

Tiziano Aspetti's Reliefs with Scenes of the Martyrdom of St. Daniel of Padua

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IN 1590 the bishop of Padua, Cardinal Federico Cornaro, and the canons decided to move the relics of St. Daniel from the main altar of Padua Cathedral to a chapel to be created underneath the presbytery. The design and construction of this underground chapel and its altar were entrusted to the architect of the cathedral, Giulio Viola, and in 1594 the body of St. Daniel was solemnly transferred to the new location.¹

The altar was designed as a freestanding marble structure, with plain marble facings enclosing the ancient Roman sarcophagus that contains St. Daniel's remains. Its only decoration was two bronze reliefs depicting the martyrdom of the saint, one set into the front of the altar, the other into the back (Figure 1). In 1953 the relief on the front, together with the surrounding marble facing, was removed in order to expose the sarcophagus to the veneration of the faithful. Both reliefs were shown in 1976 in the exhibition "Dopo Mantegna" at the Palazzo della Ragione in Padua, and are now in the Museo Diocesano.

The two reliefs, which represent St. Daniel dragged by a horse (Figure 2) and St. Daniel nailed between two boards (Figure 3), are known as works executed in 1592–93 by the Paduan sculptor Tiziano Aspetti (ca. 1561–1606). They were first published and illustrated in our century by Planiscig in 1921.² Later they were discussed in Benacchio's well-documented study on Aspetti, as well as by Venturi, Pope-Hennessy, Brunetti, and Cessi.³ The documents first published by Benacchio confirmed their authorship and date,

and their authenticity was never doubted until 1970, when another pair of bronze reliefs with the same compositions was acquired by the Metropolitan Museum (Figures 4, 5). A comparison between the reliefs in Padua and those in New York led to my discovery that the New York reliefs are Aspetti's original works, while those in Padua are fairly recent aftercasts, dating probably from the end of the nineteenth century.⁴

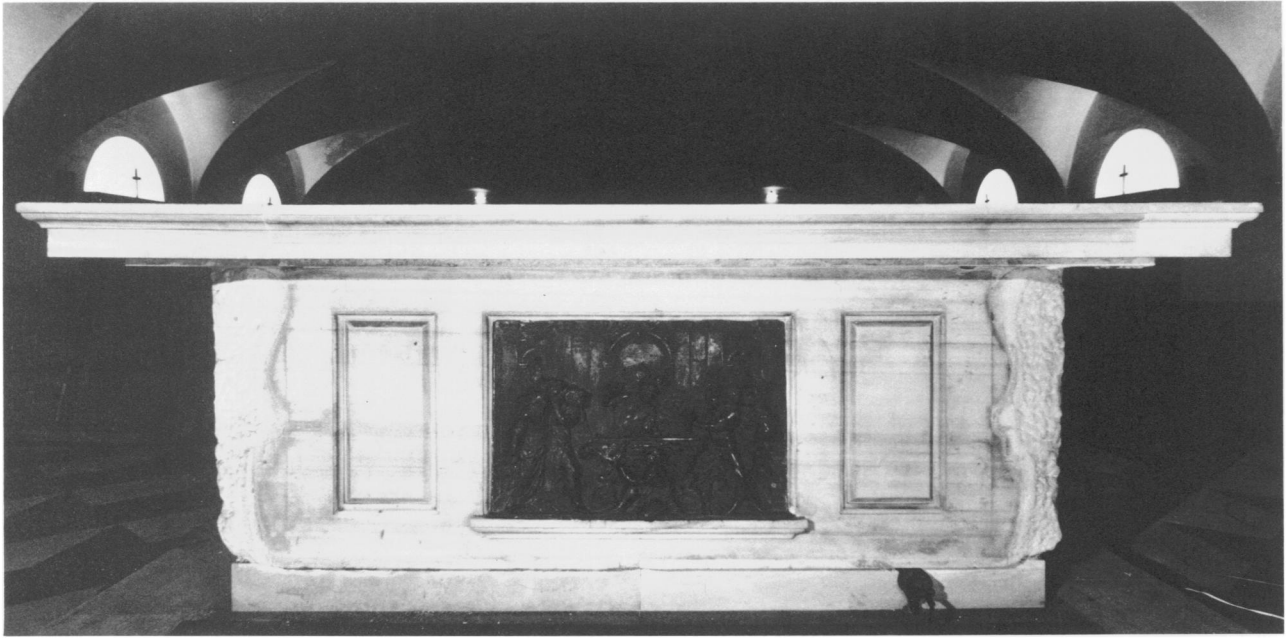
Although the present article will deal with the stylistic and iconographic sources of Aspetti's compositions, it may be useful to summarize the facts once

1. F. S. Dondi dell'Orologio, *Due lettere sopra la fabbrica della cattedrale di Padova* (Padua, 1794) pp. 42–43. C. Bellinati and L. Puppi (*Padova, Basiliche e chiese* [Venice, 1975] p. 90) mention, however, the date of June 3, 1592, for the translation of the relics.

