

©2017
Eveline Baseggio Omiccioli
ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

DEVOTION, PATRONAGE, AND POLITICAL PROPAGANDA:
ANDREA RICCIO'S RELIEFS FOR THE ALTAR OF THE TRUE CROSS
IN SANTA MARIA DEI SERVI, VENICE

By

EVELINE BASEGGIO OMICCIOLI

A dissertation submitted to the

School of Graduate Studies

Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey

In partial fulfillment of the requirements

For the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Graduate Program in Art History

Written under the direction of

Sarah Blake McHam

And approved by

New Brunswick, New Jersey

October, 2017

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Devotion, Patronage, and Political Propaganda:

Andrea Riccio's Reliefs for the Altar of the True Cross

in Santa Maria dei Servi, Venice

by EVELINE BASEGGIO OMICCIOLI

Dissertation Director:

Sarah Blake McHam

My dissertation is a close study of the first major public work by the Renaissance master of bronze Andrea Riccio. The reliefs with the *Stories of the True Cross* and the related tabernacle doors are today in the Ca' d'Oro Museum in Venice but were once assembled on an altar standing against the choir screen of Santa Maria dei Servi, mother church of the Servite order in Venice. Commissioned by the patrician Girolamo Donato at the turn of 1500 to commemorate a relic of the True Cross that he had donated to the Servites, the reliefs, as I argue, represent an important chapter in Venetian history regardless of their relatively small dimensions and their fragmentary status. Through an attentive examination of their complex iconography and a reconstruction of their original context, my dissertation shows how these bronze panels attest the past greatness of the Servite order in Venice, the crucial liturgical role of the altar that they decorated, and the archaeologically-oriented antiquarian language promoted by humanists of the caliber of Donato. Most importantly, the reliefs embody the multi-faceted character of the myth of Venice as a new Rome, new Constantinople, and new Jerusalem, in the wake of its development during the tumultuous years before the Cambrai wars (1508-1516). Each chapter focuses on specific aspects associated with the altar of the True Cross: its

unprecedented format, its significant function, the audiences it addressed, and the political message that it was designed to convey. The ultimate goal of my study is to raise Andrea Riccio's reliefs to the level of monumental art by demonstrating the pivotal position that they held in the artistic, cultural, and political context of Venice toward the end of the fifteenth century.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This dissertation is the result of years of dedicated work and could have not been completed without the support of a number of people in my life.

The first person that I would like to thank is Sarah Blake McHam, who has been and continues to be an amazing mentor to me. Without her I would have never come to the United States to pursue my PhD and certainly I would have not been able to accomplish so much. I am grateful to the numerous Rutgers faculty members and museum scholars who guided my work and provided advice and precious feedback. Special thanks go to my committee members Catherine Puglisi, Benjamin Paul, and Claudia Kryza-Gersch and Andrea Bayer, Denise Allen, and Peta Motture.

I was also extremely lucky to be surrounded by amazing friends and hopefully future colleagues whose endless support kept me going, particularly Aimee Ng, Andaleeb Banta, Justine Pokoik, Nadia Perucic, Jennifer Tonkovich, Tiziana D'Angelo, Ilaria Conti, Guia Rossignoli, Cristina Morandi, Jenevieve DeLosSantos, Alexa Arroyo, and Chiara Scappini.

However, among all, my guiding star was Allison Sherman to whom this dissertation is dedicated. A friend, a colleague, a kindred spirit whose presence will be much missed but will never be forgotten. Grazie mia dolce amica.

My work is also dedicated to my husband, Roberto, a friend, a mentor, a role model who constantly encourages me, and to my children, Massimo and Raffaele, who taught the importance of time management and whose smiles and laughs were my main motivation.

Table of Contents

Abstract.....	ii
Acknowledgments.....	iv
List of Illustrations.....	vii
Introduction.....	1
 Chapter One	
Reconstructing the Design of the Altar of the True Cross.....	17
Evidence from Written Sources	
Reconsidering the Material Evidence	
Reconstruction of the Altar of the True Cross: Previous Attempts	
A Proposal for the Design of the Altar of the True Cross	
Models and References	
Conclusions	
 Chapter Two	
Location and Function of the Altar of the True Cross: The Choir Screen at Santa Maria dei Servi.....	54
The Choir Screen: Development and Uses	
The Screen at Santa Maria dei Servi: a Necessity for Practical, Liturgical, and Aesthetic Reasons	
Liturgical Function of the Altar of the True Cross	
A Hypothesis for the Reconstruction of the Choir Screen in Santa Maria dei Servi	
Conclusions	
 Chapter Three	
The Stories of the True Cross: Iconography and Audience.....	96
The Iconography and Sources of the Stories of the True Cross	
Antiquarianism and Historicism	
Riccio and his Audience	
The Meaning of the Cross for the Servites	
Conclusions	

Chapter Four

Girolamo Donato: His Political Statement and

His Relationship with Andrea Riccio.....149

Donato: The Servites' Supporter and Politician

A Source of Inspiration: The Frescoes in Santa Croce in Gerusalemme, Rome

The Servite "Cycle"

The Granted Salvation: Andrea Riccio's Relief With Saint Martin and the Beggar

Donato and Riccio

Conclusions

Conclusions.....213

Illustrations.....228

Bibliography.....400

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

Fig. 1: Andrea Riccio, *The Dream and Baptism of Constantine*, ca. 1500, bronze, Galleria Giorgio Franchetti alla Ca' d'Oro , Venice.

Fig. 2: Andrea Riccio, *The Battle Between Constantine and Maxentius at the Milvian Bridge*, ca. 1500, bronze, Galleria Giorgio Franchetti alla Ca' d'Oro , Venice.

Fig. 3. Andrea Riccio, *The Discovery of the True Cross*, ca. 1500, Bronze, Galleria Giorgio Franchetti alla Ca' d'Oro , Venice.

Fig. 4: Andrea Riccio, *The Miracle of the True Cross*, ca. 1500, Bronze, Galleria Giorgio Franchetti alla Ca' d'Oro , Venice.

Fig. 5: Andrea Riccio, *The Exaltation of the True Cross*, ca. 1500, Bronze, Galleria Giorgio Franchetti alla Ca' d'Oro , Venice.

Fig. 6: *Lateral Portal*, Santa Maria dei Servi, Venice.

Fig. 7: *Detail of the Main Portal with Dedicatory Inscription*, Santa Maria dei Servi, Venice.

Fig. 8: *Wall Section*, Santa Maria dei Servi, Venice.

Fig. 9: *Apse's Remains*, Santa Maria dei Servi, Venice.

Fig. 10: *Bird's View with Detail of Lateral Portal and Wall Sections* Santa Maria dei Servi, Venice.

Fig. 11: *Chapel of Volto Santo*, Santa Maria dei Servi, Venice.

Fig. 12: Luca Carlevarjis, *View of the Church of Santa Maria dei Servi*, 1703, Engraving.

Fig. 13: Domenico Lovisa, *View of the Church of Santa Maria dei Servi*, 1720, Engraving.

Fig. 14: Gabriele Bella, *Battle with Sticks on the Ponte Santa Fosca*, Oil on canvas, Galleria Querini-Stampalia, Venice.

Fig. 15: Tullio Lombardo, *Andrea Vendramin Tomb*, 1493, Santi Giovanni e Paolo, Venice.

Fig. 16: Giovanni Bellini, *Lamentation* , ca. 1510, Gallerie dell'Accademia, Venice.

Fig. 17: Attributed to Giambattista Bregno, *Angel*, after 1509, Staatliche Museen, Berlin.

Fig. 18: Attributed to Giambattista Bregno, *Angel*, after 1509, Sacristy Santi Giovanni e Paolo, Venice.

Fig. 19: Alvise Vivarini, *Resurrection*, ca. 1498 and Cima da Conegliano, *Constantine and Saint Helena*, 1503, San Giovanni in Bragora, Venice.

Fig. 20: Andrea Riccio, *Saint Martin and the Beggar*, after 1513, Galleria Franchetti alla Ca' D'oro, Venice.

Fig. 21: Giovanni Bellini, *Lamentation*, ca. 1510, Gallerie dell'Accademia, Venice.

Fig. 22: *Stavelot Triptych*, 1156-1158, The Morgan Library & Museum, New York.

Fig. 23: Andrea Riccio, *Maffei Altar*, ca. 1510-1514, Sant'Eufemia, Verona.

Fig. 24: Francesco Cabianca, *Altar of the Relics*, 1711, Sacristy, Santa Maria Gloriosa dei Frari, Venice.

Fig. 25: Andrea Riccio, *tabernacle and one of the four narrative panels*.

Fig. 26: Donatello, *Eucharistic Tabernacle* from the altar in the Cappella Parva, 432-1433, Saint Peter's, Rome.

Fig. 27: *Constantine Arch*, detail with attic.

Fig. 28: Tullio Lombardo, *Tomb of Doge Andrea Vendramin*, 1493-1494, Santi Giovanni e Paolo, Venice.

Fig. 29: Desiderio da Settignano, *Eucharistic Altar*, 1461, Chapel of Saints Cosmas and Damian, San Lorenzo, Florence.

Fig. 30: Mino da Fiesole, *Sacrament Tabernacle*, ca. 1460, Santa Maria in Trastevere, Rome.

Fig. 31: Mino da Fiesole, *Murate Tabernacle*, ca. 1470, Santa Croce, Florence.

Fig. 32: Andrea Riccio, *Detail from the Tabernacle Doors*.

Fig. 33: Scaled Reconstruction of the *Altar of the True Cross* (by designer Valerio Baseggio).

Fig. 34: Donatello, *The High Altar of Saint Anthony*, 1447-50, Basilica di Sant'Antonio, Padua.

Fig. 35: Giovanni della Robbia, *Altar of the Sacrament*, Santi Apostoli, Florence.

Fig. 36: Mino da Fiesole, *Reliquary Tabernacle*, 1481, Sant'Ambrogio, Florence.

Fig. 37: Arrangement of Riccio's panels in chronological order.

Fig. 38: Arrangement of Riccio's panels according to my reconstruction.

Fig. 39: *Battle Between Constantine and Maxentius at the Milvian Bridge and Discovery of the True Cross*.

Fig. 40: *Discovery of the True Cross and Miracle of the True Cross*.

Fig. 41: *Dream and Baptism of Constantine and Discovery of the True Cross*.

Fig. 42: *Miracle of the True Cross and Battle Between Constantine and Maxentius at the Milvian Bridge*.

Fig. 43: *Dream and Baptism of Constantine*.

Fig. 44: *Battle Between Constantine and Maxentius at the Milvian Bridge*.

Fig. 45: *Detail from Tabernacle Doors*.

Fig. 46: Antonio Rizzo, *Saint James and Saint Paul Altars*, 1465-1469, San Marco, Venice.

Fig. 47: Antonio Rossellino, *Martini Altar*, ca 1471-1476, San Giobbe, Venice.

Fig. 48: Tullio and Pietro Lombardo, *Tabernacle*, end of XV century, Sacristy of Santa Maria Gloriosa dei Frari, Venice.

Fig. 49: Tullio Lombardo and Lorenzo Bregno?, *Tabernacle*, 1511, San Martino, Venice.

Fig. 50: Lorenzo Bregno, *Altar of the Sacrament*, 1518, San Marco, Venice.

Fig. 51: Lorenzo Bregno, detail.

Fig. 52: Giovanni Buora (?), *Surian Altar* (with original but altered frame), ca. 1488-1493, Santo Stefano, Venice.

Fig. 53: Antonio Lombardo and Others, *Zen Altar*, 1504-1518, Zen Chapel, San Marco, Venice.

Fig. 54: *Plan of Santa Maria dei Servi*, Venice (Architect Sara Dalla Caneva, 2015).

Fig. 55: *Schola Cantorum*, ninth-century enclosing walls, Santa Sabina, Rome.

Fig. 56: Master of the Life of St. Francis, *Christmas Miracle at Greccio*, ca. 1300
Upper Church of San Francesco, Assisi.

Fig. 57: *Crucifix* above the altar of the Cross, Church of our Lady, ca. 1250-60,
Gelnhausen.

Fig. 58: *Crucifix* above the screen's entrance, ca. 1475, Santa Maria Gloriosa dei Frari,
Venice.

Fig. 59: *Cross Altar and Choir Screen*, ca. 1400, Cathedral of St. Mary, Havelberg.

Fig. 60: Rogier van der Weyden, *Altarpiece of the Seven Sacraments*, ca. 1445-50, Royal
Museum of Fine Arts, Antwerp.

Fig. 61: Vittore Carpaccio, *The Vision of Prior Francesco Ottobon*, 1512-15, Gallerie
dell'Accademia, Venice.

Fig. 62: One of the two pulpits at the top of the screen in Santa Maria Gloriosa dei Frari,
Venice.

Fig. 63: *Model of the Machinery for Christ's Ascension* held in 1439 in the church of
Santa Maria del Carmine, Florence.

Fig. 64: Northern artists and Lombardo workshop, *Choir Precinct*, 1475, Santa Maria
Gloriosa dei Frari, Venice.

Fig. 65: *Crucifix, Apostles, Pulpit, and Carved Panels from the Screen*, Santa Maria
Gloriosa dei Frari, Venice.

Fig. 66: *View of the Choir's Precinct from the Presbytery*, Santa Maria Gloriosa dei Frari,
Venice.

Fig. 67: Detail of the *barco* that shows the balaustrade above with the lectern and the side
accesses, 1480s, San Michele in Isola, Venice.

Fig. 68: *Barco* as seen from the main entrance, San Michele in Isola, Venice.

Fig. 69: *Freely Combined Remains from the Choir's Precinct*, ca. 1488, Santo Stefano,
Venice.

Fig. 70: *Freely Combined Remains from the Choir's Precinct*, ca. 1488, Santo Stefano, Venice.

Fig. 71: Piers flanking the presbytery which shows the original location of the *transenna* San Giovanni Battista in Bragora, Venice.

Fig. 72: Sebastiano Mariani, marble slabs framed by pilasters originally coming from the *transenna*, 1490-92, San Giovanni Battista in Bragora, Venice.

Fig. 73: Sebastiano Mariani, *Piers of the Nave Arcade*, 1490-92, San Giovanni Battista in Bragora, Venice.

Fig. 74: Reconstruction of the *barco* in the Church of Sant'Antonio di Castello, Venice, (courtesy of Architect Cristiano Guarneri), ca. 1504.

Fig. 75: Plan and Key by Massimo Bisson.

Fig. 76: Giovanni Bellini, *Lamentation*, 1515-20, Gallerie dell'Accademia, Venice.

Fig. 77: Giuseppe Porta Salviati, *Assumption of the Virgin*, ca. 1555, Cappella del Rosario, Santi Giovanni e Paolo, Venice.

Fig. 78: Titian's *Assumption of the Virgin* as seen through the entrance of the screen in Santa Maria Gloriosa dei Frari, Venice

Fig. 79: Giuseppe Porta's Versus Titian's *Assumption*.

Fig. 80: *Sorrowful Madonna*, eighteenth century, San Marcuola, Venice.

Fig. 81: Antonio Visentini, *Plan and Front of the Choir in Santa Maria dei Servi*, Venice, 1730-40.

Fig. 82: *Reconstruction of the Choir's Plan and Elevation of the Screen*, 1420-22, Santi Giovanni e Paolo, Venice (E. Merlo).

Fig. 83: Reconstruction of the *Ponte* in the Church of Santa Maria del Carmine, Florence.

Fig. 84: Mauro Codussi, *Barco di San Michele in Isola*, Venice, ca. 1476-78.

Fig. 85: Detail from Fra Carnevale, *Presentation of the Virgin to the Temple* (?), ca. 1467, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

Fig. 86: Reconstruction of the Screen in Santa Maria dei Servi (architect Sara Dalla Caneva).

Fig. 87: Reconstruction of the Screen in Santa Maria dei Servi (architect Sara Dalla Caneva).

Fig. 88: Reconstruction of the Screen with Altar of the True Cross on it (designer Valerio Baseggio).

Fig. 89: Extant Walls from the Demolished Church of Santa Maria dei Servi.

Fig. 90: Byzantine School, *Dream of Constantine and Victory against Maxentius, Homelies of Gregorius Nazianzus*, IX century, Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris.

Fig. 91: Godefroid d'Huy (attributed), *The Stavelot Triptych*, mid 12th century, The Morgan Library & Museum, New York.

Fig. 92: Godefroid d'Huy (attributed), *The Dream of Constantine, The Battle against Maxentius, and the Baptism of Constantine*, The Morgan Library & Museum, New York.

Fig. 93: Godefroid d'Huy (attributed), *Helena Questioning the Jews, The Finding of the Cross, and the Miracle of the Cross*, The Morgan Library & Museum, New York.

Fig. 94: Andrea Riccio, *Dream and Baptism of Constantine*.

Fig. 95: Detail, *Constantine Asleep*.

Fig. 96: Detail, *Youth*.

Fig. 97: Detail, *Boy Touching Constantine*.

Fig. 98: Detail, *Beardless Man*.

Fig. 99: Detail, *Constantine and Beardless Man*.

Fig. 100: Detail of Constantine from the *Battle*.

Fig. 101: Detail, *Constantine Asleep and Constantine Making the Sign of the Cross on His Soldier's Forehead*.

Fig. 102: Detail, *Soldiers Reacting to Constantine's Gesture*.

Fig. 103: Detail, *Soldiers Reacting to Constantine's Gesture with Crispus Among Them*.

Fig. 104: Augsburg School, *Dream of Constantine*, IX century from Wessobrunner Gebetbuch, Munich, Bayerischen Staatsbibliothek.

Fig. 105: Piero della Francesca, *Dream of Constantine*, 1452-1466, San Francesco, Arezzo.

Fig. 106: Raphael, *The Vision of Constantine*, 1519-1521, Sala di Costantino, Vatican Palace, Rome.

Fig. 107: *The Vision of Constantine*, ca. 1500, Church of the Holy Cross of Agiasmati, Platanistasa, Cyprus.

Fig. 108: *The Battle at the Milvian Bridge*.

Fig. 109: Detail, *Constantine Parading with his Army*.

Fig. 110: Detail, *The Son of the Emperor, Crispus*.

Fig. 111: Detail, *Falling Enemy, Perhaps Maxentius*.

Fig. 112: *Battle Scenes* from Stavelot Triptych and Frescoes in Arezzo.

Fig. 113: Detail, *Triumphant Constantine Marching Into Rome*.

Fig. 114: Riccio, *The Discovery of the True Cross*.

Fig. 115: Detail, *The Thieves' Crosses*.

Fig. 116: Detail, *Helena and Bishop Macarius?*

Fig. 117: Riccio, *The Miracle of the True Cross*.

Fig. 118: Detail of *Helena* from the Two Scenes Devoted to her Story.

Fig. 119: Detail, *Triumphal Arch*.

Fig. 120: *Arch of Constantine*, 315, Rome.

Fig. 121: *Arch of Constantine Versus Riccio's Arch*.

Fig.122: Riccio, *The Miracle of the True Cross* and *The Battle at the Milvian Bridge*.

Fig. 123: *Trajan and the Fallen Man*, Scene Nine from the Trajan Column, 113 AD
And *Constantine*, detail from *The Vision of Constantine*.

Fig. 124: *Surrender of the Dacians*, scene 75 from Trajan Column, 113 AD
and *Constantine*, detail from *The Vision of Constantine*.

Fig. 125: *Equestrian Monument of Marcus Aurelius*, 161-180 AD and *Constantine*, detail
from *The Battle at the Milvian Bridge*.

Fig. 126: *Germans' Submission to Marcus Aurelius*, 176-180 AD and *Constantine*, detail
from *The Battle at the Milvian Bridge*.

Fig. 127: *The Rain Miracle*, Scene from the Column of Marcus Aurelius, 176-193 AD
And details from *The Battle at the Milvian Bridge*.

Fig. 128: *Trajan Reliefs with Battle Scenes* from the Arch of Constantine and *The Battle
at the Milvian Bridge*.

Fig. 129: Donatello, *Madonna and Child*, ca. 1448 Sant'Antonio, Padua and *Helena*,
details from the *Discovery* and the *Miracle* Scenes.

Fig. 130: Bartolomeo Bellano, *Cain and Abel*, 1484-1490, Sant'Antonio, Padua.

Fig. 131: Bertoldo di Giovanni, *Battle Scene*, ca. 1480s, Museo del Bargello, Florence.

Fig. 132: Detail with Jerusalem from the *Discovery* and *Miracle* Scenes.

Fig. 133: Detail with Rome from the *Battle* Scene.

Fig. 134: Detail with a *Promontory*, Perhaps Mount Mario.

Fig. 135: Detail with *Hills and Mountains*, Perhaps the Hill of *Prima Porta* and the
Mount Soratte.

Fig. 136: *Arch of Malborghetto, Remains and Reconstruction*, ca. 312, Via Flaminia,
Lazio.

Fig. 137: *The Miracle of the True Cross and Helena Worshipping the Cross*, Illustrations from Jacobus da Voragine, *Golden Legend*, edition of 1492.

Fig. 138: *Frontispiece* from Jacobus da Voragine, *Golden Legend*, edition of 1499.

Fig. 139: Andrea Riccio, *The Story of Judith*, 1505-1507, Sant'Antonio, Padua.

Fig. 140: Detail from *Vision Scene*.

Fig. 141: *Vision and Discovery*.

Fig. 142: *Miracle and Battle*.

Fig. 143: *Tabernacle Doors*.

Fig. 144: Giovanni Bellini, *Lamentation*, 1515-20, Gallerie dell'Accademia, Venice.

Fig. 145: *Door* from the *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili* and *Tabernacle*.

Fig. 146: Detail of *Eagle* from the *Tabernacle*.

Fig. 147: *Vision and Discovery*.

Fig. 148: Bellini, *The Miracle of the Cross at the Bridge of San Lorenzo*, 1500, Gallerie dell'Accademia, Venice.

Fig. 149: Cima da Conegliano, *Constantine and Saint Helena*, 1501-1503, San Giovanni in Bragora, Venice.

Fig. 150: *Reliquary of the Cross from San Michele di Murano in a Drawing by Giovanni Grevenbroch*, 1754-1765, Venice, Museum Correr Library.

Fig. 151: Bernardino da Tossignano, *Constantine and Saint Helena*, 1515-1520, Private Collection.

Fig. 152: Unknown, *Vision of the Cross*, 14th century, San Nicola, Lanciano.

Fig. 153: Antoniazio Romano and Assistants, *Apse Decoration with the Stories of the Cross*, ca 1496, Santa Croce in Gerusalemme, Rome.

Fig. 154: Antoniazio Romano and Assistants, *Meeting with Judas, Discovery of the Three Crosses, and Miracle of the True Cross*, Santa Croce in Gerusalemme, Rome.

Fig. 155: Antoniazio Romano and Assistants, *The Battle Between Heraclius and Chosres' Son, The Recovery of the Cross, and Heraclius Return to Jerusalem*, Santa Croce in Gerusalemme, Rome.

Fig. 156: Left: *Group of the Doubting Jews*; Right: *Turkish Onlooker Behind Judas*.

Fig. 157: Detail with *Cardinal Mendoza and Saint Helena beside the Cross*.

Fig. 158: My Reconstruction of the Altar of the True Cross.

Fig. 159: Detail of the Fresco in Rome.

Fig. 160: Detail with *Ushers*, Santa Croce in Gerusalemme, Rome.

Fig. 161: Detail with *Crispus* from *Vision*.

Fig. 162: Antoniazio Romano, *The Miracle of the True Cross*, Santa Croce in Gerusalemme, Rome.

Fig. 163: Andrea Riccio, *The Miracle of the True Cross*.

Fig. 164: Attributed to Baldassarre Peruzzi, ca 1495-1510, *Christ Judge, the Evangelists, and Stories of the True Cross*, Santa Croce in Gerusalemme, Chapel of Saint Helena, Rome.

Fig. 165: *Treaty with Effigies of the King of Hungary, Pope Alexander VI, and Venice as a Queen*.

Fig. 166: Detail with *Crispus Holding a Short Dagger?*

Fig. 167: *Last Judgment*, 13th century, Santa Maria Assunta, Torcello.

Fig. 168: Giotto, Detail from the *Last Judgment*, 1306, Scrovegni Chapel, Padua.

Fig. 169: Piero della Francesca, *Dream of Constantine*, 1452-1466, San Francesco, Arezzo.

Fig. 170: Detail with *Macarius beside Helena* in the *Finding*.

Fig. 171: *Predella* from *Cima's Altarpiece*.

Fig. 172: *Gate of the Arsenal*, 1457-1460, Venice.

Fig. 173: Mauro Codussi, *San Michele in Isola*, 1468ss, Venice.

Fig. 174: Titian, *The Triumph of Christ*, 1508-1511.

Fig. 175: Titian, *The Submersion of the Pharaoh in the Waters of the Red Sea*, 1513-1515.

Fig. 176: Andrea Riccio, *Saint Martin and the Beggar*, 1513-1520, Ca' d'Oro Museum, Venice.

Fig. 177: *All'antica Motifs* from *Saint Martin the Beggar* and *The Tabernacle*.

Fig. 178: Antonio Rizzo, *Saint James and Saint Paul Altars*, 1465-1469, Basilica of San Marco, Venice.

Fig. 179: Attributed to Andrea Riccio, *Aristotle and Alexander of Aphrodisias*, National Gallery of Art, Washington.

Fig. 180: Andrea Riccio, *Medal of Girolamo Donato*, unknown whereabouts.

Fig. 181: Andrea Riccio, *An Allegorical Scene*, National Gallery of Art, Washington.

Fig. 184. Detail with *Constantine* from *The Vision*.

Introduction

My dissertation belongs to a general rediscovery trend involving the figure of the Paduan sculptor Andrea Riccio. In 2008, two major exhibitions, respectively in Trent and New York, have attracted attention to this important master of bronze, allowing, on the one hand, better to frame his contribution within the Veneto's artistic and cultural context and, on the other hand, to engage in a more detailed analysis of some of his masterpieces.¹ The *Stories of the True Cross* can be considered among Riccio's most representative creations. The panels show various episodes from the legend of the Holy Cross as told by Jacobus de Voragine in his *Golden Legend*, which have been traditionally identified as *The Dream and Baptism of Constantine*, *The Battle Between Constantine and Maxentius at the Milvian Bridge*, *The Discovery of the True Cross*, *The Miracle of the True Cross*, and finally the tabernacle doors with *The Exaltation of the True Cross* (figs. 1-5).² This set of bronzes, today at the Ca' d'Oro Museum in Venice, once adorned the altar of the True Cross in Santa Maria dei Servi, the mother church of the Servite order in Venice, and likely constituted the first, major public commission by the Paduan sculptor as recent critics have suggested and my research has confirmed.³ The

¹ Allen, Denise, and Peta Motture, eds. *Andrea Riccio: Renaissance Master of Bronze*, Exhibition Catalogue (New York: The Frick Collection; London: in association with Philip Wilson, 2008); Bacchi, Andrea, and Luciana Giacomelli, eds. *Rinascimento e passione per l'antico. Andrea Riccio e il suo tempo*, Exhibition Catalogue, (Trent: Provincia autonoma, 2008).

² Most recently by Adriana Augusti, *Rinascimento e passione per l'antico*, cat. 89, 430-33; Gasparotto, Davide. "Andrea Riccio a Venezia: sui rilievi con le Storie della Vera Croce per l'altare Donà già in Santa Maria dei Servi," in *Tullio Lombardo: scultore e architetto nella Venezia del rinascimento*, Atti del Convegno Internazionale di Studi ed. by Matteo Ceriana (Verona: Cierre, 2007), 396-398.

³ First and foremost Ceriana, Matteo. "Profilo della scultura a Venezia tra il 1450 e il 1500," in *Da Bellini a Veronese. Studi di arte veneta*, 6 (2004), 23-81; Gasparotto, "Andrea Riccio a Venezia," 404; Allen, *Andrea Riccio*, cat. 9, 152, note 4. Augusti disagrees and believes that the reliefs were executed shortly after those for the Santo in Padua, so around 1507-1510, Augusti, *Rinascimento e passione per l'antico*, cat. 89, 432.

importance of this work, however, is not limited to the position that it holds within Riccio's oeuvre. Its exceptional format, medium, and iconography, and the complexity of its meaning make it extremely relevant for a deeper understanding of the context of its creation in the early sixteenth century Venice.

A number of studies have been dedicated to the Ca' d'Oro reliefs but the majority of them are pretty dated.⁴ The most recent and comprehensive examination of Riccio's panels is represented by Davide Gasparotto's essay published in 2007.⁵ His contribution is an exhaustive introduction of all those aspects that make the *Stories of the True Cross* worthy of our attention. Gasparotto reminds us about the prestigious patronage of the reliefs, which were commissioned by the patrician Girolamo Donato to commemorate a relic of the Holy Cross that was given to him by Pope Innocent VIII (1484-1492). The scholar emphasizes how these bronzes were once inserted into an altar of unknown and unprecedented format that was dedicated to the True Cross and stood against the church's new choir, which was also erected thanks to Donato's generous support. Moreover, Gasparotto's essay provides a concise but informative profile of both patron and artist and attempts an analysis of the possible sources at the basis of Riccio's antiquarianism. His stylistic reading of the *Stories of the True Cross* remains the most convincing so far

⁴ The earliest and most seminal work on Riccio that includes a formal analysis of the *Stories of the True Cross* is by Planiscig, Leo. *Andrea Riccio* (Wien: Schroll, 1927), esp. 211-220. Other important contributions to be mentioned are: Pope-Hennessy, John. *La scultura italiana. Il Quattrocento* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1964), 345-347; Radcliffe, Anthony in *The Genius of Venice*, Exhibition Catalogue ed. by Charles Hope and Jane Martineau (New York: H.N. Abrams, 1983), 371-372; Augusti, Adriana in *Donatello e il suo tempo. Il bronzo a Padova nel Quattrocento e Cinquecento*, Exhibition Catalogue ed. by Davide Banzato (Milan: Skira, 2001), 106-107.

⁵ Gasparotto, "Andrea Riccio a Venezia," 389-410. The content of his essay has recently appeared in a more concise form in the catalogue of an exhibition dedicated to Aldo Manuzio and his time, see Davide Gasparotto, in *Aldo Manuzio e il rinascimento a Venezia*, Exhibition Catalogue, ed. by Guido Beltramini e Davide Gasparotto (Venice: Marsilio Editori, 2016), cat. 51, 262-265.

and offers evidence for an early dating of the work. Nonetheless, it touches only superficially on some of the most important questions which arise from a close examination of Riccio's panels. These pertain to the original structure, location, and function of the altar that once hosted the bronzes, along with the message that the *Stories* were intended to convey. Another seminal text that is a must read for any study pertaining Andrea Riccio is the catalogue edited by Denise Allen and Peta Motture. Although the 2008 exhibition did not include the Servite reliefs with the *Stories of the True Cross*, it did show the panel with *Saint Martin and the Beggar* which was probably located on the twin altar to that owned by Girolamo Donato. The catalogue entry related to this work by Riccio and the introductory essays regarding his contribution, environment, and creative process provide illuminating insights much needed to further knowledge of this great master of bronze.

Coming from this solid line of established studies, my dissertation presents itself as an in-depth analysis of Riccio's reliefs with *Stories of the True Cross* aiming to shed new light on the context of their commission. The years around 1500 were a crucial moment in Venetian history for a number of reasons. First, this is when the antiquarian culture reached its apex in the Veneto and found in Riccio its most ardent supporter. As I contend, the archaeologically-oriented antiquarianism of the Paduan sculptor anticipated Raphael's contribution in Rome, thus confirming the major role played by Venice and the Veneto in encouraging the study of antiquity. Second, it was during this time that the *Serenissima* Republic faced one of the most dramatic moments since her foundation: it forever shook her destiny but reinforced her mythical image. Riccio's reliefs offer an accurate compendium of the political ideology embraced by Venice in the face of two

major threats – the Turks and the European forces – and successfully pursued by Girolamo Donato in his diplomatic duties. Third, the turn of the sixteenth century coincided with the “Golden Age” of the Servite order in Venice, which gained a reputation comparable to other well established orders in the lagoon. Exactly around the time when the altar of the True Cross was under way, the Servites’ mother church had become as magnificent as the Dominican Santi Giovanni e Paolo and the Franciscan Santa Maria Gloriosa dei Frari and hosted a comparable number of altars decorated with major works of art.⁶ Besides, the friars were active members of Venetian society and influential on many levels as the reading of Riccio’s reliefs for the altar of the True Cross emphasizes. Since among all these aspects, this last one is perhaps the least discussed in the following chapters it is worthwhile to take a few words to explain the rise of the Servites in Venice.

⁶ Humfrey, Peter. *The Altarpiece in Renaissance Venice* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press), 1993, 36.

The Servite Order in Venice, A Preamble

The fact that Donato commissioned such a prestigious work for the church of Santa Maria dei Servi may be read as a sign of the order's prominent role in Venice. Today little is known about the Servite friars and their mother church in Venice, outside the specific literature related to the order's history.⁷ However, they once held an important position in the *Serenissima*. The memory of the friars' presence has been fading since the nineteenth-century suppression of the four institutions representing the order in the lagoon: Santa Maria dei Servi in Cannaregio, San Giacomo in the Giudecca Island, Santa Maria delle Grazie in Burano, and Santa Maria del Pianto on the Fondamenta Nuove.⁸ The decline of the order had already started in the eighteenth century and was speeded up by the fall of the Republic of Venice in 1797.⁹ The Napoleonic occupation in 1806 made the Servites' disappearance more systematic with the demolition or alteration of their churches and attached monasteries and convents,

⁷ The main contribution on the Servite order in Venice is by Vicentini: Vicentini, Antonio M. *I Servi di Maria nei documenti e codici veneziani* (2 vols. Vicenza: Officina Tipografica Vicentina, 1922); Vicentini, Antonio M. *Santa Maria de' Servi in Venezia* (Treviglio: Tipografia Editrice Messaggi, 1920).

⁸ San Giacomo della Giudecca, originally known as Santa Maria Novella alla Giudecca, was founded a few decades after the arrival of the Servites in Venice (the church was completed in 1343) thanks to the bequest of Marsilio da Carrara. The two female convents, Santa Maria delle Grazie in Burano and Santa Maria del Pianto in Fondamenta Nuove, were created on the initiative of sister Maria Benedetta de' Rossi respectively in 1619 and 1647. Pacchin, Lino in AA. VV. *Fra Paolo Sarpi e i Servi di Maria a Venezia nel 750 Anniversario dell'Ordine* (Venice: La Stamperia di Venezia Editrice, 1983), 14, 23.

⁹ As proved by two subsequent decrees released by the Venetian senate in 1772 regarding the progressive suppression of the Servite order, Cecchetti, Bartolomeo. *La Repubblica di Venezia e la corte di Roma nei rapporti della religione*. Venice: Tipografia di P. Naratovich, 1874, 147-167.

followed by the consequent dispersal and relocation of the works of art that once decorated those spaces.¹⁰

Among the losses caused by this series of events, the destruction of Santa Maria dei Servi, mother church of the Servites, is by far the worst episode. Similarly to the altar that it hosted, whose memory survives through Riccio's five bronzes with the *Stories of the True Cross*, what remains of Santa Maria dei Servi is a fragmented reflection of its past greatness. The main portal, a lateral entrance, and a few sections of wall stand as a reminder of the conspicuous proportions of this building – it measured eleven-hundred square meters – which was one of the finest and most representative examples of Gothic architecture in Venice (figs. 6-11).¹¹ While the church's exterior is recorded in a painting by Gabriele Bella (1730-1799) and two eighteenth-century engravings, respectively by Luca Carlevarijs (1663-1730) and Domenico Lovisa (ca. 1690-ca. 1750), no visual materials document the arrangement of its interior decoration (figs. 12-14). Remarkable works of art paraded along its walls and on its altars, among them masterpieces such as Tullio Lombardo's *Vendramin Tomb*, now in the church of Santi Giovanni e Paolo, and Giovanni Bellini's *Lamentation* in the Gallerie dell'Accademia (figs. 15-16).¹² The

¹⁰ Pavon, Giuliano, and Graziella Cauzzi. *La memoria di un tempio. Li Servi di San Marcilian ed il Canal-Marovich in Venezia* (Venice: Edizioni Helvetia, 1988), 155-166.

¹¹ The others were the Dominican Santi Giovanni e Paolo, the Franciscan Santa Maria Gloriosa dei Frari, the Augustinian Santo Stefano, to name the most prominent examples. By the mid-fifteenth century the majority of all the Venetian churches had been built or rebuilt in the Gothic style, Humfrey, *The Altarpiece in Renaissance Venice*, 31-32.

¹² Other works of art worth remembering are the shutters painted by Bonifacio de' Pitati for Sansovino's altar of the relics (*The Redeemer and the Apostles*, Gallerie dell'Accademia, Venice), *The Assumption of the Virgin* by Giuseppe Porta, nicknamed Salviati (Cappella del Rosario, Santi Giovanni e Paolo, Venice), *Giovanni Emo's funerary monument* by Antonio Rizzo (the effigy of Emo and part of the sarcophagus are at the Museum in Vicenza while the two pages holding a shield are at the Louvre Museum). For a complete list of all the works, see Pavon and Cauzzi, *La memoria di un tempio* and Pedrocchi, Filippo in *Fra Paolo Sarpi e i Servi di Maria a Venezia*, 105-125.

glorious story of the Servite church is echoed in those artworks that defied dispersion and in the contemporary chronicles that spoke of its magnificence. In his *De origine, situ et magistratus urbis venetae* (1493-1530), the diarist Marino Sanudo listed Santa Maria dei Servi among “the big and beautiful churches” and those that contained “things that are outstanding.”¹³ The Milanese canon Pietro Casola, during his sojourn in Venice on his way to Jerusalem, singled out in his diary (1494) the Servite church as a most remarkable place, among the first that he visited.¹⁴ Comments such as these make us wonder how the Servites managed to become so prestigious in fifteenth-century Venice and to gain a status comparable to other more famous mendicant orders, namely the Franciscans and Dominicans.

Today the name of the *Servi di Maria* is mainly associated with Florence and with the most popular Servite church of the Santissima Annunziata in that city. It is indeed there that a lay confraternity devoted to the Virgin – and called *Società della Vergine Annunziata* – turned into a prestigious order.¹⁵ According to tradition, after a number of subsequent apparitions of *Nostra Signora*, the Seven Founders decided to begin their spiritual path which was signaled by three important events: the consecration to the religious life in 1244, the decision to organize themselves into an order in 1246, and its approval on the part of Pope Benedict XI in 1304.¹⁶ After official recognition was

¹³ Sanudo, Marin. *De origine, situ et magistratibus urbis venetae ovvero la città di Venetia (1493-1530)*, ed. by Angela Caracciolo Aricò (Milan: Cisalpino-La Goliardica, 1980), 49-51.

¹⁴ Newett, Margaret M. *Canon Pietro Casola's Pilgrimage to Jerusalem in the Year 1494* (Manchester: At the University Press, 1907), 134-135.

¹⁵ Before establishing the lay confraternity of Mary, these laypeople worked at the service of the Hospital of Santa Maria di Fonte Viva, Citeroni, Raffaella. *L'ordine dei Servi di Santa Maria nel Veneto. Tre insediamenti trecenteschi: Venezia (1316), Verona (1324), Treviso (1346)* (Rome: Edizione Marianum, 1998), 66.

¹⁶ The most ancient and authoritative document related to the origin of the order is the *Legenda de Originis Ordinis fratrum Servorum Virginis Mariae*, probably written by father Pietro da Todi

finalized, the order started to spread first in the nearby territories of Tuscany and Umbria. Under the supervision of the order's general Pietro da Todi (1314-1344), the largest number of monasteries was founded following the main economic routes in the north of Italy and Germany; first and foremost was Santa Maria dei Servi in Venice, destined to become one of the most important and largest communities.¹⁷ The arrival of the Servites in Venice significantly coincided with Pietro's spiritual plan to reinforce the identity of the order itself with the edition of two essential texts: a hagiography devoted to Filippo Benizi, second saint and founder of the Servites, and the *Legenda de origine Ordinis fratrum Servorum virginis Mariae*, probably written by the general himself.¹⁸ The strong sense of identity instilled in the newly founded Santa Maria dei Servi in Venice shaped the leading role played by this institution in the years to come.

around 1317-18. The bibliography on the history of the Servite order is extensive; among the major contributions see Rossi, Alessio Maria. *Manuale di storia dell'ordine dei Servi di Maria (1233-1954)* (Rome: Typis Pontificiae Universitatis Gregorianae, 1956); Casalini, Eugenio, O.S.M. *Le Pleiadi del Senario. I sette fondatori dei Servi di Maria* (Florence: Convento di SS. Annunziata, 1989); Citeroni, *L'ordine dei Servi di Santa Maria nel Veneto*; and the volumes by Di Domenico (Di Domenico, Pier Giorgio M. et al. *Fonti Storico-Spirituali dei Servi di Santa Maria, III, 2, dal 1496 al 1623*. Bergamo: Servitium Editrice, 2008) and Dal Pino (Dal Pino, Franco A. et al. *Fonti Storico-Spirituali dei Servi di Santa Maria, II, dal 1349 al 1495*. Bergamo: Servitium Editrice, 2002). Casalini provides the most accurate account of these Marian visions. The founders had their first vision of the Virgin on August 15, 1233, the feast of her Assumption. A second vision occurred on the Eve of the same celebration years later, on August 14, 1244, while they were praying in Santa Reparata in Florence. The Virgin Mary appeared to them in a luminous *mandorla*, seated on a throne surrounded by angels. A third vision happened on the Holy Friday of 1246, during the night. This time the apparition was comparable to a painting, the Virgin materialized above the main altar of the founders' oratory, dressed in black to commemorate the death of her son, and accompanied by two angels, the Dominican Pietro da Verona, and Saint Augustine. She encouraged them to found their own order, announced the order's name, established the color of the friars' habit - black in remembrance of her suffering at the foot of the Cross – and told them to follow the rule of Saint Augustine. Casalini, *Le Pleiadi del Senario*, 14, 32-33, 47-48.

¹⁷ Seven monasteries were founded in Germany and around twenty in Italy, Citeroni, *L'ordine dei Servi di Santa Maria nel Veneto*, 65, 70-71; Dal Pino, *Fonti Storico-Spirituali dei Servi*, 143.

¹⁸ The *Legenda* reinforces the Marian connotations of the order, which attracted a large number of faithful. Certainly it was not coincidence that three of the four friars sent to Venice were coming from the Siennese Servite monastery, the center of the spiritual project supported by father Pietro da Todi Siena. Citeroni, *L'ordine dei Servi di Santa Maria nel Veneto*, 76-77.

Santa Maria dei Servi was the first monastery to be inaugurated in the Veneto, although it was originally listed under the Emilia Romagna province.¹⁹ The first mass was officiated on November 26th, 1316, in a modest wooden oratory devoted to the Virgin, as a notary document accurately describes.²⁰ The friars had settled in a piece of land donated to them by Regina, widow of Tommaso Longo – rather than Giovanni D’Avanzo, as the tradition reports - and located in the area of Cannaregio, the most apt place for the establishment of a new order, since there were no other monasteries nearby. This area was also the largest of the six Venetian *sestieri* and the closest one to the mainland.²¹ From these humble beginnings, the community rapidly thrived thanks to the support of Venetian patricians and citizens from various districts as well as foreigners, especially Tuscan exiles. A century after their arrival, the “Venetian Servites” reached a “Golden Age” in the 1400s taking full advantage of a couple of events that coincidentally affected the overall order at that time.²² On a legislative level, Pope Innocent VIII issued the *Mare Magnum* in 1487, an official summary and extended renewal of all the privileges obtained by the order from 1259 on, which was published by the Observant

¹⁹ The origin of the Veneto province is traditionally associated with the general reunion of the order on May 1st, 1325. Rossi, *Manuale di storia dell’ordine dei Servi*, 241.

²⁰ The drafting of a notary document to certify the celebration of the first mass was not a common practice among Mendicant orders. This procedure was followed for the Servites in order to make the friars’ settlement official, Citeroni, 1998, 92, 94. The mass was devoted to the Holy Virgin even though it was not celebrated on a Sunday, the Madonna’s day. Father Francesco da Siena pronounced three orations: the first *Concede nos famulos tuos*, the second by Blessed Pietro Alessandrino, and the third dedicated to the Cross. See Vicentini, *Santa Maria de’ Servi in Venezia*, 1-2, also for an excerpt from the notarial document. This oratory was included in the newly built church and converted into a choir space, see Corner, Flaminio. *Ecclesiae Venetae antiquis monumentis nunc etiam primum editis illustratae ac in decades distributae* (Venetiis: typis Jo. Baptistae Pasqualis, 1749), 24.

²¹ Citeroni, *L’ordine dei Servi di Santa Maria nel Veneto*, 90.

²² Ibid., 108, 116. The definition of the fifteenth century as the “Golden Age” of the Servite order in Venice was first introduced by Vicentini, *Santa Maria de’ Servi in Venezia*, 9.

friars in Venice in 1503.²³ On a spiritual level, the foundation of the Observant reform called for a return to a strict life of seclusion and community. The *Osservanza* was not a strictly Servite phenomenon, rather a need for evangelic renovation expressed and embraced by several orders in the fifteenth century, in anticipation of the Church's general reform begun in the following century with the Counter Reformation.²⁴ What it is noteworthy is that the Servite *Congregazione dell'Osservanza* was significantly supported and guided by eminent Venetian figures. Foremost among them was the Venetian Gabriele Condulmer, elevated to the papacy as Pope Eugenius IV (1431-1447), who promoted in 1431 the foundation of the second main institution belonging to the *Osservanza*, San Alessandro in Monte Berico in Vicenza, and granted jurisdictional existence to the congregation in 1440.²⁵ Condulmer's example paved the way for similar supportive gestures carried out by the Venetian Cardinal Giovanni Michiel (1468-1503) and the Doge Andrea Vendramin (1476-1478). Michiel, who was a protector of the order, hosted the 1485 general reunion of the Servites in his castle in Vetralla when the authority of the *Osservanza* was established.²⁶ Doge Vendramin, who was buried in Santa Maria dei Servi, asked Pope Sixtus IV in 1476 to favor the passage of that monastery to

²³ Dal Pino, *Fonti Storico-Spirituali dei Servi*, 216; the Mare Magnum was published on 24 October 1503 and dedicated to Marino Baldi from the Veneto, general vicar of the Observant Congregation, Di Domenico, *Fonti Storico-Spirituali dei Servi*, 42.

²⁴ For an introduction to the concept and goals of the Observant Reform according to the words of the Observant friar Filippo Albrizzi, see Di Domenico, *Fonti Storico-Spirituali dei Servi*, 202-234.

²⁵ Rossi, *Manuale di storia dell'ordine dei Servi*, 298.

²⁶ Giovanni Michiel was made Cardinal of Sant'Angelo in Peschiera in 1468 by his uncle Pope Paul II, the Venetian Pietro Barbo. He was also bishop of Verona in 1471, Bishop of Padua in 1485, titular of San Marcello in 1489, and cardinal bishop of Albano, Palestrina, and Porto since 1491, Dal Pino, *Fonti Storico-Spirituali dei Servi*, 215-216. Giovanni was buried in the church of San Marcello along with his brother Antonio, who was the secretary of Pope Innocent VIII, Alexander VI, and Pius III and donated 830 manuscripts to the Servite library, Benzoni, Gino. "Michiel, Giovanni" in *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani*, vol. 74 (2010), 310-135.

the Observant Congregation.²⁷ In the 1490s, important personalities gravitated to the observant monastery of Santa Maria dei Servi in Venice, all somehow associated - as will be later discussed - with the creation of the altar of the True Cross: Girolamo Donato, its patron; Girolamo de Franceschi, general prior of Santa Maria dei Servi in 1491, the year of the consecration of the church where he was buried; and Gasparino Borro, the distinguished humanist whose writings are crucial for an understanding both of the cultural atmosphere surrounding the commission of the altar and the message that it conveyed.²⁸

The ability with which the friars were able to establish fertile relationships with distinguished protagonists of the Venetian political scene, such as Donato and Vendramin, may justify their nomination as *consultori in iure*, namely consultants in religious matter to the Republic of Venice. Although it seems that the office was first established in 1600 with Fra Paolo Sarpi and remained a monopoly of the Servite friars until 1769, there is reason to believe that their engagement in Venetian politics had

²⁷ The Venetian Patriarch Antonio Suriano (1504-1508) also became protector of the Observant Congregation in Venice, Vicentini, *Santa Maria de' Servi in Venezia*, 21. It is interesting to underline that the first Servite monastery in Venice to embrace the Observant Reform in 1444 was San Giacomo alla Giudecca which was under the jurisdiction of the Venetian government, specifically of the *procuratia de ultra*, see Cecchetti, *La Repubblica di Venezia*, 164; Pacchin, *Fra Paolo Sarpi e i Servi di Maria*, 14; Dal Pino, *Fonti Storico-Spirituali dei Servi*, 135. The reform introduced into the monastery of Santa Maria dei Servi must have been exemplary if the Venetian government intended to support it in such a thorough way, Paschini, Pio. "Fra Girolamo de Franceschi servita e vescovo di Corone," in *Studi Storici dell'Ordine dei Servi di Maria*, 5 (1934), 5.

²⁸ The Venetian Girolamo de' Franceschi was general vicar of the Observant Reform in 1485, 1489, and 1494, and was a substitute for the same office in 1491 and 1492. He was very close to the Cardinal Giovanni Michiel. Paschini, "Fra Girolamo de Franceschi servita," 3-13; Dal Pino, *Fonti Storico-Spirituali dei Servi*, 226. The Venetian Gasparino Borro was prior of Santa Maria dei Servi in 1488 and 1494-1495, and associate of the general vicar in 1490. Dal Pino, *Fonti Storico-Spirituali dei Servi*, 446-447.

started well before.²⁹ In his list of the order's priors, Flaminio Corner includes the name of Nicolò Inversi (prior in 1444) and categorizes him as "Reipublicae Venetiarum Consultor."³⁰ As Vicentini has suggested, probably this appointment did not entail the implications of the one held by Sarpi and his followers; however, it is still an undeniable proof of the Servites' involvement in the Venetian government as early as the fifteenth century. This certainly does not come as a surprise if we think of the popularity that the order's members gained between the fifteenth and early sixteenth century for their oratorical skills and strong humanist background.³¹ The surviving sources speak of the monastery of Santa Maria dei Servi in Venice as a breeding ground for talented preachers – often called to speak at the Basilica of San Marco – and illustrious intellectuals in a variety of disciplines, as evident from the range of publications associated with that community.³² Among the most relevant ones for the period under examination are Fra Ambrogio Spiera's *Quadragesimale de floribus sapientiae* (Venice, 1476, 1481, 1485, 1488), Gasparino Borro's *Commentum* to the astronomical treatise of Johannes de Sacrobosco dedicated to the patrician Girolamo Donato (Venice, 1490) and his *Trionfi, sonetti, canzoni e laudi della Vergine Maria* (Brescia, 1498), Fra Evangelista Fossa's *Libro novo de lo innamoramento de Galvano* dedicated to the patrician Lorenzo Loredano (Milan, before 1497 and Venice, 1508), and Fra Marcello Filosseno's collection of poems, *Sylve*, dedicated to the patrician Girolamo Barbarigo and Lucrezia Borgia,

²⁹ For a list of them see Vicentini, *Santa Maria de' Servi in Venezia*, note 2, 29.

³⁰ Corner, *Ecclesiae Venetae*, II, 64. Information reported by Vicentini, *Santa Maria de' Servi in Venezia*, note 3, 16.

³¹ For a list of the preachers active in Venice, particularly in San Marco, see Vicentini, *I Servi di Maria nei documenti e codici veneziani*, II, 54-70. According to Rossi, the fifteenth century was the golden age for the order in general. In 1487 Innocent VIII granted the Servites the privilege to preach two times a year on the Epiphany and Passion Sunday, Rossi, *Manuale di storia dell'ordine dei Servi*, 465-468.

³² Especially in Borro's dedicatory letter to Girolamo Donato.

duchess of Ferrara (Venice, 1507 and 1516).³³ The romance *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili*, published in Venice in 1499, should perhaps also be included in this list. The traditional identification of the book's author with the Dominican Francesco Colonna since the eighteenth century has been convincingly called into question by the testimony of Fra Arcangelo Giani. In his *Annalium* devoted to the Servite order and published between 1618 and 1622, Giani records a local and reliable source which attributes the popular romance to the Servite friar Eliseo da Treviso (dead in 1505).³⁴

Dissertation's Methodology and Structure

What emerges from this concise overview of the *Servi di Maria* in Venice is how their community was well integrated into the religious, political, cultural, and urban context of Venice and how their role within this milieu argues that it should be recognized. The fifteenth century was certainly the moment of greatest glory for the order as it is presented in the study of Antonio Vicentini, the only scholar to date who has collected all the available historical sources on the Servites and has rightly emphasized their reputation. His work has been continued by Pavon and Cauzzi who have

³³ From Besutti (Besutti, Giuseppe Maria. *Repertori e sussidi generali. Edizioni del secolo XV (1476-1500)*. Bologna: Centro Studi O.S.M., 1971): Fra Gasparino Borro, 116-125; Fra Evangelista Fossa devoted great attention to the study of the classics as shown by his translations published in Venice between 1494 and 1497, 56-59, 131-137; Fra Ambrogio Spiera, 180-186; Fra Marcello Filosseno, 50-55.

³⁴ For the attribution of the *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili* to a Servite friar, see Scapecchi, Piero. "L'Hypnerotomachia Poliphili e il suo autore," in *Accademie e biblioteche d'Italia*, 51 (1983), 286-298; Lippi, Emilio. "Recensione dell'opera di Piero Scapecchi," in *Studi trevisani. Bollettino degli Istituti di Cultura del Comune di Treviso*, 4 (1985), 159-162; Parronchi, Alessandro. "Il vero autore del Polifilo," in *Rara volumina*, 1 (1994), 7-12. It is important to remember that the *Mare Magnum* was also published at the beginning of the sixteenth century, see note 30.

concentrated on the reconstruction of the decorative program of Santa Maria dei Servi, probably the most assertive statement of the order's prestige in the lagoon.

The accurate surveys compiled by these scholars gave me the opportunity to scrutinize all the surviving information about the Servites and their commissions and to become familiar with the location and accessibility of the documents about Santa Maria dei Servi. Learning about this church and its original prominence, prompted in me the desire of re-tracing the past greatness of the order that it represented, even if partially. I decided to focus on Riccio's reliefs for the altar of the True Cross because of the exceptionality of these sculptures, which would allow me to reveal new, interesting insights into late fifteenth-century Venice, while indirectly rescuing the Servite friars from oblivion. The panels with the *Stories of the True Cross* add further proof about the *Serenissima's* unique position within the Italian context and about the vital support provided by the Servite order in shaping the Venetian state's distinctive profile.

Certainly the most challenging aspect of my study has been the paucity of direct evidence available. Apart from Riccio's five bronzes, nothing is left of the overall ensemble from the altar of the True Cross or of the choir screen to which it was attached, and what remains of Santa Maria dei Servi alone is not architecturally enough to establish with precision the format and dimensions of altar and screen. Furthermore, documentary sources are incomplete, due to the damage caused to the monastery's library by the 1769 fire, and descriptions of the church's interior are often vague.³⁵ A preliminary examination of the materials raises more questions than answers: how did the altar of the True Cross look and how were Riccio's reliefs displayed? Where was the altar located

³⁵ For a report of the fire, Pavon and Cauzzi, *La memoria di un tempio*, 149-52.

exactly and what was its role in the Servite liturgy? Why did Donato select those specific episodes from the *Legend of the True Cross* and what was he trying to say? Why did he choose Andrea Riccio for his commission at Santa Maria dei Servi? What was the nature of the relationship between patron and artist, and between patron and the Servite friars? The goal of my research is to address questions such as these by combining the information of both primary and secondary sources. It relies consistently on a multidisciplinary method and stresses the importance of contextualization and the use of comparative examples. Each chapter is designed to focus on a distinctive issue related to Riccio's reliefs for the altar of the True Cross: the structure of this liturgical station, its location and function, its iconography and audience, and its patron and political message. By doing so I bring forth new awareness about collateral issues related to this set of bronzes: the format of altarpieces in Venice and the ubiquity of choir screen structures in the city's churches; the popularity and meaning of the cult of the True Cross in Venice at the turn of the fifteenth century; and the role of lay patronage in the creation of the Venetian myth.

The ultimate goal of my research is to prove how relatively small, de-contextualized, and fragmented works of art can often rise to the level of monumental art in the Italian Renaissance. When appropriately examined within their original context, these creations uncover unexpected new information about the culture that shaped and infused them with meaning and purpose. Riccio's reliefs with the *Stories of the True Cross* may resemble, at first, an enlarged version of those plaquettes that made the

Paduan sculptor popular, as suggested by Ceriana.³⁶ Their size and iconographical complexity mislead the viewer and induce him/her to believe that they are in front of an exquisite example of decorative art designed to please an intellectual mind. However, the panels' multilayered meaning, prestigious patronage, and original location, I contend, re-shift the attention toward their status as high art and the importance that they held at the time of their creation. This set of small but exceptional bronzes offer a deeper understanding of one of the most important chapters in Venetian history.

³⁶ Ceriana, Matteo. "Profilo della scultura a Venezia tra il 1450 e il 1500," in *Da Bellini a Veronese. Studi di arte veneta*, 6 (2004), 54.

Chapter One: Reconstructing the Design of the Altar of the True Cross

The destiny met by the altar of the True Cross in the church of Santa Maria dei Servi in Venice is akin to that of many other sculptured altarpieces. As Peter Humfrey has emphasized in his pivotal work on Venetian altarpieces, altars consisting of sculptures were more vulnerable than their painted counterparts to changes of aesthetic and devotional taste. Many of those that survive have been removed from their original frame and architectural setting to be re-arranged according to evolving fashions.³⁷ This is what happened to the altar of the True Cross. Created around 1500 to stand against the newly constructed choir screen of Santa Maria dei Servi, the altar was dismantled between May and August 1729 along with the choir screen itself and the companion altar of Saint Martin. To make things more complicated, the materials from these structures were re-used to decorate two subsequent altars dedicated respectively to the Seven Founders of the Servite Order and Saint Pellegrino Laziosi. These later altars were also destroyed at the time of the demolition of the church, just before the arrival of the French troops in 1806.³⁸ Today what remains of the original altar of the True Cross are five bronze reliefs at the Ca' d'Oro Museum in Venice, manufactured by the talented Paduan sculptor Andrea Riccio, and possibly two marble angels attributed to Giambattista Bregno, currently divided between the Staatliche Museen in Berlin and the Sacristy of the church of Santi Giovanni e Paolo in Venice (figs. 17-18).

³⁷ Humfrey, Peter. *The Altarpiece in Renaissance Venice*, 273.

³⁸ Pavon and Cauzzi. *La memoria di un tempio*, 55, 159. The dates 1729 and 1814 for the destruction respectively of the screen and the entire church, reported by Antonio Vicentini as well, are contradicted by Emanuele Antonio Cicogna, who dates the demolition of the partition wall 1727 and that of the entire Servite complex 1812, see Cicogna, *Delle iscrizioni veneziane*, vol. I, 33-34.

Evidence from Written Sources

The survival of Riccio's five bronze panels and Bregno's angels can count as evidence for the exceptional quality of the altar of the True Cross. However, these elements alone do not give any insight into the original layout of the ensemble. Two necessary steps must be taken in order to retrace the altar's design: first, a review of all the available documentation on this liturgical item; and second, a proposal for a hypothetical reconstruction of the altar on the basis of comparable examples which were executed around the same time and may have functioned as models.

Although the fragmentary state of the material evidence extends to the documents as well, a number of types of relevant information can be gathered about the altar of the True Cross which, it is useful to remember, was commissioned by the patrician Girolamo Donato for the Servite church. The earliest and most reliable source comes directly from the Servite archives and dates soon after the completion of the altar of the True Cross. This precious passage has been overlooked so far but does contain important details about the structure of the ensemble.³⁹ The document records how on November 27th, 1509, the Servite friars granted Nicolosa Tron, widow of the nobleman Vittore Tron, the use of the altar of the True Cross to celebrate a *mansionaria*, a daily commemorative mass, requested by her husband in his will. The concession was revoked a year later but it is still interesting for the description of the altar that it provides: "an altar of marble located in the aforementioned church of Santa Maria dei Servi on the right side of the choir's entrance of the same church, which has a bronze altarpiece with the bronze story

³⁹ Gasparotto mentions this document as evidence for the dating of the altar, for which 1509 represents a *terminus ante quem*, but he does not comment on the description of the altar itself. See Gasparotto, "Andrea Riccio a Venezia, 395.

of the *Discovery of the Holy Cross*, entitled and dedicated to the Cross.”⁴⁰ The quote lists relevant information about the overall structure of the ensemble: the location of the altar on the choir screen, the material of the framework, marble, and the medium of the altarpiece itself, bronze. The altarpiece is said to picture the story of the rediscovery and dedication of the Holy Cross, thus mentioning the subject of one of the five reliefs created by Riccio, perhaps the most crucial episode among the group, as will be later discussed. The altar’s subject is identified by an inscription.

Later descriptions of the altar become vaguer and often confusing. This is proven, for example, by two different sources both dating back to the same year: the notes from the 1581 apostolic visit and Francesco Sansovino’s first edition of *Venetia, città nobilissima et singolare*. In their entry on Santa Maria dei Servi, the apostolic ambassador Lorenzo Campeggi and the bishop of Verona, Agostino Valier, seem to omit completely the altar of the True Cross.⁴¹ The section where the church’s altars are examined follows a clockwise order which begins with the high altar chapel and finishes with the left apsidal chapel, dedicated to the Emo family. At the end of this review, before moving to the sacristy, the visitors annotate the titles of two altars for which the location is unspecified but which is likely to be identified with the choir screen once standing at the center of the sacred space: “The Altar of Saint Martin and George consecrated and ornate in all its parts...The Altar of Saint Agatha which is ornate in all

⁴⁰ This and all subsequent translations are mine. “...Unum altare marmoreum positum in dicta ecclesia Sancte Marie Servorum a latere dextro intrando versus chorum ipsius ecclesie, habens unam palam eneam cum historia enea Inventionis sanctissime Crucis, intitulatum sub titulo et didicatione Crucis...”ASVe, busta 2 and Vicentini, *I Servi di Maria nei documenti e codici veneziani*, I, 10; ASVe, busta 29, processo no. 263 and Vicentini, *ibid.*, I, 154.

⁴¹ This is not surprising considering the concise and often inaccurate nature of the apostolic notes.

its parts and consecrated...”⁴² That these altars may have been attached to the choir screen seems to be confirmed by the fact that the visitors requested their removal, a typical reform measure often applied for liturgical structures that were considered an impediment or distraction to visual access to the main altar.⁴³ While the caption “The Altar of Saints Martin and George” could refer to the altar of Saint Martin, companion piece to the altar of the True Cross, also executed by Andrea Riccio after 1513 for the choir screen, the second altar entitled to Saint Agatha is never mentioned again in other documents.⁴⁴ It is improbable that at this date the dedication of the altar of the True Cross was changed to Saint Agatha, especially because the Servite friars did not own any relic of the saint. This misinformation can be seen as a proof that the apostolic notes are not exempt from errors, attributable to the negligence of their writers.⁴⁵

As if he were writing in response to the complete neglect shown by the apostolic visitors toward the altar of the True Cross, Francesco Sansovino focuses specifically on the craftsmanship of this structure in his guide to Venice, the first comprehensive book of this kind to be published in the lagoon.⁴⁶ In the entry on the church of Santa Maria dei Servi, Riccio’s panels are included among the few works that attracted the author’s

⁴² “Altare sancti Martini et Georgii consecratum et in omnis ornatum... Altare S.ma Aghata est in omnibus ornatum et consecratum...” ASVa, Congr. Vescovi e Regolari, Visita Ap., 96, f.68v.

⁴³ These altars are the only ones for which removal is ordered along with the four below the *barco* above the main entrance which are mentioned in Modesti. See Modesti, Paola. “I cori nelle chiese veneziane e la visita apostolica del 1581. Il “barco” di Santa Maria della Carità,” in *Arte Veneta* 59 (2002 [2004]), 39-65.

⁴⁴ The dedication to the altar of Saint George, never mentioned anywhere else, could be justified however by the presence of relics of the saint in the church, ASVe, busta 3, c. 35.

⁴⁵ A similar case happened in the church of San Giovanni in Bragora where the apostolic visitors did not mention at all one of the twin altars in the church’s choir, curiously enough also an altar dedicated to the True Cross. See Humfrey, Peter. “Cima da Conegliano, Sebastiano Mariani, and Alvise Vivarini, 362.

⁴⁶ Humfrey, *The Altarpiece in Renaissance Venice*, 13.

attention, in reference to which he writes: “There are also five stories of bronze relief very graceful in the altar of Gabriele Garzoni who was knight of Malta.”⁴⁷ Sansovino’s report is concise, vague, and misleading. It simply points out the quality of Riccio’s five bronzes with no reference to their arrangement, subject, or overall framework. Sansovino also believes that the altar belonged to Garzoni since that family’s tomb was located on the floor in front of it, an observation that is rectified by Flaminio Corner.

Corner’s multi-volume anthology on Venetian churches, *Ecclesiae Venetae*, can be considered the last useful source about the altar of the True Cross. Even though his work was compiled at the time when the altar and the screen of the Servite church were both demolished, the reliability of Corner’s account stands on his role as procurator of Santa Maria dei Servi, which gave him access to authentic documents.⁴⁸ After briefly describing the choir screen in the Servite church, Corner records: “In the exterior part of this wall, between each door, two altars were erected, one dedicated to St. Martin bishop, and the other to the Holy Cross, whose *inventio* was represented with figures in bronze.”⁴⁹ The passage does not add much to what the 1509 Servite document had reported; rather it seems to be based on that same source. It does indicate that the altar of the True Cross, along with the one of Saint Martin, were located on the façade of the screen in the space between the main entrance and the side doors. A further specification

⁴⁷ “Vi sono etiandio cinque historie di scoltura di bronzo molto vaghe, nell’altare di Gabriello Garzoni che fu Cavaliere di Malta,” Sansovino, Francesco. *Venetia citta nobilissima et singolare, descritta in xiii libri*. In Venetia, appresso Iacomo Sansovino, 1581, 57. Sansovino, Francesco. *Venetia citta nobilissima e singolare descritta dal Sansovino con nove e copiose aggiunte di D.Giustinian Martinioni*. In Venetia, appresso Steffano Curti, 1663, 160.

⁴⁸ For Corner’s role as procurator of the Servites see Vicentini, *I Servi di Maria nei documenti e codici veneziani*, note 3, 33.

⁴⁹ “In exteriori hujus parietis parte inter utramque januam duo Altaria surgebant, alterum quidem D. Martino Episcopo dicatum, alterum vero Sanctae Crucis cujus inventio figuris aenis repraesentabatur,” Corner, *Ecclesiae Venetae*, II, 24.

about the altar's position is given by Corner in the section where he cites the concession granted to the Garzoni family to build their tomb in the floor space in front of the altar of the True Cross, which was "near the door of the *barco*."⁵⁰ Corner's testimony is particularly valuable in connection with the patronage of the ensemble. On the basis of extant documentation, he points out how Sansovino was mistaken in his assumption that the altar belonged to the Garzoni family and associates Girolamo Donato with this commission for the first time. After mentioning the relic of the True Cross donated to the Servites by the patrician he states: "Moreover, it was the same Girolamo Donato who, it is said, commissioned the altar of the Cross to be built on the dividing wall, and added (to it) the bronze panels executed in low relief representing the discovery of the life-giving wood, which can be seen just now on the altar of the Blessed Founders."⁵¹ This information is confirmed by the dedication plaque that Donato himself commissioned to document the provenance of the relic that he donated. The inscription was most likely embedded somewhere into the altar or nearby and, as Patricia Fortini Brown underlines, "was one of the few socially well-sanctioned modes of self-glorification open to a Venetian patrician."⁵²

⁵⁰ "...ante Altare sub titulo Sanctae Crucis situatum in eorum Ecclesia Servorum penes portam Barchi, sive muri dividētis navem Ecclesiae a Capella majori..." Corner, *Ecclesiae Venetae*, II, 24.

⁵¹ "Porro Hieronymus Donatus ille ipse est, qui, ut diximus, ad parietem divisionis altare Crucis extrui mandavit, tabulasque aeneas anaglyptico opere elaborates vivifici ligni inventionem exhibentes apposuit, quae modo ad Beatorum Fundatorum aram deductae visuntur," Corner, *Ecclesiae Venetae*, II, 34.

⁵² "LIGNVM EX CRVCIS TITVLO QUI IN TEMPLO S. IN HIERVSALEM ROMAE SERVATVR QVOD HIER. DONATVS ORATOR VENETVS SIBI AB INNOCEN. VIII. PONT. MAX. MIRAE CLEMENTIAE DONO CONCESSVM PRECIOSO OPERE CONCLVSIT. ET IN SACRARIO SERVORVM DIVAE VIRGINIS DEDICAVIT ANNO SALVTIS ET GRATIAE MCCCCLXXXII," Brown, Patricia Fortini. *Venice and Antiquity. The Venetian Sense of the Past*. Yale University Press: New Haven & London, 1997, note 58, 243, 329.

Reconsidering the Material Evidence

Corner's conclusive comment about the location of Riccio's reliefs on the altar of the Blessed Founders gives the opportunity to take stock of the information collected so far. Although scanty at first sight, the sources reviewed provide a number of important features about the altar of the True Cross. We learn that this liturgical station was up and running by 1509, was located on the choir screen of the Servite church, on the right side of its main entrance, was made out of marble, and was decorated with bronze panels narrating the Discovery of the True Cross. The altar was commissioned by the patrician Girolamo Donato to preserve a relic of the Holy Wood but had attracted the attention of other devotees who wanted to be commemorated in association with it. At an imprecise date it seems that it was paired with another altar dedicated to Saint Martin whose structure and appearance are practically unknown. By Corner's time, both these altars were dismantled, together with the screen to which they belonged, and their materials were reused to build two new altars, one for San Pellegrino Laziosi and one for the Seven Founders, where Riccio's reliefs with the *Stories of the True Cross* were re-arranged.

A closer look at these subsequent altars is useful to gather further evidence that can possibly be associated with the altar of the True Cross. Even though these structures disappeared soon after the demolition of the overall church complex, their descriptions were included in the state property's inventories compiled in the early nineteenth century and have been painstakingly reported by those authors who have attempted a reconstruction of the decoration in Santa Maria dei Servi, first and foremost Antonio Vicentini. Referring first to the altar of the Seven Founders, Vicentini specifies that: "It was something splendid built with materials coming from the destruction of the dividing

wall and especially from the altar of the Cross. It consisted of two steps of Istrian limestone, a parapet with porphyry inlay and the rest in African bad marble, two fluted columns and corresponding pilasters in Carrara marble with related arch and some small statues, one of them representing Saint Peter Martyr, to whom was dedicated the previous altar, and the five famous low reliefs in bronze of Andrea Briosco representing the glories of the Holy Cross. The painting with the Madonna in glory and the Blessed is by Francesco Polazzo.”⁵³ A few pages later, talking of the altar of San Pellegrino Laziosi located farther down on the same south wall, Vicentini quotes the state inventories by saying that “it was built around 1730 with part of the materials coming from the demolition of the dividing wall...it consists of two steps in Istrian limestone, a parapet in porphyry inlay, columns of Carrara marble, a case, and pilasters in Carrara marble. The altarpiece is by Giuseppe Camerata and represents the Saint being cured by Jesus coming down from the Cross.”⁵⁴

Reading the two passages together reveals how similar the structure of the two altars was. The descriptions mirror one another, with some components from the architectural frame being exactly the same. In fact, if we remove the central canvases and the later ornaments from the altar of the Seven Founders – namely, the little statues and

⁵³ “Costruito col materiale ricavato dalla distruzione del divisorio, e più specialmente dell’altare della S. Croce, è qualche cosa di splendido. Consta di due gradini di Rovigno, parapetto rimesso in porfido e il resto in africano cattivo, due colonne scannellate e corrispondenti pilastri in marmo di Carrara con relativo arco ed alcune statuine, una delle quali raffigura S. Pietro M., cui anticamente era consacrato l’altare, oltre i cinque celebri bassorilievi in bronzo d’Andrea Briosco raffiguranti le glorie della S. Croce. Il quadro con la Madonna in gloria e i Beati sul piano è di Francesco Polazzo,” Vicentini, *Santa Maria de’ Servi in Venezia*, 82-83.

⁵⁴ “Costruito infatti circa il 1730 con parte del materiale ricavato dall’abbattimento del divisorio...Si compone di ‘due gradini di Rovigno, parapetto rimesso in porfido, colonne di marmo di Carrara, custodia e pilastri rimessi in Carrara’ (stima deman.). La pala è di Giuseppe Camerata e raffigura il Santo in atto di essere guarito da Gesù staccantesi dalla Croce,” Vicentini, *Santa Maria de’ Servi in Venezia*, 90.

Riccio's reliefs which were probably decorating respectively the sides and bottom of the centerpiece - what remains are four identical features: two steps in Istrian limestone, a parapet in porphyry inlay, two columns, and two pilasters in Carrara marble. Similarities of this kind are commonly justifiable when the altars were conceived as twin structures, to be seen side by side. However, although erected at the same time, the altars of the Seven Founders and of Pellegrino Laziosi were not intentionally designed as a pair and were placed distant from one another. Their similarity may be then considered related to the circumstances and explained by the fact that they were composed of materials coming from the destroyed choir screen and specifically, as I would like to suggest, from the two altars once standing there, the altar of the True Cross and the altar of Saint Martin. It is highly likely that these previous altars were designed as a pair and, as such, had equivalent frameworks later to be inherited by the altars of the Seven Founders and San Pellegrino Laziosi. Even though this assumption may sound like a conjecture, due to the lack of documentation, it is instead a reasonable possibility when we look into analogous examples of "twin altars."

The practice of erecting paired liturgical structures in the choir area seems to have been common in Venice for the period under consideration. At least two examples can be adduced that are relevant for the Servite case, one in the church of Santa Maria della Carità, officiated by the Lateran Canons, and one in the parish of San Giovanni in Bragora. The *barco* in the Carità was a five-bay loggia in Istrian stone completed by 1460. Its four lateral bays provided the setting for four altars which were decorated with the same number of triptychs from the Bellini workshop, today the only elements surviving from the entire ensemble. Even if the paintings were under the sponsorship of

different patrician families, they show remarkably close designs as a proof of an attempt to harmonize these works within their surroundings.⁵⁵ The same can be said about two subsidiary altars commissioned in San Giovanni in Bragora between 1494 and 1503. As at the Carità, only the altars' centerpieces still exist. They consist of two paintings of corresponding dimensions still hanging together in the same church but in a different location (fig. 19). These works by Alvise Vivarini and Cima da Conegliano were originally displayed on two altars attached to the piers within the choir enclosure and intended to hold the tabernacle of the Host and a relic of the True Cross. Documents report that the central painted panels were to be enclosed in elaborately carved frameworks, commissioned at different moments but meant to match.⁵⁶

It is not difficult to imagine that the altars on the Servite choir screen were arranged in a comparable way to the examples just discussed. Despite the lack of documentation about the altar of Saint Martin, its location on the opposite side of the altar of the True Cross may account for the fact that it was conceived as a counterpart to that previous structure. Making this hypothesis all the more likely is Vicentini's suggestion that the altar of Saint Martin was also decorated by a relief created by Andrea Riccio, namely the *Saint Martin and the Beggar* today at the Ca' d'Oro (fig. 20).⁵⁷ A panel with this subject would have certainly been appropriate for an altar dedicated to the saint, being the most popular episode from Saint Martin's life.⁵⁸ It could also have complemented the meaning of the stories narrated in the companion altar, as I will later

⁵⁵ Humfrey, *The Altarpiece in Renaissance Venice*, 181.

⁵⁶ Humfrey, "Cima da Conegliano, Sebastiano Mariani, and Alvise Vivarini," 360-361.

⁵⁷ According to Vicentini, the *Saint Martin* relief was later moved to a small wooden altar behind the main altar, see Vicentini, *Santa Maria de' Servi in Venezia*, 75-76. His hypothesis is accepted by Gasparotto, "Andrea Riccio a Venezia," 395.

⁵⁸ Allen, *Andrea Riccio*, 155.

discuss. Keeping in mind the possibility that the two altars on the Servite screen may have had analogous marble frameworks decorated with bronze altarpieces, I am now going to propose a reconstruction of their likely design by focusing on the more documented one of the pair.

