

# Layers of Venice

## Architecture, Arts and Antiquities at Rialto

Michela Agazzi, Gianmario Guidarelli,  
Myriam Pilutti Namer



**Edizioni**  
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Layers of Venice

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Michela Agazzi, Gianmario Guidarelli, Myriam Pilutti Namer

with essays by

Isabella Cecchini, Dorothy Collins, Luca Siracusano, Lorenzo Lazzarini, Nicolas Moucheront

and an Atlas of unedited photos by

Francesco Turio Böhm

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Michela Agazzi, Gianmario Guidarelli, Myriam Pilutti Namer

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Michela Agazzi, Gianmario Guidarelli, Myriam Pilutti Namer

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# Layers of Memory: On an Urban, Architectural, and Sculptural Scale (*Spolia*)

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This volume originates from a webinar that was held at the Ca' Foscari University of Venice in the midst of one of the most severe waves of COVID-19 that struck Italy, on 25th March 2021, entitled: *La chiesa di San Giacomo a Venezia. Studi di architettura, scultura, storia*.

The aim of the seminar was to study, with an interdisciplinary approach, the intriguing and challenging architecture of the church of San Giacomo di Rialto set in its own context, the Rialto area, between the Middle Ages and the Modern Age. The success of the event led us to expand our research and involve scholars who would have been able to explore the different layers of meaning that the urban and architectural context encompasses, thus contributing to a deeper understanding of the building's importance in the Medieval and Modern Ages.

This relationship is made evident in the way in which the Venetian brotherhoods were involved in the arrangement of the church's altars and burial spaces. We therefore opted to investigate more specifically the memorial character of the architecture and furnishings of the church in the context of the history of Venice. The volume thus took the form of a fruitful dialogue involving different generations of scholars from diverse disciplines. Art, architectural and urban planning historians, geologists, archaeologists and historians, all converse in the volume without conflict, each offering his or her own contribution to the discussion, to the development of specific arguments and to the investigation of ongoing problematic issues. The scholars who contributed to the volume also belong to differ-

ent schools of thought and present different levels of academic experience: for instance, together with the essay by an internationally renowned expert such as Lorenzo Lazzarini, there is an article by Dorothy Collins, a King's College of London graduate student, who wrote her degree thesis at Ca' Foscari focusing on the architecture of the church of San Giacomo di Rialto.

For the city, the celebration of the 1600th anniversary of Venice in 2021 meant the triumph of a legend over history. Indeed, the date of the city's foundation on 25th March 421 AD is a component of a genuine imaginary tradition, a myth elaborated between the 13th and the 14th century – in other words, what today might appear to us as a conscious historical distortion, as well as the narrative that wants the church of San Giacomo di Rialto to have been founded a few years later. As Venetians, or Venetians by adoption, we appreciate the value of a tradition that, however feeble, is still alive, but we would like this book to attempt to build a bridge between the strength of tradition (even if invented) and the uncertainty of the future function of an area of the city that through the centuries has undergone radical transformations in its social aspects and in the use of public spaces. The close intertwining – historically attested and critically reconstructed in this volume – between the church and the area of the market could not only shed new light on the deep sense of such tradition, but could also help define a potential future role for this area that would not underestimate the intricate and persistent multilayering of meanings that are deep-rooted in the Venetian identity.

We believe that this volume therefore offers a greater understanding of the multiple layers of meaning that have been superimposed between the Medieval and Modern Ages in the Rialto area, detecting as the leit-motif of analysis the memorial component that each operation of architectural reuse has always carried in the history of the church of San Giacomo di Rialto. Adopting

this principle, in their semantic sophistication we could interpret the persistence of the spatial model, the reuse of individual architectural and decorative elements (such as the mosaic in the high altar, probably recalling the mosaic decoration of the pre-existing apsidal calotte) but also, on a larger scale, the different configurations of the urban context (the Rialto market) through the centuries, after repeated destruction, reconstruction and transformation. With this multi-scalar approach, the church, a sort of an architectural 'relic', played a key role in the narrative strategy adopted to perpetually renovate the myth of Venice. In its urban dimension, the church of San Giacomo di Rialto appears to scholars as a seismograph of the role that the *forma urbis* has constantly played in connection with a myth that is progressively enriched with new themes. The building thus takes on a conceptual and polysemantic dimension where each component (objects, contexts, meanings, functions, images) constitutes an element of cultural memory and where each era leaves a tangible trace.

For instance, this is the case of the architectural reconstruction carried out between the 16th and the 17th century, where, in order to maintain the architectural shape – so deeply rooted in the collective memory – by adapting it to the new lighting system requirements, the entire structure (floor, columns, vaults, roof) was elevated, maintaining the perimeter walls but leaving rough-hewn stone ashlar under the columns as a memory of the operations carried out. The documentary evidence on the 17th-century renovation – published here for the first time – opens up further questions in addition to all the other research paths we wish to start with this volume. Indeed, our first goal has been to assess the knowledge acquired in recent decades on the church of San Giacomo di Rialto, clearly pointing out the many still unsolved riddles that only appropriate archaeological investigations could start to unravel. In the context of the most up-to-date historiography on the vicissitudes of



the ‘myth of Venice’,<sup>1</sup> this volume therefore represents a starting point for further and more in-depth research on the church within its urban context, which we would like to encourage, not least on the basis of the images collected at the end of the volume, resulting from a remarkable photographic campaign specifically carried out by Francesco Turio Böhm.

In recent years, this positive approach toward the interdisciplinary investigation of the urbanistic, architec-

tural and sculptural aspects of the Rialto area has been promoted by a number of events and publications aimed at imagining the future of the Rialto market, starting with the ‘Progetto Rialto’;<sup>2</sup> the decision to publish the volume in English is also motivated by cultivating a vivid idea of the future thanks to the consciousness of having to keep the fire of tradition – as Gustav Mahler once said – without fearing the cult of ashes.

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<sup>1</sup> G. Ortalli, *Venezia inventata: verità e leggenda della Serenissima*. Bologna: il Mulino, 2021. See also L. Calvelli, G. Cresci Marrone, “Oltre la leggenda. Il 421 d.C. nella Venetia”, *Ateneo Veneto*, 209, 3(21/I), 2022, 81-104, especially fn. 4 for further bibliography.

<sup>2</sup> D. Calabi, *Rialto, l’isola del mercato a Venezia: una passeggiata tra arte e storia*. Sommacampagna: Cierre edizioni, 2020; *Rialto: centro di una economia mondo*: Archivio di Stato di Venezia, mostra documentaria, 23 marzo 2019, ed. by D. Calabi, L. Molà, P. Morachiello, Ministero per i beni e le attività culturali, Archivio di Stato di Venezia: Rialto novo, Venezia Lido: Supernova, 2019.



**Rialto's Area  
in Medieval  
and Modern Time**





# The Medieval Rialto: The Transformation of an Area in the Developing City

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**Abstract** The Rialto area, where the church of San Giacomo stands, has a central role in medieval Venice: a market place from the earliest centuries that developed during the Middle Ages. De' Barbari documents the medieval quarter in 1500 before the fire of 1514. The territory was already characterised in the 11th century by long shop buildings. The churches are witnessed from the 11th century (S. Giovanni Elemosinario) and from the 12th (S. Giacomo and S. Matteo). In the 12th century the area was almost completely built. In the 13th century, a stream was buried creating the main road, connected with the Ruga of the Oresi, and the bridge was built, a fundamental link for the entire town. Offices and public buildings are scattered around the area. In the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries attempts were made to reorganise it. The Loggia (disappeared in the 16th century), at the foot of the bridge, had a central role: the trading centre was also decorated with frescoes (historical episodes and globe).

**Keywords** Venice. Rialto. Bridge of Rialto. Medieval town. Urban planning.

The Rialto is a key area of Venice, even today when the city is experiencing a flood of tourists making the bridge one of their must-see destinations. As a retail market, the area has shrunk down to a few stalls, owing to the spread of souvenir-sellers and the drop in inhabitants.

The Rialto retains its administrative importance in relation to the administration of justice (the old Fabbriche complex housing the Tribunal), the State Audit Court (Palazzo dei Camerlenghi), and the Ministry of Infrastructures (the former *Magistrato alle Acque*). How long it will continue to retain this importance is difficult to tell.

Nothing is left of the financial centrality of this area, whereas traces of the once dense concentration of purveyors of specialist artisan products survive in the names of its *calli*.

The Rialto area largely owes its current urban layout and the elevation of its buildings to the reconstruction work which took place after the 1514 fire (Calabi, Morachiello 1987). However, the Rialto's centrality in Venice as a trading area across all levels (from everyday

transactions to financial dealings) had shaped its development over the course of the previous centuries, from the 11th century onwards.

Let's start from the name: Rialto/*Rivoaltus* describes the area which for centuries served as a market place and centre of economic-financial activities; in the early centuries of its development, though, *Rivoaltus* was also the name given to the present area around St Mark's, chosen as the Doge's new headquarters in the early 9th century. This area certainly extended from the current Bacino of San Marco to the mouth of the Grand Canal (the *Rivus Altus*, i.e. deep river); it included the whole area at the back (what is now the *sestiere*, or district, of San Marco) down to Campo San Bortolomio and, across the Grand Canal, what is now the *sestiere* of San Polo as far as the present-day Rialto. Originally, internal connections were ensured not just by the curve in the Grand Canal, but also by the *rii* (small canals) connecting the Doge's Palace with this more interior area. Their names are known (something most unusual for the earliest documentary evidence: Dorigo 2003, 120): *Minutolo* (now the Rio de San Moisè), *Batario* (various stretches leading as far as San Salvador), and *rivo Curtis* (*de Palazzo*, now Rio de la Canonica), which flows into the Grand Canal where the Fondaco dei Tedeschi is located. Waterways were originally the main travel routes and these connections must certainly have ensured swift inner circulation. The Grand Canal, the main artery of the developing city, also ensured the circulation of the main freight boats, which – over the course of the 12th and 13th centuries – found their main concentration and mooring area in the present-day Rialto.

The area became a centre of trade long before then, as evidenced by one of the earliest documents: the Orio

brothers' bequest of some shops (*unum ordinem nostrum de stationibus ... positum in mercato de Rivoalto*) to the state (*per congruo honore nostri mercati*) in 1097 (Romanin 1853, 396-7; Dorigo 2003, 397, 854). This donation probably added some structures (a row – *ordinem* – of shops) to an already existing public settlement, reflecting a process of growth and increasing state control. Trade could not be exercised everywhere: in medieval cities it was an activity ensured and controlled chiefly by bishops and later by communes; in Venice – from an early date – by the ducal authorities. However, a (late) chronicle also informs us that when the episcopal seat of San Pietro di Castello was established, the Patriarch of Grado granted that a market be held there on Saturday, when people from *Rivoaltus* would flock to the area<sup>1</sup> – a piece of information that seems to point to a link between the bishop and the market. Trading activities are also well attested on Torcello.

The *stationes* of the Orio family are already mentioned in a 1051 document, the earliest one concerning the area of the Rialto between the Grand Canal and what is now Ruga Rialto: that year, the Gradenigo brothers settled a dispute and agreed to divide a vast property into four parts.<sup>2</sup> These parts (narrow and long strips) all overlooked – on one of their short sides – the *canale de Rivoalto* for a total of 78 feet (over 23 metres). This property too included *stationes*, but in addition to these buildings reserved for trade we find *solarii* (i.e. multi-storey buildings), *mansiones*, *terrae vacue* (unused plots), a vegetable garden, and a vineyard. Private *calli* and ones that were shared (by the neighbouring Orio brothers) ensured connections; access (i.e. entrance, exit, loading, and unloading) was possible not just from the *Rivoalto* canal, but from the *rio* named after the church (*rivo Sancti Iohan-*

<sup>1</sup> Simonsfeld 1883, 14; Monticolo 1905, LI.

<sup>2</sup> Baracchi 1873, 317-19; ASVe, Codice Diplomatico Veneziano, 114; Dorigo 2003, 854.





**Figure 1** Jacopo de' Barbari, *View of Venice*. 1500. Xylograph. Detail

nis) – this small canal was subsequently filled in and is now Calle del Paradiso. The document in question also offers the earliest evidence of the existence of the main parish, that of San Giovanni Confessore, which extended as far as what is now Rio delle Beccarie (*Magandessum/Magadesso* in medieval documents), an area traversed by the extension of the *rio di San Giovanni* (partly described by the document), which – as we know from later documents – used to turn northward and join the Grand Canal. This inner canal was crossed by bridges and flanked by *fondamente* (quaysides) that are described in surviving documents (see document of 1134, Dorigo 2003, 855). It came to serve as a border with the new parish of San Mattio, established in 1156 by taking some of San Giovanni's territory. It was then filled in around the mid-13th century, before 1281, when we find mention of the *stratam magnam*: Ruga Rialto.<sup>3</sup>

In 1051 the Church of San Giovanni must have been closely connected with the local landowners, since the Gradenigos and the Orios enjoyed the use of *loca*:

unum locum in ecclesia Sancti Iohanni, in scola Sanctae Mariae, iuxta locum de mansione Stefano Aurio.

This information points to the connection between big landowners and churches, which were essentially founded by private citizens.

These documents therefore suggest the presence of extensive properties – a dwelling, vegetable gardens, vineyards, uncultivated land – and of structures reserved for trade (*stationes*).

The discontinuous character of the urban fabric as late as the 11th century is also illustrated by the nearby area of San Silvestro: in the most remote phases it was clearly separated from Rio di San Silvestro, but it is

joined to the Rialto today by Riva del Vin on the side of the Grand Canal and by an unbroken pedestrian route on the interior side. At the very beginning of today's *fondamenta*, a building complex preserves the remains of a palazzo (columns, capitals, and arches on the ground floor) that up until the 15th century served as the seat of the Patriarch of Grado in Venice (Dorigo 1998; Rossi, Sitran 2010). In 1070 the Patriarch gave a nearby vineyard in concession in exchange for an annual payment in oil and money to fund the restoration of the *domus maior*: this was a luxury building in its day, since it had *caminitis cum suo solarario et aliis caminitis* (i.e. heated rooms across several floors).

By the late 11th century, the San Silvestro vineyard had been completely parcelled up, yet it remained undeveloped: in 1098 the revenue (*quintello*) from this estate was reserved for the restoration of the basilica of San Silvestro and its belfry. In the 12th century the Patriarch's building is no longer mentioned as *domus* in the documentary evidence, but as *palatium* (1164): it had therefore been renovated. We know that on the upper floor it had a large meeting hall, a chapel adorned with mosaics, a continuous arcade, and an exterior loggia that could be reached through a stairway (these are clearly documented by de' Barbari's engraving [fig. 1] and by Carpaccio's painting *Miracle of the Relic of the Cross* [fig. 2]). On the ground floor were shops for rent:

totas stationes vel cameras positas in suprascripto confinio permanentes sub palatio et ecclesie nostri patriarchatus. (1182)

The development of the market had reached this area too.

The urban transformation of medieval Venice has been reconstructed with the utmost precision by Wladimiro Dorigo – on the basis of documentary evidence – in *Ve-*

<sup>3</sup> Cessi, Alberti 1934, 311-12: *stratam magnam*; Dorigo 2003, 399, 849-58.



*nezia romanica* (2003), especially vol. 2, *Atlante della città medievale* (Dorigo 2003, 397-409, 849-58). The plates featured there (Dorigo 2003, pl. 16 A and B, 852-3) [figs 3-4] clearly illustrate the presence of public and private properties, the arrangement of the buildings in strips along parallel *calli* (reflecting the archaic settlements arranged parallel to the main waterway), and – for the 14th century – the increasing parcelling out and concentration of shops and homes for rent through the increasing revenues ensured by the increase in trade and inhabitants. The entire surface of the main parish of San Giovanni is documented for the whole 14th century.

But when was the market first established? In 1051 the members of the Gradenigo family did not divide everything among themselves: they retained joint ownership of the *stationes de becaria cum ipsa terra vacua usque in canale*. This *beccaria* (slaughterhouse) had long stood there. John the Deacon's *Istoria Veneticorum* (early 11th cent.) describes the 976 uprising against Doge Pietro Candiano and his assassination just outside the Basilica of St. Mark: on a small boat, the bodies of the Doge and his son were ferried to the *macelli forum*, to expose them to public humiliation (*ob ignominiam primitus exigua nave ad macelli forum*); only after a member of the Gradenigo family intervened, were the bodies moved to the Benedictine monastery of Sant'Ilario, where they were buried.<sup>4</sup> This information about the existence of a slaughterhouse, the link to a member of the Gradenigo family, and the reference to a public space as *forum* (a term only used twice by John the Deacon: the second time in relation to an armed conflict in *Rivoalti foro*,<sup>5</sup> which cannot have been Piazza San Marco yet

and thus must be identified with the present-day Rialto) bear witness to the existence of a peripheral place – for bodies are only exposed to public contempt in peripheral areas – where an activity is performed (slaughtering) that adds to the degrading display.

This information from chronicles and the subsequent donation made by the Orio family (1097), which added *stationes* to an already existing market, can be seen to confirm the fact that the central area of what is now the Rialto, surrounded by public building complexes and directly connected to the bridge, was already a site of public interest – located on a bend in the canal – a lowland excluded from the interests of the landowners' properties settled nearby. The fact that both sides of the bend of the Grand Canal were areas of public interest is further shown by the siting of the first mint (Zecca) on the San Bartolomio side, where the Fondaco dei Tedeschi was to be built (Dorigo 2003, 163, 404-6).

The Church of San Giacomo was located at the centre of this public area, overlooking a square: an open space whose boundaries continued to be respected by subsequent building work. The presence of the church is first documented in 1152, in a will drawn up by *Henricum Navigaiosum plebanum Sancti Ihoanni et Sancti Iacobi de Rivoalto*.<sup>6</sup> The notary was a priest responsible for both churches: the former – San Giovanni – was a parish church, while the latter was included in the parish and closely connected to the ducal authorities. According to late sources,<sup>7</sup> it was rebuilt precisely by a doge, Domenico Selvo (1071-1084).

<sup>4</sup> Giovanni diacono 1999, 162-3; Ortalli 1993, IX; Dorigo 2003, 397; Berto 2001, 208.

<sup>5</sup> Giovanni diacono 1999, 158-9; Dandolo 1938-58, 174,20; Berto 2001, 207-8.

<sup>6</sup> Lanfranchi 1955, nr. 20, 46; Dorigo 2003, 88-9; Trevisan 2008, 230-1, 348. See also Collins in this volume.

<sup>7</sup> Sansovino 1581, 196; Corner 1758, 369; Dorigo 2003, 397.



**Figure 2** Vittore Carpaccio, *Miracolo della Reliquia della croce*, Venezia, Gallerie dell'Accademia.  
© Gallerie dell'Accademia di Venezia / Courtesy of the Ministry of Culture

According to a late medieval chronicle, the Church of San Giacomo was erected just after the legendary founding of Venice in 421, as a votive offering by the inhabitants who had survived a fire, and was consecrated by the Bishops of Padua, Altinum, Treviso, and Oderzo (Dandolo 1938-58, 53.27-54.5). This legendary account of the construction of the church cannot be taken at face value, but must be interpreted in the context of the reconstruction of the history of the city's origins, associated with Attila's invasion (Ravegnani 2020, 51-3).

The Church of San Giacomo attested in 1152 was not the lynch-pin of a territorial district (the parish or *confinium*, as it is referred to in the documentary evidence); this role was instead played by San Giovanni, whose territory was restricted with the building of San Mattio in 1156 (Dorigo 2003, 849-50): further proof of urban development in that century. The Church of San Giacomo – directly connected with the Bishop in Castello and later with the Doge – served to ensure and protect the urban space where the market was held, as is declared by the cross and the inscription in the apse, which urges fairness in trade activities [fig. 5]:

SIT CRUX TUA VERA SALUS | HUIC CHRISTE LOCO. |  
HOC CIRCA TEMPLUM SIT IUS MERCANTIBUS  
AEQUUM: PONDERA NEC VERGANT NEC SIT  
CONVENTIO PRAVA.

Your cross, Christ, be true salvation for this place.  
Around this temple let the merchants' law be  
just, their weights true, and their contracts fair.  
(Dorigo 2003, 398)

Reference measurements were to be found at the Rialto, as in market areas elsewhere (for example, on a corner of the medieval Palazzo della Ragione in Padua). This is

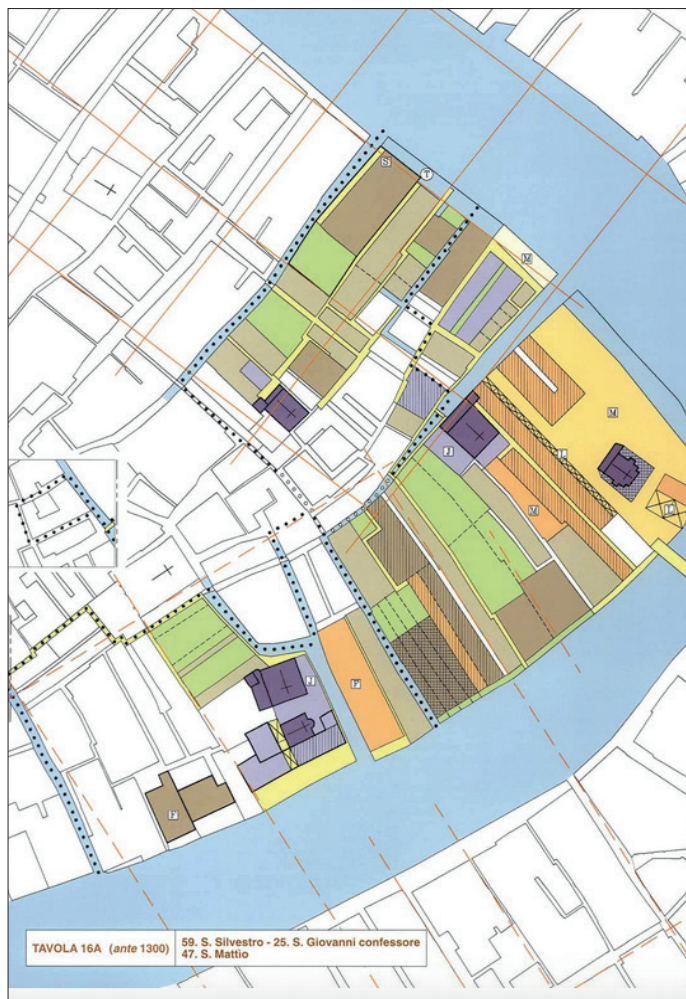
witnessed by the 1229 *Capitolare* (statute book) of the *Fornaseriis* (brick-makers): *cupos autem et petras, bonos et bene coctas, ad formam factam in pilona, Rivoalto, fatiam vel fieri fatiam sine fraudem* (Monticolo 1896, 81-2). A public scale (*statera*) is mentioned from as early as 1187 (Dorigo 2003, 398).

In the 12th century the whole *civitas Rivoalti* experienced an increase in the number and size of its buildings, a progressive development of plots of land, and the proliferation of pedestrian routes (*calli*), which came together to form a road network that was used alongside the water one, but which increasingly required the building of bridges to connect the various islands (Dorigo 2003, 117-63). The construction of a bridge linking the *insula* of San Giovanni Confessore (i.e. the present-day Rialto) to Sant'Aponal was authorised in 1228 (Dorigo 2003, 159; Rossi, Sitran 2010, 25), creating a direct interior connection across the canal, as is still shown in de' Barbari's map [fig. 1]. The route is an entirely pedestrian one today, since the old canal has been filled in.

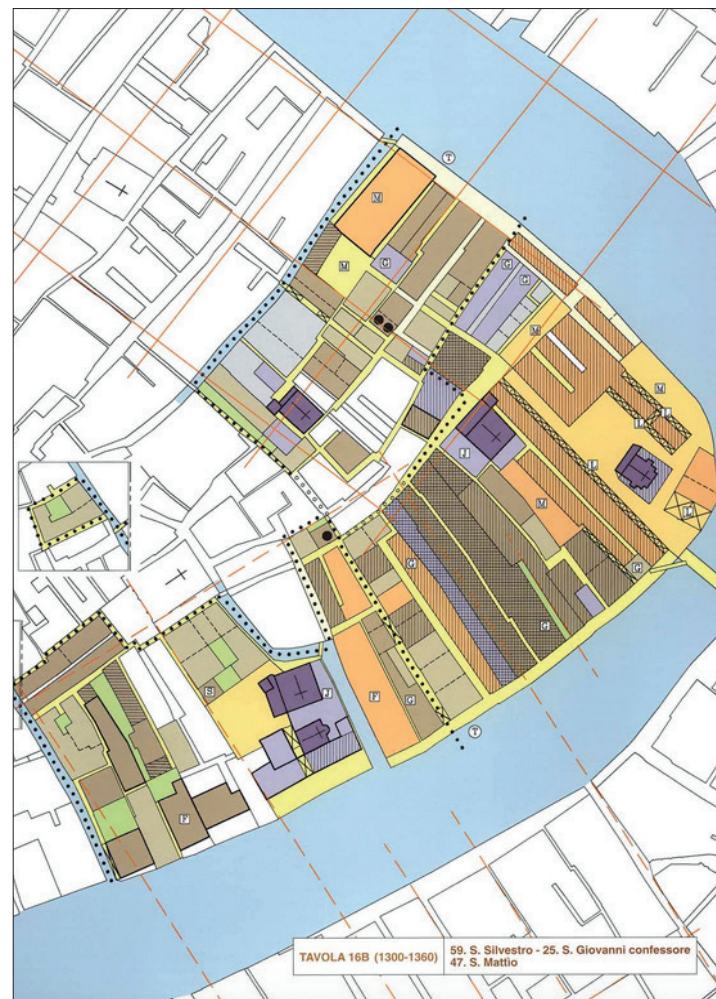
Ever since the 12th century, the Rialto has housed the offices and magistracies in charge of overseeing financial and commercial activities.<sup>8</sup> In the 13th century we witness the effects of a further growth of the financial-trading district through numerous public reorganisation measures and the establishment of new magistracies and offices, including the *Ufficiali sopra Rialto* (second quarter of the century). Their *Capitolare* (Ortalli, Princivalli 1993) is a valuable testimony concerning the activities on the whole *insula*, the distribution of the various public offices (Fersuoch 1993), and the need to regulate private citizens' conduct, the use of the area, access to the quaysides, and the mooring of ships and boats. The *Capitolare* provides a vivid picture of the proliferation of shops and storerooms, the dwindling of their owners' dwellings, and the predominance of houses

<sup>8</sup> Ortalli 1993, XI-XIV; Princivalli 1993, XXVII-XXVIII; Dorigo 2003, 402-3.





**Figure 3** Wladimiro Dorigo, Table reconstructing the urban evolution of Rialto in the Middle Ages: *ante* 1300 (Dorigo 2003, 2, tav. 16A)



**Figure 4** Wladimiro Dorigo, Table reconstructing the urban evolution of Rialto in the Middle Ages: *ante* 1360 (Dorigo 2003, 2, tav. 16B)

for rent. Chapter 49 mentions a Gradenigo house on the quayside, while chapter 95, a deliberation of the Maggior Consiglio of 1260 (Ortalli, Princivalli 1993, 44-5), mentions a Ca' Vidal, located nearby, that was already in the hands of the public authorities (Dorigo 2003, 399-400, 849, 854). Early in this century (1211), a significant portion of the Gradenigo patrimony was divided between the members of the family. The relevant document informs us that they no longer resided in the parish of San Giovanni, but had recently moved to the Santi Apostoli and Sant'Angelo areas:<sup>9</sup> a clear sign of the specialising of the neighbourhood and of the investments that were being made there (Ortalli 1993, X). Public and private buildings for rent were concentrated in the area around San Silvestro and in the stretch between Ruga Rialto and Campo Beccaria. Consisting of long blocks (*rugae*) which made the most of the available land, they overlooked the *fondamenta* for limited stretches and could be reached via side *calli* [fig. 1].

The area of public buildings surrounding San Giacomo was organised around transit spaces: the so-called Ruga degli Oresi and Campo San Giacomo. In the Middle Ages, the stretch overlooking the Grand Canal to the north progressively witnessed regeneration work, a broadening of the quaysides, building development, and the creation of mooring spaces (ferries and barges came to converge here from the mainland, in addition to those unloading goods for the food market).

Another accelerating factor was no doubt the bridge. According to late chronicles, it was built in the 12th century, but reliable documentary evidence suggests that it was erected in the 13th century, before 1264.<sup>10</sup> Up until then, ferries and barges had to be used to cross from

one side of the Rialto to the other; only in the 13th century was the need felt to create a pedestrian connection with a strong impact on the urban layout. It is worth noting that up until the 19th century the one at the Rialto was the only bridge across the Grand Canal. Up until the 16th century it took the form of a wooden drawbridge, which could be opened to let ships through.

We find a remarkable and detailed representation of this bridge in *Miracle*, the aforementioned large canvas by Carpaccio [fig. 2], and in de' Barbari's engraving [fig. 6], which shows this old bridge (requiring constant maintenance work and repairs on account of its perishable material) in its 15th-century version. The wooden structure consists of two ramps surrounded by wooden shops, which were added with the 1458 restoration in order to reap economic profit from the bridge by letting these spaces – before then, the bridge had simply offered an open view of the canal.<sup>11</sup>

The state took constant measures to improve mobility and moorings, increase the available spaces (by progressively broadening the quaysides), and prevent unauthorised building work. To some extent, this reflects the lack of any long-term planning (Dorigo 2003, 400). The Rialto market grew through private enterprise and public involvement by checking private interests and attempting to contain and face certain needs, for instance through the creation of a new square (Rialto Novo) in 1281 (Cessi, Alberti 1934, 32-3, 311-12).

Another significant measure was the purchasing of a private property and the establishment at the far end of the island, near San Silvestro, of a Fondaco delle Farine (i.e. a grain storehouse, attested from 1260), the city's main and only one up until the 15th century: the Rialto

<sup>9</sup> ASVe, San Zaccaria, *busta* 11 perg., 1211; Dorigo 2003, 855.

<sup>10</sup> Cessi, Alberti 1934, 163-4; Calabi, Morachiello 1987, 173-5; Princivalli 1993, XVIII; Dorigo 2003, 163-5, 849.

<sup>11</sup> Cessi Alberti 1934, 169-70; Calabi, Morachiello 1987, 173-85; Dorigo 2003, 164.



**Figure 5**

Church of San Giacomo di Rialto, Venice.  
Exterior apse, cross and inscriptions.  
Photo © Böhm

was also the trading place for grains, which used to be sold from shops rented by merchants but controlled by the state (first through the *Ufficiali al frumento* and then through the *Provveditori alle Biave*).<sup>12</sup>

In the 14th century (especially the first half), further attempts were made to improve the available spaces: public buildings were rebuilt, plans were made to rebuild San Giacomo, the northern side was reorganised, and another public property was acquired by seizing Ca' Querini (when the Baiamonte Tiepolo plot was

scotched in 1310) and moving the Beccaria (slaughterhouse) there.<sup>13</sup>

The numerous measures taken in that century provide a wealth of information about the uses of *rughe* (i.e. rows of shops), the kind of activities exercised there (jewellers, textile sellers and weavers, etc.) (Dorigo 2003, 407-8), and the commercial use of the space adjacent to the Church of San Giacomo. The buildings depicted by de' Barbari [fig. 1], along the Ruga degli Oresi, overlooking Campo San Giacomo and Rialto Novo, can

<sup>12</sup> Calabi, Morachiello 1987, 118-23; Concina 1997, 119-25; Dorigo 2003, 406-9, 851.

<sup>13</sup> Cessi, Alberti 1934, 35-46, 312-17; Ortalli 1993, XIX-XX; Dorigo 2003, 400-9.



**Figure 6**

Jacopo de' Barbari, View of Venice. 1500.  
Xylograph. Detail



be associated with these measures: they extend across several floors and can be accessed via exterior stairways (those facing Rialto Novo are clearly visible and are mentioned in the documents, since they were used to make announcements, hold auctions and sales, and read out sentences). They had trussed galleries (rather than colonnades as in Piazza San Marco) and irregular windows. As far as we can tell from de' Barbari's engraving, this architecture was not of a sophisticated or luxury sort, but strictly utilitarian. In 1343 the shops adjacent to the Church of San Giacomo were still owned by the latter and the state took measures to bring them under public control: the church (which protested against the acquisition through the bishop) was to be reimbursed by receiving some annual revenue (*Libri Commemoriali* nos. 61-4).

The church therefore owned the surrounding land. Here the front portico was built (see Rialto-Atlas, figs 13-17), along with a clergy house on one side, while another stretch of the property was put to commercial use – by now most trade was conducted along the main road axis. The main façade of the church, with the portico, overlooked the square, where announcements were made and financial dealings were conducted. At the back of the church stood other public buildings and a loggia.

