

Palma Vecchio's *Sea Storm*: A Political Allegory

Philip L. Sohm

Volume 6, numéro 2, 1979–1980

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1076925ar>

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.7202/1076925ar>

[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

Éditeur(s)

UAAC-AAUC (University Art Association of Canada | Association d'art des universités du Canada)

ISSN

0315-9906 (imprimé)

1918-4778 (numérique)

[Découvrir la revue](#)

Citer cet article

Sohm, P. L. (1979). Palma Vecchio's *Sea Storm*: A Political Allegory. *RACAR : Revue d'art canadienne / Canadian Art Review*, 6(2), 85–96.
<https://doi.org/10.7202/1076925ar>

Palma Vecchio's Sea Storm: A Political Allegory

PHILIP L. SOHM

University of Toronto

The *Sea Storm* (Fig. 1) by Palma Vecchio is the sole representation of an obscure fourteenth-century legend in which Saints Mark, George, and Nicholas save Venice from a squall generated by a ship pirated by a group of demons. In order to dispel the demonic possession and save Venice from a disastrous flood, St. Mark enlisted an aged boatsman to row him into the storm; they were joined by Saints George and Nicholas, and together these patron saints of Venice engaged the devils in moral combat. The *Sea Storm* represents the climax of the narrative, that is, the moment of confrontation between the demons and the saints. Lacking a pictorial tradition to rely on, Palma turned to the fifteenth- and sixteenth-century chroniclers of Venetian history who consistently recorded in unvarying detail the sequence of events.¹ From them, Palma adapted not only the essentials of the miracle of 1341, but also the location of the event. According to the manuscripts, the pirated ship was located in the vicinity of the Lido, a tradition refined in the *Sea Storm* by setting the confrontation at the northern tip of the Lido with a view northwestward towards Venice and the mainland. The map of Venice in Benedetto Bordone's *Isole del Mondo* of 1534 (Fig. 2) records a crenellated tower on the northern promontory of the Lido, similar in form and position to that of the *Sea Storm*.

The rarity of its subject, however, did not conceal the brilliance of its composition to such contemporary artists and writers as Giorgio Vasari, Francesco Sansovino, and Giovanni Paolo Lomazzo.² Vasari was deeply impressed by this picture and in 1568 he praised it in such laudatory terms, ones that he usually reserved for Tuscan painting, that they merit quotation:

In it, one sees that Palma has simulated a terrible storm at sea and some boats assailed by the fury of the winds,

all executed with much judgment and admirable care; the same may be said of a group of figures in the air, and of the demons in various forms who are blowing, after the manner of winds, against the boats, which, driven by oars, and striving in various ways to break through the dangers of the towering waves, yet are likely to sink. In short, to tell the truth, this work is of such a kind, and so beautiful in invention and in other respects, that it seems almost impossible that brushes and colours, employed by human hands, however excellent, should be able to depict anything more true to reality or more natural; for in it may be seen the fury of the winds, the strength and dexterity of the men, the movement of the waves, the lightning flashes of the heavens, the water broken by the oars, and the oars bent by the waves and by the efforts of the rowers. What else? I, for my part, do not remember to have ever seen a more awesome painting than this, which is executed in such a manner, and with such care in the invention, the drawing, and the colouring, that the picture seems to quiver, as if all that is painted were real. For this work Jacopo Palma deserves the greatest praise, and the honour of being numbered among those who are masters of art and who have the ability to express in painting the complexities of their conceptions.

Unfortunately, starting as early as 1534, the pictorial brilliance began to disappear behind

¹ Venice, Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana, Marc. It. Classe I.vi (8636), no folio number; Marc. It. Classe vii, cod. nccc (7151), fol. 172; M. Sanudo, *Vite dei Dogi*, ed. G. Monticello (Città di Castello, 1900), xxii, 608.

Versions of this paper were read at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, in March 1978 and at the Central Renaissance Conference, Cleveland, Ohio, in March 1979. I am most grateful to Egon Verheyen and Christian Hornig for their incisive criticism.

² G. Vasari, *Le Vite de' Più Eccellenti Pittori, Scultori ed Architettori*, ed. G. Milanesi (Florence, 1906), v, 244-46; F. Sansovino, *Venetia Città Nobilissima et Singolare*, ed. G. Martinioni (Venice, 1663; original ed. 1580), 286; G.P. Lomazzo, *Trattato dell' Arte* (Milan, 1584), 376; F. Scannelli, *Il Microcosmo della Pittura* (Cesena, 1657), 239.

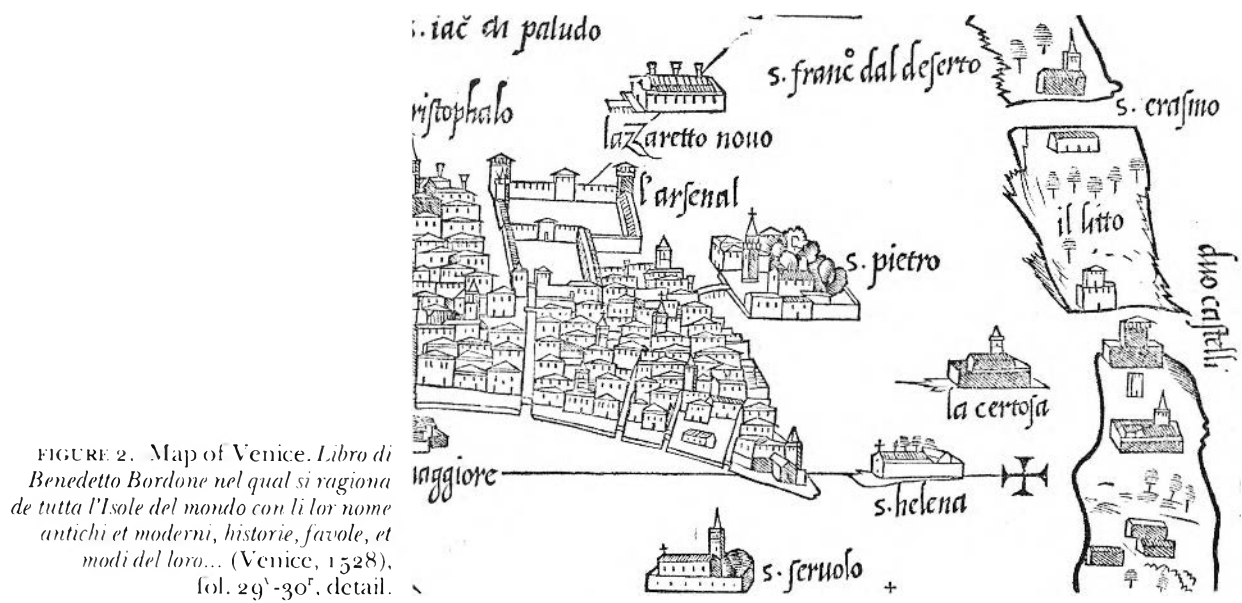




FIGURE 3. Palma Vecchio, *Sea Storm*, detail of oarsman (Photo: author).

