

English Texts

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Ambassador of Italy
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The catalogue *Venezia and Suzhou. Water Cities along the Silk Roads* is an imaginary milestone on a long path between two cities whose bond cannot reveal the value of human friendship any better.

Images and stories lead us through the history of one of the most ancient, intense and uninterrupted exchanges between East and West, a symbol of knowledge and understanding of the other. A tie enriched along the centuries, by the fervid works of poets, merchants, explorers, scholars, religious men, to a point that for both Italian and Chinese sides the signature of the “Sister Cities” Protocol between Venezia and Suzhou, in 1980, was the natural evolution that gave a bold outburst to join tradition and innovation.

Since then, relations have increased constantly, in the fields of Culture, Academia and industrial relations. Today Suzhou hosts a relevant Italian community and the largest Italian industrial district outside Europe. Venice represents a natural harbour for Chinese studies and it is considered by far by the Chinese as one of the most interesting and popular cities in the world hosting a renown Chinese Pavilion at the Biennale.

In a world still marked by the consequences of the pandemic, where distances seem to increase, the Italy-China Year of Tourism and Culture 2022 plays a pivotal role as a bridge ideally linking people, awaking the natural curiosity which always nourished the fertile soil of the enduring relations between millenary civilizations.

An ancient Chinese proverb says: “it takes a decade to grow trees but it takes a hundred years to grow people”. I strongly

believe that we have to encourage and strengthen people-to-people exchanges once again, as these represent, indeed, the most precious and resilient part of the enduring friendship between our people.

That is the power of the strong relation between Venezia and Suzhou, two cities so far on earth yet so close in mind, a vivid symbol of dialogue and collaboration between our two Nations.

Tiziana Lippiello
Rector, Ca' Foscari University Venice

The exhibition *Venezia and Suzhou. Water Cities along the Silk Roads* celebrates a millenary friendship between our civilisations, a journey that begins far back in time, with missionaries, travellers and merchants, the best known of whom was Marco Polo, a curious and eclectic Venetian merchant. We retrace the stages of the friendship between the two peoples and the collaboration between the two cities, inaugurated in 1980 with the signing of the protocol of their twinning, one of the first in China and Europe; in truth it began much earlier, with cultural and commercial exchanges along the silk routes: a tradition that continues to this day.

In this regard, I recall three important cultural initiatives that followed the twinning and consolidated it: the foundation of *Catai. Magazine of Studies and Documentation on China*, published by the Venice City Council (the first issue of which came out in 1981); the extraordinary archaeological exhibition *7,000 Years of China*, in 1983; and finally, the International Study Conference *Ancient Chinese Civilisation*, held at the Giorgio Cini Foundation in April 1985, under the high patronage of the President of the Italian Republic and with the support of the Ministry of Culture of the People's Re-

public of China, which saw the participation of the University of Venice (Seminar of Chinese Language and Literature).

To keep this thousand-year tradition of relations between the two cities alive, in February 2017 the two state universities, Ca' Foscari University of Venice and Soochow University, promoted a bilateral cooperation agreement and, by mutual agreement founded at Soochow University the Ca' Foscari Soochow Office 威尼斯大学办公室 with the aim of facilitating dialogue between the two cultural, social and economic realities, and promoting cultural and scientific collaboration projects between the two universities, useful for the development of these latter and the mutual knowledge and collaboration of the two cities. The project entitled *Two Cities, Three Bridges*, over the years has seen the scientific collaboration of professors, researchers and lecturers from different subject areas, on three themes symbolically represented by three bridges: 1. “Languages and Cultures. Cultural Heritage along the Silk Road”; 2. “Management and Business. From Flowers to Fruits”; 3. “Water, Science and Technology. Improving Quality with Advanced Materials for the Removal and Recovery of Contaminants in Natural Waters”.

The Ca' Foscari Soochow Office project was supported by the Italian Ministry of University and Research and the Italian Consulate in Shanghai. Within these three themes, the two universities conducted joint research and promoted study programmes, such as the intensive Italian language course at Soochow University, the co-tutorship programme as part of the Erasmus Plus ICM 2019-22 funded PhD programme, the seminar *The Cultural Significance of Water in Eastern and Western Classics* (Soochow University, 2018), joint

publications in the scientific field and finally the exhibition *Venezia and Suzhou. Water Cities along the Silk Roads* that crowns, in the Italy-China Year of Culture and Tourism 2022, all the cultural and scientific, educational and territorial development activities promoted by the two cities. In 2019, the general strategic agreement between Ca' Foscari University and Soochow University was joined by an agreement between the Faculty of Architecture of the latter university and Luav.

The two-year pandemic has inexorably changed our lives and our projects. Today, more than ever, international cooperation can contribute to world peace, to the realisation of shared projects of environmental, economic and social sustainability, to the construction of a universal ethic, respecting all civilisations, realising an ancient Chinese adage: harmony in diversity (*he er budong* 和而不同).

Speaking of invisible cities, Italo Calvino recalled how Kublai Khan noted that Marco Polo never spoke of Venice, and he replied: "Every time I describe a city, I say something about Venice". Kublai Khan insisted on knowing more about Venice and Marco remarked: "The images of memory, once fixed with words, are erased. Perhaps I am afraid of losing Venice all at once if I talk about it. Or perhaps, speaking of other cities, I have already lost it little by little" (Italo Calvino, *Le città invisibili*. Milan: Mondadori, [1993] 2021).

Our projects aim to safeguard two wonderful and fragile cities of water, two cities on the UNESCO World Heritage List, by promoting the enhancement of their cultural heritage and ecosystems, cultural and scientific dialogue, and the sharing of best practices and research results through the innovative and transversal skills of young talents from all over the world.

Zhang Xiaohong **Rector of Soochow University** **in Suzhou**

Marco Polo, a famous Italian traveller, born in Venice to a rich merchant family, recounts in his *Il Milione*, well known to the Chinese, what he saw during the seventeen years he spent in China, the richest country in Asia at that time. However, few people know that in *Il Milione* there is also a moving episode in which one day, during his travels, Marco came to an ancient city; here the water flowing under the bridges and the songs coming from the fishermen's boats immediately made him homesick, so much so that he called this city "the Venice of the East": it was Suzhou. On 16 March 1979, the mayor of Venice Mario Rigo wrote a letter to the interim president of the Chinese People's Association for Friendship with Foreign Countries Wang Bingnan in which he suggested a twinning between Venice and Suzhou for the first time. On 24 March 1980, Venice and Suzhou formally signed the twinning agreement, the first for the city of Suzhou: in this way the two cities continued to write a common history. Suzhou and Venice are both water cities, one in Asia and the other in Europe, and are similar in many ways: Suzhou is a beautiful city known for its historic gardens, Venice is a famous and romantic city rich in history. For two thousand years, the 'Silk Road' has united and brought the two cities together, even though they are separated by countless mountains and rivers, and connected East and West, making both civilisations shine in their contact. Seven hundred years ago, these two cities became twin cities thanks to the first link created by Marco Polo's journey and thanks to a letter filled with deep friendship written forty years ago. The five colours are

all different but mixed together they form an image, the five notes are all unique but harmonised together they give life to music. Two cities with such different development and characteristics have created a very strong consonance in the transmission of historical heritage and the mutual exchange of civilisations.

The friendship between Suzhou and Venice has continued to grow even more thanks to the close union between the universities of Suzhou and Venice. On 27 February 2017, the University of Suzhou and the University of Venice established formal cooperation by signing the *Memorandum of Cooperation between the University of Suzhou and Ca' Foscari University of Venice* and the *Memorandum for the Establishment of an Office of the University of Venice at the University of Suzhou*. Subsequently, the rectors of the two universities met several times, jointly developing the scientific research cooperation project called *Two Cities, Three Bridges* (culture, economy and environmental sustainability), the Erasmus+ Project and the Dual Internship Programme, as well as a series of other cooperation projects. In addition, they realised the exhibition *Venezia and Suzhou. Water Cities along the Silk Roads*.

"Every beauty is unique and one must be able to appreciate the beauty of other cultures as one's own"; this exhibition will help to strengthen an equal dialogue between the two cities and the two countries, to build a mutual appraisal, to promote cultural exchange, and to offer the world valuable cultural achievements.

2020 was a truly anomalous year. In dealing with the sudden outbreak of COVID-19, all countries around the world strengthened their ties and cooperation and made huge efforts to fight it. At the beginning of the epidemic, all friendly countries, including

Italy, offered great support to China and helped us achieve a great victory against the virus. As soon as the epidemic broke out in Italy, President Xi Jinping expressed the sincere closeness of the Chinese people and government to the Italian people. The Chinese government helped Italy with large quantities of materials for the treatment and prevention of the virus. The University of Suzhou and the University of Venice also supported each other in many ways. In facing common difficulties and helping each other, we felt an even deeper sense of solidarity and closeness, despite the geographical distance. The University of Suzhou has been waiting for the moment to be able to realise together with the University of Venice the exhibition *Venezia and Suzhou. Water Cities along the Silk Roads*, precisely to promote mutual understanding between Italy and China and between the Chinese people and all European peoples, to strengthen mutual cultural exchanges and build together a new and splendid future in diversity. May the exhibition be a complete success! May the solid friendship and long-standing collaboration between the University of Suzhou and the University of Venice and between the cities of Suzhou and Venice go one step further!

Rosanna Binacchi
Head of Secretariat, Italy-China
Cultural Forum

Cooperation in the cultural sphere represents one of the strong and strategic points in the dynamics of bilateral relations between Italy and China. Since 1988, when the first Italian government delegation, with expertise in cultural heritage conservation, arrived in China, cooperation in the cultural sphere between the two countries has expanded, imple-

menting a constant and significant intercultural dialogue. Today, every area of cooperation explored reveals broad and innovative prospects for development. In recent years, important conservation and restoration work has been carried out, a common line of heritage protection has been shared, exchanges in many artistic sectors have intensified, and museum cooperation has been strengthened through exchanges of exhibitions and joint projects, aimed at involving and bringing the general public of both countries closer together, promoting mutual knowledge of their respective heritages and cultures. Synergies and projects that have never completely failed, even in critical moments that have marked our recent history, but on the contrary have experimented new ways of working and sharing at a distance. In this framework of effective cooperation, the role of the Italy-China Cultural Forum, established under the aegis of the Governments of the Italian Republic and the People's Republic of China, has proved to be important and strategic, as a technical tool to promote concrete forms of cooperation in the cultural sector, in compliance with the respective legal systems and the principles of reciprocity and mutual benefit. Among the Forum's actions, a central role is played by twinning projects between Italian and Chinese UNESCO sites. In this sphere it is the twinning between Venice and its lagoon and the city of Suzhou and its gardens. An initiative aimed not only at the protection and promotion of their respective cultural heritages, but also at a targeted and articulated promotion of their respective territories.

Suzhou – a splendid city known for its classical gardens and canals. As Marco Polo called it, “the Venice of the East”.

Venice – unique and iconic for the beauty but also fragility of its artistic and architectural heritage – a universally recognised paradigm of environmental, social and cultural sustainability.

Suzhou and Venice, distant but similar. For two thousand years the ‘Silk Road’ has brought them closer, connecting East and West. A twinning that is centuries old and reaffirmed forty years ago, a concrete model of cultural diplomacy and synergy to address and experiment with solutions to the sustainability issues that polarise international research and debate.

Preface

The year 2020 marked the 40th anniversary of the twinning between Venice and Suzhou, as well as the 50th anniversary of diplomatic relations between Italy and China. To mark the occasion, despite the global impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, Ca' Foscari University of Venice and Soochow University in Suzhou planned a series of institutional and research initiatives. The exhibitions, in particular, have been re-evaluated as ongoing collaborative projects that will serve to deepen a research- and socially-based collaboration between scholars and citizens of Venice and Suzhou to address the challenges and opportunities of water cities along the Silk Road in line with the 17 UN Sustainable Development Goals and to solve the innovation challenges of both cities. The exhibition *Venezia and Suzhou. Water Cities along the Silk Roads* explores the past, present and future of two water cities such as Venice and Suzhou, whose territory is the result of an artificial balance between nature and human ambition. As part of the Silk Roads, the two cities demonstrate the importance of waterways in connecting

peoples and cultures. The exhibition takes place in Virtual Tour mode, as a new proposal for the enhancement of temporary exhibitions, an interdisciplinary platform to encourage a global dialogue on the historical, cultural and economic exchanges between water cities along the maritime silk routes in the Afro-Eurasian continent. The exhibition research team with the coordination of the curators has experimented with new solutions to connect the Ca' Foscari Exhibition Spaces with a virtual design that offers the user a complete experience of the materials selected for the exhibition. The virtual exhibition is accompanied by a richly illustrated catalogue containing essays and entries compiled by the numerous authors involved in the project. The volume becomes a further interdisciplinary platform to encourage global dialogue on the historical, artistic, cultural and economic exchanges between water cities along the maritime silk routes from the Serenissima to the Afro-Eurasian continent. Venice and Suzhou are linked by centuries of experience in the control, use and representation of water. Both cities' water landscapes are the result of a long evolution of water control. Today, both cities face the challenges of preserving tangible and intangible cultural heritage, promoting environmentally sustainable tourism, and recycling pollutants, among others, with a shared commitment to increasing the potential of urban waterways. Ca' Foscari University and Soochow University are committed to bringing research closer to society and training the next generation of global citizens and scholars. The two universities have a strategic partnership, strengthened by the opening of the Ca' Foscari office in Suzhou in February 2017. Common research areas are cultural heritage, business management and envi-

ronmental sciences, with a focus on water management.

Tiziana Lippiello,
Angelo Maggi, Andrea Nanetti

Venice in the Lagoon

“Venice is inconceivable without its lagoon; without the lagoon Venice could not exist”. (Mike Smart, Maria José Viñals)

Venice in the Lagoon. A Changing Space

Venice was born ancient in the dying Antiquity, a place of refuge and extreme resistance in a marginal space of survivors belonging to this civilization. Arising from an obliged change in the common perception of space, the lagoon becomes a settlement for the same reasons that had previously excluded it from civil life. In the lagoon, the castaways of the Roman civilization found a shelter from barbarians. The lagoon is an insidious, marginal place: its crossing requires an extensive knowledge of the changing geography of its channels and its seabed, the considerable mutation of its landscape depending on the tides, the water edges and the land.

The new inhabitants of the lagoon were forced to adapt to this environment, without surrendering to the significant restrictions of living in such an atypical place. They were not overwhelmed by a marginal survival, but transposed what they had left in their place of origin into this new space. Cassiodorus, one of the last Roman intellectuals, describes the life of the people resident in the lagoon before the birth of the City. The inhabitants – he states – eat fish and engage in salt production (so precious that it was also used as currency).

Every family owns a boat and uses it to move “as on the land horses are used”.

Cassiodorus goes on to describe the buildings, among the reeds and on stilts – similar to the *casoni* we are familiar with, that – “resemble seabird nests” and even float on the water, like rafts.

Boats ‘as’ horses, houses ‘as’ seabird nests. In the lagoon one lives ‘as’ on the land not on the land itself. Venice will never be considered a city, but ‘as’ a city, a metaphor of a city, the result of an extraordinary transposition.

With secular tenacity, the inhabitants created the conditions on the islands and salt marshes to replicate the routine of civilised life within this extraordinary environment, bestowing even more splendour to this life, because it highlights the incongruity of the lagoon space with the needs of urbanisation. For this reason, they developed an ‘acrobatic’ will that would leave its mark on their history. When Venice was founded it was decided not to separate, nor to reclaim the chaotic mixture of land and water reigning there, but rather, to jealously defend the ‘neutrality’ of this environment – neither land nor sea – at all costs, over the centuries, to preserve, through a constant human intervention, the fluid interweaving of both land and water. Nature had spontaneously but temporarily created these elements and Nature itself, if left to do so, would erase this status by burying the lagoon with the debris from the rivers that flowed into it.

The land in the lagoon is usually mixed with water. It is ‘uncertain’ land. In fact, Venetians call *terraferma* (mainland) – safe land – the territory that lies over the lagoon border. As the historian and philosopher Boncompagno da Signa wrote in 1240, for Venice “pavimentum mare, coelum est

tectum” (the floor is the sea, the roof is the sky).

The history of Venice is specifically the history of a successful management of a complex environment, that required the lagoon community to exercise a perennial demiurgic tension that deeply influenced its mentality, its social cohesion, its governmental culture and its public spirit.

One can see traces of the above-mentioned on a more general level, in the ability of the Venetian community to maintain a geopolitical position of the city that has a long-standing and complete exploitation of its potential, even beyond its very power: the centrality between East and West.

Venice will stay away from the West for a long time – a West that lies too close, because it begins at the edge of the lagoon – while near to the far East, beyond the sea. Venice has the privilege of being a world of its own – from East to West and from West to East, projecting the lagoon into the geopolitical space, between land and sea, the lagoon of the medieval Euro-Mediterranean geopolitical space that Venice helped to create.

Francesco Petrarca calls Venice the “alter mundus” (other world), grasping its essence better than anyone else. The Venice of the ‘other world’, apparently based on the reflections in the water of an iridescent and unpredictable lagoon dependent on its transitional climate – not entirely Mediterranean, not yet continental – and of course to its singular landscape. Some days, when clouds cover the horizon and the wind blows, one can feel the thrill of the high seas.

The sea seems to touch the horizon at certain points, in others a green and colourful meadow in springtime appears to stretch out turning brown, red or purple in

autumn. The waters are hidden from sight, and the profiles of boats seem to sail through the earth. A subdued place. Echoes are silenced, time is lost, in the scanty lapping and in the reflections of the waters, motionless like columns.

The section of the exhibition displays historical maps of the lagoon that fix, for an instant in time, the morphological features in the constant modification of its space, highlighting its evolution and man-made modifications, together with three short films. These films start from the city and will sail through the lagoon canals revealing what is usually hidden beneath its waters, from the benthic habitats to the MOSE structures, from the shapes of the seabed to wreckages and archaeological remains. Concurrently, one learns how far human action, based on knowledge, can go to improve this precious territory.

The scientific community is at the forefront in the research of environmental dynamics of the lagoon and its surroundings with studies besides, on sustainable management of its resources and anthropogenic impacts. Some decades ago, for instance, the loss of water-plant meadows due to excessive anthropogenic pressure had caused the depletion of biological and ecological quality of the lagoon, as well as the edible fish species stocks, with important socioeconomic and environmental consequences. A project has been designed to restore such meadows, representing an example of integrated and applied sustainability, where economic, social and environmental features proceed to restore the complicated relationship between the lagoon inhabitants and the lagoon itself.

CORILA, the Consortium for the coordination of research on the Venice lagoon system, a non-profit association involving Ca’ Foscari University of Venice, Iuav Uni-

versity of Venice, the University of Padua, the National Research Council and the National Institute of Oceanography and Experimental Geophysics, is part of this context. CORILA promotes and coordinates research on the Venice lagoon, also at international level, facilitating interaction between the scientific community and the public administration. It studies the physical system, the environment, the architecture and the landscape, as well as the economic and social aspects of the lagoon and its settlements. These are all significant interconnections of a complex system, processing and managing this information in an integrated framework, participating also in international projects and other activities funded by the European Union, offering Venice and its lagoon as a ‘study site’. Indeed, Venice may be considered a gigantic laboratory to conduct interdisciplinary research on climate change adaptation and mitigation.

Alessandro Buosi, Francesco Calore,
Caterina Dabalà, Alberto Madricardo,
Fantina Madricardo, Antonio Marcomini,
Andrea Rosina, Mauro Sclavo, Adriano Sfriso

1. Stefano Codroipo and Jacopo Leonardi (engraver). *Topographic Map of the Lagoon, of Shores and of Main Rivers of the Veneto Territories in 1792* (Archive of Adriatic Studies ISMAR CNR, Reg. ISA, c.16) Drafted by Stefano Codroipo and engraved by Jacopo Leonardi in 1792, this map of the lagoon and of adjacent areas follows the 16th century xylography by Cristoforo Sabbadino but has been updated to the last years of the Republic. With reference to the map issued two centuries earlier, the harbour mouths that connect the lagoon to the sea are already reduced to the three still existing today, but the course of many

rivers still end up in the lagoon. The mouth of the Piave river still delimits the lagoon to the Northwest, near Jesolo. The Po River delta is clearly developed, but still far from its maximum extension.

2. Pierre Lessan, Bernardo Combatti. *General Map of the Lagoons of Venice* (Adriatic studies archives ISMAR CNR, Reg. ISA, c.19)

Based on the original survey led by Eng. Lessan, director of the Civil Factories and Marine Hydraulic Works of the Napoleonic Reign of Italy (1805-14), this map has been redacted by Bernardo Combatti and engraved by Dionisio Moretti around 1818. This hand-painted copy, shows the addition of manufactures that had been completed or were already planned, as the Empire's Bridge (today Liberty Bridge), scheduled to link the mainland to Venice through the railway, and several projects to consolidate the shoreline between Lido and Malamocco already underway. The important modifications of the lagoon morphology that evolved during the following century can be observed in the complex web of canals that once characterised the lagoon before the great excavation works of the 20th century, and the mouth bar that divided the harbour mouth of Lido and Tre Porti canal, which no longer exist.

3-5. Photographic recordings of living organisms in lagoon aquatic ecosystems

In aquatic ecosystems living organisms are classified according to their position in the water column. Plants and animals living on the seabed are called 'benthos'. These organisms are characterised by a wide variety of shapes and lifestyles; they play a crucial role in the ecosystem through trophic webs and cycles of matter. The rich mosaic of habitats and biodiversity of

benthic communities are closely linked to the morphology of the lagoon system and to its evolution. Extreme and variable environmental conditions distinguish the lagoons from sea or freshwater, defining a dynamic and selective environment. Some species play a fundamental role, transforming and structuring the submarine landscape. This is the case for phanerogam prairies, the meadows of *Pinna Nobilis* or the populations of big sponges observed on the seabed of lagoon canals, in a sheltered environment sustained by the breath of the tide.

6. Detail of the Grand Canal seen with Google Earth overlaid with the high-resolution morphobathymetric map of the Venice lagoon acquired by CNR-ISMAR in 2013
Detailed view of Canal Grande via Google Earth and an overlapped high-resolution morphobathymetric map of the Venetian lagoon acquired by CNR-ISMAR in 2013. Erosive shapes can be clearly distinguished in correspondence to the vaporette (water-buses) stops along with numerous objects on the seabed. The colour scale indicates the different depths, from 1.3 meters (red) to 5 meters (blue).