This complex of public buildings – closer to the canal and the bridge – that are shown in de' Barbari's map from 1500 [fig. 1] were replaced in the 1520s, when the Palazzo dei Camerlenghi (the headquarters of a financial magistracy) was reconstructed and enlarged – despite the fact that it had survived the 1514 fire unscathed (Calabi, Morachiello 1987, 82-90).

The loggia was already in existence in 1266; it was made of wood, set on a raised platform, and open on all sides. It underwent various renovations over time and

was rebuilt in the 15th century, when it acquired the appearance recorded by de' Barbari [fig. 6].<sup>14</sup> At the back of the loggia stood two buildings of different heights, with an intermediate one between them: one building was the house assigned to the local physician, the other served as the headquarters first of the Consoli ai Mercanti and later of the Camerlenghi. In the space occupied by these three buildings we now find the Palazzo dei Camerlenghi.

The importance of the no longer extant loggia is also evident from the fact that the wall at the back (probably belonging to the buildings behind it) was frescoed. An atlas – symbolising knowledge of the world and the convergence of international trade networks in this place – was accompanied by a frescoed narrative cycle – still visible in the 15th century – devoted to another foundational myth in the history of Venice: the Carolingians' failed attempt to seize the Rialto.<sup>15</sup> See the account provided in the 13th-century chronicle by Martin da Canal (1972, 10-15).

Decades after the reconstruction of the loggia in 1425 (Basso 2014), the frescoes were repainted in accordance with a 1459 resolution by the Senate, by creating a copy (*accoppiare*) of the pre-existing ones:

Quod in muro novo costruendo ponantur et pingantur istorie depicte in veteri muro pro ipsius istorie memoria antiquitatis costruenda, que, antequam ipse muro, in quo picte sunt, diruatur, excipi et accoppiare debeant, ut in muro novo ipsemet instaurare et depingi possint, et similiter reficiatur descriptio orbis sive mapamundus qui in medio ipsarum picturarum extare consueverat. (Cessi, Alberti 1934, 317-18)

<sup>14</sup> Cessi, Alberti 1934, 34-5, 61; Dorigo 2003, 403; Basso 2014.

<sup>15</sup> Cessi, Alberti 1934, 67; Ortalli 1993, X; Ortalli 2008, 99.

The presence of the loggia thus helps explain why the inscription that the church [fig. 6] bears as a warning occurs in the apse that faces precisely this direction. Between the 13th century and 1525 – when the Palazzo dei Camerlenghi was enlarged –<sup>16</sup> trade dealings used to take place at the foot of the bridge, at the back of the Church of San Giacomo, which another tale about the

city's origins associates with the legendary founding of Venice in 421 AD.

Propaganda, political communication, and the affirmation of an independent and exceptional role for Venice thus came together in that bend on the river which had become a canal in the mediaeval harbour city, there where San Giacomo stands.

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<sup>16</sup> Calabi Morachiello 1987, 79-90; Basso 2014, 116-17.

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# An Ancient Place without Antiquities. The Rialto as *lieu de mémoire*

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**Abstract** The article discusses the *spolia* still preserved in the Rialto area and in the Church of San Giacomo. The article, therefore, describes the capitals of the church, an erratic early Byzantine capital located in the surroundings and the sculpture of the so-called 'Justice'. This short essay aims to illustrate that in this area of the city of Venice, which has traditionally been considered of ancient origin, only few antiquities are present. The most important evidence is to be found in the Church of San Giacomo di Rialto, a place of memory marked by a special relationship with *spolia*.

**Keywords** Venetian Architecture. Rialto. Spolia. Ancient Roman Capitals. Early Byzantine Capitals. Venice as Justice. Lieu de mémoire.

It is surprising that the area of the Rialto has not been considered in recent literature as a place of memory that, through its silence, could weave an evocative narrative about the relationship with antiquity in Venice.<sup>1</sup> There is no comparison with the Marciana area, to which numerous contributions have been dedicated. In particular, of interest here are the recent studies by Luigi Sperti, which have examined the complex of the Basilica, the Piazza and the Piazzetta in the light of an articulate and ambitious public political project.<sup>2</sup>

The area of the Rialto, on the other hand, is marked by the absence of such a multiplicity of symbols, especially *spolia*. Instead, here we find a few fragments of antiquity, a few excerpts of a history that transcends them, such as an early 'V' or 'lyre' type Byzantine capital, which is conserved in erratic form on the Fondamenta del Vin in Rio Terà San Sil-

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<sup>1</sup> In writing this article, I would like to pay tribute, in equal measure, to the memory of Claudia Barsanti and to Luigi Sperti for their constant and generous advice. The essay incorporates some contents published in Italian in Pilutti Namer 2015: I would like to thank the director of the *Ufficio beni culturali ecclesiastici ed edilizia di culto* of the Patriarcato of Venice, Arch. Gianmatteo Caputo, and the secretary, Dr. Irene Galifi, for allowing me to study the capitals of the Church of San Giacomo at Rialto.

<sup>2</sup> Sperti 2018, with further bibliography.

vestro [fig. 1],<sup>3</sup> or the interesting combination of ancient capitals, columns and bases located inside the Church of San Giacomo di Rialto [fig. 2], designed to achieve a sophisticated global effect, a coarse allure of antiquity for a place considered to be the oldest settlement in the emerging Venice.

Two Corinthian capitals and one composite capital can be traced back to the Severan period.<sup>4</sup> The first is number 3 [fig. 3], an Asiatic Corinthian capital of 'type 5 Pensabene', composed of two crowns of eight leaves.<sup>5</sup> In the former, this takes on an enlarged form in relation to the second, whose two upper leaves of the median lobes are articulated in such a way as to give a triangular outline to the leaf tops of the second crown. On the angular cauliculi are grafted helices transformed into two symmetrically opposed 'S-shaped' tendrils that terminate in the abacus to form the flower, which is no longer visible. The type is widely attested both in Italy, also in contexts of re-use (e.g. in Catania Cathedral, in the *matronei* of Bari Cathedral, Capua Cathedral), and in the Mediterranean (e.g. in the mosque of Kairouan, Tunisia, and in the colonnaded street of Perge, Turkey).<sup>6</sup> No. 5 [fig. 4] is also an Asiatic Corinthian capital of 'type 5 Pensabene'. The specimen is distinguished by the greater refinement in the rendering of the acanthus and in the workmanship of the helices, which are arranged in parallel to the ab-

acus and separated from it by the insertion of an additional convex lath that connects the volutes. A comparable specimen, despite the lack of the cauliculi, is reused in the Basilica of St. Mark. Deichmann suggested a dating of this piece to the 5th century AD, which by comparison with the capital in question can be rectified and placed between the late 2nd and early 3rd century AD.<sup>7</sup> No. 1 [fig. 5], on the other hand, is a composite capital of an Asian type, characterised by two crowns of three-lobed leaves, separated in the first and that in the second touch each other to create an elongated oval-shaped shadow area, surmounted by an Ionic kyma with a volute channel distinguished by the presence of the ovoid and lancet band and by angular half-palmettes that join the lateral volutes. In this case, too, the piece is compared with the 'type 5 Pensabene', from which the dating is derived, even assuming a possible reworking of the item that was necessary for its installation. A second comparison is made with an identical piece reused in Capua Cathedral (Pensabene 1990, 23, fig. 22). Three similar pieces are also reused in the Basilica of St. Mark: two of them are directly comparable, but present a different decoration of the volute channel, here featuring an ivy shoot.<sup>8</sup> Finally, there is no. 4 [fig. 6]: this too, is an Asiatic Corinthian capital, but rather similar to 'type 11 Pensabene'. Indeed, the morphology consists of two crowns of eight

<sup>3</sup> For columns and bases see Lazzarini in this volume. A catalogue of the pieces with measurements is included in the appendix to the article.

<sup>4</sup> Pensabene 1986, 309-10, fig. 2c. See also Pralong 1993, 133-46; Pralong 2000, 81-101. Sperti sets them between Pensabene's types 14 and 17, but the chronology is still the same (ca. AD 300) (Sperti 2004, 236).

<sup>5</sup> For a list of comparisons, see Pensabene 1986, 309-10; for the *matronei* of Bari Cathedral: Calia et alii, no. 12, p. 194, fig. 5; for Capua Cathedral: Pensabene 1990, 24, fig. 21.

<sup>6</sup> Deichmann 1981, no. 574, p. 127, table 42: a generic dating to Late Antiquity in Minguzzi 2000, tab. p. 186 (Type III).

<sup>7</sup> Deichmann 1981, nos. 267-9 (esp. nos. 267-8), pp. 68-9, Table 15. Deichmann proposes a date to the 5th century AD, to be revised. Minguzzi suggests that the dating should be changed to the 5th/6th century AD and assumes the provenance as Constantinopolitan (Minguzzi 2000, Type IV.b, p. 134, tab. p. 188).

<sup>8</sup> For a list of attestations of this type, cf. Pensabene 1986, 313-14, fig. 4c, and, for the Salerno capitals, Pensabene 1990, 20, figs 12-13 as well as, for the Canosa capital, 88-9, fig. 123.



leaves, which in the first one touch each other, forming geometric figures, while in the second the upper leaf of the median lobes is distinct from the oval background outline, the so-called 'horn motif'; the angular cauliculi are much reduced, as are the volutes and helices. The type is marked by the presence of a small leaf as a calyx for the stem, though not moulded, of the abacus flower, which features schematic mouldings of either side, the so-called 'two-zone abacus' (Pensabene 1986, 313-14, fig. 4c). The dissemination framework of this type is very broad, encompassing Italy, including re-used examples (see two identical examples reused in Salerno Cathedral, one Canosa Cathedral, one in the Basilica Maggiore of San Felice in Cimitile), Europe and the Mediterranean.<sup>9</sup> In the specific context of Venice, two similar pieces are found in the Basilica of San Donato on Murano,<sup>10</sup> while two identical ones were reused in the Basilica of St. Mark and have been dated by Deichmann in the generic terms of the 3rd/4th century AD.<sup>11</sup>

No. 6 [fig. 7], on the other hand, is a Corinthian capital of the so-called 'lyre' type. It is in fact characterised by two crowns of four large trilobed acanthus leaves and the 'U' shape of the volutes (similar to the lyre, hence the name). In the canonical form these usually include a sprig, a flower or an inverted leaf, whereas in the current piece there is a stylised phytomorphic shoot. As Claudia Barsanti has noted, the type derives from classical prototypes, namely capitals with double 'S' volutes, so-called 'lireggianti', manufactured in the micro-Asiatic area during the 2nd/3rd century AD and exported

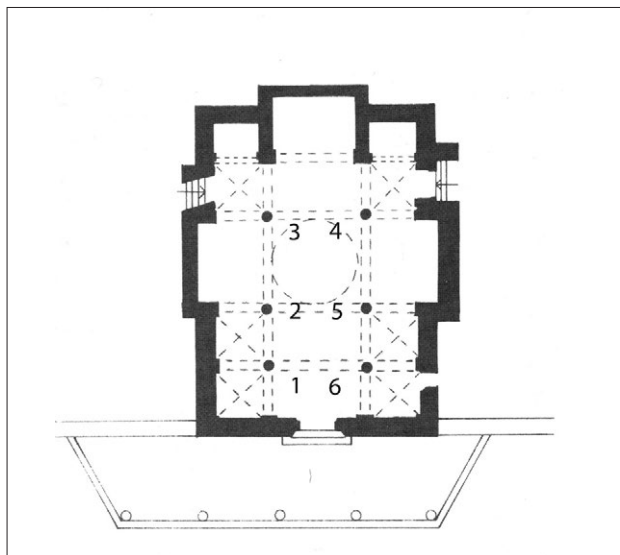


**Figure 1** Early Byzantine capital of the 'V' or 'lyre' type, with part of a column, in Rio Terà San Silvestro (CC licence)

<sup>9</sup> Sperti 2004, nos. 2, 13, pp. 233-5, figs 1-2.

<sup>10</sup> Deichmann 1981, nos. 3-4, pp. 29-30, table 1. Minguzzi suggests raising the date to between the 1st and 3rd century AD. (Minguzzi 2000, tab. p. 186, Type III).

<sup>11</sup> For the typological study and diffusion see Kautzsch 1936, 65-7; Pensabene 1986, 353; Sodini 1989, 163; Barsanti 1989, 125-35; Zollt 1994, 176-87; Guiglia Guidobaldi 1999; Pralong 2000, 88 (Type IV).



**Figure 2** Plan of the Church of San Giacomo di Rialto with indication of the numbers of the capitals (Elaborated by the Author)

throughout the Mediterranean.<sup>12</sup> The type is widespread in Italy<sup>13</sup> and also in Venice, where there are a conspicuous number of pieces: in the Basilica of St. Mark,<sup>14</sup> in the vestibule and atrium of the Ca' d'Oro,<sup>15</sup> and in the porticos and loggias of the Palaces Businello-Giustini-ani<sup>16</sup> and Ca' Loredan Corner Piscopia,<sup>17</sup> in the aedicule of the right and left façades of the Church of Santa Maria Gloriosa dei Frari (Pilutti Namer 2008-09), in the lagoon area on Torcello in the church and the portico of Santa Fosca (Guiglia Guidobaldi 1995, 604, 623 figs 9-10), and out of context in Venice itself.<sup>18</sup>

Lastly, we come to no. 2 [fig. 8]: this refers to the 'type IV Kautzsch' of Byzantine Corinthian capitals, consisting of eight crowns of acanthus leaves with large denticles that touch each other to form the *mask akanthus*, but which differs from the canonical 'type VII' in that it retains, among the ribbon-like volutes that are arranged almost in parallel with the angular leaves of the second crown, the semi-circular emergence of the *kalathos* rim.<sup>19</sup> The capitals of the group IV of Kautzsch can be dated to the last quarter of the 5th century AD, but the flattening of the relief and the presence of the atrophied helices facing the abacus boss do not suggest an important re-

<sup>12</sup> For the literature review see Barsanti 1989, 129-35, for Italy 133-4 footnotes 171-81.

<sup>13</sup> Deichmann 1981, nos. 263-6, 280, 287, 369-70, 407, 417, 523, 526, 531, 535, 556, 559, 562, 577, 583, 586, 591, 604, 624, 628. This is the group III.h in Minguzzi 2000, 132, tab. p. 187.

<sup>14</sup> For the atrium, Goy 1992, 255; for the vestibule, Barsanti suggests that the capitals are not from the 15th century, but rather 19th-century reinterpretations of pieces from the 5th-6th century AD. (Barsanti 2002, 62 fn. 16).

<sup>15</sup> One capital in the portico di riva, two in the polyphora of the loggia on the main floor, two in the polyphora of the loggia directly above (Barsanti 2002, 65).

<sup>16</sup> Two modern pieces in the portico di riva, one in the loggia (Barsanti 2002, 63 fn. 23).

<sup>17</sup> These are three pieces from Ca' Farsetti, now in the Archaeological Museum: Polacco 1981, cat. 69-71, pp. 66-7; the aforementioned capital in Rio Terà San Silvestro (*supra*, fn. 3).

<sup>18</sup> Barsanti 1989, 111-25; Sodini 1989, 172, fig. 4; Sodini-Barsanti-Guiglia Guidobaldi 1998, 316.

<sup>19</sup> Deichmann 1981, no. 382, p. 93, pl. 25. The capital is part of a group (which also includes no. 361, p. 89, pl. 23; no. 363, p. 90, pl. 23; no. 366, p. 91, pl. 24; no. 368, p. 91) reconsidered by S. Minguzzi, confirming the dating to the 5th century AD suggested by Deichmann (Minguzzi 2000, type III.i, p. 132, tab. p. 187).



**Figure 3** Asian Corinthian capital of the “Type 5 Pensabene”. Late 2nd-early 3rd century AD. Marble. H. cm 56; I crown cm 19.5; II crown cm 14.5; Ø cm 41. Conservation status: good. Photo: Böhm  
Mariacher 1954, 44 fn. 3; Sperti 2004, 236; Pilutti Namer 2015



**Figure 4** Asian Corinthian capital of the “Type 5 Pensabene”. Late 2nd-early 3rd century AD. Marble. H. cm 56; I crown cm 23.5; II crown cm 20; Ø cm 44.6 ca. Conservation status: good. Photo: Böhm  
Mariacher 1954, 44 fn. 3; Sperti 2004, 236; Pilutti Namer 2015



**Figure 5** Composite capital close to the “Type 5 Pensabene”. Late 2nd-early 3rd century AD. Marble. H. cm 51; I crown cm 16; II crown cm 13.5; Ø cm 39, 8 ca. Conservation status: good, all the leaves are chipped and there are probable signs of reworking and restoration. Photo: Böhm  
Mariacher 1954, 44 fn. 3; Sperti 2004, 236; Pilutti Namer 2015



**Figure 6** Asian Corinthian capital of the “Type 11 Pensabene”. Late 3rd-early 4th century AD. Marble. H. cm 56; I crown cm 22; II crown cm 14; Ø cm 41 ca. Conservation status: good. Photo: Böhm  
Mariacher 1954, 44 fn. 3; Sperti 2004, 236, fig. 3 a p. 237; Pilutti Namer 2015



**Figure 7** Early Byzantine Corinthian “lyre-shaped” capital. Late 5th-early 6th century AD. Marble. H. cm 48; I crown cm 20; II crown cm 27; Ø cm 36.3. Conservation status: intact. Photo: Böhm  
Barsanti 1989, 135 fn. 80; Barsanti 2002, 65 fn. 35; Dorigo 2003, 253 (reproduction); Pilutti Namer 2015



**Figure 8** Corinthian capital imitating the proto-Byzantine “Kautzsch Type IV” with two crowns of leaves. Second half 11th century AD. Marble. H. 59 cm; I crown 19 cm; II crown 25.5 cm; Ø 45.5 cm. Photo: Böhm  
Dorigo 2003, 88 (reproduction); Sperti 2004, 242; Pilutti Namer 2015



working process but rather the manufacture of the piece in the second half of the 11th century, as in some examples from Murano (Sperti 2004, nos. 1, 3, 8, 9, pp. 238-42, fig. 5, p. 241). The capital can be compared to a piece reused in the Basilica of St. Mark in particular, which shows the same schematisation of the volutes and helices, turned towards the abacus boss with a spiral wound end.<sup>20</sup> Valid here for this piece is therefore also the argument that has already been established on the 'Byzantine style' production that took place in Venice in the 11th and again in the 12th century, already analysed by Hans Buchwald starting from the Basilica of St. Mark of the 11th century and including pieces scattered throughout the entire area of influence of the growing city.<sup>21</sup>

Among the antiquities from the Rialto area, I should also mention a sculpture of considerable interest, which conveys its message at first glance, the so-called Rialto Justice [fig. 9]. The statue is a fascinating pastiche of the modern age realised through the synthesis of sculptures from different periods: the head is from the Hellenistic period, the body from the ancient Roman time (with the addition of a crown, scales, and a metal sword), the Istrian stone base is from the Renaissance period and incorporates the ancient pedestal (Traversari 1991).

Two fragments of statues of deities thus give life to an original sculpture, an allegory of Justice – a highly opportune warning in an area of tribunals, commerce, business – which at the same time embodies Venice. Venezia, a city that in the eyes of the rulers and of the Venetians appears as a beautiful, florid woman with curly blond well-coiffed hair, either Venus or Madonna, wearing white and gold robes as in Paolo Veronese's painting

in the Doge's Palace.<sup>22</sup> Here again, in the 14th-century bas-relief on the outer façade, sculpted by Filippo Calendario, we find a depiction of Venice enthroned, who brandishes a sword, to express her authority and blur her allegorical interpretation in the guise of Justice (Wolters 1976, fig. 178, cat. 49) [fig. 10].

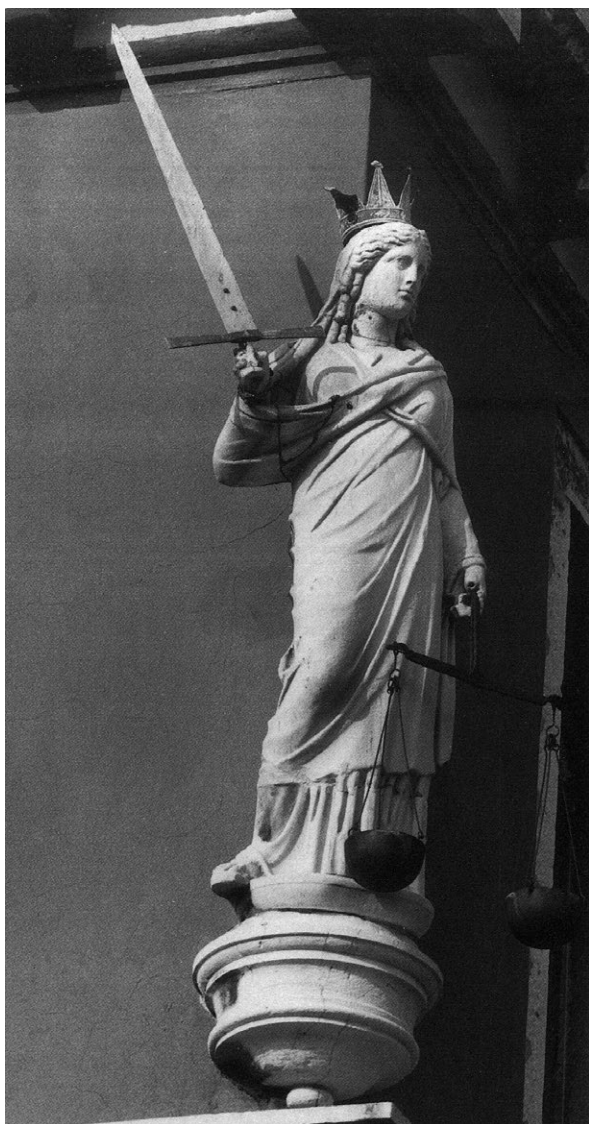
We do not know whether this important sculpture was correctly identified as ancient in modern Venice. To get an idea of the perception of the place as ancient, we have to go back to the old stones, the *spolia*, of San Giacomo di Rialto, as if they were relics, visual memory supports serving to define and qualify the historical antiquity of the place. At the centre of a debate that has been going on for decades is the issue of the 'origins of the lagoon settlement', a debate that unavoidably stems from the myth of its foundation, which converges on the date of 25 March 421 AD. Recent literature has clarified in detail the mystifying elements of this interpretation and, after sifting through the superfetations and fantasies,<sup>23</sup> what remains of the tradition is the sought-after connection of the Venetians with the centuries-old history of ancient Rome and with the legacy that this civilisation had left in Europe and the Mediterranean. In other words, a heritage that, in the complex process of constructing the cultural memory of the city, is opposed to elements that are considered allochthonous and external (the 'barbarians'). What the Venetians are concerned with is the connection with the ancient Roman civilisation, in all the elements considered worthy of admiration: prosperity, infrastructures, monumental splendour, military strength, and the conservative attitude of society (including religious devotion).

<sup>20</sup> Buchwald 1962-63; 1964. Recently, see Sperti 2004, 240-2.

<sup>21</sup> Paolo Veronese, *The Triumph of Venice*, oil on canvas, 1582.

<sup>22</sup> Ravegnani 2020, 51-3; Ortalli 2021.

<sup>23</sup> See Guidarelli in this volume.



**Figure 9** Sculpture of the so-called 'Justice at Rialto', pastiche of the modern age realised through the synthesis of sculptures from different periods. Photo © Ceolin in Traversari 1991, fig. 2



**Figure 10** Filippo Calendario, Venice as Justice. 14th century. Venice, Doge's Palace. Photo © Wolters 1976, vol. 2, fig. 178, cat. 49



**Figure 11** Venice, Rialto. Church of San Giacomo. Detail of the *all'antica* medieval frame.  
Photo: Böhm, elaborated by G. Guidarelli

These are all elements that to us may seem naïve, but which should not appear strange in pre-industrial times, when all or almost all of the building works were the result of human will and human and animal effort. To emphasise, therefore, with *pietas*, the sacral antiquity of the place, the parish priest Natale Regia, who in 1531 undertook major restoration work involving far-reaching architectural modifications *in marmore notanda*,<sup>24</sup> may also have intervened in the replacement of some of the ancient capitals in place in the church. This intervention would explain the unusual presence in Venice of as many as four capitals belonging to the Roman imperial age (1, 3, 4, 5)<sup>25</sup> besides a more common piece from the early Byzantine age and a second belonging to a Venetian production from the medieval age. Of Byzantine tradition, the *quincux* is emphasised by a frame connected with the

classical tradition, with ovoli and lancets, which could be dated to the 12th century (Dorigo 2003, 89) [fig. 11]. The effort, therefore, to combine the East and the West, to keep intact the simulacrum of an ancient place to be worshipped, also persists in the Renaissance, and perhaps above all, as a result of the observation of the material culture of the building: of columns, capitals, cornices, as well as of the bricks and cornerstones that make up the perimeter walls.

These are the antiquities of an ancient area that seems lacking in them, carefully retained and reworked over the centuries to preserve intact the memory of a place that for the Venetians symbolised their origins, but also – by comparison – the splendour of their own recent achievements.

<sup>24</sup> On the most ancient Roman capitals in Venice see Sperti 2016.

<sup>25</sup> Sperti 2004, 231-2 fnn. 12-13.



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# The Early Modern Business Area of the *piazza*

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**Abstract** Hardly the mercantile character of early modern Venice fails to pervade almost every corner of the city. As a trading hub since its very beginning, and as an important manufacturing centre from the Renaissance onward, warehouses and shops dotted above all the central districts of the city, with the highest commercial density: the areas around Piazza San Marco and its banks on the Bacino of San Marco, those around the urban route of the Mercerie linking San Marco and Rialto, and beyond the Rialto bridge the dense and cramped space of the market. It was mainly this latter area to concentrate the highest density of places designated for trade, and, as a heart to Venetian merchant world, the space in front of the church of San Giacomo summarised all the functions and services that a merchant city could offer, particularly after the great reconstruction and reorganisation after the fire of 1514: a circumscribed meeting place for merchants and intermediaries, a precise area for insurers and notaries, a public bank (two from 1619 to 1637), a space dedicated to news and public announcements, interpreters, and merchant courts, while the daily market for a city of over one hundred thousand inhabitants buzzed all around. The piazza of Campo San Giacomo represented the multinational community of Venetian traders, a place in which private interests and public reputation mingled to offer a safe environment to business. This contribution will thus highlight some of the elements that characterised the piazza.

**Keywords** Venetian Republic. Rialto. Trading places. Early modern commercial institutions. Banks. Early modern trade.

**Summary** 1 Introduction. – 2 The *Piazza*. – 3 A Place Where Reputation Rules.

## 1 Introduction

On 17 August 1632 the public official (*comandador*) Iseppo Biondo delivered a summons to three creditors of a debtor who had despite himself become one, Daniel Nijs.<sup>1</sup> Nijs had resided in Venice for more than thirty years; over time he had built up a dense network of business relations centred on luxury goods, of which Venice was still a major centre of production and distribution. It was one of the six judicial courts in Venice on behalf of another

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<sup>1</sup> ASVe, NA, busta 676r-677r, 17 August 1632.

creditor of Nijs, the Zaguri firm, to highlight the failed sale of pledges that Nijs left to guarantee his debt, and thus its repayment (in fact, some of the precious objects were still with the heir of one of the three almost thirty years later). The pledges, and the bankruptcy Nijs himself declared in May 1631, were intertwined and linked to the sale and dispersion of the Gonzaga collections. Nijs' creditors had been given paintings, sculptures, and precious objects such as six writing desks set with jewels, gold, silver, and precious stones, part of a sale which Nijs negotiated with Charles I Stuart.<sup>2</sup> Acting as bankruptcy administrators of the consortium of creditors – a score of firms, most of which can be ascribed to a recently settled and aggressive group of international merchants in Venice with solid trade connections between the Mediterranean and continental Europe – the three (Bartolomeo Carminati in partnership with Giovan Battista Mora, Alvisé Dubois, Giovan Donato Correggio) were effortlessly found in person (“tutti personalmente ritrovati”) by Biondo at Rialto when it was time to hand them the judicial deed.<sup>3</sup> It was in the middle of August, not even a year after the official end of a heavy plague epidemic ravaged by intermittent famine on the mainland and patchy blockades in the flow of overland trade due to Venetian involvement in the war of succession in Mantua.

Meeting at Rialto was part of an established, necessary, daily behaviour common to all merchants doing business in Venice. With the exception of religious feasts holidays (“in giorni di devotione [...] non si attende a negozij”),<sup>4</sup> the legal representatives of companies or their

agents had to meet every day at Rialto. Here they found all the services they needed – those of official intermediaries (*sensali*), interpreters, insurers, banks, warehouses, courts of law, tax offices, customs offices; above all, anyone who had to make a purchase or a sale, or had to lend or borrow money, or simply wanted to know the exchange rate of the ducat, or who had gone bankrupt, met there at a specific time of the day. During the ‘ora di Rialto’, which lasted the space of a morning, it was assumed that the merchants were not at home: in September 1650, for instance, another *comandador* left in the hand of a servant girl an order to appear for the representative of the Florentine company Scarlatti and Carnesecchi, ordering him to be seen on the same day “all’hora di Rialto” at the desk of the notary Giovanni Piccini (one of at least two professionals who, according to documents, worked next to the Banco del Giro and in Calle della Scurtà).<sup>5</sup>

The word *negoziante* became widespread during the 17th century, slowly replacing the word ‘merchant’ (*mercante*) in Venetian deeds. It referred to international merchants dealing both with goods (produced, exported, imported) and credit (selling and buying credit mostly through letters of exchange). It was mainly *negozianti* to animate the affairs in early modern Venice, and to use the specialised services at Rialto, courts included. But there were also large numbers of wholesalers for the local market, retailers of all kinds of merchandise, and certification offices for a core product in the Venetian economy, woollen cloth, as well as many shops sell-

<sup>2</sup> Morselli 2000; Van Gelder 2011; Anderson 2015.

<sup>3</sup> ASVe, NA, busta 10895, 676r.

<sup>4</sup> Università Bocconi, Milan, Archivio Saminati Pazzi, cartella 100, 22 April 1628.

<sup>5</sup> ASVe, NA, busta 10821, 301rv.

ing woollen and silk fabrics, and warehouses (*volte*) to store merchandise while waiting for buyers.<sup>6</sup> The prosperity of the Venetian economy has always been based on long-distance trade (import and re-export of goods), but the size of its urban population (from the fourteenth century until well into the seventeenth century, Venice was the second largest city in Italy in terms of population) also made the city an important centre of production and consumption, an aspect that became particularly evident in the sixteenth and mostly in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. It was then necessary for traders to meet in person, evaluate goods, exchange agreements aided by matchmakers, have quick access to bank desks, listen to official communications, and in the event go to court. Meeting regularly and every day permitted to decrease the inevitable transaction costs and strengthened the reputation of individual merchants and their companies, reinforcing their social capital as a necessary aspect to conduct a successful trade: as long as *negozianti* continued to be seen on the *piazza*, talked to everyone, took an interest in business, they could be seen as solid, reliable, and far from failure – hence, they were able to repay their debts on time. Rialto could be likened to a stock exchange, a “Rendes-vous [sic] de’ Mercanti” that took place every morning, as the cosmographer Vincenzo Coronelli described it in the late seventeenth century, addressing a cosmopolitan and international reading audience perfectly capable of grasping the analogies.<sup>7</sup>

Information on how trading functioned at Rialto is scarce. Even the physical location of some of the pub-

lic offices that had their headquarters there is uncertain<sup>8</sup> – unsurprisingly, since daily and repeated actions leave no documentary trace other than indirect in the folds of official regulations and documents of various kinds. It is thus very difficult to measure and assess who, and how, and how much, frequented Rialto in the period this contribution deals with (late 16th and 17th centuries). Scraps of company registration lists (mainly relating to the eighteenth century) survive, thanks to the records that a public office, the three Provveditori sopra Banchi (set up in 1524 to supervise private banks after a series of bankruptcies) decided to collect.<sup>9</sup> These lists served, however, to advertise the firms at the banks where spoken orders were sufficient to transfer money from one account to another. And as the private banks (and later the two public banks) were all located around the church of San Giacomo, it was easy for any account holder (or for anyone acting on their behalf) to verify the correctness of their account balances with those of the banker at any time.<sup>10</sup> Indeed, it was necessary to be certain that the person who ordered money to be moved from one account to another, or who withdrew it, had the power to do so, especially if they acted as employees; hence, the surviving lists certainly account for those who could act on behalf of a firm, but they probably fail to capture all those who were trading at Rialto. On the other hand, an overall registration of all existing companies was considered impracticable, both because it would have had to involve numerous patricians who still continued to have business interests even when

<sup>6</sup> At a time of crisis in 1628 the woollen cloth weavers complained how the warehouses in Rialto were full of cloth that no one was buying, and consequently how no one was giving new work to the weavers. ASVe, Collegio, Suppliche di dentro, *busta* 19, unnumbered, 9 December 1628.

