

Marco Boschini, Matteo Ponzone, and the Altar of the Scuola di San Giorgio degli Schiavoni in Venice

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Summary: *In the first decades of the seventeenth century the altar of the Scuola di San Giorgio e Trifone (also known as the Scuola di San Giorgio degli Schiavoni), at the time situated in the Venetian church of San Giovanni del Tempio, was adorned by an altarpiece by Matteo Ponzone (today in the church of Madonna dell'Orto), mentioned in 1664 by Marco Boschini as being "di Casa Stefani." Boschini's definition of Ponzone's altarpiece as belonging to the Stefani family is explained by a 1582 request by the Guardian Grande Paulo (Paolo) de Stefano, who appealed to the general chapter for permission to construct a family tomb in the church of San Giovanni del Tempio in front of the Dalmatian nation's altar of St. George. Although the construction of a family tomb in front of the confraternity altar affected its later reception as collective confraternal property, the iconography of Ponzone's altarpiece depicting the confraternity's patron saints George, Jerome, and Tryphon represents a distinct statement of Dalmatian identity, which the Scuola sought to exhibit within the multicultural society of Venice.*

In the centuries-long history of the Republic of Venice, much of its religious and social life was shaped by confraternities. In Venice, confraternities were known as *scuole* and were divided into two major groups: *scuole grandi* and *scuole piccole* (great / small confraternities). Among the latter group, there were *scuole* composed of laymen united either for purely devotional reasons or because of a common profession or origin.¹ A distinct group of such confraternities consisted of sodalities whose members

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¹ Among the studies on Venetian *scuole piccole*, see Ortalli, *Per salute delle anime e delli corpi*, and Vio, *Le Scuole Piccole*. For a survey of the artistic heritage of Venetian confraternities, see Pignatti (ed.), *Le Scuole di Venezia*.

were qualified as *stranieri* or *foresti* (foreigners) and whose main goal was to provide charitable support to individuals originating from the same geographical area, generally (but not always) outside the borders of the Most Serene Republic.² Through its social framework of lay associations organized in *scuole piccole*, Venice as a host society was thus able to sustain immigrant communities and permit the preservation of group identity through various forms of devotion to “foreign” saints and the commissioning of works of art that provided visual expressions of patriotic sentiments channelled through hagiographic narrations.

One of the exceptions among foreign communities in Venice — at least in comparison to confraternities such as those of *fiorentini* or *milanesi* who came from territories subject to different political authorities — is represented by the Scuola di San Giorgio e Trifone or Scuola di San Giorgio degli Schiavoni (today known as the Scuola Dalmata dei SS. Giorgio e Trifone), one of the few *scuole* still active in Venice.³ Founded on 19 March 1451 in the church of St. John the Baptist (San Giovanni Battista del Tempio), at the time held by the Venetian branch of the Knights Hospitaller (later known as Knights of Malta), the confraternity gathered immigrants from the eastern coast of the Adriatic Sea, mainly from Dalmatian territories under Venetian rule. Membership in the *scuola* did not depend on occupational choices, but was defined strictly in terms of origin: the Scuola degli Schiavoni provided charitable support to “Dalmati, et altri Schiavoni”⁴ residing in Venice, including also Albanians if they were not already members of the Scuola degli Albanesi founded in 1442.⁵

² See Ceriana, Mueller, “Radicalamento delle comunità straniera a Venezia nel Medioevo”; on the Scuola di San Giorgio degli Schiavoni in particular, see 322–325.

³ The official name of the confraternity as it exists today is Scuola Dalmata dei SS. Giorgio e Trifone. It was founded under the name Scuola di San Giorgio e Trifone; however, it has been variously named in literature: Scuola di San Giorgio e Trifone, Scuola degli Schiavoni, Scuola di San Giorgio degli Schiavoni, Scuola di San Giorgio degli Illirici. Key contributions to the history of the Scuola remain Perocco, “Appendice,” Perocco, *Carpaccio nella Scuola di S. Giorgio degli Schiavoni* and numerous studies by Lovorka Čoralić, collected in *U gradu svetoga Marka and Hrvatski prinosi mletačkoj kulturi*.

⁴ Archivio di Stato di Venezia, *Proveditori di comun*, Reg. P, Matricole delle scuole — Castello, *Matricola della Scuola dei SS. Giorgio e Trifone* (hereafter ASV, Pc, *Matricola*), chap. 16, fol. 582^v. For the description of the manuscript, written in the eighteenth century, see Mackenney, “Continuity and change,” 388. Chapters 4 to 53 of the first statute were transcribed from the original fifteenth-century manuscript in Vallery, *La Scuola Dalmata*, 40–66.

