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A TABERNACLE BY ALVISE TAGLIAPIETRA IN THE CATHEDRAL OF OSOR

The parish church of Osor, dedicated to the Assumption of the Virgin Mary, was a cathedral until 1822.¹ Its left aisle ends with a gothic chapel, dedicated to the Holy Sacrament.² The veneration of the Real Presence of the body of Christ in the Sacrament developed in the eleventh century. It was liturgically expressed in the period between the end of the twelfth and the beginning of the thirteenth century, through the act of elevating the Host during the celebration of the Mass, immediately after it had been consecrated. It resulted in intensified care dedicated to the housing of the Sacrament, that is, to the ornament of the tabernacle and erection of the especially dedicated chapels. In the Venetian churches this phenomenon emerged mostly during the sixteenth century, especially from the seventh decade onwards. It appears to be a specifically Venetian phenomenon, and the rise of its popularity depended on

¹ Mihovil BOLONIĆ, Arhiv bivše osorske biskupije, *Izvori za povijest otoka Cresa i Lošinja (Otočki ljetopis Cres-Lošinj*, 5), Mali Lošinj 1984, pp. 216–217. The last bishop of Osor was Franjo Rakamarić. After he died in 1815, the see remained vacant until January, 15th, 1822. That is the date of the bull that declares the bishop of Krk, Ivan Šintić, its apostolic administrator.

² The architecture, sculpture and history of the church are discussed in Samo ŠTEFANAC, O arhitekturi i kiparskim ukrasima osorske katedrale, *Prilozi povijesti umjetnosti u Dalmaciji*, 26, p. 264 and in Samo ŠTEFANAC, Le sculpture di Giovanni Buora a Oszero, *Venezia Arti*, 3, 1989, pp. 41–45. The altar is mentioned by L. V. BERTARELLI, *Le tre Venezie*, Milano 1925, p. 384 (Guida d'Italia del Touring club italiano); Mario BOTTER, Oserro, città italiana dai nobili ricordi, *Pagine Istriane*, a. I, n. 4, ser. III, 1950, p. 343; Ana DEANOVIĆ, *Mali vječni grad Osor*, Osor 1999³, p. 46 (fig. 67); Enver IMAMOVIĆ, *Povijesno arheološki vodič po Osoru*, Sarajevo 1979, pp. 81–82 (the author is of the opinion that the altar is by a follower of Gianlorenzo Bernini); Branko Fučić, *Apsyrtides*, Mali Lošinj 1990, p. 117 and Dragutin HIRC, *Na kvarnerskim otocima*, Rijeka 2003 (first published in 1904), p. 19. The last author is convinced that the altar situated in the left lateral chapel in the former cathedral of Osor represents one of the most important artistic monuments on the islands of the Quarner Bay.

the decrees of the Council of Trent, although they only enhanced the existing spiritual trend.³ In Venice, as well as in the whole Serenissima, from the sixteenth century onwards the chapel dedicated to the Sacrament was increasingly tended by the confraternities (*Scuole del Sacramento*) dedicated to the promotion of the cult of the Eucharist, and to the supervision of the display of the reserved Sacrament in parish churches. They were tied to the parish church and intensely involved with the parish life. The duties of the members consisted in preserving and renovating the Sacrament, as well as taking it to the sick and dying.⁴ It is plausible, thus, that the chapel dedicated to the Sacrament in the former cathedral of Osor, functioned also as the seat of the local confraternity who were attempting to follow similar examples in Venice.⁵

The remarkable marble altar dedicated to the Holy Sacrament in the former cathedral of Osor is, as a matter of fact, rather traditionally conceived. Its marble table bears the vertical part that consists of the frame in the form of a triumphal arch, and an imposing polygonal tabernacle that functions as the principal element of the altarpiece. The forms of the frame are rather restrained as well as flat, and they develop rather dynamically only in its open-topped pediment. The decoration of the frontal, adorned with a quatrefoil cartouche, is also rather tectonic. The relief situated at its centre, representing the Eucharistic chalice and the Host, very probably indicates that the altar functioned as the seat of the Confraternity of the Sacrament.⁶ Obviously, the primary visual function of these elements is to act as the frame of the richly decorated tabernacle of an intense plastic form. The use of coloured marble additionally underlines this purpose: the base of the altarpiece and tabernacle is made of marble of a saturated brown-

³ Maurice E. COPE, *The Venetian Chapel of the Sacrament in the Sixteenth Century*, New York – London 1979, p. 2. Compare to Emil MÅLE, *L'Art religieux apres le Concile de Trente*, Paris 1951, pp. 82–83.

