Palladio's religious architecture in Venice

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PALLADIO'S RELIGIOUS ARCHITECTURE IN VENICE

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the Louisiana State University and Agricultural and Mechanical College in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts

In

The School of Art

by
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B.ID. Louisiana State University, 2009
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Abstract

This thesis focuses on the three churches designed by the Renaissance architect Andrea Palladio in Venice: San Francesco della Vigna, San Giorgio Maggiore, and Il Redentore. Separate chapters devoted to each of these buildings explore multiple issues, among them Palladio’s awareness of the city, its civic rituals, and architectural traditions; his sources of inspiration in the buildings of classical antiquity, especially ancient Roman baths and temple façades; his relationship to the architecture of the recent past, especially in Venice but also on the terraferma; and his ability to adapt his style to suit the requirements of private, public, and monastic patrons. The thesis also examines Palladio’s innovative approaches to some of the most pressing issues of Renaissance church design, most notably the question of centralized vs. longitudinal planning, and the problem of what sort of façade should be placed before a typical church, with its high central nave flanked by lower aisles or chapel.
Introduction

This thesis will focus on the churches designed by the great Renaissance architect Andrea Palladio (1508-80) in Venice: San Francesco della Vigna, San Giorgio Maggiore, and Il Redentore. Separate chapters will be devoted to each of these buildings, in which multiple issues will be explored. Among them are Palladio’s awareness of the city and its architectural traditions; his sources of inspiration in the buildings of classical antiquity; his relationship to the architecture of the recent past; and his ability to adapt his style to suit the requirements of his patrons. In addition, the thesis will examine Palladio’s innovative approaches to some of the most pressing issues of Renaissance church design, most notably the question of centralized vs. longitudinal planning, and the problem of what sort of façade should be placed before a typical church, with its high central nave flanked by lower aisles or chapels.

At the northeastern corner of Italy sits the magical city of Venice. Its culture and history are fascinating, and its art and architecture are beautiful. For centuries, Venice ruled the sea with its powerful navy and trade connections.\(^1\) The city itself is situated on the sea, and this location provided the perfect venue for maritime trade. Like many ports, Venice was exposed to foreign cultures and ideas, which naturally influenced its own art and architecture. The city’s unique location, moreover, presented special problems that gave rise to special solutions. Situated on unstable, marshy land, it needed structures that were relatively light in weight. Hence brick, rather than stone, buildings

were the rule; in any case, adequate sources of stone were not readily available, though expensive multi-colored marbles could be imported for use as richly patterned facing.

The first chapter of this thesis serves as an introduction to the city of Venice and its unique architectural traditions. Venice had strong connections to the Byzantine Empire, which led to a culture influenced by Byzantine art and customs. Materials and ideas acquired during the Crusades and through trade were brought back to the city and integrated with local practice. During the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, Veneto-Byzantine architectural styles increasingly merged with that of the Gothic, which flourished in Venice partly because of the city's location in northern Italy. Even when a style indebted to the Roman Renaissance emerged in the sixteenth century, brought directly from Rome by Jacopo Sansovino, Venetian architecture retained elements of the Byzantine and Gothic traditions.

Wars during the early sixteenth century eventually led to financial strain, and Venetian buildings became less decorative. Ornamentation tended to be stripped down, and architecture generally took on a Roman look as the city attempted to modify its identity by associating itself with Rome. During this time, Palladio entered the building scene in Venice, and Chapter 2 looks at his background, education, and influences. The son of a stone mason, Palladio was born in Padua, but he moved to Vicenza as a young man and spent most of his early career designing palaces and villas on the terraferma. In Vicenza, he formed a close alliance with the humanist Giangiorgio Trissino, who

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furthered Palladio’s education and brought him to Rome, affording him the opportunity to study the architecture of classical antiquity at first hand. Palladio took full advantage of this opportunity upon arriving in Venice, where he encountered the work of Sansovino and almost immediately took it to a higher level.

Palladio’s first project in Venice, the church of San Francesco della Vigna, is examined Chapter 3. His commission here was to provide a façade for a building recently erected by Sansovino, and he created one that stood out from and pushed against the norms of Venetian architectural traditions, including those established by Sansovino. The chapter also looks at Palladio’s initial approach to the problem of creating a unified façade for a building with a nave flanked by rows of lower chapels. In essence, he combined two classical temple façades – a tall narrow one and a broad lower one – into a hybrid entity, a procedure he would continue to follow in his next project, the church of San Giorgio Maggiore.

At San Giorgio, the topic of Chapter 4, Palladio had his first opportunity to design a complete church, not just a façade for a pre-existing building. Thus we will have occasion to examine his solution to the problem of how to reconcile a longitudinal with a centrally planned church. Returning to his method of designing a façade of layered temple fronts for a building with a tall nave and lower aisles, we will also analyze how he succeeded in unifying the façade with a majestic interior inspired by ancient Roman baths. In addition, attention will be paid to Palladio’s ability to address the needs of different clients, both monastic and secular, as well as his sensitivity to the layout of the city and its civic rituals.
Palladio’s third and last Venetian church, Il Redentore, will be explored in the final section of this thesis, Chapter 5. Our analysis of the Redentore will revisit issues discussed in the previous chapters. Once again, Palladio had to cater to the needs of multiple clients (the Doge and the Capuchin Order) and multiple uses (votive church and processional church); respond sensitively to the location of the building within the city; remain aware of Venetian traditions; and confront the issues of form vs. function, longitudinal vs. centralized planning, and high nave vs. low chapels. To do all of this required nothing less than an architectural genius, whose achievements are as impressive today as they must have been in the eyes of sixteenth-century Venetians.
Chapter 1: Venetian Architecture

Venetian architecture was influenced by the uniqueness of the city itself – its cultural traditions, trade, and topography, all of which played a part in the development of Venice’s architectural style. Located on the Adriatic Sea in the northeastern corner of the Italian peninsula, the city of Venice is built on flat and marshy land. Its people had very specific customs, making them stand out as an individual society. The area, consisting of a series of lagoons (Fig. 1), was called Venetia by the Romans, and its original inhabitants, the ancient Veneti, were a boating people who spent their time fishing for a living and exploring its waters.

Fig. 1. Map of Venice

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5 Lane, 2. In 560 CE the natives of the terraferma were forced to move from the mainland and out into the lagoon by the Lombard invasions; Lane, 4.
There were several problems with a city built on the sea. Ships had to be guided into the city with longboats and lighthouses.\textsuperscript{6} The land was unstable and constantly shifting, due to the movement of silt and sand brought about by the changing tides. This caused flooding in some areas and the closing of important channels in others. The shifting sand and unstable ground led to buildings that had to be relatively light in weight. Walls had to be thin so as not to weigh down the building. Another recurrent problem was the frequent outbreak of plagues. Ships carrying diseases had to be quarantined, and the city suffered plagues on and off throughout the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.\textsuperscript{7} There was also a lack of space, which led to buildings being constructed close together and, in turn, requiring that windows be set on the front of the building to allow light into the center of the interior.\textsuperscript{8}

The rise of Venice as an imperial power can be dated to 1204, when the Republic played a major part in the conquest and sacking of Constantinople during the Fourth Crusade. This event represented a boost in Venetian expansion into the eastern Mediterranean and brought fabulous riches back to the city itself. Venice managed to remain politically dominant and economically prosperous not only because of its vast naval and commercial resources, but also because of the semi-legendary stability of its government. While cities in the rest of Italy underwent constant political turmoil, Venice

\textsuperscript{6} Ibid., 17.