7-8. Photographs of the Venice Lagoon

The two photographs describe an ideal journey in and out of the canals of the lagoon system: one realises that it cannot be considered just the frame of the city, but a real system, a pulsating, dynamic organ: if from above its canals are similar to arteries receiving and transporting water from the sea, inside them are hidden shapes and landscapes that are not discernible to the human eye, which is so 'distracted' by the beauty of the city. There are also dunes, the structures of the mobile dyke system, and submerged archaeological sites. Through

the digital reconstruction of the seabed and underwater filming, a hidden world inextricably linked to Venice will be revealed, but also a balance that has been disturbed many times at the hands of man. The lagoon is in fact a delicate ecosystem: a substantial portion of the local economy is inextricably intertwined with traditions and depends on that environment. We will therefore see how man has managed to retrace his steps, using the scientific knowledge and know-how of the lagoon inhabitants to restore the lagoon environments.

The Origins of Venice

Year 900: "His Lordship Duke Pietro, in the ninth year of his duchy, began to build a city with his subjects near Rialto". (Giovanni Diacono, *Storia dei Veneziani*)

Before Marco Polo. Venice in the High Middle Ages

1. The Origins of Venice

The origins of Venice represent a particularly fascinating area of study, as it is one of the very few Italian cities born in the Middle Ages. In Roman times, Venice (in Latin *Venetia et Histria*) was a vast region of the empire that stretched from Istria to the river Adda. After the fall of the reign founded in Italy by the Goths of Theoderic in 553, Venice became part of the Roman Empire, whose seat was then in Byzantium. However, the arrival of the Lombards (569) in Italy brought about significant changes and within a few decades they had conquered almost the entire North of Italy. Byzantine Venice resisted the conquest and became part of the Exarchate of Ravenna, the territorial defence organisation built by the empire in Italy, but its ter-

ritory gradually shrank. At the end of the 8th century, the Lombard historian Paolo Diacono wrote that Venice in his days, had ceased to stretch over such an extensive area recalling the imperial period, but was now made up of “a few islands”. The lagoon of Venice was born, the seat of the Byzantine military command of the Northern Adriatic, which constituted a duchy governed by a high officer who had the charge of *magister militum* or duke. However, it was too soon to allege the existence of the city of Venice, notwithstanding the increased population in the lagoon islands, most likely allured by the presence of the Byzantine authority and its political-military elite. There is limited knowledge available regarding life in early Venice but we can say that in the 8th century, the population had already begun to undertake fishing activities and exploitation of the salt pans towards an initial phase of substantial commercial activity in the Adriatic and on the Po river.

The Venetian Dukedom at the time remained linked to Byzantium. But the general crisis of Byzantine Italy, due to the intolerant religious policy of the emperors and to the territorial strengthening of the Lombard kingdom, led in 751 to the fall and subsequent siege of Ravenna and the Exarchate to the Lombard King Astolfo. Isolated, the Venetian Dukedom, consequently started to loosen its ties with the Byzantine Empire. It was in those same years that the local community elected dukes, the first affirmation of an autonomous dimension that never led to end all ties with Byzantium, which always remained the legitimising authority, often only theoretical, of the duchy's authorities.

The conquest of Italy by the Franks of Charlemagne represented a genuine turning point and undeniably, the Venetian

Dukedom ran the risk of being engulfed within the vast empire that Charles was building. Charles' own son, Pipino, presumably conquered and ruled the lagoon for some years. Byzantium intervened with a large fleet occupying the lagoon, thus leading to the withdrawal of the Franks and with the peace of Aachen in 812, the respective areas of influence of the two empires were defined: the Frankish and the Byzantine. Venice remained in the Byzantine sphere of influence.

Under these new circumstances and in view of an increasingly important role of Venice, the first ducal dynasty of the lagoon known to us, that of the Particiaci, began the construction of a real city on the islands of the Rialto archipelago and during the 9th century the church of San Marco, the Doge's Palace and the church of San Zaccaria were built. These buildings, together with the church of San Pietro di Castello the Episcopal seat since 776, constituted the urban nucleus around which the population of the nearby islands gathered. The islands of Dorsoduro were also reclaimed and opened to urbanisation. Towards the South, the ducal monastery of St. Ilario, also founded by the Particiaci family, represented a tangible symbol of the Venetian presence in the lagoon, whilst towards the North, an ancient settlement – the Island of Torcello, was also governed by the dukes.

The origins of the city of Venice – also known as the ‘City of Rialto’ (*civitas Rivoaltii*) in the Middle Ages, as an integral part of the Venetian Dukedom – during the 9th century was the scene of substantial changes. Its political and cultural ties with the Byzantine East remained steadfast and allowed Venice to establish relations with the Eastern Mediterranean and significantly profitable, albeit conflicting, trade con-

nections with the more distant Islamic world. Despite frequent military clashes on the sea, Venice started profitable commercial relations with the latter. These transactions spreading from East to West and vice versa have been reported since the 9th century, and will certainly remain at the core of Venice's future success.

However, let us not neglect another important issue – notwithstanding the Byzantine origins, noteworthy is the close association of early Venice to the Italian mainland from a territorial and commercial point of view. Venice was influenced by the mainland – with particular reference to trade on the Po river – and in equal measure by the control of the Upper Adriatic region. Two key events demonstrate these important relations in the 9th century: the collaboration and competition with the Adriatic emporium of Comacchio (until its destruction) and a precocious commercial protectorate of a kind, over Istria, in constant contrast to the Saracen and Slavic piracy. Both operations were conducted after the Frankish conquest of Italy and the formation of the Carolingian Empire, and in a new and difficult situation, Venice was able to maintain a fair balance between the two rival empires.

Stefano Gasparri

2. The Venice of the Origins

The origins of a city are never attributable to a precise point in space and time, but are the result of a process: this is also true for Venice. Often, written sources, especially historical-narrative documents, tend to simplify, or rather review the past according to specific political strategies. Venice is no exception, owing much of its ancient history (including its origins) to the *Istoria Veneticorum*, its most reputable chronicle, written around the beginning of the 11th

century. One can find the vast majority of the myths concerning the foundation of the city contained within the chronicle. The archaeological approach, on the other hand, is unique and less influenced by written texts. Material sources can indeed identify new narrative paths, but above all, question traditional ones.

Archaeology is in a position to restore, yet fragmentary, the image of the city, to reconstruct its planimetric profile from the course of the Venetian islets that comprised the Rialto archipelago up to the minute characteristics of the houses, churches and public buildings of power and religion. Thus, the Venice of the early 9th century that we can imagine is something quite different from the splendid city millions of tourists admire today. Primarily, it was a city almost exclusively made of wood, except for the churches, the monasteries, the Ducal Palace and, perhaps, some aristocratic houses. Against this backdrop, the few brick (and stone) buildings needed to stand out on the urban skyline with a much greater impact than we can appreciate nowadays. Although built on water, in those days Venice was a city with little water, so much so that the cisterns collecting rainwater were marked, in the urban landscape, by richly decorated stone wells – an unparalleled phenomenon in Italy at that time. Since the city was in continuous growth it also thirsted for dry land: land reclamation was necessary to raise the living surface, stay dry and expand the habitable space.

Living in a city like Venice was not easy and archaeologists and historians should ask themselves: “Why here?” and then: “How did it all happen?”; “What is the timeline of the city?”.

Security is often used as a plausible explanation to the process of colonisation of the

lagoon and it certainly played an important role. But security is almost never a permanent condition. So, if entire populations conquered such an inhospitable place, to the point of giving life to stable communities and create the miracle that is Venice today, then there must be more to it. Venice was, specifically the result of a lengthy political, social and economic process, with its ups and downs, trials and tribulations and surely arduous outcome.

First and foremost, the lagoon was not permanently colonised before the 5th-6th century AD, although surely populated even earlier. The nearby town, Altino, during the late Antiquity was facing a critical period, and the growing importance of in-lagoon communications, could only favour a greater exploitation of the lagoon, be it even for itinerant functions. The Byzantine influence, moreover, certainly contributed to this development. Excavations on the island of San Pietro di Castello (once Olivolo) shed light on the importance of the place before the Episcopal institution was established in the 8th century. As many as three Byzantine seals of the 5th-6th century suggest that the seat of a public official could be found there. Moreover, the location of the island of Olivolo is not accidental, it is indeed situated in connection with one of the most important entryways to the lagoon, and direct accessibility with the seas.

Between the 7th and 8th centuries there were different political actors on this scenario: the Byzantine authorities (who were soon to leave the lagoon), the ecclesiastical institutions and the new aristocracies. These particular circumstances and tension that lay beneath are clearly represented in the origins of various poles of demic aggregation, which over time (depending on the political fortuity) became

centres of political power: among them Citanova (on the edge of the Northern lagoon), Metamauco (in the Southern lagoon), then the Rialto archipelago, itself. But other dynamic centres, involving new communities, had further developed thereafter and before disappearing (or becoming appendices of the Serenissima) had enjoyed that ‘temporary’ splendour: namely, Murano, Torcello and Equilo.

The somewhat temporary exit of the Byzantines saw the end of a long-lasting rivalry and shifted the governance to one of the small islands in the Rialto archipelago, not too far from Olivolo, where fifty years earlier, the first Venetian bishop had settled. The Venetian aristocrats were gradually moving into trading areas leaving behind small treasures like precious Arabic coins that were found in the city. The Rialto archipelago undoubtedly confirmed this strategic vigour. The ability to equip a fleet was crucial because it allowed young Venetian merchants to travel the seas, developing skills in controlling and defending their boats. It is the beginning of the 9th century which gives shape to a settlement called Venice. A settlement that was born Byzantine but was now making its moves on a European and Mediterranean chessboard: between Arabs, Byzantines and Franks.

Sauro Gelichi

9. *The City of Venice in the 9th-10th Century.* Reconstruction hypothesis proposed by Sauro Gelichi, Stefano Gasparri and Claudio Negrelli. Drawing by Francesca Zamborlini

Venice, one of the most famous cities in the world has an obscure history. Written sources alone are of little help in its reconstruction: but beneath a Venice of bricks and stones, lies another city.

Much of what we can ascribe to its origins lies buried under the earth and water. Bringing it to light helps us to understand its history and explain it. Hence, ancient Venice re-emerges from the waters.

At the turn of the 9th century AD, the group of islands that make up Venice was already partly colonised. The Episcopal See was founded between 774 and 776, in Olivolo, today known as the Island of San Pietro, one of the most eastern islands. A few decades later, in 811, the seat of the ducal power was transferred to Rialto, the central part of the archipelago, and there initiated the construction of the Ducal Palace by Duke Agnello Particiaco, the first member of the oldest Venetian ducal family. A group of islands was thus on the way to becoming a real city.

10. *Piazza San Marco Seen from the Sea, in the Background the Doge's Palace and the Church of San Zaccaria.* Reconstruction hypothesis proposed by Sauro Gelichi, Stefano Gasparri and Claudio Negrelli. Drawing by Francesca Zamborlini

The Rialto archipelago, therefore, began to be populated: new lands were being reclaimed from the waters, new churches and monasteries were founded. However, the city was still mainly built on wood and only the masonry buildings (the palace, churches, monasteries) stood out on the new skyline made up of land and water.

In masonry was the recently built Ducal Palace, and so were the churches and monasteries. Among them stood out the church of San Zaccaria, which together with the palace constituted the central nucleus of the town, situated in front of the port that put the new town in contact with the lagoon and the sea.

In 828, the relics of St. Mark were stolen from Alexandria and, shortly afterwards, the first ducal chapel was built inside the

palace, which was then to house the remnants. At the beginning of the 9th century, with the arrival of the relics, the construction of the palatine chapel and the transfer of the ducal power, the great history of Venice could finally commence.

Thanks to the work of archaeologists and historians, the early centuries of Venice are finally much less obscure to us today.

Exchanges in the Contemporary Era

Venice

Suzhou

beautiful cities

beautiful people

water cities both and therefore even closer

In perfect harmony

they become twin cities

Let the water be more emerald

the mountains more verdant

let the friendship between the two peoples be everlasting

June 1979

(Ai Qing, *Venetian Serenades*, IV)

Venice and Suzhou.

Twin Cities since 1980

The history of the twinning exchange between Venice and Suzhou formally began with the visit of the President of the Chinese People's Association for Friendship with Foreign Countries Huang Hua (1913-2010) in Venice, October 1978. On a world tour, the minister visited the lagoon city and a potential twinning exchange between Venice and "a Chinese city" was discussed. References to Marco Polo were frequent henceforth to underline the key role of Venice in the Italian policy of friendship towards China and the new China's policy of reform and openness to the world.

The twinning proposal was raised by the mayor of Venice Mario Rigo (1929-2019) during an official lunch with the Chinese minister, Huang Hua. The minister expressed his enthusiasm recalling the historical ties of Venice with China and proposed Suzhou as a twin city, previously described in *Il Milione* and well-known to Europe – and China – as the "Venice of the East". Marco Polo had in fact described Suzhou as the city of six thousand bridges and since Matteo Ricci's (1552-1610) accounts, Suzhou had been described for centuries as an ideal twin city of Venice for its numerous canals and bridges.

The twinning between the two cities was in the context of a sub-state diplomacy or 'paradiplomacy' conducted by local authorities alongside their governments. The city of Venice had, up to that moment, established a twin agreement only with Tallin, in the 1960s to establish formal relations with Estonia, at the time part of the USSR. Even then, twinning exchanges between Chinese and European cities were considered an excellent means to consolidate diplomatic relations between states. A formal letter was delivered on behalf of mayor Mario Rigo to the Secretary of the Chinese People's Association for Friendship with Foreign Countries Wang Bingnan represented by the Italian Ambassador in Beijing, Francisci di Baschi and the Deputy Secretary of the Association Xie Bangding on 16 March 1979. The letter officially proposed a twinning agreement between the city of Venice and the city of Suzhou.

A visit to Venice by a Chinese delegation then took place in June 1979 and one of the members of this delegation was the poet Ai Qing (1910-1996). On this occasion, on 19 June Wang Bingnan personally delivered a letter from the municipality of Suzhou to the city of Venice accepting the twinning

agreement. The twinning agreement between the two cities was finally signed in Venice on 24 March 1980. The twinning with Suzhou was a historical event for Venice and equally important for Suzhou because it marked the first twinning exchange with a foreign city. The affinity between Suzhou and Venice was thus officially confirmed. In 1981, a delegation from the city of Venice visited China between 21 May and 2 June; on that occasion, the Venetian delegation visited Suzhou and brought a bronze lion, the symbol of Venice, as a gift. Before leaving China the delegation also attended the condolence ceremony held in Beijing after the death of Song Qingling (1893-1981), honorary president of the People's Republic of China and widow of the Father of the Republic Sun Yat-Sen (1866-1925). The members of the delegation also held a meeting in Beijing with the Chinese Vice Premier Ji Pengfei (1910-2000).

After the twinning agreement between the two cities, other events were also held that strengthened Venice's contacts with Suzhou, also confirming the centrality of Venice in Italy's renewed relations with China and, above all, its importance as a cultural centre.

One of the first initiatives was the invitation for a Suzhou company of Beijing opera (*Jingju*) and Kunqu (typical of Suzhou) and the *pingtan* (storytelling accompanied by music, a tradition of the Suzhou province, Jiangsu), to perform in Venice, Florence and Naples in the autumn of 1982. The company were on stage at La Fenice Theatre and Toniolo Theatre from 27 to 31 October, with the Beijing opera *Li Huiniang* and the Kunqu arias "In the Garden" (*Youyuan*), from the opera *Peony Pavilion* (*Mudanting*), "A Silly Dream" (*Chimeng*) and "Jiao Guangpu Stops the Horse" (*Dangma*).

The company was accompanied by a delegation from Suzhou Municipality.

An exhibition of contemporary Chinese painters was also held at La Fenice between 30 October and 7 November 1982 in which Deng Lin, daughter of Deng Xiaoping (1904-1997), also exhibited her work. On the same occasion, on 30-31 October, an academic seminar with a musical workshop on the storytellers of the *tanci* was organised by the Biennale, with the participation of leading figures in international sinology, including Giuliano Bertuccioli, Marco Müller and Jacques Pimpaneau.

Subsequently, from 4 June 1983 until 31 January 1984, the first major exhibition on Chinese archaeology organised in Italy was hosted in the Doge's Palace in Venice. The exhibition, entitled *7000 years of China. Chinese Art and Archaeology from the Neolithic to the Han Dynasty*, dedicated to Chinese antiquity up to the Eastern Han (25 BC-220 AD), was a huge success and attracted high institutional figures such as the Italian Prime Minister Amintore Fanfani, present at the inauguration, and the President of the Italian Republic Sandro Pertini. A second exhibition, entitled *China in Venice. From the Han dynasty to Marco Polo*, covered the Han era to the Yuan dynasty (1271-1368) and was held once more at the Doge's Palace, from 30 August 1986 to 1 March 1987.

To accompany these initiatives, from 1 to 5 April 1985 a major international conference on ancient Chinese civilisation took place on the Island of San Giorgio in collaboration with the Seminar of Chinese Language and Literature of Ca' Foscari University of Venice, the Italian Institute for the Middle and Far East (IsMEO), the Ministry of Culture of the People's Republic of China and the Giorgio Cini Foundation. The conference was attended by illustrious names of inter-

national sinology such as prof. Kwang-chi Chang (Zhang Guangzhi, 1931-2001) and prof. Joseph Needham (1900-1995).

Daniele Beltrame

11. The visit of Chinese President Hua Guofeng to Venice, 4-5 November 1979 (The General Archives of the City of Venice, Mario Rigo Fund. Interpress Photo)

The twinning between Venice and Suzhou was also discussed during the historic visit to Venice, in the wake of an official visit to Italy, by Chinese President Hua Guofeng (1921-2008) on 4 and 5 November 1979. The Chinese President was received with the highest honours and enthusiasm by the Venetians and was accompanied along the Grand Canal by a procession of *bisnone* boats.

12. The signing of the twinning exchange between the city of Venice and the city of Suzhou on 24 March 1980 (Photographic and Digital Archives of the City of Venice. Courtesy of Gianni Pellicani Foundation. Interpress Photo)

The picture shows the signing of the twinning agreement in Venice between the mayor of Venice Mario Rigo; on the left the President of the Revolutionary Committee (*Suzhoushi geming weiyuanhui*) of Suzhou Jia Shizhen (1914-2014). To the right of the mayor stands the deputy mayor of Venice, Gianni Pellicani (1932-2006).

13-14. Original parchments of the twinning between Venice and Suzhou signed on 24 March 1980 (Municipality of Venice)

The pictures show the original parchments of the twinning agreement between Venice and Suzhou still preserved in the Council Chamber of the Venice City Council. Photo

courtesy of the Municipality of Venice, International Relations Office.

15. Graphic reworking for the Venice-Suzhou twinning. *Suzhou bao* newspaper, 29 March 1980 (Photo by Daniele Beltrame from the original, preserved in the Soochow University newspaper library) This image was published in the daily newspaper of Suzhou *Suzhou bao* on 29 March 1980 to celebrate the signing of the twinning agreement with Venice. Within are the symbols that unite the two cities: the bell tower of San Marco in Venice and the pagoda of the Northern Temple (*Beisi ta*) of Suzhou. The ships and bridges reveal the nature of the two water cities. The two doves are clearly symbols of peace representing the amicable relations with China and overseas.

16. *Catai. Journal of Studies and Documentation on China published by the City of Venice for the Venice-Suzhou Twinning*, 1(1). Venice: The City of Venice Editions, 1981 In 1981, to celebrate the twinning, the City of Venice and Ca' Foscari University founded a journal of sinological studies titled *Catai*, whose first issue was entirely dedicated to the city of Suzhou. Here, illustrated is the cover of the first issue.

17-18. The Venetian delegation in Suzhou, 23-27 May 1981 (Photo courtesy of former mayor Mario Rigo and the General Archives of the City of Venice) The Venetian delegates visited Suzhou between 23 and 27 May 1981 and brought a bronze lion, the symbol of Venice, as a gift. In the first picture, on the top row starting from the left, stand: prof. Xu Jingtian (interpreter), Oreste Fracasso (representative of the industrialists' association), Francesco Guidolin (councillor for tourism of the

Veneto Region), Renato Paties Simon (representative of Cantieri Navali and Officine Meccaniche di Venezia), prof. Mario Sabatini of Ca' Foscari University, Maurizio Trevisan (member of the board of directors of the Biennale), Nereo Laroni (councillor for public works), Edoardo Salzano (councillor for town planning), the mayor of Venice Mario Rigo, Maurizio Pilla (the mayor's collaborator, responsible for ceremonial functions and public relations), Paolo Rizzi (journalist of *Il Gazzettino*). Below, starting from the left: Loris Volpato (city councillor), Gianfranco Capitanio (representative of Montefibre Works Council), Cesare De Piccoli (city councillor). In the background, one can see the Yunyan pagoda (also known as *huqiu data*) on Tiger Hill (*Huqiu*), a scenic spot in Suzhou. The visit took place on 26 May.

Figure 18 shows the mayor of Venice Mario Rigo and the President of the Revolutionary Committee of Suzhou Fang Ming planting two friendship trees (*youyishu*) in the Oriental Garden (*Dongyuan*) during the visit to Suzhou on 25 May. A symbolic tree, the camphor tree (*xiangzhangshu*) was chosen for the ceremony to denote the everlasting friendship between the two cities.

19-20. *7,000 Years of China. Chinese Art and Archaeology from the Neolithic to the Han Dynasty*. Doge's Palace, 4 June 1983-31 January 1984. Catalogue of the Exhibition. Milan: Silvana Publisher, 1983

21. *China in Venice. From the Han Dynasty to Marco Polo*. Doge's Palace, 30 August 1986-1 March 1987. Catalogue of the Exhibition. Milan: Electa, 1986

In the pictures the covers of the catalogues of the two exhibitions on Chinese civilisation held in Venice respectively between 1983 and 1984 and between 1986 and 1987.

During the 1980s, mutual visits followed one another almost regularly: Venetian delegations went to Suzhou and delegations from Suzhou often went to Venice.

22. The visit of Chinese Prime Minister Zhao Ziyang to Venice, 15 June 1984. (General Archives of the Municipality of Venice, Mario Rigo Fund. Cameraphoto Epoche Archives) During the 1980s Venice, was included in the itineraries of the most important leaders of the Chinese Republic visiting Italy, such as Prime Minister Zhao Ziyang on 15 June 1984, following his official visit to Rome.

In 1985 the mayor of Suzhou, Duan Xushen, led a new delegation to Venice in April and shortly afterwards the deputy mayor of Venice Ugo Bergamo visited Suzhou with a delegation from the Municipality of Venice. From then on, delegations from the two cities maintained their relations on a regular and frequent basis, especially to commemorate the major anniversaries of the twinning.

