Ducal display and the contested use of space in late sixteenth-century Venetian coronation festivals

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Festivals were interdisciplinary and, on occasion, international in scope. They drew on a rich classical heritage and developed a shared pan-European iconography as well as exploiting regional and site-specific features. They played an important part in local politics and the local economy, as well as international negotiations and the conscious presentation of power, sophistication and national identity.

The series, including both essay collections and monographs, seeks to analyse the characteristics of individual festivals as well as to explore generic themes. It draws on a wealth of archival documentary evidence, alongside the resources of galleries and museums, to study the historical, literary, performance and material culture of these extravagant occasions of state.
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In April 1597, the Ducal Palace in Venice was turned completely inside out. The palace functioned as both the seat of government and the residence of the doge. Under ordinary circumstances, its offices were the domain of members of the patriciate or political elite as well as secretaries, notaries and other bureaucrats—essentially a secondary elite—drawn from the ranks of the cittadini (citizens). Yet on Monday, 28 April 1597, patrician and cittadino had to make way for ordinary Venetians, or popolani, a category that included everyone who had no formal political role other than that of subject. That Monday, patrician magistrates handed the keys to their offices over to members of the guilds; two days later, eight patrician judges abandoned their law courts, fleeing the noise and disturbance produced by the guilds carrying out bencbes that normally provided seating for more than one thousand members of the patrician Great Council. Other councils had to relocate from one end of the palace to the other so that their rooms could be used as storage space for silverware, tapestries and other furnishings. The guilds had a week to prepare their festivities surrounding the ceremonial coronation of Dogareessa Morosina Morosini (1545-1614), wife of Doge Marino Guimani (1532-1605). (See Plates 7 and 8.)

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Venice has often been described as an urban theatre, with the waters of the canals and the lagoon lending a special theatrical quality to its striking festivals and ceremonies. Perhaps no other festival has attracted as much
attention as that organised for Morosini Morosini's coronation on 4, 5 and 6 May 1597.8 It was an exceptionally extravagant affair that in many ways jarred with Venetian republican civic culture. The ducal couple used effectively a regal image.9 The event impressed many thousands of spectators from Venice and beyond, while the doge made sure that printed festival books, paintings, engravings and other material objects kept its memory alive long afterwards.10 Both the unique character of the festival and the abundance of sources have aroused significant scholarly interest. The rich descriptions by Giovanni Rota, Dario Tuzio and Giovanni Stringa, especially, have been mined by those interested in the figure of the dogaressa, a rare female presence in the realm of ducal ambition, which clashed with the notion of the doge as an elected political figure, as put forward by Giorgio Morosini.11 Undoubtedly the doge and his wife used the festival to flaunt their ambitions with an audience of fellow patricians in mind. This chapter argues, however, that through its strategic use of space the festival also projected a message explicitly aimed at the thousands of spectators who were not part of Venice's political or cultural elite. The top-down model of festivals, ceremonies and rituals produced by an elite for a mute and largely passive audience consisting of – in Muri's words – the 'disenfranchised masses', has been replaced by one in which such events are seen as acts of communication, often conveying multiple messages, open to multiple interpretations, to multiple audiences.12 It is difficult, often impossible, to understand how spectators, both educated and uneducated, experienced and interpreted festivals.13

In contrast to earlier discussions of the festival, I will focus less on the dogaressa and more on the doge. This is not to say that Morosini Morosini did not have an exceptional role in the festival and probably also in its planning. By all accounts, Marino Grimani wanted to organise a feast that would do justice to his beloved wife of almost forty years, and she was its dazzling central figure.14 The doge, by contrast, was in visual terms almost exclusively the dazzling central figure. The ducal couple used effectively a regal image. The event impressed many thousands of spectators from Venice and beyond, while the doge made sure that printed festival books, paintings, engravings and other material objects kept its memory alive long afterwards. Both the unique character of the festival and the abundance of sources have aroused significant scholarly interest. The rich descriptions by Giovanni Rota, Dario Tuzio and Giovanni Stringa, especially, have been mined by those interested in the figure of the dogaressa, a rare female presence in the realm of ducal ambition, which clashed with the notion of the doge as an elected political figure, as put forward by Giorgio Morosini. Undoubtedly the doge and his wife used the festival to flaunt their ambitions with an audience of fellow patricians in mind. This chapter argues, however, that through its strategic use of space the festival also projected a message explicitly aimed at the thousands of spectators who were not part of Venice's political or cultural elite. The top-down model of festivals, ceremonies and rituals produced by an elite for a mute and largely passive audience consisting of – in Muri's words – the 'disenfranchised masses', has been replaced by one in which such events are seen as acts of communication, often conveying multiple messages, open to multiple interpretations, to multiple audiences. It is difficult, often impossible, to understand how spectators, both educated and uneducated, experienced and interpreted festivals. The 1597 coronation festival for Dogaressa Morosini Morosini, however, can be read as not just a statement of patrician ambition but also an explicit commentary on pressing social and political issues that involved the broader Venetian population.

