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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Sheltering refugees: ephemeral architecture and mass migration in early modern Venice

Danielle Abdon*† ID

Department of Art History, Pennsylvania State University, 240 Borland Building, University Park, PA 16802, USA
*Corresponding author. Email: danielle.abdon@temple.edu

Abstract
This article investigates the creation of a shelter for migrants in fifteenth-century Venice. As an ephemeral structure, the shelter raises questions regarding the scope, mutability and materiality of the city's early modern urban fabric. Further, due to its mission to shelter eastern refugees, the shelter is embedded in foreign policy matters stemming from and aiming to stabilize Venetian presence in the eastern Mediterranean. This article positions the structure in the context of an early modern refugee crisis and Venice's multi-pronged urban and architectural responses in poor relief.

On 28 December 1471, faced with the presence of paupers taking shelter under the porticoes and loggia of the Ducal Palace and the Basilica of San Marco in Venice, the Senate issued a decree attempting to resolve the illegal occupation of the city's religious and political centre. As the decree announced,

> It has been decreed and determined in this council that, for the sheltering of the poor – who are found in the portico and arcades of the [Ducal] Palace and of the church of San Marco – there should be made a place of refuge in another suitable place. Certainly it is a matter of greatest piety, and a charitable gift before God, insofar as those poor are being consumed by cold, hunger and nudity. And therefore, with all things considered that need consideration, there is no place more fitting and convenient – and indeed, at the same time, more advantageously and agreeably provisioned – than the Campo Sant'Antonio. May it be decreed that the Ufficio del Sal [the Salt Office] must make a *coho-pertum* [shelter] for the said poor in Campo Sant'Antonio, where it will seem more fitting. And let it be known that the Collegio should have the

responsibility of providing that that swamp – which is between [the churches of] San Domenico and Sant'Antonio – shall be filled, over which place the same Ufficio del Sal must make a shelter, so that it always exists for sheltering the poor of this sort, who always turn to our city for the honour of God, for whom there is nothing that may be done which is more pleasing, and more agreeable for piety and for his mercy.[1]

In summary, the Senate's concern over the fact that these paupers were hungry, freezing and in a state of undress led to a determination that the Ufficio del Sal, the office in charge of Venice's salt monopoly and with jurisdiction over state buildings, was to construct a *cohopertum*, a simple wooden canopy or shed, at the Campo di Sant'Antonio – an area located in the south-eastern edge of the city then known as the Punta di Sant'Antonio (Figure 1).[2] Prior to the beginning of construction, however, the Collegio, the government's highest executive branch, was expected to intervene in the area by filling the *velma*, the marshy terrain exposed during low tides and submerged during high tides.[3]

But who were these paupers who took shelter at Piazza San Marco and would be relocated to and served by the *cohopertum*? Evidence from earlier that year suggests that the poor found in the area of San Marco were immigrants fleeing Venetian colonies in the east. On 8 February 1471, for example, the Senate ordered migrants found in San Marco to be transferred to and accommodated at Marghera.[4] By the fifteenth century, Venice's dominions extended beyond the city and incorporated both a *Stato da mar*, constituted by overseas territories, and a *Stato da terra*, formed by possessions on the Italian mainland.[5] Starting in 1463, a series of wars began between the Republic and the Ottoman Empire over control of Venice's overseas colonies. As a result, Venice saw continuous waves of displaced

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Figure 1. Jacopo de' Barbari, *View of Venice* (detail), 1500. The Punta di Sant'Antonio occupies the lower part of the image. The southernmost bell tower marks the monastic complex of Sant'Antonio, while the adjacent structures represent the Ospedale and church of Messer Gesù Cristo. The convent of San Domenico is marked by the first bell tower further inland, and the Arsenale occupies the large walled area to the north. Duke Digital Repository. Accessed online: 25 September 2020, https://doi.org/10.7924/G8MK69TH.

migrants arrive in the city. Confirming that 'the poor of this sort' always turned to Venice, the decree determined the creation of a shelter for these refugees at the Campo di Sant'Antonio.[6]

Studies of ephemeral architecture in the early modern period have traditionally concentrated on structures built for royal and celebratory events. Yet, the example of the shelter at Sant'Antonio and other less alluring temporary constructions have the potential to raise questions regarding the scope, mutability and materiality of early modern urban fabrics, in some cases giving agency to historically dismissed or disempowered sections of the population.[7] This article seeks to contribute to

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[6]While the decree establishing the shelter does not specifically say that the refugees were from Venetian colonies, scholarship on the shelter has interpreted that to be the case in view of similar migratory waves preceding and following the one that led to the creation of the *cohopertum*. See, for example, D. Romano, 'L'assistenza e la beneficenza', in A. Tenenti and U. Tucci (eds.), *Storia di Venezia dalle origini alla caduta della Serenissima*, vol. V: *Il Rinascimento: società ed economia* (Rome, 1996), 391.

[7]Elaine Tierney has described the structures constructed for royal or celebratory events as 'spectacular occasional architecture'. See E. Tierney, '"Dirty, rotten sheds": exploring the ephemeral city in early modern London', *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 50 (2017), 235. The Punta di Sant'Antonio itself later saw the construction of illegal ephemeral structures in the area surrounding the Ospedale di Messer Gesù Cristo. ASV, PSMS, b. 107, fasc. 2. See also P. Pavanini, 'Venezia verso la pianificazione? Bonifiche urbane nel XVI secolo a Venezia', in *D'une ville à l'autre. Structures matérielles et organisation de l'espace dans les villes européennes (XIII–XVIe siècles): Actes du colloque de Rome (1er-4 décembre 1986)* (Rome, 1989), 496–7.

this broader and more inclusive understanding of early modern cities. Specifically, I position the ephemeral structure of the *cohopertum* in the context of an early modern refugee crisis stemming from Venetian colonialist expansion and within Venice's multi-pronged urban and architectural responses in poor relief. This focus on the shelter not only clarifies what constituted an emergency in the early modern city but also illuminates Venice's resourceful response to critical urban developments in the late fifteenth century. The shelter's geographic position, in particular, demonstrates the Republic's ability to turn the presence of migrants and their resulting social pressure into assets for the local community and the Venetian military. Due to its mission to shelter eastern refugees, the *cohopertum* is also part of a larger picture – one embedded in Venetian affairs in the east, stemming from and aiming to stabilize the Republic's presence in the eastern Mediterranean. In this way, the shelter manifests a different Venice from the one typically described: not the thriving, cosmopolitan port city that attracted foreigners, but a metropolis forced to face and creatively address the consequences of its ambitious expansion.

More broadly, despite the persistence of mass displacements today, scholars of Refugee Studies have called attention to the systematic exclusion of refugees from history.[8] According to Tony Kushner, this historical exclusion has not been accidental. Rather, it results from an active act of forgetting those who witnessed past tensions, crises and wars but did not have a prominent role in national dramas.[9] More recently, historians such as Nicholas Terpstra have attempted to address this scholarly omission, rewriting histories that highlight the fundamental roles played by those displaced.[10] In architectural and urban history, however, the absence of refugees remains pervasive. Frequently associated with makeshift and temporary construction that was neither aesthetically pleasing nor centrally located, the architecture of refugees is no doubt harder to access in the historical record. Yet, as Philip Marfleet has argued, 'denial of refugee histories is part of the process of denying refugee realities today'.[11] Denying the historical impact of refugees on urban fabrics would not be any different. As populations continue to be systematically displaced today as a result of wars, famines, diseases and other factors, these movements must be understood as part of a historical continuum. By focusing on the first documented shelter for refugees in early modern Venice, this intervention marks an important contribution not only to the history of Venice but also to the larger field of Refugee Studies, particularly as it intersects with urban history.

Issues of continuity: shelter and hospital

As demonstrated by analyses of later emergency shelters in early modern Venice, and perhaps due to their makeshift quality and similar geographical location, historians of Venetian charity have addressed these structures as precursors to

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[8]P. Marfleet underscores the lack of historical analyses in Refugees Studies in 'Refugees and history: why we must address the past', *Refugee Survey Quarterly*, 26 (2007), 136–48.

