

THE POWER OF SPACE: THE HIGH ALTAR  
OF THE VENETIAN CHURCH OF  
SAN SALVADOR

By

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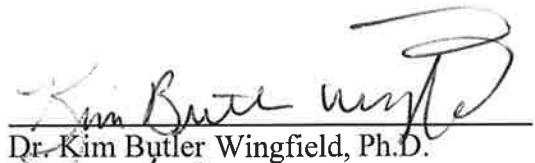
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I would like to dedicate this thesis to my mother, who has been my sounding board, editor, therapist, travel companion, and friend. To my sisters, who have always encouraged me to follow my dreams and to Rob whose sacrifices over the last two years have not gone unnoticed.

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ABSTRACT

This thesis will present a holistic analysis of the Venetian church of San Salvador focusing on the high altarpiece, the Pala d'Argento, and its painted cover, Titian's *Transfiguration*. By examining the visual, liturgical, and functional relationships between elements of the sixteenth-century visual program this thesis has uncovered socio-historical, political, and theological queues which imbue the space with meaning. Through this analysis, the visual program has been found to be strongly rooted in the Byzantine heritage of Venice and specific references to the ducal chapel of San Marco. This programmatic intention reflects a desire to promote San Salvador as the repository for the relics of Saint Theodore, the first patron saint of Venice, and to elevate the church within the culture of sixteenth-century Venice. Additionally, the findings of this thesis show that Titian was responding to the environment of the church with the intention of injecting complex allusions into his paintings.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

In the city of Venice, the church of San Salvador is located between the Rialto Bridge and Piazza San Marco. Now a monumental sixteenth-century structure, the origins of the church date to the seventh century. A series of status-increasing events occurred over the course of several centuries which led to the rebuilding of the structure in the first decades of the sixteenth century. The prestige and newly designed architecture of the church set the stage for the decorative project completed during the remainder of the century. Designed as part of the rebuilding project, the high altar frame was created with the specific purpose of housing the Pala d'Argento, a gilt silver *antependium* which was converted to the high altar.

The unique architectural plan on which the church was built, its art works, especially those of the high altar, can be seen as a visual program that is unique to the atmosphere of the sixteenth century. Scholarship on San Salvador, despite its importance, is limited. Furthermore, rather than address the unique environment the church represents, scholars have focused primarily on elements of the church in isolation and in varying degrees of depth. This project will apply a holistic approach to the church of San Salvador with the intention of investigating the complex interplay of social, cultural and liturgical influences within the visual framework of the church.

To more fully understand the visual environment of the church of San Salvador one must understand the relationship between the works of art and their environment as well as the relationship amongst the works of art within the space. Formal analysis, social history, and iconography have been the most common methods taken by scholars. However, the cultural, political and historical influences and iconographic analyses of the church and the works of art

within it allow for only a portion of the possible insights. Gaining insight into the effect of the complex, and at times seemingly contradictory, set of visual references within and between the works of art in San Salvador requires a holistic analysis and interpretation of the church unlike those previously attempted. In doing so, the aforementioned social, historical, political and iconographic interpretations are combined with a liturgical and visual analysis of the space through Michael Baxandall's "period eye."<sup>1</sup> For this type of investigation into the church will allow for a greater grasp of how the church was experienced and understood by a sixteenth-century viewer.

The disjointed nature of the existing scholarship will act as threads to be woven into the holistic analysis of the church as a whole, each topical area of existing study presenting unique challenges and benefits. To accommodate for this, the following section will break up the existing literature into focused sections on the church architecture, the Pala d'Argento, and the paintings by Titian. Although the commissions made for the church of San Salvador during the sixteenth century are not limited to works within these categories, the remaining altars, funerary monuments, mosaics and organ decorations lack sufficient scholarship necessary to fully address here. The scholarship that will be presented and evaluated consists predominantly of socio-historical, formal, and iconographic analysis.

In order to begin addressing the scholarship on the church is it necessary to discuss the two monographic texts on the church which take on the task of examining the whole of the church of San Salvador. Published in 1997, Bruno Bertoli's book *Chiesa di San Salvador: arte e devozione* dedicates chapters to the architecture, the history and inscriptions, the symbolism of

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1 Baxandall, Michael. *Painting and Experience in Fifteenth-Century Italy 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988).

the church and the Pala d'Argento and other altars.<sup>2</sup> It was created as one in a series of short books for the Ministry for Cultural Heritage and Environment, the Superintendency of Artistic and Historical Heritage of Venice and Patriarchal Curia of Venice is dedicated to promoting the historical nature and museum-like quality of the city of Venice. Bertoli focuses primarily on the history of the church and the major points of interest, like the Pala d'Argento and organ, and only gives brief information and descriptions of the other works of painting and sculpture. Despite its short format, Bertoli's work provides some insight into the history and importance of the church and the elements within it.

The second of these monographs was compiled as the result of a multidisciplinary project in honor of the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the founding of the church.<sup>3</sup> Edited by Gianmario Guidarelli, the book is composed of a series of essays written by participants whose backgrounds range from the histories of architecture, art, music and theology. However, the resulting disconnect between the individual essays continues to deal with the aspects of the church as isolated elements rather than a coherent whole. The importance of the individual essays will be discussed at length within the context of the scholarship on the individual elements of the church.

The architecture of San Salvador is the element of the church with the longest tradition of scholarship, largely because the church represents a significant example of Byzantine revival style architecture.<sup>4</sup> Early work on the architecture of the church focused primarily on the unique

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2 Bertoli, Bruno and Giandomenico Romanelli. *Chiesa di San Salvador: arte e devozione*. Venice: Marsilio, 1997.

3 Guidarelli, Gianmario. *La chiesa di San Salvador: storia, arte, teologia : atti del convegno pluridisciplinare del cinquecentenario della fabbrica : Venezia, Scuola grande di San Teodoro, 27 febbraio 6, 13, 20 marzo 2007*. (Padova: Il prato, 2009).

4 Burns, Carol Eugenia. "San Salvatore and Venetian Church Architecture: 1490-1530." (PhD diss, New York University, 1986), 5: Byzantine revival represents a style of architecture that developed in Venice during the last decades of the fifteenth century and the first three decades of the sixteenth century. This renewed interest in Byzantine culture was spurred by the influx of Greek refugees fleeing the fall of Constantinople in 1453.

formal innovations of the church. In his posthumously published 1980 text, *Venetian Architecture of the Early Renaissance*, John McAndrew traces the evolution of style within Venetian architecture.<sup>5</sup> His discussion of the church relies upon a detailed formal analysis of the architecture with a focus on the contributions of the two primary architects associated with the project, Giorgio Spavento and Tullio Lombardo. This formal analysis of style has been mirrored by authors of larger texts on the history of Venetian architecture. Although these visual analyses and descriptions are an integral component to understanding the experience of the space, McAndrew's scholarship takes a clinical approach to the architecture and fails to address the potential allusions or associations that the architectural plan may bring to mind in a sixteenth century viewer.

The majority of more recent scholarship builds upon the foundation of McAndrew by addressing the social and historical influences on the building of the sixteenth century fabric. Carol Eugenia Burns examined the architectural history of the church in her 1986 dissertation, "San Salvatore and Venetian Church Architecture: 1490-1530," at New York University.<sup>6</sup> Her approach relies heavily on archival documentation which she used to outline the early history of the church and the sixteenth century building project. This documentation allowed Burns to reconstruct the early history of the church in more depth and detail than had been done to that point. In her analysis of the sixteenth century building project she focuses attention on the patronage and funding that contributed to the building. Additionally, she expands McAndrew's work by addressing the possible meanings within the stylistic elements of the architecture.

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Additionally, hostilities between Venice and the Western powers, culminating in the War of the League of Cambrai, which resulted in a desire on the part of Venetians to reconnect with their early heritage.

5 McAndrew, John. *Venetian Architecture of the Early Renaissance*. (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1980).

6 Burns, Carol Eugenia. "San Salvatore and Venetian Church Architecture."

Elements of the physical structure of the church make direct allusions, according to Burns, to the ducal chapel of San Marco. These references would have been known by a sixteenth-century viewer and influential to their understanding and experience of the church.

Burns' socio-historical and political analysis based on documentation seems to be among the earliest applications of these methods to the church. However, it was not the last. Both of the earlier monographs on the church of San Salvador include sections dedicated to the architectural history. Although briefer than Burns' contribution, the section of Bertoli's book and essay by Ennio Concina, in Guidarelli's book, mimic the first chapter of her dissertation outlining the history of the church.

Unlike the architecture, the gilt silver high altarpiece, called the Pala d'Argento, in San Salvador was largely unstudied until recently. The work's three central panels originated as an antependium, or altar frontal, and were repurposed as the high altarpiece of the church. Having been hidden behind Titian's *Transfiguration* the majority of the year since the 1560s, it was a largely unknown work of art until it was removed from its frame, dismantled, cleaned, and conserved in 2010. Since its rediscovery it has been the subject of an exhibition at Berlin's Bode Museum for which a catalogue, consisting of several essays on the Pala, was created, together with growing number of scholarly articles.<sup>7</sup> However, the previously unknown status of this work of art has led to a number of non-scholarly articles with the aim to simply present a detailed description of the Pala d'Argento to the public. These descriptive tools are necessary for the identification of the multitude of figures present on the Pala but add little to the discussion of meaning and association that this thesis aims to discuss.

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<sup>7</sup> Passeri, Maria Cristina, Venetian Heritage Inc., et al. *San Salvador: la pala d'argento dorato restaurata da Venetian Heritage – the gilded silver altarpiece restored by Venetian Heritage*. (Venice: Marcianum Press, 2011.)

More complex scholarship on the Pala d'Argento is inaugurated by an interest in the physical evolution of the work and the iconographic associations represented by the figures. Two of the three essays in the 2010 exhibition catalogue, *San Salvador: La Pala d'Argento Dorato Restaurata di Venetian Heritage*, focus on this evolution of the work through history.<sup>8</sup> While the first of these essays addresses this theme from the perspective of a conservator, which does not relate to the research at hand, the second represents an art historian's analysis of the history of the Pala d'Argento. Silvia Pichi's essay, "The Gilded Silver Altarpiece of San Salvador: Faith, Art, History," attempts to address the Pala d'Argento from multiple perspectives, tracing the history of the work from its earliest documentation.<sup>9</sup> While evidence documenting the evolution of the work after the sixteenth century is tangential to the objective of the current investigation, her evidence of the early situation in which the Pala d'Argento was placed is invaluable. Of more importance to this research project is Pichi's analysis of the complex set of meanings associated with the Pala d'Argento, particularly the theological, political and social associations. Her visual analysis, which helpfully identifies each of the saints represented, is supplemented by an iconographic exploration of the relationship between the saints depicted and the Venetian Republic. According to Pichi, the saints represent patrons of important guilds, saints related to the Venetian republic, and to the Augustinian Regular canons who were installed at the church of San Salvador. Like Pichi, Luisa Riccato and Bruno Bertoli focus their writing on the historical and iconographic nature of the Pala d'Argento.<sup>10</sup> These works, however, at

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8 Pichi, Silvia. "The Gilded Silver Altarpiece of San Salvador: Faith, Art, History." in *San Salvador: La Pala d'Argento Dorato Restaurata di Venetian Heritage*. (Venice: Marcianum Press, 2011), 55-91. & Bonazza, Natalino. "Signum perennis gloriae. Towards a comprehensive view of the San Salvador altarpiece." in *San Salvador: La Pala d'Argento Dorato Restaurata di Venetian Heritage*. (Venice: Marcianum Press, 2011), 93-110.

9 Pichi, "The Gilded Silver Altarpiece of San Salvador," 55-91.

10 Riccato, Luisa. "La pala d'oro di San Salvador: status quaestionis." in Guidarelli ed *La Chiesa di San Salvador a Venezia: storia, arte teologia*. (Padova: Il Prato 2009), 109-117. & Bertoli, Bruno and Giandomenico

times conflict with one another. The identification of saints is not an exact science; the different possible identifications must be identified and addressed given the potential for alternate meanings.

A third approach and one which proved extremely useful to the current project, is that of Natalino Bonazza in his essay “Signum perennis gloriae. Towards a comprehensive view of the San Salvador Altarpiece” for the exhibition catalogue *San Salvador: La Pala d'Argento Dorato Restaurata di Venetian Heritage*.<sup>11</sup> Bonazza considers reception of the Pala as the central sacramental image in the church. In doing so he chose to analyze the experience of approaching the high altar from the entrance of the church. The interactive understanding of the Pala d'Argento that Bonazza lays out represents a part of the overall goal of this project. While his work advances the scholarship on the experience of the church through the Pala d'Argento, Bonazza takes the position of a contemporary audience in his analysis who observes the Pala as it appears in 2010. Elements of his work can be drawn out and applied to the sixteenth century viewer but it must be tempered by an analysis through the “period eye.”

