

RIVISTA DI SCIENZE, LETTERE ED ARTI

ATENEIO VENETO

ESTRATTO

anno CXCVII, terza serie, 9/II (2010)



ATTI E MEMORIE DELL'ATENEIO VENETO

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THE LENGTH OF THE LIBRARY

This is the story of an idea, first published by Manfredo Tafuri in 1969, and its subsequent reception in different international contexts over the last 40 years. Although the present writer is one of the protagonists in the narrative, the dynamics of the subsequent debate will be reviewed as objectively as possible. In this account much simplification of the arguments will be unavoidable, but the same controversy has recently been discussed at much greater length by Eugene J. Johnson.¹

At the time of his death in 1570, Sansovino had completed only 16 of the 21 bays of the Biblioteca Marciana, (fig. 1) and it was not until the late 1580s that the Procurators of St Mark's finally finished the building. (fig. 2) In his monograph on *Jacopo Sansovino* in 1969, Tafuri reflected on Scamozzi's eloquent criticism of the abrupt collision between the façade of Sansovino's Mint and the end wall of the Library facing the Bacino.²

The Library Reading Room occupied the first seven bays of the façade towards the Campanile; the vestibule (then a school for teaching classics to young nobles) occupied the next three bays; and the main entrance leading to a richly decorated interior staircase lay in the eleventh bay. (fig. 3) Thus, by 1556 all the facilities directly involved in the functioning of the building as a Library had been completed. If the structure were to be extended along the full length of the site, another function would have to be identified for the remainder. In the event the remaining section was used for offices for the Procuratia de Supra. The ground floor consisted of shops for letting.

¹ E. J. JOHNSON, *A Window in the Venetian Mint and the Libreria di San Marco*, «Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians», vol. 69, no. 2 (Giugno 2010), pp. 190-205.

² MANFREDO TAFURI, *Jacopo Sansovino e l'architettura del '500 a Venezia*, Padova 1969, pp. 72-79.

The original structure on the site had 22 bays, as Michela Agazzi has demonstrated.³ Because the very first bay at the north end was left vacant to open up the space between the Campanile and the new building, the present 21-bay structure has exactly the same number of bays as the previous one, minus one bay at the north. Thus the existing fabric predetermined the width of the bays in Sansovino's design, allowing the rebuilding to take place in modular stages.

The Library replaced a series of decrepit hostelries with lean-to bakery shops in front. (fig. 4) In 1536 the Procuratori de Supra approved Sansovino's repeatable one-bay model, and in the following year they decided to accommodate the Library of St Mark's inside.⁴ Each hostelry was to be relocated in turn, to sustain the maximum income from the site during the rebuilding.

The meat market occupied the final four bays of the original structure towards the Bacino, though the upper floors may have been occupied by the last of the hostelries, if we are to believe the woodcut by Jost Amman. (fig. 5) In the end, because of the shortage of commercial property around Piazza San Marco, the relocation of the meat market was not carried out until 1580, and Sansovino died leaving the building unfinished.

In the initial proposal of his hypothesis in 1969, Tafuri had suggested that Scamozzi had deliberately engineered the collision between the Zecca and the Library to 'deride Sansovino's eclecticism and empiricism'.⁵ Tafuri presumed that Scamozzi himself had planned the final resolution, although we now know that he was just one of a number of advisors who advised on the last push to complete the building in the 1580s.⁶

According to Tafuri, Sansovino himself could never have intended the solution as executed, but must instead have planned the

³ MICHELA AGAZZI, *Platea Sancti Marci: I luoghi marciani dall'XI al XIII secolo e la formazione della piazza*, Venezia 1991, p. 120

⁴ DEBORAH HOWARD, *Jacopo Sansovino: Architecture and Patronage in Renaissance Venice*, New Haven and London 1975, pp. 14-15; MANUELA MORRESI, *Jacopo Sansovino*, Milano 2000, pp. 192-3.

