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U. O. Drozdova

Possible Function of the Four 16th Century Wooden Bas-reliefs from the Church of San Nicolò in Padua¹

San Nicolò in Padua, founded in the 11th century, is one of the oldest churches in the city (Ill. 76). The church's present appearance stems from its long history, bearing witness to multiple stages of rebuilding and redecoration: a private chapel with Trecento frescoes under a Gothic vault coexists with Baroque figurines in the main apse and Tiepolo's altarpiece in the opposite nave. Most of the art pieces in the interior lost their original setting in course of two major refurbishments of the interior. The first of them took place in the 17th century when the apses were partly disassembled in order to install lavish Baroque altars [5, p. 41]. Three centuries later, even more abrupt modifications were carried out during two restoration campaigns in 1933–1939 and 1967–1972 [5, pp. 51–63]. The latter one partly followed a bold project by Marcello Checchi who intended to strip the church of its late-Medieval and Early-Modern additions, especially of the Baroque period, thus bringing San Nicolò to its condition of the 1300s [5, p. 53]. Most ideas, such as the demolition of the 18th-century parts in the central and the right nave, the reopening of Romanesque windows in the former one, and the reconstruction of three apses have never been realized [5, pp. 60–61]. The compromise character of the restoration second stage left the church with a rather overfilled interior where parts of demolished art pieces were scattered through minor chapels [5, p. 64], almost disregarding their original setting and function.

I believe that such was the case with four wooden bas-reliefs, currently in the second and the third chapels of the right nave. Clearly, they were once parts of the same monumental decoration. First of all, they share common characteristics: material (wood, presumably walnut), format (vertical, with a narrow frame enclosing a figurative image) and dimensions (1.88×1.32 m) [1, p. 142]. Secondly, the panels unite into an iconographic program with an eye to Franciscan devotion².

The first panel one notices in the church interior is *St. Bernardine Healing a King* (Ill. 77), on the right wall of the second chapel in the right nave. The healing episode is brought to the foreground: St. Bernardine of Siena, recognizable by his Franciscan habit and the 'IHS' monogram,

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² In the present article I don't aim at analyzing the program's rhetoric, its textual and visual sources; only those iconographical aspects that might shed some light on the commission conditions will be commented upon.

raises his right hand in a blessing gesture. It is addressed to a man wearing a crown — hence a king — who seems to suffer from a wound on his leg being carefully supported by one of his soldiers. Apart from this miracle, another one in the background can be made out, probably also a scene of healing or even resurrection. This time it takes place by a watermill, in front of which a figure, either male or female, is positioned. St. Bernardine, in the company of two friars, reappears with the same attributes, in the same posture, but not a single detail points to a particular miracle performed by him. All in all, the first panel is the most perplexing one of the four reliefs as I have not yet succeeded in discovering even a hint of such miracles either in textual sources (primarily, St. Bernardine's *vitae*) or in previous pictorial tradition.

Three other panels are found in the next chapel: *Stigmatization of St. Francis* (Ill. 78) on the right wall, *St. John the Baptist Preaching* (Ill. 79), and *Bilocation of St. Anthony of Padua* (Ill. 80) opposite. The *Stigmatization* scene is quite traditional, regardless of some details that may seem unusual. For instance, both St. Francis' beard and his posture (lowering rather than raising of his hands) appear even in the earliest representations of the preacher, while a lavish landscape is in tune with the 16th-century artistic tendencies.

St. John the Baptist Preaching relief is less conventional, for instead of St. John the Baptist alone in front of the crowd, or him baptizing Christ, both the Savior and the Forerunner appear next to each other in the landscape, the latter pointing at the former. It is almost a literal illustration of St. John's Gospel: "This is He of whom I said, 'After me comes a Man who ranks before me, because He was before me'" (1:30). Unlike in two previous panels, the main episode is shown practically in the background, while the foreground is occupied by people gazing towards the centre — just as the spectators standing in front of the panel do.