\textsuperscript{7} Ibid., 18.

remained stable and, with its sophisticated diplomacy and shrewd merchant class, found ways to expand and prosper in a changing Europe.\(^9\)

For centuries, Venice had supported the Byzantine Empire, but after the waning of Byzantine power in Italy, Venetians took control of Ravenna, giving Venice the strongest navy in the area.\(^10\) Regular contact with Byzantine culture and architecture had a major impact on the architecture Venice itself, as witnessed above all in the design and decoration of the Basilica of San Marco (Figs. 2 and 3). Here and elsewhere, moreover, Venetian patrons and architects incorporated spolia from Byzantium into their buildings, enriching them with ornament while appropriating the prestige of the Byzantine Empire. More than any other city or region of the Italian peninsula, Venice looked to the east as a source of inspiration for its art and architecture. Connections with Byzantium were constantly stimulated by trade with the Empire, as well as by travel associated with the Crusades. Soldiers would return to Venice with a better understanding of eastern culture, as well as with trophies and marbles collected during their travels. The cities of the Byzantine Empire were looted, and their treasures were brought back to Venice.\(^11\)

\(^9\) Lane, 2.

\(^10\) Venice fought many battles to expand and secure her empire. She defeated the Dalmatian fleet in 1000 CE under Doge Pietro II Orseolo, and in 1080 was victorious in the battle against the Normans, helping to secure the trade routes to Constantinople. Throughout the first three Crusades, Venice was a supporter and defender of the Byzantine Empire. However, after a change in the Empire, in which Venice’s privileges were revoked, the Venetians brokered the Crusade that took and plundered Constantinople, as noted above. Lane, 24-25.

\(^11\) Lowden, 349.
Fig. 2. San Marco, Venice

Fig. 3. Interior of San Marco, Venice
During the later Middle Ages and the Early Renaissance, two main styles were current in Venetian architecture: the Byzantine and the Gothic.¹² As already mentioned, direct contacts with the Empire gave rise to strong Byzantine influence in Venice, which survived into the fifteenth and even the sixteenth century. Even after Venetian architects adopted the classical vocabulary associated with the Renaissance, they retained various Byzantine-influenced elements, especially in the ground plans of churches and their decoration with mosaics. Gothic traditions arrived later, but they took root strongly in Venice, as they did throughout northern Italy. To this day, major examples of Gothic architecture survive to document the popularity of the style: important secular buildings such as the Doge’s Palace (Fig. 4) and the Ca’ d’Oro (Fig. 5.), as well as such major churches as SS. Giovanni e Paolo (Fig. 6) and the Frari (Fig. 7).

Fig. 4. Doge’s Palace (Palazzo Ducale), Venice

¹² Howard, Architectural History, 6-7.
Fig. 5. Ca’ d’Oro, Venice

Fig. 6. SS. Giovanni e Paolo, Venice
The Renaissance began in Florence and migrated from there to other Italian towns, eventually reaching Venice. Like all cities, Venice developed specific characteristics in its approach to architectural style, which can still be seen in Venetian buildings of the fifteenth century. One such characteristic is the use of color, which was very popular in Venetian art and easily translated into architecture.¹³ Venice’s exposure to the east and the accounts brought back by travelers of the colorful eastern life and exotic environment caused Venetians to long for color in their own buildings.¹⁴ Since Venice itself lacked stone, being erected on mudflat islands surrounded by water, most Venetian buildings were constructed of brick, but with expensive facing materials such


¹⁴ Ibid., 8.
as fine, multi-colored marbles imported from the terraferma and the Byzantine Empire. As a result, much Venetian architecture flaunts effects of wealth, splendor, and self-confidence, with the intention to impress and, for the many foreign visitors, perhaps also to intimidate. At a time when most cities were surrounded by grim defensive walls, Venice was not. Its open-air location, no less than the expensive materials displayed on so many façades, surprised foreigners. A Dominican friar passing through the city in 1483 described it as having “the ocean for a pavement, the straits of the sea for a wall, and the sky for a roof.”

Fig. 8. Palazzo (Ca’) Dario, Venice

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15 Hills, 1.

16 Ibid., 4.
One typical example of Early Renaissance Venetian architecture is the Palazzo (or Ca’) Dario (Fig. 8), designed by an unidentified architect. Construction on the small palace, which is located on the Grand Canal, began in the 1480s. It was built for the Venetian diplomat Giovanni Dario, who had been exposed to the Turkish Court in his travels, and a generic Turkish influence is vaguely felt in the somewhat exotic-looking façade.\(^\text{17}\) The fine multi-colored marbles of the façade were most likely gathered by the patron during his journeys to Constantinople,\(^\text{18}\) and their circular, geometrical patterning appears to have been influenced by Islamic art.\(^\text{19}\) By contrast with Renaissance palaces of Tuscany, the windows of the Palazzo Dario are not surmounted by classical pediments, but rather by typically Venetian rounded tops.\(^\text{20}\) Moreover, unlike contemporary Florentine buildings, with their axial designs and mathematical precision, the Palazzo Dario betrays another typically Venetian trait: a taste for asymmetry.\(^\text{21}\)

In the sixteenth century, Venetian patrons and their builders abandoned many of the city’s architectural traditions and adopted a style indebted to Renaissance Rome. This style, which can be characterized as that of the High Renaissance, was more influenced by classical elements than the Byzantine and Gothic elements that were so

\(^{17}\) Howard, *Architectural History*, 123.


\(^{19}\) Howard, *Architectural History*, 123,

\(^{20}\) Ibid.

common in Venice almost to the end of the previous century. There are, however, various non-artistic reasons for the shift in taste. The War of the League of Cambrai (1508-16) was devastating for Venice, financially and creatively. As a result, materials became less luxurious and construction was reduced to basic necessities. After the war, Venetians tried find a new identity, calling themselves the “true successors to ancient Rome” and reinforcing this claim in new constructions designed in a conspicuously Roman style.\(^{22}\)

![Fig. 9. Jacopo Sansovino, Loggetta of the Campanile, Venice](image)

\(^{22}\) Howard, *Architectural History*, 161-162, notes that sixteenth-century Venetians considered themselves to be directly descended from the “civilization of antiquity,” since the city was founded by Roman refugees forced from the mainland by the Lombard invasions of the sixth century.
An example of the Classical Roman influence is seen in the Loggetta of the Campanile in the Piazzetta di San Marco (Fig. 9), begun in 1538 by Jacopo Sansovino (1486-1570), a native of Florence who had also worked extensively in Rome. The Loggetta served as a meeting place for nobles and was intended to provide a backdrop for processions and other public events. Since Venetians believed in the Renaissance idea of decorum – that the style of a building must be appropriate to its function – this meant that the Loggetta must boast a grand and noble design. Built before Venice went too far into financial decline after the Cambrai war, it still incorporates the rich materials and colors that would be sacrificed in later Venetian buildings. The Loggetta was made of the finest and the most expensive white and multi-colored marbles and, moreover, is also adorned with costly bronze statues and ornate marble reliefs. Sansovino used the most elaborate orders for the Loggetta, and the building imitates a triumphal arch, thus providing another example of showy triumphalism and underscoring the new Venetian myth of Venice as successor to Rome.

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23 Sansovino was an important sculptor as well as an architect. For his sculpture, see Bruce Boucher, *The Sculpture of Jacopo Sansovino* (New Haven, Yale University Press, 1991); for his architecture, Deborah Howard, *Jacopo Sansovino: Architecture and Patronage in Renaissance Venice* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1975).


