



World Heritage / Patrimoine Mondial

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ABSTRACT

This is the first PhD thesis to be written about the Lonja, a group of buildings that UNESCO inscribed in the World Heritage on 7th December 1996. The preparatory and field work began in 1995 and the thesis has sparked off a number of initiatives and research projects in which lecturers and specialists from several European universities have taken part. Students from Italy, Portugal, Spain, Colombia and the United Kingdom have also joined the initiative and as a result, the current research resources are unprecedented in the history of the Lonja, with two Research Projects approved for the groups being formed and two R+D projects for interdisciplinary groups.

Although the prior field work involved drawing plans of the entire Lonja group, digital photogrammetry restitutions, topographical work, laboratory tests and geophysical surveys, the fundamental body of the thesis is divided into four chapters:

CHAPTER I: GENESIS OF THE CITY OF VALENCIA

This chapter looks at the origins of the city of Valencia, focusing on the three milestones in its development:

- * Foundation by the Romans
- * The Islamic period
- * The Christian city

The latter is the period of most interest for this thesis, as it leads up to the considerable social and economic prosperity of the Kingdom of Valencia that gave rise to the building of the Lonja de los Mercaderes, Lonja de la Seda or Silk Exchange.

The social, political and economic events of the city's history are examined up to the Valencian *Golden Age* in the 15th century when the Lonja was built.

Maps and figures show the evolution of the city's layout and population growth.

CHAPTER II: THE BUILDING OF THE LONJA

Having established the historical background of the city, the thesis looks at the events that led up to the building of the Lonja, its vicissitudes and other circumstances. Important data on land ownership and rights in the plot where the Lonja would be built and its connection with the main commercial area of the time are given, with virtual images of the urban layout in the immediate neighbourhood of the Lonja. These images are repeated throughout the chapter to make it easier for a non-expert in building and architecture to read and understand the text. Reaching a wider audience is, in fact, another of the aims of the thesis and the information is therefore presented in a highly approachable manner without detracting from the scientific rigour that is essential in any work of research.

Little by little, as the chapter advances, the Lonja begins to take shape. The group of buildings is discovered and described, from setting out the foundations to the construction of the roofs, from the earth moving operations and the demolition of existing buildings to completion of the work, from the appointment of the architects to the death of Pere Compte. All the stages of building are examined, researched and collected so that the public can hear about and discover them.

CHAPTER III: THE HISTORY OF THE LONJA. PROPOSALS FOR ALTERATIONS

The thesis takes a new direction with this chapter, which examines various events in the history of the Lonja after its completion. Three projects for work on the building are studied. Two of these date from the 18th century (1724 and 1749), when it was proposed to convert the Lonja into a barracks, while the other, from the 20th century (1930), involved the *Huerto de los Naranjos* or Orange Garden and a *sventramento* [demolition] of the urban layout in the neighbourhood of the Lonja.

The projects by the military engineers Antonio de Montaigu (1724) and Carlos Desnaux (1749) are particularly significant. They proposed a radical change of use of the complex. The transformation proposed by the former would have affected the volume of all parts of the Lonja and Consulado and the orange garden would have been replaced by a central courtyard. The only part that would have been left untouched would have been the wall structure of the tower, although all its windows would have disappeared, as would those of all the other buildings. This proposal was not accepted and years later Carlos Desnaux designed a "gentler" project, intended to be accepted. Consequently, his proposal was apparently more respectful, although from our point of view it was, if anything, even more disgraceful as (although it would have retained some of the volumes) it too would have destroyed the Lonja complex.

The third and last proposal was made by the architect José Cortina, who wanted to restore the image of the original grove by demolishing the 18th century military outbuildings (which still exist today) even though this would have affected part of the original walls and the private nature of the courtyard.

However, the most destructive aspect of the project would have been its transformation of the urban surroundings of the Lonja, based on the urban renewal of Valencia planned by the architect Goerlich. It

would have involved the loss of a great deal of the 15th century urban layout and of numerous houses dating from that century.

CHAPTER IV: MAJOR BUILDING WORK. THE ARCHITECTS INVOLVED

Over 110 cases of work on the Lonja complex between the 15th and 20th centuries that are considered relatively major are documented. The thesis has collected graphic material (maps, photographs and engravings) and written documentation in the form of project data. The nature of the works, their repercussions for the building and their causes and effects are examined.

Finally, the thesis records a considerable body of maintenance work and events in the Lonja throughout its history, particularly from the 16th century. Although these are of minor importance, they cast doubts on certain historians' hypothesis that the Lonja was left in a state of neglect in that century, as cleaning work and small repairs were constantly carried out, helping to keep the building in decent repair, and the "works books" even show that there was always a porter who looked after the building, as well as a keeper.

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