JACOPO SANSOVINO
Architecture and Patronage in Renaissance Venice

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II. The Procurators of St. Mark's

Of Sansovino's various Venetian patrons, the most important were the Procurators of St. Mark's, whom he served as *proto* (that is, architect and superintendent of buildings) from the time of his appointment on 7 April 1529 until his death in 1570. In this position, he was permanently employed by the Procuracy on a full-time basis, with the result that none of his other architectural patrons had the benefit of such dedicated service or close attention. His decision to become a permanent resident in Venice is a reflection of his satisfaction with the professional and financial security which the job offered him. The special relationship which developed between Sansovino and the Procurators was, in many respects, the ideal patronage situation. In the course of his career, he established close friendships with several of the individual Procurators, who often succeeded in swaying the decisions of their colleagues. And he was especially lucky that this powerful institution had the means to implement some of his most ambitious artistic ideas. It was the Procuracy which sponsored Sansovino's radical scheme for modernising and improving Piazza San Marco, and commissioned the Library and the Loggetta, two of his most prominent and highly rated architectural works.

The office of Procurator of St. Mark was originally established to take charge of the church which housed the saint's body. Since the time of the first known Procurator, Otto Basilius, who was recorded in 1152, the institution had grown in size and importance to become the main political and financial link between the state and the Church. The position of Procurator was second in prestige only to that of the Doge (apart from the post of Grand Chancellor which was occupied by a citizen, not by a patrician), and it was the only other office which could be held for life. Every ambitious Venetian noble, working his way up the political ladder, hoped eventually to be elected to the Procuracy. The duties of the Procurators had always involved handling large amounts of both public and private money, and it was this financial role which gave the office its supreme importance. As the wealth of the Basilica grew, swelled by bequests and tithes, its treasurers, the Procurators, began to take on the additional duty of administering private estates and trusts. By the later fifteenth century there were nine Procurators in all, split into three divisions. Two of these, the Procuratie di Citra and the Procuratie di Ultra, handled the private estates on either side of the Grand Canal. The third division, the Procuratie de Supra (the one which was to employ Sansovino), had special responsibility for the church itself, and for church property in and around Piazza San Marco. In the sixteenth century the office became somewhat less exclusive. The Procurators were normally elected by a ballot of the Great Council; but after the League of Cambrai, the Venetian Republic, finding itself in desperate financial straits, began to raise large amounts of capital from the richest noble families by the sale of extra Procuratorships. By the end of Grittis' reign there were as many as twenty-three Procurators. Nevertheless, they must all have felt a certain dedication to public service, for the office offered little scope for personal gain or individual power. The salary was negligible for such a distinguished position—in the sixteenth century it was only 60 ducats a year, lower than the salaries paid to many of the Procurancy's employees.

The property in the Piazza administered by the Procuratie di Supra had been bequeathed to the church of St. Mark by Doge Sebastiano Ziani, who died in 1178, together with the nucleus of the famous treasure. Unlike the two other Procuracies, this division administered few private trusts. Its income was derived chiefly from rents paid on the property in the centre of the city—inn, shops, apartments, workshops, banking tables and market stalls—and from church investments. It is important to remember that the Procuracy was strictly a secular institution. The Basilica was not the seat of the Patriarchs of Venice, but the private chapel of the Doge. Until the nineteenth century the cathedral church was San Pietro di Castello, situated in one of the remotest corners of the city—perhaps a comment on the Venetian government's eagerness to exclude ecclesiastical interests from public affairs.

On his appointment as *proto* in 1529, Sansovino was awarded a yearly salary of 80 ducats and the use of an apartment on Piazza San Marco, near the Clock Tower. He quickly impressed the Procurators with his 'diligence, industry, competence and dedication', and his salary was raised twice in the following year, first to 120 ducats and then to 180 ducats. There can be no doubt that he worked hard to earn this remuneration. Vasari makes much of Sansovino's selfless dedication to his employers:

...he was always more than ready to serve the particular needs of each of these signori Procuratori. They in turn, taking advantage of him both in Venice and elsewhere, and never doing anything without his help or advice, employed him continuously, not only for themselves but also for their friends and relations, without any payment. And he was prepared to suffer any discomfort and trouble to satisfy them.

(We must, of course, bear in mind that Vasari's source must have been either Sansovino himself or his son Francesco.)

The *proto* was not merely an architect. He was also responsible for the upkeep of all the buildings administered by the Procuratie di Supra, that is to say the Basilica and the other properties in the Piazza, charity housing and hospitals, the private estates in other parts of the city, and various possessions on the terraferma. The word *proto*, meaning 'first' in Greek, is short for *protomaestro*, the Venetian equivalent of the Tuscan term *capomaestro*. For every repair—even the mending of broken roof-tiles, window-panes or floorboards—he had to inspect the building concerned, prepare an estimate, award the contract to a suitable maestro, and organise the supply of materials. In 1532 Sansovino was
also made responsible for supervising all the workers employed on these jobs. In addition to such time-consuming chores, he had to attend meetings of the Procurators to submit his estimates for approval and to witness other administrative decisions. At the time of his appointment no more than two ducats could be spent on a repair without the formal approval of the Procurators. For the Basilica he produced major works of sculpture—including the bronze reliefs for the singing galleries and the sacristy door—as well as designs for mosaics, tapestries and choir-stalls. Meanwhile, as we shall see, he began to accept major architectural commissions from other patrons in different parts of the city. And despite all these commitments he still managed to maintain a steady output from his sculpture workshop. As far as one can tell, he carried out his architectural work relatively independently, his only recorded assistants being sculptors. Jacopo Sansovino must have been a man of prodigious energy.

PIAZZA SAN MARCO

Piazza San Marco had evolved as two interconnecting open spaces—the Piazza itself, facing the Basilica, and the smaller area in front of the Doge’s Palace known as the Piazzetta (Figure 1). The main Piazza was the scene of the great public processions on religious feast-days, while the Piazzetta was more strictly political in character, its arcades buzzing with political intrigue and propaganda. Most of the Piazza had been arcaded since the twelfth century, when the space was enlarged by Doge Ziani, although some of the porticoes were obscured by lean-to shops and stalls. The Piazza and the Piazzetta at the end of the fifteenth century are vividly illustrated in Gentile Bellini’s famous painting of the Corpus Domini Procession in Piazza San Marco (Plate 5), and in a view of the Piazzetta attributed to Lazzaro Bastiani (Plate 6). Jacopo de’ Barbari’s detailed bird’s-eye view of Venice also records the appearance of the city centre at the turn of the century (Plate 7). Little had changed by the time of Sansovino’s arrival in 1527, except for the rebuilding of the north side of the Piazza by his predecessor, Bartolommeo Buon, after a disastrous fire in 1512.

