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Communal Palaces in the Venetian Territorial State (15th–16th Centuries): The Case of Treviso

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Beginning in the 15th century, the reconstruction of Venetian state communal palaces, which served as the institutional seats of the city councils and judiciaries, was often seen as an opportunity for civic magistrates, along at times with Venetian officers, to develop plans to renovate their cities. These projects often led to the enlargement of central districts and to the transformation of cities' roads and squares. I look at communal palaces from across the Venetian territorial state, focusing on Treviso, which clearly elucidates how the modification of public buildings often led to a redefinition of central urban space. An array of mostly unpublished drawings proposing urban redevelopment projects that were not always realised are key to reconstructing the city's history, demonstrating better than other documents how communal palaces have enhanced its fabric.

Keywords: public buildings; Veneto architecture; urban landscape; Treviso; cultural heritage; early modern age

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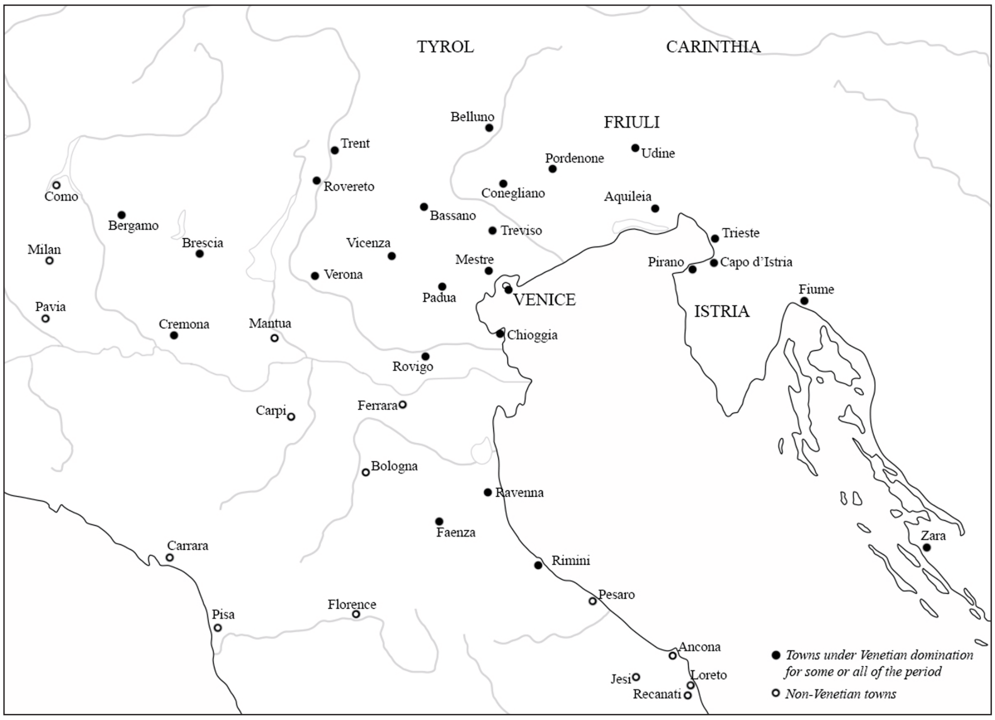
Introduction

Comparing communal palaces and other public buildings on the Venetian mainland in their urban context, in this article I use historical sources, including of documents on theory and practice, maps and archival drawings, and written accounts of places, to reconstruct the history and structure of these buildings, paying specific attention to ideas and models that led to a new project in the early modern period (**Figure 1**). I focus on the communal palace of Treviso, which does not merely reflect 'institutional urbanism' (Connors 1989; 2004; 2005) but also a sort of 'dynamic architecture'. The renovation it and palaces in other cities underwent is an example of what Marvin Trachtenberg (2010) calls 'building-in-time'. Before I address the specific case of Treviso, I highlight features these buildings share.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Treviso
Trieste
Brescia
Vicenza
Milan
Mestre
Pirano
Capo d'Istria
Verona
Padua
VENICE
Fiume
Pavia
ISTRIA
Cremona
Mantua
Chioggia
Rovigo
Carpi
Ferrara
Bologna
Ravenna
Faenza
Zara
Carrara
Rimini
Pesaro
Florence
Pisa
Ancona
Jesi
Loreto
Recanati
● Towns under Venetian domination for some or all of the period
○ Non-Venetian towns

Figure 1: Map of the Venetian state including towns under Venetian rule along with non-Venetian towns. Image created by Gianlorenzo Dellabartola.

Communal palaces in the Venetian state were usually called 'palazzi della razon' or 'palazzi della ragione', which literally translates as 'palace of reason', a courthouse of sorts. They were monumental buildings that served several political and social functions: justice administration and other government activities were carried out in them, and they were also the site of shops and small stores. For this reason, they were conceived as complex architectural structures; they had different storeys and at times the buildings that made them up were connected via an outer stairway. The political-administrative functions were hosted in the upper level, whereas shops were located in the lower level and were usually connected by internal roads. Treviso's communal palaces have all these features.

These complex buildings, which were equipped not only with halls used for public meetings but also with offices, archives, shops, and sometimes even residential areas, have been studied mainly in relation to the Middle Ages (Racine 1981; Heers 1995; Miller 1995; Bortolami 2008; Vigueur 2008; Tosco 2018) because it was a significant historical period during which the introduction of communal palaces in the urban context in the three decades after the Peace of Constance (1183) led to the opening of new roads and to the demolition of older buildings, particularly in northern-central Italy (Tosco 2000), where free communes had more success.[1] Nonetheless, they played a key role in urban settings well beyond this era (Svalduz 2010; Zaggia 2010; Svalduz 2022; Gritti 2021–2022).[2] Their long-term history remains largely unknown and their importance within the transformative dynamics of cities is often underestimated (Balchin 2008: 49–81; Ottenheym, De Jonge, and Chatenet 2010; Salamagne 2015). Indeed, as I suggest here, civic magistrates often used the reconstruction of communal palaces during the early modern age as an opportunity to plan other urban renovation projects. These projects aimed to enlarge central districts, reshape road network and squares, and relocate shops and markets under the vaults of the *palazzo* (**Figure 2**). In particular, I focus not on buildings themselves but rather on the interaction between communal palaces and built and unbuilt spaces from the 15th century onward, undertaking a broader territorial overview than has been typical in the scholarly literature to date (Calabi 1997; Svalduz 2010).

