



# Locanda Palazzone

## Historical Notes



Fig.1

Monaldo Monaldeschi della Cervara, an Orvieto historian from the noble family that dominated the town in the 14th century, wrote in his *Comentari storici*, printed in Venice in 1584, that Boniface VIII named "...*Teodorico di Ranieri Cardinal and Commander of the Patrimony in the year 1299. This Cardinal had the Palace built in the square of Santa Christina in Volsena and the Palace below Rocca di Ripeseno*"

The palazzo in Bolsena was completed in 1304, and although it was extensively restored in the following centuries, it still retained all its imposing bulk when Seroux d'Agincourt was traveling between Orvieto and Bolsena in 1780, taking notes for his monumental *History of Art*. D'Agincourt left a drawing of the building, which is preserved in the Vatican Library.

The carved Ranieri coats of arms can still be seen in the palazzo's façade; these coats of arms are identical to those which, still intact, adorn the façade of the Church of Sant'Andrea in Orvieto (Fig. 1). The Ranieri counts were one of the most important families of Orvieto in the period from the late 13th to the early 14th century.

In more recent times, Luigi Fumi published in the *Codice Diplomatico della città di Orvieto* a comment on a document from 1298 regarding Cardinal Teodorico, with a long note on the cardinal. On the basis of unpublished manuscripts by Marabottini, Fumi added to and

stated more exactly the information furnished by 16th-century historians, questioning the accuracy of some of it.

This note paints a fairly clear picture of Teodorico Ranieri: he was the prior of Sant'Andrea in about 1275 (and this explains the coats of arms on the church façade, which less likely refer to his nephew Gualtiero, canon at the same church years later) and was later the chaplain of Martin IV (and this relationship, as we will see, can be related to the architecture of the palazzo in question). Finally, he was named Cardinal in 1298 and Rector and General Commander of the Patrimony in 1300. Biographical data aside, Cardinal Teodorico was actually the fiduciary and business consultant of Pope Boniface VIII at the Commune of Orvieto (as the studies of Waley and Carocci have clarified), and this position of power increased the family's wealth and prestige.

The reason for giving this preamble is that since there is no easily obtainable documentation on the commissioning and construction of the palazzo built below Rocca Ripesena, less than three kilometers from Orvieto as the crow flies, it seems plausible to hypothesize that the building known for centuries as the "Palazzone" and the one ordered built by Cardinal Teodorico could be one and the same. Even if there is no other evidence to support this hypothesis, the introduction is of interest because it deals with a historical period and a personage which can both be linked to the



Fig. 2



Fig. 3



Fig. 4



Fig. 5

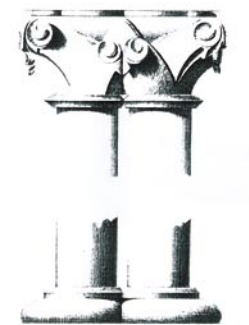


Fig. 6



Fig. 7

type of structure that we have been discussing.

Indeed, although the Palazzone is in the Orvieto countryside, at the edge of the *tenuta civitatis* (which today would be called the outskirts of town, or suburbs), it is a rare example of a country residence that has all the characteristics of a large town house. Located a few kilometers from Orvieto, before restoration the Palazzone appeared (Fig. 2) as a parallelepiped truncated on one side, built in tuff stone laid a *cortina*. The southwest side, which follows an alternating empty-full pattern, has pointed arches on the ground floor and mullioned windows on the first floor. The windows have incomplete round arched lintels that are filled and not perfectly aligned with the arches below. The external buttresses, which reach up to the floor — except for the one at the end, which reaches up to the roof — correspond to round internal arches, with one pointed arch, upon which a wooden floor rests.

The northeast wall, into which holes were cut at the ground floor level in more recent times, also shows traces of mullioned windows, and there is a large filled-in arch in the last bay. Two well-preserved, though filled, mullioned windows can be noted in the side wall facing northwest, along with traces of a door, while the southeast side has been completely redone, with the use of salvaged materials in the lower section and new tuff blocks in the upper part. The height of the roof imposts was definitely lower than the original height, as the external arches of the mullioned windows appear to be cut off by the line of the eaves. The restoration project aimed at recuperating the old existing structures, demolishing the interior walls and the superfluous additions on the exterior and rebuilding only the missing upper part.

During restoration work the impost corbels of the upper floor arches supporting the roof were found (Fig. 3) and an entire mullioned window reappeared, with the light travertine-type stone mullion complete with base and capital (Fig. 4-5). The latter discovery provided precious references for the dating of the building, for which other evidence would later appear, because this mullion in particular

(which served as a model for all the others) is virtually identical in material and shape to one of those carved for the mullioned windows of the Palazzo del Popolo (Fig. 6-7) (already partially used in 1284), and it is very similar to those in the mullioned windows of the upper hall in the Papal Palace (Fig. 8, next page) built by Boniface VIII (Fig. 9, next page) over the outside walls of the Orvieto's old cathedral, *Santa Maria de episcopatu*. The name of Palazzone referring to this building is found as early as 1591 in the "Cadaastre ... of all the Properties of the Reverend Building of S. Maria della Stella" among the possessions of the "Opera del Domo" of Orvieto: "... *the estate of Palazzone is eleven some and four hundred forty-nine canne and the vineyard in said place is two quartenghi and fifty-four canne bordering with M. Batista Saracinelli Messrs. Clementini on two sides and the heirs of M. Astolfo Palazzi and the properties of the Sisters of S. Pietro d'Orvieto...*"

The use of this name for other buildings in the area has made it particularly difficult to find reliable information regarding the ownership and dating of the estate, even in archival research. In any event, the Palazzone appears both in the "Tiroli" cadastre of 1764 and in the Gregorian cadastre of 1819 and subsequent revisions, described as a "farmhouse with a court" belonging to Count Claudio Faina (1861), who bequeathed it to his daughter Countess Clelia Faina in Pallucco, then passing by inheritance to Angelo Pallucco (1900) and, finally, to the widow Raffaella Lodella (1951).

