

UNCELEBRATED VENICE

Venezia Minore by Egle Renata Trincanato
A New Critical Edition

edited by Angelo Maggi



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The heirs of Egle Renata Trincanato – Corrado Trincanato Balistreri e Emiliano Balistreri – have allowed the translation and the publication of this volume.

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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Venice in Trincanato's Reading and other "Minority Reports"

Venezia Minore looms large amidst the vast bibliography on the lagoon city, representing the pioneering volume of a genre we might – to borrow from the title of Philip K. Dick's famous sci-fi story¹ – call "minority reports" on architecture. Let me briefly clarify. These "minority reports" on Venice contain analyses that soon became the leitmotif of a certain way of conceiving architectural projects and works as being inextricably bound to their environment. Trincanato conveyed this very idea at the opening of her chapter *Venetian Urbanism*. It gave rise to what became known as the Venetian school of architectural studies and research, under the direction of Giuseppe Samonà², and set a precedent that guided many subsequent studies³ at luav.

Far from being homogeneous, this school was extremely diverse and often at odds regarding internal cultural and academic positions. Yet, starting in 1948 – the year in which *Venezia Minore* was first published – and continuing into the 1990s, it managed to establish a typomorphological perspective that would eventually become synonymous with Italian architecture worldwide. This perspective, recognised globally since the second half of the twentieth century, contributed to a distinctive "Italian theory of architecture" which continues to intrigue major architectural scholars and historians across Europe and the Americas. One might argue that this represents an alternative

1 Philip Kinderd Dick, *Rapporto di minoranza e altri racconti*, translated by Paolo Prezzavento, (Roma: Fanucci Editore, 2002).

2 Giovanni Marras, Marco Pogacnik (edited by), *Giuseppe Samonà e la scuola di architettura a Venezia*, (Padova: Il Poligrafo, 2006).

3 This footnote is purely illustrative, citing the "Polis" series created by the Marsilio publishing house. Since the 1960s, this series has published volumes by professors and architects who have made luav a reference school at both national and international levels. These include works by Carlo Aymonino, as well as Francesco Dal Co, Luciano Semerani, and others. Additionally, outside the series, the most used and cited volume of all: *L'architettura della città* by Aldo Rossi, the first Italian Pritzker Prize winner in 1980.

interpretation to the modern approach to architecture, echoing the approach Samonà advocated in his school's curriculum: "a careful, precise 'study of architecture' which analytically considers all contributing elements to a work's genesis while culminating in a 'general synthesis' that translates into 'architectural creation'"⁴.

That it was a woman at Iuav who established an approach to the art of constructing a city that was at once theoretical, scientific, and narrative is rightfully emphasised in this new English translation, which restores the original edition and not subsequent, often more accurate reconstructions, as gleaned from later studies.⁵ And herein lies the second aspect, which I believe to be fundamental for understanding the academic impact of *Venezia Minore*. It is an aspect which concerns both the tradition of studies into which Trincanato's work was interpolated – namely the 1930s studies on anonymous architecture by Guarniero Daniel and Giuseppe Pagano – and the array of research that emerged around Venice – including the studies of the subsequent generation of Iuav faculty, from Carlo Aymonino to Aldo Rossi. These scholars charted the contours of what made Venice so unique, situating this distinctiveness within the relationship between anonymous or popular architecture and "high" or monumental architecture, whether aristocratic palaces or public buildings, from which we see the generation of substantial cohesion and inseparability between architecture and urbanism.

Yet Trincanato's volume not only verifies Samonà's lesson on synthesising disciplines within architectural projects. It also represents the first editorial model conceptualised within the walls of Iuav that was pieced together from the fragments of a broader research project. Proof of this lies in the publication of another book concerning Venice in the middle of the 1960s which was similarly constructed from research fragments: Aldo Rossi's widely influential *L'architettura della città* (*The Architecture of the City*), which assembles the Milanese architect's research conducted partly at the Polytechnic University of Milan and partly through his editorial involvement at Casabella under Ernesto Nathan Rogers⁶.

Trincanato's intuition towards (or a need for) adopting a systematic editorial structure for her fragment-based volume may have emerged from the need to format her research for a book, but it was also most likely a conscious decision – the part for the whole. Regardless, it is both interesting and timely. It underscores that the author was not producing a guide to Venice but was setting out a scientific method for reading the lagoon city, grounded in a phenomenological approach to the object of study and that she would begin by investigating the eastern and southern districts of Castello and Dorsoduro. Describing the historical city through its forms, spaces, and colours thereby becomes an exercise that the architect approaches in a serious and scholarly manner, and in many ways as a true pioneer of urban architectural descriptions. Trincanato masterfully avails herself of textual, photographic, and technical drawing instruments to produce complementary and parallel narratives of the city through a judicious balance of text and strictly monochrome iconography.