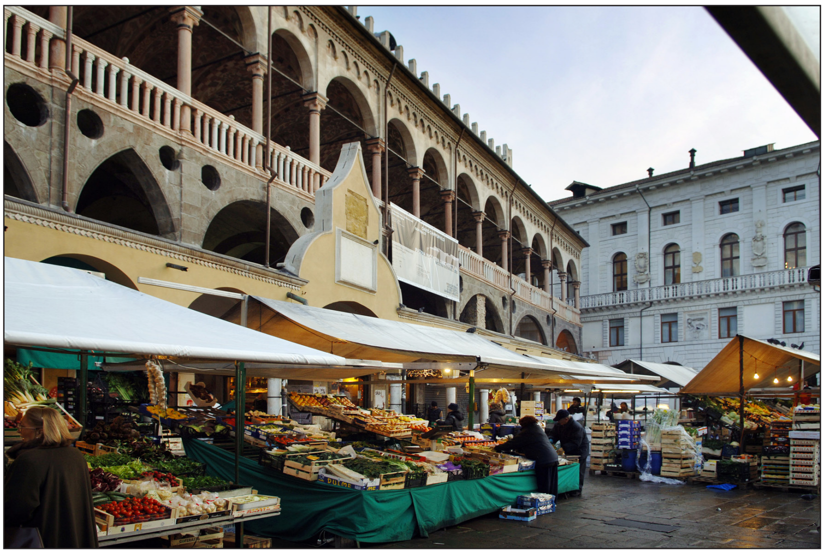


Figure 2: The Piazza delle Erbe and the Palazzo della Ragione, Padua. Photo by Massimo Pistore, 2019.

Andrea Palladio’s Descriptions of the Communal Palaces in Venetian territory

Andrea Palladio, who was born and raised in Veneto, between Padua and Vicenza, offers a close analysis of public buildings in the third book of *I quattro libri dell’architettura* (*Four Books on Architecture*), published in Venice in 1570. About two decades before his treatise went to press, he was involved firsthand in the renovation of the communal palace of Vicenza, later known as the Basilica Palladiana (**Figures 3** and **4**). The building was given a new shape, turned into a covered square, a sort of ‘shopping mall’ that was to connected to buildings already in place (Burns 2002: 403; Battilotti 2008; Beltramini 2008).

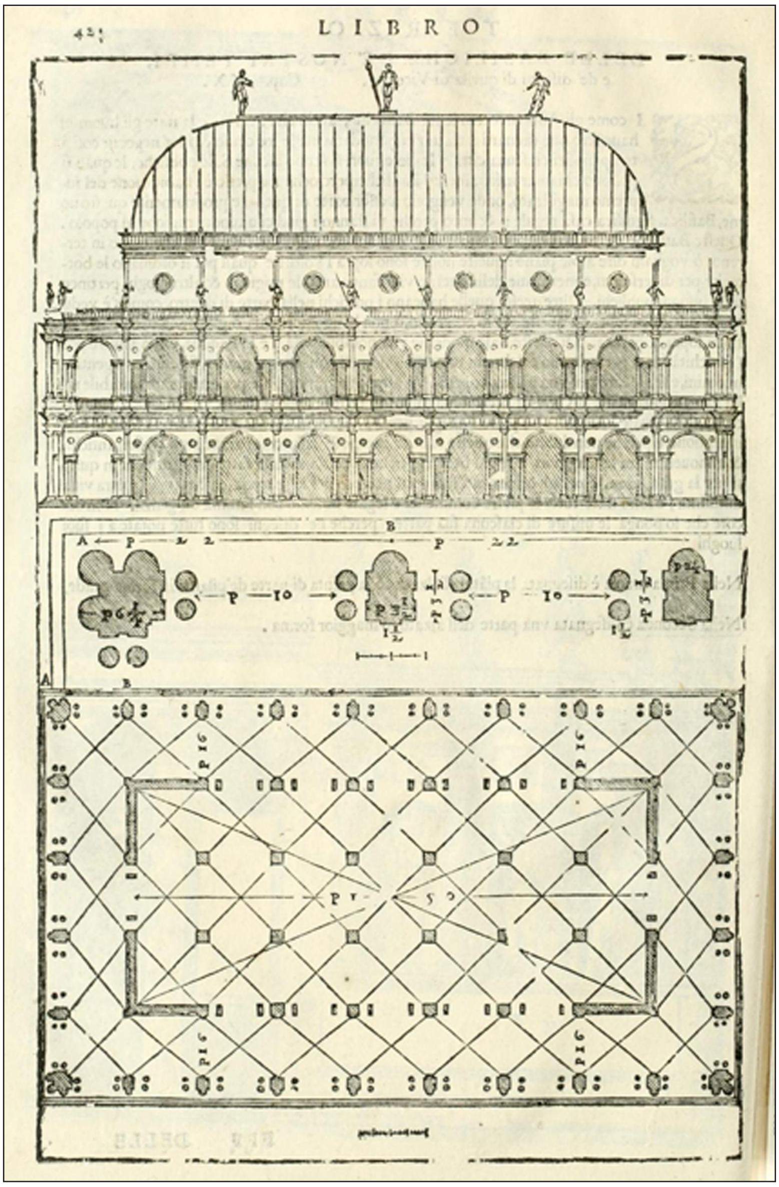


Figure 3: Andrea Palladio, basilica, Vicenza, *I quattro libri dell’architettura* (1570), 3:42v.

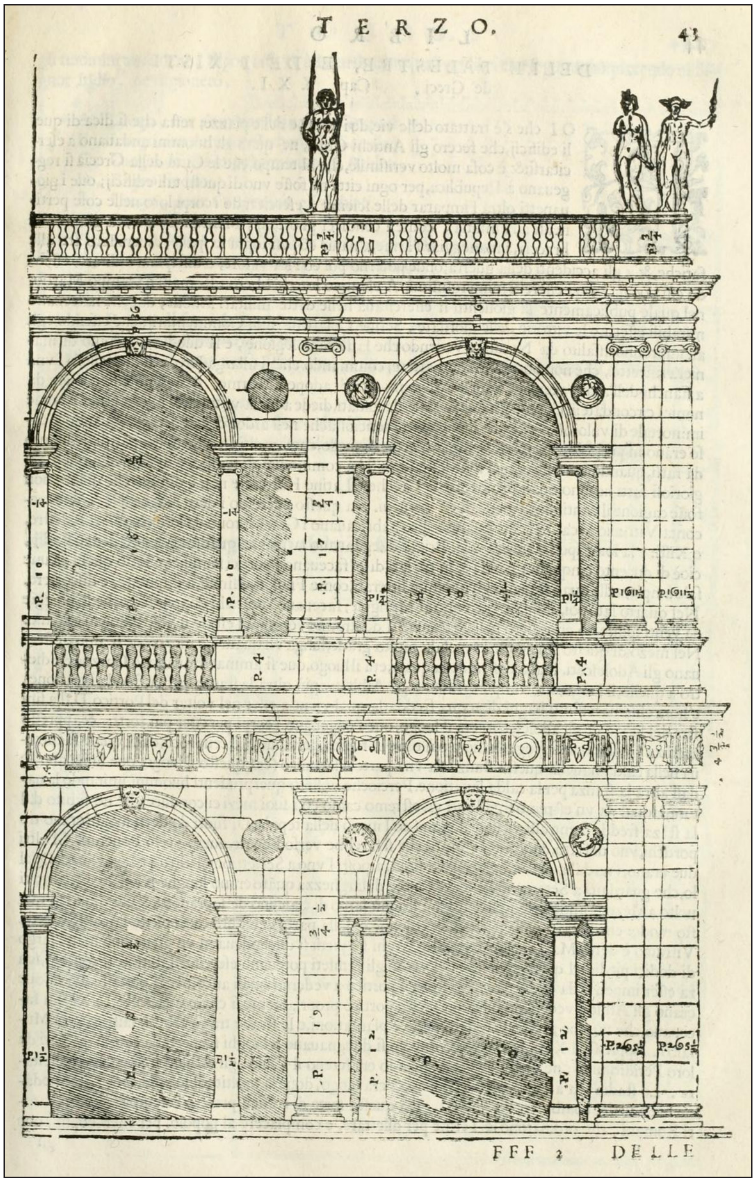


Figure 4: Andrea Palladio, basilica, Vicenza, ‘parte dell’alzato in maggior forma’, *I quattro libri dell’architettura* (1570), 3:43r.