2. L. Planiscig, *Venezianische Bildhauer der Renaissance* (Vienna, 1921) pp. 571–572, pls. 627, 628.

3. M. Benacchio, "Vita e opere de Tiziano Aspetti: I rilievi del Duomo di Padova," *Bollettino del Museo Civico di Padova*, n.s. 7 (1931) pp. 123–128; A. Venturi, *Storia dell'arte italiana* (Milan, 1937) X, pt. 3, p. 294, figs. 231, 232; J. Pope-Hennessy, *Italian High Renaissance and Baroque Sculpture* (London, 1963) text, p. 85, fig. 135; E. Brunetti, "Tiziano Aspetti," *Dizionario biografico degli italiani* (Rome, 1962) IV, p. 420; F. Cessi, "Tiziano Aspetti scultore padovano," *Padova e la sua provincia* 4 (1966) pp. 7–8, figs. 3, 4, and *Dopo Mantegna*, exh. cat. (Padua, 1976) pp. 148–149, ill.

4. For an account of the history of this acquisition see O. Raggio, "Our Finest Hour," *The Chase, the Capture: Collecting at the Metropolitan* (New York, 1975) pp. 164–169, figs. 36–39.



1. The Altar of St. Daniel in Padua Cathedral, rear view, photographed in 1970 (photo: Antonello Perissinotto)

2. *St. Daniel Dragged by a Horse*, bronze replica of the relief now in the Metropolitan Museum. Padua, Museo Diocesano (photo: Osvaldo Böhm)



more concerning the two sets of reliefs. The Museum reliefs were purchased in Munich and came from the collection of Eduard Arnhold (1849–1925), a well-known Berlin industrialist and art patron, whose acquisitions were made at the beginning of this century following the advice of Bode and Tschudi.⁵ Although no mention of the reliefs could be discovered in any source, their outstanding quality shows them as of undoubtedly sixteenth-century workmanship. Their metal is of a rather yellowish brassy color and their surfaces are tooled throughout, with many vigorously chased, engraved, and hammered passages, such as the brick patterning of the walls, the details of the costumes, the texture of various materials, and the firmly defined facial traits with deeply bored pupils. The whole is covered with the firm, opaque, black

patina that is so typical of sixteenth-century Venetian monumental bronzes.

While in principle one cannot rule out the possibility that the sculptor prepared a second set of casts for another patron, a careful comparison with the reliefs in Padua shows that the two sets are fundamentally different in workmanship. The Paduan reliefs are cast from a reddish metal which shows through a rather thin, sloppily applied, black patina, and the surface has none of the chased and stippled details that give so much life to the Metropolitan Museum versions. True enough, the figures are identical in composition, but their surfaces have a bland and boring look. There is no brick patterning, no hammered or engraved detail—save for a thin line incised along the edge of some of the costumes. The faces, with blank staring eyes, are classicizing rather than intensely expressive, the hair is chased in heavy rather than crisp locks, the contours are smooth rather than angular. There are differences also in the inscription incised on the rear wall in each scene: TITIANI ASPECTI PATAVINI OPVS (Figures 2 and 4; the name is spelt ASPETTI in the other

5. Eduard Arnhold, *Ein Gedenkbuch* (Berlin, 1928).

3. *St. Daniel Nailed Between Boards*, bronze replica of the relief now in the Metropolitan Museum. Padua, Museo Diocesano (photo: Antonello Perissinotto)





4. Tiziano Aspetti (ca. 1561–1606), *St. Daniel Dragged by a Horse*, 1592–93. Bronze, 19 × 28¾ in. (48 × 73 cm.). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Edith Perry Chapman and Fletcher Funds, 1970.264.1

scene, Figures 3 and 5); in the Metropolitan reliefs the inscription is surrounded by an incised cartouche, while in the Paduan reliefs it is not. Finally, the initials M.A.V.F. traced on the lower edge of the Metropolitan *St. Daniel Nailed Between Boards* do not appear in the Paduan set. These initials (Figure 6) must refer to the name of an as yet unknown Venetian bronze founder: M.A.V[ENETUS?] F[ECIT].

