

Charles Davis: JACOPO SANSOVINO'S 'LOGGETTA DI SAN MARCO' AND TWO PROBLEMS IN ICONOGRAPHY

In his longest description of the city of Venice, the *Venetia, città nobilissima et singolare descritta in XIII libri* (Venice 1581), Francesco Sansovino prints a very well-known and often cited explanation of the imagery of his father's "Loggetta di San Marco", enumerating what he calls its "significati esquisiti", which are given, he claims, just as his father has recounted them.¹ (This text is reprinted in John Pope-Hennessy's widely available *Italian High Renaissance and Baroque Sculpture*.) Francesco insists so often on his point (*vide infra*) that the suspicion inevitably arises that he is putting words in his father's mouth, which in a very literal sense he is doubtless doing. Francesco is of course composing rhetorical *detti* and not writing oral history, although the statements he attributes to his father cannot be discounted for that reason alone.

Taken at face value Francesco Sansovino's 1581 description of the Loggetta reads like a post-Panofskian iconographical/iconological exegesis, and coming from the horse's mouth, as it appears to do, this text is one of the contemporary texts which the most uncompromising critics of iconographical over-interpretation need to explain away. And so, just yesterday, it was proposed that what Francesco Sansovino provides is an "ex post facto" reading of the figures on the Loggetta, which he recorded as an example of his father's "ingegno", a description which, it follows, affords "no insight into the rationale for the original choice of themes".² Charles Hope of the Warburg Institute (London) maintains further that the statutes of the Loggetta hardly need explanation: "these figures simply express, in the most straightforward possible way, values which the Venetian government was expected to uphold", that is to say, wisdom, the arts, trade, and peace.

Despite my sympathy with the main thrust of the recent post-Warburgian critique of the modern academic practice of iconography (a *praxis* presently tormented by the cross-currents of controversy), in this case my own investigations have led to conclusions that run somewhat contrary to Charles Hope's



1 Venice, 'Loggetta di San Marco'.

views.³ The present note, in part, represents an attempt to re-examine the terrain that separates our results. It is worth mentioning, at this point, that Francesco Sansovino was his father's only son, and that he lived in his father's house on the Piazza San Marco most of the days of his life, in a house with windows opening onto the Loggetta itself. And, in point of fact, the praise of Jacopo's literary *ingegno* does not belong to the pattern of epideictic formulas with which Francesco sought to exalt his father's merits and fame and which are amply documented in his writings.

The Loggetta was completed by February 1546, and in the same year Francesco Sansovino, then twenty-five years old, published a brief description of the Loggetta's iconography in his rhetorical *trattato*, *L'arte oratoria secondo i modi della lingua volgare* (Venice 1546, fol. 52, with a dedicatory epistle dated 28th August 1546).⁴ This description might also be labelled *post festum*, but in that event these words would lose most of their usual power to discredit the authority of a testimony. The text Francesco Sansovino prints in 1546 has been overlooked in all the literature on Jacopo Sansovino and his Loggetta. It reads:

L'ultima parte nel nostro discorso e la prima nell'Oratore sara la memoria, ella si ha per natura e per (52 verso:) artificio; e questa è da gli antichi appellata armario delle scienze; chiave, e thesoro dell'eloquenza; questa dicano esser la principale in tutte le cose, quando ella è insieme congiunta col giudicio. Per artificio s'accresce con la continua essercitatione; si accresce con i luoghi, con le figure, alcuni collocano sotto segni materiali, i capi delle cose che essi vogliono a mente. Alcuni altri procedano per vie di statue sotto quelle abbracciando ogni materia di che essi favellano, come per esemplo. In Vinegia intorno al Campanile di S. Marco su la publica piazza, vi ha nella parte incontro al Palazzo la Loggietta, Opera e composizione cosi di Architettura come di Scoltura di M. Iacopo Sansovino Fiorentino. Tra le quali Sculture, si come principali si vede una Minerva verso la parte del canal grande, appresso all'entrata un'Apollo, dall'altra parte a má(n) destra un Mercurio, e nella fine la Pace; Queste diremo che sian come luoghi della memoria; perche non si tosto l'huomo s'incontra con l'occhio in quella imagine di Minerva, che egli comprende per quel segno tutte le cose che da lei secondo i poeti furon trattate; oltre il significato, che ella ha, cioè che l'Ottimo Massimo Senato Venetiano è sapientissimo, e ne governi, e nelle attioni. Se noi medesimamente vediamo l'Apollo, tosto ci corre a memoria, cio che di lui lasciarono gli antichi, il simile di Mercurio e de gli altri diremo, oltre il segno della Musica e dell'eloquenza, nelle quai due cose i Signori Venetiani sommanente sono eccellenti, che della prima ne è dimostratore Apollo, della seconda Mercurio, ma perche questa via de luoghi è da Cicerone, e dopo lui da Quintiliano trattata, e a nostri tempi da Ramondo Lullo, sopra il quale ampiamente si estende Cornelio Agrippa, e da Pietro da Ravenna acutissimo e breve scrittore, rimettendoci a sopradetti, potremo con facilità acquistarci per arte, quello, che la natura non ci ha voluto per se stessa concedere./ Fine del secondo libro.

