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## Centre vs Periphery in the Stato da Mar: art and architecture in the public space of fifteenth-century Dalmatia and the examples of Trogir and Šibenik

Considering the different opinions on the centre/periphery paradigm expressed respectively by Ljubo Karaman and Enrico Castelnuovo/Carlo Ginzburg, the paper provides a few reflections on the political and cultural influence of the relationship between Venice and Dalmatia on the Dalmatian artistic production during the Quattrocento. In particular, on the one hand, it addresses questions about the role that Dalmatia, as a Venetian province (using this term in Karaman's sense), played for the Serenissima during the fifteenth century; on the other, using Trogir and Šibenik as primary examples, it focuses on how the Venetian perspective may have influenced the monumental art and architecture produced in the public space of Dalmatian towns, as a result of specific territorial strategies carried out by the Serenissima for installing its authority on the urban space, so as to symbolize a good and well-organized government, as well as the subjugation to the Republic.

At the beginning of the fifteenth century, the Republic of Venice was in territorial expansion. As a result of military and diplomatic actions, it doubled its territories and population, ushering in a long period of prosperity<sup>1</sup>. Between 1409 and 1420, Venice acquired Dalmatia and imposed

<sup>1</sup> For general studies on fifteenth century Venetian expansion see: Alberto Tenenti, "The Sense of Space and Time in the Venetian World of the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries," in *Renaissance Venice*, ed. J. R. Hale, (London: Rowman and Littlefield, 1973), 17–46; Gaetano Cozzi, *La Repubblica di Venezia nell'età moderna: Dalla guerra di Chioggia al 1517* (Turin: Utet, 1986); *Storia di Venezia. Dalle Origini alla Caduta della Serenissima*, vol. 4: *Il Rinascimento. Politica e cultura*, ed. A. Tenenti and U. Tucci (Rome: Istituto della Enciclopedia Italiana, 1996); *Storia di Venezia. Dalle Origini alla Caduta della Serenissima*, vol. 5: *Il Rinascimento. Società ed economia*, ed. A. Tenenti and U. Tucci (Rome: Istituto della Enciclopedia Italiana, 1996); Alvise Zorzi, *La Repubblica del Leone. Storia di Venezia* (Milan: Bompiani, 2001); Gherardo Ortalli, "Entrar nel Dominio: le dedizioni delle città alla Repubblica Serenissima," in *Società, economia, istituzioni. Elementi per la conoscenza della Repubblica Veneta*, ed. G. Ortalli, G. Borelli, G. Zordan (Verona: Cierre Edizioni, 2002), 49–62.

its control over the eastern Adriatic coast and the adjoining islands, with the notable exceptions of Quarnaro and the Republic of Ragusa<sup>2</sup>.

Venice included Dalmatian communes in its administrative chart, assigning them new functions and political roles. The cities became emporiums, trading centres for luxury goods, salt, grain, and timber, and were divided between fortified ports and central government offices.<sup>3</sup> These new roles reflected the political and economic importance of the region as a brand-new, close, and strategic part of the Republic's *Stato da Mar* (sea domains). After 1409, Zadar became the critical administrative headquarters and military stronghold in the region; Split, after 1420, an important military fortress city; Trogir, conquered after a long siege in 1420, was a fundamental fortified maritime emporium for Venice; and Šibenik, subdued in 1412, was transformed into a customs, treasury, and salt distribution hub.

Unlike other maritime domains such as the Levantine islands, seen more as colonies (with a few exceptions),<sup>4</sup> the eastern Adriatic coast was treated as an integral part of the State, subjected by the Senate and intended to the same laws and administrative practices as the *Terraferma* (mainland), which reflected those within the *Dogado*<sup>5</sup>. Even if the same legal and administrative system ruled the whole *Stato da Mar*, the economic and symbolic importance of Dalmatian municipalities caused them to be treated, much like the *Stato da Terra* (land domains), as an expression of Venice itself through territorial policies that provided them with new symbols of the new ruling power<sup>6</sup>. These State symbols, together with

