

UNCELEBRATED VENICE

Venezia Minore by Egle Renata Trincanato
A New Critical Edition

edited by Angelo Maggi



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Editor's note: In the text, the abbreviation "n.a." refers to the "Numero Anagrafico", an Italian numbering system that corresponds to the civic or street number of a building. Please note that Venice follows a unique system of numbering its buildings. In this edition of the book, we have also updated the house numbering to assist readers in more easily identifying the buildings referenced by Trincanato.

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Emanuela Sorbo

RE-STOR(y)-A(c)TION: an Archaeology of Consciousness

The first edition of *Venezia Minore* was published in 1948, a significant year for Italy. The country was still reeling from the devastation of the Second World War and a fervent debate was raging regarding the future of its historic centres¹. Prominent figures such as Ferdinando Forlati², Bruna Tamaro Forlati, and Piero Gazzola were the main drivers of a national “resurrection” movement to chart the course for the country’s reconstruction. Yet amidst Italy’s ruinous and war-torn landscape, Venice remained steadfast as a point of reference.

An international agreement around Venice had averted the bombing that reduced neighbouring areas, such as Porto Marghera, to rubble, thus preserving the lagoon-locked city in a state of temporal suspension, frozen in its pre-war context. By contrast, Italy’s major historic centres – Florence, Rome, Milan, Naples, Palermo – were heavily impacted. The 1949 exhibition *I Monumenti e le opere d’arte danneggiate dalla guerra nelle Tre Venezie* (*The Monuments and Works of Art Damaged by the War in the Three Venices*) revealed that Padua endured 40 air raids. On just one occasion,

1 The bibliography on the subject is vast, but here are some primary sources and initiatives dedicated to post-war reconstruction by research groups on a national scale: British Committee on the Preservation and Restitution of Works of art, Archives, and Other Material in Enemy Hands. 1945. *Works of Art in Italy-Losses and Survivals in the War, Part One – South of Bologna*. London: H.M. Stationery Office; British Committee on the Preservation and Restitution of Works of Art, Archives, and Other Material in Enemy Hands. 1946. *Works of Art in Italy – Losses and Survivals in the War, Part Two*. London: H.M. Stationery Office; Direzione Generale delle Antichità e delle Belle Arti. 1950. *La ricostruzione del patrimonio artistico italiano. (The reconstruction of the Italian Cultural Heritage)*. Rome: La libreria dello Stato; Lorenzo De Stefani and Carlotta Coccoli (edited by), *Guerra, Monumenti, Ricostruzione: architetture e centri storici italiani nel secondo conflitto mondiale*, (Venezia: Marsilio, 2011).

2 Stefano Sorteni (edited by), *Le stagioni dell’ingegnere Ferdinando Forlati. Un protagonista del restauro nelle Venezia del Novecento*, (Padova: Il Poligrafo, 2017).

the Good Friday bombing of 1944, Treviso suffered 1,600 civilian deaths and the destruction or damage of over 80% of its building. Vicenza endured seven air raids between December 1943 and March 1945, resulting in approximately 1,300 casualties, the loss of around 280 homes and damage to over 480 buildings. Meanwhile, minor damage characterised the few incidents in Venice, such as to houses in the Santa Marta area – the Church of Angelo Raffaele and the detachment of frescoes at Palazzo Labia³.

The 1946 exhibition *La Reconstruction artistique en Italie* at the Grand Palais in Paris, held shortly after the founding of UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization – 16 November 1945), encapsulated the post-war focus on international cooperation in the preservation of monuments. This exhibition collected and showcased images of key reconstruction projects in Veneto, highlighting the central role of local reconstruction practices while remaining exposed to the international critical gaze. The citation that opens the exhibition catalogue, a quote from Paul Valéry, “ne faut pas que les Dieux demeurent sans toit, et les âmes sans spectacles” (do not let the gods remain homeless, nor the souls without spectacles)⁴, charted the course for a new understanding and awareness of heritage: “do not leave souls without spectacles”. This reflects a broader entanglement of what we would today term “immaterial” concerns, such as the reconfiguration of collective memory through reconstruction, and establishes Venice as a symbol of authenticity and the expression of a collective – rather than individual – genius, establishing it as an archetypal image for historic centres.

Egle Trincanato's 1948 reading traverses this historical canvas, exhibiting a nuanced understanding that blends both *les âmes* and *les spectacles*. Venice's uncelebrated architecture becomes a lens through which to observe the authenticity of collective genius, which transcends the nineteenth-century notions of the “picturesque” or “folklore” as defined by William Thoms and returns to the realm of diligent *studium*. The result is a visual lexicon that forms an architectural compendium – the only architectural atlas available in 1948 Italy not to have been ravaged by war – which reflects the radiant human scale of the city as described by Agnoldomenico Pica.

