

LITTLE-KNOWN METALWORK IN TRECENTO VENICE AND THE VENETO

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This essay discusses two little known pieces of sacred goldsmith's art: a chalice preserved in the parish church of San Simon in Vallada Agordina, in the northern Veneto, and a chalice from the church of San Samuele in Venice, now held in Santo Stefano. The former can be placed in the context of a large series of liturgical vessels produced in Venice and the Venetian area around the second quarter of the fourteenth century. The latter is a rare example of non-Venetian, possibly Central Italian goldsmithery still preserved in Venice, and can be dated to the second half of the Trecento.

Key words: *Goldsmith's art, goldsmithery, liturgical vessels, enamels, Venice, Veneto*

THE CHALICE OF SAN SIMON IN VALLADA AGORDINA

Amongst the numerous pieces of Venetian metalwork of the Trecento – examples of which, as we know, were sent to other regions and locales, well outside the Venetian lagoon itself – one object in particular has recently come to the attention of scholars: the chalice of San Simon in Vallada Agordina (figs. 1-2)¹. This object, now conserved at the Museo Diocesano in Feltre, has likely survived in large part because the surrounding area had less economic resources at its disposal than the major centres, and as such, there was less chance of the chalice being subjected to mercantile interests.

Seen as a whole, the formal elements of the chalice suggest a fruitful comparison with a series of similar liturgical furnishings datable to the period between approximately 1320-1350, all conceived with similar formal characteristics, and differentiated by the degree of accent placed on particular variants of core forms. This group of works has been gathered together over some years, the point of departure being the magnificent serpentine chalice with silver mount in the Treasury of San Marco – a work for which the scholar Hahnloser coined the term ‘Maestro del Serpentino’². In terms of sheer quantity and variety of production, this corpus of related works cannot be considered the product of a single workshop. Rather, they testify to widespread sharing of models and ideas amongst Venetian workshops, and perhaps even to the spread of Venetian models to workshops operating beyond the confines of the lagoon itself.

Many of these objects employ a distinctive motif of leafy volutes, examples being the *navicella* in the Treasury of San Marco, the chalice of San Lorenzo in Valdagno (Vicenza)³, the monstrance

¹ *Museo Diocesano di Belluno-Feltre: Feltre – Antico Vescovado*, (ed.) Tiziana Conte, Belluno, 2018, p. 166.

² *Il tesoro di San Marco*, 2 vols., II. *Il tesoro e il museo*, (ed.) Hans Robert Hahnloser, Firenze, 1971, pp. 68-70.

³ G. BALDISSIN MOLLI, *Il calice trecentesco nella parrocchiale di San Clemente di Valdagno*, in: *De lapidibus sententiae: scritti di storia dell'arte per Giovanni Lorenzoni*, (ed.) Tiziana Franco, Giovanna Valenzano, Padova, 2002, pp. 23-31.



Fig. 1. Venetian goldsmiths, Chalice, Feltre (Bl), Diocesan Museum (from Vallada Agordina, church of San Simon)

of Massenhausen now conserved in the Diocesan Museum in Freising⁴, the chalice of the parish church of Caoria (Trento)⁵, the chalice of Baierdorf, the chalice of San Gimignano, in the Cathedral of Modena⁶, the chalice in the Fitzwilliam Museum in Cambridge, the pix in the Diocesan Museum in Treviso⁷, a similar pix in Zara, and the *Reliquary of San Crisogono* and the *Arm-Reliquary of Saint John the Baptist*, also in Zara⁸. All of these are characterised by a motif of plump, rather fleshy leaves – perhaps meant to be understood as vine leaves, making Christological reference to the biblical metaphor of Christ as True Vine. Alternatively, they may be oak leaves with acorn (as can be seen in the serpentine chalice) – oak, indeed, was a positive, hopeful, symbol in Greco-Roman culture, and was reconfigured in the Middle Ages as a correlate for eternal life and the figure of Christ.