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9 See, for instance, Pompeo Molmenti, La Dogaressa di Venezia (Turin: Roux e Faiveley, 1844), pp. 505-3; Muri, Civic Ritual, pp. 293-6; Bruce Wilson, 'Il bel sesso e l'austero Senat: A arte scenografiche nelle feste veneziane cinquecentesche', in A. Salicato, 1604, fols 280r-90r and 431 v-2v. For the role of the dogaressa in Venetian political ceremony, see Wilson, 'Il bel sesso'.
10 Henry Zerner, 'Looking for the Unknowable: The Visual Experience of Renaissance Fes­
tival', in J.R. Mulryne, Helen Watanabe-O'Kelly and Margaret Shearer (eds), Exploring Cultural History: Essays in Honour of Peter Burke (Farnham and Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2010), pp. 55-76.
12 According to the letters of papa nuncio Antonio Maria Gratiani, Biblioteca Museo Correr – Venezia (hereafter: BMC), Codice Morosini Grimani 358, c. 247.
completely absent: in a (failed) attempt to prevent dynastic posturing, strict regulations forbade the couple from appearing side by side during the festivities. To understand fully the social and political implications of the modifications, ephemeral and permanent, made to Venetian urban space—outside and inside the Ducal Palace, on land and on water—Doge Marino Grimani deserves a more prominent role in the analysis.13

Although numerous scholars have examined the decorative and iconographic character of the 1597 festival, they have not looked behind the scenes. Yet the private archive of the Grimani—Morosini family holds a rich cache of financial records and cashbooks, which allows us to do just that.14

Meticulously kept by the doge himself, the many pages of expenses throw light on the planning and construction of the festival and hence on Grimani’s agenda. The goal here, though, is not merely to point out a lacuna in the source material, but to argue that neglecting the financial records is symptomatic of a tendency to study the 1597 festival as an isolated event: the coronation of Morosina Morosini has become unmoored from its Venetian ceremonial counterpart, the ducal incoronazione of 1595 and the social and political context of the last decades of the sixteenth century. By incorporating an analysis of the family’s financial records and by recontextualising the dogaressa’s coronation, this chapter shows how the festival’s ephemeral architecture, decorative programme and popular entertainment temporarily altered the social and political meaning of Venice’s central urban and ceremonial space. The change was not uncontested, yet Grimani was able to sidestep patrician opposition by choosing an alternative, but equally central, location for one of the most spectacular elements of the festival.

Doge Grimani’s coronation, 1595: chaos in place of order

Giovanni Rota wrote the most detailed and authoritative account of Dogaressa Morosina’s coronation festival. He probably had access to the organisers or might have been one of the event’s planners himself.15 Before starting to describe the 1597 coronation, however, Rota first takes the readers of his festival book back to the election of Doge Marino Grimani two years earlier, in April 1595. After Doge Pasquale Cicogna’s death at the start of that month, Rota tells us, the ensuing ducal election lasted a record-breaking four weeks. Among the ducal candidates was Marino Grimani, a patrician known for his charitable nature and donations of bread to the hungry. The Venetian sixteenth century was characterised by cyclical scarcity and epidemics, and in 1595 the city-state was in the grip of a famine that had started almost a decade earlier.16 Unsurprisingly, the generous Grimani was the most popular candidate among the majority of Venetians, a majority that had no formal say in the election. When finally, on 26 April, Grimani became the new doge, popular enthusiasm was overwhelming.

While ordinary Venetians hoped that Grimani would use his powers to guarantee a stable bread supply, many of his patrician peers suspected the new doge of demagoguery. In theory, Venetian doges exercised very little power in the Venetian Republic: laws and regulations circumscribed their role, reducing the dogeship to a mostly representative office. Each new doge had to take the ducal oath or promissione, which was adjusted and expanded before every ducal election. The promissione dictated, for example, that the doge was not allowed to open his own correspondence. All his verbal and written communications were closely supervised, he could not receive foreign visitors unattended or leave the city without permission and his sons could not hold office. Yet, at the same time, the doge was the symbolic representative of the Venetian state and deeply involved in the daily business of government, which meant that a strong doge did have ways to influence the political direction of the Republic.17 Grimani’s fellow patri­ citizens were apprehensive of how he might employ his popularity.

What disturbed them even more was that Grimani’s election was followed by an exceptional outburst of collective euphoria among ordinary Venetians, which came close to rebellious disorder. According to Rota, a pro-Grimani author, the celebrations were the biggest and most enthusiastic in Venetian history.18 The city exploded with joy: people ‘as if moved to rapture by ecstasy and out of control with happiness, abandoned their homes, shops, squares and their own businesses’, converging on the Ducal Palace, singing and shouting in praise of the new doge. The continuous ringing of church bells created a deafening noise, fireworks exploded and people lit bonfires on the Grand Canal and in every square and street, ‘so that it seemed as if Venice was going up in flames’. A large crowd wanted to congratulate Grimani in the Ducal Palace, but its doors were kept shut as a precaution. What Rota fails to mention, but what other evidence shows, is that at that time si dimostrassero li maggiori, et li più affettuosi, che in alcun tempo si dimostrarono mai per altro Principe.

15 Rota, Lettere, fol. [H4r]. Rota finished his description a mere ten days after the event, on 16 May 1597. On the differences between the contemporary descriptions, see Tomèo, ‘Memory and Tradition’, pp. 68-72.
18 Rota, Lettere, fol. [Blv]: ‘... li maggiori, et li più affettuosi, che in alcun tempo si dimostrarono mai per altro Principe’.
point joy at Grimani's election turned to frustration and vandalism. Market stalls and government property at Rialto and San Marco were smashed to pieces, and the debris was used to feed two enormous bonfires. All night people continued to shout and sing in the streets, lighting fires and setting off fireworks, in a festive frenzy that bordered on the riotous.

Destructive and unchecked revelry is not usually associated with Venice: contemporaries praised the Serenissima ('the most serene one') for its political and social stability, while historians have argued that Venetian feasts and rituals played an important part in the popular acceptance of patrician rule. Yet patricians seem to have been conscious of, and also frequently worried about, outbursts of popular disorder. The day after Grimani's election, however, populani fervour was brought under control by the traditional and structured ceremonies of the ducal coronation.

