PAOLO VENEZIANO

Art & Devotion in 14th-Century Venice

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WITH
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In Venice, during the course of the fourteenth century, at least three generations of one family practiced the art of painting. The greatest of this dynasty of painters was Paolo (ca. 1295–ca. 1362), known today as Paolo Veneziano (Paul the Venetian). He ran the leading painters’ workshop in the city, which produced a diverse range of objects, including large-scale public works; small, intricate pieces for personal devotion; decorations for civic festivities; and designs for works of art in other media. Paolo’s fame extended far beyond the confines of Venice, with major commissions coming from cities along the shores of the Adriatic and throughout the Italian peninsula. His extant body of work reveals an artist who reached new heights in the art of painting in Venice through a profound engagement with the rich cultural tapestry of his native city. For this reason, even as our understanding of early fourteenth-century Venetian art comes into sharper focus, the historic claim for Paolo as the father of Venetian painting holds firm.

Venice in the Fourteenth Century

In the fourteenth century, Venice was one of Europe’s largest urban centers, with about one hundred thousand inhabitants. The city on the lagoon was the most important trading center of the Adriatic and the most influential mercantile port for trade with the eastern Mediterranean (fig. 1). Dominion over the eastern shores of the Adriatic (Istria and Dalmatia) had been secure since the late tenth century. Following Venice’s part in the conquest of Constantinople in 1204 during the Fourth Crusade, newly gained territories afforded an unbroken chain of ports across the Mediterranean to the Black Sea, an expansion so significant that the city’s elected ruler, the doge, acquired the honorific title of “Lord of a Quarter and a Half Quarter of the Roman Empire.” Venetian nobles were granted estates that yielded great profit through the production of grain, wine, and oil on the island of Crete, which was also an important stopover on trade routes to the Crusader States in the Holy Land. The Venetian colony in Constantinople was almost as wealthy and important a center as Venice itself.
From the twelfth century onward, the economic growth of the city-states of western Europe and the legacy of the crusades stimulated demand for luxury goods from the East, such as raw silk, finished silk fabrics, dyestuffs, and spices. Merchants from the East sought metals from mines in northern Europe and Flemish cloth made from English wool. With a protected trade status acquired through centuries of astute diplomacy, Venice was the principal unloading point in the Mediterranean trade network for goods arriving from the Middle East and Asia. Venice’s markets attracted merchants from all corners of Europe and the Near East. Marco Polo is the most famous figure in this network. Venice was also the center of regional trade in more mundane goods, such as raw materials for construction and foodstuffs. Wood and stone from Istria provided the foundation for Venice’s shipbuilding industry and architectural expansion. Simultaneously, the city gained increasing renown for the accomplishments of its craftsmen in woodwork, leather, ceramics, glass, metalwork, and paintings on panel.

The cultural heritage of Byzantium, the Italian mainland, and northern Europe all flourished in Venice. The city’s relationship with Byzantium is long and complex, from its early status as a vassal state to its assertion of equal status after the Fall of Constantinople in 1204. Venice’s leaders embraced the values and tastes of Europe’s great courts and seized upon these models in literature, art, and architecture. In this environment of thriving trade and cultural exchange, artistic, literary, and antiquarian pursuits burgeoned in the city on the lagoon.

The energetic young doge Andrea Dandolo (r. 1343–54) embodied Venice’s rich intellectual climate during the main years of Paolo Veneziano’s activity. The scion of an important noble family that had already produced three doges, Dandolo was himself a scholar. His career in government began in the post of Procurator of San Marco, the officials responsible for managing the endowment of the Basilica and the Doge’s Palace. In this role, Dandolo instituted legal reform by ordering a new compilation of Venetian statutes. He authored two historical chronicles, the *Chronica Brevis* and the *Chronica Extensa*, which became the definitive source for Venetian history until the nineteenth century. Letters to Dandolo from the poet Petrarch (1304–1374) praise his dedication to learning but also lament his tenacious pursuit of war with Genoa.