Reconstruction of the Altar of the True Cross: Previous Attempts

Among the various studies devoted to re-tracing the overall decoration of Santa Maria dei Servi, surprisingly no one ever advanced any suggestion on the possible arrangement of Riccio's reliefs before the joint article published by Jacopo Benci and Silvia Stucky in 1987.⁵⁹ Their contribution is actually a focused analysis of another work coming from the church of Santa Maria dei Servi, Giovanni Bellini's *Lamentation*, which is not immediately connected to the altar of the True Cross and its reliefs (fig. 21). After a detailed examination of the painting's iconography, the two scholars deal with the issue of the original location of this canvas, whose commission remains obscure. They first report the most traditional interpretation, proposed by Vicentini, that Bellini's painting was situated on the altar of the Tertiaries dedicated to Saint Joseph, based on evidence related to later sources. Then, they introduce an alternative possibility that links the canvas to the altar of the True Cross. Stressing the fact that both the painting and the

⁵⁹ Apart from Vicentini (*I Servi di Maria nei documenti e codici veneziani* and *Santa Maria de' Servi in Venezia*), these contributions should be mentioned: Franzoi, Umberto, and Dina Di Stefano. *Le Chiese di Venezia* (Venice: Alfieri, 1976), 124-126; Zorzi, Alvise. *Venezia scomparsa* (Milan: Electa Editrice, 1972), vol. II, 348-363; Pedrocco, "Il patrimonio artistico disperse dei servi di Maria a Venezia," 105-125. For the reconstruction of Santa Maria dei Servi more from an architectural point of view see: Urbani, Elena. "Storia e architettura delle chiese dei Servi di santa Maria di fondazione trecentesca in area veneta: Venezia (1316), Verona (1324), Treviso (1346) e Padova (1392)," in *Studi storici dell'Ordine dei Servi di Maria*, 50. 2000 (2002), 1/2, 7-140; Urbani, Elena. "Santa Maria dei Servi," in *L'architettura gotica veneziana*, Atti del Convegno Internazionale di Studio, ed. by Francesco Valcanover e Wolfgang Wolters (Venice: Ist. Veneto di Scienze, Lettere e Arti, 2000), 109-113.

reliefs were commissioned around 1510 within a similar context, that of the Servite Observant Reform, Benci and Stucky come to the conclusion that Bellini's work was perhaps conceived as the main altarpiece for the altar of the True Cross with Riccio's reliefs inserted at the bottom in the form of a *predella*. Even though their hypothesis could work in terms of measurements, since the canvas is three meters wide and the panels are fifty centimeters each plus forty-four for the tabernacle, the surviving sources do not corroborate it. The two scholars themselves admit the weakness of their idea by reminding the reader that, while Riccio's reliefs stayed in place until 1729, Bellini's *Lamentation* was recorded by Boschini on the altar of Saint Joseph already in 1664. Moreover, they completely omit in their discussion the altar of Saint Martin which, as we have seen, must have looked analogous to its twin altar on the other side of the screen.⁶⁰

Exactly twenty years later, Davide Gasparotto rejected Benci and Stucky's opinion in what must be considered the first comprehensive study dedicated to the examination of Riccio's reliefs. His seminal essay provides a comprehensive analysis of the bronzes by discussing some of their most relevant aspects including location, patronage, style, and chronology. On the subject of the altar's structure, Gasparotto rules out the possibility that Bellini's *Lamentation* was ever a component of the altar of the True Cross. He underlines how a mourning scene is already included in the tabernacle relief, thus making the repetition of the same episode on the altar redundant. The scholar speculates instead that the tabernacle was the altar's centerpiece with the four narrative reliefs displayed on its sides, the stories of Constantine on the left and the stories of Saint

⁶⁰ Benci, Jacopo, and Silvia Stucky. "Indagini sulla pala belliniana della Lamentazione. Bonaventura da Forlì e i Servi di Maria a Venezia," in *Artibus et Historiae*, vol. 8, no. 15 (1987), especially 58-61.

Helena on the right in chronological order.⁶¹ The overall arrangement suggested by Gasparotto calls to mind the structure of reliquaries such as the popular Stavelot triptych (fig. 22). A masterpiece of Romanesque art, this metal and enamel object is the earliest surviving reliquary of the True Cross with scenes from the Legend of the Holy Wood. It is also among the first examples of western reliquaries of the True Cross in a triptych form, with the Holy Cross at the center and the episodes from its legend on the side wings.⁶² To imagine that the altar of the True Cross was designed to re-create a sort of larger version of a reliquary is suggestive and would fit with the purpose of the altar as a repository of a precious relic. However, a hypothesis of this kind cannot be supported by comparable examples and remains conjectural. Even if it is proven that Riccio often favored unprecedented formats in his creations, as seen in the Maffei altar in Sant'Eufemia in Verona, also examined by Gasparotto, it is unlikely that he would have adopted a completely untraditional design for his first major public commission (fig. 23).⁶³

Perhaps the most plausible solution about the arrangement of Riccio's reliefs is offered by Adriana Augusti. Admitting a certain stylistic incongruity between the tabernacle and the narrative reliefs, Augusti assumes that the panels were commissioned in different moments but were always intended to decorate the same altar, as their iconographical correlation proves. She also proposes that the tabernacle was created first and located at the center of the altar while the stories were inserted at the bottom of the structure. The comparative example that Augusti brings into the discussion, however, is

⁶¹ Gasparotto, "Andrea Riccio a Venezia," 396-398.

⁶² Voelkle, William. *The Stavelot Triptych. Mosan Art and the Legend of the True Cross*. New York: The Pierpont Morgan Library, 1980, 9, 11.

⁶³ Gasparotto, "Andrea Riccio a Venezia," 118, 120-122.

not the most appropriate, being an eighteenth-century structure executed by Francesco Cabianca for the church of Santa Maria Gloriosa dei Frari (fig. 24). This altar contains several reliquaries and Augusti seems to imply that the altar of the True Cross was also meant to host more than just the relic of the Holy Wood given by Girolamo Donato. This idea is unfounded and contradicts the information provided by the sources.⁶⁴

A Proposal for the Design of the Altar of the True Cross

The way that I envision the altar of the True Cross is akin to Augusti's suggestion. I do believe that the tabernacle relief was at the center of the whole structure while the four narrative panels were displayed at the bottom in the *scabello* or base of the ensemble. We have to imagine that the five bronzes were inserted into a complex and ornate marble frame of which no trace remains, except probably for the two kneeling angels, now divided between Venice and Berlin, and those components later re-integrated into the altar of the Seven Founders: the two steps in Istrian limestone, the parapet in porphyry inlay, the two columns, and two pilasters in Carrara marble. Given that the surviving physical elements are of dubious provenance and that reliable sources provide no firm backing, the only possible approach in reconstructing the altar of the True Cross is a close examination of Riccio's reliefs. Since the panels were the core of the altar, they may offer some useful clues for the reconstruction of its appearance.

Riccio's five bronzes are today aligned on a wall at the Ca d'Oro Museum, roughly at eye level. From this perspective it is easy to analyze the panels as a group and

⁶⁴ Augusti, "Sogno e battesimo di Costantino," cat. 89, 430-432.

to notice a stark contrast between the narrative reliefs and the tabernacle.⁶⁵ This panel differs because of its format, vertical rather than horizontal, depth of carving, and proportion of figures (fig. 25). All these formal and stylistic differences are as visible to the modern observer as they were to Leopoldo Cicognara, the president of the Academy of Fine Arts in Venice, who claimed these masterpieces for his institution in 1814. Cicognara was the first to mention the name of Andrea Riccio as the artist responsible for the creation of the narrative panels and to believe that the tabernacle was by another hand, closer to Donatello.⁶⁶ His opinion has re-surfaced in the literature every now and then, most recently in Augusti's essay.⁶⁷ Since the stylistic divergence between the stories and the tabernacle cannot be ignored, I would like to argue that it may hold the key for the original arrangement of the panels on the altar of the True Cross.

Rather than explaining the tabernacle's distinctive features in terms of a different authorship of the panel, I suggest, following Augusti's study, that this relief preceded the rest of the stories.⁶⁸ It is likely that when Donato handed over to the friars the piece of the Cross' titulus received from Pope Innocent VIII, this precious gift needed a place in which to be stored and commemorated. It was 1492, exactly six years before the erection of the screen where the altar of the True Cross was going to be located. Probably shortly after his donation, Donato, in his role as a procurator of the church, decided to commission a proper shrine for his reliquary and entrusted the young Riccio with the

⁶⁵ This evident contrast was pointed out to me by Serena Bidorini, conservator of the bronzes today at the Ca' d'Oro.

⁶⁶ Gasparotto, "Andrea Riccio a Venezia: sui rilievi con le Storie della Vera Croce," 391.

⁶⁷ For previous literature, see Gasparotto, "Andrea Riccio a Venezia: sui rilievi con le Storie della Vera Croce," notes 19-20, 408. Augusti, "Sogno e battesimo di Costantino," 430.

⁶⁸ Augusti, "Sogno e battesimo di Costantino," 430.

creation of the tabernacle's doors.⁶⁹ The Donatellesque character of the relief, often emphasized by scholars, could be related to the still dominant influence of the Florentine master on the Paduan sculptor through his works at Sant'Antonio in Padua and through the person of Bartolomeo Bellano, who was Donatello's assistant and Riccio's master. There is also the possibility that Riccio worked with a precise model of Donatello in mind provided to him by Girolamo Donato himself. A suggestive parallel between Riccio's tabernacle and Donatello's work in Saint Peter's seems to support this idea. I am referring to the tabernacle that houses the miraculous *Madonna della Febbre*, the earliest Renaissance example of wall tabernacle according to Maurice Cope (fig. 26).⁷⁰

Regardless of their different proportions, the general layout of the two reliefs is remarkably close.⁷¹ In both instances the shrine at the center is embedded into a classicizing frame that recalls the design of Roman triumphal arches. The detail of the attic is particularly striking since it seems to have been modeled after the example of the arch of Constantine (fig. 27).⁷² Riccio pushes Donatello's effort even further by engaging in a deeper connection with ancient sources. The authentic antiquarian style of his creation might suggest that Riccio and Donato were directly inspired by original ancient

⁶⁹ This practice was not unusual, as seen in the case of the relic of the True Cross in San Giovanni in Bragora. Before being commemorated through the erection of an altar, the relic was stored in a stone tabernacle enclosed by wooden doors carved by the same artist who was later commissioned with the altar's framework, Alessandro da Caravaggio. See Humfrey, "Cima da Conegliano, Sebastiano Mariani, and Alvise Vivarini," 361.

⁷⁰ Where the painting is now there was a small door. See Cope, Maurice E. *The Venetian Chapel of the Sacrament in the Sixteenth Century*. Garland Publishing, Inc.: New York & London, 1979, 12-13.

⁷¹ The altarpiece is 2,30 cm high per 1,84 wide. Schulz, Anne Markham. *Giambattista and Lorenzo Bregno. Venetian Sculpture in the High Renaissance*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991, 197.

⁷² Caglioti emphasizes how Donatello's tabernacle was completed by the attic above similarly to triumphal arches and did not need further decorative elements at the top, Caglioti, Francesco. "Altari eucaristici scolpiti del primo Rinascimento: qualche caso maggiore," in *Lo Spazio e il Culto. Relazioni tra edificio ecclesiale e uso liturgico dal xv al xvi secolo*, ed. by Jörg Stabenow (Venice: Marsilio Editori, 2006), 56.

art. However, the idea to translate the model of triumphal arches, in quite a literal way, into a tabernacle structure was probably mediated by Donatello. Certainly, Donatello's example seems to have been more influential for Riccio and his patron than Tullio's Vendramin Tomb, a work that has often been associated with the Servite tabernacle (fig. 28). Even though the tomb was probably completed by 1493 or early 1494, Donato may have started collecting ideas for his project at Santa Maria dei Servi while he was in Rome in 1491.⁷³ At that time, Donatello's relief was not enclosed into a generic wall at Saint Peter's as it appears today. This arrangement has induced scholars to underestimate the importance of this work and to think that it was conceived as a wall tabernacle intended to conceal a Eucharistic alcove. Donato had the chance to see Donatello's creation in its original context, in the apse of the *Cappella Parva* in the Vatican palaces, at the core of an elaborate complex provided with an altar.⁷⁴ The loyal patrician would have not missed the opportunity to admire this chapel whose decorative program, including a cycle of frescoes by Beato Angelico, was sponsored by the Venetian Pope, Eugenius IV. The design of Donatello's altarpiece for the Eucharistic altar of the old *Cappella Parva* may have left a lasting impression on Donato.

After the donation of the True Cross relic and the commission of the tabernacle to encase it, the Servites continued to benefit from the generous patronage of Girolamo

⁷³ On the dating of the tomb see Sheard, Wendy Stedman. "Sanudo's List of Notable Things in Venetian Churches and the Date of the Vendramin Tomb," in *Yale University Studies*, 1, 219-268.

⁷⁴ The altar was commissioned and completed before Pope Eugenius IV fled to Florence in 1433-1434. During the construction of the new Saint Peter's this altar, moved now to what remained of the main nave, substituted for a while for the main altar. See Caglioti, "Altari eucaristici scolpiti del primo Rinascimento," 59-60. The tabernacle arrived late in Saint Peter's, in 1543. This explains why, despite being the most prestigious tabernacle of the first part of the fifteenth century, it was not much imitated for the creation of analogous structures. See Caglioti, Francesco in *La Basilica di San Pietro in Vaticano*, ed. by Antonio Pinelli (Modena: F.C. Panini, 2000), 922-927.

Donato. According to the Servite librarian Giuseppe Giacinto Maria Bergantini, the patrician was responsible for the erection of the new choir screen for Santa Maria dei Servi in 1498, a wall “made of Greek marble of incredible elegance and beauty.”⁷⁵ Donato not only oversaw the construction of the screen but he also funded it, by collecting the alms necessary to cover the expenses, and decorated it with an altar dedicated to the True Cross. The commission of this altar had a double interrelated scope: to increase the prestige of the relic that he had entrusted to the Servites while attracting profitable attention on the part of the faithful. Relics were important financial resources and the friars needed all the help that they could gather to complete the building of their church, as we shall see later. It was at this time that the tabernacle was installed into the altar of the True Cross, probably within an elaborate decorative frame of which no trace remains. Girolamo asked Riccio to provide further ornaments for the new structure, namely, the four narrative reliefs at the Ca’ d’Oro. The ensemble was probably completed by 1500, with the tabernacle being executed before the erection of the screen and the panels shortly after.

In keeping with the initial inspiration derived from Donatello’s tabernacle in Rome, I contend that Donato’s altar was designed to emulate a Eucharistic altar. This structure normally combined a wall tabernacle with an altar table, and its most important purpose was to preserve and commemorate the holy host. One of the first models for this devotional structure was, not coincidentally, Donatello’s work in Saint Peter which was probably provided with an altar and integrated into an elaborate complex in the Chapel of

⁷⁵ The information is taken from Gasparotto, “Andrea Riccio a Venezia,” 395.

the Sacrament of the Apostolic Vatican Palaces according to Caglioti.⁷⁶ Another popular model which influenced several altars produced thereafter was Desiderio da Settignano's tabernacle in San Lorenzo (fig. 29). In this case as well, it seems that a *mensa* stood opposite the wall tabernacle, with the *Pietà* scene functioning as an altar frontal.⁷⁷ A number of elements in the Servite altar prove to be a reference to these examples: the tabernacle design of its bronze doors, that we have already discussed; the inclusion of the scene of *Deposition* and *Pietà* at the base of the same doors, which are typical of Eucharistic altars; and the likely presence of the kneeling angels, which probably stood outside the marble frame as are visible in Desiderio's example. However, a couple of characteristics set the Servite altar apart from the Roman and Florentine models. They are that the bronze shrine at the center already resembles a tabernacle and is decorated with Passion scenes usually destined to the architectural frame of Eucharistic altars and not to the central shrine; and the presence of a large narrative predella at the bottom of the altar, the section in which I believe that Riccio's stories were inserted.

The Servite altar's "unusual" features can be useful to point us toward a likely interpretation of the overall structure's missing details. For example, the choice to apply an elaborate tabernacle format to the shrine doors, which are usually quite simply decorated, was probably counterbalanced by the adoption of a more simple design for the marble architectural frame. Rather than a deep perspective illusion as shown in Desiderio's ensemble, the marble frame likely consisted of a shallow and unadorned niche surrounding the tabernacle doors as seen, once again, in Donatello's tabernacle in

⁷⁶ According to Caglioti, Donatello's tabernacle was inspired by the Holy Sepulchre, Caglioti, "Altari eucaristici scolpiti del primo Rinascimento," 54-56.

⁷⁷ Cope, *The Venetian Chapel of the Sacrament*, 18.

Rome with his aedicule within an aedicule format (fig. 26). In that model the central shrine, now occupied by a painting of the *Virgin and Child*, is encased into a larger shrine with two groups of angels functioning as intermediaries between these two levels of space. I believe that the Servite altar was arranged in a similar way. Riccio's tabernacle doors were probably flanked by a couple of marble angels in high relief that either worshipped or helped to hold in place the shrine as suggested by Mino da Fiesole's two tabernacles respectively in Santa Maria in Trastevere, Rome (1460 ca.), and Santa Croce, Florence (1470 ca.). While in the first the angelic figures are literally supporting the aedicule at the center, in the second version they are venerating the sacred vision which includes further angelic presences (figs. 30-31).

As in Mino's work in Santa Croce, the Servite tabernacle hosts a number of angels and ancient eroti mostly gathered around the central section of the shrine.⁷⁸ Particularly noticeable are the two angels carrying the Cross who turn their heads toward the sides, possibly seeking an interaction with their outer companions (fig. 32). Their gazes would have probably first met the marble angels within the architectural frame and then directed the viewer toward the figures in the round which I proposed stood outside the ensemble. In order to make the whole harmonious, it is likely that all the marble angels, both those standing and kneeling, were of comparable size. The complexity of the arrangement may explain why Bregno's three-dimensional sculptures are designed to look in slightly different directions. The one on the left seems to stare at the cross floating above, while his partner's attention is probably attracted by the angels in high reliefs. All these angelic presences, which at first seem almost redundant, would have reinforced the

⁷⁸ A crown of cherubs surrounds the figure of Christ in the shrine doors of Mino da Fiesole's work in Florence.

mystical nature of the vision carved by Riccio in the tabernacle doors. They were also intended to dramatize the active nature of the event represented and to make it accessible to the worshipper by functioning as intercessors (fig. 33).⁷⁹

A side note must be made in regard to the two kneeking angels. It was Vicentini who surmised that these sculptures were originally part of the altar of the True Cross considering that they were executed around the time when this structure was under construction. Anne Markham Schulz agrees with this theory and considers the angels as exemplary of Giambattista Bregno sophisticated late work (after 1508).⁸⁰ What it is known for sure is that, even if the two sculptures were commissioned for the altar of the True Cross, they were removed from this location before the destruction of the ensemble. According to the documents, they were donated by the Servite friars around 1524 to the agents of the altar of Verde della Scala, also in Santa Maria dei Servi, and they were positioned atop this structure flanking a Crucifix. Schulz, who reports this piece of information, also states how the Servites' choice could be justified by the fact that Girolamo Donato died in 1511 in a state of extreme poverty and was probably unable to pay for the sculptures.⁸¹ The inclusion of the angels in the altar of the True Cross' original layout seems to be implied by certain characteristics of the two sculptures. The width of their pedestals is roughly the same size as the width of the narrative panels below, suggesting that they may have stood above them. Moreover, although the angels

⁷⁹ Zuraw, Shelley Elizabeth. *The Sculpture of Mino da Fiesole (1429/1484)*. Doctoral Dissertation, New York University, 1993, 415, 419. Following the example of Donatello in Saint Peter's, in both tabernacles Mino uses his angels to blur the distinction between the fictive space within the pilasters and the real space inhabited by the aedicule and the viewer. Especially in the case of Le Murate Tabernacle in Santa Croce, the angels overlap the architectural boundaries, Zuraw, *The Sculpture of Mino da Fiesole*, 542.

⁸⁰ Schulz, *Giambattista and Lorenzo Bregno*, 142.

⁸¹ Ibid.; Schulz, Anne Markham. "Giambattista Bregno," in *Jahrbuch der Berliner Museen*, 22 Bd. (1980), 193.

were worked in the round and appear to advantage from any view, they were meant to be seen in profile, both looking up toward the same object, namely the tabernacle relief. Even though their inclusion in the altar may have made the overall ensemble look more complete, at the same time their removal did not probably affect the integrity of the altar.

Just below the angels would have stood Riccio's four narrative reliefs.⁸² These panels were likely intended to decorate the *predella*, the low decorated strip which raises the main part of the altarpiece to a height where it is readily visible from a distance. Donato was certainly following what was a common practice for altar decoration and he surely had in mind Donatello's masterpiece at the Santo in Padua, namely the high altar, which had a scabello decorated by large narrative scenes in reliefs (fig. 34). Moreover, the quite long and apparently unproportional character of the Servite *predella* finds a parallel in Giovanni della Robbia's altar of the Sacrament for Santi Apostoli in Florence (1500-1525 ca.). Here, too, the artist had to adapt a preexisting wall tabernacle into a new altar creation and he succeeded by simply putting a couple of angels at either side of it, drawing back curtains, and inserting a long *predella* under it (fig. 35).⁸³ The narrative nature of the *predella* decorated by Riccio reminds the viewer of the altar's original function as a commemorative repository for the relic of the True Cross. The panels below the tabernacle recount passages from the story of the Holy Cross, thus complementing both visually and iconographically the triumphal image carved in the reliquary doors. The same can be seen in Mino da Fiesole's work in Sant'Ambrogio (1481), a monumental

⁸² As technical analyses have shown, the bronzes were inserted into a marble or stone support which is probably to be identified with the sort of *predella* at the bottom of the ensemble and right above the altar's level. This information has been provided to me by the conservator Serena Bidorini.

⁸³ Cope, *The Venetian Chapel of the Sacrament*, 19.

tabernacle reliquary, in which the altar's base is carved with an historical event associated with the relic of the host preserved in it (fig. 36).

From the position in which they stood, the panels were easily accessible to the viewer who could read their stories, much as the pages of the *Golden Legend* that inspired them. However, the episodes there recounted were not probably intended to be arranged in chronological order. The normal progression of the legend would go from *The Dream and Baptism of Constantine* to his victory against Maxentius, followed by the *Discovery of the True Cross* on the part of his mother Helena and the miracle performed by Christ's Cross (fig. 37). I believe instead that Helena's panels were located at the center while Constantine's ones were on the sides, as the following analysis of the reliefs shows. This organization seems to make the transition between episodes more fluid from a formal point of view (fig. 38).

If Riccio's reliefs are disposed in chronological order, the impression one gets is that the four panels do not belong together. It is almost as if the reliefs were conceived as two separate pairs with a hiatus between the section dedicated to Constantine and the one with his mother as the main protagonist. This can be easily perceived when the two sets are joined together and the scenes at the center are analyzed side by side. It becomes evident, then, that the *Battle of Constantine* and the *Discovery of the True Cross* were not designed in tandem (fig. 39). The stories do not evolve in a harmonious way from one panel to another, the figures along the shared border turn their backs to each other and set the picture's motion in the opposite direction. Once the reliefs' disposition is changed, and the stories of Saint Helena are moved to the center with Constantine's panels at the sides, the group seems to function together much better. The narration flows almost

uninterruptedly with no disruption at the center. The sense of cohesion is reinforced by the analogous composition of Helena's panels which seems to depict two subsequent moments of the same episode (fig. 40). Both scenes are arranged symmetrically around the story's crucial moment with Helena cast in an almost identical position on the right side, while the crowds in the middle ground and the landscapes in the background merge. The fluidity of the narration is maintained even when the eyes move outside the central panels toward the *Dream and Baptism of Constantine* and the *Battle at the Milvian Bridge* placed respectively at the beginning and end of the row. The sinuous profile of the hills seems to continue beyond each panel's frame as does the line traced by the bystanders' heads. Riccio introduces a number of subtle cues to guide the viewer from one scene to the other and to guarantee a harmonious continuum. To give some examples: the youth crouched at the foot of Constantine's throne in the *Dream* looks at the children playing with a dog at the bottom right of the *Discovery*; other children seem to play together at the margins of the *Discovery and Miracle of the True Cross*; while a third pair of children at the bottom right of the *Miracle* scene run into some falling bodies from the *Battle at the Milvian Bridge* (figs. 41-42). More generally, the layout of the composition in Constantine's panels seems to direct the viewer's gaze toward the most crucial episodes at the center. In the *Dream and Baptism*, although at first it seems that there is no clear direction in the scene's arrangement, some key elements point to the right toward Helena's stories: to begin with the Cross floating in the sky and the head of the sleeping Constantine. The emperor's son, Crispus, enters from the left margin of the panel generating a motion in the right direction that it is further emphasized by the horses' heads; while on the opposite border a number of figures are squeezed toward the

next panel (fig. 43). The last panel of the series, the battle scene, is entirely oriented toward the left. Constantine, who once was holding the Cross, marches in that direction dragged by the cavalry's stream. He reappears in the scene's background while escorting his army up a hill and seems to be riding toward the scene of the miracle (fig. 44).

The decision to place Helena's reliefs at the center of the altar's "*predella*" is not surprising given the importance of the episodes that they commemorate. The *inventio* or discovery of the Holy Wood represents the crucial moment in the legend of the True Cross and it is not a coincidence that the chapter dedicated to the Cross in the *Golden Legend* is named after this episode. The same title is used to qualify the complete series of Riccio's reliefs in the earliest source which mentions the altar of the True Cross and dates shortly after its completion. The prominent location given to Saint Helena's panels would reinforce their visual and conceptual centrality. While the collateral stories of Constantine, I have argued, were probably designed to guide the viewer's attention toward the cycle's core, the *Discovery and Miracle of the True Cross* were intended to introduce the main message of the tabernacle relief hovering above: the exaltation of the True Cross. The Cross recovered by Helena in the two parallel scenes is the same as the one that is triumphantly carried by angels in the tabernacle, a piece of which was shielded behind the shrine's closed doors. It is important to remember that the relic bequeathed by Girolamo Donato to the Servites was a fragment of the True Cross' plaque which was believed to have been hidden by Saint Helena herself in the church of Santa Croce in Gerusalemme in Rome. The Spanish Cardinal Pedro Gonzalez de Mendoza had retrieved the plaque from that church during the course of a restoration of the tribune's arch, becoming the protagonist of another *inventio*.

Models and References

In his seminal work on Venetian altarpieces, Humfrey does not fail to mention the altar of the True Cross. Giving a concise summary of the altar's history, Humfrey concludes that "it does not seem to have conformed to any established type of altarpiece design." The reconstruction attempted above appears to corroborate this opinion. Although I have been trying to compare this liturgical structure in the Servite church to a Eucharistic altar, there is no surviving example with comparable features. The tabernacle's format strongly recalls the marble relief of Donatello in Saint Peter's but their affinity ends there: the materials, proportions, and overall frame in which the two reliefs were inserted are completely different. Unfortunately, the originality of the design of the altar of the True Cross may never be fully understood in all its components but at least it can be appreciated by looking into the sources that may have inspired this important work.

The distinctive creativity of Riccio and the deep erudition of his patron are probably the reasons behind the untraditional choices made in the construction of the altar of the True Cross. As we have seen, Riccio and Donato probably first looked at tabernacles and Eucharistic altars, using the former as a model for the tabernacle doors and the second as a source of inspiration for the overall ensemble. The reason for this choice may be searched in the altar's function and the iconographical content of its decoration. Although the altar actually was not intended to hold the sacrament, it did enshrine a relic of the True Cross, the relic par excellence and the object which bore the most direct reference to the body of Christ. The adoption of the tabernacle format seems to have been the most reasonable choice because of its association with Christ, with his

body, in the species of the Eucharist, and with his tomb; both are referred to in the Servite altar implicitly by the presence of the Cross and explicitly by the representation of Entombment/Pietà scenes. The parallel between the tabernacle and Christ's sepulcher, which is at the core of the creation of these liturgical objects as Zuraw emphasizes, is pushed even further by Riccio in his design of the tabernacle doors.⁸⁴ The sculptor's architectural fantasy combines the motif of the triumphal arch, in evident connection to Christ's triumph over death, with that of the temple, either the Temple of Jerusalem or the Holy Sepulchre, whose entrance coincides with the reliquary doors. Riccio particularly insists on the spatial depth of the temple front, sitting two of his angels at its doorsteps. The architecture's façade gives the impression of receding toward the back as if it were to invite the viewer to get closer and push those doors open (fig. 45). In this way the worshipper was encouraged to participate in the miraculous event represented and to partake of Christ's triumph by meditating at the same time on his death and sacrifice which was made present not only by the abundant funerary references in the relief but also by the altar's parapet with porphyry inlay, a direct reference to Christ's anointing slab.⁸⁵

Although in Venice the Eucharistic altars and tabernacles were not as popular as in Florence, some examples of these structures in the lagoon may have inspired the altar at Santa Maria dei Servi without functioning as direct models. From the altar's

⁸⁴ Zuraw, *The Sculpture of Mino da Fiesole*, 408-410.

⁸⁵ The altar and tabernacle of San Sepolcro, today in the church of San Martino in Venice, has a similar porphyry slab on the front of the altar, which is a direct reference to Christ's stone of extreme unction. The connection between this work and the altar at Santa Maria dei Servi will be discussed later. See Ceriana, Matteo. "Opere di Tullio Lombardo diminuite o scomparse (e altre minuzie)," in *Tullio Lombardo: scultore e architetto nella Venezia del rinascimento*, Atti del Convegno Internazionale di Studi, ed. by Matteo Ceriana (Verona: Cierre, 2007), 41.

characteristics examined so far, it is evident that patron and artist were seeking for originality rather than emulation, drawing from different sources in order to produce something extraordinary. A prestigious precedent for their application of the tabernacle formula for a non-Eucharistic context was certainly provided by Antonio Rizzo's twin altars of Saint Paul and Saint James for the Basilica of San Marco (fig. 46). Executed around 1460s, the altars still stand in their original location, against the two Byzantine columns of the transept, and they have been singled out as "the earliest Renaissance altarpieces in Venetian sculpture" for their originality of conception.⁸⁶ Starting from the San Marco tradition for small scale, sculptured altarpieces representing the single standing titular saint, Rizzo enlivens this standardized format with innovations taken from Florence, specifically, as pointed out by Humfrey, from Desiderio's work in San Lorenzo. Both the general configuration of the altar and the individual motifs follow that model: from the tabernacle-frame capped by a lunette to the candle-bearing adolescent angels at the sides and the putto-angels flanking the Christ Child at the apex.⁸⁷ Interestingly enough, an actual Eucharistic altar was erected in Venice by a Florentine master, Antonio Rossellino, after Rizzo's work for San Marco, probably in the early 1470s, and following up the innovations introduced by Rizzo (fig. 47). The Martini altar in San Giobbe also bears the distinctive features of Florentine designs for Eucharistic altars/tabernacles: the actual tabernacle is at the center flanked by pilasters that support an architrave topped by an attic (rather than the more common lunette).⁸⁸ The kneeling

⁸⁶ Humfrey, *The Altarpiece in Renaissance Venice*, 277.

⁸⁷ "The influence of Desiderio is also evident in the repertory of the ornament, and in the shallow, delicate treatment of the decoration *all'antica* spread over the pilasters, archivolt and spandrels." Ibid.

⁸⁸ Kurz, Otto. "A Group of Florentine Drawings for an Altar," in *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 18 (Jan-Jun, 1955), 43.

angels were likely to have originally flanked a Eucharistic representation of the Dead Christ. It remains unclear, though, if this image was intended to be painted or carved and if it served as a tabernacle door.⁸⁹

Two further examples, both connected to the Lombardo workshop, deserve some attention since they also apply the tabernacle formula to an altar of different dedication and purpose, like the one in Santa Maria dei Servi. One is the tabernacle attributed to Tullio and Antonio Lombardo today in the sacristy of the church of Santa Maria Gloriosa dei Frari, executed probably around 1480s (fig. 48). Even though the work has suffered considerable alteration due to its removal from the primary location in the Trevisan chapel, it retains some importance due to its original commission. The structure was indeed designed to preserve and commemorate a precious relic, similarly to Riccio's tabernacle in Santa Maria dei Servi. The relic was also a Christological specimen: part of the blood of Christ embedded in Magdalene's unguent that was donated to the Franciscans by Melchiorre Trevisan, admiral of the Venetian fleet in the eastern Mediterranean.⁹⁰ An analogous function was associated to the altar of Santo Sepolcro, whose design is currently divided between Tullio Lombardo and Lorenzo Bregno (1511 circa).⁹¹ Although the altar was created to be at the core of an ensemble devoted to evoke Christ's burial in Jerusalem for the church of Santo Sepolcro in Venice, this liturgical

⁸⁹ According to Humfrey, a drawing by Francesco Simone Ferrucci for an altarpiece today at the Victoria and Albert Museum, London, remarkably corresponds to the Martini altar. Humfrey, *The Altarpiece in Renaissance Venice*, 277.

⁹⁰ Schulz, Anne Markham. "New Light on Pietro, Antonio, and Tullio Lombardo," in *Mitteilungen des Kunsthistorischen Institutes in Florenz*, 54 (2010-2012), 242.

⁹¹ Schulz believes that the altarpiece with statuettes was executed by Lorenzo Bregno while the altar supported by four angels was by Tullio Lombardo, Schulz, "New Light on Pietro, Antonio, and Tullio Lombardo," cat. 29, 196-200. Humfrey supports Lombardo's authorship but agrees that the statuettes could have been created by Bregno, Humfrey, *The Altarpiece in Renaissance Venice*, 291.

station had little to do with the actual appearance of Jesus' shrine in the Holy Land, whose design was particularly well known at the time thanks to travelers' reports (fig. 49).⁹² However the reminiscence of that holy place is embedded into this liturgical station through the combination of forms referring both to a temple and to triumphal architecture, as seen in the altar at Santa Maria dei Servi.⁹³ Not differently from the Donato/Riccio creation, the altar of San Sepolcro was also apparently employed as a receptacle for the Eucharist as well as for relics from Christ's Passion, namely a piece of the True Cross and of the column of flagellation.⁹⁴ The connection between Christ's tomb, his actual and metaphorical body, and specimens from his Passion justify here the application of the tabernacle format, as they do in the altar at Santa Maria dei Servi.

Before I conclude my review, I would like to mention one more interesting case. I am referring to the altar of the Cross by Lorenzo Bregno for the basilica of San Marco located behind the High Altar (1518). This altar, even though it was created after the Servite one, like the aforementioned altar of San Sepolcro, offers a useful parallel (fig. 50). Commissioned by the procurators of San Marco, it was intended to function as a Eucharistic altar but it was dedicated to the Holy Cross. Its dual function as a tabernacle

⁹² For example, the founder of the church herself should have been aware of the actual look of the holy places in Jerusalem. Elena Celsi, after her death, left her house on the Riva degli Schiavoni to serve for the reception of female pilgrims to the Holy Land, Schulz, "New Light on Pietro, Antonio, and Tullio Lombardo," 198. As Ceriana underlines, the Holy Sepulchre was often just partially imitated and its most symbolical motifs were those which attracted attention, such as the circular form or the round of eight columns. Ceriana, "Opere di Tullio Lombardo," 52-53. Bernard von Breydenbach in his travel book, *Peregrinatio in terram sanctam*, the first illustrated travelogue (published in 1486-1488 in Latin, German, and Dutch), had made the image of Christ's shrine popular. See Ross, Elizabeth. *Picturing Experience in the Early Printed Book* (The Pennsylvania State University Press: University Park, Pennsylvania, 2014).

⁹³ Ceriana noticed the similarity between Tullio's design and a triumphal arch. According to the scholar, Tullio considered ancient art the most appropriate model for sacred creations in virtue of its archetypal nature. Ceriana, "Opere di Tullio Lombardo," 41.

⁹⁴ It also had originally a tabernacle door with a narrative relief telling the story of *Christ in the Limbo*. Schulz, *Giambattista and Lorenzo Bregno*, 198.

and an altar explains why the artist fused the conventional formats of tripartite altarpieces with niches and tabernacles composed of a foreshortened vaulted chamber framed by a pair of columns supporting an entablature.⁹⁵ The central section of the overall structure is particularly noteworthy since it gives us an idea of how the marble frame of the Servite altar looked like (fig. 51). As in my reconstruction, in San Marco a narrative bronze relief, in this case Jacopo Sansovino's *Allegory of Redemption*, is framed by worshipping angels in high relief. I would like to push this parallel even further by suggesting that the architectural frame of the altar at Santa Maria dei Servi could have possibly been associated with the Bregno workshop. This hypothesis is made all the more plausible if we agree with Schulz regarding Giambattista Bregno's authorship for the three-dimensional kneeling angels now in Venice and Berlin.

The example set by San Marco may be the reason behind the preference given to sculpture rather than painting in the "twin altars" of Santa Maria dei Servi. From an early date in the Venetian basilica carved works had been favored over painted ones for altars and this practice was continued in the Renaissance. In the thirteenth century at least two of the four auxiliary altars, erected alongside the main altar, were decorated with stone reliefs representing their titular saints, John the Evangelist and Leonard. A sculptured altarpiece was later placed on the newly founded altar of the Virgin in the Mascoli chapel in 1430 followed by five new carved works executed between 1450 and 1530: the first three by Antonio Rizzo for the altar of Saint Clement and the twin altars of Saint Paul and Saint James, mentioned above (1460s); Antonio Lombardo's bronze statues for the Zen Chapel (1503-1518); and Lorenzo Bregno's altarpiece of the Sacrament (1518) that

⁹⁵ Schulz, *Ibid.*, cat. 24, 177-180 (altar 262 cm high x 247 wide).

we have just discussed (figs. 52-53). The prominent role played by sculpture in the Doge's chapel did not pass unnoticed by Girolamo Donato. His choice to opt for this medium in his own commission was certainly encouraged by the authoritative examples listed above that dated before 1500. The patrician was aware of the social prestige that a connection with San Marco would have granted both to the Servites and himself. For the friars this was a way to consolidate their position in Venice, for Donato it was an opportunity to build a reputation similar to that of the procurators of San Marco who were renowned for supporting the patronage of sculptured altarpieces for the ducal basilica and for altars elsewhere. Urged on by his ambition, Donato did not simply commission a sculptured altar but he also decorated it with reliefs made of the most costly material: bronze.

Before Riccio's reliefs for the altar of the True Cross, bronze had been rarely used to decorate altars in Venice. Only two commissions predated the one by Donato: Giovanni Buora's *Sacred Conversation* in bronze relief for Jacopo Surian's altar in Santo Stefano (ca. 1488-1493) and the bronze figure of the *Resurrected Christ* by a follower of Pietro Lombardo once standing on the now destroyed altar of Domenico di Piero in the Carità (1480s-1490s) (fig. 52).⁹⁶ Neither of these works is impressive in size, yet they are a tangible sign of the wealth and prestige of their patrons, as was Donato's altar. Certainly the work in Santa Maria de Servi did not share the predominance and scale of the bronze altarpiece created a few years later for the Cardinal Giovanni Battista Zen in San Marco (1504-1518, fig. 53); it was, nonetheless, a remarkable creation for the

⁹⁶ For information about these works, see the section on "the bronze altarpiece," from Humfrey, *The Altarpiece in Renaissance Venice*, 286-299. See also the seminal work of Avery, Victoria. *Vulcan's Forge in Venus' City: the Story of Bronze in Venice: 1350-1650*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011.

amount of bronze employed and the quality of the reliefs. Donato was probably prompted to use bronze because of the material's intrinsic value and the meanings associated with it. Bronze was luxurious and precious, highly appropriate for a work intended to protect and commemorate a prestigious relic. It allowed for a great level of detailing thus making the stories represented more engaging. Furthermore, it had strong antiquarian connotations particularly suitable for the subject depicted in the Servite altar. If not in Venice, Donato could have learned about bronze's various properties by looking toward nearby Padua, in the basilica di Sant'Antonio. It was there that, between 1447 and 1450, Donatello had left his unsurpassed tribute to the art of sculpture, a high altar decorated with twenty-nine pieces of sculpture, mostly statues and reliefs in bronze. The complex stood at the end of a choir precinct also ornamented later with bronze panels by the masters Bartolomeo Bellano (1485-1488) and Andrea Riccio (1505-1507). Donato surely knew Donatello's work quite well and probably followed with interest the progress of the commissions inside the Santo. As we shall see, it was through his acquaintance with the cultural and artistic context of Padua that he met Andrea Riccio and developed his project for Santa Maria dei Servi.

Conclusions

The reconstruction of the altar of the True Cross once in the mother church of Santa Maria dei Servi seems, at first, an impossible task. This liturgical station shared the fate of other sculptured altars and was dismantled in 1729 when part of its materials were re-arranged into a new structure. This subsequent altar, dedicated to the Seven Founders, was also destroyed in the early nineteenth century together with the church, thus

preventing the recovery of further components from the original structure. Only five bronze reliefs by the master of bronze Andrea Riccio survive from the overall ensemble. Two marble angels attributed to Giambattista Bregno have been associated with the altar but without conclusive evidence. In this chapter, I propose what could be the likely design of the altar of the True Cross. My reconstruction cannot be deemed definitive but it is a reasonable possibility based on the re-examination of the extant written and material evidence about the altar, complemented by comparison with analogous structures.

Since the beginning of my research, the fragmentary nature of the documents on the altar of the True Cross was self-evident. No description of this structure survives and the few sources at hand provide some solid but incomplete pieces of information. We do know where the altar was located on the choir screen of Santa Maria dei Servi, that it was commissioned by the patrician Girolamo Donato sometime between 1498 and 1509, and that it was intended to commemorate and protect a relic of the True Cross. We also know that it was made of marble and decorated with Riccio's five bronze reliefs representing the *Discovery of the True Cross*, but nothing is recorded about the format/design of the marble frame, the arrangement of the panels, or the overall dimensions of the ensemble. A few more details about the altar can be gathered by investigating the descriptions of those liturgical stations derived from its destruction in 1729: the altar of the Seven Founders and the altar of San Pellegrino Laziosi. According to the reports compiled before their disassembly, these structures seem to have been oddly alike, considering that they were never conceived as a pair and were destined for different locations along the church's south wall. This has induced me to think that that their architectural frames must

have been taken from the altars once on the choir screen, namely the altar of the True Cross and the altar of Saint Martin built probably as a companion piece in the 1510s. If my hypothesis is true, then, four more elements could be added to the possible reconstruction of these altars: two steps in Istrian limestone, a parapet in porphyry inlay, two columns, and two pilasters in Carrara marble. What makes my assumption credible is evidence that “twin” altars were often erected in choir structures as proven by two examples documented in Venice during the period under examination, specifically in Santa Maria della Carità and San Giovanni in Bragora.

Although the scrutiny of written sources reveals some valuable information about the altar of the True Cross, its original layout remains undetermined. Not even the study of extant sculptured altarpieces can offer concrete help since none presents the same characteristics as the Servite altar with its five bronze panels. Being aware of these limitations and knowing that Riccio’s reliefs are the only elements that can be connected with certainty to the altar, I have narrowed my focus to these works. My intention was to see if they might hold some clues about the altar’s design. What immediately emerges from a close examination of Riccio’s bronzes is the disparity in format and style between the tabernacle and the narrative panels, as scholars have pointed out in the past. It is almost as if the reliefs were executed by different hands. It is my contention instead that the five panels were created by Riccio in two different moments. The tabernacle was probably commissioned first with the scope of preserving and commemorating the relic of the True Cross that was granted to the Servites by Girolamo Donato in 1492. The narrative reliefs were manufactured later, around 1498, when the same Donato financed the construction of the choir screen in the Servite church. It was at that time that the

patrician decided to build an altar on that screen dedicated to the True Cross. He incorporated into this new structure the pre-existing tabernacle and commissioned soon after the four narrative reliefs to further ornament the complex.

The fact that Riccio's bronzes were not designed from the beginning for the same destination would explain their stylistic and formal discrepancies. I do believe, however, that Donato took care in minimizing these differences by integrating the reliefs into a harmonious whole, both from an iconographic and structural point of view. He did choose for the narrative panels a subject that would match well with the exaltation of the Cross represented in the tabernacle. He also modeled his ensemble after a precise type of liturgical structure: the Eucharistic altar. It is Riccio's tabernacle relief that supports this idea. The panel's design strongly recalls Donatello's tabernacle relief in Saint Peter's in Rome, which once was part of a much more elaborate complex including an altar in the *Cappella Parva* in the Vatican Palaces. While in Rome, between 1491 and 1492, Donato had the opportunity to see Donatello's work in its original location and he probably used it as a source of inspiration in the commissioning of his tabernacle in Santa Maria dei Servi. He later applied the idea of the Eucharistic altar to his own altar for the same church. The result would have been something similar to the most representative examples from this category, namely Mino da Fiesole's Tabernacle in Santa Croce and Giovanni della Robbia's altar of the Sacrament for Santi Apostoli, both in Florence: a temple-like frame with the tabernacle at the center surrounded or supported by angels in relief floating inside an aedicule within an aedicule format. The four narrative panels were possibly located in the base below the structure and just above the altar, roughly at the viewer's eye level. If the sculpted kneeling angels, assigned to Giambattista Bregno,

were part of the whole, they would have stood at the top of the reliefs and outside the architectural frame.

The reconstruction that I have suggested in this chapter is highly probable but not conclusive. Apart from the insufficient material evidence, the lack of comparable examples makes the task even more difficult. I believe that Donato, while projecting his altar, did not have a specific, recognizable model in mind but he drew ideas from different sources in order to create something exceptional and remarkable. Certainly he knew the popular Florentine Eucharistic altars and tabernacles, considering his familiarity with the Florentine context.⁹⁷ He was also aware of the application of the Florentine formula in Venice, in structures such as Antonio Rizzo's twin altars of Saint Paul and Saint James for the Basilica of San Marco, Antonio Rossellino's Martini altar in San Giobbe, or Tullio and Antonio Lombardo's reliquary tabernacle in Santa Maria Gloriosa dei Frari. The choice of sculpture as a medium and of bronze as a material was highly significant. It meant prestige and recognition both for Donato and the Servites, and would have put their altar on the same level as the authoritative examples of Antonio Rizzo in San Marco and Donatello in the basilica of Sant'Antonio.

⁹⁷ Donato was close to the major humanists in Florence such as Marsilio Ficino and Angelo Poliziano. Poliziano celebrated him, along with Pico della Mirandola and Ermolao Barbaro, as "triumviri litterarii." Rigo, 742.

Chapter Two. Location and Function of the Altar of the True Cross: The Choir Screen at Santa Maria dei Servi

In the first chapter I addressed the issue of the design of the altar of the True Cross suggesting the likely arrangement of Riccio's reliefs within the ensemble. I have reached the conclusion that the altar was a liturgical furnishing of great prestige because of its precious materials, original layout, and distinguished references. The altar's pivotal role can be inferred both by looking at these formal aspects and the message that it delivered - as will be analyzed later – but was primarily related to the structure's position within the sacred space. I have mentioned before that the altar rose against the façade of the choir screen in Santa Maria dei Servi but I did not point out the implications of such a location (fig. 54, no. 22 on the key). It must be stressed that from where it stood this liturgical station was much more visible and accessible than the well studied and renowned tomb of Andrea Vendramin so far considered to be the masterpiece of the Servite church. We have to remember that tombs were not necessarily erected to be seen. When placed in the area of the presbytery and close to the high altar, for obvious votive reasons, they were often concealed by choir screens as happened with the Vendramin monument in Santa Maria dei Servi.⁹⁸

This chapter investigates how the location of the altar affected its perception and uses. My examination begins by answering broader questions about the purpose of screens and their presence in Venice in order to assess the peculiarity of the Servite case. It is noteworthy how the screen and the altar of the True Cross were deeply intertwined. The two structures shared the same history: they were both erected around the same time,

⁹⁸ I thank Dr. Gianmario Guidarelli, specialist in Renaissance architecture, for having shared this observation with me.

in 1498; they were sponsored by the same benefactor, Girolamo Donato; and they were torn down together in 1729. Most importantly, they both played a prominent part in the mother church of the Servite order for two hundred and thirty-one years.

The Choir Screen: Development and Uses

In order to understand why the choir screen in Santa Maria dei Servi deserves attention, it is necessary to provide an introduction to these liturgical furnishings. This section explains why screens were employed, what their function was, and why they became popular in Venice.

Choir screens, as the term implies, were partition walls separating the space devoted to friars and clergymen from the lay congregation. Designed as more or less elaborated architectural structures, they were commonly erected independently of the church's main structural supports so they could be removed without significant adjustments to the building itself, an aspect that has made their reconstruction and study a difficult task.⁹⁹ Although their main purpose was to protect the area of the choir and presbytery from the intrusion of laity, to define these screens as visual obstacles between the faithful and the high altar is inaccurate and misleading. Choir screens were crucial components of Medieval and Renaissance churches intended to satisfy the specific liturgical needs of the religious community and to shape the way the faithful experienced the sacred space. This is the reason why the study of their development, formats, and uses is fundamental for a better understanding of the relationship among liturgy, art, and architecture.

⁹⁹ Ackerman, James. "Observations on Renaissance Church Planning in Venice and Florence, 1470-1570," in *Florence and Venice: Comparisons and Relations*, Acts of Two Conferences, ed. by Sergio Bertelli and others, (Florence: La Nuova Italia Editrice), vol. II, 1980, 294.

The need to protect the area of the sanctuary/presbytery arose in the Early Christian period. Barriers, known as *transenne* and *cancelli*, were erected to keep the faithful at a fair distance from the high altar without preventing them from properly seeing and listening to the Mass. Made of stone, wood, or metal, these gates were quite low, often not more than one meter in height, and allowed laypeople to fully participate in the liturgy.¹⁰⁰ The situation began to change between the six and seventh centuries with the institution in Rome of the *Schola Cantorum* traditionally thought to have been through the initiative of Pope Gregory the Great. It represents the ancestor of the medieval choir as we know it.¹⁰¹ The *Schola* was composed of a group of cantors, originally laymen and clerics, who accompanied the most crucial phases of the Eucharistic rite with their solemn chants.¹⁰² The cantors stood in front of the high altar and eventually their location became more permanent with the addition of seats and low walls to delimit the space (fig. 55). Their placement between the apse and the nave set the basis for the clear definition of the three liturgical areas within the church: the sanctuary on the east side, the choir at the center, and the nave on the west side. This subdivision was established in 633 at the Council of Toledo and became canonical during the Middle Ages.¹⁰³ During this time, the precincts of the choir steadily developed into monumental structures deepening the distance between the faithful and the altar. Laymen no longer

¹⁰⁰ Quoting Evelyn Birge Vitz, I am using here a loose definition of the term “liturgy” to be intended as the “church at prayer,” see Vitz, Birge Evelyn. “The Liturgy and the Vernacular Literature,” in *The Liturgy of the Medieval Church*, ed. by Thomas J. Heffernan and E. Ann Matter (Michigan: Medieval Institute Publications, 2005), 504.

¹⁰¹ This is the ancestor of the monastic choir but the concept was spread in Europe by the Bishop of Metz, Chrodegang rather than by Gregory the Great, see Piva, Paolo. “Lo spazio liturgico. Architettura, arredo, iconografia (secoli IV-XII),” in *L’arte medievale nel contesto (300-1300)*, ed. by Paolo Piva (Milan: Jaca Book, 2006), 153.

¹⁰² Namely the Offertory, the Sanctus Hymn, the preparation for Communion with the Agnus Dei, and Communion itself, Piva, “Lo spazio liturgico,” 152.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 152.

assisted at the services, the cantors were replaced by canons or members of a monastic order, and the *Schola Cantorum* turned into an enclosed choir.¹⁰⁴

The introduction of the choir screen and its evolution into a prominent architectural structure around the eleventh century is tied to fundamental changes in the life of the religious community. The adoption of these partition walls in cathedrals, collegiate, monastic, and mendicant churches must be read both as an attempt to detach canons, monks, and friars from laypeople and as a response to an evolving liturgical practice. During the Middle Ages, the emphasis on the Mass gradually began to shift from a rite in which laity participated to one totally dominated by clergy.¹⁰⁵ Up to the fourth century, the ritual of Communion was more frequent than the celebration of the Mass itself and the consecrated bread could also be taken at home. The faithful were fully involved in the celebration of the religious rites and had complete access to the area of the high altar. From the end of the twelfth century on, the cult of the sacrament was magnified but not the frequency of its reception.¹⁰⁶ The corporal began to be treated with almost superstitious honor and the concept of the Eucharist began to change from the Communion of the redeemed to the more private action of a single celebrant on behalf of the congregation, which rarely took communion even on feast days.¹⁰⁷ As canon twenty-one of the 1215 Fourth Lateran Council established, the faithful were required to receive Communion at least once a year during the celebration of Easter Mass, while throughout

¹⁰⁴ Brown, Beverly Louise. "Choir and Altar Placement: A Quattrocento Dilemma," in *Machiavelli Studies*, V (1996), 152-153.

¹⁰⁵ Brown, "Choir and Altar Placement," 152.

¹⁰⁶ Jungmann, Joseph A. *The Mass of the Roman Rite: its Origins and Development* (Westminster, Maryland: Christian Classics, Inc., 1986), vol. I, 364.

¹⁰⁷ Parker, Elizabeth C. "Architecture as Liturgical Setting," in *The Liturgy of the Medieval Church*, ed. by Thomas J. Heffernan and E. Ann Matter (Michigan: Medieval Institute Publications, 2005), 265.

the rest of the liturgical calendar they could consume the Eucharist with their eyes alone.

¹⁰⁸ It is certainly not a coincidence, as Marcia Hall suggests, that the practice of elevating the Host was introduced in the twelfth century at the same time when the choir screen first appeared.¹⁰⁹ At this point, several churches' arrangements confirmed the growing isolation of the laity from the clergy. The principal altar was moved back toward the wall of the apse and the celebrant stood right in front of it normally with his back to the community, who could barely hear and see except by peering through the main entrance of the choir screen.¹¹⁰

Despite these tangible signs of the hierarchy ruling the medieval church interior – clergymen in the *cappella maggiore*, friars in the choir, and laymen in the nave - choir screens were not perceived as an instrument of disconnection.¹¹¹ They shaped profoundly the laymen's experience, influencing the way in which they participated in the liturgy, understood their place in the larger body of the ecclesia, and even cultivated visual skills.¹¹² By standing roughly at the middle of often extremely long naves, especially in the case of mendicant churches, these structures became tools for the creation of a more intimate and approachable space for laity. They were liminal points for lay devotion and more permeable than it is often thought. It is important to remember that, before the Council of Trent, the faithful were not required to take a seat in the church, rather they

¹⁰⁸ Dudley, Martin R. "Sacramental Liturgies in the Middle Ages," in *The Liturgy of the Medieval Church*, ed. by Thomas J. Heffernan and E. Ann Matter (Michigan: Medieval Institute Publications, 2005), 204.

¹⁰⁹ Hall, Marcia. "The Italian Rood Screen: Some Implications for Liturgy and Function," in *Essays Presented to Myron P. Gilmore*, ed. by Sergio Bertelli and Gloria Ramakus. Florence: La Nuova Italia Editrice, 1978, II, 217.

¹¹⁰ Parker, "Architecture as Liturgical Setting," 265.

¹¹¹ Hall, "The Italian Rood Screen," 339.

¹¹² Jung, Jacqueline E. *The Gothic Screen. Space, Sculpture, and Community in the Cathedrals of France and Germany, ca. 1200-1400* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 17.

could freely wander around the space peeking through the three sides of choir structures.¹¹³ In the fifteenth century, male devotees were frequently allowed to traverse the screen and enter the choir itself, as seen in the renowned fresco in Assisi (fig. 56).¹¹⁴ Women's access, on the contrary, was usually forbidden with the exception of special circumstances such as legal agreements being transacted in the choir, when the space was not in use for the friars' or canons' necessities.¹¹⁵ During the mass the congregation would gather in the area of the screen, which was commonly a few feet deep, to assist in the celebration and receive communion. Even if lay members could not fully participate in the rituals taking place at the main altar, they still could see the Elevation of the Host from the screen's main entrance which was traditionally surmounted by a Crucifix. The presence of Christ's portrayal between triumph and suffering at this specific site was meaningful. While a powerful reminder of the sacrifice re-enacted during the mass, this image turned the choir enclosure into a mystical passageway between the human and the divine, the militant church and the triumphant church. It transformed the crossing of this space into a ritual of gradual access to heaven embodied by the apse (figs. 57-58).¹¹⁶

Given the crucial position of choir screens within churches, it is not surprising that they became a preferred location for the erection of altars whose prestige surpassed that of their companions arranged along the walls. Situated either underneath the screen or on its western façade and sides, these altars were patronized by one or more families and primarily used for their private masses. Their accessibility and visibility determined

¹¹³ Jung, *The Gothic Screen*, 15-16.

¹¹⁴ Women could not do that. Brown, "Choir and Altar Placement," 156.

¹¹⁵ Cooper, Donal. "Access All Areas? Spatial Divides in the Mendicant Churches of Late Medieval Tuscany," in *Ritual and Space in the Middle Ages*, Conference Proceedings, ed. by Frances Andrews (Donington: Shaun Tyas, 2011), 107.

¹¹⁶ Jung, *The Gothic Screen*, 45, 51, 64.

their importance. Altars that stood beside the choir's main entrance - such as the altar of the True Cross in Santa Maria dei Servi - were inevitably more prominent. By representing the main focal point for the faithful who walked along the nave, they reinforced the screen's function as a "lay presbytery." This is particularly true for the Cross altar. Generally positioned in proximity with the choir's main entrance, it derived its name from the Crucifix that was hanging from the screen just above it.¹¹⁷ It presented itself either as two separate altars at the sides of the screen's central opening or as one altar in the middle of this partition wall (figs. 59-60).¹¹⁸ The Cross altar served as the community's principal altar. Besides being used during the veneration of the Cross on Good Fridays and other feast days, it was the spot where the celebrant dispensed the Eucharist and lay masses were offered.¹¹⁹

The proliferation of altars on screens inevitably resulted in making this area the liveliest within the church and the most popular among laypeople both in life and death. The tombs of affluent patrons were laid in the floor in front of the screen, while votive images were often hanging from the top, thus framing the faithful's experience. Vittore Carpaccio's *Vision of Francesco Ottobon* documents this practice by depicting rows of wax arms and legs, as well as candles and crutches, dangling from the upper story (fig. 61).¹²⁰ The screen's space was constantly animated by words, lights, fragrances, and

¹¹⁷ Parker, "Architecture as Liturgical Setting," 266. The presence of this Crucifix or rood is the reason why, especially in northern countries, the choir screen is referred to as rood screen, see Piva, "Lo spazio liturgico," 158.

¹¹⁸ The Cross altar originally stood in the middle of the nave, see Piva, "Lo spazio liturgico," 154, 156.

¹¹⁹ Jung, *The Gothic Screen*, 26-27; Piva, "Lo spazio liturgico," 154; Parker, "Architecture as Liturgical Setting," 265.

¹²⁰ Bruzelius, Caroline. *Preaching, Building, and Burying. Friars and the Medieval City*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2014, 58; Jung, Jacqueline E. "The Unifying Role of

images commonly in the form of sculptural programs on the enclosure itself or on individual altarpieces. These works of art were intended to satisfy the need of visual stimuli felt by laypeople who were obliged to keep their distance from the high altar and accustomed to pray silently to themselves. Churchgoers not only could barely see what was happening in the presbytery but they could also barely understand the mass itself, which was celebrated in Latin. Only sermons were pronounced in the vernacular, normally as a separate event from the Mass. They were often delivered from the top of screens and preachers relied extensively on their visual materials for the effectiveness of their speeches (fig. 62).¹²¹ The power of images in stirring the faithful's imagination and devotion was exploited in other ways, for example, through elaborate processions and sacred representations. These religious dramas were performed in the middle of the church using the choir screen as a stage. Some of these plays were rather complex and involved sophisticated machinery, extensive use of lights, fireworks, and special effects. The goal was to capture the audience's attention and, at the same time, to instruct it by creating physical images of sacred mysteries. Abundant records survive for such plays for fifteenth-century Florence, and scholars have been able to reconstruct the *apparati* built at the top of choir screens, thus proving the vital engagement of such structures in the liturgical practices (fig. 63).¹²²

the Choir Screen in Gothic Churches," in *The Art Bulletin*, vol. 82, no. 4 (Dec., 2000), 629; Jung, 2013, 61.

¹²¹ Brown, "Choir and Altar Placement," 164; Jung, *The Gothic Screen*, 196-197.

¹²² Fabbri, Mario. *Il luogo teatrale a Firenze. Brunelleschi, Vasari, Buontalenti, Parigi*, Exhibition Catalogue (Milan: Electa, 1975); Newbigin, Nerida. "The World Made Flesh. The *Rappresentazioni* of Mysteries and Miracles in Fifteenth-Century Florence," in *Christianity and the Renaissance. Images and Religious Imagination in the Quattrocento*, ed. by Timothy Verdon and John Henderson (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1990), 361-375.

As this review has tried to underline, choir screens were remarkably popular and multi-functional structures.¹²³ Nowadays, so little is known about them because only a few examples survive outside the Northern Countries, particularly Germany. However, screens were far more common in Italian churches than we can imagine. As in the rest of the Europe, they became an essential component of the liturgical furniture throughout the Middle Ages, particularly in mendicant churches. In the rule established by the General Chapter of the Preachers' Order in 1249 partition walls were already deemed necessary.¹²⁴ Their introduction also coincided with the most characteristic phase of the Gothic style around the thirteenth century, the architectural language preferred by Italian Mendicant orders.¹²⁵ The reason Italian screens have often been forgotten or, if extant, overlooked is because the majority of them were dismantled by the sixteenth century partially in response to Counter-Reformation requirements. The Council of Trent did not provide specific guidelines for the placement of choirs and their screens but its tenets accelerated an on-going process of transformation of sacred space. Already in the fifteenth century church interiors began to consistently embrace the ideal of a unified and clearly articulated space with the consequent removal of screens and the re-location of the choir behind the high altar.¹²⁶

¹²³ Tombs slabs, free-standing altars, votive paintings attached to columns gathered around and in front of the choir ensemble, along with the multiple lay altars proliferating on the screen itself, thus transforming the friars' churches into "often aggressively utilitarian and multipurpose," quoting Bruzelius, *Preaching, Building, and Burying*, 182.

¹²⁴ Valenzano, Giovanna. "La suddivisione dello spazio nelle chiese mendicanti: sulle tracce dei tramezzi delle Venezie," in *Arredi liturgici e architettura*, ed. by Arturo Carlo Quintavalle (Milan: Electa, 2007), 99, 112.

¹²⁵ Bruzelius, *Preaching, Building, and Burying*, 189; Piva, "Lo spazio liturgico," 157.

¹²⁶ The earliest example of such remodeling is represented by the Servite Santissima Annunziata in Florence where the choir was re-located behind the altar around 1444. Ackerman, "Observations on Renaissance Church Planning", 295; Brown, "Choir and Altar Placement," especially 147-151.

As in other Italian cities, screens are a rarity in Venice today. Yet, the situation was quite different in the Renaissance. While elsewhere these structures were becoming obsolete, in the *Serenissima* they were still built and remained in vogue much longer. Exemplary is the case of the *septum* in Santa Maria Gloriosa dei Frari and the *barco* in San Michele in Isola, both still standing. If the erection of the first can be seen as a necessary component of the Franciscan Gothic complex, the choice to install the second was at odds with the innovative architectural style inaugurated at San Michele, the first Renaissance church in Venice. The inclusion of a choir screen in such a new, modern context is accounted for by its important liturgical function. A large majority of Venetian churches were equipped with a choir and a screen at some point.¹²⁷ Apparently this was not a prerequisite exclusive to the mendicant orders to accommodate their friars. Parish and collegiate churches as well needed a choir space to host their body of subordinate priests. These special corps of lesser priests, like canons, were in charge of offices at night and at other off hours, performed a variety of duties, and were supported by parish funds, not a practice common in other cities.¹²⁸ From the records of the apostolic visit of 1580 in Venice and other specific studies dedicated to individual churches, it is possible to get an idea of the approximate number of the buildings with screens and some information about their formats.¹²⁹ The three most common typologies seem to have been

¹²⁷ This is perhaps explained by the fact that the architectural Gothic style was favored by mendicant orders (such as the Franciscans, Dominicans, Augustinian Hermits, Servites, and Carmelites), older orders (such as the Benedictines and the Augustinian Canons), and parish churches as well. See Humfrey, *The Altarpiece in Renaissance Venice*, 31.

¹²⁸ McAndrew, John. *Venetian Architecture of the Early Renaissance*. (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 1980), 59.

¹²⁹ For San Michele in Isola see Ceriana, Matteo. "Gli spazi e l'ornamento della chiesa camaldolese di San Michele in Isola," in *San Michele in Isola. Isola della conoscenza. Ottocento anni di storia e cultura camaldolesi nella laguna di Venezia*, Exhibition Catalogue, ed. by Marcello Brusegan and others (Turin: UTET, 2012), 97-109.; Bisson, Massimo. *Meravigliose*

the *transenna* or enclosure with columns, the septum or partition wall, and the bridge-like type commonly referred to as the *ponte* in Italian and known as the *barco* in Venice.¹³⁰

The first type, well represented by the *transenna* in San Marco, was the one commonly chosen by parish churches. The second format was more unusual but survives through the

macchine di giubilo. L'architettura e l'arte degli organi a Venezia nel Rinascimento. (Verona: Scripta Edizioni), 2012; Allen's dissertation on Venetian choir stalls, especially section on the septum at the Frari: Allen, Joanne. *Choir Stalls in Venice and Northern Italy. Furniture, Ritual and Space in the Renaissance Church Interior.* Doctoral Dissertation, University of Warwick, 2010; Valenzano, "La suddivisione dello spazio nelle chiese mendicanti", 99-115; for *transenne*, see Modesti, Paola. "Recinzioni con colonne nelle chiese Veneziane. Tradizioni, revival, sopravvivenze," in *Lo spazio e il culto. Relazioni tra edificio ecclesiale e uso liturgico dal xv al xvi secolo*, ed. by Jörg Stabenow (Venice: Marsilio Editori, 2006), 181-208; for the *barco* in Santa Maria della Carità, see, Modesti, Paola. "I cori nelle chiese veneziane e la visita apostolica del 1581. Il "barco" di Santa Maria della Carità," in *Arte Veneta* 59 (2002 [2004]), 39-65; for the screen in Santi Giovanni e Paolo, see Merotto, Ghedini Monica. "Il tramezzo della chiesa dei santi Giovanni e Paolo a Venezia," in *De lapidibus sententiae. Scritti di storia dell'arte per Giovanni Lorenzoni*, eds. by Tiziana Franco e Giovanna Valenzano (Padua: Il Poligrafo, 2002), 257-263; for the screen in San Giovanni in Bragora, see Humfrey, "Cima da Conegliano, Sebastiano Mariani, and Alvise Vivarini," 350-363; McAndrew, *Venetian Architecture of the Early Renaissance*, 54-62; Tramontin, Silvio. "Tracce di drammatica popolare religiosa a Venezia," in *La drammatica popolare nella valle padana*, Atti del Convegno di Studi sul folklore padano (Modena: ENAL, Università del tempo libero, 1976), 453-533.

¹³⁰ The issue of the screens' typologies is one of the thorniest since the terminology applied to the various formats is often confusing. The categorization of choir screens is more well-defined for the Northern Countries where the large majority of these structures survived. In her illuminating work Jung distinguishes between three different types: the chancel, favored in Germany; the porch screen, favored in France; and the partition type, favored in England. She also specifies how the terms *pulpitum*, *jubé* (in French), and *lettner* (in Germany) relate to choir screens' main function as a space for reading and also as a platform for singers. See "The Unifying Role of the Choir Screen, 625-26; Jung, *The Gothic Screen*, 55. Piva explains in more detail the meaning of such definitions: *jubé* derives from the French formula used by the deacon when requesting from the bishop the authority to begin the first reading, while *lettner* derives from the Latin *lectorium* (Piva, "Lo spazio liturgico," 158). For the Italian context the situation is less clear. The sources apply a variety of different terms to choir screens, making it often hard to understand to which specific type a certain structure belongs. The most recurrent definition is *tramezzo*, meaning a screening wall literally traversing the nave and aisles. According to Hall, the *tramezzo* represents the consolidation between rood screen and choir enclosure that became common in the fifteenth century and is exemplified by the partition in the church of Santa Maria Gloriosa dei Frari in Venice (Hall, "The Ponte in S. Maria Novella," 169). Piva specifies how this term should be used to describe a simple wall, while all the other definitions imply more complex structures provided with a platform: *pontile*, *solarium*, *pulpitum*, *ponte*, *podiolus*. The function of a partition wall and a bridge-like structure are quite different and this distinction should be kept clear in mind when studying Italian choir screens (Piva, "Lo spazio liturgico," 158).

screen at the Frari. The last typology was the most frequently applied in Italian Mendicant churches, including Santa Maria dei Servi.¹³¹

The Screen at Santa Maria dei Servi: A Necessity for Practical, Liturgical, and Aesthetic Reasons

In reality there is no proof about the actual design of the Servite screen. It is my assumption that it fell into the category of the Venetian *barco*, as it will be discussed later. What we do know is that the screen perfectly fit within the Venetian tradition. It was built in fact quite late, toward the end of the fifteenth and beginning of the sixteenth century, during a prolific period for the construction of screens in the lagoon. At least five churches were provided with such a structure at this time: the Franciscan Santa Maria Gloriosa dei Frari (ca. 1475), the Camaldolese San Michele in Isola (1480s), the Augustinian Santo Stefano (ca. 1488), the parish church of San Giovanni in Bragora (1490-92), and the church of Sant'Antonio di Castello presided over by the Canons Regulars of the Lateran (ca. 1504).¹³² Only two of these screens are visible today - the already mentioned septum at the Frari and *barco* in San Michele - all the others disappeared but have been the subject of recent studies (figs.64-74). The one exception is

¹³¹ One third of the monastic churches visited by the apostolic *nunzio* seemed to have been equipped with an above the ground, two-story choir screen, located in the middle of the church, and referred to with the terms *coro pensile* or *podium*. Five out of ten of these screens were described as supported by columns, likely to create a loggia more than a colonnade, and six of them had altars underneath that were recommended for removal. The churches under consideration are: Santa Maria dell'Orto, San Giorgio in Alga, Santa Maria dei Carmini, San Cristoforo della Pace, Santa Maria Gloriosa dei Frari, Sant'Antonio di Castello, San Giovanni Battista alla Giudecca, Santi Giovanni e Paolo, Santa Maria dei Crociferi, Santa Maria della Carità. This information is derived from the appendix to Modesti's essay which includes a useful list of the monastic churches seen by the apostolic *nunzio* containing precious, although partial, data about choir structures, see Modesti, "Recinzioni con colonne nelle chiese Veneziane," 63-65.

¹³² For the dates of the first four structures see McAndrew, *Venetian Architecture of the Early Renaissance*, 54-59. For San Antonio di Castello see Modesti, "I cori nelle chiese veneziane," 45 and the work of Guarnieri presented at the RSA reunion in Berlin, 2015.

the partition wall at Santa Maria dei Servi. Its reconstruction has never been attempted and its importance always underestimated. Yet, learning about the particular history of this specific screen can definitively help to shed new light on the importance of screens and their altars.

The screen under examination was not the first one erected in Santa Maria dei Servi. During the initial phase of construction in 1414, the church was provided with a choir that extended for half the length of the church, as it was customary in Gothic architecture. This first enclosure must have been provided with a screen. Even though no description remains, its location can be assumed by the presence of an organ above the altar of the Madonna dei Miracoli, mentioned in a 1453 document, and a nearby pulpit, two elements that indicate the existence of a screen (fig. 54, H-H in the floor plan).¹³³ Around 1498, the choir was reduced in size, brought closer to the *cappella maggiore*, and furnished by Girolamo Donato with a new partition wall, which was decorated soon after by the altar of the True Cross (fig. 54, L-L in the floor plan). This second complex stood in place until 1560-1562 when the friars' choir was transferred to the *coro pensile* above the main entrance, a massive two-storied structure with a balcony at the top and four chapels at the bottom (fig. 54, S-S in the floor plan).¹³⁴ What it is curious is that at this time, while the entire choir was physically removed from its location and brought elsewhere, its screen stayed in the original setting together with the main organ which was positioned above the cloister's entrance (fig. 75, *a* in the floor plan). In 1693

¹³³ For the location of this first organ see Bisson, *Meravigliose macchine di giubilo*, 225. It may be a reference to the first choir screen, the information taken from the archives by Vicentini referring to a request made by Pietro Donato bishop of Padua, uncle of Girolamo Donato, in 1450 for a mass to be celebrated every Friday at the top of the balcony ("et ogni venere dir una messa suso al balcon"), Vicentini, *Santa Maria de' Servi in Venezia*, 57.

¹³⁴ Constructed around 1500 according to Vicentini, *Santa Maria de' Servi in Venezia*, note 2, 50.

eventually the instrument was moved to an independent balcony above the choro pensile (fig. 75, *b* in the floor plan).¹³⁵ The 1498 choir screen was torn down only in 1729 before the 1731 restoration phase that saw the construction of the fourth and last choir behind the high altar (fig. 54, Z-Z in the floor plan).¹³⁶

At first, nothing seems out of the ordinary about the choir history in the Servite church. By documenting the changes in the choir structure and position over the centuries, this summary reflects the friars' constant adaptation to the progressive development of their liturgical needs and those of the community that they served, similar to what happened in other churches in and outside Venice. However there is one exceptional detail about the entire story that stands out: the long life of the second choir screen. This partition wall with its altars remained untouched, roughly at the center of the church, for two hundred and thirty one years, from the time of its erection in 1498 until the moment of its demolition in 1729. Considering the periodical transformations that the church went through, as the moving of the choir exemplified, it is surprising that this one element was preserved even when the choir precinct to which it was connected was destroyed and its main screening function became unnecessary. These observations, along with the fact that the main organ remained located nearby for a while, may be symptomatic of the importance of the Servite screen and the special functions that it fulfilled. What I propose is that this structure served as an alternative presbytery for the

¹³⁵ In the meantime, the friars had been relying since 1629 on a second smaller organ, commissioned to compensate for their distance from the *organo maggiore*, see Bisson, *Meravigliose macchine di giubilo*, 226.

¹³⁶ Inaugurated in 1574, this choir probably had a secondary function since it was of relatively smaller dimensions in comparison to the previous structures. This can be inferred by the fact that the third choir, the *coro pensile*, remained in use and was provided with a new organ around the mid-eighteenth century Bisson, *Meravigliose macchine di giubilo*, 227-28.

Servite church for a number of years while its altars were used for primary liturgical needs, especially the altar of the True Cross.

Choir, screen, and altar of the True Cross were erected in Santa Maria dei Servi around 1498 during a hectic phase of construction. In the fifteenth century, the Servite mother church was far from being completed. Even though the first stone was set in 1318, the foundations were not laid down before 1330 and the entire building underwent a radical alteration throughout the 1400s. The three apsidal chapels remained unfinished for quite some time, between the 1450s and 1490s, and two subsequent indulgences, granted by Pope Sixtus IV, show how much effort was devoted toward the completion of this area.¹³⁷ Yet the goal was not achieved at the time of the consecration of the church on November 7th, 1491. On April 5th, 1492, Pope Innocent VIII had to confer new indulgences in support of the project.¹³⁸ By 1500 the dome was probably finished, new altars were built in substitution for the old ones, and the choir and its screen were in use along with the altar of the True Cross.¹³⁹ Nothing is known, however, about the conditions of the apsidal chapels. Two more indulgences granted respectively by Pope Alexander VI on March 6th, 1498, and by Pope Julius II on March 25th, 1511, to encourage more donations for the church's construction work, induce one to believe that

¹³⁷ Urbani, Elena. "Santa Maria dei Servi," 110. Pietro Donato, bishop of Padua and ancestor of Girolamo Donato, wanted to donate money to Santa Maria dei Servi for the completion of the main chapel, as stated in his 1445 will. However, the friars refused his generous donation. They were probably not pleased with the idea that the Donato family could have control over the main chapel in their church, see Vicentini, *I Servi di Maria nei documenti*, 198-199.

¹³⁸ The friar Gasparino Borro brought the plea for this indulgence before Innocent VIII. Borro was a close friend of Girolamo Donato, who is mentioned in the text of the indulgence as an exemplary member of the Servite order. Corner, *Ecclesiae Venetae*, 33, 94-96.

