Titian, the Pesaro, and the Frari: different strokes for different folks

Carl Edward Blyskal
Louisiana State University and Agricultural and Mechanical College

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TITIAN, THE PESARO, AND THE FRARI: DIFFERENT STROKES FOR DIFFERENT FOLKS

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the Louisiana State University and Agricultural and Mechanical College in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts

in

The School of Art

by

Carl Edward Blyskal
B.B.A., University of Miami, 1966
M.B.A, Pennsylvania State University, 1967
M.S., Louisiana State University and Agricultural and Mechanical College, 2004
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Abstract

This thesis parses two early paintings by the Venetian High Renaissance artist Titian. The discussions analyze the circumstances and patronage, compositional elements, iconography, and meanings of each work that lead through a maze of often contradictory art historical scholarship. This journey concludes by my proffering greater insights for each extraordinary painting by this internationally renowned artist.

The earliest extant work by Titian—St. Peter Enthroned, with Donor and Pope—is a wonderful, if somewhat awkward, completion of a commission begun by Giovanni Bellini. Dating controversies over the centuries are examined, and a secure time-frame of 1506 to the first half of 1507 is advanced. Differences of opinion over the meaning of the work are also analyzed, and I propose that it served as an ex voto for the patron, Jacopo Pesaro, as prideful recognition of his commission as papal admiral in the Christian crusade against the Turks. The depiction of citizen patrons in devotional art did not belong to an established Venetian tradition, but to one with which Pesaro became familiar during his service at the papal court in Rome, where it was widespread. This patron used art as a means to promote his ambitions, and Titian used it to demonstrate his ability to compete with Giovanni Bellini.

The second work examined, the Pesaro Altarpiece, had a long creative gestation which included several changes in composition that culminated in a new standard for pale—“altarpieces”—and sealed Titian’s reputation as the leader of the Venetian school. This painting, in situ at the Frari, is part of a wall altar dedicated to the Immaculate Conception, adjacent to the Pesaro family tombs. The painting can only be appreciated by understanding its different meanings to Jacopo Pesaro, the rest of the Pesaro clan, the Confraternity of the Immaculate Conception, and the Franciscans of the Frari. This thesis demystifies and disproves some art
historical interpretations that have confused understanding of Titian’s artistry and the significance of the painting.
Chapter 1: Introduction

Titian is one of the most famous and exhaustively studied artists of the Renaissance, and, sans hyperbole, some consider him to be one of the greatest of all time. In fact, he is one of only two Italian artists whose names have been anglicized, further attesting to his fame among English-speaking people.\textsuperscript{1} Googling the name Titian generates over a million Internet results, suggesting the breadth of today’s interest in a personality whose name may be considered a household word.\textsuperscript{2}

Given the vast scholarship on Titian and his oeuvre, my thesis limits its scope to two early paintings: St. Peter Enthroned, with Donor and Pope and the Pesaro Altarpiece, which have some similarities of patronage and design.\textsuperscript{3} The first, often considered to be the earliest of Titian’s works, reflects his training and somewhat awkward beginnings, and the latter represents a singular coup de maître during the artist’s breakout years as he led the Venetian Renaissance into its Golden Age. In the following pages, much existing scholarship is surveyed and analyzed in the hope of settling several questions arising from the complex and contradictory interpretations of the two paintings.

The thesis is predicated upon the vast art historical literature available for Titian and his two Pesaro paintings. But we quickly learn that such history is not fixed or immutable. As we look

\textsuperscript{1} Mark J. Zucker’s lectures on Renaissance art at Louisiana State University in Baton Rouge note that Tiziano Vecellio—“Titian”—and Raffaello Sanzio—“Raphael”—are the only two Italian artists whose names have been anglicized.

\textsuperscript{2} The Internet search engine Google generated 1,320,000 results for “Titian” on August 15, 2007.

\textsuperscript{3} Other more descriptive titles for these paintings are frequently encountered; however, I prefer to use the least specific, which serendipitously coincides with the sentiment expressed in a publication by the LSU College of Art and Design, Drawing (Baton Rouge, Louisiana: Graphic Design Student Office, 2007), I. Paul Valéry is quoted: “To see is to forget the name of what one sees.”
back to the past from today’s perspective, we can better appreciate the reflection of the Dutch historian Pieter Geyl that history is “an argument without end.”