⁵ ASV, Pc, *Matricola*, chap. 39, fols. 587^r–587^v: “Ancora fù preso per bene, et utele cosa, che cadaun Nostro fratello, che al presente sia in questa Nostra Scuola, che per li tempi sarà, che per alcun modo, non possa essere nella Scuola degl’Albanexi, et se alcuno fosse nella detta Scuola degli Albanexi volemo che nel termine di giorni quindici el se habbia fatto depenar dalla detta Scuola degl’Albanexi, et passato el detto termine, et che el detto non si habbia fatto depenar, quello, ò quelli, che fossero in detta Scuola degl’Albanexi volemo che da questa Nostra Scuola li siano perpetualmente cazzadi, et cosi volemo, che se alcuno, che sia in quella Scuola d’Albanexi per alcun modo non possano intrar in questa Nostra Scuola.” For

In this respect, the membership condition based on nationality or common origin corresponded to the rules followed by other confraternities of foreigners active in Venice. An important distinction, however, was that the *confratelli* of the Scuola degli Schiavoni were actually citizens of the *Serenissima*, as the privilege of citizenship *de intus* had been granted to all inhabitants of Dalmatian towns subject to Venetian rule after the Venetian acquisition and conquest of Dalmatia between 1409 and 1420.⁶ Despite the privilege of citizenship, Dalmatian sailors without permanent residence in Venice were still *forestieri* in the city, unassisted in times of sickness or famine. This encouraged the community of *Schiavoni* already residing in the city to appeal to the authorities to approve the institution of a confraternity organized according to the conditions of other *scuole piccole* in Venice, which would provide support to fellow countrymen serving “in the armies of Our Dominion” (“nelle Armade del Nostro Dominio”).⁷ Confraternities as a social category, organized either according to occupation or social status, or simply as lay pious institutions, were widespread along the opposite, Dalmatian coast of the Adriatic Sea,⁸ so immigrants from this part of the Venetian dominion organized in the Scuola degli Schiavoni were certainly accustomed to this form of confraternal association.

The Scuola's first altar in the church of San Giovanni del Tempio

On the occasion of its foundation in 1451, and by agreement with the then Prior of the Knights Hospitaller Lorenzo Marcello, the Scuola di San Giorgio e Trifone obtained the right to convene in the Hospice of St. Catherine in the Venetian *sestiere* of Castello. Through this agreement the Schiavoni were also given the possibility of financing an altar below the belfry of the church of San Giovanni del Tempio, dedicated to their patron saints George and Tryphon.⁹ The altar was probably already in place in 1452, and definitely so in early 1456 when the confraternity's statute

an overview of the history and artistic heritage of the Scuola degli Albanesi (which housed Carpaccio's cycle with Stories of the Virgin), see Pignatti (ed.), *Le Scuole di Venezia*, 89–98.

⁶ Mueller, “«Veneti facti privilegio»,” 45.

⁷ ASV, Pc, *Matricola*, fol. 580r.

⁸ For an overview, see Ivetic, “Le confraternite nelle Venezie dell'Adriatico orientale.”

⁹ The agreement with the Prior of the Knights Hospitaller, dated 30 May 1451, is transcribed in the *mariegola* (chap. 74); the passage related to the altar in the church of St. John the Baptist reads: “Che prima visto il luogo e Chiesa de M.o Zuanne del Tempio predetto se habbiamo eletto, et ottenuto da lui l'Arco, et luogo che è sotto il Campanile d'essa Chiesa per fondare, drizzare, et fabricare un'Altare al nome delli Santissimi Martiri Zorzi, e Trifon, et fare una Capella, et adornare quella di spese delle detta Nation, e fraternità, e Scuola Nostra, in la quale se possiamo congriegare gli Officiali della detta Nostra Scuola nelli Zorni stabiliti, et ordinati per la Mariegola, et ordeni Nostri a aldire la messa, e divini Officij” (ASV, Pc, *Matricola*, fol. 599r). A transcription from the Catastico was published in Perocco, *Carpaccio nella Scuola di S. Giorgio degli Schiavoni*, 209–214.

or *mariegola* was confirmed by the Council of Ten.¹⁰ Besides the “solemn altar” in the host church, the confraternity possessed another altar, also dedicated to Saint George, in the *scuola*’s meeting-house in the old hospice of Saint Catherine.¹¹

Frequent mentions of the altar in the church of San Giovanni del Tempio in the *mariegola* testify to the prominent role of the altarpiece in the devotional practices of the Dalmatian confraternity. The Scuola managed to maintain a considerable degree of autonomy in religious services through a series of provisions and agreements with both the Priory and the priests of the church of San Giovanni del Tempio. For instance, the *mariegola* states that all offerings made to the confraternity’s altar in the church of San Giovanni del Tempio, that is, candle holders, altar paraphernalia, silverware and similar objects, must remain its permanent property.¹² One lamp always had to be lit in front of the altar so that Saint George and Saint Tryphon might pray the Omnipotent God for all confraternity members.¹³ Furthermore, priests of San Giovanni del Tempio were obliged to hold a solemn sung mass every second Sunday of the month in honour of Jesus Christ and the saints who were advocates of the confraternity. Every Wednesday small masses were celebrated for the souls of the deceased members of the confraternity, in addition to particular solemn services performed on the feast days of Saint George and Saint Tryphon.¹⁴

Not much is known of the original altarpiece that used to adorn the Scuola’s altar in the church of San Giovanni del Tempio. In the first

¹⁰ The *mariegola* was confirmed by the Council of Ten on 26 January 1455 *more veneto*. ASV, Pc, *Matricola*, fol. 591^r.

