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eum edizioni università di macerata, Centro direzionale, via Carducci 63/a - 62100 Macerata  
tel (39) 733 258 6081  
fax (39) 733 258 6086  
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Dinamiche economiche territoriali  
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a cura di Giuseppe Capriotti e Francesca Coltrinari

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Saggi

# A View from the South East. Works of the Santa Croce Workshop

Ivana Čapeta Rakić\*

## *Abstract*

The phenomenon of an intense importation of artworks from painting workshops of the Venetian capital, which is present along both coasts of the Adriatic sea, has been long recognised in scientific periodicals. Already in the 14<sup>th</sup> century, churches in this area have been furnished with works of Paolo Veneziano, Jacobello del Fiore, members of the Vivarini family, and others. However, not only the works of the leading Venetian painting workshops were in strong demand in the Adriatic market. The eastern coast of the Adriatic Sea, from Kopar in the north to Boka Kotorska in the south, is characterised by numerous artworks from the Santa Croce workshop. Their works have also been identified in the sacral premises of Apulia and Abruzzi on the other side of the Adriatic coast. As opposed to a good reception of their works in peripheral and provincial areas, in the wealthy and culturally and religiously developed capital the number of their works was reduced to occasional

\* Ivana Čapeta Rakić, Senior Research Assistant, University of Split, Faculty of Philosophy, Art History Department, Sinjska 2, 21000 Split, e-mail: [ivana.capeta@gmail.com](mailto:ivana.capeta@gmail.com).

commissions predestined to be placed in less significant locations in *La Serenissima*. This paper shall provide an analysis of certain particularities of their artworks from the perspective of the periphery as opposed to the works from the capital, and attribute a new artwork to their workshop.

Il fenomeno dell'intensa importazione di opere d'arte dalle botteghe veneziane di pittura, registrabile in entrambe le coste dell'Adriatico, è stato oggetto di numerosi studi. Fin dal XIV secolo le chiese di quest'area vennero rifornite di opere di Paolo Veneziano, Jacobello del Fiore, dai membri della famiglia Vivarini e da altri. Tuttavia non erano solo le opere delle maggiori botteghe pittoriche veneziane ad essere fortemente richieste sul mercato adriatico. La costa orientale dell'Adriatico, da Capodistria nel nord alle Bocche di Cattaro a sud, è caratterizzata da numerosi dipinti della bottega dei Santa Croce. Loro opere sono state identificate anche in edifici sacri della Puglia e dell'Abruzzo, sull'altra sponda adriatica. A differenza della buona accoglienza ottenuta nelle aree provinciali, nella culturalmente e religiosamente ben sviluppata capitale il numero delle loro opere si riduce a commissioni occasionali, destinate a trovare posto in collocazioni meno significative. Il saggio fornisce un'analisi delle caratteristiche dell'opera dei Santa Croce nella prospettiva dell'opposizione fra periferia e opere d'arte per la capitale, e attribuisce loro una nuova opera.

In the 16<sup>th</sup> century, two families of painters who bore the same name of Santa Croce were simultaneously active in Venice, while the Eastern Adriatic was dominated by works of one branch of the said family of painters whose artworks are the topic of this paper. The founder of that workshop was a painter who usually signed his works as HIERONYMO DA SANTA CROCE or HIERONYMVS DE SANCTA CRVCE, who was turned by later art criticism into Girolamo da Santa Croce (Santa Croce, Val Brembana, Bergamo 1480/1485 – Venice 1556). First he was the disciple of Gentile Bellini, most likely together with Francesco di Simone da Santa Croce, a representative of the other painting workshop of the same name<sup>1</sup>. After Gentile's death, Girolamo remained in the workshop of his brother Giovanni Bellini<sup>2</sup>. The beginning of Girolamo's own painting activity can likely be placed around 1516, when his earliest known and signed artwork dates from – a painting which is currently exhibited in the Ryerson Collection at the Art Institute of Chicago, and which depicts the Virgin and Child on a throne characterized by Renaissance features and placed in a landscape. He was obviously inspired by Bellini's Virgin and Child paintings, particularly the one from the *Sacra Conversazione* in the church of San Zaccaria in Venice, which was painted about ten years before Girolamo's.

From the 1540's onward, he produced his paintings in collaboration with his son Francesco (Venice, 1516 – Venice, 1584), whom he appointed as his

<sup>1</sup> Della Chiesa, Baccheschi 1976.

<sup>2</sup> Girolamo's stay in Giambellini's workshop has not yet been supported by archival data. For a discussion which speaks in favour of Girolamo's presence in the said workshop, see Čapeta Rakić 2011, pp. 21-24.

assignee before the court on July 16, 1543<sup>3</sup>. Interestingly enough, although already an acclaimed painter (member of the painters' guild from 1530)<sup>4</sup> and a member of the prominent Venetian Confraternity of the *Scuola Grande della Misericordia in Valverde*<sup>5</sup>, during the same period (1540's), Girolamo had been collaborating with and helping other Venetian masters, such as Lorenzo Lotto with whom he worked on several artworks for the friars of the SS. Giovanni e Paolo in Venice<sup>6</sup>. After his death in 1556, his son Francesco inherited the workshop. The workshop was active until 1620's, when Francesco's son Pietro Paolo da Santa Croce (Venice? – Venice, 1620) died, having inherited the workshop after his father's death in 1584.

