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Architectural Graphics

Volume 2 - Graphics for Knowledge and
Production

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Line Atop Line. Images of Architecture in Illustrated Periodicals from the Early 1800s in Italy

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Abstract. The phenomenon of illustrated periodicals that developed after 1832 in Europe marked the beginnings of an important period for popular communications and education. Their pages presented a rich world of images supporting various issues that came to characterise culture during the early part of the century, and with a focus on social emancipation. Among the subjects of this vast repertory of illustrations, considerable attention was given to architecture, as a tie between past and future, between history and technology, fostering a change and a reflection on the identity of different populations. Whether ancient or new, it transmitted stability, solemnity and prestige, concepts supported by illustrated periodicals presenting the best examples to a broad audience. Our study focused on illustrations contained in the first three periodicals printed in Italy. We looked in particular at how architecture was depicted, in relation to their predecessors of two years earlier in England, France and Germany. By examining a critically selected set of illustrations, the intention was to define the mechanisms of representation as a function of the subjects presented, together with geometric characteristics, and graphic aspects. This led to a greater comprehension and definition of the first medium of information, but also of a specific type of architecture.

Keywords: Images of architecture · Illustrated periodicals · Early 1800s

1 Introduction

During the early 1800s, European publishing set off down a new path of communication intent on the capillary distribution of information through periodicals and the use of illustrations [1]. Until this moment, a similar approach had been the prerogative of books¹, of a scientific and artistic character. This despite the fact that during the late 1700s literature had also made use of illustrations, albeit parsimoniously. Chivalric romance, love stories and collections of historical tales were accompanied by images that visualised particular scenes and gave a physiognomy to different characters. This insertion by publishers of visual aids within their texts was met by a pleasant and convincing appreciation from readers. Hence – supported by evolving technology – they

¹ A mention on the subject is in Tunzi P 2020.

wished to introduce illustrations also on the limited number of pages used to circulate all manner of information.

This new and popular phenomenon began in England in 1832 with the publication of *The Penny Magazine* and *The Saturday Magazine*. The format soon spread across most of Europe [4]. As early as the following year, France and Germany offered illustrated periodicals to the people of Paris and Leipzig, respectively *Le Magasin pittoresque* and *Das Pfennig Magazin*. The intention was to provide a variety of information to culturally elevate the working masses. In fact, it was precisely this latter group that was to be reached via simple and pleasant divulgation, what is more at a cost accessible to most [2].

In Italy, instead, owing to the political situation,² determined by the well-known fragmentation of its various states, the first illustrated periodical was offered to the people of Genoa only two years after the first English example: the *Magazzino Pittorico Universale*. The same year, two others were published in Rome and Turin, respectively, *L'Album* and *Teatro Universale*.

Others would follow during the course of the decade: the *Cosmorama pittorico* (1835) in Milan, *L'ape italiana delle belle arti* (1835) and *Iconografia e scenografia delle Belle Arti* (1836) in Rome, *Poliorama pittoresco* (1836) and the *Omnibus pittoresco* (1838) in Naples, and the *Museo scientifico, letterario ed artistico* (1839) in Turin.

While the wealth and variety of images presented in these periodicals merits a broader exploration for the heterogeneity of topics explored, this text is limited to the observation of only some of the many images of architecture published in the first three Italian periodicals. The prowess of architecture was one of the cardinal points around which the texts rotated, providing material for the illustrations and structuring the pages of many periodicals. At this time, representing and commenting on diverse works of architecture produced over the centuries in Europe and on the other continents, signified approaching an understanding of the past and capturing important references in various cultures that could help identify and define one's own identity.

The three Italian periodicals examined here were published weekly in an eight-page format, with two columns of text and illustrations in various formats and graphic styles. As mentioned, in the editorials of each periodical, the illustration served as the ram's head for battering down the walls of public indifference toward newspapers, the most suitable means for reaching the masses.