¹³⁹ The building of the dome is not mentioned by ancient writers and it is inferred by the bird's eye view of Venice designed by Jacopo de' Barbari in 1500. The dome appears as well in the engravings by Luca Carlevarij (1703) and Domenico Lovisa (1720).

the area around the presbytery could have been accessible but not completely finished.¹⁴⁰ We know that the Emo and Donato families benefited from the *ius patronatus* of the side apsidal chapels since the 1480s, but the sources are silent about their early furnishing and scholars focus only on their status in the eighteenth century.¹⁴¹ As for the main chapel, Giuseppe Porta Salviati's *Assumption of the Virgin* was hung there, above the main altar, probably around 1555, but not even ten years passed before new renovation work seems to have involved this space.¹⁴² Vicentini reports that when the second choir was moved above the main entrance, in 1562, another remodeling phase started that lasted well into the seventeenth century.¹⁴³ Columns were added along the walls with the inevitable rearrangement of the altars, and, as documented in the Servite archives, the restoration of the *cappella maggiore* was terminated in 1691.¹⁴⁴ Throughout this period the main altar may have been in use, particularly for the benefit of the friars, but the chapel itself was not in its best condition in terms of appearance. Moreover, it is quite surprising that no information survives about the early decoration of the main chapel, which was to be considered the most sacred and important space within any church. Carolyn Wilson has

¹⁴⁰ This indulgence was obtained thanks to the intercession of Girolamo Donato. Sanudo, Marin. *I diarii di Marino Sanuto*, ed. by Federico Stefani et al. Venice: a spese degli editori, 1879-1903, II, 547; Vicentini, *I Servi di Maria nei documenti e codici veneziani*, I, 268.

¹⁴¹ Pavon and Cauzzi. *La memoria di un tempio*, 62-64; Pedrocco, "Il patrimonio artistico disperso dei Servi di Maria a Venezia," 111-12; Zorzi, *Venezia scomparsa*, 353-54.

¹⁴² At the same time the tomb slab of the procurator of San Marco Zaccaria Vendramin was positioned there, probably in 1563, the year when his daughter, Elena, was granted a space for her family burial in the chapel, ASVe, busta 9, processo no. 41; Vicentini, *I Servi di Maria nei documenti*, I, 87. The choice of the *Assumption of the Virgin* as the theme to be represented on the main altar is understandable but out of the ordinary. Certainly this dogma was particularly important for the Servites, as we shall discuss later; however, normally the *altare maggiore* was associated with the dedication of the church, in this case the *Annunciation of the Virgin*. Gallicciolli, Giambattista. *Delle memorie venete antiche profane ed ecclesiastiche* (Venice: Domenico Fracasso, 1745), 30.

¹⁴³ Vicentini, *Santa Maria de' Servi in Venezia*, 50.

¹⁴⁴ "The restoration of the chapel of the main altar was completed," ASVe, Busta 3, c. 117, 27 September 1691; Vicentini, *I Servi di Maria nei documenti*, I, 22. In the 1680s it was also decided to re-make the dome, *Ibid.*, I, 32-33.

recently tried to fill this gap by suggesting that Giovanni Bellini's *Lamentation*, seen by Boschini on the altar of the Tertiaries of the Servite Order, could have been originally conceived for the main altar (fig. 76).¹⁴⁵ Her hypothesis is fascinating but remains speculative due to the lack of evidence.¹⁴⁶

To compensate for what was probably an unimpressive main altar and chapel, which was often a “work in progress,” there was the screen, “exceptional for its grace and elegance,” whose marble architecture was embellished by Riccio's bronzes arranged on two altars.¹⁴⁷ Within such a long and narrow nave, this wall must have been the focus of attention of any visitor entering the building, not only because it was aesthetically captivating but also because it was liturgically indispensable. The conclusion that can be drawn from the overview of the church's construction is that Santa Maria dei Servi had for over two hundred years an unfinished *cappella maggiore* whose appearance was undetermined. This was not an issue for the friars who could observe their daily duties in the choir and were not affected by the status of the high altar, but it was problematic for the numerous celebrations that dotted the Venetian liturgical calendar. These festivities involved a larger public, mostly consisting of laymen, which needed to be entertained and impressed in order to make revenues profitable. Under these circumstances, it is easy to imagine how the Servites came to rely so extensively on the screen, initially out of

¹⁴⁵ The altar was previously dedicated to Saint Joseph (according to Wilson) between 1536 and 1720 and before that to Saint Martha (as can be seen in the notes from the Apostolic Visit).

¹⁴⁶ Wilson's ideas, which will be published in the near future, were presented at RSA in Berlin, 2015.

¹⁴⁷ From a later reference, related to the moment when the screen was torn down, it seems that the high altar was “very small in comparison to the vastness of the chapel” and this impression was increased by the presence of a balustrade just in front of it, ASVe, busta 4, c. 149, 25th of August, 1729; Vicentini, *I Servi di Maria nei documenti*, I, 44. We do not know if the altar had always had such an appearance but we may assume that it was not an impressive structure since, despite its liturgical importance, it was not described in any source.

necessity, and then out of habit. At the beginning they may have used the partition wall of the first choir, conveniently close to a pulpit, and later the screen of the second complex, financed by their most generous and supportive protector, Girolamo Donato. The patrician was responsible for the collection of the alms destined to fund both the screen and the altar of the True Cross on it, where he positioned the relic of the Holy Wood that he brought home from Rome.¹⁴⁸ Girolamo was aware that the placement of such a precious relic in a prominent space would have attracted the faithful and pilgrims, and with them donations to accelerate the completion of the Servite church. It is now understandable why the screen turned out to be an essential component of the sacred space and was left in place for over two hundred years. Not even the apostolic official ordered its removal during the 1581 visit. When in 1729 the decision to tear down this structure was finally taken, the screen was still in use as proved by the following document that gives a glimpse into its past importance:

“When many years ago, according to a common tradition well known to you PP. VV. M. RR., the choir was moved from the center of this church to its present site, an example then followed by the Dominican Fathers of SS. Giovanni e Paolo and by the Hermits of S. Stefano, it is believed that the friars of that time, in order to avoid further expenses, decided to keep in place the partition structure, still extant, composed of three arches, of which the largest one led to the choir, while the others allowed to walk around it. There is certainly no one among you PP. VV. M. RR. that ignores how scandalous was the existence of such a partition structure, which was tremendously useful to those that are not in fear of God not even in his churches and, as everyone knows, was costly/lavishly inopportune for the celebrations of the divine offices since its presence made it convenient to erect ephemeral altars in the middle of the church and above our burials in order to expose the Sacrament and celebrate other offices, thus going against the ecclesiastical rules.”¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁸ Information from Bergantini mentioned in Gasparotto, 2007, 395; for the commission of the altar of the True Cross from Donato, *Ecclesia Venetae*, II, 24, 34.

¹⁴⁹ “Trasportandosi, sono già molti anni, come per costante tradizione sara' alla PP. VV. M. RR. ben noto, dal mezo di questa chiesa nel sito presente il coro, esempio seguito indi poi dai PP. Domenicani de' SS. Giov. e Paolo ed Eremitani di S. Stefano, e' credibile che i Religiosi di quel tempo, per evitare la maggior spesa, abbiano lasciato in piedi il divisorio, che tutt'ora sussiste,

The final passage of the quote above gives us a vivid picture of the church of the laymen, as the nave facing the screen is often called. This was the space where most of the divine offices were performed, where ornaments for special occasions were arranged, such as ephemeral altars, and where the faithful strived to get a burial place.¹⁵⁰ In such a context, it is inevitable to imagine the essential role played by the screen, the most visible face of the church and the stage for all these activities. The partition wall at the Servites abided by the rules. As stated in the reference, its prominent position made it “convenient” to perform the divine offices in front of it, either on temporary altars or on the altars attached to the screen, as I will suggest.¹⁵¹ A number of celebrations would

composto di tre archi, il maggiore de quali conduceva al coro, e gli altri servivano al passaggio intorno al medesimo. Non vi sara' certamente pur uno tra le PP. VV. M. RR. che ignori esser sempre stata ragione di scandali la sussistenza di un tal divisorio, servendo di dannatissimo comodo a chi non teme l'Altissimo Iddio neppure nelle sue chiese, siccome sapranno tutti esser stati sempre di dispendiosissimo incomodo alla celebrazione de divini uffizj, convenendosi per le sposizione del Venerabile ed altre funzioni far in mezzo la chiesa e sopra le sepolture degli altari posticcj contro le rubriche ecclesiastiche...,” ASVe, busta 4, c. 147, 24 maggio 1729. This passage is cited in Vicentini, *I Servi di Maria nei documenti*, I, 43-44.

¹⁵⁰ Apparently screens also sheltered less proper activities by laypeople, such as sleeping, drinking, and fornicating. Jung, “The Unifying Role of the Choir Screen,” 629.

¹⁵¹ The practice of arranging ephemeral/temporary altars in the middle of the church in the area of screens was widespread. Such temporary structures were not much different from permanent altars in chapels. They could be quite sophisticated complexes and had to be provided with some essential liturgical accessories such as table cloths, chalices, crosses, candles and so on. Unfortunately none of these altars survive but, as a few records from the archives prove, their presence was quite common at Santa Maria dei Servi. A couple of these entries, both dated to the eighteenth century, are particularly interesting. The first refers to the erection of a temporary altar for the exposition of the Sacrament in exceptional circumstances: “Having the Doge ordered to expose the Holy Sacrament in our church on Saturday and Sunday, the 27th and 28th, to plead its help for the armies in the mainland that are causing great damage to this domain (referring to the French and German armies involved in the Spanish succession war); in order to perform this office with the greatest decorum of the monastery, despite our economic hardship, it was decided to spend five ducats to erect an altar in glory of the Lord in the middle of the church and to decorate it with seventy beautiful wax candles (19th November, 1706).” The second entry discusses the issues related to the solemn celebration of the feast of Saint Pellegrino Laziosi. The friars, again in trouble financially, explore various solutions about how and when to organize the event by limiting the costs. When talking about where to perform the office, they think of the space in front of the screen: “Regarding the way, it was proposed to build a beautiful altar in the arches in the middle of the church and to decorate it with a good number of candles (20th August,

have relied on this structure as their main backdrop benefiting, at the same time, from the iconographical message provided by its altars.

Beside the most relevant practical and liturgical reasons, aesthetic motivations may have also induced the Servite friars to keep their screen for so long. Certainly this structure, with its imposing architectural body, stretching through the entire width of the church, and elegant marble and bronze decoration, must have had an impact on the viewer walking along the nave. The impression was made even stronger when Giuseppe Porta's altarpiece was hung on the main altar (fig. 77). Like *Assumption of the Virgin* would have been visible through the screen's main opening achieving an effect similar to the one the visitor can still perceive today while in the church of Santa Maria Gloriosa dei Frari (fig. 78). As Titian's *Assumption of the Virgin* at the Frari, Porta's work was conceived to be located on the back wall of the main chapel, first by standing upon the main altar, which almost leaned against the apsidal curve, and, after 1731, by hanging directly on the back wall while the high altar was pushed farther up toward the main nave.¹⁵² In this way the painting was the focus when looking through the screen's central door, which would have functioned as its most appropriate frame.

It seems likely that the Servites consciously emulated the interior of the Franciscan mother church in Venice, setting up a competition with that order. Not only did they intend to re-create in their own church a vision comparable to that experienced at the Frari, they actually commissioned from Giuseppe Porta an altarpiece that was definitely inspired by Titian's masterpiece (fig. 79). The subject of della Porta's canvas was the same, the Virgin Assunta, and intentionally coincided with the most revered

1727).” See ASVe, busta 4, c. 37t; Vicentini, *I Servi di Maria nei documenti*, I, 37; ASVe, busta 4, c. 139t; Ibid., I, 43.

¹⁵² Pavon and Cauzzi, *La memoria di un tempio*, 62-63.

dogma of the Servites.¹⁵³ In addition, the parallel between the two paintings must have been well-known if the Servite altarpiece was selected as the replacement for the Renaissance masterpiece when this was moved to the Gallerie dell'Accademia in 1816.¹⁵⁴ Salviati's painting stood in place of its more famous precedent for over a century, until 1918, a year before Titian's masterpiece was returned to its original location. At the time of its transition to its temporary lodging, the canvas by Salviati had to be extended to match the dimensions of Titian's altarpiece. Responsible for the additions, visible especially on the lower section of the painting, was the painter and conservator Antonio Florian (1770-1844), the same person who restored Titian's *Assumption of the Virgin* in 1817.¹⁵⁵

While envisioning the painting by Salviati on the main altar at Santa Maria dei Servi, we have to imagine it without Florian's later extension.¹⁵⁶ Comparable to Titian's version, the composition seemed more compact and focused on the central scene. Salviati probably intended to go beyond a mere formal and stylistic imitation of Titian's masterpiece. What he probably sought was to re-create the same physical and conceptual engagement that the viewer at the Frari felt when peering through the screen's main

¹⁵³ According to tradition, the Seven Founders of the Servite Order had their first Marian vision on the feast of the Virgin's Assumption in 1233, followed by a second apparition several years after, on the Eve of the same celebration (1244). Since then, they showed a particular preference for the mystery of Mary's assumption which became the most important liturgical event in their calendar. See Rossi, Alessio Maria. *Manuale di storia dell'ordine dei Servi di Maria (1233-1954)*. Rome: Typis Pontificiae Universitatis Gregorianae, 1956, 235-247.

¹⁵⁴ Titian's *Assumption* was located in the hall of the Scuola Grande di Santa Maria della Carità owned by the museum, see Boschin, Alice in *La basilica dei Santi Giovanni e Paolo. Pantheon della Serenissima*, ed. by Giuseppe Pavanello (Venice: Marcianum Press, 2013), cat. 86, 269. For a comparison between the paintings see McTavish, *Giuseppe Porta Called Giuseppe Salviati* (New York: Garland, 1981), 160-62.

¹⁵⁵ Boschini, 2013, cat. 86, 269.

¹⁵⁶ When moved to the Frari, the inclusion of the foreground in Salviati's canvas affected the impact of the altarpiece on the viewer. As noticed by McTavish, Salviati's *Madonna* became more restrained and solemn than its counterpart by Titian. The spectator would have also felt a sense of detachment from the image's action, see McTavish, *Giuseppe Porta*, 161.

entrance. Titian's canvas is so close to the septum that it gives the impression of hovering over the spectator. It is difficult to determine with certainty if a similar effect was achieved in Santa Maria dei Servi. We do not possess secure information about the proportion of the choir screen there or the original measurements of Salviati's creation. From the documents it appeared that the high altar was relatively small in comparison to the vastness of the chapel, a condition of which Salviati must have been aware. When designing his own altarpiece, the artist may have chosen Titian's composition as a point of reference with the awareness that it would have enhanced the faithful's engagement, thus compensating for the smaller dimensions of the altar.¹⁵⁷

Liturgical Function of the Altar of the True Cross

Once the Servite screen's crucial importance is established, it is not difficult to believe that the altar on its façade played an equally significant role. Screen and altar were erected around the same time thanks to the magnanimous support of the patrician Girolamo Donato. If Donato had envisioned the Servite screen as a sort of lay presbytery intended to compensate for, if not substitute for, an incomplete apsidal area, then he did not add an altar to this structure, soon after its completion, just for the sake of ornamentation. He acted following a precise agenda. He was looking for an altar that would properly commemorate the precious relic of the Cross that he had donated to the Servites, while, at the same time, fulfill a variety of different liturgical needs due to its convenient location and appropriate iconography.

¹⁵⁷ It is interesting to notice that Salviati's *Assumption*, which now measures 345 x 647 cm, would have originally been comparable in size to Bellini's *Lamentation* that, as has been suggested, was probably commissioned as the first altarpiece destined to be the main altar (its measurements are 312 x 444 cm).

The position of the altar of the True Cross on the screen in Santa Maria dei Servi is probably one of the most important features of Donato's commission. By choosing an untraditional design and precious materials for his altar, the patrician had already made it clear that he wanted a prestigious work. By locating this structure on the choir screen at the center of the long nave, he was sure that the altar could not pass unnoticed. Anyone who entered the church was inevitably drawn to the screen and, consequently, to the altar itself. The sponsorship of this structure was a personal investment that Donato made to the advantage of the Servites. As the procurator of their church, he was aware that the unfinished status of the building was not appealing to laymen, whose contributions were vital for the friars' community. This is why he first erected a beautifully crafted screen as the "lay church's façade" and then endowed it with a reliquary/altar to serve laypeople. Considering that the high altar was not yet appropriately decorated and could not provide the needed visual stimuli to engage the lay community, the crucial importance of the altar of the True Cross becomes obvious. Besides being a shrine for a valued relic which could spur donations, Donato's altar was the privileged location for the celebration of daily masses.

At this point, it is perhaps essential to re-emphasize the function of altars on screens. Not differently from the majority of fellow structures arranged around the church, these altars were sponsored by private patrons and their first task was to host *mansionarie*. These masses for the dead constituted perhaps the largest part of the daily liturgy and were carried out by chaplains financed with testamentary bequests.¹⁵⁸ Sometimes back-to-back masses were performed on the same space which was shared

¹⁵⁸ Bacci, Michele. *Lo spazio dell'anima. Vita di una chiesa medievale*. Rome: GLF Ed. Laterza, 2005, 86.

among different families, as was probably the case for the altar of the True Cross. In the archival documents two possible beneficiaries are mentioned in connection with the use of Donato's altar: Vettore Tron, whose family unsuccessfully negotiated a *mansionaria* with the friars in 1509-1510; and Gabriele Garzoni and his heirs, who were granted a burial spot in front of the altar in 1566.¹⁵⁹ Apart from this general purpose, altars located on screens were convenient for the celebration of daily masses directed to the lay community.¹⁶⁰ Their crucial liturgical importance is today almost forgotten, after the disappearance of most screens, but can still be inferred through the surviving documentation. As scholars have proven, screens and their altars were considered a ritual requirement equal to the *cappella maggiore* and its high altar and as such were commonly foreseen from the very beginning of a church's building project.¹⁶¹ Actually altars on choir enclosures sometimes were furnished and decorated before the high altar itself, a sign of their vital role in the church's everyday life.¹⁶² The lay altar par excellence was certainly the aforementioned Cross altar, so called because of its proximity with the Crucifix usually surmounting the the top of the screen.¹⁶³ This structure consisted either of an altar positioned at the center of the screen's western façade or of two altars at the sides of its central opening.¹⁶⁴ Because of its location and vicinity with a Crucifix that probably was on the Servite screen, it is likely that the altar

¹⁵⁹ ASVe, busta 29, processo no. 263 and Vicentini, *I Servi di Maria nei documenti*, I, 154; ASVe, busta 33, processo no. 323 and Ibid., 185. As I mentioned before, the Garzoni were misidentified by Sansovino as the original patrons of the altar itself.

¹⁶⁰ Piva, 154.

¹⁶¹ Cooper, "Access All Areas?," 94, 96.

¹⁶² As happened in the church of San Giovanni in Bragora, see Humfrey, "Cima da Conegliano, Sebastiano Mariani, and Alvise Vivarini," 360.

¹⁶³ Bacci, *Lo spazio dell'anima*, 82.

¹⁶⁴ Piva, "Lo spazio liturgico," 156.

of the True Cross assumed the function of the Cross altar co-sharing this role with the fellow altar of Saint Martin built later.

Alongside these essential duties, a variety of celebrations in Santa Maria dei Servi could have engaged the choir screen and its altars, which were suitable stations for special festivities and processions, as their dedications imply. This applies especially to the altar of the True Cross. Its iconographical content was extremely relevant for the Servite order in general and for the church of Santa Maria dei Servi in specific. From the beginning, the Servites had devoted equal attention to the cult of the Virgin Mary and of her son, Christ, in the form of his consecrated body and the Crucifix.¹⁶⁵ The focus on the Passion's main instrument and its commemoration increased toward the end of the fifteenth century, particularly in the monasteries that had embraced the *Osservanza* reform, including Santa Maria dei Servi in Venice.¹⁶⁶ It is not coincidental that the altar of the True Cross was commissioned around 1500, within this context. Beyond the multilayered meaning of the episodes selected, which will be analyzed in detail later, the stories represented in Riccio's five bronzes were, more generally, intended to support the veneration of Christ's Cross by narrating the history of the Holy Wood before the Passion and emphasizing its already effective redeeming power. In this way the message transmitted by the altar would have complemented the meaning of the Crucifix

¹⁶⁵ The cults of the Virgin and her crucified Son were united in one cult toward the end of the fifteenth century: that of the suffering of the Virgin during her Son's Passion. A letter written in support of the order by Pope Innocent VIII in 1487, underlines that the friars had chosen to dress in black in remembrance of the Virgin's pain. The veneration of the Sorrowful Madonna became the goal of a specific confraternity entitled to the Madonna of the Seven Sorrows in the seventeenth century. The Donato chapel in Santa Maria dei Servi in Venice was assigned to this confraternity. Dal Pino, Franco A. et al. *Fonti Storico-Spirituali dei Servi di Santa Maria, II, dal 1349 al 1495*. Bergamo: Servitium Editrice, 2002, II, 58, 307-308; Rossi, *Manuale di storia dell'ordine dei Servi*, 444-47.

¹⁶⁶ Dal Pino, *Fonti Storico-Spirituali dei Servi*, II, 139.

surmounting the choir screen and of the Crucifixion worshipped by the Lucchesi, whose chapel was adjacent to the Servite church. I believe that the confraternity of the Lucchesi had a significant involvement with the rituals associated with the altar of the True Cross, as their special devotion to Christ's Cross and connection with the Servites seem to suggest.

The Lucchesi had found refuge from Lucca's political turmoil in Venice between 1307 and 1317.¹⁶⁷ Probably because of their common Tuscan origins, they felt immediately close to the Servites on their arrival in the lagoon and became great supporters of the order.¹⁶⁸ In 1360, in recognition for their sponsorship, the friars granted the Lucchesi permission to build their chapel beside Santa Maria dei Servi, the shell of which still stands despite the demolition of the church.¹⁶⁹ The chapel was consecrated in 1376 on the day of Saint Michael, and it was dedicated to the Crucified Christ under the title of the Volto Santo and under the protection of Saint Martin and Saint Mark.¹⁷⁰ The Volto Santo was the Crucifix preserved in the Cathedral of San Martino in Lucca, a miracle-working image that was believed to have been sculpted by Nicodemus, a disciple of Christ, with the assistance of angels.¹⁷¹ The image of the Volto Santo was ubiquitous in the Lucchesi chapel.

¹⁶⁷ Venice was willing to welcome them because of their experience in silk manufacture. Pavon and Cauzzi, *La memoria di un tempio*, 107.

¹⁶⁸ One of the first Servite monasteries was founded in Lucca in 1267. Ibid., 108.

¹⁶⁹ The chapel was built along with the cemetery on a piece of land that previously belonged to the confraternity of the Virgin Annunciate. Ibid., 108.

¹⁷⁰ Dal Pino, *Fonti Storico-Spirituali dei Servi*, II, 51.

¹⁷¹ The oratory was also known as Cappella del Centurione since the Crucifix that the Lucchesi worshipped had a leather belt around its vest, Pavon and Cauzzi, *La memoria di un tempio*, 109. About the Lucca crucifix, see Mansi, Giovan Domenico. *Diario sacro delle chiese di Lucca* (Lucca: Dalla Tipografia Giusti, 1836), 222-25.

The confraternity enjoyed a special relationship with the Servites, who were indeed the only members of the confraternity who were not Lucchesi. The friars presided over a number of celebrations in the chapel of the Volto Santo: they performed a mass dedicated to the Cross every Friday and last Sunday of the month; they were compensated for the offices of the Exaltation of the Cross, and subsequent commemorative services for the dead Lucchesi, as well as for the solemn mass on the day of Saint Michael. During Easter, the Lucchesi also provided bread and lamb for each friar in the monastery, with whom they celebrated this feast.¹⁷² What brought together the Servites and the Lucchesi, apart from their common Tuscan origins and mutual support, was the fervent devotion that they shared toward the Holy Cross. The Lucchesi's major feast was the *Inventio* of the True Cross, held on May 3rd, but they were also the main protagonists of the rituals associated with the Exaltation of the Cross, held on September 14th, and the Corpus Domini, one of the most important events in the Catholic liturgical calendar.¹⁷³ The pilgrim Pietro Casola who witnessed such a feast at the Servite church in 1494, during a stop in Venice on his way to the Holy Land, noted that "the natives of Lucca...make a great festival on the day of the corpus domini."¹⁷⁴ This observation bears some significance considering how few churches in Venice could have actually kept up with the spectacular procession organized in San Marco square by the *Serenissima*.¹⁷⁵ The fact that the confraternity of the Lucchesi was allowed to actively contribute to such an important festivity is definitively a sign of the prestige that they enjoyed in Santa Maria dei Servi.

¹⁷² ASVe, busta 8, processo no. 7; Vicentini, *I Servi di Maria nei documenti*, I, 76.

¹⁷³ Dal Pino, *Fonti Storico-Spirituali dei Servi*, II, 32; Vicentini, *I Servi di Maria nei documenti*, II, 10.

¹⁷⁴ Newett, *Canon Pietro Casola's Pilgrimage*, 135.

¹⁷⁵ Not to forget all the festivities held at the Church of Corpus Domini in Venice.

It is likely that these celebrations were not confined to the Lucchesi chapel but rather entailed processions that traveled through the oratory and the church, involving the choir screen and its altars. Both altars, in fact, prove to have a close connection to the veneration of the Cross and the Lucchesi chapel as well. For the altar of the True Cross the reasons are obvious, considering the dedication of the altar and the precious relic from the Holy Wood that it housed.¹⁷⁶ In the case of the altar of Saint Martin, the saint was at the same time the protector of the Lucchesi and the titular of their Cathedral in Lucca where the miracle-working Volto Santo was enshrined.¹⁷⁷ There was also a more physical link between the chapel and the screen to support the theory of their mutual engagement in the rituals. As can be seen in the reconstruction plan, the Servite choir “ended” at the same height as the main door of communication between the Lucchesi oratory and the church (fig. 54, D in the floor plan). In addition, the screen itself was basically attached to another entrance to the chapel. A few steps down the screen’s left side there was a spiral staircase which led to a gallery internal to the Volto Santo and still visible today, although not accessible, which was perhaps originally a *cantoria* (fig. 54, T

¹⁷⁶ A proof of this connection is provided by Coronelli. While listing all the churches which displayed relics of the Cross during the feast of the *Inventio*, he included “the Servi, headquarters of the Lucchesi.” The author thus makes explicit the involvement of the Lucchesi in the celebration as well as in their “use” of the precious relic of the Cross owned by the friars since they did not own a relic from the Holy Wood. Coronelli, Vincenzo. *Guida de' Forestieri Sacro-Profana Per osservare il più ragguardevole nella Città di Venezia Con la di lei Pianta per passeggiarla in Gondola, e per Terra*. Venice: N.N, 1700, 172-4.

¹⁷⁷ Allen, Denise, and Peta Motture, eds. *Andrea Riccio: Renaissance Master of Bronze*, exhibition catalogue (The Frick Collection, New York, 2008). New York: The Frick Collection; London: in association with Philip Wilson, 2008, 154. There are further iconological parallels between the two altars that will be examined later. We should also remember here that the episode of *Saint Martin and the Beggar* carved by Riccio was likely represented twice on the monumental wooden altarpiece in the Chapel of the Volto Santo as seen in the drawing by Giovanni Grevembroch. For its reproduction see *Fra Paolo Sarpi e i Servi di Maria a Venezia*, 20.

in the floor plan).¹⁷⁸ These channels of communication seem to bring new evidence to the deep relationship between the Servites and the Lucchese community that they hosted.

Beside the Corpus Domini, other *feste mobili* must have relied upon the choir screen and its altars as the main stage, for example, all the various celebrations occurring during the holy week. Coronelli provides a brief but detailed description of the rituals performed, day by day. After having been displayed during Lent in several churches, including Santa Maria dei Servi, the Sacrament was stored with solemn processions on Wednesday, while the Lord was placed in his sepulcher on Thursday. On Friday, the week's pivotal moment, the *Adoratio Crucis* took place at the Cross altar, and all the relics related to Christ's Passion were exhibited for worship, the relic treasured at the Servi being one of them.¹⁷⁹ It is likely that this precious item was exposed on the altar of the True Cross whose reliefs narrated its legend. Today we can only imagine how suggestive each of these individual moments may have been, in the midst of chants, candles, and emphatic gestures. These celebrations aimed to imitate theatrical performances in order to impress the viewer and capture his attention. Indeed they were often accompanied by sacred representations that were staged on choir screens. Although the evidence for these *drammi* seems at first to be scarce for Venice, this does not mean that they were not popular. The problem is that the spectacular nature of the events

¹⁷⁸ The spiral staircase also gave access to the covered vestibule once in front of the chapel's façade, now destroyed, where the members' tombs were located. Pavon and Cauzzi, *La memoria di un tempio*, 112.

¹⁷⁹ Coronelli, *Guida de' Forestieri*, 137-47. In his sojourn in Venice, Arnold von Harff also talks about this ritual by stating: "Item close by is a monastery of monks called ad Maria de Servo, in which on Easter Even they had evening Mass, so that the priest preserves the holy sacrament through the day, which seemed to me very strange," Harff, Arnold Ritter von. *The Pilgrimage of Arnold von Harff, Knight, from Cologne, through Italy, Syria, Egypt, Arabia, Ethiopia, Nubia, Palestine, Turkey, France and Spain, Which He Accomplished in the Years 1496 to 1499*, Transl. from the German and ed. with notes and an introd. by Malcolm Letts (London: 1946), 66-67.

organized in San Marco overshadowed everything else and the chronicles often disregarded what happened in less important institutions.¹⁸⁰ Scattered information remains about a good number of representations of various types, some set up during preaching, others that covered the most important moments of the history of salvation, from Christmas to the Epiphany, to Lent. Their intention was to offer the faithful a visualization of the most sacred mysteries of the Christian tradition, similar to preachers' sermons, which were replete with allegorical images, and the processions which were also quite dramatic and choreographic. At the beginning of the sixteenth century Venetian bishops' and patriarchs' decrees started to show a growing concern for these dramatic enactments and to attempt to shut them down. The patriarch Antonio Suriano in 1507 denounced the abuses happening during rehearsal and at the time of the performance with profanation of the sacred spaces; while the patriarch Antonio Contarini in 1515 complained about the excessive decoration of the sepulcher during Holy Thursday.

Traces of the enactment of these sacred plays survive in the Servite archives. An inventory of goods owned by the friars, dated 1613, lists a couple of items that could have been utilized during the holy week rituals such as: "an ornament of green satin with pearls and golden laces used for the Cross during solemn processions" and "five pieces of tapestries with figures in bad condition that were used for the sepulcher."¹⁸¹ The same archives reveal the presence of another interesting liturgical furnishing, namely the dressed Madonnas. It seems that the Servites had at least four of them, according to the records from the inventory cited before, all equipped with a rich and assorted

¹⁸⁰ Also it must have been quite difficult to keep track of what occurred in Venice: before Napoleon's edict, around two hundred and fifty churches were open to the cult!

¹⁸¹ ASVe, busta 3, c. 36 and c. 48t; Vicentini, *I Servi di Maria nei documenti*, I, 16-17.

wardrobe.¹⁸² One of these Madonnas seems to have been located on the choir screen: “It was decided to change some old and unused garments of the Madonna situated in the arches in the middle of the church into other objects necessary for the church, such as parapets, pillows, and chasubles.”¹⁸³ These wooden simulacra, sometimes not of fine quality, were objects of great devotion in Venice venerated during the numerous festivities dedicated to the Virgin, such as the Annunciation, the Nativity, the Assumption, and several others. It is noteworthy that most of these celebrations were adopted in the *Serenissima* earlier than elsewhere, considering the ties of the city with the Byzantine world where the majority of them originated.¹⁸⁴ The Servite friars were particularly attached to the cult of the Mater Dolorosa, which they promoted. According to tradition, the Servite order was founded when an image of the Sorrowful Virgin appeared to seven Florentine fathers in 1239 inviting them to dress in dark garb to promote her sufferings. Since then the friars tried to convince the Pope to recognize their feast of the Madonna of the Seven Sorrows, based on their vision, a wish that was granted to them by Pope Pius V in 1605, along with the institution of a confraternity.¹⁸⁵ Coincidentally, the only one of the four dressed Madonna once owned by the Servites still extant is a Sorrowful Madonna now in the church of San Marcuola (fig. 80). Perhaps this is the image that was venerated in the chapel with the same title on the left side of the *cappella maggiore*, known before as the Donato chapel that was crowned after the compline of Holy Saturday.¹⁸⁶

¹⁸² Bonardo, Gioachino in *Madonne della laguna. Simulacri “da vestire” nei secoli XIV-XV*, ed. by Riccarda Pagnozzato (Rome: Ist. della Enciclopedia Italiana, 1993), cat. 20, 289-290.

¹⁸³ 30th June, 1689, ASVe, busta 3, c. 116t; Vicentini, *I Servi di Maria nei documenti*, I, 32.

¹⁸⁴ Bonardo and Pagan, *Madonne della laguna*, 81-90.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid., 83.

¹⁸⁶ Bonardo, *Madonne della laguna*, cat. 20, 289-90.

The Madonna on the screen's arches would have made a perfect pair with the Crucifixion hanging from the top of the ensemble, both visually and conceptually. The two images incarnated the symbols of Servite veneration: no wonder that they were so centrally positioned. From there they dominated the attention of the faithful, and pilgrims who flocked to the altar of the True Cross on the occasions discussed above and others, providing the necessary visual stimulation to frame any ritual. The co-presence of Christ of the Passion and his suffering mother on the screen would offer, for example, the perfect scenario for the *planctus Mariae*, the lament of the Virgin at the foot of the Cross. This poem, which was introduced in France and Italy in the twelfth century both in Latin and the vernacular, expressed the doctrine of Mary as co-redemptrix so central to the Servite cult.¹⁸⁷ The recital of the *planctus* usually accompanied the rituals of Holy Week and was commonly inserted into Passion plays performed during that time.¹⁸⁸

It is undeniable that the imagery created by the objects on the screen – the crucifix, the sculpture of the Virgin, and Riccio's reliefs with the Stories of the True Cross and Saint Martin – was meant to compose the ideal setting for many occasions, both ordinary and exceptional ones. An example is the feast of the Santa Annunziata, in honor of the Madonna and incarnation of Christ, the church's patron saints, which belonged to the first category. According to Sansovino, anniversaries of this kind were commemorated with great solemnity in Venice. Churches were crowded and filled with music, their columns and pilasters lavishly decorated with rich fabrics, and the altars

¹⁸⁷ Parker, "Architecture as Liturgical Setting," 291.

¹⁸⁸ Several other hymns to the Cross sung in processions or particular festivities would have instead found a correspondence in Riccio's stories, since some of their texts refer to episodes from the Legend of the True Cross and their protagonists portrayed as by the Paduan artist. See Szövérfy, Joseph. "Crux fidelis...Prolegomena to a History of the Holy Cross Hymns," in *Traditio*, vol. 22 (1966), 1-41.

were brightly illuminated and laden with silver.¹⁸⁹ The anniversary of the Servite church was made even more special by the fact that the feast of the Annunciation, one of the main religious events of the Venetian calendar, coincided with the traditional date of March 25, the day that marked the foundation of Venice and the Crucifixion of Christ.¹⁹⁰ It is significant that on this yearly occasion, the Doge attended a special mass in the Basilica of San Marco, while the members of the Scuola Grande di San Marco honored Santa Maria dei Servi with their presence.¹⁹¹

A Hypothesis for the Reconstruction of the Choir Screen in Santa Maria dei Servi

The reconstruction of the screen in Santa Maria dei Servi is useful to determine more precisely the exact location and proportions of the altar of the True Cross. Unfortunately, as in the case of the altar itself, little is known about the screen's format. No reproduction survives, neither in print nor painting, to document the original appearance of the interior of Santa Maria dei Servi and of its 1498 choir screen once positioned at the core of the sacred space. The only exception is a drawing by the architect Antonio Visentini with the caption "Choir that is in the church of the Servi," dated around 1730-40 (fig. 81).¹⁹² Although it is not unlikely that Visentini may have visited the Servite church before the demolition of the partition wall, it is improbable that his image captures the likeness of the screen.¹⁹³ The drawing is not compatible with the

¹⁸⁹ Renier, Alessandro. *Le Feste Ducali, dello Stato e Sagre Popolari* (Venice: Filippo Editori, 2009), 267.

¹⁹⁰ Sanudo, *De origine*, 13.

¹⁹¹ Renier, *Le Feste Ducali*, 134; Vicentini, *Santa Maria de' Servi in Venezia*, 20.

¹⁹² Bassi, Elena. *Tracce di chiese veneziane distrutte. Ricostruzioni dai disegni di Antonio Visentini* (Venice: Ist. Veneto di Scienze, Lettere e Arti, 1997), 9, 170.

¹⁹³ As Paola Modesti seems to believe, see Modesti, "Recinzioni con colonne nelle chiese Veneziane," note 41, 56.

earliest writers' descriptions of the structure. It has been suggested that it possibly illustrates the *barco* or *coro pensile* built above the main entrance around 1560 but some scholars have dismissed this hypothesis as well. On the basis of the data provided by a survey of the main façade's remains, Pavon states that the choir above the entrance must have had five and not six arcades as seen in Visentini's "capriccio," the central one corresponding to the main door and the others hosting chapels underneath.¹⁹⁴ This idea is supported by Bisson in his blueprint of the Servite church's interior (fig. 75, *e* in the floor plan).¹⁹⁵

The few secure data that can be gathered about the Servite screen are based solely on written sources. The earliest document to mention this structure is the entry on Santa Maria dei Servi from the Apostolic Visit of 1581. At that time, the friars' choir had already been moved above the main entrance in the *coro pensile* but the partition wall commissioned by Donato for the previous choir was still standing, as the report acknowledges. In a concise description of the building's interior, under the section "Status Ecclesiae," the apostolic *nunzio* Lorenzo Campeggi and the bishop of Verona, Agostino Valier, talk of:

"A large church with a nave so ancient has an honorable roof with wooden beams following the plan of the nave, a floor partly made of square stones partly of wooden beams, made without balconies/terraces, a straight wall, a crucifix, a pulpit, an organ, pillars for the holy water, a choir suspended above the main door, painted doors."¹⁹⁶

¹⁹⁴ Pavon, *La memoria di un tempio*, 53.

¹⁹⁵ Bisson, *Meravigliose macchine di giubilo*, fig. 164, 225.

¹⁹⁶ "Ecclesia ampla cum una navi tantum vetusta, habet tectum ex asseribus honorifice ad formam navis constructum, pavimentum partim ex lapide quadrata partim ex asseribus, sine solariis confectum, parietem rectam, crucifixum, suggestum, organum, pilas pro aqua benedicta, chorum pensile super porta(m) maiorem, fores tictas," ASVa, Congr. Vescovi e Regolari, Visita Ap., 96, f.68v. The translation is mine. In an appendix to her essay Modesti transcribed only part of this passage, omitting the information about the "straight wall," Modesti, "Recinzioni con colonne nelle chiese Veneziane," 64.

Despite its concise style, this overview of the church's interior is quite informative since it lists all the essential components of the building. After examining the roof and the floor, the two visitors notice a straight wall with a crucifix and a pulpit, certainly the old screen, along with the main organ hanging nearby.¹⁹⁷ It is interesting that they did not seem to be bothered by the presence of the screen and simply annotated its existence, not specifying the appearance or function. Moreover a call for its removal was not issued, as it was for the two altars that were leaning against it, namely the altar of the True Cross and the altar of Saint Martin.¹⁹⁸

No further specific information is offered by the next source, the archival document attesting the demolition of the screen in 1729. The screen is simply defined as a *divisorio*, meaning generically a partition element with no specification about its format. The only feature that the passage underlines is the presence of three openings, described as arches; the central one, which is the largest, leading to the choir, the lateral ones used to walk around it.¹⁹⁹ The particular detail of the three openings is at the core of Corner's posthumous description of the choir screen, so far the most detailed one. The Venetian senator and procurator of the church of Santa Maria dei Servi, talks of the structure as "a wall made of precious Greek marble, exceptional for its grace and elegance," with three openings on it. The one in front of the façade ornamented with columns and giving access to the choir, the two lateral ones leading to the smaller parts of

¹⁹⁷ In 1581 for the first time Venice was forced to allow the apostolic officials to visit its religious institutions. For the story of the event and the fierce opposition with which Venetian authorities tried until the end to avoid the visit, see Tramontin, Silvio. "La visita apostolica del 1581 a Venezia," in *Studi veneziani*, IX (1967), 453-533.

¹⁹⁸ See above 18-19.

¹⁹⁹ ASVe, Archivio del Convento di Santa Maria dei Servi, busta 4, c. 147, published by Vicentini, *I Servi di Maria nei documenti*, II, 43-44. The entire passage is commentated below.

the church.²⁰⁰ Corner addresses the screen both as a *parete* and a *barco*, using the two terms as synonyms.

Although the materials gathered so far do not allow for precise re-construction of the Servite screen, it is still possible to imagine how the complex looked by comparing the references collected above with the evidence of other similar structures in Venice and elsewhere. The impression that one may get is that the format of the screen at the Servites was a hybrid of a wall and a *barco*, a combination of the *septum* at the Frari and the *ponte* in San Michele in Isola (figs. 64, 67). The consistency with which the sources refers to this *arredo* as a wall certainly means that, despite the three arches/openings, the overall effect must have looked like a solid wall, probably topped by a platform. It must have been an element architecturally independent from the choir precinct that it served since the removal of the friars' stalls in 1560s did not have an impact on it. The structure was completed by a crucifix and a pulpit as it can be inferred from the apostolic notes: crucifixes were commonly projecting from the top of screens, while pulpits could be either attached to the sides or the platform above. What distinguished the Servite screen from analogous bridge-like examples in Venice was its loggia, which was characterized by three and not five arcades as still visible in the surviving *barco* in San Michele in Isola and recorded for the destroyed complexes in Santi Giovanni e Paolo, Santa Maria della Carità, and Sant'Antonio di Castello (figs. 74, 82).²⁰¹ Besides, these openings were not of the same size. The main arch at the center seems to have been more ornate – it was framed by columns – and was larger than the lateral ones to allow for a better view of the main altar at the opposite end of the choir precinct.

²⁰⁰ Corner, *Ecclesiae Venetae*, 24.

²⁰¹ For bibliographical references see note no. 34.

The only screen that so far seems to offer a plausible resemblance for the Servite “wall” is the *ponte* that once stood in the church of Santa Maria del Carmine in Florence (fig. 83). This structure was a solid wall with three arches that served as doors and a platform above, supported by two large pilasters in the center and the church’s walls on the sides. Two altars were installed against the central pilasters, similar to the position that I assume the altars of the True Cross and Saint Martin had in the Servite screen.²⁰² What induces me to think that the reconstruction of the Santa Maria del Carmine *ponte* could be associated with the original appearance of the Servite ensemble and give a sense of its proportions, is also the consideration that both buildings were considerably large and shared the same plan: a single, long, and narrow nave crossed roughly at the center by a screen.²⁰³ The main distinction between these two partition walls may have been the style. While the *ponte* at the Carmine, built before 1439, was Gothic in its architecture, the Servite wall, erected in 1498, was likely a classicizing structure following the examples in Santa Maria della Carità and San Michele in Isola, and exemplified in the painted model by Fra Carnevale (figs. 84-85).²⁰⁴ Moreover, it was decorated with marble and was probably polychromatic.²⁰⁵ Talking about the two altars in Santa Maria dei Servi that were made up with the materials originally from the destroyed screen, respectively the altar of san Pellegrino Laziosi and of the Seven Founders, Pavon and Cauzzi record

²⁰² Similarly in Santa Maria Novella, according to Hall, altars were located between the doors. Fra Angelico made those tabernacles for relics, Hall, “The Ponte in S. Maria Novella,” 159.

²⁰³ Fabbri, *Il luogo teatrale a Firenze*, 59-60.

²⁰⁴ Fra Carnevale’s painting was well known in Venice, see Gasparotto, “Andrea Riccio a Venezia, 399.

²⁰⁵ Following the example of the screen in Sant’Antonio of Padua.

Rovigno stone, porphyry, Carrara marble, Istrian stone, and African marble.²⁰⁶ The white, red, and black of the stones and marbles on the screen would have paralleled the colors of the marble floor tiles.²⁰⁷

My elevation drawings combine together the idea taken from the reconstruction of the Carmine's *barco* with the few surviving data from the church of Santa Maria dei Servi (figs. 86-87). What I have proposed is that the Servite screen was a rather solid wall with some depth and a walkable space at the top, pierced by three main openings. The space between these arched doorways was ample enough to accommodate the erection and use of the two altars of the True Cross and Saint Martin (fig. 88). The ensemble was probably not too tall as a way to balance the extreme length and height of the church. According to the survey executed at the time of the building's demolition and the measurements of the extant remains, the Servite Gothic complex seems to have been a quite impressive building. The church had one long nave ending in three apsidal chapels and its perimeter was 60 x 217 Venetian feet, which translates to circa 20.58 x 74.43 meters. The walls still standing are 17 meters high and did not probably rise originally above 20 meters for reasons of stability (fig. 89).²⁰⁸ Since the height of the screen commissioned by Girolamo Donato is unknown, I have used the measurements from the surviving lateral portal as a point of reference and I have postulated that the partition wall

²⁰⁶ Pavon and Cauzzi, *La memoria di un tempio*, 65-66. In the space under the arches of the *ponte* at the Carmine there were tombs as it was likely for the screen at the Servites according to a reference in Cicogna, Antonio. *Delle iscrizioni veneziane*. Bologna: Forni Editore, 1982, V, 599.

²⁰⁷ Vicentini, *Santa Maria de' Servi in Venezia*, 47.

²⁰⁸ The buttresses measure 26 cm and the walls are 85 cm thick. The bricks used, called *altinelle*, are 17 x 8 x 5h cm. All these data have been collected with the precious assistance of Engineer Riccardo Tommasi and Architect Sara Dalla Caneva who also assisted me in the re-construction of the church's floor plan and the screen's elevation.

was around 8.70 meters in height (fig. 86). The reconstruction of the altar of the True Cross that I have provided in the previous chapter is also based on this assumption.

Conclusions

The analysis and reconstruction of the choir screen in Santa Maria dei Servi is fundamental for a better understanding of the perception and uses of the altar of the True Cross. If the uniqueness of this liturgical structure was already evident in the selection of the materials and design, its crucial role in the context of Santa Maria dei Servi in Venice was certainly tied to its original location. The altar stood against the screen's façade which was positioned roughly at the center of the sacred space. As we have seen, altars on screens were, at first, not different from their fellow companions around the church. Sponsored by private patrons, they were commonly employed for the masses of the dead dedicated to the members of the families which benefitted from their space. Their importance, however, was related to their visibility and accessibility. Normally, altars positioned on the screen's western façade were rather prestigious, since they were the focus of the entire lay community and functioned as a sort of lay alternative to the high altar. I believe that the altar of the True Cross – and later the one of Saint Martin – coincided with this type of altar, specifically with the most representative one from this category known as the Cross altar. Named after its proximity with the Crucifix image usually hanging from choir screens, the Cross altar could be either one liturgical station located at the center of the screen's façade or two similar structures framing its main entrance, as in the case of the altars in Santa Maria dei Servi. The iconographical

program of the narrative reliefs from the two Servite altars would have made them particularly fitted candidates for the role of Cross altars.

The liturgical importance of the altar of the True Cross was further strengthened by the specific circumstances under which the Servite screen was commissioned. This partition wall was erected by the patrician Girolamo Donato around 1498, during a hectic phase of construction in Santa Maria dei Servi. In 1491, when the church was dedicated, its apsidal area was still unfinished and unadorned, and remained such for some time as a number of subsequent papal indulgences seem to point out. Donato knew that the church's status was not attractive enough to incite the much needed participation and donations on part of the lay community. That is why he financed the construction of the screen and of the altar of the True Cross, respectively as a substitute presbytery and high altar devoted to the faithful's service. The situation in the Servite church was, in reality, not dissimilar from the condition of other mendicant complexes in Venice, as Humfrey has emphasized. Similarly to Santa Maria dei Servi, the Franciscan Santa Maria Gloriosa dei Frari and the Dominican Santi Giovanni and Paolo, among others, apparently did not have properly decorated high altars in the fifteenth century or at least no information exists to the contrary.²⁰⁹ This consideration induces one to think that their screens, and altars on them, were the liturgical focus of these complexes. What makes the Servite case unique is the longevity of the screen's and its altars' existence which played a prominent part for a long uninterrupted period of time. They indeed stood in place even when the friars' choir was moved to a different location within the church and thus the primary use of the screen as a demarcation point between the friars' church and the laymen's church was unnecessary. The reasons for the Servites to preserve the screen and its altars may

²⁰⁹ The same is true for Santa Maria del Carmine and Santo Stefano, see Humfrey, 1993, 39.

have been both of practical and liturgical nature. On the one hand, the main chapel remained an “open construction site” up to mid-sixteenth century and again toward the end of the sixteenth century well into the seventeenth century. On the other hand, a variety of celebrations – both ordinary and extraordinary – seem to have involved the partition wall and its altars, particularly the altar of the True Cross. Some of these feasts – such as the *Inventio* of the True Cross and the Exaltation of the Cross – found a suitable iconographical backdrop in the ornamentation of Donato’s altar and engaged the participation of the most prestigious confraternity associated with the Servites, that of the Lucchesi. Their chapel of the Volto Santo – which still survives today – was physically linked to the choir screen.

In terms of format, the Servite choir screen seems to have been as original as the altar that it hosted. Even though it was built around the same time as other renowned partition structures in Venice, that is, toward the end of the fifteenth century, none of them seems to provide a convincing model for its construction. Relying on the little secure information about its format, I contend that the Servite screen belonged to the loggia type which is represented by the existing *barco* in San Michele in Isola. It probably shared with this structure the elegant classicizing profile, the *all’antica* ornamentation, as well as the presence of the balcony at the top which was likely furnished with a pulpit and a crucifix. Contrary to San Michele and other similar examples in Venetian churches, the Servite structure had three rather than the more common five openings, the central one larger, thus resembling the destroyed *ponte* in Santa Maria del Carmine in Florence. As in that Florentine church, the screen stood roughly at the center of the single long nave and had two altars prominently displayed at

each side of the main entrance. On the basis of some estimates that I have made using the few surviving measurements from the Servite building, I believe that the overall ensemble was not too imposing in its dimensions. It was meant to offer the faithful a welcoming and approachable space that mediated the impressive length and height of the church's interior and provided a personal and intimate experience.

Chapter Three. The Stories of the True Cross: Iconography and Audience

The city of Venice boasted quite an impressive number of relics of the True Cross. Alongside the prestigious specimens in the San Marco Treasury, almost every parish and monastic church in the lagoon claimed to own a piece of the Holy Wood making the *Serenissima* second only to Rome in the possession of this most precious relic.²¹⁰ However, only a few of these alleged particles from the Cross' wood received the honorable commemoration granted to the piece enshrined in Santa Maria dei Servi. Enclosed within a cross-shaped reliquary made of gilded silver and quartz, the Servite relic was preserved on an altar noteworthy for its original format, fine materials, and prominent location. The particular treatment that the piece received was probably related to its special status. Apparently, the fragment in the mother church of the Servite order was the only sample of the Cross' titulus preserved in Venice and its authenticity was

²¹⁰ According to an inventory dated 1634 that I found in the Venetian archives, these are the churches that owned a relic of the Cross: San Marco (several pieces), San Geminiano, San Servolo, Sant'Antonio di Torcello, San Vito e Modesto a Burano, San Mauro di Burano, Scuola di San Giovanni Battista in Murano, San Giacomo di Murano, San Giorgio in Alga, Oratorio di San Francesco del deserto, Sant'Andrea al Lido, San Archangelo Michele of Murano, San Nicolò al Lido, Sant'Elena in Isola, Scuola della Misericordia, Scuola della Carità (donated by Cardinal Basilios Bessarion), Scuola di San Giovanni Evangelista, Scuola di San Rocco, Scuola di San Teodoro, Church and Convent of the Augustinian Nuns at the Giudecca, Ognissanti, Santa Maria Maggiore, San Biagio alla Giudecca, Santi Cosma e Damiano, San Sebastiano, Santa Maria dei Carmini, Santissima Trinità alla Giudecca, San Nicolò, Santa Maria Gloriosa dei Frari, San Matteo in Rialto, San Tommaso, Sant'Andrea, Santa Chiara, San Nicola da Tolentino, Madonna dei Miracoli, Santa Caterina, Santa Maria dei Crociferi, Santa Maria dei Servi, San Giovanni Crisostomo, Santa Maria Nuova, Santa Maddalena, Santa Fosca, San Leonardo, San Sepolcro, Santa Giustina, San Lorenzo, Sant'Anna, Santi Giovanni e Paolo, San Francesco della Vigna, San Francesco di Paola, San Giovanni in Bragora, San Martino, San Pietro di Castello, Santo Stefano, San Giuliano, San Luca, San Samuele, Santa Maria Zobenigo, San Matteo, San Donato a Murano, Santi Marco e Andrea in Murano. ASVe, Procuratori di San Marco, Procuratori de Supra, Chiesa, Atti, 83. In a subsequent inventory, dated 1666, other churches are listed: Zitelle, Sant'Andrea in Isola, San Tomà, San Rocco e Santa Margherita, Corpus Domini, San Cassiano, Ascensione, San Mauro in Murano, Santa Croce alla Giudecca, Compagnia di Gesù, Sant'Antonio di Castello, San Vitale. ASVe, Procuratori di San Marco, Procuratori de Supra, Chiesa, Atti, 84. Some of these relics are listed again in the modern account by Frolow, Anatole. *La Rélique de la Vraie Croix. Recherches sur le développement d'un culte*. (Paris: Institut Français d'Etudes Byzantines, 1961).

guaranteed by the provenance from the most authentic repository of Christ's True Cross in Italy, namely the church of Santa Croce in Gerusalemme in Rome. Moreover, as Sanudo emphasizes in his *De origine*, this was the only other relic from the Holy Wood in Venice to work miracles beside the famous piece preserved in the Scuola of San Giovanni Evangelista.²¹¹ Although no record survives about the devotional practices associated with the Servite specimen, what remains of the altar dedicated to it can account for its importance. Riccio's five bronze reliefs attest the kind of veneration that the relic attracted and what its acquisition meant both for the establishment of the Servite order in Venice and for the consolidation of the Venetian myth of the Holy Republic.

As chapter one emphasized, the format of the Servite altar cannot be compared to any extant structure especially in regard to the inclusion of Riccio's four bronze narrative reliefs. Inserted at the bottom of the reliquary's doors as a sort of *predella* – a quite long one! – the panels are rare for their medium and the stories that they recount. No other painting, sculpture, or illumination, in or outside Venice, represents an analogous selection of episodes from the legend of the True Cross in such a credible antiquarian style. The sophistication of the reliefs' design and the multilayered message that they convey, put them within the tradition of larger cycles dedicated to the celebration of Christ's Cross. The present chapter will discuss in detail the specific iconography adopted by Riccio and his patron Donato, stressing the ways in which it was designed to address and respond to the needs of different audiences: first and foremost the lay community and the Servite friars.

²¹¹ The translation is mine: "Queste sono chiesie devotissime per li miracoli cotidiani...Et la croxe dove è il titolo, a i Servi (These are the most devoted churches for daily miracles...And the cross reliquary where the titulus is preserved, at the Servite church)" Sanudo, *De origine*, 49.

The Iconography and Sources of the Stories of the True Cross

The reliefs at the Ca' d'Oro represent four different moments from the story of the True Cross. Following a chronological order, the series includes the *Dream of Constantine* and his victory against Maxentius along with the *Discovery and Miracle of the True Cross* overseen by his mother Helena (figs. 1-4). Before the panels designed by Riccio, no other known work of art had ever focused mainly on the same selection of episodes. The scenes chosen for the Servite altar coincide with the some of the most crucial moments in the history of Christianity, which constitute as well the core of the True Cross' legend as it originated around the fourth and fifth centuries. The events from the life of Constantine appeared first in the historical accounts of Lactantius Firmianus and Eusebius of Caesarea.²¹² Around a century later, they were combined with Helena's deeds, first in the Latin translation and continuation of Eusebius' *History of the Church* by Rufinus of Aquileia and, in a more elaborated version, in the apocryphal *Acts of Judas Cyriacus*.²¹³ It is noteworthy that the closest examples to Riccio's selection are two of the earliest known representations of the Cross legend, which drew from these resources for reference: an illuminated page from the late ninth-century *Homilies* of Gregorius Nazianzus in the Bibliothèque Nationale de France and the mid-twelfth century enamels in the *Stavelot Triptych* at the Morgan Library & Museum (figs. 90-93). Even though the

²¹² Lactantius' *De mortibus persecutorum* was written just before the Edict of Milan (313 A.D.) while Eusebius' *Ecclesiastica historia* was compiled probably before 326.

²¹³ According to Luzietti, the legend of Judas connects the mission of Helena to Constantine's vision in a more explicit way than any other previous source, Luzietti, Marilena. *Culto e rappresentazioni della Croce nell'età della Controriforma. Itinerario nei territori dello Stato Pontificio*. Tesi di dottorato, Sapienza Università di Roma, 2011-2012, 25. Rufinus of Aquileia's translation and addition to Eusebius' *History of the Church* was written around 402 A.D. The first published edition dates 1474 but includes neither the name nor the location of the publishing house, see Eusebius of Caesarea Bishop of Caesarea and Rufinus of Aquileia. *Storia della Chiesa*, translated by Lorenzo Datrino (Rome: Città Nuova Editrice, 1986), 9.

stories that they portray do not match exactly the selection depicted in Riccio's reliefs, both works center mainly on the figures of Constantine and his mother as does the Servite altar. While in the *Homilies*, Constantine's dream and battle are paired with Helena interrogating the Jews and supervising the finding of the Cross, in the *Stavelot Triptych*, Constantine's Baptism and Helena questioning the Jews are combined with the four scenes seen later in the Venetian bronzes.²¹⁴

Donato may have consulted the same original accounts used by the *Homilies'* illuminator or the creator of the *Stavelot's* enamels. The patrician had broad literary interests and was certainly familiar with both Latin and Greek, considering his activity as a philologist and translator.²¹⁵ It is, however, more likely that he may have relied upon the easily accessible and well-known *Golden Legend* by Jacobus de Voragine, a hagiographic encyclopedia compiled around 1250. Not an original work, Jacobus' text was instead a compendium of historical accounts and apocryphal writings, conceived as a manual for preachers and organized according to specific feast days. The book had become a bestseller in Venice in the second half of the fifteenth century when the first edition in the vernacular was published there by Nicolò Malerbi.²¹⁶ In 1492, shortly

²¹⁴ The narrative character of the *Homilies'* illustrations is unprecedented in Byzantine art, where the commemoration of Constantine and Helena as standing hieratic figures is more common. In his version of the stories, the artist seems to have followed the account of Lactantius for the dream, of Eusebius for the battle, and of Judas Cyriacus for the episodes of Helena. The decorator of the *Stavelot Triptych* relied on Eusebius/Rufinus' *History* for the scenes of the dream and battle, on the apocryphal fifth-century *Acts of Sylvester* for the Baptism of Constantine, and on the text of Judas Cyriacus for the section on Helena. See, Voelkle, *The Stavelot Triptych*, 12-16; Luziotti, *Culto e rappresentazioni della Croce nell'età della Controriforma*, 37-48.

²¹⁵ Donato's interests will be discussed in the following chapter.

²¹⁶ Humfrey, *The Altarpiece in Renaissance Venice*, 59.

before Donato commissioned his reliefs from Riccio, an illustrated edition appeared, which was probably the one employed by Riccio in the creation of his bronze panels.²¹⁷

The legend of the True Cross is narrated in the chapter dedicated to the *Inventio of the Cross*, the feast of the *Discovery of the Holy Wood* celebrated on May 3rd.²¹⁸ Before addressing the crucial moment of the story - Helena's finding of the Cross - Jacobus provides a long preamble in which he discusses the possible origin of Christ's wood from the Garden of Heaven and its subsequent encounter with King Solomon and the Queen of Sheba. The two had the opportunity of witnessing the wood's divine properties before it was chosen to sculpt Christ's instrument of Passion. After a brief diversion on the different qualities of wood that were probably applied to create the Cross, finally the author presents the story of Constantine's conversion to Christianity, the event that really set off the discovery of the True Cross on part of his mother Helena.²¹⁹ The overall section is built in such a way as to make it clear to the reader that there would have been no Cross and, especially, no triumph of Christianity without Constantine's vision and subsequent victory against Maxentius. In order to reinforce the historical foundation of these events in the emperor's life, Jacobus carefully organizes his materials. He first introduces and discredits the traditions that seem unfounded to him and then focuses on

²¹⁷ According to D'Essling, the first illustrated edition was published in Venice by Manfredo de Monteferrato on December 10th, 1492, although an edition that appeared earlier that same year, on May 16th, published by Matteo Capcasa is preserved at the Morgan Library & Museum in New York. D'Essling includes in his list the edition by Bartolomeo Zanni dated December 5th, 1499, also part of the collection of the Morgan Library & Museum. Massèna, Victor, duc de Rivoli, then prince d'Essling. *Les livres à figures vénitiens de la fin du XVe siècle et du commencement du XVIe : études sur l'art de la gravure sur bois à Venise* (Florence: L. S. Olschki; Paris: H. Leclerc, 1907-1914), part 1, vol. II, 124-125, 128.

²¹⁸ According to Gregory of Tours, Helena's discovery happened on that day in 326. Voelkle, *The Stavelot Triptych*, 16.

²¹⁹ Le Goff, Jacques. *In Search of Sacred Time: Jacobus de Voragine and the Legend of the True Cross*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014, 108-109.

what it is considered the most reliable source – among modern historians as well – namely the *History of the Church*. Like the author of the *History*, Eusebius, and his translator, Rufinus, Jacobus conveys the idea that the triumph of Constantine as the first Christian emperor was guided by God as part of a specific divine plan²²⁰:

“However, the Ecclesiastical History says that the victory was achieved in a different way: at the time when Maxentius had invaded almost entirely the Roman Empire, the emperor Constantine came to him to engage in a battle at the Milvian Bridge. Once he saw the powerful army set against him and the myriad of soldiers, he became anxious. Looking up to the sky, he began to pray asking for divine assistance and saw in the eastern portion of the sky the sign of the Cross, glimmering of reddish glow with angels surrounding it who said to him: Constantine, in this sign you will triumph. As it is reported in the Tripartite History, while Constantine was wondering what that meant, in the upcoming night Christ appeared to him with the same sign that he had seen in the sky and he ordered him to have an image made of it to assist him in the battles. Then, Constantine, reassured about the victory, made the sign of the cross, which he had seen in the sky, in his forehead and changed the sign on the military standards carrying a golden cross in his own hand. After this, he prayed God to not allow his right hand, which has been fortified by the salutiferous sign, to get stained with Roman blood and to grant him victory against the tyrant without bloodshed... This is the story of the discovery of the Holy Cross as it recounted in the Ecclesiastical History which is concordant with the chronicle and seems to be more authentic than the one declaimed in the churches...”²²¹

²²⁰ Eusebius, *Storia della chiesa*, 42-43.

²²¹ The translation is mine: “Beche altramente narra lhistoria ecclesiastica essere conseguita tale victoria: dice dunq havendo Massentio assalito limperio romano & tutto quasi occupato venneli icontra constantino imperator a volet combattere con quello si incontro i lui appresso al ponte Mambino. Veduto el potente exercito cotra di lui & essere una innumerabile multitudine di combattenti populi. Molto anxiato & pieno de angustie alzando frequentemente gli ochi al cielo pregando che gli fusse madato el divino aiuto vide nel somno in cielo verso la parte dorientel segno della croce rutilare di resplendente fuocho & essere intorno a qllo gli angeli e dirli. Sapi constantino che i questo tale segno vicierai. Et si chome se dice nella historia tripartita metre che constantino se maravegliava che cosa fusse questo ne la superveniente nocte gli aparve christo co tal segno da esso vedeva nel cielo & comandoli che facesse fare una figura di tale segno elqual sarebe in aiuto suo ne li cogressi dele bataglie. Alhora constantino facto lieto & securo dela victoria feceli ql segno de croce che veduto havea in cielo sopra la fronte sua & transformo li militari stendardi ne segnali della croce portado ne la mane drecta la aurata croce. Doppo qsto fece la oratione a Dio che egli non permetta essere maculata dal romano sangue la mano dextra sua laqual fortificato haveva con salutifero segno ma che li prestasse del tyranno la victoria senza spargimeto de sangue... Questa dunq historia della inventione della croce sancta laqual si trova nelle ecclesiastice historie a laqual etiam e consonante la cronica pare esser molto piu authentica che quella che se recita per le chiese...” Jacobus, de Voragine. *Legendario de sancti vulgar storiado* (Venice: Matteo Capcasa (di Codeca), 16 May 1492), folio LXXXIIIv. Even though

The passage above was certainly the one that inspired the first section of Riccio's stories. However, it is difficult at first to find a precise correspondence between text and image, since the artist's iconography shows great originality of invention. In the first episode of the series Riccio offers an unprecedented interpretation of Eusebius' account (fig. 94). Rather than representing Constantine's daytime vision and nocturnal dream as two distinct moments, or favoring one over the other, he combines them together. Constantine is not asleep in his bed at night receiving Christ's visit; on the contrary he is resting on a throne, surrounded by his soldiers, while the cross is being carried by a group of angels in the center of the sky as a reminder of the vision that he had at midday. Riccio provides a visual translation for the wondering and meditation that the emperor went through right

Jacobus says that he is reporting Constantine's deeds according to the *History of the Church*, it is more likely that the text he consulted was another work written by Eusebius shortly after the emperor's death in 337, *The Life of Constantine*. While in Eusebius' *History of the Church* the vision and dream of Constantine are not included (IX, 1-8, Constantine is simply said to have achieved victory against Maxentius thanks to the protection of God), in *The Life of Constantine* they are accurately described (I, 28-32): "About the time of the midday sun, when day was just turning, he said that he saw with his own eyes, up in the sky and resting over the sun, a crossed shaped trophy formed from light, and a text attached to it which said, 'By this conquer'. Amazement at the spectacle seized both him and the whole company of soldiers which was then accompanying him on a campaign he was conducting somewhere, and witnessed the miracle. He was, he said, wondering to himself what the manifestation might mean; then, while he meditated, and thought long and hard, night overtook him. Thereupon, as he slept, the Christ of God appeared to him with the sign which had appeared in the sky, and urged him to make himself a copy of the sign which had appeared in the sky, and to use this as protection against the attacks of the enemy," from Eusebius, of Caesarea Bishop of Caesarea. *Life of Constantine*, translated by Avril Cameron and Stuart George Hall (Oxford: Clarendon Press; New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 81. In Rufinus' translation of Eusebius' *History* the version of the story is quite different. There Constantine is described as having seen the cross in a dream and, when he awakened in terror, an angel appeared to him saying "in hoc conquer" (Voelkle, *The Stavelot Triptych*, 12). In the first Italian translation of the text of Eusebius/Rufinus, published in Venice in 1547, the dream and the consequent apparition of the angels are followed by Constantine making the sign of the Cross, a detail included by Jacobus himself; see Eusebius, of Caesarea Bishop of Caesarea. *L'istoria ecclesiastica. Tradotta dal latino nella lingua volgare* (In Venetia per Michele Tramezino, 1547), 236 (IX, 9).

after the first divine manifestation.²²² Unable to understand with human rationality the uncertain auspice that he had seen in the sky, Constantine relinquishes vigilance over his senses and falls asleep, preparing his mind to receive the prophecy directly from God in a dream. This is exactly the moment captured by Riccio, when the emperor dozes off and he is ready to receive the key to interpret the divine message that was sent to him, following the rules of Roman divinatory practice.²²³ Constantine sits on a Solomonic throne adorned with a sphinx, a clear reference to the wisdom with which he is endowed and to his role as the chosen one. A number of figures squeeze around the emperor, evidently unaware of the important event happening right in front of them: the poorly dressed youth crouched at the throne's feet, who negligently caresses the sphinx's wing; the child right behind Constantine, who touches lightly his arm; and the beardless man on the emperor's right side who stares into space making an awkward gesture (figs. 95-98). These people stand for the fool who is unable to grasp the truth revealed, in open contrast to the status of Constantine, the illuminated emperor who will change the course of Christian history.²²⁴ In his *De Sculptura* Gauricus, a humanist friend of Riccio, further elucidates the contrast between the posture and state of mind of Constantine and the fools encircling his figure:

“In addition to rest and motion, there is also the attitude of rest. Rest can be noble or ignoble. The noble rest is, for example, that of philosophers that are meditating on death suspended on a basket, such as Socrates or Aristophanes. The

²²² In his *Life of Constantine*, Eusebius emphasizes more than Jacobus this interval of thinking: “He was, he said, wondering to himself what the manifestation might mean; then, while he meditated, and thought long and hard, night overtook him,” Eusebius, I, 28-32, see Eusebius, *Life of Constantine*, 81.

²²³ Calcani, Giuliana. “La pratica divinatoria e la visione della croce in Costantino” in *La Croce. Iconografia e interpretazione (secoli I – inizio XVI)*, atti del Convegno internazionale di studi (Napoli, December 1999), ed. by Boris Ulianich. Napoli: Elio de Rosa Editore, 2007, 225-226.

²²⁴ Figures of this kind appear frequently in fifteenth-century Venetian art, see Gentili, Augusto. *Le storie di Carpaccio*. Venezia, i Turchi, gli Ebrei. Venice: Marsilio Editori, 1996, 131-133.

ignoble rest instead has lately become familiar to our painters and it is represented in particular by our Mantegna, in whose works the servants are sometimes lying down in a negligent attitude, sometimes are yawning while attending to the master's orders, and sometimes are simply motionless and foolish. If this attitude is represented in the proper manner it provides the whole composition with pleasantness and grace, thanks to the variety."²²⁵

The beardless fool and the Roman emperor reappear again, side by side, at the center of the composition (fig. 99). The former is scratching his head, showing even more his lack of awareness, while the latter is depicted making a gesture that has not yet been fully understood. According to the most recent interpretation of the scene, Constantine would be the kneeling figure on the ground being baptized.²²⁶ However, no holy water can be spotted anywhere in the picture and the person performing the rite is neither a bishop nor a Pope as traditions report.²²⁷ I contend that Constantine may be identified with the general standing roughly at the center. A number of details seem to support this hypothesis. Like the sleeping emperor, this figure has the most ornate cuirass, a sign of distinction for Roman emperors and generals as is the laurel crown that can be seen

²²⁵ The translation is mine: "Oltre lo stato ed il moto c'è anche l'atteggiamento del riposo. Il riposo può essere nobile o ignobile. Nobile è per esempio quello di filosofi che meditano sulla morte sospesi in una cesta, come Socrate o Aristofane. Quello ignobile invece, ormai da diverso tempo è divenuto familiare ai nostril pittori e viene particolarmente rappresentato dal nostro Mantegna, nelle cui opera i servi ora stanno distesi in attitudine negligente, ora attendono sbadigliando i comandi dei padroni, ora stanno immobili e istupiditi. Se questo atteggiamento verrà realizzato in maniera opportuna conferirà all'insieme piacevolezza e grazia con la varietà," Gaurico, Pomponio. *De Sculptura*. Ed. by Paolo Cutolo (Naples: Edizioni Scientifiche Italiane, 1999), 215.

²²⁶ Augusti in *Rinascimento e passione per l'antico*, cat. no. 89, 431.

²²⁷ Eusebius in his *Life of Constantine* states that the emperor was baptized shortly before his death in 337 by the Arian bishop of Nicomedia whose name was also Eusebius. This late baptism was favored by Saint Ambrose and Saint Jerome. Both, like Eusebius, gave Constantine's desire to the baptized in the Jordan as the reason for the postponement. The church did not wish to encourage the practice of such late baptisms, and, for various ecclesiastical and political reasons, it readily accepted as genuine the apocryphal fifth-century *Acts of Silvester* in which Pope Silvester is said to have converted and baptized Constantine earlier in life. Through these acts, which may well have been written in Rome, the papacy assumed a central role in Constantine's baptism and triumph of the church that followed. This account gained great popularity. It was incorporated and illustrated in various liturgical texts. Voelkle, *The Stavelot Triptych*, 14-15.

through his curly hair.²²⁸ From the position of his left hand it seems that he originally was holding something, perhaps a small golden cross such as the one that Constantine was supposed to carry as his sole weapon in the *Battle* scene (fig. 100).

Once that we have established that the standing and sleeping figures are definitively two portrayals of the same person, as their similar physiognomy proves, it is still not clear what the scene at the center represents (fig. 101). The fact that there are two Constantines in the same panel is a sign that two subsequent moments of the same story are narrated, a detail that distinguishes this relief from the rest of the series. Riccio marks clearly the hiatus between these moments. First, he traces an invisible line that separates the two main groups of bystanders, which runs through the back of the stiff figure right behind the standing Constantine. Second, he changes the ornamentation on Constantine's breastplate probably in a sophisticated attempt to emphasize that a major change has occurred in the persona of the emperor. While the sleeping Constantine is still an anxious non-believer who cannot fully grasp the meaning of the vision that he has seen, the figure at the center is a confident person who has embraced a new faith and has decided to fight under the sign of the Cross. This is the reason why the Cross' wood is hovering just above Constantine's head and he is depicted making that same sign on his soldiers' forehead.

²²⁸ The cuirass worn by Roman emperors and generals were usually ornamented on the upper breast with a Gorgon's head, griffin deities, or winged victories completed by acanthus leaves and scrolled tendrils. See D'Amato, Raffaele. *Arms and Armour of the Imperial Roman Soldier. From Marius to Commodus, 112 BC-AD 192* (London: Frontline, 2009), 122-123. The breastplate of the sleeping Constantine seems to be decorated with the bust of a winged victory, while the cuirass worn by the standing emperor seems to show a harpy, a symbol of divine elevation. See Banzato, Davide. "Il candelabro pasquale di Andrea Briosco. Note sulla storia, la committenza, la lettura, le derivazioni dall'antico e da altre fonti figurative," in *Rinascimento e passione per l'antico*, 101-106.

Again, Riccio has interpreted Voragine's text in an original way. Nowhere in his legend does Jacobus mention the moment depicted by Riccio but he does refer to people crossing themselves in three different instances: Constantine, right after his nocturnal encounter with Christ; Judas, Helena's helper, before he dies as a martyr; and lastly the notary, protagonist of the final anecdote, who repels the demons in that way.²²⁹ By taking the cue from Jacobus, Riccio underlines the importance of this gesture as the most ancient and powerful affirmation of faith, an instrument of conversion, and a defensive weapon against evil. Rather than representing the episode when Constantine changes the emblem on his labarum, he illustrates the moment, never recounted by any source, when the emperor introduces his troops to the Christian faith and convinces them of the power of the Cross's sign. The sculptor captures with great accuracy the array of different reactions expressed by the soldiers: trust, wonder, and incredulity. The most forceful emotion is the visible concern that can be read on the face of the knight that probably represents Constantine's son Crispus and whose features conceal Riccio's self-portrait (figs. 102-103).²³⁰ The young general seems to have entered the scene in a rush, probably after noticing the agitation in the army, since he is holding tight his knife's handle.

²²⁹ "Thus Constantine, become pleased and secure about the victory, made that sign that he had seen in the sky on his forehead...And Julian ordered that he [Judas] would be thrown in a boiler filled with hot oil: and since he, making the sign of the cross, was intended to throw himself in spontaneously and asked God to baptize him in the baptismal font, Julian outraged commanded to pierce his chest with a knife: in that way he died...And that [the notary] immediately made the sign of the cross and screamed that he was Christ the Savior's servant: as soon as he made the sign of the cross the multitude of demons disappeared..." Jacobus, *Legendario*, folio LXXXIIIv, LXXXIIIv.

