

Visualizing the 1630-31 Plague Epidemic in Early Modern Venice and the Veneto

by

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ABSTRACT

In the summer of 1630 a catastrophic plague epidemic struck Venice and its subject cities in the Veneto region, killing around 100,000 inhabitants, disrupting travel and trade, and affecting all aspects of life over the course of its 18-month duration. In response to the outbreak, the Venetian State and other local governments and boards of health implemented widespread plague controls and other initiatives, such as quarantine, travel restrictions, and citywide prayers. The 1630-31 plague generated a rich visual and material culture, both during the epidemic and in its aftermath. Works related to this outbreak range from modest ex-votos created during the plague by individuals, to large-scale architectural and decorative campaigns designed as memorials to the tragedy, commissioned by the Venetian Senate, confraternities, and other social institutions.

This dissertation explores the making and the efficacy of art associated with the 1630-31 plague in Venice and the Veneto. Building on iconographic conventions and motifs introduced during earlier plague epidemics, artists such as Domenico Tintoretto, Antonio Zanchi, and Giambattista Tiepolo took up the challenge of representing the plague visually. The imagery in altarpieces, votives, and confraternity halls emphasized disease-stricken bodies, ubiquitous body-removers (*pizzigamorti*), and timely sacred intercession by saintly protectors. A balance was struck between evoking the dire conditions of plague, affirming the power of the Venetian State to manage the epidemic, and instilling a sense of order in the community. In this way, visual art promoted social cohesion, countering the destabilization caused by the outbreak. In later

memorials and retrospective works, the triumph over the 1630-31 plague became a *topos* used to characterize local civic and religious identities.

Following the Introduction, Chapter 2 of this dissertation presents a timeline of the progression of the 1630-31 plague epidemic and introduces the most important social and religious institutions responding to plague in seicento Venice. Chapter 3 explores Venice's two plague hospitals (*lazzaretti*), which operated continuously and exerted influence over life in Venice and its subject cities during plague epidemics and in times of general wellness. The second half of the dissertation offers detailed analyses of individual works of art representing the 1630-31 plague. Chapter 4 examines case studies of works of art that were created in Venice during the outbreak, addressing issues related to patronage and the challenges affecting art production during major outbreaks of plague. Topics include Venice's relationship with its colonies in Dalmatia, and the common themes related to holy intercession that were shared across media, linking sacred music composed by Claudio Monteverdi to painted plague votives. The focus of Chapter 5 is Antonio Zanchi's monumental painting created for the Scuola Grande di San Rocco in 1666, arguably the most extensive visualization of plague's effects on a city in the early modern world. This chapter considers the conceptual frameworks shared by seventeenth-century painting and the performance arts, particularly public opera. The dissertation concludes by leaving Venice proper in Chapter 6 to explore the impact of the 1630-31 plague epidemic on art production in Este, a subject city in the province of Padua. A series of commissions are tracked, from an *ex-voto* completed during the seventeenth-century outbreak, to a commemorative altarpiece created by Giambattista Tiepolo in 1759. The role of plague in generating collective memories and supporting socio-cultural identity in the eighteenth century is examined.

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

A single red flagstone gleams from within the pavement of a *sotoportego*, or covered alleyway, in the Venetian *sestiere* of Castello [Figures 1.1, 1.2]. The bricks around this stone have been cut to accommodate the interruption of this conspicuous element, placed to catch the eye of any inattentive walker who may have strode past the Corte Nova and failed to recognize the importance of the surroundings. Though this residential corridor is distant from major landmarks in the city and, in most ways, indistinguishable from streets in other similar neighborhoods, this *sotoportego* is the site of a miracle that was reported to have occurred in 1630.

While an outbreak of plague devastated Venice and the surrounding areas of the Veneto, killing around 33% of the population of the city over the sixteen months from June 1630 to November 1631, residents of the Corte Nova neighborhood, who passed through this *sotoportego* daily and offered prayers to a painting of the Madonna and Child situated on an interior wall in the alley, were miraculously spared from the disease [Figure 1.3]. Initially, residents demonstrated their devotion to the miracle-working image by leaving small votives and other tokens of thanksgiving — ephemeral objects that have long since disappeared. However, after the epidemic, more elaborate and permanent markers were created. This painting's salvific powers came to be associated with the *sotoportego* itself, and the *sotoportego* was gradually

transformed into a shrine in the years following the outbreak. The pavement was cut to accommodate the red stone, marking the neighborhood's zone of safety on the line that plague would not cross. Wooden panels, coffered and painted, were added to the ceiling, along with a cycle of four paintings depicting episodes from the 1630-31 plague placed on the walls sometime between the end of the seventeenth and the middle of the eighteenth century [Figures 1.4, 1.5].¹ These paintings, though significantly deteriorated after their exposure to the elements for nearly three hundred years, still register a number of iconographic elements associated with plague paintings in seicento Venice. These elements include a personification of the city as a stately woman in opulent clothes; an alliance between the city government and sacred intercessors; bodies of plague victims, naked and languishing near the foreground; and red-capped sanitation workers, known in Venetian dialect as *pizzigamorti*, whose job it was to transport the sick and suspected ill to the plague hospitals (*lazzaretti*) and to collect the corpses that proliferated in the city during the 1630-31 outbreak [Figures 1.6-1.10].²

In many ways, the history of this *sotoportego*, with its post-epidemic transformation through the accretion of works of art and architectural elements, represents a practice common to the veneration of objects credited with miracle-working capabilities, and especially those associated with plague. The commemorative additions to the *sotoportego*, particularly the

¹ Little substantive information on these paintings exists, as early modern documents related to their creation and placement in the *sotoportego* have not been found. They have received little scholarly attention due to this fact, as well as their deteriorated state. The history of the *sotoportego* can be found in Antonio Niero, Giovanni Musolino, Silvio Tramontin, *Santità a Venezia* (Venice: Ed. dello Studium Cattolico Veneziano, 1972), 256-7, and *Venezia e la peste* (Venice: Marsilio, 1979), 291.

² In fact, this site is credited with the continual protection of the Corte Nova neighborhood, demonstrated by a lunette placed over the north entrance to the *sotoportego* in the twentieth century that lists the dates of local disasters from which Corte Nova residents have been spared, all the way up to World War I. In September 2016, Save Venice, Inc., an American organization funding conservation and education projects in the city, completed an extensive conservation campaign in the *sotoportego*, including cleaning and stabilizing the four paintings depicting scenes of the 1630-31 epidemic, re-situating them in the nearby church of San Francesco della Vigna, and commissioning weather-resistant reproductions for placement in the *sotoportego*. The original paintings had already been removed from the *sotoportego* and placed in storage several decades prior to this point.

narrative paintings, are part of an established tradition of imaging plague, which had its own distinct set of conventions and iconography in Venice and the Veneto region. Plague was a critical threat to public health throughout the early modern period. While there was no effective medical treatment for the disease until the development of antibiotics many centuries later, early modern residents of Venice sought to defend themselves against plague through a variety of methods, many of which centered on works of art.

This dissertation evaluates the rich body of visual art and material culture that was generated by the 1630-31 plague epidemic in Venice and cities of the Veneto region. I have selected a group of case studies that represents the critical concerns and functions of plague art during the later early modern period, from those created at the height of the outbreak to others that memorialized this public health crisis more than a century after its close. I examine the evolution of established iconographies representing plague in this region, as well as the development of new conventions, specific to the 1630-31 epidemic, that characterize the disease and, in turn, offer insight into how residents of Venice and its subject cities took action against pestilence. I instantiate the 1630-31 plague outbreak in Venice as a catalyst for self-definition and the re-formulation of regional identities, set into motion by the production of visual art addressing this crisis. Seventeenth-century Venice and its territories encompassed a great diversity of peoples, and in exploring the impacts of the 1630-31 plague epidemic, this dissertation seeks to highlight, through available sources, the heterogeneity of the city's residents, who include detainees at the lazaretti and members of confraternities, as well as individuals living in the State's subject cities on the mainland and in its Eastern Mediterranean colonies.

By making the 1630-31 plague epidemic a lens through which to examine the evolution of plague art in Venice and the Veneto, this dissertation raises questions about larger trends in the region's visual culture in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Venice had an exceptional relationship with plague for several important reasons that affected how the disease was visualized in the city and its territories. For many years prior to the plague of 1630-31, Venice had been at the forefront of medical innovations against plague. The city was unique in Western Europe for maintaining two hospitals that were dedicated solely to plague, open and operating on a permanent basis. The Lazzaretto Vecchio and the Lazzaretto Nuovo sequestered dangerous, plague-stricken individuals away from the city's center, and also performed a variety of functions related to the spectrum of residents affected by plague. Sick patients at the Lazzaretto Vecchio were treated with what were felt to be the most effective medicines and procedures, as well as provided with clean water and food. The Lazzaretto Nuovo was a decontamination site for material goods and provided for the sorting out of Venetian residents who were only potentially harboring the disease, allowing them to serve quarantine away from the confirmed-sick in communal, sometimes family groups divided by perceived risk level.

Furthermore, Venice was able to develop and maintain these lazzaretti for over three hundred years because of the city's wealth and, perhaps more important, because of its established history as a state built upon the combined functioning of numerous well-organized bureaucracies. Government-enforced quarantine, travel bans, disinfection of homes, ships, and material objects, and even the treatment of plague victims was unusually consistent and wide-ranging because of the powerful oversight of the Venetian State. The cooperative relationship between the Venetian Health Office, run by *Provveditori alla Sanità*, and local health boards in regional cities in the Veneto also made enforcement of these plague-related health policies

possible. In addition to implementing sanitary legislation, the Venetian State organized special Masses, processions, and displays of relics from saints and other holy people associated with plague healing before the disease reached the city in 1630, during the outbreak, and to celebrate its end. The wealth and variety of written documents generated by this bureaucratic state — one with a history of commissioning works of art and architecture for state-sanctioned worship and celebration — allows for an informed understanding of how social institutions in Venice responded to plague.

Venice's unusual geography had a significant role in its relationship to plague epidemics. On one hand, being an urban conglomerate of centralized main islands surrounded by more distant islands distributed throughout the lagoon made the isolation of plague-infected objects and people easier. Both of the *lazzaretti* were located on islands away from the city center and distant from each other. The hoped-for outcome was that a plague epidemic could be stopped in the earliest phases through quick detection and isolation. However, Venice's maritime economy and cosmopolitan population made it a target for plague. The Venetian government understood that the constant movement of travelers, merchants, and diplomats in and out of the city, as well as the importation of numerous goods by sea and overland, made Venice especially vulnerable to outbreaks of infectious diseases, of which plague was the most feared. The *Sanità*'s constant monitoring of the city and surrounding regions for cases of plague, and the rigorous implementation of policies for inspection, separation, and disinfection were all the more critical for a high-risk city like Venice. The pervasiveness of these public health measures affected the appearance of plague art produced in the city. Case studies examined in this dissertation explicitly register a number of these sanitation procedures.

From a social perspective, Venice's relationship to plague was affected by its own self-styled and distinct spirituality, historically contrasted to that of Rome and supported by a rhetoric emphasizing the Venetian State's saintly protectors and history of timely sacred intervention. Works of art visualizing the city's special relationship with Saint Mark, as well as its favored status with the Virgin (who was depicted in civic commissions as an analogue for Venice) promoted the State's privileged position. By the seventeenth century, even before the epidemic struck, Venice's patriarchs (supported by doges and the Signoria) worked to codify a hagiography of Venetian saints to further legitimate Venice's claim to a singular and separate local spirituality autonomous from papal oversight, if not fully independent of it. Patriarch Giovanni Tiepolo worked to solidify the pantheon of Venetian saints in the early seventeenth century, linking it to the state-organized veneration of the Beato Lorenzo Giustiniani during the 1630-31 epidemic, which resulted in the holy man's canonization in 1690. Venetian spirituality was crucial during plague epidemics, not only due to the increased need for, and urgency of, appeals made for protection and salvation, but because Venice and its *terraferma* cities maintained the cults of important plague saints and healers, including Saint Anthony of Padua and Saint Roch, whose intact body was interred in the Chiesa di San Rocco in Venice.

The cult of Saint Roch exploded in popularity during the sixteenth century, and the Scuola Grande di San Rocco's reputation as one of the city's most important social institutions was solidified by the wealth and prestige brought to the confraternity through its custodianship of the plague saint's relics. The Scuola Grande di San Rocco and its influence on Venice will be explored throughout this dissertation. The cult of San Rocco was vital during the plague, with votive offerings presented to the Scuola and the church. In addition, a major decorative campaign retrospectively commemorating the triumph over the 1630-31 plague was undertaken

by the Scuola in its grand stairwell in the 1660-70s. The two resulting paintings, completed by Antonio Zanchi and Pietro Negri and installed in the confraternity's meetinghouse, represent the most comprehensive examination of plague's effects on a city during this period or any other.

The importance of the 1630-31 epidemic

The reoccurrence of numerous plague outbreaks in Europe during the late medieval and early modern periods came to be known as the second plague pandemic, spanning the years from 1347 through 1722.³ Venice was struck by multiple outbreaks of plague during this period. Some were mild, causing relatively few casualties and leaving little mark in the city's material records. Others, like those of 1348-51, 1363, 1575-77, and 1630-31, killed tens of thousands of Venetian residents, generating considerable legislation amid the economic hardship, strained resources, fervid spiritual appeals, and interrupted lives. Each of the later two catastrophic epidemics killed around 50,000 people in Venice itself, not counting mortality in the Veneto and other areas of northern Italy. They represent equally disruptive episodes in the history of Venice in the later early modern period. The 1630-31 outbreak is distinguished by several factors. First, the Venetian State met this epidemic with a pre-established set of medical and spiritual interventions modeled directly on what happened in 1575-77. While it was commonplace (and common sense) to adopt legislation and practices during plague epidemics that had been beneficial in past outbreaks, the State's evident use of 1575-77 as a model and departure point is remarkable. From adjusting the number of body clearers in the city according to perceived

³ The first recognized plague pandemic began with the Justinian Plague in 541, which spread from northern Africa, to the Levant, and throughout Europe and the Mediterranean. Sporadic outbreaks of plague erupted continually in Europe and Western Asia until they appeared to die out in the 8th century. After the disease's reemergence in the second pandemic of 1347-1722, third plague began in China in 1855 and spread to other areas of Asia and India until antibiotics largely controlled it by the mid-20th century. For a challenge to this standard chronology of plague, see Samuel K. Cohn, Jr. "Epidemiology of the Black Death and Successive Waves of Plague," *Medical History*, v.27 (2008), 74-100.

failures in sanitation fifty years prior, to designing the architectural votive church Santa Maria della Salute to function in the same manner as Palladio's successful Il Redentore of 1577, the 1630-31 plague epidemic demonstrates the Venetian State's dependence upon its past policies and interventions to guide it during the current crisis. Venice was primed to take multiple, visible actions across the city in a concerted effort to contain the plague and manage the social and economic disruption caused by the epidemic. This well-orchestrated response to a destabilizing and potentially chaotic event left a significant mark in the material record and in visual art.

From an art historical standpoint it is critical that this hyper self-awareness was embodied in the visual art produced during the 1630-31 plague outbreak and afterwards. The epidemic spurred the creation of myriad works of art and other kinds of material culture, from ephemeral ex-votos, to elaborate painting campaigns, to the construction of votive chapels and churches that memorialized the event. Furthermore, these works reflected the interconnectedness of the Venetian social landscape during the seventeenth-century epidemic and in its aftermath. A painting by Domenico Tintoretto for the church of San Francesco della Vigna in Venice dated 1631 shows the evident ties that linked prayers and appeals made to intercessors at the neighborhood level to those orchestrated by the State in citywide ceremonials [Figure 4.5]. This painting, which will be examined in depth in Chapter 4, contains a banner of text that recites a prayer: *Pray, I beseech you, to your son, so that he may heal this cruel wound, with great piety; and help us, placate his wrath [so that] sighs cease.*⁴ The implied voice "speaking" this prayer can be associated with several figures in the painting, from the two women donors at the bottom edge, to the personification of Venice who dominates the center of the composition. The plea, directed toward Christ and the Virgin pictured in the upper register, reflects more than a request

⁴ *"Prega ti prego il tuo figliol che sani questa piaga crudel che ci divora/e con l alta pietade noi soccorra placata l ira sua cessin gli affani."*

for help made by specific votaries associated with San Francesco della Vigna; it also references several lines in a litany composed by Claudio Monteverdi in 1631 that were sung during processions of a revered miracle-working image in the Piazza San Marco, the Madonna Nicopeia [Figure 2.1].⁵ This painted intervention against plague reflects how integrated the approaches to fighting the disease were in seicento Venice and the Veneto — the material culture of plague existed within a web of interconnected cultural responses that cannot be parsed cleanly along material or institutional lines. Across the varied works instigated by the 1630-31 plague epidemic such as Domenico Tintoretto’s banner, certain repeated themes, tropes and other conventions reveal that this crisis generated its own iconography by tapping into the traditions of previous centuries in plague art and by combining these elements with imagery specific to the seicento outbreak. Each chapter of this dissertation considers factors that contributed to the evolution of plague art in seventeenth-century Venice and the Veneto, including its development into an emblem of local character and identity in the later eighteenth century.

One of the main iconographic elements that exemplifies the 1630-31 plague is the pictorial abundance of *pizzigamorti* (body clearers), whose ubiquity in seicento plague art points to their critical function from a public health standpoint, and also their rootedness within the early modern imagination of pestilence. Works of art from 1630-31 established conventions in picturing their dress and behavior, and also developed models for depicting them decorously in devotional works so as to mitigate their fear-inducing and unsettling presence. Along with the *pizzigamorti*, the spiritual healer Beato Lorenzo Giustiniani emerged as a prominent subject, although primarily after the end of the epidemic. Though he died in the mid-fifteenth century and appears not to have had a significant following in the sixteenth century, Giustiniani became

⁵ James H. Moore “‘Venezia favorita da Maria:’ Music for the Madonna Nicopeia and Santa Maria della Salute,” *Journal of the American Musicological Society*, v.37, n.2 (Summer 1984), 332-6.

associated with the sixteenth century epidemic through the revival of his cult in 1630 via state-organized processions of his relics and through the commission of numerous works of art depicting his image. There was also an increased interest in representing pestilence in allegorical form in Venice in the aftermath of the 1630-31 epidemic. In these allegorical representations, plague was personified as a woman, but with a large degree of variation and without a distinct set of codified attributes (of the kind found in emblem books from the period like Cesare Ripa's *Iconologia*). Plague was frequently configured as an aged, gaunt, and dirty woman, but in some cases, a younger and more robust characterization was used, or, conversely, a physiognomy that appeared more demonic than human.

Foremost among the distinguishing features of plague art from the 1630-31 outbreak in Venice and the Veneto is its use to describe and define communal identity and belonging. Plague art of previous epidemics also functioned in this way — establishing inclusion in a devotional community or membership in a confraternity, visualizing the piety of supplicants, and serving as encomia for those pictured. However, works rendered during and after this particular epidemic operated to a greater degree to give shape to social identities and assert their long-lasting viability. The reasons for this are complex, and to some extent, vary from commission to commission. One unifying factor relates to the history of plague in this region: the 1630-31 epidemic was the last to strike Venice or any of the cities in the Veneto. Naples was devastated by a major outbreak in 1656-58, and other cities on the Italian peninsula, particularly in the south, experienced sporadic episodes of plague throughout the seventeenth century. From a medical and social standpoint, it is unclear why Venice remained plague-free after 1631, when its continued status as an important hub of commerce and international politics left it just as

susceptible to plague as in the past.⁶ After 1631 when other cities in early modern Europe continued to be affected by plague, Venice and its *terraferma* subjects were spared. This fact in some ways confirmed for residents of the Republic long-held rhetoric touting the city's unusual and favored spiritual status — the so-called “Myth of Venice,” confirmed year-by-year through its protection from plague. Pleas made to sacred intercessors sought precisely this scenario: succor or protection in exchange for renewed and increased veneration of the saints and the Virgin Mary. The region's freedom from pestilence after its collective efforts to garner security from the Virgin, Christ and other spiritual healers in 1630-31 served as evidence that Venetians' appeals were sufficient and recognized. The long-term result is that this particular plague epidemic remained relevant years after the end of the crisis, developing into a powerful symbol of adversity overcome by virtue of organized communal actions and intrinsic worth.

The impact of plague on early modern Europe

While it appears that the experience of plague was in many ways different in Venice from that of other cities in early modern Italy, and that the 1630-31 outbreak distinguished itself from previous epidemics, the question remains as to why plague had such a profound impact on early modern political and cultural formations in Europe. Infectious diseases were endemic in the early modern world, but none had the broad reach and longevity of plague. A sort of lineage can be traced in major diseases that affected Western Europe in the medieval and early modern periods, from leprosy, which developed first in the eleventh century, to the inception of the second plague pandemic in 1347, to syphilis at the end of the fifteenth century. Later,

⁶ Some medical historians, Richard Palmer in particular, have supported the theory that Venice's rigorous Health Office was responsible for the city's protection from plague after 1631, though this is difficult to prove and is somewhat complicated by the fact that the *Sanità* was working at full capacity before and during the 1575-77 and 1630-31 epidemics, yet was still unable to thwart the disease. *The Control of Plague in Venice and Northern Italy, 1348-1600*, (PhD dissertation, University of Kent at Canterbury, 1978), 315-21.

nineteenth-century Europe battled outbreaks of cholera that were reminiscent of these earlier epidemics. Though there was overlap in the presence of these diseases (they are all still active today), each had a distinct peak period. Among them, plague as a major threat persisted for nearly four hundred years, was constantly active in some location on the continent, and represented the greatest loss of lives per acute outbreak. Though leprosy and syphilis could be devastating, they were slow-developing diseases that could progress over years and did not spread with the shocking swiftness of the plague. For those who contracted plague in the early modern world, death was imminent, sometimes occurring within hours or days from the onset of symptoms, and an entire city could be exposed before the outbreak was recognized. Outbreaks of cholera in Europe could also kill quickly and spread rapidly through urban populations via contaminated water and poor sanitary conditions. However, incidences of cholera were more isolated than those of plague and did not have the centuries' long permanence of pestilence. Nineteenth-century medical practices and beliefs about disease transmission also differentiated cholera from the earlier endemic diseases of Western Europe.

Plague had a remarkable presence in visual art unparalleled by these other diseases. Its longevity as a health crisis was one reason, though there were multiple contributing factors. First, plague was a communal disease. In studying the iconography of both leprosy and plague, Christine Boeckl notes that works of art imaging plague far exceed in number those of leprosy because of the ways in which each disease progressed and how each was categorized in the early modern mind.⁷ Those afflicted with leprosy (Hansen's disease) were ostracized and often forced to leave the communities in which they lived. Leprosy infections resulted in the isolation of individuals, who were then marked by a physical and symbolic separation from the greater

⁷ *Images of Leprosy: Disease, Religion, and Politics in European Art*, (Kirksville, Mo.: Truman State University Press, 2011), 123.

population. Plague, however, struck communities quickly and without differentiation.⁸ Civic populations and communities experienced the danger and the suffering collectively, and the commission of works of art was felt to be an essential component of group protection. While plague had been perceived as a disease of the poor in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, by the mid-sixteenth century in Venice, plague was recognized to affect people across the social spectrum. The creation of visual art to represent socially diverse congregations and civic institutions became all the more important in an era that saw plague as a citywide threat. Works imaging the disease became multifunctional tools with which to secure holy intercession, rid the body of dangerous humors or emotions, and strengthen social order in destabilized times.

In addition, plague arose in Italy at a time when works of art were credited with the power to effect real, tangible changes in the world. Religious experience was shaped by the belief that images could occasion miracles and could mutate physically, operating as conduits for sacred agency in the mundane world.⁹ Offering votive gifts in association with prayers and vows of faith was common practice among people seeking relief from a variety of hardships.¹⁰ Renaissance medicine supported notions of the transferability of physical states through sight. Paintings depicting a chubby Christ Child placed on a bedchamber wall could result in the conception of healthy babies, while demons populating a scene of Hell might introduce a

⁸ Higher incidences of plague were experienced by lower status individuals, but this was due to overcrowded, unsanitary living conditions, and the economic impossibility of them fleeing the city at the first sign of an outbreak, which was an option typically chosen by those of greater means.

⁹ Recent scholarship on miraculous objects and art in Italy include: Sergio Rossi, *Scienza e miracoli nell'arte del '600: alle origini della medicina moderna*, (Milan: Electa), 1998; Michele Bacci, *Pro remedio animae: Immagini sacre e pratiche devozionali in Italia centrale*, (Pisa: ETS), 2000; Erik Thunø and Gerhard Wolf, eds. *The Miraculous Image in the Late Middle Ages and Renaissance* (Rome: L'erma di Bretschneider), 2004; Jane Garnett and Gervase Rosser, *Spectacular Miracles: Transforming Images in Italy from the Renaissance to the Present*, (London: Reaktion Books), 2013; and Megan Holmes, *The Miraculous Image in Renaissance Florence*, (New Haven: Yale University Press), 2013.

¹⁰ Robert Maniura, "Ex Votos, Art, and Pious Performance," *Oxford Art Journal*, v.32, n.3 (2009), 409-25. For recent work on painted ex-votos in early modern Italy, see Fredrika Jacobs, *Votive Panels and Popular Piety in Early Modern Italy*, (New York: Cambridge University Press), 2013.

dangerous element into living spaces. Physical bodies were responsive to their environments through all of the senses: susceptible to corrupt air, noxious odors, and foods that would upset humoral balances, as well as receptive to healing through the touch of a holy relic, and the edifying effects of sacred music and harmonious images. The physical and spiritual were integrated in early modern Venice, and the period in which the plague pandemic was active in Western Europe coincided with the height of theological and medical philosophies that would support the usefulness of visual art against outbreaks of pestilence.

Finally, the visual culture of plague in the later early modern period was generated out of a dialectic between tradition and innovation. As started earlier, works of art produced in response to the 1630-31 epidemic demonstrate an acute awareness of the conventional iconography and compositional strategies that had been developed in previous outbreaks, particularly in this region, but also across the Italian peninsula. While the adoption of formats for dividing pictorial space and methods for envisioning holy intercession remained relatively stable, certain other elements appear to have been more fluid. Some of this fluidity resulted from simple changes to make a work locally applicable, such as including landmarks and saints particular to a city or region. However, other variable aspects of plague paintings from this period — such as how to render the corpses of plague victims — related to the continual development of new strategies for dealing with the more challenging aspects of picturing the disease. These concerns will be explored throughout the dissertation, as they are critical to understanding how plague art was designed and used. At the foundational level, visual art specific to plague in Venice and the Veneto was perceived to be efficacious — it worked. It attested to the piety, hope and resilience of a community, as well as the ability to effect positive change, conveying a sense of permanence and social cohesion, even in precarious circumstances.

Method and historiography

This dissertation develops a method of evaluating plague art by isolating one epidemic in a single locale, specifically the 1630-31 plague in Venice and the Veneto region. Rather than limiting my analysis to works of art created during this epidemic, I give equal weight to the continued production of visual art that represented the 1630-31 outbreak in the years following the crisis. In this way, my dissertation builds upon previous scholarship that has considered plague art with a regional or city-specific focus, yet I expand the scope into a long-term evaluation of the genre. This study offers an innovative perspective on the 1630-31 plague epidemic by advancing the thesis that visual art generated by this crisis was instrumental in re-defining Venetian and regional identities during a time of social transition from the outbreak to the fall of the Republic in 1797. To a greater extent than had been seen in previous epidemics of plague on the Italian peninsula, the seventeenth-century outbreak in Venice became linked with concepts of shared experience, collective memory, and socio-cultural identity. The individual case studies presented here explore the circumstances under which works of visual art that engaged directly with the epidemic were produced and displayed. These votive paintings, altarpieces, and commemorative devotional works addressed common social, spiritual and political concerns, asserting continuity with the past and projecting future resilience.

Seventeenth-century Venice has been underrepresented in art historical scholarship, and this dissertation contributes new material to several infrequently studied topics in the existing literature. These include seicento art production in Venice and Italy broadly, Venice's relationship to its *stato da mar* colonies along the Croatian coast in the later early modern period, and the economic and social aspects of Venetian culture that continued to thrive in the eighteenth century, a period typically categorized as one of decline and decay in traditional studies of the

city's history. The dissertation complicates narratives of settecento Venice's economic and political faltering by bringing into focus the vitality of certain sectors of artistic production and the dynamic relationship between painting and nascent opera.

Scholars have come to use the term "plague art" to describe the artistic output that can be related to epidemics of the disease. There was no designated term in the period itself and the category, as applied, is somewhat loose and contingent on multiple factors. For example, religious works featuring a plague saint such as Roch or Sebastian, even if only as secondary figures, connotes an association with the disease, though these figures and their healing capacities may not have been the primary importance of the work; conversely, a miracle-working object bearing no plague iconography or previous connection to an epidemic could develop significance in the context of plague through healing the stricken during an outbreak. In this dissertation, I will consider the category of plague art to include visual art and material culture created explicitly to visualize plague, as well as works used during the early modern period in direct connection with the disease. These works may have been created during an epidemic or in a time of general wellness, from varied materials, and each may have served a number of diverse social and/or religious functions.

The study of the relationship between plague epidemics and art production in early modern Italy began in 1951 with the publication of Millard Meiss's pivotal book, *Painting in Florence and Siena after the Black Death: The Arts, Religion and Society in the Mid-Fourteenth Century*.¹¹ This book gave rise to plague studies as a sub-field within the discipline of art history. It established plague art as a distinct genre related to holy intercession, visualized piety, divine intervention and sacred hierarchy, and civic commissions. Scholars, however, challenged

¹¹ Meiss, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1951).

Meiss's contention that works of art in Florence and Siena showed a stylistic regression in response to the devastation of the so-called Black Death of 1347-51. Rather than linking changes in style to widespread anxieties and fear of divine retribution, later art historians have examined plague art as a social and spiritual tool that devotees used to generate positive change and offer stability during the tumult of plague epidemics. Meiss's ideas are also less tenable as the field has moved away from models of progressive stylistic development. The book has, however, remained a launching point for plague studies and has been influential broadly in the field of renaissance art history. Popular survey textbooks like John Paoletti and Gary Radke's *Art in Renaissance Italy* have included Meiss's theory since the 1990s — refuting it as a demonstration of the methodological shortcomings of teleological models of stylistic change.¹²

Meiss's *Painting in Florence and Siena after the Black Death* did, however, make an important contribution in calling attention to the role of the formal properties of visual art that engaged with plague. Style and iconography need to be taken into consideration when analyzing the efficacy of imagery that was shaped by patrons and artists to achieve particular results, whether religious, political, or aesthetic. This dissertation in some ways offers a reevaluation of the significance of style and the plural functions of plague art in the early modern world. Case studies examined in Chapters 4-6 highlight a number of stylistic concerns that were specific to visualizing plague, from modifying the conventions for depicting contaminated objects and bodies, to adopting compositions and formats that would best communicate local histories associated with plague.

After the innovative work of Millard Meiss, a seminal exhibition at Venice's Palazzo Ducale in 1979 and its associated catalogue, *Venezia e la peste*, have made the largest impact

¹² Paoletti and Radke, *Art in Renaissance Italy*, 1st ed. (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1997), 143-5.

upon the modern study of plague and visual art, bringing together the work of important scholars from several disciplines, including the histories of art and medicine.¹³ This catalogue set a standard for considering plague comprehensively, exploring the disease's effect on Venetian society from its first occurrence in the city in 1348 through the end of the Republic in 1797. The strength of *Venezia e la peste* was its examination of a large and varied body of primary sources generated by plague in Venice during the late medieval and early modern periods, as well as its endeavor to illustrate the genealogy of the visual and material culture of plague in the city. In many ways, this catalogue remains unsurpassed in its inclusive exploration of the topic through the work of scholars who have shaped the field of plague studies in the Italian and English languages, including historians Paolo Preto and Richard Palmer, and scholars of Venetian art such as Stefania Mason Rinaldi and Antonio Niero.¹⁴ This catalogue has served as a springboard and model for the development of my own methodology in studying the 1630-31 plague epidemic. In my research, I adopt an interdisciplinary approach when evaluating my case studies, considering them within the interconnected web of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Venetian society. Examining the cultural responses to seicento plague that informed my case studies has led me down several paths outside of standard art historical enquiry, most notably unpacking seventeenth-century medical theories of disease transmission. My approach has opened pathways in studying the disease as a cultural phenomenon, including an exploration of the shared conceptual frameworks underpinning painting practices and the performance arts, particularly public opera, in seicento Venice.

¹³ *Venezia e la peste: 1348-1797*, Assessorato alla cultura e alle belle arte. (Venice: Marsilio, 1979.)

¹⁴ Richard Palmer's dissertation, *The Control of Plague in Venice and Northern Italy, 1348-1600*, PhD dissertation, (University of Kent at Canterbury, 1978) continues to be defining work on plague in Venice. See also, "L'azione della Repubblica di Venezia nel controllo della peste. Lo sviluppo della politica governativa," in *Venezia a la peste*, 103-110. For Preto's major publications, see *Epidemia, paura, e politica nell'Italia moderna*, (Rome: Laterza), 1987, and *La società veneta e le grandi epidemie di peste*, (Vicenza: N. Pozza), 1984.

A cluster of publications on plague in Italy appeared in the 1980s and early 1990s on the heels of *Venezia e la peste*, and primarily in the discipline of history. Each of these studies offered nuanced views on plague that contributed to a greater understanding of the disease's far-reaching impact on the early modern world. For the most part these studies adopted regional approaches, examining the effects of plague in individual cities and with respect to local conventions and civic functioning. Giulia Calvi, for example, took a microhistorical approach to the 1630 plague outbreak in Florence through close examination of documents resulting from the litigation of criminal cases associated with breaking quarantine laws.¹⁵ Likewise, Ann Carmichael has evaluated the development of plague legislation from the perspective of restricting and controlling subaltern social groups in Florence and Milan, though also extending her analysis to include the phenomenon across the Italian peninsula more broadly during the Renaissance period.¹⁶ In the area of Venetian studies, Richard Palmer and Paolo Preto have made significant contributions to an understanding of the medical and bureaucratic responses to plague in the city, while Paolo Ulvioni's 1989 book focused on the 1630-31 plague to consider the economic impact of the outbreak in Venice and on the mainland.¹⁷ Of particular relevance to this dissertation is Luigi Piva's 1991 exploration of the history of plague in the Veneto region, which considers the phenomenon with respect to the local contexts of individual cities, including

¹⁵ Giulia Calvi, *Storia di un anno di peste*, (Milan: Bompiani), 1984. Historian John Henderson's forthcoming book will also treat the subject of the 1630 plague in Florence.

¹⁶ Ann Carmichael, *Plague and the Poor in Renaissance Florence*, (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press), 1986; Carmichael, "Contagion Theory and Contagion Practice in Fifteenth-Century Milan," *Renaissance Quarterly*, v.44, n.2 (Summer 1991), 213-256; and Carmichael, "Plague Legislation and the Italian Renaissance," *Bulletin of the History of Medicine*, v.57, n.4 (Winter 1983), 508-525.

¹⁷ Richard Palmer's dissertation, *The Control of Plague in Venice and Northern Italy, 1348-1600*, continues to be a defining work on plague in Venice. See also, "L'azione della Repubblica di Venezia nel controllo della peste. Lo sviluppo della politica governativa," in *Venezia a la peste*, 103-110. For Preto's major publications, see *Epidemia, paura, e politica nell'Italia moderna*, (Rome: Laterza), 1987, and *La società veneta e le grandi epidemie di peste*, (Vicenza: N. Pozza), 1984. Paolo Ulvioni, *Il gran castigo di Dio: Carestia ed epidemie a Venezia e nella Terraferma, 1628-1632*, (Milan: Franco Angeli Libri), 1989.

Padua, Vicenza, Verona, and Este.¹⁸ Piva's work exemplifies an increasing interest in regarding the Veneto as socially distinct from Venice, recognizing its history in the early modern world as a topic equally rich and viable for sustained study.¹⁹

Each of these publications has contributed a substantial and rigorously researched body of scholarship on plague in early modern Italy. However, the impact and central importance of visual art and material culture to the lived experience of plague in early modern Venice remains understudied. There have been a number of insightful explorations of plague art in the field of art history, though no study after Millard Meiss's intervention, and before this dissertation, has interrogated the artistic output and the longer-term impact on visual culture of one epidemic in a specific region.²⁰ Louise Marshall's pioneering scholarship on plague and confraternities in early modern Italy set the groundwork for understanding plague art as a spiritual tool that confraternity brothers and other residents of early modern cities used to fight pestilence actively, demonstrating a cooperative sense of agency. Her exploration of the efficacy of visual art against plague and the sense of empowerment it gave devotees countered Millard Meiss's theory on the regressive impact that epidemics of pestilence had on art production. Marshall's early work focused on examples of confraternal plague art from central Italian cities, including

¹⁸ Luigi Piva, *Le pestilenze nel Veneto*, (Padua: Camposampiero), 1991.

¹⁹ The historical literature on plague is vast, and while my exploration of the topic has involved the evaluation of many sources as a means of situating myself in the discipline's historiography, I cannot account for all of the important and influential studies in this introduction. My engagement with various scholars and modes of enquiry will be evident throughout the proceeding chapters, though I will note here the importance and impact of Nelli-Elena Vanzan Marchini's work on Venetian hospitals and the lazaretti (*La memoria della salute: Venezia e il suo ospedale dal XVI al XX*, (Venice: Arsenale), 1985 and *Venezia e i lazaretti mediterranei*, (Mariano del Friuli Edizioni della Laguna), 2004). Samuel Cohn and Carlo Cipolla have also contributed significant studies resulting in a greater understanding of the long-term cultural and social implications of plague across the Italian peninsula. See in particular, Samuel K. Cohn, *The Black Death Transformed: Disease and Culture in Early Renaissance Europe*, (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press), 2002; Cohn, *Cultures of Plague: Medical Thinking at the End of the Renaissance*, (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press), 2010; and Carlo Cipolla, *Cristofano and the Plague: a Study in the History of Public Health in the Age of Galileo*, (London: Collins), 1973.

²⁰ Recent art historical examinations of the 1630-31 plague include Catherine Puglisi, "Guido Reni's *Pallione del Voto* and the Plague of 1630," *Art Bulletin*, v.77, n.3 (1995), 403-12, and Sheila Barker, "Poussin, Plague, and Early Modern Medicine," *Art Bulletin*, v.86, n.4 (December 2004), 659-89.

Florence, Siena, Perugia, and Arezzo, though a recent article considers Tintoretto's contributions to the Chiesa di San Rocco in Venice.²¹ Her reevaluation of works of art occasioned by plague fostered new ways of thinking about artistic output during outbreaks, as well as the adaptive use of plague art during episodes of relative health and the multifunctional capacity of devotional art generally in early modern Italy. The methodological framework she established for evaluating plague art has informed the types of questions I ask when exploring my own case studies in this dissertation, especially when considering the dynamic functioning of these works within the social institutions of early modern Venice.

After the inception of modern plague studies within the field of art history with Meiss in 1951, and the second generative moment in the 1980-90s, a third wave of important publications on the disease appeared in the early 2000s. A widely reviewed exhibition, *Hope and Healing: Painting in Italy in a Time of Plague, 1500-1800*, was held at the Worcester Art Museum in 2005, curated by Gauvin Baily, Pamela Jones, Franco Mormando, and Thomas Worcester. The catalogue explored plague and art in the later early modern period, organized around essays focusing on individual cities on the Italian peninsula.²² The catalogue includes an essay on plague in Venice by the architectural historian Andrew Hopkins, who traces a history of plague in the city and offers an overview of the Venetian response to the disease — from attitudes towards charity and poor relief, to the operations of the city's Health Office.²³ The attention Hopkins gives to the 1630-31 epidemic in his essay is limited to the commission for the votive

²¹ Louise Marshall, "Manipulating the Sacred: Image and Plague in Renaissance Italy," *Renaissance Quarterly*, v.47, n.3 (Autumn 1994), 485-532; "Confraternity and Community: Mobilizing the Sacred in Times of Plague," in *Confraternities and the Visual Arts in Renaissance Italy: Ritual, Spectacle, Image*, eds. Barbara Wisch and Diane Cole Ahl, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 20-45; and "A Plague Saint for Venice: Tintoretto at the Chiesa di San Rocco," *Artibus et Historiae*, v.66, n.33 (2012), 153-88.

²² eds. Gauvin Alexander Bailey, Pamela Jones, et al., (Worcester, Mass.: Clark University), 2005.

²³ "Combatting the Plague: Devotional Paintings, Architectural Programs, and Votive Processions in Early Modern Venice," in *Hope and Healing*, 137-152.

church, Santa Maria della Salute, a subject that he developed in detail in his book from the year 2000, *Santa Maria della Salute: Architecture and Ceremony in Baroque Venice*.²⁴ However, detailed information on any specific outbreak of plague in Venice is limited in this catalogue, as the goal of *Hope and Healing* was to demonstrate the pervasiveness of plague in the early modern consciousness and its impact upon the production of works of art related to the disease across the Italian peninsula.

Most prominent in the field of Venetian art history is Stefania Mason, who expanded upon her early work on plague imagery in *Venezia e la peste* with more recent publications related to early modern medicine and concepts of the body and mortality in sixteenth-century Venice and the Veneto region. Her essay in the 1998 exhibition catalogue *Scienza e miracoli nell'arte del '600* situates plague depictions within the context of seventeenth-century medical and spiritual practices for disease treatment, while a 2000 essay considers visual renderings of plague with respect to representations of bodies that are mortified by injuries or other maladies in Venice and its *terraferma* cities.²⁵ Her methodology continues that established by *Venezia e la peste*, affirming the historical interconnectedness of religion, science, and medicine that was fundamental to healing plague in early modern Venice, and which is reflected in visual art through its perceived role in this healing process.²⁶

Recent work by historians of medicine studying plague in Venice has also yielded valuable insights into health care in the early modern city, providing comparative material that links the medical and spiritual approaches to healing the plague-stricken in 1630-31. Jane

²⁴ (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 2000.

²⁵ Mason, "Scienza e miracoli nella pittura Veneta del Seicento," in *Scienza e miracoli nell'arte del '600: alle origini della medicina moderna*, (Milan: Electa, 1998), 124-33; Mason, "L'immaginario della morte e della peste nell'arte del Seicento," in *La pittura nel Veneto. Il Seicento*, (Milan: Electa, 2000), 523-42.

²⁶ A book published recently in Denmark on Venetian art includes a chapter dedicated to plague, Mogens Nykjær, *Venezia: byhistorie og kunst*, "Pesten," (Kbh.: Gylendal, 2010), 353-79.

Crawshaw's study of the development and function of Venice's *lazzaretti* cannot be overvalued for its detailed analysis of these dynamic hospitals' operations in the city. In her 2012 book, *Plague Hospitals: Public Health for the City in Early Modern Venice*, Crawshaw explores the daily operations at the Lazzaretto Nuovo and the Lazzaretto Vecchio in an attempt to recover the experiences of both the patients and detainees, as well as the vast team of health care workers who made these hospitals and decontamination centers run.²⁷ Crawshaw's meticulous archival work with *Sanità* documents enabled an understanding of how the Venetian *lazzaretti* functioned over their 300-year history. Her work compliments a 2000 publication by Gerolamo Fazzini of the Archeoclub d'Italia that detailed the excavations undertaken on the hospital islands by archaeologists in the 1990s.²⁸ Together, these publications provide substantive information on an important, previously neglected aspect of plague in Venice. Jane Crawshaw also extended her work on plague to the *pizzigamorti* and a consideration of their crucial function in city sanitation. In an article that predates her book, she tracked metaphors used to describe these provocative figures in early modern texts.²⁹ Crawshaw's work on this subject corresponds with my own exploration of the seventeenth-century fascination with representing these body clearers in depictions of the 1630-31 plague epidemic, as *pizzigamorti* became one of the tropes defining the outbreak.

Using a methodology complimentary to Crawshaw's, historian Alexandra Bamji's work on death in early modern Venice has provided new insights into the State's management of foreign populations in the city during epidemics, as well as expanding upon previous knowledge

²⁷ *Plague Hospitals: Public Health for the City in Early Modern Venice*, (Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate), 2012.

²⁸ Gerolamo Fazzini, ed. *Isola del Lazzaretto Nuovo*, (Venice: Ministero per i Beni e le Attività Culturali e l'Archeoclub d'Italia, sede di Venezia), 2004.

²⁹ Jane Crawshaw, "The Beasts of Burial: *Pizzigamorti* and Public Health for the Plague in Early Modern Venice," *Social History of Medicine*, v.24, n.3 (2011), 570-87.

of the city's death registers, including official procedures for documenting cases of plague.³⁰ Each of these recent studies reflects increasing attention turned to understanding Venice's complex social makeup and multi-ethnic population through the lens of health care and other state-enforced mandates. Rather than viewing *Sanità* regulations as tacit methods for controlling marginal populations, this recent scholarship reflects upon the varied strategies and practices adopted by distinct groups in the city and upon ways in which community responses fit into state-run initiatives that were both medical and spiritual. This approach — evaluating plague interventions with respect to their individual applications and cooperative capacities — defines my own exploration of the visual culture related to the 1630-31 plague.

Outline of chapters

Following this Introduction, five chapters proceed chronologically to track the production of works of art and material culture during and after the 1630-31 plague epidemic. Chapter 2 presents a timeline of the epidemic, exploring the major events and providing an overview of the most important institutions in early modern Venice working against the plague. I place particular emphasis on the Health Office (*Sanità*) and the State-sponsored spiritual initiatives adopted throughout the epidemic.

Chapter 3 examines in depth Venice's two plague hospitals, which were renowned in the early modern world for the rigor with which they isolated dangerous groups away from the city center, treated the plague-stricken, and maintained sanitation in the city both during epidemics and in times of relative health. This chapter features little-studied material on the visual culture at the plague islands, including votives, wall paintings, and graffiti. The plague hospitals receive

³⁰ “The Control of Space: Dealing with diversity in early modern Venice,” *Italian Studies*, v.62, n.2 (2007), 175-88, and “Medical Care in Early Modern Venice,” *Journal of Social History*, v.49, n.3 (2016), 483-509.

separate treatment in their own chapter because of their crucial importance to the Venetian State and the treatment of plague. Only recently have these islands received sustained scholarly attention, and the study of the roles played by visual art in their functioning is still in its earliest stages.

Chapter 4 marks a shift to what can be considered the second half of the dissertation, structured around specific works of art that were produced during and after the plague. This chapter offers four case studies of objects created in Venice during the 1630-31 epidemic and highlights works funded by the State and commissioned by local confraternities. This chapter demonstrates the crucial role works of art played in imaging donors' identities within their social circles — serving as encomia, preserving reputations, and visualizing the worth and piety of individuals, devotional communities and members of collective social institutions. It highlights the protean nature of works of art imaging plague, considering their post-epidemic evolution to meet the changing needs and uses for devotional works of art. The works featured in two of the case studies have received little scholarly attention: a small devotional painting on silk at the Scuola Grande di San Rocco and an ex-voto from the Scuola di San Giorgio degli Schiavoni. My examination of this latter votive painting presents new perspectives on Venice's relationship with its *stato da mar* territories along the Adriatic Coast, in the region historically known as Dalmatia (modern-day Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, and Albania).

Chapter 5 investigates Antonio Zanchi's large-scale painting depicting the 1630-31 plague outbreak, completed in 1666 in the grand stairway of the Scuola Grande di San Rocco. This chapter explores how the Scuola, the wealthiest and most powerful confraternity in the city, commemorated the recent plague by embarking on a major decorative campaign that reworked established plague tropes within expansive new scenographies. In fact, Zanchi's painting

represents the richest and most detailed visual rendition of plague in early modern Venice. It demands its own chapter and individual treatment on account of the complexity and subtlety of its conception. Zanchi's painting is compared to its pendant by Pietro Negri across the stairwell, completed seven years later, as well as to other plague memorials simultaneously underway in the city, including the interior decoration of Santa Maria della Salute. This chapter explores the seicento fascination with creating interactive experiences for spectators through several techniques, including the incorporation of the built environment as part of the conceptual framework and utilizing visual strategies that implicated viewers in the narrative. These techniques were used as well in civic spectacles and performances of public opera. In many ways, this dissertation functions as a recuperation of the art and visual culture of seicento Venice, which has been neglected in comparison to that of the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries that bracket it. This chapter provides my main intervention in seicento art history by offering a sustained look at an important work of art that was celebrated during its period and situating it within its cultural milieu.

Chapter 6, the final chapter of the dissertation, considers eighteenth-century memorials to the 1630-31 plague epidemic. It explores theoretical concerns related to collective memory and examines how ideas about plague evolved in communities in which the disease was no longer part of lived experience. By tracing a series of commissions in the cathedral of Este, a small town in the province of Padua, this chapter highlights the persistence of the 1630-31 epidemic as a contemporary subject in visual art in Venice and the Veneto region. From an ex-voto and chapel created in 1631 to Giambattista Tiepolo's celebrated high altarpiece, completed and installed in Este's duomo in 1759, plague received ongoing artistic treatment in the town for over a century. This chapter positions Tiepolo's commemorative work with respect to its plague-

related predecessors in Este, as well as to other settecento paintings depicting plague in Venice. It evaluates retrospective interpretations of the 1630-31 outbreak as a way of forging civic identity in Venice and cities in the Veneto. It addresses the function of plague memorials, the growing aestheticizing of the disease in works of art, and the factors that drove a rapid evolution in what was desired of plague paintings in the later eighteenth century.

Ultimately, this dissertation opens new pathways to understanding how the use of plague art in early modern communities extended far beyond epidemics and their immediate wakes. Plague imagery, though specialized in its conventions and iconography, maintained relevance in the aftermath of epidemics by offering a resonant means of shaping collective memory, by visualizing community identity and belonging, and by promoting social coherence in early modern Venice and the Veneto. Visual art was distinctly suited to representing the diverse groups affected by outbreaks of plague and presenting their triumphs over adversity. As expressed by Venetian resident Marco Ginammi, a participant at the State celebration of the end of the 1630-31 plague epidemic in November 1631, the paintings created to thank God for his deliverance, which were displayed in the Piazza San Marco, bore witness to “the triumph of painting” — these works resonated with devotees, who found their “hearts enchanted through their eyes.”³¹

³¹ Marco Ginammi, (Venice: Conzato, 1631). “Si vedevano i Trionfi della Pittura espressi in diversi quadri, che rapivano il cuore per gli occhi.”

CHAPTER II

Plague in Venice in 1630-31

“Far greater care and attention, both public and private, ought to be paid to fevers that are strictly speaking pestilent, if only doctors and others could venture to approach them without fear.”

- Girolamo Fracastoro

De contagione et contagiosis morbis, 1546, book III, chapter VII

Introduction

When the first cases of plague appeared in Venice in early June 1630, there was undoubtedly a great deal of fearful anticipation in the city.¹ The devastation caused by the last outbreak of plague in 1575-77 represented a dark moment in the city’s recent history, and, as with all sudden appearances of diseases with swift development and high mortality rates, concern was justifiable. Bergamo, Brescia, then Mantua, where this epidemic first took root on the Italian peninsula in 1629, had all been reporting disturbingly large death tolls resulting from the infections.² To say that Venice and its esteemed Health Office sprang to action at the first incidents of plague in the city during the summer of 1630 would be misleading. In fact, the State had begun to enact preventative measures in the city eight months prior to this moment, as soon

¹ Antonio Niero, “Pietà ufficiale e pietà popolare in tempo di peste,” in *Venezia e la peste*, (Venice: Marsilio, 1980), 289.

² Paolo Ulvioni, *Il gran castigo di Dio: Carestia ed epidemie a Venezia e nella Terraferma, 1628-1632*, (Milan: Franco Angeli Libri, 1989), 52.

as it was clear that a plague-like disease was spreading rapidly in neighboring cities.³ In September 1629, patriarch Giovanni Tiepolo had called for a weeklong display of the Sacrament in San Pietro in Castello — the city’s cathedral — along with special prayers offered to the Virgin, seeking protection against the descent of plague on the city.⁴ This ritual was the first in a series of devotions offered to the Virgin at the start of this epidemic. Weekly processions with the city’s most venerated icon, the Madonna Nicopeia, paired with fervent petitions to the Virgin were maintained throughout the duration of the crisis, culminating in the most opulent expression of veneration and thanksgiving — the construction of, and yearly procession to the votive church, Santa Maria della Salute.

Patriarch Giovanni Tiepolo’s interventions, begun before the inception of the 1630 plague and rigorously upheld during the epidemic, were spiritual in nature, intended first to prevent disease, and then to halt the epidemic’s spread, to lessen the suffering of those afflicted, and to secure salvation for the devout. These measures were felt to be critical to Venice’s wellbeing, and they were performed alongside other citywide controls of a medical nature that were established and maintained by the Health Office, or *Sanità*. Indeed, seeking divine intervention was not the only tactic taken on in earnest by the State before plague entered the city. While the Health Office operated on highest alert during this public health crisis, it too worked steadily to prevent the introduction of plague in Venice long before the first cases appeared in the city. The *Sanità* and its two permanent lazaretti devoted to the treatment of plague cases worked constantly to maintain the city’s health and to stop pestilence from penetrating the borders of the territorial state. The Health Office monitored threats to public

³ James H. Moore “‘Venezia favorita da Maria:’ Music for the Madonna Nicopeia and Santa Maria della Salute,” *Journal of the American Musicological Society*, v.37, n.2 (Summer 1984), 317-18; Ulvioni, 52-55.

⁴ Biblioteca Museo Correr, Codice Cicogna, 2583, fol. 37v-39v, cited in Moore, 317, n65; Niero, *Venezia e la peste*, 289, 298.

health through the processing of a staggering amount of correspondence from within the city: through reports from doctors, parish priests, and other community leaders such as the rabbis in the Ghetto, and from tips received from residents of Venice, all of whom were required by law to inform state officials immediately upon witnessing any suspicious illnesses or deaths.⁵ *Bocche delle denunce segrete*, relief sculptures comprising a face with a gaping mouth, open to an internal repository, were affixed to the exterior of government buildings throughout the city, ready to receive anonymous tips calling out suspicions of plague. The Health Office also processed an equally abundant amount of correspondence that was generated outside Venice's borders. Reports from ambassadors, travelers, and even spies sent out for the expressed purpose of ferreting out threats of plague masked by other cities wishing to avoid having their borders closed through travel bans enacted upon them were critical aspects of the daily operations of Venice's Health Office; the *Sanità* constantly scanned the surrounding territories and monitored its inhabitants for imminent threats.⁶ As a result, the *Sanità* was aware of a plague-like disease as early as 1628, erupting among soldiers enlisted during the Thirty Years' War moving near the

⁵ ASV, *Provveditori alla Sanità*, f. 88v (May 27, 1504), cited in Richard Palmer, *The Control of Plague in Venice and Northern Italy, 1348-1600*, PhD dissertation, (University of Kent at Canterbury, 1978), 138. Venice's death records, the *Necrologi*, are an extensive register compiled by the Health Office that detailed all deaths in the city, beginning in the early sixteenth century. These registers contained an increasing amount of information as time progressed, and by the seventeenth century, basic information recording name and age of deceased and cause of death was supplemented with information regarding whether the deceased had been seen by a doctor (in cases of illness), and if so, by whom and with what treatments. Medical historian Alexandra Bamji's recent work on the *Necrologi* provides a fascinating look into changing conceptions in medical care in Venice over the course of the early modern period, as well as health management from a bureaucratic perspective. See, Alexandra Bamji, "Medical Care in Early Modern Venice," *London School of Economics and Political Science, Department of Economic History Working Papers*, n. 188 (March 2014), 1-29.

⁶ For more on the cooperative sharing of information regarding plague between early modern Italian cities, see, Palmer, 153-5; on the issue of concealment, denial, or uncertainty in plague correspondence, see pages 157-160. For more on spying and the vital role of communication in the political affairs of Venice in the late sixteenth through seventeenth centuries, see Filippo de Vivo, *Information and Communication in Venice: Rethinking Early Modern Politics*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 2007; de Vivo, "Paolo Sarpi and the Uses of Information in Seventeenth-Century Venice," *Media History*, n. 11, v.1-2 (2005), 37-51; de Vivo, "Pharmacies as Centres of Communication in Early Modern Venice," *Renaissance Studies*, v. 21, n. 4 (September 2007), 505-521; and Ioanna Iordanou, "What News on the Rialto? The Trade of Information and Early Modern Venice's Centralized Intelligence Organization," *Intelligence and National Security*, May 11, 2015, 1-22.

German border, and it made concerted efforts to follow the progress of the disease. When Mantua was stricken, Venice's Health Board increased its scrutiny of travelers entering the city from this region and remained vigilant to the potential threats posed by the numerous boats mooring daily in its harbors that could import food and goods, but also disease.

The broad-reaching legislation enacted during early modern plague epidemics in Venice resulted in sweeping restrictions that cut across social boundaries: entire neighborhoods were cordoned off, people were sequestered in their homes, families split up, high-ranking *cittadini* were escorted to quarantine in plague hospitals alongside their poorer neighbors, and travelers who could not show a certificate of health endorsed by a doctor — a *fede di sanità* — were denied entry to the city. The laws made at the highest levels produced poignantly tangible effects on individual lives, at a time when plague itself struck arbitrarily, and rent the order of Venetians' lives and collective experience. The hardships caused by the widespread epidemic and the restrictions imposed by the health board posed significant challenges to the city's residents. From marriage licenses registered with the scuole even during the height of the disaster, to the ambitious undertaking of the construction of Santa Maria delle Salute, Venetians confronted the plague's scourge with pragmatic and constructive endeavors.⁷ In examining the vigorous and inventive actions taken against plague, it is evident that the disease did not shutter Venice's vibrant social and cultural functioning.

This chapter presents a chronology of the 1630-31 epidemic, from its first appearance outside the territories of the Venetian State, to the celebrations ordered by the Senate once the city was declared plague-free. Venice in 1630 was prepared, theoretically, for the cases of plague that began to spring up in the city during the early summer months. The government's

⁷ A surprising number of marriage licenses from the years 1630 and 1631 still exist in the guardian grande's files from the Scuola Grande di San Rocco, evidence that in the midst of catastrophe, there are always those who refuse relinquish hope for the future. ASV, *Scuola Grande di San Rocco*, seconda consegna, *cauzioni*, buste 169-170.

massive bureaucracy devoted to public health, strict trade laws, and systematized religious ceremonies in the service of civic spiritual health were designed to thwart plague at moments like these. Despite the State's perceived preparedness, however, plague cases took a sharp increase at the end of the summer in 1630, exploding to over 14,000 deaths in the month of November alone, and the city was in a state of crisis for a year and a half.⁸ This chapter introduces the political and social institutions that were most critical for the control and treatment of plague (with the two plague hospitals and their visual art treated in a separate chapter that follows). The focus will be on the progress of the disease in the city and the responses of the government and religious institutions, through spiritual means — special Masses, processions, and displays of holy relics — and by widespread controls enacted by the city's Health Office, controlled by the the *Provveditori alla Sanità*. Contemporary medical understanding of the plague, which influenced both the treatment of plague victims and the city's management of the crisis, will also be discussed. The chapter will provide a rich and complex context for situating the works of art commissioned in response to the epidemic, with their plague iconography and referentiality discussed in subsequent chapters.

The 1630-31 plague epidemic in Venice

As noted above, the Venetian government began to ready itself for the arrival of plague before the first cases appeared, understanding quite well that the best remedy against plague was to prevent its advent. Once the disease took hold in a city, available treatments and spiritual responses were only palliative — capable of offering some comfort to the ill by treating their most distressing symptoms and reassuring them of their spiritual protection from God, but

⁸ Reinhold C. Mueller, "Peste e demografia: medioevo e Rinascimento," in *Venezia e la peste*, 96; Ulvioni, 73.

certainly there was no cure for the disease itself. The earliest move taken against this epidemic was the weeklong display of the sacrament in San Pietro in Castello from September 23-30, 1629, ordered by the patriarch, Giovanni Tiepolo.⁹ The special ceremonies and sacred music performed daily in conjunction with the display were intended to demonstrate Venetians' piety and commitment to earnest veneration. The sacramental devotion reassured the city's inhabitants that they resided within a state overseen by a republican government, but one that operated foremost according to ideals of Christian devotion. Rhetoric asserted that Venice enjoyed spiritual favor and protection from the Virgin and Christ, as well as from its patron saints Mark and Theodore, and a host of other holy figures significant to the city.

As reports of plague on the mainland mounted, the Health Office began to make adjustments in their administration, adding positions in preparation for the epidemic that threatened to advance on the city. In spring of the following year, on April 15, 1630, the *Sanità* appointed a group of men to help regulate operations in the lazaretti, the *sopraprovveditori*.¹⁰ The Health Office understood that once plague appeared within Venice, the operations of these plague hospitals would need to expand rapidly, potentially beyond their capacity. The appointment of the *sopraprovveditori* at this early stage was a prescient move prompted by gaps and failures in the *Sanità*'s operations during the previous century's epidemic of 1575-77, which were evidently attributed in part to under-regulation and insufficient oversight by administrators. Richard Palmer's meticulous study of plague in northern Italy during the early modern period has traced the development of Venice's Health Office, from its inception in the fifteenth century to its growth into an impressively large and well-ordered regulatory body by the eighteenth

⁹ Biblioteca Museo Correr, Codice Cicogna 2583, folios 37v-39v. Cited in Moore, 317, and Niero, in *Venezia e la peste*, 289, 298.

¹⁰ ASV, Senato terra reg. 105, 74v, April 15, 1630, cited in Jane Crawshaw, *Plague Hospitals: Public Health for the City in Early Modern Venice*, (Farnham, Surrey, England: Ashgate, 2012), 118, fn45.

century. He describes the ever-increasing group of administrators — men who oversaw the creation of *Sanità* laws and their enforcement on the ground — through the creation of additional levels of management in the *sopraprovveditori* and the *provveditore generale*.¹¹ The *Sanità* was concerned not only with maintaining adequate numbers of men working in supervisory roles within the city, but also, and more important in the seventeenth century, with enforcing Health Office laws within Venetian territories on the mainland and in towns bordering the city's holdings.

In one sense, this mushrooming of bureaucracy mirrors developments in the Venetian government during this period, marked by a tendency toward an increasingly bloated and byzantine system of lower ranking officials with various powers.¹² However, Palmer outlines the difficulty of managing a magistracy as large and powerful as the *Sanità*, particularly with regard to its operations outside of the city center, within Venice's subject cities on the mainland where *Sanità* administrators worked alongside local public health authorities in collaborations that often resulted in conflicts and power struggles.¹³ The Health Office's reach spread even to surrounding areas outside of Venetian control in times of active epidemics, where its representatives attempted to implement quarantines and uphold travel bans, which could be met with cooperation or resistance.¹⁴ The development and responsibilities of the Health Office will be

¹¹ Palmer, 175.

¹² William J. Bouwsma, "Venice under the *Giovani*," in *Venice and the Defense of Republican Liberty: Renaissance Values in the Age of the Counter Reformation*, (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1968), 232-292; Edward Muir, "Was there Republicanism in the Renaissance Republic? Venice after Agnadello," in John Martin and Dennis Romano, eds., *Reconsidering Venice: The History and Civilization of an Italian City-State*, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000), 137-167; Peter N. Miller, "Friendship and Conversation in Seventeenth-Century Venice," *The Journal of Modern History*, v.73, n.1 (March 2001), 1-31.

¹³ Palmer, 165-171.

¹⁴ Palmer, 165-171.

described in greater detail in the following section of this chapter, when seventeenth-century medical understanding of plague — its causes and treatment — will be considered.

Two weeks after bolstering the administration of the *lazzaretti*, the State undertook another display of the sacrament on April 26, which was to last twelve days, and involved ceremonies at six churches dedicated to the Virgin: Santa Maria Maggiore, Santa Maria del Giglio, Santa Maria Formosa, Santa Maria dei Miracoli, Santa Maria Annunziata, and Santa Maria Celeste.¹⁵ In this way, before plague even reached Venice's borders, and long before the vow made by the Senate to begin construction on the votive church Santa Maria della Salute, this plague epidemic was associated officially with the Virgin. The earlier catastrophic plague of 1575-77 was marked by devotions to Christ the Redeemer and resulted in the construction of the votive church designed by Palladio, *Il Redentore*. In many ways, this sixteenth-century epidemic became a point of reference for the outbreak of 1630-31, providing guidelines for what to do and what not to do. In the selection of a divine figure as the focus of prayers, promoted by the State, and paired with an orchestrated series of public veneration in the form of processions and special Masses, and culminating in the construction of an elaborate state-sponsored votive church, the Venetian government modeled its spiritual response to the 1630 epidemic on what had inspired the greatest confidence and sense of civic cohesion amongst the population during the previous century's epidemic.

The ardent increase in Marian worship in the early seventeenth century, decades before the appearance of plague, made the Virgin the natural choice as the state-sponsored intercessor in 1630. Mary's cult, while historically popular in the city, expanded in influence during this period, largely through the promotion of a singularly Venetian religiosity made distinct from that

¹⁵ Moore, 317-18. Records of these Marian ceremonies are found in the Venetian patriarchy's holdings related to Giovanni Tiepolo, Archivio della Curia Patriarcale, *Liber Actorum*, folios 108v-109v.

in Rome and advocated by Giovanni Tiepolo, who served as *primicerio*, the head canon at San Marco from 1603 until his promotion to patriarch in 1619. Tiepolo was an influential figure in the spiritual climate of seicento Venice, and also in prevailing Venetian politics that directly opposed Roman oversight, a topic that will be explored elsewhere in this dissertation for the ways in which it affected the appearance of devotional art.¹⁶ Andrew Hopkins and Deborah Walberg have both noted the absence of a State-controlled church in Venice dedicated to Mary before the seventeenth century that could serve as the site at which residents could venerate their protector, who had long figured in Venetian history as its patroness.¹⁷ In a sense, the tragedy of 1630 provided the opportunity that allowed the State to allocate funds amid widespread public support for building an extravagant church of ample size and prestige to accommodate citywide processions and host regular visits by the Doge and his retinue. Though scattered through the city, the twelve days of organized Marian worship at the churches dedicated to her in *La Serenissima*, performed on the eve of plague's arrival in Venice in 1630, set a precedent for the weekly processions during the epidemic, in which Venice's most revered miracle-working image of Mary, the Madonna Nicopeia, was carried through the Piazza San Marco.

The Madonna Nicopeia, a modestly sized Byzantine icon likely created in the 12th century and depicting the Virgin holding a blessing Christ Child on her lap, was reputed to have been taken from Constantinople during the infamous raid on the city in 1204, but its provenance

¹⁶ For more on Giovanni Tiepolo's promotion of Venetian spirituality and his political influence, see the recent work of Deborah Walberg, "Patriarch Giovanni Tiepolo and the Search for Venetian Religious Identity in the Waning of the Renaissance," *Celebrazione e autocritica: La Serenissima e la ricerca dell'identità veneziana nel tardo Cinquecento*, (Venice: Centro Tedesco di studi veneziani), 14, (January 2014), 233-252, and "The Pastoral Writings and Sacred Art Patronage of Patriarch Giovanni Tiepolo (1619-31). A Preliminary Investigation," *Studi veneziani*, LXII-LXIV, (December 2011), 193-224.

¹⁷ Andrew Hopkins, "Plans and Planning for S, Maria della Salute, Venice," *Art Bulletin*, v.79, n. 3 (September 1997), 442-3; and Deborah Walberg, "Pastoral Writings and Sacred Art," 205-213. For more on Venice's special relationship with the Virgin and its reflections in the city's civic art and architecture, see David Rosand, *Myths of Venice: the Figuration of a State*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press), 2001.

remains enigmatic [Figure 2.1].¹⁸ It was believed that this painting was created supernaturally, painted by Saint Luke, and thus a “true” portrait of the Virgin and a work of art that carried greater spiritual weight because of its status as an *acheiropoietos* — an image made “not by human hand.” The Nicopeia had resided in the sacristy of the Basilica San Marco for centuries, only displayed on special feast days or when called upon to empower Venice during crises such as war, before it was translated and re-enshrined in the second decade of the seventeenth century. On April 17, 1618, the Nicopeia was moved to a new opulent and prominent location in the basilica — an altar created especially for it in the church’s north transept, close to the main altar.¹⁹ The construction of this new shrine and translation of the icon were important events in Venice, documented by Giovanni Tiepolo himself in a published pamphlet, *Trattato dell’immagine della gloriosa vergine dipinta da San Luca conservata già molti secoli nella ducal chiesa di San Marco della città di Venetia*, and sparking new devotions carried out at the Basilica.²⁰ An extravagant procession through the city marked the relocation of the Nicopeia, and presiding Doge at the time, Nicolò Donato, instituted thereafter regular veneration of the image in which specially written litanies were sung at the Nicopeia’s shrine every Saturday evening, appealing to the icon to protect the city.²¹ These ceremonies established a precedent for appeals made to the Nicopeia in the months before plague’s arrival in Venice in the spring of 1630, and also the

¹⁸ Deborah Walberg, “The Cult of the Nicopeia in Seventeenth-Century Venice,” in *Reflections on Renaissance Venice: A Celebration of Patricia Fortini Brown*, eds. Blake de Maria and Mary E. Frank, (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 2013), 201.

¹⁹ Several entries in the procurators of San Marco de Supra note lavish expenses for the ceremonies marking the translation of the Nicopeia. ASV, San Marco, Procuratia di Supra, Registro 8, April 24 and April 26, 1618. Cited in James Moore, “ ‘Venezia favorita da Maria:’ Music for the Madonna Nicopeia and the Santa Maria della Salute,” *Journal of the American Musicological Society*, v. 37, n. 2 (Summer 1984), 306, n.25.

²⁰ Surviving documents on the construction of this important altar can be found in the State Archives, ASV, Cancelleria Inferiore, Atti dei Dogi, Registro 80, 103. Portions of these documents have been transcribed in Rodolfo Gallo, *Il tesoro di S. Marco e la sua storia*, (Venice), 1967. Cited in Moore, “ ‘Venezia favorita da Maria,’” 306, n.24.

²¹ ASV, Cancelleria Inferiore, Atti dei Dogi, Registro 80, 123. Cited in Moore, 306, n.26.

organized veneration of this important icon throughout the outbreak. Indeed, the epidemic's end in November 1631 was celebrated by a procession with the Nicopeia to the location at which Santa Maria della Salute would be constructed — this powerful icon extending her blessing to the newly-established site at which Venice could further honor Mary and her benevolent protection of the city.

In June 1630, two months after Patriarch Tiepolo organized the statewide appeals to the Virgin for protection, plague entered the city. Several conflicting accounts emerged that identified the first recognized case of plague. One featured Alessandro Striggio, an associate of Monteverdi who had been living in Mantua, as the person who brought plague to the city and the first victim in Venice, while another pointed to a carpenter working in San Clemente. Neither of these specific stories, however, can be substantiated.²² The reality is likely to be much less precise. With the epidemic emerging in all major cities surrounding Venice, variable incubation periods from the time of exposure to the onset of symptoms, and in a cosmopolitan place such as Venice, in which merchants, ambassadors, travelers, and vagrants entered daily, the appearance of plague was inevitable. The early cases were, in fact, recorded in multiple locations in the city, simultaneously, and only officially recognized as plague in the months afterward. As these first cases appeared in the city — still not verified officially by the Health Office as *la peste* — the *Sanità*, perhaps belatedly, increased their vigilance in monitoring entry into the city, evidenced by the publication of a public broadsheet, the *Deliberatione* of June 19, 1630. This printed and publicly disseminated document demanded the receipt of health passes — *fedi di sanità* — for all

²² Ulvioni, 55-56; Moore, 318. Ulvioni records the story of the carpenter from San Clemente who was first stricken by plague, along with several others working in his home, which resulted in the island being barricaded by armed guards to prevent any inhabitants of the island leaving. I have not found primary sources to fully substantiate this occurrence, though it does not seem unlikely. Paolo Preto adheres to notion that plague was likely first imported to Venice on June 8 by Striggio's retinue, "Le grandi pesti dell'età moderna: 1575-77 e 1630-31," *Venezia e la peste*, (Venice: Marsilio, 1980), 124-5.

those who had traveled from lands in which infectious diseases were active, and threatened the most severe punishments for anyone caught hosting or hiding persons who had entered the city from these suspected lands without receiving the physician-approved form declaring them infection-free.²³ Interestingly, this document uses neither the term “peste” nor “pestilenza.” While the Health Office was well informed on the worrisome disease proliferating throughout northern Italy at this time, taking what it felt to be adequate precautions to keep Venice safe, it was not yet prepared to declare these infections as true plague.

Throughout July and August, around 50 deaths caused by plague-like symptoms occurred in Venice. While it was evident to many that this was the beginning of the epidemic all had feared, there was a degree of uncertainty and resistance by some doctors and the State to acknowledge that these deaths marked a looming disaster. Speaking from the privileged place of history, it is easy to suggest that denial was at play in these resistances, and that the city would have been better served had these early deaths been declared resolutely as caused by plague. However, the economic and social ramifications involved in announcing the arrival of plague make the situation more complicated. To declare these deaths officially as plague-induced, would necessitate legally the strongest response from the Senate and the Health Office: immediate quarantine of all those who were ill and who had come into contact with them, and potentially closing off neighborhoods or the city itself. While such measures could have helped prevent the spread of disease, they would have guaranteed costly state expenditures and disruptions of commerce in the city. A cynical interpretation of the Senate’s hesitancy would attribute the delay to concern over lost revenues. However, taking caution before declaring a state of plague-related emergency in the city had real concerns based in public welfare. In 1555,

²³ ASV, *Sanità*, 155, unnumbered broadsheet in 1630 folder.

after several plague deaths occurred in Padua, Venice closed its borders to the city with a travel ban that effectively halted all movement of goods, including food, in and out of Padua. In this circumstance, the plague outbreak turned out to be mild, but reports emerged from the city that its residents were dying in great numbers — from famine.²⁴ Similarly, in the summer of 1575, at the beginning of what was to become one of the most severe plague epidemics in Venetian history, travel bans were put in place against people and goods coming from Verona, another Venetian subject city where many were falling ill with a suspicious sickness, isolating it from surrounding cities. By January of the following year, it was clear that most cases of the suspect illness in the city were caused by typhus, and Verona was desperately in need of food and financial assistance from Venice to help relieve the suffering of its inhabitants, particularly the great number of workers in the wool and silk trades who were unemployed as a result of the exportation ban.²⁵

Geographically, the city of Venice was already isolated, which was both a great benefit and hindrance. Though the island of Sant’Erasmus produced numerous crops for the city, Venice relied upon shipments from its subject cities on the *terraferma* to feed its large population. Hastily disrupting the flow of foodstuffs into the city and revenue-bringing goods out could result in a public crisis of an economic nature that was potentially more damaging than the infectious diseases appearing within its borders. Therefore, a prudent response to declaring the presence of plague in a city hinged upon a balance between haste and deliberation, determined by careful scrutiny of the symptoms of those who had died, as well as how quickly they

²⁴ Palmer, 156. The reports of widespread starvation-related deaths come from the correspondence of the Florentine ambassador in Venice, Pero Gelido, Archivio di Stato di Firenze, *Archivio Mediceo del Principato*, filza 2971, folios 250r,v, August 31, 1555.

²⁵ Palmer, 271-6. Palmer cites two letters to the Doge, as well as an address to the Senate, from a representative of Verona, Marcantonio Corfino, pleading for the ban to be lifted in order to save the lives Verona’s inhabitants (the majority of whom were free of disease), and to avoid the potential for riots prompted by the desperate situation in which the city had been placed. ASV, *Sanità*, reg. 13, folios 168r-171r.

succumbed after the first onset of symptoms (plague was known for swiftness in mortality, in which victims sometimes died within twenty-four hours of falling ill), in order to determine the likelihood that severe plague was afoot and that mobilizing the Health Office's extensive resources and controls would offer the greatest benefit.

Venetian *protomedico* Cecilio Fuoli — a state physician whose role was to act as liaison between university doctors and the Senate, overseeing public health, and advising in the drafting of laws related to the city's welfare — describes in his account of the epidemic the assembling of thirty-six doctors on August 22, 1630. These doctors were asked to determine whether the recent deaths in the city were indeed the result of plague.²⁶ His uncle, and predecessor as *protomedico* during the outbreak, Giovanni Battista Fuoli, was one of a small minority among these doctors in favor of declaring the presence of plague in Venice. The symptoms of those who had died in June and July were confusingly inconsistent, however, and though glandular swellings — telltale buboes — were described in some of the cases, it was difficult to align the discordant physical symptoms of the deceased with the expected manifestations of plague. Overwhelmingly, the doctors from the University of Padua present for the convocation denied the likelihood that these deaths resulted from plague, and instead attributed them to one of various infectious diseases cropping up periodically in Venice that were referred to by the medical community as “lenticular” fevers, such as typhus or smallpox.²⁷ They advised the State to take a conservative approach toward the illnesses arising throughout the city, not wishing to induce panic or risk the consequences of effectuating a too heavy-handed set of laws crippling travel and trade. The

²⁶ Biblioteca Museo Correr, Codice Cicogna, 1509; ASV, *Sanità*, busta 562, *Opinioni mediche sul contagion di Venezia*, 1630. See also, Emmanuele Antonio Cicogna, *Della peste opinioni dei medici di Venezia nel 1630*, (Padua: Tipografia Penada, 1843), 12. For more on protomedici, who were a development resulting from changes to the governance of public health in Italy in the seventeenth century, see David Gentilcore, “‘All that pertains to medicine:’ *Protomedici* and *Protomedicati* in Early Modern Italy,” *Medical History*, v.38 (1994), 121-42.

²⁷ Girolamo Fracastoro, *De contagione et contagiosis morbis et eorum curatione, libri III*, 1546, trans. Wilmer Cave Wright, (New York and London: G.P. Putnam and Sons, 1930), 223; Ulvioni, 59-60.

Venetian Health Office, however, had recognized that plague was present outside the city's borders at this time. Earlier in the month, on August 2, 1630, the *Sanità* published another public announcement, similar to that of June, a *Proclama Publicato*, which reiterated the legal necessity for health passes, this time for all travelers.²⁸ In this document, plague is identified specifically as the threat to public health — all foreigners were considered suspect, and *fedi* were the critical means of keeping Venice safe during this time of “pericoli di peste.” Anyone who failed to receive a *fede*, harbored travelers without health passes, or forged *fedi* would be treated as though intentionally spreading plague, and would suffer the most severe consequences by law, including capital punishment. There seemed to be a curious contradiction between recognizing the presence of plague outside Venice, and simultaneously denying its appearance within the city. *Sanità* officials at the August 22 convocation, however, were those most in favor of declaring a plague emergency in Venice, and they debated with the Paduan doctors who urged reticence.²⁹ The arguments of the physicians from the University of Padua, however, prevailed.

At this time, Patriarch Tiepolo moved forward with another series of official prayers aimed at securing protection from sacred intercessors, with devotions centering now on Saint Roch, from July 2-7, and Beato Lorenzo Giustiniani, from July 8-10. As part of Giustiniani's veneration, the body of the noted thaumaturge — and Venice's first patriarch — was processed around the neighborhood of San Pietro in Castello.³⁰ Though the Virgin was the primary

²⁸ ASV, *Sanità*, 155, 75v-78v.

²⁹ BMC, Codice Cicogna, 1509; Preto, “Le grandi pesti dell'età modern,” *Venezia e la peste*, 125; Palmer, 275-9. Crawshaw, *Plague Hospitals*, 30-31. The lack of consensus between the Health Office and university physicians mirrors eerily the convocation of doctors in Venice in 1576, at the outset of the other early modern plague catastrophe in Venice.

³⁰ Niero, “Pietà ufficiale,” *Venezia e la peste*, 289-90, 303-4; Ulvioni, 55. These state-organized prayers to Saint Roch and Lorenzo Giustiniani are recorded in *Modi et ordini che si doveranno tenere nella esposizione del Santissimo Sacramento*, identified by Antonio Niero in *Venezia e la peste* as a rare pamphlet written by Antonio Pinelli in 1630 found in ACP, Venezia, *Filza actorum generalium ab anno 1224 ad 1782*, n.23. This information

intercessor associated with this epidemic, particularly in State-sponsored appeals, it is clear that succor was still sought from saints traditionally associated with plague, such as Sebastian and Roch, and from healers with special significance in Venice. Though the beginning of this epidemic was characterized by uncertainty from the medical community, the State's inclusive and sustained appeals for protection from the spiritual realm in early summer 1630 reflect the belief that a widespread epidemic was imminent, and the safest response was to pledge reverent faithfulness to all relevant protectors.

It became clear soon enough that plague had taken hold in the city as summer ended in 1630. The 50 casualties of July and August leapt to 1,200 in September, and nearly doubled again to 2,100 residents who succumbed to plague and were noted in the city's death registers, the *Necrologi*, in October.³¹ Thousands of residents with the means to do so fled Venice in August, and the Senate released an official notice exhorting people to stay in the city — to avoid spreading the disease further and to stand fast with their neighbors.³² The Senate produced a number of laws and declarations in October, as the mounting seriousness of the outbreak became evident, and the State officially recognized that Venice was indeed mired in a severe outbreak of plague. During this month, additional taxes were levied on homeowners, and the State requested a loan of 10,000 ducats from Jewish merchants in the Ghetto to help fund the rising costs of running the two *lazzaretti* at maximum operating capacity.³³ Leon Modena, a rabbi and well-respected scholar in the city, noted in his personal diary at the height of this plague that in

has been published also in Giovanni Battista Gallicciolli, *Delle memorie Venete antiche, profane ed ecclesiastiche*, (Venice: Domenico Fracasso, 1795), 170-74.

³¹ Mueller, 96; Ulvioni, 73.

³² Ulvioni, 61. Conversely, at the end of this epidemic, after the city had lost 33% of its population, the State petitioned foreigners and *cittadini* from the mainland to relocate to Venice, in order to bolster the city's economy. See, ASV, *Senato Terra*, reg. 105, 4v-5, October 16, 1631. Cited in *Venezia e la peste*, cat. s156, p.147.

³³ ASV, *Sanità*, reg. 17, 155v, October 16, 1630, and ASV, *Senato Terra*, reg. 140, October 16, 1630. Cited in *Venezia e la peste*, cat. s151, p.144; and Ulvioni, 61.

addition to the hardships caused by the cash advances expected by the State from the Jewish community, “an unprecedented rise in prices has been the worst blow of all, causing many Jews in these communities to become impoverished, the rich becoming middling, the middling poor, and no one taking pity any longer on the poor, for there is no money.”³⁴

In October 1630, the Senate commissioned the shipyard workers at the Arsenale to make 1,000 beds for patients at the lazzaretti, with an additional 1,000 beds ordered a mere three days later, in response to the explosion of plague cases.³⁵ The Arsenale workers were also tasked at this time with increasing the construction of carts for the *pizzigamorti*, the city’s sanitation workers, to use in gathering the bodies of the deceased and conveying them through the city to boats that would transport them for burial in mass graves on the Lido. Evidently burying the mounting corpses became difficult during this time as well. Documents exist detailing the Senate’s order for two boats to carry quicklime to Venice from the northern mainland town of Treviso, in order to treat the bodies of deceased plague victims that could not be removed from the city quickly enough due to unfavorable winds preventing the *pizzigamorti*’s boats from reaching the Lido. The harbor was becoming blocked by the growing number of corpse-laden boats moored there, awaiting transport to the Lido’s burial grounds.³⁶

These dreadful realities drove the development of public policy in October 1630 that was related not only to city health and cleanliness, but to health in an ecclesiastical sense, as well. On October 22, 1630, the Senate made its memorable vow to the Virgin, promising to construct a

³⁴ Leon Modena, *The Life of Judah*, MS 22a, Second Adar 5391 (March 5, 1631), in *The Autobiography of a Seventeenth-Century Rabbi: Leon Modena’s Life of Judah*, ed. and trans. Mark R. Cohen, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988), 134-5.

³⁵ ASV, *Sanità*, reg. 17, 127r, October 26, 1630; 133r, October 29, 1630. Cited in *Venezia e la peste*, catalogue number s145, page 143, and Crawshaw, *Plague Hospitals*, 91.

³⁶ ASV, *Sanità*, reg. 17, 111r, October 12, 1630; Senato Terra Registro, reg. 104. Cited in *Venezia e la peste*, catalogue number s143, p. 142.

votive church dedicated to her, like the Redentore — “*ci porge confidenza sicura di ricever con atto simile di pieta altra simile gratia al presente.*”³⁷ The votive church was intended to serve as a physical marker of the city’s earnest veneration and pledge to maintain devotion in exchange for receiving the Virgin’s pity and aid in this catastrophe. In this same proclamation, the State declared its intention to process the Madonna Nicopeia throughout the Piazza San Marco for the next fifteen Saturdays. Indeed, this weekly ritual extended beyond the four months promised, and continued throughout the epidemic until its official end in November 1631.

Despite the proliferation of laws designed to protect Venice against plague, the Health Office’s frenzied but remarkably efficient efforts to isolate the ill from the healthy through quarantine and disinfection, and the fervent appeals to the Virgin and other intercessors, living conditions in Venice continued to deteriorate at the close of 1630. Some 14,000 deaths by plague were recorded in November alone, and the Senate released a public notice that the State would clear the past criminal records and welcome into the city anyone who had been banished if they would agree to work as body clearers for the Health Office. These were positions difficult to staff (for evident reasons), and difficult to keep staffed, as a large percentage of the men working in these roles succumbed to the plague contracted through their constant exposure to plague victims, corpses, and contaminated material goods.³⁸ On December 6, 1630, a Health Office notice assured the residents of Venice that though plague had spread quickly among those quarantined and treated in the *lazzaretti*, these plague hospitals were the safest place for patients suffering from the disease, as they could be assured of the best care possible through the

³⁷ ASV, *Senato Terra Registro*, 104, folios 363v-365r, October 22, 1630. A portion of this State decree is transcribed in Andrew Hopkins, *Santa Maria della Salute: Architecture and Ceremony in Baroque Venice*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), appendix I, 1, 162.

³⁸ ASV, *Sanità*, reg. 17, 145r-146-r, November 2, 1630. Transcribed in *Venezia e la peste*, appendix, n.21, 370, also catalogue number s146, p.143.

administration of State-approved medicines, as well as access to healthful food and clean water, which they could no longer rely upon having in their homes in the midst of the crisis.³⁹ That the Venetian State would need to publish this official statement signals the fear that the city's inhabitants had of being committed to the *lazzaretti*, which engendered resistant behaviors such as fleeing, hiding stricken family members, and general combativeness. In addition to collecting bodies, the *pizzigamorti* were also responsible for escorting the sick and the suspected cases to the hospitals, with patients' cooperation not a prerequisite.

Indeed, in this month, the Health Office employed around three hundred *pizzigamorti* — triple the number on employ during the height of the previous century's epidemic of 1575-77.⁴⁰ It is clear that the Health Office made decisions regarding its operations in 1630-31 that were directly responsive to perceived shortcomings and mistakes made during 1575-77. During the sixteenth-century outbreak, the understaffing of body clearers was widespread, which led to ghastly breaches in *Sanità* policy. A notary in the city, Rocco Benedetti, detailed in his account of the epidemic that ill Venetians were often transported to the *lazzaretti* in boats intended only for the dead, which were piled with corpses, simply for lack of manpower to row additional boats for the living.⁴¹ The *pizzigamorti* were greatly feared in early modern Venice, though they were also critical figures who ensured, perhaps more than any other single group of people, that Venice could continue to function as best as could be expected during the chaos of a severe outbreak of plague. Historian Jane Crawshaw's recent work on the *pizzigamorti* has traced the

³⁹ ASV, Sanità, busta 17, 189r-191r, December 6, 1630. Crawshaw, *Plague Hospitals*, 180, n 116; Crawshaw thanks Alexandra Bamji for the reference.

⁴⁰ ASV, Sanità reg. 17, 223r, December 19, 1630. See also, BMC, Codice Cicogna, 1509. Published in Jane Crawshaw, "The Beasts of Burial: *Pizzigamorti* and Public Health for the Plague in Early Modern Venice, *Social History of Medicine*, v.24, n. 3, 573, n22; and Crawshaw, *Plague Hospitals*, 197, n61.

⁴¹ Rocco Benedetti, *Relatione d'alcuni casi occorsi in Venetia al tempo della peste l'anno 1576 et 1577 con le provisioni, rimidii et orationi fatte à Dio Benedetti pe la sua liberatione*, (Bologna, 1630), 22. Cited in Crawshaw, *Plague Hospitals*, 89, n55.

evolution of metaphors used to describe these body clearers as wild animals roaming the city, without compassion or respect for order. Indeed, these men appear to have captured the imagination of early modern Venetians, eliciting complex emotional responses made evident in works of art depicting plague epidemics. The 1630-31 epidemic, in fact, inspired the greatest number of artistic reflections on the *pizzigamorti*, which will be explored throughout this dissertation, and in particular depth in Chapter 5.

Mortality rates dropped from 14,000 in November, to 7,600 in December 1630, and to a relatively consistent rate of around 2,000 deaths per month for January through April 1631.⁴² On April 1, 1631, construction began on the promised votive church to the Virgin, Santa Maria della Salute, with the ceremony in which the cornerstone was laid at the Punta della Dogana site, a location allowing for maximum visibility from the Doge's palace and the Basilica San Marco across the Piazzetta.⁴³ Though the epidemic appeared to be waning by mid-spring 1631, plague persisted through the ensuing summer, taking high-ranking citizens with it. Doge Nicolò Contarini succumbed to the disease on April 2, 1631, only one day after the cornerstone laying ceremony at the Salute. Patriarch Giovanni Tiepolo, the powerful advocate for the cult of the Virgin and promoter of the canonization of the Venetian Beato and healer Lorenzo Giustiniani, died of plague in the following month, on May 7, 1631. One can easily imagine the disquietude and growing desperation among Venice's residents caused by the loss of these powerful figures, who had been living representations of the city's grandeur and favor with God. Added to the deaths of Venice's political and spiritual leaders at this time was a surge in mortalities in June 1631, with more than 4,000 succumbing. Fortunately for the city, summer 1631 was the turning

⁴² Mueller, 96; Ulvioni, 73.

⁴³ For a detailed account of the construction of Salute, from the competition to choose an architect based on design submissions, to the church's consecration in 1683, see Andrew Hopkins, *Santa Maria della Salute: Architecture and Ceremony in Baroque Venice*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 2000.

point in this outbreak. After July's loss of around 3,000 residents, the death toll dropped off sharply at the close of summer. Plague deaths in September and October dwindled to the hundreds, and, amid a growing sense of hope, the Senate officially declared the end of the plague epidemic on November 13, 1631.⁴⁴ This declaration was followed by a jubilant citywide celebration organized by the State on November 21, 1631. Mass was held at San Marco, followed by a procession to the temporary wooden church built for the occasion at the site where the Salute was under construction, which became the first annual celebration of the Festa della Salute.

It would be difficult to overstate the impact that the 1630-31 plague epidemic had on the lives of those living in and near Venice during the outbreak. The city was locked in a state of crisis for eighteen months, during which time all aspects of life were affected. The final death toll for the epidemic was estimated around 46,000 residents in the city center and nearest peripheral islands. Plague itself was an unpredictable disease that struck with variable severity, and with symptoms that appeared to evolve throughout the early modern period, and which were sometimes confusingly similar to those of other endemic diseases. In tracing the evolution of the 1630 epidemic, it becomes clear that multiple strategies were used to prevent, detect, and treat plague, and that these strategies were derived from knowledge collected from past outbreaks and informed by up-to-date developments in medicine and sanitation. The following section will delve more deeply into the difficulties of defining plague by considering the medical understanding of the disease historically and the evolution of its epidemiology. Important urban institutions associated with plague — the Health Office and the *lazzaretti* — will be explored, as

⁴⁴ ASV, *Senato Terra Registro*, 106, fols. 445r-446r, November 13, 1631. This document is transcribed in Andrew Hopkins, *Santa Maria della Salute*, Appendix 1, 24, 178-9.

well as the information network within Venice and beyond its borders for plague related communications.

