



Four



Squares



in



Umbria

Andrew Levitt

Prologue

After a long damp winter studying architecture in London I received an invitation from an old friend who was living in a farmhouse near Assisi. The place was primitive but if I wanted to spend some time in Umbria he could offer me a place to stay. This immediately seemed like an excellent idea and I began thinking how I could leave as soon as possible. The only problem was an essay I was supposed to write on renaissance architecture and Umbria was not a place known for renaissance architecture. After a few days of dreaming I approached my professor with a half-baked proposal. Could I write my essay on the architecture of the Italian medieval period as a way to better appreciate renaissance architecture. I quickly explained that I would need to go to Italy and spend some time in Umbria researching medieval towns. To my surprise she listened to my entire proposal without interruption and then simply said "Fine. Go ahead". That is how I found myself in the reading room of British Museum studying accounts of Umbria and pouring over maps while trying to make sense of the local bus and train schedules. I decided to visit Orvieto, Todi, and Perugia before finishing in Assisi where I would retreat to the farmhouse and write the required essay. My preparations were

completed by taking evening classes in conversational Italian. Finally, a week before Easter, the long awaited day arrived. I flew to Rome in the morning and caught the local train to Orvieto where I arrived in time for dinner. Six weeks later I returned to London, reworked my notes, printed photographs and submitted "Four Squares in Umbria." I had thoroughly enjoyed traveling Umbria and hoped the essay would be awarded a pass. Having worked without supervision on a project that at times felt significantly lacking in direction, this was by no means guaranteed. Several weeks later the essay was returned in a thick envelope. I can still see the professor's lengthy page of comments but it is the first sentence of her critique that I clearly remember. "This is obviously a work of love and as such, suffers from the problem of infatuation." I thank my professor today as I have done many times before for allowing me to fall in love with something I continue to be inspired by; the mysterious richness of the built world.

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Introduction

Imagine yourself flying over Umbria at an altitude that gives objects such as hills and rivers a size that is easy to grasp. From this height a medieval town appears as a tightly packed mass of red tile roofs and crooked streets. Within this organic composition rests one or perhaps two clearings commonly referred to as squares or piazza. I take this space to be absolutely central to medieval life; a living place that today has no modern equivalent.

These voids may or may not be regular in shape. Their importance is not the result of their location in the town or their size or architectural properties. What gives these spaces their power and influence? Contrast. The medieval town is a place of intense opposites. It's labyrinthine composition of narrow topographically inspired passageways and chiseled streets is relieved in only one place; the piazza. This spatial tension boldly organizes the town and is responsible for all of its rhythms. The piazza is the only public place where the passage of sun can be measured and the only venue that can possibly accommodate public assembly. Not only does this space give residents a uniquely welcoming place

to move towards, it also offers every citizen an opportunity to stand and experience life at the very heart of their world.

Long before news was a printed affair or messages could be communicated electronically, these stone faced public rooms saw saints obeyed and people murdered. They witnessed armies clash in hand to hand combat and then saw cotton, fruit and vegetables traded for barter and coin. In these public spaces citizens spontaneously assembled to hear what their role would be in times of conflict as well as to participate in festivals. The experience of life was not packaged. There was no time delay or mute button – life was direct and vividly experienced. And because this had been practiced for thousands of years, every shift in the fortune of a town came to be marked upon these spaces. The effort of transcribing historical events into place making is found at every scale; an unforgettable facade constructed on the rumour of a miracle, the same facade destroyed due to a jealousy. Urban design was in the hands of animals and gods. What we inhabit today was shaped as though facades were anvils. And what we easily experience in a

minute took centuries to heat, hammer, and cool. Only the essential and genuine life force of making and living that mingled in these places could turn utility and amenity into such beauty. The blunt, sweet and sometimes brutal reality of human behavior was given a place to call home.

I began to think of these ancient clearings like a nucleus is to a cell (1). I wondered if it would be possible to read and understand these spaces as though they carried the genetic code for each town. If this was true, then each piazza contained a record of the essential history and fate of each town. I was curious to find out if the forwarded and suppressed characteristics of a piazza could be read as conscious and unconscious decisions that stemmed directly from the trials of the town. In contrast to the heavy stone from which every town was built it seemed that each place embodied a lithe and sympathetic spirit that was alive to both the accumulation of hardship and the need to make space amenable to human needs.

I also embarked upon this exploration believing that form is the “print out” of forces that are both conscious and unconscious. And while form is usually the focus of these studies I became

increasingly absorbed in trying to understand stories for which the formal shapes and designs are merely evidence of deeper and less measurable phenomena. Gradually these stories became more and more important. The sculpted surfaces that we know through photographs are merely the formal aspect of the often emotional stories that live beneath them. As the stories began to broadcast themselves to me, the mysterious process that shaped and underpinned these places increasingly became my calling.

The piazza exists not only as the physical centre of public life; it is central to the dynamic of public life in a town. It is a collective dwelling place that when viewed from above can be imagined like a Mandala. A Mandala is two dimensional diagram or painting used by meditators as an aid to meditation. It is intended to be studied and visualized in order to help the meditator embody the messages that are encoded on its surface. The fulfillment of the Mandala work sees object and subject unite. Like a Mandala, the piazza perimeter is a container holding the tradition in the form of facades while its centre is always open to interpretation. In a similar way these places seemed to impart an experience – not through visualization but through inhabitation. The piazza becomes a living

meditation where messages are received through being in the space.

I wanted to ride both the historical facts and specific traits of each Piazza in order to discover the unique life force of each space. I was looking to discover what allowed ritual, amenity and purpose to seamlessly come together. I also wanted to immerse myself in the history of the Mandala-like central space in hopes of understanding how these forces could be so gracefully reconciled with our longing to make a place to call home.²

Umbrian Overview

Overview

Umbria has been called the heart of Italy; she has no seacoast, nor does she lie on the border of any foreign country, and this makes it unique among Italian provinces [1]. Enclosed on one side by the Tiber Valley and on the other side by steep hills along the western edge of the Marche, she lies rather like an inland sea (which is what Umbria was millions of years ago). With the exception of Perugia itself there are no cities in the sense that none reflect their present inhabitants but only those of the past.

The Umbri are one of the oldest races of indigenous people in Italy (Pliny, Natural History Vol 3. p 112-114). Most Umbrian cities were settled in the 9th - 4th centuries BC and were located on easily defensible hilltops. The region of Umbria is the land bordered by the Tiber and Nar rivers and the area covered by the Appennine slopes on the Adriatic. The Umbrian language is part of a group called Oscan-Umbrian which is related to Latin (Buck, 1904). Throughout the 9th-4th centuries imported goods from Greece and Etruria became more common as well as the production of local pottery.



When one scratches the surface of Umbria, it is as often Etruscan as much as Roman relics that are discovered. It appears the Etruscans came from the eastern Mediterranean around 1000 B.C. and planted themselves in central Italy, dispossessing the native Umbrians of sites that appealed to them (notably of certain commanding hilltops) and apparently leaving them unmolested in other places. It is these hilltops that were to become characteristic sites of Umbrian domestic life.

All that is known of the Etruscans has been gathered from the scanty remains of their architecture, which were mostly funeral sites containing small amounts of pottery. There are few references to the Etruscans in Roman literature, and their own writing (written right to left and resembling Greek) is today still inaccessible. From such remains we can gather that the Etruscans were no precarious or fugitive civilization. Their architectural remains show no lack of ambition. There are gates and walls in both Perugia and Todi that show masonry constructed in the same bold key as the Egyptian and Mayan people. The characteristic material they used is huge rectangular blocks of stone laid one upon the other without mortar. This practice is recognizable in their tombs near Orvieto.

D.H. Lawrence visited these tombs and in an essay entitled *Etruscan Mornings* he suggested the source for the "Latin" temperament that dominates Italian life has its origins in the Etruscan civilization. Etruscan religious practices were also thought to be a key to many aspects of Roman religious rituals and rites; among these divination by the flight of birds. Even long after their conquest by Rome, Etruscans were looked upon as authorities on all matters of religion and young Romans were sent to them for instruction.

For a time, while Rome was establishing herself, the two civilizations marched side by side. However, once Rome began to strengthen and expand it was plain that the Etruscans were an obstacle that must be cleared from the path. It was not a sudden conquest, but bit by bit the Etruscans were beaten down, and finally at the end of the 4th century B.C., Rome made a victorious peace with the Twelve Capitals of the Etruscan League.

The new imperial power swept over the Etruscan world doing its best to submerge and extinguish it. Having passed beyond its first historical stage, Umbria was merged into Rome and her cities,

enjoying the advantages of connection with the powerful capital. In nearly all Umbrian cities we find Roman relics such as temples, traces of amphitheatres, walls, and gates. The degree to which Rome favoured each town is clearly indicated by the remains which we see today.

As the Roman empire declined, Umbrian cities suffered at the hands of barbarian invaders. The so-called Dark Ages followed and with the exception of momentary visits of popes, scholars or saints, little emerged or was added to Umbrian history. When light next breaks over Umbria, it is upon the question of the Guelf and Ghibelline wars. Beginning in Germany but gradually moving onto the Italian peninsula these conflicts assumed the character of a permanent rivalry between the Emperor and the Church in which the Pope represented the Guelf cause and the Emperor, the Ghibelline cause. The next chapter was the rise of the Communes during which, by degrees, cities that were not directly ruled by the Pope or those that could throw off the Emperor's yoke or whoever's fist was upon them, asserted their own independence and the right to rule themselves.

This is the period of Italian history when individualism was carried with all its attendant goods and evils to its highest pitch. Naturally the cities did not remain completely isolated; they still declared themselves, either voluntarily or by coercion, as Guelf or Ghibelline. Whenever possible a city would develop its own laws and institutions which it administered until outside interference would command their attention. These maturing city states would choose their ruling magistrates from a distant city, setting close limitations on their powers, electing them for only a year at a time and by this practice hope to avoid submission to a single leader. As time went on the significance of the Pope and Emperor in the original Guelf/Ghibelline causes faded. However these were still the cries under which rival communes went to war and competing factions within each town waged their bloody private battles. Today the two allegiances are preserved in two types of battlements that can be seen on the top of significant public buildings. The square battlement indicating the Pope (Guelf) cause while the "fishtail" type which stood for the rule of Emperor or State (Ghibelline). Within this pair of protagonists there would be lesser but no less violent wars between noble families. At the time of the greatest expansion and prosperity of these cities an internal war between powerful families

was always raging. One party would become strong enough to establish a tyranny which would be held by condottiere—one of those independent captains with a band of mercenary soldiers at his back or by the head of this most powerful household. As soon as this tyranny was in place it would be inevitably be challenged by another family that had designs on their own ascent to power. In this way the great families were installed across all of Italy. In Florence the Medicii, in Urbino the Feltreschi and then in Perugia the Baglioni. The need for each tyrant to assure his position and make it safe for posterity made this stage the longest of the Commune's history. The nearest city would always be an enemy and the more distant city (from where the ruling magistrate might be chosen) an ally. Having to fight neighbors rather than large confederations almost insured a future blinded by wars that turned life into one long emergency. In various stages this atmosphere lasted for four hundred years between the 11th and the 15th century. Some cities finished their wars by merging with the powerful Papal States, while others began to suffer from the internecine changes till they no longer could mount a fighting force. All these stages are reflected successively in the history of the Umbrian city. They all have their individual stories, with different points of contact with the main stream.

Some have passed through every stage while others have started late or finished early, but they all share a common heritage from this long and complicated past. They too have their very particular histories in which we see their distinct personalities built up as they were, through centuries of revenge, jealousy and ambition. Their trials became the foundation for a fierce individualism and independence, which no amount of unity or amalgamation could ever destroy. In this way the typical piazza, with its public buildings, churches, and domestic buildings standing in proud and stubborn order about the place of assembly, is a symbol of one of the earliest experiments of self-rule in the history of Europe. The commune or cities and towns of Umbria which exists today is a twentieth century successor to the medieval city state, and thus is still a focus for the loyalty of an Umbrian to his own hilltop settlement.

Using the morphology outlined by Zucker¹ in his book *Town and Square* it is possible to organize the public spaces to be discussed. Piazza del Duomo in Orvieto is a classic parvis-type piazza. The Piazza Vittorio/Emanuele II in Todi combines church, state and private buildings upon a square whose origin is believed to be Roman. In Perugia the Piazza

Novembre I V (the date when Italy and Austria signed armistice agreements ending World War 1) and once called Piazza san Lorenzo and before that Piazza Grande, is made up of a grand public building facing a cathedral, the space between punctuated by a fountain. Piazza Commune in Assisi began as a Roman cistern beneath a clearing and evolved into the main market place and exists now in a loose relationship with the nearby Piazza San Rufino which is a parvis-type plaza.

These four piazzas located in the heart of Umbria form both the setting and the vehicle for the journey that follows [2].



*Piazza Del Duomo,
Orvieto*

First Facts

Orvieto is built upon a huge volcanic plateau embedded in the more recent geological formations of central Italy. She sits on her table of rock with perpendicular walls to the north, south and east [3]; only to the west is there a slight slope [4]. For this reason Orvieto [5] never had neighbours, and this gave her a natural position of security that was to lead to greatness.

The Paglia River flows beneath her towards the Tiber River, while the surrounding countryside spreads like a patterned carpet from her feet. Since Etruscan times the city had been a stronghold and by the 13th and 14th century Orvieto was one of the most prosperous cities in Central Italy.

With a population of thirty-thousand that included a part of the sea coast where she had always yearned for an outlet, Orvieto became a powerful and influential city state. It is therefore not surprising that popes were frequent visitors to this town for it was known to be loyal, and by reason of its position offered security in the days when Rome did not.



My visit there coincided with the kidnapping of the Italian Prime Minister, Aldo Moro, who later was murdered by his Red Brigade captors. So concerned was the Vatican that the Pope once again left Rome and retreated to Orvieto to conduct Easter Mass. All counted, it is said that 23 popes stayed in Orvieto for various periods of time. One pope, Clement VII, so feared his safety after the sack of Rome in 1527 that he arrived in Orvieto disguised as a gardener riding on the back of a donkey.

It is not surprising when building types are counted this Piazza should be something of a Vatican satellite, helping to maintain the Catholic grid which spread over Europe. Long before the invention of wireless networks, a grid of faith based sites stretched across Europe with Cathedrals acting like remote relay stations to amplify the Christian signal. Assembled like loyal servants on the Piazza is the grand Duomo, the Bishop's Palace, Pope's Palace and Opera del Duomo.