Palladio opens the chapter concerning the basilica with an account of features that the public rooms, or town halls (‘sale publiche’), shared, comparing them with ancient Roman basilicas. He illustrates both the functions and spatial organisation of the basilica in chapter 19 of book 3, pointing out that people met in basilicas in both winter and in summer ‘trattar comodamente le lor cause et i lor negozi’ (1570: 3:42) (‘to deal with their lawsuits and business in comfort’) [1997: 203]. He notes that these secular structures house ‘i giudici a render ragione al popolo’ (the judges who administer justice to the populace) (1997: 203), and in many cities, not only in Italy but also abroad ('d'Italia e fuori'), basilicas were used for business, just as modern basilicas are (1570: 3:42). A fundamental difference between ancient and modern basilicas, however, was that while ancient basilicas were set at ground level, modern palaces were built on vaults. Moreover, modern basilicas housed prisons and other places essential for public life, like shops and various trades and business while ancient basilicas did not (1997: 203).

With the gradual occupation of all the spaces in the lower level, modern rooms ('sale moderne') came to depart even more from Palladio's ancient model. Indeed, he notes that 'quelle aueano i portichi nella parte di dentro [...], e queste per lo contrario, o non hanno portichi, o gli hanno nella parte di fuori, sopra la piazza'(1570: 3:42) 'ancient basilicas had porticoes inside [...] while, conversely, ours either do not have porticoes or have them on the outside on the square' (1997: 203). He no doubt had in mind the Palazzo della Ragione in Padua, his hometown when he wrote this. The Paduan palace is today still called the 'salone' (big hall) because of the size of its upper hall (Svalduz 2022: 7–10): the rows of porticoes which were gradually added hosted the activities that were previously carried out in various open spaces. By the end of the 15th century, a good balance in the interaction between the monumental building and spaces nearby had been achieved, it having been transformed, as Palladio states, into a wide 'covered square' for gentlemen who gathered there (1997: 203).[3] The permeability between places of administration and trade is made clear by the plan of the Paduan building. The ground floor is characterised by a transversal axis connecting commercial areas that intercepts two longitudinal paths used as internal shops (Zaggia 1997: 255–265). While Palladio underlines the main characteristics of large public buildings in his treatise that he knew well such as that in Padua (the 'most remarkable' one [1570: 3:42]) and that in Brescia (the other 'recently built' public palace for which he had been consulted) [Puppi 1999: 347–348; 409–411; Battilotti 2016], he focuses in particular on Vicenza, where he tried to adapt the typical features of the ancient roman basilicas to modern needs (Beltramini 2008).

To fully understand the history and impact of monumental architecture as 'built-in-time', however, it is useful to leave the study of architecture behind for a moment and explore the dynamics of urban history by changing our point of view from the palace to the city and considering both the interaction between full and empty spaces and the continuous transformation/adaptation of the urban fabric, a practice that Joseph Connors (1989; 2004; 2005) calls 'institutional urbanism' and that Palladio himself seems to call for. This process is activated by the large buildings hosting institutions like communal palaces, which are the real driving forces of urban renewal.

Architecture in Motion: Public Buildings, Built Environment

Starting from the beginnig of the 15th century, Venice gradually acquired sections of a territory in the northeastern part of the Italian Peninsula that it referred to as 'terraferma' or 'stato da tera.' By the mid-15th century, the Venetian territorial state had extended from Udine in the east, via Treviso, Padua, Vicenza, and Verona, to Brescia and Bergamo in the west (Law 2000; Knapton 2005; Romano 2007).

A number of recent studies have analysed the urban structure of these cities, paying a special attention to renovations dating to the early modern period and identifying similarities among buildings and places that carried out civil government functions, hosted public institutions, and facilitated the exchange of goods and money (Battilotti 1991; Gini 1996; Degrassi 2003; Svalduz 2022).[4] First of all, places started to be identified by the names of the activities that were held there: 'piazza delle erbe' (the square for selling vegetables), 'piazza dei frutti' (the square for selling fruit), the 'piazza dei signori' (the square where buildings for settling public and civil matters were located), the *pescaria* (where the fish stores were located), and the *beccaria* (the area for butchers' shops) (**Figure 5**). These squares featured similar buildings (Zucconi 1989), suggesting that certain building models became popular not only because of their architectural features but also because of the use to which the buildings were intended to be put. The communal palace was of course one of main symbolic buildings in the mainland towns but so were the palaces of the *rettore* and of the *podestà* (the civil and justice authorities), the council lodge, the pawnshop ('monte di pietà'), the clock tower ('torre dell'orologio'), and, finally, the column and the flag of St. Mark's, or the lion.[5] As Gaetano Cozzi (1997: 291–336) notes, a real 'environmental unit' was slowly

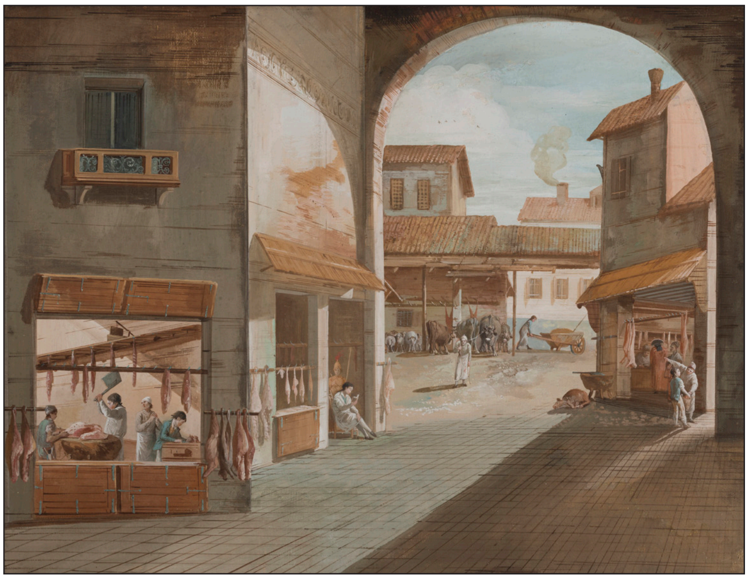


Figure 5: Giuseppe Bernardino Bison, *Le Beccherie*, 1797, inv. P 224, Musei Civici di Treviso.

created, as a political act that overlapped the already built urban fabric in the cities Venice took control of (Zaggia 1997, 2014). In the last decade of the 15th century, many Venetian mainland towns were renovated in a way that clearly intended to modify both the functions and the structures of central places and buildings. This was a dynamic process that happened on the ground in and between buildings (Trachtenberg 2010) and modified the ideal represented in plans for architectural projects.