A different approach to an old “argument,” promoted by the twentieth-century painter and humanist Mark Rothko, provides the grist for my thesis. Rothko’s defensive premise states that “one does not paint for design students or historians but for human beings, and the reaction in human terms is the only thing that is really satisfactory to an artist.” My thesis uses the evolution of often polar art historical accounts to accentuate art that has significance to different audiences—in our case, the artist Titian, the Pesaro patrons, and the Frari clerics, as well as art historians—thus “different strokes for different folks.” This subtitle of the thesis reflects what marketing professionals would identify as the strategy—“market segmentation”—of designing a product or service to appeal to a specific group of consumers. Titian demonstrated his virtuosity in appealing to all the stakeholders for his paintings.

The following discussions essentially attempt to answer the age-old question as to the meaning of art. Evaluating the rich variety of scholarship on Titian and his paintings for the Pesaro provides an enjoyable exercise in the evolution of our understanding. There is an old Polish colloquialism, *taki buty*, which is a contraction of a phrase that translates as, “it depends upon the color of your shoes.” This merely means to recognize—and appreciate—the different point of view that each person brings to a discussion. It seems that Titian was a master at

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4 Herbert H. Rowen, “The Historical Work of Pieter Geyl,” *The Journal of Modern History* 37 (March 1965): 45; William Bark, “Encounters in History by Pieter Geyl,” *History and Theory* 4 (1964): 110-11, notes that Geyl’s attitude about historical scholarship is “criticism, again criticism, and criticism.” However harsh this attitude may seem—certainly influenced by two World Wars—Geyl defended reason and criticism as basic rules for the study of history. My intent is for any criticisms of previous art historical scholarship reported in the thesis to be respectful and well-reasoned.


6 *Sono un polacco-americano.* “I am a Polish-American.”
recognizing the “color of the shoes” that different members of his audience wore. It is hoped that, with an open mind, each reader will also appreciate the taki buty inherent in this thesis.
Chapter 2: Titian

Tiziano Vecellio (figure 1), commonly known by his anglicized name Titian, was born in Pieve di Cadore in 1488-90. The small Alpine town is located in the Dolomites of northeastern Italy and was part of the Venitian terraferma at the time, albeit in a poor and thinly populated area.

The Vecellio family had a tradition of professions in law, government administration, and the military, and seems to have been relatively prosperous.

Titian and his younger brother Francesco went to Venice to train as painters at a young age. There is anecdotal evidence of Titian’s childhood artistry and supposed apprenticeship to Antonio da Cadore, a follower of Bartolomeo Vivarini. In Venice, Titian first apprenticed with the mosaicist Sebastiano Zuccato, but some scholars disparage Zuccato’s influence on his subsequent painting.

1. Titian, Self-Portrait, Gemäldegalerie, Berlin

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10 Ibid., 11, Hope states that they were twelve and thirteen respectively; see also Mather, “When Was Titian Born?” 23-24, citing Dolce for Titian’s age of nine.

11 Successive generations of the Vivarini family had a successful workshop in Venice during the fifteenth century.

as an association with Giorgione, thus acquiring first-hand knowledge of both conservative and modern painting styles.\textsuperscript{13} Titian absorbed the influences of his teachers and went on to become the leader of the Venetian High Renaissance, whose growing artistic reputation vied with those of Raphael and Michelangelo.\textsuperscript{14} He dominated \textit{cinquecento} painting in Venice for almost seventy years.

By 1513, Titian was self-assured in his abilities and petitioned the Venetian Council of Ten to paint in the Palazzo Ducale, “not so much for the desire to earn money as for the attempt to acquire a small fame; and being counted among those who currently make a profession of art.”\textsuperscript{15} By offering to forgo opportunities with important patrons outside Venice, Titian also demonstrated his loyalty to the Republic at a time when its \textit{terraferma} was threatened by war. However, he was also assertive in requesting a sinecure of the Council from the Fondaco dei Tedeschi, which was granted in May 1513, after which he opened his first workshop.\textsuperscript{16} He soon succeeded Giovanni Bellini, at the latter’s death in 1516, as official painter to the Republic, for which he received an annuity for life.\textsuperscript{17} He was a highly acclaimed portraitist and eventually turned almost exclusively to private commissions, not only in Venice but also for European royalty, the papal court in Rome, and three Holy Roman Emperors. Charles V of Spain knighted Titian in 1533 with the highest social rank for a painter. Titian was one of the first artists to

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\textsuperscript{13} Francesco Valcanover, “An Introduction to Titian,” in \textit{Titian: Prince of Painters}, ed. Susanna Biadene (Munich: Prestel, 1990), 8; Cole, “Titian: An Introduction,” 3. Cole’s argument favors Giorgione and Titian as contemporaries rather than master and pupil; Mather, “When Was Titian Born?” 25, notes that most early biographers name Titian as a pupil of Giorgione, but he makes a stronger case for Titian as Giogione’s assistant.