2 The Magazzino Pittorico Universale

The illustrations published in the first Italian weekly were collected on two pages set far from the texts, unlike the format adopted by their English and French counterparts, which preferred to integrate them. The title of this weekly was inspired by the French periodical *Le Magasin pittoresque*, though without adopting its same structure. Michele Canale, its editor from 4 January 1834 at the printer Ponthenier of Genoa, set the format by dedicating six pages to text and two to images. Certainly the choice of separating

² It should be remembered that the 1830s were a period of widespread agitation by the working class in many Italian states that translated, in political terms, into the drive toward the Risorgimento.

the two components facilitated its layout by favouring the integrity of the articles and giving maximum value to the illustrations. This structure can be traced back to the publishing traditions of art and archaeology, which seems to have been preferred to the approach taken on the other side of the Alps. The emancipation from this model came with the adoption of an agile solution of commercial folios, instead of the more voluminous academic publications. What is more, it should be noted that that back of the illustrated pages was left entirely blank, similar to art journals accompanied by illustrations separate from the text. This particularity allows for the supposition of the regular use of engravings that, while printed in large numbers and of medium-low quality, were in any case considered a work of art that many could collect at a reasonable price. This was the idea behind the title of the periodical, intended as an ideal container for conserving a large quantity of heterogeneous and pleasing subjects,³ as affirmed by Michele Giordano [3].

The aim outlined in the editorial accompanying the first issue was the divulgation of the sciences, literature and the arts, already present in specific articles in English, French and German reviews, opportunely accompanied by Italian products treated in a light-hearted manner. The “*Centro d’ogni scibile [utile a] l’Istruzione generale*” (The Centre of Anything [useful to] General Education) referred to monuments and the work “*del Genio Italiano*” (of Italian ingeniousness), a cultural point of reference for the direction taken by the periodical. Each issue contained “3 or 4 lithographs, representing any subject deemed worthy of the admiration or curiosity of readers”, Michele Canale noted⁴. What is more, new lithographic prints permitted a “greater sharpness and perfection than those allowed by wood pressings” – he continued – hoping this would be appreciated by the public.

Many illustrations were the work of the Genoese Federico Peschiera,⁵ hired by Ponthenier when he was only twenty years of age. They served to visualise historical events and figures, but also depicted animals and natural environments, accompanied by sophisticated reproductions of works of art and architecture (Fig. 1). These latter often assume the role of scenes in the documentary illustration of historical narratives, for example the arrival of the Duchess Anne of Brittany in the city of Morlaix during the 1400s, an image designed to bolster the story (Fig. 2). Some issues were entrusted entirely to Peschiera, who worked until 1837, the year the periodical ceased publication.

Other engravings were produced by the painters Giuseppe Isola, G.M. Danielli, Luigi Belletti, Camillo Pucci, and the Savonese architect Giuseppe Cortese, who prepared elevations of newly designed buildings, for example the Carlo Felice theatre in Genoa designed by the architect Carlo Francesco Barabino in 1826 (Fig. 3). There is an evident predominance of Italian subjects, with numerous images dedicated to architecture in Genoa, Turin, Naples and Campania, Lombardy, together with Rome, Florence and

³ The term “*magazzino*” was suggested by the English “*magazine*”, whose meaning is here equivalent to “*review*”. For the Italians (like the French) it rendered the idea of the accumulation, in one container, provided, eventually, with a showcase.

⁴ Cf. the biographical note by A. Benvenuto Vialeto nel *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani*, vol. 17, 1974.

⁵ See the short biography curated by the Istituto Matteucci of Viareggio, <http://www.istitutomatteucci.it/en/artisti-censiti/peschiera-federico>.

Venice. There was a focus on Neoclassical architecture, though without ignoring key examples of the Gothic style, for example Strasbourg Cathedral and the Duomo in Siena. Historic works of architecture were generally depicted in their specific context, as they could actually be seen and visited. New constructions, on the other hand, were presented in design drawings, generally elevations and in a few rare cases floor plans.

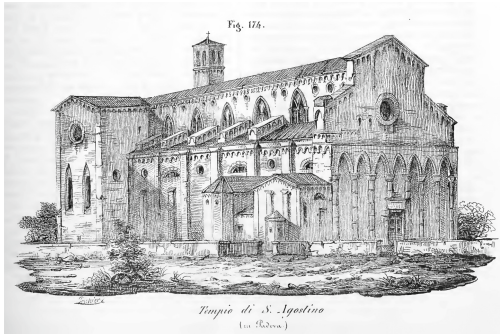


Fig. 1. F. Peschiera, Church of St. Augustine in Padua. *Magazzino Pittorico*, n. 44, 1834.