- 2 For studies on the Venetian expansion throughout the Eastern Adriatic coast and the Levante see: Marko Šunjić, *Dalmacija u 15. stoljeću* (Sarajevo: Svjetlost, 1967); Agostino Pertusi, *Venezia e il Levante fino al secolo XV* (Florence: Olschki, 1973); Frederic Chapin Lane, *Venice, a Maritime Republic* (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1973); *Storia di Venezia. Dalle Origini alla Caduta della Serenissima*, vol. 12: *Temi: Il Mare*, ed. A. Tenenti (Rome: Istituto della Enciclopedia Italiana, 1991); Benjamin Arbel, "Colonie d'oltremare," in Tenenti and Tucci, *Storia di Venezia*, vol. 5, 947–985; Reinhold Christopher Mueller, "Aspects of Venetian Sovereignty in Medieval and Renaissance Dalmatia," in *Quattrocento Adriatico. Fifteenth-Century Art of the Adriatic Rim* (Bologna: Nuova Alfa Editoriale, 1996), 29–56; Filippo de Vivo, "Historical Justifications of Venetian Power in the Adriatic," *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 64: 2 (2003): 159–176; Monique O'Connell, *Men of Empire: Power and Negotiation in Venice's Maritime State* (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 2009); Oliver Jens Schmitt, "Das venezianische Südosteuropa als Kommunikationsraum (ca. 1400 – ca. 1600)," in *Balcani occidentali. Adriatico e Venezia fra tredicesimo e diciottesimo secolo / Der westliche Balkan, der Adriaraum und Venedig (13.–18. Jahrhundert)*, ed. G. Ortalli and O. J. Schmitt (Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2009), 77–101; Egidio Ivetić, "Venezia e l'Adriatico orientale: connotazioni di un rapporto (secoli XIV–XVIII)," in Ortalli and Schmitt, *Balcani occidentali*; Benjamin Arbel, "Venice's Maritime Empire in the Early Modern Period," in *A Companion to Venetian History, 1400–1797*, ed. E. Dursteler (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2013), 125–253; *Venezia e Dalmazia*, ed. U. Israel and O. J. Schmitt (Rome: Viella, 2013).
- 3 Mueller, "Aspects of Venetian Sovereignty," 29–56; Michael Mallett, John R. Hale, *The Military Organization of a Renaissance State. Venice c. 1400 to 1617* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 7; Irena Benyovsky Latin, "The Venetian Impact on Urban Change in Dalmatian Towns in the First Part of the Fifteenth Century," *Acta Histriae* 22 (2014): 576.
- 4 Maria Georgopolou, *Venice's Mediterranean Colonies: Architecture and Urbanism* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001).
- 5 Alfredo Viggiano, *Governanti e governati nello Stato veneto della prima Età Moderna. Legittimità del potere ed esercizio dell'autorità sovrana* (Treviso: Edizioni Canova, 1993); O'Connell, *Men of Empire*, 2, 31.
- 6 Gian Maria Varanini, "Centro e periferia nello stato regionale. Costanti e variabili in rapporto tra Venezia e le città della Terraferma nel Quattrocento," in Ortalli Borelli, Zordan, *Società, economia, istituzioni*, 75–97; Claudio Povolo, "The Creation of Venetian Historiography," in *Venice Reconsidered. The History and Civilization of an Italian City-State*, ed. J. J. Martin and D. Romano (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002), 491–519; O'Connell, *Men of Empire*, 59–61.

other elements such as the fortification, legal and administrative systems and the networks of power, contributed to unifying a large empire that was neither geographically nor geopolitically homogeneous and whose centre and peripheries required different policies.<sup>7</sup>

However, the symbolic attention paid by the centre to the eastern Adriatic coast happened to be more complicated than in the case of the *Terraferma*. In Dalmatia, the Serenissima found a set of municipalities with a strong communal identity expressed in well-established forms of self-government and urban structures from the previous Angevin domination under the Hungarian and Croatian Crown<sup>8</sup>. Negotiations had to be concluded with local élites of the municipal councils to obtain their trust, maintaining local political and social structures and solid building codes.<sup>9</sup> Except for a few changes, Venice decided to retain the old Dalmatian statutes and some elements of political autonomy, when not in contrast with its necessities<sup>10</sup>. The intermediaries between the two components, Venetian and communal, were the Venetian Counts who acted as the actual urban rulers and representatives of the State in the region – not as colonists but as the mouthpiece of the local élite.<sup>11</sup>

In this light, it appears that any reference to the governmental institutions of Dalmatia during the fifteenth century should be expressed in terms of a duality between the Venetian State power and the local administration, which was represented by the communal councils. The latter, in many cases, also exercised direct control over the main local religious institutions. These factors made the communes of the eastern Adriatic coast politically and socially different from the towns of the Venetian *Terraferma* and pushed Venice to develop a specific territorial strategy based on negotiation<sup>12</sup>. Understanding how this policy affected the expression of Venetian control over public building sites and artistic commissions throughout the region remains a challenge.

7 Benyovsky Latin, "The Venetian Impact," 577; Gaetano Cozzi, "La politica del diritto nella Repubblica di Venezia," in *Stato, società e giustizia nella repubblica veneta (sec. XV- XVIII)*, ed. G. Cozzi (Rome: Jouvence, 1980), 15–152; Donatella Calabi, "Le basi ultramarine," in Tenenti, *Storia di Venezia*, 862.

8 Calabi, "Le basi ultramarine," 862; O'Connell, *Men of Empire*, 27–33; Benyovsky Latin, "The Venetian Impact," 575–577.

9 O'Connell, *Men of Empire*, 27–33; Benyovsky Latin, "The Venetian Impact," 573–616; Irena Benyovsky Latin, "Governmental Palaces in Eastern Adriatic Cities (13th–15th Centuries)," in *Political Functions of Urban Spaces and Town Types through the Ages. Making Use of the Historic Towns Atlases in Europe*, ed. R. Czaja, Z. Noga, F. Opll, M. Scheutz (Cracow/Torun/Wien: Towarzystwo Naukowe w Toruniu, 2019), 111–159.

