foscarini, Cavaliere e Procuratore di S. Marco* (Venice, 1624; translation of Latin edn. of 1623); R. Zago, 'Giacomo Foscarini', *Dizionario biografico degli italiani*, 49 (Rome, 1997), pp. 365–70.

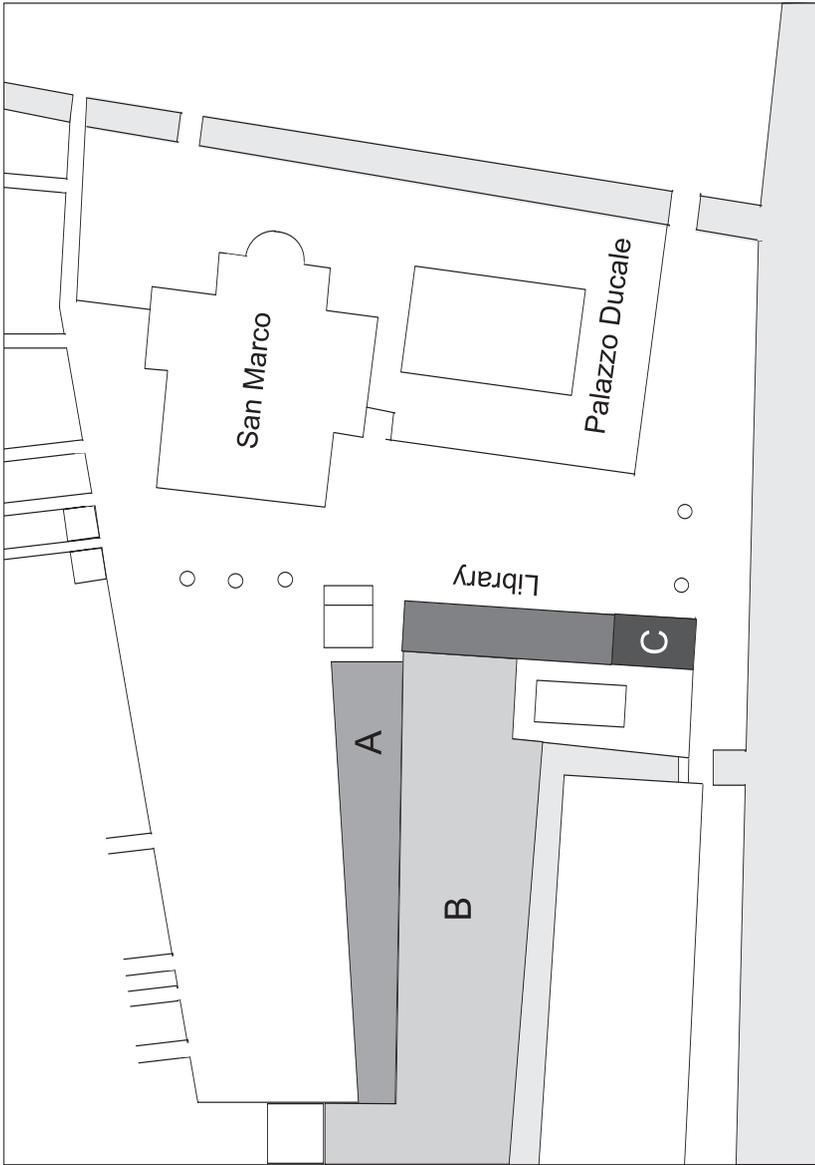


Figure 6. Sketch-plan of Piazza San Marco, Venice, showing (A) the areas to be demolished, (B) the site of the new Procurators' houses, now known as the 'Procuratie Nuove', and (C) the extension to the Library.

appointed the sole Procurator responsible for the work.⁶⁷ Significantly, however, it has been overlooked that Barbaro was appointed in his absence. He was still absent when a few days later his two much younger colleagues, Andrea Dolfin and Federico Contarini, were elected to join him to form the small executive committee to administer the construction of the new buildings.⁶⁸ As early as January in the following year, Barbaro asked to be excused from the committee, and he was replaced by his friend Giacomo Foscarini, who, in turn, resigned a year later in March 1583.⁶⁹ There seems to have been little enthusiasm for direct involvement in the task.

A meeting to consider the three designs submitted for the continuation of the buildings was held on 5 April 1582.⁷⁰ As is well known, Barbaro and Foscarini persuaded their colleagues to select the model by the young Vincenzo Scamozzi, who had inherited their support after the death of Palladio in 1580. As a native of Palladio's adopted home town, Vicenza, Scamozzi presented the academic credentials of a scholar-architect rather than a mere *proto*. His design was chosen in preference to those by two local *proti*, the Procuratia de Supra's own *proto* Simon Sorella, and Francesco Fracao, also known as Smeraldi. In contrast to the situation in the time of Sansovino, who had been both *proto* and architect, design and execution were once again separated. Although Scamozzi was paid for his drawings and models, Sorella was put in charge of the building site.⁷¹ Nonetheless, the procedure of broad consultation of local *proti* was once again put into action in 1582 when concern arose over whether Sansovino's Library could support a third storey on top, as recommended by Scamozzi.⁷² Even a relatively autonomous body such as the Procuracy of St Mark's relied on continual recourse to outside consultants.

Still there was reluctance to take responsibility. Andrea Dolfin and Giacomo Foscarini both resigned from the building committee in 1584, and one of the Procurators appointed to succeed them, Giacomo Soranzo, declined on the grounds of ill-health.⁷³ Late in 1586 the three

⁶⁷ ASV, Procuratia de Supra: Chiesa, Atti, registro 135, ff. 41v–42r., 30 May 1581.

