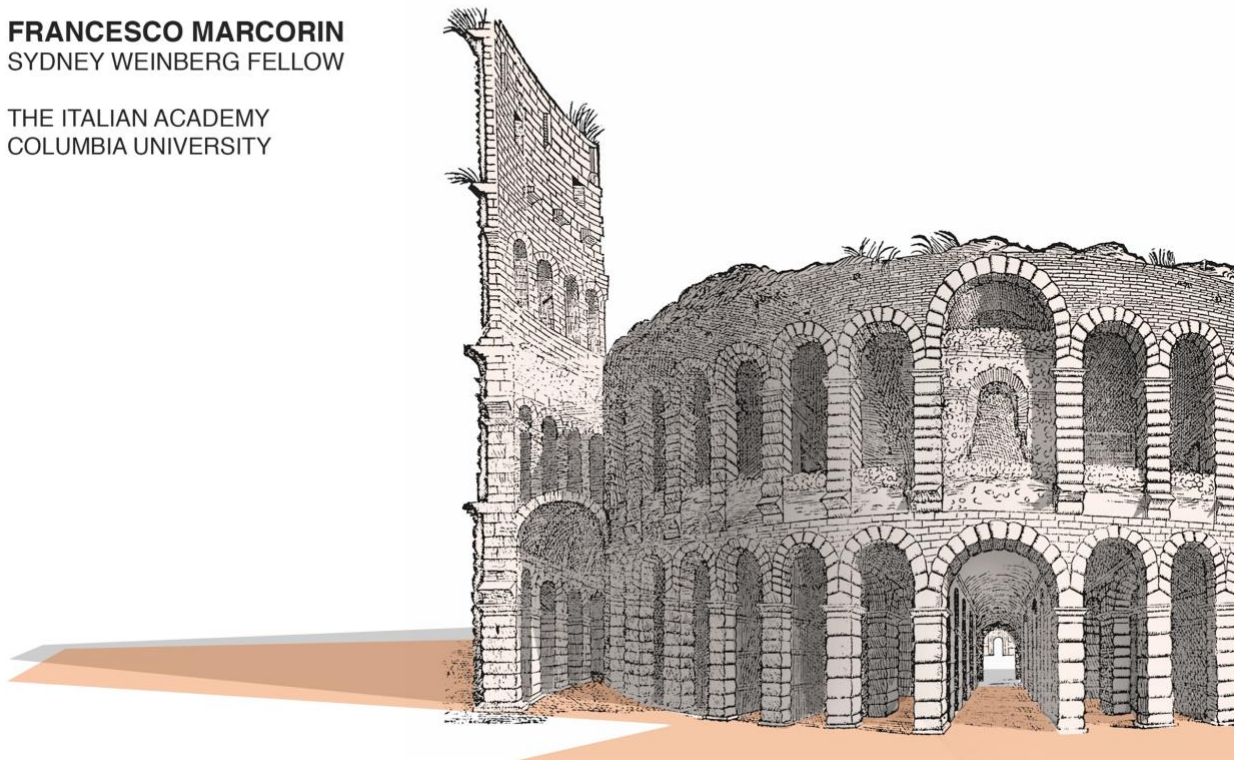


CRAFTED IDENTITIES: RENAISSANCE VERONA AS A CASE-STUDY

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In 2016 the city of Verona was visited by 2 millions of tourists.

In the timeframe of an average 2-day stay, out of 100 tourists who entered a museum, 49 visited the Arena (the Roman amphitheater), 20 Juliet's house, 10 the Museum of Castelvecchio, 6 the Roman theater and the archeological museum, and only 1 the Scaliger tombs¹. Nevertheless, only a few of the 329.000 people who paid a ticket to enter Juliet's house knew that the legendary balcony made popular by Shakespeare was fake and did not exist until 1940, when the entire museum was created to launch a new brand in the World: Verona, the city of lovers (**fig. 1**). Similarly, the popularity of the Arena is linked to its modern reuse as an open-air opera theater, whose successful *Arena Opera Festival* in 2016 produced earnings summing up to over 22 millions of euros² (**fig. 2**).

Although nowadays the identity of a city is mostly shaped in function of tourism – a phenomenon whose “nobility” can be long debated, but that will not be analyzed in this paper –, the dynamics of the definition of a local identity are exactly the same throughout the centuries, with the only difference in the final purpose (economic, cultural or politic).

Verona, whose massive presence of Roman antiquities has always been one of the main features of the city, tried many times to self-promote through its monuments: in the 1950s, as described before; in the 18th century, through a revival of the local Renaissance as a response to the worldwide spreading of neo-Palladianism in architecture³; and in the 16th century, when the city represented itself as the Second Rome.

¹ The statistical data are contained in the annual report published by the Direzione Musei d'Arte Monumenti, pp. 116-117 (http://museoarcheologico.comune.verona.it/media/_ComVR/Cdr/Cultura/Allegati/REPORT2016/DirezioneMuseiMonumenti.pdf).

² (www.arena.it/files/arena/comunicati/2016/risultatiOperaFestival2016.docx).

³ Neo-Palladianism – or just Palladianism – can be defined as an architectural language inspired by the designs of the Renaissance architect Andrea Palladio (1508–1580). During the 17th and 18th centuries, Palladio's *Quattro Libri dell'Architettura* (*Four Books on Architecture*, 1570) were translated into a number of languages and came to influence the new architectural tendencies in England (promoted by Lord Burlington and Inigo Jones), in Russia (by Giacomo

The shaping of a cultural identity in Renaissance Verona moving from the local antiquities is the focus of my present research, and this investigation is part of a broader project on the influence of models alternative to Vitruvius and ancient Rome on early-modern culture.

Although the reception of Antiquity is probably the most explored and obvious branch within Renaissance studies, new contributions and interpretations are still possible, thanks to a significant quantity of new archival findings made in the last decades and the spread of a new interdisciplinary approach. More specifically, the intersections among art/architectural history, archaeology, identity studies and a number of other disciplines resulted in new research topics, such as the two mentioned before: the influence of alternative – i.e. Etruscan, Greek, Late-antique and Medieval, not only Roman – antiquities on modern aesthetics, and the role played by local antiquities in the multifaceted definition of the modern identity. With the term “local antiquities”, art historians refer to the ancient monuments⁴ disseminated on a specific territory or city, in antithesis with the monuments in Rome, generally considered by early-modern European culture as universal models. The reinterpretation of local antiquities contributed to the multi-faceted shaping of the artistic language in the Renaissance and helped defining – often with a political implication – the modern identity of a number of cities in Italy and beyond the Alps.

The importance of Verona is connected to the exceptional quantity and quality of its ancient monuments and the strong influence that such relics exerted on the culture of both Verona and its neighboring cities, including Venice. Despite the centrality of the topic within the frame of the Renaissance in Veneto and in Italy, the reception of the ancient Veronese monuments has mysteriously received very little consideration from scholars. The 1980 exhibition *Palladio e Verona* drew for the very first time the attention of international architecture and art historians, and its catalogue can still be considered the most relevant contribution to the topic (see BURNS 1980; MARCHI 1980; MAGAGNATO 1980; SCHWEIKHART 1980; TOSI 1980). Two more books were published between 1986 and 1988 – *I segni della Verona romana* by Nino Cenni and Maria Marchi, and *L'architettura a Verona nell'età della Serenissima*, edited by Pierpaolo Brugnoli and Arturo Sandrini –, but the predominance of contributions from local scholars resulted in a change of perspective and in the

Quarenghi), in many other European countries and in the United States (by Thomas Jefferson). The revival of Palladian language also characterized the 18th-century architecture in Veneto; in Verona, instead of imitating a language alien to the local tradition – Palladio designed two palaces in Verona, but only a small portion of one was built –, some architects chose to rediscover and celebrate their illustrious predecessor Michele Sanmicheli (1484/88-1559).