The “period eye” is most important when dealing with the works of painting within the church commissioned from the artist Titian. While he is now recognized as one of the most important Venetian artists of the Renaissance, his status has not always been secure. Giorgio Vasari's disdain for Venetian artists has meant that the arts of Venice had been systematically marginalized up unto fairly recently. Titian's painterly brushwork and reliance on color over line has been seen as a deficient quality of his work. Additionally, the works present in San Salvador represent later works by Titian in which his brushwork became more painterly. His two works

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Romanelli. “La pala d'argento e i capolavori della pittura.” in *Chiesa di San Salvador arte e devozione*. (Venice: Marsilio Editori, 1997), 31-46.

11 Bonazza, “Signum perennis gloriae,” 93-110.



for the church have been left largely understudied and at times written off as poor or unfinished works of art in monographs on Titian's career.<sup>12</sup> However, Titian has been shown to be an artist who was sensitive to the environment into which his paintings would be placed. David Rosand, in his analysis of the *Assunta* altarpiece in Santa Maria Gloriosa dei Frari, showed that Titian made choices so as to integrate the work into its architectural space and responded to the way in which the painting would be experienced.<sup>13</sup>

Like the Pala d'Argento the *Transfiguration* has been the subject of conservation prompting the completion of a text addressing the painting entitled *La trasfigurazione di Cristo: Tiziano Vecellio per il sinodo di Belluno-Feltre*.<sup>14</sup> Of additional note is W. R. Rearick's article, "Titian's 'Transfiguration' and its Marble Altar and Statue of Christ in the Church of San Salvador."<sup>15</sup> Rearick cites the contemporary importance of the *Transfiguration* in that it was engraved for reproduction almost immediately after completion.<sup>16</sup> His analysis of the *Transfiguration* emphasizes the importance of viewpoint and the complex counterbalance of the upward motion of Christ and the downward falling of the apostles. Additionally, Rearick explains the lack of detail in the painterly brushwork as Titian accounting for the distance from which the viewer would observe the work. His important analysis of the painting speaks to the thoughtfulness of the artists in creating a work for the specific space and function of the church. Furthermore, his analysis of the possible influences on Titian reveal that the painting is a result

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12 Biadene, Susanna and Mary Yakush. *Titian: Prince of Painters*. (Munich: Prestel, 1990): In *Titian: Prince of Painters* the *Transfiguration* is mentioned in one of the essays but not included in the comprehensive list of Titian's paintings.

13 Rosand, David. "Titian in the Frari," *The Art Bulletin*, 53, No. 2 (Jun., 1971) 196-213.

14 Chiesa di San Rocco (Belluno). *La trasfigurazione di Cristo: Tiziano Vecellio per il sinodo di Belluno-Feltre*. (Cinisello Balsamo: Silvana, 2005).

15 Rearick, W. R. "Titian's 'Transfiguration' and its Marble Altar and Statue of Christ in the Church of San Salvador," in *Studies in Venetian Art and Conservation*. (New York, NY: Save Venice Inc., 1999)

16 Ibid., 24 -27.

of conscious choices on the part of the artists and that the work represents a composition designed for the specific space of San Salvador.

Additionally, art historian Daniela Bohde has employed a social historical approach to the works of Titian as a whole within the church. In her article, “Titian's Three-Altar Project in the Venetian Church of San Salvador: Strategies of Self-Representation by Members of the Scuola Grande di San Rocco,” Bohde argues that these works, along with an unfinished third commission, actually represent a coherent program intended for three altars of the church by the patrons and Titian.<sup>17</sup> Bohde presents documentation that in addition to his *Transfiguration* and *Annunciation* paintings, Titian was commissioned to paint a *Crucifixion* for a third altar directly across the nave from the *Annunciation*. The patrons who commissioned the *Annunciation* and *Crucifixion* were both members of the Scuola Grande di San Rocco indicating that they knew each other. Their goal in the commissioning of these works, according to Bohde, was to illustrate their knowledge of Catholic liturgy as well as their artistic taste and wealth. Together the three commissions would have represented the dual nature of Christ and would have formed an equilateral triangle enhancing their collective meaning. Additionally, Bohde performs a detailed analysis of Titian's *Annunciation* in which she advocates that the manner in which Titian painted the work represents the complex Incarnation theme. Her analysis of the relationship between the works focuses primarily on the *Annunciation* and non-existent *Crucifixion* but largely ignores a direct relationship with the *Transfiguration*, which was only mentioned in passing as a third point within the equilateral triangle. However, the relationship she describes

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17 Bohde, Daniela. “Titian's Three-Altar Project in the Venetian Church of San Salvador: Strategies of Self-Representation by Members of the Scuola Grande di San Rocco.” *Renaissance Studies* 15, No. 4 (2001): 450-472.

can be elaborated upon concerning the *Annunciation* and *Transfiguration* especially when the Pala d'Argento is properly considered.

Although other commissions were made for mosaics, organ decorations, altars and funerary monuments during the sixteenth century for San Salvador, these works lack significant scholarship. The monographic texts of Bertoli and Guidarelli include varying degrees of scholarship on these works of art and Burns discusses briefly the secondary patronage of altars and tombs within the church. Using the limited information available and in conjunction with the text by Francesco Sansovino, which documents all altars and tombs in the church as of 1663, these largely unstudied works will be integrated into the overall understanding of the sixteenth century church fabric and the experience of a sixteenth-century viewer.

## CHAPTER 2

### AT THE CENTER OF VENICE: THE RISING STATUS OF SAN SALVADOR

#### Foundation Legend

The foundation legend of San Salvador linked the church to the divine origins of the city as well as other churches in the lagoon. The legend states that the church was founded by Saint Magnus, the first bishop of Venice, in the year 638.<sup>18</sup> Tafuri relays Sanudo's account that “through a revelation” Magnus was inspired to travel to the lagoon to begin building a city which would be called Venice.<sup>19</sup> He founded the churches of San Pietro di Castello and the church of the Angelo Raffaello at the request of the divine entities to which the churches are dedicated.<sup>20</sup> After this, Christ appeared to the saint instructing him to build a church dedicated to him.<sup>21</sup> The intended location of the church, at the center of the city, was denoted by Christ through a cloud of rose-colored smoke.<sup>22</sup>

This position is significant in relation to the other seven churches founded by Magnus; San Pietro in Castello, San Raffaele, Santa Maria Formosa, Santi Aposoli, San Guistina, San Zaccaria, and San Giovanni in Bragora.<sup>23</sup> The two earlier mentioned churches, San Pietro in Castello and San Raffaele, were located at either end of the city [Figure 1], San Pietro at the far

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18 Burns, 19; & Tafuri, Manfredo. “Republican pietas, Neo-Byzantinism, and Humanism. San Salvador: A Temple in Visceribus urbis,” in *Venice and the Renaissance*. (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1989), 17.

19 Tafuri, “Republican pietas,” 17.

20 Ibid.

21 Ibid.

22 Sanudo, Marin. *De Origine, Situ et Magistratibus Urbis Venetae ovvero La Città di Venetia (1493-1530)*. (Milan: Cisalpino-La Goliardica, 1980), 16: “Poi li apparse Christo Giesù, salvator del mondo, et li ordenò etiam in mezo della città, zoè dil circuito che dovea esser, dovesse edificar una ghiesia in loco dove troveria una niola rossa, et cusi fe', et si chiamò San Salvador.”

23 Ibid., 16-17.

east and San Raffaele at the extreme west. Tafuri identifies these placements as creating a “triangulation of sacred sites.”<sup>24</sup> The location of these churches gave the appearance that the city was defended by Saint Peter and the angel Raphael while the heart of the city was dedicated to the Savior.

### Early History

Little is known about the early history of the church of San Salvador. Flaminio Corner quoted an anonymous thirteenth-century writer who described the church as resembling the plan of the Holy Sepulcher in Jerusalem and that its floor included iron grates under which water flowed.<sup>25</sup> Howard adds that the original church had a thatched roof.<sup>26</sup> However, no other documentation on the appearance of the church seems to have survived. What we do know points towards an early identification of the city with the Holy Land. By using the church of the Holy Sepulcher as the model for San Salvador, Tafuri notes, Venice was setting itself up to appear as the rightly successor “as the *sigillum veritatis* and seat of Solomonian justice.”<sup>27</sup>

Documentation increased in the twelfth century after the institution of Augustinian Regular Canons at the church in 1141. On May 3<sup>rd</sup> of that year, Bonifiglio Zusto, a parish priest, introduced the order to San Salvador<sup>28</sup>: an action not without controversy. Giovanni Polani, the bishop of Castello under whose jurisdiction the church of San Salvador existed, opposed the institution as it would override his authority.<sup>29</sup> The conflict between the two resulted in the

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24 Tafuri, “Republican pietas,” 17.

25 Quoted in Tafuri, “Republican pietas,” 18.

26 Howard, Deborah. *The Architectural History of Venice*. (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2002), 4.

27 Tafuri, “Republican pietas,” 18.

28 Burns, “San Salvatore and Venetian Church Architecture,” 20.

29 Ibid.

removal of San Salvador from the bishop's jurisdiction and the placement of the church under the control of the Apostolic Seat by Pope Innocent III on May 13<sup>th</sup>, 1141.<sup>30</sup> Continued support from the Pope can be seen in the privileges conferred upon the church in 1148 and 1153 by Eugenius III: the latter event carried additional support from the bishop of Castello thus ending the conflict.<sup>31</sup> Still, during this time Zusto entered into self-imposed exile and was eventually killed by his enemies.<sup>32</sup> His body was returned to San Salvador by Enrico Dandolo to be buried in a marble arch behind the high altar.<sup>33</sup>

In 1177 the church was consecrated by Pope Alexander III. This date is one of great importance to the Republic of Venice. The primary purpose of this 1177 visit to Venice enabled the Doge, Sebastiano Ziani (1172-78), to mediate peace between the Pope and the Holy Roman Emperor, Frederick Barbarossa. This event was used as propaganda by the Venetians to promote their own supremacy. As Rosand notes, acting as mediator placed the Republic on an even level with the Roman Catholic Church and the Holy Roman Empire on European political stage.<sup>34</sup> Additionally, this propaganda contributed to the developments of Venice's identification as the "Most Serene Republic." This rhetoric, according to Rosand, is largely based on the scholar and poet Petrarch who described Venice as, "home of liberty, peace, and justice, the one refuge of honorable men, haven for those who, battered on all sides by the storms of tyranny and war, seek to live in tranquility."<sup>35</sup> To further indoctrinate the church into the 1177 event, an inscription and

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30 Ibid.

31 Ibid., 21.

32 Ibid.

33 Ibid.

34 Rosand, David. *Myths of Venice: The Figuration of a State*. (Chapel Hill & London: The University of North Carolina Press, 2005), 6.

35 Quoted by Rosand, *Myths of Venice*, 7.

early chronicles, cited by Burns, assert that the Pope spent a night sleeping under the portico of the church.<sup>36</sup> The alignment with this important event in the history and identity of Venice substantially raised the prestige of the church in the Venetian consciousness.

Shortly after the consecration it appears that the structure was damaged, necessitating the rebuilding of the church. Burns attributes the rebuilding to a fire which almost completely destroyed the church and monastery.<sup>37</sup> Bertoli and Romanelli also state that the church was severely damaged by fire in 1167.<sup>38</sup> However, other scholars, including Tafuri and Concina, instead attribute the reconstruction to the church's increase in status as a result of its consecration and rising importance within Venice. Regardless of the cause, the structure was rebuilt by 1209 at the initiation of the prior, Gregorio Fioravanti.<sup>39</sup> Seemingly contradictory documents describe the plan of this medieval church. The Barbari map [Figure 2] from 1500 illustrates a Latin cross church while a document in the Archivio di Stato [Figure 3], published by Concina and Burns, indicates that the medieval church was built on a longitudinal plan, without a transept. However, Concina asserts that it is possible to use both images to glean an idea of what the church looked like. In his interpretation, the church ground plan resembles the drawing in the Archivio di Stato while the elevations create the Latin cross seen in the Barbari map. That is to say that the roof line of the structure is raised down the central nave and across the structure to create a fictive transept. The cross shape would have been significant to the monastic community at San Salvador since the cross obviously held particular significance to their devotion. Additionally,

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36 Burns, "San Salvatore and Venetian Church Architecture," 21.

37 Ibid.

38 Bertoli & Romanelli, *Chiesa di San Salvador*, 7.

39 Burns, "San Salvatore and Venetian Church Architecture," 21; Tafuri, "Republican pietas," 18; & Concina, Ennio. "San Salvador: la fabbrica, l'architettura." in Gianmario Guidarelli ed *San Salvador: storia, arte, teologia*. (Padova: Il prato, 2009), 12.