10 Maja Novak, *Autonomija dalmatinskih komuna pod Venecijom* (Zagreb: JAZU, 1965); Tomislav Raukar, "Komunalna društva u Dalmaciji u XV. i 1. polovici XVI. stoljeća," *Historijski zbornik* 35 (1982): 43–118; Gherardo Ortalli, "Il ruolo degli statuti tra autonomie e dipendenze: Curzola e il dominio veneziano," *Rivista Storica Italiana* 98 (1986): 195–220; Gian Maria Varanini, "Gli statuti delle città della terraferma veneta nel Quattrocento," in *Statuti, città, territori in Italia e Germania tra Medioevo ed Età Moderna*, ed. Giorgio Chittolini and Dietmar Willoweit (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1991), 247–317; Gherardo Ortalli, "La città e la capitale. Gli statuti locali nello Stato veneziano e il caso bellunese," in Ortalli, Borelli, Zordan, *Società, economia, istituzioni*, 63–73; O'Connell, *Men of Empire*, 31–33; Bruno Dudan, *Venezia e Dalmazia: statuti e ordinamenti* (Venice: Scuola Dalmata dei SS. Giorgio e Trifone, 2008).

11 Benyovsky Latin, "The Venetian Impact," 579.

12 O'Connell, *Men of Empire*, 27–33.

It is important to consider the actions that Venice, as a political and artistic centre, directed at its Dalmatian province in light of the latter's local and cultural identity. Venice promoted and financed public works that could symbolize its presence and authority over the territory; it provided new symbols, iconographies and architectural or artistic forms that would allow its power to be collectively recognized; in order to express its importance and tradition, artists were sent over from the centre to be involved in local commissions or official endeavours; and so on. Because of the restrictions faced by the Serenissima in carrying out an actual manipulation of the local political institutions and urban space, these practices were aimed at maintaining order and gaining the trust of local élites while exploiting the strategic role assigned to the subjugated territories and stressing the importance of Dalmatia in the Adriatic trade routes. However, the constant attention to the wishes of local communal councils that characterized this process of "Venetianisation" gave local institutions a broader freedom in terms of artistic commissioning and production.

Right after 1420, the most important Dalmatian towns underwent significant urban changes to adapt spaces and buildings to the functional needs of the Venetian State. The first investments were aimed, together with the restoration of the fortresses, at the reconstruction of secular and religious public buildings<sup>13</sup>. In most cases, the Serenissima decided to preserve the medieval positions and their public role within the well-established urban structures<sup>14</sup>. This contributed to the maintenance and further development of the Dalmatian public squares as ideal spaces for the representative communication policies carried out by the main public institutions. The artistic and architectural political symbols in those squares should therefore be historically read not simply as a univocal expression of Venetian representativeness, but as a result of specific and distinct political languages that were eventually unified in a shared public space under Venetian authority.

In this context where the local municipal component was still robust, one wonders if it is possible to clearly observe the Venetian impact on the changes made in the main squares and to identify some degree of independence between Venetian and municipal commissions in these public spaces. Venice certainly had a decisive role in promoting, financing, and

13 Donatella Calabi, "Città ed edilizia pubblica nel dominio veneziano da mare: modelli, significato civile, linguaggio architettonico," in *Attes du colloque de Rome 1986* (Rome: École Française de Rome, 1989), 813-843; Donatella Calabi, "Città e territorio nel dominio da mar," in *Storia di Venezia. Dalle Origini alla Caduta della Serenissima*, vol. 6: *Dal Rinascimento al Barocco*, ed. G. Cozzi and P. Prodi, (Rome: Istituto della Enciclopedia Italiana, 1994), 943-977; Benyovsky Latin, "The Venetian Impact," 573-616; Benyovsky Latin, "Governmental Palaces," 111-159.

14 Calabi, "Città ed edilizia pubblica," 813-843; Benyovsky Latin, "The Venetian Impact," 602-606; Benyovsky Latin, "Governmental Palaces," 111-159; Krasanka Majer Jurišić, "The Dwellings of Venetian Rulers in Dalmatia from the 15th to 18th Century," *Peristil* 56 (2013): 165-176; Krasanka Majer Jurišić, *Arhitektura vlasti i suda: vijećnice, lože i kneževе palače u Dalmaciji od 15. do 18. stoljeća* (Zagreb: Hrvatski restauratorski zavod, Društvo povjesničara umjetnosti Hrvatske, 2017).

approving specific works, but it seems that it did not always make a direct contribution, responding to the different needs voiced in the complex local civic environment. Therefore, the architectural and artistic redesign of the public urban space within Venetian territorial policies, reveals a more complex mixture of cultural issues which, although taking place under the consent of the Venetian Senate, should be regarded as an expression of communal identity values promoted by local institutions.

All the urban changes in Dalmatian towns, especially in the early decades of the fifteenth century, revealed, at least in financial terms, Venice's intention of emphasizing its sovereignty and protection, and its efforts to bring local needs in line with the aspirations of the centre.<sup>15</sup> However, this seems to have happened cautiously and gradually, since the Venetian presence created new loyalties with the local patriciate within the city councils and new forms of dialogue and political collaboration. The new Venetian authorities paid special attention to repairing local communal palaces and public buildings like loggias and civic towers, while largely preserving their former conditions.<sup>16</sup> Investments in public buildings started during the fifteenth century and increased later on, particularly during the sixteenth century.<sup>17</sup> Dalmatian town councils requested financing for specific public works, and the Venetian government swiftly approved the funding according to its intentions and the necessities of local institutions. As long as the Serenissima decided to negotiate with the local élites, the redesign of Dalmatian public squares did not bring about much structural difference compared to the situation before the Venetian arrival. However, the Republic's impact on these urban changes can be traced to the commitment of new forms, functions and especially new symbols, which were gradually grafted in different ways and in constant parallelism with the symbols of the communes.<sup>18</sup> Among these details were floral-late-gothic windows or doors, the coats of arms of Venetian counts, and, most of all, the Lion of St. Mark, which was emblazoned on every public building<sup>19</sup>. The use of specific styles, forms and iconographic programmes to represent the Venetian and communal components continued at the same pace throughout the fifteenth century, in some cases overlapping with one another and in others evolving independently, but always with the permission of Venice. Celebrations of the episcopal power were also included, the cathedrals being a significant communal property but also, obviously, extremely important for the State.