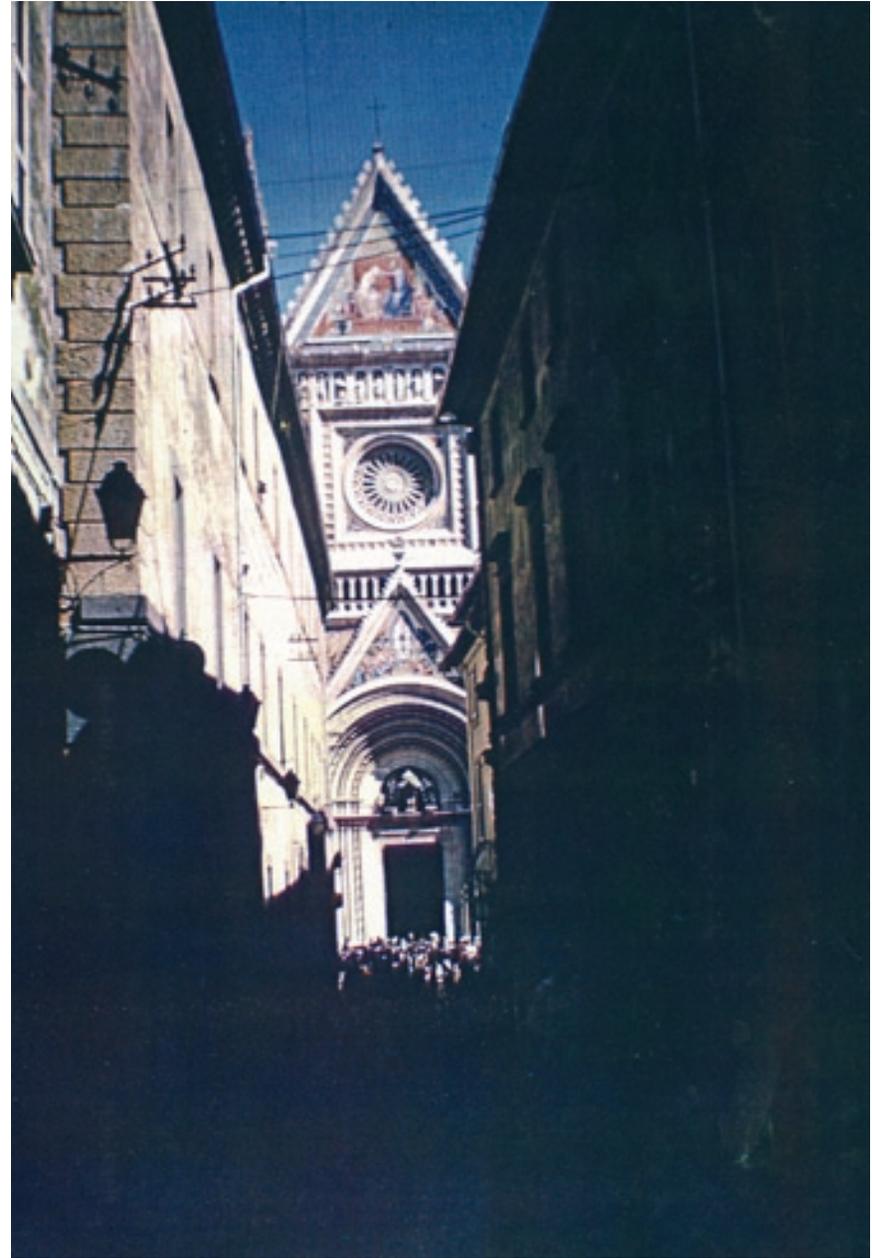


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Miracle of Bolsena

In 1263 a young German priest was on his way from Prague to Rome, hoping in Rome he might decide or at last be persuaded to believe in the truth of Transubstantiation, for this was his great doubt. One day, while resting on the shores of Lake Bolsena, he was approached by local villagers and asked to help celebrate a mass at the church of Santa Crista. It came to pass that as the priest elevated the host he saw drops of blood upon the Corporal, "each stain assuming the form of the human head with features like VolteSanto". Overcome with fear and reverence he dared not to consume the Holy Species but decided to quickly travel to Orvieto, where the Pope resided. The young priest there confessed to the Pope not only the miracle, but his torment over long standing doubts. The Bishop of Orvieto, at the command of the Pope, went to Bolsena and brought the altar of Santa Crista, the sacred Host and the blessed Corporal. Pope Urban IV, with all his clergy went out in procession to meet the Bishop, and it was decided then by the Pope that Orvieto should receive a church that would astound the people and remind them of the miracle of Bolsena. Truth or lie, upon the miracle of Bolsena and in recognition of the young priests faith the great Cathedral of Orvieto was built.



First Approach

If we begin our approach at noon walking down Via Maitani towards Piazza del Duomo, as soon as we pass a slight bend in the narrow street, the Duomo swings into view [6]. Only the centre bay is visible and immediately our eyes are lifted from the stone portal to the tip of the bright gable and then gaining speed our gaze accelerates beyond the plain iron cross off into space. From this dark cool street the Duomo seems to crackle and inhale light; its facade saturated with colour like a cinematic image viewed through tiny bubbles. A few more steps and we are standing upon the threshold of Piazza del Duomo. Immediately the Piazza admits it is not so much an enclosure as it is a boundary which was formed to respect the presence of this great cathedral. The day is sunny and bright. The Duomo seems sunnier and brighter. The piazza is filled with regulars and tourists. The building seems busier and more vibrant. Scanning the facade we can see the stories of New and Old testaments sculpted in stone and mosaic. There are twirling columns around each portal and niched figures clustered around a great rose window which sits above an intricate gallery of slender Gothic columns. But more than these elements, the bold pattern of triangles [7] creates an incessant verticle



geometry—the upper half consisting of three gables and four pinnacles while below the gallery is a trio of identically proportioned stone gables that matter of factly form pointed canopies over the three doors. It is the repetition of verticle symbols that sends our gaze to the heavens. The church looks as though it will blast off. In truth it seems like an advertisement for a spiritual power that only temporarily exists on earth. The real destination and the centre of attention is somewhere far above in the heavens. The triangles combine as if to pierce gravity and the tension between where this structure aims and the fact that it is bound to the earth registers in our bodies as a sense of excitement.

What keeps this structure on earth?

Two factors: first, seven broad steps ground the church². Physically the steps enlarge the area of contact between the structure and the Piazza [8]. The podium seems like a device which nearly trembles as it releases the verticle energy of the building. In the same way an animal will shake, releasing energy collected and focused for a fight never fought, so these steps register a release of energy in their ripple-



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like descent [9]. Secondly the stone is gathered like a hem around the first meter of the facade. These easy folds cushion the verticle energy and by their mass contribute appropriate ballast to the structure. We can sit down opposite the Duomo on a stone bench constructed in alternate courses of black and white stone or proceed across the Piazza. We choose to walk across the Piazza and into the church, noting like a pilgrim what we can along the way. Crossing the Piazza with its Italian traffic and tour buses photographers, and parties of conversation we climb the seven broad steps to where, inches from the lifelike bas-reliefs and mosaic panels, tourists stand reading from guide books that describe the meaning of the facade. Surely in the relative scale of technologies this surface is a medieval microchip. No amount of action in this piazza can challenge the supremacy of the façade [10].

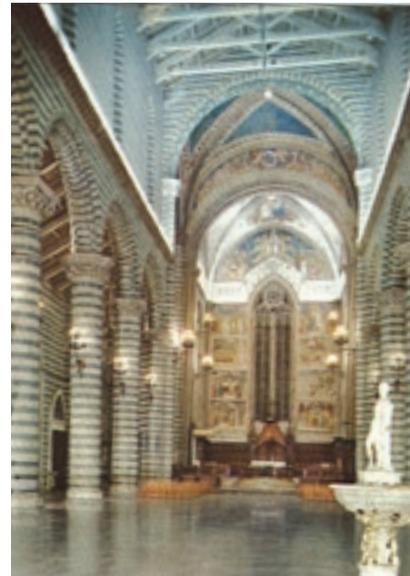
Entering the Duomo there is a total change in atmosphere and attitude. Inside the cathedral is simplicity itself [11].

We can see the plan consists of a parallelogram form, from which three [12] chapels of equal size

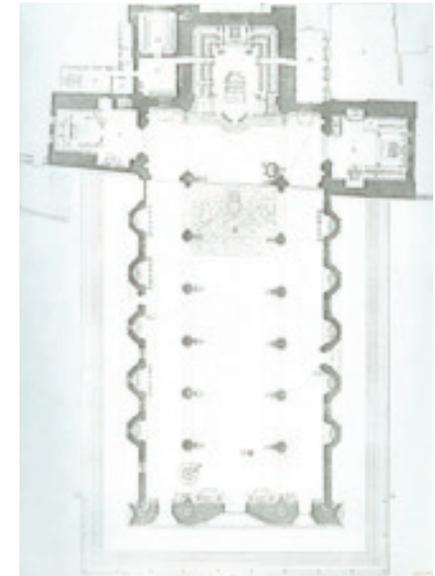


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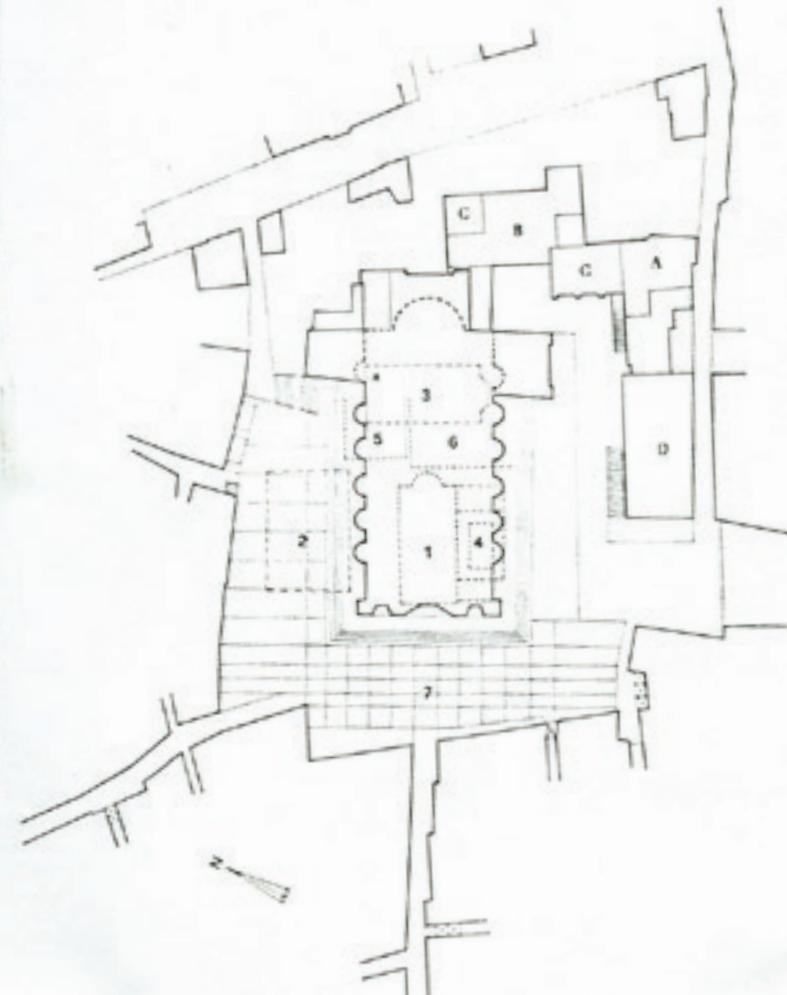


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project, one at the east end, one at the north end, and one at the west end. There is a wide nave and two aisles with 13 large columns crowned in primitive looking capitals. The interior volume is composed of alternating bands of coloured marble, a bold palette that appears surprisingly innocent. The volume is not beautiful but it's humility is raised to a fine artistic key. The windows are small and narrow, the roof a simple rural-like repetition of post and beam-type construction. The space is smaller than the facade leads one to expect. It is becoming apparent that this is no mere façade. This is a medieval billboard. The interior design is such that the floor rises imperceptibly from the back towards the chancel with the pillars progressively shorter as they proceed, in order to create a stage effect of distance within this modest space. This advantaging can be verified by comparing the base and capital of each pillar. The only trace of great verticle energy found inside the structure is located in the way the walls cut through the worn red marble floor and ascend to their full height like great trees bursting through earth. The temperature is cool and the light subdued. If the facade celebrated the miracle of Bolsena, the interior believes in prayer and humility.

IV (1262-64); C Palazzo Papale di Martino IV (1281-84); D Palazzo Soliano o di Bonifacio VIII (1297-1304); 1 Chiesa capitolare di San Costanzo; 2 presumibile posizione di Santa Maria la Prisca; 3 ubicazione di Santa Maria la Prisca secondo il Carli; 4 chiostro, camere, botteghe ed orto dei canonici; 5 case e camere situate « post tribunal S. Constantii versus ecclesiam S. Marie »; 6 posizione presunta del cimitero e della sacristia dei canonici; 7 piazza; a porta del Corporale.



Advancing further into this volume, whose quiet settles comfortably upon us after the busy Piazza, we finally stand facing the Capelle del Corporale. Guarded in a fine gold casket, this is the relic from the Miracle of Bolsena. We turn and face the east chapel where the four great frescoes by Signorelli are painted. Entering the side chapel, the atmosphere changes again and now we are in a brightly coded cell. After the relatively calm knave it is easy to be overwhelmed by the density of messages painted in this space. The stone vaulted ceiling appears to blossom down towards the earth and as we bend our head back to take in the ceiling, it seems as though the fragrant transmission is received directly into our throat.

We turn to leave, noting the generously sized apses which collect the east and west walls in half wells that have no function other than to humanize, by way of their relatively modest volume the larger interior of the cathedral. Sitting on a bench across from the Duomo we can begin to visualize the space of the Piazza viewed from above. This is Piazza del Duomo [13], a horseshoe-shaped space wrapping itself around the three sides of the Duomo as though the assembled buildings form a humble audience to



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the great cathedral. Connected to the Duomo on its edge is the Bishop's Palace [14]. This in turn connects to the Pope's Palace which projects somewhat into the Piazza, parallel, but in less commanding ways than the cathedral. Across the Piazza from the Palazzo dei Papi is the Chapel of the Hospital, with Opera del Duomo situated opposite the Duomo to the east of Via Maitani. Finally to the west of Via Maitani is the Palace of Count Faini [15]. A whimsical note is struck to our left where on a modest turret sits Torreta dell' Orologio. Locally known as Mairizio, it dates from the 14th century [16]. Its playful figures cast in bronze strike a large bell on the hour [17]. Architecturally the arrangement marks the west approach to the Piazza along Via Duomo [18]. The remaining buildings are unusual in so far as they are only two and three stories in height. These almost cottage-like dwellings increase the otherworldliness of the Duomo making it at moments seem like an alien leviathan.

Perhaps the security afforded by the town's unique topographical position allowed the people to build this type of dwelling which is more common in the Umbrian countryside than in Umbrian towns. Our eye is constantly drawn back to the fierce verticle energy sculpted upon the facade of the Duomo [19].



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From the valley below Orvieto it is the seemingly wafer-thin gable of the Duomo that projects sharply into the sky and within the close confines of the Piazza this verticle power completely dominates the town [20].

The Duomo

Several books have been written which are exclusively devoted to the details and history of this building. Here an overview is given that enlarges an appreciation of the Cathedral in relation to the Piazza.



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Basic Facts

- 1 . The site of the present Duomo is the highest point of Orvieto.
2. An Etruscan temple is believed to have stood on this site.
3. At least two other churches are known to have occupied this site—San Constance and Santa Maria la Prisca.
4. The first stone of the 'new' church was blessed 26 years after the Miracle of Bolsena by Pope Nicholas IV in 1290.

5. The first plans drawn were for a straightforward Romanesque church—with three aisles and a semicircular nave under the direction of Fra Beviagnate of Perugia.

6. A local architect took over the project and attempted to introduce the Gothic style. A transept was added and the two chapels to the east and west were fastened to the growing structure.

7. Badly built in the first place and 'wounded' by this addition the structure began to fall apart.

8. 1310--Lorenzo Maitano the Sienese master is called in to buttress walls, restore the interior fabric and to build the facade.

9. In 1321 he sets up a Fabrica of mosaics and it is the lower images on the facade that were completed by him or under his direction [21].

10. Maitano's facade now gives structural problems and Antonio Frederighi of Siena arrives—his contributions include the twelve niches we see surrounding the rose window [22].

11. Half a century later the middle cusp of the facade was finished, the project occupying 2 years.

12. The right-hand side is completed in 1590 by Ippolito Scalco and the left side finished in the 17th century.

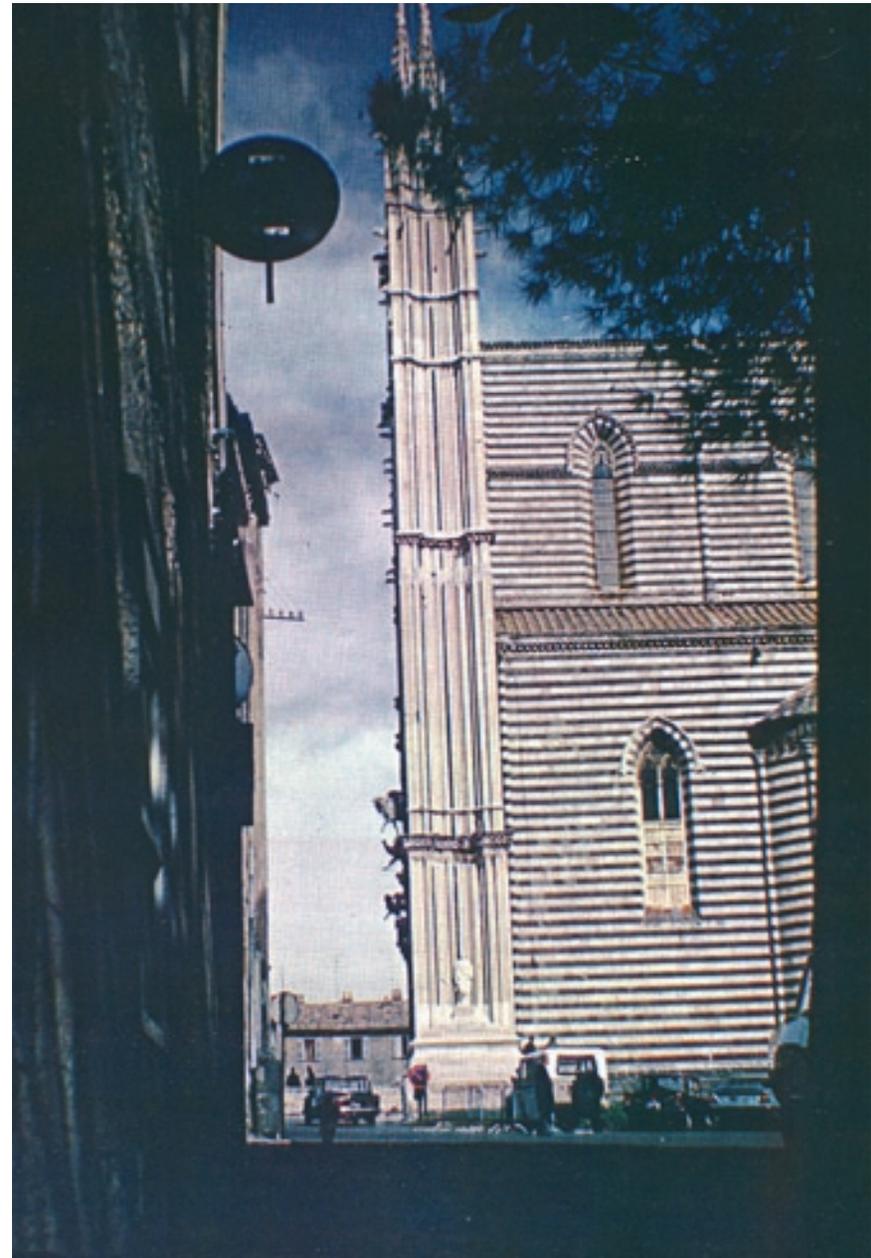


13. Lightning struck the right-hand spire on December 10, 1775 and took ten years to repair.

14 The bronze doors of the main portal were installed in 1965 when the artist Emilio Greco completed their casting—they were received with mixed reviews by the local press.