This wing, now known as the Procuratie Vecchie (Plate 8), was let out by the Procuracy as shops and apartments. Meanwhile the Procurators themselves still lived, rent-free, in the ancient houses on the opposite side of the Piazza (a valuable subsidy to their modest allowances).

Vasari records that Sansovino was the first proté to try to improve the appearance of Piazza San Marco. Both Vasari and Francesco Sansovino describe how, in the year of his appointment as proté, with Doge Gritti’s support, he organised the removal of the sordid wooden stalls around the two great columns at the lagoon end of the Piazzetta. In the early sixteenth century the centre of Venice was cluttered with temporary shacks and stalls—both legal and illegal. Money-changing booths stood at the base of the Campanile, and bakers’ shops occupied some lean-to huts nearby. Meat and vegetable stalls and even latrines surrounded the great columns, at the very place where the most distinguished visitors were welcomed to the city. Five rather dubious hostelries, as well as the meat market, were housed in the decrepit buildings in the Piazzetta, facing the Doge’s Palace. And there was a row of cheese-and-salami shops along the lagoon side of the Mint.
Clearing such eyesores from the city centre was not a simple matter, for their very existence was perpetuated by strong economic pressures. To the Procuracy the rent from the shops and stalls was a substantial source of revenue. The tenants of these properties were in turn dependent on the custom of the crowds who frequented the Piazza. Foreign visitors, since the time of the Crusades, had needed guest-houses and taverns, as well as money-changing facilities. Tenants of shops and hostellers often held long-standing rights to premises in the Piazza. Only if the Procuracy offered suitable accommodation elsewhere could such tenants be evicted. And since empty sites in the centre of Venice were almost non-existent by the sixteenth century, moving one tenant probably involved further evictions, and the provision of yet more alternative premises.

After the decision to clear the space around the great columns, eight new stalls on the waterfront beyond the Mint were erected for the displaced green-grocers.\textsuperscript{22} The Procuratoria de Supra's radical programme of general reforms, formulated in 1531, included a bolder resolution, almost certainly suggested by Sansovino himself, to keep the whole Piazza absolutely free of stalls and other obstructions, except during the annual trade fair at the Festa della Sensa.\textsuperscript{23} Throughout Sansovino's career as probo, attempts were made by the Procuracy to shift commercial activities away from the political centre of the city, but they were constantly thwarted, either by the shortage of space, or by blatant disregard of the Procurators' orders. During the great rebuilding schemes which Sansovino launched in the Piazza, shops which were displaced when the sites were cleared were, of necessity, moved temporarily to the foot of the great columns, in spite of the resolutions to keep that part of the Piazza clear.\textsuperscript{24} Illegal stall-holders—selling goods such as poultry, eggs, fruit and vegetables—were a continual problem. Many of them found trade so profitable that they were undeterred by the penalty of a 25 lire fine and the confiscation of their wares.\textsuperscript{25} In 1555 the Procurators threatened offenders with 15-day prison sentences in addition to the usual punishments.\textsuperscript{26} A year later the fine was
raised to 50 lire, but still obstinate traders disobeyed the regulations. Eventual-\nally, in 1569, the year before Sansovino’s death, the Council of Ten had to\nintervene with a decree banning stalls and counters from the great columns\nand the arcades of the Doge’s Palace. Of course, the separation of commercial and political activity in the city\ncentre was not a concept invented by Sansovino. It was an ancient tradition in\nItalian urban planning, given new life by Quattrocento architectural theorists\nsuch as Alberti and Filarete. Indeed such a division already existed in Venice\nitself. The commercial centre had always been in the part of the city known\nas the Rialto on the other side of the Grand Canal, linked to Piazza San Marco\nby the street called the Merceria. Nevertheless, as we shall see in the following\nchapter, the distinction was not clearly defined—some political activity took\nplace at the Rialto, and some commercial business in Piazza San Marco. To\nSansovino we must give credit for trying to clarify the contrasting functions\nof the two centres. It was thanks to his initiative that the Procurators persistently\ntried to play down the commercial aspects of life in the Piazza.

Sansovino’s greatest contribution to the appearance of Piazza San Marco was not, however, the redistribution of food stalls, but his far more significant\nplan to replace all the more dilapidated buildings with new ones. At the time\nof his arrival in Venice, many of the existing structures in the Piazza were\nnearing the end of their useful life, and the fact that this coincided with a phase\nof economic and political recovery in the Republic gave him the opportunity\nto initiate one of the most ambitious programmes of urban renewal in sixteenth-\ncentury Italy. As the paintings of Bellini and Bastiani indicate (Plates 5 & 6),\nthe south side of the main Piazza and the west side of the Piazzetta still preserved\ntheir ancient Veneto-Byzantine buildings. Now that the whole of the north\nwing of the Piazza had been reconstructed, the shoddy state of the old buildings\nwould have been even more obvious. Since the Procurators themselves lived\nin this part of the Piazza, they were constantly reminded of the urgency of the\nproblem. The cost of maintaining their antiquated houses was steadily rising,\nand parts of them periodically threatened to collapse completely. Faced with\nsuch strong incentives, the Procuracy decided to remedy the situation. On 14\n
July 1536, Sansovino was commissioned to make a model for a new building\non the site of their old houses (extending as far as the church of San Geminiano),\nwith two storeys of apartments for Procurators’ dwellings above the ground\nfloor, like the recently-built wing by Buon on the other side (Plate 8). What transpired in the Procuracy in the months which followed this\ndecision has not been recorded, but the project must have been discussed\nverbally, for it underwent a radical transformation. In the event, for unspeci-\nfied reasons, construction was begun not on the south side of the Piazza as first\nproposed, but in the Piazzetta opposite the Doge’s Palace. On 6 March 1537\nit was recorded that work had just started on the site of the bakers’ shops near\nthe Campanile, using a model prepared by Sansovino. It was on that day that\nthe Procurators resolved to house in the new building (originally intended for\ntheir own dwellings) the magnificent collection of Greek and Latin manus-\nscripts bequeathed to the Venetian Republic by Cardinal Bessarion in 1468. This was a momentous decision, for the Library of St. Mark’s was to become\nSansovino’s best-known work.