26 Howard, *Architectural History*, 179.

27 Concina, 187.

28 Goy, 138.
The Fabbriche Nuove di Rialto (Fig. 10) represents the next phase in the Romanizing of Italian Renaissance architecture in Venice. Built by Sansovino in 1554, the long, sprawling structure on the Grand Canal was intended to regularize the Rialto market – to clean it up and make it more presentable. It moves from the sumptuous style of the Loggetta to a more economical approach. Unlike the Loggetta, saving money was taken into account for its construction. Besides, the function of the building was more utilitarian than ceremonial, so decorum dictated a relatively modest design. In any case, the dominant feature of the Fabbriche Nuove is a simple arcade of white Istrian stone. Furthermore, unlike the ornate Corinthian columns of the Loggetta, the Fabbriche uses the simpler Doric and Ionic orders on its upper storeys, and on the ground floor has a

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29 Ibid., 100.
flat rusticated arcade supported by simple, blocky piers. Finally, in keeping with this simplicity, and in stark contrast with the Loggetta, the building is completely lacking in sculpture.31

Six years after Sansovino designed the Fabbriche Nuove, Palladio arrived upon the scene to alter the course of Venetian architecture yet again. Departing from local tradition, his designs are symmetrical rather than asymmetrical, monochromatic rather than colorful, and inspired by the architecture of classical antiquity rather than that of the Byzantine east or the Gothic north. To some extent, Sansovino paved the way for all this, and Palladio did not ignore his influence. Like Sansovino, he borrowed heavily from the classical tradition, but in a purer, more archeologically correct way that reflects his theoretical concerns. When Sansovino died in 1570, Palladio was finally able to assume a position amounting to official architect of the city. During the last decade of his life, he produced what may well be his greatest work, the votive church of Il Redentore, which, as we shall see, represents a powerful evocation of the ancient Roman world while, paradoxically, paying homage to the architectural traditions of Venice itself.

31 Ibid., 178-179.
Chapter 2: Palladio’s Life

Andrea Palladio was born in Padua on November 30, 1508, and the overwhelming majority of his buildings are located in the Veneto, where he was active during the final wave of the High Renaissance.\(^{32}\) He was born at an ideal time to become a prominent architect, for Venice was rebuilding and revitalizing its architectural fabric after the Italian wars of the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, when Italy was greatly damaged economically.\(^{33}\) It was at the end of these wars that Palladio began his career, with precisely the opportunities he needed to help recapture and renew the architectural culture of Venice and its mainland possessions in the Veneto.\(^{34}\)

Palladio was originally called Andrea di Pietro della Gondola.\(^{35}\) His father, Pietro, having no proper surname, received the nickname *della Gondola* ("of the gondola"). Pietro was a miller and a stone mason who specialized in carving millstones, and Andrea himself was initially involved in stonework.\(^{36}\) Palladio’s godfather, Vincenzo Grandi, was also a mason and was most likely responsible for Andrea’s apprenticeship, at the age of thirteen, to Bartolomeo Cavazza, a stone mason from Vicenza who was working in Padua.

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\(^{34}\) Holberton, 5.

\(^{35}\) Ackerman, 20.

\(^{36}\) Holberton, 16.
at the time. Palladio worked on small jobs for Cavazza and performed various minor tasks in the workshop, such as helping to repair existing buildings. However, his apprenticeship did not last the typical six years; Andrea broke his contract, left after three years, and moved with his father to Vicenza.

In Vicenza, Andrea took up a position as an assistant to sculptors Giovanni da Porlezza and Girolamo Pittoni, the “Pedemuro masters,” so called from the section of town in which their shop was located. Vicenza provided better opportunities for Andrea than Padua. It was a larger city at the time, and much more building activity was taking place there. Palladio lived in the same building as the Pedemuro shop, worked as a stone mason and a sculptor, and did decorative work on buildings in the area. Residence in Vicenza also afforded him the opportunity to study the work of the great High Renaissance architect Michele Sanmicheli (1484–1559), whose most important buildings are located in nearby Verona.

In 1534, at the age of twenty-six, Andrea married a woman named Allegradonna, the daughter of a carpenter, who would eventually bear him five children. His clientele

37 Ackerman, 20.
38 Holberton, 16.
39 Ibid., 17.
40 There were plans to extend government buildings in the area. In addition, the buildings of the famous University of Padua were being refurbished and extended. Holberton, 17.
41 Holberton, 18.
42 Ackerman, 20.
43 Allegradonna was most likely a maid in the household of Bonifazio Pojana, commissioner of Palladio’s early Palazzo Pojana, and Pojana’s wife Angela provided her dowry; Holberton, 18.
and reputation spread through family lines, as well as his through association with the Pedemuro workshop, which worked regularly for wealthy local patrons.\textsuperscript{44} By means of these connections, Andrea received a commission from Girolamo de’ Godi to build his first villa, the Villa Godi (1537-42) (Fig. 11), located in Lonedo di Lugo, north of Vicenza.\textsuperscript{45} Also for the Godi family, he collaborated with the Pedemuro shop to design the main portal of the church of Santa Maria dei Servi in Vicenza and, later, the Godi family chapel in San Michele. Thus Andrea gained essential knowledge from the Pedemuro workshop in the form of technical carving skills, besides learning how a sculpture yard worked and, more importantly, how to apply his architectural studies to specific commissions.

![Fig. 11. Palladio, Villa Godi, Lonedo di Lugo](image)

\textsuperscript{44} Ibid., 19.

\textsuperscript{45} Ibid.
When he was thirty years old, Andrea was assigned to work on a villa for Count Giangiorgio Trissino (1478-1550), an important humanist and intellectual from Vicenza. Trissino took him in, educated him, and, to elevate him to a higher status, gave him the classicizing name Palladio, by which he has been known ever since.\textsuperscript{46} Trissino chose the antique-sounding name as a reference to Pallas Athena, the Greek goddess of wisdom, and because of its associated meaning, “prudent or skilled.”\textsuperscript{47} Trissino also provided Palladio with the social opportunity to network and gain commissions.\textsuperscript{48}

Trissino was interested in architecture and looked to Palladio as a possible assistant. Given Palladio's already advanced age and non-humanist training, however, Trissino did not have time to give him a well-rounded education; instead, Trissino focused mainly on architecture, engineering, ancient topography, and military science.\textsuperscript{49} Through Trissino, Palladio gained further exposure to north Italian architecture and received a general education in architectural theory.

Trissino noticed that Palladio was naturally gifted in mathematics and highly skilled in architectural drafting. Recognizing these talents, he took Palladio to Rome, to measure and draw classical architecture, and throughout his life Palladio continued to educate himself through his travels, sketching classical and contemporary architecture

\textsuperscript{46} Ackerman, 20.
\textsuperscript{47} The name has also, but implausibly, been associated with the fourth-century Roman writer Palladius, who briefly discusses architecture in his treatise on agriculture; Holberton, 21.
\textsuperscript{48} Ibid., 18.
\textsuperscript{49} Ackerman, 21.
wherever he went. On his trip to Rome with Trissino, he was influenced by the architecture of the Roman Renaissance as well as that of classical antiquity. Back in the Veneto, he took special interest in such recent buildings as the Loggia Cornaro in Padua (Fig. 12), designed by the Veronese architect Giovanni Maria Falconetto; in the Mantuan palaces of the Roman émigré Giulio Romano; and in the monumental palaces and city gates of Verona by Michele Sanmicheli (Fig. 13), already mentioned above.

Fig. 12. Giovanni Maria Falconetto, Loggia Cornaro, Padua

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50 Holberton, 19; Ackerman, 25-26
51 Ackerman, 22
52 Ibid., 31.
Through Trissino, Palladio also became a great admirer of the ancient Roman architect and engineer Vitruvius, whose treatise *De Architectura* is our fundamental source of information on the architecture of the classical world.\(^5\) Even more important for Palladio's understanding of ancient architecture than Vitruvius, however, was the contemporary illustrated treatise by Sebastiano Serlio, *The Seven Books of Architecture* (*I sette libri dell'architettura*).\(^5\) This important work served as a model for Palladio's own *Four Books of Architecture* (*I quattro libri dell'architettura*); published in Venice in 1570, toward the end of the author's life, and lavishly illustrated with woodcuts based on

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\(^{53}\) Holberton, 21.