[9]T. Kushner, *Remembering Refugees: Then and Now* (Manchester, 2006), 47.

[10]N. Terpstra, *Religious Refugees in the Early Modern World: An Alternative History of the Reformation* (New York, 2015).

[11]Marfleet, 'Refugees and history', 137.

permanent institutions that subsequently occupied the same site.[12] In the case of the shelter at Sant'Antonio, the *cohopertum* has been discussed in connection to the Ospedale di Messer Gesù Cristo (1474), which existed in the same general area as the shelter until its demolition in 1810 (Figure 2).[13] During this period, the terms *ospedale* (hospital) or *ospizio* (shelter) broadly defined institutions that sheltered and provided for the sick and poor, either permanently or during a critical period in an individual's life.[14] Commissioned by the Venetian government, the Ospedale di Messer Gesù Cristo originated as a governmental attempt to alleviate Venice's overwhelmed charitable system of support for the city's sick and poor through the construction of a general hospital with wide-ranging functions.[15] The first stone for the hospital was set in 1476, and starting in 1485, the Procurators de supra in charge of the Ospedale obtained a series of papal bulls to support construction of the institution. Until its destruction in the nineteenth century along with most of the buildings at the Punta di Sant'Antonio to create space for the Napoleonic Gardens, the institution occupied, like the shelter, the site between the monastic complexes of Sant'Antonio and San Domenico (see Figure 1).

Since no depictions of the *cohopertum* have been identified to date, scholars have assumed that the shelter and Ospedale occupied the same site, with the hospital representing a more permanent iteration of the *cohopertum*. In an example of hindsight bias, despite the lack of evidence connecting the shelter and hospital, discussions of the *cohopertum* have historically appeared in studies of the Ospedale, creating a direct connection between the two structures that, in fact, did not exist.[16] Rather, the 1474 Senatorial decree establishing the Ospedale gave freedom to the hospital administrators to determine where the hospital should be built ('far dichiarir dove el se habbia a fare'), suggesting that the institution was not initially envisioned as a physical replacement for the shelter.[17]

In this case, modern understandings of 'emergencies' versus 'crises' help us better comprehend how the roles of these structures differed.[18] Borrowing from disaster management literature, this article considers an emergency as 'a state in which

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[12]As I will address below, this is also the case with the shelters built prior to the establishment of the Ospedaletto and the Ospedale dei Mendicanti in the sixteenth century.

[13]Formed by an elongated structure and a somewhat regular main building constructed around a courtyard, the hospital complex was adjacent to the hospital church of Messer Gesù Cristo, later known as the church of San Nicolò di Bari. I address the Ospedale di Messer Gesù Cristo in detail in D. Abdon, 'Poverty, disease, and port cities: global exchanges in hospital architecture during the Age of Exploration', Temple University Ph.D. thesis, 2020, 24–107.

[14]For a catalogue of Venetian hospitals throughout history with entries on individual institutions, see F. Semi, *Gli ospizi di Venezia* (Venice, 1983).

[15]Despite the Ospedale's original mission to serve the sick poor, by the time the hospital opened in 1503, the Maggior Consiglio, Venice's Great Council, had decided that the institution would become a shelter for poor sailors who had served the Republic. I discuss this change in the mission of the Ospedale in D. Abdon, 'Architecture in relief: hospitals for the poor in Venice and Lisbon', in D. Hitchcock and Julia McClure (eds.), *The Routledge History of Poverty, c. 1450–1800* (London, 2021), 265–90.

[16]Early scholarship on the Ospedale already showed this conflation, which I believe stems from the fact that, at the ASV, materials related to the *cohopertum* have been archived with Ospedale records. Corner, for example, published transcriptions of documents related to both structures together. See *Ecclesiae Venetae*, 401–10.

[17]ASV, PSMS, b. 107, fasc. 2. The decree is transcribed in Corner, *Ecclesiae Venetae*, 402–3.

[18]See Abdon, 'Architecture in relief'.
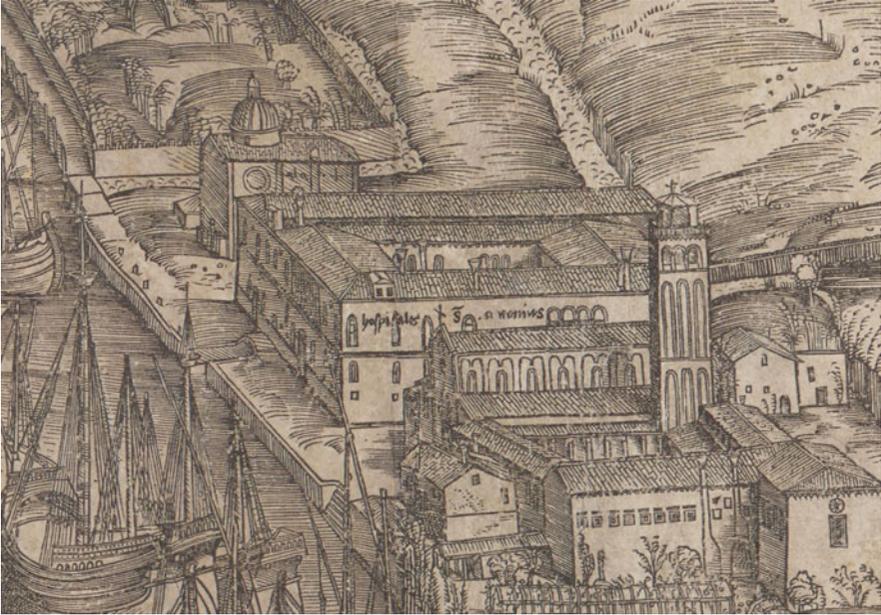
Figure 2. Jacopo de' Barbari, *View of Venice* (detail), 1500. This detail shows the monastic complex of Sant'Antonio with the Ospedale and church of Messer Gesù Cristo to the north. The buildings face the Canale di San Marco. Duke Digital Repository. Accessed online: 25 September 2020, https://doi.org/10.7924/G8MK69TH.

normal procedures are suspended and extra-ordinary measures are taken to save lives, protect people, limit damage and return conditions to normal'.[19] Meanwhile, a crisis presents a difficult or dangerous *period of time* to an individual or small population, threatening public trust and eventually triggering changes in public policy. Thus, an emergency is an abrupt change that requires immediate action: the sudden arrival of a group of refugees in Venice during winter followed by the fast construction of a structure to shelter them. A crisis, on the other hand, does not result from an unanticipated event but rather from the accumulation of issues over time: the inefficiency of Venice's charitable system combined with population growth and an increase in the numbers of the local and foreign poor led to the need for a general hospital (the Ospedale di Messer Gesù Cristo) to treat the sick poor. Both emergencies and crises are expected to lead to disaster and, as such, require intervention by authorities. Yet, these definitions also caution us against conflating the histories of the *cohopertum* and the Ospedale di Messer Gesù Cristo. Contrary to the initial vision for the Ospedale to tackle poverty and disease in the city as a whole, the *cohopertum* merely provided overnight shelter for the poor, who were otherwise to support themselves by begging throughout

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[19]H. Al-Dahash, M. Thayaparan and U. Kulatunga, 'Understanding the terminologies: disaster, crisis and emergency', in P. Chan and C. Neilson (eds.), *Proceedings of the 32nd Annual ARCOM Conference*, vol. II (Manchester, 2016), 1193.

the city during the day.[20] More specifically, the temporary shelter targeted the poor who could be found sleeping in the porticoes of San Marco and the Ducal Palace, relocating them from that central area to a site that would help their integration into society. Extracting the *cohopertum* from the Ospedale's much longer history, this article exclusively addresses the construction of this temporary shelter as a rapid response to an urban and social emergency in fifteenth-century Venice.