15 Calabi, "Città ed edilizia pubblica," 813-843; Benyovsky Latin, "The Venetian Impact," 602.

16 Benyovsky Latin, "The Venetian Impact," 573-616; Benyovsky Latin, "Governmental Palaces," 111-159; Majer Jurišić, *Arhitektura vlasti i suda*.

17 Benyovsky Latin, "The Venetian Impact," 602.

18 O'Connell, *Men of Empire*, 60; Benyovsky Latin, "The Venetian Impact," 605-606.

19 Mueller, "Aspects of Venetian Sovereignty," 36; Alberto Rizzi, *I leoni di Venezia in Dalmazia* (Venice: Scuola Dalmata dei SS. Giorgio e Trifone, 2008); O'Connell, *Men of Empire*, 60; Benyovsky Latin, "The Venetian Impact," 598, 606; Benyovsky Latin, "Governmental Palaces," 156.

Two case studies best exemplify the level of interest and interaction from all the major institutional parties in exploiting the public space of town squares in artistic terms for representation purposes. These are Trogir and Šibenik, where all the main public buildings coexisted even before the Venetian arrival in the same urban space, coinciding with the main square. The Serenissima decided to keep them in this position throughout its centuries-long dominion. An important factor that determined the importance of the squares of Trogir and Šibenik is that, unlike in other Dalmatian cities, they hosted both civic and main religious institutions – not simple municipal churches but also the cathedrals. This made the public space more significant in symbolic terms and justified the substantial investments in artistic commissions.

The fact that both the State power and the municipal and episcopal ones shared the same public space as their official seat and had the same interest in making it the place for their representation allows us to better observe the interaction between central and local powers in the management of public artistic sites and its influence on the whole process of art commissioning and production.

In Trogir, right after the Venetian conquest, each building of the *platea comunis* was restored, and other brand-new buildings were erected, making it different from the medieval square in both formal and symbolic terms.<sup>20</sup> These new buildings include the chapel of Saint John in the Cathedral of St. Lawrence (better known as Orsini Chapel), the church of Saint Sebastian, and the new baptistery. The works on the chapel of Saint John (Fig. 1) started with a contract dated 1468, by which the sculptors Niccolò di Giovanni Fiorentino and Andrea Alessi were commissioned by the city council and the bishop Giacomo Turloni to execute a stone casing that replicated in a new Renaissance style the gothic civic chapel containing the remains of the communal patron saint.<sup>21</sup> The construction went on from 1477 to 1482, and the sculptures for the decoration, which also involved

20 Irena Benyovsky Latin, "Urbane promjene u Trogiru u prvim desetljećima mletačke vlasti (1420.-1450.)," in *Povijesni prilozi*, 23 (2002), 71-85; Irena Benyovsky Latin, *Srednjovjekovni Trogir: proctor i društvo* (Zagreb: Hrvatski institut za povijest, 2009); Benyovsky Latin, "The Venetian Impact," 604-606; Radoslav Bužančić, *Niccolò di Giovanni Fiorentino and Trogir's renovatio urbis* (Split: Književni krug, 2015); Irena Benyovsky Latin, "Medieval Square in Trogir: Space and Society," *Revue d'histoire croate* 14: 1 (2018): 9-62.

21 Cvito Fisković, "Aleši, Firentinac i Duknović u Trogiru," *Bulletin Instituta za likovne umjetnosti JAZU* 7 (1959): 20-43; Anne Markham Schulz, *Niccolò di Giovanni Fiorentino and Venetian Sculpture of the Early Renaissance* (New York: New York University Press 1978); Radovan Ivančević, "Rekonstrukcija Firentinceva oltara trogirске kapelle," *Peristil* 38 (1995): 51-58; Reinhold Christopher Mueller, "Contract Between the Opera of the Cathedral of Trau and the Stonecutters Niccolò di Giovanni Fiorentino and Andrea Alessi for the Construction and Decoration of the Chapel of the Blessed Giovanni Orsini in Traù, 1467 - 1468," in *Quattrocento Adriatico*, 225-230; Samo Štefanac, "Niccolò di Giovanni Fiorentino e la cappella del Beato Giovanni Orsini a Traù: il progetto, l'architettura, la decorazione scultorea," in *Quattrocento Adriatico*, 123-141; Anne Markham Schulz, "Further Thoughts on Niccolò di Giovanni Fiorentino in Dalmatia and Italy," in *Quattrocento Adriatico*, 143-162; Radovan Ivančević, *Rana renesansa u Trogiru* (Split: Književni krug, 1997); Vanja Kovačić, *Nikola Ivanov Firentinac u Trogiru* (Split: Književni krug, 2007); Vladimir Marković, "Kapela blaženog Ivana Trogirskog Nikole Firentinca i sakralna arhitektura u Dalmaciji 300 godina poslije," *Radovi Instituta za povijest umjetnosti* 31 (2007), 121-130; Bužančić, *Niccolò di Giovanni Fiorentino*; Ivan Josipović, "Nikola Firentinac i Alešijeva Krstionica Trogirске Katedrale," *Radovi Instituta za povijest umjetnosti*, 33 (2009), 47-66.