Fig. 2. F. Peschiera, Historical scene: Anne of Brittany. *Magazzino Pittorico*, n. 48, 1836.

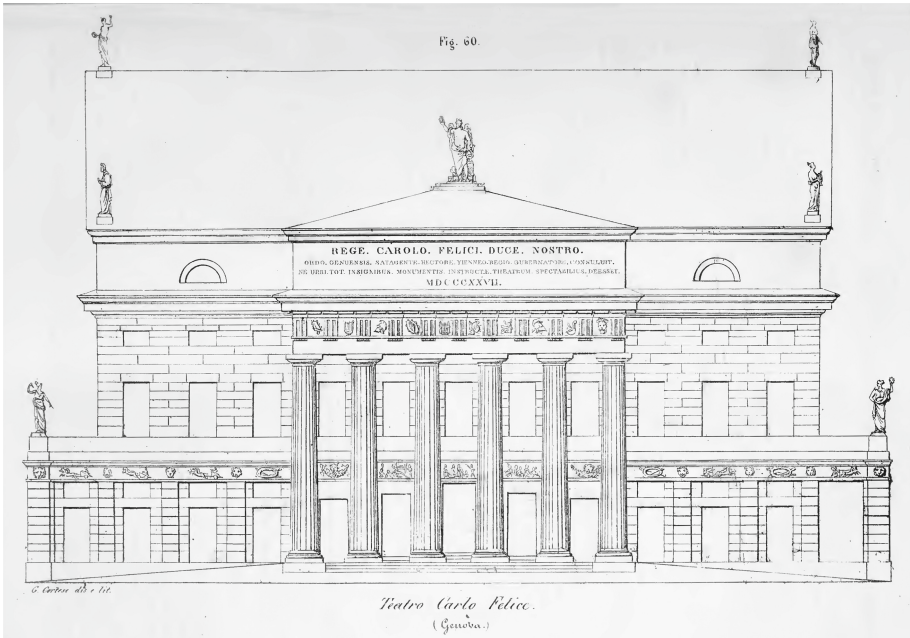


Fig. 3. G. Cortese, Carlo Felice Theatre in Genoa. *Magazzino Pittorico*, n. 14, 1834.

Some images, such as historical scenes and more important works of architecture, were framed, while others, instead, were left unframed, without a backdrop and maintaining the white surface of the paper. Simple frames served to highlight the image with respect to the text and the space around it, emphasising its artistic value and elevating them to precious small works of art.

3 Architecture in the Second Italian Periodical

Diverse from the *Magazzino Pittorico Universale*, the illustrations in the *L'Album. Giornale letterario e di Belle Arti*, first distributed in Rome on the 8 March 1834, were closely related with the text. The diversity of layout between the two is evident. *L'Album*, printed by the Tipografia delle Belle Arti, under the direction of Giovanni De Angelis,⁶ was in line with the majority of European periodicals. Despite being accompanied by only a few images, their insertion within the text marked a success that would continue until 1862, that is, for a remarkable twenty-eight years. Many of these images, at least for the first two years, came from *Penny* and the *Magasin pittoresque*. However, new ones were later produced thanks to contributions from a few Italian engravers⁷ such as Gaetano Cottafavi (Fig. 4), Tommaso Piroli, Filippo Palmucci, Emanuele Pernié, Luigi Barocci, Salvatore Marroni, Achille Parboni and others.⁸



Fig. 4. G. Cottafavi, Ehrenbreitstein Castle. *L'Album*, n. 34, 1834.

The layout adopted a less rigorous composition, with images not aligned with the texts, in some cases too small and surrounded by too much space, or inserted either

⁶ Cf. [6].

⁷ Issue n. 27 from 1860 contains a short list of engravers and artists. Furthermore, during its final years, the captions to the images listed the name of the review from which they originated.

⁸ It is worth noting in relation to this issue that the nineteenth century was a period of rediscovery and renewal for engraving. Cf. [5].

before or after the text.⁹ This structure would remain until the final issues, despite the fact that the publishing of periodicals had reached a decent level of graphic design by the 1840s.

