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PIERANTONIO PALMERINI'S ALTARPIECE FOR THE CHURCH OF ST SAVIOUR IN DUBROVNIK

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Abstract: The paper discusses the commission and stages of execution of the high retable of the church of St Saviour in Dubrovnik, of which survives only the altarpiece of the *Ascension*, commissioned in 1527 from Pierantonio Palmerini from Urbino. Before signing the contract for the St Saviour altarpiece, Pierantonio Palmerini painted its *modello*, a presentation piece then acquired for the Senate Hall, while the wooden frame for Palmerini's altarpiece was executed by architect and woodcarver Giovanni (*Zanetto*) di Francesco del Coro from Ancona, who received final payment after its delivery to Dubrovnik in March 1528. The high altar of the church of St Saviour was finally completed in 1533, when magister *Petrus pictor*—most likely Pietro di Giovanni, a Venetian painter active in Dubrovnik—decorated the altarpiece frame with azurite and gold.

Keywords: Dubrovnik, church of St Saviour (Sv. Spas), Pierantonio Palmerini, Giovanni del Coro, Pietro di Giovanni

The votive church of St Saviour (Sv. Spas) in Dubrovnik, commissioned by the Republic of Dubrovnik after the 1520 earthquake,¹ presently houses two old

¹ On the construction of the church of St Saviour, with an overview of previous studies and new insights, see Danko Zelić, »Gradnja crkve Sv. Spasa u Dubrovniku (1520. – 1534.)«. *Anali Zavoda za povijesne znanosti HAZU u Dubrovniku* 60 (2022): pp. 77-112.

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The cited archival sources were partially presented in the historical overview included in the conservation study of the church of St Saviour in Dubrovnik (Croatian Conservation Institute, 2021, project leader Krasanka Majer Jurišić). The documents were transcribed by Danko Zelić, whose insights and suggestions have led to numerous improvements of this paper.

master paintings: the *Ascension* by Pierantonio Palmerini (Urbino?, c. 1500 – Urbino, 1538), formerly its high altarpiece,² and the *Crucifixion with St Blaise and view of Dubrovnik* painted by an unknown eighteenth-century painter, now set within the earlier, much bigger Renaissance stone frame of the present high altar.³ Scarce information on the former liturgical furnishings of the church of St Saviour, spared by the earthquake of 1667, is provided by the records of the 1692 canonical visitation conducted by Archbishop Giovanni Vincenzo Lucchesini. In late seventeenth century, the church had three altars: the high altar dedicated to the Ascension and two side altars, one dedicated to the Annunciation and bequeathed by Frano Pankracijev Benessa, and the other dedicated to St Matthew.⁴ Besides Palmerini's *Ascension*, the only other preserved part of the described, presumably original arrangement, is the stone altar frame bearing the Benessa family arms, at some unidentified moment moved to the position of the high altar and furnished with the aforementioned eighteenth-century *Crucifixion with St Blaise*. Alterations of the interior of the church of St Saviour, including the dispersal of the wooden frame of Palmerini's altarpiece, probably took place in the period of French administration following the dissolution of the Republic, when the church was secularized and turned into a military warehouse (like many other ecclesiastical buildings in Dubrovnik),⁵ to be reopened for liturgical service in 1845.⁶ Pierantonio Palmerini's altarpiece, commissioned in 1527 and completed in 1528, is therefore the only surviving artwork belonging to the original furnishings

² Tempera on canvas transferred from panel, 307 × 250 cm. Earlier published sources position the altarpiece above the main church entrance (Stefano Skurla, *Ragusa: cenni storici*. Zagabria: A spese dell'autore, 1876: p. 105; Vojislav J. Đurić, *Dubrovačka slikarska škola* [Srpska akademija nauka i umetnosti, Posebna izdanja, knj. 363; Odeljenje društvenih nauka, knj. 45]. Beograd: Naučno delo, 1963: p. 165), while Mirjana Gligorijević was the first to record it in its present position on the west wall (Mirjana Gligorijević, »Pjer-Antonio Palmerini«. *Zbornik za likovne umetnosti* 7 (1971): p. 62).

³ Oil on canvas, 232 × 158 cm; dated after 1725, since the veduta of Dubrovnik depicted in the lower part of the painting shows the church of St Ignatius, erected between 1699 and 1725 (Vedrana Gjukić-Bender, »Prikazi Dubrovnika u slikarstvu«. *Prilozi povijesti umjetnosti u Dalmaciji* 38 (1999): p. 238; Vedrana Gjukić-Bender, »Sveti Vlaha – trajno nadahnuće slikarac«, in: *Sv. Vlaha u povijesti i sadašnjosti*, exhibition catalogue, ed. Pavica Vilać. Dubrovnik: Dubrovački muzeji, 2014: pp. 304, 306).

⁴ *Visitationes*, ser. 3, vol. 4, ff. 40r-40v, 68v-69r, Arhiv Dubrovačke biskupije (Diocesan Archives Dubrovnik; hereafter: ADB).

⁵ The French converted as many as fifteen churches in Dubrovnik into warehouses and military barracks (Stjepan Ćosić, »O slomu Republike i ustroju francuske uprave u Dubrovniku 1808. i 1809«. *Anali Zavoda za povijesne znanosti HAZU u Dubrovniku* 23 (1995): pp. 184-185, and note 27).

⁶ *Gradnje i popravci – crkve i kapele*, ser. 3.1, vol. 2, ADB.



Fig. 1. Pierantonio Palmerini, *Ascension*, 1528, Dubrovnik, church of St Saviour (Sv. Spas)

of the sixteenth-century church, and at the same time one of the few documented state-financed commissions of altar paintings, especially in the light of the fact that it was not commissioned for the cathedral.⁷

⁷ As state endorsed commissions of religious paintings gradually ceased from the middle of the fourteenth century, the role of patrons came to be assumed mostly by individuals (Igor Fisković, »Dubrovačko slikarstvo i društveni okviri njegova razvoja u XIV stoljeću«. *Prilozi povijesti umjetnosti u Dalmaciji* 23 (1983): p. 106), with the exception of painted and precious metalwork altarpieces commissioned by the state for the cathedral (for an overview see the documents published in *Katedrala Gospe Velike u Dubrovniku*, ed. Katarina Horvat-Levaj. Dubrovnik-Zagreb: Gradska župa Gospe Velike, Institut za povijest umjetnosti, 2014: pp. 538-542).