Variants that date to the same period, but are less obviously linked to the model of the Serpentine chalice, are the *Reliquary of the Holy Thorns* in the church of San Salvador in Venice, the chalices of San Lorenzo in Sogliano al Rubicone (Forlì-Cesena)⁹, the Duomo of Muggia (Trieste)¹⁰ and the Duomo of Dubrovnik¹¹, and the foot of the pyx of Cunevo, in the province

of Trento¹². There remain some doubts about the authenticity of the base of a small monstrance, later transformed into a candlestick, now at the Musée du Louvre, and a monstrance at the Musée de

⁴ *Il tesoro...*, *op. cit.*, (n. 2), tav. CLI.

⁵ M. L. MEZZACASA, “Hunc calicem fecit fieri presbiter”. Testimonianze di oreficeria tardogotica veneziana nell’Alto Veneto, in: *Quando comandava la spada. Il medioevo in Valbelluna, conference proceedings*, (ed.) Giorgio Reolon, Belluno, 2017, pp. 119-132.

⁶ M. L. MEZZACASA, Il Calice di san Geminiano, in: *La gloria del Santo. Culto e immagine di San Geminiano a Modena dal Medioevo all’Ottocento*, (eds.) Giovanna Caselgrandi, Francesca Fontana, Simona Roversi, Modena, 2014, p. 36.

⁷ *Oreficeria Sacra in Veneto*, (ed.) Anna Maria Spiazzi, Cittadella (Pd), 2004, pp. 99-100 (Maria Pregnolato, cat. n. 16); M. L. MEZZACASA, Temi d’ornato e microtecniche nell’oreficeria gotica veneziana a paragone con le arti maggiori, in: *Rabeschi d’oro. Pittura e oreficeria a Venezia in età gotica*, (eds.) Cristina Guarnieri, Andrea de Marchi, Milano, 2015 [*Arte Veneta*, 71 (2014)], pp. 202-206.

⁸ N. JAKŠIĆ – R. TOMIĆ, *Umjetnička baština Zadarske nadbiskupije – Zlatarstvo*, Zadar, 2004, pp. 66-67, 72-76; I. PETRICIOLI, *Esposizione permanente d’arte sacra*, Zadar, 2004, p. 11, cat. M3.2.

⁹ M. L. MEZZACASA, *op. cit.* (n. 7), pp. 202-206.

¹⁰ L. CRUSVAR, Il tesoro del duomo: testimonianza di fede e di arte, in: *Muggia e il suo duomo a 750 anni dalla fondazione*, (ed.) Giuseppe Cuscito, Trieste, 2014, pp. 159-160.

¹¹ *Arte per Mare. Dalmazia, Titano e Montefeltro dal primo Cristianesimo al Rinascimento*, (ed.) Giovanni Gentili, Cinisello Balsamo, 2007, pp. 147-148 (Ivana Prijatelj Pavičić, cat. 71).

¹² D. FLORIS, L’oreficeria: una ricognizione territoriale, in: *Le vie del Gotico. Il Trentino fra Trecento e Quattrocento*, (ed.) Laura Dal Prà, Trento, 2003, pp. 284-287.

Cluny, both in Paris. Works that are less dependent on the volute scheme, meanwhile, but still linked to the *namepiece* of the San Marco Treasury, using freer raceme motifs comprising tiny little leaves, include the foot of the chalice later re-employed as the base of the cross at Santa Maria del Giglio in Venice, the *Reliquary of San Forte* in the Basilica of Sant'Antonio in Padua, and, also in the Santo, the much richer and more complex *Reliquary of the Glass of Aleardino*, which adopts an even freer scheme¹³. The beautiful chalice from the parish church in Vallada, now in Feltre, can be traced back to this last variant of decoration.

In the Vallada chalice, there are several striking characteristics indicating Venetian production: the form of the octagonal base with inflected sides, the decoration with embossed racemes and the typical studded knob, which, over the course of the Trecento, gradually substituted the undulating knob pattern popular in the thirteenth century, exemplified in the Fitzwilliam chalice. Similarly 'Venetian' are the little collars placed above and below the knob, an element typically found in Venetian metalwork



Fig. 2. Venetian goldsmiths, Chalice (detail), Feltre (Bl), Diocesan Museum (from Vallada Agordina, church of San Simon)

of the late Duecento and evidenced in a handful of important surviving objects, such as the candelabras in rock crystal in the basilica of San Nicola in Bari.