\textsuperscript{14} Peter Humfrey, \textit{Painting in Renaissance Venice} (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 149.

\textsuperscript{15} Valcanover, “An Introduction to Titian,” 4. This is an excerpt translated from Titian’s written petition.

\textsuperscript{16} Biadene, \textit{Titian: Prince of Painters}, 404; Brown and Ferino-Pagden, \textit{Bellini, Giorgione, Titian}, 48, observe that Titian would not complete the commission for twenty-five years.

\textsuperscript{17} Biadene, \textit{Titian: Prince of Painters}, 405. He received tax exemption for life, 100 ducats annually, and twenty-five ducats for each official portrait of a new doge.
achieve international fame in the West. He spent most of his working life in Venice and lived to an old age, dying of the plague on August 27, 1576. He is buried in the church of Santa Maria Gloriosa dei Frari.

Titian’s unique style of visual artistic expression is readily recognizable as venezianità, a characteristic which naturally embraced asymmetry as a function of Venice’s irregularly-shaped physical layout—a style counter to mainland Renaissance principles of symmetry. The Venetian lagoon setting also inspired artists to emulate its chromatic richness, light, pattern, and surface, while the unstable climate and the atmosphere of the lagoon were reflected in painting by the softening and blending of colors and the blurring of edges. This distinctive Venetian colorito suggests a floating perspective that runs counter to the Albertian one-point view.

The far-ranging mercantile activities of Venice’s citizenry encouraged them to cultivate a discriminating sense of quality, material, disegno, and colorito. Venice was a cosmopolitan entrepôt, which created a greater sensitivity to the subtleties of racial color differences and a discernment of international luxuries, where gratuitous color was valued. Such worldliness also resulted in an attention to circumstantial detail and a pastiche aesthetic that borrowed from the best of known cultures and interwove them with existing Venetian traditions. This was Titian’s developmental incubator.

18 Hope, Titian, 7; Cole, “Titian: An Introduction,” 1, 6. Knight of the Golden Spur and Count Palatine were minor titles but important to Titian’s European career and sources of personal pride. Gold chains denoting these honors are often included in his self-portraits, as in figure 1.
19 Brown, Art and Life in Renaissance Venice, 15, 18, combines her studio art credentials with those as an art historian to demonstrate the linkages between the Venetian physical environment and its artistic tradition.
20 Paul Hills, Venetian Color: Marble, Mosaic, Painting and Glass 1250-1550 (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1999), 18, 104-05, thoroughly traces color traditions over three centuries and in different media as intrinsic to the Venetian world.
21 Ibid., 19, 21.
Our discussion continues with an exploration of two creations from Titian’s early career. It was a time when the influences of his training in the prestigious workshops of the Bellini and his association with Giorgione were reflected in his work. It was also a time when Titian’s virtuosity began to lead Venetian art into its Golden Age. The analysis of *St. Peter Enthroned, with Donor and Pope* begins a search through the scholarship—often contradictory—regarding the artist, his patrons, his environment, and most importantly, his art. It is this very complexity that adds to the enjoyment of the study of art history.
Chapter 3: *St. Peter Enthroned, with Donor and Pope*

Possibly the earliest extant work by Titian, *St. Peter Enthroned, with Donor and Pope* (figure 2) is painted in oil on a canvas measuring 145 x 183 cm. (4' 9" x 6') in its present condition. Its original location is unknown, but it was in the collection of Charles I of England in the seventeenth century and has belonged to the Koninklijk Museum voor Schone Kunsten in Antwerp since 1823. Complex issues of dating, authorship, patronage, and meaning have only partially been resolved by art historians. The painting’s earliest recorded title is the one inscribed on the *trompe l’oeil* tablet at the lower center, where Titian’s name is preceded by the words *RITRATTO DI VNO DI CASA PESARO IN VENEZIA CHE FV FATTO GENERALE DI SANTA CHIESA*: “Portrait of a member of the House of Pesaro in Venice who was made General of the Holy Church.” The papal banner with the Borgia coat of arms identifies the pope as Alexander VI (reigned 1492-1503), whose distinctive facial features are also recognizable. However, notwithstanding the reference on the tablet to a member of the Pesaro family, one early inventory described the subject as *Pope Alexander Burgeo and Caesar Burgeo his son by Tytsian [sic]—a quaint reference to the infamous Cesare Borgia, who was indeed the son of Alexander VI but who does not appear in the painting.*

There is little doubt that the patron of the painting was Jacopo Pesaro (c. 1465-1547),

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23 Biadene, *Titian*, 148. According to Crowe and Cavalcaselle, *Life and Times*, 75, and Harold Wethey, *The Paintings of Titian* (London: Phaidon Press, 1969), vol. 1, 152, the support is panel rather than canvas. However, Dorine Cardyn-Oomen, Scientific Director of the Research Department at the Koninklijk Museum, confirms that the painting is on canvas; I am grateful to her for this personal communication.

