

Oldest known city view of Venice discovered

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A researcher from the University of St Andrews has unearthed the oldest known city view of Venice, dating from the 14th century.

The discovery, by Dr. Sandra Toffolo from the School of History, was made during research for her monograph "Describing the City, Describing the State. Representations of Venice and the Venetian Terraferma in the Renaissance," which will be published in early 2020.

The image is part of a manuscript containing the travel account of Niccolò da Poggibonsi, an Italian pilgrim who traveled to Jerusalem in 1346-1350. The manuscript was likely made shortly after he returned to Italy in 1350. During his pilgrimage, Niccolò passed through Venice and his description of the [city](#) is accompanied by a pen drawing of Venice.

Dr. Toffolo (pictured right), who specializes in the history of Venice in the Renaissance, discovered the image in May 2019 during her research in the Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale in Florence, and has worked on representations of Venice during the Renaissance for several years.

When Dr. Toffolo discovered the image, she realized that the city view of Venice predates all previously known views of the city, excluding maps and portolan charts. The oldest extant map of Venice was made by Fra Paolino, a Franciscan friar from Venice, and dates from around 1330. Since the discovery, Dr. Toffolo has spent the last several months verifying the image through consulting books, manuscripts and articles.

A series of small pinpricks discovered on the original manuscript image also suggests that the city view was more widely circulated. This technique was used to copy images: powder was sifted through the pinpricks onto another surface, thereby transferring the outlines of the image.

Dr. Toffolo said: "The presence of these pinpricks is a strong indication that this city view was copied. Indeed, there are several images in [manuscripts](#) and early printed books that are clearly based on the image in the manuscript in Florence.

"The discovery of this city view has great consequences for our knowledge of depictions of Venice, since it shows that the city of Venice already from a very early period held a great fascination for contemporaries."

More information: For further information visit Dr Toffolo's research profile: st-andrews.academia.edu/SandraToffolo

Provided by University of St Andrews

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