Already from his first signed artwork Girolamo had set the course for the workshop which, in terms of the painting style and manner of functioning, followed the path charted by the leading painting workshops of the previous generation, especially Giovanni Bellini's and Cima da Conegliano's. The same stylistic patterns were adopted by Girolamo's successors who, despite many years of presence in the market, remained true to this form of expression until the last painted artwork. Within the total output of the Santa Croce workshop, a dominant number of their artworks is in the form of multi-panel compositions (triptychs and polyptychs) framed with richly carved and gilded retables, as well as in the form of single panel altarpieces. They also painted church flags and produced smaller artworks which were used for private devotion or in family votive chapels. Several paintings which most likely constituted parts of painted furniture<sup>7</sup> were correctly attributed to them.

Basing the typology of their works on the painting style of the late *quattrocento*, which they perpetuated throughout the 16<sup>th</sup> and the beginning of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, the Santa Croces also adhered to the iconographic repertoire of artworks, established in the two already mentioned workshops run by the previous generation of painters. In this regard their corpus is very homogeneous and of predominantly religious content, which is especially true of the artworks on the eastern coast of the Adriatic Sea where only such works exist.

In a formal sense, their painting is characterized by symmetric and static compositions structured according to the principle of addition. The figures are placed in the painted context so that there is no "communication" between them. It is a sort of a *cocktail* of figures which have often been replicated from the famous artworks of their forerunners, or repeated in a somewhat modified version. The Santa Croce painters recurrently resorted to already adopted

<sup>3</sup> Ludwig 1903, p. 21; Della Chiesa, Baccheschi 1976, p. 6; Stradiotti 1975-1976, p. 574.

<sup>4</sup> Nicoletti 1890, p. 504.

<sup>5</sup> Stradiotti 1975-1976, p. 572.

<sup>6</sup> On November 29, 1542, in his notebook *Libro di spese diverse*, Lotto wrote: «[...] doi teste per Salvator per mastro Sixto frate in Zani Polo me feci aiutar a mastro Hieronimo Santa Croce [...]»: Zampetti 1969, p. 246.

<sup>7</sup> Čapeta Rakić 2012, pp. 130-137.

canons, which is why citations and copies of saintly figures can be identified in a large number of their artworks. Apart from citing other painters' formulas, they even more frequently resorted to repetitions or variations of their own inventions. The same patterns identified in the artworks from the beginning of Girolamo's career were repeated in his later works, while some of his formulas were later adopted by his son Francesco and grandson Pietro Paolo.

Around 1516, the year in which autonomous work of Girolamo da Santa Croce began, the Venetian capital was undergoing significant changes in the cultural and artistic context. A new era of entirely different and "modern" painting in the Lagoon City began with Titian (1490-1576). This period coincided with the death of Giovanni Bellini (1516) and Cima da Conegliano (1517/1518), two painters who marked the painting of the second half of *Quattrocento* and of almost entire two decades of the following century. A few altarpieces by Titian, which were made in the period between 1516/1518 and 1527/1529, thoroughly changed the former manner in which saints were depicted in altarpieces. His *Assunta* in the Church of Santa Maria Gloriosa dei Frari, Ancona altarpiece (pala Gozzi), the *pala* Pesaro, also in the Church of the Frari, and the *Death of Saint Peter Martyr* for Venetian dominican order in the church of SS. Giovanni e Paolo represented the turning point in the former way of painting dominated by a static and contemplative quality. In addition to the radical stylistic changes in the composition and the use of an entirely new colouring, his altarpieces should also be perceived as a reflection of the religious atmosphere of the said period, both in Venice and elsewhere<sup>8</sup>. This was the period of an intense religious crisis within the Catholic Church, which had spread onto the entire Europe. At that time, Venice was an important centre of reformation within the Catholic Church itself. Scientists have oftentimes emphasised the role of two Venetians, the blessed Paolo Giustiniani and Gaspare Contarini<sup>9</sup>, who were the pillars of morality and spirituality of the Venetian church. It can generally be said that a change in the perception of Christian values had occurred: what was primarily advocated was mercy and love. The humanistic and secular views of faith were no longer welcome and, consequently, the manner of depicting saints in paintings had changed. They became inhabitants of heaven and were depicted as such. The Mother of God was ever more often painted among the clouds, surrounded by angels, while the saints became Christian heroes whose martyrdom or acts of charity became increasingly frequent themes of paintings. Single panel altarpiece, most commonly in the form of an upright rectangle terminated in a round arch, became the dominant form of a religious painting. Therefore, from the year 1524–1525, polyptychs no longer appeared in the churches of the City of Venice<sup>10</sup>. Apart from Titian as the leading master

<sup>8</sup> Humfrey 1999, pp. 1119-1202.

<sup>9</sup> Jedin 1958, pp. 107-123.