The same composition is used in the last panel, where the story unfolds in a church, and two saintly figures are substituted with a lonely preacher, seemingly sleeping on the pulpit. The episode was described in a 1935 article as St. Anthony of Padua bilocation during a mass in one of the French towns before his arrival in Italy [21, p. 204]. Although the miracle is mentioned in numerous hagiographical texts (a manuscript in Lucerne (MS.XVI-F.6-4 A.) [15, p. 115], *Benignitas* (Lég. Benignitas, f. 146 b 2, 147 a 1, mirabilia, n. 3–7) [15, p. 119], Sicco Polentone's *Sancti Antonii Confessoris de Padua vita*) [15, p. 176], there are no examples of its earlier representation in painting or sculpture.

The reason for choosing such unusual episodes for at least two of the four panels, the message of the iconographical program, the authorship of the art pieces in question, as well as their initial disposition and function — all those issues remain unresolved in modern scholarship because the panels have never been studied properly in monographs nor even mentioned in general works on Italian sculpture [23]. Two 20th-century publications related to the reliefs were not quite scholarly. The first of them, a one-page article written in 1935 by an unnamed author, is focused entirely on the description of St. Anthony's miracle; it also contains valuable excerpts from San Nicolò inventory books of 1604 and 1671 [21, p. 204], to which I will turn shortly. A year later, in 1936, the four reliefs were mentioned in Wart Arslan's *Inventario degli oggetti d'arte d'Italia*; the author provides each panel's brief description and observes the similarity of the costumes in the Paduan reliefs with those in Alexander Colyn's "tavole" for Ferdinandeum and Maximilian I cenotaph in Innsbruck, thus corroborating that the series was produced in the second half of the 16th century [1, p. 142]. Finally, in a 1986 book on the church's history,

Camillo Semenzato brings all those pieces of information together and hints at possible Northern European influences, evident not only in the later Mannerist style (*tardomanierismo*) of the panels but also in the choice of wood as their material [5, p. 89]. However, the reliefs deserved just a quick mention in his overview of the art in San Nicolò, so the issues of the attributional accuracy, the original correlation of the panels, and their rhetorical message have been still unaddressed. In my view, the intricacy of iconography, the motives for its elaboration, and the conditions of commission could be understood only after two important questions are answered: where the reliefs were displayed and what they served for. The present essay aims to address these issues.

To approach the former questions, I shall start with the most prominent clues available — records in the inventory books of San Nicolò, as given in the mentioned article of 1935. According to its unnamed author, the panels first appear in the inventories in 1604 [21, p. 204]. Thus, this year can be taken as a *terminus ante quem*, which roughly places the creation of the reliefs in the 1590s. They were donated to the *Cappella della Madonna* by Girolamo Roberti of Padua, whose family presumably acted as patrons of the chapel [21, p. 204].

No further information about the series' initial disposition can be traced in alternative textual sources. Although the 18th- and 19th-century guidebooks about Padua mention San Nicolò several times [19, pp. 247–248; 8, pp. 179–180; 16, p. 151; 11, p. 251], only Pietro Selvatico describes the art pieces in his 1869 publication: “On the walls of the so-called Crucifixion chapel, four big wooden carvings crowded with figures, with the following sacred representations, attract attention now: — St. Anthony who preaches on a pulpit. — The stigmata of St. Francis. — St. John the Baptist preaching to the people. — A miracle of St. Bernardino of Siena”³ [20, p. 200]. Selvatico's reference fixes the whereabouts of the reliefs in the second half of the 19th century, when they all were in the same chapel, although not that of Madonna. Then, their sequence is noted, but not a single hint of a series's typology is given. Hence, two conclusions can be drawn: firstly, by 1869 the panels had already been deprived of their initial setting and dismantled. Secondly, their original sequence could well have been disrupted, and the iconographical program — distorted (I shall remark, in passing, that already in the 19th century Selvatico could not recognize two puzzling miracles of St. Bernardine and St. Anthony, sticking to their brief description). The possible explanation for the series' state (and probably for three centuries of neglect on their account) can be discovered in the same guidebook. Selvatico speaks of a recent restoration, or simply cleaning, of the panels that had been covered with a white patina, hiding the beauty of the pieces [20, p. 200].

However, even uncovered, they did not obtain much attention. In 1936, W. Arslan listed the panels in yet another order (their rearrangements must have been not infrequent) but remained silent both about their typology and placement in the chapel(s) [1, p. 142]. No new details appeared in later publications [5], so it can only be presumed that after restorations of 1933–1939 and 1967–1972, the panels were shifted once (or many times) again.