⁴ COPE 1979, cit. n. 3, pp. 4, 8, 9; Peter HUMFREY, *The Altarpiece in Renaissance Venice*, New Haven – London 1993, pp. 115–116.

⁵ The manuscripts of the pastoral visits of the former Diocese of Osor should yield the information regarding who was responsible for the furnishings of the chapel. At present these manuscripts are kept in the Archive of the Diocese of Krk, but they are not consultable.

⁶ Silvia GRAMIGNA – Annalisa PERISSA, *Scuole di arti, mestieri e devozione a Venezia*, Venezia 1981, pp. 47–48.



1. Osor, former Cathedral of the Assumption, *Altar of the Sacrament*, in the chapel terminating the left lateral aisle

ish-red hue, the lateral columns, the flat surface behind the tabernacle, the frieze and the pediment are made of the variegated brown and violet marble. The tectonic, flat black frame behind the tabernacle additionally accentuates its dynamic form and rich decoration. Therefore, this altar should be defined, according to the classification by Maurice E. Cope, as the synthesis of a traditional altarpiece in the shape of the triumphal arch that originally contained only the cabinet or a little tabernacle, where the reserved Eucharist was kept, and the free-standing tabernacle. The increasing dimensions together with the accentuated three-dimensionality of the latter allowed it, in time, to replace the altarpiece itself.⁷ During the 16th century Venetians preferred their tabernacles to be of rather contained dimensions, and they celebrated the Sacrament through complex cycles of paintings adorning the walls of the chapel. During the 17th century they commenced to prefer the elaborate tabernacle, and the paintings became somewhat neglected. This approach to the display of the Sacrament was much more straight-

⁷ COPE 1979, cit. n. 3, pp. 18–24.

forward than the one typical of the High Renaissance. It was focused on the celebration of the Host, whether it was the Sacrament exposed in the forty-hour devotion, or the one housed and hidden in the lavishly adorned tabernacle.⁸

One of the consequences of this shift in interest was the abandoning of the narrative aspect of the iconography connected to the celebration of the Sacrament, which also included the mediaeval typology. Consequently the representations of the Eucharistic Christ were quite often replaced by the more abstract symbols of theological virtues. The altar of the Holy Sacrament in the former cathedral of Osor, with its iconographic programme, met these demands to the fullest. The imposing body of the tabernacle masked by the rich ornament contains the cabinet. Its door is surrounded by the personifications of three theological virtues. On the left there is Hope in the guise of a young woman. Her right hand rests on an anchor and the left one is risen in a gesture indicating that originally it held something, probably a dove. To the right there is Charity, a young woman with bare breast, carrying two children in her arms. Above the door is the personification of Faith; in the Venetian tradition this is quite often indistinguishable from the personification of the Church, represented as a woman with a veiled head. In her left hand there is a chalice with a rising Host and her right hand very probably originally held a metal cross. The whole scene is complemented with cherubs situated laterally to the personifications of the virtues. Beneath the heads of cherubs, on the volutes and on the pilaster-strips that divide those from the sculptures of virtues, there are garlands and bouquets of fruit and flowers. They allude to the symbolic relation between the flower giving hope for fruit and to Charity.⁹ This iconographic programme is completed with the head of a cherub above the tabernacle door, and a cartouche made of clouds containing the dove of the Holy Spirit situated on the top in the form of a double bulb. The body of the tabernacle, as well as its sculpture, are made of white marble, while the red marble is restricted

⁸ COPE 1979, cit. n. 3, pp. 24–25.

⁹ Anđelko BADURINA, s. v. Kreposti i mane, *Leksikon ikonografije, liturgike i simbolike zapadnog kršćanstva*, Zagreb 1979, pp. 338–341; James HALL, s. v. Ljubav prema bližnjemu, Nada, Vjera, *Rječnik tema i simbola u umjetnosti*, Zagreb 1991, pp. 187–188, 215, 359–360.

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2. Alvise Tagliapietra, Tabernacle, *Altar of the Sacrament* (detail of fig. 1)

to the elements of its base, the frame of the door and the truncated volutes in its upper parts. The floral motifs beneath the legs of the lateral virtues and small vases adorning the volutes, situated to the back in the tabernacle's upper part, are yellow.