24 There is an error in early scholarship identifying the municipality of Antwerp as recipient of the painting in 1825, but Cardyn-Oomen (as noted above) has confirmed that King William I of the Netherlands gave it to the Koninklijk Museum in 1823.

25 Wethey, *Paintings of Titian*, vol. 1, 153, records this title from an exhibit of 1650, by which time the canvas had already arrived in England. Cesare could not be the tonsured cleric in the painting, as he resigned his ecclesiastical offices in 1498 (*Columbian Encyclopedia*, 2nd ed., 229).
shown kneeling to the right of center and presented to St. Peter by Pope Alexander. A member of the large and powerful Pesaro family of Venice, Jacopo became a Dominican friar and, in 1495, titular bishop of Paphos on the island of Cyprus, which then formed part of the Venetian empire. Since his religious affiliation precluded employment with the Venetian government,

26 According to Crowe and Cavalcaselle, *Life and Times*, 73, Jacopo was born in 1460, but Goffen, *Piety and Patronage*, 107, gives 1464, and Wethey, *Paintings of Titian*, vol. 1, 102, gives 1466.
27 John P. O’Connell, ed., “A Practical Dictionary of Biblical and General Catholic Information,” in *The Holy Bible* (Chicago: The Catholic Press, Inc., 1950), 31, defines the term *titular bishop* to mean a bishop with the title, but without jurisdiction, in a defunct See. The term as applied to Jacopo is curious, since Venice annexed Cyprus in 1489, and the Turks did not conquer it until 1570-71. Goffen, *Piety and Patronage*, 133, observes that the Conventual Franciscans maintained custody of Cyprus until its loss to the Turks. Perhaps, then, the lack of a Dominican presence on the island prevented Jacopo from assuming jurisdiction. According to Paul Joannides, *Titian to 1518: the Assumption of Genius* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), 151, Jacopo “acquired” the bishopric in 1495; Biadene, *Titian*, 194, describes him as an “elected” bishop. It may be noted that Paphos was the name of two cities in southwest Cyprus: “Old” Paphos was Phoenician in origin and the center of worship of the Greek
Jacopo received an admiralty commission as a papal legate from Alexander VI, at whose court in Rome he had previously resided. The serene seascape with galleys in the background of Titian’s painting alludes to this position.

The tonsured Pesaro is portrayed with a black mantle over a white undergarment and wearing gray gloves. Black and white are the colors of the Dominican habit, but this may be no more than coincidence, for Jacopo’s rich garments are not those of a friar. Some scholars have identified his garb as that of a Knight of Malta, an identification thought to be reinforced by the helmet on the pavement in front of him. However, this brilliantly rendered object, painted in conscious emulation of Giorgione (compare figure 3), serves as no more than a generic military attribute. In any case, there is no evidence that Jacopo was a Maltese Knight, and, conversely, ample evidence that black was the
goddess Aphrodite; “New” Paphos is ten miles to the northwest and became the capital of the district and an important Roman seaport (Columbia Encyclopedia, 2nd ed., 1483).


29 Wethey, Paintings of Titian, vol. 1, 152, points out the error of previous scholars, who identified Pesaro’s garments as the Dominican habit, but Wethey himself errs in assuming that the dress is ecclesiastical. Goffen, Piety and Patronage, 117, points out that this black gown is not brocaded as in the Frari altarpiece.

30 Biadene, Titian, 148; Pedrocchi, Titian, 85. In fact, the designation is anachronistic, since the Knights were not established on Malta till 1530, when sovereignty over the island was conferred upon them by the Emperor Charles V (Columbia Encyclopedia, 2nd ed., 1063).
prescribed color for the robes of Venetian males over the age of twenty-five.\textsuperscript{31} Rounding out the major elements of the painting is the “gonfalon,” or banner with streamers. Proffered by Jacopo, it features the papal insignia of crossed keys surmounting the Borgia family crest and, displayed repeatedly on the streamers, the arms of the Pesaro family enclosed within a circle.