As Francesco Sansovino pointed out in his guide of 1581, his father proposed\nto continue the elevation of the Library around the whole of the south side of\nthe main Piazza, as far as the church of San Geminiano. It must have been\nSansovino who suggested widening the main Piazza, making it trapezoid-shaped\ninstead of rhomboidal, so that the Basilica became the central feature at the\neast end (Plate 9 and Figure 1). This plan drew attention to the Campanile,\nwhich emerged as a separate monument in its own right, and allowed the\narcade to run unbroken around the corner between the Piazza and the Piazzetta. Sansovino even planned to continue the porticoes of the Piazza along\nthe front of the little church of San Basso near the Clock Tower. After\nSansovino’s death it was left to Scamozzi to complete the whole scheme, but\nthe later architect did not simply continue the two-order elevation of the\nLibrary, as Francesco Sansovino suggests was his father’s intention, but built\ntwo storeys above the ground floor to comply with the original commission for\nthat part of the Piazza (Plate 10). What Sansovino himself would have done\nis unclear. If he really intended to extend the two-order elevation around the
main Piazza, then Scamozzi altered the delicate balance between the heights of the two sides, and lost something of the effect of a huge open-air room with the ceiling removed. However, it is highly unlikely that either architect would have been able to resist the Procurators' demands for space in their new residences.

Sansovino was not the first architect in Renaissance Italy to undertake such a radical renewal of an urban complex. The effectiveness of arranging the various buildings of the city centre in a single unified scheme had already been demonstrated in the fifteenth century in the new town of Pienza, designed by Bernardo Rossellino. In emphasising the continuity of the portico Sansovino was following in the wake of more recent schemes for transforming town centres by the construction of new arcaded buildings—as at Vigevano and Loreto. Parallel to his activities in Piazza San Marco were Michelangelo's plans to give a new face to the Capitol, the centre of Ancient Rome. Yet Sansovino's own achievement can scarcely be underestimated. His deep understanding of the complex economic and human problems involved, his capacity to conceive ideas on a huge yet realistic scale, and his intimate relationship with his distinguished patrons, allowed him to transform the appearance of the centre of Venice—giving it dignity, coherence and harmony—even if he never lived to see the final result.


THE LIBRARY
The Library of St. Mark's lies along the west side of the Piazzetta, facing the Doge's Palace on the opposite side. It is one of the most striking buildings in Venice (Plate 11). The elaborately carved Istrian-stone façade is twenty-one bays long, with a Doric order on the ground floor surmounted by an Ionic piano nobile and finally a crowning balustrade carrying a row of skyline statues. On the west side it adjoins the State Mint, which Sansovino was also to rebuild during the same period. (This commission, awarded not by the Procuracy but by the government, will be discussed in the next chapter.) The façade of the Library exudes a richness appropriate both to the distinguished site and to the eminence of the Procuracy which commissioned it. What were the circumstances which led such a notable monument to be conceived and constructed?

The choice of the Piazzetta site for the Library in 1537 was made after over half a century of indecision and vacillation. It was no small scandal that Bessarion's bequest had been neglected for so long. It included one of the richest collections of Greek manuscripts then in existence—some 500 in all. And the fact that Venice was a major centre of Greek studies made this state of affairs even more disgraceful. The conditions of the bequest had stipulated that the Procurators should provide suitable premises for the Library in or near the Basilica. At first the books were stored in a room near the Doge's Palace, but
they took up valuable space, and at one point the Senate even considered handing them over to the monastery of Santi Giovanni e Paolo. In 1535 another proposal, to house the Library in Buon’s new wing in the Piazza, was revoked because of the shortage of public funds in the aftermath of the League of Cambray. Eventually, in 1537, the precious books, still in their original crates, were moved out of the Doge’s Palace into an upper room in the Basilica.

However, this makeshift solution did not satisfy everyone. By this time some of the books had been damaged, and others lost. The two people who made the greatest efforts to persuade the Procuracy to carry out Bassari’s wishes and to give the books a suitably distinguished home were the Procurator Vettor Grimani (Plate 12) and the new librarian, Cardinal Pietro Bembo (Plate 13). Vettor Grimani, as Vasari tells us, was one of Sansovino’s closest friends, and a loyal supporter of the architect. He was the grandson of the previous Doge, and nephew of Cardinal Domenico Grimani who had employed Sansovino in Rome. In April 1532, Vettor urged his colleagues to give first priority in their building programme to the provision of a new library, before they used up any funds on the reconstruction of their own houses. A few weeks later, Bembo, who was also a friend of Sansovino’s, reminded Doge Gritti of the need to find a permanent home for Bassari’s bequest, and the Doge called the Procurators to discuss the matter. Since his appointment as librarian and official historian in 1530, Bembo had been trying to recover ‘borrowed’ books and to restrict lending, and he also took trouble to make provisions for visitors to consult the codices, and for manuscripts to be printed or copied. He was a most assiduous librarian—stimulated by his fervent enthusiasm for classical studies—and he must have felt a deep sense of shame at the sad state of Bassari’s priceless bequest. His intellectual curiosity also embraced a keen interest in architecture, and it was this combination which made him a particularly powerful promoter of the new Library.

As we have seen, there is no evidence to suggest when the initial commission, issued in 1536 for a three-storey building in the Piazza, was amended. Whether the new function of the Piazzetta building as a library called for a completely revised model, or indeed whether a three-storey design was ever produced, cannot be ascertained. Construction work had begun in the Piazzetta in February 1537, only a month or so before the decision to put Bassari’s library there. Thus the building had clearly not progressed very far by the time the change was made. The purchase of materials and monthly payments to workers continued for the next three years without interruption, although during this initial burst of activity no more than a small section near the Campanile was under way. The date 1538 appears in one of the arches at this end of the building. Of the five hostels on the site, only part of the first of these, the Pellegrino, had so far been demolished, together with the bankers’ shops in front of it.