The altarpiece of the *Ascension* was first mentioned by Stjepan Skurla (1876) as the work of an “unknown, but classical” master,⁸ while Giuseppe Gelcich (1884) listed it as attributed to Giorgio Vasari.⁹ The name of its author was first introduced by Kruno Prijatelj (1951) as “Petar Antun from Urbino”,¹⁰ whose artistic profile and full name came to be gradually revealed through newly discovered archival records published during the 1950s. The contracts for two Palmerini’s works preserved in Dubrovnik—the altarpiece of the *Ascension* and the reliquary cabinet in the sacristy of the Franciscan church—were published by Jorjo Tadić (1952),¹¹ while Cvito Fisković (and indirectly Vojislav Đurić) uncovered the painter’s full name, *Petrus Antonius Baptiste Palmerinus de Urbino*, as recorded in the lease agreement for a house near the Domino church owned by the nunnery of St Claire, stipulated by Palmerini and his associate Giacomo di Marco from Florence on 16 April 1526.¹² Palmerini’s activity in Dubrovnik was discussed in greater detail by Vojislav Đurić in his book *Dubrovačka slikarska škola* (1963), who interpreted the artist’s arrival to Dubrovnik as one of the signs of decline in local painting.¹³ Mirjana Gligorijević (1971) delineated Palmerini’s full artistic profile by integrating the Dubrovnik episode with his known Italian oeuvre,¹⁴ but the two paintings in Dubrovnik were brought to the attention of foreign scholars only ten years later by Silvia Cuppini Sassi’s text in the exhibition catalogue *Lorenzo Lotto nelle Marche* (1981).¹⁵ Since then, given the preserved contracts for their commissions, Palmerini’s Ragusan paintings have been

⁸ S. Skurla, *Ragusa*: p. 105.

⁹ Giuseppe Gelcich, *Dello sviluppo civile di Ragusa considerato ne’ suoi monumenti storici ed artistici*. Ragusa: C. Pretner, 1884: p. 111, followed by Alessandro Dudan, *La Dalmazia nell’arte italiana – venti secoli di civiltà. Volume secondo: Dall’anno 1450 ai nostri giorni*. Milano: Fratelli Treves, 1922: p. 398.

¹⁰ Kruno Prijatelj, »Prilozi slikarstvu XV. – XVII. st. u Dubrovniku«. *Historijski zbornik* 1-4 (1951): p. 180; besides the given name and terms of the contract, Prijatelj listed other documents mentioning the painter, adding that he was not able to identify the artist in available literature.

¹¹ *Građa o slikarskoj školi u Dubrovniku XIII–XVI v., II: 1500–1601* [Srpska akademija nauka, Građa, knj. V, Istoriski institut, knj. 4], ed. Jorjo Tadić. Beograd: Naučna knjiga, 1952: pp. 128-129 (doc. 1040, 1041).

¹² Cvito Fisković, »Nekoliko podataka o starim dubrovačkim slikarima«. *Prilozi povijesti umjetnosti u Dalmaciji* 10 (1956): p. 151. Fisković states that the contract was “also noted by V. Đurić, who mentioned it in his manuscript” (i.e., PhD thesis).

¹³ V. J. Đurić, *Dubrovačka slikarska škola*: p. 165, note 12.

¹⁴ M. Gligorijević, »Pjer-Antonio Palmerini«: pp. 57-81.

¹⁵ S. C. S. [Silvia Cuppini Sassi], »Pier Antonio Palmerini«, in: *Lorenzo Lotto nelle Marche: il suo tempo, il suo influsso*, exhibition catalogue, ed. Paolo Dal Poggetto and Pietro Zampetti. Firenze: Centro Di, 1981: p. 296.

highlighted as firm points for the reconstruction of the painter's entire oeuvre. A new contribution to the interpretation of the altarpiece of the *Ascension* was given by Benedetta Montecvecchi (2001), who identified a smaller, compositionally similar canvas of the same theme (now in the sacristy of the church of San Filippo Neri in Fossombrone) as the presentation piece (*modello*) mentioned in the contract for the St Saviour altarpiece.¹⁶ Finally, in his more comprehensive studies on Palmerini,¹⁷ Alessandro Nesi proposed the attribution of *St Catherine of Alessandria* in the parish church of Madonna of Mercy in Pakljena (Island of Šipan) to Pierantonio Palmerini on the basis of similarities with the figure of the Virgin on the altarpiece for the confraternity of St Andrew in Pesaro (today in the Pinacoteca di Museo Civico in Fano) and the chromatic features of the *Altarpiece of St Anthony the Abbot* in the Museo diocesano "Albani" in Urbino, although sustaining that it could not have been painted during Palmerini's residence in Dubrovnik, but rather sent to Šipan either from Pesaro or Urbino.¹⁸

Pierantonio Palmerini trained in the workshops of Timoteo Viti (Urbino, 1469/1470 – Urbino, 1523) and Girolamo Genga (Urbino, c. 1476 – Le Valle, Urbino, 1551), presumably accompanying the latter to Rome in early 1520s, where he was influenced by Raphael's and Michelangelo's inventions that he would

¹⁶ Oil on canvas, 153 × 119 cm; at the time the painting was kept in the deposits of the Pinacoteca Civica in Fossombrone (Benedetta Montecvecchi, »Pietro Antonio Palmerini«, in: *Pesaro nell'età dei Della Rovere*, 2, ed. Guido Arbizzoni, Antonio Brancati. Venezia: Marsilio, 2001: p. 141). In Croatian scholarship the painting in Fossombrone was mentioned by Radoslav Tomić, »Umjetnost od 16. do 19. stoljeća«, in: *Milost susreta. Umjetnička baština Franjevačke provincije sv. Jeronima*, exhibition catalogue, ed. Igor Fisković. Zagreb: Galerija Klovićevi dvori, 2010: p. 120; Radoslav Tomić, »Majstori talijanske renesanse u Hrvatskoj«, in: *Tizian, Tintoretto, Veronese, veliki majstori renesanse*, exhibition catalogue, ed. Radoslav Tomić. Zagreb: Galerija Klovićevi dvori, 2011: p. 32.

¹⁷ Alessandro Nesi, *Pierantonio Palmerini. Cultura figurativa ed esperienze artistiche di un pittore urbinato, prima e durante la decorazione dell'Imperiale di Pesaro*. [Fermignano]: Centro Studi G. Mazzini, 2004, on paintings in Dubrovnik pp. 53-63, 153-157; Alessandro Nesi, »Precisazioni sulle opere croate di Pierantonio Palmerini«. *Accademia Raffaello: atti e studi*, n. s., 2 (2008): pp. 39-48.

¹⁸ In discussing the painting in 2004, Nesi dates it around 1525 (A. Nesi, *Pierantonio Palmerini*: p. 55, pp. 138-139; identified as St Barbara), while in 2008, in a revision of conclusions on paintings in Dubrovnik, favours a later dating, placing it to the 1530s, after Palmerini's return to Italy (A. Nesi, »Precisazioni sulle opere croate«: pp. 47-48). The typology of female figures connecting the Virgin in the St Andrew altarpiece in Fano and the figure of St Catherine in Pakljena was one of the arguments in support of the attribution of *Virgin and Child with Infant St John the Baptist* (present location unknown) to Pierantonio Palmerini (Alessandro Nesi, »Una Madonna col Bambino e San Giovannino dal convento urbinato di Santa Maria della Torre«. *Quaderni dell'Accademia Fanestre* 7 (2008): p. 311).