The type of filigree is of particular interest, too. 'Filigree' is a term used in a rather general manner to refer to different kinds of metalwork techniques, principally granulation, as well as the technique of twisted thread (the latter being the Venetian meaning of the term). Granulation – a technique for which the term 'filigree' would seem more 'correct' – is a decorative technique that exploits the natural tendency of metals to coagulate into granules when brought to melting point (1064 degree Celsius for gold). The granules thus naturally produced came to be employed as a form of decoration by making them adhere to each other and to the surface through a process known as colloidal soldering. The filigree for which Venetians metalwork is famous, on the other hand – so famous that the technique came to be referred to as *opus veneticum ad filum* – is the use of bent and twisted gold thread to craft delicate volutes and tresses. In Venetian works, in any case, the term filigree always refers to twisted thread attached on top of a structure – not integral, that is, to the actual surface. The technique was certainly not invented in Venice; in this period it was widely used in different parts of Europe, especially in the area between northern France and Germany bounded by the Meuse and Rhine rivers. However, some extraordinary thirteenth-century examples of certain Venetian facture

¹³ *Basilica del Santo. Oreficerie*, (eds.) Marco Collareta, Giordana Mariani Canova, Anna Maria Spiazzi, Padova-Roma, 1995, pp. 85-66 (Giordana Mariani Canova, cat. 4); *Giotto e il suo tempo, catalogo della mostra (Padova, 25 novembre 2000-29 aprile 2001)*, (ed.) Mirella Cisotto Nalon, Milano, 2000, pp. 403-404 (Giovanna Baldissin Molli, cat. 42).



Fig. 3. Venetian goldsmiths, Chalice (detail), Feltre (Bl), Diocesan Museum (from Vallada Agordina, church of San Simon)



Fig. 4. Venetian goldsmiths, Chalice (detail), Enego (Vi), church of Santa Giustina



Fig. 5. Venetian goldsmiths, Chalice (detail), Feltre (Bl), Diocesan Museum (from Vallada Agordina, church of San Simon)

are still conserved in the Treasury of San Marco. The filigree technique gradually declined in quality throughout the course of the thirteenth century and was eventually abandoned in the Trecento. The last examples of it, rather poor in quality, are found in some of the chalices mentioned above, including the chalice of Vallada.

In terms of the figurative aspect of the chalice, we can observe that there are small reliefs on the studs of the knop, which were most likely realised with punches. By examining different examples in this group of furnishings, we can recognise strong similarities between objects and sometimes even identify actual artistic personalities based on those similarities. Some of the plaquettes on the knop of the chalice of Vallada (fig. 3) are identical to those of the chalice of the parish church of Santa Giustina in Enego (Vicenza)¹⁴ (fig. 4), for example; the same style is recognised in a pyx conserved in

Liubač and in the chalice of Caoria. Punching techniques are sometimes also employed for the larger plaquettes on the foot, as in the case of the monstrance of San Vito di Cadore (Belluno) and the chalice of Sant'Elizario in Ariano Irpino (Avellino)¹⁵. In the case of the Vallada chalice, however, the

¹⁴ *Oreficeria Sacra in Veneto*, (ed.) Anna Maria Spiazzi, Cittadella (Pd), 2004, p. 21 (Claudio Rigon, cat. 7).

¹⁵ M. L. MEZZACASA, *op. cit.* (n. 5), pp. 119-124.

plaquettes with figures that are applied to the base have been realised with an embossing technique and free-hand incision (fig. 5). The representations, it must be said, are not particularly refined: the faces are rather simplified and the garments rendered with rigid and not especially complex or articulated lines. Even so, stylistically and iconographically they are fully aligned with the figurative context of all the other Venetian objects cited above, thus with a probable dating around the 1320s-1330s.