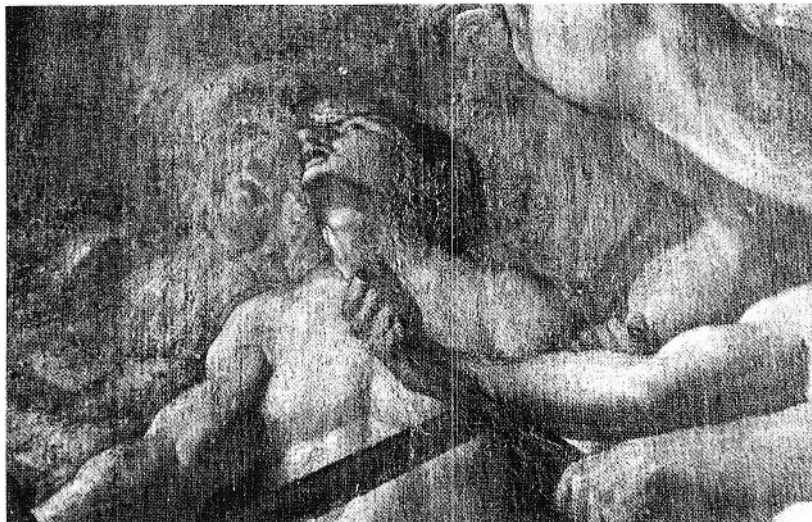


FIGURE 4. Palma Vecchio, *Sea Storm*, detail of oarsman (Photo: author).

turgid restorations. In that year, Paris Bordone began to paint the *Donation of St. Mark's Ring* (Venice, Accademia), the pendant and sequel to the *Sea Storm* in which the boatsman presents Mark's ring to the Doge – a portrait of Doge Andrea Gritti (1523-38) – as proof of the miracle.³ Probably at the same time he added the gondola with saints to the *Sea Storm*; however, whether this was painted *al nuovo* or simply to complete the picture, possibly left unfinished by Palma after his death in 1528, is unknown.⁴ It is clear that Bordone made no attempt to adapt his style to that of Palma. Bordone favoured matt colours organized into tight linear patterns, and he applied this manner, without modification, in the *Sea Storm*. In contrast, Palma composed his pictures through luminous glazes of tonally harmonious colours. The resulting stylistic disjunction is troubling. In 1733 Giuseppe Zanchi, son of the more gifted Antonio Zanchi, repainted the nude oarsmen in the foreground as well as the surrounding sea.⁵ Characteristically, Zanchi could not resist enlivening the original poses of the oarsmen with an increased contortion, expressive, in his mind, of physical strain (Figs. 3, 4). The sea monster in the lower left corner was added in 1830 by Sebastiano Santi when the picture was removed from its original location above the corner of a door and a new piece of canvas was required to fill in the empty space. Thus, by the late nineteenth century, the *Sea Storm* was only a dim reflection of the original, and Vasari's panegyric seemed excessive and unjustified. In 1955, a restoration attempted to capture the purity of the original. While it did

reveal areas of unrivalled freshness, it nevertheless compromised the visual integrity of the picture because it left a perplexing mosaic of opaque seventeenth- and eighteenth-century additions alternating with the translucent glazes, the impressionistic brushwork, and even the primed canvas of Palma's work.

Such pictorial obscurity has not deterred art historians from posing delicate questions concerning attribution: Is this an autograph Giorgione, a Giorgione *concetto* completed by Palma Vecchio, or an autograph Palma? Appropriately the problematic question of attribution was initiated by the founder of our discipline, Giorgio Vasari. When Vasari visited Venice in 1541-42, he was impressed by the *Sea Storm*, then located in its original position in the board room of the Scuola Grande di San Marco. In the 1550 edition of the *Lives*, he attributed it to Giorgione.⁶ During one of his subsequent sojourns, that is, in either 1563 or 1566, Vasari must have received infor-

3 For the dating of *Mark's Ring*, see Sandra Moschini Marconi, *Gallerie dell' Accademia di Venezia, Opere d'Arte di Secolo XVI* (Rome, 1962), 70-72; and Giordana Canova, *Paris Bordone* (Venice, 1964), 18-20.

4 Bordone's contribution was first alluded to by Sansovino, 286, who observed that the picture had been attributed to that artist by some people. His observation that 'altri dicono di Paris Bordone' was taken up in the Scuola inventory of 1681: Archivio di Stato, Venezia (hereafter ASV), Scuola Gr. di San Marco, B. 46, n.6, c.62-63, 14 April 1681. F. Zanotto, *Pinacoteca della R. Accademia di Belle Arti* (Venice, 1833), 1, fasc. 22, was the first to specify the boat as Bordone's sole contribution, an opinion accepted thereafter.

5 Marconi, *Accademia*, 165-68.

6 G. Vasari, *Vite de gli Architettori, Pittori et Scultori*, ed. C. Ricci (Milan, n.d.), III, 28-29.

mation from a different, more reliable, source, because in the 1568 edition he credited the picture to the less important Palma.

Vasari's change of attribution from Giorgione to Palma Vecchio has sparked a debate amongst scholars which continues unabated and unresolved. The first attribution to Giorgione was reiterated by Marco Boschini (1664) and later accepted by Zanetti among others.⁷ The Giorgione proponents of our day have focused on the phantasmagorical nature of the painting, usually by associating it with the *Dream of Raphael*,⁸ but have disregarded the fact that the tenebrous lighting, the fierce wind, and the crew of demons are integral parts of the narrative. Certain artistic liberties were nonetheless taken at the expense of the prosaic chronicles which would suggest the inventive imagination of Giorgione. The painter of the *Sea Storm* chose to embellish the written accounts with the inclusion of naked, rowing demons in the foreground as well as the devil straddling and clubbing a monstrous fish. Their mysterious presence – especially the inexplicable violence of the group on the right – serves to heighten the poetic, veiled threat implicit in the possessed ship careening into the dark from which emerges the fragile gondola of St. Mark.

Scholars favouring Palma Vecchio prefer to

concentrate on certain passages of the *Sea Storm*, notably the landscape in the upper left, that were revealed by the recent restoration and emphatically establish Palma's participation.⁹ Although no one would now deny Palma's contribution, many art historians – exemplified by the recent publications of Tschmelitsch and Hornig – maintain that Giorgione must have been responsible for the picture's conception, if not for some of its execution.¹⁰

By focusing their attention exclusively on the question of attribution, scholars may have neglected crucial information concerning the artistic and historical context of the *Sea Storm*, information that can increase our understanding and appreciation of this work and, parenthetically, may help to resolve the attribution in favour of Palma.