Fig. 1

Chapel of Saint John (Orsini Chapel),  
Cathedral of St. Lawrence, Trogir

Giovanni Dalmata, were paid from 1482 to 1494. Since its foundation in the fourteenth century, the chapel had been under the jurisdiction of the commune rather than the bishop, according to a system of direct control over the body of the *Operaria* and to the practice of appointing the procurators of the cathedral among the nobles rather than the clerics<sup>22</sup>. This interference of the secular powers on the religious one meant that the altar of the saint in the new chapel became a public place for the exercise of political functions such as official oaths, which had to be carried out inside the chapel so that the swearing parties could touch the relics of the saint that ensured protection and legitimacy to the whole city<sup>23</sup>. Therefore, the chapel was communal to all intents and purposes and represented a recognizable celebrative monument of local communal identity. It is still challenging to understand whether Venice intended to introduce any symbols directly connected to its authority over the commune into such a politically important endeavour. A clue can be found in a particular event: in 1487 Niccolò di Giovanni was paid for a statue of Christ ascending (Fig. 2), which was to be placed at the frontal summit of the chapel.<sup>24</sup> In 1494, however, he provided a second version, depicting the resurrected Christ.<sup>25</sup> In the Venetian mythology of power at that time, the ascending Christ represented the Doge approaching God.<sup>26</sup> This allusion came from the Venetian *ducat* and appeared in art for the first time in the funeral monument of doge Francesco Foscari in the Frari church.<sup>27</sup> In its crowning, the figure of the ascending Christ changed the common motif of the risen Christ, providing an eloquent symbolic device celebrating the doge, his power and, therefore, the Republic.<sup>28</sup> However, it may have been unsuitable for any context other than the funeral monument of a doge, which is why the Trogir composition, once completed, was replaced with a traditional Resurrection.<sup>29</sup> This event would have brought the iconographic program back to a communal dimension while preserving the symbolic autonomy from the State of such an important communal place.

The church of Saint Sebastian (Fig. 3) was built between 1477 and 1480 as a communal votive offering to celebrate the end of the plague of 1466.

22 Benyovsky Latin, "Medieval Square in Trogir," 9–62.

23 Benyovsky Latin, "Medieval Square in Trogir," 9–62.

24 Cvito Fisković, *Opis trogirske katedrale iz XVIII. stoljeća* (Split: Bihać: Hrvatsko društvo za istraživanje domaće povijesti u Splitu, 1940), 43–44.

25 Fisković, *Opis trogirske Katedrale*, 43–44.

26 Markham Schulz, *Niccolò di Giovanni Fiorentino*, 11, 62; Markham Schulz, "Further Thoughts," 160–161; Anne Markham Schulz, *The History of Venetian Renaissance Sculpture (ca. 1410–1530)* (Turnhout: Harvey Miller, 2017), 134–135.

27 Schulz, *Niccolò di Giovanni Fiorentino*, 11, 62; Schulz, "Further Thoughts," 160–161; Markham Schulz, *The History of Venetian Renaissance Sculpture*, 134–135.

28 Schulz, *Niccolò di Giovanni Fiorentino*, 11, 62; Schulz, "Further Thoughts," 160–161; Markham Schulz, *The History of Venetian Renaissance Sculpture*, 134–135.

29 Schulz, *Niccolò di Giovanni Fiorentino*, 11, 62; Schulz, "Further Thoughts," 160–161; Markham Schulz, *The History of Venetian Renaissance Sculpture*, 134–135; Igor Fisković, "Stup s Firentinčevim kipom Krista Uzašašća sred Trogira," *Prilozi povijesti umjetnosti u Dalmaciji* 41 (2008): 269–299.



The importance of this church was increased even further as it was converted in a civic tower<sup>30</sup>. It took on the connotations of a public place that represented the whole local community, united by the same experience and identity. Also in this case, Niccolò di Giovanni Fiorentino and his workshop produced the statues for the façade (Fig. 4), and the beautiful stone statue of Saint Sebastian for the high altar<sup>31</sup> (Fig. 5). For that church, the architects used an older wall of the medieval apse of the church of Saint Mary de' Platea and created a new opening onto the square, putting the church in direct communication with the outside as a continuation of the public space, probably for ritual reasons<sup>32</sup>.

Ritual necessities also brought the commune to order the construction of a new baptistery for the cathedral (Fig. 6). Also in this case, the commission was communal. The work, signed by Andrea Alessi, was inaugurated in 1467.<sup>33</sup> For the baptistery, Alessi used Renaissance forms inspired by ancient models and created a great relief depicting Saint Jerome in the desert (Fig. 7), whose cult assumed high importance in fifteenth-century Dalmatia as it celebrated the identity of the region. The sculpture represented the whole local community gathered in the baptistery for the collective ritual of baptism, consolidating the image of this place as a communal sacred building.