Everything, or nearly, of Francesco Sansovino's 1581 explanation is present here *in nuce*, thirty-five years earlier, and besides there is the intriguing mention of the name of "Ramondo Lullo", the medieval founder of Lullism, which Frances Yates showed could also serve as an *Ars memorativa*, and further there is the even more unexpected reference to the Loggetta's statues as "*come luoghi della memoria*", which seems to raise the possibility that the Loggetta was consciously conceived as a full-fledged mnemotechnic, or artificial memory structure, replete with 'places' and 'images', a prospect which may electrify enthusiasts of Giulio Camillo's once again fashionable memory theater as it alarms critics who hope to shave academic iconography with Ockham's razor of common sense.

But before considering the plausibility of these last possibilities, note must be taken of the fact that the interpretation of the Loggetta, which Francesco Sansovino had printed in 1546, is, in 1556, developed further by the same writer in his *Tutte le cose notabili e belle che sono in Venetia*, a text to which Francesco adds new touches in 1561, in his *Delle cose notabili che sono in Venetia*, thereby creating a body of texts that flow, in part verbatim, into the much later 1581 description with which we began.⁵ These several descriptions do demonstrate that Francesco Sansovino's was the literary intelligence that perfected the verbal formulation of his father's ideas which is presented in 1581. This, however, does not *ipso facto* invalidate the claims of this text and those of its precursors to provide a guide to the 'correct' understanding of Jacopo Sansovino's Loggetta. A detailed examination of the modifications and developments from 1546 to 1581 will be examined in the context of a longer study presently under completion.⁶ But despite the small divergencies of the several texts they all appear to adhere to an essential and intended ground of meaning.

A few further topics deserve brief comment.

(1) The essential equations of the statuary program (Minerva = Sapienza; Apollo = Musica; Mercurio = Eloquenza; Pace = Peace) run through all the texts from first to last. The presence of Peace, an allegorical personification, among the Olympian Deities, suggests that they are to be understood allegorically.⁷ The four bronze figures merely comprise an ensemble of statues, and thus they neither express nor suggest a mythological action or narrative. The interpretations advanced by Francesco Sansovino in his books for these figures are not, in my view, based on extravagantly *recherché* connections, as has been claimed. For a single instance: the lyre (of which only a fragment remains) that Apollo held in his left hand pointed almost inescapably to his connection with music.

