

THESIS ABSTRACT

“THE PICTURE OF POVERTY: CHARITABLE AND ARTISTIC PATRONAGE IN RENAISSANCE VENICE”

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The Picture of Poverty: Charitable and Artistic Patronage in Renaissance Venice explores the way in which the representation of the doge took shape through the civic and religious ceremony, art, and architecture patronized by the Doge Cristoforo Moro (r 1462–71). By examining a broad range of material related to ducal representation as it took shape under Doge Moro, the thesis traces the transformations in the intense devotion of Republican Venice to its own representation during a decade of geopolitical upheaval and instability. A controversial politician and a failed crusader, Moro was responsible for several bold commissions in Venice’s political, religious, and economic centre, the Piazza San Marco. He completed a monumental passageway into the Ducal Palace and, after declaring war on the Ottomans, dedicated altars in the ducal basilica of San Marco, prompting an alarmed Senate to restrict individual signs of display in the basilica as a transgression of Republican decorum.

Yet, Moro also became the chief sponsor of San Giobbe, a hospice with a church in one of the poorer neighbourhoods of the *sestiere* of Cannaregio in fifteenth-century Venice, far removed—by Venetian standards—from sites of ducal power. Despite the narrative of poverty associated with the church and hospice of San Giobbe, both enjoyed major financial and territorial bequests from Moro as doge. During a twenty year period that began in the 1450s, before he was elected to the dogate, and ended with his death in 1471, Moro donated land to the hospice and the church, oversaw several design interventions at the church, and became a member of several of the devotional confraternities in residence at the church. Moro may have regarded the poor church of San Giobbe as a *tabula rasa* where he could entwine the spiritual ambitions of the Observant Franciscan church with his identity as doge while the basilica of San Marco became a sign of contested authority between the government and the doge.

The thesis reassesses the history of San Giobbe through the lens of the competing branches of authority at the site: Doge Moro, the Observant Franciscan friars, the hospice administrators, and the members of the various confraternities that held legal rights, or *jus patronatus*, over an altar in the church or paid rent for meeting rooms on its property. Soon after San Giobbe was constructed, contemporary historians cleared up the messy chronology of the church by assigning the impetus for its construction to Moro when he became doge. Historians such as Francesco Sansovino (1521–86) claimed

that Moro constructed San Giobbe as a votive to his personal saint protector, Bernardino of Siena, the former Vicar-General of the Observant Franciscan order, who allegedly predicted Moro's election to the dogate when the two met in Padua in the early 1440s while Bernardino conducted a series of Lenten sermons there.¹

The thesis highlights Moro's participation in the construction of the church after the canonization of Bernardino (1450) primarily through the *scuola piccola* dedicated to the newly minted saint. Most records of San Giobbe state that the confraternity was established on the day of Bernardino's canonization and feast day, 20 May 1450.² Because the Observant church of San Francesco della Vigna in Venice also hosted a confraternity dedicated to Bernardino, the early initiation date of the San Giobbe counterpart gave it seniority and greater authenticity.³ The Sienese saint was added to the title of San Giobbe on 10 May 1452 by the Council of Ten, which allowed the *scuola* of Santa Maria della Misericordia to visit the church of San Giobbe to celebrate the feast day of Bernardino at what was emerging as the principal location of his cult. In 1453, the Council of Ten revoked all rights of any church but San Francesco della Vigna to host the confraternity of San Bernardino, a conflict that by the following year had already faded from recorded documentary history. Given the presence of yet a third confraternity dedicated to Bernardino, this time at the Church of the Frari in Venice and the papal indulgences granted to each of the three confraternities in the late 1450s, the bans against San Giobbe had, most likely, been revoked.⁴

Though the confraternity of St. Bernardino at San Giobbe was infamously *malissimo governate* for several years after Moro's death, during his rule, it was the most powerful confraternity at the church.⁵ Moro left money

¹ Corner, *Ecclesiae Venetae Antiquis Monumentis*, 6:180. In some accounts of the meeting, reconstructions of the prediction add a reply by Moro, "Se io saro Dose, e voi sarete Santo." Bernardo Bembo, *Gratulatio ad Christophourum Maurum*. Bembo said that after he was declared doge, Moro "crescete piu la fede et devotione in detto San Bernardino." Sansovino, *Venetia città nobilissima*, 56.

² ASV, Scuole Piccole, Busta 260; ASV, San Giobbe Busta, 5, xlvi, fol. 64r.