<sup>7</sup> Coronelli 1697, 32; Cecchini 2022.

<sup>8</sup> Donatella Calabi and Paolo Morachiello in their studies have meticulously pieced together evidences of public offices in Rialto, mostly referring to a period before the great fire of 1514.

<sup>9</sup> Tiepolo 1994, 946-7; Panciera 2001, 17, 184-6.

<sup>10</sup> Mueller 1997, 7, 44-5.

they no longer traded directly themselves (thus breaking the customary confidentiality of not revealing too much about one's affairs), and because the practice was to place maximum trust in mercantile good faith:

in proposito de dite, nelle quali non è solito farsi charezza mai alcuna [...] deve bastarli l'obbligo suo sudetto.<sup>11</sup>

Magistracies and public offices that dealt with economic, financial and commercial activities were located throughout the area, often with overlapping competences. In fact, the distinction with the offices in San Marco was not only topographical, depending on whether they were located on one side or another of the Canal Grande: the offices located in Palazzo Ducale had mainly jurisdictional tasks, and those in Rialto mainly economic and financial ones.<sup>12</sup> Overseeing the rents of warehouses, sales stalls and public-owned workshops, collecting taxes, and ensuring policing, were initially the task of the Visdomini, who were succeeded in the mid-thirteenth century by the Ufficiali sopra Rialto and later on, incorporating their functions, the Provveditori al Sal. The Provveditori were established in 1428 to oversee the supply and sale of salt, a strategic market that the Venetian government managed under monopoly conditions, but they also took over the duties of the Ufficiali on the control of the Rialto market.

An exclusively mercantile connotation had been the main character of the entire area from the very begin-

ning. From the first expansion of the market around the *insula Rivoalti*, and from the solemn donation to the public from one of the powerful families owning the area (the Orio) towards the end of the 11th century, the commercial and sales functions had progressively grown, and the entire area soon came under public jurisdiction, through the control of several offices.<sup>13</sup> Continuous, progressive rearrangements tried to give a functional order to an extremely congested area, in which the market had arisen from the beginning without a precise organisation, without a hierarchical conformation of goods and exchanges, and therefore subject to constant confusion.<sup>14</sup> Throughout the 15th century a series of renovations intervened on the water traffic on the banks and the movement of goods and people, identifying precise areas divided by function – the public weigh station, the oil, wine and coal banks, the town crier's place (*pietra del bando*) for public announcements – while from 1422 a large golden ray marked the hours from the façade of San Giacomo.<sup>15</sup> A fire that broke out on 10 January 1514, responsible for an almost total destruction, triggered substantial reconstruction works without altering the pre-existing conformation of the market; as was also the case at San Marco, reconstruction resulted in a clearer, more differentiated and regular system of Renaissance squares.<sup>16</sup> Following an urban specialisation by functions, as Donatella Calabi hypothesises, Rialto served the urban commercial spaces, while the other founding pole of Venetian identity, Piazza San Marco, with a process of renovation to accentuate architectural features derived

<sup>11</sup> ASVe, NA, busta 3400, 78v, 26 April 1621.

<sup>12</sup> Cessi, Alberti 1934, 29; Ortalli 1993, XII-XVII, with summary bibliography.

<sup>13</sup> Cessi, Alberti 1934, 21-9; Dorigo 1983, 1: 397-8.

<sup>14</sup> Calabi 1996, and as a summary Calabi 2020; Calabi, Morachiello 1987.

<sup>15</sup> Calabi, Morachiello 1987, 95-103.

<sup>16</sup> Calabi 1992-93, 190.





**Figure 1** Antonio Mazzoni, Drawing of the Rialto area, detail. Second half of the 18th century. Pen and watercolour on paper. 758 x 533 mm. Miscellanea Mappe 174, Archivio di Stato, Venice

from classical typologies, and the removal of all commercial activity except for the Ascension Day fair and a few mobile stalls, served the political ones.

Rialto worked like an organism, made up of parts each with its own function. As if in a sort of blood circulation, the flow of goods and foodstuffs was concentrated in the area, nourishing the body of the city at its centre, in a compact urban fabric dense with workshops (the highest density of workshops and warehouses in the whole of Venice was here).<sup>17</sup> Although some confusion remained, from 1514 onwards the long phase of reconstruction and redevelopment, completed by 1591 with a new bridge in stone, led to a clear definition of the spaces for the various activities: the sale of meat, fish, vegetables, the gold-

smiths' street (metaphorically, a street for selling precious goods) and that of grocers and apothecaries – the essence of Venice as a market, as a permanent and everyday international fair.<sup>18</sup> The dense space of warehouses and workshops would remain so until the end of the Venetian Republic (and until today, really). In a well-known plan composed in the second half of the 18th century, the *insula* of Rialto thus appears as a compact, orderly space, dense with numbers, each corresponding to a workshop or a warehouse [fig. 1].

The heart, the beating organ of Rialto and the entire city – the *piazza* of Rialto – had not, however, changed from where it was before the fire: in front of the church of San Giacomo.

## 2 The *Piazza*

To indicate a space for commercial and financial trading, and by extension the distinct place where trading is carried out, the term *piazza* is widespread in the Italian area. It directly takes up the etymology of the Latin word *platea*, and the functions attributed to a *forum*, thus indicating a wide space surrounded by buildings, according to the meaning of the first edition of the *Vocabolario degli accademici della Crusca* (1612). But in the early modern Italian mercantile environment (16th and 17th centuries), the word *piazza* designates a site (usually a city) where it is possible to quote money in a foreign currency, and to collect or demand sums of money through letters

of exchange and through the clearing houses that exchange fairs established; by extension, *piazza* also ends up indicating the group of traders involved in commerce and credit activities in that same place.<sup>19</sup>

Both *plateae* and *fora* housed markets and courts; significantly, in Venice (a city where open spaces are called *campi*, fields), the only two toponyms for *piazza* are to be found here, in the space in front of San Giacomo di Rialto (the Campo di San Giacomo), and in Piazza San Marco. In San Marco the activities related to a real 'market' (the presence of mobile stalls and the sale of foodstuffs) had been progressively expelled since the

<sup>17</sup> Concina 1989, 35.

<sup>18</sup> Luzzatto 1954, 208-9; Concina 1989, 38-40.

<sup>19</sup> As in Peri 1660 (who nevertheless does not dwell on defining *piazza*, but uses the word extensively in his treatise), 77: "[s]e il Cambio è permuta del danaro presente col danaro absente, sarà dunque il Cambio permuta di danaro, che si ritrova in luoghi distinti, & il vero Cambio sarà solo quello, che cambia il danaro d'vna Piazza con quello d'vn'altra: perciò la diuersità del luogo, nel quale termina il contratto da quello, oue cominciò, è sostanza del Vero Cambio".



start of the urban redevelopment of the area in the 16th century,<sup>20</sup> but here continued to be held until the end of Venetian republic the annual, two-week Ascension Fair every spring; moreover, in Piazza San Marco a general market was still running on Saturday mornings at the end of the 16th century,<sup>21</sup> and probably even later according to the testimonies of foreign travellers, for some of whom even the Broglio area (in the morning restricted only to patricians who met to discuss in front of the ducal palace) was occupied by stalls.<sup>22</sup> Both Rialto and San Marco, then, continued to share some common features (courts and markets) still during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

The connection between the two *piazze* given by the Mercerie, which branched off from the Torre dell'Orologio, linked San Marco with Rialto in a continuum of shops, identifying the entire area across the Canal Grande with an urban place of merchants' practice that, if it carries out individual enterprise and commitment, is also the historical substance of the state, founded on public and private values and virtues.<sup>23</sup> It is precisely the mingling of public and private that characterises the realtine *piazza*, however, more than in San Marco. Indeed, this feature tends in Rialto to conform in the early modern period predominantly to private initiative, supervised and circumscribed (but not controlled and driven) by the public. The protagonists of trading in early modern Rialto were in fact, in increasing numbers, mer-

chants of various nationalities and also, of course, Venetians and subjects, but less and less they were part of the patrician class that had instead given rise to Frederic Lane's famous definition of a senate in the form of a board of directors - indicating that commercial interests had been materially expressed in the body of government and in specific measures from the late Middle Ages until at least the mid-16th century.<sup>24</sup>

The reconstruction of the area after the fire of 1514 reaffirms and reorders the functional distribution of spaces, buildings, riverbanks, as "an extraordinary opportunity to implement the permeable separation pursued by public offices for at least a century" between the central place of merchants, high finance, and exchanges, and the quaysides of the food markets (Rialto Nuovo, Erbaria, Pescheria), "a set of built and unbuilt places" differently characterised in use and form, linked by arches, hanging passages, porticoes, because they were part of the same visual system and activity.<sup>25</sup> This reorganisation retains a precise space (in the detail of figure 1 it is called 'Campo di S. Giacomo') for the transactions necessary for wholesale trade to and from Venice. It is a porticoed space on two sides, with a third covered space provided by the church portico [fig. 2], where to a certain extent the form of a loggia (a "portico open on the sides, usually vaulted, inside or in front of a building")<sup>26</sup> is taken up as a specific structure for the meetings of the urban nobility and bankers, set apart from the spaces of the mar-

<sup>20</sup> See Morresi 1999. On Piazza San Marco see Agazzi 1991.

<sup>21</sup> Sansovino 1581, 64; Sanudo 1880, 43.

<sup>22</sup> For instance Moryson 1617, 85; Coryat 1776, 1: 210.

<sup>23</sup> Concina 1989, 49.

<sup>24</sup> Lane 1982, 40-1; Ciriaco 2021.

<sup>25</sup> Calabi 1996, 132; 1992-93.

<sup>26</sup> Pevsner, Fleming, Honour 1981, 391.



**Figure 2** Giovanni Antonio Canal called Canaletto, *Campo San Giacomo di Rialto*. Second half of the 18th century. Pen and brown ink on paper. 246 × 372 mm. Sotheby's; present whereabouts unknown. © Wikimedia Commons

ket and passing traffic;<sup>27</sup> a loggia was built at the foot of the wooden bridge, clearly visible in Jacopo de Barbari's plan (1500), later demolished when the stone bridge was built.<sup>28</sup> The identification of this area as a meeting and trading space, a space for the circulation of goods and also of ideas (from the 15th century onwards, a school of philosophy was located here) was also perfectly captured by one of the plans for the reconstruction of Rialto after the fire of 1514. Its author, the Veronese humanist friar Giovanni Giocondo, proposed to rebuild the square like a Greek *agorà*, separating the daily market on the outside and the international market on the inside. The project was treated with complacency, its author considered an outsider, and therefore unable to understand the place, and the market was rebuilt on its original plan;<sup>29</sup> however, apart from the classicist inspiration that was coherent with the humanist culture still widespread in the first decades of the 16th century, it is significant that the reference to the symbolic place of meeting and discussion, the core of all political, commercial, religious and social activity in Greek cities, was proposed as a model for the urban reorganisation of the entire area.

If there was one main economic function concentrated on Campo di San Giacomo, however, it was the bank. Throughout its history, Venice remained faithful to the *banco di scritta* – a private banking system that allowed money to be moved by writing (*scrivere*) debit or credit sums simply by transferring them in the bank's ledgers,

and which was based both on the absolute trust on the bank's owners and backers, and on the veracity of the ledgers compiled by the bankers themselves: they in fact accepted coins of all minting types, returning to the depositor a promise of payment in the form of a ledger credit.<sup>30</sup> In Venice, as elsewhere, the activity of the banks thus influenced the circulation of money, often requiring the intervention of the government, which nevertheless used the same banks to manage the credits of its suppliers. From 1380 onward the term *bancherius* or *bancherius a scripta* became commonly applied to the deposit bankers installed at Rialto: "Venetian and foreigners alike then took to calling Rialto banks 'banchi di scritta', the distinctive place of business of the Venetian local bankers."<sup>31</sup>

The Venetian government's recourse to private banks had been considerably reduced at the end of the war with the Ottomans in 1537-40, in correspondence with the entry into force of a new system of public loans – the deposits in the mint (*Zecca*) – which probably contributed to reducing and eliminating recourse to loans from private banks. Private banks, moreover, were owned and guaranteed by the same patricians who sat on the government's benches. After yet another series of bankruptcies, in 1568 the Senate decreed the closure of all the private banks within three years, but the last of them, the Pisani-Tiepolo, resisted until 1584 when it went bankrupt for one million ducats. There had been talk for years of

<sup>27</sup> Calabi 2010, 93-4.

<sup>28</sup> Mueller 1997, 33-5.

<sup>29</sup> Calabi, Morachiello 1987, 52-4; Howard 2010, 222-3.

<sup>30</sup> Deposits on current accounts in medieval Venice were "not intended primarily for safekeeping or for earning interest but rather as a means of payment which facilitated the clearance of debts incurred in the process of doing business", thus establishing 'bank money', "money based on the banker's promise to pay, which the client could transfer to his creditor by oral order to settle a debt without the use of coin. With the agreement of the banker, he could make a payment also by overdrawing his account." Such 'giro' accounts "early became the hallmark of Venetian banking" (Mueller 1997, 15).

<sup>31</sup> Mueller 1997, 30.





**Figure 3** Giovanni Antonio Canal called Canaletto, *The campo of Rialto*, detail. 1758-63. Oil on canvas, 118 × 188 cm. Gemäldegalerie, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Preußischer Kulturbesitz, Berlin

opening a bank guaranteed by the government, an operation whose opportunities and risks were clearly seen, and brief experiments had been attempted; and, on the other hand, for Gino Luzzatto the strict public control over private banks had always made them, in fact, essentially public institutions. However, in order not to leave the piazza without a banking institution, the government decided to open the Banco della Piazza in April 1587. The Banco della Piazza was essentially a deposit bank: it summarised the essential functions of private *banchi di scritta*, accepting money from depositors and offering a service of clearing debts and credits between the current accounts of the depositors, who could with-

draw cash if they wish; it did not offer credit, but the Banco was instead obliged to credit letters of exchange, an essential function for maintaining trade. The first irregularities did not take long to have an effect, as usual, on the circulation of money, and there remained the problem of how to pay the state's suppliers, which were becoming more and more substantial from the last years of the 16th century onwards; it was then decided to set up the Banco del Giro in May 1619, with the function of managing the financial relations between the government and its suppliers, to whom a current account was opened with the sums owed to the state – thus allowing the management of the floating debt.<sup>32</sup>

**32** Luzzatto 1934; Tucci 1981, 231-50; Lane 1985, 63-4; Mueller 1997; Pezzolo 2003, 120-7.



**Figure 4** Anonymous, *Campo San Giacomo di Rialto*. First half of the 18th century. Oil on canvas, 101.6 × 129.5 cm. Present whereabouts unknown. Bologna, Fototeca della Fondazione Federico Zeri (copyright is exhausted)

Private banks had taken their place around the Campo di San Giacomo, and also under the portico of the church; on the other hand, there was no need for a very large space, except for a table (the *banco*, in fact) where account books and the counting of coins were placed. Instead, the desks of the Banco della Piazza, and later the Banco del Giro, where hosted in the covered space in front of the church, probably coexisting (a notary's desk was also next to them) from 1619 to 1637, when the former Banco was closed. Above the arcades, on the first and second floors, were the offices of the magistrates in charge of banking control – the Provveditori and Sopraprovveditori sopra banchi [fig. 3].

The area in front of the church had thus assumed a precise fulcrum of meeting and daily gathering for the merchants, a fulcrum reaffirmed by the town crier's column, supported by the crouching telamon [fig. 4].

Despite the dedicated area, however, confusion and intermingling with other activities remained: it was originally the task of the Ufficiali sopra Rialto to remove ped-

dlers, bread or fruit sellers, and beggars from the Campo di San Giacomo, but when their efforts were handed over to the Provveditori al Sal it seemed unnecessary. A regulation of the Giustizia Vecchia of April 1578 forbade auctions of objects and furniture “nell’Isola di Rialto ne di San Marco, ne meno sopra li Campi di alcuna delle contrade di questa Città”, except those that public offices authorised: “[c]he tutti gli incanti che si farano in Rialto [i.e. in front of the church of San Giacomo] si debbano far fuora delli Porteghi al Discoperto eccettuando gli incanti che si farano per conto delli Magistratti Nostri et quando sara cativo tempo cioe pioza et non per altra causa”, prohibiting auctions of bulky goods (tables, beds, barrels, even carriages) “ogni giorno nel mezo della Piazza de Rialto quale destinata per il Ridutto de Mercanti”.<sup>33</sup> These rules were further confirmed some twenty years later, in 1602,<sup>34</sup> indicating how, in fact, confusion and the overlapping of several functions around the Campo di San Giacomo were all but inevitable.

### 3 A Place Where Reputation Rules

Practices implemented in late medieval trade by both the governing bodies and the merchants ensured a series of facilitations to reduce costs and render more profitable a long, complex, and rich series of trades. Until the sixteenth century, the role of the Venetian government in facilitating the flow of international trade was not limited to providing a suitable environment that protected the basic rights of merchants, fundamental though these aspects were. Government also intervened directly in the conduct of trade, both by giving a precise direction to

the lines and timing of traffic with the Levant, and because the members of the government themselves traded by pledging themselves and their possessions. One of the main initiatives were the convoys of ships bound for the main Mediterranean, English and Flemish ports, with soldiers on board. The ships taking part in the convoy (the galleys) differed from the vessels with which most of the mediaeval maritime trade was generally conducted, i.e. the round ships powered by sail: galleys were lower, longer, faster, and more expensive to build and

<sup>33</sup> ASVe, Giustizia Vecchia, busta 5, 96r.

<sup>34</sup> ASVe, Giustizia Vecchia, busta 5, 111r.



maintain, fitting out one to three sets of oars for manoeuvring in port (making them also more manoeuvrable in the event of an attack by sea), and perfect for taking on board the most valuable merchandise. It was the Senate to be in charge of setting their charter value; generally the charter rates for the Levant routes were kept high enough for the contracted galleys to yield a profit margin to the government to cover the running costs, while sometimes for the Western voyages subsidies were necessary to attract contractors.<sup>35</sup> Public control over the main maritime routes and the direct participation of the patriciate also ensured tight control over the conduct of individual merchants: a combination of coercion and reputation-building based on a superstructure of legal sanctions and possible exclusion from state-generated revenues (participation in convoys and the right to trade 'as Venetians did' – that is, with substantial custom advantages – in the ports of the Levant).<sup>36</sup>

This transport system, and the advantages associated with it, did not survive the sixteenth century. Throughout the Mediterranean area, the profound geopolitical rebalancing (which was already evident at the end of the fifteenth century), with the formation of states at the head of vast territories (the Ottoman Empire, the French expansion, the Portuguese and Spanish empires, the aggressiveness of English and Dutch companies, and overall the global flow of trade), and the involvement of Venice in a series of wars, led to a drastic reduction of Venetian political and economic influence in the area, while competition from northern shipping in transport

and trade grew. With increased dangers of navigation, convoys of galleys began to suffer interruptions, as early as 1452 for the oldest line to the Black Sea; convoys to Alexandria ceased definitively in 1564, and after 1570 none departed.<sup>37</sup> Venice's traditional role as a commercial intermediary centre between East and West was progressively losing importance, thus making it useless to revive a mode of trade (buying and selling from a position of strategic strength) when English, French and Dutch competitors were able to arrive earlier, offer goods that were more attractive to Levantine buyers, and pay for them in sterling silver.<sup>38</sup> However, the lagoon city was far from losing its attractiveness as a primary international trade centre, and the declining flow of maritime trade was increasingly replaced with rich and elaborated manufactures<sup>39</sup> to be sent along a web of overland trade routes connecting Venice with northern and western Europe.<sup>40</sup>

This could not fail to have consequences also on the management of trade at a microeconomic level. There were more and more foreigners traders on the piazza, and fewer Venetian patricians haggling with matchmakers, turning up at insurance counters, or hiring a transport boat. In itself, however, that there were more foreigner traders on the Rialto was nothing new.

Giace adunque dinanzi alla Chiesa di San Iacomo, la piazza di Rialto in forma quadrata, intorno alla quale corrono sottoportichi doppi, da i cui lati si veggono volte & stanze del Dominio, & d'altri priuati che seruono a i mercanti per riporui le cose loro, & per

<sup>35</sup> Lane 1978, 392-3.

<sup>36</sup> Gonzales De Lara 2008.

<sup>37</sup> Lane 1978, 402-8.

<sup>38</sup> Fusaro 2015, 16-23, with detailed bibliography and comments.

<sup>39</sup> Ciriaco 1996, 580.

<sup>40</sup> See for instance the affairs that engaged Flemish firms in Venice (Van Gelder 2009).



Scuole [...] Di sotto ne portici dalla destra, vi s'aduna ogni mattina, quasi su la hora sesta, gran parte della nobiltà: & vi si raduna non per altro effetto, che per uedersi insieme, & per intrinsecarsi ragionando a fine di conseruar sempre l'unione, & la concordia fra loro. Dall'altra parte doue è la pietra del bando, i sottoportichi sono ogni giorno frequentati da i mercanti Fiorentini, Genovesi, Milanesi, Spagnuoli, Turchi, & d'altre nationi diuerse del mondo, i quali ui concorrono in tanta copia, che questa piazza è annoverata fra le prime dell'Universo. Et da i lati, doue corre la via comune, sono lunghissimi volti, doue sono botteghe in gran numero di finissimi panni di diuersi colori, de quali la maggior parte è mandata, per tutta Europa, & in Levante.<sup>41</sup>

Francesco Sansovino was keen to emphasise the harmony and unity shown by the members of the Venetian patriciate precisely at a time when this harmony was becoming increasingly difficult, due to the positions of intolerance and rebellion that were soon to manifest themselves within the patriciate.<sup>42</sup> Yet he could also point out how increasingly the *piazza* from the late sixteenth century onwards was certainly frequented by Venetians, but less by patricians and more by merchants from various parts of the Mediterranean, Europe and the Near East.

This is hardly the place to remark on the gradual 'foreignisation' of Venetian trade in the seventeenth century. Instead, it is important here to emphasise how the organism formed by the early modern *piazza* combined the activities of an institution that continued to be regu-

lated and controlled by public magistrates (as the board of Provveditori sopra banchi who ruled over banks), and was as well substantially based on the reputation of individual traders. The enforcement of contracts certainly benefited from the system of institutions set up over the centuries to serve international trade (specific public offices for the protection of claims, the notarial registration system, the control of customs and thus of incoming and outgoing goods, albeit with conspicuous signs of inefficiency, and then courts dedicated to mercantile disputes) – thus, the Venetian government acting as an efficient third-party enforcing agency;<sup>43</sup> however, the repeated and necessary frequentation of Rialto reinforced the overall social capital of the *piazza's* frequenters, and created informal, self-enforcing institutions as those – “within relevant networks of commerce, credit, wage-labour, and other contractual relations that support[ed] free-market activities” in a cooperative way<sup>44</sup> – that bolstered up the process of industrialisation in early eighteenth-century England.

Above all, the Rialto area functioned as an institutional and judicial core in trade-related matters. In addition to the seats of the tax offices, a specific tribunal for merchants (the Consoli dei mercanti) was located there from its institution around the first half of the thirteenth century, despite most of Consoli's tasks on commercial issues were cut out with the creation (provisional in 1506, and definitive in 1517) of the board of trade formed by the Cinque Savi alla mercanzia. The Consoli were joined by the office of the Sopraconsoli dei mercanti, with special jurisdiction over insolvencies and non-willful bank-

<sup>41</sup> Sansovino 1581, 133-4.

<sup>42</sup> The politically-troubled years of the early seventeenth century have been masterfully depicted by Gaetano Cozzi. See Cozzi 1995. On Sansovino see Bonora 1994.

<sup>43</sup> Gonzales de Lara 2008, 77-8. For an overview of merchants' institutions Ogilvie 2011.

<sup>44</sup> Mokyr 2008, 71.

ruptcies, and later the sale of pledges from the Ghetto banks.<sup>45</sup> In the early sixteenth century the Consoli dei mercanti were located at the Palazzo dei Camerlenghi, at the foot of the Rialto bridge, immediately behind the church of San Giacomo; the Sopraconsoli in the opposite building of the Dieci Savi alle Decime.<sup>46</sup> It was, however, the Cinque Savi alla mercanzia who progressively took over all matters related to every aspect of trade and commercial navigation. The Savi had the availability of a few rooms in the building that surrounded the apse of San Giacomo – spaces that were probably (as can be seen even today) very cramped, so much so that in 1602 a request was made to suspend a renovation work (and indirectly the meetings with merchants there) because, being exactly behind the altar, the attendance of “infidels of all kinds” (Turkish, Bosnian, Persian and Armenian merchants, whose arrival was favoured with the idea that they could revitalise Venetian trade with the Levant) would jeopardise its sacredness.<sup>47</sup> In 1643, however, it appeared that the Savi had been meeting almost exclusively at the Palazzo ducale for fifteen years: most of their duties were absorbed by the “contese, e differenze” between Jewish and Turkish merchants, and for this

reason San Marco was considered a more efficient meeting place, not least because the merchants went there anyway outside the hours of bargaining at Rialto.<sup>48</sup> In 1669 the Savi, still without a fixed seat, were invited to return to meet again at Rialto, to relieve the merchants

che uengono à godere, così, come si conuiene, dalla loro diligente assistenza gli effetti di una retta giustizia [...] tenendo essi Cinque Sauij il proprio Magistrato à Rialto, iui instituito anticamente, come in sito più opportuno, e commodo alli medemi negotianti.<sup>49</sup>

It is not clear to the present author whether the Savi had returned to meet (also) at Rialto; it seems, however, that before the mid-eighteenth century they had found their definitive seat at the Palazzo ducale.<sup>50</sup> Certainly their powers had been thinned out, just as Venetian economic policy was becoming increasingly marginal, and attached to modes of the past that were no longer adequate for the entrance to the modern age of international trade.<sup>51</sup> Rialto, eventually, was on its way to becoming a site of curiosity, where every morning visitors could admire the “Rendes-vous de’ Mercanti”.<sup>52</sup>

<sup>45</sup> Da Mosto 1937, 100; Tiepolo 1994, 979-80; Ortalli 1993, XIII.

<sup>46</sup> Calabi 2020, 32-3; Calabi sets the Sopraconsoli at the Camerlenghi in a later period (Calabi 2020, 69).

<sup>47</sup> ASVe, Cinque Savi alla mercanzia, Prima serie, register (hereafter reg.) 17, 44-5, 31 December 1602.

<sup>48</sup> ASVe, Cinque Savi alla mercanzia, Prima serie, reg. 154, 13r-14r, 5 March 1646.

<sup>49</sup> ASVe, Compilazione delle leggi, Prima serie, *busta* 139, 133r-v, 12 April 1669.

<sup>50</sup> Cecchini 2022.

<sup>51</sup> An overview in Panciera 1998; Panciera 2014.

<sup>52</sup> Coronelli 1697, 32.

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## **On the Horns of a Dilemma**

Interpreting the Church  
of San Giacomo di Rialto



# The Church of San Giacomo di Rialto in the Medieval Era

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**Abstract** The Venetian church San Giacomo di Rialto is one of the oldest surviving medieval structures on the Lagoon today. Constructed around the year 1000, it follows a 'Greek cruciform' or cross-in-square architectural layout which was predominantly developed in the territories of the Byzantine Empire during the High Middle Ages (1000-1204). This paper examines the significance of the architecture of San Giacomo. This paper details the history of the construction of the church and subsequently its importance in the physical, ideological, and cultural construction of medieval Venice. In this paper I evaluate the difference between Eastern and Western architecture in the Medieval Mediterranean and how San Giacomo exemplifies or challenges both styles.

**Keywords** San Giacomo di Rialto. Venice. Medieval architecture. High Middle Ages. History of Venice. Romanesque. Byzantine. Medieval. Greek cruciform. Basilica.

**Summary** 1 Introduction. – 2 Structure of the Church of San Giacomo di Rialto. – 3 Medieval Architectural Styles. – 4 History and Mythology. – 5 Constantinople or Rome. – 6 Conclusion.

## 1 Introduction

The Church of San Giacomo di Rialto has been dubbed by scholars as the only surviving example of small Byzantine parish churches in Venice. According to historian Ennio Concina, as many as twenty small, local churches – concentrated around the areas of Rialto and San Marco – belonged to this originally Eastern design.<sup>1</sup> These parish churches were planned around a central square, three sides of which extend to form three arms, rooted with barrel vaulting to produce the design of a Greek cross. This cluster of churches – contemporaneous with the oldest remaining basilicas in the Lagoon – appeared to be derived from this architectural tradition that originated in Medieval Constantinople, known as Byzantine architecture. San Giacomo di Rialto is the only surviving structure of this group on the main island of Venice.

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<sup>1</sup> Concina 1998, 71-80.



The earliest reliable documentation for San Giacomo di Rialto dates to the year 1152.<sup>2</sup> However, according to local historiography, San Giacomo di Rialto is the oldest ecclesiastical structure on the Lagoon, predating the founding of the city of Venice itself; its foundations being the first stones laid on the island by their founders in the fourth century. It is widely believed that the current structure was built at the beginning of the High Middle Ages (1000-1204).<sup>3</sup>

Some scholars speculate that the architectural landscape of Venice at the time of the construction of San Giacomo di Rialto could have looked like an *alterum By-*

*zantium*.<sup>4</sup> Richard Krautheimer argues that Venice in the High Middle Ages was a direct emulation of Constantinople, the “westernmost cultural stronghold of the Eastern Empire”; simultaneously a “powerful member of both the European and Near Eastern political and economic communities”.<sup>5</sup> This belief is widespread throughout academic discourse. Fortini-Brown, Pincus, Demus et al. concur that the aesthetic character of early Venice was directly informed by the historic relationship between Constantinople and the Veneto region. San Giacomo is a direct product of this medieval cultural exchange.

## 2 Structure of the Church of San Giacomo di Rialto

The church is a free Greek cross-in-square with an extended western arm, surmounted by a dome and supported by six free-standing columns.<sup>6</sup> The central arm of the crucifix is divided into three: the narthex is supported by two columns with the remaining four supporting the dome above the central space where the nave and transept intersect.<sup>7</sup> The columns that mark the transept support the vaults which divide the nave into its tripartite structure. These columns are of Greek marble and feature Corinthian, Composite and Byzantine-style capitals. The dating of these columns has been highly contested. Some are as old as the second century, whilst others are contemporary with the construction of the church in

the eleventh century. Their provenance is largely Eastern Mediterranean and Levantine.<sup>8</sup> The attribution of these columns attests to the maritime successes of Venice, which is an important part of their culture. Further, the eclectic styles and from various ages are symbolic of Venice as a whole – a city that lays claim to the history of both Constantinople and Rome. Two integrated pillars adorned with faint inscriptions demarcate the sanctuary and the entrance, with further inscriptions on the walls either side of the entrance and above the East and West doors of the transept.<sup>9</sup> All the columns and arches in San Giacomo are supported by a network of metal struts attaching to one of the main interior walls [fig. 1].

<sup>2</sup> Ousterhout 2019, 101.

<sup>3</sup> See Agazzi in this volume.

<sup>4</sup> Krautheimer 1992, 405-11.

<sup>5</sup> Krautheimer 1992, 405-11.

<sup>6</sup> Concina 1995, 124-40.

<sup>7</sup> Concina 1995, 124-40.

<sup>8</sup> Concina 1995, 124-40. See Lazzarini in this volume.

<sup>9</sup> Concina 1995, 124-40.



**Figure 1** Church of San Giacomo di Rialto, Venice. Network of metal struts supporting columns and arches

The current church has been modified and rebuilt up until the fifteenth century, and the Gothic façade is a later addition to the original structure.<sup>10</sup> This façade includes an ironically inaccurate clock and a polygonal

portico supported by five columns.<sup>11</sup> The extensive modifications and restorations of the structure are indicative of its importance to the everyday Venetians. The church has been dubbed “the only surviving example of small

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<sup>10</sup> Pilutti Namer 2011.

<sup>11</sup> Concina 1995, 124-40.