²³⁰ His higher status in comparison to the other knights is underlined by the elaborate breastplate that he is wearing, comparable to the emperor's one. Allen is the one who identified this self-portrait of the artist as Crispus. Allen appropriately emphasizes how this is the sole figure who looks up to witness the sleeping emperor's vision. She believes that the artist picked this role on purpose. Not only Riccio's name translate as Crispus, meaning "with curly hair," but by adopting a noble Roman patronymic the artist intentionally comments on his "noble" status. Riccio had achieved nobility through the practice of his art as much as Flavius Iulius Crispus was renowned

After such an in-depth analysis of the first panel in Riccio's series, it is evident that the title of the relief should be changed to *The Vision of Constantine and the Emperor Making the Sign of the Cross on his Soldiers' Foreheads*.²³¹ These are, indeed, the two moments that Riccio narrates using a totally original iconography. While for the episode of Constantine instructing his soldiers to the new faith the artist did not have any previous example at his disposal, for the moment of the vision he had access to an established tradition. As we have mentioned before, the vision or dream of Constantine was among the first events from the legend of the Cross to be represented. The earliest figurative tradition shows the emperor asleep in his bed being visited by an angel.²³² This version appeared as early as the ninth century in the prayer book known as Wessobrunner Gebetbuch and remained the most popular one for a while since it was adopted by Piero della Francesca himself in his well-known cycle in Arezzo (1452-1466) (figs. 104-105).²³³ It was only with Raphael's frescoes in the Vatican (1519-1524) that the illustration of the midday vision according to Eusebius became more common, with Constantine standing among his troops while the Cross appears in the sky (fig. 106)²³⁴.

for his valorous contribution to the battle field. See Allen, Denise, and Peta Motture, eds. *Andrea Riccio: Renaissance Master of Bronze*, exhibition catalogue (The Frick Collection, New York, 2008). New York: The Frick Collection; London: in association with Philip Wilson, 2008, 33-34; Gasparotto, Davide. "Andrea Riccio a Venezia: sui rilievi con le Storie della Vera Croce per l'altare Donà già in Santa Maria dei Servi," in *Tullio Lombardo: scultore e architetto nella Venezia del rinascimento*, atti del convegno internazionale di studi ed. by Matteo Ceriana (Venezia, Fondazione Giorgio Cini, 2006), Verona: Cierre, 2007, 404-405.

²³¹ Luzietti and I have independently suggested a similar title for Riccio's panel at the same time: Luzietti, *Culto e rappresentazioni della Croce*, 278; Baseggio Omiccioli, Eveline. "Andrea Riccio's Reliefs for the Altar of the True Cross in Santa Maria dei Servi, Venice: a Political Statement within the Sacred Walls," in *Explorations in Renaissance Culture*, 38 (2012), 113-114.

²³² It is probably based on the account of the Acts of Judas Cyriacus, see Luzietti, *Culto e rappresentazioni della Croce*, 25.

²³³ See Luzietti for bibliographical references on the cycle, *Ibid.*, note 309, 98.

²³⁴ Such as the fresco depicting *Constantine's Vision of the Cross* in the Gallery of Geographical Maps in the Vatican Palace, painted by Girolamo Muziano, Cesare Nebbia, and others in 1580-1583.

An interesting version of the same moment was depicted in the Church of the Holy Cross of Agiasmati at Platanistasa in Cyprus around 1500, where the emperor surrounded by his retinue looks up at a starry sky (fig. 107).²³⁵ By deciding to detach their stories from the most common iconography available at the end of the fifteenth century, Donato and Riccio made a bold statement. They became the creators of a new, unparalleled interpretation of the legend that set their work apart within the panorama of the cycles dedicated to the legend of the Cross.

In the *Battle at the Milvian Bridge*, Riccio seems at first to follow more closely the *Golden Legend's* narration (fig. 108). For this particular episode Jacobus relies exclusively on the account of Eusebius of Caesarea, providing a much more concise report of the battle than the one offered by the Greek historian.²³⁶ After the vision Constantine pleads to God to grant him a bloodless victory against the tyrant Maxentius and to prevent his right hand from being stained by Roman blood:

“Therefore Maxentius prepared the ships in the river in order to set the trap and to arrange above them the bridges: when Constantine approached the river Maxentius came promptly toward him with some of his soldiers commanding the others to follow: and, having forgotten about his own work, he went up the bridge with a few from his retinue and got misled by the same trick with which he intended to deceive Constantine, he fell down off the bridge and drowned in the deep river...”²³⁷

²³⁵ Walter, Christopher. *The Iconography of Constantine the Great, Emperor and Saint* (Alexandros Press: Leiden, 2006), 61-62.

²³⁶ Both in the *History of the Church* (IX, 9) and the *Life of Constantine* (I, 38), Eusebius' account is much more detailed and includes the parallel between Constantine's victory and the defeat of Pharaoh on part of Moses.

²³⁷ “Comado dunq masentio che fussero posto nel fiume le navi apparecchiate a inducere la trapola & fusse agualiate a essere posti de sopra gli ponti: essendo gia acostato constantino al fiume prestamente li fu allincontro Masentio con pochi di soi comandando che li altri el sequissero: & discordato delopera sua ascende el ponte con pochi & fu ingannato con quello medesimo iganno con qual voleva ingannare constantino cade giu del pote & fu summerso nel profundo del fiume...,” Jacobus, *Legendario*, folio LXXXIIIv.

The episode illustrated by Riccio opens in the midst of the battle. Constantine's cavalry is posed throughout the panel's foreground, with some soldiers in the front left portrayed while overpowering the enemy's forces. Constantine keeps himself a bit at distance from that most violent group; he rides his horse at a slow pace holding firmly in his right hand what must have been a small golden cross. In keeping with Jacobus' narration Riccio keeps the emperor's hand stainless, he is indeed not engaged in the fight and neither are the soldiers following him (fig. 109). Some of them, actually, look quite perplexed at the ease with which they are achieving this victory, especially the knight riding just behind him who bears the same features as the Crispus/Riccio from the previous relief (fig. 110). By turning his head to the right, Crispus/Riccio makes us notice the detail of the bridge and of the water underneath it in which an enemy is drowning (fig. 111). This is certainly a reference to the fatal trick devised by Maxentius that cost him his own life. The most puzzling characteristic of the entire scene is the fact that the co-protagonist of the episode is completely missing for the first time. In the examples that survive, the battle usually focuses on the confrontation between Constantine and Maxentius (fig. 112).²³⁸ In Riccio's work, the tyrant is perhaps to be identified with the person drowning in the right forefront, even though there is no detail that would help the viewer to identify him. I believe that Riccio's intention was to transform the conflict between the two opposing armies into a commemoration of Constantine's divine victory. The emperor does not fight and he is already crowned as the sole ruler. Rather than representing a battle, the artist arranges a parade in the forefront which echoes the emperor's triumphal entrance into Rome visible in the background. There Constantine is

²³⁸ This is for example the case in the Stavelot Triptych or in the cycle of Piero della Francesca in Arezzo.

seen marching at the head of his troops holding a bigger cross as a military standard. The profile of the eternal city is set against the distant horizon (fig. 113).

In Jacobus' legend, the story of Helena begins right after the victory of Constantine. The author relies mainly upon the *Acts of Judas Cyriacus*, an apocryphal text dedicated to the discovery of the Cross that gained popularity between the fifth and sixth centuries. The preference given to this source, which Jacobus admits was not entirely reliable, may be related to the fact that it had the merit to connect the mission of Helena with Constantine's vision in a more explicit way than the writings by the Fathers of the Church.²³⁹ Jacobus himself was interested in emphasizing the link between these two events in order to reinforce the credibility of Helena's discovery through the historicity of Constantine's deeds.²⁴⁰ In contrast with the section devoted to the Roman emperor, the story of Helena does not focus much on her persona. The empress seems to act more as a background figure who coordinates the main development of the story, while the real protagonist of the narrative is her Jewish "assistant" Judas. Upon her arrival into Jerusalem, Helena convenes the savviest among the Jews to ask them about the location of the Cross. Judas already knows the reason why Helena wants to talk to the Jews and, at first, refuses to collaborate since he is aware that the re-discovery of the Cross will cause the end of the Jewish religion. However, after a few days of torture, he agrees to help the empress in her quest.

“When he [Judas] was taken out and came to the location and he did there the oration, suddenly the place trembled and he smelled such a delightful aroma of spices that, astonished, Judas stood up with both hands exclaiming you certainly are, oh Christ, the savior of the world. In that place there was, according to the ecclesiastical history, the temple of Venus which was built in there by the emperor Hadrian so that any Christian who came to that location to worship was

²³⁹ Luzietti, *Culto e rappresentazioni della Croce*, 25.

²⁴⁰ Le Goff, *In Search of Sacred Time*, 109.

mistaken for venerating Venus and, for this reason, since nobody was visiting it, that place was forgotten until the queen [Helena] ordered the temple to be destroyed and burned to the ground. After this event, Judas, feeling inspired, began to dig and having dug for twenty steps he found the three hidden crosses that he immediately took to the queen: and, since he did not know how to distinguish the Lord's cross from those of the thieves, he left them in the middle of the city waiting in that place the glory of the Lord: thus, around the ninth hour, the body of a youth was being carried to its burial when Judas stopped the coffin and posed the first two crosses on the deceased's body: but the youth was not resurrected: when the third cross touched his body the dead boy immediately was brought back to life."²⁴¹

After the discovery Judas converted to Christianity and became a bishop. The story continues with Judas helping Helena to find the nails used in the crucifixion and with his martyrdom under Julian the Apostate. Jacobus explains in detail the torture that Judas went through and how he died making the sign of the cross.²⁴²

As in Jacobus of Voragine's text, the real protagonist of Riccio's visualization of the stories of Helena is Judas. In both the episodes of the *Discovery* and the *Miracle of the True Cross*, the Jew is the focus of the composition and the catalyst of action. In the *Discovery*, Riccio combines Judas' conversion with the finding of the True Cross, providing another original interpretation of the *Golden Legend's* account (fig. 114). Judas is portrayed in the moment when, dazzled by some divine signs, he recognizes Christ as

²⁴¹ "Essendo dunque tracto fuera & pervenuto al lucho & ivi facto loratione sua imanimente? si comosse el loco & sentisse uno fumo de mirabili odori aromatici in tato che stupefacto Judas se drizzasse co ambe due le mani divedo iverita o christo tu sei el salvator del modo. Era i ql loco secondo se lege nele ecclesiastice historie el tepio de Venus fabricato in quel loco da adriano imperatore che se alchuno christiano i ql loco adorar volesse paresse adorar Venus & p qsto no andado alcuo era venuto i oblivion perlaqlcosa feci la regina destrugere el tepio & arare il loco. Dopo qsto judas virilmte succinto icomicio a scavare & scavato p vinti passa retrovo essere ascose tre croce lequale iconitete lui deporto alla regina: & no sapendo discernere la croce del signor da qlle di latroni posero qlle nel mezo della cita aspectado I ql loco la gloria del signor: ecco che circa lhora de nona fu portato alla sepoltura uno gioveneto morto fece Judas restar el cataletto ponendo sopra il corpo del defuncto la prima & la seconda croce: ma el gioveneto non resuscito: posta dunque la terza subitamente el defucto ritorno ala vita," Jacobus, *Legendario*, folio LXXXIIIr.

²⁴² Ibid., folio LXXXIIIv.

the Savior and kneels on the ground in front of the instrument of the Passion that he is going to recover. In this way, Riccio anticipates the identification of the True Cross by associating its redemptive power with the conversion of Judas. The Cross as a symbol plays a fundamental role within the narrative of the scene. I am referring not only to the authentic wood used in the Crucifixion but also to the crosses of the thieves who were tortured with Christ. While the first one arises from the crowd just above Helena's head as a sort of marker for her presence; a second one appears in front of ancient architecture in ruin, probably a reference to the temple of Venus that was built by the emperor Hadrian to conceal the location of Christ's Cross (fig. 115).²⁴³ This third cross is upside down and is being carried by a foolish figure. Along with the many children who populate the scene, such as those climbing the temple, the fool is, once again, a metaphor for the ignorant who is unaware of the miracle unfolding in front of him.

Among the multitude of bystanders that assist at the event, showing various levels of involvement, an unusual character stands out beside Helena: a bishop (fig. 116). Identifiable because of his miter and pastoral staff, it seems that he is interacting with Helena since he turns and points toward the empress. This figure could be a portrait of Macarius bishop of Jerusalem who, some as some sources suggest, had helped Helena in the search for the Cross.²⁴⁴ However, his inclusion in Riccio's *Discovery* is a bit redundant since he is commonly represented in place of Judas and never alongside him. What is even more puzzling is that the bishop disappears in the following scene which occurs right after the *Discovery of the Cross*.

²⁴³ Ibid., folio LXXXIIIr.

²⁴⁴ See the very helpful graph compiled by Luzietti, *Culto e rappresentazioni della Croce*, 22-23.

The composition of the *Miracle of the True Cross* is remarkably close to the *Discovery*. Among a crowd of onlookers, the miracle unfolds. Judas, at the center of the scene, revives a deceased man with the touch of the True Cross and his deed is framed by a triumphal arch in the background. Helena stands, as usual, at Judas' right side, her presence signaled by the cross just above her head (fig. 117). She has removed the veil from her hair and holds her hands on her chest in a gesture of prayer instead of inciting the Jew as she did before (fig. 118). As in the *Discovery*, a group of women gather behind her mirroring the group of men on the other side of the scene. Probably a reminder of the gender separation during the mass still in practice at Riccio's time, the inclusion of bystanders in the episode of the *Miracle* is a common iconographical detail. It dates back to the first representations of the Cross' legend as can be seen in the page from the *Wessobrunner Gebetbuch*.²⁴⁵

In the panel with the *Miracle*, Riccio abides closely by the text of the *Golden Legend*. Incapable of discerning Christ's Cross from those of the thieves, Judas waits for the sign of God and the body of a youth on whom he can perform his "test." The artist narrows the focus to the moment of the resurrection of the deceased who seems more an adult than a young man. The rejected crosses are far away from the main action and rise in the background, beside the triumphal arch. This architectural element is probably the most interesting addition to Riccio's story and one that holds the key for the interpretation of the series (fig. 119).

The presence of the triumphal arch in the background of the *Miracle* has two different levels of meaning. On a first, immediate level, the arch celebrates the triumph of

²⁴⁵ The female cortege may also allude to the passage from the History of the Church where Helena is said to have invited the virgins for a banquet after the *inventio* of the Cross. Ibid., 125-126.

the True Cross, which has just been identified, by framing the miracle of the resurrection. On a second, more erudite level, the arch invokes the victory of Constantine over Maxentius that was commemorated in Rome with the erection in 315 of the still standing *Arch of Constantine*. Riccio does not recreate an exact copy of the monument that has three openings (fig. 120). However, he does reproduce closely the central barrel vault with its fluted columns, winged victories in the spandrels, and the statues of the Dacian soldiers in the attic (fig. 121). The inclusion of the arch in the *Miracle's* scene, unjustifiable from a narrative point of view, is intended to directly connect Helena's discovery of the Cross with Constantine's conversion. The emperor's vision is what made everything possible: the victory against the tyrant; the finding of the True Cross as the earliest and most illustrious relic; and the triumph of Christianity. The historical events in which Constantine was the protagonist set off the rapid diffusion of the Christian religion and the conversion of today's Europe.²⁴⁶ What makes the visual link strong between Constantine from the previous panels and the arch in the *Miracle* scene is Riccio's arrangement of the stories. The victorious emperor from the adjacent *Battle* scene seems to be marching toward the *Miracle* and toward his own monument, claiming his destiny (fig. 122).

Antiquarianism and Historicism

Now that the main iconographical guidelines of Riccio's reliefs have been deciphered through a comparison with the account in the *Golden Legend*, attention can be shifted to the artist's antiquarian language. Before the panels for the altar in Santa Maria dei Servi, the stories of the True Cross were never depicted convincingly as "ancient

²⁴⁶ Le Goff, *In Search of Sacred Time*, 109.

history” as they were supposed to be, considering that the two main protagonists are the emperor Constantine and his mother Helena. So far, Raphael has been credited as the first artist who re-created an authentic Roman context for Constantine’s deeds in his frescoes for the emperor’s room in the Vatican apartments.²⁴⁷ His attempt was anticipated, however, by twenty years by Andrea Riccio. The Paduan artist preceded Raphael and his school not only in the definition of an archaeologically-oriented antiquarian style; but also in the use of this language to reinforce the historicity of the events narrated.

As many scholars have recently emphasized, in the reliefs for the Servite church Riccio flaunts his deep knowledge of ancient art. He does not simply imbue his scenes with an *all’antica* atmosphere, rather his panels look like genuine ancient art and the use of the bronze reinforces this analogy. It is probably undeniable that Riccio built the core of his vocabulary in Padua. As Giulio Bodon emphasized, the city had a strong and deeply-rooted antiquarian culture which was constantly nourished by the commerce in antiquities and the growing collections of antiquarian objects put together by personalities such as Pietro Bembo. In the Paduan artistic context this antiquarianism had already manifested itself in the work of Donatello, Andrea Mantegna, and Bernardino da Parenzo, and knowledge of ancient art was widespread through the circulation of *all’antica* drawings and prints.²⁴⁸ In such an environment, Riccio’s predispositions certainly found a fertile terrain. However, the artist’s deep comprehension of ancient art was probably facilitated, as I contend, by his acquaintance with Girolamo Donato.

²⁴⁷ Luzietti, *Culto e rappresentazioni della Croce*, 175-176 and references.

²⁴⁸ Bodon, Giulio. *Veneranda Antiquitas. Studi sull’eredità dell’antico nella Rinascenza veneta* (Bern: Peter Lang AG, 2005), especially 23-51 and 227-243 where Bodon proves that the first drawings of Trajan’s Column circulated in Padua. See also Bodon, Giulio. “Archeologia e produzione artistica fra Quattro e Cinquecento: Andrea Riccio e l’ambiente padovano,” in *Rinascimento e Passione per l’Antico*, 121-139.

Riccio's first important patron was the one who likely provided him first hand with materials and education about ancient art. Donato's interest in antiquity was not limited to the study of ancient writers. The patrician was a major collector of antiquities, particularly epigraphic materials, that he brought back from his numerous official travels such as the sculpture of "a man in a toga" and an equestrian statue believed to represent Attila taken from Ravenna.²⁴⁹ It cannot be a coincidence that the altar that Riccio decorated for Donato is the work with the most direct references to ancient art in the artist's oeuvre. The majority of these "quotations" come from monuments in Rome, a city that Donato visited frequently at the time of the Servite commission.²⁵⁰

Riccio's erudite citations are interspersed throughout the panels. They are so embedded in the artist's fluid narrative and adapted to the needs of the story that they are often not easy to spot. It is not surprising that their highest concentration is to be found in Constantine's panels. Here, Riccio really makes an effort to design an authentic ancient setting with the intention to support the historical validity of the events depicted. While some references to Roman art are more generic, others are quite literal. Riccio, for example, uses scenes from Trajan's Column as a model for the scale of his figures, their military equipment, and the posture of the two Constantines in the episode of the *Vision*

²⁴⁹ For Riccio's collection see Franzoni, Claudio. "Girolamo Donato: Collezionismo e *Instauratio* dell'Antico," in *Venezia e l'archeologia: un importante capitolo nella storia del gusto dell'antico nella cultura artistica veneziana*, Congresso Internazionale di Studi (Rome: G. Bretschneider, 1990), 27-31. Also: Fortini Brown, *Venice and Antiquity*, 245-246 and Lauber, Rosella. "Girolamo Donà," in *Il collezionismo d'arte a Venezia. Dalle origini al Cinquecento*, ed. by Michel Hochmann, Rosella Lauber, and Stefania Mason (Venice: Marsilio Editori, 2008), 273. It is significant that Donato owned a statue of Attila who was a protagonist of the foundation myth of Venice as remembered in Breydenbach, see Rossm *Picturing Experience in the Early Printed Book*, 66.

²⁵⁰ Donato had made at least four legations to Rome in 1491, 1497, 1505, and 1511 (I will discuss them in detail in the next chapter). These visits to the capital of the Christian world gave him plenty of opportunity to see and study ancient art.

which emulates but does not exactly copy the original source (figs. 123-124). In the scene of the *Battle*, instead, several elements are directly borrowed from works associated with the emperor Marcus Aurelius. The riding Constantine is closely modeled after two portraits of the emperor: a relief in the Palazzo dei Conservatori entitled *The Clemency of Marcus Aurelius* and the famous equestrian statue on the Capitoline Hill, which was believed to represent Constantine throughout the Middle Ages (figs. 125-126).²⁵¹ In addition, the three “falling soldiers” at the relief’s bottom, as I have noticed, appear in an episode from the column of Marcus Aurelius, the *Miracle of the Rain*, significantly an

²⁵¹ Coming from an unknown monument, the reliefs were visible in the Renaissance in the church of Santa Martina, Gasparotto, “Andrea Riccio a Venezia,” 401. The original equestrian monument is today preserved in the Capitoline Museums in Rome. Of the many bronze equestrian statues in Rome in antiquity, this is the only one which survived destruction, thanks to its identification in the Middle Ages with Constantine the Great, the first Christian emperor. It appears to have had the figure of a crouching barbarian underneath the horse’s raised foot. In the Renaissance the statue was highly valued and was copied by many artists. Among the learned fifteenth-century identifications of the statues are Poggio Bracciolini’s as Septimus Severus, Filarete’s as Commodus, and Plantina’s as Marcus Aurelius. However at the beginning of the sixteenth century people still called it the horse of Constantine, see Bober, Phyllis Pray, and Ruth Rubinstein. *Renaissance Artists and Antique Sculpture* (London: Harvey Miller Publishers; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), 206-207. I would like to add here some thoughts about the portrayal of Constantine with a beard. Although the surviving portraits of the emperor executed during his life show him beardless – the most famous one being the giant head in the Palazzo dei Conservatori – the later figurative tradition has mostly represented him with a beard as a sign of his imperial role (Cormack, Robin, and E.J.W. Hawkins. “The Mosaic of Saint Sophia at Istanbul: the Rooms above the Southwest Vestibule and Ramp,” in *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 31 (1977), 240-241). Yet, it is surprising, in my opinion, that Donato may have dismissed the more historical depictions of Constantine widespread in easily accessible medals. Perhaps he decided to purposely portray the emperor with a beard to enhance the parallel between him and his predecessors whose style was characterized by thick curly hair and beard (on the subject of hairstyle see Parisi, Presicce Claudio. “L’abbandono della moderazione. I ritratti di Costantino e della sua progenie,” in *Costantino il Grande. La civiltà antica al bivio tra Occidente e Oriente*, Exhibition Catalogue, ed. by Angela Donati and Giovanni Gentili (Milan: Silvana Editoriale: Cinisello Balsamo, 2005, 139-155), especially 139, 143. The comparison is striking especially with Aurelius who was, according to Baronius, one of Constantine’s most esteemed emperors (Baronius, Caesar Cardinal, and Odoricus Raynaldus. *Annali ecclesiastici tratti da quelli del Cardinal Baronio per Odorico Rinaldi, etc.* Roma: Vitale Mascardi, 1656, vol. I, 803).

example of divine intervention in favor of the Roman emperor (fig. 127).²⁵² This was the column's most visible episode and the only recounting a historical event.²⁵³ Riccio's *Battle* also recalls amazonomachy scenes from sarcophagi, such as those in the Vatican Museums, and the Trajan reliefs inserted into the *Arch of Constantine*, which, as we have seen, play a prominent role in the *Miracle* scene (fig. 128).²⁵⁴

Riccio artfully blends the ancient component into his own unmistakably Paduan personal style. Reminiscences from the tradition established by Donatello, Bartolomeo Bellano, and Bertoldo di Giovanni in Padua appear, side by side, with his more archaeological references. Riccio's Helena seems to duplicate Donatello's Mary from the altar in the Santo while her throne certainly inspired Constantine's seat in the *Vision* (fig. 129). The rocky landscape present in all the backgrounds recalls Bellano's reliefs, as do the scenes' vivid rhythm and the figures' violent expressions, also a characteristic of Bertoldo's work (figs. 130-131).²⁵⁵ The result is a highly eclectic language that rivals both ancient art and modern masters of bronze.

Much attention has been devoted to narrowing down the ancient sources consulted by Riccio. However, no scholar has yet noticed how these references avoid any connection with the art produced during Constantine's time, which would have been a

²⁵² The motif of the soldier riding over the enemy appears also in the battle scene that adorns the Sarcophagus of Helena at the Vatican Museums. Moreover, the motif of the soldier drawing is also present in the relief representing the *Battle of Verona* in the Arch of Constantine.

²⁵³ Beckmann, Martin. *The Column of Marcus Aurelius: the Genesis and Meaning of a Roman Imperial Monument* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011), 188-189.

²⁵⁴ These references have been pointed out by Bodon (Bodon, "Archeologia e produzione artistica fra Quattro e Cinquecento," 121-122) who identifies Riccio's arch as that of Titus. However, my idea that Riccio was looking at the Arch of Constantine instead, seems more logical. Gasparotto mentions the Arch of Constantine, the Arch of Titus, the arch in the Vendramin tomb, and the one in the Barberini panels as possible sources of inspiration that Riccio may have used. Gasparotto, "Andrea Riccio a Venezia," 399.

²⁵⁵ Bacchi, *Rinascimento e passione per l'antico*, 36-37; Gasparotto, "Andrea Riccio a Venezia," 401 (for the parallel with Donatello's throne), 402 (for Bellano).

more accurate option for reliefs representing his story. In the majority of cases, Riccio looked for inspiration to the Roman art produced under the reigns of Trajan and Marcus Aurelius, two of the greatest protagonists of the “golden age” of the imperial era, between the 1st and 2nd centuries AD, when the Roman Empire was at the peak of its power. Most of the ancient citations in the Servite bronzes come from reliefs either from the Trajanic or Aurelian columns or from lost monuments associated with those emperors and later re-used in the Arch of Constantine or visible in the church of Santa Martina. It is likely that this choice had something to do with Donato’s preferences and that it is not simply related to the popularity of the sites mentioned above. As a philologist and great connoisseur of ancient art and culture, Donato was probably aware of the stylistic differences between the periods in Roman art and was the one who may have asked Riccio to refer to some specific sources.²⁵⁶ I believe that the patrician’s intention was somehow to replicate the propagandistic program pursued by Constantine himself in his commemorative arch. By including in his arch reliefs coming from monuments of the great representatives of the Roman past, Constantine wanted to emphasize his legacy and position within an established tradition.²⁵⁷ Riccio’s panels are designed to achieve a similar goal through a pastiche of allusions to the greatest imperial art. They aim to celebrate Constantine as the emperor that brought the Roman Empire back to its military greatness but also to its spiritual glory. Constantine’s deeds, in fact, represent the culmination of a divine plan that began with Caesar Augustus, under whose reign Christ was born, and was completed during Constantine’s time when Christianity officially

²⁵⁶ Raphael seems to have been the first to comment on the different style of the reliefs in the Arch of Constantine in an undated letter to Pope Leo X, written on his behalf by Baldassare Castiglione, see Bober and Rubinstein, *Renaissance Artists and Antique Sculpture*, 1986, 182. It is likely that Donato himself was aware of the various styles of Roman sculpture.

²⁵⁷ Liverani, Paolo. “L’arco di Costantino,” in *Costantino il Grande*, 68.

triumphed.²⁵⁸ What the Arch of Constantine simply implies, Constantine's success as being guided by a *mens divina*, namely God's intelligence, is appropriately stated and celebrated in Riccio's reliefs.²⁵⁹ By presenting the figure of Constantine as the military and spiritual leader par excellence, Donato, as we will see, appropriates some important aspects of the political propaganda pursued by the Roman papacy in Rome and transfers them to Venice.²⁶⁰

The effort of re-creating an authentic setting for the stories of Constantine and Helena in Riccio's panels goes beyond the application of a suitable antiquarian language. Each episode's location is accurately described in order to enhance its historical foundation. In Helena's stories, the two scenes' setting is quite similar. Riccio adopted parallel designs probably to stress that the *Discovery* and the *Miracle* occurred at a brief temporal distance from one another. The action is set against a mountain-like landscape intended to recall Mount Calvary, which was located just outside Jerusalem. The walled-city on the background is certainly a portrayal of the Holy City as it was depicted in the imagination of artists at the time (fig. 132). Another city's profile is represented, as it has been mentioned, on the horizon of the *Battle* scene (fig. 133). In this case it is the city of Rome as can be deduced by the inclusion of the Colosseum and what seems to be the

²⁵⁸ It is Calcani who emphasize this parallel between Caesar Augustus and Constantine, see Calcani, "La pratica divinatoria," 227.

²⁵⁹ For an interpretation of the inscription in the Arch of Constantine mentioning the divinity, see Liverani, "L'arco di Costantino," 63-64.

²⁶⁰ The figure of Constantine played an important role in the Roman papacy, especially under Sixtus IV. In 1471 ancient bronze statues, including the Marcus Aurelius, were transferred to the Capitoline Hill and the Arch of Constantine is represented four times in the frescoes of the Sistine Chapel, see Quednau, Rolf. "Costantino il Grande a Roma. Forme e funzioni della memoria nelle testimonianze visive da ponte Milvio a Mussolini," in *Costantino il Grande tra medioevo ed età moderna*, ed. by Giorgio Bonante et al. (Bologna: Società editrice il Mulino, 2004), 333-334.

Pantheon.²⁶¹ According to historical sources, the confrontation between Constantine and Maxentius happened just outside Rome, at the Milvian Bridge on the northern side of the city. The promontory just behind Constantine is maybe a reference to Mount Mario not far from the place of the battle, on which an oratory dedicated to the Sanctae Crucis was built in 1350 (fig. 134).²⁶²

Bare mountains completely dominate the last episode to be mentioned, the *Vision of Constantine* (fig. 135). This apparently generic choice conceals what it is probably another accurate contextualization. Modern historians have identified the original location of Constantine's military camps around the area of the Hill of Prima Porta, the last elevation of some significance before descending into the Tiber's plain. Here the remains of a quadrifrons triumphal arch have been found and examined in connection to the presence of Constantine's army (fig. 136).²⁶³ The arch, which was built in Constantine's time and resembles the *Arch of Janus* also dedicated to the emperor, was probably erected to mark the place where Constantine's camps were situated and where he had his vision/dream.²⁶⁴ Although it is impossible to establish what Donato really knew about Constantine's campaign, it is still suggestive to think that he may have re-traced the main loci of the emperor's greatest feat. The hills in the background of Riccio's *Vision* could be a reference to the Prima Porta while the mountain chain far in

²⁶¹ A similar but more detailed profile of Rome is represented in Riccio's later relief of *The Story of Judith* for the Santo in Padua (1505-1507).

²⁶² A tradition considered this to be the location of the Vision of Constantine, see Quednau, "Costantino il Grande a Roma," 331-332.

²⁶³ Apparently the Arch was rediscovered by the architect Giuliano da Sangallo at the beginning of the sixteenth century. The artist designed a reconstruction of the monument. Carboniero, Bruno, and Fabrizio Falconi. *In hoc vinces. La notte che cambiò la storia dell'Occidente* (Rome: Edizioni Mediterranee, 2011), 60.

²⁶⁴ Carboniero, *In hoc vinces*, 56, 58.

the distance could represent Mount Soratte which signaled another stop in Constantine's long march toward Rome.²⁶⁵

Evidence of how much Donato effectively knew about Constantine's history can be provided by the inclusion of two unusual characters in the stories for the Servites. The first is Flavius Julius Crispus, first-born son of Constantine and Minervina; the second is Macarius, bishop of Jerusalem. Crispus seems actively engaged in both episodes dedicated to his father Constantine. In the *Vision*, he enters the scenes in a rush, trying to figure out what is happening; in the *Battle* he rides right behind his father. His presence in this portion of Constantine's history is anachronistic (figs. 103, 110). At the time of the Milvian Bridge's conflict in 312 Crispus was probably seven years old and could have not participated in the battle. He played a significant role in his father's campaign against Licinius years later in 324.²⁶⁶ The reason for Crispus' presence in Riccio's reliefs may go beyond his function as a pun for the name and hairstyle of the artist whose features he personifies.²⁶⁷ The young man is portrayed as if he were in his early twenties, the age that he had when he achieved military fame and died. In 326, after a formal process, he was sentenced to death by his own father probably after being involved in a conspiracy against him. This event deeply upset his grandmother Helena who apparently embarked

²⁶⁵ Mount Soratte was twenty kilometers from Malborghetto, the name of the location where Constantine's camps were situated. The Mount was a natural astronomical observatory, a characteristic that favored the construction of a number of sacred buildings. The last temple erected there was dedicated to Soranus Apollus, a divinity associated with the cult of the Sun worshipped by Constantine. Ibid., 65-67.

²⁶⁶ The sources agree in describing Crispus as a young man of most excellent character and marked ability; and indeed he proved his valor and military talents in the war against Licinius in which he won a great naval battle: "And the things which Licinius with his own eyes had seen come upon the former impious tyrants he himself likewise suffered...But Constantine, the mightiest victor, adorned with every virtue of piety, together with his son Crispus, a most God-beloved prince, and in all respect like his father, recovered the East which belonged to them," Eusebius, *History of the Church* (IX, 5-6), translated by Arthur Cushman McGiffert.

²⁶⁷ Allen is the one who identified in this figure the features of Riccio and assumed that he is portrayed as Crispus, Allen, *Andrea Riccio*, 33-34.

on her trip to Jerusalem as an expiatory pilgrimage.²⁶⁸ It is possible that Donato included the figure of Crispus in Constantine's panels as a reference to an unpopular but not less historical event in the emperor's life. The death of Constantine's beloved son undoubtedly reveals a dark side of the emperor's personality and a possible explanation for the decision to support his mother's journey to the Holy Land in the same year, 326.²⁶⁹ Constantine needed to find an expedient to distract attention from his family's scandals.²⁷⁰ Crispus thus becomes a subtle but critical link between Constantine's deeds and Helena's stories.

The second character whose presence is inconsistent with the events narrated is Macarius, bishop of Jerusalem. In some versions of the legend of the Cross, Macarius is the person who helps Helena to find the Holy Wood.²⁷¹ However, he is not supposed to be part of the story according to *Judas Cyriacus' Acts*, which is the source used by Riccio for his reliefs. His inclusion only in the episode of the *Discovery* and not in the *Miracle* is also odd, as is his demeanor. The bishop is not engaged in the discovery unfolding in front of him, rather his attention seems to be directed toward the empress. Macarius turns his head and points at Helena as if he were talking to her (fig. 116). Perhaps his role can be explained as a support for the historical credibility of the event. The name of Helena, in fact, was associated with the discovery of the True Cross for the first time by Saint

²⁶⁸ Nuti Massimiliano. *Costantino il Grande: un falso mito?* Parma: Mattioli 1885 Srl., 2014, 102-104, also for references.

²⁶⁹ Citing historical sources, Nuti emphasizes how upset Helena was about the loss of her grandson and suggests that the pilgrimage made to Jerusalem was of expiatory nature, Nuti, *Costantino il Grande*, 102-104. Gregory of Tours supplied the date for Helena's discovery of the True Cross, Voelke, *The Stavelot Triptych*, 16.

²⁷⁰ That same year Constantine also murdered his wife Fausta. Some historians in the past have connected Crispus' and Fausta's death and involved them in an illicit relationship. For a summary of the hypotheses see Nuti, *Costantino il Grande*, 102-104.

²⁷¹ See Luzietti's very useful graph, *Culto e rappresentazioni della Croce*, 22-23.

Ambrose in 395, while Eusebius, the most authoritative historian consulted by Jacobus da Voragine, omitted entirely Helena's quest in his historical works.²⁷² Eusebius does report, however, a document that seems to support the *inventio* of the Cross. In a letter addressed to Macarius, Constantine mentions that the monument of Christ's Passion, which had been long buried underground, has been miraculously found (book III, 30). This is probably what prompted the emperor to order the construction of the Holy Sepulcher and to entrust Macarius with the direction of the work.²⁷³ The portrayal of the bishop in the *Discovery* could be interpreted as additional historical evidence in favor of the discovery of the True Cross. His presence beside Helena and his gesture of pointing is perhaps to ensure that Helena could receive the proper credit for her role in the event.

Riccio and his audiences

After a detailed review of the iconography and sources of Riccio's stories, a question immediately comes to mind: to what extent was the general public able to grasp the nuances of Riccio's language and his erudite references? Although this is impossible to determine, the general storyline was indeed accessible to a broad public. As Peter Humfrey has emphasized, Venice was a major European center for the printing and sale of books and a relatively high number of Venetians, including members of the citizen class, were literate. The *Golden Legend* by Jacobus da Voragine was listed among the

²⁷² For the political reasons that may have induced Eusebius to avoid mentioning the finding of the Cross, see Loconsole, who also reviews how the legend began to spread. Loconsole, Michele. "Il simbolo della croce tra giudeo-cristianesimo e tarda antichità: un elemento della *translatio Hierosolymae*," in *Liber Annus*, 53 (2003), 217-284.

²⁷³ In mentioning this letter Luzietti emphasizes how the document was used as a proof of the actual discovery of the True Cross during the Counter-Reformation, see Luzietti, *Culto e rappresentazioni della Croce*, 14-15.

best-selling books.²⁷⁴ It is important to remember that in the 1490s illustrated editions in the vernacular of the text were published in Venice. They included illustrations related to the theme of the various chapters which assisted the reader in envisioning the episodes. The section dedicated to the *Inventio of the Cross*, for example, opens with a double scene representing the miracle of the True Cross and Helena worshipping the Holy Wood (fig. 137).²⁷⁵ The frontispiece of the *Golden Legend* closely recalls the design and antiquarian motives of the front of the Vendramin Tomb in Santa Maria dei Servi (fig. 138). Images of this kind certainly educated the eye of the viewer and made it receptive to the work of Riccio.

The faithful's familiarity with the stories narrated by Riccio was not the only way to ensure the reliefs' accessibility. In order to capture his audience's attention and enhance its understanding of the mysteries revealed, Riccio applied some of the techniques often used in poetry and rhetoric. Each of his stories unfolds with the same sense of grandeur as the written page from a classical epic poem. The main event in the scene is set off by the action of one protagonist whose solitary heroism emerges from large, emotional crowds. The artist skillfully directs the motion and focus of the story, and leads the attention of the viewer toward the crucial moment maintaining, at the same time, the vitality of smaller, anecdotal details. The scenes follow one another with the same eloquence as the parts of a beautifully crafted speech. It is evident that Riccio was acquainted with the classical triad of oratorical purposes: *docere*, *delectare*, and *movere*. Introduced by the magister of eloquence, Cicero, these three rhetorical targets instructed

²⁷⁴ Humfrey, *The Altarpiece in Renaissance Venice*, 59.

²⁷⁵ The same image reappears in the chapter introducing Saint Helena.

the potential orator on the importance of instructing, delighting, and moving.²⁷⁶ Between the fourth and fifth centuries, the father of the Church Saint Augustine re-interpreted these principles within a Christian frame in what it is considered the first treatise on Christian rhetoric, *De doctrina christiana*. In this seminal work, Saint Augustine emphasizes how the Christian orator is not a talented speaker who exploits the persuasive and stylistic potentials of language to engage his audience, regardless of the truth of the subject delivered. He is, instead, the interpreter of the biblical text and a defender of faith, whose goal is to communicate the truth of the sacred scriptures simply, clearly, and intelligently.²⁷⁷ To succeed, he is allowed to use all of the three types of elocution – *docere, delectare, and movere* – without losing track of the importance of his task: “A hearer must be delighted, so that he can be gripped and made to listen, and moved so that he can be impelled to action...”²⁷⁸

²⁷⁶ Cicero introduced this triad in the *Brutus*, *Orator*, and *De optimo genere oratorum*. “The man of eloquence whom we seek, following the suggestion of Antonius, will be one who is able to speak in court or in deliberative bodies so as to prove, to please and to sway or persuade. To prove is the first necessity, to please is charm, to sway is victory; for it is the one thing of all that avails most in winning verdicts. For these three functions of the orator there are three styles, the plain style for proof, the middle style for pleasure, the vigorous style for persuasion; and in this last is summed up the entire virtue of the orator,” Cicero, *Orator*, XX 69. Certainly Cicero was well known to Donato and to the part of the public that had access to the altar of the True Cross. Aldo Manuzio, a dear friend of Donato, had published portable books of famous Latin authors such as Cicero at the beginning of the sixteenth century.

²⁷⁷ Augustine, *DDC* IV, XVIII.

²⁷⁸ “But although our teacher must be a speaker on important matters, he should not always speak of them in the grand style but rather use the restrained style when teaching, and the intermediate style when censuring or praising something. But when action must be taken and we are addressing those who ought to take it but are unwilling, then we must speak of what is important in the grand style, the style suitable for moving minds to action. Sometimes one speaks about one and the same important matter in all three styles: in the restrained style, if it is being taught; in the moderate style, if it is being praised; and in the grand style, if antagonistic minds are being driven to change their attitude,” Augustine, *DDC* IV, XIX 38, 104. On the topic and for the quote see Milică, Ioan. “Funcțiile stilului în retorica creștină a Sf. Augustin / Functions of Style in St. Augustine’s Christian Rhetoric,” in *Diacronia*, 1 (January 2015), 1-8.

Riccio follows Saint Augustine's tenets to the letter. The rhetoric that he applies is the one recommended to the Christian orator. The artist's goal is to emphasize the divine truth of the episodes that he narrates whose historical accuracy is supported, as we have seen, by an attempt at accurate reconstruction of the events. In order to provide the most solid argumentation, Riccio exploits all three of the oratorical principles first addressed by Cicero and then re-elaborated by Saint Augustine. As required in teaching, great care is devoted to the scenes' clarity. The artist makes sure that the central action and message of each episode are easily traceable as is the identification of the main protagonists. Once he has grabbed the viewer's attention, he keeps him/her engaged in a number of ways. The more general public is attracted by the naturalism of the setting, characters, and their expressions, which reinforces their participation in the events described. The erudite are lured by the cultured antiquarian references hidden in numerous details. Finally, the emotional charge transmitted by the stories and their actors all together is intended to move everyone and solicit the veneration of the True Cross.

In his attempt to emulate the work of poets and orators, Riccio anticipates some of the principles elucidated by Pomponius Gauricus in his *De sculptura* (1504). This treatise was written with the goal of elevating the art of sculpture, bronze in particular, to the rank of the liberal arts by stressing the parallel between sculptors and writers. Already in the first chapter of his book, Gauricus makes an important statement about the similarity of these two disciplines:

“Writers work with words, sculptors shape materials; the former narrate, but the latter represent and explain; the first delight not always the very delicate sense of hearing, the second, however, delight the eyes and hold the attention of the viewer after having captured them with beautiful images. I really believe that

these [writers and sculptors] are so tied by similarity and affinity, that they cannot be separated in any way.”²⁷⁹

The connection between sculpture and the ancient written arts of poetry and rhetoric becomes even more evident when Gauricus is asked by his interlocutors – Raffaello Regius and Niccolò Leonico Tomeo, professors from the University of Padua – to list the qualities of the ideal sculptor. The humanist traces a profile that is remarkably close to the status and the ideals pursued by Riccio himself. Rather than paraphrase, it is more useful to listen to Gauricus’ own “voice”:

“First...I would like the sculptor to be educated, as much as possible, in all disciplines and to be very cultured, in a way that he knows the most information, narrations, and stories...I would like him to be practical and not inexperienced, capable of understanding that there are precise criteria for everything...Every detail in fact must be adapted to the nature of the characters, places, times and situations...I would like him to have a good antiquarian culture...Without any doubt he will have to be the best *euphantasíotos*, which means capable of imagining infinite aspects of a person...This ability is indispensable to poets and orators as well and it should not be developed beyond reality, in order to avoid the representation of vague images...Moreover, the sculptor will have to be *cataleptikós*, which means capable of receiving and imitating ideal forms, conceived in his mind, of all the models that he intends to portray...In reality, he has to avoid any form of adulation, which means not adding any embellishment to the truth...In conclusion, only someone exceptionally knowledgeable, and with technical ability, should learn how to sculpt. Never therefore, to insist on the same point, without culture or erudition...So these are the qualities that someone who has the intention to pursue the fame of excellent sculptor needs to possess: I am not demanding the *Republic* of our Plato or Cicero’s *Orator*, but one that is easier to be found and that exists.”²⁸⁰

²⁷⁹ “Gli scrittori lavorano con le parole, gli scultori pero’ modellano la materia; I primi raccontano, ma I secondi rappresentano e spiegano; I primi allettano, e non sempre, il delicatissimo senso dell’udito, I secondi pero’ dilettano gli occhi e tengono in loro potere gli uomini dopo averli per cosi’ dire catturati con bellissime immagini. Veramente, per conto mio, ritengo che questi siano cosi’ uniti da somiglianza e affinita’, che non si possano in alcun modo dividere,” Gaurico, *De Sculptura*, 127.

²⁸⁰ The translation is mine: “Come prima cosa...vorrei che lo scultore fosse istruito, nel limite del possibile, in tutte le discipline e veramente colto, tale cioe’ da avere conoscenza del piu’ gran numero di dati, di narrazioni, di storie... Lo vorrei pratico e non inesperto, in grado cioe’ di capire che in ogni cosa c’e’ un preciso criterio...Ogni particolare infatti deve essere adattato alla

Skimming through this list of points reveals the qualities described by Gauricus that could apply to both sculptors and writers alike. The knowledge acquired through the study of the liberal arts, antiquarian culture, the ability to represent the body and the soul, and to capture the essence of ideal forms in a permanent medium make sculpture the material equivalent of poetry and rhetoric. While illustrating his ideas, Gauricus constantly brings up examples from ancient art and literature side by side, especially from his favorite writer Homer, he also has constantly in mind the fundamental rhetorical work of Cicero.²⁸¹ His quotations from epic poems and literature emerge throughout the text not only in the most theoretical sections of the discourse but even when Gauricus

natura dei personaggi, dei luoghi, dei tempi e delle situazioni... Vorrei anche che conoscesse l'antiquaria... Senza dubbio dovrà essere in sommo grado euphantasiotos, capace cioè di immaginare gli infiniti aspetti di un individuo... Questa capacità e' indispensabile anche ai poeti e soprattutto agli oratori, non andrà tuttavia sviluppata al di là del reale, per non raffigurare vane immagini... Lo scultore inoltre dovrà essere anche cataleptikos, cioè capace di accogliere e imitare le forme ideali, concepite nella sua mente, di tutti i modelli che vorrà ritrarre... Questi in verità deve tenersi lontano da ogni adulazione, cioè non deve aggiungere nessun abbellimento alla verità... Insomma io non vorrei che si dedicasse alla scultura alcuno che non sia ricchissimo di cognizioni, oltre che di capacità tecniche. Giammai quindi, per insistere ancora sul medesimo punto, senza cultura, senza erudizione... Ecco dunque le qualità che deve possedere colui che ha intenzione di conseguire la fama di ottimo scultore: non pretendo certo la *Repubblica* del nostro Platone o l'*Oratore* di Cicerone, ma uno che può assai facilmente trovarsi ed esistere." Gaurico, *De Sculptura*, 133-147.

²⁸¹ He often mentions Cicero in his treatise. One of the most interesting passages is the following in which he clearly implies that sculpture can surpass rhetoric for eloquence: "Dopo che io ebbi detto ciò, Regio replicò: "Approvo pienamente questo tuo proposito, e mi congratulo con te: senza dubbio si dirà nei secoli future che tu per primo ha conciliato scultura con cultura. Ma continua, poichè questi tuoi argomenti mi affascinano, e già da tempo ammiro vivamente quest'arte, al punto che, se l'età me lo consentisse, mi dedicherei senza dubbio tutto ad essa: potrei sperare infatti di ricavarne qualcosa di gran lunga migliore che da Cicerone e Quintiliano (the translation is mine: "After I said that, Regio replied: I fully support your intention, and I congratulate you: without doubt in the future they will say that you were the first one to reconcile sculpture and culture. But please continue, since these topics you are discussing are fascinating to me, and I have been admiring this art for a while, to the point that, if age would allow me, I would dedicate myself to it: I could infact hope to gain much more from it than from Cicero and Quintilianus," Gaurico, *De Sculptura*, 129.

provides practical advice to amateur sculptors. In this way the humanist constantly emphasizes how the objectives of the written word and the sculpted image converge.

It is likely that Gauricus had learned much about sculpture from acquaintance with artists like Riccio, as Denise Allen has rightfully underlined. The Neapolitan humanist had transferred to Padua between 1501-1509, in a moment when this art played a dominant role in the city's intellectual culture, thanks to sculptors of the caliber of Donatello, Tullio Lombardo, and Severo da Ravenna.²⁸² These are some of the names that are mentioned in Gauricus' treatise alongside that of Riccio who is identified as his friend.²⁸³ Their friendship was characterized by a harmony of interests and the two belonged to the same circle of intellectuals gravitating around Paduan Aristotelian culture.²⁸⁴ Although Riccio is not part of the humanist's dialogue, "his sculptures brilliantly deliver these dicta, and more, in a manner that would have gratified his friend. Riccio, the sculptor, was both a poet and a rhetorician of bronze."²⁸⁵

Allen proves her statement by focusing on Riccio's earliest documented works, the bronze narratives commissioned to flank the entrance to the Santo's choir (1505-1507). According to her, the stories of Judith and David engage with Gauricus' ideas about how to design figurative *istorie* according to classical literary concepts (fig. 139). Without losing the event's magnificent range, the crowded scenes – the most difficult

²⁸² Allen, *Andrea Riccio*, 20-31.

²⁸³ Gauricus, *De Sculptura*, 255.

²⁸⁴ The two speakers of the dialogue themselves are representative of the same circle of intellectuals. Nicolò Leonico Tomeo, was among the people involved in the commission of Riccio's Paschal Candelabrum. A pupil of Ermolao Barbaro, he was the main intermediary of the Platonic ideas and the first in Padua to read Aristotle in the original language, see Banzato, "Il candelabro pasquale di Andrea Briosco," 99; Raffaele Regio is included in Donato's list of intellectual friends, as remembered by D'Agostini, 214.

²⁸⁵ Allen, *Andrea Riccio*, 22.

type, Gaurico says – focus on the action of key figures and include a number of ornamental details that linger in the viewer’s mind. The perspective applied in the Santo narratives is the shifting, triple system described in the *De sculptura* where the progression between midground and foreground is shown through the different representation of the figures: shallow reliefs or simply a row of heads in the distance, yet increasingly frontal, complete, and three dimensional when approaching the front.

I strongly believe that the same principles that Allen has identified in the Santo’s panels were already employed by Riccio, although on a smaller scale, in his first public work: the reliefs for Santa Maria dei Servi. Executed around 1500, before Gauricus moved to Padua and began drafting his treatise in 1501, these panels were probably among the works of art that inspired Gauricus while he was writing his book. Riccio’s sculptures indeed encompass most of the concepts discussed in the *De sculptura*, creating a visual translation in anticipation of Gauricus’ central ideas. I am not referring only to the perspective and organization of the composition, already well explicated by Allen in her analysis of the Santo’s reliefs. I am also thinking about the application of a sophisticated antiquarian culture to re-create the appropriate context, the emphasis given to truth and simplicity, and other more practical details such the figures’ representation. In the chapter devoted to the *Physiognomonica*, Gauricus explains how a person’s character can be determined through the nature of his traits. Some of the features of Riccio’s portrait of Constantine reflect aspects associated by Gauricus with specific personal qualities (fig. 140):

“A well-drawn nose is a sign of honesty of life and habits...He with the head of medium size [of correct proportion] is brave, wise, and magnanimous...A broad chest is a sign of courage...He who has legs and thighs well-articulated and

strong will show an excellent natural predisposition and generosity...Nicely drawn ankles reveal a noble person...”²⁸⁶

The correspondence between Riccio's reliefs and Gauricus' treatise is even more striking when we read passages such as the one on equestrian statues, again in connection with the figure of the riding Constantine. Gauricus refers to two different kinds of riding style according to the chivalry's equipment, Riccio applies the first to his portrait of the emperor (fig. 109):

“And then, since often equestrian statues are erected...Isn't maybe necessary that he [the sculpture] would be an excellent rider or at least that he would know well the art of horseback riding? This art, since it is barely known to our knights, is of two types...: the first is the way in which we ride when we are lightly equipped...In the first the position of the knight is a sitting one...In one the knees will be bent...In the first the feet will be in a flat and stable...In the rider lightly equipped the chest is slightly noticeable, while the neck is curved backwards...The first has sometimes a riding crop on his right hand...”²⁸⁷

Apart from the position of the neck, the description repeats the posture of Constantine who was originally carrying a small cross in his right hand.

Regardless of the viewer's awareness of the level of sophistication of Riccio's language, all the techniques discussed above had one, single goal: that of engaging the faithful and guaranteeing their understanding of the message transmitted by the stories.

The person approaching the altar to pray may have not been able to properly identify

²⁸⁶ The translation is mine: “Un naso ben disegnato è segno di onestà di vita e di abitudini... Chi ha la testa media è coraggioso, dotato di buon senso, e magnanimo... Un torace ampio denota coraggio... Chi avrà gambe e coscie ben articolate e solide mostrerà un ottima attitudine naturale e generosità... Le caviglie ben disegnate rivelano l'individuo nobile...,” Gaurico, *De Sculptura*, 189, 195, 197, 199.

²⁸⁷ The translation is mine: “Ma poi, dato che assai di frequente vengono innalzate statue equestri...Non sarà forse necessario che egli stesso sia un ottimo cavaliere o almeno che conosca bene l'arte dell'equitazione? Questa, dal momento che è a malapena conosciuta dai nostri stessi cavalieri, è di due tipi...: il primo è il modo in cui montiamo quando siamo armati alla leggera...Nel primo la posizione del cavaliere è quella di una persona seduta...Nell'uno le ginocchia saranno flesse...Nel primo i piedi avranno una posizione piana e stabile...Nel cavaliere armato alla leggera il petto è leggermente rivelato, mentre il collo è piegato all'indietro...L'uno talvolta ha nella mano destra un frustino...,” Gaurico, *De Sculptura*, 137.

Riccio's antiquarian references or the rhetorical nuances of his style. Yet, he/she was likely smitten by the eloquence of the narration, the naturalism of the figures' gestures and emotions, and the amount of detail. Moreover, he/she could have certainly appreciated the affinity between the bronze stories and the pages of a book such as the *Golden Legend* or the sermons commonly pronounced from the top of the choir screen, against which stood the altar of the True Cross. We have to remember that these sermons were the part of the mass that was generally most attended and widely understood by people, since they were not delivered in Latin, and that they extensively relied on decorative furnishings to reinforce and complement their message.

Although no surviving sermon pronounced in Santa Maria dei Servi shows a direct connection with Riccio's reliefs, a number of well-known liturgical texts used during special celebrations would have worked well in parallel with Riccio's reliefs.²⁸⁸ Some Cross hymns associated with the feast of the *Inventio*, *Exaltatio*, and Good Friday, when the *Adoratio Crucis* occurred, specifically included passages from the discovery's legend or imagery strongly related to the triumph of the Cross celebrated by Riccio's reliefs. The *Dulce carmen lingua promat*, for example, a hymn that appeared around the tenth century or earlier, focuses entirely on the legend of the Cross from the appearance of the sign before Constantine's battle to Helena's discovery of the Cross's Wood thanks

²⁸⁸ The only published sermon that I have found was pronounced in Santa Maria dei Servi by Girolamo de Franceschi, who was prior of the monastery at the time of the church's consecration. His speech was delivered on the first day of the year 1492, well before the screen was erected and the altar of the True Cross was built. The sermon focuses on how to sanctify Christ and his name. While he was in Brescia, in 1496, Girolamo Donato had published one of John Chrysostom's homilies on Paul's first letter to the Corinthians. This sermon was commonly read during Holy Thursday and deals with some issues related to the institution of the Eucharist. See Cortesi, Mariarosa. *Leggere i padri tra passato e presente* (Florence: Sismel, Edizioni del Galluzzo, 2010), 183-186.

to the help of Judas.²⁸⁹ *Vexilla regis prodeunt*, one of the first Cross hymns ever written by the sixth-century poet Venantius Fortunatus, and still popular today, opens with a vivid image of the Cross being carried in a festive procession before discussing its meaning and role in redemption.²⁹⁰ Verses such as these, which were sung during the festivities dedicated to the Holy Cross, certainly engaged the altar of the True Cross and its reliefs. The stories narrated by Riccio would have offered the faithful some useful visual materials to grasp the content of the hymns, whose Latin may have not been accessible to most.

How important was it for Riccio that the broader public could easily “read” his panels is proved by the way the stories are organized and structured. Rather than arranging the panels in chronological order, the artist applied the principle of analogy. He paired together those reliefs that shared a similar content and provided them with parallel compositions. Consequently, *Constantine’s Vision* and the *Discovery of the True Cross* appear first, followed by the *Miracle of the True Cross* and *Constantine’s Battle*. Each of the episodes of the first pair depict moments of revelation and conversion – Constantine’s and Judas’ – while the second pair includes two episodes of triumph in the name of the Cross: Constantine’s military success at the Milvian Bridge and the victory over death

²⁸⁹ For the complete text of the hymn, see Blume, Clemens, and Guido M. Dreves, *Hymnodia Gotica Die Mozarabischen Hymnen des Alt-Spanischen Ritus* (Leipzig: O.R. Reisland, 1897), 90-95. For other hymns mentioning the *Inventio* of the Cross, see Szövérfy, Joseph. “Crux fidelis...Prolegomena to a History of the Holy Cross Hymns,” in *Traditio*, vol. 22 (1966), 18, 32, 34.

²⁹⁰ It is interesting to remember that the occasion for the composition of this hymn by Venantius, along with other two, was the arrival of some relics of the Cross sent to Poitiers by the emperor Justin and his wife Sophia. In a thank you letter to the emperor, also drafted by the poet, Justin is compared to Constantine and his wife to Helena, Szövérfy, “Crux fidelis,” 6-11. For further literature on Venantius, a Ravenna poet who had settled in Gaul, see Morris, Colin. *The Sepulchre of Christ and the Medieval West. From the Beginning to 1600*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 82-83.

performed by the Cross's Wood. The thematic connection between the scenes is reinforced by their analogous design. On one hand, the *Vision* and the *Discovery* are set against a rocky landscape that opens at the center revealing distant mountains in the former and the city of Jerusalem in the latter; a kneeling figure is portrayed in the forefront and the hovering cross in the sky points to the main protagonist (fig. 141). On the other hand, in the *Miracle* and *Constantine's Battle* the space is dominated at the center middle-ground by a triumphal arch in the former and a rocky wall in the latter, both intended to frame the crucial deed at the center foreground. The composition of this second set is overall simpler, since the stories represent one individual moment rather than two condensed into one space as in the case of the *Vision/Discovery* (fig. 142).

The idea of organizing the stories according to a thematic correspondence rather than chronological order was certainly not new. An illustrious precedent was represented by what is probably the most famous cycle dedicated to the Cross, Piero della Francesca's frescoes in Arezzo. In that case as well, the artist creates visual parallels between different episodes with the aim of emphasizing the stories' ultimate meaning beyond their narrative component.²⁹¹ In Riccio's series, the message was intended to reach the viewer loud and clear: Christ's Cross shares the redemptive power of its former owner, as the sign that can convert, lead the victorious, and defeat death. The four narrative scenes located at the base of the altar of the True Cross worked as a perfect commentary on the image depicted in the tabernacle's doors (fig. 143). Here the Holy Wood, supported by Christian angels and ancient eroti alike, stands triumphant above two scenes from Christ's Passion – the *Entombment* and the *Pietà* – as an evident reminder of

²⁹¹ Luzietti, *Culto e rappresentazioni della Croce*, 103; Wood, Jeryldene M. "Piero's *Legend of the True Cross* and the Friars of San Francesco," in *The Cambridge Companion to Piero della Francesca*, ed. by Jeryldene M. Wood (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 51-65.

Jesus as the signifier of the Cross's meaning and power. The fact that the episodes selected for the narratives are four that could also be read as further reference to the inevitable connection between Christ and his Cross. Four were indeed the types of wood from which the Cross was composed as they were the letter of the name *Iesu*.²⁹² That number established a pattern of symbolism that was closely associated with the Cross's traditions and found expression in hymns.²⁹³

Despite its antiquarian disguise, the decoration of the tabernacle doors would have immediately reminded the faithful of the feast of the *Exaltation of the Cross*. On September 14th relics of the Cross were carried in a small procession within the church and elevated by the celebrant in front of the reunited community.²⁹⁴ The same was true for the precious reliquary preserved inside the Servite altar. The gesture of the angelic figures, which seem to support and expose the Cross, intentionally mimics the priest's duty.

²⁹² In his sermon Girolamo de' Franceschi emphasizes how the letters of the name Iesu are four and explains the significance of each letter. See Franceschi de, Girolamo. "Del modo di santificar Giesu Christo, & dell'eccellenza del suo nome, il primo di dell'anno 1492," in *Delle prediche di diversi illustri theologi, et Catholici Predicatori della parola di Dio*, ed. by Thomaso Porcacchi (Vinetia presso Giorgio de' Cavalli, 1566), 329.

²⁹³ Adam's name also consisted of four letters like the inscription INRI, see Szövérfy, "Crux fidelis," 22, 26. The number four returns with a certain consistency within Riccio's tabernacle: four are the Erotes at the sides of the Cross, the cardinal virtues at the top and bottom of the columns, and the angels with trumpets in the arch's spandrels. According to my reconstruction, the number of angels framing the altar were also likely four.

²⁹⁴ Barbaro, Orlando, and Iulia Tarciniu Balan. *Le Icone delle Feste. Il Linguaggio dell'Immagine nella Liturgia* (Venice: Marcianum Press, 2010), 34.

The Meaning of the Cross for the Servites

Once we have examined how the faithful would have approached and read Riccio's *Stories of the True Cross*, it is time to see what impact the erection of the altar had on the Servite community. What was the role of this liturgical structure within the space of their mother church? What particular meaning did the friars give to Riccio's narrations?

As I have briefly mentioned elsewhere, the arrival of a relic of the Cross was warmly welcomed by the Servites. This precious gift, from the hands of their supporter Donato, had come one year after the consecration of their church while construction work on the building was far from completion and needed some financial support. A relic would have certainly helped to elicit numerous donations, especially a prestigious one supposedly coming from the piece of the Cross brought to Rome from Saint Helena herself and recently re-discovered in the church of Santa Gerusalemme in that same city. It was thanks to the alms collected probably in connection with the piece of the Cross that Donato was able to finance the elevation of the new choir screen and consequently of the altar of the True Cross, which stood right in front of it. The newly built altar of the True Cross played a prominent role within the decorative program of the choir screen. First, its antiquarian language was probably a perfect match with the style of the screen itself, which was covered by refined marbles. Second, the stories of the True Cross that decorated the altar would have complemented other relevant imagery around the screen's area, such as the Crucifix suspended from the platform above, the dressed Madonna hanging from the arches, and the altarpiece visible through the structure's main opening. If this was Giovanni Bellini's *Lamentation* today at the Accademia, as suggested by

Carolyn Wilson, the iconographic connection between all these pieces would have been even stronger (fig. 144). The huge Cross towering at the center of the composition with Christ at its feet would have recalled the suspended Crucifixion above the choir screen and the re-discovery of the Holy Wood on the part of Constantine and Helena depicted on the altar of the True Cross.

The theme of the Cross itself was particularly relevant in Servite doctrine. Although the friars were consecrated to the Virgin Mary, as their official name states, and the devotion to the mother of God was their primary focus, their cult of the body of Christ and of Christ on the Cross was zealous from the beginning. The first known Servite sermons often combine the theme of Christ's Crucifixion and his mother's compassion, giving vivid expression to one of the most important fundamentals of Servite doctrine: the preference granted to the Mourning Virgin.²⁹⁵ It was under in this guise that the Madonna had materialized above their altar in one of the most important visions experienced by the friars on Good Friday 1246, when the mother of God announced the order's rule, name, and habit. This is how she addressed the friars according to the text of the legend compiled by the founders:

“If you want me as your Lady, I descend from the glory of heaven on earth, dressed in my mourning clothes since my Son, the Savior is still on the cross...And I, the Mother, cannot avoid wearing the color of mourning...Your robe reminds you of me at the feet of the Cross...of which you will be the champions of faith...”²⁹⁶

²⁹⁵ Dal Pino, *Fonti Storico-Spirituali dei Servi di Santa Maria*, 58.

²⁹⁶ “Se mi volete come vostra Signora, io scendo dalla gloria del cielo sulla terra, vestita a lutto perchè il Figlio mio, il Salvatore è ancora in croce...E io, la Madre, nel tempo non posso che portare il colore del lutto...Il vostro è l'abito che vi ricorda di me ai piedi della Croce...di cui sarete campioni di fedeltà...” The translation is mine but the quote is taken from Casalini, Eugenio, *Le Pleiadi del Senario*, 48. Rossi, *Manuale di storia dell'ordine dei Servi di Maria*, 387.

The central connection between the Crucified Christ and the Mourning Madonna is strongly emphasized in the *Planctus Domine Nostre*, a sermon compiled in 1395 by the friar Nicolò d'Arezzo. The *Planctus* concentrates primarily on the Virgin's relationship with her son and her participation in Christ's Passion. It opens with a warning to the faithful that clarifies the meaning of the Servite cult:

“...If the soul, which is in the world to fight against evil, deserts the battle, since it does not fight against it [the evil] by meditating on the passion of Christ and by joining today the most miserable mother in her cry for her son's death, it won't have part of the prize, namely the kingdom of heaven, because the kingdom was given to us through the Passion of Christ.”²⁹⁷

At the turn of the sixteenth century – around the time when Riccio's reliefs were created – the devotion to the Mourning Virgin, her crucified son, and the Holy Cross intensified particularly within the Observant context.²⁹⁸ This reform, which was established around 1430-1440, had promoted a renewed respect toward the norms of the Augustinian rule and the Order's ancient constitutions with a consequent return to stricter monastic life, a more austere discipline in the liturgical offices, and a greater attention to studies and preaching.²⁹⁹ The general reassessment of the Order's primary foundation was the main reason also for the renewed interest in the figure of Christ whose name began to appear with a certain consistency in the correspondence and monastic registers, through the use of the monogram YHS, and whose Crucifix became the insignia of the

²⁹⁷ The translation is mine: “...Se l'anima, che è nel mondo per combattere contro il demonio, si ritira dal combattimento, poichè non combatte contro di lui meditando la passione di Cristo e unendosi oggi alla mestissima madre per piangere la morte del figlio, non avrà parte alla preda, cioè al regno dei cieli, perchè il regno ci è stato dato attraverso la Passione di Cristo,” Dal Pino, *Fonti Storico-Spirituali*, 529.

²⁹⁸ Di Domenico, *Fonti Storico-Spirituali dei Servi di Santa Maria*, 253.

²⁹⁹ Dal Pino, *Fonti Storico-Spirituali*, 139; For the content of the Observant Reform see, ibidem, especially 122-140; Di Domenico, *Fonti Storico-Spirituali*, especially 92-109 (which includes the document edited by the General Vicar of the Observant Reform Filippo Albrizzi and the text of the Constitutions); Rossi, *Manuale di storia dell'ordine*, especially 296-369.

Observant Reform.³⁰⁰ The Christological character of the Servite cult in Santa Maria dei Servi in Venice was already strong when the Observant rule was introduced into the monastery in 1476 through the intervention of Doge Andrea Vendramin.³⁰¹ The veneration of the Cross had been promoted there since 1360, when the confraternity of the Lucchesi was entrusted with permission to build their school beside the church and to dedicate it to the *Volto Santo*, the crucifix venerated in the Cathedral of Lucca.³⁰² As I have emphasized before, the Lucchese community presided over a number of celebrations involving the Holy Cross: from the routine masses devoted to the Holy Wood every Friday and last Sunday of the month, to the more official celebrations from the liturgical calendar commemorating the Discovery of the True Cross and its Exaltation.³⁰³

The commission of objects such as Riccio's reliefs for the altar of the True Cross or Bellini's *Lamentation* simply accentuated a tendency that was already underway. The emphasis given to the Cross in these works is perfectly in tune with the Observant climate in which they originated. Indeed, they both find an appropriate commentary in the seminal writings of the Servite friar Gasparino Borro, one of the most important spokesmen of the Observant Reform.³⁰⁴ Renowned for his skills as an orator and a poet, a great humanist and a close friend of Girolamo Donato – to whom he dedicated a work on astronomy in 1490 – Borro had died in 1498 exactly when Donato begun his commission

³⁰⁰ Dal Pino, *Fonti Storico-Spirituali*, 139; Rossi, *Manuale di storia dell'ordine*, 369.

³⁰¹ Rossi, *Manuale di storia dell'ordine*, 306.

³⁰² Dal Pino, *Fonti Storico-Spirituali*, 32.

³⁰³ See chapter two, especially 67-72.

³⁰⁴ Benci and Stucky use the text of Borro particularly in connection with Bellini's *Lamentation* to prove that the male friar represented in the painting is Bonaventura Tornielli da Forlì, see Benci and Stucky. "Indagini sulla pala belliniana della Lamentazione," 52-57.

for the Servite choir.³⁰⁵ That same year the volume of his poetic compositions – *Triumph* – was published posthumously to commemorate his death.³⁰⁶ Among the over one hundred poems contained in the book, six are dedicated to the Crucifixion (viij, xiiij, xlii, lix, cxxx, and cxlii) and two to the Cross (xv and not numbered).³⁰⁷ Even though they are not prominent in number, in comparison to the overwhelming majority focused on the Virgin, these compositions are essential to understanding the penitential character of the Servite devotion to Christ/Crucifix/Cross and its strong ties with the predominant Marian cult. One of the most interesting sonnets is number xv dedicated to the Cross which is structured after the prayer Ave Maria as Jacopo Benci and Silvia Stucky have underlined:

“Hail cross worthy of reverence / You are full of grace: / The lord suffers: dies: hangs from you. / Blessed be you which are our insignia. / Among the wives kind Mary / And blessed is the fruit of your womb: oh Mary death takes. / Jesus your son that the sky shows. / Holy Mary follow the high cross. / Mother of God mourn with every Christian. / Now for us sinners Jesus Christ god. / show the high voice. / Now and at the hour of the painful grief. / Of our death: show the pious sky.”³⁰⁸

³⁰⁵ Dal Pino, *Fonti Storico-Spirituali*, 447. For Borro see, ibidem, 446-451; Besutti, *Repertori e sussidi generali*, 116-127.

³⁰⁶ The complete title is: *Triumph, sonetti, canzon et laude de la gloriosa Madre de Dio Vergine Maria*, ed. by Tommaso da Cremona, Simone da Castellazzo e Giovanni Battista Boneto (Brescia, Angelo de' Britannici, 23.X.1498). The text is divided in two parts. The first comprises six triumphs narrating the life of the Virgin, *The lament on the death of the blessed Bonaventura da Forlì of the Order of the Servites*, the *Eulogy of God's mercy*, and the *Eulogy of the Virgin Mary*; the second part is a collection of various poems of different content. For a discussion of each section see Veronese, Ileana Renza. “L'opera letteraria di Gasparino Borro,” in *Studi Storici dell'Ordine dei Servi di Maria Roma*, 20 (1970), 77-92.

³⁰⁷ As reported by Benci and Stucky, “Indagini sulla pala belliniana,” 56.

³⁰⁸ “Ave croce di riverentia degna / Gratia plena in te tutta sextende: / Dominus tecus pate: more: pende. / Benedicta tu che sei nostra insegna. / In mulieribus maria benigna / Et benedictus fructus pur soffende: / Ventris tui: o maria morte prende. / Jesus tuo figlio che lo ciel mensegna. / Sancta maria compagni alalta croce. / Mater dei cum doglia ogni christiano. / Ora pro nobis Jesu christo idio. / Peccatoribus monstra lalta voce. / Nunc & in ora dil noglioso affanno. / Mortis nostre: monstrane il cielo pio.” Although the sonnet is reported by Benci and Stucky in their article, I have consulted a rare copy of Borro's text at the Morgan Library & Museum (New York) and translated the poem. The present quote and the following are taken from this edition.

The important nexus between the Virgin Mary and the Cross, which can be considered as a sort of leitmotiv throughout the entire volume, is also seen in this passage from another poem addressed to the heart: “Accept the crucifix as helmsman...Blind I tie the rope at the high cross / Which never conceals the virtue at the tormented: I escape under Mary’s cape.”³⁰⁹ It is significant how the Cross and the Virgin’s mantle are presented as equivalent instruments of salvation. The image of the Cross transmitted by Borro’s writings would have offered the faithful praying in front of Riccio’s reliefs the most valuable tool for appreciating the message delivered by the stories. The rhythmical way in which the Holy Wood appears in the bronzes somehow replicates the format of the poem entitled *Salutatione di la sancta croce* in which each stanza opens with a different yet similar greeting to the Cross: “Hail banner of the people: true support for the miserable human beings...Hi banner that the enemy set on fire depriving it of the superb: and big empire...Hi [banner] wet by the pure blood of Jesus christ redeemer...Hi sublime sign of eternal piece...”³¹⁰ Borro’s verses seem clearly to be inspired by hymns such as the “Crux fidelis” which were well known to the general public.³¹¹

The work of Borro represents a new aspect in the cultural life of his order. No other Servite friar before him had treated religious matters in poetry rather than prose, interpreting sacred subjects through the medium of the profane compositions of Dante and Petrarch. His *Triumphs* really embody the dynamic cultural atmosphere of the Venetian monastery of Santa Maria dei Servi and its receptivity toward the humanist

³⁰⁹ “El crucifisso accepta per nochiero...La fune alalta croce ceco chio lego / Che a tibulati la virtu mai cела: / sotto dil manto fugo di maria.”

³¹⁰ “Salve vexillo del humana gente: ai miseri mortali ver sostegno...Salve standardo che linimico arse spoliando del superbo: e grande impero...Salve bagnato di quell sangue mero di Jesu xpo redemptor...Salve excelso segno deterna pace...” The poem is quoted entirely in Benci and Stucky, 57.

³¹¹ Veronese, “L’opera letteraria di Gasparino Borro,” 91.

tradition. At the turn of the sixteenth century, the Servite community in Venice was renowned as a highly cultivated brotherhood dedicated to theological, philosophical, and humanist studies, and Borro himself describes it in such terms in his dedicatory letter to Girolamo Donato which opens his *Commentum* to the work of Sacrobosco.³¹² The presence of personalities of the stature of Borro and Donato definitely gives a sense of the climate that permeated the Servite monastery, which was probably not extraneous to the creation of one of the most original literary works of the time: the *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili*.

Published by Aldus Manutius in Venice in December 1499, this book belongs to the same context in which Riccio's reliefs with the *Stories of the True Cross* were created. Indeed the two works entered the public domain at the exact same time and seem to be nurtured by the same antiquarian culture. More than a love novel, as it was supposed to be at a first level of reading, the *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili* is a celebration of that antiquarian language that Riccio brought to life through his art. Numerous are the correspondences between the text and the work of the Paduan sculptor for the Servites: from the simple decorative motives that abound in the book often in the form of grotesques and hieroglyphics, to the monument frequently encountered by Poliphilo throughout his journey, such as the "triumphal door" at the base of the pyramid that he sees at the beginning of his adventure. This magnificent structure to whose description Poliphilo devotes several pages, closely recalls in format Riccio's tabernacle doors. With the exclusion of the double columns and the pediment topping Poliphilo's door, the design of the two triumphal openings is quite similar as we see by comparing illustration

³¹² *Commentum super tractatum Sphaerae Johannis de Sacrobosco* (Venetia, Boneto Locatelli, 1490). The dedicatory letter is available in Besutti, *Repertori e sussidi generali*, 117-119.

and relief (fig. 145). Also, one of the portal's decorative reliefs returns, although slightly modified, resembles that in Riccio's panel: it is the bronze eagle described as standing above an outstretched garland in the door's frieze. In Riccio's bronze the motif is translated into two eagles holding a garland rode by two putti (fig. 146).

Another relief that is also part of the pyramidal building recalls Riccio's bronzes. I am referring to the gigantomachy sculpted at the pyramid's base. Poliphilo's detailed description of the scene echoes aspects of the *Battle* panel in Santa Maria dei Servi, especially where he talks about a group of fallen soldiers which seems to correspond to the figures portrayed by Riccio in the panel's left corner (fig. 147):

“...There was one who, lying on the ground, fought supine protecting himself behind a shield...Among the dead there was another who, caught screaming, still instilled fear, and who persisted with fierceness and another who, agonized, seemed to die for real, in perfect imitation of nature...”³¹³

The parallels between Riccio's sculptures and the text of the *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili* can be explained in light of the common cultural matrix to which both sculptor and author belonged. Their creations show evident ties to the antiquarianism that had been proliferating in the Veneto in the second half of the fifteenth century through the contributions of artists such as Giovanni Bellini, Andrea Mantegna, and Bernardo Parentino.³¹⁴ The period was characterized by a ubiquitous interest in antique remains both real and fictive, fruit of the imagination and the erudition of artists of the caliber of

³¹³ The translation is mine: “...Chi, steso a terra, combatteva supino proteggendosi con lo scudo...In mezzo ai morti c'era ancora chi, colto nell'urlo, incuteva timore, chi si ostinava furibondo e chi, agonizzante, sembrava morire davvero, con perfetta imitazione della natura...,” Colonna, Francesco. *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili*, ed by Marco Ariani and Mino Gabriele (Milan: Adelphi Edizioni, 2004), vol. II, 35.