From a comparison of their measurements, it appears that the two reliefs in Padua are somewhat smaller than those in New York.⁶ This discrepancy can be accounted for by the irregular shape of their edges. But when we compare their inner measurements, these also appear to be consistently smaller, with dif-

ferences ranging from 1 to 2.5 centimeters. This is a reduction that can be explained only if we assume that the Paduan reliefs were not cast from the same model, but from a plaster cast taken from the larger reliefs. The suspicion that such aftercasts may have been taken not in the sixteenth century but in fairly modern times is fully confirmed by the appearance of the reverse side of the relief, which I examined in 1970 in the treasury of the cathedral.⁷ While the Museum bronzes show the typical, dark, partly oxidized reverse of sixteenth-century castings, the relief in Padua has the muddy, pinkish coloration of a cast of fairly recent

6. *St. Daniel Dragged by a Horse*: 45 × 71 cm. (Padua), 48 × 73 cm. (MMA); *St. Daniel Nailed Between Boards*: 44 × 68 cm. (Padua), 48 × 74.5 cm. (MMA).

7. I should like to thank Monsignor Professor Arcangelo Rizzato, treasurer of the cathedral chapter, for kindly giving me access to the normally closed treasury and helping me to inspect this relief.



5. Aspetti, *St. Daniel Nailed Between Boards*, 1592–93. Bronze, 19 × 29¼ in. (48 × 74.5 cm.). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Edith Perry Chapman and Fletcher Funds, 1970.264.2

date. We are forced, therefore, to conclude that some time before 1921, when Planiscig published photographs of the reliefs in Padua for the first time, the original casts were removed and modern ones substituted in their place.

Once this startling conclusion is reached, the summary, lifeless surfaces of the two Paduan reliefs become more easily understood. Their flaccid quality need not be explained as a strangely disappointing regression in Aspetti's usually brilliant performance; it is the characteristic deficiency of modern bronze reproductions, in which no attempt is made to duplicate the painstaking tooling, engraving, and chasing of earlier works.

The discovery of the originals of Aspetti's reliefs for the cathedral of Padua offers an ideal opportunity for a fresh analysis and evaluation of these works, which in recent literature have been surrounded by some uneasiness and critical uncertainty. Their study may also be useful in arriving at a better definition of Aspetti's artistic personality and of the place he occupies in the history of late sixteenth-century Venetian sculpture.

The subjects are sufficiently uncommon to merit a word of explanation. St. Daniel, together with St. Prosdocimus and St. Giustina, is one of the patrons of Padua. He was a deacon of the Paduan church at the beginning of the fourth century A.D., and died as a martyr, probably during the persecutions of Diocletian.⁸ Nothing is known about his life, and his legend rests only upon the discovery in 1075 of an ancient

8. *Bibliotheca Sanctorum*, IV (Rome, 1964) cols. 474–478.

marble sarcophagus allegedly inscribed *HIC CORPUS DANIELIS MARTYRIS ET LEVITAE QUIESCIT*. In the absence of any textual account, a reconstruction of his manner of death was inspired by the sight of the unusually tortured body of a Christian deacon found inside the sarcophagus, laid upon a marble slab, covered with a wooden board, and pierced by many nails.⁹

In the first of the reliefs (Figure 4), we see the martyr still clad in his ecclesiastical vestments, lying on the ground, tied by his legs to a rearing horse which is restrained by a Roman soldier ready to march; this soldier looks back to an officer on the far right, who is giving the signal to start off.

The second relief (Figure 5) depicts Daniel in his final agony: his naked body lies pressed between two boards upon a table, with two executioners hammering away at a row of enormous nails while a third

executioner, casually turning back to speak to a Roman officer, drills through the upper board.

Both the choice of the scenes and the insistence upon the details of the torture are typical of the Counter-Reformation spirit that lies behind this commission. While traditional Paduan iconography had portrayed Daniel as a serene-looking young deacon carrying a model or a banner of the city of Padua,¹⁰ the new post-Tridentine, late sixteenth-century devotion required a dramatic depiction of his martyrdom. When on May 18, 1592, the canons of the cathedral voted to ask the president of the Fabbrica, Monsignor Camillo Borromeo, to commission two bronze reliefs representing the martyrdom of St. Daniel, they explicitly said that these were expected to be made "at his own discretion."¹¹ A cousin of St. Charles Borromeo, Monsignor Camillo was the cathedral theologian, and a man of great learning and piety.¹² It was undoubtedly he who formulated the two scenes of Daniel's torture, based on hagiographical texts as well as on two eleventh- and twelfth-century manuscript accounts of the *Inventio Danielis*.¹³

The episode of the horse is evidently an interpretation of Daniel's suffering by *diversis suppliciis*, mentioned in the eleventh-century text. As to the second torture, the depiction of Daniel pierced by huge nails clearly reflects the wording of the twelfth-century

6. Detail of Figure 5, showing founder's inscription at lower left



9. For a discussion of the legend, see A. Barzón, *Padova cristiana* (Padua, 1955) pp. 237–251. There were remains of the martyr's liturgical vestments.