It would have been inconceivable to clear the whole of such a valuable site at the very beginning. Hostelry rents were considerably higher than those of ordinary houses and shops. Since the Procuratoria de Supra depended on rents as its main source of income, piecemeal demolition was the only sensible procedure. Besides, the Procurators were legally obliged to keep at least three inns in Piazza San Marco, and it was not easy to find alternative sites for the demolished hostels. Provision for moving the Pellegrino was not made until 1544 when it was decided to pull down the rest of the inn. A group of houses near the Piazza, in the street known as the Spadaria, was selected and converted for the purpose. Sansovino’s scheme for this hostelry provided for several new shops as well, a useful supplement to the Procuracy’s rent income. This was one of the projects mentioned by Vasari which earned for Sansovino the favour of his employers by increasing the revenue accruing from their properties. In order to carry through such a major building programme as the new Library, he shrewdly realised that he had to convince them of his awareness of the need to economise in other ways. Vasari’s account of Sansovino’s career as proto emphasises how he was a financial boon to the Procurators, for which ‘he fully deserved their love and affection’.

The basic model for the Library, described in one of Aretino’s letters in 1537, consisted of a two-storey elevation, Doric below and Ionic above. However, it can have been no more than a repeatable bay system, for a design for the corner had still not been supplied in 1539. In that year Sansovino carried off a remarkable publicity stunt by appealing to architects from all over Italy for suggestions. The problem he posed was how to comply with Vitruvius’s recommendation that half a metope should fall at the end of a Doric frieze (Plate 14). (Since the triglyphs must be placed above the columns, there is normally no space for a full semi-metope beyond the final corner column.) In
only one window fell, together with the vault above it.\(^{63}\) Sansovino estimated the cost of repairing the damage at 800–1,000 ducats, a mere fraction of the amount already spent on the building. He blamed the collapse chiefly on the effects of frost, the vibrations caused by artillery fire from a galley, and the premature removal of the props by ignorant workmen. But he was forced to admit that his employers’ preference for a wooden ceiling—voiced some time before by the Procurator Antonio Capello—was probably wise.\(^{64}\) Sansovino’s experiences in the circles of Bramante and Raphael in Rome had left him with a high regard for great vaulted spaces, but in Venice he was forced to compromise with the more conservative wishes of his patrons, who were aware of the potential instability of the terrain in the city.\(^{65}\) As we shall see, this was not the only occasion on which Sansovino was persuaded by Venetian clients to use wooden beams, which had the advantage of greater elasticity, rather than a vault.

Less than a year after the disaster the building was inspected and found to be ‘stronger, safer and more durable than before the collapse’.\(^{66}\) Yet a proposal to grant him an interim payment of 100 ducats as a means of livelihood was turned down because of the opposition of one Procurator, Piero Grimani, and the absence of two others.\(^{67}\) His salary was not restored until more than two years after the calamity.\(^{68}\) and the sum of 1,000 ducats which he owed for the repairs was not finally discharged until twenty years afterwards when it was set against payments for various sculptural commissions.\(^{69}\) The submissive way in which Sansovino accepted his fate is a measure of his respect for his employers and his acknowledgment of their absolute authority over him. Indeed he commented wistfully to Bembo in his letter of 1346, ‘May God forgive the one who wished it to be done in that way.’\(^{70}\)

In the same letter to the librarian, Sansovino claimed that the Library was now usable. He was a little over-optimistic, considering that the roof had not yet been built, but this was soon remedied. At the end of 1346, the Procurators borrowed 300 ducats from their trust funds to pay for the roof, so that the first five shops in the arcade could be let to bring in some revenue.\(^{71}\) By the early fifties the first seven bays—the very ones which contained the Library reading-room on the piano nobile—had been completed.\(^{72}\)

The next stage in the demolition of the hostleries began smoothly. In 1350 the tenants of three houses in Campo Rusulo, a little square near Piazza San Marco, were evicted so that their homes could be converted for the Osteria del Cavaletto.\(^{73}\) Rehousing the last of the hostleries in the row, the Lion, turned out to be the most complicated undertaking. Two possible sites were considered—one in the Merceria, and one at Santa Maria in Broglio—but each turned out to be unsuitable. The former was a cramped site, exposed to a serious fire-risk, which needed an expensive conversion. The latter was occupied by a stubborn tenant who steadfastly resisted every attempt to evict him.\(^{74}\) Eventually, in 1356, another site was chosen, and the Lion was rehoused in Campo Rusulo near the new Cavaletto.\(^{75}\) According to Vasari, the moving of these hostleries increased the Procuracy’s rent income by 3,400 ducats a year, an estimate supported by the evidence of surviving inventories.\(^{76}\) The Procurators had now fulfilled their obligation to retain three hostleries in or near the Piazza. In consequence, the replacement of the two other demol-

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15. The Library, detail showing corner.
ished hostelries, the Luna and the Rizza, was less pressing, and these were not reopened in new premises until the 1570s.77 The whole of the main hostelry block had now been demolished. Only a smaller building at the far end of the site, beyond the entrance to the Mint, was still standing.

The storm which had broken over the collapse of just one bay of the Library is a symptom of the enormous importance which was attached to the project. It was the prestige element which encouraged the Procurators to make a special effort to press on with the building work in the 1550s, despite the fact that the boom conditions of the thirties had now been superseded by a more problematic situation of high inflation. The prospect of additional rent income from the new shops in the arcade was an extra incentive. In 1551 they decided to elect one of their number every year to take special responsibility for the scheme.78 The incomplete state of such a conspicuous monument was a source of shame and embarrassment to the Procuracy. As they explained in a long motion in 1552, they felt a duty to their ancestors, who had spared no expense in embellishing the city, to complete the building 'for the honour and dignity of our Republic, and for the benefit of the church'.79 The odd appearance of the partly-finished Library is clear from two engravings dating from the mid-sixteenth century (Plates 16 and 31). In the drive to complete the project, attempts were made to keep strict control over the building expenses.80 But this alone was not enough. In the early fifties the Procuracy resorted to various extra fund-raising measures to augment the usual annual grant of 1,200 ducats set aside for the building. Money was drawn from a variety of sources—from the recovery of unpaid rents, the sale of unprofitable terraefera holdings, income from government bonds held by the Procuracy, the rent on two priories near Bergamo, and even loans from the kitty which financed the day-to-day running of the Procuracy.81 Thanks to these exceptional provisions, work proceeded at an unprecedented rate. During the three-year period 1551–54 exactly twice as much of the building was constructed as in the previous fourteen years. By 1554 fourteen bays had been finished, and two years later the Library was sixteen bays long.82