³¹⁴ See essays by Silvia Urbini and Augusto Gentili in: Scarsella, Alessandro et al. *Intorno al Polifilo. Contributi sull'opera e l'epoca di Francesco Colonna e Aldo Manuzio* (Venice: Biblioteca nazionale marciana, 2001), especially 193, 280-281.

Riccio. However, the connection between Poliphilo's novel and the bronzes with the *Stories of the True Cross* becomes more meaningful if we assume that they could have both originated within the milieu of the Servite order in the Veneto. Even though the issue of the authorship of the *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili* seems to be solved, according to most, in favor of the Dominican friar Francesco Colonna, the possibility that the book's writer could be a Servite figure cannot be completely dismissed.³¹⁵ The candidate would be friar Eliseo da Treviso, a humanist affiliated with the University of Padua and a member of the Servite monastery in Treviso. His name was brought up first by Alessandro Parronchi and later by Piero Scapecchi who re-discovered in the *Annalium* of the Servite Arcangelo Giani, compiled at the beginning of the seventeenth century, which contains a reference to Eliseo as the person who wrote the *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili*. Giani states that he received that piece of information directly from the friars in the Trevisan community who had showed him the book.³¹⁶ While even recent supporters of Francesco Colonna believe that this news was ill-founded and intentionally spread by the Servite friars, there are a couple of points in its favor that cannot be overlooked.³¹⁷ First, we should underline that Giani's *Annalium* were conceived as the official history of the Servite order and produced within the climate of the counter-reformation, an historical moment when the paternity of a work such as the *Hypnerotomachia* would have not been looked on favorably.³¹⁸ Second, a book so much imbued with humanist culture would

³¹⁵ For a review of all the various hypotheses advanced, see introduction in Colonna, *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili*, 64-90.

³¹⁶ Parronchi, Alessandro. "Il vero autore del Polifilo," in *Rara volumina*, 1 (1994), 7-12; Scapecchi, Piero. "L'Hypnerotomachia Poliphili e il suo autore," in *Accademie e biblioteche d'Italia*, 51 (1983), 286-298, especially 289-291.

³¹⁷ See especially Fumagalli, Edoardo. "Una supplica di Francesco Colonna (con una premessa su Eliseo da Treviso)," in *Italia medioevale e umanistica*, 29 (1986), 211-213.

³¹⁸ Scapecchi, "L'Hypnerotomachia Poliphili," 289.

have fitted perfectly in the context of the Servite order in Venice as it has been delineated above.

Around the same time when the *Hypnerotomachia* was produced, two other works of analogous nature were published by Servite friars close to the Venetian monastery: the *Sylvae* by Marcello Filosseno from Treviso published in Venice in 1507 by Nicolò Brenta and the *Libro novo de lo inamoramento de Galvano* by Evangelista Fossa da Cremona published in Milan before 1497 by Pietro Martire e fratelli Mantegazzi. The *Sylvae* contains the youthful poems written by the humanist and poet Marcello who lived at the court of Mantua and in Rome, where he became close to Pope Alexander VI. He nurtured a platonic love for the Pope's daughter, Lucrezia Borgia, to whom his rimes are dedicated in a letter addressed to the noblewoman by the Venetian patrician Girolamo Barbarigo. In the *prefatio* to the collection by Giovanni Battista Locatelli Marcello, the poet, is praised as equal to his illustrious predecessors Dante and Petrarch.³¹⁹ Evangelista Fossa was born to an ancient and noble family and received a humanistic education. He belonged to the Venetian cultural milieu as proven by the dedication of his poem to a patrician named Lorenzo Loredan.³²⁰ The chivalric poem in thirteen cantos is not his only work, he also translated Virgil and Seneca and his publications appeared in Venice.³²¹

³¹⁹ Besutti, *Repertori e sussidi generali*, 51-53.

³²⁰ Stoppino, Eleonora. "Arthur as Renaissance Epic," in *The Arthur of the Italians. The Arthurian Legend in Medieval Italian Literature and Culture*, ed. by Gloria Allaire and F. Regina Psaki (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2014), 126.

³²¹ Besutti, *Repertori e sussidi generali*, 131-137.

Conclusions

As this chapter has proven, Riccio's *Stories of the True Cross* deserve a place of respect within the category of narrative cycles which made the Legend of the Holy Wood popular in the Renaissance. Despite their relatively small dimensions, these bronzes stand out for the sophistication of their execution, the complexity of their iconography, and the erudition of their antiquarian language. The goal of this section has been two-fold: on one hand, to determine the literary and iconographic sources of Riccio's panels; on the other hand, to examine how the stories were intended to address both the regular faithful and the Servite friars.

Although it is evident that the stories were based on the account of Jacobus da Voragine's *Golden Legend*, Riccio's response to this literary source is distinctively original and, in many aspects, unprecedented. The artist and his patron, Girolamo Donato, detached themselves from the established figurative tradition, preferring a philological approach to the legend of the True Cross. In order to emphasize the historical authenticity of the events narrated, they set Constantine and Helena's deeds within the proper antiquarian and historical context, thus anticipating the results achieved by Raphael and his pupils in the life of Constantine depicted in the Vatican apartments. They also attempted to elevate the reliefs to the level of dignity of the written word. The panels indeed unfold with the same eloquence as the sermons delivered from the choir's screen and with a sense of grandeur comparable to the pages of an epic poem. Riccio applies to his narrative the techniques recommended by ancient rhetoric and revisited by Saint Augustine in Christian terms, some of which also appear in the treatise on sculpture written by Pomponius Gauricus shortly after the completion of Riccio's work for the

Servites. Every aspect of Riccio's design – from the compositional arrangement to the setting's characteristics and the smallest decorative details – aims to engage the viewer's attention and to facilitate his/her understanding of the stories' ultimate message: the salvific power of the True Cross.

What the acquisition of the relic preserved in Riccio's altar meant for the Servite friars has been previously underlined. The inclusion of such a precious item in their mother church marked the order's definitive establishment within the Venetian religious community while stressing one of the most important components of the Servite devotion: the cult of Christ's instrument of the Passion. This chapter provides an overview of the relevant role played by the Cross in the order's doctrine with particular attention to its ties with the Observant community which had an important outpost in Santa Maria dei Servi in Venice. Influential personalities gravitated around the monastery at this time strengthening its cultural status and its predisposition to humanist studies. The writings of Gasparino Borro, the antiquarian interests of Girolamo Donato, and the extremely sophisticated archaeological language of the *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili*, perhaps composed by a Servite friar, give a sense of the particular atmosphere which surrounded the creation of Riccio's reliefs. They also provide a useful commentary to decipher the complexity of the message that they deliver.

Chapter Four. Girolamo Donato: His Political Statement and His Relationship with Andrea Riccio.

In the previous chapter I examined what kind of impact the reliefs with the Stories of the True Cross had on two categories of audiences: the common faithful or pilgrim who would have worshipped at the altar of the True Cross; and the Servite friars, for whom the relic of the True Cross meant prestige for the order and support for the cult of the crucifix which played an important role in the Observant community's life in Venice. There is a third category of viewers that I have purposely omitted. These are the erudite intellectuals who would have grasped and appreciated Riccio's antiquarian references and its subtle connection to the politics of the time. Girolamo Donato, the patron of the altar, is probably the person that represents this third category the best. The interests nurtured by the patrician throughout his life are embedded in the reliefs for the Servites and their creation: his dutiful contribution to the Republic of Venice, his love for the study of the humanities, and his life-long devotion to the Servite order. A close analysis of the persona of Donato and his multifaceted profile is thus necessary for an understanding of the panels' third, deepest, and perhaps least immediate level of reading.

Donato, The Servites' Supporter and Politician

The relationship between Girolamo Donato and the Servite order was not simply of a customary nature. Certainly Donato's palace was located not far from Santa Maria dei Servi and a number of his family members were buried there: not only his father

Antonio but also his grandfather Andrea and his ancestor Bartolomeo.³²² As remembered in the indulgence proclaimed in favor of Girolamo by Pope Alexander VI, the family tombs were probably located in the Donato chapel, on the left side of the high altar, which was dedicated to Saint Jerome.³²³ However, Donato's closeness to the order seems to have been dictated by a more personal inclination. When Girolamo received the precious relic of the Cross' titulus from the hands of Pope Innocent VIII in 1491-1492, he did not deliver it to the Doge as his father Antonio did when he obtained the golden rose from Pope Sixtus IV.³²⁴ Rather he entrusted the Venetian Servites with this meaningful gift, taking care to commission an altar for its commemoration which was positioned on the newly constructed choir screen. Moreover, while he was on his death bed, he stipulated that he be buried in the Servite church of San Marcello in Rome.³²⁵ It was from that same church that the procurator Marco dai Letti brought a large number of relics to Venice in 1413.³²⁶

The donation of the relic, the care devoted to the commission for its altar, and to the general adornment of the church as proven by the erection of the marble-encrusted screen, are all actions that can be explained in connection with Donato's role as the procurator of Santa Maria dei Servi. In the dedicatory inscription compiled at the time of

³²² Cicogna, Antonio. *Delle iscrizioni veneziane*. Bologna: Forni Editore, 1982, 42-43; 56-57.

³²³ "Capella nob. De Ca Donato. Altare consecratum sub titulo sancti Hieronymi habet pallam veterem, in reliquis ornatum," ASVa, Congr. Vescovi e Regolari, Visita Ap., 96, f.68v; Pavon and Cauzzi. *La memoria di un tempio*, 64; Rigo, Paola. "Donà, Girolamo," in *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani*, 40 (1990), 745.

³²⁴ During an embassy in Rome, Antonio was made knight by Pope Sixtus IV and was granted the golden rose as a sign of gratitude for the Venetian effort against the Turks, Lauber, Rosella. "Girolamo Donà," 272.

³²⁵ Agostini degli, Giovanni. *Notizie Istorico-Critiche Intorno La Vita, e le Opere degli Scrittori Viniziani*. 2 vols (Venice: Occhi, 1754), 223. The brief inscription commemorating his tomb has now disappeared, Rigo, "Donà, Girolamo," 751.

³²⁶ Cardinal Giovanni Michiel, protector of the order, donated to the Servites his palace in San Marcello, Vicentini, *Santa Maria de' Servi in Venezia*, 20, 61.

the church's dedication in 1491, Donato is mentioned alongside Nicolò Mudazzo as one of the procurators.³²⁷ This office was not dissimilar from the more prestigious one held by the procurators of Saint Mark. As the fellow-custodians of the ducal chapel of San Marco, lay procurators oversaw the finances, patrimony, and physical structure of a church, and administered wills and trusts.³²⁸ A list of their more common responsibilities can be examined in connection with the nomination of Francesco Donato as the procurator of Santa Maria dei Servi in 1519, a person that I would like to identify with the future Doge and first cousin of Girolamo.³²⁹ Francesco is defined as procurator, conservator, guardian, governor, and mayor of the monastery, responsible for the enlargement of the building and its preservation as well as for administration of alms.³³⁰ This document is interesting not only because it gives us a glimpse into the specific duties of procurators but also because it proves how the office was a life-long commitment often likely to endure from one generation to the other.³³¹

³²⁷ "REVERENDVS IN XPO – PATER D ANTONI' SARACO – DEI GRACIA ARCHIEPS – CORIN / THIENSIS – VICARIVS RMI – D PATRIARCHE – VENETIAR – CONSECRAVIT-HANC ECCLE – ET ALTARE / MAIVS – DIE – VII – MENSIS – NOVEMBRIS – MCCCCCLXXXI – EXISTETE – PORE – DICTE ECCLE – DNO – MAG HIER / DE FRANCISCIS – SACRE – THEOLOGIE PFESORE – AC MAG DNI – HIERONIMO DONATO QDAN MAG DNI / ANTONII EQVITIS ET DOCTORE – ET – NICOLAO MVDACIO – QDAN – MAG D LVDOVICI – PROCVRATORIBS," Cicogna, *Delle iscrizioni veneziane*, 35, who also provides information about every personality involved in the consecration.

³²⁸ Sherman, Allison. "Soli Deo Honor et Gloria. Pietro Lombardo e il tramezzo di Santa Maria Gloriosa dei Frari," in *Santa Maria Gloriosa dei Frari*, ed. by Carlo Corsato and Deborah Howard (Padua: Centro studi antoniani, 2015), 211-222.

³²⁹ In the document's passage recorded by Vicentini (Vicentini, Antonio M. *I Servi di Maria nei documenti e codici veneziani*. 2 vols. Vicenza: Officina Tipografica Vicentina, 1922, 134), Francesco Donato is identified as "D. Franciscum Donatum equitem q. magn.ci Aloysij," namely the son of Alvise Donato. According to the family trees reported in the ASVe (Barbaro, misc. codici serie I storia veneta, 19) Alvise was the brother of Antonio Donato, father of Girolamo Donato, and consequently Girolamo's first cousin. Apparently Francesco was raised by his uncle Antonio, father of Girolamo.

³³⁰ ASVe, section II parchments, busta 7.

³³¹ Allison. "Soli Deo Honor et Gloria," 213-16.

The strong devotion shown by Donato toward the Servites and his deep engagement with religious matters in general was not in contrast with his role as a successful politician or a passionate humanist. To be religious was a requirement for those who served the Republic in Venice as it was often to be a humanist. Humanistic interests and religious faith were not separate in the *Serenissima*, rather they joined forces, unlike what was happening in Rome and Florence.³³² The way that culture married well with religion is exemplified in the person of Girolamo and can be referred to as another reason for the patrician's affinity with the Servite order. Since he was a young student at the University of Padua, Donato dedicated himself both to the study of philosophy and theology, and the two interests are interconnected in his series of publications. On the one hand, he translated Alexander of Aphrodisias, commentator of Aristotle *par excellence*, sharing his friend Ermolao Barbaro's goal to re-connect philosophical debates to original and corrected texts with the goal of undermining the position held so far by Averroes. On the other hand, he made accessible the work of theologians such as Dionysius the Aeropagite or John Chrysostom, composing, at the same time, treatises to support the supremacy of the Roman papacy and the Latin doctrine on the Holy Spirit.³³³ Donato seems to have adhered to the new spirituality promoted by the congregation of San Giorgio in Alga in the early fifteenth century.³³⁴ This religious fervor was embraced by fellow patricians and friends such as Gasparo

³³² Branca, Vittore. "La cultura: l'umanesimo," in *Rinascimento: politica e cultura*, ed. by Vittore Branca et al. (Rome: Ist. della Enciclopedia Italiana, 1996), 727.

³³³ For all the writings of Donato see Rigo, Paola. "Catalogo e tradizione degli scritti di Girolamo Donato," *Atti dell'Accademia nazionale dei Lincei. Classe di scienze morali, storiche e filologiche*, series VIII, vol. 31 (Gen.-Feb. 1976), 49-80.

³³⁴ The translation from Greek to Latin of the *Homily in I Cor. ix* was dedicated by Donato to Andrea Anselmino bresciano, presbitero of San Giorgio in Alga. Rigo, "Catalogo e tradizione degli scritti di Girolamo Donato," 56.

Contarini, Paolo Giustinian, and Vincenzo Querini and aimed to employ culture at the service of the evangelical renewal.³³⁵ The same message was shared, not coincidentally, by the new religiosity promoted by the Servite observant reform, especially in the context of the Venetian monastery of Santa Maria dei Servi. There humanism and spirituality found a perfect balance, as we have seen, in the writings of Gasparino Borro. Like his friend Donato, the friar cultivated both theological and philosophical studies, dedicating special attention to astronomy as well.³³⁶ Borro's work became emblematic of Venetian humanism's ideals which believed that it is impossible to have science without knowledge, understood as wisdom coming from God, and without disengaging the spiritual world from the natural world.³³⁷

It is not a surprise that the search for a new spirituality became stronger in Venice toward the end of the fifteenth century. The 1490s witnessed the progressive and relentless deterioration of the city's status both in Italy and abroad. External attacks on Venice's actions on the mainland and her policies in regard to the Ottoman threat, already evident around mid-century, intensified in the last decade of the fourteen hundreds. Harshly criticized by outsiders and haunted by doubts from within, the city vacillated but stood firm, thanks to the strong support of faithful citizens like Girolamo Donato. The almost religious devotion of the patrician to the Republic was truly exceptional. His strong political vocation went far beyond the sense of duty that he inherited from his

³³⁵ Branca, Vittore. "Umanesimo Veneziano fra Barbaro e Bembo," in *Una famiglia veneziana nella storia: i Barbaro*, Atti del Convegno di Studi in Occasione del Quinto Centenario della Morte dell'Umanista Ermolao, ed. by Michela Marangoni and Manlio Pastore Stocchi (Venice: Istituto Veneto di Scienze, Lettere e Arti, 1996), 13.

³³⁶ It seems that Donato was also writing a treatise on astronomy that is now lost, Rigo, "Catalogo e tradizione degli scritti di Girolamo Donato," 51. King, Margaret L. *Venetian Humanism in an Age of Patrician Dominance* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986), 240-241, note 87.

³³⁷ Branca, "La cultura: l'umanesimo," 743.

family.³³⁸ Throughout his life Donato constantly put his knowledge and his diplomatic skills at the service of the Venetian cause, becoming a leading protagonist of one of the most delicate chapters in Venetian history.

The apex of Donato's career coincided with a dramatic moment for the *Serenissima*. Around 1500, at the time when the altar of the True Cross was commissioned, Venice was forced to face challenges coming from every front: from the Mediterranean, where the Turks' implacable advance after the fall of Constantinople in 1453 progressively eroded the Venetian maritime empire; from Europe, where the threat of the French invasion of the Italian peninsula was becoming a reality in 1494; and from Italy itself, where the Pope was plotting to join forces with the Empire, France, and Spain in a league against Venice.³³⁹ Donato was fully aware of the Republic's growing isolation and of the necessity of employing diplomatic tools to guarantee her survival. As a matter of fact, during this period, he traveled to Rome at least four times as an ambassador in order to represent and defend Venetian interests in the crucial center of Italian politics. The first time, he was sent to the capital of Christianity in 1491-1492 with the apparent purpose of resolving the controversy of his friend Ermolao Barbaro's nomination as the patriarch of Aquileia on the part of Pope Innocent VIII. In 1497-1499 he was an orator - and Venice's official representative - at the court of Pope Alexander VII from where he reported the shifting alliances following Charles VIII's death and

³³⁸ His ancestor Bartolomeo (second half of the fourteenth century-1431) was a Procurator of Saint Mark; his grandfather Andrea (1395-1466 ca) was the intercessor of the peace between the Pope Eugenius IV and the emperor Sigismund, a major protagonist of the Council of Basel, and Duke of Candia; his father Antonio (ca1422-1481) was an eminent politician and humanist, see Cicogna, *Delle iscrizioni veneziane*, 42-43; 56-57.

³³⁹ For a concise but good summary of this historical moment, see King, *Venetian Humanism*, 225-226; 231; 236-237.

attempted to appease the two-faced nature of the Borgia Pope. In 1505 he was a member of the grandiose legation intended to honor the newly elected Pope Julius II. Donato was destined to spend the last years of his life in the entourage of this Pope. He was among the six orators appointed to appeal to Julius II after the catastrophic defeat at Agnadello in July 1509 but the only one who enjoyed the favors of the fearsome Pope. He remained in Rome as the Republic's sole ambassador until his death on October 20, 1511, and was the only one capable of reversing Venetian fortunes in Italy.³⁴⁰ It was mainly thanks to Donato's diplomatic ability that Venice renewed her relationship with Julius II through signing on to the Holy League.³⁴¹

Although the first legation to Rome was not a successful one, Donato did not come back to Venice with empty hands. Perhaps he was not able to convince his friend Ermolao to respect Venetian law and to refuse the appointment as a patriarch, but he did secure his way into Innocent VIII's graces. After having convinced him and the suspicious Giuliano della Rovere, Cardinal of San Pietro in Vincoli, of the good intentions of the Venetians, he was granted by the Pope the precious piece of the Cross' titulus that he donated to the Servites. He also obtained from Innocent VIII a plenary indulgence in favor of the church of Santa Maria dei Servi. In the body of the text, announced on April 1492 just before Donato left Rome, the remission of sins was promised to all the faithful who would visit the Servite church and "offer a helping hand" to the proper restoration and preservation of the sacred building and its numerous

³⁴⁰ For the best review of Donato's political career, see Paola Rigo, "Donà, Girolamo," especially 744-751.

³⁴¹ On the day of Donato's death, the Republic of Venice organized a public parade to celebrate this great diplomatic success. According to Sanudo, the figure of Donato was carried in procession along with that of the Pope, see Branca, *La Sapienza Civile*, 118.

relics.³⁴² The piece of the Cross given by Innocent VIII was certainly going to enrich this precious collection and to become “handy” during the phase of completion of the Servite mother church. Such a prestigious addition was probably what allowed Donato to collect the alms necessary to fund the construction of a new choir screen and the altar in front of it, especially dedicated to the True Cross. The reliefs destined to decorate the altar were commissioned from Andrea Riccio sometime after Donato’s second legation to Rome, as suggested by the specific model that the patron had in mind.

A Source of Inspiration: The Frescoes in Santa Croce in Gerusalemme, Rome

When Donato received the relic of the Cross from Innocent VIII, he could have simply enshrined it in the beautiful reliquary made out of jasper where it is still preserved today. This is how pieces of the Holy Wood were commonly commemorated in various churches in Venice, including San Marco. On the contrary, the patrician created, first, a tabernacle to store the reliquary and then an altar adorned with bronze panels to host the receptacle. The choices that he made were absolutely unconventional, beginning with the format of the altar and the inclusion of bronze narrative reliefs telling the stories of the True Cross. Roughly in the same years when Riccio was working on the altar of the True Cross, at least two other commissions in Venice were associated with the commemoration of a piece of the Holy Cross: the panels for the boardroom of the Scuola Grande di San Giovanni Evangelista (1490s-1505/10) and the altarpiece for the altar of

³⁴² Corner, *Ecclesiae Venetae*, 94-96.

the Cross in the church of San Giovanni in Bragora (1501-1503).³⁴³ While the first cycle consisted of the nine monumental canvases, painted by six different artists, which illustrate the miracles performed by the institution's prestigious relic as everyday events set within a Venetian urban context, the small altarpiece executed by Cima da Conegliano looked far more conventional (figs. 148-149). The artist adapted on a painted panel the traditional Byzantine iconography commonly used for metal reliquaries of the Cross, showing Constantine and his mother Helena as standing witnesses to the authenticity of the True Cross.³⁴⁴ This image was certainly well-known to Donato since several examples were available in Venice, for instance in San Marco and San Michele in Isola (fig. 150).³⁴⁵ However, the patrician opted for an unprecedented solution. He refused to commemorate the Servite relic in the traditional way favored by Cima and his patrons or to immortalize its miracles in the modern anecdotal style chosen for the most popular fragment in San Giovanni Evangelista.³⁴⁶ Ultimately he decided to look for inspiration elsewhere than Venice, where the legend of the True Cross was not popular.

³⁴³ Humfrey, "Cima da Conegliano, Sebastiano Mariani, and Alvise Vivarini," 361; Fortini Brown, Patricia. *Venetian Narrative Painting in the Age of Carpaccio* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988), 136-164.

³⁴⁴ Humfrey, "Cima da Conegliano, Sebastiano Mariani, and Alvise Vivarini," 362.

³⁴⁵ As Humfrey underlines, there were two gilt silver reliquaries of this kind in San Marco and one in San Michele in Isola. There were also painted icons following the same scheme, such as the one in the church of Sant'Elena accompanying the shrine of the saint and a relic of the Cross. Humfrey, "Cima da Conegliano, Sebastiano Mariani, and Alvise Vivarini," note 60, 362. We should also remember that a similar structure is employed in the reliquary of the Cross donated by Cardinal Bessarion to the Venetian Scuola Grande della Carità, covered by a tabernacle's door painted by Gentile Bellini, see Campbell, Caroline, and Alan Chong, eds. *Bellini and the East*, exhibition catalogue (Boston, Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum and London, National Gallery, 2005-2006). London: National Gallery Company and Boston: Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, 2005, cat. 5-6, 38-39.

³⁴⁶ Certainly Donato was aware of both commissions, especially the one in San Giovanni Evangelista. In fact, a connection between the Servites and San Giovanni existed through the figure of the Doge Andrea Vendramin buried in Santa Maria dei Servi: his grandfather, Andrea Vendramin, was Guardian Grande of the Scuola and the protagonist of two miracles associated

Apart from Riccio's reliefs, the story of the Holy Wood in Venetian art was usually relegated to the *predella* of painted altarpieces with a preference given to Helena's deeds.³⁴⁷ This was the case, for example, in the polyptych executed by the Bolognese artist Michele di Matteo for the church of Sant'Elena in Isola, the above mentioned altarpiece by Cima da Conegliano for San Giovanni in Bragora, and a polyptych by Bernardino da Tossignano (figs. 149, 151). This last work shares Cima's Byzantine iconography and the same selection of episodes from the Legend in the *predella*, with the scenes of Helena's *Finding of the True Cross* and the *Miracle of the Holy Wood* flanking Constantine's mother convening the Jewish wise men in a meeting.³⁴⁸ In order to find commissions of greater impact we need to move along the Adriatic regions and Tuscany, where large frescoed cycles dedicated to the True Cross began to appear between the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. The much damaged decoration of San Nicola in Lanciano, Abruzzo, dated around 1320s, anticipated the renowned Franciscan cycles of Agnolo Gaddi for the choir of Santa Croce in Firenze (1388-93) and of Piero della Francesca for San Francesco in Arezzo (1459-1466) which established an important figurative tradition (fig. 152).³⁴⁹

with the Cross. In Gentile Bellini's *Miracle at the Bridge of San Lorenzo*, the Guardian Grande bears the features of his nephew the Doge with whom he shared a name, see Fortini Brown, *Venetian Narrative Painting*, 222.

³⁴⁷ This is probably due to the influence of the artistic production in the Marche on Venetian art, see Luzietti, *Culto e rappresentazioni della Croce nell'età della Controriforma*, 117-118.

³⁴⁸ Even later when larger canvases were dedicated to major events from the Legend of the True Cross, Helena was favored in Venice alongside Heraclius. See for example, Tintoretto's *Miracle of the True Cross* for Santa Maria Mater Domini (1561-1565) and Palma il Giovane's *Heraclius Bringing the Cross to Jerusalem* in San Giovanni Elemosinario (1595-1599) or his *Miracle of the True Cross and Heraclius Bringing the Cross to Jerusalem* in the church of Santa Maria Assunta dei Gesuiti (1620-1625). Luzietti, 161-162.

³⁴⁹ For a discussion of the iconography of these cycles and related bibliography, see Luzietti, *Culto e rappresentazioni della Croce*, 80-106.

When Donato was in Rome during his second legation at the court of Pope Alexander VI between 1497 and 1499, another frescoed decoration had been recently completed in the eternal city: *The Stories of the True Cross* in the apse of Santa Croce in Gerusalemme (fig. 153). This sacred space had profound ties with the cult of the Holy Wood, and its prestige had begun to thrive more vigorously during the second half of the fifteenth century. As the dedication itself implies, the church was strongly connected to the Holy Land since it was the first Christian basilica referring to the Holy Places of Palestine.³⁵⁰ According to tradition, it was founded by Helena herself upon her return from the journey to Jerusalem around 326-328 with the purpose of preserving and commemorating part of the True Cross that she had brought back with her.³⁵¹ The original building was a major hall of Helena's imperial villa complex, the main edifice of which was known as the Palatium Sessorianum. Its design may have recalled the Christological *martyria* of the Holy Land, also erected in Constantinian times.³⁵² Although the relocation of the Cross' fragment within the basilica on the part of Constantine is mentioned for the first time in the *Liber Pontificalis* only in the sixth century, the veneration of the relic probably had begun before and grew rapidly. Already in the fifth century the fourth Sunday of Lent and Holy Friday were celebrated in Santa Croce in Gerusalemme.³⁵³ Since the seventh century, on Holy Friday the Pope walked barefoot from the Lateran to the basilica to commemorate the Crucifixion, while the

³⁵⁰ Argentini S., and M. Ricciardi. "Il complesso di S. Croce in Gerusalemme in Roma: nuove acquisizioni ed ipotesi," in *Rendiconti / Pontificia Accademia Romana di Archeologia*, 69, 1996-1997 (2000), 257

³⁵¹ Apparently Helena divided the Cross in three sections which she destined for Jerusalem, Constantinople, and Rome, see Ortolani, Sergio. *S. Croce in Gerusalemme*. (Rome: Marietti, 1969), 6.

³⁵² Argentini and Ricciardi, "Il complesso di S. Croce in Gerusalemme in Roma," 287.

³⁵³ *Ibid.*, 282

faithful could conduct a ritual Adoration of the Cross and attend a Passion play staged outside the building. On May 3rd a papal mass was said there on the occasion of the feast of the Discovery of the Cross, a celebration of particular relevance in Santa Croce as was the other Constantinian feast of the Exaltation of the Cross. Last but not least, as early as the papacy of Innocent II, in the twelfth century, the space had been used for papal masses seeking aid against the infidels.³⁵⁴

The prominence of Santa Croce in Gerusalemme and of its cult of the Cross strengthened in the last decade of the fifteenth century due to an event that significantly affected Donato himself and his commission for the Servites in Venice. During a renovation campaign of the church's interior promoted by Pedro Gonzalez De Mendoza, Cardinal titular of the church (1478-1495), an important relic was brought to light: the Cross' titulus, hidden at the summit of the triumphal arch probably by Helena herself or by the emperor Valentinian. This was Christ's plaque of which Donato received a fragment from Pope Innocent VIII's hand probably right after the Holy Father went to greet the remarkable discovery despite his poor health conditions.³⁵⁵ The resonance of the event was made even greater by the fact that the fortunate find occurred on 1 February 1492, the same day as the news reached Rome of the victory of the Spanish monarchs, Ferdinand and Isabella, over the Turkish forces at Granada, the last stronghold of the infidels in Spain. The recovery of this lost, substantial piece from Christ's instrument of martyrdom in such fortunate circumstances had a tremendous impact both on the life of

³⁵⁴ Loconsole, Michele. "Il simbolo della croce tra giudeo-cristianesimo e tarda antichità: un elemento della translatio Hierosolymae," in *Liber Annus*, 53 (2003), 51-53; Gill, Meredith J. "Antoniazio Romano and the Recovery of Jerusalem in Late Fifteenth-Century Rome," in *Storia dell'Arte*, 83 (1995), 30-31.

³⁵⁵ Cappelletti, Francesca. "L'affresco nel catino absidale di Santa Croce in Gerusalemme a Roma. La fonte iconografica, la committenza e la datazione," in *Storia dell'Arte*, 66 (1989), 124.

Santa Croce and on the morale of the capital of Christianity. The church's already rich catalogue of relics from the Passion increased as did its popularity as a pilgrimage site.³⁵⁶ At the same time Rome's metaphorical image as a New Jerusalem received further support. A few months after the re-discovery of the titulus, Innocent VIII also acquired from the Sultan of Turkey, Bayazid II, the iron tip of the Holy Lance, another item that traditionally owed its recovery to Helena and represented a sign of the divine favor bestowed on the eternal city. Nothing was more appropriate to reinforce the momentum of the crucial success in Granada. The Spanish achievement was a critical victory for the Church in the West after years of inconclusive maneuvers and failed attempts in the fight against the Turks. After the fall of Constantinople, Pope Pius II had manifested an eager interest in reuniting the Italian forces in a crusade and the project was reconsidered by Sixtus IV, who became Pope with the promise of selling Paul II's treasure to finance the endeavor.³⁵⁷ However, there was no concrete result until the deed in Granada in 1492.³⁵⁸

The fact that the victory of Granada coincided with the extraordinary finding of the Cross' titulus was certainly read by Cardinal Pedro Gonzalez De Mendoza as evidence of God's special favor. In his capacity as advisor and prime minister, the Cardinal had contributed and participated personally in this major military success and throughout his life he had shown a particularly strong devotion to the sign of the Cross.³⁵⁹

Born on May 3rd, the day of the feast of the Discovery of the True Cross, Mendoza

³⁵⁶ The relic conveniently completed the substantial catalogue of relics at the church that, like the relic of the cross and soil from Calvary, were believed to owe their provenance to Helena. The church became the seventh church in the city, see Gill, "Antoniazzo Romano," 31-32.

³⁵⁷ Cappelletti, "L'affresco nel catino absidale di Santa Croce," 122

³⁵⁸ The victory was the most vital of all victories over Islam since it represented the final expulsion after eight hundred years of the Muslims from Spain, see Gill, "Antoniazzo Romano," 35.

³⁵⁹ He had probably accompanied the monarchs on their ceremonial entry into Granada in the first week of January, see Gill, "Antoniazzo Romano," 33.

adopted the Cross both as his personal emblem and in all the dedications of the pious institutions that he founded. With great determination, he appealed to the papacy to obtain the title of Cardinal of Santa Croce in Gerusalemme and, after the miraculous recovery there, he decided to support more incisively his church in Rome, to re-build the temple in Jerusalem, and to dedicate to the Cross a college in Valladolid.³⁶⁰ Over his death bed Mendoza affixed a splendid Cross on which he meditated as he died and, after he was deceased, grass was said to have spontaneously grown in the form of the cross in the grounds of his college and hospital.³⁶¹

Considering Mendoza's religious vocation for the Holy Wood and the mysticism that suffuses his entire biography, it is almost predictable that he intended to commemorate the extraordinary finding of the Cross' plaque with a major artistic commission. The Cardinal had already launched some renovation work inside Santa Croce around 1488 so the re-decoration of the apse perhaps began soon after the recovery of the relic in 1492 with the intention of being completed in time for the approaching Jubilee of 1500. The frescoes executed by Antoniazio Romano, an artist favored among Spanish patrons, belong to the category of monumental cycles dedicated to the legend of the Cross such as those in Florence and Arezzo. However, they distinguish themselves from previous examples both for their compositional structure, modeled after the tradition of early Christian apsidal mosaics, and for the reduced number of episodes depicted. Unlike Gaddi and Piero della Francesca, Antoniazio represents only six moments from the legend and arranges them symmetrically on the sides of the main Cross at the center

³⁶⁰ Cappelletti, "L'affresco nel catino absidale di Santa Croce," 126.

³⁶¹ Gill, "Antoniazzo Romano," note 44, 44. On his vision see Luzietti, *Culto e rappresentazioni della Croce*, 145. It was said that these cruciform plants grew in all the religious institutions that he dedicated to the Cross, see Cappelletti, "L'affresco nel catino absidale di Santa Croce," 126.

which arises below a Medieval-looking apparition of Christ within an almond-shaped aureole of light against the starry sky (fig. 153).³⁶² The scenes are grouped around two clusters of episodes from the story of the Holy Wood that correspond to the most important festivities associated with the Cross: the *Discovery of the True Cross*, or *Inventio*, with Helena's meeting with Judas, the finding of the three crosses, and the miracle of the true one; and the *Exaltation* with the battle between Heraclius and Chosroes' son, the recovery of the Cross, and the emperor returning it to Jerusalem (figs. 154-155). As Cappelletti has underlined, this specific selection of episodes shares the visionary and political character of Piero della Francesca's frescoes in Arezzo and closely refers to the recent events involving Santa Croce in Gerusalemme and its patron Mendoza. While the section devoted to Helena's *Discovery of the True Cross* is a direct reference to the historical foundation of the church and a clear allusion to the 1492 recovery of the Cross' titulus, Heraclius' deeds are representative of the crusading spirit revived in the Spanish victory and of the Church's constant fight against the infidels. The recovery of the Cross on the part of Heraclius and its restoration in Jerusalem were supposed to be a reminder of the still vivid urgency to re-conquer the Holy Land, a mission to which the expulsion of Islam from Spain had given renewed hope.³⁶³

The "Turkish dispute" and the issue of the infidels in general is a relevant aspect in Antoniazzi's frescoes. A number of Turkish people animate the stories, interspersed throughout the narration alongside Christians and Jews. The overall atmosphere is of peaceful co-existence, with representatives of the three religions portrayed as quiet

³⁶² Christ is sitting on a throne and his opened book reads "Ego sum via veritas vita," a passage from the Gospel of John (John 14, 6), see Luzietti, *Culto e rappresentazioni della Croce*, 122.

³⁶³ Cappelletti, "L'affresco nel catino absidale di Santa Croce," 121.

bystanders, either engaging in some conversation or witnessing the events unfolding in front of them. This is the case, for example, of the group of “doubting Jews” who are observing the finding of the three Crosses or the Turkish onlooker who is assisting at the miracle of the True Cross behind Judas (fig. 156). Judas himself is likened to an Old Testament prophet, a wise Jew. In the cycle, there is no reference to the threats and tortures inflicted on him by Helena. When summoned, Judas stands in front of the empress as an equal and participates in the identification of the True Cross as a co-protagonist. The lack of antisemitism and the sense of unity under the sign of the Cross expressed by the frescos in Santa Croce are openly discordant with the actual historical situation, particularly in Spain. Fifteenth-century domestic policy was characterized by coerced conversions which became a regular practice with the approval in 1478 of the Holy Spanish Inquisition, under Sixtus IV, an institution that was strongly supported by Cardinal Mendoza. In the year of Granada’s re-conquest, all the Muslims and Jews were banished from Spain and those who did not intend to embrace the Christian faith were exposed to violent treatment.³⁶⁴ The image that Mendoza ordered for the apse of his titular church thus reflects only a utopia quite distant from everyday reality, which anticipates a goal that would soon be pursued by the Counter-Reformation. What the Church was hoping for was not to find an illusory and unworkable harmony in the diversity, rather to establish unity within the purity of faith. Obviously this had to be the Christian faith, the unique and authentic one, which had to be fully embraced by the heretics and infidels through a complete conversion.³⁶⁵

³⁶⁴ Luzietti, *Culto e rappresentazioni della Croce*, 131-132.

³⁶⁵ Luzietti and references, *Culto e rappresentazioni della Croce*, 132.

The idea of a Christian peace established under the banner of the Holy Cross immediately calls to mind the figure of Constantine. Constantine was the person who brought unity and stability to the Roman Empire through the Christian religion and who, apparently, impelled his mother to recover the True Cross, thus supporting the foundation of the Holy Wood's cult so crucial for Christianity and Santa Croce in Gerusalemme in particular. His absence in the frescoes of the church's apse may be only apparent, since his role seems to be here personified by Cardinal Mendoza himself. As Meredith Gill has suggested, the position of Mendoza on the right side of the Cross, although kneeling, coincides with the one usually held by Constantine. His purple cardinal's gown, I would add, recalls the imperial color worn by the emperor, for example, in Cima da Conegliano's painting (fig. 149).³⁶⁶ The inclusion of the Cardinal's portrait in such a prominent location within the church could be justified by his function as an alter-ego of his "patronal forebear," with whom he shared, as we have seen, a strong devotion to the Cross. The allusive presence of the first Christian emperor in Antoniazzo's paintings is also implied in the episodes dedicated to Heraclius, whose deeds closely mirror those of his predecessor.³⁶⁷ Since the seventh century, Heraclius' restoration of the Cross, following the fall of Jerusalem, had been perceived as a re-enactment of Constantine's foundation of the Christian Empire. In the cycle in Santa Croce it seems that patron and artist have selected those episodes from Heraclius' story that are more strongly related to Constantine's portion of the legend. The Persian King Chosroes, who is such a central character in Heraclius' deeds, is completely omitted from the paintings: there is no

³⁶⁶ Gill, "Antoniazzo Romano," 39-40.

³⁶⁷ The parallel between the two emperors is emphasized in Gaddi's cycle as well, which includes the episode of the *Dream of Heraclius* not mentioned by Jacobus da Voragine's *Golden Legend* but present in twelfth-century chivalric poems, see Luzietti, *Culto e rappresentazioni della Croce*, 96.

reference to his theft of the Cross, his mocking of the Christian symbol, or his subsequent defeat and beheading.³⁶⁸ All the attention is focused on two specific moments, the battle between Heraclius and Chosroes' son and the subsequent triumphal march and entrance of the emperor with the Cross into Jerusalem, both somehow reminiscent of the figure of Constantine. The setting of the bloodless duel on the bridge recalls images of Constantine's battle at the Milvian bridge, while the equestrian portrayal of the triumphant Heraclius is modeled after popular medieval images of Constantine derived from the equestrian monument of Marcus Aurelius.³⁶⁹

The Servite "Cycle"

The message delivered by the frescoes in Santa Croce in Gerusalemme was definitively grasped by Girolamo Donato. Antoniazzo's decoration was probably completed by the time of the patrician's assignment in Rome at the court of Alexander VI, between 1497 and 1499. The plenary indulgence announced by the same Pope on July 1496 for all those who visited Santa Croce on the last Sunday of January, in memory of the date of the titulus' recovery, provides a *terminus ante quem* for the completion of the work that should have been ready for this important commemoration. Evident iconographic correspondences induce me to believe that Donato had the cycle of Santa Croce in mind while designing his altar of the True Cross for Santa Maria dei Servi. They range from general compositional choices, intended to assimilate frescoes and reliefs, to

³⁶⁸ For the complete legend of Heraclius, which is at the base of his image as a Crusades' hero, see the LXX Homely by Rabanus Maurus summarized by Luzietti, *Culto e rappresentazioni della Croce*, 52-53.

³⁶⁹ Gill, "Antoniazzo Romano," 39-40.

more specific references to specific details within the painted narration that often re-appear in the bronze panels as well.

Both Antoniazio Romano and Andrea Riccio adopt a similar bipartite scheme of medieval origin, with the image of the Cross at the center and the narrative scenes arranged in a symmetrical way on both its sides. Although in Riccio's case, the tabernacle with the portrayal of the Cross does not stand exactly in the middle of the narrative section, its presence just above the panels represents a hiatus or pause between the two groups of scenes in the predella below (fig. 158). Like the Roman example, in the Venetian bronzes the story unfolds from panel to panel in a continuous flow. The uninterrupted landscape in the background and the presence of key-figures intended to guide the viewer guarantee the unity of the entire decorative set as happens in Santa Croce (fig. 159).³⁷⁰ A number of elements from the frescoes return, slightly varied, in Riccio's reliefs. Let's think, for example, of the narrator figure fitted out as a pilgrim who ushers in the drama on the far left of the apse (fig. 160).³⁷¹ The exact same role is performed by the soldier identifiable as Crispus in the Venetian cycle, who enters from the left of the first panel, thus setting up the narration (fig. 161). Both figures are portrayed as if coming from outside the picture frame below an analogous rocky mountain animated by shepherds. Other similarities can be found in the pose and garments of Helena and Judas, in the nudity of the resurrected man, or in the crucial presence of the crowds of bystanders which function as intercessors between the viewer

³⁷⁰ Luzietti notices how the different kind of trees represented in the middle part of the frescoes belong to the four different species from which the Cross was made: the olive, the palm, the cypress, and the cedar, see Luzietti, *Culto e rappresentazioni della Croce*, 122-123. In Riccio's reliefs, the trees also seem to play a prominent role but they all refer to one single type, the cedar, identifiable from its rounded and high foliage and the thin trunk.

³⁷¹ Gill, "Antoniazzo Romano," 39.

and the image and as witnesses of the miraculous events.³⁷² In the *Miracle*, Antoniazzo positions Helena and Judas respectively at the head of the female and male groups of onlookers (fig. 162).³⁷³ A comparable arrangement appears in the same scene for the Servite church where Riccio moves Judas to the center but keeps the figure of a wise Jew at the right side of the bed to counterbalance Helena (fig. 163).

It is not strange that the cycle in Santa Croce had attracted Donato's attention so much that it influenced his own commission in Venice. The circumstances under which the frescoes were created and the figures involved in their execution must have been familiar to the patrician, as I contend. As we have seen, Cardinal Mendoza was the official patron of the decoration which he ordered to commemorate the recovery of the Cross' titulus and the simultaneous victory of Spain against the infidels. His personal attachment to Christ's Cross and his involvement in the Spanish cause certainly make him the most obvious candidate for the patron of Antoniazzo's cycle, a hypothesis that has been confirmed with the identification of his portrait in the male kneeling at the center beside the Cross.³⁷⁴ The Cardinal's personality shows a number of traits in common with that of Girolamo Donato. A brilliant diplomat and a refined humanist, Mendoza was capable of reconciling the *otium philosophicum* with decisive political action like the patrician. However, because of his professional obligations, he was kept away from his beloved titular church in Rome, and it seems that he had never set foot in

³⁷² Luzietti, *Culto e rappresentazioni della Croce*, 125.

³⁷³ As Luzietti has underlined that this gender separation was rather common in the figurative tradition, dating back to the Wessobrunner Gebetbuch, and applied by Gaddi and Piero della Francesca as well, see Luzietti, *Culto e rappresentazioni della Croce*, 125-128.

³⁷⁴ Cappelletti, "L'affresco nel catino absidale di Santa Croce," 125.

the capital of Christianity.³⁷⁵ As a consequence, it is likely that Donato came to know him through his fame and his closer acquaintances, such as Pope Alexander VI and Bernardino Lòpez de Carvajal y Sande, the Cardinal's representative in Rome. Ambassador of the Spanish Crown to the Holy See, Carvajal was probably the one who directly supervised the restoration inside Santa Croce as well as the decoration of the apse before becoming himself Cardinal titular of the church after the death of Mendoza in 1495.³⁷⁶ Following in the footsteps of his predecessor, he continued this munificence at Santa Croce. Around 1495 and 1510, he financed the refurbishment of the Early Christian mosaics in the chapel of Saint Helena where, according to tradition, the empress deposited the Passion relics that she brought back from Jerusalem.³⁷⁷

This second cycle is particularly interesting since, in a sense, it complements the frescoes in the apse. Within a rich decorative frame, Christ enthroned appears in a clypeus at the center of the vault surrounded by the four evangelists portrayed within ovals. In the four smaller trapezoid compartments, scenes from the legend of the Cross are represented (fig. 164). Along with the most traditional *Finding and Miracle of the True Cross* and *Heraclius Returning the Cross to Jerusalem*, two unusual scenes are depicted: *The Division of the Cross* and its *Apparition and Adoration*. While the first has been connected to Helena's transport of the relics from Jerusalem to her chapel in Rome, the second has been interpreted as a celebration of the contemporary triumph of the Cross in the recent Spanish victory, whose memory was still vivid in Rome. Carvajal, the Pope, and the King and Queen of Spain kneel to worship the red colored Cross greeted by a

³⁷⁵ Ibid., 126.

³⁷⁶ Luzietti, *Culto e rappresentazioni della Croce*, 121.

³⁷⁷ Ibid., 135ss.

smiling Christ above, an image that can be read as a prophecy of an upcoming peaceful era in the name of the Cross.³⁷⁸ As evident in the sermon that Carvajal pronounced in front of the emperor Maximilian on the feast of the Exaltation of the Cross in 1508, the Cardinal strongly believed in the imminent defeat of Islam and the final reunion of all the populations under the Church of Rome as the New Jerusalem. In his homily, which starts with a summary of the Legend of the True Cross mentioning all its major protagonists, he explains in detail the various reasons why the infidel is going to be extirpated, beginning with the nature and present condition of Islam and continuing with evidence from the Sacred Scriptures and revelations made in his own time such as Granada's conquest. His speech closes with a plea directed to the emperor Maximilian to become the leader of the fight against the infidel in the name of the Catholic Church.³⁷⁹ Carvajal dedicated his entire life to supporting the necessity of a crusade and of a reform of the church. He really hoped that he could play a major role in the final triumph of the Christian religion, which was presaged by all the mystics of the time.³⁸⁰

Even though Donato's political activity and writings lack the mysticism that characterized the actions of Mendoza and Carvajal, the patrician deeply shared the political hopes expressed in both decorations in Santa Croce in Gerusalemme. At the time of his legation in Rome in 1497-1499, the situation of Venice was rapidly

³⁷⁸ For a complete description of the decoration and an in-depth interpretation of the mosaics see Ibid., 136-151.

³⁷⁹ For the content of his speech see Minnich, Nelson H. "The Role of Prophecy in the Career of the Enigmatic Bernardino Lopez de Carvajal," in *Prophetic Rome in the High Renaissance Period*, ed. by Majorie Reeves (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 111-120.

³⁸⁰ Significant prophets included not only Savonarola but also the Franciscan Amedeo da Silva who wrote the *Apocalypsis Nova* while he was in San Pietro in Montorio, whose manuscript was rediscovered by Carvajal himself in 1502. Amedeo prefigured the coming of a reformer of the Church, a figure in which Carvajal recognized himself, see Luzietti, *Culto e rappresentazioni della Croce*, 146.

degenerating, pressured as it was on a number of fronts. Donato was sent to the capital of Christianity with the goal of re-shifting Venetian alliances after the death of Charles VIII and of keeping an eye on the suspicious plotting of Pope Alexander VI. Around 1500, new concerns began harassing the Venetians and Donato in particular, such as the frightening partnership between the emperor Maximilian and Louis XII and the fall of Modone into the hands of the Turks. This harsh loss, which was preceded by the capture of Lepanto the year before and the fall of Corone, sister colony of Modone, shortly after, upset Venice so much that Sanudo wrote “the entire city experiences more grief over this than it has ever had from its foundation until now”.³⁸¹ Beside the fact that along with Corone, Modone had constituted the Republic’s main Peloponnesian bases for two and a half centuries and was a vital port for the trade in the Mediterranean, the city was the key to another profitable business: the pilgrimage to Jerusalem. Since 1227, Venice had been controlling that business using Modone as a crucial stopping point mid-way to the Holy Land. The recent defeats damaged not only the city’s reputation in the military and economic fields, but also her image and role as a defender of Christianity.

The way in which Venice introduced herself in the treaty signed on March 3rd 1501 with Pope Alexander VI and the King of Hungary is significant: “The sacred and most Serene Queen Venice as the only and sublime protector and guardian of the Christian faith (fig. 165).” This alliance was the sign of a change in Venetian policy toward the Turks. Up to this point, Venice’s policy toward Islam had been one of pragmatism and accommodation, but Modone prompted the *Serenissima* to feel for the

³⁸¹ Quote from Finlay, Robert. *Venice Besieged: Politics and Diplomacy in the Italian Wars, 1494-1534* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008), 62.

first time the urge to organize a counter-attack.³⁸² As we have seen, the idea of a crusade had been circulating in Italy since the fall of Constantinople and was particularly felt in Rome toward the end of the fifteenth century when Carvajal brought up the need to organize a defense against Islam during the mass opening the conclave that would have elected Pope Alexander VI.³⁸³ It is not a coincidence that the tone of the 1501 League echoes the message delivered by the decoration campaigns in Santa Croce in Gerusalemme, calling for the destruction of the Turks and their conversion to the Holy Cross. The text of the treaty ends with an invitation to rejoice in the upcoming defeat of Islam which had been anticipated by many prophecies.³⁸⁴

The Venetian call for a crusade had a double scope. While its primary goal was to find the needed support in the fight against the Turks, it was also intended to distract the European powers from their hatred against Venice. The growing hostility shown toward the opportunistic behavior of the *Serenissima* would soon lead to the League of Cambrai between the Pope, France, Spain, and the Holy Roman Empire which eventually struck a humiliating defeat on the city. The line of conduct followed by Venice at this time is well

³⁸² Finlay, *Venice Besieged*, 62-63

³⁸³ Minnich, "The Role of Prophecy," 112. The papacy had been attempting to unify Europe beyond a new crusade since the Ottoman Sultan Mehmed II captured Constantinople in 1453. Pius II (1458-1464) died at the Italian port of Ancona waiting for crusading forces promised by other European powers to arrive but the Venetians carried on without them through the dramatic loss of their colony at Negroponte in 1470 (today the Greek island of Euboea). During the papal conclave for the election of Innocent VIII the issue became urgent again and the pontiff, as soon as elected, circulated an encyclical among European leaders to try and muster support again for crusade. Taxes were routinely instituted to raise money for these failed ventures and indulgences constituted another important way to collect funds. See Ross, 57-59.

³⁸⁴ "...Pronouncing to everyone what it is found in many opinions and holy ancient prophets inspired in their prophecies by divine inspiration who sing and foresee the destruction of this Turkish bulldog and in this time being the end of his law and its sublimation to the Christian empire....," the translation is mine. For the complete, original text of the treatise see D'Essling, Prince. *Les Livres à Figures Vénitiens de la fin du XV Siècle et du Commencement du XVI*. Florence: Librairie Leo O. Olschki; Paris: Librairie Henri Leclerc, 1908, vol. II.

explicated in the oration that Donato pronounced in front of the Emperor Maximilian between March and July 1501 to convince him to join the Christian cause against the infidels. An example of Donato's refined rhetorical skills, the speech was published in Latin and translated into Italian in June of the same year, even before the patrician came back home. The celerity with which the text was circulated and also made accessible to the broader public shows how Venice felt the urgency to seek as much support as possible and to change the defamatory opinion about her political agenda.

In his address to the Emperor Maximilian, Donato avoided the apocalyptic tone later applied by the Cardinal Carvajal in his sermon pronounced in front of the German ruler. Rather than reporting prophecies about the imminent destruction of Islam, the patrician provided a lucid presentation of the facts interspersed with the conventional adulation expected in these official circumstances. First, Donato indulged in explaining the divine nature of the imperial office and the high respect in which he was held by the Venetians, apologizing for the delay of his legation. He then engaged in a long and detailed explanation of the main reason for his visit which is worth quoting:

“Since the Christian Republic is in serious danger, we came to you, most glorious Caesar: who, in every moment, holds the unsheathed knife in order to defend our religion: if you do not use it at this time to defend the most miserable Christian communities, which are tormented and killed by the abuses of the infidel enemies, Christianity can be considered lost since the insatiable and immense pleasure with which the Turks make Christian blood flow, already well known to your Majesty, came to the greatest fury and cruelty and has reached the limit...The protection of Christians is the responsibility of other Kings and Princes: but it belongs to you in a particular way: you have constantly in front of your eyes the shape of the Christian republic. This is primarily taking care of the impious. In such danger you can do what the healthy head does for any illness of the body. This is why, having come to your Majesty first, we pray and implore you to collect these great spirits of yours for the Christian cause and in your soul and mind overturn the imminent destruction of the Christian religion and the immense power over the sea and the land of the Turks longing for Christian blood. You perfectly know

how easy it is for them to cover the sea with fleets and fill the land with infantry and cavalry. If one day this stream is able to break and dismantle the machines that we set up, it will destroy everything and cause the ruin of all of Christianity. Already that unbridled and cruel beast calls itself with the most superb titles, not only emperor of Asia and of the Barbarians: but also of Europe and of the Christians. Having noticed the moment when we were provoked and occupied in the greatest and most intolerable injuries it [the Turk] has broken the peace signed shortly before: it has taken Lepanto in Aetolia: Modone and Corone in the Peloponnese: with every possible cruelty it depopulated Dalmatia, Liburnia and the homeland of Friuli: and not only has it killed and enslaved in great number our people: but also those subjected to your empire: and these Christians now serve the enemies of Christ's name, and tied up, beg for the help of your Majesty. Our Senate defending at the same time its own things and those of the Christians has tried to block this great enemy with bars and banks put together with the blood and life of our citizens: and these have sustained great part of the imminent violence. Now the most ferocious Turk is trying to break through these obstacles and eliminate these machines in order to destroy and remove from the world the Christian religion together with the Majesty of the empire. Therefore Most Serene Caesar sharpen the knife of faith on the stone of your glory and conscience: this was given to you from god to defend our religion...The loss of Christian blood, even the most despicable, is a serious thing for the optimum emperor. Therefore Most Serene Emperor what you have always desired: what has always been in your soul is now placed in your hands. We know that since you were young you had this incredible desire to avenge and glorify the Christian name. Seize the opportunity that you have been waiting for. For God's will you have obtained what you wanted...Certainty since, in respect to the past, danger has never been so set and present for the Christian religion: then, thanks to God's benignity, you have never had such a perfect occasion to repair the situation. The Pope has already set the sacred weapon and won't miss providing the lay one. He is preparing the troops to help the Most Serene King of Hungary. The Most Christian King of France too is preparing the most efficient army for such an endeavor. The most serene and really catholic Kings of Spain keep in Sicily a large number of ships ready to sail: with which they have already attacked the enemies together with us and done something worthy of the Most Christian Princes. The most Illustrious King of Lusitania, your relative, has imitated them by arranging many maritime garrisons and spontaneously allowing them to be used for the defense of the Christian faith...As for us: we have been oppressed for three years in the most fervent war that we have financed with public and private assets: but since these are not sufficient in the face of such a great danger for us and for the Christian Republic, we give ourselves, our bodies to the wounds: and disregarding life we do not escape weapons, fire and tortures. Therefore, most benevolent and strongest Caesar now recognize and incite the antique foundation of your soul. This is your business: this is your praise. Do not allow others to seize your honor and glory: you know how much the head can benefit all the other healthy body parts: how less the other body parts count, even if healthy, without the head's virtue. There is no Christian Prince so powerful and forceful

who does not esteem the good mind and will of your Majesty in this matter. Forbid this most deceitful and deceptive King of the Turks from boasting about his war against the Christians. We all hope that you want and can do a lot in this situation...The stories of the most Serene and Christian emperors before you can incite your Majesty. But is there really a need to incite you? Or to find a better example than you? No one has desired the opportunity of this war more passionately than you: no one could have desired it more...So grab the occasion of your praise and glory most Glorious and Excellent Caesar. Ensure that the other princes look at you as in a true mirror: and see reflected in yourself how much this ornament is worthwhile...Certainly you will triumph. You will win in the sign of the cross: and the light of god's face signed above you will defeat and make the enemies of Christ fall...You will free the Christian generation from the most atrocious injury and from the imminent danger. At this point most sublime Caesar deploy your victorious eagles for Christ's faith, whose open wings resemble the Cross of Christ the redeemer. Every Christian victory, which is certainly going to happen if you will undertake this endeavor with the others, will be referred to you as the head of the princes. Every wound that the enemy of Christ will receive will be considered to be done with the knife which has been divinely granted to your Majesty...Therefore raise your power and authority, strongest and Maximus Caesar: so that, with you as the guide, the Christian Republic could not only be vindicated from imminent danger: but could also be elevated to the top. Along with us, the optimum and most righteous God will help your magnanimous and most just endeavor: and you will really triumph not only on earth but in heaven as well having defeated the enemies of Christ. We believe that we have sufficiently declared our request..."³⁸⁵

³⁸⁵ The translation is mine: "Essendo adoo costituita la christiana rep. in sumo piculo siamo vennti a te gloriosissimo Cesare: ilqle possedi il nome xpiano in fidele defensione & che a tutti mometi tieni el nudato coltello copato ala defesione dela nra religione: elqle se a qsto tepo no usi in defender li miserrimi populi di Xpo che sono da la scevitia deli infideli inimici coculcati e morti la christianita si pol qsi dir pduta la inexpleta & imesa libidine de turchi di trare il christiao sangue de la tua Maiesta be conosciuta gia e pvenuta a sumo furore & crudelita & ha rotto el fren de tutta la licetia { : & ogni sua forza & ipo ha ricolto nella cede & pnicie del nome christiano: alqle e da occorrere pstissimamente. } La christiana defensione e coe a gialtri Re & Principi: ma a te e ppria & peculiare: alqle debe esser nati agliochi ognihora la forma dela republica christiana. Questa e la precipua cura de loimpio. Tu in tato piccolo poi pstare qllo che sol fare i ogni egritudine del corpo la bona valitudine del capo. Per laqlcosa essendo venuti ala tua Maiesta primamete ti cofortiamo pghiamo & obsecramo vogli p la causa christiana raccogliere qsti gradi tuoi spiriti & nellaio & mete tua rivoltare lo iminete exitio dela christiana religione & la imesa potetia de turchi p terra & p mare sitibondi del christiano sangue. Tu conosci optimamete come facil cosa e a loro coprire il mare de armate & ipire la terra di pedoni & cavalieri. Se una volta sqto torrete ropera & diffara le machine da noi opposte distrugera el tutto & mettere i ruina tutta la christianita. Gia qlla fera senza freno: & crudele: si fa chiamare co supbissimi titoli no solo ipatore de Lasia & Barbari: ma dela Europa & de christiani. Havedo osservato il tempo nel qle eravamo pvocati & occupati in gradissime & intollerabilissime iniurie ne ha rotto la pace & poco avati firmata: preso Lepato in Etholia: Mothone & Coron in Peloponesso: co' ogni generation de crudelita depopulata Dalmatia Liburnia & la patria del Friul: & non solo li nri populi: ma qlli che al tuo ipio pximamete sono subiecti in gradissimo numero ha morti & portati i servitu: liquali

Christiani adesso serveno ali inimici del nome di Christo & ligati implorano ladiutorio dela tua Maiesta. El nro Senato difendendo insieme le cose sue & qlle di Christiani a tato inimico ha opposto & palli & arzeri coadunati de sangue & occisione de nri cittadini: liqli gra parte hano sostenuto li imineti ipeti. Adesso il crudelissimo Turcho cercha di rompere questi obstaculi & dissipare qste machine per destrugere & ruinare del mondo la Christiana religione insieme co la Maiesta de limpio. Agutia adoq Serenissimo Cesare ala pietra dela tua gloria & coscietia el coltello dela fede: ilqle te e dato da dio ala defensione dela nra religione. Rifrena insieme co ghaltri Principi Christiani tato ipeto. {No pmetter qto e in te de li populi Christiani altri esser robadi: altri presi esser menati in servitu: altri esser trucidati altri co acerbissimi & crudelissimi tormenti esser afflicti.} Al optimo imparatore la iactura del sangue Christiano anchor che sia vilissimo debe esser grave. Adoq Serenissimo Cesare qllo che hai desiderato: qllo che sempre e stato nel aio tuo adesso e posto nella tua mano. Sapiamo che qsi da picolino hai habuto qsto icredibile desiderio di vedicare e ppagare el nome Christiano. Piglia la opportunita da te expectata. Volonta de dio e stata che psto ti sia occorso qllo che volevi...Certamete si come p el passato mai parve piu apparecchiato ne piu psente piculo ala religion Christiana: cosi p la benignita de dio mai a te fu piu pmpta occasione a remediare. Il Pontifice gia ha tracte larme spuale ne machera co le teporale. Apparecchia larmata p subveniri al Serenissimo Re de Hungaria. Il Cristianissimo Re di Franza a tale impresa etia apparecchia una validissima armata. Li serenissimi & veramete catholici Re di Spagna tieneno in Sicilia grade copia de nave apparecchiate: co le quale gia insieme co noi hano assalito linimici & facto csa digna de Christianissimi Principi. Questi ha imitato lo Inclytissimo Re de Lusitania tuo parete apparecchiado molti presidii maritime & quelli spontaneamente pmettedo p la defension dela Christiana fede...Quato apartiene a noi: sono gia tre ani che siamo vexati in ardetissima guerra alaquale havemo conferito & le publiche & le private richeze: lequale cosiderado in tato nro piculo & dela rep. Christiana & mal poter bastare si opponemo nui medesimi: li corpi nri damo ale ferrite: & despezado la vita no fugimo arme non fuochi no tormenti. Adoque clemetissimo & fortissimo Cesare riconosci adesso & excita lantiquo istituto de lanimi tuo. Questa e tua faceda: questa e tua ppria laude. No lassar che ghaltri entrino senza di te nela possession del tuo honore & gloria: tu cognosci qto possi giovare a tutti ghaltri mebrì sani el capo: & senza la virtu del capo qto meno vaglino ghaltri mebrì ancor che sani siano. No e alcuno Principe Christiano cosi potete & di gra forze el quale no faci gradissima stima dela bona mete & volota dela tua Maiesta in questa faceda. Fa che questo Re pfidissimo & medacissimo de Turchi p tua pmissione piu non si possi vantare di far Guerra cotra Christiani. Speramo tutti che in questa cosa assai vogli & possi...Ad excitare la tua Maiesta possano referire le historie deli Serenissimi & Christianissimi Impatori tuoi pdecessori. Ma che e bisogno stimularle? O vero cerchare exeplo sora di te? Niuno piu ardentemete di te ha desiderato la opportunita di questa Guerra: niuno meglio lha potuta desiderare. {Questa tua forteza veramete Imparatoria & Augusta co laquale hai facto tate guerre da picolino havedo spesse volte vincto la adversa sorte de laquale niuno inimico e maggiore}...Piglia aduq la occasione dela tua laude & gloria Gloriosissimo & Celsissimo Cesare. Fa che ghaltri principi riguardino in te come in vero spechio: & vedino in te qto questo ornameto be seli covenghi...A te e apparecchiato el certissimo triupho. Vinceraì nel signo di la croce: e signato sopra di te el lume del volto de dio: nel quale linimici di Christo sarano scoficti: & cascherano. {Dometre che cosegliaerai ala tua gloria:} libereraì etia la generation Christiana dala atrocissima iniuria & da iminetissimo piculo. Ormai sublimissimo Cesare spiega queste tue vincitrice Aquile p la fede di Xpo. Laquale aperte lare no altro figurano che la Croce de Xpo redeptore. Ogni Christiana victoria de laquale e certissimamente da sperare se a questa ipresa ti vorai apparecchiare co ghaltri: se referira in te come nel capo de principi. Ogni piaga de laquale sara ferito linimico de Xpo si existimera facta dal coltello divinamete cocesso ala tua Maiesta...Excita adonq la tua potetia & auctorita fortissimo & Maximo Cesare: acioche la republica christiana essendo tu guida no solo vindicate dalo iminete piculo: ma sia in summita

Donato's oration seems at first not very different from the dispatches that he usually addressed to the Venetian senate. The patrician presented to the emperor a detailed and informative report about the war against the Turks that was intended to emphasize the gravity of the situation and the urgency for a military operation. The infidels' threat had never been more imminent and grim and Venice alone could not succeed in opposing this powerful enemy. Donato carefully described all the most recent atrocities committed by the Turks and their latest conquests, including the crucial harbors of Lepanto, Modone, and Corone. The enemy seems unstoppable and all of Christianity needs the help of the emperor Maximilian who is presented in this oration as the favored candidate to lead the Christian armies. Everybody is ready and willing to fight but no one is more suitable to guide a successful military campaign than Maximilian whose skills on the field, motivation, and moral qualities are innate. Donato's speech is entirely designed with the goal of inducing the emperor to believe that it is his moral duty to assist the Venetians and the other Christian allies to defeat the Turk. The patrician painstakingly presented the evidence to support this belief by talking about the emperor's genealogy, his natural inclinations, his inner desires, and his personal experience, but especially by underlining the divine character of his office. Toward the end of his speech, Donato's tone becomes almost apocalyptic and the emperor Maximilian is presented as a new Constantine, the first Christian emperor and the one who allowed Christianity to reign over the world. The way that Donato described or, better, predicted Maximilian's triumph

collocata. Aiutara insieme co noi la tua Magnanima & iustissima impresa loptimo & Iustissimo dio: & no solamete in terra ma in cielo verissimamete triumpherai havendo supato linimici di Christo. Abbiamo secondo el creder nostro dechiarito a sufficietia qto richiede la cosa....” Donato, Girolamo. *La oration del Magnifico & Clarissimo Misier Hieronymo Donado Orator Veneto facta ala sacra Maiesta de re Maximiliano*, stampata in Venezia per Bernardino di Vidali del M.CCCCI. Adi.IX. Del Mese de Zugno, 198r -200v.

over the Turks recalls the legend of Constantine and of his victory under the sign of the Cross: “Certainty you will triumph. You will win in the sign of the cross: and the light of god’s face signed above you will defeat and make the enemies of Christ fall.” The parallel between the two emperors is clearly established even though the name of Constantine does not appear in the oration.

The portrayal of Maximilian as a new Constantine, as an emperor elected and guided by God to defeat the infidels, is not the only image that explicitly connects Donato’s speech to his commission for the church of Santa Maria dei Servi. Two other elements from the oration seem to reappear in Riccio’s reliefs, thus making Donato’s speech a point of reference for the dating of the altar of the True Cross. First, the knife which is described as the weapon given to Maximilian by God to defend the Christian religion. In three different instances the knife is mentioned by Donato, every time in the speech’s most crucial points: at the beginning, when he states that Maximilian always has this weapon ready to protect Christianity and if he does not use it now Christ’s people will perish; at the core of his speech when he encourages the emperor to sharpen the knife that has been given to him by God and to engage in the battle against the infidels; and in the final and most important section of his oration, when he says that every injury inflicted on the enemy will be considered to be achieved by this divinely granted weapon. It is significant that this is the same weapon carried by the figure of Crispus in the first relief of the cycle in the Servite church. The son’s emperor who, as we said, is entering the scene in haste as if attracted by the turmoil of his father’s soldiers, is holding the handle of what seems to be a short dagger or *pugio* usually worn by officers on the right

side of the body (fig. 166).³⁸⁶ He is the only character in the panel to be portrayed with a weapon and captured in the moment when he is going to pull it out, a behavior that could be associated with the exhortations made by Donato in his oration to convince Maximilian to join the war against the Turks. Another, more convincing parallel can be drawn between Donato's speech and the tabernacle relief which was located at the center of the altar's ensemble. The panel has been referred to by scholars as *Exaltation of the Cross*, even though it has nothing to do with the same episode from the story of Heraclius. The triumphant imagery of the relief, with the Cross carried by two angels at the center and being greeted by cheerful trumpets, resembles instead a motif often present in *Last Judgment* scenes such as the thirteenth-century mosaic in Santa Maria Assunta in Torcello or the popular version by Giotto in the Scrovegni Chapel in Padua executed around 1306 (figs. 167-168).³⁸⁷ Such an iconography would have worked as a perfect commentary for the last part of Donato's oration where he foresees Maximilian's success under the sign of the Cross, both on earth and in heaven, thus anticipating the reward that Jesus will bestow on the emperor during his second coming.

The eagles carrying a garland at the top of Riccio's fictive triumphal structure can be read as a visual translation of the imperial eagles mentioned by Donato, whose spread wings are said to resemble the Redeemer's Cross. This image may also have something to do with the vision that occurred to Costantine on the eve of the battle against

³⁸⁶ D'Amato, *Arms and Armour of the Imperial Roman Soldier*, 80-84. Crispus is the one holding the "knife of faith" rather than Constantine himself, since probably putting a weapon in the hands of the emperor would have contradicted the miraculous and bloodless victory that he achieved.

³⁸⁷ It is interesting that in the Venetian example Christ's Cross is depicted as a sort of reliquary worshipped on an altar while in Giotto the Holy Wood is represented with its title in evidence. The same motif is also included in Rogier van der Weyden's *Last Judgment* in the Musée de l'Hôtel-Dieu, Beaune (1446-52) and in Michelangelo's work for the Sistine Chapel, just two mention two further examples.

Maxentius. Carboniero and Falconi have been able to reconstruct what was visible on the sky the night when Constantine had his prophetic “dream.” Apparently two constellations could be seen at that time from the location where his troops were lodged: one resembling a swan and another an eagle, both of which recalled very much the sign of the Cross. The two scholars have proven how their reading was probably already known in the Renaissance by an artist such as Piero della Francesca. In his version of the *Vision* episode, in fact, he represents the angel of God flying toward Constantine’s tent in the shape of the constellation of the swan and against the dawn’s starry sky (fig. 169).³⁸⁸ Considering Donato’s interest in astronomy, it is possible that he was informed about these astronomical factors which seem to have inspired the iconography of some medals as well.³⁸⁹ The eagles mentioned in his oration and carved in his altar, thus, would refer both to the imperial insignia and to one of the constellations that were seen by Constantine the night before his most crucial battle.

The suggestive connection between Donato’s oration and the reliefs that he commissioned for the altar of the True Cross is a further proof of the political meaning of the patrician’s patronage for the Servites. As I have proposed, Riccio’s work was probably executed between 1498 and 1501 during a critical period in the history of the *Serenissima* and was intended to address contemporary events. When guiding Riccio in the design of the bronze panels, Donato partially appropriated the idea transmitted by the frescoes in Santa Croce in Gerusalemme by elaborating a cycle intended to celebrate

³⁸⁸ Carboniero, *In hoc vinces*, 84-88; 133-136. Astrological/astronomical readings such as this one were quite common in Venice at that time. It is sufficient to remember that they were appropriated by Venetian historians as signs of Venice’s auspicious beginnings: they recur, for example, both in Sabellico and Sanudo, see Fortini Brown, *Venice and Antiquity*, 176-178.

³⁸⁹ Carboniero, *In hoc vinces*, 112-113.

Christianity's triumph under the banner of the Cross. However, as I will discuss, he translated the message delivered by Antoniazio Romano in typical Venetian terms, changing some of the most characteristic aspects from the Roman example.

The first noticeable difference between the paintings in Rome and the bronzes in Venice is the absence in the latter of any reference to the Church of Rome. Despite the large numbers of figures that populate Riccio's panels, only one in the episode of the *Finding of the True Cross* can be identified as a clergyman, and that is the bishop Macarius shown beside Helena, playing a secondary role (fig. 170). The absence of any sign of reverence to the Church in the cycle for the Servites is not surprising in Venice. As Donato's frequent delegations to Rome have shown, the relationship between the papacy and the *Serenissima* was problematic at the turn of the sixteenth century. Already Innocent VIII – the same pope who had given Donato the relic – had provoked the Venetian government by electing Ermolao Barbaro as patriarch against the city's policies and the situation remained uncertain under the ambivalent Alexander VI turning into a drama with Julius II, who was responsible for the League of Cambrai and the defeat of Venice. The city fought to maintain a certain independence from Rome and was often bold enough to present itself as more Catholic than the Roman Church itself.

Another element that it is missing in Riccio's reliefs is the presence of Turks. Even though, as we have seen, the issue with the expanding Ottoman forces was rather pressing, in the altar in Santa Maria dei Servi there are no Turkish figures. This is a bit strange, considering how the Turk is a constant bystander in a number of works of art in Venice toward the end of the fifteenth century, significantly, for example, in the *predella* of Cima's altarpiece with Saint Helena and Constantine where episodes from the

Discovery of the True Cross are narrated (fig. 171).³⁹⁰ The absence of Turks may be explained as Donato's attempt to depict Constantine and Helena's stories as very authentic moments from ancient Roman history. As I have emphasized in the previous chapter, the patrician applied to the series of reliefs at the Servite church the same philological accuracy that he relied upon for his literary works, thus anticipating the archeologically oriented style developed at the beginning of the sixteenth century by Raphael in Rome. The historical approach pursued by Donato in his commission also preceded the program carried out by the official Church during the Counter Reformation. In order to favor the cult of the Cross, Pope Gregory XIII entrusted Cesare Baronio to write a treatise that brought together the historical argument in support of the Holy Wood. His *Annales Ecclesiastici* (1588-1607) devoted special attention to Constantine's vision and Helena's *Inventio Crucis*, episodes that are presented as historical facts in which God's intervention materializes through the miracles performed. Similarly to Riccio's reliefs, Baronio's work aimed at providing exhaustive historical and divine justification for the cult of the image and relic of the True Cross.³⁹¹

By focusing on the historicity of the events narrated, the reliefs for the Servites had the primary scope of validating the effective power of the Holy Cross, a precious fragment of which was preserved in the order's mother church. As we have seen, at this moment Venice needed to count on the miraculous assistance of the Holy Wood as never before. Even without a direct reference to the Church of Rome or the Turks, the hovering presence of these two threats is implied in Riccio's panels by the way in which the Holy

³⁹⁰ Turks are constantly present, for example, in the work of a contemporary of Cima, Vittore Carpaccio. See Gentili, Augusto. *Le storie di Carpaccio. Venezia, i Turchi, gli Ebrei* (Venice: Marsilio Editori, 1996).

³⁹¹ On Baronius and his work, see Luzietti, 265-266.

Wood is evoked as a “divine shield” and an “impenetrable armor against human adversities,” borrowing the words from Giacomo Bosio’s treatise *La Trionfante e Gloriosa Croce*.³⁹² The choice of focusing on the figure of Constantine rather than Heraclius, as in Santa Croce in Rome, also reveals a clear political intent tied to the current historical situation. While Heraclius’ deeds are set in the Far East and Holy Land, and focus mainly on the re-conquest of the Wood of the Cross which had fallen into the hands of the infidels, Constantine’s story is much more elaborate than the tale about the first crusader’s achievements. After having defeated Maxentius in Rome and Licinius in the Hellespont, Constantine terminated the one-century long parenthesis of the tetrarchy (293-324) and re-united the eastern and western parts of the Roman Empire under a sole emperor: himself. This re-unification was established under the aegis of the Christian God to whom Constantine attributed his military successes. In the Edict of Milan, issued in 313, the emperor granted Christianity legal status, the first step toward its recognition as the official religion of the Roman Empire. With Constantine the Cross assumed for the first time a political value. Originally identified as the symbol of Christ’s triumph and redemptive power, the Cross became the insignia of the Christian armies in their fight against the enemy and the infidel.³⁹³ The Church of Rome inherited Christ’s badge in this double role and not coincidentally connected its temporal rights to Constantine’s concession of the popular *Constitutum Constantini*. Through this document the first

³⁹² Bosio, Giacomo. *La Trionfante e Gloriosa Croce. Trattato di Iacomo Bosio. Lettione varia, e divota ad ogni buon Christiano utile e gioconda, in Roma nella stamperia del S.or Alfonso Ciacone* (Rome, 1610), 587.