The *Sea Storm* was painted for the *albergo* or board room of the lay confraternity, the Scuola di San Marco, as part of one of the more famous Venetian pictorial cycles. As one of five *scuole grandi* in Venice, the Scuola di San Marco provided a convenient outlet for popular piety, ranging from the extreme form of flagellation to the more sociable forms of prayer, *laude*, and the Mass.¹¹ By the early sixteenth century, the confraternity had developed extensive social programmes guaranteeing basic physical comforts for its members. The poor could receive money, food, and housing on the basis of need and merit; the sick could enter hospices and receive medical care; fatherless daughters were eligible for dowries. As an expression of its charitable enterprise, the Scuola di San Marco had constructed during the 1430s an immense, lavishly decorated meeting hall situated on the prestigious Campo dei SS. Giovanni e Paolo.¹² A fire in April 1485 destroyed this structure, an unfortunate loss that was compensated, in retrospect, by its replacement.

The first room of the new building to receive pictorial decoration was the *albergo* (Fig. 5). This should hardly be surprising since the *albergo* served as the executive board room for the thirteen officers (the *Banca*) and as the centre for their philanthropic activity.¹³ In 1492, Gentile Bellini, then a member of the *Banca*, proposed that he and his brother Giovanni provide a painting to be placed on the wall facing the door leading into the *albergo*.¹⁴ For a variety of economic and structural reasons, Gentile did not start this picture, the *Preaching of St. Mark in Alexandria* (Milan, Brera; Fig. 6), until 1504. In 1505, Gentile and Giovanni suggested that a

7 M. Boschini, *Le Minere della Pittura* (Venice, 1664), 237; A.M. Zanetti, *Della Pittura Venetiana* (Venice, 1771), 92; ASV, Scuola di S. Marco, B. 33, c.188-89, inventory dated 1733; F. Zanotto, *Accademia*, I, n.22.

8 The extensive bibliography on the *Sea Storm* from this century is cited by Marconi, *Accademia*, 165-68; see also Michelangelo Muraro and A. Grabar, *Treasures of Venice* (Geneva, 1963), 157.

9 G. Robertson, 'The Giorgione Exhibition in Venice,' *Burlington Magazine*, xcvi (1955), 277; Marconi, *Accademia*, 165-68; G. Mariacher, *Palma il Vecchio* (Milan, 1968), 87; Pietro Zampetti, *L'Opera Completa di Giorgione* (Rome, 1968), 100; Terisio Pignatti, *Giorgione* (Venice, 1969), 135-36.

10 Günter Tschmelitsch, *Zorzo, genannt Giorgione* (Vienna, 1975), 396-99; C. Hornig, 'Giorgiones Spätwerk,' *Annali della Scuola Normale Superiore di Pisa, Classe di Lettere e Filosofia*, series 3, vi (1976), 877-927, esp. 910-13.

11 Brian Pullan, *Rich and Poor in Renaissance Venice* (Cambridge, Mass., 1971); William Wurthmann, 'The Scuole Grandi and Venetian Art, 1260-ca.1500' (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Chicago, 1976).

12 Pietro Paoletti, *L'Architettura e la scultura del rinascimento in Venezia* (Venice, 1893-97), 119-21, 127-30, 175-79 and 222-25; Paoletti, *La Scuola Grande di San Marco* (Venice, 1929), 13-64; and Philip L. Sohm, *The Scuola Grande di San Marco, 1437-1550: the Architecture of a Venetian Lay Confraternity* (New York, 1980).

13 ASV, Scuola di S. Marco, Reg. 19, fol. 5^v, 23 Dec. 1537; B. 124, c.1-3; and Reg. 18, fol. 5^v, 1508: 'Despenza fatta in albergo de la schuola nostra el mco. misser piero di liavardian grando... a poverj dela ditta schuola.'

14 P. Paoletti, *Raccolta di Documenti Inediti per Servire alla Storia della Pittura Veneziana nei Secoli xv e xvi* (Padua, 1894-95), 17.

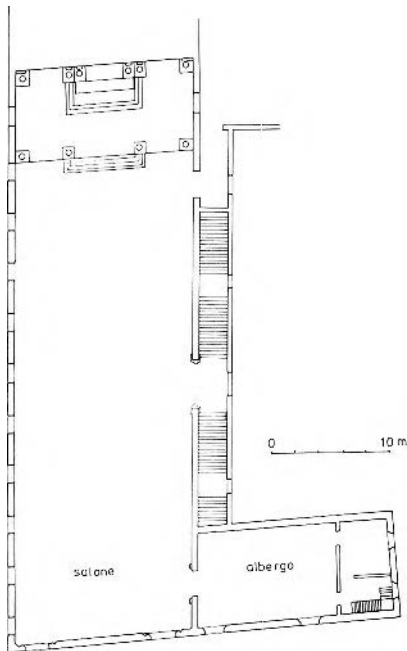


FIGURE 5. Venice, Scuola di San Marco, plan of *piano nobile*. (After Soprintendenza ai Monumenti, n. c301/7; drawing: author)

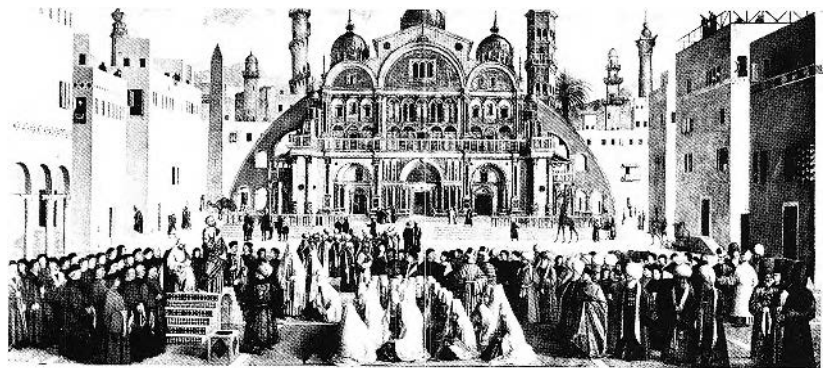


FIGURE 6. Gentile Bellini, *Preaching of St. Mark in Alexandria*. Milan, Brera (Photo: Alinari).

painting depicting the Martyrdom of St. Mark would be suitable for the wall above the portal, opposite the *Preaching of St. Mark*. Although Gentile provided a sketch for this picture, nothing was done until 1515, when Giovanni agreed to paint it.¹⁵ The *Martyrdom of St. Mark* (*in situ* above the portal) was left unfinished when Giovanni died in 1516, but was completed in 1526 by his follower Vittorio Belliniano. Towards the end of his career, Giovanni Mansueti (d. 1529) added three inept paintings to the side walls representing *St. Mark Curing Anianus* (*in situ*), *St. Mark Baptizing Anianus* (Milan, Brera), and the *Denouncing and Imprisonment of St. Mark* (*in situ*).¹⁶ Finally, in 1534, Paris Bordone began the coda to the fourteenth-century legend of the *Sea Storm*, that is, the *Fisherman Presenting St. Mark's Ring to the Doge* (Venice, Accademia). The chronological position of the *Sea Storm* in the sequence of decoration cannot be documented. Scholars generally agree that it must date after 1508, but when it might have been commissioned between that date and Palma's death in 1528 remains conjectural, at least on the basis of style.