In his introduction to the first edition of *Venezia Minore*, Pica himself describes Trincanato's study of Venice as an “intellectual adherence”, or rather a careful *studium*, that reveals the complexity of Venice's construction and creation: a process which Jean Cocteau would later describe as a “collective genius” in his colloquium of 1962⁵. The fusion of functional and aesthetic aspects within a framework of hierarchies – piazza, campo, corte, calle, rio, bridges, porticoes – perfectly illustrates the social value of architecture. A decade later, these ideas would lead Saverio Muratori to write *Studi per un'operante storia urbana di Venezia*⁶.

From the outset of the process that culminated in the 1964 *Venice Charter*⁷, for which Trincanato was a key advocate, and the foundation of ICOMOS (International

3 Michelangelo Muraro (edited by), *Mostra del Restauro di monumenti e opere d'arte danneggiate dalla guerra nelle tre Venezie*. (Venezia: Soprintendenza ai Monumenti di Venezia, 1949).

4 A.A.VV., *La Reconstruction artistique, en Italie*. (Roma: Istituto Poligrafico dello Stato; Paul Valéry, 1947); *Eupalinos ou l'architecte precede' de l'ame et la danse*, (Paris: Editions de la Nouvelle Revue Francaise, 1923).

5 Caedemon Records, Jean Cocteau – *A Self-Portrait: A Conversation With William Fifield*, 1966.

6 Saverio Muratori, “Studi per una operante storia urbana di Venezia. I: Quadro generale dalle origini agli sviluppi attuali”, in *Palladio*, n. 3-4, (Roma: Istituto Poligrafico dello Stato, 1960).

7 ICOMOS, *La Carta di Venezia (The Venice Charter)*, 1964.

Council on Monuments and Sites – Warsaw 1965), Venice became the physical and cultural space where the awareness of the relationship between context and architecture would emerge as of the central themes concerning the dialogue between society and its “monuments” in the second half of the twentieth century. The title of the proceedings is, in fact, programmatically *The monument for the man*⁸.

This growing awareness of architectural depth, particularly within a dimension of places we could define as domestic, has its origins in the post-war climate and Trincanato's reading of Venice. Here, every element becomes part of a lexicon of architectural authenticity: chimneys, cornices, windows, mouldings, floor plans, porticoes, and arches. To interpret *Venezia Minore* is to become involved in the process of the archaeology of knowledge, where tone, colour, and material merge with form⁹.

Structurally, the volume's index threads this narrative, situating architectural elements *sestiere* by *sestiere* within a historical perspective (houses of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, fifteenth-century houses, and so on). The bibliography alternates between references like Pietro Selvatico's *Guida Artistica* and John Ruskin's *The Stones of Venice* (the Italian translation by A. Guidetti, published in Turin on the eve of the Second World War in 1942) as well as citing such authors as Vittorio Moschini and Sergio Bettini.

The architectural excavation that precedes the architectural dimension introduces total engagement with the theme of the relationship between man and society¹⁰ (or rather the relationship between tradition and creativity). Implicit throughout *Venezia Minore* is the need to seek out the root; indeed, in the same year, Simone Weil was also grappling with this idea, asserting that the “roots” of human existence lie in one's active and natural participation in the life of a community capable of preserving the treasures of the past while maintaining a vision for the future.” Such “natural” participation is one that is inherited, almost automatically, from the place where one is born, practises one's trade, and lives out one's life¹¹.

The term *minore* (here translated as *uncelebrated*) thus becomes the leading word in a domestic conception of human life, in which the individual is part of a collective, and brings us back to Cocteau's theme of “collective genius,” as that

8 *The monument for the man. Records of the II International Congress of Restoration*, (Padova: Marsilio, 1964).

9 “[...] the picturesque manner of perforating façades balances this out and blends into a graceful harmony – one that never ceases to intrigue with its unexpected and imaginative features, despite operating within the confines of only two fundamental layouts. All of this rich heritage begins to fade from uncelebrated architecture after the seventeenth century. Neoclassical influences instil both rigidity in the shaping of forms and uniformity in the arrangement of voids. Openings that were once curved becomes predominantly architraved; cornices, balusters, jambs, and sills flatten out into plane surfaces that intersect at right angles, thinning out and losing much of their relief; colour dulls to a uniform tone of grey; windows which were once arranged in picturesque schemes of concentrated openings and solid breaks start to spread out – arranged in a uniform and equidistant pattern in keeping with the canons of neoclassical architecture”, see p. 77 of the present volume.