In what follows, I offer an analysis of a set of drawings, maps, and documents that depict public buildings and their squares as part of an ongoing construction. While a few of these drawing, maps, and documents date to the time of the renovations, others were produced later. They are particularly interesting because they dictated how public space was used, and they show us the urban fabric surrounding the communal palaces in different periods. Heterogeneous in scale and chronology, these 'building-in-time' drawings can be seen as a representation of long-term processes. The central spaces of Vicenza are, for instance, visualised in the so-called Pianta del Peronio, a map preserved in the Biblioteca Bertoliana of the city that dates to 1481.[6] This document shows some of the toponyms already mentioned: the square for selling wine (*piazza del vino*), the one for selling wheat (*piazza del biade*), the old *pescaria*, where people could buy any kind of fish that separated from the square of the 'tiny fish' (*pesce minuto*) along with the names of major guilds (goldsmiths, fur-coat makers). Their shops stood all together under the pawnshop in front of the Palazzo della Ragione (that is, the Basilica Palladiana), where other activities and places for trade were located on the ground floor, since they were not permitted in the more important private buildings.

In 1483, two years after the Pianta del Peronio was created, Marin Sanudo crossed the mainland together with a group of Venetian ministers seeking to bring order to the subjected towns and recorded his personal impressions, which underline the ongoing works of transformation of the central areas.[7] For instance, he compares the communal palace in Vicenza to that in Padua, both of which had large rooms over a floor of shops. He also remarks that just as in Padua, in Vicenza, 'da l'altra banda dila piazza è il palazzo dil capitanio' (2014: 364–366) ('on the other side of the square is the captain's palace').

Sanudo describes similar buildings in every town he visited. He notes that Treviso had 'piazza, pallazo et loza, con un horologio como quello di Padoa sopra la caxa dil retor' (2014: 386) ('a square, a palace, and a loggia with a clock like the one in Padua, above the rector's house'). Even though there aren't many of these buildings, they end up defining the features of the Venetian mainland state because they are located in the heart of the city, offering a topography of civic institutions (Knapton and Law 2014: 51–52). This can be seen as a Veneto model that Stefano Zaggia (1997: 273–275) claims Ludwig H. Heydenreich alludes to when he compares the Loggia del Consiglio in Padua to the similar one in Verona, the Loggia di fra' Giocondo, characterizing it as 'its rather later sister building' (1996: 116).

No architect working between the 15th and 16th centuries — a time in which renovation operations were more intense — managed to create a plan for the reconfiguration of public spaces and places. Later drawings, of which there are quite a number, that mention the sizes shops should be and that mark simple functions for spaces are not the result of a common and organic project but rather represent an attempt to map out a long-term programme that dispensed with medieval norms for space management and embraced new ways of responding to community needs (Calabi 1997; Calabi 2001: 430–434).[8] Political-institutional changes in particular led to the redesigning of places meant for communal activities. When new magistracies and new governmental entities were created, it made sense to adapt old administration offices or to add new ones and to come up with different configurations for public spaces designed to integrate the community buildings where citizens gathered to attend the proclamation of edicts and official rulings or to purchase products that the little shops offered nearby.

Treviso 'fidelissima': The Communal Palace and Its Squares

The wide documentation — and in particular the historical cartography — available concerning the squares in the central area of Treviso make them a good case study of dynamic architecture.

The medieval characteristics of the urban pattern in Treviso today is more evident than in other Veneto cities (Coletti 1926: 35–39; Rando and Varanini 1991).[9] It is a polycentric city where the Piazza dei Signori, the civil communal palace, and the Piazza del Duomo, the cathedral and archbishop's palace, are connected by a main road, the Calmaggiore. Private houses and buildings on the two sides of this street are covered with arcades.

The civil architectures that define the articulated system of central squares — the Palazzo della Ragione, or Palazzo dei Trecento (whose hall, which overlooks the 1,400 square metres of the Piazza dei Signori, measures 47x20 metres), the communal palace, and the Palazzo del Podestà, situated near where the Calmaggiore begins (Bellieni 2008) — were mostly completed by around the mid-13th century. The group of public buildings appears as a monumental nucleus with a mixed use and includes shops (such as those the drapers rented from the commune) made of bricks located under the state rooms as well as temporary facilities that are set up against the pillars (**Figure 6**). The Loggia del Minor Consiglio (minor council) and the Loggia dei Cavalieri (knight's lodge), which were both gathering venues for nobles, are located nearby.

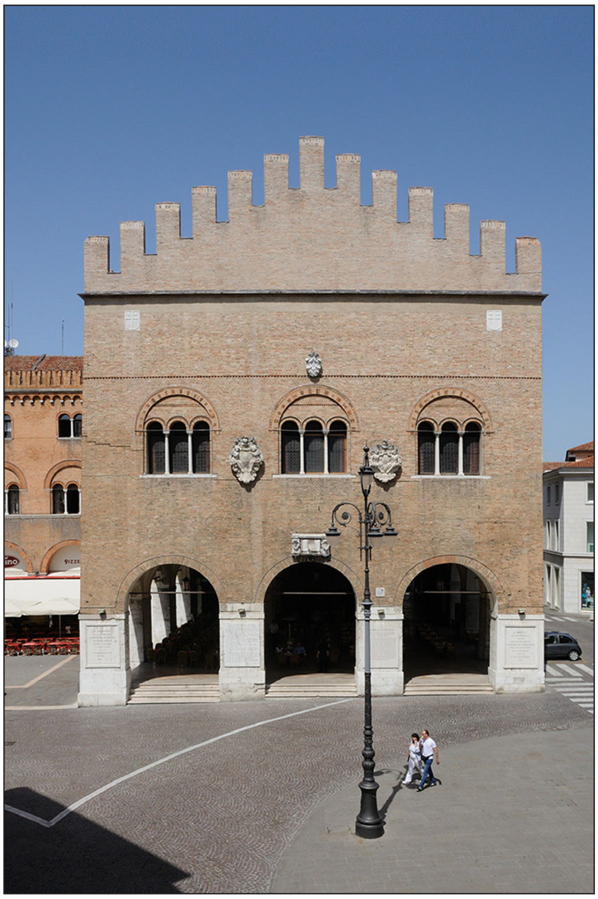


Figure 6: Palazzo dei Trecento, Treviso, 2015, Palladio Museum.

Focusing on the geography of trade places, the communal statutes mention three major areas: Duomo, Carubbio, and San Leonardo (Betto 1984, 1:213–217; Svalduz 1997: 294–302). However, a larger market extended beyond this regulated one from that included the Piazza delle Erbe, the *beccaria*, and the *pescaria* for centuries. The urban growth of Treviso in general and of central areas in particular took off after city was annexed to Venice in 1388. It is well known that Treviso was the first settlement that fell in the orbit of the capital, even before it was officially annexed, because its geographical proximity facilitated the integration between the cities. Treviso's loyalty to Venice is celebrated in several historical sources. Giovanni Bonifacio, for one, notes in his *Historia*, that Treviso could be considered the garden of Venice (1744: 523).