10. See Donatello's bronze statue for the high altar of S. Antonio, Padua (H. W. Janson, *Donatello* [Princeton, 1957] pl. 282); two paintings by Domenico Compagnola in the Museo Civico, Padua (L. Grossato, *Il Museo Civico di Padova* [Venice, 1957] nos. 155, 171); and a terracotta statue by Francesco Segala in Sta Giustina, Padua (photo: Böhm 6393).

11. "1592 inditione V^o die luna 18 mensis maii Padua in sacristia maiori loco solito capitulari. Vada parte che sia commesso a Mons. Boromeo presidente della fabbrica il far far dei quadri del martirio nell'arca del glorioso martire S. Daniele di bronzo come parerà alla prudenzia sua essendo e il Presidente e il Rev.mo e Ill.mo Vescovo concordi. Quae pars cunctis votis capta remansit" (Benacchio, "Tiziano Aspetti," p. 145, doc. XXI).

12. P. Litta, *Famiglie celebri italiane* (Milan, 1819–1911) II, s.v. Borromeo di S. Miniato, pl. 3.

13. The earliest account is in the library of the Seminario Vescovile in Padua, MS. 540. The latest, written by a Magister Franciscus de Donoctis de Mutina, was in the library of the Eremitani in Padua, and was published in F. Dondi dell'Orologio, *Dissertazioni sopra l'istoria ecclesiastica di Padova* (Padua, 1802) III, p. 52. Excerpts from both texts are quoted side by side in J. Brunacci, *Chartarum coenobii S. Iustinæ explicato* (Padua, 1763) pp. 129ff.

manuscript and of the following passage in Petrus de Natalibus:

Daniel was lying upon a wooden board of the same size as his body, which was flat and stretched out. He was covered with a marble slab of the same size, joined together with the board underneath him by means of enormous iron nails. These pierced the head, the chest, the belly, and all the limbs of the martyr. All of this showed to what suffering he had been subjected by the heathen.¹⁴

Since no contract commissioning the reliefs from Aspetti has survived, we do not know what agreements were made concerning their actual execution. But we may suspect that the sculptor was given considerable freedom, for when the bronzes were delivered early in 1593, the canons were surprised to find that they had not been carried out as mere bas-reliefs but comprised figures almost fully in the round. Indeed, the canons were so pleased that they nearly doubled Aspetti's fee and paid him 110 *scudi* over and above the 140 that had been originally agreed upon.¹⁵ Undoubtedly Aspetti's success was due to the fact that he had managed to translate Borromeo's instructions into the forthright and edifying manner that the Church expected artists to employ in the depiction of sacred subjects.

In the absence of any iconographic tradition to which Aspetti could turn for the formulation of the two scenes, it is interesting to see what visual sources he drew on in creating his own compositions. For *St. Daniel Dragged by a Horse*, a Venetian model existed in the *Martyrdom of St. Isidore*, as represented in St. Mark's in the chapel of St. Isidore. The same torture is depicted in one of the mosaics of the vault, executed about 1355 (Figure 7),¹⁶ as well as in a relief on the mid-fourteenth-century sarcophagus of the saint.¹⁷ It is the mosaic scene that was obviously adapted by Aspetti. As a simple comparison between the two compositions will show, the sculptor, although reversing the scene, has, in fact, reused several details in a remarkably literal fashion. The rather inexplicable little boy riding the horse in the relief (Figure 8) derives from the young man on horseback in the mosaic, and both look back in much the same way at the martyr behind them. Even the group of soldiers and commanding officer on the right in Aspetti's relief seems to be inspired by the group of gesturing soldiers standing at the far left in the mosaic.

The adaptation by Aspetti of a fourteenth-century

mosaic can hardly surprise us when we remember the interest that St. Mark's ecclesiastic authorities were showing, in the second half of the sixteenth century, in the preservation of the old mosaics. A special decree, promulgated in 1566, emphasized the respect due to them and to the faithful retention of their iconography.¹⁸ In this sense, in patterning the martyrdom of St. Daniel on the time-honored story of the martyrdom of St. Isidore, Aspetti could well be seen to confer a measure of historical dignity on his own composition.

As to *St. Daniel Nailed Between Boards*, it is evident that Aspetti has adapted and recomposed elements derived from a sacrificial scene that occurs in at least two late antique sarcophagi, well known to the sixteenth century: the sarcophagus now in the Uffizi (Figure 9),¹⁹ and another at Mantua.²⁰ The pose of the kneeling attendant in the foreground (Figure 10) is derived from that of the *victimarius* holding the head of the steer, that of the executioner on the left-hand side echoes the pose of the Roman *papa* swinging his ax, while the two figures on the far left seem to derive from those at the left in the Mantuan relief. Such compositional similarities are far from coincidental and once they are recognized, Aspetti's rendering of Daniel's torture appears more clearly as an allusion

14. "Iacens super ligneam tabulam ad instar sue longitudinis supinum et extensum; habens super se aliam marmoream tabulam eiusdem longitudinis ac inferiori confixam clavis: videlicet ferreis enormibus: caput martyris pectus et ventrem: ac omnia transfodientibus membra: & binas tabulas colligentibus: que omnia qualiter a gentilibus passus fuerat evidentiis ostenderunt" (Petrus de Natalibus, *Catalogus Sanctorum gestorum eorum* [Venice, 1506] cap. LX).