Concina notes, the formal establishment of the monastic community coincided with the liturgical celebration of the memory of the discovery of the True cross in 1141.<sup>40</sup> This date likely refers to when Pope Innocent III removed the church of San Salvador from the jurisdiction of the bishop of Castello thus eliminating the conflict surrounding the early years of the monastic community.

Like the architecture of the medieval structure, little is known about the interior decoration or this early church. However, some sources, cited by Concina, suggest that the main apse was decorated with mosaics that depicted Christ, perhaps similar to the central apse of San Marco, and the kneeling figure of Doge Marino Morosini.<sup>41</sup> This would indicate the high prestige of the church even in this early period since it clearly had a close bond with the Doge. The status of San Salvador would increase throughout the intervening centuries, most notably due to the acquisition of the relics of Saint Theodore.

#### Saint Theodore and Saint Magnus

As the first patron saint of Venice, Saint Theodore was of particular importance to Venice. A Byzantine saint, Theodore represented the historical heritage of the city. Iconographically, Theodore is very similar to Saint George since both are warrior saints who are portrayed wearing armor and slaying dragons. Muir identifies the Venetian Saint Theodore as an amalgam of two saints: a martyred soldier from Amasea in Pontus with the feast day of November 9<sup>th</sup> and a general of Heraclea whose feast day was February 7<sup>th</sup>.<sup>42</sup> However, Venice embraced only one of these saints and chose to celebrate his feast day on November 9<sup>th</sup>. Evidence suggests that the first ducal chapel was dedicated to Saint Theodore in or before 819 by

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40 Concina, "San Salvador: la fabbrica, l'architettura," 13.

41 Ibid., 15.

42 Muir, Edward. *Civic Ritual in Renaissance Venice*. (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1981), 93.



a man named Marco, a wealthy Greek.<sup>43</sup> When the relics of Saint Mark were brought from Alexandria to Venice in 828, Saint Theodore was replaced by the Evangelist whose lion became the symbol of the Republic.

The translation of the body of Saint Theodore follows a similar, albeit less miraculous, narrative as that of Saint Mark. A 1607 pamphlet, now in the Biblioteca Marciana, describes how the body of Saint Theodore was found in a church in Mesembria.<sup>44</sup> It was transferred to the church of San Nicolo d'Embolo in Constantinople by Giacomo Dauro in the year 1257.<sup>45</sup> This church, owned by the Venetians, held the body for ten years. In 1267 a descendant of Giacomo, Marco Dauro, brought the relics of the saint with him when he returned to Venice.<sup>46</sup> They were interred in the church of San Salvador, the parish church of the Dauro family, and a confraternity dedicated to Saint Theodore was established a year later.<sup>47</sup> While Mesembria was at one point part of the Byzantine empire, by the thirteenth century control of the city had changed hands and it became part of the Bulgarian Empire. Therefore, the desire to save the relics from a rival can be interpreted as analogous to the theme present in the legend of Saint Mark of the triumph of Catholicism over Islam.

After the translation of the saint's body to San Salvador, St Theodore reemerged as an important figure in the Venetian lagoon. Muir notes that in 1329 Saint Theodore's statue was placed alongside the Lion of Saint Mark on two pedestals in Piazzetta of the Ducal Palace,<sup>48</sup>

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43 Ibid. 94.

44 Dionigi, Bartolomeo, trans. "Translatione del Corpo del Beato Martire Theodoro à Venetia." in *Vita, e Martirio del Glorioso Cauallier di Christo San Theodoro*. (Venice: Nicolò Moretti, 1607), 18

45 Ibid., 18.

46 Ibid., 19.

47 Burns, "San Salvatore and Venetian Church Architecture," 23.

48 Muir, *Civic Ritual*, 95.

indicating an early desire to place the two saints on the same level in the public space. Its location was especially important because the Piazzetta was the reception point for important guests to the lagoon and the entrance into the religious and political heart of the city. Additionally, as part of the reconstruction of the Doge's Palace begun in 1340, a sculpture of Saint Theodore was included in the decoration of the balcony off the Great Council hall, along with Saints Mark, Peter, Paul and George.<sup>49</sup>

The fifteenth century saw further interest in the cult of Saint Theodore develop. Tafuri tells of indulgences that were granted to visitors of San Salvador on the feast of Saint Theodore in 1434 by Pope Eugenius IV, and to those who visited the saint's altar by Nicholas V in 1448. In 1449 additional indulgences were offered by nineteen cardinals in the chapel of Saint Theodore.<sup>50</sup> In 1450, the Venetian Senate added November 9<sup>th</sup> to the calendar of ducal processions.<sup>51</sup> Honoring Saint Theodore, the procession, including the Doge and other important members of the city, would process to the church of San Salvador. Tafuri notes that Sanudo recorded three processions to San Salvador between 1506 and 1530 in his *Diarii*.<sup>52</sup> In addition to these processions, the influence of Saint Theodore was reinvigorated within the church of San Marco, where a chapel dedicated to Theodore was rebuilt in 1486, likely to commemorate the victory of Argenta during the War of Ferrara, news of which arrived on his feast day.<sup>53</sup>

While the status of Saint Theodore increased within Venice, so too did the prestige of Saint Magnus. New emphasis was placed on the founding legend of Saint Magnus in the

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49 Concina, "San Salvador: la fabbrica, l'architettura," 17.

50 Tafuri, "Republican pietas," 19.

51 Muir, *Civic Ritual*, 93; & Tafuri, "Republican pietas," 19.

52 Tafuri, "Republican pietas," 19.

53 Concina, "San Salvador: la fabbrica, l'architettura," 17.

fourteenth century.<sup>54</sup> His story was revised in 1370 by the writer Pietro de Natali in his *Catalogus Sanctorum et Eorum Gestorum* and subsequently included in Jacobus de Voragin's *Golden Legend*.<sup>55</sup> The Senate recognized the divine origins, based on the Saint Magnus legend, of eight churches throughout the lagoon and added the feast of Saint Magnus to the calendar of holy days in Venice in 1454.<sup>56</sup> In addition, other churches founded by the saint began to be rebuilt in the new Renaissance style around the lagoon, most notably Santa Maria Formosa.<sup>57</sup>

### Regular Canons and Congregation

This religious renewal coincided with a major shift in the monastic community of the church. In the early years of the fifteenth century it appears that the community of Regular Canons at San Salvador was experiencing a decline.<sup>58</sup> An attempt to reform the order was made in 1427 by Gabriele Condulmer, the future Pope Eugenius IV, who at the time was bishop of Siena.<sup>59</sup> He would later try again to reform the community by appointing an administrator, the Dominican bishop of Trau, Tommaso Tommasini, and by sending twenty-five Lateran Canons.<sup>60</sup> This does not seem to have worked because in 1442 Pope Eugenius IV ordered the Canons of San Salvador to be united, from then on, with the Regular Canons of the Holy Savior in Bologna.<sup>61</sup> This alliance seems to have reinvigorated the order in Venice and would later be

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54 Ibid., 16.

55 Ibid.

56 Ibid., 17

57 Concina, "San Salvador: la fabbrica, l'architettura," 17.

58 Burns, "San Salvatore and Venetian Church Architecture," 27.

59 Ibid.

60 Ibid.

61 Ibid., 28.

advantageous in the acquisition of funds for the sixteenth century rebuilding project.<sup>62</sup> Concina cites documentation that described the church as an “emblematic place of union and collective piety” second only to that of San Marco.<sup>63</sup>

### Conclusion

Representing the intersection of the two saints, Theodore and Magnus, the church of San Salvador benefited from the growing status of both saints. The reemergence of the Byzantine saint marked an identification of Venice as a “second Constantinople” while the rebirth of interest in the Saint Magnus legend reemphasized the divine origins and, by extension, divine protection of the city. Drawing upon these associations the church of San Salvador thrived. By the end of the fifteenth century the church of San Salvador had grown both in status and in community. Its congregation had grown and gained a large number of important Venetian patrons. These factors, coupled with the state of the structure which will be discussed in the next chapter, led to the need to rebuild the church in the early sixteenth century. Additionally, its status allowed for funding to continue, uninterrupted, through the War of the League of Cambrai, largely from the State and other congregations associated with the Canons in Bologna.

This rise in status can be seen in the visual elements of the sixteenth-century church. Architecturally, the church harkens back to the Byzantine heritage of the lagoon which, as noted above, had reemerged as an important element of Venetian national identity. The monumental space of the structure acts as a proclamation of the church's status. Within the church the high altarpiece and its painted cover make reference to the ducal chapel of San Marco only a short

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62 Ibid., 28 & 40.

63 Concina, “San Salvador: la fabbrica, l'architettura,” 19.

walk away. These visual elements are used consciously to create an environment which emphasizes the prestige of the church within Venetian culture.

## CHAPTER 3

### CREATING THE SPACE: THE SIXTEENTH-CENTURY ARCHITECTURE

By 1506, the church of San Salvador had been demolished and the rebuilding project begun. As we have seen, this building project was likely the result of the church's increased status. However, documents reveal that the structure was unstable making intervention necessary. The resulting structure represents the apex of Byzantine Revival architecture. This style, which developed in the last decades of the fifteenth century primarily at the hands of the architect Mauro Codussi, sought to modernize the Byzantine tradition by integrating elements of Tuscan Renaissance architectural theory. In the church of San Salvador, the largest of the Byzantine Revival churches, this style was transformed into a monumental work that is described by Deborah Howard as “one of the most imaginative and successful design in the history of Venetian ecclesiastical architecture.”<sup>64</sup> In rebuilding the structure, the canons, with the help of the Venetian government, were able to create a new spatial environment that embodied the values and associations they worked to emphasize in the first decades of the sixteenth century.

#### History of Byzantine Revival Architecture

To understand the qualities that make the Byzantine Revival style unique it is important to examine the development of the architectural tradition in Venice. While other Italian cities possessed a visual record of the classical Roman past through ruins, Venice was first settled by those fleeing the invasion of Attila the Hun between 434 and 453.<sup>65</sup> This meant that Venetian architects during the Renaissance did not have access to the same classical past from which architects like Brunelleschi and Michelozzo developed their style. Rather, Venice drew upon its

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<sup>64</sup> Howard, *Architectural History of Venice*, 154.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 3.

Byzantine origins. Confirmed as a semi-independent entity within the Byzantine empire in 811, Venetian art and architecture was heavily influenced by the East through the Middle Ages.<sup>66</sup> This eastward focus was maintained even after the fall of the Byzantine empire through extensive trade routes and land holdings in the Mediterranean. The most notable representative of the Byzantine style in ecclesiastical architecture is the Ducal chapel of San Marco [Figure 4] built in 829 and reconstructed due to damage in the mid-eleventh century.<sup>67</sup> San Marco would remain an influential monument for Venetian art and architecture throughout the Renaissance.

Venetian architectural history followed its own distinct path and stylistic movements were often adopted later in Venetian architecture than in the rest of Europe. The close ties to Byzantium and the relatively remote location of the city likely resulted in the delayed adoption of new architectural styles. In the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries the Gothic style was introduced as a result of increased Venetian power and trade with the mainland, or *terraferma*, and Northern Europe.<sup>68</sup> It would continue to be popular into the fifteenth century when the *all'antica* style, which had flourished in central Italy during the previous decade, would finally make an impact on Venetian architecture.

As mentioned above, the city of Venice lacked the Roman ruins relied upon by the rest of Italy. However, by the fifteenth century their holding on the *terraferma* would have allowed, at least in theory, access to classical Roman models. Howard asserts that the reluctance to join the

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66     Howard, *Architectural History of Venice*, 7: “In 811 the *Pax Nicephori* between Charlemagne and the Eastern empire confirmed the existence of Venice as a semi-independent province of Byzantium, the only Italian city to retain an affiliation with the East.”

67     Ibid., 19.

68     Ibid., 75-76: The Gothic style became popular with mendicant orders, which first appeared in Venice during the thirteenth century. Howard states that this is due to the international nature of mendicant orders which allowed them to develop their own architectural traditions divorced from those of the specific cities in which they resided.

revival of classical style was not willful disregard or dislike for the newer style of architecture. Rather, she states, Venetians did not consider their own culture inferior because the Republic was at the height of its political and economic power during this time.<sup>69</sup> This is not to say that the Tuscan style did not eventual make a mark on the Venetian landscape. The first structure derived from classical antiquity, the gateway to the Arsenal, was constructed in 1460 and others examples would follow in the remainder of the century.<sup>70</sup>

It was during this time that architect Mauro Codussi laid the groundwork for the Byzantine Revival style that would be an important model for the church of San Salvador. Codussi's first contribution to the Venetian landscape was the 1469 church of San Michele in Isola [Figure 5]. Although the architect never travelled to Rome, he was acquainted with the classical ruins of Verona, Pola and Spoleto which influenced his use of *all'antica* elements evident in San Michele. Additionally, his travels to Ravenna, as well as his time in Venice, introduced him to Byzantine architecture like the basilica of Sant' Apollinare Nuovo.<sup>71</sup> In San Michele, Codussi illustrates his ability to use the ideas from these diverse traditions by creating a three-aisled nave with columns and round arches similar to Sant'Apollinare Nuovo while also using classical forms to organize the space.<sup>72</sup>

Codussi would also evolve his hybrid style to fit the more localized desires of parish churches. Begun in 1492, the church of Santa Maria Formosa [Figure 6] has been called by John

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69 Ibid., 117.