The first of three coronation stages took place in the Basilica di San Marco, where the doge was presented to the community of Venetians. The Basilica had a dual function as both the doge's private chapel and the city's most prominent church, home to the body of its patron saint. The Piazza di San Marco formed the background to the coronation's second stage, which consisted of the doge tossing coins to the crowds, a ritual known as the sparsio. Grimani and his male relatives threw some 1,400 ducats to the assembled people, while his wife and daughters threw another 200 ducats from the windows of the Ducal Palace. These sums went well beyond what was customary on such occasions; Grimani's own promissione had stipulated the distribution of only one hundred ducats. The third and final part of the coronation took place on the Scala dei Giganti (Stairway of the Giants) in the courtyard of the Ducal Palace, where the doge was crowned first with the camauro, the white skullcap, and then with the corno, his embroidered crown.

Traditionally, the coronation was followed by festivities that could be more or less lavish, depending on each doge's personal preferences. Grimani went all out. He spent a staggering seven thousand ducats in total, paying for the sparsio, but also for celebratory banquets, musicians, decorations for his family palace and, of course, charitable donations. To put these amounts into perspective: a skilled craftsman working in the Arsenal shipyard in this period was paid the equivalent of fifty ducats per year.27 The sum of roughly five hundred ducats the new doge spent on distributing bread and wine throughout the entire city was what impressed ordinary Venetians most. Their hopes for a generous head of state were fulfilled, and shouts of ‘Viva, viva’ greeted Grimani for months afterwards.

19 BMC, Codice Ciganna 2479; Archivio di Stato di Venezia (henceforth: ASV), Delibazioni, Tera, f.135, c. 211-12.
20 According to the report by Juan de Zornoza, ambasciatore for Parma, Archivio di Stato di Parma, busta 615/1579-1599 Venezia, 29 April 1595.
21 This is one of the main arguments of Muir, Civic Ritual. See also Robert C. Davis, The War of the Fairs: Popular Culture and Public Violence in Late Renaissance Venice (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994) and Florence Alazard, Art social, art du gouvernement: la musique, le prince et la cité en Italie du Nord 1550-1610 (Paris: Minerva, 2002).
22 Finlay, Politica, p. 55.
23 Andrea da Mosto, I dogi di Venezia nelle loro pubbliche e vostre promissioni (Florence: A. Mannini, 1977), pp. XXII-XXXII; Padovan Urban, 'Feste ufficiali', p. 575; Muir, Civic Ritual, pp. 281-2. The Gabrieli Consort & Players have reconstructed and recorded the music for Grimani's coronation mass celebrated in San Marco a day later, on 28 April 1595.
24 On promissioni, see Muir, Civic Ritual, p. 286 and Da Mosto, I dogi, p. XXV. For Grimani's promissione, see BMC, F.2409, Promissione Marino Grimani 1595.
25 Over the centuries it was the camauro, not the crown, that took on a sacred significance, Muir, Civic Ritual, pp. 281-2.
26 ASV, Archivio Privato Grimani-Barbarigo (henceforth: APGB), busta 33, c. 343v-6v. Also G. Goico, 'Le spese del nobile uomo Marino Grimani nella sua elezione a doge di Venezia', Archivio veneto XXXIII (1887), 443-54, which is based on another version of the expenses from a separate, now lost, register.
in a city-state where ducal charity was supposed to be altruistic and in conformity with traditional restrictions, such actions did not put his peers at ease.

Organising the 1597 festival

The Venetian populace fully expected the dogaressa's coronation to take place shortly after Grimani's own election; instead, the event was delayed for two years. Most scholars have attributed the delay to his patrician opponents, who were afraid that Grimani's spending power would turn the dogaressa's coronation into an unprecedented glorification of his family.32 Whereas the ducal coronation was strictly circumscribed, there were hardly any regulations concerning the incoronazione of a dogaressa, primarily because of its rarity. The only other coronation of a dogaressa in the sixteenth century had taken place forty years earlier, in 1557, to honour Zilia Dandolo, while another hundred years separated the Dandolo coronation from the previous one.33 The Republic's official ceremony books (ceremoniali) contained no information on dogaressa coronations, which caused the organisers in 1557 to wonder what the ceremony should actually entail.34 The lack of regulations allowed for a great deal of freedom, which would explain patrician nervousness about leaving the event in the hands of a popular doge, whose penchant for ostentation was matched by his spending power. Instead of consolidating Venetian social relations, the festival might have just the opposite effect.

The delay, however, seems to have been the doge's own decision. Both Rota and Tuzio stress that it was Grimani himself who kept postponing the event. His concern for the 'public good' forced him to wait until the availability of food supplies could feed not just the city itself, but also all the Italian and foreign visitors.35 Finally, in the spring of 1597, the urban warehouses were sufficiently full. Whereas the festivities organised by Grimani in 1595 had been primarily an improvised reaction to the outcome of an uncertain election, marred by unprecedented spontaneous celebrations on the streets, this time the ducal couple had had two years to plan.

29 Da Mosto, I dogi, p. 315, suggests it was part of Grimani's promissione. Although the promissione contains no such condition, most scholars have followed Da Mosto, see Muir, Civis Ritus, p. 293; Hochmann, 'Le mécénat', p. 42; Caixi 1 gesti, p. 302; Wilson, 'Il bel sesso', p. 83.
30 Many, but not all, sixteenth-century doges were unmarried or widowers. War and outbreaks of the plague had also prevented dogaressa coronations from taking place; see Caixi, I gesti, pp. 290-303; Molmenti, La Dogaressa, pp. 278-9 and Harthun, The Dogaressa.
31 Tondro, 'Memory and Tradition', p. 64; Venetia civitatis nobilissimae, fols 275v-8v; Muir, Civis Ritus, p. 292.
32 Rota, Lettera, fol. [A2v-]1; Tuzio, Ordine et modo, p. 4.
35 For more details, see Rota, Lettera and Tuzio, Ordine, p. 282.
36 Muir, Civis Ritus, pp. 293-4. For the role of the guilds, see especially George McCloskey, The Culture of Profession in Late Renaissance Italy (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004), pp. 165-72.
37 Venetia, civitatis nobilissimae, fol. 280v.