⁶⁸ ASV, Procuratia de Supra: Chiesa, Atti, registro 135, ff. 42r–42v, 4 June 1581.

⁶⁹ ASV, Procuratia de Supra: Chiesa, Atti, registro 135, f. 64v., 17 Jan. 1581 *m.v.* (=1582), with marginal note dated 9 March 1583.

⁷⁰ ASV, Procuratia de Supra: Chiesa, Atti, registro 136, f. 5v, 5 April 1582. The selection of Scamozzi's design was confirmed on 10 April 1582 (*ibid.*, f. 6v). Copies of these documents are contained in ASV, Procuratia de Supra, Restauro Stabile, busta 65, processo 142, ff. 18r, 19r.

⁷¹ Sorella was given a salary rise on 31 May 1582. See ASV, Procuratia de Supra: Chiesa, Atti, registro 136, f. 13v.

⁷² Tafuri, *Venezia e il Rinascimento*, pp. 257–8; Hopkins, 'Completamento', p. 202.

⁷³ ASV, Procuratia de Supra: Chiesa, Atti, registro 136, f. 104v, 15 Jan. 1583 *m.v.* (=1584), and f. 105v, 29 Jan. 1583 *m.v.* (=1584).

Provveditori in charge of the new Procurators' houses finished their term and suggested the election of a single commissioner to succeed them. The election, however, was a tie between Foscarini and Barbaro, so no election was made.⁷⁴ Barbaro was absent for most of the spring of 1587, but in September he made his now famous speech urging his fellow Procurators to accept the addition of a third storey.⁷⁵ Four of his fellow Procurators urged caution, and once again technical experts were consulted. Whereas Sorella asserted with conviction that the foundations were inadequate, Scamozzi marshalled more representational arguments for the opposite view, claiming that the aim was to complete this masterpiece both to enhance the image of the Republic and to create a timeless example worthy of respect throughout the world.⁷⁶

The arguments between Sorella and Scamozzi and their respective supporters dragged on during 1588, with further consultations of other *proti*.⁷⁷ In the end the dispute was resolved only with a motion of the Senate, which imposed on the Procurators the decision that the Library elevation in the Piazzetta should be continued without the third storey, but that the new Procurators' houses in the Piazza should have three storeys.⁷⁸ By May 1589 the office accommodation in the Piazzetta was ready for occupation, and Federico Contarini was put in charge of the erection of the new Procurators' houses in recognition of his excellent service in the earlier phase, recorded by an inscription on the building dated 1581.⁷⁹ Yet again, however, in 1590 the Senate asserted its authority over the

⁷⁴ The three Procurators who had finished their term were Francesco di Priuli, Federico Contarini and Girolamo da Mula. They wished to elect 'un solo clarissimo Procuratore' to succeed them. Barbaro and Foscarini each received five votes in favour and one against; Andrea Dolfín received four in favour and two against; while Girolamo Emo received two in favour and four against. ASV, Procuratia de Supra, busta 65, Restauro Stabile, processo 142, f. 25r, 9 Dec. 1586. Because of the stalemate, it was decided not to record the motion in the Atti of the Procuratia dei Supra.

⁷⁵ ASV, Procuratia de Supra: Chiesa, Atti, registro 137, f. 118, 27 Sept. 1587; copy in ASV, Procuratia de Supra: Chiesa, busta 65, Restauro Stabili, processo 142, f. 26r.

⁷⁶ ASV, Procuratia de Supra: Chiesa, busta 65, Restauro Stabili, processo 142, ff. 28r–28v, 13 Oct. 1587 (Sorella's report); ff. 30r–31r, 6 Dec. 1587 (Scamozzi's report). Two *proti* from the building site at San Giorgio Maggiore were brought in to support Scamozzi, but contrary to Tafuri's assertion, they only addressed technical issues and did not discuss the recondite question of the correct heights of the friezes. ASV, Procuratia de Supra: Chiesa, busta 65, Restauro Stabili, processo 142, ff. 32r–32v, 6 Dec. 1587.

⁷⁷ Further opinions were taken from a range of *proti* from Jan. to April 1588. See ASV, Procuratia de Supra: Chiesa, busta 65, Restauro stabili, processo 142, ff. 34r–45r.

⁷⁸ Senato Terra, registro 58, ff. 110r–111r, 7 Sept. 1588.

⁷⁹ ASV, Procuratia de Supra: Chiesa, Atti, registro 137, ff. 179v–190r, 10 Sept. 1589; Procuratia de Supra: Chiesa, busta 65, Restauro stabili, processo 142, ff. 48r–48v, 1 Oct. 1589.

Procuratia de Supra, complaining of poor accounts and incompetent site supervision. Almost certainly these accusations were entirely justified, although they must be seen in the context of factional power struggles within the ruling oligarchy.⁸⁰ In 1591 Barbaro and Foscarini were once again put in charge of the work, but both asked to be excused a few months later.⁸¹ Despite his strong support for Scamozzi, Barbaro had no desire to be in charge of the detailed site supervision, and on at least two occasions he asked to skip his turn as chief treasurer.⁸²

The Procuratia de Supra, as constituted, represented the elite of the Venetian patriciate, whether through experience or wealth. Thus their arguments tended to reflect the cultural affiliations of the *vecchi*: that is to say, they preferred erudite classicism and the display of magnificence to represent the public face of the Venetian state. But even within their ranks, internal disagreements and reluctant management characterised their patronage in the later sixteenth century, and their independence was increasingly reined in by the elected assemblies.⁸³

The Rialto Bridge⁸⁴

While the heated polemic about the continuation of Sansovino's Library raged in the Procuratia de Supra, a very different debate in the full Senate focused on the decrepit state of the old wooden Rialto Bridge. The issue of the bridge had remained unresolved ever since the idea of rebuilding it in stone had first been suggested in 1507.⁸⁵ Since 1554 a magistracy of

⁸⁰ ASV, Senato Terra, registro 60, ff. 142r–142v, 16 Nov. 1590.