4 Renato Bocchi, "La "presenza" di Samonà all'IUAV di Venezia", in Laura Pujia (edited by), *Ri-leggere Samonà*, (Roma: RomaTrE-Press, 2021).

5 See, for example, the 2008 edition of *Venezia Minore* curated by Corrado Balistreri or earlier versions from the 1980s and 1990s, such as the English version edited by Renzo Salvadori, *A Guide to the Venetian Domestic Architecture* (Venice: Canal Libri, 1989), and the French version edited by the same author, *Venice. Guide de l'architecture mineure* (Bologna: Edizioni Fuori Catalogo, 2010).

6 For the dissemination of *L'architettura della città* and subsequent interpretations, see in particular Fernanda De Maio, Alberto Ferlenga, and Patrizia Montini Zimolo (edited by), Aldo Rossi, *la storia di un libro. «L'architettura della città», dal 1966 ad oggi* (Padua: Il Poligrafo, 2014).

Venezia Minore stands out, on the one hand, as part of a legacy of studies from the interwar period that sought to inventorise the vernacular or anonymous architectures that defined Italy's urban heritage. On the other hand, and partly through the way the author arranges her work, the volume also testifies to the exceptional nature of Venice as an urban variant, composed of cases that relate to variations on types of row or courtyard houses – where the city's aquatic urban setting plays a fundamental role. We might ask whether it would be fair to compare Trincanato's substantial volume, which partially reprises themes from her thesis a decade prior, with an article by Luigi Moretti on the very subject of Venice. Moretti's *Colore di Venezia* (*The Colour of Venice*) represents another of the aforementioned "minority reports" on the city and was published in his magazine⁷ two years after *Venezia Minore*. Though it may seem strange to compare a book of over three hundred pages with a brief article, the similarity lies in their approach to urban analysis – not as an isolated science, but as an integral part of architecture.

Even beyond the text itself, a parallel reading of Trincanato's iconographic work and the article by the distinguished Roman architect reveals intriguing similarities in how each narrative captures aspects of Venetian architecture. Both architects, for example, describe the close interplay between the city's sculptural and pictorial qualities. But setting aside the reliefs Trincanato reworked in her published drawings, it is worth dwelling on the photographs, to point out the different approach to the medium in *Venezia Minore* and in *Colore di Venezia*, where both textually recount the spatial qualities of urban complexes in which vernacular and noble architectures coexist and articulate the so-called Venetian Picturesque.

The first significant difference lies in Trincanato's aforementioned use of black-and-white photography in contrast to Moretti's publication of coloured photographs. Moretti specifically explores colour to highlight distinctions between lesser architecture, painted in ochres, reds, greens, and blues (for façades, roofs, and watery reflections), and the whites and greys of monumental marble surfaces seen in churches and major buildings.

Trincanato, by comparison, embraces the widespread use of black-and-white for the book's many photographs. Many of these depict Venice through the artworks of its great painters operating in the city until the turn of the nineteenth century. These soon make way for photographs of buildings or architectural details captured in profile – largely sourced from Alinari, Carlo Naya, Guido Cirilli, Pietro Fiorentini, Osvaldo Böhm, and Trincanato herself. In snapshots taken from the city's streets and alleyways, the author photographs details of buildings, cornices, windows, and balconies – along with some other features as documented with some page numbering errors in the credits at the end of the volume.

Through this still strictly documentary use of photography, the young Luav scholar uses shots and sketches to distil the typical elements of Venetian architecture, which has stratified over the centuries thanks to the slow transformation of popular architectural tastes. Returning to *Colour of Venice*, Moretti – while maintaining photography's documentary value – opts for colour photographs⁸ by Claudio Emmer and enlists the painter Nicolò Segota to define a Venetian colour palette, potentially drawing on Trincanato's concurrent studies of Venice's uncelebrated architecture. Although this remains speculative, the presence of Agnoldomenico Pica, a shared name and "mentor" between Spazio and *Venezia Minore*, may offer some confirmation.

7 Luigi Moretti, "Colore di Venezia", in *Spazio*, n.3, ottobre 1950, pp. 33-39.

8 For the role that Luigi Moretti assigns to photography, see Angelo Maggi's essay, "Moretti, i fotografi e la visione dell'architettura," in Bruno Reichlin and Letizia Tedeschi (edited by), *Luigi Moretti, Razionalismo e Trasgressività tra Barocco e informale* (Milan: Mondadori Electa, 2010), pp. 224-237.



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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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