Pope Alexander VI was born in 1431 of Spanish nobility as Roderigo Llançol-Borja i Borja—Rodrigo Borgia in Italian. Through the nepotism of his uncle, Pope Calixtus III, he quickly achieved the highest offices in papal administration, whose lucrative benefices allowed him to indulge his ambitions and pleasures. He bribed his way to the papacy in 1492 and was generally vilified after his death.\textsuperscript{32} Alexander wears the papal tiara in Titian’s canvas and is garbed in a luxurious green cope. In my opinion, the fact that he is standing in the presence of St. Peter is significant. It suggests that he had already died and entered heaven, for if he were still alive, he would probably kneel rather than stand. Moreover, no living person is likely to be shown presenting a donor to a saint.\textsuperscript{33} Thus it is probable that the painting postdates the pope’s death in 1503. The notion of Alexander VI’s being in heaven is certainly a strange one, but it stands as a testament to Jacopo’s high regard for his benefactor. Many years later Jacopo endowed regular masses for Alexander’s soul in his will, an action suggesting that his regard for the pope remained undiminished, but one that also suggests a change of attitude on Jacopo’s part. If Alexander were already in heaven, there would be no need to pray for his soul.\textsuperscript{34}

\textsuperscript{31} Hills, \textit{Venetian Color}, 176.
\textsuperscript{33} Hope, \textit{Titian}, 26; Joannides, \textit{Titian to 1518}, 151; and Biadene, \textit{Titian}, 148, discuss the iconographic implications of standing in the presence of saints and presenting donors.
\textsuperscript{34} Joannides, \textit{Titian to 1518}, 151, provides some of this information and opines that the image of Alexander represents Titian’s first posthumous portrait. Much earlier, Crowe and Cavalcaselle, \textit{Life and Times}, 77-78, had noted that Alexander appears younger than he would have been in the opening years of the sixteenth century, suggesting that his likeness was taken from an earlier portrait.
Of importance to our discussion are the pope’s military alignment with Spain and Venice in 1501 to stem the threat of a Turkish invasion into the Christian West and his subsequent bull appointing Jacopo Pesaro as his legate in the campaign. A key event in this campaign—at any rate, from Jacopo Pesaro’s point of view—took place at the Ionian island of Santa Maura, also known as Leucadia or Lefkas, located off the southwest coast of Greece at the mouth of the entrance to the Gulf of Arta. Several years after it had been captured by the Turks, the allied forces of Pope Alexander VI, Spain, and Venice—which supplied all the ships—were victorious in retaking Santa Maura on August 30, 1502. Jacopo commanded the papal armada and was mainly credited for the victory. But his cousin Benedetto was Generalissimo da Mar of the combined fleet, and Benedetto’s branch of the Pesaro family competed with Jacopo for the bragging rights. In any case, the victory proved to be Pyrrhic and of little historical significance, as the Turks regained the island through a treaty negotiated the following year. Since Jacopo never achieved anything greater in his religious, patrician, or military career, the victory at Santa Maura turned out to be the high mark of his life.

St. Peter is pictured on the left, enthroned atop a marble plinth with a pseudo-classical relief. His traditional iconography, which includes the keys to the Kingdom of Heaven at his feet, has been altered somewhat with his red—rather than blue—dress and yellow mantle. He holds a book in his left hand, makes a blessing gesture with his right, and looks in the direction of Jacopo Pesaro with a gaze that also encompasses Alexander VI and the papal standard.

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36 Joannides, *Titian to 1518*, 152.
37 Erwin Panofsky, *Problems in Titian: Mostly Iconographic* (New York: New York University Press, 1969), 19, raises the unanswered question as to whether Titian altered the standard iconography deliberately or out of ignorance. If the former, then his intention remains unclear, but I believe it reflects his nascent preference for artistic expression over iconographic tradition.

38 The ambiguity of Peter’s gaze has given rise to conflicting opinions about its object. Crowe and Cavalcaselle, *Life and Times*, 75, thought that Peter was directing his attention—and his blessing—toward Jacopo Pesaro, but Brown, “Bellini and Titian,” 60, believing the painting to predate the Battle of Santa Maura, suggests that he is blessing the
classicizing bas-relief on the base of the throne is enigmatic but can be interpreted in a variety of ways that need not be mutually exclusive. In a general sense, it reflects the contemporary Venetian fascination with classical antiquity and, perhaps, Titian’s desire to vie with Giovanni Bellini in imaginatively recreating a classical frieze.39 Since it serves as a base for St. Peter’s throne, however, it may also symbolize Christianity’s defeat of paganism.40 Any more specific interpretation would seem to hinge on a correct identification of the subject of the frieze, a task that has yet to be accomplished. According to one theory frequently encountered in the literature, the seminude female figure at the right is Venus and hence a reference to Pesaro’s position as titular bishop of Paphos, a center for the worship of Aphrodite in ancient Greek times. However, the notion is purely conjectural and probably also misleading, since the town of “New” Paphos, where Pesaro held his bishopric, was a later foundation that had no connection with Aphrodite worship.41