The tabernacle in the Chapel of the Holy Sacrament in Osor is almost the exact copy, as a whole, but also in its details, of the

tabernacle that Paolo Goi in 2000 attributed to Enrico Merengo (Germany, 1628? – Venice, 1723).¹⁰ It is the tabernacle that is today situated in the church of the Assumption of the Virgin (Chiesa dell'Assunta) in Noale near Venice, and was originally made for the church S. Maria della Misericordia, built near the Benedictine monastery in the same town. As we are unaware of any official documentation supporting this claim in either a direct or an indirect manner, the attributive proposition of Paolo Goi relies on his conviction that it could be ascribed to Merengo and his assistant. The author makes a good case by emphasising its specific style of execution, the sculptural treatment of the structure, the robust naturalism of Hope and Charity and the vibrant floral motif, which are very similar to that present on the altar of the Holy Family by Merengo situated in the Venetian church of Scalzi, as well as the fluid forms of the decorative elements. He also notes the specific forms of drapery of the figures on the tabernacle from Noale, and the analogies in the representation of God the Father with similar figures in the churches S. Andrea della Zirada and S. Moisè in Venice, executed again by Enrico Merengo. Furthermore, the figure of Charity is very similar to the same personification on Merengo's altar in Nimis near Udine. The conventional rendering of the clouds on the tabernacle of Noale could also be seen on Merengo's aforementioned altar dedicated to the Holy Family in the Venetian church of Scalzi. The conclusion of this short analysis by Goi, concerning the tabernacle in Noale is of particular interest: 'But here we can also find some analogies with the work of Tagliapietra, particularly his baptismal font and tabernacle for the sacred oils in Chioggia, considering especially the general decorative tone of the piece.'¹¹ In fact, in his article of 2003, Paolo Goi is even more explicit: according to him it was Alvise Tagliapietra (Venice 1670–1747) that assisted Merengo in the execution of the altar in Noale.¹² The hypothesis that the former

¹⁰ Paolo Goi, Enrico Meyring e dintorni: contributi, *Francesco Robba and the Venetian Sculpture of the Eighteenth Century*, Ljubljana 2000, p. 62; Matej KLEMENČIČ, s. v. Enrico Merengo, *La scultura a Venezia da Sansovino a Canova*, Milano 2000, pp 760–762.

¹¹ «Ciò per quanto non manchino agganci con la produzione del Tagliapietra: Fonte battesimale e Tabernacolo degli olii santi di Chioggia in specie, tono decorativo del manufatto in genere.» Goi 2000, cit. n. 10, p. 62.

¹² Goi 2000, cit. n. 10, p. 62., Paolo Goi, Callalo e Tagliapietra, *Arte in Friuli, Arte a Trieste*, 21–22, Trieste 2003, pp. 136–137.



3. Alvise Tagliapietra, *Faith*, as in fig. 2

got his professional education in the workshop of the latter cannot be supported from any written documents. Nevertheless, the strong influence of the Merengo's style is explicit in the early works by Tagliapietra, which, in conjunction with the fact that the older artist acted as the witness at Alvise's wedding in 1697, resulted in the general acceptance of this hypothesis.¹³ Although Paolo Goi is rather reticent on the possible dating of the tabernacle of Noale, one could suppose that by introducing the analogies with the works by Alvise Tagliapietra, he shouldn't be inclined to date it before the middle or the end of the last decade of the 17th century.¹⁴

If the young Alvise Tagliapietra really assisted Enrico Merengo in the execution of the tabernacle from Noale, he could have

¹³ Simone GUERRIERO, *Profilo di Alvise Tagliapietra (1670–1747)*, *Arte Veneta*, 47, Milano 1995, p. 33; Matej KLEMENČIČ, s. v. Alvise Tagliapietra, *La scultura a Venezia da Sansovino a Canova*, Milano 2000, pp. 790–791.

¹⁴ In 1704 Alvise Tagliapietra was already documented as the head of a *bottega* situated in the Venetian parish of S. Moisè. Paola Rossi, *Per gli esordi di Alvise Tagliapietra: una nuova opera, Prilozi povijesti umjetnosti u Dalmaciji*, 33 (*Prijatelj zbornik II*), Split 1992, p. 294; GUERRIERO 1995, cit. n. 13, p. 34.

4. Alvise Tagliapietra, *Hope*, as in fig. 25. Alvise Tagliapietra, *Caritas*, as in fig. 2

kept or copied the preparatory drawings, only to use them few years later for the commission coming from Osor. In fact, the typology of figures, as well as the anatomic details of the faces, the hands and feet, the treatment of the mass and space, the folding of the drapery, it all points to the probability that the author of the altar of the Holy Sacrament in Osor is Alvise Tagliapietra, although at present we know of no documentation that would corroborate this hypothesis. The decorative ease and vivacity of the forms of the tabernacle are quite similar to the executive style of Tagliapietra that Simone Guerriero¹⁵ describes as 'serene and calm, free of any anxiety, restlessness or dramatic emphasis.'