Byzantine parish churches in Venice”,<sup>12</sup> chiefly due to its faithful rendering of a Middle-Byzantine domed martyrion. However, much of the discussion around San Giacomo has focussed on its pseudo-historic origin in the founding myth of Rivoalto and Venice, rather than its architectural importance.<sup>13</sup>

San Giacomo underwent many phases of reconstruction throughout its history, and an inscription in front of the main altar inside the church details a reconstruction by parish priest Natale Regia in 1531.<sup>14</sup> The inscription to the right of the altar [fig. 2] is a copy of the original that is to the left-hand side [fig. 3] and is completed with Regia’s coat of arms. This includes a celebratory phrase

dedicated to Regia and his interventions and reconstructions between 1531 and 1532.<sup>15</sup> Sansovino records internal mosaics in 1581, which confirms that the reconstructions under Regia did not modernise the church as was customary in Venice during the Renaissance era.<sup>16</sup> Furthermore, between 1600-01 large public construction works were carried out on the church with the intent to improve the appearance of the building.<sup>17</sup> The restoration was not intended to strengthen the structure, but rather to enhance the aesthetic of the church.<sup>18</sup> These construction works indicate the importance of the carefully preserved ‘antique’ furnishings at San Giacomo.<sup>19</sup>

### 3 Medieval Architectural Styles

The architecture of the church resists easy categorisation. Its explicitly Eastern architectural design conflicts with its Western location. The consensus amongst scholars is that this architectural style – stemming from the Middle-Byzantine artistic tradition – was standardised and disseminated to the Veneto as migration to the Lagoon began.<sup>20</sup> The evolution of this architectural style

can be traced back to the third century.<sup>21</sup> In early medieval architecture, architectural forms were generally heterogeneous according to regional differences and gradual developments over time. Yet evidence exists of a shared, surprisingly standardised architectural church plan across seemingly separate Christian communities.<sup>22</sup> By the end of the fifth century, liturgical changes caused

<sup>12</sup> Howard 2002, 45-50.

<sup>13</sup> See Guidarelli in this volume.

<sup>14</sup> Pilutti Namer 2011.

<sup>15</sup> Pilutti Namer 2011.

<sup>16</sup> Pilutti Namer 2011.

<sup>17</sup> Concina 1995, 130-40. See Guidarelli and Moucheront in this volume.

<sup>18</sup> Concina 1995, 130-40.

<sup>19</sup> See Pilutti Namer in this volume.

<sup>20</sup> Fortini Brown 1997, 13.

<sup>21</sup> Krautheimer 1992, 23-39.

<sup>22</sup> Outserhout 2019, 101.

alterations to be imposed on the spatial organisation of churches. Cruciform churches in this period show the introduction of the tripartite division of the sanctuary to delineate a space for the *Prothesis* rite of preparing the bread and wine for the Eucharist.<sup>23</sup> Despite the overlap in ritual and beliefs between Roman Catholic and Orthodox Catholic liturgy, the centralised cruciform church developed to accommodate the specific needs of the latter denomination. Multiple variations on the centrally planned type had emerged by the end of the fifth century.

By this time, the centrally planned church type had become the standard, with multiple popular variants, the most prevalent of which being the cross-in-square, the tetraconch and octagonal structures, all of which developed to specifically support a dome over the central space.<sup>24</sup> Two main variants of the 'cross-in-square' style can be found in Venice. The large multi-domed basilica, such as the Basilica of Saint Mark, and the much smaller single domed churches, such as San Giacomo. The 'cross-in-square' design, which is often referred to as 'Greek cruciform', was named after the equal sided crucifix used in Greek Orthodoxy.<sup>25</sup> These churches were typically built around a cross with arms of equal length within a compact square composed of three spatial units: the narthex, nave and sanctuary and often surmounted

by a dome above the central nave space.<sup>26</sup> Such designs provide an interesting contrast to the Latin cruciform basilica plan: a rectangular nave with three aisles, divided by colonnades.<sup>27</sup> In the case of larger Greek cruciform structures, four additional domes typically surmount each arm of the crucifix layout.<sup>28</sup>

This style belongs to the Middle Byzantine architectural tradition and became popular during the High Middle Ages. In a modern world largely unfamiliar with the term 'Byzantium', Byzantine artistic developments are usually neglected, as they don't neatly fit into the linear understanding of European cultural history. The architectural and artistic developments of the Byzantine Empire are lesser known and understudied in comparison to contemporaries in Western Europe. Rather than following the trajectory of Western architecture – developing from small Middle Ages basilicas to large Gothic Cathedrals – Byzantine architecture seemed to shrink by comparison, with the popularisation of small, centralised and domed churches. San Giacomo is not solely Byzantine despite its evidently Eastern plan yet is not entirely Romanesque either despite its geographic and cultural location. When it is given scholarly consideration, its complex nature is invariably simplified. The significance of the architectural form of this church has been greatly diminished by centuries of apparent misidentification.

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<sup>23</sup> Leontis 2009, 31-51.

<sup>24</sup> Ousterhout 2019, 101.

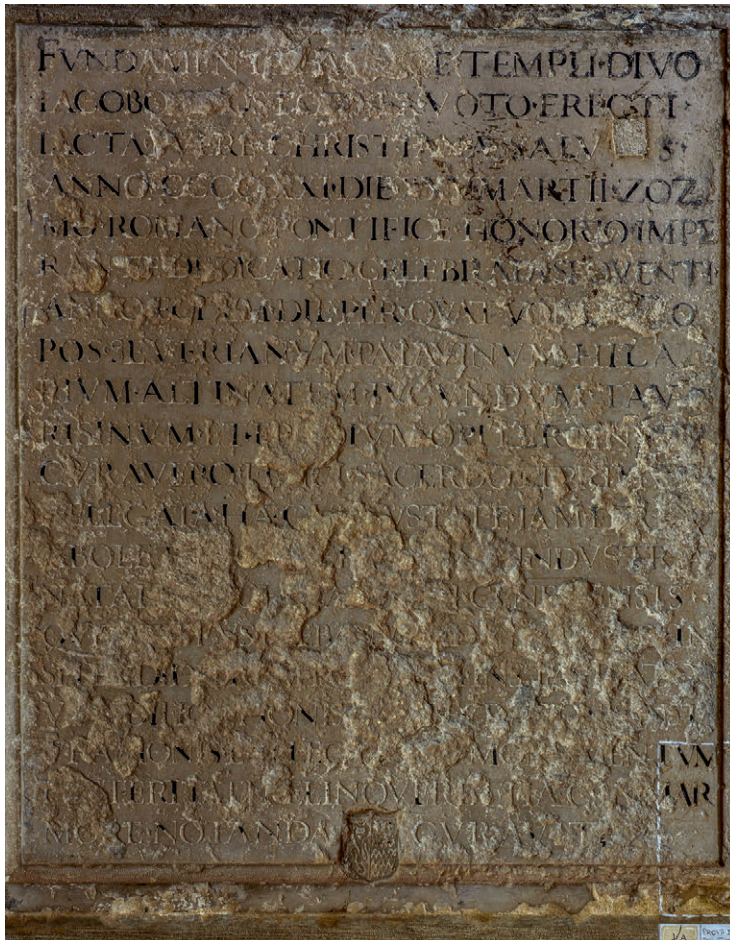
<sup>25</sup> Krautheimer 1992, 167-75.

<sup>26</sup> Krautheimer 1992, 167-75.

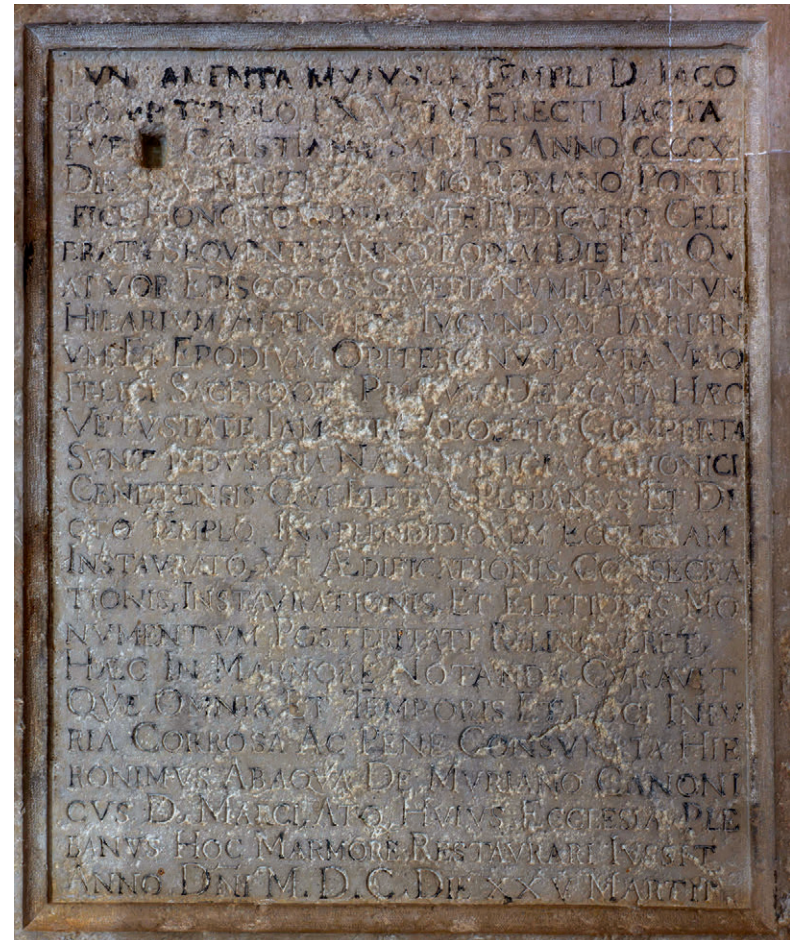
<sup>27</sup> Krautheimer 1992, 167-75.

<sup>28</sup> Concina 1998, 35-8.





**Figure 2** Church of San Giacomo di Rialto, Venice.  
Inscription to the left of the main altar



**Figure 3** Church of San Giacomo di Rialto, Venice. Inscription to the right of the altar.  
Copy of the original that is to the left-hand side and completed with Regia's coat of arms

## 4 History and Mythology

Due to the mythological appendages attached to San Giacomo, it is incredibly difficult to ascertain the date of its actual foundation. According to Andrea Dandolo (1343-54), the church was built as a gift to the Saint who saved the city from a disastrous fire which broke out shortly after its founding on the 25th of March 421 AD, the feast day of the Annunciation.<sup>29</sup> The legendary consecration of the church, which took place precisely a year after its construction began, was attended by Bishops from the neighbouring towns of Padua, Altino, Oderzo and Treviso.<sup>30</sup> The founding myth of San Giacomo authenticates the sanctity of the Lagoon in the Middle Ages, and in turn, this myth makes abundantly clear the importance of this medieval structure to the construction of Venetian identity. It was a place devoted to religion that is protected by God.<sup>31</sup>

Local legend aside, little is known about the actual foundation of the church. The structure underwent ex-

tensive renovation in 1071 under the ordinance of Doge Domenico Selvo; the oldest verifiable documentation relating to its foundation dates to 1152.<sup>32</sup> According to information advanced by plaques inside the church today, the site was officially reconsecrated in July 1177 under Pope Alessandro III. The authentic occurrence of this event has been confirmed by historian Roberto Cessi.<sup>33</sup> In the Venetian tradition, the church was the only surviving structure saved by divine will from another devastating fire that broke out in the Rialto area in 1514.<sup>34</sup> This event affirms the special sacred status of the city as presented in Venetian historiography. Further, the repeated rescuing of the first church built by the first inhabitants indicates that the devotion of the people has been recognised and rewarded by divine forces. The people of Venice constructed a church as their first permanent structure and the preservation of that church contributes to the assembly of Venetic civic identity as a city favoured by God.

## 5 Constantinople or Rome

Venice in the High Middle Ages was much closer to Rome than Constantinople, both geographically and ideologically. In terms of religion, Venice naturally adopted a Roman type of Christianity and liturgical services were unsurprisingly conducted in Latin.<sup>35</sup> Therefore, it

is perhaps surprising that distinctly Roman Christianity was practised in a building developed in an Eastern Orthodox tradition. When constructing San Giacomo, it would have been more reasonable to refer to the Roman tradition. Some of the earliest archaeological evi-

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<sup>29</sup> Pilutti Namer 2011.

<sup>30</sup> Pilutti Namer 2011.

<sup>31</sup> See Guidarelli in this volume.

<sup>32</sup> Concina 1998, 17-45.

<sup>33</sup> Pilutti Namer 2011.

<sup>34</sup> Concina 1995 124-40.

<sup>35</sup> Ousterhout 2019, 507.

dence of Christian buildings in the Mediterranean are found in Rome. The Catacombs of St Callixtus on the Via Appia date to 230, a century before the inauguration of the city of Constantinople.<sup>36</sup> Moreover, Constantine may have only built few churches in Constantinople, but he also did construct the Lateran Basilica in Rome in 313.<sup>37</sup> Originally dedicated to Christ, the basilica later became the most significant church in the city – the Basilica of St. Peter, the Cathedral of Rome.<sup>38</sup> Rome certainly had a comparable Christian identity as Constantinople. Therefore, that the Venetians of the eleventh century did not turn to the West as a reference for the construction of San Giacomo is unusual. It is initially unclear why the Venetians consciously embraced an Eastern architecture for their latent city state when Rome was still a flourishing Christian centre in its own right.

The architecture of San Giacomo highlights the strong connection between Venice and the East. Constantinople became the capital of a Christian Empire in 313 after the Edict of Milan officially recognised the religion.<sup>39</sup> Constantinople had no previous sacred associations, unlike its religious counterpart Rome.<sup>40</sup> Constantinople was virtually a clean slate whilst Rome had to contend with its ancient history of pagan polytheism during a time when such old beliefs were actively rejected in favour of Christianity. Constantinople was a holy city from its conception, a fact which eventually established it as the capital of a Christian Empire, whilst Rome offered a different aesthetic culture to Venice. The ancient past of Rome

would have appealed to the early inhabitants of the Lagoon when constructing San Giacomo di Rialto as the region lacked any noteworthy historic settlements. It is worth recognising that the Greek cruciform churches in Venice, including the Basilica of St. Mark, were constructed at around the same time as the iconic Romanesque cathedral at Pisa.<sup>41</sup> Opting for an explicitly ‘Constantinopolitan’ architecture could indicate a conscious desire to deviate from existing Western religious centres that were close to Venice. This rivalry with the ‘Romanesque’ cities across the Western Mediterranean could be indicative of a civic anxiety felt by the medieval Venetians over their lack of a comparable ancient past. The construction of San Giacomo as contemporaneous with the fabrication of a mythological founding story of the city attests to the insecurity of Venetian identity before the High Middle Ages. The role of legend and myth in the founding of San Giacomo is significant as it is indicative of the attitude that medieval Venetians had towards their heritage as they were constructing their new city. A prime example of the employment of myth in medieval Venice is the legend of the founding of Venice by Antenore in the thirteenth to fourteenth century.<sup>42</sup> The Venetians fabricated a comparable founding story to that of Rome which indicates an attempt to establish their city as equal in greatness. This narrative established a history for the Venetians that legitimised their standing in the socio-political sphere of the medieval Mediterranean. Therefore, in terms of culture and architecture, the me-

<sup>36</sup> Ousterhout 2019, 7.

<sup>37</sup> Mango 1986, 18-30.

<sup>38</sup> Ousterhout 2019, 13.

<sup>39</sup> Doig 2008, 23.

<sup>40</sup> Concina 1998, 17-45.

<sup>41</sup> Ousterhout 2019, 514.

<sup>42</sup> Fortini Brown 1997, 112-20; Muir 1981; Pincus 1992.



dieval Venetians that built San Giacomo did not neglect their Italian neighbours entirely, instead they adopted elements of Roman culture for a different purpose. Here, it seems that the Venetians turned to Rome for its prestigious historic past and to Constantinople for its future ascending Christian status. The two concepts converge as one in the ecclesiastical architecture of San Giacomo.<sup>43</sup>

As cruciform church, San Giacomo legitimises the clear religious authority of Venice in the medieval Med-

iterranean society. Regardless of the crucifix structure being 'Greek' and not 'Latin', a compact church on a clear cross design effectively communicates the piety and devotion of those who constructed it. The cruciform shape is most apparent when viewed from above and it is therefore an important 'visual' means of communicating devotion to God. It is a clear and simple plan, purposefully selected because of its religious symbolism.

## 6 Conclusion

The medieval church of San Giacomo di Rialto is the embodiment of the fluidity of Venetian architecture: it is an amalgamation of various cultures that when combined, create something entirely new and unique. Often tragically upstaged by the dazzling Basilica of St. Mark, San Giacomo nevertheless maintains its primacy in Venetian history at the physical and ideological heart of Venice. It is no accident that San Giacomo is based on an Eastern ar-

chitectural model – it became a symbol of the emergence of Venice. Rather than a far-flung Byzantine outpost in the Northern Adriatic, or a *Nova Roma* of any sort, Early Venice should be reconceptualised as a city that outgrew their Byzantine past, eschewed their Roman connections, and emerged as a rival power in the Mediterranean in the Middle Ages that out-last-ed them both, and it all started with the small local parish church San Giacomo di Rialto.

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<sup>43</sup> See Pilutti Namer in this volume.



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# The Church of San Giacomo di Rialto in the Sixteenth Century: Architecture and Founding Myth of the City

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**Abstract** The essay discusses the chief architectural transformations affecting the church of San Giacomo in the sixteenth century, before the radical transformation that began in 1598. In this period, the church space became one of the models for Venetian Renaissance architecture, its meaning connected and intertwined with the founding myth of the city and with the reconstruction of the Rialto area. It presents a case of ‘spatial memory’ that enriched itself over time, gaining layers of meaning. Starting from the fire of 1514, its development must be contextualised in the events of the reconstruction of the Rialto market, first, and the Rialto bridge, later.

**Keywords** San Giacomo di Rialto. Venetian early modern architecture. Urban History. Architectural History. Religious architecture.

The implementation of the *quincunx* in sixteenth-century Venice seems strongly conditioned by the model of the Basilica of St. Mark; indeed, Francesco Sansovino indicates the ‘cuba di mezzo’ (‘middle cube’) of the palatine basilica as the model for the Romanesque church of Santa Maria Formosa (Sansovino 1581, 10), and for the modern ones of San Salvador<sup>1</sup> and Santa Maria Mater Domini.<sup>2</sup> Yet it is the same Sansovino who sees the prototype of the Basilica in the church of San Giacomo di Rialto, “la [cui] compositura della testudine è così ben raccolta insieme et mantenuta da i volti che sostengono gli archi, che è mirabile cosa a vedere et può dirsi che ella fosse il modello della chiesa di San Marco” (Sansovino 1581, 196). In a recent essay (Günther 2021), H. Guenther thoroughly discusses in depth what had already been claimed by W. Wolters, namely that the quick spread of *quincunx* spaces in Venice between the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries expresses a long and uninterrupted tradition that sees the church of San Giacomo, and not the Basilica of St. Mark, as

<sup>1</sup> “Modello [...] imitato dalla parte di mezzo della Chiesa di S. Marco”, Sansovino 1581, 47.

<sup>2</sup> “Et restaurata à tempi nostri su la forma de la cuba di mezzo di S. Marco”, Sansovino 1581, 74.

the main model (Wolters 1997, 253). On the other hand, adopting the *quincunx* in structures that were rebuilt on pre-existing foundations<sup>3</sup> meant reiterating a pre-existing Romanesque layout consisting of a Greek-cross plan inscribed in a square with a dome atop the intersection of nave and transept.

The church of San Giacomo is a small building, the perimeter of which is limited by a series of adjacent structures (shops and offices) that forced opening the church's windows on the upper part of the walls, directly under the ceiling vaults [figs 1-2]. These openings, however, were added after the church was rebuilt in the late 16th century (see later); the church depicted by Jacopo de Barbari was certainly lower and darker [fig. 3]. The small dimensions of the building allowed the masonry vaults to be supported not by massive pillars (as is the case in the Basilica of St. Mark) but by slender, marble columns [fig. 4]; this way the light spreads downwards into the building more effectively since it is not hindered by columns or partition walls. All of these features were shared by many small parish churches that were rebuilt between the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, making San Giacomo an ideal model for a large number of new projects. In particular, the structural system of San Giacomo, stripped down 'to the bone', seems especially suitable for a translation into the typical frame structures of the architectural orders. This is the case of churches such as San Giovanni Crisostomo, San Geminiano, San Nicola di Castello, San Giovanni Elemosinario, Santa Maria Mater Domini, and San Felice, which all present

a *quincunx* configuration set upon slim pillars recalling those of San Giacomo. It is clearly a particularly versatile spatial system that can be adapted to devotional buildings of different sizes, relevance, and nature (parish, monastic and collegiate churches) thanks to the possibility of 'cloning' the same structural cell on different axes and connecting it to peripheral spaces (presbytery, chapels, naves, external porticoes) in very efficient, functional ways. But it is also possible to adapt this light structural system to others divided by partition walls (as Mauro Codussi does in the church of Santa Maria Formosa).

The success of the San Giacomo model is also related to the process of elaboration of the foundation myth of Venice, which, from the second half of the fifteenth century, assigned the foundation of Rialto and that of its church overlap to a single, specific date (25th March 421). In fact, despite this symbolic connection, more ancient chronicles present different dates for the two events: 25th March 421 indicates the day on which the city of Venice was founded, and 8th January 429 indicates the date of the establishment of the church (*Venezia, 25 marzo 421*, 2022). The juxtaposition of these dates, and their relative symbolic meanings, has been testified by Bernardo Giustiniani in his *De origine Urbis Venetorum* (1477-81) and by all subsequent chroniclers.<sup>4</sup> In 1557, Niccolò Zen<sup>5</sup> added new details to the foundation myth of the city: he came to include the figure of the Greek architect Entinopos, to whom the stone construction of the church of San Giacomo is attributed, as a result of a vow that was taken for the miraculous extinguishing of a fire.

<sup>3</sup> As speculated by W. Dorigo, nine churches were built in the Middle Ages following a central plan (coinciding more or less with a *quincunx* system); and of these nine at least five seem to have maintained this layout model even after their reconstruction in modern times: San Felice (1123), San Geminiano (1172-78), San Giovanni Confessore o Elemosinario (ante 1051), San Giovanni Crisostomo, Santa Maria Mater Domini (1149), San Giovanni in Oleo (ante 1152). The others are San Bartolomeo (1070) and the chapel dedicated to All Saints in the patriarchal palace of San Silvestro (ante 1070), Dorigo 2003, 1: 255-8. See also Rossi, Sitran 2010, 68-75.

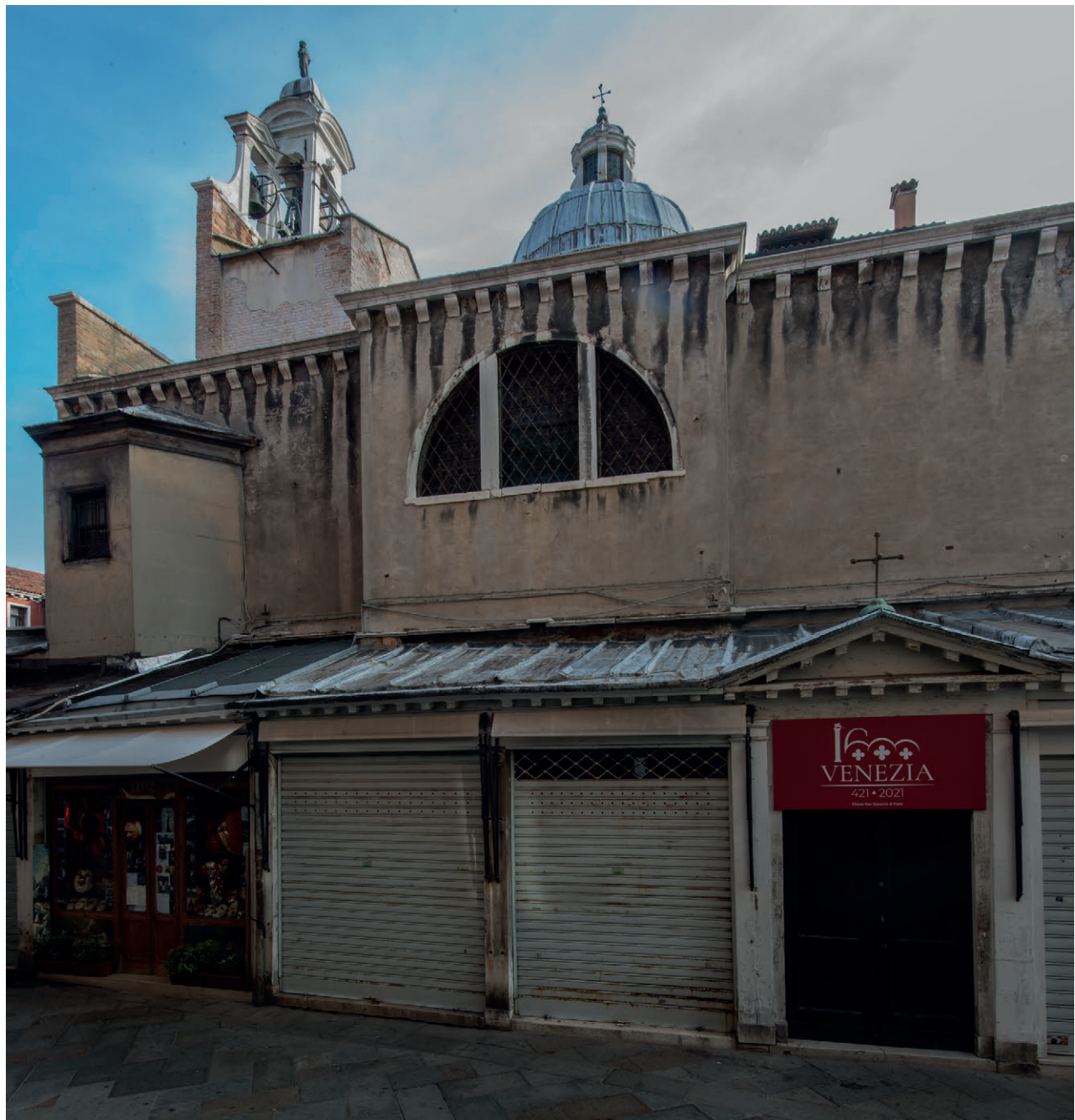
<sup>4</sup> Giustiniani 1722, 108. For a recent review of the issue, see Günther 2021, 278-82. See also Howard 2020, 81-3.

<sup>5</sup> Zen 1557, 192, reiterated by Sansovino 1581, 72r. See also Gaier 2019, 299-300.



**Figure 1**  
Church of San Giacomo  
di Rialto, Venice, frontal view.  
Photo © Böhm





**Figure 2**  
Church of San Giacomo  
di Rialto, Venice, lateral view.  
Photo © Böhm



**Figure 3**  
Jacopo de' Barbari,  
*View of Venice*, detail



Having become a fundamental part of the myth of Venice, the shared foundation date of the city and its first church came to highlight the sacred character of the city's destiny; in the unique blend of civil, political, and religious motifs that was to become so important in the consciousness of the Venetian elite from this moment on.

It is in the context of this progressive 'mythification' of the role of San Giacomo in the history of Venice that the church emerges unscathed from the fire of 1514. Marin Sanudo himself read this circumstance as a confirmation of the special sacrality of the church:

the only thing that remained standing was the church of San Giacomo, covered in lead and in the middle of the fire [...]. God did not want such a grand misfortune as that of burning the most ancient church in the city.<sup>6</sup>

The mood of the city was already vulnerable because of the ongoing Wars of the League of Cambrai, which made the public sensitive to all kinds of omens. This is only one of the many miracles that seemed to have marked the fate of the church, such as the one that occurred in 1511, when a strong wind hit the church's portico with an iron cross, which however became stuck on its roofing and was read as a sign of Venice's role as saviour against the "barbarians" threatening Italy at the time (Sanudo 1879-1903, 12, 80). In the second decade of the century, the church's miraculous destiny grew into a true *topos*, becoming official when two Pontifical Briefs by Pope Leo X, dating between 1516 and 1520, granted the parish priest Natale Regia particular privileges on the occasion of the celebrations of Holy Thursday and Holy Saturday.<sup>7</sup>

Therefore, at this time San Giacomo was undergoing a transformation from a simple place of worship for merchants, artisans, and guilds into an actual sanctuary of the State. It is precisely this new symbolic role that explains the long dispute over the election of the church's rector, which had always been a patriarchal privilege: first (in the fifteenth century) the right was claimed by the 'provveditori al Sal', and afterwards by the doge who obtained the patronage of the church under Pope Clement VII. Thus, San Giacomo became an annex to the Basilica of San Marco, with a parish priest who was not under the canonical authority of the patriarch but of the primicerius (chief priest of San Marco). Natale Regia (Gardani 1966, 16-17), the last parish priest appointed by the patriarch, may have played an important role in this change of jurisdiction. The parish priest had a fundamental role in formalising the synchronisation of the foundation myths of the city and the church: the inscription placed inside the church, commemorating the parishioners' election of their priest in 1503, is a physical reminder, as is the more eye-catching inscription [fig. 5] that was placed under the portico in 1531 on the occasion of the church's completed construction work. Indeed, the rector had been the promoter of significant renovation work, aimed at 'restoring the original shape' of the church's interior, which is adorned with precious marbles while also preserving the mosaics of the apse, as described by Francesco Sansovino in 1581 (Sansovino 1581, 196). Natale Regia boasted of having made the exterior of the church more monumental, as shown in the painting by Bonifacio de' Pitati, *Nascita della Vergine*, which in 1554 presents an image of the façade that is significantly transformed

<sup>6</sup> "Solum restò in piedi la chiesa di San Giacomo di Rialto coperta di piombo qual era in mezzo del fuoco, e ita Deo volente si preservò", Sanudo 1879-1903, 17, 461.

<sup>7</sup> Gardani 1966, 66-72. In 1516, mention is made of an 'ecclesiam quae miraculose edificata existit' ('a church that miraculously exists'). In 1520, it is specified that both the construction and survival of the fire were clear signs of divine protection.

compared to its previous state (illustrated by Jacopo de' Barbari's map of Venice, 1500), with a new bell gable on the top of the roof.

The monumentalisation of the facade maintains the medieval relationship with the market arcades whose shape is inspired by the medieval tradition of making market squares 'permeable' to the city by means of arcades; but this operation highlights the importance that this space assumed in the context of the reconstruction of the Rialto market after the fire of 1514. Indeed, the churches of San Giacomo and San Giovanni Elemosinario both became key points in the renovation project,<sup>8</sup> but with significant swings in the decision-making processes. The first urban layout, as defined by Giovanni Giocondo, placed a church at the centre of the piazza; a church that, however, disappeared in the second layout, in which it was relocated "under the loggias so as not to block the piazza".<sup>9</sup> It is important to note that Scarpagnino, who executed the final design, arranged the reconstruction of the piazza around the church of San Giacomo, with a series of arcades that seem like a natural extension of the church's portico [fig. 6]. The monumentalisation of the church pursued by Natale Regia, however, did not eliminate the shops that almost enveloped it completely, forming a sort of 'shell' around the sacred space, entirely managed by state authorities. The shops, for example, provided an important funding source for the State but they could also be converted into office

spaces (such as that of the Razon Nove) (Calabi, Morachiello 1987, 96). In short, the church of San Giacomo is one where the secular and sacred characteristics, as well as the architectural and urban dimensions, are inextricably interconnected.

The apostolic visit of 1581<sup>10</sup> describes a building in good condition, detailing the presence of marble columns dividing the three aisles and an orderly sacristy showing no particular signs of maintenance issues. The vaulted main chapel is described as adorned with a crucifix 'in frontispicio'; on the main altar, dedicated to San Giacomo, although not consecrated, stood a gilded wooden tabernacle and an altarpiece. As for the side altars (each equipped with an altarpiece), one was dedicated to San Marco, whereas all the others were dedicated to the Madonna: to the Beatissima Vergine, the Natività della Vergine, and the Annunciazione. Subsequent events led to the replacement and rededication of all these altars,<sup>11</sup> but the original Marian program seems to refer to an immediate superimposition of the Virgin Mary and the city of Venice, a fundamental theme of the mythopoeia that had been established between the fourteenth and the beginning of the sixteenth century.

It is in this phase that the events regarding San Giacomo became even more closely intertwined with those regarding the construction of the Rialto Bridge and the repercussions on both sides of the Canal.

<sup>8</sup> Cessi-Alberti, 99-102. For San Giovanni Elemosinario Calabi, Morachiello 1987, 106.

<sup>9</sup> "Sotto le logge perché non impedisse la piazza" (Vasari 1906, 5: 271).