\(^{54}\) Ackerman, 25.
Palladio’s own drawings, it is probably the most influential architectural treatise ever written.

After reaching his maturity, Palladio became a prolific architect in the Veneto. Apart from the Teatro Olimpico in Vicenza, arguably his masterpiece, Palladio’s work falls conveniently into three different categories: public and private palaces, chiefly in Vicenza, including the Palazzo della Ragione (“the Basilica”) (Fig. 14), the Loggia del Capitaniato (Fig. 15), the Palazzo Thiene (Fig. 16), and the Palazzo Chiericati (Fig. 17); suburban villas throughout the region, most notably the Villa Rotonda (Villa Capra) near Vicenza (Fig. 18) and the Villa Barbaro at Maser (Fig. 19); and ecclesiastical architecture in Venice – the subject of this thesis – especially the churches of San Francesco della Vigna, San Giorgio Maggiore, and Il Redentore, all of which will be discussed in detail below.  

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55 The best overall survey of Palladio’s architecture in English is Ackerman. Cf. also Andreas Beyer’s long, detailed entry on Palladio, with extensive bibliography, in Grove Art Online. For the villas, see especially Holberton.
Fig. 15. Palladio, Loggia del Capitaniato, Vicenza

Fig. 16. Palladio, Palazzo Thiene, Vicenza
Fig. 17. Palladio, Palazzo Chiericati, Vicenza

Fig. 18. Palladio, Villa Rotonda (Villa Capra), Vicenza
When Palladio arrived in Venice in 1560, the principal architect of the city was Jacopo Sansovino, whom we have already encountered as the designer of the Loggetta and the Fabbriche Nuove di Rialto. Although Palladio admired Sansovino’s work – especially the Biblioteca Marciana (Fig. 20), which he held to be the best building erected since classical antiquity – his first experiences in Venice were unsuccessful, partly owing to Sansovino’s dominance. Palladio applied for several important civic commissions (e.g., designs for the Rialto Bridge and the Scala d’Oro in the Doge’s Palace), only to have them rejected in favor of proposals by Sansovino. Although his projects for San Francesco della Vigna and San Giorgio Maggiore were accepted, it was not until Sansovino’s death that Palladio came to be regarded as the official architect in the city, a preeminence reflected in his selection as architect of Il Redentore, his only project to be
sponsored by the state and the only one in Venice to be carried out fully according to his plans.\footnote{Ackerman, 34.}

Fig. 20. Jacopo Sansovino, Biblioteca Marciana (Libreria), Venice

Palladio was the only significant architect active in Venice to have been born and trained in the Veneto, rather than in Venice itself or elsewhere in Italy. Other architects who were successful in Venice came from Lombardy, such as Pietro Lombardo (1435-1515) and Mauro Codussi (1440-1504); or, like Sansovino, they came from central Italy. All of these “foreigners” adapted their styles to the Venetian setting. Palladio, of course, is best known for his adaptations of ancient Roman architecture, and his Venetian patrons counted on him to bring the authority of that style to their commissions. At the same time, they would have expected him to work within the parameters of local tradition, and this he certainly did. As James Ackerman, author of the best English-
language introduction to Palladio put it, no other sixteenth-century architect “quite absorbed, as Palladio did, the Byzantine fantasy or the marvelous lightness and radiance of the provincial earlier Renaissance architecture of Venice. The sensuousness of Venetian style was a catalyst that transformed the scholarly and intellectual ingredients of Palladio’s thought in the most human architecture of his age, and made it accessible to every succeeding generation.”

57 Ibid., 19-20.
Chapter 3: San Francesco della Vigna

Palladio was approximately fifty years old when, shortly before 1558, he received his first important ecclesiastical commission: to design a new façade for the Venetian church of San Pietro di Castello. His previous religious projects in Venice were confined to relatively minor monastic work and hence made no impact on the public. The new commission, however, was prestigious. Despite its out-of-the-way location at the easternmost tip of the city, San Pietro served as the cathedral until San Marco assumed that role in 1807. Palladio is known to have submitted designs for the façade to the Patriarch of Venice, Vincenzo Diedo, but the project was abandoned after Diedo’s death in 1559 and remained unexecuted until 1594-96. Designed by a little-known architect, Francesco Smeraldi (Fig. 21), it amounts to a pastiche of Palladio’s authentic façades, chiefly San Francesco della Vigna.

Built on a site originally occupied by a vineyard (vigna), San Francesco is the smaller of the two Franciscan churches of Venice, located in a remote section of town seldom visited by modern tourists, although it contains several notable examples of Renaissance painting and sculpture. The church was originally erected in the Gothic


59 Concina, 215.

60 Prof. Zucker, personal communication. The larger and far more prominent Franciscan church of Santa Maria Gloriosa dei Frari is situated at the opposite side of the city from San Francesco.
Fig. 21. Francesco Smeraldi, San Pietro di Castello, Venice

style in the mid-thirteenth century, but rebuilt between 1534 and 1554 by Jacopo Sansovino (Figs. 22-23) – except for the façade, for which Sansovino's design was apparently deemed too old-fashioned.\(^{61}\) Instead, the commission was transferred to Palladio in 1562 and, along with the unexecuted plan for San Pietro di Castello, signaled his growing reputation in Venice, which accompanied the decline of Sansovino, now in his mid-seventies. It was the first church façade that Palladio oversaw from start to finish in his lifetime (Figs. 24-25).\(^{62}\)

\(^{61}\) Ackerman, 143.

\(^{62}\) Cooper, 77. Palladio had also been commissioned to design the interior wall corresponding to the façade; however, the wall was never built. Concina, 215.
Fig. 22. Jacopo Sansovino, Plan of San Francesco della Vigna, Venice

Fig. 23. Jacopo Sansovino, Interior of San Francesco della Vigna, Venice
Fig. 24. Antonio Visentini, Façade of San Francesco della Vigna (drawing)

Fig. 25. Palladio, Façade of San Francesco della Vigna, Venice
Palladio’s patron at San Francesco della Vigna was Giovanni di Gerolamo Grimani, who inherited the rights to the façade after the death of his brother, Marino di Gerolamo, Patriarch of Aquileia. Although Giovanni succeeded Marino as Patriarch of Aquileia, unlike his uncle and two of his brothers (including Marino) he never achieved the rank of cardinal, since he was suspected of Lutheran sympathies. Having successfully defended himself from these charges at the Council of Trent in 1563, Giovanni must have viewed the façade of San Francesco as an opportunity for self-celebration. His desire to be portrayed with dignity and high status is clearly reflected in Palladio’s design. Giovanni, moreover, was a passionate collector of Roman antiquities, filling his family palace at Santa Maria Formosa (located not far from San Francesco) with “entire and fragmented figures, torsos, and heads in unequaled abundance, . . . all select and praiseworthy.” Thus he would have welcomed the sort of conspicuously classical design for which Palladio was well known. Grimani is represented on the façade by an eagle in a roundel in the main pediment, accompanied by a scroll inscribed with the word Renovabitur (Fig. 26). The inscription calls attention to his renovation of the

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63 Cooper, 77-78, cites the change in patronage as a possible reason for the change in architect from Sansovino to Palladio, and notes connections between the Grimani brothers and Giangiorgio Trissino, whose significance for Palladio’s career was discussed in ch. 2 above.

64 Cooper, 77.


church, while the eagle is a symbol of both Divine Wisdom and the patron’s name saint, John the Evangelist.