<sup>10</sup> The last polyptych set in a Venetian church was the *Polyptych of St. Barbara* by Palma



of Venetian painting of the period, an additional *forte* was the return of the already mature Lorenzo Lotto who had been absent from the city for a longer period of time. An entire generation of painters, born around 1470's and 1480's<sup>11</sup>, who still adhered to Bellini's "old" style, was virtually unable to win a single large-scale commission in Venice. The Venetian market was already saturated with such paintings, and their artworks and commissions within the city were reduced to individual and occasional instances, representing a distant and quiet echo of Bellini's formerly great manner. In the economically, culturally and religiously developed capital, the number of their works was reduced to occasional commissions predestined to be placed in "less significant" locations in La Serenissima. Sparse commissions in the city became even more pronounced among those masters after the coming-of-age of a new generation of painters such as Tintoretto and Veronese, who took over the leading role in the Venetian art scene of the second half of *Cinquecento*.

From then on, the upholders of Bellini's painting tradition, including the Santa Croce workshop, were mostly associated with commissioners from the peripheral or provincial areas outside of Venice. Their renown in the eastern coast of the Adriatic Sea coincided with the extinguishment of the local painting tradition and the activity of national painters, when the importation of artistic artefacts of predominantly Venetian origin was generally on the rise in this area. Today, works of the Santa Croce workshop can be found in a total of fifteen sites, from Kopar in the north to Boka Kotorska in the south of the eastern Adriatic coast. For some of these sites the Santa Croce painters produced several artworks, amounting to a total of twenty-two altarpieces or paintings, most of which are still *in situ*. This means that the works of the Santa Croce workshop are the most numerous within the entire corpus of 16<sup>th</sup> century paintings in the area<sup>12</sup>.

Considering such a strong reception of the said artworks in provincial areas in the time when some of the best works of the coryphaeus of the 16<sup>th</sup> century Venetian painting were already produced in the capital, it is necessary to ask oneself who were the commissioners of the Santa Croce paintings who, at the dawn of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, still commissioned paintings in the form of a polyptych. Furthermore, the question arises whether the crucial factor for the selection of artworks was the price, or the commissioner's taste?

Empirical research had established that the eastern Adriatic area is dominated by commissions associated with Franciscan churches and monasteries. From the

Vecchio, which was commissioned by the confraternity of the Bombardieri (artillerymen) for the Santa Maria Formosa church in Venice.

<sup>11</sup> Members of this group are Marco Basaiti (oko 1470/75-1530), Francesco Bissolo (1470-1554), Andrea Previtali (1470/80-1528), Vincenzo Catena (about 1480-1531).

<sup>12</sup> Their works can be found in the following sites: Blato on the island of Korčula, Drvenik Veliki (now Mursko Središće), Dubašnica (Porat), Hvar, Izola, Kopar, Košljun, Kotor, Krapanj, Lopud, Pazin, Rijeka, Split, Stari Grad, Vis.

total of fifteen sites where the artworks from the Santa Croce workshop can be found, eight of them refer to churches and monasteries of the Franciscan order. In terms of numerosity, these are followed by commissions for diocesan (parish) churches, while one artwork was commissioned for a Dominican church and a private chapel/church.

It is important to highlight that, unlike in the western coast of the Adriatic Sea, not a single artwork from the Santa Croce workshop can be found in the cathedrals on the eastern coast. Artworks were neither produced for sacred spaces of other monastic communities, apart from the already mentioned altarpiece for the former Dominican church of Saint Nicholas in Kotor.

The fact that such artworks can predominantly be found in Franciscan churches does not necessarily provide an answer about their commissioners. So far the relevant literature conventionally believed that the Franciscans had commissioned the said artworks. This is probably true; however, except in the case of one or two artworks, it has still not been confirmed.

One of the well-documented altarpieces is the main altar polyptych on the islet of Košljun in Puntarska Draga on the island of Krk, which Girolamo da Santa Croce and his collaborators painted in 1535 (fig. 1). According to the preserved contract for that artwork, it is evident that in this case the polyptych was commissioned by the guardian of the monastery, Frane Šubić, who also personally participated in designing its layout<sup>13</sup>. In accordance with his ideas and on the basis of a good recommendation, he chose the appropriate artist for its completion. Judging from the payment confirmation for the completed artwork, the guardian was truly satisfied with the work done, for he additionally rewarded every participant in the project. One cannot rule out the possibility that some of the commissions for Franciscan churches, ensued not long after the completion of the Košljun polyptych, resulted from the warm recommendation by a satisfied guardian. It was not uncommon for a certain order to have its favourite painter. Well-known is the link between Lorenzo Lotto and the Dominican order, for which he produced paintings even outside of the territory of the *Serenissima*<sup>14</sup>. It was also not uncommon that one successfully completed commission to lead to another.

It is interesting to mention an observation by Michael Douglass–Scott, who thinks it is possible that commissions of Girolamo's artworks for the eastern coast of the Adriatic Sea after 1530 could have been prompted by a recommendation from Federico Renier<sup>15</sup>. Federico Renier was a procurator of the monastery on the islet of Košljun and the procurator of the entire Franciscan province of Dalmatia. On his behalf, his son Alvise Renier, along with Stjepan Trevisano and Frano Šubić, concluded an agreement with Girolamo da Santa

<sup>13</sup> Brusić 1932, pp. 394-399; Čapeta 2010.

<sup>14</sup> Humfrey 1993, p. 97.

<sup>15</sup> Douglas-Scott 1995, pp. 153-154.