(2) The topical link with the patron or ruler, the Venetian State, is established already in 1546 ("Senato", "Signori"), and it is more completely specified in terms of its timeless topicality ("essendo nata repubblica si è sempre mantenuta repubblica") in the 1556 description, where the attic reliefs of the Loggetta are explicitly connected with the city of Venice, her rule over the cities of the *terraferma*, and her dominions in the seas, with specific topological references of an obvious nature. Thus it is that, already in 1556, the Venetian interlocutor of Francesco Sansovino presents the Loggetta to the *Forestiero* as simply a "ritratto" of the Venetian Empire: "E così voi vedete ch'in questa facciata di questo picciol luogo è collocato in figura l'imperio di questi signori in mare e in terra".⁸ The long-lastingness, or perpetuity of Venice's republican government constitutes the keynote of the panegyric of the Venetian Urbs that Francesco Sansovino ascribes to his father,⁹ and it is also consonant with Jacopo Sansovino's ideas about the Venetian polity which his son records in other circumstances.¹⁰ In 1561, immediately following his description of the Loggetta as a "picciol luogo" where is "collocato in figura l'imperio di questi signori in mare e in terra" (a passage already present in 1556), Francesco inserts a discussion of the "due Giganti di marmo" ("Marte" and "Nettuno") by Jacopo Sansovino which soon ("tosto") are to be installed on the large staircase of the Palazzo Ducale cortile — "i quali, si come saranno in segno che questi nostri signori sono patroni del mare nelle cose della guerra". Soon, in the Giuntina edition of Vasari's *Vite* (1568), the two colossal statues of Mars and Neptune are said to demonstrate "le forze che ha in terra et in mare quella serenissima repubblica",¹¹ thus making more pointed the linkage of the *giganti* with the Loggetta program as described in 1556. In 1581 Francesco explains the "significative delli giganti di palazzo" at page 119 a: "significative amendue lo stato di terra et di mare", and again in the same year in his *Cronico veneto*: "significative l'uno l'forze di Mare, et l'altro di Terra della Repubblica".¹² (The small variations are similar to those found in Francesco's several treatments of the Loggetta). The striking and obviously calculated scenographic connection between the Scala dei Giganti and the Loggetta was convincingly described by Deborah Howard in her book, *Jacopo Sansovino: Architecture and Patronage in Renaissance Venice* (London-New Haven 1975). The existence of this visual axis appears to confirm (and to find confirmation in) the programmatic link between Sansovino's projects for the Loggetta and the Palazzo Ducale staircase. It is at least as likely that, in planning the Palazzo Ducale *giganti*, the sculptor-architect has extended his own ideas (or has drawn upon counsel to which he had ready access over a long period) as that two distinct patrons, the Procurators of S. Marco, especially Antonio Capello, and the *Provveditori del Palazzo Ducale*, were able to agree on a coherent, consistent ideological programme for separate projects commissioned at a distance of over fifteen years. In the case of the *giganti* it appears certain that the references to the state patron implied by these mythological statues, far from being elaborated for extraneous motives after the fact, were formulated in advance. The same ideas recur elsewhere in Francesco Sansovino's writings. In 1581 he describes the programme of a ceiling decoration in the Palazzo Ducale which he had devised ("et l'invenzione [è] di colui che scrive le presenti cose", p. 122), a programme similar in kind to the programme he describes for the Loggetta, and, in several of its aspects, similar in content as well. And in one of the immediately successive rooms Francesco (without naming the programme's author¹³) describes a ceiling panel with "un Marte et un Nettuno, per la fortezza di terra et di Mare di questo stato", once again mythological figures with references to the state patron.

With regard to the Loggetta it should be remembered that buildings, through their decoration, very frequently make clear, even topical allusions to their patrons or dedications, as an application or extension of the fundamental Vitruvian principle of decorum. The programme that Francesco Sansovino adumbrates in 1581 is entirely fitting to the function of the Loggetta as a "ridotto" for the Venetian nobility, upon whom the Venetian republic and its liberty rested. Francesco Sansovino is a fairly laconic writer, and while his reading of the Loggetta statues is somewhat more loquacious than is the norm in his *Venetia città nobilissima* descriptions, it seems inaccurate to describe it as a "very extravagant interpretation".¹⁴ That we might never guess all the meanings explained in this text does not prove that the designer of the Loggetta did not put them there. It seems mistaken to attempt to explain away the evidence of this text because it appears to contradict preconceptions concerning the nature of Renaissance iconography.