The medical perspective on plague

Since the plague's catastrophic second wave appearance in Europe during the so-called Black Death of 1347-51, the disease occurred routinely in Italy until the eighteenth century. Though only the largest, most severe outbreaks left substantial material records, plague was an ongoing event in early modern Italy. Typically, the disease was active somewhere on the peninsula at any given time, and city governments and boards of health were vigilant for signs or rumors of plague within their jurisdictions and in the continent at large. The movement of people and goods through war, commerce, pilgrimage, and for various other reasons, aided in the spread of infectious diseases, a fact well understood by Venetians. A cosmopolitan city like Venice, which experienced a constant flux of people across its borders, and with a high population density confined on the lagoon islands, was particularly at risk for importation and spread of plague. In the fourteenth century, however, plague was not recognized to be a contagious disease. Plague epidemics at this time were believed to be caused by miasmatic air that engendered a corruption of the bodily humors, and also an eruption of God's anger for the sinfulness of humanity; plague was considered primarily a scourge of the poor, and an unleashing of divine wrath. However, conceptions of the disease developed over the early modern period — driven not only by a greater understanding of the theory of contagion, but also by changes in how the disease itself manifested. Ann Carmichael and other scholars have observed that during the fifteenth century, small outbreaks of plague erupted constantly

throughout the continent.⁴⁵ Though mortality rates could be high, loss of lives overall was moderate during this century. Because of the newly-endemic nature of the disease, the fifteenth century also marked the emergence of the first significant legislation aimed at controlling the spread of plague and the construction of, or at least provision for, plague hospitals in many cities on the Italian peninsula, prompted by the new reality of plague as a constant threat to public health.⁴⁶

The pattern of the disease, however, shifted during the mid-sixteenth century when epidemics occurred less frequently, but with greater intensity. Major outbreaks of plague that erupted in Venice, Milan, and Naples during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries killed tens of thousands of people in short duration, with the stricken cities reporting losses of over 30-60% of their population during these epidemics, numbers that met or exceeded death tolls during the Black Death.⁴⁷ Though travel bans, quarantine, and the disinfection of homes and material goods were critical components of health boards' action against plague during the devastating epidemics of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries — and these measures likely did make positive inroads against the spread of disease — their early implementation was not always strictly enforced, which still left stricken cities unprepared for the intensity and lethal swiftness of some of these plague outbreaks.

⁴⁵ Ann Carmichael, "Contagion Theory and Contagion Practice in Fifteenth-Century Milan," *Renaissance Quarterly*, v. 44, n.2 (Summer 1991), 213-256.

⁴⁶ Ann G. Carmichael, "Plague Legislation in the Italian Renaissance," *Bulletin of the History of Medicine*, (Winter 1983), v.57, n.4, 519.

⁴⁷ Due to the speed with which plague was transmitted and how quickly those who contracted it perished in the early modern period, many modern scholars have questioned whether these medieval and renaissance episodes of *la peste* were, in fact, caused solely by the bacteria *Yersina pestis*, or were perhaps several coincident outbreaks of multiple infectious diseases, which would account for the variances seen in symptoms. The most prominent historian questioning *Yersina pestis* as the main agent behind these repeat epidemics is Samuel Cohn. For more on his work in this area, see, Samuel Cohn, *The Black Death Transformed: Disease and Culture in Early Renaissance Europe*, (New York: Oxford University Press), 2002; and Samuel Cohn and Guido Alfani, "Households and Plague in Early Modern Italy," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, v. 38, n. 2 (Autumn 2007), 177-205.

By 1630, however, plague's easy communicability was unquestioned, and the Venetian Health Office's response to disease control had become stable and systematized. Plague was known to be an illness that resulted from specific causes (though the exact vectors were unclear) that did not discriminate in terms of social or economic status.⁴⁸ In Venice, and throughout Italy in the seventeenth century, plague was treated as contagious — a disease that tore through the population and was capable of infecting entire households and neighborhoods, necessitating the intervention of quarantine. However, the epidemiology and etiology of plague — what caused it and how it developed and spread — was unknown, and still continues to vex scholars today. In the late nineteenth century, the Swiss bacteriologist Alexandre Yersin identified the bacillus responsible for causing the bubonic plague in humans. This bacterium, subsequently named *Yersinia pestis*, was understood to be a causal factor within a chain of vectors, whereby the disease, in order to be contracted by humans through the bite of a flea, had first to incubate in an infected rat harboring the bacteria, on which the flea subsequently fed. According to this etiology, bubonic plague was not transmitted by human-to-human contact, but solely through the presence of a population of rats as carriers and fleas as transmitters. The bubonic form of the disease, marked conspicuously by the appearance of the glandular swellings, or buboes, so commonly described in primary texts and often depicted in art, could develop into the deadlier pneumonic and septicemic versions of plague, which were highly contagious through person-to-

⁴⁸ Traditionally, plague had been a disease associated with the lower classes, as it seemed to strike them first and take a greater number of their lives. Early legislation against plague in Italy targeted the *popolani*, who were subject to more intense monitoring and harsher restrictions. However, by the seventeenth century, it was observed that the poor were more likely to contract plague and succumb to the disease not because of any inherent, bodily defects, but because they were forced by circumstances to live in overcrowded, often unsanitary conditions, and stood a greater likelihood of reduced ability to fight infectious disease due to malnourishment. Also, at the first development of plague in cities throughout the early modern period, those with the financial means to leave the city often fled, leaving the remaining population exposed to the disease composed of an even greater percentage of the lower classes. For more on hospitals, plague legislation, and the poor, see Ann G. Carmichael, *Plague and the Poor in Renaissance Florence*, (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press), 1986; and Giulia Calvi, *Storie di un anno di peste*, (Milan: Bompiani), 1984.

person contact, via droplets in the air generated by coughing or sneezing, or through contact with other bodily fluids. However, a conception of the plague as a disease spread primarily by fleas and not through contact with the stricken, their possessions, and the bodies of the victims, is not consistent with the historical evidence found in the large corpus of late medieval and early modern accounts of those who lived during the epidemics. Recently, modern scholars of medicine have noted this basic incongruity: the remarkably high death tolls, the speed with which early modern plague spread, and the manner in which new cases developed are all indicative of a contagious disease, transmitted person-to-person, and not isolated bacteriological infections.⁴⁹ The issue of immunity also presents telling contrasts. While those who have contracted and survived the modern plagues associated with *Yersinia pestis* do not have immunity from the disease, this appears not to have been the case for the late medieval and early modern plagues in Europe. A seventeenth-century account by Father Antero Maria da San Bonventura, who assisted in Genoa's plague hospitals during the 1656 epidemic, notes concern over how to control the unpredictable and sometimes euphoric behavior of plague survivors recovering in the lazaretto, whose unruliness resulted from a realization that not only had they survived the disease, but that they no longer needed to fear contagion.⁵⁰ Those who contracted plague and lived appeared to have been immune afterwards. Indeed, the *pizzigamorti* who

⁴⁹ For recent work on this issue, see the work of Samuel Cohn, specifically, *The Black Death Transformed: Disease and Culture in Early Renaissance Europe*, and Samuel Cohn and Guido Alfani, "Households and Plague in Early Modern Italy," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, v. 38, n. 2 (Autumn 2007), 177-205. See also David Herlihy, *The Black Death and the Transformation of the West*, (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press), 1997; Lynn A. Martin, *Plague?: Jesuit Accounts of Epidemic Disease in the Sixteenth Century*, (Kirksville, Mo.: Sixteenth Century Journal Publishers), 1996; and Susan Scott and Christopher J. Duncan, *The Biology of Plagues: Evidence from Historical Populations*, (London: Cambridge University Press), 2001.

⁵⁰ Crawshaw, *Plague Hospitals*, 70, citing Father Antero Maria da San Bonventura, *Li lazaretti della città e riviere di Genova* (Genoa: Pietro Giovanni Calenzani e Francesco Meschini, 1658), 506. On the issue of immunity after plague, Crawshaw cites Rocco Benedetti's narrative of the 1576-77 plague in which the notary observes that many of those who survived plague were put to work in the city or assisting in the lazaretti because of their perceived inability to contract plague again. *Plague Hospitals*, 207; Benedetti, *Relatione d'alcuni casi occorsi in Venetia al tempo della peste l'anno 1576 et 1577...* (Bologna, 1630), 25.

transported the sick and the dead throughout Venice were feared not only for their grisly occupation and license to enter citizens' homes at will, but also because of their seemingly supernatural resistance to the disease.⁵¹ In addition, one of the hypotheses developed to explain the disappearance of plague in Europe during the eighteenth century is that after several centuries of the disease sweeping across the continent, the population was composed of enough people whose ancestors had already survived plague and passed along their immunity to thwart any new epidemics, the same principle of "herd immunity" through which large-scale vaccination campaigns work today.⁵² This evidence points towards a viral disease, in which bodies can develop long-term immunity, unlike bacterial infections, which can be contracted during subsequent exposures.

As an art historian, the specific epidemiology of plague is outside my purview. However, my research relies upon interpreting early modern narratives, both painted and written, that document actions taken in response to plague, and it is evident from these sources that plague was treated as a disease that passed easily from person-to-person through infected individuals and contaminated objects. Venetian legislation is rich with prohibitions and guidelines put in place to prevent the spread of plague during outbreaks and to promote health and wellness

⁵¹ Luigi Piva, "I Monatti," in *Le pestilenze nel Veneto*, (Padua: Camposampiero, 1991), 265-280. Crawshaw, "Beasts of Burial," 578. In fact, a great number of pizzigamorti succumbed to the disease, at a rate that can be assumed to be similar to that of the general population. Those who contracted plague and survived, however, appeared to have been resistant to the infection, in keeping with others who recovered.

⁵² Paul Slack, "The Disappearance of Plague: An Alternative View," *The Economic History Review*, v.34, issue 3, (August 1981), 469-74. Slack also credits developments in disease detection and quarantine with driving the end of the second plague pandemic, which coheres with Richard Palmer's assertion that despite the catastrophic epidemics of the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, human intervention through wide-ranging disease controls ended this pandemic in Europe. Why plague died out in Europe by the mid-eighteenth century remains unclear and contentiously debated. Others have suggested that black rats themselves developed immunity to the bacterium and no longer served as the vector that transmitted the disease to humans; Andrew B. Appleby, "The Disappearance of Plague: A Continuing Puzzle," *The Economic History Review*, v. 33, issue 2, (May 1980), 161-173. For recent scholarship on this issue, see Guido Alfani, "Plague in Seventeenth-Century Europe and the Decline of Italy: An Epidemiological Hypothesis," *European Review of Economic History*, v. 17, n. 4, (November 2013), 408-430, and Kirsten I. Bos, Alexander Herbig, et al. "Eighteenth-Century *Yersinia pestis* genomes reveal the long-term persistence of an historical plague focus," *eLife*, v. 5 (January 2016).

throughout the city's population with a number of preventative measures upheld even when the city was plague-free. This health legislation reveals critical concerns with proximity — to survive plague, the safest response was to flee the city or avoid contact with contaminated areas, people, and goods whenever possible.

Though general consensus among doctors and lay people in seicento Venice held that plague was a communicable disease, its causes were certainly less clear. Plagues of previous centuries were reputed to have arisen from a number of sources: divine punishment for humanity's sinful behavior (which did not necessarily require a specific, identified transgression); unfavorable alignments of stars, planets, and other celestial bodies; and corrupt air containing putrefying materials that rooted in bodies and fomented disease within them, the preeminent "miasma theory" of disease transmission. These causes were all external to the body, suggesting that plague was conceived as the result of ambient sources in the earthly and heavenly environments. The disease was also theorized, however, with regard to its development internally, within bodies. Humoral imbalances were an often-cited contributor to plague's development, though there was disagreement over whether dangerous proportions of the four bodily humors could actually generate plague, or if unhealthy constitutions simply made an individual weaker, and more susceptible to contracting plague.⁵³ Venice in 1630 still subscribed to the possibility that these factors could instigate or prolong an epidemic of plague. However, these traditional humoral explanations, associated with the Galenic practice of medicine, were paired with new developments in medicine and disease transmission that arose locally, in Padua, which had become widespread throughout Europe at the end of the sixteenth century.

⁵³ Christiane Nockels Fabbri, "Treating Medieval Plague: The Wonderful Virtues of Theriac," *Early Science and Medicine*, v.12, n.3, (2007), 247-83.

Girolamo Fracastoro, a doctor born in Verona and educated in medicine at the esteemed University of Padua, published his theory on disease transmission in *De contagion et contagiosis morbis et eorum curatione* in 1546. In this book, Fracastoro outlines the nature and treatment of many diseases, including rabies, syphilis, and plague, and advances the concept of contagion through contaminated particles, which he called “fomites.” According to his theory, epidemic diseases were spread through these fomites or *seminaria* — “seeds of disease” — which could be passed through close contact between people, through contaminated objects on which these seeds had fallen and remained active, and also through the air. Medical historian Vivian Nutton has traced the reception of Fracastoro’s theory of contagion from its inception in the sixteenth century, up to the modern era, in which the physician has often been hailed in scholarship as an innovator who precociously anticipated germ theory before the development of the microscope and the identification of specific pathogens.⁵⁴ Nutton and other scholars have questioned both the originality of Fracastoro’s theory and the paradigm shift with which it had been credited in the nineteenth-century literature. Carlo Cipolla, for example, outlines the division between doctors adhering to the traditional miasma theory of disease transmission, which was dominant, and the fringe minority, who believed in the spread of epidemics through fomites.⁵⁵ Nutton challenged the modern characterization of miasma and contagion theories as incompatible, demonstrating that by the end of the sixteenth century, Fracastoro’s theory was not only widespread, but also generally accepted. Both theories were built upon similar notions of epidemics transmitted through invisible particles and were not contradictory, despite their evident differences. Far

⁵⁴ “The Reception of Fracastoro’s Theory of Contagion: The Seed that Fell Among Thorns?” *Osiris*, 2nd series, v.6, Renaissance Medical Learning: Evolution of a Tradition, (1990), 196-234.

⁵⁵ Cipolla, *Miasmas and Disease: Public Health and the Environment in the Pre-Industrial Age*, (New Haven: Yale University Press), 1992; *Fighting Plague in Seventeenth-century Italy*, (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press), 1981; and *Cristofano and the Plague: a Study in the History of Public Health in the Age of Galileo*, (London, Collins), 1973.

from being radical, Fracastoro's treatise was built upon similar ideas that had been circulating for decades in the medical community at the University of Padua and throughout the continent. Furthermore, both theories called for the avoidance of contaminated areas and treating the environment to reduce the spread of disease; if the miasma theory espoused the importance of draining standing water and dredging canals to create cleaner air, it was not a far intellectual leap to also appreciate the benefit of airing out fabrics believed to harbor disease and washing walls in plague-contaminated homes to disperse the contagious seeds. Richard Palmer notes that Fracastoro should not be credited with revolutionizing the understanding of disease transmission in the early modern world, but with adding nuance to prevailing theories — within corrupt air, the Veronese doctor postulated the presence of individual particles and theorized the ways in which they could invade bodies and how to prevent their proliferation.⁵⁶

Fracastoro, in Chapter VII of *De contagione*, characterizes plague as a disease that is typically contracted from contact with others who are infected, but is also capable of arising “originally in ourselves,” a nod to the not-yet-discredited belief in unbalanced bodily humors engendering disease.⁵⁷ The physician recommends in his opening paragraph one principal aspect of plague treatment that should supersede all others: prevention. “It is clear that first of all we ought not to overlook the prophylactic treatment...In the first place, precaution must be taken against contracting it, since, once contracted, it is nearly always fatal.”⁵⁸ In accordance with emphasizing the importance of prevention, he also suggests that the best way to keep oneself safe is to flee at the onset of an outbreak. Though this was a response not encouraged by civil and religious authorities, it was widely acknowledged that flight from plague was, indeed, often the

⁵⁶ Palmer, 93.

⁵⁷ Girolamo Fracastoro, *De contagione et contagiosis morbis et eorum curatione, libri III*, 1546, trans. Wilmer Cave Wright, (New York and London: G.P. Putnam and Sons, 1930), 239.

⁵⁸ Fracastoro, 239.

wisest decision, for those with the economic means to do so. Despite his candid recognition that the best medicine for plague was immediate escape, Fracastoro understood that as a physician, his responsibility was to alleviate suffering through the recommendation of working methods of disease prevention and control. The remainder of his entry on “The Treatment of True Pestilent Fevers” in *De contagione*, therefore, offers practical advice for the treatment of plague that can be used by doctors, health boards, and individuals, which prioritizes cleaning the air through burning infected materials and airing out dwellings. Keeping one’s body clean, avoiding fasting, surrounding oneself with pleasantly scented fruits, flowers, and plant materials known for improving air quality, as well as the pungently cleansing scent of vinegar, were all recommended as methods of keeping plague at bay through promoting bodily strength and wellness.⁵⁹ For those who had already contracted the disease, Fracastoro’s advice is decidedly moderate — a welcome note of balance at a time when some doctors and a variety of charlatans selling their cures advised extreme remedies, sometimes with fatal consequences, such as ingesting poisons or starving patients, that killed the stricken faster than the disease itself.⁶⁰ Fracastoro eschews bloodletting or the use of extreme purgatives, and recommends feeding the ill healthful, easily digestible foods that would not provoke the body into increased fever in order to “maintain the patient’s energy.”⁶¹ He advises a variety of plants that can be used to make syrups to be drunk by

⁵⁹ Fracastoro, 241.

⁶⁰ David Gentilcore has done extensive work on vernacular cures sold by itinerant healers and peddlers, sometimes collectively referred to as charlatans (*ciarlatani*) in Italy during the early modern period. Gentilcore stresses that city governments — Venice included— regulated and approved the medicines sold by these healers in appointed locations, though quite a number of quacks continued to sell useless and dangerous medicines without regulation. For more on the panoply of cures sold in Italian cities in the fifteenth through seventeenth centuries, see, *Medical Charlatanism in Early Modern Italy*, (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press), 2006; and *Healers and Healing in Early Modern Italy*, (New York: St. Martin’s Press), 1998. Jane Crawshaw identifies several healers whose medicines offered to treat plague in Venice appeared to be beneficial to the ill, as well as the unfortunate (but darkly humorous) incident of an itinerant merchant who contracted plague intentionally in order to demonstrate the effectiveness of his urine-and-feces-based cure, dying promptly after the application of his medicine. (Crawshaw, *Plague Hospitals*, 171).

⁶¹ Fracastoro, 243-5.

the patient with cold water, which he considers essential to promoting the “extinction of contagion” in their bodies. Fracastoro’s approach to plague is conservative: above all, maintain the patient’s bodily strength by avoiding extreme methods and create conditions that will allow the contagious materials to be expelled from the body and the environment. He does recommend the lancing and draining of buboes, followed by cleansing the areas with heat, and applying herbal poultices to promote the draining and drying of sores.⁶² Though this surgical approach is more invasive than his medicinal recommendations, it coheres with his belief in the importance of promoting the expulsion of infection through the most moderate means that will be effective. In closing, the doctor provides recipes for syrups to drive out plague that he himself relies upon, complete with the increments for each ingredient, and which are composed primarily of lemon water, herbs, and vinegar, with variable additions of curative clays, such as Armenian bole, or ground minerals, depending on physicians’ preference. Fracastoro’s advice on plague is remarkable, in a way, for how unremarkable it is. His recommendations, while temperate and made with patients’ comfort and safety foremost, do not deviate drastically from what had been accepted practices in plague treatments since the late fifteenth century. What is innovative about his work, however, is how this moderation in treatment is paired with greater precision with respect to treating diseases according to *how* they arose in a patient’s body.⁶³ In other words, Fracastoro differentiates between chronic and acute forms of disease, and understands that to heal the sick successfully, one must know specifically which agent to treat. This differs from earlier Galenic concepts in medical care that considered the bodily imbalances produced in the unwell to be more homogeneous in nature — that illness produced by, or producing, humoral

⁶² Fracastoro, 245-7.

⁶³ For example, in his entry on the treatment of “contagious phthisis” — bacterial tuberculosis — Fracastoro is explicit that the successful remedy for this lung disease depends upon understanding its source, whether it developed naturally in the body, or resulted from breathing in particles from another infected individual. (Fracastoro, 251.)

disturbances created poisons in the body, which called for medicines that were tailored more to individuals' personal constitutions, than to specific properties of the disease agents.

It is difficult to determine which theories of plague transmission and treatment were most influential in sixteenth-century Venice because most all publications on the disease, from reprinted tracts in the vernacular to the Latin works of Fracastoro and other university doctors, reiterated long-standing theories and methods. Advice to flee plague-ridden areas, to avoid contact with suspected sources of contamination, and to maintain overall spiritual health through prayers and bodily health through moderating food, drink, and sexual activities remained remarkably static. In addition, any putative "breakthrough" medicines were new formulations intended to work similarly to older established medicines: to purge the body of the poisons generated by plague. The Health Office oversaw the sale of any new medicines for the prevention and treatment of plague, requiring those wishing to sell their cures in the city to demonstrate that their recipes were not only safe to use, but also appeared to be at least marginally effective.⁶⁴ As expected, there were few curatives that were credited with making any substantial impact against plague.

Jane Crawshaw examined the case of the Colochi family, whose esteemed recipe for plague medicine was purchased by the Venetian State during the 1575-77 outbreak, with the intention of administering it widely to the city's residents in order to halt the spread of disease.⁶⁵ Though this campaign seems not to have been enacted, or at least not effectively, it is noteworthy

⁶⁴ Gentilcore, *Charlatans*, 1-4, 104-6.

⁶⁵ At the height of this major epidemic, Ascanio Olivieri, doctor of the Venetian Health Office, sold the recipe for a medicine that would ease the symptoms of plague and render patients no longer contagious developed by his father-in-law Nicolo Colochi (also a former doctor of the Health Office) to the State for the large lump sum of 800 ducats and a significant increase to his yearly salary. (ASV, Secreta, MMN 95, 144r, July 23, 1576.) This information was recently published by Jane Crawshaw in an article that provides a detailed look at the Colochi's family involvement in treating plague in Venice, including the long-overlooked role of women as healers in the public sphere. See, Crawshaw, "Families, Medical Secrets, and Public Health in Early Modern Venice," *Renaissance Studies*, v.28, n.4, (2014), 601. For more on local cures developed against plague in Venice, including Olivieri's recipe, see David Gentilcore, *Medical Charlatanism in Early Modern Italy*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 141-144.

as one of the few examples of a plague medicine the State was willing to endorse on a large scale. This endorsement was likely due to the strong reputation of the Colochi family, several members of which had worked to treat the plague-stricken in the city's lazaretti as doctors, a caregiver, and as head of the body clearers. Another noteworthy curative against plague with a substantial reputation was theriac, the expensive concoction that had been considered the gold standard against plague (and all cases of illness considered to involve bodily poisoning) since the Black Death.⁶⁶ Theriac manufactured in Venice was reputed to be of the highest quality available in the early modern world and was a sought-after export. Interestingly, sources in Venice speak little of any significant use of theriac in the city, which indicates that possibly its high cost made widespread usage impractical, or that its performance in the field did not match its peerless reputation.⁶⁷

Beyond various medicines, purgatives, and plasters meant to draw out bodily toxins produced by disease, plague was also treated surgically in seicento Venice through lancing buboes and occasionally bloodletting. Surgeons, whose duties were distinct from those of physicians, performed these operations in homes and in the lazaretti.⁶⁸ Draining the glandular

⁶⁶ Nockels Fabbri, "Treating Medieval Plague: The Wonderful Virtues of Theriac," 248-9.

⁶⁷ For more on theriac's usage to treat plague in Venice, see, "La triaca dello struzzo," in *Venezia e la peste*, 149-154.

⁶⁸ Several scholars have noted that in Venice the divide between physicians and surgeons was less decisive than that in other early modern cities. Traditionally, physicians were university-educated and considered the more eminent and intellectual of the two professions, some of whom worked in a more advisory role, rather than dealing with patients' bodies directly. Surgeons typically received training on the job as apprentices, and without the many years of formal education in internal medicine that physicians received. However, this division between the professions appears to have been somewhat exaggerated in scholarship, and doctors' treatments — whether performed by physician or surgeon — appear to have overlapped. Alex Bamji describes the relationships between medical professionals as "fluid" in sixteenth-century Venice, noting that *Necrologi* reports indicated that both physicians and surgeons were most often referred to by the term *medici*, and that some doctors were interchangeably labeled as both *chirurgo* and *medico*. ("Medical Care in Early Modern Venice," *Economic History Working Papers*, n. 188 (2014), 6-7). Richard Palmer has also explored the interrelated relationship between surgeons and physicians in Venice, noting that both health care professionals worked collaboratively, without evident differences in social standing suggested by modern scholarship. See, "Physicians and Surgeons in Sixteenth-Century Venice," *Medical History*, v. 23, (1979), 451-60.

swellings associated with plague, which was a more invasive method of removing toxic matter from the body, was still common practice during the 1630-31 epidemic, and one endorsed by Fracastoro and many university-trained doctors. Bloodletting as a therapy for plague patients, however, had fallen out of favor in the previous century and was rarely performed, as it was believed to hasten death by weakening the patient. Medical interventions against plague in seventeenth-century Venice, it can thus be seen, were characterized more by tradition and continuity than by revolution. This is evidenced by general cohesion in the medical literature on plague, even in the innovative work of Fracastoro, who sought to amend rather than challenge previous wisdom on disease transmission.

Medical and surgical treatments applied during the 1630-31 Venetian outbreak developed out of aggregate knowledge gained from pairing vernacular wisdom on plague transmission with the established work of university-trained doctors in Venice and from the University of Padua (though it was just these weighty opinions that initially stalled plague treatments at the outset of the epidemic). The recorded experience of what had worked in the previous major plague epidemic of 1575-77 was of critical importance, shaping the medical, and also spiritual, approaches taken to plague prevention and treatment in 1630. In facing the varied challenges of protecting the city against plague, the government, run by its efficient system of bureaucracies, sought refuge in holding fast to what it already knew and extending faith that Venice would eventually be liberated from the crisis by maintaining order and adhering to established custom and ritual.

Sacred petition and propitiation

It is evident that major plague epidemics destabilized the normative social order in early modern Italy. In these times of public crisis, cities relied upon what they believed would work for them: restricting the movement of people and goods in areas in which the disease had erupted, deploying cures that had shown promising results in the past, and equally important, appealing to local religious cults, saints, and intercessors who were particular to each region, town, confraternity, or parish. The importance of local intercessors, considered embodiments of a town's virtue and associated with the collective experience of an epidemic, cannot be overstated. Venice had its own rich and distinctive spiritual landscape in 1630, in which it sought protection and derived strength from the pre-epidemic moment, when plague was only a threatening possibility, to the height of the outbreak, and finally, to the denouement of the catastrophe when plague was vanquished and Venice's residents demonstrated their gratitude to the holy figures who had taken pity on them. This section will outline briefly the most prominent plague saints and intercessors in early modern Italy, and offer an extended examination of those who were most important to the Venetian ambient, including the ways in which Venice sought their intervention. Venice's State-run religious initiatives and processions, the dynamic cults of plague saints, and the ceremonies performed at the opulent scuole grandi, demonstrate the many ways in which divine and sacred assistance were mobilized in the city, in addition to the creation of devotional works of art, which will be explored in subsequent chapters of this dissertation.

By the seventeenth century, there was a large pantheon of plague saints in Italy. The most popular saints associated with plague were Sebastian, and after the late fifteenth century, Roch, whose cult rose rapidly from obscurity to widespread popularity in Italy and Europe.

Sebastian was an early Christian martyr in fourth-century Rome who survived having been shot with numerous arrows — he is universally depicted in works of art with an arrow-riddled body — only to be later beaten to death for pronouncing publicly his Christ-like resurrection after surviving the shooting. The origin of Sebastian’s linkage with plague is somewhat unclear, as the saint was not associated with disease or credited with miraculous healing in his early *vitae*. Scholars have suggested that the development of his cult’s association with healing plague in the ninth century is related to the Christian significance of the arrows piercing his body. Louise Marshall, in her study on the use of works of art to effect spiritual change during times of plague, has suggested that Sebastian’s association with the disease is related not only to the arrows piercing the saint’s body as metaphors for God’s sudden wrath, striking mankind from the heavens, but that Sebastian’s miraculous ability to survive the initial onslaught and to contain the threat in his body makes him a Christ-like figure and redeemer. This iconography is related to the bodily scourging of Christ referenced in the Man of Sorrows.⁶⁹ Regarding the dissemination of Sebastian’s iconography, Sheila Barker has noted that the expansion of the saint’s cult and reputation as a plague healer in Florence occurred after the outbreak of 1363, which was followed by a succession of painted altarpieces and other devotional works visualizing the saint’s efficacy.⁷⁰

As throughout Italy, Venice had an active cult dedicated to this popular plague saint, which was centered at the church of San Sebastiano, founded in the mid-fifteenth century, and

⁶⁹ Louise Marshall, “Manipulating the Sacred: Image and Plague in Renaissance Italy,” *Renaissance Quarterly*, v.47, n.3, (Autumn 1994), 495-500.

⁷⁰ “The Making of a Plague Saint. Saint Sebastian’s Imagery and Cult before the Counter-Reformation,” in *Piety and Plague: From Byzantium to the Baroque*, eds. Franco Mormando and Thomas Worcester (Kirksville, Mo.: Truman State University Press, 2007), 102.

located in the southwest corner of the city in the *sestiere* of Dorsoduro.⁷¹ The founders of this Venetian church were from Padua and established their church in Venice in 1453, after receiving permission from the Senate.⁷² There were also altars dedicated to Saint Sebastian in churches throughout the city.⁷³ While Sebastian does not play a significant role in the State-organized spiritual appeals during the 1630 plague in Venice, the saint was associated with two episodes of miraculous healing during other early modern epidemics in the city. Richard Palmer retells an incident in 1464 in which nuns at the church of Santa Croce on the Giudecca prayed fervently to Saint Sebastian after four of the sisters had contracted and subsequently died of plague; the saint was credited with halting the impending outbreak before it spread any further after hearing the nuns' pleas.⁷⁴ This miraculous healing is recalled in the following century, during an incident in which the Venetian government, acting on the collective memory of this miracle, attempted to provoke another holy intervention at the nunnery to halt the devastation during the 1575-77 epidemic. In association with the cornerstone laying ceremony for the votive church Il Redentore, the Patriarch organized the translation of the relics from the church of San Sebastiano to Santa Croce on the Giudecca, where they were submerged in the well there. Large crowds gathered at the church to drink from the well, hoping to imbibe Sebastian's protection from

⁷¹ The current church at the site was built in the first half of the sixteenth century by Scarpagnino, and decorated throughout by Veronese's breathtaking paintings, both frescos and works on canvas, in the later half of the same century.

⁷² Richard Palmer, *Control of Plague*, 283, n3. Palmer cites the Senate document conveying permission to the fraternity to found a church to Saint Sebastian in Venice. ASV, *Senato Terra*, reg.3, folio 59v, March 5, 1453.

⁷³ Notable examples are a chapel dedicated to the saint in the church of Santa Maria della Carità, in which Jacopo Bellini contributed a triptych with Sebastian as the central panel around 1470, (now in the Accademia), and Antonello da Messina's enigmatic c.1476 depiction of Saint Sebastian as part of a triptych found in at an altar in San Giuliano, now dismantled with the Sebastian panel residing in the Gemäldegalerie in Dresden.

⁷⁴ Palmer, 284.

plague in the water, and the Patriarch and Doge celebrated Mass at the nunnery before heading a procession to the site at which Il Redentore was to be built.⁷⁵

While Sebastian's cult following arose earlier than Roch's and maintained greater traction in Rome throughout the early modern period, the cult of Saint Roch was meteoric in its rise to prominence at the end of the fifteenth century, and it was undeniably the most important plague-associated cult in Venice and in the Veneto region. This saint's connection to plague is much more direct. Roch was born reputedly in southern France in Montpellier in 1348 and was credited with healing a number of plague victims in multiple Italian cities — Aquapendente, Rome, Mantua, Modena, and Parma — while on pilgrimage to Rome.⁷⁶ After contracting the disease himself, Roch retreated to the seclusion of a forest where he not only miraculously survived, but was visited daily by a loyal dog who supplied him with bread to sustain him in the wilderness. The animal's uncanny behavior and exceptional devotion were considered additional testament to Roch's elevated spiritual status, proof of the man's holiness and grounds for his beatification and later sainthood. His cult began to develop first in northern Italy in the 1460-70s, and spread with the publication of several texts outlining the saint's life and his miraculous healing of the plague-stricken, the most notable of which was written in 1479 by Venetian scholar Francesco Diedo and disseminated throughout the Italian peninsula.⁷⁷

⁷⁵ Palmer, 284, n.2. This story is found in a broadsheet published in the late sixteenth century, which was studied by William Schupback in "A Venetian 'plague miracle' in 1464 and 1576," *Medical History*, v.20, n.3, 1976, 312-16.

⁷⁶ There are no secure dates for Roch's birth or death, and many conflicting accounts in stories of the saint's life. Even at the height of Roch's popularity in the early modern period, there was voiced skepticism surrounding the likelihood that Roch existed at all. An interesting document exists in the files of Scuola Grande di San Rocco: the transcription of seven letters from the spring 1587 from the Campagna di San Rocco in Rome to the Scuola di San Rocco in Venice, regarding Roch's canonization, in which brothers from Rome seek justification of Roch's sainthood — his miracles performed and the significance of his cult in Venice, where his body is interred in the confraternity's church. ASV, *Scuola Grande di San Rocco*, seconda consegna, busta 154, filza n. 32, XXX, 4, 1r-6v.

⁷⁷ Marshall, "Manipulating the Sacred," 156-9.

Roch's cult was founded in Venice in 1478 as a flagellant confraternity, with the State's granting of permission for a church and confraternity to be established in the city, first at San Zulian near the Basilica San Marco, then permanently in the parish neighborhood of the important Franciscan church of Santa Maria Gloriosa dei Frari.⁷⁸ The confraternity rose quickly in prestige after it acquired an exceptional relic in 1485 — the saint's intact body — which was interred in the high altar of the church.⁷⁹ The enormous wealth generated by a growing body of *confratelli* and the countless devotees who visited the saint's body and donated to support the cult allowed the Scuola di San Rocco to acquire "grande" status in 1489, becoming the wealthiest confraternity in Venice by the sixteenth century, and to remain so throughout the early modern period.⁸⁰ Roch is depicted in works of art wearing the garments of a traveling pilgrim: a hat, a mantle with a shell affixed at the shoulder, and a staff for walking. Almost invariably, he is shown pointing to, or otherwise displaying a bubo on his thigh by lifting his tunic or dropping the hose on his affected leg. He is depicted frequently standing in *contrapposto*, to further emphasize the glandular swelling marking him as a victim of plague and is often accompanied by his faithful dog — bread in mouth and eyes fastened devotedly on the saint. This standard iconography can be seen in an image of the saint painted by Tintoretto for the upper hall of the Scuola di San Rocco, where it appeared prominently on the end wall with a paired canvas representing Saint Sebastian [Figures 2.2, 2.3].

⁷⁸ The grant to allow the foundation of the church and scuola is found in the Council of Ten's files: ASV, *Consiglio dei Dieci*, reg. misto 19, f.73v, (June 10, 1478). Cited in Palmer, 285, n.3, 286. The Frari was initially in control of the location at which the Scuola's meetinghouse and church were built, and maintained the earliest contracts and records for the Scuola until the confraternity and its operations were fully established.

⁷⁹ Roch's body was reputedly stolen from a church in Voghera by a monk from Murano, though two monks from Padua were originally hired for the deed. Richard Palmer cites a chronicle that rehearses the appropriately dramatic nighttime theft. *Control of Plague*, 287, n.1.

⁸⁰ Patricia Fortini Brown, "Honor and Necessity: the Dynamics of Patronage in the Confraternities of Renaissance Venice," *Studi Veneziani*, XIV (Pisa: Giardini, 1987), 179-81; Brian Pullan, *Rich and Poor in Renaissance Venice*, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1971), 84.

The Scuola Grande di San Rocco was a powerful presence in early modern Venice. The confraternity generated a vast membership of five hundred brothers (women were not allowed to be members of the *scuole grandi*, though they were represented at the *piccoli*), and they hosted or participated in lavish ceremonies and processions in Venice throughout the year, always holding a position of prominence because of their vaulted status in the city. During the procession of November 21, 1631 that marked the end of the plague epidemic, the Scuola Grande di San Rocco appeared in a place of the highest prestige in the procession, behind only the Doge and Signoria, and with the remainder of the city's represented social institutions falling in rank behind them.⁸¹ The Scuola did not treat plague patients and had no associated hospital or connection with the medical community. In times of wellness or during plague outbreaks, the confraternity functioned as a charitable institution, assisting those in financial need by paying for critical exigencies in life; they provided funds for funerals and burial costs, dowries, and the payment of major outstanding debts. They owned and maintained a number of residences in the city, on which they collected rent. By the mid-sixteenth century, the Scuola Grande di San Rocco displayed Roch's body publicly five times a year, and typically took the saint's finger bone along with them when processing through the city.⁸² They organized an opulent procession through Venice every August 16 on Roch's feast day, which originated in their lavish meetinghouse — the celebrated site decorated throughout by Tintoretto — and wound its way through each of the six *sestieri*. Though the Senate restricted the number of processions in the city during major epidemics of plague and banned all unnecessary congregating of large groups of people, the

⁸¹ Marco Ginammi, *La liberazione di Venetia*, (Venice: Conzato, 1631), collection of the Biblioteca Museo Correr. This printed pamphlet, produced shortly after the first celebration of the Festa della Salute, provides an eye-witness account of the celebrations and procession on this day. Though its reliability at points is questionable, this pamphlet remains a valuable source for information on this important event, and will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 4.

⁸² Palmer, 289.

confratelli of the Scuola di San Rocco were still permitted to process through the city on August 16 of both 1630 and 1631, though expenses for the latter procession were less than half of what was paid the previous year, the result of the large number of brothers who had died during the previous year's outbreak and the significant reduction in spending for confraternal events during the crisis.⁸³

During plague epidemics the confraternal church, containing the relics of the saint, was a dynamic site of sacred petition by the wider Venetian public. Unsurprisingly, this devotion to Saint Roch generated countless votive offerings and other physical traces of devotees' veneration. While most of these are no longer extant, a few examples remain in the treasury of the confraternity's meetinghouse. These include a small, embossed silver token from the seventeenth century, showing a devotee kneeling in prayer, hands clasped and eyes raised in adoration before a celestial vision of Roch and his dog appearing in a cloud [Figure 2.4]. There also still exists an unusual painted offering created on a satin support, also from the seventeenth century, in which Venice, personified as a woman, kneels before a Christ-like Roch, arms spread in awe, as a dark-haired personification of pestilence clutching a skull and whip, flees in terror at Roch's appearance [Figure 2.5]. This painted *ex-voto* has not been firmly dated by textual sources, but based on style and iconography, there is reasonable evidence that this work may have originated during the 1630 epidemic — a topic that will be considered in greater depth in Chapter 4, in which the painting appears as case study. In addition to these remaining indices of the votive exchange at the confraternity, a document in the Scuola's archives speaks to the saint's efficacy as in intercessor and, in particular, his assistance in halting the plague's attack on

⁸³ ASV, *Scuola Grande di San Rocco*, cauzioni, busta 170, n.16, loose sheet dated August 1631; ASV, *Scuola Grande di San Rocco*, cauzioni, busta 169, n.15, loose sheet dated August 1630. Total expenses for the event in 1630 were 2830 ducats, a vast expense, particularly compared to the greatly reduced 1277 ducats spent the following year.

the city during the 1575-77 outbreak, evidenced by the variety of ex-votos left in thanks at the saint's tomb in the church. In a series of seven letters between officials at the Compagnia di San Rocco in Rome and those at the Scuola Grande di San Rocco in Venice, written throughout spring and early summer of 1587, Guardian Grande Bernardo Ruspini and other high-ranking *confratelli* at the Venetian scuola assert Roch's holiness and offer proof of his sanctified status by outlining his active role in protecting the city against plague. In a letter dated June 1587, Ruspini describes the accretion of countless votive offerings in their church during and after the 1575-77 outbreak — “an infallible sign” — testifying to Roch's spiritual efficacy and the devotion of his cult followers who left, “an infinity of votive offerings in our church, [constructed] of wax, of wood, of silver, and painted, with inscriptions on many that speak of the quality of the grace they received.”⁸⁴ The confraternity commemorated Saint Roch's crucial role during the 1630-31 plague with the commission of two monumental paintings in their grand stairwell that depict the epidemic, which will be discussed in detail in Chapter 5 [Figures 2.6, 2.7].

Sebastian and Roch were only the most widely recognized saints associated with plague in early modern Italy. There were numerous other holy people and saints who were called upon to prevent or halt the progress of plague. These intercessors were petitioned to bring relief from suffering during illness and to restore health to the stricken, and also ensure mercy and forgiveness for the dying and dead. Prayers were made by and sometimes on behalf of individuals and collective groups, who were bound by geography, religion, or cultural background in parishes, neighborhoods, and of course, in entire cities. Plague intercessors were chosen for their association with healing (which did not need to be related directly to plague), a

⁸⁴ ASV, *Scuola Grande di San Rocco*, seconda consegna, busta 154, filza n. 32, XXX, 4, 3v.

local importance they may have had as a city's protector and patron, or the power and influence of their cult in general, which was particularly true after the proliferation of Counter-Reformation saints in the later sixteenth century and throughout the seventeenth century. Region was the significant defining factor in the veneration of these secondary intercessors. San Giobbe had been associated with plague since the late fourteenth century in Venice and the Veneto. Though Job's following diminished in the region following the explosion of Roch's cult, evidence of his continued veneration as a plague saint in Venice can be found in the church of San Giobbe, in northwestern Cannaregio, which once housed Giovanni Bellini's famed *San Giobbe Altarpiece* of 1487, now in the Accademia [Figure 2.8]. The church of San Tommaso Cantauriense in Verona still maintains in situ an early sixteenth century altarpiece by Girolamo dei Libri that presents a combination of these most popular plague saints in the Veneto region: a central Saint Roch is flanked by Sebastian to his left, and Job to his right [Figure 2.9]. Job, following tradition, is depicted aged and nude, except for a swath of fabric tied around his waist, in order to show the lesions covering his body, referencing his role in the Bible as a man who suffered numerous hardships — including affliction with skin disease. Though Sebastian and Roch are commonly depicted together, often with another supporting saint or saints, it is unusual to see the trio of Roch, Sebastian, and Job.

Two distinct saints named Anthony were also relatively popular in plague art from the Veneto. Saint Anthony Abbot, third-century monk and church father, and Saint Anthony of Padua, a thirteenth-century Franciscan friar, both of whom were associated with healing skin diseases, make frequent appearances alone or beside Sebastian and Roch in plague art in the region [Figures 2.10-2.12].⁸⁵ Elsewhere on the Italian peninsula, Saint Nicholas of Tolentino and

⁸⁵ Notable examples of works of art with Sant'Antonio Abate together with Roch and Sebastian are Alessandro Vittoria's sixteenth-century sculptural altarpiece in San Francesco della Vigna, and an altarpiece by Bernardino

San Bernardino of Siena were frequently invoked against plague in the fifteenth century, though neither had any significant following in Venice.⁸⁶ The Virgin, though not technically a saint, was also a popular intercessor against plague for several centuries. Because of the motherly, protective role given to her — she is often depicted in medieval and early modern works beseeching an angry Christ or wrathful God to take mercy on humanity stricken by varied crises — she developed a natural association with halting plague that was strengthened by the number of miracle-working images of her that proliferated on the peninsula.⁸⁷ In particular, her incarnation as the Madonna della Misericordia, protecting beleaguered devotees inside her enveloping mantle, was seen frequently in plague art [Figure 2.13].⁸⁸ This iconography was also popular in Venice, found on a number of bas-reliefs placed protectively over doorways in the city (typically without specific reference to pestilence, though the implied connection would be relevant during epidemics). A notable example of which is Bartolomeo Bon's sculpture created

Prudenti in the church of San Martino on Burano. Sant'Antonio di Padova is honored in a painting by Pietro Libri at one of the six altars that ring the perimeter space of Santa Maria della Salute.

⁸⁶ San Bernardino, while without a large cult following in Venice, has sometimes been credited with pushing the Venetian government to establish the Lazzaretto Vecchio. Evidently the preacher visited Venice in 1422, after having worked to heal plague victims in Siena, and petitioned Doge Francesco Foscari to build a plague hospital to isolate and treat the sick. (Crawshaw, *Plague Hospitals*, 40.)

⁸⁷ Megan's Holmes, in her impressive and thorough work on miraculous and cult images in early modern Florence, identifies several miracle-working Madonnas in this city associated with healing plague among other disasters, including the powerful *Madonna of Orsanmichele* and *SS. Annunziata*. (*The Miraculous Image in Renaissance Florence*, (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2013, 46, 86-7). Venice in particular gravitated toward miraculous images of the Virgin in the Byzantine style, notably the Madonna Nicopeia, and, later, the icon placed on the sculptural high altarpiece of Santa Maria della Salute, the so-called Madonna di Tito or *Mesopanditissa*, which was supposedly taken from the church of S. Tito in Crete in 1669, when Venice lost control of the city. (*Venezia e la peste*, 299.) Like the Florentine examples, these icons have been called upon in times of pestilence, but their powers for healing and protection extend into all matters requiring intercession. For recent work on the veneration of miracle-working images of the Virgin elsewhere on the Italian peninsula, particularly in Genoa and Liguria, see Jane Garnett and Gervase Rosser, *Spectacular Miracles: Transforming Images in Italy from the Renaissance to the Present*, (London: Reaktion Books), 2013.

⁸⁸ A beautiful example of this iconography is Benedetto Bonfigli's *Plague Madonna della Misericordia*, a banner made for a Perugian confraternity in 1464, and studied extensively by Louise Marshall in her formative work on plague art, "Manipulating the Sacred: Image and Plague in Renaissance Italy," *Renaissance Quarterly*, v.47, n.3 (Autumn 1994), 506-10. This iconography also appears frequently in the Venetian context, and in fact, was adapted at times to also include the personification of Venice. An example of this is seen in Domenico Tintoretto's ex-voto for the church of San Francesco della Vigna, which will be examined closely in Chapter 4.

c.1450 for the façade of the Scuola Grande della Misericordia, removed and now in the Victoria and Albert Museum, though plentiful examples still appear in the city, such as those benevolently overlooking the *campi* of San Tomà and Santa Margherita [Figures 2.14-2.16]. The Virgin's sustained role as protector of the city, a civically adopted patron saint who was depicted in works of art literally shielding endangered residents from harm, contributed to the increased veneration of the Madonna Nicopeia in the seventeenth century and her subsequent adoption as the official intercessor in the 1630-31 epidemic [Figures 2.1, 2.17]. After the Counter Reformation, several healers who became associated with plague were identified among the newly canonized Jesuit saints and other holy figures important in the Roman milieu.⁸⁹ The most important of these was San Carlo Borromeo. Cardinal Carlo Borromeo, later sainted for his omnipresent role during the 1576-77 outbreak in Milan and his selfless care of its victims, became a figurehead for this epidemic in Milan and Rome. Borromeo's image became common plague iconography in these cities during the seventeenth century, and the saint appears in countless paintings and prints referencing this specific outbreak and the disease in general.⁹⁰ Carlo Borromeo's image and appeals to his cult, however, are conspicuously rare in Venice

⁸⁹ Guido Reni's plague banner created for Bologna during the 1630 epidemic is a telling example of the shift in plague art and intercessors following the Counter-Reformation. The composition teems with an army of holy intercessors — both the city's traditional patron saints and new Jesuit intercessors: Francis of Assisi, Dominic, Petronius, Francis Xavier, Ignatius of Loyola, Florian, and Proculus. For more on the banner, see Catherine Puglisi, "Guido Reni's *Pallione del Voto* and the Plague of 1630," *Art Bulletin*, v.77, n.3 (September 1995), 402-12.

⁹⁰ San Luigi Gonzaga was a younger contemporary of Borromeo, a Jesuit and reformer from Mantua, who also became associated with plague healing after succumbing to the disease at age 23, after caring for plague victims in Rome. For more on the cult of Carlo Borromeo in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, see Pamela M. Jones, "San Carlo Borromeo and Plague Imagery in Milan and Rome," in *Hope and Healing: Painting in Italy in a Time of Plague, 1500-1800*, ex. cat., eds. Gauvin Alexander Bailey and Pamela M. Jones, (Worcester, Mass.: Clark University, 2005), 65-96. Cardinal Borromeo's nephew, Cardinal Federico Borromeo, served as archbishop of Milan during the following plague of 1630-31, and his account of this epidemic's events was transcribed into Italian and published, *La peste di Milano del 1630: la cronaca e le testimonianze del tempo del cardinale Federico Borromeo*, trans. Ilaria Solari, (Milan: Rusconi), 1998.

[Figure 2.18].⁹¹ In a city whose history was characterized by long-standing conflicts with Rome, and that had recently expelled the Jesuits from its borders in 1607, this intercessor, associated with the implementation of Tridentine Reforms and the strengthening of the Roman church, had little place in Venice.

The Venetian answer to Carlo Borromeo was Lorenzo Giustiniani, Venice's first patriarch in 1451, a Beato who had been associated with plague since the fifteenth century. Fascinatingly, his linkage with plague appears to have as much to do with the formation of public policy as with miraculous healing — a particularly Venetian enterprise. Giustiniani was born in Venice to the patrician class in 1381. His public religious life as a secular canon of San Giorgio in Alga and Bishop of Castello, before receiving the newly founded position of Patriarch, was marked not only by the requisite piety, but by establishing and codifying religious initiatives against plague, including petitioning Pope Nicholas V in Rome for special indulgences for those who tended plague victims.⁹² Giustiniani had a large congregational following of supporters during his lifetime who moved swiftly to honor him and promote his status as a holy man and intercessor after his death in 1455. His nephew, Bernardo Giustiniani, published a biography of the Beato in 1475, detailing his uncle's devotion and commitment to Venice's spiritual life, including miracles said to have occurred during his lifetime.⁹³ Lorenzo

⁹¹ Several seventeenth-century depictions of Borromeo do appear in Venetian churches, but these are rare outliers in the city, whereas images of the saint proliferate in other Italian cities. Two examples are a round ceiling fresco in San Pietro in Castello, *Saint Carlo Borromeo in Glory*, by an unknown artist, and an undated oil painting of the same subject by Camillo Procaccini in the Pisani Chapel in the church of San Nicolò da Tolentino. I Tolentini was founded in the mid-sixteenth century by the order of Theatines who had fled Rome after the city's sack, so their representation of saints outside the typical Venetian pantheon has religious significance. The artist, Procaccini, who died in 1629, worked primarily in Bologna and Milan in his maturity and was never known to have traveled to Venice, and so this painting was likely not created in the city, but brought to Venice by the Theatines to adorn their church.

⁹² Cecilia Cristellon and Silvana Seidel Menchi, "Religious Life," in *A Companion to Venetian History, 1400-1797*, ed. Eric Dursteler, (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 395.

⁹³ Bernardo Giustiniani, *Vita Beati Laurenti Iustiniani Venetiarum Patriarchae*, (Venice), 1475. This book was reprinted in 1690, to honor Giustiniani's canonization in that year. For more on the saint and his cult following, see

Giustiniani's cult was also promoted through the creation of works of art that disseminated his image throughout the city and helped to shape appeals made to the holy man. The Accademia houses a particularly striking image of Giustiniani, a tempera on canvas painting by Gentile Bellini from 1465, originally from the Madonna dell'Orto, Giustiniani's home church during his lifetime [Figure 2.19]. In many ways, this painting set a precedent for the Beato's iconography. He is depicted in sharp profile, wearing a cap and extending the first two fingers of his right hand in blessing. His face is defined by sharp cheekbones and somewhat sunken eyes, his expression austere but receptive. From the late fifteenth century through the seventeenth, a number of devotional images of Giustiniani were made in Venice with remarkable faithfulness to this painting, depicting him typically in profile or three-quarters orientation, though usually portraying him from the waist up, while Bellini's seminal image includes his full body [Figures 2.20-2.22].⁹⁴ This half-length tradition may, in fact, relate to another early effigy to Lorenzo Giustiniani, a sculptural bust of the Beato from the second half of the fifteenth century, created for the church of San Pietro in Castello by an unknown artist [Figure 2.23]. As Venice's cathedral until 1807, when the Basilica San Marco received the distinction, San Pietro in Castello was the patriarchs' church, and it became the cult site for Lorenzo Giustiniani. The saint's body was interred here in an elaborate sculptural altar designed by Baldassare Longhena, completed in 1649, and the church still abounds today in images of the celebrated holy man [Figure 2.24].

Antonio Niero, "Pietà popolare e interessi politici nel culto di San Lorenzo Giustiniani," *Archivio Veneto*, 117 (1981), 197-224.

⁹⁴ Pordenone's altarpiece featuring the saint, *Beato Lorenzo Giustiniani with Saint John the Baptist, Saint Louis of Toulouse, San Bernardino of Siena, Saint Francis, and secular canons of San Giorgio in Alga*, completed in 1532 for a side altar in the Madonna dell'Orto (but now in the Accademia) is a notable outlier to this formula: Giustiniani faces directly outward in this work. For more on this painting and other works of art depicting Lorenzo Giustiniani in Venice, see, Michael Douglas-Scott, "Pordenone's Altarpiece of the Beato Lorenzo Giustiniani for the Madonna dell'Orto," *The Burlington Magazine*, v.130, n.1026, (September 1988), 672-79.

While Giustiniani's cult was popular in Venice from its inception (though it was to remain always obscure outside of the city), veneration of the holy man increased in intensity during the 1630-31 plague outbreak. In fact, he was credited with helping to bring about the end of the epidemic, though always secondary to the Virgin, to whom all major devotions were directed. From the display of his relics and their ritual procession throughout the San Pietro in Castello parish neighborhood before the advent of the plague, to the legislature promoting his canonization that was linked with the Senate's official vow to build Santa Maria della Salute, and to Doge Nicolò Contarini's reported prayers to the Beato to halt the plague's devastation, Giustiniani was omnipresent throughout the 1630-31 epidemic. In a way, veneration to Giustiniani were ideologically aligned with other political and spiritual initiatives in Venice, promoted by Patriarch Giovanni Tiepolo, which sought to aggrandize Venetian religiosity and assert its independence from, and primacy over, Rome. Venice embraced its special relationship with the Virgin through reigniting its dedication to the icon of the Madonna Nicopeia before this plague and constructing the Salute during the epidemic; honoring Giustiniani became another complimentary aspect of the State's rhetorically Venice-centric spirituality. Lorenzo Giustiniani's increased popularity persisted after the epidemic and reached a culmination point at the turn of the eighteenth-century, with his official attainment of sainthood in 1690. This event was marked by the creation of a number of works of art that simultaneously honored the saint and paid tribute to the 1630 plague outbreak [Figures 2.25, 2.26]. The topic of collective civic memory and the evolution of Giustiniani's cult will be addressed in the final chapter of this dissertation when exploring works of art that commemorated the seicento epidemic after plague no longer occurred in the region.

Venice had a long tradition of grand public spectacles and processions organized by the State, in which people from all levels of society participated to some degree. Public veneration of holy figures and saints was inextricably tied to honoring the city of Venice itself, and all major plague epidemics engendered similarly structured expressions of civic pride and religious piety. During the 1575-77 epidemic, Christ the Redeemer was chosen as the focal point for State-run veneration that culminated in the construction of Palladio's church of Il Redentore on the Giudecca. Evidently this type of organized devotion, resulting in an extravagant ex-voto that would make a significant and permanent alteration to the urban fabric of the city, was a formula considered successful, as it was repeated in 1630 with the focused veneration of the Virgin as a plague intercessor. Much as Venetian neighborhoods could encompass heterogeneous populations of people with varying profession and social status, Venetian appeals to the sacred during plague epidemics were similarly variegated. While the government oversaw civic spiritual health by structuring devotional exercises for the populace, these orchestrated veneration were permeable — shot through with the veneration of various local saints and holy people who held special significance for its diverse residents. Intercession against plague was inclusive. The collective protection of many intercessors, with whom devotees felt distinct bonds characterized by differently inflected spiritual relationships, was preferred to the strict veneration of one sole protector. This inclusivity, the result of a sort of ideological flexibility in seicento Venice that mixed curiously with a government defined by clear hierarchies and social structures, is visible as well in the medical treatment of plague in 1630-31.

Spiritual measures taken in response to plague in 1630-31, therefore, were characterized not by a religiosity markedly different than that of the past or resulting directly from Counter Reformation reforms, but by continued veneration of established cults, and through appeals to

new intercessors who were important for their place deep in Venetian history and identity. In a sense, the larger innovations developed against plague in seventeenth-century Venice were found more in the realm of public policy than in medicine or religion. This is not to imply that Venetian medical or spiritual efforts involved a wholesale reiteration of past practices, without new vigor or innovation. On the contrary, appealing to established theories and customs allowed Venetians in 1630-31 to adopt what felt most efficacious in past efforts and adapt these solutions to current needs. This plague, therefore, was not hallmarked by sweeping new reforms or unprecedented medical treatments, but by the evident order and orchestration with which the city met the catastrophe and attempted to subdue it with a powerful mixture of legislation and piety.

Urban management of plague in Venice

Venice maintained a rigorous and structured set of laws related to disease control and plague prevention in the city. The preeminent institutional structures functioning against plague were the two lazaretti, which were open and operating on a permanent basis. The Lazzaretto Vecchio held those with confirmed plague symptoms, while the Lazzaretto Nuovo housed suspected cases and contaminated goods. These pest houses constitute the most conspicuous way that plague was fought in Venice, though they were only one critical component in a larger network of state-run initiatives against infectious disease. Because of their importance in early modern Venice — especially during major outbreaks of plague, but also in times of relative health in the city — the Venetian lazaretti will be discussed separately, and in depth in the following chapter. These plague hospitals' history and development will be described, as well as their operations in the city and the large team of health care workers employed there. The role of visual art at the lazaretto islands will also be explored, for while little of the material culture of

the plague hospitals remains today, it is clear that works of art were once important features at the lazzaretti.

The plague hospitals were maintained by the *Provveditori alla Sanità*, which was established permanently in Venice in 1490 and oversaw and controlled numerous issues affecting public health in the city. Before the foundation of the Health Office, the *Provveditori al Sal*, or Salt Office, had overseen measures taken against plague, establishing the city's lazzaretti in 1423 (Vecchio) and 1456 (Nuovo), appointing priors to run them, and funding their expenses. During the sixteenth century, the Salt Office continued to contribute financially to the plague hospitals, but had passed control of their operations to the Health Office, which grew during this time to superintend nearly all matters related to public health. By 1630, the Health Office was a powerful magistracy in Venice, having gained wider jurisdiction throughout the sixteenth century, and increasing the number of posts it maintained and people employed throughout the city.⁹⁵ The Health Office was responsible not only for running the lazzaretti and managing a large body of workers by the seventeenth century, but also for regulating various trades and functions that could impact health in the city. These included monitoring the quality of food and water and ensuring that noxious and potentially dangerous smells from sewers, animal waste, and trades like tanning were kept at a safe distance from living quarters. Prostitution, too, came under the *Sanità*'s purview, as regulating this lucrative business was seen as a matter benefitting public wellbeing, particularly after the spread of syphilis throughout western Europe.⁹⁶

⁹⁵ The most comprehensive study of the history of the *Sanità* in Venice is found in Chapter 3 of Richard Palmer's dissertation, "The Establishment of the Venetian Health Office," *The Control of Plague in Venice and Northern Italy*, 1348-1600, 51-86.

⁹⁶ For more on the Health Office's expansion into regulating an increasing number of trades in the city, see the work of Nelli-Elena Vanzan Marchini, *I male e i rimedi della Serenissima*, (Vicenza: N. Pozza), 1995, and *Le leggi di sanità della Repubblica di Venezia*, (Treviso: Canova), 2000. For more on the development of syphilis and resulting perceptions towards the disease and its treatment, see, Jon Arrizabalaga, John Henderson, and Roger French, *The Great Pox: The French Disease in Renaissance Europe*, (New Haven and London: Yale University Press), 1997.

However, Venice operated under the auspices of many magistracies, whose responsibilities sometimes overlapped. For instance, the dredging of the city's canals — critical for keeping commerce flowing through the city and preventing miasmatic air from collecting — was controlled not by the Health Office, but by the *Provveditori di Comun*; the lagoon waters, which could breed malaria in the shallow areas, were monitored and tended by yet another office, the *Savi ed Essecutori alle Acque*.⁹⁷ The Salt Office, while not involved in these offices' daily functioning, contributed financially to them with the enormous wealth it collected from salt taxes, and was responsible for a variety of other initiatives and building campaigns in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Venice. In addition, the *lazzaretti* also received funds from another government body, the *Procuratori di San Marco de citra*, who contributed to the maintenance and decoration of the buildings on each island.⁹⁸

Though the *Provveditori alla Sanità* oversaw and enforced plague controls in early modern Venice, agents of the Health Office did not work in isolation, but rather collaborated with other citizens in positions of authority who were employed outside the *Sanità*. Most notably, the Health Office had a close partnership with parish priests, who could be considered the frontline of plague detection in Venice. Since 1504, the State required each parish priest to document any deaths among his parishioners and report these numbers daily to a scribe from the Health Office, giving details on presumed cause of death and, beginning in the seventeenth century, any medical attention the deceased had received.⁹⁹ While the State had multiple

⁹⁷ Palmer, *Control of Plague*, 126.

⁹⁸ Crawshaw, *Plague Hospitals*, 35.

⁹⁹ Alexandra Bamji, "Medical Care in Early Modern Venice," 2. These death records, known as *Necrologi*, exist for the years 1537-1805, noting not only death tolls, but by the seventeenth century, causes of death, treatments the patients had received and by which doctors, and length of time the person was ill before dying, if illness was the cause of death. Venice's population during the early modern period was also extensively studied by Daniele Beltrami, *Storia della popolazione di Venezia dalla fine del secolo XVI alla caduta della Repubblica*, (Padua: CEDAM), 1954.

motivations for compiling these death records, foremost was the early detection of any impending epidemic that could threaten the city. From the government's perspective, it was crucial that parish priests make special note of any deaths that seemed "suspicious" — those that occurred rapidly after the first onset of symptoms, or that exhibited symptoms associated with plague. After 1563, any deaths that occurred less than four days after the victim fell ill necessitated investigation by a State doctor, a *protomedico*, who would perform an inspection of the corpse to assess the likelihood of plague as cause of death.¹⁰⁰ Priests were prohibited from burying any bodies that had not received an official burial license issued by the State, and priests not following protocols could be fined for their infractions.¹⁰¹ In this way, the Venetian government kept close watch on the potential development of infectious diseases in the city, pairing the efforts of its Health Board with the roles of priests, who had traditionally attended to the welfare of their parishioners. Alexandra Bamji's detailed work with these death registers, the *Necrologi*, reveals the great importance that the State placed on these daily reports. Though the 1630-31 plague epidemic was the last to hit Venice, cities in central and southern Italy were devastated by a violent outbreak between the years of 1656-57. Bamji noted a tremendous increase in the number of deaths in Venice that were inspected by *protomedici* in 1656-57.¹⁰² Though plague never reached the city, and all bodies inspected were declared plague-free, the resulting documentation of the upswing in corpse evaluations shows that the priests' daily reports were not perfunctory, but vital tools that were assessed carefully by the State.

Not all of Venice's inhabitants were under the jurisdiction of parish priests, however. The city was home to a relatively large population of Jews who resided in the Ghetto, in the

¹⁰⁰ Bamji, "Medical Care," 2.

¹⁰¹ ASV, *Sanità*, reg. 794, cited in Palmer, *The Control of Plague*, 139, and Bamji, "Medical Care," 2.

¹⁰² Bamji, "Medical Care," 5.

northwestern *sestiere* of Cannaregio. In 1516, the same year in which the Senate voted to restrict Jewish residents to the Ghetto, the State mandated that leaders in the Jewish community monitor and record all deaths among its members and report these daily to the Health Office, in a manner similar to what was required of parish priests.¹⁰³ By the seventeenth century, Jews also maintained their own health register, kept in the Ghetto, which duplicated the information sent to the *Sanità*.¹⁰⁴ Jewish physicians' ability to practice medicine in early modern Venice was a contested issue. During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, Jewish doctors were alternately permitted to, and prohibited from, treating Christians, according to successive contradictory Papal decrees. Notable is the case of the well-respected Jewish physician David de Pomis, who petitioned Pope Sixtus V in 1589 to restore his license to treat Christian patients by appealing to the superlative care he gave gentiles during the plague of 1575-77, citing that a physician is required to offer help to all those who require it, regardless of religion.¹⁰⁵

During this time, the Jewish community in the Ghetto was served by a number of physicians and surgeons registered with the State, some of whom did treat Christian patients on occasion, particularly during the plague epidemics of 1575-77 and 1630-31. In fact, honorable care of Christians during times of plague was routinely given as evidence for restoring Jewish doctors' prerogative to treat non-Jews outside of epidemics. David Valenzo, who followed the earlier example of David de Pomis, cited his extensive treatment of Christians suffering from plague in 1630-31 as grounds for the Health Office to allow him to practice medicine again

¹⁰³ Bamji, "Medical Care," 16.

¹⁰⁴ Bamji, "Medical Care," 16.

¹⁰⁵ De Pomis's defense of Jewish practitioners' right to work with Christians, *De Medico Hebraeo Enarratio Apologica*, was published in Venice in 1588. Cited in Bamji, "Medical Care," 9.

outside of patient groups defined by their Jewish identity.¹⁰⁶ Though *Sanità* records regarding deaths in the Ghetto and treatment by Jewish physicians are few in comparison to the documents compiled from parish priests' reports, the existence of these records from the Ghetto represents the State's effort to be rigorous in its plague controls, while indicating certain jurisdictional limitations on the authority of the board. Toward the end of the plague epidemic, in August 1631, the Health Office implemented additional death registers that would record non-Christian deaths in a separate ledger, and which was divided into two main categories of Jews and Turks.¹⁰⁷ These categories into which the population was divided, defined by an admixture of religion and ethnic background, were also apparent in the *lazzaretti* — Jews, Turks, and Christians, as well as the materials owned by the members of these groups, were isolated separately in the plague hospitals, as much as space would allow.¹⁰⁸ “Turk” was a complicated and loaded term for categorizing ethnic identity during the later early modern period. It was applied imprecisely in Venice to a variety of people from the Levant, though at its foundation, it implied followers of Islam. In the seventeenth century, use of this term of “othering” took on increasing significance in the Venetian lexicon when the city was engaged in the War of Candia for more than twenty years. This preoccupation with “the Turk” as a threat to Venetian sovereignty shows up throughout the culture of Venice in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. This phenomenon will be addressed further in the dissertation in Chapter 3, on the *lazzaretti*, and in Chapter 5 on popular themes in Venetian opera during this period.

¹⁰⁶ Bamji, “Medical Care,” 10. For more on Jews during the 1630-31 plague epidemic in Venice, see Carla Boccato, “La mortalità nel Ghetto in Venezia durante la peste del 1630,” *Archivio Veneto*, 5th series, 140 (1993), 111-146.

¹⁰⁷ Bamji, “Medical Care,” 16.

¹⁰⁸ Crawshaw, *Plague Hospitals*, 97. ASV, *Sanità* reg. 3, 88v, December 6, 1609, notes the division of merchants, as well as their goods, according to which of the three categories they fit.

Plague epidemics in early modern Italy frequently involved an intensification of suspicions aimed at marginalized groups and were marked by xenophobic impulses that resulted in the persecution of populations already denigrated by society. Ann Carmichael's work has outlined notable examples in which women, the itinerant poor and beggars, a variety of foreigners, and most especially Jews, became scapegoats for the importation of plague into a city throughout this period.¹⁰⁹ Origin myths for outbreaks developed with disturbingly consistent patterns: plague was brought into the city by someone "other," often through what was assumed to be their patent ignorance or uncleanness, but sometimes kindled and spread intentionally by the terrorizing "plague spreaders," or *untori*, who were accused of anointing public locations in a city with infectious materials that were intended to spark an epidemic.¹¹⁰ The most famous episode of *untori* on trial for intentional spreading of plague took place in Milan during the 1628-30 outbreak, in which three men were executed for their reputed manufacture and dispersal of plague-infected ointment.¹¹¹ Venice was not gripped by the public spectacle of a witch-hunt for plague spreaders in 1630, nor during any other epidemic of *la peste*, though occasional accusations of this nature arose, which were perfunctorily examined and dismissed by the government.¹¹² Greater fears in Venice centered on the spread of plague by the *pizzigamorti*, who

¹⁰⁹ Ann G. Carmichael, "The Last Past Plague: The Uses of Memory in Renaissance Epidemics," *Journal of the History of Medicine*, v.53, (April 1998), 132-160.

¹¹⁰ For more on "othering" related to the transmission of infectious disease, see Samuel K. Cohn, "Pandemics: Waves of Disease, Waves of Hate from the Plague of Athens to AIDS," *Historical Research*, v. 85, n.230 (November 2012), 535-555; and Duane J. Osheim, "Plague and Foreign Threats to Public Health in Early Modern Venice," *Mediterranean Historical Review*, v. 26, n.1, 67-80.

¹¹¹ Carmichael, "Last Past Plague," 146-9. See also, Romano Canosa, *Tempo di peste: magistrato ed untori nel 1630 a Milano*, (Rome: Sapere 2000), 1985; Giuseppe Farinelli and Ermanno Paccagnini, *Processo agli untori: Milano 1630*, (Milan: Garzanti), 1988; William G. Naphy, *Plagues, Poisons, and Potions: Plague-spreading Conspiracies in the Western Alps, c.1530-1640*, (New York: Palgrave), 2002; Giulia Calvi, *Storie di un anno di peste*, (Milan: Bompiani), 1984; and Paolo Preto, *Epidemia, paura, e politica nell'Italia moderna*, (Rome: Laterza), 1987.

¹¹² Alexandra Bamji, "The Control of Space: Dealing with Diversity in Early Modern Venice," *Italian Studies*, v. 62, n. 2 (Autumn 2007), 181-2; Paolo Preto, "Le grandi pesti dell'età moderna: 1575-77 e 1630-31," in *Venezia e la peste*, 125-6, 145-6.

were believed to be immune to the disease (some of those who contracted plague and lived may indeed have been), and keen to turn a profit selling the clothes and personal items stolen from the houses of the stricken, regardless of laws prohibiting this. Despite the Venetian government's skepticism toward the issue of plague anointers, however, Venetian legislation during plague epidemics and in periods of relative health did promote the division of marginal groups and other "non-Venetians" through their general clustering into distinct areas in the city, apart from other populations. The most notable example are Jews, whose restriction to the Ghetto was the most rigorously regulated and enforced, though this trend is also demonstrated by the organized grouping of prostitutes, shipyard workers, Turks and others from the Levant, Orthodox Greeks, and German merchants. In paintings representing episodes from the 1630-31 plague in Venice, the portrayals of marginalized "others" do not play a significant role. Differences in race, ethnicity, religion, and social status were considered part of the structured, hierarchic order to society and were not influential on the development of seicento narratives of plague, with the bold exception of the *pizzigamorti* who became emblems of the 1630-31 tragedy. These sanitation workers are depicted with a combination of fascination and ambivalence, as both dangerous to the city and essential to its continued functioning during major epidemics. They came to symbolize the Health Office's strictest and most feared laws put into practice in the city — embodiments of the social upheaval caused by plague.

When plague descended on Venice in 1630, it was experienced by a diverse city with a deep, established history with the disease. Despite the high death toll, surpassing the loss of over 46,000 lives, and the widespread disruptions caused by this outbreak, Venice was indeed prepared for the crisis, as much as could be expected. The city mobilized its extensive and varied resources against plague, resulting in a collective pushback against the disease by

government offices and civic leaders, and by medical and religious communities. The following chapter will examine closely the city's two lazaretti — arguably the Venetian State's most powerful tools in preventing and stopping plague's progress. They were sites that buzzed with activity during major epidemics and even outside of them, looming in public consciousness and shaping early modern attitudes toward disease control as the State's prerogative. An examination of the role played by the architectural design and special organization of these plague hospitals, as well as the few sculptural and painted works of art that survive, further enhances our understanding of the visual culture of plague in sixteenth-century Venice.

CHAPTER 3

Venetian lazzaretti

Introduction

To approach by boat the two islands that were home to Venice's plague hospitals in the early modern period, segregated from the city center at the margins of the lagoon, was to encounter imposing sites that communicated, at a glance, the power of the Venetian State to isolate and control inhabitants there [Figures 3.1-3.4]. Brick walls that rose as high as twelve feet in some locations ringed each island. They deterred entry to the hospitals not only through their insurmountable height, but through the implication that these walls were mainly designed to keep residents of the islands within, many of whom were transported there and detained against their wills. Guards stood sentry at points along the perimeters. Within these walls were contained highly organized machines of the State — institutionalized urban centers at a remove, populated by a hierarchy of service and health care workers. At each island, large wards with high windows and enclosed courtyards stood ready to receive patients. These wards were cavernous during times of wellness, but teeming and overfull during massive outbreaks like that of 1630-31 [Figure 3.5]. Those arriving to the islands during an epidemic of plague would see numerous boats of all sizes and types docked around the lazzaretti — importing supplies, shuttling patients, and anchored as mobile quarantine sites. They would see and smell smoke rising into the air from fires burning to disperse the miasma and destroy infected materials, and hear the sounds of

thousands of Venetian residents and detained travelers to the city, well and ill, inhabiting this microcosm. Before even entering the towering walls of the lazaretto and being processed through the institution, new arrivals would witness at a distance the power and capability of Venice's plague hospitals.

Venice's two lazaretti were the most rigorously maintained defense against plague in the city. They were devoted exclusively to treating plague victims, holding in quarantine those suspected of incubating the illness, and disinfecting material goods. The city's well-ordered government, which was composed of a network of bureaucracies supported by the Republic's substantial wealth, provided Venice with the means to develop these critical institutions and run them efficiently for over three hundred years. The lazaretti were maintained by the administrators of the Health Office (*Sanità*) and operated on a fulltime basis — during the worst epidemics and in times of relative health. When not actively treating the plague-stricken and cleaning contaminated materials during outbreaks, the lazaretti functioned as important sites for preventing plague's appearance in the city through the processing of ships' cargoes and travelers who may have been harboring the disease. In a sense, they were buffers that created a safe zone of protection between the city center and the world beyond. As such, the lazaretti were part of the everyday life of people in early modern Venice, whether through the lived experience of having been processed personally through these powerful machines of the *Sanità*, through employment within the walled structures, or simply by way of recognizing the lazaretti as one of the State's many means of maintaining order in the city.

Two early modern writers' observations on Venice's plague hospitals provide telling glimpses of the ambivalence these institutions inspired — situated, as they were, at a distance from the city, isolated on two lagoon islands, but ever present in association with the plague.

Written accounts of the lazzaretti by Francesco Sansovino and Rocco Benedetti each describe with vivid language what life was like for detainees in these hospitals. These are the most extensive early modern sources of information on the lazzaretti, which historians working on plague in Venice have frequently analyzed and compared, including most recently Jane Crawshaw in her book on the subject.¹ In his notation on the lazzaretti in *Venetia città nobilissima et singolare* (1581), Sansovino praises the hospitals for their spaciousness, cleanliness, and the exemplary care given to the ill sequestered there.² He speaks only briefly on the Vecchio, but becomes expansive on the Nuovo, claiming to have stayed there when his wife and daughter were stricken with plague in 1577. Sansovino praises the Nuovo as an exemplar of civic and Christian piety, as a place where the city's residents could depend on plentiful food and compassionate care by workers at the hospital, all at the generous expense of the State. The poor, who made up the majority of the occupants there, were treated equally to the residents from the nobility and citizen class. Sansovino describes a camaraderie between inmates at the Nuovo, whom he claims were greeted with warm welcome at their first arrival on the island by those already serving quarantine there, all filled with happiness to find themselves in a place where they did not have to work.³

Sansovino's account, while perhaps encouraging to readers, both local and from outside of Venice, curious about the city's innovative lazzaretti, seems unduly optimistic. The writer's aim, of course, was to celebrate Venice's splendors and distinctive features, which precluded

¹ For Crawshaw's work with these sources and examination of metaphors used to describe the lazzaretti, see Jane Crawshaw, *Plague Hospitals: Public Health for the City in Early Modern Venice*, (Farnham: Ashgate, 2012), 43-54. Sansovino's passage is treated also in *Venezia e la peste*, 133.

² Francesco Sansovino, *Venetia città nobilissima et singolare*, Book 5, "Santa Croce," (Venice: Jacopo Sansovino, 1581), 84-86.

³ Sansovino, *Venetia città nobilissima et singolare*, 233. "...le quali tutte erano accettate & salutate con lieto applauso, & con allegrezza di ogn'uno, protestando a veggenti che stessero di buono animo, perche non vi si lavorana..."

detailing the grittier aspects of plague conditions and management. In contrast, Rocco Benedetti, a notary in the city who also lived through the plague of 1575-77, used metaphors of a different tone when describing the lazaretti in his extended treatment of this epidemic, published first in 1577 and then reissued during the 1630 outbreak: Hell, at their worst, Purgatory at their best.⁴ Benedetti describes his knowledge of the Lazzaretto Vecchio in graphic terms that overwhelm the senses — the screams of the stricken, who were delirious and frenzied, breaking free of their confines and running terrorized through the hospital; the stench of putrescent bodies and burning corpses producing dark clouds surrounding the island; and the inhumanity of the *pizzigamorti* who carelessly tossed the dead and the near-dead together for burial.⁵ The Lazzaretto Nuovo was mere Purgatory by comparison, without the infernal horrors found at the Vecchio, but fraught by overcrowding and disorganization, and populated with the depressed, the dejected, and the desperate. Both of these accounts, Sansovino's and Benedetti's, represent the lazaretti with certain rhetorical biases that likely did have some basis in reality, though they have been embellished to represent the extremes at either end. In truth, Venice's lazaretti encompassed something of both of these conflicting accounts, and were moreover institutions that functioned continuously from their inception in the fifteenth century, providing different services and filling different needs throughout their long history in the city. In conditions mundane and catastrophic, and in all states in between, the plague hospitals shaped life in the city and were a part of public consciousness.

⁴ Rocco Benedetti, *Relatione d'alcuni casi occorsi in Venetia al tempo della peste l'anno 1576 e 1577 con le provisioni, rimedii, et orationi fatte à dio Benedetti per la sua liberatione*, (Bologna: Carlo Malisardi, 1630). A portion of this account is transcribed in *Venice: a Documentary History*, eds. David Chambers and Brian Pullan, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001), 117-19. See also *Venezia e la peste*, 127

⁵ Pullan, 117-19.

This chapter opens by tracing the development of Venice's *lazzaretti*, the responsibilities of the varied employees who worked there, and the manner in which the hospitals operated during times of plague. This detailed account complements the description of plague conditions and management in the city of Venice presented in the proceeding chapter and offers useful insight into how the extraordinary measures that were taken to contain contagion shaped the built environment and material culture of the *lazzaretti*. An historiographic perspective is also provided, calling attention to the important recent scholarship by Italian and British historians who have examined *Sanità* records extensively, as well as archaeologists who began excavating and conserving the deteriorating structures at the *lazzaretto* islands in the past twenty years, making significant contributions to our understanding of how these hospitals worked.⁶ In providing an overview of the recent work on the *lazzaretti*, the first half of this chapter establishes a foundation that will ground my analysis of the function of visual art at these sites during the early modern period. While scholars have studied the architecture and spatial layout of the islands, little attention has been devoted to the visual culture at the *lazzaretti* — the works of art and material culture and the experience of the built environment that shaped the daily lives of patients, doctors, and administrative staff at the islands. The reason for this gap in scholarship is the disappearance of much of this material, and thus the difficulty in recovering information about its usage at the *lazzaretti*. The islands have changed substantially since the State's decommissioning of the hospitals in the late eighteenth century, with many structures having been demolished or deteriorated in the passage of time. The majority of the few works of art that are mentioned in textual sources are no longer extant. What remain are two relief sculptures that once were placed in prominent locations on the *Lazzaretto Vecchio*, multiple layers of graffiti

⁶ In particular, see the work of Nelli-Elena Vanzan Marchini, Gerolamo Fazzini, Paolo Preto, Richard Palmer, Jane L. Crawshaw, and Alexandra Bamji.

painted and scratched on the walls of the wards at both islands, and several damaged frescoes located in various structures at the Lazzaretto Vecchio, which will each be evaluated.

The goal of this chapter is to establish a context and to lay a foundation, to the extent possible, for considering the visual art and culture of the lazaretti, based on textual evidence, as well as what is currently in situ. Given the critical importance of the lazaretti within the Venetian experience of plague, I seek to recover a sense of how works of art and material culture would have functioned, particularly during the seventeenth century and in relation to the 1630-31 plague epidemic. Visual art at the lazaretti was shaped, and in fact, limited, by circumstances that were distinct to the hospital islands and not experienced elsewhere in the city. Furthermore, plague imagery at the lazaretti emphasized the critical role of sacred intercessors and plague healers, like saints Roch and Sebastian, who were ubiquitous in plague art in the city and throughout the region. However, at Venice's plague hospitals, works of art also emphasized particularly the protective and administrative capacity of the Venetian State, to an even greater degree than what was seen in the city's urban center. This phenomenon will be examined later in this chapter.

The material culture of the plague hospitals should be evaluated with respect to whether it was created during an epidemic or in a time of general wellness in the city, as this will have had a fundamental impact on its commission and intended usage. Major outbreaks of plague made it extremely difficult, if not impossible, for artists to have access to the lazaretti — to bring in the necessary materials for on-site works like frescoes, or to have brought to the islands more moveable works like sculptures and smaller-scale paintings. In fact, there is little evidence to suggest that the commission of substantial works of art was frequent at the islands. The visual materials that appear to have been most prevalent, found in the wards, living spaces, and

administrative areas, fall into a number of general categories. In light of the fundamental roles of votive petition and of sacred intercession in relation to plague, it is not surprising that the altars in the two churches located on the islands were adorned with paintings, sculpture, and liturgical furnishings, now known only through scant textual sources. These works were probably commissioned in the aftermath of epidemics by patients and administrators. There were also commemorative works commissioned for various prominent sites in the lazzaretti by members of the administration to praise the efficacy of the institutions and acknowledge the roles of those funding the operations (typically produced outside of epidemics). There were frescoes that served religious and decorative functions in the interior of the prior's home and in the wards reserved for the more economically privileged patients (again, commissioned during periods of wellness). And finally, patients and detainees created more modest votives and graffiti drawings onsite in the wards during epidemics, with the limited means at hand.

In analyzing what can be pieced together of the visual culture at the lazzaretto islands, this chapter offers preliminary work on the fundamental differences shaping art production in the plague hospitals, distinct from votive action and patronage in churches and confraternities in the city center. Across media, visual art at the lazzaretti was defined by the limitations imposed by the isolated location of the plague hospitals and the restrictions that cut them off from access to typical resources and procedures. In this way, the lazzaretti environment had a profound impact on the incidence and appearance of visual art on the premises. The environment put constraints on the materials and scope of works produced during plague epidemics, though not entirely shuttering production, and encouraged the more lavish retrospective and commemorative offerings in the commissions of the administrators required to reside on the islands.

Foundation of the lazaretti

The lazaretti were impressive institutions. Richard Palmer, whose unpublished dissertation on plague controls in Venice and northern Italy from 1348-1600 remains one of the most rigorously researched works on the topic, characterizes Venice's system of plague hospitals as unequalled anywhere on the continent by the seventeenth century, though their initial framework for operations was inspired by innovative measures against plague developed earlier in Milan, in the fifteenth century.⁷ Milan was one of the first cities in early modern Europe to develop stringent quarantine practices, within the city and through limiting or banning trade with other cities that were reputed to harbor cases of plague. Early separation of the sick from the well during an outbreak was considered critical to preventing the spread of *la peste*. These fifteenth-century measures are evidence of changing conceptions of the disease, in which it was increasingly treated as contagious and not solely the result of divine wrath or miasmatic air.

In protecting itself against plague, Venice had a geographical advantage. Being composed of multiple interconnected islands surrounded by the waters of the lagoon allowed the city to isolate more effectively groups of people and material goods. Long before the establishment of the lazaretti in the fifteenth century, Venetians had taken advantage of their unique geography, relegating dangerous or unsanitary activities to islands at a distance from the central city cluster. Tanneries were located on the Giudecca, and Venice's famed glass production was restricted to Murano, where potential fires or explosions from the furnaces would not reach the urban center. In an interesting reversal of this practice of isolation on remote islands, Torcello, which was the earliest settled island in the lagoon, was depopulated in favor of development in the Rialto area in the thirteenth century because the marshy waters surrounding

⁷ Richard Palmer, *The Control of Plague in Venice and Northern Italy, 1348-1600*, PhD dissertation, (University of Kent at Canterbury, 1978), 190-5; Ann Carmichael, "Contagion Theory and Contagion Practice in Fifteenth-Century Milan," *Renaissance Quarterly*, v. 44, n.2 (Summer 1991), 213-256.

Torcello fostered high rates of malaria and other mosquito-borne illnesses.⁸ Venice had a history of keeping unhealthy conditions at arm's length, and so the foundation of the city's first plague hospital under Doge Francesco Foscari in 1423, the Lazzaretto Vecchio, was only the most recent permutation of promoting public health through the isolation of threats on distant islands. The Lazzaretto Vecchio was established on an island near to the Lido, where the Eremite monastery, Santa Maria di Nazareth, already stood [Figures 3.6, 3.7].⁹ The preexisting structures were used, so while Venice's move to create a permanently operating plague hospital was at the forefront of epidemic prevention, the architecture was not purpose-built, as were later lazaretti constructed in on the mainland in Padua and Verona.¹⁰ Later additions were constructed at the Lazzaretto Vecchio over the roughly three centuries in which it was used, dictated by need. However, the layout of the core monastic buildings extant at the foundation of the hospital largely determined the division of space on the island.

It is evident that the Venetian government valued this new institution and was eager to expand its system of quarantine, as the Senate voted to establish another lazaretto in 1468, only 45 years after the Lazzaretto Vecchio began operating. The Lazzaretto Nuovo was founded on an island northeast of the city, near to the agricultural island Sant'Erasmus [Figures 3.8, 3.9]. Similar to the Lazzaretto Vecchio, the Nuovo was established on an island that had previously housed a monastery, in this case, that of the Benedictine monks of San Giorgio Maggiore who

⁸ Elizabeth Crouzet-Pavan, "Venice and Torcello: History and Oblivion," *Renaissance Studies*, v. 8, n. 4 (1994), 416-27.

⁹ Palmer, 186.

¹⁰ Though these plague hospitals were constructed specifically to segregate and treat victims of the disease, they too developed over the early modern period, undergoing new additions and adaptations to the structures to meet needs and changing concepts of the disease. The most notable example is the addition of central, circular chapels to many in the seventeenth century, which Jane Crawshaw attributes to Counter-Reformation initiatives to increase the spiritual component of plague treatments. See, Crawshaw, *Plague Hospitals*, 24, 74-6. On the development of lazaretto architecture in mainland Italy, see Palmer, *Control of Plague*, 187. Bergamo, Vicenza, and Brescia were purpose-built structures, as well.

maintained the church of San Bartolomeo at the site. While the preexisting monastery was co-opted for use by the new plague hospital, construction at the Lazzaretto Nuovo was ongoing in the early modern period, with the most notable result being the vast warehouse, the *tezon grande*, built in 1561 to hold and decontaminate cargo from quarantined ships [Figure 3.10]. While the Lazzaretto Vecchio's primary purpose was to isolate victims of the plague from the uninfected, the State quickly understood that determining who or what was likely to harbor the disease was not clear cut. There existed a critical need for an additional site at which to monitor suspected cases, such as family members who had resided with victims of the plague, and to disinfect objects that may have become contaminated through close proximity to the stricken. The Lazzaretto Nuovo, therefore, provided the State with the resources to differentiate between levels of contagion and further divide the population according to perceived levels of exposure and contamination. Richard Palmer has shown that even the Lazzaretto Nuovo itself was subdivided into four areas of separation that corresponded to levels of potential infectiousness. Quarantine typically lasted forty days (though this could vary), and each unit at the Nuovo was designed to hold detainees for ten days. As the proscribed time elapsed and residents in an area showed no signs of disease, they were considered less likely to harbor plague and moved up to a "safer" unit; if any resident developed signs of plague, he or she was shipped to the Lazzaretto Vecchio, and all those housed with him or her began the process of quarantine again, at the unit of highest contamination.¹¹

By the mid-sixteenth century, the Lazzaretto Nuovo was also used to house patients who had recovered from the plague in the Lazzaretto Vecchio. The Venetian government was cautious about re-introducing potentially infectious people into the city, and the need for beds at

¹¹ Palmer, 190.

the Vecchio during major epidemics prompted hospital workers to move out convalescing patients as soon as possible to create space for new ones. The Lazzaretto Nuovo became the practical solution for accommodating these liminal cases. In addition, the State was obligated to process a virtually unmanageable amount of material goods during outbreaks of plague, and both hospital islands were crucial for this. Cargo from ships that held a confirmed or suspected case of plague, or that had sailed from ports in which the disease was present, were required to be held in quarantine before entering the city, and in some cases, the materials on board were rigorously disinfected. The Venetian State also took responsibility for sanitizing the household items in the homes of people who had been placed in the lazaretti. While those objects believed to be most contaminated through direct contact with active cases of plague were often burned, many household goods were cleaned through a variety of methods.¹²

By the 1630-31 epidemic, the *Sanità* had developed a precise and extensive set of instructions for how to decontaminate material goods, based upon their physical make up, their perceived level of contamination, and their monetary value.¹³ Not all objects were believed to harbor and transmit plague equally. Fabrics and other textiles for clothing construction, such as wool, linen, silk, fur, and feathers, were thought to carry the highest risk of contagion, and were prioritized in the disinfecting process.¹⁴ Other goods, including spices, food items that were not packaged in cloth, medicines, wood, metal, and paper, were felt to pose little risk, and were not routinely taken to the lazaretti.¹⁵ To a large extent, the natural environment was used in the

¹² For a printed proclamation from 1631, related to cleaning procedures, see, Biblioteca Museo Correr, manuscript Donà Dalle Rose, n. 181,f.35, cited in *Venezia e la peste*, cat. s142, p. 142; Palmer, *Control of Plague*, 200-204.

¹³ Crawshaw, *Plague Hospitals*, 213.

¹⁴ Palmer, 200; Crawshaw, 211.

¹⁵ Palmer, 200; Crawshaw, 211-12. For information on the spices that were routinely imported for use in treatments for the plague in Venice, see Ugo Tucci, "Farmacie e aroma nel commercio veneziano delle spezie," in *Rotte mediterranee e baluardi di sanità: Venezia e i lazaretti mediterranei*, ed. Nelli-Elena Vanzan Marchini, (Milan:

disinfection process. It is clear that what was critical in decontaminating materials was movement and changes of state concerning these items. Placing objects outside allowed the movement of air across their surfaces and exposure to the sun's rays. Bundles of textiles and other soft items required specialized cleaners working at the Lazzaretto Nuovo, known as *smorbadori*, to reach into the heaps twice daily to turn the materials, allowing their pockets of bad air to be released.¹⁶ Running water and boiling water were also utilized as methods of disinfection, which again, emphasize movement across a surface, as well as change in temperature. Abrading objects with sand, or sifting the grains around them, was a viable, water-free method of removing diseased particles from more delicate objects.¹⁷ The *Sanità* also recommended the use of noxious and harsh substances, such as lye, pitch, sulfur, laurel and juniper berries, and myrrh, to disinfect goods, particularly contaminated textiles, during the 1630-31 plague epidemic, a practice revived from the earlier 1575-77 outbreak.¹⁸ The air inside homes and other interior spaces was disinfected through the use of aromatics and burning substances that would release thick smoke, filling a building and driving out diseased particulate in the air.¹⁹ However, in spite of the multiple methods of cleansing available, a large quantity of

Skira, 2004), 95-111. Theriac was a medieval panacea – a combination of many herbs and ingredients that was used to heal a variety of maladies, including plague, up through the early modern period. Venice was a prime site for the importation of high-quality theriac. See, Christiane Nockels Fabbri, “Treating Medieval Plague: the Wonderful Virtues of Theriac,” *Early Science and Medicine*, v.12, n.3 (2007), 247-83. For illustrations of Venice's Arsenal workers' (*facchini*) involvement in the grinding of the components for theriac, see the watercolor illustrations of Giovanni Grevenbroch's *Gli abiti dei veneziani di quasi ogni età con diligenza raccolti e dipinti nel sec. XVIII*, in the holdings of the Museo Correr and reproduced in *Venezia e la Peste*, 152-3.