sporadically quote in later works.¹⁹ In the short period between the assumed stay in Rome and the departure to Dubrovnik in 1526, Palmerini received several important commissions for clients in Pesaro, executed in collaboration with the Florentine painter Giacomo di Marco (otherwise undocumented as an independent artist). The preserved and documented works from that period include the said altarpiece of the *Virgin and Child with Saints Andrew and Paul (Pala di Sant'Andrea)* for the church of Sant'Andrea in Pesaro (now in Pinacoteca di Museo Civico in Fano), commissioned by the confraternity of St Andrew in Pesaro on 28 June 1524. Compared to the works of Palmerini's more prominent contemporaries, and especially to the models he could have encountered in Rome, the Pesaro altarpiece displays the same "rustic rigidity and restraint" noticed by Kruno Prijatelj in the Dubrovnik *Ascension* (in relation to the "phase of decadence of the Dubrovnik school [of painting]", Palmerini being one of its agents),²⁰ as well as similar compositional organization of distant landscape opening in the background behind symmetrically arranged figures. Apart from formal affinities with documented works on the other shore of the Adriatic Sea, the St Andrew altarpiece is interesting in the light of the two painters' prospective departure for Dubrovnik, since its contract was witnessed by one (otherwise unidentified) Stefano da Ragusa.²¹

Pierantonio Palmerini's activity in Dubrovnik represents a reflection and an often-cited example of the changes that began to occur in local painting from the third decade of the sixteenth century onwards, marked by a growing presence of foreign masters and intensified imports of works of foreign painters.²² Within the heterogeneous panorama of painterly activity in Dubrovnik after the deaths of Nikola Božidarević (†1517), Mihajlo Hamzić (†1518) and Vicko Lovrin

¹⁹ The painter's artistic profile is discussed in detail in A. Nesi, *Pierantonio Palmerini*; for an overview and recent bibliography, see Alessandro Nesi, »Palmerini, Pierantonio«, in: *Dizionario biografico degli italiani* 80 (2014), online edition ([https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/pierantonio-palmerini_\(Dizionario-Biografico\)](https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/pierantonio-palmerini_(Dizionario-Biografico))), accessed 28 June 2022).

²⁰ K. Prijatelj, »Prilozi slikarstvu XV. – XVII. st. u Dubrovniku«: p. 180.

²¹ B. Montevecchi, »Pietro Antonio Palmerini«: p. 138.

²² For an overview of sixteenth-century painting in Dubrovnik, especially in the context of the perception of these changes in art historical studies, see Milan Pelc, »Dubrovačka slikarska kultura 16. stoljeća«, in: *Restauriranje Tizianove slike iz crkve sv. Dominika u Dubrovniku*, ed. Višnja Bralić. Zagreb: Hrvatski restauratorski zavod, Dominikanski samostan sv. Dominika u Dubrovniku, 2008: pp. 9-32. A more objective (and more favourable) assessment of the painterly climate in sixteenth-century Dubrovnik in relation to the local tradition was given by Vladimir Marković, »Slikarstvo«, in: *Zlatno doba Dubrovnika XV. i XVI. stoljeće: urbanizam, arhitektura, skulptura, slikarstvo, iluminirani rukopisi, zlatarstvo*, exhibition catalogue, ed. Vladimir Marković. Zagreb: MTM, 1987: pp. 169-176.

(†1517/1518), Palmerini's works indicate a shift from the local tradition, in terms of style still definable as late Gothic or early Renaissance. It should, however, be noted that Pierantonio Palmerini remains a typical representative of his own artistic background, characterized by intense activity of local masters who in the first decades of the sixteenth century all followed the same models and went through analogous stylistic changes that would similarly determine Palmerini's own painting (from Timoteo Viti and echoes of Raphael's inventions, to Mannerist motifs), reworked to result in their more modest, local reflections.²³ Consequently, just as the comparisons of Palmerini's admittedly modest capabilities with those of his contemporaries active in major artistic centres cannot be taken as a starting point for a relevant assessment of his varied oeuvre, they can neither be taken as starting points for an assessment of Dubrovnik's likewise varied, but above all acceptant cultural environment, nor of the taste of its commissioners.

The high altar of the church of St Saviour in archival sources

The details surrounding the arrival of Pierantonio Palmerini and Giacomo di Marco in Dubrovnik in 1526 remain unknown, but it is generally assumed that the invitation was extended by the state authorities,²⁴ since the aforementioned lease agreement dated 16 April 1526 mentions the two artists as "painters paid by the Dubrovnik commune" (*pictores salariati communis Ragusi*).²⁵ Newly discovered archival records provide further details on their reception in Dubrovnik:

²³ The artistic situation in the northern part of the Marche region at the time of Palmerini's activity was outlined by Luciano Arcangeli: *Accanto a Timoteo Viti, che è la figura più autorevole, tutta l'area nord delle Marche è interessata nei primi decenni del secolo da una intensa fioritura pittorica, anche se con risultati per lo più modesti; in questi pittori ricorrono in varia misura analoghi spunti e problematiche: il rapporto con la cultura peruginesca e con il Viti, l'evoluzione sotto la scorta dell'influsso raffaellesco, e, nei casi più tardi, lo sbocco in una dimensione 'popolare' del manierismo*. (Luciano Arcangeli, »La pittura del Cinquecento nelle Marche«, in: *La pittura in Italia. Il Cinquecento*, I. Milano: Electa, 1992 [1988]: p. 388).

²⁴ V. J. Đurić, *Dubrovačka slikarska škola*: p. 165; M. Gligorijević, »Pjer-Antonio Palmerini«: p. 60; Kruno Prijatelj, »Uz nove restauratorske zahvate u Trogiru i Dubrovniku«. *Prilozi povijesti umjetnosti u Dalmaciji* 25 (1985): p. 188; V. Marković, »Slikarstvo«: p. 174; Igor Fisković, »Figuralne umjetnosti renesansna doba u Hrvatskoj«, in: *Hrvatska renesansa*, exhibition catalogue, ed. Miljenko Jurković, Alain Erlande-Brandenburg. Zagreb: Galerija Klovičevi dvori, 2004: p. 184; A. Nesi, »Precisazioni sulle opere croate«: p. 39.

²⁵ The contract was published by Cvito Fisković, »Nekoliko podataka«: p. 151, note 35. Painters receiving communal salary were mentioned already in 1440 by Filippo de Diversis (Filip de Diversis, *Opis slavnoga grada Dubrovnika*, ed. Zdenka Janeković Römer. Zagreb: Dom i svijet, 2004: p. 111,187).

the allocation of a yearly subsidy of fifty *perperi* for Giacomo di Marco and Pierantonio Palmerini's housing arrangement was approved by the Senate on 12 April 1526,²⁶ several days prior to the lease agreement, in accordance with the established practice of targeted government incentive that can be traced back to the fourteenth century.²⁷ The choice of the house situated near the Domino church was probably not accidental, given the fact that painters' workshops were traditionally located in that part of the city.²⁸

The contract for the altarpiece of the *Ascension* between Pierantonio Palmerini and overseers (*provisores*) of the construction of the church of St Saviour Danijel Nikolin Resti, Damjan Ivanov Menze and Petar Junijev Sorgo, drafted on 25 August 1527,²⁹ was preceded by the decision of the Minor Council on a deposit payment corresponding to one sixth of the agreed price, registered on 22 August 1527.³⁰ According to the contract, the clients agreed to an overall price of 150 gold ducats and promised to provide the wood for the altar and its decoration (frame), as well as hire a master who would complete the woodwork.³¹ Palmerini