⁴ Defining the concept of “monument” would probably require an entire paper, if not a book, due to its centrality within the debate on the nature of Art, the role of memory and the approach to the past with regards to preservation. Generically, every remain from the past which is given by a community a cultural meaning and the role of collecting a memory can be considered as a monument. According to such a definition, the term “monuments” include not only architectural products, but also sculptures, epigraphs and other artworks.

general lack of a wider contextualization, with very few exceptions (i.e. MAZZI 1988). The following publications tended to consider Verona as an isolated case-study and to analyze the Renaissance in architecture separately from art history and literature; even when they tried to better understand the connections among artists, patrons and humanists, they were strongly affected by misinterpretations and mistakes. The result was a very particular interpretation of the Veronese Renaissance – still embraced by contemporary scholars –, in which the artistic and literary productions were explained almost exclusively as a political tool (MARCHI 1980: 12; AURENHAMMER 1995: 170, 174-175, 178; CONFORTI 2000: 370-371). Nonetheless, such publications had the merit of questioning aspects and dynamics of the early-modern culture that had never been studied before and providing a wide quantity of newly-discovered documents. In 2001, Giuseppe Conforti approached the topic from a very innovative point of view in his article *Verona veneziana nel Cinquecento. La città del principe*; such an original reading, that unfortunately did not have any impact on the following studies, will constitute a starting point for the current research project. More recently, the archaeological interest for the local antiquities in the 15th and 16th centuries has been explored by Margherita Bolla (2001) and David Hemsoll (2014), while the influence of ancient monuments on modern identity in Verona has been newly re-analyzed by Valeria Cafà (2013).

The present paper is intended as a preliminary introduction to the seminar and will provide a general contextualization of the topic from the historical and artistic point of view, applying the traditional research approach. The ending point will be a list of methodological and interpretative questions rising up from the analysis, which constitute the main focus of my current research project and will be discussed during the seminar presentation.

Verona and the past

The “golden age” of Verona can be dated to the 1st century A.D., when the city became an important strategical base and its population grew up to 25,000 units. Despite the well-documented history from the Roman age to the present, we know very little about its origins. Latin historiographers variously identified its first inhabitants with the Euganei, the Raeti, the Veneti (or Heneti), the Etruscans and the Gauls, and the debate on the first settlers is still open; nonetheless, the archaeological evidence seems to indicate that different populations lived in the same area, probably in different times.

After the fall of the Roman Empire, Verona was elected by the Gothic King Theoderic the Great as one of his favorite residences, and the ancient walls and most of its monuments were restored (BOGNETTI 1959). For a short period, the city was given the title of capital of the Longobard reign,

but its destiny changed innumerable times in the following centuries; eventually, it became a commune in 1136 and then a seigniorship in 1262. Ruled by the Della Scala family, Verona flourished once again between the 13th and the 14th centuries, also developing new artistic tendencies, especially within sculpture. The city's expansion of the political control across the mainland – to Vicenza, Padova, Belluno, Feltre, Monselice, Bassano, Montagnana, Treviso and Lucca – worried Venice, which set up an alliance with the neighboring seigniorships (Carraresi, Visconti, Gonzaga and Estensi) that led to the annexation of Verona to the territories of the Serenissima Republic in 1405, taking advantage of the political instability that occurred after the Della Scalas' defeat.

One century later, the growing influence exerted by Venice in northern Italy caused the same reaction by the neighboring states, which organized themselves in the coalition known as the League of Cambrai. In 1509 Verona was invaded by the imperial army and annexed to the Holy Roman Empire. The imperial domination lasted only eight years, and from the end of 1516 to the fall of the Serenissima Republic in 1797, Verona once again came to be part of the Venetian territories. Nevertheless, despite its short duration, the imperial domination had such an impact on the local politics and culture that at least for one century Venetian governors in Verona had to fight a newborn faction made of filo-imperial exponents, who openly opposed the Venetian control (CORTE, *Istorie*, 3: 201-204, 281; BORELLI 1980: 3; BURNS 1995: 70-71; CONFORTI 2000: 370; DAVIES, HEMSOLL 2000a: 263; FRANK 2000: 289). Such a phenomenon somehow reflected the nostalgia for the ancient freedom and an idealized past, identifiable with the Scaliger period, and was the violent manifestation of a feeling that had never been able to find a tangible expression during the 15th century.

The first half of the 16th century was also characterized by the systematic exploration of the local past through an historiographical and archaeological approach. In a city with such a huge presence of Roman monuments, local antiquities actually never ceased to be part of the local culture. Just to give an example, in 1368, much before the official “beginning” of the Renaissance, Cansignorio della Scala financed the construction of the fountain still raising in the middle of the Piazza Erbe – in the same place of the main square (the forum) of the Roman city – re-assembling an ancient marble basin with a female statue, probably taken from the Theatre. After reworking some parts, the pagan statue was baptized as “Madonna Verona” (Lady Verona; here the term Madonna must not be confused with the title of the Virgin Mary); what is particularly interesting is the idea of re-using an ancient artwork as an allegorical tool to express the greatness and the antiquity of the entire city (CAFÀ 2013: 339; see also CORNA DA SONCINO, *Fioretto*: 48).

As we will see in the next chapter, even though local antiquities deeply influenced the aesthetics of early-modern painting and architecture at least from the second half of the 15th century, after 1516

something new happened: the approach to ancient monuments ceased to be a mere imitation and became more “scientific”, as the antiquities started to be measured and dated.

Surveys of the ancient monuments in Verona were first published by Sebastiano Serlio in his *Terzo Libro* (1540), among a collection of antiquities in Rome, Pola and other cities. In the same year the Veronese humanist Torello Saraina published *De origine et amplitudine civitatis Veronæ*, as a reply to the mistakes made by Serlio, who had probably never seen those monuments and made the drawings after other authors (SARAINA, *De origine*: 1^v). Nevertheless, despite the critical statement that opens the book, Saraina is likely to have started to work on his project much earlier than 1540, since a collection of such a wide amount of information and the collaboration with the painter Giovanni Caroto, who made the surveys of the monuments and transferred them into woodcuts, must have lasted more than just a few months. Just like the written memory of famous ancient monuments had lasted longer than the monuments themselves, Caroto’s book aimed at giving local antiquities a longer life, demonstrating a strong humanistic approach to antiquarianism (see, for a parallel: Horace, *Odes*, III, 30: «Exegi monumentum aëre perennius⁵»). Descriptions of Verona and its antiquities already existed in the 15th century (i.e. CORNA DA SONCINO, *Fioretto*, written in 1477), but their approach was merely poetical and celebratory.

Saraina’s book explored for the first time the pre-Roman history of the city, combining information taken from ancient historiographers with the study of toponymy and archaeological evidence. Although the origins of Verona were obscure and often mixed with legends, it was clear that the city was even older than Rome and its identity was a multi-layered stratification of cultures. In 1542 Saraina published a second book, *Historie e fatti de’ Veronesi nelli tempi d’il popolo e signori scaligeri*, intended as the chronological prosecution of the first, but such a topic – the history of the Scaliger seigniorship – was considered as a threat by the Serenissima Republic, and the book was censored.

After the great success of *De origine* – and the illegal circulation of the *Historie* –, other authors dedicated themselves to historiography, gleaning information from Saraina’s books and providing new details from a variety of sources, in most cases apocryphal⁶. In 1560 Giovanni Caroto re-published the woodcuts made for Saraina’s *De origine*, with some corrections; in the same years Onofrio Panvinio wrote his *Antiquitates Veronenses*, that probably circulated as a manuscript for almost a century before its posthumous publication in 1648⁷. In the 1580s Alessandro Canobbio

⁵ “I have raised a monument more lasting than bronze”.

⁶ The most interesting one is the manuscript *Collectione di una scrittura in un vaso di pietra trovata nella terra di San Martino [etc.]* by Alvisio Salviazio (ca. 1550), containing an apocryphal story recounting the foundation of Verona by Aeneas and the Trojans. The manuscript is collected at the Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles.