The space used by Venice to represent its presence and authority in the square more directly was the new Loggia magna<sup>34</sup> (Fig. 8, 9). The structure was enriched with a stone relief by Niccolò di Giovanni Fiorentino assisted by Andrea Alessi. Inaugurated in 1471, it gathered all the crucial political symbols: a high relief of Saint Mark's lion, now lost, which emphasized the authority of the Serenissima in the city; the statue of the Justice, suitable the functions carried out in the location; Saint Lawrence, patron of the diocese; and the local Saint John, patron of the commune. The coat of arms of Count Alvise Lando completed the iconographic ensemble, celebrating the local government under Venetian control. This altarpiece acted as a political manifesto and enabled the community to recognize the State's presence and authority and the quality of its government and justice in union with the local civic and religious institutions.

30 Samo Štefanac, "Nikolaj Florentinec in njegova kipa Sv. Sebastijana v Trogiru," in *Raziskovanje kulturne ustvarjalnosti na Slovenskem*, ed. J. Šumi (Ljubljana: Univerza Edvarda Kardelja v Ljubljani, 1999), 519–534; Bužančić, *Niccolò di Giovanni Fiorentino*, 117–128; Benyovsky Latin, "Medieval Square in Trogir," 43.

31 Cvito Fisković, "Firentinčev Sebastijan u Trogiru," *Zbornik za umetnostno zgodovino* 5/6 (1959): 369–382; Markham Schulz, *Niccolò di Giovanni Fiorentino*, 11, 62; Bužančić, *Niccolò di Giovanni Fiorentino*, 117–128.

32 Benyovsky Latin, "Medieval Square in Trogir," 43.

33 C. Fisković, "Aleši, Firentinac i Duknović u Trogiru," 20–43; Andrija Mutnjaković, *Andrija Alessi* (Zagreb: Architectonica Croatica, 1998); Radovan Ivančević, "Trogirska krstionica i montažne konstrukcije dalmatinske graditeljske škole," *Prilozi povijesti umjetnosti u Dalmaciji* 30 (1990): 145–185; Ivančević, *Rana renesansa u Trogiru*, 57–78; Bužančić, *Niccolò di Giovanni Fiorentino*, 82–90; Benyovsky Latin, "Medieval Square in Trogir," 50–51.

34 Radovan Ivančević, "Trogirska loža: Templum iuris et ara iustitiae (1471)," *Prilozi povijesti umjetnosti u Dalmaciji* 31:1 (1991): 115–146; Ivančević, *Rana renesansa u Trogiru*, 91–113; Marija Anderle, *Die loggia communis an der östlichen Adria* (Weimar: VDG, 2002); Bužančić, *Niccolò di Giovanni Fiorentino*, 117–128; Benyovsky Latin, "Medieval Square in Trogir," 41–45.



Fig. 2

Niccolò di Giovanni Fiorentino, *Ascending Christ*,  
1487, Museum of Sacred Art, Trogir



Fig. 3

Church of St. Sebastian and Clock tower,  
Trogir



Fig. 4

Niccolò di Giovanni Fiorentino and workshop,  
*Ascending Christ and St. Sebastian*, 1480 c.,  
Church of St. Sebastian, façade, Trogir



Fig. 5

Niccolò di Giovanni Fiorentino, *St. Sebastian*,  
1480 c., Church of St. Sebastian, Trogir



Fig. 6

Andrea Alessi, *Baptism of Christ*, 1465–67,  
Baptistery, entrance, Trogir



Fig. 7

Andrea Alessi, *St. Jerome in the desert*, 1465–67,  
Baptistery, Trogir



Fig. 8

Relief with St. Mark's Lion and Trogir's civic symbols,  
before the destruction of the Lion in 1932, Loggia  
Magna, Trogir

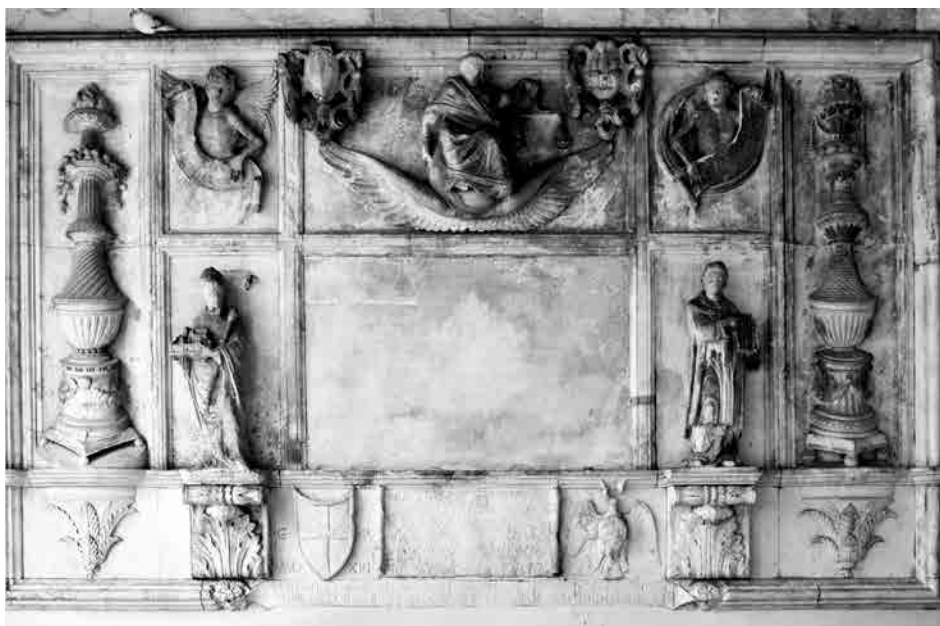


Fig. 9

Relief with Trogir's civic symbols, after the destruction  
of the Lion in 1932, Loggia Magna, Trogir