Interpretations of the painting necessarily revolve around questions of authorship, patronage, and dating, as well as iconography. X-ray analysis has helped to determine that two different “hands” contributed to the final picture. It is generally, but not universally, acknowledged that Giovanni Bellini received the commission and began the painting, executing the face of St. Peter and sketching in the underlying compositional layout, while Titian was responsible for


41 See above, note 27, where distinctions between “Old” and “New” Paphos are described. The theory associating the frieze with Pesaro’s bishopric seems to have originated with Crowe and Cavalcaselle, *Life and Times*, 73. See also Wethey, *Paintings of Titian*, vol. 1, 152, for a detailed discussion of the relief and another interpretation of its subject and meaning.
everything visible on the surface except for St. Peter’s face. Nevertheless, since the painting is undocumented, its attribution is largely dependent on connoisseurship. As noted at the beginning of this chapter, Titian’s name does appear on the trompe l’oeil tablet at the lower center of the canvas, which stands illusionistically in front of the rose- and cream-colored checkerboard pavement. However, the inscription tablet was added at a “much later date than the time of Jacopo Pesaro,” which means that it cannot be considered a primary source. This is also implied by its lack of specificity, identifying Jacopo only as “a member of the House of Pesaro in Venice who was made General of the Holy Church” (“uno di casa Pesaro in Venezia che fu fatta Generale della Santa Chiesa”). The failure to identify him more precisely suggests that the inscription stems from a time after his death, when the name of Jacopo Pesaro had sunk into obscurity and lost interest for whoever owned the painting. Since the language of the inscription is Italian, it may have been added when the picture was still in Venice, but sometime after Jacopo’s death in 1547.

That it remained in Venice through the first quarter of the seventeenth century is clear, since Anthony Van Dyck visited the city in 1623 and made a copy in his so-called Italian Sketch Book, now in the British Museum (figure 4). Unfortunately, Van Dyck did not indicate the exact

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43 This type of pavement is typical of Venetian churches. See, for example, the pavement of Santa Maria Gloriosa dei Frari (figure 8), the Pesaro family church, which is also echoed in Titian’s Pesaro Altarpiece (figure 15).
44 Wethey, Paintings of Titian, vol. 1, 152.
45 Thus, scientific analysis should have identified a third “hand,” but this has not been mentioned in the literature on the painting. According to research conducted at the Koninklijk Museum in Antwerp, both the inscription tablet and the horizontal gray band behind it appear to be contemporary with the rest of the canvas. On balance, a later date for these elements still remains a better alternative, but whatever the case may be, Titian’s signature postdates the main portion of the inscription, as it is clearly painted over the craquelure in warmer and more transparent pigment; the Museum’s investigation found no trace of an earlier inscription beneath it.
46 Special thanks to Sheila O’Connell, Assistant Keeper, Department of Prints and Drawings at the British Museum, for providing the copy of Van Dyck’s sketch (© register 1957,1214.207.19) prior to its on-line availability.
location of the painting, which could either have been a church or, more likely, a private residence. Curiously, Van Dyck’s copy omits the inscription tablet, perhaps suggesting that it did not yet exist in 1623. Since the maritime scene is also missing from the background, the date of the sketch cannot unequivocally be used to date the addition of the tablet. However, the mistaken identity of Cesare Borgia in the title of this painting, when exhibited at Somerset House and sold from the estate of King Charles I of England, implies that this tablet was still not present in 1650.\textsuperscript{47} But despite the lack of documentary evidence, Jacopo Pesaro’s identity is probable. Not only does the iconography of the painting fit his career, but his likeness in the painting is similar

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{fig4_vandyck}
\caption{4. Van Dyck, \textit{Italian Sketch Book}, British Museum, London}
\end{figure}

\textsuperscript{47} Wethey, \textit{Paintings of Titian}, vol. 1, 152, identifies the date and title, but fails to make the association with the tablet.
to that of the man who later appears—somewhat older, to be sure—in Titian’s *Pesaro Altarpiece* (figure 5).