The urban development of the Punta di Sant'Antonio

Development of the site chosen for the *cohopertum* had begun in 1334, when the Maggior Consiglio ceded the lands at the Punta di Sant'Antonio to Marco Catapan and Cristoforo Istrigo, two *cittadini* (citizens) of the island of Sant'Elena.[21] Visible in the view of the city by Fra' Paolino from *c.* 1346, the area appears undefined, likely still a marshy site with shallow waters (Figure 3). Throughout the fourteenth century, landfills stemming from private and religious initiatives took place in various areas of Venice, promoted by the Republic as a strategy to expand the city's habitable zones. Not coincidentally, the land concession to Catapan and Istrigo required that they fill the lot in question, measuring 40 x 60 *passi* (steps), within three years.[22] The two *cittadini* must have satisfied this requirement by 1336, when the Magistrato al Piovego, the magistracy overseeing the maintenance and repair of streets, bridges, canals and quays in Venice, confirmed the presence of a *pallificata*, a required structure built as part of land reclamations to prevent landslides.[23]

   After building a wooden house on the site, Istrigo offered it to the Florentine friar Giotto degli Abati, then prior of the congregation of the Canons Regular of St Anthony of Vienna in France.[24] With the help of Istrigo, Catapan and others, the friar established a monastery at the Punta.[25] In 1346, Doge Andrea Dandolo (r. 1343–54) set the first stone for the future church of Sant'Antonio di Castello and its annexed hospital, which would give the Punta its name.[26] The church was finished by 1347, when the main altar received a polyptych by Lorenzo Veneziano.[27] In order to connect the newly reclaimed lands to the city proper,

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[20]B. Pullan, *Rich and Poor in Renaissance Venice: The Social Institutions of a Catholic State, to 1620* (London, 1971), 212; Corner, *Ecclesiae Venetae*, 404.

[21]G. Tassini, *Curiosità veneziane, ovvero Origini delle denominazioni stradali di Venezia*, ed. L. Moretti (Venice, 1964), 35; Foscari and Tafuri, 'Sebastiano da Lugano', 100; Sandrelli, 'Sant'Antonio di Castello', 159–60. The class of *cittadini* existed below the nobility in Venice's social hierarchy. There were different types of citizenship, and the Republic offered benefits and opportunities accordingly. See B. Pullan, '"Three orders of inhabitants": social hierarchies in the Republic of Venice', in J. Denton (ed.), *Orders and Hierarchies in Late Medieval and Renaissance Europe* (Toronto, 1999), 160–3.

[22]Approximately 200 x 300 feet since a Venetian *passo* equals 5 feet. Sandrelli, 'Sant'Antonio di Castello', 159.

[23]*Ibid.*

[24]Foscari and Tafuri, 'Sebastiano da Lugano', 100. However, Istrigo only formally donated the land to the monastery in 1360.

[25]Tassini, *Curiosità veneziane*, 35.

[26]Mentioned by Bishop Nicolò Morosini in the document authorizing construction of the monastery. Foscari and Tafuri, 'Sebastiano da Lugano', 100.

[27]The complex of Sant'Antonio gained cultural prominence in the sixteenth century due to the important artistic commissions at the church as well as the establishment of a prominent library. See A. Zorzi,
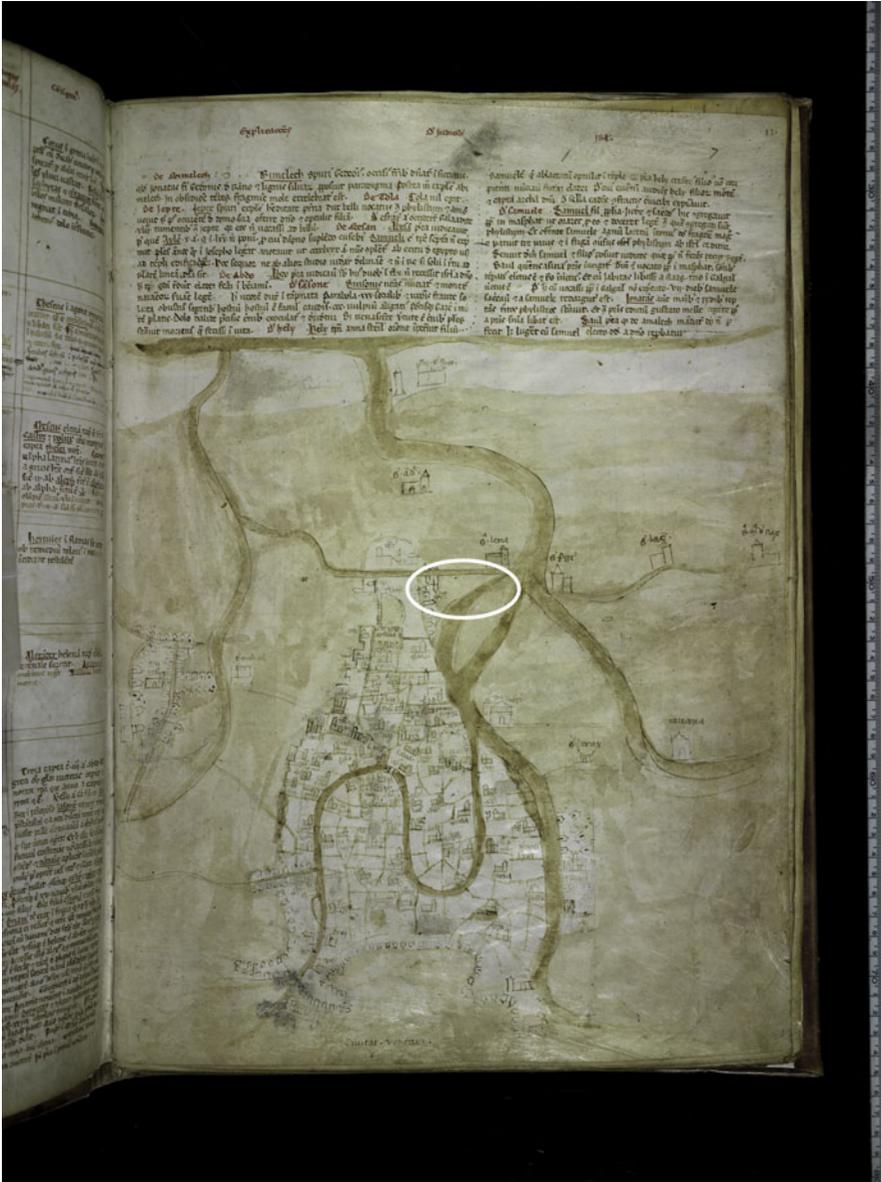
Figure 3. Fra' Paolino, View of Venice from *Chronologia magna*, *c.* 1346. The circle indicates the area of the Punta di Sant'Antonio, still undefined then. Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana, Mss. Lat. Z. 399 (=1610), fol. 7r. Courtesy of the Ministero dei Beni e delle Attività Culturali e del Turismo – Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana. Reproduction forbidden.

Venezia scomparsa (Venice, 1972), 93, 95, for the artworks and funerary monuments inside the church. On the library, see M.J.C. Lowry, 'Two great Venetian libraries in the age of Aldus Manutius', *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library*, 57 (1974), 128–66.