15. "1593 inditione 6° die iouis 11 mensis februarii Padua in sacristia maiori loco solito capitulari. Vada parte che havendo maestro Titian Aspetti fatto il martirio di S. Daniele di metallo di rilievo spiccato oltre l'obbligo suo, che lo doveva far di basso rilievo et massime che è stato laudato da alcuni di questi signori a ciò fare perchè vada parte che alli 140 scudi che era l'accordo li sia agionto scudi 110 che in tutta somma siano scudi 250. Quae pars cunctis votis capta remansit" (Benacchio, "Tiziano Aspetti," p. 145, doc. xxii).

16. R. Pallucchini, *La pittura veneziana del trecento* (Venice, 1964) pp. 78–79.

17. W. Wolters, *La scultura veneziana gotica (1300–1460)* (Venice, 1976) I, p. 189, and II, figs. 310 and 315.

18. O. Demus, *Die Mosaiken von S. Marco in Venedig* (Vienna, 1935) p. 70.

19. G. Mansuelli, *Gallerie degli Uffizi: Le sculture* (Rome, 1958) I, p. 235, no. 253.

20. A. Levi, *Sculture greche e romane del Palazzo Ducale di Mantova* (Rome, 1931) p. 86, no. 186, pl. 97.



7. *The Martyrdom of St. Isidore*, ca. 1355. Mosaic. Venice, St. Mark's (photo: Alinari)

8. Aspetti, *St. Daniel Dragged by a Horse*, detail



to the sacrificial role of the Christian martyr. In the same spirit, the ultimate victory of Daniel's martyrdom is appropriately symbolized by the design of the facade in the background: three bays reminiscent of a triumphal arch, with two reclining Victories at the center, holding the head of a Medusa.

If we now consider how Aspetti chose to organize the two reliefs, we notice that both scenes take place against an architectural backdrop parallel to the picture plane, the characters being confined to a narrow stage front and almost jutting into space. The choice of this traditional classicistic scheme was undoubtedly

9. Sarcophagus with sacrificial scene (detail), Roman, 1st century A.D. Florence, Gallerie degli Uffizi (photo: Deutsches Archäologisches Institut, Rome)



10. Aspetti, *St. Daniel Nailed Between Boards*, detail



inspired by the design of the nine marble reliefs in the chapel of St. Anthony in S. Antonio, where a similar basic arrangement is uniformly maintained. The last of these reliefs, which depict scenes from the life of the saint, was that of *St. Anthony Raising a Youth to Life in Lisbon* (Figure 11), designed and partly executed in Venice by Danese Cattaneo shortly before his death in 1572, and carried to completion by Gerolamo Campagna in 1577.



11. Danese Cattaneo (ca. 1509–73) and Gerolamo Campagna (1549/50–ca. 1625), *St. Anthony of Padua Raising a Youth to Life*, 1572–77. Marble. Padua, S. Antonio (photo: Alinari)
12. Jacopo Sansovino (1486–1570), *St. Mark Saving a Servant of the Lord of Provence from Death*, 1541–44. Bronze. Venice, St. Mark's (photo: Alinari)



A comparison between this work and the St. Daniel reliefs shows a similar reliance on dramatic groupings of figures together with crossing diagonal lines that stress a multiplicity of psychological tensions. Violent gestures and exaggerated contrapposti point to the emotional involvement of the characters, who no longer simply witness the events but fully participate in them. In the Aspetti reliefs, which depict not a miracle but scenes of martyrdom, the bystanders are moved by feelings of cruel hostility, jaded indifference, or involuntary horror, but the expressive devices used by the artist are very similar to those employed in the Cattaneo–Campagna relief. Other similarities also indicate Aspetti's careful study: for instance, the two shallow figures in profile who seem to travel across the background of *St. Daniel Nailed Between Boards*, as do some figures in the Cattaneo–Campagna relief—a conventional device employed even earlier by Jacopo Sansovino in the relief of *St. Anthony's Miracle of the Maiden Carilla*, also in the Santo. Direct quotations from Sansovino rather than Cattaneo occur elsewhere in the reliefs: for example, the two soldiers with long, flowing beards in the center of *St. Daniel Dragged by a Horse* are borrowed from figures in Sansovino's bronze relief in St. Mark's, Venice, of *St. Mark Saving a Servant of the Lord of Provence from Death* (Figure 12).