Therefore, I have no other way but to return to the references in the inventory books. One discrepancy immediately catches the eye: the reliefs are said to be dedicated to the Madonna

³ In Italian: “Sulle pareti della cappella detta del Crocefisso, attraggono ora l'attenzione quattro grandi intagli in legno popolosi di figure, colle seguenti sacre rappresentazioni: — S. Antonio che predica dal pulpito. — Le stimate di S. Francesco. — S. Giambattista predicante alle turbe. — Un miracolo di S. Bernardino da Siena”.

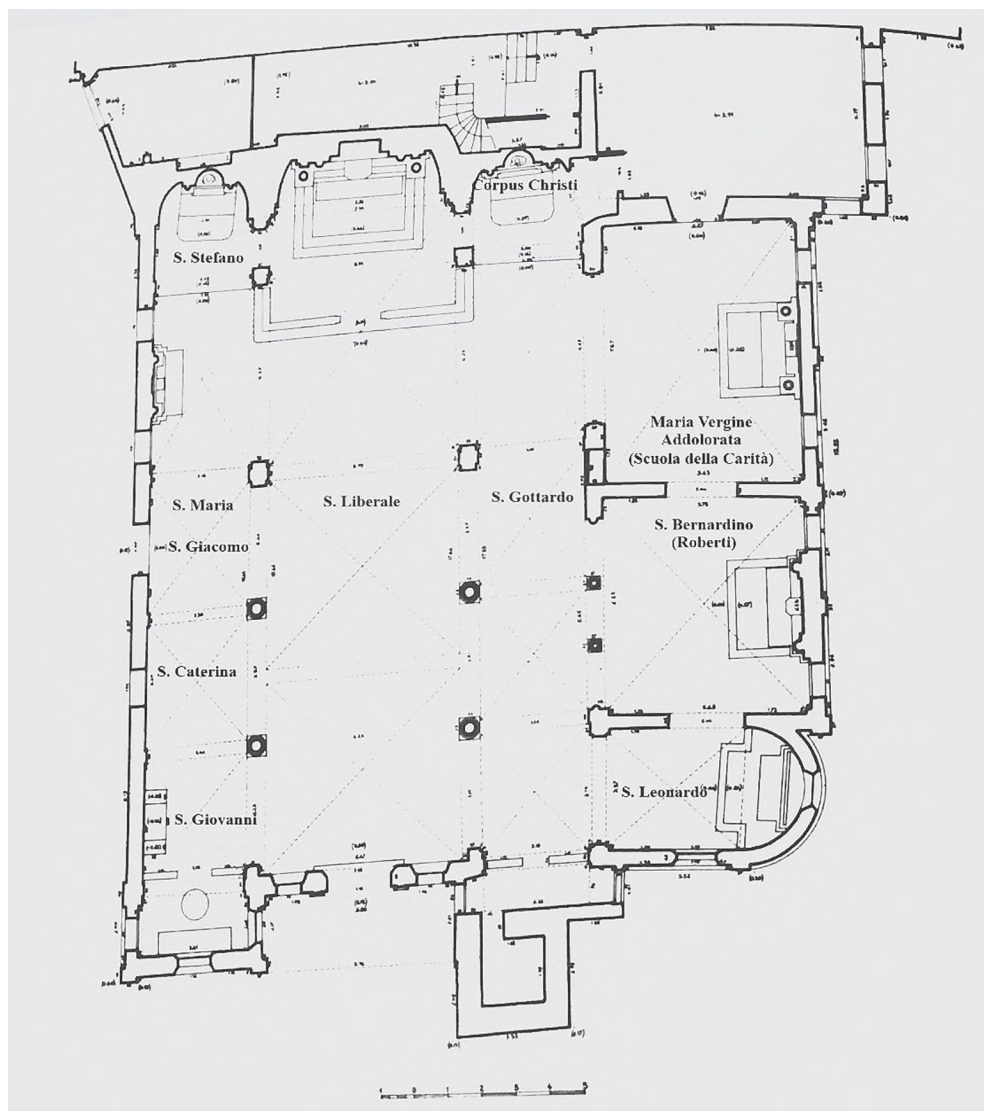


Fig. 1. San Nicolò, plan. After [5, p. 42]. Notes (altars in the 16th century) by U. Drozdova