Flipping through the different issues of the journal, it is possible to note a certain propensity toward wonder, the extraordinary and the atypical. The subjects proposed in the articles, in some cases very short, were selected to amaze readers and stimulate their curiosity, while simultaneously presenting stories and events considered unique, almost as if they were a secret story known only to the community and to be rendered public. There were also works and monuments by well-known authors, some restorers, as well as technical and technological novelties. In truth, it was precisely these that were considered a sign of the progress achieved in various states, not only European. Thus, the classical Parthenon was accompanied by an image borrowed from issue n. 4 of the *Magasin pittoresque*¹⁰ of the steel bridge across the Menai River¹¹ (Fig. 5), completed in 1825 in England, and explaining the application of an Italian invention by Vincenzo Scamozzi.

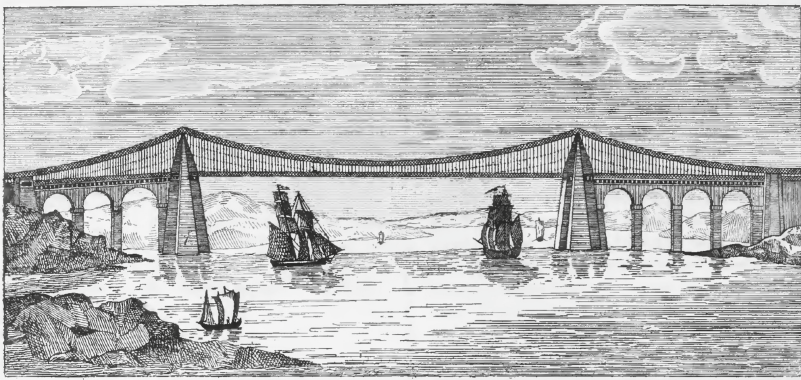


Fig. 5. Menai Bridge. *L'Album*, n. 41, 1834.

While not very frequent, there were also images of architecture, from Greek¹² to Neoclassical, with views of cities and urban settings, though not always with important framings. Meticulously curated articles were accompanied by specific descriptions, in some cases supported even by the dimensions of what was represented.

⁹ In issue n. 45 from 22 December 1860 I even found an upside down image of the fountain of Pope Julius III along the Via Flaminia, presented at the front of the publication. Unfortunately, I was unable to verify if this error is present in other copies.

¹⁰ The only difference between the two images is the sky, treated with dense horizontal lines in the French engraving.

¹¹ Issue n. 12 from 1850 presents new of the inauguration, across the same river, of the tubular bridge designed by the engineer Robert Stephenson in 1846.

¹² The image of the temple at Paestum, for example, calls to mind that realised by Louis Germain at the end of the 1700s, what is more already similarly depicted by Filippo Morghen in 1776. The aforementioned engraving is conserved at the Capodimonte Museum and attributed to the artist Robert Hubert.

4 Other New Illustrations

Four months after the publication of *L'Album*, precisely on the 5 July 1834, the publisher Gaetano Balbino, in partnership with Giuseppe Pomba,¹³ offered the public in Turin the *Teatro Universale*,¹⁴ with the subtitle *Raccolta enciclopedica e scenografica*. It featured a rather manageable format, no larger than one of today's weeklies and was presented to the market in a different manner than the other two magazines: below the header printed in Bodoni and comprised of three lines, the space of the page was reserved entirely for the image accompanying the first article, making it a sort of cover page. Inside the magazine, the number of illustrations rarely exceeded four, and often of small dimensions. In the header, between two lines of text, it was noted that the entire annual collection of 52 issues was accompanied by 250 engraved illustrations, meaning that each issue contained at least two large images, one of which was generally a landscape.

Architecture found its proper place here, with important examples of graphic design, often fascinating, like the subterranean Indra Sabah in India (Fig. 6). The intelligent play of light and shadow emphasised the details and the entire interior space, confirming the designer's communicative skills. Regarding the quality of the images, however, despite the talent of unknown artists, there was a scarce level of graphic design, given the elevated number of issues printed.

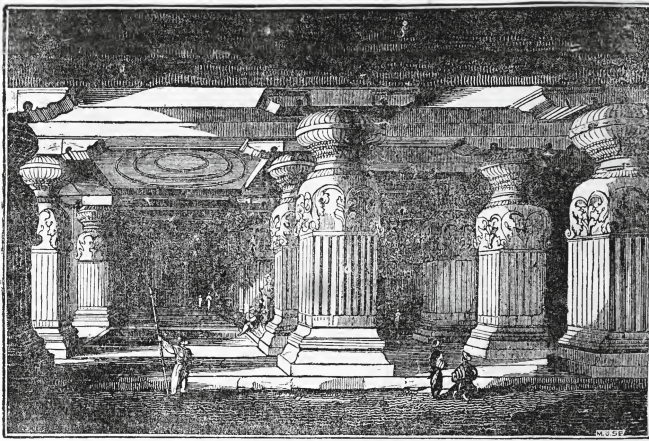


Fig. 6. Indra Sabah. Teatro Universale, n. 31, 1835.