⁵ M. TAFURI, *Jacopo Sansovino*, p.76: «lo Scamozzi sembra deridere l'eclettismo e l'imperismo sansoviniani.»

⁶ DEBORAH HOWARD, *Venice Disputed: Marc'Antonio Barbaro and Venetian Architecture 1550-1600*, New Haven and London 2011, pp. 178-87.

Library building to terminate where he left it. Tafuri's initial argument was based partly on his critical sensibility, which considered that the recession of the façade of the Library would enhance the theatrical qualities of the Piazzetta, and partly on a subtle analysis of the symbolic nature of the functions of the buildings.

The following year, in a multi-author monograph on *Piazza San Marco*, edited by Giuseppe Samonà, Giovanni Battista Stefinlongo gave graphic form to Tafuri's hypothesis, and this plan was re-issued in the paperback edition of Tafuri's book on Sansovino in 1972.⁷ The hypothetical plan of the supposed 'original design' aligns the south wall of the Library with Molo façade of the Doge's Palace, thereby leaving more space around the westernmost of the two great columns in the Piazzetta. Curiously, however, although Tafuri's original idea had been proposed in relation to the Mint rather than the Library, this plan ignores the full implications of the supposed 'ideal' design. That is to say, it does not show graphically that in this scenario the principal land entrance to the Zecca would be swallowed up within the final 17th bay of the shortened structure of the Library.

Tafuri's idea that Sansovino intended a seventeen-bay Library was welcomed with enthusiasm, not only by Italians but also by American scholars, especially in John McAndrew's review of the two books in 1972.⁸

While these ideas were taking shape in print, I was collecting documentation in the Archivio di Stato for my doctoral dissertation, completed in 1972, on Sansovino's redevelopment of Piazza San Marco.⁹ In 1974, I published a short article entitled 'Two Notes on Jacopo Sansovino' in the journal *Architettura*, in which argued against Tafuri's hypothesis of the shortened Library.¹⁰ My response to Tafuri's hypothesis was based on archival sources, underpinned by reference to the visual evidence and political circumstances.

⁷ GIOVANNI BATTISTA STEFILONGO, *La libreria di San Marco*, in *Piazza San Marco: L'architettura, la storia, le funzioni*, a cura di Giuseppe Samonà, Padova 1972, p. 170 (pp. 161-171) (and see also Samonà's introduction on p. 12); M. TAFURI, *Jacopo Sansovino*, pp. 82-93.

⁸ JOHN MCANDREW, review of MANFREDO TAFURI, *Jacopo Sansovino e l'architettura del '500 a Venezia*, «Art Bulletin», 54 (1972), p. 212.

⁹ DEBORAH HOWARD, *Studies in Sansovino's Venetian Architecture*, unpublished PhD dissertation, London University: Courtauld Institute of Art (1972).

¹⁰ DEBORAH HOWARD, *Two Notes on Jacopo Sansovino*, «Architettura», 2 (1974), pp. 132-

Unfortunately my case was gravely weakened by the fact that the first of the two 'Notes' turned out to be completely wrong. I had proposed that the present five-bay building on the bridge between the Zecca and the former Granary was the series of five shops erected by Sansovino in 1531, for which I had found documents, but without realising that Sansovino's five shops were rebuilt in the 19th century.¹¹

In the second 'Note', my argument about the length of the Library rested first and foremost on new documentary evidence, which revealed that Sansovino had made zealous efforts in the 1560s to relocate the Beccaria, or meat market, in order to complete the Library building 'sino al canton della Zecca' ('as far as the corner of the Zecca'). Sansovino rejected the possibility of incorporating the Beccaria in the last four bays, because the extension of the portico of the Library building around the end would drastically reduce the available space. He was frustrated in his attempts to clear the site by the difficulty of identifying a suitable alternative site in the centre of the city for the Beccaria.

