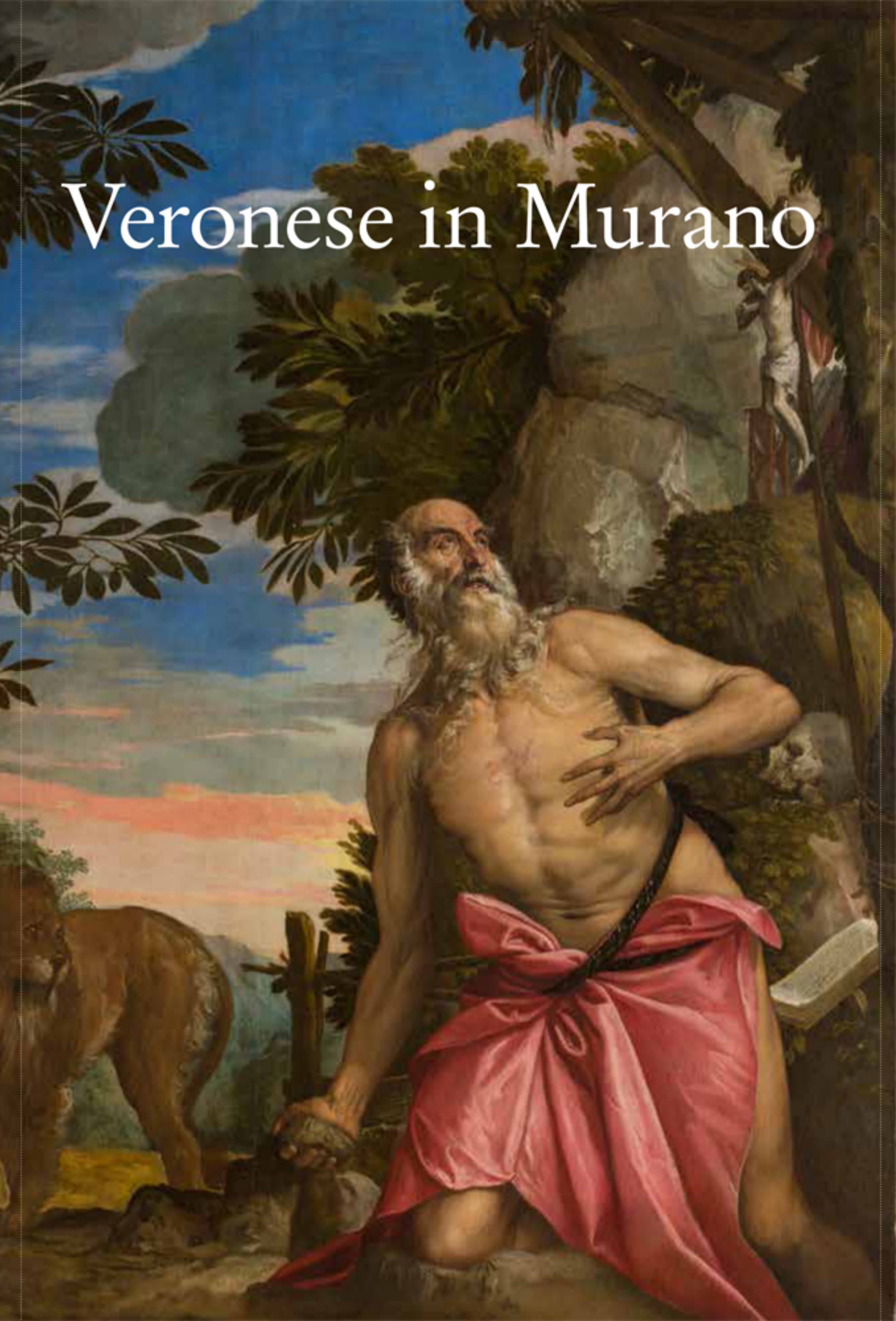


Veronese in Murano



Veronese in Murano

Two Venetian Renaissance Masterpieces Restored

Xavier F. Salomon

with Maichol Clemente and Claudia Vittori

THE FRICK COLLECTION

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Contents

Director's Foreword 6

Preface 8

Sponsor's Statement 10

Lender's Statement 11

Acknowledgments 12

Francesco degli Arbori's Chapel in Murano and Its Decoration by Paolo Veronese

Xavier F. Salomon

15

Restoring and Rediscovering Color

Claudia Vittori

61

Two Late Baroque Venetian Frames: A First Encounter

Maichol Clemente

71

Exhibited Works 77

Bibliography 82

Appendix 87

Index 91

Photograph Credits 96



FIG. 1. *Top*, Jacopo de'Barbari, *Murano* (detail of his *Map of Venice*), 1498–1500. Woodcut on paper, $52\frac{3}{4} \times 110\frac{1}{2}$ in. (134×280.8 cm). The British Museum, London. *Bottom*, Map of Murano showing the locations of Santa Maria degli Angeli, San Pietro Martire, Santo Stefano (demolished between 1813 and 1835), and Palazzo Trevisan

Francesco degli Arbori's Chapel in Murano and Its Decoration by Paolo Veronese

Xavier F. Salomon

Half a mile northeast of Venice, in the lagoon between the city and the mainland, lies the island of Murano (fig. 1).¹ While always loosely dependent on Venice, Murano was governed after 1272 by a magistrate known as a *podestà*, and although its population was linked to Venice, the island functioned independently for most of its history. Here, especially after the fifteenth century, patrician families built retreats and gardens where they could delight in their time away from the city. At the same time that these pleasurable residences were being constructed and decorated, a glass industry, on the island since at least the tenth century, flourished, making it the preeminent location for glass production in the early modern era. A site of both aristocratic leisure and glassmaking furnaces, Murano was an extraordinary place.

Murano is bisected by a large canal known as the Canale di Santo Stefano, named for one of the island's principal churches (demolished between 1813 and 1835). In June 1187, the noblewoman Ginevra Gradenigo donated family land, on the northwestern edge of the Canale di Santo Stefano, to a group of Augustinian nuns and on that site established the church of Santa Maria degli Angeli.² In the later Middle Ages, the church, with its adjacent monastery, became one of the most important of Murano's many religious institutions. In the late fifteenth century, the church was rebuilt and substantially enlarged, and the new church of Santa Maria degli Angeli was consecrated in May 1529 (fig. 2). Its importance is attested to by the burial there, in 1578, of Doge Sebastiano