Chapel [21, p. 204], but a number of reports of pastoral visits put that of St. Bernardine under Roberti's juspatronage [5, p. 24]. Nothing is known of the change of their chapel's dedication to that of Madonna, so the family must have commissioned the wooden panels for another one in San Nicolò. There could have been only one reason for such a decision: *Cappella della Madonna* was more important to the congregation than St. Bernardine chapel.

Traditionally, in San Nicolò, laymen must have been segregated from laywomen. As there is no particular mention of a separate space for laymen in the reports of pastoral visits, it would seem that the interior was divided into two parts. In that case, laymen had access to the upper church, while the rest of the interior behind the enclosure served as *chiesa delle donne* [13, p. 13]. Eight altars were mentioned in the lower church, both on the northern (*settentrionale*) and southern (*parete di mezzogiorno*) walls (Fig. 1) [5, p. 24]. Consequently, a low dividing wall (*bassa parete*) ran from the north to the south, perpendicularly to the main axis of the building.

Among the eight altars in the *chiesa delle donne*, one was dedicated to St. Mary. It was located in the left part of the enclosure. Only its wooden *mensa* is mentioned by Bellinati; no further details concerning its decoration, dedication, or juspatronage are known [5, p. 24]. It is worthy of note that Roberti's St. Bernardine altar belonged to the same part of the church [5, p. 24]. Although it would be tempting to suggest that two altars sharing the same setting were purposefully linked via monumental wooden decoration, St. Mary's altar does not seem to have been of much importance and, thus, of much interest to a rather ancient and prosperous Paduan family of Roberti.

To find a more probable option, one's attention should shift to the upper church (*chiesa di sopra*). The juspatronage of one of the altars was reserved for Scuola di Santa Maria della Carità; therefore, it must have been dedicated to Madonna. In the records of pastoral visits, it is listed just before the altars in the *chiesa delle donne* [5, p. 24]. Of particular interest is the reference of 1563, where immediately after Madonna's altar in the upper church, St. Bernardine's altar outside the choir is mentioned [5, p. 20]. The historical evidence is corroborated with two plaques incorporated in the chapels' walls. In the last one of the right nave, where three out of four reliefs are placed today, a stemma of Santa Maria della Carità appears, while in the adjacent chapel, with St. Bernardine relief, there is Roberti's coat of arms (Fig. 2). Thus, two chapels, one seemingly *inside* the choir and the other nearby, were tightly linked in terms of space. It would not be surprising that a respectable Paduan family searched to point out the bond on a rhetorical level as well.

As religious confraternities played an important role in the life of Italian cities, there might be a number of motives for Roberti to donate the lavish wooden series to the Scuola. For instance, the family could have tried to strengthen its position in Paduan society by taking part in the confraternity's charitable activity; the panels could have been regarded as a thanking gift for some kind of service to Roberti or as a contribution to the Scuola on the part of its members (if



Fig. 2. Plaque with Roberti coat of arms. San Nicolò, second chapel of the right nave. Photo by U. Drozdova

Roberti were the ones). In the meantime, these hypotheses are merely suggestions that can only be verified if the relevant documents are found.

Another argument in favor of the direct link between the Scuola and the reliefs is the latter's Franciscan iconographical program. Scuola della Carità of Padua was situated just in front of the hospital and the Basilica of San Francesco Grande, where the second chapel on the right belonged to the confraternity and was dedicated to the Virgin as well [4, p. 130]. All three institutions (Scuola, hospital, and basilica) had ties since the 15th century, when their building was financed by Baldo Bonafari da Piombino and his spouse Sibilla de' Cetto [14]. Therefore, the Paduan confraternity was historically related to Franciscan devotion.