At this point the differences of execution between the tabernacles from Noale and Osor should also be noted. While the former has a somewhat elongated silhouette, the latter seems to be rather massive. Surprisingly enough, the animated and rather delicate sculpture of the elegant form, the slight drapery and the graceful movements of the

¹⁵ «... sereno e pacato, scevro di ogni ansia, inquietudine o enfasi drammatica.», GUERRIERO 1995, cit. n. 13, p. 33.



6. Alvise Tagliapietra, vegetal motif, as in fig. 2



7. Enrico Merengo, Tabernacle, *Noale*, Chiesa dell'Assunta

charming personifications of the virtues on the tabernacle from Osor, as well as the better adjusted proportions of all the elements, result in a visibly more harmonious whole than is the case of the tabernacle from Noale. The sober descriptive rhythm of Merengo's work that develops in the sense of vertical construction and the adding of the rotund masses, is replaced by a united and heaving whole of highly decorative and elegant surfaces.

The hypothesis of a rather early date of the execution of the tabernacle from Osor is supported by the fact that Tagliapietra, instead of executing his own innovative creation, repeated rather faithfully the work that was very probably conceived by his teacher Enrico Merengo. This proposition is also corroborated by the executive style of the tabernacle. The strong influence of Merengo is present in the typology of the figures, but even more in their rather robust forms and sturdiness, in the way the drapery falls in soft folds. They are still rather clumsily draped, and the figures, as well as the ornament, lack the specific rococo stylisation and decorative ease that is present in Tagliapietra's works

dating to the third decade of the 18th century, such as those executed for the church of St. Chrysogonus (Sv. Krševan) in Zadar.¹⁶ The hypothesis of the rather early execution is further supported by the comparison of the figures on the tabernacle from Osor to those on the altar executed by Merengo, and situated on the altar in the parish church in Nimis (originating from the church of San Silvestro in Venice), that are dated in the last decade of the 17th century.¹⁷ Some significant analogies are also visible between the tabernacle under discussion and Merengo's sculptural group representing the Annunciation (1699–1700), situated on the main altar of the Venetian church Santa Maria del Giglio.¹⁸

Still, the strongest analogies concerning the executive mode of the tabernacle from Osor can be found within the work of Alvise Tagliapietra. Principally with his sculptures made for Chioggia during the first decade of the 18th century, and precisely with the sculpture, ornament and architectural composition of the baptismal fountain situated in the local cathedral. It should be noted that the fountain, according to Paolo Goi, also testifies to a certain affinity of the tabernacle from Noale to the works by Alvise Tagliapietra.¹⁹ For example, the similarity of the heads and gestures of Charity on the mentioned works is rather striking, as is the case with the figures of the children that accompany the personifications of this theological virtue. The garlands of fruit and vegetables bound with decoratively folded ribbon, done in relief from the basis of the baptismal fountain in Chioggia, have an almost identical but somewhat humbler pendant in the decoration of the pilaster-strips behind Hope and Charity on the tabernacle from Osor. A certain soft quality and smoothness of the forms, especially of the drapery, on this tabernacle, opposite to the resolute and stylised shaping of the surfaces in the mature period of the sculptor, is, at least in part, due to the rather reduced dimensions of the sculpture

¹⁶ Radoslav Tomić, *Barokni oltari i skulptura u Dalmaciji*, Zagreb 1995, pp. 125–129.

¹⁷ Paola Rossi, Per il catalogo di Enrico Merengo, *Arte documento*, 7, 1994, pp. 98, 99, n. 25; GUERRIERO 1995, cit. n. 13, p. 38.

¹⁸ Paola Rossi, I Morlaiter a Santa Maria del Giglio, *Arte Veneta*, 51, 1997/II, p. 108.

¹⁹ Goi 2000, cit. n. 10, p. 62.

on the tabernacle from Osor.²⁰ On the other hand this approach connects the tabernacle from Osor to the personifications of the theological virtues from Chioggia, especially to the figure of Faith. The affinity of Tagliapietra's sculpture from Chioggia to those on the tabernacle from Osor, and both of them to the works by Merengo could be sensed also in a certain meditative quality and emotional distance of the figures, suggested through the somewhat restrained gestures, that evoke elements of choreography. This effect is also enhanced by the somewhat summary modelling of the faces with downcast, elusive eyes and an "archaic smile" devoid of any pathos.