10 “These groupings, like many others of uncelebrated architecture, show an astute framing of perspective, varied harmonies of masses, and extraordinarily vivacious accents of colour which, in setting the picturesque tone for successive compositions, are arranged within the conventional limits of well-conceived harmony. Such harmony defines symmetries and cadences with its constant rhythm of parts and masses, and orders voids and solid spaces according to logical compositional groupings. Some examples exhibit perfect spatial harmony achieved using very cheap means, which seems more like the creation of a master architect than the work of humble craftsmen”, pp. 68-69 of the present volume.

11 Simone Weil, *L'Enracinement. Prélude à une déclaration des devoirs envers l'être humain*, (Paris: Gallimard, 1949).

unconscious creative force through which a city generates itself. Venice here represents the “root” of how urban space is constructed, the grammatical rule throughout the pages of its history.

This capacity to intertwine history evokes the influence of Heidegger’s philosophy on the relationship between monuments and historic centres, especially the central idea of “Being and Time,” that is of being within time¹². This is embodied in Trincanato’s polyphonic reading of buildings, where understanding an individual monument requires engagement with the accompanying voices, eschewing abstract analyses in favour of a series of concrete case studies within the lexicon and language of architecture. This phenomenological approach would become the core of the themes within the Venice Charter. On this topic, Simone de Beauvoir wrote in 1960 that phenomenology acts by “overcoming the opposition between idealism and realism by affirming the primacy of consciousness and the world as we perceive it”¹³.

The relationship with historic centres and their “uncelebrated”, more marginal environment is thus the key to understanding society itself and the redefinition of being within a temporal framework of reconstruction. The most fundamental aspect of this process is the translation of the concept of the monument from an individual architectural object to a collective urban organism. Ambrogio Annoni had already emphasised this in 1946 in his work *Scienza e arte del restauro architettonico, idee ed esempi* (*Science and Art of Architectural Restoration, Ideas and Examples*) where he underscored the social testimonial value of historic centres¹⁴. This awareness of architectural history as a channel of social interpretation culminated in the Venice Charter, where Article 1 emphasises the “cultural significance” of modest works as a collective chorus, a polyphonic symphony of peoples¹⁵. With this impetus, the preservation of forms, languages, and elements becomes fundamental, as each constitutes a vehicle of collective memory and a “testimony” of traditions and civilisations. As we turn the pages of *Venezia Minore*, we witness a tradition of scholarship come to life – an active (and “phenomenological”) approach to history, in which architecture and its conservation serve narrative roles for society and collective memory.

12 Martin Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*, (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 1927).

13 Simone de Beauvoir, *La force de l'âge*, “Mémoires”, vol. 3, (Paris: Gallimard, 1960).

14 Ambrogio Annoni, *Scienza e arte del restauro architettonico, idee ed esempi*, (Milano: Edizioni Artistiche Framar, 1946), p. 30: “Monumento è tutto ciò che ha valore di testimonianza e tali “si possono intendere anche quegli edifici che, pur privi di valore essenzialmente artistico e storico, rappresentano la fisionomia di un pericolo, o di un quartiere, o di una città”.

15 ICOMOS, *La Carta di Venezia. (The Venice Charter)*, 1964. Art. 1: “The concept of a historic monument embraces not only the single architectural work but also the urban or rural setting in which is found the evidence of a particular civilization, a significant development or a historic event. This applies not only to great works of art but also to more modest works of the past which have acquired cultural significance with the passing of time”.



Corte Bottera in Castello, near San Giovanni e Paolo. Portal from the thirteenth century.



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***Venezia Minore* by Egle Renata Trincanato** **A New Critical Edition**

First published in 1948, *Venezia Minore* – or *Uncelebrated Venice* – is Egle Renata Trincanato's landmark study of Venice's urban fabric from the fourteenth to the eighteenth century. A pioneering architect and scholar, Trincanato was the first woman to graduate in Architecture from the Regio Istituto Superiore di Venezia in 1938. Her meticulous research laid the foundation for later morphological studies, shaping the way we understand the city's lesser-known architectural heritage.

Now, on the 77th anniversary of its original publication, this new English critical edition brings Trincanato's insights to an international audience. Rich with her original drawings and archival materials preserved in the Università Iuav di Venezia's Archivio Progetti, this edition also reproduces her rare layout mockup – annotated by hand and carefully composed. More than a book, *Uncelebrated Venice* stands as a testament to Trincanato's vision of the printed page as both an intellectual and artistic creation.

A must-read for scholars, students, architects, and lovers of Venice alike, this volume invites readers to rediscover the city's hidden architectural treasures through the eyes of one of its most influential thinkers.

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