If Grimani desired a display of power and magnificence at San Francesco, Palladio certainly produced such an effect with his monumental façade of white Istrian stone (Fig. 25). The impression of power is reinforced by the scale of the building, which is much larger than that of surrounding structures. However, the grandiose scale of the orders on the façade would have been surprising to contemporary Venetians. Venetian Gothic church façades were traditionally made of brick, with Istrian stone used only for

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67 Prof. Zucker, personal communication.
68 Concina, 215.
69 Howard, Architectural History, 195.
70 Huse and Wolters, 96.
More recent façades were clad with multicolored marbles in flat patterns, as in Pietro Lombardo’s church of Santa Maria dei Miracoli (1481-94) (Fig. 27). Façades built mainly of Istrian stone, such as that of San Michele in Isola by Mauro Codussi (1469-78) (Fig. 28),72 were still relatively flat or, as with Codussi’s façade of San Zaccaria (1480-1500) (Fig. 29), consisted of a multiplicity of small-scale columns and pilasters.

Fig. 27. Pietro Lombardo, Santa Maria dei Miracoli, Venice

71 See especially the façades of the Frari (Fig. 7), the Madonna dell’Orto, and SS. Giovanni e Paolo, all erected over the course of the fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries; illustrations in Alessandra Boccato, *Churches of Venice* (Venice: Arsenale Editrice, 2001), nos. 8, 19, and 39. I am grateful to Prof. Zucker for bringing this well-illustrated book to my attention.

72 Boccato, no. 51.
Fig. 28. Mauro Codussi, San Michele in Isola, Venice

Fig. 29. Mauro Codussi, Façade of San Zaccaria, Venice
The central element of San Francesco della Vigna, which corresponds to the nave of the church behind it, was ultimately inspired by the Pantheon. Resembling a Roman temple front, it is dominated by a giant order of Corinthian half columns supporting a massive pediment and flanking a “thermal” window derived from Palladio’s studies of Roman baths. Lower portions of the façade flank the central section and correspond to the rows of side chapels inside the church (see Figs. 22-23). These lateral sections are articulated by smaller columns (and, at the outer limits, pilasters) that support entablatures and segments of pediments, creating what appears to be a low, horizontal temple front that passes behind the taller one. The combination of two temple fronts helps to create a sense of unity between the lateral and central portions of the façade.73 Palladio must have felt that Sansovino had failed to integrate the low side aisles and the high nave.74 To resolve this problem, he placed all of the columns – those of the sides as well as the center – on a common base or plinth that continues across the whole width of the façade, raising both the giant and the small columns high above eye level.75 Unfortunately, this solution left another problem unresolved. As Ackerman put it, “the base on which the large and small orders rest could not look right for both,” producing “an essentially insoluble conflict” with which Palladio continued to grapple in subsequent designs, as we shall see in the following chapters.76

73 This arrangement becomes more developed in Palladio’s façade of San Giorgio Maggiore, to be discussed in detail in the following chapter.
74 Ackerman, 143.
75 Howard, 195.
76 Ackerman, 143.
Completely successful or not, the façade of San Francesco della Vigna represented a dramatic departure from Venetian tradition, as noted above, and perhaps even from Palladio’s own earlier design for San Pietro di Castello. To judge from a document describing the latter, it may have resembled the agglomeration of small-scale elements used by Codussi at San Zaccaria (Fig. 29). The façade of San Francesco also varies markedly from Sansovino’s sober interior, which features flat arches and pilasters of gray stone (Fig. 23). By contrast, the sun-bleached white façade with its boldly three-dimensional columns almost looks like it belongs to a different building. The only way to bring about a more complete unity between interior and exterior would be for Palladio to design the plan and interior, as well as the façade, of a church. This he was finally able to do at San Giorgio Maggiore.

The present chapter has touched on a number of points to which we will return, and upon which we will expand, in subsequent discussions of San Giorgio and the Redentore: Palladio’s adaptation of sources in ancient Roman architecture; his desire for effects of monumentality, dignity, and magnificence; his response to the aspirations of a patron; and his distinctive approach to the problem of how to create a unified façade while reconciling a tall nave with lower side chapels or aisles. At San Francesco della Vigna, Palladio also showed his awareness of recent Venetian architecture, if only by rejecting its principles. At San Giorgio, there begins to emerge a more nuanced response to local traditions, as we shall see in the following chapter.

77 Cited and partially quoted by Wittkower, 89, n. 1.
Chapter 4: San Giorgio Maggiore

San Giorgio Maggiore is an example of Palladio’s ability to address the needs of multiple clients and create a functional, unified space, while adhering to his own principles of design. At San Giorgio, Palladio created a façade that served as an impressive backdrop for the Doges’ processions over the water from the Piazzetta di San Marco and, in a sense, functioned as an extension of the buildings of the Piazzetta itself. As always, Palladio found his principal source of inspiration in the architecture of classical antiquity – most notably, Roman temple fronts and baths – to create a noble façade and a majestic interior space worthy of the Doge. He also took into account the importance of music for the Benedictine residents of the monastery to which San Giorgio belonged, designing a choir with the proper acoustics and layout to accommodate a large vocal group.

Located on a small island across the lagoon from the Piazzetta (Fig. 1), near the tip of the Giudecca, San Giorgio was the first church that Palladio designed completely from the beginning to the end.\textsuperscript{78} The island had been the site of a church dedicated to St. George since 790 and, since 982, of a community of Benedictine monks, whose desire to spend their lives in prayer and contemplation, separated from the world, was satisfied by the isolated locale.\textsuperscript{79} The original Benedictine church and monastery were rebuilt following an earthquake of 1223, but none of the thirteenth-century buildings survive.

\textsuperscript{78} Howard, \textit{Architectural History}, 197.

\textsuperscript{79} Cooper, 109.
Palladio began working on a wooden model of a completely new church in 1565, although renovations and additions to other parts of the monastic complex were already under way, including a simple but elegant refectory built to Palladio’s designs in 1560-1562.

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80 Concina, 215. According to Cooper, 114, the model took a year to build; Wittkower, 90, notes that the foundation stone was laid in 1566.

81 Cooper, 109; Howard, *Architectural History*, 196, noting that the monks had been planning to rebuild the monastery and church since 1520. Discussion of the refectory, which soon came to house Veronese’s colossal *Marriage of Cana* (1563), now in the Louvre, lies outside the scope of this thesis.
Fig. 31. Palladio, Façade of San Giorgio Maggiore, Venice

Fig. 32. Palladio, Interior of San Giorgio Maggiore, Venice
During the design and construction of the new church, Palladio made sure to take into account his clients’ needs, involving the Benedictines throughout the process. Above all, the order wanted the architecture to display its high social status, and Palladio certainly complied with this mandate, creating an imposing façade (Figs. 30-31) and a grand interior (Fig. 32) that still impress visitors to Venice. In addition, Palladio had to be aware of Benedictine traditions and requirements in the space. His chief model was probably the abbey church of Santa Giustina in nearby Padua (1521-60), associated with the largest and most important Benedictine community in northeastern Italy. He used a similar plan (Figs. 33-34), featuring a nave flanked by two side aisles that are separated from the nave by piers and composite columns on pedestal bases; and he also included a transept with arms terminating in semicircular apses, as well as a deep choir likewise terminating in a semicircular apse. As at Santa Giustina, the crossing of the nave and transept is surmounted by a dome, but Palladio avoided using additional domes over the nave and the transept, as found in Santa Giustina and its main prototype, the Basilica of San Marco in Venice. He did, however, include half domes over the transepts.

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82 Cooper, 109.