Venetian authorities had already asked the Dominicans who owned the land separating the Punta from the rest of Venice to allow the friars of Sant'Antonio to build a path (1334) and bridge (1342) through their possessions.[28] Finally, in 1359, the Maggior Consiglio granted the monastery ownership of the entire Punta di Sant'Antonio.[29] The friars acquired another stretch of land in 1364, this time towards the Canale di San Marco, and in this way, the Punta assumed the topographical characteristics it would keep in future views of the city (see Figure 1).[30]

Building the shelter

The commission of the shelter initiated the development of the area between San Domenico and Sant'Antonio in 1471, with the Venetian Senate engaging the Collegio and the Ufficio del Sal to guarantee the reclamation of the marshy site at the Punta and the construction of the temporary structure. The *cohopertum* was operative by August 1472, approximately eight months after the Senate's decision to establish the shelter, if not earlier. On that date, recognizing that some paupers were not physically able to beg, the Senate established a food subsidy for the shelter.[31] It was determined that the Provveditori alle Biave, the commissioners in charge of grains, were to send two *staia* (approximately 166 litres) of bread for the poor on a weekly basis.[32] This Senatorial measure remains significant since it established a *terminus ante quem* for the opening of the shelter. Moreover, combined with later data, this food subsidy can also hint at the number of paupers living at the *cohopertum*. A 1649 publication indicates that Venice then consumed 634,888 *staia* of bread per year. Considering that the population in 1642 was 120,439, it is possible to estimate that a person ate approximately 5.3 *staia* of bread in a year, or 0.1 *staia* in a week.[33] This is, of course, a rough estimate that does not account for social class, wealth or a more complete diet. Yet, based on these numbers, the 2 *staia* of bread sent to the *cohopertum* could feed approximately 20 people per week. Since the decree specifically targeted those who were physically unable to beg, the number of paupers at the shelter was

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[28]Foscari and Tafuri, 'Sebastiano da Lugano', 100.

[29]Referred to as 'd'acqua e palude esistente', of water and marshes, i.e. the land adjacent to that previously obtained by Istrigo. Foscari and Tafuri, 'Sebastiano da Lugano', 100.

[30]Sandrelli, 'Sant'Antonio di Castello', 159–60. Future land concessions to the monastery happened in 1418, 1445, 1446, 1441 and 1457. See also Pavanini, 'Venezia verso la pianificazione?', 494 n. 14.

[31]'Pauperes nostri, qui morantur ad S. Antonium maximam patiuntur victus egestatem, multi quorum propter senectam, & impotentiam mendicare per urbem non possunt, & ii, qui id faciunt, non inveniunt tantum, quantum victui suo satisfaciat, sed quoniam Dominus Deus noster elimosinis, & omni alia via nobis propiciandus est. Valid Pars, quod singula ebdomada per Provisores nostros bladorum dari debeat dictis pauperibus in elimosinam staria duo panis, ut hoc adjumento melius vivere valeant.' Transcribed in Corner, *Ecclesiae Venetae*, 404. I thank Sam Barber and Amy Gillette for their help translating this passage.

[32]A. Martini, *Manuale di metrologia: ossia, misure, pesi e moneti in uso attualmente e anticamente presso tutti i popoli* (Turin, 1883), 818.

[33]Data on bread consumption comes from P. Molmenti, *Venice: Its Individual Growth from the Earliest Beginnings to the Fall of the Republic*, trans. Horatio F. Brown, Part III, The Decadence, vol. I (Chicago, 1908), 95 n. 1. For Venice's population, see K.J. Beloch, *Storia della popolazione d'Italia* (Florence, 1994), 397.

likely much higher, accounting for the individuals able to roam the city asking for alms.

Despite our knowledge that the shelter was operative by August 1472, the area between San Domenico and Sant'Antonio encompassed a substantial stretch of land, and the precise location and appearance of the *cohopertum* have remained obscure (see Figure 2). Using recent high-quality scans of Jacopo de' Barbari's *View of Venice* (1500), this article hopes to shed light on the matter.[34] A detail of the Punta di Sant'Antonio shows a previously unnoticed tent-like structure to the right of the hospital church (Figure 4). In his *De situ urbis Venetae* (*c.* 1494), fifteenth-century historian Marco Antonio Coccio, best known as Sabellico, mentioned a wooden church next to the later Ospedale di Messer Gesù Cristo.[35] John McAndrew hypothesizes that Sabellico, who visited the site between 1489 and 1490, perhaps saw a small oratory erected to serve the Ospedale while the hospital church of San Nicolò de Bari remained under construction.[36] Indeed, it is possible that this wooden structure described by Sabellico and discussed by McAndrew could have been the lower building identified by this study in de' Barbari's *View*. Yet, it is also possible that it was the *cohopertum*, especially since the structure features the rectangular shape and triangular roof pitch historically associated with tents.[37] If correct, this hypothesis would suggest that the shelter remained in place into the sixteenth century. The original decree commissioning the *cohopertum* hints at this possibility, claiming that the 'Ufficio del Sal must make a shelter, so that it *always* exists for sheltering the poor of this sort.'[38] It would not be unreasonable for the Senate to count on the longevity of a makeshift shelter. As studies of ephemeral structures have demonstrated, some of these constructions could survive for generations.[39]

Contextualizing the shelter

The construction of temporary structures as responses to urban crises related to disease and poverty was not novel in European cities in the fifteenth century.[40] Scholarship on plague outbreaks has shown that the provisional occupation of existing buildings or the construction of ephemeral structures constituted the

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[34]The scan is approximately 34,000 x 16,000 pixels and resulted from a collaborative endeavour spearheaded by Duke University's Wired! Lab. See https://repository.duke.edu/catalog/duke:448098 accessed 30 October 2020. I am grateful to Kristin L. Huffman for providing me with high-quality details of the *View*.

[35]M. Sabellico, *Del sito di Venezia Città (1502)* (Venice, 1957), 26.

[36]J. McAndrew, *Venetian Architecture of the Early Renaissance* (London, 1980), 530.

[37]R. Corser, 'Tents: the state of the art in deployable shelter', in D. Froehlich and M. Pride (eds.), *Seeking the City: Visionaries on the Margins* (Washington, DC, 2008), 580–2.

[38]My emphasis.

[39]As demonstrated by Tierney, '"Dirty, rotten sheds"', 231–52. In any case, eighteenth-century depictions of the Punta, such as those by William Marlow and Antonio Visentini, do not record any buildings to the right of the hospital church, indicating that the construction, whether church or shelter, must have been removed by then.

[40]As evidenced by contemporary military treatises and discussed by scholars working particularly on the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, tents were also common in military encampments. See, for example, K. Andresová, 'Military camps in military manuals', in A.S. Wilkinson and G. Kemp (eds.), *Negotiating Conflict and Controversy in the Early Modern Book World* (Leiden, 2019), 170–1.
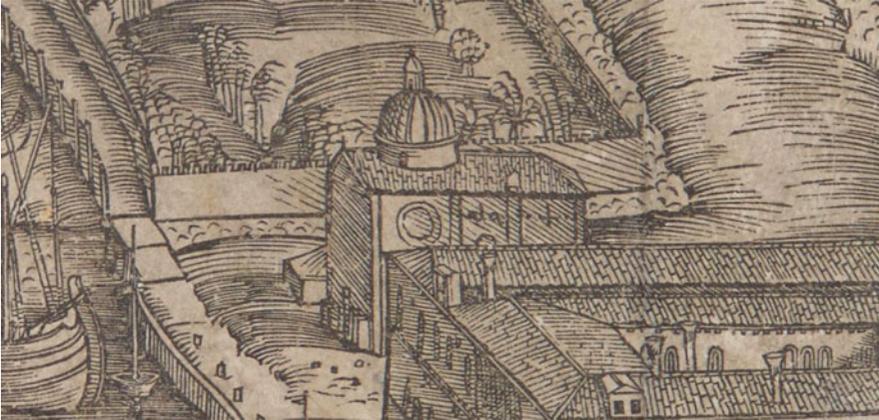
Figure 4. Jacopo de' Barbari, *View of Venice* (detail), 1500. Visible in the detail is the previously unnoticed tent-like structure, likely the *cohopertum*, to the right of the hospital church. Duke Digital Repository. Accessed online: 25 September 2020, https://doi.org/10.7924/G8MK69TH.

most makeshift and expeditious forms of response to an epidemic.[41] Visual evidence of ephemeral responses to plague comes from a detail of a painting known as the *Madonna dei tencìtt* (or *Madonna degli sporchini*), Giovan Battista Rastellini's 1890 copy of an original created by prior Bernardo Catoni in 1630–31.[42] The painting's foreground shows the presence of dozens of tents in the courtyard of Milan's Lazzaretto during the 1630 plague outbreak (Figure 5). Traditionally, these improvised shelters would be burned once the plague subsided.