The same symbolic system was used in Šibenik. Here the political symbolism of the main square was mainly concentrated in the cathedral, dedicated to Saint James the Greater (Fig. 10). The building runs along the southern side of the square in dialogue with the large sixteenth-century loggia in front. After 1412, Venice did nothing more than restore the medieval public buildings without making substantial changes to the square. The reconstruction of the cathedral continued from the first half of the fifteenth century until 1536.<sup>35</sup> The works were officially inaugurated in 1431, but the turning point happened in 1441 when the new bishop Giorgio Sisgoreo (Juraj Šižgorić), together with the city council, entrusted the function of *protomagister* to Giorgio da Sebenico.<sup>36</sup> After his death in 1473, the building passed under the direction of Niccolò di Giovanni Fiorentino. The great cathedral was crucial to the city authorities and was financed using different funds managed by the city council, the bishop, and the Venetian Senate. For these reasons, the building became a truly public architecture and an ideal platform for conveying to the community a set of collective values and meanings which, this time, directly involved Venice.

The iconographic programme of the external sculptural decoration was the main instrument for symbolizing the role of the public institutions in the city.<sup>37</sup> As in Trogir's main loggia, the representation depicted the relationship between the communal identity, the religious sphere, and the State. Around 1498, Niccolò di Giovanni Fiorentino executed the statue of Saint Michael (Fig. 11) and provided to his own workshop the models for those of Saint James and Saint Mark that crown the sides of the choir and transept. The three saints, facing onto the square, took on great civic importance as the protector saints of the city, the diocese, and the Venetian Republic respectively.<sup>38</sup> They completed an iconographic narrative that started inside the building, at the presbytery level, with the same symbols.

- 35 For general studies on Šibenik Cathedral, see: Antonio Giuseppe Fosco, *La cattedrale di Sebenico e il suo architetto Giorgio Dalmatico* (Zara: Tip. Demarchi-Rougier, 1873); Johan Graus, "Der Dom zu Sebenico, Der Kirchen Schmuck," *Blätter des christlichen Kunstvereines der Diözese Seckau* 17 (1886): 25–60; Dagobert Frey, "Der Dom von Sebenico und sein Baumeister Giorgio Orsini," *Jahrbuch des Kunsthistorischen Institutes Österreichisches Bundesdenkmalamt* 7 (1913): 1–169; Vojko Devetak, "Šibenska katedrala," *Crkva u svijetu* 2: 5 (1967): 37–61; Radovan Ivančević, "Nova crkva u Šibeniku (1502) Posljednje djelo Nikole Firentinca," *Peristil* 40 (1997): 67–80; Giuseppe Maria Pilo, "Appunti sulla cattedrale di San Giacomo a Sebenico," in *L'arte nella storia. Contributi di critica e di storia dell'arte per Gianni Carlo Sciolla* (Milano: Skira, 2000), 297–304; Emil Hilje, "Juraj Dalmatinac i Korčula, prilog za kronologiju gradnje šibenske katedrale," *Radovi Instituta za povijest umjetnosti* 25 (2001): 53–74; Predrag Marković, "Sakristija šibenske katedrale: ugovor, realizacija i rekonstrukcija," *Radovi Instituta za povijest umjetnosti* 34 (2010): 31–50; Predrag Marković, *Katedrala sv. Jakova u Šibeniku. Prvih 105 godina* (Zagreb: Naklada Ljevak, 2010); Predrag Marković, "Experiment of Construction – Innovation in the Form. The Cathedral of St. James in Šibenik and 'Freedom of creation in peripheral milieu,'" *Il capitale culturale* 10 (2014): 157–175.
- 36 On the engagement of Giorgio da Sebenico on the Šibenik Cathedral building site, see: Fosco, *La cattedrale di Sebenico*; Frey, "Der Dom von Sebenico," 1–169; Marković, "Sakristija," 31–50; Joško Belamarić, "Come Giorgio di Matteo ottenne la carica di protomaestro della cattedrale di San Giacomo a Sebenico," in *Per l'arte da Venezia all'Europa. Studi in onore di Giuseppe Maria Pilo* (Venezia: Edizioni della Laguna 2001), 97–101; Fabio Mariano, "Giorgio di Matteo da Sebenico e il 'Rinascimento alternativo' nel '400 adriatico," *Critica d'Arte* 73: 45–46 (2012): 7–34.
- 37 Predrag Marković, "Prijedlog ikonološke interpretacije Firentinčeve katedrale – Prostor i vrijeme Dalmacije u drugoj polovini 15. Stoljeća," *Radovi Instituta za povijest umjetnosti* 28 (2004): 52–63.
- 38 Marković, "Prijedlog ikonološke interpretacije Firentinčeve katedrale," 52–63.