THE CHALICE OF SAN SAMUELE IN VENICE

An important late medieval chalice originally belonging to the church of San Samuele in Venice is now kept in the church of Santo Stefano (fig. 6). This chalice, whose quality of craftsmanship is way above the average, is a complete *unicum* within the Venetian context, and thus far has not had adequate scholarly attention or thorough analysis directed towards it. In the sixteenth century it was believed that the object had been made for the church by the knight Marco Venier, son of Nicolò, consistent with a liturgical object mentioned in his testamentary will and in subsequent church inventories. This belief is expressed in the following inscription, found on the rear of the foot of the chalice: DE LA COMESARIA D.M. MARCO VENIER CHEVALIER 1581 ADI' PRIMO ZUGNO. Along with this, three coats of arms are incised: the Venier one and two other shields. However, this evidence alone is inconclusive, since the chalice also bears another inscription that would seem to contradict its association with Venier. On the lowermost collar of the chalice, standing out against an enamelled background, we read: PER RIMEDIO DEL ANIMA DI LORENZO DI MATEO¹⁶. This would seem to indicate that the chalice was made for a man named Lorenzo di Matteo, for the express purpose of soliciting prayers for his soul. The donation and bequest of objects "pro remedio animae" was a common practice at the time, and chalices appear to have been the kind of liturgical vessel that was most frequently donated for this purpose. The link with Venier seems further contradicted by the fact that the studs on the knob bear two coats of arms – one, a shield with a bend chequy on a red background (fig. 7), and another a shield with a ben featuring three stars, possibly blue, also on a red background. Neither of these shields match that of the Venier family. The former, though, matches the coat-of-arms of Pietro Tomacelli, the Pope Boniface IX, who reigned at



Fig. 6. Central Italian goldsmiths (?), Chalice, Venice, church of Santo Stefano Protomartire (from San Samuele)

Further contradicted by the fact that the studs on the knob bear two coats of arms – one, a shield with a bend chequy on a red background (fig. 7), and another a shield with a ben featuring three stars, possibly blue, also on a red background. Neither of these shields match that of the Venier family. The former, though, matches the coat-of-arms of Pietro Tomacelli, the Pope Boniface IX, who reigned at

¹⁶The collar – which is clearly consistent with the original making of the chalice – has been re-mounted upside down.



Fig. 7. *Central Italian goldsmiths (?), Chalice (detail), Venice, church of Santo Stefano Protomartire (from San Samuele)*

the time this chalice was in all likelihood realised. If this were the case, the concession of the shield to the man who commissioned the chalice would represent a connection between that man and the Roman Curia, possibly a sort of statement of loyalty to the Pope during the Western Schism. Moreover, this would account for the presence of two different coats of arms, and would imply a date within the epoch of the Tomacelli papacy.

The foot of the chalice has a peculiar floral form, comprising six large petals that alternate with six smaller ones. Each side bears a hexalobular enamelled plaque with a figure of a saint. Above the foot of the chalice there is a small hexagonal knob, connected to the main knob via a hexagonal stem, bearing on each side an engraved and enamelled figure of an angel with hands joined together in a gesture of prayer. The knob takes the shape of a flattened sphere from which six hexalobate protuberances extend. On each of these, the figures of the Magdalene and the Virgin alternate with the above-mentioned coats of arms. A second hexalobate collar – here portraying musician angels – links the knob to the cup. The base of the cup is surrounded by a plaque featuring ogival arches depicting seraphim.

No similar chalice can be found in Venice, and the analysis of the object itself and the enamels' figurative language exclude, in fact, a provenance from Venice. As far as I know, there is only one chalice sufficiently similar that it might actually be considered a product of the exact same milieu, if not of the same workshop, and that is the chalice that used to be in the church of Vízakna (now part of Romania), but which entered the collections

of the National Museum of Hungary (58.173 C) at the beginning of the twentieth century (fig. 8). The Hungarian chalice and the San Samuele not only match closely in their distinctive shape, but are strikingly similar in every single aspect. They both employ the same floral motifs on the foot as well as on the knob, and use the same ornamental bands – a roped one and a band made of a series of small embossed stars – on the step of the foot. Even the shape of the plaquettes that wrap around the foot of the cup is perfectly consistent from one to the other. There are some noticeable differences, however, in the iconographic program, as well as in the craftsmanship. The *basse-taille* plaquettes of the San Samuele chalice are considerably more refined and accurately incised. Moreover, the Vízakna