The weaker chiaroscuro effects present on the tabernacle from Osor, compared to those present on the personifications from Chioggia could be, as already mentioned, the result of the restricted dimensions of the former work. They might also reveal a young artist that is still shaping his personal style in the shade of his master. Although a more precise dating of the tabernacle from Osor will be possible only after the examination of the manuscripts of the pastoral visits of the former cathedral of Osor, it is possible that here we are confronted with a rather early work by Alvise Tagliapietra, executed probably during the first decade of the 18th century, or maybe even during its first five years.

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²⁰ The tabernacle is 175 cm high and the length of the volutes that support the sculptures representing the theological virtues is 82 cm. The figure of Faith is 65 cm high, and the width of the basis of the tabernacle is 96 cm. Several points of the sculpture on the tabernacle are damaged, especially the protruding elements, such as fingers and toes of the personifications of the theological virtues.

UDK 73(497.5) : 929 Tagliapietra A.

NEZNANO DELO ALVISEJA TAGLIAPIETRE V NEKDANJI OSORSKI KATEDRALI

V osorski župnijski cerkvi Marijinega vnebovzetja in katedrali do leta 1822, v gotski kapeli v zaključku leve stranske ladje, se nahaja oltar Svetega zakramenta. V Benetkah, pa tudi na celotnem ozemlju Serenissime, je od 16. stoletja dalje kapela Svetega zakramenta vse pogostejše postajala sedež bratovščin Svetega zakramenta (Scuole del Sacramento), ki so bile tesno povezane z življenjem v župniji in s samo župnijsko cerkev: dolžnost članov je bila skrb za oltar, hranjenje in obnavljanje Najsvetejšega, prav tako pa tudi njegovo nošenje bolnikom in umirajočim. Sklepamo lahko, da je bila tudi osorska kapela Svetega zakramenta po vzoru beneških sedež takšne lokalne bratovščine, ki je najverjetneje naročnik oltarja.

Osorski tabernakelj kot celota, pa tudi v podrobnostih posnema tistega, ki ga je Paolo Goi leta 2000 pripisal Enricu Merengu (Nemčija, 1628? – Benetke 1723) in pomočniku, točneje Alviseju Tagliapietri. Gre za tabernakelj, ki je danes v cerkvi Marijinega vnebovzetja (Chiesa dell'Assunta) v Noaleju v beneškem zaledju, izvira pa iz cerkve S. Maria della Misericordia ob benediktinskem samostanu v istem kraju. Čeprav avtor tabernaklja iz Noaleja ne datira, lahko na podlagi analogij z opusom Alviseja Tagliapietre sklepamo, da je Goi mnenja, da delo ni nastalo pred sredino ali celo pred koncem zadnjega desetletja 17. stoletja. Če je bil mladi Alvise Tagliapietra resnično sodelavec Enrica Merenga pri izdelavi omenjenega dela, se zdi zelo verjetno, da je hranil ali kopiral pripravljalne risbe in jih nekaj let pozneje uporabil pri naročilu iz Osorja. Tako tipologija figur, obravnava prostornin, način gubanja draperije, kot anatomske detajli obrazov, rok in nog, kažejo na to, da je avtor osorskega oltarja Svetega zakramenta prav Alvise Tagliapietra. Poleg dejstva, da je Tagliapietra namesto lastne izvirne zamisli zelo zvesto ponovil delo, ki ga je najverjetneje zasnoval njegov učitelj Enrico Merengo, govorijo v prid sorazmerno zgodnje datacije osorskega tabernaklja tudi njegove slogovne značilnosti ter velika podobnost z Alvisejevim tabernakljem za hranjenje svetih olj iz Chioggie, ki se datira v prvo desetletje 18. stoletja. Sklepamo lahko, da gre tu za zelo zgodnje delo, ki je nastalo v prvem desetletju ali celo prav v prvih letih 18. stoletja.

Slikovno gradivo:

1. Osor, nekd. katedrala, *oltar sv. Zakramenta* v levi stranski ladji
2. Alvise Tagliapietra, tabernakelj, *oltar sv. Zakramenta*
3. Alvise Tagliapietra, *Fides*, kot sl. 2
4. Alvise Tagliapietra, *Spes*, kot sl. 2
5. Alvise Tagliapietra, *Caritas*, kot sl. 2
6. Alvise Tagliapietra, rastlinski motiv, kot sl. 2
7. Enrico Merengo, tabernakelj, *Noale*, Chiesa dell'Assunta