²⁶ *Prima pars est de acceptando ad salarium comunis nostri Iacobum Marci Florentinum et Petrum Antonium Baptiste Palmerinum de Urbino pictores. Per XXIII, contra: XVII. // Prima pars est de dando eis de salario yperperos quinquaginta in anno ambobus pro affictu domus eorum habitationis. Per: XXI, contra: XVIII. (Acta Consilii Rogatorum, ser. 3, vol. 38, f. 105v, 12 April 1526, State Archives in Dubrovnik (hereafter: SAD)).*

²⁷ I. Fisković, »Dubrovačko slikarstvo«: pp. 130-131 (drawn upon documents edited by Jorjo Tadić); numerous examples of state subsidies being granted to different artisans can be found in *Dubrovnik: Civitas et Acta Consiliorum 1400-1450* [Mrežna izdanja Instituta za povijest umjetnosti, knj. 9], ed. Ana Plosnić Škarić, Danko Zelić. Zagreb: Institut za povijest umjetnosti, 2017 (https://ducac.ipu.hr/project/wp-content/uploads/Dubrovnik_Civitas_et_Acta_Consiliorum.pdf, accessed 10 June 2022).

²⁸ I. Fisković, »Dubrovačko slikarstvo«: p. 131. As part of the communal properties lease scheme, painters were leased houses with shops situated in the tenth and the eleventh block on the southern part of the Placa, opposite the Franciscan church (Danko Zelić, »*Utilitas et lucrum* – općinske kuće u srednjovjekovnom Dubrovniku«, in: *Umjetnost i naručitelji. Zbornik radova sa znanstvenog skupa »Dani Cvita Fiskovića« održanog 2008. godine*, ed. Jasenka Gudelj. Zagreb: Institut za povijest umjetnosti, Odsjek za povijest umjetnosti Filozofskog fakulteta Sveučilišta u Zagrebu, 2010: p. 17).

²⁹ *Diversa notariae*, ser. 16, vol. 99, ff. 159v-160r, SAD; *Građa*, II: pp. 128-129, doc. 1041.

³⁰ *Die XXII augusti 1527. Captum fuit de faciendo poliziam Petro Antonio pictori pro pictura altaris sacre Ascensionis, videlicet pro parte sexta ducatis auri. (Acta Minoris consilii, ser. 5, vol. 35, f. 240r, SAD); Građa*, II: p. 128, doc. 1040 (not interpreted as one sixth of the agreed amount, but only as "payment of a sum of ducats").

³¹ *Cum hoc quod prefati domini provisosores teneantur dare lignamen tam pro altare, quam pro eius ornamentis, nec non et magistrum pro ipso lignamine aptando ad dictos usus sumptibus et expensis ipsorum dominorum provisorum ac omnia alia ad perfectionem dicti altaris necessaria, exceptis tantum coloribus et pictura, et omnia que pictori facere convenit de arte sua, que ipse Petrus Antonius dare teneatur. (Diversa notariae, vol. 99, ff. 159v-160r, SAD; Građa*, II: pp. 128-129, doc. 1041).

agreed to provide pigments for the painting, which would be executed with well-arranged and well-formed figures, according to the presentation piece (*modello*) already viewed by the Senate.³² Palmerini received one sixth of the agreed price, i.e., 25 ducats, at the time of signing the contract (as anticipated by the decision of the Minor Council), while the remainder of the amount was disbursed in instalments by 1 July 1528, when the painter confirmed that he was paid in full.

The contract for the St Saviour altarpiece contains several unconventional features: an unusually high fee (150 ducats) agreed only for the painting, the mention of a painted presentation piece (instead of a drawing), and the absence of a deadline for the completion of the work. These known terms of the contract can now be complemented by new findings that enable a more comprehensive insight into the stages of creation of the high altarpiece of the church of St Saviour. Three weeks prior to the contract for the *Ascension* altarpiece, on 31 July 1527, overseers of the construction of St Saviour were granted the Senate's permission to enter into negotiations with Pierantonio Palmerini for the commission of the altar painting.³³ The said permission already mentions the *modellum* previously presented to the Senate, as well as the decision to acquire it from the painter for display in the Senate's new meeting hall.³⁴ The overseers' contractual obligation to provide all wood and employ a woodcarver for the execution of the altarpiece frame was fulfilled contemporaneously with the creation of the painting. Newly emerged archival sources reveal that the task in question was awarded to another foreign master: on 13 March 1528, the woodcarver recorded as *Zannettus magistri Francisci del Cora* from Ancona received the sum of 15 gold ducats as final

³² [...] *iuxta exemplar sive modellum presentatum in excelso Consilio rogatorum, et illud complere et ornare bonis coloribus et bene compositis ac preparatis figuris bonis lineamentis perficere et omnia que ad eum spectat de arte sua complere ad laudem et approbationem cuiuslibet boni magistri pictoris.* (*Diversa notariae*, vol. 99, f. 159v, SAD; *Građa*, II: p. 129, doc. 1041).

³³ *Prima pars est de dando libertatem provisoribus ecclesie Sacre Ascensionis paciscendi pro altare ibidem faciundo cum Pierantonio Palmerino de Urbino secundum modellum per eum monstratum, nec non emendi ab ipso dictum modelum pro ponendo ipsum in sala facta noviter pro excelso Consilio rogatorum eo pretio et modo prout eis melius videbitur. Per: omnes, contra: IIII.* (*Acta Consilii Rogatorum*, vol. 38, f. 262v, 31 July 1527, SAD).

³⁴ Probably the hall mentioned in 1493 as positioned east of the hall of the Major Council (north of the Rector's Palace) and facing the harbour, which provided the Senate a meeting space separated from the one used by the Major Council (Nella Lonza, »Prostori vlasti, prostori svakodnevice«, in: *Knežev dvor u Dubrovniku: utvrda – palača – muzej*, exhibition catalogue, ed. Pavica Vilać. Dubrovnik: Dubrovački muzeji, 2016: pp. 238-239; see also Lukša Beritić, »Ubikacija nestalih građevinskih spomenika u Dubrovniku«. *Prilozi povijesti umjetnosti u Dalmaciji* 10 (1956): p. 50).

payment for his craftsmanship and sculptural work on the St Saviour altar.³⁵ Although completed in 1528, the altarpiece of the *Ascension* did not leave Palmerini's workshop before the end of May 1530, when, to enable its extraction, the Minor Council granted permission for state-funded temporary demolition and subsequent repair of a windowed wall of a house owned by the nunnery of St Claire³⁶ (the one leased to Palmerini and Giacomo di Marco in April 1526). At that point the construction of the church of St Saviour was still in progress, and the reason for the removal of the altarpiece from the painter's workshop might have been the termination of the lease agreement. Although Palmerini's initial intention to remain in Dubrovnik for a prolonged period is implied by the fact that in March 1529 he employed a servant for a period of three years,³⁷ on 12 August 1530 he was recorded in Urbino as creditor to a widow,³⁸ which suggests that the altarpiece of the *Ascension* had to be extracted from the painter's workshop due to his departure from Dubrovnik.