Croce and other masters for the production of the Košljun polyptych. Federico Renier had to have been familiar with the work of Girolamo da Santa Croce. In 1527, in the Venetian church of Santa Maria dell'Orto, he issued a request for the erection of the altar dedicated to the blessed Lorenzo Giustiniani in the place which previously featured Girolamo's painting dedicated to the beatified Venetian. The painting was then moved to the monastery of San Giorgio in Alga in order to make room for the Renier's altar (Girolamo's painting was not preserved.)

Had Federico Renier indeed stood behind the recommendation, would he not have personally hired Girolamo instead of Pordenone, who eventually produced both the altar and the painting for the church of Santa Maria dell'Orto around 1532?

If we opt for the possible warm recommendation scenario, the second alternative becomes more likely. Namely, there was a confraternity in the Franciscan Observant church of San Francesco della Vigna in Venice, for whom Girolamo painted a series of fourteen paintings on canvas depicting scenes from the life of Saint Francis and two paintings of the same theme for the altar<sup>16</sup> in 1532. After the fall of the Republic of Venice, the said artworks were lost. There was another painting in that church – the still misplaced Girolamo's painting on wood, which depicted Saint Anthony of Padua with other saints<sup>17</sup>, as well as a painting depicting the martyrdom of Saint Lawrence. Today we are familiar with this artwork thanks to an 18<sup>th</sup> century copy, located in the church below the pulpit. The series of paintings for the confraternity meeting-houses associated with Venetian Franciscan Observants (and the church of San Francesco della Vigna) was commissioned only two years prior to the first commission for the eastern Adriatic commissioner. Considering the fact that the said artwork was commissioned in Venice in the time when the work for the local Franciscans must have already been completed, the question arises whether is it possible that Girolamo's fine work was recommended to the guardian from Košljun by one of the members of Venetian confraternity or Franciscans? Connections between the eastern Adriatic Franciscans and the said Venetian church were rather strong. This hypothesis is further supported by the fact that Franciscan seminarians from Croatia attended a part of their studies at the Institute of the San Francesco della Vigna monastery, where they often resided as professors, teachers, parish priests or monks<sup>18</sup>.

<sup>16</sup> Onda 2003, p. 2; Thode 2003, p. 490. In the older literature, they are first mentioned by Boschini (cfr. Boschini 1664, p. 205).

<sup>17</sup> Also mentioned by Martinioni and Boschini: «Nell'Altare di ricontra alla cappella di Profeti vi è la pala di Sant'Antonio di Padova con altri santi dipinta già da Girolamo da Santa Croce, ma al presente deturpata da altro pittore che pretese accomodarla» (Sansovino 1663, p. 53); «S. Francesco della Vigna; [...] Segue la tavola ove è dipinto Sant'Antonio di Padova con molti altri Santi di mano di Girolamo da Santa Croce» (Boschini 1664, p. 199).

<sup>18</sup> Čoralić 2010, p. 40.

According to the contract for the Košljun polyptych, the guardian payed a total of 181 ducats for the artwork. Although the polyptych may seem rather expensive in comparison with the price of Titian's paintings<sup>19</sup> produced around the same time in Venice, when compared with the gilded polyptychs by Paolo Campsa, it becomes obvious that this was the regular market price of gilded wooden altars at the time. For example, a document was preserved according to which the mayor of the Costa di Rovigo municipality, a mister Campo di Pace, promised to pay 200 ducats to Paolo Campsa for the «*Corporis Christi cum multis figuris*» polyptych for the church of San Giovanni Battista, for which the artist had already painted two polyptychs for the price of 500 ducats. Two smaller artworks which he produced for the cathedral of Santa Maria Assunta on the island of Torcello also costed 265 ducats in total<sup>20</sup>. Therefore, the price of the Košljun polyptych can partially be justified by the high cost of materials required for its completion, considering the fact that it is a fully gilded retable. However, despite the fact that the Košljun polyptych was rather large and contained a large number of figures painted on canvas<sup>21</sup> and a fully gilded retable, its price still remains relatively expensive, samely as the polyptychs by Campsa at the time. In other words, for the sum they paid to Girolamo for his polyptych, the Franciscans could have bought paintings from Titian, Lotto or Palma Vecchio; especially knowing that they had sufficient resources thanks to the legacy of Catherine Dandolo which amounted to a total of one thousand ducats.

What is also interesting is that Campsa's expensive wood carving works were commissioned for small mainland municipalities or for the islands of the Lagoon in the period when they had long since gone out of fashion in Venice and larger towns in the Veneto<sup>22</sup>.

During the 1580's, as many as three polyptychs were made by Francesco da Santa Croce for the Franciscan church of Our Lady of Mercy in Hvar. In their basic idea, these artworks still adhered to the *quattrocento* style (fig. 2). Making a comparison, we shall point out that at the same time Paolo Veronese was working on his *Apotheosis of Venice* for the ceiling of the Doge's Palace in Venice, and Tintoretto once again set about to paint the building of the *Scuola Grande di S. Rocco* (Confraternity of Saint Roch), notably its upper floor. Titian had been dead for seven years and had long since created some of the best artworks of Venetian painting of the period. However, one should not forget that even this master had produced polyptychs in the second and third decade of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, while the acclaimed workshop of Paolo Veronese produced a polyptych in the eighth decade of the *cinquecento* for provincial commissioners, for the church in Vrboska, also on the island of Hvar.