⁸¹ ASV, Procuratia de Supra: Chiesa, Atti, registro 138, f. 52r, 15 Dec. 1591; and f. 59r, 6 April 1592.

⁸² ASV, Procuratia de Supra: Chiesa, Atti, registro 137, f. 71, 13 July 1586; and registro 138, f. 62v, 3 May 1592.

⁸³ Tafuri has credited Andrea Dolfin, the one Procurator who urged restraint, with 'giovani' politics but the 'giovani' themselves had little respect for Dolfin. See Tafuri, *Venezia e il Rinascimento*, pp. 258–62. For Nicolò Contarini's opinion of Andrea Dolfin, see Cozzi, *Il doge*, p. 354. Dolfin certainly had enemies, for he was murdered in 1602. See Benzoni, 'Giovanni Dolfin', p. 510.

⁸⁴ This section is based on my paper 'The Great Rialto Bridge Debate', given at the conference *Bâtiments publics aux XVI^e–XVIII^e siècles. I: Le gouvernement, la justice et l'économique/Public Buildings in early Modern Europe (16th–18th Century), part I: Government, Justice and Economy* (Troisième rencontre d'architecture européenne du Centre André Chastel, Paris/Sorbonne-Paris IV), at the Catharijneconvent, Utrecht, 28–30 June 2006 (proceedings in press, ed. Konrad Ottenheim).

⁸⁵ Marin Sanudo (Sanuto), *I diarii*, 58 vols., ed. R. Fulin *et al.* (Venice, 1879–1903), vol. 7, column 168, 22 Oct. 1507. See also Donatella Calabi and Paolo Morachiello, *Rialto: le fabbriche e il Ponte 1514–1591* (Turin, 1987), p. 195.

three nobles had been elected annually to address the problem, but because of the constant rotation of magistrates no coherent policy had emerged.⁸⁶ In December 1587, the Senate re-opened the discussion, focusing on two main issues: the alignment of the bridge and whether it should have one arch or three.⁸⁷ At this point Leonardo Donà, as outspoken as ever, opposed the very idea of a new bridge and suggested restoring the bridge in wood to save money for the defence budget. One chronicler complained of Donà's tiresome propaganda outside the Senate which 'wore everyone out, referring to the affairs of the whole world and the danger of war'.⁸⁸

In December 1587 three new *Provveditori* (commissioners in charge of the building project) were elected, and this time they were to remain in office until the bridge was finished. Two of them, Giacomo Foscarini and Alvise Zorzi, had already served on the body of three *Provveditori* or commissioners responsible for the post-fire rebuilding of the Doge's Palace. The third, yet again, was Foscarini's close friend and fellow Procurator de Supra, Marc'Antonio Barbaro. It must already have been evident from the experience of the Palazzo Ducale repairs that Zorzi and Foscarini held diametrically opposite political views. Zorzi, like Donà, was a puritanical, anti-aesthetic adherent of 'giovani' policies, and it may not be insignificant that he suffered from very poor eyesight.⁸⁹ Foscarini, on the other hand, generally sympathised with Barbaro's preference for monumental classicism as a representation of the state.

By 7 January it had already been decided to rebuild the bridge with two rows of shops like the old wooden structure, but with additional

⁸⁶ The resolution to elect the magistracy had been taken in the Senate in 1525, but it was not revived until 1551, when the first three *Provveditori*, Vettor Grimani, Antonio Cappello and Tomaso Contarini were elected. ASV, Senato Terra, registro 37, ff. 88r–88v, 17 Jan. 1550 *m.v.* (=1581). From 1554 onwards, except in the years 1568–77, the three magistrates were re-elected regularly, but with the constant rotation of officers little progress was made. The annual elections are recorded in ASV, Segretario alle Voci, Elezioni Senato, registro 2, 1554–9, f. 53; registro 3, 1559–67, f. 50; registro 4, 1568–77, no elections listed; registro 5, 1578–88, ff. 113v–114. See also Zorzi, 1966, docs. 5–10, pp. 248–9.

⁸⁷ The debate is recorded in the chronicle of Alvise Michiel, Biblioteca Correr di Venezia (henceforth BCV), cod. Cic. 2556, 'Annali delle cose della Repubblica di Venezia 1587–8', unnumbered ff., 2 Jan. 1587 *m.v.* (=1588).

⁸⁸ BCV, cod. Cic. 2556, Alvise Michiel, 'Annali delle cose della Repubblica di Venezia 1587–8', unnumbered ff., 2 Jan. 1587 *m.v.* (=1588).

⁸⁹ On Alvise Zorzi, son of Benedetto (1515–93), see Tafuri, *Venezia e il Rinascimento*, pp. 247–8, n. 7. Zorzi's poor eyesight was mentioned as an excuse when he declined the position of *Provveditor* in Zecca on 23 April 1585 'per la molta debilità della sua vista'. ASV, Senato Terra, registro 56, f. 26r.

walkways on the outer sides ‘so that, to enhance its beauty, it will be possible to view the [Grand] Canal, as the drawing shows’.⁹⁰ Who made the drawing is unclear. Already a detailed procedure of consultation was under way, and over thirty technical experts had already been consulted. Between late December and mid January a series of questions drawn up by the Provveditori was put to seventeen *proti* from different building sites in and around Venice. Some replied in writing, and others dictated their responses to a chancery secretary.⁹¹ On 12 January the three commissioners put their views to the Senate. Barbaro (with Foscarini’s support) spoke vigorously (*gagliardamente*) and at length in favour of the three-arched proposal, recommending a grandiose classicising scheme by Scamozzi, while Zorzi passionately defended the single-arched option (Fig. 7).⁹² As in the case of the Redentore, the debate was so heated that it had to be adjourned. A week later they resumed their polemic, but when it came to the vote Barbaro received just eight votes from the 174 Senators present.⁹³ Instead, it was decided to base the decision on the views of the ‘experts’.⁹⁴ As Table 1 shows, their views were equivocal about the number of arches, but everyone agreed that the single arch would cause less obstruction to the Grand Canal and, above all, would cost less (Table 1).