³⁹³ Walter, *The Iconography of Constantine the Great*, 39; Nichols, Stephen G. “In Hoc Signo Vincis: Constantine, Mother of Harm,” in *Piero della Francesca and His Legacy*, ed. by Marilyn Aronberg Lavin (Washington: National Gallery of Art, 1995), 43-44.

Christian emperor granted the Pope civic jurisdiction over Rome, all of Italy, and the entire western world, thus justifying his subsequent political ambitions.

To be sure Girolamo Donato was well informed about the political implications of the figure of Constantine and his ties to the Church of Rome. The presence of the emperor in Rome had been kept alive for centuries and the Popes made every effort to preserve his memory vividly and to use it as an instrument of propaganda for their self-image. Loci such as the Milvian Bridge, Constantine's Arch, and the legendary site of his baptism in the Lateran, were preserved with great care. References to the emperor were made in a number of key locations, first and foremost in Old Saint Peter's, where Constantine was portrayed in the triumphal arch's mosaic as the founder of the church alongside Christ and Peter. In the Sistine Chapel's frescoes, executed around the 1480s, the Arch of Constantine appears at least four times as a celebration of the papacy's *majestas*, even though some forty years before the humanist Lorenza Valla had proven the unsustainability of the Church's temporal power by discrediting the validity of Constantine's Donation.³⁹⁴ Toward the end of the fifteenth century this discovery was still fresh in public opinion and it is the subject of an ironic comment made by Girolamo Donato to the Borgia Pope. Apparently, when asked about the origin of Venice's right over the Adriatic, the patrician replied that it was written on the obverse of Constantine's concession to the Pope.³⁹⁵

³⁹⁴ Quednau, Rolf. "Costantino il Grande a Roma. Forme e funzioni della memoria nelle testimonianze visive da ponte Milvio a Mussolini," in *Costantino il Grande tra medioevo ed età moderna*, ed. by Giorgio Bonamente et al. (Bologna: Società editrice il Mulino, 2004), 321-322; 332-334.

³⁹⁵ Rigo, "Donà, Girolamo," 750.

From the tone of his response to the Pope, it is obvious that in the eyes of Donato the papacy's claims of a direct "lineage" from Constantine were tenuous. The facts counted much more than a forged document and they clearly pointed in favor of Venice. While the Turks were getting stronger and bolder every day, the Pope seemed more concerned about securing for himself control of Italian politics rather than taking care of the well-being and unity of Christianity, particularly when talking of Alexander VI. His attempts to organize a crusade can be defined as weak and inconclusive, being tainted by his personal political agenda.³⁹⁶ Venice was the only power actively engaged in the battle against the infidel and worthy of inheriting Constantine's title of *defensor dei*.³⁹⁷ According to Donato and his fellow citizens, the *Serenissima* had more objective reasons to back up her right to Constantine's succession, in virtue of her long-standing ties with

³⁹⁶ First, he collected some funds for the anti-Ottoman war during the 1500 jubilee but they were seized by his son Cesare to support his military campaign in Romagna; then, he decided to support the Venetian cause but just to guarantee the alliance of the *Serenissima* in the possible hostilities represented by France and Spain (especially over the control of the Kingdom of Naples); lastly, when he nominated bishop Jacopo Pesaro as a superintendent for the papal galleys sent against the Turks, he did it primarily to make peace with Venice over the issue of the testament of Battista Zen, cardinal of Verona. See Brown, Beverly Louise. "In hoc signo vinces. *Il vescovo Jacopo Pesaro e papa Alessandro VII davanti a san Pietro* di Tiziano," in *Tiziano, Venezia e il Papa Borgia*, Exhibition Catalogue (Florence: Fratelli Alinari Fondazione, 2014), 48-50.

³⁹⁷ It is noteworthy that the same opinion was held by the author of the *Peregrinatio in Terram Sanctam* by Bernhard von Breydenbach, the first illustrated travel book created as a preparatory guide for pilgrims headed to the Holy Land (published in Latin, German, and Dutch in 1486-88). The book's text and images are not just organized to follow a pilgrimage but to describe a journey from Venice, a bastion of orthodoxy and resistance to the Muslim aggression, to the Holy Land, overrun by heresy. The way that the *Serenissima* is presented in a long speech of commendation echoes themes current in the propaganda of Venetian diplomats: "For a long time all alone out of Christendom, she [Venice] has done her part because of her love, piety, and fortitude by contesting, persecuting, afflicting, indeed dislodging in many places, with great cost and work, truly, diligently, and in many fashion, the unholy Turks, the strongest and most harmful enemy, hater, and curser of Christian blood, indeed persecutor of the cross of Christ. [She] has set herself as a wall for the Christian Church, so that of those who give help and support from all the wide territory of the Church, no one else, spiritual and temporal, is found who so greatly demonstrated their faith and piety to God and the Church so entirely without a doubt," Ross, *Picturing Experience in the Early Printed Book*, 65-66.

the Byzantine Empire. The image of Venice as a new Constantinople was in fact deeply embedded in the urban context and became stronger after the fall of Constantinople in 1453 when a number of refugees, some of them quite illustrious, were welcomed in the lagoon. Among them we have to remember Cardinal Basilios Bessarion whose arrival in Venice in 1463 was greeted with princely honors. While in the *Serenissima* for seven months, Bessarion was busy planning a crusade against the infidels and he showed the intention of entrusting Venice with the role of leading the endeavor. After the death of Pope Pius II, the plan unfortunately was aborted but the Cardinal donated his rich library to the Venetians granting the city the privilege of being the repository of the endangered Greek culture.³⁹⁸

Gestures such as Cardinal Bessarion's donation were wisely exploited to nurture Venice's myth as the new heir of the Christian empire. Already in the thirteenth century the city had begun to lay down the foundations of her two-fold heritage, as both the ancient and the Christian Rome. The interplay between the east and west had continued in the following centuries with the very practical purpose of legitimizing the political and economic policies of the *Serenissima*.³⁹⁹ In the years between the fall of Constantinople and the battle of Agnadello, Venice reinforced even more the idea of her mythic creation, first in literature and then in various architectural projects. Chronicles such as those by Marco Antonio Sabellico (*Historiae rerum Venetarum ab urbe condita*, 1487), Bernardo Giustiniani (*De origine urbis gentisque Venetorum historiae*, 1493), and Marino Sanudo

³⁹⁸ Tafuri, Manfredo. "La nuova Costantinopoli. La rappresentazione della renovatio nella Venezia dell'umanesimo," in *Rassegna*, 9 (1982), 31.

³⁹⁹ With the scholar-doge Andrea Dandolo as an active proponent, Venice began publicizing in the fourteenth century a foundation story that created parallels with the old Rome. See Pincus, Deborah. "Venice and the Two Romes: Byzantium and Rome as a Double Heritage in Venetian Cultural Politics," in *Artibus et Historiae*, vol. 13, no. 26 (1992), 101-105.

(*De origine, situ et magistratibus urbis Venetae*, 1493-1530), describe Venice as born on the ruins of the Roman empire under special divine protection and as a free, blessed Virgin destined to lead the new Christian kingdom. This “imperial” image is reflected in the architectural campaigns of the time which are imbued with triumphal themes and references to Byzantine models. Think, for example, of the *Gate of the Arsenal* (1457-1460) which repeats the *via triumphalis* motif already adopted for the *Porta della Carta* (1438-42) or the work of Mauro Codussi in San Zaccaria, in the Scuola of San Giovanni Evangelista, and San Michele in Isola, as examined by Manfredo Tafuri (figs. 172-173).⁴⁰⁰ Donato, who was a member of this “school of thought” - Sabellico’s *De Venetae urbis situ libri tres* (1492) was dedicated to him – also promotes a Christian-imperial ideology in his reliefs for the Servites. His altar which, similarly to the official historiography, fuses together history and myth, opens at the center in a triumphal arch that can be interpreted as the last of “a series of gateways through which the Renaissance of antiquity entered Venice,” quoting the words of Fortini Brown.⁴⁰¹ The figures of Constantine and Helena personify the double role of Venice as a new Constantinople and a new Jerusalem, as the heir of Constantine’s goal to re-unite the Roman Empire under the Christian insignia.⁴⁰² This is exactly the mission that the emperor accomplishes in the Servite altar, without any spilling of blood, invested as he is with the same divine favor with which Venice strongly believed she was endowed as well.

⁴⁰⁰ Tafuri, “La nuova Costantinopoli,” 28; Fortini Brown, 95-115.

⁴⁰¹ Fortini Brown, *Venice and Antiquity*, 104.

⁴⁰² It is significant that the role of Venice as a new Rome and new Jerusalem had been already introduced before in San Marco. In the Mascoli Chapel, built as the *Cappella della Madonna* by doge Francesco Foscari in 1430-31, the Marian cycle presents a Venice that combines the holiness of Jerusalem and the power and authority of Rome. During the same period, as seen above, similar values were expressed with a new triumphalistic rethoric in state architecture. *Ibid.*, 105-107.

The co-presence of Saint Helena in the cycle, beside her son, reinforces the idea of the *Serenissima* as the chosen one. Exactly like Saint Mark, the holy empress had arrived in the lagoon through divine intervention: smuggled from a church in Constantinople, her body was carried to Venice on a boat that miraculously landed where the saint wanted to be. This is the *translatio* tale – so impressively close to the one written for Saint Mark – as reported in the Venetian chronicles, first and foremost Andrea Dandolo's, and in the *Golden Legend* as well, which was the source of inspiration of Riccio's reliefs.⁴⁰³ Flaminio Corner, who in his *Notizie storiche* provides a summary of the legend, reminds the reader that both the Romans and the French claimed to possess Helena's remains but "much better is the argument of the Venetians who acquired the sacred body in Constantinople, where the Holy Empress was buried, transported there under the order of Constantine the Great, her son."⁴⁰⁴ Thanks to the presence of the body, the cult of Saint Helena spread fast in Venice. She was one of the few female saints represented on the chancel of Saint Mark and in the mosaics of the basilica along with her son.⁴⁰⁵ The church dedicated to her became an important station on the pilgrims' route in Venice which was intended to enhance the parallel between the city and Jerusalem.⁴⁰⁶

⁴⁰³ "Constantine her son had her body brought to Constantinople after he went to live there, and after Constantinople fell under the control of the Venetians it is said that they moved it to Venice where it was buried in a monastery dedicated to the saint. This became popular for the many miracles that occurred," the translation is mine. From de Voragine. *Legendario de sancti vulgar storiado*, fCXL recto.

⁴⁰⁴ Corner, *Ecclesiae Venetae*, 65. Corner also talks about other precious relics preserved in the monastery of Saint Helena, such as a piece of the True Cross, 67.

⁴⁰⁵ Modesti, Paola. "Recinzioni con colonne nelle chiese Veneziane. Tradizioni, revival, sopravvivenze," in *Lo spazio e il culto. Relazioni tra edificio ecclesiale e uso liturgico dal xv al xvi secolo*, ed. by Jörg Stabenow. Venice: Marsilio Editori, 2006, note 20, 185-186; Tramontin, Silvio, et al. *Culto dei santi a Venezia*. (Venice: Edizioni Studium Cattolico Veneziano, 1965), 150.

⁴⁰⁶ It is listed, for example, as a station visited in the pilgrimage of the merchant Arnold von Harff who records the presence of the body of Saint Helena in the church along with other precious relics, such as a piece of the Holy Cross and a thumb of Saint Constantine her son, see Letts,

The Venetians made every effort in order to transform Venice into a pilgrimage destination herself; they supported the circulation of licensed guides, or *tholomarii*, who provided a list of must-see locations and relics.⁴⁰⁷

To summarize, the reliefs designed by Riccio for Santa Maria dei Servi contain two important statements: Venice is at the same time the heir of Constantine and of his role as a protector of Christianity, and the site divinely elected as a new Jerusalem. The fact that the *Serenissima* wanted to deprive Rome of two of its primary roles is symptomatic of the particular climate of the time. Trapped in her current political isolation and under the imminent threat of the League of Cambrai, Venice confides in her destiny as a God-elected leader of the new Christian empire which was promised to her by the miraculous foundation from the ruins of the old Roman Empire. The city evokes the power of the Holy Cross which becomes her protective shield and salvation's sign. This is the message delivered by Donato in the panels that decorate his altar, a message of hope and faith that anticipates the content of two popular prints designed by Titian sometime later in connection with the Cambrai events: *The Triumph of Christ* (1508-1510/1511) and the *Submersion of Pharaoh in the Waters of the Red Sea* (1513-1515). While in the former Titian celebrates a spectacular procession of faith with Christ triumphant on a chariot drawn by the four symbolic beasts of the Evangelists and pushed by the Doctors of the Church, in the latter the artist probably wanted to compare Venice's

Malcolm. *The Pilgrimage of Arnold von Harff knight from Cologne, through Italy, Syria, Egypt, Arabia, Ethiopia, Nubia, Palestine, Turkey, France and Spain, which he accomplished in the years 1496 to 1499* (London: Hakluyt Society, 1946), 68. Coincidentally or not, the thumb of Constantine is precisely the finger that the emperor uses to make the sign of the Cross on his soldier's forehead in Riccio's panel.

⁴⁰⁷ Howard, Deborah. *Venice & the East. The Impact of the Islamic World on Venetian Architecture 1100-1500* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2000), 193-194.

recent disastrous military setbacks to the biblical event (figs. 174-175). Like the Israelites who were capable of escaping from Pharaoh's army thanks to the supernatural protection of the closing in of the Red Sea, the Venetians defied the enemy thanks to the exceptional nature of their city built on water. Venice, the chosen and inviolable virgin, is saved by the lagoon's barrier and God's renewed favor. Although Titian does not explicitly refer to contemporary events in his design, some elements can certainly be read as allusions to Venice's recent history. They are the choices to represent, for example, the fleeing soldiers in modern costumes or to disguise the Israelites as humble farmers from the Veneto who played such an important role in the survival of Venice. The city herself could be identified in the Jerusalem-like view on the background.⁴⁰⁸

The symbiosis between the episodes of the *Submersion of the Pharaoh* and Constantine's defeat of Maxentius becomes even stronger once we are reminded of the connection established between the two events by Eusebius of Caesarea. In his *Life of Constantine*, the Greek historian draws a parallel between the defeats of Maxentius and the Pharaoh, both perpetrated by divine intervention: "Thus, as in the time of Moses himself and of the ancient God-beloved race of Hebrews, "he cast [God] Pharaoh's chariots and host into the sea, and overwhelmed his chosen charioteers in the Red Sea, and covered them with the flood," in the same way Maxentius with his soldiers and bodyguards "went down into the depths like a stone," when he fled before the power of God

⁴⁰⁸ Loechel, André-Jean-Marc. "Le rappresentazioni della comunità," in *Storia di Venezia. Dalle origini alla caduta della Serenissima. IV, Il Rinascimento. Politica e cultura*, ed. by Alberto Tenenti and Ugo Tucci (Rome: Editore Istituto Dell'Enciclopedia Italiana "Giovanni Treccani," 1996), 34-37.

which favored Constantine...(I, 37-38)."⁴⁰⁹ Even though a direct comparison between Moses' and Constantine's deeds is missing in the reliefs for the Servites, it is likely that it was implied by Donato. The patrician and the most sophisticated section of his audience knew about the similarities between the two heroes' stories and were perhaps familiar with the episode of the battle against Amalec when Moses, like Constantine, had a prefiguration of the Cross and achieved victory fighting under that sign (Es. 17, 8-16).⁴¹⁰ They just hoped that Christ's Cross was going to intervene in favor of Venice during this most dramatic moment in her history and prove, one more time, how divine support was on her side.

The Granted Salvation: Andrea Riccio's Relief with Saint Martin and the Beggar

The message of confidence and hope delivered by Donato through his altar in Santa Maria dei Servi worked indeed some miracles. Right before his death the patrician had the opportunity to significantly contribute to a change of fortunes for his beloved Venice. On October 4th, 1511, Julius II signed the Holy League with Venice, Spain, and England, ending the curse on the *Serenissima* and becoming, in a sense, her savior. Donato was among the most influential promoters of the treaty and his role in the negotiations was commemorated in the magnificent procession organized by the Venetian government to celebrate the breakthrough. On the day that marked his mourned death in Rome, the patrician's portrait kneeling in front of the Pope was carried out through Piazza San Marco on a platform along with the city's most precious relics and images of

⁴⁰⁹ Cameron, Averil, and Stuart G. Hall. *Eusebius. Life of Constantine* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999), 84.

⁴¹⁰ Loconsole, "Il simbolo della croce tra giudeo-cristianesimo e tarda antichità," 247.

the main protagonists of the political scene.⁴¹¹ The renewed sense of faith and confidence that was felt in those days is well expressed in the verses pronounced by another representation included in that same parade, an angel of God sent to announce victory to the Venetian people:

“Divine Senate replete with pure faith, which lives in heaven along with the other virtues among the wisest souls and makes your beautiful name exceed everyone; a rare justice gave itself over to a loud cry since almost all souls prayed for your glory and salvation in a way that in God your future is well visible; I am here to announce to you new good, new fame, new honor, and a new identity and a new throne, a more propitious star and more favor. God grants you the good and not the bad. Your faith, your justice and your good heart will have victory and heaven for its merit.”⁴¹²

Salvation was not granted to Venice right away though. Only after another disastrous campaign in 1513, could the city breathe a sigh of relief. With the Treaty of Noyon, signed in August 1516, those same powers which had convened before to almost destroy Venice, came together again to restore her greatness and nearly all her lost possessions, reviving her role as a leading secular state.⁴¹³ It is during this positive climate of recovery that Riccio was called for a second major commission inside Santa Maria dei Servi. If the *Stories of the True Cross* were intended to evoke the miraculous power of the Holy Cross and the role of Venice as a champion of the True Faith, then the

⁴¹¹ “Poi uno altro soler con il Papa sentato, vestito da pontefice con la mitria in testa et pivial d’oro, e uno in forma di sier Hieronimo Donado dottor orator nostro veneto in zenochioni davanti a Sua Santita’,” from Sanudo’s *Diarii*, passage quoted by Branca, Vittore. *La Sapienza Civile. Studi sull’Umanesimo a Venezia*. Florence: Leo S. Olschki Editore, 1998, note 84, 116-117.

⁴¹² “Almo Senato pien di pura fede / che su nel ciel tra l’alme più sapute / la età spira come le altre virtute / e fa che ogni altro il tuo bel nome excede; / Rara justitia un sì alto crido diede / da posa chè le anime quasi tute / pregaron per la tua gloria e tua salute / a tal che in Dio tuo futur ben si vede; / Nove ben, nova fama, novo honore / ti anoncio, et nove spoglie et novo segio / e più benigna stella e altro favore. / Il ben Idio seconda et non il pegio. / Tua fede, tua justitia e il tuo bon core / victoria aràno e il ciel per il suo pregio.” From Sanudo, Marin. *I diarii di Marino Sanuto*, ed. by Federico Stefani et al. (Venice: a spese degli editori, 1879-1903, vol. XIII), 138.

⁴¹³ The best source of Venetian history of the time is Bembo, Pietro. *History of Venice*, ed. and trans. Robert W. Ulery. 3 vols. (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard UP, 2007).

relief with Saint Martin, today also at the Ca' d'Oro, served to reinforce this metaphor and give further proof of its veracity.

The bronze relief with *Saint Martin and the Beggar* was entrusted to Riccio sometime between 1513 and 1520 (fig. 179).⁴¹⁴ It was probably designed to decorate the altar devoted to the saint which stood on the church's choir screen on the opposite side of Donato's twin altar of the True Cross.⁴¹⁵ No records survive to attest to its appearance or patronage and only in a couple of instances is an altar of Saint Martin mentioned in the documents. The first time was in connection with a parishioner named Martino Cesena who petitioned to be buried in the Servite church and to fund a chapel there dedicated to his name saint in 1485.⁴¹⁶ The second occurrence was in the Apostolic Visit of 1581 where an altar consecrated to Saint Martin and George appears at the end of the altars' list compiled for Santa Maria dei Servi. It is likely identifiable with one of the two liturgical stations standing originally on the choir's screen.⁴¹⁷ While the former reference has little to do with the altar that once hosted Riccio's relief, the latter is certainly connected to it since it dates to the time after the screen was erected toward the end of the fifteenth century.

The fact that an altar named after Saint Martin surfaced twice in the scant documentation about Santa Maria dei Servi must be a proof of the significance of the saint for the Servites in Venice. Martin was a popular holy figure in Venice – one of the

⁴¹⁴ I agree with Denise Allen's dating, see Allen, *Andrea Riccio: Renaissance Master of Bronze*, 152-157.

⁴¹⁵ Corner, *Ecclesiae Venetae*, II, 24.

⁴¹⁶ Gasparotto, "Andrea Riccio a Venezia: sui rilievi con le Storie della Vera Croce," note 45, 409.

⁴¹⁷ "Altare sancti Martini et Georgii consecratum et in omnis ornatum... Altare S.ma Aghata est in omnibus ornatum et consecratum..." ASVa, Congr. Vescovi e Regolari, Visita Ap., 96, f.68v.

first churches ever built was dedicated to him – and he is still celebrated to this day; however, not many commissions in the lagoon commemorate his persona and story with the exception of Riccio's relief.⁴¹⁸ As Denise Allen suggested in her recent analysis of the panel, the saint's cult was encouraged by the Servite friars because of its connection with the confraternity of the Lucchesi. Their chapel – the biggest of the entire church – was dedicated to the Volto Santo, a miracle working crucifix preserved in the Cathedral of Saint Martin in Lucca, and was dedicated to both Saint Martin and Saint Mark.⁴¹⁹ The association between Martin and the crucifixion also made this altar an undeniably perfect match for Donato's altar of the True Cross. The relic preserved there was a piece of Christ's instrument of the passion, a particle coming from the first and most important crucifix. The pairing between the two altars is strengthened by a number of similarities: the choice of bronze as the medium, of Riccio as the artist, and of a similar iconography. Although different in format and style because of its extremely high relief, the *Saint Martin* bears nonetheless significant analogies with the *Stories of the True Cross*. The antiquarian language adopted to portray the saint is the same that was applied for Constantine, since Martin, like the emperor, was an historical figure, specifically a Roman cavalry officer who was born during the reign of Constantine. Some of the *all'antica* motives that decorate Donato's tabernacle – such as the garlands, the *bucrania*, and laurel branches – return in Martin's panel (fig. 177). Last but not least, the role of the

⁴¹⁸ It is interesting that the parish church of Saint Martin is located in the area of the Arsenal of Venice, where the bulk of the Venetian Republic's naval power was located. There was a close connection between the highest officials of the Arsenal and the parish church: the admiral and the *proti* used to traditionally seal the beginning of their time in office by attending a mass in San Martino, see Della Puppa, Giuseppe. *La chiesa di S. Martino "De Geminis" in Venezia* (Venice: Grafiche Veneziane, 1997), 33.

⁴¹⁹ Allen, *Andrea Riccio*, 154; Dal Pino, Franco A. et al. *Fonti Storico-Spirituali dei Servi di Santa Maria, II, dal 1349 al 1495*. Bergamo: Servitium Editrice, 2002, vol.2, 51.

protagonists themselves, Martin and Constantine, as heroes and defenders of the Christian faith links the two.⁴²⁰ Even though Riccio represents what it is probably the most popular moment in the saint's hagiography, when Martin shared a piece of his cloak with the beggar/Christ, a subsequent episode from Martin's life recalls more closely Constantine's deed. As reported by Voragine, on the eve of his last battle as a Roman soldier, the saint told his general:

“...I am not allowed to fight. Resentful, the General Julian replied that he refused to fight not because of his religion but because he was afraid of the upcoming battle. Martin replied to him with no fear that he would have shown how his behavior was justified by faith and not fear, that tomorrow he was going to stand in front of the enemies barehanded and in the name of Christ protected just by the sign of the cross and not by weapons, that he was going to penetrate the entire enemy's army with no other weapon than the sign of Christ. It was ordered then that he [Saint Martin] be kept under custody so then he could be sent unarmed in front of the enemies as he wanted and the following day the enemies sent their ambassadors in surrender and there was no doubt that this bloodless victory was achieved through the intervention of the saint...”⁴²¹

The parallel between this story and the episodes represented in the altar of the True Cross is evident. Not only for the outcome of the battle itself, a bloodless victory achieved by the power of the faith in the Cross; but also especially for the importance given to the sign of the Cross. When Martin mentions the sign of the cross as his only weapon in the dialogue with the general, he is definitively referring to the same sign that Constantine makes on his soldier's forehead in the first panel of Donato's altar. That

⁴²⁰ Saint Martin was also considered to be the protector of pilgrims. Consequently, he was the ideal saint to stand beside a precious piece of the relic of the True Cross.

⁴²¹ “...A me non e licito combattere. Isdegnato Iuliano disse che refutava alla militia non per cagione della religione. Ma si per timore de la sopravveniente battaglia. Alquale respose Martino senza paura se qsto se attribuisse alla paura & no ala fede dicote che domane io staro disarmato cotra lexercito denimici & nel nome de xpo difeso dal segno dela croce & non co le arme over el meto seculo penetraro tutto lo exercito de inimici no armato de arme ma solo del segno de christo siche fu comandato chel fusso custodito acioche disarmato come dicto havea fusse gittato avanti ali barbari & nel sequete giorno madorono li inimici li ambasiatori dandose loro & tute sue cose & non e dubio essere data tale victoria senza sangue per li meriti del sancto...” Voragine, *Legendario de sancti vulgar storiado*, f185 verso-f186.

gesture, which was probably first introduced at the time of Constantine, became customary for Christian soldiers before they began fighting.⁴²² Interpreted in the light of contemporary events that were occurring at the time of their creation, both the reliefs with the *Stories of True Cross* and *Saint Martin and the Beggar* contain important statements about the position of Venice within the context of the Cambrai wars. Constantine and Helena's deeds served to elicit the combative spirit of Venice on the eve of the Cambrai threat by reminding her of her role as a new Constantinople, new Rome, and new Jerusalem, and as a defender of the Christian faith; the miraculous and bloodless victory achieved by Saint Martin was seen as a parallel to the similarly miraculous victory of Venice after the Cambrai events.⁴²³ In spite of all the odds, the city had stood firm and inviolate, thus demonstrating to the world that divine favor was still on her side. Just like *Saint Martin with the Beggar*, Venice had now to show her gratitude toward God by revealing her charitable and pious soul.

Before concluding this section on the altar of Saint Martin, I would like to advance a hypothesis about the format and likely patron. Even though the panel does not seem to have anything to do at first with the *Stories of the True Cross*, the rough similarity between its dimensions and those of Donato's tabernacle points toward the possibility that the relief was at the center of a more complex structure, not different from Riccio's doors. It probably preserved a relic of the body of Saint Martin, enshrined within a small tabernacle as two random pieces of information taken from Vicentini and

⁴²² Bosio, *La Trionfante e Gloriosa Croce*, 586.

⁴²³ Allen, *Andrea Riccio*, 155.

Pavon/Cauzzi seem to suggest.⁴²⁴ However, it is difficult to project a likely image of the altar's appearance with the limited data that we have at hand. Perhaps it bore a resemblance to Antonio Rizzo's altars of Saint James and Saint Paul in the Basilica of San Marco which were decorated with a sculptured portrait of the patron saint (fig. 178). Even with its narrative subject, Riccio's panel gives great attention to the icon-like figure of Martin.

The patron of the Saint Martin altar is as equally mysterious as its appearance. So far no attempt has been made to nominate a possible candidate but the person that I have in mind would certainly offer a suggestive possibility: Girolamo de' Franceschi. His name appears in connection with Santa Maria dei Servi in Venice alongside that of Girolamo Donato, since he was the prior of the monastery at the time of the consecration of the church in 1491. This other Girolamo was an eminent member of the Servite friars' community. Remembered as a great preacher and a tireless advocate for the Observant Reform, the friar had an impressive career. After studying theology in Venice, Padua, and Bologna, he became prior of the Venetian monastery three times and general vicar of the Observant Congregation four times. Thanks to the favor of the Cardinal Giovanni Michiel, protector of the order, he was made bishop of Corone in 1496, even if apparently he never set foot in that city and preferred to stay with his supporter until the Cardinal died in 1503. From 1504 on his activity gravitated around Friuli. There he entered the

⁴²⁴ When talking about the later reinstallation of the relief with Saint Martin, after the dismembering of the choir screen, Vicentini states that the panel was positioned on a small wooden altar just behind the main altar. He specifies in a footnote that his reconstruction is based on the data contained in the public assessment, which lists the Saint Martin bronze and two brass small doors, two objects that the author put in relationship with the altar of Saint Martin mentioned by Cicogna, Vicentini, *Santa Maria de' Servi in Venezia*, 74-76 and note 1, 76. Pavon and Cauzzi say that this second Saint Martin altar, located behind the high altar, preserved a relic belonging to the saint without reporting the original source of this piece of information, Pavon and Cauzzi, *La memoria di un tempio*, 63.

circle of Cardinal Domenico Grimani, patriarch of Aquileia, and was the major figure responsible for the founding of the Servite monastery in Udine. Girolamo died in Udine in 1513, but his body was brought to Santa Maria dei Servi in Venice and buried there.⁴²⁵

The potential connection between Girolamo de' Franceschi and the commission of the Saint Martin relief is a hypothesis based on a couple of details contained in his personal will. The testament was drafted in 1511 and reads:

“He chose a burial for his body in the de' Franceschi chapel located in the glorious church of the Servite order in Venice in the tomb of his ancestors or in another to be built in the above-mentioned chapel, in which he wanted and requested to be located according to his condition and status. And through the assistance of the approved commissioners and testament's executors, he ordered and provided one hundred golden ducats for the erection and creation of an image in bronze of the reverend lord testator himself with the de' Franceschi's insignia and those of the Pope in honor of the supreme almighty God and of his church and not without glory...He demanded that the friars of the same monastery commit themselves to celebrate or have celebrated a mass in the above-mentioned chapel on certain special days...That until his church in Corone was not in the hands of the faithful, the same friars [from the Venetian monastery] could use it [his cope] on the feast days of the Nativity of the Lord, Easter, Assumption of the Virgin, and Corpus Christi, and that in the case that the above-mentioned church of Corone returned into the hands of the faithful – something that he wishes God almighty would make it happen through his mercy – that the same friars are committed to send back this cope to Corone. The same reverend testator wanted and ordered that the golden Jesus with the cross covered in gems, the golden chain, and the pontifical ring, that he has been using until now, be safeguarded by his reverend brothers in Aquileia, until the church of Corone was returned into the hands of the faithful, something that he wishes God would allow in his mercy...”⁴²⁶

⁴²⁵ Paschini, Pio. “Fra Girolamo de Franceschi servita e vescovo di Corone,” in *Studi Storici dell'Ordine dei Servi di Maria*, 5 (1934), 3-13.

⁴²⁶ The translation is mine: "Suo igitur corpori dum de hac vita anima eius migrare contigerit sepulturam elegit in capella de Franciscis sita in ecclesia gloriose Virginis Marie Fratrum Ordinis Servorum de Venetijs in tomba progenitorum suorum, vel alia in dicta capella construenda, in qua voluit et ordinavit honorifice portari et locari iuxta statum et conditionem suam. et per infrascriptos commissarios suos et executores testamentarios ordinavit et voluit exponi ducatos auri centum pro structura et fabrica unius ipsius R.mi D. Testatoris imaginis de bronzo cum armis et insignis de Franciscis ac insignis pontificalibus ad honorem summi omnipotentis Dei ac S.R. Ecclesie et non inanis glorie...Quod Fratres predicti monasterij teneantur et obligati sint singulis

Although the original location of the de' Franceschi family chapel remains unknown, it is not unlikely that the tomb of Girolamo could have been located near to the altar of Saint Martin. Making my hypothesis more attractive is the fact that the friar ordered an image in bronze for his commemoration and that this was probably executed sometime after his death in 1513 in accordance with the stylistic dating of Riccio's *Saint Martin*. The change in the subject, from a personal effigy of Girolamo endowed with his own insignia to a devotional image focusing on Saint Martin, may have occurred in connection with the particular circumstances under which the commission was carried out. After the propitious events which followed the Cambrai wars, the testament's executors probably thought that it was a better idea to celebrate Venice's accomplishments and re-gained status rather than simply represent de' Franceschi's features. They knew that Girolamo would have been pleased by this decision since his own will is a proof of how engaged he was in the political situation. The document clearly expresses the friar's hope that Venice would recover Corone from the Turks through the intervention of a merciful God, since this wish is stressed at least three times in the list of precious objects that Girolamo entrusted to the brothers in Venice and

quibus diebus celebrare vel celebrari facere unam missam in dicta capella...Fratres Servorum de Venetijs, donec ecclesia sua Coronensis devenerit ad manus fidelium, et Fratres ipsi possint eo uti in diebus Nativitatis Domini, Pasce, Assumptionis Virginis Marie, in festo Corporis Christi, et in eventu quod ecclesia predicta Coronensis deveniat ad manus fidelium - quod Deus omnipotens sua misericordia hoc faciat - quod predicti Fratres teneantur pluviale ipsum mittere fideliter ven. capitulo Coronensi ibidem Coroni. Item voluit, jussit et ordinavit idem R.mus D. Testator quod Jesus aureus cum cruce gemata et cathena aurea ac annuli pontificales, quibus utitur et usus est hucusque, serventur et custodiantur per R.mo D. Confratres suos s. Aquilegensis ecclesie canonicos, donec ecclesia Coronensis devenerit ad manus fidelium, quod Deus misericordia sua concedat..." ASVe, Santa Maria dei Servi, busta 29, signed process no. 267; Vicentini, *I Servi di Maria nei documenti e codici veneziani.*, 155-156.

Aquileia until the return of Corone's diocese into Christian hands.⁴²⁷ As for Girolamo's personal interest in the figure of Saint Martin, evidence comes from his only published sermon which has been handed down to us. Pronounced in the mother church of the Servites in Venice on the first day of 1492 – a significant date that coincides, as we have seen, with the Virgin's Annunciation, Christ's Passion, and the founding of Venice – the speech teaches how to sanctify Christ and his excellent name. After saying that we should “wear this holy name on our forehead as well, signing ourselves often with it,” in evident reference to the sign of the Cross that plays such a significant part in the reliefs with the *Stories of the True Cross*, Girolamo goes on to bring in two examples of devoted saints that honored Christ by pronouncing his name, the first of the two being Saint Martin:

“The glorious Saint Martin always brought this honored name in his mouth, like the most precious diamond, as they said about him. In his mouth there was nothing else, except Jesus Christ.”⁴²⁸

⁴²⁷ This information is even more interesting considering that it seems that he had renounced to the diocese in Corone already in 1502, see Santifilippo, Matteo. “Girolamo de’ Franceschi,” in *Dizionario biografico degli italiani*, edited by Giuseppe Pignatelli et al. (Catanzaro: Arti Grafiche Abramo S.r.l., 1997), 49, 624.

⁴²⁸ The translation is mine: “Portiamo ancho nella fronte nostra questo santo nome, segnandoci spesse volte con esso...Questo honorato nome portava il glorioso San Martino sempre nella bocca sua, a modo di un preciosissimo diamante, come si legge di lui. Che nella bocca sua non era altro, che Giesu Christo...” from Porcacchi, Thomaso. *Delle prediche di diversi illustri theologi, et catholici predicatori della parola di Dio* (Venice: Giorgio de’ Cavalli, 1561), 328.

Donato and Riccio

The commission of the second altar to Riccio does not come as a surprise, especially if we think that it was dictated by the desire to create an appropriate counterpart to the reliefs with the *Stories of the True Cross*. The choice of the Paduan sculptor seems even more predictable in retrospect once Girolamo de' Franceschi is suggested as a potential patron. The friar belonged to the same circle as Girolamo Donato with whom he likely shared political views and spiritual ideals. However, while Riccio's authorship of the altar of Saint Martin may look obvious, one question still remains partially unanswered: what prompted Donato to call Riccio to Venice in the first place and how did he meet the artist?

Donato and Riccio prove to be remarkably "kindred souls." Both, in fact, were driven by an equally strong interest in antiquarian art and by the ambition of bringing to life works that were not merely *all'antica* but could compete with authentic examples of ancient art. Along with being obsessed with ancient culture and knowledge, Donato was an avid collector of antiquities. Wherever he served as an official of the Republic or was sent on a legation, the patrician came home with new pieces for his collection: from ancient epigraphs recalling the Roman origins of his family name to real sculptural works such as the statue of a man with a toga or the equestrian effigy of Attila.⁴²⁹ Riccio, on the other hand, grew up and worked in Padua, the city with the most solid antiquarian heritage in Veneto. This was the place where the collection of ancient items could be supplemented by occasional recoveries and by a flourishing commerce, and where the

⁴²⁹ Franzoni, "Girolamo Donato: Collezionismo e *Instauratio* dell'Antico," 27-31; most recently Lauber, "Girolamo Donà," 272-273.

constant exposure to *anticaglia* informed the production of artists such as Donatello, Mantegna, or Parenzano, just to mention a few.⁴³⁰ Within this environment, however, the antiquarianism of Riccio distinguished itself for its purity: he did not simply take inspiration from ancient art but created works that are comparable for style, sophistication, and content to real antiquities. This is the main reason why Donato chose him: Riccio's brand stood for quality.

Even without direct evidence, it is likely that Padua was the scenario where Donato became acquainted with Riccio. The city was where the patrician graduated in 1478 *in artibus* - completing later further studies in theology and civic and canonic law - and where his family name had gained a reputation thanks to his ancestor and uncle, Pietro Donato.⁴³¹ A humanist and bibliophile himself, Pietro had been bishop of Padua between 1428 and 1447 and seems to have been involved in the project of renovation of the Santo's choir screen which, according to Andrea Calore, was carried out by Leon Battista Alberti around 1438.⁴³² Roughly seventy years later, in that same choir Riccio would be commissioned to execute some of his most successful public works, probably though the intercession of Girolamo Donato himself.

Right after his first legation to Rome in 1492, when he brought back the relic for the Venetian Servites, Donato had hoped that he could spend more time in Padua. He thus began the construction of a palace there, where he planned to indulge in erudite

⁴³⁰ On the Paduan context see especially Bodon, *Veneranda Antiquitas*.

⁴³¹ The best biography on Donato is by Rigo, "Donà, Girolamo," 741-753.

⁴³² Calore, Andrea. "Il coro e presbiterio della basilica del Santo. Vicende storiche e artistiche nel sec. XV," in *Il Santo*, 38 (gennaio-agosto 1998), 75-77. Pietro Donato was also a friend of the fellow humanist Ciriaco d'Ancona who prepared for him a folder of antique drawings (information provided to me by Dr. Allison Sherman).

conversations with fellow humanists.⁴³³ Some of the most controversial philosophical discussions indeed happened in Donato's Paduan residence according to Vittore Branca. They focused on the intellect's unity and the soul's immortality quoting Aristotle and his commentators, including those who were in conflict with Christian doctrine like Averroes' and Alexander of Aphrodisias.⁴³⁴ These debates had become so intense and frequent that the bishop of Padua, Pietro Barozzi, felt the need to control them and in 1489 prohibited public debates on the topic.⁴³⁵ Donato was then forced to publish his translation of Aphrodisias' commentary on *de Anima* of Aristotle elsewhere, in Brescia in 1495.⁴³⁶

The inclusion of Riccio in Donato's intellectual gatherings is circumstantial but not entirely improbable. It may mean something that almost all the personalities involved in the sculptor's most important commission for the Santo, the candlestick, were engaged in Aristotelian studies at some level. Banzato has made a list which includes the rector of the basilica, Antonio Trombetta, and the President of the Veneranda Arca, Giovanni Battista di Leone, both devoted to the study of Aristotle, along with figures such as Ermolao Barbaro and the ecclesiastic Niccolò Leonico Tomeo who taught Aristotelian philosophy at the University of Padua, the latter being the first to read and teach in the

⁴³³ Agostini degli, Giovanni. *Notizie Istorico-Critiche Intorno La Vita, e le Opere degli Scrittori Viniziani*, II, 1754, 206.

⁴³⁴ Rigo, "Donà, Girolamo," 744.

⁴³⁵ Dondi Orogio, Francesco Scipione. *Dissertazione nona sopra l'istoria ecclesiastica padovana* (Padua: Tipografia del Seminario, 1816), 75ss.

⁴³⁶ He had started working on it in the same 1489 while he was in Milan as an ambassador, see Rigo, Paola. "Catalogo e tradizione degli scritti di Girolamo Donato," *Atti dell'Accademia nazionale dei Lincei. Classe di scienze morali, storiche e filologiche*, series VIII, vol. 31 (gen.-feb. 1976), 54.

original Greek.⁴³⁷ The presence of Barbaro and his pupil Tomeo, who were certainly among the participants of Donato's reunions, induces one to believe that the patrician may have played a prominent role in the assignment to Riccio of the Paschal Candlestick. As the first major patron of the artist, he was likely the one who introduced Riccio to this circle of people and made him familiar with their intellectual concerns. He in fact asked Riccio to design two small works of unquestionable philosophical content: a plaquette representing Alexander of Aphrodisias being instructed by Aristotle about the content of what is probably the book on the soul and Girolamo's personal medal (Fig. 179).⁴³⁸ The medal designed by Riccio for Girolamo Donato is emblematic of the complex, philosophical context in which the two operated. It also reflects, more clearly than in the Servites' reliefs, the deep connection that existed between the artist and his patron (Fig. 34). Riccio really gives proof of his talent in filtering and translating in visual terms the ideals and inner thoughts of Donato, creating a device that has long eluded any clear and definitive explanation.

Girolamo's medal respects the canons commonly applied in the design of this category of objects. The obverse represents the patron in rigorous profile

⁴³⁷ Banzato, "Il candelabro pasquale di Andrea Briosco," 98-99. In the same catalogue Davide Gasparotto (cat. 47, 338) has attributed a medal representing Niccolò Leonico Tomeo to Riccio and has provided a concise but useful biography of the philosopher. A great art collector, Tomeo was one of the interlocutors of Pomponio Gauricus' *De Sculptura* and the recipient of the letter on Paduan art written by Girolamo Campagnola which was used as a source both by Marcantonio Michiel and Giorgio Vasari. See also Branca, "La cultura: l'umanesimo," 738; King, *Venetian Humanism*, 234-5.

⁴³⁸ Neither of the two examples of Donato's medal listed in Hill (Hill, George Francis. *A corpus of Italian medals of the Renaissance before Cellini*. London: The British Museum, 1930, no. 530) are currently extant. There is a variant plaquette version of the reverse at the National Gallery in Washington (1957.14.345), which is the one that I am using for my examination.

accompanied by his name and the title of doctor.⁴³⁹ The reverse depicts an allegorical image that is intended to allude to the ideas and interests embraced by the sitter or his personal accomplishments and aspirations, by adopting an intentionally cryptic and not immediately intelligible language. In this particular case the scene, which has been reproduced in a plaquette variant as well, portrays a young, naked male figure sound asleep in a semi-seated posture, against an antique vase replete with some branches (fig. 180-181). He holds his head with the left hand and a book with the right that it is being snatched by two little cupids who are clearly taking advantage of his unconscious status. The act is commented on by the motto in Greek letters “sacred theft” which is accompanied by two other branches tied together in a knot.

By identifying the expression “sacred theft” with the concept elaborated by Saint Augustine in his *De doctrina christiana*, the image has been interpreted as a metaphor of the love for ancient knowledge that has induced modern people to keep alive and use the heritage of antiquity. Certainly Donato shared with Augustine the idea that the message of ancient philosophy did not entirely clash with the Christian belief but was instead often compatible with the truth proceeding from God. Throughout his busy career, the patrician put a lot of effort into trying to “steal” some time for the *otium*, as he calls his studies, in order to give a personal contribution to the search for an equilibrium between ancient and Christian wisdom. As a consequence, it is not so strange to find in his medal such an open homage to antiquarian culture, which does not compromise the patron’s status as a Christian believer and a major supporter of the Servite order. However, as I will show, the message expressed by his personal emblem goes far beyond the desire to celebrate

⁴³⁹ A small rose at the end of the inscription serves to recall the specific branch of the Donato family to which he belonged: Donato delle Rose.

Donato's devotion to antiquity. What Riccio elaborated is an ideal portrait of Girolamo as a scholar that summarizes some of the most popular philosophical ideas circulating in the Renaissance.

The handsome youth with a sculpted, naked body depicted on the reverse of Donato's medal is an ideal portrayal of the sitter's alter ego. This is not the first instance in which a sleeping nude male accompanied the effigy of a professional intellectual as the essay of Maria Ruvoldt has underlined. She mentions at least three other examples of such a combination on medals: one that precedes Riccio's work, namely Sperandio of Mantua's medal of Tito Vespasiano Strozzi (ca. 1476), and two following the contribution of the Paduan sculptor, which are Valerio Belli's medal of Pietro Bembo (1532) and Domenico Poggini's medal of Benedetto Varchi (ca. 1561). Similar to Donato's case, in all three instances the sitters are represented on the back of their portraits as an ideal version of themselves, stripped of their clothes and caught in the arms of Morpheus (figs. 182-183).⁴⁴⁰ Through an accurate examination of the Neoplatonic ideas elaborated by Marsilio Ficino in his *De vita triplici* (1489), Ruvoldt has read these images as a visual representation of the inspired poet who achieves knowledge and creativity in the privileged communion with the divine guaranteed by sleep. The choice of nudity is explained with the attempt to emphasize simultaneously the ideal state of the self, its spiritual transcendence, and the association with the classical tradition.⁴⁴¹

⁴⁴⁰ Ruvoldt, Maria. *The Italian Renaissance Imagery of Inspiration: Metaphors of Sex, Sleep, and Dream* (Cambridge UK; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 12-23.

⁴⁴¹ Ruvoldt, *The Italian Renaissance Imagery of Inspiration*, 32.

Riccio's allegorical portrayal fits perfectly within this interpretation and carries even deeper philosophical content as its different iconographical solutions suggest. Unlike the examples analyzed by Ruvoldt, Donato's alter ego does not rest in the canonic poetic *locus amoenus* and he is not alone. The figure leans against an ancient vase topped by some branches, while more branches spring behind one of the Erotes that animate the scene. Moreover, the youth is sleeping in a sort of sitting up position that resembles the pose of Constantine in the Servite reliefs and shows an attempt at self-control in contrast with the relaxed reclining poses of Bembo and Varchi (fig. 184).⁴⁴² All these different details serve to define Donato more as a scholar and a philosopher rather than a poet. First of all, his ideal image on the reverse differs so much from the patrician's actual effigy so that it underscores that the naked youth stands for the soul of the patrician. Finally liberated from the restraints of rational thought represented by the book, the scholar's tool, Donato's soul can be led toward communion with the divine which has sent his faithful assistants in the figures of the two Erotes. The freedom achieved by Donato is further underlined by the presence of the closed vase, symbol of the rational soul, which is topped by what I interpret as olive branches, attributes of Athena and symbols of divine wisdom and peace and of the immortality associated with them. The inclusion of the palm branches beside the olive ones, both behind the sleeping figure and at the bottom of the inscription, serves to enhance the sense of victory, peace, and noble intelligence granted to the soul which surrenders itself to God.⁴⁴³ The "sacred theft"

⁴⁴² Of the three examples mentioned by Ruvoldt, only the medal of Tito Vespasiano Strozzi shows the poet resting in a sitting position.

⁴⁴³ The reference for the meaning of all these symbols comes from the hieroglyphics represented in the text of the *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili*. The book is the work of an author that certainly belonged to the humanistic circles frequented by Girolamo Donato. Colonna, Francesco.

alluded to the motto thus refers in this context to the Platonic doctrine of divine furor as that condition that elevates the soul to its original union with God.

It is essential now to recall how relevant the message of Donato's medal was to the patrician's specific philosophical interests. As it has been mentioned before, Donato was deeply involved in current discussions on the immortality of the soul which were so popular in Padua at the turn of the century and he actively contributed to them by translating the commentary of Alexander of Aphrodisias on Aristotle's *De anima*. He may have also engaged in the study of the concept of sleep and its effects on the human soul, as is suggested by the fact that at least two of the works commissioned from Riccio had something to do with sleep/dream: I am referring to the medal and to the episode of the *Dream of Constantine* represented in one of the reliefs for the Servites. Moreover Ermolao Barbaro, dear friend of Donato and a fellow scholar of Aristotle, had dedicated to him his Latin version of Temistio's *De somno*, one of his first translations from the Greek.⁴⁴⁴ What makes things more interesting is that the same ideas elucidated in Donato's medal about the status of sleep as the ideal condition for a re-unification with the creator are summarized in a sermon by the Servite friar Girolamo Quaino pronounced in Udine on the first Sunday of Advent in 1505.⁴⁴⁵ Although Donato did not attend that particular mass, he was probably acquainted with this Servite member from the monastery of Padua and surely knew quite well the most important points of his discourse

Hypnerotomachia Poliphili, ed. by Marco Ariani and Mino Gabriele (Milan: Adelphi Edizioni, 1998), 609-611.

⁴⁴⁴ Branca, "Umanesimo Veneziano fra Barbaro e Bembo," 20.

⁴⁴⁵ Scifoni, Felice, ed. *Dizionario biografico universale, contenente le notizie più importanti sulla vita e sulle opera degli uomini celebri...* (Florence: David Passigli Tipografo-Editore, 1840-1849), 718.

on sleep. Some of these are worth quoting since they seem to offer an appropriate commentary to accompany our analysis of Riccio's medal:

"The Apostle does not talk of the sleep of contemplation, considered that there is not another kind of sleep in this life that is not harmful, nor reproachable for the sleeper, except for that which can be enjoyed in the quiet status of contemplation. This one, even though it is long and continuous, is not reprehensible, but it is favored so much so that, in order to please the soul, God picks it up in his sweetest embrace, holds it tight, nurtures it, guards it, and does not allow any noise or other external impediment to disturb the soul from its beloved rest, he gives it freedom to sleep until it wants... This happy sleep must be very gratefying to God since he himself proves to be its beloved, its faithful protector, its solicitous zealot... This is that blessed sleep that the Platonic philosophers call furor, and alienation of the mind, I am not referring to the insane furor, which can be caused sometimes by human infirmity, and transforms us into mean animals, and inferior to our species: but to the noble and divine furor that, ignited in the soul with flames of pure light, abducts the soul from the senses, elevates it above the human being, and brings it to God through those same levels from which, when it was created, it descended into this body. In total the soul can reach six levels and through those it completes entirely its journey. The first is represented by God, the last by the body." ⁴⁴⁶

⁴⁴⁶ The translation is mine: "Del sonno della contemplazione non parla anche l'Apostolo, atteso che non e' altro sonno in questa vita, che non sia di danno, o d'alcuno biasimo a chi lo dorme, salvo quel che si gode nella quiete della contemplazione. Questo per lungo, & continuo che si sia, non solo non e' ripreso, ma favorito in tanto, che, perche' lo gusti l'anima, piu soave la raccoglie Iddio nelle sue braccia, se la porta in seno, la sostiene, le vegghia sopra, non patisce ch'ella per romore, o altro estrinseco impedimento sia disturbata dal suo amato riposo, la lascia in liberta' che dorma fin che le piace... Ben deve essere grato a Dio questo sonno felice, poi che se ne dimostra egli medesimo si tanto amatore, custode si fido, sollecito zelatore... Questo e' quel sonno beato, che con altro nome chiamano I Platonici furore, e alienatione di mente, non dico furor insano, il quale alle volte da humana infermita' suol'essere cagionato, che questo ci trasforma in animali vili, & ci fa in certo modo alla propria specie inferiori: ma furor nobile, & divino, ch'acceso nell'anima con fiamme di pura luce, la fura a' sensi, la rapisce sopra l'esser humano, & fa salir a Dio per li medesimi gradi, per li quali creata discese in questo corpo. Sei gradi in tutto sono quelli dell'anima, per li quali ella fa intieramente il suo viaggio. Il primo e' Iddio, l'ultimo il corpo." From Porcacchi, *Delle prediche di diversi illustri theologi*, 14-15.

Conclusions

This fourth chapter has explored the political meaning conveyed by Riccio's reliefs with the *Stories of the True Cross*. Not immediately intelligible to all the faithful approaching the altar, this message was conceived by the patron Girolamo Donato and intended to address the critical situation of the Venetian Republic at the turn of the sixteenth century. As I have shown, Girolamo was fully aware of the delicate moment through which his city was going and contributed in a fundamental way to her survival and recovery. Between the 1490s and his death, which occurred in 1511, the patrician was sent to Rome a number of times for extensive periods in order to represent Venice and keep her informed about any news circulating in the epicenter of Italian politics.

While in Rome, Girolamo had the opportunity not only to be an active participant in political negotiations but also to become acquainted with the great artistic projects supported by the Papal court in order to promote the image of Rome as the new capital of Christianity. One of these, namely the re-decoration of the church of Santa Croce in Gerusalemme, had a tremendous impact on the patrician's most prestigious commission: the altar of the True Cross for Santa Maria dei Servi. The frescoes for the apse of Santa Croce in Rome were commissioned by the titular Cardinal of the church, Pedro Gonzalez De Mendoza, on the occasion of the miraculous recovery of the titulus of the True Cross which was hidden in the church. Occurring at the time of what was seen as the similarly God-driven victory against the Moors in Spain, the re-discovery of such a precious relic was interpreted as a sign of the imminent fall of the infidels' threat and of the upcoming rise of a new Christian era under the badge of Christ's Cross. Donato, who received a fragment of this titulus from the Pope in recognition of his services, decided to fund an

altar/reliquary to preserve it and commemorate it, and adorned it with a sequence of episodes taken from the legend of the True Cross similar to the frescoes completed in Santa Croce in Gerusalemme. Although it is evident that the cycle, executed by Antoniazio Romano at the end of the fifteenth century, was a source of inspiration for Donato's altar – as I show - the patrician translated the political metaphors and images of the Roman example into Venetian terms, bringing to life a new statement about the Venetian myth. By reviving the most authentic antiquarian style and avoiding any direct reference to contemporary personalities and circumstances, Donato and Riccio provided what can be considered a visual document about the historical validity of the events related to the recovery of the True Cross. Constantine and Helena are represented as the real, historical figures, who contributed to the foundation of the cult of the Holy Cross. However, their presence in the artistic context of Venice at this crucial time in the Cambrai wars has subtle political implications. The first Christian emperor and his mother are portrayed at the Servites' church with the purpose of enlisting the assistance of the Holy Cross for the Venetian cause and of reinforcing the myth of Venice as a guardian of the Christian faith, as a new Constantinople/Rome and a new Jerusalem. The relevance of this message is shown in this chapter through the reading of Girolamo Donato's oration to the emperor Maximilian I, which provides a proper historical framework for the interpretation of Riccio's bronze panels.

The last section of chapter four offers some new insights into the relationship between Donato and Riccio. The two shared a similar profound knowledge of ancient art and philosophy as shown in the medal designed by Riccio for Girolamo. Beyond what seems to be a simple homage to antiquarian art, lies a deep understanding of some of the

most important philosophical ideals embraced by an intellectual of the stature of Donato which gives us a glimpse into the vivid cultural context of Padua between the end of the fifteenth and the beginning of the sixteenth century. The imagery applied in Donato's medal reflects on a smaller scale the intricate and multifaceted message of the reliefs for Santa Maria dei Servi thus offering a key to their interpretation.

Conclusions

My dissertation is a focused analysis of one individual work of art: five bronze panels representing the *Stories of the True Cross*. Fruit of the craftsmanship of the master of bronze Andrea Riccio, these reliefs were once mounted on the altar dedicated to the Holy Cross in Santa Maria dei Servi, Venice, which was commissioned by the patrician and diplomat Girolamo Donato for the choir of the Servites' mother church. The goal of my research has been to prove the exceptionality of this liturgical station, unprecedented in Venice for its format, medium, and distinctively archaeological antiquarian style. By relying on a combination of archival sources, secondary literature, and relevant comparative materials, each chapter examines several important aspects associated with the altar of the True Cross: from its original design and location, to the function and needs it was intended to satisfy, to the multilayered message it delivered, which was tailored to the different audiences engaged in a dialogue with it. Every single issue has been investigated within the broader historical, religious, and cultural background in order to stress the crucial role that this work of art played in the context of Venetian history, politics, and the visual arts.

Sharing the fate met by many altars with sculptures, the altar of the True Cross was subject to changes in taste. In 1729, it was dismantled along with the choir screen to which it was attached, and its materials were re-assembled into another altar, dedicated to the Seven Founders. The same happened to its counterpart, the "twin" altar of Saint Martin, which was torn down and re-used in a subsequent liturgical station honoring Saint Pellegrino Laziosi. Both of these later structures disappeared after the destruction of Santa Maria dei Servi during the Napoleonic occupation, leaving behind just a list of

materials. In chapter one, I re-examine the material and documentary evidence related to the altar of the True Cross in order to suggest a likely reconstruction of its original design. My hypothesis brings together for the first time all the components that were possibly once combined in this structure: the five bronze reliefs created by Andrea Riccio today at the Ca' d'Oro Museum in Venice, the marble kneeling angels attributed to Andrea Bregno and divided between the Staatliche Museen in Berlin and the Sacristy of Santi Giovanni e Paolo in Venice, and the elements from the lost sculptural frame that was described as re-integrated into the altar of the Seven Founders. What I propose is that the five reliefs were inserted into a complex and ornate temple-like frame made out of marble and consisting of two steps in Istrian limestone, a parapet in porphyry inlay, and two columns and two pilasters in Carrara marble. Riccio's tabernacle relief was likely positioned at the center within a larger marble panel in perspective view while the four narrative panels with the *Stories of the True Cross* were inserted in the base below the structure and just above the altar, roughly at the viewer's eye level. The kneeling angels were probably standing outside the architectural frame above the narrative reliefs, from where they stared in the direction of the tabernacle at the center.

The overall design may have recalled the format of the Eucharistic altar by Desiderio da Settignano in San Lorenzo in Florence. This work inspired similar structures in Venice, such as the examples in San Giobbe and Santa Maria Gloriosa dei Frari, as well as altars not necessarily dedicated to the Eucharist, such as those designed by Antonio Rizzo in San Marco. It is certain, however, as I have emphasized, that Donato did not have a specific model in mind when he commissioned his liturgical station at the Servite church; rather he intentionally wanted to create something out of the ordinary and

original, drawing from different sources of inspiration. The choice of sculpture over painting as the altarpiece's medium, especially in the form of rare and prestigious bronze, would have called for immediate associations with precious, refined, and ancient creations and would have put Donato's commission on the same level as the work of Donatello in the Santo or even the tomb of Sixtus IV by Antonio del Pollaiuolo in Saint Peter's. The smaller scale of Riccio's creation would have not diminished the impact of the prestigious reference and the sense of monumentality conveyed by the Servite series, which was unprecedented in the Venetian artistic panorama.

In chapter one I also stress how the stylistic differences between tabernacle and narrative reliefs give us some insight into the commission's time-frame. As has been noticed, the tabernacle relief was probably created earlier and, in my opinion, modeled after Donatello's Eucharistic altar for Saint Peter's in Rome. Donato was in Rome in 1491 and it is during this time that he received the donation of a piece of the newly re-discovered plaque of Christ's Cross from Innocent VIII. He also certainly had the opportunity to see Donatello's sculptural ensemble in the basilica of Saint Peter in its original location and to use it as a source of inspiration for his Servite tabernacle. He entrusted Riccio with the creation of what was probably a temporary container for his precious donation to the Servite community and later decided to integrate the tabernacle's door into a fully functional altar. The occasion probably came with the construction of a new choir for Santa Maria dei Servi around 1498. As procurator of the church, Donato was in charge of overseeing the work and assisted in the collection of the money necessary to complete the project, personally contributing to the erection of the new choir's screen. It was then that he decided to fund a fully functional altar dedicated to the

Holy Cross in which he incorporated the pre-existing tabernacle and a series of four narrative reliefs also commissioned from the master of bronze Andrea Riccio. The scenes, probably completed around 1500, showcase the sculptor's more mature style and were possibly arranged in a thematic rather than chronological order. As my analysis of Riccio's sophisticated narrative language demonstrates, the panels with Helena's stories were positioned at the center just below the Cross' exaltation image depicted in the tabernacle while Constantine's deeds framed the central episodes of the rediscovery of the True Cross by providing the necessary "background" story.

If the altar's precious materials, unconventional format, and erudite references point to the central role of this liturgical structure, certainly its position within the sacred space reinforces this idea. Standing against the choir screen roughly at the center of the church, the altar of the True Cross was easily visible and accessible, a couple of characteristics that deeply shaped its perception and uses as the second chapter emphasizes. My discussion begins with a review of the function and evolution of choir screens from late antiquity throughout the Renaissance. Liminal points for lay devotion and more permeable than is often believed, these architectural components affected profoundly the faithful's experience, influencing the way in which they participated in the liturgy, understood their place in the larger body of the *ecclesia*, and even cultivated their visual skills. Given the crucial position of altars on choir screens, they became a favored location for the erection of altars whose prestige often surpassed that of their companions arranged along the walls. These altars satisfied a number of liturgical needs from masses to the dead to other daily religious functions, special festivities, and processions.

The choir screen in Santa Maria dei Servi, which hosted the altar of the True Cross, was built toward the end of the fifteenth century, at a time when similar structures were becoming obsolete in Italy due to a shift in the conception and use of liturgical space. While other screens were erected in Venice around the same time, none of them shared the unique story of the Servite structure. The screen, whose construction was financed and overseen by the patrician Girolamo Donato around 1498, exceptionally stood in place for over two hundred years, thus outliving the destruction around 1560s of the choir that it served. It is my assumption that what motivated the friars to keep their screen and convinced the apostolic visitors to avoid its removal was the fact that this element was aesthetically captivating and liturgically indispensable. Within the long and narrow one-nave body of Santa Maria dei Servi, the screen would have provided the visitor with a welcoming, intimate, and approachable space while also functioning as an alternative presbytery. In fact, at the time of the screen's creation not only, was the apsidal area still incomplete but it remained unfinished for quite some time. The high altar was decorated with Giuseppe Salviati's *Assumption* only around the 1550s and a subsequent remodeling phase, begun with the moving of the second choir, ended up with a new restoration of the main chapel which terminated in 1691. I believe that throughout this on-going construction period Donato's screen may have offered an alternative and elegant space for important celebrations that engaged religious and lay members alike, centering especially on the altar of the True Cross and later on its counterpart, the altar of Saint Martin. The particular iconography of the bronzes that decorated these two liturgical stations was suitable to a number of festivities in the Servite calendar which involved the community of the Lucchesi in the nearby Chapel of the Volto Santo. This

confraternity showed strong ties to the cult of the Crucifix, the Holy Cross, and Saint Martin as well, as I clearly point out, and its chapel was physically linked to the screen.

In the last section of the second chapter I advance a hypothesis for the design of the Servite screen. As the altar that it hosted, this partition structure was unlike anything else in Venice and must have been the product of an original design introduced by the patron Girolamo Donato. The reconstruction that I have proposed combines information from written descriptions, a few available measurements, and comparative evidence. I suggest that the screen was a hybrid of a wall and a *barco*, something between the *septum* at the Frari and the *ponte* in San Michele in Isola. The consistency with which the sources refers to this *arredo* as a wall certainly means that, despite the three arches/openings, overall it must have looked like a solid wall, probably topped by a platform and completed by a Crucifixion and a pulpit. It must have been an element architecturally independent from the choir precinct that it served since the removal of the friars' stalls in the 1560s did not have an impact on it. Departing from similar bridge-like examples in Venice, the screen opened into three rather than five arcades with the central entrance larger in size and more ornate. The only screen that, in my opinion, seems to provide a plausible model for the Servite "wall" lies outside the lagoon, in Santa Maria del Carmine in Florence. Here, too, the screen did not survive but its reconstruction may give us an idea of the original appearance and proportions of the Servite partition. The Carmelite structure was supposed to be a solid wall with three arches that served as doors and a platform above, supported by two large pilasters in the center and the church's walls on the sides. Two altars were installed against the central pilasters, similarly to the position that I assume the altars of the True Cross and Saint Martin had in the Servite screen. To

make the parallel stronger is evidence that the church of the Carmelite order was quite large like that of Santa Maria dei Servi and shared the same floor plan: a long, and narrow nave crossed roughly at the center by a screen.

What the first two chapters emphasize is that the altar of the True Cross was a remarkable liturgical station which played an important function within the church of Santa Maria dei Servi. Original in its format and design, the altar stood against an equally unusual choir screen, untraditional in style and prominent for its uses since it was employed as an alternative presbytery for the church over a number of years. As an essential component of such a structure, the altar itself proves to have been a crucial element in the Servites' liturgical routine, going beyond its practical use as a reliquary and engaging in a number of prestigious rites that brought together the Servite friars and the confraternity of the Lucchesi. The last two chapters offer further evidence about the exceptionality of the altar of the True Cross and its centrality in the life of the Servite community. They focus particularly on the stylistic and iconographical choices made by patron and artist and show how they were targeted to address specific audiences and trigger determined responses.

After a brief excursus into the importance of the relic preserved in the altar of the True Cross, chapter three engages in a close analysis of the primary source applied in Riccio's stories, the *Golden Legend* of Jacobus de Voragine, a bestseller in Venice after its translation into the vernacular in the mid fifteenth century. The section in which the episodes represented by Riccio are narrated is entitled the feast of the Discovery of the Holy Wood and deals primarily with the stories of Constantine and his mother Helena which are at the basis of the cult of the Holy Cross. Even though it is evident that Riccio

and Donato relied extensively on Jacobus' compendium for their reliefs, as precise correspondences between text and image show, it is my contention that the panels elaborate the information provided by the source in a totally original way. They revolutionize the established figurative tradition associated with the *Stories of the Cross*, bringing to life a unique and unparalleled response detached from previous and subsequent examples. Not only are certain details of the stories emphasized to augment the major role played by Constantine in the legend of the Cross, but a new, particular attention is devoted for the first time to the historical value of the events narrated. In his role as a philologist and as a direct protagonist of a critical moment in the history of Venice, Donato wanted to make sure that his audience was reassured about the authenticity of the relic preserved in his altar and the events in which it was involved. The piece of the Cross enshrined in the tabernacle was considered truly part of Christ's instrument of salvation, a powerful weapon of conversion and a miracle-making tool.

The way in which Riccio designed the scenes was definitely intended to enhance the historical truth of the events narrated as I contend. The stories unfold as chapters of authentic ancient history, flaunting an archaeologically-oriented, antiquarian style that precedes the one introduced in Rome by Raphael and his team in their frescoes for the Vatican dedicated to the figure of Constantine. It is likely that Riccio drew on the rich antiquarian tradition of his native Padua, as scholars have claimed, as well as direct instructions by his first important patron, Girolamo Donato, who was a fine connoisseur of antiquities. I suggest that it was Girolamo who personally guided the sculptor in the selection of a specific array of ancient sources for the Servite reliefs which are, in Riccio's *oeuvre*, the sculptures with the largest number of direct references to Roman

Imperial Art. The accuracy with which Riccio re-creates an authentic setting for the stories of Constantine and Helena goes beyond the application of a suitable antiquarian style. The location of each episode is directly tied to historical sources in order to make the event more believable. The impression one gets is that Donato knew first-hand important details about Constantine's campaign and wanted to re-trace the main loci of the emperor's greatest feats.

The credibility of Riccio's stories and their accessibility to the broader public was guaranteed by the artist's skillful application of some of the techniques applied in poetry and rhetoric. The scenes follow one another with the same eloquence as the parts of a beautifully crafted speech or written page of a poem, demonstrating, as I argue, Riccio's familiarity with the tenets of Christian oratory as introduced by Saint Augustine. In order to provide the most solid argumentation, first the artist devotes great care to the clarity of the scene, making sure that the central action and message are as easily traceable as the main protagonists' identification. He then maintains the viewer's attention in a number of ways. While the general public is attracted by the naturalism of the setting, characters, and their expressions, the erudite spectator is allured by the sophisticated antiquarian references hidden in numerous details. Finally, the emotional charge transmitted by the stories and their actors glues the whole audience and solicits the veneration of the True Cross, whose important role in the Servite doctrine, especially in the context of the Observant Reform, I stress at the end of this chapter. In his attempt to elevate his narrative cast in bronze to the same level as the written word, Riccio anticipates the goal pursued by the humanist Pomponius Gauricus in his treatise *De sculptura*. His reliefs for the Servites offer a visual translation of some of Gauricus' central ideas and I contend

that these panels should be enlisted among the works that inspired the writer during the drafting of his text.

The fourth and final chapter is entirely devoted to the figure of Girolamo Donato and his political views. If it is true that the altar at the Servite church reflected the antiquarian interests of the patrician and his devotion to the Servite order, it is equally admissible that it served as a platform for his political ideas which lucidly mirrored the position of Venice during one of the most dramatic moments in her entire history. In the first part of the chapter, I demonstrate how Girolamo was freely inspired by the frescoed decoration recently completed in the apse of Santa Croce in Gerusalemme, the church from where the precious relic of the titulus preserved in Santa Maria dei Servi originally came. Antoniazio Romano's cycle with the *Stories of the True Cross* is used as a source for a number of iconographic details and its political content is emulated by Donato but manipulated from a Venetian perspective. Whereas in Santa Croce the stories of Helena and Heraclius are visually linked together through the figure of the Cardinal Mendoza, patron of the cycle and protagonist of the victory of the Catholic Spanish forces against the Turks, in Santa Maria dei Servi the connection of the stories to contemporary events is more subtly implied. The reliefs are devoid of any patron's portrait or direct reference to Venice and the Church of Rome – implied in the presence of the bishop Macario. Similarly, any reference to the Turks is significantly diminished, if not omitted. However, the political tone of the panels is revealed by the absence of these two major protagonists of the contemporary scene. At a time when the Pope and the Turks were both attempting to destroy the *Serenissima's* domain respectively in Italy and the East, the city decided to shield itself behind the power of the Holy Cross and to invoke one of her most important

foundation myths: her destiny as a God-elected leader of the new Christian empire. Born from the ruins of the pagan Roman Empire, under special divine protection and as a free and blessed virgin, Venice believed itself to be destined to lead the new Christian kingdom. This idea, rooted in centuries-old traditions, grew stronger toward the end of the fifteenth century and became a prominent motif in the chronicles published then. While the infidels were gaining territory and the Pope was busier pursuing his personal political agenda rather than chasing the infidels, Venice thought of itself as a paladin of faith and the last hope of Christianity. This is how the city is presented in the treaty signed with Pope Alexander the VI and the King of Hungary in 1501 as well as in the oration pronounced by Donato in front of Maximilian I the same year.

In this chapter, I discuss in detail the content of Donato's speech for the Emperor Maximilian in order to prove its ties to the Servite commission. Both works were used by the patrician for his political propaganda and their content show two complementary aspects of the Venetian strategy. While in the oration Donato exploits his diplomatic skills to convince Maximilian I to join the Venetian "crusade" against the Turks, thus distracting the European powers from their hatred versus Venice; in the reliefs great emphasis is given to the figures of Constantine and Helena as alter egos of the *Serenissima*. By choosing Constantine rather than Heraclius for the protagonist of his cycle and by pairing him with his mother Helena, Donato intended to stress the image of Venice as the heir of the royal family. On the one hand, Constantine represents the Venetians' belief that they were the sole, true guardians of Christianity, and the only power responsible for the re-unification of the old Roman empire, identified in the cities of Constantinople and Rome; on the other hand, Helena embodies Venice's role as the

site divinely elected as the new Jerusalem and possibly the only city that could expel the infidel from the Holy Land.

The political meaning of the altar of the True Cross is complemented by the twin altar of Saint Martin which was probably erected a decade later. Almost no information survives about this structure but it was likely modeled after Donato's commission and, like his, decorated by Andrea Riccio's relief with *Saint Martin and the Beggar*. My analysis of this piece is intended to prove how the altar, despite the different style and size of its single panel, was conceived to match the one built for Donato. This idea is made plausible by the location of the structure itself, on the choir screen, as well as by a number of other reasons: the choice of bronze as a medium, of Riccio as a sculptor, and of a similar iconography for the decoration. The relief tells the story of Saint Martin, a popular figure in Venetian cults and particularly important for the church of Santa Maria dei Servi. Martin was the titular saint of the Chapel of the Lucchesi, a major confraternity hosted by the Servite community, and his name recalls the Duomo in Lucca where a miracle-working crucifix was preserved. The link between Martin and the crucifix made him a perfect pair to the relic worshipped on Donato's altar. The saint also bore an important connection to Constantine: he was a Roman cavalry officer born at the time of the famous emperor, and like him, he was the protagonist of a bloodless victory under the protection of the sign of the Cross. Since the altar of Saint Martin was built after the wars of Cambrai, it proves how the plea to the True Cross made by Constantine's and Helena's reliefs worked in favor of Venice, guaranteeing the city's survival in one of the most dramatic moments of its entire history.

Aware of the lack of evidence about the patron of the altar of Saint Martin or the context of its commission, I advance the hypothesis that its commission could be connected to the figure of Girolamo de' Franceschi. A Servite friar from the monastery in Venice, Girolamo was the prior of Santa Maria dei Servi at the time of the consecration of the church and his name appears alongside that of Girolamo Donato in the dedicatory inscription. He was an eminent member of the Servite community and informed about the status of Venetian politics, considering that he was nominated bishop of Corone in 1496. In 1511, he drafted a will in which he expressed the desire to be buried in the family chapel in Santa Maria dei Servi and to have it decorated with an image of himself in bronze. Although the specific location of this chapel is uncertain and we do not know if Girolamo's effigy was ever executed, it is likely that the friar's burial place was located at the altar of Saint Martin, in a prominent location within the church and nearby the liturgical station erected by his friend Girolamo Donato. The decision to have the altar decorated with a scene from the life of Saint Martin rather than a patron's portrait was probably made by his testament's executioners after his death in 1513. Following the propitious events which terminated the Cambrai wars, they may have thought that it was a better choice to commemorate their city's achievements rather than simply commemorate the features of Girolamo. They picked Saint Martin because of his popularity in Venice, his role as a Christian soldier, and his confidence in the power of the Cross which was celebrated in the nearby altar.

The last section of chapter four is devoted to the analysis of the relationship between Donato and Riccio. Two kindred spirits and acquainted with the most eminent Paduan intellectuals, patron and artist most likely met in Padua where the former pursued

his studies and owned a palace. Donato's house was the stage for lively philosophical discussions that Riccio probably attended finding in them inspiration for his sophisticated creations as well as potential clients for prestigious commissions. It is not hard to imagine that it was through Donato's connections that the sculptor secured patronage inside the Santo in Padua. The closeness between the two is proven by the fact that Riccio not only executed the reliefs for Donato's altar in Santa Maria dei Servi but also designed for him the plaquette representing *Aristotle Instructing Alexander of Aphrodisias* and his own personal medal. The last object, which is emblematic of the small exquisite creations that made Riccio popular, is a compendium of some of the most important philosophical ideas circulating in Donato's circles and an emblem of his passion for antiquarian culture as I emphasize. While the reverse bears a conventional portrait of Girolamo in profile, the obverse can be interpreted as a metaphorical portrayal of the patrician's soul. Finally liberated from the restraints of rational thought, personified by the book, Donato's spirit is lifted in communion with the divine, which has sent his faithful assistants, the two Erotes, to accomplish the task. The "sacred theft" alluded to in the motto stands for the Platonic doctrine of divine furor as the condition that guarantees the union between the soul and God.

The new reading of Girolamo Donato's medal that I present in chapter four is the most appropriate conclusion to my investigation of the altar of the True Cross in Santa Maria dei Servi. By providing a "picture", both visual and metaphorical, of the patron of this exceptional series of sculptures, my research offers a further clarification about the context of the creation of the Servite altar which can be read as a cultural, religious, and artistic portrayal of the *Serenissima* at the turn of the sixteenth century. Andrea Riccio's

reliefs with the *Stories of the True Cross* were designed to evoke some of the most essential components of the Venetian myth that it was a divinely founded city, elected to inherit the role of a new Christian empire. They represent Donato's and the Servite friars' plea for God's favor and protection over the Venetians, during one of the most dramatic moments of their city's history. A prayer such as this could be satisfied only if accompanied by the adoration of an authentic piece of the True Cross.