The Ship

“On the border of the Estuary, beyond the slipway and the pilings, the dawn's blaze begins to illumine the tops of the gathering clouds that transmute the portico into a turreted circle of the future City, with its domes, its towers, its gilded basilicas...” (Gabriellino D'Annunzio and Mario Roncoroni, *La Nave*, 1921)

23a-c. Publicity leaflet for the film *La Nave* directed by Gabriellino D'Annunzio (Turin, Ambrosio Film, 1921)

The Ship (The Film, 1921)

“O sea, o glory, strength of Italy”. (Gabriele D’Annunzio, *Canto novo*, 1882)

The film *La Nave* is a grandiose product of the historical genre created by the Italian film industry at the time of silent cinema in its golden age. This film is the first about the origins of Venice and probably the first film about Venice ever; it is surprising that it is not mentioned in any of the essays published in the book edited by Gian Piero Brunetta and Alessandro Faccioli on *The Image of Venice in Twentieth-Century Cinema* (Brunetta, Faccioli 2004). The film has the first aerial video shots of the Venetian lagoon, the Torcello basilica, and the Marciana area. It is based on the homonymous tragedy by Gabriele D’Annunzio (1863-1938), who began it in 1905 and ended it in the summer of 1907. In 1908, it was printed by the publishing house Emilio & Giuseppe Treves in Milan (Damerini [1943] 1992, 96). This play stages Venice in the 6th century CE with information drawn from historical sources, particularly Procopius of Caesarea. The mythical origins of Venice are intertwined with the story of Basiliola, daughter of Orso Faledro, the pagan tribune who had been driven away and blinded by his Christian antagonists, the Gràtici family. Basiliola, full of resentment, decides to set in motion the cruellest of revenge by using her beauty and sensuality to force two brothers, Marco Gràtico, the new tribune, and Sergio Gràtico, the bishop, into a fratricidal duel. Marco kills Sergio. But Basiliola is condemned to the same fate as her father. Marco then sets sail for Egypt on a huge ship called *Totus Mundus* to bring the remains of St Mark back to Venice. Venice is a ship that sails towards the world (Damerini [1943] 1992, 95-100).

The play’s *première* was performed at the *Teatro Argentina* in Rome on 11 January 1908 and then at the *Teatro La Fenice* in Venice on 25 April 1908, on St Mark’s Day (Benedetti 1908, 13; Damerini [1943] 1992, 100-1; Puppa 1991). Right from the start, in parallel with theatrical criticism, *La Nave* also ignited the political debate that continues to this day with consensus or criticism depending on the faction groupings and opportunistic contingencies (Damerini [1943] 1992, 100-10); in connection with the historical memory of the *Stato da Mar* of the Venetian Republic (Nanetti 2021, 12-19). In the concert of praise paid to the play, some off-key notes deserve to be cited to understand the range of the debate. On the evening of 6 April 1908, in the foyer of the theatre of Split in Croatia, the lawyer Francesco Forlani gave a heated lecture on *La Nave*, which he then published at his own expense. Forlani identifies the controversial elements of D’Annunzio’s play, defining the work as a rode, a threatening bluster. He writes that “while appreciating the patriotic chord, which makes D’Annunzio’s muse vibrate, he wants to add that exaggerations also in political matters are dangerous” (Forlani 1908, 11), moving a criticism focused on anachronism and dangerousness of the will to conquer. A caricature published on 16 June 1908 in the *Duje Balavac humoristično satirički list* depicts Gabriele D’Annunzio arriving in Split on an antiquated rowing ship and finding himself in front of a battleship. At the end of World War I, on 3 November 1918, a dramatic reduction of *La Nave* was made by Tito Ricordi for the music of Italo Montemezzi. It was staged for the first time at the *Teatro alla Scala* in Milan “to exalt the glory of our homeland entirely reconstituted and turning free towards its new radiant destinies” (Gatti 1918, 424; Ricordi 1919; Damer-

ini [1943] 1992, 110; Chandler 2014). During World War II, Italy had attacked Greece in 1941. In 1943, Gino Damerini praised this play by writing that “with *The Ship* [...] D’Annunzio wanted to recall Italy to its tasks, re-proposing the need for liberation of the Adriatic as the first fatal stage for the resurrection of its power in the world” (Damerini [1943] 1992, 96).

The film was made with great use of means, with a sumptuous grandeur of sets, a cast of prominent actors and hundreds of extras. The directors are the son of Gabriele D’Annunzio, Gabriele Maria known as ‘Gabiellino’ D’Annunzio (1886-1945) and Mario Roncoroni (flor. 1912-28). The female protagonist, Basiliola, is the famous Russian dancer Ida Lvovna Rubinstein (1885-1960), of whom this film has the only surviving video shots. The other actors, all famous at the time, are Ciro Galvani, 1867-1956, who plays Sergio Gràtico, Alfredo Boccolini, 1885-1956, who is Marco Gràtico, Mary Cléo Tarlarini, 1878-1954, in the role of deaconess Ema, mother of the Gràtici, and Mario Mariani as the monk Traba.

The gestation of this cinematographic work lasted a decade, from 1911 to 1921, as the production and the author disagreed on the adaptation of the literary text and resorted to legal action as evidenced by the documents preserved in Gardone Riviera in the archive of the *Vittoriale degli Italiani (Società Anonima Ambrosio, I, 6; VI, 2)*. However, Mario Verdone (1952, 51-2 fn. 2), Paolo Paoletta (1952, 16), and Eva Rognoni Landi (1952, 112) mention two previous versions of the film, one in 1911 and the other in 1920. This statement must be corrected because only one film was made, even though the screenplay was worked on several times (D’Amico 1975, 107). The salient events of the production are reviewed below because they consti-

tute a significant testimony of the evolution of the relationship between the literary text, the growing prestige of the author, the production house, the director, and the cinematographic product itself. On 24 May 1911, in Paris, Gabriele D'Annunzio grants *Società Anonima Ambrosio*, represented by its director, Arturo Ambrosio, who accepts "the right of reproduction and cinematographic representation" of six of his literary works published up to that date. With the same contract, Gabriele D'Annunzio delivers three subjects and makes a receipt for the payment of twelve thousand liras. As will become clear only later, *La Nave* will be one of the other three works still to be chosen, whose delivery must be within 18 months with a fee of four thousand Lire each. It is also agreed that "these subjects must be artistically and technically cinematographic". To this end, "Gabriele D'Annunzio undertakes to personally bring or allow others to make the necessary changes to the needs of the film industry" (*Società Anonima Ambrosio*, VI, 2). Concerning this last contractual clause, on 4 August 1911, Arturo Ambrosio from his summer residence in Arcachon, France, wrote to Gabriele D'Annunzio to inform him that "the scripts as they stand would not give the works the desired prominence, considering that unfortunately, cinema lacks the word". Therefore, Ambrosio sends them back "with small variations with a prayer" to see if he likes them (*Società Anonima Ambrosio*, VI, 2). However, disagreements arose and led to a court case in Turin in 1916, which will be resolved only three years later with a private agreement dated Milan, 27 February 1919 (*Società Anonima Ambrosio*, I, 6). Armando Zanotta, President, and Arturo Ambrosio, Managing Director of the *Società Anonima Ambrosio*, agree with Gabriele

D'Annunzio that of the six subjects decided on 24 May 1911, five return "in full and free availability" of Gabriele D'Annunzio. The films derived from them will be withdrawn from circulation. As for the sixth subject, *La Nave*, "Gabriele D'Annunzio allows the *Società Anonima Ambrosio* with the means and decorum required by the subject, the fame of the Author and the name of the [cinematographic] house itself", to proceed without delay with the execution of the film. First, the *Società Anonima Ambrosio* undertakes to draw "from the work of Gabriele D'Annunzio the cinematographic scheme or scenario" to be submitted to the author for approval. The understanding is that the author "will allow those adaptations that are required by necessity or cinematographic opportunity, within the limits of the decent interpretation of his work". For the rights of *La Nave*, the *Società Anonima Ambrosio* undertakes to pay Gabriele D'Annunzio upon signing the contract "the sum of fifty thousand liras as a fixed premium [...] and ten per cent on net profits". Furthermore, "for the execution of the film mentioned above [and two other cinematographic products], *Casa Ambrosio* undertakes to hire and use the cooperation of Mr Gabriellino D'Annunzio, towards the consideration of 1,500 liras per month starting from 1 March 1919 for 24 months, and beyond if the execution of the films requires it. In addition, the *Società Anonima Ambrosio* undertakes to pay Gabriellino D'Annunzio the sum of liras 4,000 as a prize for each of the three films referred to in this contract. The payment of this sum will take place at the end of the production of each of the films". As the last clause, it is established that "before the marketing of the films subject to this contract, the *Società Anonima Ambrosio* will obtain the approval of Mr Gabriele D'Annunzio. The titles, cap-

tions, and anything else that refers to films will be submitted to the same, again for his approval" (*Società Anonima Ambrosio*, I, 6). At the time of the film release, the *Società Anonima Ambrosio* (Optics, Photography, Cinematography), in addition to the Turin plant, had agencies in Paris, London, Berlin, Moscow, Vienna, Barcelona, Copenhagen, New York, Buenos Aires, Rio de Janeiro, Montreal, Sydney and Yokohama (*Società Anonima Ambrosio*, VI, 2). The film was released in theatres on the occasion of the fifteenth centenary of the mythical origins of Venice (421-1921): on 25 November 1921 in Rome, 31 March 1922 in Japan, 5 January 1923 France, 18 October 1927 in New York (cf. IMDb: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0188089>). Then, for almost a century, the traces of the film are lost until the *Cinema Ritrovato* programme of the *Cineteca del Comune di Bologna* restores a version of the film. The restoration starts from an incomplete and largely decomposed negative on nitrate support held by the *Cineteca Italiana* in Milan and from a coeval positive of the Spanish version, also incomplete and partially decomposed, owned by the *Filmoteca Española*. A short anthology of film criticisms follows this introduction. It retraces a vision of how the appreciation of the work changed between 1921 and 2000. On the occasion of the sixteenth centenary of the mythical origins of Venice (421-2021), the discourse must be brought from the political space of discord and factional opportunisms to that of intercultural dialogue. Thus, *La Nave* becomes an opportunity to talk about the uses and abuses of the past. And work on building a future of peace. *La Nave* of this new century, the ship of the sixteenth centenary, is no longer that of D'Annunzio and the fifteenth centenary, which was that of the arms enterprises (Abulafia 2011).

Instead, it is that of Beauty and Creativity sailing towards the world in the name of overcoming linguistic obstacles and cultural barriers, for an open society with which Venice shares its history and its values for the whole of humanity.

Anthology of Film Critique

“And on the screen, the grandiose tragedy of Gabriele D’Annunzio, *La Nave*, loses nothing of its other signification. Even if many of its beauties disappear, the superb literary form, which has classical perspicuity, and the robust lyricism permeate the entire work. It is robust and wide as the breath of that salty sea from which it draws its direct inspiration, harsh and hard like its sound waves. However, we dare to say that even from the paintings, from the cinematic vision, a piece of music comes out that captivates and makes us think, reviving in our soul the melodious echoes that the tragedy has left deep indestructible. [...] Films like *La Nave* are like healthy breaths of pure and regenerating air in mouldy or fetid environments, from which everything is regenerated. Even the screen and the public’s taste are regenerated, they need to regenerate. [...] For us, Gabriellino D’Annunzio has overcome all the difficulties that the execution presented, brilliantly overcoming, proving a high value, and placing himself, with his first job, among our best stage managers. Indeed, we, who would have occasion to see other works of him, believe that his temperament is more in place in this historical genre, of greater complexity than in modern and bourgeois drama. He possesses ingenuity, culture, an exquisite and profound sense of beauty – not in vain, he is the son of a great aesthete – and will be able to work for the benefit of this reviled cinema [...]. Narciso Maffei’s photography is good, although, as we observed, it is not

sought after in photographic effects. In essence, tragedy is a reality of the life of peoples, majestic and simple; as such, it could not lend itself to the exercises of a photographic and executive impressionism or the acrobatic mechanics of American technique. Here the painting had to dominate and prevail over the technique. And therefore, to the short-sighted, it seems that the technique is a bit outdated. What did they want? A kaleidoscope of fleeting images? However, the non-exceptional interpretation is commendable. Ida Rubinstein exceeded all expectations. [...] She had gestures and expressions of incomparable plastic beauty, punctuated by an inner movement, full of musical harmony: so that body and soul appear as a vibrating string stretched over the arch of Basiola’s passions. [...] *La Nave*, in conclusion, is one of those works that represent a sum of considerable efforts. It performed on the eve of the crisis, appearing in full crisis, are like the cry of the vigorous strength of our Cinematographic Industry that does not want to die suffocated and serve as a warning to all, they call to the rescue. [...] And it concludes bitterly that not the crisis, perhaps, but the sloth, the laziness, the selfishness and rapacity, the artistic negation of men, are the fault of the terrible conditions present, of the decay of Industry Italian Cinematographic. Therefore, the industry will be saved if the men who wanted its ruin fall” (La Pesca 1921).

“In this film, [...] the influence of the stage is still present, especially in Rubinstein’s interpretation, who, although a great artist, does not know how to move and dance here as required by cinema, terrible analytical eye, which magnifies more the defects than the merits. Movements of too much-studied slowness, serpentine gestures and sudden shots, too fixed smiles,

lack of nuances in the expression of the face are the negative elements. The other performers act in a more cinematic way – accurately reconstructing environments and costumes, a notable search for a pictorial flavour in photography. The chronicles of the time were lavish with praise to Gabriellino D’Annunzio, who was addressing film directing for the first time, and to Rubinstein, whose dances were especially considered valuable, which perhaps precisely because they were so praised, leave us today disappointed...” (Rognoni Landi 1952).

“The work of the archives has put something back into circulation which, with reasonable approximation [...] allows us to understand how Gabriellino’s film must have been. So, we are forced to reopen the question. The value and particularity of the mode of representation found in the film force us to consider it much more than the desperate oddity of a production house on the road to bankruptcy. *La Nave* we have seen is not the reflection of cinematography devoted to self-destruction. The ship has a course and holds it without hesitation. The fact that passengers around it chose whether to travel on it is a problem of a completely different nature. [...] *La Nave* can be considered, at first sight, as a sensational emblem of that ‘literary’ that weighs down Italian cinema to the point of causing it to sink [...]. One thing that strikes you in this, as in other films of D’Annunzio’s derivation or inspiration, is a certain underlying static. All the mute Italian is accused, probably rightly, of not knowing how to detach himself from primitive modes of representation or attractive logic if you prefer. [...] In late Symbolist or D’Annunzio’s cinema, *La Nave* is just one example among others. The actions do not take place within fixed frameworks. *La*

Nave is a film with frenetic editing at times. It consists of over 550 shots and 200 cuts due to the captions. In short, a fragmented film, in which the frequency of the cuts seems to tend to the dynamisation of a staged mass perhaps already perceived as not very mobile. [...] Therefore, the reasons for the stillness are to be reconnected, in large part, to that rituality of the gesture inscribed in the source text. There is not a lot of action in the film, and what is there seems to obey the dictates of stylised and (hyper)codified acting. All this was already happening in Cabiria ...” (Manzoli 2002).

Andrea Nanetti

Marco Polo

“And in all truth I tell you that in this city there are six thousand stone bridges, built in such a way that one, even two galleys could pass under them”. *Devisement dou Monde (Il Milione)*, ch. 150

Marco Polo / Suzhou

In 1298, Marco Polo was held prisoner in Genoa after the Venetian defeat in the waters of Korčula / Korcula (Dalmatia). During the detention he wrote the *Devisement dou Monde*, the “description of the world”, also known as *Il Milione* in Italy and elsewhere. The text was written in French in collaboration with an inmate, the Pisan Rustichello. The prologue of the book was, in fact, delivered by the Parisian MS fr. 1116 of the Bibliothèque nationale de France (this manuscript is considered the oldest, and one of the most important, among 140 others that transmitted the text, translated into most of the languages of Medieval Europe, and in Latin). There are no reasons to doubt the truthfulness of this information; nevertheless, Rustichello is also

known for his Arthurian novel in prose (also in French), and importantly, the choice of French may have depended on the marketing strategies regarding literature at the time. At the end of the 13th century, French was the language of chivalric literature and of the aristocracy who mostly commissioned copies and tended to buy writings in French rather than in Venetian. French was the language of the elite that dominated the Levant, the territories conquered with the Crusades – and where Venice had very important commercial interests.

The *Devisement* is not an easy book to define, because its structure and content respond to various communicative intentions. The title suggests a geographical encyclopedia, and corresponds to the content of approximately 200 of the 232 chapters that make up the text: the description from West to East of continental Asia (from Armenia to part of Indochina) and, backwards from East to West, the so-called Indiae, namely the coastal and island regions on the Indian Ocean, from Japan to Abyssinia. Diversely, the order of the description coincides with the route (by land from West to East, and then – going down to the South – by sea from East to West) that guided Marco, his father Niccolò and Uncle Matteo, to come upon the Chinese court of Qubilai, the Mongolian emperor, founder of the Yuan dynasty, and to live under his authority between 1271 ca. and 1295. This very journey is thoroughly described in the first eighteen chapters of the *Devisement*. Geography is therefore intertwined with history, from a general point of view which narrate the populations of Asia, in particular the Mongols, and from an individual perspective with the biography of a traveller. It represents a geography of men and of places. The gaze of Marco – a merchant, bear in mind – rests

on languages and religions, on the bonds of personal submission to Qaghan, his greatest ruler, on crafts, raw materials, goods and commercial activity rather than on the physiognomy of natural spaces and those modified by human action.

Only the Mongolian Peace imposed by Chinggiz Qan and his heirs – who in less than sixty years unified the territories between the Levant and China under a homogeneous power – had made it possible for the three Westerners to travel safely across the entire continent over the slopes of the Silk Road. Certainly they were not the first explorers to have travelled along the same route: the Franciscan Giovanni di Pian di Carpine had gone as far as Qaraqorum, by request of Innocent IV (1243-47); the confrère William of Rubruk, also, by command of Louis IX of France (1253-55). Interestingly, these explorers left accounts of their travels in Latin, with different connotations in the monastic or religious sphere. Marco was the first to write about Asia using a vulgar idiom, addressing laymen – the non-religious – contributing thus to the success of the book, besides describing an unfamiliar, even mythical world before the arrival of the Mongols to the plains of central Europe (1241). The *Devisement* was translated several times, in Italy and overseas in other vernacular languages, but above all in Latin (an enterprise which reinforced an indirect recognition of its important geographical description). The historical events also played a fundamental role: in the West the *Devisement* was a primary source of information on Asia for several centuries, dating back to the Ming dynasty in China (1368), which ultimately prohibited Westerners to remain in Asia until the reinstatement of contacts between the 15th and 16th centuries at-

tributed mainly the roving and travels of the Portuguese.

More than one hundred and forty manuscripts, and twenty-five translations in thirteen languages (Latin included) are the reason for the huge success of the *Devisement*. As far back as the 16th century, people were reading the book (Christopher Columbus, for one, used it to feed his imagination before setting off for Catai – northern China – sailing West...). The achievement of the book can even be traced back to the first decade of the 14th century. According to information provided by some manuscripts, in August 1307, Marco Polo gave a French aristocrat, Thibaut de Chepoy, who was in Venice for a diplomatic mission, a copy of the book and on his return (1310), he engaged in improving the French version on Rustichello's endeavour and had it copied several times (evidence of this dates back to 1312). The copies of this 'French version' possess some common characteristics: they were commissioned by members of the aristocracy in typically large volumes, in parchment, and in some cases illustrated by a series of miniatures. Four of the manuscripts display the set of images that can be seen in this exhibition:

London, British Library, Royal MS 19 D I – is a large parchment manuscript (267 sheets of 425 × 310 mm), produced in Paris in the atelier of Richard de Montbaston and his wife post 1330; it contains many texts in French, and the *Devisement* (ff. 58-135) is illustrated with 38 miniatures (out of a total of 164).

Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Bodley 264 – is a large parchment manuscript (271 sheets of 415 × 300 mm), produced in two separate phases: the first part in Flanders by 1344; the second was added in ca. 1410, in England containing numerous texts in French; the *Devisement*, in addition (in the

second part, ff. 218-271) is illustrated with 38 miniatures (out of a total of 172).

Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, f. fr. 2810 – this renowned parchment volume is a collection of 8 French texts on Asia: composed of 297 sheets of 425 × 305 mm, illustrated with 265 miniatures (according to the style of two French masters, the Master of Boucicaut and the Bedford Master). It was commissioned by the Duke of Burgundy Jean Sans Peur (d. 1419) between 1404 and 1413, after imparting it to his Uncle Jean de Berry, one of the greatest bibliophiles of the 15th century.

Paris, Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal, 5219 – is a parchment manuscript, 168 sheets of 300 × 210 mm, transcribed at the beginning of the 16th century, and presumably circulating in the Savoy Court of Louise (d. 1531: mother of King François I). The text of the *Devisement* is 'commented' throughout by 197 miniatures.

Furthermore, the illustrative programmes of these four MSS contain images that 'describe' Venice and the urban environment of China, Suzhou (Sugiu in *Devisement*) in particular. These images consent reflection on how a Westerner may represent a completely unfamiliar Chinese city solely through his or her personal experience of reading the pages of the *Devisement*. These images do not come without some important indications:

(1) a miniature is an illustration of the text; in the language of medieval rhetoric *inlustratio* also means 'comment': in brief, the image is a form of comment of the word; (2) the illustrator's first point of reference is therefore the text, which must be interpreted literally; the text, however, was not designed to be 'commented' by an image (for example: if Marco mentions Venice, he does not go into describing the characteristics of

the city to be illustrated...). The illustrator is therefore called upon to interpret the text and to read between the lines or the non obvious and so he may resort to the 'encyclopedia' of images at his disposal;

(3) the perception of an authentic and tangible image is seldom an objective in the eye of the illustrator, especially when direct experience of reality is lacking. He thus works according to the iconic models available in the workshop of his atelier adapting those models to the contents to be illustrated;

(4) likewise, the viewer 'sees' reality according to the cognitive and representative schemes that he has mastered over time. The on-demand characteristic of the book requires the illustrator to adapt the images to the expectations of his/her audience.

In conclusion, the Chinese cities in the miniatures may well resemble the Western cities for several reasons bearing in mind three main factors: the author's wish to communicate, the illustrator's perception, and the viewer or reader's mental capacity for adaptation and interpretation.

Venice and the Imagination of Medieval Illustrators

24a-24b-24c-24d. *Venice*. After 1330; 1410 ca; early 1500; 1400 ca. (London, British Library, MS Royal 19 D I, f. 58r; Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Bodley 264, f. 218r; Paris, Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal, 5219, f. 9r; Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, fr. 2810, f. 1r)

How did the illustrators of French manuscripts imagine Venice in the 14th century? The images on the frontispiece page of the *Devisement dou Monde* may indeed betray their perspectives.