In weighing the evidential value of the description of the Loggetta that Francesco Sansovino printed in 1581, it may be considered that Francesco records that his father could talk easily, and at length about all the topics he understood, amplifying his discourse with many examples, and that in his old age Jacopo had perfect recall of his childhood, of the Sack of Rome, and of many other particulars of his past fortunes.¹⁵ Finding refuge in the Venetian Republic (after the Sack of Rome) constitutes a primary theme of Jacopo Sansovino's biography¹⁶, as it does of that of his friend, Pietro Aretino. Concerning attempts to entice Jacopo Sansovino back to Rome to head the building of the new St. Peter's, Francesco writes that "tutto fu vano, perche egli diceva che non era da cambiare lo stato del vivere in una repubblica a quello di ritrovarsi sotto un principe assoluto".¹⁷ This view is in line with Pietro Aretino's well-documented anti-court positions, and with his celebration of the liberty afforded by the constitution of the Venetian Republic, and it is in line with Aretino's famous warning of Sansovino against the temptations of Rome, a letter containing invocations of the Sack of Rome and of Venice as the city of liberty.¹⁸ Similarly Venice was, in Francesco's words, where "libertà" finds "il suo vero albergo, il suo tempio", in which his father "dopo il sacco" found refuge and reward for the remainder of his life.¹⁹ These themes are consistent with those found in Francesco Sansovino's several accounts of the Loggetta imagery.

While it is perhaps not possible to demonstrate conclusively if, and to what extent, the 1581 text can be accepted as an 'authoritative' guide to understanding the Loggetta, I have adduced reasons for which this text cannot be easily dismissed. One difficulty is that the evidence stems in large part from a single source, Francesco Sansovino, and the process of verification cannot escape an element of circularity. Nevertheless it would be precipitous to consider the explanation that Francesco offers as farfetched, since the invention he recounts is a simple celebration of Venetian state institutions, i. e., the central feature of the 'mito di Venetia'²⁰, and is transacted in terms of the standard *topoi* of Venetian self-praise. Hence it represents no more than an amplification of themes codified by the 1520's and known well, owing to their constant repetition.

(3) The question of whether Jacopo Sansovino's Loggetta might seriously be considered as a mnemotechnic structure is not one easy to dismiss as confidently as one might wish.²¹ Francesco Sansovino, it is true, does not explicitly state that the Loggetta is a Arch of Memory: he says only that the statues can be seen as "*luoghi della memoria*". But in 1561 he describes the Loggetta as a "*piccolo luogo*" where is put "*in figura*" the Venetian Empire — evoking precisely the two primary components of the art of memory, 'places' and 'images'. Not only are the "*figure*" named (Minerva, Apollo, Mercurio, Pace), but the "*luoghi*" are specified as well ("*verso la parte del canal grande*", "*appresso all'entrata*", "*dall'altra parte a man destra*", "*nella fine*"), according to the conventions for artificial memory structures.

In this connection it is difficult not to recall the connections of Giulio Camillo and his Memory Theater with the Venetian Renaissance. Francesco Sansovino explicitly cites Camillo in his *Arte oratoria* (Book I). In 1528 his father's friend, Sebastiano Serlio, designated Camillo his '*erede universale*' in the presence of Alessandro Cittolino, who in turn was Camillo's long-time assistant and collaborator.²² Furthermore, Lodovico Dolce, who was in some measure one of Francesco Sansovino's mentors and career models, published an early edition of Camillo's "*Theatro*" (1552), and later Dolce published a memory treatise under his own name (1562). Francesco's father may have remained untouched by this milieu, but the text, quoted above, from the *Arte oratoria*, composed by his young son, shows that the latter was aware of the classical art of memory and its medieval and modern afterlife.