The high retable of the church of St Saviour was finally completed in 1533, when on the last day of March, a painter recorded only as *magister Petrus pictor* promised to gild and paint in azurite the wooden frame of the St Saviour altarpiece, already in his possession. The agreement specified that the finished work should be similar to the altarpiece located in the sacristy of the Franciscan church, and that the material had to be provided by the *provisores* of the church of St Saviour.³⁹

³⁵ *Die XIII Martii 1528. Ego Zannettus magistri Francisci del Cora de Ancona faber lignarius confiteor quod super me et omnia mea bona recepi a ser Iohanne Nic. di Nic. de Palmota et sociis officialibus scripte laboreriorum Ragusii solventibus ex ordine provisorum fabrice Gloriose Ascensionis pro integra et totali satisfactione magisterii et sculpture altaris dicte Gloriose Ascensionis facti per dictum Zannettum ducatos auri quindecim pro integra solutione dicti sui magisterii iuxta accordium et conventionem alias factam. Renunciando (Debita notariae pro comuni, ser. 36.2, vol. 2, f. 39v, SAD).*

³⁶ *Acta Minoris consilii*, vol. 36, f. 154r, SAD; mentioned by V. J. Đurić, *Dubrovačka slikarska škola*: p. 165, note 11.

³⁷ *Građa*, pp. 137-138, doc. 1052.

³⁸ A. Nesi, *Pierantonio Palmerini*: p. 60.

³⁹ *Die ultimo Martii 1533. Magister Petrus pictor ibi presens ex conventione habita cum dominis officialibus fabrice ecclesie Ascensionis, videlicet ser Damiano Io. de Menze et ser Nicolao Martini de Goze, promissit et sic convenit expedire anconam dicte ecclesie quam tenet in manibus suis ab omni opere spectante officio pictoris, tam in pingendo, quam in inaurando ubi fuerit opus, ad rationem ducatorum auri octo pro quolibet milliari auri pro sua mercede. Cum hac tamen declaratione quod dicti domini officiales teneantur sibi dare totum aurum necessarium ad inaurandum dictam anconam et de pluri colorem azurinum ad expensas comunis. Cetera autem omnia spectantia ad ornamentum dicte ancone promissit expedire omnibus suis expensis. Item de pluri, dictus magister Petrus promissit dictam anconam facere ad similitudinem illius anconae que est posita in sachristia*

On 5 April 1533, five days after the initial agreement, the painter received the sum of ten gold ducats.⁴⁰ Given the importance of the commission, the decoration of the frame of the St Saviour high altarpiece was most likely entrusted to Pietro di Giovanni, the most prominent of the three painters named *Petrus* active in Dubrovnik at around the time of the agreement.⁴¹ It should be noted that archival records usually mention Pietro di Giovanni by giving his full name or by indicating his Venetian origin, but precisely the exceptions from such accurate identification related to his attributed works support the hypothesis of his collaboration on the decoration of the high altar of St Saviour.⁴² Furthermore, commissions he received were not limited to painting but also included woodcarving and polychromy, and during the first half of the sixteenth century he was entrusted several state-funded commissions for paintings,⁴³ all of which probably made him a suitable candidate for another state-funded task.

*Sancti Francisci. Remittens se ad iudicium peritorum in arte qui debeant iudicare bonitatem operis predicti. Presentibus dictis dominis officialibus et de predictis se contentantibus. (Debita notariae pro comuni, vol. 2, f. 110v, SAD). In Ragusan sources the term *ancona* refers mainly to retables in general (usually polyptychs), while various stages and conditions of execution of the commissioned artwork are further defined in relation to the painted and/or sculpted elements included in the overall design. Terminology related to altarpieces as used in documentary sources is discussed in Igor Fisković, »Tipologija i morfologija oltarnih slika 15. stoljeća u Dalmaciji«. *Prilozi povijesti umjetnosti u Dalmaciji* 29 (1990): pp. 113-155; for the term *ancona* especially pp. 116-117.*

⁴⁰ *Die V^o Aprilis 1533. magister Petrus supradictus sponte confessus fuit habuisse et recepisse a supradictis dominis officialibus ducatos auri decem in una polittia facta sibi per ser Nicolaum Mar. de Ragnina et socios officiales de scritta, que polittia est de numero 148 et facta de ordine ditorum dominorum officialium. Renunciando. (Debita notariae pro comuni, vol. 2, f. 110v, SAD).*

⁴¹ Besides Pietro di Giovanni, these were Petar Bogdanović (*Petrus Natalis*), documented throughout the first half of the sixteenth century, but almost exclusively as merchant *Građa*, II: p. 155, doc. 1086; pp. 157-158, doc. 1089, 1090; p. 161, doc. 1098; p. 164, doc. 1102, 1103; p. 169, doc. 1113; p. 171, doc. 1117; V. J. Đurić, *Dubrovačka slikarska škola*: p. 190, note 111), and his apprentice Petar Radonjić (*Petrus Radi*), not recorded later than October 1532 *Građa*, II: pp. 150- 151, doc. 1079; V. J. Đurić, *Dubrovačka slikarska škola*: p. 179).

⁴² The contracts for two lost altarpieces associated with Pietro di Giovanni (the triptych for the church of Petilovrijenci, commissioned in 1534, and the polyptych for the church of St Andrew, documented in 1545 and 1548) refer to the painter only as *Petrus pictor Građa*, II: pp. 153-154, doc. 1083; V. J. Đurić, *Dubrovačka slikarska škola*: p. 186) or as *magister Petrus pictor Građa*, II: pp. 176-177, doc. 1131; pp. 182-183, doc. 1147; V. J. Đurić, *Dubrovačka slikarska škola*: p. 186). Furthermore, the attribution of the *Virgin and Child with Saints Andrew and Joseph* in the church of St Andrew at Pile to Pietro di Giovanni is based on the 1556 document mentioning only one *Petrus pictor*, as well as on the fact that at that point Pietro di Giovanni was the only active painter bearing that name (V. J. Đurić, *Dubrovačka slikarska škola*: p. 190).

⁴³ In 1518 Pietro di Giovanni and Mihajlo Hamzić were commissioned to complete the altarpiece for the altar of St Joseph in the cathedral, left unfinished by Nikola Božidarević (*Građa*, II: p. 92,

Palmerini's Fossombrone Ascension and the problem of the St Saviour presentation piece

The *modello* for Palmerini's altarpiece of the *Ascension* mentioned in the contract presents an exception to the usual practice traceable in archival records that usually mention presentation drawings, and not, as in our case, paintings. Benedetta Montavecchi identified the presentation piece for the St Saviour altarpiece with the compositionally similar painting on canvas preserved in the sacristy of the church of San Filippo Neri in Fossombrone, thought to have been taken from Dubrovnik to the Marches by Palmerini himself, as possible proof of important commissions received in Dubrovnik.⁴⁴