¹⁶ Crawshaw, *Plague Hospitals*, 212.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 214. For more on the *Sanità* guidelines for decontaminating material goods — methods and length of cleaning, according to material construction, see Nelli-Elena Vanzan Marchini, *Venezia e i lazzaretti mediterranei*, (Venice: Edizioni della Laguna, 2004), 39-40.

¹⁸ *Venezia e la peste*, 142.

¹⁹ Crawshaw, *Plague Hospitals*, 153, 214-15. The Venetian doctor Girolamo Thebaldi, who offered suggestions on various medicines for plague victims and how to disinfect the lazzaretti during the 1630-31 epidemic advised the burning of aromatics as an effective means of cleaning diseased air. Ambroise Paré, the French royal surgeon whose widely published and translated 1568 treatise on the treatment of plague and other infectious diseases, *Traité*

personal possessions and goods were simply burned, which was the easiest and most efficient way of dealing with contaminated objects.²⁰ The downside to this practice, however, was the great cost to the State; the Senate required compensation, at least in part, to people whose personal items were destroyed while they were sequestered in the *lazzaretti* or through the disinfection of their homes.²¹

These mandated procedures required a tremendous amount of space, manpower, and money necessary to transport the furniture and goods taken from the homes of the plague-stricken, document and treat these materials, and restore them to their owners (permitting they survived the epidemic), and to compensate those whose possessions were destroyed. Jane Crawshaw's extensive archival work on the processing of material goods at the *lazzaretti* details this complicated dimension of these operations. Though seventeenth-century Health Office documents record the substantial cost for decontamination and compensation, it is unclear how consistently these accommodations were made across the social spectrum of Venice's inhabitants; it is likely that the patriarchy and high-ranking *cittadini* fared better in this system than those on the lower social rungs.²² However, beginning in 1575, the State expected citizens above a determined income threshold to pay back the cost of clothing or beds given to them if theirs had been destroyed in the *lazzaretti* or were still held in quarantine; poorer patients were not

de la peste, de la petite vérole e de la rougeole avec un brève description de la lèpre, also advised cleaning the air as an effective means of stopping the spread of plague.

²⁰ Crawshaw, *Plague Hospitals*, 216.

²¹ Crawshaw, *Plague Hospitals*, 216-17. Extensive records related to the Health Office's processing of a vast amount of objects and goods during epidemics exists, which Crawshaw has examined closely.

²² Crawshaw has traced the development of new posts at the Lazzaretto Nuovo to accommodate the overwhelming amount of material goods to be processed at the site: an auditor to keep track of merchants' goods in 1601, and the *soprintendente sopra i lazzaretti* who were appointed in 1617 and who oversaw the movement of material goods at the hospitals. *Archivio di Stato di Venezia*, Sanità, reg. 3 102r, September 11, 1617.

required to repay the charity.²³ Conversely, the State was also saddled with a large amount of abandoned goods left in the lazzaretti, after epidemics subsided, by patients who had perished and whose surviving family members did not claim their personal items. Health Office documents from 1644 give evidence of the State's grappling with unclaimed blankets and mattresses remaining at the Lazzaretto Nuovo from the 1630-31 epidemic, which were not valuable enough for resale and were therefore donated to the city's standard hospitals.²⁴ The lazzaretti and their adjacent islands, therefore, were indispensable as locations for holding and processing veritable mountains of household goods in 1630-31, as well as sites for the operation of an elaborate bureaucracy devoted to the reintegration of Venice's inhabitants into the city.

Lazzaretti management and architectural layout

Though each lazzaretto specialized in related but different aspects of the quarantine process, they shared architectural similarities and were run by a parallel hierarchy of employees. Each lazzaretto was overseen by a prior and a prioress, who were often married, and were secular employees of the State. The prior's responsibilities included overseeing the daily care of the patients, ensuring that hospital employees performed their designated duties, managing the purchase of food and supplies, and calculating and distributing employees' salaries. Priors were in charge of keeping the keys to all of the buildings and storage areas for patients' possessions, supplies, and documents on the island in order to prevent theft, a responsibility sometimes shared with other staff members in positions of authority, such as doctors and chaplains.²⁵ While they

²³ Crawshaw, *Plague Hospitals*, 208. ASV, *Secreta* MMN 12v, April 9, 1576.

²⁴ ASV, *Sanità*, 740 22v, March 7, 1644. Cited in Crawshaw, *Plague Hospitals*, 221-2. For more on the operations of Venice's four other hospitals from the early modern period to the twentieth century, see Nelli-Elena Vanzan Marchini, *La memoria della salute: Venezia e il suo ospedale dal XVI al XX*, (Venice: Arsenale), 1985.

²⁵ Crawshaw, 116.

did not engage directly with the patients, priors managed all the most critical functioning of the hospitals. Priors also supervised bookkeeping, which involved the recording of income and expenditures, the number of patients in residence, and daily death tolls for the lazaretto. Priors were aided in these multifarious tasks by at least one assistant. Prioresses, who had sometimes managed the care of female patients early in the establishment of the lazaretti during the fifteenth century, appear to have had few documented responsibilities by the seventeenth century, though it would be misleading to assume their role was minimal. The work of the prioress is largely undocumented. Prioresses likely worked in myriad capacities maintaining order in the lazaretti, which is supported by the fact that they, too, were assigned assistants.²⁶ Priors and prioresses lived on the lazaretto islands, receiving the benefit of lodging in the house reserved for the post, in addition to their salaries. The position paid reasonably well — 120 ducats at the Lazzaretto Vecchio during the sixteenth century — and it appears that the job of prior was relatively sought-after among the citizen class, for the salary and associated prestige.²⁷ Considerable drawbacks, however, were the isolation, as the prior and his wife were not allowed to leave the island during epidemics without stated permission from the Health Office, and the high risk of death; during the 1575-77 outbreak, six priors worked between the two lazaretti, and three of them died of plague.²⁸

Beneath the prior and prioress, Venetian lazaretti were also staffed by at least one doctor, a barber-surgeon, a chaplain, multiple nurses, and various domestic employees such as cooks, laundresses, aides, and cleaners.²⁹ These employees worked directly with the patients, or

²⁶ Crawshaw, 116; Palmer, 184.

²⁷ Crawshaw, *Plague Hospitals*, 117.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 116. In circumstances in which the prior died, a new prior and prioress pair were selected to the post by *Sanità* officials. In event of the death of a prioress, another would be appointed to serve beside the current prior.

²⁹ Palmer, 184. For comparative material on the complex team of staff at Padua's lazaretto, see Crawshaw, 114.

indirectly in capacities related to their care or the maintenance of the facilities. By the late sixteenth century, as the *lazzaretti* became increasingly associated with trade and the disinfection of material goods, considerable numbers of workers employed by the State to transport, document, and sanitize cargos and household objects were also present on the islands. Occupying the islands were also the *pizzigamorti*, or body clearers. These Health Office employees performed the critical job of transporting the sick to the *lazzaretti*, moving patients between the islands as their conditions changed, and removing the bodies of victims for burial on the Lido, though mass graves existed on both *lazzaretto* islands as well. The *pizzigamorti*, who will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 5, are fascinating for a number of reasons, particularly their unusual mobility in the city during outbreaks of plague. Priors were sequestered on the *lazzaretti* islands during epidemics; neighborhoods in the city could be locked down in quarantine, and residents could be barred from their homes until receiving permission to re-enter from the State; and entire ships' crews were often forced to remain on board, with their vessels moored in the harbor. Yet *pizzigamorti* were free to enter homes, cross sanitation lines, and move unrestricted between the quarantined islands and the city center because of the nature of their jobs.

Though the plague hospitals were sites of division and isolation, they were also dynamic places that served as foci for Venice's varied measures taken against plague. Doctors, surgeons, and nurses administered medicines and treated patients' bodies, while chaplains oversaw their spiritual health through performing Mass and Last Rights, and offering counsel. In addition to those who cared directly for plague victims, the *lazzaretti* buzzed with a veritable army of State employees who specialized in cleaning, body removal, and broad-spectrum disinfection. Care was also specialized in the plague hospitals for patients with special needs, such as orphaned

infants and young children who were attended by wet nurses and other women who worked to keep them as comforted and clean as the arduous conditions would allow.³⁰ Armed guards were also stationed at both lazaretti, to ensure that those sequestered did not escape, and to protect against the theft of merchandise held in quarantine.³¹

It is difficult to get a sense of the exact number of patients held in the plague hospitals during the 1630-31 epidemic, as records are no longer extant, but an interesting picture emerges by comparing the remaining statistical information that exists for the 1575-77 outbreak with that recorded in 1630-31. Modern medical historians have examined the mortality records written by *Sanità* scribe Cornelio Morello during the sixteenth-century epidemic, in which approximately 40% of those people who died of plague in the city succumbed in the plague hospitals, numbers that are consistent with those recorded in the lazaretti of other Italian cities during the early modern period.³² Breakdown of overall deaths from plague in 1575-77 indicate around 50,000 total deaths in the city and surrounding areas, with 19,000 of those occurring in the lazaretti.³³ Total loss of population in the 1575-77 epidemic in Venice was around 30%, comparable to the 33% population reduction in 1631. By surprising contrast, however, deaths occurring in the lazaretti in 1630-31 drop significantly. The previous mortality statistics reporting 40% of deaths from plague occurring in the lazaretti drops to a mere 15% during the seventeenth-century epidemic. Out of 46,000 plague deaths in the city by the end of the year in 1631, just

³⁰ Palmer, 197; Crawshaw, *Plague Hospitals*, 101-2.

³¹ Crawshaw, 132.

³² Cohn, *Cultures of Plague*, 20-22; Palmer, 60.

³³ Cornelio Morello's statistics are recorded in, ASV, *Secreta*, MMN 95, 164r. Cited in Crawshaw, *Plague Hospitals*, 187.

under 7,000 are reported from the lazzeretti.³⁴ Though the reason for this drop in mortality at the lazzeretti is unclear, Jane Crawshaw attributes it most likely not to vast improvements in the treatment of the sick, but in the changing ways in which the lazzeretti were used. Due to rampant overcrowding at the Lazzaretto Vecchio, and concern over the potential of an explosion of infections at the Nuovo, where patients were equally overcrowded but had increased contact with one another, it appears as though fewer people overall were sent to the lazzeretti during this epidemic.³⁵ Fewer suspected cases were taken to the Nuovo, or perhaps better put, those people who were labeled *sospetti* and transported to the Nuovo in 1630-31 were much more likely to be harboring plague than in previous epidemics. If these statistics are near to accurate (which they appear to be), fewer deaths occurring in the lazzeretti meant that more Venetians were dying in their homes and in the streets in 1630-31. The city, in fact, may simply have been overwhelmed by the eruptive death toll early in the epidemic, and were unable to process effectively the number of victims. 14,000 people died in November 1630 alone — creating a nightmare both psychological and logistical. This adds another dimension to the threefold increase in *pizzigamorti* roaming the city during this outbreak, the proliferation of plague imagery depicting these sanitation workers, and the evident fascination they engendered.

Turning to the architecture of the lazzeretti, as previously noted, both lazzeretti supplanted monasteries, utilizing extant buildings [Figures 3.11, 3.12]. Ongoing construction throughout the early modern period at both islands reveals how the lazzeretti were adapted to meet changing needs. It would be incorrect, therefore, to consider the architecture as constituting a specific lazzeretto building type or even hospital type, or of being directly

³⁴ ASV, *Sanità*, busta 17, 407r-408r, nd. Cited in Crawshaw, *Plague Hospitals*, 188. For more on the population demographics during these major epidemics, see Paolo Preto, “Peste e demografia: L’età moderna: le due pesti del 1575-77 e 1630-31,” in *Venezia e la Peste*, 97-8.

³⁵ Crawshaw, *Plague Hospitals*, 189.

reflective of new innovations in quarantine. However, continuing construction at both islands reveals obliquely how the lazaretti were adapted to satisfy various needs. For example, the enormous warehouse built at the Nuovo evidences growing emphasis on the processing and disinfection of goods, over mere isolation of the sick.³⁶ Despite evolving construction and differing functions, there are commonalities shared between the two Venetian plague hospitals and those found in other northern Italian cities, such as open communal wards, space dedicated to religious services, and walls that demarcated clearly the hospitals' confines.³⁷ As noted in the introduction, impressively high walls enclosed both Venetian lazaretti, which communicated these sites' powerful separation of people and objects from the vulnerable urban center, as well as the separation of infected and exposed individuals from their families and corporate affiliations in the city. Gates penetrated the walls at several locations around each island, particularly wherever there was a dock. The adornment of some of these gates with sculptural works, which will be addressed shortly, reveals the importance of these entrance and exit points. The height of the walls also visually symbolized impregnability and ensured that the sequestered inmates — particularly the able-bodied quarantined — would not escape and slip back into the city. In turn, the sick cloistered in the plague hospitals were also considered vulnerable, and their isolation in the hospitals was also spoken of in terms of protection. Jane Crawshaw has asserted that the lazaretti were thought of not only as a means of protecting Venice from the

³⁶ Giovanni Caniato, "Mercanti e guardian, commerce e contumacie: Note preliminary sulla costruzione del *Tezongrande* e sui marchi mercantile," in Gerolamo Fazzini, *Isola del Lazzaretto Nuovo*, 37-46.

³⁷ For a comparison between the plans of varied lazaretti in early modern Europe and in Venice's *stato da mar* territories, see *Venezia e la peste*, 165-192. The most impressive of these early modern plague hospitals was that found in Milan, which began operating in 1513, and was constructed with meticulous attention to what worked best in Venice, as well as cutting-edge medical knowledge on plague contagion and treatment. It was an enormous structure that both treated the sick and quarantined the suspected cases, and is reputed to hold over 16,000 patients concurrently. For more on the Milanese lazaretto and plague controls in the city, see Armando Torno, *La peste di Milano del 1630: la cronaca e le testimonianze del tempo del cardinale Federico Borromeo* (Milan: Rusconi), 1998; Pamela M. Jones, "San Carlo Borromeo and Plague Imagery in Milan and Rome," in *Hope and Healing*, eds. Gauvin Alexander Bailey and Pamela M. Jones, (Worcester, Mass.: Clark University, 2005), 65-96; and Palmer, *Control of Plague*, 193.

further spread of infectious disease, but also as places that protected the welfare of the sick, where they stood a greater chance of surviving plague through close monitoring and the administration of medicines, clean water, and healthful foods.³⁸

Of necessity, both lazaretto islands also had a large dock and several smaller ones — a distinctly Venetian phenomenon — at which ships dropped off and received patients, goods, and supplies. Both islands also contained a house, separated from the hospital for the prior and prioress, a church with a main altar and several side chapels, a central courtyard, at least one well-head marking a cistern, and open garden spaces used for food production and the edification of the prior and other long-term island residents, which were systematically reduced during the early modern period in order to accommodate expanding disinfection procedures.³⁹ Storage structures for gunpowder were also located on both the Lazzaretto Vecchio and the Nuovo, evidence of yet another dangerous element in early modern Venice that was managed at the plague hospitals.⁴⁰

It is difficult to speak with precision about the architecture of the lazaretti because both the Vecchio and the Nuovo were altered dramatically in the early nineteenth century after the arrival of Napoleon and the Austrians' subsequent transformation of the islands into military barracks and storage sites.⁴¹ A number of structures on the islands were demolished, and many new ones were constructed. By the early twentieth century, buildings on both islands were left to deteriorate, buried under the unchecked growth of grasses, vines, and shrubs. Excavations and

³⁸ Crawshaw, *Plague Hospitals*, 13-14, 71.

³⁹ For greater detail on the structures found at the lazaretti and how they were used, see Crawshaw, *Plague Hospitals*, “‘Abandon hope, all you who enter here’: Experiences of Staff and the Patients’ Daily Routine,” 109-151.

⁴⁰ Fazzini, *Isola del Lazzaretto Nuovo*, “I caselli di polvere,” 67-70; Crawshaw, 65, 96.

⁴¹ *Venezia e la peste* collects an impressive number of architectural plans that illustrate the structures found on the lazaretti islands, though, again, most of these documents are from the eighteenth century, post-dating the plague era when the islands were used for storage and detainment. See, “Lazaretti, l’istituzione e la riforma,” 165-192.

conservation, begun in the 1980s and continued in recent years by archaeologists from the *Soprintendenza per i Beni Ambientali e Architettonici di Venezia* and the *Archeoclub di Venezia*, have recovered and stabilized the remaining architecture, but these buildings provide only a limited view onto what the lazaretti looked like in 1630-31.⁴² Primary sources are limited in their physical descriptions of the plague hospitals' architecture, and therefore, do not provide clarity on the subject.⁴³ However, through architectural plans and schematic drawings from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, as well as the extensive recovery work on the ground by archaeologist Gerolamo Fazzini, and the careful examination of documents in the *Sanità*'s archives by historian Jane Crawshaw, the major structures at each site can be determined.

At the Lazzaretto Vecchio, there existed separate hospital wards for male and female patients during the epidemics of 1575-77 and 1630-31 [Figure 3.7]. The wards were open, and housed many patients side-by-side on individual beds, though sources indicate that bed sharing was widespread during these major epidemics due to lack of space and resources.⁴⁴ Open wards allowed doctors and attendants to move quickly from patient to patient, and to see at a glance who was in need of immediate medical attention, an architectural design feature commonly seen in early modern hospitals in Italy since the fifteenth century.⁴⁵ These wards were long,

⁴² Gerolamo Fazzini, "Gli scavi per il restauro degli edifici storici i Campi Archeoclub e le altre ricerche," in *Isola del Lazzaretto Nuovo*, 81-90.

⁴³ Crawshaw, *Plague Hospitals*, 61, 68.

⁴⁴ Palmer, 196; Crawshaw, 91.

⁴⁵ John Henderson explored the importance of architecture to the functioning of hospitals in early modern Florence in his detailed book, *The Renaissance Hospital: Healing the Body and Healing the Soul*, (New Haven and London: Yale University Press), 2006. It should be noted, however, that Florence did not have a dedicated hospital for plague until nearly the sixteenth century when the city's modest lazaretto was opened. Before this point, plague sufferers were not welcomed into their general hospitals for fear of spreading contagion, and if admitted, were kept outside the building, in structures requisitioned for this particular use. However, the Venetian Lazzaretto Vecchio shares certain design features in common with these Florentine hospitals (such as large, open, high-ceiling wards, a chapel, and the division of male and female patients). It must also be borne in mind that both Venetian lazaretti were co-opted monasteries, and not purpose-built, so some architectural similarities could be coincidentally related to their prior religious function. For more on how hospitals' architecture reflected their twofold function of tending

rectangular structures with high ceilings to promote airflow that stretched along the eastern perimeter of the Lazzaretto Vecchio, and extended perpendicularly across the island's width. Additional long structures that could accommodate more patients in times of need, but served primarily as storage for material goods, were built during the mid-sixteenth century, radiating out from the center of the island and extending toward the island's Lido-facing perimeter. In addition to these wards for the general population and goods, there existed a separate ward for the higher-status patients, which was located in the cloisters found next to the church, between the prior's house and the general ward. A loggia of columns still distinguishes the portion of the island reserved for those of highest social rank [Figure 3.13].

Two paintings created in Venice during the sixteenth century visualize how the interiors of the lazzaretti wards may have appeared, though each painting presents an aestheticized and somewhat fantastical take. Jacopo Tintoretto's painting of 1549 in the Chiesa di San Rocco, *Saint Roch Healing the Plague Victims*, is one of these rare early modern depictions of a plague hospital ward [Figure 3.14].⁴⁶ As an artistic representation, the painting should not be assumed to depict accurately how the lazzaretti looked, as this is, in fact, a particularly attractive and idealized vision. From the common ward with the beds spaced widely and covered in ample white linens, to the elegantly dressed attending women, to the strangely vigorous plague victims — sitting up or emerging energetically from their hospital beds to display their buboes in classical poses — the painting presents an elegant and somewhat peculiar image. The Lazzaretto Vecchio divided patients by sex, but Tintoretto has depicted mixed wards with both men and

to patients' bodily and spiritual needs, see especially Chapter 5, "Splendid Houses of Treatment Built at Vast Expense," 147-85.

⁴⁶ Louise Marshall has most recently examined this painting in "A Plague Saint for Venice: Tintoretto at the Chiesa di San Rocco," *Artibus et Historiae*, v.66, n.3 (2012), 153-88. For important scholarship on this painting, see Boschini, *Le ricche minere*, S. Polo, 48-9; Antonio Maria Zanetti, *Della pittura veneziana*, libro secondo, 138-9; *Venezia e la peste*, 243-4; Christine Boeckl, *Images of Plague and Pestilence: Iconography and Iconology*, (Kirksville, Mo., Truman State University Press, 2000), 102-4.

women suffering from plague held together. The architectural space rendered in the painting represents the wards as much smaller than they were in reality, though the high placement of the windows is correct. It is uncertain what sources may have informed Tintoretto's rendering of the lazaretto interior, though it is possible that prints or other paintings depicting hospitals, as well as perhaps the painter's personal experience of general hospitals in the city, were utilized. The right side of the painting's foreground in particular underscores the universality of plague, as well as Saint Roch's power to heal. A young man, a middle-aged woman, and a man with a turban, possibly meant to represent a Muslim or resident of Ottoman lands, are grouped together, awaiting treatment. In early modern Venice, turbans were visual shorthand for "the Turk," a term that reflected Venetian anxieties related to their ongoing loss of territory and jurisdiction in the Mediterranean to Ottoman forces. Depictions of elaborate headwear were used to racialize and condense Muslims and a variety of ethnic groups inhabiting the Levant into an identifiable and singular "other".⁴⁷ In Tintoretto's painting, the implication that a non-Christian may receive the saint's curative touch is striking, and may reflect the diverse population living in Venice during the sixteenth century. However, Tintoretto's work was designed not to render the realities of a functioning lazaretto, but to depict Saint Roch's miraculous ability to protect and heal. Emphasis is placed on Roch's fearless proximity to plague-infected bodies, and in particular, his willingness to touch them. While this painting cannot provide us with dependable insights into the operation of plague hospitals during epidemics, it does envision what hospitals, churches, and other charitable institutions promoted: caring for the poor and the ill as an act of piety, and assuming the risk of infection in exchange for spiritual favor.

⁴⁷ For more on the complex issue of Venetian and Western Europeans attitudes toward Muslims and other non-Christians from the Near East, see Karen-edis Barzman, *The Limits of Identity: Early Modern Venice, Dalmatia, and the Representation of Difference* (Leiden: Brill), 2017; and Palmira Brummett, *Mapping the Ottomans: Sovereignty, Territory, and Identity in the Early Modern Mediterranean* (New York: Cambridge University Press), 2015.

Tintoretto's painting can be compared to another Venetian work of the period depicting Saint Roch in a lazaretto: Sante Peranda's *Saint Roch Heals the Plague-Stricken* in the church of San Giuliano near the Basilica San Marco, typically referred to in Venetian dialect as San Zulian [Figure 3.15]. This undated painting was created in the late sixteenth century, after Tintoretto's canvas, but before 1604, when it is first mentioned in the edition of Sansovino's *Venetia città nobilissima et singolare* expanded by Giovanni Stringa.⁴⁸ This painting, vertical in orientation in contrast to the horizontal format of Tintoretto's work, depicts a structure with both interior and exterior space in which the saint is attending plague victims. Roch is shown leaning forward to touch a man in bed, holding his identifying staff and with a golden glow around his head that serves as a halo. In these details, the paintings represent the saint quite similarly. However, Peranda's painting uses a reduced number of figures, who appear mostly in the immediate foreground. The composition oscillates between this foreground action and a distant space framed by the columns of a loggia, where two men carry away a body on a stretcher. Peranda's work presents a somewhat more realistic depiction of plague treatment. The men and women attending the ill are dressed in utilitarian clothes, with sleeves rolled up for work, and the two men in the foreground suffering from the disease appear weak with fatigue. These men are helped to a sitting position to witness the saint's presence, unlike Tintoretto's vigorous plague victims [Figure 3.16].

Peranda's painting is also notable for two details that appear to represent the actual practice of plague treatment in Venice: the men tasked with disinfecting material goods, the *smorbatori*, and the section of the Lazzaretto Vecchio reserved for the nobility [Figures 3.17, 3.18]. The columns in Peranda's painting that demarcate the interior from exterior space are

⁴⁸ (Venice: Salicato, 1604), 96. For scholarship on this painting, see Boschini, *Le ricche minere*, S. Marco, 111; Carlo Donzelli and Giuseppe Maria Pilo, *I pittori del seicento Veneto*, (Florence: Edizioni Remo Sandron, 1967), 326; *Venezia e la peste*, 254-5.

similar to those of the cloisters in which patients of the highest social status were treated in the Lazzaretto Vecchio, though the fanciful white fence topped by obelisks and interrupted by a classical temple front in the background were not features of the island. In fact, this classical courtyard space looks remarkably like that found in Tintoretto's *Miracle of the Slave* painted for the Scuola di San Marco in Venice, evidence of Peranda's familiarity with his older colleague's work [Figure 3.19]. In addition, the men peering into the scene around the column at the left-hand edge of Peranda's canvas also mirror the *Miracle*, but with plague-specific references. Two men stand out among this group watching Saint Roch tend to the plague victims: a man in pink who stares intently at the healing taking place, and another man directly beneath him who is dressed in a black-and-orange striped tunic [Figure 3.20].

The man in pink has been rendered with a remarkably individualized face, which may be evidence that it represents a specific person, though this remains speculative. Clues toward the identity of this man and his profession may be determined by what he holds in his left hand: a key on a chain. This detail may suggest that he is the prior of the plague hospital. As noted, priors did not treat patients, but were responsible for the administration of the hospital, as well as the personal safekeeping of all the keys to the lazaretto, ensuring that only men in this role had access to all areas of the island.⁴⁹ The prominent display of a key would, therefore, be a distinguishing detail indicating this man's importance. He is also noteworthy as the only figure in the painting whose face is positioned in near-frontal orientation. While his eyes are directed toward Roch, his forward-facing position allows him to engage with viewers. His stern expression does not make him a particularly sympathetic liaison, but his introspective and shrewd look forges a connection nevertheless, and he sets an example for the appropriate tone to

⁴⁹Crawshaw, 116.

adopt when contemplating the subject matter and the saint's healing powers. As the painting is undated, it would be difficult to determine the identity of the man depicted, if this is indeed a portrait. However, visual evidence supports that one of these important lazaretto administrators has been depicted, though it could be a generic image intended only to reference the position and not a specific individual.

The man in black and orange stripes in Peranda's painting, near to the prior, is attired in conspicuously bold clothing that matches the garments worn by a figure in another plague painting in Venice: Antonio Zanchi's *The Virgin Appears to the Plague-Stricken* from 1666 in the Scuola Grande di San Rocco, which is the primary case study examined in Chapter 5 [Figures 3.21, 3.22]. This man represents a one of a group of abundant employees at the plague hospitals — the hundreds of disinfectors tasked with decontaminating material goods, known as *smorbadori* or *bastazzi* (this second term closer to “porter” (*facchino*), which emphasizes their role in moving merchandise, rather than the cleaning aspect referenced in *smorbadori*, which is derived from *sborro* — to disperse).⁵⁰ While early modern texts that reference the pattern of orange and black stripes used in the artistic depictions of these men have not been located, this feature remains consistent in visual art imaging the disinfectors. The *smorbadori*'s tied tunics and headbands used to keep sweat from their eyes are also consistent with descriptions of the functional attire worn by these porters in Cesare Vecellio's costume book and others from this period [Figure 3.23].⁵¹ The *smorbadoro* in this painting gazes reverentially at Saint Roch. Only his face and the left side of his torso are visible, emerging from the left edge of the canvas. His

⁵⁰ Gerolamo Fazzini, “Il Lazzaretto Nuovo: costumi e personaggi,” in *Isola del Lazzaretto Nuovo*, (Venice: Ministero per i Beni e le Attività Culturali e l'Archeoclub d'Italia, sede di Venezia, 2004), 64-66; Palmer, *Plague Control*, 201.

⁵¹ See, Cesare Vecellio, *De gli habiti antichi et moderni di diverse parti del mondo*, (Venice: Presso Damian Zenaro, 1590) 146-7, and Giovanni Grevembroch, *Gli abiti dei Veneziani di quasi ogni età con diligenza raccolti e dipinti nel secolo XVIII*, n.d. (1754?), in Museo Correr, (Venice: Filippi), 1981.

left arm appears to be extended across his body, as though he is in the process of reaching for, or carrying, something, and has only just paused in his work to witness the miracle happening at the hospital. As with the two *pizzigamorti* lugging a slack-armed corpse in the background of the painting, just within the loggia, the disinfecter is shown at work — committed to the vital role he plays in maintaining the city's welfare. Sante Peranda, to a greater extent than Tintoretto, chose to depict elements specific to the treatment of plague in Venice. His inclusion of identifiable figures and architectural details would resonate with viewers who knew these people and places through personal experience, or simply through common knowledge on the *lazzaretti* and their wide reach in the city. Sante Peranda, who was born in Venice in 1566 and remained in the city until his death in 1638, likely experienced both catastrophic visitations of plague in the city during this period, that of 1575-77 and 1630-31. Though the seicento epidemic occurred after the painting at San Zulian, and Peranda would have been only a child in 1575-77, his personal experience with a major outbreak of the disease may have informed his knowledge on the plague hospitals.⁵² However, as with Tintoretto's more iconographically generic painting, the plague has still been aestheticized in Peranda's work through the creation of an attractive and engaging image that emphasizes Saint Roch's power as an intercessor and a role model for the compassionate care of the stricken.

⁵² Jacopo Tintoretto, too, lived through the 1575-77 plague in Venice, though his painting of Saint Roch treating the plague victims was created prior to this, at a time of wellness in the city. However, Jacopo's son and work partner, Domenico (1560-1635), lived through both 1575-77 and 1630-31 as well. In fact, Domenico, who was 70 years old when plague hit Venice in 1630, was evidently worried about his survival, which is evidenced by him writing a will in October 1630, soon after the State declared an active epidemic. For a transcription of this will, see Evelyn March Phillips, *Tintoretto*, (London: Methuen & Co., Ltd., 1911), 153-4.

Works of art and material culture at the lazaretti

The scope of the works of art and material culture at the lazaretto islands — including their material construction, scale, and number — was inhibited by the limitations imposed by their hospital setting. To some extent, visual art at the plague hospitals can be divided between two distinct locations on each island: the church, which contained altarpieces, as well as other devotional and votive works at their primary altar and within several chapels, and other sites on the island, from the interiors of the patients' wards, to the prior's house, to the façades of the buildings. Devotional art could be located in the living spaces and hospital wards as well, but the expressly liturgical function of the altars inside the lazaretto churches distinguished their use on the islands. As indicated in the introduction, the material culture at the hospital islands can also be thought of as originating in two very different moments of time: those works created and installed during plague-free periods of general wellbeing, when the lazaretti were functioning as busy but not overburdened administrative centers, and episodes during major plague outbreaks, which represented a disruption to the typically controlled operations of the plague hospitals and set into motion a series of critical epidemic related procedures.

It appears that very few substantial commissions were created at the lazaretti during outbreaks of plague, if any at all. The logistics of bringing artists and materials to the site made it essentially impossible, unless the works were prefabricated and required only simple installation that could be performed by the lazaretto staff. The disease itself, as well as the State's stringent laws segregating the sick, the suspected-ill, and the healthy also discouraged any ambitious projects constructed offsite being brought to the lazaretti during epidemics. Plague victims died too quickly to allow for any but the most quickly constructed votives and personal objects at the individual level. State-sponsored commissions, of which there were

many, were focused on the urban center and were designed for use by the well, as a means of halting the spread of plague and healing those who were distant and detained at the lazaretti. Likewise, many large-scale commissions paid for by confraternities and congregation members of churches in the city during times of plague may not have been initiated by individuals who were suffering from the disease, but those seeking prophylactic benefit or giving thanks for their safety. The fatality rate of those who contracted bubonic plague in the early modern period was well above half, and death was more or less a certainty for those with the septicemic and pneumonic forms of the disease; statistically speaking, plague-survivors were not a large percentage of patrons. However, their near-miraculous recoveries might make these individuals the most likely of any to commission works of thanksgiving. Chapter 4 of this dissertation explores cases studies reputedly created during the 1630-31 epidemic in Venice, though it is unknown if any of these patrons suffered from plague. For many reasons, therefore, lazaretti, were not sites that generated substantial works of art during plagues.

Few written sources that detail the visual and material culture of the lazaretto islands exist. The accounts of Francesco Sansovino and Rocco Benedetto describe only the function of the hospitals along particular agendas, and do not address the presence of visual art. In addition, only a handful of short notations in Venetian archives mention the religious works of art that were once housed in the demolished lazaretto churches. In fact, little is known about the architecture of these churches, though a photograph from the late nineteenth century shows an image of the campanile at the Lazzaretto Vecchio before its destruction [Figure 3.24]. Only in the eighteenth century, after the lazaretti were no longer functioning as centers for plague treatment and decontamination, was information on works of art at these islands published, and this was restricted to the contents of the church at the Lazzaretto Vecchio. Flaminio Corner's

1758 book cataloguing the churches of Venice provides scant, but nevertheless valuable, information on what was present at the altars.⁵³ Corner notes that the Vecchio's church contained a wooden altar, as well as a fine marble altar, added c.1716, dedicated to "Nostra Signora della Salute."⁵⁴ Though not directly stated in the text, it is reasonable to infer there was a connection with this early eighteenth-century altar dedicated to Our Lady of Health and the 1630-31 plague epidemic. The Virgin, with this toponym, was the primary intercessor associated with this plague and the landmark eponymous votive church that commemorated the end of the epidemic. Corner lists also the presence of two other altars dedicated to Saint Sebastian and Saint Roch, the former decorated with an image of San Bernardino of Siena.⁵⁵ As the primary saints associated with plague, dedications to Sebastian and Roch would be expected within the lazaretto church. San Bernardino's connection to plague in Venice and the Veneto comes from his presence in the region in the first half of the fifteenth century, during which the saint was credited with encouraging doge Francesco Foscari to build a plague hospital in 1422 (which resulted in the Lazzaretto Vecchio), as well as his preaching in Padua during the plague of 1448.⁵⁶ At the time of Corner's writing, the structures at the lazaretti were already in a state of deterioration, which Corner notes in his entry, describing the Vecchio's church as "ruinous."⁵⁷ In addition to Corner's description of the contents of the church at the Lazzaretto Vecchio, a document in the *Sanità*'s

⁵³ Flaminio Corner, *Notizie storiche delle chiese e monasteri di Venezia e di Torcello*, (Padua: Giovanni Manfrè, 1758), 554-6.

⁵⁴ Corner, 556. "Rinovaronsi nell'anno 1565, le fabbriche già rese rovinose del Lazzeretto vecchio, e nell'anno 1716 fu eretto nella Chiesa, in cui eravi un solo altare di legno, altro nobile altare di marmo dedicato a Nostra Signora della Salute, e poiche anni dopo aggiunti vi forono altri du e altri sotto l'invocazione de' due santi protettori contro la peste Sebastiano Martire, e Rocco Confessore; nel qual incontro comandò is Senato, che aggiunta fosse nell'Altare di San Sebastiano l'immagine di San Bernardino al Siena, in grata memoria degli eccitamenti dati da esso per lo stabilimento del luogo." See also, Crawshaw, *Plague Hospitals*, 62.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Crawshaw, 40; Palmer, 281.

⁵⁷ Ibid., "...le fabbriche già rese rovinose del Lazzeretto vecchio..."

archives dated to 1590 briefly describes devotional objects placed at the Vecchio's main altar on Christmas Eve. This short inventory lists the presence of a small textile adorned with a gold heart (called in the document a "palio" — indicating possibly a small banner with a votive function), a hanging lamp, and a priest's vestments for Mass; it is the only such document known to mention works of art in the lazaretti chapels while the hospitals operated.⁵⁸

As for the church at the Lazzaretto Nuovo, there are similar challenges to recovering a sense of how the church functioned and what devotional works it contained. Despite plentiful graffiti left on storeroom walls at this island, which will be discussed later in this chapter, no works of art created for religious usage at the Lazzaretto Nuovo remain. Nor do early modern accounts of the Nuovo's church describe this structure in detail or offer any substantive information on the objects that populated it. Archaeological excavations at the island have found primarily items like glassware, ceramic shards, and coins, which offer little insight into spiritual life at the quarantine island.⁵⁹ The little information that remains is found in an eighteenth-century inventory, which notes the presence of a painted altarpiece of the Madonna and Child in the main chapel, with saints Roch, Sebastian, and Francis, which may have been a *sacra conversazione*, as this format was popular in Venice.⁶⁰ The inventory also lists several wooden crucifixes, a wooden sculpture of Saint Roch over the doorway, and three other paintings, one depicting the Nativity and another, San Carlo Borromeo.⁶¹ As noted in Chapter 2, Borromeo's cult was extensive in seventeenth-century Italy, particularly in Milan, where the cardinal became a figurehead for the 1576-77 plague epidemic there after launching citywide processions and

⁵⁸ ASV, *Sanità*, 736, 40r, December 24, 1590. Cited in Crawshaw, *Plague Hospitals*, 62.

⁵⁹ Gerolamo Fazzini, *Isola del Lazzaretto Nuovo*, (Venice: Ministero per i Beni e le Attività Culturali e l'Archeoclub d'Italia, sede di Venezia), 2004.

⁶⁰ Crawshaw, *Plague Hospitals*, 68. ASV, *Sanità* b.1009.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

collective demonstrations of piety, and devoting himself to the care of plague victims during the outbreak.⁶² However, tributes to this holy man are rare in Venice, which generally strove to maintain a political distance from Rome. A painting portraying Borromeo at the Nuovo could imply the presence of devotees at the island either from Lombardy or with religious ties to the Milanese reformer and plague saint. This painting also offers another example of how plague art at the lazaretti did not always follow the same patterns identified in plague-related works commissioned in the city itself and in the Veneto region. In addition to these small paintings, a devotional work on paper of Saint Anthony was also reported in this chapel.⁶³ Beyond the information gleaned from these two inventories, created seventy years after the last plague epidemic in Venice, no other archival sources have been found that detail works of art used in the chapels of the Lazzaretto Nuovo or the Vecchio.

John Henderson, in his study of Florentine hospitals in the early modern period, has been able to recover substantial information about the decoration of these hospitals' chapels and cloisters, allowing him to examine the iconography and significance of works of art commissioned specifically for general hospitals in Florence.⁶⁴ In comparison, little can be concluded about the adornment of the devotional spaces of the Venetian lazaretti. However, the dedication of a new altar to the Virgin at the Vecchio church in the early eighteenth century, as well as the 1590 inventory indicating that special adornments were added to altars on important dates in the liturgical calendar, signal that these hospital churches functioned as active sites for

⁶² For more on the development of Carlo Borromeo's cult and the plague art produced in response, see Pamela M. Jones, "San Carlo Borromeo and Plague Imagery in Milan and Rome," in *Hope and Healing: Painting in Italy in a Time of Plague, 1500-1800*, eds. Gauvin Alexander Bailey, Pamela M. Jones, et al., (Worcester, Mass.: Clark University, 2005), 65-96.

⁶³ ASV, *Sanità*, 745, 134v, December 2, 1700. Cited in Crawshaw, 68.

⁶⁴ See Henderson, *The Renaissance Hospital*, Chapter 4, "'To the Almighty Physician no infirmity is incurable:' The Role of the Hospital Church," 113-146.

worship. It is clear that the architecture of Venice's lazaretti churches also impacted their usage. While chapel spaces constructed within hospital wards would potentially allow immobile patients visual and auditory access to Masses said at these altars, as well as opportunities to view the devotional art present, Venice's plague hospital churches were separate, stand-alone structures. This would certainly have limited the access of sick patients, who may have been incapable of getting to the church, as well as disallowed to leave the confines of the treatment wards. Furthermore, it is known that the lazaretto churches were not large structures, given the space constraints where they were located on each island. These churches would not have been able to manage large numbers. What this suggests is that the lazaretto churches were primarily for the use of the highest-ranking administrative staff at the hospitals, specifically the prior and prioress who lived at the islands, the doctors, and the chaplains. Possibly patients who were well enough — as well as of patrician or citizen standing — were also granted access. The lazaretti were open and functioning continuously throughout the early modern period, whether Venice was mired in a plague outbreak or not, and the religious needs of those who worked at the hospitals would be ongoing. The functioning of the churches at these islands, therefore, may represent more the spiritual lives of the State employees working there during times of wellness, than plague-time exigencies.

Despite being active centers for the spiritual lives of workers at these institutions, as well as for patients to some extent, patronage practices at the chapels of these churches appears to have been notably different from those at churches in the city's urban center. Accessibility and location again affected commissions. Those dying at the lazaretti could not have been buried inside or on the grounds of the churches at the hospital islands (though this was an option for the prior), and the restricted nature of the institutions prevented any adornments made in the chapels

to have wider visibility by other Venetian residents, post-epidemic.⁶⁵ It appears that high-profile commissions of visual art, which encompassed both spiritual and encomiastic functions, were preferred in neighborhood parish and monastic churches, as well as in scuole and in prominent urban churches associated with the plague, rather than at the lazzaretti. Long-term or extensive decoration at the lazzaretto chapels was not desirable to patrons because, for the most part, these churches were not linked to their spiritual and civic identities.

This is supported by the related issue of acts of charity and donations made to the plague hospitals set out in Venetian testators' wills. As Richard Palmer has shown, since 1431, Venetian notaries were required to ask all testators writing their wills anywhere in the city if they would like to make a bequest to the lazzaretti.⁶⁶ The plague hospitals became standardized recipients of charitable donations, and this practice represented the Maggior Consiglio's initiative to generate an ongoing source of revenue for the city's lazzaretti. However, Crawshaw has revealed that even for wills written at the lazzaretti by plague sufferers during the early modern period, these testators were at least as likely to leave money, land, or personal possessions to the churches that they patronized in Venice as they were to the lazzaretti.⁶⁷ While the lazzaretti received bequests in times of wellness and during epidemics, more personal expressions of piety were typically reserved for churches, confraternities, and other institutions in the city to which an individual belonged that were tied more closely to his or her identity and social grouping. The works of art within the lazzaretti churches, therefore, were most likely to

⁶⁵ Crawshaw, 194.

⁶⁶ Palmer, 185. ASV, *Maggior Consiglio, Ursa*, f.88v (September 23, 1431). Palmer notes this practice was instituted in Verona and Brescia as well. (188)

⁶⁷ Crawshaw, 199-204. Seventy-four wills written at the lazzaretti during the early modern period remain in the *Sanità's* archives, within several different folios, which Crawshaw notes depended on whether these wills survived related to issues of litigation over their contents or for other reasons. The wills Crawshaw examined were from the sixteenth century, ASV, *Sanità*, folios 726-32.

have been commissioned by the lazzaretti administrators or wealthier employees. On rare occasions, works may have been generated through the testamentary bequests of plague victims, or by plague survivors, the families of plague victims, government officials, and others who were unusually motivated to commemorate plague saints by investing in the devotional fabric of the lazzaretti.

As noted previously, major works of art produced at the lazzaretti were commissioned typically during periods of wellness in the city. In many ways, these works reflect the administrative functioning of the hospitals, giving credit to the magistracies that funded the lazzaretti and honoring administrators. Two relief sculptures, both originally placed above doorways in highly visible locations at the Lazzaretto Vecchio, give evidence of this bureaucratic use of visual art at the plague hospitals. The older of these bas-reliefs dates to 1525, the work of Lombard sculptor Guglielmo Bergamasco, and is housed in the collection of the Museo Correr [Figure 3.25].⁶⁸ The second relief is still in situ at the Vecchio, placed prominently on the façade of an administrative building opposite the prior's house, at which new arrivals to the island were processed [Figure 3.26, 3.27].⁶⁹ An inscription on this sculpture dates it to 1565, though the artist who created it is unknown. Both of these works were completed during years when plague was not present in Venice, and each emphasizes the generosity and oversight of the lazzaretti

⁶⁸ Very little scholarship exists on either of these relief sculptures. For work on the Guglielmo Bergamasco relief, see *Venezia e la peste*, 88-9, which reproduces the original contract for the sculpture when the Procurators of San Marco *de citra* commissioned it in March 1525. See also Giandomenico Romanelli, *Il Museo Correr*, (Milan: Electa, 1994), 91-2; Crawshaw, *Plague Hospitals*, 62.

⁶⁹ Scholarship on the 1565 sculpture is minimal. The work is mentioned briefly in a multi-volume ecclesiastical history of Italy, published in the mid-nineteenth century. See, Gaetano Moroni Romano, *Dizionario di erudizione storico-ecclesiastica da S. Pietro sino ai nostri giorni*, v.91 (Venice: Tipografica Emiliani, 1858), 487. Jane Crawshaw notes its presence at the Vecchio (*Plague Hospitals*, 64), reproduces its image as well as that of the earlier relief in the Correr, and suggests that an eighteenth-century book on Europe's lazzaretti probably also mentions the work's presence at the island. John Howard, *An account of the principal lazzarettos in Europe: with various papers relative to the plague...* 2nd edition, (London: Johnson, Dilly, and Cadell, 1791), 11. "Over the gateways of two large rooms or warehouses, were carved in stone the images of three saints, (San Sebastiano, San Marco, and San Rocco) reckoned the patrons of this lazaretto."

administrators through the inclusion of the *stemmi* of men who were involved in the allocation of government funding to the plague hospitals.

Guglielmo Bergamasco's 1525 bas-relief is carved in characteristic Istrian limestone, and was commissioned by the Procurators of Saint Mark *de citra*, one of several government bodies who contributed financially to the plague hospitals, as well as appointed trustees to manage the disbursement of funding to the *Sanità* institutions.⁷⁰ The work was designed to stand above the entrance to the Lazzaretto Vecchio.⁷¹ The sculptor, Guglielmo Grigio, was from a family of masons from Bergamo who worked in Venice, in the circle of Bartolommeo Bon. His relief for the Vecchio is divided into two pictorial zones. The upper, triangular area features a central figure of Saint Mark, with saints Sebastian and Roch at either side. The lower margin reproduces seven coats of arms glorifying the men who paid for the work and identifies the magistracy representing them: "PROCURATORUM DE CITRA PIETATE."

The iconography of the relief is spare but succinct. In the pictorial space, Saint Mark dominates, his large size representing his importance as Venice's patron saint, while also referencing the Procurators of Saint Mark *de citra* who footed the bill for the work. The plague saints Roch and Sebastian appear hieratically smaller than Mark and exhibit typical iconography; Roch wears a pilgrim's cloak and exposes his thigh, and Sebastian appears nude except for a cloth around his waist, though he lacks arrows piercing his body. The execution of the relief is not particularly sophisticated, and the bodies appear blocky and oddly proportioned, with small, square heads and stubby legs, giving a stiff appearance to the saints. This may be reflective of the choice of the patrons to hire a mason who was not one of the more distinguished sculptors in

⁷⁰ Palmer, 57, 185.

⁷¹ Venezia e la peste, 88.

the city at this time. At the bottom corners of the pendentive shape, the year has been chiseled: “MD_XXV.”

The bottom register of the relief, where the family emblems are located, gives the appearance of usurping space from the pictorial section above. The *stemmi* and the inscription take up nearly half of the relief, forcing the saints’ heads up through the decorative frame that outlines the perimeter of the triangle. The *Venezia e la peste* catalogue has identified the *stemmi*, showing that some of Venice’s oldest and richest families financed the Lazzaretto Vecchio in the 1520s. Men from the Grimani, Gussoni, Corner, Priuli, Giustinian, Molin, and Mocenigo families not only paid for the honor of having their family crests represented prominently on the entrance to the Vecchio, but also reputedly contributed more than 10,000 ducats apiece to be elected as high-ranking commissioners of the Procurators of Saint Mark *de citra*.⁷² These huge sums were not destined for the plague hospitals, but, in fact, were contributed to the city’s war funds. This shows the interconnectedness of the various bureaucracies that managed the plague hospitals, as well as the broad influence that the highest-ranking patrician families in Venice had on their city’s government. While the *Sanità* was ultimately in control of the operations of the lazzaretti, funds came from diverse governmental sources.

The relief’s original placement — high above a doorway and at an entrance to the Lazzaretto Vecchio — affected the viewing of this sculpture. The *stemmi* that appear in the bottom register were closest to viewers. When considered with the prominent depiction of Mark and his role as visual stand-in for the State, the message is clear: the Venetian Republic and its ruling families who serve in the city’s governing bodies are in control, even here at the lazzaretto. The sculpture’s awkward proportioning of the saints’ bodies was likely

⁷² *Venezia e la peste*, 89.

deemphasized when viewed from below; in fact, the saints' heads are carved in the deepest relief, which would allow them to extend beyond their bodies, increasing their visibility above the coats of arms on which they stand. Placing images of the two most important plague saints in Venice — Sebastian and Roch — over a doorway to the Lazzaretto Vecchio can also be understood as a call for these intercessors to protect the island and all those detained there. In this way, the sculpture connects the distant plague hospital with the centers for worship and veneration in the city, especially the Chiesa di San Rocco, where the saint was interred and his cult operated. Despite its schematic and somewhat utilitarian presentation, the relief's adherence to traditional iconography and its conspicuous placement at the island's entrance communicate effectively the power of the patriarchy in controlling the city and the State's role in maintaining the plague hospital. Capping the twelve-foot-high walls that enclosed the island and sequestered its detainees, who were permitted to leave the hospital only after *Sanità* officials allowed their reintegration into the city, this sculpture provides a visual reminder of the expected submission to the administrative process.

The second relief sculpture from 1565, still in situ at the Vecchio, served a similarly encomiastic function. It can be found on the façade of a large building near the prior's house, surmounting the main entrance to a site where varied functions took place, including the admittance and processing of new patients. This was a critical juncture in which wards for the sick, the cloisters, and the prior's administrative areas met. It was an important, high traffic area of the island. An inscription on the lintel indicates that this relief was also a gift of the Procurators of Saint Mark *de citra*, on the occasion of their generous contribution to the repair of

crumbling and damaged architecture on the island in 1565.⁷³ This sculpture, also made of Istrian limestone, features a trio of intercessors standing on plinths in the central field, capped by Venice’s symbolic winged lion of Saint Mark, his paw resting on top of a book bearing the inscription, “Pax tibi Marce Evangelista meus.”⁷⁴ Saint Roch appears at the left side of the middle register, and Sebastian is situated at the right. These plague saints are angled to face the figure between them. However, the identity of the central figure remains uncertain due to the damaged state of this sculpture. While some sources have identified it as Saint Mark, most likely because of the inscription naming the Procurators of Saint Mark *de citra*, iconographically speaking, this figure more closely resembles Christ the Redeemer.⁷⁵ While the face of the figure is entirely missing, which has led to the confusion, the body looks much more like typical depictions of Christ than Mark. He is wrapped in loose garments that billow away behind him to reveal a body in *contrapposto* pose. The right hand is upheld in benediction with two raised fingers — another feature better attributed to Christ. The left arm is missing below the elbow, though it is evident that it originally extended out from the relief. Were this arm still attached, the gesture or the contents of its hand would likely have helped to identify the figure. On the basis of these observations, as well as the appearance of the Lion of Saint Mark surmounting this relief, I propose the central figure to be that of Christ. Mark has already been referenced with his symbolic lion, which also simultaneously ties the saint to the Venetian government, making his appearance between Roch and Sebastian redundant. Furthermore, the attention each ancillary

⁷³ “HOSPITALE VETVSTATE COLLAPSVM DIVI MARCI PROCVRATORES DE CITRA VERI PII AC SOLI GVBERNATORES VT QVI A LANGORIBVS CRVCIAVTVR COMMODIVS LIBERENTVR SVMMA CVRA ISTAVRARE IVSERVNT ANNO SALVTIS NOSTRÆ M D LXV MENSE MAZO.”

⁷⁴ This inscription, “Peace be upon you, Mark my evangelist,” references the Venetian legend of the so-called *praedestinatio*, in which Mark was said to have visited the lagoon during his lifetime and received the message from an angel, telling him that his body would eventually come to rest there. This served as justification for the theft of the saint’s body from Alexandria in 828, and this phrase and iconography is found throughout the city.

⁷⁵ Jane Crawshaw called the figures saints Roch, Mark, and Sebastian, on the grounds of John Howard’s eighteenth-century identification. *Plague Hospitals*, 64.

saint gives to the central figure supports the Christ identification. Christ the Redeemer, triumphing over death, would be an appropriate figure to be shown between the two plague intercessors. Indeed, a decade after the installation of this relief, the Venetian State selected Christ in this incarnation as the primary intercessor during the 1575-77 plague, commissioning Palladio's *Il Redentore* to symbolize the city's salvation.

Whether the central figure represents Christ or Saint Mark, the iconography of this sculpture also asserts the primacy of the State and the extension of its control over the lazaretto. It also images the vital mediation of the two plague saints, who both had consecrated altars in the hospital church. Like the earlier relief sculpture of 1525, the figural fields are supported by the *stemmi* of men who held important positions in the Procurators of Saint Mark *de citra*. The crest at the left has not been securely identified, though it may represent either the Crespi or Donà family. The other *stemmi* belong to the Zen and Grimani families, respectively. Again, the importance of the patrician families funding the plague hospitals is underscored by their *stemmi* quite literally supporting imagery of spiritual triumph over plague. The money of noble families, as well as the work of these men distributing funds through their administrative roles, enabled the State to facilitate civic health.⁷⁶

While there was an evident political dimension underlying some of the sculptural commissions at the Lazzaretto Vecchio, other works of art created for administrators and high-status patients at the island were intended to adorn their living spaces and facilitate devotion. One of the most elaborate of these now fragmentary works is a fresco featuring the Virgin and Child, with saints Roch and Sebastian attending [Figures 3.28, 3.29]. It is located within the

⁷⁶ A third, more modest relief with no figural register, and imaging only five *stemmi*, reinforces the political impetus behind much of the sculpture at the Vecchio. This relief is inset into the bricks of an external doorway that connected the sick wards to an open space originally containing the Vecchio's church. It has been badly weathered, making the identification of its *stemmi* difficult. Nevertheless, it provides another example of the visual predominance of patrician families at the plague hospitals.

island's cloisters, which had been converted into wards for the economically privileged patients at the hospital during plague times. The fresco is found in a room above the ground floor on the far right when facing the arcade of columns, barely visible through the last arch on the second story. Its condition is relatively poor, with numerous surface abrasions and losses, including the total loss of the plaster composing the lower right corner that depicts Sebastian's body.⁷⁷ Roch appears at the left of the fresco, to the Virgin's right, pulling up the edge of his tunic to display a bubo on his thigh and gazing reverentially at the Virgin and Child. Sebastian, on the other side of the composition, mirrors the devotional expression. He appears bare-chested and with identifying arrows piercing his body. The Christ Child looks down into Sebastian's face, while the Virgin stares out of the painting with an expression both serene and direct.

Stylistic analysis supports a date for the work anywhere from the late sixteenth century through the seventeenth century, though this remains tenuous.⁷⁸ Based on its location and iconography, the fresco appears to have been meant as an aid to worship. The cloisters at the Lazzaretto Vecchio did not house a monastic order, but served alternately as an administrative structure and as the location where the nobility and higher-ranking patients were kept. That this painting appears in an individual room on the second story of the structure suggests private usage; this fresco was not located where it could be readily accessible to anyone at the hospital. Because the space in which this painting was created was designed for lodging the elite residents at the lazaretto, this work is evidence of the varying resources available for those of a higher social status, as well as these patients' potential to shape the hospital environment. While all

⁷⁷ Unfortunately, the cloister itself is in a similar state of decay. The building is structurally unsound and therefore, no longer safe to enter, which prevented close-range analysis of this painting. However, basic iconographic analyses can be adduced from reproductions of the work.

⁷⁸ Dating of this painting is not secure. The fresco has yet to be sufficiently studied by art historians and is currently unpublished, including in the scholarship of the *Archeoclub di Venezia*, who have had the greatest presence on the lazaretto islands.

patients were guaranteed healthful food, clean water, and the administration of State-approved medicines, evidently wealth and prestige could garner additional benefits in the form of private rooms and efficacious works of sacred art.

It is difficult to situate this painting with respect to the specific devotional usage it had in the hospital, due to lacking textual sources and its uncertain dating. However, the fresco is remarkable as a rare surviving example of both religious art and adornment in either of the lazzaretti. Like the bas-reliefs at the Vecchio, this painting most likely was not made during an epidemic, but had been commissioned during a time of wellness. It is probable that an individual who had a special connection with the plague hospital commissioned the work, though it is unclear under what circumstances. The imagery supports a connection with a petition made against plague, which might indicate that a patient who recovered from the disease commissioned this work to give thanks, post-epidemic. It is also possible that a long-term administrator at the island, such as a doctor or chaplain, resided in this room and paid an artist to decorate the space. Potentially, there may have been other devotional frescos within the cloisters, though there remains no firm visual evidence to support this.

There is, however, another frescoed section within the general wards that suggests, compellingly, that there may have been some decoration in the spaces reserved for lower status patients. Near the end of the wards that stretch along the south side of the island, close to the storage areas that face the Lido, a wall has been painted with illusionistic architectural details [Figure 3.30]. A section of yellow plaster has been laid over an interior wall, framing a rounded-top window with a wooden shutter. This embellishment creates a distinct, simulated architectural space that consists of a painted dado in ochre, capped by small ionic columns that uphold a fictive entablature. Simulated fabric curtains have been painted between these

columns. It is unclear when this wall was painted. As with much of the visual art at the Vecchio, it is also uncertain how this decorative feature functioned during the early modern period. However, this décor seems to demarcate a different zone within the ward. It is possible that this space could imply the presence of an altar where the sick patients were kept. Such a site within the sick wards would address the issue of the inaccessibility of the hospital church at the Vecchio. The area beneath the rounded window may have framed a painting, sculpture, or other religious object meant to serve the spiritual health of the stricken housed there. Furthermore, it is also possible that the window did not originally pierce the brick to the outside, but instead served as a niche to hold the Host and other consecrated materials necessary for Mass or performing Last Rights sacraments. Formally speaking, the painted architectural surround with a central storage space resembles the chapels of other early modern hospitals in Italy, such as the sculptural tabernacle designed by Bernardo Rossellino for the women's ward in the hospital of S. Maria Nuova in Florence in 1450 [Figure 3.31]. John Henderson describes the importance of this tabernacle to the spiritual treatment of patients in the sick wards, holding oil used to anoint the dying during Extreme Unction, and also serving as a focal point for liturgy performed for all those housed in the wards.⁷⁹ While this usage cannot be confirmed for the painted space in the Lazzaretto Vecchio ward, visual evidence makes a strong case for a religious purpose of this type. The yellow architectural detailing in this area also appears over the doorway on the perpendicular wall, consisting of horizontal bands at the uppermost portion of the wall [Figure 3.32]. No other such illusionistic painting remains in the wards or storage rooms at the Vecchio, though graffiti left by the patients is plentiful at these locations, which will be discussed

⁷⁹ Henderson, *The Renaissance Hospital*, 178-9.

shortly.⁸⁰ Unlike the fresco of the Virgin and Child in the cloisters, this painted feature appears to have been for general, communal purposes, which also supports its use by the hospital chaplain and priests to perform sacraments for the patients. Payment for this work was probably included as part of the functional expenses for the institution, rather than the commission of an individual, though there is also strong likelihood that paintings, sculptures, and other material adornments to the chapel (if that is indeed what it was) could have been paid for and donated by patrons.⁸¹

The most extensively decorated area at the Lazzaretto Vecchio appears to have been the prior's house. The majority of the extant wall painting can be found there, and given that the prior and prioress were permanent residents of the island, and that their positions came with high rank, it is reasonable to suggest that works of art were most plentiful in their living spaces. The prior's house at the Lazzaretto Vecchio is a relatively large structure, airy by design, and located on the periphery of the island, opposite the Lido, facing out toward the Bacino. Standing on the balcony of this house provides a view of the buildings on the Piazza San Marco, alluringly visible on the not-too-distant horizon, but metaphorically a world away during epidemics [Figures 3.33, 3.34]. At the Lazzaretto Nuovo, the resident prior and prioress also had a sizeable, two-story house where they lived year-round, though nothing remains of it as the structure was destroyed during the Austrian occupation.⁸²

The prior's house at the Vecchio is in a similarly degraded state to that of the island's cloisters, and entry to it is currently restricted for safety reasons and in order to preserve what is

⁸⁰ This room has been afflicted badly by the growth of bright green algae, found throughout the lazaretto, creeping up the walls at the floor and roofline. This growth, which began in the past several years after the theft of the copper gutters and drain spouts by vandals, is hastening the deterioration of the already-fading graffiti and threatening the integrity of the bricks to which it adheres.

⁸¹ John Henderson describes the varied sources of funding by patrons and hospital officials for the altar and embellishments at the men's wards in the Hospital of S. Maria Nuova, (*Renaissance Hospitals*, 176).

⁸² Fazzini, 14.

left of the architecture and wall paintings within.⁸³ However, some of these frescoes can still be viewed, and they offer a fascinating glimpse into the prior's living space during the later early modern period. Abundant wall painting is found in the entry to the prior's house that depicts fictive curtains and moldings, and embellishes a lunette over the door [Figures 3.35, 3.36]. The faux curtains and architectural elements in this vestibule link the room's imagery with that in the painted chapel area of the wards, suggesting perhaps that they were completed by the same artist or that some sort of visual coherence was desired. These painted mauve curtains, hung by simulated loops threaded over narrow rods, elicit the impression of soft, inviting fabric wall hangings where there was only cool, smooth plaster for sanitary concerns; fabrics would hold diseased particles within their soft depths, whereas smooth walls would allow the fresh winds off the sea to circulate the air, and they could be routinely washed to disinfect them. Certainly the prior's home contained a high degree of material comfort — including genuine fabrics, textiles, and upholstered furniture — but in the entryway to his home, closest to the areas for the sick and contaminated materials, it appears that a buffering foyer was created that minimized the retention of infectious particles. Most of the plaster is damaged in the prior's house — crumbling, painted over, defaced in recent years, or entirely missing — making further analysis of the painted décor impossible. The presence of illusionistic curtains in the entry, however, demonstrates that paintings were a vital part of embellishing the prior's house, and they were used to differentiate this space from other areas on the island. This house was a domestic zone, and while it was likely that religious art adorned these walls too, works of art found here also asserted the higher social status of the prior. Visual art at the prior's house demonstrates that this site was a

⁸³ Unfortunately, this structure has also been badly damaged by vandals and others illegally entering the building in recent years. Those in charge of daily maintenance at the grounds have told me in 2016 that many artifacts have been stolen, and contemporary graffiti is abundant here.

permanent living space in which the inhabitants possessed certain comforts and luxuries unattainable on the rest of the island.

The sick and quarantine wards at the Lazzaretto Vecchio and the Lazzaretto Nuovo represent the opposite end of the spectrum — utilitarian spaces in which transient inhabitants came and went, with their departures often hastened by their deaths at the Vecchio. The walls of these spaces, too, appear to have supported numerous decorative additions, though of a different nature, in the form of graffiti. The long, high-ceilinged wards that took up most of the space at both of the hospital islands were adaptive structures, and their walls appear to have been constantly transforming surfaces as well. The interiors of these wards and warehouses changed continually as lazaretto workers applied new layers of whitewash to disinfect the walls as a routine task, and detainees serving quarantine or receiving treatment habitually scratched into and painted on their surfaces.⁸⁴

Graffiti at the Lazzaretto Nuovo are the best preserved, as well as the most studied.⁸⁵ Similarly to the Lazzaretto Vecchio, this island's function required accommodations for large numbers of people, though, as previously stated the space in its wards was subdivided according to level of contamination. There existed greater differentiation between residents at the Nuovo, with emphasis on decontamination and monitoring threats, rather than preserving the health of its inmates, who were not yet proven to be ill. Its wards, therefore, held groups of people of both sexes — often admitted together — in communal spaces that were then kept distinct from the three other zones of open accommodations. In many circumstances, family members were

⁸⁴ For more on graffiti in early modern Europe and its ubiquity as a commonplace practice, see Juliet Fleming, *Graffiti and the Writing Arts of Early Modern England*, (London: Reaktion Books, 2001.)

⁸⁵ For work on the graffiti here, see *Venezia e la peste*, 353-6; Gerolamo Fazzini, *Isola del Lazzaretto Nuovo*, (Venice: Ministero per i Beni e le Attività Culturali e l'Archeoclub d'Italia, sede di Venezia, 2004), 47-62; Crawshaw, *Plague Hospitals*, 96-7.

housed together, and it was believed that maintaining the family unit, when possible, would keep occupants' spirits high and make them more bodily able to resist disease.⁸⁶ By the seventeenth century, it appears that sailors and merchants were the most frequent inmates at the Lazzaretto Nuovo. These men were detained on their ship's arrival to Venice if an illness suspected to be plague broke out on board, or if their ship had traveled from, or docked at, the harbors of cities with active epidemics of plague.

Crewmembers from these ships in good health were responsible for a large amount of the graffiti appearing on the walls of the Nuovo's largest structure, the *tezon grande* [Figures 3.37-3.39]. This vast warehouse measured approximately 350 x 75 feet, and was designed with open arches running along its length to allow air to circulate over the contaminated goods and potentially sick individuals within, dispersing the infectious particles.⁸⁷ The Procurators of Saint Mark *de citra* were a magistracy actively involved in shaping the physical environment at the Lazzaretto Nuovo as well as the Vecchio, as evidenced by their funding of the construction of the *tezon grande*.⁸⁸

Of the preserved graffiti left on the walls of the *tezon grande*, many are inscriptions that record the names of the detainees, the ships on which they arrived, the ports they sailed from,

⁸⁶ Crawshaw, *Plague Hospitals*, 69. Samuel Cohn's research has explored the increasing emphasis in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Italian medical knowledge on maintaining level emotions to prevent the onset of illness (neither despairing nor too enthusiastic) not only on an individual level, but collectively, through states of mind engendered by social institutions and laws. Essentially, early modern Italian governments were exhorted by a number of both medical professionals and spiritual leaders to create legislature and architecture that promoted emotional wellness as a critical component of disease prevention. See, "Plague Psychology," in *Cultures of Plague*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 264-93. For more on the use of works of art to prevent plague in the seventeenth century, see Sheila Barker, "Poussin, Plague, and Early Modern Medicine," *Art Bulletin*, v.86, n.4, (December 2004), 659-89.

⁸⁷ Crawshaw, *Plague Hospitals*, 68. These arches have been bricked up and show only the shape of what used to be areas open to the elements.

⁸⁸ *Venezia e la peste* noted documents from the magistracy showing that the Procurators of Saint Mark *de citra* donated 400 ducats to finalize construction of the warehouse on September 22, 1556. (354) ASV, *Procuratori S. Marco di Citra*, colto LXIX, busta 163, fasc. D[6], c. 14.

and dates. Other personal marks were made by employees of the Nuovo who recorded their names and duties.⁸⁹ Notable among these is the 1585 inscription of Antonio Trivisan, a guardian of the *Sanità* who recorded the arrival of goods from Constantinople, as well as dates and the names of others associated with the city's governmental offices [Figure 3.40].⁹⁰ These marks are not tabulations or record keeping, and they appear to have been written for posterity, rather than utility. A graffito from the summer of 1631, as the plague epidemic began to wind down, is also found in the warehouse. Though it is mostly effaced, it still records an incidence of disinfection taking place at the Nuovo during a time of plague: “ADI 19 LUGIO 1631 / FUSIMO QUA A SBORAR...DA...”⁹¹ Most of the dated inscriptions in the *tezon grande* are from the late-sixteenth century through the seventeenth century, and it can be assumed that many of the non-dated drawings and writing comes from the same period. The clustering of dates is related to practical issues — the structure was completed in 1561, and it evolved by the mid-seventeenth century into a space that primarily held goods rather than people. Any records made on the walls by those detained there or employed cleaning materials would naturally have been most prevalent during this timeframe.

In addition to written inscriptions, the *tezon grande* also contains a number of figural drawings and the monograms of hospital workers and detainees. The most detailed drawings are those of boats and soldiers (who may represent guards on the island), though there also appear hearts, personal symbols, and coats of arms [Figures 3.41, 3.42].⁹² These graffiti give voice to the numerous people who were processed through Venice's continually operating plague

⁸⁹ Venezia e la peste, 354.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ A transcription appears in *Venezia e la peste*, 356.

⁹² Recent scholarship analyzing early modern graffiti includes Alessandra Russo, *The Untranslatable Image: A Mestizo History of the Arts in New Spain*, trans. Susan Emanuel, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2014).

hospitals, as well as those who made this machine of the State function. Though women were certainly present at the island, as workers washing and sanitizing material goods and providing food and water to detainees, as well as patients waiting out their quarantine periods, they have not left identifying graphic marks on the wards or warehouses. The graffiti at the Lazzaretto Nuovo reflect more the active agency of male *Sanità* employees and merchants who were accustomed to having greater voice in their professional lives.

Graffiti at the Lazzaretto Vecchio, while linked to that of the Nuovo as shared visual representations of those inhabiting Venice's plague hospitals, are in some ways different. While workers at both hospitals were able to record their presence in the wards and storage spaces at each, the patients of the Vecchio were in a much different state than those in the quarantine hospital. Healthy merchants at the Nuovo — inconvenienced and likely bored by their detainment — recorded their tenure at the institution and their professional identities. In contrast, a great many of the plague-stricken patients at the Vecchio were not well enough for such activities. For those who did leave their marks at the sick hospital, the resulting graffiti are less elaborate and tidy, with few exceptions.

The issue of the availability of materials is critical at both lazzaretti, though especially so for the Vecchio. The painted motifs that appear on the walls of the sick wards are all a deep brownish red, as they were created by a combination of powdered brick mixed primarily with olive oil and occasionally lamp oil — the materials to which patients had access, in addition to small, hard objects that were used to score the plaster and create the incised designs.⁹³ Similar materials appear to have been used at the Nuovo, as the colors are comparable, though graffiti at the Nuovo are in a much better state of preservation.

⁹³ Luciano Zarotti, "Note tecniche," in Gerolamo Fazzini, *Isola del Lazzaretto Nuovo*, (Venice: Ministero per i Beni e le Attività Culturali e l'Archeoclub d'Italia, sede di Venezia, 2004), 52-6.

The Vecchio graffiti are varied in content and in a fragmentary state. Names, portions of dates, and parts of phrases can sometimes be made out, but much of what appears on the walls is broken and punctuated by sloughing off plaster and an exposed stratigraphy of whitewashing and inscribing, sustained throughout the early modern period [Figure 3.43]. In some circumstances, it is clear that later architectural interventions in the wards damaged some of the painted imagery [Figures 3.44, 3.45]. The words found on the walls are primarily in Italian and Venetian, but a variant of Arabic, possible Ottoman Turkish, also appears over the main door into the oldest ward, giving evidence of the diverse populations held in the plague hospital [Figure 3.46].⁹⁴ Ascribing precise dates to the inscriptions at the Vecchio is challenging, though it is reasonable to suggest, given the concurrent usage of both plague hospitals and as well as the disease's disappearance in Venice in the seventeenth century, that most of the graffiti here were also created during the mid-sixteenth century through the seventeenth century.

Drawings are abundant on the walls of the Vecchio's wards, surprisingly well rendered and occasionally humorous in content. Churches, suns, coats of arms, crosses, symbols whose meaning have been lost, and mathematical computations all appear on the walls of the sick wards [Figure 3.47]. A schematic drawing of the Vecchio's church and campanile has been painted on the nearly exposed bricks found in one of the interior wards [Figure 3.48]. One of the more elaborate and esoteric sketches among the graffiti represents a winged figure with a human body, whose face has been obliterated (possibly representing an angel), and whose two legs, emerging from an ornate skirt, end in horse-like hooves [Figure 3.49]. To the left of this figure, two erect phalluses are poised, pointing toward the creature's legs [Figure 3.50]. It would be difficult to

⁹⁴ The Arabic inscription is in a poor state, and thus it is difficult to determine what it says. It appears very high up on the wall, like many other examples of remaining graffiti, introducing the question of how it got there — what objects (crates, furniture, ladders, etc.) were accessible to patients and lazzaretti workers to give them access to the highest areas of the walls.

interpret the possible meanings of this montage, but there seems to be a degree of humor present here.

These hospital paintings offer evidence of the complexity of the lived experience at the lazaretti. The plague islands were isolated environments that nevertheless represented a shifting community of diverse occupants — Venetians and foreigners, the sick and the well, those who came to the lazaretti only once in their lives (and maybe did not live to later recount their experience), as well as those for whom the hospitals were part of their daily professional identities. Graffiti inscribed on the walls of these institutions give evidence of the occupants' dauntless and sometimes playful defiance of plague, and even death, through their drive to create lasting marks on their surroundings and record their presence in the hospitals. While the graffiti were not part of an organized decorative campaign — scrawled and scratched onto the walls by anyone with access and inclination — they share in common with the commissioned works of art at the lazaretti a pervasive desire to make interventions on the environment, despite the challenges imposed by their hospital setting.

In some ways, similar limitations to those that have been shown in this chapter to prevail in the Venetian lazaretti also conditioned art production in Venice's urban heart during the 1630-31 plague epidemic. Quarantine, travel bans, and the reduced circulation of raw materials confronted patrons and artists who were nevertheless motivated by the outbreak to petition intercessors for protection and leave indices of their participation in the city's many social institutions. The following chapter delves into the topic of plague art production in Venice during the 1630-31 outbreak, exploring the challenges and variables affecting the commission of works of art while the disease gripped the city. Each case study demonstrates that immediate

need for efficacy, as well as concern for the long-term use of these works, promoted ongoing transformations in iconography and composition.

CHAPTER IV

Works of art created in Venice during the 1630-31 epidemic

Introduction

The 1630-31 plague epidemic in Venice generated works of art that maintained the social order and engendered a sense of empowerment in residents — demonstrating their ability to push back and make inroads against the disease. The multiple functions that works of art enacted against plague were interrelated but distinct, and they germinated across the social spectrum. Major outbreaks of plague in early modern Venice strained individual households affected by the disease and had an equally powerful impact on the institutions in the city that managed the resources necessary to quell epidemics. Plague outbreaks also put pressure on the varied social organizations like the *scuole* that served as important anchoring points for civic identity in the early modern world. Paintings and other works of art imaging plague during the 1630-31 epidemic demonstrate where these points of concern and fissure lie.

Foremost, paintings from the 1630-31 plague were linked to notions of community and belonging as much as they were concerned with combatting the disease from a spiritual standpoint. While plague was still attributed to divine wrath during the seventeenth century, newly developed theories of contagion and methods of disinfection put increased emphasis on material actions taken against the disease. Plague paintings in 1630-31 reveal the continued essential importance of holy intercessors, particularly the Virgin, who served as the primary

intercessor during this epidemic, and Beato Lorenzo Giustiniani, who represented Venetian spirituality. However, these works also emphasized inclusion within the social world, asserting the centrality of the parish, confraternity, or the ethnic group to which an individual belonged, as support structures during the crisis. Works of art that depicted donors' social identities also served as encomia, attesting to the worth and piety of individuals and congregations — beneficial in life when petitioning the sacred, but also important after death, were they not to survive the epidemic. Likenesses and reputations were preserved and honored through paintings created against plague.

Paintings made during the 1630-31 epidemic were distinguished by their functions, display conditions and viewership, which changed over time. The four case studies examined in this chapter each demonstrate different but related concerns with viewership. In representing the collective body of a church, confraternity or the city as a whole, these paintings were designed to be seen by groups of varied individuals who were nevertheless bound not only by their inclusion in the institutions represented, but also by plague itself, which catalyzed assertions of belonging. One of the case studies under consideration has been documented as part of a large-scale procession, and while sources no longer exist to definitively link the others to processional use, the format and iconography of two of them suggest strongly that these paintings also began life as mobile images used in rituals of sacred propitiation and thanksgiving.

Movement and transformation continued to define these works' use in the decades after their creation. Three of this chapter's case studies were relocated post-plague within the institutions in which they were displayed, placed in remote, infrequently accessed locations. One painting even underwent physical alteration to remove its most explicit references to the disease, which appear to have become disruptive in plague-free Venice. These continued interventions

result from the provocative nature of seventeenth-century plague imagery, which sought to render the atrocities of plague with a mixture of dramatic presentation and shocking naturalism, while working within the dictates of decorum and the long-term suitability of works of art displayed publically.

Temporality, therefore, is a critical issue when interpreting paintings that represented and memorialized the 1630-31 plague epidemic. In considering the afterlives of these works — created either during or just following the epidemic — a loose dichotomy is evident. Some of these paintings were designed to be efficacious in the here-and-now of the epidemic, as tools deployed actively during the crisis that engaged with plague-time experiences. Others, in contrast, were fashioned as forward-looking commemorative works that had equal suitability and use value as spiritual objects over the long term. Making a clear-cut distinction between these two emphases — positing distinct types — would be inaccurate and would flatten the complexity of these plague paintings. However, the circumstances of creation, the evolving narratives that characterized the 1630-31 outbreak, and the adaptive use of the paintings did affect the iconography and function of these works.

Dating plague paintings with a degree of accuracy presents a considerable challenge. Frequently there are no primary sources that detail the commissions, and the dates and inscriptions that appear on the works can be retrospective or applied after the fact. The date “1631” on a painting, for example, may not refer to the year of its completion, but rather to the commemoration of a vow, the end of the plague, or the commission of the work itself. Close analysis of iconography and style, as well as determining what can be known about usage over the long term are crucial in assessing the dating and initial functioning of visual art associated with the plague.

An epidemic as devastating as that of 1630-31 had an uneven and paradoxical impact on the production of paintings and other works of art. On one hand, the outbreak catalyzed increased production of visual art, from inexpensive prints bearing images of intercessors and the text of prayers, to the opulent state-sponsored votive church, Santa Maria della Salute. Plague art, as a distinct category of devotional art that developed its own conventions and iconography, evolved along with the disease over the course of the early modern period in Europe. That is to say, the genre exists because of the disease.¹ However, in the midst of large-scale public crises, resources were diminished and redirected, and circulation within urban and island spaces could be restricted. As shown in Chapter 2, at the height of the 1630-31 outbreak, authorities struggled to bury the bodies of plague victims, and movement through the city was fettered for most residents by widespread quarantine. How many works of art could feasibly have been made and installed under these conditions? However, paintings that visualized and inspired petitions for divine and sacred protection were more critical than ever; they reassured residents of Venice's continued power to care for its population and asserted that a good death and proper entry into the afterlife were still possible during the turmoil. Despite depleted resources, the impetus to create visual art to combat plague and redress its effects prevailed, but with limits on available materials and productivity. As noted in Chapter 3 for example, inhabitants of lazzaretti wards used powdered bricks and lamp oil to scrawl graffiti on the hospitals' walls.

This chapter presents four case studies that demonstrate varied artistic responses to the 1630-31 outbreak, created for public spaces in Venice. I am using the term "public" to indicate locations outside of private homes, though it must be stated that viewing access in churches and confraternity meetinghouses varied and did not offer equal access to all. While only one of these

¹ While works of art imaging other endemic diseases such as leprosy, which pre-dated plague, and later, syphilis, exist, their numbers are negligible compared to those depicting plague. Plague, it seems, took root in the imaginations of early modern Europeans and generated attention in the arts broadly, like no other disease.

paintings can be firmly dated (Bernardino Prudenti's commission to celebrate the end of the epidemic), each of them exhibits formal markers that suggest creation and use during or in the immediate aftermath of the outbreak. Each case study will be situated within the context of the particular social institution for which it was created, with an attempt to recuperate its early viewership and usage. In some instances, the viewing conditions, physical appearance, and function of the paintings were adapted over time in response to changing audiences, institutional needs, and iconography, exemplifying the fluidity of visual art associated with the plague.

Domenico Tintoretto's *Venice Supplicating to the Virgin to Intercede with Christ for Cessation of the Plague* for San Francesco della Vigna

In the northeastern *sestiere* of Castello, the Franciscan church of San Francesco della Vigna has stood since its construction in 1554, though an earlier medieval structure had been at the site since the middle of the thirteenth century after the patrician Marco Zaini bequeathed his vineyard to the resident monks [Figures 4.1, 4.2].² The site bears a weighty legacy as it was reputed to be the location at which Saint Mark arrived in Venice during his lifetime, later serving as justification for the translation of the saint's relics from Alexandria to Venice in 828. Within the present church, designed by Sansovino and featuring a classical façade by Palladio, Domenico Tintoretto's *Venice Supplicating to the Virgin to Intercede with Christ for the Cessation of the Plague* is located on the right wall of the deep choir space that extends behind the main altar, situated beside a window [Figures 4.3-4.5].³ The painting, measuring 340 x 164

² Silvano Onda, *La chiesa di San Francesco della Vigna: guida artistica* (Venice Parrocchia di San Francesco della Vigna, 2004), 6. See also Ann Markham Schulz, *La Cappella Badoer-Giustinian in San Francesco della Vigna a Venezia*, (Florence: Centro Di), 2003.

³ For notable scholarship on Domenico Tintoretto's ex-voto and its preparatory *modello*, from the early modern period to the present, see Boschini, *Le ricche minere* (1674), 40-44; Pietro Antonio Pacifico and Mattio Pizzati, *Cronaca veneta, ovvero succinto racconto di tutte le cose più conspicue & antiche della città di Venetia...* (Venice:

centimeters, has a format consistent with ex-votos in early modern Italy, where the compositional space is divided into two distinct registers: the earthly realm at the bottom, where a crisis is taking place, and the celestial sphere above where holy intercessors materialize. It resembles, in larger scale and with higher-end execution, the ubiquitous ex-voto *tavolette* that proliferated in churches throughout the early modern period.⁴ In terms of the painting's iconography, the most immediately evident figure is that of a woman dressed in a gown of gold brocade, crowned and cloaked in the Doge's ermine stole. She is the personification of the city of Venice. Her extended arms are raised as she kneels on a pillow and gazes heavenward, appealing to the Virgin Mary and an adult Christ. A scroll bearing the text of a prayer unfurls between the two registers: *Pray, I beseech you, to your son, so that he may heal this cruel wound, with great piety; and help us, placate his wrath [so that] sighs cease.*⁵ Below and to either side of Venice's outstretched hands are two groups of figures. Two women kneel in prayer in the foreground and gaze out of the canvas, while above them, in the deeper pictorial space of the painting, a cluster of *pizzigamorti* are at work. They cart plague-infected corpses

Domenico Lovisa, 1697), 181-8; Boschini and Zanetti, *Descrizione di tutte le pubbliche pitture della città di Venezia e isole circonvicine*, (1733), 233; Zanetti, *Della pittura veneziana e delle opera pubbliche de' veneziani maestri*, (Venice: Albrizzi, 1771), 261; Giannantonio Moschini, *Guida per la città di Venezia: all'amico delle belle arti*, (Venice: Nella tip. di Alvisopoli, 1815), 34-54; Rosanna Tozzi, "Notizie biografiche su Domenico Tintoretto," *Rivista de Venezia*, v.22, (1933), 313; Carlo Donzelli and Giuseppe Maria Pilo, *I pittori del seicento veneto*, (Florence: Edizioni Remo Sandron, 1967), 393-5; Hans Tietze and Erika Tietze-Conrat, *The Drawings of the Venetian Painters in the 15th and 16th Centuries*, (New York: Hacker Art Books, 1979), 268; *Venezia e la peste* (1979), 260-1; Rodolfo Pallucchini, *La pittura veneziana del seicento*, volume 1, (Venice: Alfieri, 1981), 27; James H. Moore, "'Venezia favorita da Maria': Music for the Madonna Nicopeia and Santa Maria della Salute," *Journal of the American Musicological Society*, v.37, n.2 (Summer 1984), 332-6; Paola Rossi, "Per la grafica di Domenico Tintoretto," *Arte Veneta*, v.38 (1984), 57-71; Paola Rossi, "Temi marciiani di Domenico Tintoretto," *Arte Veneta*, v.59 (2002), 246-51; Gauvin Alexander Bailey and Pamela M. Jones, eds. *Hope and Healing: Painting in Italy in a Time of Plague, 1500-1800*, ex. cat. (Worcester, Mass.: Clark University, 2005), 248-9; Silvano Onda, *La chiesa di San Francesco della Vigna: guida artistica* (Venice Parrocchia di San Francesco della Vigna, 2004), 87.

⁴ Fredrika Jacobs's recent book explores the topic of painted ex-votos and their function as self-generated spiritual tools. See, *Votive Panels and Popular Piety in Early Modern Italy*, (New York: Cambridge University Press), 2013.

⁵ "*Prega ti prego il tuo figliol che sani questa piaga crudel che ci divora/e con l alta pietade noi soccorra placata l ira sua cessin gli affani.*"

out of the homes in which victims of the disease have perished. Shrouded bodies lie inert on stretchers, while other corpses remain prone on the street.

At the outset, this painting presents a number of questions for which verifiable details are few. The date 1631 appears prominently on the right side of this votive work. It is unclear in which month this painting was created, as no documentation outlining its commission or installation has been found in the church's archives. In the absence of any anchoring documents, it is also worth considering this painting's potential production after the epidemic, with the date referencing the end of the crisis. However, visual and textual evidence, which will be evaluated shortly, support its creation during the outbreak. The identity of the two donors appearing at the bottom edge of the canvas remains unknown, though it can be reasonably inferred that they were responsible for the painting's commission. Their elevated social status is conveyed by their clothing and jewelry, as well as by their having the funds to commission a work from Domenico Tintoretto, a sought-after artist in sixteenth-century Venice. Significant changes made to the painting's content may also reveal something of the patrons' tastes or expectations for the work, as it appears that Domenico's initial design for the work was rejected in favor of more subdued iconography. This crucial point will be considered when reconstructing how this work may have been used.

There also remains the question of how this painting functioned in the church. While it is currently situated in a remote location (all but inaccessible in the choir), the painting initially held a prominent place on the right wall beside the high altar during the seventeenth century [Figure 4.3]. Marco Boschini's 1664 *Le minere della pittura* describes the painting only in terms of its most basic imagery — “Maria intercedes before [her] Son, the Savior, for [the] liberation from the plague of the city of Venice” — but notes that within the church, it was located to the

right of the main altar, on a wall outside of a small chapel to San Bonaventura.⁶ Pietro Antonio Pacifico's 1697 guidebook, *Cronica veneta*, confirms the work's once highly visible location here.⁷ However, its placement in the church prior to 1664, or during the 1630-31 epidemic, remains uncertain. No sources identify it as an altarpiece or devotional work in any of the church's private chapels. If the painting's prominence beside the high altar in 1664 represents its original location in the church, it suggests the importance of Domenico's work. A position next to the high altar would be reserved for works of art deemed exceptional for varying reasons — whether artistic prestige, spiritual efficacy, or a combination of factors.

Giannantonio Moschini's *Guida per la città di Venezia* from 1815 confirms the painting's continued position beside the high altar during the early nineteenth century.⁸ At some point after this date, Domenico's work was moved to its current remove in the choir. Its demotion from a place of honor to one of obscurity is not particularly unusual since works of art were moved with relative frequency during this period, especially after Napoleon's arrival in the city in 1797. However, this relocation, when considered with respect to a significant watering down of explicit plague imagery that transpired between the preparatory *modello* that Domenico created for the commission and the finished work, suggests that iconography's disruptive potential in the early conceptual stages of design, as well as after the completion and display of the painting [Figure 4.6].⁹

⁶ Boschini, *Le minere* (1664), 200-1. "Dall'altro fianco, euui Mria, che intercede avanti il figiuolo Salvatore la liberazione della Peste, per Città di Venezia: opera di Domenico Tintoretto."

⁷ Pacifico, 185. "...nell, altro la B.V. ch'intercede avanti il Figliolo, per la liberation della peste per la Città di Venetia, opera del Tintoretto."

⁸ Moschini, 39. "Il quadro a fianco di questo è di Domenico Tintoretto. Si vede nell'altro N.D. che priega il Salvatore a liberare dalla pestilenza Venezia, la quale in figura di donna vi sta di sotto. Vi hanno pure due ritratti de donne."

⁹ There is another painting by Domenico Tintoretto of the same dimensions in San Francesco della Vigna, *The Virgin and Child Hears the Prayers of Saint Francis and Domenico*, that has sometimes been considered a pendant to this work in guidebooks but generally disregarded in the scholarship on plague art. Indeed, though this painting is

It is evident that Domenico Tintoretto had a clear sense of the design for the composition during the preparatory stage of the painting and maintained this in large part in the finished composition, despite the mirror-image-like flipping between the two stages. The flipping was a peculiar habit of the artist that he employed not in relation to printmaking, as might be assumed, but as part of an idiosyncratic process of settling on a compositional design.¹⁰ Equally conspicuous is the change made in the lowest register between *modello* and finished work. In the place of the serene donors in the final painting, a mound of naked corpses tips out of the foreground of the preparatory sketch, piling up around the knees of the personification of Venice [Figure 4.7]. A prominent white X appears at the center of the composition of the sketch, just above Venice's outstretched arm. This X illustrates one aspect of the Health Office's quarantine practices and policy of isolating plague-infected homes. After the ill and suspected ill were escorted from their houses and sent to the appropriate *lazzaretti*, the doors were boarded up for decontamination. Those who had come in contact with members of afflicted households were sometimes also confined to quarantine in their own homes, their doors barricaded in this way as well to keep them isolated inside for anywhere from 15-40 days.¹¹ The ominous X in

dated 1630 it makes no references to plague and appears to be of a lesser technical quality, calling into question the Domenico Tintoretto attribution and placing it more likely as a product of the master's workshop or a work inspired by the Domenico under discussion. I have chosen to omit it from the discussion as I do not believe it was created in connection with the epidemic.

¹⁰ For more on Domenico's working methods and drawing style, see Michiaki Koshikawa, "I disegni di Domenico Tintoretto," *Arte Veneta*, v.47 (1996), 56-69. A number of drawings in the artist's sketchbooks that were created in preparation for larger commissions appear in reverse, with no evidence that they were destined for a print plate. Koshikawa observes that Domenico produced many painted sketches when planning out his major commissions, as part of his working process, and that this flipping of the composition was one method of finding the most harmonious composition for his finished works. For additional analysis of the younger Tintoretto's drawing style, particularly in distinction to his father's, see Paola Rossi, "Per la grafica di Domenico Tintoretto, II" *Arte Veneta*, v.38 (1984), 57-71.

¹¹ Richard Palmer, *The Control of Plague in Venice and Northern Italy, 1348-1600*, PhD dissertation, (University of Kent at Canterbury, 1978), 141-2. ASV, *Provveditori alla Sanità*, reg. 2, f.103v, 1541.

Domenico's sketch represents lumber nailed across the entries to plague-stricken homes, restricting access in and out.

The contrast between the foreground of the *modello* with diseased corpses and that of the finished work with donor portraits is significant. The depiction of donors as supplicants in the bottom register of religious paintings was common practice in early modern Italy, so in a sense, this choice is unremarkable. Likewise, Domenico's initial provocative imagery of the plague-stricken was conventional in depicting the disease in the Veneto region. In order to better appreciate this change in iconography between the *modello* and the finished painting, it is useful to compare the project with an altarpiece painted by Antonio Giarola for the church of San Fermo in Verona, *Verona Prays for Liberation from the Plague of 1630*, which also features the prominent corpses of plague victims in the foreground, rendered starkly [Figure 4.8].¹² Giarola's painting, a commemorative work created in 1636, five years after the epidemic, depicts a mature Christ in the sky, seated with God and the Holy Spirit, representing the full Trinity. The Virgin appears on a bank of clouds marginally beneath them, kneeling in supplication, her left arm raised to stay the arrows of pestilence in Christ's upraised hand. Verona, a subject city under Venice's political jurisdiction, but culturally and spiritually distinct from *La Serenissima*, did not adopt the Virgin as the primary intercessor in the 1630-31 plague, evidenced by the secondary role she plays in this painting.