In my article of 1974, I pointed out that the present entrance of the Library lies in the very centre of the wing – in the eleventh of the 21 bays, an axis that is given added poignancy by its alignment with the beautiful medallion of Venice as *Justice* on the façade of the Doge's Palace. I also questioned the logic of hiding the splendid water entrance to the Zecca within the seventeenth bay, while leaving the rest of its very plain east wall visible.¹² Finally the economic argument should not be discounted: the high value of property in the centre of Venice discouraged the clearing of such a prominent site.

After this, the debate gathered momentum, but from this time onwards its participants divided themselves largely by nationality. Italian historiography codified Tafuri's hypothesis with further graphic reconstructions, so that the idea developed its own historical 'truth', for example in the influential multi-volume *Storia di Venezia*

¹¹ Although Sansovino rebuilt the three shops on the Ponte della Pescaria in the form of five new shops in 1531, these were replaced with the present structure by Lorenzo Santi in the early 19th century. See GIANDOMENICO ROMANELLI, *Venezia Ottocento: l'architettura, l'urbanistica*, Venezia 1988, pp. 128-9, note 192, and pp. 182-6.

¹² E. J. JOHNSON, *Jacopo Sansovino's Entrance to the Venetian Mint*, «Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians», 86 (2004), pp. 430-458.

in 1994.¹³ After all, the creation of reconstructions of supposed 'original' designs has been a standard procedure for scholars for centuries, dating back to the reconstructions of Roman ruins in Renaissance treatises.

Tafuri's fullest refutation of my argument is contained in a lengthy footnote in his book on Doge Andrea Gritti, *Renovatio Urbis* in 1984.¹⁴ In response to the documents I had discovered, he proposed that Sansovino's wish to extend the building 'sino al canton della zecca' resulted from a change of plan of 1554. At the same time, however, he adhered zealously to his idea that the original design would have contained only seventeen bays.

Soon afterwards, in 1986, the German scholar Thomas Hirthe sided with my view that Sansovino always intended 21 bays, pointing out, for instance, that the series of male river gods in the spandrels of the Doric order is interrupted in the present central bay by figure of Neptune and Aeolus, giving prominence to the central focus.¹⁵ Hirthe also drew attention to the life of Sansovino first published in 1540 by Giacomo Foresti da Bergamo, which mentioned that the new Library was to house the Procurators' 'habbitatione', as well as the Library and the school.¹⁶ He argued that this phrase suggested that already at this date other functions were intended for the new structure. Personally I do not regard this as strong support for the 21-bay Library, as the final bays as completed contained offices, not houses; rather, I believe that this passage refers to the intention to continue Sansovino's elevation around the south side of the main Piazza, where it would replace the old Procurators' houses. But at the same time, I would argue that Sansovino's design of 1536-7 was a modular elevation intended to remodel the Piazza and Piazzetta,

¹³ MANFREDO TAFURI, *Il pubblico e il privato: Architettura e committenza a Venezia*, in *Storia di Venezia*, VI, *Dal Rinascimento al Barocco*, ed. Gaetano Cozzi and Paolo Prodi, Roma 1994, pp. 406-10 (pp. 367-447).

¹⁴ MANFREDO TAFURI, *Renovatio urbis venetiarum: il problema storiografico*, in M. Tafuri (ed.), *Renovatio urbis: Venezia nell'eta di Andrea Gritti, (1523-1538)*, Roma 1894, pp. 51-2, note 90 (pp. 9-55).

¹⁵ THOMAS HIRTHE, *Il "foro all'antica" di Venezia: La trasformazione di Piazza San Marco nel Cinquecento*, «Quaderni del Centro Tedesco di Studi Veneziani», 35, Venezia 1986.

¹⁶ The text of the life of Sansovino of c. 1539 by Jacopo Philippo [Foresti] da Bergamo is published in MANFREDO TAFURI, *Ricerca del Rinascimento: Principi, città, architetti*, Torino 1992, pp. 364-5.

replacing *all* the outdated structures incrementally, one by one, including the whole length of the Piazzetta.