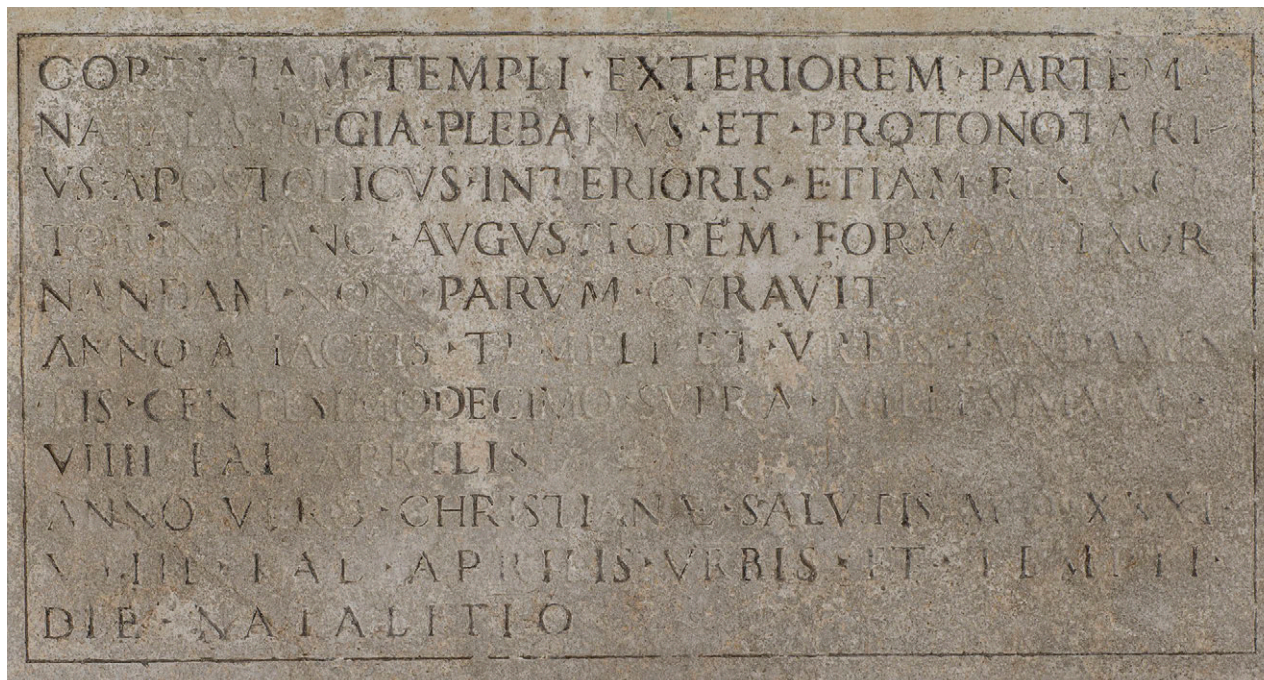
<sup>10</sup> ASPVe, Curia patriarcale di Venezia, Archivio 'segreto', Visite apostoliche, cc. 276rv, published in Gardani 1966, 77-84.

<sup>11</sup> See the *Visita primiceriale* of 1609, ASVe, Cancelleria inferiore, reg. 259, cc. 1rv, published in Gardani 1966, 85-8. Also see the essay by Luca Siracusano.





**Figure 4**  
Church of San Giacomo di Rialto, Venice, inner view.  
Photo © Böhm



**Figure 5** Church of San Giacomo di Rialto, Venice. Inscription in the portico. Photo © Böhm

As is well known, the first idea for the construction of the stone bridge dates back to 1503. The fire of 1514 and the collapse of the bridge in 1524 were clear signs of the urgency of the intervention. However, it was not until 1551 that a commission of supervisors announced a public tender and examined the submitted projects for a new bridge.<sup>12</sup> During the very long decision-making process, and while the standing wooden bridge still required constant restoration work, the most important architects of the time proposed new projects, in a debate on the shape of the structure that involved the likes of Jacopo Sansovino, Andrea Palladio, and Vincenzo Scamozzi, and a series of *proti* who

tirelessly criticised the many structural shapes and ideas. In the meantime, in July 1587, the collapse of some houses and shops owned by the patriarch adjoining the nearby church of San Bartolomeo triggered a reconstruction process that was favoured by the Signoria thanks to a loan.

The reconstruction of the bridge and the transformation of the buildings on both sides of the Grand Canal are probably connected, although not necessarily contained in one general reconstruction project. Nonetheless, it is a fact that the two churches of San Giacomo and San Bartolomeo underwent a long and simultaneous reconstruction process.

<sup>12</sup> Calabi, Morachiello 1987, 196-206; Calabi 2022; Howard 2010; 2011, 131-67.

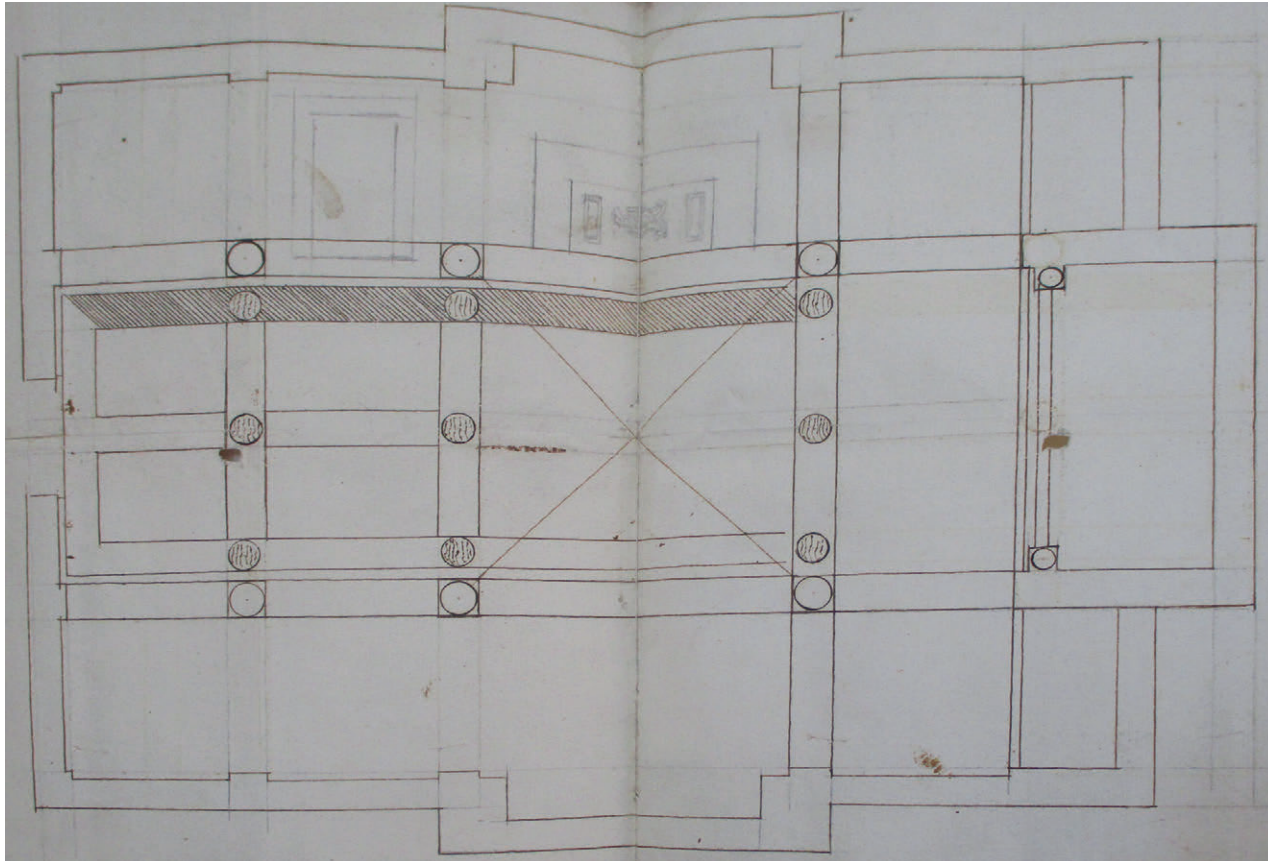




**Figure 6** Campo di San Giacomo di Rialto, lateral view. Photo © Böhm

The fire of 1572 that broke out in San Bartolomeo, destroying the sacristy and the archive of the patriarchal registries (on the eastern side of the church), prompted a long process of reconstruction. The overall reconfiguration of the presbytery, initiated in 1582, also extended to the three terminal chapels, with the demolition of the main altar and the reconstruction of the church in 1624 (Guidarelli 2011). The Senate's decision of 1588 to change the direction of the new stone bridge (compared to the alignment of the existing wooden one) sparked a

heated debate regarding the position start of the abutments of the bridge on the bank of the canal, on the Riva del Ferro. This, in fact, entailed reorganising a large portion of the urban fabric between the church and the new bridge, with extensive demolitions and reconstructions. The rebuilding process, which indirectly involved the church of San Bartolomeo, began with the preliminary survey of the church's perimeter, presumably carried out by Antonio da Ponte in 1587-88 and now preserved in the State Archives of Venice, in the dossier on the construc-



**Figure 7** Antonio da Ponte, Preparatory plan of the rise of the floor of the Church of San Giacomo di Rialto, ASVe, Provveditori sopra il ponte di Rialto, dis. 17. Photo © Guidarelli

tion of the Rialto Bridge.<sup>13</sup> At the same time, on the other bank of the Grand Canal, the church of San Giacomo underwent a significant renovation. Once again, it was the parish priest who took the initiative by addressing a plea to the Signoria, asking for the intervention of the

Magistrati al Sal to finance the elevation of the church floor. The priest Francesco di Allegri complained that the construction of the seat of the Razon Nove above the space of the church (occupying a third of its surface) had led to structural failures that required a consolidation of

<sup>13</sup> ASVe, Provveditori sopra il ponte di Rialto, dis. 17, published and discussed in Calabi 1982, 62 fig. 46.



the foundations. Furthermore, the drop in the floor level that seemed to have been a consequence of this structural intervention, made the church increasingly more exposed to high water, which hindered liturgical celebrations (Calabi, Morachiello 1987, 96-7).

In May 1587, the Collegio examined the matter and referred the issue to the Senate which, after hearing the opinion of the *proto* of the Provveditori al Sal, decided to allocate 150 ducats to “raise the floor of the church, which today can be accessed by descending a few steps”.<sup>14</sup> The difference in elevation between inside and outside was also due to the paving and therefore raising of the external footfall level. The Provveditori al Sal had been consulted the previous February and had received Antonio da Ponte’s expert valuation in April. The *proto*, confirming the parish priest’s claim, indicated the need to raise the floor and fix the perimeter walls: “it is necessary to restore the walls, which are in bad shape, and raise the level of the floor”.<sup>15</sup>

The drawing [fig. 7] attached to da Ponte’s appraisal is a plan of the church’s foundations (Calabi, Morachiello 1987, fig. 41). It shows the existence of continuous sections of masonry supporting the two rows of columns, and an underground vaulted ceiling below the second bay of the main nave (therefore showing that the cavity is maintained in the reinforcement project for the floor). Da Ponte designed a system of vertical supports connected to a foundation frame (necessary to support the raised floor) that seems to extend to the presbytery. As a result, while providing for an elevation of the overall floor, the *proto* centred the new foundations under the

central nave (shown in the drawing by a different ink). He also marked, in pencil, some tombs that were to be maintained on the left side wall. The operation entailed an overall renewal of the church interior and is the primary reason why all the altars were reconstructed (see Siracusano in this volume). However, this intervention did not require changing the interior<sup>16</sup> and did not affect the upper structures thereby maintaining the ‘antica forma’ (‘ancient shape’) of the church, simply adapting it partially to external transformations. Yet, these first operations were a gateway to a series of other interventions that, after minor works on the roof in 1593, intensified in 1598 when the Senate allocated 330 ducats for a first consolidation of the vaults and main altar. Thanks to the documentary corpus later published here by Nicolas Moucheront, it is possible to confirm what is stated in the inscriptions inside the church: under the supervision of Antonio Contin, the entire system of vaults and columns was raised, maintaining the perimeter walls and building a dom on a drum [figs 8-9] to replace the previous one placed under the roof pitches. The floor was then further raised, which forced the elevation of the access portal toward the portico, reaching a height of more than 160 cm above the original outer footfall level (as verified during the 1937 restorations) (Marzemin 1937, 270-1).

This entire operation occurred *Prisca eius forma servata*; that is, preserving the spatial form that was so closely linked to the Venetian identity, albeit with a substantial aesthetic renewal. Indeed, the elevation of walls, columns, vaults, and dome could not be raised above the level of the new adjacent buildings, which in the

<sup>14</sup> “Alzare il pavimento della chiesa al quale oggi si giunge scendendo alcuni gradini”, ASVe, Senato, deliberazioni Terra, filza 102, alla data 5 June 1587.

<sup>15</sup> “E fare beoxgno reconzar i pare atorno, molto mal condizionadi unde per alzar suso il pavimento”, ASVe, Senato, deliberazioni terra, filza, alla data 4 April 1587.

<sup>16</sup> Stringa 1604, f. 155v, writes that even after this intervention, and before the construction work that took place at the end of the century, the internal floor was still three steps lower than the level of the outside street level.

meantime had themselves also been raised. The opening of three large semicircular windows on the upper part of the façade, presbytery, and southern transept walls helped to stream light into the church, emphasising the precious marble of the newly built altars. This new organisation of the light changed the perception of the church space, which went from being a seemingly confined one to a spacious, monumental environment, all without changing the overall shape or means of access. The same dome was raised on a drum, pierced by four new circular windows, and crowned by a lantern [figs 10-11]: this allowed the penetration of new sources of light while also maintaining the shape of the preexisting dome. The rationality and efficiency of this solution would make it a prototype for dozens of subsequent restorations, as it allowed the admittance of new light into preexisting churches by simply opening semicircular windows under the ceiling vaults without upsetting the support structure or spatial organisation.

In this way, the *visita primiceriale* of 1609 (when compared to the Apostolic Visit of 1581) describes a building with the same spatial layout and altar arrangement (although these had been rebuilt and dedicated to new saints), despite the fact that the entire church had been dismantled and rebuilt.<sup>17</sup> The church's fate of being re-

peatedly manipulated to preserve its original shape finds its fulfillment in the restoration works that took place between the mid-nineteenth century and the 1940s. Thanks to an important archival dossier,<sup>18</sup> it is possible to reconstruct the course of these various transformations, starting with the almost complete reconstruction of the portico (partial replacement of stone blocks and restoration of the roof), the painting of the façade, the partial restoration of the church roof, and the main altar restoration from 1858 to 1860. The portico roof was then completely reconstructed between 1884 and 1885 (and later in 1905), when general maintenance of the interior (walls, altar, and floor) was also carried out, especially around the organ loft located on the counter-façade.

By contrast, the interventions that were carried out in 1936-38 were more structural, with a consolidation of the presbytery and the replacement of a large part of the external walls. In particular, the main façade was subjected to significant external restoration work (brick replacement, plaster removal, and reorganisation of the façade openings), while the internal counter-façade was freed of the organ and organ loft.

Once again, the transformations (even the more radical ones) were aimed at maintaining the 'Prisca forma' ('ancient form'), to renew the ancient significance of the church of San Giacomo di Rialto.

<sup>17</sup> ASVe, Cancelleria inferiore, reg. 259, cc. 1rv, published in Gardani 1966, 85-8.

<sup>18</sup> Soprintendenza ABAP di Venezia. Archivio Antico, A 8 San Polo; *busta* 5 Sestiere di San Polo "chiesa di San Giacomo. Campanile di San Tomà". The modern restorations of San Giacomo will be the subject of a dedicated future publication.



**Figure 8**

Church of San Giacomo di Rialto, Venice,  
view of the inner vaults. Photo © Böhm



**Figure 9**  
Church of San Giacomo di Rialto, Venice,  
view of the inner vaults. Photo © Böhm

**Figure 10**  
Church of San Giacomo di Rialto, Venice,  
view of the inner dome. Photo © Böhm





**Figure 11**  
Church of San Giacomo di Rialto, Venice,  
view of the external dome.  
Photo © Böhm

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# A Family Affair: The High Altar of San Giacomo di Rialto, or Alessandro Vittoria's Last Work

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**Abstract** San Giacomo at Rialto, a church under the patronage of the Doge, was restored by the State in the years around 1600. Three new altars were financed by three different guilds. The high altar was commissioned by the Casaroli guild and adorned with sculptures. In 1604, Giovanni Stringa listed the statue of St. James as a work by Alessandro Vittoria. However, at this date the artist was certainly too elderly to carve stone sculptures by himself. The investigation of the hitherto little-studied Casaroli Altar may shed new light both on the dynamics of the later Vittoria's workshop and on his closest relatives-assistants.

**Keywords** Alessandro Vittoria. Andrea dall'Aquila. Vigilio Rubini. Venetian Renaissance Sculpture. Venetian Trade Guilds. San Giacomo di Rialto.

**Summary** 1 "Per maggior ornamento": Renovating San Giacomo at Rialto. – 2 The Altar of the Scuola dei Casaroli e Ternieri. – 3 Confirmation and Theory for the Late Years of Vittoria's Workshop.

## 1 "Per maggior ornamento": Renovating San Giacomo at Rialto

In the Serenissima, reliance on public institutions and civic pride imbued religious sentiment. This is also reflected in the account of the Church of San Giacomo di Rialto written by the Canon Giovanni Stringa in 1604.<sup>1</sup> At the time this small but significant church had just been restored with state funds.<sup>2</sup> In addition to the parish priest Girolamo dall'Acqua, the inscriptions mention the names of the Provveditori al Sal, the magistrates who financed public buildings. The restoration was carried out following the request of the Senate with the approval of the Doge Marino Grimani. Annexed to the Basilica of St. Mark, the church was indeed under ducal patronage. A second inscription related to the renovation bears the date 25th March 1600. On that day, three anniversaries were celebrated: the feast of the Annun-

<sup>1</sup> Sansovino, Stringa 1604, cc. 155v-156v.

<sup>2</sup> Stanziani in 1598 and in 1599: ASVe, Cancelleria inferiore. Doge, 200, c. 15rv; Avery 1996, 2, 564-5 cat. 109.



ciation, the legendary birth of Venice and the anniversary of the presumed foundation of San Giacomo itself. According to the legend, the first stone of the temple was in fact laid on 25th March 421 by those same Christians who were fleeing from Attila and gave birth to the city.<sup>3</sup>

The time had come for some new altars. Three of them were sponsored by the same number of *scuole delle Arti* (Schools of the Arts). The increasing pomp and splendour reveal the competitive spirit of the guilds. On 7th June 1600, the Garbelladori and Ligadori begged the doge for permission to erect the altar on the right wall of the church; they positioned there the altarpiece depicting the Annunciation by Marco Vecellio. Then, that same year, on 10th September, the Casaroli and Ternieri guild asked for and obtained permission to renovate an altar previously held by the Scuola dei Compravendi, who had it 'del tutto abbandonato'. Marino Grimani approved, but on 1st December 1600, 'per maggiore ornamento', he transferred the concession to the high altar – after all, the patron saint of the Casaroli was St. James [fig. 1]. A total of eight marble sculptures were placed on the new polychrome altar, including the *San*

*Giacomo* [fig. 15], which Stringa promptly recalled as a work by Alessandro Vittoria. Finally, on 9th April 1601, the wealthiest Orefici and Gioiellieri guild, which was previously housed in San Silvestro, was granted permission to build the altar on the left wall of the church.<sup>4</sup> Built according to a drawing by Vincenzo Scamozzi in 1602, the altar was equipped with bronze statues by Girolamo Campagna early on. When the work was completed in 1607, the Orefici had already spent over 1,800 ducats.

The well-documented altar of the Orefici has been studied extensively in recent times. The high altar, on the other hand, has received little attention. It is a challenging work, both due to the lacunae of documents and the impossibility of acknowledging Vittoria's complete authorship in the sculptures. The fact is that, at these dates, the artist was too elderly to carve anymore. If examined more carefully, and compared with better documented works, the Casaroli altar can therefore provide useful information on the later years of Vittoria's workshop and on its closest collaborators, who I shall try to identify. First of all, however, let us consider the scope of the commission.

## 2 The Altar of the Scuola dei Casaroli e Ternieri

In Venice, the Scuole delle Arti were brotherhoods for the owners and the labourers of the more than one hundred specific professional sectors disciplined by the Giustizia Vecchia. The handicraft origin of these consortiums was the first difference from the wealthier Scuole Grandi, born from the Scuola dei Battuti, and the innu-

merable other *scuole minori*, which in their turn could be distinguished between those of a lay or purely devotional nature. Only the Scuole grandi and a few minor *scuole* could afford to build their own seat. The scuole delle Arti, on the other hand, generally convened next to an altar, where religious services were also held.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>3</sup> This information is drawn from epigraphs walled in the church and also transcribed by Sansovino, Stringa 1604, c. 156rv. For the *giuspatronato*, Gardani 1966, 15-16, 73-6. Furthermore see Collins and Guidarelli in this volume.

<sup>4</sup> For the documents, ASVe, Cancelleria inferiore. Doge, 78, cc. 42r, 45rv, 50r; Gardani 1966, 30-1, 42 fn. 27; Jones 2016, 3, 208-10 docs 9.2-4. For the attribution of the *San Giacomo*, Sansovino, Stringa 1604, c. 155v.

<sup>5</sup> On the altars of the *scuole delle Arti*: Humfrey, MacKenney 1986; Martin 1998, 64-72; Jones 2016, 1: 34-5.

Sellers of edible oil, honey, cheese and meat from fresh or salted pork belonged to the Scuola dei Casaroli e Ternieri. In the aforementioned supplication of 10th September 1600, the brethren declared that they had had an altar in St. James' since '... already 200 years and more'. We do not know what that primitive altar looked like, but the Casaroli asked for and obtained permission to renovate an altar previously held by the Compravendi. However, on 1 December, 'per convenienti rispetti a noi esposti', the Doge turned the concession around: the Casaroli were given the more prestigious (and more expensive) task of erecting the high altar.<sup>6</sup>

We would like to know more about the choices they made, the means of financing, the timing and the costs of this undertaking. But the documentation that has survived is lacking. At the State Archives in Venice, there are no accounting ledgers of the Scuola dating prior to 1683.<sup>7</sup> The first *Libri delle parti* are also too recent, starting respectively in 1626 and 1686. There we can read that the oldest documents had already been lost and stolen in the 17th and 18th centuries.<sup>8</sup> Finally, in the two *Mariegoles* in the Correr Museum Library, there is at most a copy of the supplication and two subsequent ducal concessions, dating from 1600.<sup>9</sup>

However, there is no lack of encouraging information. In an inscription walled in the presbytery we can read 'DIVO IACOBO MAIORI | CASEARII III NO (nas) APRILIS | MDCII'.<sup>10</sup> The date 3rd April 1602 seems to refer to the completion of the altar construction, which in fact, in 1604, was described by Stringa as 'fabricato [...] in forma rara e singolare'. However, his comments on the 'bella statua di San Giacomo [...] di mano del Vittoria' that 'va posta' in the 'nicchio' are more ambiguous.<sup>11</sup> If considered in a literal sense, the verbal form 'va posta' would suggest that in 1604 the sculpture was not yet on the altar. Similarly, Stringa referred to a 'tabernacolo, in cui starà il corpo santissimo del Signore'. In this case, we are certain that the work was not accomplished. It was not the Casaroli who commissioned the custody of the Sacrament, but the Senate, with a resolution dated 28th February 1605. The 17th-century tabernacle is lost and the current one, made of marble, was ordered in 1747 to replace one made of wood.<sup>12</sup> At the time of the visit of the *primicerius* on 28th March 1609, the mensa had not yet been consecrated, but the entire altar was commanded 'dai Casaroli', except for the tabernacle 'fatto dai Signori del Sal'.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>6</sup> For the document, cf. *supra*, fn. 4. The expression "200 anni e più" should not be taken as literal. In 1436, the Casaroli would have gathered in Sant'Aponal according to Manno 1995, 40-1, to whom I also refer for a description of the Arte and for the archival sources, together with Vio 2004, 711-13 no. 670.

<sup>7</sup> ASVe, Arti, 84.

<sup>8</sup> Both in ASVe, Arti, 82 (on the loss of the earliest material, c. 1r of both the *Libri*). Sporadic copies of resolutions for the years 1486 to 1674 in ASVe, *Arti*, 68/2, not relevant to this research.

<sup>9</sup> BMCV, IV, 9, c. 104rv; BMCV, IV, 127.

<sup>10</sup> A second epigraph mentions the concession by Doge Grimani. Both of these are transcribed in Sansovino, Stringa 1604, c. 155v.

<sup>11</sup> Sansovino, Stringa 1604, c. 155v.

<sup>12</sup> For the resolution of 1605, ASVe, Senato, Deliberazioni, Terra, Registri, 75, c. 210rv; Gardani 1966, 31, 39 footnotes 17-18 (even for the 1747 resolution concerning the new tabernacle).

<sup>13</sup> On the document, Gardani 1966, 85-8.



**Figure 1**

*High Altar. 1600-1602. Church of San Giacomo di Rialto, Venice. Photo © Böhm*





**Figure 2**

Tommaso Contin, *Altar of the Nicopeia*. 1617. Basilica of St Mark, Venice. Photo © Fondazione Giorgio Cini, Venice





**Figure 3**

Alessandro Vittoria and workshop, *Monument to Alessandro Vittoria*. 1602-1603. Church of San Zaccaria, Venice.  
Photo © Fondazione Giorgio Cini, Venice

Not a single source names the architect. Suzanne Martin does not exclude that the project may be the work of Vittoria himself.<sup>14</sup> Indeed, the pairs of columns on two different depth levels, the pulvinated frieze and the interrupted entablature recall the more ancient altar of the Crocifisso, now in San Zanipolo, formerly in the Scuola della Giustizia in San Fantin and possibly designed by Vittoria around 1580.<sup>15</sup> In 1600, the year of the concession to the Casaroli, the elderly artist was still designing altars, such as the one in the Scuola del Rosario in San Domenico, executed by Melchisedec Longhena, now unfortunately lost.<sup>16</sup> However, it seems to me that this altarpiece better reflects the later altars of the *Nicopeia* and the Sacrament in the Basilica of St. Mark, designed in 1617 by Tommaso Contin [fig. 2].<sup>17</sup> The design of the *cy-masa* is quite similar, featuring a triangular pediment framed by curvilinear pediment elements at the back.

In addition to the name of the architect, the lost documents of the Scuola could have disclosed the scale of the expenditure, which must have been significant. I do not know if the State commission for the tabernacle indicates that the Casaroli was at a certain point no longer able to finance the undertaking. If this is so, the inclusion of a deliberation of 21st January 1604 in their *mariegola* might not be a coincidence. The magistrates at the Giustizia Vecchia and the Savi alla Mercanzia warned those *gastaldi* who overspent on 'litte, fabbriche et altre cose stravacanti' without first consulting their brethren. It was then up to the *Arti* to settle debts through extraordinary payments, 'con grave danno di esse Scole et di tutto il populo'.<sup>18</sup> Such payments, on the other hand, also covered the considerable costs of the Altar of the Orefici.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>14</sup> Martin 1998, 224-6 cat. 13. It should be stressed that the Casaroli altar is adorned with a golden mosaic in the background. This element is also present in the Monument of Jacopo Soranzo in the Church of Santa Maria degli Angeli in Murano (1599 circa), in the background of the portrait bust by Vittoria (see Annibali 2020). Nonetheless, the use of golden mosaic was not a prerogative of Vittoria's workshop; for instance, it is used in the Tomb of Marino Grimani and Morosina Morosini in San Giuseppe di Castello (1598-1604), designed by Vincenzo Scamozzi, with sculptures by Girolamo Campagna and bronzes by Cesare Gropo (see Jones 2016, 3, 81-196 cat. 8).

<sup>15</sup> On this altar, Martin 1998, 236-41 cat. 18; Finocchi Ghersi 2013.

<sup>16</sup> Avery 1999b, 175-6 doc. 145. On the relationship between Vittoria and Melchisedec, Hopkins 2006, 246-52.

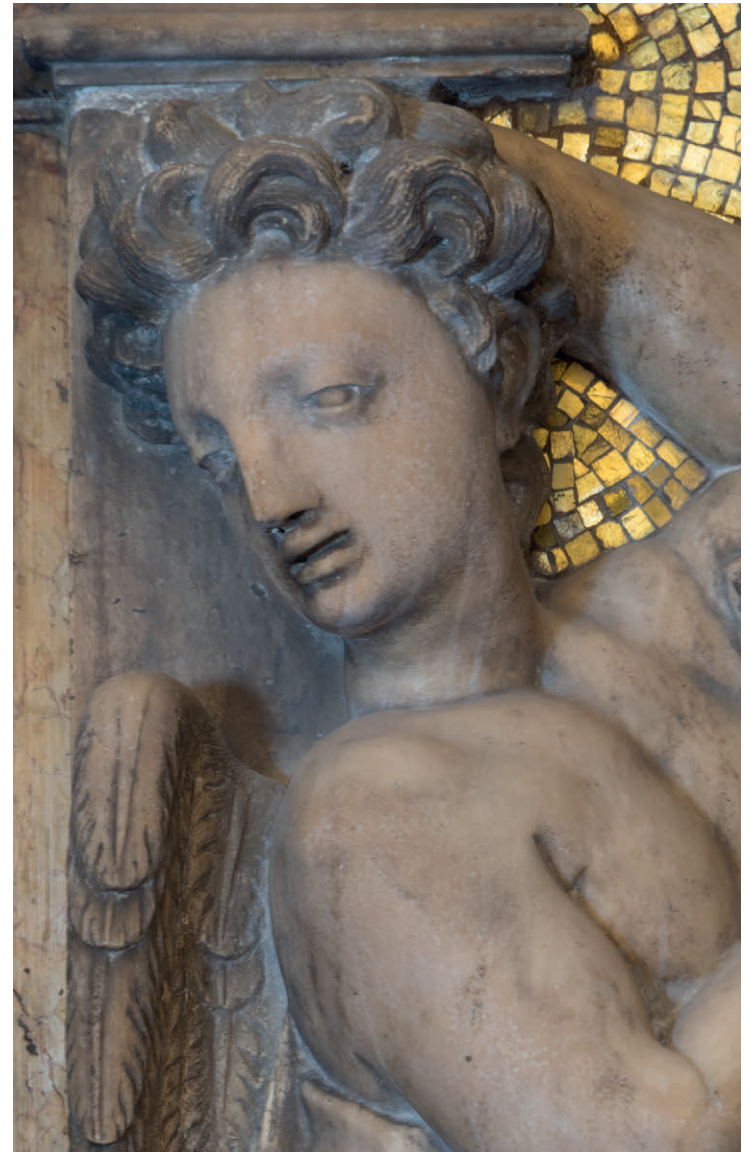
<sup>17</sup> On these altars, Kryza-Gersch 2008.

<sup>18</sup> For the document, BMCV, IV, 9, cc. 107v-108r.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. *supra*, fn. 5.



**Figure 4** Andrea dall'Aquila, *Madonna and Child* (detail). 1601 ca.  
Church of Santa Maria Assunta dei Gesuiti, Venice.  
Photo © Didier Descouens CC BY-SA 4.0



**Figure 5** Workshop of Alessandro Vittoria (Andrea dall'Aquila),  
*Angel* (detail). 1600-1602. Church of San Giacomo di Rialto, Venice  
Photo © Fondazione Giorgio Cini, Venice



### 3 Confirmation and Theory for the Late Years of Vittoria's Workshop

Evidently, the *Scuola's* papers do not resolve our doubts as to the autography of the sculptures. Setting aside the excitement of the sources, all recent literature traces the execution back to the workshop of Vittoria.<sup>20</sup> The remarks of Manfred Leithe-Jasper and Vittoria Avery seem to me particularly relevant. According to Leithe-Jasper, a large part of the work was carried out by a collaborator of Vittoria, who he hypothetically identified as Giulio dal Moro – I will return to this theory later.<sup>21</sup> As for Avery, she points out the derivative nature of this 'workshop product': the caryatids are descended from the "Monumento de Franza" in the Doge's Palace, dated 1575; the St. James from the statue of identical subject for the Scuola Grande della Misericordia, circa 1581; lastly, the little angels from those in the Tiepolo Chapel of St. Saba in St. Antonin, dated 1592.<sup>22</sup>

We know that around 1600 the more than 75-year-old Vittoria was no longer carving stone. He had even abandoned the Scuola dei Tagliapietra in 1597.<sup>23</sup> In this sense, the words of Abbot Giulio Brunetti, agent of Francesco Maria II della Rovere, are significant. Brunetti was supposed to find a sculptor in Venice to carve the statue of Federico da Montefeltro in marble and then send it to

Urbino. In July 1603, the agent informed the duke that Vittoria 'è tanto vecchio che non attende più a niente'.<sup>24</sup> The statue of Federico da Montefeltro was then commissioned to Campagna, who was about a quarter of a century younger and estimated to be the best at that moment (in the meantime he was working on the altar of the Orefici, as well as on the tomb of Doge Grimani).<sup>25</sup>

It is therefore possible that, after half a century's successful career, the Casaroli altar was Vittoria's last commission. Some years earlier, between 1579 and 1584, he had set a new standard in the patronage of the *scuole delle Arti* with the Marzeri altar in San Zulian, completed with Francesco Smeraldi and his friend Palma il Giovane.<sup>26</sup> Also of significance, later in the 1580s, was the Luganegheri altar in San Salvador, that suffered the same fate as the Casaroli altar regarding a lack of documents, both from the brotherhood and from the artist's personal records.<sup>27</sup>

But the documents of the 'Commissaria' are nevertheless precious in our case. They shed light on the assistants still at Alessandro's side around 1600. Two of his 'nepoti' stand out: Andrea dall'Aquila and Vigilio Rubini. The workshop was, after all, frequently a family affair. These two relatives-collaborators are also mentioned in the mas-

<sup>20</sup> On sources, Sansovino, Stringa 1604, c. 155v; Temanza 1778, 493; Selvatico 1847, 390. On recent bibliography, Serra 1921, 84; Venturi 1935-37, 3: 142 fn. 1; Cessi 1961-62, 2: 25. The altar appears on the list of removed works in Finocchi Gherzi 2020, 140.