On the one hand, the 1597 coronation of the dogaressa would consist of elements that echoed the ducal coronation — the dogaressa, for instance, would be presented with the promissione, which she would swear to uphold. On the other hand, it would incorporate elements already present in the Dandolo festival: the guilds would decorate the Ducal Palace, the dogaressa would make the symbolic translatio from the family palace to the Ducal Palace in the Bucintoro and she would entertain hundreds of patrician and cittadini women. But most importantly it would be an occasion of unprecedented lavishness and a demonstration of the ducal couple's political agenda.

One potentially inflammatory element was the presentation of the Golden Rose, a personal gift from Pope Clement VIII to Morosina Morosini. In the final decades of the sixteenth century, Venetian-papal relations were increasingly strained, and an important contingent of Venetian patricians was highly suspicious of Rome. Eventually these tensions would develop into the open conflict known as the Interdict (1606-1607). Marino Grimani had always been known as an advocate of a pro-papal course.35 Despite protests from Leonardo Donà (1536-1612), a patrician who belonged to the anti-Habsburg and anti-papal camp, and the most vocal of Grimani's opponents, a special representative of the pope presented the Rose to the dogaressa on the third day of the festival in the Basilica.36 The donation of the Golden Rose was a highlight of the Grimani—Morosini festival, but the entire event was filled with numerous other ceremonies, processions and banquets.37 When examining the festival's organisation, most attention has been devoted to the forty young patricians in charge of the entertainment for the nobility or to the efforts of the guilds. Traditionally, the dogaressa was the patroness of Venice's artisanal guilds, which is why they were given the task of decorating the Ducal Palace, building festival structures on the Piazza San Marco and organising a fleet of decorated boats to accompany the Bucintoro, the state galley transporting Morosina Morosini. (See Plate 9.) When Grimani met with the guilds before the festival, he stressed that they should do what they could while spending as little as possible, given the difficult economic times.38 Although several poorer
grooms asked to be released from their obligations, guilds overall spent a considerable amount of money.38

The lion's share of the festival's costs, however, was borne by the doge himself, who spent close to 6,000 ducats in the process, almost matching the cost of his own coronation. The Grimani–Morosini cashbooks show payments to Venetian retailers who provided Morosina Morosini's festive clothing, including three ducal crowns (probably one for each day) as well as clothes for her female retinue and for her two dwarfs. Grimani also paid for musicians and a series of regattas, and for the food, drinks, cooks and other staff for the various banquets. He hired hundreds of additional chairs, stools and beds, while other expenses included commemorative medals with Morosina's image, gifts of money and luxury goods, fireworks and decorations.39

Grimani's control was not, however, just financial. His own cavaliere or master of ceremonies, Salustio Gnecci, was in charge of overseeing the entire event. It was Gnecci, for instance, who allocated the rooms in the Ducal Palace to the various guilds.40 His primary task, it emerges, was to supervise the adornment of the architectural cluster formed by the Palace, the Piazza San Marco, the Piazzetta and the Basilica di San Marco. Civic and liturgical rituals had tied these spaces together since the earliest centuries of the Venetian Republic, amalgamating them into the centre of Venice's 'devotional and political geography'.41 It was over the use of this highly charged space that the ducal couple clashed harshly with their patrician peers.

Jousting in the piazza

The doge and the doge drew up plans for a grandiose jousting tournament in the Piazza San Marco, something for which they initially received permission.42 For centuries, tournaments had been an occasion for Europe's ruling dynasties to shine. By the late sixteenth century, tournaments had evolved from a military sport into the theatrical enactment of a joust, while continuing to form part of royal entries, coronations and weddings.43 In Venice, jousts had been a standard part of festivities in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. In 1253, for instance, a jousting tournament was organised in the Piazza for a ducal coronation. In contrast to jousts in dynastic states, these jousts were mostly an exercise for Venice's military forces instead of an opportunity for the local elite to show off. Although nobles of other states often ridiculed Venetian patricians for their poor horsemanship, the republican ideal will have been the main reason for their lack of engagement in equestrian pursuits.44 The jousts' popularity with Venetian spectators and their potential for inciting rowdy behaviour, however, caused the authorities to impose stricter control at the end of the fourteenth century.45 The last serious joust had been held in Venice around 1500, but the practice continued in the cities on the Terraferma, which were close to Venetian military encampments.46 Perhaps Grimani, who had served as governor of the main Terraferma cities, had witnessed a few of these tournaments himself.

By the time of Morosina's coronation, no joust had been held in the Piazza for almost a century. To revitalise this tradition, with its clear link to dynastic and military leadership, the ducal couple sought the assistance of the captain-general of Venice's infantry, the noble mercenary Giovanni Battuta Bourbon del Monte (1541–1614). At the start of April 1597, Grimani sent a courier to tell Del Monte that he was invited to take care of the joust. A patrician messenger followed in order to 'discuss the joust that is going to take place on the day of the coronation'.47 Del Monte, as the city-state's principal commander, was to use his military expertise to organise the tournament, recruit participants and oversee the logistics, which involved importing a considerable number of horses.