70 Howard, *Architectural History of Venice*, 120.

71 Ibid., 133.

72 Ibid., 133-134.



McAndrew Codussi's "first mature masterpiece."<sup>73</sup> Set in one of the largest *campi* in Venice, only minutes from San Marco, the structure is almost completely freestanding unlike most other churches in the city. It is potentially for this reason that Codussi chose a Greek-cross plan which would enable dynamic views of the structure from all sides.<sup>74</sup> Although only one Veneto-Byzantine Greek-cross churches survives - San Giacomo di Rialto [Figure 7] - during the time that Codussi designed Santa Maria Formosa there were likely more examples still in existence from which he drew inspiration.<sup>75</sup> McAndrew suggests that an additional influence could have been the influx of Greek refugees coming into Venice from Crete or that the architect was simply following the existing foundations.<sup>76</sup> Regardless of the cause, Codussi's choice to use the Byzantine prototype for the layout of the space while abandoning the traditional Byzantine decorative scheme was influential.

Even more important for a discussion of San Salvador is an understanding of the church of San Giovanni Crisostomo [Figure 8], situated just a stone's throw away near the Rialto Bridge. Begun in 1497, San Giovanni Crisostomo represents according to McAndrew the "ultimate resolution of a type."<sup>77</sup> Unlike Santa Maria Formosa, in San Giovanni Crisostomo Codussi omitted the side chapel walls that broke up the space so that the overall square plan of the space was discernible from the interior. Out of this square shape emerges the Greek-cross which is centered on a dome. The arms of the Greek-cross were, according to McAndrew, all once

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73 McAndrew, John. *Venetian Architecture of the Early Renaissance*. (Cambridge, Mass & London: The MIT Press, 1980) 282.

74 Howard, *Architectural History of Venice*, 138.

75 Ibid.

76 McAndrew, *Venetian Architecture*, 283.

77 McAndrew, *Venetian Architecture*, 303.

covered with barrel vaults.<sup>78</sup> However, the chancel has since been altered so that it is now covered by a flat wooden roof which disrupts the unity of the space. In each corner a chapel is formed by round arches which spring from minor, Doric capitals and support low barrel vaults giving the appearance of a baldacchino. The space of the church is unified by a series of horizontal moldings and a uniform palette of grey stone and white plaster.

The Byzantine revival style would be used from 1490 to 1530 to create about a dozen churches in Venice.<sup>79</sup> In addition to San Giovanni Crisostomo, Burns identifies Santa Maria Mater Domini (begun c. 1504), San Nicolò di Castello (begun c. 1503, now destroyed), San Geminiano (begun c. 1505, now destroyed), San Giovanni Elemosinario (begun c. 1527), San Felice (begun c. 1532), and Sant'Andrea della Certosa (begun c. 1492, destroyed) as some of the churches within this group which are, interestingly enough, all parish churches.<sup>80</sup> The largest and the most monumental of these, San Salvador, draws upon the tradition which influenced all of these structures yet also represents new and innovative ideas that set it apart.

### The Architecture of San Salvador

While the growing prestige of San Salvador may well have impacted the desire to rebuild the church in the sixteenth century, there appear to have been practical concerns as well. A document referenced by Burns dated August 7<sup>th</sup>, 1504, now in the church archives, states that the structure was unstable, the walls were falling down and the tie rods supporting the arches were on the verge of collapse.<sup>81</sup> In this document, the Regular Canons petitioned the state for funds to make the necessary repairs and to enlarge the church so that it could accommodate its growing

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78 Ibid., 305.

79 Burns, "San Salvatore and Venetian Architecture," 2.

80 Ibid., 5: She does not, however, include Santa Maria Formosa as part of this group.

81 Burns, "San Salvatore and Venetian Architecture," 29.

congregation which included many important Venetian families.<sup>82</sup> It would seem, based on this request, that the building was salvageable. Despite this, the church was destroyed and rebuilding begun by 1506.

An August 8<sup>th</sup> 1506 document identifies Giorgio Spavento as the architect commissioned to design the new structure.<sup>83</sup> A pupil of Codussi, he had become one of the *protos* of the *Procuratori de Supra*, who were responsible for maintaining the church of San Marco.<sup>84</sup> During this time Spavento designed the sacristy and anti-sacristy of San Marco as well as the Chapel of Saint Theodore located behind the north transept.<sup>85</sup> None of these works have the same scale or grandeur of the church of San Salvador. However, his experience in and knowledge of San Marco seems to have influenced his use of the Greek cross shape promoted by Codussi.

This Greek cross plan, also called a quincunx plan, was used like a building block by Spavento. These nine-celled units consisted of the central Greek cross, with arms that are half the width of the center, with four additional square sections on each corner which are half the size of the arms [Figure 9]. The central unit is, generally, supported by piers at the corners and often covered by a large cupola on pendentives; the arms are covered with barrel vaults.<sup>86</sup> The corner elements are commonly covered by smaller cupolas, sometimes, however, groin vaults are used instead.<sup>87</sup> For the church of San Salvador, Spavento took the quincunx unit and layered three in a row to create a longitudinally planned church [Figure 10]. The arms and corner pieces

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82 Ibid.

83 Ibid, 35.

84 McAndrew, *Venetian Architecture*, 426.

85 Ibid.

86 Burns, "San Salvatore and Venetian Architecture," 115.

87 Ibid.

of the central section overlap with the two end units and the apse was created by adding rounded ends. Additionally, he created a transept by adding additional arm sections to either side of the west segment. This design was derived from the plan of San Marco where the quincunx plan was layered to create a larger Greek cross shape [Figure 11]. In this way, Spavento utilized the prototype of San Marco, the quintessential Byzantine church in Venice, and transformed it into a Renaissance structure.

In 1509, Spavento died leaving Tullio Lombardo to complete the majority of the building project. Two years earlier Lombardo had been named *proto* due to Spavento's failing health.<sup>88</sup> Although the plan was fixed, there is little evidence as to what Spavento's elevations were actually meant to look like. The previously mentioned August 8<sup>th</sup> document notes that there was intended to be a cupola above the high altar. A 1507 contract, cited by Burns, describes the architecture as including both major and minor cupolas.<sup>89</sup> This is potentially in reference to those above the nave and the aisles. Scholarship tends to attribute the entire design to Spavento with Lombardo only continuing his plan and later additions by Sansovino. However, some scholars, Burns and McAndrew included, have suggested that Lombardo should be understood as having greater agency in the design of the structure.<sup>90</sup> While this debate sheds light on the architecture of the church it has little bearing to this study.

The resulting structure owes its impressive interior to the sense of unity achieved through the careful use of proportion, color, and style [Figure 12, 13, & 14]. These elements bring together aspects from the Veneto-Byzantine architectural tradition, through the structures

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88 Burns, "San Salvatore and Venetian Architecture," 41, & McAndrew, *Venetian Architecture*, 456.

89 Burns, "San Salvatore and Venetian Architecture," 39.

90 Burns, "San Salvatore and Venetian Architecture," 249, & McAndrew, *Venetian Architecture*, 456.

proportions, and the classically-based Renaissance tradition, in the color scheme and stylistic choices.

Stylistically, the church utilizes classical architectural forms to order and emphasize the monumental space. The uniform color palette of grey and white Istrian stone places emphasis on the architectural elements rather than decorative detailing. Two rows of six large cruciform piers run down the length of the nave. Each is supported by a monumental pedestal and base which towers over head height further emphasizing the monumental nature of the architecture. The columns are clothed in plaster with recessed molding creating vertical rectangular panels on each side. An additional pair of semi-detached piers of the same design can be found at the east end, marking the point at which the cappella maggiore and the apsidal chapels meet. In line with these piers is a matching set of partial pilasters on the west wall. These structural supports include both major and minor capitals [Figure 15] which allow for both the unification and segmentation of the large space.

The major, Corinthian capitals support a massive entablature which runs the entire length of the structure, now broken by the various funerary monuments and the organ loft above the left side entrance. This entablature is composed of an architrave, an undecorated frieze and a heavy cornice which serve to balance the verticality of the rest of the architecture. These Corinthian capitals are unique in that the leafy elements have been downplayed allowing the curled volutes and caulicoli to become more prominent. Additionally, each abacus includes a figure at its center; according to Burns these include human or cherub heads, an eagle with outstretched wings the lion of Saint Mark or floret patterns.<sup>91</sup>

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91 Burns, "San Salvatore and Venetian Architecture," 119.

The minor, Ionic capitals serve as the support for the arches on which the pendentive vaults and small dome rest. They are uniform and all placed at the same height, a few feet below the major capitals, on two sides of each column. This allows for the large entablature to continue uninterrupted above the arches. Along each side wall corresponding pilasters support the arches. These arches support the cupolettes which cover the square corner units of the quincunx plan. The use of capitals to distinguish hierarchical architectural levels was, according to Burns, a new innovation in Venice and San Salvador was the first example.<sup>92</sup>

Above the entablature is an attic that was also new to the Venetian architectural vocabulary. This attic consists of a rectangular zone of wall with a smaller, raised rectangle of molding with a circle at the center. At its corners the recessed molding of the columns are repeated and topped with a cornice, molding, and an ovolo from which the vaults spring. Through this configuration the attic elongates the vertical nature of the columns while also emphasizing the horizontal entablature. Additionally, the attic supports the arches which carry the barrel vaulting of the nave. These arches emphasize the undulating movement of the structure adding to the dynamic nature of the space. The barrel vaults frame the pendentives which serve as the foundation for the three major cupolas. Each covers one of the central quincunx units and is delineated by a stone entablature which follows the lower circumference.

Later additions and interventions have since altered the original design of the church in significant ways. The addition of tomb monuments and an organ loft has interrupted the entablature as earlier mentioned but they have also interrupted the flow of the architecture. With these additions, the walls became more sculptural than they would have been. However, it is also likely that these expansive spaces of wall were designed with tomb monuments in mind,

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92 Ibid., 122.

given the need for and presence of wealthy patronage in the church. Furthermore, the lighting within the church has since been altered to adhere with changing aesthetic styles. Burns suggests that the principal light source would have been the large oculi in the upper walls of the nave.<sup>93</sup> Additional windows existed as part of the original structure however it would seem that the lighting was still lacking because lanterns were added to the tops of each major cupolas in 1778.<sup>94</sup>

The proportional scheme used for the church is uniform across both the ground plan and elevations. This system of ratios is described in detail by Burns who has found that the entire structure is built in 1:1 and 1:2 ratios derived from the quincunx plan. The central unit, a perfect square, represents a 1:1 ratio while the arms of the Greek cross shape and the transept sections, being half the size of the central unit, illustrate the 1:2 ratio.<sup>95</sup> Additionally, the square corner section, like the center unit, also represents a 1:1 ratio.<sup>96</sup> When applied to the elevations of the structure, Burns has shown a complex system of ratios which the space created by the baldacchino elements acting as the primary units from which the rest of the proportions are derived.<sup>97</sup>

Both 1:1 and 1:2 were considered “perfect” by Saint Augustine in his text *De musica*, a text that had been applied to building practice during the Middle Ages and surely known to the Augustinian Regular Canons at San Salvador.<sup>98</sup> Additionally, the 1:2 ratio is praised by Leon

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93 Burns, “San Salvatore and Venetian Architecture,” 126,

94 Ibid., 71.

95 Ibid., 133.

96 Burns, “San Salvatore and Venetian Architecture,” 133.

97 Ibid., 134-137.

98 Ibid., 138.

Battista Alberti in his work *De Re Aedificatoria (On the Art of Building)* as one of the recommended ratios for church walls.<sup>99</sup> Both of these texts would have been accessible and Burns argues that they would have had an impact on the construction of San Salvador through Tullio Lombardo.<sup>100</sup>

### Conclusion

Representing the synthesis of the developments made by Codussi and the newer ideas of Spavento, and Lombardo, the church of San Salvador represents a uniquely constructed environment. As the apex of the Byzantine Revival style, the monumental space references the multiple quincunx plan of San Marco. Relying on, and making connections, with San Marco and the Byzantine tradition can be interpreted as a continuation of the rising status derived from the Byzantine Saint Theodore. The organization of the interior based on a consistent system of proportions creates a dynamic and monumental space utilizing classical forms. Whereas San Marco and the other churches in the Byzantine Revival were often built on square plans, San Salvador substantially deviates from this design. By layering the quincunx units to create a longitudinal space Spavento set up an ideal environment in which to place the Pala d'Argento, and later Titian's *Transfiguration*. The longitudinal space plays a crucial role in directing the eye down the space towards the high altar which contains an additional set of relationships with San Marco and the Byzantine tradition. This will be examined in the next two chapters.<sup>101</sup>

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99 Ibid., 139.