The altarpiece of the *Ascension* in the church of St Saviour and the smaller painting of the same subject in Fossombrone share a similar compositional arrangement, with minor differences in rendering of figures (colours of the apostles' garments, position of the Virgin's head and the circlet of cherubs around the figure of Christ, omitted in the altarpiece) and more accentuated modifications in the background landscape. The broad landscape in the altarpiece includes the motif of a fortified town on the left and outlines of two more distant settlements with tall towers in the central part, while in Fossombrone the landscape is simpler, with modest architectural structures scattered on the slopes of a distant mountain. The generically rendered fortified town set within the hilly landscape can hardly be interpreted as inspired by the actual landscape of Dubrovnik, as has been suggested,⁴⁵ but it is worth noting that the background itself represents a novelty in relation to common patterns of compositional arrangement applied by Ragusan painters active in the first decades of the sixteenth century (as far as conclusions can be drawn, given the scarcity of preserved artwork). In keeping with the assigned theme, Palmerini distributed the full-length figures of its protagonists across two horizontal zones lined up parallel to the picture plane, where the

doc. 966; V. J. Đurić, *Dubrovačka slikarska škola*: p. 185); in December 1549 he painted a *Crucifixion* under the porch of the Rector's Palace *Građa*, II: p. 186, doc. 1155; V. J. Đurić, *Dubrovačka slikarska škola*: pp. 186-187), and he is associated with a payment for the material and work on a cornice in the Rector's Palace, made to "master Petar the painter" in 1555 (*Građa*, II: p. 193 (doc. 1172); V. J. Đurić, *Dubrovačka slikarska škola*: p. 194, connected the document with the painted wooden ceiling preserved in the Rector's Palace).

⁴⁴ Cf. A. Nesi, *Pierantonio Palmerini*: p. 55.

⁴⁵ A. Nesi, »Precisazioni sulle opere croate«: p. 42: [...] *volle legare indissolubilmente il dipinto al luogo per il quale lo andava eseguendo*.



Fig. 2. Pierantonio Palmerini, *Ascension*,
Fossombrone, church of San Filippo Neri, sacristy

elevated viewpoint and the arrangement of densely grouped apostles with the Virgin pulled slightly towards the back lead the spectator's gaze to the broad panorama in the background.⁴⁶ Although judged to be the lowest point in his career,⁴⁷ the altarpiece of the *Ascension* represents an important step away from the dominant, traditional forms of multi-panelled altarpieces produced by local painters, thus standing at the beginnings of a broader transformation that affected Ragusan painting from the 1520s onwards, discernible primarily in the growing presence of artwork of foreign artists.⁴⁸ Compared to the painting in Fossombrone, the altarpiece in Dubrovnik shows two more differences, one of which could be interpreted as the painter's quip: the 1983/1984 restoration of Palmerini's altarpiece, necessary after both paintings in the church of St Saviour were intentionally damaged in 1978, revealed the figure of a small white dog standing at the lower right edge, later repainted into a tree stump.⁴⁹ The other detail that distinguishes the Dubrovnik altarpiece from the painting in Fossombrone is the figure of a soldier placed near the left edge of the picture, observing the heavenly scene from the background.

Visual narration of both Palmerini's paintings of the *Ascension* follows the brief account in Luke's Gospel ("Then he led them out as far as Bethany, and lifting up his hands he blessed them. While he blessed them, he parted from them and was carried up into heaven." *Luke 24:50-51*), and the somewhat more elaborate version given in the Acts of the Apostles: "And when he had said these things, as they were looking on, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. And while they were gazing into heaven as he went, behold, two men stood by them in white robes, and said, 'Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus,

⁴⁶ The only comparable local examples of convincingly conceived, deep landscape background remain Nikola Božidarević's *Lopud Annunciation* (1513) and the lunette and predella panels of the *Danče triptych* (1517); see Radoslav Tomić, »Pejzaž u starom dubrovačkom slikarstvu«, in: *Likovna kultura Dubrovnika 15. i 16. stoljeća*, ed. Igor Fisković. Zagreb: Muzejsko galerijski centar, 1991: pp. 203-204.

⁴⁷ A. Nesi, *Pierantonio Palmerini*: p. 56: [...] *l'Ascensione resta forse il gradino più basso mai toccato dall'urbinate, che scivola malamente sulle proprie ambizioni compositive, sulla scarsa dimestichezza con il formato monumentale, e con la palese difficoltà di organizzare una scena caratterizzata dal moto verticale della figura del Cristo in un assurdo formato quasi quadrato.*

⁴⁸ M. Pelc, »Dubrovačka slikarska kultura«: p. 16.

⁴⁹ K. Prijatelj, »Uz nove restauratorske zahvate«: p. 188, provides an overview of restorations: originally painted on panel, the altarpiece was transferred to canvas during the Austrian administration, and minor repairs were conducted by the Regional Institute for Protection of Cultural Monuments in Split in 1967 (Regionalni zavod za zaštitu spomenika kulture u Splitu, restorer Filip Dobrošević). During the 1983/1984 restoration conducted by the same Institute (restorers Filip Dobrošević, Špiro Katić and Slavko Alač) the painting was glued to a wooden support.

who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven.” (*Acts 1:9-11*). Relation to the text is especially evident in the dynamic gestures of the apostles and the mirrored figures of two angels clad in white (comparable to the figures in the altarpiece of St Andrew in Fano⁵⁰), gesturing with both hands towards the ascending figure of Christ and the Virgin on the ground. In both paintings, Palmerini departs from the usual iconography of the Virgin and depicts her in light blue instead of red gown.⁵¹

One of the obstacles for establishing a firm link between Palmerini's paintings in Fossombrone and Dubrovnik is the unknown provenance of the former, but given the time of construction of the church of San Filippo Neri (1608 – 1613), it is certain that it was placed in its sacristy at a later date.⁵² The assumed relationship presentation piece—finished work can now be rejected in the light of the fact that in 1527 Palmerini sold the *modello* to the Ragusan Senate, and it seems rather unlikely that three years later, on his departure from Dubrovnik, he would have taken that same painting with him.⁵³ In other words, the painting in Fossombrone and the presentation piece mentioned in the contract for the St Saviour altarpiece cannot be identified as one and the same; a more plausible explanation could be that the Fossombrone *Ascension* is a third painting of the same subject created as a variant of the same, apparently successful composition.

⁵⁰ B. Montevercchi, »Pietro Antonio Palmerini«: p. 141.

⁵¹ Representations of the Virgin clad in blue are usually associated with Byzantine tradition which sees the Virgin in blue as queen of heavens, a concept gradually introduced into Western art (Robin Cormack, »The Mother of God in apse mosaics«, in: *Mother of God: representations of the Virgin in Byzantine Art*, ed. Maria Vassilaki. Milano: Skira, 2000: p. 93). Such departure from the common iconography of the Virgin appears in another sixteenth-century altarpiece preserved in Dubrovnik—the central panel of the polyptych of the *Assumption* painted by Titian and workshop, now in the cathedral (Tanja Trška, »Tizian i poliptih 'Uznesenje Marijino' u dubrovačkoj katedrali«, in: *Renesansa i renesanse u umjetnosti Hrvatske. Zbornik radova sa znanstvenih skupova »Dani Cvita Fiskovića« održanih 2003. i 2004. godine*, ed. Predrag Marković, Jasenka Gudelj. Zagreb: Institut za povijest umjetnosti, Odsjek za povijest umjetnosti Filozofskog fakulteta Sveučilišta u Zagrebu, 2008: p. 247).