FIG. 2. Santa Maria degli Angeli, Murano

Venier—one of the victorious leaders of the Christian navy against the Turks at the Battle of Lepanto—in front of the main altar. Between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries, art patronage at Santa Maria degli Angeli flourished, and paintings by Pordenone (the high altar with the *Annunciation*), Giuseppe Porta Salviati, Pietro Damini, and Nicolò Rondinelli, as well as sculptures by Orazio and Angelo Marinali, were created for the Augustinian nuns. It was next to this significant church that a small chapel was built in the mid-sixteenth century, and it was there that a series of five paintings by Paolo Veronese were preserved.

Francesco degli Arbori and His Chapel

Little is known about Francesco degli Arbori, the priest of Santo Stefano who served as the chaplain to the nuns of Santa Maria degli Angeli, though a deed of gift from him to the nuns at Santa Maria degli Angeli, signed on November 10, 1566, provides some history.³ In the document,

the priest, who describes himself as chaplain of the nuns (“capellano al presente delle Reverende madre Monache delli anzoli”), states that the nuns gave him permission to use, free of charge, a plot of land within their cemetery, adjoining the church. There, for his own personal devotion (“per mia devotione”), he intended to build a chapel dedicated to St. Jerome. The 1566 deed transferred ownership of the planned chapel, and everything in it, to the nuns, offering the gift—“made with my own labor” (“fatta delle mie fatiche et non d’altri”)—in honor of God, the Virgin Mary, and saints Jerome and Nicholas. Degli Arbori stipulated that his family was to have no jurisdiction whatsoever over the chapel and also promised that during his lifetime the monastery would not be responsible for any of the chapel’s expenses. He asked that no one be buried in the chapel and expressed his wish that the nuns allow him to be buried near the chapel, in the cemetery (“nel suo cimiterio appresso la sudetta cappella”). The nuns’ confessor, Domenico Surian, and their farmer, Zuan Michiel Beffa, acted as witnesses to the signing of the deed.