Barbaro’s sense of public duty obliged him to accept the decision to choose the single-arched option, but he was alarmed by the casual procedures. First of all, he asserted, ‘there must be a firm and solid resolution of the form of the bridge, with its measurements of length, height, width, foundations and so on’, in order to avoid expensive errors.⁹⁵ Secondly, ‘it is necessary to appoint the most intelligent person possible to take charge

⁹⁰ ‘... accioche per maggior bellezza possa scoprir esso canale come nel disegno si vede.’ ASV, Senato Terra, registro 56, f. 246r, 7 Jan. 1587 *m.v.* (=1587), published in Zorzi, *Le chiese*, pp. 250–1, doc. 14.

⁹¹ ASV, Provveditori sopra la fabbrica del ponte di Rialto, busta 3, Pareri, fasc. 1. Published in Roberto Cessi and Annibale Alberti, *Rialto: L’isola—il ponte—il mercato* (Bologna, 1934), doc. XIX, g–s, pp. 352–71, and docs. bb–ii, pp. 376–85. See Calabi and Morachiello, *Rialto*, pp. 244–50.

⁹² BCV, cod. Cic. 2556, Alvise Michiel, ‘Annali delle cose della Repubblica di Venezia 1587–8’, unnumbered pp., 12 Jan. 1587 *m.v.* (=1588).

⁹³ BCV, cod. Cic. 2556, Alvise Michiel, ‘Annali delle cose della Repubblica di Venezia 1587–8’, unnumbered pp., 19 Jan. 1587 *m.v.* (=1588). ASV, Senato Terra, registro 57, ff. 256r–256v, 20 Jan. 1587 *m.v.* (=1588) does not give the full voting figures cited by Michiel. See also Cessi and Alberti, *Rialto*, pp. 201–2.

⁹⁴ See above, note 91.

⁹⁵ ASV, Provveditori sopra la fabbrica del ponte di Rialto, busta 3, Pareri, fascicolo 2, 28 Jan. 1587 *m.v.* (=1588): ‘si deve fare ferma e salda resolutione della forma di esso ponte con le sue misure di grandezza, altezza, larghezza, fondamento et altro’. The document is published in Cessi and Alberti, *Rialto*, pp. 205–6; and in Calabi and Morachiello, *Rialto*, p. 259.

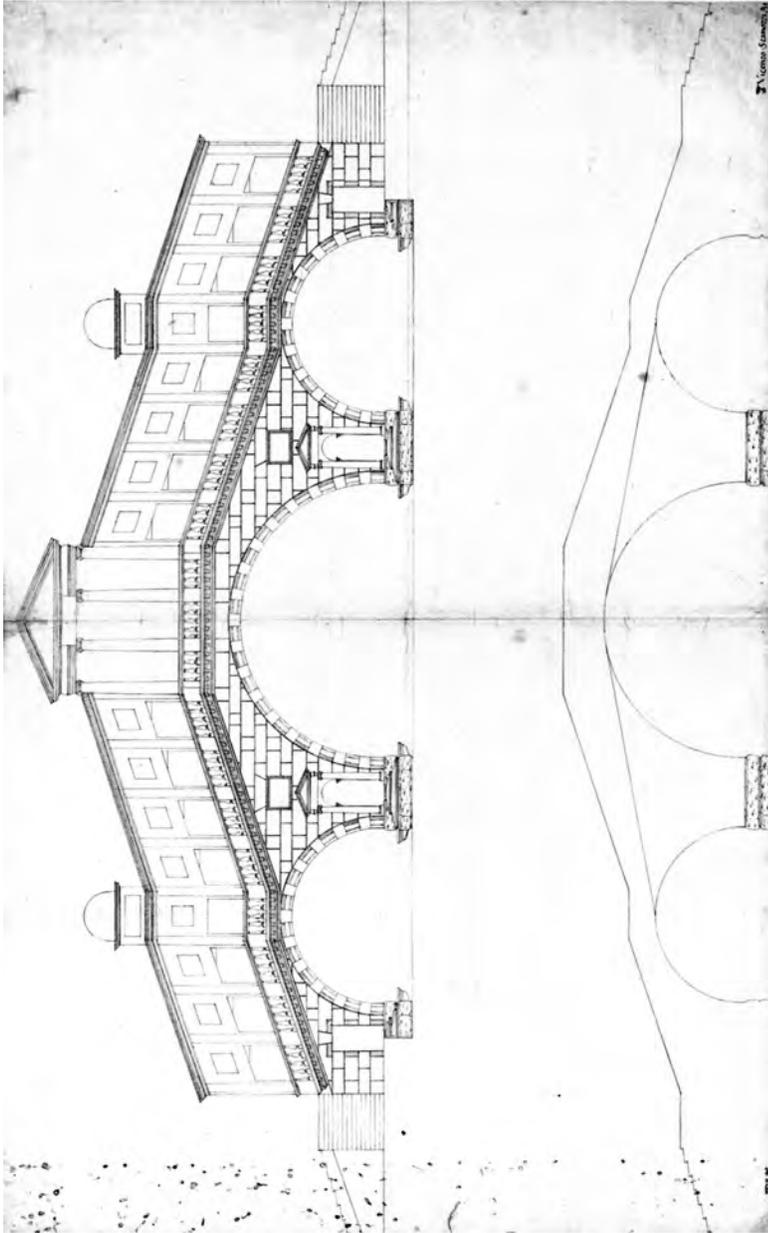


Figure 7. Vincenzo Scamozzi, project for the Rialto Bridge, 1587. (London, Royal Institute of British Architects, VIII/10.)