⁷ References to Panvinio’s book can be found in Alessandro Canobbio’s *Historia*. An ongoing study on Canobbio’s manuscript is expected to be ready for publication in one year.

started to work on his *Historia intorno la nobiltà e l'antichità di Verona* (to remain unpublished), while Pietro Zagata wrote his *Cronica della Città di Verona*, printed only in 1747. In 1586 Orlando Pescetti translated into Italian Saraina's *De origine* (*Dell'origine et ampiezza della Città di Verona*), while in 1590 Giovanni Francesco Tinto published *La nobiltà di Verona*, followed by *Delle istorie della città di Verona* by Girolamo della Corte (1592); and almost contemporarily, in 1586, the poet Adriano Valerini published *Le bellezze di Verona*. Valerini's book can be considered the most representative expression of the Veronese culture of the time, not much for its contents – that once again were gained by Saraina's *De origine* –, but for the celebratory purpose, that became a sort of manifesto of the local cultural identity. The constant fluctuation between two different registers – the historiographical and the poetical – and between real data and personal interpretations was strategically planned in order to confuse the reader and make such a biased and overstated description of the city credible. For example, writing about the origin of the city's name, Valerini mentioned its provenance from Etruscan and from the name of the legendary king Vero, who first reigned in the city; he also provided a new etymological explanation – *Vere una*, “really unique” in Latin – and then suggested to interpret the name as the combination of VE (Venice), RO (Roma) and NA (Naples), since the main features of each of the three cities were all contained in Verona (VALERINI, *Bellezze*: 9). Such an interpretation, that clearly has no basis, had a striking influence on the following literature, and was still mentioned in 19th-century publications. The aim was to present Verona to the World as something absolutely exceptional and original, with its own culture and at the same level as cities like Rome, Athens and Thebes (VALERINI, *Bellezze*: 11).

The allegorical representation of Verona as a “second Rome” was a constant element in the 16th-century historiography: the river Adige was assimilated to the Tiber, the Arena to the Colosseum and the same legendary origin, from settlers who escaped from Troy, presented analogies with Roman mythography. Another issue was the revindication of Latin writers, such as Catullus, Pliny, Cornelius Nepos (SARAINA, *De Origine*: 38^r-39^r; VALERINI, *Bellezze*: 69-92), whose marble portraits were put on top of the Loggia del Consiglio. An even greater importance was also given to the architect Vitruvius, through a process of cultural appropriation, identifying the one who left his signature on the Gavi Arch – Lucius Vitruvius Cerdo – with the celebrated architect Marcus Vitruvius Pollio, author of one of the most influent treatises of the past, *De Architectura libri decem* (*Ten books on Architecture*). Although the two “Vitruviuses” were likely to be two different architects, it was easier and more convenient not to pay too much attention to such a detail and accept it as given (SARAINA, *De Origine*: 38^r; VALERINI, *Bellezze*: 79).

Local antiquities, modern architects

Thanks to the high-sounding name of its designer, the Gavi Arch was probably the monument that most impressed and inspired early-modern architects (**fig. 5, 6**). It was first taken as a model for two altars – Faella in Sant’Anastasia (1520-27) and Saraina in San Fermo (1523) – and was then reproduced in several other altars: Pindemonte in Santa Anastasia (1529-42) (**fig. 7**), Nocchieri in San Fermo (1535), Alighieri (or Allighieri) also in San Fermo (1547) and Fregoso in Santa Anastasia (1565) (MARINI 1980: 165; SCHWEIKHART 1980: 86; MAZZI 1988: 151; AURENHAMMER 1995: 175-179). It was also clearly recalled in the monuments to Averoldo in Santa Maria della Ghiara (1537) and Nichesola (1542), and in the wooden arch erected in Padua in 1556 in honor of the passing of Bona Sforza, designed by Michele Sanmicheli (BURNS 1980: 107; MAGAGNATO 1980: 153; SCHWEIKHART 1980: 86; TOSI 1983: 100; AURENHAMMER 1995: 178; DAVIES, HEMSOLL 2002: 357-358).

Sebastiano Serlio, who published a short description of the arch and some drawings in 1540 (Serlio *Terzo Libro*: CXXXI-CXXXIII), was skeptical about its attribution to the most famous Vitruvius, both for the non-correspondence between the two names (Lucius Cerdo – Marcus Pollio) and for the particular design of the *cornice* that was totally alien to the language of the Roman architect⁸. Nevertheless, despite the non-orthodox use of the moldings and the medieval alterations that transformed the arch into a tower, such a monument drew the attention of the most important architects of the 16th century, like Baldassarre Peruzzi, Antonio da Sangallo the Younger and Andrea Palladio. All of them meticulously measured and drew the parts still visible in order to ideally reconstruct the original shape of the monument from the fragments. It must be considered that the arch as we see it today is the result of a radical restoration made in 1932 – it was dismantled in 1805 in order to enlarge the street and then re-built in a different place, with heavy integrations –, while in the 16th century it was in really poor condition: it was still possible to see the columns, the arch and a fragment of the entablature, while the entire attic was missing and the pedestals were hidden under the level of the medieval road.

After centuries of disuse and spoliations, the other monuments – the Arena (**fig. 4**), the Leoni and Borsari Gates (**fig. 8-11**), the theater and the Arch of Jupiter Ammon – were also in the same condition, or even worse. This is an important element to consider while analyzing Renaissance

⁸ In the same cornice, modillions and dentils are used together. Although it was very common in Roman architecture, Vitruvius in his *De Architectura* described such a solution as wrong.

drawings, since they represented not the actual shape of the ancient monuments, but the interpretation provided by the early-modern architects in accordance with their ability to read the fragments and their archaeological knowledge.

As said before, the attention to the local antiquities was not a phenomenon arisen in the 16th century, but it was still present in the previous generations of architects, sculptors and painters. Much before Serlio, Saraina and Palladio, such monuments had fascinated artists like Andrea Mantegna (1431-1506) and had been taken as models by local stonecutters for the decoration of portals, altars and cloisters. The ancient monuments were deemed interesting for their ornamentation rather than for the architectural proportions, and in this sense the approach to antiquity before the 1520s was more “instinctive” than philological. Even the first “modern” Veronese monument – the Faella altar, designed by Francesco da Castello in 1520 – was still an imprecise reinterpretation of the Gavi Arch, close to the original as for the general design, but unable to fully understand the meaning and the function of its architectural elements.

What happened in Verona and in Veneto in the 1520s was a profound revolution in the arts that changed completely the approach to antiquity and the shape of the cities. A brief description of such a new phenomenon is given by the biographer Giorgio Vasari:

Giovan Maria [Falconetto] was the first who brought the true methods of building and the good architecture to Verona, Venice, and all those parts, where before him there had not been one who knew how to make even a cornice or a capital, or understood either the measurements or the proportions of a column or of any Order of architecture, as is evident from the buildings that were erected before his day. This knowledge was afterwards much increased by Fra Giocondo, who lived about the same time, and it received its final perfection from Messer Michele San Michele, insomuch that those parts are therefore under an everlasting obligation to the people of Verona, in which city were born and lived at one and the same time these three most excellent architects. To them there then succeeded Sansovino, who, not resting content with architecture, which he found already grounded and established by the three masters mentioned above, also brought thither sculpture, to the end that by its means their buildings might have all the adornments that were proper to them. And for this a debt of gratitude – if one may use such a word – is due to the ruin of Rome, by reason of which the masters were dispersed over many places and the beauties of these arts communicated throughout all Europe (VASARI/DE VERE, 6: 47)⁹.