100 Ibid., 141.

101 In addition, it seems that San Salvador had a raised balcony-type choir which would not have impeded the view of the high altar. Burns, "San Salvatore and Venetian Architecture," 69.

A modern analysis of this experience has been put forth by Bonazza in his "Signum perennis gloriae." essay.



## CHAPTER 4

### THE GILDED CENTER: THE PALA D'ARTENTO

One of the most significant aspects of the church of San Salvador is the silver gilt altarpiece atop the high altar. The Pala d'Argento [Figure 16] was originally composed of three silver gilt panels which date from the second half of the fourteenth century,<sup>102</sup> but has since been expanded to include two more panels. As one of the few artistic elements retained from the medieval church<sup>103</sup> the altarpiece represents a complex set of associations and meanings that would have been understood by a sixteenth-century Venetian viewer. Significantly, the altarpiece can be understood as part of a program that emphasized the emulation of San Marco and the continuation of the Venetian tradition of gilt altarpieces. These associations highlight San Salvador as the resting place of Saint Theodore and his regained role as the first patron saint of Venice. The central axis of the panels highlights the duality of Christ, as both human and divine. Additionally, the saints represented can be read as references to church history, the culture of Venice and its geographic location.

#### The Origins of Gilt Altarpieces

The tradition of gold and silver altarpieces in Venetian churches is a long one which originated in San Marco. According to the eleventh century chronicler John the Deacon, the first *pala* was commissioned in 976 in Constantinople by Doge Pietro Orseolo (976-978).<sup>104</sup> While

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102 Rossi, Toto Bergamo. "Preface." in *San Salvador: La Pala d'Argento Dorato Restaurata di Venetian Heritage*. (Venice: Marcianum Press, 2011) 13.

103 Burns, "San Salvatore and Venetian Architecture," 114: The crypt is the only architectural feature retained from the medieval structure.

104 Klein, Holger A. "Refashioning Byzantium in Venice, ca. 1200-1400." in Henry Maguire and Robert S. Nelson ed. *San Marco, Byzantium, and the Myths of Venice*. (Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 2010) 197.

nothing remains of this original *pala*, and its appearance is unknown, several scholars cite John the Deacon's description of the Pala as “miro opere ex argento et auro,”<sup>105</sup> emphasizing the materials of gold and silver. Orseolo set a precedent which was continued by Doge Ordelaaffo Falier (1102-18) when he commissioned a golden *pala*, also from Constantinople, in 1105 for the high altar of the church.<sup>106</sup> It is generally accepted that elements of this *pala* were altered and absorbed into what is now known as the Pala d'Oro [Figure 17].<sup>107</sup> The Pala d'Oro is documented by Hohnloser and Polacco as having undergone alterations and additions in 1209 and 1345.<sup>108</sup> This latter renovation was commissioned by Andrea Dandolo who was also responsible for a broader program of artistic patronage which included a revamping of the high altar, commissioning decorative covers for sacred texts, the mosaics in the chapel of Saint Isidore and the baptistery, and an altarpiece for the chapel of Saint Nicholas.<sup>109</sup> Dandolo, who became procurator of San Marco in 1328 and Doge in 1343,<sup>110</sup> was additionally responsible for a variety of other commissions for San Marco including the painted cover for the Pala d'Oro, which will be addressed in greater detail in the next chapter.

The Pala d'Oro became increasingly influential for church decoration throughout the lagoon after Dandolo's intervention. The Venetian cathedral of San Pietro in Castello would gain its own gilded altarpiece in 1408 [Figure 18].<sup>111</sup> Commissioned by Angelo Correr upon being

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105 Klein, 197. & Fiocco, Giuseppe. and Rona Goffen “La pala feriale” in Hahnloser and Polacco. *La Pala d'Oro*. (Venezia: Canal & Stamperia Editrice, 1994), 163: *Miro opere ex argento et auro* translates as “wonderful work in silver and gold.”

106 Klein, “Refashioning Byzantium,” 197.

107 Ibid. See also Footnote 13.

108 Hahnloser, *Pala d'Oro*, 136-137.

109 Klein, “Refashioning Byzantium,” 199.

110 Ibid., 199-200.

111 Pichi, “Gilded Silver Altarpiece,” 60.

elected Pope Gregory XII, this Pala was, according to Pichi “the most refined example of Venetian goldsmith's art from the beginning of the 15<sup>th</sup> century.”<sup>112</sup> The presence of gilt altarpieces in San Marco and San Pietro reflects their importance as political and religious locations within the city of Venice. However, as the fortunes of Venice increased throughout the fifteenth century so too did the number of churches in possession of gilt altarpieces. By the early sixteenth century other churches that are documented as having gilt altarpieces include: San Salvador, San Cassiano, Santa Maria Mater Domini, Santa Maria Formosa, San Polo, Santi Apostoli and San Geremia.<sup>113</sup>

### The Pala d'Argento

As earlier mentioned, the Pala d'Argento consists of two sections: the older, original three central panels and the later extremities at top and bottom, which through documentation can be dated to the beginning of the eighteenth century.<sup>114</sup> These later additions are inconsequential to the study at hand but are worth noting since Bonazza has suggested that they represent in gilt silver what had originally been painted on wood panels.<sup>115</sup> Documents indicate that these painted wood panels were added in the seventeenth century, however, prior to this there is no text indicating the manner in which the Pala was positioned in the frame.<sup>116</sup> The central three registers originally formed an *antependium*, or hanging form of altar decoration with deep roots

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112 Ibid.

113 Pichi, “Gilded Silver Altarpiece,” 60; Sanudo, *De Origine*, 53; & Hahnloser, *Pala d'Oro*, 187-188. Hahnloser also tells that San Luca gained a gilt silver altarpiece in 1572 and that several churches on other islands in the lagoon possessed gilt silver and gold altarpieces.

114 Pichi, “Gilded Silver Altarpiece,” 74.

115 Bonazza, “Signum perennis gloriae,” 100.

116 Pichi cites Sanudo and Sansovino as having made no mention of spacers in the frame. Pichi, “Gilded Silver Altarpiece,” 74.

in the tradition of the Venetian lagoon and the high Adriatic.<sup>117</sup> Hinges connect the upper and lower registers to the central panel allowing them to close over the central scene.<sup>118</sup> This indicates that the original *antependium* was used for special occasions similarly to the way in which the Pala d'Argento would subsequently be revealed from behind Titian's *Transfiguration* on Christmas, Easter and the Feast of the Transfiguration. Retained from the medieval church, the Pala was transformed into the new high altarpiece after the rebuilding project. Guglielmo de' Grigi, an architect and sculptor, was commissioned to create the new altar table and frame (figure 4), completed in 1543 which would house the Pala d'Argento.<sup>119</sup> This monumental altar frame shows classical influence and has a geometric composition. Bonazza suggests that it was de' Grigi's interest in geometric forms that influenced the creation of a display space which was actually taller than the Pala d'Argento, although not a perfect square, necessitating the creation of painted wood panels to fill the gaps.<sup>120</sup>

Each horizontal register of the Pala d'Argento can be understood as representing a theme based on the figures portrayed. The central register features the Transfiguration of Christ in the center raising his hand in a sign of blessing [Figure 19]. As an institution dedicated to the Savior Christ, the Canons of San Salvador chose the Transfiguration as the main motif for their high altar. Other Christological scenes, such as the Crucifixion, Ascension, or Resurrection, could have been used, but the Transfiguration represented a significant and celebratory moment in the early ministry of Christ, when his divine nature was revealed and confirmed by prominent Old Testament figures. Moreover, the imagery of light in the narrative seems to have lent itself to a

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117 Pichi, 56.

118 Passeri, Maria Cristina. "The Restoration of the Gilded Silver Altarpiece of San Salvador in Venice." in *San Salvador: La Pala d'Argento Dorato Restauata di Venetian Heritage*. (Venice: Marcianum Press, 2001) 17.

119 Pichi, "Gilded Silver Altarpiece," 72.

120 Bonazza, "Signum perennis gloriae," 100.

depiction in the medium of shiny gilt metal. In addition, the bright cloud which appears in the Transfiguration narrative could have been considered an apt reference in San Salvador, reminding viewers of St Magnus' "rose-colored cloud" which miraculously indicated the future site of the church. In the Pala, rays of light radiate from Christ's body as described in the Gospel of Matthew (17:2).<sup>121</sup> Below him Saints Peter, John, and James kneel witnessing the event while the prophets Elijah and Moses, representing the Old Testament revelation of the messiah; appear to his right and left. The presence of these figures is in keeping with the Biblical narrative as related by all three synoptic Gospels: Matthew 17: 1-9; Mark 9: 2-8; and Luke 9: 28-36. However, rather than being portrayed in conversation with Christ the prophets kneel with their hands crossed at their chests in recognition of Christ's divinity.<sup>122</sup> In addition, according Bertoli and Romanelli, the Old Testament these figures had "a direct mystical experience" that in some Jewish traditions meant that they were freed from death and enjoy the ability to partake in the divine glory.<sup>123</sup>

This central scene is flanked by eight other saints who are represented standing on pedestals, separated from the sacred scene and each other by ornate columns. Each figure is framed by an ogee arch which unifies them but clearly defines the importance of Christ who appears under a larger, more elaborate arch. The accompanying eight saints have religious associations and special meaning for church history, the monastery and church of San Salvador, the confraternities located there and the pilgrims for whom the church was a stopping point.<sup>124</sup>

To the right beginning in the center are Saints Paul, Augustine, Mark and Mary Magdalene and

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121 Bruno & Romanelli, *Chiesa di San Salvador*, 31.

122 Riccato, Luisa. "La pala d'oro di San Salvador: status quaestionis." in Guidarelli ed *La Chiesa di San Salvador a Venezia: storia, arte, teologia*. (Padova: Il Prato, 2009) 111.

123 Bertoli & Romanelli, *Chiesa di San Salvador*, 31.

124 Pichi, "Gilded Silver Altarpiece," 69. & Riccato, "La pala d'oro di San Salvador," 113.

to the left John the Baptist, James the Elder, Theodore and Catherine of Alexandria. These saints operate in pairs extending out from the center, each pair representing a sub-theme for the Catholic Church and San Salvador specifically.

The first pair consists of Saint Paul to the right, holding a sword and a book, and Saint John the Baptist to the left, pointing to an unrolled scroll. These saints were major participants in the spread of Christianity after the death of Christ. As the last prophet, Saint John the Baptist was described by the Gospel of Luke as being responsible for turning “many of the sons of Israel to the Lord their God” (1:16).<sup>125</sup> Paul, on the other hand, is described by Riccato as “the apostle to the heathen nations.”<sup>126</sup> The next pair of saints represent important figures for the church of San Salvador. It is interesting to note that Saint James appears twice on the Pala d'Argento both below Christ to the right and to the left of Saint John the Baptist. In this standing depiction he has a long beard and holds a book. During this time a confraternity existed in San Salvador dedicated to Saint James and an altar was dedicated to him within the church.<sup>127</sup> In addition, the oldest church in Rialto, the nearby economic center of Venice, was San Giacomo di Rialto, dedicated to Saint James. As the patron saint of pilgrims, Pichi notes that he would have held special importance to pilgrims traveling to Santiago di Compostela which increased in the late fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.<sup>128</sup> In the corresponding space to the right is Saint Augustine, patron saint of the Regular Canons.<sup>129</sup> In the third space on either side stand the patron saints of

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125 Riccato, “La pala d'oro di San Salvador,” 113.

126 Ibid.

127 Pichi, “Gilded Silver Altarpiece,” 69.

128 Pichi, “Gilded Silver Altarpiece,” 69. & Laurie Dennett, “2000 Years of the Camino del Santiago: Where Did it Come From? Where is it Going?” (paper presented at a Gathering of Pilgrims, Toronto, Ontario, 14 May 2005).

129 Pichi, “Gilded Silver Altarpiece,” 69. & “Historical Facts,” Chiesa San Salvador, accessed July 10<sup>th</sup>, 2013, [http://www.chiesasansalvador.it/eng/ssalv\\_storia.php](http://www.chiesasansalvador.it/eng/ssalv_storia.php)

Venice: Saint Theodore atop a dragon and Saint Mark. As we have seen, in 1267 Marco Dauro donated the body of Saint Theodore, which was located in the family parish church of San Salvador, to the city of Venice.<sup>130</sup> Recent restorations suggest that the dragon on which Saint Theodore stands was a later addition which required the shortening of the saint's legs to accommodate reptile's oversized form.<sup>131</sup> The corresponding right niche contains Saint Mark who became the new patron saint of the Venetian republic after his remains were stolen from Alexandria by Venetian merchants in 828. His presence on the Pala d'Argento also refers to the Ducal Chapel of San Marco, the location of the Pala d'Oro as earlier mentioned and the most important church in Venice. Finally, the saints on the extreme ends of this register, Saint Catherine and Mary Magdalene, two of the more popular female saints represent feminine holiness, likely chosen to complete the diverse representations of piety and act as a model for the female patrons of the church.<sup>132</sup> All the saints in this panel turn towards the central figure of Christ which adds emphasis to the importance of his Transfiguration and the divinity of Christ. Together they represent the complex set of devotional relationships within the church of San Salvador.