Fig. 8. Central Italian goldsmiths (?), Chalice, Budapest, Magyar Nemzeti Múzeum (from the church of Vízakna, nowadays Ocna Sibiului, Romania)

na chalice bears a coat of arm with golden fleurs-de-lys on a blue field, which fostered a traditional attribution to the patronage of Louis I of Hungary. The Vízakna chalice has been exhibited a few times¹⁷ and catalogued by Judit Kolba¹⁸. More recently also Etele Kiss¹⁹, followed by Glyn Davies²⁰, considered the chalice in Budapest to be a Tuscan, probably Florentine object, dating between 1350 and 1400. To support their hypothesis, both Kolba and Kiss compare the chalice to the one by Francesco di Vanni in the Duomo of Barga (Lucca), notice the presence of St. John the Baptist, patron of Florence, and highlight that Vízakna was a mining centre where Florentine merchants were active as silver dealers. The Tuscan hypothesis, although plausible, would need the support of further and more compelling evidence.

The San Samuele and Vízakna chalices share some features with Siennese examples, such as hexalobate shape of the enameled plaquettes, both on the foot and on the knop, and the ogee-shaped plaquettes around the cup with figures of angels. Related examples, to mention only a few, are the chalices in The Martin D'Arcy Gallery in Chicago, Museu Capitular of Avila, and the Fitzwilliam Museum in Cambridge²¹. These features were adopted until the late fourteenth century, as can be seen in the chalice by Antonio Celi in the Treasury of the Cathedral of Lyon (France), datable between 1390 and 1400²², as well as the one by Andrea Brac-

¹⁷ *Hungaria regia (1000-1800): fastes et défis*, exh. cat. (Bruxelles, 1999-2000), Turnhout, 1999, cat. 32, p. 123; *L'Europe des Anjou: aventure des princes angevins du 13. au 15. siècle*, exh. cat. (Fontevraud 2001), Paris, 2001, pp. 336, cat. 105.

¹⁸ *Liturgische Goldschmiedearbeiten im Ungarischen Nationalmuseum: 14.-17. Jahrhundert (Catalogi Musei Nationalis Hungarici. Series Mediaevalis et Moderna; 1)*, Budapest, 2004, pp. 28-29 (Judith H. Kolba, cat. 5).

¹⁹ *Sigismundus rex et imperator: art et culture au temps de Sigismond de Luxemburg*, (ed.) Imre Takács, Mainz, 2006, p. 104 (Etele Kiss, cat. 1.22).

²⁰ G. DAVIES, „Omnes et singuli aurifices”: guild regulations and the chalice trade in central Italy c. 1250 – 1500, in: *The historian's eye: essays on Italian art in honor of Andrew Ladis*, (eds.) Hayden B. J. Maginnis, Shelley E. Zuraw, Athens, (Ga, USA), 2009, pp. 33-44.

²¹ E. CIONI, *Scultura e smalto nell'oreficeria senese dei secoli XIII e XIV*, Firenze, 1998, pp. 624-648.

²² G. CANTELLI, *Storia dell'oreficeria e dell'arte tessile in Toscana dal Medioevo all'età moderna*, Firenze, 1996, p. 86, p. 117, fig. 11-13.



Fig. 9. Central Italian goldsmiths (?), Chalice (detail), Venice, church of Santo Stefano Protomartire (from San Samuele)

analysis. At any rate, the San Samuele chalice remains one of the very few pieces of non-Venetian goldsmith's art existing in Venice. Foreign goldsmiths, both from other Italian states and from beyond the Alps, were clearly present and working in the Lagoon, as is confirmed by documents more than by material evidence. In this case, however, nothing proves that the chalice was made in Venice; and it was not brought to the city among the personal goods owned by a foreigner that moved to the city and left it to San Samuele upon his death.

It remains only to confirm how the San Samuele chalice came into the hands of Venier, given that, according to the evidence presented here, the object does not appear to have been originally made for him. In Venier's will there is actually no mention of one object in particular, but simply a request for the building and endowment of a chapel. Furthermore, a Byzantine reliquary, later inserted into a Renaissance frame at San Samuele, and now in Santo Stefano, has been linked to Venier by Grevomboch, who reproduces it for his collection of drawings. Here again, however, there is no documentary evidence to verify this link. Indeed, the oldest inventories conserved in the church

cini in the Museum of the Cathedral of Pistoia (1384)²³, and the so-called Albergati Chalice in the cathedral of Bologna²⁴. However, these comparisons only show that specifically Siennese features spread in Gothic goldsmithery and got assimilated by other productive contexts, as the differences between the San Samuele and Vízakna, and the others are still marked.