At the same time, the program chosen for the reliefs was suited not only to pay tribute to the Scuola but also to remind of Roberti's own chapel in San Nicolò, as St. Bernardine belonged to the mendicant order. It is the relief representing the miracles of the Sienese preacher that seems to be the most puzzling one, probably referring to some local tradition of his veneration. Deliberately turning to the unknown episode of the Franciscan's *vita*, Roberti could distinguish him among other saints. In this way a reference to the family's chapel in the lower church was created, which elevated its status in relation to a prominent altar inside the choir.

The quarter of San Francesco Grande may be important for the history of the panels in yet another relation — their attribution. Currently, they are supposed to be made by Giambattista Viani (il Vianino), a woodcarver from Cremona [5, p. 89]. The attribution first appeared in the article of 1935 [21, p. 204], and it has not changed since. According to the author, the inventory reference of 1671 ascribed the reliefs to a certain Vanini, but neither books on the history of sculpture, nor art history dictionaries allude to such a sculptor [21, p. 204]. Hence, the researcher suggests reading the record as the misspelled "Viani" and including the panels into the body of his known art pieces [21, p. 204].

I reject this attribution for a number of reasons. To start with, there is no information of Viani's sojourn in Padua or of his contacts with local commissioners. But what is more important, Vanini did exist, and it was not one person. There were two brothers, both sculptors, Marcantonio and Agostino from Bassano [12]. Their most celebrated carvings were done for the Venetian Bucintoro of 1606 in collaboration with Alessandro Vittoria [22, p. 232]. Around the same time, Marcantonio created a *sepulcro* for Holy Thursday in San Giorgio Maggiore (lost), and Agostino — a number of Crucifixions, including one still in the Crocefisso chapel of San Gaetano in Padua [22, p. 232]. I should like to note its expressive nature with vibrating, broken contours outlining Christ's weary body, distorted by violent convulsions in His last plea for God the Father. In my view, the same graphic manner is intrinsic to the panels *Stigmatization of St. Francis* and *St. John the Baptist preaching* in San Nicolò. Twisting lines of intricate carving create a restless dynamic movement, while Christ's figure on the Crucifixion in the former relief and that of St. John the Preacher in the latter seem to have something in common with the art piece in San Gaetano in the proportions and postures. Therefore, I suggest ascribing the two panels to Agostino Vanino. The other two are not inferior in quality, but they are characterized by a more "painterly" style. The carver prefers large planes and juxtapositions of high- and bas-relief to obtain richer light-and-shade effects and a somewhat classical plasticity in the treatment of figures. I could only suppose that two panels left (*St. Bernardine healing a king*, *Bilocation of St.*

Anthony of Padua) are attributable to Agostino's brother, Marcantonio. The reliefs could well have been made by some apprentice of Vanini's workshop, and if so, quite an endowed one.

Speaking of the workshop, one of the documents dating from March 15, 1604, indicates that the brothers lived in Padua, in front of San Francesco Grande [22, p. 234]. They stayed there even while working on the Bucintoro, asking the commissioners to send all the necessary materials to their workshop instead of installing it in Venice⁴. The brothers did not leave Padua after accomplishing their task, which the Crucifixion from San Gaetano confirms, as it was not completed until 1610 [2]. But when did they arrive, then? The first mention of Vanini in the Veneto region dates back to January 25, 1595: it is a record in the inventory book of San Giorgio Maggiore, attesting to the commission of a wooden *cassa* for the rites of the Holy Week from Marcantonio [9, p. 347]. If by the 1600s the brothers had a well-established workshop in Padua, I could assume they had already set up there around 1595. It is probably then that Girolamo Roberti, willing to contribute to the Scuola della Carità nearby, decided to entrust the commission of the panels to Vanini who lived in the neighborhood of San Francesco Grande. The brothers' activity matches the circumstances of the reliefs' creation chronologically and locally, which allows me to further corroborate my attribution.

Finally, the fact of their engagement in San Giorgio Maggiore's refurbishment just when a number of artistic projects were carried out there could help me with defining the typology of the art pieces I have been dealing with.

I have already observed the panels' unified vertical format and dimensions, their similar narrow frames; a rather low relief suggests that each of them could have been attached to a separate foundation to be then incorporated into a complex structure. Analogous pieces, including wooden carvings of the same chronological (second half of the 16th century) and geographical (Veneto) span, are found in choir stalls decoration in two Benedictine abbeys.