After Tafuri's premature death, Manuela Morresi took up the baton. Her monograph on *Piazza San Marco* of 1999 is especially valuable for its full analysis of the institutional power struggles between the Procurators of St Mark's and the Provveditori of both the Zecca and the Beccaria.¹⁷ In her magisterial monograph on *Jacopo Sansovino* of 2000, Morresi correctly drew attention to the fact that the revenues of the Beccaria provided essential funding for the building work.¹⁸ She argued that since there were only seventeen bakery stalls in the previous structure, this was a natural point to conclude the Library building. She also highlighted the observation that placing the central axis of the seventeen bays in the centre of the vestibule was just as significant as its eventual placement the main entrance in the centre.

In an article of 2004, E.J. Johnson considered the problematic placing of the main land entrance to the Zecca, now hidden in the gloom beneath the 17th bay of the structure, as all users of the Biblioteca Marciana will know.¹⁹ He argued that Sansovino added the dramatic Doric herms in 1554-6 to the Zecca's land entrance, which then consisted only of a simple rusticated portal, like the existing water entrance at the back. Johnson reminded his readers that a narrow *calle* still separates the Zecca from the Library, and proposed that light from the *calle* would have provided top-lit illumination for the new portal, seen dramatically through the tunnel-like entrance under the Library building.

An intriguing extension to the debate was opened up by the researches of Maximilian Tondro for his doctoral dissertation on the Coronations of the Dogaresse in 1557 and 1597.²⁰ In 2002 Tondro published an article showing that, for the Coronation of 1557, the

¹⁷ MANUELA MORRESI, *Piazza San Marco: Istituzioni, poteri e architettura a Venezia nel primo Cinquecento*, Milano 1999, pp. 67-80

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, note 4, pp. 202-6.

¹⁹ See above, note 1.

²⁰ MAXIMILIAN L. S. TONDRO, *Memory and tradition: the ephemeral architecture for the triumphal entries of the Dogaresse of Venice in 1577 and 1597*, unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Cambridge 2002.

Beccaria constructed a temporary triumphal arch with two facades, enclosing an open-air room in which to welcome the Dogaressa.²¹ Here the butchers indulged in ambitious self-presentation, as if to underline their right to sell meat on that site in perpetuity. One of the Procurators had described the Beccaria as a ‘monster among many jewels’, and understandably the butchers were eager to restore their public image.

The intention of this paper has not been to defend my own position, although this has changed little over the course of four decades, but rather to illustrate the dynamics of scholarship, using one particular debate as a case study. Tafuri’s idea, though based at first purely on intuition, has accrued a rich literature, thanks to his incisive critical intelligence and his incalculable influence on our field. Through his graphic reconstructions, the hypothesis has acquired its own historical ‘truth’. With brilliant insight Tafuri positioned the two buildings that line the Piazzetta in the context of the Republic’s Solomonic self-presentation: the *Domus Sapientiae* facing the *Domus iustitiae*. Thus the two Solomonic virtues of wisdom and justice, claimed by the Venetian Republic, were played out in a compelling visual dialogue on either side of the Piazzetta, reinforced by the biblical pair of giant columns. Such sensitive and convincing interpretative propositions have tended to give added credence to Tafuri’s more speculative hypotheses.

Through teaching and the choice of textbooks, each generation of scholars influences the next one within its own academic tradition. Sadly, the distinct national epistemologies intersect little until the stage of doctoral research, and even at this level linguistic limitations may discourage free cultural exchange. More senior scholars meet at conferences and often become good friends, but their intellectual training and loyalties tend to keep their ideas on parallel rather than converging tracks. It is to be hoped that future generations will achieve less polarised dialogue, thanks to the speed and increasing ease of the electronic communication of knowledge.

²¹ MAXIMILIAN L. S. TONDRO, *The First Temporary Triumphal Arch in Venice (1557)*, in *Court Festivals of the European Renaissance: Art, Politics and Performance*, a cura di J. R. MULRYNE e ELIZABETH GOLDRING, Aldershot 2002, pp. 335-362.