84 Concina, 216.

85 Howard, Architectural History, 198.

86 Lotz, 149.
Fig. 33. Ground plan of Santa Giustina, Padua

Fig. 34. Palladio, Ground plan of San Giorgio Maggiore, Venice
In San Giorgio the choir – technically, a “retro-choir” – is located behind the altar and separated from the rest of the church by a screen of columns (Figs. 34-35). This division is further realized in the elevation of the choir four steps above the presbytery in front of it; when viewed from the nave, however, the presbytery is raised up on a small flight of steps, giving visual importance and authority to the high altar. The choir, intended for exclusive use by the monks, is lit by windows with alternating triangular

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87 Prior to the sixteenth century choirs were typically located in front of the altar, a place of greater importance. Cooper, 114; Howard, Architectural History, 202.

88 Cooper, 114.

89 Concina, 215.
and rounded pediments.\textsuperscript{90} It is a large and frequently used space in the Benedictine church, accommodating 48 richly carved wooden choir stalls with scenes from the life of St. Benedict, where the monks sat to sing their prayers seven times a day.\textsuperscript{91} The singing of prayers was a major occupation of the order, for the Benedictines considered the choir to be a place where “the work of God was performed.”\textsuperscript{92} Palladio respected their needs and focused on the importance of music in his design of the space, which is larger than conventional choirs and longer than the arms of the transept at San Giorgio itself.\textsuperscript{93} Moreover, acoustical considerations were on Palladio’s mind in his choice of a barrel-vaulted ceiling for the main space of the choir. Contrary to the prevailing school of thought, which favored flat ceilings because of their alleged ability to absorb echoes, Palladio sided with a minority of architects who preferred barrel vaulting.\textsuperscript{94} This, he reasoned, would better project the sound of the choir into the nave of the church, as would the apsidal space at the end of the choir.

Besides considering the specific needs of the Benedictines, Palladio had to balance his own passion for the architecture of classical antiquity with the requirements of a Christian church. The longstanding debate over the question of centralized vs.

\textsuperscript{90} Concina, 216.

\textsuperscript{91} Howard, \textit{Architectural History}, 202; Cooper, 114.

\textsuperscript{92} Cooper, 114.

\textsuperscript{93} Ibid., 114-19, noting that elongation of the choir might have been inspired by Giuliano Careni, Abbot of San Giorgio during the planning (though not the construction) of the church. Careni had previously been Abbot of the Benedictine monastery of San Sisto in Piacenza, where the choir was remodeled around 1500 to be longer than originally built.

\textsuperscript{94} Howard, \textit{Architectural History}, 202, also noting that Sansovino favored flat wooden ceilings in his Venetian churches.
rectangular plans was once again an issue in church design, as it had been since the fifteenth century.\textsuperscript{95} Suppressing his own preference for a centrally planned building, Palladio adopted a longitudinal plan for San Giorgio, which he justified by falling back on a time-honored explanation: that a rectangular plan intersected by a transept forms the shape of a cross. “In the longitudinal church,” Palladio wrote, “the worshipper can see before his eyes the tree on which our Saviour hung. This is the form in which I built the church of San Giorgio Maggiore in Venice.”\textsuperscript{96}

In addition to responding to monastic and liturgical concerns, Palladio also needed to be sensitive to the requirements of civic ceremonies associated with processions to San Giorgio made annually by the Doge and his entourage on Christmas night.\textsuperscript{97} The Doge desired that the architecture of the façade provide continuity with the architecture of the Piazzetta, from which he would embark by boat to San Giorgio.\textsuperscript{98} In fact, one of the early seventeenth-century Doges, Leonardo Donà (1606-1612), even called for the destruction of other buildings on the island of San Giorgio so that the church could be the dominant and defining building of the entire lagoon.\textsuperscript{99} As a result, the façade can be

\textsuperscript{95} See the following chapter for a fuller discussion of this issue.

\textsuperscript{96} Quoted by Wolfgang Lotz. \textit{Architecture in Italy 1500 to 1600} (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 149. See also the end of this chapter, where it is argued that Palladio was able to retain the effect of a centralized plan despite the much greater length of the longitudinal axis of nave, crossing, presbytery, and monk’s choir.

\textsuperscript{97} Boccato, 24. The date corresponds to the eve of St. Stephen’s Day (December 26), and this has special significance for San Giorgio, which has housed the remains of St. Stephen since 1110. It may be noted that statues of Sts. George and Stephen by Giulio del Moro (1555-1616) appear in niches flanking the portal of the façade; \textit{Venezia e dintorni} (Milan: Touring Club Italiano, 1951), 317.

\textsuperscript{98} Concina, 207.

\textsuperscript{99} Concina, 216; Howard, \textit{Architectural History}, 198.
said to create an extension of major buildings fronting on the Piazzetta di San Marco, from which the church can be seen across the water. In particular, it reflects Sansovino’s Biblioteca Marciana (Fig. 20), which, we may recall, Palladio regarded as the finest building erected since classical antiquity. Moreover, his use of white Istrian stone for the façade of San Giorgio is fully in the Venetian tradition. Although Palladio believed that white was the most appropriate color for a church, as it represented purity and hence was more pleasing to God,\textsuperscript{100} the sunlit façade and its reflections in the water create a sparkling effect that is in keeping with the Venetian emphasis on surface and spectacle.

Palladio’s creative problem-solving was required again when it came to the façade, where the blending of temple and church architecture presented the same challenge he had previously confronted at San Francesco della Vigna. As already noted, Christian basilica architecture involves a difference in height between a tall nave and lower aisles that does not exist in temple architecture, where the height of the interior is uniform. As he did at San Francesco, therefore, Palladio designed the façade of San Giorgio as a combination of two classical temple fronts, one superimposed upon the other. The dominant central element, featuring four giant half-columns of the Composite order, stands in front of the nave, and the sides of its pediment parallel the slope of the roof. The side aisles, fronted by smaller Corinthian pilasters supporting parts of a lower pediment, are clearly subordinate, and the pediment over the aisles looks as if it is hidden by the central section of the façade and might continue behind it. Unfortunately, the façade of San Giorgio was not erected until 1597-1610, long after Palladio’s death,\textsuperscript{100}

\textsuperscript{100} Howard, \textit{Architectural History}, 200.
and does not correspond entirely to his intentions. Nevertheless, as at San Francesco, Palladio’s ingenious solution enabled him to bring about a genuine synthesis of classical temple and basilican church.

Despite its late completion date, the façade of San Giorgio still echoes the interior of the church (Figs. 32 and 36), which likewise features giant Composite half-columns rising from high pedestals, and smaller Corinthian pilasters arranged in pairs and rising directly from the ground. The smaller order also serves the important function of helping visitors to relate themselves to the architecture in terms of scale, since the smaller order mediates in size between the height of an average person and the much greater height of the colossal order.

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Fig. 36. Palladio, Interior of San Giorgio Maggiore, Venice

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101 For the discrepancies between the façade as built and Palladio’s original design, preserved in a drawing, see Wittkower, 94-95 and Pl. 33b.

102 Howard, Architectural History, 200.
The main interior space is lit by thermal windows clearly inspired by those of ancient Roman bath houses, although thermal windows are otherwise rare in Italian Renaissance architecture.\textsuperscript{103} The influence of Roman architecture even extends to the forms of the moldings and other decorative details, for which Palladio provided templates to the stone masons hired to execute his designs.\textsuperscript{104} All in all, the main space of the church is unusually bright, clear, and harmonious: bright, because of the numerous large windows; clear, because the contrast of gray stone columns, pilasters, and arches with white stuccoed walls and vaults enables one to grasp the structure of the building at a glance; harmonious, because of Palladio’s well-known sensitivity to proportions.