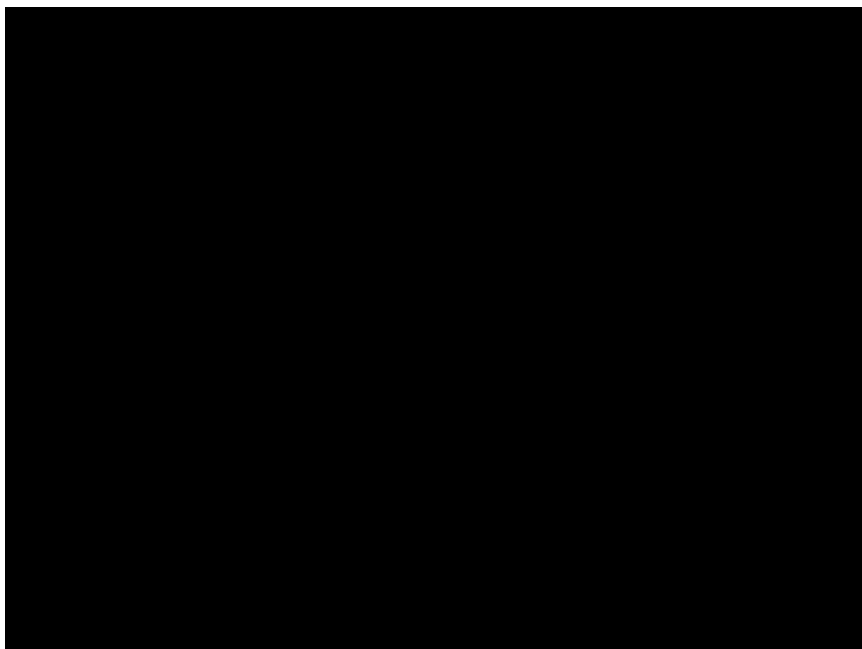


FIG. 3. Domenico Gallo, Map of church and monastery of Santa Maria degli Angeli, Murano, September 20, 1569. Archivio di Stato, Venice



FIG. 4. Site of Francesco degli Arbori's destroyed chapel, Santa Maria degli Angeli, Murano

The plot of land where Degli Arbori's chapel was built, presumably between the end of 1566 and 1567, to the side of the church, is visible in a number of maps of Santa Maria degli Angeli (fig. 3).⁴ The church was, and still is, surrounded by land on two sides. This area served as a public square in front of the building and as a cemetery for the nuns to the side. To the left of the church was the large area occupied by the nuns' monastery. The interior of the church was divided into two main areas, one used for the nuns' choir, toward the facade, and one for public worship, closer to the high altar. Because of this, the public entrance to the church was not from the main facade, as one would expect, but instead from the middle of the right wall of the building.⁵ Across, more or less, from the right transept was Degli Arbori's freestanding chapel, a small structure within the cemetery. By November 1566, the construction of the chapel and its decoration must have been underway. An inscription on the facade of the chapel, on one side of the door, recorded its patron and

its foundation on October 6, 1566.⁶ Another inscription, on the opposite side of the door, documented the date of its consecration, by Giovanni Dolfin, Bishop of Torcello, on February 5, 1568.⁷ The chapel was demolished in 1830, but the site on which it once stood, near Santa Maria degli Angeli, remains untouched (fig. 4).