The first of them is Santa Giustina in Padua, where reliefs in three rows of stalls were executed under the supervision of a French sculptor, Riccardo Taurino (*Taurigny*), in 1558–1566 (Fig. 3) [6, p. 477]. He followed Domenico Campagnola's drawings [16, p. 130], and a learned iconographic program was composed by the abbot Eutizio Cordes d'Anversa [16, p. 129]. It includes three complementing levels. In the lower row, the so-called hieroglyphs, based on Pierio Valeriano's *Hieroglyphica*, are placed [17, p. 376]. They sum up symbolically the ideas of the Old and New Testament scenes, unfolding in two upper tiers [17, p. 377]. Although all three levels of decoration should be taken into consideration to fully understand its rhetoric, it is a series of figurative reliefs with Evangelical episodes that has a leading role in the project. The panels are used as seat backs, so they are all vertical in format, and are put in narrow frames.

The other example is chronologically even closer to San Nicolò's reliefs: it is a choir stalls decoration in San Giorgio Maggiore in Venice (Fig. 4). It was being worked on in the 1590s [10, p. 122], just about the time when Vanini brothers were engaged in work on two commissions in the city and when four Paduan pieces were presumably conceived. The Venetian project was realized by a number of sculptors, but the most praised of them was a Flemish artist, Albert de Brule, responsible for the figurative panels [3, p. 299]. Once again, they were used as seat backs,

⁴ "Con detti Marcantonio et Agostin Vanini fratelli abbita in Padova in contrà de San Francesco Grando di far la meza vetta a pupa del Bucintoro detto iusto la mostra o ver disegno presentatto nella casa, et questo per precio de ducati novanta et doveva haver il suo pagamento in contadi" [22, p. 235].



Fig. 3. Riccardo Taurino. Choir stalls decoration. 1558–1566. Santa Giustina, Padua. Photo by U. Drozdova



Fig. 4. Albert de Brule, others. Choir stalls decoration. 1594–1602. San Giorgio Maggiore, Venice. Photo by U. Drozdova

so the same description (a vertical format, a rather low relief, narrow frames) is applicable to them. All pieces are devoted to the single story: that of the order's founder, St Benedict's, life, as told in an engraved edition of *Speculum et Exemplar Christicolarum. Vita Beatissimi Patris Benedicti Monachorum Patriarchae Sanctissimi* (*Mirror and Example for the Worshippers of Christ. The Life of the Blessed Father Benedict, Most Holy Patriarch of Monks*), printed in Rome in 1587 [18, p. 117].

In my opinion, the Paduan panels resemble those in Benedictine basilicas in their typology, so they could have been part of a lost monumental choir decoration. According to Bellinati, pastoral records mentioned a beautiful choir since the beginning of the 16th century⁵, but no detailed descriptions survived. In that case, was the initial series of the reliefs more extended, or was the choir of San Nicolò very small, including about four seats only?

In parish churches, unlike monastic basilicas, the number of clerics participating in the divine office could have been very limited. The parish of San Nicolò was subjected to a rector whose authority was confirmed by the abbess of a nearby convent of St. Pietro (the latter had supervised over the church since 1088 [5, p. 13]) [5, p. 16]. Judging by records of pastoral visits in the 14th–15th centuries, it was the rector who celebrated the liturgy in the main altar. However, in 1455, one of the parishioners, interviewed by the bishop during another pastoral visit, made a complaint about three chaplains of San Nicolò who were to take part in Solemn Mass (*Messa in canto*) but usually neglected their duty [5, p. 16]. Consequently, I could suppose that there were about four clerics celebrating liturgies in the Paduan church.

Some circumstantial proof of my theory may be learned from W. Arslan's inventory, made up in 1936. He lists three chairs (*poltrone*) used during Solemn Mass (*da messa cantata*) in the 18th century [1, p. 143]. If I take it that the set has been fully (or at least mostly) preserved, it is not likely that it considerably outnumbered its predecessor. Thus, the reliefs in question might correspond to four seat backs in the 17th century arrangement for *Messa in canto*. The hypothesis that three 18th-century chairs were used as a substitution for Vanini's work, or were in some way related to it, seems more plausible because on the seat back of one of them appears St Francis' stemma under the crown [1, p. 143]. Its emergence tempts one to think that it was a conscious choice to follow the tradition of Franciscan presence in the church's choir, even if in a reduced form in comparison with the earlier series' rhetorical program.

