

Albanian Cultural Representation In The City Of Venice Through Albanian Painters In Italy

Irena Ndreu

Faculty of Foreign Languages, University of Tirana, Albania
e-mail: alen_irena@yahoo.com

Received 10.01.2017; Accepted 01.02. 2017

Abstract

Many men of education run away to European cities after the invasion of the entire Balkan Peninsula. The ideals of humanism and renaissance were affirmed, thanks to their intelligence, which brought the Greek-Roman classicism to the top of the fields of literature and art. This paper will present the works of brothers Gjon (Giovanni) and Pal (Paolo) Gazulli, the poet Michele Marulli, the writer Marin Barleti (Marino Barlezio), the philosopher Leonik Tomeu, the painter Vittore Carpaccio, excelled with their talent and works in the city of Venice. The Albanian community needed a fortune to compete with groups from other nations, with the Dalmatians among many. They needed to decorate the premises of their association with precious objects and paintings: there is proof of this in the paintings of Vittore Carpaccio, in the first years of the XVIth century. Carpaccio's works are important, they present, in the cycle "Stories of St. Ursula", the uniform of Albanian soldiers serving the Republic of Venice.

Keywords: education, Albanian Cultural Representation, Albanian Painters

1.Introduction

The fall of Constantinople (1453) and the invasion of the entire Balkan Peninsula caused the fleeing of many men of education to European cities, especially to Italy. It was there, thanks to their intelligence, that the ideals of humanism and renaissance were affirmed, which brought the Greek-Roman classicism to the top of the fields of literature and art.

Among these distinguished people, appreciated in the Greek culture circles, there was a group of Albanian intellectuals who had left their country to escape the Turkish invasion. The brothers Gjon (Giovanni) and Pal (Paolo) Gazulli, the poet Michele Marulli, the writer Marin Barleti (Marino Barlezio), the philosopher Leonik Tomeu, the painter Vittore Carpaccio, and many others who excelled with their talent and works, left their marks in the countries where they immigrated, establishing thus a world reputation.

Albanian immigration to Venice was so numerous that in 1489 they (Albanians) had established the premises of the association in the surroundings of St. Maurice (San Maurizio) square, which in solemn cases they decorated masterfully that it looked like a pleasant garden or a solemn theater.

The facade of this building preserves to this day reliefs that suggest a lot: bas-reliefs that represent three guardian saints, the emblem of Loredan, of Da Lezze, and the lion of St. Mark (San Marco). In addition, there is the striking central profile of a cliff with a castle on top: Scutari (Shkodra) facing two Turks: The Grand Vizier and Sultan Mehmed II; the big dagger which he grasps threateningly and the turban on his head stand out on the marble field of Istria (fig. 5, 6, 7,). In the meantime, they made sure to record the history of the association in a record book that can be found in the Library Marciana of Venice. It has the image of The Lady of Scutari on the front gate (Nadin 1995,10) (fig. 8).

2. Some words about some people

The Albanian community needed a fortune to compete with groups from other nations, with the Dalmatians among many. They needed to decorate the premises of their association with precious objects and paintings: there is proof of this in the paintings of Vittore Carpaccio, in the first years of the XVIth century; the six stories of the life of the Virgin: Birth, (fig.14) presentation at the Temple, (fig.15) Marriage, Proclamation, Visit of Mary to Elisabeth: Death of Mary (Ibidem, 12), although they were later blended with the works of art created after the fall of the Republic of Venice.

The works of Carpaccio are important because they present, in the cycle “Stories of St. Ursula”, the uniform of Albanian soldiers serving Serenisima (The Most Serene Republic of Venice).

Vittore Carpaccio, son of Pietro, a fur trader (Sgarbi, 1944, 23), was born in Venice in 1455. His parents came from Albania, the city of Korça, and they had moved to the Republic of Venice in the 15th century. His family lived in the Venetian community, while other relatives of Carpaccio had settled in Romania. In 1472, he was nominated heir of his uncle Zuane (Giovanni), the Franciscan priest known as Ilario in the Padova Monastery of Saint Ursula (Ibidem, p.23).