ILLUSTRATIONS

INTRODUCTION



Fig. 1: Andrea Riccio, *The Dream and Baptism of Constantine*, ca. 1500, bronze, Galleria Giorgio Franchetti alla Ca' d'Oro , Venice.



Fig. 2: Andrea Riccio, *The Battle Between Constantine and Maxentius at the Milvian Bridge*, ca. 1500, bronze, Galleria Giorgio Franchetti alla Ca' d'Oro, Venice.



Fig. 3. Andrea Riccio, *The Discovery of the True Cross*, ca. 1500, Bronze, Galleria Giorgio Franchetti alla Ca' d'Oro, Venice.



Fig. 4: Andrea Riccio, *The Miracle of the True Cross*, ca. 1500, Bronze, Galleria Giorgio Franchetti alla Ca' d'Oro, Venice.



Fig. 5: Andrea Riccio, *The Exaltation of the True Cross*, ca. 1500, Bronze, Galleria Giorgio Franchetti alla Ca' d'Oro, Venice.



Fig. 6: *Lateral Portal*, Santa Maria dei Servi, Venice.



Fig. 7: *Detail of the Main Portal with Dedicatory Inscription*, Santa Maria dei Servi, Venice.



Fig. 8: *Wall Section*, Santa Maria dei Servi, Venice.



Fig. 9: *Apse's Remains*, Santa Maria dei Servi, Venice.



Fig. 10: *Bird's View with Detail of Lateral Portal and Wall Sections* Santa Maria dei Servi, Venice.



Fig. 11: *Chapel of Volto Santo*, Santa Maria dei Servi, Venice.

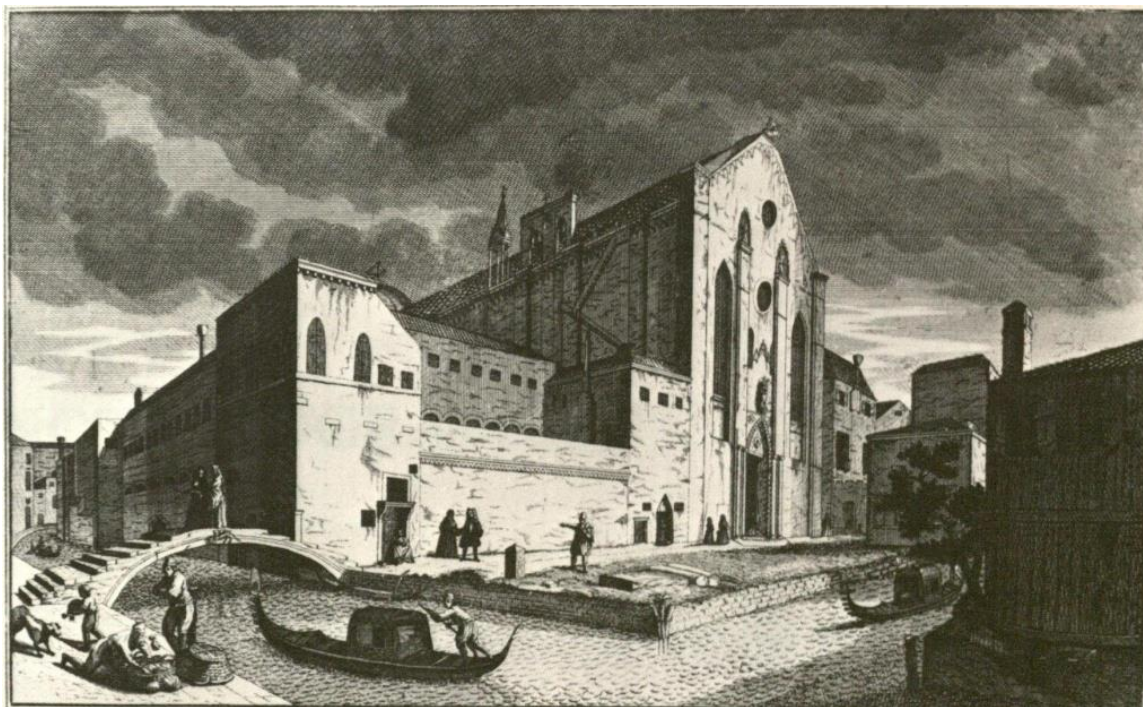


Fig. 12: Luca Carlevarj, *View of the Church of Santa Maria dei Servi*, 1703, Engraving.



Fig. 13: Domenico Lovisa, *View of the Church of Santa Maria dei Servi*, 1720, Engraving.



Fig. 14: Gabriele Bella, *Battle with Sticks on the Ponte Santa Fosca*, Oil on canvas, Galleria Querini-Stampalia, Venice.



Fig. 15: Tullio Lombardo, *Andrea Vendramin Tomb*, 1493, Santi Giovanni e Paolo, Venice.



Fig. 16: Giovanni Bellini, *Lamentation* , ca. 1510, Gallerie dell'Accademia, Venice.

CHAPTER ONE

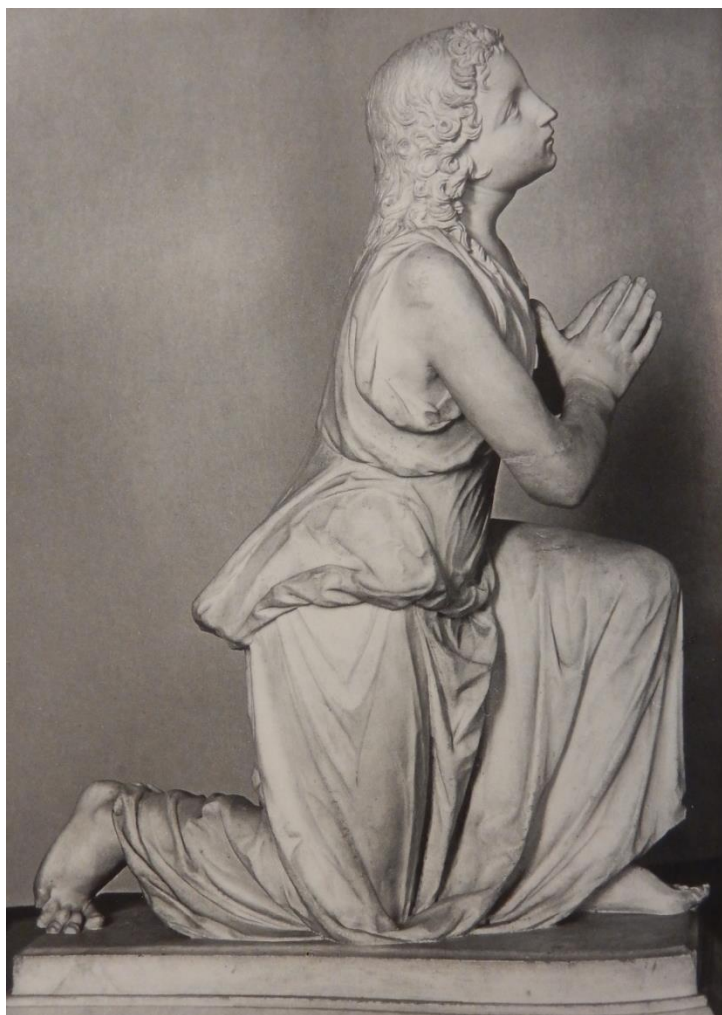


Fig. 17: Attributed to Giambattista Bregno, *Angel*, after 1509, Staatliche Museen, Berlin.



Fig. 18: Attributed to Giambattista Bregno, *Angel*, after 1509, Sacristy Santi Giovanni e Paolo, Venice.



Fig. 19: Alvise Vivarini , *Resurrection*, ca. 1498 and Cima da Conegliano, *Constantine and Saint Helena*, 1503, San Giovanni in Bragora, Venice.



Fig. 20: Andrea Riccio, *Saint Martin and the Beggar*, after 1513, Galleria Franchetti alla Ca' D'oro, Venice.



Fig. 21: Giovanni Bellini, *Lamentation*, ca. 1510, Gallerie dell'Accademia, Venice.



Fig. 22: *Stavelot Triptych*, 1156-1158, The Morgan Library & Museum, New York.



Fig. 23: Andrea Riccio, *Maffei Altar* , ca. 1510-1514, Sant'Eufemia, Verona.



Fig. 24: Francesco Cabianca, *Altar of the Relics*, 1711, Sacristy, Santa Maria Gloriosa dei Frari, Venice.



Fig. 25: Andrea Riccio, *tabernacle and one of the four narrative panels*.



Fig. 26: Donatello, *Eucharistic Tabernacle* from the altar in the Cappella Parva, 432-1433, Saint Peter's, Rome.



Fig. 27: *Constantine Arch*, detail with attic.



Fig. 28: Tullio Lombardo, *Tomb of Doge Andrea Vendramin*, 1493-1494, Santi Giovanni e Paolo, Venice.



Fig. 29: Desiderio da Settignano, *Eucharistic Altar*, 1461, Chapel of Saints Cosmas and Damian, San Lorenzo, Florence.



Fig. 30: Mino da Fiesole, *Sacrament Tabernacle*, ca. 1460, Santa Maria in Trastevere, Rome.



Fig. 31: Mino da Fiesole, *Murate Tabernacle*, ca. 1470, Santa Croce, Florence.



Fig. 32: Andrea Riccio, *Detail from the Tabernacle Doors*.



Fig. 33: Scaled Reconstruction of the *Altar of the True Cross* (by designer Valerio Baseggio).



Fig. 34: Donatello, *The High Altar of Saint Anthony*, 1447-50, Basilica di Sant'Antonio, Padua.



Fig. 35: Giovanni della Robbia, *Altar of the Sacrament*, Santi Apostoli, Florence.



Fig. 36: Mino da Fiesole, *Reliquary Tabernacle*, 1481, Sant' Ambrogio, Florence.



Fig. 37: Arrangement of Riccio's panels in chronological order.



Fig. 38: Arrangement of Riccio's panels according to my reconstruction.



Fig. 39: *Battle Between Constantine and Maxentius at the Milvian Bridge and Discovery of the True Cross.*



Fig. 40: *Discovery of the True Cross and Miracle of the True Cross.*



Fig. 41: *Dream and Baptism of Constantine and Discovery of the True Cross.*



Fig. 42: *Miracle of the True Cross and Battle Between Constantine and Maxentius at the Milvian Bridge.*

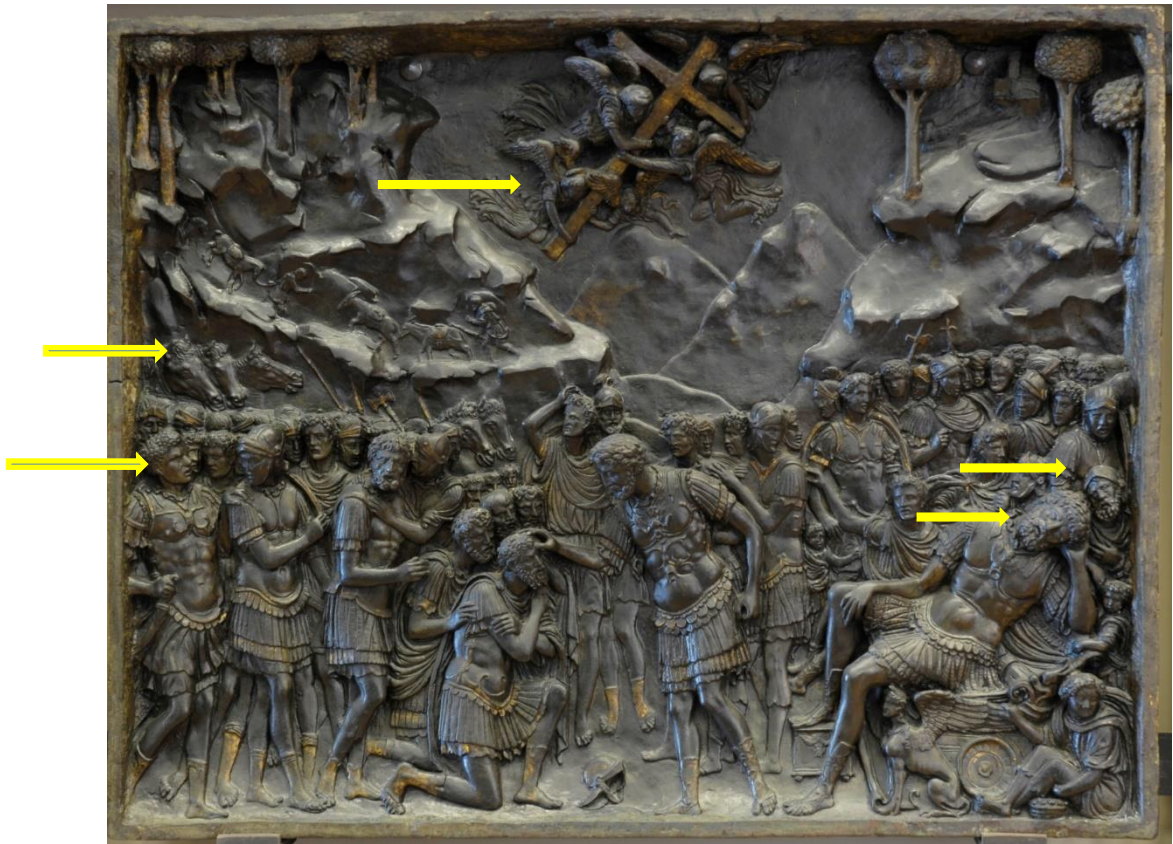


Fig. 43: *Dream and Baptism of Constantine.*

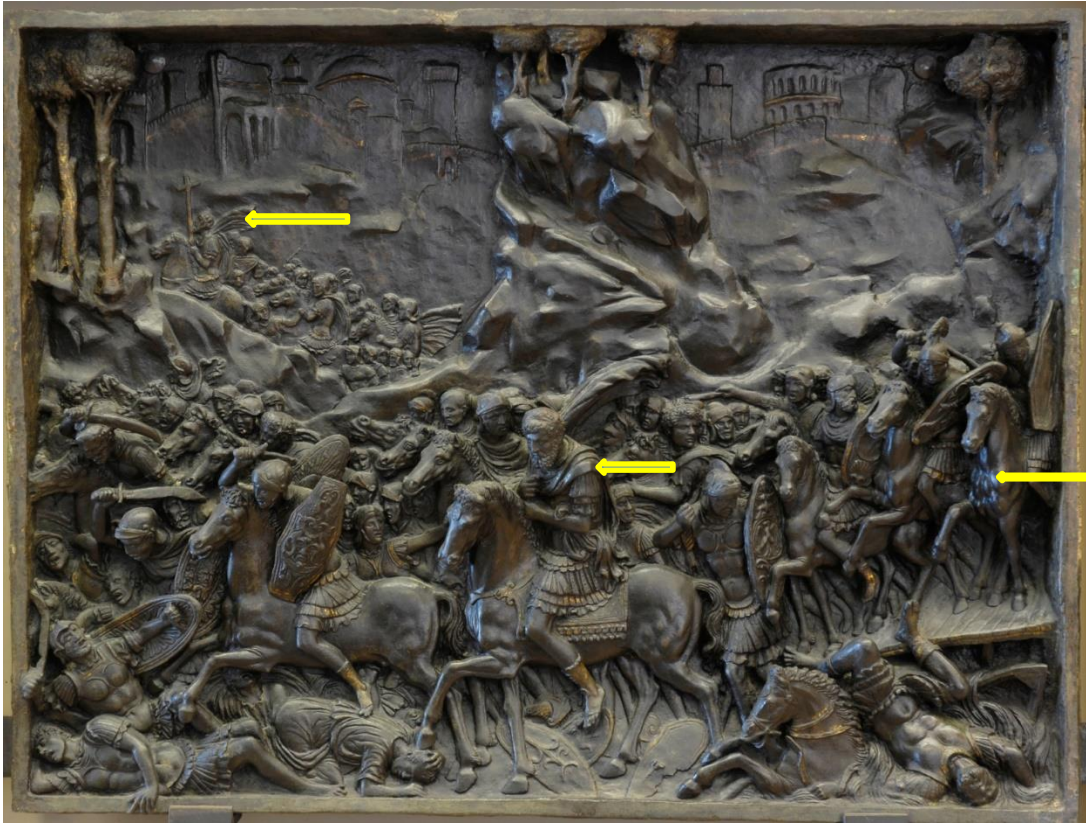


Fig. 44: *Battle Between Constantine and Maxentius at the Milvian Bridge.*



Fig. 45: *Detail from Tabernacle Doors.*

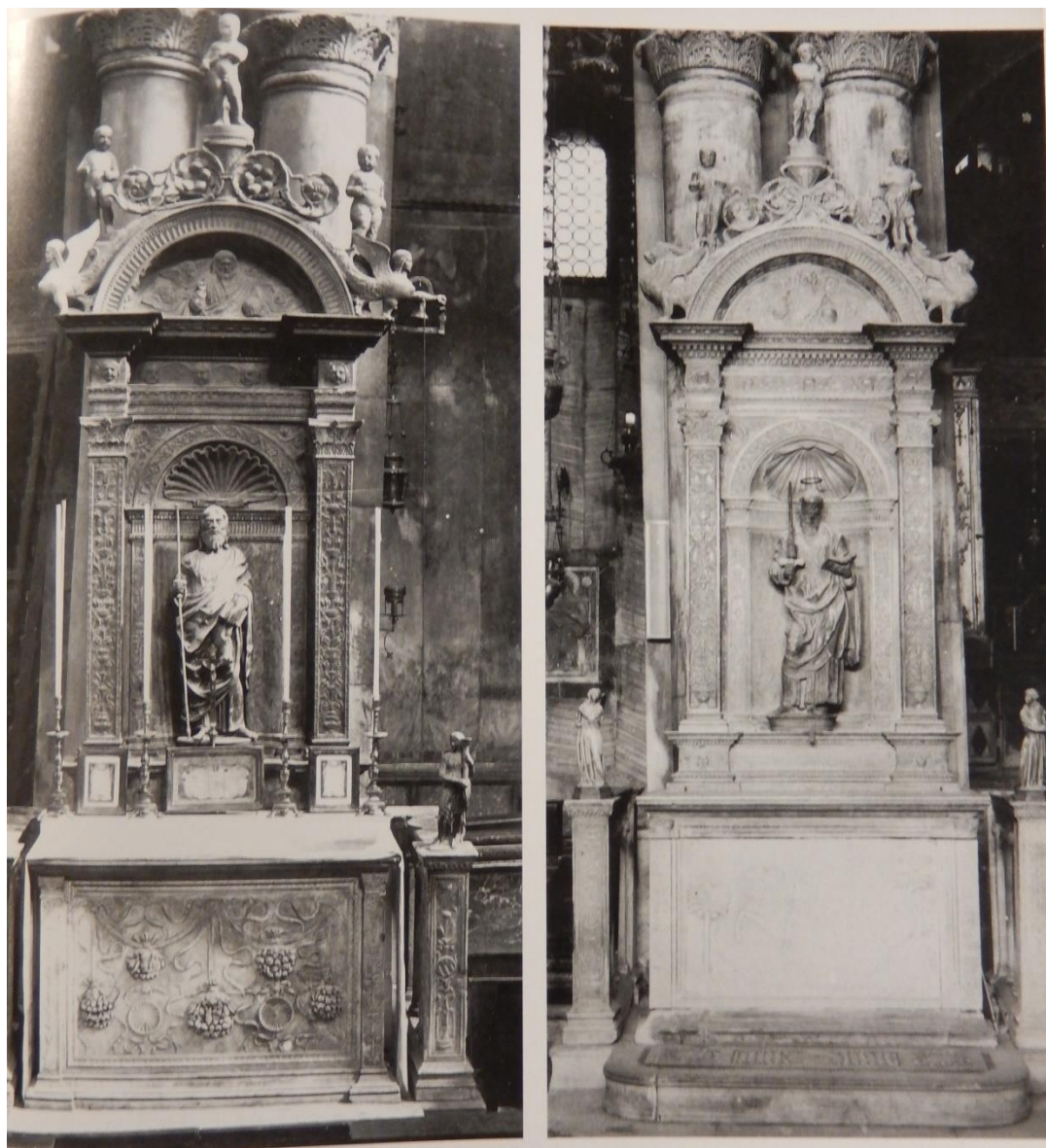


Fig. 46: Antonio Rizzo, *Saint James and Saint Paul Altars*, 1465-1469, San Marco, Venice.



Fig. 47: Antonio Rossellino, *Martini Altar* , ca 1471-1476, San Giobbe, Venice.



Fig. 48: Tullio and Pietro Lombardo, *Tabernacle*, end of XV century, Sacristy of Santa Maria Gloriosa dei Frari, Venice.



Fig. 49: Tullio Lombardo and Lorenzo Bregno?, *Tabernacle*, 1511, San Martino, Venice.



Fig. 50: Lorenzo Bregno, *Altar of the Sacrament* , 1518, San Marco, Venice.



Fig. 51: Lorenzo Bregno, detail.



Fig. 52: Giovanni Buora (?), *Surian Altar* (with original but altered frame), ca. 1488-1493, Santo Stefano, Venice.



Fig. 53: Antonio Lombardo and Others, *Zen Altar*, 1504-1518, Zen Chapel, San Marco, Venice.

CHAPTER TWO

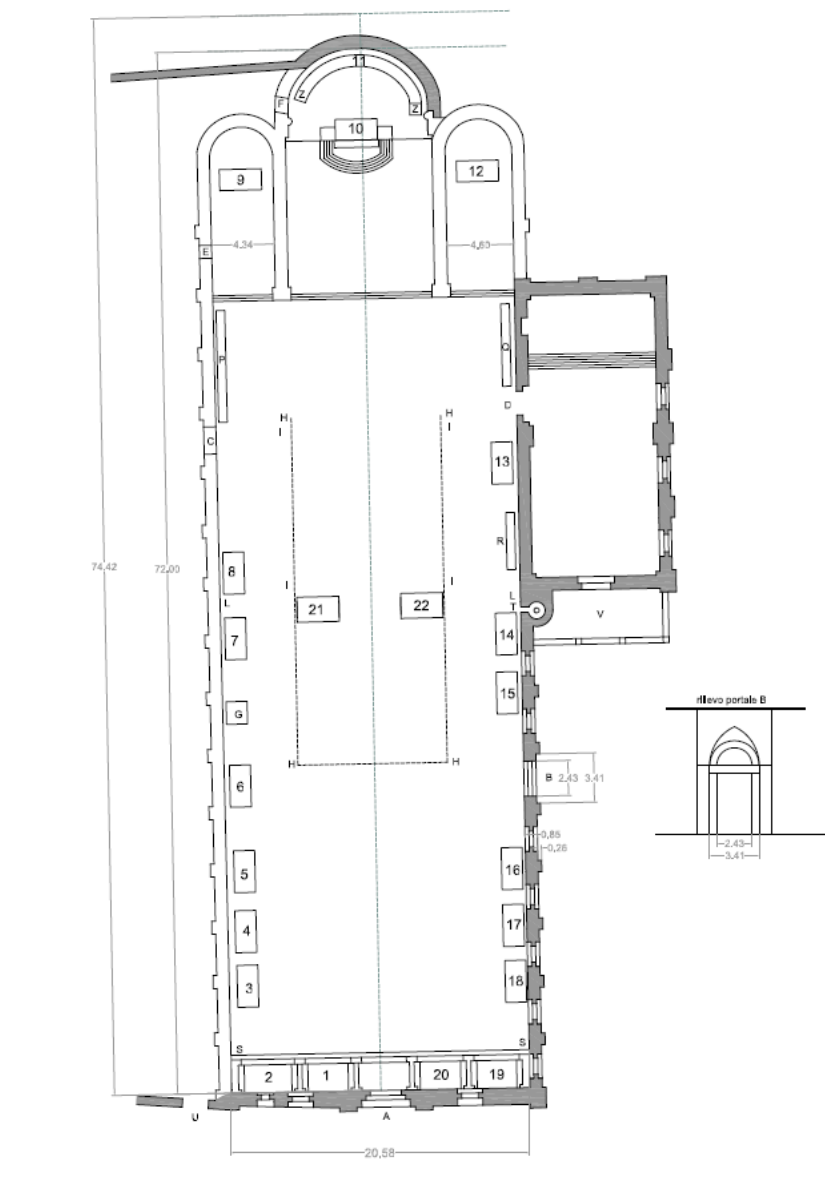


Fig. 54: *Plan of Santa Maria dei Servi, Venice* (Architect Sara Dalla Caneva, 2015).

Key

- A – Main Entrance
- B – Door of Saint Pellegrino
- C – Entrance to the Central Cloister
- D – Internal Door to the Chapel of the Volto Santo
- E – Entrance to the Sacristy
- F – Entrance to the Fourth Choir
- G – Pulpit
- H-H – First Choir
- I-I – Second Choir
- L-L – Partition Wall
- S-S – Third Choir
- T – Spiral Staircase
- Z-Z – Fourth Choir
- 21 – Altar of Saint Martin
- 22 – Altar of the True Cross



Fig. 55: *Schola Cantorum*, ninth-century enclosing walls, Santa Sabina, Rome.



Fig. 56: Master of the Life of St. Francis, *Christmas Miracle at Greccio*, ca. 1300
Upper Church of San Francesco, Assisi.



Fig. 57: *Crucifix* above the altar of the Cross, Church of our Lady, ca. 1250-60, Gelnhausen.



Fig. 58: *Crucifix* above the screen's entrance, ca. 1475, Santa Maria Gloriosa dei Frari, Venice.



Fig. 59: *Cross Altar and Choir Screen*, ca. 1400, Cathedral of St. Mary, Havelberg.



Fig. 60: Rogier van der Weyden, *Altarpiece of the Seven Sacraments*, ca. 1445-50, Royal Museum of Fine Arts, Antwerp.



Fig. 61: Vittore Carpaccio, *The Vision of Prior Francesco Ottobon*, 1512-15, Gallerie dell'Accademia, Venice.



Fig. 62: One of the two pulpits at the top of the screen in Santa Maria Gloriosa dei Frari, Venice.

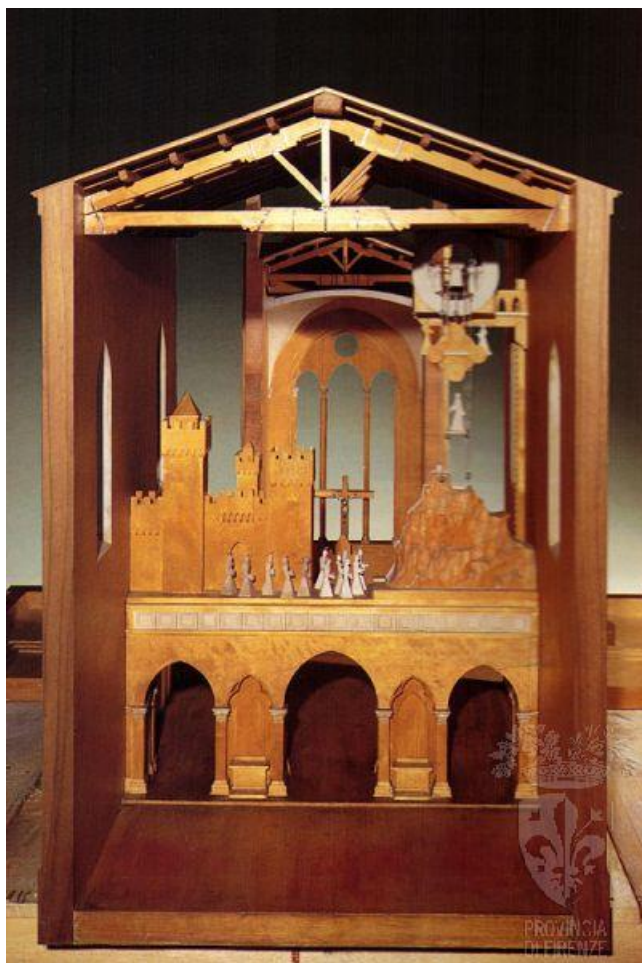


Fig. 63: *Model of the Machinery for Christ's Ascension* held in 1439 in the church of Santa Maria del Carmine, Florence.



Fig. 64: Northern artists and Lombardo workshop, *Choir Precinct*, 1475, Santa Maria Gloriosa dei Frari, Venice.



Fig. 65: *Crucifix , Apostles, Pulpit, and Carved Panels from the Screen, Santa Maria Gloriosa dei Frari, Venice.*



Fig. 66: *View of the Choir's Precinct from the Presbytery*, Santa Maria Gloriosa dei Frari, Venice.



Fig. 67: Detail of the *barco* that shows the balaustrade above with the lectern and the side accesses, 1480s, San Michele in Isola, Venice.



Fig. 68: *Barco* as seen from the main entrance, San Michele in Isola, Venice.



Fig. 69: *Freely Combined Remains from the Choir's Precinct*, ca. 1488, Santo Stefano, Venice.



Fig. 70: *Freely Combined Remains from the Choir's Precinct*, ca. 1488, Santo Stefano, Venice.



Fig. 71: Piers flanking the presbytery which shows the original location of the *transenna* San Giovanni Battista in Bragora, Venice.



Fig. 72: Sebastiano Mariani, marble slabs framed by pilasters originally coming from the *transenna*, 1490-92, San Giovanni Battista in Bragora, Venice.



Fig. 73: Sebastiano Mariani, *Piers of the Nave Arcade*, 1490-92, San Giovanni Battista in Bragora, Venice.

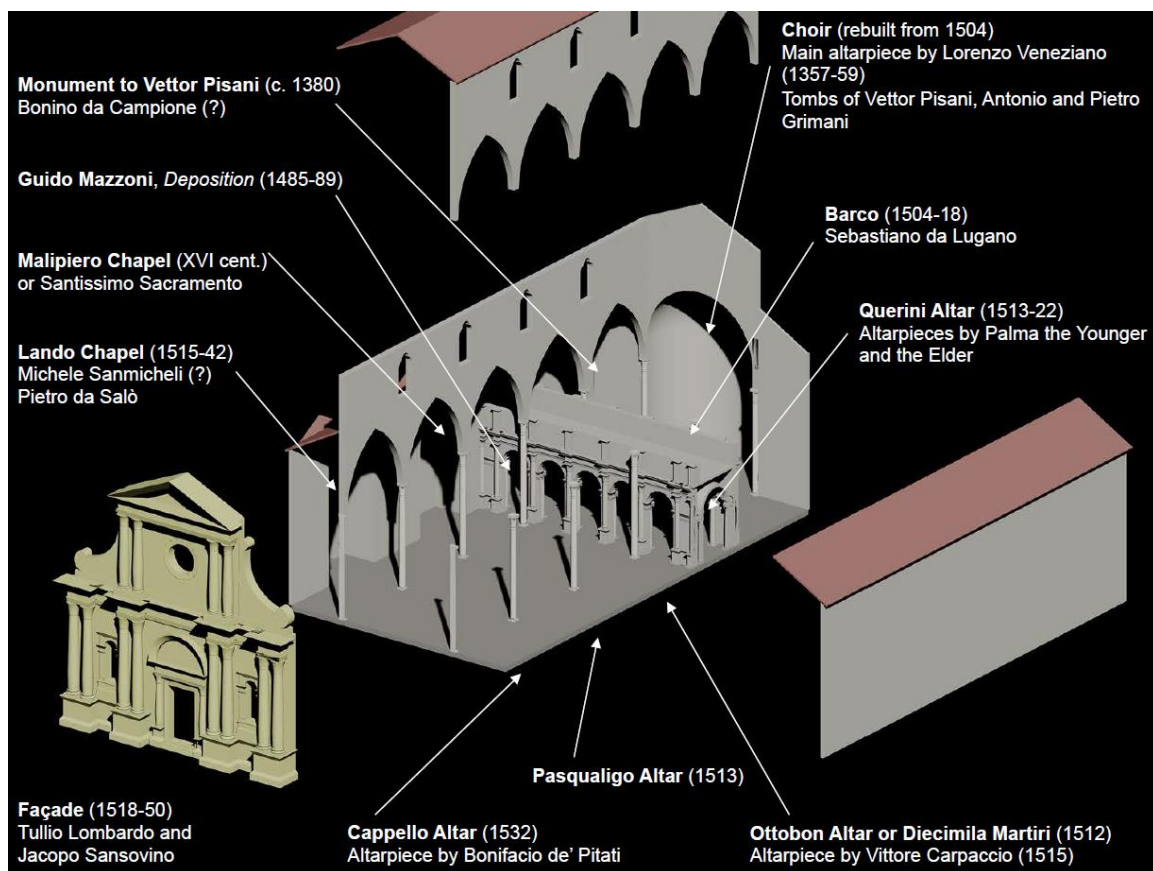


Fig. 74: Reconstruction of the *barco* in the Church of Sant'Antonio di Castello, Venice, (courtesy of Architect Cristiano Guarneri), ca. 1504.

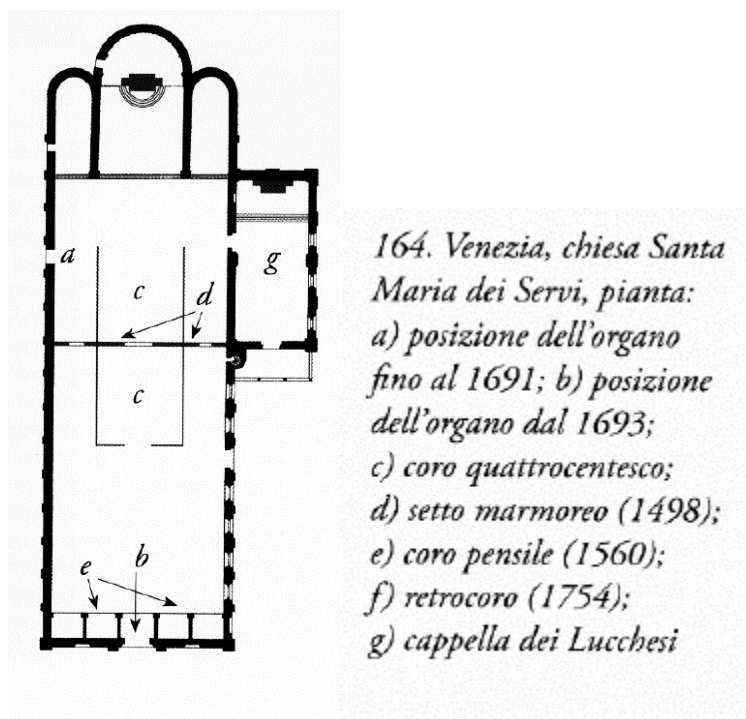


Fig. 75: Plan and Key by Massimo Bisson.



Fig. 76: Giovanni Bellini, *Lamentation*, 1515-20, Gallerie dell'Accademia, Venice.



Fig. 77: Giuseppe Porta Salviati, *Assumption of the Virgin*, ca. 1555, Cappella del Rosario, Santi Giovanni e Paolo, Venice.



Fig. 78: Titian's *Assumption of the Virgin* as seen through the entrance of the screen in Santa Maria Gloriosa dei Frari, Venice.



Fig. 79: Giuseppe Porta's Versus Titian's *Assumption*.



Fig. 80: *Sorrowful Madonna*, eighteenth century, San Marcuola, Venice.

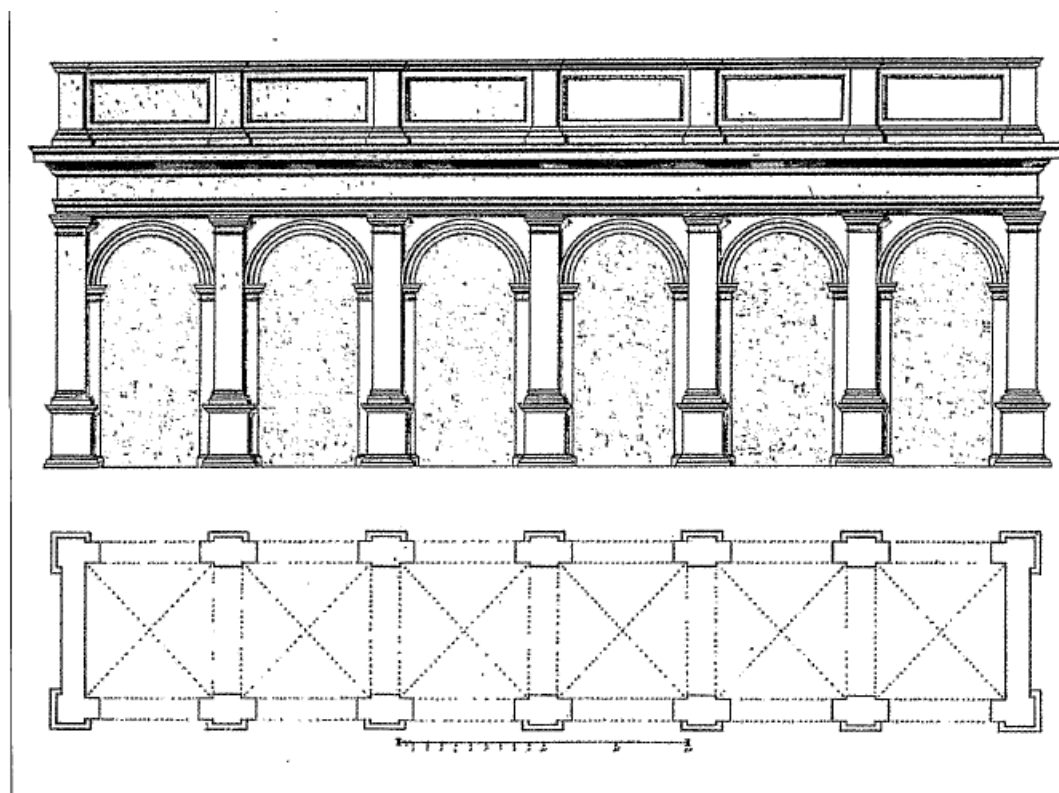


Fig. 81: Antonio Visentini, *Plan and Front of the Choir in Santa Maria dei Servi, Venice, 1730-40.*

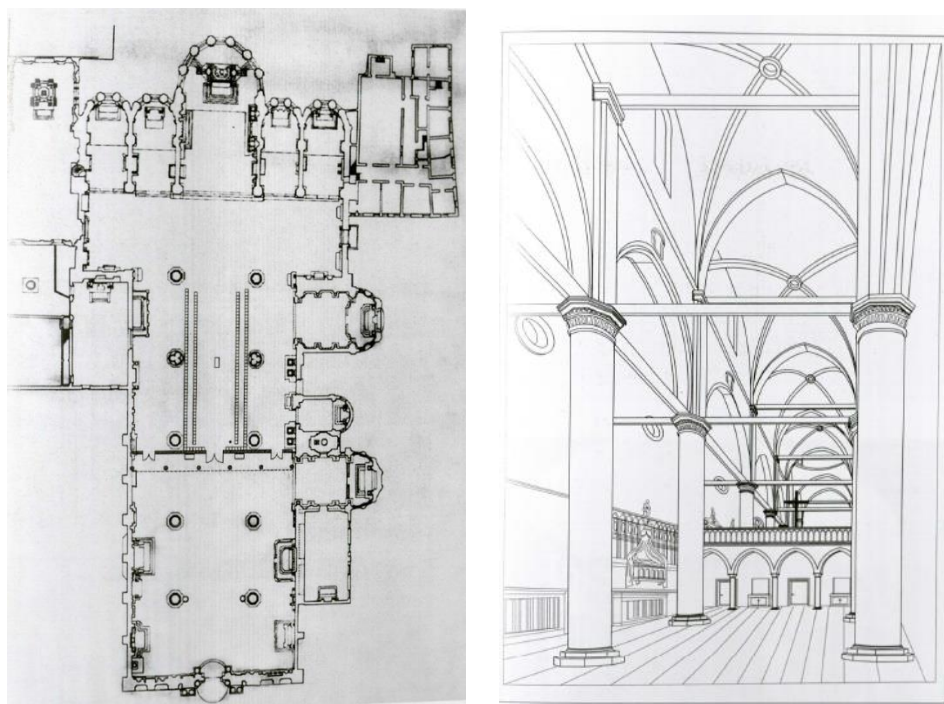


Fig. 82: *Reconstruction of the Choir's Plan and Elevation of the Screen, 1420-22*
Santi Giovanni e Paolo, Venice (E. Merlo).

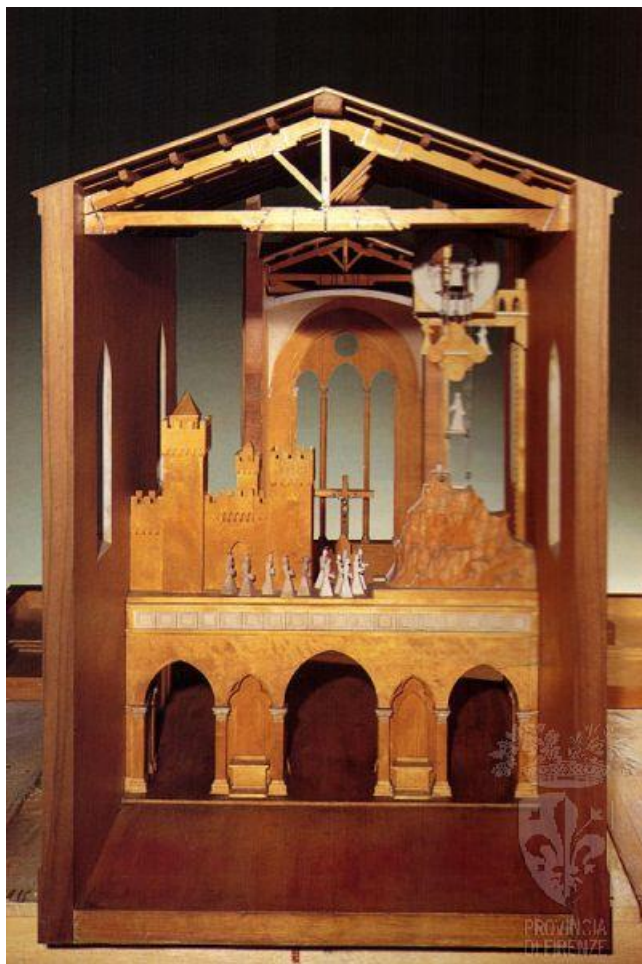


Fig. 83: Reconstruction of the *Ponte* in the Church of Santa Maria del Carmine, Florence.



Fig. 84: Mauro Codussi, *Barco di San Michele in Isola*, Venice, ca. 1476-78.



Fig. 85: Detail from Fra Carnevale, *Presentation of the Virgin to the Temple* (?), ca. 1467, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

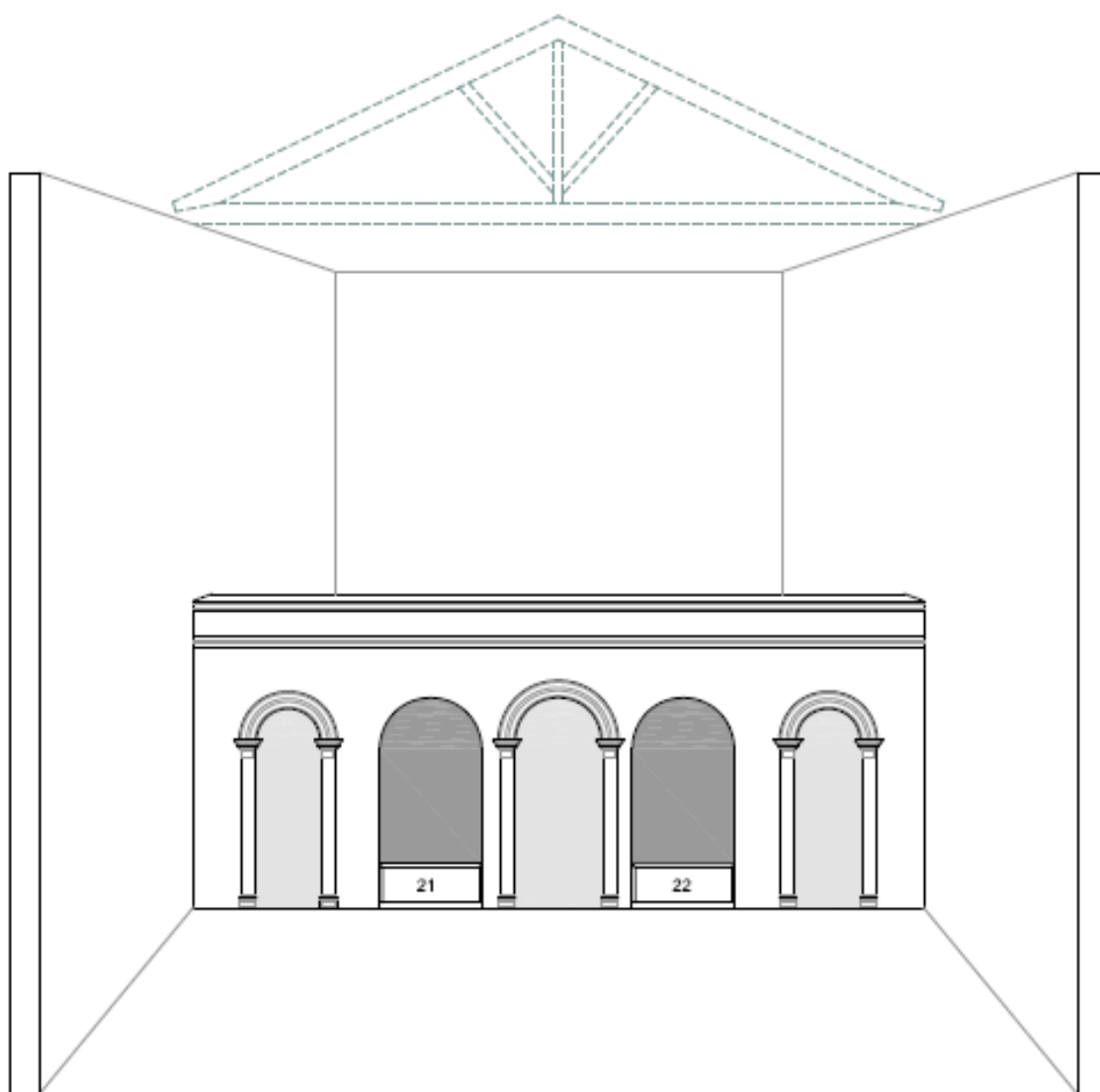


Fig. 87: Reconstruction of the Screen in Santa Maria dei Servi (architect Sara Dalla Caneva).

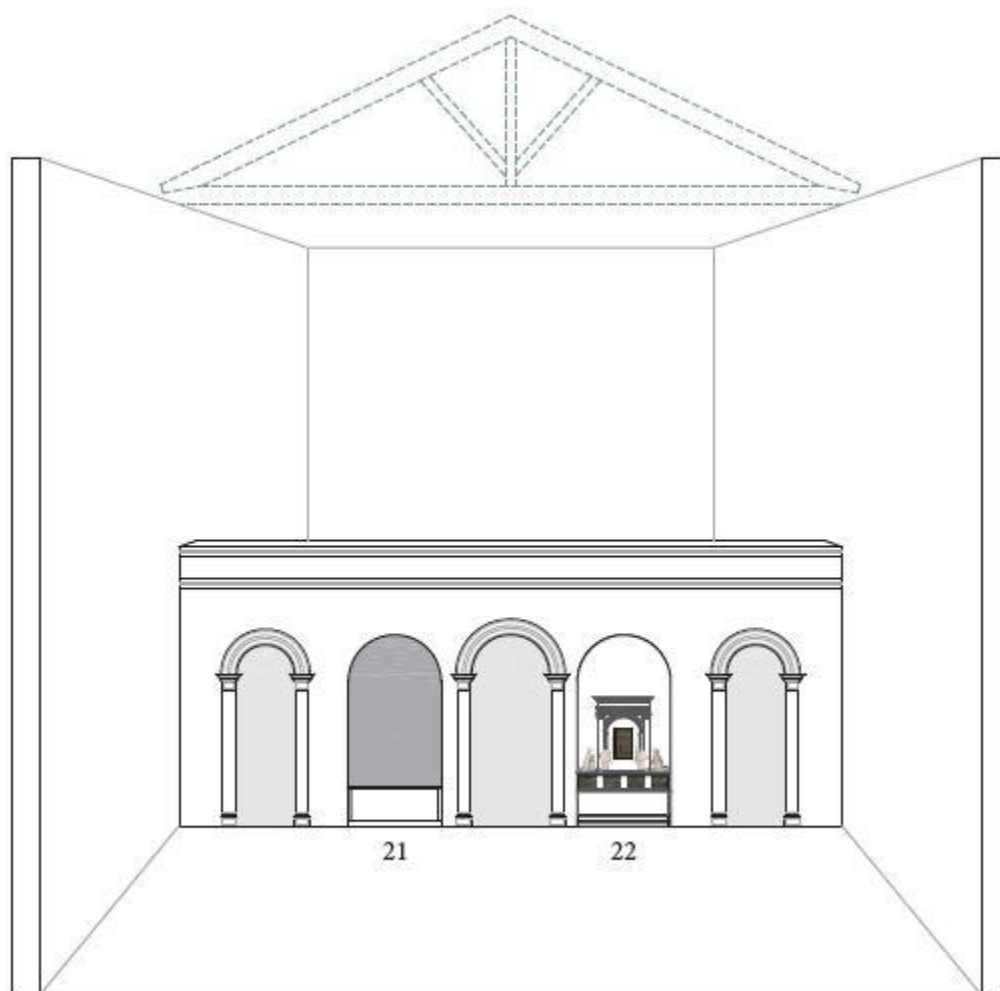


Fig. 88: Reconstruction of the Screen with Altar of the True Cross on it (designer Valerio Baseggio).



Fig. 89: Extant Walls from the Demolished Church of Santa Maria dei Servi.

CHAPTER THREE



Fig. 90: Byzantine School, *Dream of Constantine and Victory against Maxentius*, *Homelies of Gregorius Nazianzus*, IX century, Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris.



Fig. 91: Godefroid d'Huy (attributed), *The Stavelot Triptych*, mid 12th century
The Morgan Library & Museum, New York.



Fig. 92: Godefroid d'Huy (attributed), *The Dream of Constantine, The Battle against Maxentius, and the Baptism of Constantine*, The Morgan Library & Museum, New York.



Fig. 93: Godefroid d'Huy (attributed), *Helena Questioning the Jews, The Finding of the Cross, and the Miracle of the Cross*, The Morgan Library & Museum, New York.



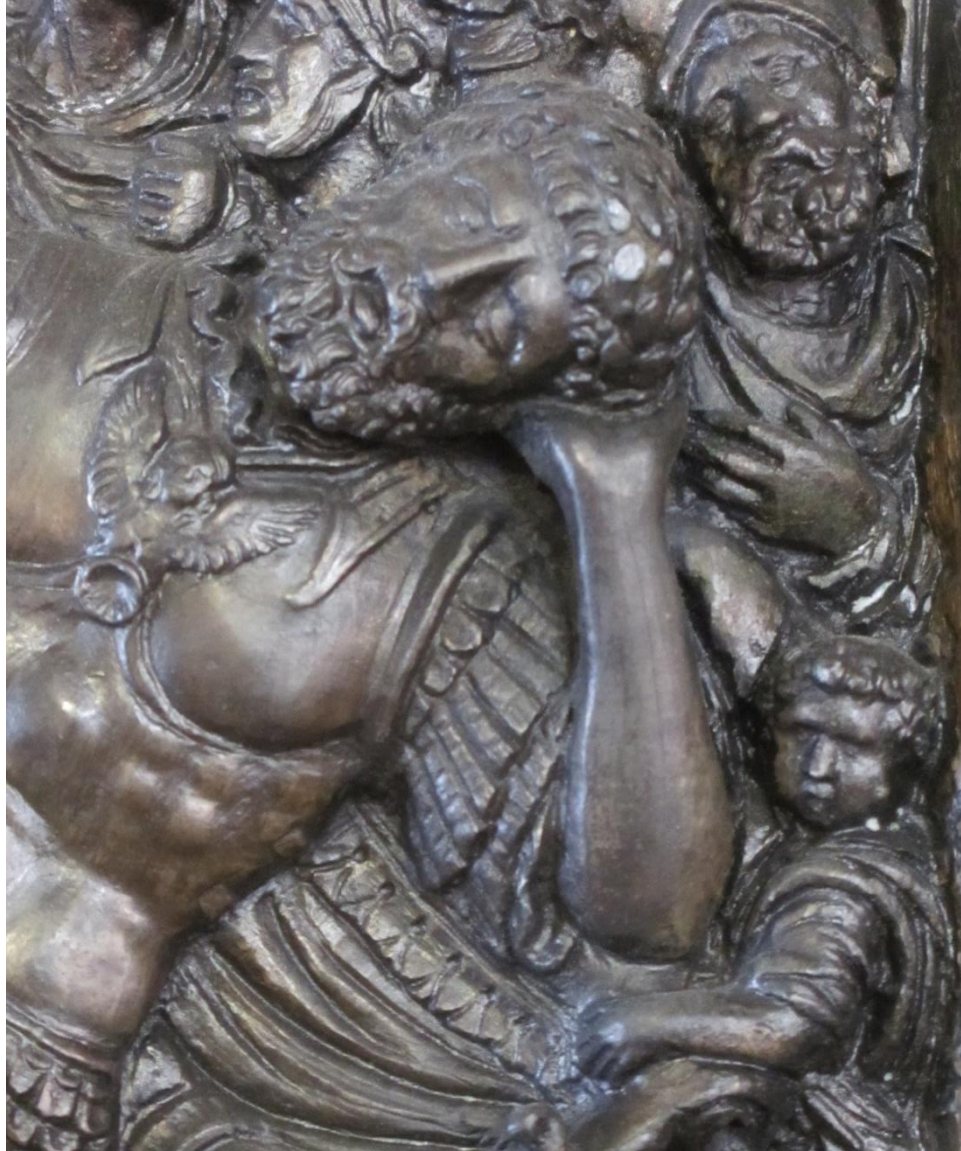
Fig. 94: Andrea Riccio, *Dream and Baptism of Constantine*.



Fig. 95: Detail, *Constantine Asleep*.



Fig. 96: Detail, *Youth*.



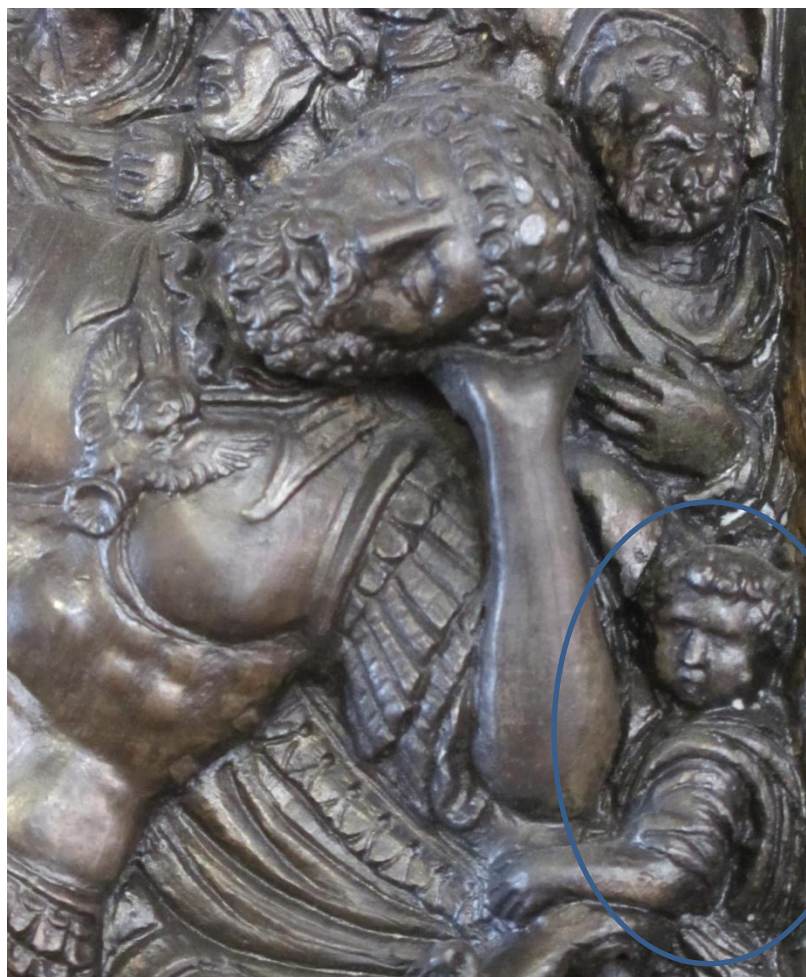


Fig. 97: Detail, *Boy Touching Constantine*.

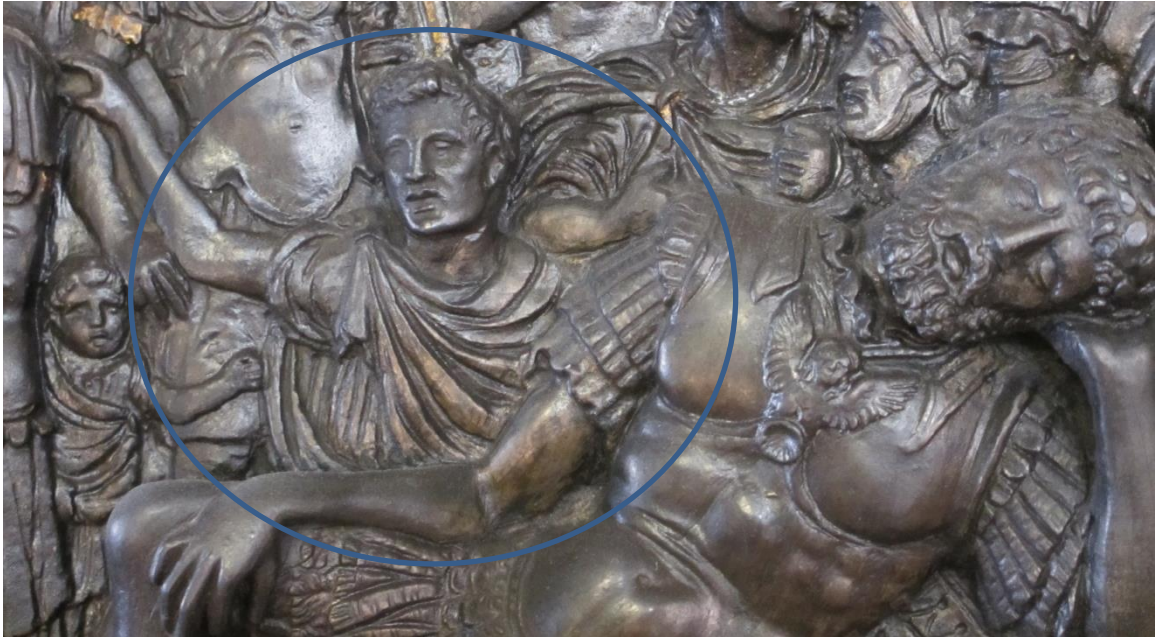


Fig. 98: Detail, *Beardless Man*

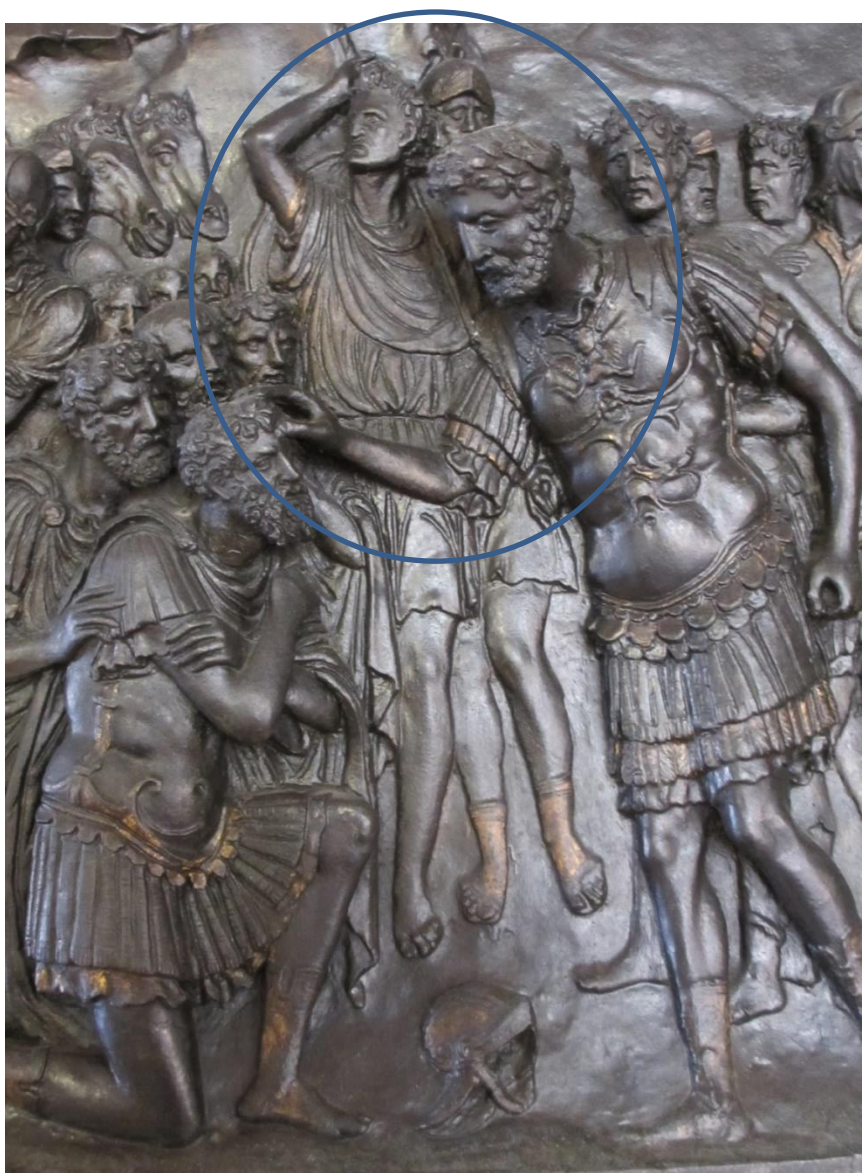


Fig. 99: Detail, *Constantine and Beardless Man*.



Fig. 100: Detail of Constantine from the *Battle*.



Fig. 101: Detail, *Constantine Asleep and Constantine Making the Sign of the Cross on His Soldier's Forehead*.

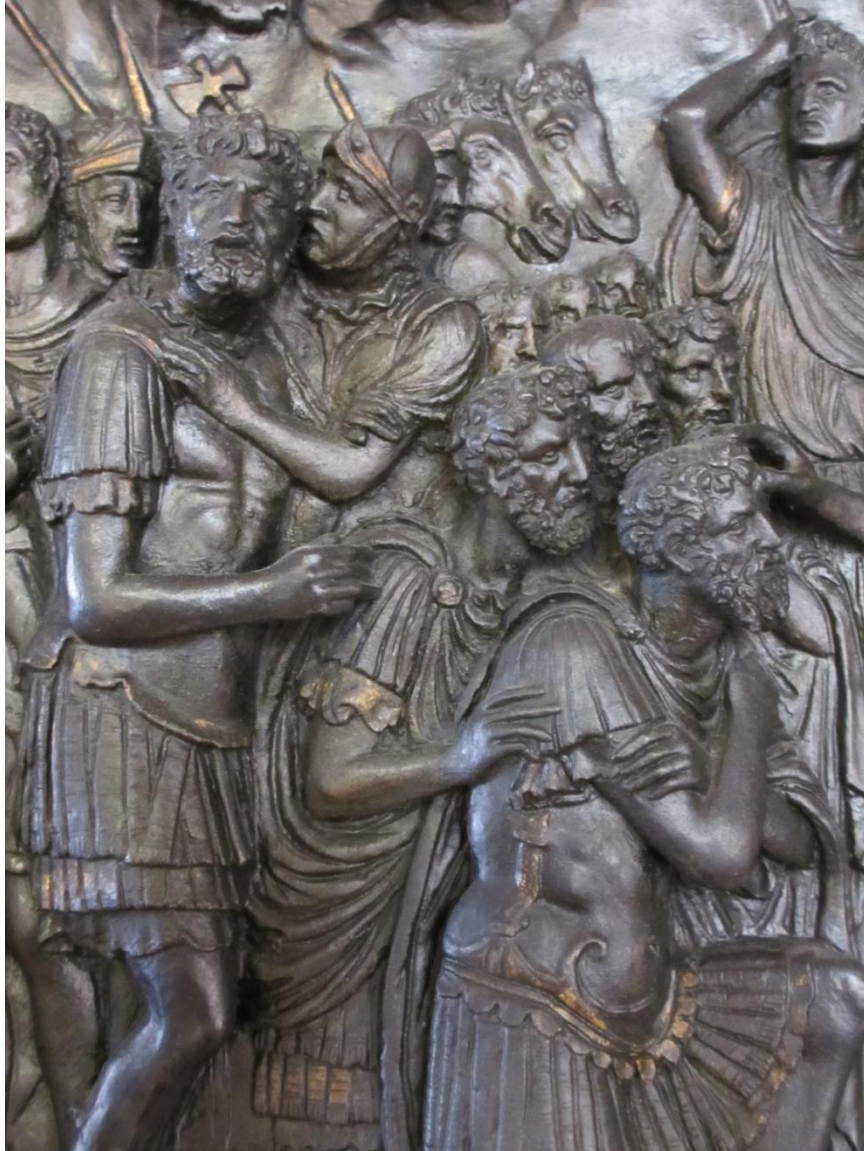


Fig. 102: Detail, *Soldiers Reacting to Constantine's Gesture*.



Fig. 103: Detail, *Soldiers Reacting to Constantine's Gesture with Crispus Among Them.*

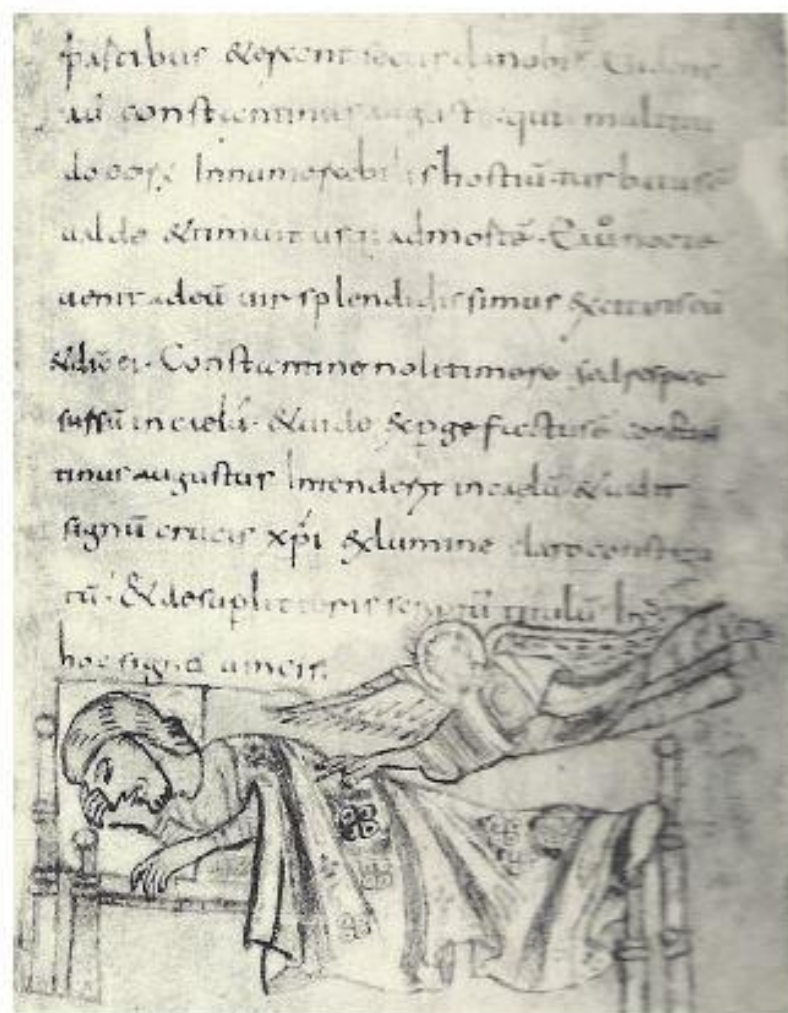


Fig. 104: Augsburg School, *Dream of Constantine*, IX century from Wessobrunner Gebetbuch, Munich, Bayerischen Staatsbibliothek.



Fig. 105: Piero della Francesca, *Dream of Constantine*, 1452-1466, San Francesco, Arezzo.



Fig. 106: Raphael, *The Vision of Constantine*, 1519-1521, Sala di Costantino, Vatican Palace, Rome.



Fig. 107: *The Vision of Constantine*, ca. 1500, Church of the Holy Cross of Agiasmati, Platanistasa, Cyprus.



Fig. 108: *The Battle at the Milvian Bridge.*



Fig. 109: Detail, *Constantine Parading with his Army*.



Fig.110: Detail, *The Son of the Emperor, Crispus*.

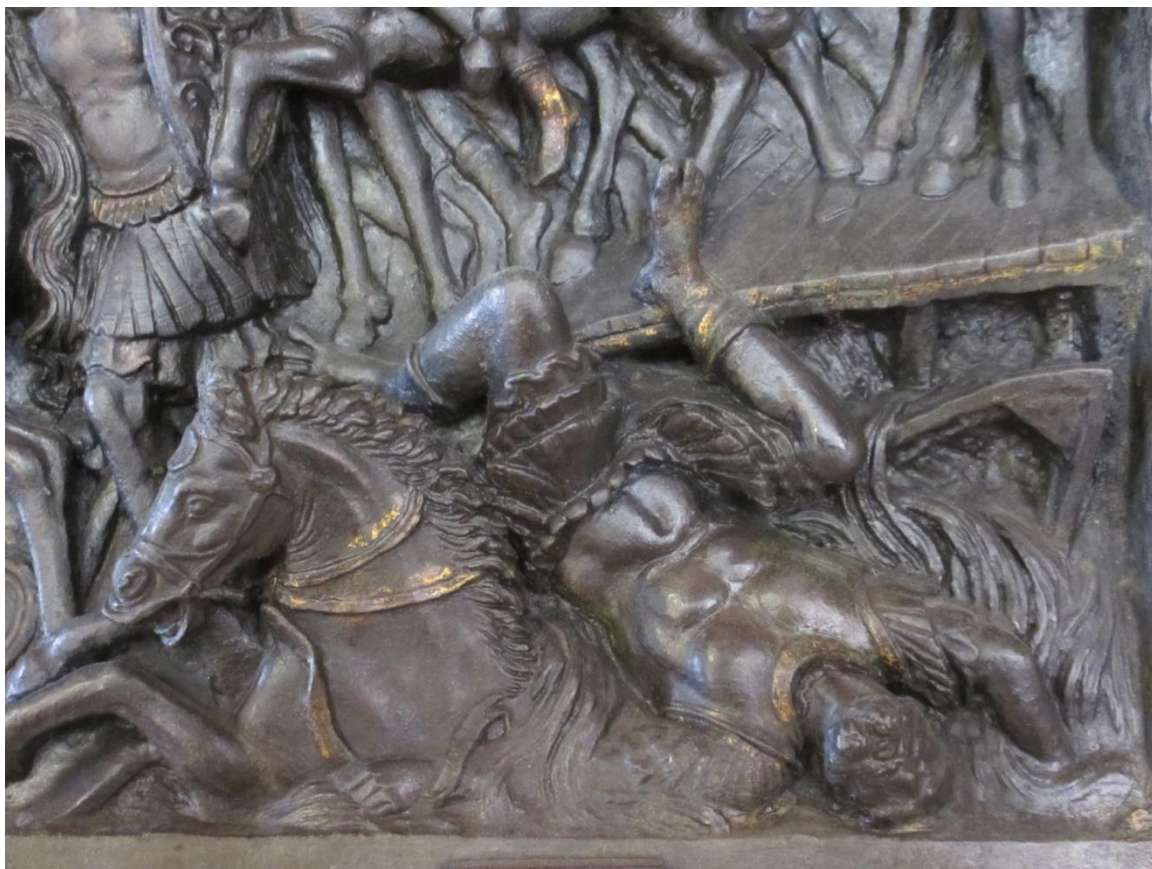


Fig. 111: Detail, *Falling Enemy, Perhaps Maxentius*.



Fig. 112: *Battle Scenes* from Stavelot Triptych and Frescoes in Arezzo.



Fig. 113: Detail, *Triumphant Constantine Marching Into Rome*.



Fig. 114: Riccio, *The Discovery of the True Cross*.

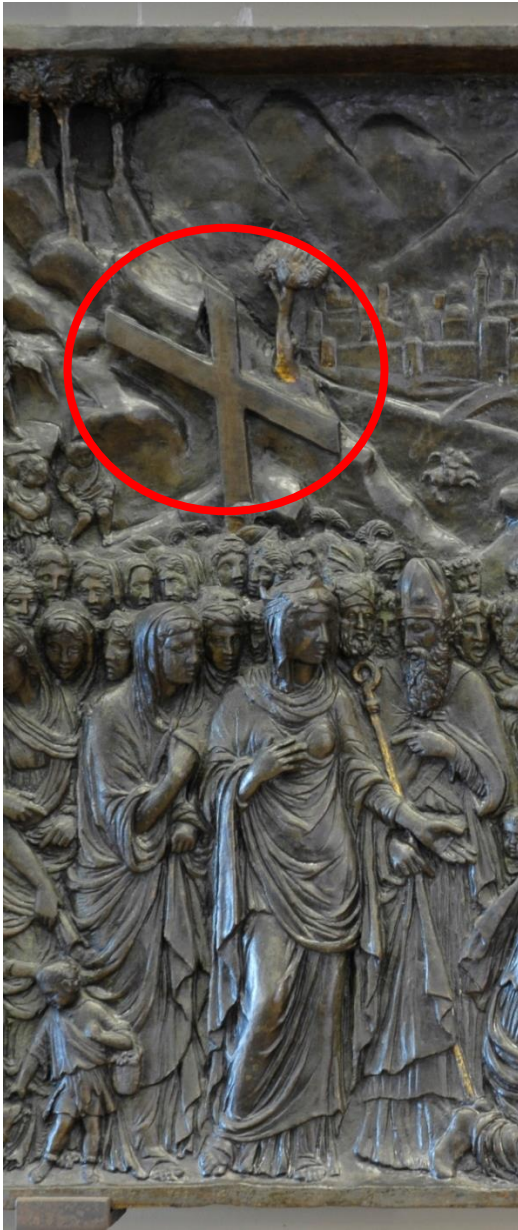


Fig. 115: Detail, *The Thieves' Crosses*.



Fig. 116: Detail, *Helena and Bishop Macarius?*



Fig. 117: Riccio, *The Miracle of the True Cross*.



Fig. 118: Detail of *Helena* from the Two Scenes Devoted to her Story.



Fig. 119: Detail, *Triumphal Arch*.



Fig. 120: *Arch of Constantine*, 315, Rome.



Fig. 121: *Arch of Constantine Versus Riccio's Arch.*



Fig.122: Riccio, *The Miracle of the True Cross* and *The Battle at the Milvian Bridge*.

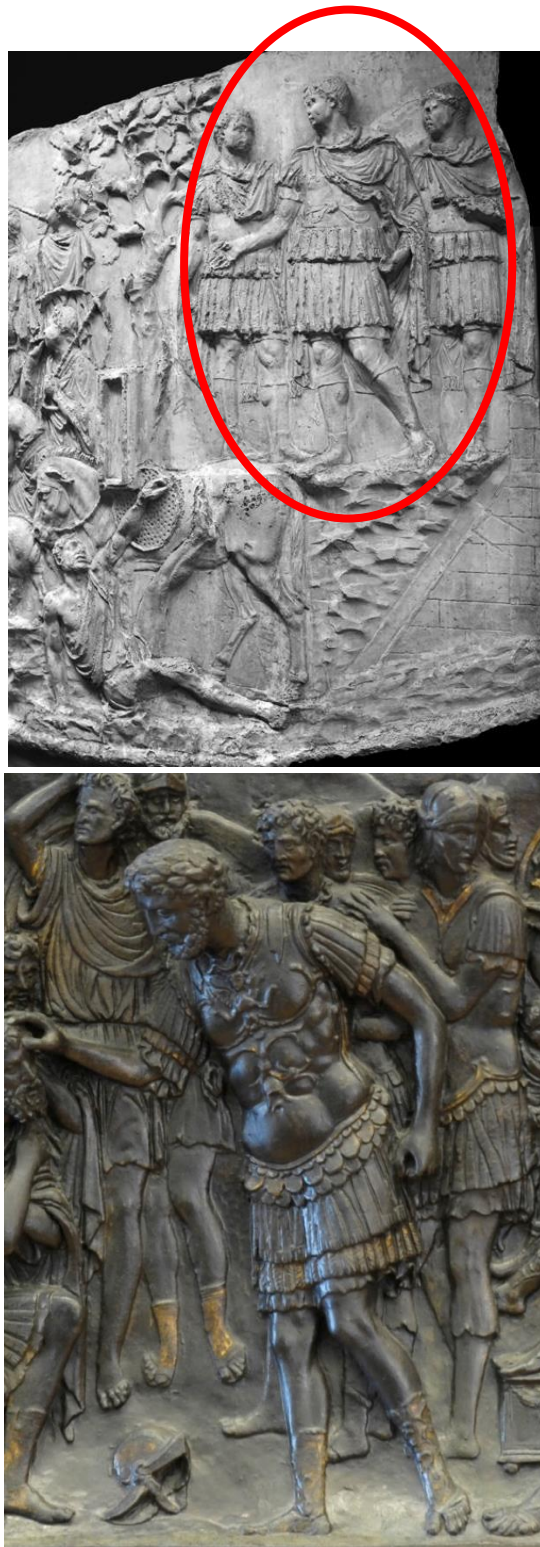


Fig. 123: *Trajan and the Fallen Man*, Scene Nine from the Trajan Column, 113 AD
And *Constantine*, detail from *The Vision of Constantine*.