⁹ *Fu il primo Giovanmaria [Falconetto] che portasse il vero modo di fabricare e la buona architettura in Verona, Venezia ed in tutte quelle parti, non essendo stato innanzi a lui chi sapesse pur fare una cornice o un capitello, né chi intendesse né misura, né proporzione di colonna, né di ordine alcuno, come si può vedere nelle fabbriche che furono fatte innanzi a lui; la quale cognizione, essendo poi molto stata aiutata da Fra' Giocondo, che fu ne' medesimi tempi, ebbe il suo compimento da Messer Michele San Michele, di maniera che quelle parti devono perciò esser perpetuamente obbligate ai Veronesi, nella quale patria nacquero ed in un medesimo tempo vissero questi tre eccellentissimi architetti, alli quali poi succedette il Sansovino che, oltre all'architettura la quale già trovò fondata e stabilita dai tre sopraddetti, vi portò anche la scultura, acciò con essa venissero ad avere le fabbriche fatti quegli ornamenti che loro si convengono; di che si ha obbligo, se è così lecito dire, alla rovina di Roma. Perciò che essendosi i maestri sparsi in molti luoghi, furono le bellezze di queste arti comunicate a tutta l'Europa. (VASARI, *Vite*, 4: 593)*

According to Vasari, «the true method of building and the good architecture» were first introduced in Veneto by three Veronese architects – Fra’ Giocondo, Giovan Maria Falconetto and Michele Sanmicheli – as an immediate consequence of the Sack of Rome in 1527¹⁰. Although this is undoubtedly an oversimplification – Fra’ Giocondo was in Venice as early as 1506, Falconetto’s first building in Veneto dates back to 1524 and Sanmicheli had already come back from Rome and Orvieto in 1526/27 – the passage bears consideration specifically for its desire to emphasize that «those parts are therefore under an everlasting obligation to the people of Verona». Falconetto and Sanmicheli came from two completely different backgrounds, yet they both left Verona around 1500 to move to Rome. Very little is known about their activity in the capital, except that Sanmicheli came in contact with Antonio da Sangallo the Younger and his extraordinary workshop, while Falconetto collected an impressive quantity of drawings of monuments in Rome, Tivoli, Capua and many other sites in central and southern Italy. Once back in Veneto, their archaeological knowledge was much more solid and wider than any other architect, and for the first time the local antiquities were analyzed and interpreted, and not only imitated. Despite the amount of time spent out of Verona, the languages of both Falconetto and Sanmicheli could reveal a sort of “imprinting” exerted by the Veronese monuments, so that it is possible to find specific references in their buildings: for example, the arch keystones with the head of Jupiter Ammon in Falconetto’s Loggia Cornaro (1524) and Sanmicheli’s Porta Nuova (started in 1532) were clearly inspired by the one in the homonymous arch in Verona; Falconetto’s signatures on the piers of the gates of Padua (1528 and 1530) and the Arco del Capitanio (1532) were made after the model of the Gavi Arch; the spiral fluted columns in Sanmicheli’s Pellegrini chapel (ca. 1528) and in the Palazzo Bevilacqua (1556) were a homage to the ones in the Borsari Gate. The antiquities of Verona raised the curiosity of the Renaissance architects for their particularities in comparison with the monuments in Rome, and most of these became specific features also of the modern Venetian architecture. Andrea Palladio, for example, was impressed by the original way in which the plinths of the Gavi Arch were shaped, and reused them in his buildings¹¹; the Tuscan capitals of the theater and the Arena presented an unusual profile¹², imitated by Falconetto in the Loggia Cornaro and reproduced by Palladio in his *Quattro Libri* (PALLADIO, *Quattro Libri*, I: 21), while the design of the pilasters of the upper level of the Arena was replicated by Jacopo Sansovino in the façade of the Palazzo Cornaro at San Maurizio in Venice.

¹⁰ The Sack of Rome (May 6, 1527) was a military event carried out by the mutinous troops of Charles V, best known as the Landsknechts (*Lanzichenecchi* in Italian). Such a dramatic event forced the majority of the artists settled in Rome to leave the capital and move to other cities in Italy and beyond the Alps, with the consequent dissemination of the local artistic tendencies in Europe.

¹¹ The plinth is the square block in the lower part of the base of the column, under the moldings; in the Gavi Arch, plinths are carved together with the underlying pedestals and shaped with a curved profile, in order to let the rain slide away.

¹² They are carved with a *cyma recta* in the place of the *ovolo*.

The ability to interpret the ancient monuments demonstrated by the new generation of architects had an impact not only in early-modern architecture, but also in painting – famous artists like Paolo Veronese and Paolo Farinati were both stonecutters/architects and painters, as was Giovan Maria Falconetto – and in literature. Torello Saraina would not have been able to write his *De Origine* without the help of the painter Giovanni Caroto; and probably the same drawings by Caroto needed to be revised by Falconetto before being published. But Saraina was also the commissioner of the Saraina altar in San Fermo (1523), imposing himself as an active promoter of the revival of antiquity and the spread of the new architecture. Something similar can be said for the Alighieri altar (1547), financed by Francesco Dante Alighieri, who was the author of a translation into Italian of Vitruvius' *De Architectura*; and the fact that his monument was a replica of the Gavi Arch – without the “mistake” in the entablature criticized by Serlio – suggests that he was such a deep expert on Vitruvius and on architecture to be able to intervene in the design process (BRUGNOLI-SANDRINI 1988, II: 160; AURENHAMMER 1995: 178).

The interest on Vitruvius' treatise in Verona is proved by the circulation of two different translations in the 1530s-40s, one by Alighieri and the other by Bernardino Donato. Apparently, such books did not have a huge impact on the local culture, yet they drew the attention of another humanist, Daniele Barbaro, who was working on the same project; and, once again, Barbaro would not have been able to translate Vitruvius' *De Architectura* without the help of Andrea Palladio, who made the illustrations.

For thirty years the activity of local architects like Francesco da Castello coexisted without conflicts with the new language imported by Sanmicheli, Falconetto and Sansovino, but a general evolution in the approach to antiquity and modern architecture was necessary to survive: not only the new generation of artists, but also the patrons themselves were well informed about the new tendencies.

Architecture as a political tool

Humanists, artists, patrons and collectors were part of a complex network, whose extent overstepped the boundaries of Verona and Veneto. As many artists worked also in Venice, Vicenza, Padua and had contacts with Rome, most of the patrons were connected with the humanistic élite in the capital and in the other courts (Mantova, Ferrara, Florence) and were totally aware of the new trends in art and architecture. This means that they were able to select the artists to work with in order to introduce a specific language and obtain a specific effect, and in this sense architecture was the most efficient tool. The façades of the palaces, as well as the private chapels and altars, were intended

as the mirror of the patrons' culture, richness and power, and such a phenomenon was at the origin of the so-called *Renovatio urbis* – the city renewal.

The involvement of a specific architect could depend on a multitude of factors, but a deep analysis of the cultural network reveals a close connection between different circles of artists/architects and circles of patrons: in other words, oral recommendations and personal contacts were the best ways for obtaining a commission. The existing network of relations between artists, intellectuals and patrons, and the cultural influence they exerted on one another was mistakenly considered by historians in the last 30 years as a declaration of political support.

As said before, 16th-century authors described post-1517 politics in Verona as split in two parties, the aristocracy and the lower classes: while the former was clearly hostile to the Venetian domination, the latter was supportive of the Venetian rule (SANSOVINO, *Origine*: 239; FRIZZI, *Memorie*: 112; BORELLI 1980: 3; BURNS 1995: 71; CONFORTI 2000: 371)¹³. Actually, the belonging to a specific party was not automatically connected with the social classes; just like there were representatives of the anti-Venetian faction among the common people – and Giovan Maria Falconetto was one of them¹⁴ –, there also were aristocrats who favored the Venetian government. It was also possible that members of the same family belonged to different parties, that makes really hard to clearly identify the overall position of the aristocrats: examples can be found within the Nogarola and Bevilacqua families. In any case, for at least one century, violent fights between the two parties subverted the political stability of the city and were a source of considerable concern for Venice: this clearly emerges in the letters sent by the *podestà*, which was very nervously watching the manoeuvres of certain nobles, who were holding large secret day and night gatherings in their homes (BURNS 1995: 71)¹⁵. To give an example, Antonio Bevilacqua, according to the biographer Valerio Seta, «had so many followers, and such a large area of the city was on his side, that his enemies were terrified»¹⁶ (SETA, *Compendio*: 254; CONFORTI 2000: 370). The Veronese attachment to their autonomy was also evident in their numerous attempts to organize and finance rebel groups and by the spread of dovecotes «with the features of fortresses», the purpose of which was to «provide hiding places for these bandits and rogues», also documented in the area of Rovigo (FRANK 2000: 287). It is equally undeniable that Venice was tightly controlling the situation and immediately destroying any kind of fortification or opposing the creation of meeting places, and using strict censorship over printed

¹³ See Machiavelli: «E' gentiluomini, parendo loro forse essere in colpa, non son Marcheschi; e' popolari e la infima plebe è tutta viniziana» (The nobles, possibly feeling at fault, are not supporters of St. Mark; the commoners and the poorest, however, are all Venetians) (MARCHI 1980: 9).