Such occasional borrowings or adaptations from Sansovino's works serve mainly to draw our attention, however, to the fundamental difference between their compact plasticity and the mannered, linear style practiced by Aspetti. The angular, astringent modeling of his figures, their complicated poses, and their lively, somewhat exaggerated gestures are part of a personal vocabulary that he developed during his first twelve years of activity in Venice, before obtaining the Paduan commission.

We know that in 1580 Aspetti was living in Venice, having in 1577 entered the household of the patriarch of Aquileia, Cardinal Giovanni Grimani (ca. 1500–93), well known as a patron and collector.²¹ At the outset he probably spent some time in one of the

21. M. Benacchio, "Vita e opere di Tiziano Aspetti: La vita," *Bollettino del Museo Civico di Padova*, n.s. 6 (1930) p. 194. From a petition addressed by Aspetti to the Venetian Republic in 1594, we learn that he had worked for the patriarch for sixteen years (Pio Paschini, "Il mecenatismo artistico del Patriarca Giovanni Grimani," *Studi in onore di Aristide Calderini e Roberto Paribeni* [Milan, 1956] III, pp. 851–862).



13. Aspetti, *Venus Visiting Vulcan's Forge*, 1589. Marble. Venice, Doges' Palace, Sala dell'Anticollégio (photo: Osvaldo Böhm)

leading studios of Venice, in order to learn the technical side of his art. If so, this apprenticeship is likely to have been in the studio of Campagna, rather than that of Vittoria as has been suggested. For there is no trace of the influence of Vittoria's soft, painterly manner on Aspetti's later style, while there are several points of contact with Campagna, especially in the underlying classicism of both sculptors. The really determining influence, however, came from Aspetti's early acquaintance with the works of the Mannerist painters whom Grimani had patronized since the 1560s—Giuseppe Porta called Salviati, Battista Franco, and Federico Zuccari—who all worked on the decoration of the Grimani Palace at Sta Maria Formosa and the Grimani chapel in S. Francesco della Vigna. Their emphasis on Florentine *disegno* must have provided a basic direction for the young Aspetti, as did his study of the famous collection of antiquities as-

sembled by the patriarch of Aquileia: a collection for which we know that between 1587 and 1592 Aspetti restored several marbles, willed by Grimani to the Venetian Republic.²²

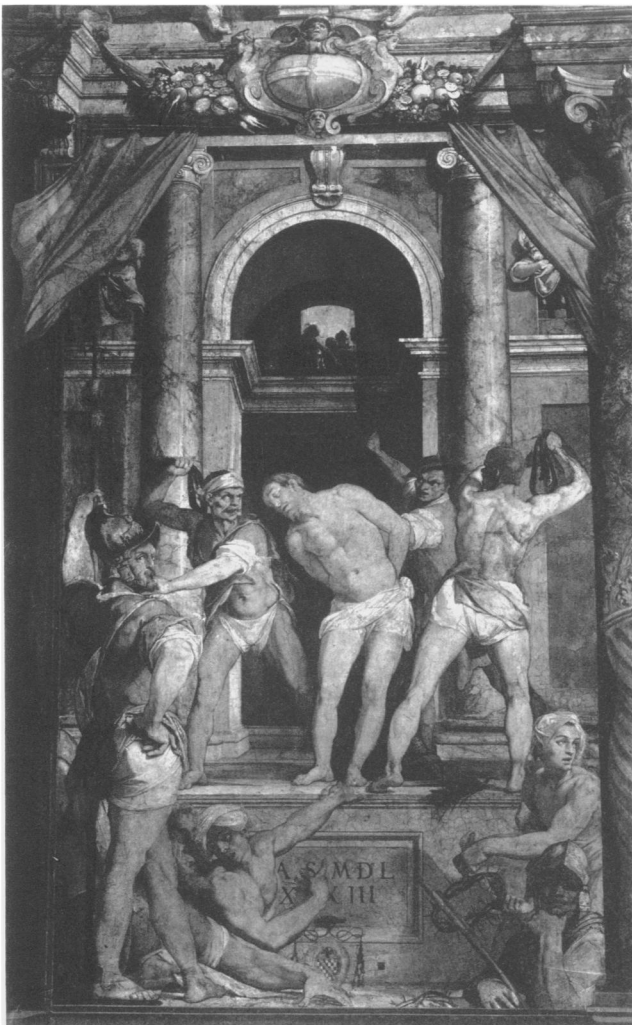
Aspetti's earliest commissions, no doubt obtained through the offices of Patriarch Grimani, reflect his classicistic and somewhat eclectic education. *Venus Visiting Vulcan's Forge*, a relief carved in 1589 for the chimneypiece in the Sala dell'Anticollégio of the Doges' Palace (Figure 13), is still a beginner's work: it combines a self-conscious classicism with the influence of the engravings of Battista Franco and of the early paintings of Palma Giovane. A work such as *The Gathering of Manna* in S. Giovanni dell'Orto (Figure