Fig. 10

Cathedral of St. James, Šibenik



Fig. 11

Niccolò di Giovanni Fiorentino, *St. Michael*, 1498 c.,  
Cathedral of St. James, Šibenik



The presence of Saint Mark facing the sea underscored the affiliation of the city and its territory to the Republic, as a symbol of sovereignty and political and military protection.<sup>39</sup> The identity of the communal government was represented by the statue of its patron Saint Michael, and by the numerous coats of arms of Venetian counts in the square.<sup>40</sup> Saint James was the titular saint of the cathedral, protector of the diocese and, therefore, of the city's religious institutions.<sup>41</sup> As in Trogir's loggia, these three components seem to merge into a single symbolic dimension aimed at depicting the mutual relation among the public institutions.

To complete this political narrative, a stone tondo with the coat of arms of count Stefano Malipiero on the external wall between the northern transept and the apses, featuring another relief of Saint Jerome in the desert (Fig. 12), worked as a further symbol of local identity.<sup>42</sup> As in the case of the Trogir baptistery, the presence of Saint Jerome in the public space constituted an additional element of identity that sanctioned the city council's substantial freedom to use, in the public heart of the city, communal symbols that were not necessarily connected to Venice.

The choice of masters and workshops seems to be part of the same complex combination of factors which do not give us any precise indication on the direct responsibility of the Venetian authorities. Moreover, unlike the centre, where the artistic market was way more dynamic as it involved many different itinerant workshops and artists, in Dalmatia the workshops working on public and private commissions in the region were pretty much always the same. Niccolò di Giovanni Fiorentino may have arrived in Trogir thanks to his relationship with the Venetian count of Trogir Alvise Lando<sup>43</sup> and with the Dalmatian local noble élite, since he is already documented in Šibenik between 1464 and 1465<sup>44</sup>. Giorgio da Sebenico may have been involved in the prestigious works on the Šibenik cathedral, in which Venice also had a direct political and economic interest, thanks to his relationship with the Venetian authorities. In both cases, according to the documents, the two artists were in Venice right before their arrival in Dalmatia.<sup>45</sup> The fact that they were

39 Marković, "Prijedlog ikonološke interpretacije Firentinčeve katedrale," 52–63.

40 Marković, "Prijedlog ikonološke interpretacije Firentinčeve katedrale," 52–63.

41 Marković, "Prijedlog ikonološke interpretacije Firentinčeve katedrale," 52–63.

42 Emile Hilje, "Nikola Firentinac u Šibeniku 1464. godine," *Radovi Instituta za povijest umjetnosti* 26 (2002): 7–18; Marković, "Prijedlog ikonološke interpretacije," 52–63.

43 Anne Markham Schulz, "Niccolò di Giovanni Fiorentino in Venice: The Documentary Evidence," *The Burlington Magazine* 141 (1999): 749–752.

44 Hilje, *Nikola Firentinac*, 7–18; Radoslav Bužančić, "Nikola Firentinac i njegova pojava u Dalmaciji," in *Scripta in honorem Igor Fisković*, ed. M. Jurković and P. Marković (Zagreb: University of Zagreb, 2015), 291–300.

45 Ileana Chiappini di Sorio, "Proposte e precisazioni per Giorgio da Sebenico," *Notizie da Palazzo Albani*, 2/3 (1973/74), 18–26; Ileana Chiappini di Sorio, "Ancora su Giorgio da Sebenico a Venezia," *Radovi Instituta za povijest umjetnosti* 3/6 (1979/82): 93–99; Samo Štefanac, "Le tracce di Niccolò di Giovanni Fiorentino a Venezia," *Atti dell'Istituto Veneto di Scienze, Lettere ed Arti, Classe di Scienze Morali, Lettere ed Arti* 147 (1989): 355–370; Markham Schulz, *Niccolò di Giovanni Fiorentino in Venice*, 749–752; Ileana Chiappini di Sorio, "Giorgio da Sebenico architetto e imprenditore del XV secolo," in *Adriatico. Un mare di storia, arte, cultura*, ed. B. Cleri, (Ripatransone: Maroni, 2000), 107–112; Mariano, "Giorgio di Matteo da Sebenico," 7–34.



Fig. 12

*St. Jerome in the desert and coat of arms of count Stefano  
Malipiero, 1465-1468, Cathedral of St. James, Šibenik*

chosen for supervising some of the most important institutional artistic works in the region along with local artists such as Andrea Alessi, may be due to their experience in Venice. This would suggest that the Serenissima contributed more directly to their involvement, and that it paid the same quality of attention to important Dalmatian artistic commissions, such as the construction of the Šibenik cathedral, than to more central projects. In conclusion, observing the ways and occasions in which the artistic production in the urban public spaces of Dalmatian towns openly reflected the central attempt to express representative and political symbols in the province, it becomes clear that during the fifteenth century Venice addressed the strong political and cultural communal identity of Dalmatian towns by negotiating its territorial policies and by leaving greater liberty to the local institutions in the management of artistic commissions. As a result, Dalmatia was in a way detached from the central artistic system. However, Venice possibly made a more concrete and direct contribution to the public artistic production within the most important urban spaces and buildings of the main Dalmatian towns, not only by imposing representative symbols and iconographies, but also by sending over artists to work on several major public construction sites.

Upon its arrival in Dalmatia, the Serenissima seems to have symbolically shared the urban space with the city councils and local institutions under its jurisdiction, although with different purposes. The recognition of local traditions, the preservation of the functions and position of medieval public buildings and the liberty of self-representation granted by Venice to local institutions in the public space were certainly part of a political strategy carried out by the Serenissima to prove its political benevolence and magnanimity to the local community.

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