38 Tiuso, Ordine et modo, p. 4. The wealthy guild of the grocers (marzoni) spent close to five hundred ducats. On the marzoni and their expenses, see Tondro, 'Memory and Tradition', p. 9. See also Miot, Civic Ritual, p. 284.

39 ASV, APGB, busta 33, cc. 353v–8v.

40 Rota, Lettere, vol. 15 (484). On 11 April 1597, Gnecci began declaring expenses made for the organization of the coronation, ASV, APGB, busta 33, cc. 352v.


42 BMC, Codice Morosini Grimani 318, c. 284.

43 Richard Barber and Juliet Barker, Tournaments: Jousts, Chivalry and Pageants in the Middle Ages (New York: Boydell Press, 1985), pp. 83–9. See also Gregory Husband, "The Lion's Share of the Festival's Costs, however, was borne by the doge himself, who spent close to 6,000 ducats in the process, almost matching the cost of his own coronation. The Grimani–Morosini cashbooks show payments to Venetian retailers who provided Morosina Morosini's festive clothing, including three ducal crowns (probably one for each day) as well as clothes for her female retinue and for her two dwarfs. Grimani also paid for musicians and a series of regattas, and for the food, drinks, cooks and other staff for the various banquets. He hired hundreds of additional chairs, stools and beds, while other expenses included commemorative medals with Morosina's image, gifts of money and luxury goods, fireworks and decorations. It was Gnecci, for instance, who allocated the rooms in the Ducal Palace to the various guilds. His primary task, it emerges, was to supervise the adornment of the architectural cluster formed by the Palace, the Piazza San Marco, the Piazzetta and the Basilica di San Marco. Civic and liturgical rituals had tied these spaces together since the earliest centuries of the Venetian Republic, amalgamating them into the centre of Venice's 'devotional and political geography'. It was over the use of this highly charged space that the ducal couple clashed harshly with their patrician peers.

Jousting in the piazza

The doge and the doge drew up plans for a grandiose jousting tournament in the Piazza San Marco, something for which they initially received permission. For centuries, tournaments had been an occasion for Europe's ruling dynasties to shine. By the late sixteenth century, tournaments had evolved from a military sport into the theatrical enactment of a joust, while continuing to form part of royal entries, coronations and weddings. In Venice, jousts had been a standard part of festivities in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. In 1253, for instance, a jousting tournament was organised in the Piazza for a ducal coronation. In contrast to jousts in dynastic states, these jousts were mostly an exercise for Venice's military forces instead of an opportunity for the local elite to show off. Although nobles of other states often ridiculed Venetian patricians for their poor horsemanship, the republican ideal will have been the main reason for their lack of engagement in equestrian pursuits. The jousts' popularity with Venetian spectators and their potential for inciting rowdy behaviour, however, caused the authorities to impose stricter control at the end of the fourteenth century. The last serious joust had been held in Venice around 1500, but the practice continued in the cities on the Terraferma, which were close to Venetian military encampments. Perhaps Grimani, who had served as governor of the main Terraferma cities, had witnessed a few of these tournaments himself.

By the time of Morosina's coronation, no joust had been held in the Piazza for almost a century. To revitalise this tradition, with its clear link to dynastic and military leadership, the ducal couple sought the assistance of the captain-general of Venice's infantry, the noble mercenary Giovanni Battuta Bourbon del Monte (1541–1614). At the start of April 1597, Grimani sent a courier to tell Del Monte that he was invited to take care of the joust. A patrician messenger followed in order to 'discuss the joust that is going to take place on the day of the coronation'. Del Monte, as the city-state's principal commander, was to use his military expertise to organise the tournament, recruit participants and oversee the logistics, which involved importing a considerable number of horses.
The ducal couple also engaged Venice’s foremost architect, Vincenzo Scamozzi, to design a setting for ‘regal’ entertainment in the Piazza. For years Scamozzi had worked on the renovation of the San Marco area, but his project had encountered intense opposition from certain factions within the patriciate, among them Leonardo Donà, and ended in compromise. Scamozzi knew that adapting the Piazza, the architectural space that was supposed to mirror the Republic’s constitutional continuity and fundamental values, would be highly controversial. Perhaps eager to mould the space at least temporarily to his vision, Scamozzi proposed to design new and innovative constructions, including a hippodrome in ‘imitation of the Ancients’. It could be used for Del Monte’s jousting tournament, for wagon and horse races, but also for more plebeian forms of entertainment, such as the popular caccia deti tori (bull-baiting).

All these plans for games in the Piazza came to nothing. Donà took steps to hinder the festivities in several ways. He first argued that the city’s food supplies were simply not adequate to support the festival. When this strategy did not work, Donà claimed that attracting great numbers of people carried the risk of unseemly chaos right in the heart of the city. Popular entertainment in the Piazza could, he said, incite spectacles and destabilise the social order. This last argument must have evoked memories of the riotous scenes in the Piazza two years earlier, and those who previously had supported the plans for the joust now began to waver. The doge decided to put the matter before the Council of Ten, the college responsible for maintaining the public peace. Once he recognised that the Ten were swayed by Donà’s arguments, Grimani withdrew his proposal and called off both Del Monte’s plans for games and Scamozzi’s architectural designs.

The doge, however, was left without a suitably impressive setting for the festivities. He first argued that the city’s food supplies were simply not adequate to support the festival. Supplies were simply not adequate to support the festival. Perhaps eager to mould the space at least temporarily to his vision, Scamozzi proposed to design new and innovative constructions, including a hippodrome in ‘imitation of the Ancients’. It could be used for Del Monte’s jousting tournament, for wagon and horse races, but also for more plebeian forms of entertainment, such as the popular caccia deti tori (bull-baiting).