Possibly the most interesting feature of Francesco Sansovino's first description of the Loggetta is the very explicit distinction between the significations that the statues are meant to express ("*il significato, che ella ha ...*", "*oltra il segno ..*", "*che della prima ne è dimostratore ...*") and the numerous other associations that, owing to the faculty of memory, they arouse.²³ Francesco seems to affirm the near inevitability of 'poetical' and 'erudite' associations, coming perilously close to the doctrine of levels of meaning so dear to present-day criticism and presenting us with a Loggetta whose images are expected to awaken each a chain of associations. Places as well as men may be celebrated, and to the extent that the Loggetta is a commemorative monument (one which accompanies the Venetian Republic in the "*diuturnità del tempo*") its appeals to memory are scarcely misplaced. Needless to say, the illustration of the Loggetta that Francesco appends to the second book of his rhetorical treatise, *L'arte oratoria*, is also intended to immortalize his father. And while the reference to the potential mnemotechnic functions of the Loggetta is clearly occasioned by the context of the treatise on oratory (of which memory is a part), it seems undeniable that Francesco Sansovino saw this as a plausible response to the structure and its statues. The broader methodological implications of Sansovino's descriptions can be little affected by our judgement of their value as historical evidence concerning the Loggetta, since he would scarcely have attempted to deceive his contemporaries and posterity with an explanation that by its very nature would have struck them as absurd.

NOTES:

¹ Sansovino, Venetia, 1581, p. 112: "*Serviva la predetta Loggia ne gli anni andati per ridotto de nobili, i quali ne tempi così di verno come di state, vi passavano il tempo in ragionamenti*".

Francesco Sansovino's Venetia (1581) is something rather different and rather more than the simple 'guida artistica' is it usually considered. This almost unstudied book requires analysis in light of other urban descriptions, and in term of its evolution and sources (among others, Leandro Alberti, Sabellico, Vitruvius, and 'Publio Vittore'). For the Loggetta, see: J. Pope-Hennessy, Italian High Renaissance and Baroque Sculpture (forthcoming revised edition), and M. Tafuri, Jacopo Sansovino e l'architettura del '500 a Venezia, Padua 1972. Recently also: B. Boucher, in: Cultura e società nel Rinascimento, ed. V. Branca and C. Ossolo, Florence 1984, pp. 335-350; J. B. Bury, The Loggetta in 1540, in: Burl. Mag. CXXII, 1980, pp. 631-635.

² Ch. Hope, review of W. Wolters, Der Bilderschmuck des Dogenpalastes, Wiesbaden 1983, in: Kunstchronik, 38, 1985, pp. 331-336.

³ The present observations are based on a comprehensive investigation of the narrative sources (esp. Vasari and Francesco Sansovino) for the biography of Jacopo Sansovino begun in the context of the exhibition Giorgio Vasari, Arezzo 1981 (catalogue, Florence 1981, pp. 230-231, 234-235, 293-295; cf. also Ch. Davis and M. Daly Davis, Giorgio Vasari, Indici, con aggiunte e revisioni, Florence 1982,