It is really the facade that interests us most in relation to the Piazza, for the facade is a triumph of decorative art. It is as R. Langton Douglas points out a “front-piece” for it bears no sincere relation to the construction of the building [23]. The gables rise above the aisles and beyond them soar parapets and pinnacles. The revision to the facade by Federighi give the ‘front-piece a slightly more imposing appearance than it would have presented had Maitano’s final designs been carried out. For the most part the facade today differs in no important way from that designed in the 14th century. Douglas also gives a fine account of artwork upon the facade³:

“The reliefs on the pilasters of the facade of the Orvieto Cathedral were executed in the period 1310 to 1321 in part by Lorenzo del Maitano and in part under his supervision. They belong to the Golden Age of art in Siena; to the age



of Duccio and Simone Martini, to the age of Pietro and Ambrozio Lorenzetti, to the age of the architects of the great unfinished cathedral. Maitano was an artistic kinsman of Simone. Like Simone he owed a great deal to the influence of Giovanni Pisano. Like Simone he was a great designer. He had, too, something of that painter's marvellous grace of line, something of his devotion to a hieratic sumptuousness, something for his love of brilliant colour, as well as something of his extraordinary fineness—we might almost say fastidiousness—of technique. Excepting the works of Jacopo della Quercia, the reliefs of Orvieto were the greatest achievement of the Sienese school of sculpture."

And so we find the entire history of creation is expressed on this facade, sometimes with a naive sort of realism, sometimes with primitive symbolism. To think that this front-piece is practically the work of one mind is truly staggering. Factors which stretched the time of construction out over more than four hundred years include a major famine followed by devastating plague, the worst tyranny in the history of Orvieto, earthquakes and attacks by Charles VIII.

Finally, as if to give balance to the passions that were engaged upon the work of the Duomo, there is a story

that while Andrea Pisano was finishing the statues of the Madonna and Child, the Ghibelline leader from Orvieto was being dragged through the streets of Rome in a cage on wheels while his captors grabbed bits of his flesh with red hot pincers.

Palazzo Vescovile

Palazzo Dei Papi and other Buildings of the Piazza

The oldest building is probably the Bishop's Palace. It is said to have been founded in 977 and was then restored and enlarged by Adrian IV in 1150. Almost all traces of this medieval building have been removed by the restorations made in the 16th century. There are some pointed windows carved with chequers that hint of the earliest facade. Most of the structure faces what is now Piazza Marconi and Via Soliana behind Piazza del Duomo. Adjoining, and of greater consequence to the Piazza is Palazzo dei Papi [24]. It is sometimes called Pallazzo Solitano, (perhaps in derivation from the word 'sole' or 'sun') as the ancient cult of Mithra may have once practiced on this site. It was built in three stages between the 10th and 14th centuries. Boniface the VIII contributed a great deal to its current form. Visiting popes lived there and used the spaces for receptions, and conveniently it is

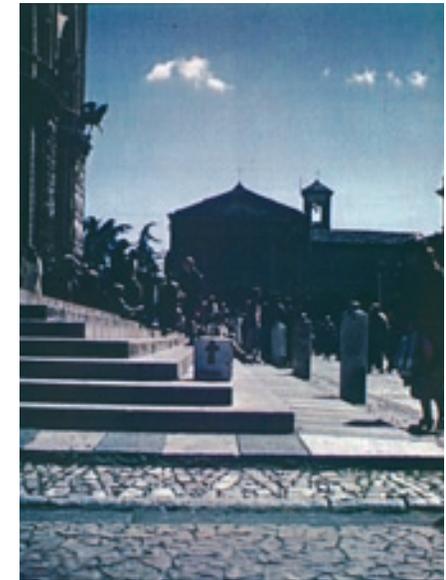


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connected via the Bishop's palace with the Duomo. The building now houses religious relics. The upper gallery is of interest because it contains models and elements of the Duomo so they could have been examined prior to full scale construction, and several early drawings of the facade which some scholars attribute to Lorenzo Maitani. With a little imagination we can sense a fraction of the ambience of the great workshops that must have existed at the time of the Duomo's construction.

Second Approach

Crossing the Piazza one is always in direct contact with the powerful cathedral, the reason being that there are no other relationships available. The enclosing buildings are modestly scaled and seem distant and almost detached as one crosses the Piazza [25]. Only the clusters of people and the tangled traffic break down the vastness one experiences in the Piazza [26]. This vastness is drawn not from the configuration of elements so much as the powerful result of being so excluded by the single intention of the space.



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Having spent several days in the environment of the Piazza it is possible to begin to understand the subtle ways in which this place is inhabited. During the mornings, sun lights the east wall of the Duomo, at noon the facade and then at dusk the west wall is lit. It is in relation to this arch that local people casually move. If you desire a sunny position you are beside the Duomo sitting on the wide steps or against the rippling walls; the building is used freely, its religious purpose not intimidating to anyone. If you desire the shade you move in the same arc but on the outer face of the plaza. The projecting apses give the long side walls of the Duomo a wavy plan that is emphasized by the alternate courses of black and white stone. People spontaneously group themselves into the positive and negative spaces which are the result of this plan [27]. At the foot of the seven steps which descend from the Duomo are ten large Seal of Solomon designs executed in triangular stones of red, white and black. The rest of the Piazza is paved in this triangular fashion with black stone. The terrain is slightly dished but does not generate into a factor of space. Nearby the Palazza dei Papi rests like a sphinx; instead of crouching over front paws she rests over three vaults that support a piano noble which is reached by a large outdoor stair. The steps do not face the Piazza proper, but they do create in a private



sort of way a dynamic which is sufficient to support a lesser space between the Duomo and the Palazzo. This space is clarified by a modest patch of grass where children play [28] and dogs are often led. The Papal Palazzo has an austere handsome facade especially when viewed from in front of the Duomo. Parking is accommodated on the west sleeve of the Piazza. In front of the Duomo the bus from the train station (at the foot of old Orvieto—and the heart of “new” Orvieto) comes to rest. Through traffic is channeled from Via Soltano to Via Maitani. This flow pierces the main body of the Piazza in front of the Duomo, which is filled with tourists and local residents who calmly converse in small clusters as though the entire Piazza were their private club. So we find that in what more northern climates might be a legislated intersection, in Orvieto is a surreal juxtaposition of purposes and repose that can excite itself until for a moment the vibrant mosaics of the facade of the Duomo have found their match and then the congestion eases and affairs take on their old relationship [29].



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Conclusion

When Urban IV had finished hearing the young priest tell his story, he asked that the people of Orvieto be given a great church as a permanent reminder of the Miracle of Bolsena. His purpose was really to re-establish the then waning doctrine of Christianity in the towns. What he received was a great facade, a powerful sign pointing out a special message. He neither asked for or received a miraculous piazza or symbolic space. Such a request was unthinkable in the 13th century.

If anything can be said to enlarge the concept of the plaza it is the two broad sleeves of space on either side of the Duomo. These allow us to get behind the 'front-piece' without having to enter the church. While not intended as spatial psychology it is a leniency which relieves the facade from becoming something of an idol to those inhabiting her foreground—slightly enlarging the character of parvis-type composition. Just as the 'front-piece' of the Duomo bears no sincere relation to the rest of the church, so the buildings which enclose the Piazza show no real allegiance to creating a space. They are merely frame in a painterly sense, to the

Duomo which is the central and single figure of the composition.

It could be said that the Duomo facade is the centre and circumference of the Piazza. It is easily the most lavishly decorated of the set of all unrelated planes that demarcate the void. Human beings are certainly not included in any planned way nor in this Piazza is the architectural sense of place explored.

Trying to understand Piazza del Duomo in the context of what Zucker refers to as "Latin Space Consciousness" the Piazza has to hold that position where the two dimensional plane has been developed to its absolute peak. And it follows that the energies sculpted into this facade, if carried further, will either cause it to topple or will somehow have to be transformed into a new three dimensional spatial typology.

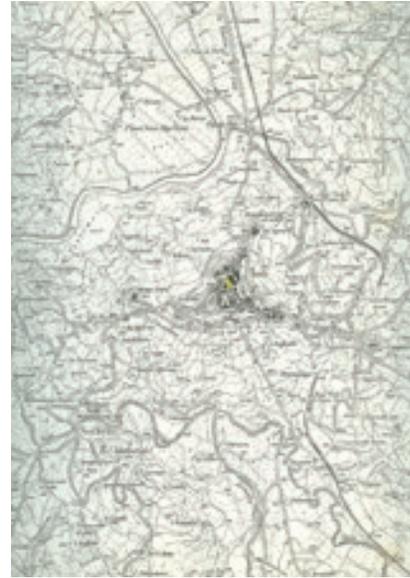
Piazza Vittorio Emanuele II,

Todi

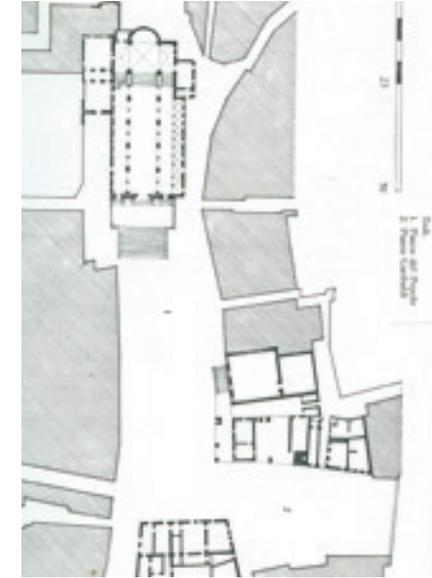
First Facts

Looking at the plan of Piazza Vittorio Emanuele II we are able to gather first facts [30, 31]. The Piazza is an irregular rectangle measuring 98 x 45 meters [32]. Access to the space is provided through four typically narrow streets, one at each corner, that basically follow the north-south orientation of the space. At the north end, upon a flight of stairs, rests the Duomo. The east side has another public building—the Palazzo del Capitano & Palazzo del Popolo. This twin structure also features a flight of stone steps which run parallel to the facade. The last public building occupies the entire south edge and is the Palazzo dei Priori. Also visible in plan is the related but distinct Piazza Garibaldi which is like an anteroom to the main Piazza, with its eastern edge opening as a balcony to the Umbrian countryside. The scale of the entire place is modest but the geometry is very precise.

Questions arise as to what the experience will be; such an enclosure would seem to enlarge the importance of steps, building height, paving treatment, and features such as arcading and balconies. Our questions all anticipate the nature of what appears to be a very defined space.



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Cut to the Piazza

We are now standing across from the Palazzo del Capitano and Palazzo del Popolo [33]. These buildings are experienced as one mass although they came from two different dates of construction and house separate functions. They are joined together into a unitive state by a large stone staircase [34]. The absence of balustrade and a supporting parabolic vault give the whole piece an elegant yet robust character. It's presence is at once concentrated yet so perfectly at ease that it begins to resemble a well practiced yoga pose. At one time these steps were used as a tiny amphitheatre or platform where citizens gathered to discuss their affairs. Beneath these steps and extending deep into the building mass is the groin vaulted foundation work of the above structures. The piers and arches are of stone and thin bricks, and many of the vaults run into segments of walls or columns from previous building efforts. Today a small outdoor market occupies this space.

The Palazzo Capitano

The Palazzo Capitano Constructed between 1290 and 1296 the Palazzo Capitano is distinguished by



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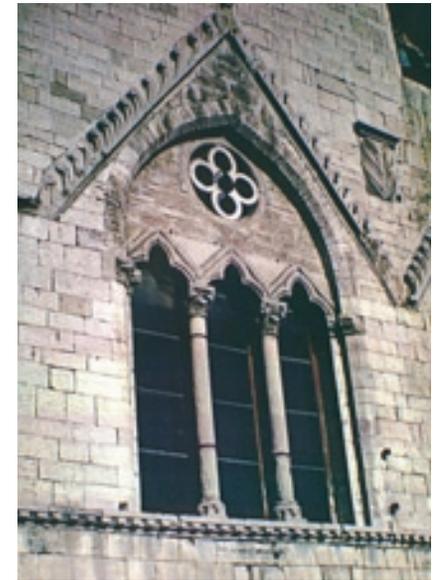
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three ornate windows of the Gothic style, elegantly set 35 in carved stone sills and surmounted by rose windows and a peaked roof [35]. Inside there is the Sala de Consiglio or Council Room. It is still in use today, a tall domed chamber that is square in plan. There are faint 13th century frescoes on the wall as well as two stone eagles which date from the same period. Above this floor behind the narrow and less stimulating fenestration is the Biblioteca Communale. Recently renovated, it is a large handsome room with enormous wooden beams supporting the ceiling.

The Piazza del Popolo

The bulk of the Palazzo del Popolo was completed in 1213 and enlarged in 1228. It receives the stairs it shares in a more advantageous way because this structure is planted several meters into the volume of the Piazza. It is sparsely fenestrated which reminds us that it is from an era when security was built in a very direct way into the architecture [36]. From its Ghibelline battlements to its brace of arcades, it is a proud creation. Built in the Lombard style, its slender windows in horizontal frames are set in a facade of broad blank walls of stone in simple contrast to its nearby twin. The first floor is now a picture



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gallery and the upper floor, a museum. Both spaces are renovated and save for their generous volumes are of no special interest to us. Together this pair form a verticle couple; narrow windows and stone surfaces are raised sharply by the stone edges which accentuate all the right angles of the structure. The ground is met squarely and the entire stone mass rises sharply from the horizontal piazza floor as though the entire edifice was built by stacking giant wooden blocks.

The Pallazo dei Priori

The Palazzo to our right seems to cast one eye to the other palaces in a manner that is partly challenging, partly ignoring [37]. This was the home of the town's administration; the priors, then the rectors, then the vicars, and finally the pontifical governors [38]. The tower, which has lost some of its height since the 13th century, easily commands both Piazza Garibaldi and Piazza Vittorio Emmanuel II. The structure has increased in size, with construction commencing in 1293 and expansion taking place between 1334 and 1339. In 1514 when Leon X acquired buildings that occupy the corner along Via Mazzini, the size of the present structure was realized [39]. The seam



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where this final addition was added is visible to the left of the second window from the right. A bronze eagle (which has been a symbol of Todi since ancient times when as a Roman military camp it was called Tuder) is pinned like a brooch high on the facade [40]. The eagle is of interest because it offers a way of tracing some of the earliest experiences of the town. The town was first an Umbrian and then an Etruscan stronghold. Though never on a principle line of communication, her hilltop gave her a clear view of the large turn that the Tiber River takes in the valley below. Romans built a military camp here and during the Middle Ages she was among the first cities to revolt against the patrician families, to be governed by her own people and to prescribe her own laws. Between the 13th and 15th centuries she grew to the form we recognize today. Above all she had a formidable military organization. One assumes that it is the Etruscan statue of Mars which was found here (it now sits in the Vatican museum) that indicates the lineage she was to descend from. At one time it is said to have rivaled Perugia for combativeness. The stone courses increase the horizontal feel of the building and ultimately add, layer-like to its weight. Finally the Guelf battlement bites the sky in contrast to the neighbouring palaces that wear a Ghibelline cap.