of the execution of the project, so that the work will be administered and carried out as it should be'.⁹⁶

Work had already begun on sealing the site for laying piles at the market end of the bridge and when problems arose the elderly *proto* to the Salt Office, Antonio da Ponte, then 78 years old, came to the rescue, promising to secure the site at his own expense. With this ostensibly public-spirited gesture, he seized full control.⁹⁷ Da Ponte was almost illiterate, and was completely agnostic about the architectural language: he simply stated 'Above these streets [on the bridge] put some decoration that befits the site'.⁹⁸ His one surviving drawing for the bridge, in an eccentric mixture of plan, section and elevation, reveals his lack of a classical training in draughtsmanship (Fig. 8), but its ingenious format conveyed all the necessary information on a single sheet. What is more, his successful direction of the restoration of the Doge's Palace had already gained the confidence of Zorzi and Foscarini. And he had produced the fullest and most convincing budget, always a confidence-inspiring move.

The pile-driving at one end of the site went ahead through the spring and summer, until doubts began to arise over the unprecedented system of piles on three different levels (Fig. 9).⁹⁹ At this point Barbaro requested an investigation into the technical merits of this solution. Once again stormy sessions in the Senate ensued, and a committee of five more Senators was appointed to advise the original committee of three.¹⁰⁰ Their

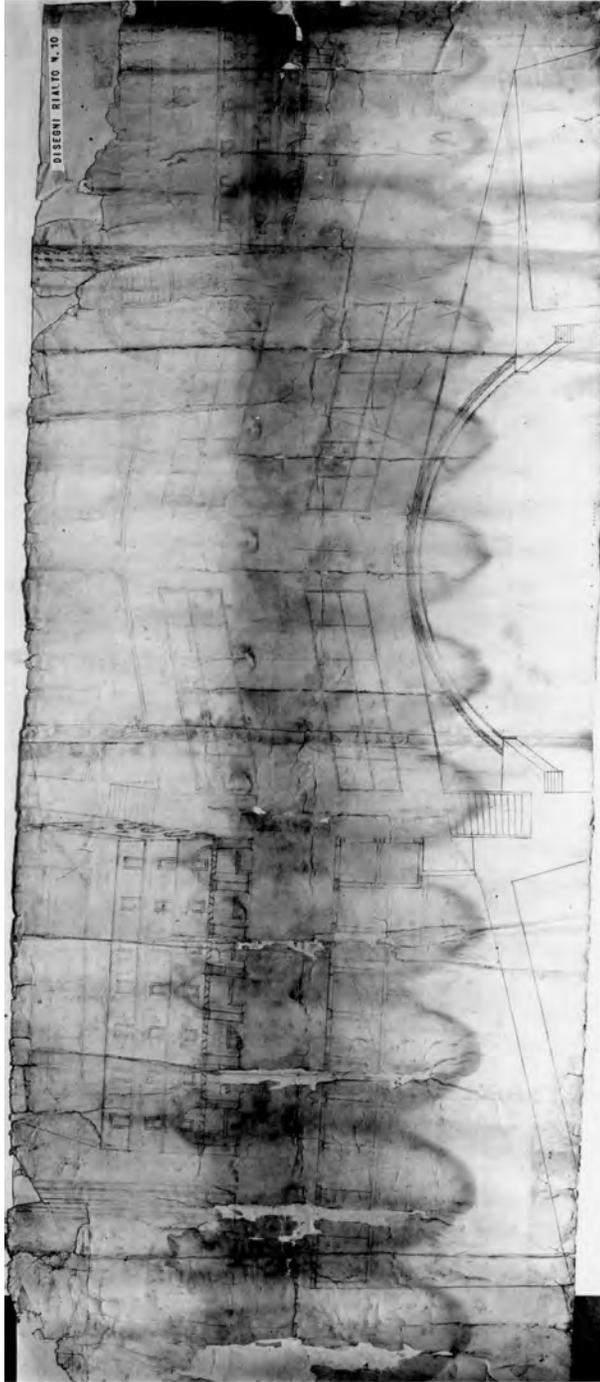
⁹⁶ ASV, Proveditori sopra la fabbrica del ponte di Rialto, busta 3, Pareri, fasc. 2, 28 Jan. 1587 *m. v.* (=1588): 'e nesario di far eletion di persona quanto piu intelligente sia posibelle per asister continuamente all'operation che sia condotta et fatta come si deve' (transcribed in Cessi and Alberti, *Rialto*, pp. 205–6). Barbaro presumably hoped Scamozzi would be appointed to this role.

⁹⁷ ASV, Senato Terra, registro 58, f. 7v, 12 March 1588, published in Zorzi, *Le chiese*, doc. 26, p. 254. See also Calabi and Morachiello, *Rialto*, pp. 261–2, 266. On Antonio da Ponte's career see T. Temanza, 'Vita di Antonio da Ponte architetto', in *Vite dei piu celebri architetti e scultori veneziani che fiorirono nel secolo decimosesto* (Venice, 1778), pp. 499–518; Brigida Balboni and Paola Martinelli, 'Antonio dal Ponte Proto al Sal: "l'acconciar" e le nuove "fabbriche"', Ponte di Rialto e Prigioni', unpublished *tesi di laurea* (relatore P. Morachiello), Istituto Universitario di Architettura di Venezia, anno accademico 1982–3, approved 1984; M. Petrecca, 'Antonio da Ponte', *Dizionario biografico italiano*, 32 (Rome, 1986), pp. 701–6.