Carpaccio was an Albanian last name which is still used as such. It comes from the Albanian word ‘karpë’ (AA.VV., Brera, guida alla pinacoteca, Electa, Milano 2004. “*IL CONTRIBUTO ALBANESE AL RINASCIMENTO EUROPEO*” di Mikel Prenushi - English: cliff).

The Albanian origin of this artist has been certified throughout his artistic life. He was a contemporary and collaborator of great artists of the Italian renaissance, Gentile and Giovanni Bellini.

Gentile, we gently remind, had made the authentic portrait of Scanderbeg when the latter had been in Italy.

Vittore Carpaccio considered Gentile Bellini as his only master.

Many scholars have put Vittore Carpaccio at the same level as the geniuses of paintings of the Venetian Renaissancelike Andrea Mantegna, Bellini, Carlo Crivoli, Lazzaro Bastiani, etc., but what they have left unmentioned is his Albanian origin as well as his creative work as an Albanian artist. He has unjustly been considered a Venetian painter while all the works of his lifetime clearly reflect the fact that he was an Albanian patriot.

In the “Larousse” dictionary, we find these words: *“Quando si ammira l’opera di questo semplice pittore, di talento ed affascinante, dispiace veramente che non si sappia nulla della sua vita”* (“When one admires the work of this simple painter, an artist of talent and charm, it is, in fact, a pity that one does not learn anything about his life”.)

The writer Luigi Corraia had emphasized in his work “Elogio di Carpaccio” (Praise for Carpaccio) – read at the Academy of Venice – the difficulties in finding the painter’s biography.

Art critics and historians in Italy and elsewhere have written about Carpaccio and have positively evaluated his works. They, however, have never discussed his Albanian origin, at a time when all of his contemporaries were described in the minutest of details.

Paola Giulini wrote in 1939, comparing Carpaccio to Donatello, : *“Ricordate l’eroe donatelliano, creato strettamente con la semplicità olimpica dei santi cristiani... guardate, invece il cavaliere furioso tratteggiato dal pennello di Carpaccio. Il cavallo è un cavallo di fuoco, battagliero e nero e, l’intera composizione, assomiglia alle nostre raffigurazioni immaginarie dei semplici cavalieri tanto popolari nelle visioni e sogni fantastici.”* (Remember the Donatellian hero created strictly with the Olympic simplicity of Christian saints... see, instead, the furious rider sketched out of Carpaccio’s brush. The horse is a fire horse, the fighting is black, and the entire composition resembles our imaginary portrayals of simple riders who are very popular in the fantastic dreams and visions.”

Giulini evaluates the paintings under “Stories of Saint Ursula” (fig.1) with these words: *“E’ la luce che entra dalla finestra aperta che ha qualcosa dal vero cielo. I colori delicati cantano ...”* (It is the light that enters from the open window, and there is something in it from the real sky. The delicate colors sing...)

In 1502, Carpaccio signs his first paintings for *S. Giorgio degli Sciaconi* school: (fig.2) under “*The Calling of Saint Mathew*” (fig.3) and “*The Funeral of Saint Jerome*”. (Carpaccio, 1964, 9) (fig.4)

Carpaccio worked for other schools as well, like that of St. Ursula under the Dominican Covent in Saint Giovanni and Paolo (where there were six other schools, including the great Saint Marco school). Saint Stephan school and that of the Albanians were located opposite the Covent of Saint Augustine in Saint Stephan (Ibidem, 28).

Unlike his popularity through his paintings along these centuries, the Albanian identity of the painter had not been established, instead hidden and not presented by any of the scholars who wrote about him.