Although the general nature of the painting’s subject is well understood, a number of issues remain unresolved. Intertwined with the question of the date of the work is the problem of whether the scene takes place before or after the Battle of Santa Maura, which occurred on August 30, 1502. Those favoring the “before” scenario note that there are no signs of battle in the seascape in the background. The “after” advocates counter by referring to the military attribute of the helmet on the pavement and by noting that Alexander VI’s death in August 1503 establishes a *terminus post quem*, for reasons mentioned above. These opinions are predicated on the assumption that the Battle of Santa Maura was the key achievement of Jacopo Pesaro’s career. One may question, however, whether Pesaro himself would have made this assumption at the time when he commissioned the painting. We now recognize its importance in his life, but even after the triumph of 1502, and Alexander’s death in the following year, Jacopo still had his

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charge for the papal crusade against the Turks and must have hoped for greater future successes than the Pyrrhic victory at Santa Maura. He could not have known that nothing but unfulfilled ambition lay ahead of him. Therefore, I believe we should view the painting exclusively as commemorating his high honor as admiral in service to the Holy See, an honor which is represented as being uninterrupted from the first pope, St. Peter, to Jacopo’s sponsor, Alexander VI, without reference to the Battle of Santa Maura.49

As already noted, the question of the date of the painting, and hence its meaning, is intricately intertwined with the question of Titian’s birthdate. If Titian was really born in 1488-90, as most scholars now believe, then he would have been between twelve and fourteen years old when the Battle of Santa Maura took place and probably too young to have painted the Antwerp canvas if it were done around 1502. Although the possibility remains that Giovanni Bellini began the work at about that time, Titian’s contribution must be somewhat later. In fact, if we agree that the iconography of the painting requires a date of execution later than Pope Alexander’s death in 1503, even Bellini’s initial layout must be dissociated from the battle. This interpretation accords well with the biography of Jacopo Pesaro, who was absent from Venice from early 1503 until 1506, presumably on military exercises.50 All things considered, it seems best to assume that Bellini received the commission sometime after Jacopo’s return to Venice in 1506, and that Titian completed it while still a member of the Bellini workshop. The Bellinesque style of the painting is manifest, especially the figure of St. Peter, and it is reasonable to assume that Bellini would not have given up so important a commission to an outsider, especially if he had already have received partial payment. The precise date that Titian left Bellini’s workshop is not known, but his debut as an independent artist dates from his collaboration with Giorgione on

49 Mather, “When was Titian Born?” 18, almost arrives at this interpretation but stops at describing the scene as commemorating Jacopo’s appointment due to the lack of war imagery.
50 Biadene, Titian, 148, 403-04.
the frescoes of the Fondaco dei Tedeschi, which were begun by May 1507.\textsuperscript{51} Therefore it seems reasonable to conclude that Titian worked on the Antwerp canvas sometime between 1506 and the first half of 1507, when he was in his upper teens, thus establishing it as his earliest extant work.

This conjecture may be supported by comparing the figure of St. Peter with that of St. Mark in Titian’s altarpiece of St. Mark Enthroned with Sts. Cosmas, Damian, Roch, and Sebastian in the church of Santa Maria della Salute (figure 6), which can be dated to c. 1510. Although some scholars view these figures as being stylistically similar,\textsuperscript{52} the differences seem far more striking, especially the looser brushwork of the Salute St. Mark, its greater sense of mass, and its broader, more simplified drapery folds, all of which suggest the hand of a mature High Renaissance artist. By contrast, the figure of St. Peter in the Antwerp canvas betrays the hand of an immature painter still working in the manner of Giovanni Bellini and still tied to conventions of the Early

\textsuperscript{51} Crowe and Cavalcaselle, \textit{Life and Times}, 85, determined that Titian was contracted to work with Giorgione on the frescoes at the Fondaco between May 16, 1507 and 1508. I believe this establishes a \textit{terminus ante quem} for the Antwerp painting.

\textsuperscript{52} E.g., Pedrocco, \textit{Titian}, 85.
Renaissance. In other respects, as well, the “primitive” style of the painting suggests that it can only be one of Titian’s earliest, no matter what its specific date. The formulaic composition exhibits a tentative treatment of space, and the perspective of the pavement is somewhat awkward. While the portraits of Jacopo Pesaro and Alexander VI are masterful, the form of St. Peter has—not without reason—been described as ungainly. Moreover, as one prominent scholar puts it, the sky “fails to convey a sense of atmosphere,” and the seascape in the background, “with its hard dark green water and rather linear galleys disappoints and does not reveal the mastery of landscape that Titian commanded.”