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Duomo

To our left is the Duomo [41]. The polarities in the Piazza are completed with the Duomo at the north edge. It is mounted upon a mass of steps so that an earlier Roman temple is included as its crypt. Looking deeper we find that much of the Piazza with its even floor comes to us as a result of being the roof of a cavernous Roman cistern with access arranged under what is now the Palazzo Priori [42]. This then accounts for the exacting measure of the space though little excavation has been undertaken to date. The facade of the Duomo is nearly square with Romanesque features. This building is first mentioned in 1150, with renovations occurring frequently in the first few centuries and most recently in 1958 [43]. The campanile sits behind the facade and plays a minor role in the composition. From early drawings of the facade we gather that its present height has been reduced. The oldest part of the Church belongs to the period when the Lombard dukes ruled at Spoleto though little of this remains with us today. The Comcine builders were at work in the 13th and 14th centuries and much of the present structure is attributed to them. A very broad stair leads up to a balustraded podium which gives a good view over the Piazza. There are three doors of pointed design,



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each surmounted by a “wheel” which is an elaborate creation of the 15th century. The central door has broad scrolls of foliage springing from a crown of leaves in place of retreating planes with shafts and mouldings [44]. The side doors have shafts and moulding and closely above sit their round windows with boldly cusped tympanums.

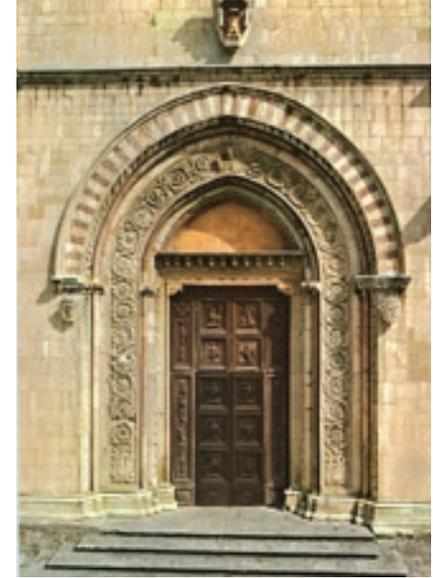
Throughout the structure there is the subtle use of pink and white marble in detailing the range of ornament. The entire effect is surprisingly calm almost detached– like a rock in a Zen garden. The interior is spacious and does not seem to be too disturbed by the generations of alterations to its design [45]. The nave is formed by alternate piers and columns, nine in number, above which an unbroken wall rises to the clerestory.

The nave capitals are further examples of the vigorous carving. The piers which alternate with the columns are of Renaissance design with sculpted figures facing into the nave.

The choir is raised above the nave by seven steps; this and the added aisle to the right are roofed with



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groined vaulting and look as if they are fairly recent pieces of work. Overall it is the original Roman character of the interior that is rewarding.

There are two palaces on the east side of the Duomo; Palazzo Desi, belonging to a powerful family of the same name and renovated in 1762, and the Palazzo Corinni. Today they house offices and residences.

Making up the remaining architectural enclosure I counted fourteen individual facades. Everyone of them has decayed, been rebuilt and changed throughout the centuries. Not that there is any sense of unworthiness to them, rather they create a strange homogeneity with the range of changes seeming constant.

No building asserts itself. It's almost an organic collection of facades that one reads as a continuation in the same architectural key [46].

When we step back, even the grandeur of the public buildings merge with this sensibility. All of the buildings, save for one, are four stories high and



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have cornices in the form of overhanging roof lines [47]. There is no attempt to relate from one building to another or to collectively form an element such as an arcade. The floor of the Piazza is regularly paved, clear of any statue or fountain. Today it is a busy parking lot [48].

The Piazza del Popolo

Standing in the Piazza del Popolo we experience the loss of space more than any wish the space might grant. There is no leniency in this geometry, no subtlety to the form. The place feels more garrison than piazza. The houses of power which are so grandly built stand now like old boxers in a ring. It is a space which is difficult to inhabit. The Piazza floor is nearly flat and its regular black stones do not relieve any part of this feeling. Instead the right angles of facade to Piazza are unusually sharp. These angles and the boxiness visible on many of the buildings seems to pull the opposite sides in towards the void. Access to the space was controlled by gates until the 17th century and though the gates have been removed the four narrow streets makes it difficult to gaze out. Even when it is possible to look out through these openings, the view is certain to be eclipsed by



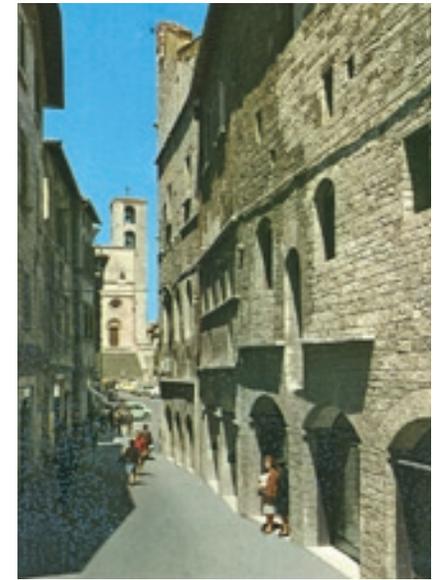
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a bend in the road [49]. An outdoor room? Yes, and at first experience it seems to lack the furnishings necessary to be comfortable. It is as though the space were created by a military mind with emphasis on control rather than on free strolling and conversation. We are included without choice or flexibility. The first building that lifts our eyes, in the only possible direction leading out, is the Duomo [50]. First we follow those 29 steps, each 18 meters wide and then we catch sight of the subtle placement of round windows. When joined with a line, the windows create an equilateral triangle aiming softly at the sky; thus we can at least in our mind's eye, escape. The facade itself has a calmness that asserts itself by quiet understatement in relation to all the other buildings. The facade seems as timeless as a seashell. If we climb the steps and look back at the Piazza we find a partial relief to the containment. From here we have a fine view of the remaining facade, but sooner or later we must descend [51]. Walking towards the second set of steps, those of the Palazzo of the eastern edge whose run lies in the direction of the Duomo the character of the place changes. Climbing these steps our view foreshortens the entire Piazza.

Two factors give these steps their glow: first a sweep



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of steps free of any balustrade and secondly, the vaulted roofing below [52]. The space beneath the stairs is a beautifully crafted system of groin vaults, piers, arches, and walls. The construction becomes, for a few meters, a useful arcade framing the way through to Piazza Garibaldi.

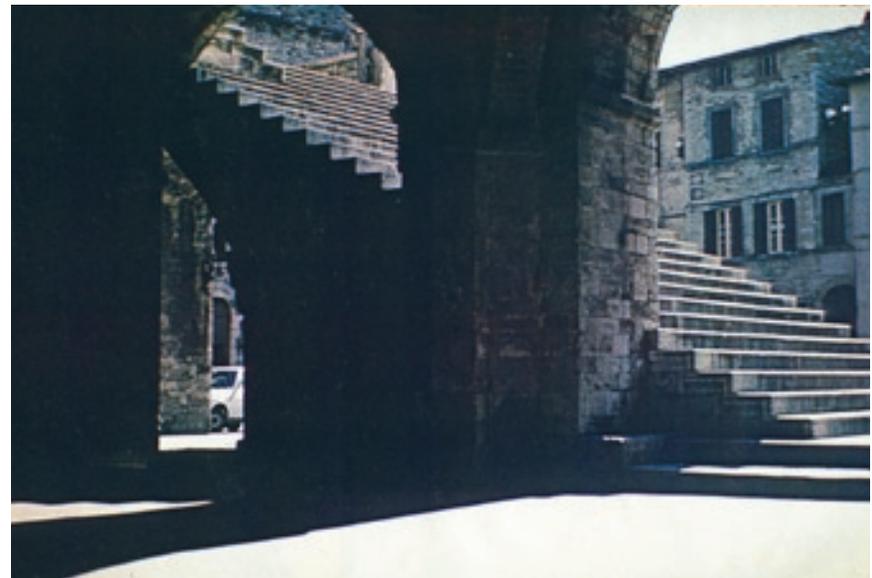
In looking again at the plan of the Piazza the question arises as to the relationship between these two clearings.

There are, in certain large cities, examples of parks whose influence manages to radiate through a wide mass of urban fabric. One does need to enter the green space to experience a sense of refreshment. The parks presence can be experienced, perhaps because some memory of such a feeling is now carried within us. It is through this unlikely chain of experiences that Piazza Garibaldi is successful and has a psychological rather than directly physical effect on the main Piazza. It does not have a relationship in terms of sequence, timing or mass. It is enclosed on its south edge by the Palazzo Atti, a worldly structure of 1552 that once belonged to a powerful family by the same name. The Palazzo Popolo to the north is busy with



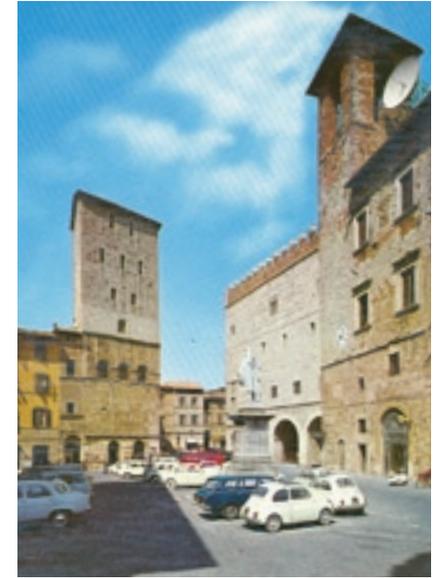
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bureaucratic functions on the ground floor although the thin connection through the space beneath the steps is not developed. In the centre of the Piazza stands a bronze sculpture of Garibaldi [53]. And standing even more alone than the sculpture, which has the tension of the void to keep it company, is a single poplar tree. Surprising as trees are in these stone cities built a top rocky hills, it grows in its corner like a forgotten sign of life [54]. When viewed from the valley below it is the only tree visible at such an altitude.

Naturally we walk to the eastern rail of the Piazza. Leaning on the stone balustrade which is built on pre-existing Roman walls we are able to survey what has been called the “Galilee of Italy” [55]. The Umbrian countryside has a serene and abundant quality that provides a beautiful counterpoint to these carved towns. As rich as the country side is, there is also something almost lean to the feeling of the valley. It is as though this leanness is born from the void of space itself and this emptiness allows us to be included along with a host of natural elements and powers in the Umbrian experience.



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Air, light, wind, and all growing things are somehow simplified and opened and we share space with them. Perigino (the painter who from his studio in Perugia executed paintings that touch this mystical depth) is well described by the art critic Berenson, who terms the painter's finest word "space composition". Berenson goes on to say:

*"Space composition is the art which humanizes the void. Architecture closes in and imprisons space. It is largely an affair of interiors. Painted space composition opens out the space it frames in, puts boundaries only ideal to the roof of heaven... In other words - this wonderful art can take us away from ourselves and give us - while we are under its spell the feeling of being identified with the universe - perhaps even being the soul of the universe."*⁴

The wealth of Todi is found in the contrast between two spaces. One, Piazza Vittorio Emanuele II is pure container. The other, Piazza Popolo is pure expansion. The surprising hinge is a stair where space can be mounted .



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Conclusion and Return

When we walk back into the reality of Piazza del Comune we can immediately see both the ambition and fear that pervaded medieval consciousness [56]. If you visualize Todi resting atop its green hill like a perfect jewel it becomes clear that three sets of walls give this town its spatial memory. There are three sets of walls because every civilization that attached itself to this hilltop feared attack. Reading the rings from circumference to centre we find Medieval, Roman and Etruscan constructions. Everyone understood life could only prosper when protected, therefore every expansion necessitated a new enclosure. Like a snail with its shell every time the town grew the wall had to move. Ambition and fear had to move as one. Only one space at the very heart of the town never moved [57]. It is the piazza which is enclosed by the final set of walls that are the facades forming the piazza. Almost delicate, these walls face inwards and respond to the lives of the Commune. This precious void is more than a simple clearing. All the key players in the towns history are represented and they seem to be quietly and permanently reminiscing about more than a thousand years of history. To enter the piazza is to enter a story. The achievement of Todi was its



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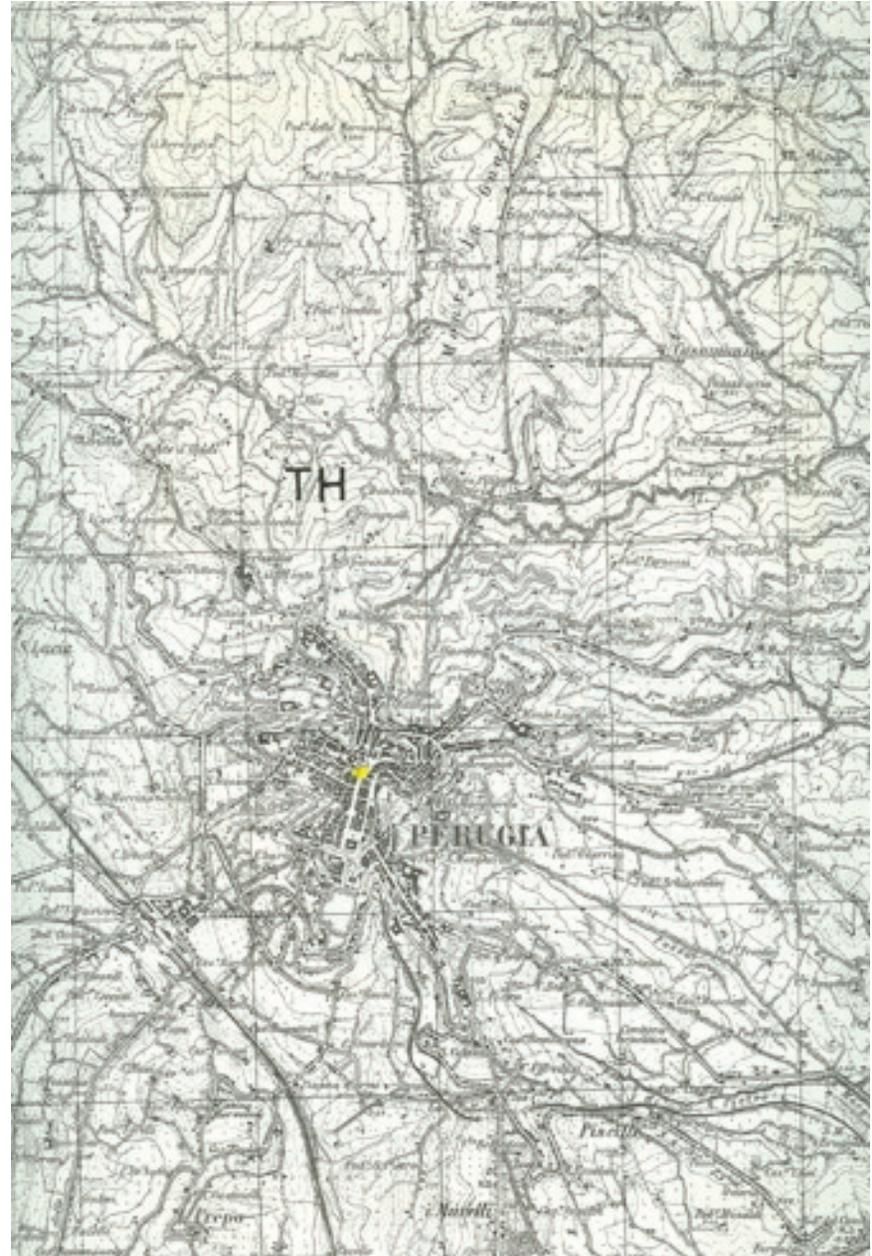
ability to remain dedicated to security while never forgetting the importance of creating a profound urban mandala.

*Piazza Novembre IV,
Perugia*

First Facts

The people of Foligno came barefoot, with sword and knife tied around their necks to plead pardon from Perugia, but the Perugians continued to attack and molest them. It is recorded that three times in 1282 the fields of Foligno were ruined and her town captured. The west wall was smashed and orders given that it should never be reconstructed. Finally Pope Martin IV became so disgusted with Perugia (to which he was honestly attached), that he issued a severe excommunication against them. What followed was this: the Perugians made a pope and cardinal out of straw and dragged them through the streets of the city and up to a hill where these effigies were burned complete with crimson robes. The story finishes with the Pope forgiving the Perugians and it is said that on a subsequent visit to the town he died of eating too many eels.

Perugia has been called the Empress of Umbrian hill towns [58]. She sits more than 1200 feet above the Tiber river. At lesser heights, easily within her range of vision sit Assisi, Spoleto, Todi and Foligno; hills conceal Orivieto and Ancona.