I shall limit myself to a brief comment on the issue, as the problems of iconography and rhetoric are not in the focus of the present essay. However, I would like to point out that all four reliefs, now separated, are subject to a particular message. It opens with *St. John the Baptist preaching*, where the preacher, Christ's forerunner and His follower at the same time, stands by the Saviour, ready to *imitate* Him. Logically, *Stigmatization of St. Francis* then goes, with the same idea — *imitatio Christi*. Thus, St. Francis is likened both to Christ and to St. John the Baptist⁶, whose ideals he revived by founding a mendicant order. Finally, two other reliefs, *St. Bernardine of Siena healing a king* and *Bilocation of St. Anthony of Padua*, represent the miracles of two types: healing and preaching. Although performed by St. Francis' most outstanding

⁵ "Bello è anche il coro, probabilmente ligneo, dove si recita il divino Ufficio" [5, p. 19].

⁶ Bonaventura in *Legenda Major Sancti Francisci* likens St. Francis to St. John the Baptist: "...secundum imitatoriam quoque similitudinem Praecursoris destinatus a Deo, ut viam parans in deserto (Mark 1, 3; Luke 3:4) altissimae paupertatis, tam exemplo quam verbo poenitentiam praedicaret (Isaiah 40:3; Luc 24:47)" [7].

followers, they also remind one of the deeds the saint of Assisi was famous for. Thus, the theme of *imitatio Christi* transforms into *imitatio Francisci*, praising the order's sanctity. Therefore, the series has yet another feature in common with monumental choir decorations: a particular rhetorical program.

Even though my conclusions may only be confirmed by consistent documentation (regarding the history of the church, the activity of the Vanini brothers and that of the Roberti family), it seems that formal and iconographical features so far confirm my theory as to the panels' typology and function. Presumably made by Agostino and Marcantonio Vanini and/or their apprentices in the Paduan workshop, established near San Francesco Grande by the mid-1590s, the reliefs could have been commissioned by Girolamo de' Roberti as a sign of his devotion and his involvement in the activity of the Scuola di Santa Maria della Carità. Intended for the latter's chapel in the *chiesa di sopra* of San Nicolò, the series exploited the complex Franciscan iconography, which would refer to the confraternity's tight links with San Francesco Grande. At the same time, a particular emphasis on St. Bernardine performing an unknown miracle created an allusion to Roberti's own chapel in the lower church just outside the choir. Finally, the reliefs' vertical format, their identical dimensions, the material, and the coherent iconographical program find the closest parallel in monumental choir stalls decorations, such as those in Santa Giustina in Padua and San Giorgio Maggiore in Venice. Therefore, if the four panels actually were once a part of such a decoration later dismantled, they should not be regarded as an incidental and isolated example of wooden carvings on Italian soil that were only carried out because of an eccentric commissioner or sculptors with a particular background. Instead, the panels are to be included in a circle of prestigious projects of monumental wooden decoration that appeared in the 16th century in a number of Benedictine basilicas⁷. In that case, we deal with a unique phenomenon in the history of Late Renaissance sculpture in Northern Italy, which deserves further special study.

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⁷ The abbey of St. Peter, to which San Nicolò was subjected, also belonged to the Benedictines. Probably, it is the same intellectual and religious *milieu* that inspired Girolamo Roberti to offer wooden carvings instead of more traditional marble or bronze pieces to the chapel of Paduan confraternity.