The religious landscape of fourteenth-century Venice was made up of a collective of governmental, episcopal, parish, and monastic interests, while the city’s spiritual identity was shaped, like its economy and politics, by its status as a nexus between East and West. The selection of St. Mark the Evangelist as the city’s patron saint was both an expression of spiritual destiny and a political choice. Its principal shrine, the Basilica of San Marco, as the Doge’s Palace chapel and the state church, was intimately bound up with Venice’s civic identity. The transferral of St. Mark’s remains to the city from Alexandria in the year 828 had marked the beginning of a centuries-long tradition of relic hoarding by the citizens of Venice. This activity had reached its climax with the brutal Sack of Constantinople, when many of Byzantium’s greatest treasures were forcibly removed by Venice and her allies. Consequently, Venice boasted the greatest concentration of “incorruptible bodies” in western Christendom, and the
associated cults were promoted at state level, as well as by the individual religious communities acting as custodians of the saintly remains.\textsuperscript{20}

The arrival of the new mendicant orders in Venice and other major centers on the Italian peninsula, during the thirteenth century, made the city’s existing web of religious entities all the more complex.\textsuperscript{21} The Dominicans and Franciscans, in particular, made their presence felt by erecting impressive basilicas in prominent locations within the urban fabric of Venice’s center. The appearance of both St. Dominic and St. Francis in the late thirteenth-century cycle of mosaics for the Basilica of San Marco is another testament to the acceptance of these new orders by the Venetian state, while the many bequests made to their orders by Venice’s wealthy citizens attest to their popularity among lay people.\textsuperscript{22} There appears to have been a community of Franciscans in Venice by 1225; and in 1234, they were given land on which to establish their friary.\textsuperscript{23} The community quickly outgrew whatever early edifice they had at this site; by the 1250s, construction had already begun on a second church.\textsuperscript{24} Such was the exponential growth of the community that no sooner had this church been built than plans were initiated for a third complex, the present one, Santa Maria Gloriosa dei Frari (fig. 2). The church’s construction began between 1323 and 1330 and continued well into the following century. The Dominican house of Santi Giovanni e Paolo, elided in the Venetian dialect to San Zanipolo, had been built during the second half of the thirteenth century but was demolished in 1333 to make way for a larger edifice that was not completed until a century later.

By the 1340s, when Paolo’s workshop reached the height of its renown, Venice had attained a level of prosperity that was perhaps unparalleled in its history.\textsuperscript{25} Nonetheless, the period was also beset with great calamities. The fifteenth-century historian and diarist Marino Sanudo (1466–1536) described Dandolo’s rule as a time in which “there was almost always war, plague, and famine.”\textsuperscript{26} The greatest calamity was, of course, the Black Death, the plague that devastated Venice, along with the greater part of Europe, in 1348. Three fifths of the population, estimated at forty-five
to fifty thousand people, perished. The consequences of the plague and the ongoing war with Genoa would outlast the young doge. Dandolo died in 1354, succumbing to ill health reportedly caused by the stress of his reign.

This was the Venice into which Paolo Veneziano was born, where he trained as a painter and where he achieved extraordinary success as the master of a celebrated workshop. Steeped in the vestiges of a complex history of conquest and expansion, it was a wealthy, cosmopolitan world where industry and creativity thrived, even as its citizens faced the threat of war and disease.

**Life and Career**

As with the great Venetian artist dynasties of the following century, painting for Paolo was a family business. His father was Martino, of whom we know nothing more than his first name and the fact that he was a painter. His elder brother, Marco, was also a painter, and it seems probable that Paolo took charge of the family workshop following Marco’s death or departure from Venice. Later, Paolo’s workshop included his sons Luca and Giovanni and probably a third son, Marco, and maybe even a fourth, Gregorio. Of the seven names that appear in the documentary record, Paolo is the only one definitively associated with a surviving body of work. Approximately thirty extant works are attributed to him, but only seven bear inscriptions. In two of these, the painter identified himself with the Latin name “Paulus de Veneciis.” On two other works, Paolo signed his own name, as well as those of one or both of his sons, Luca and Giovanni. Over the course of the last century, scholars have used this nucleus of signed works as the basis for establishing Paolo’s corpus.