¹² Notable scholarship on the Giarola altarpiece from the early modern period to the present includes Bartolomeo dal Pozzo, *Le vite de' pittori degli scultori et architetti veronesi*, (Verona: Giovanni Berno, 1718), 171, 235; Luigi Simeoni, *Verona: guida storico-artistica della città e provincia*, (Verona: C.A. Baroni, 1909), 25; Carlo Donzelli and Giuseppe Maria Pilo, *I pittori del seicento Veneto*, (Florence: Edizioni Remo Sandron, 1967), 196-7; Maddalena Salazzari Brognara, "Antonio Giarola, detto Cavalier Coppa," in *Cinquant'anni di pittura Veronese, 1580-1630*, eds. Liscio Magagnato and Francesca Flores d'Arcais (Verona: Neri Pozza Editore, 1974), 198-200; *Venezia e la peste* (1979), 270-1, color plate VI; Daniele Benati, Fiorella Frisoni, et. al., *L'arte degli Estensi: la pittura del Seicento e del Settecento a Modena e Reggio*, (Modena: Edizioni Panini, 1986), 249; Angelo Mazza, "La conversion emiliana di Antonio Zanchi," in *La pittura veneta negli stati estensi*, eds. Jadranka Bentini, Sergio Marinelli, Angelo Mazza, et. al. (Verona: Banca popolare di Verona, 1996), 244.

Giarola's altarpiece, like Domenico's painting for San Francesco della Vigna, adheres to a common formula found in ex-votos, showing the connection between catastrophe on earth and sacred intervention. Beneath the heavenly realm in Giarola's painting, Verona is depicted with geographic accuracy [Figure 4.9]. The hill of Castel San Pietro rises up in the center of the composition, paralleled by a depiction of the recognizable Ponte Pietra extending over the Adige River. In the bottom right corner of the canvas, a dark-haired woman in gold with a blue mantle draped over her left shoulder and across her chest stares imploringly at the Trinity. She is the personification of the city of Verona, following the customary practice in Venice — indeed, evident in Domenico's work — but adapted here, with local specificity. Venice personified was typically rendered blond and dressed in opulent garments, including the accoutrements of the Doge: gold and red damask and velvet, with the white ermine cloak and peaked *corno ducale* [Figure 4.10]. Domenico's rendition fits neatly in this tradition. Giarola's Verona, in contrast, appears with raven hair tied back and lacking Venice's typical pearls and gold adornments. Verona is dressed in an antique-looking gown and mantle representing the colors of the city's arms, which are repeated in a cartouche held by a lion crouching at her knees. There is no mistaking Verona's more austere and unadorned beauty for Venice's golden and glittering opulence. Verona gestures at the city with her right hand and clutches a white cloth in her left at chest level, suggesting that this cloth had been covering her mouth and nose moments before, shielding her from the poisonous air of her miasmatic city. Beneath her outstretched fingers, the city teems with corpses, from the immediate foreground to the far distance, where tiny boats full of plague victims float on the Adige. The largest figure in the composition, equal in size only to Verona herself, is the cadaver of a man, nude but for a dark red garment covering his loins, lying prostrate and foreshortened in the immediate foreground. His left arm is outstretched to display

a darkened bubo in his auxiliary, matching a second one appearing on his left hip. A woman lies prone beside him, her head resting on his right thigh. Her foreshortened body lies along a diagonal, becoming a visual bridge that leads viewers' eyes deeper into the sea of bodies strewn across the Veronese landscape. With the flow and undulation of the landscape and the idealized and elegantly draped bodies of the stricken population, the painting presents an image at once striking and repellent.

Domenico's *modello* indicates a design for his painting that would have operated in a manner similar to that of Giarola's altarpiece, provoking a visceral and spiritual reaction in viewers, while emphasizing the importance of the city itself as a unit defining the scope of the epidemic and the character of its residents. This approach was rejected in San Francesco della Vigna for reasons unknown. Both works were intended for ecclesiastical settings. Giarola's painting has been situated on the right lateral wall of the Cappella della Madonna in San Fermo since its installation in 1636, indicating that its explicit imaging of plague evidently caused no significant objections [Figure 4.11, 4.12]. Issues of decorum in San Francesco della Vigna, or possibly matters of personal taste for the patrons, dictated a different sort of composition for the final work. A painting created by Bernardino Prudenti to celebrate the end of the epidemic in Venice on November 21, 1631 provides an interesting parallel. This work initially featured a similar foreground of plague corpses. However, this portion of the canvas was cut off at an unknown point during the seventeenth century, effectively "sanitizing" the image [Figure 4.57]. The reasons for this will be examined in detail later, in the final case study.

The finalized composition of Domenico Tintoretto's painting for San Francesco della Vigna reflects the challenges presented by living in plague-battered Venice and demonstrates the hope of ameliorating these hardships through the patrons' visualized demonstrations of piety.

The donors' direct but calm looks implore viewers to adopt similarly reverential attitudes, thus guiding the prayers of other congregation members [Figure 4.13]. Venice personified is flanked by the lion of Saint Mark who bears a "pax" sign, referencing the injunction, "Peace be with you, Mark, my evangelist. Here your body will rest," supposedly spoken to the saint by an angel when Mark first arrived in Venice at the very site where this church was constructed.¹³ The lion gazes at Venice like a docile but devoted dog, acting with his mistress as the supplicants' first intermediaries to accessing the spiritual world. Venice, with arms outstretched, becomes like a double for the Virgin, whom she solicits on behalf of the Venetians. The Virgin is depicted in a conventional manner, with a blue mantle over a rose-colored garment. In this chain of intercession, the Madonna turns imploringly to her son (in a manner similar to Giarola's painting in Verona), who also wears a blue garment thrown over his shoulders. A gold aureole opens behind Christ's head, while a nude putto stays the sword in his right hand; two bodiless seraphim fill in the negative space in the clouds above the Virgin.

In many of these aspects, Domenico's painting adheres to standard representations of holy intercession depicted in Venetian paintings of this period, despite the somewhat unusual imagery of a putto restraining the weapon of an angry Christ. Conforming to established formulae in devotional art fulfilled viewers' expectations during times of turmoil and presented them with a comforting sense of order. However, with *tavolette* and other works of art representing dramatic sacred intercession in the face of catastrophe, the specificity of details that outline the crisis is crucial. In *Venice Supplicating to the Virgin*, these specifying details — namely, the representation of the *pizzigamorti* and the scroll of text spanning the center of the

¹³ "Pax tibi Marce, evangelista meus. Hic requiescit corpus tuum."

composition — offer the strongest points of entry in reconstructing this work’s spiritual function in the church.

While *pizzigamorti* appear in both the graphic *modello* and staid final work, Domenico Tintoretto has increased their numbers in the finished painting, rendering them with restraint and exhibiting a marked orderliness. In the *modello*, two *pizzigamorti* are depicted on the left side of the composition, directly beneath the banner and the Virgin, who appears on the right [Figure 4.6]. The body clearers appear less integrated with the holy figures than they do in the final work. Three *pizzigamorti* appear in the finished painting, with the suggestion of a fourth who is hidden behind the figure of Venice [Figure 4.5]. They have been rendered only in the background, industriously collecting the corpses of plague victims that have been shrouded and reduced in scale from the *modello*. The *pizzigamorti* appear clean and well dressed. There is a sense of businesslike tidiness to these figures, each stooped under the burden he is carrying. Though a body rests on the ground near the right edge of the canvas, just above the date, and another lies deeper in the depicted space, opposite the feet of the *pizzigamorti*, these corpses’ location in the street appears as more of a momentary disruption than a representation of a widespread breakdown in the urban fabric. In other words, the *pizzigamorti* in this painting have the situation under control. Through their methodical work the city will suffer only momentary lapses in its typically well-ordered functioning. In fact, their placement in relation to the personification of Venice is telling. Venice gazes heavenward, her eyes slightly unfocused, but directed toward the Virgin, whose outstretched hands indicate she has heard Venice’s plea and will advocate for the city to be spared by Christ. The figure of Venice is a double of Mary; her pose is similar to that of a Madonna della Misericordia, her arms outstretched to create a protective zone beneath her ducal cape, but her hands raised, palms up, to indicate her appeal to

Heaven. The *pizzigamorti* appear directly beneath Venice's protectively outstretched hands. The tiny red cap marking out the head of the body clearer at the left side of the composition emphasizes his importance to the painting's conceit, and his proximity to the fingers on Venice's extended right hand suggest his spiritual importance as well. With an interesting duality, the body clearers are shown protecting Venice, the urban site, by keeping it free of plague-contaminated bodies, while the figure of Venice shields the *pizzigamorti* and ensures their salvation through the intercession of the Virgin and Christ. There is a sense of ordered reciprocity illustrated in this cycle.

An interesting question arises as to what motivated Domenico Tintoretto to portray the *pizzigamorti* with a positive valence when they were such fear-inducing and divisive figures in public consciousness. How were the interests and concerns of the patrons reflected in this choice? While reconstructing the motivations of the patrons is difficult without knowing their identities, some useful inferences can be made based on the location of San Francesco della Vigna in the city and the possible makeup of its congregation. Castello, where the church is located, is found in the northeastern section of the city, and its parochial boundaries abut Venice's shipyard, the Arsenale [Figure 4.2]. The Arsenale, in fact, was a locus for *pizzigamorto* activity during the 1630-31 epidemic, and while these body clearers were known for their wide traverse throughout the city and the lagoon, some of their work clustered in the shipyard during the height of the outbreak. On October 29, 1630, when plague cases began soar, the Senate ordered the Arsenale workers to construct 2,000 hospital beds for the lazzaretti and scores of carts and additional boats for the *pizzigamorti* to use in transporting the stricken and dead throughout the city and to the Lido for burial.¹⁴ Venice's shipbuilding yard temporarily became

¹⁴ ASV, *Sanità*, reg. 17, 127r, October 26, 1630; 133r, October 29, 1630. Cited in *Venezia e la peste*, catalogue number s145, page 143.

an ad hoc distribution center for the plague hospitals' most vital tools, and the site at which workers in both the naval and health care industries found their working lives intertwined. Indeed, builders in the Arsenale began to contract plague in large numbers after their increased direct contact with the *pizzigamorti*, as well as their continued interaction with *smorbadori*, who functioned primarily as porters in the shipyard during times of health, but were tasked with disinfecting the mountains of contaminated material goods during the 1630-31 epidemic.¹⁵ There were, however, no clear-cut distinctions between shipyard workers and disinfectors. Men who transported infectious household materials and cleaned them at the lazaretti were conscripted from the Arsenale, as need dictated, and the tasks they performed overlapped with those of the *pizzigamorti*. While *smorbadori* did not ferry boats of corpses, they did work directly with contaminated materials — relocating them to sites for cleansing — as did the body clearers.

Domenico Tintoretto's sympathetic portrayal of the *pizzigamorti* in this ex-voto may relate to the church's proximity to a major site of these men's interfacing and the hub for the redistribution of materials in the city. San Francesco della Vigna and the Arsenale both straddle the northernmost edge of the city, where the *fondamenta* faces out to the lagoon, serving as the launching site of Venice's naval fleet and departure point for boats headed from the city center to the Lazzaretto Nuovo, where the majority of plague-contaminated goods were held and treated. Tintoretto's painting may register the social makeup of the congregation of the church for which it was created and where it was displayed. Admittedly, the patrons of this painting were of a social status higher than that of the men who typically worked as body clearers and disinfectors,

¹⁵ Interestingly, *Sanità* documents from October 1630 also indicate a clustering of over 300 deaths by wounds in the Arsenale at this time, mostly of men who had resided in the San Pietro in Castello neighborhood. It is unclear if these are related to an accident, civic unrest, or some other conflict among residents in this neighborhood. See, Stephen R. Ell, "Three Days in October of 1630: Detailed Examination of Mortality during an Early Modern Plague Epidemic in Venice," *Reviews of Infectious Disease*, v.11, n.1 (January-February 1989), 135, n.53. ASV, *Sanità*, registro 17, folios 133r-v, 159r, 183r-v.

but this does not exclude the possibility of wealthy citizens in the congregation who recognized that these men were crucial to maintaining order in their neighborhood. Proximity to men working in these dangerous jobs may have increased an empathic response from some *cittadini*, made visible in a votive that includes even these marginalized groups within the direct path of salvation. These observations support the painting's creation during the 1630-31 epidemic. A sympathetic and idealized portrayal of the *pizzigamorti* made during the crisis could reflect hopes for the body clearers' ethical conduct and a return to an ordered routine life.

This returns to the question of how Domenico's painting functioned in San Francesco della Vigna. Undoubtedly, it was a means of petitioning the divine for protection from the plague, but it may have served other functions as well. Plague paintings, like religious art in general in early modern Italy, do not necessarily fit into one distinct category of usage. In fact, their use was fluid, fulfilling multiple roles in an ecclesiastical setting and evolving over time. In her pioneering scholarship on plague art, Louise Marshall examined the varied uses of a confraternal banner from Perugia featuring San Benedetto.¹⁶ This banner, to which special prophylactic properties against plague were ascribed, was commissioned in 1471 during a time of relative health and housed in the parish church of Santa Maria Nuova (rather than the confraternity's meetinghouse), in order to allow for greatest accessibility by Perugia's residents.¹⁷ In the church setting, it resided within a chapel and served as an altarpiece, fulfilling liturgical functions. During plague epidemics, however, it was carried in processions through the town for greater visibility and to disseminate its protective powers. This banner functioned as a confraternity's emblem, an altarpiece, and a miracle-working image, fluctuating

¹⁶ Louise Marshall, "Confraternity and Community: Mobilizing the Sacred in Times of Plague," in *Confraternities and the Visual Arts in Renaissance Italy: Ritual, Spectacle, Image*. eds. Barbara Wisch and Diane Cole Ahl, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 20-45.

¹⁷ Marshall, 26-8.

unproblematically between these varied roles, depending on which aspect was most needed, while still maintaining the distinction of each.

Paul Hills has cautioned against strict categorizations of sacred images, calling into question the usefulness of “altarpiece” as a class of devotional object based on formal grounds.¹⁸ He observes that some early modern paintings that resemble physically what modern eyes have come to expect of an altarpiece had, in fact, never been used for liturgical purposes. Conversely, other works of art that deviated formally from the expected conventions in altarpiece design did perform a liturgical function, but have been overlooked in modern scholarship. These insightful interventions in the study of devotional works of art offer a reminder that the multiple roles played by religious paintings may not be evident in the physical forms they take, and it is limiting to think of them performing distinct, isolated functions.

In considering Domenico Tintoretto’s painting for San Francesco della Vigna, one should therefore assume a degree of fluidity and adaptive usage, particularly as this work seems not to have been created for the high altar or even a private chapel. There is no evidence it served as an altarpiece, even though it is very similar in composition and iconography to Giarola’s altarpiece in San Fermo Maggiore in Verona. Instead, the painting likely fulfilled varied uses of a spiritual nature. Originally, it appears to have commemorated a vow made by the painting’s patrons, the two supplicating women. Their presentation of the painting to the church was motivated by personal needs, but it also reflected the virtues of the congregation as a collective, and the city in its entirety, through their inclusion in the figural allegory of Venice. Because of the large scale of the painting and its creation by a well-known artist from the respected Tintoretto family, this ex-voto was a more elite object than a conventional *tavoletta*. Domenico Tintoretto, though

¹⁸ Paul Hills, “The Renaissance Altarpiece: a Valid Category?” in *The Altarpiece in the Renaissance*, eds. Peter Humfrey and Martin Kemp, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 34-48.

never earning the impressive reputation of his father Jacopo, still maintained a lucrative career in the city, particularly as a portraitist for confraternities and other civic groups. This ex-voto was painted near the end of his career when the artist was in his seventies and had just completed a twenty-year affiliation with the Scuola Grande di San Giovanni Evangelista, producing multiple works for the confraternity.¹⁹

As mentioned in the Introduction to this dissertation, it appears likely that Domenico's ex-voto was connected to the large-scale devotions organized by the State during the 1630-31 epidemic. Musicologist James Moore was the first to have suggested that the prayer written on the banner unfurling across the painting follows closely the phrasing found in litanies composed by Claudio Monteverdi when he was music director at the Basilica di San Marco for use in the weekly processions of the Madonna Nicopeia during the epidemic. Specifically, this text aligns with spiritual music performed during the procession honoring the Senate's official announcement to construct the Salute on October 26, 1630.²⁰ Moore transcribed several lines from Monteverdi's motet, in which Venice pleads to the Virgin for succor: "O happy portal, we cry to you...we sigh to you, mourning and weeping in this vale of tears / She who is a secure link between men and God, the forgiveness for sins / O mediatrix, our advocate, turn your merciful eyes upon us..."²¹ While there are certain similarities between both texts, particularly those that

¹⁹ Carlo Ridolfi's brief biography of Domenico that was published at the close of his expansive work on the life of his famous father Jacopo, does not mention his work for San Francesco della Vigna. See, Ridolfi, *Vita di Giacopo Robusti detto il Tintoretto, celebre pittore, cittadino venetiano*, (Venice: Oddoni, 1642); Carlo Ridolfi and Giuseppe Vedova, "Vita di Domenico Tintoretto, veneziano, figliuolo di Jacopo," in *Le meraviglie dell'arte: ovvero Le vite degli illustri pittori veneti e dello stato*, Volume II, (Padua: Cartallier, 1837), 501-510; and in English translation, "The Life of Tintoretto and of his Children Domenico and Marietta," trans. Catherine and Robert Engass, (University Park, Pa.: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1984), 86-94.

²⁰ James H. Moore " 'Venezia favorita da Maria: ' Music for the Madonna Nicopeia and Santa Maria della Salute,' *Journal of the American Musicological Society*, v.37, n.2 (Summer 1984), 332-6.

²¹ Moore, 334. "O felix porta...ad te suspiramus, gementes et flentes in hac lacrimarum valle / Illa quae tutum est medium inter homines et Deum, pro culpis remedium / O mediatrix, o advocata nostra, illos tuos misericordes oculos ad nos converte..." These are lines excerpted from Claudio Monteverdi's composition, *Audi caelum—Salve Regina*, for the October 26, 1631 procession.

evoke the Virgin as a portal and reference the sighs of Venice's beleaguered residents, these tropes are not unusual in early modern prayers to the Virgin and other intercessors. Both are representative of general conventions in soliciting sacred intercessors, in which supplicants characterize their plight in terms both physical and spiritual. The sacred figure solicited is appealed to as a powerful, but merciful and sometimes familial figure who can choose to act as their advocate in the spiritual realm.

Rather than considering Domenico's painting a direct response to sacred music composed for the State-run ceremonies during the epidemic, it is more useful to think about votives offered during this plague — those with text and without — and Monteverdi's music as representative of a prevailing Venetian spirituality during the Seicento, developed from a broadly Italian tradition, but demonstrating local specificity in varied media. Parallels in imagery and language found in various appeals to the sacred during this epidemic do not necessarily evidence an orchestrated collusion, but rather demonstrate long-standing themes in intercession that had become convention. What is most interesting are the ways in which traditional rhetoric and iconography were adapted across media. In the case of Domenico Tintoretto's votive painting, the personification of Venice is a common metaphor in Venetian art and State-sponsored self-fashioning.

It is perhaps more fruitful to consider the text that appears on Domenico's pictorial banner not only in terms of its relation to contemporary music, but with regard to what appears on the canvas itself. The question arises: whose voice is speaking on this banner? Are we hearing the prayers of one of the women votaries who appear at the bottom of the composition, or is this text Venice herself, speaking on behalf of the city? I am inclined to the latter interpretation, which gives even stronger force to the lines, "help *us* placate his wrath, [so that]

sighs cease” — Venice considers all devotees who pray to the Virgin as part of a cohesive whole, gathered under her personal protection and represented in her appeal to the Virgin. Venice’s outstretched arms, an iconographic reference to the Madonna della Misericordia, echo visually this unity and protection.

It is possible that Domenico’s canvas was carried in procession or otherwise left San Francesco della Vigna for use outside the church. Parochial displays of their churches’ relics and small-scale processions around their *campi* were common in early modern Venice, though they have not left large traces in the material record. Indeed, the basilica of San Pietro in Castello processed Giustiniani’s body in their parish neighborhood at the outset of the 1630-31 epidemic, not far from San Francesco della Vigna, and the Scuola Grande di San Rocco routinely displayed paintings depicting their titular saint during Roch’s yearly feast outside of their meetinghouse [Figure 4.14].²² As Domenico’s painting does not appear to have served a liturgical function or have had a dedicated space for it in the church at the time of its creation, it is possible that mobility was important to its use in 1631. Its size — large enough to be visible at a distance, but not too large to be unmanageable in transit — and its vertical orientation would be well suited to movement and legibility by crowds. If its design and text were inspired by Monteverdi’s sacred music for the Madonna Nicopeia, this too supports mobile usage. As the Nicopeia was processed regularly during the outbreak, so too might have Domenico’s painting.

Whether or not *Venice Supplicating to the Virgin* was used in processions during the 1630-31 plague epidemic, the painting is still marked by conceptual evolution and physical movement. Domenico’s reworking of the pictorial content to minimize the plague corpses and

²² The best visual evidence of this practice is Canaletto’s *Feast Day of Saint Roch* of 1735, now in the collection of the National Gallery of Art in London, in which the meetinghouse is depicted festooned with garlands to honor the celebration, and crowds of *confratelli* gather outside amid dozens of paintings displayed in the *campo* to honor Roch’s feast day.

give greater weight to the *pizzigamorti* documents his participation in designing plague art that would be both visually appealing and functional from a spiritual standpoint. Both of his compositional solutions were responsive to widespread trends in plague art in Venice and the Veneto region.

Ex-voto with Giorgio Pallavicino at the Scuola di San Giorgio degli Schiavoni

On the second floor of the meetinghouse of the Scuola di San Giorgio degli Schiavoni, referred to alternately as the Scuola dei SS. Giorgio e Trifone or the Scuola Dalmata, there exists another ex-voto from the plague epidemic of 1630-31 [Figures 4.15-17]. This painting depicts a captain employed by the Venetian navy, Giorgio Pallavicino, living in the Dalmatian city of Perast, who supplicates before an enthroned Virgin and Child. Saint Roch presents Pallavicino to the Virgin, with Saint Sebastian kneeling opposite. The pair of plague saints would be enough to indicate that this work of art relates to pestilence in some way. However, this painting also features a Latin inscription, painted on two fictive sheets of paper “adhering” at the bottom right of the canvas that identifies the donor, the cityscape behind him, and states that this commission was a votive offering in the 1631 plague outbreak. The first sheet of paper reads: “GIORGIO PALLAVICINO AND PERAST / CAPTAIN AND COLLEGE MEMBER/ MADE THIS IN A TIME OF PESTILENCE.” The second inscription names other important confraternity members and notes the Dalmatian cities from which they came: “EX-VOTO FROM THE YEAR 1631 / GUARDIAN JACOB PETRO OF SEBENICO / VICAR NICOLAO GALLIO / LUSTIZA, FOREMOST IN CHARACTER” [Figure 4.18].²³

²³ “GEORGIVS PALLAVICINUS E PERASTO / NAVARCHVS CVM ESSET COLLEGII / HVIVS SCRIBA TEMPORE PESTILENTIAE”. The second: “EX VOTO ANNO MDCXXXI / GVARDIANO IACOBO PETRO DE SEBENICO / VICARIO NICOLAO GALLIO / LVSTIZA PROTHO INGENI”. Sebenico and Lustiza were both cities in the Cattaro region of Dalmatia, near Perast.

This work provides a look into the understudied relationship between Venice and its maritime colonies along the coast of the Adriatic Sea, in what are now modern-day Slovenia, Croatia, Montenegro, and Albania, and encompassing the region historically known as Dalmatia during the time of plague [Figures 4.19, 4.20]. This painting has received little scholarly attention. It was not included in the comprehensive catalogue from the landmark *Venezia e la peste* exhibition of 1979 and appears only as a brief mention in a handful of modern sources and several early modern guidebooks, which offer no critical analyses of the painting.²⁴ The confraternity for which the painting was created, where it still resides in situ in the meetinghouse, represented Dalmatian residents in early modern Venice, as well as other immigrants from nearby Croatian lands who settled in the city. The Venetian State controlled a long narrow strip of land down the Adriatic coast that extended from Istria in the north, down to the Bay of Kotor from the early fifteenth century until the Republic's end in 1797, though Venice lost various portions of this region throughout the seventeenth century in battles with Ottoman forces.²⁵ The region was volatile as it bordered Ottoman lands and became the main site of Venice's land skirmishes with the Turks. This ex-voto, though created with the primary intent of thwarting plague and visualizing the patron's spiritual capital, also honors Giorgio

²⁴ A publication on the art of the Scuola Dalmata, published by the confraternity, mentions this painting briefly. See Alberto Rizzi, *Scritti di arte sulla Dalmazia*, Collana di ricerche storiche Jolana Maria Trèveri series, 14 (Venice: Scuola Dalmata dei SS. Giorgio e Trifone, 2016), 25. It is also mentioned in a footnote in Christopher Black, *Italian Confraternities in the Sixteenth Century*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 245, n36.

²⁵ Perast became a Venetian colony in 1420. In the later 17th century and throughout the 18th, up until the fall of the Republic, Venice did successfully push back the Ottoman encroachment on their land holdings in this region. Though the eventual loss of Crete in 1669 in the decades-long Battle of Candia was a blow to Venice's military, the Venetian presence was strengthening in Croatia during this same time period. Venice wrested back a considerable amount of land in Dalmatia at this time, and these maritime colonies increased in size during this period. See, Lovorka Čoralić, "Emigrants from Kotor and the Croatian Fraternity of St. George and Triphon in Venice / Kotorški iseljenici i hrvatska bratovština sv. Jurja i Tripuna u Mlecima (XV-XVII. St.)," *Croatica Christiana Periodica*, v.32, issue 61, (January 2008), 18-34; Tea Perinčić Mayhew, *Dalmatia between Ottoman and Venetian Rule*, (Rome: Viella), 2008; and Benjamin Arbel, "Venice's Maritime Empire in the Early Modern Period," in *A Companion to Venetian History, 1400-1797*, ed. Eric Dursteler, (Leiden: Brill), 143-3.

Pallavicino as a prominent citizen connected with both Venice and the Dalmatian city of Perast, in current-day Montenegro [Figures 4.21].

The 1630-31 plague epidemic in Venice first struck the Italian mainland in 1628, and though Venice was plague-free by the end of 1631, the disease was still an active but sporadic presence in the Balkan cities along the Adriatic, at Corfu, and throughout the Peloponnese into the early 1630s.²⁶ Perast appears not to have been stricken by the outbreak of 1630-31, though early modern sources have not surfaced to substantiate this fully. However, due to the city's close relationship to Venice and its importance as a port, plague controls were put in place here as well, and the entire region was closely monitored by the *Sanità*.²⁷ Pallavicino's votive depicts Perast as his home and the location of his professional life. It represents his regional identity while calling for protection from plague to the site. Though the inscription on the painting indicates that Pallavicino was a captain during a time of plague, it does not specify where the man was during the epidemic. As the intended location for this work was the Scuola Dalmata in Venice, protection for the Italian city is implied. However, as the depicted geography presents an aerial view of Perast, a sort of carry-over in the salvific and protective powers of the Virgin and Christ is implied for the Dalmatian port city as well. Though Perast appears not to have been gripped by an epidemic at the time of this painting's creation, pestilence came frequently to the Balkan cities, and a naturalistic rendering of Perast in Pallavicino's painting allows for a

²⁶ In fact, plague continued to spring up in the region with regularity during the eighteenth century. See Katerina Konstantinidou, Elpis Mantadakis, Matthew E. Falagas, Thalia Sardi, and George Samonis, "Venetian Rule and the Control of Plague Epidemics on the Ionian Islands during the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries," *Emerging Infectious Diseases*, v.15, n.1, (January 2009), 41.

²⁷ Jane Crawshaw uncovered *Sanità* documents related to architectural designs for lazaretti given to governors in Dalmatia in order to institute the establishment of a plague hospital in the region early in the seventeenth century. ASV, *Sanità*, reg.3, 88v, (October 6, 1609), cited in *Plague Hospitals*, 36, n154. For more on Dalmatian lazaretti, see, Sabine Florence Fabijanec, "Hygiene and Commerce: the Example of Dalmatian Lazarettos from the Fourteenth until the Sixteenth Century," *Scientific Research Journal for Economic and Environmental History / Časopis za gospodarsku povijest i povijest okoliša*, issue 4 (2008), 115-33.

transference of protection, were plague to spring up there, too. The bird's-eye view of the city can be linked to new initiatives undertaken in the late sixteenth century through the seventeenth century to map out Venice's *stato da mar* territories with more accuracy. The ex-voto's rendering of the city is similar to that included in one of the earliest Venetian-printed maps to show cities along the Dalmatian coast in detail, Simon Pinargenti's *Isole che son da Venetia nella Dalmatia...con le loro fortezze, e con le terre più notabili di Dalmatia* from 1573 [Figures 4.22, 4.23].²⁸ In the map book, Perast is shown at the point of a peninsula that extends into the Bay of Kotor, which has widened out beyond a strait. Pinargenti's map includes two large islands in the bay directly in front of the town. A depiction of the Church of Saint Nicholas situates Perast on land within a few gathered structures. The Scuola Dalmata's votive painting reproduces the narrow strait, the widened bay, the dominant Church of Saint Nicholas, and the two islands, though these two elements have been depicted in slightly different locations [Figure 4.24].

Unlike Domenico Tintoretto's mobile ex-voto for the church of San Francesco della Vigna, this painting appears as an integral part of the decorative scheme in the Scuola di San Giorgio degli Schiavoni's *sala superiore*. It is one of a dozen paintings, horizontal in format and created during the seventeenth century, that ring the meetinghouse's upper room, lining the top section of the walls below the ceiling. These paintings each depict prominent members of the confraternity, their portraits appearing in the immediate foreground of narrative scenes either taken from the Bible or illustrating troubling and dangerous current events, such as recent naval

²⁸ The full title is *Isole che son da Venetia nella Dalmatia, et per tutto l'Arcipelago, sino à Constantinopoli, con le loro fortezze, e con le terre più notabili di Dalmatia: nuovamente poste in disegno a beneficio de gli studio si di geografia*, (Venice: Simon Pinargenti), 1573. Scholars have noted that there was increasing interest in Venice at this time to produce accurate maps of the Croatian and Dalmatian regions in relation to the ongoing battles with the Ottomans at this time. See Mirela Altić, "Johannes Janssonius's Map of Dalmatia and the Ottoman-Venetian Borderland (1650)," *Imago Mundi*, v. 70 (2018), 65-78, and Josip Faričić, "Geographical Names on 16th and 17th Century Maps of Croatia," *Kartografija i Geoinformacije*, v.6 (2007), 148-79.

battles or, in the painting currently under consideration, an outbreak of plague. Pallavicino's ex-voto is the only work related to plague, but it has something remarkable in common with close to half of the paintings in this room: it includes a topographically accurate depiction of an important city in Dalmatia or Venetian Albania. The four-lobed Bay of Kotor (Cattaro) and the city of Perast (Perasto) — the site at which Venice maintained a sizable fleet of boats and a land army, vigilant and prepared for skirmishes with the Ottomans — appear opposite the Virgin and Child from Giorgio Pallavicino. The city's tipped-up orientation shows boats on the bay, the *campanili* of churches, and the outlines of a prosperous city backed protectively by mountains. Again, these features are consistent with the maps newly developed by Pinargenti and others at the end of the sixteenth century. Other votives adorning the walls of the Scuola's upper floor meeting room and the stairs that lead to it illustrate the cities of Trogir (Traù, in Venetian) and Zadar (Zara), the island and town of Rab (Arbe) near Istria, and the Gulf of Patras, where the Battle of Lepanto took place in 1571. These paintings, honoring the donors who commissioned them and commemorating the sacred favor that led to their triumph, also celebrate the Croatian and Dalmatian lands with which these men were connected. *Confratelli* and *consorelle* saw in these works an affirmation of their distinct cultural identities within the local Venetian amalgam. A mixture of varied, but distinct groups and ethnicities defined the population of Venice, and these groups co-existed with relative peace. However, this heterogeneity was countered by the concept of "Venetian-ness," promoted in contradistinction to the varied regional identities and ethnicities that characterized foreignness in Venice, as well as the mosaic of local neighborhood and corporate allegiances of Venetian citizens.

The Scuola di San Giorgio degli Schiavoni was founded in 1451, in the *sestiere* of Castello, a short distance from the church of San Francesco della Vigna and the Arsenale, after

the brotherhood received a parcel of land on which to build their meetinghouse from the church of San Giovanni del Tempio and the monastery of Santa Caterina.²⁹ Though never attaining grande status and representing a foreign population in the city, the Scuola Dalmata was an important institution in Venice. It received the support of Cardinal Bessarion, who granted the confraternity an indulgence in 1464, one of several the Scuola would receive throughout the early modern period, later granted by Popes Sixtus IV, Alexander VI, Urban VIII, and Alexander VII for Dalmatia's active involvement in raising land troops against Ottoman forces.³⁰

The confraternity's meetinghouse in its current form was reconstructed in 1551 by an architect at the Arsenale, Giovanni Zon, though the Scuola had already been in possession of its most valuable treasure since the beginning of the sixteenth century: the relics of Saint George.³¹ At that time, the confraternity commissioned the famed cycle of nine paintings by Vittore Carpaccio that represent the life of the sodality's titular saints. These paintings adorn the walls of the meetinghouse's ground floor and depict episodes from the lives of saints George, Matthew, Jerome, and Augustine. Though some of these works originally hung on the upper floor of the meetinghouse before the 1551 renovation, all of Carpaccio's works were relocated to the ground floor afterwards, leaving the *sala superiore* in need of an artistic program to complete

²⁹ Tullio Vallery, *La Scuola Dalmata dei Santi Giorgio e Trifone*, Collana di ricerche storiche Jolana Maria Trèveri series, 11 (Venice: Scuola Dalmata dei SS. Giorgio e Trifone, 2011), 5.

³⁰ Vallery, 88-92. The Scuola di San Giorgio degli Schiavoni was, therefore, valuable to the interests of both the Venetian State, which sought to maintain control of its maritime colonies along the Adriatic and the Peloponnese that continued to slip from the city's grasp in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and the Papacy, who also struggled to promote Christian dominion in this area of the world that was returning with increasing force to Turkish control. Important cities in Croatia and Dalmatia, particularly Perast, began to grow in wealth and prestige during the mid-sixteenth through the seventeenth centuries for their crucial role in supporting the military and political maneuverings of these two powerful institutions on the Italian peninsula.

³¹ Vallery, 99-103.

the space. The dozen paintings created throughout the seventeenth century, of which Pallavicino's is included, fulfilled this need while honoring high-ranking *confratelli*.³²

Authorship of Giorgio Pallavicino's plague votive is uncertain. The Scuola Dalmata, in an unusual deviation, was not suppressed by the French troops that invaded Venice under Napoleon in 1797, and thus the confraternity's documents remained with the brotherhood and did not pass into the charge of the State. However, materials dating prior to the nineteenth century are rare in the Scuola's archives. Documents related to the commission of this painting, or any of the seicento ex-votos, have not been found. Indeed, contractual information for Carpaccio's works is also missing, a vexing point for scholars.³³ In both seventeenth-century editions of Boschini's guidebooks, the author has little to say about the works of art present in the Scuola di San Giorgio degli Schiavoni, noting mainly that the confraternity possessed nine works by Carpaccio, detailing the lives and miracles of saints George and Jerome, as well as several other saints; no mention of any of the paintings in the *sala superiore* appears.³⁴ In eighteenth-century guides to the city, Anton Maria Zanetti offers nothing on the Scuola Dalmata, and Giovanni Battista Albrizzi only reiterates the scant information Boschini offered a century earlier.³⁵ The ex-voto is first mentioned by Giannantonio Moschini in his 1815 guidebook to the

³² The perceived artistic quality of these works has been denigrated since the early modern period, where they have been compared in guidebooks perennially to Carpaccio's masterpieces residing below. See, Giannantonio Moschini, *Guida per la città di Venezia: all'amico delle belle arte*, volume 1 (Venice: Nella tip. di Alvisopoli, 1815), 92. Even modern guides to the confraternity's works of art, which can be purchased at the meetinghouse, attribute little aesthetic value to the works appearing upstairs. See, Guido Perocco, *Guida alla Scuola Dalmata dei santi Giorgio e Trifone*, (Venice: Scuola Dalmata), 1972.

³³ See Helen I. Roberts, "St. Augustine in 'St. Jerome's Study': Carpaccio's Painting and its Legendary Source," *Art Bulletin*, v.41, n.4 (December 1959), 283, n.2; Stefania Mason, "Scuola di San Giorgio degli Schiavoni," in *Carpaccio: the Major Pictorial Cycles*, trans. Andrew Ellis, (Milan: Skira, 2000), 110.

³⁴ Boschini, *Le minere*, (1664), 194; *Le ricche minere*, (1674), 37. Interestingly, Boschini also mentions the presence of a number of banners that were processed outside the scuola on festival days "Vi sono nove quadri di Vittore Carpaccio, alcuni contengono la vita, e miracoli di S. Giorgio, & altri...Euui poi il Confalone, che il giorno della festiuità si metter fuori della Scuola..."

³⁵ Anton Maria Zanetti, *Della pittura veneziani e delle opere pubbliche de' veneziani maestri, Libri V*, (Venice: Giambattista Albrizzi, 1771), 37; Giovanni Battista Albrizzi, *Forestiero illuminato intorno le cose più rare, e*

city, in which the painting is identified as by the hand of Jacopo Palma il Giovane, though Moschini notes that this is impossible, as the artist had died three years prior to the votive's creation.³⁶ Subsequently, the painting has been described as "school of" or "in the style of" Palma Giovane, when any attribution is offered.

Pallavicino's ex-voto renders space in a complex way, playing with notions of the presence and absence of the sacred. The Virgin is enthroned in the center of the composition, with the Christ Child on her lap. Saint Roch appears to her right, at the left side of the canvas, extending his arm to present Giorgio Pallavicino to her; Saint Sebastian kneels at her left side, hands crossed over his chest in supplication, with three arrows piercing his body [Figures 4.25, 4.26]. Both saints appear with standard iconography, and each holy figure is crowned with a gilded halo, though golden rays, rather than a flattened disc shape, emanate from the Christ Child. The Virgin sits on a throne, though a green velvet cloth with golden fringe, draped behind her like a framing backdrop, obscures its shape and appearance. This textile references a tradition in Venetian painting developed during the previous century. Several of Giovanni Bellini's renditions of the Madonna and Child from the early sixteenth century exhibit this convention. Depicting a green cloth of honor behind the Virgin indicates her elevated spiritual status and introduces an element of spatial disruption that shows her present within the scene, yet also remote from it [Figure 4.27]. In the Scuola Dalmata's painting, the green cloth frames and differentiates the Virgin, while also blocking off and stabilizing what would otherwise have been an open background of sky and a diminutive landscape far below her. While the cloth grounds

curiose, antiche, e moderne, della città di Venezia e dell'isole circonvicine...(Venice: Giambattista Albrizzi, 1772), 144.

³⁶ Moschini, *Guida per la città di Venezia*, 92. "...un quadro con N.D. col Bambino fra i santi Sebastiano e Rocco con un ritratto, opera fatta nell'anno ivi segnato della pestilenza, che fu il 1630, e che diriasi d'Jacopo Palma, se morto non fosse alcun anno prima."

the image, is also disrupts the spatial orientation of the composition. The drapery maintains sharp, rectangular creases in its pile, as though it had been folded for a substantial amount of time and had only recently been unfolded and used to situate the Madonna — typical in paintings that use the cloth of honor iconography. In this way, the cloth becomes a *trompe l'oeil* element, similar to the sheets of paper set fictively on the canvas's surface that identify the donor and the occasion for the votive's creation.

At first glance, this painting gives the impression of bodies rendered naturalistically — correctly proportioned, consistently lit, and interacting in a convincing space. However, a discord becomes evident when the spatial interplay between the figures, the *trompe l'oeil* objects, and the landscape is carefully examined. Not only do the green cloth and text blocks float oddly in the immediate foreground of the painting, but the celestial figures become flattened by these objects. Giorgio Pallavicino's position in relation to these elements becomes increasingly strange. Roch, Sebastian, and the Virgin and Christ are oriented to one another in a coherent space; the two saints kneel upon the same plane that supports Mary's throne. However, the green cloth behind the Virgin, when examined at the top edge of the canvas appears tacked to the pictorial surface like the simulated papers. When considered this way, Mary and Christ become planar, no longer three-dimensional beings sitting within the depth of a throne, but like images themselves, imprinted onto the surface of the green cloth. The Virgin's right elbow and Christ's outstretched fingers reach just to the edge of the framing cloth, but do not extend over its limits.³⁷ Like figures painted on canvas, they are contained within the rectilinear spatial confines on which they have been imaged. As for Pallavicino, were a credible, consistent space maintained in this painting, he would be positioned as if kneeling on a lower section of flooring

³⁷ Oddly, the top of the Virgin's halo has been clipped by the frame's uppermost edge, indicating that this work might have been cut down to fit the space. It is unclear how much of the canvas may have been removed, if it was altered.

beneath the Virgin's raised throne, reached by a short flight of steps. The disruptive quality of the foreground objects makes the donor's position seem uncertain. He appears simultaneously present before the Virgin and floating in some indeterminate space, neither grouped with the holy people nor part of the landscape behind him. The entire figural grouping becomes like an overlay, placed atop the distant view of Perast.

This odd pictorial arrangement raises issues related to the uncertainties of intercession and the importance of place in votive works of art. Like *sacra conversazioni*, Pallavicino's painting addresses the question of divine and sacred presence. The donor is at once kneeling before the Virgin's throne and also outside of the otherworldly space she inhabits. The presence of the Virgin herself is also indeterminate. She vacillates between an embodied apparition and a painted depiction of the Madonna on cloth, which, in fact, she is. These incongruities were developed by the painter to register pictorially the neither/nor status of the sacred's eruption in the mundane world. Like the Eucharist, during which the wafer is believed to transubstantiate materially and supernaturally into the body of Christ, calling upon sacred intercessors invokes sacrality on earth. This process, if successful, produces tangible changes on earth, put into effect by something inherently immaterial.

Giorgio Pallavicino's *ex-voto* acknowledges this paradox. The painting embraces disruption by showing divine presence within the mundane world in a way that highlights the gaps between them. The indeterminacy of sacred space also creates an interesting counterpoint to the geographically precise rendition of Perast in the painting's background. Perast appears just above the painted dedication, creating a double citation for the donor's identity and for a geographical site where sacred intervention should be directed — one visual, the other text-

based. By depicting Perast with specific detail in a votive painting intended for Venice, the two cities are conjured simultaneously. Dalmatia has been made manifest in Castello.

A topographical representation of the city in which pestilence has erupted is a common feature of early modern plague art in Italy and is related to the tradition of *tavolette*. It situates the narrative action and directs sacred assistance. Specific details and recognizable landmarks illustrate supplicants' identity and belonging within a social and civic milieu. While Venice is the expected primary target for protection in this painting — it was this city's ongoing health crisis that spurred its creation — Perast takes on a dominant role because of its precise rendering.

As with Domenico Tintoretto's painting for San Francesco della Vigna, the question arises as to whether this painting was actually created during the plague epidemic of 1630-31. The work fits precisely into the decorative scheme of the *sala superiore*; its size and format were predetermined to fit the space. Its theme — a prominent member of the Scuola Dalmata pictured before an important event in Venetian history — also coexists comfortably with other works in the upper room. The plague of 1630-31 may have provided an opportunity for the Scuola to commission a work of art that celebrated the confraternity and the importance of Dalmatian cities to the Venetian State. If this painting was created after the 1630-31 epidemic as a commemorative work and not during or shortly after the outbreak as would have been typical for a true *ex-voto*, the curious decision to render Perast in detail when Venice was in turmoil becomes clearer.

The identity and circumstances of the supplicant Giorgio Pallavicino are important to understanding the work's dual representation of Perast directly and Venice obliquely. The Pallavicino, or alternately Pallavicini, were an influential family in early modern Italy, with prominent branches in several regions, including Lombardy, Emilia-Romagna, Lazio, and

Liguria. The main family line originated in Genoa, and the man portrayed in this painting has been associated with the Genoese branch through the cartouche to his right, below Roch's knees, that shows the Pallavicino house's crest above Genoa's arms.³⁸ Little is now known of Giorgio Pallavicino's career as a naval captain, his connection to Venice, or how he became involved with the fleet in Perast. He has not been located on the expansive family tree created for the Pallavicino family in Pompeo Litta's *Famiglie celebri italiane* published in 1850. Furthermore, the Pallavicini appear not to have been major players in early modern Venetian society. Notable members of the family who were connected with Venice during the late-sixteenth and seventeenth centuries include the playwright and satirist Ferrante Pallavicino who fled Rome for the protection of Venice in the 1630s after writing a scathing criticism of the Barberini family (before his arrest and execution in Avignon in 1644), and Benedetto Pallavicino from Cremona who studied the composition of sacred music at the Basilica di San Marco while in residence at Mantua in the 1580-90s.³⁹ However, these men were merely transient within the Venetian ambient and do not appear to be closely related to Giorgio.

Giorgio Pallavicino's position as a captain with ties to Venice is confirmed through several documents appearing in the Venetian State Archives, six years before the epidemic. Giorgio Pallavicino and another captain, Nicolò di Vincenzo, were described in Senate documents as "two men from Perast" who were involved in negotiating the return of residents

³⁸ Pompeo Litta, et al. *Famiglie celebri italiane*, volume 5 (Milan: Giulio Ferrario), 1850. Alberto Rizzi, *Scritti di arte sulla Dalmazia*, Collana di ricerche storiche Jolana Maria Trèveri series, 14 (Venice: Scuola Dalmata dei SS. Giorgio e Trifone, 2016), 25.

³⁹ For more on Ferrante Pallavicino, see Giorgio Spini, "Ricerca dei libertini: la teoria dell'impostura delle religioni nel Seicento italiano," in *Revista critica di storia della filosofia*, 39, v.3 (1984), 643-7; and Edward Muir, *The Culture Wars of the Late Renaissance: Skeptics, Libertines, and Opera*, (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press), 2007; and Letizia Panizza, "Ferrante Pallavicino's *La retorica delle puttane* (1642): Blasphemy, Heresy, and Alleged Pornography," in *Beyond Catholicism: Heresy, Mysticism, and Apocalypse in Italian Culture*, eds. Fabrizio di Donno and Simon A. Glison, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 105-124. For work on Benedetto, see *Benedetto Pallavicino: Opera Omnia*, (Neuhausen-Stuttgart: Hanssler-Verlag), 1987; and Peter Flanders, *A Thematic Index to the Works of Benedetto Pallavicino*, (Hackensack, NJ.: J. Boonin), 1974.

from Perast who had been captured by pirates in June 1624 to be sold as slaves. The Senate contributed 200 ducats toward their travel to Tunisia for the captives' return.⁴⁰ The dragoman Giovanni Battista Salvago, ambassadorial interpreter for the Venetian State who was born and resided in Istanbul, had been staying in Venice when he too was sent to northern Africa to negotiate the freeing of the kidnapped Dalmatians.⁴¹ He mentions Pallavicino and Nicolò in his correspondence to the Senate, though nothing more is said of either man's reputation or career.⁴² Assuming that Salvago is accurate in his characterization of the captains leading the diplomatic mission to Tunisia, it would seem that Giorgio Pallavicino was from Dalmatia and not Venice. The second inscription that appears on the painting in the Scuola Dalmata, in front of that naming Pallavicino, supports this supposition. In this second inscription, which begins, "Ex-voto from the year 1631," the Guardian Grande of the confraternity is named, and it is noted that he is from the city of Sebenico (Šibenik) in Croatia: "Guardiano Iacobo Petro de Sebenico." A vicar Nicolao Gallo is also named, and it can be inferred that the reference to Lustiza (another town in Dalmatia) indicates his place of residence. It would appear that the men associated with this ex-voto were all Dalmatians, and Giorgio Pallavicino's status as resident — and protector — of Perast sheds light on his decision to depict his hometown in this painting. While his location during the 1630-31 epidemic remains unknown, it is reasonable to consider that Pallavicino may have been resident in Venice during the outbreak, prompting the creation of the votive work.

⁴⁰ ASV, *Dalmazia, rettori, e altri*, filza 29, dispaccio del Rettore e Provveditore di Cattaro, June 23, 1624 and ASV, *Senato Mar*, 82, delib. July 4, 1624, c.107. The campaign to return the 20 kidnapped residents of Perast appears in the letters of the dragoman Giovanni Battista Salvago. Salvago was a diplomatic interpreter for the Venetian State who was born in Istanbul. His diplomatic correspondence related to this incident has been published in "*Africa overo Barbaria: relazione al doge di Venezia sulle reggenze di Algeri e di Tunisi del dragomano Gio. Battista Salvago, 1625*," introduction and notes by Alberto Sacerdoti, (Padua: Cedam), 1937. For more on Salvago, see E. Natalie Rothman, "Self-Fashioning in the Mediterranean Contact Zone: Giovanni Battista Salvago and His *Africa overo Barbaria* (1625)," in *Renaissance Medievalisms*, ed. Konrad Eisenbichler, 123-43. (Toronto: Center for Reformation and Renaissance Studies), 2009.

⁴¹ Rothman, 128.

⁴² Salvago, "*Africa overo Barbaria*," vii.

Another more famous member of the Pallavicino family — a captain with close ties to Venice — provides a possible familial connection with Giorgio Pallavicino. Sforza Pallavicini was a general in the Venetian navy in the late sixteenth century, who, along with Sebastiano Venier, *capitano generale da mar* for the Republic and commander of the city's naval fleet during the Battle of Lepanto in 1571, led a failed incursion against the Turks in Dalmatia to capture an Ottoman castle in Corfu in 1570. Pallavicini sailed his fleet from Zadar to Corfu, pausing at the Bay of Kotor in Perast in the summer of 1570. He returned to Venice incensed, writing an official apology to Doge Alvise Mocenigo, in which he attributed the offensive's failure to the excellence of the Turkish fleet, which was better provisioned and organized, as well as the weakened state of the Venetian sailors and soldiers, who had been beset by a pestilence that had incapacitated or killed a number of the men.⁴³ Indeed, through a series of battles from 1570-73, the Ottomans wrested control of nearly all of Dalmatia from *comuni* run by Venetian and Croatian governments, resulting in the reduction of Venetian-controlled land to only a narrow strip along the Adriatic Sea.

While technically at peace with the Ottomans during this period until the official declaration of the War of Candia in 1645, constant fighting occurred along this Ottoman-Venetian border in Dalmatia. This was due to persistent small-scale, but destabilizing raids from across the Turkish border, particularly in the city of Zadar, far north of Perast. Also stirring discord in the region was an untenable situation produced by the discrepancy in territory size; the coastal Venetian holdings were too small to generate enough food for the population living within their borders, and so constant trading and negotiation over food importation strained an

⁴³ Kenneth M. Setton, "The Failure of the Expedition of 1570 and Pius V's Attempts to Form the Anti-Turkish League," in *The Papacy and the Levant, 1204-1571*, v.4 (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1976), 974-992.

already volatile situation.⁴⁴ Sforza Pallavicini's failed attempt to take the Corfu fortress in Albania in 1570 was only one of countless skirmishes between the two political superpowers in the region who each fought to re-take control or maintain their own sovereignty in multiple cities. While Giorgio Pallavicino, a captain affiliated with the Republic's naval forces in Perast and at times working for the State in a diplomatic capacity, cannot be firmly connected to the older, well-known *capitano* Sforza Pallavicini, a familial relationship is likely and would indicate a tradition of military service in the unstable Dalmatian region.⁴⁵

Pallavicino's ex-voto renders Perast in a way that showcases the city's importance to the Venetian Republic. The main interior lobe of the Bay of Kotor, in which Venice maintained its large military fleet on a permanent basis, appears in the foreground of the landscape. Two islands project out of the bay, depicting the medieval church and monastery of Saint George on the left, and a manmade island on the right, a shrine raised out of the waters and outfitted with a chapel in 1452 after the discovery of a miracle-working image of the Virgin on a rock. The church of Saint Nicholas on the mainland has also been represented near the coast, with a small fleet of tall-masted ships on the bay in front of it. Two towers for surveillance and defense are also evident in the landscape — one at the mouth of the strait that leads to the inner bay, and another capping the entrance to the bay, near the neighboring town of Kotor. If the painting had reproduced architectural details of the city center, one would see a municipality filled with

⁴⁴ Croatian historian Tea Perinčić Mayhew has recently written an impressive book on the complex political and social world in Croatia, Albania, and Dalmatia during the early modern period. See, *Dalmatia between Ottoman and Venetian Rule: contado di Zara, 1645-1718*, (Rome: Viella, 2008), 27.

⁴⁵ Despite the disappointing outcome of the 1570 incursion into Corfu, Sforza Pallavicini had a long naval career, in which he earned respect and many distinctions for his skill as captain. Cities in Croatia today still register Pallavicini's career through public structures built under the captain's command during the early modern period, such as a fort and monument bearing his name, which were built in 1567 in Zadar (Zara).

Venetian-style palazzi and civic buildings, constructed from the sixteenth century through the eighteenth century by architects from Venice.⁴⁶

Perast was not an insignificant outpost in the hinterlands, but a vibrant city in Albania before Venetian dominion and an even richer one after becoming a colony of the Republic. Wealth increased in the city as a result of its development into a naval yard for Venice. Perast quartered a standing militia of Venetians and Dalmatians and a large armada of warships, prepared for battle with the Ottomans at sea or on land just beyond the mountains. Its location on the Adriatic coast, with large enclosed bays and mountains backing it protectively, made Perast easily defensible, sparing it from the numerous raids that plagued Zadar in the flat plains of the north.⁴⁷ The modern scholar of Montenegrin and Croatian history, Lovorka Čoralić has argued that Perast's connection to Venice — particularly the honorable role of men from Perast serving as permanent standard-bearers for the Doge in these military campaigns — provided this city with enough wealth not only to expand economically, but to assert itself politically in the region and gain independence from Kotor, under whose jurisdiction Perast had historically been subjected.⁴⁸ By 1754, in a census report from the city, Perast boasted forty-four ships, thirty-seven captains, and close to 400 sailors in the city, a considerable number from a population comprised of 300 families in total.⁴⁹ While one should be wary of inadvertently endorsing a political situation in which a culturally distinct and independent smaller nation has been

⁴⁶ Nineteen Baroque-style palaces were built in Perast during this time period for the *casade*, or twelve patrician houses that made up the nobility in Perast. Architecturally, they reflect a number of Venetian and Italianate design elements, yet do not look strictly “Venetian” in style. In fact, use of local materials, as well as responsiveness to the desires of the Dalmatian patrons, resulted in distinctive architecture that presents a fascinating admixture of numerous cultural and architectural influences. The issue of patronage, in which Venetian architects traveled to Perast to design and build these *palazzi* for the local aristocracy, has not received substantial scholarly attention.

⁴⁷ Mayhew, 20.

⁴⁸ Lovorka Čoralić, “‘For the Glory of the Serenissima’: Seamen and Warriors of Perast (Boka Kotorska) — the Guardians of the Standard of the Venetian Doge,” in *Études Balkaniques*, Académie des Sciences di Bulgarie, (Sofia: Institut d’Études Balkaniques & Centre de Thracologie), Issue 2-3 (2011), 175-6.

⁴⁹ Čoralić, 177.

overtaken by a larger political power — citing the “benefits” resulting from this wresting of jurisdictional autonomy, however evenhanded — early modern sources do support the alliance of Venice and Perast as mutually beneficial. Perast emerged as an independent *comune* in the Kotor region, and the Senate appears to have had little interest in controlling local civic functioning, outside of its greater military concerns.⁵⁰ Residents of Perast also obtained the privilege of becoming Venetian citizens and relocating to *La Serenissima*, if they chose. The Scuola Dalmata’s rapid growth in Venice during the sixteenth century shows the frequency of emigration and the increasing populations of wealthy Dalmatians and Croatians in several *sestieri* throughout the later early modern period.⁵¹ Modern Croatian scholar Tea Perinčić Mayhew has noted that large numbers of Dalmatians from Zadar and other cities most affected by a failed attempt to renegotiate territory borders in 1626 immigrated to Venice under the auspices of the Venetian alliance.⁵²

Outside of their role in the Venetian military, early modern residents of Perast were also independent merchants who maintained their own lucrative maritime trading routes, and Venice, where they received exemptions on certain taxes, was a central *entrepôt* for this economy.⁵³

⁵⁰ The political situation and governance of Venice’s *stato da mar* territories was expectedly complex. A hierarchy of variously ranked *Rettori*, *Provveditori*, and counts (with accompanying administrators) were elected by the Senate and sent to oversee these colonies for set terms of usually a year to two years. However, this system varied greatly from town-to-town, which was responsive to the structure of local governments.

⁵¹ Čoralić, 178. For more on Dalmatian growth in Venice and their representation in the city’s scuole, particularly the Scuola di San Giorgio degli Schiavoni and the Scuola Grande di San Rocco, see Lovorka Čoralić, “Emigrants from Kotor and the Croatian Fraternity of St. George and Triphon in Venice / Kotorški iseljenici i hrvatska bratovština sv. Jurja i Tripuna u Mlecima (XV-XVII. St.),” *Croatica Christiana Periodica*, v.32, issue 61, (January 2008), 18-34; and Lovorka Čoralić, “Croatian emigrants in Venice and the Scuola Grande S. Rocco / Hrvatski iseljenici u Mlecima i Scuola Grande S. Rocco,” *Croatica Christiana Periodica*, v.33, issue 63, (January 2009), 65-76.

⁵² Mayhew, 27.

⁵³ For more on the region of Boka’s prominence in trade and as high-ranking administrators in the Scuola di San Giorgio degli Schiavoni, see Lovorka Čoralić’s recent article, “From the past of Boka — family Durovic from Prcanj and the Croatian confraternity of St. George and Tryphon in Venice (18th century – the beginning of the 19th century) / Iz prošlosti Boke-Prcanjska obitelj Durovic i Hrvatska Bratovština sv. Jurja i Tripuna u Mlecima,” *Croatica Christiana Periodica*, v.83, issue 73, (June 2014), 71-83. Croatian and Montenegrin studies have received

Perast was a cosmopolitan city before the increased Venetian presence in the region in the seventeenth century, maintaining a culturally and religiously diverse population of residents since the time of the Roman Empire.⁵⁴ While the Dalmatian region was the site of many clashes along the Venetian-Ottoman border, it should also be noted that this political border was permeable, and that Muslims and Christians of varied ethnic backgrounds lived on either side of it. In fact, goods and services routinely moved in both directions. Furthermore, pressure should be put upon restrictive notions of an Ottoman/Venetian binary to the political maneuverings in the region. Hapsburg-controlled lands bordered the northern regions of Croatia, and subjects of the Monarchy, notably the Uskoks, clashed routinely with both Venetians and Ottomans, though also aligning themselves at times with forces against the Ottomans, such as during the Battle of Lepanto.⁵⁵

This overview of Dalmatia in the seventeenth century provides insight into the world from which Giorgio Pallavicino came. Though Perast's history of plague epidemics has yet to be elucidated through early modern sources documenting life in the city during times of contagion, as a colony of Venice, it would have been subject to the *Sanità*'s stringent laws. Reparations for crises of a different nature, such as the chronic sieges by pirates, particularly Berber corsairs, were backed by Venetian money and bureaucratic power, as documented by Pallavicino's personal involvement in reclaiming kidnapped Dalmatians in 1624. The alignment of Dalmatian and Venetian navies provided protection for both regions and opportunities for the personal advancement of those involved. For example, young men from Perast's twelve noble families

relatively little attention from Italian scholars, though the relationship between Venice and its subject cities along the Adriatic Coast is rich. Historians from Croatia and Serbia have dominated scholarship on this topic.

⁵⁴ E. Natalie Rothman, *Brokering Empire*, 235.

⁵⁵ Mayhew, 20, 28. Another group prominent in the area were the Morlachs, who were itinerant cattle farmers from the Ottoman-controlled region, who routinely crossed the political border with their herds, thus becoming a contentious subject for Venetian governors in Dalmatia.

had served as standard-bearers for the Doge since the sixteenth century, having distinguished themselves as *gonfalonieri* on Sebastiano Venier's lead warship during the Battle of Lepanto. The ceremonial position became a tradition in Perast that entitled standard-bearers to regular monthly stipends regardless of combat status, which continued until the Republic's fall.⁵⁶ These *gonfalonieri* were well known in the Croatian region and a subject of interest for Venetians, evidenced by their depiction in the Venetian geographer Vincenzo Maria Coronelli's map book of the Dalmatian region in 1688.⁵⁷ Included with engravings illustrating Dalmatian and Croatian residents and their dress, *Repubblica di Venezia: città, fortezze, ed altri luoghi principali dell'Albania, Epiro, e Livadia* represented a *gonfaloniere*, holding aloft his sword and the banner of the Venetian Republic, bearing a depiction of the Crucifixion that had become standard in naval battles since Lepanto [Figure 4.28]. His elaborate dress and the pile of munitions at his feet speak to his high professional rank and active role in the military. Above him on the printed sheet, the following caption appears in Italian: "Standard-bearer of Saint Mark — guarded with loyalty, defended with the valor of the Perastini."⁵⁸

Perast supported numerous careers in war- and trade-based economies and became an important site for military distinctions earned by men from both Venice and Dalmatia. While the *gonfaloniere* in Coronelli's map book was depicted in stylish, ostentatious clothing befitting his ceremonial function in the navy, Giorgio Pallavicino communicates his professional distinction through somber, simple garments in the plague ex-voto he commissioned at the Scuola Dalmata [Figure 4.29]. He wears a black robe with golden-brown lapels folded out across his chest,

⁵⁶ Mayhew, 181.

⁵⁷ Engravings of the residents of Perast and the *gonfalone* that appear in Coronelli's map book are held at the civic museum in Perast, the Muzej grada Perasta, which is housed in the Bujovic Palace, a palazzo built in 1694 by the Venetian architect Giovanni Batista Fontana for the Perast patrician Vicko Bujovic.

⁵⁸ "Confalone, di S. Marco, custodito dalla fedelta, e difeso dal valore di Perastini."

beneath which can be seen a black shirt front. Hatless and with closely cropped hair, Pallavicino's heavy-lidded gaze and palms pressed together in prayer present a man of serious mien. The solemn presentation aligns with the difficulties of life during an epidemic of plague. It also underscores his status as a person of authority. As a captain for the Venetian-Dalmatian flotilla, Pallavicino was responsible for maintaining order in Perast and promoting Venetian interests abroad, including serving as a diplomatic envoy. His choice to honor Perast in this ex-voto, above Venice, illustrates the importance he attaches to the Dalmatian city as the locus of his personal and professional identities.

Unlike the other case studies explored in this chapter, Giorgio Pallavicino's 1630-31 plague painting appears not to have been characterized by mobility or dynamic usage — neither through processional use, nor movement within the Scuola di San Giorgio degli Schiavoni's meetinghouse. Even without documentation related to the commission, it is evident that the painting was made for the *sala superiore*; in size, format, and in subject matter honoring the career of an exemplary brother in Venice's recent history, the painting fits seamlessly into an artistic program that was carried out throughout the later seventeenth century. That it was an ex-voto made during the epidemic is questionable, despite the painted inscription that identifies it as such. Ironically, it is the only object among my case studies that states explicitly in the composition that it was made for votive use during the outbreak. However, the work bears witness to the intricate web of social connections that made up supplicants' lives in seventeenth-century Venice. With this painting, Pallavicino is situated within the complexities of professional life at the meeting point of Dalmatia and Venice, and between their allies and adversaries in the Mediterranean world. The stability of the painting's traditional *sacra conversazione* format and iconography contrasts with the insecurities of the content — a plague

crisis, a militarized city bordering enemy lands, and a navy captain working with in international diplomacy.

Small-scale devotional work with Saint Roch at the Scuola Grande di San Rocco

Confraternities in early modern Venice commissioned works of art frequently and in a variety of media. Beyond the major decorative campaigns underway at the scuole grandi throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, confraternal meetinghouses — both for piccoli and grandi — were abundant with other visual materials: banners and other moveable paintings; three-dimensional works ranging from costly, large-scale sculptures, to precious reliquaries, to inexpensive votives; and prints representing holy figures important to the organization.⁵⁹ The Scuola Grande di San Rocco was the most powerful non-government institution associated with plague in Venice. It was the richest and most influential of the city's scuole grandi as a result of its custodianship of Saint Roch's cult. With considerable funds under its control, the confraternity provided charitable relief in Venice, for example by paying for the funerals and marriages of those unable to afford the expensive rites supporting these life transitions. *Confratelli* also spearheaded various artistic and architectural campaigns to decorate the Scuola's meetinghouse and organized processions through the city on Roch's August 16 feast day. The Scuola also financially supported celebrations honoring Roch throughout the year by

⁵⁹ The most well known of the ephemeral works of art associated with the Scuola Grande di San Rocco is the print designed by Titian featuring a central image of Saint Roch, surrounded by smaller images depicting events from his life. Notably, Titian included images of an alms box and painted ex-voto near the bottom of the composition, indexing the print's role in prompting donations from devotees visiting the Scuola. It was also used by pilgrims paying homage to Saint Roch before continuing on to Jerusalem and other holy sites. See Lisa Pon, "A Document for Titian's St. Roch," *Print Quarterly*, v.19, n.3 (September 2002), 275-7.

hosting concerts of sacred music and participating in the cooperative events and feast-day celebrations of other confraternities in Venice and those the sponsored by the government.⁶⁰

The Scuola Grande di San Rocco commissioned two large-scale paintings memorializing the 1630-31 plague epidemic on their grand stairway, which can be securely dated to the later seventeenth century and will be the subject of the following chapter. It is reasonable to expect that during the outbreak many other less ambitious works of art and material culture were created at the behest of *confratelli*, though few documents exist to substantiate this. Evaluation of objects found in the confraternity's treasury and held in storage reveals two possible candidates for inclusion in the artistic output spurred by the 1630-31 crisis.

At the intersection of individual devotion and corporate demonstrations of piety lie objects such as a small painting depicting Saint Roch on a satin support, undated but identified as an ex-voto in the 1979 exhibition catalogue *Venezia e la peste* [Figure 4.30].⁶¹ This modestly sized work, measuring only 23.5 x 18 centimeters and rendered in tempera paint and embellished with silver thread, includes a personification of Venice in the same pose and with iconography similar to that used by Domenico Tintoretto in his painting for San Francesco della Vigna [Figure 4.5]. This iconography employs the familiar trope aligning Venice with the Virgin that was popularized in the city in the late sixteenth century, and which proliferated in Marian imagery developed during and after the 1630-31 epidemic. In fact, the painter Pietro Negri also used this metaphoric device in his *The Madonna Saves Venice from the 1630 Plague* for the Scuola di San Rocco's grand stairwell in 1674. On account of the small satin painting's use of iconography popular during the seicento epidemic, as well as other general markers of style, I am

⁶⁰ For work on music performed in Venice's scuole, see the extensive scholarship of Jonathan Glixon, particularly *Honoring God and the City: Music at the Venetian Confraternities, 1260-1807*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 2003.

⁶¹ *Venezia e la peste*, 339.

proposing that this work resulted from the 1630-31 plague and possibly was created during the epidemic. I also aim to reevaluate its status as an ex-voto. The use of silver thread to define the central image and separate it from the surrounding decorative borders coheres technically with the figural panel inset on an eighteenth-century banner found at the Scuola Grande dei Carmini [Figure 4.31]. Rather than consider the San Rocco painting primarily a votive created for or by a *confratello* to give physical form to prayer, I propose that it was a panel in a larger textile made for ceremonial use. In this capacity the painting could have functioned simultaneously as a votive and processional banner.

The Scuola di San Rocco is well known for the painting cycles completed by Jacopo Tintoretto during his decades-long tenure at the confraternity in the mid-sixteenth century. Amid these opulent works are many others — less costly, less visible — that served other important functions, notably the votives created to petition or thank Saint Roch for his intercession. In a letter written in 1587 by the head of the Scuola in Venice, Bernardo Ruspini, to officials at the Compagnia di San Rocco in Rome, Guardian Grande Ruspini described the abundant ex-votos — created in wax, wood, silver, and on painted supports — that filled the altar in the Scuola's associated church where the saint's body was interred. Devotees to the cult of Saint Roch left these objects in acknowledgment of healing and protection received. Ruspini notes that these objects proliferated in the church following the recent end of the 1575-77 plague epidemic that had struck the city, a testament to the saint's efficacy as a sacred intercessor.⁶²

⁶² ASV, *Scuola Grande di San Rocco*, seconda consegna, busta 154, filza n. 32, XXX, 4, 3v. "... et secoli di tutta Christianità ma principalmente di questo numerosissimo Popolo della sanità et lei meriti di questo Glorioso Santo, sempre giudicato, et celebrato come Protettore, tutelare, et liberatore di cadauno, che ferito è dalla Peste, o dal timor di quella, l'ha supplichevolmente rechiesso, Di che n'è segno infallibile un'infinità di voti offerti alla Chiesa nostra, di Cera, di Legno, d'argento, e di pittura, con l'inscrizione in molti della qualità della gratia ricevuta..."

Few of these early modern votives once deposited at the Scuola remain today. Many of them likely deteriorated over time or were discarded by the cult's custodians when they became too plentiful. In some cases, votives that were constructed of materials with intrinsic material value such as wax may have been reused or put to a new purpose. The act of leaving physical objects at a shrine or altar to mark a supplicant's prayers or give thanks for the receipt of grace was commonplace in early modern Italy. Due to the proliferation of these votives, those in charge of maintaining the shrines where they were left had to manage the ever-accruing traces of sacred intervention. The small collection of votives remaining at the Scuola can be found today in the confraternity's treasury, housed with a variety of reliquaries and other silver objects made for ceremonial use. These ecclesiastical objects range in date from the mid-fifteenth through the nineteenth century. The ex-votos among them were preserved because of the preciousness of the material used in their construction and for the quality of their artistic production. The satin painting of Saint Roch, however, does not fit into this category on material grounds, which has contributed to its placement in storage.

Among the silver objects in the treasury is an ex-voto relevant to the current discussion: a small embossed silver token depicting a man kneeling before a vision of Saint Roch and his dog appearing in a bank of clouds [Figure 4.32]. This votive is not dated, but it has been considered a sixteenth-century work since its first documentation in an eighteenth-century inventory of treasures in the confraternity.⁶³ Measuring only 6.8 x 8.5 centimeters, the ex-voto has a hole at the center top edge, indicating that it was attached to something else, possibly a textile, but most likely the wall of a chapel when it was offered. In terms of style or technique, it is difficult to date this object with more precision. However, an eighteenth-century catalogue produced after the inventory

⁶³ *Inventario di tutte le reliquiari et argent*, ms. del 1783, 49; documented in *Venezia e la peste*, (Venice: Marsilio, 1980), 339.

offers an intriguing piece of information about the supplicant kneeling before Roch: he is identified as a “figure from Albania”, presumably on the basis of his clothing.⁶⁴ He wears a short jacket that tapers at the waist before flaring out to meet a pair of striped or pleated breeches. His hat and dagger are placed on the ground in front of him. The man’s dress can be compared to the figure described as “Schiavone, overo Dalmatino” in Cesare Vecellio’s 1590 edition of *De gli habiti antichi e moderni* [Figure 4.33]. Both figures wear short jackets that are cinched at the waist with a flare at the bottom. However, in a later print included in Coronelli’s 1688 map book (in which the *gonfaloniere* of Perast appears), a Dalmatian man is depicted wearing clothing nearly identical to the man imaged in the silver ex-voto in San Rocco [Figure 4.34]. Minus a knee-length overcoat, the supplicant’s garments are almost identical to those worn by the Dalmatian in this book, from the voluminous breeches to the wide-brimmed hat. While by some measures Albania was a distinct region south of Dalmatia, parts of northern Albania were included in Venice’s Dalmatian land holdings, and these geographic designations were sometimes used loosely during the early modern period.⁶⁵ The devotee who paid for the silver ex-voto may have shared a cultural background with members of the Scuola Dalmata in Castello. As Lovorka Čoralić’s recent work has shown, a large number of Dalmatians who had relocated to Venice were also involved with the Scuola di San Rocco.⁶⁶ Without the evidence of new documents it would be difficult to date the silver ex-voto explicitly to the 1630-31 epidemic.

Of the satin painting of Saint Roch identified above as an ex-voto, even less has been verified. No early modern documents such as inventories are known to mention the work, and

⁶⁴ “...con figura albanese,” 49; *Venezia e la peste*, 339.

⁶⁵ What constituted “Dalmatia” shifted constantly due to skirmishes along the border. There was also an issue semantic plurality, as well. Perast, for instance, was considered to be part of Dalmatia by some accounts, but the region in which it lies is also referred as Venetian Albania.

⁶⁶ Lovorka Čoralić, “Croatian emigrants in Venice and the Scuola Grande S. Rocco / Hrvatski iseljenici u Mlecima i Scuola Grande S. Rocco,” *Croatica Christiana Periodica*, v.33, issue 63, (January 2009), 65-76.

the painting has been published only in a short entry in *Venezia e la peste*. Dates proposed for this work are approximate. Authors of *Venezia e la peste* suggest that its style is “*cinque-seicentesco*”, but indicate that it dates anywhere from the seventeenth to the eighteenth century.⁶⁷ Clothing cannot date the painting as the allegorical figures and the saint are dressed in fantastical garments. However, the composition and iconography, which will now be given detailed attention, suggest that this work can be linked to the 1630-31 outbreak of plague in Venice.

The painting comprises three figures: two women flank a central Christ-like Saint Roch, appearing beneath and to either side of him. On Roch’s left, the personification of Venice kneels, arms outspread in supplication. To the saint’s right, Pestilence, portrayed as a dark-haired woman holding a skull and a whip, flees while staring back in awe at the apparition of the powerful plague saint. Behind these two women appear the lion of Saint Mark, staring up at Venice personified, and a tiny depiction of the Piazzetta San Marco skyline, as seen from the Bacino. This cityscape, framed within Plague’s raised right arm and whip, is barely visible, little more than a faded outline, but it is recognizable by its schematic depiction of the campanile [Figure 4.35].

The work is composed almost entirely in primary colors, with large areas of red defining the baldachin behind Venice, brilliant blue for Roch’s cuirass-like garment, and with golden areas picked out in Venice’s brocaded dress, in the lion, and in the short cape thrown over Plague’s right shoulder. This tripartite color scheme continues into a decorative border that appears above the rounded top of the central image. Silver metallic thread has been sewn to the satin, framing the figural scene and creating two pendentive-shaped areas of negative space at the upper corners where the rectangular frame meets the lunette. In these spaces the artist has

⁶⁷ *Venezia e la peste*, 339.

rendered with delicacy a variety of flowers in blue, red, and yellow. It is surprising to find decorative floral imagery in plague art; these flowers create a pleasant disruption, calling to mind illuminated manuscript pages. They do not belong to the pictorial space in which the figures appear, and instead act as attractive marginalia — a breath of purer air at the edges of this allegorical work and the implied disease-bearing miasmatic vapors its subject suggests [Figure 4.36].

Saint Roch is the dominant figure in this painting due to his central placement and the eye-catching color of his blue garment [Figure 4.37]. He sits upon a mound of light gray clouds that rise up beneath him like a rocky outcropping, his left leg bent and elevated to meet their surface. His pilgrim's hat has been removed and hung from his staff, which is held against his body by his left hand; the staff leans against his shoulder and terminates, somewhat strangely, between his legs. In fact, the saint's left hand serves a dual purpose: it supports the staff while simultaneously pulling back the hem of his tunic to reveal the place where a bubo would appear. Roch's right hand is angled upwards, index finger extended to point to the Holy Spirit — materialized as a dove emanating a golden glow — above his head. Roch looks remarkably like Christ in this image. If not for the identifying pilgrim's staff, hat, and cape thrown over his shoulders, the figure would read as the Son of God. The saint is depicted with the body of a warrior: muscular, with arms and legs nude below the elbow and above the knee respectively, and he is dressed in what appears to be a hybrid of shaped leather armor and tunic. The peculiarity of Roch's dress extends to his cape — similar to the pilgrim's cloak in which Roch is often shown but unusual for its black-and-white color scheme. The symbolism here is unclear but may result from a stylistic choice on the artist's part or perhaps references confraternal or monastic robes.

Roch's martial appearance represents his strength in overcoming plague — both personally during his lifetime and later when he is invoked as an intercessor against the disease. His visual alignment with Christ underscores his spiritual strength and Savior-like qualities in delivering from pestilence those who pray to him. His depiction in this painting as directly linked to the Holy Spirit — without the mediating presence of Christ or God the Father — is also unusual. It strengthens the Roch/Christ duality, demonstrating the saint's role as a direct conduit to salvation for believers. This Christ-like depiction would support dating the work to the 1575-77 epidemic in Venice, in which Christ the Redeemer was the primary intercessor chosen by the State. However, other elements in this painting support a connection with the 1630-31 outbreak, particularly the representation of Venice and the doges' baldachin under which she genuflects.

A kneeling personification of Venice, dressed in gold brocade and wearing the doges' ermine cape, has already been noted in Domenico Tintoretto's votive of 1631 for the church of San Francesco della Vigna [Figures 4.13, 4.38]. While the poses and details vary slightly between Domenico's work and the satin painting, both images engage with the same allegorical conceit. In the satin votive, Venice kneels on a plush red cushion with Mark's lion tucked firmly against her right side. Domenico's canvas exhibits the same grouping — even the lion's eye nearest to Venice is partially obscured by her cape in both works. In the satin votive, Venice is aligned even closer to the doge iconographically. The doge's distinctive *corno ducale* rests on the ground beside her, and on her head Venice wears the linen *camauro* placed beneath the *corona*. This detail suggests that Venice has just removed the symbolic hat to demonstrate her reverence when supplicating before Saint Roch. This small narrative element proclaims her as more than an allegorical figure, but as a stand-in for the city government's acting head. The allegory contains two figurations of the State: Venice as an exalted woman/Venice as elected

civic leader. Venice personified, when equipped with the trappings of the doge, carries both the political and spiritual weight of the Republic.

The creator of the small satin painting for Saint Roch's confraternity used a visual language that explicitly linked the brotherhood and the State as forces against plague. This is best seen in the painting's inclusion of the red damask baldachin appearing behind Venice personified. The image of Venice ensconced in the doge's throne was popular in the later 1570s and 80s and proliferated in State-funded works of art throughout the later sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. A number of Venetian paintings from this period such as Jacopo Tintoretto's *Triumph of Doge Nicolò da Ponte* from 1584 in the *Sala del maggior consiglio* of the Palazzo Ducale depict doges sitting beneath a structure like this [Figure 4.39]. The personification of Venice was also shown frequently in this ducal structure. In fact, in the same room within the Doge's Palace, both Veronese and Palma il Giovane contributed paintings in which Venice, richly attired, sits upon the doge's seat beneath the red damask canopy and curtains [Figures 4.40, 4.41].⁶⁸ By placing the allegory of Venice beneath this ceremonial baldachin, the maker of the satin painting for Saint Roch's confraternity tapped into a trend in State-sponsored visual rhetoric that rose in popularity *after* the 1575-77 plague epidemic. Though Roch's Christ-like depiction makes sense in the context of 1575-77, the iconography and compositional choices point toward this work's origin in the seventeenth century.

The San Rocco satin should be understood as a representative of a larger corpus of visual works of art whose composition and iconography refer explicitly to the 1630-31 plague epidemic. In proposing that this painting was created during the outbreak, like Domenico's work for San Francesco della Vigna, I do not claim that either work instituted this iconographic type,

⁶⁸ Veronese's work is *Venice between Justice and Peace* from 1575-77, and Palma's is *Venice crowned by Victory welcomes the subject provinces* from 1584.

but that both participate in a visual language adopted by the State before the epidemic, which expanded during the epidemic and permeated all levels of visual culture. In support of this claim are works of art memorializing the 1630-31 epidemic in the city and on the *terraferma* that also adopt this composition and iconography — demonstrating the dissemination of this popular imagery and its evolution into a visual shorthand for the 1630-31 epidemic. For example, Antonio Giarola's 1636 commemorative painting for San Fermo in Verona [Figure 4.8], discussed earlier in this chapter, also reproduces this format, as does Giambattista Tiepolo's altarpiece for the Este cathedral, painted more than a century later, which will be discussed in detail in Chapter 6 of this dissertation [Figure 6.1].

Strong support for the San Rocco votive's origin in the 1630-31 plague outbreak can be found in its alignment with Pietro Negri's *The Madonna Saves Venice from the 1630 Plague* from 1674 in the Scuola Grande di San Rocco [Figure 4.42]. While Negri's vast painting — the pendant to Antonio Zanchi's in the stairway — differs appreciably in scale and visibility from the satin painting, it reiterates the formula: Venice personified genuflects at the bottom edge of the composition while requesting divine intervention, clad in symbolic garments representing the State [Figure 4.43]. In choosing a composition for the stairway long after the epidemic had subsided, Negri selected imagery that would have evoked the 1630-31 epidemic explicitly.

In *The Madonna Saves Venice from the 1630 Plague*, as in the satin work, Venice faces the holy intercessors in profile, with arms outstretched to display her ducal regalia. While Saint Roch is the only focus of Venice's attention in the small votive, in Negri's work, the personification of the city looks directly at the Madonna. Saints Mark, Roch and Sebastian appear in an intermediary space to recommend her. The Venice/Virgin connection seen in Domenico Tintoretto's ex-voto is also evident in Negri's work, in which the two women — each

powerful emblems of Venice — appear separately but united by the strong diagonal axis of their mutual gaze. This is reinforced by the staff held by the Archangel Michael who appears in the sky between them, his weapon aligned along the same plane [Figure 4.44]. Similar to the device used in the satin votive, Negri has depicted Venice in the doge's garments, with the *corona ducale* placed on the ground beside her, her left hand gesturing toward it as an indicator of the State's need for the Virgin's succor. The lion of Saint Mark, with his head turned to fix Venice with worshipful eyes, is also present in the grand painting, though he is separated from the personification by a grouping of allegorical women representing Venice's virtues [Figures 4.45, 4.46]. The doges' red damask baldachin fills the right side of the canvas, its enclosed throne empty, as Venice has stepped down from its depths to pray. The canopy of this structure hangs above a depiction of the church of Santa Maria della Salute, which was nearly completed by the time Negri made the painting. With this detail, the synthesis of the Virgin/Venice is strengthened as the votive church offered to the Madonna is "enthroned" under the baldachin covering the dais just vacated by the allegorical representation of the city.

The plague iconography shared by the San Rocco votive and Pietro Negri's painting has an analog in two altarpieces created for Santa Maria della Salute in the 1650-70s. The church's sculptural high altar designed by Giusto le Court, completed circa 1670, presents a female personification of Venice beneath the crowned Virgin and Child, as well as a figuration of plague fleeing, which will be discussed momentarily. [Figure 4.47] Venice personified, wearing the doge's cape and with the *corona* placed on a pillow by her knees, appears in profile when the sculptural group is viewed from straight on. The second work using this iconography is a painting by Pietro Libri, completed in 1656, depicting *Venice implores Saint Anthony of Padua to intercede with Christ and God to halt the plague* [Figure 4.48]. Saint Mark's lion lounges

beside the ermine-caped Venice, the peaked crown of the doge resting on the ground at his paws [Figures 4.49, 4.50].

As noted, the satin painting at the Scuola Grande di San Rocco pairs the allegorical representation of Venice with a second female personification of Plague. Plague appears in the bottom left corner, her flail raised for action but her eyes fixed on Roch as she flees his presence [Figure 4.51]. Like Roch, this figure has been rendered somewhat unconventionally. In his *Iconologia* of 1593, Cesare Ripa described “Plague or Pestilence” as best represented by a withered old woman, shriveled and visibly dirty, her filthy breasts exposed behind a transparent veil, and with her face marked by a sallow, pale complexion and clouds of miasmatic air crowning her head. Wolves rest beside her, and the skins of dead animals surround her, symbolizing the predation of plague and its carnage. Plague should be depicted with a whip or other scourge to represent her violent cutting down of the afflicted.⁶⁹ While the confraternity’s satin painting does indeed represent Plague as a woman with a scourge, it deviates from Ripa’s dictates in most other regards. In contrast, Giusto le Court’s sculptural altarpiece created for the Salute depicts the personification of plague closely to the haggard body-type described by Ripa.

In the Scuola di San Rocco’s votive painting, Plague is represented as young and robust, with a muscular body that still reads as feminine. Her long black hair is loose about her

⁶⁹ Cesare Ripa, *Iconologia, ovvero, descrizione di diverse imagini cauate dall’antichità & di propria inventione*, (Rome: Lepido Facij, 1593), 397. The figure of Pestilentia is not illustrated, though the text is extensive. “Peste ovvero Pestilentia — Donna vestita di color tanè oscuro, haverà la faccia smorta & spaventevole, la fronte fasciata, le braccia, e le gambe ignude, la veste sarà aperta da’ fianchi, & per l’apertura si vedrà la camiscia imbrattata, & sporca; parimente si vedranno le mammelle anchi’esse fozze, & ricoperte da un velo trasparente, & à piedi d’essa vi sarà un Lupo... Donna, vecchia, macilenta, & spaventevole, di carnaggione gialla, sarà scapigliata, & in capo haverà una ghirlanda di nuuoli oscuri, sarà vestita di color bigio, sparso d’umori, e vapori, di color giallaccio, starà sedere sopra alcune pelli d’agnelli, di pecore, & altri animali, tenendo in mano un flagella con le corde accolte sanguinose. Come è questa figura per la vecchiezza, & color macilente, spiacevole à vedere, così la peste per la brutta, e malinconica apparenza universale è horribile, e detestabile; la carnaggione gialla mostra l’infettioni de corpi, essendo, questo color solo in quelli, che sono pochi fani della vita... I nuuoli mostrano che è proprio effetto del cielo, e dell’aria mal conditionata; Il color bigio è il color che apparisee nel cielo in tempo di pestilenza. Le pelli di molti animali signifitano mortalità, sentendo nocumendo da questa infettione d’aria...”

shoulders, rippling away from her body with a short cape that streams behind her on the breeze of polluted air generated by her terrorized flight from the scene. Though the tempera pigment used on the satin support could have faded over time, her body does not exhibit the sallow complexion attributed to her in *Iconologia*; the jaundice has been reserved for her yellow cape, while she appears merely pale. The entry on this painting in *Venezia e la peste* describes her body as nearly nude and greenish in hue.⁷⁰ In fact, close examination reveals that Plague is wearing a garment, similar to that of Roch, which gives the impression of nakedness but conceals the body beneath. The rolled cuffs at Plague's elbows and the thin line of a collar around her neck indicate the presence of a garment, and the blue tonality of her skin is in fact a diaphanous covering. This clothing creates a consonance between the figures of Plague and Roch. It also gives Plague a more decorous body, obscured by clothing, with her breasts hidden by the outstretched arm with which she holds a skull. Plague's vigorous body and the subtle expressiveness of her face have been rendered by the artist with delicacy, despite the schematic treatment of some areas of the composition, including the flail and skull she holds, as well her hands holding them — mere lines flicked to represent fingers, rendered with no modeling or volume.

Behind Plague, the lagoon can be seen as blue ripples, with the campanile of San Marco rising from the waters, framed by Plague's raised arm. While Venice is barely discernable in the depths of this painting, a tree appears closer to the foreground. Its bare branches extend into the painting just above Plague. It looks lifeless at first glance. However, close examination of the tree reveals tiny, impressionistic yellow buds. This surprising vernal detail may indicate the time of year when this painting was created — spring — or may also suggest symbolically the return

⁷⁰ “È una donna seminuda, la pelle verdastra, capelli lunghi, neri ed incolti che le scendono sulla schiena,” 339.

of life to Venice after pestilence's decimating winter had been driven away. The fully blooming flowers in the upper corners of this painting offer more evidence of a visual rhetoric suggesting the triumphant return of vigor and beauty in the aftermath of plague.

This painting is sophisticated in how it represents the symbolic expulsion of plague from the city. The epidemic has been rendered as a celestial battle fought in the skies above Venice, with the tiny cityscape and lagoon waters just visible in the far distance. Thanks to the joined forces of Saint Roch and Venice, Plague has already been pushed to the margins. Plague's physical strength and apparent vitality are no match for the fusion of State and confraternal spiritual directives.

The small scale of this painting and its format probably suggested its recent identification as a votive. The painting's current framing also supports such a use, though the frame appears to be later in date than the satin work, having the feel and appearance of machine-cut wood.⁷¹ However, as stated in the introduction to this dissertation, this painting's materials — lightweight satin with stitched detailing in silver thread — align it formally with a type of ceremonial banner used by early modern Venetian confraternities. This work may have been created initially as a panel inset into a larger textile used by the Scuola Grande di San Rocco in relation to the 1630-31 plague epidemic. Such use does not exclude the possibility that the painting was a devotional object or even a votive work.

⁷¹ The satin painting's frame is currently silver in color. In *Venezia e la peste*, however, the frame appears much darker in the photograph, and the text describes it as silver, painted black. The catalogue entry further notes that the frame is wood, but laminated in metal painted black. The glazing is noted to be old, and it is described as "cast glass." The implication may be that the wooden elements are newer than the glass. The general shape of the frame, including the stamped metal decorative areas at the edges, appears the same. Therefore, the frame must have been cleaned or conserved in some other way since 1979. ("La cornice è di legno ricoperta di sottile lamiera di metallo dipinto di nero. Agli angoli quattro ornamenti a palmette stampigliati. La lastra di vetro è vecchia, di vetro colato," 339.)

Louise Marshall and Catherine Puglisi have each examined the commission and processional usage of paintings created to function as *gonfaloni* during early modern epidemics of plague, in Perugia and Bologna respectively.⁷² However, the examples they discuss vary significantly in scale, tone, and content from the modest San Rocco painting just described. One of Marshall's case studies is the eleven-foot-high *gonfalone* by Benedetto Bonfigli, created for a Perugian confraternity in 1471. Guido Reni's spectacular ex-voto rendered on silk in 1630, the subject of an article by Puglisi, is of similarly large dimensions at over twelve feet in height [Figures 4.52, 4.53]. Both of these paintings were rendered by artists with well known reputations and created on a vast scale for visibility in processions and for placement above altars where they also functioned liturgically as altarpieces after serving as mobile ceremonial objects.

The satin painting in storage at the Scuola di San Rocco in Venice is evidently a different sort of object. Considered in relation to the monumental plague banners studied by Marshall and Puglisi, the San Rocco painting is diminutive, with the delicate qualities of embroidery. However, the work is painted, not embroidered, rendering it distinct from the various precious textiles used for liturgical functions and during other ceremonies that took place at early modern altars. The San Rocco work shares a close affinity with a type of confraternal banner that combines qualities of painting and embroidery, which may have been particularly popular in Venice. Its closest early modern counterpart in Venice is a flag-like banner belonging to the Scuola Grande dei Carmini, dating to the eighteenth century [Figure 4.31], though modern-day

⁷² Louise Marshall, "Confraternity and Community: Mobilizing the Sacred in Times of Plague," in *Confraternities and the Visual Arts in Renaissance Italy: Ritual, Spectacle, Image*, eds. Barbara Wisch and Diane Cole Ahl, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 20-45; and Catherine Puglisi, "Guido Reni's *Pallione del Voto* and the Plague of 1630," *Art Bulletin*, v.77, n.3 (1995), 403-412.

analogues can also be seen at other Venetian confraternities, including the Scuola Dalmata [Figure 4.54].