<sup>19</sup> Averoldi polyptych 200 ducats, the *pala* Pesaro costed 102 ducats, and the *Death of St. Peter Martyr* costed 100 ducats (cfr. Humfrey 1993, p. 154).

<sup>20</sup> Schulz 2001, pp. 16-17.

<sup>21</sup> Predella paintings painted on wood.

<sup>22</sup> Schulz 2001, p. 36.

Based on all this one can conclude that it was not financial possibilities nor the desire to save money that affected the purchase and selection of such artworks, but it was the commissioner's taste that played the crucial role in their commissioning. Apart from this, one should also keep in mind that multi-panel paintings composed of smaller parts which could later be assembled in larger polyptychs were easier to transport to remote locations than a large single panel altarpiece.

As was already stated, the works of the Santa Croce workshop were commissioned predominantly for Franciscan Observant churches and to a certain extent for diocesan churches and one Dominican church on the eastern Adriatic coast. With regard to the location of the said artworks, it is interesting to analyse their iconographic content, which was affected by religious and political circumstances of the period and predominantly reflected the theological views of the Franciscan order. In terms of numerosity, iconographic themes related to the Marian cult and glorification of the Virgin are the most frequently encountered. This observation is hardly surprising, as in the said area the Virgin had traditionally occupied a very important place both in the popular piety and among the clergy, Franciscan monks in particular. They were major advocates of the worship of Mary. In various themes and schemes which are oftentimes ambiguous, the figure of Mary Mother of God appears twenty-six times in the eastern Adriatic corpus of Santa Croce's paintings, out of which as many as twenty one time in paintings in Franciscan churches. Among these, two themes should be particularly highlighted, which reflect the Franciscan attitude towards the Virgin. These are: Mary's Immaculate Conception and Our Lady of the Angels. The worship of Mary's Immaculate Conception was advocated already by Saint Francis of Assisi, and in 1645 it was precisely the Immaculate Virgin who became the official patron saint of the Franciscan order<sup>23</sup>. After numerous and centuries-long theological debates, piety became a dogma due to the Pope Pius IX's Bull<sup>24</sup>. Thanks to Ivan Duns Scot and Bernardino de Bustis, who propagated devotion to the Immaculate Virgin, the specific iconography of the Virgin was developed in the works of the Santa Croces. Two very significant representations of the *Immaculata* stand out, which occupy a very important place in the context of the overall eastern Adriatic Marian iconography. Generally speaking, the earliest representation of the Immaculate Virgin among the emblems of this geographical area is the one on the first painting of the predella of Girolamo's polyptych on Košljun (fig. 3)<sup>25</sup>. The second one incorporates two schemes of the *Immaculata*: the Immaculate Virgin sent upon the Earth by God, and the Immaculate Virgin surrounded by Prophets<sup>26</sup>. It can

<sup>23</sup> Prijatelj Pavičić 1998, p. 118.

<sup>24</sup> De Gioia 2005, p. 27.

<sup>25</sup> Čapeta 2010, pp. 311-317.

<sup>26</sup> Prijatelj Pavičić 1998, p. 125.

be found on the southern altar under the choir in the church of Our Lady of Mercy in Hvar (fig. 4).

The Franciscans also worship Our Lady of the Angels. Saint Francis often invoked her in his sermons, and the first Franciscan church in Assisi, known as the Porziuncola, was dedicated to her. In his sermons, Saint Francis also glorified the figure of the Queen of Heaven, which is why Our Lady of the Angels as the heavenly queen is one of the most frequent representations of Virgin Mary in the Santa Croces' works in Franciscan churches on the eastern coast of the Adriatic. The invocation to the Virgin Mary as the Queen of Angels (*Regina Angelorum ora pro nobis*) appears in the Litany of Loreto which became official in the 16<sup>th</sup> century due to the strengthening of the Loretan cult. Virgin Mary's title of a queen is actually associated with the concept of mercy and refers to the Mediatrix of All Grace, the person closest to God, the all-powerful advocate and the One who, according to the Biblical tradition, looks after Her people and defends it. She is therefore also Our Lady of Grace, the patron saint of the Franciscan church and monastery in Hvar where the largest and, along with the one from Košljun, iconographically the most complex series of the Santa Croce workshop paintings devoted to Virgin Mary can be found.

Virgin Mary is also worshipped in diocesan churches. Most frequently she can be seen with the Child on a throne in the *Sacra Conversazione* theme. She is crowned by two angels and flanked by male saints (three of four parish churches which contain works of the Santa Croces contain variations of this scheme: Isola, Stari Grad and Vis). The iconography of the enthroned Virgin Mary is associated with the themes of the Seat of Wisdom and *Majestas Virginis*, i.e. Majesty of the Virgin, indicating the ideology of Mary as the Queen of Heaven (crowned Mary sitting on a throne), and is one of the most common Marian schemes in general. It can also be found in artworks commissioned for other Franciscan churches (in Kopar, Pazin, Split and Hvar).