Paolo is thought to have been born sometime during the final decade of the thirteenth century. His earliest signed work, from 1333, is a large-scale altarpiece for the Franciscan church of San Lorenzo in Vicenza, three panels of which are now housed in the city’s civic museum (fig. 3). This altarpiece is not the work of an immature or developing painter but of an accomplished and fully formed master. A number of other panels, which are not signed, have been posited as likely early works, among them, the wings of the Santa Chiara triptych in Trieste (see fig. 25), the two donor figures on the relief icon of San Donato (dated 1310), now in Venice’s Museo Diocesano, and the small scenes of the Life of the Virgin in Pesaro.

In 1335, a “master Marco” is recorded as living near the Frari, the seat of the Franciscan order. Paolo lived in the same district, though it is not clear whether they resided on the same premises or merely close to one another. In 1339, Doge Francesco Dandolo (r. 1329–39) was buried in the chapter house of this same friary. A lunette painting by Paolo Veneziano formed the centerpiece of the tomb design (fig. 4). A document from 1339 records the sale of property in Treviso that Paolo had received as part of the dowry of his wife, Caterina Baldoino. In addition to providing a historical record of his spouse, this document is also the only known source that states the name and profession of his father. Paolo is described as “Master Paolo the painter, son of the late Martino the painter.” The designation of “master,” a term used to describe his brother but not Paolo four years earlier, may indicate that
Paolo had taken over as head of the family workshop. In this same document, Paolo is described as living in the parish of San Luca, in Venice, the neighborhood with the city’s greatest concentration of painters’ workshops. The artist’s only known signature, aside from inscriptions on panel paintings, is in another notarial document, from 1341, which also locates the painter as a resident of the parish of San Luca.

The commission for the lunette painting to crown the doge’s tomb is the earliest indication of Paolo’s excellent reputation in Venice. His artistic ascent would continue through the 1340s. In 1342, Paolo (“ser Paulus pincor”) was provided with a year’s salary for making decorations for the Venetian state celebration, the festa delle Marie. The salary came at the behest of three patricians, who together held the administrative post of ufficiali allo estraordinario (special customs agents), whereby they were responsible for collecting customs duties, fines, and rent for state-owned galleys. Both the salary and the commission for this festival have been interpreted as evidence that by 1342 Paolo was the official painter of the Venetian Republic.

3 Paolo Veneziano, The Dormition of the Virgin, 1333. Tempera on panel, St. Francis 35 1/4 x 9 1/2 in. (89 x 23 cm), St. Anthony 35 1/2 x 9 1/2 in. (90 x 23 cm), Death of the Virgin, 30 1/4 x 44 3/4 in. (77 x 112 cm). Musei Civici di Vicenza (A 157)
Paolo Veneziano, Virgin and Child with Saints Francis and Elizabeth of Hungary, Presenting the Doge Francesco Dandolo and His Wife Elisabetta Contarini, 1339. Tempera on panel, 57 1/8 x 89 7/8 in. (145 x 233 cm). Church of Santa Maria Gloriosa dei Frari, Venice

4 High altar of the Basilica of San Marco
The Fourteen Saints is mentioned for the first time in the unpublished notes of Giuseppe Ranaldi (1790–1854), a local historian of San Severino. Writing in 1820, Ranaldi records his discovery of the polyptych in Santa Maria del Glorioso, a Dominican church on the outskirts of San Severino Marche. An 1868 guidebook to San Severino that includes a note lamenting the polyptych’s disappearance signals an interesting phase in its history. To save the polyptych from state seizure during the suppression of religious orders in 1861, a priest arranged for the altarpiece to be hidden in a peasant’s home, where it was used as a bedroom screen. From there, the local senator Carlo Luzi (1818–1899) appropriated it for his own collection. In 1895, legal action ultimately compelled him to surrender the work to the mayor of San Severino.