The four manuscripts offer various interpretations albeit a common trait defining a de-

parture from home to far away and obscure lands. The illustrations on the MS 2810 show no resemblance to a city like Venice but more to a fortified city (may that be Constantinople?), summarily depicted (and with ‘northern’ features: houses with half-timbered façades, and conical slate roofs...), of two men – brothers, presumably – Matteo and Niccolò Polo as they start off on their first travels to Asia (1259-69). The two other manuscripts likewise present the brothers’ outward journey; in the lower register of the opening miniature in the Royal MS the representation is somewhat generic and ‘contemporary’: the Gothic fortification on the water may depict Venice or most likely Constantinople. A more representative image of Venice is however evident in the subsequent Arsenal MS: the two men are standing on the pier of a port, clearly illustrating a ‘sui generis’ Venice (the Island of San Giorgio in the background; a back view of the Basilica of San Marco in the shape of a typical Gothic church but its emblematic domes give it away; the canals, the lagoon, and boats of generic shape that vaguely recall gondolas.

The illustrators are cautiously intending to depict a ‘type’ of place – a city on the waters – at once recognisable for the contemporary landmarks, rather than to a ‘realistic’ portrayal of a defined location. An exception is the miniature in the title page of the Bodley MS, an image which illustrates and conforms to much of the information within the book. The core of the book is unconfoundably Venice: the columns with the statues of San Teodoro – ‘El Todaro’ – and the Lion of Saint Mark (the theme of the lions is taken up in the foreground of a land beyond water) are all unmistakably depicted; looking to the right, a building with a loggia recalls the Doge’s Palace, and in the back-

ground the four horses on the first floor of an ambiguous building (place of public, private or religious demeanour?) all seem to allude to the statues currently on the façade of San Marco, symbols of the war spoils following the conquest of Constantinople and the fourth Crusade (1204). The urban description (the square, the houses, the towers) is most certainly baffling – a city that recalls an urban landscape of Northern Europe, albeit with canals and bridges that connect the islands that make up the city. A distinguishing characteristic is the picture of three men – two more mature and one younger man – on their way: the illustrator of the Bodley was resolute in immortalising the departure of Polo, and Marco, in their second travels (1271-95), taking up the main theme of the book and does this by abiding to figurative conventions as well as an awareness of real representations without underestimating the expectations of an audience and a strong adherence to the illustrated matter.

25a-25b-25c-25d-25e. *Quegianfu* (possibly Xi’an, city of Shaanxi). Paris, Bibliothèque de l’Arsenal, 5219, f. 85r; *Cacianfu* (Hezhongfu, now Puzhou, early 1500). Paris, Bibliothèque de l’Arsenal, 5219, f. 101r; *Ciangli* (Jiangling, now Dezhou, in Shandong). Paris, Bibliothèque de l’Arsenal, 5219, f. 101v; *Singiumatu* (Xinzhoumatou, identifiable with today’s Jining, in Shandong). Paris, Bibliothèque de l’Arsenal, 5219, f. 103r; *Çaiton* (today Quanzhou, early 1500). Paris, Bibliothèque de l’Arsenal, 5219, f. 121r

Cities of China

The Chinese urban landscape made a significant impression on Marco Polo; its geo-anthropological characteristics greatly power-

fully attracted the merchant side of the renowned explorer merchant’s attention: a strongly anthropised landscape, brimming with a civilised and wealthy population, mildly intent on their commercial and artisanal activities and the eyes of the Western traveller would linger his gaze on all the areas of the city and think they all look alike. Hangzhou and typically all the Chinese cities are described by Polo as a blueprint laying out the same information, using the same formulas. This especially applies to the cities of Northern China (the ‘Catai’ of Polo) and to the Southern cities (the ‘Mangi’: the domination of the Song dynasty conquered by Qubilai in 1276, giving rise to the Yuan dynasty). What is more, Polo was not interested in the description of the natural or urban landscape as such: the few references he makes in the book are always connected to human activities, which are much more important to him. The 16th-century illuminator of the Arsenal MS was unable to find convincing elements in the book of a representation of the dense network of cities that overwhelms Polo’s description of China. He therefore aimed at an anachronistic and conventional depiction: castles and fortified cities of ‘Gothic’ shape, drawbridges and boats on streams, few characterising details (in f. 101r at the entrance of Cacianfu, a body burnt at the stake, illustrates the fact that “the population is idolatrous, and they burn their dead”: [*Devisement*, ch. 130]; bags full of grains betray the commercial features of Çaiton, “The largest port in the world” (according to Ibn Baṭṭūṭāh, 1346), in f. 121r.

26a-26b-26c. *Sugiu* (Suzhou). Early 1500 (Paris, Bibliothèque de l’Arsenal, 5219, f. 113r); *Quinsai* (Hangzhou). Early 1500 (Paris, Bibliothèque de l’Arsenal, 5219, f. 114r); *Quinsai* (Hangzhou). 1410 ca. (Paris,

Bibliothèque nationale de France, fr. 2810, f. 67r)

Sugiu

What does Marco reveal about Suzhou? Its description is in *Devisement*, ch. 150 (first part). Here is the text (we translated the text prepared for the digital edition of E. Burgio and S. Simion, currently being published on the website of Edizioni Ca' Foscari, Venice:

[1] Here is told of the city of Sugiu

[2] Sugiu is a very great and noble city.

[3] The inhabitants are idolaters, subjects to the Great Khan, and have paper currency. They have silk in huge quantities. They live by trade and craft. They richly produce gold and silk fabrics for their clothes. There are many rich merchants here. [4] The city is so large that it is sixty miles round. There is a very great quantity of people in it, so that nobody could know their number. [5] And I tell you that if those from the province of Mangi were men-at-arms, they would be able to conquer the rest of the world: but they are not men in arms, they are men lacking in courage. But I tell you that they are skilled merchants and subtle men of all crafts; among them there are great philosophers and great natural physicians, who know nature very well. There are many magicians and diviners, too.

[6] Moreover, I tell you in all truth that in this city there are quite 6,000 stone bridges, under the greater part of which a galley or two could well pass.

[7] Further, I tell you that in the mountains around this city, rhubarb and ginger grow in huge quantities, because I tell you that for one Venetian groat you could get quite 60 pounds of fresh ginger, which is excellent. [8] You should know that this city has 16 very large cities under its domain, which

are of great trade and industry. [9] The name of this city, Sugiu, means 'Earth'; there is another city whose name, Quinsai, meaning 'Heaven' (we will tell you about it later on. They received these names because of their nobility and power.

Marco focuses more on the activities of the inhabitants than on the places: they are 'idolaters' (that is, they follow a religion that does not respond to any monotheist profession of faith), merchants and artisans (great producers of woven silk fabrics, tempting many a merchant), they are unfit for war; meek, wealthy, and wise men live among them. In a nutshell, Marco regards China as an urban civilisation: a much more populous one than the other civilisations he had come across in the Mediterranean. In fact, in the *Devisement* many of the descriptions of Chinese cities (in particular those of the Southern Song) reveal this line of thought. But here Marco provides information on the urban structure; he says very little, but that little suggests an impression of grandeur: 60 miles of perimeter, 6,000 stone bridges, canals so wide as to allow the simultaneous passage of two galleys (the Venetian ones are on average 50 meters long, 7 wide)... all accounts for his admiration for Chinese cities, with the eyes of a traveller who comes from a world in which wood is used in public and private buildings rather than stone. The same tone is noted in the next chapter, dedicated to the city of Quinsai/Hangzhou, the Song capital since 1123: the longest chapter of the *Devisement* (about 5% of the total text), dedicated to a city Marco considered the largest in the world: 100-mile perimeter and over 12,000 bridges that unmistakably connote the urban landscape. Marco mentions the moat and the bastion in the Eastern part, the canals, the sandbanks on

the shore, the river and the methods of canalisation, the bridges, the stone warehouses, and so on.

Sugiu and Quinsai are both depicted in the Arsenal MS; the two images, in many respects have similar characteristics and seek a compromise between Polo's description and the imagination of the miniaturist and of his audience: a stream that cuts the city in two, connected by one or more stone bridge. This is an illustration of what is contained in the book; the bridges outside the walls remind us vividly of the entrances on the moats to a Western fortified city.

The representation of Quinsai in MS fr. 2810 is delightfully out of date: a group of pastel-coloured houses interspersed with towers and portions of fortifications, all in distinct 'Western' style, divided and linked by stone bridges thrown over canals; there are no banks or foundations (as one would say for Venice): Quinsai is a city all, literally, resting on water. In the Arsenal MS, a detail betrays a more careful reading of the text: in the centre of the miniature, placed on a hill, a man beats a hammer on a flat surface; The ch. 151 of *Devisement* explains: "I also tell you something more: in the city there is a mountain, on which a tower stands, and above that tower there is a wooden table held by a man, who hits it with a hammer, and you can hear the sound so that it feels from afar, whenever a fire blazes in the city or whenever a riot happens; and as soon as that happens, that table immediately shakes and reverberates".

27a-27b-27c. *The Meeting with the Gran Khan.* After 1330; early 1500; 1410ca. (London, British Library, Royal MS 19 D I, f. 115r; Paris, Bibliothèque de l’Arsenal, 5219, f. 15r; Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, fr. 2810, f. 3v)

The Representation of the ‘Great Khan’ Qubilai

The use of conventional representation schemes in the illustration of medieval manuscripts is a well-acknowledged and efficient way of meeting the expectations of recipients’ mental imagery thus permitting an unambiguous decoding of what the miniature ‘describes’. This observation concerns objects and people. The three miniatures represent the emperor Qubilai, Lord of China and head of the leaders of the Mongols; each unveiling the ‘representative style’ of the manuscripts.

The illustration of the Royal MS is a somewhat surreal depiction: we see a sovereign possessing the same characteristics (the crown in particular) as the king of England or France; he is the embodiment of a sovereign devoid of any specific features that belong to the emperor described in the *Devisement*. The same mechanism is used to represent Quinsai, within, we encounter perspectives of style and solid motivations: a small miniature, fitting perfectly to the size of the image.

The illustrators of the Arsenal and fr. 2810 manuscripts are contained within a larger space providing ample leeway to work on the more descriptive elements: yet again (as in the Royal MS) the beard refers to the wisdom of the sovereign; the shape of the headdress and the luxurious clothing denounce an ‘exotic’ man, and allude to the Orient of the crusades (likewise, the numerous details of the contextual charac-

ters, not to mention the Polo brothers in the MS fr. 2810, whose attire alludes to the military dress of the Templars, or of the Knights of Jerusalem).

Eugenio Burgio

28. *Fra Mauro’s Map of the World* (1450 ca). Digital reconstruction by Andree Hansen Wibowo under the supervision of Davide Benvenuti (NTU Singapore) based on 36 files provided by the Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana in 2019

Original artefact: The *mappa mundi* was completed on 20 August 1460 as marked with an inscription carved on the back. The map was made with inks and tempera paints on parchment sheets glued to a revolving circular wooden platform (about 196 cm in diameter), which is housed on a square-shaped wooden support (223 × 233 cm) with a circular opening in the centre which is slightly larger than the tondo (i.e., the circular central part). The gap between the tondo and the support is covered by a golden circular frame. The tondo includes approximately 2,800 place names, 200 short texts in Venetian vernacular and hundreds of iconic representations (cities, ships, animals, architectural monuments, mountains, roads, rivers etc.). The four corners of the square frame are filled in with the skies and astronomical distances (upper left corner), tides and earth (upper right corner), earthly Paradise (lower left corner), element theory and Southern regions (lower right corner).

Interactive system for map exploration: <https://engineeringhistoricalmemory.com/FraMauro.php>

The *Digital Exploration of Afro-Eurasia in the ‘mappa mundi’ of Fra Mauro* is one of the outcomes of the two-year period between November 2017 and November 2019 devel-

oped by the international collaboration of the Research Group coordinated by Dr Andrea Nanetti at the LIBER Lab of the Nanyang Technological University of Singapore with researchers from the Marciana National Library of Venice, from the Ca’ Foscari University of Venice, and Microsoft Research. The aim is to overcome the linguistic and cultural obstacles of historical research in a transcultural (re)reading of primary sources and secondary literature for the pre-modern history of Afro-Eurasia (1205-1533). For the first time all the informative elements that can be read on the globe are linked to the interpretative results of the research as consolidated by Piero Falchetta in the Marciana Library (Falchetta 2006; 2011), as well as other contemporary sources such as Marco Polo’s book (edition by Burgio 2018) and Ibn Battuta’s travels (edition by Tazi 1997). The individual elements have been manually linked to the relevant Wikipedia pages to provide a unique multilingual understanding and to an automatic “Multimodal Scholarly Trove” system (in collaboration with international publishing houses, such as Scopus Elsevier and Taylor & Francis) to aggregate publications, images and videos useful for research in real time. Users are invited to collaborate.

The research continues.

Andrea Nanetti

The Iconography of Suzhou

“Suzhou is Suzhou and Venice is Venice, each with its own unique characteristics”. (Zhao Yingyun)

The Iconography of Suzhou

In the eyes of European travellers, missionaries and merchants who visited China in modern times, the city of Suzhou seemed very similar to Venice ever since Matteo Ricci S.J. (1522-1610), in the 16th century, explicitly established a kinship between the two cities, writing these lines on Suzhou in his memoirs: “Sta Suceo posto in un fiume che non corre se non per dove va il vento, se non vogliamo dire in un lago [太湖], come Venetia nel mare” (Ricci 1942, 36). [Suzhou is placed on a river that does not run except for where the wind goes, if we don't mean in a lake [太湖], like Venice on the sea].

Matteo Ricci first established an association between the two cities in his reports, which were later read and taken up by other Jesuits. This continuous comparison led to the collective and protracted formation of a legitimate palimpsest in which Suzhou was repeatedly described as the Chinese Venice. In the imagery of Jesuit sinology, the first and most widespread in Europe and fundamental reference for all travellers preparing to visit China, this vision of Suzhou as a splendid water city became an integral part of its description. The two cities were admittedly different in the quality of the waters – Venice was built on a sea lagoon while Suzhou was surrounded by fresh water. Early travellers also noted the beauty, wealth and culture of Suzhou, as well as the Chinese adage *Shang you tiantang, xia you Su Hang* “In Heaven there is the Paradise, as on Earth

there are Suzhou and Hangzhou”. During the Ming (1368-1644) and Qing (1644-1911) dynasties, Suzhou was one of the most affluent cities in Jiangnan, the prosperous South of China, famous besides for the wealth of its many merchants, the sophistication of its crafts and the culture of its literati. These key factors indeed contributed to its association with Venice.

The features of Suzhou, also evident in Chinese representations, were reported and replicated by European travellers, who constructed an image of the city that enchanted Europeans.

The description of Suzhou had undergone iconographic declinations since the 17th century: the first to give a detailed and, above all, cartographic description was Martino Martini, in his *Novus Atlas Sinensis* (1655). In his graphic rendering, Suzhou is shown as a fortress in the middle of the waters of Lake Tai.

The cultural exchanges, particularly enhanced by the Jesuits at the Chinese court, as well as the growing trade between Europe and China between the 17th and 18th centuries contributed to mutually enrich European and Chinese figurative traditions. Court painting and woodblock prints produced in Suzhou in the mid-18th century were greatly influenced by a European perspective mostly thanks to the painter and Jesuit Giuseppe Castiglione (1688-1766).

The court painter, Xu Yang (1712-after 1777), a native of Suzhou, dedicated his works to the Emperor Qianlong and his travels to the South, showing greater depth, due to the new perspective technique. A blend of aerial and linear perspective can also be seen in the two woodblock prints shown in the exhibition, which represent the crowded Changmen gate, one of Suzhou's main commercial centres at the

time; the same combination is also present in Xu Yang's scroll which illustrates Suzhou and its daily activities.

What emerges from these descriptions is the architectural beauty, richness and vitality of a large, productive and commercially flourishing city represented in a coordinated and detailed manner together with the details of urban life.

The iconographic cultural exchanges clearly revealed perspective according to the style of European painters – Jiao Bingzhen (ca. 1650-after 1726) for one, with his imaginary representation of Venice, the city built on the waters in the West. It is a reconstruction almost certainly based on images and descriptions of Jesuit missionaries such as Giulio Aleni (1582-1649), who, in 1623, integrated Chinese geographical knowledge with a presentation of foreign countries to China, including Venice and its dominions, in his work *Zhifangwaiji* (*Geography of Countries Foreign to China*, 1623). Martino Martini had introduced China to Europe, likewise Aleni presented the rest of the world to China.

In 18th century Europe, the imagery of the *chinoiseries* was very much in vogue and also influenced an English painter who visited China as a member of the famous Macartney mission (1792-94) – William Alexander (1767-1816). He was drawing near to Suzhou when he had a vision, most likely inspired by the Jesuits and their previous descriptions of Suzhou and by Canaletto's paintings. In a similar Canaletto-style of landscape painting, Alexander portrayed the Chinese city, visually reinforcing the traditional association between Venice and Suzhou.

Chinese cartography has also awarded great importance to the city of Suzhou, formerly called Pingjiang: the oldest and best preserved map of a Chinese city is the stele

called *Pingjiangtu* (Map of Pingjiang), dating back to the Southern Song Era (1126-1279). What emerges, once more, is a solid and fortified city connected by a network of navigable canals – from this description one can assume its commercial centrality. The urban form, far from being immutable, shows its changes in the map of the Republican Era of 1927, which describes plans for the recovery and expansion of a city destined to grow and evolve over time to become a large and modern city, with an ability to preserve its historic centre beyond its ancient walls.

The cultural heritage of the city, mainly characterised by its gardens and many monuments, is evident in the stereoscopic photos by the renowned Underwood & Underwood Company, specialised in stereoscopic images. In the year 1900, in a series of 3D photographs of Suzhou, they promoted knowledge of the territory, not only through the picturesque landscape, but by capturing genre scenes – including singular images of fishermen, washerwomen, merchants and travellers – thus offering the idea of an exotic and happily folkloristic China.

Daniele Beltrame and Angelo Maggi

29. Painting attributed to Jiao Bingzhen, *Western-Style Painting or A View of Venice*. Ink and colour on silk, 127.7 × 49.6 cm (Yamato Bunkakan Museum di Nara, Japan)

This painting is attributed to Jiao Bingzhen (ca. 1650-after 1726, courtesy name Er Zheng), a Chinese painter who lived between the 17th and 18th centuries. Born in Jining in Shandong, he served as an official in the Imperial Astronomical Office and was also a court painter. In the Astronomical Office he worked in close contact with the European Jesuits, in particular Ferdi-

nand Verbiest (1623-88, in Chinese Nan Huairen), and thus had the opportunity to learn the techniques of Western art, especially the technique of perspective, particularly interesting and innovative for Chinese painters because it allowed a more realistic representation of the scenes. Perspective was greatly appreciated in Chinese landscape painting and in 1695, Jiao Bingzhen, on behalf of Emperor Kangxi (1654-1722), used this technique to create the series of images of *Pei wen zhai gengzhi tu* (*Illustrations on Rice and Sericulture*, also known as *Yuzhi gengzhi tu*).

The attribution of the painting on exhibition remains dubious also because there are neither signatures nor specific indications of the authorship. There are two seals at the bottom right displaying a name – “Jiao Bingzhen” and a phrase – “At the court’s service” but Kobayashi thinks they are “of doubtful origin” (2006, 263). It is certainly an exercise in Western-style painting, evident from the central perspective with a single vanishing point showing how the technique was still used in an elementary way. Chinese artists had first been influenced by the indications of Jesuit painters in the Imperial Academy, but in 1729 a treatise on perspective was issued in Chinese, thanks to Giuseppe Castiglione, namely the *Shixue* (Study of Vision), adapting and translating the *Perspectiva pictorum et architectorum* (1693) by Andrea Pozzo.

Even the figures represent a lesson in Western-style painting. They are clearly illustrated according to Chinese taste and style, but don and bear typical European symbols such as the cross around the neck of the tamed beast being dragged by the characters in the foreground. Kobayashi (2006) claims that the scene represents the motif of the tribute offered to the Chinese

emperor by representatives of a far-off country. Moreover, the observatory on the top left-hand corner is another element that connects this experiment of perspective to the Western world and in particular to the Jesuits, a detail that contributes to ascribe the authorship to Jiao Bingzhen, who had worked in the Observatory.

The subject of the painting is a Western city, probably Venice, given the water and the female figure on board a gondola-like boat. In the Yamato Bunkakan Museum in Nara, where it is kept, the painting is presented as a “Western-Style Painting” but the catalogue description suggests that it is indeed Venice. Kobayashi (2006) explicitly speaks of the painting as a “view of Venice”.

The first representations of foreign countries and their cities were in fact introduced by the Jesuits; and in particular, Giulio Aleni, with his *Zhifang waiji* (*Geography of Countries Foreign to China*, 1623) provided important information that was not found within imperial documents. Other sources used by the Jesuits were atlases, rich in images, including the *Civitates Orbis Terrarum* (1572) by Georg Braun and Franz Hogenberg, whose volumes were proposed to China by the Jesuits at the beginning of the 17th century (Mungello 2009, 72). Therein, Venice is described as a city built on water.

Daniele Beltrame

30. *Complete Map of the Urban Area of Suzhou in the Seventeenth Year of the Republic. 1927* (Suzhou City Archives)

At the beginning of the Republican Era, China was enjoying a momentous modernisation of urban functions and a renewed concept of urban planning emerged in every part of China; in Suzhou, the Jiangsu Provincial Government requested the or-

ganisation of the Municipal Administration Work Office to develop “Suzhou Urban Policies”. The District Governor Wang Nashan was chairman of the municipal government’s work office and the architect Liu Shiyong was appointed as engineer, and together they planned the city of Suzhou. Six months later, the work office drew up the first comprehensive and modern urban planning plan of Suzhou’s modern history towards a medium and long-term development of Suzhou. The old city started its transformation and precise standards were set for roads, canals, public parks, markets, and other buildings. Among these planning rules, the Suzhou City Council’s work office also established the “boundaries of the urban area” of Suzhou, and proposed a general three-phase construction plan. The first phase was the “renovation period” (green in the map), namely, “the renovation of the old town and its surroundings”: the focal point of this phase was the reorganisation of streets, canals, buildings, the construction of public parks, markets, public baths etc. The second phase was “the planning period” (in blue on the map), namely, “the construction of the new urban area” – the instructions for Suzhou’s main roads were to “convey them all to the western half of the city”. Considering the geographical situation, most of the famous historical locations such as Tiger Hill (Huqiu), Hanshan Temple, Tianping Mountain, Lingyan Mountain, Dongting Lake, Shangfang Mountain, Shi Lake, Baodai Bridge were all located in the southwest area, therefore, the work office established that “the direction of the future development of Suzhou city will need to be concentrated in the western area outside the city centre”. The design of the “new urban area” of Suzhou was then developed to make “Changmen and [the] new Chang-

men, as the centre, to facilitate traffic, improve the urban conformation and from thereon to delineate a radial street pattern”. The third phase envisaged was known as “the preparation period” (in yellow on the map), namely, “the programme of future urban expansion”, more precisely the “outward development of the city with the old and new city as the nucleus”, to create the “expansion zone” of Suzhou. According to the planning, the boundaries of the future urban area of Suzhou would have been as such: “in the north, from [the village of] Lumu, in the west through Tiger Hill, the temple of Hanshan, skirting the canal to Hengtang”, “in the south it skirts the canal surrounding the foreign concession”, “in the east the boundary is the original city limits”, “a circular area with an approximate diameter of 20 li”.