There is also a significant inconsistency in his year of birth; none of the authors who have written about Carpaccio includes the accurate year. According to Vittorio Sgarbi, he was born in 1460: Terio Pignatti describes his birth in 1465: Mikel Prenushi in his research proves that he was Albanian and was born in 1455.

Studies published before the war in Albania point out Vittore Carpaccio’s activity in the Albanian brotherhood of Venice. Vittore Carpaccio was, in that city, one of the most active members of the brotherhood “*Scuola degli albanesi*” since the beginning of the 16th century. (fig.5)

There are numerous paintings of big dimensions created by Carpaccio’s brush, and among them there is a special place for those of the Albanian theme. Thus, when *Scuola degli Albanesi* was

founded in 1502, there is evidence of his series of works (1502 – 1510) among which we find the famous painting “Death of the Virgin” (Pignatti, 8). (fig.9)

His work “The Departure” (fig.10, 11) is a painting in vibrant colors and reflects the reality of the time through the departure of the citizens and their fleeing toward the shore. The artist, according to Mikel Prenushi, might have expressed the nostalgia of his country of origin for the departure of Albanians to flee invasion toward the shore of the Adriatic. In this painting, there is an apparent beauty and harmony among people, typical sailing ships of the city surrounded by the sea, and other details like the creative fantasy, the expressive and vibrant humanism, his art in the use of colors, etc.

Carpaccio has also documented his Albanian origin with the marble recoating of the facade of Scuola degli Albanesi and, above all, with the decoration of his greatest works, where one can clearly see the traces of Albanian motives. On the main facade of the school, (fig.6, 8) there is an Albanian-themed bas-relief between two windows, a very significant memory of the country of origin. It shows the fall of Scutari: the castle in the center which symbolizes the Albanian resistance, and opposite it, at the bottom of the castle, there are Sultan Mehmed and the great Vizier with their non-glorious weapons. Carved above the bas-relief, there is the year MCCCCLXXIII (1474), the year of the first siege and the heroic defense. This bas-relief has been preserved to this day, and it is one of the most precious works of Renaissance with one of the most important events of the epoch.

That Vittore Carpaccio was a remarkable painter is a universal fact. What is more and not that known, for the needs of the Albanian brotherhood, he also worked as a sculptor, as an architect, and as director of works for the marble coating of the school. Some of his works were based on the religious theme, and some were not. He is also known as a complementing teacher of the landscape. There were six works of this painter, created and prepared with exquisite taste and inspiration for the Scuola degli Albanesi in Venice (fig.12, 13,) when he was at the culmination of his artistic maturity. The best two of those six works were taken under the order of Metternich, when the Austrians occupied Venice, and they have been kept in Vienna. The other works are found in the Academy of Venice and at other Italian cities.

Carpaccio’s works are important because they show the uniform of Albanian soldiers in the cycle “Stories of Saint Ursula”. In addition, his renaissance style was appropriate for the Venetian tradition (Carpaccio, 1977, 21). Furthermore, there is an important description of the Albanian relations with Venice in the Palazzo Ducale in Venice, where, if you look up on the ceiling you see the paintings of Tintoretto, Giovanni Bellini, Alvise Vivarini, Carpaccio, and right after Tiziano, Pordenone and Veronese (Sgarbim 1944, 14). In the same direction on the right and left, there are many other stories: the takeover of Smirne (Izmir) directed by Piero Mocenigo in 1471, and the liberation of Shkodra lead by Antonio Loredan in 1474 (Nadin). The author of the oval and of the two other parts is Paolo Veronese. Work on these paintings started after the fire that fell in 1577 on the entire side of the Ducal Palace. The scene painted by Veronese exhibits a cliff in the background, the castle of Shkodra on which there is a Venetian flag with the initials of Loredan family. Up on the hill, there is the city and a religious building, that of Saint Stephan who was the

owner of that building. Yonder on the field, there are Turkish camps where the crescent appears among cannons and attack horses. On the front of the painting there are Turkish soldiers who had kidnapped a woman from Scutari (Shkodra); to help release her, Antonio Loredan intervenes. (Ibidem, 16)

Although the artist operated in an openly polycentric society and a very competitive one, one can see great independence in the works he had been asked to make (Zorzi, 1988, 10).