¹¹ In 1502, on the occasion of Paolo Valaresso’s donation of the relic of St. George to the Scuola, it was recorded that the relic was brought to the Scuola and placed on the altar of St. George: “andarono con assai Preti, Trombe, e Diphari insieme con il Magnifico Missier Polo à levar la reliqua alla giesia de Santo Anzolo per portarla alla Scuola sopradetta, et fu presentata sopra l’Altar di San Zorzi con grandissima devotion.” ASV, Pc, *Matricola*, chap. 66, fol. 595^v. The first inventory of the Scuola, drafted in 1557 (after the 1551 reconstruction of the old hospice of St. Catherine), lists “Un altar de S. Zorzi” inside the confraternity meetinghouse. See Perocco, “Appendice,” 98.

¹² “[...] infra le altre cose nui havemo patti, et condition con Misier lo prior, et suoi Successori come appar per le nostre carte come tutte le Offerte, che fossero fatto [sic] sopra del Nostro Altar nella Chiesa de Misier San Zuanne del Tempio siano perpetualmente della Nostra Scuola li Zorni delle Nostre feste et solennitade ciouè dopieri, Candelotti, pani, paramenti, Argenti, et cadauna cosa, la qual fosse per adornamento della Chiesa, e della Nostra Scuola.” ASV, Pc, *Matricola*, chap. 32, fol. 585^v.

¹³ “Acciò che Dio illumina le Anime Nostre in vita eterna per li Meriti delli preciosi Santi Martiri Missier San Zorzi, et M.o San Trifon Avocati Nostri volemo, che sempre davanti el nostro Altar debbia arder una lampada delli beni della Nostra Scuola, acciò che M.o San Zorzi, et M.o San Trifon priega l’Omnipotente Iddio per tutti noi.” ASV, Pc, *Matricola*, chap. 19, fol. 583^r.

¹⁴ ASV, Pc, *Matricola*, chap. 34, fol. 586^r.

known inventory of the confraternity, drafted in 1557, it is mentioned only as “our altar of St. George,” with no further description of the corresponding altarpiece.¹⁵ It has been suggested that the two panels representing Saint Tryphon and Saint Jerome, ascribed to an unidentified follower of Antonio Vivarini and now preserved in the *sala superiore* of the Scuola, might have been the side panels of the original altarpiece dedicated to Saint George, whose lost image is presumed to have formed the centre-piece.¹⁶ The altarpiece is believed to have been moved from the church of San Giovanni del Tempio to the still extant altar in the *sala inferiore* of the Scuola’s new building constructed after 1658,¹⁷ where a “tavola antica” (ancient panel) with the confraternity’s three patron saints was recorded in 1815 by Moschini, who described it as very damaged,¹⁸ and again in 1839 by Ermolao Paoletti.¹⁹ The central image of Saint George was apparently lost before 1852, the year of publication of Pietro Selvatico and Vincenzo Lazari’s guidebook of Venice, which mentions a fourteenth-century altarpiece (probably a fifteenth-century work) recently removed from the main altar of the Scuola that represented Saints Jerome and Tryphon flanking an image of the Virgin.²⁰ No firm evidence connects the two preserved panels representing Saint Jerome and Saint Tryphon to the confraternity’s first altarpiece in the church of San Giovanni del Tempio, especially in the light of the fact that a 1672 record mentions another altarpiece in the *sala superiore* described as “all gilded with the image of our Patron Saints.”²¹ Dimensions and format of the surviving two panels (147 × 27 cm each), if compared to preserved fifteenth-century altarpieces,²² suggest that the original altarpiece might have been composed of more than three panels, most likely five. In any case, in the first half of the seventeenth century the unquestionably Gothic effect of the fifteenth-century altarpiece was replaced by a more up-to-date artwork, commissioned for the Scuola’s altar from Matteo Ponzone (Venice, 1583–1663/1675).

¹⁵ “In chiesa di S. Zuane dal tempio il nostro altar de S. Zorzi con li banchi ove si reduce il nostro V. e compagni li giorni ordinari al dir la messa.” The inventory was first published by Perocco, “Appendice,” 97–98.

¹⁶ Perocco, “Appendice,” 83.

¹⁷ Perocco, “Appendice,” 83.

¹⁸ “Sull’altare v’è una tavola antica in campo d’oro con i santi Girolamo, Georgio e Trifone, ma molto annerita.” Moschini, *Guida per la città di Venezia*, 91.

¹⁹ “La pala dell’altare è una tavola antica co’ ss. Georgio, Girolamo e Trifone.” Paoletti, *Il fiore di Venezia*, 207.

²⁰ Selvatico, Lazari, *Guida di Venezia*, 101.

²¹ “tutto indorato con la imagine delli nostri Santi Protettori.” Perocco, “Appendice,” 80.

²² Especially examples produced in the central decades of the fifteenth century by the Vivarini workshop; see Humfrey, *The altarpiece in Renaissance Venice*, 163–174, 340–342.