This map is currently kept in the municipal archives of Suzhou.

Wang Han

31. Martino Martini. *Novus Atlas Sinensis. Provincia IX – Kiangnan* (Jiangnan). 1655 (Courtesy of Centro Studi Martino Martini of Trento)

Martino Martini (1614-1661) arrived in China for the first time in 1643 at the age of twenty-nine, he stayed there for seven years, then returned to Europe for nine years. He went back to China on a second trip and died two years later in Hangzhou. A great Jesuit scholar, he was the first to publish works on Chinese geography and history in Europe. The most important of these works is certainly the *Novus Atlas Sinensis*, published in 1655 in Amsterdam. The atlas was illustrated with seventeen maps, fifteen of which were dedicated to each of the Chinese provinces at the begin-

ning of the Qing era (1644-1912). Although geographical documents and maps of the empire were already available in China, these maps were the first European source of information on Chinese geography and the first cartographic representation of the city of Suzhou in Europe. Obviously, there were already numerous Chinese geographical texts and maps of the Chinese empire but the sources on which Martini’s Atlas is based are unknown.

In Martini’s Atlas, the city of Suzhou, called Sucheu, is the “Tertia Urbs” (third city) of Kiangnan Province (Jiangnan), the Southern part of the Yangzi River, which divides the North and South of China.

It is noteworthy that the map shows the city as a fortified city according to the model of the Renaissance ‘modern-style’ fortresses. Moreover, the “IHS” sign above the city indicates the presence of a Catholic mission, also present in the nearby city of Changxo (Changshu).

For each province the maps are accompanied by the description of the main cities. For each city the geographical position, resources, commercial activities, characteristics of the inhabitants and so on are described. Here is an excerpt from the description of the city of Suzhou:

“In all its extension the city is built on a placid freshwater river, which looks more like a lake than a river, so that here, as in Venice, you can move both by land and by water. The water is drinkable and can be used for the needs of the people, and so the city exceeds Venice. There are many bridges, both inside and outside the city, but not as many as in the metropolis of Hangcheu [Hangzhou]. Many of these are built according to magnificent engineering projects. All are of solid stone. Some are multi-arched, others constructed with just a single arch on narrower banks within the

city. The streets and buildings themselves rest on pine tree trunks deeply embedded using pile drivers and machines, as commonly seen in marshland. The rivers and canals allow the passage of ships, and even the most extensive areas to the sea from the city are just three days' walk away. The city is close to the vast Lake Tai, from whence the rivers flow into the sea and an incredible number of ships, merchandise and merchants are visible at all times" (Martini [1655] 2002, 599-603).

Daniele Beltrame

32. Stele of the map of Pingjiang (Suzhou) from the Southern Song era. 1229 (Stele Museum of Suzhou)

The *Pingjiangtu* map is engraved on stone; the papercast is 279 cm high and 38 cm wide. The stele dates back to the Southern Song Era (1126-1279), and precisely to the second year of the Shaoding Emperor's reign (1229). It was designed under the direction of Li Shouming, governor of Pingjiang (the name of Suzhou at the time) and in the same year was engraved on stone by the sculptors Lü Ting, Zhang Yuncheng and Zhang Yundi. In the sixth year of the Republic, 1917, under the supervision of Ye Dehui and Zhu Xiliang the map was inscribed once more, by Huang Weixuan. In 1961, the Chinese government announced that the map was to be included among the main national treasures for protection and preservation. It is currently kept in the Stele Museum (the Confucius Temple in Suzhou). From the third year of Emperor Zhenghe's reign (1113) in the Northern Song Era (960-1126) Suzhou was promoted to the rank of prefecture under the name of *Pingjiangfu*; in the fifteenth year of Emperor Zhiyuan of the Yuan (1275) the name changed to *Pingjianglu*; in the sixteenth year of Emperor

Zhizheng of the Yuan (1356) Zhang Shicheng changed the name again, to *Longpingfu*; in the seventeenth year of the Zhizheng Empire (1357), the city was renamed *Pingjianglu*, until the first year of the Ming Dynasty (1367) when it took on the ultimate name of *Suzhoufu*. Suzhou was known as Pingjiang for approximately 237 years.

In the fourth year of the Jianyan Era (1130) Suzhou was conquered by the Jin troops and some parts of the city were devastated. It was gradually renovated and then completely reconstructed during the second year of the reign of the Shaoding Emperor of the Southern Song (1229). This map shows the period of the final restoration of the city.

The map illustrates the waterways, bridges and neighbourhoods; the drawing is an accurate representation defining a total of 644 topographical details of natural geography and human landscape inside and outside the city including 640 place names. Within the map there are six longitudinal channels and fourteen transversal channels. There are 314 bridges (295 inside the city, 19 on the outside; 309 street bridges; there is a bridge inside a temple, a bridge inside the prefecture, a bridge inside a warehouse, two bridges inside a building; 307 bridges with specific names, seven bridges with no names); 57 ancient quarters; 111 Daoist and Buddhist temples and other religious buildings; 93 constructions including government offices, barracks and similar places; 24 mountains, islets, hills and other geographical elements; 18 rivers, lakes, ponds and suchlike; 19 other sites. The map also shows the directions as follows: the North at the top, the South at the bottom, the West on the left and the East on the right-hand side. According to the survey carried out in 1978 by the public

works office of the city of Suzhou, the North-South direction is oblique, the South is shifted to the East, the North to the West with an inclination of seven degrees and 54 minutes; the scale is about 1 to 2,000 and the distance between the East and West is slightly narrower, while the distance between the North and South is slightly longer. The roads in the map are indicated in two dimensions, while buildings, reliefs, tombs etc. are displayed with three-dimensional symbols, water is indicated with wave ripples. The names of the locations are divided in two lines: vertical and horizontal – many of them are repeated. In the map, the streets and canals are parallel, throughout the city, the markets are scattered breaching the customary division between an imperial city and a mercantile city ("in front of the dynasty, behind the merchants") and this reflects the development in the productive and mercantile sectors. In general, the design of *Pingjiangtu* conveys the illustrious Chinese cartographic tradition, which achieved a new level in the areas of topography, scale and captions; it is currently the oldest and best preserved urban map in the world and has enormous documentary and research value for the development of urban planning in the classical era, for its design and many other aspects.

The ancient maps largely reflected the historical information present in the ancient texts, such as the geography and urban topography, the description of the buildings and the water environment of the city of Suzhou, etc. The *Pingjiangtu* is considered the oldest and most complete Chinese map engraved on stone still existing. It is a detailed two-dimensional record of the essential features of Suzhou in the Song Era: rectangular in shape, with 16 km perimeter walls. There is a double wall, inside and

outside the city, and five water and land gates; within the city there are numerous waterways: from North to South, the city is crossed by six canals, from East to West by fourteen canals, intersecting each other. Besides, the system of canals outside the city ensures the required exchange of water and a defence of the city. The urban structure inside the city is collected and orderly: the districts and alleys have a chessboard distribution, the houses are built close to the canals: the streets in the forefront and the canals behind the streets, running parallel, form a double chessboard. This distribution has not to date modified significantly and many toponyms are still preserved today.

From the *Pingjiangtu* the outer perimeter of the city of *Pingjianfu* was an estimated 32 *li* (16 km) in distance, measuring 9 *li* (4.5 km) from North to South and from East to West approximately 7 *li* (3.5 km) with a surface area of approximately 15.75 square km. The outer city had an irregular shape due to the strength of the river. The citadel had a rectangular shape and was parallel to the outer city: the perimeter of the city was 20 *li* (10 km) and the ratio of length to width was three to two. There are six major vertical channels that appear in the *Pingjiangtu* and twelve in horizontal direction; the channels are straight from North to South and East to West and form a considerably regular network of waterways. Since roads and canals run parallel, the network of land roads and waterways overlap for the most part. The map clearly indicates a flat surface, resembling a double chessboard based on the formula “water and land proceed together, roads and canals stay close together”. The term ‘double chessboard’ in this case underlines the idea of the difference between Suzhou and

other chessboard cities. The original is preserved in the Suzhou Stele Museum.

Wang Han

33-34. Master of Baohujian. *View of Changmen in Suzhou*. Hand-painted woodblock prints, 108.6 × 55.9 cm. 1734 (Umi-Mori Art Museum of Hiroshima, Japan)

33-34. Master of Baohujian. *The Three Hundred and Sixty Trades*. Hand-painted woodblock prints, 108.6 × 55.6 cm. 1734 (Umi-Mori Art Museum of Hiroshima, Japan)

The two works presented here are hand-painted prints from wooden matrixes, attributed to the Master of Baohujian and dated 1734. Although separate, they are two halves of a single view of the city of Suzhou also known as the left and right-hand perspective of “A bird’s eye view of the city of Suzhou”, kept in the Umi-Mori Museum of Hiroshima. In the 18th century Suzhou was an important centre for the production of luxury products, including prints. These products were often deliberately innovative and ‘exotic’, so it is not surprising to encounter foreign techniques. These may be seen within Chinese paintings through the prints that missionaries circulated in southern China and the painted and printed images that were imported from Canton and imitated by local craftsmen, especially export goods such as porcelain (Clunas 2009).

The print on the left, measuring 108.6 × 55.9 cm, is specifically a view of the Changmen gate entitled as such: *View of the Changmen Gate in Suzhou*. The second print, slightly smaller, measures 108.6 × 55.6 cm and is presented by the Umi-Mori Museum as “*The Three Hundred and Sixty Trades* (the title is written at the top right-hand side of the print), referring to the remarkable vital-

ity and prosperity of a rich merchant city such as Suzhou in the mid-18th century. The Changmen area was in fact one of the most centralised areas of the city’s mercantile and productive activities. The element of water is evident, both as a natural element that crosses the human city and as a communication route for the exchange of goods, thus underlining the commercial energy of the city. In fact, on the left half of the diptych, there are verses celebrating the wealth of the city of Suzhou, which is compared to the capital of the Song Dynasty, Kaifeng; at the end of the inscription, one can see the date and the artist’s signature.

It is a mixed perspectival view: a bird’s eye view with a precise vanishing point, as in European painting. In fact, this representation is exceptionally noteworthy – for its innovation in Chinese painting of the period and the application of the perspective technique introduced by the Europeans, above all by Jesuit painters of the court – Giuseppe Castiglione (1688-1766) being one of these. Interestingly, perspective is here assimilated to the Chinese painting tradition: if the description of the city captures the urban space in the foreground with its geometric regularity and its human activities, then the background – more vague and indistinct – recalls how nature is always present and how it can placate the mundane and frenetic world of mankind. In the background the Pagoda of the Northern Temple is seen (*Beisi ta*), still standing in Suzhou.

On the right-hand side of the diptych, one can observe the road with its shops stretching into the natural landscape until it fades out into the horizon. The use of perspective also explains the sharp contrast of light and shadow, which underlines the volumes

and their orientation towards the vanishing point.

Daniele Beltrame

35. William Alexander. *Chinese Barges of Lord Macartney's Embassy Preparing to Pass under a Bridge*. Watercolour, with pen and grey ink, over graphite, 30.5 × 45.6 cm. 1796 (London, British Museum)

William Alexander (1767-1816) was an English painter, engraver and draughtsman. In his paintings, attention is drawn to the reality of the landscape and to the detail of the costumes and the characterisation of the figures. He mostly owes his fame to the position of assistant illustrator for the mission of Lord George Macartney (1737-1806) to the Qing Empire between 1792 and 1794. After a disappointing audience with Emperor Qianlong (1711-1799), the mission left Beijing for Canton at the beginning of October 1793. The journey advanced along rivers and inland waterways. Some members of the mission, including Alexander, only made it as far as Hangzhou and then continued by sea. On his journey from Beijing to Hangzhou, which lasted just over a month, Alexander took a close look at China stretching before him along the shores and then portrayed its landscapes and inhabitants.

His works are a wealth of information regarding the cities, buildings and the everyday life of China at the time earning him the reputation of one of the very first artists to portray China from life. For many years after his return home, he produced drawings, engravings and watercolours from his Chinese experience, drawing material from memories, sketches and his diary. One of the watercolours taken from the drawings made after his return to England is the one reproduced here: dated 1796, it is a rep-

resentation of the surrounding areas of Suzhou. The painting depicts in particular, the passage of the mission boats near Suzhou on 7 November 1793. The South of China appeared much more populous and prosperous than the North to the English travellers. Along the banks and on the canal one can view considerable activity and vitality. In this scene, the painter is eager to illustrate the interlude after the lowering of the boat masts before the crossing of a bridge along the Grand Canal at a confluence with a smaller canal.

The ascendancy of 18th century models of his landscape formation is clearly visible in Alexander's works: the author himself leaves an important testimony of the visit to Suzhou in his diary: "At 2 p.m. arrived at the famous and flourishing city of Soutcheou [Suzhou], passing through but a portion of it where the canal is close under the walls of the city... many houses project over the canal reminding me of Canaletti's [sic] views in Venice..." (quoted in Legouix, Conner 1981, 44).

Alexander, therefore, not only confirms an association between Suzhou and Venice, inherited mainly from the Jesuits, but also indicates that the watercolour is an illustration of the surrounding areas of Suzhou and of the canal where boats are moving towards the South.

Alexander is most certainly a man of his times, applying the concepts of romanticism and the picturesque to his art (Legouix 1980). Alexander conveys a picturesque image of China, not unlike the bucolic, but by no means retrogressive landscapes of the Italian or English countrysides. In their memoirs, the mission members clearly express their wonders on the magnificence and grandeur of the Chinese bridges, even if some were not high enough to accommodate all the boats.

Alexander is described as "an observer, rather than an innovator" (Wood 1998, 102), so he tended to authentically and objectively represent the reality before his eyes. Beside the images of a picturesque China, he left us, with an ever-curious gaze, many scenes from everyday Chinese life, the many activities of farmers as well as portraits of many different figures.

The members of the mission were monitored throughout their journey and therefore they were not completely free to explore the Chinese landscape. Alexander shows his frustration and desire to look beyond, to overcome the material aspect, to exceed the visual obstacle, purposefully represented by the bridge. The need to lower the mast for the boats is one of these obstacles, but it allows the painter to pause, observe and portray – sitting on the main boat, dressed in blue is his self-portrait as an observer of life.

According to Archer (1962) the passage to which Alexander contributed the most was "from Cathay to China", i.e. from an idyllic and idealised description of China transmitted by the Jesuits to a more objective and sometimes merciless description that began in the mid-18th century. For Archer, Alexander's realism describes, without romantic distortions, a concrete yet imperfect land. However, according to Sloboda (2008) the claim of authenticity of the images brought by Alexander is demeaned by a common adherence to a stereotype of China during those times, especially for the landscape images, taken mainly from descriptions of Chinese gardens. The figurative language chosen is also a well-established and comprehensible language of the picturesque, which facilitated the translation of the exotic for a European audience of the time.

In this painting, however, authenticity is more relevant – apart from various figures in the foreground and the roof of what could be a temple, there are no elements that are clearly identifiable as Chinese and the painting may well be the exotic version of a Canaletto. Picturesque elements in the painting may be the bridges and the canal crowded with boats (as in the Venetian *vedutisti*) and the isolated arch on the bank (as in the desolate Roman antiquities of Canaletto or Piranesi).

Although the elements of the landscape are recomposed by the author in an unrealistic and original way, as in Guardi's *capricci*, there are details that transport the viewers to Suzhou: Staunton himself, in his memoirs, refers specifically to this same image when writing about the approach of the mission to “Sou-choo-foo” (Staunton 1797, 427).

It is, therefore, a description of the surrounding areas of Suzhou. A further element of contact between this watercolour and another by the same author is the door on the right bank. In yet another watercolour, generically entitled *Suburbs of a Chinese City*, commonly identified with Suzhou (Legoux, Conner 1981, 46), a tall pagoda similar to the *Ruiguangta* of Suzhou is seen. The pagoda itself is distinguishable in the book *The Costume of China*, a collection of Chinese scenes published by William Alexander in 1805, describing “A pagoda (or tower) near the city of Sou-tcheou [Suzhou]” (1805, 10).

In conclusion, the scene mostly refers to the surroundings of Suzhou, seen by the English expedition on its arrival into the city but elements of the city itself can be unmistakably referred to Suzhou.

Daniele Beltrame

36. Xu Yang's *Burgeoning Life in a Resplendent Age* or *Prosperous Suzhou*. Ink and colour on silk, 35.8 × 1225 cm (Liaoning Provincial Museum)

At the beginning of the Qing Dynasty, Suzhou was the most economically and culturally developed city in the whole of China. *Burgeoning Life in a Resplendent Age*, commonly called *Prosperous Suzhou*, was painted in the 24th year of Emperor Qianlong's reign (1759) by the famous court painter Xu Yang. Xu Yang, courtesy name YunTing, was originally from Wu County in the Suzhou Prefecture. In the 16th year of Emperor Qianlong's reign (1751), Xu Yang, a pupil of the Imperial College, already in his forties, presented a collection of paintings to the emperor and joined the Imperial Art Academy by decree of the emperor. After Emperor Qianlong's second “Southern Inspection”, he painted the scroll *Burgeoning Life in a Resplendent Age* to depict the enlightened imperial government.

Prosperous Suzhou is a long painting on a 12.41 m long by 39 cm high silk scroll. The area depicted is described as follows: “Starting from Mt. Lingyan and going east from Mudu village, one passes Mt. Heng and Lake Shi. Passing by Shangfang Mountain and, from the northern shore of Lake Tai, between Shi and He Mountains, one enters the city of Suzhou. From the three gates Fengmen, Panmen and Xumen, one can leave the Changmen Gate, move around Shantang Bridge and finally reach Tiger Hill. This painting depicts the imperious walls and moats of the city, the forest of government offices, the beauty of the landscape, the activities of fishermen and lumberjacks, ploughing and weaving, the huddle of merchants, the rows of shops as thick as fish scales, etc.” According to a rough estimate approximately 12,000 people appear in the crowded picture.

There are also numerous boats along the river—almost 400, including government officers' boats, transport boats, passenger boats, mixed transport boats, decorated boats, wooden and bamboo rafts. A multitude of shops stretch along the streets: over 260 shop signs of all kinds. We see 50 different kinds of bridges. All this, together with more than ten scenes of theatre and cultural events, amply demonstrate an advanced level of civilisation achieved by Suzhou at the height of the Qing Dynasty.

Shops

Prosperous Suzhou displays more than 260 shop signs really existing in Suzhou at the time, and it provides the posterity a realistic and rare figurative record besides official documents.

Imperial Exams, Education and Culture during the Ming and Qing Dynasties

The inhabitants of Suzhou were the most successful candidates in the imperial examinations. There were many candidates from Suzhou who successfully passed the exams and often obtained top positions, which earned them a true national excellence. During the Qing Dynasty, a quarter of the top candidates in the imperial examinations throughout the country came from the Suzhou Prefecture.

In *Prosperous Suzhou* we find many scenes of study and examinations, which reflect this feature of the city.

To the west of Mount Lingyan a library is located in the middle of a thick forest, where an old man is writing and another man is in deep thought. Many Suzhou writers in fact, would spend their last period of study in preparation for exams in these quiet and sheltered environments.

Theatrical and Musical Culture

Suzhou was a famous centre for music and theatre and during Emperor Kangxi's reign (1661-1722) there were apparently over a thousand theatre companies in Suzhou alone.

The stretch of town between Jinmen Gate and Changmen Gate portrayed in *Prosperous Suzhou* was the area where theatres were most numerous. For this reason, there are many scenes related to the theatre within the painting.

Changmen Gate

In the middle of the Suiyuan Garden in Mudu a theatre performance in a private home is taking place. On a raised platform, some high-ranking guests sit in a circle watching the performance.

Before Mount Shi there is an animated public theatre scene. Xu Yang, a court painter, not only illustrates the domestic performances of the literati, but also portrays the lively atmosphere of popular entertainment.

Culture and Customs of Wedding Rites

In *Prosperous Suzhou* two wedding scenes are shown, and the popular wedding ceremonies of the mid-18th century are vividly depicted.

This scene is occurring in the alley of Huanglifang Bridge. The groom's family has already received the bride at home. The red lanterns are hung well above, with decorated red scrolls and lucky red silk ribbons. Relatives and friends, adults and children, dressed in festive clothes, are all cheerful and joyful.

Garden and Landscape Culture

Numerous views of gardens and their magnificent scenery are depicted in *Prosperous Suzhou*.

At the beginning of the scroll, one enters the Suiyuan Garden of the ancient village of Mudu. There are large and small pavilions, buildings, terraces, halls and boats, all illustrated in the picture. There are bizarrely shaped rocks behind the walls, wooden inlays, trees, flowers and ornamental plants. In the next scroll, under the western walls of the Wuqu district, a glimpse of the Yilaoyuan Garden, located next to the provincial governor's office, is depicted in a corner.

Tiger Hill (*Huqiu*) is undeniably a treasure in Suzhou's beautiful scenery. In the picture, the Buddhist temple stands in the very centre of the scene. From top to bottom, we see Zhengshanmen Gate, the Ershanmen Gate, the Fifty-three Visits (*wushisan can*), the Sanshanmen Gate, the main temple hall (*xiongbaodian*), the Thousand Buddhas Pavilion (*qian Fo ge*), the temple hall (*jialandian*), the Yunyan Pagoda (*Yunyan ta*), which is the highest point. Halfway up the coast are two steep cliffs commonly known as 'the two buckets' (*shuangdiaotong*), and at their feet is the famous Sword Lake (*Jianchi*), considered the pinnacle of Huqiu's beauty and the symbol of Suzhou's ancient beauty.

Prosperous Suzhou can be considered a precious cultural heritage of mankind, which perfectly conveys the *forma urbis* of a remarkable cultural and economic centre of China between the early and mid-18th century as Suzhou, undoubtedly was.

Cao Lindi and Shi Sha

The Iconography of Venice

"In Venice, Carlo Naya, Giuseppe Canella and many others used the camera from an exquisitely artistic perspective, emphasizing above all the spectacular character of their visual research. Photographer and painter thus contributed together to delineating a poetics that did not see them as antagonists but rather as allies in the interpretation of a single powerful cultural tension". (Angelo Maggi)

Venice. A City of Water, between Pictorial and Photographic Vedutismo

"Over the temples, the marmoreal buildings, the modest houses with their broken and capricious contours painted over the luminous background of air, the airy couples and bell towers fling themselves, among them the sublime one of St. Mark, similar to that of a boat master antenna, immense boat, launched between the sky and the sea towards the distant East to the conquest of wealth, power and glory". These are the words that describe the admirable panorama of Venice as described by the historian and art critic Pompeo Gherardo Molmenti (1852-1928). With his works, he was able to create a new cult for Venice all over the world. Molmenti's was a Venice that lived in the twilight of pictorial *vedutismo* to make way for photography. Following the invention of photography in 1839, it took many years before photos were able to be registered as workpieces with a copyright. Far from being simple mechanical registrations of reality, the oeuvres of famous photographers of the 19th century became masterpieces of imagination and originality often competing with those of contemporary painters.