³ ASV, San Giobbe, Busta 4, fol. 2r. "E fu comenzado questa benedeta scuola correndo gl'anni del Sig. 1450. Adi 20 di Maggio in la Giesia de Misier S. Giobbe. In la qual giesia si e fabricando una capella ad honor de M. S. Bernardino confessor nostro special avvocato della devotion nostra, la qual capella fece edificar il N. H. missier Cristoforo Moro Procu. De M. S. Marco devoto del Beato San Bernardino." ASV, San Giobbe, Busta 5, proc. XLVI, fol. 64r, contains a copy of the *mariegola* beginning 20 May 1450. The confraternity's house is described as adjacent to the church in what is now the campo San Giobbe, "di varda in faza el porte grandio di legno di S. Job."

⁴ Pope Callixtus III granted indulgences in 1455 and the Patriarch of Venice in 1457 for contributions to the *scuola* of San Bernardino in the Frari. *Bullarium Franciscanum*, 1929–90, Vol. II, n. 1359, 1607. Papal indulgences were granted on 1 February 1455 and 2 September 1455 to those who visited and donated to the confraternity at San Giobbe.

⁵ ASV, Provedditore di Comun, Reg. O, fol. 133r–v. Contains the *Mariegola* of the *scuola* of San Bernardino.

on his death to all the confraternities of which he was a member, but he left the confraternity of Bernardino twenty ducats as opposed to the five or ten ducats he left his other confraternities.⁶ Based on the special privilege conferred to the confraternity of Bernardino, the thesis argues that they were granted their own space in the right transept of the church before the confraternity's permanent *scuola* was recorded in 1504.⁷

The early function of the chapel has been a point of debate in the scholarly literature, but the *scuola* of Bernardino likely inserted the medallions that bind together the ribs at the centre of the pointed vaults in the chapel, each containing the IHS monogram used by Bernardino during his sermons. In the histories for the confraternity there is a note that reads, "This blessed *scuola* began in the year of our Lord 20 May 1450 in the church of San Giobbe. In that church, a chapel in honour of St. Bernardino our special confessor and advocate of devotion was built. The chapel was made by Cristoforo Moro Procurator of San Marco and devotee of San Bernardino."⁸

If the histories of the confraternity are to be trusted, one of the doge's first acts was to begin the process of dedicating the high altar of San Giobbe to St. Bernardino.⁹ By the 1460s, the other confraternities at San Giobbe needed to petition the confraternity of St. Bernardino to say high mass at the high altar in the church. In 1470, the doge made Bernardino one of the exclusive saint protectors of the Republic along with St. Mark the Evangelists and St. Theodore. By elevating Bernardino's cult and status in Venice, Moro laboured to align the city's history with his own personal narrative, conferring weight to Bernardino's prediction of his election as doge. At the altar, Moro would receive the continued intervention of his patron saint, Bernardino, in divine negotiations for the salvation of his soul through the prayers recited on the anniversary of his death, capitalizing on the axis between the altar and the tomb that held his body so as to gain spiritual favours from the rituals and prayers recited there.

The next chapter of the dissertation offers a reevaluation of the San Giobbe Altarpiece in light of the confraternities in residence at the church. It addresses the two major art historical questions relating to its chronology and patronage, but the chapter focuses on the function of the altar in the nave.

⁶ ASV, Testamenti, Not. Tomei, Busta 27, no. 2394. "Lasso a le schole in le qual io son s. Iopo s. Francesco ducati 5 per una de 5, Antonio da Padua xe ai fine minori ... S. Marie de Valverde, s. Chrostofallo, ducati 10, e per s. Bernardino ducati 20."

⁷ *Iconografia*, 1821. The map of the parish shows that the *scuole* of the Barcajuoli da Mestre and of the Varrotteri, or leatherworkers were also located in the campo, perpendicularly situated in relation to the facade.

⁸ ASV, San Giobbe, Busta 4, fol. 2r. "E fu comenzado questa benedeta scuola correndo gl'anni del Sig. 1450. Adi 20 di Maggio in la Giesia de Misier S. Giobbe. In la qual giesia si e fabricando una capella ad honor de M. S. Bernardino confessor nostro special advocato della devotion nostra, la qual capella fece edificar il N. H. missier Christoforo Moro Procu. De M. S. Marco devoto del Beato San Bernardino."

⁹ ASV, Scuole Piccole, Busta 260.

Rona Goffen assigned ownership of the San Giobbe Altarpiece to the devotional confraternity of St. Job based on one of the only documents associated with the painting, a 1753 inventory of property belonging to the confraternity, which listed “an altarpiece with its saints.”¹⁰ There is no other known painting that would fit the inventory description.¹¹ The obligation of the *scuola* of San Giobbe to recite mass at their altar on the feast days of three saints depicted in the painting—Dominic, Francis, and Job—corroborates Goffen’s attribution of ownership to the confraternity.¹²