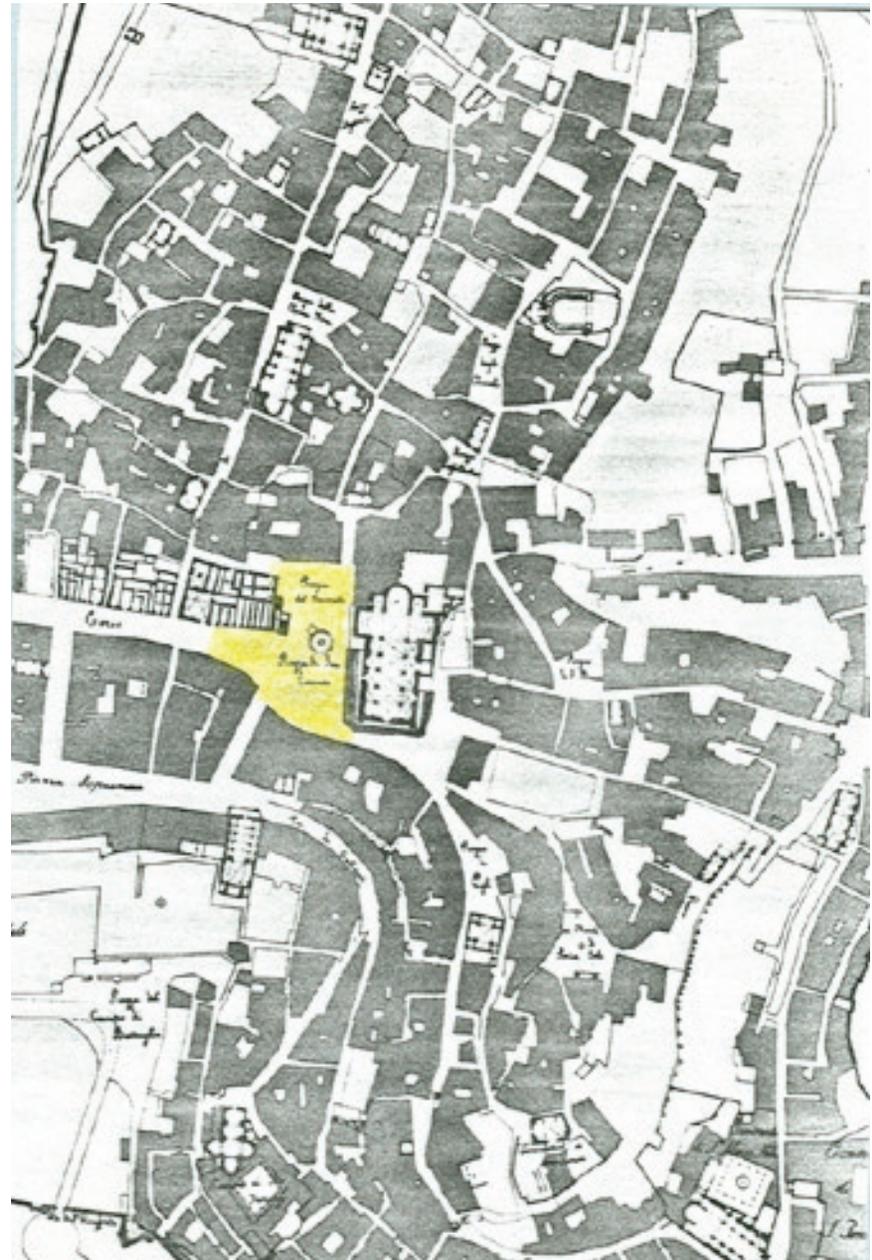
Late in the Middle Ages, at the peak of her strength, Perugia had a passion for battle that became legendary throughout Italy. Powerful families, the church, and neighbouring city states were the parties from which any combination of alliances was possible and every type of cruelty committed. Each faction fought as fiercely inwardly as outwardly, the unifying factor being the violence that was committed with each swing of power. In 1790, bastard son of Ridolfi Baglioni wounds a certain Naldino Corciano, a friend of the mighty Digli Oddi. Naldino runs off to show his bloody wounds to his allies, the Oddi. The Oddi family now mad with rage, rush off fully armed to the Piazza striking at every Baglioni adherent along the way. The Baglioni are not slow to appear and the fighting begins. All shops are closed. Citizens arm themselves. A procession that is winding its way towards the Duomo is thrown into complete disorder. Women from upper windows drop tiles and jugs on the citizens below. This opera-like scene has left many dead before the bishops and doctors of law carefully leave their guarded homes and exhort the nobles to lay down their arms. Finally a truce is obtained and for a time there is peace.

Duomo

In plan we can see that the Piazza boasts two key buildings on its edges and a fountain which punctuates the void between [59]. Respectively these are the Duomo, Palazzo Priori, and Fonte Maggiore, and it is in this order we shall consider them.

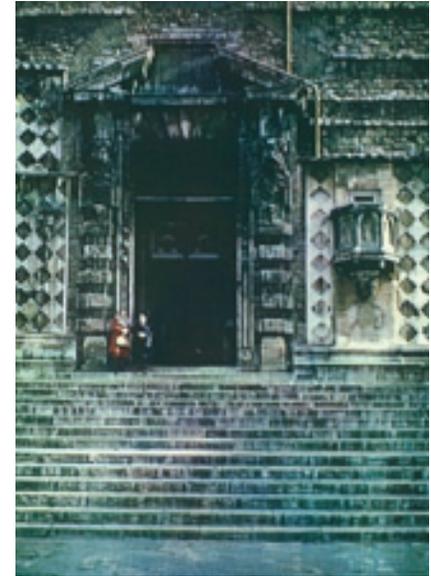
Throughout Perugia's history in the 13th, 14th and 15th centuries, we hear of fights and skirmishes in the Piazza but it is always the Cathedral and not the Palazzo that turned into a fortress. In 1489, in one of the endless fights between the Baglioni and Oddi, the cathedral became a castle. Guido Baglioni arrived in "hot haste" from Spello and proceeded to turn the Oddi out of Perugia. The historian Vilani records "... they took position of San Lorenzo—placed artillery there, and fortified the church, its loggia and its roof in every way they knew of. The Duomo on this occasion proved an excellent stronghold that the Baglioni had to abandon their siege and return once more to the country. "

The first church which stood on this site was pulled down in 1200 in order to make way for a superb new



cathedral. Citizens assembled to talk about their new project, and they went so far as to appoint Fra Bevingnate as their architect. But the Perugians were too busy with their rivalries and wars, and many years were to pass before building funds could be found. Finally in 1345 the Bishop laid the foundation stone of San Lorenzo. It is said to have been a solemn day and as it turned out a very lonely one for the stone, for it lay untouched for the rest of the century and another hundred years went by before the church was completed. Parts of the nearly finished church were dismantled to provide parts for another cathedral, but finally in the 15th century the Bishop Baglioni (whose tomb now stands to the right as one enters the cathedral) put the place in comparative order. At this time the Piazza was called Piazza San Lorenzo. The door we see facing the Piazza is the work of Galeazzo Alessi and was completed in 1568 [60].

To the right of the doorway we can see a pulpit built in 1425 in homage to St. Bernardine of Siena [61]. He was a Franciscan and travelled widely to preach. It is said that from this pulpit he had the citizens of Perugia in tears and they burned their books and finery at his request. Further along the stone



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courses and unfinished facade are two niches, one set above the other. The upper one, which is empty, was built in 1467 and the lower one was filled with its Madonna and child in 1954. The tile work is obviously unfinished and the entire facade has an unusually rough quality to its surface. The good of this effect is that gives the place an oddly timeless quality.

As we face the church, the tall dark arches on the left create the Loggia di Braccio Fortebraccio [62]. They were built by order of Fortebraccio in 1423. He was the Signore of Perugia at the time and some reports claim this Loggia formed part of his home which was destroyed in the 16th century. Fortebraccio was very popular; it was he who named the city loafers “I consumatori della Piazza” (those who wear out the pavement). Another account suggests the Loggia was built so that the citizens might have greater comfort in the Piazza. Today the Loggia is a half bay shorter than when it was first built and it is where the elderly men sit.

Entering the Cathedral one has an unexpected feeling of being embraced by warmth and gentleness. The space is built in the form of a Latin cross with three naves. The ceiling is painted but poorly lit, much



of the stain glass work is new and the pillars were painted so as to imitate marble. The place is large in scale but its elements suffer from too little inspiration; only the volume offers repose. The Mass I attended on a Tuesday morning was well attended.

Palazzo Dei Priori

[63] On August 14, 1500, a member of the Baglioni family was to get married. Perugia was turned into a 'garden of loveliness' for the occasion. Simonette Baglioni rode through the city casting quantities of candies at the crowds. His bride it was said to have surpassed all others in her beauty and glory of her gown, her hair woven with jewels and garlands.

That night while the families and guests were asleep a terrifying attack took place. Some say it was inspired in part by the Pope's jealousy of the family's authority and power. Exhausted from the celebrations, there was never a chance for battle. Only the chief Baglioni managed to escape to the country and after collecting a fresh army of allies, returned to Perugia, took power, and proceeded to revenge his assailants. A hundred men who were suspected of complicity

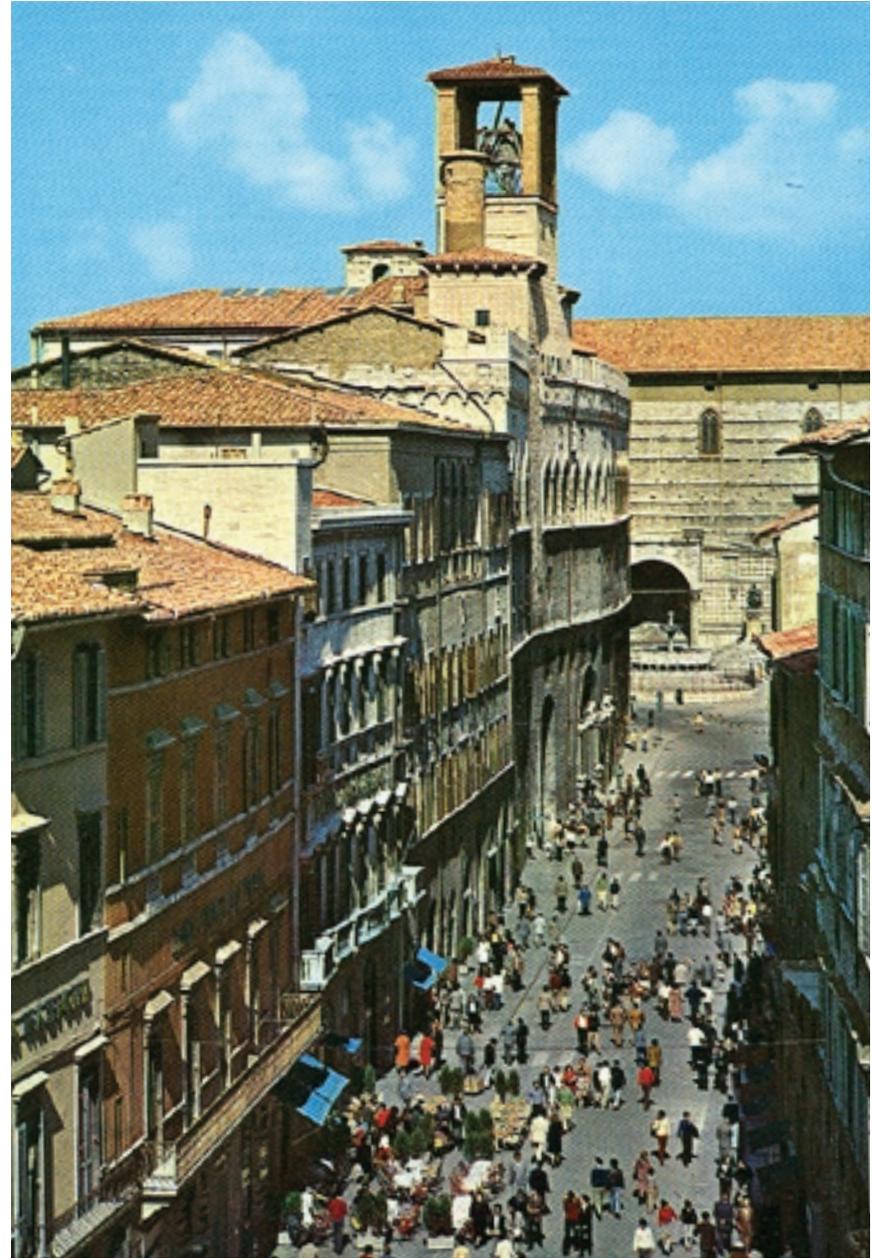


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in the treason were murdered in the Piazza and the Cathedral. He then had the Cathedral washed with wine and re-consecrated. The heads of the traitors were left to drip blood from the Palazzo on hooks which were there especially for this purpose. Mourning for the event lasted till nearly 1535 when Pope Paul III defeated the Baglioni and Papal forces ruled the city. The Pope built his fortress on the site of the old Baglioni Palace. The entire affair marked an end to Perugia's bloody ways.

The present palace was finished in the middle of the 14th century. Long before that date there had been a public hall on the site where the rulers of the city met to discuss and settle its affairs.

It is difficult to reconstruct these earlier buildings which have almost vanished with time and countless fires, but they lay more to the west of the Piazza, and formed a fine group with a great flight of stairs leading up to them from the square. The church of Maesta delle Volte belonged to them, as did the exquisite little arch which is left standing alone at the head of the Via Verzaro. This building was small and cramped and a new meeting house was undertaken



without regard to expense. It took nearly one hundred and thirty years to build and that it was finished several times (sections were added at intervals along Corso Vennuci [64]) accounts for the waving line of the east façade which became one of its most pleasing features [65]. The first architects of Benvenuto were natives of Perugia, Fra Bevignate, Giacomo de Servadio, and Giovanello di. The original plan of the building structure was probably square reaching from the present north facade down to where the great door now stands. If we examine the building from the back we gain an understanding of its organic construction; the location of the first palace became a nucleus from which the present building grew. This first palace extended on the north side three windows from the corner of Vennuci and on the east side ended after the tenth window from the Piazza.

The citizens took great interest in the building of their public palace and many private houses and churches were pulled down in order to make room for it. As with the decoration of the Duomo, a neighbouring town, Bettona was stripped of her marbles to supply the Priori with pillars and friezes. Think of it as involuntary recycling. Different portions of the structure were given to various guilds within



the city to decorate. The principal door, which was dedicated to St. Louis of Toulouse and the chapel were decorated by the merchant's guild. The door is carved in grey stone called 'pietra serna' which always looks slightly worn and dusty. On this dramatic doorway the emblematic heraldry of the towns three patron saints is carved: St. Ercolano, St. Costanzo and St. Louis of Toulouse, the last of these being the patron saint of the Palace. The two lions which support the pillars are symbols of the Guelf cause [66]. Passing through this doorway leads into a grand hallway where a staircase leads into the rooms of the palace above. In former times there were steps and persons of distinction rode up on horseback to the council chamber. The chamber was one of the largest in Italy measuring 27 x 14 meters, its roof supported by 8 wide arches [67].

An open staircase leads up to the north entrance of the palace relating a beautiful composition [68]. The pulpit projecting here was part of the Church of San Searo that once occupied this site [69]. When the priori expanded in 1298 this piece of the church was absorbed into the construction. Citizens were called to these broad stairs by trumpet and bells to discuss the business of the day. It was also up this stair that



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the Podesta and Prior proceeded in their long gowns and medallions. The principal door through which the Priori probably emerged is guarded by two great beasts -- a gryphen and a lion, emblems of the city and the Guelfs. These were originally made for a fountain in the square but in 1398 the fountain was destroyed and a little later the beasts were hoisted into their present position. In the warring days of Perugia, long chains and keys hung from their claws; these keys had been won after battle, from the justice hall in Siena. The door with the brazen beasts above it leads straight into the Sala dei Notari, a vaulted hall whose ceiling is covered with frescoes. This large hall was given by the lawyers of Perugia in 1583 who had purchased it and the chambers below. They redecorated their new quarters and did all their business there until early in the 19th century. The room is now used for public concerts and lectures which it accommodates with grace and acoustical accomplishment. The street which runs from the Piazza down into the Via Priori is still called Via della Gabbia because of the large iron cage which used hang above the upper windows of the Palace. In this cage the Perugians imprisoned thieves and state enemies and there are stories of priests being left to die through exposure to the winter weather. A large open air prison looked into Via Del Gabbia which was



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a large cavern and here prisoners sat at the mercy of all who passed by. Separate windowless, undrained, and unaired cells were built into the massive walls where the most unfortunate were sent to pay for their crime. The roughest treatment devised by the Perugians was simply to throw criminals out from the upper story of the Palazzo. For those who were spared this death there was another which was to be hung from iron posts called lumiere, specially placed for this purpose on the facade of the Palazzo. Imagine if you can, the butchered men hanging, their blood dripping while the unforgiving citizens of Perugia called for more vengeance.