In terms of frequency, these themes are followed by the iconography of various saints, primarily Saint Francis of Assisi (in churches of the Franciscan order on the eastern coast of the Adriatic he has been depicted eight times, but he can also be seen in paintings in parish churches, for example in Blato in the painting of All Saints; he was also depicted in the still misplaced painting from the polyptych from Vis)<sup>27</sup> and his female follower, Saint Clare (depicted in a total of five paintings). Numerous are renderings of Saint John the Baptist (eight times in total) whose baptismal name was given to Saint Francis of Assisi. The iconography of paintings also reflects the reverence towards the local history and tradition, especially in Franciscan churches<sup>28</sup>. The most frequently depicted

<sup>27</sup> «In medio imaginem Beatae Mariae Virginis filium in manibus tenentis, Sancti Iohannis Baptistae á dextra, á sinistra veró Sancti Petri, á parte autem dextera earundem imaginem Sanctorum Lucae et Sebastiani desuper, infra S. S. Stephani et Francisci», Diocesan archives in Hvar, Milani Visitatio, cc. 466-467; according to Fisković 1963-1964, p. 58; Tomić 2003, pp. 97-106.

<sup>28</sup> Mirković 1994, p. 129.



is the patron saint of the Franciscan Province, Saint Jerome (depicted seven times in total), patron saints of various towns and dioceses (Saint Quirinus in the diocese of Krk was featured in two artworks, as well as Saint Stephen Pope in the diocese of Hvar; a painting for the diocese of Split features Saint Domnius, and the one in the diocese of Dubrovnik features Saint Blaise), and personal patron saints of certain distinguished people or sponsors of commissioned artworks, such as, for example, namesake saints of the members of Krivonosović family of Pakljena (Saint Thomas, Saint Anthony) who commissioned a polyptych for the church of Saint Nicholas<sup>29</sup>.

On the western coast of the Adriatic, works of Girolamo, Francesco and Pietro Paolo da Santa Croce were commissioned for sacral buildings of Veneto, Abruzzi and Apulia in the south of Italy. They were commissioned for cathedrals, diocesan and various monastic churches, as well as for confraternity meeting houses. Commissioners were members of different social classes, ranging from confraternities and guilds, through various members of the clergy, to aristocratic families.

Considering the extremely diverse categories of commissioners of Santa Croces' artworks on the western Adriatic coast, and with regard to where they were located, one can also notice the heterogeneity of iconographic content of the said corpus of paintings. One of the prominent common features of paintings from Venice and the Veneto region is a dominant number of depicted male saints. The custom of painting a male *main* saint in the centre of the composition, the place where one would expect the theme of the Virgin and the Child was not unusual for Venice. Moreover, Humfrey pointed out that such iconography is one of the characteristics of Venetian painting. Using a table which he himself composed on the basis of a sample containing two hundred and five single panel altarpieces and polyptychs produced for Venetian churches in the period between 1450 and 1530, he noticed that eighty of them feature the iconography of a male saint at the centre of the composition<sup>30</sup>. Thus in the works of the Santa Croces in Venice and the Veneto region, the titular saint of the church or the altar for which the artwork is commissioned was usually in the centre of the painted composition. For example, Saint Matthew for the church of San Matteo di Rialto, Saint Martin for the church of San Martino in Luvigliano, Saint Julian for the church of San Giuliano (San Zulian).

In his early autonomous works of art, such as the *Sacra Conversazione* from 1520, in the church of San Silvestro in Venice, Girolamo demonstrated that he had fully mastered the painting style which was still somewhat modern at the time. In this painting he depicted the enthroned Saint Thomas of Canterbury flanked by two saints on the unified field of the pala<sup>31</sup>. According to Humfrey,

<sup>29</sup> Čapeta 2008, pp. 159-168.

<sup>30</sup> Humfrey 1993, p. 64.

<sup>31</sup> The work is *in situ* but without the decorative frame – retable.

one of the characteristics of the *Sacra Conversazione* theme in the Venetian painting is that it has the form of a single panel altarpiece<sup>32</sup>. Because of this it is important to call attention to the specifics which appear in Girolamo's works of art as well as in some of the works by his contemporary, Lorenzo Lotto<sup>33</sup>. In the artworks produced for Venice, Girolamo demonstrated modern tendencies reflected in the choice of the form of the painting. These are single panel altarpieces which predominantly feature themes such as the *Sacra Conversazione*, narrative themes such as the *Coronation of the Virgin*, or a scene from the life of a saint such as the *The Calling of Saint Matthew*. When he produces artworks for provincial areas, where commissioners still require multi-panel compositions (polyptychs), a certain fusion occurs, i.e. merging of modern and traditional altarpiece forms. This is exemplified by the polyptychs from Pazin and Vis which were made for commissioners from the eastern coast of the Adriatic Sea. In the central panel they represent the *Sacra Conversazione* theme, the enthroned Madonna and the Child surrounded by two or more saints. This central scene could function as an independent altarpiece; however, it is flanked by panels featuring figures of saints. In other words, here the Renaissance type of a single panel altarpiece depicting the *Sacra Conversazione* has been combined with the traditional multi-panel painting form.