<sup>21</sup> Leithe-Jasper 1963, 213-14.

<sup>22</sup> Avery 1996, 2, 564-5 cat. 109. For the "Monumento de Franza", Wolters 2010, 54; for the *San Giacomo* today at the Embassy of Portugal in Rome, Finocchi Gherzi 2020, 99 cat. 40; for the sculptures at Sant'Antonin, Avery 1999b, 164-7 docs 133(i)-(viii).

<sup>23</sup> Avery 2015a, 104 fn. 8.

<sup>24</sup> For the letter, Betti 1821, 111.

<sup>25</sup> Vittoria still benefited from considerable influence. In 1606, the Duke of Urbino asked him to visit Campagna to ascertain the quality of the *Federico da Montefeltro*: Siracusano 2022, 135, 148-9 (with further bibliography).

<sup>26</sup> On this altar, Huffman Lanzoni 2008.

<sup>27</sup> Avery 1996, 2, 512-14 cat. 81; Annibali 2020. Proposals of different dating in Martin 1998, 302-4 cat. 36 (1595-96) and Finocchi Gherzi 2020, 135 cat. 17b (1600 circa).





**Figure 6**

Andrea dall'Aquila, *St Michael*. 1595. Caorle (Venice),  
Santuario della Madonna dell'Angelo.  
Photo © Ufficio Beni Culturali – Curia Patriarcale di Venezia



**Figure 7**

Andrea dall'Aquila, *Madonna and Child* (detail). 1601 ca.  
Church of Santa Maria Assunta dei Gesuiti, Venice.  
Photo © Didier Descouens CC BY-SA 4.0





**Figure 8**

Workshop of Alessandro Vittoria (Andrea dall'Aquila),  
*Angel in Adoration*. 1600-1602. Church of San Giacomo  
di Rialto, Venice.

Photo © Fondazione Giorgio Cini, Venice



**Figure 9** Workshop of Alessandro Vittoria (Andrea dall'Aquila), *Angel with a book*. 1600-1602. Church of San Giacomo di Rialto, Venice. Photo © Fondazione Giorgio Cini, Venice



**Figure 10** Andrea dall'Aquila, *Madonna and Child* (detail). 1601 ca. Church of Santa Maria Assunta dei Gesuiti, Venice. Photo © Didier Descouens CC BY-SA 4.0

ter's three last testaments. In the seventh one, in 1597, Vittoria named them legatees of his highly valuable repertoire of models (including Matteo dall'Aquila, a cousin of Andrea, in the bequest).<sup>28</sup> According to the eighth tes-

tament of 1601, the workshop collection was to be passed on to Andrea and Vigilio alone. In the ninth and last testament of 1608, all the models went to Vigilio, reserving for Andrea those 'd'architettura, palle d'altari, porte, fenestre

<sup>28</sup> Vittoria himself called them 'nepoti' (nephews), but Vigilio alone was effectively so. See here below, *infra*. For the document, Avery 1999b, 171-3 doc. 141. For Matteo, Rossi 2003, 390. Andrea had already been legatee of one third of the models in the fifth will of 1584; the remaining two thirds were to be given to Agostino Rubini, Vigilio's brother. Avery 1999, 142-3 doc. 121. Agostino is missing from later bequests because he died before 1592: De Lotto 2008, 94 fn. 131.



et nappè' (other models were to be shared with Giuseppe Batteri, who was also a relative of Vittoria's).<sup>29</sup>

Those documents punctually document the expenses incurred by the elderly Vittoria for the monument he had erected for himself in 1603 in San Zaccaria [fig. 3] when he was still alive. The aedicula included sculptures that had been completed some time ago, such as the two caryatids, from before 1566, and the bust, prior to 1595. But the figures to be executed *ex novo* were all entrusted to Andrea and Vigilio. The two nephews together were paid for the base with two cherubs in November 1602, while Andrea alone was paid for the 'putini' of the crowning. Finally, in February 1603, Vigilio was paid for the personification of the Sculpture [fig. 13].<sup>30</sup> This is precisely the time of the Rialto sculptures – just after, if we trust the date of 3rd April 1602 of the Casaroli's inscription; just before, if we consider that in 1604 the St. James had not yet reached the church. In short, we should conclude that the two workshop veterans also worked on our altar. Indeed, Andrea's involvement appears well discernible in the two adoring angels, the two caryatids, the two little angels and the apical cherub.

A nephew of a cousin of Vittoria, dall'Aquila was born in Trento between 1562 and 1566. When he was a boy, in 1578, he was sent to Venice to be educated as an artist by his illustrious relative.<sup>31</sup> He eventually became the most assiduous assistant. He collaborated on seven projects, from the Redentore in Santa Maria Gloriosa dei Frari, in 1581, to the monument in San Zaccaria, twenty-one years later.<sup>32</sup>

Nonetheless, Andrea also worked as an independent master. His earliest known works could not have been identified: the stuccoes in the Procuratie Nuove and the Libreria Marciana, dated to 1590 and 1591.<sup>33</sup> The four figures he had carved by August 1599 for the façade of the same Procuratie are also hard to identify.<sup>34</sup> Instead, the St. Michael in the Sanctuary of the Archangel in Caorle, 1595 [fig. 6] is signed,<sup>35</sup> as is the Madonna with Child in Santa Maria Assunta of the Gesuiti in Venice [fig. 7]. This last group stood in the former church of the Crociferi, in the chapel of the lawyer Ludovico Usper, who died in 1601. There were six other statues, which are missing as well as the lost stuccoes.<sup>36</sup> We can omit here the later works of Andrea, who worked rather unsuccessful-

<sup>29</sup> For these two wills, Avery 1999b, 176-8 doc. 147, 184-6 doc. 155. In May 1609, a year after Vittoria's death, Andrea claimed and obtained a further 100 ducats on the estate, 'per la servitù fatta per il corso de anni 31', Avery 1999b, 193-4 doc. 159. Avery 1999a, 132 reads the claim as compensation for the poor daily wages that the master paid to Andrea.

<sup>30</sup> For the general accounting, Avery 1999b, 347-8(ii). For the monument, Rossi 1999, 171-3; Finocchi Ghersi 2020, 83-4 cat. 29. Venturi 1935-37, 3: 145 assumed, but without providing comparisons, that Vigilio Rubini was involved in carving the portrait.

<sup>31</sup> Vittoria himself mentioned that he welcomed him on 15th June 1578, at the request of Sigismondo dall'Aquila, Andrea's uncle and cousin of the renowned artist. Avery 1999b, 118 doc. 105(i). The date of birth is deduced from other documents. According to the wedding certificate, celebrated in Sant'Angelo on 12th August 1598, Andrea 'venne in Venetia de anni 12' (Vio 2001). If 1578 is the year of his transfer, Andrea may have been born in 1566. According to the *Libro dei morti* of the same parish, the sculptor died on 20th November 1626 'de anni 64'. The date of birth should then be anticipated to 1562 (Rossi 2003, 389-90; but obituaries did not always accurately state the age of the deceased).

<sup>32</sup> For the interpretation of the role of Andrea as a collaborator of Vittoria, Avery 1999a, 131-3.

<sup>33</sup> De Lotto 2008, 23, 96 fn. 169, 169 cat. 2, 184 doc. 2.

<sup>34</sup> Timofiewitsch 1964. On this episode see here below, *infra*.

<sup>35</sup> Bacchi 2000a. The date is deduced from an inscription placed in the presbytery.

<sup>36</sup> The work is mentioned by Sansovino, Stringa 1604, c. 148r, when the chapel is described as 'nuovamente [...] fabricata'. See Sherman 2020, 246-52, also for a profile of Usper.





**Figure 11** Andrea dall'Aquila, *Cherub* (detail). 1602. Church of San Zaccaria, Venice. Photo © Fondazione Giorgio Cini, Venice

fully for almost two decades after Vittoria's death, dying in the parish of Sant'Angelo in 1626.<sup>37</sup>

By about 1600, the style of dall'Aquila is evident from his signed works. The *Usper Madonna*, in particular, is very similar to the Casaroli sculptures. The face of the Virgin is almost overlapping with that of our caryatids, due to the profile of the slightly open mouth, the delicate

curve of the eyebrow arch and the design of the eyes, which are somewhat distant from each other, without pupils and with a rather swollen upper eyelid [figs 4-5]. The physiognomy, the extended proportions, the polished surfaces and the simplified drapery of the *Madonna* show Andrea's curious resemblance to certain works by Giulio dal Moro. This explains the theory of Leithe-Jasper, who had

<sup>37</sup> See Mariacher 1953; Goi 2001, 143-4; Rossi 2003, 389. For the year of death see *supra*, fn. 33.



**Figure 12** Workshop of Alessandro Vittoria (Andrea dall'Aquila), *Cherub*. 1600-1602. Church of San Giacomo di Rialto, Venice. Photo © Fondazione Giorgio Cini, Venice

cautiously suggested the name of this artist for the Casaroli altar.<sup>38</sup> These physiognomic features and the modest drapery recur in the two angels standing on either side of the Rialto tabernacle. For the latter, the comparison with St. Michael in Caorle, bearing similar extended wings [figs 6-8], may also apply. As for the little angels,

the mannerist pose and the tenderness of their flesh, with dimples in knees and elbows, are reminiscent of the Child of the Usper Madonna [figs 9-10]. Finally, with its typical facial type, the cherub of the Casaroli altar recalls the cherub on the right in Vittoria's funerary monument, also as regards plumage [figs 11-12].<sup>39</sup>

<sup>38</sup> Let's consider, for instance, Giulio's sculptures in San Felice, for which see Bacchi 2000b, 730, figs. 75-7.

<sup>39</sup> I assume that the right-hand cherub is the one by Andrea, whereas the left-hand one, by exclusion, would be by Vigilio. On general accounting see *supra*, fn. 32.

I would be more hesitant about the statue of St. James [fig. 15]. The drapery is undoubtedly consistent with that of the caryatids, but the roughness of his face does not coincide with the impression we have of Andrea, a sculptor who was not very inclined to enhance surfaces. May Vigilio Rubini's involvement be plausible? Indeed, Vittoria commanded both grandsons the sculptures for his monument, and in his last will and testament divided the workshop fund between them.

Regrettably, the figure of Rubini is more obscure. Born possibly by 1558, and therefore somewhat older than his mate, Vigilio was the son of the sculptor Lorenzo Rubini and of Vittoria's sister Margherita. It seems that Alessandro had great expectations for him. In 1576 he named Vigilio his universal heir and urged him to study "scultura et architettura, per poter servir gli miei signori et patroni con più eccellentia che non ho potuto far mi".<sup>40</sup> However, Vigilio would only appear among Vittoria's assistants from 1587 onwards, on the large worksite of the Cappella del Rosario in San Zanipolo.<sup>41</sup>

In his native Vicenza as in Venice, Vigilio seems to have lived in the shadow of his older brother, Agostino for a long time. The latter, who was artistically more gifted, soon became his uncle's favourite, holding this position until his death in 1592.<sup>42</sup> Agostino signed the two Doleni of the altar of the Sacramento in San Zulian, around 1580, and the four Evangelists today on the façade of the

Duomo in Mestre.<sup>43</sup> Vigilio, on the other hand, was only allowed to sculpt a divinity of his own in the crowning of the Libreria Marciana after assisting his brother in two other statues. However, his Latona, dated 1590-91, dubiously identified as the second figure from the right in the façade on the Piazzetta, is a rather mediocre work.<sup>44</sup>

Further on, like dall'Aquila, Vigilio also worked on the façade of the Procuratie Nuove. This was another joint project, with the participation of the renowned Tiziano Aspetti and Girolamo Campagna, in addition to the latter's pupil Girolamo Paliari. Five sculptors were therefore responsible for four figures each. In August 1599 we learn that the elder Vittoria appraised their work.<sup>45</sup> Identifying the works of the two nephews is certainly not simple in this case. Merely in theory, I shall trace the figures in the fifth and sixth windows from the left to Vigilio [fig. 14]. Indeed, the pose of the two old men who pass their hands through their beards is taken from the Rivers completed almost half a century earlier by the younger Vittoria for the Libreria Marciana and the *Sala degli Dei* in Palazzo Thiene in Vicenza. In the Vicenza area, the same motif appears in a fireplace in Villa Caldogno, which – remarkably – was carved by Lorenzo Rubini, father of Vigilio.<sup>46</sup>

The ignudi of the Procuratie recall the St. James of Rialto because of the strong cheekbones and pupil-less eyes, the deeply incised beards and hair. That way of

<sup>40</sup> Avery 1999b, 112-13 doc. 96.

<sup>41</sup> Avery 1999b, 321 doc. 128(v). For this undertaking, Avery 2013 (with further bibliography). For more of Vigilio's collaborations, Avery 1999b, *ad indicem*.

<sup>42</sup> See *supra*, fn. 30.

<sup>43</sup> On Agostino, Benuzzi 2014 (with further bibliography).

<sup>44</sup> The statue of Vigilio is incorrectly referred to as an *Opi* of 1588-89 (for instance, Binotto 1999, 190 fn. 51). Instead, Vigilio was paid a Latona: Ivanoff 1964, 107-9; De Lotto 2008, pp. 32, 37 (to whom I refer for the identification of the statue also).

<sup>45</sup> On the document, Timofiewitsch 1964; Avery 1999b, 173-4 doc. 142.

<sup>46</sup> For comparison works, Binotto 1999, 164-5.





**Figure 13**

Vigilio Rubini, *Personification of Sculpture*. 1602-1603.

Church of San Zaccaria, Venice. Photo © Fondazione Giorgio Cini, Venice





**Figure 14** Vigilio Rubini (?), *Ignudo*. 1599.  
Procuratie Nuove, Venice



**Figure 15** Workshop of Alessandro Vittoria (Vigilio Rubini?), *St James the Elder*. 1600-1604 ca. Church of San Giacomo di Rialto, Venice.  
Photo © Fondazione Giorgio Cini, Venice

carving the stone also evokes the hair of the Sculpture in San Zaccaria, the only known work by Rubini [figs 13-15]. But it would be rash to go further, as Vigilio's too meager catalogue offers very few clues. In any case, in light of the data on the later years of Vittoria's workshop (and affections), it is evocative to envisage the two nephews paired in this ultimate endeavour as well.

It is worth recalling that Rudolf Wittkower classified Gian Lorenzo Bernini's work into four different categories of authorship: sculptures that were designed by the master himself and carried out by him; those that were only partly carried out by the master; those for which the master provided a design, but participated minimally or not at all in the execution; and, finally, those for which

the master provided only minor preliminary sketches.<sup>47</sup> This heuristic principle may also work for Vittoria. The San Girolamo of the Zane Altar at the Frari would fall into the first category, entirely autographed, in spite of its protracted genesis.<sup>48</sup> As for the projects where Vittoria provided guidance but did not handle the chisel,

we should include part of the aedicule of St. Zacharias and the coeval altar of St. James: not because of his lack of interest in such undertakings – we know that he did care about his monument – but because of the constraints of his old age.

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<sup>47</sup> Wittkower 1958 ed. 1965, 112.

<sup>48</sup> Avery 2015a, 93, 95, 99; Avery 2015b (with further bibliography).

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# Marbles and Stones in the Church of San Giacomo di Rialto

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**Abstract** The accurate autoptic study of marbles and stones in the Church of San Giacomo di Rialto (Venice) reveals the identification of around twenty lithotypes, most of which are from the Triveneto area, but some imported from outside this area, including three marbles (Proconnesian marble, Verde Antico, Pavonazzetto) taken from ancient monuments, albeit most probably recovered on the Venetian market. Among the first, 'local' ones, in addition to the typically Venetian stones (Istrian stone, nodular limestones from Verona, Euganean trachyte) some other types were added during the important restorations the church underwent in the 16th-17th centuries, notably in Grigio Carnico marble and Breccia di Brentonico, while Carrara marble, Breccia Medicea and Rosso di Francia marble were brought to Venice in the Baroque age via the thriving stone trade of the Italian peninsula.

**Keywords** Rialto. Church of San Giacomo at Rialto. Marbles. Stones. Reused materials.

**Summary** 1 Introduction. – 2 Marbles and Stones *in situ*. – 2.1 Left Side Altar, Known as the Orfìci Altar, Dedicated to St. Anthony Abbot, by Vincenzo Scamozzi. – 2.2 Altar in the Left Apse Dedicated to St. Francis of Assisi. – 2.3 High Altar Dedicated to St. James the Apostle. – 2.4 Altar in the Right Apse Dedicated to St. Anthony of Padua. – 2.5 The "Dell'Annunziata" Altar on the Right Side, Altarpiece by Marco Vecellio. – 3 Conclusions.

## 1 Introduction

The Church of San Giacomo di Rialto, vulgo 'San Giacometo', is not, as is generally assumed, one of the oldest churches in Venice, as its construction dates back to the end of the 12th century, but it is among the most popular in the city due to its location at the foot of the Rialto Bridge (west side) and its proximity to the historic Rialto market. There is little left of the primitive church, even with regard to the building and the ornamental materials that had survived the considerable restoration and renovation work carried out in the 16th cen-



tury (around the year 1531) and in the 17th century (from 1601 onwards).<sup>1</sup> The present study is a kind of *ekphrasis* of stone materials that takes into consideration the most notable lithotypes currently in use in the structures and

decoration of the altars and floor of the church, by identifying them macroscopically on the basis of their textural and chromatic characteristics and setting them in their chronological context of use.

## 2 Marbles and Stones *in situ*

The visit to the church begins from the portico in front of its main west-facing façade, a portico added in the 14th century and almost unique in Venice. This is elevated from Campo San Giacomo by two steps of Istrian stone (Lazzarini 2008), is paved with small blocks (*masegni*) of Euganean trachyte<sup>2</sup> with bands of Istrian stone and is entirely covered by a roof supported by five small columns of Proconnesian marble (*marmor proconnesium/cyzicenum*) (Lazzarini 2015) set on octagonal bases of Istrian stone. These small columns form a homogenous group with regard to the size and quality of the marble: the heights vary from 1.99 to 2.03 m, and the maximum diameters at the base from 27 to 30 cm; the Proconnesian marble is of the slightly veined/grey-coloured quality, sometimes better identified as of the *listato* variety. The nature of the marble and the homogeneity in size suggest that these are reused columns from a sole ancient monument. Over the columns, the splendid Gothic capitals are also made of marble, the origin of which is, however, impossible to determine by autopsy.

In the interspace between the third and the fourth column from the left of the portico, in the main façade of the church is a Gothic portal composed of alternating red Verona *broccato* ashlar<sup>3</sup> and white Istrian stone, all of which were carved with the traditional Gothic saw. The Verona red nodular limestone is in a precarious state of conservation, in particular in the lower part of the portal, and in need of urgent restoration.

In the interior, the pavement with a chequerboard pattern consists of squares (34 × 34 cm) of white Istrian stone and red Verona *broccato* [fig. 1]. It contains seven tombstones: three are in front of the absidal area, two of red Verona *broccato* (framed by *nembro rosato* limestone) interposed by one of Istrian stone, and two in front of the lateral altars. Of the two, the one on the left consists of one large slab of red Verona *broccato* framed by a band of Istrian stone with inserted longitudinal rectangular panels of white-veined black limestone, most likely to be identified as *nero Timau*;<sup>4</sup> in the tomb on the right, the large slab is of red *broccato*.

<sup>1</sup> On the history of the church see Franzoi, Di Stefano 1976, 13-14, Mazzariol 2019 and the articles of M. Agazzi, D. Collins and G. Guidarelli in this volume.

<sup>2</sup> On the geology of the Euganean Hills and trachyte see De Pieri, Gregnanin, Sedeà 1983; on the *masegni* in Venice see Lazzarini 2021.

<sup>3</sup> This is one of the most common varieties of the so-called Nembro Group, some nodular limestones like the *broccato* belonging to the geological formation known as 'Rosso Ammonitico Veronese' dated to the Dogger pro parte-Malm, outcropping in several areas of the Lessini Mountains (province of Verona), on which Albertini 1991, 37.

<sup>4</sup> This Devonian limestone was, and still is, extracted in the homonymous site (namely in the localities of Pramossio and Valcollina) in the Carnic Alps; on its related general geology, Venturini 2006, 57-65; for the specific geology of this stone, Castelli, Podda 2010, 28, 32.



**Figure 1** Church of San Giacomo di Rialto, Venice. Pavement with a chequerboard pattern consists of squares of white Istrian stone and red Verona brocade. Photo © Böhm

*catello*,<sup>5</sup> and the frame is also made of the Veronese *nembro rosato*.

The church is divided into a nave and two aisles by two rows of three columns, all of them which come from ancient monuments, as is evident from the fre-

quent jointing of two shafts [fig. 2]. These columns are made of Proconnesian marble, even though it is difficult to detect its variety because of the considerable dirt from ancient coatings, possibly undertaken with organic substances that had been chromatically altered,<sup>6</sup>

<sup>5</sup> It corresponds to the small nodule variety of *broccato*, and is the most valuable variety of Veronese red limestone.

<sup>6</sup> In the past, in Venice, cooked linseed oil was the most commonly used organic substance for stone conservation.

and due to superficial deposits of atmospheric particulate matter/candle smoke. All but one, the second on the right, stand on a base of Istrian stone, in some cases brought up to a uniform height by interposed rings of marble (unidentified). Their dimensional description is provided below:

- first column on the left: is composed of two fragments, the smaller one at the bottom being 50 cm high with a diameter of 38 cm, surmounted by a shaft 1.99 m high;
- second column: as the one above, it is composed of a 56 cm fragment of Istrian stone at the bottom, with a diameter of 40 cm, and a 2.18 m-high marble one placed upon it, without the upper part of the shaft;

- third column: one single shaft of 2.98 cm, with a diameter of 42 cm at most;
- first column on the right: one fragment of a shaft 86 cm high and 40 cm in diameter below, a second one 2.26 m high;
- second column: one shaft 2.75 cm high, with a diameter of 40 cm;
- third column: a single shaft 3.00 m high and 40 cm in diameter.

It was not possible to get close to the capitals, also ancient and related to the first church,<sup>7</sup> and identify the stone material with certainty: however, from binocular observation, all six of them seem to have been carved in a crystalline, truly metamorphic marble.

### 2.1 Left Side Altar, Known as the Orefici Altar, Dedicated to St. Anthony Abbot, by Vincenzo Scamozzi

The two steps are made of *nembro rosato*; the platform displays a beautiful geometric design with small perspective cubes made of small black *lavagna* tiles,<sup>8</sup> white marble (probably from Carrara)<sup>9</sup> and *grigio di Roveré* (province of Verona) limestone (Albertini 1991, 30) [fig. 3]. The main structure of the altar is made of Proconnesian marble blocks and slabs (at the base) and Carrara marble (side parts and elevation), with an antepend-

ium decorated with a central slab and two lateral panels of *verde antico* (*marmor thessalicum*) (Lazzarini 2007, 223-44) [fig. 4]. The four beautiful small columns are also made of this diffused marble (not of serpentine, as reported in some guidebooks), one that is always reused in ancient Venetian buildings, where it is often used precisely for columns in the main altars.<sup>10</sup> The columns are 2.51 m high with a diameter of 27 cm.

<sup>7</sup> On the capitals see Pilutti Namer in this volume.

<sup>8</sup> *Lavagna* is the common name given to the black slate (flat-parallel-textured carbonaceous phyllite) that was exploited since pre-Roman times, and then continuously, in the homonymous site and in others in the Eastern region of Genoa; on this material, Savioli 1988.

<sup>9</sup> Dolci 1980; Bradley 1991.

<sup>10</sup> E.g. in the Basilica of St. Mark (in the apsidal altar, and as a covering in the ciborium), and in the high altars of the churches of St. Salvador and Santa Maria Formosa, where their relative four columns have been cut in the dark variety of *verde antico*.





**Figure 2** Church of San Giacomo di Rialto, Venice. View of the interior with the main nave with two rows of three columns made of Proconnesian marble. Photo © Böhm





**Figure 3**

Church of San Giacomo di Rialto, Venice.  
Orefici Altar. Photo © Böhm





**Figure 4**  
Church of San Giacomo  
di Rialto, Venice. Orefici Altar,  
antependium. Photo © Böhm



**Figure 5**  
Church of San Giacomo  
di Rialto, Venice. Altar dedicated  
to St. Francis of Assisi, antependium.  
Photo by the Author

## 2.2 Altar in the Left Apse Dedicated to St. Francis of Assisi

The platform consists of three slabs of different quality and size of Proconnesian marble, evidently taken from the former church, or from some other buildings. The antependium is covered with slabs of *breccia di Brentonico*<sup>11</sup> [fig. 5] which has deteriorated due to salt crystallisation: on the surface, they present the brush strokes of a conservative coating with deep-browened organic matter that was extended to the entire altar. The Istrian stone

riser features red panels made of *broccatello* from Verona (perhaps a replacement for the original *breccia di Brentonico*, which had also deteriorated prematurely if, as is assumed, this altar is the counterpart of the one to the right of the apse for its materials). The two small columns are made of *nembro rosato*: they are 1.77 m high, with a diameter of 21 cm.

## 2.3 High Altar Dedicated to St. James the Apostle

The two steps leading up to the altar are made of *nembro rosato* marble, a limestone that is also used in the altar platform, decorated with a geometric pattern of stone tiles composed of white and grey Carrara marble, red Verona limestone and *grigio carnico* limestone,<sup>12</sup> with various elements of different shapes and sizes of *verde antico*, and one of *pavonazzetto* marble (*marmor phrygium/ docimenum/ synnadicum*).<sup>13</sup> The altar structure is made of *nembro rosato* marble; the antependium is decorated with large panels of *verde antico* in the dark variety, Verona *broccato* and *nero Timau*. The riser presents a base,

an entablature and lateral niche frames of *nembro rosato*. The tabernacle features a base of antique *pavonazzetto* marble, and panels of *verde Alpi* marble [fig. 6],<sup>14</sup> while the six small columns are of *verde antico*. The statue of St. James by Alessandro Vittoria, the two angels and the lateral putti are made of white, slightly veined Carrara marble.<sup>15</sup> The four side columns are made of good quality *grigio carnico* limestone [fig. 7], and they stand 2.40 m high, with a diameter of 30 cm. Four *grigio carnico* pulvins surmount the capitals.

<sup>11</sup> The *breccia di Brentonico* is of the intra-formational type, and formed from clasts of Lyassic limestones known as *giallo Mori* (from the nearby homonymous village, quarries in Castione, province of Rovereto): it reached Venice around the first half of the 16th century, and was used in the 17th-18th centuries mostly for altars in the guise of small columns and panels.

<sup>12</sup> *Grigio carnico* cataclastic limestone belongs to the same formation as *nero Timau* (see fn. 7). It differs slightly from it because it underwent very weak metamorphism that probably burnt part of the carbonaceous pigment, making it lighter in colour. The quarrying localities are located in Timau, Paluzza and Forni Avoltri (UD). *Grigio carnico* is a very common marble adopted for decoration in Venetian Baroque altars: important examples of columns made in this material can be admired in the high altar of the Church of Santo Stefano, and in that of San Lio, as well as in altars in the Churches of San. Cassiano, San. Giacomo dall'Orto, etc. Altar Panels are so common that a list of them would occupy too many pages.

<sup>13</sup> Monna, Pensabene 1977, 29-77; Pensabene 2010.

<sup>14</sup> *Verde Alpi* is a generic name for a vast group of green stones, petrographically classifiable mostly as ophicalcites, some of which were already quarried in ancient Roman times both in sites in Valle d'Aosta (e.g. Val Tournance) and Piedmont (e.g. Val di Susa): see Pieri 1958, 177, 292-3. Their use in the form of altar panels and, more rarely, of columns, dates to the late Baroque.

<sup>15</sup> See Siracusano in this volume.





**Figure 6** Church of San Giacomo di Rialto, Venice.  
Altar dedicated to St. James the Apostle, tabernacle. Photo © Böhm

## 2.4 Altar in the Right Apse Dedicated to St. Anthony of Padua

The two steps and the altar structure are made of Istrian stone. The platform is made of two slabs of Proconnesian (*fasciato* variety) marble. The antependium is decorated with a central tondo and two lateral panels in *rosso di Francia* limestone [fig. 8] from Languedoc (Bourrouilh, Bourque 1999), probably substituted for original *breccia di Brentonico* that was badly altered if, as it is believed,

the two apsidal altars were symmetrical and made simultaneously: indeed, this breccia is still present in the panels at the base of the riser. Further evidence of the homogeneity of the stone materials employed in the two altars is provided by the two *nembro rosato* columns that are similar both in quality and in size (1.8 m high, 22 cm in diameter) to the ones on the altar of St. Francis.





**Figure 7**  
Church of San Giacomo di Rialto, Venice. Altar dedicated  
to St. James the Apostle, detail. Photo © Böhm





**Figure 8**  
Church of San Giacomo di Rialto, Venice. Altar dedicated to St. Anthony of Padua. Photo © Böhm

**Figure 9**  
Church of San Giacomo di Rialto, Venice.  
"Dell'Annunziata" Altar. Photo © Böhm





**Figure 10** Church of San Giacomo di Rialto, Venice. “Dell’Annunziata” Altar, antependium. Photo © Böhm

## 2.5 The “Dell’Annunziata” Altar on the Right Side, Altarpiece by Marco Vecellio

The steps and the altar structure are made of Istrian stone [fig. 9]. The platform itself is made of the same stone, featuring two rectangular side slabs and, in the centre, three polychrome squares made of small tiles in *lavagna* stone, white Carrara marble, *grigio di Roveré* limestone, surrounded by a frame made of *breccia di Arbe* (Lazzarini 2000). The antependium is decorat-

ed with three *verde antico* panels, once again of the dark variety, while some coloured panels that have been completely lost due to severe deterioration are missing in the riser in Istrian stone, like the entablature: what remains are two small squares made of *verde Alpi* marble, and two central rectangles of *breccia di Arbe*; the lateral ones beneath the columns are of *breccia medi-*

cea.<sup>16</sup> The two columns (height 2.09 m, diameter 23 cm) are of Proconnesian marble, including one of the *fasciato* variety [fig. 10].

The stoup features an elegant, moulded base of Istrian stone where a fragment of a column and a fine ba-

sin, both of white marble, have been placed. The one for the basin is translucent and formed of calcite crystals showing a medium grain size (approximately 2-3 mm in diameter), suggesting the use of the very famous Parian marble.

### 3 Conclusions

From the identification provided of both structural and ornamental stone materials, general information about their chronology, circumstances of use and significance can be derived. Following the adopted descriptive sequence, and thus firstly considering the pavement of the church, it can be said that its characteristics coincide perfectly with the majority of pavements in Venetian Renaissance churches. These are covered with large square tiles of Istrian stone alternated with others of red Verona limestone forming chequered patterns, the same materials and pattern adopted in many private palaces in the Renaissance and throughout the Baroque age (Lazzarini 2010; Lazzarini 2018). The more elaborate pavements of the platforms are also quite common in Venice: the one of the Goldsmiths' altar (Lazzarini 2010, 62), in particular, features in the Church of St. Rocco other similar examples in design, and partly in materials, possibly suggesting the employment of the same craftsmen,<sup>17</sup> who brought with them the same preparatory cartoons and stone materials. On the other hand, the decorative pattern and the materials of the platform of the Annunziata altar clearly recall some details of the floor of the nave of the Church of Miracoli (Lazzarini 2010, 61), possibly taken as a model.