The bell tower over the Corso was an addition to the 1340 expansion [70].

When complete, the building's volume was sufficient to house, entertain, and provide offices for every civic and public body in the city. The buildings did not receive their Guelf battlements until the Papal rule of the late 16th century.

The bell tower over the Corso was an addition to the 1340 expansion. Today these functions have dispersed



while new ones have taken their place. In 1860 the building was thoroughly renovated.

Fonte Maggiore

The problem of supplying water to the city of Perugia had troubled her citizens for many years. Enemies could easily exploit the fact that without a dependable supply of water she was especially vulnerable to sieges. Earlier attempts to bring water via aqueduct from the reservoirs north of the city had ended in failure. Like other civic efforts, when the job was finally undertaken with proper resources of men, time, and money, the result was a success. Water first flowed from the present fountain on February 10, 1280 and we can imagine the pride this caused local citizens. There are details of elaborate guardianship laws for the fountain which at one time had eight troughs surrounding the present basin.

The plan of the fountain was supplied by Fra Bevignate and it was he who called in other sculptors to aid in its construction. In 1227 Bevignate applied to Claude Anjou for permission to employ the Florentine Arnolfini di Lapo to help design the second basin. In the

same year a certain Rosso, believed to be from Venice, was invited to contribute his skills.

The fountain consists of three circular basins which decrease in circumference as they ascend [71]. The two lower basins are surrounded by panels designed by Nicholas Pisano and carried out by his son Giovanni. The lower one carries bas-reliefs dealing with the development of the individual and how society is composed. The panels present Aesop's fables, scenes of domestic life, legends, months of the year, tales of the Old Testament and the Umbrian Saints, all intermingling around the The upper basin relates to the constitution of society. This circumference like a medieval encyclopedia basin, with panels fastened on the lower basin, rises up on a series of slender columns which give the fountain a welcome lightness of appearance.

These two marble basins are crowned by a third cup of bronze slender columns giving the fountain a welcome lightness of appearance which tops a stone stem with the figures of three nymphs rising from the dish with the ever present gryphen over their heads. Some historians suggest a significance to the



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orientation of all the scenes upon the lower cisterns. This may be so, although today their relationship is difficult to follow.

In 1948 the entire fountain was cleaned and restored to its original form.

Canonica

The last building described separately here is the Canonica, or as it was called by chroniclers of the time, the “Vatican of Perugia”.

Although no longer decorated as it must have been, the sheer mass of the structure insures its stature as one of the finest medieval relics of Perugia [72]. It stands beside the Duomo, in places with walls as thick as eight feet while the rooms inside are enormous. The cloister is relatively modern but the beautiful open air staircase that leads from it down to the Piazza Cavallotti is probably very much the same as it was when vacationing popes would descend on it, riding their horses. In those days the Magistrates and the Podesta would share this building as a residence. There is one story of how when the building had



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caught fire the only liquid at hand for quenching the flames was that from the immense wine cellars.

First Approach

Approaching the Piazza from Via Volte (Street of the Vaults) we pass beneath a row of charred arches. They belong to the original Palazzo de Podesta which burned down in 1543 and now stands like a skeleton to testify to its former presence. Via Volte was cut through these remains to connect the lower part of the town with the Piazza. The little church (the Maesta del Volte), appearing on our right with small doorway standing alone, is now closed. At its side and in the open we see a small doorway standing alone, a portal made of red and white stone serving no visible purpose [73]. If we pass through this doorway, which once formed part of the church (destroyed for the palace's expansion) we would see a house made from a tower, supported by three massive columns that help span over the space to the neighbouring building which dates from the 13th and 14th century. Other houses of this age complete the tiny courtyard.

This walk is useful because in a brief time and space

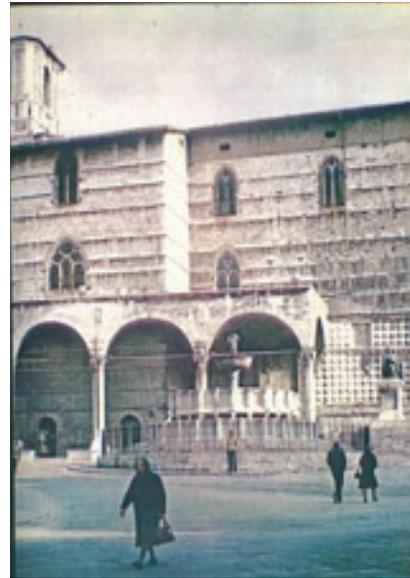


we absorb the force with which Perugia was formed. There is a Piranasian quality, as well as a dark and mysterious force that causes one to imagine death as only the sharply lit medieval street can. If cities have nightmares then Perugia has had its share of sleepless nights.

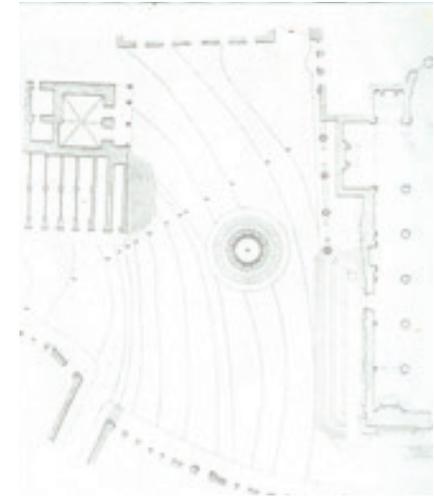
Continuing on Via Volte we are made to turn and ascend simultaneously so as to complete half a spiral and we find ourselves facing east looking directly at the Fonte Maggiore. The elegant fountain surprisingly calm after our experience, rests ten meters away in the space of Piazza Novembre IV [74].

Piazza Novembre IV

Piazza Novembre IV is a magnificent Piazza yet there is not the usual medieval sense of enclosure [75]. There is no dominant facade, no simple form to the confinement nor an obvious focus to the space. Texture of stone changes from building to building as does the surface of the paving stones. The facades are not in any way unified. This is a celebration of textural diversity arrived at through centuries of conflict. The Piazza is neither carefully



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paved nor lit. Terrain slopes away from the south wall of the Duomo, down and out the wide opening of Corso Venucci. Buildings snake timidly around the far eastern edge as if wishing to avoid the place altogether.

What is it that constructs the grand character of this Piazza? [76]

Two factors--the first is time which has been through her like a hammer. Not a stone from the lowest paving to the highest sill has been spared the splash of blood. The church has more of a beard than a facade; her steps look like a device designed to prevent the stone facade from being mistaken for a wall under construction. In contrast, the Palazzo sits like a fine old rock, its walls dark from 600 years of life, its mass transmitting a feeling of dignity and respect. Between these two rivals lies Fonte Maggiore. Fonte Maggiore is our second factor. With the fountain identified the following relationships come into play [77].



Plan

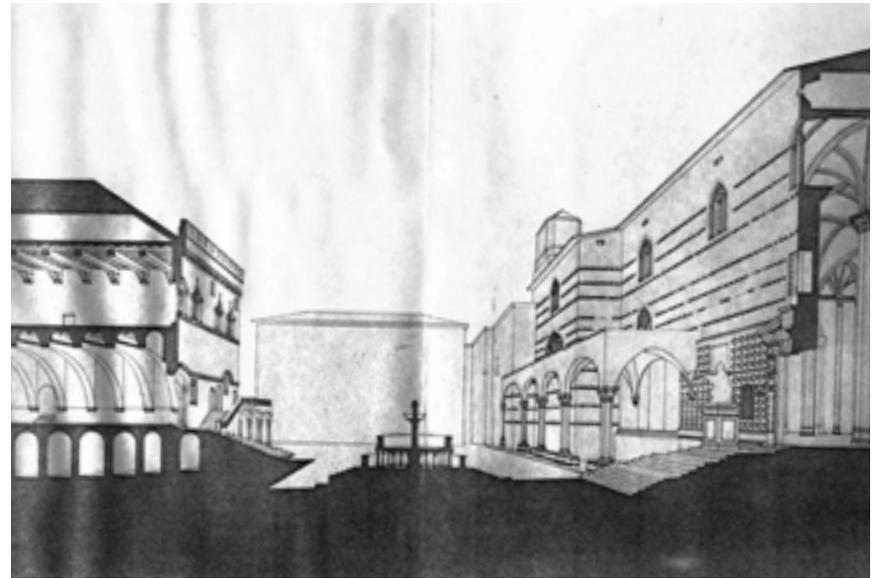
The fountain is positioned slightly closer to the Duomo than it is to the Palazzo. This factor tips the centre of gravity for the entire space. Without becoming a focus the fountain sets in motion the attraction and repulsion of all the surrounding elements [78].

Form

The fountain is round in plan. Its outermost rim is a bench of "stone with a fence of sharp spears above. Within this border are three basins of diminishing size, the uppermost resting on a slender stone column. The eastern wall of the buildings is felt to sweep through the Piazza, banking off the fountain and returning any energy to the space that may have been lost in the slope to Corso Venucci. In an unconscious and subtle way the fountain plugs this opening and energy is gathered and returns to circulate in the Piazza [79].

Mass

Whether sitting on the Duomo steps, descending from the Palazzo, or crossing the Piazza one feels included



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in the Piazza. Perhaps it is by our identification with the fountain which sits softly in the void suggesting rendezvous and repose. The fountain is a key to our inhabiting the space, a simple suggestion about how to belong in the void.

Identify the fountain as the kingpin and a host of minor energies release and begin to quicken. The Loggia of three and a half bay built by Braccio is well suited to joining the incomplete work of the Duomo with the Canonica.

This arcade element is reflected in a reduced scale beneath the stairs of the Palazzo's north facade [80]. The oversized steps rise from the Piazza like a miniature Mayan temple before the top is pinched by marble balustrade. The path continues up another level where the entire movement is caught in a pulpit [81]. This projection when occupied by an individual becomes a tiny piazza, the entire space for a moment gathered into the scale and authority of a single human being. Standing here an incredible power can be sensed.



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The pulpit has its mate across the Piazza, on the Duomo, just above what looks like an experiment in pink and white tiling to the right of the entrance. St. Bernardino's pulpit, as it is called, is richly carved and moulded yet looks as though it were shot from a gun against the horizontally coursed facade. The facade will change its colour according to the light but we can expect the range to move between a dark grey and brownish beige. The courses which stretch right across the structure handsomely relate the roof line to the horizon of the Piazza. The grounding of the Cathedral is consummated in a simple fashion by the travertine steps which face south and functions as an urban scaled bench welcoming you to the Piazza. The streets which spin out in different directions and different levels accentuate the changing glimpses into and out from the Piazza.

Conclusion

Perugia founded law schools and universities early in her history. History informs us the combatants have left this arena but we can see their battles worked deep into the texture of stone. The unconscious formal factor in this Piazza is passion. With an almost

wild instinct for survival, Perugia has always fought fiercely. She not only produced great artists but in matters of religion she is reputed to have taken flagellation to its wildest extremes. Witches were burned in the Piazza until prayer all but dried up and only the most feverish superstition remained.

Perugia has always been fearless. She rode bravely through Umbrian space and conquered all of her enemies. And though this defiance and power happened long ago, she seems as proudly filled by these acts as any circumstance in her present life. This means that when you walk down Corso Venucci you feel empowered by the city. Somehow the space communicates instructions governing sophisticated urban behaviour and in short order tourists wear a civic confidence that any Italian citizen naturally takes for granted. Perugia never retreated or quit - which were the alternatives as I see it. Perugia mounted her passions; most of the others dug in.

Today a large language school at Perugia University insures that the Piazza is full of uniquely costumed young people from Africa, Asia, and Europe. The city teaches elusive qualities of urban pleasure.

There is no problem in terms of inhabiting this great plaza. Sitting with dozens of people on the steps of the Duomo, it is as though Perugia has transmuted her medieval energies and arrived at some sort of modern consciousness. The Piazza is open to this change; able to grab and let go of those who inhabit her space in a timeless way.

*Piazza Del Comune,
Assisi*

First Facts

Mount Subasio is best known as the home of Assisi and Assisi [82] is best known as the birthplace and home of Saint Francis patron saint of Italy. Since Etruscan times people of this region have settled themselves on hilltops for reasons of security. Assisi presents an exception to this for she has chosen to lie closer to the foot of Mount Subasio than to the peak [83].

Viewed from a distance we can see Assisi spreads along south-facing east-west contours while Mount Subasio rises strongly behind reaching 4,000 feet above the Umbrian Plain. The mountain dominates the fertile plain and Assisi resembles a splash of light upon her green slope. It is Mount Subasio which plays another role in the setting of Assisi; that of supplier of building materials. The stone which Assisi is built of was quarried from Mount Subasio and the mountain provides an endless supply of rose coloured stone. Today masons can be found working in the quarry on the north side of Mt. Subasio. An almost mystical tone of light springs from these stones allowing Assisi to change colours as the sun travels through its arc. A piazza or street that might



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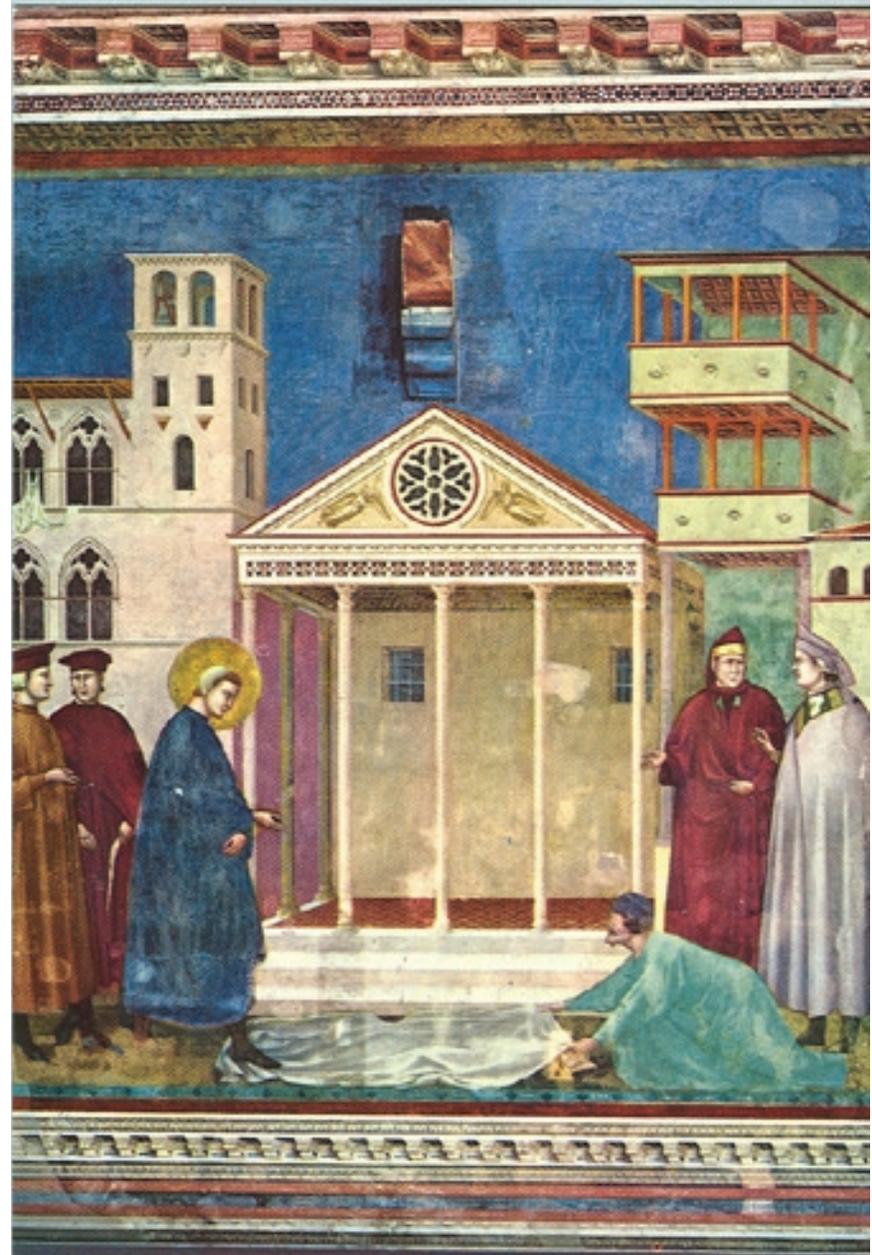


appear flesh coloured in the morning will then appear saffron and then perhaps a pale grey late in the afternoon before turning rose coloured at dusk.