Girolamo produced paintings of traditional iconography and form, typologically akin to eastern-Adriatic formulas, for the Apulian cathedrals in Castellaneta (in 1531) and Lucera (in 1555)<sup>34</sup>, while for the church of Santa Maria Maggiore in Lanciano (Abruzzo) he produced a triptych of the so-called "Paduan format"<sup>35</sup>. In these paintings, the central axis of the composition features the enthroned Madonna and the Child, surrounded with various saints selected in accordance with the local geopolitical circumstances of the respective places. Apart from these artworks which are well-studied by the historical and artistic historiography, here I shall use the opportunity to reflect on another artwork which so far has not been identified as a work of the Santa Croce workshop by the relevant literature. It is the altarpiece which can be found

<sup>32</sup> «In the present book, the term will accordingly be used to refer to a type of altarpiece composition established in Venice by Giovanni Bellini, and remaining characteristic of fifteenth-century tradition, in which the Madonna (or a central saint) is represented in the company of other saints within same place» (Humfrey 1993, pp. 13, 18). In the Italian art history the term is also used for horizontal single panel compositions depicting half-length figures of saints, oftentimes placed in a landscape, which were painted for private devotion. Compare Tempestini 1999, pp. 939-1015.

<sup>33</sup> Comparable in this regard is the polyptych of Saint Dominic from 1508, produced for the Dominicans in Recanati (Marche), currently in the Civic Museum in Recanati; Compare Frapiccini 2000, p. 150.

<sup>34</sup> Della Chiesa, Baccheschi 1976, p. 31, fig. 65/7; *Restauri in Puglia* 1983, cat. ent. no. 25, pp. 88-89.

<sup>35</sup> The term is borrowed from Humfrey 1993, pp. 180 – 184. For the triptych from Lanciano cfr. Campitelli 2011.



in the church of San Francesco d'Assisi in Castelvecchio Subequo, Aquila<sup>36</sup>, described by Nicola Petrone in the following manner:

Entriamo dal lato destro della porta centrale e posiamo lo sguardo sulla prima tela che adorna l'altare della "Cintura". È il più bel lavoro su tela che si trova nella chiesa; l'opera appartiene ad un grande maestro della scuola umbra. Nella parte centrale della tela c'è la Vergine circondata da una folta schiera di Angeli che la guidano verso il cielo, mentre, in basso, ai due lati sono raffigurati Francesco d'Assisi ed Antonio da Padova, che aprono la doppia fila degli Apostoli, riprodotti a dimensioni ridotte; questi ultimi hanno lo sguardo rapito verso il cielo e contemplano la Vergine trasportata sulle ali degli angeli [...] La tela centrale è di una finezza imparaggiabile; tra la figura della Vergine e gli Apostoli c'è una sorta di rottura proprio per dare più risalto al mistero centrale. La delicatezza dei lineamenti del volto della Vergine, la flessuosità del panneggio, la freschezza del movimento ascensionale donano una visione riposante ed elevante al mistico visitatore (fig. 5)<sup>37</sup>.

Instead of being attributed to an unknown 16<sup>th</sup> century master of the Umbrian school<sup>38</sup>, I believe that the painting can without a doubt be listed among the Santa Croce artworks. There are numerous comparative examples from their corpus which can support this thesis. For example, the figure of Saint Francis of Assisi, which can be seen on the left side of the painting from Castelvecchio, has its counterpart in the figure of the same saint on Girolamo's signed painting of All Saints from the parish church in Blato on the island of Korčula, and in the left panel of the Saint Roch polyptych from the Franciscan church in Lopud (fig. 6). Similar figures of Saint Anthony of Padua can be seen on the signed polyptychs from the Franciscan churches in Pazin and Košljun. Kruno Prijatelj was right when, in 1957, he pointed out that the works of the Santa Croces, in particular those of Girolamo who, in his opinion, far exceed the quality of his son's works, «certain elements of the painting demonstrate a few latent hints at new currents of style and taste of the time». Referring to the painting from Castelvecchio, and following on from the words of Kruno Prijatelj, I would like to point out that in terms of the composition this painting complies with "the new type" of the Assumption, introduced in Venice by Titian in the altarpiece of the Franciscan church of Santa Maria Gloriosa dei Frari around 1518. In the said painting the Virgin is not lifted by the angels, but ascends to glory by herself, surrounded by them<sup>39</sup>. Versions of the Assumption similar to that from

<sup>36</sup> Special thanks to Andrea Padovani for the photos of this altarpiece.

<sup>37</sup> Petrone 1976, p. 84.

<sup>38</sup> On the web site *Musei d'Italia, musei digitali* the painting is ascribed to Pietro Perugino and presumably dated around 1490-1510: <[http://www.culturaitalia.it/opencms/opencms/system/modules/com.culturaitalia\\_stage.liberologico/templates/museid/viewItem.jsp?language=it&id=oai%3Aculturaitalia.it%3Amuseiditalia-work\\_86103#](http://www.culturaitalia.it/opencms/opencms/system/modules/com.culturaitalia_stage.liberologico/templates/museid/viewItem.jsp?language=it&id=oai%3Aculturaitalia.it%3Amuseiditalia-work_86103#)>, 28.11.2014.

<sup>39</sup> Humfrey believes that Titian had to have been familiar with Fra Bartolomeo's composition drawing for the Assumption of the Virgin *pala* altarpiece which he was commissioned to do around 1516, but had never completed it. In the said period the two masters could have met at the court of Ferrara where Titian could have adopted Fra Bartolomeo's new concept; cfr. Humfrey 1993, p. 304.