Marco Boschini and Matteo Ponzone's altarpiece "di Casa Stefani"

The altarpiece of *St. George, St. Jerome and St. Tryphon* (fig. 4.1), which used to adorn the first altar on the left side of the church of San Giovanni del Tempio, was first mentioned by Marco Boschini in his *Miniere della pittura* (1664), where he attributed it to Matteo Ponzone.²³ He then repeated the attribution in his revised edition *Ricche miniere* (1674).²⁴ This information was adopted by later seventeenth- and eighteenth-century authors such as Domenico Martinelli and Anton Maria Zanetti, who repeated Boschini's attribution to Matteo Ponzone and his accurate iconographical description of the altarpiece representing Saints George, Jerome, and Tryphon.²⁵ However, neither Boschini nor later scholars mention the altarpiece as belonging to the altar of the Scuola di San Giorgio e Trifone, but — again drawing on information provided by Boschini — define it as being "di casa Stefani." Even the nineteenth-century Croatian historian Ivan Kukuljević Sakcinski, otherwise eager to promote (and over-promote) all things Slavic, in his 1858 dictionary of South-Slavic artists does not mention the altarpiece as painted for the altar of the Scuola degli Schiavoni, but only as once located at the high altar of the church of San Giovanni dei Furlani, which he mistakenly described as having been demolished.²⁶ Boschini's association of Ponzone's altarpiece with the Stefani family continued to be maintained well into the twentieth century,²⁷ leading Lino Moretti to advance the name of the notary "Giorgio Stefani del fu Girolamo," active between 1632 and 1663, as its possible commissioner.²⁸ The presence of Saints George and Jerome in Ponzone's altarpiece was thus explained by the corresponding names of the proposed commissioner and his late father, while the inclusion of Saint Tryphon, one of the patron saints of Dalmatia and titular saint of the cathedral in Cattaro (today, Kotor), led Moretti to associate it with the original location of the work in the church of the Knights of Malta, who defended the Adriatic Sea from Ottoman forces. However, the three Dalmatian saints unmistakably link

²³ "La Tavola nell'Altare à mano sinistra con S. Giorgio, S. Girolamo, e S. Trifone, e di mano di Matteo Ponzone, & è di Casa Stefani." Boschini, *Le miniere della pittura*, 192.

²⁴ Boschini, *Le ricche miniere*, 35 (Sestiere di Castello).

²⁵ Martinelli, *Il ritratto di Venezia*, 207 ("La Tavola del primo altare alla sinistra entrando in Chiesa, con S. Giorgio, S. Girolamo, e S. Trifone, è opera di Matteo Ponzone."); Zanetti, *Descrizione di tutte le pubbliche pitture*, 228 ("L'Altare primo a mano sinistra, ch'è di Casa Stefani à la tavola con SS. Giorgio Girolamo, e Triffone opera delle belle di Matteo Ponzone"). Albrizzi, *Forestiere illuminato*, 121–122, mentions only an altarpiece by Ponzone, without its description.

²⁶ "U porušenoj crkvi S. Giovanni de' Furlani biaše slika glavnoga oltara sa SS. Jurjem, Jerolimom i Trifunom djelo Pončunovo, koje njeki za Karpatovo držahu." Kukuljević Sakcinski, *Slovník*, 349.

²⁷ Zangirolami, *Storia delle chiese*, 124, defined as "di proprietà della Casa Stefani."

²⁸ Moretti, Niero, Rossi, *La chiesa del Tintoretto*, 77.

the altarpiece with the Scuola di San Giorgio degli Schiavoni, which had its altar in the church of St. John the Baptist since its foundation in 1451.

Boschini's definition of Ponzone's altarpiece as belonging to the altar of "Casa Stefani" can now be explained by the request made by the then Guardian Grande Paulo (Paolo) de Stefano, dated 1 April 1582. In his appeal to the general chapter, he asked for permission to construct a family tomb in the church of San Giovanni del Tempio in front of the Dalmatian nation's altar of St. George.²⁹ Before the construction of the new tomb for himself and his descendants, Guardian de Stefano was obliged to remove the existing wooden steps and the tread in front of the altar, rebuild them and construct the tomb in stone in the centre of the footpace above the steps of the confraternity's altar. The agreement, approved by a majority of votes, specifies that the *scuola* should bear no expense for the said tomb and that all costs should be covered entirely by Paolo de Stefano. The Guardian was granted permission to have his family name written on the tomb, but was not allowed to place a coat of arms of any kind or make any kind of modifications other than being buried inside it.³⁰

The inscription that used to mark the de Stefano tomb outlived the altar itself, dismantled after the Napoleonic suppression of the Order of Malta in 1806. The altar remained in the church of San Giovanni del Tempio, which was reconstructed in 1841 after the reinstitution of the Grand Priory in 1839.³¹ The text reported to have been on the grave slab makes no association between Paolo de Stefano and the Scuola di San Giorgio degli Schiavoni, but merely identifies the tomb as belonging to the then fifty-year-old *Domino* Paolo de Stefano, who in 1582 secured a final resting place for himself and his descendants.³² The prominent position of the tomb under the *supedaneum* of the altar of Saint George, as well as the inability to associate the commissioner with the Scuola, evidently induced Boschini's identification of the altar as "di Casa Stefani."