This is a very well preserved medieval town. Additions to and subtractions from her architecture have been a matter open to review for many years. This means any industrial buildings have been located in the rarely visited town of Bastia in the plain, while population growth is accommodated around the corner, so to speak, of Mount Subasio in a new village. The year 1926, the 700th anniversary of St. Francis's death, initiated the great tourist flows that along with more serious religious pilgrimages are now Assisi's main source of income.

Umbria Mystica

St. Francis came from a bourgeois family; his father's house and 84 shop were just off Piazza Cammah and their position is now enshrined by a church whose funding came from Philip 111 of Spain in 1619 [84]. It is relevant to our entire experience of Umbria to see her long monastic tradition.



As Rome was falling in the 7th century, St. Benedict was establishing his first monastery in Norcia, itself a hermit among Umbrian hill towns. He began to plant the seeds of a new Western spiritualism that St. Francis would bring to flower six centuries later. Briefly, the rule of Saint Benedict asserted not only to forswear the world but also to serve and heal it. Work (by this he meant field work) was to take more time than church service. This was a spiritual breakthrough in the adoption of the monastic ideal to Western Europe. In the face of rampant corruption he introduced an idea of service where monks were bound to communities for life through their good deeds. Nowhere did the Benedictine tradition take firmer root than in his native Umbria. The seed began to germinate as the cities lay unconscious of one another in the deep sleep of the dark ages.

“The kingdom of heaven is at hand. Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out devils. Freely ye have received, freely give. Provide neither gold nor silver nor brass in your purses, nor scrimp for your journey, neither two coats, neither shoes nor staff. . .” . So read the priest from the gospel of the day in 1209. The listener of interest was Frances Bernardone. This was to be the passage that would

initiate Frances to his life’s vocation. After a period in Assisi where he repaired two crumbling churches he began to travel and preach throughout Umbria. When he was seen approaching, town bells would ring to announce the arrival of the good word. All would leave their houses and go to the Piazza where on stairs or a low wall St. Francis would speak to the people not with the authority of a priest but with the kindness of a friend. His message never wavered; practice “simplicity and love”.

His unadorned life and regard for all living things quickly became legendary. His message is best appreciated when seen against the background of medieval conditions. Not only was starvation, disease, and tyranny the day to day reality but the popes authority was increasingly corrupted and undermined by greed, lust for power and arrogance.

The most local result of St. Francis’ preaching is that party strife and intercede war diminished. In 1228 Assisi and Perugia (these two had been the most bitter of enemies) formed an alliance which included lands of Spoleto. The town of Assisi remained Guelf for the whole of the 13th century. It was during this

century that church building flourished and palaces of the Priori and Podesta were built in the Piazza Communale. Violence returned in the 14th and 15th centuries so that when peace finally did emerge again Assisi was exhausted, and lapsed into the condition of an out of the way provincial centre.

It is necessary to outline the work of St. Francis because in investigating the Piazza Communale one is confronted by an atmosphere which has no apparent explanation unless something of the spiritual intention of this man is allowed to exist. It is as though the message and vision of St. Francis crystallized over time and the built world started to express his deeds and message.

Roman Foundation

Before we arrive in the Piazza there is one more layer we must pass through to sense the history of Assisi. Though of no great military importance in Roman times, Assisi today possesses some fine relics from the Roman period. Many of these are difficult to identify because medieval structures have incorporated Roman foundations and walls

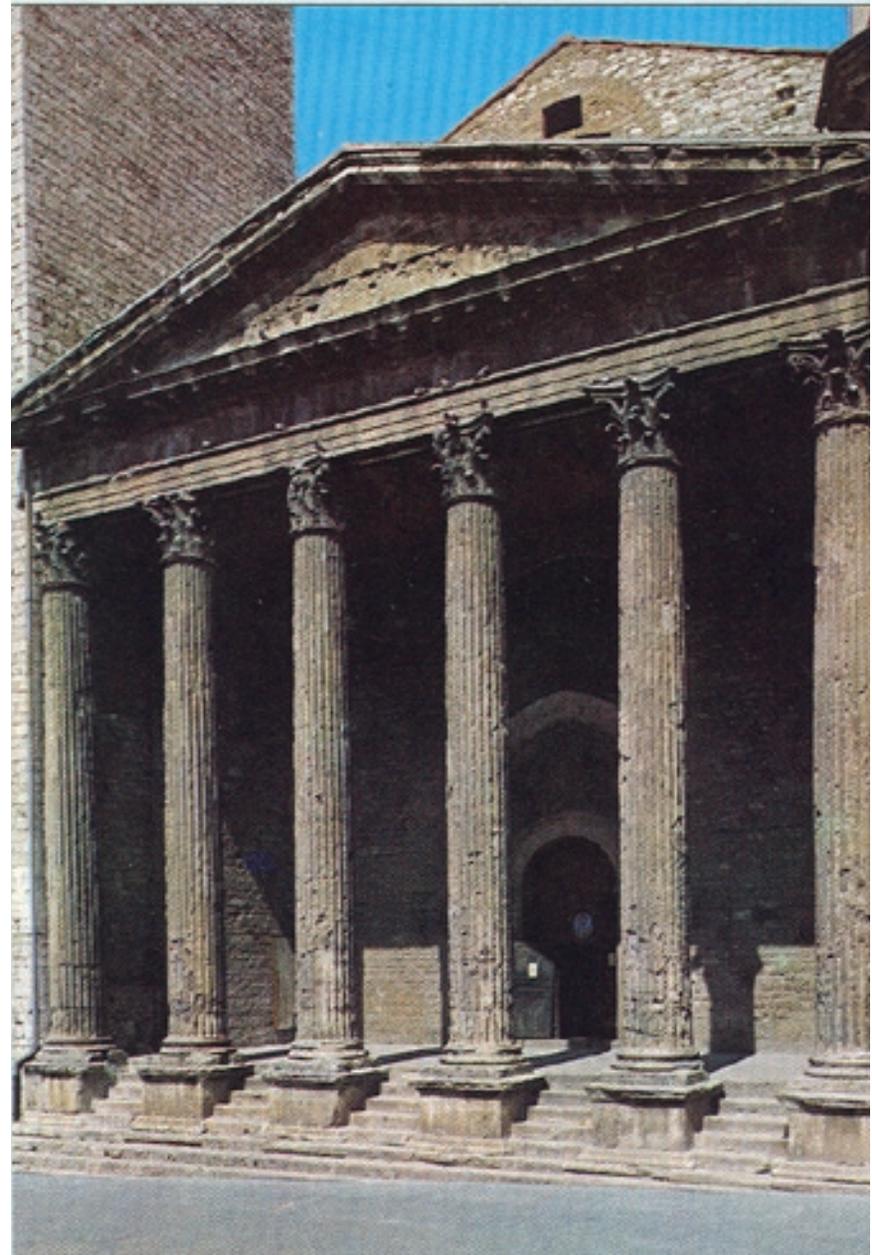
into themselves. There is a Roman amphitheatre whose perimeter foundations now support a block of medieval housing. The mimic of sea fights was a popular entertainment in Roman times and took place in this amphitheatre. Water was carried away by means of a drain which extends from Piazza Nuova to a garden behind Saint Rufino. By the Middle Ages these drains made fine escape routes, especially when the Baglioni from Perugia were raiding the town. The most interesting inheritance is the Roman temple of Minerva which stands in Piazza Communale. As we approach Piazza Commune by Via Portico on our left is a tiny pulpit where St. Benedict once preached. This was once the side of the church San Nicolo. This church was rectangular with two naves from the 11th century and it now houses the post office. The crypt of the church has been turned into a Roman museum.

A Romanesque vault forms the entrance to the Roman reservoir. To the right of the entrance is a long corridor which takes us into what was the main square of the town in ancient times. A whole side of it is in a remarkably good state of preservation.

We can imagine the temple of Minerva raised on

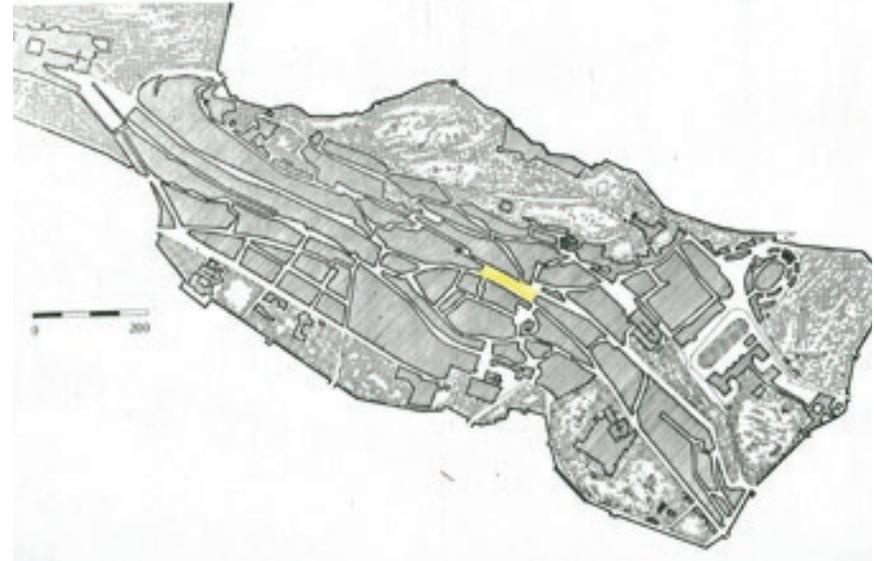
its own terrace above the level of the square, with Castor and Pollox grouped with horses in the centre [85]. Two doorways lead from the square beneath the temple's terrace, presumably to a staircase that emerged from under the temple's columns. These two doorways are intact for us to see in this corridor, one a little shorter than the other probably because of alterations made in the 15th century. We must imagine that the square extended in width about 45 yards beyond the present square. A useful measure of the square is the long gutter near the wall into which water from the entire square flowed. If we stand at the far end of the corridor and look back we see the gentle slope towards the gutter. There are grills over our head where cars and pedestrians pass, which gives a good idea of the former depth of the Piazza versus the current one. Where the corridor widens there is a long stone platform.

This is the tribune where the seven magistrates sat. By going down a corridor that once faced the platform we can see the actual site of the Castor and Pollux sculpture, which was given to the people of Assisi by a private family. It has a base with four columns and an inscription which tells of how a banquet dedication was held. This inscription describes how



much money was spent on the Decurions (members of the town's senate), how much on the sexvirate (six government officials), and how much on the people, eleven in total. If we walk past the tribune we come to the latest archeological excavations on this site done in 1959. Above us now are the fountains and shops at the east side of the Piazza. There is a plaque which describes alterations and repairs to the Temple. We then come to a square fountain or bath beneath the level of the square, with steps leading down to it and a perfectly intact travertine arch above. Looking carefully we see that the lips of the trough have been carefully built up to prevent water from leaking. Looking back we see that the forum wall is still perfectly aligned though it is of course now a foundation to all the buildings of the Piazza.

Another fountain lies beyond the one we see and has yet to be excavated. The gutter now makes a turn indicating the forum has reached its full length. Here signs of shops appear, their thresholds still intact. Their shutters secured in exactly the same way that is used on the Piazza above. Here too, vases of wine and cooking oil were packed in moist sand and kept at a cool temperature.



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Piazza del Comune

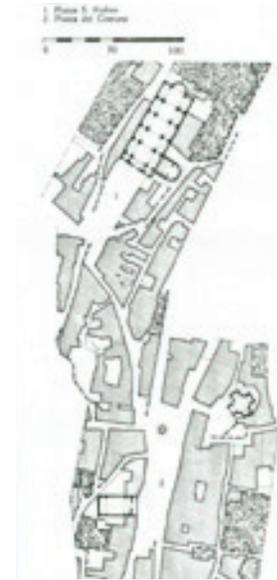
Looking at a plan of Piazza del Comune we can see that in [86] orientation the space imitates the arrangement of the town. In plan we recognize the volume as an elongated rectangle, the south-facing edge [87] less regular than the north-facing edge, with various buildings filling [88] the east and west sides respectively. This Piazza operates like a pedestrian transit hub, a central station to the town with routes beginning, ending, and continuing around and through the space which makes it an ideal location for a market. This is evidence of what is at once satisfying about the medieval space. It is at once practical, straightforward and yet slightly mysterious.

Again, if we consider Piazza san Rufino and Piazza Commune as a pair we fulfill the example Zucker describes [89-90]:

In this way one of the most typical features of medieval cities originated--a feature which became of the greatest aesthetic importance for the town as a whole: the parallel existence of two separate squares. One of them was located before the church as a parvis was otherwise adjacent to it--the other a certain distance away as a market square. From



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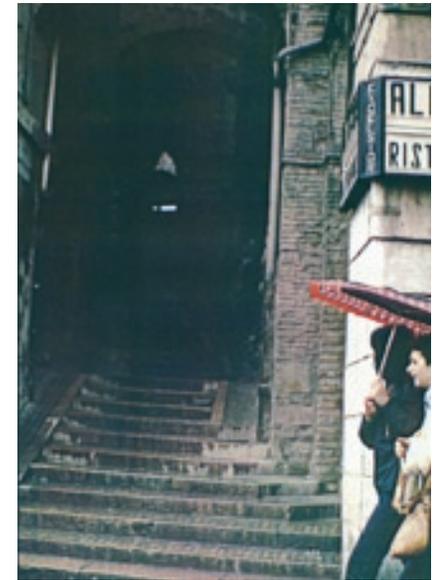
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the latter only higher parts of the structure with its towers and steeples would be visible.^{1b}

This is exactly the situation in Assisi today. These two places do not have direct impact upon one another nor do they climax special approaches. They however, begin to express the diversity that space could be invested with. The so-called parvis is dominated by one building from which entrance and exit was a very precise affair. In contrast Piazza del Comune is made of the unbridled forces of medieval life. One force attempts to maximize the possibility of movement and display of market goods, the other accommodates assembly and rituals related to the church.

Standing in the piazza there is no rigid sense of enclosure. In part, this is ensured by the large numbers of small scale openings (I counted ten) that permit entry to and exit from the space. This not only enhances the flow through the market place, it also creates a surprising sense of freedom and permeability throughout the stone plaza [91].



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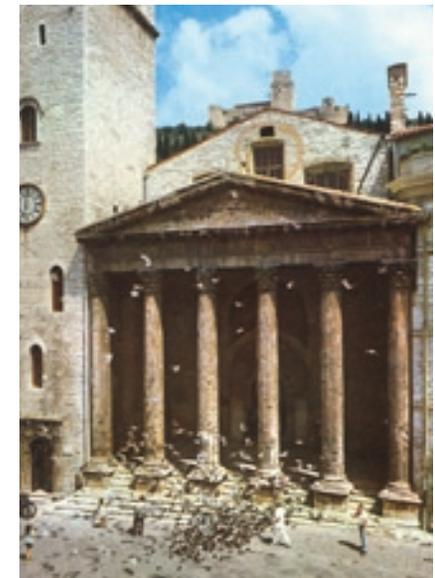
Allowing free movement of people arouses a strong sense of one's independence within the town's physical structure. Generally speaking these routes descend from north to south while the east- west passages enter and exit on different levels. These passages leave the Piazza floor with a series of warps which ease the meeting of these elevations and further break down the sense of a singular space [92]. Imagine the various ascending and descending routes crowded with every sort of produce and products, and those who did not have a stall in the market spreading their wares upon the stone ramps and steps. Because of this permeability, in one moment the space is busy and full, the next moment the space is empty. This magical interplay of fullness and emptiness is made all the more satisfying the soft unblinking tone of rose light thrown off by the local stone.

In the Piazza today it is the south-facing wall of buildings which engages us at first. Particularly, our attention is drawn to the strange coupling of two structures, a medieval tower and the Roman temple of Minerva [93]. Neither conceit nor respect is hinted at in this juxtaposition; the contrast is so genuine as to seem dumb [94].



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It is an brilliant design decision that predates formal architectural training. If a display of medieval authority were sought it would have been more decisive to destroy the temple. In the 13th century it could have been superstition which thwarted this move in Assisi. Not superstition in any simple sense. As the Jungian scholar Edward Edinger has remarked, "To be primitive in relation to the outer world is to be superstitious; but to be primitive in relation to our inner world is to be wise." The temple remains, both surprising and re assuring.

Perhaps what was desired was to temper the obvious architectural power of the temple. The source this power could be drawn from was exercised in the medieval tower. We know this tower well, for from any street of Assisi it provides a reference point and guides us in relation to the Piazza. It seems that the beauty of Umbrian architecture of the Middle Ages [95] stems from its modesty, which is almost an economy. It is as though the energies consumed in construction so spent the maker as to leave no energy for him to transmit upon the surface of the structure ornament or ostentation. These buildings constantly gain merit by their simple existence rather than by their significances.