The plan of the church (Fig. 34) is also notable for the clarity and geometry of its organization. The crossing is a perfect square centered between the entrance and the altar, and this hemispherically domed space is intersected by vaults of equal width on each of its four sides. Two of these sides form the arms of the transept, whose semicircular apses have the same diameter as the dome of the crossing. The groin-vaulted aisles are distinguished from the barrel-vaulted nave and transept by their lower height and different vaulting systems, which help to draw attention to the cruciform shape of the church and to emphasize the dome in the center;\textsuperscript{105} and the separation of these units is further emphasized by the piers along the sides of the nave,

\textsuperscript{103} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{104} Cooper, 111.

\textsuperscript{105} Howard, \textit{Architectural History}, 200.
which are lacking in the aisles.\textsuperscript{106} By emphasizing the domed crossing and giving approximately equal depth to the transept and the presbytery, Palladio created the effect of a centrally planned church; at same time, this effect is negated by the lengthening of the nave – it is three bays long – and the extension of the monks’ choir behind the presbytery. Maintaining an impression of centrality while adhering to the rectangular plan dictated by liturgical practice, Palladio succeeded in combining two different planning systems into a cohesive whole.

For all these reasons, the church of San Giorgio Maggiore represents a remarkable achievement – “a success beyond all reason,” according to Henry James,\textsuperscript{107} and one for which Palladio has rightly been celebrated. His ability to respond to multiple needs, his sympathetic understanding of Venetian traditions, his sensitivity to the unique character of the site, and his ingenious solutions to architectural problems have all been noted. Also remarkable is the way he succeeded in imposing a style that is recognizably his own by creatively adapting classical models to new uses. While still at work on San Giorgio, Palladio received an official commission from the Venetian state to design another church from start to finish: the votive church of Il Redentore. Here he had to deal with several of the same issues he had encountered at San Giorgio. If anything, the results were even more impressive, as we shall see in the next chapter of this thesis.

\textsuperscript{106} Lotz, 150: “The piers are solid enough to make a clean separation between the aisles . . . .”

Chapter 5: Il Redentore

Il Redentore (Figs. 37-45) is located on the Giudecca Island, facing the city. Although not consecrated till 1592, twelve years after Palladio’s death, it was commissioned by the Venetian Senate in 1576 to honor a vow that a church dedicated to “the Redeemer” would be erected as thanksgiving for delivering Venice from the devastating plague of 1575-1576, in which 40-50,000 citizens had perished. The layout, the location, and the religious affiliation of the church were all debated by city officials. A location on the Guidecca was chosen in 1577, partly because it met the size requirements of Palladio’s early drawings, which called for an eighty-foot-long space. However, he later increased the size of the church in order to produce a larger, more grandiose building that forms part of a monastic complex occupying a site whose total dimensions are 170 x 440 feet.

Like many architects of the Renaissance, beginning with Alberti, Palladio considered the centralized plan to be the most perfect and beautiful form for a church. Centrally planned churches, however, were usually impractical. In a conventional rectangular space, the congregation faced the altar, behind which a choir might be

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108 The Doge (Alvise Mocenigo), the Patriarch of Aquileia, and the Venetian Senate all donated money to fund the project; Cooper, 229.
109 Cooper, 234.
110 Cooper, 239.
111 Ackerman, 127. The classic discussion of the centralized plan is that of Wittkower, 16-17.
located. In a centrally planned church this arrangement could not be achieved, for then the congregation would need to surround the altar, which should properly be placed at the center of the building, and there would be no logical place for a choir. Practical problems notwithstanding, Renaissance architects continued to design centrally planned churches; but almost always they were forced to alter such ideal schemes and yield to
necessity, or else the decision was made after the original architect was already dead and gone.\textsuperscript{112}

Palladio’s models and drawings were powerful tools for communicating with his clients, and the Redentore is a good example of his use of such devices.\textsuperscript{113} When Palladio designed the Redentore, he made two models: “one in round form and one in rectangular form,” according to the documents.\textsuperscript{114} Votive churches were typically built with centralized plans, and this was a point of conflict during the initial stages of designing the Redentore. Eventually, a longitudinal design was chosen, in part because it was better suited for the processions that were intended to take place at the site (Fig. 38).\textsuperscript{115} From a distance, however, the façade, which masks the body of the church, and the huge hemispherical dome do give the impression of belonging to a centrally planned structure (Fig. 39).\textsuperscript{116}

In remembrance of the plague, the Doge promised to visit the Redentore once a year, on the third Sunday in July, and he already made the first annual procession during the construction of the church.\textsuperscript{117} To accommodate such processions, a temporary

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\textsuperscript{112} Ackerman, 127. The most famous case of this sort occurred at St. Peter’s, which was designed by Bramante as a centrally planned building in the opening years of the sixteenth century, but turned into a longitudinal one by Carlo Maderno a century later.

\textsuperscript{113} Cooper, 239.

\textsuperscript{114} Ackerman, 127.

\textsuperscript{115} Howard, \textit{Architectural History}, 204.

\textsuperscript{116} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{117} Cooper, 229.
\end{flushright}
bridge constructed of wooden rafts had to be erected across the broad Giudecca Canal, a custom still followed today (Fig. 39), although the makeshift structure has given way to a causeway of linked barges. Il Redentore's location on the Giudecca, far from the center of Venice, adheres to a tradition for votive churches to be situated on the outskirts of a city, in order to create long processional routes. In addition, the Venetian love of spectacle is evident in the placement of the church, since the procession would have to pass through the narrow streets of Venice and out onto the wide canal. As the dark, closed-in streets
gave way to shimmering open water, the brilliant white façade of the Redentore created (and continues to create) a dramatic impression bordering on the theatrical.\textsuperscript{118} This impression is also enhanced by Palladio's decision to raise the building on a pedestal. Like Alberti before him, he believed that “temples” should be elevated above the mundane world at ground level, with a flight of steps leading up to the entry. At the Redentore, this elevation also serves to create an impressive approach to the church, especially for those involved in the procession.\textsuperscript{119}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=0.8\textwidth]{image}
\caption{Causeway of linked barges leading to Il Redentore, Venice}
\end{figure}

\textsuperscript{118} Howard, \textit{Architectural History}, 203-204.

\textsuperscript{119} Ibid., 204.
Palladio designed the Redentore to fulfill the needs of multiple groups of people. The church had three main functions, and all three had to work in harmony with one another. The first was in the choir. This space served a monastic function for the members of the Capuchin Order, to which the church was assigned. The nave was congressional and served the Doge’s need for a grand processional space. The tribune and side chapels served the votive function. These spaces are clearly separated – the nave from the tribune by colossal piers that seem to frame the altar; the choir from the tribune by a screen, or exedra, of four columns that still allow for the passage of light (Figs. 40 and 42). However, this sequence of magnificent spaces was not in line with the beliefs of the Capuchins, an austere offshoot of the Franciscan Order founded in 1520 with the goal of returning to the original tenets of Franciscanism. Devoted to humility and poverty, the Capuchin friars were troubled by the grandeur and scale of Palladio’s project. Respecting their wishes, he designed the choir as a much simpler, relatively unadorned space than the main body of the church (Fig. 42). Thus Palladio responded sensitively to the demands of his commission, creating spaces to satisfy the Capuchins as well as the state, but unifying them through the use of similar materials and a uniformly white color scheme.

The way in which Palladio divided the spaces at Il Redentore was inspired by his study of Imperial Roman baths, which often had spaces that needed to be separated yet

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120 Ackerman, 130; Cooper, 229.