Gonfaloni were created in diverse sizes and types. While visually striking examples like Bonfigli's and Reni's have garnered scholarly attention for their formal similarities to other established categories of painting, they are not representative of most of the banners used ceremonially in early modern Italy. As Barbara Wisch has noted, *gonfaloni* were crucial components to confraternal operations, ubiquitous among the understudied "plethora of artifacts of devotion and commemoration" that make up the rich visual cultural of Italian confraternities.⁷³ These ceremonial banners were made on a number of supports, including panel, canvas, and various textiles, and their shapes varied as well, though typically rectilinear or pennant-like, and sometimes comprising multiple pictorial fields. The San Rocco satin panel appears to belong to a flag-like type of confraternal banner, the same as that which still exists in the Scuola Grande dei Carmini, close neighbor to the more powerful Scuola Grande di San Rocco [Figure 4.31].

This eighteenth-century banner at the Carmini is described on the object label at the brotherhood's confraternal meetinghouse as a *vessillo processionale* — a term with a slightly different semantic shade than *gonfalone*, suggesting a standard, more than a banner. It is composed mainly of red silk embellished with silver stitch work in intricate vegetal flourishes that traces the standard's perimeter and frame an inset figural panel of the Madonna dei Carmini.⁷⁴ The panel, ovoid in shape, has been painted on canvas, created separately from the

⁷³ Barbara Wisch, "Re-Viewing the Image of Confraternities in Renaissance Visual Culture," *Confraternitas: The Bulletin of the Society for Confraternity Studies*, v.14, n.2 (Fall 2003), 16.

⁷⁴ A number of terms were used in the early modern period to describe ceremonial textiles that were used in processions, and while shades of difference were implied in their meanings, the terms were sometimes used interchangeably and not necessarily with consistency. Some of the terms denoting these objects were: *gonfalone*, *vessillo*, *palio*, *pallione*, *drappo*, and *stendardo*.

forked, triangular body of the *vessillo*, and attached later to create a small narrative vignette at its widest part [Figure 4.55].

The San Rocco satin painting, while not as lavish as the painted inset on the Carmini standard, exhibits some common features. Both paintings represent the titular saints of their respective scuole, each resting upon a cloudbank and depicted according to pictorial conventions in votive *tavolette* and other small devotional paintings. While the Carmini example was rendered with greater modeling and naturalism, both of these works exhibit paired-down imagery that reduce the figures to only those essential to represent the spiritual power of each confraternity's sacred representative. Narrative elements have been reduced, and both textile panels privilege iconic representations of the depicted figures — communicating a heavy semantic weight succinctly through allegory in the San Rocco painting, and, in the case of the Carmini standard, through an adherence to traditional iconography.

In addition to shared compositional features, the San Rocco painting's material construction points to its original inclusion in a larger textile. Its satin support alone suggests a work of art that was used differently from a typical devotional painting, which would have been rendered more conventionally and easily on canvas or panel. Silk and satin were both lightweight and costly fabrics from which banners were frequently fashioned in the early modern world. Even Guido Reni's monumental *pallione* created in Bologna during the 1630 epidemic was painted on a silk support, unusual for its vast size and expense.⁷⁵ The satin painting's small scale, while in keeping with the typical dimensions of small devotional works of art, would also have been functionally sized for inclusion on a pennant-type *gonfalone* or other fabric standard.

⁷⁵ Puglisi, 405, n16.

The most telling physical evidence that suggests that the San Rocco painting originally belonged to a larger processional textile is the silver stitching that frames the figural panel. The inclusion of this precious metal elevates the materials of this painting, like the satin support itself, and adds a textural component to the flat surface that would have reflected light before the material oxidized to the dull gray color it has today. The Carmini panel is rich with silver embellishment and gold sequins, which would have created an appealing, flickering quality when reflecting candle- or sunlight, particularly when in motion. The San Rocco panel uses a simpler chain stitch for the silver adornment, sewn to the satin with yellow thread [Figure 4.56]. It traces the entire perimeter of the central image of Roch, Venice, and Pestilence — running behind the wooden frame along the sides. Money and effort would not have been expended on limning the outlines of this devotional painting in silver thread if the original intent were for it to be enclosed by wood.⁷⁶

This detail corroborates the theory that the painting was removed from its original support and subsequently reframed, allowing it to function in a new context as an intimately sized devotional painting. The reasons for this reframing remain speculative, though deterioration of the *gonfalone* on which it may have been attached is possible, as well as a shift in how this work was used. As with Bonfigli's and Reni's banners, which served plural functions as processional objects and altarpieces, the San Rocco satin painting may have had more than one use. Its appearance on a confraternal standard does not preclude a simultaneous function as an *ex-voto*, commissioned to petition Saint Roch for his protection and processed to demonstrate the earnestness of the supplicants' prayers. Further, as we have seen in the other

⁷⁶ The removal of the satin painting from its wooden frame in order to examine the edges of the fabric for frayed edges, stitching, or the remainder of pieces of another textile upon which it may have been attached, would offer further evidence of this object's previous life on a banner. I have not yet been able to perform this additional scrutiny.

case studies in this chapter, the reframing and physical alteration of plague paintings in response to evolving devotional uses was common in the seventeenth century. These transformations show that plague paintings could have diminished relevance as spiritual tools after the epidemics for which they were created, but that other aspects of these works were important enough to prompt material interventions.

Bernardino Prudenti's *The Virgin and Child for Santa Maria della Salute*

After the Senate announced the end of the 1630-31 plague epidemic on November 13, 1631, Venice's residents began preparations for various city-wide celebrations. The Venetian State's creation of a new holiday to mark the occasion is well known: November 21, 1631 was the first annual observance of the Festa della Madonna della Salute, which coincided with a date already important in Marian devotion, the Presentation of the Virgin in the Temple.⁷⁷ Because of extant textual sources from 1631 that describe these official celebrations, and because of the grandeur and prominence of Santa Maria della Salute, scholarly attention has focused on the Venetian State's tributes to Mary and to public health during the epidemic and post-plague. However, these observances were only the most conspicuous. In the Ghetto, for example, Jews organized their own celebrations of thanksgiving on November 25-26, praising God for delivering them from the pestilence that had raged in the city. Leon Modena describes in his diary the Jewish community's experience of this moment: "There was great celebration in the

⁷⁷ ASV, *Senato Terra Registro*, 106, fols. 445r-446r, November 13, 1631. This document is transcribed in Andrew Hopkins, *Santa Maria della Salute*, Appendix 1, 24, 178-9. The Feast of the Presentation of the Virgin had long been an important holiday in the Eastern Church, but was first instituted in Venice in 1369-70. Edward Muir has noted that the Presentation of the Virgin became the primary celebration of the Madonna in Venice, replacing the Festival of the Twelve Marys, which he argues had been problematic for its alignment with Carnivale, causing tensions between two celebrations so very different in tone. (*Civic Ritual in Renaissance Venice*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981), 151-3). Following the Council of Trent, the Presentation of the Virgin was removed from the liturgical calendar by Pius V in 1568, but restored by Sixtus V in 1585. Venice, however, continued to celebrate the Presentation of the Virgin, regardless of decrees from Rome.

city, and everyone gave thanks to his God. In addition, a fast was decreed in all the holy congregations on the eve of the new moon of Kislev [Tuesday, November 25, 1631], with a prayer service for the new moon during the day [November 26]...A collection was taken up in every synagogue, which will be used to make a silver object to commemorate the deliverance.”⁷⁸ Certainly individual parishes marked the occasion in their own ways as well, giving thanks to God and other sacred intercessors, and offering prayers for the souls of congregation members who had perished.

A printed pamphlet produced at the end of the epidemic, *La liberatione di Venetia*, represents one of the more extensive sources on the State’s ceremonies. It describes the post-plague celebrations of November 21, 1631 as fervid jubilation, as though an ecstatic energy drove the events that honored the end of the epidemic.⁷⁹ It also provides evidence of the important role works of art played during the celebration. The eye-witness-like account of these official ceremonies, written by Marco Ginammi, includes descriptions of the procession route, the temporary votive church built at the Salute site, and the music and works of art that gave structure to the ceremonies.⁸⁰ Ginammi’s account provides a rich narration of the day’s events,

⁷⁸ Leon Modena, *The Life of Judah*, MS 23a, Kislev 5392 (November, 1631), in *The Autobiography of a Seventeenth-Century Rabbi: Leon Modena’s Life of Judah*, ed. and trans. Mark R. Cohen, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988), 137. Unfortunately, no more is currently known about silver object created to commemorate this moment. While the Museo Ebraico Venezia possesses a number of ornate and precious silver objects from the seventeenth century, it is unclear if any of them resulted from the collection taken up in the Ghetto in 1631.

⁷⁹ Marco Ginammi, (Venice: Conzato, 1631), Biblioteca Museo Correr. This document has been transcribed partially by Andrew Hopkins in, *Santa Maria della Salute*, Appendix 1, 26, 180-2, and in full by Jeffery Kurtzman and Linda Maria Koldau in, “*Trombe, Trombe d’argento, Trombe squarciate, Tromboni, and Pifferi in Venetian Processions and Ceremonies of the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries*,” *Journal of Seventeenth-Century Music*, v.8, n. 1, (2002). An eighteenth-century transcription of this document, in which the text is attributed to a Venetian cleric named Antonio de’ Vescovi, can be found in the Biblioteca Museo Correr, *Codice Cicogna*, 1509, 109r-112r.

⁸⁰ In addition to Ginammi’s pamphlet, notation of the first procession and ceremonies that became the Festa della Salute were also detailed by an unnamed state official in the State Ceremonial files, though the rendition of events is sparser. ASV, State Ceremonial 3, folios 83r,v, November 21, 1631. This document has been transcribed in Hopkins, *Salute*, Appendix 1, 25, 179-180, and in Massimo Gemin, *La chiesa di S. Maria della Salute e la cabala di Paolo Sarpi*, (Abano Terme: Francisci Editore, 1982), 257-9.

with details on the emotionally affective nature of the celebration. He describes the splendor of the Piazza San Marco decorated to honor this day — the columns, arcades, and windows adorned with garlands, golden hearts, and tapestries, and the onlookers gathering around the votive works that represented the miraculous interventions that brought about the end of the tragedy. He ascribes expressions of rapture and longing to the crowds present, as though they were overcome with emotion, dazzled by the opulence, and moved to great piety, “their hearts enchanted through their eyes.”⁸¹

After detailing the extensive decoration of the piazza and the prayerful attitudes of the participants, Ginammi’s account supplies readers with information on the processional route — the streets through which it wound, the votive bridge constructed of boats that allowed celebrants to cross the Grand Canal, and the temporary triumphal arches and wooden church that met them at their destination. Ginammi provides varied information regarding music for the event, including notation of the instruments, the musicians’ dress, and Claudio Monteverdi’s involvement. As *maestro di cappella* at San Marco, Monteverdi has been credited with the composition of music for the event as well as overseeing its performance. Most important for the present study, Ginammi mentions two paintings that served as focal points during this celebration: the Madonna Nicopeia, the preeminent miracle-working image in the city, which was carried to the Salute site (and which Ginammi calls an image of the Blessed Virgin, “painted by Saint Luke”); and a large-scale painting commissioned by the heads of the *Sanità*, Bernardino

⁸¹ “La Piazza era tutta addobbata. Non vi era cosa, che non rapisse, e rendesse confusa la curiosità degli occhi. Non si rende così ammirabile, nè così venerabile il Cielo per l’infinità, & per la varietà de i suoi lumi, come lei appariva quel giorno. L’haverebbe creduta V.S. Illustrissima un Teatro per rappresentarvisi sopra le meraviglie del Mondo. Le Colonne, i Portici, e le fenestre erano tutte arricchite di superbissimi Arazzi, Cuori d’oro, e Tapeti. Sotto le Procuratie nuove l’Asia, e l’Assiria facevano pomposa ostentatione dei suoi piu degni lavori. V’erano in diversi pezzi effiggiati quei miracoli, che si guadagnarono dalla antichità tutta la gloria dell’ammirazione con sì ingegnoso artificio, che accrescevano il merito a i veri. Si vedevano i Trionfi della Pittura espressi in diversi quadri, che rapivano il cuore per gli occhi. Sembravano persone vive, che tacessero ammirando però apparato così degno.”

Prudenti's, *The Virgin and Child, with Saint Mark the Evangelist, the Blessed Lorenzo Giustiniani, Saint Roch, and Saint Sebastian* [Figure 4.57]. Ginammi tells us that this painting, measuring approximately two by three meters today and created specifically for the November 21 ceremony, was completed in an astounding four days.⁸² Such a claim begs credulity, as oil paint would not have dried sufficiently in this time frame. However, it is likely that the work was created rapidly, given the short period between the declaration of the end of the epidemic and the celebratory events. The speed with which Prudenti was credited in finishing the painting should also be contextualized in relation to the rhetoric employed in descriptions of Venetian painting practices that became widespread during the sixteenth century. Rapid execution became a defining characteristic largely due to the working practices of Titian and Tintoretto.⁸³ While four days seems an insufficient time for Prudenti to have completed his painting, he may have used techniques popular in Venice since the early sixteenth century to speed the drying time of oil paint by combining it with tempera and other additives.⁸⁴

The Nicopeia was a conspicuous sacred image throughout the 1630-31 epidemic, processed weekly around the Piazza San Marco with special Masses held at its newly appointed chapel in the basilica. Prudenti's painting, in turn, is significant as one of two major works of art commissioned by the Venetian government to commemorate the end of the epidemic, along with

⁸² "Tutto ingegnioso artificio del penello del S. Bernardino Prudenti, che (con stupore di chi lo sà), di commissione de' Signori alla Salute lo perfettionò in quattro giorni."

⁸³ The drying time of oil paint was sometimes sped up by mixing oil with tempera to make *tempera grassa*, a particularly Venetian practice. For more on this technique, see Robert Wald, "Materials and Techniques of Painters in Sixteenth-Century Venice," in *Titian, Tintoretto, Veronese: Rivals in Renaissance Venice*, (Boston: MFA publications, 2009), 73-81. Philip Sohm has addressed the issue of speed and the rhetoric of speed in relation to Venetian painting practices in a number of his publications, including *Pittoresco: Marco Boschini, his Critics, and their Critiques of Painterly Brushwork in Seventeenth- and Eighteenth-Century Italy*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 1991, and "Titian Performs Old Age," in *The Artist Grows Old: the Aging of Art and Artists in Italy, 1500-1800*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), 82-103.

⁸⁴ Robert Wald, "Materials and Techniques of Painters in Sixteenth-Century Venice," in *Titian. Tintoretto. Veronese. Rivals in Renaissance Venice*, Museum of Fine Arts, (Boston: MFA Publications, 2009), 79.

the votive church of Santa Maria della Salute. Purpose-made for the Festa della Salute in the immediate wake of the catastrophe, Prudenti's painting represents the holy figures who were emblematic during the epidemic, visualizing the State-supported iconography associated with plague in 1631. The work was displayed in front of the Procuratie Nuove during the ceremonies, as the central and most opulent painted work in the piazza. It was designed to create iconographic unity amongst the varied works of art and material culture filling the piazza, acting as a sort of focal point that imposed a codified order through its large scale, vivid colors, and affective imagery. Its creation for this day demonstrates the importance the Venetian State placed upon paintings as conveyors of meaning — capable of focusing prayers, asserting orthodox iconography, and crystalizing votive initiative within physical form.⁸⁵

Like the other paintings discussed in this chapter associated with the 1630-31 outbreak of plague, Prudenti's *Virgin and Child* emblemized a collective group identity.⁸⁶ Even when

⁸⁵ A note of reservation should be made regarding the Ginammi pamphlet. Though it is valuable as the most expansive account of the first celebration of the Festa della Salute, its description of events should be taken with a figurative grain of salt. This document — so keen to present an authentic, “eye-witness” narrative — appears to be partially a pastiche of an earlier document written during the city's celebrations after the 1575-77 plague. In studying the Ginammi text and the musical compositions created for Salute in 1631, musicologist James Moore revealed that entire passages in the pamphlet appeared nearly verbatim in *La liberazione di Vinegia*, a letter reportedly written by Venetian citizen Muzio Lumina and published in 1577 that described the procession to Il Redentore on July 21, 1577 to celebrate the end of that epidemic. The Ginammi text pairs specific details of the 1631 events — the procession to the Salute site, the music and religious ceremonies performed there, and the use of devotional art — with generic descriptions of a grateful and joyous throng of devotees, which were lifted in full from Lumina's 1577 letter. The 1631 account is vexing in other ways as well, as the text has also been ascribed to other authors, and with conflicting dates. An eighteenth-century transcription of this document, with minor, scattered deviations, appears in the Museo Correr's archives in which the missive is attributed to a cleric named Antonio de' Vescovi, who erroneously identifies the date of the ceremony as November 29. James H. Moore “‘Venezia favorita da Maria:’ Music for the Madonna Nicopeia and Santa Maria della Salute,” *Journal of the American Musicological Society*, v.37, n.2 (Summer 1984), 316-17.

⁸⁶ There has been little scholarship produced on Prudenti's painting for the Salute. Indeed, bibliographic information for this painting's citation in *Venezia e la peste* includes only two sources, and one of which is its entry in Boschini's 1644 *Le minere*. For what has been published on the work, beyond Boschini, see Samuele Romanin, *Storia documentata di Venezia*, volume 7, (Venice: P. Naratovich, 1858), 307-8; Vittorio Piva, *Il tempio della Salute, eretto per voto de la Repubblica Veneta, XXVI-XXMDCXXX*, (Venice: Libreria Emiliana Editrice, 1930), 42, 43, 95, 96; Antonio Gambacorta, “Appunti per una monografia sulla vita e le opere di Bernardinus Prudenti pittore del Seicento veneziano,” in *La Zagaglia: rassegna di scienze, lettere, ed arti*, n.17, (March 1963), 8-9; *Venezia e la peste*, (Venice: Marsilio, 1979), 263; Andrew Hopkins, “Plans and Planning for S. Maria della Salute, Venice,” *Art Bulletin*, v.79, n.3 (September 1997), 453-4; Hopkins, *Santa Maria della Salute: Architecture and Ceremony in*

portraits of donors and supplicants were depicted, such as in the examples from San Francesco della Vigna and the Scuola Dalmata, the works situate these individual subjects within larger group formations, elaborating through attributes and behavior the significance of their incorporation. Prudenti's painting represents the broadest level of collective identity: a Venetian-ness associated with having experienced and survived the plague as residents in the city. This is not to say that the diversity of people living and working in the city was fully represented. Nor does it suggest that the social differences and inequalities upon which the city was structured, or the economic hierarchies that divided and excluded distinct groups in the city, were not at play in the public celebrations on November 21, 1631. I am arguing, however, that Prudenti's painting was designed to produce a coherent and accessible visual rhetoric for participants in the procession, as they entered the Piazza San Marco and assembled before the façade of the Procuratie Nuove. Its iconography is the most generic of all the paintings discussed in the case studies in this chapter. The Senate, in commissioning a work to represent the city's triumph over plague, chose imagery that would be most inclusive, although from a Christian perspective. The painting images spiritual intercessors and excludes references to civic leaders, including the doge, with the exception of the two symbolic characters of the lion of Saint Mark at the bottom margin of the canvas and a rendering of Santa Maria della Salute, which was little more than a collection of drawings, an architect's model, and the beginnings of a foundation during the November 21 ceremony.

Prudenti's painting, currently situated in the Salute's sanctuary, was initially hung in a conspicuous and important location during construction of the church, after the Festa della Salute

Baroque Venice, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 213-14; and Hopkins, "Combatting the Plague: Devotional Paintings, Architectural Programs, and Votive Processions in Early Modern Venice," in *Hope and Healing: Painting in Italy in a Time of Plague 1500-1800*, ex. cat., eds. Gauvin Alexander Bailey and Pamela M. Jones, (Worcester: Mass., Clark University, 2005), 143-4.

ceremonies of 1631. Once the main body of the church was completed, the painting was displayed in the apse area, next to what served as the high altarpiece, Alessandro Varotari's *The Virgin and Child with a model of Santa Maria della Salute*, until both works were displaced by Giusto Le Court's sculptural altarpiece installed in 1670, seventeen years before the church's official consecration [Figures 4.58, 4.59].⁸⁷ Prudenti's painting was then moved to an area over the sanctuary, on the west wall behind the main altar, before its further relocation within the depths of the sanctuary.⁸⁸ The series of moves within the Salute, marked by increased marginalization from the primary liturgical spaces of the church, parallels the fate of Domenico Tintoretto's work within San Francesco della Vigna, which was moved from a central location on a lateral wall of the apse, to the periphery of the church's choir — away from public view after plague was no longer a reoccurring phenomenon. This seeming diminishment of the spiritual efficacy of these paintings will be addressed further at the close of this chapter.

Prudenti's work is an essential case study when investigating works of art created for the 1630-31 plague outbreak because of its important status as a Senate commission and the archival documents that date it firmly. In addition, the work is significant because it shows the extensive measures that could be taken to mitigate plague imagery at a temporal remove from the epidemic, when the vividness of the descriptive mode had lost its immediate relevance and utility, and it had become indecorous within the ecclesiastical setting. Besides being moved to sites of increasing remoteness in the Salute, this painting was also physically altered in the decades immediately following its creation in 1631, when the bottom section of the painting containing graphic representations of plague victims was cut off and discarded.

⁸⁷ Boschini, *Le minere*, 348.

⁸⁸ Hopkins, *Salute*, 20, 213. Varotari, also known as Il Padovanino, created this painting in 1631, to be displayed at a temporary wooden altar set up for the Salute's cornerstone laying ceremony on April 1.

Prudenti's *Virgin and Child* was designed on a monumental scale. Its large size was important for commanding attention during the Festa della Salute ceremonies and being legible at a distance. The placement of the figures creates a triangular composition, resulting in the appearance of stability, which would have been further strengthened by the original lower register grounding the scene. Slate-colored clouds alluding to pestilential air fill all but the central section of the scene. They have been endowed with substance enough to support the gathered intercessors and angels flanking the centralized Virgin and Christ Child. This work represents the hierarchy of intercessors protecting Venice against plague during the 1630-31 epidemic. The Madonna appears at the top of the painting — an indicator of her primacy, formally recognized by the State [Figure 4.60]. She looks intently out of the painting, making eye contact with viewers and connecting with devotees who sought her protection and reassurance. Besides the lion of Saint Mark, nearly indistinguishable at the bottom edge of the canvas, the Virgin is the only figure whose eyes make contact with viewers. She raises her right hand in a gesture of recognition, with her open palm indicating an appeal to God. Similarly, the Christ Child raises his tiny right hand in benediction, staring down into the face of an angel helping to support the bank of clouds on which he and his mother sit.

The triangulation of the intercessors' gazes in this work reinforces the spiritual hierarchy of the 1630-31 epidemic and echoes the compositional shape of the painting. At the apex, the Virgin sits. The supporting intercessors descend out at angles from either direction to the bottom corners of the canvas, though the original terminus of the painting, of course, was composed of the aforementioned plague victims. Extending out from Virgin's left, on the right side of the canvas, are saints Roch and Sebastian; from the Madonna's right, Beato Lorenzo Giustiniani and Saint Mark genuflect before the mother of God [Figures 4.61, 4.62].

Each saint or holy person is depicted according to iconographic convention. Roch kneels and returns the Christ Child's gaze with reverence, clutching his pilgrim's staff and exposing his right thigh to reference his status as plague healer and victim. Saint Sebastian, so often portrayed in tandem with Roch, kneels on a cloud beside and below Roch. Two arrows pierce his body — standard iconography, but with restraint. Reducing the number of arrows shown protruding from the saint's body deemphasizes his suffering in favor of keeping the Virgin the spiritual focal point of this painting. Sebastian extends his left index finger, pointing not to the Virgin and Child, but to Roch's thigh and the implied bubo. Interestingly, Roch's staff passes directly behind Sebastian's head, almost like a third arrow piercing the saint, lending his figure greater vulnerability and tying him visually to his partner, Roch.

The second set of holy intercessors, Saint Mark and Beato Lorenzo Giustiniani, appear on the left, beneath the Virgin's upheld arm. Mirroring Saint Roch across the canvas, Giustiniani kneels closest to the Madonna, arms crossed and eyes turned piously toward her. He holds a crozier, indicating his status as the first patriarch of Venice.⁸⁹ On the same day that the Senate took their vow to build Santa Maria della Salute on October 22, 1630, the city also voted to begin the canonization process for the Beato, which finally resulted in his attainment of sainthood in 1690.⁹⁰ Giustiniani and the Salute had thus been connected since the votive church's inception, an outgrowth of the State's sponsorship of Giustiniani as a protector prior to, and during, the 1630-31 epidemic.⁹¹ Doge Nicolò Contarini was also reputed to have prayed to Giustiniani at the height of the plague, appealing to the healer to stop the disease's attack on the city. Giustiniani's

⁸⁹ This portion of the canvas appears to have sustained some damage and may have been subsequently over-painted, which can be seen in the muddy obscurity of the holy man's face.

⁹⁰ ASV, *Senato terra registro*, 104, folios 363v-365r, October 22, 1630. This document is partially transcribed in Andrew Hopkins, *Salute*, Appendix I, 1, (162).

⁹¹ Niero, "Pietà ufficiale," *Venezia e la peste*, 289-90, 303-4; Ulvioni, 55

position in Prudenti's painting as the Virgin's literal "right-hand man," closer to her even than Saint Mark, indicates his spiritual primacy at this particular moment.

Saint Mark's back is turned to viewers, his shoulder and back most prominent, and his face turned into the canvas, toward the Virgin. Mark is the least active of the assembled saints and holy figures. He does not engage with viewers. While kneeling in reverence, his piety is not demonstrative. Though Venice's primary patron saint, and thus representing the city, he was not an active agent in the devotional appeals made to Venice's sacred plague protectors, and has been depicted accordingly in Prudenti's work.

Bernardino Prudenti's painting also gives evidence of the extent to which Santa Maria della Salute's architecture remained faithful to its initial design. At the knees of Mark and Giustiniani, and above the lion, the painter included a recognizable depiction of the votive church in which the painting was to reside later [Figure 4.63]. Marco Ginammi, in his record of the first Festa della Salute, noted the presence of a temporary wooden church that was constructed for the November 21 procession, situated where the Salute now stands. However, this structure was modest in scale and bore no architectural similarities to the grandiose church that ultimately materialized in the space. Prudenti's rendering of the Salute in *The Virgin and Child* — fantastical yet accurate — has been of interest to architectural historians, including Rudolf Wittkower and Andrew Hopkins, who have used the painting as documentary evidence that the Senate was decisive in the design it chose for the commission, and that the resulting church did not deviate significantly from its initial conception in Longhena's drawings.⁹²

Around 1644, Marco Boschini produced an elaborate and precise engraving of the church, including a procession of celebrants entering the structure. Like Prudenti, he relied on

⁹² Rudolf Wittkower, "S. Maria della Salute," *Saggi e memorie di storia dell'arte*, n.3, (1963), 147-170; Hopkins, *Salute*, 213-14, and "Plans and Planning for S. Maria della Salute," *Art Bulletin*, v.79, n.3 (September 1997), 453-4.

architectural drawings and the three-dimensional model to guide his design [Figure 4.64]. The Salute made frequent appearances in works of art, even before its construction was complete. In fact, both paintings memorializing the 1630-31 outbreak on the stairway of the Scuola Grande di San Rocco included the church in their compositions. As the premier encomium to the 1630-31 epidemic in Venice, the Salute developed into a stable symbol representing the seicento plague crisis. It referenced the 1630-31 outbreak in a way that was explicit, but not challenging — the key to its long-term popularity. Images of the church proliferated in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and the structure continues to be a defining element of the city’s architectural landscape.

As I have argued throughout this chapter, and will continue to explore in the dissertation as a whole, a particular set of iconographies developed around the 1630-31 plague epidemic. This imagery evolved over time in response to changing conceptions of the disease and diminishing personal involvement, resulting in different goals and visual strategies for works of art imaging this outbreak. Prudenti’s painting illustrates pointedly the shift in what was desired of plague paintings in the years after the epidemic when the bottom register depicting plague victims’ bodies was removed. Evidence of this censorship is found in seventeenth-century guidebooks. In Marco Boschini’s 1664 and 1674 editions of his *Le minere della pittura* and *Le ricche minere*, the painting is described as representing sacred intercessors in the sky and beneath them, “a quantity of cadavers on the ground.”⁹³ By the eighteenth century, city guides note only the presence of the holy people in the painting, the cut-down, sanitized version visible

⁹³ *Le minere* (1664), 344; *Le ricche minere* (1674), 413. “...che fù fatto per esponer nella Piazza di San Marco, il giorno, che si fece l’allegrezza, per la liberazione della Città alla Peste; doue si vede Maria col Bambino, San Marco, San Rocco, San Sebastiano, San Lorenzo Giustiniani, che pregano per la Città di Venezia, con quantità di Cadaveri per terra: opera di Bernardin Prudenti.”

today.⁹⁴ While noting the presence of plague victims, Boschini does not describe their appearance. However, reasonable inferences can be made about the missing section's appearance by comparing this work to contemporaneous plague paintings, specifically Domenico Tintoretto's 1631 *modello* for the San Francesco della Vigna votive and Antonio Girola's 1636 altarpiece for San Fermo in Verona, both discussed earlier in this chapter [Figures 4.6, 4.8]. Both of these works include prominent depictions of bodies struck down by plague in their foregrounds. The corpses in Girola's work are naked, with colored cloths decorously covering their genitals; they exhibit stylized markers of the disease in the form of subtle darkened areas in the armpits and groins referencing buboes. Tintoretto's work, though a loose sketch, also shows initial plans for a painting with a similar composition and rendering of conspicuous corpses without any shrouds. While these renderings of the plague-stricken are arresting, explicit, and unambiguous about what they represent, the bodies in both these works are also idealized and maintain a certain level of visual appeal. They are smooth-skinned and proportional, and preserve a sense of dignity for the dead. Truly naturalistic depictions of bodies struck by plague would present images undeniably more gruesome. Such an approach was evidently not desired even in the most graphic of renditions, exceeding what was considered acceptable.

Each of these works that include plague corpses as important elements to the composition provides insight into issues of decorum and the shifting boundaries that defined how plague paintings were supposed to function in ecclesiastical settings. Provocative imagery was used to elicit emotive responses in early modern viewers, and in some respects, as a goad to prayers felt more intensely.

⁹⁴ See Zanetti, *Descrizione di tutte le pubbliche pitture della città di Venezia e isole circonvicine* (1733), 335.

The tone struck by Prudenti's painting before it was cut down reflects what was considered appropriate in rendering the vividness of plague death just after the epidemic had been declared over by the Venetian State. At the same time, it appears that any depictions too candid, too "scientific" in their treatment were eschewed. The imagery had to reassure and not stoke prevalent anxieties over the return of contagion and concern for the mortification of bodies. Plague time deaths sometimes occurred without the ill receiving Last Rights and other standard religious and social procedures, and the routine practice of burying bodies in mass, anonymous graves went against cultural convention. Paintings that depicted the bodies of plague victims in an aestheticized way and in proximity to sacred figures could help to allay widespread fears generated by these deviations to the typical afterlife preparations. Bernardino Prudenti's painting for the November 21 ceremonies reflects the tenuous equilibrium of presenting the terrorizing conditions out of which Venice had just emerged and asserting the city's almost predestined victory over plague through its protection by the intercessors responsive to Venetian residents.

Though written sources documenting when and why Bernardino Prudenti's *The Virgin and Child* was altered have not been found, it seems evident that the work's provocative imagery drove its censorship. An image of Venice covered by mounds of plague victims — so powerful in the immediate aftermath of the crisis — appears not to have been appropriate in the decades following the work's completion. As Venice's population and economy began to recover in the years following the tragedy, plague imagery began a semiotic creep, an evolution away from the vivid portrayal of plague-infected bodies, toward a more generalized representation of sacred intercession that reassured the living and encouraged their continued faith in the Virgin and in Venice as a protective republic. A telling, comparative example from sixteenth-century Bologna

illustrates that such challenges in depicting plague were not restricted to Venice, but shared across the Italian peninsula in the later early modern period. In 1580, in the aftermath of 1575-77 plague outbreak in northern Italy, Paolo Ghiselli commissioned the artist Federico Zuccaro to paint a plague-themed painting of Saint Gregory the Great for his family chapel in Madonna del Baraccano in Bologna. This painting, with its foreground of corpses, was rejected upon completion, because its imagery was deemed “too ugly to look at.”⁹⁵ The patron commissioned a second painting of this same subject from another artist, Cesare Aretusi.⁹⁶ This resulting work, which reduced the size of the corpses and relegated them to the background, was met with satisfaction. In a similar vein in Venice, the patrons who commissioned Domenico Tintoretto for their plague votive may have chosen a more tempered composition, rejecting the foreground of corpses first proposed by the painter in the *modello* because of similar issues of decorum and aesthetics. What was desired was a work with greater long-term suitability as a devotional object that could function effectively outside of epidemics, with imagery that uplifted and encouraged, rather than disturbed.

Defining the scope and evolution of plague iconography in seventeenth-century Venice is complicated. While trends indicate that a post-epidemic tempering of the most explicit and challenging imagery was commonplace, it would be misleading to suggest it was universal. In addition, the continued development of plague imagery through reworking tropes and standard compositional formulas was not linear. In a word, plague paintings were adaptive. Works memorializing the 1630-31 plague epidemic at the end of the seventeenth century and into the

⁹⁵ This quote comes from a rival Bolognese painter who criticized Zuccaro’s work, and in full, reads: “le figure che erano inanzi quali per ragione di prospettiva devono esser più grande erano minori et facevano brutto vedere.” Detlef Heikamp published it in *Scritti d’arte di Federico Zuccaro*, (Florence: L.S. Olschki, 1957), 187. I thank Sheila Barker for bringing this to my attention.

⁹⁶ Heikamp, 188-9.

eighteenth did not necessarily show increasing generalization in their iconography but demonstrated a different privileging in what seemed important in visualizing the disease. Emphases shifted in depicting core imagery, and innovation developed around finding new ways of telling stories about the epidemic.

CHAPTER V

The grand stairway at the Scuola Grande di San Rocco

Introduction

The Scuola Grande di San Rocco was the most important social institution in Venice associated with plague. This confraternity's charitable activities concentrated on providing money for dowries, burials, and other life expenses for the poorer residents in the San Polo neighborhood, rather than running a hospital or caring for victims of plague. However, as the center of the cult dedicated to the plague saint Roch, the Scuola Grande di San Rocco was vital to the spiritual practices associated with fighting the disease. This chapter considers the confraternity's memorialization of the 1630-31 plague epidemic through the 1666 commission of Antonio Zanchi's large-scale painting *The Virgin Appears to the Plague-Stricken*. This painting is distinguished as the most comprehensive rendition of plague in visual art created in Italy during the late medieval and early modern periods. While other examples provide rich details showing the disease's impact on life in early modern cities — from the treatment of the sick, to the disposal of bodies and related religious responses — Zanchi's painting is unmatched in its portrayal of the foremost concerns associated with controlling plague in seventeenth-century Venice.¹ A number of conditions particular to this commission fostered Zanchi's expansive

¹ Italian paintings from this period that depict the social strain of plague epidemics (representing burials, diseased bodies in the city, and the varied interventions taken to mitigate the crises) include Giovanni del Biondo's Saint Sebastian *vita* altarpiece in S. Maria del Fiore, Florence (particularly the bottom left panel), c.1370; Benedetto Bonfigli, *Plague Madonna della Misericordia, gonfalone* for San Francesco al Prato in Perugia, 1464 (Figure 2.13);

approach, including its creation for a confraternity associated with plague, the work's location within the dynamic environment of a stairwell, and the Venetian tradition of creating immersive viewing experiences in public spectacles, performances, and painting campaigns at the *scuole grandi*.

In the lowest register of *The Virgin Appears to the Plague-Stricken*, an immense painting that spans two canvases on the stairway of the Scuola Grande di San Rocco, a disturbing tableau unfolds. Out of the gloom materialize the corpses of a woman and infant, graying and still clasped in an embrace, with darkened spots on their skin that signal they are the victims of a plague epidemic. Their forms are foreshortened, with the effect that they seem to project from the canvas, the lifeless woman's empty face and the child's toes extending out at viewers' eye level when seen from the bottom of the stairs. Framing these corpses are a large pilaster and the muscular calves of a *pizzigamorto* (body clearer) who stands in the shallow boat in which the bodies lie. He is collecting the dead for transport to a mass grave on the Lido. If one looks up from the body clearer, one's gaze is assaulted by a third corpse, dangling in the air beneath a bridge as his body is heaved into the boat by another sanitation worker. A further look reveals atop the bridge more infected bodies, hauled there for disposal and heaped amid contaminated fabrics and the wooden supports of a stretcher for carrying corpses. An onlooker dressed in black plugs his nose against the polluted air, staring impassively at the grisly spectacle taking place at his feet. His response is blunted by familiarity; he turns his head to glance before exiting the scene [Figures 5.1-5.3].

Antonio Zanchi's painting is a dramatic *tour de force* that bears witness to the continued vitality of the Scuola Grande di San Rocco as a preeminent social institution in the city. It

Jacopo Bassano, *Saint Roch Visiting the Plague-Stricken*, originally for the church of San Rocco in Vicenza, c.1575-77; and Guido Reni, *Pallione del Voto*, Bologna, 1630 (Figure 4.51).

asserts the Scuola's primacy among the city's venerable scuole grandi, as well as its spiritual function in combatting plague. This painting and its pendant across the stairwell, *The Madonna Saves Venice from the Plague of 1630*, completed by Pietro Negri in 1673, represent the city's most opulent painted memorials to the recent plague catastrophe [Figure 5.4]. These paintings were created at a time when the State-sponsored votive church to the 1630-31 plague, Santa Maria della Salute, began to near completion [Figure 5.5]. By the 1660s, after thirty years of sustained construction, the majority of the church's structural components were complete and attention was then turned to the interior. High-ranking brothers at the Scuola Grande di San Rocco elected to decorate the grand stairway in their meetinghouse while paintings were being installed at the Salute's altars and other important commissions were underway throughout Venice. By commissioning two large-scale paintings at this artistically generative time, San Rocco's confraternity reminded *confratelli* and visitors of the Scuola's important role in the city's spiritual welfare, particularly during outbreaks of pestilence.

Antonio Zanchi's painting for the Scuola di San Rocco pairs traditional plague iconography with details specific to the 1630-31 outbreak, representing a distillation of the most critical and defining elements associated with the recent epidemic. *The Virgin Appears to the Plague-Stricken* formulated a narrative for the 1630-31 plague, finding order in what was an inherently chaotic event. Zanchi's painting was completed thirty-five years after the end of the outbreak — enough time for the city's economy and population to begin substantial recovery, yet recent enough for the catastrophe to still be part of the memories and identities of those who had lived through it. The work's emotionally affective imagery and eye-witness-like details were designed to resonate with viewers. In addition, Antonio Zanchi took advantage of the painting's location in the stairwell by transforming the setting, which could have been a limiting and

difficult space in which to work, into a defining conceptual feature of the work. The painting's monumental scale and incorporation of the built environment created an immersive experience for early modern viewers, who would have been compelled to interact closely with disturbing images of the dead and dying victims of plague before reaching scenes of salvation at the apex of the stairs. Zanchi's painting demonstrates a tendency towards historicizing recent events in Venice's past and creating interactive experiences for audiences that was shared by a popular new art form that originated in the city in the 1640s: the public opera. Both the visual and performance arts in seventeenth-century Venice were invested in heightening viewing experience through the direct solicitation of spectators by various means. Audiences became participants through an expressive mode that included them as actors who shaped the dramatic possibilities contained in the presentation. Zanchi's painting will be explored with respect to its connections to theatrical performativity shared across media in seicento Venice.

Pietro Negri's pendant painting across the stairway, also visualizing the theme of intercession during the 1630-31 epidemic, will be discussed in comparison with key elements of Zanchi's painting. *The Madonna Saves Venice* relies on allegory more than its predecessor, though stylistically both works have much in common, including compositions that mimic opera stage sets and evoke an embodied viewing experience. Commission details for each painting, for which little documentary evidence remains, will be considered together under the framework of building campaigns at the Scuola di San Rocco and controversies related to the construction of the grand stairway in which they reside. Together, these works completed the decorative campaign in this important and highly visible site in the confraternity's meetinghouse. Each offers a related, though differently inflected, message on the primacy of holy intercession against plague and the Scuola's role as a conduit for divine protection.

Zanchi's and Negri's paintings demonstrate the continued evolution of trends in Venetian plague art throughout the seventeenth century. Just as a number of plague paintings created during the 1630-31 epidemic underwent transformations post-outbreak — from relocation to alterations of content — commemorative works like Zanchi's show that plague iconography continued to evolve, even in works of art created during times of general wellness. In fact, the Scuola's stairway paintings represent distinctive examples that, while built upon the previous centuries' established conventions in plague art, depart stylistically and in scope from works made during the epidemic that they memorialize. This chapter will investigate the varied elements in *The Virgin Appears to the Plague-Stricken* that situate the work within the specific milieu of late seicento Venice.

Context for the commission

An inscription in Latin appears on Zanchi's painting, represented as if chiseled into the bridge that spans the two canvases: "Bernardo Briolo, Guardian Grande, dedicates this painting to the Virgin, mother of God, and to Saint Roch, in the year of our Lord 1666, October 14. Antonio Zanchi, painter, painted this."² Guardian grandi were the elected heads of the scuole grandi in Venice, whose terms throughout the early modern period lasted one year. A body of the six highest-ranking *confratelli* — an elected group of men known as the *banca* — advised the guardian grande. Together, they made decisions regarding the operations of the confraternity, from overseeing charitable works and poor relief, to organizing the many processions and concerts performed to honor Saint Roch. The *banca* members and guardian grandi also made decisions collectively regarding all construction and adornment of their meetinghouses.

² "DOM / DEIPARAE VIRGINI DIVOQ. ROCHO / HANC DICAVIT PICTURAM / BARNADUS BRIOLUS / GUARDIAN.S MAIOR / ANNO D.NI MDCLXVI / DI XIV MENSIS OCTOB. / ANT.S ZANCHI P.P."

However, commissions for works of art could be treated as separate and distinct expenses from those related to the structural architecture at the scuole grandi by the seventeenth century. Construction of the scuole's meetinghouses (completed in large part by the sixteenth century, with the exception of the Scuola Grande dei Carmini), as well as subsequent additions or modifications to the architecture were paid for from the confraternities' coffers, with approval of the governing bodies controlling the institutions. Such expenses were considered crucial for housing the brotherhoods and for maintaining the sodalities in the city.

At the Scuola Grande di San Rocco, increasingly exorbitant spending in the mid-sixteenth century for ephemeral events like banquets and for the decoration of the meetinghouse came under scrutiny by the Council of Ten. Brian Pullan's comprehensive study of Venice's scuole grandi in the early modern period reveals that the Scuola Grande di San Rocco spent more than 50,000 ducats over a period of 50 years from 1516 to 1564 for building and decorating their meetinghouse — equivalent to the total funds they contributed to charity over a twenty-year period.³ By the seventeenth century, the extravagant spending of the preceding decades resulted in the careful monitoring of expenses for extraneous events (those outside the major feast days and established celebrations) and works of art not related directly to the architecture or upkeep of the meetinghouse. Any non-essential commissions, therefore, could not be financed with funds reserved for building construction and maintenance; decoration of this nature was to be paid for by the *confratelli* themselves, typically by the highest-ranking members. Guardian grandi paid for a number of these types of commissions entirely themselves, though they also sometimes sought financial assistance through the collection of funds from other wealthy brothers. These

³ Brian Pullan, *Rich and Poor in Renaissance Venice: the Social Institutions of a Catholic State to 1620*, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1971), 128-31. Jacopo Tintoretto's paintings for the ceiling of the *sala superiore*, as well as the gilded embellishment to the wood framing, were paid for out of the Scuola's operating budget — a funding situation different from that used for the stairwell paintings by Zanchi and Negri in the following century.

funds, raised for works of art and events such as musical performances, feasts, and processions, were secured through *rodoli*, which were contracts that recorded the names of men who contributed financially and the amount of money they gave.⁴ In their one-year terms as guardian grandi, it appears that the heads of the Scuola di San Rocco felt compelled to leave a lasting mark at the confraternity, distinguishing themselves from their predecessors. *Rodoli* created for a variety of celebrations and adornments to the confraternity appear throughout the Scuola's archives, in the guardians' files from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.⁵

The pressure to distinguish oneself with a lavish and memorable tenure as guardian grande must have been intense. Brian Pullan has shown that due to the exorbitant personal expenditures required to fund a year's term as guardian grande with the expected grandeur, a number of men who were elected to the position dodged the costly honor by refusing to accept the post. Because of this, the position became difficult to fill at all of the scuole grandi, and fines of 200 ducats were imposed on men who were elected guardian but refused the office. Evidently this penalty was too lenient, as the fines were increased to 300 ducats, and finally 400 ducats by 1605.⁶ Wealthy brothers who felt themselves likely to be elected and wished to avoid the distinction found clever ways of disqualifying themselves. Pullan records an episode from 1613 in which brothers from San Rocco appealed to the Council of Ten for arbitration. No guardian could be found because all potential candidates had taken advantage of a loophole in the confraternity's bylaws that prohibited tenants who rented a residence from the Scuola from holding office; the wealthiest *confratelli* had signed contracts leasing a number of the Scuola's

⁴ Jonathan Glixon, *Honoring God and the City: Music at the Venetian Confraternities, 1260-1807*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 27.

⁵ Most relevant, is a series of four *rodoli* related to decorative stonework added to the floor of the landing that divides the grand stairway of the Scuola di San Rocco in half, found in the confraternity's archives from the year 1673. ASV, *SGSR*, seconda consegna, *cauzione*, reg. 189, filza n.35, loose sheets, (1672-3).

⁶ Pullan, 122, n94. ASV, *Consiglio dei Dieci*, registro comune 1605, fols. 27v-28r.

properties in order to disqualify themselves for election, while also enjoying the added benefit of income collected through subletting.⁷

Antonio Zanchi's painting represents the kind of extravagant commission undertaken by a guardian grande to enhance his reputation through embellishment of the Scuola di San Rocco's meetinghouse. Documents related to the painting's commission and the expenses incurred have not been found in the Scuola's archives, neither in the guardian's files nor in the receipt books recording monies paid for building maintenance.⁸ No *rodoli* recording a fundraising campaign among the brothers have surfaced either, indicating that Bernardo Briolo likely funded the project alone. Commission details and receipts, if they exist, would be found in Briolo's personal documents, which have not been located. Therefore, the painting's cost remains unknown, as well as that of Negri's associated work, which was paid for and completed during Angelo Acquisiti's term as guardian grande in 1673. As for the conceptual content of these works, their subject matter and iconography would not have been left up to the personal discretion of the guardians who commissioned them. As major works of art adorning a well-traversed, ceremonial space in the meetinghouse that connected the building's ground floor to its lavish *sala superiore*, decorated by Jacopo Tintoretto throughout the mid-sixteenth century, Zanchi's and Negri's compositions would have been developed in consultation with the *banca*. The stairway paintings do not reflect the personal tastes of the men who paid for them, but rather the corporate identity and ideology of the institution they represent. In other words, Bernardo

⁷ Pullan, 123, n99. Archivio di San Rocco, *Registro delle terminazioni* 4, fols. 200v, 202r. Pullan indicates that the Council settled the dispute by mandating that in order to be disqualified, the men had to actually live within the leased residences. (Pullan, 123, n.99, ASV, *Consiglio di Dieci*, registro commune 1613, 7v.)

⁸ Scrutiny of the guardian grandi's files, the *cauzioni*, from the years 1666 and 1673, turned up plentiful information related to maintenance and upkeep of the confraternity's meetinghouse and properties they owned and rented in the city, but no documentation of either paintings' commission. The guardian grandi's files for the relevant years are: ASV, *Scuola Grande di San Rocco*, seconda consegna, *cauzione*, reg. 186, filza n.33, (1665-6), and ASV, *SGSR*, seconda consegna, *cauzione*, reg. 189, filza n.35, (1672-3). Receipt books for relevant years: ASV, *SGSR*, seconda consegna, *ricevute*, reg. 424.

Briolo and Angelo Acquisiti's contributions to the décor of San Rocco's meetinghouse evince the wealth and generosity of these patrons — their literal good fortune in possessing adequate funds to serve as guardian grandi and have their names associated with these monumental works — not their personal connection to the plague of 1630-31.⁹

The distinct division of funds between expenses allocated for architectural works and upkeep of the building, and those paid for more decorative additions, had its foundation in a particular public controversy for the Scuola Grande di San Rocco during the construction of the grand stairway in the previous century [Figure 5.6]. The confraternity's meetinghouse was built between the years of 1517-49, with the current stairway the result of a second construction campaign begun in 1545. Philip Sohm has traced the controversial demolition of the original stairs and resulting furor, followed by the execution of this new design featuring grander proportions deemed more suitable for ceremonial usage than those of the initial staircase.¹⁰ This decision elicited public criticism for the extravagant expense, which was construed as a misuse of funds for the charitable institution, particularly as the demolished stairway had been built only

⁹ Another noteworthy artistic program completed at the Scuola during this period is Francesco Pianta's allegorical figures carved in walnut for the *sala superiore*, which were installed from 1657-76, with their initial commission overlapping several guardians' tenures. A few documents related to the early years of this project are found in the Scuola's archives, likely because the commission spanned multiple guardians' terms and was at least partially funded by the confraternity. ASV, Scuola Grande di San Rocco, seconda consegna, reg. 2 (*catastico*), 1657, and ASV, SGdiSR, seconda consegna, reg.1, 302, 1658. For more on Pianta's sculptures, see Paola Rossi, *Geroglifici e figure di pittoresco aspetto: Francesco Pianta alla Scuola Grande di San Rocco*, (Venice: Istituto Veneto di scienze, lettere ed arti), 1999.

¹⁰ Philip Sohm, "The Staircases of the Venetian Scuole Grandi and Mauro Coducci," *Architectura*, v.8, no.2 (1978), 126. Sohm's article is the most thorough examination of the controversy over the staircase. While archival sources for the confraternity do not state explicitly why the scuola required a larger-scale staircase, Sohm infers that there were several reasons for the demolition and new construction, including the likelihood that the first staircase was truly ill-proportioned and did not cohere with the architecture of the existing building. A new staircase built on a larger scale was necessary to accommodate the anticipated ceremonies that would take place at the building after one of the confraternity's members, Francesco Donato, was elected Doge and promised to visit yearly, during the feast of San Rocco. (Sohm, 146). For more on the staircase project, see Gianmario Guidarelli, "La fabbrica della Scuola Grande di San Rocco," in *La Scuola Grande di San Rocco a Venezia*, ed. Posocco (Modena: Panini, 2008), 43-63, and 234-6.

twenty years before.¹¹ Interestingly, the Scuola's first staircase had also been mired in controversy. The first structure was built from a design that had been opposed by many of the *confratelli* who supported the plans of other several architects who were competing for the job. Disagreements between brothers over which design should be chosen ultimately resulted in the involvement of the Council of Ten to settle the disputes and end a standoff that had halted construction for over a year.¹² Following the demolition of this first, fraught project, and in spite of complaints over the expense of the second stairway, the new design itself was met with satisfaction upon its completion. The stairway was now felt to be harmonious with the pre-existing architecture of the building and suitable for accommodating the yearly visit of the doge during the Feast of Saint Roch on August 16.¹³

Zanchi's and Negri's paintings were considered a critical success after their unveiling, particularly Zanchi's contribution. In his 1674 *Le ricche minere della pittura veneziana*, Marco Boschini praised Zanchi's painting for its ability to evoke emotional responses in viewers.¹⁴

Joachim von Sandrart echoed similar praise for the painting in *Academia nobilissimae artis*

¹¹ The most publicized and eloquent criticism is found in a satirical poem from 1541 by Alessandro Caravia entitled, *Il Sogno di Caravia*, (Venice: G.A. di Nicolini da Sabbio). Caravia's poem questions the operation of charitable organizations in cinquecento Venice, particularly the scuole grandi. The Scuola Grande di San Rocco's flagrant expenditure on its two staircases was specifically lampooned, though the confraternity was not identified by name. For more on Caravia's critique of the lavish building campaigns of the scuole grandi, see also Brian Pullan, "Chapter 4: Pomp and Office: the Citizens and the Scuole Grandi," in *Rich and Poor in Renaissance Venice*, 99-131.

¹² Sohm, 142-5. Designs for the first staircase were submitted by Pietro Bon, Tullio Lombardo, Antonio Scarpagnino, and Biasio da Faenza. After much argumentation amongst the Scuola's *banca* members, a design was chosen of which Bon, as acting *proto*, did not approve. His refusal to begin construction according to this design led to his dismissal from the project, and ultimately, resulted in Bon filing a lawsuit against the confraternity. The first staircase was finally completed by Scarpagnino, according to a modello by Giovanni Celestro that cohered with the initial design to which Bon had objected.

¹³ In addition the suitability of the site, Philip Sohm notes that the staircase's design was influential in subsequent building campaigns at other scuole; he cites the adoption of stairways utilizing this design at San Teodoro and the Carmini. The Carmini's competition with San Rocco, and the confraternity's subsequent hiring of Zanchi to decorate their meetinghouse after the completion of his stairway painting for San Rocco will be discussed later in this chapter. (Sohm, 147).

¹⁴ Boschini, 51. "In aria, poi si vede la B.V. Maria et San Rocco intercessori, genuflessi appresso la Divina Maestà, pregando per il sollievo di que flagella: espressioni in ogni genere così raramente rappresentate, che in un'istesso rendono terrore, e pietà."

pictoriae, the 1683 Latin translation of his *Teutsche Academie*.¹⁵ Favorable reviews of Zanchi's contribution to the stairwell continued into the eighteenth century. In his *Della pittura veneziana* of 1771, Antonio Maria Zanetti described Zanchi as an innovative painter, noting in particular his facility for rendering bodies and creating drama with his use of mid-tones and deep shadows.¹⁶ He declared Zanchi's painting for the confraternity to be the most lauded work in the artist's oeuvre.¹⁷

While Pietro Negri's painting never garnered the same level of attention as Zanchi's, it was received favorably in period criticism. A year after its completion at the Scuola, Boschini described *The Madonna Saves Venice from the Plague of 1630*, noting the major allegorical figures that appear in the work. However, he wrote little beyond stating that the painting was an "expression worthy of praise."¹⁸ Zanetti commended Negri with a similar admixture of

¹⁵ Sandrart, (Nuremberg, 1683), 398.

¹⁶ Zanetti, *Della pittura veneziana e delle opera pubbliche de veneziani maestri libri V*, (Venice: G. Albrizzi, 1771), 404. "Questo nuovo stile che lunge da Venezia ebbe i principii suoi, vantava sopra tutto perfetta imitazione del naturale, qualunque l'avesse ritrovato il Pittore, e voleva sorprendere lo spettatore con aspra violenza, senza curarsi d'alletterarlo...Era dunque pertanto buon naturalista, rappresentando la morbidezza e gli effetti della carne con intelligenza e facilità; dando rilievo alle figure sue con il mezzo d'ombre gagliarde e masse grandi di scuro."

¹⁷ Zanetti, 405. : "...nel secondo ramo della scala trovasi la più bella e lodata pittura che mai sacesse il Zanchi." From the late 18th century into the present day, Antonio Zanchi and Pietro Negri's paintings for the Scuola make frequent, but brief, appearances in the many guidebooks created for Venice. These guides typically note the function of these paintings to commemorate the 1630 plague, and, if providing more information, repeat their status as the most revered works of art from both artists' oeuvres. See Giovanni Battista Albrizzi, *Forestiero illuminato intorno le cose più rare, e curiose, antiche, e moderne, della città di Venezia*, (Venice: Presso Giambattista Albrizzi Q. Gir, 1772), 259; Giannantonio Moschini, *Itinéraire de la ville de Venise et des îles circonvoisines*, (Venice: Tip. de Alvisopoli, 1819), 284; Pietro Selvatico and Vincenzo Lazari, *Guida di Venezia e delle isole circonvicine*, (Venice: Paolo Ripamonti Carpano, 1852), 189; Vittorio Alinari, *Églises et "scuole" de Venise*, (Florence: Alinari Frères, 1906), 262; Michelangelo Muraro, *A New Guide to Venice and Her Islands*, (Florence: Arnaud, 1952), 328; *Guida d'Italia: Venezia*, (Milan: Touring Club Italiano, 1985), 378.) Within art historical scholarship, these paintings have been identified as works of art related to plague, but analysis of them has generally centered on discussions of their formal qualities or Zanchi's style. For the most recent assessments of Zanchi's *The Virgin Appears to the Plague-Stricken*, which also consider the painting in relation to other plague paintings, see Franco Posocco, *La Scuola Grande di San Rocco a Venezia*, (Modena: Panini, 2008), 236-7; Stefania Mason, "L'immaginario della morte e della peste nella pittura del Seicento" in *La pittura nel Veneto. Il Seicento*, (Milan: Electra, 2000), 523-542; Nykjær, Mogens, *Venezia: byhistorie og kunst*, (Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 2010), 366-70.

¹⁸ *Le ricche minere*, "Sestier di San Polo," 51-2. "Pietro Negri è l'Autore della presente espressione degna di lode." The entire passage reads: "Alla sinistra dello stesso ramo di scala, ed al dirimpetto del detto quadro si vede, per intercessione di San Marco Protettore di Venezia, comparir sopra le nubi al Beatissima Vergine, assistita da un choro d'Angeli, aderenti Santi Rocco, e Sebastiano, alla di cui comparsa, Venezia scesa dal Trono costeggiata dalle

moderation and warmth. He noted the similarity in style of the paintings, though he credited Negri with possessing the greater “nobility” in conceptualizing his works.¹⁹ The two painters, it seems, worked in tandem or in collaboration on a number of occasions, contributing paintings together for several commissions in churches and institutions in the city.²⁰ Though the origin of their connection is no longer known, both were perceived to be accomplished artists within the Venetian milieu. Zanchi and Negri appear to have enjoyed a close working relationship and likely a personal one as well.²¹

One can imagine the satisfied *confratelli* at the Scuola Grande di San Rocco, pleased with the two paintings that filled the stairway by 1673 — activating the walls with saturated color and arresting images that were further decorated with the praise of critics. The completion of Negri’s painting, in fact, prompted another project on the stairway, almost immediately after its unveiling in August 1673. Four *rodoli* appear in Guardian Grande Acquisiti’s files in the confraternal archives, dated from November 1673 to February 1674, which record the collection of money from high-ranking brothers to further embellish the stairwell’s landing with the addition of new

quattro Virtù Teologali, e sostenuta dalla Fede, e Religione, supplica in ginocchi, con l’altre tutte l’istessa Vergine per la salute del suo Popolo & esaudite queste preghiere, si spica un raggio dal Cielo, che percuorendo la Morte, che è abbracciata con la Peste, le pone in fuga, al passar delle quali alcuni restano morti. Vedesi poi l’Angelo, che per dimostrar placate l’ire celeste, ripone la spada nella vagina. Pietro Negri è l’Autore della presente espressione degna di lode, e questa opera fù fatta fare dal Guardian Grande Angelo Aquisiti in quest’anno del suo Guardianato 1673.”

¹⁹ Zanetti, *Della pittura veneziana*, 406-7. “Il Negri tuttavia ebbe qualche volta maggior nobiltà nel pensare.” The full passage reads: “Poco dissimili da quelli del Zanchi furono i modi di questo Pittore; e non fu a quello secondo nell’artificio, e ne dipingere felicemente. Il Negri tuttavia ebbe qualche volta maggior nobiltà nel pensare; ma nel colorire fu anch’egli del chiaro giorno alquanto nemico.”

²⁰ In Boschini’s *Le ricche minere*, Zanchi and Negri are credited each with contributing paintings to S. Giacomo and SS. Giovanni e Paolo, and even today, works by both artists still proliferate in churches throughout the city. (*Le ricche minere*, 34-6, 64-5.)

²¹ For biographical information on Zanchi, see Beatrice Andreose, “Antonio Zanchi ‘Prior della fraglia de’ Pittori di Venezia,’” in *Antonio Zanchi, “Pittor Celeberrimo,”* Beatrice Andreose and Felice Gambarin, (Vicenza: Terra Firma), 2009; and Alberto Riccoboni, “Antonio Zanchi e la pittura veneziana del seicento,” *Saggi e memorie di storia dell’arte*, v.5, (1966), 53-135. For Pietro Negri’s biography, see Donzelli and Pilo, *I pittori del Seicento Veneto*, (Florence: Remo Sandron, 1967), 298; Eduard A. Safarik, “Pietro Negri,” *Saggi e memorie di storia dell’arte*, n. 11 (1978), 81-93, 189-201; and Giorgio Fossaluzza, “Annotazioni e aggiunte al catalogo di Pietro Negri, pittore ‘del chiaro giorno alquanto inimico,’” *Verona illustrate*, part I (XXIII, 2010, 71-90) and part II (XXIV, 2011, 1909-133).

stone cladding in marble and Verona red [Figure 5.7].²² The first *rodolo* of November 21, 1673 notes that the new pavement must “conform to the already-established design...and praise God and Saint Roch.”²³ It appears that Zanchi’s and Negri’s paintings provoked new enthusiasm for the stairs, generating another project to compliment and complete this portion of the confraternity’s meetinghouse.

The stairwell, lacking a formal artistic program before the arrivals of Zanchi and Negri, and possibly still carrying the weighty legacy of a site mismanaged and criticized early in its construction, was ripe for reinvigoration. Works of art imaging plague and holy intercession are unsurprising choices for a confraternity dedicated to a plague saint. The Scuola di San Rocco possessed many works of art and other objects of visual culture related to plague, in both the meetinghouse and associated church: sculptures, paintings, banners, votives, works on paper, and reliquaries. The confraternity, however, did not possess any large-scale works that explicitly commemorated a specific late medieval or early modern epidemic of plague before Negri’s and Zanchi’s paintings. The treasury contained a small collection of ex-votos in silver, many ostensibly given by supplicants during outbreaks, such as the small metal relief depicting a

²² ASV, *SGSR*, seconda consegna, *cauzione*, reg. 189, filza n.35, loose sheets, (1672-3). The *rodoli* are dated November 21, 1673; December 20, 1673; January 26, 1674; and February 11, 1674. These last two dates, in January and February are still listed on the documents as occurring in the year 1673 because the Venetian calendar year began on March 1 during this period. I have converted the dates to conform to modern usage to avoid confusion. Though the document is not explicit on where precisely on the stairway the stonework was carried out, it appears that the large landing between the two halves of the staircase received the embellishment. The February document describes the space as, “*il salirado fra le doi scalte...*” The term “salirado” is a derivation of “salizada” or “salizzata,” which refers to an older pavement type in the city composed of cobblestones. In this context, it refers to a framing element on the floor that differentiates one space from another using variant tiling or stone inlay. ASV, *SGSR*, seconda consegna, *cauzione*, reg. 189, filza n.35, unnumbered sheet, recto and verso, November 21, 1673. Subsequent *rodoli* include the name of the stonemason performing the work, Girolamo Artori, and offer more detail on the type of stone being used. The first *rodolo* of November recorded the preliminary collection of monies, before a stonemason had been secured. It lists all brothers who contributed to the project, with the largest amount of 100 ducats having been donated by Angelo Acquisiti himself, down to five *confratelli* who each contributed only 5 ducats apiece, for a total collection of 280 ducats.

²³ ASV, *SGSR*, seconda consegna, reg. 189, filza n.35, November 21, 1673. “...il salizado al mezzo Scala, conforme il disegno già stabilito con questo però che anco la Scola metti il rimanente della spesa per perfezionar tal opera che sarà di spesa di 700 in circa, e ciò à laude d’ Dio e di San Rocho.” The total cost for the project at 700 ducats.

devotee described in Chapter 4. Likewise, votives proliferated at the altars in the Chiesa di San Rocco and at the saint's tomb throughout the early modern period, but these objects were modest in size, commissioned or created at low cost by individuals, and were often ephemeral expressions of thanksgiving and hope.²⁴ These objects are quite different in visibility and function than large-scale institutional commissions. Zanchi's and Negri's paintings, therefore, represent an unusual initiative in their explicit commemoration of a recent plague.

The Scuola di San Rocco's decision to memorialize the 1630-31 epidemic in their stairwell resulted from the brotherhood's desire to participate in the important commemorative moment engineered by the Senate at Santa Maria della Salute. When Antonio Zanchi was hired in 1666 to create his work for San Rocco's stairway, the decoration of the altars inside the Salute was underway, even though the votive church was not consecrated until 1683. Early information about the paintings and sculptures created for these altars was emerging in guidebooks published by both Martinioni and Boschini. Martinioni's *Venetia, città nobilissima et singolare...* of 1663 mentions the first of these altars to be completed. He describes in detail the stone altar and surrounds that frame Pietro Libri's *Venice implores Saint Anthony of Padua to intercede with Christ and God to halt the plague*, which was finalized in 1656 [Figure 5.8].²⁵ He notes that the remaining five altars were to be completed in the near future, likewise graced with fine marble work and painted altarpieces.²⁶ Boschini's 1664 *Le minere*, published two years before the creation of Zanchi's painting for the Scuola, offers more detail. He describes two paintings

²⁴ ASV, *Scuola Grande di San Rocco*, seconda consegna, busta 153, filza n.32, XXX, 4r-3v.

²⁵ Martinioni, *Venetia, città nobilissima et singolare...*, (Venice: S. Curti, 1663), 280. "De gl'Altari non è terminato fin hora, se non il dedicato à S. Antonio da Padova, nobile per disegno di ordine Corinto, e ricco per marmi, tutti bianchissimi, e finissimi da Carrara con la Tavola di mano del Cavalier Liberi, il quale ha fatto di sopra le tre persone della SS. Trinità, Padre, Figliuolo, & il Spirito Santo..."

²⁶ Martinioni (1663), 280. "Si finiranno di breve gl'atri cinque Altari, anch'essi di marmi fini, e di forme singolari, si come saranno anco dipinte le loro Tavole da più Eccellenti Pittori, che vivino al presente."

created in 1631, at the close of the epidemic: Alessandro Varotari's *The Virgin and Child* [Figure 5.9] and Bernardino Prudenti's *Virgin and Child* [Figure 5.10], the large-scale painting displayed in the Piazza San Marco during the November 21 celebrations, discussed in Chapter 4. Of these works, Boschini speaks most of the Prudenti, listing all the intercessors who appear in the heavenly bank of clouds, noting the plague corpses on the earth below, and recounting the elation felt by the residents of Venice when the city was declared plague-free.²⁷

The Scuola Grande di San Rocco, as the richest and most influential of the city's scuole, must have seen in this moment the opportunity to enter into dialogue with the State-run Salute commission. By commemorating the 1630-31 plague outbreak with a pair of large-scale paintings depicting the crisis at the same time that the Venetian State was commissioning paintings for the Salute's altars, the Scuola made a strong statement for its importance to the spiritual wellbeing of Venice as the seat of Saint Roch's cult and the custodians of his body and relics.²⁸ The relays of intercession visualized in both the paintings by Zanchi and Negri demonstrate the confraternity's capability to serve as an intermediary facilitating supplicants' appeals to Saint Roch, comparable with the State's position to honor the Virgin and obtain her favor and mercy. As sources recording the first Festa della Salute on November 21, 1631 have described, the Scuola di San Rocco was the first institution to appear in the votive procession to the Salute's construction site, following only the Doge and the highest-ranking Senate members

²⁷ Boschini, *Le minere* (Venice: Appresso Francesco Nicolini, 1664), 348-9. See Chapter 4 of this dissertation, note 89.

²⁸ Andrew Hopkins, in his impressive book on the commission of the Salute, from its inception to completion, notes that the construction of these interior altars was reflective of Counter-Reformation practices, and represents a departure from the typical Venetian patronage of the previous centuries. The altars were not paid for and decorated by individual families, but were the purview of the architect himself; Longhena designed these altars and their decoration to be uniform with one another (they come in two styles that appear in a repeating pattern), and also to cohere with the entire architectural program. As an official Ducal church, the Senate had complete control over the commission and left no part of the decoration to the tastes of individuals. Andrew Hopkins, *Santa Maria della Salute: Architecture and Ceremony in Baroque Venice*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 70.

in importance.²⁹ On the heels of the 1630-31 plague epidemic, San Rocco held an esteemed position in the city. In the creation of memorials honoring victims of the tragedy thirty-five and forty-two years after its close, the confraternity illustrated this venerable status.

Emulation between painters working at both sites is evident, as there seems to have been some cooperative harmony between the Salute and San Rocco commissions. The next paintings to be completed and installed in the Salute after Pietro Libri's *Saint Anthony* were a series of three works on the life of the Virgin by the Neapolitan artist Luca Giordano, completed in the mid- to late 1660s. These works include *The Assumption of the Virgin* (c.1664 or 1667), *The Birth of the Virgin* (c.1667 or 1674), and *The Presentation of the Virgin in the Temple* (c.1667 or 1674) [Figures 5.11-5.13].³⁰ Though the dating of these works has not been secured with documents, the first of these altarpieces was completed within the timeframe in which Zanchi's painting was installed in the Scuola, and the two others were possibly completed just after Negri revealed his contribution to the Scuola. Giordano's works for the Salute incorporated figures that were based on well-known Venetian precedents — including Antonio Zanchi's and Pietro Negri's new works at the Scuola di San Rocco. In Giordano's *Presentation*, the figure of a woman in the immediate foreground whose back is turned to viewers appears to be a type that circulated in earlier Venetian paintings, found in the figure of Ariadne in Titian's *Bacchus and Ariadne* (1520-3, for the Ducal Palace in Ferrara), and in Pietro Negri's *The Madonna Saves Venice*, in the allegorical figure of Strength directly behind the personification of Venice [Figures 5.14, 5.15]. In *The Birth of the Virgin*, Giordano designed the figure of the attending

²⁹ Marco Ginammi, *La liberazione di Venetia*, (Venice: Conzato), 1631.

³⁰ Though the *Assumption* is signed and dated 1667, there appears to be some confusion regarding the exact dates of these works. I have adopted the dates chosen by Andrew Hopkins, though other sources (including the labels at the altars in Salute) date the completion of these works later, in the 1670s. Records in the Venetian State Archives have not turned up firm dates, and documents related to this period in Giordano's career are somewhat murky.

nurse cradling the infant Virgin in emulation of the woman holding her baby in Zanchi's *The Virgin Appears to the Plague-Stricken*. Their garments and braided hair are nearly identical, as is the gesture they perform, gently lifting the swaddling cloth away from their babies' bodies and holding it loosely in their extended fingers [Figures 5.16, 5.17]. Both Zanchi and Giordano could have been modeling their figures on a yet-unidentified archetype, but the closeness of the two commissions in time, as well as the connection they shared in commemorating the 1630-31 plague, suggest that these two works were in dialogue. It appears that Giordano, aware of the critical success of Zanchi's and Negri's works at the Scuola, and respectful of Venice's painting tradition, included figures in his altarpieces for the Salute that cited both contemporary paintings and famed examples from the previous century.

When Zanchi completed his stairwell painting, nearly four decades had passed since the Senate had declared the city plague-free. The outbreak was already transitioning from a current event to an episode in the city's recent past. This blunting of immediacy opened up an interpretive space — enough time had elapsed to allow for certain potent episodes and figures to emerge and develop into emblems for the epidemic. These figures became rhetorical shorthand for exemplifying the 1630-31 outbreak. The *pizzigamorti* are the preeminent example of this phenomenon, appearing in greater numbers and portrayed vividly and with more character than had been seen previously in late medieval and early modern plague art. Zanchi's work for the Scuola Grande di San Rocco is the most complete example of collected tropes and themes associated with plague — a compendium of the genre's iconography. It is also an outlier in some respects for its exceptionality. Negri's painting, while also a product of this generative moment in Venetian plague art, took an allegorical approach to depicting Venice's triumph over the disease. Zanchi, in contrast, challenged viewers with imagery more provocative and tied

directly to lived experience in the city. The remainder of this chapter will focus on Zanchi's work as the primary case study. Negri's contribution to the stairway will be brought into the conversation at points where it compliments or complicates the message communicated by its pendant.

Antonio Zanchi's *The Virgin Appears to the Plague-Stricken*

What likely struck early modern viewers foremost when contemplating *The Virgin Appears to the Plague-Stricken* was the work's active solicitation of their attention. The painting included them as participants who move through disturbing episodes on their progress up the stairs, incorporating the built environment as the most effective feature driving this conceit.³¹ The stairwell, in fact, was a difficult site in which to work. The elevation changes of the stairs create a trapezoidal pictorial surface on the wall, level along the upper edge, but significantly lower at the bottom, at the foot of the steps, than at the top of the stairs. Though the stairway is broad, it is still not wide enough to allow viewers adequate space to back up in order to see the monumental paintings in their entirety. The exception is at the very top and bottom of the staircase where the viewpoint from each side presents a foreshortened, distorted view of the full composition. Furthermore, the preexisting architectural elements of the stairwell presented the painters with other evident obstacles to work around. A prominent white pilaster bisects each wall, roughly a third of the way up the stairs, and a balustrade, half-recessed into each wall, is positioned just above the steps.

³¹ While Zanchi and Negri's work was met with wide approval in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, nineteenth-century critics were not so enamored. Several guidebooks ignore the paintings entirely, mentioning the staircase merely as a way to get from the ground floor to the upper hall, with a particularly amusing example found in Augustus J.C. Hare's guide for English-speaking audiences that praises the marble steps themselves, but fails to mention that the walls and ceiling are decorated: "A magnificent staircase (observe the admirable but simple ornament on the steps)..." *Venice*, (London: G. Allen, second edition, 1885), 162.

Zanchi considered early on how to manage these disruptive architectural elements. The painter created a moderate-sized preparatory sketch in oil paint, in which he worked out how to accommodate the pilaster and balustrade [Figure 5.18]. This *modello*, now in the Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna, is rectangular; the odd trapezoidal shape of the final painting was omitted in this exercise.³² The sketch exhibits a similar composition to that in the final work, evidence that Zanchi most likely made this *modello* in the later stages of his preparations for the project. The major figural groups, composed of the *pizzigamorti* in the boat and on the bridge at the right; the celestial vision of Roch, the Virgin, and Christ; and the frightened residents of Venice who have gathered in the streets of the disordered city all appear in the same positions in both *modello* and finished work. The artist developed the color palette between the two works, and while there are some divergences in the details, the overall tonality and predominance of reds, yellows, and blues is consistent. Both works are defined by gray-brown shadows throughout, with scattered areas of bright color that create points of contrast and act like signposts, leading the viewer through the darkness of the composition.

³² For scholarship on the *modello*, see Leo Planiscig, “Die Sammlung Fischel, Wien,” in *Jahrbuch des Kunsthistorischen Institutes*, v.8 (1914), 63-94; Alberto Riccoboni, “Antonio Zanchi e la pittura veneziana del seicento,” *Saggi e memorie di storia dell’arte*, v.5, (1966), 110; Donzelli and Pilo (1967), 431; *Venezia e la peste*, 274-6; Annalisa Scarpa Sonino, in *Le Scuole di Venezia*, ed. Terisio Pignatti, (Milan: Electra, 1981), 1982; Caterina Furlan and Stefania Mason, “Scienza e miracoli nella pittura veneta del Seicento,” in Sergio Rossi, ed. in *Scienza e miracoli nell’arte ‘600: alle origini della medicina moderna*, ex. cat. (Milan: Electa, 1998), 116-133, 299, and 342-3; Stefania Mason, “L’immaginario della morte e della peste nella pittura del Seicento,” in *La pittura nel Veneto, Il seicento*, v.2, (Milan: Electa, 2001), 539-40.) The object file for this painting in the Kunsthistorisches Museum contains no documents or information related to the early life of this work, and the provenance cannot be traced earlier than its long-term loan to the museum in the nineteenth century. It would be interesting to know who owned this work originally — if it were it Briolo — and how was it displayed (if it was displayed). Its surfacing in Austria may be related to the Venice’s Austrian occupation in the early nineteenth century, after the city fell to Napoleon. The painting was evidently valued, or it would not have been preserved and gifted to the Kunsthistorisches. The Venetian art world of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries found increasing intellectual and monetary value in *modelli* and their looser, sketchier counterparts, *bozzetti*. Marco Boschini celebrated *macchie* in his 1660 *La carta del navegar pitoresco* – the stains, marks, and traces left by an artist’s hand in paintings composed of loose, expressive brushstrokes in the *colorito* style. (See, *La carta del navegar pitoresco: edizione critica con la “Breve istruzione” premessa alle “Ricche minere della pittura veneziana,”* ed. Anna Pallucchini, (Venice: Istituto per la collaborazione culturale), 1966.) Boschini argues that such paintings assert intellectual primacy over those composed in a tighter, *disegno*-based method because they require an experienced eye, paired with knowledge of the technical demands of painting, to appreciate the skill exhibited by artists’ *macchie*.

Zanchi, concerned with how to situate his work within the structural confines of the stairway, included some of the limiting architectural elements in the *modello*. The artist bisected his preparatory sketch with the bold white vertical of the pilaster, turning this feature into the outermost face of a set of piers that extends into the deep pictorial space. This area of the composition was executed in the same manner in the finished work on the stairway. It illustrates the artist's resourcefulness in transforming an unavoidable limitation of the space into a particularly successful passage in the design. In both the *modello* and finished work, a man leans into the scene, poking his head and shoulders out from behind the pilaster and in front of the first fictive pier painted in the arcade, strengthening the effect. This device does more than just incorporate the actual with the represented architecture; it also mimics the stage sets of seventeenth-century theatrical performances, which were innovated by new techniques for depicting space on stage at this time. Further discussion of this topic will continue in a later section of this chapter that explores the conceptual aspects of Zanchi's memorial to plague at San Rocco.

Zanchi did not include the stairway's balustrade in his *modello*. The bottom edge of the rectangular preparatory work exhibits the greatest contrast with the finished painting. In this portion of the *modello*, a canal opens up, running parallel to the picture plane, and separating viewers from the primary action of the scene with the open channel of water. At the far left, a man rows a boat through the canal, and bodies appear at the water's edge along the *fondamenta*. The painter appears to have been working through the spatial challenges presented by the balustrade and had not yet achieved a solution in the *modello*.³³ His management of the

³³ There also remains the question of the intended use for this *modello*, beyond its function as a tool to allow the artist to work out compositional details, and to demonstrate his plans to his patrons. In the following century, Giambattista Tiepolo was known for making gifts of his *modelli*, and some were also kept in his workshop for later sale — an indication of the artistic and monetary value attached to these preparatory works in the eighteenth century.

balustrade in the completed work, however, is ingenious. Zanchi used the railing and balusters in his canvas by transforming them into the side of a bridge that runs parallel to the fictive bridge painted in the work. In doing so, *confratelli* and visitors entering the stairway arrive at the scene at the lowest point of the canvas, in the polluted waters of the canals. Viewers find themselves as if positioned in the boat of corpses manned by the *pizzigamorto* [Figure 5.19]. In conceiving the stairs and their balustrade as a bridge analogous to that represented in the painting, Zanchi located those who traveled up or down the stairs within the plague-stricken Venice of 1630-31. As they ascended, early modern viewers moved past terrifying images of the dead and the dying, piles of contaminated household goods, and clusters of Venetian residents, until they reached the redemptive intercessors at the apex of the stairs.

The Virgin Appears to the Plague-Stricken assails viewers with passages that alternate between fascinating and disturbing, enticing them to look closer and also impelling them to step back. The relay of intense vignettes encountered along the stairs' ascent demands sustained attention. The painting is also oversaturated with details. The thrusting of the figures and narrative action to the immediate foreground, hemmed in by a shallow backdrop, intensifies the sensation of superabundance. Plague all but bursts forth from this image. Its richness of detail acts as a pictorial prospectus of the most prevalent spiritual and medical concerns regarding

It is unclear whether Zanchi's *modello* was destined to enter the collection of Briolo, or another prominent Venetian, but if so, disregarding the balustrade and creating a more regularized shape for the composition might have been done intentionally, to create a more harmonious work. For more on Tiepolo's *modelli* and *bozzetti*, and the eighteenth century's appreciation for these preparatory works, see Jaynie Anderson's book, *Tiepolo's Cleopatra*, in which the author cites correspondence between the Venetian painter Sebastiano Ricci and his patron, Count Giacomo Tassis from 1731, in which the artist asserts that the sketch he has made in preparation for an altarpiece demonstrates more unfiltered artistic value than the finished work, with the finalized canvas being merely a copy of the initial conceit first laid out in the sketch. (Melbourne: Macmillan, 2003, 94). This well-known letter from Ricci has been published since the early nineteenth century. See, Giovanni Gaetano Bottari, *Raccolta di lettere sulla pittura, scultura, ed architettura*, ed. Stefano Ticozzi, (Milan: G. Silvestri, 1822), v.4, 90-97. "Perchè questo non è monello solo, ma è quadro terminato, e le giuro che io farei un quadro grande d'altare simile a quello che io ho fatto, piuttosto che far questo piccolo, che ella chiama col nome di modello. Sappia di più che questo piccolo è l'originale, e la tavola da altare è la copia."

plague in the seventeenth century. It characterizes the protagonists of the 1630-31 outbreak in Venice, approaching the subject of plague through layering traditional tropes with details of targeted specificity.

Ultimately, Zanchi's painting advocates for the primacy of holy intercession against plague. His work visualizes the critical need for appeals to Venice's protectors to save individuals and the city as a collective. Saint Roch represents a vital intermediary figure and the first line of defense against the disease. He inhabits a celestial middle ground in the painting, held aloft by a cluster of large angels [Figure 5.20]. Roch appears between the residents gathered on the steps of a bridge, and the more distant forms of the Virgin and Christ, who sit at a remove on their own supportive mound of angels in the sky, at a deeper spatial point in the work. Saint Roch forges the primary link in the chain of intercession leading to the heavenly realm situated at the top of the stairs. The implication is that the Scuola Grande di San Rocco, as the site of this powerful plague saint's cult, could assist supplicants in obtaining divine favor.

The saint's depiction and gestures in this painting reinforce his accessibility in comparison to Christ and the Madonna. Roch's arms are spread wide — inclusive and embracing — while blessing with his right hand and extending the open palm of his left, registering the extremity of the situation that has befallen Venice. Even his red cloak, like his unbound dark hair, has become an activated encompassing element, blowing out behind him on a breeze that reads like a freshening celestial breath, dispelling the stale, stagnant air of plague's miasma. Roch has been dressed according to convention, in a dark pilgrim's garment, with a white shell affixed at his shoulder, but some of his attributes have been omitted in favor of presenting a more dynamic vision of the saint. His pilgrim's hat is missing, allowing viewers an unimpeded view of his face, which has been rendered with a serene expression. He gazes down

toward the Venetians beneath him — those painted on the canvas, and the living people traveling the stairway. Roch does not hold his staff, giving the saint a greater degree of expressive freedom with his hands. In fact, he has passed this attribute down to one of the supporting angels beneath him. Roch's dog does not make an appearance in the scene either. Possibly Zanchi was unsure of how to include this iconography while rendering Roch airborne and still maintaining the triumphant tone of the composition.³⁴

Roch has been portrayed with far greater dynamism and approachability than the Virgin and Christ. Christ's face, while lit from behind by the weak rays of a yellow nimbus, is shadowed and in profile, giving him a remote aspect. The Virgin, whose head is turned upward with eyes fixed on her son, also does not acknowledge the viewer. The pair is exclusive in their attention. These remote portrayals do not diminish the theological importance or primacy of the Virgin and Christ as sacred intercessors. They are, in fact, at the apex of protection and salvation from plague, and Zanchi's painting demonstrates that achieving the desired connection to the Virgin and Christ is facilitated by appealing to Roch, and by extension, to the Scuola. Furthermore, the Virgin is given a prominent role in Pietro Negri's *The Madonna Saves Venice from the Plague of 1630*, where she is presented as the primary source of salvation. She sits at the vertex of a compositional golden triangle traced out by a shaft of light descending to earth from the heavens and the diagonal line of the Archangel Michael's raised spear [Figure 5.21]. In Negri's painting, Roch plays a similar, mediating role (in conjunction with Saint Sebastian), but with much greater emphasis placed on the Virgin's salvific power.

³⁴ On the subject of Saint Roch's dog in art, Giambattista Tiepolo created a series of rather psychological portraits of the saint in the 1730-40s, in which his relationship with his dog played an important role. In all but one of these works, his dog, which Tiepolo renders variously — sometimes with the scruffy hair of a terrier, other times exhibiting the sleekness of a sight hound, but always black-and-white in color — is placed awkwardly in the work, like an odd psychic disruption. Examples of these curious studies are found in the collections of Harvard's Fogg Museum, the Art Gallery of New South Wales in Sydney, the Courtauld Gallery, the Musée des Beaux-Arts in Strasbourg, and the Philadelphia Museum of Art.

Plague iconography

Antonio Zanchi's painting for San Rocco is complex in both its function and imagery. Though much of the painting's dynamism comes from its interaction with the built environment, the work is also compelling for its dialogue with traditional plague iconography, which had been developed and adapted to represent the disease since the fourteenth century. Zanchi's inclusion of these visual markers situates his painting within an enduring tradition of imaging plague in early modern Italy.

One element of established plague iconography used by Zanchi in this painting is the poignant imagery of women paired with infants, calling attention to the ruptures within family and community, and in nurturing relationships during epidemics. In the painting, there are two pairs of women with young children. One pair appears at the bottom of the right canvas, near the entry, while the other is found also at the bottom edge of the composition, but near the top of the stairs [Figures 5.22, 5.23]. The image of a woman and child together during an outbreak of pestilence was disseminated in the sixteenth century through Marcantonio Raimondi's 1515 engraving of a plague scene from the *Aeneid*, known as *Il morbetto*, which was modeled on a drawing by Raphael [Figure 5.24]. This print features a dead mother and her still-living baby in the foreground. The baby clutches at the woman's inert form, but is pushed away by an intervening man who plugs his own nose, seeking to protect himself and the child from contagion. It is evident that Zanchi was familiar with this earlier imagery. However, rather than reproduce the pair as easily recognizable citations, Zanchi doubled the figures and used them as contrasting points — binary opposites that demonstrate the importance of divine intervention. The mother and child found near the top of the steps, beneath the cluster of sacred intercessors,

are both still alive.³⁵ The woman appears healthy, with a look of concern that reveals her worry over the fate of the baby in her arms. The slight darkening of the child's skin and a subtle stiffness to his form indicate he may be in the early stages of succumbing to the disease. Three corpses on the ground (two adults and an infant) and a *pizzigamorto* attempting to cover the bodies with a basket, hem the mother and child in from behind. Two additional sanitation workers haul away another body on a bridge directly above and behind them [Figure 5.25]. The gaze of the woman is fixed on an aged man in yellow and a younger one in pink, positioned in front of her near the pilaster [Figure 5.26]. These men are among the first to recognize salvation appearing in the sky above them. The standing figure in pink bends forward and grasps the prone man, pulling him to a sitting position, while gesturing toward the holy figures. His extended index finger nearly brushes Saint Roch's knee; deliverance from plague is literally at his fingertips. The safety of the woman and child, while not certain, is at least hopeful as her attention is drawn to the scene of intercession manifesting above her.

The same cannot be said of the second mother and child pair. The graying corpses are stretched out in the *pizzigamorto*'s boat floating in the polluted canal. As described in the opening of this chapter, they are the first figures one encounters when progressing up the stairs. Meeting them when entering the stairwell is a visual and emotional assault. The child's feet and the woman's head appear to jut out of the pictorial plane, just above the balustrade. The open, empty eyes of both figures paradoxically appear to stare out, effecting an unsettling face-to-face encounter with the viewer. Even their bodies are angled such that they seem to turn toward those moving upwards on the stairs. This positioning invites viewers to come closer, and then repels them into retreat [Figure 5.27]. The disturbing encounter with the corpses of the woman and

³⁵ This is the dyad that was reproduced, in mirror image reverse, by Luca Giordano in his *The Birth of the Virgin* for the Salute, a year after Zanchi's painting was completed.

child is made stranger and more awkward by the prominent calves of the *pizzigamorto* manning the boat that contains them. These legs intrude and force the viewer's eyes upward, to make sense of their encroachment. The S-curve of the body clearer's back, in turn, directs the viewer to the dangling corpse on the bridge, seemingly about to tumble onto the woman and child in the boat, crushing their bodies. Close at hand are more *pizzigamorti*, additional bodies, and a man dressed in black, plugging his nose against the diseased air. This rapid sequence of viewing efficiently conveys the horror of the plague scene. The catastrophic state of plague-ridden Venice is taken in before encountering the possibility of safety represented by the living woman and baby in the upper scene beneath the sacred intercessors.

The primacy of intercession sought through prayer and acts of devotion is asserted in another way through the image of the deceased mother and her baby. The woman's corpse is adorned with two amulets: a strand of red beads circles the wrist of her left arm, still embracing the child, and a round pendant hangs from a thin cord around her neck [Figure 5.28]. Both amulets were meant to prevent or cure the plague. The use of protective amulets in early modern Italy was widespread, with the objects taking myriad forms. The many dangers they sought to mitigate ranged from dog bites to demonic possession to disease. Amulets represent a particular juncture of medical and spiritual healing, as their powers were felt to be derived from the curative properties of the materials from which they were made and the efficaciousness of the prayers or other powerful words inscribed upon or within them, including the occasional (and censured) use of consecrated materials.³⁶ In Zanchi's painting, however, what is striking is the

³⁶ The pendant worn around the woman's neck in Zanchi's painting appears to be the type of amulet that was hollow inside and hinged, which would allow a variety of curative materials and objects to be placed inside. Though few of these objects have been preserved, a similar example created from a hazelnut is illustrated in the exhibition catalogue *Venezia e la peste: 1348-1797*, (Venice: Marsilio, 1979, 70), collection unspecified. For information on the medically based rationale behind amulets and the curative components placed within, see Martha L. Baldwin, "Toads and Plague: Amulet Therapy in Seventeenth-Century Medicine," *Bulletin of the History of Medicine*, v. 67, n. 2 (Summer 1993), 227-247. Her work on the various materials used in amulets and the healing properties they

apparent skepticism with which the two amulets are presented. For here it is only the dead who wear amulets. While the Venetian Inquisition examined cases in which consecrated materials were deployed inappropriately in cures and charms created by local healers throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, in the painting these apotropaic objects are not presented as heretical, so much as merely ineffectual.³⁷ In addition, though the *Sanità* required all remedies and cures sold in the city to be effective and unlikely to cause deleterious effects in their users,

were believed to have is incredibly useful. The materials most frequently used during the seventeenth century were arsenic, silver, gold, mercury, pearls, emeralds, sapphires, coral, menstrual blood, spiders, ink, burnt feathers, horse dung, rotting berries, and most common of all, pulverized toads. (Baldwin, 233-9) Baldwin reproduces a diagram illustrating a hinged amulet that was intended to hold a “toad cake,” similar to that worn by the woman in the painting, which was published in the tract *Basilica Chymica* by the Swiss physician Oswald Croll around the year 1600. (Baldwin, 231-5) However, Baldwin suggests that the spiritual use of amulets was condemned in the seventeenth century as superstitious and outmoded. This contention is not borne out by primary sources or the large body of secondary scholarship that indicates belief in the spiritual efficacy of amulets, charms, printed materials, and works of art was vital during this time period. For scholarship on the spiritual powers of amulets, see Don Skemer, *Binding Words: Textual Amulets in the Middle Ages*, (University Park, Pa.: Pennsylvania State University Press), 2006; David S. Areford, *The Viewer and the Printed Image in Late Medieval Europe*, (Surrey and Burlington, Vt.: Ashgate), 2010; and Jacqueline Marie Musacchio, “Lambs, Coral, Teeth and the Intimate Intersection of Religion and Magic in Renaissance Tuscany,” in *Images, Relics and Devotional Practices in Medieval and Renaissance Italy*, (Tempe, Az.: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2005), 139-156. The vibrant and widespread cult use of art objects and other visual materials as a means of soliciting divine intervention and mobilizing individuals and communities in times of crisis has been recently explored in these publications: Jane Garnett and Gervase Rosser, *Spectacular Miracles: Transforming Images in Italy from the Renaissance to the Present*. (London: Reaktion Books), 2013; Megan Holmes, *The Miraculous Image in Renaissance Florence*, (New Haven: Yale University Press), 2013; Fredrika Jacobs, *Votive Panels and Popular Piety in Early Modern Italy*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 2013; and Robert Maniura, “Persuading the Absent Saint: Image and Performance in Marian Devotion,” *Critical Inquiry*, v. 35, n. 3 (Spring 2009), 629-654.