During the second half of the 19th century, at least until the first decades of the 20th century, the lively critical debate on photography in relation to other forms of artistic expression was characterised by several viewpoints – a multitude of artists and critics were skeptical of the diffusion and massification of photography, refusing to acknowledge it as deserving as other artistic disciplines; a small number of critics did not consider it as a form of art in itself, but were aware of its valid support to artists, and painters in particular. Indeed, from a technical point of view, photographs were able to offer the painter images that were depicted on a bi-dimensional surface, similar to that of painting, photography and painting thus shared this perspectival construction.

Pietro Selvatico (1800-1880), professor of aesthetic and ‘perpetual secretary’ at the Belle Arti Academy, published an essay called “On the Advantages that Photography Can Give to Art” in the anthology *Scritti d’arte*. Moreover, the last part of the inaugural speech was entitled “Art Taught in Academies According to Scientific Norms”, and was held before an audience of the Venetian Academy on 8 August 1852, and subsequently published in the relative proceedings. He was among the first experts who recognised photography as a valid aid to art disciplines, highlighting the meaning of the photographic image in relation to the study of composition and chiaroscuro. The artist’s intention was simply to obtain a ‘correct’ drawing, according to the realistic canons of photography. In this document, Selvatico explained how photography, “this feared rival of art, would become its sister in the education of the artist [...] and all arts will come together to untangle the enigma of truth”.

In Italy, many *fin-de-siècle* painters would go on to use photography. As was the case, in the era of the Venetian representation via optical camera by Canaletto (1697-1768), Bernardo Bellotto (1721-1780), and Venetian painter Giuseppe Canella (1837-1913), not to be confused with the namesake landscape painter who died in 1847. Canella skilfully used perspectival techniques in function of the optical instrument when he decided to portray the view of Canal Grande that gradually was to frame the front part of Ca’ Foscari and the nearby Palazzo Giustinian. In this painting, the expertise with which the architecture is rendered, the elevated viewpoint in relation to eye level, the slight dilatation of the gaze and of the urban scenery on the surface of the water, all underline the role of photography that investigates the objective data without erasing the artistic contribution of the artist conveying a subject on canvas.

The talented photographer to whom Canella is inspired is certainly Carlo Naya (1816-1882). Naya’s photographic representations were destined to a mass demand for photography reached in the meantime. Venice inherited a zeal for incisions and lithographs, and adopted them to show the appeal and the unreachable devotion to the subject. Naya was able to painstakingly identify Venetian views, and to restore that nocturnal sweetness with its manipulated moonlights. With that quirky mystified luminosity that only the most able painters could render, Naya’s photomontage would enter history. The two prints on albumin in imperial format of the Rialto Bridge, perfectly preserved and shielded at the Fortuny Museum, represent the two stages of the visual ‘reading’ that would make Venice so voluptuously desir-

able in the tourist imaginary of the *voyage en Italie*.

Even the eclectic Mariano Fortuny y Madrazo (1871-1949) would measure up with Venice and with a curious declination of the gaze through his amateur activity of photographer. In his *au fil de l’eau* shooting, Fortuny’s eye longs for a vision of the lagoon city that is definitely astonishing for his time. Evidently, photography was the ideal tool to demonstrate the Venetian imaginary of the gondola from a new aesthetic perspective. His experimental images shot with a Kodak-Panoram no.4 camera are never documentary, but coincide perfectly with the poetics of the mirror, showing Venice with its rarefied objectivity from the canals. Fortuny is fascinated and enchanted by the panoramic shooting and in a uninhibited frenzy uses the gondola’s bow as a metronome, or better as a visual wedge that penetrates the representation of the city from the waters.

Fortuny, Naya, Canella and many others have used photography under an artistic profile, giving meaning and intention to the spectacular outcomes obtained through their visual research. Painter and photographer so concurred to delineate a poetics that did not regard them as antagonists but rather as allies in the interpretation of a strong unique cultural tension. “If on the one hand – as Claudio Marra writes in one of his important historical artistic contributions – the painter pays his/her debt aware that some traits of an epiphany of authenticity are now deriving from the diffuse and imposed schemes of the rampant photographic technology, then likewise, the photographer, in evoking traits of auratic solemnity, also turns to the art of painting and ensures a certain detachment from reality which photography,

alone, is unable to exhibit with its direct frankness”.

37. Giuseppe Canella (1837-1913). *View of the Grand Canal with Ca' Foscari and Palazzo Giustinian*. Oil on canvas, 66 × 84 cm. Late 19th century (Private collection)

38-39. Carlo Naya. *View of the Grand Canal with Ca' Foscari and Palazzo Giustinian*. Reproduction from original negative. 1875 ca. (Fondazione Musei Civici di Venezia, Palazzo Fortuny Archive)

Giuseppe Canella was born in Venice on 9 June 1837 and died in Padua on 9 February 1913. He enrolled at the Academy of Fine Arts in Venice in 1857 where he became a pupil of the artist Napoleone Nani (1839-1899). During his years of training in Venice, Canella distinguished himself by winning several prizes and in 1860 he received a grant in the three disciplines of painting, sculpture, and architecture in order to perfect his studies. According to the art critic Agostino Mario Comanducci (1891-1940) in his *Illustrated Dictionary of Modern and Contemporary Italian Painters and Engravers*, Canella's artistic production “is very varied, due to the numerous watercolours, representing seascapes, landscapes, still lifes, portraits and interiors. Like all the artists of the time, he showed excessive care in reproducing minutiae and the finest details; however, he is increasingly admired for his technique, the harmony and transparency of colours, and the vividness of the representations” (Comanducci 1962, 1: 299). Together with the painter Eugenio Prati (1842-1907), he became stage designer and painter at the La Fenice Theatre in Venice. In 1870, with the birth of the School of Decorative Art in Padua, he was appointed director of the school where he remained “honourably” in charge for

forty years. The painting is in a private collection in Padua and has the hot-sealed initials “GC” on the wooden frame. What is most striking about this Venetian view, apart from the detailed precision with which the architecture is depicted, is the originality of the point of view. This composition is clearly reminiscent of Carlo Naya's photographic point of view. Among his best-known works is a *Moonlit View of the Grand Canal* which attests to his familiarity with Naya's famous ‘moonlit’ Venetian views.

40. Carlo Naya Atelier. *The Rialto Bridge [by moonlight]*. Albumen print (imperial format), with touch up and clouds painted on the plate, 58 × 88 cm. 1900 ca. (Fondazione Musei Civici di Venezia, Palazzo Fortuny Archive: FP 06901)

41. Carlo Naya Atelier. *The Rialto Bridge*. Albumen print (imperial format), without plate manipulation, 58 × 88 cm. 1900 ca. (Fondazione Musei Civici di Venezia, Palazzo Fortuny Archive: FP 06903)

Native of Tronzano Vercellese, where he was born on 2 August 1816, and a law graduate from the University of Pisa in 1840, Carlo Naya is remembered as one of the greatest and most renowned photographers of the 19th century in Italy. After moving to Venice in 1857, he worked in a photographic atelier and optical instrument shop with Carlo Ponti (1823-1893). The collaboration ended in 1868 due to a dispute, but Naya was already well-known for the quality of his photographs of urban views. He opened the Carlo Naya Company at number 2758 in Campo San Maurizio. He later extended the distribution of his images to various shops in St Mark's Square and on the Riva degli Schiavoni. What characterises Naya's work is the high quality of the photographic representation of archi-

itecture and the masterly visual lucidity in the selection of urban views. He carefully reproduces viewpoints that evoke the great Venetian tradition of veduta painting. The annexation of Venice and Veneto to the Kingdom of Italy in 1866 rapidly increased tourism and trade in the lagoon city. Aware of this important opportunity, Naya organised an extensive network of agents to excel in the sale of Venetian images, achieving extraordinary recognition abroad with his famous imperial photographs: large-format prints which, with double exposures and monochrome colouring, become the ‘moonlit views’. As Zannier explains, Naya's workshop has many people who participate “directly in the development of the atelier, including taking many photographs wrongly attributed to Carlo” (Zannier 1999, 146). Naya certainly took charge of the management of the firm and left much of the photographic practice to his assistants, who followed the technical and aesthetic dictates as if they were a trademark. The firm is remembered for its numerous souvenir albums of Venice, packaged in the most varied formats and prices for tourists and keen collectors. Among the types of images appreciated by the numerous buyers are romantic evocations of the lagoon city, represented in an ethereal, almost timeless atmosphere. In the variety of image types produced by the Naya Company, an important place is undoubtedly held by the ‘moonlit views’, two examples of which here depict the Rialto Bridge taken from a boat mooring site in Riva del Ferro on the Grand Canal. The rarity of this pair of albumen prints lies not only in the large format and perfect state of preservation, but the sequence of manipulation of the image, distinctly visible in the comparison of the two works. The image is clearly the same: the first photograph is the

matrix of the second plate, which is manipulated with a 'direct photomontage' intervention enhancing the figurative part of the sky with clouds. The light contrasts created generate the so-called 'moonlight'.

42. Carlo Naya. *View of Saint Mark's Square in High Water*. Reproduction from original negative, 58 × 88 cm. 1875 ca. (Fondazione Musei Civici di Venezia, Palazzo Fortuny Archive)

43. Carlo Naya. *View of the Squero in San Trovaso*. Reproduction from original negative, 58 × 88 cm. 1870 ca. (Fondazione Musei Civici di Venezia, Palazzo Fortuny Archive)

In an article on photography in Venice, published in the *British Journal of Photography* in April 1874, an account emerges of a city rich in monuments with strong signs of decay where only photographers have the power to perpetuate its existence. Carlo Naya's photography makes of him the only 'Venetian artist' capable of capturing Venice in all its beauty. Through various processes of transformation of photographs, Naya became one of the greatest producers of iconic Venetian images. His vision of the city is linked to the canons of veduta painting and transforms the panorama of Venice with its waters into an element of great romanticism. As the author of this essay writes: "photographs of Venice have power to stir other thoughts, and the marvellous art depicted therein leads the mind to forget the present in the past; for Venice is no city of today. The Gothic tracery and profuse ornamentation – the domes and pinnacles and towers that catch the eye everywhere, and shimmer in the gondola-broken waters of her canals – are no stuccoed hypocrisies born of the nouvelles richesses of our time. The great and beautiful and noble monuments which everywhere greet the eye in

Venice are the memorials of a beautiful past – a past of artists and of art-loving people who had a joy in their work, and an estimation of true art such as it were vain to look for now" (A.J.W. 1874, 161-2; cited in Maggi 2004, 42-3).

The two images by Carlo Naya selected from the Palazzo Fortuny Photographic Archive are documentary in nature and perfectly describe the city's relationship with water. In the first photograph, he depicts the phenomenon of high water in a perfectly balanced composition in which the façade of St Mark's Basilica does not interfere with the silhouette of the three men posing on the boat in the centre of the flooded square. The richness of its details allows comparisons of nowadays pictures of the same event. The second photograph is a typical view of Venice: the *squero* near the church of San Trovaso. This boatyard, which dates back to the 17th century, is where gondolas are built and repaired, and Naya frames it with masterly visual clarity, not only crystallising the architecture and the workers at work on the plate of his camera, but also filling the general view with the passage of a gondola. Once again, it is the photographer's privilege to achieve a likely realistic reconstruction and at the same time a poetic vision which is distinctively Venetian.

44. Mariano Fortuny. *View from the Grand Canal towards Saint Mark's Basin with Santa Maria della Salute Basilica*. Reproduction from original negative. 1905 ca. (Fondazione Musei Civici di Venezia, Palazzo Fortuny Archive)

45. Mariano Fortuny. *View from the Grand Canal towards Saint Mark's Basin with Punta della Dogana*. Reproduction from original negative. 1905. Fondazione Musei Civici di Venezia, Palazzo Fortuny Archive

46. Mariano Fortuny. *View of the Grand Canal*. Reproduction from original negative. 1905 ca. (Fondazione Musei Civici di Venezia, Palazzo Fortuny Archive)

47. Mariano Fortuny. *Fondamenta and Diedo's Bridge in Cannaregio*. Reproduction from original negative. 1905 ca. (Fondazione Musei Civici di Venezia, Palazzo Fortuny Archive)

Mariano Fortuny y Madrazo was born in Granada on 11 May 1871. He moved to Paris with his family at an early age and in the French capital he had the opportunity to train as a painter in various artistic circles. He attended painting classes held by Jean Joseph Benjamin Constant (1845-1902) and for his first sculpture lessons he was an apprentice in the atelier of Auguste Rodin (1840-1917). In 1889 he arrived in Venice where he remained for the rest of his career with his mother and sister Marie-Louise. These two women and his wife Henriette had a strong influence on Fortuny's life, both because they aroused in him a passion for the countless activities he undertook and because of his numerous contacts and exchanges with the international artists living in or passing through Venice. As the historian of photography Italo Zannier explains, Mariano Fortuny began photographing in Paris and arrived in Italy with basic equipment, which he used to shoot family scenes, models posing with his printed fabrics, and, more rarely, views of the lagoon city. The series of photographic landscapes presented here is the one Fortuny made in Venice around 1905-1907 with a Kodak Panoram no. 4, with which he produced evocative panoramic photos at the water's edge. The camera, patented in 1894, has a rotating lens with a 142 degrees field of view and the format of the negative is approximately 90 × 300 mm. Although Fortuny's images are unusual in

the vast Venetian iconography, Zannier emphasises that the dating of this corpus of images is very important, because they do not show the bell tower of St Mark's in the Venice skyline, as it collapsed in 1902 and was rebuilt over the next ten years. For Fortuny, photography was "a private art, use of which he never advertised or flaunted" (Zannier 1999, 186). Held in Venice in 2005, the exhibition *Fortuny's Eye: Panoramas, Portraits and Other Visions*, in the rooms of his splendid palace where his precious archive is still kept, offered the occasion to study his photographic production, and in particular his panoramic work.

48. Mariano Fortuny. *Tintoretto's House*. Reproduction from original negative. 1905 ca. (Fondazione Musei Civici di Venezia, Palazzo Fortuny Archive)

49. Mariano Fortuny. *Rio dell'Abbazia in Cannaregio*. Reproduction from original negative. 1905 ca. (Fondazione Musei Civici di Venezia, Palazzo Fortuny Archive)

In the preface to the volume accompanying the exhibition *Fortuny's Eye: Panoramas, Portraits and other Visions* (2005), the then director of the Musei Civici Veneziani, Giandomenico Romanelli, wrote: "Fortuny's photographic images evoke and describe with a vividness and quality that are difficult to equal, they are a perfect testimony of a culture and a world" (Romanelli 2005, 7). In these views, taken with the Kodak Panoram no. 4 camera, Romanelli identifies the most daring suggestions of Mariano Fortuny's photographic activity. A little more than twenty years earlier, in another exhibition dedicated to Mariano Fortuny as a collector (1983), the historian of photography Claudio Marra highlighted how Fortuny's images hardly retain "the ambition to go beyond their genesis to become true interpretative forms of a general pho-

tographic aesthetics" (Marra 1983, 16). Fortuny's panoramic camera is a special type of camera that takes a continuous shot of a larger portion of the landscape than can normally be photographed in a single exposure. The lens explores the entire view from side to side and exposes a long, narrow strip of film through a vertical slit. What is most striking about these photographs is not so much the widest possible view of the lagoon cityscape, but the overall point of view of the operator on the gondola crossing the canals of Venice, which implies a certain amount of movement during the shooting. Almost compulsively, like a true image hunter, Mariano Fortuny gives this unprecedented vision from the surface of the water in a personal interpretation of the city. He is not in the least worried by the presence of the prow of the gondola: his infatuation with panoramic photography is such that the gondola itself gives the viewer the feeling of being suspended in the middle of the canal. This element, which marginally obstructs the gaze, stands between the photographer and the urban backdrop and is explored many times until it becomes a constant in the representation of many panoramic views of Venice. This undoubtedly planned leitmotiv represents a specific form of artistic expression in Fortuny's photographic language.

50. Mariano Fortuny. *View from Saint Mark's Basin*. Reproduction from original negative. 1903 ca. (Fondazione Musei Civici di Venezia, Palazzo Fortuny Archive)

51. Mariano Fortuny. *View from Saint Mark's Basin with the Island of San Giorgio and Riva degli Schiavoni*. Reproduction from original negative. 1905 ca. (Fondazione Musei Civici di Venezia, Palazzo Fortuny Archive)

52. Mariano Fortuny. *Riva degli Schiavoni*. Reproduction from original negative. 1905 ca. (Fondazione Musei Civici di Venezia, Palazzo Fortuny Archive)

53. Mariano Fortuny. *View of Punta della Dogana and Santa Maria della Salute Basilica*. Reproduction from original negative. 1905 ca. (Fondazione Musei Civici di Venezia, Palazzo Fortuny Archive)

Building a photograph around as many compositional schemes as possible does not ensure its success. Photographers usually resort to more than one compositional scheme even if they have not consciously analysed the connection between different visual elements. In taking these panoramic photographs of Venice, Mariano Fortuny knows exactly what he wants to achieve from each relationship, and the composition has been carefully orchestrated by controlling the framing of the prow of the gondola in the foreground. The sequence of photographs taken in the most open area of St. Mark's basin is well balanced on the horizontal axis, with the gondola's prow counterbalancing the edges of the image. This horizontal balance of the view is not rigid, however, as the angular shape of the boat to the left or right seems to carry more weight than the distant outline of the city. The weight of this recurring visual element catches the eye and is certainly increased by the inclination of the boat, which does not allow one to make out the 'iron' or 'comb' of the gondola. The visual standpoint is such as to transform the 'iron' into a thin, imperceptible slat. This reinforces the visual rhythm created by the boat and irresistibly guides the viewer's attention in the direction in which the gondola is tilted. In these images, the yearning for space and the denial of space itself evoke a fundamental characteristic of the photographic and artistic avant-gar-

de in the years to come. It is through Fortuny as a photographer that Fortuny as a painter tries to come to light.

Suzhou Gardens

“In China, architecture and the garden are one. In the West, a building is a building and a garden is a garden: they are linked in spirit. But in China they are one and the same”. (Ieoh Ming Pei)

The Gardens of Suzhou. A Classic of Chinese Culture

In every nation in the world, the garden is seen as a paradise on earth, an ‘environment created for the spirit’ and ‘a form of second nature’. The Chinese garden is a composite cultural expression that combines the best of landscape, architecture, floriculture and all forms of art.

Among the Chinese gardens, those of Suzhou are the most representative: they embody the fundamental genes of Chinese spirituality; they are the fruit of a millenary stratification of knowledge relating to the care of physical health, the cultivation of the spirit through poetry and the aesthetic fulfilment pursued by painting; they represent the expression of an oriental taste for elegance and romanticism and of a civilisation of living imbued with poetic sentiment.

An Ethics and Spirituality Based on Personal Virtue

The value of art consists entirely in the thought it expresses! In their essence, the gardens of Suzhou were places used by the literati to perfect their moral character and spirituality. Central to these is the Chinese cultural heritage – founded on Confucianism, Daoism, Songs of Chu and Chinese Buddhism – within which a model of moral-

ity centred on the cultivation of ‘inner wisdom’ took shape.

In ancient China, there were no specialists in the design of gardens. Instead, these spaces were designed by scholars and painters.

The fundamental theme of the Suzhou gardens is withdrawal from society, represented as a return to rural life, the pursuit of a wandering existence, a hermitage in the mountains and forests.

Since before the unification of the Chinese empire by the Qin dynasty in 221 BC, Chinese literati-functionaries have developed a strong sense of integrity and moral uprightness based on the conviction that they must follow a ‘Way’ (the Dao). This morality also appears in epigraphs and odes dedicated to gardens. The Ming dynasty scholar Chen Jiru (1558-1639) wrote: “When the master is free from vulgarity, his house and garden reveal his literary soul”. The “literary soul” (*wenxin*) is an ‘ideal’, an ‘intangible element’ that needs a ‘tangible element’, an ‘observable reality’ to be represented, consisting of the landscape, buildings and plants: in each garden, ‘ideals’ and ‘observable reality’ are combined differently.

For example, the Northern Song dynasty poet Su Shunqin (1009-1049) had a kiosk built on the bank of a stream called the Blue Water Pavilion (*Canglang ting*). Using the image of the water changing clarity as it flowed past the pavilion, he intended to represent his discontent with the political situation and his attitude towards life.

During the Qing dynasty, the garden was rebuilt by the provincial governor Song Luo (1634-1713), who moved the kiosk from the shore to the top of a mountain. In this way he intended to make the ideal expressed by Su Shunqin even more in keeping with his moral stature, drawing inspiration from

these verses from the *Classic of Odes* (*Shijing*): “A high mountain is looked up to with admiration | A broad road is travelled with ease”. Later, the *Temple of the Five Hundred Famous Sages* (*Wubai mingxiansi*) was added to the complex, making the Blue Water Pavilion a landmark for the moral education of government officials.

When, during the Ming dynasty, Wang Xiancheng (late 15th-early 16th century) abandoned his administrative career and retired to private life, he built the Garden of the Humble Administrator (*Zhuozheng yuan*). By giving this name to his residence, he intended to express his desire to abandon the affected manners, mellifluous words and servility of politics and follow the example of the famous poet Tao Yuanming (365-427), who retired to lead a ‘humble’ life in the countryside to preserve his inner authenticity. By positioning the garden’s entrance inspired by the pathway leading to the legendary Peach Blossom Springs (*Taohua yuan*) – which in Tao Yuanming’s famous poem of the same name is accidentally discovered by a fisherman – the Garden of the Humble Administrator transformed the aspirations of its owner into a tangible and concrete element.

Ren Lansheng (1837-1888), the owner of the Garden of the Meditative Retreat (*Tuisi yuan*), served as a commissioner in the local defence circuit, but was accused of abuse of power and bribery. Although there was no concrete evidence of such guilt, he was dismissed for inadequacy and sent home. Ren gave his garden the name “meditative retreat” to compare himself to Xun Linfu, commander of the State of Jin in the Springs and Autumns period (722-481 BC) who, after a disastrous defeat against the army of an opposing state, was rehabilitated and allowed to redeem himself. In

this way, Ren intended to indicate that, although he had made mistakes, he still felt himself to be a faithful servant of the state. Inside the scenic garden there is a series of inscriptions that refer to the imagery of lotus flowers growing immaculately out of the mud. These include: “Boat shaking red flowers” (*Naohong yige*), taken from the first stanza of a ballad composed by the poet Jiang Kui (1155-1209) during the Song dynasty; “Fragrance kiosk on the water” (*Shuixiang ting*); “Fresh marsh grasses” (*Gupu shengliang*); “Circular corridor of the nine bends” (*Jiuqu huanlang*). The choice of these names, in addition to expressing Ren Lansheng’s aesthetic taste, was a way of washing away the infamy of the accusations unjustly levelled against him.