⁹⁸ ASV, Proveditori sopra la fabbrica del ponte di Rialto, busta 3, Pareri, fasc. 1, no. 5, 20 Dec. 1587: 'E di sopra a deto strade farli qualche adornamento che ricerca deto liogo'.

⁹⁹ William Barclay Parsons, *Engineers and Engineering in the Renaissance* (Cambridge, MA and London, 1939), pp. 516–18; Cessi and Alberti, *Rialto*, p. 208; Calabi and Morachiello, *Rialto*, pp. 269–70.

¹⁰⁰ ASV, Senato Terra, registro 58, ff. 95v–98r, 6–9 Aug. 1588; ff. 100r–100v, 13 Aug. 1588 (documents partially cited in Zorzi, *Le chiese*, docs. 31–2, pp. 256–7); Secretario alle voci, Elezioni in Senato, registro 5, ff. 113v–114r, 9 Aug. 1584. The debates are recounted in BCV, cod. Cic. 2556, Alvise Michiel, 'Annali delle cose della Repubblica di Venezia 1587–8', unnumbered pp., 6–9 Aug. 1588.



(a)

(b)

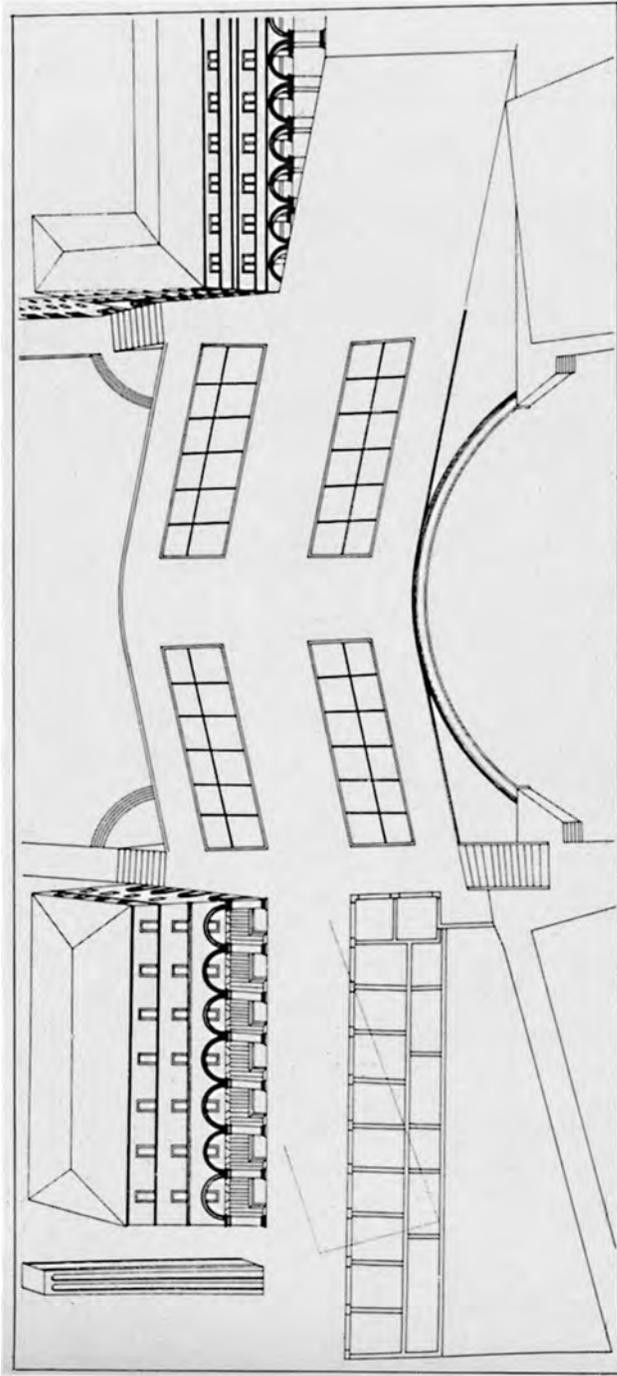


Figure 8. (a) Antonio da Ponte, project for Rialto Bridge, Venice. (Archivio di Stato di Venezia, Provveditori sopra la fabbrica del ponte di Rialto, disegni, no. 10); (b) as re-drawn by Paolo Rossi in Calabi and Morachiello, 1987, fig. 93. (Photograph: Istituto Universitario di Architettura di Venezia, diateca del DSA.)