Passing through the region in 1838, the Prussian scholar Johannes Gaye (1804–1840) was the first to attribute the panels to the Venetian school rather than to the generally favored Allegretto Nuzi (ca. 1316–1373/74). Vittorio Emanuele Aleandri (1863–1927), the first custodian of the civic gallery, narrowed the attribution to Lorenzo Veneziano. Bernard Berenson was the first art historian to attribute the altarpiece to Paolo Veneziano, an attribution affirmed in 1930 by Evelyn Sandberg Vavalà.

The altarpiece comprises six panels joined in a unified structure by the frames affixed to their surface. The bottom register consists of four rectangular, upright panels, each featuring two saints and measuring roughly 26 by 45 1/2 inches (67 x 115 cm). From left to right, the saints are Catherine of Alexandria, the Archangel Michael, John the Baptist, Peter the Apostle, Paul, Philip, Dominic, and Ursula, with two attendants from her company of eleven thousand virgins. The six half-length saints of the upper register are arranged in groups of three on two panels, measuring 40 9/16 by 17 5/8 inches (103 x 44 cm). They are, from left to right, Severinus, Venantius, Peter Martyr, Thomas Aquinas, Thomas the Apostle, and Bartholomew. The upper register features sharply pointed gables that add just more than 6 inches (15 cm) to the height of the altarpiece. With the exception of a few pieces, the framing elements are original. Spiral columns and triforate arches limned with a frieze of acanthus leaves enclose each saint. Shell lunettes crown the full-length saints. Triangular recesses in the gables lead into delicate trefoils that are carved through to the back of the framework, allowing light to pass through.

**Provenance**

Earliest mention in the Dominican church of Santa Maria del Glorioso, San Severino Marche, 1820; hidden in the home of a tenant of the Dominican order known as Bisonni (dates unknown), about 1861; appropriated by Marchese Carlo Luzi (1818–1899), 1863–95; restituted to the Pinacoteca Comunale of San Severino Marche, 1895.

**Inscriptions**

Top register, left to right: S. SEVERINUS, S. VENANCIIUS, S. PETRUS M., S. THOMAS DI AQUINO, S. THOMAS APL, S. BARTHOLOMEIUS

Bottom register, left to right: S. CHATERINA, S. MICHAEL, S. JONES BP, S. PETRUS, S. PAULUS, S. PHILIPUS, S. DOMINICUS, S. URSULA

**Exhibition History**

Ancona 1950, no. 2; Rimini 2002, no. 31.

**Literature**

Ranaldi 1820, 88–89; Ranaldi 1837 (as Allegretto Nuzi); Gentili 1838, 85 (as Allegretto Nuzi); Servanzio Collio 1851 (as Venetian school); Servanzio Collio 1851, 250–52 (as Allegretto Nuzi); Valenti 1868, 123–24, 170 (as Allegretto Nuzi); Aleandri 1889, 100; Aleandri 1897, 116 (as Lorenzo Veneziano); Berenson 1905, 350 (as Paolo Veneziano and workshop); Bernardi 1906, 77 (as Lorenzo Veneziano); Testi 1909–15, 1: 229 (as Lorenzo Veneziano); Van Marle 1924, 4: 41 (as Lorenzo Veneziano); Serra 1929, 113 (as Lorenzo Veneziano); Ancona 1950, 11 (as Lorenzo Veneziano); Sandberg Vavalà 1930, 165–77; Fiocco 1931, 878; Pallucchini 1950, 8–10.13–16; Bologna 1951, 24; Di Carpegna 1951, 171; Berenson 1957, 128; Lazareff 1954, 89 (as Paolo Veneziano and workshop); Mariacher 1957, 124; Pallucchini 1964, 51–53; Pallucchini 1966, 4; Cipriani 1969, 22; Muraro 1970, 65, 120–21; Macerata 1971, 65–67, no. 12; Kiel 1977, 105–8; Marchi 2000, 15–18; Rimini 2002, 166–67, no. 31; Pedrocchi 2003, 202–3, no. 29; Donnini 2004, 67–69, no. 22; Costanzi 2005, 193; Guarnieri 2006, 22, 35, 82, 203; Boskovits 2009b, 161–62; Toniolo and Valenzano 2010, 139; Minardi 2012, 316–32; Valenti 2014, 42; De Marchi 2014, 16–18, 21; Salvador 2014, 117–19; Paciaroni 2018.
PAOLO AND GIOVANNI VENEZIANO

