

HISTORIA ARTIS MAGISTRA



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AMICORVM·DISCIPVLORVMQVE·MVNVSCVLA
JOHANNI·HÖFLER·SEPTVAGENARIO·DICATA

LJUBLJANA·2012

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JOHANNI HÖFLER SEPTVAGENARIO DICATA

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250

Lektoriranje:
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Ljubljana, 2012

Prevod povzetkov:
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Deks d.o.o.

CIP - Kataložni zapis o publikaciji
Narodna in univerzitetna knjižnica, Ljubljana

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Vse pravice pridržane

7.072(497.4):929Höfler J.(082)

Založila:
Znanstvena založba Filozofske fakultete
Univerze v Ljubljani, zanjo:
Branka Kalenič Ramšak,
dekanja Filozofske fakultete, in
Slovensko umetnostnozgodovinsko društvo,
zanj: Robert Peskar

HISTORIA artis magistra : amicorum
discipulorumque munuscula Johanni Höfler
septuagenario dicata / [uredila Renata
Novak Klemenčič, Samo Štefanac ; prevod
povzetkov Alessandro Quinzi, Madita Šetinc
Salzmann, Deks]. - Ljubljana : Znanstvena
založba Filozofske fakultete : Slovensko
umetnostnozgodovinsko društvo, 2012

Izdal:
Oddelek za umetnostno zgodovino

ISBN 978-961-237-623-9 (Znanstvena založba
Filozofske fakultete)
1. Novak Klemenčič, Renata 2. Höfler, Janez
271102976

AVCTORVM TITVLORVMQVE CONSPECTVS



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Three Altarpieces by Costantino Cedini, “che s’occupa degli affreschi”

In her entry on Costantino Cedini (Padua, 1741 – Venice, 1811) in *Dizionario biografico degli Italiani*,¹ published in 1979, Elena Bassi pointed out that it was quite probable that many unrecognized works by the same painter existed in Veneto, attributed to the more high-sounding names than his or not attributed at all. The research and publications that succeeded, have confirmed this hypothesis,² corroborating the opinion of Cedini, put forward already by Giannantonio Moschini in 1806, as the artist practicing exclusively fresco painting, that is »che s’occupa degli affreschi«.³ To his oeuvre that enumerates a significantly smaller number of religious compositions or cycles, compared to those executed for secular ambiances, three altarpieces in the technique of oil on canvas could be added.

According to an entry in the Parish cash book of St. Eustace in Dobrota, Boka Kotorska (Bocche di Cattaro), in 1782 an unknown master was paid for the altarpiece intended for the altar dedicated to St. Joseph.⁴ The painting represents the Virgin with the Child, seated on the throne of clouds, giving scapulars. Below them and in the left foreground, there is elderly St. Joseph, seated on a stool and holding the flowering staff. A mature female saint, probably St. Anne, stands behind him, while another elderly male saint stands to their right. It is in all likelihood St. Joachim, forming thus the motif of the Holy Parenthood. The neat grouping of saints, the dense and opaque brushwork with occasionally accentuated dark contour lines and pinkish reflections on incarnate, light but at the same time