As already mentioned, at "San Giacometo" the columns of the portico, the large ones of the nave and the two small ones of the Annunziata altar, all made of Proconnesian marble, are undoubtedly re-used, as in the church of San Giovanni Decollato (vulgo San Zan Degolà), and in many other major Venetian churches. They attest to the long lasting availability of this marble on the Venetian stone market that I have no hesitation in describing as a centuries-old phenomenon, as I already stated in a previous article,<sup>18</sup> and are evidence of the Venetian merchants' frequentation of *Fondaci* and ruins of Graeco-Roman/Byzantine cities in the Eastern Mediterranean. The same can be said for the fine columns and *verde antico* panels of the Scamozzi altar: this prestigious marble originating from Thessaly, although not comparable in quantity to the Proconnesian one, is among the most frequently used coloured marbles of Eastern Mediterranean origin in the Renaissance and the Baroque period, not just in Venice but in the Italian peninsula as a whole. The decorative role assumed in this church is also worth noting, as in many other Renaissance ones in the city, by the coloured stones from Verona present in several varieties, in this church in particular in the *nembro rosato* limestone of some columns and

<sup>16</sup> It is a calcareous *meta-breccia* exploited in various Versilian localities (Stazzema, Monte Corchia, Seravezza, etc.) and in remarkable quantities under the Medici family: Zangheri 1993; Bartelletti, Amorfini 2003.

<sup>17</sup> Or perhaps of various 'tajapiera' who were using the same preparatory cartoons.

<sup>18</sup> See fn. 4.



steps. Of particular note is also the presence, in the late 16th century, of the *grigio carnico* marble in the form of the four beautiful columns on the high altar, and *brecchia di Brentonico*. This one was regrettably so deteriorated in the antependium of St. Anthony's altar that it was replaced, inappropriately in terms of colour, by *rosso di Francia* limestone, which is also one of the most dif-

fused and valuable<sup>19</sup> stones in Baroque altars all over Italy. The identification of the same materials at work in the two lateral apsidal altars eventually led to the conclusion that they were built at the same time and with the same lithotypes, some of which – that is the Proconnesian marble of the platforms – may have been taken from remains of the primitive church.

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<sup>19</sup> Its abundance in Venice, including in the form of massive columns (as for example in the Church of Santo Stefano), is indeed impressive, especially if we consider the very long and dangerous transport by sea (as evidenced by a few shipwrecked cargoes, Beltrame et al. 2012), involving the circumnavigation of the Italian peninsula that was needed to deliver this stone from south-western France to the lagoon.

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# A Booklet of Documents Concerning the Reconstruction of the Church of San Giacomo di Rialto Around 1600

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**Abstract** This paper presents a full transcript of a booklet of documents written in 1598 and in 1599 related to a restoration project of the church San Giacomo in Rialto. These reports provide an overview of the preservation conditions of the medieval church at the time, and they also discuss both the need for repairs in the church itself and the plans for modern reconstruction. The aim of this article is to argue that ultimately a compromise was achieved between these two propositions: the church of San Giacomo di Rialto was totally rebuilt between 1600 and 1601 respecting the typology of the medieval building and reusing some of the materials previously employed.

**Keywords** San Giacomo di Rialto. History of Architecture. Restoration. Reuse of building materials. Conciери. Acqua alta.

## List of Documents

### 1 ASVe, Senato, deliberazioni, Terra, *filza* 152, *alla data* 27th November 1599

Copy from the Senate's deliberation of 27th November 1599. The text in the *filza* is similar to the transcript in the respective register, but mentions in addition the names of all the 18 patricians who approved the project on the occasion of a preliminary vote in the Collegio. The deliberation signed by "Marco Venier, Savio del Consiglio" was read and approved by 4/5 of the members of the Collegio a few hours before being presented to the Senate. The results of these two elections are 17 yes, 0 no and 1 "non sincero" in the Collegio and 181 yes, 1 no and 6 "non sinceri" in the Senate.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Cessi, Alberti 1934, 137; Howard 1980, 14-17, in particular 16.



Il Serenissimo Principe

Conseglieri: Vincenzo Capello, Bernardo Tiepolo, Nicolo Donà, Marcantonio Memmo, Marcantonio Erizzo, Matteo Zane Cavaliere

Capi di 40: Lunardo Emo, Zuan Arseni di Prioli

Savii del Consiglio: Giacomo Foscarini Cavaliere e Procuratore, Lunardo Donà Cavaliere e Procuratore, Marco Venier, Francesco Molin Cavaliere, Zuane Dolfìn Cavaliere e Procuratore; absente, Zaccaria Contarini Cavaliere

Savii di Terra Ferma: Ottaviano Bon, Antonio Querini, Alessandro Salamon, Nicolò Morosini; absente Fantin Corner

Ritrovandosi l'antica chiesa di San Giacomo di Rialto iuspatronato di sua Serenità, in quel ruinoso stato, che è ben noto à questo Consiglio, ricerca il culto divino et il pio instituto della Republica nostra, che con pronta liberalità sia riparato al suo urgente bisogno però.

Andarà parte, che appresso li ducati trecento et trenta concessi da questo Consiglio à 22 agosto dell'anno passato, per ristauratione della detta chiesa di San Giacomo di Rialto, siano dati dai danari della Signoria Nostra altri ducati seicento settanta, siché siano in tutto ducati mille, da esser contati à parte à parte ai Provveditori al Sale, perche senza dilatione faccino restaurar la prefata chiesa, senza alterar punto la sua antica forma, anzi rinovare in ogni parte le venerande memorie di esso tempio, dovendosi provvedere particolarmente che sopra al luoco nel quale si ripone il Santissimo Sagramento la settimana santa, non vi sia stanza di sorta alcuna.

Et perché sia maggiormente conservata detta chiesa debbano i medesimi Provveditori fare al tutto, che i patroni d'alcune botteghe che la circondano faccino senza dilatione restituire alla chiesa i suoi muri proprii, et accomodare interamente quei che essi hanno guasti, come s'è inteso per depositione de protti per allargare esse botteghe.

Oltre di questo intendendosi che molti hanno usurpato delle ragioni di detta Chiesa con poco timor del Signor Dio, sia parimente commesso ai Prefatti Provveditori che per rimover queste usurpationi, debbano farsi mostrar li acquisti dai Patroni di dette botteghe et conferendosi sopra i luochi maggiormente assicurarsi delle sopradette usurpationi, per venir poi nel Collegio nostro con quanto haveranno trovato, acciò che questo Consiglio possa deliberar quelli che stimerà conveniente à gloria di sua Divina Maestà, et à laude della Signoria Nostra, il che sia fatto de cito quanto prima, non dovendosi restar tra tanto d'attendere alla reparatione della detta Chiesa.

Marco Venier, Savio del Consiglio

\_181\_1\_6

Letto in Collegio à 27 novembre 1588 \_17\_0\_1 4/5

**2 ASVe, Senato, deliberazioni, Terra, filza 152, alla data 27th November 1599**

Supplication from the priest Girolamo dell'Acqua, undated. The presentation of the supplication in front of the doge in the presence of all his counsellors on 15th and 20th October 1598 is registered on the bottom part of the sheet by the unanimous members of the Collegio "from one hand" and "the other hand".

Già sono passati molti mesi che concesse la Serenità vostra ducati trecento e trenta per la reparatione della ruinosa chiesa di San Giacomo da Rialto, prima chiesa di questa felicissima città, et Jus patronatus della Serenità vostra, acciò che nella frequentia della Nobiltà, Cittadini, et Popolo, che vengono à Messa in essa Chiesa, cadendo non faccia lacrimoso spettacolo alla città con la morte de quelli che in essa si ritrovassero, ma mentre che si ha butato à terra un volto che pareva che solo minaciasse rovina, tutti li altri ruinano, si che con quella pocha provisione concessa dalla Serenità Vostra, et dall'Ecc.mo Senato, non è possibile rimediar all'Inminente pericolo, mà bisogna ò lasciar la chiesa scoperta ò continuar nel timore della sua ruina. Il che sapendo Io piovano di essa chiesa non esser intentione della Serenità Vostra, comparo à suoi piedi et la supplico che prese le debite informazioni dall'Ill.mi Provveditori al Sal, si come fece sopra l'altra supplica, voglia proveder compitamente alla reparatione di essa Chiesa, acciò che quietamente, et senza pericolo si possa celebrar li divini Offitii et pregar il Signor Dio per la felicità di questo Christianissimo dominio, et alla buona gratia della Sublimità vostra, genibus flexis, mi raccomando.

1598 adi XV Ottobre

Che alla soprascritta supplica ne rispondino i Provveditori al Sale, et ben informati delle cose in questa contenute, visto, servato et considerato in quanto si deve, dicano l'opinion loro con giuramento et sottoscrizione di mano propria giusta le leggi, facendo far nota sopra la risposta del loco et nome del supplicante et rimandando il tutto con la mansion sigillata et diretta alla Sria in mano d'uno de suoi segretarii \_ 5 \_ 0 \_ 0

Conseglieri, Bertuci Bondumier, Zan Mattia Pisani, Andrea Sanudo, Lorenzo Loredan, Ferigo Rhenier

Giulio Girardi, segretario

1598, 20 ottobre

Che ha comesso alli Savii dell'una et l'altra mano \_ 5 \_ 0 \_ 0

Conseglieri, Bertuzzi Bondumier, Zaccaria Contarini, Andrea Sanudo, Lorenzo Loredan, Federigo Rhenier

Lauro Ciera, segretario

### 3 ASVe, Senato, deliberazioni, Terra, filza 152, alla data 27th November 1599

The response of the Magistrati al Sal is given on the occasion of the second reading of the *pievano's* supplication in the Collegio, as written on 19th October 1598.

Serenissimo Principe,

Habbiamo veduto la nova comissione dataci dalla Serenità Vostra, perché rispondiamo alla supplica del Reverendo piovano de San Giacomo de Rialto, et con ogni riverentia le dicemo, che è avenuto à quell'antica chiesa, quel che avviene sempre ne gli edifici ruinosi, che credendosi spender poco, subito che si è posto mano dentro, con la ruina del volto maggiore, tutta la chiesa è risentita in modo, che hà più tosto bisogno di esser refabricata, che reparata et se bene conoscemo che è bene sempre risparmiar il denaro publico, tutta via considerando noi che questa è stata la prima chiesa et che dalla religione e pietà della Republica è nata la conservatione di questo felice Dominio, noi concorem in opinione che Vostra Serenità che in altre opere pie hà speso tanto denari, non debba per alcuna maniera restar di far questa così per laude del Signor Dio come per mantener quella religiosa fabrica, che li progenitori nostri hanno non pur felicemente principiato, ma fin'hora conservata, et con quanta maggior larghezza ella concorerà in questo, tanto per opinione nostra ella sia per acquistar laude al mondo et gratia et merito appresso il Signor Dio.

Datii die 19 octobrio 1598

Alessandro Michiel, provveditor al Sal con giuramento  
Zambattista Vitturi, provveditor al Sal con giuramento  
Nicolò Sagredo, provveditor al Sal con giuramento

### 4 ASVe, Senato, deliberazioni, Terra, filza 152, alla data 27th November 1599

The Magistrati al Sal are requested to present the opinions of experts, as their own reports do not convince the Collegio members. On 28th October 1598 they provide the following list of questions.

Noi Provveditori al Sal infrascritti dicemo à voi  
messer Simon Sorella  
messer Cesare de Franco  
messer Bortolamio protto à San Rocho  
messer Francesco Fracao et  
messer Antonio Contin protto dell'ufficio

Che unitamente dobbiate trasferirvi in Rialto, à veder il bisogno in che s'attrova la chiesa de messer San Giacomo, cosi le fondamenta mentre si volesse fabricarvi sopra. Veder le capele in che stato s'atrovano. Veder la fazada se ha ò havra bisogno de reparo, mentre si volesse alzar la chiesa et refar la fazada alla moderna. Veder il pavimento, se si potrà alzar senza che si disfaccia et tutte quelle altre cose, che conoscerete esser di bisogno in essa chiesa, dandone separatamente in notte le oppionioni Vostre con sagramento senza saputa uno dall'altro, et cosi essequirete.

Dato all'Officio del Sal, adi 27 ottobre 1598

Alvise Michiel, provveditor al Sal  
Zambattista Vitturi, provveditor al Sal

Et la spesa che voi altri periti oltra scritti haverete, secondo l'opinione vostra particolarmente, à capo per capo.

Alvise Michier, provveditor al Sal  
Zambattista Vitturi, provveditor al Sal

## 5 ASVe, Senato, deliberazioni, Terra, *filza 152, alla data 27th November 1599*

1st expert report written by Simon Sorella, *proto* of the procurators of San Marco *di supra*, 14th November 1598.<sup>2</sup>

Essendomi stato comeso a mi Simon Sorela proto per Vostre Srie Ill.me, Ill.mi Provveditori al Sal, col mezzo de uno mandato di Vostra Serenità de 27 Ottobre presente, che stasferirmi mi deba nela chiesa de messer San Giacomo de Rialto et veder il bisogno suo che cusi prontamente desideroso de vollar acon[tentarli] mi sono stransferito sopra detto locho andando il tutto con ogni diligentia veder, dicho reverentemente a vostre Srie Ill.me et per la perizia et confirmation mia afermo.

Prima che le fondamenta de detta chiesa sonno atte a sustenere ditte fabriche che sonno al presente et ancho si volesse refar in una nave sola et refar la faziada ala moderna.

Il pavimento poi de detta chiesa, si potrà alziar et quando se volesse lasiar detta chiesa nel statto si atrova, meglio lassarle per [non] sbasiar più le colonne che li è adoso esso salegiatto over pavimento, che senza dubio se vegnirebe a squrtare.

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<sup>2</sup> The correct sum is l. 939, s. 4. Tommaso Contin probably read l. 30 instead of l. 310 for the works of the *marangon*.



Ricordandoli con ogni reverenzia, che quando si refacesse da novo essa chiesa, cosa necessaria sarebe de refar et restaurar tutti li stabeli che li intorno a essa chiesa, che se ritrovano al presente.

Si po rifar la capela mazor et far una lanterna nela cuba de mezo che darà lume et farà bela vista et reuscirà bene, et a Vostre Srie Ill.me umilmente mi reverendo.

Quando alla spesa li andará dalla detta summa cinque cento e più e meno secondo si vorà far essa [...]. Simon Sorella [con mio] parer et mio iuramento.

## **6 ASVe, Senato, deliberazioni, Terra, filza 152, alla data 27th November 1599**

2nd expert report written by Cesare Franco, *proto* of the Proprio, 16th November 1598.

Ill.mi Sri Proveditori al Sal

Si come dal mandato ordine dato da Sue Srie Ill.me il di 27 ottobre prossimo passato à messer Simon Sorela, Bortolo protto à San Rocco, Francesco Fracao, Antonio Contin et à me Cesare q. Franco Torello, che tutti noi dovessimo unitamente trasferirsi in Rialto per veder il bisogno in che si attrova la chiesa di San Giacomo, cossi delle fondamente quando si volesse fabricarvi sopra, come delle capelle et della fazzada mentre si volesse alciar et riddur alla moderna, et se il pavimento si potesse alciare senza che fusse disfatte, et altri bisogni in detta chiesa, siamo tutti insieme stati sopra il loco, et prima habbiamo veduto le fondamente e considerato cadauno di noi tutte le sopradette cose.

Onde dovendosi dire la nostra opionione separatamente una dall'altra in scrittura, per ciò, Io Cesare sopradetto con ogni riverenza dirò il parer mio, sottoponendolo però al prudente giudizio di Sue Srie. Ill.me, il quale è questo che segue.

Mia opionione è che l'antiquissima chiesa di San Giacomo che ha quasi più antiquo principio della città, debba stare nel stato e disegno in che s'atrova, solamente laudarebe che si facessi una lanterna nel mezo che si ergesse sopra il detto, dalla qual riceverebbe lume sufficiente, ne perciò si muterebbe l'architettura presente di esso tempio.

Le fondamente di tutte le parti di essa chiesa sono sufficientissime per il peso presente et quando si alciasse ancora la fabrica non harebbe bisogno di esser rificate.

La facciata della chiesa nel stato presente, non ha bisogno ne rispeto alle fondamente, ne ad altro di riparo di sorte alcuna. Ma quando fossero di opinione de rificare la ditta facciata alla moderna, con collonati, cornicioni

et pedestalli, in tal caso bisognrebbe ingrossar nella parte di fuori esse fondamente, rispetto alli ressalti delle collone et pedestali.

Lo alciar il pavimento si farebbe con poco dano di esso ma con bruttura, essendo che sepelirebbe in parte le collone che sustentano di dentro essa chiesa.

Le capelle per il stato presente mi par che stiano bene, somamente la capella che si fabrica serà bene finirla, e ridurla al pristino et antiquo esser suo.

Nelle qual opere, cossi nel far la lanterna, come finir la capella, et conciar il coperto, de legnami et fatture in tutto vi potria andar di spesa ducati seicento in circa duc. 700.

Havendo trovato alcuni scorticamenti in li muri di detta chiesa nella parte de fuori, nelle boteghe, che intorniano essa chiesa, per allargarsi et comodarsi li boteghieri, esso muro resta debillitato, e credo vene sia anco nelli officii; serà ottima opera reddure il muro alla sua grossezza per tutto, ne permetter cha sia mosso.

Ma quando pur Vostre Srie Ill.me terminassero di riddure la facciata alla moderna, bisognerà alciarla più dell'esser presente e insieme il resto della chiesa, cossi anco il pavimento et tetto e del tutto forma et disegno, ampliandola accio che riesca capace in maggior numero di populo, riducendola in forma quadrangulare, ò a forma spaciosa, con li altari alli muri per fianco et uno maggiore in facia et più in fuori, li qualli si potrebbero ornare con le collone che ora sustentano di dentro essa chiesa, riducendola in isola con li portici à torno per commodità della nobiltà et populo, sopra li qualli si potrebbero accomodare li officii con bel ordine, senza alciarsi sopra essa chiesa. Intorno il qual proposito quando gli paresse cossi deliberare, più minutamente con modelo et scrittura li diro l'opinione mia et la spesa.

Con che riverentemete bascio le mani à sue Srie. Ill.me. Data li 16 novembre 1598 con giuramento.

Cesare q. Franco Torello humilissimo suo servitor

**7 ASVe, Senato, deliberazioni, Terra, filza 152, alla data 27<sup>th</sup> November 1599**

3rd expert report by Bortolo, *proto* of the Scuola grande of San Rocco, 23rd November 1598.<sup>3</sup>

Ill.mi Sri Proveditori al Sal

In obediencia dela schrittura datta dale vostre Srie Ill.me, me Bortolo protto a San Rocho, dicho avermi transfe-  
ritto diverse volte in la gesia de messer San Iacomo de Rialto insieme chon l'altri protti e visto il tuto diligente-  
mente, ala qual schritura riverentemente, chon mio sacramento, le rispondo.

Dicho che la opinion mia, e che la fundamenta che o visto abonda ancha intrando dentro della ditta gesia dala  
porta granda sono bona per la fabrica che al presente la se trovano e ancho per potersi alza[r] al quanto di piu  
la ditta giesia.

Quanto poi ale chapele tegno che quele siano sigure nel grado che al presente quele se ritrovano.

Quanto ala fazada che sono al presente non ano bisogno de riparo, mache se volesero farla ala moderna, sariano  
necessario di ingrossar la fundamentata di fuori via, per sustentar el peso deli adornamenti di piera viva, che  
se li afondesero in nela ditta fazada.

Quanto al pavimento restando la giesia nel stato che se ritrovano al presente, non ochore di alzarlo per che la  
giesia resteriano tropo basa.

Quanto poi ala spesa di restaurar la chapela granda, per mio parer, li potriano andar di spesa in circha duc. cin-  
que cento e piu e mancho secondo li adornamenti se li volesero far in quella.

Reportandome sempre al maggior guditio. Io Bortolamio sopra ditto schrise.

<sup>3</sup> On the bottom right side of the sheet the bill is listed as following: l. 1136, s. 4 + l. 765 + l. 659, s. 4 + duc. 140 + l. 2031 = l. 5459, s. 8 = duc. 880, l. 3, s. 8.

**8 ASVe, Senato, deliberazioni, Terra, filza 152, alla data 27th November 1599**

4th expert report by Francesco di Bernardino Smeraldi detto Fracao, 23rd November 1598.

adi 23 novembrio 1598

De mandato delli Ill.mi Sri Provveditori al Sal, essendo io Francesco de Bernardin protto stransferido nella gesia de S. Jacomo de Rialto, et prima aver visto in una parte le fondamenta della ditta giesa, dove son stato fato cavar per veder le sudete fondamenta, le qual son palificate, et rispondo a vostre Srie Ill.me che le sudete fondamenta sonno secure per quella fabricha che son posta sopra le sudette fondamenta, sara secure senza dubio alcun che non possi resister di fabricha di mazor alteza a porcion della grandezza della pianta della ditta gesia.

Quanto poi alle chapele della ditta gesia, quelle si trova esser sicure che non potra far motto nissuno de pericolar, facendo bisogno restaurar in qualche parte de li volti delle dete chapelle, et quelle restra sicura nel suo esser.

Poi la fazada della ditta gesia non a bisogno de reparacion alcuna, la qual si atrova molte sicura e ancho quando la se volese far alla moderna, se potra far senza nissuna difficulta et resteria sicura.

Il pavimento della ditta gesia, non ha bisogno di alzarlo ne moverlo, non avendo pensier de reformar la ditta gesia in altro modo de quello che si atrova fatta, per la sua baseza della ditta gesia et antiqita, perche si atrova molto basa di fabrica nel suo stato, per che son stato alzato il detto pavimento unna altra volta, et ha bisogno in molti lochi della ditta gesia nelli muri di dentro apreso il pian, investirli de pietre cote nove et quella restera sicura finno che piacera ai dio.

Recordando a vostre Srie Ill.me de far acomodar li coperti della ditta gesia in quelle parte che son ofesi per la sua vegiezza dal tempo, et quando se volesse nella cuba de mezo far una lanterna in forma di feral, nel mezo della ditta chuba sopra li coperti quella saria beleza et daria lume nel mezo.

Quando vostre Srie Ill.me le piacesse di riformar la ditta gesia in altro modo, et farla in una nave sola la qual resteria in molto più chomoda, et luminosa di lumi intorno, senza impedimento di colonne nel mezo, la qual resterebbe libera et comoda per la molta frequentacion di concorso di populi, che per devocion in quella se reduce a far le sue oracion, massimamente nel tempo del perdon del zuoba Santa, et quella se potra far con molte invencion de comodita et di mazor grandezza, et comodita della botege intorno, senza privarsi delli sitti et utilita di ese botege.

Recercando Vostre Srie Ill.me la spesa della ditta gesia, per voler restaurar la ditta gesia vegia in quel modo che si atrova, per la qual posa darne information de quantita, ma volerla far in altro modo non poso darne quantita sicura, pero io in quella parte che poso comprender con la mia perizia et praticha, restaurando il vegio in quel modo che o detto et che si attrova, se potra spender ducati cinque cento in circha. Val. \_ duc. 500



Et questo quanto al parer mio et mia perizia con bonna consentia et fedelta, Io Francesco de Bernardin sopra ditto affermo con mio juramento quanto in questa si contien.

## 9 ASVe, Senato, deliberazioni, Terra, filza 152, alla data 27th November 1599

5th expert report by Antonio Contin, *proto* of the Salt Office, 6th November 1598. Written before the visit of the other experts.

Le Ill.me Srie Vostre ha comesso che Io, Antonio Contin, proto dell'ufficio, dia la mia opinione del bisogno in che si trova al presente la chiesa di San Giacomo di Rialto, cosi di fondamente mentre che si volesse fabricarvi sopra, et le capelle in che stato si attrovano et la fasada se ha, overo havera bisogno di riparo, mentre si voria alzar la chiesa, et refar la fazzada alla moderna et veder anco il pavimento, se si potrà alzar, senza che si disfaccia essa chiesa, et tutto il resto che si conoscerà haver di riparo, mi sono transferito sopra luogo una e più volte et il tutto visto e considerato, onde dico riverentemete à Vostre Srie Ill.me che essa chiesa non è pericolosa di cascar, restaurando però certe fisure che si attrovano in esse capelle et li muri che sono rotti per causa del salso, et refar il cielo della capella maggior et se si volesse fabricar sopra le fondamente e muri maestri, per alzar essa chiesa, si potrà quelli alzar, perché sono buone fondamente et buone muraglie, che potrà portar il peso che si alzarebbe alzandola, pero à portione della sua longhezza et larghezza, et perché è stato alzato il pavimento, le colone sonno sotterade et la chiesa resta esser bassa, é alzandola bisognarebbe alzarla per il meno gradi quatro sopra il salizado della piazza de Rialto, si che faria bisogno de desfar le capelle, cube, volti dalle muraglie maiestre in poi, et anco il luogo delologio et una parte dell'Officio di cinque Savii sopra la mercantia et Rason nove, perché alzando il pavimento et non alzando le capelle, la chiesa restaria tanto bassa che non potrebbe haver niuna sorte di portione, é le colone resterebbe il terzo sotterate sotto terra facendo la fazada alla moderna, se potria tenere delle fondamente et parte della muraglia, ma la mia opinione sarebbe di far la fazzada dove al presente si attrova le colone del sotto portego di essa chiesa, che si veniria à grandir essa chiesa et faria una vista bella quando la fosse adornata, si come di sopra è detto alla moderna, et questo è il mio parer, per mia peritia et alla bona gratia di Vostre Srie Ill.me mi raccomando.

Data adi 6 Novembrio 1598

Io Antonio Contin proto Officio sal affermo con mio giuramento quanto nella presente si contien.

**10 ASVe, Senato, deliberazioni, Terra, filza 152, alla data 27th November 1599**

Estimate for restoration works in the church, undated and unsigned. Written by Tommaso Contin in November 1598 as a complement to the expert report by Antonio Contin.

Chonto della spesa che andara a restaurar la giesa di San Giachomo de Rialto, alzarla nel termine che si ritrova chome qui soto sara descritti et prima

Per piere grande per chonzar la capela granda et il volto apresso et alialtri volti reparali, miara n° 8 a l. 24 l miaro, monta \_ l. 192

Per chalzina negra masteli 400 a s. 15 il mastello, monta \_ l. 300

Per calzina bianca masteli 60 a s. 28 il mastello, monta \_ l. 84

Per polvere da Muran per le smaltadure \_ l. 62

Per sabion burchi n° 5 a l. 12 il burchio, monta \_ l. 60

Per portadura di ditta roba \_ l. 62

Per legniam per far li teti aditi volti et armadure \_ l. 124

Per chiodi di più sorte dafar teti et le armadure \_ l. 31

Per porta via ruvinazzi di più sorte \_ l. 186

Per fatura di murer a far tutti ditti lavori e rebochar li muri et refonar li predetti tetti dove fara bisogno et tutte le smaltadure per tutta ditta giesa in tuto \_ l. 930

Suma lire doi mile e tranta una. Val. \_ l. 2031

Chonto di legnami et feramente et fatura di marangon

In la nave di mezzo li va vatene n° 7 li andara bordonlaoti di larese n° 7 a l. 20 l'uno, monta \_ l. 140

In l'altro scontizzo lo si va chadene n° 3 li va bordonaloti n° 3 di larese monta \_ l. 60

Per mezzo giave di larese per il ditto n° 16 a detto l'una monta \_ l. 64

Per tole di larese per il dito n° 100 monta \_ l. 200

Per brage di fero n° 10 pessa £ 160 a s. 8 la lira monta \_ l. 64

Per chiodi da peso £ 160 a s. 8 la ditta monta \_ l. 64

Per chiodi di piu sorte per il ditto \_ l. 37, s. 4

Per fatura di marangon in far dita opera in tuto \_ l. 310

Suma lire sie cento e cinquanta nove s. 4. Val. \_ l. 659, s. 4

Per piombo che mancherà nel choperto da novo miara 2 a duc. 45 il mier monta \_ duc. 90

Per rebutar il vegio di fatura \_ duc. 50

Suma ducati cento e quaranta. Val. \_ duc. 140

Conto de la spesa andara a far la chuba da novo come qui soto sara stimato

Per ponti di larese per la dita n° 100 à s. 40 l'uno monta \_ l. 200

Per doi bordonali di larese per far il teler della dita et il fano di sopra \_ l. 62

Per tole di larese per far le chantinele di soto cia de la dita n° 40 a s. 30 l'una monta \_ l. 60

Per chiodi di diversi per la ditta \_ l. 93

Per fenestre de veri n° 6 per il fano monta \_ l. 62

Per una chrose chon la sua banderola che va in cima al fano \_ l. 40

Per fatura di marangon dela dita chuba et fano in tutto \_ l. 248

Suma lire sete cento e sessanta cinque \_ Val. l. 765

Per roba et fatura di mure va alzar ditta chuba chome qui soto sara descrito

Alzaral piede 3 atorno via da muro di una piera 1/2 li va piere miara 3 a l. 24 il mier monta \_ l. 72

Per chalzina mastelli n° 2° a s. 15 il mastello \_ l. 15

Per sabion \_ l. 3

Per fatura di murer \_ l. 37, s. 4

Per terazzo per la ditta, stera n° 10 a s. 40 il stero \_ l. 20

Per chalzina bianca mastelli n° 20 a s. 29 il mastello \_ l. 28

Per fatura du murer \_ l. 124

Per piombo per la ditta miara 3 duc. 45 il miaro \_ l. 837

Suma lire mile cento e trenta sie, s. 4. Val. \_ l. 1136, s. 4

Fa duc. 880, l. 3, s. 8

## **11 ASVe, Senato, deliberazioni, Terra, filza 152, alla data 27 of November 1599**

2nd supplication presented by Giacomo dall'Acqua, undated.

L'occasione della necessaria riparatione della sua Chiesa di S. Giacomo di Rialto hà dato ancora occasione à me padre Giacomo dall'Acqua pievano di detta chiesa d'investigare la cagione della rovina che sovrastano, realmente veduta, et riferita à VV. SS. Ill.me da periti, come già nella mia supplicatione ho esposto. Et perché parmi d'haver scoperto cosa la quale concerne et l'interesse pubblico et l'ecclesiastico, hò giudicato essere debito et obbligo mio di brevemente darne del tutto conto à VV. SS. Ecc.me, sapendo quanto questa Christianissima Repubblica sia stata sempre zelante dell'accrescimento non che conservatione et mantenimento delle cose sacre dei Santi Tempii, et delle loro immunità et giuridittioni.

Tutte le chiese, come è ben noto à Vostre Srie Ecc.me, vengono consecrate al Signore con circuito di pavimento chiuso dalle muraglie, et nella parte esteriore, così per riverenza del luogo, come per riverenza del cimitero et dell'habitatione de'Ministri. Non di meno questa sua Chiesa, la quale essendo in Rialto, sta posso dire nel cospet-



to di tutto il mondo, et che non solamente è la prima Chiesa, ma il primo fondamento dei fondamenti della città, si vede talmente parte inferiore ristretta et occupata da botteghe et da statii, che non solamente gli è occupato tutto il circuito sacro del cimiterio et di parte della Chiesa, non vi essendo alcun luogo per il riponere i vasi sacri, et gli altri ornamenti necessarii al culto del Signore ma che à pena hà libere le porte per la sua entrata.

Il che hà ancora dato occasione all'ingordie de gli huomini, di tagliare et occupare le stesse muraglie, servendosi in loro proprio uso particolare et profano contro le leggi divine et humane, oltre il danno che hanno apportato per lo risentimento della stessa muraglia dal che il rimanente è diventato co'l tempo ruinoso.

Et oltre quello che la ragione et la consuetudine certamente persuade del luogo sacro occupato et profanato, sensatamente il medesimo si vede nella bottega del cartolaro all'insegna della Scala, dalle stesse sepolture de' morti, il che quanto sia repugnante alla stessa pietà et religione di VV. SS. Ill.me si rimette alla grave loro prudentia, essendo cosa, la quale è più atta à destrare le lagrime che bisognosa di discorso.

Ma quello che ancora è di maggior importanza, e che apporta à ciascheduno pietosa meraviglia, è essere la Chiesa nella parte superiore similmente per la maggior parte occupata, et l'essere stata nell'Ufficio dei Signori Cinque Savii fabricato una stanza inarpesata et fermata alla muraglia della capella del Santissimo Sacramento, la quale oltre alla poca riverenza et rispetto, che pur grandissimo si dovea havere à quel Santissimo luogo, hà tutta quella parte aperta, et dato occasione ad una delle maggiori rovine di quella Chiesa, et accumulandosi errore ad errore, et inconveniente ad inconveniente, sono state fabbricate ancora altre stanze sopra la stessa capella della chiesa medesima, le quali oltre à Christiani per il bisogno delle mercantie, dano nello stesso tempo che si celebrano i divini Officii et che al Signore si offeriscono i Santi sacrifici ricevere à diversi infedeli nemici della croce, i quali forse prendono da ciò occasione et di operare e di ragionare in vilipendio di nostra religione, oltre che nei luoghi stessi possono di giorno e di notte commettersi dalla miseria degli huomini molte cose illecite, et inconvenienti, et contro la riverenza del luogo sacro, et contro la dispositione della ragione et dei santi decreti.