53 Rota, Lettere, fol. [A3v–A4v].
55 Rota, Lettere, fols [H3v–H4r]; ‘con tanta frequenza de gente de varie nazioni, sono passate di giorno, & di notte, le cose tutte con incredibile quiete, senza che sia seguito per minimo molestia, non dito de’ fatti, ma ni animo de parole offensive ne’ pubblici, o ne’ privati luoghi della Città’.
56 Tuzio, Ordine, pp. 20–1; ‘ma quel ch’io in notte fui poi, è il vedere l’immensa gente talmente quieta, & pacifica che non successe mai pur uno minimo disordine, con tutto, che si dice, che il numero della gente fossera ascendersi il più di quarantamila’.
towards her subjects.\(^{57}\) This was a reference to the arrival of ships carrying Northern European grain, made possible by the relaxation, under Grimani's dogeships of some of the protectionist Venetian laws against foreign shipping.\(^{58}\) Tuzio chimed in, pointing out that during the festival 'the piazzes were continuously abundant not just with bread, but every other type of food, such as meat, poultry and fish.'\(^{59}\) By describing a city filled with orderly spectators, both Rota and Tuzio counterbalanced the images of upheaval surrounding Grimani's own coronation and, predictably, stressed Venice's reputation as the Serenissima. Yet it is their emphasis on the abundance of food that provides a crucial clue to an alternative reading of the festival's iconographic programme, a reading that brings to the fore the visual and spectacular message the organisers aimed at the crowds of non-elite spectators.

An iconographically literate spectator might have understood all or at least most of the allegorical references, perhaps filling in certain blanks with his or her imagination, but a far broader group must have been able to grasp recurrent visual motifs.\(^{60}\) Arguably, the festival's most prominent ephemeral construction was the butchers' guild's triumphal arch on the Piazzetta. Giacomo Franco's engraving (see Figure 9.2) captures the aquatic procession of the dogaressa and her cortège just before she entered the San Marco area through the arch.

Triumphal arches were essentially a foreign custom, something that was at odds with the Venetian egalitarian use of public space. Although self-images of prominent Venetians filled private palaces and the façades and interiors of churches, monuments of individuals did not have a place in public squares or the Piazza.\(^{61}\) The first temporary arch within the Venetian urban structure had been constructed for the coronation of the dogaressa in

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\(^{57}\) Rota, Lettere, fol. 18 (1591): 'non è certo punto inferiore, anzi degno d'eterna memoria, il considerare che, essendosi fin dai principii dell' anno passato fatto sentire in molte parti d'Europa, la pessura, & la sterilità d’ogni sorte di biade, Venetia, & tante città, & provene ai si sia ritrovata copia grandissima de’ grani, fatti venire dall’estreme regioni, con esempio di singolar prudentia, & carità, di questa Serenissima Republica, verso li suoi suddi, & che, nel tempo di questa solennità, vi sia stata, oltre la quantità grande di bello, & bonissimo pane, ch'era in molti luoghi pubblicamente venduto, abondanza grandissima di carne, di pesce, & di ogni altra sorta di vettovaglie.'

\(^{58}\) Tuzio, Ordine, p. 21: 'resta à dire che quello che piu parmi di maggior considerazione, & degno di esemplare memoria 1a questo che in tal tempo un popolo d’infinito numero, con notevole quantità di diversi fornamenti di più notizie, havessse le piazze continuamente pollute, come di pesce.'

\(^{59}\) For an example of a contemporary iconographic reading of the permanent decorations in Piazza San Marco in the mid-sixteenth century, see David Rosand, Myths of Venice: The Culture of the Doge's Palace, 1530-1630 (University of North Carolina Press, 2001), pp. 126-8.

\(^{60}\) The equestrian statue of Mercenary Bartolomeo Colleoni on the Campo S. Giovanni e Paolo is the exception to this rule.

\(^{61}\) On the first arch constructed in Venice, also by the butchers' guild, for the 1557 coronation, see Maximilian L.S. Tondro, 'The First Temporary Triumphal Arch in Venice (1557)', in J.B. Mulhine and Elizabeth Geldring (eds), Court Festivals of the European Renaissance: Art, Politics and Performance (Aldershot and Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2002), pp. 335-62.

\(^{62}\) Bernardo Fogni, a monarach, had designed the arch after consulting with the lawyer Attilio Facio, see Rota, Lettere, fol. C4v; Venice, città nobilissima, fol. 281v-2. Also Mant, 'Images of Power', p. 48; McClure, The Culture of Profusion, p. 162. For the use of Ripa's Iconologia, see Tondro, 'Memory and Tradition', p. 68. The use of emblem books and mythological encyclopedias was common practice in designing European court festivals; see Strong, Art and Power, p. 26.

\(^{63}\) Wilson, 'Il bel sesso', p. 76.
None of the depictions of the arch correspond with the detailed descriptions by Rota and Stringa, but Franco’s engraving (see Figure 9.3) seems to come closest. On the side facing the waterfront, the 1597 arch was decorated with two large paintings depicting classical deities. One was Neptune, a familiar figure in Venice’s iconographic programme. On the Palace’s Scala dei Giganti he was paired with Mars, the god of war (see Figure 9.3), but on the arch the designers chose a lesser-known deity:

64 For the description of the arch, see Vinterrì, città nobilissima, fol. 281 and Rota, Lettera, fol. C6r-O8r. The arch also figures in Andrea Vicentino’s painting of Morosini’s arrival at San Marco, but since he painted quickly and from memory, the representation is not very clear or detailed, Pedotti Urbano, ‘Apparati scenografici’, 132-4. 


66 Rota, Lettera, fol. [D3v]. The Procurators managed the execution of wills and bequests made by Venice’s inhabitants to the Procuratoria di San Marco, distributing alms and allocating cheap housing.