The later 1550s were devoted chiefly to the decoration of the interior, so that the Library could finally be opened. The first stage was the execution of the grand marble portal of the reading-room, begun in 1553 (Plate 17).83 The painted decoration of the ceiling of the salone also took high priority (Plate 18). Contracts were awarded to seven different painters for the twenty-one ceiling roundels in 1556.84 The books were probably moved from the Basilica to the new Library soon after the completion of the ceiling, and they were certainly in their new home by 1564—a century after Bessarion's bequest.85

The decoration of the vestibule and the staircase, a less urgent matter, was begun somewhat later, in 1559.86 Sansovino treated these two components as separate elements in his design (Figure 11)—in contrast to the other famous library then under construction in Italy, Michelangelo's Laurentian Library in Florence, in which the vestibule actually contained the staircase leading up to the reading-room. In Sansovino's Library the vestibule had a specific function...
of its own, to house the public school previously held near the Campanile. In this school two lecturers were employed by the State to give classes to young nobles in humanistic studies. The fact that the range of the curriculum—Greek and Latin philosophy, law, history and literature—mirrored the contents of Bessarion's library made the vestibule a most appropriate setting. Just as the iconography of the reading-room ceiling, extolling the pleasure and satisfaction afforded by learning, encouraged the library-users in their quest for knowledge, so Titian's allegorical painting on the ceiling of the vestibule (Plate 19), thought to represent Wisdom (or possibly History), aimed to inspire the young patricians to study diligently. Work on the wall-decoration and the wooden furniture of both the vestibule and the reading-room dragged on into the 1560s and beyond, but apart from these finishing touches both rooms were virtually finished by the time of Sansovino's death in 1570. The vestibule was converted into a museum for the Grimani collection of antique sculpture in 1591–96, and apart from the ceiling the original decoration and furnishings were removed. However, the staircase still preserves its rich alt'anta stucco and painted ceiling decoration (Plate 20).

Unfortunately the architect never lived to see the remaining five bays of the building erected. The Library now extended as far as the entrance to the Mint (Plate 21). It still remained to demolish the last building on the site, which contained a meat market on the ground floor. The five bays yet to be built were to contain the Procurators' offices on the piano nobile. The original intention had been to incorporate the meat market into the lagoon end of the new building, but it was now becoming apparent that, because of the space taken up by the portico, there would not be enough room left for the butchers' stalls. In 1563 Sansovino surveyed three possible alternative sites, but the discussions which followed in the Procuracy made it clear that none of these was ideal. Yet the need to remove the meat market from the Piazzetta was now fully recognised—it was after all hardly appropriate for such a distinguished
site. Its transfer would be a natural sequel to Sansovino's earlier attempts to separate commercial and political activities in the city centre. Eventually, in 1565, the Collegio decided on the site preferred by Sansovino himself, at Santa Maria in Broglio, but after this the matter seems to have been dropped. In the past the Procurators had been prepared to take extraordinary trouble over their greatest showpiece. Now, however, the Library's chief promoter in the Procuracy, Vettor Grimani, was dead; and the aged Sansovino seems no longer to have had the energy or influence to overcome such difficulties. The meat market was not moved until 1580, and the last five bays were finally erected under Vincenzo Scamozzi between 1588 and 1591. 90

It is sad that Sansovino never saw the work which is generally considered his masterpiece in its finished state. According to Vasari, widely travelled connoisseurs judged it to be without parallel anywhere. 91 This was also the building which Palladio called the richest and most ornate since Antiquity. 92 It was the "all antica" character of the Library which most impressed contemporary critics. Aretino wrote in a letter to Sansovino, "You are the man who knows how to be Vitruvius." 93 Sansovino's vast knowledge of the antiquities of Rome and his thorough familiarity with Vitruvian doctrine were welcomed in Venice, the city which hungered for opportunities to rival the great civilisations of Antiquity. 94 As the Senate pointed out in their decree of 1515, the whole notion of building a splendid public library was a conscious attempt to emulate the Ancients. 95 Few libraries since Antiquity had been public—into the Middle Ages most of them were attached to princely courts or monasteries, and used only by certain privileged scholars. 96 Bessarion's stipulation, in the conditions of his bequest, that his library should be accessible to any reader thus offered a great chance to re-create an aspect of ancient civilisation. 97

Both Vitruvius and Alberti had expressed admiration for the libraries of Antiquity in their treatises, but neither gave any indication of the appearance of the buildings they occupied. 98 Classical literary sources were a little more informative. For instance, Pausanias in his guide to Greece described the library built by Hadrian in his temple in Athens as "the hundred columns of Phrygian marble, with walls built just like the columns, and pavilions with gilded roofwork and alabaster, decorated with statues and paintings. Books are kept in them." 99 The remarkable series of resemblances between Sansovino's Library and these fragmentary records of ancient prototypes—the vicinity to the Basilica (or temple), the adjoining vestibule and school, the surrounding colonnade, the fine precious marble columns, the gilded ceiling, and the rich painted and sculptural decoration—can hardly be fortuitous. 100 After all, the humanistic emphasis in the contents of Bessarion's bequest called for a classicising setting. To an even greater extent than in Michelangelo's Laurentian Library (which was, in fact, part of the monastery of San Lorenzo), little survived in Sansovino's project of the ascetic atmosphere of medieval libraries. 101 Even the choice of the Piazzetta site for the Library had a classical justification, for it complied with Vitruvius's recommendation that libraries (like bedrooms) should face the east—to admit morning light and to protect the books from decay. 102 Vitruvius's treatise, published in Venice in 1511 in Fra Giocondo's famous edition, was well known in the city (a fact which accounts for the amazing impact of Sansovino's corner solution). 103