Castelvecchio are encountered again in Girolamo's polyptych from Košljun, more precisely on the last panel of the predella (fig. 7). He also used this "Titian type" of the Assumption on his two drawings, one kept in the British Museum<sup>40</sup> in London (fig. 8), and the other exhibited in Teylers Museum in Haarlem<sup>41</sup> (fig. 9). The Virgin is depicted as standing up, carried up into heaven by angels which surround her like a living mandorla. In the London drawing, the Virgin has both arms spread wide, while in the Haarlem drawing her hands are clasped in prayer. It should be pointed out that, unlike the rendering in the two drawings, in the painting from Castelvecchio the theme of the Assumption is synthesized with the Madonna of the Girdle (Madonna della Cintola) theme. The theme is clearly recognizable since the painting represents the Virgin holding a belt with both hands and offering it to Thomas the Apostle in order to convince him of her Assumption. The vaguely painted landscape in which the holy scene takes place is typical of the Santa Croce workshop, in particular the gradation of the firmament whose blue expanse is streaked with small white clouds.

Due to a large number of saintly figures borrowed from the corpus of the previous generation of painters, which the Santa Croce workshop had routinely perpetuated until the end of their activity, and due to the choice of the traditional polyptych form and the manner in which light was used in their paintings, their style is predominantly defined as conservative and uninventive. It is an indisputable fact that their approach to painting completely ignored modern tendencies established in the Lagoon City by the leading painters of their time such as Giorgione and Titian, and later Tintoretto and Veronese. Multi-panel paintings, relatively large in size, painted in vivid colours and framed with carved and gilded frames, must have glistened before the eyes of the clergy and the pious people by the light of candles. Decorative and completely clear in terms of their message, they were close to the spectators' taste which did not approve of modern tendencies of the leading painters of the time. In a period filled with fear and uncertainty of life, commissioned paintings and their iconography in the eastern coast of the Adriatic Sea were associated with vows and prayers of the community or individuals for salvation from enemies or disease. To conclude with the words by Milan Pelc, in such circumstances «they were produced primarily out of an existential necessity, while the aesthetic needs were of secondary importance»<sup>42</sup>.

<sup>40</sup> Popham 1947, p. 226; Frerichs 1966, pp. 1-18, fig. 4.; Gilbert 1977, pp. 19, 27, note 65, fig. 17; Humfrey 1986, p. 74; Humfrey 1993, pp. 138, 151, fig. 135; Fossaluzza 1998, p. 51, note 52; Aikema 1999, pp. 354-355, note 76; Sartor 1999, pp. 113-118; Tomić 2003, pp. 97-106; Čapeta 2006, pp. 185-195; Čapeta Rakić 2011, pp. 182-183.

<sup>41</sup> Regteren Altena 1966, p. 46, fig. 18; Meijer 1984, cat. 11; Sartor 1999, p. 113; Čapeta 2006, pp. 185-195; Čapeta Rakić 2011, pp. 183-184.

<sup>42</sup> Pelc 2007, p. 12.

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*Appendix*

Fig. 1. Girolamo da Santa Croce, *Polyptych on the main altar*, 1535, Košljun, Franciscan church



Fig. 2. Francesco da Santa Croce, *Polyptych on the main altar*, 1583, Hvar, Franciscan church





Fig. 3. Girolamo da Santa Croce, *First panel of predella on the main altar polyptych*, 1535, Kosljun, Franciscan church



Fig. 4. Francesco da Santa Croce, *Polyptych on the south altar (altar of the Immaculate Conception)*, 1583, Hvar, Franciscan church



Fig. 5. Girolamo da Santa Croce, *Assumption of the Virgin Mary*, Castelvecchio Subequo, L'Aquila, Saint Francis church





Fig. 6. Girolamo da Santa Croce, *Polyptych of saint Roch*, (hypothetical reconstruction of the original appearance, drawing by Ivana Čapeta Rakić), Franciscan church and parish Museum, Lopud



Fig. 7. Girolamo da Santa Croce, *Last panel of predella on the main altar polyptych*, 1535, Košljun, Franciscan church

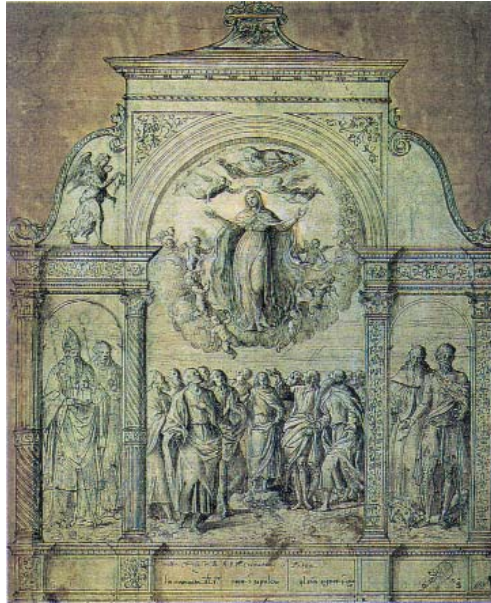


Fig. 8. Girolamo da Santa Croce, *Drawing of polyptych, Assumption of the Virgin Mary with Saints*, London, British Museum



Fig. 9. Girolamo da Santa Croce, *Drawing, Assumption of the Virgin Mary and Saint Jerome*, Haarlem, Teylers Museum

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