Two photographs from the 1930s found in the municipal library of Orvieto also provide important documentation (Fig. 10-11). These photos show the building before the recent changes made by the owners, who used it as a rural house and later for storing agricultural equipment and machinery. Therefore, while there is sufficient documentation on how the building was used at least during the last few centuries, in order to go back to its original function one should take into consideration its position in the area and analyze more in depth its architectural style.

It has already been mentioned how the building is located not far from Rocca Ripe-



Fig. 8



Fig. 9

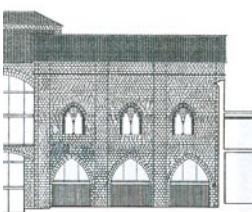


Fig. 12



Fig. 13

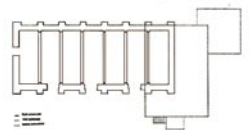


Fig. 14



Fig. 10



Fig. 11

seña, in the area northwest of the Orvieto massif. In that same area, which Carpentier's study of the 1292 cadastre identified as the old parish of San Donato, there are other medieval buildings, such as the Church of San Marco dei Templari, the core of the Hermitage and the Torre della Fame ("Hunger Tower"), all structures that allow one to suppose that there existed a road that was a spur from the Via Francigena and ran halfway up the hill between the Paglia river and the Alfina high plain, making it possible to reach Orvieto from Acquapendente: this road could be the reason in loco for the Palazzone, even more so given that Cardinal Teodorico had estates in both towns.

Although there are no certainties regarding the original commissioning of the building, it was definitely not built for religious or monastic purposes, as no qualifying elements (such as bell towers, churches or cloisters) can be found in the immediate vicinity, nor are there any fortified structures such as those at the nearby medieval defensive sites. Thus it can be said that the building is a fairly exceptional example of a country residence; indeed, an analysis of its style shows that it possesses all of the characteristics of a town house or palace seen in the urban architecture of Orvieto from the latter half of the 13th century. The structural elements (arches and buttresses), the construction materials and techniques (tuff stone masonry laid a cortina)

and the architectural details (the mullioned windows on the first floor, even though simplified) are those found with minimal variations in the large houses and palaces in town, in both public buildings (such as the Palazzo del Popolo [1275-1303] and the part of the Papal Palace built under Martin IV [1281-1284]) (Fig. 12) and private houses (such as Palazzo Medici and Palazzo Ranieri, later Palazzo Monaldeschi), or in some suburban residences (such as the not-too-distant Abbey of SS. Severo e Martirio).

The building also has a diaphragm arch-type structure, very common in the churches of central Italy and especially in Umbria, the origin of which is to be found in Cistercian residential construction or in the large halls of civic buildings built in those years in Perugia, Todi, and Spoleto, as well as in Orvieto.

The dating of the building to the last quarter of the 13th century is confirmed also by looking at the stonework, which is typical of the area and consists of a face laid with stones of regular height ("isometric course" masonry), varying in size from 20 to 34 cm, during the period between 1100 and 1450. More precisely, the height of the stones in Orvieto buildings known to have been constructed around the year 1300 varies between 27.5 and 29.5 cm. In the specific case of the Palazzone, this measurement is 27.5 – 28.0, which could correspond to the old piede, or foot, formerly used as a unit of measurement in Orvieto, and could also have been the module for the building proportions. Using this unit of measurement as the module for the original planimetric dimensions, reconstructed on the basis of the existing buttresses and the buttresses lost but visible in old photographs, we would have a building with seven bays (Fig. 13-14) 100 feet long and 40 feet wide, with a ratio of 5:2, used also in the elevations, as the height was also 40 feet. Unless there was an exterior stairs with a loggia, built in stone and set against the missing part of the building (although no foundations of stairs can be seen), the interior vertical stairs, like the probable partitions on the first floor, must have been made from wood.

A reasonable conclusion as to the original function of the rural building called the Palazzone can be drawn from the documentation gathered and the considerations made: given

its residential-type architecture and its relatively isolated location in the countryside near Orvieto, the Palazzone was very likely built as a *hospitalis*, or hostel, for prelates and travelers or as a station for pilgrims headed toward Rome, as the first Jubilee was officially proclaimed by Boniface VIII in 1300.

Pericle Perali wrote that in that year "... more and more, never-ending swarms of Romei (pilgrims) poured into Rome," and it cannot be mere coincidence that a stream still known today as the Romealla flows less than 700 meters below the Palazzone.

*Alberto e Valentina Satolli*

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- > Photo from the 1930s (Municipal Library, Orvieto)

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