The register directly above the center, now the second panel, focuses its attention on the human aspects of life. At the center is the Madonna of Humility [Figure 20], a typical representation of Christ's humanity. Christ sits on the Madonna's knee resting one hand on her chest, emphasizing his own humanity and holding a swallow in his other hand which references his resurrection.<sup>133</sup> The presence of the Madonna and Child also refers to the Annunciation, an

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130 Pichi, "Gilded Silver Altarpiece," 67.

131 Ibid., 69.

132 Riccato, "La pala d'oro di San Salvador," 113.

133 Ibid., 113.

important event for the city of Venice. Legend states that the city was founded on the Feast of the Annunciation thus creating a link between the Virgin and Venice. Additionally, the first stone of the rebuilt church of San Salvador was placed on the Feast of the Annunciation, adding a further connection between the church, the Virgin and the city of Venice.<sup>134</sup> The Madonna and Child are flanked on both sides by kneeling angels and a total of eight half-length figures: two prophets and six saints. The matching micro-architectural niches connect this panel to the central register, each figure appearing under an individual ogee arch and separated from the sacred central scene by columns.

In addition to this central figure, the prophets and saints continue the theme of humanity by alluding to the worldly associations surrounding the church of San Salvador. On the right appear the prophet Isaiah and Saints Bartholomew, Benedict, and Stephen and to the left the prophet Jeremiah and Saints John the Evangelist, Anthony Abbot, and Lawrence. Riccato states that the prophets Isaiah and Jeremiah are present in the mosaics of San Marco, often associated with the “theological privileges of the Virgin,” thus adding an additional connection with the important church.<sup>135</sup> Both prophets wear head coverings and Isaiah holds the implement of his martyrdom, a saw, while Jeremiah is represented with his hand to his chest. The remaining saints can be identified as the patron saints of several guilds in the area of San Salvador. Being located between the Rialto and San Marco made San Salvador the meeting place between the economic and religious districts of the Venetian lagoon. These patron saints represent the relationship the church of San Salvador had with its surrounding area. Saint Bartholomew, to Isaiah's right, holds the knife of his martyrdom and a book. His presence on the Pala is likely a

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134 Pichi, “Gilded Silver Altarpiece,” 69.

135 Riccato, “La pala d'oro di San Salvador,” 115.



tribute to the nearby church dedicated to him close to the Rialto and officiated by the German community of merchants.<sup>136</sup> Opposite Saint Bartholomew is the figure of Saint John the Evangelist, the patron saint of tinsmiths, whose guild had an altar in the church of San Salvador until 1477.<sup>137</sup> Saint John holds a book and points both towards the book and the Madonna and Child to emphasize the link between the word and the central image.<sup>138</sup> Moving out from Saints Bartholomew and John are figures identified by scholars as Saints Benedict and Anthony Abbot respectively. These two saints represent Western monasticism and Eastern Europe.<sup>139</sup> Saint Benedict represents the monasticism of the West and is represented holding a book in one hand and a bell in the other. Saint Anthony Abbot is portrayed with a long beard and holding a now missing attribute in one hand and an unidentified object in the other. He was the patron saint of both the Luganegheri guild, a composite guild composed of sausage makers and lard rollers, and the guild of goldsmiths. The goldsmith guild was the oldest arts and crafts guild in Venice whose first meeting place was likely in San Salvador in 1250.<sup>140</sup> The guild was still in existence in the parish of San Salvador in the sixteenth century.<sup>141</sup> At the ends of the register are the two martyr saints Stephen and Lawrence. Saint Stephen, represented next to Saint Benedict and holding a book in one hand and a palm in the other, is the patron saint of stonemasons and a model of Augustinian devotion.<sup>142</sup> On the opposite side of the register is Saint Lawrence,

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136 Ibid.

137 Pichi, "Gilded Silver Altarpiece," 70. & Riccato, "La pala d'oro di San Salvador," 115.

138 Riccato, "La pala d'oro di San Salvador," 115.

139 Riccato, "La pala d'oro di San Salvador," 115.

140 Pichi, "Gilded Silver Altarpiece," 69.

141 Gastone, Vio. *Le scuole piccole nella Venezia dei Dogi. Note d'archivio per la storia delle confraternite veneziane*. (Vicenza: A. Colla, 2004), 399.

142 "Saint Stephen," BBC: Religions, accessed July 10<sup>th</sup>, 2013, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/christianity/saints/stephen.shtml> & Riccato, 115.

holding the gridiron of his martyrdom in one hand and a book in the other, who was the patron saint of coal workers guild which was located on the opposite side of the Grand Canal.<sup>143</sup> This scuola was operating in San Salvador by the fifteenth century.<sup>144</sup> The panel as a whole emphasizes the humanity both of Christ and of his followers. The central figure of the Madonna of Humility represents the humanity of Christ in contrast to the divinity represented in the central panel. In addition, the Virgin, along with the saints, represents various facets of the city of Venice and by extension the physical, human world.

The lowest of the original panels, now the fourth register of the altarpiece highlights the theme of worship. The donor of the altarpiece is depicted [Figure 21] along with the symbols of the four evangelists. He is dressed as a prior holding a crozier kneeling in prayer with his eyes directed upward towards Christ. The figure provides an exemplar of piety and devotion which would have been expected from the Regular Canons and laity. This patron has been identified as the prior of the monastery by the insignia, a hedgehog, granted by Alexander III in 1177.<sup>145</sup> However, Renato Polacco believes that the donor can be identified as Francesco de Grazia based on the coat of arms at his feet.<sup>146</sup> This assumption and the presence of the Grazia family crest supports the dating of the three central panels to the last two decades of the fourteenth century.<sup>147</sup> The depiction of the patron, together with the four symbols of the evangelists each holding a book direct the focus both visually and iconographically towards the upper two panels of the original antependium. Importantly, this is the second depiction of Saint Mark on the Pala

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143 Riccato, "La pala d'oro di San Salvador," 115.

144 Pichi, "Gilded Silver Altarpiece," 70.

145 Riccato, "La pala d'oro di San Salvador," 115.

146 Cited in Riccato, "La pala d'oro di San Salvador," 115. & Passeri, "Restoration of the Gilded Silver Altarpiece," 19.

147 Riccato, "La pala d'oro di San Salvador," 115.

d'Argento highlighting his crucial role as patron of Venice. Worship is presented through the devotion and piety of the patron as well as the primary manner in the teachings of Christ were received: the Gospels.

The horizontal portions of the altarpiece are unified by the central vertical axis which represents the dual nature of Christ. His Transfiguration represents the confirmation of his divine origins while his humanity is represented by the Madonna and Child. The patron's devotion further emphasizes his role as divinity within the theological context. This unification is continued and completed by the two later panels. At the top a phoenix symbolizes Christ's resurrection, and at bottom a sacrificial lamb on what appears to be an altar or book, alludes to the crucifixion. While out of narrative order, the central axis represents major events in Christ's life: his human birth, the confirmation of his divine origins, the crucifixion, and resurrection. As we shall see in the next chapter this same narrative will shaped the images created by Titian for the altarpiece cover.

### Conclusion

Although not created to be an altarpiece, the conversion of the Pala d'Argento from an antependium allowed for the imagery to have a larger effect in the church environment. Its overarching theme of Christ's life directly reflects the dedication of the church to the Savior. The focus on his divinity and humanity reflect the two united facets of his life. In addition to this central imagery unifying the registers, individual figures create further sub-themes. As a city which aligned itself closely with Christian piety, the association of saints represented in these registers would have been understood to a sixteenth-century observer. Furthermore, these references to elements of the church and Venetian life reinforced the identification of Venice as a

divine city - the Christian successor to Jerusalem, Rome and Constantinople - and placed San Salvador at the city's physical and religious center.

As illustrated in Chapter One the church of San Salvador experienced a growth in status and recognition within Venice during the medieval and renaissance periods. The presence of gilt altarpieces in many other important churches in the lagoon, including San Marco and San Pietro in Castello, created a precedent of decoration for churches of status within Venice. Interestingly, of these churches with gilt altarpieces five were founded by Saint Magnus: San Salvador, San Pietro in Castello, Santa Maria Formosa, Santi Apostoli, and San Zaccaria.<sup>148</sup> The prestige of these churches likely effected their church decoration and particularly the inclusion of gilt altarpieces. Within the church of San Salvador, the Pala d'Argento can thus be interpreted as the starting point from which the subsequent artistic program developed. The most notable example of this is Titian's *Transfiguration* which will be the subject of the next chapter. When creating this work Titian had to respond to the existing composition of the high altar and the Pala d'Argento for which the *Transfiguration* was a cover.

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<sup>148</sup> Sanudo, *De Origine*, 53: While San Zaccaria is not included in Sanudo's list of churches with gilt altarpieces, records indicate that the high altar originally included silver panels.

## CHAPTER 5

### “HIS FACE SHONE LIKE THE SUN”: TITIAN’S *TRANSFIGURATION*

In 1534, shortly after the completion of the high altar, Titian was commissioned to create a cover for the Pala d'Argento.<sup>149</sup> The tradition of covering altarpieces, like the tradition of gilt altarpieces, is closely linked to the church of San Marco. Titian's *Transfiguration* [Figure 22] continues the linking of visual elements between the churches and presents a new rendition of the subject Bellini had produced for the high altar of San Salvador half a century earlier. Significantly, Titian's stylistic and compositional interpretation of the theme alludes to the Byzantine artistic heritage of Venice, directs the eye towards the chapel of Saint Theodore, and responds to the Pala d'Argento and the frame in which it is displayed. Furthermore, Bohde has shown that the *Transfiguration*, along with two other works by Titian, continues the Christological narrative evident in the Pala d'Argento.

#### The Tradition of Altarpiece Covers: The Pala Feriale

Covering altarpieces was not an unusual occurrence in Renaissance Italy. Although the exact origin of the practice is unknown, by the sixteenth century the practice of covering altarpieces, particularly ones with prestige, with shutters, curtains or hangings had become an integral part of church decoration.<sup>150</sup> In Venice we see an additional type of covering: paintings. This tradition of altarpiece covers, like that of gilt altarpieces, is closely linked to the Doges and their chapel. According to Fiocco and Goffen, covers of this type date back to the

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149 Rearick, W. R. “La *Trasfigurazione di Cristo* di Tiziano e il suo altare cinquecentesco nella chiesa San Salvador” in *La Trasfigurazione di Cristo: Tiziano Vecellio per il sinodo di Belluno-Feltre*. (Cinisello Balsamo: Silvana, 2005), 20.

150 Nova, Alessandro, “Hangings, Curtains, and Shutters of Sixteenth-Century Lombard Altarpieces.” in *Italian Altarpieces 1250-1500: Function and Design*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 179.

commissioning of the first Pala d'Oro in 976.<sup>151</sup> They do not, however, give any information regarding the possible cover for the 976 Pala or the later version commissioned by Doge Ordelaaffo Falier. While these earlier potential examples seem to be lost to history, much information is known about the Pala Feriale, or weekday altarpiece, [Figure 23] commissioned by Andrea Dandolo as part of his interventions in the visual program of San Marco during the twelfth century. The Pala Feriale, now in the Museum of San Marco, was commissioned from Paolo Veneziano and his sons by Dandolo in 1345.<sup>152</sup> Its purpose was to shield the Pala d'Oro during everyday mass allowing the golden altarpiece to be unveiled only on high holy days. In his text *Pala d'Oro*, Hahnloser created a recreation of what the high altar of San Marco might have looked like including a complicated pulley system which allowed part of the Pala d'Oro to be raised and lowered in order to fit behind the smaller Pala Feriale [Figure 24].<sup>153</sup>

As we have seen, at least seven other churches in Venice besides San Marco also had gilt altarpieces. Humfrey has suggested that it is likely all these altarpieces were accompanied by painted covers which concealed them the majority of the time, similar to the arrangement in San Salvador.<sup>154</sup> This would indicate a decorative program based on the high altar of San Marco which was consistent across all examples in the lagoon. This tradition is interesting when considered in relation to the widespread use of curtains to cover sacred images during the season

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151 Fiocco & Goffen, "La pala feriale," 163.