Venice, for the most part, did not rely on makeshift structures when dealing with plague. As early as 1423, the city had established a permanent plague hospital, now known as the Lazzaretto Vecchio, followed by construction of the Lazzaretto Nuovo in 1471 – both located on islands in the lagoon. In 1457, a proposal advocated for the construction of tents on the Lido to provide an area to quarantine those suspected of carrying the plague. Yet, the measure did not move forward.[43] Rather, the Republic only resorted to temporary structures with the goal of expanding the capacity of existing institutions: in 1576, for example, employees of the Arsenale, the state shipyards, built a temporary extension to the Lazzaretto Nuovo to allow for more patients.[44]

When it came to addressing an influx of paupers into the city, however, this provisional approach seems to have been the Republic's preferred response. Shelters similar to the *cohopertum* were built in peripheral areas of Venice in the sixteenth

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[41]The construction of buildings to be used exclusively during epidemics and the establishment of plague hospitals constituted more developed, yet also more expensive, forms of response since they involved a structure in constant use that, as such, required permanent staffing. See J.S. Crawshaw, *Plague Hospitals: Public Health for the City in Early Modern Venice* (Farnham, 2012), 8–9.

[42]I am grateful to Ann G. Carmichael for bringing this painting to my attention. She discusses the image in a forthcoming essay on 'Pest-house imaginaries'.

[43]Palmer, 'The control of plague', 56.

[44]Crawshaw, *Plague Hospitals*, 90–1.

Figure 5. Giovan Battista Rastellini (after Bernardo Catoni), *Madonna dei tencìt* (detail), 1890. Located in Via Laghetto, Milan. *Source:* Wikimedia Commons (https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File: Lazzaretto_1630.jpg). Accessed online: 25 September 2020.

century as attempts to address severe famines that drove people from Venetian territories into the city.[45] During the great famine of 1527–28, private citizens rallied to create a shelter east of the church of Santi Giovanni e Paolo to support the wave of starving immigrants from the Republic's possessions on the mainland.[46] This shelter consisted of two structures described as 'teze', large wooden canopies likely similar to the *cohopertum*, to allow for separation of sexes, as well as a small wooden chapel for worship.[47] Known as the Ospedaletto, the long and narrow complex featured at least three wooden structures when the institution received its statutes and the official name of Santa Maria dei Derelitti in 1537. A temporary construction appeared again as a response to another emergency later in the century, when starving paupers flocked into the city as a result of poor harvests and ensuing famine. In 1594, the commissioners in charge of hospitals decided to build an institution to shelter these vagrants – the Ospedale dei Mendicanti, also near the church of Santi Giovanni e Paolo.[48] Prior to construction of the permanent fabric starting in 1601, however, temporary shelters and a wooden chapel were built to house and serve approximately 100 paupers.[49] No known evidence indicates the commission of similar shelters for beggars and paupers in the city prior to 1471, but documentation from the late fifteenth and sixteenth centuries appears to demonstrate that, when dealing with a sudden increase in the numbers of paupers in the city, ephemeral architecture offered Venice a rapidly deployable solution. Despite limited historical records, it is possible that the *cohopertum* started this trend.

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[45]P. Cottrell, 'Poor substitutes: imaging disease and vagrancy in Renaissance Venice', in T. Nichols (ed.), *Others and Outcasts in Early Modern Europe: Picturing the Social Margins* (Aldershot, 2007), 62–85.

[46]D. Howard and L. Moretti, *Sound and Space in Renaissance Venice: Architecture, Music, Acoustics* (New Haven, 2009), 171. See also Semi, *Gli ospizi*, 120–7.

[47]The use of different nouns, such as *cohopertum* or *teza*, to describe these temporary structures does not necessarily imply that the tents were dissimilar. Rather, I believe the terms simply reflected a language choice in the documents: Latin for the *cohopertum* or *teza* in the Venetian dialect.

[48]On the later Ospedale, see A. Bamji, L. Borean and L. Moretti (eds.), *La chiesa e l'ospedale di San Lazzaro del Mendicanti: Arte, beneficenza, cura, devozione, educazione* (Venice, 2015).

[49]Howard and Moretti, *Sound and Space*, 186.

Venice's existing system of support

The need for the construction of temporary shelters suggests that Venice's charitable network in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries could not absorb a sudden increase in the number of paupers. But what was the state of this system prior to 1471, when the Venetian Senate addressed the poor migrants in the area of San Marco by commissioning the *cohopertum*? Records indicate that, in the early 1470s, the city had at least 42 hospitals, not counting isolation institutions on other islands, such as the Lazzaretto Vecchio and Nuovo for plague victims.[50] These establishments stemmed from the initiative of private donors, religious orders, confraternities, guilds and, less often, the state. Out of these institutions, the location of 29 *ospedali* can be identified, offering a glimpse into Venice's charitable network during this period (Figure 6).

Despite these 42 hospitals, until the late fifteenth century, Venice did not have a large-scale institution except for the foundling Ospedale della Pietà, which had been established in 1346 in the parish of San Giovanni in Bragora to house abandoned infants of both sexes.[51] Rather, the average size of a Venetian hospital allowed for 10 patients or residents, often widows or old men, arguably the most vulnerable groups of society after orphans and young women. Two institutions targeting the poor could each shelter approximately 20–50 paupers, while foreigners relied on *ospedali* designated for their particular communities, such as the two hospitals for Germans and an institution for Armenian immigrants. A 1497 report by the Milanese ambassador Battista Sfondrato confirms the limited scale of Venetian *ospedali*. Sfondrato recounted that Venice had small hospitals far away from each other and without much funding. Unimpressed, he remarked the lack of an institution as renowned as the Ospedale Maggiore (1456) in Milan, a general hospital designed to accommodate between 300 and 350 patients at a time and with over 2,000 admissions per year.[52]

The Venetian government was certainly aware of this undesirable scenario and eventually established a commission in 1489 to survey the hospitals in the city. The commission's findings offer crucial insight into Venice's charitable crisis. Besides inspecting these institutions' physical headquarters and finding them to be in precarious conditions, the commission also investigated testaments whose bequests had established hospitals in Venice. They reported that the majority of these institutions were 'in poor condition and even decayed, which is an offence to God and to the honour of our state, on account of the complaints of the poor who are not receiving their dues as they ought, or in accordance with the bequests and

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[50]An inventory from *c.* 1560 provides a picture of charity in the late fifteenth-century city. The inventory is transcribed in Pullan, *Rich and Poor*, 423–30. Pullan used information from the inventory and a few other archival sources to compile a list of 52 hospitals that existed in early modern Venice. I cross-referenced his data with those in Semi, *Gli ospizi*, in order to locate these *ospedali*, excluding those established after 1471.

[51]Pullan, *Rich and Poor*, 207.

[52]Sfondrato's report is transcribed in R.C. Mueller, 'A foreigner's view of poor relief in late Quattrocento Venice', in *Pauvres et riches: société et culture du Moyen-Âge aux temps-modernes: mélanges offerts à Bronislaw Geremek* (Warsaw, 1992), 61–2. For the data on the Ospedale Maggiore, see P. Guedes (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Architecture and Technological Change* (London, 1979), 147; and J. Henderson, *The Renaissance Hospital: Healing the Body and Healing the Soul* (New Haven, 2006), 280.
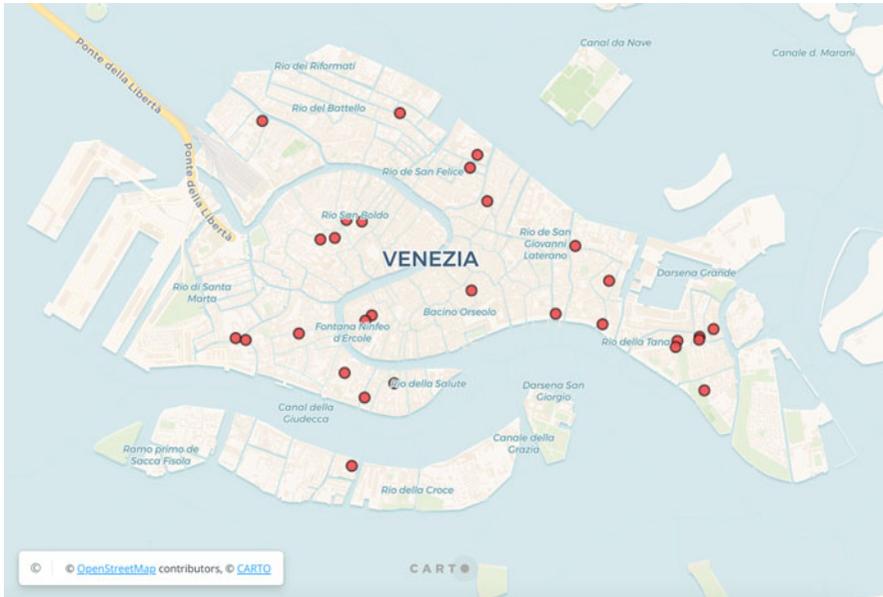
Figure 6. Digital map showing 29 out of 42 hospitals that existed in Venice by 1471. Created by author.