In the 'fidelissima' ('very faithful') Treviso, like in other cities, the communal palace was crucial to the urban setting. Central areas were redefined as a result of the addition of buildings and spaces to it (for example, the Palazzo del Podestà) (Bellieni 1992). Other elements, including a fountain, a column, and a series of arcades, contributed to the creation of a new urban design. Typically, this process started from single buildings, adopting an empirical approach when they had to deal with the entire shape of the surrounding urban spaces (Foscari and Tafuri 1983: 77). New buildings and spaces were never the result of a formally completed design project. Moreover, in this period, the decisions of the civic magistrates were usually inspired by their new appreciation of the political significance of urban decorum rather than by plans inspired by architectural treatises. Treviso was not an exception (Calabi 1997; Svalduz 2022).

In the 15th century, the renovation of Treviso was characterised by a 'cautious' renewal and the central areas did not change much, according to Gaetano Cozzi in his account of the process of assimilation that initially bound Venice to cities it assumed control of (Cozzi 1997). The city continued to carry out administrative functions in the existing buildings, progressively adding elements such as loggias, clocks, and St. Mark's columns that had both a highly symbolic and functional value.[10]

The clock that Marin Sanudo saw in Treviso and said was 'como quello di Padoa sopra la caxa dil retor' ('like the Paduan one, on top of the home of the rector') was the work of the local master Vivian ('maestro Vivian de Padoa'), who built it in 1482. The clock appears in the background of the portrait of a nobleman, maybe a rector, and on an extraordinary fresco in the villa Van Axel at Posmon di Montebelluna (**Figure 7**). In 1491 according to the *scrittura esposta* (Petrucci 1985), the Loggia del Podestà was completed, apparently named after Priamo Tron, a *podestà* and *capitano* (Bellieni 2008: 51). A few years later, in 1496, the Monte di Pietà was founded. It was first hosted in the rooms made available by the Treviso city council that were then gradually enlarged. This was the only building constructed by the will of the community after the Middle Ages. Because it was a critical thread in the urban fabric, it contributed to a series of adaptations, and for this reason its relationship with public buildings and central spaces is particularly important.[11]

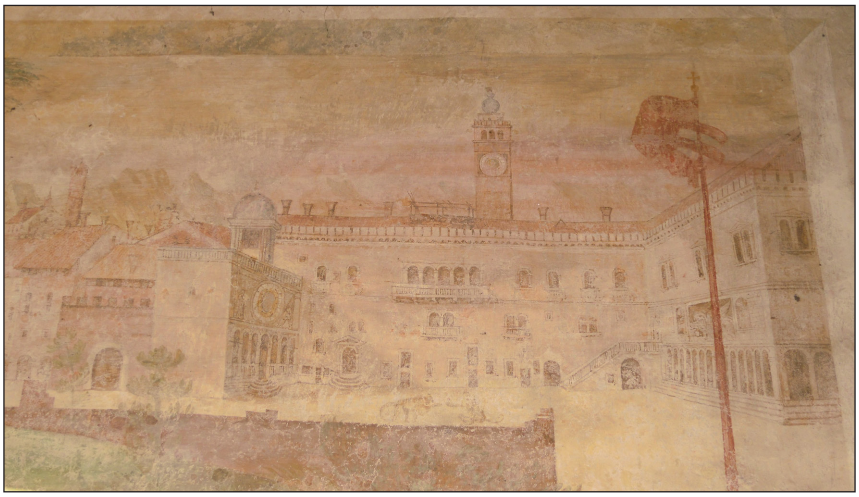


Figure 7: Piazza dei Signori, Treviso, fresco painting, 16th century, Posmon di Montebelluna, Villa Loredan-Van Axel.

The defeat of Agnadello in 1509 affected the urban development of Treviso. Cautious renovation (the clock, the *podesta*'s lodging, the Marcian lion) no longer ruled the day; the interventions became more incisive. Most important in Treviso, as in other Venetian cities, were the construction of new city walls and the formal reorganisation of the seats of the Venetian magistracy. The policy of providing ('munire') became complementary to that of adorning ('ornare'), as Ennio Concina has shown. These interventions led to the overall reorganisation of the road network as well as of entire parts of the city (Concina 1983: 8; Baiamonti 1991; Concina, and Molteni 2001: 126).

The opening of the loggia under the Palazzo dei Trecento, an operation planned by the city council as early as 1540 (**Figure 5**), was the main episode in this new period of urban renewal. The aim was 'butare zoso le botege che al presente sono sotto el palazzo della ragione'; that is, to demolish the shops that located under the palace. The Palazzo dei Trecento, known also as Palazo Grande, had been surrounded up until then by porticoes: there a new spacious place ('luogo tutto spacioso'), a sort of loggia (Svalduz 1997: 308; Svalduz 2016: 83), should be created. These kinds of renovations were needed, as Palladio puts it (1570: 3:42), 'non tanto per ornamento di essa città, quanto per comodità del riddursi al coperto de i cittadini et alcuni habitanti di quella et de i contadini anchora che vengono al mercato con vittuvaglie nel tempo pluvioso' ('not so much for the ornamentation of the city, as for the convenience of sheltering the citizens and some of its inhabitants and the peasants who also come to the market with victuals in the rainy season' [1997: 203).[12] The construction process was slowed down by negotiations between the central and local governments regarding financing and the allocation of public workshops, arbitration that was mediated by the Venetian *podestà*.[13]

A model for a loggia was presented to the Venetian college and evaluated by the senate in 1551 (Senato Terra, Deliberazioni, Filza 13, 27 June 1551, ASVe). Works on the building, referred to in documents as the 'fabrica del palazzo de Treviso', were completed in 1553 under the direction of the Lombard-born master Martino da Brescia with help from Andrea da Valle (Rigoni 1939: 44–45). A group of narrow arcades on pillars was located on the perimeter of the 14th-century palace, clearly visible in the fresco at Villa Loredan-van Axel in Posmon di Montebelluna (Pavanello, and Mancini 2008: 367–369), in the rear part of the building. The new structure connected the main square (*maggiore*) directly with the Piazza delle Donne, thus decisively contributing to the reorganisation of its functions (**Figure 8**).