⁵² A. Nesi, *Pierantonio Palmerini*: p. 149, suggests that a possible mediator might have been Sebastiano Locatelli (Bologna, 1636 – Fossombrone, 1709), from 1668 prefect of the Fossombrone oratory. Although Locatelli was a passionate bibliophile and art collector, Palmerini's *Ascension* was not identified among works of art in his possession (Maria Maddalena Paolini, »Arte in convento: il filippino Sebastiano Locatelli (Bologna 1636 – Fossombrone 1709)«, *Pesaro, città e contà* 21 (2005): pp. 151-160).

⁵³ A. Nesi, *Pierantonio Palmerini*: p. 55, proposed that the painting was first taken to Urbino and then to Fossombrone, perhaps by a member of the Della Rovere family who endorsed the construction of the church of San Filippo Neri.

Artists and craftsmen of the St Saviour high altarpiece

Details of the several years long endeavour of creation and installation of the St Saviour high altarpiece enable an insight into the relationships between the client (in this case the state) and the artists employed for various phases of its execution. The division of tasks specified in the contract served Ljubo Karaman as a case in point of the difference between respective working practices of Italian and Ragusan workshops, with the conclusion that the division of labour between painters and carvers occurred earlier in the former.⁵⁴ Demarcation of various tasks in Italian workshops was sometimes conditioned by guild regulations,⁵⁵ but in the case of the *Ascension* altarpiece it arose from the fact that Palmerini's workshop specialized only in painting, as suggested by the contracts for commissions received before the Ragusan period which show no evidence that Palmerini and Giacomo di Marco undertook any carving work.⁵⁶ As mentioned above, the contributions of various masters in the execution of the St Saviour high altarpiece were clearly separated: in 1527 Pierantonio Palmerini received the commission only for the painting, the woodcarving part was completed a year later by Zanetto di Francesco from Ancona, while gilding and painted decoration of the wooden frame was executed in 1533 by the painter Pietro di Giovanni.

The 1528 payment to woodcarver Zanetto, son of master Francesco from Ancona (*Zannettus magistri Francisci del Cora de Ancona*) seems to be the only known mention of his presence in Dubrovnik, which suggests that he did not reside there, but had probably received the initial commission elsewhere (most likely in the Marches) and travelled to Dubrovnik only to deliver the finished frame and collect final payment. Thanks to archival research conducted by Italian scholars, the master in question can be identified as architect and woodcarver Giovanni del Coro from Ancona, most likely the son of woodcarver Francesco di Giacomo from Lendinara named "del Coro" as author of the choir of Sant'Agostino in Ancona.⁵⁷ The documented activity of Giovanni del Coro (in notary records

⁵⁴ Ljubo Karaman, »O staroj slikarskoj školi u Dubrovniku«. *Anali Historijskog instituta JAZU u Dubrovniku* 2 (1953): p. 108.

⁵⁵ For Venice, see Peter Humfrey, »The Venetian Altarpiece of the Early Renaissance in the Light of Contemporary Business Practice«. *Saggi e memorie di storia dell'arte* 15 (1986): pp. 70-75.

⁵⁶ A. Nesi, *Pierantonio Palmerini*: pp. 25-26.

⁵⁷ Francesca Coltrinari, »Ancona, 1534: new documents concerning Lorenzo Lotto and Giovanni del Coro«. *Il Capitale Culturale. Studies on the Value of Cultural Heritage* 10 (2014): p. 924.

often registered as Giannetto,⁵⁸ which explains the variant *Zanetto* in the Ragusan document) is mostly related to the Marches. He is first recorded in July 1528 when he received the commission to carve the wooden casing for the organ of the cathedral in Recanati, while the period between the 1530s until his death in 1553 was marked by the friendship and collaboration with Lorenzo Lotto.⁵⁹ The previously unknown payment record for the wooden frame of the high altarpiece of St Saviour, dated March 1528 in Dubrovnik, extends the area of his activity to the other shore of the Adriatic Sea, and seems to be the earliest known account of Giovanni del Coro's independent woodcarving practice.

The Italian origin of the three artists involved in the creation of the high retable of the church of St Saviour—Pierantonio Palmerini, Giovanni del Coro and Pietro di Giovanni—speaks eloquently of the patrons' ambition and the desire to obtain a different, visually more impressive ensemble in comparison to the artwork offered by local masters. It seems that the reason for Palmerini's arrival to Dubrovnik was precisely the commission of the St Saviour altarpiece, but the formal signing of the contract (for a business deal perhaps first agreed orally in the Marches) was delayed by the plague that had blocked Dubrovnik from late 1526 until June 1527 and suspended all affairs endorsed by the state⁶⁰ (including the construction of the church of St Saviour). The epidemic also seems to have ended the collaboration between Palmerini and Giacomo di Marco, who is thought to have died during the outburst.⁶¹ Palmerini must have used that interval to paint the altarpiece *modello*, which evidently turned out to be lucrative, since the Ragusan authorities decided both to buy the presentation piece and formally

⁵⁸ Francesca Coltrinari, »Quasi una seconda patria. Lorenzo Lotto e le Marche«, in: *Lorenzo Lotto: il richiamo delle Marche. Luoghi, tempi e persone*, exhibition catalogue, ed. Enrico Maria Dal Pozzolo. Milano: Skira, 2018: p. 72.

⁵⁹ Giovanni del Coro was commissioned to carve the frame of Lotto's altarpiece for Sant'Agostino in Ancona (*Pala dell'alabarda*, 1538/1539, Ancona, Pinacoteca Civica "F. Podesti"), as well as the frame for the altarpiece of the Amici family in the cathedral in Jesi (1552, lost). He is frequently mentioned in Lotto's *Libro di spese diverse*, and is considered to be the sitter in his *Portrait of an Architect* (c. 1535), today in the Gemäldegalerie in Berlin (Francesca Coltrinari, »Personaggi in contatto con Lorenzo Lotto nelle Marche«, in: *Lorenzo Lotto: il richiamo delle Marche. Luoghi, tempi e persone*, exhibition catalogue, ed. Enrico Maria Dal Pozzolo. Milano: Skira, 2018: p. 266; for the artist's profile, see also Francesca Coltrinari, »Quasi una seconda patria«: pp. 71-72, 76-79 in the same volume).

⁶⁰ Zlata Blažina Tomić, *Kacamorti i kuća: utemeljenje i razvoj zdravstvene službe u Dubrovniku*. Zagreb, Dubrovnik: Zavod za povijesne znanosti HAZU u Dubrovniku, 2007: pp. 148-161.