152 Fiocco & Goffen, "La pala feriale," 163.

153 Hahnloser, *Pala d'Oro*, plates LXV & LXVI.

154 Humfrey, Peter. *The Altarpiece in Renaissance Venice*. (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1993), 51.

of Lent.<sup>155</sup> Gilt altarpieces were, therefore, considered especially sacred in that they were only revealed on high holy days.

### The History of San Salvador High Altar

Titian's *Transfiguration* was not the first high altarpiece cover in San Salvador. The work was commissioned to replace a painting of the same subject by Giovanni Bellini. Rearick dates the commissioning of the Bellini to around 1484, however, by the time the church was rebuilt the painting had suffered damage.<sup>156</sup> Rearick identifies the constant raising and lowering mechanism as the cause of the damage while Bonazza suggests that fire could have been the responsible.<sup>157</sup> While it is unclear what became of Bellini's work from San Salvador, there are three known Transfiguration paintings by the artist. One of these, currently in the Capodimonte Museum in Naples [Figure 25], dating from 1478-79 is known to have been painted for the Cathedral of Vicenza. A second, now in the Correr Museum in Venice, [Figure 26] attributed to Bellini, is identified by the wall text as having once adorned an altar in San Salvador or the church of San Giobbe. However, most scholarly writing on the subject identify the fragments now in the Gallerie dell'Accademia as the painting that once graced the high altar of San Salvador [Figure 27].<sup>158</sup> Rearick states that the painting was moved to the sacristy and cut up to

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155 Ibid.

156 Rearick, "La *Trasfigurazione di Cristo* di Tiziano," 15.

157 Rearick, "La *Trasfigurazione di Cristo* di Tiziano," 15. & Bonazza, Natolino. "Ipsium audite': memoria e sguardo di fede dinanzi alla pala della *Trasfigurazione di Cristo*." in *La Trasfigurazione di Cristo: Tiziano Vecellio per il sinodo di Belluno-Feltre*. (Cinisello Balsamo: Silvana, 2005), 129.

158 Rearick, "La *Trasfigurazione di Cristo* di Tiziano," 15-20; Bonazza, "Signum perennis gloriae," 129. & Merkel, Ettore. "La *Trasfigurazione di Cristo* di Tiziano: storia di un dipinto," in *La Trasfigurazione di Cristo: Tiziano Vecellio per il sinodo di Belluno-Feltre*. (Cinisello Balsamo: Silvana, 2005), 25.

save the portions that were still in good condition<sup>159</sup> which is consistent with the identification of the Accademia fragments as the earlier cover.

The remaining fragments give limited information regarding the appearance of Bellini's *Transfiguration* when it was placed on the high altar of the church. Only two rectangular portions of the painting have been saved, which are approximately the same size and shape of the fragments mentioned by Rearick.<sup>160</sup> Furthermore, their content represents the most important portions of the painting. Christ's head and shoulders take up the majority of one segment, his stoic eyes directed upwards into the viewer's space against a blue sky. Additionally, the drapery of Christ's left shoulder and forward-facing body position are extremely similar to the Naples version. This, coupled with the second fragment, depicting a small tree or plant on which Bellini has placed scroll with his signature, leads to the conclusion that the basic compositions of the two *Transfiguration* paintings were similar. One contrast, I would argue, is that the rugged, sloping nature of the landscape in the Accademia fragment would indicate a more mountainous landscape in keeping with the Biblical narrative.

During the sixteenth-century rebuilding project a new altar table and frame [Figure 28] was commissioned from Guglielmo de' Grigi. De' Grigi worked primarily as a decorative architect and builder while occasionally venturing into realm of sculpture.<sup>161</sup> For the high altar of San Salvador, Humfrey states, de' Grigi created a visual transition between the monumental classical proportions of the new architecture and the relatively small Pala d'Argento for which

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159 Rearick, "La *Trasfigurazione di Cristo* di Tiziano," 15.

160 The section portraying Christ's head is approximately 33 x 22 cm while the section containing the inscription is approximately 31 x 22 cm.

161 Humfrey, *The Altarpiece*, 295.



the frame was designed.<sup>162</sup> In doing so he enlarged the scale of the freestanding high altar by raising it up a flight of steps. Carved from a darker stone, similar to that which is found in the pavement of the church, the steps create contrast with the white, gray green and pink stones which make up the altar. The decision to use multi-colored marbles in the design of the altar allows it to contrast against the whites and grays of the church interior. Polychrome architecture, both sacred and secular, was integral to the Venetian cityscape. One of the most notable structures in this genre is the church of San Marco which incorporates many colored stones and *spolia* from the Venetian sack of Constantinople in 1204. By using multi-colored stone for the altar table and frame, de' Grigi drew upon Venetian architectural heritage and made an important connection between the high altar and the church of San Marco.

In addition to the reliance on the Venetian tradition, the composition of the altar illustrates a knowledge of classical forms. Placed atop of a set of steps, the altar table is decorated with geometric decoration of diamonds, squares, ovals and circles in green, pink and white marble. To compensate for the height of the altar table, the frame is supported by a pedestal that wraps around the table in a U-shape. Unified by a consistent base and cornice, the pedestal and altar table act to ground the monumental high altar. The geometric patterns continue in the small predella-like section and moldings which surround the altarpiece. Flanking the altarpiece are four green columns, two on each side, with gilt bases and composite capitals. As the darkest part of the altar these columns and the porphyry roundels placed strategically around the frame, contrast with the generally pastel colors of the majority of the altar. Above, the frame is unified by a single entablature and a pediment with scroll details and a gilt central panel depicting a cherub. At the top of the high altar is an unusual sandstone sculpture of Christ,

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162 Ibid.

suggested by Save Venice Inc. to be a later addition.<sup>163</sup> Christ's outstretched right arm is carved from wood and could, at one point, be raised and lowered by a pulley system operated from behind the altar.<sup>164</sup> Similarly, Nova describes the mechanism which raised and lowered Titian's *Transfiguration* as a system of counter weights which, rather than wrap the canvas around a roller as in other examples, moved the canvas vertically up and down, so that it would disappear below the altar table when the Pala d'Argento was revealed.<sup>165</sup>

### Titian's Transfiguration: Breaking from Tradition

Commissioned shortly after 1534, according to Rearick, it took almost thirty years before Titian's *Transfiguration* was complete.<sup>166</sup> The painting was reproduced as an engraving by Nicolas Beatrizet shortly after its completion and recorded by Vasari during his 1566 visit to Venice, supporting this dating.<sup>167</sup> Constrained by the format of the pre-existing altar frame, Titian created a bold composition. Harold E Wethey describes the extremely painterly brushwork, monochromatic palette and bold composition of the *Transfiguration* as characteristic

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163 Conn, Melissa & David Rosand ed. *Save Venice Inc. Four Decades of Restoration in Venice*. (New York: Save Venice Inc., 2011), 376.

164 Conn & Rosand, *Save Venice Inc.*, 376.

165 Nova, "Hangings, Curtains, and Shutters," 183.

166 Rearick, "La Trasfigurazione di Cristo di Tiziano," 20.

For the painting, see: Bertoli, Bruno, and Giandomenico Romanelli. *Chiesa di San Salvador: arte e devozione*. (Venice: Marsilio, 1997); Biadene, Susanna, Mary Yakush. *Titian: Prince of Painters*. (Munich: Prestel, 1990); Bohde, Daniela. "Titian's Three-Altar Project in the Venetian Church of San Salvador: Strategies of Self-Representation by Members of the Scuola Grande di San Rocco." *Renaissance Studies* 15, No. 4 (2001): 450-472; Chiesa di San Rocco (Belluno). *La trasfigurazione di Cristo: Tiziano Vecellio per il sinodo di Belluno-Feltre*. (Cinisello Balsamo: Silvana, 2005); Ferino-Pagden, Sylvia ed. *Late Titian and the Sensuality of Painting*. (Venice: Marsilio, 2008); Finocchi Ghersi, Lorenzo. "Artisti e Committenti a San Salvador." *Arte Veneta* 51(1997): 20-39; Guidarelli, Gianmario. *La chiesa di San Salvador: storia, arte, teologia*. (Padova: Il prato, 2009); Humfrey, Peter. *Titian*. (London: Phaidon, 2007); Nova, Alessandro. "Hangings, Curtains, and Shutters of Sixteenth-Century Lombard Altarpiece." in *Italian Altarpieces 1250-1550: Function and Design*, edited by Eve Borsook and Fiorella Gioffredi Superbi, 177-189. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994); Rearick, W.R. "Titian's 'Transfiguration' and its Marble Altar and Statue of Christ in the Church of San Salvador," in *Studies in Venetian Art and Conservation*, 14-17. (New York, NY: Save Venice Inc., 1999); Wethey, Harold E. *The Painting of Titian: I. The Religious Paintings*. (London: Phaidon, 1969)

167 Rearick, "La Trasfigurazione di Cristo di Tiziano," 20.

of Titian's late style.<sup>168</sup> This late style, however, was evidently not highly praised. Sansovino omitted the *Transfiguration* from his first edition while Vasari remarks that “although some good things can be seen in them,” the *Transfiguration* and *Annunciation* [Figure 29] in San Salvador “are not very highly regarded by him and do not possess the perfection of his other paintings.”<sup>169</sup> Whether Titian truly felt this way about his paintings for the church of San Salvador is unknown and Vasari is known for being highly subjective in his analysis of artists, especially Venetian artists. However, despite this criticism Ludovico Dolce, a true promoter of his city, gives a more positive review of the artist's later style, stating that this late style illustrated the “desperate greatness” of the artist.<sup>170</sup>

As indicated by the diverse reception of the work, Titian made artistic decisions which both adhere to and deviate from the traditional representations of the subject. When compared with the two complete *Transfiguration* paintings by Giovanni Bellini, now in the Capodimonte and Correr Museums, striking differences emerge. According to the Gospel accounts, Christ and the apostles, Peter, James, and John, are at the top of Mount Tabor when the prophets Moses and Elijah appear. Although not completely faithful in the Naples version, Bellini has used his talent for rendering landscapes to create defined settings in which his *Transfiguration* scenes occur. The Correr version places Christ, Moses and Elijah at the top of an earth platform within a wider landscape. Titian, instead, only hints at the mountain on which the figures stand. One of Christ's feet is grounded by what appears to be the top of Mount Tabor and the apostles Peter and James fall towards the viewer on to the small patch of ground at the bottom of the painting. Moreover,

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168 Wethey, Harold E. *The Paintings of Titian: I. The Religious Paintings*. (London: Phaidon, 1969), 163.

169 Vasari, Giorgio. *The Lives of the Artists*. Trans. Julia Conaway Bondanella & Peter Bondanella. (Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 502.

170 Quoted in Biadene & Yakush. *Titian: Prince of Painters*, 319.

Titian has eliminated the blue sky in favor of a golden, divine light which emanates from behind Christ and filters through the clouds from which Moses and Elijah materialize.

The figures of the prophets and apostles too differ greatly from Bellini's precedent. Bellini's figures of Moses and Elijah are placed firmly on the ground to either side of Christ and his volumetric figures are defined largely by the illusionistic drapery they wear and their simple static gestures. Conversely, Titian has illustrated his prophets in dynamic poses as if they had recently flown in from outside the frame. In contrast to the prophets who appear to gravitate toward Christ, the apostles fall backwards towards the viewer. Bellini's figures lie down, covering their eyes or looking away from Christ in the Correr painting, one figure appearing to be asleep. In the Naples version he has altered their portrayal to actively crouching, raising their arms in concern and surprise but not covering their eyes. Again, Titian's dynamic poses break with Bellini's traditional approach, prompting the question, from where did Titian seek inspiration?

Rather than a reliance on his Venetian predecessor, Titian's choice of setting can be attributed to the influence of Raphael. It is known that Titian saw Raphael's *Transfiguration* [Figure 30] during his visit to Rome in 1545.<sup>171</sup> The painting, which consists of the Transfiguration event in the upper half and the Failure to Heal in the lower, was created for the French Cathedral of Narbonne. However, it was never sent to France, instead being placed on the high altar of San Pietro in Montorio by 1522.<sup>172</sup> In Raphael's painting, Christ floats above the top of the mountain - a deviation from the Biblical story - but is surrounded by clouds with a heavenly white light creating an illusionistic halo around his head. As we can see, this unique

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171 Rearick, "La *Trasfigurazione di Cristo* di Tiziano," 23.

172 King, Catherine. "The Liturgical and Commemorative Allusions in Raphael's *Transfiguration* and *Failure to Heal*." *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*. 45 (1982), 152.

setting for Christ and the prophets, who float next to him, was used as the basis for Titian's composition. However, Titian has compressed the space between the figures, likely due to the constraints of the canvas, and rather than white light he placed golden light emanating from behind Christ. Similarly to the floating prophets in Raphael's painting, the figures of Elijah and Moses, like Christ, float above the top of Mount Tabor as if they have just developed out of the clouds which surround the scene. The implied motion of the figures gives the impression they are flying towards the center of the composition, directing attention towards Christ.