1 Elena Bassi: ‘Cedini, Costantino’, *Dizionario biografico degli Italiani*, vol. 23, Roma 1979, p. 310.

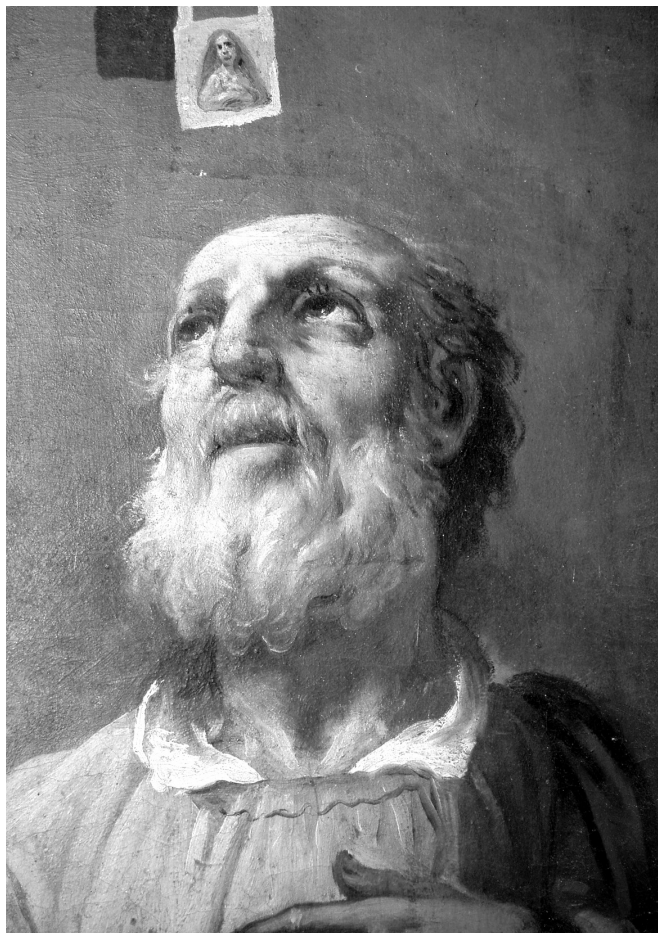
2 Giuseppe PAVANELLO: ‘Francesco Fontebasso e Costantino Cedini in Palazzo Diedo a S. Fosca’, *Bollettino dei Musei Civici Veneziani*, 21 (3/4), 1976, pp. 9–13; Giuseppe PAVANELLO: ‘Gli affreschi di Palazzo Maldura a Padova’, *Arte veneta*, 29, 1975 (1976), pp. 262–268; Terisio PIGNATTI: ‘Due nuovi disegni di Costantino Cedini (1741–1811)’, *Notizie da Palazzo Albani*, 12 (1/2), 1983, pp. 277–281; Emanuela ZUCCHETTA: ‘Due soffitti inediti di Costantino Cedini’, *Arte veneta*, 46, 1994, pp. 69–72; Roberto DE FEO: ‘Gli inediti affreschi di Costantino Cedini e Giuseppe Bernardino Bison a palazzo Giustinian Recanati alle Zattere’, *Arte documento*, 8, 1994 (1995), pp. 267–273; Rodolfo PALLUCCHINI: *La pittura nel Veneto. Il Settecento*, vol. II, Milano 1996, pp. 276–284; Giuseppe PAVANELLO: ‘Costantino Cedini frescante a Santa Margherita’, *Venezia arti*, 9, 1995 (1996), pp. 155–158; Paola Rossi: ‘La decorazione dei soffitti delle chiese di Santa Margherita (ora auditorium dell’università) e di San Barnaba di Venezia’, *Venezia arti*, 9, 1995 (1996), pp. 158–162; Giuseppe PAVANELLO: ‘Affreschi veneziani del tardo Settecento’, *Arte veneta*, 63, 2006 (2007), pp. 123–133; Giuseppe PAVANELLO: ‘Vendramin e Foscarini ai Carmini, gemelli da dividere: magnificenze ed esotismi intorno a una stanza di maiolica’, *Arte veneta*, 66, 2009 (2010), pp. 103–136; Giuseppe PAVANELLO: ‘Affreschi in palazzo Zen ai Gesuiti’, *Arte veneta*, 67, 2010 (2011), pp. 183–190.

3 Giannantonio MOSCHINI: *Della letteratura veneziana del secolo XVIII fino a’ nostri giorni*, Tomo terzo, Venezia 1806, p. 86; Giuseppe PAVANELLO: ‘Costantino Cedini (1741–1811)’, *Bollettino del Museo Civico di Padova*, 61, 1972, p. 190. PAVANELLO (ibid., pp. 220, 246, 255, 257, 272, 273) includes several paintings executed in the technique of oil on canvas in the painter’s catalogue. With the exception of the decoration for the pulpit in the parish church in Dolo, all the other works are of profane character, executed for private or public palaces and theatres.

4 Antun TOMIĆ: ‘Crkva sv. Eustahije u Dobroti’, *Godišnjak Pomorskog muzeja u Kotoru*, vol. 27–28/1979–1980, p. 95, n. 19. The Parish of St. Eustace in Dobrota was founded in 1753. The new parish church, dedicated to the patron Saint, was finished in 1773.