Despite Vasari's claim that the Library first demonstrated to the Venetians how to apply Vitruvian discipline in architecture, Sansovino did not adopt strictly Vitruvian proportions for the orders of the Library, treating the 'grammar' with a freedom more typical of ancient Roman architecture in reality than Vitruvius's codification would suggest. 104 But unlike the other architects who contributed the fruits of their Roman experience to the local building tradition, Sansovino had the rare opportunity of embarking on a building project on the prodigious scale of the ancients, the Library being conceived to extend around the whole of the south side of the main Piazza to the church of San Germainino. Thus its "all antica" character not only reflects the contents of Bessarion's bequest, but also expresses the grandeur of the city's political centre as a whole, the classical reminiscences gratifying the yearning of the Serenissima to emulate ancient civilisations. 105

To Venetians it was naturally the unfamiliar classical elements in the Library which made the strongest impression. To an outsider, on the other hand, the peculiarly Venetian character of Sansovino's design would have been equally striking. It is difficult to imagine the Library in any setting other than Venice. The degree to which Sansovino managed to assimilate the indigenous architectural tradition, even in his first Venetian works, is remarkable. The Library reproduces the basic arrangement of the previous building on the site—the two-storey elevation with a ground-floor arcade and balconies on the piano nobile (Plate 6)—which would have been foremost in the minds of his employers when they commissioned the new building. Sansovino replaced the Veneto-Byzantine crenellations with a more up-to-date balustrade (recalling Raphael's Palazzo dell'Aquila in Rome), and crowned it with a row of skyline figures, complementing the statues on top of the Basilica. Florid skylines are a distinctive feature of the Venetian townscape. Furthermore, the use of local materials gives the Library a strong Venetian flavour. Istrian stone, transported cheaply to Venice by sea, is exceptionally easy to carve, and the fall of morning light on the brilliant white stone brings out the richness of the carving and emphasises the deep shadows of the portico. The façade of the Library in fact plays no structural role, but is simply a veneer superimposed on a brick skeleton beneath. In Venice, elaborate Istrian-stone façades were a feature of the more ostentatious buildings, such as the Scuola Grande di San Rocco (Plate 74), begun two decades before the Library. Similarly, plentiful supplies of glass in the city allowed Sansovino to eliminate the wall-surface as an expressive element in the design. Air seems to circulate freely through the building—through the crowning balustrade, around the paired columns framing the first-floor windows, and along the portico below (Plate 22).

Not only do juxtapositions of light and shade enliven the façade. The effect of richness and variety is conveyed, too, by contrasts between horizontal and vertical forces, mobile and static elements, and rounded and angular forms. The strong horizontal stress exerted by the continuous heavy projecting cornices (reminiscent of Coducci's Palazzo Vendramin) on a façade of this length was a bold gesture on Sansovino's part, especially considering that the elevation was to be continued around the whole south side of the main Piazza.
The architect achieved the compensating vertical emphasis needed by clearly indicating the continuous uprigt structural axes. As the eye follows these axes upwards, the forms become progressively lighter and more mobile. In the putti in the upper frieze, the downward vertical force finally breaks into movement, so that the skyline figures above appear to be released from the building and to soar into the sky (Plate 23). Such tensions between movement and stability are attenuated by the combination of lively sculptural decoration with the solid, grid-like framework of the façade. Juxtapositions of rounded and angular forms are exploited repeatedly to give variety to the long elevation—the triglyphs and metopes of the Doric frieze, the round half-columns and square corner piers, the skyline obelisks and statues, and the cubic blocks in the balusters of the balconies. Sansovino fully exploited his unique opportunity to work with an exceptionally generous budget, and it is no wonder that this splendid showpiece should be considered his capolavoro.

**THE LOGGETTA**

Until Sansovino’s scheme for the transformation of Piazza San Marco was put into effect, the Campanile of the Basilica stood hemmed in by buildings on two sides (Figure 9). Only narrow alleys separated the tower from the neighbouring structures. By realigning the buildings on the south side of the main Piazza, Sansovino planned to isolate the Campanile as a free-standing monument. The Piazza and the Piazzetta would thus be intervisible, and the uninterrupted arcade around the corner of the new building would emphasise the continuity between these two spaces. In consequence, the Campanile would become a far more prominent feature of the whole complex (Plate 9). As soon as this plan was formulated, it must have been obvious that the shabby little loggia at the base of the bell-tower would also have to be replaced.

The old Loggetta, as Bastiani’s view of the Piazzetta indicates, was a simple lean-to shelter with a triple arcade supported on four stone columns. It was used by the nobility as a meeting-place when they came to the Piazza on government business. The site at the foot of the Campanile was a particularly hazardous one—whenever the tower was struck by lightning the Loggetta was liable to be hit by falling masonry, and it was also badly damaged in the earthquake of 1511. Although it was repaired on each occasion, it could hardly be expected to hold its own aesthetically amid the magnificent complex of buildings, free from stalls and other eyesores, which Sansovino envisaged for the centre of Venice.

Like the Basilica and most of the rest of the buildings in the Piazza, the Campanile and the little loggia below it were administered by the Procuratia de Supra. They must have decided to commission a new Loggetta before November 1537, when Aretino mentioned the project in his famous letter of admiration to Sansovino. Early in the following year the caretaker of the Loggetta, who was also the sacristan of the Basilica, was awarded a salary increase because of the extra work caused by the rebuilding. From the Procurators’ account-book for this period, it appears that most of the main structure was erected between 1538 and 1540. The sculptural decoration was applied afterwards—the first purchases of red and white marble date from early in 1540. Sansovino’s four bronze figures were ready in 1545, by which time the building seems to have been more or less completed.
The patricians probably began to use their new meeting-place as soon as possible—maybe even before the final touches were added to the decoration. The Loggetta was open every morning until noon, and then again in the evenings (lit by oil lamps in winter). However, it seems that the new building was not such a welcoming spot as the old one—perhaps the small flight of steps in front of Sansovino’s Loggetta discouraged the noble from wandering in casually, as they had before. By 1581, when Francesco Sansovino published his guide to Venice, the habit had already died out. The Loggetta was now usually kept closed, except on Sundays during the assemblies of the Great Council, when it was occupied by three of the Procurators, attended by fifty guards supplied by the Arsenal as fire-watchers. The Procurators themselves sometimes held meetings in the Loggetta. At last, in 1734 it acquired what was arguably its most successful function, as the headquarters of the Public Lottery.