instructions of testators'.[53] It is important to note that the Republic supervised but did not directly subsidize poor relief, relying instead on a decentralized system of private donations. However, it appears that those responsible for managing Venice's hospitals were neglecting their duties and appropriating funds, leading to the inefficiency of the city's charitable network.[54] Thus, the Republic not only lacked a large institution able to accommodate a sudden increase in the number of paupers, but the ones that existed were already ineffective in serving the local poor, explaining the need for the construction of temporary shelters.

The Venetian migrant crisis

It is no surprise, then, that the flood of immigrants into the city from Venetian territories in the east starting in the 1470s required an unusual public intervention in poor relief in the form of the *cohopertum*.[55] As mentioned in the introduction, this arrival of foreigners originated in the Republic's expansion in the Mediterranean.[56]

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[53]The commission's report is partially translated in Pullan, *Rich and Poor*, 211. The Latin phrase was inspired by Psalm 9:13. D. D'Andrea, 'Charity and confraternities', in Dursteler (ed.), *A Companion*, 433–4.

[54]These institutions could have been managed by private individuals, confraternities or the state itself.

[55]With the exception of B. Imhaus, *Le minoranze orientali a Venezia: 1300–1510* (Rome, 1997), historical studies of migrant populations arriving in Venice have tended to concentrate on either the fourteenth or sixteenth centuries. I have avoided using precise data from those centuries but relied on this material to offer a broader sense of these migrants' experience in Venice and their relationship to the Republic.

[56]G. Fedalto, 'Le minoranze straniere a Venezia tra politica e legislazione', in H.G. Beck, M. Manoussacas and A. Pertusi (eds.), *Venezia centro di mediazione tra Oriente e Occidente: secoli XV–XVI, aspetti e problemi* (Venice, 1977), 143; and Imhaus, *Le minoranze*, 16.

Starting with the Fourth Crusade (1202–04), Venice began to acquire territories in the Aegean Sea, and following the conquest of Corfù in 1386, the Republic further advanced into the Ionian Sea, essentially controlling access to the Adriatic.[57] Together, the Dalmatian coast and the Greek mainland and islands formed what became known as Venetian Romania. Yet, Venice's dominance began to suffer serious challenges with the conquest of Constantinople by the Ottoman Turks in 1453 and the Republic's subsequent loss of several eastern territories during the First Ottoman–Venetian War (1463–79).

Beginning with the fall of Constantinople, migrants started to move from eastern to western Europe, initially targeting the Greek islands of Negroponte (present-day Euboea) and especially Crete.[58] However, Ottoman advances into Venetian territories, combined with social and economic instability, led to a second migratory wave – this time towards Venice itself. These migrations involved both voluntary migrants, whose homeland remained in Venetian possession, and refugees, whose birthplace fell under Ottoman control.[59] Migrants also came from throughout Venetian Romania, and this movement intensified in 1470 with the siege and subsequent loss of the important outpost of Negroponte in August of that year. Recent studies have demonstrated the difficulty in linking migratory movements towards Venice to specific events in the east, but the fact remains that, due to war and accompanying economic decline in its eastern territories, Venice saw a particularly significant influx of Greeks, Albanians and Dalmatians during this period.[60] Estimates indicate that, by the early sixteenth century, approximately 5,000–6,000 south-eastern European natives lived in the city.[61]

Archival evidence from petitions and privileges suggests that both voluntary migrants and refugees had strong connections to their homeland as well as to Venetian political authority.[62] Subjects of the Republic, they often spoke non-Italian languages and could even adhere to different religious rites. They were not Venetian, but they were also not foreigners in the same sense as someone from France, Spain or even Florence. Their position as subjects of the Republic granted them legal status anywhere in the Venetian Empire, including Venice itself – a standing that allowed them access to courts, jobs, privileges and protection.[63]

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[57]For a summary of the creation and expansion of the *Stato da mar*, see A. Zannini, *Venezia città aperta: gli stranieri e la Serenissima, XIV–XVIII sec.* (Venice, 2009), 17–18, 26.

[58]F. Thiriet, 'Sur les communautés grecque et albanaise à Venise', in Beck, Manoussacas and Pertusi (eds.), *Venezia centro*, 218–19.

[59]E. Burke, '"…To live under the protection of your Serenity": immigration and identity in early modern Venice', *Studi veneziani*, 67 (2013), 125. If a territory surrendered, both locals and Venetian officials were allowed time to flee. Otherwise, the city would be destroyed and its inhabitants either killed or enslaved. See also E. Burke, *The Greeks of Venice, 1498–1600: Immigration, Settlement, and Integration* (Turnhout, 2016), 18–19.

[60]See Imhaus, *Le minoranze*, esp. part I, ch. 2. The bibliography on each of those communities and other foreign minorities in Venice is extensive, but overviews can be found in Imhaus, *Le minoranze*, 13–24; and B. Ravid, 'Venice and its minorities', in Dursteler (ed.), *A Companion*, 449–85.

[61]Imhaus, *Le minoranze*, 49.

[62]Burke, '"…To live under the protection"', 139.

[63]Burke, *The Greeks of Venice*, 13. The position of foreigners in the city has been nuanced in R. Salzberg and C. Judde de Larivière, 'Comment être vénitien? Identification des immigrants et "droit d'habiter" à Venise au XVIe siècle', *Revue d'Histoire Moderne & Contemporaine*, 64 (2017), 68–92.

Although studies often present Venice as a thriving port city and therefore an 'attractive' destination to foreigners, in the case of refugees, these migrants had been under Venetian rule for decades and many simply found themselves without another option in the face of conflict and instability in the east, seeing Venice as a 'centre' to which they were naturally, and legally, connected.[64] Moreover, as Venetian subjects, these minorities must be understood within the structures, regulations and hierarchies of the Venetian Republic.[65] Considering historical parallels with current migrant crises and questions of accountability, Venice's own acknowledgement of responsibility for this influx of refugees into the city must be emphasized. This onus is evident in a Senatorial decree from 1479. Arguing that the Republic should be fair towards poor Albanians and their requests since they had been forced to leave their homeland, the Venetian Senate explained that aiding them made it so that 'in the entire world our state could not be justly slandered'.[66] In question, then, was not only Venice's moral duty but also its status.