It must be stated first and foremost that the great painter by the name of Vittore (Viktor) Carpaccio, is mentioned among the most prominent founders of the Italian Renaissance. He left significant traces in the humanist trend the art was taking at the time. He was a student of the great Italian painter, Giovanni Bellini. He created a great number of works, which are now to be found in the most well-known museums of the world, from the “Metropolitan” in New York, to “Brera” in Milan, from “Luvre” in Paris, to “Tratjakov” in Russia, from Venice to the “Prado” in Spain, and in many others as well (I megali zografi – Apo tin anajenisi ston Greke”, Melissa, Athina 1988, p. 88-990). Vittore Carpaccio died in Venice in 1526, at the age of 71.

3. Illustrations



Fig. 1. The Dream of Saint Ursula, Vittore Carpaccio, (1495) Venezia, Galleria dell'Accademia



Fig. 2. Scuola S. Giorgio degli Schiavoni



Fig. 3. The Calling of Saint Matthew, Vittore Carpaccio (1502)

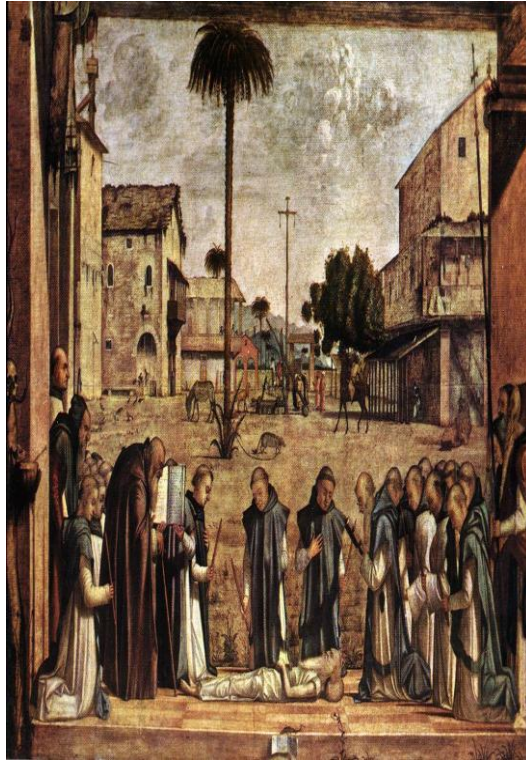


Fig. 4. Funeral of Saint Jerome, Vittore Carpaccio (1502)



Fig. 5. Scuola degli Albanesi



Fig. 6. Renaissance relief on the facade of former "Scuola degli albanesi", in Campo San Maurizio. The Turkish Sultan Mehmed II occupies the city of Scutari (which was under Venetian rule).