No evidence of the architectural structure of Degli Arbori's chapel survives, but Abbot Vincenzo Zanetti, in his book on Santa Maria degli Angeli of 1863, describes the structure in some detail.⁸ Born in 1824, Zanetti would have been too young to remember the chapel; he must have consulted sources and talked to people who recalled it. According to Zanetti, its facade had a single door, over which was inscribed the dedication to St. Jerome (SACRVM DIVI HIERONIMI). Until now, it had not been noticed that the small stone door, surmounted by a triangular pediment supported by two corbels, that now leads from the exterior right wall of Santa Maria degli Angeli to an interior staircase (close to

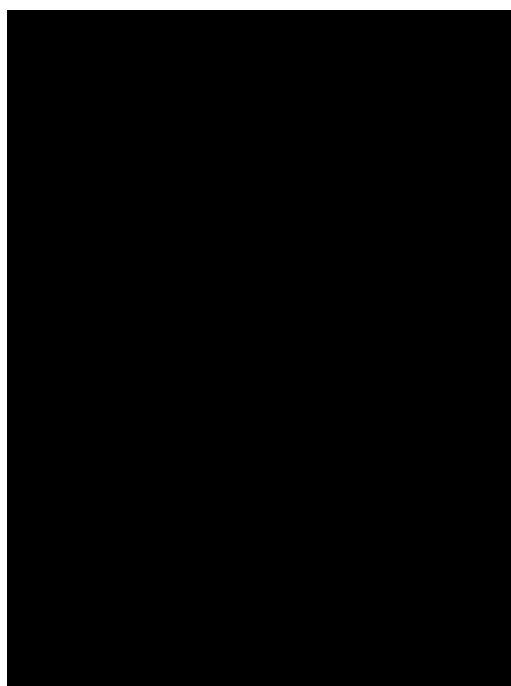


FIG. 5. Original door of Francesco degli Arbori's destroyed chapel, Santa Maria degli Angeli, Murano

the site where the main door of the church once stood) bears the inscription reported by Zanetti (fig. 5). When the chapel was demolished, the door must have been preserved and repurposed. Below the inscription is a carved rosette. Saved in 1830 and reused, the door is evidently the only architectural relic of Degli Arbori's chapel.⁹

On March 6, 1579, Degli Arbori signed his will, which he had written in his room in an attic near the church of Santo Stefano ("in confinio Sancti Stephani . . . in una camera in sollaro").¹⁰ He started with instructions for his funeral, stipulating that eight masses be celebrated for his soul in his chapel, dedicated to St. Jerome, and that he be buried just outside the door of the building ("nella mia archa che è per mezzo la porta della chiesiola predetta"). His body was to be brought to the chapel, in a simple manner, without pomp, with his coffin covered by a rug and accompanied by two tapers ("in un tapedo con doi torceti"). The candles were to be paid for by the chapter of Santo Stefano, not by the nuns of Santa Maria degli Angeli. Degli Arbori asked that his body be accompanied in procession to the chapel by the chapter of Santo Stefano, by the nuns' confessor (presumably Domenico Surian, who witnessed the 1566 document) and others associated with Santa Maria degli Angeli. He left money for them all, including one ducat each for the undertakers who were to bury him. He listed gifts to various family members and friends. To his nephew, Ludovico, a friar in the order of the Carità, he left his breviary, and to Ludovico and another nephew, Niccolò, who was a priest at San Silvestro, went all his books—which he said were not worth much. Money was left to both of his nephews and to the other children of his brother Piero and his sister Monica, including his niece Marina, who had married the notary Zuanne Crielli.¹¹ He also left twenty-five ducats for the dowry of one of his nieces, daughter of his deceased brother Piero, "whose name I do not remember" ("della qual hora non mi ricordo il nome"). Money—one hundred ducats—was also left to the priests of Santo Stefano, with the stipulation that every year, on the Sunday after Easter, for all eternity, they celebrate a mass for his soul in his chapel. Degli Arbori had 575 ducats invested in bonds, which he left to the nuns of Santa Maria degli Angeli, with the condition that two of them—Giustina Morosini and Eufrasia Tiepolo—invest the funds for

the maintenance of his chapel. The nuns had to promise that every year, for all eternity, masses would be celebrated on the feast days of St. Jerome (September 30), St. Nicholas (December 6), and St. Agatha (February 5). With the remaining money from the investments, candles and oil for the lamps in the chapel were to be acquired, and money would also have to be spent on dowries for young girls and charity for poor old men (“sii maridatte fie donzelle de honesta vita et fatta ellemosina a poveri vechij despossenti”). Degli Arbori also asked that both nuns nominate nuns to replace them when they died, so that two nuns of the monastery would always oversee the chapel and its funds. The priest nominated his niece Andriana, wife of Giacomo Gardello, who during his lifetime had been particularly close to him, as his universal heir.