Yet, the influx of foreigners in the early 1470s raised both social and public health concerns. Socially, although some migrants could be well educated and possess financial resources, this migratory wave from Venetian colonies to Venice resulted in the arrival of many paupers, primarily single young men, in the city.[67] As refugees, they disembarked in Venice with little money or financial support from their families, in many cases having left behind whatever possessions they had.[68] Even if Venice restored relations with their homelands, now under new rulers, these migrants' financial struggles made it difficult for them to return to or even visit their places of origin. Upon arrival, they not only faced several challenges, housing being the most critical, but their presence, presumably to stay, created social and economic tension with those already settled, whether Venetians or foreigners.[69]

Further tension emerged due to concerns regarding the spread of disease. Richard Palmer has called attention to the fact that, since 1455, the Republic had kept a close watch on immigration from the Balkans due to the area's constant struggles with plague outbreaks.[70] A wave of migrants from Dalmatia in 1455 prompted the state to house them temporarily in a public warehouse located at the parish of San Biagio, while the sick were sent to the Lazzaretto Nuovo and provisions were arranged for those willing to leave Venice. A year later, the Senate determined that, as a result of the high numbers of migrants from Dalmatia and Albania, its measures to prevent plague remained inefficient. At that point, immigration was banned, with the Republic surveilling the Lido and other points of arrival for illegal migrants. The situation repeated itself in 1461, leading to similar measures. In 1478, a year marked by a particularly severe plague outbreak, this fear

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[64]As Zannini has explained, this idea of Venice as an idealized 'città-ospite', or host city, has been disseminated throughout history through the myth of Venice. See *Venezia città aperta*, 12–13.

[65]G. Plakotos, 'Diasporas, space and imperial subjecthood in early modern Venice: a comparative perspective', *Diasporas*, 28 (2016), 39.

[66]Cited in D. Calabi, 'Gli stranieri e la città', in Tenenti and Tucci (eds.), *Storia di Venezia*, 915, 917.

[67]Thiriet, 'Sur les communautés', 218–19; Imhaus, *Le minoranze*, 410.

[68]Burke, '"…To live under the protection"', 129.

[69]Burke, *The Greeks of Venice*, 22.

[70]Palmer, 'The control of plague', 54–5.

led the Republic to ship off to Istria the Albanian refugees dying of hunger under the porticoes of San Marco.[71] As these examples demonstrate, even if a particular wave of migration was not linked to outbreaks in other regions, public health likely factored into the Venetian decision to move paupers away from central urban areas.

Considering the *cohopertum*'s role

Whether for social or public health concerns, considering the remote location of the *cohopertum*, the Venetian government's choice to establish a shelter at the Punta di Sant'Antonio indeed suggests an attempt to isolate migrants from the central areas of Venice. Generally speaking, foreign presence in early modern cities materialized in two ways: through foreigners' occupation of an urban space, as was the case with the migrants sleeping on Piazza San Marco, or through state intervention in the form of appointed or manufactured shelters to control minorities, as exemplified by Venice's creation of the *cohopertum*.[72] For the Republic, foreign presence required the Senate to produce space to accommodate these newcomers, often leading to their marginalization through placement outside of the city's already dense urban fabric.[73] This strategy fits with what Elisabeth Crouzet-Pavan has identified as the creation of a spatial hierarchy in fifteenth-century Venice, marked by the pushing to the periphery of activities such as ship-building, brick production, as well as of charitable institutions like confraternities and hospitals.[74] Since this urban transformation was linked to attempts to control and purify behaviour in certain spaces of Venice, particularly the central areas of Rialto, Venice's commercial centre, and Piazza San Marco, the religious and political headquarters of the city, scholarship discussing the *cohopertum* has tended to approach the issue of migrants by highlighting the undesirable presence of the poor in San Marco.[75] Yet, I argue that Venice had deeper social and military reasons for placing these immigrants at the Punta di Sant'Antonio – reasons that went beyond the Republic's anxieties over social decorum and public health.

Undeniably, the sudden arrival of a large number of refugees in Venice threatened the order of the city.[76] To prevent disorder, the Republic's best approach would be to incorporate these migrants into society as quickly as possible, and employment constituted one way to guarantee that transition.[77] In Venice, many eastern migrants would become domestic servants, hold public jobs as couriers or nightguards, work as craftsmen (i.e. bakers, barbers, etc.) or traders or serve

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[71]*Ibid.*, 55.

[72]D. Calabi, 'Gli stranieri e la città. Casi di violenza nelle forme del costruito', *Contemporanea*, 1 (1998), 535.

[73]For a detailed study of this topic in relation to several foreign communities, see Calabi, 'Gli stranieri', in Tenenti and Tucci (eds.), *Storia di Venezia*. Although much later, the creation of the Jewish Ghetto in 1516 remains one of the best examples of this trend.

[74]E. Crouzet-Pavan, '*Sopra le acque salse': espaces, pouvoir et société à Venise à la fin du Moyen Âge* (Rome, 1992), ch. 11.

[75]For example, Foscari and Tafuri used the shelter as an example of the increasing connectivity between the organization of the periphery and central areas of Venice in the fifteenth century. See 'Sebastiano da Lugano', 102.

[76]Burke, '"…To live under the protection"', 149.

[77]*Ibid.*

in the Venetian army or navy.[78] Their integration could be facilitated by 'national' confraternities or *scuole*. For example, the Scuola of Santa Maria e di San Gallo degli Albanesi existed since 1442, assisting Albanians coming into Venice; Dalmatians counted on the Scuola of San Giorgio degli Schiavoni, established in 1451; and the Greek community received permission to establish its own confraternity in 1498.[79] While the presence of poor refugees in the area of Piazza San Marco indisputably posed a challenge to urban decorum for Venetian authorities eager to maintain the status of the city's most prominent civic space, migrants *could* be absorbed into Venice and its workforce.[80] The temporary shelter provided an immediate bridge.

The fact that housing presented one of the most difficult and expensive challenges faced by migrants in their new city further underscores the importance of the *cohopertum*.[81] In a recent study, Rosa Salzberg has called attention to Venice's 'infrastructure of hospitality', particularly the key role of stop-gap accommodations such as inns (*osterie*) and lodging houses (*albergarie*) as transitional spaces for newcomers who could afford those services.[82] For refugees with very limited or non-existent financial resources, few contacts and unable to access these types of accommodation as a result, the *cohopertum* offered a significant alternative. Yet, while *osterie* and *albergarie* clustered in the areas around San Marco and Rialto to better serve visitors, the position of the shelter at the remote area of Sant'Antonio might, once again, suggest an attempt at isolation rather than integration of these migrants. Once the location of the *cohopertum* is set in a more complex context, however, a contrasting picture emerges.

As discussed above, development of the Punta di Sant'Antonio had begun in the fourteenth century, but the parish of San Pietro di Castello, where the Punta is located, constituted an unusual area of the city with its own orientation focused on the Arsenale, the state shipyards first established in 1303, rather than Rialto and San Marco.[83] Due to the presence of industrial trades and resulting noise, the parish had historically failed to attract inhabitants. This scenario only began to change starting in the late 1400s, when the Ottoman threat led to the expansion of the state shipyards. Lured by the promise of secure work through military enrolment, a shipbuilding community began to develop in that remote area of the city.[84]

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[78]A. Ducellier, 'Les albanais a Venise aux XIVe et XVe siècles', *Travaux et Mémoires*, 2 (1967), 409. On the role of foreign servants in Venetian households, see D. Romano, *Housecraft and Statecraft: Domestic Service in Renaissance Venice, 1400–1600* (Baltimore, 1996), 122–9.

[79]For an overview of the *scuole* of foreigners, see F. Ortalli, *'Per salute delle anime e delli corpi': scuole piccole a Venezia nel tardo Medioevo* (Venice, 2001), 102–14. Plakotos has emphasized the role of these confraternities in the broader subject-making strategies of the Venetian Republic. See 'Diasporas', 47–50.

[80]Salzberg and Judde de Larivière, 'Comment être vénitien?', 76–7. As the authors have demonstrated, once immigrants settled into a parish, daily relations slowly led to their cultural integration into Venetian society.

[81]Burke, *The Greeks of Venice*, 22.

[82]R. Salzberg, 'Mobility, cohabitation and cultural exchange in the lodging houses of early modern Venice', *Urban History*, 43 (2018), 1–21.

[83]R.C. Davis, *Shipbuilders of the Venetian Arsenal: Workers and Workplace in the Preindustrial City* (Baltimore, 1991), 84. For a brief history of the Arsenale, see F.C. Lane, *Venetian Ships and Shipbuilders of the Renaissance* (Baltimore, 1934), 129–45.