The composition of the *Sea Storm* was conceived with its original location in mind – the wall adjacent to and to the right of Belliniano's *Martyrdom of St. Mark*.¹⁷ The most effective position to view the painting is standing just inside the

doorway. At this point, the oblique line of sight of the viewer is continued into the painting by the movement of the two demonic boats, the wind generated by a wind god in the upper left corner, and the pictorial light. Unlike all of its companion pieces in the *albergo*, the light within the *Sea Storm* does not correspond with the natural lighting that strikes the painting from windows directly opposite and to its right; rather, the light seems to come from the entrance of the *albergo*. The artifice of divorcing pictorial light from the natural lighting serves to heighten the dramatic surge from left to right. Similarly the violent movement of wind and ship away from the observer immediately engages anyone entering the room and endows the confrontation between the lurching, demonic ship and the defenceless, but blessed, gondola with an added poignancy.

¹⁵ Paoletti, *Raccolta*, 14, 18–19.

¹⁶ The literature on Mansueti is justifiably limited; see F. Heineman, 'Spaetwerke des Giovanni Mansueti,' *Arte Veneta*, xix (1965), 150–52, with bibliography. For the settlement between the Scuola and the heirs of Mansueti for the *Denouncing and Imprisonment of St. Mark*, left unfinished at his death, see G. Ludwig, 'Archivalische Beiträge zur Geschichte der venezianischen Malerei,' *Jahrbuch der Königlich Preussischen Kunstsammlungen*, Beiheft, xxvi (1905), 66–67; and an earlier, unpublished agreement between the two parties, asv, Scuola di S. Marco, B. 133, c.6, 17 Feb. 1529.

¹⁷ asv, Scuola di S. Marco, B. 46, n.6, c.62–63, inventory of 1681; B. 33, c.188–89, 1733; Boschini, 237.



FIGURE 7. Venice, Arsenal Portal (Photo: R. Lieberman).

Whereas an attempt was made to integrate the composition of the *Sea Storm* with its physical setting, both formally and iconographically it diverges from the paintings of the cycle as a whole. All of the other paintings in the *albergo* include elaborate architectural settings and numerous portraits of the confraternity's officers, a compositional type initiated at San Marco by

¹⁸ P.L. Sohm, 'The Staircases of the Venetian *Scuole Grandi* and Mauro Coducci,' *Architectura*, viii (1978), 131-32.

¹⁹ For descriptions of the destroyed paintings by the Bellini, Vivarini, and Carpaccio among others, see Ludovico Dolce, *Dialogo della Pittura* (Venice, 1557), 21; Vasari, *Vite* (Milanesi), iii, 156-62; Sansovino, 328-35.

²⁰ For information on Mark's life in Alexandria as well as further bibliography, see G. Pavanello, 'San Marco nella Leggenda e nella Storia,' *Rivista di Venezia*, vii (1928), 293-324; and S. Tramontin, 'Realtà e Leggenda nei Racconti Marciani,' *Studi Veneziani*, xii (1970), 35-38. For a little-known account of Mark's life, see *Passio et Translatio quedamque miracula gloriosissim. S. Marci evangeliste*, manuscript in the Biblioteca Correr, Venice (Cod. Cicogna 2987-88, n.17), undated but written in late-fifteenth-century script.

²¹ The most recent and interesting contribution on Tintoretto's paintings in the Scuola is E. Weddigen, 'Thomas Philologus Ravennas, Gelehrter, Wohltäter und Mäzen,' *Saggi e Memorie di Storia dell' arte*, ix (1974), 55-61.

²² A. Bonardi, 'Venezia e la lega di Cambrai,' *Archivio Veneto*, ser. 3, vii (1904), 209-44; F. Gilbert, 'Venice in the crisis of the League of Cambrai,' *Renaissance Venice*, ed. J.R. Hale (London, 1973), 278-86; L. Libby, 'Venetian History and Political Thought after 1509,' *Studies in the Renaissance*, xx (1973), 7-45.

Gentile Bellini's *Preaching of St. Mark* (Fig. 6). The formal divergence of the *Sea Storm* is not significant so much for the consequent visual disunity as for the fact that the officers in charge of its commission had to concede that they would not be portrayed. Indeed the importance of group portraiture for confraternity decoration should not be underestimated. In many respects the *scuole* served as surrogate governments for the disenfranchised *cittadini*, from whom the majority of the *Banca* was drawn. Excluded from participation in the Republic's government, the citizen officers of the *scuole* vented their political frustrations through bureaucratic activities modelled on those of the *Signoria*, as well as their artistic patronage.¹⁸ One example of the latter is the adaptation of group portraiture from the pictorial cycle in the Sala del Maggior Consiglio of the Palazzo Ducale.¹⁹ Through this artistic imitation, the officers could assure a modest fame for themselves by recalling the portraits of the nobility, thereby allusively enhancing their social status. Thus the selection of the *Sea Storm* – a subject not suitable for the inclusion of portraiture – must be seen as an important concession.

The pictorial cycle of the *albergo* was devoted to the principal events of Mark's life in Alexandria,²⁰ starting with his first act – the *Curing of Anianus* – and rotating clockwise around the *albergo* to the *Martyrdom*. Had the narrative of the cycle been continued sequentially, the scene to follow the *Martyrdom*, which would have occupied the position of the *Sea Storm*, should have been the Christians of Alexandria saving Mark's body from the pyre, a subject painted later for the Scuola by Jacopo Tintoretto.²¹ Yet the officers chose an obscure legend from the posthumous life of Mark which had never before been represented, and never would be painted again.