Since it would be highly unlikely for a confraternity to grant such a prominent burial place to a complete outsider, missing connections between the Scuola's altar and Boschini's qualification are to be found in other sources. Modifications of the confraternity altar in the church of San Giovanni del Tempio were recorded in a 1582 addition to the aforementioned first inventory of the confraternity. It states that all old stone pieces from the altar of Saint George in the church were moved to the

²⁹ ASV, Pc, *Matricola*, fol. 623^r (see the transcription in the appendix below).

³⁰ The document specifies that de Stefano was supposed to remove "il zapar" or tread in Venetian dialect, defined as "la superficie su cui sta il piede salendo le scale" (Boerio, *Dizionario del dialetto veneziano*, 731), in this case probably the footpace of the altar.

³¹ Amendolagine, "Un'avventura architettonica," 84–85.

³² The inscription is transcribed in Sommi Picenardi, "Del Gran Priorato," 137: "DMNO PAUL. DE STEFFANIS ANNO ETATIS / SUE QUINQUAGESIMO SCIENS CERTE / MORTEM EE ULTIMUM OIUM ADHUC / VIVENS HOC IN MORTE CORPORIS / HABITACULUM SIBI POSTERISQ. POSUIT. / MDLXXXII"

Scuola, while ironware and other elements belonging to the altar were sold by “messer Paulo,” in other entries identified as Paolo de Stefano.³³ The permission to construct a family tomb in front of the confraternity altar suggests the importance of Paolo de Stefano in the life of the confraternity, or perhaps the degree of his *benefitio* to the *scuola*. He served as Guardian Grande in 1582 and again in 1588/1589,³⁴ and was responsible for other improvements of movable goods related to the Scuola di San Giorgio e Trifone in the years he held office. In 1582, he arranged for the restoration of the confraternity’s processional banner and donated a new, richly ornamented carpet to be placed in the church on ordinary mass days. In 1589, he provided for the gilding of a cross that decorated an indulgence he himself obtained in Rome, and donated a finely embroidered cover for a large chalice used at the altar.³⁵

The case of Paolo de Stefano’s tomb in the church of San Giovanni del Tempio offers us an insight into the dynamics of the collective and the individual in the functioning of the Scuola di San Giorgio degli Schiavoni.³⁶ From its foundation in 1451, the church of San Giovanni del Tempio was the burial place of members of the Scuola; according to the initial agreement with the Prior of the Knights Hospitaller, the confraternity was granted four tombs inside the church,³⁷ frequently mentioned in fifteenth- and sixteenth-century testaments of confraternity members.³⁸ Since they were financed and maintained by the *scuola*, inscriptions on these tombs identified them as collective property and mentioned the individuals who donated them to the confraternity or held office at the time of their institution or restoration.³⁹ In contrast, the request for the construction of a privately financed family tomb was made by Paolo de Stefano as

³³ “Tutte le piere vecchie ch’era nel altar in gesia de S. Zorzi fu portà in scola, et ferj et ogni altra cosa fu vendute sotto per ms. Paulo.” Perocco, “Appendice,” 98.

³⁴ Perocco, *Carpaccio nella Scuola di S. Giorgio degli Schiavoni*, 233; Vallery, *La Scuola Dalmata*, 153. The list of Guardians provided by Vallery lists “Paolo de Stefano Baoncini” as Guardian Grande in 1588, while the one compiled by Perocco mentions “Paolo de Stefano” in 1589.

³⁵ “Uno penon con antenna et bricola et croce con de lato l’abate che si mete ditto penon a mità et la scola de S. Zuane. (fu renovado il penon et l’abbate sotto ms. Paulo ... Sto). [...] 1582 — Uno tapedo moschetto qual si mette in gesia quando si canta la messa hordinaria qual è novo et fu donato per ms. Paulo de Stefano V. grando. Item una jndulgentia faza vinir jl ditto da Roma à sue spese come nel breve croce sua sannta [sic]... 1589 adì 30 luglio fo fatto dorar sotto me Paulo de Stefano. Uno fazzoletto per il calese grando recemado doro con uno Z. et li sui piccoli darzento et doro qual fu donato per il preditto Vardian.” Perocco, “Appendice,” 98.

³⁶ The dynamics of public and private in a much broader Venetian context are discussed in Mackenney, “Public and private.”

³⁷ Perocco, *Carpaccio nella Scuola di S. Giorgio degli Schiavoni*, 212.

³⁸ See Čoralić, “Bratovština sv. Jurja i Tripuna,” 87–88.

³⁹ Some of the inscriptions preserved after the nineteenth-century restoration of the church are transcribed in Sommi Picenardi, “Del Gran Priorato,” 133–134.

an individual member of the confraternity, so the inscription placed on the grave stone could not have mentioned his leading role in the *scuola*. However, the approval of his request (subject not only to the governing bodies of the Scuola, but also — at least nominally — to the Provveditori di comun), certainly depended on his merits as Guardian Grande, which eventually earned him a resting place in the very part of the church most venerated by the confraternity. Although the intent was entirely different — especially in light of the fact that no coat of arms of any kind was to be placed on the grave stone — de Stefano's tomb “privatized” the Scuola's altar to the extent that more than eighty years later Marco Boschini saw no evident signs of the confraternity's presence.