A few months later, on September 7, 1579, Francesco degli Arbori died.¹² As he had wished, he was buried outside his chapel, under an inscribed stone slab.¹³ His legacy to Santa Maria degli Angeli, however, was contested, and Francesco’s nephews and nieces, Niccolò, Marina, and Andriana, sued Giustina Morosini and Eufrasia Tiepolo, the two nuns in charge of their uncle’s bequest to Santa Maria degli Angeli, over the dowry of their mother Monica, Francesco’s sister. The lawsuit continued for years.¹⁴

Paolo Veronese’s Paintings for Francesco degli Arbori

Francesco degli Arbori’s chapel was no doubt a modest space, with no inscriptions in its interior and a single altar facing the main door. Degli Arbori was not rich, but he was devoted to his chapel and must have spent a substantial amount of his income to build and decorate it. For the paintings inside the chapel, he chose Paolo Caliari (1528–1588), known as Veronese after his birthplace. In the mid-1560s, Veronese was at the height of his career in Venice, working for the state, aristocratic families, and religious institutions in the city. Having moved permanently from Verona to Venice in 1555, he had already painted works for prominent public locations, such as rooms in the Doge’s Palace and the ceiling of the Biblioteca Marciana.¹⁵ In the early 1560s, he had decorated the Palladian villa of Marcantonio and Daniele Barbaro in Maser and completed large altarpieces for San Francesco della Vigna, San Sebastiano,



FIG. 6. Paolo Veronese, *Wisdom and Strength*, ca. 1565.
Oil on canvas, 84½ × 65¾ in. (214.6 × 167 cm). The Frick Collection, New York

and San Zaccaria in Venice.¹⁶ In about 1565, he was in the midst of painting some of the most monumental works of his career: in 1562–63, he had painted the massive *Marriage Feast at Cana* for the refectory of San Giorgio Maggiore (now in the Musée du Louvre, Paris) and was at work on the altarpiece of the *Martyrdom of St. George* for San Giorgio in Braida in Verona (ca. 1565); the large lateral paintings in the apse of San Sebastiano in Venice, *St. Sebastian Exhorting Mark and Marcellinus to Their Martyrdom* and the *Martyrdom of St. Sebastian* (ca. 1565); and the *Family of Darius before Alexander* (ca. 1565–67) for Francesco Pisani's palace at Montagnana (now in the National Gallery, London). In these same years, he was painting the two large allegorical canvases—the *Choice between Virtue and Vice* and *Wisdom and Strength* (fig. 6)—that were on the market (and probably reached Vienna) by 1567 and are now in The Frick Collection.¹⁷ How Degli Arbori got to know such a prominent—and high-priced—painter and his reason for choosing him to decorate his chapel remain unknown. During the previous decade, about 1555, Veronese had decorated with frescoes two of the main rooms of the magnificent palace of Camillo Trevisan in Murano, on the eastern side of the island, and Degli Arbori may have known about these works.¹⁸

A project similar to Degli Arbori's chapel was a small chapel, dedicated to St. John the Baptist, built in the early 1560s by Giovanni Stravanzino and his father Bartolomeo, next to the church of the Cappuccini on the Giudecca.¹⁹ Dedicated in 1561, the freestanding chapel was decorated with a single altarpiece by Veronese, the *Baptism of Christ* (fig. 7), and included portraits of both patrons. When the chapel was demolished later in the sixteenth century to make space for the building of the church of Il Redentore, the small altarpiece was saved and displayed in the sacristy of the new church. Stravanzino's chapel may have provided one of the models for Degli Arbori's creation of the chapel of St. Jerome.

In both his deed of donation and his will, Degli Arbori writes about his devotion to St. Jerome. In the two documents, he also lists St. Nicholas, and in his will, St. Agatha. It is understandable that Giovanni Stravanzino would dedicate his chapel to St. John the Baptist, his name saint, and commission from Veronese an altarpiece depicting one of the key episodes in the saint's life. Why, however, Francesco