68 Tondio, ‘Memory and Tradition’, p. 128.
of plenty, filled with sheaves of wheat, while her right hand carried more sheaves. His depiction of Ceres and her attributes followed to the letter Cesare Ripa’s description of Abundance ‘in forma di Matrona’.69 Ripa, for whom Ceres symbolized a Golden Age immune from scarcity, in turn based his description on representations of Annona, the Roman personification of the grain supply.70 A motto under the Venetian painting read ‘Hilaria flavescent’ (‘More cheerfully they become golden’), a reference to the flourishing of the crops under the goddess’s, and by extension the ducal couple’s, protection.71 These classical references would have been deciphered by only a select few, perhaps even only by those familiar with Ripa’s recent publication. But for those not versed in Latin, mythology or iconography, the entire display still carried a clear visual message of abundance.72

That same message of plenty was broadcast by the alternative entertainment the doge and his event planners had scrambled to put together for the festival’s final day after Donà’s intervention had led to the cancellation of the tournament in the Piazza. The cashbooks show that on 1 May, just three days before the festival started, Grimani engaged a group of Dutch sailors to perform a naumachia or mock naval battle. These sailors had arrived a couple of days before with a convoy of ships from the Dutch provinces of Holland and Zeeland, carrying grain to feed the Venetians.73 Amid all the other preparations, Grimani ordered silk liveries and matching bats for the sailors, in the colours of the Grimani family (pink and white). He had wood sent to the Dutch ships to modify the sloops for the naumachia, and he ordered painters to paint the boats in a suitable colour for the games.74 Giacomo Franco has depicted the aquatic joust or ‘giochi navali’ behind Scamozzi’s Floating Teatro detto il Mondo (see Figure 9.4). In his engraving, the boats carry flags with heraldic lilies, which were part of the Morosini family’s coat of arms.75

On 6 May, the doge and dogaressa, seated separately on two different balconies of the Palace, got ready to watch the aquatic games. It was one of the festival’s biggest attractions, drawing throngs of spectators. People watched from the waterfront, others from aboard the innumerable boats. The Dutch – ‘huomini pratici, & arditi nel mare’, according to Rota76 – came rowing in from the island of Giudecca, opposite the San Marco area, and saluted the ducal couple with a deafening volley of cannon shots. They then performed their naumachia with some twenty sloops: four men rowed each sloop, while a fifth stood on a platform with a long bastone (lance), as Franco’s engraving shows. Two boats fought duels in tournament-style until only one man was left standing, to the amusement and applause of the crowd.77 All the chroniclers commented on the naumachia, praising the quality of the boats, the skill of the northern sailors and the foreignness of their games, which also included two men on different boats pulling apart live eels and geese. The doge personally handed out prizes to the sailors.

71 Rota, Lettere, fol. F4v; Tuzio, Ordine, pp. 9–10. According to McClure, this motto does not have a classical origin; McClure, The Culture of Profession, p. 326.
72 See Zerner, ‘Looking for the Unknowable’, for a similar argument.
74 On the currences, see Gavarni Niccolò Dugliani, Historia veneziana scritta freemente (Venice: Duriano Zemari, 1598), p. 1032. The naumachia con Grisanti between 100 and 150 ducats, ASV, APGB, busta 33, cc. 334v, 354v, 355r.
75 A few Dutch sloops are also present in Franco’s engraving of the Bacintoro arriving at the arch (see Figure 9.2).
76 Rota, Lettere, fol. [H1v].
77 Tuzio, Ordine, pp. 19–20. Such games were a standard part of Dutch festivals, see J. ter Goes, De volkscultuur [Haarlem: Bohn, 1871]. See for instance those organized for Maria de Medici’s visit to the Dutch Republic in 1638, J. Puget de la Serre, Histoire de l’entrée de la reyne mère du roy tres-chrestien dans les Provences Union des Pays-Bas (London: Jean Rainworth, George Thomason and Octavian Pullen, 1639), fol. 42v–3v.
and loud applause of the spectators. Yet folded into the amusement was a clear message: the sailors of the foreign grain ships, dressed in the ducal Venetian people's clothes, were a well-provisioned city during his reign.

From ephemeral to permanent

The day after the festival, a satisfied Doge Grimani walked the short distance from his residence to the council chambers on the other side of the Ducal Palace to thank the guilds for their efforts. After he left, guild members started dismantling all the ephemeral decorations and other temporary structures. With the Palace back in order again, the doge undertook an additional step to consolidate the memory of both his wife's and his own coronation, commissioning paintings and probably also Rota's festival monument for himself and the dogaressa in the peripheral church of San Giuseppe in Castello. At first glance his choice of San Giuseppe makes little sense: it was quite a distance from the Grimani Palace and an out-of-the-way place for a doge to be buried. Most doges preferred the imposing church of San Giovanni and Paolo, which became the locus for increasingly personalised ducal funeral monuments. San Giuseppe, by contrast, attracted little patronage. Charitable initiatives, however, had long linked the Grimani family to this particular part of Castello. Also, the church had been the site of frequent papal visits and appears to have attracted little patronage. All these aspects fit into Grimani's political profile.

With no other families vying for its space, Grimani set out to turn San Giuseppe into the most personalised church interior in the whole of Venice. Already in the 1580s he had dedicated the chapel of the high altar to his deceased father. But it was the funerary tomb for himself and his wife that radically changed the inside of the church to accommodate the construction of the wall-filling monument, which dwarfs all other memorials, the northern doorway had to be moved (Figure 9.5). The doge himself closely supervised the design and building, and the monument was finished within his lifetime, which was highly unusual. Once again, the costs were enormous: the entire structure, finished in 1604, cost 5,865 ducats. It effectively turned San Giuseppe into a Grimani pantheon.