121 The Venetian Senate tried to convince the Capuchins that they were bothered by the grand scale only because they were used to small, modest spaces, but the Senate did agree with them not to allow burials in the church; Cooper, 250. Eventually the friars were provided with simple living quarters behind the Redentore, and Palladio made sure that the exterior of the church open to their view was as plain as possible; Howard, Architectural History, 206.
connected by columnar screens. He seems to have viewed the relationship of the nave, choir, and tribune as analogous to that of the frigidarium, tepidarium, and calidarium of the Roman baths. Palladio also looked to ancient Roman baths as sources of inspiration for the wall thicknesses and the niches in the apsidal spaces of the Redentore, as well as for their structure. Instead of following the medieval practice of employing freestanding piers for the support of vaulting and domes, he used the Roman idea of wall masses. Upon the walls, then, he superimposed colossal engaged columns as a form of ornament, rather than for structural purposes, an approach to building rooted in Roman antiquity that had already been used at St. Peter’s.

The pure white interior of the Redentore (Figs. 40-41), far less ornate than most previous Renaissance churches, and strikingly different from the colorful buildings of Venetian tradition, may have been a response to the desire for austerity dictated by the Counter-Reformation. Instead of rich decorative effects, Palladio focused on the power and strength of the architecture, and he clearly sought a somber and serious look. Following local practice, the walls of the building are made of brick, but coated with whitewashed stucco, while the columns are of white Istrian stone. The overall visual

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122 Ackerman, 132, citing the Baths of Caracalla and those of Agrippa, behind the Pantheon in Rome, both of which were studied and reconstructed by Palladio; see also Ackerman, 172-174 and figs. 92-93.

123 Ibid., 132. Roman bathers would move through these three rooms in succession. The frigidarium was unheated, the tepidarium was “warm,” and the calidarium was the hottest of the three; Tony Rook, Roman Baths in Britain (Buckinghamshire: Shire Publications Ltd., 2002), 23.

124 Howard, 206.

125 Ackerman, 132.

126 Ibid., 130.
effect calls to mind the grand monuments of ancient Rome – or at least the Renaissance interpretation of them – that fascinated Palladio throughout his career.

Fig. 40. Palladio, Interior of Il Redentore, Venice

The nave of the church is vaulted, and the base of the vault is pierced by thermal windows that provide the interior with brilliant light. Engaged columns attached to piers run down the nave in pairs, with niches in the piers between them. There are three chapels on each side of the nave, with vaulted ceilings and arches connected to smaller Corinthian pilasters. The columns give a strong feeling of verticality to the space, offset or balanced by the equally strong horizontal entablature running on top of the columns,
as well as by the entablatures surmounting the niches of the nave and the pilasters of the chapels.\textsuperscript{127}

Fig. 41. Palladio, Interior of Il Redentore, Venice

The choir (Fig. 42) behind the altar does not have the classical orders of the rest of the building, for the Capuchins wanted to “return to the primitive church,” which to them, apparently, meant avoiding overt references to ancient Roman architecture.\textsuperscript{128}

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{127} Cooper, 242.
\textsuperscript{128} Ibid., 245.
\end{flushleft}
Nor does the choir have the elaborate trim or moldings of the nave but, rather, a more conservative molding along the windows and a simple molding at the base of the vault. The windows of the choir fill the space with light, and additional light filters through the columnar exedra (Fig. 43) separating the choir from the tribune.129

Fig. 42. Palladio, Choir of Il Redentore, Venice

129 Cooper, 245.
The plan (Fig. 38) allows for a sequence of side chapels that are accessible without entering the main space of nave and, therefore, without disrupting the mass. Like other Franciscan churches – those belonging to the Capuchin Order in particular – these chapels are linked to each other by a sort of corridor, which functions like an ambulatory.\textsuperscript{130} Designed expressly to accommodate Capuchin demands or not, similar plans are common during the Counter-Reformation, which called for churches with large, uninterrupted areas suitable for preaching and with good acoustics.\textsuperscript{131} Thus there are no aisles in the Redentore, and their absence also gives more space for a wide nave deemed appropriate for the ceremonial processions. In the area of the presbytery,

\textsuperscript{130} Cooper, 245.

\textsuperscript{131} Howard, \textit{Architectural History}, 206. The best-known example of this arrangement is the Gesù in Rome, begun in 1568 by Giacomo Vignola.
however, a transept with semicircular arms broadens out the space and provided a location for the Doge, Senators, and other dignitaries to sit. The dome is at the center of the crossing.132

Like many other architects of the period, Palladio sought a harmonious correspondence between the interior of the church and its exterior design. This was achieved through the monochrome white color of the façade and especially by its monumental columns, which match those of the nave (Figs. 37 and 44). As at San Giorgio and San Francesco della Vigna, however, the most conspicuous feature of the façade is its use of two superimposed classical temple fronts: a tall one in the center, corresponding to the nave, and a lower one, set back behind the central element, corresponding to the side chapels. The former features a pure, unbroken pediment supported by giant columns and pilasters of the Composite order; the latter features a pediment visible only at its extremities, seemingly supported by smaller, flatter, Corinthian pilasters that are doubled at the ends to give a sense of closure. Thus the center of the building is clearly dominant, a dominance that is further stressed at the single entrance to the building, which is framed by a pair of engaged Corinthian columns supporting an unbroken pediment that echoes the larger one above it on a smaller scale.

Viewed up close (Fig. 44), the façade of the Redentore completely masks the body of the church, but its vertical elements pull the eye upward to the bulbous hemispherical dome (Fig. 37), which calls to mind the domes of San Marco. As previously mentioned,

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132 At San Giorgio, by contrast, the location of the transept and dome are unrelated to that of the presbytery and the altar; Cooper, 245.
together the façade and the dome give the impression of belonging to a centrally planned structure, thus making reference to the tradition of centrally planned votive churches. The façade also helps to conceal the external buttresses that run along the sides of the building (Fig. 45) and support the barrel vault of the interior, but the church’s two bell towers remain visible from most points of view and beautifully frame the dome. Constructed of the same warm red brick as the external walls and buttresses, in color the upper sections of the bell towers also echo the façade, as do the external frames of the thermal windows. 

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133 Howard, *Architectural History*, 204.

134 Cooper, 246, notes that the decorative detailing on the bell towers and the thermal windows is made of stucco painted to simulate stone.
The Redentore was a project with many purposes to fulfill. It had to serve the needs of a monastic community, provide a suitable space for impressive civic ceremonies, and, as a votive church, serve as a focus for the devotions of ordinary Venetian citizens. It had to find a balance between the centralized plan of a typical votive church and the basilican plan needed to accommodate processions. Finally, it also had to balance Imperial Roman splendor with Counter-Reformation austerity. Palladio managed to do all these things, while producing a monument that, for its sheer beauty and the way it dominates the Venetian skyline, has seldom if ever been surpassed.
As in most of his work, Palladio drew on his studies of classical architecture in designing Il Redentore. For the façade, the portico of the Pantheon was his principal model;¹³⁵ for the interior, he found his chief source of inspiration in ancient Roman baths. Yet here, as in all of his Venetian projects, Palladio also paid homage to local traditions. The dome of the Redentore is an obvious reflection of San Marco, and one’s view of the church from across the Giudecca Canal – or from the pontoon bridge leading up to it on the third Sunday of July – is in keeping with the centuries-old Venetian tradition of providing viewers with a showy theatrical display. Without losing sight of practical concerns, Palladio maintained the traditions of his adopted city while recreating the grandeur of the classical world. In the final analysis, his greatest achievement may have been to fulfill these goals in a single, monumental, cohesive church.

¹³⁵ Howard, Architectural History, 204.
Bibliography


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Vita

Katherine Fresina was born in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. She graduated from Christian Life Academy in 2004 and during this time developed an interest in art. She earned a Bachelor of Interior Design degree from Louisiana State University in December 2009. Katherine’s love of design and architecture led her to pursue a master’s degree in art history with a focus in Renaissance architecture. She is currently working to complete the requirements for the Master of Arts degree in art history.