³⁷ For a fascinating study of witchcraft accusations in Venice and the intervention of the Venetian Inquisition, see Ruth Martin, *Witchcraft and the Inquisition in Venice 1560-1650*. (New York: Basil Blackwell, Inc.), 1989. Martin has closely examined Inquisition records to reveal that inquisitors in Venice were quite lenient, with emphasis not on punishment, but on education. Many accusations were dismissed outright without an interview or trial, and those who were found guilty were typically assigned spiritual penance or instructed in more orthodox behaviors. (Martin, 8, 182-7). Martin notes a case from 1588 in which a healing woman was found guilty of using dirt from consecrated church grounds as a means of preventing plague. (Martin, 131) No scholars have yet examined Inquisition records with the specific intent of examining cases related to plague cure and prevention. For more on witchcraft and Venice during the early modern period, see Jonathan Seitz, “The Root is Hidden and the Material Uncertain: The Challenges of Prosecuting Witchcraft in Early Modern Venice,” *Renaissance Quarterly*, v. 62 n. 1 (Spring 2009), 102-133.

Zanchi's painting suggests that these types of cures are, at best, secondary to seeking intercession through prayer.³⁸ In other words, faith placed solely in the power of amulets is faith misplaced.

Another theme in Zanchi's painting that appears frequently in early modern plague art is that of a figure plugging his or her nose in protection against the miasmatic air associated with pestilence. Raimondi's *Il morbetto* includes this iconography, as do Poussin's 1630 *Plague at Ashdod* [Figure 5.29] and Giambattista Tiepolo's later *Saint Tecla Pleads God for the Liberation of Este from the Plague* from 1759 [Figure 5.30], which will be discussed in detail in Chapter 6. Just as with the mother-and-child imagery, Zanchi adopted this well-known motif and amplified it with increased complexity in three separate renditions. A man in black, directly above the prominent *pizzigamorto* in the boat on the right canvas grips his nose and turns his head towards the gruesome tableau at his feet [Figure 5.31]. His eyes are downcast, and his other hand is held up in alarm as he crosses the bridge. His black robes distinguish him as a member of an elevated social class; he wears garments in which men of the patrician class are depicted regularly in early modern Venice. He turns to look somberly at the devastation beside him while moving out of the scene.

The second figure plugging his nose is found at the center of the composition, dressed in red and situated between the two men who have witnessed the arrival of Saint Roch and a *smorbadoro* (disinfector employed by the *Sanità*) who wears a distinctive orange-and-black striped tunic to mark his trade [Figure 5.32]. The red garment worn by this nose-plugging figure, who appears to be a child, is vibrant and features slashed sleeves that allow a glimpse of gold near the shoulder. It resembles the liveries worn by servants in Veronese's *Wedding Feast at*

³⁸ David Gentilcore, *Medical Charlatanism in Early Modern Italy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 104-105. On the myriad of healing options available, across the social spectrum, see also, Gentilcore, *Healers and Healing in Early Modern Italy* (Manchester, NY: Manchester University Press), 1998.

Cana of 1563 [Figure 5.33]. His youth, clothing resembling that of a servant, and his position next to the *smobadoro* suggest a social class lower than that of the man in the black robe.

The third figure plugging his nose is found at the far left of the composition, in the middle ground, dressed in a short green jacket and breeches with white hose [Figure 5.34]. A basket is looped over his left arm at the elbow, and he appears to be delivering something. He too wears clothing that indicates the lower social standing of a middle class merchant or tradesman in the city, a member of the *popolani*. He is shown mounting the steps of a bridge that extends into the pictorial plane, following on the heels of two *pizzigamorti* and the corpse they carry. His efforts to protect himself from the diseased air represent even greater urgency than that of the other two men plugging their noses, given his close proximity to the body clearers at work.

The varied status of the men Zanchi depicted plugging their noses in this painting conveys the message that pestilence can affect everyone across the social spectrum, contradicting earlier widespread rhetoric that plague was a disease of the poor.³⁹ It suggests, too, that salvation

³⁹ Ann Carmichael's scholarship has provided a fascinating window on the relationship between city governments' restrictions placed on residents during epidemics to curb the spread of disease, such as quarantines and travel bans, and social controls instituted broadly as a means of controlling the lower classes. Her work on Florence during the late fourteenth- and early fifteenth centuries examines the use of quarantine and the development of *lazzaretti* to further promote city legislation that controlled marginalized groups, such as prostitutes and the city's "undeserving poor." The belief that the poor harbored and spread pestilence was ample justification for new laws to restrict the lower classes during plagues and in times of relative health. See *Plague and the Poor in Renaissance Florence*, (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press), 1986. Her work on plague in early modern Italy also explores city health boards' cultivation of rhetoric and development of a "collective memory" of past plague epidemics as a means of rationalizing the controls imposed during then-current outbreaks. She also considers case studies during the sixteenth century, in which appeals to recent historical plagues were used as justification to target the Jewish community in Udine and lower status women in Milan. ("The Last Past Plague: The Uses of Memory in Renaissance Epidemics," *Journal of the History of Medicine*, v. 53 (April 1998), 132-60.) Interestingly, Venetian historian Jane Crawshaw has recently noted in her thorough book on the city's *lazzaretti* that though Carmichael's work has revealed very compelling information on the ulterior motives of disease-related controls in Florence, the same cannot be said of Venice. Crawshaw asserts that the state-run *lazzaretti* were established early in Venice, more than one hundred years before the city imposed widespread social controls on the movement of marginalized groups. In Venice, poverty was believed to be only one of many vectors aiding plague transmission, and restrictions of the poor and transient were not reliant upon plague legislation. By the sixteenth century, when the poor were associated with higher incidences of plague, it was understood to be a result of their poor living conditions, which included overcrowding and poor diet. See *Plague Hospitals: Public Health for the City in Early Modern Venice*, (Farnham,

was equally available for all those who seek it. Medically speaking, each man shielding his nose exhibits similar knowledge of the pathways through which plague was contracted and how to protect himself. Both the contagion and miasma theories of disease transmission espoused that plague could be fostered in bodies through the inhalation of contaminated particles in the air. Whether these men were conversant in newly emergent medical practices or knew only of commonplace wisdom on plague, their self-protective gestures would be identical.

The artist elaborated upon the theme of polluted air and contamination in a number of ways in *The Virgin Appears to the Plague-Stricken*. From a general corruption of the environment represented by the murky canals, to the corpses of those who have perished from the disease, scattered throughout the composition and in close proximity to the well, Antonio Zanchi created a painting that envisions Venice at her most dangerous, without any physical environment that is safe from the spread of infection. The ubiquitous *pizzigamorti*, busily at work throughout the composition, represent a distinctive source of contamination — each a mobile pathway through which the disease could be spread throughout the city. The painter also emphasizes stationary, inanimate sources of contagion through the depiction of mounds of infectious household goods jumbled in the foreground, just above the balustrade and on the fictive bridge [Figure 5.35]. By the seventeenth century, it was believed that plague was contracted not only from other people (both living and dead) and from unclean environments, but also from infected particles found on the surfaces of objects and material goods — Fracastoro’s “seeds” of contagion, discussed in Chapter 2. Zanchi did not omit this visual sign of contagion

Surrey, England: Ashgate, 2012), 79-80. Historian Giulia Calvi’s work in the Florentine city archives explores city legislation against the poor during the 1630 outbreak in the city. She examines over 300 trial records in which poor residents were accused of intentionally breaking quarantine, hiding ill family members, and smuggling goods. Calvi asserts that these trials illuminate forms of resistance and self-preservation in the lower classes in Florence, which erupted as a means of asserting control over their property and lives in the face of greater imposition and control by city officials. See *Storie di un anno di peste*, (Milan: Bompiani, 1984.).

in his plague-stricken city. The scene's evocation of danger — the city turned alien and threatening — is heightened by the disorder of broken and discarded goods strewn above the balustrade, as though spilling out onto the stairway. This detail is evident also in Zanchi's preparatory *modello*, which depicts contaminated fabric, broken cooking vessels, and the outward face of a wooden bench at the same place in the composition. As described in Chapter 3, Venice's *lazzaretti*, particularly the Nuovo, processed a staggering amount of material goods during the 1630-31 outbreak, and to some degree, the disinfecting of material goods took greater primacy over the strict isolation of potentially infectious people. Zanchi's painting for the Scuola reflects this preoccupation in his rendering of straining bags of grain, a tipped over barrel, a broken bench, and an abandoned basket of unsavory-looking bread. Food and water are no longer safe in this perilous moment, and even material possessions can kill. Elsewhere in the painting, there are other menacing objects. Further up the stairs, the woman holding her baby kneels on a grimy striped pillow, its seams fraying and the lighter portions of its fabric stained and streaked with brown discolorations. Directly behind her, the foreshortened foot of a plague victim rests on another heap of tied, soiled sacks [Figure 5.36]. Filth itself is a character in this tableau. The amassing of putrid objects in Zanchi's painting communicates the extent of the peril during the 1630-31 plague, highlighting the resulting inversion of the typical ordered life in Venice caused by the crisis.

The pizzigamorti

Antonio Zanchi's development of the body clearers as a central theme in his painting for the Scuola is unparalleled in early modern Italy. While sanitation workers were frequently portrayed in plague art of the period, the function of these men in the city during epidemics and

their emotive connection to the disease had never been so thoroughly explored. These fraught figures populate all areas of *The Virgin Appears to the Plague-Stricken*; Venice in this painting is teeming with *pizzigamorti*. No fewer than seven body clearers are depicted in the composition, with an implied eighth supporting the back end of a stretcher off-canvas. The first *pizzigamorti* encountered on the lower stairs are the three figures seen in the immediate foreground, standing in the body-collecting boat, hefting a corpse off the bridge, and dragging additional cadavers to the pile atop the bridge. At the uppermost portion of the painting, at the stairs' apex, a shirtless sanitation worker attempts to cover a pile of corpses with a basket, and two other turbaned *pizzigamorti*, with black crosses marked out on their white shirts, carry away a body on a stretcher [Figure 5.37]. Within the deep space of the right canvas, the diminutive form of another body clearer emerges from the opening of a *sotoportego*, beneath the dangling corpse on the bridge. He looks behind him, communicating with the un-pictured *pizzigamorto* at the other end of the stretcher, bent forward under the weight he is supporting [Figure 5.38].

Body clearers are, of course, not unique to Venice or the 1630-31 epidemic. In all severe epidemics during the medieval and early modern periods in Europe, there existed the acute need for men who could collect, remove, and dispose of the dead through individual burials, mass graves, or even burning. Like the *smorbadori*, they were also responsible for handling contaminated goods, which were to be disinfected or destroyed, depending on the material composition of the objects, their monetary worth, and their contamination level. In addition, *pizzigamorti* in Venice also fumigated homes in which plague victims had died — whitewashing the walls and occasionally holding controlled burnings inside to clean the air.⁴⁰ As early as the so-called Black Death of 1348, body clearers were critical figures associated with plague. They

⁴⁰ Jane L. Stevens Crawshaw, "The Beasts of Burial: *Pizzigamorti* and Public Health for the Plague in Early Modern Venice," *Social History of Medicine*, v.24, n.3, 574.

appear in art and literature from the late medieval period through to modernity and have come to signify, even in the modern epoch, the dehumanizing nature of the disease [Figure 5.39].⁴¹ Body clearers were identified under many names in early modern Italy, which varied depending on city and local dialect. In Venice, they were referred to as *pizzigamorti* or *picegamorti*, though they were also identified as *monatti*, a term which was in wide usage throughout northern Italy.⁴² While they were understood to be essential to the pursuit of public health and cleanliness, historical records reveal that they also inspired fear, unease, and, at best, strong ambivalence because of the physical and social transgressions required by their jobs. Many people believed that body clearers spread the disease, if not intentionally, though general negligence and disregard for contamination when these workers entered people's homes, poor and rich alike, to seek out the ill and the dead. Indeed, *pizzigamorti* routinely broke quarantine as a condition of their occupation. They were the only social group that was allowed unrestricted movement through Venice during epidemics, and this widespread access was seen as dangerous not only for its potential to spread pestilence, but because it violated boundaries associated with the normative social order.

In the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, Venice's Health Office employed 2-3 *pizzigamorti* on a permanent basis, who, in addition to collecting corpses and assisting in the city's hospitals, were also given special license to earn their salaries as ferry boatmen.⁴³ During acute outbreaks of the disease, however, the city hired additional *pizzigamorti* on a temporary basis to manage the large numbers of the sick and dying. In order to entice men into this

⁴¹ A notable example of body clearers as horrifying characters in literature is found in Alessandro Manzoni's famed novel published in 1827, *I Promessi Sposi*.

⁴² Luigi Piva, *Le Pestilenze nel Veneto*, (Padua: Camposampiero, 1991), 265. Other names for body clearers in Italy are: *nettesini*, *smorbatori*, *sotradori*, *becamorti*, *sotterratori*, *becchini*, and *carrettieri di peste*.

⁴³ Crawshaw, "Beasts," 572.

position, Venice offered large salaries and additional incentives to those willing to work as body clearers.⁴⁴ As historian Jane Crawshaw notes, the city actively pursued men who were most likely to accept such a position — those with criminal pasts, whose poverty and status at the margins of society made them consider the post and the salary appealing. During the 1575-77 and 1630-31 epidemics, the Venetian government offered to forgive the past crimes of convicts who had been imprisoned or banned from the city, were they to accept employment as *pizzigamorti*.⁴⁵ In addition, *pizzigamorti* were promised large lump sums at the end of the epidemic, permitted they survived, to retain them in the position and encourage the following of protocols intended to prevent the transmission of the disease.⁴⁶ The body clearers, therefore, were disturbing figures not only on account of their contact with diseased bodies and soiled materials, but particularly because they were men already deemed dangerous to society, whom the State now gave license to move freely through the city, entering homes where plague was present and entrusted with the responsibility of transporting the ill to the *lazzaretti* and handling their personal items.⁴⁷ Jane Crawshaw asserts that this social inversion — in which men of the lowest levels of society were suddenly granted authority to make decisions concerning the lives and property of *cittidini* — resulted in widespread metaphors of the world turned upside-down,

⁴⁴ *Venezia e la peste*, 143. Crawshaw, “Beasts,” 573. ASV, Senato, Terra. Reg. 104, (November 15 and December 8, 1630.)

⁴⁵ Crawshaw, “Beasts,” 576. *Venezia e la peste*, 143. For reprints of these *Sanità* documents, see, *Venezia e la peste*, 368-70.

⁴⁶ Crawshaw, “Beasts,” 576.

⁴⁷ Crawshaw, “Beasts,” 576. Indeed, concern over theft was great during plague epidemics, not only by *pizzigamorti*, but in the *lazzaretti* and from the general population. The sale of the linens and clothing of the deceased was particularly worrisome, as these objects were believed to be highly contaminated and a source of spreading pestilence.

in which *pizzigamorti* were compared to wild beasts loosed on the city, and the plague epidemic became a macabre Carnevale, with no discernable end in sight.⁴⁸

A significant increase in the number of *pizzigamorti* during the 1630-31 plague epidemic in Venice resulted in their greater visibility in the city. This offered the potential for more efficiency in their operations, as the Health Office hoped, or increased opportunity to take advantage of their unique position. The sheer numbers of *pizzigamorti* roaming the streets in 1630-31 distinguished this epidemic from earlier outbreaks in the city. At the height of the 1575-77 epidemic, Venice employed around 120 body clearers. In 1630, the number of *pizzigamorti* in the city peaked at over 300 individuals, nearly triple the number employed in the previous century.⁴⁹ As noted in Chapter 2, this large increase in body clearers was made to avoid the dangerous and unsanitary conditions that were believed to have resulted from insufficient numbers of *pizzigamorti* in the city in 1577. Chilling stories circulated in the sixteenth century, notably in Milan during the epidemic of 1575, in which body clearers were accused of atrocious deeds, such as hastily tossing the ill — naked and prostrated with pain — into the carts of dead bodies for removal.⁵⁰ Whether additional sanitation workers could have prevented such negligent work, or instead given license to more men capable of these inhumane acts, remained uncertain in the early modern consciousness.

Antonio Zanchi's painting for the San Rocco stairwell reflects both the administrative reality of *pizzigamorti* filling Venice during the 1630-31 epidemic and the anxieties over their

⁴⁸ Crawshaw, 575-83. On the issue of plague and Carnivale inversion, see Brian Pullan, "Plague and Perceptions of the Poor in Early Modern Italy," in Paul Slack and Terence Ranger, eds. *Epidemics and Ideas: Essays on the Historical Perception of Pestilence*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 101-23. For information on the State's control of violent behavior during the actual Carnivale of 1630, see Paolo Ulvioni, *Il gran castigo di Dio: carestia ed epidemie a Venezia e nella Terraferma 1628-1632*, (Milan, Franco Angeli Libri, 1989), 118.

⁴⁹ *Venezia e la peste*, 143. Crawshaw, "Beasts," 573, n22. This information comes from two archival sources in the Archivio di Stato di Venezia: ASV, Secreta Materia Miste Notabile (MMN) 95 66v, August 9, 1576 and ASV, Sanità, reg. 17, 223r, December 19, 1630.

⁵⁰ Samuel Cohn, *Cultures of Plague*, 102, 105, 114.

function. They appear in the painting like an infestation in themselves. Despite the fear and distaste they provoked, Zanchi has characterized them with surprising subtlety and meaningful details. In some respects, he has humanized these figures, who were so open to dehumanization in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. In early modern Europe, there were deliberate efforts to mark out body clearers, to make them recognizable at a distance, thus allowing city residents to give them a wide berth.⁵¹ In Venice, *lazzaretti* workers who dealt with bodies and contaminated materials were identifiable by a white sign on their clothing, and *pizzigamorti* wore bells on their legs to make their proximity audible as well. When they moved through the city during the day (most body removal took place at night), they were accompanied by a guard, which further marked them out in the crowd.⁵² By the 1630-31 epidemic, *pizzigamorti* were also advised by the *Sanità* to wear tarred cloaks, which were thought to prevent contaminated particles from adhering to their clothing, and to carry aromatics to cleanse the air around them.⁵³ These adaptations to their dress reflect innovative medical practices, rather than simply proclaiming the marginal and dangerous status of body clearers through visual and aural means.⁵⁴ It is possible to speak of *pizzigamorti* as evoking, or rather repulsing, most of the bodily senses. Their distinctive clothing and the white and black boats they manned (for the sick and dead, respectively) marked them out visually; they could be heard walking through the city by the jingle of brass bells at their calves; their presence was associated with scented herbs and the

⁵¹ William G. Naphy, *Plagues, Poisons, and Potions: Plague-Spreading Conspiracies in the Western Alps, c.1530-1640*, (New York: Palgrave, 2002), 115; Crawshaw, *Plague Hospitals: Public Health for the City in Early Modern Venice*, 131; see also, Crawshaw, "Beasts," 580.

⁵² Crawshaw, *Plague Hospitals*, 131; Crawshaw, "Beasts," 580. This information comes from *Sanità* documents, ASV, Secreta MMN 95r, October 5, 1576.

⁵³ Crawshaw, *Plague Hospitals*, 197. Interestingly, Giovanni Grevenbroch's eighteenth-century manuscript on Venetian costume, *Gli abiti dei veneziani di quasi ogni età diligenza raccolti e dipinti ne sec. XVIII*, depicts a *pizzigamorto* whose garments look nothing like those described in the *Sanità* documents.

⁵⁴ For a discussion on the development of protective clothing for doctors treating plague victims, see Jacqueline Brossollet, Richard J. Palmer, and Andreina Zitelli, "Evoluzione del costume del medico," in *Venezia e la Peste*, 63-8.

stench of the sick and deceased in their carts and boats; and most significantly, they represented the act of intimately touching contaminated bodies and objects. They were figures who stood out not only for their large numbers, but for their easy detection through multisensory routes.

Curiously, the *pizzigamorti* in Zanchi's painting are not dressed with any consistency, and they lack cloaks or references to the herbs and medicines they were instructed to use in order to limit the disease's transmission.⁵⁵ The only *pizzigamorti* who wear anything resembling the prescribed uniform are the two men carrying a stretcher in the mid-ground of the larger canvas. They are dressed in white shirts with large black crosses on their backs, and close examination reveals circlets of brass bells glinting on the right calves of the *pizzigamorti*, most evident on the man at the rear [Figures 5.40, 5.41]. Each of them wears a red turban, a feature that unifies them with the *pizzigamorto* in the boat. The tiny figure of the body clearer emerging from the *sotoportego* appears also to be clad in a white shirt and red turban, but the cross on his back is not visible as he is in a frontal position. Other body clearers in the painting are depicted in a state of semi-undress. The three prominent *pizzigamorti* surrounding the bridge on the right are shirtless and appear also without trousers or hose to cover their legs. They are clad only in loose fabric tied at their waists, in a sort of *all'antica* loincloth that leaves most of their muscular bodies bared. It is difficult to determine if this garment reflects a realistic depiction of what body clearers wore while working, or if such indeterminate, yet vaguely classical attire was meant to impart an aesthetically "timeless" quality to the painting. All body clearers in Zanchi's painting wear something on their heads, either a red or white turban, or a headband tied around the temples, similar to the *smobadoro* dressed in black and orange stripes. This headgear —

⁵⁵ From 1575 onwards, *pizzigamorti* were treated with a curative secret concocted of *smartella* (myrtle), which was sold to the State by a man named Scipione Paragatto. Paragatto was employed as the head *pizzigamorto* in 1575, and his duties were administrative in nature. (Crawshaw, "Beasts," 578.) For more on Paragatto and the State's official use of secret recipes against plague, see Jane Crawshaw, "Families, Medical Secrets, and Public Health in Early Modern Venice," *Renaissance Studies*, v.28, n.4 (September 2014), 597-618.

connoting physical labor and creating visual difference — unifies the body clearers and disinfectors in this image, signifying a class of men who are simultaneously dangerous and critically necessary. The red hats shown in Zanchi's painting, in fact, are typical of other representations of *pizzigamorti* in Venice and the Veneto from this period, a detail not explicit in textual sources describing the body clearers' attire, but commonplace in visual art.

In addition to indexing the physically demanding nature of sanitation workers' jobs, the undress of the *pizzigamorti* allows Zanchi to depict the nude male form. The painter demonstrated his skill in depicting bodies in various states of dress and positions. The hyper-muscular bodies also represent Zanchi's homage to the work of Michelangelo and Tintoretto. However, this nudity serves other functions specific to the *pizzigamorti*. First, it creates a consonance between the body clearers and the plague-stricken. A visual connection is made between the ill and the dead and their bearers, as they are in similar states of nakedness. In addition, the victims and the bearers are connected to Christ and his salvific power, as he too, and the tumult of angels that bears him up, are similarly undressed. This visual connection references widespread rhetoric during the early modern period that to suffer from plague could be a blessing, as it allowed one to experience a similar mortification of the body as Christ. This relates also to the notion that plague outbreaks provided opportunities for salvation. The selfless care of a sick family member or neighbor represented Christ-like sacrifice and could accrue enormous spiritual gains for those who remained in a plague-battered city and aided the ill. In this way, Zanchi suggests that the *pizzigamorti*, for all their past criminal records and frightening transgressions, could be recipients of Christ's beneficence.

The nudity resonates with another meaning specific to the rhetoric associated with body clearers in Venice. As previously noted, Jane Crawshaw observed that *pizzigamorti* were

metaphorically considered to be like wild beasts, rampant in the city.⁵⁶ Cecilio Fuoli, whose uncle Giovanni Battista Fuoli served as *protomedico* for the Venetian State during the 1630-31 plague, wrote an account of the epidemic in 1675, in which he describes the barbarism of the *pizzigamorti* and their crass, dangerous behavior.⁵⁷ Rocco Benedetti's account of the 1575-77 plague names the body clearers as predatory wolves and lions, whom all Venetians avoided with fear.⁵⁸ Crawshaw notes the particularly charged nature of referring to the *pizzigamorti* as lions, with respect to the tradition of the lion of Saint Mark representing the Venetian State symbolically.⁵⁹ In *The Virgin Appears to the Plague-Stricken*, the *pizzigamorti* are represented as physically powerful beings, aligned with their literary characterizations. Their hyper-muscular bodies convey a sense of power and strength to the point of animalism, which is magnified by the obscuring of their faces. Each *pizzigamorto* in the Scuola's painting is either turned to face into the pictorial plane, or has angled his head down, keeping his features shadowed. Their humanity is downplayed though denying the viewer access to their faces, and leaving one instead, to meditate upon their corporeality. They are physical creatures, whose emotions are hidden from the viewer. The artist has created them in the image of beasts — potent, physical, and defined by their bodies and physical work.

However, Zanchi counters this dehumanization with a subtle but potent passage. In the depiction of the *pizzigamorto* in the boat at the bottom of the stairway, the figure's head is turned away from spectators on the stairs. His eyes are locked on the face of the corpse dangling from

⁵⁶ Crawshaw, "Beasts," 579-83. For more on the brutal reputation of body clearers, see Luigi Piva, *Le pestilenze nel Veneto*, (Padua: Camposampiero, 1991), 265-80.

⁵⁷ BMC, Codice Cicogna 1509 17v. Cited also in *Venezia e la peste*, 141. Crawshaw, *Plague Hospitals*, 14. Crawshaw, "Beasts," 574.

⁵⁸ Crawshaw, "Beasts," 579.

⁵⁹ Crawshaw, "Beasts," 581. For information on the Venetian State's use of symbolism to promote and communicate the Republic's storied reputation, see David Rosand, *Myths of Venice: the Figuration of a State*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press), 2001.

the bridge, mere inches from his own visage [Figure 5.42]. These two men's faces — one living, the other dead — meet in an inverted mirror image in the open air. Their bare torsos and arms, muscular and brightly lit, reflect a sameness in build and strength, though the pallor of the dead man's skin and the stiffening of his fingers contrast with the vigor of the body clearer. The *pizzigamorto* seems to pause in his work for a moment to stare at the face before him, in a remarkable memento mori. His expression is one of introspection and empathy. It is as though, for all his exposure to plague victims and their remains, the man has just in this moment perceived something deeper. Does he recognize the lifeless body being lowered into his boat, or does he suddenly see himself and his own mortality in this man's face? It is a charged passage caught only in the startled arch of the sanitation worker's brow and his pensive expression. While Antonio Zanchi created an image of Venice overrun with *pizzigamorti*, emphasizing their control over life in the city, he also used these same men to produce the most affective meditation on mortality in the work.

Performing plague and seicento opera

Antonio Zanchi used evocative imagery to tell the story of the 1630-31 plague outbreak in Venice, creating three distinct clusters of “actors” who materialize out of the work's deep shadows episodically, as viewers ascend the stairs. Venice's recognizable cityscape emerges behind the foreground figures, like a backdrop for a stage set, situating the narrative action. With respect to its format and rendering of space, this painting shares much in common with theatrical stage sets of this period. Moreover, beyond the compositional and stylistic similarities, Antonio Zanchi's activation of the architectural setting and co-opting of spectators as embodied elements evolved from devices used in the public operas developed in Venice during the 1640s.

A compelling number of correspondences existed between the performance arts of seicento Venice and contemporaneous painting practices, including a sustained fascination with historicizing current events in the city and comparing them to stories set in antiquity. Zanchi's use of operatic devices in *The Virgin Appears to the Plague-Stricken* can be linked to the artist's early career working as a draftsman and painter creating stage sets and frontispieces for several opera performances. In exploring these convergences, I do not suggest that Zanchi's painting for the Scuola Grande di San Rocco was intended to replicate an opera set or reproduce the costuming and props used in these performances, but rather that the painting exhibits a similar conceptual framework to early productions of opera in Venice.

Fully realized operas, complete with extravagant stage settings, prima donne, and technical marvels that allowed performers to "fly" and scenes to be changed with speed, emerged in the city in the early 1640s. The impresarios who organized these productions promoted them with enthusiasm, and opera represented a new business venture for the noble families who owned the recently modified or constructed opera houses and footed the bill for these staged spectacles.⁶⁰ From the first opera performed in Venice in 1637 at the San Cassiano theater, through the 1680s when Venetian operagoers demanded increasingly novel and complex elements in performances, opera fascinated the public.

The genre of opera, as defined by sung verse acted out on stage, first arose in Italian courts in the early seventeenth century in Florence and Mantua and in elite circles in Rome.⁶¹

⁶⁰ Beth L. Glixon and Jonathan E. Glixon, "Marco Faustini and Venetian Opera Production in the 1650s: Recent Archival Discoveries," *The Journal of Musicology*, v.10, n.1 (Winter 1992), 48. The patrician families who owned the theaters typically covered the cost of opera house construction and maintenance, but turned the rest of the operations and expenses over to the impresarios, who paid the various workers and performers, and profited from box rentals and nightly ticket sales. For more on the financial aspects of putting on operas in seicento Venice, see the preeminent source on the subject, Ellen Rosand, *Opera in Seventeenth-Century Venice: the Creation of a Genre*, (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1991), 77-81.

⁶¹ Ellen Rosand, 9-11. The Medici, Gonzaga, and Barberini families were known for their staging of private operatic productions, which were closed events, typically performed only once, to celebrate a particular political or

These were private performances, restricted to court members and developed out of a melding of *commedia dell'arte* with a humanist interest in the heroic stories of antiquity. These nascent productions addressed more serious themes than those performed by the traveling *commedia dell'arte* troupes, and the inclusion of sung verse, rather than spoken lines, was innovative. These hybrid performances, however, did not gain wider traction outside of their limited court contexts until intellectual academies, first in Padua, then immediately afterwards in Venice, adopted this new mode of dramatic acting in publicly accessible performances.⁶² The first opera in Venice, *Andromeda*, performed during Carnevale in 1637, was an instant success. It set off what was to become forty years of zealous organizing and promoting yearly opera seasons, with intense competition between the vying opera houses that sprang up in Venice in the 1640s and 50s. No less than nine theaters were built or adapted for performances in Venice by 1678, and large numbers of spectators took in these early productions.⁶³ Each of these opera houses, architecturally distinct from Palladio's famed *Teatro Olimpico* built in Vicenza in the previous century, could seat over 500. Sandy Thorburn estimates that, through the twelve to forty performances of each opera during a given season (which roughly corresponded to Carnevale, from late December through Lent), a successful opera in Venice would have been seen by between 3,000 and 20,000 spectators.⁶⁴

Scholars have identified various reasons why opera rose so rapidly in popularity in the mid-seventeenth century, and why Venice was the center of this burgeoning art form. Edward

social event. By contrast, the operas that developed in Venice in the 1630s were public affairs, paid for and organized by private families and companies, but overseen by the Council of Ten and subject to restrictions regarding subject matter. In a sense, whether public or courtly, early operas were intrinsically tied to local politics.

⁶² Edward Muir, "Why Venice? Venetian Society and the Success of Early Opera," *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, v.36, n.3, Opera and Society: Part I, (Winter 2006), 338.

⁶³ Sandy Thorburn, "What News on the Rialto? Fundraising and Publicity for Operas in Seventeenth-Century Venice," *Canadian University Music Review*, v.23, n.1-2 (2003), 168; Muir. 347.

⁶⁴ Thorburn, 178.

Muir has suggested that the Interdict of 1606, and the subsequent expulsion of the Jesuits from Venice's borders until the Senate voted to allow their return in 1657, created a permissive, "libertine" atmosphere in Venice, which was not bound by Counter Reformation oversight and censorship.⁶⁵ This cultural environment, more intellectually liberal than that found in many other cities on the Italian peninsula, allowed librettists more latitude to create works dealing with controversial or titillating subjects — often containing political critiques and thinly veiled satires, and engaging with themes like corruption in the church and evolving conceptions related to gender and sexuality.⁶⁶ However, opera scholar Beth Glixon contends that Muir's focus on the primacy of a citywide libertine attitude is an oversimplification of the complexities of seicento Venetian politics (that continued to uphold a conservative, albeit pro-Venice, agenda) and does not account for the diversity found in libretti themes and among opera audiences. Even in considering conservative viewpoints and variation among consumers of visual culture and the performance arts in Venice, there was an appreciably tolerant attitude in the city during 1640s. The city's many printers published books, pamphlets, and tracts that addressed controversial topics and contained heterodox themes during this time.⁶⁷ Indeed, literary academies such as the *Accademia degli Incogniti*, whose members wrote a number of libretti and orchestrated the most famous operas at the Teatro Novissimo in the 1640s, flourished in Venice in this period.⁶⁸

⁶⁵ Muir's first foray into this topic is found in the article, "Why Venice?..." *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, (2006), which he expands in his book, *The Culture Wars of the Late Renaissance: Skeptic, Libertines, and Opera*, (Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press), 2007.

⁶⁶ On the fascinating topic of evolving notions of gender and individuality in seventeenth-century Venice, and its reflection in opera, see Dennis Romano, "Commentary: Why Opera? The Politics of an Emerging Genre," *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, v.36, n.3 (Winter 2006), 401-9.

⁶⁷ Beth L. Glixon, review of *The Culture Wars of the Late Renaissance: Skeptics, Libertines, and Opera*, by Edward Muir, *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, v.39, n.3 (Winter 2009), 426-7. On the tolerance of Venice with regard to printing controversial works, tempered by the widespread practice of censorship, see Mauro Calcagno, "Censoring Eliogabalo in Seventeenth-Century Venice," *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, v.36, n.3 (Winter 2006), 255-77.

⁶⁸ Thorburn, "What News on the Rialto?...", 170; Muir, "Why Venice?...", 339; Rosand, 88-109.

Dennis Romano identifies seventeenth-century opera's ability to engage with important, and often troubling, current events in the politics and culture of seicento Venice as a major contributor to the art form's success. He suggests that opera felt topical to seventeenth-century audiences, though obliquely. Venice's widespread economic recession and continual skirmishes with Ottoman forces threatening the city's wellbeing could be called out directly in opera prologues, but then submerged as metaphors within stories set in the antique world, with long-suffering heroes that typically triumphed.⁶⁹ Venetian audiences were keen to see themselves represented in these dramatic productions, which reasserted the Republic's long-standing power and projected its continued grandeur. Essentially, an opera performance not only entertained spectators with crafted magnificence, but also produced a cathartic effect though engaging with the city's most critical problems in a low stakes, aestheticized environment.

Each of these explanations for opera's emergence and rapid rise in Venice as one of the city's preeminent art forms offers distinct, but related insights into the desires of its seicento audiences. Venice in the late 1630s was ripe for entertainment and diversion. Recovery from the devastation of 1630-31 plague epidemic can be traced through the variety of cultural developments that arose as residents emerged from the shadow of the crisis. Carmelo Alberti, in his study on the origins of theater in Venice, posits that the 1630-31 outbreak produced a notable difference in the tone and types of entertainments in the city post-epidemic. He claims that this catastrophe, paired with destabilizing schisms forming between differing political factions in the city and an increasing emphasis on entertaining foreign dignitaries, resulted in the widespread promotion of opera as an intoxicating distraction.⁷⁰

⁶⁹ Romano, "Commentary: Why Opera?...", 403.

⁷⁰ Carmelo Alberti, "L'invenzione del teatro," in *Storia di Venezia: dalle origini alla caduta della serenissima*, v. VII, *La Venezia Barocca*, eds. Gino Benzoni e Gaetano Cozzi, (Rome: Istituto della Enciclopedia Italiana, Fondata da Giovanni Treccani, 1997), 719-21.

Cristoforo Ivanovich published the first history of opera in 1681, a treatise entitled “Memorie teatrali di Venezia,” as an appendix to his *Minerva al tavolino*, a series of letters related to the war with the Ottomans.⁷¹ In this treatise, Ivanovich relies on libretti to create a detailed list of all the operas that had been performed in the city from the landmark 1637 performance of *Andromeda*, until the year in which his book was published. Ivanovich’s treatise suggests indirectly that the 1630-31 plague generated the rapid growth of theatrical performances in Venice. In his chapter on the number of theaters in Venice and their origins, the Dalmatian critic and historian refers to two theaters from the 1580s, mentioned in Sansovino’s guidebook, as early examples of architectural structures that housed the theatrical performances which were to become the precursors to opera. However, Ivanovich states that the emergence of true opera and the theaters built to hold them occurred only in the seventeenth century, in the years just before the last plague.⁷² In this way, he asserts an origin for opera linked with the epidemic, distinct from any earlier antecedents.

Ivanovich also considers the flowering of a range of entertainments in mid-seicento Venice. In the opening of his treatise, after the requisite comparison of the theaters of ancient Rome to those newly developed in Venice, Ivanovich devotes ten pages to enumerating the many diversions to be found in Venice, season-by-season, with special emphasis on those surrounding Carnevale — opera’s season.⁷³ From horsemanship (a somewhat surprising pastime for the lagoon city) to ball games, from public spectacles arranged around major holidays to the famous bridge fights, post-plague Venice offered varied, continual delights for residents and visitors of

⁷¹ Cristoforo Ivanovich, “Memorie teatrali di Venezia,” in *Minerva al tavolino*, (Venice: Appresso Nicolò Pezzana), 1681.

⁷² Ivanovich, 395-6. “Convien dunque probabilmente conchiudere, che i Teatri, e le Comedie principiassero in questo secolo corrente, e non prima, avendo io sentito molti Vecchi, che raccontavano di ricordarsi, che pochi anni prima dell’ultima peste, che fù l’anno 1629.”

⁷³ Ivanovich, 371-82.

all social rankings. Opera, however, as the subject of Ivanovich's treatise, emerges as the preeminent form of entertainment.

Beginning in 1580 with the two theaters mentioned by Ivanovich and found in Sansovino's guides, Venice introduced an innovative form of architecture later reborn in the opera houses of the 1640-50s. This theater design contained separate, enclosed viewing boxes (*palchi*) that positioned spectators with elevated vantage points, in addition to floor seating on the parterre. Continued development of this new seating arrangement was stalled for several decades due to the Senate's concern over the secluded spaces *palchi* created and the illicit acts possible within them.⁷⁴ The stacked viewing box design re-emerged in Venice in the late 1630s in theaters modified to host operas, as well as the first opera houses purpose-built for the genre, beginning with the Teatro Novissimo, which opened in 1641.⁷⁵ Opera boxes offered spectators a viewing experience that was distinct from that of amphitheater style structures like the *Teatro Olimpico*, in which theatergoers sat within relative proximity to one another [Figure 5.43]. Views of the stage were relatively homogeneous in the amphitheater style, and while audiences could be (and were) segregated by social status and sex, the architecture did not provide any spaces that were substantially favorable or at a noticeable remove from standard seating. Theaters that employed stacked opera boxes, however, introduced greater diversity in seating options, and by extension, the privileging of certain spaces and spectators in the audience [Figure 5.44]. Opera boxes were paid for seasonally, and were typically rented year-to-year by the same noble families.⁷⁶ While all boxes offered private, preferred seating over the parterre seats on the floor, some boxes were situated more favorably than others, and this made social difference visible at a

⁷⁴ See Eugene Johnson, "The Short, Lascivious Lives of Two Venetian Theaters, 1580-85," *Renaissance Quarterly*, n.55 (2002), 936-68.

⁷⁵ Rosand, 88-91.

⁷⁶ Rosand, 80.

glance. Though much has been written on the obscuring and crossing of class boundaries during Carnevale, and also in attending opera performances — where audiences were often masked and composed of both Venetians and foreigners who looked forward to “trying on” someone else’s social position for an evening — physical location within the theater communicated clear information on a spectator’s status. Opera boxes also afforded their occupants unimpeded and advantaged visual access to the actors on stage, as well as to the spectators on the floor and the other occupants of boxes across the theater.⁷⁷

Antonio Zanchi and Pietro Negri both depicted privileged viewing spaces with high vantage points for painted spectators in their works for the Scuola Grande di San Rocco. Each painting presents a perspectival rendering of an architectural façade at its lowest margins on the stairwell [Figures 5.45, 5.46]. In each canvas, a couple appears, ensconced in a balcony that overlooks the frightening plague scenes unfolding beneath them. These spaces resemble opera boxes that render them somewhat outside the scope of the action — observers and commentators on the disturbing tableaux, but from a protective height. In a way, they become stand-ins for viewers on the stairs, demonstrating through their gestures that the scenes before them are to be witnessed and discussed.

The couple in Zanchi’s painting differs from that in Negri’s and may reflect varied social types. The balcony in Zanchi’s *The Virgin Appears to the Plague-Stricken* contains two women whose disheveled hair and garments suggest a subaltern social status or communicate instead the dire conditions in the depicted city and its effect upon residents. A striped mattress and a blue

⁷⁷ Privileged viewing from elevated spaces has a tradition in Venice even before new developments in theater design. Eugene Johnson has suggested that residents in the city utilized a number of sites as vantage points to view varied spectacles, from the upper story of the Biblioteca Marciana, to the balconies of buildings overlooking the bridges on which Venice’s famed bridge fights took place. (“The Short Lascivious Lives,” 946). Even Veronese’s frescos painted in Palladio’s Villa Barbaro in Maser feature images of patrician women in rarified spaces looking down in the rooms — spectators, but not full participants in their social world.

blanket are draped over the balcony, giving the impression of uncleanness. The mattress looks dingy and discolored, and the fact that both linens have been thrown over the parapet suggests that they are contaminated and require disinfection through exposure to fresh air. This detail situates the women within the scene and potentially in danger, rather than as disinterested onlookers. The more prominent woman peers downward, wringing her interlaced hands in a gesture of dismay, while her companion rests her head upon her palm.

By contrast, Negri's balcony figures appear to be engaged in a debate about the narrative action unfolding beneath them. A man and a woman — richly dressed and coiffured — gaze not at the scene of holy intercession and fleeing residents, but at each other, the dim light glinting off the silk sleeves of their stylish garments. Each raises a hand to gesture toward the tumult beneath them, indicating that their fixed attention on each other is not reflexive, but relates to a conversation about what they are seeing. Their remove from the scene below is greater than that of the women in Zanchi's canvas across the stairs. Though their elevated balcony puts them on a level with the clouds of angels who have appeared around the celestial apparition in the sky, the couple's placid discourse presents them as mere spectators.

The painted observers in both of these plague paintings for the Scuola share formal parallels with drawings and prints that depict stage settings from Venetian operas of the 1640-50s. Giacomo Torelli was the most famous set designer of the period, esteemed for developing a new pulley system that allowed scenery to be changed rapidly and with greater ease.⁷⁸ Torelli was known for the magnificence of the backdrops, flats, and movable scenery he designed for

⁷⁸ Some scholars debate today which innovations Torelli developed himself, and which have been merely attributed to him through name recognition. For more on Torelli's career and mechanical innovations, see Orville K. Larson, "Giacomo Torelli, Sir Philip Skippon, and Stage Machinery for Venetian Opera," *Theatre Journal*, v.32, n.4 (December 1980), 448-57; Maria Ida Biggi, "Torelli a Venezia," in *Giacomo Torelli invenzione scenica nell'Europa barocca*, (Fano: Fondazione Cassa Risparmio di Fano, 2000), 33-40; and Rick Boychuk, *Nobody Looks Up: the History of Counterweight Rigging System, 1500-1925*, (Toronto: Grid Well Press, 2015).

operas, in addition to the technical marvels his engineering allowed, such as “flying” actors. A number of prints represent these admired sets, including those illustrating a commemorative book compiled by Torelli himself and published in 1644 entitled, *Apparati scenici per lo Teatro Novissimo di Venetia*.⁷⁹ This publication reproduces several fold-out engravings from the operas *Bellerofonte* (1642), *Venere gelosa* (1643), and the yet-to-be performed *Deidamia* (1644). These engravings were inserted within detailed descriptions of the sets and costumes worn by performers, summaries of the narrative action, and libretto-like transcriptions of all the dialogue of *Venere gelosa*.⁸⁰

One of the sets from *Venere gelosa* included in the book portrays an ancient city on the Greek island of Naxos [Figure 5.47]. The perspectival rendering of classical façades lining a broad urban street resembles the buildings that are pictured at the lowest side margins of Pietro Negri’s and Antonio Zanchi’s works in San Rocco. The *all’antica* structures in the Scuola paintings, made Venetian through the depiction of the city’s distinctive domed chimney tops and pointed arches, are similar to Torelli’s buildings, with projecting masonry fronts and decorative sculptures. Torelli’s constructions, in turn, rely on the sixteenth-century architectural drawings of Sebastiano Serlio, whose geometrized representations of urban space (including figural sculptures to represent scale and populate the city with stoic, lapidary citizens) were also emulated by Palladio [Figure 5.48].

⁷⁹ Typically, librettists were responsible for all aspects of the production of libretti, including securing publishers and collecting the revenues. Torelli, evidently an innovator in promotions as well as engineering, used his already substantial reputation and business acumen to develop this book — part libretti, part illustrated souvenir — and collect the proceeds.

⁸⁰ When this book was published, *Deidamia* had not yet been performed, so the information relating to this performance is not as complete as that for *Venere gelosa*, and could be thought of as a clever way of advertising for the upcoming opera season, a practice not unusual for savvy impresarios wishing to generate advance excitement and, with hope, increased ticket sales. For more on various ploys to increase attendance and revenues, see Sandy Thorburn, “What News on the Rialto? Fundraising and Publicity for Operas in Seventeenth-Century Venice,” *Canadian University Music Review*, v.23, n.1-2, (2003), 166-200.

A drawing by Giacomo Torelli, now in the collection of the Morgan Library in New York City, provides additional evidence for Zanchi's and Negri's evocation of opera stage sets in their paintings for San Rocco. The drawing, entitled *Royal Entry into a Classical Court*, represents the design for a stage set used during the 1654 production of *Les noces de Pelée et de Thétis*, performed in Paris after Torelli left Venice in 1645 [Figure 5.49]. The arcades and extending entablatures that define the set demonstrate a conventional method of rendering space on stage in the seventeenth century. Through this method, series of parallel, large-scale flats on runners or grooves set into the floor mimic the diminution of objects in deeper space, augmented by perspectival backdrops and smaller, moveable elements placed between the flats.⁸¹ Torelli's drawing shows the opulence of seicento opera performances through their reliance on complex settings, grouped performers, and numerous supporting props. Visually and conceptually, the staging is similar to that created by Zanchi in *The Virgin Appears to the Plague-Stricken*. Moreover, some of the figures appearing in Torelli's drawing — those standing between the columns at the sides and especially those peering down from the heights of balconies atop the architecture — read as both actors and spectators [Figure 5.50].

Antonio Zanchi and Pietro Negri did not need to be familiar with this particular drawing to have ample knowledge of stage settings and the visual materials used in seicento opera performances. Engravings reproducing many of Torelli's sets were readily available through *Apparati scenici*. In addition, other prints depicting the scenographer's work circulated throughout the city and beyond the Italian peninsula. Ticket prices for Venetian operas were also reasonable enough to allow *cittidini* and wealthier members of the *popolani* to attend performances, and it is possible that the painters themselves witnessed these spectacles as

⁸¹ Glixon and Glixon, 229-39.

audience members.⁸² However, beyond the relative accessibility of operatic imagery, Zanchi and Negri had firsthand experience with the creation of libretti and stage settings. Though it is little remarked upon in scholarship today, Zanchi had a known professional connection with opera in Venice during the 1650s and 60s. The designs for a number of high quality engravings for frontispieces printed in libretti during this period are among his earliest documented works in the city [Figure 5.51].⁸³ Pietro Negri had some experience in this arena as well, having provided the design for a frontispiece published in the libretto of a Venetian opera in 1658, though he was never as prolific as Zanchi, nor as entrenched within the circle of printers producing visual materials for libretti.⁸⁴ More important than Zanchi's reputation as a frontispiece engraver is his role in the production of scenery for opera performances. In the libretto for the 1656-7 performance of *Le fortune di Rodope e Damira* at the Sant'Aponal opera house, the artist is given credit for the stage settings.⁸⁵ While Zanchi's exact contributions to scenery-making remain unknown, it is clear that the painter had direct involvement in creating these elements essential to opera productions. The artist was an active producer of works for opera, both before and during his tenure at the Scuola Grande di San Rocco, and he brought the styles, conceits, and methods used in stage performance to his other large-scale painting projects in Venice.⁸⁶

⁸² 304-5.

⁸³ Bernard Aikema, *Pietro della Vecchia and the Heritage of the Renaissance*, (Florence: Istituto Universitario Olandese di Storia dell'Arte, 1990), 84-5. Zanchi's frontispieces are included in the following libretti: *La Statira* (1655), *Apollo e Dafne* (1656), *Il Medoro* (1658), *Artemisia* (1656), *Elena* (1659), *Pompeo Magno* (1666), *L'Argia* (1669), and *Il Genserico* (1669). See also Glixon and Glixon, *Inventing the Business of Opera*, 122, n67.

⁸⁴ Aikema, 84-5. Negri provided the frontispiece for *Antioco*. Aikema notes that Zanchi worked exclusively with the printers Francesco Nicolini and Andrea Giuliani, and likely was employed by them directly.

⁸⁵ Aurelio Aureli, *Le fortune di Rodope e Damira* (Venice: Andrea Giuliani), 1657. See also Massimo Favilla and Ruggero Rugolo, 'Un tenebroso all'opera. Appunti su Antonio Zanchi', *Venezia Arte* 17/18 (2003-2004), 62-3; Wendy Heller, 'Venezia in Egitto: Egyptomania and Exoticism in Seventeenth-Century Venice', in *L'arte della scena e l'esotismo in età moderna*, ed. Francesco Cotticelli and Paologiovanni Maione (Naples: Turchini Edizioni, 2007), 116; and Glixon and Glixon, 329.

⁸⁶ Zanchi's 1667 commission for the Scuola di San Fantin, *Christ Driving the Money-Changers from the Temple*, uses many of the same dramatic devices found in *The Virgin Appears to the Plague-Stricken*.

In Zanchi's and Negri's paintings for the Scuola Grande di San Rocco, the plague catastrophe of 1630-31 became an historical event — like a heroic mythology — set in local, recent history and within the memories of survivors. To represent the epidemic in this way ennobled and redeemed what was an otherwise profoundly destabilizing episode in the city's recent past. By including those traveling the stairs as “actors” in the drama, Antonio Zanchi tapped into practices that were widespread in seicento Venetian operas, in which spectators were connected to the narrative action through a number of devices. These include the use of local names and landmarks and the evocation of metaphors that linked seicento Venice to the ancient world.

In particular, seventeenth-century opera in Venice was committed to strengthening the “Myth of Venice” and glorifying the city's long history and continued magnificence in the early modern period. This was done through soliciting audience involvement in performances and inserting contemporary politics within the stories. Prologues of libretti published in the 1640s and 1650s — opera's so-called golden age in Venice, when the genre was still primarily a Venetian phenomenon — reveal that the juxtaposition of antiquity and the contemporary moment, conceived of as analogous and coexistent, was a powerful trope. Of the smash hit, *La finta pazzo* of 1641, which scholars have noted set a precedent for what was considered a successful opera in the early modern world, Ellen Rosand states that the performance very pointedly “played to their [the audience's] *venezianità*, to their shared sense of being citizens of a unique state, uniquely situated in time and place.”⁸⁷ Throughout this opera, allusions and asides were made that referenced Venice specifically, even though the narrative action took place in the ancient world on the Greek island of Skyros. Rosand notes that a number of “plays-within-a-

⁸⁷ Rosand, 125. Edward Muir, “Why Venice?”, 346.

play” erupted within the dialogue, in which performers broke the so-called fourth wall and addressed audiences directly, sometimes sharing their perspective as spectators witnessing a staged production.⁸⁸ Anna Renzi, who became opera’s first celebrity prima donna playing the lead role of Deidamia in this production, broke character at several points during the performance. In one episode of her feigned insanity, Renzi as Deidamia determined to stage her own dramatic production, commenting coyly upon the scenery around her and making a pun on the theater’s name; she took the audience’s perspective as her own when admiring the imaginary setting in her head.⁸⁹ This clever dismantling of the fictive framework occurred episodically throughout the opera in quick, self-conscious asides by actors, which kept the performance oscillating between a fiction set in antiquity and the Venetian here-and-now.

This opera and others performed in the 1640-50s also contained underlying content that was deeply political. *La finta pazza* was produced by the *Accademia degli Incogniti*, which ran the Teatro Novissimo, and which undertook a savvy advertising campaign in the months leading up to opening night. In the varied publicity materials they disseminated throughout the city to generate excitement about the upcoming performance, the *Incogniti* made direct, repeated statements linking the magnificence of their operas to the grandeur of Venice politically and historically. These promotional materials stated that the splendor of the staged productions at the Teatro Novissimo not only reflected the beauty and power of *La Serenissima*, but that the content of these performances reified Venice’s political ideologies.⁹⁰ In other words, the so-called “Myth of Venice” found an appropriately grand mouthpiece in the *Incogniti*’s operas. Notably, the ancient city of Troy, which early modern Venetians hailed as the progenitor to their own city,

⁸⁸ Rosand, 113.

⁸⁹ Rosand, 114.

⁹⁰ Rosand, 90.

often appeared as the setting for storylines in seicento operas. Libretti prologues from the 1640s extol the virtues of Troy and, by extension, those of its illustrious Christian incarnation, Venice.

The most conspicuous overlay of antiquity with seventeenth-century Venice emerged in the opera *Bellerofonte*, the successor to *La finta pazza*, performed in the 1642 opera season. In one of Giacomo Torelli's expansive sets for the performance, the backdrop lifted behind a depiction of ancient ramparts and moored ships to reveal Venice's Piazza San Marco, complete with campanile, Ducal palace, and the two columns that framed public spectacles and executions [Figure 5.52]. The implication was that Venice had just emerged from the sea, prompting the actors on stage portraying Neptune and the allegorical representations of Innocence and Justice to sing a hymn celebrating the city for its noble character and worldwide admiration.⁹¹

Bellerofonte also conjured seventeenth-century Venice in its storyline in a subtler way, through the actors' dialogue. In fact, this performance contains an unusual reference to plague — a topical subject for Venetians. The protagonist Bellerofonte mentions plague in a humorous aside in Act Two. Reacting to a conversation in which the father and sister of his love interest Archimene discuss options for marrying her off to a mature candidate, the hero quips: “An old man? Oh madness! I would rather have the plague...”⁹² This casual reference to pestilence provides an example of how the disease permeated Venetian consciousness and likely everyday language. Its use as a punch line indicates that jokes about plague were likely to be enjoyed by audiences. It is difficult to determine whether this flippant attitude reflects evolving thoughts on the disease after a sufficient amount of time had passed post-epidemic (i.e. it was not “too soon”

⁹¹ Rosand, 134-6.

⁹² Vincenzo Nolfi, libretto for *Bellerofonte*. (Venice: Appresso Gio. Battista Surian, 1642), 75. “Un vecchio? oh forsennata/ Prima vorrei la peste,/ Donna a Vecchio legata/ Sempre ha vigilie, o feste...”

to make such jokes), or if gallows humor of this nature would also have been appreciated during active outbreaks, as a means of mitigating fear and taking control through humor.

Like the Venetian operas of the later seventeenth century, Zanchi's and Negri's paintings for the Scuola di San Rocco engaged with a recent troubling event in the city from an aesthetic standpoint. These paintings are set within plague-ridden Venice, with subject matter that commemorates a specific event in the city's past. Time (1630-31) and place (Venice) are implied, though these works are conspicuously staged affairs that do not aim for eye-witness-like reportage. The use of established tropes codified in plague art, as well as citations of other well-known contemporary paintings and sculptures, resulted in imagery that was self-consciously as much about artistic production in seicento Venice as about representing the 1630-31 epidemic. Negri's pervasive use of allegory, combined with the classicizing attire worn by the major figures in both works, complicates a strictly seicento time frame. These devices place both paintings somewhat outside of 1630-31. By sharing opera's dramatic tone and anachronisms, and by impelling spectators to become active in the depicted scenes, the painters have engineered works that allow plague to re-erupt continually on the Scuola di San Rocco's staircase.

Though plague had disappeared in Venice by the 1640s, and would never again return to the lagoon, the city was enmeshed in a different sort of crisis. While opera flowered, the city's naval fleet and ground forces were engaged in the War of Candia with the Ottomans, seeking to maintain control of the island of Crete, which Venice eventually lost in 1669. War was first declared in 1645, and Venice's nobility likely felt the strain of their financial obligation to support the campaign. The 1646 opera season was cancelled at the behest of the State because of the state of war. In subsequent years, notably 1651, some theaters also closed due to financial

hardships caused by the ongoing overseas campaigns.⁹³ Venetians' sense of their city's position in this war oscillated as their fleet dominated in some battles and was routed in others.

Unsurprisingly, opera as an art form that had been tied to current events since its development reflected a preoccupation with war, battles, and the prowess of the fighters in the classical stories it told. Allusions to Venice as a paragon of justice and peace proliferated throughout the libretti of the 1650-60s, and some of the dialogue included commentary on "the Turk" as a bellicose and threatening outside force.⁹⁴ Venetian audiences almost certainly expected to witness their contemporary concerns and civic identities performed on stage, bolstered by insinuations of their city's reputation for justice and military domination. Opera reified the rhetoric that the Venetian Republic would continue to flourish. Antonio Zanchi's 1666 painting was created in the midst of this patriotic zeal. Like the triumphant heroes in many operas of this period, Zanchi's work depicts Venice prevailing — not in war or matters of love, but over the recent epidemic, and through its profound spiritual worth. I suggest that *confratelli* and visitors to San Rocco in the 1660s would have drawn connections between the triumphalist rhetoric familiar from opera staging and that in Zanchi's painting.

Antonio Zanchi's *The Virgin Appears to the Plague-Stricken* narrativized the 1630-31 plague outbreak in Venice and presented the epidemic with greater complexity than earlier examples of plague art from the period. Its interactive capacity and operatic treatment of the recent crisis made it different from other memorializing works created in the immediate post-plague years. Zanchi's painting opens up temporal boundaries. In this work, the 1630-31 plague was not isolated by a commemoration that sought to represent the outbreak in its distinct

⁹³ Rosand, 143-4.

⁹⁴ Some of the most noteworthy operas engaging with this widespread topic were *Ersilla* (1648), *Tolomeo* (1658), and *Elena* (1659). Rosand, 145-6.

moment, but rather the painting allowed plague to “breathe” — to become a marker for the history of Venice in a broader sense. The painting is anchored within deep traditions of plague art and spectatorship, while opera’s influence also gave the disease currency as a modern topic of discourse. That the epidemic can be aestheticized in this way indicates a shift from how plague had been rendered visually in the past.

Zanchi’s work for the Scuola explores ideas about the disease in an unusually sophisticated way that distinguishes it in the canon of plague art. The most salient example is his treatment of the *pizzigamorti*. Rather than use these men simply as visual shorthand for an outbreak of plague or as emblems of the world turned upside down by the social strain of an epidemic, Zanchi complicates his reading of the body clearers. His psychological treatment of the *pizzigamorti* incites viewers to consider them in a more fully realized, human way. They are presented with respect to their own varied reactions to the horrors around them. The painting resists categorizing them as wholly sympathetic or antagonistic figures. *The Virgin Appears to the Plague-Stricken* remains one of the most detailed and analytical examinations of the role of body clearers in plague art, including works made in the centuries following its creation.

The 1630-31 plague epidemic, while a major public health crisis and economic burden, also became a defining point for seicento Venetian identity in the later seventeenth century. Antonio Zanchi’s painting for the Scuola Grande di San Rocco was the first large-scale work to commemorate this outbreak retrospectively, at a point when the epidemic had transitioned from recent tragedy to historical event. His painting for San Rocco was at the forefront of a trend that continued to flourish in the eighteenth century when the memorialization of this particular plague epidemic, in both Venice proper and its subject cities in the Veneto region, made statements about collective identity during the waning of the Republic.

CHAPTER VI

Eighteenth-century retrospectives on plague in the Veneto

Introduction

During the winter in 1760 an argument ensued between members of the governing body of the town of Este, a Venetian subject city in the province of Padua. Consiglio members disagreed about whether or not to hire Giandomenico Tiepolo, son of the esteemed Venetian painter Giambattista Tiepolo, in a project that involved the updating and modernizing of a chapel in the city's cathedral with a new altarpiece. Controversy developed around this commission because the renovation entailed the removal and replacement of one of Este's revered symbols: an ex-voto painted during the height of the previous century's plague crisis in 1630-31 [Figure 6.4]. While the original votive painting had represented the town's patron saint Tecla, kneeling in prayer beneath an angry God, appeasing the deity to end the plague outbreak that had beset the city, this new commission would present Saint Tecla in a more auspicious setting, beside saints Peter and Paul, and removed from the context of an epidemic.¹ This was a crucial moment in which the Estense government clashed over how best to represent the town's collective religious identity: through a relic of a successful spiritual appeal made 130 years in the past, tangibly linked to the 1630-31 plague epidemic, or through a new painting that would visualize the town's

¹ Biblioteca del Gabinetto di Lettura in Este (BGLE), Isidoro Alessi, *Memorie della controversia*, c.2r, and ACDE, MB 15, Angelo Bianchi, *Memorie della Chiesa di Este 1743-1777*, 60. Cited in Cogo 47, n.42 and n.43, cited in Bruno Cogo, *Santa Tecla nella città di Este: iconografia e storia, la pala del Tiepolo e le alter memorie*, (Este: Duomo di Este, 2016), 48.

saintly protection in the modern style of painting produced by the Tiepolo family workshop. In the end, the votive work remained above the altar, and Giandomenico Tiepolo did not provide a painting for Este. Council member Isodoro Alessi, disturbed by the possibility of losing such a spiritually significant work, had written to a letter to Cardinal Sante Veronese, Bishop of Padua, appealing for arbitration. Alessi claimed that to replace the 1631 ex-voto would constitute breaking the solemn vow made during the epidemic, in which Este's residents demonstrated their devotion to Tecla in exchange for deliverance from plague.²

The idea of hiring Giandomenico to contribute a new painting to Este's duomo developed out of a highly successful commission that had been completed in town in the previous year. On Christmas Eve in 1759, Giandomenico and his father Giambattista were both present for Mass in the duomo and for the revelation of a soaring new altarpiece at the high altar, *Saint Tecla Pleads God for the Liberation of Este from the Plague of 1630*, completed by the elder Tiepolo [Figure 6.1].³ This was an important moment for Este because the installation of Tiepolo's new work ended a ten-year period in which the high altar was without a permanent work of art to anchor liturgy. What led to this unusual hiatus was a visit by Cardinal Rezzonico from Padua in 1748, during which the cardinal declared that Este's then-current altarpiece, *The Canonization of*

² BGLE, Raccolta Estense 1282, Isidoro Alessi, *Memorie della controversia*, 1-10.

³ Information on the Christmas Eve unveiling can be found in two sources from 1760: one, an account written by canon Angelo Bianchi, and the other, a letter written by Isidoro Alessi to bishop Sante Veronese. The Bianchi account can be found in the duomo's archives: Archivio Capitolare del Duomo di Este, MB 15, Angelo Bianchi, *Memorie della Chiesa di Este, 1743-1777*, c.60. "1759, 24 dicembre. Levata la tela rappresentante la beatificazione di S. Lorenzo Giustiniano, opera del Zanchi dalla facciata del Coro, in suo luogo vi fu posta altra pittura rappresentante la liberazione d'Este dalla pestilenza per intercessione di S. Tecla, titolare e tutelare della Colleggiata e del Paese, opera di Giambatta Tiepoletto." The Alessi letter can be found in Este's civic archives, Biblioteca del Gabinetto di Lettura in Este, Raccolta Estense 1282, Isidoro Alessi, *Memorie della controversia tra il s.r. Pietro Bertoloni e me Isidoro Alessi per l'altar di S. Tecla*, cit. c.2r. "La Vigilia del SS. Natale dell'anno 1759 giunse il Tiepoletto col nuovo Quadro; che fu tosto alzato nella Tribuna. Nel tempo stesso che si lavorava a metterlo nel suo nicchio: si radunarono i Sig.ri Deputati, i Sig.ri Soprastanti, con alcuni del Collegietto: e fu proposto e conchiuso de levar tosto la Pala di S. Tecla dall'altar laterale." Transcripts of both of these documents have been published in Bruno Cogo, *Santa Tecla nella città di Este: iconografia e storia, la pala del Tiepolo e le alter memorie*, (Este: Duomo di Este, 2016), 47.

Lorenzo Giustiniani by Antonio Zanchi, was unfit for its liturgical function and demanded its immediate removal, which was granted [Figure 6.2].⁴ With the installation of Giambattista Tiepolo's plague-themed high altarpiece in 1759, the religious identity of Este's residents became characterized by their historical triumph over the previous century's plague epidemic. In the altarpiece imagery, though vignettes of death and desolation populate the foreground, Tecla's prayers have sent the allegory of plague fleeing into the distant skies, and a benevolent God raises an arm in benediction over a depiction of Este below.

The final chapter of this dissertation investigates the rich history of the 1630-31 plague in the Venetian subject city of Este. In moving from the urban center of Venice to one of the city's regional towns, a greater diversity of voices responding to the seicento plague crisis can be heard. At each locale in which the Venetian Republic maintained bureaucratic oversight — on the Italian mainland and throughout the Mediterranean — local prerogatives and traditions combined with Venice's cultural influence. With respect to its sustained artistic response to the 1630-31 plague epidemic, Este provides a particularly resonant example of the sometimes concordant, sometimes conflicted relationship that defined the varied hierarchies of control in the territories, from the town's city council, to the regional diocese, to what could be considered a Venetian national authority. This chapter examines how, through a series of paintings commissioned by the Estense city government, this outbreak became an emblem defining civic character in the eighteenth century. From the commission of an ex-voto securely dated to the epidemic by documents in the town's archives, to Tiepolo's grand manner high altarpiece, to an

⁴ Rezzonico's objection to the Zanchi altarpiece has been preserved in Bianchi, ACDE, *Memorie della Chiesa di Este, 1743-1777*, 34-5. "Adi 30 maggio 1748...fu levato il quadro di facciata del nostro Coro rappresentante la presentazione del Cereo per la Beatificazione di S. Lorenzo Giustiniani; e questo per compiacere S. Em.za ch nol poteva tollerare in quel sito, per non essere pittura tale, che possa seuire alle veci d'una Sacra Pala." Cited in Cogo, *Santa Tecla*, 44; Alberto Riccboni, "Antonio Zanchi e la pittura veneziana del seicento," *Saggi e memorie di storia dell'arte*, 5 (Florence: Leo S. Olschki, 1966), 93.

etching reproducing the altarpiece's imagery created by the painter's youngest son Lorenzo, the 1630-31 plague outbreak developed into a *topos* for representing Estense identity, continually reinvigorated by visual art. Each of these commissions can be linked by the dialogue that developed between them, as artists and the civic authorities who served as patrons in each of these transactions collaborated to create works that would tap into the deeper history of representing plague in the region. Visual art depicting plague in Este adhered to conventions for the genre developed in Venice and also exhibited a regional specificity that situated plague in the *terraferma* and within the local ambit.

Two key issues should be considered when analyzing the conceptual frameworks of these plague paintings. First, Este's relationship to Venice, as its subject city during a period of destabilization effectuated by the plague, and which continued throughout the eighteenth century as the Republic experienced increasing challenges in maintaining its economic and political footing in Europe; and secondly, the function of memorials to codify and represent collective experience. In many ways, the 1630-31 plague represented a blow to Venice's ability to manage its territories on the mainland and along the Adriatic Coast from which it never fully recovered.⁵ As early as the turn of the nineteenth century, many histories characterizing eighteenth-century Venice have promoted romanticized notions of the fall of the Republic in 1797 and the crumbling of the "Myth of Venice" that civic authorities in the city had so carefully managed in the previous centuries.⁶ Indeed, settecento Venice struggled to maintain its political oversight in regional cities under its jurisdiction, and this period saw the increasing autonomy of local aristocratic families in the Veneto in running their cities' governments, even before the fall of

⁵ For an overview of Venice's economic decline post-plague, see Alfredo Viggiano's essay "Politics and Constitution," in *A Companion to Venetian History, 1400-1797*, ed. Eric R. Dursteler (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 47-84.

⁶ For the first major work in what could be considered the literary genre linking Venice with decadence and decay, see Noël Daru, *Histoire de la République de Venise* (Paris: Firmin Didot, 1819).

Venice transferred control to Austria.⁷ However, as will be shown in this chapter, emphasis on the widespread economic recession oversimplifies the complex web of trade and local economies that were specific to each city in the Veneto. During the eighteenth century, Este experienced growth in several industries centered in town, with the related revenue supporting the commission of high profile works of art and architecture by the city government at this time. Moreover, while Venice was unable to financially keep up with management of its land holdings in the Veneto, its alliance with Dalmatian cities continued to flourish until 1797, prompting factions in the Venetian government to push for increased attention to the Bay of Cattaro region, the site of Captain Giorgio Pallavicino's plague ex-voto from 1631, which was discussed in Chapter 4.⁸

This final chapter also explores the concept of collective memory as it relates to commemorations of the plague and to the appeal of the 1630-31 epidemic to civic authorities as a fertile ground for outlining and solidifying a collective experience. By the mid-eighteenth century, the 1630-31 plague outbreak was a distant event for inhabitants of the Veneto, outside the range of living memory and part of a succession of important episodes that characterized the region's deep history. After a century during which Venice and its mainland cities were plague-free, perspectives on the disease had evolved significantly. However, the continued relevancy of the 1630-31 outbreak in visual art can be linked to renewed anxieties over the possibility of plague's return to northern Italy during the early eighteenth century. Though the 1630-31 epidemic was the last to strike Venice and the Veneto, the disease was still active sporadically throughout Western Europe in the eighteenth century. In fact, a major outbreak occurred in

⁷ Michael Knapton, "The Terraferma State," in *A Companion to Venetian History, 1400-1797*, ed. Eric R. Dursteler (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 115-17.

⁸ Viggiano, 79.

Marseilles in 1720-22, in which 40,000 people died in the city alone (around 40% of the population), with an estimated total of 100,000 deaths when including Aix-en-Provence and the surrounding areas.⁹ This plague, imported to a busy port city via infected sailors and cargo traveling on a ship from the Levant, must have made an impression on the Venetian State, which had been systematically monitoring trade and travel from this region in order to prevent precisely this scenario from happening within Venetian territory.¹⁰ Though twenty-first-century hindsight provides us with the knowledge that Venice and its subject cities in mainland Italy were safe from future devastation of this nature after 1631, settecento residents had no such comfort.

Equally important to explaining the sustained prominence of plague in the visual culture of Venice and the Veneto during the eighteenth century is the disease's distinctive ability to catalyze group expressions of piety that underscore the importance of belonging to civic and religious collectives. As stated in the Introduction to the dissertation, plague epidemics struck across the social spectrum and the impact extended well beyond the subsiding of infection. While those who contracted plague stood little chance of survival and often died rapidly after the onset of symptoms, the disease affected all over a long timeframe, rippling out across the population through the wide-ranging initiatives enacted by the Venetian State and local

⁹ Jean-Noël Biraben, "Certain Demographic Characteristics of the Plague Epidemic in France, 1720-22," *Daedalus*, v.97, n.2, Historical Population Studies (Spring 1968), 538-40; Junko Thérèse Takeda, *Between Crown and Commerce: Marseille and the Early Modern Mediterranean*, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2011), 125-8. For early modern sources on this epidemic, see Jean-Baptiste Bertrand, *Relation historique de tout ce qui passé à Marseille pendant la dernière peste*, (Cologne: P. Marteau), 1723 and Jean-Baptiste Boy, *Lettre écrite à Mr. Calvet, conseiller medecin du Roy, professeur royal et doyen en l'université de Caors. Avec des Observations sur la maladie de Marseilles. Par Mr. Mailhes...* (Marseille: Jean-Bapitste Boy, Imprimeur du Roy & de la Ville and Marchand), 1721. For recent scholarship on the 1720-22 plague in Marseilles, see Charles Carrière, Marcel Courdurié and Ferreol Rebuffat, *Marseille ville morte: la peste de 1720*, (Gemenos: Autres temps), 2008. More evidence of the rampant aestheticizing of plague in the 19th century is found in the theatrical production, "Le Peste de Marseilles: melodrame historique en trois actes et la grand spectacle," written by Alexandre Piccinni and performed in Paris in August 1828.

¹⁰ The *Sanità* maintained constant correspondence with its representatives in Venice's *stato da mar* colonies along the Adriatic, particularly those abutting Ottoman lands in Dalmatia, Croatia, and Albania, to stay abreast of any imminent threats of plague. For some of these reports from the late 17th-early 18th centuries, see ASV, *Provveditori e Sopraprovveditori alla Sanità*, 745.

governments, from organized prayers to quarantine to travel bans. Plague prevention in early modern Venice and the Veneto was predicated upon group action (even when the mandate called for isolation and separation), which was reflected in the vast corpus of visual art generated for this purpose. This fundamental emphasis on collective representation and response carried over into later works that memorialized past epidemics through new assertions of group inclusion. In eighteenth-century Venice and its regional cities, shifting social relationships related to the faltering Republic and the evolution of economic and political hierarchies intensified desires to codify civic, local identities. This was particularly important with respect to how these regional identities could be seen as independent, yet linked to a larger concept of Venetian grandeur and historical stability — a shared sense of *Venezianità*.¹¹

In the twentieth century, French sociologist Maurice Halbwachs pioneered the study of the relationship between memory, history, and group identity with his work, *On Collective Memory*.¹² In this work, Halbwachs asserts that the act of recollection itself, of making sense of one's identity and past, is built upon external frameworks established and perpetuated from the outside by the social groups to which one belongs. "Most of the time, when I remember, it is others who spur me on.... [Memories] are recalled to me externally, and the groups of which I am a part at any time give me the means to reconstruct them, upon condition, to be sure, that I turn toward them and adopt, at least for the moment, their way of thinking."¹³ This social aspect to remembering and situating memories within a group context is what Halbwachs referred to as "collective memory." In examining the social factors that led to the continual memorialization of

¹¹ For a discussion of the concept of *Venezianità* in nineteenth-century Venice, see Margaret Plant, *Venice: Fragile City, 1797-1997*, (New Haven: Yale University Press), 2002.

¹² Maurice Halbwachs, *Les cadres sociaux de la mémoire*, (Paris: F. Alcan), 1925; English translation, *On Collective Memory*, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1992).

¹³ Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, 37.

the 1630-31 plague outbreak with visual art, long after the end of the crisis in the eighteenth century, Halbwachs' exploration of how frameworks develop to support the process of communal memory are particularly useful. A later section of this chapter will examine this phenomenon with respect to settecento Venice and the Veneto, drawing on Halbwachs' theory and also considering the work of later historians who have taken up similar questions concerning memory and group identity, including Pierre Nora and François Hartog.

While memory and remembering are fundamental considerations when creating works of art that commemorate an historical event, there are additional resonances to the eighteenth-century memorials that depict the 1630-31 plague. Giambattista Tiepolo's altarpiece for the duomo in Este is an evocative example. Tiepolo was late in his career when he painted this work for the cathedral, with an international reputation and the sort of name recognition that led the city council members in Este to seek him out for the commission.¹⁴ He was also a painter who had been associated throughout his career with embodying the style and magnificence of painting from Venice's past "Golden Age" in the sixteenth century. Even during his lifetime, Tiepolo was described as the stylistic heir to Veronese because of his palette, the fanciful, anachronistic costuming of his figures, and even the subject matter he painted — grand historical and biblical narratives — which were seen as old-fashioned.¹⁵ The choice to hire Giambattista Tiepolo for this commission demonstrates that the government of Este desired a work of art that would represent their city within notions of the past splendor of Venice, and to participate in a

¹⁴ More details on this commission, including documents stating the council's expectation of hiring a painter "of distinction", as well as the progress of the commission, will be explored later in the chapter. AMCE, Libro dei Consigli XVI, (1742-1759), 341v-342r. Cited in Cogo, 46, n.40.

¹⁵ Venetian patron Francesco Algarotti was one of the earliest to liken Tiepolo to Veronese, and even described Tiepolo as "a spirited *pittore de macchia*", which recalls not the sixteenth-century master, but Marco Boschini's seventeenth-century characterization of Venetian painting in his *Carta del navegar pitoresco*. See Francis Haskell, *Patrons and Painters: A Study in the Relations between Italian Art and Society in the Age of the Baroque*, 2nd edition (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980), 351-3.

renewal of the Myth of Venice. This assertion of continuity with the past may have felt all the more critical in 1759 precisely because this period of Venetian dominance was recognized to be disappearing, if not already gone. Multiple layers of commemoration exist in Tiepolo's *Saint Tecla Pleads God for the Liberation of Este from the Plague of 1630*, from the epidemic it takes as its subject, to the history of the Republic that shaped life in the Veneto for centuries, to the tradition of Venetian painting.

Returning to broader questions about the evolution of plague art as a genre in this region, the final chapter of this dissertation examines the continued development of iconography representing the 1630-31 plague and situates it with respect to changing ideas about what was desired in altarpieces and other works visualizing the disease. Increasing generalization marked eighteenth-century representations of plague as artists relied on traditional formulae and iconography, while eschewing the graphic imagery that had characterized some seventeenth-century precedents. Settecento works tended toward compositions that showed plague, in a sense, "domesticated" — rendered less immediate and subsumed into larger narrative scenes, such as Antonio Bellucci's *Doge Nicolò Contarini implores the Blessed Lorenzo Giustiniani to Halt the Plague of 1630* for San Pietro in Castello in Venice [Figure 6.15]. In the eighteenth century, plague was aestheticized. Representations of the disease are more generic, with a reduction in the most evocative imagery of corpses and civic disorder, and a new privileging of technique and a sometimes reflexive, historiographical approach to referencing plague paintings from the previous two centuries. Genealogy emerges as a primary concern characterizing these paintings. However, the importance of locally specific details and intercessors, so crucial to votive works and civic commissions in times of plague, remained. A number of works depicting Lorenzo Giustiniani were created around the beginning of the eighteenth century, spurred by the

holy man's canonization in 1690, which could reference plague explicitly or only indirectly. Paintings registering this plague intercessor's attainment of sainthood offer an interesting view into the range and limits of Giustiniani's cult, both in terms of geography and temporality, which will be explicated in a later section of this chapter. Giustiniani emerges as a distinctly Venetian phenomenon, lacking resonance in the surrounding Veneto region.

Ultimately, the last chapter of this dissertation evaluates plague art commissioned in Venice and the Veneto during what could be termed the beginning of a post-plague period. With the reduced incidence of plague in eighteenth-century Italy and its absence in the Veneto region, ideas about the disease changed in emphasis. While plague in the clinical sense was entering a post-mortem phase in Europe, works of art that depicted the disease continued to appear, demonstrating the extent to which plague as a concept had become commonplace — a conventional motif used to represent a number of ideas related to identity, belonging, and normative social order. The dissertation's conclusion considers the lasting impact of plague as a *topos* in Venice and the Veneto and its continual reinvention in the early modern imagination.

Este during the 1630-31 plague

Plague arrived in Este in July 1630, roughly concurrent with the disease's arrival in Venice sometime in June 1630, though the Venetian State did not officially recognize the epidemic for what it was until early autumn.¹⁶ The midsized town, twenty miles south of Padua and situated within the Paduan province, had been vigilant for the onset of plague, as were all

¹⁶ Since the seventeenth century, historians in Este have documented the events of the 1630-31 plague in Este. Primary sources outlining the advent and progression of the outbreak in the city include the handwritten manuscript of Antonio Gobbi, *Tragici avvenimenti della peste dell'anno 1630 venuta in Este*, (1632), 5v-6r, and the account of an Estense doctor, Alessandro Alessi, *Preservatione della peste ed historia della peste di Este*, (Padua: Paolo Frambotto), 1660. For recent work on the course of the epidemic in Este, see Antonio Soster, *Due anni infausti per Este (La peste del 1630-31)*, (Este: G. Bertolli), n.d.; Luigi Piva, "La peste ed Este" in *Le pestilenze nel Veneto*, (Padua: Camposampiero, 1991), 123-39; and Cogo, *Santa Tecla nella città di Este*, (2016), 34-6.

cities within the Veneto region after the disease's eruption in Mantua in 1629. Government authorities in Este working under the guidance of the Venetian *Sanità* followed a similar timeline in response to the outbreak as that which had been adopted in the lagoon city, implementing and enforcing reciprocal laws to prevent the spread of the disease. A health pass (*fede* or *tessera*) from 1630, printed by the Estense Health Office to certify a traveler's physical wellbeing and legal approval to enter neighboring cities, can be found today in Este's archives [Figure 6.2]. A figural woodcut design on this pass depicts Saint Tecla at the left and Este's *stemma* to the right. Both emblems of Este flank a central cartouche that depicts the winged lion of Saint Mark — figural evidence of Venetian oversight in the city, as well as the cooperative nature of initiatives taken against plague by health boards in Venice and in mainland Veneto cities.¹⁷

It is unclear precisely how the plague made its way into Este. Though the town braced itself for the arrival of an outbreak from its neighboring cities to the west, with whom there was daily commerce (Verona, for example, had been declared in an epidemic state since March 1630), sources suggest plague arrived via Venice.¹⁸ Since 1547, the Estense government had maintained a house on a portion of land outside the city center referred to as the Brancaglia, which was reserved to act as a *lazzaretto* during outbreaks of plague.¹⁹ The major Venetian epidemic of 1575-77 also struck Este, and the Brancaglia became an essential component of the city Health Office's operations. During the 1630-31 outbreak in Este, this structure proved insufficient and a second *lazzaretto* was instituted in town. A dilapidated building with a large courtyard near the Bisatto River was co-opted for the purpose — renovated to contain sixteen

¹⁷ Este had its own *Provveditori di Sanità*, which consisted of 5-6 members throughout the 1630-31 epidemic, including Alessandro Alessi and Antonio Gobbi, Gobbi, *Tragici avvenimenti*, 7r-8v.

¹⁸ Piva, *Le pestilenze nel Veneto*, 125-6.

¹⁹ Archivio della Magnifica Comunità di Este, *Consigli*, Libro V, c.385. Cited in Piva, 126.

wooden stalls in the courtyard to separate and treat plague victims.²⁰ The course of the disease in Este was similar to that in Venice: the largest number of deaths occurred in the autumn of 1630, followed by a waning in the early months of 1631, and a resurgence of mortality in the spring of 1631.²¹ The epidemic resolved slightly later in Este than in Venice. While Doge Francesco Erizzo declared Venice plague-free on November 13, 1631, plague deaths continued in Este until the year's end, when the outbreak officially ended there in late December 1631.²² Plague-related deaths were estimated to be around 3,500 in Este, which represented a loss of approximately 25% of the population.²³

Like Venice, Este combatted the 1630-31 plague with a combination of quarantine and disinfection, increased scrutiny of travelers and circulating goods, organized prayers, and practical steps to avoid contracting the disease, such as avoiding highly contaminated areas.²⁴ Este also sought to repel the outbreak by commissioning works of art that would entreat holy intercessors and demonstrate collective piety. Antonio Gobbi, who served on the city's health board and had been appointed to oversee the commission of an altar and ex-voto during the

²⁰ AMCE, *Istrumenti*, v.40, c.231. Cited in Soster, 10; Piva, 129. Four additional wooden structures were built at each corner of the fenced courtyard to house the guards who were stationed to ensure that no patients escaped.

²¹ For the end of the plague, see Gobbi, 11v. For timeline overviews, see Piva, 130-1,134; Soster 18-19. Alessi attributes the short hiatus from plague in February 1631, followed by its resurgence in the following month, to sinister causes. He credits witches and a basilisk with plague's return. Alessi, *Preservazione della peste*, 21. Cited in Piva, 131, and Soster, 19.

²² AMCE, *Comunità di Este*, Ducali, Libro 3, c. 37. Transcribed in Piva, 137-8. Soster, 21-2.

²³ Piva, 138. A census from 1578 lists the number of residents in Este as 14,658.

²⁴ The methods used to disinfect materials goods in Este — from airing to boiling — are consistent with those used at the Lazzaretto Nuovo in Venice. See, Soster, 10-11; Piva, 136-7. The account of Alessandro Alessi, a doctor who remained in Este during the 1630-31 outbreak to treat plague victims, and who survived the epidemic, (*Preservazione della peste ed historia della peste di Este*, published in 1660), opens with eighteen steps to avoid contracting plague. Step 1 suggests adopting consistently moderate and pious comportment; Step 2 recommends staying away from plague-infested areas. “La prima è raccomandarsi à Dio onnipotente, che è vera salute, al voler del quale agiustando le parole, i pensieri, e l’attione, si fa una consonanza o unione, che mantiene la salute, l’aumenta, e la conserva. Seconda, non andar in luoco c’ habbi aere cattivo, e infetto...” Alessandro Alessi, *Diciotto regole per la preservazione della peste di Alessandro Alessi, medifisico della Magnifica Comunità di Este, Anno 1630-31*, (Este: G. Longo), 1885.

epidemic, wrote in his 1632 account that Este eventually triumphed over the disease through extensive decontamination efforts, as well as prayers offered to Saint Tecla to placate God's wrath, evidence that the city was "armed with its incomparable virtue."²⁵ Works of art, generated through the votive process of petition and thanks for sacred intercession, were central to these spiritual initiatives taken against the 1630-31 plague in Este, and their commission came in several waves during and after the epidemic.²⁶ This staggered pattern in the creation of plague votives offers insight on the importance of temporality in relation to the material culture of plague. Even commissions initiated during epidemics often did not result in completed works until well after the end of the outbreak, complicating dating and issues related to the timing of commemorations.

A document dated October 29, 1630 records the Consiglio's decision to create an ex-voto for placement within the town's basilica, calling upon Saint Tecla as their universal protector: "...Being that the Blessed Saint Tecla has always been the universal protector of all the people of Este, to this pious work we make recourse, and in particular, this Magnificent Community, praying with devotion that she will intercede for us all with the Highest God, to put down his whip and free us from this terrible disease."²⁷ Indeed, Tecla had been a revered intercessor in the

²⁵ Gobbi, *Tragici avvenimenti*, 14r-v, and 11r. "...con l'armi dell'incomparabil sua virtù..." Gobbi's appointment to co-manage the construction of an altar and painting to honor Saint Tecla in a preexisting chapel devoted to the saint can be found in document from November 14, 1630. AMCE, *Consigli VIII* (1622-1635), c.175. Cited in Cogo, 34-5, n13. For Gobbi's own word on the chapel project, see *Tragici avvenimenti*, 14v-15r.

²⁶ A votive church in the town, the Chiesa della Beata Vergine della Salute, on which construction was begun in 1639, is not related to the 1630-31 plague epidemic, as has been inferred by its name (similar to Venice's La Salute) and erroneously passed down in some 19th and 20th century guidebooks. (See, Gustavo Chiese, et. al. *La patria: geografia dell'Italia, Provincie di Verona, Vicenza e Padova*, (Turin: Unione Tipografico-Editrice, 1903), 436.) The church, in fact, was commissioned to honor a miracle-working fresco of the Virgin and Child. For more on the history of the image and subsequent construction of the church, see Maria Luisa Trevisan, *La Chiesa della Beata Vergine della Salute in Este: storia e decorazione*, PhD dissertation, Università degli Studi di Bologna, 1989.

²⁷ AMCE, Libro dei *Consigli VIII*, c.175. "...et essendo che la Beata e Santa Tecla fu sempre et è universale protettrice di tutto il popolo d'Este, a quest dunque con voto pio doverà fare ricorso, et in particolare questa Magnifica Comunità, pregandola con divote orationi si degni intercedere per noi tutti appresso l'Altissimo Motore che deponga il flagella e ci liberi da questo mal contagioso." For a full transcription and photograph of a copy of

city for many centuries. Este's local history began earlier than that of Venice, the site having been settled since the late Neolithic period and maintaining a vibrant culture and economy through antiquity and the later Roman period.²⁸ Saint Tecla's cult is said to have been present in Milan and the Paduan region since the 4th century, and Este's adoption of the Seleucian saint as its patroness likely dates somewhat later, to after the 6th century.²⁹ It is believed that construction of Este's basilica, dedicated to Saint Tecla, was completed in the 9th century, with successive renovations and additions made throughout the early modern period before its demolition in 1690.³⁰

When plague struck Este in 1630 and it was determined that a vow would be made to Tecla in October, followed by the creation of a new altar dedicated to the saint, the Consiglio decided to co-opt a preexisting chapel in the duomo for this purpose.³¹ The Confraternita della Morte had maintained a chapel near the sacristy, to the left of the high altar, since the sixteenth century, which became the new votive chapel to Saint Tecla during the plague [Figure 6.3].³² On November 14, 1630, the city elected Antonio Gobbi and Antonio Francesco Fracanzani to

this document, see Cogo, 38, 42-3. Gobbi records the vow and subsequent building of a votive altar as well, *Tragici avvenimenti*, 13v-15r.

²⁸ For more on Ateste culture during the Roman period, see Stephen L. Dyson, "The Transpadane Frontier," in *The Creation of the Roman Frontier*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985), 42-86.

²⁹ Cogo, 29-31.

³⁰ Gaetano Nuvolato, *Storia di Este e del suo territorio*, third printing, (Este: Libreria editrice Zielo, 1989), 569. This first church dedicated to Tecla is believed to have been built upon the site of a pagan shrine. Dating the construction of the church is difficult as there are no documents that refer to it until 1107, at which point the basilica was already a complete and established institution in the city. Cogo, 31. Some sources have posited that the basilica was dedicated to Saint John the Baptist, while others have indicated that only the baptistery beside the church was dedicated to this saint. See Carmelo Gallana, *Il Duomo di Este: memorie storiche desunte in parte da un manoscritto del Cav. Francesco Franceschetti*, (Este: Bertolli, 1961), for suppositions on the Baptist dedication (17), followed by his support of an attribution to Tecla (39). The basilica that was demolished in 1690 may have been a second church built at this site, with an earlier structure dedicated to the Baptist existing there previously.

³¹ Cogo, 34-6.

³² Cogo, 36; Nuvolato, 571-2. This confraternity does not appear to have had any special relationship to plague prior to this point.

manage the altar project and contributed 100 ducats toward the initial construction expenses.³³

Work moved swiftly. The new altar was dedicated and functional by 1631, though the full decorative campaign was not completed until 1635.³⁴

The creation of an ex-voto to serve as the altarpiece for this chapel was an essential aspect of the project, begun simultaneously with the lapidary work to construct the marble altar. Two documents record payments made to an artist for the votive painting, the first 90 lire paid immediately, and the second installment of 50 additional lire made on July 5, 1631.³⁵ These receipts do not list the painter's name. The ex-voto was completed by the summer of 1631 when full payment was made, and this documentation is critical. It reveals that in spite of the dire circumstances in Este, this significant campaign of construction and decoration in the duomo was carried out and completed *during* the epidemic. In the introduction to Chapter 4, the question was raised concerning the extent to which large-scale works of art could be completed during major outbreaks of plague, when resources were strained and quarantine limited the movement of people and goods. Some works said to be made during the 1630-31 outbreak appear more likely to have been completed afterwards and dated retrospectively, such as Giorgio Pallavicino's painting for the Scuola Dalmata in Venice. However, the votive project in Este demonstrates that despite the hardship, in some circumstances, the urgency to petition intercessors and create loci for prayers during the 1630-31 plague could produce impressive works of art in the midst of the crisis.

Este's plague altarpiece exhibits a compositional design and a number of iconographic elements typical of seventeenth-century paintings produced in Venice and the Veneto in response

³³ AMCE, Libro dei *Consigli* VIII, c.175. Cited in Cogo, 34-5, n13.

³⁴ AMCE, Libro dei *Consigli* VIII, c.175. Cited in Cogo, 36, n15.