However, she also identifies the commission by the *scuola* of San Giobbe as a rejection of Doge Moro’s clout over the high altar chapel of the church. Regardless of his posthumous reputation, Moro’s power at the church may have made a spatial confrontation to his memory difficult. Before his death, the doge ordered the executioners of his will to find appropriate replacements to serve as his advocates in perpetuity.¹³ These substitutes continued to protect the doge’s interests at the church at least through the seventeenth century when members of the Priuli family campaigned to have a family member buried alongside Moro under the high altar chapel.¹⁴ More importantly, Doge Moro was a member of the confraternity devoted to Job; in his testament, he made a donation to the *scuola* and granted it the privilege of participating in his funeral exequies. The *scuola* had a mass recited for the doge’s patron saint, Bernardino of Siena, on his feast day at their altar in the nave, likely to acknowledge the patronage of a prominent member of the community, while Bernardino was depicted on the bishop’s cope in the San Giobbe Altarpiece.¹⁵

Moro died in 1471, and there is no particular reference to him in the San Giobbe Altarpiece, but given his relationship to the confraternity, the Altarpiece probably celebrated the doge as a member of the confraternity of San Giobbe and as the most prominent patron of the church. Many scholars have doubted that a devotional confraternity associated with the ideals of absolute poverty could have played such a vital role in the creation of such a large altarpiece, but the evidence detailing the doge’s contributions to the confraternity suggests the opposite: that family members or allies of Doge Moro,

¹⁰ ASV, Scuole Piccole, Busta 375, *Libro di avensari della scolla di San Giobbe l'anno 1753*, 25 April.

¹¹ Heinneman, *Giovanni Bellini*. Delaney, “The Iconography of Giovanni Bellini’s Sacred Allegory,” 331; Goffen, *Giovanni Bellini*, 1989, 114–6.

¹² ASV, Provedditore del Comun, Reg. N, 133. The confraternity records were compiled in the seventeenth century based on policies that dated to the beginning of the fifteenth century.

¹³ BMC, Codice Cicogna 3115 /12, unnumb. fol.. “Item voio et ordeno che cadauno de mie commessieri posti ala sua morte substituir uno commissiar e per el simel substituir de tempo in tempo imperpetuo possi substituir.”

¹⁴ ASV, Provedditore del Comun, Reg. O, fol. 131v. In 1585, Daniele Priuli’s burial request would have necessitated the creation of a new high altar. “usque ad limbella sepulcrum Chori per longitudinem, et per latitudinem over ut ipse loco reperitur includendo dictum altare maius.

¹⁵ BMC, Codice Cicogna 3115 /12. “Lasso a le schole in le qual io son s. Iopo s. Francesco ducati 5 per una de 5, Antonio da Padua [...] S. Marie de Valverde, s. Chrostofallo, ducati 10, e per s. Bernardino ducati 20.” ASV, Provedditore del Comun, Reg. N, 133v.

perhaps even the doge himself, commissioned the altarpiece to celebrate his relationship to the confraternity.

In discussing Moro's work at San Giobbe, the thesis frames its exploration of the doge's patronage with an evaluation of the visual components that mark the beginning and the end of a doge's rule: the manuscripts formalizing the doge's oath of office, the *Promissione* and his funerary monument. On assuming office, the doge was obligated to provide a formal document that was often illustrated with a votive image of the doge in supplication before the Madonna and Child. The restrictions governing the rule of the doge were set out in the document, but the votive image provided an opportunity for the doge to situate himself as the pivot in a spiritual and political hierarchy.

Because the doges served until their deaths, many were commemorated by large wall monuments that glossed over the cadences of the doge's individual biography to glorify his position as the figurehead of the Republic.¹⁶ In stark contrast to the elaborate figurative monuments of most doges, Doge Moro requested burial under a slab before the high altar of the church of San Giobbe. The thesis examines the slab as a counter monument, demanding the interaction of the worshipper, and accommodating suffrages for the dead, but it also evaluates the doge's break in burial convention in the context of the immense political, economic, and health problems that troubled Venice under Moro. While assessing Moro's burial slab as an uncharacteristic expression of ducal humiliation in Venice, the thesis also argues that Moro converted the entire architectural ambient of the high altar chapel into his burial monument. In his testament of 1470, Moro offered the enormous donation of 10,000 ducats for the enlargement of the church and the completion of the high altar chapel according to "orders given."¹⁷ The placement of the doge's coat-of-arms at the entrance of the high altar chapel provides tangible evidence of his patronage, and, in accordance with his wishes, Moro's burial slab lay directly in front of the high altar. By appraising Moro's complicated political persona and diverse acts of patronage in the church and at the confraternity of San Giobbe, the thesis contributes to the larger project of tracing the rhetorical strategies that informed the construction not only of a doge's image, but also Venice's image as a divinely ordained republic.

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¹⁶ Pincus, *The Tombs of the Doges of Venice*, 36.

¹⁷ BMC, Codice Cicogna 3115 /12.

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