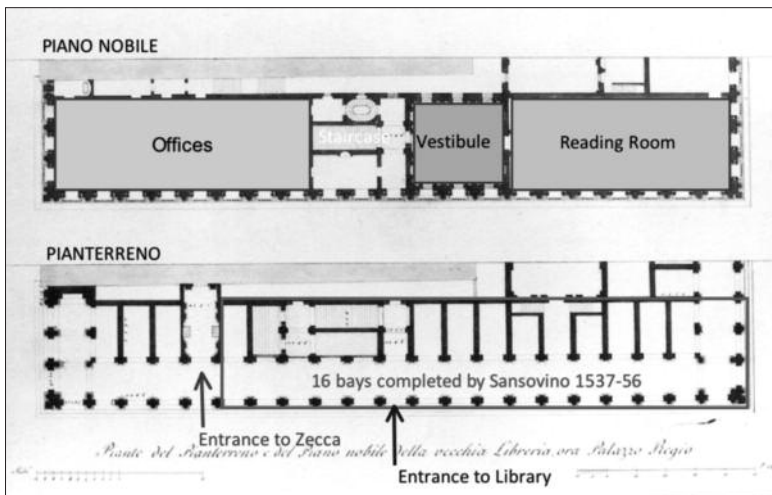
1. Ludovico Toeput, detto il Pozzoserrato, *Fire in the Palazzo Ducale 1577*, detail of left side showing the Biblioteca Marciana, left unfinished at 16 bays long on the death of Sansovino in 1570. Treviso, Museo Civico.



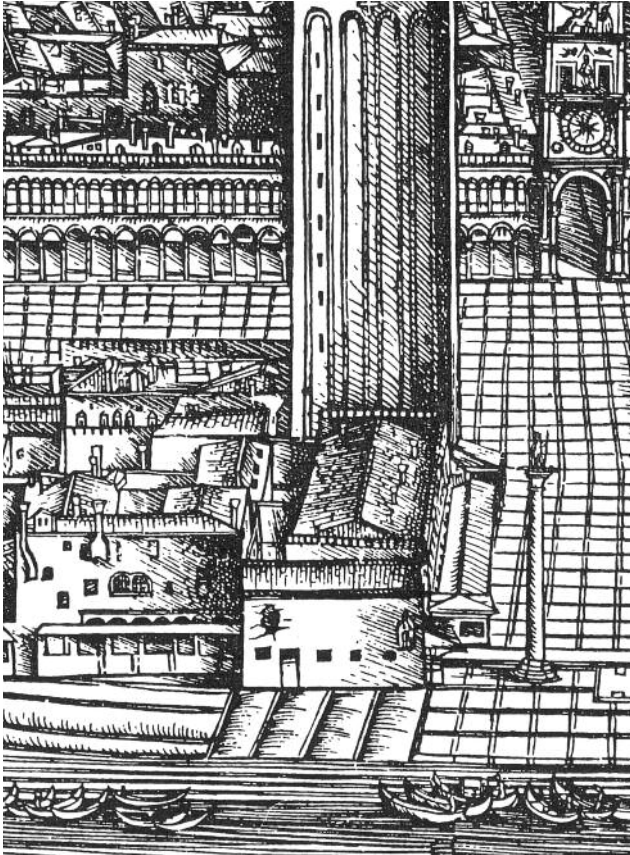
2. Biblioteca Marciana as completed to 21 bays in length in 1588-91.



2 bis. Biblioteca Marciana, detail.



3. Biblioteca Marciana, plan.



4. Jacopo de' Barbari, bird's-eye-view map of Venice, woodcut 1500, detail showing the previous buildings (hostelries, bakeries and meat-market) on the future site of the Biblioteca Marciana.



5. Jost Amman, *The Procession for the Doge's Marriage with the Sea*, detail. Woodcut, mid 16th-century. Venice, Museo Correr.