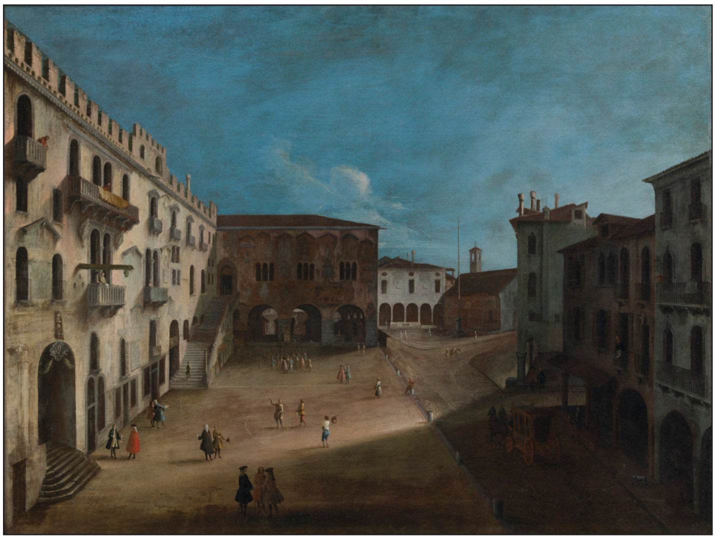


Figure 8: Medoro Coghetto, Piazza della Signoria o Piazza Maggiore (today Piazza dei Signori), mid-18th century, inv. P 479, Musei Civici di Treviso.

The work in Treviso echoes in its development — but not in its formal outcome — that of the more famous Palazzo della Ragione in Vicenza, transformed into a basilica by Andrea Palladio. The basilica was constructed using an 'elastic sequence' of Serlian windows concealing the different widths of the bays (Beltramini 2008: 82; Burns 2002: 403–405) and was connected to the old building by three vaulted passages in the lower area. In the case of Treviso's palace, on the other hand, the series of narrow arcades on pillars on its perimeter was replaced by a loggia that made the space beneath the hall of the palace larger and that, thanks to its wide brick cross-vaults supported by four central cruciform pillars, almost passed for a covered space. Civic identity was constructed at the same time as the buildings via the statutes, Bonifacio's *Istoria*, and Mauro's *Genealogies of Treviso*, while the façade of palaces frescoed by artists lent Treviso the shape of a painted city (Riscica and Voltarel 2017).

Treviso's 'Monte di Pietà': A Significant Public Building

During the 1550s, the Monte di Pietà became another protagonist in the process of renovation in the central area of Treviso. It attracted public initiatives led by the local ruling class, thanks to its position next to the public palace and near the market squares. As I have already noted, when it was first established in 1496, it consisted only of one room rented by the municipality but then, expanded, transforming and redefining the central parts of the city meant for specific functions (Svalduz 1996, 1997). As in other cities, it became a crucial element of the urban landscape, flanking or overlapping public buildings were medieval in origin like the communal palace and council lodge used to house city magistracies. A new building was constructed above the church of Santa Maria delle Carceri and above the church of San Vito between 1550 and 1561, as new spaces were needed for the preservation of pledges (**Figure 9**). Functional requirements prevailed over formal desires, resulting in the limited use of stone and the simple scanning of the façades defined by the windows of the storerooms arranged perpendicularly to the façade on Piazza San Vito and protected by gratings. These elements appear in other Venetian pawnbroking institutions, which in the 16th century began to develop in the central urban space (Svalduz 2011).

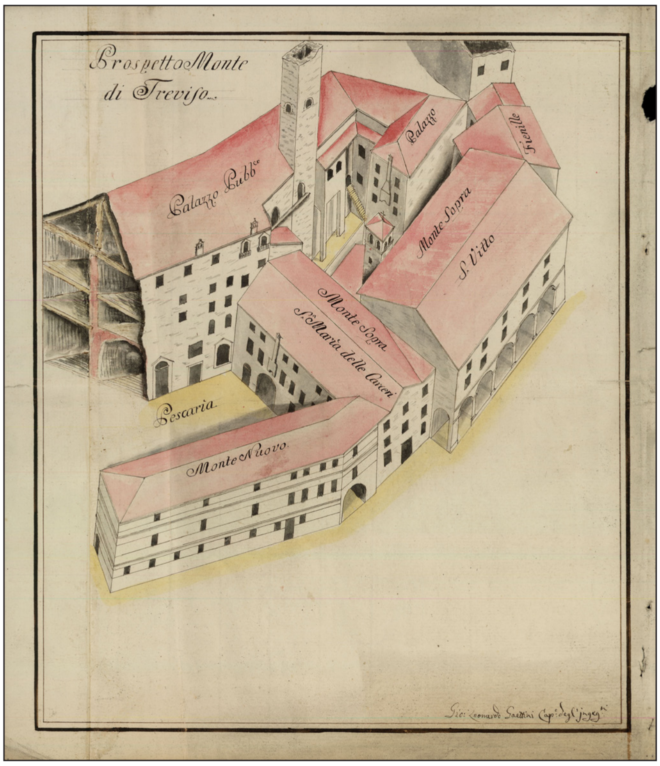
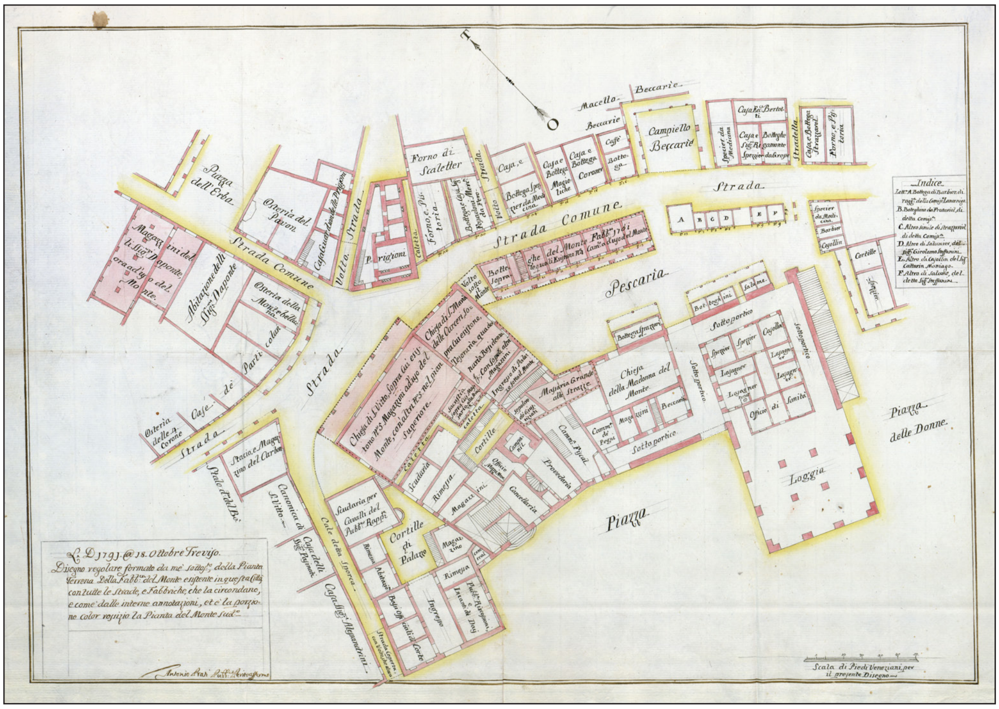

Prospetto Monte
di Treviso
Palazzo Pubb.co
Palazzo
Fienille
Monte Sopra
S. Vitto
Monte Sopra
S. Maria delle Carceri
Pesaria
Monte Nuovo
Gio: Leonardo Gaettini Cap.o degl'ingeg.ri

Figure 9: Giovanni Leonardo Gaettini, prospect of Monte di Treviso, 1792, Scansadori alle Spese Superflue, B. 107, ASVe.