The construction of the de Stefano family tomb in front of the altar of the Scuola di San Giorgio degli Schiavoni roughly coincides with the scarcely documented reconstruction of the church of San Giovanni Battista and the priory complex of the Knights of Malta carried out in the second half of the sixteenth century.⁴⁰ It was followed by a period of economic prosperity for the Scuola and its members,⁴¹ which encouraged significant modifications of the interior of the meeting-house (namely the decoration of the entire *sala superiore*) and the commission of the new altarpiece in the host church. In the seventeenth century, the church of San Giovanni del Tempio had seven altars,⁴² and the altar of the Dalmatian confraternity was the first on the left from the entrance of the church. Restorations in the eighteenth century reduced the number of altars to five,⁴³ but did not affect the altar of Saint George that housed Matteo Ponzzone's altarpiece. A late nineteenth-century description based on earlier sources suggests a rather impressive ensemble: the altar was made of Istrian stone and featured a tympanum and four columns, two of which were of black and white Friulian marble and the other two of the red marble known as *occhio di bue*.⁴⁴ It is safe to assume that the construction of the new retablo

⁴⁰ Earlier studies mention the year 1565 as the year of the reconstruction of the complex (see Franzoi, Di Stefano, *Le chiese di Venezia*, 495). However, construction works in one part of the complex had already been carried out in 1554, during the priorate of Cardinal Ranuccio Farnese (Trška, *Lodovico Beccadelli e le arti visive*, 26–30). For an overview of the architectural history of the complex, see Amendolagine, “Un'avventura architettonica.”

⁴¹ An entry in the *mariegola* dated 6 July 1606 states that the income of the confraternity had recently been increased: “Essendo augmentate nella Scuola nostra per la Dio gratia, e delli Nostri Gonfalon M.o San Zorzi, e M.o San Triphon le intrade [...]” ASV, Pc, *Matricola*, fol. 631^v.

⁴² Seven altars are shown on a seventeenth-century drawing of the properties of the Priory (Sovrano militare ordine di Malta, Archivio del Gran Priorato di Venezia e Lombardia, *Cabreo del 1600*), as mentioned by Martinelli, *Il ritratto di Venezia*, 207. Onofri, *Cronologia veneta*, 151, curiously states that the church had eight altars.

⁴³ Shown on the 1766 plan of the properties of the Priory, published in Perocco, “Appendice,” 75.

⁴⁴ Sommi Picenardi, “Del Gran Priorato,” 106.

coincided with the commission of Matteo Ponzone's altarpiece dedicated to the patron saints of the Scuola, realized several decades after Paolo de Stefano had his family tomb installed in front of the altar.

The church of San Giovanni del Tempio now houses three altars brought from different Venetian churches as a result of a 1841 restoration of the church, necessary after the Napoleonic suppressions, which completely desacralized the complex of the Priory and transformed the church into a warehouse. These early nineteenth-century events caused the removal of Ponzone's altarpiece from the church of San Giovanni del Tempio and its subsequent relocation first to the Gallerie dell'Accademia and then, in 1868, to the still extant altar of Federico Renier in the church of Madonna dell'Orto,⁴⁵ where it replaced Pordenone's altarpiece of *Blessed Lorenzo Giustiniani* now in the Gallerie dell'Accademia.⁴⁶

Matteo Ponzone's altarpiece for the Scuola di San Giorgio degli Schiavoni

Written data regarding Matteo Ponzone's altarpiece for the Scuola di San Giorgio e Trifone, at least at the current stage of research, pretty much reflects the situation vividly described and analysed by Peter Humfrey in his study on altarpieces commissioned by Venetian *scuole piccole* between 1440 and 1600.⁴⁷ Very few of the altarpieces produced in that period are directly documented (the original fifteenth-century altarpiece commissioned by the Scuola being no exception), while contracts between artist and confraternity representatives are virtually non-existent. Ponzone's altarpiece is still equally undocumented in archival sources and its undisputed attribution is due to Boschini's mention in *Miniere della pittura*. However, despite the lack of a direct confirmation of Ponzone's authorship of the altarpiece for the Scuola di San Giorgio e Trifone, it represents a firm point in the reconstruction of the painter's catalogue as the earliest painting in his career, datable to the middle of the second decade of the seventeenth century or earlier.⁴⁸ Analogies with both documented and attributed works belonging to the early period of his activity reveal Ponzone's dependence on models created by Palma Giovane and the artist's master Sante Peranda. This is particularly visible in the symmetrical and rather sustained composition reminiscent of sixteenth-century altarpieces, in the rendering of individual figures and especially in the figure

⁴⁵ Moretti, Niero, Rossi, *La chiesa del Tintoretto*, 77. See also Vallery, "Una doverosa rivendicazione."