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Title. Possible Function of the Four 16th Century Wooden Bas-reliefs from the Church of San Nicolò in Padua

Author. Drozdova, Uliana O. — Ph. D. student. Lomonosov Moscow State University, Leninskye Gory, 1, 119991 Moscow, Russian Federation; uliana_drozdova@mail.ru; ORCID: 0009-0003-8604-0360

Abstract. Among art pieces in a little Paduan parish church of San Nicolò one series is of particular interest: four wooden bas-reliefs that represent the deeds of Christian saints (St. Bernardine Healing a King, Stigmatization of St. Francis, St. John the Baptist Preaching, and Bilocation of St. Anthony of Padua). The formal identity (vertical panels in narrow frames, measuring 1.88×1.32 m) and rhetorical unity of the reliefs (miracles of the saints who imitated Christ's life, especially Franciscans) suggest they were once part of the same monumental decoration. According to church's inventory books and pastoral visitation records, the panels were offered to the Cappella della Madonna by Girolamo dei Roberti in the early 17th century. In the article, it is identified with the third chapel in the right nave, which belonged to the Paduan Scuola della Carità, linked to the hospital and the Basilica of San Francesco Grande. It is just next to this basilica where woodcarvers Marcantonio and Agostino Vanini from Bassano lived — basing on the published record in one of the inventory books concerning the reliefs, I re-attributed them to these sculptors. Finally, the function of the pieces in question may be defined by means of their comparison with two monumental projects with wood carvings that were made up in the second half of the 16th century in the Veneto region: choir stalls decoration in Santa Giustina in Padua and in San Giorgio Maggiore in Venice. Treating the four reliefs from San Nicolò as a part of a minor decoration adjusted to the needs of a little parish church allows us to ascribe them to a particular tradition of monumental wooden carvings that seem to have flourished in Northern Italy at the turn of the 17th century.

Keywords: monumental wooden carvings, choir stalls decoration, the Veneto sculpture, Vanini, Late Renaissance sculpture

Название статьи. О возможном предназначении четырех деревянных рельефов XVI века из церкви Сан Николо в Падуе

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аспирант. Московский государственный университет имени М.В. Ломоносова, Ленинские горы, 1, Москва, Российская Федерация, 119991. uliana_drozдова@mail.ru; ORCID: 0009-0003-8604-0360

Аннотация. Среди украшающих приходскую падуанскую церковь Сан Николо произведений искусства особый интерес представляет серия деревянных рельефов, посвященная деяниям святых («Св. Бернардин, исцеляющий короля» «Стигматизация св. Франциска», «Проповедь св. Иоанна Крестителя», «Билокация св. Антония»). Общность формата (крупное вертикальное панно в узкой рамке, 1,88×1,32 м) и единая тема (чудеса францисканцев, по заветам Христа избирающих путь аскетичной жизни) позволяют видеть в произведениях части не сохранившегося до нашего времени ансамбля. Согласно упоминаниям в инвентарной книге церкви и в отчетах о пастырских визитах, панели были заказаны для капеллы делла Мадонна Джироламо деи Роберти в начале XVII века. Мы отождествляем ее с третьей капеллой в правом нефе, которая принадлежала падуанскому братству Санта Мария делла Карита, связанному с госпиталем и базиликой Сан Франческо Гранде. Именно рядом с этой базиликой жили резчики по дереву Маркантонио и Агостино Ванини из Бассано — основываясь на опубликованной записи о рельефах в инвентарной книге, мы восстанавливаем их атрибуцию этим скульпторам. Наконец, типологию произведений можно определить после их сопоставления с двумя монументальными резными ансамблями в регионе Венето второй половины XVI века — это украшения хоров в базиликах Санта Джустина в Падуе и Сан Джорджо Маджоре в Венеции. Если четыре рельефа из Сан Николо являлись частью декорации небольшого хора, соответствовавшего потребностям маленькой приходской церкви, их возможно отнести к особой традиции монументальной деревянной скульптуры, которая, по-видимому, процветала в Северной Италии на рубеже XVI–XVII веков.

Ключевые слова: монументальная деревянная резьба, декорация хоров, Ванини, скульптура Вене-то, скульптура Позднего Возрождения



Ill. 76. San Nicolò, interior. Padua. Photo by U.Drozdova



Ill. 77. St. Bernardine healing a king.
Before 1604. San Nicolò, Padua. Photo by
U. Drozdova



Ill. 78. Stigmatization of St. Francis. Before 1604. San Nicolò, Padua. Photo by U. Drozdova



Ill. 79. St. John the Baptist preaching. Before 1604. San Nicolò, Padua. Photo by U. Drozdova



Ill. 80. Bilocation of St. Anthony of Padua. Before 1604. San Nicolò, Padua. Photo by U. Drozdova