Thanks to a number of mostly unpublished drawings produced during the 18th century in connection with the reorganisation of the Monte di Pietà (**Figure 10**) along with the Palazzo della Ragione, the Palazzo del Comune, the Palazzo del Podestà (the seat of the 'curia podestarile', the *podestà*'s curia with its retinue of officials), and the residence of the Venetian rector, we can get a clear picture of the complexity and flexibility of this type of structure. Luigi Coletti (1935: 25) likewise captures the complexity of this structure of built elements and open spaces that characterises the urban landscape in describing the *palazzo comunale* as 'a group of buildings constructed in different periods and largely modified over the centuries' (**Figure 11**).


L. D. 1791. @ 18. Ottobre Treviso.
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Antonio Prati Pubb.co Periito
Strada Comune
Pescaria
Piazza
Loggia
Piazza delle Donne
Chiesa della Madonna del Monte
Campiello Beccarie
Beccarie
Macello
Piazza dell'Erba
Indice
Scala di Piedi Veneziani per il presente Disegno

Figure 10: Antonio Prati, drawing of the Fabbrica del Santo Monte di Pietà surrounded by streets and buildings, 1791, Scansadori alle Spese Superflue, B. 106, ASVe.

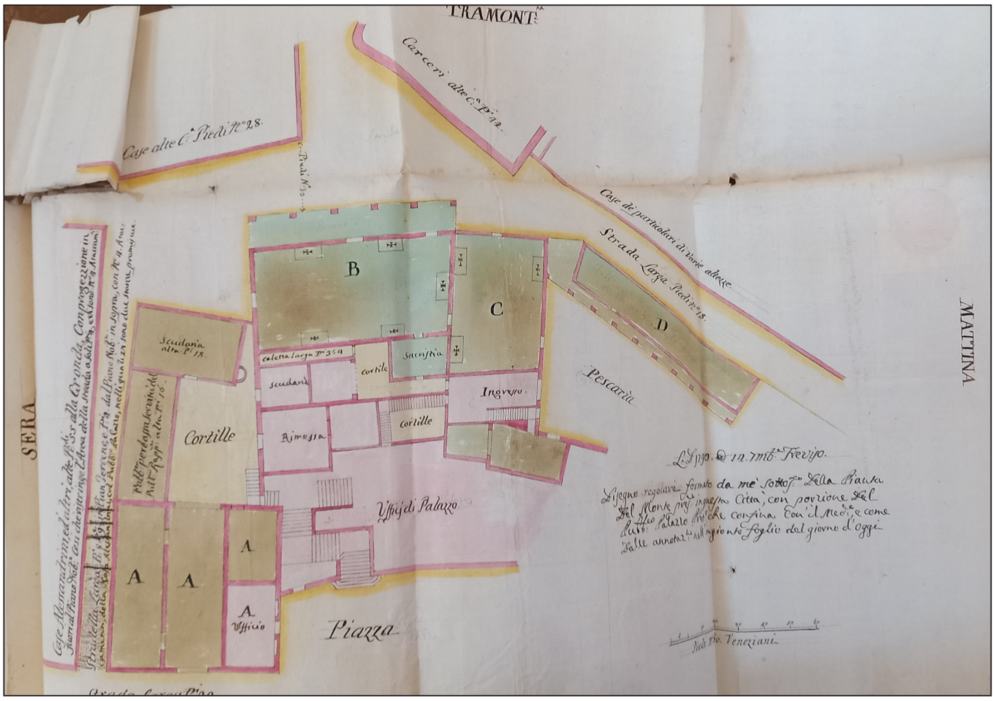
TRAMONT.
MATTINA
SERA
Carceri alte P. 31
Case alte P. Piedi N.° 28
Case de particolari di varie altezze
Strada Larga Piedi N.° 18
Pescaria
Piazza
B
C
D
A
A
A
A
Ufficio
Scuderia alta P. 17
Cortille
Rimessa
Scuderia
Cortile
Sacristia
Ingresso
Uffizj di Palazzo
L. D. 1790. @ 14. 7mb.e Treviso.
Disegno regolare formato da me sottos.to Della Pianta Del Monte Pietà in questa Città, con porzione Del Pubb.co Palazzo Pret.o che confina con il Med.mo, e come dalle annotaz.ni nell'ingionto foglio del giorno d'oggi
Piedi N.o Veneziani

Figure 11: Antonio Prati, drawing of Monte di Pietà and Palazzo Pubblico Pretorio, 1790, Senato (Secreta), Deliberazioni Rettori, Filza 393, ASVe.

Until the 18th century, when the Venetian magistracies undertook a wide range of restoration projects in public palaces of the subjected cities ('Sommario delli ristauri delli Palazzi Publici', Savio Cassier, B. 640, Fasc. 1, ASVe), the articulated layout of Treviso's civic buildings, as in many other cities, appeared as a single 'disharmonious construction' that had resulted from 'conjunctions' between different bodies, additions progressively arranged around the medieval core, loggias, and covered passages (Senato (Secreta), Deliberazioni Rettori, Filza 391, 3 September 1790, ASVe).[14] The large number of solutions left on paper to resolve the intricate situation in Treviso reveal the extent to which this aggregate of civil buildings constituted a real design laboratory. The series of drawings preserved in the Venetian State Archives, which have not received adequate attention so far, are critical to reconstructing the design choices made by architects. These drawings specify the function of each individual room, documenting the presence of workshops, wooden 'stazi' (stands), and staircases and corridors connecting the various buildings (**Figure 12**).[15] In other words, these archival drawings demonstrate the resilience of these buildings, that is, their capacity to adapt to change in the lifeworld (Trachtenberg 2019).

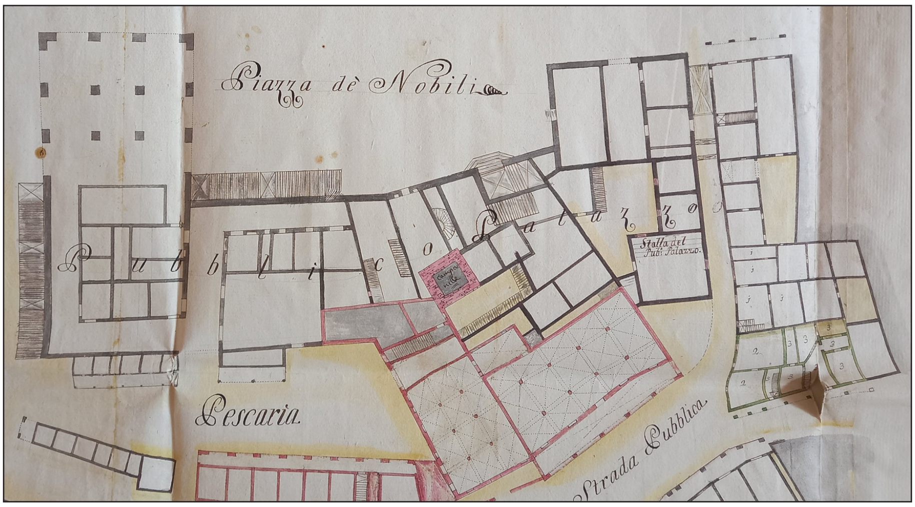

Figure 12: Giovanni Leonardo Gaettini, 'Topografia generale dell'attuale Santo Monte di Treviso con tutte le sue addiacenze e pertinenze', 1792, Scansadori alle Spese Superflue, B. 107, ASVe.