Fig. 124: *Surrender of the Dacians*, scene 75 from Trajan Column, 113 AD and *Constantine*, detail from *The Vision of Constantine*.



Fig. 125: *Equestrian Monument of Marcus Aurelius*, 161-180 AD and *Constantine*, detail from *The Battle at the Milvian Bridge*.



Fig. 126: *Germans' Submission to Marcus Aurelius*, 176-180 AD and *Constantine*, detail from *The Battle at the Milvian Bridge*.

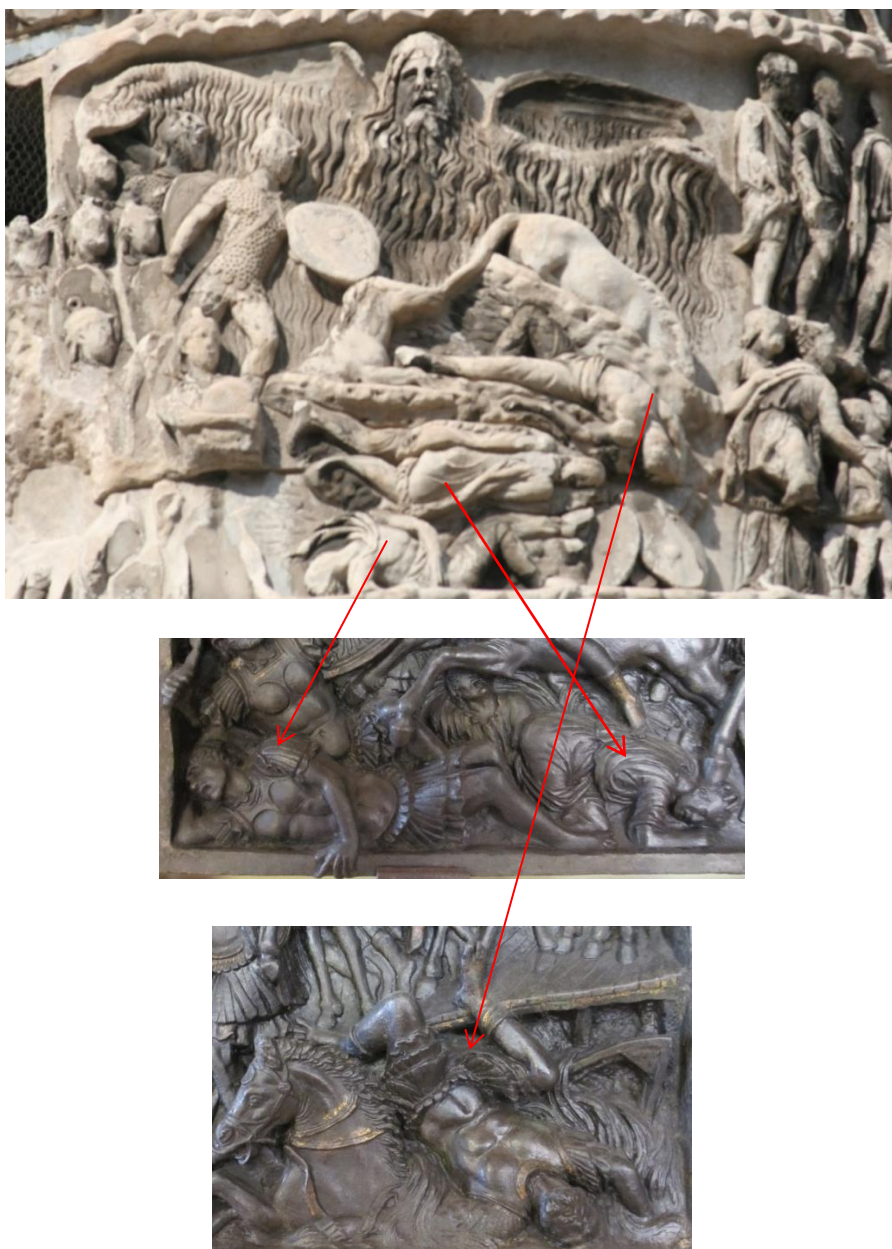


Fig. 127: *The Rain Miracle*, Scene from the Column of Marcus Aurelius, 176-193 AD
And details from *The Battle at the Milvian Bridge*.



Fig. 128: *Trajan Reliefs with Battle Scenes* from the Arch of Constantine and *The Battle at the Milvian Bridge*.



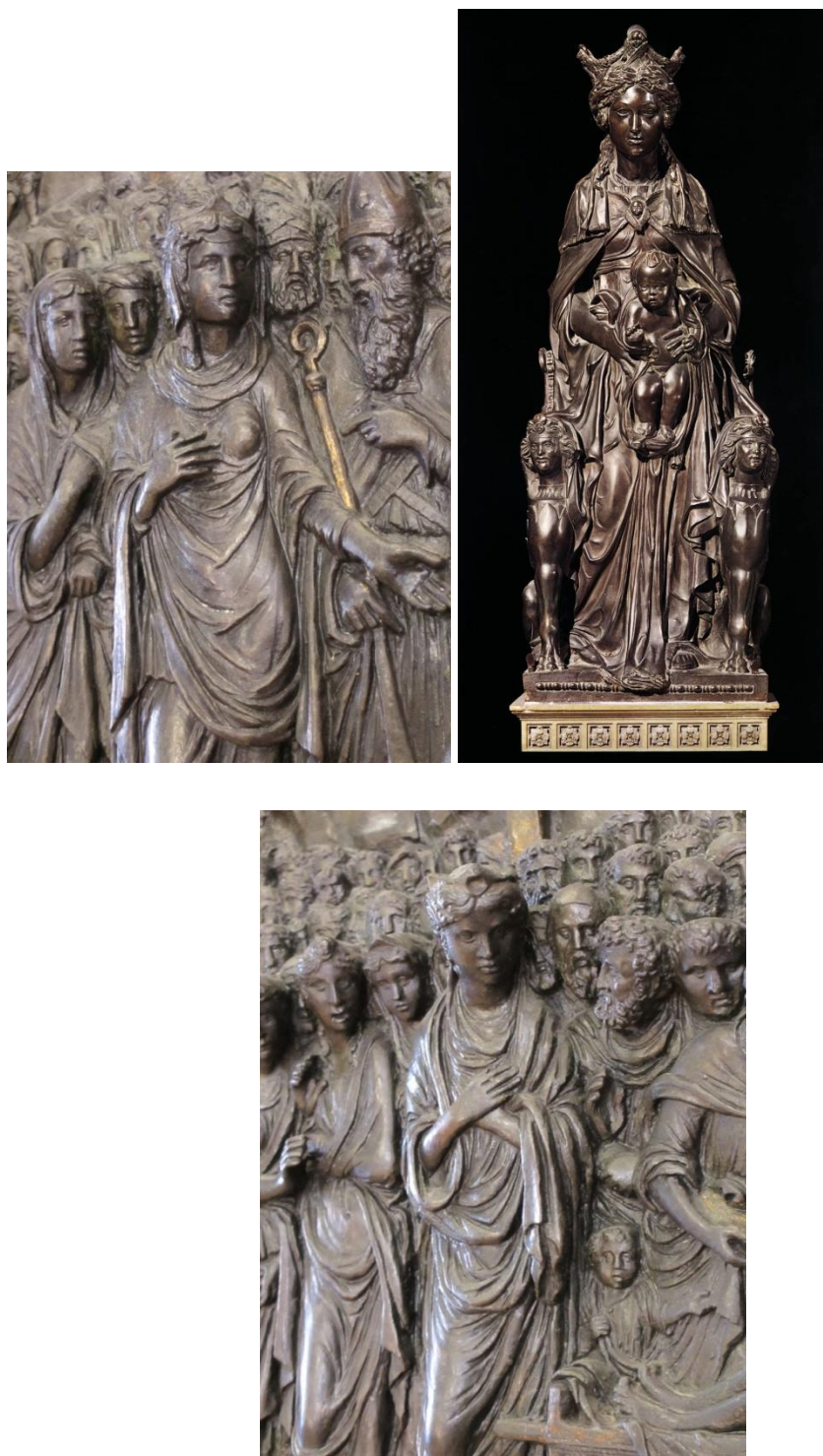


Fig. 129: Donatello, *Madonna and Child*, ca. 1448 Sant'Antonio, Padua and *Helena*, details from the *Discovery* and the *Miracle Scenes*.



Fig. 130: Bartolomeo Bellano, *Cain and Abel*, 1484-1490, Sant'Antonio, Padua.



Fig. 131: Bertoldo di Giovanni, *Battle Scene*, ca. 1480s, Museo del Bargello, Florence.



Fig. 132: Detail with Jerusalem from the *Discovery and Miracle Scenes*.



Fig. 133: Detail with Rome from the *Battle Scene*.

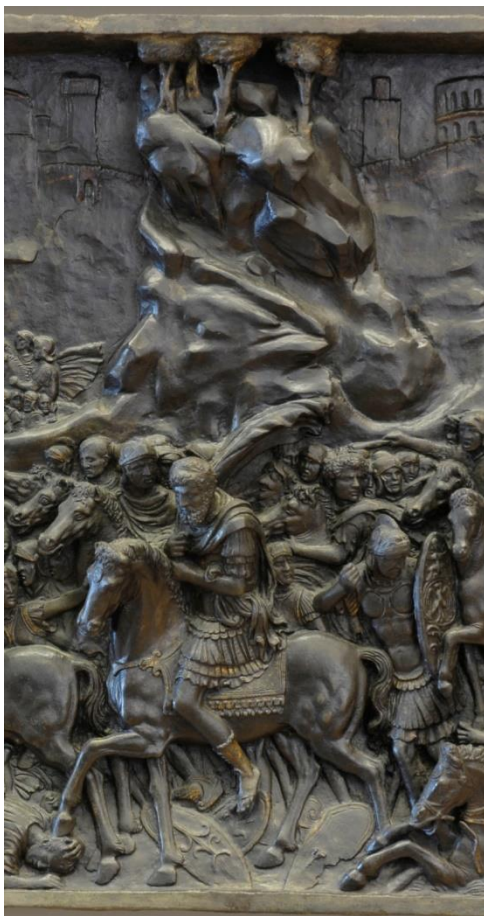


Fig. 134: Detail with a *Promontory*, Perhaps Mount Mario.



Fig. 135: Detail with *Hills and Mountains*, Perhaps the Hill of *Prima Porta* and the Mount Soratte.



Fig. 136: *Arch of Malborghetto, Remains and Reconstruction*, ca. 312, Via Flaminia, Lazio.



Fig. 137: *The Miracle of the True Cross and Helena Worshipping the Cross*, Illustrations from Jacobus da Voragine, *Golden Legend*, edition of 1492.

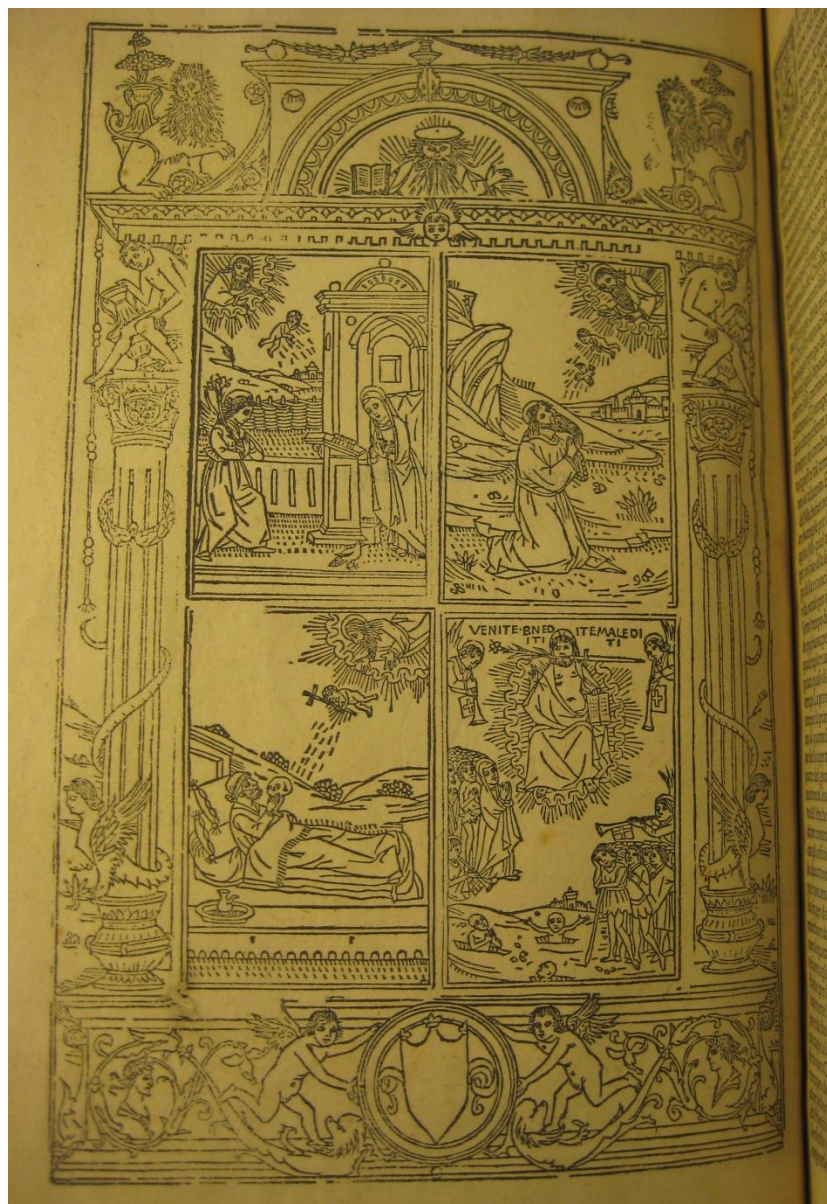


Fig. 138: *Frontispiece* from Jacobus da Voragine, *Golden Legend*, edition of 1499.



Fig. 139: Andrea Riccio, *The Story of Judith*, 1505-1507, Sant'Antonio, Padua.



Fig. 140: Detail from *Vision Scene*.



Fig. 141: *Vision and Discovery.*



Fig. 142: *Miracle and Battle.*



Fig.143: *Tabernacle Doors*.



Fig. 144: Giovanni Bellini, *Lamentation*, 1515-20, Gallerie dell'Accademia, Venice.

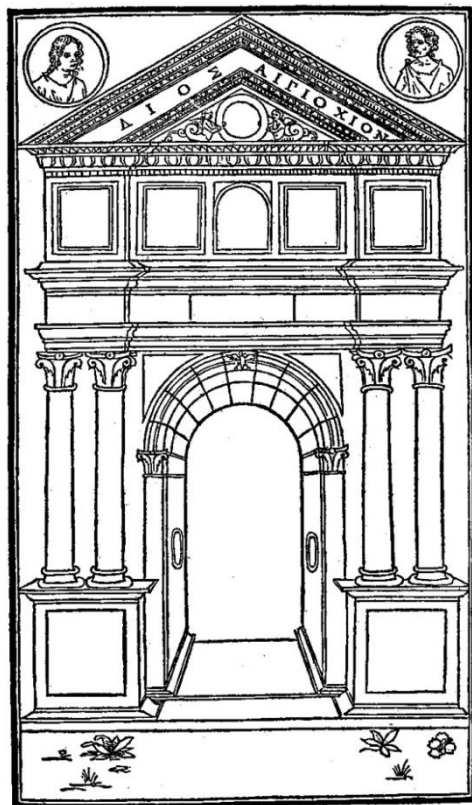


Fig. 145: Door from the *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili* and Tabernacle.



Fig. 146: Detail of *Eagle* from the *Tabernacle*.



Fig. 147: *Vision and Discovery*.

CHAPTER FOUR



Fig. 148: Bellini, *The Miracle of the Cross at the Bridge of San Lorenzo*, 1500, Gallerie dell'Accademia, Venice.



Fig. 149: Cima da Conegliano, *Constantine and Saint Helena*, 1501-1503, San Giovanni in Bragora, Venice.



Fig. 150: Reliquary of the Cross from San Michele di Murano in a Drawing by Giovanni Grevenbroch, 1754-1765, Venice, Museum Correr Library.



Fig. 151: Bernardino da Tossignano, *Constantine and Saint Helena*, 1515-1520, Private Collection.



Fig. 152: Unknown, *Vision of the Cross*, 14th century, San Nicola, Lanciano.



Fig. 153: Antoniazio Romano and Assistants, *Apse Decoration with the Stories of the Cross*, ca 1496, Santa Croce in Gerusalemme, Rome.



Fig. 154: Antoniazio Romano and Assistants, *Meeting with Judas, Discovery of the Three Crosses, and Miracle of the True Cross*, Santa Croce in Gerusalemme, Rome.



Fig. 155: Antoniazio Romano and Assistants, *The Battle Between Heraclius and Chosres' Son, The Recovery of the Cross, and Heraclius Return to Jerusalem*, Santa Croce in Gerusalemme, Rome.



Fig. 156: Left: *Group of the Doubting Jews*; Right: *Turkish Onlooker Behind Judas*.

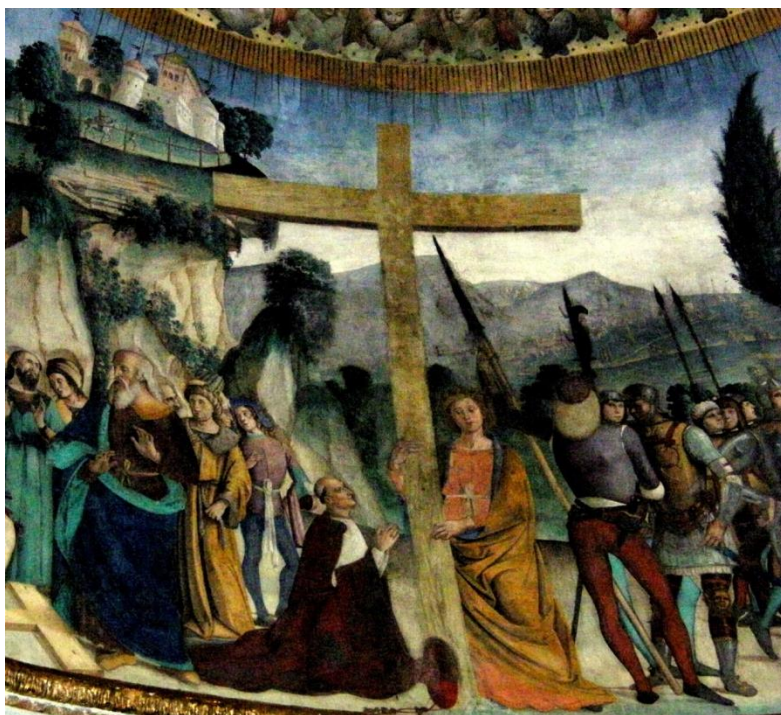


Fig. 157: Detail with *Cardinal Mendoza* and *Saint Helena* beside the Cross.



Fig. 158: My Reconstruction of the Altar of the True Cross.



Fig. 159: Detail of the Fresco in Rome.

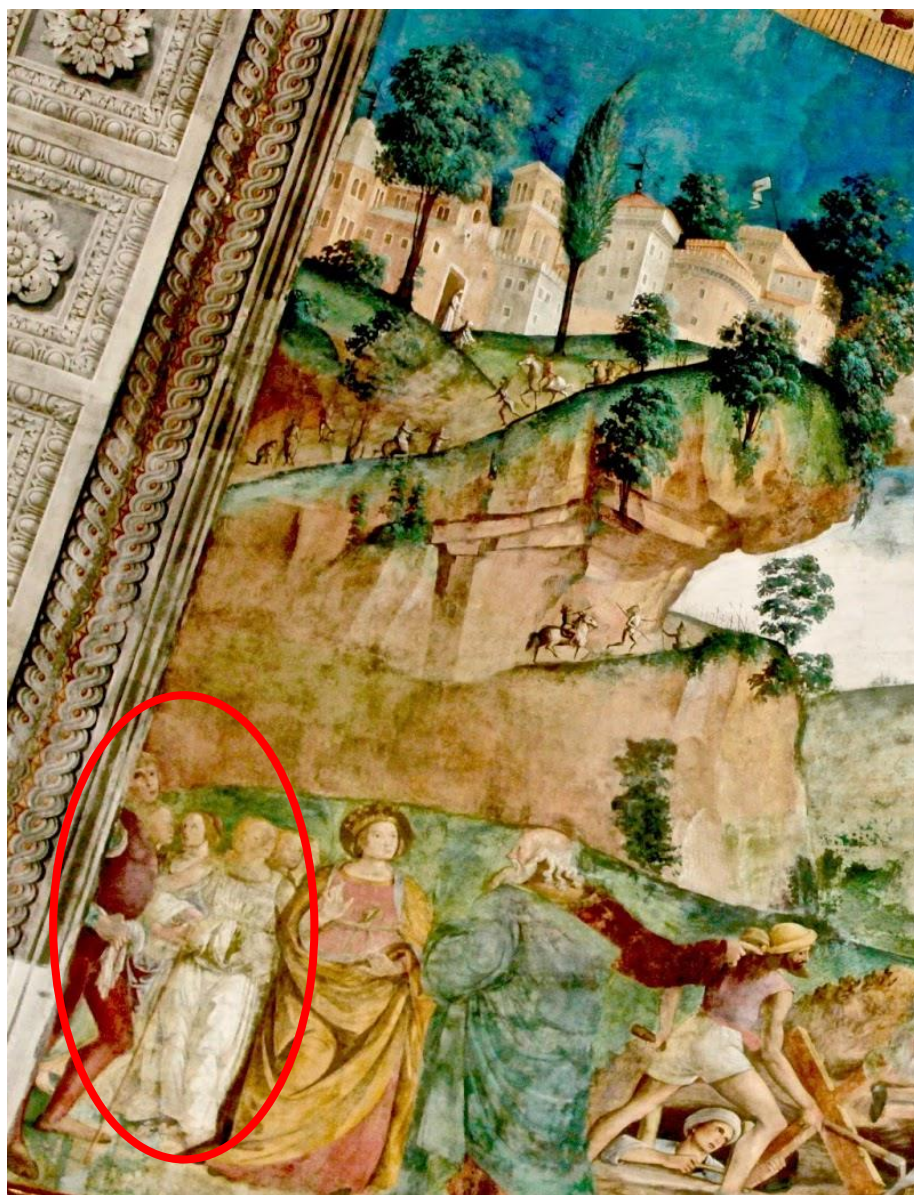


Fig. 160: Detail with *Ushers*, Santa Croce in Gerusalemme, Rome.



Fig. 161: Detail with *Crispus* from *Vision*.

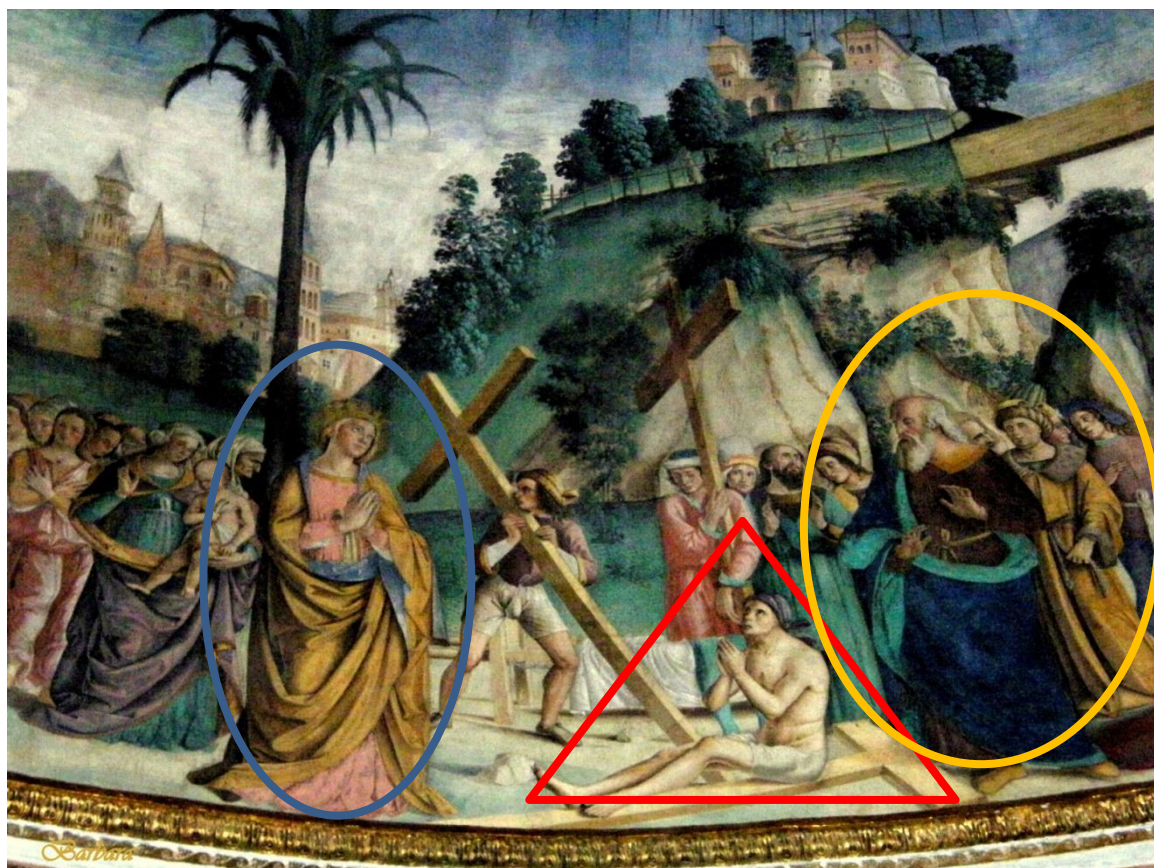


Fig. 162: Antoniazio Romano, *The Miracle of the True Cross*, Santa Croce in Gerusalemme, Rome.

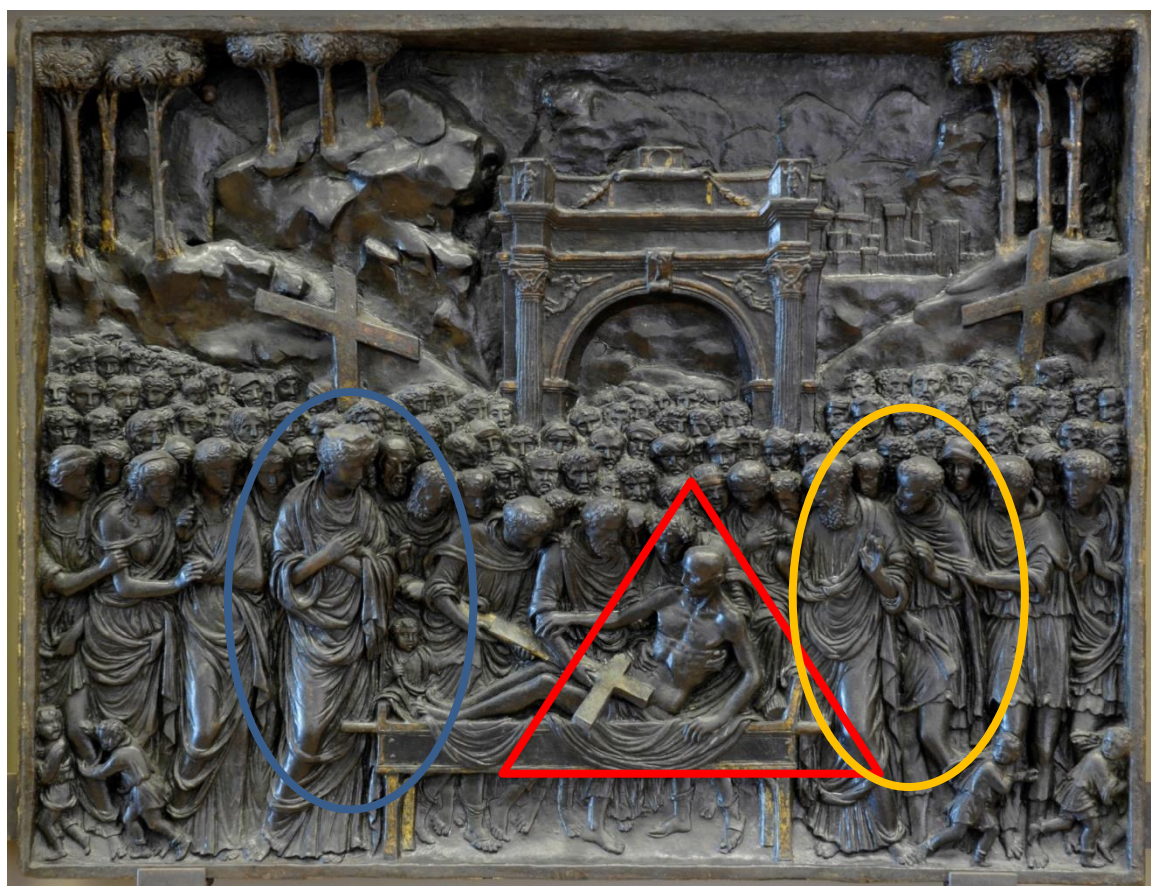


Fig. 163: Andrea Riccio, *The Miracle of the True Cross*.



Fig. 164: Attributed to Baldassarre Peruzzi, ca 1495-1510, *Christ Judge, the Evangelists, and Stories of the True Cross*, Santa Croce in Gerusalemme, Chapel of Saint Helena, Rome.

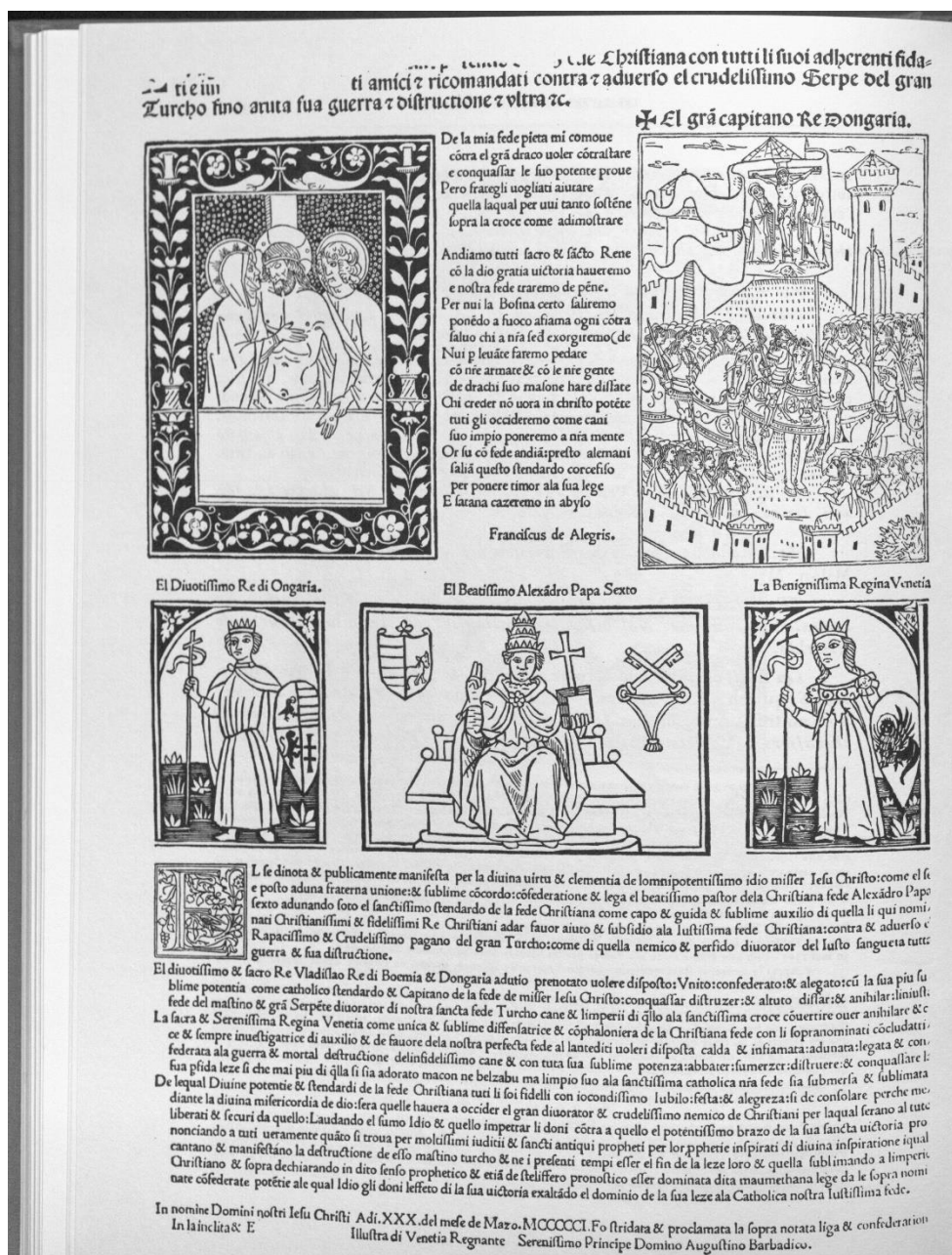


Fig. 165: Treaty with Effigies of the King of Hungary, Pope Alexander VI, and Venice as a Queen.

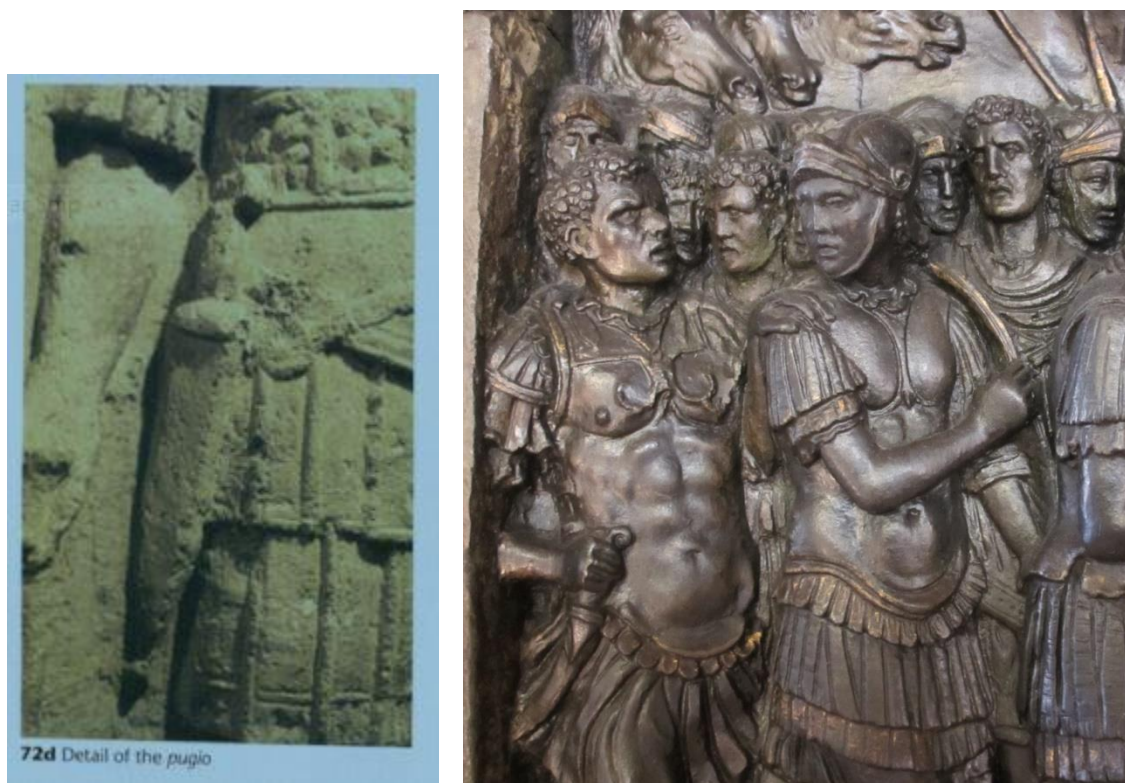


Fig. 166: Detail with *Crispus Holding a Short Dagger?*

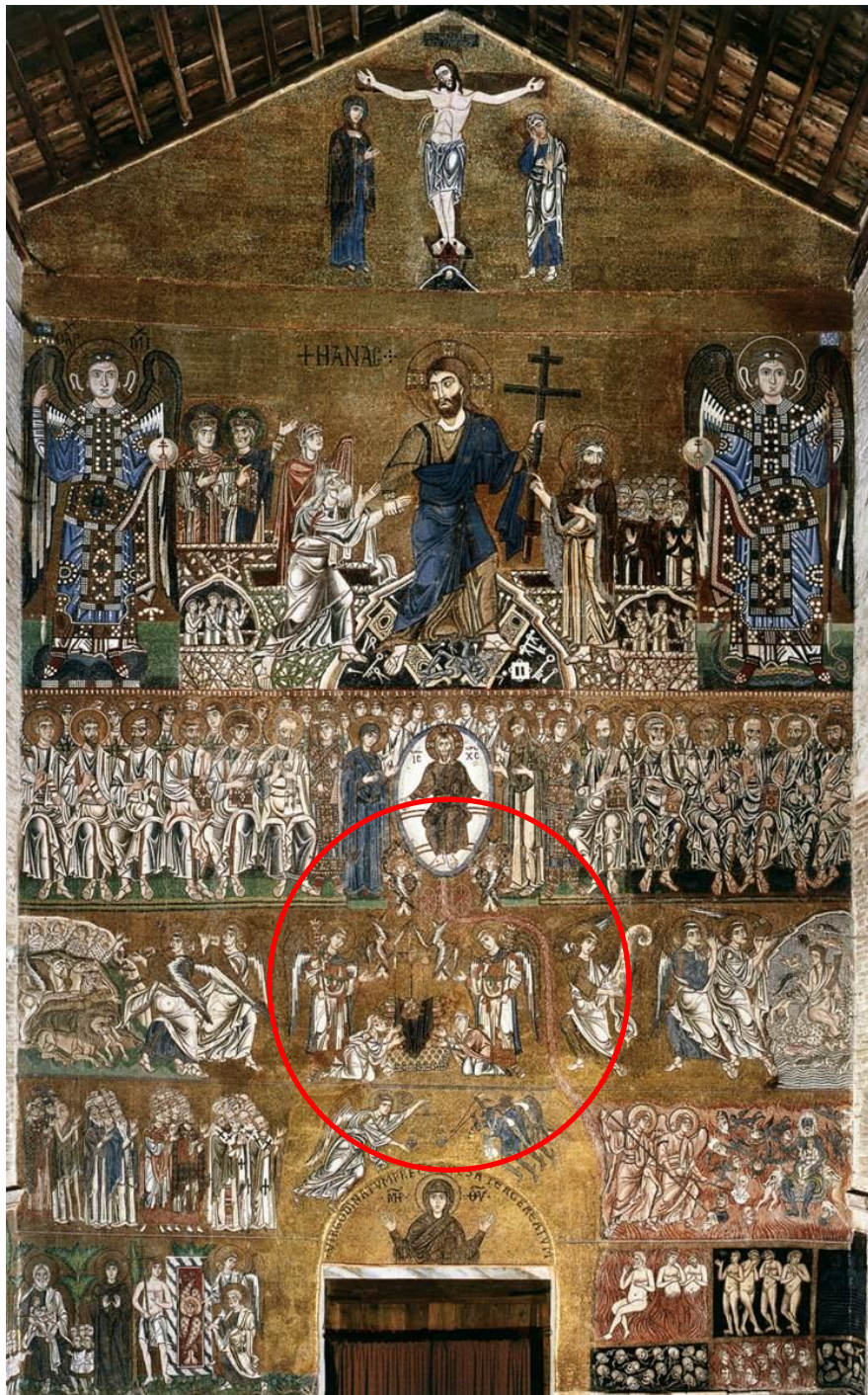


Fig. 167: *Last Judgment*, 13th century, Santa Maria Assunta, Torcello.



Fig. 168: Giotto, Detail from the *Last Judgment*, 1306, Scrovegni Chapel, Padua.



Fig. 169: Piero della Francesca, *Dream of Constantine*, 1452-1466, San Francesco, Arezzo.



Fig. 170: Detail with *Macarius beside Helena* in the *Finding*.



Fig. 171: *Predella from Cima's Altarpiece.*



Fig. 172: *Gate of the Arsenal*, 1457-1460, Venice.



Fig. 173: Mauro Codussi, *San Michele in Isola*, 1468ss, Venice.



Fig. 174: Titian, *The Triumph of Christ*, 1508-1511.

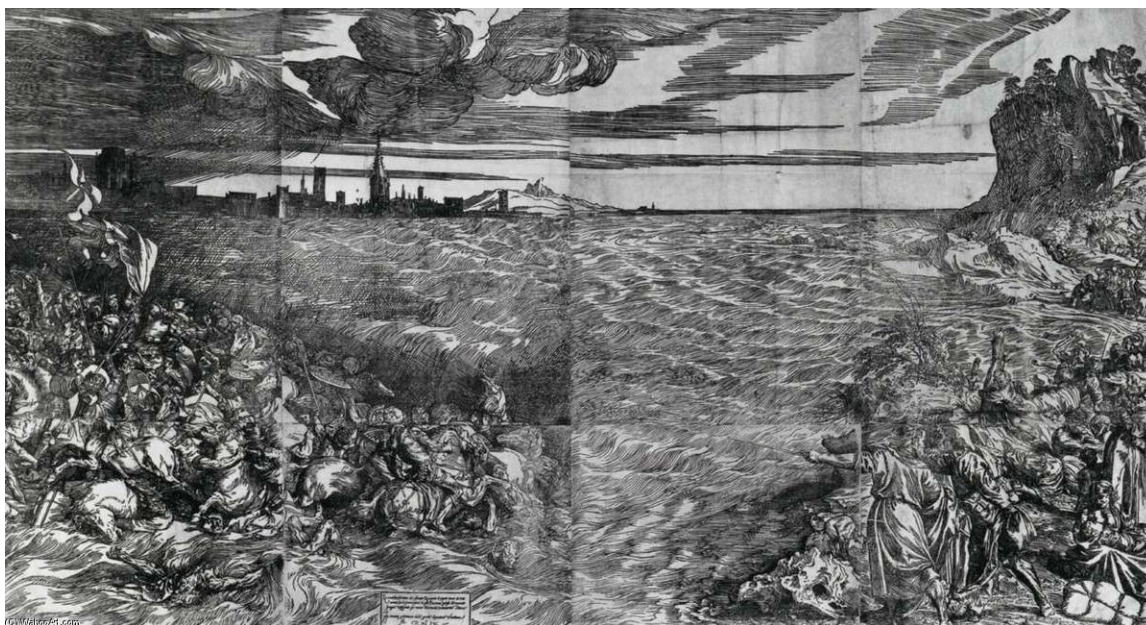


Fig. 175: Titian, *The Submersion of the Pharaoh in the Waters of the Red Sea*, 1513-1515.



Fig. 179: Andrea Riccio, *Saint Martin and the Beggar*, 1513-1520, Ca' d'Oro Museum, Venice.

Bibliography

AA. VV. *Fra Paolo Sarpi e i Servi di Maria a Venezia nel 750 Anniversario dell'Ordine*. Venice: La Stamperia di Venezia Editrice, 1983.

Ackerman, James. "Observations on Renaissance Church Planning in Venice and Florence, 1470-1570," in *Florence and Venice: Comparisons and Relations*, Acts of Two Conferences (Villa I Tatti, 1976-1977), ed. by Sergio Bertelli and others, vol. II (Cinquecento). Florence: La Nuova Italia Editrice, 1980, 287-307.

Agostini degli, Giovanni. *Notizie Istorico-Critiche Intorno La Vita, e le Opere degli Scrittori Viniziani*. 2 vols. Venice: Occhi, 1754.

Allen, Denise, and Peta Motture, eds. *Andrea Riccio: Renaissance Master of Bronze*, Exhibition Catalogue (The Frick Collection, New York, 2008). New York: The Frick Collection; London: in Association with Philip Wilson, 2008.

Allen, Joanne. *Choir Stalls in Venice and Northern Italy. Furniture, Ritual and Space in the Renaissance Church Interior*. Doctoral Dissertation, University of Warwick, 2010.

Argentini S., and M. Ricciardi. "Il complesso di S. Croce in Gerusalemme in Roma: nuove acquisizioni ed ipotesi," in *Rendiconti / Pontificia Accademia Romana di Archeologia*, 69, 1996-1997 (2000), 253-288.

Ariani, Marco, and Mino Gabriele, eds. *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili*. 2 vols. Milan: Adelphi Edizioni, 2004.

Avery, Victoria. *Vulcan's Forge in Venus' City: the Story of Bronze in Venice: 1350-1650*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011.

Bacci, Michele. *Lo spazio dell'anima. Vita di una chiesa medievale*. Rome: GLF Ed. Laterza, 2005.

Bacchi, Andrea, and Luciana Giacomelli, eds. *Rinascimento e passione per l'antico. Andrea Riccio e il suo tempo*, Exhibition Catalogue (Trent, Castello del Buonconsiglio, 2008). Trent: Provincia autonoma, 2008.

Barbaro, Orlando, and Iulia Tarciniu Balan. *Le Icone delle Feste. Il Linguaggio dell'Immagine nella Liturgia*. Venice: Marcianum Press, 2010.

Baronius, Caesar Cardinal, and Odoricus Raynaldus. *Annali ecclesiastici tratti da quelli del Cardinal Baronio per Odorico Rinaldi, etc.* vol. 4. Roma: Vitale Mascardi, 1656.

Bassi, Elena. *Tracce di chiese veneziane distrutte. Ricostruzioni dai disegni di Antonio Visentini*. Venice: Ist. Veneto di Scienze, Lettere e Arti, 1997.

Beckmann, Martin. *The Column of Marcus Aurelius: the Genesis and Meaning of a Roman Imperial Monument*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011.

Beltramini, Guido, and Davide Gasparotto, eds. *Aldo Manuzio e il rinascimento a Venezia*, Exhibition Catalogue (Gallerie dell'Accademia, Venice, 2016). Venice: Marsilio Editori, 2016.

Bembo, Pietro. *History of Venice*, ed. and trans. Robert W. Ulery. 3 vols. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard UP, 2007.

Benci, Jacopo, and Silvia Stucky. "Indagini sulla pala belliniana della Lamentazione. Bonaventura da Forlì e i Servi di Maria a Venezia," in *Artibus et Historiae*, vol. 8, no. 15 (1987), 47-65.

Besutti, Giuseppe Maria. *Repertori e sussidi generali. Edizioni del secolo XV (1476-1500)*. Bologna: Centro Studi O.S.M., 1971.

Bisson, Massimo. *Meravigliose macchine di giubilo. L'architettura e l'arte degli organi a Venezia nel Rinascimento*. Verona: Scripta Edizioni, 2012.

Blume, Clemens, and Guido M. Dreves, *Hymnodia Gotica Die Mozarabischen Hymnen des Alt-Spanischen Ritus*. Leipzig: O.R. Reisland, 1897.

Bober, Phyllis Pray, and Ruth Rubinstein. *Renaissance Artists and Antique Sculpture*. London: Harvey Miller Publishers; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986.

Bodon, Giulio. *Veneranda Antiquitas. Studi sull'eredità dell'antico nella Rinascenza veneta*. Bern: Peter Lang AG, 2005.

Bosio, Giacomo. *La Trionfante e Gloriosa Croce. Trattato di Iacomo Bosio. Lettione varia, e divota ad ogni buon Christiano utile e gioconda, in Roma nella stamperia del S.or Alfonso Ciacone*. Rome, 1610.

Branca, Vittore. *La Sapienza Civile. Studi sull'Umanesimo a Venezia*. Florence: Leo S. Olschki Editore, 1998.

Branca, Vittore. "Umanesimo Veneziano fra Barbaro e Bembo," in *Una famiglia veneziana nella storia: i Barbaro*, Atti del Convegno di Studi in occasione del quinto centenario della morte dell'umanista Ermolao (Venice, 1993), ed. by Michela Marangoni

and Manlio Pastore Stocchi. Venice: Istituto Veneto di Scienze, Lettere e Arti, 1996, 9-42.

Branca, Vittore. "La cultura: l'umanesimo," in *Rinascimento: politica e cultura*, ed. by Vittore Branca et al. Rome: Ist. della Enciclopedia Italiana, 1996, 723-755.

Brown, Beverly Louise. "In hoc signo vinces. *Il vescovo Jacopo Pesaro e papa Alessandro VII davanti a san Pietro* di Tiziano," in *Tiziano, Venezia e il Papa Borgia*, Exhibition Catalogue (Pieve di Cadore, June-October 2013). Florence: Fratelli Alinari Fondazione, 2014, 47-91.

Brown, Beverly Louise. "Choir and Altar Placement: A Quattrocento Dilemma," in *Machiavelli Studies*, V (1996), 147-180.

Brown, Patricia Fortini. *Venice and Antiquity. The Venetian Sense of the Past*. Yale University Press: New Haven & London, 1997.

Brow, Patricia Fortini. *Venetian Narrative Painting in the Age of Carpaccio*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988.

Bruzelius, Caroline. *Preaching, Building, and Burying. Friars and the Medieval City*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2014.

Caglioti, Francesco. "Altari eucaristici scolpiti del primo Rinascimento: qualche caso maggiore," in *Lo Spazio e il Culto. Relazioni tra edificio ecclesiale e uso liturgico dal xv al xvi secolo*, ed. by Jörg Stabenow. Venice: Marsilio Editori, 2006, 53-90.

Calcani, Giuliana. "La pratica divinatoria e la visione della croce in Costantino" in *La Croce. Iconografia e interpretazione (secoli I – inizio XVI)*, Atti del Convegno Internazionale di Studi (Napoli, December 1999), ed. by Boris Ulianich. Naples: Elio de Rosa Editore, 2007, 223-230.

Calore, Andrea. "Il coro e presbiterio della basilica del Santo. Vicende storiche e artistiche nel sec. XV," in *Il Santo*, 38 (gennaio-agosto 1998), 31-69.

Calore, Andrea. "Proposta ricostruttiva dell'altare maggiore del Santo, opera di Donatello," in *Il Santo*, 34 (1994), 71-80.

Cameron, Averil, and Stuart G. Hall. *Eusebius. Life of Constantine*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999.

Cameron, Avril, and Judith Herrin. *Constantinople in the Early Eighth Century: The Parasteseis Syntomoi Chronikai*. Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1984.

Campbell, Caroline, and Alan Chong, eds. *Bellini and the East*, Exhibition Catalogue (Boston, Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum and London, National Gallery, 2005-2006). London: National Gallery Company and Boston: Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, 2005.

Cappelletti, Francesca. "L'affresco nel catino absidale di Santa Croce in Gerusalemme a Roma. La fonte iconografica, la committenza e la datazione," in *Storia dell'Arte*, 66 (1989), 119-126.

Carboniero, Bruno, and Fabrizio Falconi. *In hoc vinces. La notte che cambiò la storia dell'Occidente*. Rome: Edizioni Mediterranee, 2011.

Casalini, Eugenio, O.S.M. *Le Pleiadi del Senario. I sette fondatori dei Servi di Maria*. Florence: Convento di SS. Annunziata, 1989.

Cecchetti, Bartolomeo. *La Repubblica di Venezia e la corte di Roma nei rapporti della religione*. Venice: Tipografia di P. Naratovich, 1874.

Ceriana, Matteo. "Gli spazi e l'ornamento della chiesa camaldolese di San Michele in Isola," in *San Michele in Isola. Isola della conoscenza. Ottocento anni di storia e cultura camaldolesi nella laguna di Venezia*, Exhibition Catalogue (Venice, Museo Correr, Museo Archeologico Nazionale, Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana, 2012), ed. by Marcello Brusegan and others. Turin: UTET, 2012, 97-109.

Ceriana, Matteo, and Victoria Avery, eds. *L'industria artistica del bronzo del Rinascimento a Venezia e nell'Italia settentrionale*. Atti del Convegno Internazionale di Studi, Venezia, Fondazione Giorgio Cini (October, 2007). Verona: Scripta Edizioni, 2008.

Ceriana, Matteo. "Profilo della scultura a Venezia tra il 1450 e il 1500," in *Da Bellini a Veronese. Studi di arte veneta*, 6 (2004), 23-81.

Cicogna, Antonio. *Delle iscrizioni veneziane*. Bologna: Forni Editore, 1982.

Citeroni, Raffaella. *L'ordine dei Servi di Santa Maria nel Veneto. Tre insediamenti trecenteschi: Venezia (1316), Verona (1324), Treviso (1346)*. Rome: Edizione Marianum, 1998.

Colonna, Francesco. *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili*, ed. by Marco Ariani and Mino Gabriele. Milan: Adelphi Edizioni, 1998.

Cormack, Robin, and E.J.W. Hawkins. "The Mosaic of Saint Sophia at Istanbul: the Rooms above the Southwest Vestibule and Ramp," in *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 31 (1977), 175-251.

Cooper, Donal. "Access All Areas? Spatial Divides in the Mendicant Churches of Late Medieval Tuscany," in *Ritual and Space in the Middle Ages*, Conference Proceedings (Harlaxton Symposium, 2009), ed. by Frances Andrews. Donington: Shaun Tyas, 2011, 90-107.

Corner, Flaminio. *Ecclesiae Venetae antiquis monumentis nunc etiam primum editis illustratae ac in decades distributae*. Venetiis: typis Jo. Baptistae Pasqualis, 1749.

Coronelli, Vincenzo. *Guida de' Forestieri Sacro-Profana Per osservare il più ragguardevole nella Città di Venezia Con la di lei Pianta per passeggiarla in Gondola, e per Terra*. Venice: N.N, 1700.

Cortesi, Mariarosa. *Leggere i padri tra passato e presente*. Florence: Sismel, Edizioni del Galluzzo, 2010.

Cushman McGiffert, Arthur. *Eusebius, History of the Church*. Acheron Press, 2012.

D'Amato, Raffaele. *Arms and Armour of the Imperial Roman Soldier. From Marius to Commodus, 112 BC-AD 192*. London: Frontline, 2009.

D'Ancona, Alessandro. *Sacre rappresentazioni dei secoli XIV, XV e XVI*. 2 vols. Florence: Successori Le Monnier, 1872.

D'Essling, Prince. *Les Livres à Figures Vénitiens de la fin du XV Siècle et du Commencement du XVI*. Florence: Librairie Leo O. Olschki; Paris: Libraire Henri Leclerc, 1908.

Dal Pino, Franco A. et al. *Fonti Storico-Spirituali dei Servi di Santa Maria, II, dal 1349 al 1495*. Bergamo: Servitium Editrice, 2002.

Della Puppa, Giuseppe. *La chiesa di S. Martino "De Geminis" in Venezia*. Venice: Grafiche Veneziane, 1997.

Di Domenico, Pier Giorgio M. et al. *Fonti Storico-Spirituali dei Servi di Santa Maria, III, 2, dal 1496 al 1623*. Bergamo: Servitium Editrice, 2008.

Donato, Girolamo. *La oration del Magnifico & Clarissimo Misier Hieronymo Donado Orator Veneto facta ala sacra Maiesta de re Maximiliano*, stampata in Venezia per Bernardino di Vidali del M.CCCCI. Adi.IX. Del Mese de Zugno.

Donati Angela, and Giovanni Gentili. *Costantino il Grande. La civiltà antica al bivio tra Occidente e Oriente*, Exhibition Catalogue (Rimini, Castel Sigismondo, 2005). Milan: Silvana Editoriale: Cinisello Balsamo, 2005.

Dondi Orologio, Francesco Scipione. *Dissertazione nona sopra l'istoria ecclesiastica padovana*. Padua: Tipografia del Seminario, 1816.

Eusebius, of Caesarea Bishop of Caesarea and Rufinus of Aquileia. *Storia della Chiesa*, translated by Lorenzo Dattrino. Rome: Città Nuova Editrice, 1986.

Eusebius, of Caesarea Bishop of Caesarea. *Life of Constantine*, translated by Avril Cameron and Stuart George Hall. Oxford: Clarendon Press; New York: Oxford University Press, 1999.

Eusebius, of Caesarea Bishop of Caesarea. *L'istoria ecclesiastica. Tradotta dal latino nella lingua volgare*. In Venetia per Michele Tramezino, 1547.

Fabbri, Mario. *Il luogo teatrale a Firenze. Brunelleschi, Vasari, Buontalenti, Parigi*, Exhibition Catalogue (Florence, Palazzo Medici Riccardi, Museo Mediceo, 1975). Milan: Electa, 1975.

Finlay, Robert. *Venice Besieged: Politics and Diplomacy in the Italian Wars, 1494-1534*. Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008.

Franceschi de, Girolamo. "Del modo di santificar Giesu Christo, & dell'eccellenza del suo nome, il primo di dell'anno 1492," in *Delle prediche di diversi Illustri theologi, et Catholici Predicatori della parola di Dio*, ed. by Thomaso Porchacchi, in Vinetia presso Giorgio de' Cavalli, 1566.

Franzoi, Umberto, and Dina Di Stefano. *Le Chiese di Venezia*. Venice: Alfieri, 1976.

Franzoni, Claudio. "Girolamo Donato: Collezionismo e *Instauratio* dell'Antico," in *Venezia e l'archeologia: un importante capitolo nella storia del gusto dell'antico nella cultura artistica veneziana*, congresso internazionale di studi (Venice, 1988). Rome: G. Bretschneider, 1990, 27-31.

Fumagalli, Edoardo. "Una supplica di Francesco Colonna (con una premessa su Eliseo da Treviso)," in *Italia medioevale e umanistica*, 29 (1986), 207-231.

La Rélique de la Vraie Croix. Recherches sur le développement d'un culte. Paris: Institut Français d'Etudes Byzantines, 1961.

Gallicciolli, Giambattista. *Delle memorie venete antiche profane ed ecclesiastiche*. Venice: Domenico Fracasso, 1745.

Gasparino, Borro. *Triumph, sonetti, canzon et laude de la gloriosa Madre de Dio Vergine Maria*, ed. by Tommaso da Cremona, Simone da Castellazzo e Giovanni Battista Boneto. Brescia, Angelo de' Britannici, 23.X.1498.

Gasparotto, Davide. "L'altare Maffei in Sant'Eufemia a Verona, Giulio della Torre e Andrea Riccio," in *Nuovi studi*, 14 (2009[2010]), 115-127.

Gasparotto, Davide. "Andrea Riccio a Venezia: sui rilievi con le Storie della Vera Croce per l'altare Donà già in Santa Maria dei Servi," in *Tullio Lombardo: scultore e architetto nella Venezia del rinascimento*, Atti del Convegno Internazionale di Studi, ed. by Matteo Ceriana (Venezia, Fondazione Giorgio Cini, 2006). Verona: Cierre, 2007.

Gaurico, Pomponio. *De Sculptura*. Ed. by Paolo Cutolo. Naples: Edizioni Scientifiche Italiane, 1999.

Gentili, Augusto. *Le storie di Carpaccio. Venezia, i Turchi, gli Ebrei*. Venice: Marsilio Editori, 1996.

Gill, Meredith J. "Antoniazio Romano and the Recovery of Jerusalem in Late Fifteenth-Century Rome," in *Storia dell'Arte*, 83 (1995), 28-48.

Hall, Marcia. "The Italian Rood Screen: Some Implications for Liturgy and Function," in *Essays Presented to Myron P. Gilmore*, ed. by Sergio Bertelli and Gloria Ramakus. Florence: La Nuova Italia Editrice, 1978, II, 213-218.

Hall, Marcia. "The Ponte in S. Maria Novella: The Problem of the Rood Screen in Italy," in *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, vol. 37 (1974), 157-173.

Harff, Arnold Ritter von. *The Pilgrimage of Arnold von Harff, Knight, from Cologne, through Italy, Syria, Egypt, Arabia, Ethiopia, Nubia, Palestine, Turkey, France and Spain, Which He Accomplished in the Years 1496 to 1499*. Transl. from the German and ed. with notes and an introd. by Malcolm Letts. London: 1946.

Heffernan, Thomas J., and E. Ann Matter, eds. *The Liturgy of the Medieval Church*. Michigan: Medieval Institute Publications, 2005.

Howard, Deborah. *Venice & the East. The Impact of the Islamic World on Venetian Architecture 1100-1500*. New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2000.

Humfrey, Peter. *The Altarpiece in Renaissance Venice*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1993.

Humfrey, Peter. "Cima da Conegliano, Sebastiano Mariani, and Alvise Vivarini at the East End of S. Giovanni in Bragora in Venice," in *The Art Bulletin*, 62 (Sept. 1980), 350-363.

Jacobus, de Voragine. *Legionario de sancti vulgar storiado*. Venice: Matteo Capcasa (di Codeca), 16 May 1492.

Jung, Jacqueline E. *The Gothic Screen. Space, Sculpture, and Community in the Cathedrals of France and Germany, ca. 1200-1400*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013.

Jung, Jacqueline E. "The Unifying Role of the Choir Screen in Gothic Churches," in *The Art Bulletin*, vol. 82, no. 4 (Dec., 2000), 622-657.

Jungmann, Joseph A. *The Mass of the Roman Rite: its Origins and Development*. 2 vols. Westminster, Maryland: Christian Classics, Inc., 1986.

King, Margaret L. *Venetian Humanism in an Age of Patrician Dominance*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986.

Kurz, Otto. "A Group of Florentine Drawings for an Altar," in *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 18 (Jan-Jun, 1955), 35-53.

Lauber, Rosella. "Girolamo Donà," in *Il collezionismo d'arte a Venezia. Dalle origini al Cinquecento*, ed. by Michel Hochmann, Rosella Lauber, and Stefania Mason. Venice: Marsilio Editori, 2008, 272-273.

Le Goff, Jacques. *In Search of Sacred Time: Jacobus de Voragine and the Legend of the True Cross*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014.

Lippi, Emilio. "Recensione dell'opera di Piero Scapecchi," in *Studi trevisani. Bollettino degli Istituti di Cultura del Comune di Treviso*, 4 (1985), 159-162.

Loconsole, Michele. "Il simbolo della croce tra giudeo-cristianesimo e tarda antichità: un elemento della translatio Hierosolymae," in *Liber Annus*, 53 (2003), 217-284.

Loechel, André-Jean-Marc. "Le rappresentazioni della comunità," in *Storia di Venezia. Dalle origini alla caduta della Serenissima. IV, Il Rinascimento. Politica e cultura*, ed. by

Alberto Tenenti and Ugo Tucci. Rome: Editore Istituto Dell'Enciclopedia Italiana "Giovanni Treccani," 1996.

Luzietti, Marilena. *Culto e rappresentazioni della Croce nell'età della Controriforma. Itinerario nei territori dello Stato Pontificio*. Doctoral Thesis, Sapienza Università di Roma, 2011-2012.

Mansi, Giovan Domenico. *Diario sacro delle chiese di Lucca*. Lucca: Dalla Tipografia Giusti, 1836.

Massèna, Victor, duc de Rivoli puis prince d'Essling. *Les livres à figures vénitiens de la fin du XVe siècle et du commencement du XVIe : études sur l'art de la gravure sur bois à Venise*. Florence: L. S. Olschki; Paris: H. Leclerc, 1907-1914.

McAndrew, John. *Venetian Architecture of the Early Renaissance*. Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 1980.

McTavish, *Giuseppe Porta Called Giuseppe Salviati*. New York: Garland, 1981.

Merotto, Ghedini Monica. "Il tramezzo della chiesa dei santi Giovanni e Paolo a Venezia," in *De lapidibus sententiae. Scritti di storia dell'arte per Giovanni Lorenzoni*, ed. by Tiziana Franco e Giovanna Valenzano. Padua: Il Poligrafo, 2002, 257-263.

Milică, Ioan. "Funcțiile stilului în retorica creștină a Sf. Augustin / Functions of Style in St. Augustine's Christian Rhetoric," in *Diacronia*, 1 (January 2015), 1-8.

Minnich, Nelson H. "The Role of Prophecy in the Career of the Enigmatic Bernardino Lopez de Carvajal," in *Prophetic Rome in the High Renaissance Period*, ed. by Majorie Reeves. New York: Oxford University Press, 1992, 111-120.

Modesti, Paola. "Recinzioni con colonne nelle chiese Veneziane. Tradizioni, revival, sopravvivenze," in *Lo spazio e il culto. Relazioni tra edificio ecclesiale e uso liturgico dal xv al xvi secolo*, ed. by Jörg Stabenow. Venice: Marsilio Editori, 2006, 181-209.

Modesti, Paola. "I cori nelle chiese veneziane e la visita apostolica del 1581. Il "barco" di Santa Maria della Carità," in *Arte Veneta* 59 (2002 [2004]), 39-65.

Morris, Colin. *The Sepulchre of Christ and the Medieval West. From the Beginning to 1600*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005.

Musolino, Giovanni, et al. *Santi e beati veneziani: quaranta profili*. Venice: Studium cattolico veneziano, 1963.

Nelson, Jonathan. "The High Altar-Piece of SS. Annunziata in Florence: History, Form, and Function," in *The Burlington Magazine*, 139 (Feb. 1997), 84-94.

Newbigin, Nerida. "The World Made Flesh. The *Rappresentazioni* of Mysteries and Miracles in Fifteenth-Century Florence," in *Christianity and the Renaissance. Images and Religious Imagination in the Quattrocento*, ed. by Timothy Verdon and John Henderson. Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1990, 361-376.

Newett, Margaret M. *Canon Pietro Casola's Pilgrimage to Jerusalem in the Year 1494*. Manchester: At the University Press, 1907.

Nichols, Stephen G. "In Hoc Signo Vincis: Constantine, Mother of Harm," in *Piero della Francesca and His Legacy*, ed. by Marilyn Aronberg Lavin. Washington: National Gallery of Art, 1995, 37-47.

Nuti Massimiliano. *Costantino il Grande: un falso mito?* Parma: Mattioli 1885 Srl., 2014.

Ortolani, Sergio. *S. Croce in Gerusalemme*. Rome: Marietti, 1969.

Palazzo, Éric. "Relics, Liturgical Space, and the Theology of the Church," in *Treasures of Heaven. Saints, Relics, and Devotion in the Medieval Europe*, Exhibition Catalogue (The Cleveland Museum of Art, The Walters Art Museum, and The British Museum, 2010-2011) ed. by Martina Bagnoli et al. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2010.

Pagnozzato, Riccarda. *Madonne della laguna. Simulacri "da vestire" nei secoli XIV-XV*. Rome: Ist. della Enciclopedia Italiana, 1993.

Panepuccia, Cesare, ed. *Andrea Bregno e la committenza agostiniana*, Atti del Convegno di Studi (Rome, 2008). Rome: Erreciemme, 2008.

Parronchi, Alessandro. "Il vero autore del Polifilo," in *Rara volumina*, 1 (1994), 7-12.

Paschini, Pio. "Fra Girolamo de Franceschi servita e vescovo di Corone," in *Studi Storici dell'Ordine dei Servi di Maria*, 5 (1934), 3-13.

Pavanello, Giuseppe. *La basilica dei Santi Giovanni e Paolo. Pantheon della Serenissima*. Venice: Marcianum Press, 2013.

Pavon, Giuliano, and Graziella Cauzzi. *La memoria di un tempio. Li Servi di San Marcilian ed il Canal-Marovich in Venezia*. Venice: Edizioni Helvetia, 1988.

Pincus, Deborah. "Venice and the Two Romes: Byzantium and Rome as a Double Heritage in Venetian Cultural Politics," in *Artibus et Historiae*, vol. 13, no. 26 (1992), 101-114.

Piva, Paolo. "Lo spazio liturgico. Architettura, arredo, iconografia (secoli IV-XII)," in *L'arte medievale nel contesto (300-1300)*, ed. by Paolo Piva. Milan: Jaca Book, 2006, 221-264.

Planiscig, Leo. *Andrea Riccio*. Wien: Schroll, 1927.

Pope-Hennessy, John. *La scultura italiana. Il Quattrocento*. Milan: Feltrinelli, 1964.

Porcacchi, Thomaso. *Delle prediche di diversi illustri theologi, et catholici predicatori della parola di Dio*. In Vinetia presso Giorgio de' Cavalli, 1561.

Quednau, Rolf. "Costantino il Grande a Roma. Forme e funzioni della memoria nelle testimonianze visive da ponte Milvio a Mussolini," in *Costantino il Grande tra medioevo ed età moderna*, ed. by Giorgio Bonamente et al. Bologna: Società editrice il Mulino, 2004, 319-387.

Renier, Alessandro. *Le Feste Ducali, dello Stato e Sagre Popolari*. Venice: Filippo Editori, 2009.

Rigo, Paola. "Donà, Girolamo," in *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani*, 40 (1990), 741-753.

Rigo, Paola. "Catalogo e tradizione degli scritti di Girolamo Donato," in *Atti dell'Accademia nazionale dei Lincei. Classe di scienze morali, storiche e filologiche*, series VIII, vol. 31 (Gen.-Feb. 1976), 49-80.

Rigo, Paola. "Per il carteggio di Girolamo Donato: inventario ed epistole inedite," in *Atti dell'Accademia nazionale dei Lincei. Classe di scienze morali, storiche e filologiche*, series VIII, vol. 29 (Lug.-Dic. 1974), 532-555.

Ross, Elizabeth. *Picturing Experience in the Early Printed Book. Breydenbach's Peregrinatio from Venice to Jerusalem*, University Park, Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2014.

Rossi, Alessio Maria. *Manuale di storia dell'ordine dei Servi di Maria (1233-1954)*. Rome: Typis Pontificiae Universitatis Gregorianae, 1956.

Ruvoldt, Maria. *The Italian Renaissance Imagery of Inspiration: Metaphors of Sex, Sleep, and Dream*. Cambridge UK; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004.

Santifilippo, Matteo. "Girolamo de' Franceschi," in *Dizionario biografico degli italiani*, edited by Giuseppe Pignatelli et al. Catanzaro: Arti Grafiche Abramo S.r.l., 1997, 49, 623-624.

Sanudo, Marin. *De origine, situ et magistratibus urbis venetae ovvero la città di Venetia (1493-1530)*, ed. by Angela Caracciolo Aricò. Milan: Cisalpino-La Goliardica, 1980.

Sanudo, Marin. *I diarii di Marino Sanuto*, ed. by Federico Stefani et al. Venice: a spese degli editori, 1879-1903.

Sansovino, Francesco. *Venetia città nobilissima e singolare descritta dal Sansovino con nove e copiose aggiunte di D.Giustinian Martinioni*. In Venetia, appresso Steffano Curti, 1663.

Sansovino, Francesco. *Venetia città nobilissima et singolare, descritta in xiii libri*. In Venetia, appresso Iacomo Sansovino, 1581.

Scapecchi, Piero. "L'Hypnerotomachia Poliphili e il suo autore," in *Accademie e biblioteche d'Italia*, 51 (1983), 286-298.

Scarsella, Alessandro et al. *Intorno al Polifilo. Contributi sull'opera e l'epoca di Francesco Colonna e Aldo Manuzio*. Venice: Biblioteca nazionale marciana, 2001.

Scifoni, Felice, ed. *Dizionario biografico universale, contenente le notizie più importanti sulla vita e sulle opera degli uomini celebri...* Florence: David Passigli Tipografo-Editore, 1840-1849.

Seymour Wood, William. *The Cross in Tradition, History, and Art*. New York and London: G.P. Putman's Sons, 1898.

Schulz, Anne Markham. "New Light on Pietro, Antonio, and Tullio Lombardo," in *Mitteilungen des Kunsthistorischen Institutes in Florenz*, 54 Bd. (2010-2012), 231-256.

Schulz, Anne Markham. *Giambattista and Lorenzo Bregno. Venetian Sculpture in the High Renaissance*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991.

Schulz, Anne Markham. "Giambattista Bregno," in *Jahrbuch der Berliner Museen*, 22 Bd. (1980), 173-202.

Stedman, Wendy Sheard. "Sanudo's List of Notable Things in Venetian Churches and the Date of the Vendramin Tomb," in *Yale University Studies*, 1, 219-268.

Sherman, Allison. "Soli Deo Honor et Gloria. Pietro Lombardo e il tramezzo di Santa Maria Gloriosa dei Frari," in *Santa Maria Gloriosa dei Frari*, ed. by Carlo Corsato and Deborah Howard, Padua: Centro studi antoniani, 2015, 211-222.

Stoppino, Eleonora. "Arthur as Renaissance Epic," in *The Arthur of the Italians. The Arthurian Legend in Medieval Italian Literature and Culture*. ed. by Gloria Allaire and F. Regina Psaki. Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2014.

Szövérfy, Joseph. "Crux fidelis...Prolegomena to a History of the Holy Cross Hymns," in *Traditio*, vol. 22 (1966), 1-41.

Tafari, Manfredo. "La nuova Costantinopoli. La rappresentazione della renovatio nella Venezia dell'umanesimo," in *Rassegna*, 9 (1982), 25-38.

Tramontin, Silvio. "Tracce di drammatica popolare religiosa a Venezia," in *La drammatica popolare nella valle padana*, Atti del Convegno di Studi sul folklore padano (Modena, 1974). Modena: ENAL, Università del tempo libero, 1976, 399-412.

Tramontin, Silvio. "La visita apostolica del 1581 a Venezia," in *Studi veneziani*, IX (1967), 453-533.

Tramontin, Silvio, et al. *Culto dei santi a Venezia*. Venice: Edizioni Studium Cattolico Veneziano, 1965.

Urbani, Elena. "Storia e architettura delle chiese dei Servi di santa Maria di Fondazione trecentesca in area veneta: Venezia (1316), Verona (1324), Treviso (1346) e Padova (1392)," in *Studi storici dell'Ordine dei Servi di Maria*, 50. 2000 (2002), 1/2, 7-140.

Urbani, Elena. "Santa Maria dei Servi," in *L'architettura gotica veneziana*, atti del convegno internazionale di studio (Venice, 1996), ed. by Francesco Valcanover e Wolfgang Wolters. Venice: Ist. Veneto di Scienze, Lettere e Arti, 2000, 109-113.

Valenzano, Giovanna. "La suddivisione dello spazio nelle chiese mendicanti: sulle tracce dei tramezzi delle Venezie," in *Arredi liturgici e architettura*, ed. by Arturo Carlo Quintavalle. Milan: Electa, 2007, 99-114.

Veronese, Ileana Renza. "L'opera letteraria di Gasparino Borro," in *Studi Storici dell'Ordine dei Servi di Maria Roma*, 20 (1970), 46-109.

Vicentini, Antonio M. *I Servi di Maria nei documenti e codici veneziani*. 2 vols. Vicenza: Officina Tipografica Vicentina, 1922.

Vicentini, Antonio M. *Santa Maria de' Servi in Venezia*. Treviglio: Tipografia Editrice Messaggi, 1920.

Voelkle, William. *The Stavelot Triptych. Mosan Art and the Legend of the True Cross*. New York: The Pierpont Morgan Library, 1980.

Walter, Christopher. *The Iconography of Constantine the Great, Emperor and Saint*. Leiden: Alexandros Press, 2006.

Walter, Wolfgang. *La Scultura Veneziana Gotica (1300-1460)*. 2. vols. Venice: Alfieri, 1976.

Wood, Jeryldene M. "Piero's *Legend of the True Cross* and the Friars of San Francesco," in *The Cambridge Companion to Piero della Francesca*, ed. by Jeryldene M. Wood. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002, 51-65.

Zorzi, Alvise. *Venezia scomparsa*, vols. II. Milan: Electa Editrice, 1972.