The Coronation of the Virgin, 1358

Tempera on panel, 43 1/4 x 27 in. (109.9 x 68.6 cm)
The Frick Collection, New York (1930.1.124)

At a public lecture in 1868, the German dealer Joseph Maillinger stated that a panel in his possession depicting the Coronation of the Virgin had come from a chapel near Ravenna that had been used for storing coal. The next year, Maillinger lent the panel to Ausstellung von Gemälden älter Meister, an exhibition in Munich of Old Master paintings from regional private collections. The art historians Joseph Archer Crowe and Giovanni Battista Cavalcaselle visited the exhibition and included the panel and signature inscription in their landmark publication Storia della Pittura in Italia. In 1873, the panel entered the Hohenzollern Collection (Fürstlich Hohenzollernsche Sammlungen zu Sigmaringen). After the sale of that collection in 1927, the panel was purchased by The Frick Collection from M. Knoedler & Co.

In the panel, Paolo and Giovanni Veneziano represent Christ crowning the Virgin Mary as Queen of Heaven, the conclusion of the apocryphal narrative of her life. A choir of sixteen angels plays contemporary instruments in celebration: from left to right, a frame drum, a straight trumpet, a mandora (mandola), a bladder-pipe, a vielle (viola), a psaltery, a lute, a shawm, another psaltery, another straight trumpet, and a second shawm. The attributes of the moon and sun positioned at the feet of the Virgin and Christ draw on traditions of biblical symbolism to characterize these holy figures.

Bernard of Clairvaux (1090–1153) interpreted the Song of Songs as an allegory for the Virgin’s relationship to Christ. The woman praised in the Song of Songs is described as “fair as the moon.” Similarly, Bonaventure (1221–1274) understood the vision of the woman “clothed with the sun, and with the moon under her feet” in the book of Revelation to be a reference to the Virgin Mary. The first five verses of the Gospel of John culminate in the description of Christ as the light that shines in darkness, an image naturally expressed by the symbol of the sun.

The only works in Paolo Veneziano’s oeuvre with a signature inscription that credits family members are the Frick panel and the Pala Feriale. Dated to 1345, the Pala Feriale mentions Giovanni and another son, Luca. The Frick panel is the last of Paolo Veneziano’s signed and dated works. Details such as the naturalistic expressions of the angel choir and the Gothic architecture of the throne have been seen as evidence of Giovanni’s contribution to the painting, suggesting that the younger painter was more open to European influences, while Paolo is presumed to have relied more on Byzantine styles.

PROVENANCE
Earliest mention in a chapel used for storage near Ravenna; Count Pietro (?) Bacinetti (dates unknown); Joseph Maillinger (1831–1884), Munich, by 1867; bought by the painter Franz Reichardt (1825–1887), 1873; bought from Franz Reichardt by Prince Karl Anton von Hohenzollern-Sigmaringen (1811–1885), 1873; by descent to Prince Leopold of Hohenzollern-Sigmaringen (1835–1905); by descent to Prince Wilhelm von Hohenzollern-Sigmaringen (1864–1927); A. S. Drey, Munich, by 1929; M. Knoedler and Co., 1929; The Frick Collection, New York, 1930.

INSCRIPTIONS
Along base of throne: REGINA COELI LE / TARE ALE / LVIA. QUEN. MERVISTI CHRIST / TVM PORTARE ALELVIA [Queen of Heaven, rejoice, alleluia (for) which you merited to bear Christ, alleluia]

LITERATURE