The apostles, however, differ from Raphael's version in that Titian's figures are disproportionately large and portrayed in extreme poses which appear to push against the picture plane towards the viewer. Their expressive gestures and posture are in keeping with the description of the Transfiguration in Matthew's Gospel: "they fell on their faces and were greatly afraid."<sup>173</sup> Peter, who takes up the bottom left half of the painting, leans on one elbow while raising his other arm to cover his eyes. James too has fallen on one arm and twists away from Christ with his other arm raised. John, to the far right, is mostly blocked by James but holds his hands up in prayer towards Christ. The apostles' presence at and reaction to the Transfiguration is biblically accurate indicating that Titian has chosen to represent the moment at which God speaks to them from a white cloud: "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. Hear Him!"<sup>174</sup> This moment is further indicated by Christ's attention being directed upward and out of the frame of the painting as if listening to the words of God. Bonazza notes that each of the apostles embodies one of the three theological virtues as understood in the sixteenth century

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173 Matthew, 17: 6. New King James Version.

174 Matthew, 17:5. New King James Version

through the writings of Pietro de' Natali, dating from 1506.<sup>175</sup> Peter represents faith through his shielded eyes, James's uplifted hand embodies hope while the red robes of John indicate charity.<sup>176</sup>

This dynamic representation of the figures is heightened by the exaggerated use of light and the twist of their bodies in space. The strong central light source creates similarly strong shadows towards the outer edges of the painting. Additionally, the centralized light exaggerates the shadowing on the garments of the prophets. Titian also darkened the extremities of the canvas to the point where the shadows merge and the figures blur into the background creating the appearance that they are materializing out of the clouds. The lighting additionally emphasizes the way in which Titian positioned their bodies twisted in space. Moses turns towards the viewer holding the tablets on which the Ten Commandments are inscribed while Elijah extends his arms towards Christ. The prominence of the tablets, a departure from most other examples discussed here, references the continuity between the Old and New Covenants.

#### Titian's *Transfiguration*: Interpretation

In his *Transfiguration*, Titian took into consideration visual history, liturgical, theological, sociopolitical associations and the space of the church. In doing so he creating a complex work of art that has ties to exterior ideas and traditions as well as relationships with other works of art within the church of San Salvador. Therefore it is necessary to understand the choices made and the relationships they invoke. As David Rosand has shown, Titian also applied a similar holistic approach to his altarpiece in Santa Maria Gloriosa dei Frari, where he

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175 Bonazza, "Signum perennis gloriae," 131.

176 Bonazza, "Signum perennis gloriae," 131-132.

carefully composed his paintings to visually respond to the columns, choir screen and apse window tracery in the church.<sup>177</sup>

The importance of San Marco as an influence on church art in Venice cannot be understated. The materials and color of the Pala Feriale may have in some way influenced the choices made by Titian when creating his *Transfiguration*. Unlike other Transfiguration scenes Titian has placed his figures against an almost complete background of golden light which lights the scene from behind. Gold as a medium in Venetian altarpieces continued into the Renaissance more so than in any other Italian city. The use of gold has been read most often as a reference back to the golden mosaics decorating interior of the church of San Marco. Works by Cima da Conegliano, including the *Madonna and Child Enthroned with Saints* now in the Staatliche Museum [Figure 31], and Giovanni Bellini's altarpieces for San Giobbe, San Zaccaria, and the Frari [Figures 32] all include fictive mosaics within the illusionistic architectural space, making a direct reference to San Marco.<sup>178</sup> The literal references in these earlier works paved the way for the development of a more covert allusions to the important church. Notably, Titian's *Assunta* altarpiece [Figure 33] for the church of Santa Maria Gloriosa dei Frari, completed in 1518, utilizes golden color to portray the divine light of God, breaking away from the architectural and moving towards the portrayal of the ambiance experienced in San Marco.<sup>179</sup> In his *Transfiguration* for San Salvador, his only documented attempt of the subject, Titian's use of divine light filtering through the clouds creates a similar effect to the mosaics of San Marco, which oscillate between dark and bright depending on changing light conditions and the viewer's

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177 Rosand, "Titian in the Frari."

178 Nicholas A. Herman, "Prophetic Time and the Mosaics of San Marco." (paper presented at the annual meeting for the College Art Association, Chicago, Illinois, February 12-15, 2014.)

179 Rosand, "Titian in the Frari," 196-198.

movement through space. Additionally, the golden light seems timeless, creating a direct link to the Byzantine icon tradition from which Paolo Veneziano was drawing when creating the Pala Feriale.

Titian's reliance on gold is offset by an overall muted, uniformed color scheme. In creating this color palette Titian seems to have been responding to the polychrome stone of de' Grigi's altar frame. As earlier described, the frame was composed of multi colored marble including brown, pink, green, and grey/white tones with elements of red porphyry and gilding. The emanating light that comes from the center of the painting, while not as bright as the Pala d'Argento, stands out within the frame and catches the eye as one walks into the church. Additionally, it responds to the gilt elements, specifically the base and capitals of the columns which stand on either side of the frame and which also offset the centralized light source. This draws the eye of a viewer towards the image of Christ from even the farthest point in the church acting as a visual substitute for the gleaming Pala d'Argento itself. As one approaches the high altar the figures around Christ become easier to see. Patches of red, primarily from the cloths of the apostle John, link with the porphyry roundels that surround the painting. The dark colors of the shadows and cloths of Peter and James join with the dark columns to create a register that is contrasted with the light colors of the altar, pedestals, and entablature. Titian understood that his painting would not be seen in isolation but within the pre-existing structure of the altar frame. Therefore, his choices created a work that both stands out from the altar but also works within it in a manner that draws the eye and enhances the experience in the church.

Acting as a cover, the *Transfiguration* also had to operate in a relationship with the Pala d'Argento. As Paul Hills has shown, Titian was particularly attuned to the use of veils and covers both within his painted images and to cover his paintings, a sensitivity surrounding



themes of covering and revealing which could apply to the San Salvador cover.<sup>180</sup> This painting portrays the same subject as the central image of the Pala d'Argento but in a much clearer and more understandable way for a viewer in the church. Bonazza discusses the experience of the Pala d'Argento as overwhelming due to the elaborate ornamental and figural surface of the golden Pala.<sup>181</sup> He goes on to discuss the way in which a viewer would then, from a short distance away, be able to recognize individual figures within the registers. However, this analysis is based on a viewing point from a relatively short distance away from the high altar. At a distance, the individual elements of the Pala d'Argento are engulfed by the overwhelming shine of the gilt altarpiece. Titian was charged with creating a painting that embodies the main function of the Pala d'Argento but in a more simplified and easily comprehensible way.

In order to create his painting for the high altar of San Salvador Titian needed to omit the dense and complex subject matter of the Pala d'Argento. However, he maintained the importance of the dual nature of Christ through the relationship between the *Transfiguration* and other paintings by him in the church, as analyzed by Daniela Bohde. Bohde finds that Titian had been commissioned to create altarpieces for two secondary altars in the church of San Salvador, one of which, the *Annunciation*, was completed and installed in the church between August 1563 and March 1566.<sup>182</sup> However, the second painting, a *Crucifixion*, was never completed. These paintings, along with the *Transfiguration*, represent the major events in the Christological

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180 Hills, Paul. "Titian's Veils." *Art History*, 29, Issue 5 (Nov. 2006), 771-795.

181 Bonazza, "Signum perennis gloriae," 105.

182 Bohde, "Titian's Three-Altar Project," 460.

narrative. Reinforcing this idea, she cites, is the equilateral triangle created by the three altars which would have enhanced the iconography of the three altarpieces.<sup>183</sup>

An additional external reference serves to reinforce the importance of the church of San Salvador as the resting place for the relics of the first patron saint of Venice, Saint Theodore. Christ's upward attention has already been shown to represent the point in the Transfiguration narrative when God speaks to the apostles. However, the gesture Christ makes with his right hand is unprecedented in traditional representations of the subject. Of the three Transfiguration images discussed here none include such a theatrical gesture as presented by Titian. Bellini's Capodimonte painting shows Christ with both hands raised to the height of his shoulders in a blessing manner. Christ makes a similar blessing gesture with one hand in the Correr version while a c. 1511 Lorenzo Lotto *Transfiguration* [Figure 34] shows Christ turned towards Elijah in conversation. Finally, Raphael has raised both of Christ's hands towards the sky yet they still present his palms towards the viewer in a sign of blessing. Titian's Christ turns as if to walk towards the left but twists his upper body and raises his left hand towards the right. It is possible to understand it as a further reference towards God. However, I argue that it is also possible to see the gesture as one towards the chapel of Saint Theodore which occupies the space directly to the right of the high altar. By directing the viewer's gaze towards the chapel, Titian has reinforced the importance of the church of San Salvador within Venetian history and society.

### Conclusion

Titian's *Transfiguration* would have been visible for most of the year in San Salvador, only being removed to reveal the Pala d'Argento on the feast of the Transfiguration (6 August)

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183 Ibid., 452.

and the high holy days of Christmas and Easter. Rather ironically, then, the image was taken down on the very feast day it commemorated. However, Titian created an image suitable for veneration all through the liturgical year. In fact, Catherine King has shown that the liturgical readings for the feast of the Transfiguration were repeated on two other occasions: the second Sunday in Lent and the Saturday preceding it.<sup>184</sup> This association indicates that, in addition to the iconography representing resurrection and salvation and the dual nature of Christ, the subject would be appropriate for penitential fasting and prayer throughout the year, particularly during Lent.<sup>185</sup> As a cover which was removed for the crucial feast of the Transfiguration, this additional reference would make Titian's painting significant throughout the remainder of the year.

Titian's painting not only creates a new interpretation of the Transfiguration, but thoughtfully highlight the links between the church of San Salvador and San Marco. The artist utilizes a complex set of visual associations which emphasizes the status of the church which has been shown in the first chapter. Christ gestures toward the relics of Saint Theodore emphasizing the role of the church as similar to San Marco: both churches acting as resting places for the patron saints of Venice. Furthermore, this is in keeping with the overall emphasis on the Byzantine heritage of Venice as illustrated by the revivalist architecture and the visual reference in the Transfiguration image to the tradition of mosaics and icons. As the cover for the Pala d'Argento, Titian's *Transfiguration* served a liturgical function as the high altarpiece, referencing themes of Resurrection, Salvation, and the penitential feast of Lent. As a striking image filled

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184 King, Catherine. "The Liturgical and Commemorate Allusions in Raphael's Transfiguration and Failure to Heal." *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*. 45 (1982), 150.

185 Ibid., 148 & 152.

with golden light, the cover provides a visual substitute for the Pala d'Argento, calling attention to the high altar from all parts of the church.

## CHAPTER 6

### CONCLUSION

This thesis has examined four significant aspects of the church of San Salvador in Venice: its prestige and status, the Byzantine-revival style of the architectural rebuilding, the Pala d'Argento and Titian's *Transfiguration* high altarpiece cover. As we have seen, in all four elements, San Marco has emerged as a significant point of reference, inviting comparisons between the two churches which suggests the high status of San Salvador in the medieval and Renaissance periods. Like San Marco, San Salvador housed the relics of a Venetian patron saint, its architecture followed a quincunx plan, and the high altar was decorated with a lavish metal altarpiece protected by an everyday painted version.

Beyond identifying the San Marco influences in San Salvador, this thesis has demonstrated how the architectural and artistic schemes in the church were formulated to work together. The quincunx plan which represents the basic unit of a Byzantine Revival church is used here in a more complex way. While the layering of the unit can also be seen in the church of San Marco, in San Salvador the layering creates a longitudinal space which directs the eye towards the high altar. As well as being the liturgical center of the church, the high altar houses the gilt silver altarpiece with a painted cover that parallels the high altar of San Marco. The importance of this configuration is heightened by San Salvador being the only church to retain their high altar intact to the present day. Similar to the Pala d'Oro, the Pala d'Argento includes allusions to the sacred and secular culture of Venice which, in the Renaissance, often overlapped.

Finally, this thesis offers a new interpretation of Titian's *Transfiguration* understudied. Through thoughtful artistic decision-making, Titian elevated his *Transfiguration* to include deeper levels of meaning than generally recognized. As we have seen, the work alludes to the

Pala Feriale and Byzantine mosaics in a sophisticated manner. This, as well as the cloud motif possibly referring to the foundation of San Salvador, shows that Titian responded to the historical and political significance of the space and used this knowledge to charge his painting with deep significance. As stressed above, his ability to respond to the environment intended for his artworks has been documented in other churches yet has been all but overlooked within San Salvador. Together with the metal altarpiece and architectural setting, the interior of San Salvador presents a unified program across multiple media in which Titian's *Transfiguration* is an integral contribution and supports the unity of space and meaning.

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