¹⁴ During the Hapsburg rule, Falconetto himself was the head of a faction that supported the Emperor, a role for which he was well rewarded (TEMANZA, *Vite*: 133-134).

¹⁵ ASVe (State Archives of Venice), *Consiglio dei Dieci, Lettere dei Rettori ai Capi*, b. 192, fol. 109-110, 232.

¹⁶ «[...] Di tanto seguito che tirando seco una gran parte della città si rendeva tremendo a gli nemici et emuli suoi».

material – in whole or in part – as in the case of the first edition of Saraina's *Historie*, in 1542 (MARCHI 1980: 12 and footnote 14).

After Sanmicheli's return to Verona around 1526/27, one of his first patrons was the bishop Ludovico di Canossa, who had lived in Rome and had been in contact with the most influent humanists and artists of his time, like Raphael and Giulio Romano. In Verona, Canossa's network included the most powerful aristocratic families – like the Bevilacuas and Della Torres –, artists like Giovanni Caroto and Domenico Brusasorzi and humanists like the bishop Gian Matteo Giberti, the doctor Girolamo Fracastoro, the grammarian Bernardino Donato and the geographer Giambattista Ramusio. Sanmicheli was introduced to this circle and became close friend with Ramusio and Fracastoro; what is more significant is that his entire activity in Verona was made possible by private and public commissions from aristocrats belonging to the same network. Sanmicheli worked for the Della Torre family, who distinguished themselves for the quantity of artists involved in their projects and their ability to discover new talents, like Falconetto, Sanmicheli himself and eventually the young Palladio; and also for the Bevilacqua, the Pellegrini and the Lavezzola families.

Since the first studies on the Veronese Renaissance, scholars have always considered all these families as exponents of the anti-Venetian party, highlighting the close connections between political orientation and the spread of a new architectural language in the 16th century. According to such an interpretation, the revival of the local antiquities in modern architecture was a tool to reclaim a cultural identity and the autonomy from Venice. It must be considered that the foundation of Venice was relatively new – it dated to 421 A.D., according to the legend –, and for such a reason the capital of the Serenissima Republic did not have any relevant monument from the past, if not the ones taken from Constantinople and other Mediterranean cities during the Middle Ages. On the contrary, Verona, Vicenza and Padua were founded much earlier than Venice, and the Roman monuments still existing were the proof of such antiquity. In Vicenza it was still possible to see the ruins of the Berga Theater – measured and drawn by Andrea Palladio –, while Padua could boast a theater, an amphitheater, a bridge and a few other monuments; but in both cities such relics from the past were really poor. Verona, on the other hand, had the most imposing monuments in Italy after Rome, and this made possible for Renaissance architects and artists to draw inspiration from local antiquities; in other words, the city was able to self-represent with no need to import models from outside.

According with modern scholars, the highest example of such a tendency is the façade of the Palazzo Bevilacqua, due to its impressive quantity of references to local antiquities and monuments in Rome and Capua, and the presence of busts of Roman emperors on the keystones (**fig. 12**). As a reply to the marble lions disseminated by the Venetian governors all around the city, placing the portraits of Roman emperors on a façade was an act of rebellion, that could be interpreted as both a

form of devotion to the Holy Roman Empire and an allusion to the flourishing of Verona prior the foundation of Venice. Through the architecture of the city gates, the private and public palaces and even the altars, and through the literary production and antiquarians, the Veronese élite openly expressed its hostility to Venice, in a continuity with the Medieval myth of the “Madonna Verona” and with the creation of a new identity, as “the second Rome”.

Is another perspective possible?

Despite the deep influence of such an approach on modern studies, the documentary evidence seems to suggest that the phenomenon of the revival of the local antiquities in Renaissance Verona cannot be interpreted as a mere political tool. As for the Bevilacqua family, for example, homonymies and misinterpretations led to a completely wrong direction; if it is true that the family during the Middle Ages had received titles and benefits also from the German emperors, during the 15th and the 16th centuries they loyally supported the Serenissima Republic. Scholars who have written about the busts of emperors on the façade of their palace seem not to have noticed that the same façade contains the biggest quantity of lion heads than any other palace in Verona, that clarifies the devotion of the family to Venice (MARCORIN 2013; MARCORIN 2015). As for the other families, their political orientation is not always clear, and more in general the dynamics of the relationship between the two factions is not easily explained, without risking oversimplification or generic arguments; members of the two factions did have contacts, were sometimes present at the same social gatherings, had equal access to public office, and could also get married (CORTE, *Istorie*, 3: 201-204, 281; SANSOVINO, *Origine*: 239; FRIZZI, *Memorie*: 182).

In 2001, Giuseppe Conforti in his *Verona veneziana nel Cinquecento. La città del principe* provided an interesting collection of documents that demonstrate that the interest for the ancient monuments in Verona was not only accepted by Venetian governors, but even encouraged and sponsored. In the 1530s the *podestà* Giovanni Dolfin promoted the new paving of the main street, re-connecting the main monuments; he also financed the construction of a new portal, designed by Sanmicheli – who, far from being the architect of the anti-Venetian party, was indeed the main military engineer of the Serenissima Republic – and intervened in the design of the Porta Nuova.

Analyzing the case-study of Verona in a wider context, it is also possible to find similarities with other cities, especially in their self-identification as “second Romes”; in fact, far from being a prerogative of Verona, self-representing through a comparison with Rome was a phenomenon quite common, with a variety of meanings and aims, referring to both the pagan and the papal city. Trier and Aachen in Germany (known in Italian as Treviri and Acquisgrana), Avignon and Fontainebleau

in France, Winchester in England and Tarnovo in Bulgaria received in different ages the appellative of “second Rome”, as did in Italy Milan, Capua, Ravenna, Aquileia and Frascati. During the Late Roman Empire the title of “the second Rome” was given to Constantinople, defining its role as the new capital of the World; and Rome itself was depicted as “the second Babylon” («secunda Babylonia»; St. Augustine, *De Civitate Dei*, XVI: 17 and XVIII: 22).

That said, defining Verona as a “second Rome” was first a dialectical tool, based on the presence of local antiquities; but, within the territories of the Serenissima Republic, Verona was not the only city with ancient monuments, and the same phenomenon could have risen also in Pula, Split, Kérkyra or Famagusta (Gazimağusa). On the other hand, Venice, whose identity had been influenced for centuries by the contacts with the Byzantine empire, mysteriously never took inspiration from its Greek colonies in order to develop an original architectural language in the Renaissance, and always tended to be impenetrable to Roman culture. Venice considered itself “better than Rome, born free and Christian” (FORTINI BROWN 1991: 527), counterposing its identity to the Veronese one, and declaring its superiority.

To conclude – and to introduce my presentation – the Veronese cultural identity in the Renaissance needs to be re-contextualized and reconsidered carefully: and, although it is possible that in some cases art and historiography also contained political meanings, more in general the shaping of a modern local identity was undoubtedly a more complex – and even a more spontaneous – phenomenon within the frame of the creation of the modern European culture.