⁴⁶ See Douglas-Scott, "Pordenone's Altar-Piece."

⁴⁷ Humfrey, "Competitive Devotions," 402.

⁴⁸ Prijatelj, *Matej Ponžoni — Pončun*, 33; Pallucchini, *La pittura veneziana del Seicento*, 86. For recent additions to Ponzone's catalogue, see Tomić, "Nuovi dipinti" and Tomić, "Posljednje dopune."

of God the Father, comparable to the altarpiece of the *Visitation* in Bale (previously, Valle) in Istria.⁴⁹ Pallucchini, who curiously defined the subject as “St George slaying the dragon between St. Jerome and St. Clement” (instead of St. Tryphon), assessed the altarpiece as reminiscent of the manner of Palma Giovane, but characterized by a more refined sensibility of cold palette and formal structure.⁵⁰

The iconography of the altarpiece firmly connects Ponzone’s work to the Dalmatian confraternity dedicated to Saints George and Tryphon, in which the veneration of the patron saint of Dalmatia, Saint Jerome, seems to have increased in the first decades of the seventeenth century. Saint Jerome was first mentioned alongside Saint George and Saint Tryphon in 1464, not in the records of the Scuola itself, but in the hundred-day indulgence granted to confraternity members by Cardinal Bessarion, which included the feast days of Saint George, Saint Jerome, Saint Tryphon, Corpus Domini and the first Sunday of the Ascension.⁵¹ However, although one of the most famous works still adorning the Scuola’s seat — Carpaccio’s cycle of Saint Jerome — might be proof enough of the confraternity’s devotion to the saint, when it came to ordinary religious services, Jerome was definitely overshadowed by Saints George and Tryphon to whom, after all, the confraternity was originally dedicated. The original chapters of the Scuola’s *mariegola*, drafted shortly after the confraternity’s foundation, prescribed processions and solemn religious services in the church of San Giovanni del Tempio. Liturgical celebrations were obligatory on Good Friday, on feast days of the Scuola’s patron saints George and Tryphon and on feast days of Saint John the Baptist and Saint Catherine, titular saints of the church and hospice which housed the Scuola in the first century of its existence — but not on the feast of Saint Jerome.⁵² The patron saint of Dalmatia was first mentioned in the *mariegola* in chapter sixty-five, recorded in early 1498 (7 January 1497 *more veneto*), when members of the confraternity devoted to the assistance of the poor of the “Dalmatian nation” asked for their prayers to be directed towards the intercession of the Lord and Saints George, Jerome, and Tryphon.⁵³ A slightly later reference to religious services on the feast day of Saint Jerome occurs in

⁴⁹ For the Bale altarpiece, see Tomić, “Značajno djelo,” and Kudiš Burić, Bralić, *Istria pittorica*, 399–401.

⁵⁰ Pallucchini, *La pittura veneziana del Seicento*, 86.

⁵¹ Published in Perocco, *Carpaccio nella Scuola di S. Giorgio degli Schiavoni*, 214–215.

⁵² ASV, Pc, *Matricola*, chap. 31, fol. 585^{r-v}.

⁵³ ASV, Pc, *Matricola*, chap. 65, fols. 594^r–595^r: “Siando questa Scuola fatta, e dedicata in benefitio della Nanzion [sic] Nostra dalmatina, e per accrescer la devotion delle persone, ed augmentar questa nostra Scuola, vedendo, che molti, e molti poveri de questa nostra benedetta Scuola sono impotenti, ed in estrema necessità, che vivono miserabilmente, et imperciò l’è cosa pia à farli una qualche provision in sovegnir quello secondo la possibilità de questa Nostra Scuola, et acciò che le oration loro et per loro prieghi Missier domenedio, San Zorzi, e San Gierolimo, e San Trifon mantegna, ed augmenti sempre questa nostra Scuola, e fraternitade.”

the *Catastico*, a book containing transcriptions of the most important documents related to the Scuola, in a concession given by the apostolic legate to perform religious services in the church of San Giovanni del Tempio including on the feast day of Saint Jerome.⁵⁴ The year of the document is 1502, when devotion to Saint Jerome found its artistic expression in Carpaccio's famous *teperi* executed in the very same period.

The gradual increase of veneration of Saint Jerome was certainly encouraged by Bessarion's indulgence and the fact that the saint held under his protection the whole territory of Venetian Dalmatia, as opposed to Saints George and Tryphon whose veneration was locally restricted to the cities of Antivari (Bar) and Cattaro (Kotor) respectively, places of origin of many confraternity members. In this context, it seems significant that in 1633, on the occasion of the donation of the relics of a number of saints, including those of Saint Jerome (some of which are still preserved by the confraternity), the donor Count Giovanni Angelo Andrea Flavio Comneno referred to himself as "Guardian Grande della Veneranda Scola delli santi Georgio Triffon et Gieronimo,"⁵⁵ even though there is no evidence that the confraternity had officially altered its name to include Saint Jerome. This change is reflected in the iconography of Matteo Ponzone's altarpiece. It represents a visual expression of key devotional aims of the Scuola's members, who in their *mariegola* pleaded for the continual intercession of Saints George and Tryphon from God the Father, shown in the upper part of the composition, now joined by the patron saint of Dalmatia Jerome.