The choice of an iconographically disparate subject would seem to suggest that the *Sea Storm* contained a meaning transcending its ostensible subject. I would like to suggest that the unique selection of the legend of 1341 was prompted by an equally unique set of circumstances – the disastrous war against the League of Cambrai. Venice's obtuse expansionism on the *terraferma* during the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, coupled with a supercilious attitude towards the consequent objections raised by the transgressed states, led directly to the formation of the League.²² When the treaty was signed at Cambrai in December of 1508, it was specifically committed to the chastisement of Venice and to



FIGURE 8. Venice, Arsenal Portal, detail of pedestal relief (Photo: author).



FIGURE 9. Venice, Arsenal Portal, detail of pedestal relief (Photo: author).

the dispersal of her empire. The Holy Roman Emperor Maximilian I claimed Verona, Vicenza, Padua, Treviso, and the Friuli; King Louis XII of France claimed Brescia, Bergamo, and Cremona; all of the Romagna was to revert to the Papacy, and the Apulian seaboard to the King of Spain. Neither the threat of defeat by the united front of Europe's major powers nor the excommunication of Venice by Julius II in April 1509 had greatly worried the Venetian Senate, so the calamitous defeat of the Venetian army at Agnadello in May 1509 came as an unexpected and devastating blow. By the end of the month, Venice had lost all of her territory except the city of Treviso. The defeat of her formerly invincible empire inflicted a grievous wound on the Venetian psyche, one which hung over the city while the war continued intermittently until 1516.

As one might expect, the war left its imprint on Venetian art and architecture. The city endured grave economic restraints which necessarily interfered with the construction of buildings and, to a

lesser extent, the commissioning of paintings. But the war also made an impact on sculptural and pictorial iconography. For example, the reliefs of snarling lions set on each pedestal of the Arsenal portal (Figs. 7-9), built during the *dogato* of Pasquale Malipiero (1457-62), were used as eloquent symbols of Venetian power. The Arsenal, as generator of Venetian military power, was an appropriate symbol for the Republic as a whole and, as its most visible element, the portal came to represent her entire military complex. Exact copies of the lion reliefs were set on the pedestals of the Porta di San Tomaso in Treviso (Fig. 10), the Porta Vescova in Verona, and the Porta Venezia in Padua. Significantly, all of these city gates were started in 1516 as symbols of Venice's aggressive re-establishment of control over these three strategic cities after their temporary loss to the League of Cambrai. While these lions from the Arsenal emblematically sealed Venetian dominance, they also served as talismanic correctives to the symbolic destruction

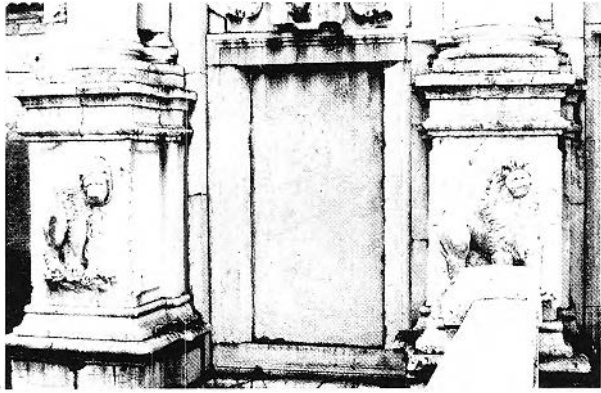


FIGURE 10. Treviso, Porta di San Tomaso, detail of pedestal (Photo: author).

of the Lion of St. Mark by the League patriots upon their capturing Venetian cities.²³

Few other works with overtly political imagery have survived from these years, perhaps because of their topical nature. However, the iconography of the reliefs on the Basilica di San Marco were reinterpreted in 1509 by Luigi da Porto in light of the current war. In a letter of that year, he recorded an imaginary monologue in which the speaker attempts to prove the inevitability of the recent calamity. He argues that Venice's power originated with the sea and any attempt at expansionism on the mainland, resulting in a confrontation with the Germans, must have an

²³ Luigi da Porto, *Lettere Storiche dall' anno 1509 al 1528*, ed. B. Bressan (Florence, 1857), 81-82. Porto, in a letter of 12 June 1509 to Antonio Savorgnano, describes the destruction of the Lion of St. Mark in Vicenza.

²⁴ L. da Porto, *Lettere Storiche scritte dall' anno MDIX al MDXII* (Venice, 1832), 74-75: 'E se si avesse a continuar a prestare alcuna fede ad antiche indovinazione e segni (che pur è da prestargliela), noi a guerreggiare con Tedeschi grandissimo riguardo dovremmo avere, vedendosi nella facciata di questo nostro tempio, che verso Rialto guarda, posto di picciolo rilievo primieramente un leone che volendo mordere un Tedesco armato, da lui con la spada è ferito; e poco più in alto si vede il Tedesco suonando uno de' suoi zufoli di guerra cavalcare il leone; e sopra questi due intagli, in riposta parte e fuori d'ogni ordine delle altre figure, v'è posta una testa di donna in atto di piagnere, tutta scapigliata, che Vinegia da molti s'interpreta.' The iconography of these reliefs provides further evidence in support of Muraro's hypothesis that Giorgione's frescoes for the nearby Fondaco dei Tedeschi were conceived as political allegories: M. Muraro, 'The Political Interpretation of Giorgione's Frescoes on the Fondaco dei Tedeschi,' *Gazette des Beaux-Arts*, ser. 6, LXXXVI (Dec. 1975), 177-83. Muraro argues that the Fondaco frescoes were conceived as an expression of the optimistic alliance between Venice and Germany on the eve of the signing of the Cambrai treaty. Once the League had been formed on 10 December 1508, the programme might have been modified so that the figure of Venice brandishing a sword over a soldier, presumably a German, symbolizes the betrayal of Venice by Emperor Maximilian.

unfortunate end. To prove that this fact had been recognized centuries earlier, the speaker describes three reliefs on the Basilica (Figs. 11, 12):

And if one would continue to give any faith to ancient divinations and signs, ... then we must have considered waging war against the Germans, since one sees placed on the façade, which faces the Rialto, of our church, a small relief with a lion which wants to bite a German soldier, who has wounded the lion with a sword; and a little higher up one sees the German playing one of his flageolets of war while riding on a lion; and above these two reliefs ... there is set the head of a woman in the attitude of crying, completely dishevelled, whom many interpret as Venice.²⁴

Whereas the primary meaning of the preceding works was intended or perceived as essentially political, topical allusions do exist within religious or historical narratives. The most celebrated example is Titian's *Battle of Spoleto* (Fig. 13),



FIGURE 11. Venice, Basilica di San Marco, north façade, detail of relief (Photo: F. Gasparoni).



FIGURE 12. Venice, Basilica di San Marco, north façade, detail of relief (Photo: F. Gasparoni).