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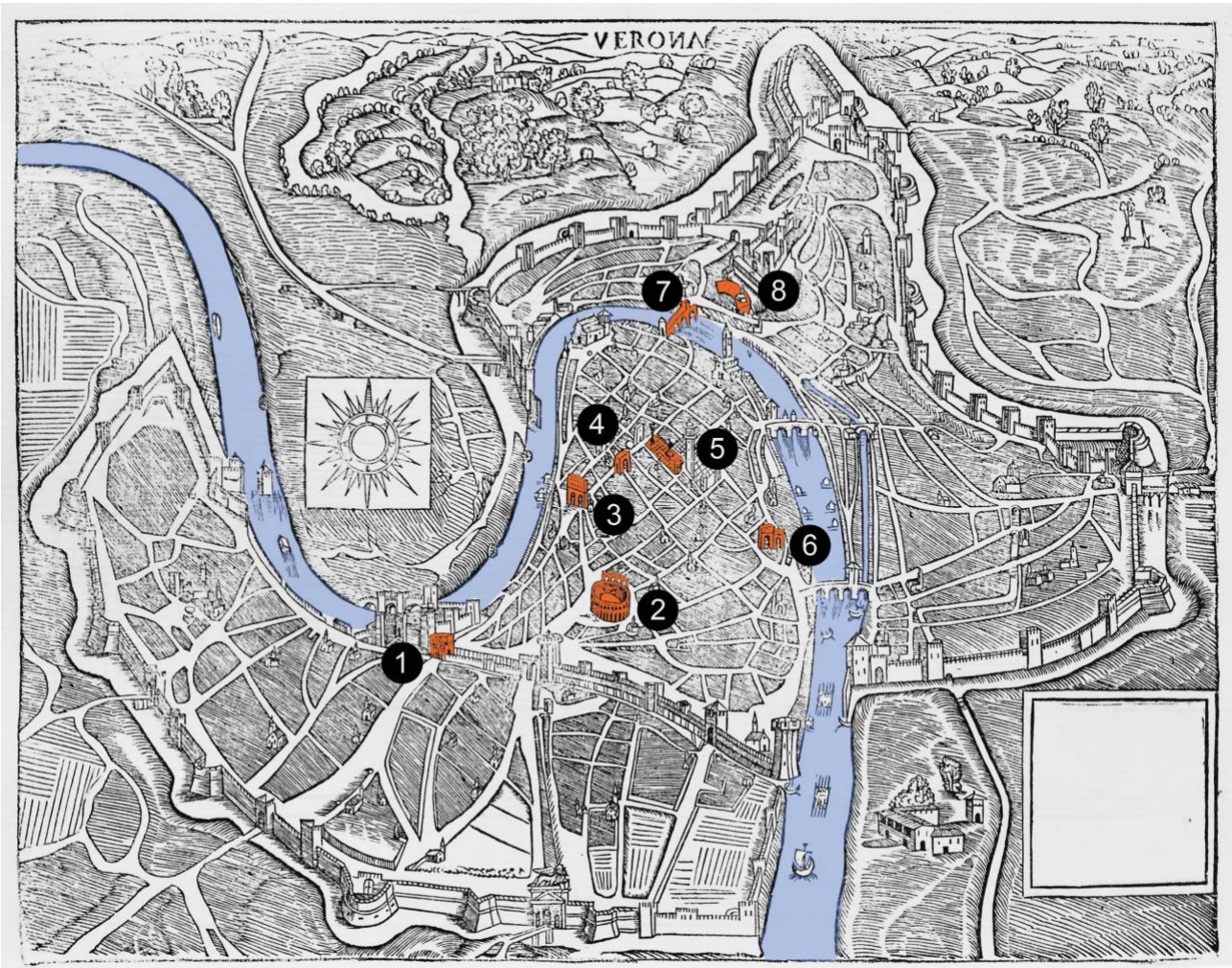
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1. *Verona, the city of lovers.*

2. *Arena Opera Festival.*



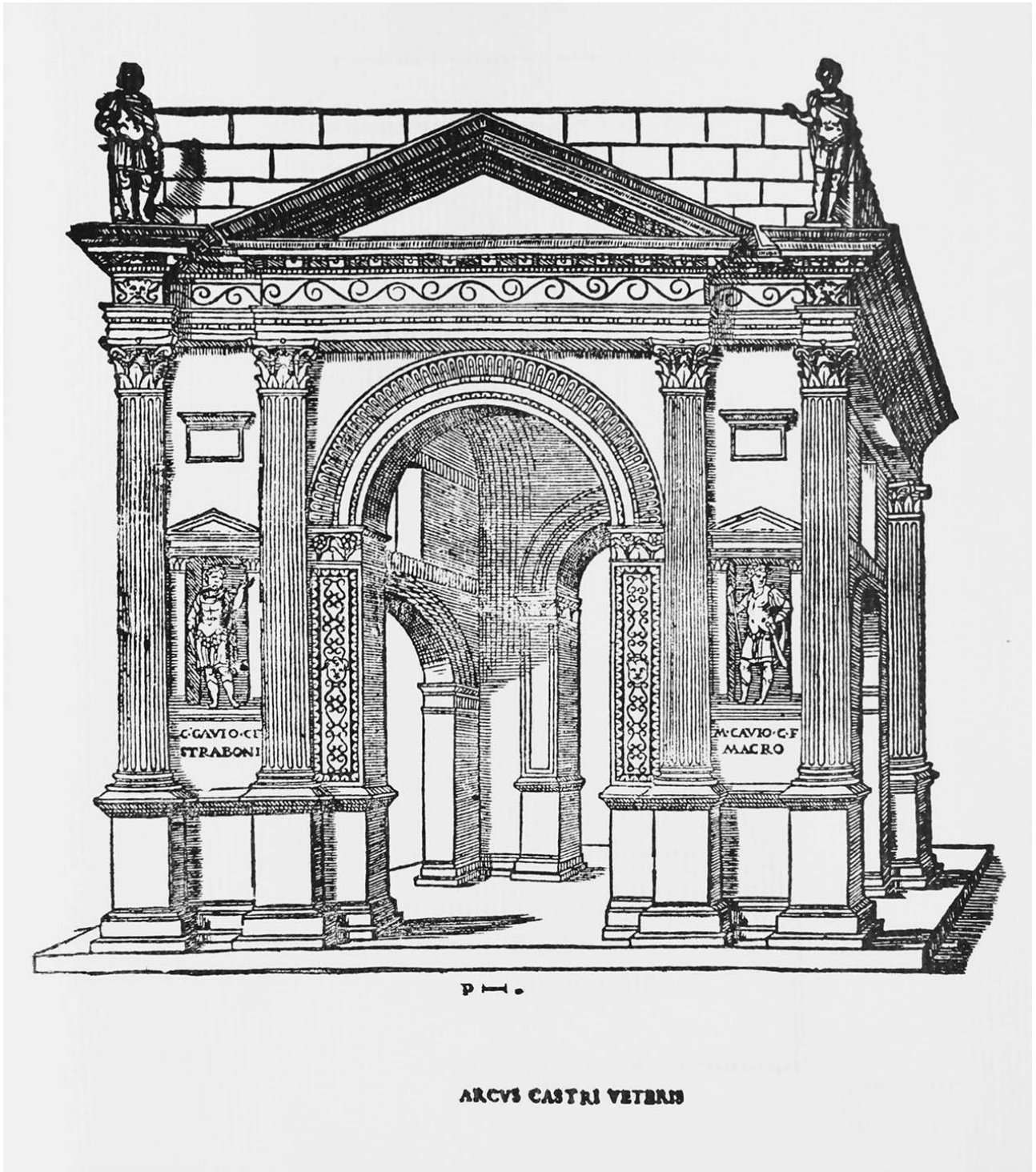
3. Giovanni Caroto, *Map of Verona*, in SARAINA, *De Origine* (1540); CAROTO, *Antiquità* (1560):

1. Gavi Arch (*Arco dei Gavi*);
2. Arena (amphitheater);
3. Borsari Gate (*Porta Borsari*, or *Porta dei Borsari*);
4. Arch of Jupiter Ammon (*Arco di Giove Ammone*);
5. Piazza Erbe (forum);
6. Leoni Gate (*Porta Leoni*);
7. Ponte Pietra;
8. Theater.