The Loggetta is a small pavilion faced in red and white marble attached to the base of the Campanile (Plate 24). The three-bay façade is articulated by pairs of free-standing Composite columns in various different types of Oriental marble. Four bronze statues occupy the niches between them, and all the available surfaces are sumptuously decorated with relief sculpture. The building as we know it today has undergone several changes. A spirited engraving by Giacomo Franco, published in 1610, shows the appearance of the Loggetta in its original state (Plate 25). In the seventeenth century the side windows of the façade were converted into doorways, and iron grills were installed in the lunettes. The red marble benches in front were replaced by a wide terrace surrounded by a marble balustrade (Plate 26). In the eighteenth century a bronze gate was placed across the entrance to this terrace; and the attic storey—believed at that time to have been left incomplete—was extended across the whole width of the façade. The Loggetta was totally crushed when the Campanile collapsed in 1902, but it was rebuilt as before, with the addition of a marble facing on the brick walls at the sides. The latest restoration had revealed the vivid and varied colour of the marble, but nevertheless the architect would have been more than a little surprised to see the building in its altered form.

The fact that the Loggetta was extremely small in scale compared with the other buildings in the Piazza was a major influence on the design. If it was to stand up to its distinguished setting, it had to be sufficiently eye-catching to compensate for its diminutive proportions. The basic construction costs were correspondingly small, so that the Procurators were not forced to economise too strictly. Whereas more than 28,000 ducats were spent on the first sixteen bays of the Library, the Loggetta cost only 4,238 ducats and 14 grosi. Yet even this relatively modest sum was an extravagant price to pay for what was, after all, only a small shelter. As in the case of the Library, the main structure was built in brick; but the lavish materials used and the copious sculptural decoration of the outer coating show that the Procurators were more interested in display than in utility (Plate 27).

No expense was spared in the acquisition of stone. Red Verona marble, most of it supplied by a cousin of Michele Sanmicheli in Verona, forms the framing elements in the architecture—the cornices, the crowning balustrade, the panelling inside the niches, and the frames of the upper reliefs. The pilasters behind the columns and the convex frieze of the main entablature are made of white Carrara marble veined with grey; and this stone was also adopted for the capitals and the crowns of the arches. Sansovino’s great friend, Marc’Antonio Giustiniani, whom he had met in Rome, provided much of the white marble, which was not easy to obtain in Venice. A dark green marble, known as verde antica, forms the vertical strips between the niches and the main pilasters. The reliefs are of Istrian stone, which is easier to carve than marble. Rare Oriental marbles were used for the eight projecting columns, increasing in richness of colour and texture towards the centre. In spite of the variety of materials used, the effect is by no means gaudy, but is carefully contrived to tone in with the surroundings. The dominant colours, red and white, were not a casual choice. The colour scheme of the Loggetta echoes the warm red of the brick Campanile above; and at that time the Piazza, too, was paved in red brick. Red and white are also the colours of the façades of the Doge’s Palace.

Although it was so small, the Loggetta had an important role to play in the sixteenth-century transformation of the Piazza. Sansovino was certainly aware of the scenographic arrangement of the Piazzetta, especially when seen from the lagoon. The Clock Tower acts as the focal point in this prospect, while the Loggetta and the Basilica project forward in front of it on either side like the wings of a stage. Hence the rich colours of the Loggetta are designed to balance the polychromatic exterior of the Basilica opposite. Not only did the Loggetta serve as part of the ‘scenery’ of the Piazzetta, it also acted as the focal point in the view from the Scala dei Giganti (Plate 28) (so-called on account of the
great statues of Mars and Neptune added by Sansovino towards the end of his life). This splendid staircase in the courtyard of the Doge's Palace was the setting for Ducal coronations and was used by all important visitors entering or leaving the palace. The Venetians had long been sensitive to scenographic effects unfolding along significant axes. It can hardly be accidental that from the top of the Scala dei Giganti the upper edge of the main door of the palace, seen through the Arco Foscarí, blocks out the Loggetta at the level of the main cornice; while from the landing half-way down, the door cuts the façade at the upper cornice, above the attic reliefs (Plate 29). The width of the Loggetta is revealed bay by bay as the spectator approaches.

Like the Library, Sansovino's Loggetta combined ideas from his Central Italian experiences with features of the local architectural tradition. Here, too, the use of locally available materials gave the building a peculiarly Venetian feeling. Verona marble was not expensive in the city, and rare Oriental marbles could be brought by sea from the eastern Mediterranean. (Yet even in Venice such rich materials were used only for relatively small buildings such as the Cal d'Oro and the church of the Miracoli.) Again in this case the Loggetta reproduces the basic components of the previous building on the site—that is, a triple arcade with a central entrance (Plate 6). The niche figures and the red and white marble echo the Arco Foscarí in the Doge's Palace, which frames the view of the Loggetta from the Scala dei Giganti (Plate 28). Projecting columns were not uncommon in Venice—appearing for example on the façade of the Scuola di San Rocco (Plate 74)—but their use in the Loggetta is also reminis-
cent of the similar feature on the left side of Raphael's fresco of the *Fire in the Borgo* in the Vatican, which has a theatrical layout not unlike the Loggetta. The variety of precious materials, the bronze statues in niches, and the garlands hung between the capitals again look back to Raphael, this time recalling the Chigi Chapel in Santa Maria del Popolo. The façade of the Loggetta is adapted from early triumphal arches—an early drawing by Francesco da Ollandà actually omits the Campanile and portrays the Loggetta itself as a triumphal arch. Vasari's description of Sansovino's temporary façade for the Duomo in Florence, erected for the entry of Leo X in 1515, suggests that in many respects this early project foreshadowed his design for the Loggetta, a link which underlines his conception of the Loggetta almost as a piece of scenery.