An Environmental Model Based

on Harmony Between Man and Nature

In the creation of a Chinese garden, the highest degree of artistic realisation is to ensure that “when produced by man, it appears to be the work of nature”. The garden as a whole is an earthly reproduction of the ‘cosmos’ and constitutes an artistic model based on the aesthetics of nature.

The vision of nature as a unitary and all-encompassing organism, represented in the doctrines of the masters of the Daoist tradition Laozi and Zhuangzi, expresses a broad and profound ecological thinking and reflects the environmental knowledge of these ancient thinkers.

Ancient Chinese philosophers believed that the sky, earth and all things were composed of water, wood, fire, earth and metal, the five basic constituents of the universe. These ‘five elements’ generate each other in a circular fashion and are

related to the seasons, cardinal points and colours.

For example, in the series of the “eight trigrams” (*bagua*) of the Classic of Changes (*Yijing*), east and south-east correspond to the trigrams Zhen and Xun; according to the five-element theory, they are related to ‘wood’, to which green, the colour of plant growth, corresponds. Being a living element and connected to the place where the sun rises and the day begins, wood represents hope and the future. For this reason, the buildings within the Suzhou gardens are all made of natural materials and wood and brick structures, considered the most suitable for housing.

An understanding of celestial phenomena and geomancy is central to the design of the gardens. In residences with gardens, the buildings in the living area have a ‘formal’ structure, with the left and right parts balanced and symmetrical, the larger ones in the centre and the smaller ones at the sides, and with a clear hierarchical division of spaces according to the position of the occupants; the buildings represent the ‘container of social norms’ and are the concrete representation of the Chinese vision of the ‘round sky and square earth’: the symmetry around the central axis represents the roundness of the celestial vault and the enclosure with walls on all four sides represents the square shape once attributed to the earth.

The panoramic garden part follows the rules of the five elements theory. With a pond in the centre of the garden, the buildings and vegetation around it are positioned following the cycle of mutual generation of the five elements: water generates wood, wood generates fire, fire generates earth, earth generates metal and this in turn generates water.

An example of this is the central area of the Garden of Permanence (*Liuyuan*). The eastern side of the pond corresponds to spring and the wood element. On this side, directly facing the water, is the Lake Pavilion of the Cool Breeze (*Qingfeng chiguan*). When the wind picks up inside, one can enjoy a pleasant coolness. In the middle of the east side is the Sinuous Stream Pavilion (*Quxi lou*), reminiscent of the ‘babbling stream’ of the Orchid Pavilion (*Lanting*), the most famous literary symposium in Chinese history held in 353 AD. A footbridge over the water covered by a pergola of wisteria leads to the Little Island of the Immortals (*Xiao Penglai*). The purple colour of these flowers in Daoist tradition is associated with the eastern sky, illuminated by the aura of the great sage Laozi, and is considered auspicious.

The southern side of the pond corresponds to summer and the fire element. The Shimmering Tower (*Mingse lou*) and the Mountain Dwelling Pervaded by Greenery (*Hanbi shanfang*) overlook the pond, which in summer turns into an expanse of lotus leaves. To the east of the buildings is a palm maple tree with a wide canopy and a pavilion opening onto the water called Shade Amidst the Green (*Lüyin*).

The western part of the pond corresponds to autumn and the metal element. The Osmanthus Fragrance Pavilion (*Wen muxiang xuan*) is located above a rocky rise, connected to a covered corridor. Several *Osmantus fragrans* trees grow around the pavilion, whose intense fragrance in autumn wafts far into the air.

The north side of the pond corresponds to winter and the water element. At one time, numerous bungeana pines were planted there. In the northeast corner is the Pavilion of the Far Green (*Yuancui ge*), with the Hall of Naturalness (*Zizai chu*) inside. From

this building it is possible to see in the distance the Tiger Hill (*Huqiu*), a famous hill to the northwest of the city of Suzhou where the pagoda of a Buddhist monastery stands.

The gardens of Suzhou make skilful use of the beauty of nature. From the end of the Ming dynasty, it became fashionable for men of letters to build garden villas in the suburbs, in rural areas between hills, by rivers or near forests, to create an organic and harmonious whole with the surrounding natural environment.

Outside the Villa of Mount Tianping (Tianping shanzhuang) there is a long zigzag walkway running over a pond surrounded by willows and peach trees. The entrance to the garden is deliberately small and low. Upon entering, there is a long corridor between two walls that leads directly to the foot of the hill.

The Garden of Qi (Qiyuan) “sprawls over an expanse of waves as large as thirty-six thousand fields and overlooks the greenery of seventy-two peaks”, offering the best of the lake and hillside landscape.

The gardens of the city residences are distinguished by their secluded location and the tranquillity within.

The Cultivation Garden (Yipu) is located in Wenya alley, in the busy commercial area inside Suzhou’s Changmen Gate. Despite this, it appears just as described in these verses dedicated to it: “The hubbub of the market is kept out | It is like being in a remote village in the mountains”.

The Garden of Permanence is located outside Changmen Gate. It was surrounded by small alleys, with Huabu Street to the northeast, Banbian Street to the north, Wufu Alley to the east and Xiuhua Alley to the west.

The Garden of the Humble Administrator was originally a woodland plot, with an

ancient, simple and natural appearance. Its Jade Pavilion (*Yiyu xuan*) is large and open on all four sides. To the side is a bamboo grove perched on a rise, in front of which once stood a white Kunshan rock. Observing them from the balustrade of the pavilion, the bamboo and rock appeared as “shimmering jewels shaken by the spring wind”.

The rock compositions within the gardens (called *jiashan*, ‘artificial mountains’) appear to conform to the artistic theory enunciated by the famous painter Shitao (1642-1707): “One must draw inspiration from all the most extraordinary peaks”; they are the result of an inner vision that mixes the most famous peaks and the most beautiful landscape places, becoming itself the pictorial model of nature.

The rock compositions of the Villa of the Embrace of Beauty (*Huanxiu shanzhuang*) cover an area of just over 300 square metres, with one massif and two peaks. Climbing these heights feels like climbing the famous Mount Tai and Mount Hua and entering their tunnels is like entering the famous caves of Guangdong and Guilin provinces.

The residences within the gardens are structured in ‘courts’ (*yuanlou*), with the lower buildings at the front and the taller ones at the back. In the centre of each module, between the buildings, is an inner courtyard called a ‘celestial well’ (*tianjing*), which receives sunlight from above and allows rainwater to drain to the ground. The buildings have doors and windows at the front and back, to which are added other architectural elements such as open passageways and latticed windows.

The ‘winding paths’ and ‘meandering ditches’ prescribed in the garden construction manuals represent elements found in nature. Cloud’s partition walls (*yunqiang*)

have a curved profile like the wings of a bird; there are curves in the protuberances and hollows of mountains, in the winding paths of watercourses, in paths that reveal different views at every step, in the arches of bridges, in zig-zag corridors...

For the garden, water is like blood running through the veins. Ponds and streams reproduce in artistic form the emotions and feelings aroused in nature by the sight of rivers, lakes, streams, springs and waterfalls. They give concrete form to the creative principle that “a ladle of water is worth a multitude of lakes and rivers”.

The banks of the ponds consist mainly of piled rocks, interspersed with rock walls and boulders jutting out over the water, or pavilions and corridors overlooking the water, with lively and varied shapes that approximate those found in nature.

All the gardens use seasonal plants to create panoramas representative of the four seasons, so that there are flowers to admire all year round.

For example, in the Garden of the Humble Administrator, in spring you can go to the Spring Flowering Apple Tree Enclosure (*Haitang chunwu*) to appreciate the flowers of *Malus spectabilis*, in summer you can look at lotus flowers from the Hall of Distant Fragrance (*Yuanxiang tang*), in autumn you can go up to the Kiosk of Waiting Frost (*Daishuang ting*) to see the mandarins, while at the turn of winter you can admire the flowers of *Prunus mume* from the Kiosk of Fragrant Snow and Blue Clouds (*Xuexiang yunwei ting*).

“Life at the Highest Level” in a Dwelling Steeped in Poetry

The gardens of Suzhou offer a model of “life at the highest level”, i.e. an art in life and a life in art.

The artistic principle for the construction of the Suzhou gardens is to “follow rules but have no clichés”: within the same garden, one never finds buildings of the same style, mountains with the same structure and lakes of the same shape; the elements are arranged in a random manner that is difficult to understand, with a great variety of plants, flowers and light contrasts that surprise and satisfy aesthetically in every corner.

Whether political ideals or common desires such as happiness, power, longevity, fortune and wealth, the gardens of Suzhou are able to express all these aspirations with refined artistic forms that delight the eyes and heart.

For example, the use of motifs referring to the legend of King Wen of Zhou (1125-1051 BC) personally visiting a wise old man to invite him to court as an official or that of General Guo Ziyi (697-781) receiving a pardon from the emperor on his birthday, expressed the desire for enlightened rulers and ministers.

Lush pine trees and bamboos expressed the wish for good relations between brothers and friends. Mythologically inspired motifs, such as the Heavenly Nymph Scattering Flowers and Chang'e Flying to the Moon after ingesting the elixir of life, represented the aspiration for a happy life. Carved friezes depicting “ten deer” (*shilu*) were meant to be an allusion to the homophonic expression meaning ‘becoming a career official’. The depiction of “three halberds in a vase” (*pingsheng sanji*) hinted at the homophonic expression ‘to be promoted three levels up’. Fish are often used to represent wealth, as in Chinese the word ‘fish’ (*yu*) has the same pronunciation as the word ‘abundance’. Examples of this are the decorative motif of “three carp with one head” (*sanli gongtou*), which refers to

the expression ‘enjoying many benefits’, and that of the “sound stone and a pair of carp” (*jiqing shuangli*), assonant with ‘good omen and mutual benefit’. The image of a heron with lotus flowers alludes to the expression “passing all exams in a row to become an official” (*yilu lianke*). Again for the sake of assonance, a magpie (*xique*) on a plum tree branch symbolises happiness (*xi*). The names in Chinese of *Nandina domestica*, *Malus spectabilis*, magnolia and peony combined together form the phrase “best wishes for prosperity and glory in your administrative career”. The gardens of Suzhou provide the ideal environment for ‘dabbling in the arts’, i.e. the recreational activities traditionally enjoyed by literati. For example, in the Garden of the Meditative Retreat, one can play the *qin* zither in the Zither Room (*Qinfang*), play the game of Go *weiqi* in the Sleeping in the Clouds Kiosk (*Mianyun ting*), engage in reading in the Hall of Labours (*Xinshi*) and paint in the Pavilion of the Panorama (*Lansheng ge*).

The owner of the Garden of Amenity (*Yiyuan*) succeeded in obtaining a *qin* zither made by the famous scholar and poet Su Shi (1037-1101), called the Source of the Jade Stream (*Yujianliu quan*). To preserve the instrument, he had the Hall of the Immortal’s *qin* of the Slope (*Poxian qinguan*) built, after the nickname Dongpo (Eastern Slope) by which Su Shi is commonly known. For more than a hundred years, *qin* zither concerts have been held in the Garden of Amenity and a painting circle (*Yiyuan huaji*) has been established that is very popular in artistic circles.

In the gardens, ‘literary gatherings’ dedicated to wine drinking and poetic composition were organised, emulating the famous Elegant Gathering of the Orchid Pavilion (*Lanting yaji*) once organised by the

calligrapher Wang Xizhi (303-61) and other eminent literary figures.

The stone epigraphs on display in the Suzhou gardens include the calligraphies of numerous famous people of the imperial era and contemporaries. They show the aesthetic evolution of different Chinese calligraphic styles (spherical, chancery, cursive and regular) and are an element that adds further beauty to the garden.

Dedication to elegant pastimes, such as the appreciation of rocks, antiques and painting, was an important part of cultural and spiritual life. Within the Garden of Permanence, the landscaped rocks create an enchanting panorama, following a pattern rooted in the primitive cult of the earth, the conception of rocks as the “essence of the earth” and the belief that “in a single rock one can appreciate all the beauty created by Mother Nature”.

Furniture in the Suzhou style echoes the patterns and characteristics of Ming dynasty furniture, giving shape to a person-centred conception of construction. The ‘elegant things’ were the antiques or collectibles with a high cultural content and depth, part of the refined artistic-cultural system of the Chinese literary elite, such as mottled marble panels to hang on walls, fossils, archaic bronze drums, handicrafts and others.

According to aesthetics scholar Zhu Guangqian (1897-1986), when beautiful images are imprinted in the heart and one is regularly immersed in beauty, confused thoughts spontaneously dissipate: all beautiful things have the power to save us from vulgarity.

54. Model of the Garden of the Master of the Nets

Garden of the Master of the Nets (Wangshi yuan)

The name of this garden, Master of the Nets (*wangshi*), literally means ‘fisherman’ and is inspired by the theme of the old hermit fishing in idyllic solitude along the river. Over the centuries, generations of people have contributed to shaping the special ‘world’ recreated within this garden and enhancing its cultural depth.

The Garden of the Master of the Nets is located along Kuojiatou Alley, a long and narrow alley running through the south-eastern part of the old city of Suzhou, which is very evocative and full of poetry.

On the southern side of the courtyard in front of the residence, two sophora trees are planted. The presence of these trees has cultural and symbolic significance, as the yellow colour of the flowers and wood of the sophora, as well as the round shape of its fruit, are historically associated with the sphere of nobles and officials.

The Garden of the Master of the Nets today has the typical form of Suzhou’s stately residences of the Qing era, with the residential part to the east and the scenic garden to the west. The buildings are separated by courtyards, with the front lower and the rear higher. The main entrance is located to the southeast and is called Blue Dragon Gate (*Qinglong men*).

The drum-shaped stone plinths on either side of the main entrance have the function of protecting the gate from impact and supporting the wooden jambs, safeguarding them from water and erosion. Both plinths are decorated in relief with the image of three lions playing with a ball; they symbolise good luck associated with

even numbers and are a good omen for prosperity for the household.

The vestibule, called the Carriage Room (*Ji-aoting*) or more commonly the Tea Room (*Chating*), was used to offer tea to low-ranking guests.

At the top of the carved grey brick portal are five niches to hold commemorative tablets dedicated to Heaven, Earth, Sovereign, Parents and Masters, the main elements of spirituality and symbols of social order in imperial China.

In the courtyard in front of the main hall are two Magnolia *denudata* trees, while in the rear courtyard are yellow Osmanthus trees. The Chinese names of these two plant species contain the characters ‘jade’ (*yu*) and ‘gold’ (*jin*), and are therefore considered auspicious and a symbol of wealth. The carved brick portal, visible when looking south from the main hall, was made during the reign of Emperor Qianlong (1735-1796). It is decorated with various types of relief inlays and tracery and is considered one of the wonders of the Jiangnan region. Twelve pairs of elegantly carved goose heads rest on openwork brick panels depicting the stylised character *shou*, ‘longevity’.

The upper band of the frieze is decorated with a tendril of peonies, a symbol of imperishable wealth and honour. Below, there are three round seals with the *shou* character, surrounded by decorations depicting bats, cloud-shaped immortality mushrooms, Buddhist swastikas, sunflowers and other auspicious motifs.

The door underneath is decorated with metal studs representing snails. According to the theory of the five elements, this animal is associated with water and is considered auspicious. In ancient times in China, the doors of the houses of ordinary

people with no particular social position did not have studs.

The main hall (dating), built during the Qing dynasty, is large and bright; it occupies the central position of the living area. On the partition inside the hall hang two scrolls with the verses of a couplet, while on the east and west walls are four wooden panels with mottled marble inserts depicting landscapes in different seasons.

The southern wall of the Hall of the Ladies (*Nüting*) is decorated with rather simple carvings, among which are auspicious motifs for the prosperity of the household. The two ends of the central part of the frieze are decorated with the image of a sound stone and a pair of carps, elements whose names in Chinese are assonant to the expressions ‘good omen’ and ‘mutual benefit’.

The inner hall (where the Hall of the Ladies is located) is a two-storey, five-bay building with side wings. Inside resided the master of the house and his entire family and there is a calligraphic plaque by Yu Yue (1821-1907), an important philological scholar of the Qing dynasty. The inscription (*Xiexiu lou*) means ‘palace from which one can see beauty’, i.e. from which one can enjoy a beautiful view.

All the buildings have service passages leading to the scenic garden, through which residents used to be able to access and enjoy this space on a daily basis.

The mosaic pavement in front of the small kiosk on the western side of the courtyard behind the Hall of the Ladies depicts five bats and a heron on a pine tree, symbols of good luck and longevity. The mosaic in the centre of the courtyard depicts stylised four-petalled flowers. All around, framing it, are *Calicanthus* trees, *Bungeana* pine, boxwood, holly, clumps of Japanese lily of the valley and various other plants.

Central Part of the Landscaped Garden

The low opening leading from the doorway to the garden is surmounted by a plaque with the inscription “Small abode of the master of the nets” (*Wangshi xiaozhu*). Behind this, on the other side of the door, there is a plaque in characters in the style of seals with the phrase “Refreshment can be found there” (*Keyi qiche*). This is a quotation from the poem “The Ash Gate” (*Hengmen*) from the *Classic of Odes* (*Shijing*), which sings of the joys of a simple and quiet life, spent living in a modest house and eating frugally, without the pretension of taking a woman from a rich household as wife. This sentiment was characteristic of the traditional culture of the ancient Chinese literati.

The landscaped garden is wider to the north and narrower to the south. As soon as you enter, you can see the plastered wall separating the garden from the living area to the east. Along the wall is a pathway running north-south, once used as a service passage by the women of the house and servants. On the right side of the entrance is the ‘meandering stream’ (*Panjian*), a rivulet with irregular banks that occupies the part of the garden southeast of the pond, cut in the middle by a sluice. The stream is overlooked by the Bridge of Tranquillity (*Yinjing qiao*), which separates it from the main body of water of the garden, creating two different environments, one more open and one more secluded.

The Osmanthus Hill Pavilion (*Xiaoshan conggui xuan*) has windows on all sides. On the north wall, there is a square window with a round opening in the centre of the latticework that offers a view of the rock composition outside.

Leaving the pavilion and heading west, one connects to the Woodcutter’s Path (*Qiaofeng jing*), a corridor that climbs a

mound on one side and leads to the Pavilion of Harmony (*Daohe guan*) and the Qin Zither Kiosk (*Qinshi*) on the other. In the centre of the zither kiosk is a hollow brick from the Han dynasty, above which hangs a marble panel depicting a landscape. The door in the east wall of the courtyard is surmounted by a plaque engraved with the words Iron and Zither (*Tie qin*), which refers to the expression ‘bones of iron and heart of zither’, meaning to be resolute but loving.

On the west side there is a large jujube tree and on the east side there is an imposing and old-looking pomegranate bonsai tree. The views described above are in secluded areas.

In the centre of the garden is the Pond of Pink Clouds (*Caixia chi*), a pond of just over 300 m², with no islets or lotus flowers in it. The body of water extends southeast beyond the Bridge of Tranquillity and northwest beyond the stone footbridge. The shape resembles that of a turtle, an auspicious animal and symbol of long life.

The zigzag walkway skimming the water and the jagged cliff, with boulders jutting into the pond, give the feeling of floating on water. All the pavilions, balconies, corridors and kiosks overlook the pond, so that from every corner of the garden you have a view of the water. The perfection of the proportions, the natural arrangement of the spaces and the discreet presence of the architectural elements in the garden make the body of water appear large and boundless, creating the suggestion of being immersed in a lakeside village.

The buildings and vegetation surrounding the pond are arranged in accordance with the theory of the five elements (wood, fire, earth, metal and water) and the four seasons. The eastern shore is associated with the element of wood and spring.

During this season it is enlivened by a riot of colours: the low branches of the winter jasmine (*Jasminum nudiflorum*) skim the water in front of the corridor, the sinuous tops of the red plum (*Prunus mume*) are in blossom, the wisteria covers the lion-shaped rock mound and the flowering stems of the *Rosa banksiae* climb the plastered wall. The southern side is associated with the element of fire and summer. The pavilion on the water and the mound of rocks called the Hill in the Clouds (*Yungang*) give the water mirror an idea of boundlessness. The western shore is associated with the element metal and autumn. On a small promontory in the centre stands the Kiosk of the Rising Moon and the Rising Wind (*Yuedao fenglai ting*). The northern side of the pond is associated with the water element and winter. The main plants are a *bungeana* pine and a cypress. Behind these is the Pavilion for Observing Pines and Reading Paintings (*Kansong duhua xuan*). Next to the pavilion is a corridor leading to the Pavilion of the Plum Branch Sprouting Among the Bamboos (*Zhuwai yizhi xuan*). To the west of the Pond of Pink Clouds is an inner garden called Fisherman’s Retreat West of the Pond (*Tanxi yuyin*), named after the ancient garden of Shi Zhengshi (1119-1179), a famous Song Dynasty official. Inside is the Late Spring Dependency (*Dianchun yi*), dedicated to the flowering season of peonies. The Cold Spring Kiosk (*Lengquan ting*) is named after the nearby Emerald Spring (*Hanbi quan*), a deep pool in the southwest corner of the courtyard. The name of the spring is engraved on the rocks above in the calligraphic style of seals. The entire mosaic floor of the courtyard is decorated with a net motif with lotus leaves, fish and shrimp, elements closely related to the theme of the ‘Master of the Nets’.

The Study Rooms

The entire area north of the Pond of Pink Clouds is occupied by studios. In order from west to east, there are: a small studio, the Pavilion for Observing Pines and Reading Paintings, the Study of Reunion in Emptiness (*Jixu zhai*), the Study of the Five Peaks (*Wufeng shufang*).

Inside the small studio, on the northern wall hangs a couplet by Chen Hongshou (1768-1822), one of the eight master seal carvers from the Xiling academy in Hangzhou active during the Qing dynasty, which reads: “Heavenly grace repays virtuous rulers. The most esteemed of feats is passing on knowledge from generation to generation”.

Inside the spacious Pavilion for Observing Pines and Reading Paintings are two pieces of silicified fossilised wood, reminiscent of the two old pine trees planted to the south of the building. These two fossils have been given their own names, as if they were personified and deified objects: Rock of Magic Wood (*Shenmu shi*) and Rock that Subdues Dragons (*Jianglong shi*). The bicentennial papaya tree to the east of the pavilion is also considered an apotropaic object and has its own name: Tree that Subdues Dragons (*Jianglong mu*).