4. The Arena.

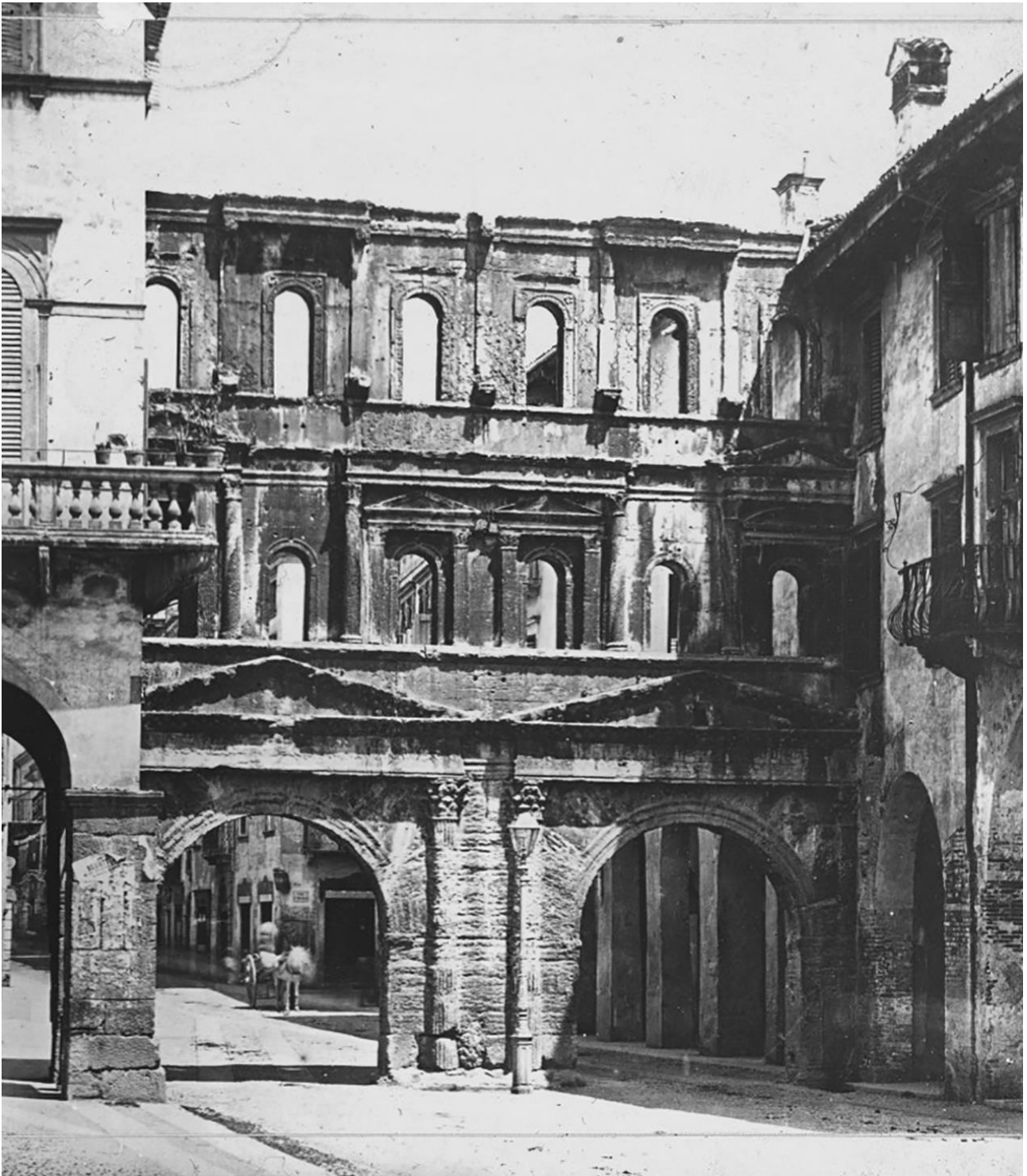
5. The Gavi Arch.



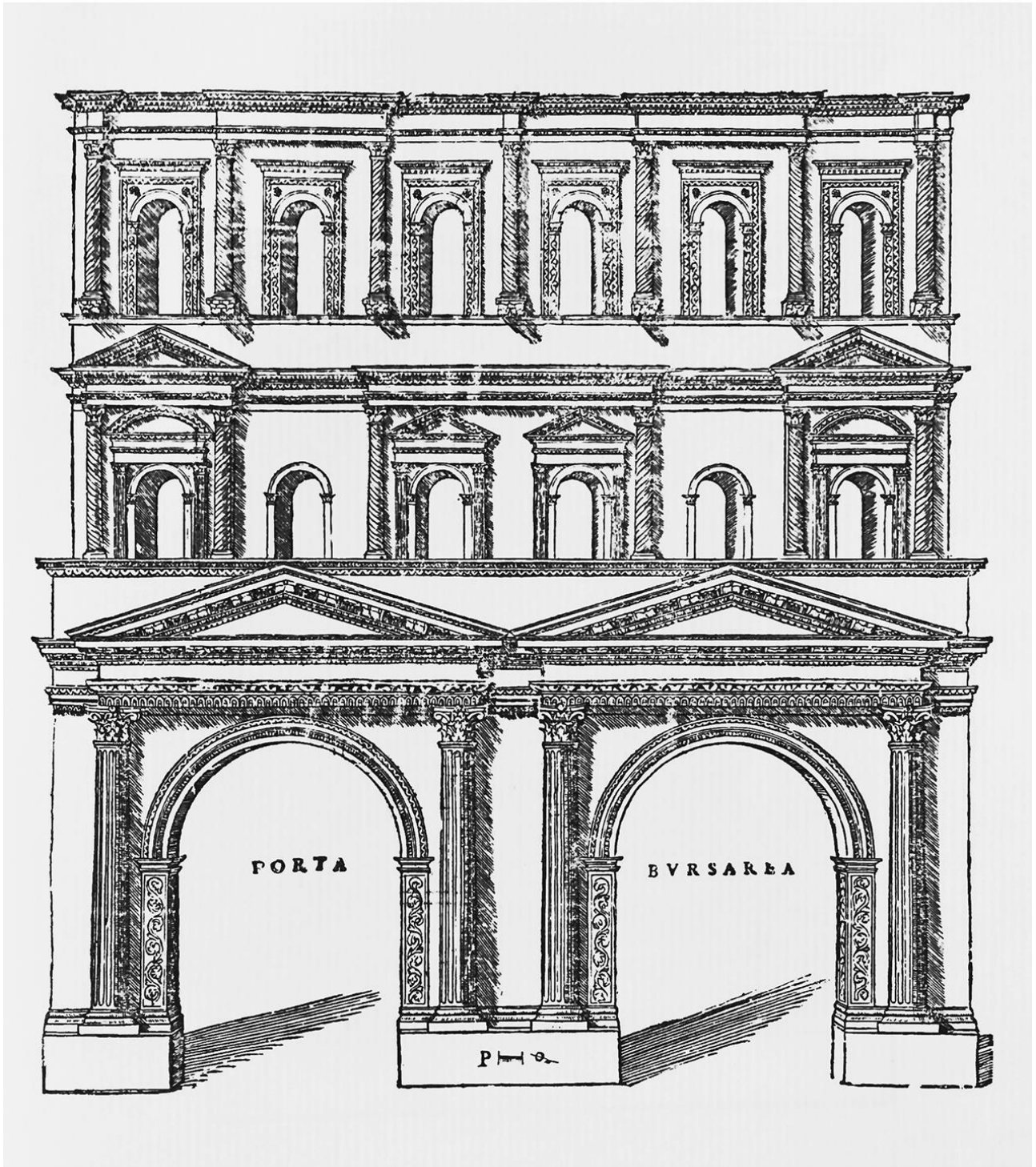
6. Giovanni Caroto, *The Gavi Arch*, in SARAINA, *De Origine* (1540); CAROTO, *Antiquità* (1560).