Questi così gravi et importanti abusi et inconvenienti, se bene sono per molti anni trascorsi, fino à questi tempi per la negligenza et inavvertenza forse di chi dovea dal principio darne conto alla Serenità vostra et à Vostre SS. Ill.me, mi rendo io padre Gieronimo suo humilissimo et devotissimo servitore, che saranno al presente da loro con prudente et maturo discorsi considerati, per apportargli quell'opportuno rimedio et ispediente provisione che conosceranno persuadere la giustizia et la pietà christiana et la molta religione et la grandezza di questa Serenissima et Christianissima Repubblica, si come io ancora per l'obbligo dell'ufficio mio et la servitù che io debbo a VV. SS. Ill.me et Ecc.me riverentemente le supplico à provvedere et à rimediare al tutto.

Et alla buona gratia di VV. SS. Ill.me et Ecc.me humilmente mi raccomando.

**12 ASVe, Senato, deliberazioni, Terra, filza 152, alla data 27th November 1599**

Detailed report by the Magistrati al Sal to contest the 2nd supplication presented by Giacomo dall'Acqua on 28th January 1598 mv.

Havendo Vostra Serenità et VV. SS. Ecc.me commesso à noi Provveditori al sal che dovessimo risponder alla supplica del Reverendo Piovano de San Giacomo de Rialto et inieme darle informatione del stato cosi di essa chiesa come delle botteghe et fabriche à lei congiunte, et quel di più che è in essa commissione.

Però riverentemente gli dicemo che si siamo più d'una volta conferiti nel proprio luoco della chiesa, et fabriche à lei adherenti, le quali sono state benissimo da noi considerate et parimente è manifesto à tutti, che la chiesa de San Giacomo à Rialto è circondata intorno intorno da bottege, eccetto che nel sotto portico della facciata denanzi, per il qual sotto portico si transita, mà la parte che è verso la draparia è tutta piena de bottege eccetto quel poco vacuo dove è la porta del fianco di essa chiesa, et tutta quella parte si comprende veramente che era sotto portico, anziche in due bottege vi sono due fosse sotteranee, che con qualche raggione si può suspecttar, che fossero sepolture, le qual bottege verso la draparia sono godute da diversi particolari, i quali pretendono con tutto che non habbiamo veduti li acquisti, se ben sono stati da noi ricercati.

Dalla parte di dietro verso li naranzeri, vi sono parimenti botteghe appoggiate alli muri alla capella grande di essa chiesa, non scoprimo però vestigio d'alcun portico da quella parte, le quali botteghe sono medesimamente godute da diversi particolari con l'estesse pretensioni e suoi acquisti.

Dall'altro latto verso i portegi del broglio, in qualche luoco si può suspecttar che vi fosse sotto portico, dove hora sono tutte bottege ma' non si vede cosi chiaro per esser stati fabricati li officii da quella parte, è ben vero che si vede quasi manifestamente dove è la sagrestia, che par che sia stata occupata qualche parte di sagrestia, però del sotto portico che potesse andar alla chiesa non havessero i sacerdoti da quel tempo alienato alcuna cosa et ristretta essa sagrestia, poichè si vede angustissima et divisa da una bottega de un librer con un solo parè di tavole, et nella bottega contigua à quella che fosse stata sepoltura, et in molte delle bottege che sono intorno il circuito della chiesa per far il luoco più capace et comodo et per farsi banchi et armeri, sono state scanate le muraglie, onde non è alcun dubio, che se questo possi esser stato causa di ressentimento alli muri di detta chiesa.

Resta che noi diamo conto alla Serenità Vostra della scala che ascende ai cinque Savii et Rason nove et delle fabriche cosi di essi officii, come d'una volta de particolari che da non molto tempo in qua sono stati fabricati.

Noi troviamo Serenissimo Principe che in questa parte non solo sono state appoggiate le fabriche ai muri di essa chiesa, cioè tutto l'officio de cinque savii, cosi de l'officio vecchio, come anco nel novo fatta una gionta che è appoggiata al muro della capella grande, et non è dubbio che l'haver inarpesato essa gionta d'officio alli muri della detta capella antichissima potemo creder che non vi sia stato de alcuno beneficio, ma quel che estrema-

mentete ne despiace, et che è de grandissimo scandalo, nell'ufficio delle Rason nove, una parte di esso ufficio è fabricato sopra una capella della chiesa, et quando si celebra in detta capella, vi sono persono che per necessit  convengono caminarvi di sopra, et quel che noi dicemo di questa parte, il medesimo avviene della scala che ascende alli officii sopradetti, poi che sopra di essa vi   situata quel poco di sagrestia che di sopra habbiamo detto, et conservandosi in essa la settimana santa il Santissimo Sacramento, convien anco per necessit  in quel tempo seguir il medesimo disordine, che vi siano gente che caminino sopra il Santissimo Sacramento, cos  de christiani come infedeli, il restante delli officii et volta sono nel resto semplicemente appoggiati alli muri di detta chiesa, et questo   quanto fidelmente si pu  riferire alla Serenit  Vostra, in quanto al sito et visione fatta da noi del circuito del luoco di detta chiesa.

Aggiungeremo per fin di questa parte, che per quanto restano informati, tutte le botteghe che circondano essa chiesa importano li loro affitti duc. 800 in circa riportandosi   pi  certa verit  delle affittationi.

Quanto all'opinion nostra circa la restauration di essa chiesa, Noi Alessandro Michiel, Alvise Zorzi et Nicol  Sagredo, sentimo che non sia alterata la pianta, forma et misura di essa chiesa, che quanto al sotto portico della chiesa dinanzi, prohibir ogni incanto et traffico di qualonque sorte, per reverentia del Serenissimo Dio. Io Zuanbattista Vitturi voria star nella medesima forma dell'antica, m  vorria con la fazz  di essa chiesa sola spingermi avanti quanto hora occupa il sotto portico che inanzi detta chiesa, per allongarla per maggior commodit  di essa et per levar gli inconvenienti che nascono da esso sotto portico sacro, temendo io che non siano per durar la prohibitioni che fussero fatte di levar li incanti, et altri abusi, che sono introdotti in detto sotto portico.

Quanto poi alle botteghe et fabriche che sono intorno essa chiesa, dicemo tutti unitamente che opinion nostra saria che afatto si levassero le fabriche in soler, cio  l'ufficio de Cinque Savii, quel delle Rason nove et volta   quelli contigui, cos  per esser come habbiamo detto, parte di essi posti sopra una capella della chiesa, come per levar le occasione delle continue innovationi che in diversi tempi si fanno in essi officii, hora scanando muri, hora inarpesando, hora facendosi qualche altra cosa   petition de ministri, et altri   pregiudizio di essi muri, et   ruina di detta chiesa, portando essi officii nelle volte sopra i sotto portegi dove si riduceno la nobilit .

Diressimo forse il medesimo de levar le botteghe nel piano intorno ad essa, m  ne rimoveno d  quest  opinion diverse considerationi. Prima dubitiamo che rimosse quelle, col tempo li istessi piovani   poco   poco ne introducessero delle altre, come   stato fatto   San Bortolamio et altri luochi di questa citt . Secondo che cos  come al presente si cometteno molte dishoneste operationi, et si fanno molte immonditie nelli porteghi ove hora si riduce la nobilt , cos  al sicuro seguiria sotto quelli coperti che fossero d'intorno essa chiesa, levate le botteghe, oltre che non   di poca consideratione, che cavandosi da dette botteghe entrata d'affitti per ducati 800 in circa all'anno, quando si levassero, convenirebbe il pubblico per giustizia esborsar alli particolari l'amontar di esse, che ascenderia   desene de migliaia de ducati, et per ultimo [con]sideramo anco che molte et molte chiese di questa citt , sono circondate in molte parti da botteghe de diversi particolari.

Aggiongemo per fin di questa nostra scrittura, chel luoco dove hora sono le scale dell'officii si dovesse aplicar all'agrandimento della sagrestia, che è molto ristretta et all'adito più libero della porta della chiesa, da quella parte, come anche desidereresia veder più alontanate dalla porta dell'altro fianco di essa chiesa verso draparia, quelle due bottege che la tengono occupata.

Questa è l'opinion nostra, la qual reverentemente rappresentamo alla Serenità Vostra et à VV. SS. Ecc.me sottomettendola al suo prudentissimo giudizio.

Della spesa non le dicemo alcuna cosa, se non che per la vision fatta da noi de quelli antichissimi muri, andamo dubitando che quando se vi metta le man dentro sii facil cosa, che vi ne sia per rimaner pochissima parte in piedi, et questo sarà poi à suo tempo da esser messo in consideration dalla Serenità Vostra et dalle SS. VV. Ecc.me, alla prudenza delle quali si rimettemo. Grazie.

Dati ex Officio salis die 28 Januarii 1598

Alessandro Michiel, provveditor al sal con giuramento

Zambatista Vitturi, provveditor al sal con giuramento

Alvise Zorzi, provveditor al sal con giuramento

Nicolò Sagredo, provveditor al sal con giuramento

### **13 ASVe, Senato, deliberazioni, Terra, filza 152, alla data 27th November 1599**

Estimate for the stone facade proposed by Antonio Contin, provided at the request of the Magistrato al Sal Zuanbattista Vitturi, 28th February 1598 mv.

Richiesto dall'Ill.mo signor Zuanbattista Vituri proveditor all'ufficio del sal che io Antonio Contin proto a detto ufficio dica per quanto mi offerirei, à far la fazada di San Giacomo de Rialto de pietra viva con pilastri, e cornise frontespicio alla moderna, slongandola tanto quanto sono il sotto portego, reportando il Relogio in essa fazada per maggior sicurezza et alzar il corpo di essa chiesa tanto quanto era avanti che si alzasse il salizado, facendo che si monti di sopra il salizado doi scalini per andar in chiesa tornandola in quella forma statto che sono al presente, non si partendo dall'ordene della sua antiquita, onde il tutto per me visto et considerato, dicho che mi offro di far tutte le cosse sopradite per ducati doi mille de ogni sorte robbe et fatture, tornando in opera tutta la robba vechia che saranno bona dandola finita del tutto. Val. \_ duc. 2000.

Antonio Contin, proto officio



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# **Appendix**

## A Rialto-Atlas

Francesco Turio Böhm





**Figure 1**  
Venice, Rialto, view  
of Campo San Giacomo.  
Photo © Böhm





**Figure 2**

Venice, Rialto. View of Campo  
San Giacomo. Photo © Böhm



**Figure 3**  
Venice, Rialto.  
Lateral view of the Church  
of San Giacomo.  
Photo © Böhm





**Figure 4**

Venice, Rialto, View of Campo  
San Giacomo from the portico  
of the church. Photo © Böhm



**Figure 5**  
Venice, Rialto,  
View of the Ruga dei Oresi  
from Campo San Giacomo.  
Photo © Böhm





**Figure 6**  
Venice, Rialto,  
View of the Pietra del Bando  
in Campo San Giacomo.  
Photo © Böhm



**Figure 7**  
Venice, Rialto, Frontal view  
of the façade of the church  
of San Giacomo. Detail.  
Photo © Böhm





**Figure 8**

Venice, Rialto, Frontal view of the façade  
of the church of San Giacomo.  
Detail. Photo © Böhm





**Figure 9**  
Venice, Rialto, View of Campo San Giacomo  
from the Tribunal.  
Photo © Böhm





**Figure 10**  
Venice, Rialto, View of the Church of San Giacomo  
from the Tribunal. Photo © Böhm





**Figure 11**

Venice, Rialto, View of the Church of San Giacomo  
from the Tribunal. Detail. Photo © Böhm



**Figure 12**

Venice, Rialto,  
Church of San Giacomo.  
Detail of the lantern of the dome.  
Photo © Böhm





**Figure 13**  
Venice, Rialto,  
Church of San Giacomo.  
Lateral view of the portico.  
Photo © Böhm





**Figure 14**  
Venice, Rialto,  
Church of San Giacomo.  
Lateral view of the portico.  
Detail. Photo © Böhm





**Figure 15**  
Venice, Rialto,  
Church of San Giacomo.  
Entrance portal.  
Photo © Böhm



**Figure 16**  
Venice, Rialto,  
Church of San Giacomo.  
Lateral view of the portico.  
Detail. Photo © Böhm





**Figure 17**  
Venice, Rialto,  
Church of San Giacomo.  
Corner capital of the  
portico. Photo © Böhm





**Figure 18**

Venice, Rialto, Church of San Giacomo.  
Inner view. Photo © Böhm





**Figure 19**  
Venice, Rialto, Church of San Giacomo.  
Inner lateral view. Photo © Böhm





**Figure 20**  
Venice, Rialto, Church of San Giacomo.  
Inner lateral view. Photo © Böhm

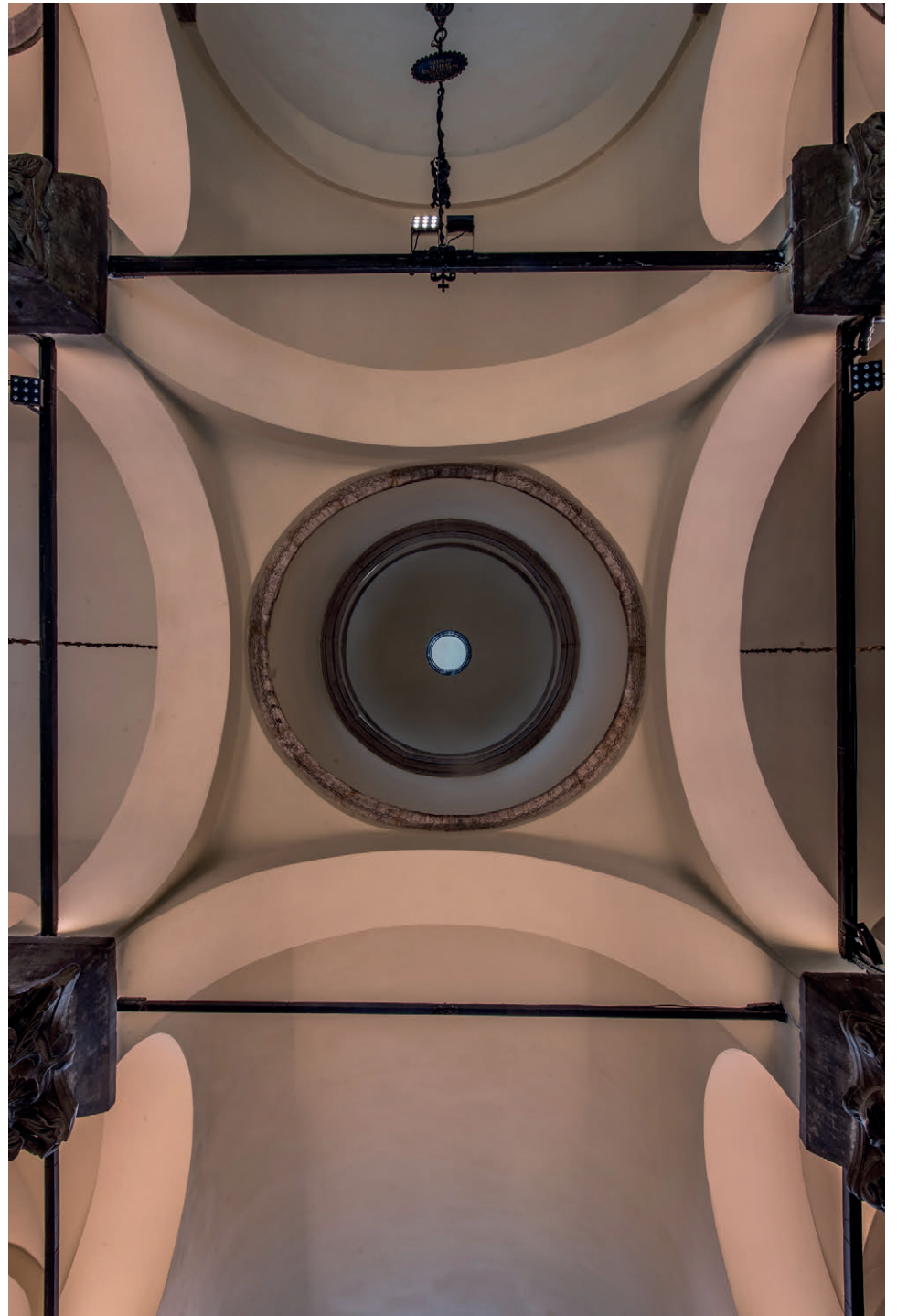




**Figure 21**

Venice, Rialto, Church of San Giacomo.  
Inner lateral view. Photo © Böhm



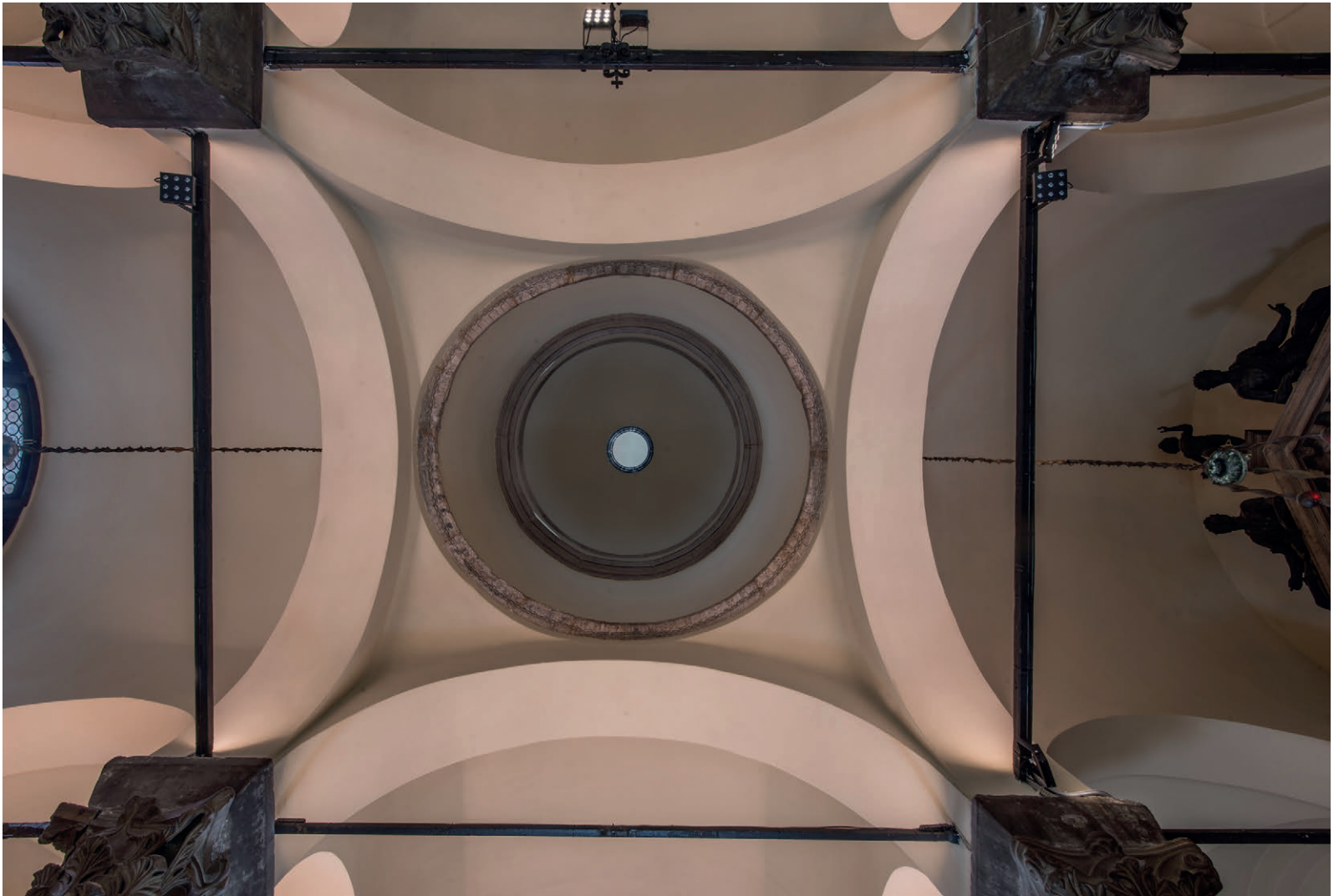


**Figure 22**

Venice, Rialto,  
Church of San Giacomo.  
Inner view of the dome  
with vaults and arches.  
Photo © Böhm



**Figure 23**  
Venice, Rialto,  
Church of San Giacomo.  
Inner view of the dome  
with vaults and arches.  
Photo © Böhm



**Figure 24**

Venice, Rialto, Church of San Giacomo.  
Inner view of the dome with vaults and arches. Detail.  
Photo © Böhm





**Figure 25**

Venice, Rialto, Church of San Giacomo.  
Inner view of the dome. Detail of the medieval all'antica frame.  
Photo © Böhm



**Figure 26**

Venice, Rialto, Church of San Giacomo.  
One of the column made of Proconnesian marble positioned on its base and surmounted by a medieval capital.  
Photo © Böhm



**Figure 27**

Venice, Rialto, Church of San Giacomo.  
View of the main altar.  
Photo © Böhm





**Figure 28**  
Venice, Rialto,  
Church of San Giacomo.  
View of the main altar.  
Detail. Photo © Böhm





**Figure 29**

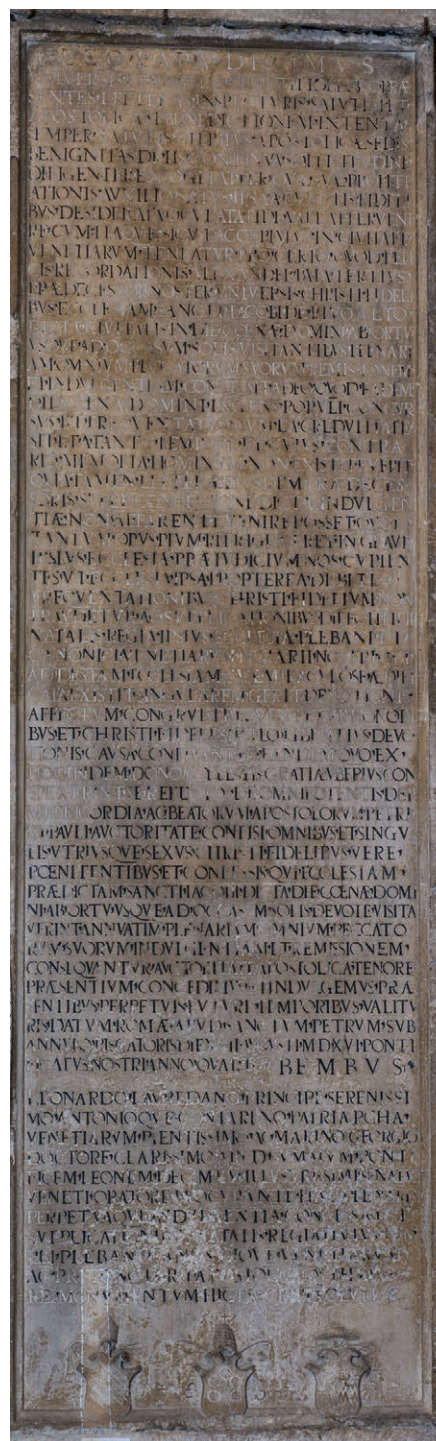
Venice, Rialto,  
Church of San Giacomo.  
View of the main altar.  
Detail. Photo © Böhm



**Figure 30**  
 Venice, Rialto,  
 Church of San Giacomo,  
 main chapel.  
 View of the inscription at right.  
 Photo © Böhm

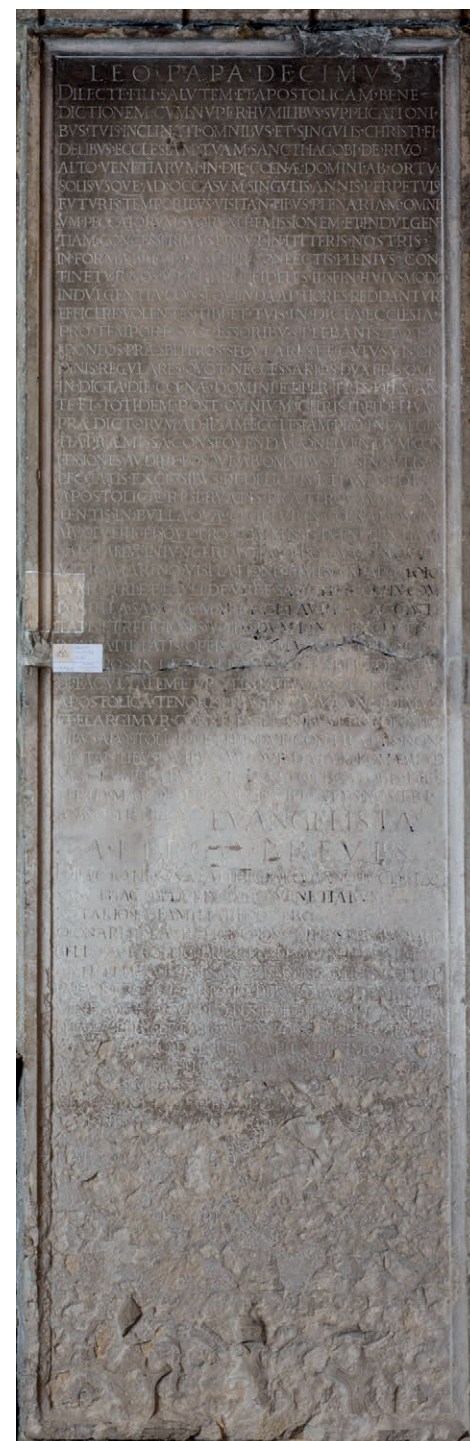
**Figure 31**  
 Venice, Rialto,  
 Church of San Giacomo,  
 main chapel.  
 View of the inscription  
 at left. Photo © Böhm





**Figure 32**

Venice, Rialto,  
Church of San Giacomo.  
View of the inner inscription  
at left of the entrance.  
Photo © Böhm



**Figure 33**

Venice, Rialto,  
Church of San Giacomo.  
View of the inner inscription  
at right of the entrance.  
Photo © Böhm

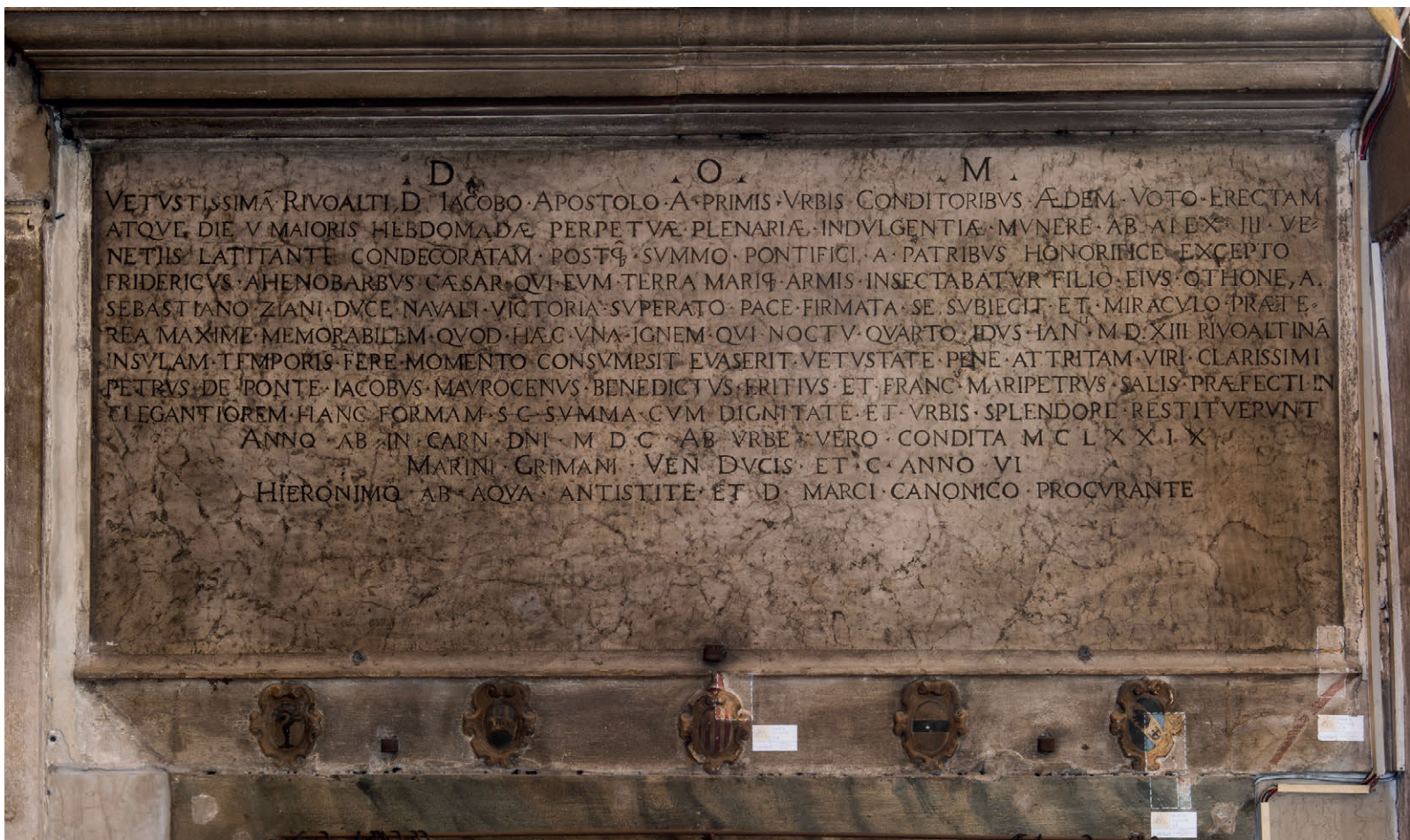


HANC D. JACOBO APLO A PRIMIS VRBIS  
FVNDAMENTIS DICATAM ADEM IAM  
VETVSTATE RVENTEM EX MAIOR  
RELIGIONE SENAT. CON RESTAVRANDAM  
PRISCA EIVS FORMA SERVATA OPVS  
INCEPTVM BERNARDVS THEVPOLO  
IO DONATO M ANTONIVS LONGO  
IO JACOBVS ZANE SALIS PRÆSS.  
PERFICIENDV C.  
AN. SALVTIS M.D CII AB VRBE ET ADE CONDITIS  
M.CLXXX MARINI GRIMANI DVCATVS VII

**Figure 34**

Venice, Rialto, Church of San Giacomo.  
View of the inner inscription at right of the entrance.  
Photo © Böhm





**Figure 35**

Venice, Rialto, Church of San Giacomo.  
View of the inner inscription above the entrance at right.  
Photo © Böhm









**Figure 37**

Venice, Rialto,  
Church of San Giacomo.  
View of the Orefici altar.  
Photo © Böhm



**Figure 38**  
Venice, Rialto,  
Church of San Giacomo.  
View of the Orefici altar.  
Detail. Photo © Böhm





**Figure 39**

Venice, Rialto, Church of San Giacomo.  
View of the Orefici altar. Detail. Photo © Böhm





**Figure 40**  
Venice, Rialto,  
Church of San Giacomo.  
View of the altar dedicated  
to St. Francis. Photo ©  
Böhm



The book offers a greater understanding of the multiple layers of meaning that have been superimposed in the course of the Medieval and Modern Ages in the Rialto area. The authors follow the Leitmotiv of the memorial component that each operation of architectural reuse has carried in the history of the church of San Giacomo di Rialto, a building which stands, emblematically, as a sort of architectural relic. Adopting this principle, the book offers an in-depth analysis of the spatial model, the reuse of individual architectural and decorative elements but also, on a larger scale, the different configurations of the urban context (the Rialto market) through the centuries, after repeated destruction, reconstruction and transformation. By adopting this multi-scale approach, the book reveals the key role played by the church in the narrative strategy adopted to perpetually renew the myth of Venice, taking on a conceptual and polysemantic dimension where each component (object, context, meaning, function, image) constitutes an element cultural memory, with each leaving a tangible trace of its own.

The volume includes essays by: Isabella Cecchini, Dorothy Collins, Luca Siracusano, Lorenzo Lazzarini, Nicolas Moucheron. The book also includes an Atlas of unedited photos by Francesco Turio Böhm.



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