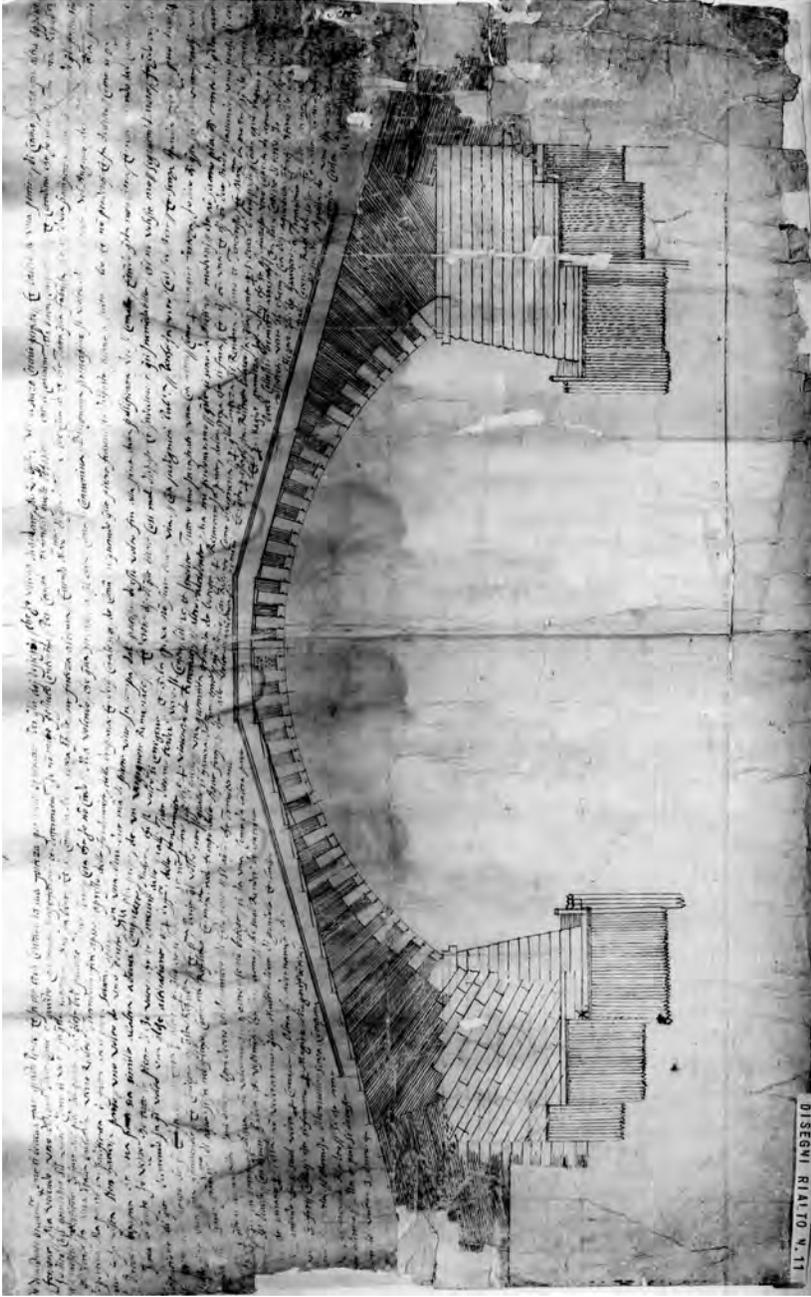


Figure 9. Rialto Bridge, Venice, section showing structure as built (left) and as recommended by the anonymous draughtsman (right), (Archivio di Stato di Venezia, Proveditori sopra la fabbrica del Ponte di Rialto, disegni, no. 11.)

solution was the same as before, to put the matter out to public consultation. Surprisingly, the committee not only interrogated *proti*, but even canvassed opinions from bystanders and stall-holders including a sausage-maker, a wine-merchant and two fruit sellers, all of whom gave their views on the pile-driving process.¹⁰¹ A brandy-seller claimed that the sinking of some piles had taken three hours: 'In my judgment it is impossible that these foundations should be defective, and I can assure you that the pile-driving has been done properly; [I say this] as confidently as I know how to taste a glass of *malvasia*, and tell whether it is good or bad, which is my profession.'¹⁰²

Meanwhile the *proti* were invited to give their views to the committee on the stepped foundations and the diagonal bedding of the stonework, which in reality were the secret to the success of the design, effectively preventing outward slippage of the foundations.¹⁰³ Once again, the *proti* were far from unanimous, as Table 2 demonstrates, but the majority view supported the continuation of the work as begun. Finally in September another series of six questions about the alignment was put to the *proti*, for even after nine months the actual route of the bridge was still undecided.¹⁰⁴

The dynamics within the group of three Provveditori were uneasy. In the first summer (1588), Zorzi tried to resign when his wife was ill, but his resignation was not accepted by the Senate.¹⁰⁵ The three commissioners had to sign every contract for every stage of the work, including

¹⁰¹ The interrogation was carried out in the Collegio in front of Ottaviano Valier, Giacomo Contarini, Lorenzo di Priuli and Caterino Corner and the Provveditori sopra il Ponte di Rialto, and transcribed by a secretary. See Provveditori sopra la Fabbrica del Ponte di Rialto, busta 3, Pareri, no. 4; BMV, cod. Marc. it. Z, 29 (=4796), 'Difficoltà sopra la fabbrica del ponte di Rialto', ff. 15r–17r, 12 Aug. 1588. See also Cessi and Alberti, *Rialto*, pp. 403–5; Calabi and Morachiello, *Rialto*, p. 273.

¹⁰² BMV, cod. Marc. it. Z, 29 (=4796), 'Difficoltà sopra la fabbrica del ponte di Rialto', ff. 16r–17r: 'Et a mio giudicio de mi non è possibile che quel fondamento mai manca, et fece io così buon giudicio di quella fundamenta, havendola fatto fabricar come faria, à saver gustar un bichier de Malvasia, se l'è buona, ò cattiva, che s'è mia profession.' This evidence is discussed by Parsons, *Engineers*, p. 520, remarking that: 'This is what a modern commission would do—listen to both reason and gossip.'

¹⁰³ BMV, cod. Marc. it. Z, 29 (=4796), 'Difficoltà sopra la fabbrica del ponte di Rialto', ff. 5r–14r.