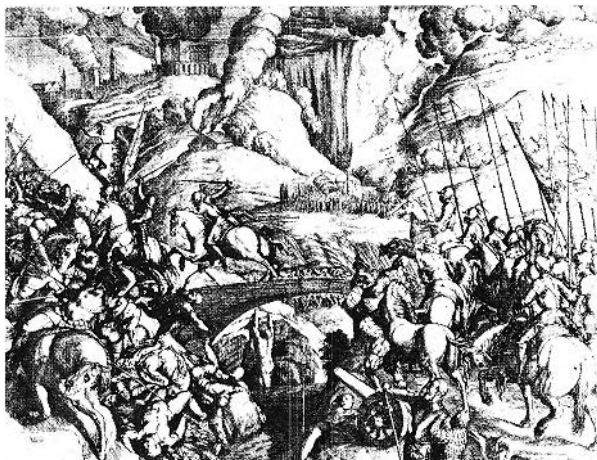


FIGURE 13. Giulio Fontana, engraving after Titian, *Battle of Spoleto* (Photo: Paris, Bibliothèque nationale).

started in May 1513 for the Sala del Maggior Consiglio in the Palazzo Ducale.²⁵ Destroyed in the fire of 1577, but recorded in various drawings, engravings, and paintings, Titian's picture ostensibly depicted the Battle of Spoleto (1155) with the army of Pope Alexander III routing that of the Holy Roman Emperor Frederick Barbarossa. It replaced Guariento's mid-fourteenth-century fresco which had been clearly identified with the inscription: VRBS SPOLETANA QVAE SOLA PAPAE FAVEBAT OBSESSA ET VICTA AB IMPERATORE DELETUR.²⁶ However the identifying label was dropped in Titian's replacement, and the iconography subtly changed. In order to maintain a thematic continuity with the cycle, the primary subject remained the Battle of Spoleto; nevertheless this mythical battle was identified with the contemporary Battle of Cadore (1508), in which the Venetians defeated the army of Emperor Maximilian.²⁷ Vasari was certainly aware of the contemporary undertones of Titian's *Battle* when, with malicious wit, he identified the scene as the

Battle of Agnadello, the disastrous Venetian defeat commencing the war against the League of Cambrai.²⁸

Political symbolism could also be infused into a religious topic, as in the *Submersion of the Pharaoh's Army in the Red Sea*, a monumental woodcut probably designed by Titian in 1514 or 1515 (Fig. 14). It has been suggested that it can be associated with the struggle and victory of Venice over the League of Cambrai.²⁹ During the sixteenth century, the Venetians identified themselves with the chosen people of the Bible,³⁰ hence the salvation

25 G.B. Lorenzi, *Monumenti per servire alla storia del Palazzo Ducale di Venezia* (Venice, 1868), 157, 219. M. Sanudo, *I Diarii*, xvi (Venice, 1887), 316, mentions in 29 May 1513 the agreement with Titian. For a summary of the problematic history of its execution, see Harold Wethey, *Titian, the Mythological Paintings*, iii (London, 1975), 227-29.

26 Sansovino, 327.

27 The mural was first labelled the *Battle of Cadore* in an inventory of Bartolomeo della Nave's collection, ca. 1639 (E. Waterhouse, 'Paintings from Venice for Seventeenth-Century England,' *Italian Studies*, vii [1952], 19). Soon thereafter, Ridolfi confirmed this identification (C. Ridolfi, *Maraviglie dell' arte*, ed. D.V. Hadeln [Berlin, 1914; original ed., Venice, 1648], i, 165-66). Most scholars have accepted this tradition; see in particular J.A. Crowe and G.B. Cavalcaselle, *Titian: His Life and Times* (London, 1877), ii, 8-17, and E. Panofsky, *Problems in Titian, Mostly Iconographic* (New York, 1969), 180-82. Recently M. Muraro's review of Panofsky, *Problems in Titian*, in *Art Bulletin*, LIV (1972), 354, has questioned whether the contemporary Battle of Cadore could indeed constitute the primary subject. Muraro's note of caution is well taken since this battle could have been only a secondary, albeit recognizable, theme.

28 Vasari, *Vite* (Milanesi), vii, 439.

29 David Rosand and Michelangelo Muraro, *Titian and the Venetian Woodcut* (Washington, D.C., 1976), 70-73. The sudden popularity of the *Submersion of Pharaoh's Army* in Venetian graphics during the turbulent war years might have been a product of this recognized political typology; see M. Muraro, 'Titien: Iconographie et Politique,' *Symboles de la Renaissance* (Paris, 1976), 126.

30 Staalé Sinding-Larsen, *Christ in the Council Hall*, Acta ad Archaeologiam et Artium Historiam Pertinentia, v (Rome, 1974), 141-42.

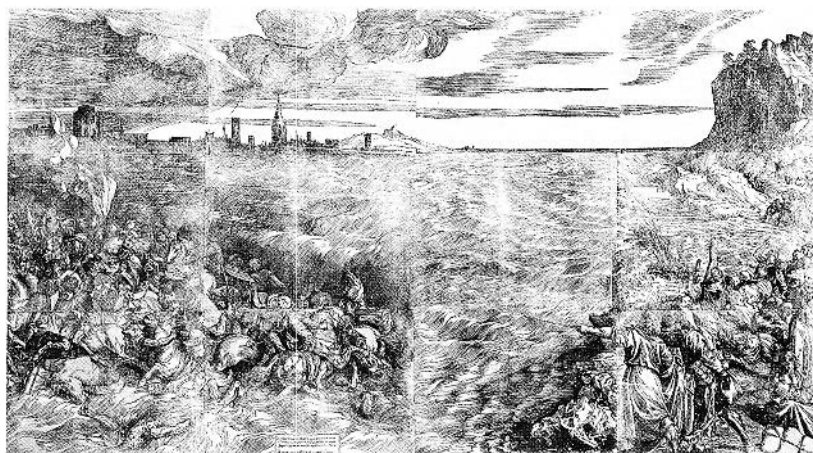


FIGURE 14. Attributed to Titian, *Submersion of the Pharaoh's Army in the Red Sea*. Woodcut (Photo: Fogg Art Museum).

of the Israelites and the destruction, by water, of the Egyptian army would have been understood by the Venetians during those desperate years as a civic allegory. Certain details help to substantiate this interpretation. The defecating dog, placed strategically under Moses' arm, may be interpreted as a sign of disdain comparable to an episode at the end of a battle in 1513 between the Venetians and Germans, when the former bared their buttocks to the retreating imperial troops. To these observations, I would like to add that the church tower silhouetted against the sky above the immersed Egyptian army (Fig. 15) seems to be a Gothic spire, normally associated with Germany, and thereby identifying the Egyptian army with that of the Emperor.