- esp. p. 22). A synthetic presentation of the scope, methods, and results of this research was presented in a public forum at Villa I Tatti on 6th October 1983, and I have reported findings elsewhere in: *Kunstchronik*, 37, 1984, pp. 81-88; *Antichità viva*, 23, 2, 1984, pp. 45-50, esp. n. 3 (line 1 should be corrected to read: "... in gran parte passati inosservati nella storiografia moderna ..."); *Antichità viva*, 23, 6, 1984, pp. 32-44. Annotations to the present note have been kept to a minimum (*u. infra* n. 6).
- ⁴ Other editions: 1561, 1569, 1575, 1584. The 1546 edition of the *Arte oratoria*, here quoted, is found in the Folger Shakespeare Library, Washington, D. C.
- ⁵ *Anselmo Guisconi* (= *F. Sansovino*), *Tutte le cose notabili e belle che sono in Venetia*, Dialogo (ed. pr. 1556), ed. Venice 1861, pp. 14-17; *F. Sansovino*, *Delle cose notabili che sono in Venetia*, Libri due, Venice 1561, pp. 19 v-21 v (see 'Tavola': "*Significato della logetta di piazza, et delle sue figure*"). I have not consulted *F. Sansovino*, *Dialogo di tutte le cose notabili che sono in Venetia*, ed. Venice 1561.
- ⁶ See *supra*, n. 3.
- ⁷ Cf. *H. R. Wehrauch*, *Studien zum bildnerischen Werke des Jacopo Sansovino*, Strassburg 1935, p. 60.
- ⁸ While this description applies, I believe, to the entire Loggetta, it might be argued that its application extends only to the attic reliefs.
- ⁹ One may compare ideas which *Francesco Sansovino* expressed in 1543 in his *Lettere sopra le dieci giornate del Decamerone* (n. p.) at fol. 52: "*In questa [Vinegia] poi ... è maravigliosa la pace, et la quiete, principio d'ogni ben fondata Rep. Ella si gode una pace eterna ... veramente beata Rep. da che con la quiete eterna ogn'altra Rep. ha vinto ... Ecco ella non tanto è altera ..., per l'Impero mirabile, che ella possiede quanta per la lunghezza del tempo con quale ella ha trapassata gl'Albermiesi, i Lacedemoni, i Romani, et qualunque piu famoso Rep. ... Ella ... si faccia, conserva, et nutrisca chi viver libero si diletta, et nella pace contento*"; etc. See further the dedicatory epistle in *Sansovino's L'Avvocato*, Venice 1559: "... questa maravigliosa Città e riputata da savi una delle migliori, et più regolate Rep. che si sieno mai ritrovate nel Mondo ... ha potuto poi sopravanzare tutte l'altre Città in lunghezza di anni ..."; etc.
- ¹⁰ See *infra*, n. 16-17.
- ¹¹ *Vasari-CdL*, VII, p. 376.
- ¹² *F. Sansovino*, *Cronico veneto*, Venice 1581, p. 35.
- ¹³ Cf. *Wolters* (n. 1), p. 244. Aretino's was a name Francesco avoided by 1581.
- ¹⁴ *Hope* (n. 1), p. 334.
- ¹⁵ That *Francesco Sansovino* alone was responsible for the post-1570 *Vita di M. Iacopo Sansovino Scultore, et Architetto eccellentissimo della Sereniss. Rep. di Venetia* (n. p., but Venice) will be demonstrated in detail in a forthcoming study (see also *infra*, n. 3).
- ¹⁶ Compare the following texts written by *Francesco Sansovino*: Uffizi, Ms. 60, Misc. I, Ins. 23 (autograph, published in *Antichità viva*, 23, 6, 1984, pp. 40-41, lines 35-39, 42-45); Dante con l'esposizione di Cristoforo Landino, Venice 1564, fol. * (8) verso; *Cronaca universale*, Venice, 1574, p. 593 verso. See also *Vasari* in the Giuntina edition of the *Vite* (1568) at pp. 829, 831 (with information from a Venetian, Sansovinian informant). See *supra* n.
- ¹⁷ *Vita di M. Iacopo Sansovino* (n. 15), p. 12 verso.
- ¹⁸ *P. Aretino*, *Lettere sull'arte*, ed. *F. Pertile* and *E. Camesasca*, Milan 1957, I, pp. 81-83.
- ¹⁹ *F. Sansovino*, *Del segretario*, Venice 1584, p. 221.
- ²⁰ See most recently *Wolters* (n. 1) and contributions in: *Interpretazioni veneziane* (Fs. M. Muraro), ed. *D. Rosand*, Venice 1984, and in *Renovatio Urbis*, ed. *M. Tafuri*, Rome 1984.
- ²¹ See, in general, *F. A. Yates*, *The Art of Memory*, London 1966, and the same author's collected essays (see, however, the reservations of *B. Vickers*, in: *Journal of Modern History*, LI, 1979, pp. 287-316). More recently: *Architettura e utopia nella Venezia del Cinquecento*, Exhibition, Venice 1980, Cat., ed. *L. Puppi*, Milan 1980, esp. pp. 209-218 (*G. Barbieri*).
- ²² *L. Olivato*, *Per il Serlio a Venezia*, in: *Arte veneta*, XXV, 1971, pp. 284-291.
- ²³ In his dedicatory epistle to the *Dialogo del Gentiluomo Vinitiano* (Venice 1566) *Francesco Sansovino* writes: "*Io non mi trovo mai satio di ragionar della grandezza, della nobiltà, et dell'amministrazione di questa felicissima et veramente beata Repubblica ... ne potrò mai astenermi di non celebrar giusta mia possa, questa Rep. eterna la onde essendo io ripieno di trovar modo di poter esaltare et l'una cosa et l'altra ...*".

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Alinari: Fig. 1.