7. The Pindemonte altar (1529-42, right) compared with the Gavi Arch (left).



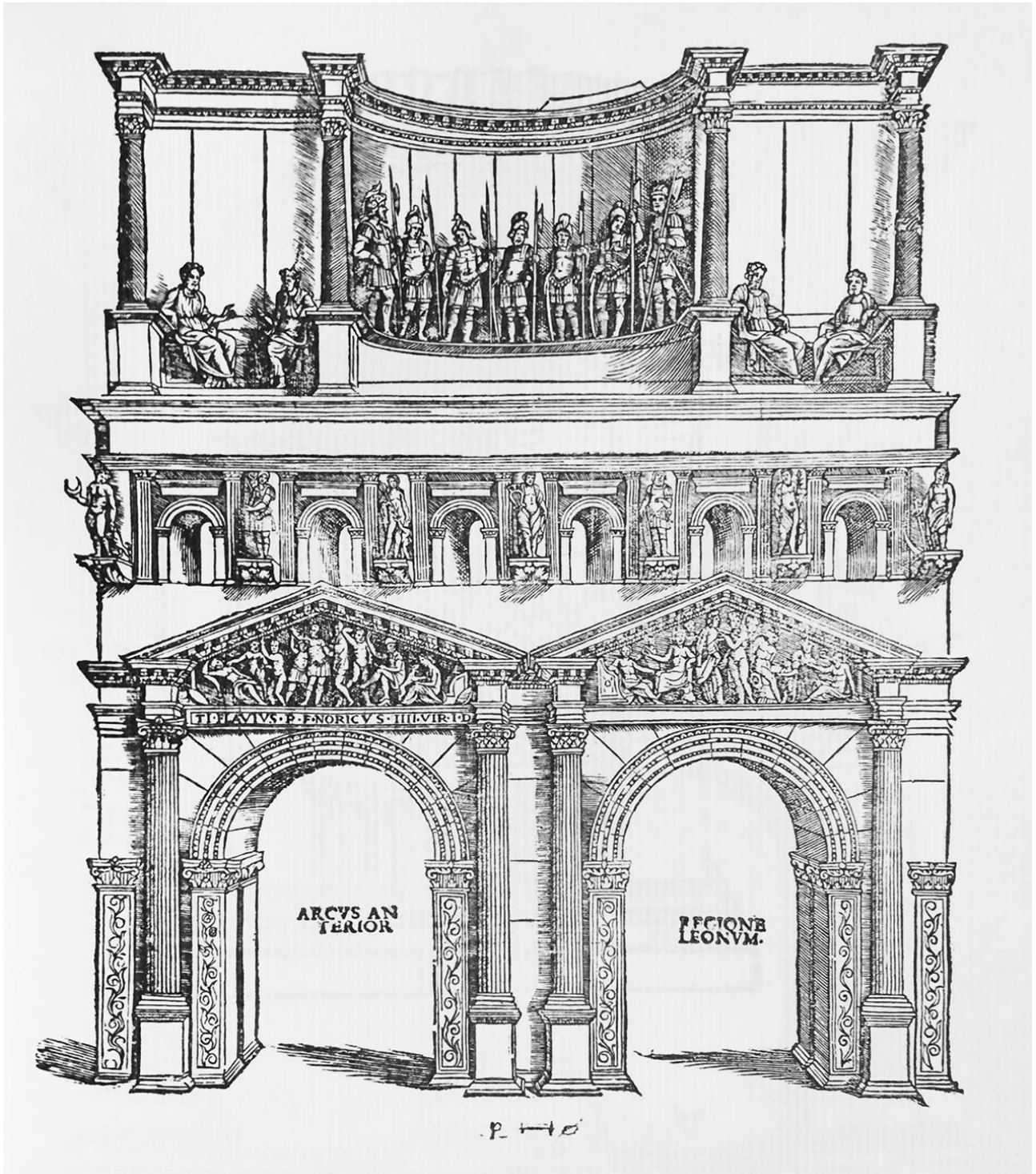
8. The Borsari Gate.



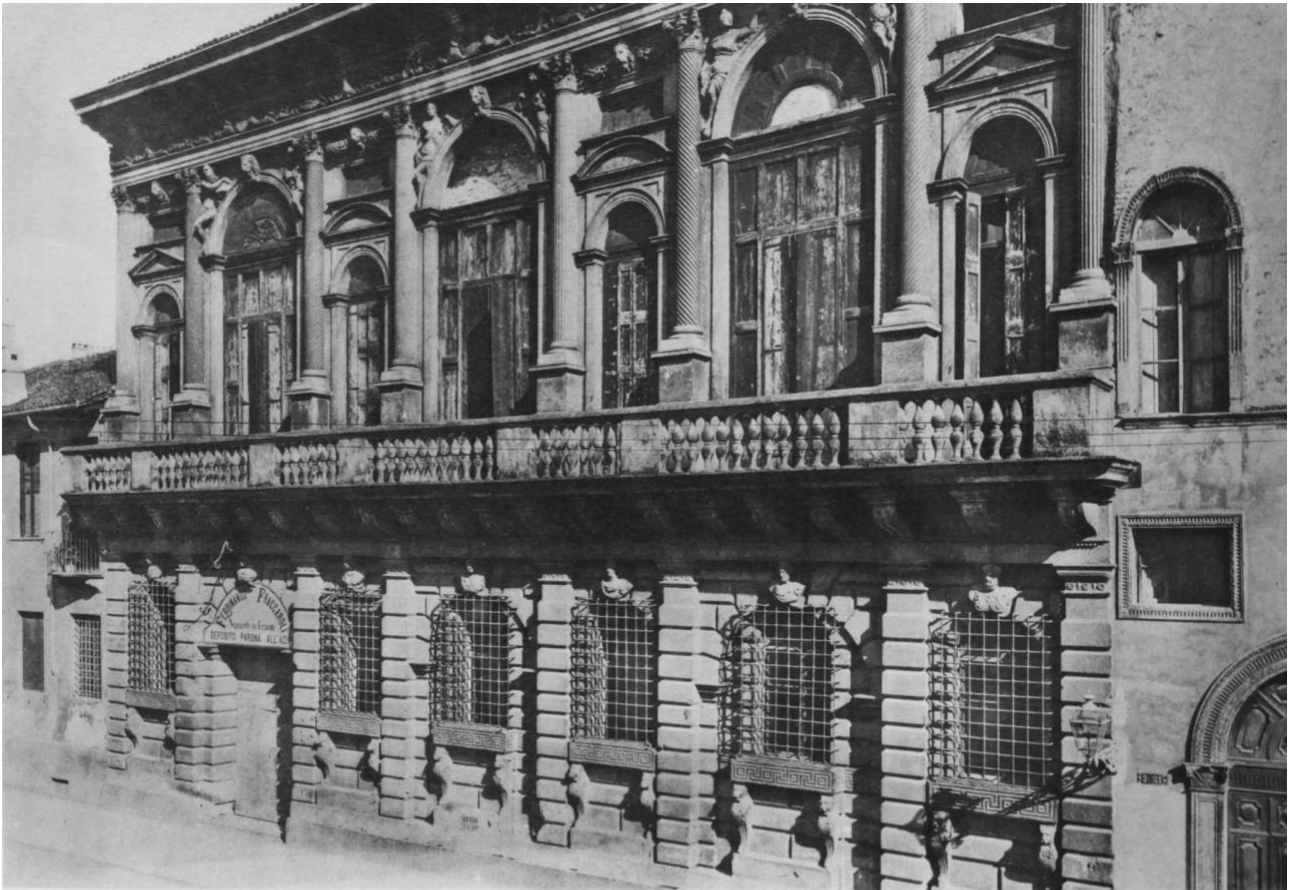
9. Giovanni Caroto, *The Borsari Gate*, in SARAINA, *De Origine* (1540); CAROTO, *Antiquità* (1560).



10. The Leoni Gate.



11. Giovanni Caroto, *The Leoni Gate*, in SARAINA, *De Origine* (1540); CAROTO, *Antiquità* (1560)



12. Michele Sanmicheli, Palazzo Bevilacqua (1556-1559).