Although the Tuscan goldsmithery does not offer indisputable terms for comparisons, the enamels of the San Samuele chalice have generic affinities with late fourteenth-century Florentine and Tuscan paintings. The figures of the Crucified Christ and the Virgin in the chalice (fig. 10), for example, appear reminiscent of some of the figures in contemporary Florentine painting, such as those in the *Crucifixion* by Nardo di Cione in the Accademia in Florence. However – in spite of the excellent quality of these enamels – the difference in dimensions renders an exact comparison difficult, and all these resemblances remain necessarily vague and generic and not sufficient to put forth a hypothesis of a Tuscan provenance.

In conclusion, the most plausible conclusion for the San Samuele chalice would be that it was made in the last quarter of the fourteenth century, whereas any hypothesis of provenance needs further

²³ G. CANTELLI, *op. cit.* (n. 22), p. 128.

²⁴ *Il tesoro di San Pietro in Bologna e Papa Lambertini*, (ed.) Franca Varignana, Bologna, 1997, p. 171, cat. 4.

of San Samuele, datable to the late Cinquecento, list the chalice as an object from Ca' Venier, but make no mention of Venier when the *Reliquary of the Cross* is listed. Unfortunately, the inventory of assets and furnishings is missing from the dossier of Venier's *commissaria* in the Archivio di Stato in Venice, which may have contained the information we require. I hope that, in the future, further documentation will emerge and shed light on some of these questions, particularly in regard to how these precious artefacts ended up in the belongings of Marco Venier.



Fig. 10. Central Italian goldsmiths (?), Chalice (detail), Venice, church of Santo Stefano Protomartire (from *San Samuele*)

Neke manje poznate trecentističke metalne rukotvorine u Veneciji i Venetu

U ovom će radu biti predstavljena dva, čak i među istraživačima slabo poznata, trecentistička zlatarska djela. Radi se o dvama kaležima datiranim u 14. stoljeće.

Prvi se čuva u crkvi San Simon u mjestu Vallada Agordino u okolici Belluna, dakle u najsjevernijem dijelu pokrajine Veneto. Kalež posjeduje neka od oblikovnih svojstava koja ga povezuju s poznatom skupinom mletačkih rukotvorina razasutih od Venecije i Veneta do Dalmacije, ali i šire po Europi. Unatoč sličnostima, djela iz ove skupine ne mogu se atribuirati jednom te istom zlataru. Analiza ukupnoga *corpusa* upućuje na usvajanje zajedničkih motiva i na kolanje istih modela među raznim zlatarskim radionicama tog doba. Kaležom iz Vallade proširuje se ta važna skupina zlatarskih rukotvorina.

Drugi kalež čuva se u crkvi Santo Stefano Protomartire u Veneciji, međutim potječe iz nedaleke crkve San Samuele. Taj primjerak iznenađujuće visoke kvalitete predstavlja *unicum* u kontekstu mletačkog zlatarstva. Jedini koji se s njim može izravnije usporediti je kalež iz Vízakne u Rumunjskoj, a čuva se u Narodnom muzeju u Budimpešti. Spomenute dvije rukotvorine posjeduju dovoljno zajedničkih svojstava po kojima ih se može pripisati istoj radionici, mada je kalež iz crkve San Samuele stilski i izvedbeno profinjeniji. Ipak se čini da nije proizveden u Veneciji.

Neki su istraživači pretpostavili da je kalež iz Vízakne nastao u Toskani. Unatoč stanovitim srodnostima sa sijenskom produkcijom, ova pretpostavka zahtijeva ipak dodatna pojašnjenja i potvrde. Zanimljivo je između ostaloga primijetiti kako je mletački kalež naručen *pro remedio animae* stanovita Lorenza di Mattea, čiji je grb izveden na kaležu, no već je u 16. stoljeću naveden kao dio ostavštine Marca Veniera (umro 1417.) crkvi San Samuele.

Ključne riječi: *umjetnost zlatarstva, zlatarstvo, liturgijsko posuđe, emajli, Venecija, Veneto*

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