1. Costantino Cedini, *The Virgin and Child with Sts. Joseph, Anne and Joachim*. Dobrota, Boka Kotorska (Bocche di Cattaro), Montenegro, Parish church of St. Eustace.



2. Costantino Cedini, *The Virgin and Child with Sts. Joseph, Anne and Joachim*, detail. Dobrota, Boka Kotorska (Bocche di Cattaro), Montenegro, Parish church of St. Eustace.

muffled palette and, above all, specific, somewhat saccharine typology of saints and angels, point unequivocally to Costantino Cedini as the author of the painting. It belongs to the period when he was still following the Tiepolesque tradition, acquired chiefly but not exclusively through the work of his master, Jacopo Guarana (Verona, 1720 – Venice, 1808).⁵ Accordingly, very strong stylistic and analogies in the brushwork, as well as those connected to the typology of figures, could be found between the altarpiece from Dobrota and Cedini's important compositions, such as *Venus and Mars in Vulcan's Net* in Palazzo Emo Capodilista, Padua, executed around 1780⁶ or the decoration of the ceiling of the Venetian church of Santa Margherita, dated in 1784.⁷

5 PAVANELLO, *op. cit.* (note 3), p. 190; PALLUCCHINI, *op. cit.* (note 2), pp. 277–278.

6 PAVANELLO, *op. cit.* (note 3), pp., PIGNATTI, *op. cit.* (note 2), p. 279; PALLUCCHINI, *op. cit.* (note 2), p. 280.

7 ROSSI, *op. cit.* (note 2), pp. 158–159.



3. Costantino Cedini, The Assumption of the Virgin with Sts. Prosdocimo and Peter. Camponogara (Padua), Parish church Santa Maria Assunta e San Prosdocimo.

Cedini's fresco painting representing the *Assumption of the Virgin with Sts. Prosdocimo and Peter*, executed immediately after 1792, decorating the wall behind the main altar of the Parish church in Camponogara near Padua,⁸ testifies to the fact that the painter of limited expressive resources - as Paola Rossi judged him,⁹ had the inclination to repeat the successful compositions, such as the one present on the altarpiece from Dobrota. At the same time, it demonstrates that at the

8 Such information could be found on the internet page of the *Parish of Santa Maria Assunta e San Prosdocimo*: <http://www.parrocchiacamponogara.it/il-ciclo-pittorico.aspx>.

9 Rossi, op. cit. (note 2), p. 160.



4. Costantino Cedini, *The Ecstasy of Saint Agnes*. Christie's London 1998.



5. Costantino Cedini, *The Virgin and Child with Two Dominican Saints*, Semenzato 2005.

beginning of the last decade of the 18th century, Cedini still had a strong inclination towards late baroque forms and solutions, at least as far as the religious subjects were concerned.

In the same, pre-neoclassical period of Cedini's career, another altarpiece of the imposing dimensions (339 x 146.6 cm) could be dated. It represents *The Ecstasy of Saint Agnes* and it was auctioned by Christie's in London on the 16th December 1998 as a work by Francesco Zugno (Venice, 1709–1787). According to Mauro Lucco such an attribution rests upon the analogies between the auctioned painting, formerly owned by a religious institution in Stockholm and Zugno's *Saint Cecilia* (1742). Nevertheless, he dates it in the seventh or early eight decade of the 18th century.¹⁰ It is rather obvious that Costantino Cedini was very impressed by Zugno's altarpiece made for the Venetian church of San Cassiano, now in the Pushkin Museum in Moscow: St. Agnes faithfully repeats the pose of St. Cecilia and the draperies of their elaborate dresses form rather similar interplay of creases and folds. Still, the dynamics of spatial relations between the figures, their theatrical, almost rhetoric gestures, the typical opaque and dense, rather cold palette, specific and somewhat repetitive typology, betray the hand of the master belonging to another generation of Venetian painters – the one that transformed the late baroque tradition into neoclassical idiom.¹¹ Cedini had the opportunity to admire Zugno's painting while he was executing the fresco decoration for the church of San Cassiano at the end of the 18th century, although his contacts with the donor, Cattarin Corner, were documented already in 1773. In 1783 the same nobleman ordered to the painter a series of fresco paintings representing the stories of Alexander the Great, for his mansion Ca' Corner della Regina, situated nearby.¹²

The splendour of the *Ecstasy of Saint Agnes*, its lavish forms and subtle pearly palette, together with an artistic quality above the average, indicate not only the date of execution that coincides with the peak of Cedini's career in the chronologic vicinity of the frescoes in the church of San Barnaba (1785–1790)¹³, but also that it very probably originally adorned an important altar in Venice or Veneto.