The allegorical syntax of the *Sea Storm* coincides with these examples. The notion of a demonic pirate crew who have captured a ship and threaten to destroy the city of Venice but are prevented from so doing by Saints Mark, Nicholas, and George must have been understood, at least on a secondary level, as an allegory of the salvation of Venice. The meaning of the civic *psychomachia* enacted by the infernal interlopers and the patron saints of Venice is clarified by the ship and the storm itself.

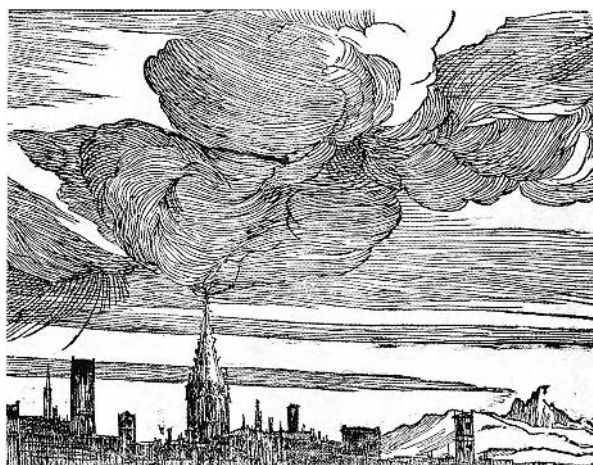


FIGURE 15. Attributed to Titian, *Submersion of the Pharaoh's Army*, detail (Photo: Cleveland Museum of Art).

The captured ship would have been widely understood during the early sixteenth century as a symbol of the besieged Venetian republic. The metaphor of the 'ship of state' had been a prevalent figure of speech since its use by Horace and Quintilian,³¹ and the identification of the state with a ship was particularly apt for the maritime republic of Venice. In 1531, Pope Clement VII compared Venice to 'a great ship that fears neither fortune nor the commotion of the winds however great they may be.'³² The ship-state analogy was particularly popular during the war years between 1509 and 1516. Paolo Giovio compared the war-torn Venetian republic to 'a broken fleet full of cracks.'³³ Following a temporary break in the city's misfortunes in 1511, the Scuola di San Rocco, one of the other five *scuole grandi*, carried a processional float which consisted of a ship with the inscription: 'Do not be afraid, the winds have stopped.'³⁴

Allusions to war as a tempest were equally popular at the time. For example, in rejecting a tentative treaty with the Emperor Maximilian, the Senate noted that it wished to wait for 'this tempest' to pass.³⁵ The association is apt not only because of the destructive forces embodied by war and storms alike, but also because both are characterized by the fickle nature of Fortuna and thus were seen to be synonymous.³⁶ Furthermore, the congruity of war and tempest through their common quality of Fortuna was reinforced by the storm-tossed ship itself, which would have been readily recognized as a symbol of that capricious goddess.³⁷

The various images of the *Sea Storm* may find their proper context in a speech given by Doge Leonardo Loredan in 1513, and transcribed by

31 Horace, *Carminum*, 1, 14; Quintilian, *Institutio oratoria*, III, vi, 44. For its use in the Renaissance, see J. Richard Judson, 'Marine Symbols of Salvation in the Sixteenth Century,' *Essays in Memory of Karl Lehmann* (Locust Valley, N.Y., 1964), 147-48, and R. Gruenter, 'Das Schiff. Ein Beitrag zur historischen Metaphorik,' *Tradition und Ursprünglichkeit, Akten des 3. Intern. Germanisten-Kongress Amsterdam* (Bern/Munich, 1966), 86-101.

32 Eugenio Albèri, ed., *Relazioni degli Ambasciatori Veneti al Senato*, ser. 3, III (Florence, 1846), 286. Ambassador Antonio Soriano reported the following statement by Clement VII: 'E non son molti di che Sua Santità parlò meco largamente in tale proposito; con dire, che quest' inclita Reppublica era da compararsi a una grossa nave, che non teme fortuna o commozione di venti, per grandi che siano.'

33 P. Giovio, *Istorie*, trans. Lodovico Domenichi (Venice, 1555), II, 538. 'Era allora la Signoria a guisa d'un naviglio rotta piena di fessure.'

34 M. Sanudo, *I Diarii*, XIII (1886), 135, 10 Oct. 1511: 'Poi fo portato uno soler con una nave suso, la qual haveva una brieve che diceva *nolite timere, cessavit ventus*.' The cause of celebration, albeit ephemeral, was a treaty signed with England, Spain, and Rome.

35 Francesco Guicciardini, *Storia d'Italia*, ed. S.S. Menchi (Turin, 1971), II, 922.

36 *Vocabulario degli accademici della Crusca* (Venice, 1612), s.v. 'Fortuna'; in Latin, see Du Cange, *Glossarium mediae et infimae latinitatis*, III, s.v. 'Fortuna'; for further information on the etymological association, see Edgar Wind, *Giorgione's Tempesta* (Oxford, 1969), 3, 20-21.

37 Aby Warburg, 'Francesco Sassetis Letzwillige Verfügung,' *Gesammelte Schriften* (Leipzig/Berlin, 1932), I, 145-51; A. Doren, 'Fortuna im Mittelalter und in der Renaissance,' *Vorträge der Bibliothek Warburg*, II, pt. 1 (1922-23), 71-144.

Andrea Mocenigo. In it, the Doge lamented the hardships of war and concluded in the following terms: 'Nevertheless with such shifting affairs and near shipwreck, the Venetian ship and its steady virtue remains as firm and immobile as the rocks of Caucasus.'³⁸ Not only does Loredan employ the popular metaphor of the Venetian ship of state, but he also compares the imperilled ship with the Caucasian bluffs, an image of enduring solidity. Similarly, the ravaged ship of the *Sea Storm* is linguistically identified with the fortified tower. The particular type of ship depicted in the *Sea Storm* was called a *caracca*, but at times it was referred to as a *roccaforte*, that is, a fortress. Thus the ship of state, like the tower, is characterized by fortitude and, although endangered, would never sink. Or, put into a broader allegorical context, Venice survived the calamity of war against Europe by means of its military and spiritual strength and with the deserved help of its patron saints. Indeed, the success of Mark's mission and the salvation of Venice from the demoniac forces is indicated by the broken mast of the banner, a traditional sign of defeat best known from figures of Synagogue.³⁹

The inclusion of political symbolism in the decoration of a lay confraternity was not, as may appear at first, unsuitable. The Venetian *scuole grandi* were directly involved with the military defence of the Republic. In times of war, the *scuole* were required to donate men and funds for the Venetian galleys, and during the war against the League of Cambrai, the levies were particularly burdensome.⁴⁰ Hence being dedicated to the patron saint of Venice (a fact continually stressed in the Scuola's records) and by subsidizing the war effort, the Scuola di San Marco did help indirectly to save Venice.