¹⁰⁴ ASV, Provveditori sopra la fabbrica del ponte di Rialto, busta 3, Pareri, fasc. 2, nos. 14–25; also contained in BMV, cod. Marc. it. Z, 29 (=4796), 'Difficoltà sopra la fabbrica del ponte di Rialto', ff. 35v–49r, 1–2 Sept. 1588, transcribed in Cessi and Alberti, 1934, doc. XXII, pp. 418–32.

¹⁰⁵ ASV, Provveditori sopra la fabbrica del ponte di Rialto, busta 3, Pareri, fasc. 2, no. 3, 8 Aug. 1588.

those for boatmen, pile-drivers, masons, bricklayers. Barbaro was often absent from their meetings, and in reality it was Zorzi who provided the most dedicated support for the day-to-day execution of the project. All the technical drawings and templates were provided by Antonio da Ponte, but the design details of the superstructure were prepared by Benedetto Banelli, the on-site deputy of the second *proto al Sal*, Antonio Contin.¹⁰⁶ (The second *proto al Sal* was needed because of da Ponte's great age and numerous commitments.) The fact that the masons had to go to Foscarini's house to collect the templates strongly suggests that Barbaro and Foscarini kept close control over the classical details.

There were undoubtedly problems, too, with the on-site supervision—when challenged, da Ponte admitted that he was often too busy with other work, while Contin declared that he could not remember if he had supervised the workers properly.¹⁰⁷ Considering that a budget of 250,000 ducats was spent on the project, such loose site management is surprising. Nonetheless, da Ponte was so proud of the design that he was granted a patent for its invention by the Senate in October 1590, forbidding anyone to sell views of the bridge or images of its foundations for twenty years.¹⁰⁸

Technologically, scenographically and functionally the bridge was a triumphant success. (Fig. 10). By contrast the classical details were superficial additions—the central arch plucked from Serlio's treatise, the balustrade from Scamozzi's rejected design, and the rustication of the shops from the arena in Verona.¹⁰⁹ Here the inherently dynamic—and sometimes erratic—process of decision-making through consultation with experts in local building practice ensured that the image of the Republic was conveyed by technical innovation rather than by coherent classical erudition.

¹⁰⁶ The specifications awarded to the various *maestri*, are contained in ASV, Provveditori sopra la fabrica del ponte di Rialto, busta 4, Contratti. On the next stages of the building work see Cessi and Alberti, *Rialto*, 218–21; Calabi and Morachiello, *Rialto*, pp. 283–99.

¹⁰⁷ ASV, Provveditori sopra la fabbrica del Ponte di Rialto, busta 4, fascicolo 8, parte 3, Processi, 13 Aug. 1591 and 1 Sep. 1591. Contin was probably the nephew of Antonio da Ponte, as first suggested by Temanza, *Le vite*, p. 518.

¹⁰⁸ ASV, Senato Terra, registro 60, ff. 130r–130v, 27 Oct. 1590.

¹⁰⁹ Sebastiano Serlio, *Tutte l'opere d'architettura et prospettiva* (Venice, Giacomo de' Franceschi, 1619 edn.), Book III, f. 74v.



Figure 10. Antonio da Ponte, Rialto Bridge Venice, erected 1588–91. (Photograph: author.)

Conclusion

As we have seen, in later sixteenth-century Venice the utopian ideals of the ‘vecchi’ and their favourite architects, Palladio and Scamozzi, were repeatedly thrust aside by the democratic processes of government. Architectural classicism, by now diffused across Europe through printed architectural treatises, held little sway in the decision-making processes. In Venice, by contrast, the rigid academic approach seemed old-fashioned and impractical, while an ever-increasing regard was given to technical expertise. In a patrician oligarchy it is perhaps surprising that the views of mere *proti* and even (as in the case of the Rialto) members of general public were held in such high regard. Yet the number of patents granted by the Venetian Senate in this period for inventions of all kinds reminds us of the Republic’s enthusiasm for technological expertise.¹¹⁰ By the second half of the sixteenth century, any coherent attempt to refine the Roman identity introduced by Sansovino in the time of Doge Gritti faded beneath the more pragmatic, technologically orientated cultural programme of the ‘giovani’. The lengthy and elaborate consultation processes could have been paralysing, but in reality they played a crucial role in winning political acceptance for ambitious adventures in public building.

Note. This lecture was written while I was the Robert Lehmann Visiting Professor at Harvard University’s Villa I Tatti near Florence in the Spring Semester of 2007. The support of the Director Joseph Connors and the kind assistance of the Library staff, as well as the friendship of the other Visiting Professors and Fellows, made this the ideal place to undertake the work. Brian Pullan kindly read the whole text and made numerous helpful and perceptive suggestions. I am most grateful to John Law, Malcolm Longair, Sarah Longair and Laura Moretti for advice, information and support.

Note on transcriptions. The original spelling has been retained, but abbreviations have been expanded and the punctuation and capitalisation modernised. Where appropriate, ‘u’ has been rendered as ‘v’, and ‘j’ as ‘i’, both in documents and in early printed sources.

Dating. According to the Venetian dating system, the year began on 1 March. Thus dates in January and February are given both in *more veneto* (*m.v.*) and in modern dating.

¹¹⁰ See for example, the 30-year patent granted in 1578 to the Florentine architect Bernardo Buontalenti for three machines: two for milling grain with and without water, and one for raising water (ASV, Senato Terra, reg. 51, f. 96v, 20 Sept. 1578; renewed reg. 52, f. 161v., 23 Apr. 1579); and the 30-year patent granted in 1580 to the Venetian *proto* Francesco Zamberlan for a new method of spinning fine woollen thread (ASV, Senato Terra, reg. 52, f. 246r, 6 Feb. 1579 *m.v.* (=1580)).