¹³ In 1828 – based on the experience of the Englishman John Bell – he launched the economical series entitled *Biblioteca popolare*, consisting of classical works of Italian literature at the price of 50 cents. See the biography by Palazzolo MI 2015. *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani*, 84. Using mechanical presses purchased in England, in 1829 the publisher increased the production of economical books and the circulation of illustrated periodicals.

¹⁴ The title *Teatro* refers to important illustrated works from the Renaissance, such as that on the territories, the *Theatrum Orbis Terrarum* by Abramo Ortelio (1570), on cities, *Theatrum urbium italicarum* by Pietro Bertelli, (1599), or chronicles of the human race by Jean Jacques Boissard, *Theatrum vitae humanae* (1596).

The names of the authors were often unknown, and only with great difficulty is it possible to identify a few, not Italian, already seen in other periodicals. Examples include Jackson, skilled in depicting architecture and reproducing works of art; Wimper, who produced views of urban (Fig. 7) and naturalistic settings; Elwalls, who realised all manner of scenes.



Fig. 7. The Graben, square and public promenade in Vienna. Teatro Universale, n. 14, 1834.

This situation was confirmed in the editorial from 1836, which stated that “the engravings are English, and realised from polytypes from the two best *Magazines* in London”. Even the articles originated in foreign publications. Partially translated, their topics ranged through the immensity of cultural heritage, transporting “the reader into all districts, into all ages”.

A particular image is present in issue n. 381 from 1841 (Fig. 8), realised by John Jackson in an unusual form, partially framed and partially unframed. The same artist had already introduced composite images in issue n. 376 from the same year to illustrate the novel *El Cid*. This new approach to the illustration and layout of a historical story presented in instalments – and the use of numerous portraits of illustrious figures accompanied by urban views and decorations (Fig. 9) – was a small though important change that can be found in many other magazines from the years that followed. Architecture was thus integrated with other illustrations in an attempt, successful I would say, to expand the communication of a particular subject. I therefore consider this a notably appreciable attempt to open up toward the modern layout adopted by other Italian journals beginning in the 1840s, to bring more value to the subjects depicted.

The composure of architecture, we could say “posed”, was accompanied by a great figurative freedom and transmission. In all probability, it was this discovery that led to the success of *Teatro Universale* across the Italian Peninsula, supported by a society of booksellers based in Turin, Florence, Milan and Genoa and in other cities, which guaranteed its diffusion for fourteen years.



Fig. 8. J. Jackson, A scene from the novel *El Cid*. *Teatro Universale*, n. 381, 1841.



Fig. 9. Portrait of Petrarch surrounded by scenes. *Teatro Universale*, n. 376, 1841.

5 Conclusions

The persuasive strength of the illustration as a cultural system is to be found in visual illusion. It brings the reader beyond the boundaries of personal space and time to consent a broad, extraordinary and marvellous understanding. The physiognomy of works of architecture present in distant cities is revealed in pen strokes, in an unusual *chiaroscuro* supported by realistic views and glimpses.

The lines etched into engraving plates or marked on lithographic stone gave body to volumes and atmospheres, recreating what was perceived or observed, and suggesting intriguing ideas. Directed toward the general public, through constant serial reproduction, it was later subject to a reconsideration. The frequency with which these illustrations were distributed had a considerable impact on graphic quality. Images had to be effective, but also realised very quickly, and more accurate engravings were simply too costly. For this reason, sometimes the architecture in historical scenes was barely outlined in favour of the characters.

Depicting the existing was considered a social responsibility, and in the periodicals published in Italy, filled with many images, were a first step toward cultural unity. Illustrations heightened the awareness of people from all classes and regions of the existence of a rich and vibrant world. Constantly expanding knowledge, distributed in

visual form, could no longer be a secondary activity. Social emancipation rode on the back of ink drawings.

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