The hand of Costantino Cedini as an altarpiece painter has not been mistaken only for the hand of the closest collaborators and followers of Gianbattista Tiepolo, but also for the hand of a painter active mainly at the turn of the 18th century, that is, Bortolo Litterini (Venice, 1669–1748).¹⁴ In the auction catalogue of 2005, containing mainly the works of art and furnishings of Villa Gorgo (Nogaredo al

10 Christie's London, *Important old master pictures*, London 1998, sale 6068, lot 66, pp. 102–103. See also the Internet page <http://www.christies.com/lotfinder/lot/francesco-zugno-the-ecstasy-of-saint-agnes-1373391-details.aspx?intObjectID=1373391>. The text that accompanies the reproduction runs as follows: »We are grateful to Professor Mauro Lucco for the attribution, confirmed in a letter of 15 October 1998. He considers that this picture dates from the later period of Zugno's oeuvre, the 1760s or early 1770s, when the artist was still strongly influenced by the work of the Tiepolo family and of Francesco Fontebasso. Lucco compares this picture to Zugno's *Saint Cecilia*, in the Pushkin Museum, Moscow, no. 1553, which has been traditionally dated to 1742, on the basis of an inscription which is probably not original to the picture.» For the painting of St. Cecilia by Zugno, see: Nina KUDIŠ: 'Per Pietro Antonio Novelli e Francesco Zugno', *Arte Documento*, 24, 2008, pp. 181–182.

11 PALLUCCHINI, *op. cit.* (note 2), p. 276.

12 PAVANELLO, *op. cit.* (note 3), pp. 212, 236–237; PALLUCCHINI, *op. cit.* (note 2), p. 278. Costantino Cedini also worked on two ceilings in Palazzo Renier near the church of San Pantalon, together with Francesco Zugno and Davide Rossi. PAVANELLO 2006 (2007), *op. cit.* (note 2), p. 126.

13 PAVANELLO, *op. cit.* (note 3), pp. 235–236.

14 Francesco SORCE: 'Litterini (Letterini), Bartolomeo (Bortolo)', *Dizionario biografico degli Italiani*, vol. 65, 2005, [http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/bartolomeo-bortolo-litterini_\(Dizionario_Biografico\)/](http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/bartolomeo-bortolo-litterini_(Dizionario_Biografico)/).

Torre, near Udine), the auction house Semenzato published an altarpiece of modest dimensions (102 x 55 cm) and representing *The Virgin and Child with Two Dominican Saints* as the work of the Venetian painter of *tenebrose* stylistic inclinations.¹⁵ Apart from characteristic Cedini's typology, quotations from the rich Tiepolesque repertoire, muffled palette, specific treatment of drapery and introduction of the vaporous clouds beneath Mary's feet, this unassuming painting is characterised by a certain compositional rigour and restraint of neoclassical overtone, accompanied with an expressive fatigue that could be found in the painter's later work, that is, at the turn of the 19th century.

15 *Asta dell'arredamento antico di Villa Gorgo in Nogaredo di San Vito al Torre – Udine*, Semenzato (Casa d'aste), asta 1291, seconda parte, 14–15 maggio 2005, p. 185. I am very grateful to Damir Tulić (University of Rijeka) who pointed out to me the paintings published in both catalogues, the one by Christie's and the one by Semenzato. I came across the article by Giuseppe PAVANELLO, 'Dipinti sacri di Costantino Cedini', *AFAT*, 30, 2011 (printed in December 2012), pp. 313–320, only after I have submitted this article. Among other paintings with religious subject matter, the author also attributes Costantino Cedini *The Virgin and Child with Two Dominican Saints*, Semenzato 2005.