³⁵ Archivio Capitolare del Duomo di Este, MP 135, *Mani Morte. Chiesa d S. Tecla o del Duomo, 1629-1674*, c.223 and AMCE, Libro dei *Consigli* VIII, c.188. Cited in Cogo, 37, n18, 19.

to the 1630-31 outbreak [Figure 6.4].³⁶ Saint Tecla kneels in the foreground, positioned frontally and looking heavenward to an apparition of God directly above her. She holds a crucifix in her left hand, on which the prominently corporeal figure of Christ acts as a mediating figure between Tecla and God. The composition is divided neatly in half. God, putti, and pestilential clouds fill the upper portion of the work, while Tecla and her two attending lions (standard iconography for the saint) dominate the bottom half.³⁷ Behind these two holy figures, the city of Este stands silent and empty except for six small figures populating a central piazza — *pizzigamorti* on their body-collecting rounds. The color scheme and tonality of this work are similar to that of Bernardino Prudenti's painting for the Salute, with a muted primary palette of yellow, light gray-blue, and rose [Figure 6.5].

Tecla is depicted as an iconographic type common to the 1630-31 outbreak: a devout woman, dressed in decorous but rich garments, who represents her city's population and intercedes on its behalf. Tecla thus doubles as a patron saint and civic personification. Domenico Tintoretto in Venice and Antonio Giarola in Verona each utilized this allegorical device in plague votives, with the female figure representing not a patron saint, however, as in the Este commission, but solely an allegory of the city [Figures 6.6, 6.7]. In the Este ex-voto, the method of imaging the town is also comparable to Domenico Tintoretto's rendering of Venice for San Francesco della Vigna. In both works, the urban landscape has been depopulated except for body clearers at work and the corpses of plague victims they are collecting. This macabre activity has been pushed to the background of each painting, and these disturbing figures appear

³⁶ The work, not well represented in scholarship, has only recently been published. See Cogo, 40-3.

³⁷ For more on Tecla's life, see Stephen J. Davis, *The Cult of Saint Thecla: A Tradition of Women's Piety in Late Antiquity*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 2001; Susan E. Hulen, *A Modesty Apostle: Thecla and the History of Women in the Early Church*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 2015; and Cogo, "Particolare devozione in Alta Italia," 24-7.

particularly small in the Este ex-voto [Figures 6.8, 6.9]. To Tecla's right, at the left side of the canvas, two *pizzigamorti* carry a body on a stretcher, transporting it into the center of the canvas. They are en route to meet their associates deeper in the pictorial space and to deposit their cadaver on the large flatbed wagon that appears below Tecla's right arm. This wagon, pulled by two oxen, contains a large quantity of corpses, rendered as an indistinguishable tangle of limbs. A *pizzigamorto* leads the oxen while a second body clearer acknowledges the arrival of the men with the stretcher, his arm outstretched in greeting; he wears a red cap to make his occupation unmistakable. To Tecla's left, on the other side of the composition, another pair of capped *pizzigamorti* strides past a column in the piazza to join the others.

Issues of decorum, similar to those that shaped the iconography and appearance of Domenico Tintoretto's painting, were likely at play in the Este commission. Each painter adopted similar strategies to ensure that a viewer's focus would remain on the act of prayer and intercession, rather than be diverted by a meditation on the more gruesome conditions associated with an outbreak of plague. The desolation of the city, however, and the free movement of body clearers through the streets effectively communicate the disrupted civic state. To counter this, the impeccable appearance of the female personification in each painting mitigates seeing the city as thoroughly violated. Though plague has created a state of fear and social upheaval, intrinsic sanctity and virtue remain unsullied.

The depiction of God in the Este ex-voto — angry, wrathful, and wielding red arrows of pestilence — is somewhat unusual for paintings of the 1630-31 plague. God is the only sacred figure who appears in the cloudbank; neither Christ, the Virgin, nor any other holy figures are present in the heavens. Tecla is thus Este's only intercessor against the celestial onslaught. Plague depicted as the punishment of God, without intervening figures, had become somewhat

old-fashioned iconography by the seventeenth century. By this point, plague paintings tended to represent salvation from the disease in more hopeful terms, with success over plague likely through satisfactory veneration and negotiation. A related sixteenth-century example of this outmoded iconography is found on the ceiling of the sacristy in SS. Giovanni e Paolo in Venice (Zanipolo, in Venetian dialect) [Figure 6.10]. A painting by Marco Vecellio dated to before 1611, entitled *The Virgin and Saints Dominic and Francis intercede for Humanity's Sinfulness*, shows Christ at the apex holding a handful of arrows he is about to hurl down to earth. The Virgin, in the middle, looks to Christ and holds out her hands in an imploring gesture. Dominic mirrors this pose on earth beneath her, while Francis presses his palms together in prayer. The painting has not been linked to a plague outbreak, and it does not feature any other iconography typical of the genre, outside of the arrows, which might also reference any widespread disease, blight, or hardship. However, this work demonstrates that plague paintings from 1630-31 could fit into similar, overlapping categories of devotional art related to intercession.

In Este's ex-voto, Tecla's appeal is direct. Tecla, aided only by the crucifix in her upraised hand — suggesting the support of Christ — seeks to halt the crisis. The threat feels larger and more intense when one intercessor intervenes alone against an actively angry God. Adding to the threatening atmosphere conjured by this painting, the spatial distance between Tecla and God has been reduced to almost nothing. While one could suggest that such proximity alluded to the likelihood of God hearing the saint's prayers, visually, this makes the deity's assault all the more powerful and personal. The red arrows of pestilence gripped in his raised fist are about to be thrown, pointblank, into Tecla's imploring face. The saint's encounter with God has not been depicted as particularly propitious. It visualizes "such punishment in the hands of

the Lord God” experienced by Este, and cited in the *comune*’s decision to create this ex-voto.³⁸ As a work created while the plague maintained its hold in Este and in all surrounding cities in the Veneto region, a triumphant or overly optimistic tone may have felt discordant. In the following century, however, Giambattista Tiepolo’s opulent new altarpiece for the town’s duomo presents God in a very different aspect, seeming to materialize at Tecla’s behest and blessing Este with his outstretched hand. The cultivated drama and poetic possibilities of this iconographic reversal will be examined later in this chapter.

Este’s plague ex-voto from 1631 remained in its prominent chapel near the basilica’s apse for over fifty years. The decision to demolish the church in 1690 resulted from an earthquake that struck the town in 1688 and destabilized the structure, which had already been deteriorating prior to the seismic event.³⁹ The new construction was begun with the ceremonial laying of the cornerstone on May 14, 1690, at the site where the former basilica once stood.⁴⁰ Baldassare Longhena’s student, Antonio Gaspari, designed the new church in Este shortly after overseeing the completion of Santa Maria della Salute in Venice following Longhena’s death in 1682.⁴¹

The *Comune* of Este evidently valued their votive chapel dedicated to Tecla in 1631 because the new duomo’s design included a side chapel — one of eight niches that radiate out from the centralized oval plan — to display the painted ex-voto [Figure 6.11]. Tecla, already an important symbol of the city before her spiritual protection of residents during the 1630-31

³⁸ AMCE, Libro dei *Consigli* VIII, c.175. “...essendo tal castigo nell mani del Signor Iddio, a quello dunq. è necessario il ricorso, con il mezzo però dell’Intercessione de Santi...” For a full transcription, see Cogo, 38, 42-3.

³⁹ Gallana, 58-64; Cogo, 31. Archpriest Marco Marchetti promoted and oversaw the demolition of the old basilica and building campaign of the new duomo.

⁴⁰ Archivio Capitolare del Duomo di Este (hereafter ACDE), MB 3, Marco Antonio Da Vò, *Notizie sopra la caduta e nuova recedif.ne del Duomo 1688*, 41-2. Cited in Cogo, 37, n.20.

⁴¹ Gallana, 60-1.

plague, became firmly associated with the crisis in a way that gave her cult an historically grounded moment in the recent past. A document from the Consiglio's files dated June 29, 1711 outlines the project to create a new altar honoring Tecla's intervention.⁴² The new niche was completed and dedicated with Mass said at the altar on June 25, 1713, "giving thanks to the protective saint and our preservation in times of plague, which will continue with our faith..."⁴³ A local artist, Antonio Del Soldà, adapted the painted ex-voto at this time in order for it to fit the new altar, though the extent to which it was modified is unclear.⁴⁴ It does not appear that the cutting down or resizing of the canvas resulted in any significant compositional changes, such as the interventions taken against Bernardino Prudenti's painting for the Salute in which the bottom register depicting plague corpses was removed. Primary sources documenting the creation of Este's plague altarpiece and the construction of two successive altars associated with it do not offer any evidence that would suggest the 1713 alterations were extensive or effected any changes to iconography. The painting, as it appears today in its niche to the left of the high altar, can be reasonably assumed not to deviate substantially from its original realization in the seventeenth century.

Commemorating Lorenzo Giustiniani's canonization in Este and Venice

Though Este's new duomo was not complete until 1748, construction had progressed enough by the beginning of the eighteenth century that the church could accommodate a

⁴² AMCE, Libro dei *Consigli*, XIV (1706-1724), 76v; and ACDE, MP 137, *Mani Morte. Chiesa di S. Tecla o del Duomo 1711-1729*, 549. Cited in Cogo, 39. The new altar cost 1,360 ducats.

⁴³ ACDE, MB 3, Marco Antonio da Vò, *Notizie sopra la caduta*, 96v; Cogo, 40. "...e ciò per ringraziamento alla Santa Tutelare e preservation ne tempi presenti di sospeto di peste, continuando le fedì e restelli per tal causa..."

⁴⁴ Biblioteca del Gabinetto di Lettura in Este, *Raccolta Estense*, IV-AI, Documento derivato dalla *Quaderneria della Magnifica Comunità* n.90, in Cogo, 40, n.29. Cogo indicates that Del Solda adjusted the painting's measurements in order for it to fit the new altar.

congregation (though probably limited in size) and function from a liturgical standpoint. To this end, archpriest Marco Marchetti commissioned an altarpiece from Antonio Zanchi in 1702, *The Canonization of Lorenzo Giustiniani*, which was placed in the presbytery [Figure 6.12].⁴⁵ The subject matter is unusual for an altarpiece, and especially so for Este, where the Venetian holy man had no particular relationship with the town. Local politics were at play here, as well as an overlap in regional spirituality and shared sense of *Venezianità*, which, at times, was not a precise fit. Giustiniani's canonization in 1690 corresponded with the beginning of construction on Este's duomo, and so to some extent, the topicality of the event influenced its adoption for the altarpiece. Specifically, the subject of this altarpiece provided the opportunity to represent visually the political connections between the Veneto and Venice, and between the regional dioceses and Rome. Archpriest and abbot Marco Marchetti, who hired Zanchi and paid for the painting, is shown kneeling before Pope Alexander VIII, presenting him with a ceremonial candle [Figure 6.13]. Alexander, whose brief two-year tenure as pope from 1689 until his death in 1691, was from a noble Veneto family, the Ottoboni.⁴⁶ His election as head of the Papacy, followed by his canonization of Giustiniani, represented two honors for the region in quick succession: the ascendancy of a Venetian pope with roots in the Veneto and the sainting of Venice's first Patriarch. Venice's dominion in the highest spiritual and administrative levels of the Church was remarkable, and the commission for a painting in Este's cathedral marking this event shows that Giustiniani's attainment of sainthood was linked politically across the region. However, Este's cathedral became the site of this commemoration not through a religious

⁴⁵ ACDE, MB 3, Marco Antonio Da Vò, *Notizie sopra la caduta*, 75v. Cited in Cogo 63, n.56.

⁴⁶ Pope Alexander VIII was born in Venice as Pietro Vito Ottoboni in 1610.

connection to Giustiniani, but because of Abbot Marchetti's personal involvement. Marchetti, Este's archpriest, had been present at the official canonization ceremonies in Rome.⁴⁷

Zanchi's *The Canonization of Lorenzo Giustiniani* pairs the political with the spiritual explicitly and makes clear the connections between Venice and cities in the Veneto. The bottom half of the painting presents a succession of portrait heads — the pictorial lineage of important local church officials and citizens from Venice and several *terraferma* cities. Many of the men depicted, including the pope, were no longer living in 1702. However, Zanchi presented them as a powerful collective, linked by a Venetian spirituality characterized to also encompass its regional cities. Two deacons and the Venetian Ambassador, Giovanni Landi, flank Alexander, and the queue of cardinals who spill out from the Pope's left include men who served as bishops of Padua, Vicenza, and Brescia.⁴⁸ At the far right of the canvas, below the cardinals, Marchetti's predecessors as archpriests of Este are pictured beside a self-portrait of Zanchi in red.⁴⁹

The interrelationship of Venice with Este occurs in the celestial realm as well. The upper half of Zanchi's painting depicts Lorenzo Giustiniani kneeling before a large crucifix, held up by Saint Tecla, whose dress and placement make her an analogue for the Virgin, who is not pictured in the scene. This substitution of the Virgin for the civic embodiment of Este underscores the political overtones of this work. Saint Mark, accompanied by the lion, backs Giustiniani, and gazes also at Christ's form on the cross. He acts as a stand-in for Venice, and his inclusion in the composition, like that of Tecla, implies the alliance of city governments in support of this

⁴⁷ Cogo, 63.

⁴⁸ Beatrice Andreose and Felice Gambarin, *Antonio Zanchi, "Pittor Celeberrimo"*, (Vicenza: Terra Firma, 2009), 43; Alberto Riccoboni, "Antonio Zanchi e la pittura del seicento," *Saggi e memorie di storia dell'arte*, v.5 (1966), 93.

⁴⁹ Ibid. The most disseminated portrait of Zanchi was published posthumously in *Serie di ritratti degli eccellenti pittori*, volume II, "Scuola Veneziana, romana, e Napoletana. Lombada e Bolognese," a book from the series *Museum florentinum*, first published between 1752-66 by Antonio Francesco Gori, with the engraving made by Pier Antonio Pazzi.

religious event. God the Father hovers above the scene, hazy in the distance, and supporting the blue orb of the heavens — iconography that Tiepolo would incorporate into his replacement altarpiece 50 years later in acknowledgment of his work's predecessor. Though Zanchi's painting is not a plague painting in the strict sense, the disease is referenced obliquely through Giustiniani's spiritual importance during the 1630-31 epidemic, including his miraculous intervention that served as the basis for his canonization. This painting advances rhetoric that the political and spiritual ascendancy of local leaders and diplomats have been divinely ordained.

The period between the end of the seventeenth century and the beginning of the eighteenth marks the last flowering of the cult of Lorenzo Giustiniani. In a way, his attainment of sainthood acted as the final chapter capping off the story of his resurgence to popularity during the 1630-31 epidemic. By 1690, his cult and relevancy had taken on a distinctly political dimension. Interest in the holy man and his function as a representative and protector of Venice occurred in several waves during the early modern period. In the fifteenth century, profile portraits of Giustiniani (inspired by Gentile Bellini's iconic representation of the beato in 1465), proliferated, as discussed in Chapter 2 [Figure 6.14]. This represented the earliest stages of Giustiniani's cult, when the patriarch was beatified following his death in 1455. Though traditionally associated with healing, the holy man was not invoked during the major epidemic of 1575-77, for reasons that are unclear. However, it was Patriarch Giovanni Tiepolo's active promotion of Giustiniani's cult in the seventeenth century — part of his wider campaign for the recognition and codifying of a Venetian spirituality — that led the veneration of the beato to resurge in 1630. The processing of the saint's relics at the beginning of the epidemic, as well as his representation in State-sponsored works of art, solidified Giustiniani as a local Venetian plague healer in the later early modern period. In a way, Giustiniani's hagiography resulted from

a civic (one might even say, corporate) initiative to develop and promote a local spiritual figurehead for the plague crisis of 1630-31. In coordination with his canonization in 1690, Giustiniani's fifteenth-century biography was republished in Venice, and a large-scale painting for the lateral wall of the apse in San Pietro in Castello (Venice's cathedral) was commissioned from Antonio Bellucci [Figure 6.15].⁵⁰ This painting was part of a large decorative campaign honoring Giustiniani in the cathedral, undertaken in the later seventeenth century, which included the sculptural high altarpiece incorporating the saint's tomb, completed by Giusto le Court, the sculptor also responsible for the high altar in the Salute.⁵¹

Bellucci's painting *Doge Nicolò Contarini implores the Blessed Lorenzo Giustiniani to halt the plague of 1630*, completed in 1695, presents an almost panoramic view of Venice during the outbreak and incorporates a number of separate, dramatic vignettes characterizing the effects of the epidemic in the city.⁵² This work's retrospective take on the 1630-31 plague epidemic privileges Giustiniani's role in the outbreak, promoting his cult and attempting comprehensiveness in depicting his miracles. Variations in scale and a lack of connection

⁵⁰ Giustiniani's hagiography was written by the holy man's nephew, in response to his uncle's surge of popularity following his death. Bernardo Giustiniani, *Vita Beati Laurenti Iustiniani Venetiarum Patriarchae*, (Venice), 1475.

⁵¹ Extensive reconstruction was underway thirty years later in the Chiesa di San Rocco in Venice, which resulted in the near re-building of most of the church between 1722-36, following the direction of architect Giovanni Scalfarotto. The original 16th-century apse, including the tomb and body of Saint Roch, were exempt from significant alteration.

⁵² This painting has sometimes been erroneously identified as Giustiniani praying for the cessation of a plague in 1447, an error unfortunately perpetuated by incorrect signage in San Pietro. The supplicating doge has been firmly identified as Nicolò Contarini, who held this position during the plague years of 1630-31. The confusion results from conflating events during Giustiniani's life with his posthumous, miraculous intervention in 1631. For scholarship on this painting, see Silvio Tramontin, *S. Lorenzo Giustiniani nell'arte e nel culto della Serenissima*, (Venice: Studium cattolico veneziano, 1956), 30-1, 38-9; and *Venezia e la peste*, (Venice: Marsilio, 1979), 281-2. For more on Antonio Bellucci's career, see Antonio Maria Zanetti, *Della pittura veneziana...* (Venice: Giambattista Albrizzi, 1771), 412-14. Evidently Zanetti was uncertain of the subject matter of the painting for San Pietro in Castello, as he described it as "the Doge with many bystanders," (...col Doge in atto di orare, e con molti astanti," 413) with no mention of plague.; Rodolfo Pallucchini, *La pittura veneziana del Settecento*, (Rome: Istituto per la collaborazione culturale, 1961), 8, 10, 49; Carlo Donzelli and Giuseppe Maria Pilo, *I pittori del seicento Veneto*, (Florence: Edizioni Remo Sandron, 1967), 85-9; and F. Magani, "1692: Antonio Bellucci da Venezia a Vienna: note sull'escordio veneziano e la prima attività austriaca," *Arte veneta*, v.XLVII (1995), 20-31.

between the narrative episodes, however, make the painting's subject challenging to discern. A woman fleeing with a child, and a group of men holding the flags of the doge and the Republic near a fountain appear largest, while both Doge Contarini and Beato Giustiniani are difficult to locate in the composition. Giustiniani appears in the upper left corner, framed by the golden light of the areole in which he has materialized. Beneath him, Contarini kneels on the steps below the throne he has presumably just vacated in order to pray for sacred intercession. The doge's outstretched arms and amazed expression communicate his awe at the holy man's apparition. If not for his ermine cloak, Contarini would be lost among the gathered group on the steps. In designing his composition, Bellucci adopted a variation on the theatrical mode popular in the later seventeenth century, but his striving to combine comprehensiveness, extreme drama, and decorum resulted in a work that is almost illegible.⁵³

The painting is situated within the church on the right wall of the apse, and Bellucci designed his composition to be read from right to left, as viewers approach the high altar and Giustiniani's tomb. Plague victims are portrayed in the painting in the immediate foreground at the right side of the canvas, along with the personification of plague. However, these figures are submerged in shadow — presumably for propriety — and difficult to read [Figure 6.16]. Each is rendered somewhat idiosyncratically. Most prominent in this group is a plague corpse, brightly lit and inverted with its feet in the air, being hoisted by a man holding a cloth looped under the cadaver's hips. To the left, Plague appears, rendered emaciated and skeletal, and restrained by a woman with a flail raised in her hand — the weapon traditionally associated with plague-personified is being applied to the disease. This is an unusual depiction of plague, not only for the allegorical figure representing the disease shown caught and pinned to the ground (rather

⁵³ His work does resemble a stage set, though more in the expansive manner of Veronese's *Feast in the House of Levi* than Zanchi's episodic *The Virgin Appears to the Plague-Stricken*.

than fleeing), but because of the violence of Plague's expression, making the figure appear more like a victim of demonic possession.⁵⁴ The onlookers who peer over the side of the fountain next to the ducal flag bearers present calm expressions, which are disorienting for their contrasting impassivity. Between the feet of the inverted corpse, the face of a woman holding a plague victim's body is framed. This pair adheres most to standard representations of the plague-stricken and seekers of mercy. The living woman's eyes are turned imploringly toward the vision of Giustiniani in the sky, while the body in her arms is pale and waxy, with a darkening of the skin near the axillary. In the deep pictorial distance behind them, framed by an arch and an unexpectedly blue sky (not the typical miasmatic look), a group of men haul a coffin on their shoulders. They are participants in a funeral, not body clearers working under treacherous conditions. Their small procession resembles rites performed in typical times, and not the rushed, anonymous burials depicted in paintings representing the height of an epidemic. Bellucci's adoption of these deviations appears to stem from a desire to privilege Giustiniani's efficacy and Venice's triumph over the darkness of an outbreak. This painting indicates that by the late seventeenth century, some of the visual traditions associated with plague in the region had begun to atrophy or transform as the temporal distance with the disease increased. The precise semantic relevance of some imagery of pestilence became less urgent and more open to interpretation.

Bellucci's painting for San Pietro in Castello and Antonio Zanchi's rendition of the canonization of Giustiniani for the duomo in Este were conceived with similar conceptual frameworks. Though different in scale and orientation, both works endeavored to give equal

⁵⁴ A plague painting created by Poussin in 1657, now in the collection of the Louvre, also contains an embodiment of pestilence with a similar ghoulish appearance. In this work, a woman kneels in prayer to solicit the aid of a female Roman saint, Saint Frances (canonized in 1608). In the background, an emaciated, Medusa-like personification of plague departs the room on foot with the body of an infant slung over its shoulder.

weight to the spiritual and political influences of the newly canonized Giustiniani — alluding to the miracles associated with the holy man, while simultaneously asserting his important role from a civic standpoint. These attempts at comprehensiveness in function, developed through abundant, disparate compositional details, resulted in works with a disjointed appearance. Iconographic clarity is strained in both works, and even the subject matter of the Bellucci resists interpretation. The drama in each is defined by an artificiality that appears not to be the result of an aesthetic choice to stylize and cloak the narrative presentation, but rather an effect of the difficulty of combining discordant elements.

Rather than characterize these challenging compositions as demonstrating a stylistic breakdown or failure, it is better to consider them with respect to a greater functional uncertainty. Each work was commissioned for their city's respective cathedrals, to commemorate the recent canonization of a saint who was credited with helping to stop a plague epidemic that ended over sixty years in the past. At the outset, there was a dissonance driving these commissions, in the mandate to depict simultaneously Giustiniani's ascendancy in the present, as well as his acts in 1630-31 that resulted in his sainthood. Even the "past," as a narrative construct in these works demonstrating the spiritual healer's sacrality, has become over-determined — it is split twice, as Giustiniani's miraculous intervention during the 1630-31 plague occurred nearly two hundred years after the holy man's death. Temporally, Bellucci situated his painting in 1630-31, condensing a variety of episodes from the epidemic, which eventually culminated in Giustiniani's intercession and, ultimately, his canonization. Zanchi, in the altarpiece for Este, responded to his patron's desires with a different approach, focusing on the immediate moment of canonization in 1690 and imbuing his painting with a topicality that nearly undermined the painting's purpose of representing Giustiniani's spiritual capital as a saint and intercessor. The

work at once reads as a devotional object and something akin to a confraternity's group portrait. Both of these paintings were expected to distill an unmanageable collection of narrative moments and spiritual resonances into one emblematic vision of Giustiniani's importance. The resulting compositional shortcomings reflect the difficulty of this task.

Giambattista Tiepolo and the high altarpiece commission in Este

On his pastoral visit to Este in May 1748, in honor of the duomo's consecration, Cardinal Carlo Rezzonico from Padua deemed Antonio Zanchi's painting of the canonization of Giustiniani to be unsuitable to its spiritual function as an altarpiece. His order for its immediate removal was executed. Two sources from the period detail the event. Isidoro Alessi writes in his account: "He did not like the painting in this site. He stated that in order to be suitable at the high altar of the church, a painting should represent God or the holy person to whom the church is dedicated, and not the Abbot Marchetti as the principal figure."⁵⁵ A canon of the church, Angelo Bianchi records the removal of the Zanchi altarpiece in his chronicle: "May 30, 1748. Before this past vespers, with the consensus of the entire chapter and in the presence of the Archpriest Pietro Zannini and Canon Angelo Goldini, the painting facing our choir representing the presentation of the candle for the beatification of Saint Lorenzo Giustiniani was removed; this was to please His Eminence who could not tolerate the painting in this site, for such a work does not satisfy the needs of a high altarpiece."⁵⁶

⁵⁵ Biblioteca del Gabinetto di Lettura in Este, Isidoro Alessi, *Memorie della controversia tra*, c.2r. Cited in Cogo, 44, n.38. "Non piacque un tal quadro in quel sito. Diceva far esso la figura della Pala principale della Chiesa, che doveva rappresentare o il Signore o il Titolare del Tempio, e non l'Ab. Marchetti, figura principale, e in grazia di cui era fatto il quadro. Mostrò perciò il desiderio che fosse levato: e per rispetto di lui fu di là tolto, e attaccato alla destra parete della Cappella."

⁵⁶ ACDE, MB 15, Angelo Bianchi, *Memorie della Chiesa di Este 1743-1777*, 34-5. Cited in Cogo, 43-4, n.37. "Avanti il Vespro di questo di, col consenso di tutto il Capitolo, presenti l'Archiprete Pietro Zannini e il Canonico Angelo Goldini, fu levato il quadro di facciata del nostro Coro rappresentante la presentazione del Cereo per la Beatificazione di S. Lorenzo Giustiniani; e questo per compiacere S. Em.za che nol poteva tollerare in quel sito, per

After Zanchi's painting was returned to the presbytery, where it was hung originally in 1702 while the duomo was under construction, the newly consecrated church was in need of a high altarpiece that would be suitably grand for the space. No permanent work of art has been documented at the high altar from the removal of Zanchi's painting in May 1748, to the installation of Giambattista Tiepolo's work on December 24, 1758. It is unclear what was placed in the apse during the decade-long period without an altarpiece. While Cardinal Rezzonico influenced the content of the artistic program in the apse of Este's cathedral indirectly — the result of his elevated position within the church hierarchy — it was the *comune*'s responsibility to pay for the necessarily extravagant new altarpiece. Having just completed over fifty years of continuous construction to build the new duomo, Este's coffers were likely strained by the project, and this may explain the ten-year hiatus without an altarpiece.

The Consiglio, however, brought the issue to a vote on June 29, 1758, with the majority in favor of hiring an artist to paint an altarpiece "...representing an image of our protectress Saint Tecla to honor our church and our homeland, created by a painter of distinction..."⁵⁷ It is clear from the language of the Consiglio's discussion that the *comune* intended to secure an acclaimed artist whose work in the duomo would be an impressive addition to the town. While Tiepolo's

non essere pittura tale, che possa supplire alle veci d'una Sacra Pala." Upon its removal, Zanchi's work was first returned to the presbytery. In the 1853, it was removed from the duomo entirely and placed in the church of Santa Maria delle Consolazioni in Este. Finally, in 1904, it was returned to the duomo and hung on a wall at the entrance to the sacristy, outside of the main interior of the church, where it can still be found today. See Andreose and Gambarin, *Pittor celeberrimo*, 44; Cogo, 65.

⁵⁷ AMCE, Libro dei Consigli XVI, (1742-1759), 341v-342r. Cited in Cogo, 46, n.40. "...per essere il sitto della Pala principale della Chiesa, il quale è molto conveniente che rappresenti l'Immagine della nosra Protettrice S. Tecla e che per decoro della Chiesa e della Patria si format da qualche Pittore distinto..." There were evidently 32 votes in favor of commissioning a grand altarpiece, and 5 against. A transcription of this document can also be found in Pompeo Molmenti, *G.B. Tiepolo, la sua vita e le sue opere*, (Milan: U. Hoepli, 1909), 119, n.35. "Dai Magnifici Deputati ora in questo Magnifico Consiglio vien posta parte che sia data autorità al Magnifici Signori Deputati loro precessori e Sig. Soprastanti pro tempore all'altare di Santa Tecla di procurare la scielta di un valente pittore con l'opinione de' soggetti d'intendimento, col quale a detti Signori Deputati pro tempore e soprastanti abbiano ad accordare quel prezzo che sarà necessario per formare la detta Pala, la quale rappresenti la Gloriosa Santa Tecla in qualità di protettrice di Este ecc."

name was not mentioned in the documents from June 1758, the painter was in many ways an ideal choice. By 1758, Tiepolo was at the height of his career. The Venetian master had recently completed his famed frescos for the Residenz in Würzburg in 1753 and had returned to Venice where he was engaged in several important commissions, including frescos in the Villa Valmarana in Vicenza in 1757 and Ca' Rezzonico in Venice in 1758. In fact, Tiepolo and Cardinal Carlo Rezzonico — who was elected Pope Clement XIII in 1758, the same year the painter completed work in his Venetian palazzo — appear to have had a warm relationship; the man who originally set into motion the removal of the high altarpiece from Este's duomo ten years prior may have been involved in securing Tiepolo for the new commission.⁵⁸ Directly after finishing two ceiling paintings in Ca' Rezzonico, the painter was chosen for the Este project in the summer of 1758.⁵⁹

Este's high altarpiece was completed quickly, without delay. Tiepolo presented the Consiglio with a *modello* for the work sometime during the winter of 1758-59, and undertook work in earnest on the massive painting in the summer of 1759. The artist was simultaneously employed in Udine for work on a fresco, and it appears that the Este altarpiece was created there, with both projects running concurrently.⁶⁰ Records of the Consiglio's meeting on August 21, 1759 indicate that by the end of the summer, Tiepolo had made significant progress on the altarpiece and was ready to present it, in an incomplete but advanced state, for the *comune's*

⁵⁸ Keith Christensen, ed. *Giambattista Tiepolo: 1696-1770*, exhibition catalogue, (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1996), 116, n3; Michael Levey, *Giambattista Tiepolo: His Life and Art*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986), 221.

⁵⁹ Two men from the Consiglio, Pietro Bertoloni and Antonio Rota, were chosen as deputies overseeing the altarpiece commission in summer 1758. Cogo, 46.

⁶⁰ Cogo, 46-7.

review.⁶¹ The work was complete by mid-December 1759, and Tiepolo and his son Giandomenico, who appears to have been involved in work on the painting, arrived in Este a few days before Christmas to oversee its installation in the duomo.⁶² The painting's grand unveiling occurred during Mass on Christmas Eve, attended by the artist and his son, and met with the satisfaction of the Consiglio and Este's residents.⁶³

Giambattista Tiepolo's high altarpiece for Este is monumental. Measuring 6.75 x 3.9 meters, the painting is one of the largest completed by the artist on canvas, and its grand scale and tone harmonize with the architecture of the eighteenth-century duomo [Figures 6.17, 6.18].⁶⁴ Technically and conceptually, Tiepolo's painting differs substantially from the work by Zanchi that it replaced. Beyond differences in the artists' styles and in the subject matter of the two altarpieces, contrasts between the works can also be attributed to changes in what was considered desirable in plague paintings created in Venice and the Veneto during the intervening sixty years. Antonio Zanchi's painting of the canonization of Lorenzo Giustiniani addressed plague only indirectly; it demonstrated greater concern with Este's political positioning within the greater church hierarchy and its connections with Venetian bureaucracy. Zanchi's work was concerned with situating the current moment within a lineage, visualizing continuity with the past through

⁶¹ AMCE, Libro dei Consigli XVI (1742-1759), 367. "...in breve è per portarsi a Este il Pitor s. v. Tiepoletto con il quadrone per la Tribuna di detta chiesa da lui dipinto." Cited in Cogo, 47.

⁶² Cogo, 47. For information on the painting's cost, see Cogo, 47-8. Tiepolo was paid in two installments, the first on January 1 1760, and the final installment on January 10, 1760, for a total of around 1,953 ducats. Payment information was recorded in the *comune's* receipt books: AMCE, *Quaderno di Comunità A 91*, January 1, 1760 and January 10, 1760.

⁶³ Isidoro Alessi and Angelo Bianchi recorded the installation of Tiepolo's painting on Christmas Eve in their Estense chronicles. See, Biblioteca del Gabinetto di Lettura in Este (BGLE), Isidoro Alessi, *Memorie della controversia*, c.2r, and ACDE, MB 15, Angelo Bianchi, *Memorie della Chiesa di Este 1743-1777*, 60. Cited in Cogo 47, n.42 and n.43. Evidence of the campaign to commission Giandomenico Tiepolo to create a replacement painting for the 1630-31 ex-voto of Saint Tecla, introduced at the beginning of the chapter, is documented in BGLE, *Raccolta Estense* 1282, Isidoro Alessi, *Memorie della controversia*, 1-10. For more on the topic, see Cogo, 48, n.46; Sister, 30; Gallana, 101.

⁶⁴ Christensen, 317.

including recognizable portraits of contemporary people with holy figures from previous eras. It presented sacred intercession as merged and naturalized with the mundane world. These effects were achieved using compositional design strategies that were popular in late-seicento Venetian painting. In addition, interest in Giustiniani as an intercessor, which experienced a resurgence of popularity around his sainting, began to wane in the later eighteenth century. The holy man's cult ossified into a phenomenon associated almost exclusively with the 1630-31 plague epidemic and never achieved lasting influence. Veneration of Giustiniani was restricted to Venice, and not shared by cities in the Veneto, which is why Marchetti's commission for the Este cathedral never resonated with the congregation.

By contrast, Tiepolo presented Este with an altarpiece that glorified the city's spiritual identity, situating it within a traditional composition. With his *Saint Tecla Pleads God for the Liberation of Este from the Plague*, the painter has deliberately introduced retrospective archaizing features, adopting the imagery and style of plague paintings from the previous two centuries and avoiding elements with a specifically settecento topicality. In creating a work that is largely a pastiche of earlier iconography, set within a cinquecento-style composition, Tiepolo produced a plague memorial that was likely to remain relevant and functional as a spiritual tool for the *longue durée*. Because Tiepolo's work was not produced during an epidemic of plague, the altarpiece for Este's cathedral had to satisfy a set of conditions different from those spurred by the immediacy of an outbreak. A vow, a plea, or a representation of the present moment were not part of the commission. What the Consiglio desired was a generalized and aesthetic rendering of the 1630-31 plague epidemic that characterized the town according to this historical event. In response to his patrons' wishes, Tiepolo designed the altarpiece with a traditional format not to obscure its eighteenth-century origins, but to unanchor the work from the present.

The painter endeavored to create a sense of timelessness and to establish the seicento crisis as an important historical moment that nevertheless continued to shape the religious experience of those living in Este.

Tiepolo's responsiveness to the precedents established by earlier plague paintings is remarkable. A number of figures in this work, as well as the compositional design, can be linked to analogues found in older plague paintings. These include references to Marcantonio Raimondi (*Il morbetto*, c.1515) and Poussin (*Plague at Ashdod*, 1630) with the deceased mother and living infant; Antonio Giarola's painting for San Fermo in Verona, *Verona Supplicates to the Trinity*, discussed in Chapter 4, which seems to have served as the organizational model for Tiepolo's composition; and, of course, Antonio Zanchi altarpiece for Este's duomo, which is cited by Tiepolo through the figure of God [Figures 6.19, 6.20, 6.7, 6.12]. It is evident that Tiepolo was familiar with these works, and in most cases, through direct access to the paintings.⁶⁵ On a canvas in which the number of figures has been reduced to only those essential to convey the narrative, the inclusion of so many referents becomes all the more impressive. The abundant cast of actors who populated the late seicento works by Zanchi, Negri, and Bellucci are absent. Tiepolo has privileged economy over abundance. The result is a work that is legible and effective for its functions as a high altarpiece.

In designing the altarpiece for Este's cathedral, Giambattista Tiepolo began first by creating a *modello*, *Saint Tecla Praying for the Plague-Stricken*, a highly finished sketch in oil, now in the collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York [Figure 6.21].⁶⁶ The

⁶⁵ Poussin's *Plague at Ashdod* was likely the only painting of the group that Tiepolo knew through a print. Giarola's votive work in Verona and, of course, Zanchi's works in Este and those in Venice were easily accessible to Tiepolo.

⁶⁶ Important bibliography on this painting includes Pompeo Molmenti, *G.B. Tiepolo: la sua vita e le sue opere*, (Milan: U. Hoepli, 1909), 260; *Venezia e la peste*, 282-3; William L. Barcham, *The Religious Paintings of Giambattista Tiepolo Piety and Tradition in Eighteenth-Century Venice*, (Oxford: Clarendon, 1989), 228; Massimo Gemin and Filippo Pedrocchi, *Giambattista Tiepolo: i dipinti, opera completa*, (Venice: Arsenale, 1993), 467, 486a;

completed altarpiece varies little from the sketch with respect to the overall composition, though there are differences in details that affect the tone of this painting, as will be discussed shortly. In both works, Saint Tecla kneels at the bottom left corner of the canvas, appealing to a vision of God aloft in a bank of clouds in the upper right corner. Plague-stricken residents of Este appear on the pavement around the saint, while the personification of plague flees the scene, flying off the left-hand edge; the city appears in the background. The *modello* appears not to have been given to the city council members in Este, but kept by the Tiepolo workshop and later sold to a buyer in Spain.⁶⁷

In keeping with conventions for visualizing sacred intercession, Tiepolo maintained the division of his canvas into two distinct zones: tragedy taking place at a specific site in the mundane world (Este), and intercession manifesting in the celestial realm above. Like the *ex-voto* commissioned in Este during the plague epidemic in 1630, the interchange between supplicant and intercessor remains a dialogue between Saint Tecla and God the Father alone, consistent also between Tiepolo's *modello* and final work. The allegory of Plague appears in the sky like a satellite between the sacred figures, hovering ignobly over Tecla, with arms and legs

and Keith Christensen, ed. *Giambattista Tiepolo, 1696-1770*, (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1996), 33, 317-19, no. 51.

⁶⁷ Provenance traced by the Met shows that the work was first recorded in the collection of the Spanish painter Francisco Bayeu, until his death in 1795, and the sketch's subsequent sale to Leonardo Chopinot in the same year. Bayeu lived in Madrid, and it has been assumed that Tiepolo brought this sketch and others with him expressly to sell when he transferred to the city in 1761, commissioned by Charles III to produce a ceiling fresco for the royal palace. Tiepolo's sketch was recorded in Bayeu's will, which was published in 1952; see Marques del Saltillo, *Miscelanea Madrileña, Historica y Artistica*, v.1, (Madrid: Maestre, 1952), 76. *Modelli* were desired works of art particularly in eighteenth-century Venice, but also elsewhere in Western Europe. They were sometimes credited with better revealing artists' styles and "natural" sensibilities than finished works. For more on this subject with regard to Tiepolo (whose workshop produced many high-quality oil sketches that were gifted or later resold), see Jaynie Anderson, *Tiepolo's Cleopatra*, in which the author cites correspondence between the Venetian painter Sebastiano Ricci and his patron, Count Giacomo Tassis from 1731, in which the artist's *modello* is attributed with the greater unfiltered artistic value, with the finalized canvas being merely a copy of the initial conceit first laid out in the sketch. (Melbourne: Macmillan, 2003, 94). This famous letter from Ricci has been reproduced since the early nineteenth century. See, Giovanni Gaetano Bottari, *Raccolta di lettere sulla pittura, scultura, et architettura*, ed. Stefano Ticozzi, (Milan: G. Silvestri, 1822), v.4, 90-97. "Perchè questo non è monello solo, ma è quadro terminato, e le giuro che io farei un quadro grande d'altare simile a quello che io ho fatto, piuttosto che far questo piccolo, che ella chiama col nome di modello. Sappia di più che questo piccolo è l'originale, e la tavola da altare è la copia."

extended in hurried retreat. The general parsing of space is also largely the same between the two conceptual phases of the commission. The setting is constructed with a thin strip of open water in the foreground, a paved area where Tecla and the residents of Este appear in the middle ground, and a topographical depiction of the town in the deeper space.

Despite having a layout and composition that appear to have been determined in the earliest stages of the commission, Tiepolo made a number of iconographic changes between the preparatory work and finished altarpiece that impact the work. Tecla, for example, who stares at the apparition of God in the *modello* with her mouth agape in awe and her hands raised to chest level in prayer, appears more restrained and composed in the final work. In the altarpiece her hands have been dropped to her knees, though still pressed together in prayer, and her expression is pious and resolute. Tiepolo has changed her yellow cloak to crimson, which, while somewhat of a discontinuity with the overall light palette, draws viewers' eyes to the saint and reinforces her importance.

The depiction of God is consistent between *modello* and finished work, though the cluster of angels surrounding him has been modified in several areas [Figures 6.22, 6.23]. The masculine-appearing angel to his left, at the right edge of the canvas, has been shifted from a profile position to an oblique angle, with the figure looking down to earth. This angel's large scale, proximity to God, and role in shouldering the celestial orb indicate his importance. The initial pose in the *modello* — in profile and framed by the white backdrop of his wing — may have made him too prominent, detracting from God's singular grandeur. God the Father's *gravitas* was also interrupted in the *modello* by a bizarre set of legs dangling out of the cloudbank directly beneath him. This amusing pictorial aside, while ultimately abandoned in the finished work, is, in fact, a recurrent feature in the artist's paintings.

Tiepolo's work was known during the artist's lifetime for its beauty, defined by grace and a lively but cultivated tone that became his trademark.⁶⁸ Antonio Maria Zanetti praised the painter in his 1771 *Della pittura veneziana*, describing his style as "happily picturesque" ("*pittoresca*" referencing Boschini's use of the term in the seventeenth century to describe a style of seicento Venetian painting, which Zanetti was to largely dismiss), and noted that in his emulation of Veronese's style, the expressions of Tiepolo's figures lacked nothing of the grace (*grazia*) and beauty (*bellezza*) of the earlier master's work.⁶⁹ While commending in particular the painter's technique in fresco, Zanetti attributes to Tiepolo's work in all media "*una vaghezza*," which connotes something different from the simply beautiful, suggesting an allure worthy of admiration and desire, with the potential for an underlying deviant quality.⁷⁰ In his study of critical terms used in early modern Italy to describe style, Philip Sohm likens the term *vaghezza* to Aristotle's conception of women as mutable, changeable, and outside of the masculine boundaries of logic and order.⁷¹ *Vaghezza* has a "wandering" quality. This suggests not that Zanetti saw something inconstant in Tiepolo's style, but that the Venetian painter surpassed normative grounds for the simply well conceived and well executed to create works that were

⁶⁸ For period reception of Tiepolo's work, see Francesco Algarotti, *Opere del Conte Algarotti*, vi, (Livorno: M. Coltellini, 1765), 29-30; and Vincenzo Da Canal, *Vita di Gregorio Lazzarini*, (Venice: Palese, 1809), xxxi-xxxv.

⁶⁹ Antonio Maria Zanetti, *Delle pittura veneziana e delle opera pubbliche de' veneziani maestri, Libri V*, (Venice: Giambattista Albrizzi, 1771), 464-5. "Bell'esempio della pittoresca felicità, della sicurezza del pennello e della pronta esecuzione fu il nostro Tiepolo, che trovò sempre ubbidiente la mano ad esprimere sulle tele quanto concepia l'intelletto... Non vi fu Pittore fra' nostri che più di lui risvegliasse le sopite felici leggiadrissime idee di Paolo Caliari... Le forme dell teste non sono d' inferior grazia e bellezza..."

⁷⁰ Zanetti, 465. "Le opere forse più belle che abbiamo in Venezia di questo Maestro sono le pitture a fresco. In quel modo di dipingere, che ricerca appunto prontezza e facilità, andò inanzi il Tiepolo a qualunque altro Pittore; e introdusse con arte maravigliosa nelle opere sue una vaghezza un sole che non ha forse esempio." For seventeenth- and eighteenth-century usage of the word "vaghezza," see the 1612 edition of the dictionary, *Vocabolario degli accademici della Crusca*, (Venice: 1612), 915, and for an Italian-English dictionary entry, see *Queen Anna's New World of Words, or Dictionary of the Italian and English tongues, collected and newly much augmented by Iohn Florio: necessary rules and short observations for the true pronouncing and speedie learning of the Italian tongue*, (London: Melch. Bradwood, for Edw. Blount and William Baret, 1611), 586. For more on *vaghezza* and other terms used in early modern Italy to describe style, see Philip Sohm, *Style in the Art Theory of Early Modern Italy*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 110-12 and 185-200.

⁷¹ Sohm, *Style*, 110-11.

superior and transcendent. Both *grazia* and *vaghezza* imply ineffable qualities that exceed rationality and proportion. *Vaghezza* in particular resists definition — it operates within the realm of the *non so che*, suggesting even disorientation or seduction.⁷²

The allure and indefinable charm of Tiepolo's *vaghezza* is supported not only by the artist's technique (his "hand" or *maniera*) and his compositional arrangements, but also by the variety of small disruptions to the main narrative the artist added to his works. These include oddly cropped figures and the proliferation of subtle asides at the margins — animals evaluating the scene with contemplative and all-too-human expressions, encounters between tertiary figures, and objects jutting into the composition, almost of their own volition [Figures 6.24-6.28]. The disembodied legs beneath God in the Este altarpiece are a conspicuous example of one of these playful digressions. While Tiepolo's marginalia typically produced only small interruptions that did not undermine the overall conceit, but rather, enhanced it, these intruding legs were evidently too disruptive, too unconventional, and were left out of the final work entirely. One wonders if Tiepolo's inclusion of this humorous element in the *modello* was facetious; the legs not only slip out of the clouds directly below God, but also line up with Tecla's face, creating a right angle between the two sacred figures. The legs also appear as though they are dropping down toward the trio of the deceased woman, the living child, and the man shielding his nose at the canvas's right edge — calling attention to Tiepolo's citation from Raphael/Raimondi's celebrated plague print.

Tiepolo's style — characterized by monumental historical narratives with intimate details — in many ways represents a tension in the evolution of painting practices and patrons' interests during this period. In Francis Haskell's study on art production in seicento and settecento Italy,

⁷² Sohm, *Style*, 193-200. Filippo Baldinucci attempted to define *vaghezza* in *Vocabolario Toscano dell'arte del disegno* of 1681, though Sohm finds his definition "oddly restrictive" when so many of his contemporaries expanded on the term's broader, more evocative, and even contradictory capacities. (195)

the art historian characterizes Venice in the mid-eighteenth century as politically conservative, with art patronage driven by the patrons' desire to assert the stability of their social rankings and to maintain the status quo.⁷³ For all of his *vaghezza*, Giambattista Tiepolo was linked with the past traditions of Venetian painting and not attributed with a progressive style. Venetian art collector Francesco Algarotti, who was a patron of Tiepolo early in his career, described the artist as a history painter in the 1740s, as well as a "*pittore di macchia e spiritoso*."⁷⁴ More than embodying the style and vibrant palette of Veronese, Tiepolo kept alive the tradition of large-scale historical painting in Venice, which aligned with the contemporary interests of many of his patrons who used the commission of expensive works of art as a means of insisting on their continued relevancy in the face of a Republic that was evolving socially and politically, and which seemed to have lost its footing as a major economic player in the juncture of Western Europe, the Near East, and the greater Mediterranean.⁷⁵ Tiepolo's grand manner and ebullient touches resulted in works sought after equally by patrons of the established patrician families in Venice and those from the Veneto who had been newly admitted to the city's noble rank in the period from 1646-1718, during which 128 *terraferma* families secured patrician status.⁷⁶ For each of these groups with differing yet related motivations for commissioning large-scale works of art, Tiepolo provided visual evidence that the Myth of Venice was still alive and prospering in the eighteenth century, embodied in paintings that could effectively sell the fiction of continuity.

For the Consiglio in Este, a new altarpiece celebrating the town's triumph over plague more than a century in the past provided just such a statement, offering visual evidence of their

⁷³ Francis Haskell, *Patrons and Painters: A Study in the Relations between Italian Art and Society in the Age of the Baroque*, 2nd edition (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980), 318.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 351-3.

⁷⁵ Haskell, 257.

⁷⁶ Michael Knapton, 'The Terraferma State,' 117.

spiritual capital and deep history, and projecting a continuation of prosperity in the future.

Tiepolo was an ideal artist to create this memorial on the grounds of his reputation as a narrative painter in the grand Venetian tradition, and because the subject, an historical outbreak of plague, resonated with the conceit of a past and present securely tied. The rich iconographic tradition of depicting plague that had developed by the eighteenth century provided an opportunity to honor Saint Tecla at the high altar of Este's new cathedral and to depict the town's special relationship with its protector. In citing a variety of works depicting plague in the region over the previous two centuries, Tiepolo's *Saint Tecla Pleads God for the Liberation of Este from the Plague* provides a visual connection between Venice and its regional cities on the mainland through the experience of pestilence and the shared cultural responses to the 1630-31 outbreak.

In visualizing plague in seicento Este, Tiepolo adapted his altarpiece design to most effectively pair the genre's traditional tropes with updated motifs to satisfy his patrons. The middle ground of both the *modello* and the final altarpiece makes the strongest connections to past plague art and also exhibits the greatest number of changes between the two conceptual phases of the commission [Figures 6.29, 6.30]. In the *modello*, besides Tecla and the Raimondi citation of man-woman-child, this section of the painting contains only a cloaked woman behind the intercessing saint, bent over and holding a cloth to her face against the miasmatic air. In the foreground, a plague corpse appears, emerging over the side of a stretcher abandoned in the fetid stream that runs along the bottom edge of the painting. The corpse's head and a shoulder are the only visible parts of its body. Its face is half-shrouded, the covering cloth having slipped away to reveal a stiffened jawline. Tiepolo's initial conception for this portion of his painting is succinct.

The reference to the collaboration of Raphael and Raimondi on *Il morbetto* — as well as the many other paintings that cited this print after 1515 — illustrates efficiently the tragedy on an intimate, personal level, while also connecting the painting to the long tradition of plague art that preceded this eighteenth-century work. Above the foreground corpse in the stretcher, the body of the deceased mother and her still living child appear. The dead woman's sallow skin is set off by the brilliant blue cloth of her dress spilling out beneath her head and shoulders. While the child in this pairing is older in the finished work, the pathos of the corpse's arm still encircling her living child has been preserved. In the *modello*, the man's hand reaches out to grasp the child's arm, attempting to pull her away to safety while covering his own nose with his free hand. His skin appears darker than that of the woman and child. It is unclear whether this detail was intended to racialize the figure, or if it merely reflects his position deeper in the pictorial space, shadowed by the heavenly apparition above him. Whether this man should be understood as the child's father, or if he is an unrelated resident of the town is also uncertain. However, his action — stepping toward the danger of the infectious body and contaminated materials to rescue the child — makes him a sympathetic figure. Tiepolo omitted him from the finished altarpiece, and in his place appear the wheel and back end of a cart, covered by a red cloth. The dead woman's right arm extends out toward this cart, connecting her to it visually and suggesting this object may belong to the *pizzigamorti* whose collection of her body is imminent. A gourd-shaped water jug appears near the woman's head in both the preparatory sketch and finished work, alluding to the widespread nature of contamination during outbreaks of plague.

In some ways, the *modello* presents a more pointed, acute rendering of plague-stricken Este than the completed altarpiece. Having fewer figures confers greater importance on the tragic family-like grouping. Tecla's look of shock at God's arrival suggests that even she was

uncertain that a celestial respondent would save the town. The hunched woman behind her, hiding her face in a cloth, makes plague's effect in Este universal — every mortal figure in this painting is either dead or in immediate danger. The corpse, polluting the greenish water in which it rests in the foreground, represents viewers' guide into the painting. The white cloth covering the face continually draws the eye back down to it. Had this corpse been included in the final version of the altarpiece, it would have been much greater than life-size and appeared directly over the high altar.

Tiepolo's modified composition in the finished altarpiece softens the bluntness of the preparatory work by adding more mediating figures in the middle ground and omitting the more disturbing aspects of the scene. In a sense, the *modello*'s more graphic rendition aligns it with the tenor of plague imagery in the seventeenth century, which tended to confront and challenge viewers, as seen in Antonio Zanchi's magisterial *The Virgin Appears to the Plague-Stricken* in the Scuola Grande di San Rocco. The more moderate finished altarpiece for Este's cathedral must reflect, instead, the Consiglio's preference for an aestheticized vision of plague. The foreground corpse has been removed. The stretcher, which appears more substantial, with solid sides like a cart, lies empty, with the skull-and-crossbones motif peeping above the water surrounding it. As previously noted, the family-like trio has been reduced to the pairing of mother and child, which, while still effective as a trope that situates Tiepolo's work within a lineage of plague paintings, changes how this element is read. While the vignette becomes less effective as a reference to extended family structures, the pathos is intensified as the death of the mother now leaves the child bereft and alone. None of the other figures added by Tiepolo interact with her. In fact, these additional figures do not appear to be active participants in the scene, but behave more like spectators. This effect is the subtle result of their placement. In the

modello, all of the figures other than God and his retinue of angels appeared on the pavement with Saint Tecla, equally implicated in the danger. In the finished work, however, only Tecla, the dead mother, and her daughter are situated on the flagstones. The bearded man behind Tecla who replaced the hunching woman, and the four men beside the saint at her left have been placed behind the paved area. While their gestures convey shock, desolation and anxiety, these figures, positioned at the edge of the pavement at waist level and standing in an indeterminate space, are somewhat detached. This is not to suggest that they are entirely divorced from the dangers presented by the surrounding plague scenes, but that the threat to them is at a relative remove. The man closest to Tecla leans his elbows on the flagstone “stage,” his face hidden behind the hand covering it in a gesture of grief. Beside him, a man in orange has placed both of his hands atop his head and stares at the mother and child in front of him, his brow furrowed and mouth open in a look of shocked confusion. These two men are partially in shadow, as Saint Tecla’s form blocks the light from reaching them. Behind them, lit by the glow produced by God’s apparition, the second set of men stare in a different direction, laterally across the pictorial plane. Their heads are tipped toward one another, as though they are in intimate discussion. The bald man with the white beard looks thoughtfully in the direction indicated by the younger man, who pinches his nose closed. The pointing man’s outstretched finger aligns to “touch” a burial scene in the deeper space behind him, though the angle of his head and pose indicate he is gesturing at something else occurring off-canvas. In the space created by the upraised arm of the shocked man in the frontal pair and the yellow garment of the bald man in the posterior pair, the bare foot of the dead woman on the flagstones has been framed, her toes silhouetted by the light, producing an arresting detail not found in the *modello*.

The adjustments Tiepolo made to the iconography of his altarpiece for the Este cathedral demonstrate that decorum and its relation to the spiritual function of visual art was still a crucial concern in the production of plague paintings during the eighteenth century. The prominence given to plague corpses remained negotiable in determining the most effective way to make a work unambiguously about plague that would resonate with viewers through pathos and naturalism, without diverting its purpose in visualizing holy intercession and promoting conventional expressions of piety. In finding the correct balance in his composition, Tiepolo adopted a solution popular in seventeenth-century Venice in portraying plague victims' bodies as classically beautiful in form and pose, while including the *pizzigamorti* at work at a safe, remote distance from viewers. In the background of *Saint Tecla Pleads God for the Liberation of Este*, behind the quartet of gesturing men and set against the backdrop of the cityscape, two *pizzigamorti* heft a shrouded body, presumably for burial, while mourners accompany them outside the city limits [Figure 6.31]. These figures appear in two clusters. Closest to the town, three figures stand, wearing what appear to be antique toga-like garments. They have stopped, not venturing farther from Este with the body clearers. One raises a hand in a gesture of recognition or farewell. Their anachronistic dress raises the issue of costuming and fantasy, a defining conceit of Tiepolo's work even during the artist's lifetime, and an occasional point of contemporary criticism.⁷⁷ In this circumstance, the classical garments worn by these figures refer to two works quoted extensively by Tiepolo: Raphael/Raimondi's *Il morbetto* and Poussin's *Plague of Ashdod*, as previously mentioned. Both of these works illustrate plague outbreaks in antiquity and served as inspiration for the Venetian painter. Tiepolo's adroit incorporation of

⁷⁷ For scholarship on Tiepolo and costuming, his emulation of Veronese, and theatrical influences, see William Barcham, "Costume in the Frescoes of Tiepolo and Eighteenth-Century Italian Opera," in *Opera and Viviani*, ed. Michael Collins and Elise Kirk (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1984), 149-69; Roberto Guerrini, *Ut pictura poësis: Il Tiepolo e la stanza del Tasso a Villa Valmarana*, (Bologna: Nuova Alfa Editoriale), 1985; and Keith Christiansen, "Tiepolo, Theater, and the Notion of Theatricality," *Art Bulletin*, v.81, n.4 (December 1999), 665-692.

multiple elements from these early modern precedents is one method the painter used to historicize his altarpiece for Este. By interjecting classical figures into the scene, Tiepolo also links the plague outbreak in Este that occurred 128 years prior with epidemics of the much deeper past. The lineage visualized by the painter exceeds artistic dialogue and spiritual practices maintained during the early modern period, and proposes broader connections with respect to a community's response to plague outbreaks, shared from the classical period to the eighteenth century.

The closer group of figures in the distance comprises the plague corpse leaving Este for burial, the two *pizzigamorti*, and the two mourners. These mourners are also cloaked in ambiguous garments that cover their bodies and allow them to resist placement in time. The body clearers, however, are attired and presented in a way that situates them firmly within the Veneto region in 1630-31. The *pizzigamorto* holding the upper part of the body is nude, except for a white cloth tied around his loins — a costuming choice adopted and popularized by Zanchi in his stairway painting for the Scuola Grande di San Rocco in 1666. The second *pizzigamorto* is dressed in a red shirt and cap. Though textual sources have not been found that tie red hats with seicento body clearers in this region, the proliferation of this accessory in works of art depicting the plague of 1630-31 provides evidence of the connection. From Zanchi's Scuola di San Rocco painting, to Domenico Tintoretto's work for San Francesco della Vigna, to the ex-voto created in Este during the outbreak, paintings imaging body clearers in 1630-31 almost invariably include red caps of a similar design to indicate these men's occupation. To avoid placing too great an emphasis on these disturbing figures, the *pizzigamorti* were placed in the background, their disruptive capacity mitigated by the prominence of holy intercessors at the front of the pictorial

plane, separating viewers from the more visually “dangerous” imagery.⁷⁸ Though Tiepolo incorporated this strategy in his altarpiece for the Este cathedral, he did not include *pizzigamorti* in the *modello*. It is interesting to consider whether the painter himself chose to add body clearers in his final work, or whether a request was made by the Consiglio, who were interested in seeing a reprise of iconography from their votive offering of 1630-31.

The high altarpiece commission for Este’s duomo represents the deliberate efforts of the town’s governing body to use the 1630-31 plague epidemic as an emblem that would characterize a local history and identity for residents. Through creating an altarpiece that visualized the town’s relationship to its patron Tecla and its deliverance from the previous century’s outbreak, a clear focal point for civic and collective piety was established. In contrast with Antonio Zanchi’s earlier high altar image, Giambattista Tiepolo’s painting formalized a master narrative for the 1630-31 plague, using details specific to Este (the prominence of Tecla, the meticulous rendering of the town’s architecture), and stabilizing them within an established plague iconography.

The 1630-31 plague and collective memory in the eighteenth century

The Este altarpiece commission demonstrates how plague could be emblemized in the eighteenth century and used to self-mythologize and formulate shared local histories in Venice and the Veneto. The 1630-31 plague epidemic, in being the last to strike the region, in representing a terrible loss of lives, and in having been experienced collectively by Venice and its mainland cities, developed in public consciousness along the lines of the traditional “Myth of

⁷⁸ Antonio Zanchi’s painting for the Scuola Grande di San Rocco, *The Virgin Appears to the Plague-Stricken*, is a notable exception to this practice. The work, with its emphasis on creating an immersive experience for viewers and using the architecture of the stairwell to drive this conceit, subverted conventions for pushing *pizzigamorti* to the periphery. Zanchi chose to emphasize the body clearers, capitalizing on their fear-inducing capacity to define the emotive function of his work.

Venice” — a shared tragedy, the overcoming of which demonstrated the superior qualities and inherent virtues of those afflicted. This was a self-defining episode that was all the more powerful because it was not restricted to Venice, but linked all cities in the region. Giambattista Tiepolo’s adaption of the imagery and design of plague paintings from the previous two centuries evidences the growing conception of a break with the past, represented by the self-conscious valorizing of “traditional” Venetian painting. This phenomenon of looking back to the past grandeur of art production in cinquecento Venice extends beyond eighteenth-century plague commemorations — it was a widespread preoccupation that defined period criticism and patronage. The commission of monumental painting campaigns (including works in fresco, which were popular on the mainland) contributed to the impression that Venice and its subject cities were part of an unbroken lineage. The so-called “Myth of Venice,” which James Grubb has aptly described as a “many-layered confection” developed and elaborated upon by Venetians since their city’s foundation to tout Venice’s rarefied and privileged status, was still a powerful theme tapped by patrons to assert stability and the divinely sanctioned distribution of wealth and social dominance.⁷⁹

Maurice Halbwachs established the modern study of the relationship between memory and group identity in the early twentieth century when he asserted in *On Collective Memory*, “the past is not preserved but is reconstructed on the basis of the present.”⁸⁰ Halbwachs stated that memory — in its capacity to define an identity for ourselves and situate it within a sense of the past — depended upon external social frameworks to give it meaning and stabilize it. Collective

⁷⁹ James S. Grubb, “When Myths Lose Power: Four Decades of Venetian Historiography,” *The Journal of Modern History*, v.58, n.1 (March 1986), 43, 66-70; Massimo Favilla, Ruggero Rugolo, Dulcia Meijers, “Venetian Art, 1600-1797,” in *A Companion to Venetian History, 1400-1797*, ed. Eric Dursteler, (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 831-3; Haskell, *Patrons and Painters*, 257.

⁸⁰ Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, 40.

memory, he theorized, was the product of multiple, individual interpretations of past events that exist in a sort of tension, where what emerges as the dominant or defining memory for a social group is not an aggregate, but a self-selected reconstruction of one image to represent the past. The prevailing framework that establishes the group memory will be the one that reaffirms and naturalizes the current mores and beliefs of a society.⁸¹ In writing about collective memory as an image, Halbwachs was not speaking about visual art necessarily, but about the visual dimension of recollection, ordered through a succession of images. However, works of art and visual culture — from historical paintings to monuments commemorating a person or an event — are vital tools in the process creating and perpetuating histories and identities. This phenomenon is evident in the many retrospectives on the 1630-31 plague outbreak that appeared in Venice and its regional cities in the years after the crisis.

French historians Pierre Nora and François Hartog have taken up Halbwachs' inquiry into the ways social groups define themselves through the cultivation of collective memories and the construction of monuments, theoretically and through the creation of written histories and memorials. In his most recent book, Hartog advances a concept of historicity, which he defines as more than simply "...how individuals or groups situate themselves and develop in time...the forms taken by their historical condition."⁸² Historicity for Hartog involves recognizing oneself as part of a present historical moment, distinct from the past, by becoming aware of a distance or "estrangement."⁸³ Hartog places the advent of modern history — as defined by a self-conscious awareness of this estrangement — at the end of the eighteenth century, though he argues that the recognition of difference and discontinuity with past epochs can be traced through antiquity to

⁸¹ Halbwachs, 39-40.

⁸² François Hartog, *Regimes of Historicity: Presentism and Experiences of Time*, trans. Saskia Brown (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015), xv.

⁸³ Hartog, xv-xvi.

the present, noting that engagement with this concept was a particular point of reference for the Renaissance.⁸⁴ Writing histories that assert the continuity of the present with an historical past necessarily represent a paradox, and it is in what Hartog refers to as “crises of time” (moments of significant social and cultural change) that self-definition along these lines becomes all the more critical. Most interesting for the study of plague memorials in settecento Venice and the Veneto is Hartog’s work on the concept of heritage, which he links with patrimony.⁸⁵ For Hartog, “...what defines heritage fundamentally is that it is something *transmitted*. The natural environment was qualified as ‘heritage’ as soon as people realized that its deterioration, whether accidental or ordinary (pollution), temporary or irreversible, endangered its transmission. ...[Heritage encompasses] some awareness, more often than not uneasy, that something (an object, a monument, a site, or a landscape) had disappeared or was about to disappear.”⁸⁶

While developing notions of cultural patrimony and heritage status for monuments in order to preserve or conserve them sounds distinctly modern, in fact, such initiatives defined attitudes to local history in late-eighteenth-century Venice. I have argued against the often-rehearsed narratives of decline and decay used to define the Republic at this time, which tend to oversimplify the complexity of multiple economies and political alliances linking the city and its varied connections in Italy and throughout the Mediterranean. However, Venetians did recognize that their city’s stability had deteriorated, with no clear solutions for reversing problems caused by an unmanageably large body of bureaucracies, a weakened military, and dwindling financial resources.⁸⁷ What arose in this socially destabilized environment was an

⁸⁴ Ibid., xv-xvii, 155-62.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 151.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 151-2.

⁸⁷ Viggiano, “Politics and Constitution,” 78-81.

interest in documenting and preserving stories of Venice's historical reputation, some of which were generated by the State. Alfredo Viggiano, in his recent work on the Venetian constitution before the fall of the Republic, characterized mid-settecento Venice as existing in state of "irreparable fracture between the mythic representations, encomiastic and celebratory literature, and use of the historical memory of the Venetian past, on one hand, and the daily life, practices and culture of the institutions on the other..."⁸⁸ As evidence of a self-conscious desire to preserve civic identity and reputation, Viggiano points to the publication of several histories and genealogies written during the 1750-60s on topics that include a compilation of important Venetian literature (like Paolo Sarpi's letters), a history of the city's churches, and a nine-volume study by Vettor Sandi, *I Principi di storia civile della Repubblica di Venezia*, published between 1755-72, that traced the origins and development of Venice's magistracies.⁸⁹ Preeminent among these preservationist works is the State-sponsored project instituted by the Council of Ten in 1781 for Francesco Donà to write an official, full history of the Republic of Venice. The language of the commission states that Donà's work, which was to be undertaken using archived state documents, would be capable of "...preserving the honor of our venerable historical memory, from which both the living and posterity shall gain useful and necessary teachings."⁹⁰ In its preoccupation with codifying and transmitting the histories of waning institutions in the city, eighteenth-century Venice embodied Hartog's concept of heritage.

Commemorations of the city's triumph over the 1630-31 plague became another vehicle for the transmission of stories that attested to the past eminence of the city and the region at

⁸⁸ Ibid., 82.

⁸⁹ Ibid. Marco Foscarini, *Delle Letterature veneziana*, (Padua: Manfre, 1752); Flaminio Correr, *Ecclesiae Venetae*, (Venice: Baptiste Pasquale, 1749); Vettor Sandi, *I Principi di storia civile della Repubblica di Venezia*, Volume 1 (Venice: Sebastian Coleti, 1756).

⁹⁰ Viggiano, 83. Cited in Amelia Vianello, *Gli archivi del Consiglio dei dieci: memoria e istanze di riforma nel second Settecento veneziano*, (Padua: Il Poligrafo, 2009), 131.

large, and projected a continuation of prestige in the future. The overcoming of this crisis was attributed to the profound spirituality of Venetians, the protection of specific holy figures, and the capacity of social bonds to unite residents through hardships. Works of art created during the epidemic and in its immediate wake used imagery that located patrons and devotees within social institutions like churches and confraternities, and which often visualized triumph over the disease as part of the collective efforts of the social body. In this way, plague paintings were equipped with a set of conventions for commemoration that could be easily adapted to differently inflected memorializations in Venice and the Veneto, post-plague. Later memorials, like Giambattista Tiepolo's *Saint Tecla Pleads God for the Liberation of Este from the Plague*, used past iconography common to the region to project a shared sense of *Venezianità* used to support social identities in a period of rapid transformation.

The eighteenth-century interest in distilling the 1630-31 plague outbreak into a contained marker of identity, representative of a population that, in fact, had no direct experience of the event, can be compared to Hartog's notion of heritage based on absence and loss, as well as to historian Pierre Nora's theory about *lieux de mémoire*. Nora posits that history and memory operate in opposition — that memory is the living product of human activities carried out in the present, unquestioned and unexamined because it is entrenched in current social practice, while history, on the other hand, strives to reanimate that which is already dead, and which bears the mark of strangeness or “other,” as it represents a no longer functioning practice.⁹¹ For Nora, sites of memory, or *lieux de mémoire*, are created at moments when it becomes evident that a spontaneous memory no longer exists; history then enters the picture, acting upon memory,

⁹¹ Pierre Nora, “Between Memory and History: *Les Lieux de Mémoire*,” *Representations*, n.26 (Spring 1989), 7-8. Nora's *Les Lieux de Mémoire* was published in three volumes by Gallimard. Tome 1 appeared first in print in 1984, and all three volumes were reprinted in a new edition in 1997. Pierre Nora, *Les Lieux de Mémoire*, v.1-3 (Paris: Gallimard), 1997.

“deforming and transforming it, penetrating it and petrifying it.”⁹² Thus the presence of a site of memory or commemoration necessarily represents a rift with the past.

Nora’s dissociation of memory and history has an interesting but unstable fit when considered with respect to plague memorials, particularly when these works were tied to a votive context. Commemorative works of art and material culture created during and after epidemics of plague were commonplace in early modern Italy, as evidenced by the varied examples explored in this dissertation. These works were bound by memory and a desire to crystalize a particular moment, which could be as personal and singular as a vow made by one individual at an altar, or much more broadly, representing the collective experience of a congregation or even an entire city. I would contend that “memory,” in the sense that it can be condensed into a definable experience or set of actions, cannot be unified and set in direct opposition to more removed engagements with past events. Put differently, there are variations to memory, both temporally and with regard to social practice — a point with which Halbwachs and Nora would each agree. These variations can make memory distinct from history in some regards, as proposed by Nora. In other circumstances, however, perceived boundaries between memory and history dissolve where social practices continue relatively unchanged and uninterrupted, even though the stimuli that generated them initially (e.g. outbreaks of plague) may have disappeared.

Though plague paintings shared common iconography and conventions in their formatting and construction, their functions and usage varied. As discussed in Chapter 4, dating plague paintings can be challenging because many of them bear retrospective dates. In terms of iconography, a votive work commissioned in 1631 and another begun in 1636 may look similar; they may even share inscriptions that identify their subject as the outbreak of 1631. And yet, the

⁹² Ibid., 12.

impulses that prompted their creation, and the conditions under which they were made, are distinct. Furthermore, an ex-voto begun during the height of an outbreak, in tandem with a vow made, may not have been finished and installed in its intended site until the epidemic had already run its course. How fine a line of distinction should be drawn regarding the purpose and use of these works? As the case studies explored in this dissertation have shown, paintings visualizing plague typically experienced an evolution in their usage as the event they commemorate slipped deeper into the past. This could result in physical changes enacted on the works themselves, from removal and relocation, to censorship through painting over or cutting down. In addition, adjustments made to the physical appearance and the use of plague paintings varied. New outbreaks precipitated the creation of new works, but also brought about the increased or resumed veneration of older works. In some ways, a painting representing an episode of plague was always at a temporal remove from the moment of crisis. At the same time, plague images perpetually maintained the potential to be relevant and even crucial through ritual reactivation during subsequent epidemics and in their memorial function.

Works of art commemorating the 1630-31 epidemic in Venice and the Veneto are exceptional because in memorializing the last epidemic to hit the region, they fomented a different set of relevancies for plague paintings in a post-plague era. A new outbreak did not make these works topical again, yet they signified in other ways. The sustained engagement with this final outbreak during the eighteenth century, when plague was no longer part of living memory, meant that plague paintings developed new currency as emblems of civic character. Tiepolo's altarpiece for Este is a highly developed form of this phenomenon. Having been designed more than a century after the outbreak it commemorates, it did not fulfill a votive need, nor aid intercession against the disease. The acute, primary purpose of most plague paintings

featuring this format was absent. Instead, Tiepolo's altarpiece was conceived of as a monument to an historical event, in which loss and victory are combined to characterize the religious identity of the settecento residents of Este.

Plague paintings — as well as other primary sources detailing outbreaks of pestilence like chronicles or doctors' treatises — were bound up with concepts of civic belonging, function, and dysfunction, and each of these were dependent upon local recollection and memory. On the nature of interpreting early modern accounts of plague, historian Ann Carmichael notes, "it is important to recognize that much of the material we use to understand past plagues is drawn from memory. Apart from administrative records gathered in the daily management of an epidemic, most plague accounts are retrospective. They typically impose narrative order on a past plague, assigning its beginning, middle, and end, and selecting which facts and memories are needed to capture the essence or meaning of the plague."⁹³ Carmichael was concerned with the development of collective memory from a bureaucratic perspective, specifically the manipulation of facts and details from previous epidemics to justify and naturalize laws imposed by the elite ruling class through its magistracies and health offices.⁹⁴ Though her sources are textual, Carmichael observes that the power and efficacy of these stories are "greatly augmented when physical sites for remembrance are established, sites that colonize the public space with less mutable and malleable repositories of memory."⁹⁵

Giambattista Tiepolo's *Saint Tecla Pleads God for the Liberation of Este from the Plague* can be thought of as a plague memory that was manufactured and promoted by the *comune*. The painting's monumental scale, privileged location in the duomo, and execution by an elite artist

⁹³ "The Last Past Plague: the Uses of Memory in Renaissance Epidemics," *Journal of the History of Medicine*, v.53 (April 1998), 134.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 139-40.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 150.

make it a powerful “repository of memory” in a public site. Its role as a devotional object and aid to prayer, however, give it greater nuance beyond its capacity to glorify the municipality that paid for it. Tiepolo successfully mined and condensed a two-hundred-year iconographic tradition in plague art, while at the same time, evoked local history and gestured toward the perpetuation of civic ideals in Este in the future.

The abandoned campaign for Giandomenico Tiepolo to replace the 1631 ex-voto of Saint Tecla made during the outbreak, which was detailed in the opening of this chapter, provides additional evidence of the importance the *comune* placed on works of art to represent past and current religious identities in the town. The preservation of the ex-voto on the grounds that to replace it would constitute breaking the plague-time vow demonstrates that a sense of continuity with the past, at least in spiritual matters, prevailed over a preference for a more contemporary visual aesthetic in religious representation. While this commission never came to fruition, the Tiepolo family did provide Este with an additional commemorative work, inspired by Giambattista’s high altar painting. Shortly after the completion of the altarpiece, Giambattista’s youngest son, Lorenzo Tiepolo, created an etching that reproduced the composition of *Saint Tecla Pleads God for the Liberation of Este* faithfully, albeit in reverse orientation [Figure 6.32].⁹⁶ Lorenzo, whose career was much shorter and less established than that of his brother Giandomenico, produced nine etchings during the span of 1759-62, each showcasing his father’s recent acclaimed works.⁹⁷ Lorenzo’s decision to create a print of the Este altarpiece illustrates that the painting was received favorably and that a market was felt to exist for such an item. Like the painting it reproduces, the etching is large, with a plate area measuring 70 x 40

⁹⁶ Cogo, 52-3.

⁹⁷ Suzanne Boorsch, *Venetian Prints and Books in the Age of Tiepolo*, (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1997), 28-31.

centimeters. This would not have been an inexpensive print. Though it is unclear how many etchings of the Este altarpiece were produced and how successful the print run may have been, the Tiepolo family workshop understood that the desirability of Giambattista's plague memorial made it viable for reproduction. The motivation may also have been inspired by the growing romanticizing of plague in the later eighteenth century and into the nineteenth, after the disease had disappeared in Europe. When plague became active only in the imagination, the population's relationship with the disease changed. Plague "memories" were not only created for large-scale public commemorations at this time, but were also reproduced for individual consumption and engagement with the *topos* through print media.

Conclusion

Venice in the later eighteenth century was a Republic in transition. Notions of decadence, decline, and "fallen empire" became tropes associated with the city after its fall to Napoleon in 1797, even as early as the first major history written that characterized the event, Pierre Daru's *Histoire de la Republique de Venise* in 1819.⁹⁸ While the Maggior Consiglio's vote to surrender to the French troops represented the end of the Venetian Republic, the city and the Veneto region had been evolving politically and economically for decades, and not merely towards what has been typically defined as decline. To some extent throughout the eighteenth century, Venice and its *terraferma* cities each experienced shifts in which greater emphasis was placed on certain economies like manufacturing and tourism, while losses were sustained in other traditional sources of revenue like maritime trading. Histories of the region from the nineteenth century onwards reiterate narratives of widespread economic recession in Veneto

⁹⁸ (Paris: F. Didot), 1819.

cities. However, more recent scholarship has shown that the eighteenth century is more accurately defined as a period of economic transition, with developments analogous to those of other Western European cities.⁹⁹ For example, the production of wool and silk for domestic and foreign export, which had been major industries in the Veneto since the fifteenth century, continued to provide revenue in the eighteenth century, though with increased emphasis on manufactured garments, rather than raw materials.¹⁰⁰ In Este, agriculture remained a primary source of income without significant alteration after the city's transfer to Austrian control in 1798 and municipal independence in 1829.¹⁰¹ The city also continued to earn revenue from the manufacture and export of majolica and ceramics, which had been an established industry in Este for centuries. In fact, this trade experienced substantial growth in Este during the mid-eighteenth century through the development and innovation of porcelain techniques that were specific to the city and recognized by the international market.¹⁰² The general economic stability of Este supported the expense of building a new cathedral and commissioning elite artists like Giambattista Tiepolo to decorate the church's interior.

Looking deeper at eighteenth-century developments in the industries of the Veneto gives greater nuance to an understanding of the social and economic functioning of the region, complicating long-held narratives of settecento decline. "Plague" as a concept and an historical event, rather than an active threat to public health, was also transitional during this period. Marseille's outbreak of 1720-22 and persistent reports by *Sanità* representatives of small

⁹⁹ Edoardo Demo, "Industry and Production in the Venetian *Terraferma* (15th-18th centuries)," in *A Companion to Venetian History, 1400-1797*, ed. Eric Dursteler, (Leiden: Brill), 291-318.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 297-303.

¹⁰¹ Nuvolato, *Storia di Este*, 514-19, 645-6.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 645. Giacomo Pietrogrande, For more on innovations in porcelain techniques that were developed by Girolamo Franchini in Este, see the chapter "Girolamo Franchini," in Giacomo Pietrogrande, *Biografie estensi*, (Padua: Salmin, 1881), 222-34.

outbreaks of plague near Venice's *stato da mar* territories along the Croatian coast kept the disease relevant in the early eighteenth century, if not imminent.¹⁰³ Yet by the latter half of the century, plague had evolved more fully into an abstract. The Venetian *Sanità*'s extensive bureaucracy designed to combat plague throughout the early modern period also evolved in response. The monitoring of disease reports from within and outside of the city continued, but the nature of the *Sanità*'s operations in the city, particularly at the lazaretti, changed. Increasingly, the lazaretti were used for the storage and decontamination of goods brought into the city through trade. Jane Crawshaw notes that Venice's plague hospitals became processing and disinfecting sites for two new commodities that developed into lucrative markets in eighteenth-century Venice: coffee and tobacco.¹⁰⁴ Distinctions between the two lazaretti — the Vecchio traditionally for treating the ill, the Nuovo for containing the suspected cases — dissolved, and both islands were used for processing goods without distinction.¹⁰⁵ By mid-century, however, use of the lazaretti was waning; the architecture on the islands had deteriorated to the extent that the structures were no longer sound or fully functional.¹⁰⁶ It appears that repairing and maintaining the lazaretti buildings was not considered worth the expense, and the Lazzaretto Nuovo was abandoned by the State in 1792.¹⁰⁷ After the arrival of Napoleon, both islands were used to house troops and munitions, and under Austrian occupation,

¹⁰³ ASV, *Provveditori e Sopraprovveditori alla Sanità*, 745, (1693-1703).

¹⁰⁴ Jane Crawshaw, *Plague Hospitals: Public Health for the City in Early Modern Venice*, (Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate, 2012), 239. ASV, *Sanità* 751 183r. Evidence of concern regarding how to decontaminate tobacco from *Sanità* officials in Venetian Dalmatia also show up in the Health Office's files from the late seventeenth century. ASV, *Provveditori e Sopraprovveditori alla Sanità*, 745, (1693-1703).

¹⁰⁵ Crawshaw, 240.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 241.

¹⁰⁷ Gerolamo Fazzini, *Isola del Lazzaretto Nuovo*, (Venice: Ministero per i Beni e la Attività Culturali e l'Archeoclub d'Italia, sede di Venezia, 2004), 14.

the walls surrounding the Nuovo were fortified and additional structures were built.¹⁰⁸ The lazaretti, however, had evolved away from plague by the end of the eighteenth century. Rather than serving public health, these once critical institutions became depositories that were left largely to decay throughout the nineteenth century.

Plague was a phenomenon whose influence in early modern Venice and the Veneto would be hard to overstate. Even outside of active outbreaks, public consciousness was filled with reminders of the disease's reach, from Health Office advisories restricting travelers from afflicted cities, to memorials left in churches that commemorated past epidemics. The 1630-31 plague outbreak in particular developed into a leitmotif in visual art, continually referenced in works created post-epidemic, reborn for each commission and re-imagined to fit the particular needs of the moment. The visual art associated with the 1630-31 plague is characterized by both continuity and specificity in response to contingency, and it does not align tightly with general stylistic developments. Works created in the mid-seventeenth century and later commemorations of the eighteenth century shared a vocabulary of plague iconography and design conventions. At the same time, the formal aspects of these works reflect how artists and patrons — who were as diverse as supplicants, devotees, brotherhoods, and governmental bodies — satisfied various needs by depicting this outbreak of plague. What aligns these works is their enduring impulse to engage with the epidemic — to define, contain, and memorialize the 1630-31 plague through visualizing individual and collective experiences.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

APPENDIX



Figure 1.1:
Red brick cut into the pavement in the Corte Nova *sotoportego*



Figure 1.2: *Sotoportego*



Figure 1.3: Reproduction of miracle-working Madonna and Child



Figure 1.4: *Sotoportego*, recently conserved (paintings are reproductions)



Figure 1.5: Painting reproductions



Figure 1.6: Original *sotoportego* paintings, housed in San Francesco della Vigna



Figure 1.7: *Priest Comforting Plague Victims*



Figure 1.8: *Personification of Venice Enthroned Consults Doctors*



Figure 1.9: *Personification of Venice Kneeling Before Christ and the Virgin*
(subject under question)



Figure 1.10: *Venetians Give Thanks Before a Votive Image of the Virgin and Saints Roch and Sebastian*



Figure 2.1: Madonna Nicopeia
Basilica di San Marco, tempera on panel, 12th century, 58 x 55 cm

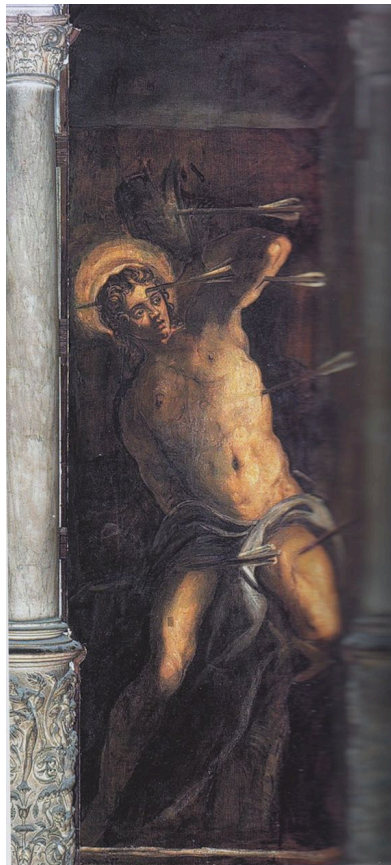


Figure 2.2:
Jacopo Tintoretto, *Saint Roch*
Scuola Grande di San Rocco
Oil on canvas, c.1580,
80 x 250 cm

Figure 2.3:
Jacopo Tintoretto, *Saint Sebastian*
Scuola Grande di San Rocco
Oil on canvas, c.1580
80 x 250 cm



Figure 2.4:
Silver embossed ex-voto, Scuola Grande di San Rocco, 6.8 x 8.5 cm, 17th century



Figure 2.5:
Unknown artist
Votive painting at the Scuola Grande di
San Rocco
Tempera on satin with silver stitching
23.5 x 18 cm, 17th c, (c.1630-31)



Figure 2.6:
Antonio Zanchi
The Virgin Appears to the Plague-Stricken
Scuola Grande di San Rocco
Oil on canvas, 9.7 x 12.6 meters, 1666



Figure 2.7:
Pietro Negri
The Madonna Saves Venice from the 1630 Plague
Scuola Grande di San Rocco
Oil on canvas, 9.7 x 12.6 meters, 1673



Figure 2.8:
Giovanni Bellini
San Giobbe Altarpiece
Oil on panel, c. 1478
471 x 258 cm



Figure 2.9:
Girolamo Libri
Saint Roch with Sebastian and Job
San Tomaso Cantuariense, Verona
Oil on panel, 215 x 162 cm, early 16th century



Figure 2.10:
Alessandro Vittoria, *Saint Anthony Abbot with Roch and Sebastian*
San Francesco della Vigna, Venice, Istrian stone, 185 x 70 cm, 1563-4



Figure 2.11:
Bernardino Prudenti
*Saint Roch with Sebastian
and Anthony Abbot*
Oil on canvas, mid-17th century



Figure 2.12:
Pietro Liberi
Venice imploring Saint Anthony of Padua to intercede with Christ and God to halt the plague
Santa Maria della Salute, oil on canvas, 400 x 190 cm, 1656



Figure 2.13:
Benedetto Bonfigli
Plague Madonna della Misericordia
San Francesco al Prato, Perugia, confraternal banner
1464



Figure 2.14:
*Madonna della Misericordia with
confratelli of the Scuola della
Misericordia*
Istrian stone, c.1450



Figure 2.15:
Madonna della Misericordia
Campo Santa Margherita, n.d.



Figure 2.16:
Madonna della Misericordia
Campo San Tomà, n.d.