The search for a suitable location for the Monte di Pietà triggered an awareness of the built heritage, which was already historic at the time and generated many considerations on the refunctioning of public buildings. In this context, the role of the Venetian magistrates' office for avoiding excess expenses (Scansadori alle spese superflue) stands out.[16] They were engaged in a sweeping operation in the mid-18th century to verify the locations of the Monti di Pietà throughout the Venetian mainland. This attention to the heritage bequeathed to the city in the 18th century creates a synergy with the reflections of the Riccati school and with the debate on the art of building, which in Treviso seems to remain confined to a theoretical sphere (Piccoli 2012).[17] Unfortunately, in that period the city was marked by economic and demographic stagnation: this situation did not allow the realisation of the planned interventions in the main public building sites of Treviso especially concerning the Monte di Pietà. Traces of this can be found in the numerous drawings preserved in the archives, which concern alternative solutions: constructing a new building in Piazza Duomo or adding 'pieces' of building, making the existing more capacious; or adapting the Bressa palace, the configuration of which we learn about before its demolition thanks to these drawings. What is striking in all the plans drawn up for the Monte di Pietà is the continuous reference to the centrality of the public palace, which is never questioned.[18]

In spite of the considerable interest in the rearrangement of public buildings, no project was actually translated into stone. Recorded on paper, the various design solutions nonetheless represent an architectural and archival heritage of great importance for the entire history of the 'loyal' city, which at the fall of the Venetian Republic was subjected to various governments that again made of the public buildings their seats of representation. Only in the last 20 years of the 19th century, however, the entire complex of municipal buildings was reconfigured with a series of interventions that redefined the urban image of Treviso. This process ended about 50 years later, at the threshold of the Second World War (Menichelli 2017). At this stage, a series of visual testimonies, including photographs, give an account of the importance of some restorations carried out in particular on the Palazzo dei Trecento. These interventions, as it has been proven in recent studies, have taken on exemplary significance with regard to the recomposition of the building's urban image (Forlati 1952; Pregnolato 2008; Sorbo 2017).

Conclusions

In Veneto cities, public buildings were part of a very articulated set of institutional and administrative sites. During the early modern period, political and institutional changes led to a redesign not only of the buildings but also of the places where community activities took place. The establishment of new magistracies and the creation of new forms of government resulted in old offices of the administration being adapted or new ones being added, as demonstrated by the case of the open loggia under the Treviso town hall. This case study shows how the history of public buildings in Venice is marked by a dialectic whereby buildings adapt to transformations and reorganisations of civic institutions and at the same time maintain a crucial role in the public life and cultural landscape of its mainland cities.

Notes

[1] Although the relationship between public order in the city and the construction of the buildings symbolising city power has been thoroughly covered, the history of municipal buildings, including their construction campaigns and their role in the city, has not. Milani 2005 does address the increase in written documentation for all sectors of the administration and the consequent need to set up appropriate offices. See also Balossino and Rao2020 and Liévaux 2007.

[2] For a broader account of palaces in cities, see Boucheron and Chiffoleau 2004 and Czaja, Noga, Oll, and Scheutz 2019.

[3] On the interaction between monumental buildings and urban space, see Connors 1989, 2004, and 2005.

[4] Morresi 1998 and Calabi 2001: 430–434 examine the urban structure of cities from the perspective of architectural history, while Svalduz 2022 explores it in the context of historical urban dynamics. See also HERA, 'Public Spaces: Culture and Integration in Europe', https://heranet.info/funding/current-funding-opportunities/hera-public-spaces-2019-2022/.

[5] See Rowe 2021 for an excellent comparative analysis of clocktowers in different cities.

[6] The map has been published several times; Beltramini 2008: 84 supplies a brief exhibition catalogue entry.

[7] Knapton and Law 2014 provides an excellent account of the significance of the work. See also Toffolo 2020, Romano 2007, and Melchiorre 2013.

[8] A similar approach to the urban history of Venice is taken by the contributors to Zaggia 2006.

[9] For this reason, the literature on medieval Treviso is extensive while that on the history of the modern city is sparser; for one of the few studies of the modern city, see Brunetta 1992.

[10] For an extensive discussion of these issues, see Guidoni, and Soragni 1997 and Calabi 1997, both of which inform Degrassi 2003.

[11] On the building characteristics of the pawnshops, see Svalduz (2011).

[12] For more detail regarding the council's decision), see Senato Terra, Deliberazioni, Filza 13, 22 November 1540, ASVe: 'Al tempo pluvioso li citadini se possino reddur al coperto et anche li poveri contadini et contadine che vengono il giorno de mercato, secondo il solito, possino vegnir più liberamente per vender della vittuaria per universal beneficio di questa citade et star al coperto nel detto tempo pluviato, il che cederà etiam a maggior beneficio delli corpi humani, havendo rispetto che l'aere che descende nella piazza qual è pessimo harà maggior exito et farassi buono' ('In the rainy season the citizens will be able to live under cover and also the poor peasants and peasant women who come on market day, as is usual, will be able to come more freely to sell their produce for the universal benefit of this city and to stay under cover in the rainy season, which will also be for the greater benefit of the human body, as the air that descends in the square, which is very bad, will have greater effect and be good'). See also 'Libro i delle parti', c. 50r–v, 22 November 1540, Archivio comunale, B. 1466, ASTv.

[13] On the matter of renting out the workshops and their redistribution under the palace, see Svalduz 1997: 308.

[14] In the 18th century, there were campaigns everywhere to assess and reorganise public buildings. However, the case of Treviso is not addressed by contributors to Simoncini 2000.

[15] See, for example, '1792: Disegni relativi al Santo Monte di Pietà di Treviso', 'Disegni del Cap. Ingegnere Paolo Deslanges', 'Disegni del Cap. Ingegnere Gio. Leonardo Gettini', and 'Dissegni ristauri nel palazzo delli NN. HH. Signori fratelli Brescia' in Scansadori alle Spese Superfle, B. 108, ASVe. The graphic documentation in the case of Treviso is very rich.

[16] Most of the information on buildings housing Monti di Pietà and municipal offices can be found in this rich archival source, even though what it covers is not directly related to municipal buildings.

[17] See Simoncini 2000 and Kieven 2012 for useful comparisons between other Venetian and European cities.

[18] See, for example, Senato (Secreta), Deliberazioni Rettori, Filza 391, 3 September 1790, ASVe.

Competing Interests

The author has no competing interests to declare.

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