[84]Davis, *Shipbuilders*, 84.

The strong connection between the Arsenale and the parish only intensified in the following decades, as evident in Vittore Carpaccio's *Apparition of the Crucified of Mount Ararat in the Church of Sant'Antonio di Castello* (*c.* 1512) showing the interior of the now-destroyed church (Figure 7).[85] Visible under the church arcade and near the ceiling are models of ships and small flags, likely left on site by devotees as ex-votos. Significantly, the traditional cult of St Anthony of Vienna did not have any links to navigation. It was the location of the church of Sant'Antonio near the Arsenale that led to local veneration of the saint as the protector of navigation, evidence of the development of a strong geographical symbolism.[86]

These devotees worked in the shipyards, forming a community known as *arsenalotti*, and served in the Venetian navy.[87] Since the mid-fourteenth century, the Republic had relied significantly on its eastern subjects, particularly Albanians, Dalmatians and Greeks, as manpower for its navy and shipyards.[88] In this period, Venice had difficulty staffing the Arsenale and its galleys since local Venetians were not interested in subjecting themselves to these heavy and exhausting jobs. While the Arsenale paid much less than private shipyards in the city, conditions aboard Venetian galleys could be grim, with most of the crew sleeping, working and eating on deck, inefficiently protected from extreme weather and the elements by a large canvas tent.[89] As a result, in the 1400s, the Arsenale community encompassed primarily foreigners, which explains the Senate's choice to place a shelter for refugees from those regions at the Punta di Sant'Antonio.[90] Aside from contact with compatriots, who might facilitate their transition into society, this geographical choice positioned these paupers in close proximity to the Arsenale. The latter, at that point, represented potential employment to men of any age.[91] A later Senatorial decision further supports this hypothesis: faced with another influx of Albanians following the loss of Scutari (present-day Shkoder, Albania) in 1479, the Senate mandated that a few archer positions in each galley be reserved for Albanian immigrants.[92] The shipmasters who disobeyed these orders would be fined. By placing these refugees in its shipyards and navy, the

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[85]On the painting, see P.F. Brown, *Venetian Narrative Painting in the Age of Carpaccio* (New Haven, 1998), 186–9.

[86]Sandrelli, 'Sant'Antonio di Castello', 162, 165 (n. 28); E. Muir and R.F.E. Weissman, 'Social and symbolic places in Renaissance Venice and Florence', in J. Agnew and J. Duncan (eds.), *The Power of Place: Bringing together Geographical and Sociological Imaginations* (Boston, MA, 1989), 93.

[87]On the *arsenalotti*, see Davis, *Shipbuilders*; and Lane, *Venetian Ships*, 176–88.

[88]R.C. Mueller, 'Greeks in Venice and "Venetians" in Greece: notes on citizenship and immigration in the late Middle Ages', in C.A. Maltezou (ed.), *Ricchi e poveri nella società dell'Oriente grecolatino* (Venice, 1998), 178; I. Iordanou, 'Maritime communities in late Renaissance Venice: the *arsenalotti* and the Greeks, 1575–1600', University of Warwick Ph.D. thesis, 2008, 68. I am grateful to Iordanou for generously sharing her unpublished dissertation with me.

[89]Imhaus, *Le minoranze*, 88; Iordanou, 'Maritime communities', 43; Lane, *Venetian Ships*, 177. Due to higher payments, until around 1480, Venetian craftsmen opted for employment in the private sector.

[90]Both the Dalmatians and Greeks mentioned their service to the Venetian fleet in their petition to found their respective *scuole*. See Brown, *Venetian Narrative*, 69–70; and D. Chambers and B. Pullan, *Venice: A Documentary History, 1450–1630* (Toronto, 2001), 333–4.

[91]Iordanou, 'Maritime communities', 35–6; and E. Concina, *L'arsenale della Repubblica di Venezia* (Milan, 1984), 88–9.

[92]Iordanou, 'Maritime communities', 46.

Figure 7. Vittore Carpaccio, *Apparition of the Crucified of Mount Ararat in the Church of Sant'Antonio di Castello* (detail), *c.* 1512. Courtesy of the Galleria dell'Accademia, Venice.

Republic would be using the same war that led to their arrival in Venice to facilitate their absorption into the urban and social fabric of the city. At the same time, the Republic would fulfil the needs of its military workforce, perhaps even taking strategic advantage of these migrants' knowledge of their places of origin.

Conclusion

Since the Middle Ages, theologians believed that the souls of the rich were more vulnerable to damnation than those of the needy. According to contemporary belief, salvation of the wealthy depended on the poor since the prayers of the needy had the power to intercede for those privileged. This interdependence created what historian Dennis Romano has called a 'symbiotic relationship' between the rich and poor of Venice that was understood by contemporaries as highly influential in the maintenance of peace in the Venetian Republic.[93] If we consider the dispute with the Ottoman Turks in the east in this context, the disorder caused

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[93]Romano, 'L'assistenza e la beneficenza', 355–406.

by the influx of immigrants into the city not only generated a social crisis surrounded by public health anxiety, but it also led to a religious predicament since Venice's existing charitable system was not able to adequately aid those in need. For Venetians, this social and, consequently, religious neglect could only result in divine punishment – war losses being one of many potential unfavourable outcomes.

If war represented divine punishment, charity toward the needy could secure divine favour during health, economic, or military crises. Documentary evidence from the period confirms this connection: at the founding of the Ospedale di Messer Gesù Cristo in 1503, for example, the Maggior Consiglio issued a decree stating that 'the chief and most salutary means of obtaining divine favour for a state and republic…is the maintenance of the poor, in whom the person of Our Lord Jesus Christ is represented'.[94] Later into the sixteenth century, Venice's four main hospitals were referred to as the 'bastions of the Republic', once again stressing the crucial role of charity toward the needy in upholding the state.[95] As the war in the east progressed and Venetian possessions continued to be threatened, the commission of a temporary shelter at the Punta di Sant'Antonio for those dying of cold and hunger would ensure that divine favour fell on the Venetian side, justifying Venice's more active engagement with poor relief.

The initial decision of the Republic to build a *cohopertum* for the poor stemmed from a social emergency, and while the evidence associated with the shelter supports the independence of the *cohopertum* from the institutional and architectural history of the Ospedale di Messer Gesù Cristo, the choice to construct a temporary shelter at the Punta was not simply a spontaneous response to the arrival of immigrants in the city. Rather, the Venetian government had a multi-pronged mission. First, the Republic physically and visually removed beggars from the centre of the city, ensuring social decorum and isolating any potential health threats associated with the migrants. Second, the Venetian government relocated these refugees to an area where they would have temporary housing, find compatriots and perhaps hold a job at the Arsenale, potentially fulfilling the Republic's military needs. In this way, the modest structure of the *cohopertum* materialized the symbiotic relationship between the rich and poor of Venice. Addressing the charitable and religious components of what might appear to us today as clear-cut social pressure, the shelter belonged to a larger strategy to guarantee the maintenance and stability of the Venetian Empire through poor relief.

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[94]For the entire document, see M. Sanudo, *I Diarii*, ed. B. Nicolò, B. Guglielmo, F. Rinaldo and S. Federico (Venice, 1880), vol. IV, cols. 810–12. The decree has been partly transcribed in Pullan, *Rich and Poor*, 214.

[95]The four hospitals were the Derelitti, the Mendicanti, the Pietà and the Zitelle, described as 'principalissimi bastioni'. See R. Palmer, 'L'assistenza medica nella Venezia cinquecentesca', in B. Aikema and D. Meijers (eds.), *Nel regno dei poveri. Arte e storia dei grandi ospedali veneziani* (Venice, 1989), 35–42; and R. Palmer, '"Ad una sancta perfettione": health care and poor relief in the Republic of Venice in the era of the Counter-Reformation', in O.P. Grell, A. Cunningham and J. Arrizabalaga (eds.), *Health Care and Poor Relief in Counter-Reformation Europe* (London, 1999), 85–6.