The monument was shaped like a triumphal arch, and although this was a fashionable form, its shape, proportions and symbols recall the ephemeral arch of 1597. Each level of the monument celebrates the doge's glory, from the sculpture group representing the theological virtues Charity, Hope and Love on the pediment, the octagonal relief of the kneeling doge and dogaressa before the Virgin Mary, to the reclining images of the doge and dogaressa on their sarcophagi and other, smaller elements. The funerary monument's iconographic suggestion that Grimani was divinely elected as doge as a reward for his virtues is exceptional within the Venetian context.

The doge made sure that representations of the coronations formed a conspicuous part of the impressive monument, at an easily visible height. On 18 November 1601, he ordered two bronze depictions of 'the coronations of his Serenity and the Most Serene Dogaressa' with the sculptor Cesare Groppo, indicating the precise measurements of the reliefs and the figures in them. The two reliefs, shown here in Figures 9.6 and 9.7, represent Grimani's own crowning and Morosina receiving the Golden Rose in the Basilica. One and a half years later the reliefs were finished and transported to San Giuseppe, to be installed directly below the doge's and dogaressa's sarcophagi and thus perpetually link one coronation to the other, clearly visible to parishioners and other visitors to the church. A satisfied Grimani paid 460 ducats for the bronze reliefs, donating additional sums of drinking money (three ducats per beverazo) to the sculptor and his workers. By the time the entire monument in San Giuseppe was finished, there was little left of the Grimani–Morosini fortunes. Having no male heirs, the couple had felt no need to

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78 Tezio, Ondata, p. 20.
79 Rota, Lettere, 2nd ed. (1921).
83 On the Grimani family's ties to Castello, see Antonio Foscari and Manfredo Tafuri, Seba nano da Lugano, i Grimani e Jacopo Sansovino, artisti e committenti nella chiesa.
85 For the specifics on the monument's construction, see Timofiewitsch, 'Quellen und Forschungen'.
88 Timofiewitsch, 'Quellen und Forschungen', p. 44.
89 See Timofiewitsch, 'Quellen und Forschungen', p. 44.
preserve the family fortune, investing instead in munificence, feasts, art and architecture, both ephemeral and permanent. The dynastic ambition projected through the 1597 coronation’s imagery was always more rhetorical than actual.

90 ASV, Notarile – Testamenti, h.1249/1, c.181r – v. The costs of the dowries for the couple’s daughters had been significant, but a major expense had also been the construction of the Grimani family palace.
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Donà's successful efforts to cancel the tournament in the Piazza. The 1597 coronation transmitted different messages to different audiences: it gave patrician women an uncommonly central role in state ritual, and it flaunted Grimani's political ambitions by celebrating the ducal couple in an almost regal style, a theme effectively continued on the funerary monument in San Giuseppe. But the festival also carried a message intended for a much broader public, namely that in a period of frequent famines the city and its people were in the safe hands of a 'father of the poor', the generous and benevolent doge.

Instead of the collective responsibility of the ruling elite, the festival communicated that Grimani himself was in charge of the steady supply of bread and grain. This contentious message was transmitted through the use of symbols of abundance woven into the festival architecture and the decorations in the palace, later repeated on the funerary monument. The display by the German bakers - including the fact that after years of empty bread shops there was sufficient grain and bread to spare for decorative purposes - recalled the Venetians' hopes at Grimani's election and emphasised the contrast between the previous decade of dearth and the abundance of the present. This was forcefully underlined by the Dutch sailors' participation in the event. One unforeseen outcome was that patrician irritation resulted in the formal prohibition of future dogaressa coronations. 91 Ironically, this only further emphasised the singular character of the 1597 coronation festival.

Although it is impossible to reconstruct exactly how the public experienced the festival, the memory of the two coronations proved persistent. Grimani adroitly shaped that memory by engaging authors and artists to produce a range of festival books, paintings, coins and engravings, which recorded the iconic elements of his wife's coronation in their urban setting, such as the triumphal arch on the Piazzetta, the aquatic games on the Bacino and the ceremony of the Golden Rose in the Basilica. In an additional challenge to Venetian ideas about the use of public space, Grimani turned the peripheral church of San Giuseppe in Castello into a family memorial, accessible to all and with the two coronations forming the central theme of the oversized funerary monument. Again, it is not possible to determine to what extent these objects, artefacts and narratives shaped and mediated the memory of these events. It is clear, however, that ordinary Venetians remembered and passed on the memory of Grimani munificence. In 1612, six years after Grimani's death, a crowd of Venetians taunted his successor, the parsimonious Leonardo Donà, by hailing him with shouts of 'Viva, viva Doge Grimani, padre dei poveri'.

91 Molmenti, La Dogarezza, pp. 340-41. Despite this decision, Doge Silvestro Yalier organized a coronation for his wife Elisabetta in 1694.
92 Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana, Ms. It VII, 1818 (9436), c.88v: 'Ii fanciulli, et anco quasi tutto il populo li dettero una ramanzina gagliarda, gridando ad alta voce “Viva, viva il Doge Grimani, Padre dei Poveri”.'

Conclusion

For most spectators, the festival for the dogaressa's coronation had been the feast of a lifetime. The celebrations in 1595 had already demonstrated both Grimani's spending power and the extent of his popular support, and despite patrician opposition, the 1597 festival only confirmed his ambitions. The display of personal power took full advantage of Venice's terrestrial and aquatic space, something most prominently displayed in Grimani's decision to organise the alternative joust on the Bacino, in defiance of...

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