⁶¹ A. Nesi, *Pierantonio Palmerini*: p. 54.

commission the altarpiece. The monumental scale of the finished altar painting without its wooden casing (307 × 250 cm) already surpassed the size of retables (mostly polyptychs) executed by local artists,⁶² and the task of producing a complementally ambitious frame must have been beyond the capabilities of local woodcarvers. The overseers of the construction of the church of St Saviour therefore turned to yet another artist from the Marches, Giovanni del Coro, whose woodcarving skills in that period are vividly illustrated by the 1528 design for the casing of the organ of the cathedral in Recanati.⁶³

As already noted, Pierantonio Palmerini and Giovanni del Coro received final payments for their respective work in 1528, but Palmerini's altarpiece remained in his workshop until his departure from Dubrovnik in 1530. The wooden frame made by Giovanni del Coro must have been kept for some time in the workshop of Pietro di Giovanni, who in 1533 agreed to colour and gild the *ancona* already "in his hands". It is also possible that the large altarpiece of the *Ascension* (perhaps together with the frame) was transferred from Palmerini's atelier to the workshop of Pietro di Giovanni, since at that point the church of St Saviour was still in construction. One of the practical reasons for that solution would have been the location of Pietro di Giovanni's workshop, for several decades (from September 1528 until the 1560s) situated in the leased space of a communal house in the southern part of Dubrovnik's main street (Placa),⁶⁴ opposite the Franciscan church. An idea of the final appearance of the now lost frame of the St Saviour altarpiece

⁶² The *Ascension* altarpiece is the largest preserved single painting of the period; earlier preserved works of art supersede its dimensions only if measured with their frames: higher than Palmerini's painting is only Nikola Božidarević's Danče polyptych (1517; 320 × 235 cm), while Pietro di Giovanni's polyptych (c. 1523) in the church of St Mary (*Gospa od Špilica*) on the island of Lopud results larger as a whole (540 × 380 cm). Dimensions of preserved wooden retables dating from the fifteenth to the eighteenth century in Dubrovnik and surroundings are given by Božena Popić-Kurtela, *Drveni oltari od 15. do 18. stoljeća na dubrovačkom prostoru*, master's thesis, Filozofski fakultet Sveučilišta u Zagrebu, 2010: pp. 226-237.

⁶³ The drawing was published by Francesca Coltrinari in *Lorenzo Lotto: il richiamo delle Marche. Luoghi, tempi e persone*, exhibition catalogue, ed. Enrico Maria Dal Pozzolo. Milano: Skira, 2018: pp. 140, 187 (cat. VI.6).

⁶⁴ Pietro di Giovanni was last recorded as tenant of a house in the tenth block of houses in August 1566, when he was granted a five-year lease; in 1571 the house was let to Petar Petrov, also a painter (*Knjige nekretnina dubrovačke općine (13.-18. st.) – Libri domorum et terrenorum communis Ragusii deliberatis ad afflictum (saec. XIII-XVIII)*), ed. Irena Benyovsky Latin and Danko Zelić. Zagreb, Dubrovnik: Zavod za povijesne znanosti HAZU u Dubrovniku, 2007, II: p. 125). In August 1528 he was renting a workshop in a house owned by the monastery of St Michael (V. J. Đurić, *Dubrovačka slikarska škola*: p. 184).

is provided by the preserved frame of the other Palmerini's documented work in Dubrovnik, the reliquary cabinet in the sacristy of the Franciscan church, the decoration of which Pietro di Giovanni promised to replicate (*promissit dictam anconam facere ad similitudinem illius anconae que est posita in sachristia Sancti Francisci*).⁶⁵ The paintings for the reliquary cabinet doors were commissioned from Palmerini in August 1528 by Luka Mihov Bona (Bunić) and paid in full a year later. The terms of the contract and the appearance of the finished work suggest that the division of labour was similar to the one for the St Saviour retable: Palmerini was commissioned only for the paintings, but the contract nevertheless specified that the carved wooden frame had to be decorated with gold and azurite, evidently by another master.⁶⁶

The success of Palmerini's design is confirmed by the fact that the presentation piece for the *Ascension* altarpiece was acquired for the Senate Hall (and therefore paid separately), as well as by the extremely high price paid only for the painting. Palmerini's *Ascension* has often been highlighted as the most expensive painting commissioned in Dubrovnik in the sixteenth century, but the overall cost of the whole high retable seems to have been much higher: besides the 150 ducats paid to Pierantonio Palmerini, Giovanni del Coro received fifteen ducats as final instalment of the unknown total amount, and Pietro di Giovanni was paid further ten ducats as advanced payment for the completion of the retable. These known expenses, amounting to 175 ducats of state money, were increased by unknown amounts spent on material (also provided for by the Ragusan authorities) and other payments made to the two artists employed on the frame, but also by indirect, unspecified costs, such as repair of the wall demolished for the extraction of the painting from Palmerini's workshop.

⁶⁵ *Debita notariae pro comuni*, vol. 2, f. 110v, SAD. The proposal that the reliquary cabinet was not originally placed in the sacristy but in the Franciscan church, suggested by A. Nesi (*Pierantonio Palmerini*: 155), was prompted by the text of the contract stating that Palmerini promised to execute paintings for the altar of the Bona family in the church of St Francis, painted according to the model/design in the sacristy (*pingere cum bonis coloribus et laudabili pictura unum altare in sancto Francisco, secundum exemplar sive designum quod est ibi in sacrestia*; *Grada*, II., p. 135, doc. 1049). Considering its function as cabinet for relics, usually kept outside the main liturgical space, it seems more likely that the Bona family altar was originally intended for the sacristy (where an altar is mentioned in 1533). Moreover, had it been placed in the church, Palmerini's reliquary cabinet probably would not have survived the fire that destroyed the interior of the church of St Francis immediately after the 1667 earthquake.

⁶⁶ *Grada*, II: p. 135, doc. 1049.

Archival sources indicate that the execution of the high retable of the church of St Saviour turned out to be among the more challenging projects endorsed by the Ragusan authorities, both financially and in terms of execution, which comes as no surprise given the high aspirations and high costs that accompanied the construction of the church itself, different from other Ragusan churches in design and sculptural decoration of its façade. An equally ambitious idea guided the St Saviour officials in commissioning its high retable, a monumental, highly finished structure that must have completely occupied the rather small area of the presbytery and was created by foreign, admittedly more skilled masters. The features introduced by Pierantonio Palmerini's altarpiece and its presentation piece acquired for the Senate Hall—unified pictorial space, absence of gold leaves and scene set against a deep landscape background—were still uncommon in local painting. Judging from the contemporary design for the casing of the organ in Recanati, Giovanni del Coro most likely provided an elaborate *all'antica* frame, in use in early sixteenth-century Ragusan altarpieces but only for polyptychs, with more elaborate elements sometimes imported from Italy. Finally, the choice of Pietro di Giovanni for the final decoration of the retable must have been motivated by the fact that at that time he was the most skilled and most resourceful resident artist: as a Venetian who came to Dubrovnik in 1512 from Recanati, he maintained ties with Venetian woodcarvers from whom he procured sculpted elements for his previously commissioned retables that he would then colour and gild.⁶⁷ His artistic profile is well illustrated by the fact that he trained with Lorenzo Lotto,⁶⁸ himself connected to another key figure in the creation of the St Saviour retable, Giovanni del Coro. During the first half of the sixteenth century, all three artists moved between Venice and the Marches, which raises the issue of mediation and opens up the possibility that Pietro di Giovanni's role in furnishing of the high altar of the church of St Saviour might have been more prominent than suggested by known archival sources.

⁶⁷ V. J. Đurić, *Dubrovačka slikarska škola*: p. 186.

⁶⁸ David Frapiccini, »Lorenzo Lotto e gli strumenti del mestiere: la periferia come consapevole scelta strategica«. *Il Capitale Culturale. Studies on the Value of Cultural Heritage* 10 (2014): pp. 241, 245.