22. R. Gallo, "Le donazioni alla Serenissima di Domenico e Giovanni Grimani," *Archivio Veneto* 50–51 (1952) pp. 56–57, and M. Perry, "The Statuario publico of the Venetian Republic," *Saggi e memorie di storie dell'arte* 8 (1972) pp. 78–79. On the Grimani collection as a source in Venice for Florentine and Roman classicistic Mannerism see L. Coletti, "La crisi manieristica nella pittura veneziana," *Convivium* 13 (1941) pp. 109–126.



14. Palma Giovane (1544–1628), *The Gathering of Manna*, 1575. Fresco. Venice, S. Giovanni dell'Orto (photo: Osvaldo Böhm)

15. Federico Zuccari (ca. 1540/3–1609), *The Flagellation of Christ*, 1583. Fresco. Rome, Oratorio del Gonfalone (photo: Gabinetto Fotografico Nazionale)



16. Aspetti, *St. Daniel Nailed Between Boards*, detail



14), painted by Palma Giovane in 1575 soon after his return from Rome, provided Aspetti with a repertory of Mannerist poses and groupings and a staccato style of narration that would eventually determine his own relief style.

The St. Daniel reliefs show that Aspetti looked also at the works of Federico Zuccari and Veronese, adapting from them compositional devices and formal inventions, much in the same way that Campagna drew upon Michelangelo and Tintoretto.

In *St. Daniel Nailed Between Boards*, the rigid, centralized, boxlike structure of the composition recalls Zuccari's *Flagellation* of 1583 in the Oratorio del Gonfalone in Rome (Figure 15). Here we find the same crisscrossing of diagonal lines leading in and out of the picture and such typical Zuccaresque *repoussoir* figures as the helmeted soldier in the left foreground, translated by Aspetti into the officer standing at the far right in the relief (Figure 16). It is undoubtedly Zuccari's rigid, linear, geometrical style, represented in Venice itself by his fresco of *Barbarossa Making Obeisance to Pope Alexander III* painted in 1582 in the Doges' Palace,²³ that accounts for the style adopted by Aspetti in the Paduan reliefs.

Veronese's influence, on the other hand, can be detected in Aspetti's use of contemporary costumes and such decorative touches as the opulent gallooned banner in *St. Daniel Dragged by a Horse*. Instead of classical armor, Aspetti exploits the variety of late sixteenth-century military apparel. Here are the plumed burgonets, cuirasses and quilted jackets, breeches, and shoes worn by the Venetian officers, and the leather caps and coats of mail of the soldiers and the *galeotti* in the plates of Cesare Vecellio's *Habiti antichi et moderni di tutto il mondo* (1589–90). Their use gives the reliefs the lively, picturesque tone of miniature *tableaux vivants*, staged like a classical play in front of an architectural screen.

It is in this theatrical vivacity that we find Aspetti's most original, inventive character. We see it at its clearest in his handling of figures, which are firmly and deftly modeled, while the light is sent bouncing and rippling over well-defined surfaces, always preserving the integrity of the taut outlines. The incised initials M.A.V.F. show that, like other contemporary sculptors, Aspetti used a professional founder to cast his wax models into bronze. But surely it was he who controlled the various decorative surface effects, the elaborate chasing and engraving that give the fin-



17. Aspetti, *Angel Holding a Candlestick*, 1593. Bronze. Padua, S. Antonio (photo: Osvaldo Böhm)

ished works a formal elegance and refinement and that distinguish them from the bronzes cast after Campagna's or Vittoria's models.

The success of Aspetti's reliefs in the cathedral brought him almost immediately an even more important Paduan commission: the decoration of a new altar for the chapel of St. Anthony in S. Antonio, which he obtained in the fall of 1593. It is interesting to note that the wording of the contract between Aspetti and the Congregazione dell'Arca for the bronze statues for this altar stipulates that the new works be "as beautiful as those made for the altar of St. Daniel."²⁴ Aspetti's bronzes, especially the four *Angels* still on the altar of St. Anthony (Figure 17),

23. S. J. Freedberg, *Painting in Italy 1500 to 1600* (Harmondsworth, 1970) fig. 292.

24. A. Sartori, *Documenti per la storia dell'arte a Padova* (Vicenza, 1976) pp. 11–12.



18. Aspetti, *Hope*, 1593. Bronze. Padua, S. Antonio (photo: Osvaldo Böhm)



19. Aspetti, *Mars*, ca. 1590–1600. Bronze. New York, The Frick Collection (photo: The Frick Collection)

20. Aspetti, *Mars*, ca. 1590–1600. Bronze. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Gift of Irwin Untermyer, 1970.³¹⁴

and the four *Virtues* which now stand on the communion rail of the church (Figure 18), are indeed strikingly similar in facture to the cathedral reliefs. Modeling, surface treatment, metal, and patination of all these statuettes are virtually identical. The *Angels* step forward with the same feverish animation as some of Aspetti's soldiers. The *Virtues'* complicated, slightly precious stances and expressive gestures are similar to those of certain figures in the reliefs. All sport belts



and costume borders with beautifully engraved arabesques similar to the borders of the banner or the edge of Daniel's vestments in the "dragging" scene.