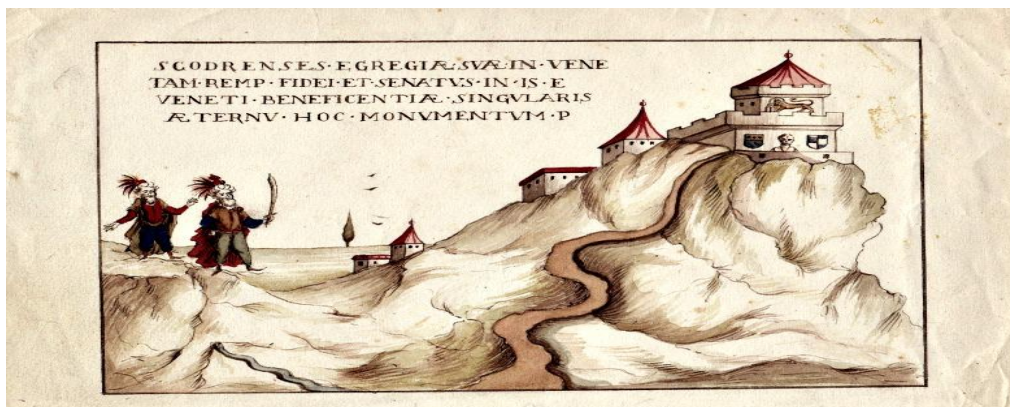


Fig. 7. Bas-relief on the facade of Scuola degli Albanesi



Fig. 8. Bas-relief on the facade of Scuola degli Albanesi



Fig. 9. Death of the Virgin, Vittore Carpaccio, (1502 - 1508), tempera on canvas



Fig. 10. Meeting of the Betrothed Couple and the Departure of the Pilgrims, Vittore Carpaccio (1495)



Fig. 11. The Departure of the Pilgrims, Vittore Carpaccio, (1495) Venice, Gallery of the Academy



Fig. 12. Stories of the Virgin , Vittore Carpaccio – Cycle Scuola delli Albanesi



Fig. 13 Stories of the Virgin , Vittore Carpaccio – Cycle of the Albanian School



Fig. 14. Birth of the Virgin



Fig. 15. The Presentation of the Virgin Mary at the Temple



Fig. 16. Antonio Loredan (seated on the right), Vittore Carpaccio

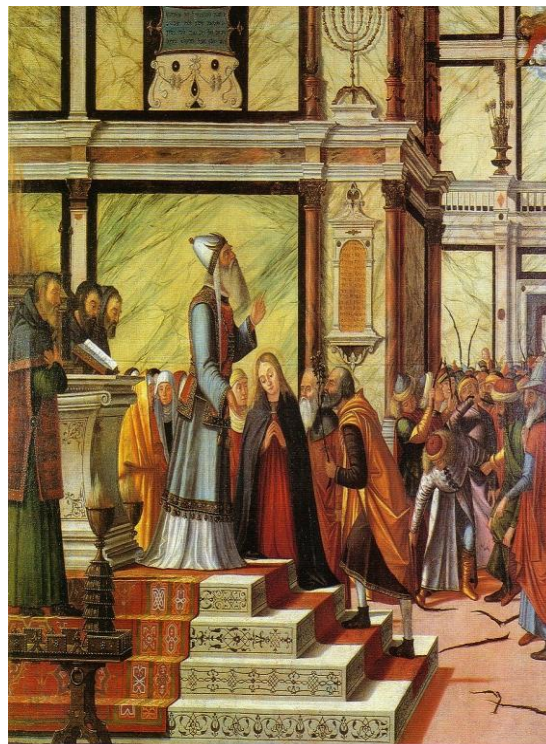


Fig. 17. The Enigma, Vittore Carpaccio

References

1. Carpaccio, (1964). *Nella scuola di S. Giorgio degli Schiavoni*, Ferdinando Organia, 9.
2. Murano, M. (1977) *I disegni di Vittore Carpaccio*, La nuova Italia Firenze, 21.
3. Nadin, L. (2008). *Migrazioni e integrazione, Il caso degli albanesi a Venezia (1479 – 1552)* Bulzoni, 15.
4. Nadin, L. (1995). *Venezia e Albania trace di antichi legami*, 10.
5. Prenushi, M. (2004) "*Il contributo albanese al rinascimento europeo*" in AA.VV., Brera, guida alla pinacoteca, Electa, Milano 2004.
6. Organia, F. (1964). *Carpaccio, Nella scuola di S. Giorgio degli Schiavoni*.
7. Pignatti, T. *Vittore Carpaccio*, Aldo Martello Milano, 8
8. Sgarbi, V. *Carpaccio*, Rizzoli, (1944), 14-23
9. Zorzi, L. (1998). *Carpaccio e la rapresentazione di Sant'Orsola*, Einaudi, Torino, 10.