With the oscillations of martial fortune and shifting military alliances characteristic of the time, it is difficult to specify which particular occasion during the war prompted this particular votive painting. Was it the formation of the Holy League in 1511, the concluding peace with Emperor Maximilian in 1516, or any of the many other possibilities? Since no military or diplomatic coup warranting a major celebration occurred until November 1511 – the reconquest of Padua in June 1509 granted the city an uneasy reprieve but was not the source of jubilation – it is unlikely that the *Sea Storm* was commissioned before Giorgione's death one month earlier. It may well have been commissioned in 1513, the year in which Palma Vecchio became a member of the

Scuola.⁴¹ Since artists active in the decoration of the confraternity were usually admitted at the time of their first commission, Palma's work on the *Sea Storm* may date from 1513.⁴² This suggestion is supported by the fact that, on 22 May 1513, Venice signed a treaty with France dedicated to the expulsion of the Imperial troops from Lombardy and the Veneto. The treaty was celebrated with an elaborate procession in the Piazza and was sufficiently important to warrant the commissioning of Titian's *Battle of Spoletto* only

³⁸ Andrea Mocenigo, *Le Guerre Fatte a Nostri Tempi in Italia nelle Quali si Narra il fatto d'arme di Ghiera, d'Adda, l'assedio di Padova, e di Bressa...* (Venice, 1544; written 1515-18), 28: 'Tuttavia in tale stempramento di cose e naufraggio vicino, la nave Vinitiana e la costante vertu è stata, come la rupe del caucaso monte soda e immobile, e ha rizzato le cose cadute, e le perse recuperate.'

³⁹ As with the *Battle of Cadore*, the political iconography of the *Sea Storm* might have been confirmed by the banner. In Titian's *Battle*, the double-headed eagle atop the mast of the retreating army identified it with the defeated troops of Emperor Maximilian. Unfortunately, the analogous *clavis interpretationis* in the *Sea Storm* has been obscured by centuries of overpaint. From a distance the damaged outline of the insignia congeals and might be read as a double-headed eagle, sable on gules. This could refer to any number of families of the captured city of Verona, including the da Ponte, the Capo di Ponte, and the Capolungo, c.f. Johannes Rietstap, *V. and H.V. Rolland's illustrations to the Armorial général* (London, 1967), 5, pl. LXXX; 2, pl. XXI-XXII. However, it could also refer to the Hapsburg arms which occasionally took this configuration: E. Kornemann, 'Adler und Doppeladler im Wappen des alten Reiches,' *Das Reich. Idee und Gestalt. Festschrift für Johann Haller* (Stuttgart, 1940), 45-69.

⁴⁰ Pullan, *Rich and Poor*, 146-55; Wurthmann, *Scuole Grandi*, 103-12.

⁴¹ G. Ludwig, 'Archivalische Beiträge zur Geschichte der venezianische Malerei,' *Jahrbuch der Königlich Preussischen Kunstsammlungen* (1903), Beiheft, XXIV, 65.

⁴² Gentile Bellini entered the Scuola in 1466 (ASV, Scuola di S. Marco, Reg. 4, fol. 159^v), and was given the commission for two paintings on 15 Dec. 1466 (P. Molmenti, 'I Pittori Bellini; Documenti e Ricerche,' *Archivio Veneto*, xxxvi [1888], 227-28). Andrea da Murano and Bartolomeo Vivarini entered in 1467 (Paoletti, *S. Marco*, 82), and in the same year started a painting (Paoletti, *Raccolta*, 10). The carpenter Bartolomeo Fiorentin entered in 1482 (ASV, Scuola di S. Marco, Reg. 4, fol. 7^v), the same year as his work is recorded in the *albergo* (Paoletti, *Architettura*, 102). Giacomo dei Vecchi was ordered to paint the façade in 1482 (Paoletti, *Raccolta*, 16), the same year in which he entered (ASV, Scuola di S. Marco, Reg. 4, fol. 20^v). Antonio Abboni, called Scarpagnino, started his work on the chapel of the chapter hall in 1532 (Paoletti, *Architettura*, 107), the year in which he became a member (ASV, Scuola di S. Marco, Reg. 4, fol. 67^v). Since none of the contracts specify membership as one of the prerogatives of the commission, we must assume that this arrangement between artist and confraternity was more informal. In only one recorded instance was the right to enter the Scuola specified in the contract: S. Moschini Marconi, 'Nuovi Documenti sulla Pala della Scuola Grande di S. Marco,' *Atti dell'Istituto Veneto di Scienze, Lettere ed Arti*, xxiv (1965-66), 85-96. Giorgione was not recorded as a member of the Scuola.

nine days later.⁴³ Thus it seems probable that the Scuola, inspired by the example set by the Venetian Senate, wished to celebrate the treaty with France and an anticipated victory over the Emperor Maximilian, and did so by ordering the *Sea Storm* from Palma in 1513.⁴⁴

43 Sanudo, *Diarii*, xvi, 284-90. The connection between Titian's *Battle of Spoleto* and the treaty celebrations has apparently never been commented upon.

44 This date is suggested only as a plausible *terminus post quem*. Like Titian's *Battle of Cadore*, its execution could have been postponed or prolonged for many years. Indeed, Bordone's addition of Saints Mark, Nicholas, and George in 1534 may suggest that the *Sea Storm* was left unfinished at Palma's death in 1528.



Le Musée du Québec signale le vol d'un bronze d'Alfred Laliberté (1878-1953) ayant pour titre *Le loup-garou*. L'œuvre mesure 16¹³/₁₆ po. et est signée sur la base, à l'arrière : A. Laliberté. Sur la base avant, on note l'inscription *Le loup-garou*; à droite de la base était vissée une plaquette en cuivre indiquant le numéro d'inventaire : s253. La pièce pèse environ 35 livres. Le vol a été constaté le 31 août 1979.

Description de l'œuvre : un personnage accolé à un animal fantastique (le loup-garou). La pièce était en bon état au moment du vol. On peut transmettre toute information relative à cette œuvre en communiquant avec le directeur du Musée du Québec, monsieur Laurent Bouchard (418-643-4173). Les renseignements obtenus auront un caractère confidentiel.

Les autorités du Musée du Québec rappellent également la disparition d'un bronze d'Alfred Laliberté survenu lors d'une exposition présentée en 1968 à Terre des Hommes, Montréal. Intitulée *Le balai de cèdre*, l'œuvre, de petite dimension, représente une femme en pied tenant un balai artisanal.