Like the decorations in honour of Leo X, the Loggetta was a forceful vehicle of political propaganda. Commissioned at the end of the illustrious reign of Doge Andrea Gritti, it was an expression of the self-confidence and optimism of the Venetian Republic at that time—reflected not only in the flamboyant character of the design, but also in the specific content of the iconography. According to Francesco Sansovino the Loggetta was proposed and promoted by the Procurator Antonio Capello, who possibly invented, or at least commissioned the iconographic programme. Francesco records his father's explanation of the significance of the Loggetta sculptures—the four bronze figures stressing the superiorit of the Venetian government, and the upper reliefs representing the Republic's power on land and sea. The four statues are identified as Pallas, Apollo, Mercury and Peace. Pallas on the far left signifies the supreme wisdom of the Venetian patriciate. The second figure, Apollo, represents the sun—the one and only sun—to demonstrate the uniqueness of the Venetian Republic; and he is also the God of Music, a reference to the exceptional harmony of the government. The statue of Mercury on the right of the entrance extols eloquence as a means of translating ideals into action. And finally, Peace is a reminder of the value of the peaceful policies of the Venetian state. The subjects of the attic reliefs are identical to those of the three bronze standard bases set up in front of the Basilica in 1505 (another high point in Venetian morale). In the central panel the figure of Justice is enthroned between two river-gods representing the terrafirma empire. The two reliefs on either side symbolise the Venetian possessions in the Mediterranean—Jupiter, former King of Crete, is portrayed on the left, and Venus, Queen and Goddess of Cyprus, on the right. Pietro Benso's nephew claimed to have found the tomb of Venus while on military service in Cyprus, and according to a report quoted by Francesco Sansovino the supposed tomb of Jupiter had long been on the island of Crete. (Venice in fact lost the possession of Cyprus to the Turks in 1571, the year after Sansovino's death.)

The Loggetta is the most complete surviving visual representation of the 'myth of Venice'—that is, the Venetian view of their own state as the perfect republic. While this concept coloured the political writings of the time, the great fires in the Doge's Palace in 1574 and 1577 destroyed virtually every other artistic interpretation dating from before the loss of Cyprus (Plate 21). The Loggetta served not only to impress on foreign visitors the supremacy of the Venetian state, but also to remind Venetians themselves of the myth. The use of classical allusion and mythology, prompted by the current fashion for

*all'antica* allusion, would have added another dimension to the almost narcissistic iconography. From Sansovino's point of view, the Loggetta, like the Library, was in effect a public if not a state commission. Despite the fact that the Procurators were discouraged from taking an active part in the government, they occupied an extremely distinguished position in the political hierarchy. They were not strictly a public body, yet they were certainly fully briefed by the Doge and his group of advisors, the Collegio. They naturally recognised that Piazza San Marco was the centre of the Venetian government and that its buildings should be appropriate to the setting. The Loggetta may be small, but it is by no means overshadowed by the imposing monuments which surround it. With its dignified façade modelled on classical triumphal arches and adorned with precious materials and rich sculptural decoration, it fully lives up to its distinguished situation. Perhaps it should be regarded not so much as an architectural work on a small scale, but rather as a great piece of sculpture.

Vasari's contention that Sansovino was continually thinking of ways to improve the financial state of the Procuracy is reinforced by documentary evidence, especially during the first fifteen years of his career as *proto*. The re-siting of the Piazzetta hosteries has already been mentioned. Another obvious way to increase the revenue of the Procuracy was to provide extra shop premises. For instance, in 1531 it was decided to convert three shops on the bridge between the Mint and the Granaries (Plate 7) into five narrower ones.
For the new shops, Sansovino designed a simple five-bay Doric façade in white Istrian stone, which still exists today, adjoining Sansovino's Mint (Plate 30). (This was his first independent architectural work in Venice—a demonstration piece in the purest style of the Roman High Renaissance—yet, curiously, it has long been forgotten.) Similarly, two years later it was resolved to evacuate all the shops at the foot of the Campanile and rebuild them in greater number. But the fruits of such minor economy measures were trifling beside the cost of the radical rebuilding programme. Throughout Sansovino's career as proti attempts were made to control the expense on repairs to the old buildings, but in the more extreme cases of disrepair total rebuilding often seemed a wiser policy than costly restoration.

During the last decade of Sansovino's life the Procuracy's expenditure on repairs reached an exorbitant level. In 1536 they had been granted freedom by the Great Council to manage their own budgeting without Ducal interference; but this liberty was curtailed in 1569 when a body known as the Revisori sopra i Procuratori was appointed to investigate their finances. An inquiry was held into the fact that more than half their total outlay for the years 1559–69 had been spent on repairs to their properties, and especially on work on their own residences. The Procurators defended themselves with eloquent descriptions of the precarious state of their own houses, but the fact remained that they now owed considerable sums of money. From 1570 onwards they were forced to repay their debts at the rate of 6,000 ducats a year, until by 1588 most of the amount had been repaid; and it was only then that they were able to resume building work on the Library.

However, we cannot blame Sansovino for the disastrous state of the Procuratorial finances at the time of his death. The scheme for remodelling Piazza San Marco, begun during a period of relative prosperity in the 1530s, had become a serious drain on the resources of the Procuracy during the harder economic conditions of subsequent decades. Such a comprehensive building project could hardly have been financed easily. The greatest periods of artistic patronage often ended in economic chaos—compare, for example, the state of the papal finances after the death of Leo X in 1521. Besides, even a less imaginative proto in sixteenth-century Venice would have been forced to spend heavily on the maintenance of the ancient structures. Sansovino was certainly aware of the need to economise; and the charm and powers of verbal expression which Vasari attributes to him must have been useful vehicles for setting his far-sighted artistic ideas in motion.

The Procurators of St. Mark's were no ordinary patrons. They were the only Venetian institution or public body in which the members were elected for life. This led to an unusually consistent attitude from the group as a whole, whereas in other situations regular changes in the office-holders resulted in less predictable policies. Naturally some of the Procurators were more enthusiastic than others—Vettor Grimani, as we have seen, took a special interest in the Library, and Antonio Capello was responsible for the Loggetta commission; while Piero Grimani, for example, was often hostile to Sansovino's ideas. But even so, their corporate approach towards long-term building projects changed relatively slowly. This stable situation was a great asset to Sansovino, and he took full advantage of it. The Procuracy, like the Scuole Grandi which