Ponzone's altarpiece represents the only surviving work of art that includes the three saints related to the Scuola in a unified pictorial space. It is implicit that this is due to the date of execution of the altarpiece, painted in the period when multi-panel schemes had long been surpassed, but in terms of compositional organization, it seems significant that Saint Jerome is depicted as equal in importance to Saints George and Tryphon.

Matteo Ponzone's family ties to the eastern coast of the Adriatic and his documented, artistically prolific stay in Dalmatia from 1635 to the early 1640s,⁵⁶ preceded by commissions from Istrian patrons (including confraternities),⁵⁷ all raise questions on the role of the Scuola di San Giorgio e Trifone in patronage networks that might have connected Dalmatian patrons to the Venetian art market. Long considered *dalmatino* or *schiafone*, the question of Ponzone's birthplace was resolved by the discovery of the act of baptism in Venice, dated 3 November 1583, and other archival records mentioning him as *Venetus*.⁵⁸ Still, his kinship to the

⁵⁴ Scuola Dalmata dei SS. Giorgio e Trifone, *Catastico*, fol. 12^r.

⁵⁵ Scuola Dalmata dei SS. Giorgio e Trifone, *Catastico*, fol. 224^r. On Comneno, see Economopoulos, "Per l'anima di noi benefattori."

⁵⁶ See Tomić, *Splitska slikarska baština*, 67–88.

⁵⁷ Kamin, "Piranska bratovščina."

⁵⁸ Moretti, "Nuovi documenti."

Dalmatian-born Archbishop of Spalato (Split) Marco Antonio de Dominis (who was succeeded in the archiepiscopal see by the painter's brother Sforza Ponzone in 1616) might have provided the right prerequisites for the commission of the altarpiece for the Scuola di San Giorgio degli Schiavoni. One of the Guardians of the Scuola di San Giorgio e Trifone in 1596, and again in 1606, was Nicolò de Dominis from Arbe (Rab), who belonged to the same family as Matteo Ponzone's relative, Archbishop Marco Antonio de' Dominis. Nicolò de Dominis was one of the confraternity members actively involved in the decoration of the *sala superiore* of the Scuola's seat realized in the first decades of the seventeenth century, as commissioner of the painting of the *Madonna and Child with Saint Christopher*, which includes his portrait and the De Dominis coat of arms. Such possible connections based on kinship, which coincide with the period of economic prosperity of the Scuola di San Giorgio e Trifone, might have conditioned the choice of painter for the confraternity's new altarpiece, especially in light of the fact that its iconography represents a distinct statement of Dalmatian identity that the confraternity sought to demonstrate within the multicultural Venetian society.

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APPENDIX

Archivio di Stato di Venezia, *Proveditori di comun*, Reg. P, Matricole delle scuole — Castello

Matricola della Scuola dei SS. Giorgio e Trifone, fol. 623^{r-v}.

A. D. 1582 adi p:mo April.

Convocato el Capitolo Generale nel Nostro Albergo al numero de persone quaranta.

In questo degno Capitolo compar el Mag.co M. Paulo de Stefano Guardian mazor, el qual domanda, che li sia concesso di poter fabricar un'Arca nella Chiesa di San Zuanne del Tempio detto de furlani davanti l'Altar della Nation dalmatina di San Zorzi in questo modo cioè.

Desfar tutti li Scalini di legno, et il zapar davanti el predetto Altar, et cosi el predetto Mag.co Vardian si obliga de farlo refar et far la predetta Arca il tutto di piera viva, la quale Arca sia in mezzo il zapar sopra li Scalini davanti l'Altar e questo s'obliga far far à tutte sue spese senza spesa alcuna della predetta Scuola, con questa convention, che sia nella predetta Arca sepolta tutta la sua descendenza à suo beneplacito, et che sopra detta Arca possi far far el suo nome, ma che non possi però far far arma di sorte alcuna, et che ne lui, nè la sua descendenza per tempo alcuno non possi haver altra ation, se non essere sepolti nella predetta Arca, e non altrimenti.

E à qual gratia li fù concessa per el benefitio, che lui hà fatto alla Scuola. Ballottata la sopradetta parte hebbe dalla banda de sì ballote n. 32 et di non n. 7, e presa.

Die 26 Junij 1582

Cla.mi S.Sri Giacomo Deodo, M.o Bernardo Donado honorandi Proveditori di Comun visto il tenor, e continentia della parte sopradetta, et delle cose in essa contenute, ed il fatto bene considerato auctoritate sui Offitij terminantes quella laudano, approbano, ratificano, e confermano come stà, e giace, et sic annotavi iusserunt.
Sabba Mauroceno Not.

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Catastico

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4.1. Matteo Ponzone, *St. George, St. Jerome, and St. Tryphon*, c. 1615, oil on canvas, 420 × 220 cm. Madonna dell'Orto, Venice (formerly San Giovanni del Tempio). By permission, Curia Patriarcale di Venezia.