The St. Daniel reliefs have often been used as points of reference for the attribution to Aspetti of a number of bronze statuettes.²⁵ Two of the most convincing are figures of Mars: one as a heroic nude, as represented by an example in the Frick Collection (Figure 19),²⁶ the other, in pseudo-classical armor, as in an example in the Metropolitan Museum (Figure 20).²⁷ The design of these statuettes clearly depends

25. Planiscig, *Venezianische Bildhauer*, p. 572; H. Weihrauch, *Europäische Bronzestatuetten* (Brunswick, 1967) p. 160.

26. J. Pope-Hennessy, *The Frick Collection: III. Sculpture* (New York, 1970) pp. 183–185.

27. J. D. Draper in *Highlights of the Untermyer Collection of English and Continental Decorative Arts*, exh. cat. (MMA, New York, 1977) no. 316, pp. 170–171.



21. Attributed to Aspetti, *Putto Holding a Shell*, ca. 1590–1600. Bronze. Location unknown (photo: after Bode)
22. Attributed to Aspetti, *St. Peter*, ca. 1602. Silver. Rotterdam, Museum Boymans-van Beuningen (photo: A. Frequin)
23. Attributed to Aspetti, *St. Paul*, ca. 1602. Silver. Rotterdam, Museum Boymans-van Beuningen (photo: A. Frequin)

on some of the figures surrounding St. Daniel in the reliefs, while their surfaces display the same metal-worker's delight in the sharp, graphic definition of details.

Some new attributions may also be proposed on the basis of the reliefs and related works. A bronze statuette of a putto holding a shell (Figure 21), published by Bode with a tentative attribution to Niccolò Roc-

catagliata,²⁸ recalls the compositional rhythms of Aspetti's *Virtues*. The *Putto's* energetic striding forward and bending sideways are especially close to the movement of Aspetti's *Charity*, who is accompanied by similar, moon-faced children.²⁹ It is tantalizing to note that, like the St. Daniel reliefs, this bronze statuette was once in the Eduard Arnhold collection. Is it a simple coincidence, or could the statuette—which may have served as a holy water stoup—have also come from the cathedral of Padua? The whereabouts of the *Putto* today are unknown.

It must have been Aspetti's success in handling the bronze medium that brought him opportunities to work in silver. From a letter he wrote in 1602 to the

28. W. Bode, *The Italian Bronze Statuettes of the Renaissance* (London, 1912) III, p. 24, pl. CCLXV.

29. Venturi, *Storia dell'arte italiana*, X, pt. 3, p. 301, fig. 237.

duchess of Mantua, Laura Gonzaga,³⁰ we learn that he had made two statues of silver for her. Nothing more is known about them. There are, however, two large silver statuettes of SS. Peter and Paul now in the Boymans Museum, Rotterdam (Figures 22, 23), which have been ascribed to Vittoria,³¹ but which, in my opinion, bear all the hallmarks of Aspetti's style. They have elongated, sickle-shaped contours, sharply articulated stances, and low-belted garments with lavishly engraved details that are strikingly close to those

of Aspetti's *Virtues*, while their stern expressions recall certain faces in the St. Daniel reliefs.

It is in these first Paduan works of the young Aspetti that we can now more convincingly grasp the true quality and originality of his personal style: a lively, narrative, almost vernacular language, which stems from a delicate balance between the conventions of late sixteenth-century Florentino-Roman *maniera* and the tenacious traditions of Venetian and Paduan classicism.

30. "ma perche le cose de li argenti portano maggior tempo di quel che non si stima o deferito sino ora pero io spero di esser di domenicha ouero marti con le due statue l'una finita a fato et l'altra a bonissimo termine et spero che sua Altezza restarà compitamente satisfata . . ." (A. Bertolotti, *Artisti in relazione coi Gonzaga signori di Mantova* [Modena, 1885] p. 79).

31. Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, *Meesters van het brons der Italiaanse Renaissance* (Amsterdam, 1961) nos. 153, 154. The similarity between these statuettes and the work of Aspetti has been noted by Ulrich Middeldorf.