The technical beauty of the Temple of Minerva is so foreign to this flow that a strange circuit is awakened. Imagine all the facades which form the Piazza circumference connected wire-like to form an electrical circuit, using Minerva as their circuit breaker.

We begin scanning with Minerva and soon are among the jostling textures of stone, and strange rhythm of door and window openings, until we have forgotten all traces of technical beauty. The usual narrow domestic medieval facade does not yield to analysis by systems of proportion or by comparison with ancient models. Several [96] of them visible in one sweeping glance (really possible only in a piazza) gives us a full, almost collaged impression. Then we scan round to the temple again and the entire circuit is rekindled with a strange new artfulness.

It is a fascinating instance of the environment responding to an [97] individual form, for Minerva (actually just a portico) in the midst of a score of medieval buildings, transmits its technical beauty over the entire space, yet never dominates so that other architectures recede. Goethe visited the temple



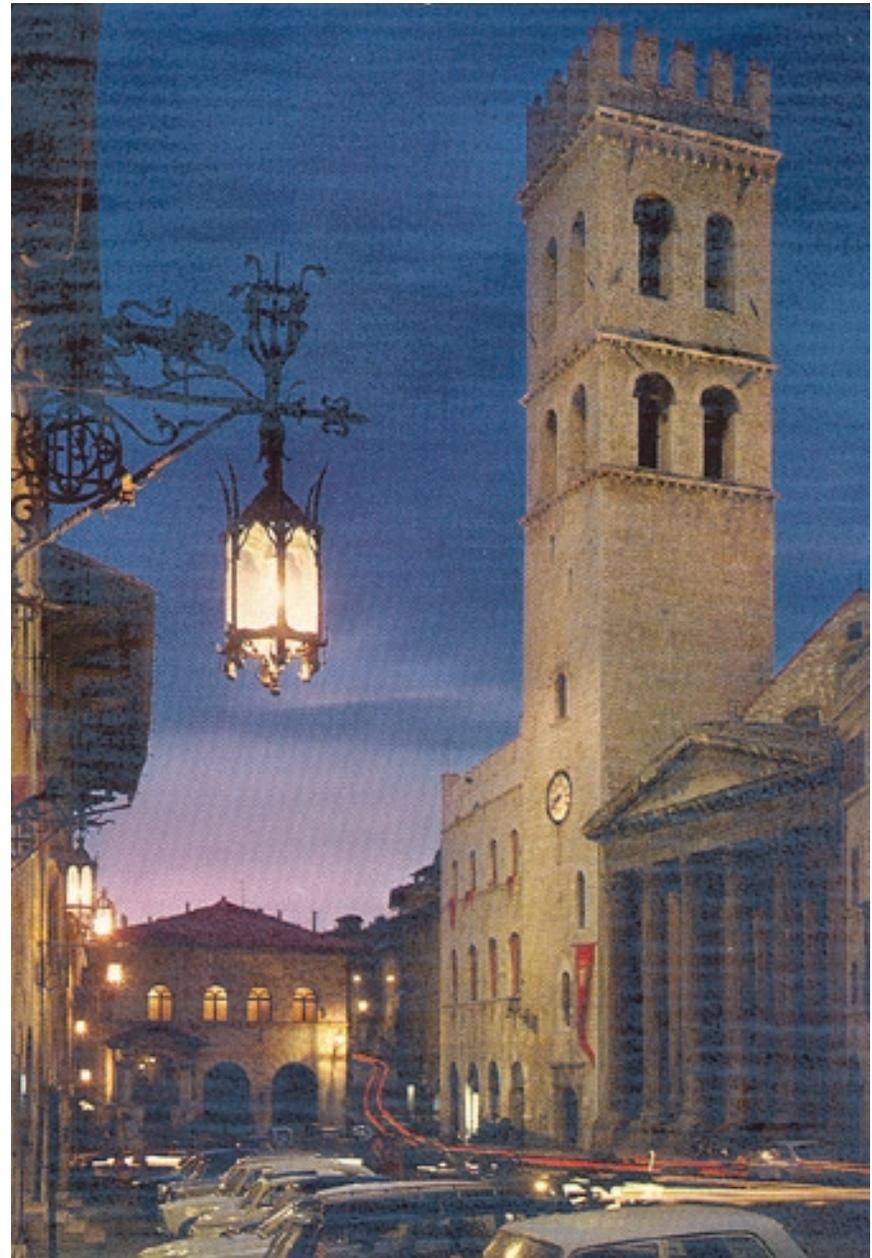
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and his impressions are as follows [98]:

“From Palladio and Volkmann I had gathered that a beautiful temple of Minerva, of the time of Augustus was still standing and perfectly preserved. Asking a good-looking youth where Maria della Minerva was, he led me up through the city which stands on a hill. At length we reached the oldest part of the town, and I beheld the noble building standing before me, the first complete monument of ancient days that I had seen. A modest temple as befitted so small a town, yet so perfect, so finely conceived, that its beauty would strike one anywhere. But above all its position! Since reading in Vitruvius and Palladio how cities ought to be built and temples and other public edifices situated, I have a great respect for these things... The temple stands half way up the mountain, just where two hills meet together, on a piazza which to this day is called the Piazza... In old times there were probably no houses opposite to prevent the view. Abolish them in imagination, and one would look towards the south over a most fertile land, whilst the sanctuary of Minerva would be visible from everywhere. Probably the plan of the streets dates from long ago as they follow the conformation and sinuosities of the mountain. The temple is not in the centre of the Piazza, but is so placed that a striking, though foreshortened, view of it is obtained by the traveller coming from Rome. Not only should the building itself be drawn but also its



fine position. I could not gaze my full of the facade; how harmonious and genial is the conception of the artist... Unwillingly I tore myself away, and determined to draw the attention of all architects to it so that correct drawings may be made; for once again have I been convinced that tradition is untrustworthy. Palladio, on whom I relied, gives us, it is true, a picture of this temple, but he cannot have seen it, as he actually places pedestals on the level whereby the columns are thrown up too high, and we have an ugly Palmyrian monstrosity instead of what is a tranquil, charming object, satisfying to both the eye and the understanding. It is impossible to describe the deep impression I received from the contemplation of this edifice, and it will produce everlasting fruit. ”⁶

The temple possesses a scientific beauty which, if we wish, we can dismantle and assemble in our mind's eye. I've always felt it was the verticle that was worked with and drawn first. The deeply fluted columns have such different destiny than the shallow Coursed entablature. The verticle and horizontal quantities are gathered by The gable whose peak is the perfect sum of forces.

The staircase is interesting and is cleverly prolonged in the intercolumnium to occupied less space in



relation to the narrowness of the Piazza. The classical language is surprisingly fresh and vivid today. No doubt when the level of the Piazza was such that the temple lorded over the space, its public presentation must have had a tremendous power.

The Roman temple of Minerva became Church Saint Maria Sopra Minerva in 1539 and a century later received its present Baroque interior by Giacomo Girgetti. Beside Church Saint Maria Sopra Minerva is the Torre. The Torre del Popolo is first mentioned in 1276 and a plaque indicates that the quadrangular structure with Ghibelline battlements was completed in 1305. The doorway was designed by Cecco de Bernardino in 1524. To its left is a plaque which relates medieval measures for bricks with measures for slates and is dated 1348 [99]. The adjoining Palazzo del Podesta was complete in 1282--its Guelf battlements date from the 1927 restoration. The building is now used by the local police.

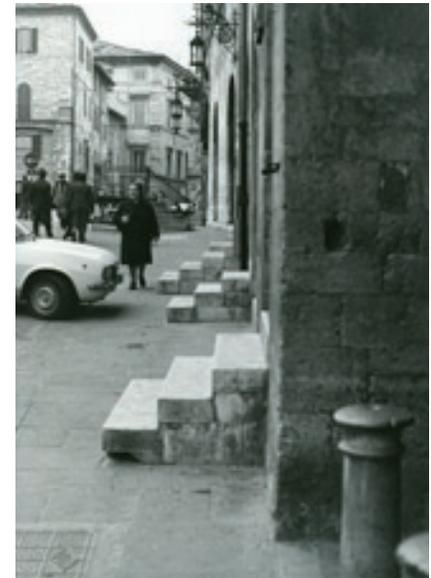
In the beginning of the 13th century the civil affairs of Assisi had assumed such large proportions that it was impossible to transact business in the unsheltered quarters of the Piazza as had been done. And the



citizens determined to build a Palazzo Publico. A house was bought belonging to the same Benedictine abbot of Mount Subasio who had given humble dwellings to St. Francis, and on its site they erected the present Municipal Palace which was enlarged in 1375 and again in the fifteenth century. Here the Priors and the Consuls ruled the citizens in the absence of a despot. The nucleus of the structure can be identified by its Guelf battlements. The growth of this building has spread to include nearly all the buildings on the south side of the Piazza, though upon their facades there is no sign of their common tenant.

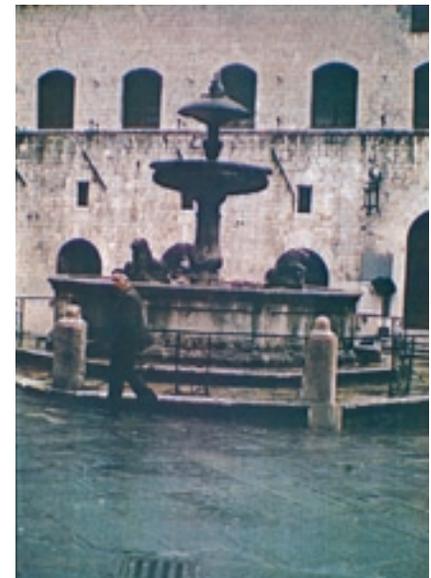
Of significance to the Piazza are the deep vaults which pierce this municipal mass and connect it with the lower part of Assisi [100].

The only trait of official function (besides the coat of arms of Assisi carved upon the facade) are the piles of steps that are deposited outside of each doorway. Fittingly the Palazzo Publico and Palazzo del Capitano del Popolo are situated on opposite sides of the Piazza [101]. It was their function to act as a drag upon each other in civil matters.



101

102



At the east end of the Piazza is a fountain that is in the same modest key The public buildings have projected [102]. The fountain features a large basin out of which rises a stone stem with two lesser cups. The construction is guarded at its base by three lions [103]. It rests upon a podium which absorbs into the Piazza the conflicting heights of the entrances on its 68 north and south edges. The podium is well suited to act as a meeting place and piazza scaled bench. The mass of the fountain is sufficient to draw attention from the enclosing facades, which is then distributed at a new scale. The slight increase of built density and its resultant activity at the east end of the Piazza gives the space its major organizing feature. The result is an even distribution of forces throughout the Piazza. Had the fountain been more centrally located this would have spoiled the balance.

Conclusion

The enclosure simply records the centuries of architectural values [104] while never attempting to consciously manipulate these in plan. But the result is hardly simple. What is memorable is the uncanny sense that St. Francis is the architect of this place. Beauty here is created by contrasts: public buildings, religious buildings and private houses stand together



in service of the public realm. Their individual height and widths meet in sheer connection to one another, only a common boundary connects and disciplines them. There was obviously no special feeling for exterior space; it seems the membrane has so forgotten its centre that one finds in this Piazza a deep patience which sometimes makes it feel anonymous.

Though no longer a busy market, the Piazza remains the town's meeting place. Its position is a constant to all streets, pathways, and churches. This position insures a lively flow of residents, tourists and monks who seem to quietly materialize out of the rose coloured stone, cross the space and then disappear again. The narrow openings onto the dark paths which animate the space allow people to come and go like a thought. Piazza del Comune is a 69 simple space. Possibly its interest to us lies in the fact that such a simple space, by being in a town of supreme religious importance, has come down to us intact, with all its modesty and relative architectural unimportance. Somehow it is satisfying to experience the home of the greatest saint is humble and that it serves us freely rather than demands anything from us. A perfect offering, everything quietly points to something greater than any one could build.



Conclusion

When these medieval towns reached their zenith in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, the world was imagined as centre of that greatest of spaces: the universe. In fact, many people still reasoned that the earth was flat. Thus, the birth of Copernicus in 1436 is a useful way to mark the beginning of the end of medieval space consciousness. When the work of Copernicus was published in 1543 the earth and all her creatures were finally put into space. Or to say it the other way around, space became alive. We were not only being asked to live on earth but in space.

The over scaled sculptural figures found in Piazza Signoria in Florence catch this new spirit. Here are our new instructions regarding our position in relation to space. We need look no further the gods on their stone pedestals. Each figure stands confidently in space. And this invites us to do the same.

All the world's a stage,

And all the men and women merely players:

They have their exits and their entrances;

And one man in his time plays many parts,

- W. Shakespeare As You Like It 2/7

Medieval architecture is fascinating to watch because space seems born but not quite alive. More than we might at first appreciate, this still "space" is the essence of the medieval piazza rather than that which is space forming or space occupying. In medieval piazzas the fundamental value of the space is found in the way wall and floor surfaces meet and the clarity with which they define and enclose space.

Our instinctual need to be in a limited and static space is satisfied. In this sense the nature of medieval space can be said to be "arresting". As we walk through medieval towns there is never a formal announcement of an impending piazza. When we enter the piazza we are not directed towards an object or an abstract point. There is no moment of formal manipulation. There is just presence. The relationship from one void to another is one of juxtaposition--we are simply IN or OUT.

This relationship exists for the single piazza as well as for adjacent spaces. It seems that perspectival theory led to an antithesis development - that of "driving" space. Rather than a juxtaposition between places we have a transition. We begin to anticipate reading an

architectural language to discover impending events or objects. We are being transported through space rather than being encouraged to dwell in it. Upon entering a clearing we are, as it were, commissioned to move through it towards an object or an abstract point. Walls, floors, and objects are so active as to exclude us from experiencing being in space.

In these spaces we are not free to experience what the medieval piazza might have been proposing in seed form, motion without advance. Each piazza is a contemporaneous event where by not being moved or manipulated we can be still, and begin to watch events outside ourselves. This seed was never explored and therefore the necessary subtlety was not developed. Intuitively, I wonder if theories of perspective were handled by scientists of the Renaissance with the same respect our equivalent citizens now afford to nuclear energy and the possibilities of atomic physics.

Exit

The medieval piazza was formed in the same way that planets cooled into spheres or a species adapt

to the evolving realities of their environment. The most elemental forces of life were at work and it is these unbridled energies which impart a severe yet magical charm to the piazza. This ingredient disappeared as forces were gradually mastered and harnessed. Designers received new tools from science, art, and technology and a new sense of space was the inevitable result. Of the medieval piazza~ a passage from Rilke spreads out the accrued Nature of time, space, memory, and attention in a way I admire:

“My purpose is to awaken memories in you which are not yours--which are older than you, to renew connections and renew relationships which lie in the distant past.”

He goes on to say, two sentences later:

But when I attempt to visualize my task, it becomes clear to me that it is not people I have to speak of but things. Things. When I say the word (do you hear?) there is silence; the silence which surrounds things. All movement subsides and becomes contour--and out of the past and future time something permanent is formed: space, the great calm of objects which know no urge. ⁸

Carved directly out from the living mass of the medieval town, the piazza is intimate and feels made as much by stories as by stone. Nothing is hidden in these places and over time these settings naturally socialize us and encourage us to do the same with others. Medieval space offers a genuine sense of homecoming. There is no tension between one space and another, no sense of manipulation. These spaces don't call for thinking so much as touching. The art of the medieval space is the direct and primal voice of enclosure.

These truly are outdoor rooms and are very easy to relate to the rooms we inhabit in our own homes offering a very direct link between what is private and what is public. Our lives are understood in spaces and circumstances that are defined and we accept these limits in exchange for something that can not be so easily measured. The restlessness born of living in a modern city, is nowhere felt as clearly as in the moments of repose and contentment that naturally gather in these places.

Notes

1. Paul Zucker, *Town and Square*, p.174.

1b. *Ibid.*, pp.80-81.

2. "Grounding or getting the patient in touch with reality--the ground he stands on..." p.40, *Bioenergetics*, A. Lowen M.D. Lowen demonstrates certain exercises which release energy accumulating and blocking the flow of energy through the body.

3. R. Laughton Douglas, *Architectural Review*, June 1903, p.203.

4. Bernard Berenson, *Central Italian Painters of the Renaissance*, pp.99 & 102.

5. These historical sketches are paraphrased from translated chronicles first written by medieval historians in *The History of Perugia* by W. Heywood.

6. L.D. Gordon, *The Story of Assisi*, pp.159, 302-303.

7. L.Mumford, *The City in History* , p.253.

8. Rainer Maria Rilke, *Selected Writings*, p.136.

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