‘Reading paintings’ (*duhua*) is an elegant expression indicating an appreciation of painting. Chinese paintings are composite works of art that blend poetry, calligraphy, painting and seals. In this context, ‘reading paintings’ can be understood either as the appreciation of the two-dimensional depictions of a painting or rather as the appreciation of the three-dimensional painting visible outside the pavilion.

On the north wall, there is an elegant trellis window open in the centre with a couplet on either side that reads: “All around swallows fly in the shade of the plants | Before your

eyes the plum blossoms are like sun-kissed snow”. The rocks and plants behind the pavilion seem to be embedded in the window lattice, which frames a beautiful three-dimensional painting of plum blossoms.

Passing through the door in the shape of a full moon from the Pavilion of the Plum Tree Branch Sprouting Among the Bamboos, one enters a small courtyard with two clumps of slender and elegant bamboos (*Bambusa multiplex*) arranged to the east and west. The pavement is decorated with a cracked ice pattern, very sober and clean. Looking south beyond the round door, one can see the latticework parapet, the flowering branches, the rocks on the shore and the Hill in the Clouds enclosed within the circle of the door, as if they were part of an imaginary, fairy-tale moonscape.

The Study of Recollection in Emptiness takes its cue from a passage in the famous text of the Daoist Zhuangzi school: “The Dao is only collected in emptiness: emptiness is the fasting of the mind”. Cultivating inner peace through study and completely freeing oneself from useless thoughts, one enters a state of purity that transcends the pursuit of material satisfactions.

On the first floor of the Study of Reckoning in Emptiness is the study room of the householder’s children, commonly referred to as the “Youth Lodge” (*Xiaojie lou*). At the ridge ends of the roof are two conspicuous decorations in the shape of phoenix heads. The phoenix is a mythological animal considered to be the ruler of all birds and is – together with the dragon – one of the two main Chinese auspicious motifs. It is also the symbol of marital harmony and the expression “flying away on the back of the phoenix” (*chengluan kuafeng*) was popularly used to indicate the crowning glory of a happy marriage.

In one view, three different types of decorations appear on the roof ridges: phoenix head, beak of a hen and ‘sceptre of fortune’ (*ruyi*).

To the east is another two-storey building used as a studio, with a painting and calligraphy room above and the Studio of the Five Peaks below. On the front and back of this building are compositions of Tai Lake rocks with peaks and troughs: they represent remote mountains among which one can immerse oneself in the studio.

Some of the curiously shaped heights and peaks created with rocks in the southern courtyard are particularly majestic. They represent the five peaks of Mount Lu, immortalised in these famous verses by the Tang Dynasty poet Li Bai (701-62): “The five old peaks southeast of Mount Lu | They look like golden lotus flowers silhouetted against the blue sky”. In this pavilion, scholars could pleasantly devote themselves to their studies, feeling as if they were among the rocks of Mount Lu.

The rock compositions are laid out on a rustic pavement with a cracked ice pattern, which suggests the melting of ice in spring and magically creates the effect of water without the presence of this element.

The Garden of the Master of the Nets offers an infinity of paths and views, despite having an area of only a few mu (approximately 5,000 square metres). In it, the state of simultaneous ‘depth and vastness’ idealised by the Tang dynasty scholar Liu Zongyuan (773-819) seems to be realised. The pond has an ancient, placid appearance, while the plants express an ideal of refuge amidst the greenery of nature. Inside the garden, one can sit and take a break, stop to count the fish leaning against a balustrade, enjoy the moon and the cool breeze inside a kiosk, watch the shadows of the plants pass over the walls in the course of

the day, or contemplate imaginary peaks and cliffs silhouetted in front of the window as in a painting, thus rediscovering all the pleasure of a moment of tranquillity.

Cao Lindi

Dancing with the Light

A few years ago I briefly visited the Classical Gardens of Suzhou. During the visit, my attention was constantly drawn away from the beautiful plants, bridges and stones, towards the walls of the gardens. Mostly white, fairly high, some parts of the walls are peeling off from the main structures, creating pockets of space in which light and vegetation can be observed. Thus, the walls are not only the boundaries of the gardens, but they also form protected paths that guide you on a journey. The memory of the white walls stayed with me and I started to imagine how many shadows could be collected by them, allowing a playful performance to unfold. This revealing moment was so significant that I promised myself I would come back to explore it with my camera. It was therefore a natural decision to use these walls as the subject for a special photographic essay commissioned by the Power Station of Art (PSA) in Shanghai for my solo exhibition in 2019. During the first shoot, however, I realised that I was not so much interested in the show of shadows as in the walls themselves, and the way in which they have preserved the imprints and traces of time. I could discern wear and tear, the micro-organisms' growth, and weathering related to distant meteorologist events, while at the same time the walls vibrated with and echoed the adjacent stones and trees. Working with these walls and their marks, I began to feel as if I

were collecting all the stories that had been imprinted there, the dreams of some distant land they might have evoked for the inhabitants confined within them. I started to see the marks on the walls as desirable landscapes, some thing like painted remiscences of secular rituals. The photographs were taken spontaneously and framed straight onto the subject with two of my cameras, not only the classic 4 × 5 but also my 6 × 6: a format that has no hierarchy, and allows me to work more freely. The relationship between the two formats creates a new dialogue in this book, enabling viewers to create their own landscapes. The shoot happened during the month of June, just after the rain, which had brought with it an incredible amount of humidity. The air was full of droplets: droplets containing the light and the colour of the surroundings. As colour is born out of a dance between light and a body, when photographing in colour I find myself capturing a brief moment of this dance.

Hélène Binet

The Gondola

Barca xe casa (The boat is home)

“The contemporary gondola is the latest outcome of a centuries-old, gradual succession of imperceptible structural modifications and empirical tricks introduced over time by Venetian shipwrights”. (Giovanni Caniato)

The Tramontin Gondola

There was a risk of the loss of such a precious heritage as the making of a gondola when Roberto Tramontin died prematurely in November, 2018, he was the only member of the fourth generation of gondola constructors who had started the

activity in Venice with the founder, Domenico, Roberto's great-grandfather. Their art is an intangible legacy of working techniques, empirical knowledge, specific and unique instrumentation passed down from father to son without interruption for well over a century. Domenico Tramontin was born in 1854 into a family originally from the Dolomites between Friuli and Cadore, and arrived in Venice at the very beginning of the 19th century. His sons then joined him and took over his company, one of them was Giovanni, father of Nedis. Nedis worked incessantly – for approximately seventy years – in the family's *squèro*: from the early 1930s until 2004, invariably adopting the methods and equipment used by his father and uncles – in particular the *cantièr* (a word that in Venetian identifies the counter shape anchored to the ground on which the hull is positioned), and the *sèsto*, a peculiar empirical template. These parts were both prepared by his grandfather, Domenico at the end of the 19th century – the frames of the gondola, each different from the other, were all constructed thanks to these instruments and all off the building site.

Domenico carried out his apprenticeship in the *squèro* of the Casal family, considered perhaps the most important family of axe masters well into the 19th century. Domenico then set up his own *squèro* at the end of the century and in 1884 founded, at the age of thirty, the company that still bears his name today and is graciously represented by his nephew Nedis (1921-2006), Roberto's father. The inevitable break in continuity in the 'transmission of knowledge', from father to son or from teacher to apprentice, in Venetian *squèri*, is inevitably related to the lack of generational turnover, which is a real shortage of young workers keen to learn a highly specialised

craft, which necessarily requires, in addition to an innate inclination and a strong will to learn, a long-standing hands-on experience. This craft is fine-tuned on the construction site, but has deeper 'upstream' origins: starting from the 'woodlands' of the hinterland where other tasks and skills are required, i.e. the selection and formation of the boards according to appropriate thickness and size; the assortment of the logs from the different kinds of trees, each destined to the single structural components of the gondola. Nowadays, a careful selection is fundamental to guarantee the best outcomes – the logs: oak wood for the *sèrci* (the two load-bearing boards for the sides of the gondola), larch and fir for the planking, cherry for the *trasti*, elm, mahogany and walnut; besides, these single items need to meet certain indispensable requirements, not always perceptible to the naked eye but essentially monitoring for regular veinings, compactness of the mixture, the absence or at least the scarcity of knots, radial detachments, internal rot or mould.

The *squèro* of the Tramontin family, "suppliers to the Royal House" (as recites the scroll with the Savoy coat of arms, still hanging on their shipyard), whose existence is documented at least since the 17th century, was originally one with the two adjoining wooden *tèze* used by another branch of the Casal family tree until immediately after the Second World War, then by the Manin in co-operation with axe-master Giovanni Giuponi in the Fifties and, finally, by the axe-master Daniele Bonaldo; Bonaldo is still active today in a shipyard that works with the storage of motor boats and has unfortunately lost one of the essential distinguishing components of the traditional *squèro* that is a slip of beaten earth sloping down towards the water, laid out on a refined

marble bas-relief that adorns the 19th-century base of the Casal funeral monument, in the cemetery of San Michele island. The antique art of the Casal family *squèro* of the Ognissanti Banks somehow lost its original characteristics, subject to the constraint of the law 1497/1939 on the "protection of natural and panoramic beauty", with an addendum note no. 4130/1964 of the Superintendence for the monuments of Venice. These singularities, are however preserved in the neighbouring *squèro* of the Tramontin family – the beaten-earth forecourt can be seen sloping down towards the water for the launching and haulage of boats, overlooked by the large *tèza* (a wooden shed, set on terracotta pillars, with removable planked walls) for indoor work. A scaffold-like structure which in some cases catered for an upper floor where the owner or his workers would live. The nearby *squèro* of San Trovaso is an example, inactive now for over thirty years but still overlooking the Rio de la Senza in Cannaregio. These shipyards were called *squèri da sotil* or *squèri da fin* (shipyards of refined craftsmanship), where gondolas, *sàndoli*, *topi* and other boats of limited size were constructed and repaired. The *squèri da grosso* (shipyards of rough craftsmanship) were located on the outskirts of the city and were specialised, at least until the middle of the last century, in the production of heavyweight wooden boats (*peàte*, *burci*, *comacine*) and, before the ultimate triumph of motorised and iron boats, and genuine small-sized ships with two or three masts.

The coexistence of a typical 'workplace', still intact in its peculiar typological characteristics, and the longest dynasty of axe-masters specialised in the exclusive construction of gondolas conforming with the traditional pre-20th century methods, was one of the reasons why the *squèro* of

the Tramontin family was filmed for tens of hours between 1989 and 1991. The aim of this footage was to document each phase, be it preparatory or executive, of the construction of the gondola with techniques, procedures and traditional materials. This protracted operation, carried out with VHS support, directed by Giuliano Virgiliani Pesenti and initiated in accordance with the Museo Nazionale delle Arti e Tradizioni Popolari in Rome (now part of the Museo delle Civiltà, in Rome EUR), represented the only Italian institution with specific expertise in the demo-ethno-anthropological field. This project of documentation on the construction of the gondola has its origins in particular in the important exhibition dedicated to the seamanship of the Upper Adriatic Sea, organised in the National Museum of Rome in 1989. This Museum has been traditionally involved, since its origins, in the material culture 'of the land' and the filming initiative had favoured the creation within the same museum dedicating a permanent section to the maritime traditions of the Upper Adriatic Sea and, in particular, of Venice and its lagoon. At the request of the Museum's management, the entire footage was deposited in 1992 for its own purposes of documentation and preservation of immaterial culture.

A few months ago, joining the exhibition project Venice and Suzhou Water Cities along the Silk Road, we deemed appropriate to renew the friendship and mutual solidarity between the two cities. The event is due to be inaugurated at Ca' Foscari University on the occasion of the fortieth anniversary of the twinning that took place in 1980 with Suzhou, where a gondola especially built for the occasion by the aforementioned Master Giuponi was brought as a gift offering in 2008. The gift, a gondola, is a universal symbol of Venice and represents a renewal

of the relations between the two cities and the two nations. The gondola is not to physically materialise in China as in 2008 it will do so with the aid of technology allowing us to appreciate the very peculiar construction features and the refinement of the Venetian axe-masters. Thanks to a journey through augmented reality, the user actively discovers the *squèro* and the various phases of the construction of a gondola.

In this regard, it is worth mentioning the obsolescence of techniques and materials, such as tow and pitch, abandoned due to health regulations prohibiting the use of molten pitch, and to the introduction of marine plywood instead of oak or fir boards, seasoned and shaped after being heated. Moreover, in recent decades, glues and resins, non-existent or unusual thirty years ago as regards traditional Venetian shipbuilding, have been introduced. The application, once exclusive, of galvanised iron nails, largely replaced by stainless steel screws and the common use of ancient Venetian units of measure have all vanished. These procedures were part of the regular preparatory and construction phases of what the protagonist of this film, Nedis Tramontin, called his very own 'creatures'.

The extraordinary relevance, from a demo-ethno-anthropological, but also technical-linguistic point of view, of this 'raw' footage, though realised with excellent executive and formal qualities, is now even more significant due to the recent death of Roberto, the young son of Nedis who, still in his thirties, worked side by side with his father in almost all the phases of the footage. The fifth generation of the Tramontin family is represented by Roberto's two young daughters, who, did not continue the business but are active and willing to find solutions to carry on the memory of the family tradition and to encourage the resumption

of appropriate, compatible, productive and educational activities in the old *squèro*.

Our final objective – on the sidelines of this year's beautiful exhibition initiatives, promoted by Ca' Foscari University, in agreement with Chinese institutions – is to reorder the complex technical and executive chain of the gondola, tracing back in succession, by means of this truly remarkable audiovisual document, the main phases of the construction of the boat, symbol of Venice using it as a showcase for all scholars, students, craftsmen, interested citizens and attentive tourists.

55. Photograph by Leonio Berto of the *squèro* in Venice

1. The seasoning of the wood: oak trunk reduced in planks, kept at a distance from each other to favour the aeration and the correct seasoning; from the two central planks, about 2.2 cm thick, the two *sérci* are obtained and are as long as the gondola and comprise the supporting planking of the two sides; for an optimal result the *sérci* should be obtained from a 11.5 m long trunk, with a diameter of about 40 cm, with one side as straight as possible and one slightly curved side.

2. The shed (in Venetian, the *téza*) with two pitches constructed indoors, overlooking the slip in beaten earth, sloping down towards the water, where the launching and the haulage of the boats take place and where, during the warm season, maintenance is done.

3. The *cantier* is the wooden structure, usually anchored to the ground and to the beams above, on which the frame of a new gondola is set; it represents the counter-shape of the curve of the bottom part and of the two *aste* (rods) of the hull, marked with the position of all the frames (in Venetian, *còrbe*). On the *cantier* the

three main frames (*còrbe maistre*) will be fixed first, starting from the stern frame, marked with the heights of the two sides.

4. The off-site arrangement of all the frames (*còrbe*, each made up of three elements), which include the supporting frame of the gondola, is manufactured with a special template (*sèsto da corbàme*) – refined at the end of the 19th century and still used by the Tramontin family until a few years ago. Along the edge of the *sèsto* there are markings (markings of the *cadùo*), which allow for the progressive reduction of the external curvature on each *sancón* (the obverse of the frame), whose inclination (*spanto*) is calculated via a separate series of markings drawn along the lower part.

5. The hot bending, with water and fire fed by a bundle of marsh reeds, on one of the two *sérci*: the bearing boards in oak, the length of the gondola, which make up the upper lateral structures.

6. Particular attention must be paid to the selection of the wood for the stern and bow *aste* (rods), obtained from a single elm board (sometimes made of oak also), avoiding any joining and via a careful selection of trunks with a natural elbow curve consistent with the shape of the *asta* (rod).

7. The positioning of the frames, the planking of the sides and the *trasti* that join the sides themselves are completed, then the hull is turned over and the bottom part of the gondola is saturated with fir boards; the hull will be forced to take on the required sheer (*sentinà* or *cavalin*) and it is in this delicate operation that the experience and the 'eye' of the master play a fundamental role. The master will account for the needs (and the weight) of the gondolier commissioning the gondola and the weight of the iron bow (*dolfin*) which may vary from 6-7 to 20 kilograms or more.

In order to fix the sheer, two props will first be tightened between the bottom part of the upturned gondola and the trusses of the shed, in correspondence to the stands where the latter rests; at the edges of the hull, two other props will be tightened as the operation proceeds, attempting also to 'soften' the two *sérci* by dampening and heating them.

8. In order to ensure that the hull is watertight, hot tarring of the junctions is undertaken between the boards of the bottom part and the sides, after the insertion of the tarred tow using the mallet and the special 'caulking irons'.

9. At the request of the client, on completion of the hull, a craftsman carver may intervene, who will draw in full scale the decorative motif on oily paper, then will trace it using the 'dusting' technique on a desired part of the gondola.

Giovanni Caniato

The Virtual Side of Venice

Challenges are part of the daily routine of those who work in the field of exhibitions but one of the most arduous and insidious may be the staging of the intangible value of the works on display. The ability to convey the intangible stratification of meanings and contents condensed into a fragment of heritage, be it archaeological, architectural, cultural or of other nature, is a far from obvious undertaking. This strenuous enterprise needs to address a constant balance between scientific rigour, narrative effectiveness and market demands. From this point of view, the evolution of narrative codes and the increasingly widespread and deep-rooted presence of the media has played a fundamental role which, on the one hand, has greatly increased the range of solutions available to designers and curators and, on

the other, has contributed to a complication of the scenario in this sector. It is, therefore, no wonder that, in the face of fruition patterns increasingly shaped by technological advances and its complex rules – immediacy, accessibility, overabundance, and experientiality, noteworthy is the contamination of traditional codes with innovative languages and singular narrative solutions that have become an evolutionary trend, equally natural and indispensable. All the more so evident, in the museum sector where the quality of the exhibition is also measured, among other things, by the ability to express in a concrete, effective and mainly universal way, the intangible value of the works that constitute the exhibition itinerary.

In this process of expressive restyling, solutions based on the so-called immersive technologies represent one of the most interesting in terms of potential and versatility, with applications ranging from Projection Mapping, Augmented Reality, Virtual Reality and Immersive Rooms. Working on perceptive and sensorial mechanisms and exploiting the illusory effect generated by the use of various projections and visualisation devices, the immersive solutions allow for a transformation of space and physical environments, virtually immersing the public in an experience that is periodically able to enrich, integrate or even obliterate and replace the very space dedicated in the exhibition. It is also true that the unfortunately too common use of solutions of this kind is most likely due to an over-eagerness induced by the fascination of novel technological interventions tout court rather than to an effective response to the specific exhibition or narrative needs. However, in cases when the decision to resort to immersivity stems from a pondered critical reflection and a strategy that is consistent with the rest of the exhi-

bition, as we have tried to do here, then the integration between traditional solutions and innovative storytelling can certainly yield beneficial outcomes towards a uniquely advanced and productive fruition experience. As regards the exhibition project *Venice and Suzhou. Water Cities along the Silk Roads*, the decision to include an installation based on the use of Virtual Reality in the exhibition itinerary was adopted with a view to maximising the accessibility and communicability of an articulated and highly immaterial content by its very nature, which is the building tradition of the Venetian gondola. This theme, though accompanied by a rich audio-video documentation and an exhaustive critical apparatus (see Giovanni Caniato's contribution in this regard), may have been jeopardised by the limited nature of traditional systems, which were not able to adequately pay tribute to the complexity and to a world that was strongly linked to the act of making. Hence, the decision to designate 'physical' access to a *squèro* and to the simultaneous experience of the workings and peculiarities of a gondola construction – an experience that transforms the visitor from a passive spectator – as in the case of a simple traditional text or screen channels – to an interactive protagonist and agent within a spatial, as well as virtual involvement.

"The Virtual Side of Venice" (the title of the relevant section) works as a window looking onto the past of the Venetian *squèri*, through which the visitor, equipped with the headset, immerses him- or herself into a virtual experience and is able to literally turn back the hands of time, go through a limited digital reconstruction of ancient Venice and verify a hands-on experience of the different processes and operations carried out by the axe-masters while they

created the most iconic of Venetian boats. The *squèro* of the Tramontin family is the background to this experience and was chosen precisely because, quoting from the above mentioned contribution by Giovanni Caniato, is a perfect synthesis between an existing 'work place' and the workplace of one of the most long-standing carpenters in the exclusive production of Venetian gondolas.

Coming back to the technical aspects, *Virtual Reality*, compared to other possible solutions offered by the immersive field, is particularly appropriate for the type of content on display and for this reason was selected. The *Virtual Reality* mechanism possesses the technical requirements able to exhibit a strictly technical and practical know-how and it has, in fact, made the balance lean in favour of an expressive strategy option able to combine the themes of visualisation, presence and interaction in a single appliance. From this point of view, *Virtual Reality* has therefore been considered a suitable solution for three main reasons: firstly, it had been used with relative success in areas characterised by similar needs and fruition dynamics, such as innovative training, immersive training and production as well as maintenance networks; secondly, it was able to leverage cognitive and perceptive

mechanisms towards effective transfer information and content, supplemented by a fair degree of randomness without being necessarily supported by a material component, as confirmed by numerous and differing sectorial literature and surveys (from neuroscience to visual merchandising). Finally, the system was easily exportable and scalable – both logistically and geographically as a global experience, in line with the itinerant nature of the exhibition, as well as, albeit symbolically, with the 1980 twinning agreement between Venice and Suzhou, reaffirmed in 2008 with the donation of a gondola built by axe-master Giuconi to the city of Suzhou.

In conclusion, it is worth recalling the team involved within the project. The assembly of *The Virtual Side of Venice* originated from the work of a transversal team featuring different realities, both from the academic and the entrepreneurial and associative worlds.

The project was coordinated by the architect and expert in innovation and immersive-tech Andrea Gion, generously financed via donation by the Cultural Association Savio Benefactor of Venice by courtesy of chairman Dina Pasquali Vivante. The main supervisors were Giovanni Caniato, prof. Giuseppe D'Acunto, coordinator of the VIDE laboratory (Vision In-

tegral Design Environment) section of the IR.IDE research infrastructure of the Iuav University of Venice and its research team (Alessio Bortot and Francesco Bergamo), and constructed by Hybrid Reality, a Padua start-up specialised in the use of Virtual Reality for architecture, education and museums. More specifically, Hybrid Reality was responsible for both the technical design of the installation and the creation of content, detecting, digitising, mapping and finally implementing the VR environment of an urban section of ancient Venice, the Tramontin *squèro*. They were also in charge of the various activities carried out by the workers in the construction of the gondolas.

The experience of a novel fruition experience in a project of extreme complexity and of the highest quality such as the joint exhibition project held by Ca' Foscari University of Venice and Soochow University of Suzhou represented an important opportunity for future discussion on a fruition and exhibition theme more and more innovative and important. The world of exhibitions and the people who work within are constantly expected to address, in one way or the other, these intriguing challenges every day.

Giuseppe D'Acunto and Andrea Gion