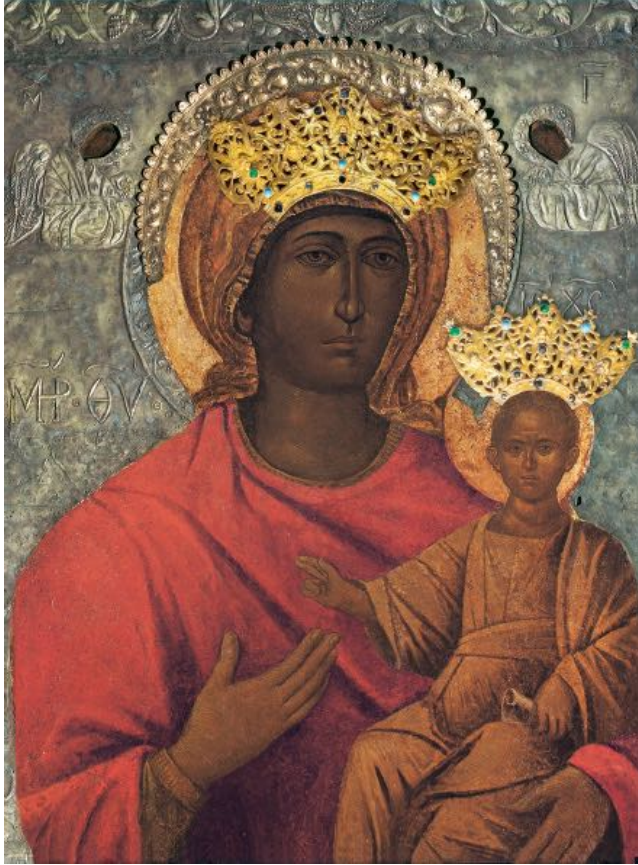


Figure 2.17:
Madonna di Tito (Mesopanditissa)
Santa Maria della Salute, high altar
Tempera on panel, 13th century



Figure 2.18:
Unknown artist
San Carlo Borromeo in Glory
San Pietro in Castello, ceiling of the
Cappella delle Croce
17th century



Figure 2.19:
Gentile Bellini
The Blessed Lorenzo Giustiniani
Tempera on canvas, 221 x 155 cm, 1465



Figure 2.20:
Unknown Venetian artist
Lorenzo Giustiniani
Museo del Seminario Patricale di Venezia
c.1465



Figure 2.21:
Unknown Venetian artist
Lorenzo Giustiniani
Museo Carrara, Bergamo
c. 1480

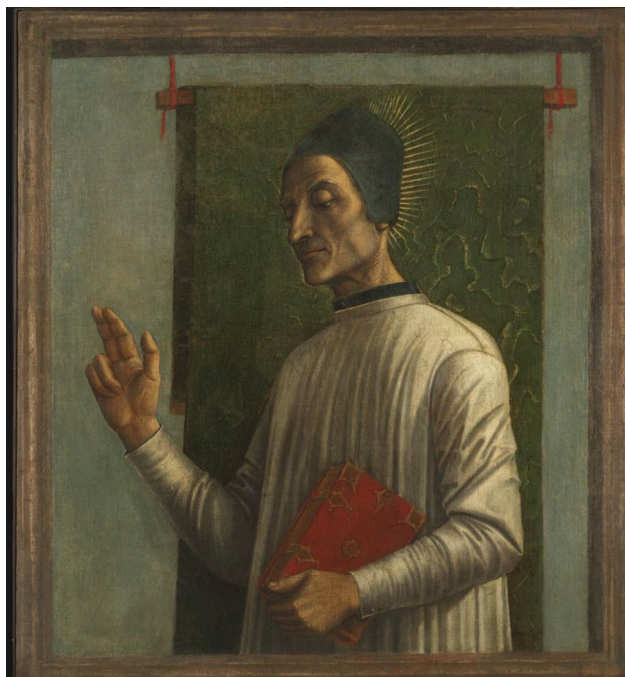


Figure 2.22:
Follower of Bellini
Blessed Lorenzo Giustiniani
Fogg Museum, Harvard University
c.1500



Figure 2.23:
Unknown artist
Blessed Lorenzo Giustiniani
San Pietro in Castello, c.1460



Figure 2.24:
Giusto le Court, et al, designed by Baldassare Longhena
Tomb of Lorenzo Giustiniani, high altarpiece
San Pietro in Castello, 1649



Figure 2.25:
Antonio Bellucci
Doge Nicolò Contarini implores the Blessed Lorenzo Giustiniani to halt the plague of 1630
Lateral of high altar in San Pietro in Castello
Oil on canvas, 1695



Figure 2.26:
Antonio Zanchi
The Canonization of Lorenzo Giustiniani
Duomo di Santa Tecla, Este, oil on canvas, 1702



Figure 3.1: Map showing locations of Venetian lazaretti

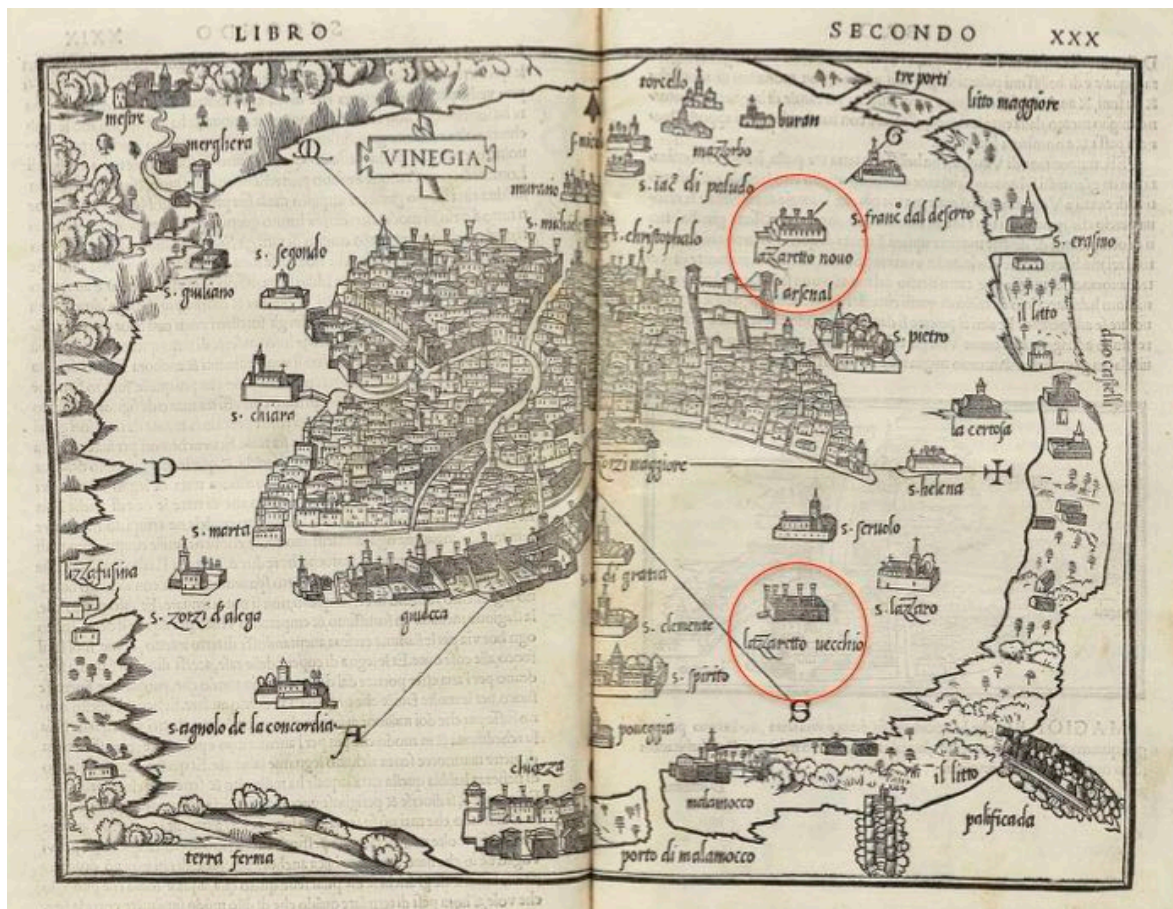


Figure 3.2:
 Benedetto Bordone, *Isolario*, (Venice: Nicolò Zappino), 1528
 "Vinegia" with lazaretti circled, Wellcome Library



Figure 3.3: Lazzaretto Vecchio, aerial view



Figure 3.4: Lazzaretto Nuovo, aerial view



Figure 3.5: Interior of ward at Lazzaretto Vecchio



Figure 3.6: Exterior of Lazzaretto Vecchio, facing Lido (photo: 2016)



Figure 3.8: Lazzaretto Nuovo exterior (photo: 2014)

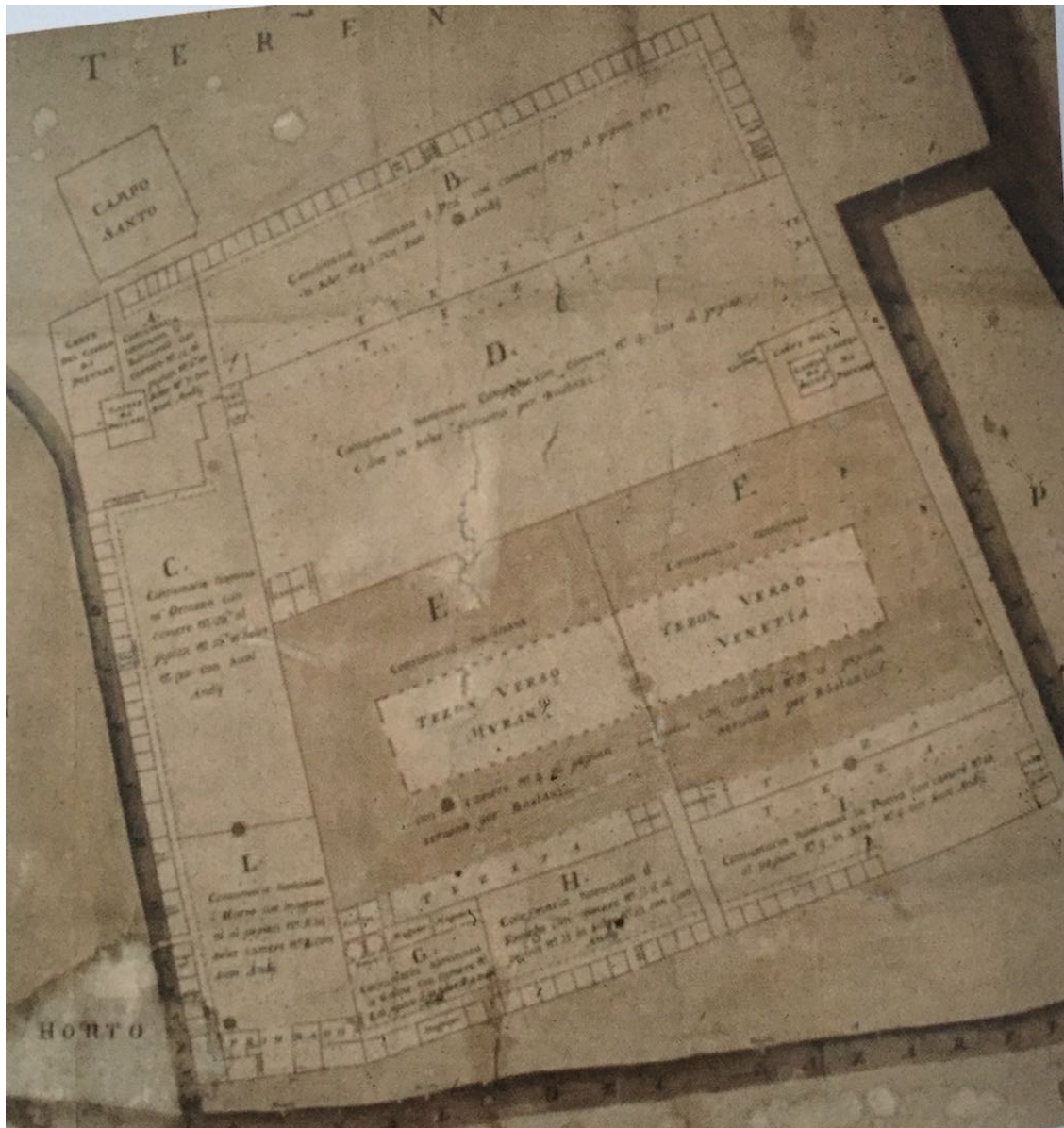


Figure 3.9:
 Plan of Lazzaretto Vecchio
 Andrea Cornello
 “Dissegno in pianta del Lazareto Novo,” 1687
 ASV, Provveditori alla Sanità, busta 8, n1



Figure 3.10: *Tezon grande*, Lazzaretto Nuovo

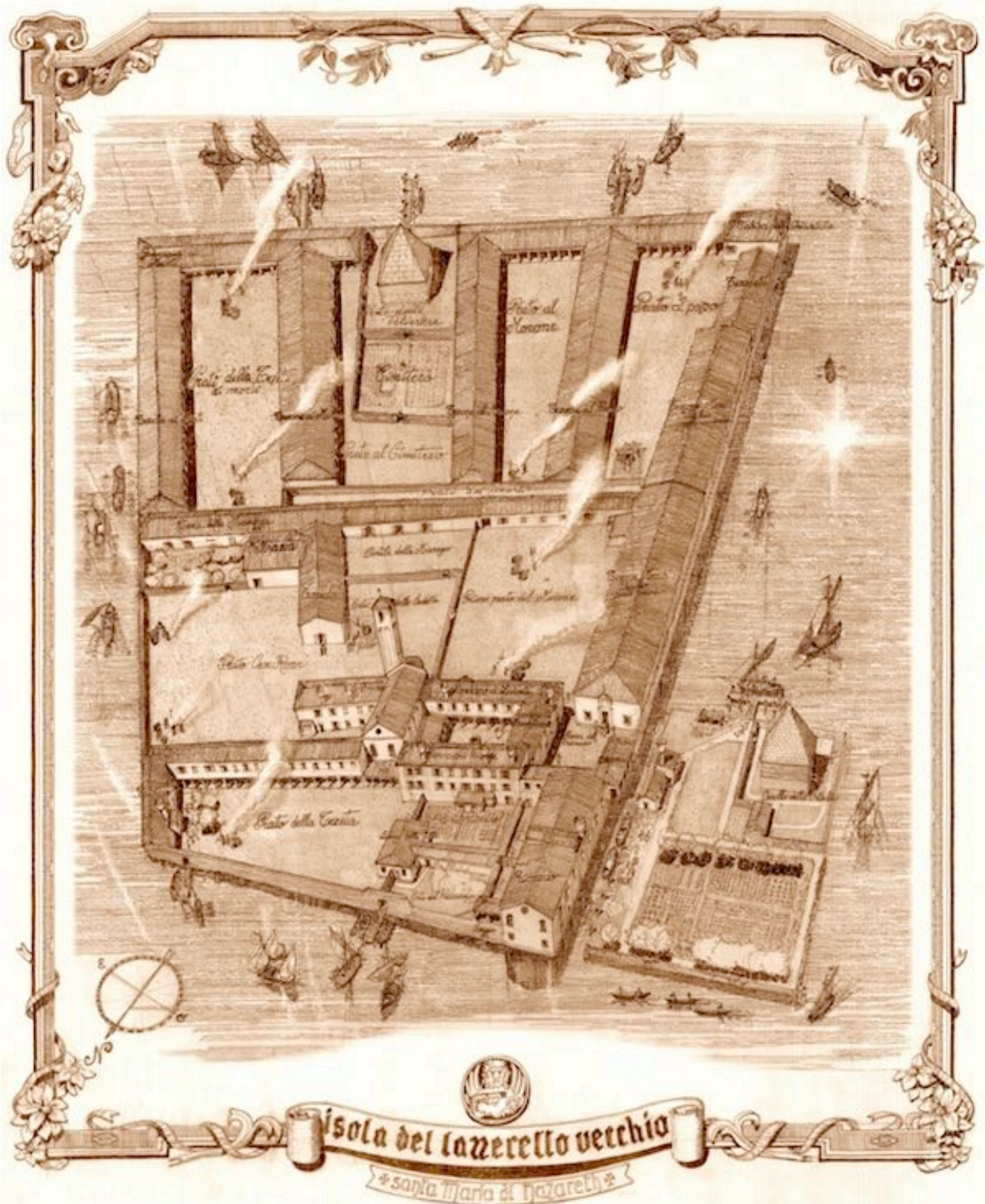


Figure 3.11: Reconstructed drawing of the Lazzaretto Vecchio in the 16-18th centuries
Giorgio Barletta

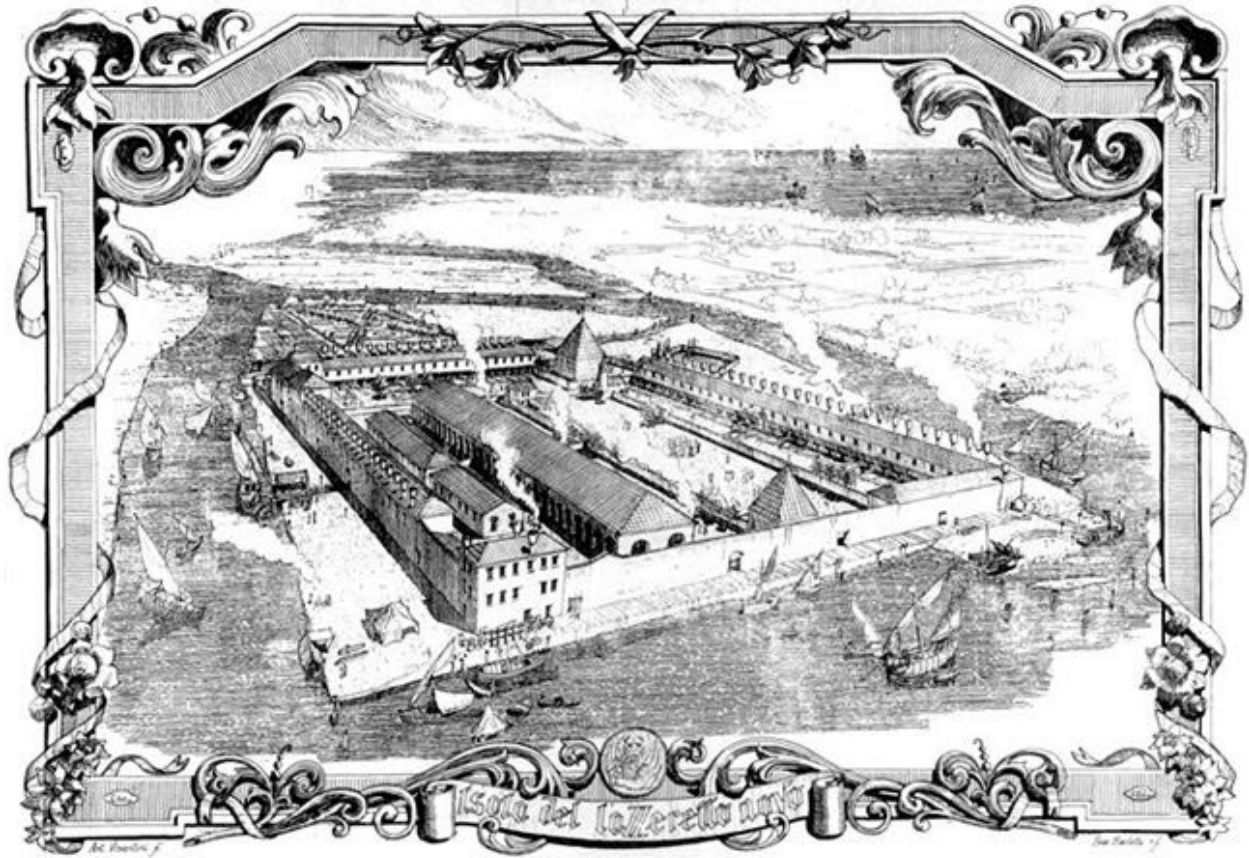


Figure 3.12:
Reconstructed drawing of the Lazzaretto Nuovo in the 16-18th centuries
Giorgio Barletta



Figure 3.13: Cloisters at the Lazzaretto Vecchio



Figure 3.14:
Jacopo Tintoretto, *Saint Roch Healing the Plague Victims*
Chiesa di San Rocco, Venice, 1549



Figure 3.15:
Sante Peranda, *Saint Roch Healing the Plague-Stricken*
San Zulian, Venice, late 16th-century



Figure 3.16: Detail of *Saint Roch Healing the Plague-Stricken*

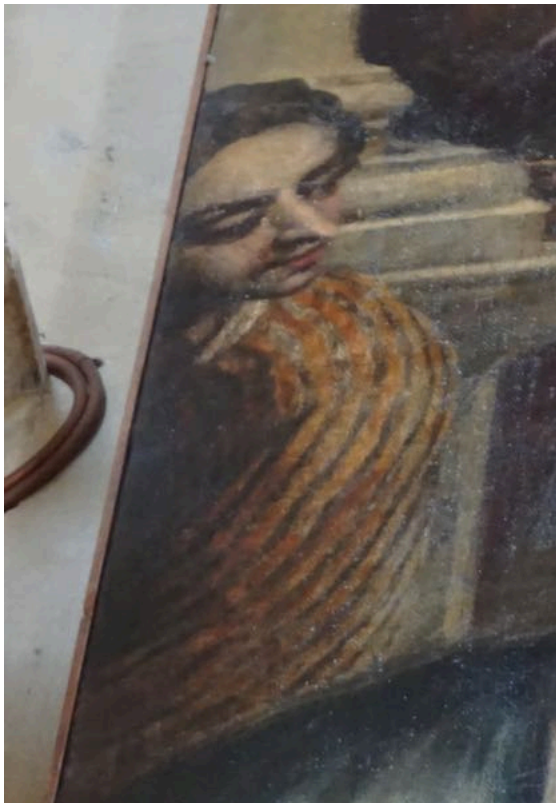


Figure 3.17: Detail of *Saint Roch Healing the Plague-Stricken, smorbadoro*



Figure 3.18: Detail of *Saint Roch Healing the Plague-Stricken*, *pizzigamorti* and architectural details



Figure 3.19: Jacopo Tintoretto, *Miracle of the Slave*, 1548



Figure 3.20: Detail of *Saint Roch Healing the Plague-Stricken*, smorbadoro and prior



Figure 3.21: Antonio Zanchi, *The Virgin Appears to the Plague-Stricken*, 1666

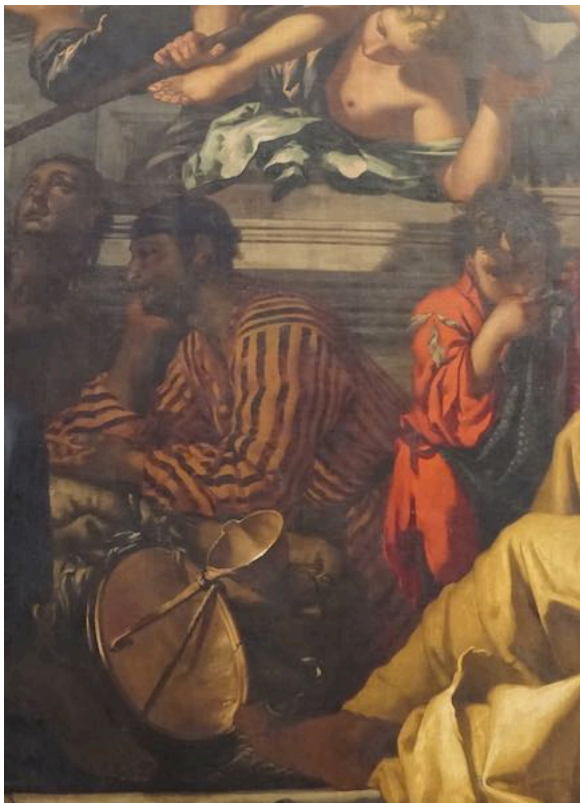


Figure 3.22: Detail, *The Virgin Appears to the Plague-Stricken*, smorbadoro



Source gallica.bnf.fr / Bibliothèque nationale de France

Figure 3.23:
Cesare Vecellio, *De gli abiti antichi e moderni...*
(Venice: Damian Zenaro, 1590), "Facchino," 176v
Bibliothèque nationale de France



Figure 3.24
Photograph of the campanile of the Lazzaretto Vecchio
Unknown photographer, late 19th century
Collection of the Museo Fortuny, Venice



Figure 3.25: Guglielmo Bergamasco, Istrian limestone, 1525, Museo Correr, Venice



Figure 3.26: 1565 relief sculpture in situ at the Lazzaretto Vecchio



Figure 3.27: 1565 relief sculpture at Lazzaretto Vecchio, detail



Figure 3.28:
Fresco of Virgin and Child
and saints Roch and Sebastian
Cloisters, Lazzaretto Vecchio



Figure 3.29: Location of fresco in cloisters



Figure 3.30: Illusionistic wall in the Lazzaretto Vecchio general wards



Figure 3.31:
Bernardo Rossellino
Sculptural tabernacle for women's ward in the
Hospital of S. Maria Nuova, 1450
Relocated to Sant'Egidio
(Bronze door, Lorenzo Ghiberti)



Figure 3.32: Frescoed wall perpendicular to proposed altar area



Figure 3.33: Prior's house and courtyard



Figure 3.34: View of the Piazzetta San Marco from the prior's balcony



Figure 3.35: Painted entry to prior's house



Figure 3.36: Detail of painted curtains in prior's entryway



Figure 3.37: Exterior of *tezon grande*, Lazzaretto Nuovo



Figure 3.38: Interior of *tezon grande*, Lazzaretto Nuovo



Figure 3.39: Interior view of *tezon grande* with graffiti above and beside door

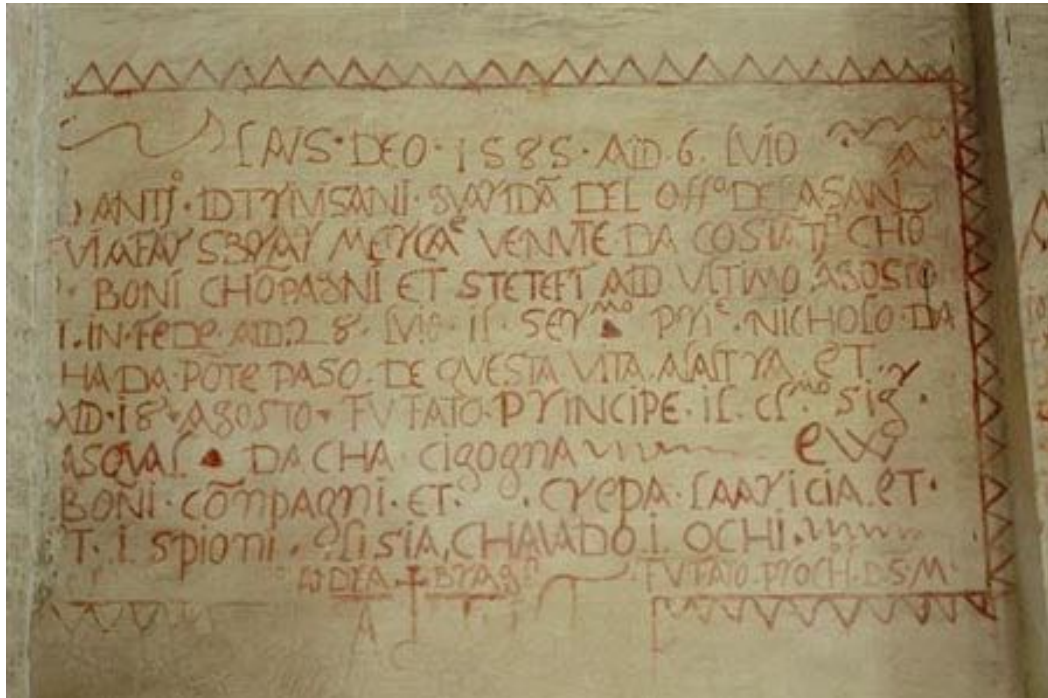


Figure 3.40: Trivisan inscription in the *tezon grande*

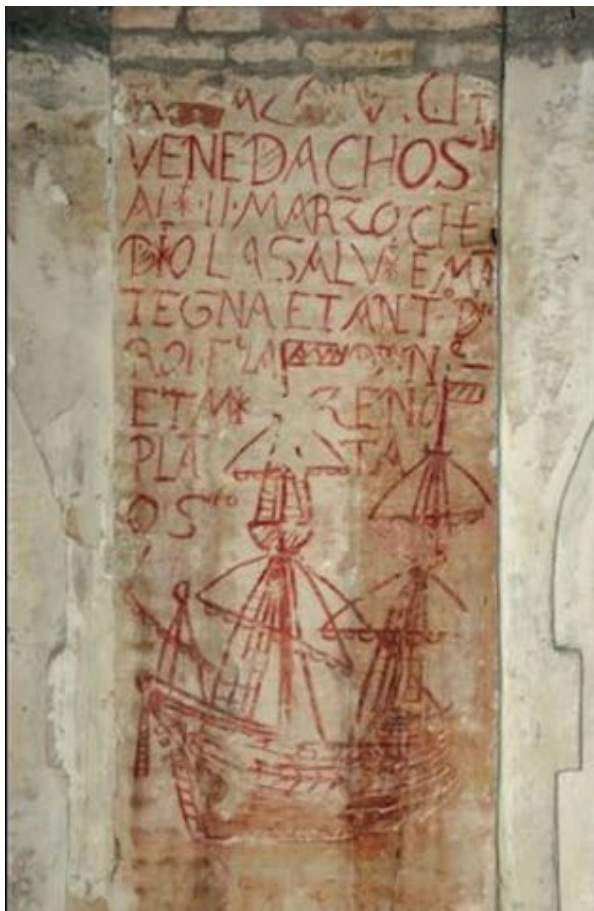


Figure 3.41:
 Ship graffito in the *tezon grande*



Figure 3.42: Graffiti of soldiers, boats, and emblems in the *tezon grande*



Figure 3.43: Deteriorating graffiti at the Lazzaretto Vecchio



Figure 3.44: Graffito damaged by structural additions at the Lazzaretto Vecchio



Figure 3.45: Graffito damaged by structural additions at the Lazzaretto Vecchio



Figure 3.46: Arabic graffiti over the door in Lazzaretto Vecchio ward



Figure 3.47: Graffiti in the Lazzaretto Vecchio wards



Figure 3.48: Graffito of church and campanile at the Lazzaretto Vecchio



Figure 3.49:
Graffito of hooved angel at the Lazzaretto Vecchio

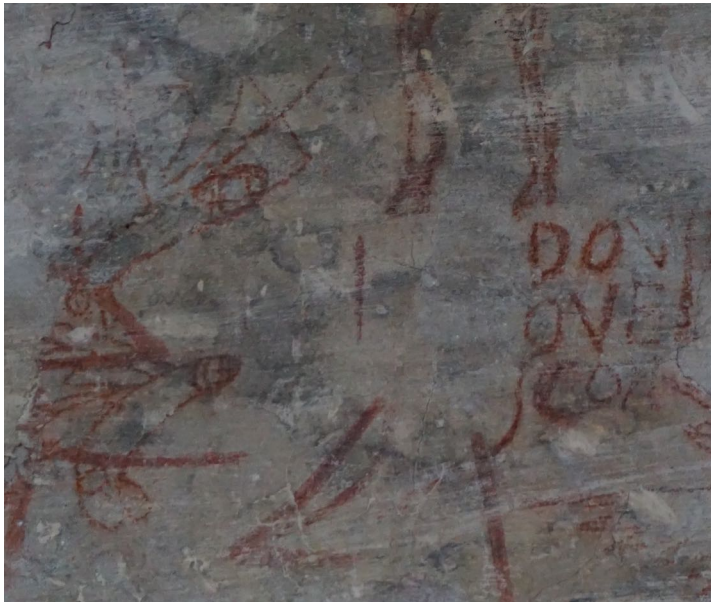


Figure 3.50:
Detail of phalluses



Figure 4.1: San Francesco della Vigna
Design by Sansovino, begun 1534; façade by Palladio, completed 1568

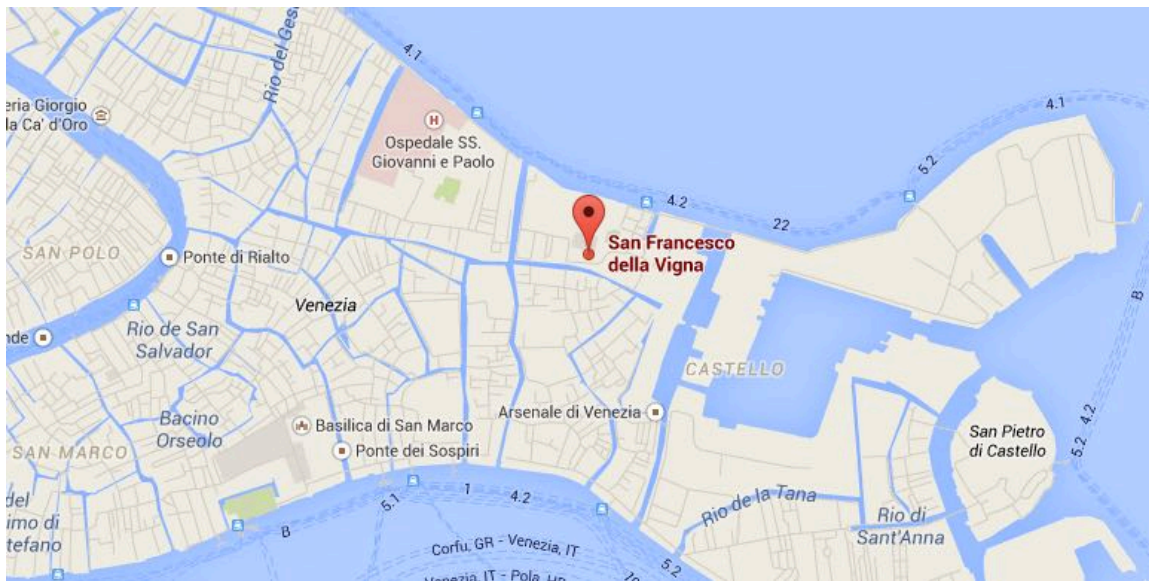


Figure 4.2: Map indicating the location of San Francesco della Vigna and the Arsenale

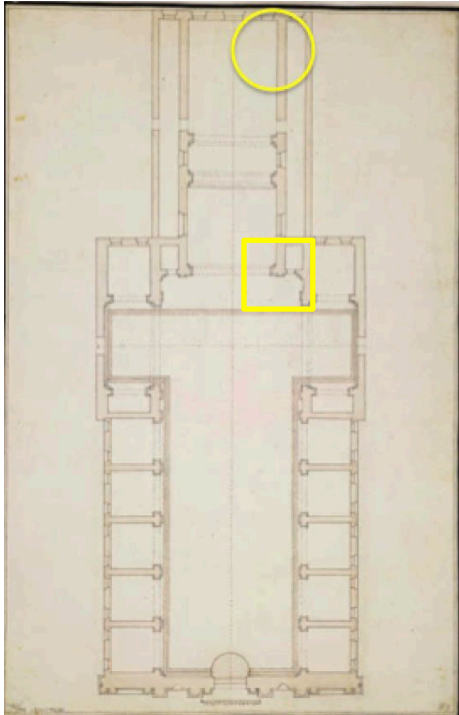


Figure 4.3: plan of San Francesco della Vigna

Circle showing current choir location of painting
Square showing original location



Figure 4.4: Domenico Tintoretto painting in situ



Figure 4.5:

Domenico Tintoretto
*Venice Supplicating to the Virgin to
 Intercede with Christ for Cessation
 of the Plague*
 San Francesco della Vigna
 1631



Figure 4.6:

Domenico Tintoretto
Venice Supplicating to the Virgin
 modello
 Princeton University Art Museum
 Princeton, New Jersey
 c.1630-31



Figure 4.7: Detail of corpses in foreground of *modello*



Figure 4.8:
Antonio Giarola
Verona Supplicates to the Trinity for Liberation from the Plague of 1630
San Fermo Maggiore, Cappella della Madonna, Verona
1636



Figure 4.9: Detail of Girola



Figure 4.10: Domenico Tintoretto, personification of Venice

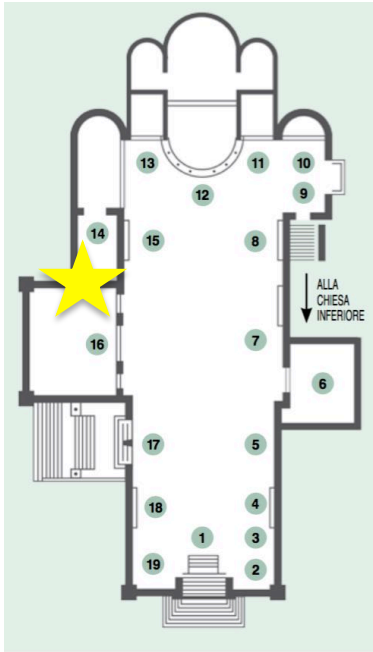


Figure 4.11:
Plan of San Fermo, showing location of Giarola



Figure 4.12:
Giarola painting in situ



Figure 4.13:
Detail of donors and lion



Figure 4.14: Canaletto, *Feast Day of Saint Roch*, oil on canvas, 147.7 x 199.4 cm, c.1735



Figure 4.15: Scuola di San Giorgio degli Schiavoni, *Sala superiore*

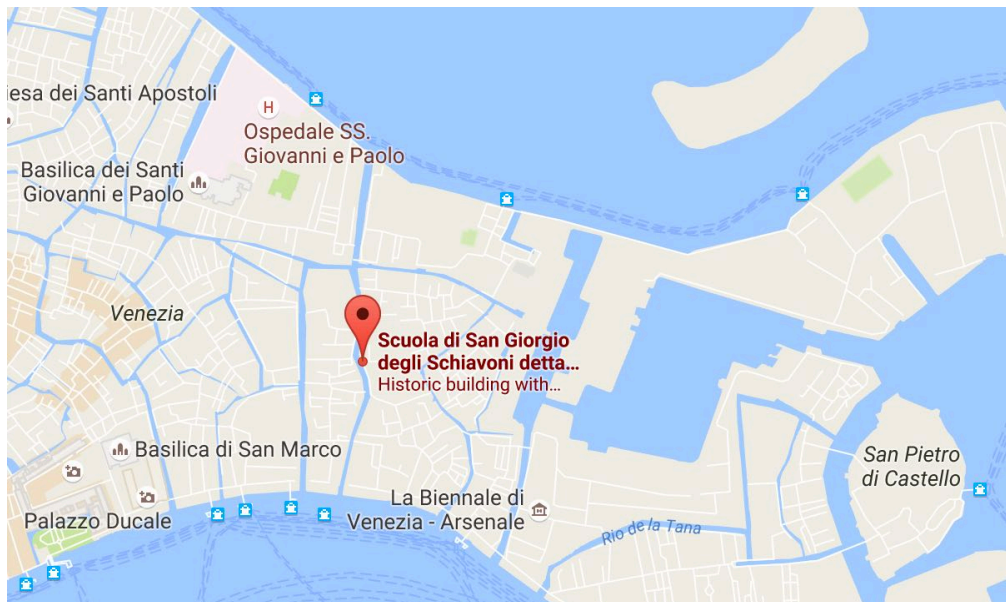


Figure 4.16: Map indicating location of the Scuola di San Giorgio degli Schiavoni



Figure 4.17:
Unknown artist (school of Palma il Giovane)
Ex-voto with Giorgio Pallavicino and the city of Perast
Oil on canvas, 100 x 252 cm, 1631



Figure 4.18: Detail, inscription and aerial view of Perast

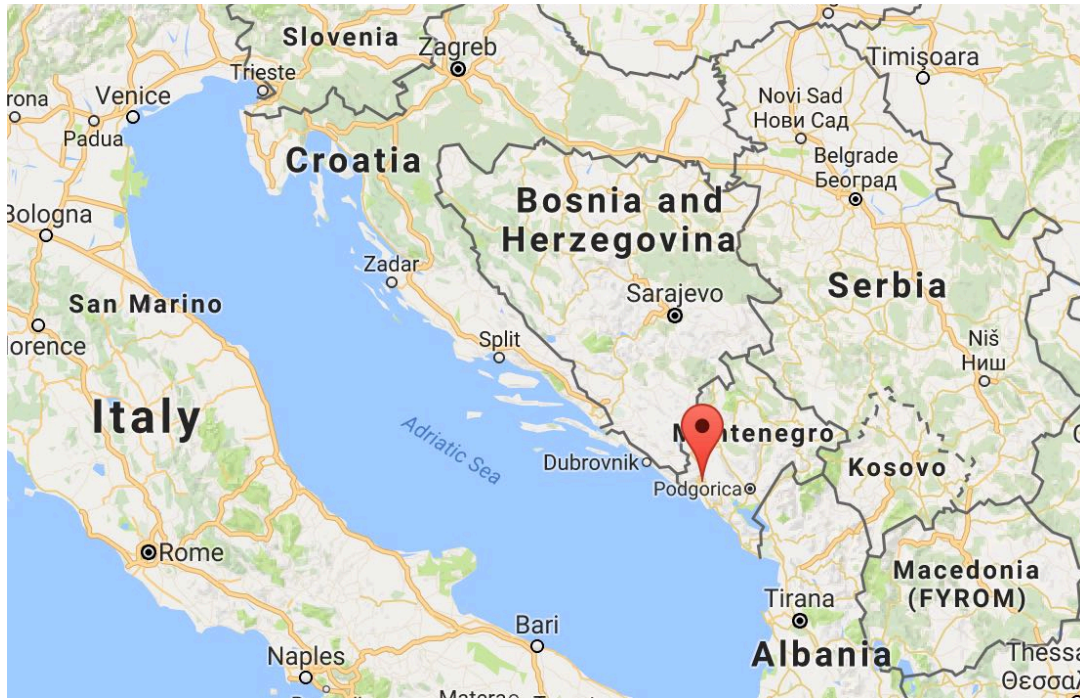


Figure 4.19: Adriatic coast indicating location of Perast

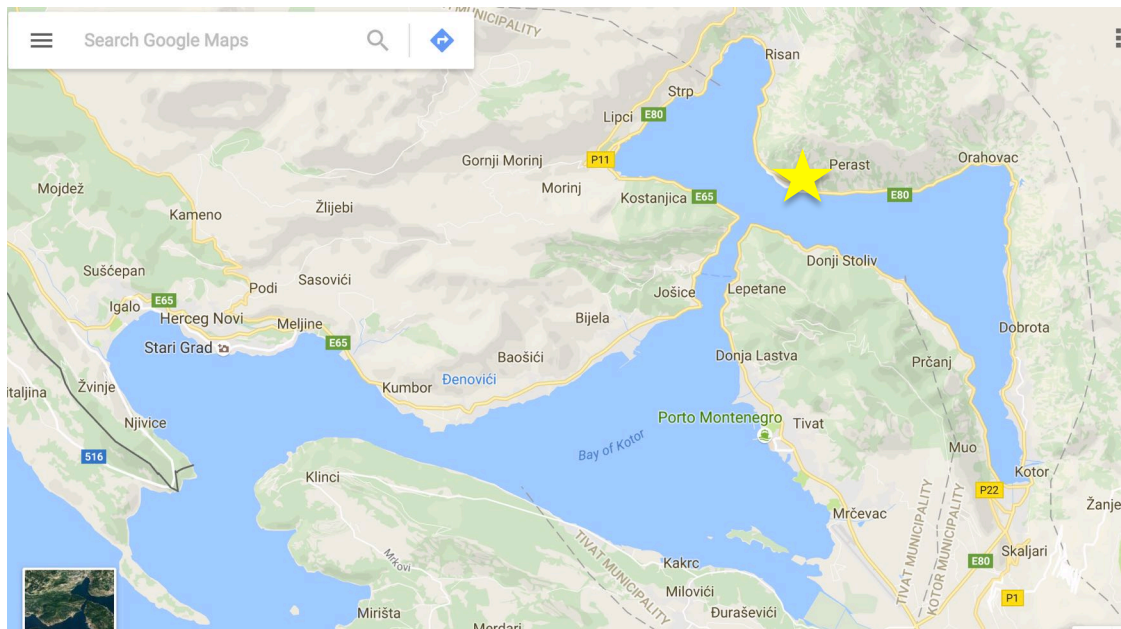


Figure 4.20: Map indicating multi-lobed Bay of Kotor, with Perast starred



Figure 4.21: Present-day Perast, Montenegro



Figure 4.22: “Golfo di Venetia” in Simon Pinargenti, *Isole che son da Venetia nella Dalmatia*, 1573



Figure 4.23: Detail of Pinargenti's map, showing Perast



Figure 4.24: Detail of Perast from the Scuola Dalmata's ex-voto



Figure 4.25: Saint Roch and Giorgio Pallavicino



Figure 4.26: Saint Sebastian



Figure 4.27:
Giovanni Bellini, *Madonna and Child*, oil on canvas, 85 x 115 cm, 1510, Brera, Milan



Figure 4.28: Vincenzo Maria Coronelli, *Gonfaloniere of Perast*, engraving, 1688



Figure 4.29: Detail of Giorgio Pallavicino



Figure 4.30:
Unknown artist
Votive painting at the Scuola Grande di San Rocco
Tempera on satin with silver stitching, 23.5 x 18 cm, seventeenth century (c.1630-31)



Figure 4.31:
 Processional banner from the Scuola Grande dei Carmini
 Red silk with silver stitching, gold sequins, and oil on canvas figural panel
 Second half of the eighteenth century, on display at the Carmini's confraternal meetinghouse



Figure 4.32:
 Silver embossed ex-voto
 Scuola di San Rocco,
 6.8 x 8.5 cm
 Seventeenth century



Figure 4.33: “Schiaivone, overo Dalmatino”
Cesare Vecellio, *De gli habiti antichi e moderni*, (Venice: Damian Zenaro, 1590), 345r



Figure 4.34: Vincenzo Maria Coronelli, *Dalmatians*, engraving, 1688



Figure 4.35: Detail of Plague and cityscape of Venice



Figure 4.36:
Floral marginalia



Figure 4.37:
Detail of Saint Roch

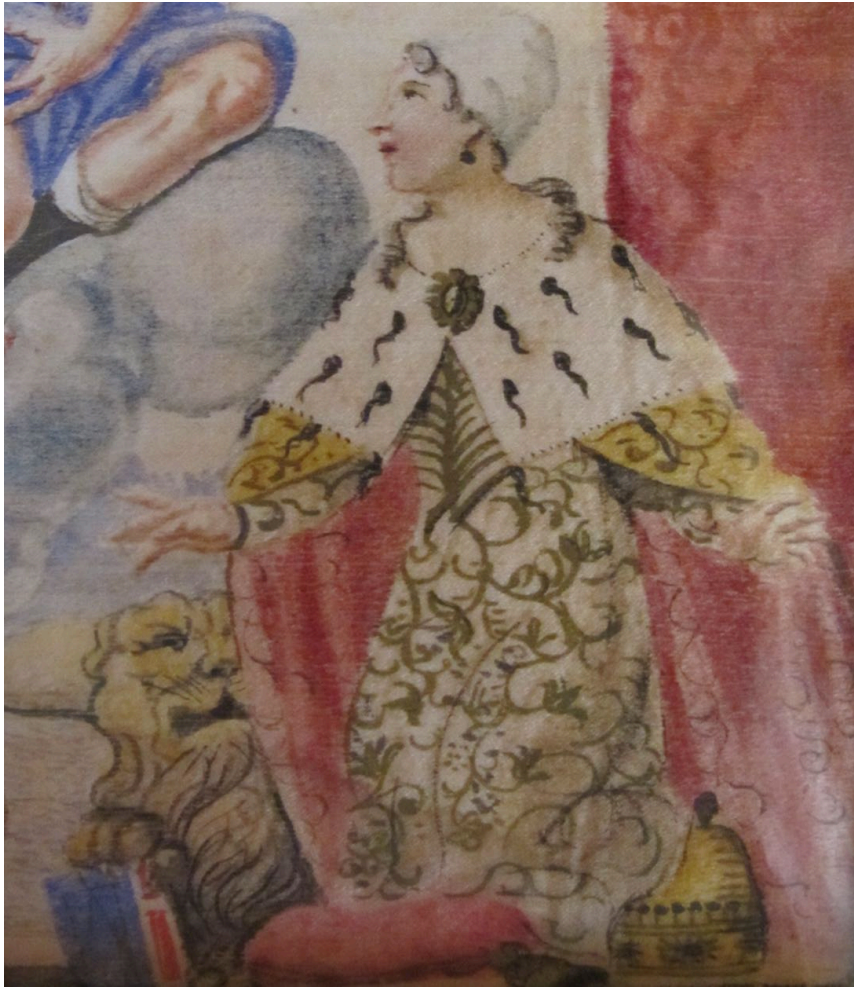


Figure 4.38: Detail of the personification of Venice



Figure 4.39:
Detail of Jacopo Tintoretto,
Triumph of Doge Nicolò da Ponte
1584



Figure 4.40:
Veronese
Venice between Justice and Peace
1575-77



Figure 4.41:
Palma il Giovane
Venice Crowned by Victory
1584



Figure 4.42:
Pietro Negri
The Madonna Saves Venice from the 1630 Plague
Scuola Grande di San Rocco
Oil on canvas, 335 x 555 cm and 635 x 705 cm, 1673



Figure 4.43: Detail of genuflecting Venice with the Salute



Figure 4.44: Detail of intercessors

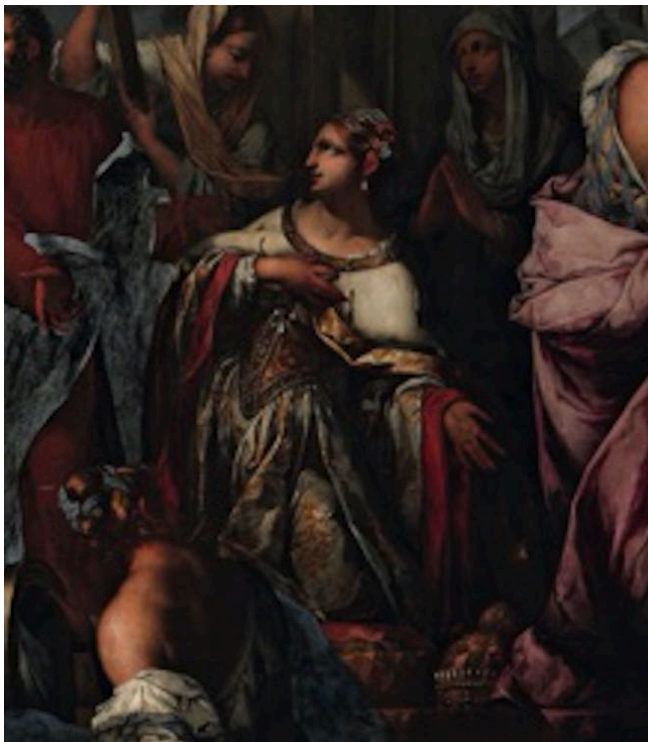


Figure 4.45:
Detail of Venice personified,
Corona ducale



Figure 4.46:
Detail of lion



Figure 4.47:
Giusto le Court
Detail of sculptural high altarpiece for the Salute
Venice, the Virgin, and Plague



Figure 4.48:

Pietro Liberi

Venice imploring Saint Anthony of Padua to intercede with Christ and God to halt the plague
Santa Maria della Salute, oil on canvas, 400 x 190 cm, 1656

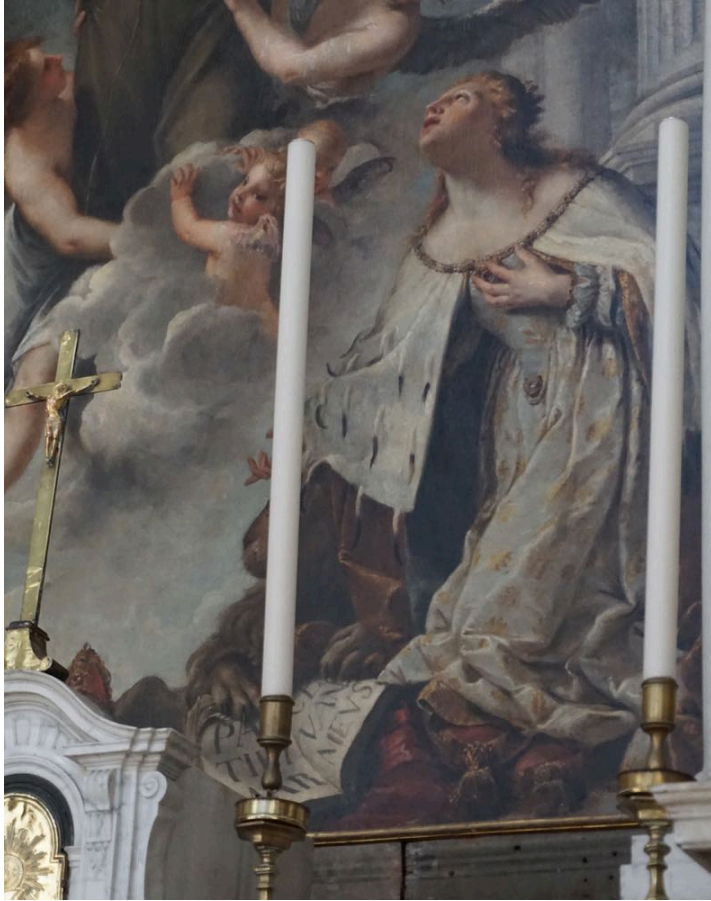


Figure 4.49:
Pietro Liberi
Detail of Venice



Figure 4.50: Detail of lion



Figure 4.51: Detail of Plague

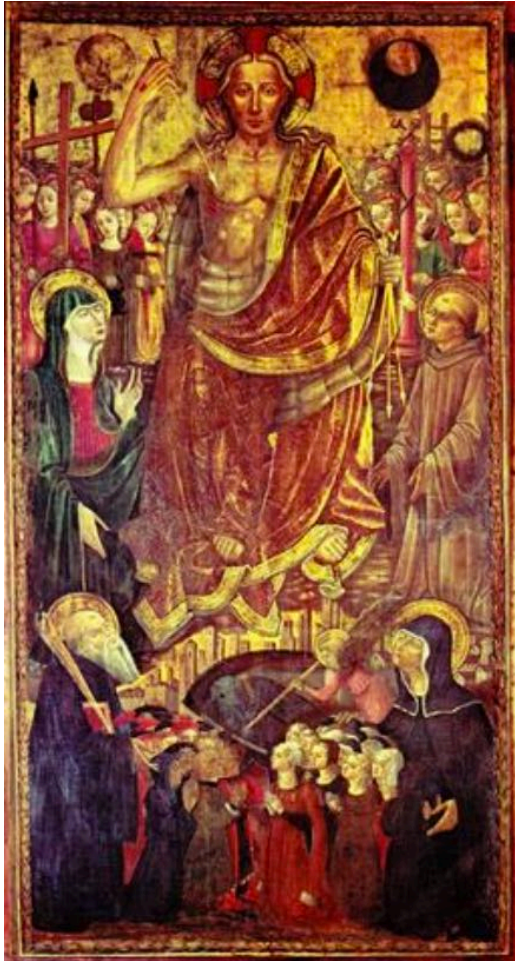


Figure 4.52:
Benedetto Bonfigli
*Processional banner of the
Confraternity of San Benedetto dei Frustati*
Perugia, Santa Maria Nuova, c.1471-2



Figure 4.53:
Guido Reni
Pallione del Voto
Bologna, Pinacoteca Nazionale,
1630



Figure 4.54:
Banner at the Scuola Dalmata,
with figural inset
Twentieth century

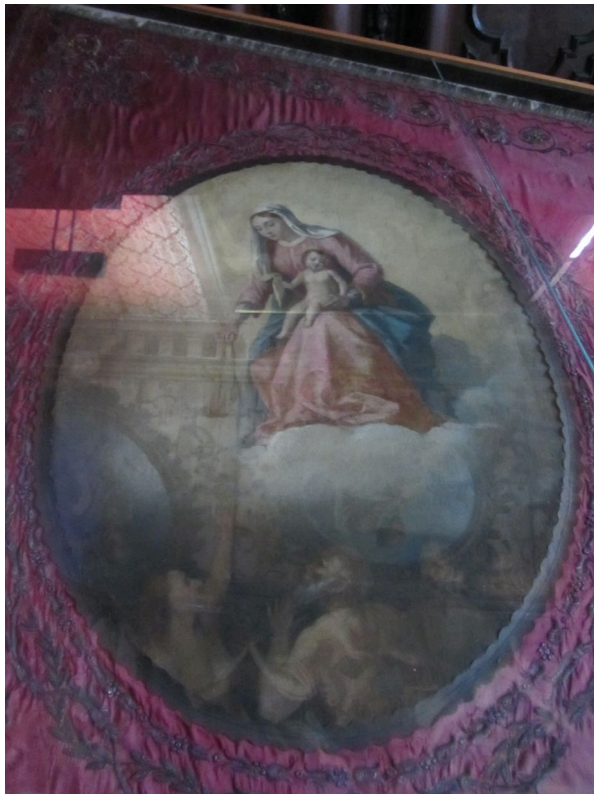


Figure 4.55:
Detail of figural panel
on Carmini processional banner



Figure 4.56: Detail showing the convergence of frame and silver stitching



Figure 4.57:
Bernardino Prudenti
*The Virgin and Child, with Mark the Evangelist, the Blessed Lorenzo Giustiniani,
Saint Roch, and Saint Sebastian*
Oil on canvas, 2 x 3 meters, 1631



Figure 4.58:
Alessandro Varotari (Il Padovanino)
The Virgin and Child, with model of Salute
1631



Figure 4.59: Giusto le Court, High altarpiece, Santa Maria della Salute, 1670



Figure 4.60: Detail of Virgin and Child

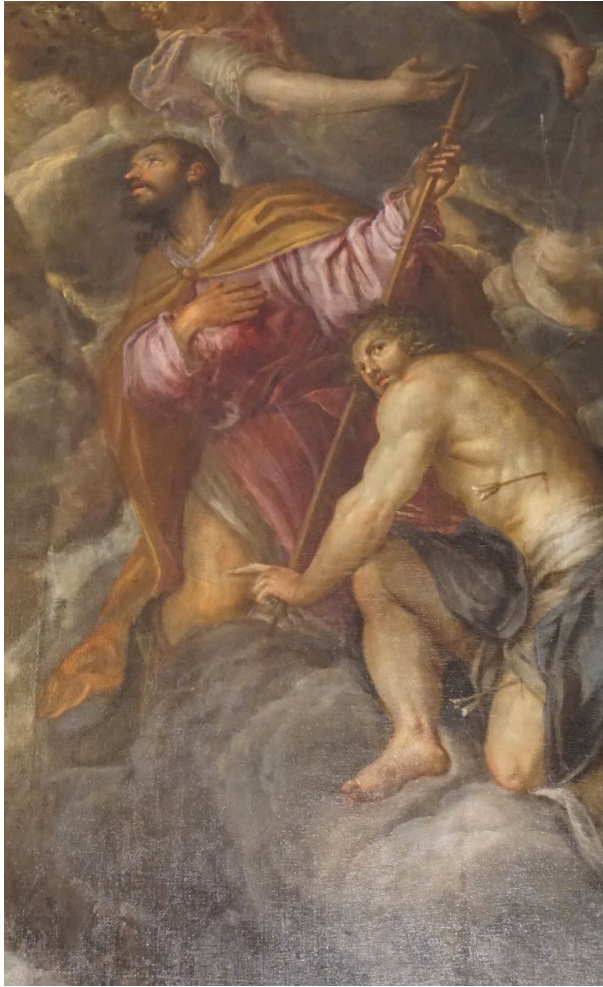


Figure 4.61:
Detail, Roch and Sebastian

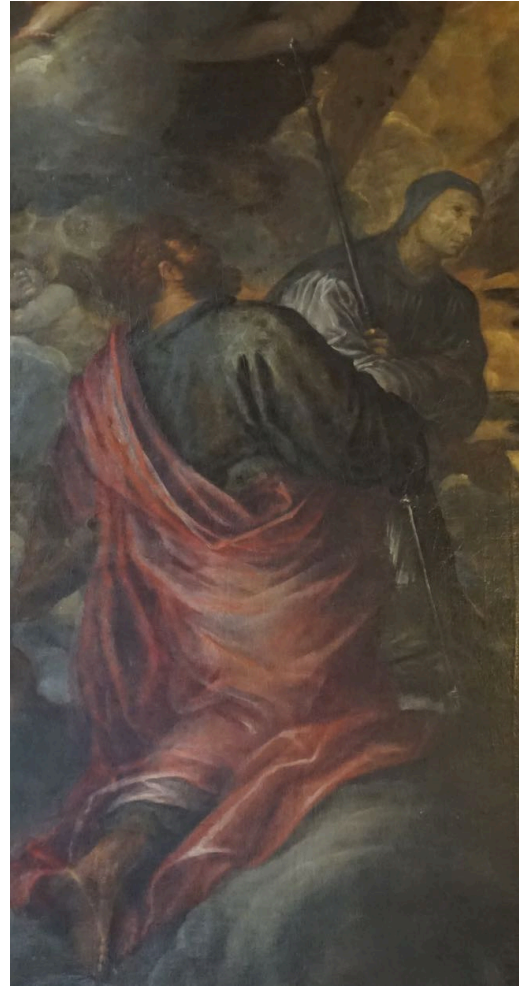


Figure 4.62:
Detail, Mark and Giustiniani



Figure 4.63:
Detail, model for the Salute



Figure 4.64:
Marco Boschini, *Procession to Santa Maria della Salute*, engraving, 1644



Figure 5.1:
Antonio Zanchi
The Virgin Appears to the Plague-Stricken
1666
Oil on canvas (two canvases separated by a pilaster)
33.5 x 55.5 m and 63.5 x 70.5 m
Scuola Grande di San Rocco, Venice



Figure 5.2: *The Virgin Appears to the Plague-Stricken*, detail



Figure 5.3: *The Virgin Appears to the Plague-Stricken*, detail



Figure 5.4:
Pietro Negri
The Madonna Saves Venice from the Plague of 1630
1673
Oil on canvas (two canvases separated by a pilaster)
33.5 x 55.5 m and 63.5 x 70.5 m
Scuola Grande di San Rocco, Venice



Figure 5.5: Baldassare Longhena, *Santa Maria della Salute*, consecrated 1683

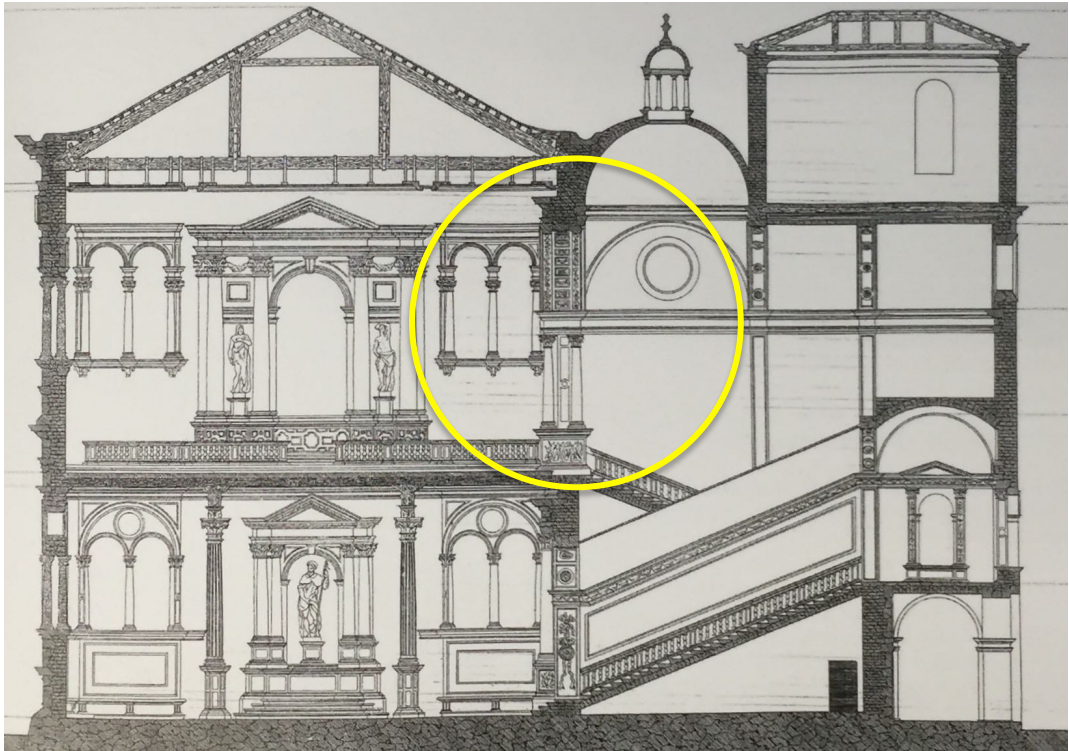


Figure 5.6: Leopoldo di Cicognara, *Le fabbriche e i monumenti cospicui di Venezia* (1858)



Figure 5.7: Stone inlay on the landing of the grand stairway in the Scuola Grande di San Rocco



Figure 5.8:
Pietro Liberi
Venice implores Saint Anthony of Padua to intercede with Christ and God to halt the plague
1656
Oil on canvas, 400 x 190 cm
Santa Maria della Salute



Figure 5.9: Alessandro Varotari (Il Padovanino), *The Virgin and Child with model of Salute*, 1631



Figure 5.10: Bernardino Prudenti
The Virgin and Child, with Mark the Evangelist, the Blessed Lorenzo Giustiniani, S. Roch, and S. Sebastian, 1631
Oil on canvas, 2 x 3 meters



Figure 5.11: Luca Giordano, *Assumption of the Virgin*, c.1667, oil on canvas, Santa Maria della Salute



Figure 5.12: Luca Giordano, *Birth of the Virgin*, c.1667, oil on canvas, Santa Maria della Salute



Figure 5.13: Luca Giordano, *Presentation of the Virgin in the Temple*, c.1667
Oil on canvas, Santa Maria della Salute



Figure 5.14:
Titian, *Bacchus and Ariadne*
1520-23, oil on canvas
176.5 x 191 cm



Figure 5.15: Pietro Negri, *The Madonna Saves Venice from the Plague of 1630*,
Detail of the allegory of Strength



Figure 5.16: Giordano, *Birth of the Virgin*, detail

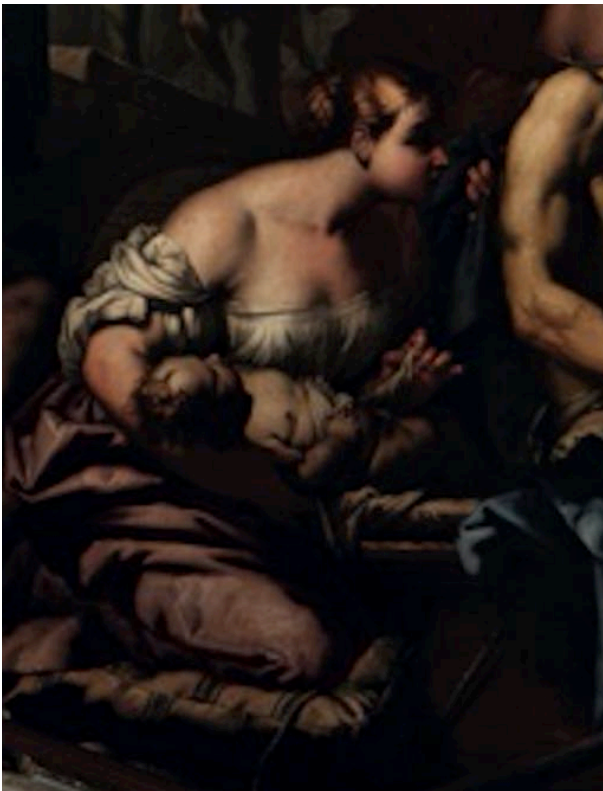


Figure 5.17:
Antonio Zanchi, *The Virgin Appears to the
Plague-Stricken*, detail



Figure 5.18: Antonio Zanchi, modello for *The Virgin Appears*, c.1666, oil on canvas



Figure 5.19: Zanchi, *The Virgin Appears*, detail



Figure 5.20: Zanchi, *The Virgin Appears*, detail



Figure 5.21: Pietro Negri, *The Madonna Saves Venice*, detail



Figure 5.22: Zanchi, *The Virgin Appears*, detail of deceased mother and child

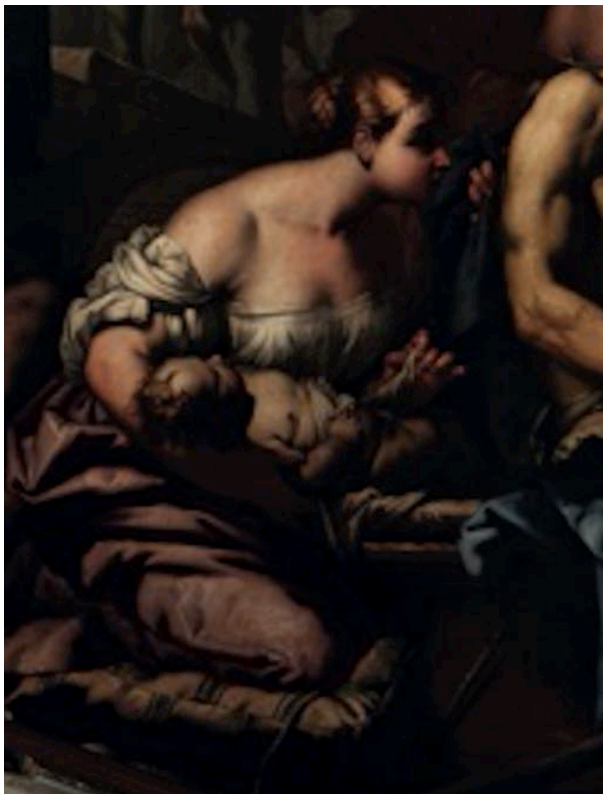


Figure 5.23: Zanchi, *The Virgin Appears*, detail of living mother and child



Figure 5.24: Marcantonio Raimondi, after Raphael, *Il morbetto*, c.1515, engraving, 198 x 252 mm



Figure 5.25: detail of *pizzigamorti*



Figure 5.26: Zanchi, *The Virgin Appears*, detail



Figure 5.27: Zanchi, *The Virgin Appears*, detail

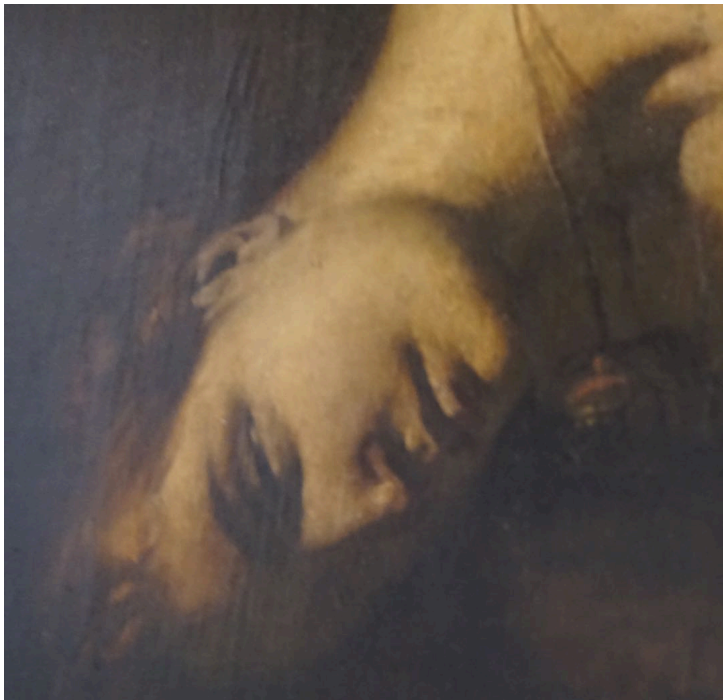


Figure 5.28: Zanchi, *The Virgin Appears*, detail of pendant



Figure 5.29: Nicolas Poussin, *The Plague at Ashdod*, 1630, oil on canvas, 148 x 198 cm



Figure 5.30: Giambattista Tiepolo, *Saint Tecla Pleads God for the Liberation of Este from the Plague* 1759, oil on canvas, 675 x 390 cm



Figure 5.31: Zanchi, *The Virgin Appears*, detail of patrician man



Figure 5.32:
Detail of red-clad boy



Figure 5.33: Paolo Veronese, *Wedding at Cana*, 1563, oil on canvas, 677 x 994 cm, detail



Figure 5.34: Zanchi, *The Virgin Appears*, detail of man in green covering nose



Figure 5.35: detail of contaminated trash near bridge



Figure 5.36: detail of corpses, baskets, and trash

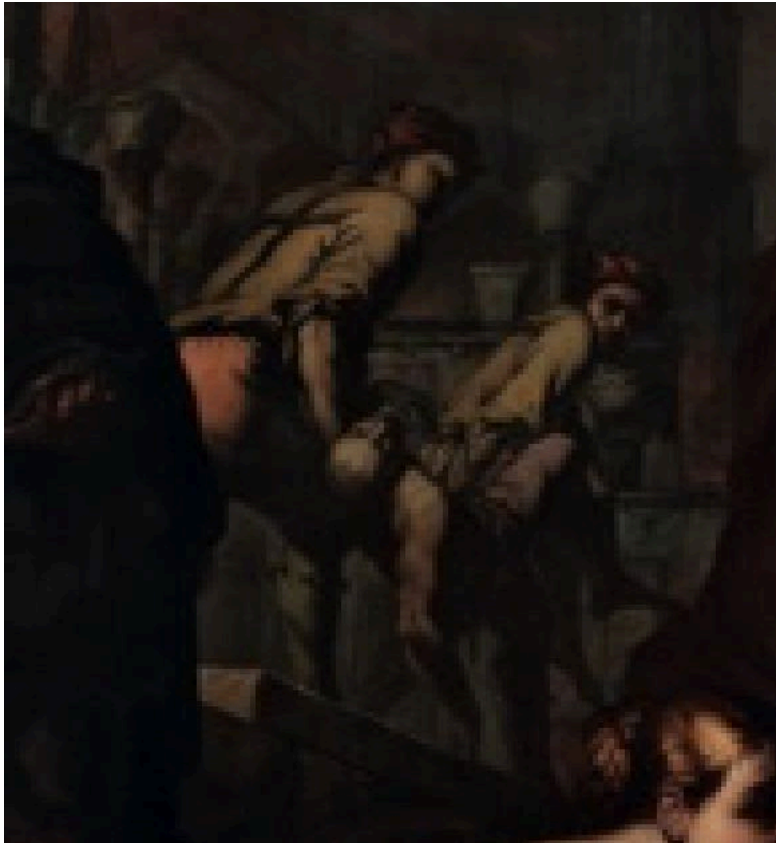


Figure 5.37: Detail of pizzigamorti with identifying garments



Figure 5.38: Detail of small-scale pizzigamorti in sotoportego



Figure 5.39: 17th-century engraving of plague doctor mask and garment first developed in Paris



Figure 5.40:
 Zanchi, detail of bells at calves of pizzigamorti



Figure 5.41: pizzigamorto bell, seventeenth century
Lazzaretto Nuovo



Figure 5.42: detail of pizzigamorto and corpse *memento mori*



Figure 5.43: Andrea Palladio, Teatro Olimpico, 1585, Vicenza



Figure 5.44: Interior of the San Giovanni Grisostomo opera house showing stacked *palchi*, Engraving, Vincenzo Maria Coronelli, 1709



Figure 5.45: Zanchi, *The Virgin Appears*, detail of virtual opera box



Figure 5.46: Negri, *The Madonna Saves Venice*, detail of virtual opera box



Figure 5.47: Set design for *Venere gelosa*, late 17th century, etching by Pierre Aveline

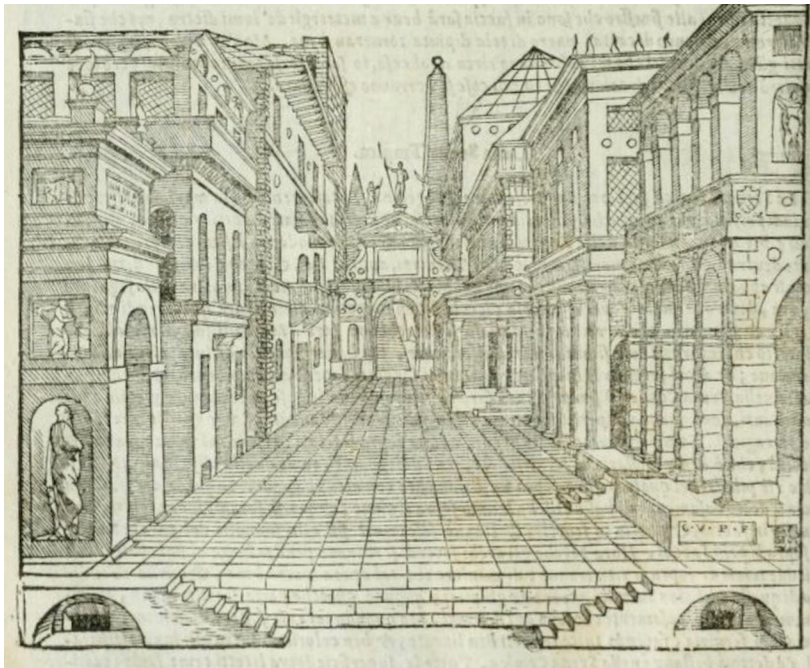


Figure 5.48: Sebastiano Serlio, “Della scena tragica” in *Tutte l’opere d’architettura et prospetiva*, Book II (Venice: Giacomo de’ Franceschi, 1618), 47.

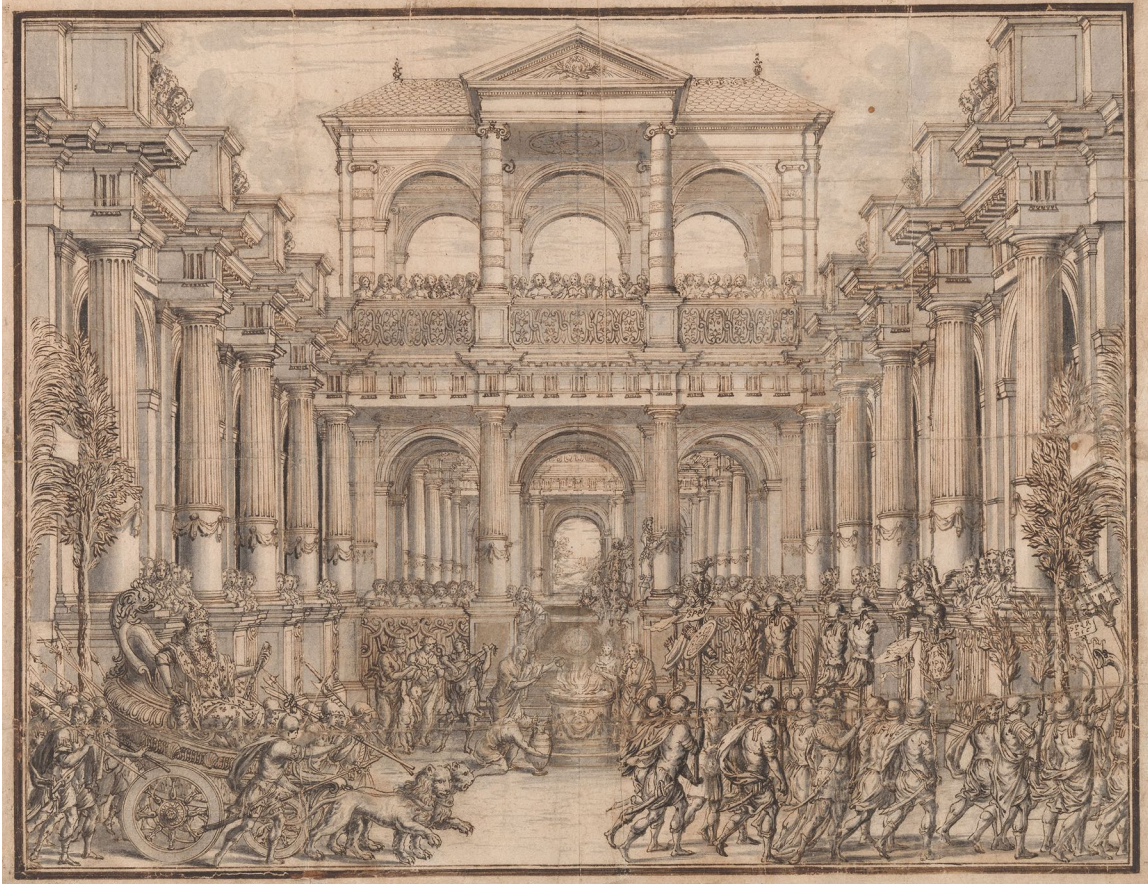


Figure 5.49: Giacomo Torelli, *Royal Entry into a Classical Court*, mid-17th century, pen and ink

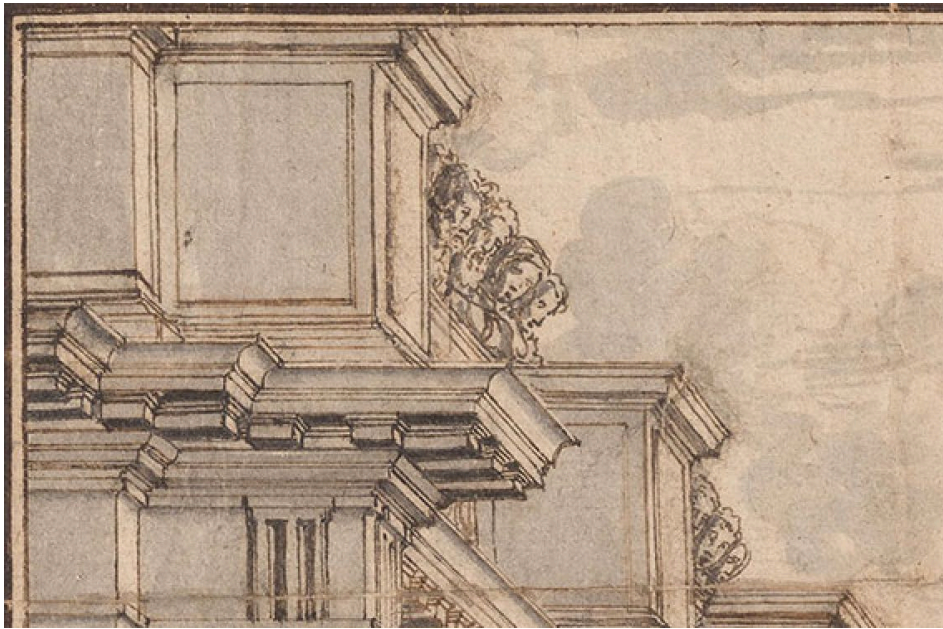


Figure 5.50: Torelli, *Royal Entry* detail

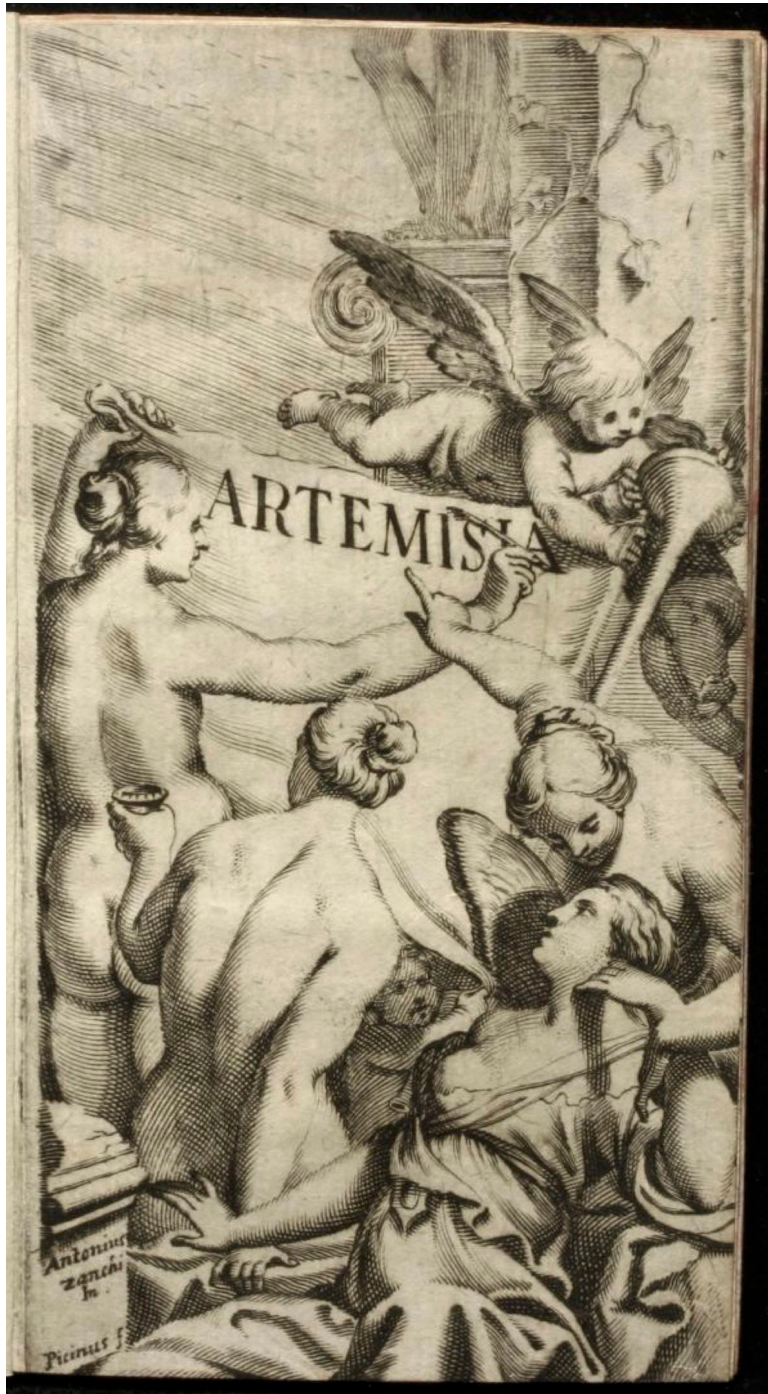


Figure 5.51:
Antonio Zanchi
Frontispiece in libretto for *Artemisia* (1656)
Performed at Teatro dei SS. Giovanni e Paolo
Engraving, 147 x 81 mm
Printed by Andrea Giuliani



Figure 5.52: Giacomo Torelli, stage set for *Bellerofonte*, 1642, engraving by Giovanni Giorgi



Figure 6.1:
Giambattista Tiepolo, *Saint Tecla Pleads God for the Liberation of Este from the Plague*
Oil on canvas, 6.75 x 3.9 meters, 1759

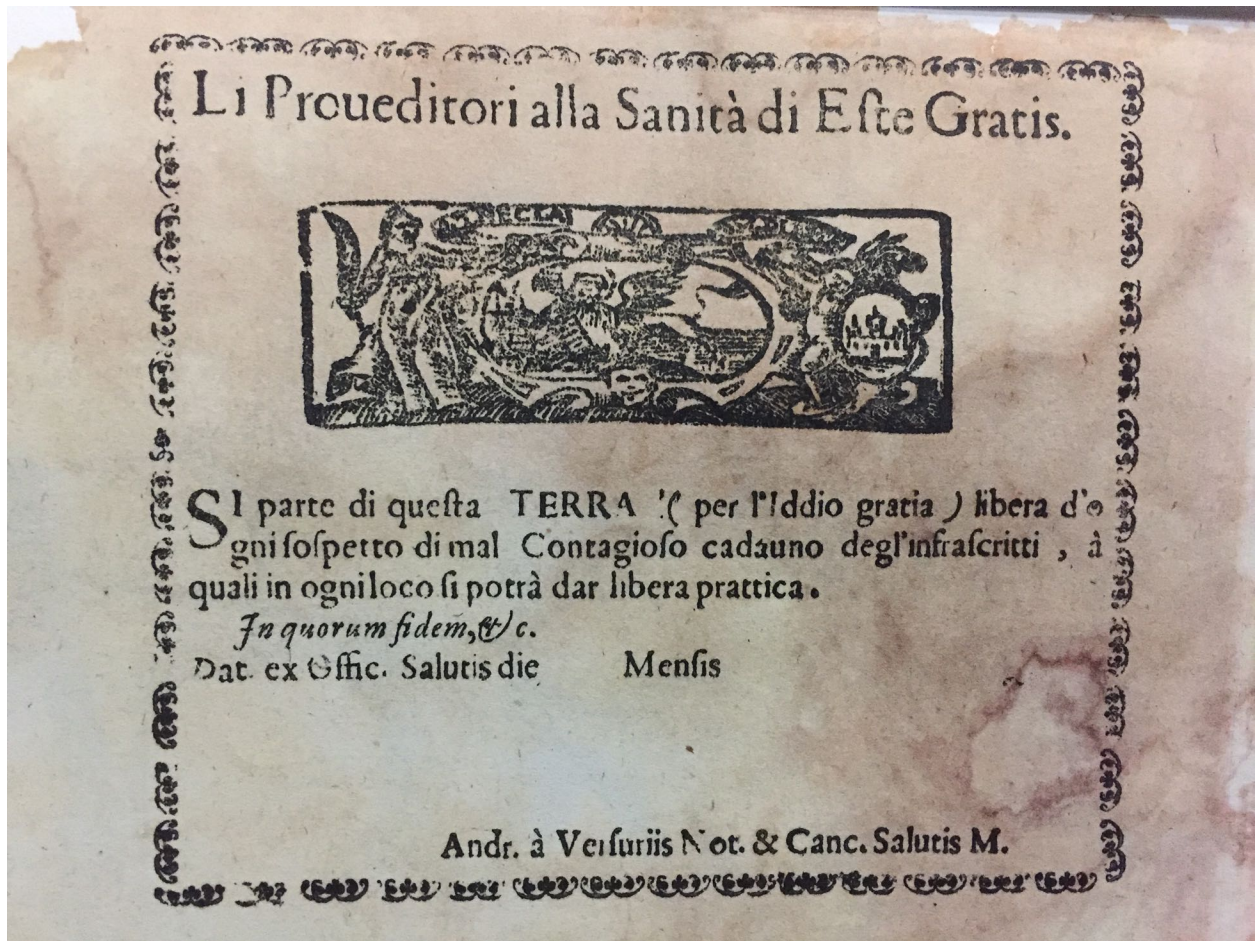


Figure 6.2: Health pass from Este (*fede*) from 1631

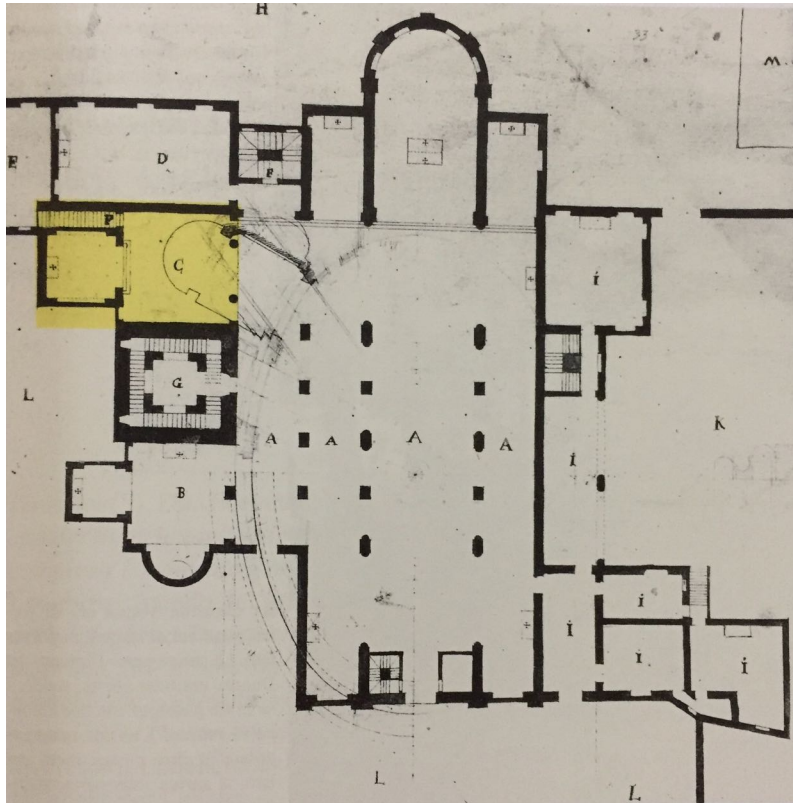


Figure 6.3:
Plan of original basilica in Este
(demolished in 1690),
Highlighted portion showing
original votive chapel to Saint
Tecla

From *Raccolta Gaspari*, III, 33,
Museo Correr, Venice



Figure 6.4: Votive painting of Saint Tecla interceding for Este
Unknown artist, 230 x 130 cm, 1631



Figure 6.5: Bernardino Prudenti
*The Virgin and Child, with Mark the Evangelist, the Blessed Lorenzo Giustiniani,
Saint Roch, and Saint Sebastian*
Oil on canvas, 2 x 3 meters, 1631



Figure 6.6:
 Domenico Tintoretto
Venice Supplicating to the Virgin
 San Francesco della Vigna, Venice
 Oil on canvas, 1631



Figure 6.7:
 Antonio Giarola
Verona Supplicates to the Trinity
 San Fermo Maggiore, Verona
 Oil on canvas, 1636



Figure 6.8: detail of *pizzigamorti* with stretcher and cart of bodies



Figure 6.9: detail of *pizzigamorti* on right side of canvas



Figure 6.10:
Marco Vecellio
*The Virgin and Saints
Dominic and Francis
intercede for Humanity's
Sinfulness*
SS. Giovanni e Paolo,
Venice
Oil on canvas, before 1611



Figure 6.11: Este's 1631 plague ex-voto in its altar in the new duomo



Figure 6.12: Antonio Zanchi, *The Canonization of Lorenzo Giustiniani*
Oil on canvas, 665 x 395 cm, 1702



Figure 6.13:
Detail of Zanchi's
*Canonization of
Lorenzo Giustiniani*

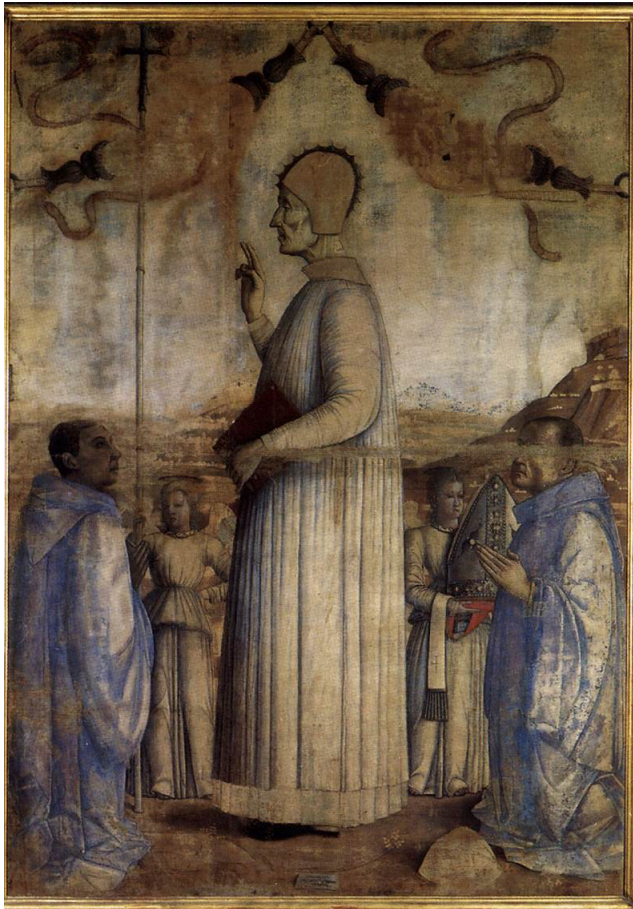


Figure 6.14:
Gentile Bellini
The Blessed Lorenzo Giustiniani
Tempera on canvas, 222 x 155 cm, 1465



Figure 6.15:
Antonio Bellucci
Doge Nicolò Contarini implores the Blessed Lorenzo Giustiniani to halt the plague of 1630
San Pietro in Castello, oil on canvas, 6.75 x 3.90 m, 1695



6.16: detail of plague victims



Figure 6.17:
Giambattista Tiepolo, *Saint Tecla Pleads God for the Liberation of Este from the Plague*
Oil on canvas, 6.75 x 3.9 meters, 1759



Figure 6.18: Interior of Este's Duomo di Santa Tecla, with Tiepolo altarpiece in situ, before its removal in 2012 for conservation



Figure 6.19:
Marcantonio Raimondi,
after Raphael
Il morbetto
Engraving, 19.8 x 2.52 mm
c.1515



Figure 6.20:
Nicolas Poussin, *Plague at Ashdod*, oil on canvas, 148 x 198 cm, 1630



Figure 6.21: Giambattista Tiepolo, *modello* for Este altarpiece, 81.3 x 44.8 cm, 1758-59



Figure 6.22:
God and cloudbank in the *modello*



Figure 6.23:
God and cloudbank in the finished altarpiece



Figure 6.24:
Giambattista Tiepolo
Soldiers and Columns
Villa Valmarana, Vicenza
Fresco, 1757



Figure 6.25:
Detail of expressive dog



Figure 6.26:
Giambattista Tiepolo
Banquet of Cleopatra
Oil on canvas, 250 x 357 cm, 1743-44



Figure 6.27:
Detail of figures in background



Figure 6.28:
Giambattista Tiepolo
Detail of disembodied trumpets from margins of
Transport of the Holy House of Loreto
Oil on canvas, c.1743



Figure 6.29:
Detail of middle ground
of *modello*



Figure 6.30: Detail of middle ground of *Saint Tecla Pleads God*



Figure 6.31: Detail of background of *Saint Tecla Pleads God*



Figure 6.32: Lorenzo Tiepolo, *Saint Tecla Pleads God for the Liberation of Este*
Etching, 70 x 40 cm, c.1759

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