Nevertheless, we begin to see in the Antwerp canvas Titian’s characteristic colorito—his “coloring” or loose paint application—a distinctive quality that increased throughout the course of his long career. More generally, Titian’s sensitivity to the needs of the donor is impressive. The picture has been classified as a “votive” painting or ex voto, terms that are often regarded as synonymous but which also have slightly different meanings. I believe we should apply the word “votive” only to a painting offered as commemoration of a vow that has already been fulfilled, while ex voto implies a vow as yet unfulfilled. According to these definitions, Titian’s painting for Jacopo Pesaro must be considered an ex voto, since his hopes for fame and glory never came to fruition, the victory at Santa Maura notwithstanding. At any rate, it is a shrewd piece of self-promotion on behalf of the patron, as well as a hopeful one, and in this respect it serves a sort of dress rehearsal for the greater and more famous canvas that Titian was soon to execute for the same man.

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53 The adjective primitive is applied to the painting by Robertson, “Jacopo Pesaro,” 291.
54 Crowe and Cavalcaselle, Life and Times, 76.
55 Wethey, Paintings of Titian, vol. 1, 152.
56 My preference is based on the strict definitions of the terms in Webster’s Third New International Dictionary.
Chapter 4: Dominicans, Conventual Franciscans, Santa Maria Gloriosa dei Frari, and the Doctrine of the Immaculate Conception

Our present interest in the Dominicans is based upon Jacopo Pesaro’s ordination in this branch of mendicant friars. The Dominican Order was founded by St. Dominic (Dominic Guzmán, c. 1170-1221) when he received papal authority from Honorius III in 1216. The raison d’être for these friars is to defend the Christian faith, particularly against heresy, by preaching and teaching. They are considered to be among the more intellectual of friars—Thomas Aquinas was a member—which is one of their distinctive characteristics. Unlike hermitic monks of remote rural regions, the preaching friars necessarily interact with the public in urban settings. A Dominican’s typical iconography includes a tonsure, a black cloak over a white gown, and often a book to symbolize learning.

St. Francis of Assisi (Giovanni di Bernardone, c. 1182-1226) founded a similar Order of Friars Minor, eponymously known as the Franciscans, with oral approval by Pope Innocent III in 1209 and formal investiture by Honorius III’s papal bull of 1223. St. Francis visited the Veneto, where he established his second friary—after Assisi—on the Lido, the location of the anecdote of his preaching to the birds. A wondrous event in Francis’ life occurred at Monte della Verna in 1224, two years before his death, when he had a vision and received the wounds of the Crucifixion, known as the stigmata. His original vows included poverty, which became a point of contention within the Order from its onset. A sect known as the Observants favored a rigorous adherence to the vow of poverty, while another faction, known as the Conventuals, preferred a less strict interpretation so as to allow the ownership of property. The dissension was recognized

57 Nevertheless, it is hard to think of such a wealthy patrician as begging.
58 For the iconography of St. Dominic, see Rosa Giorgi, Saints in Art, ed. Stefano Zuffi, trans. Thomas Michael Hartmann (Los Angeles: Getty Publications, 2003), 106. Dominic’s Christian name is linked to the word *domenica*, which means Sunday, or the Lord’s Day. St. Dominic was a native Spaniard who preached in Spain, France, and Italy, where he died in Bologna.
in a division of the Order into these groups by the Council of Constance in 1415, but not until 1517 did Pope Leo X officially acknowledge the split. The iconography of St. Francis includes the display of his stigmata, and Franciscans in general are tonsured and wear either gray or brown habits with white rope belts tied in three knots.\textsuperscript{59}

The Franciscans and Dominicans took different sides in the debate over the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception, which was not solemnly defined as Catholic dogma until December 8, 1854, by Pope Pius IX.\textsuperscript{60} The significance to our discussion of these opposing views relates to the Franciscan church of Santa Maria Gloriosa dei Frari in Venice, which is dedicated to Mary.\textsuperscript{61} The Dominican Bishop Jacopo Pesaro is credited with commissioning Titian to create the next painting under discussion, the \textit{Pesaro Altarpiece}, for an altar dedicated to the Immaculate Conception in a Franciscan church. After considering the issues surrounding the Immaculate Conception and discussing its iconography, I present some background on the Frari itself before turning to questions of patronage in the following chapter.

The term “Immaculate Conception” defines the Virgin Mary’s singular privilege of being conceived without Original Sin. Devotion to Mary, the Mother of God, dates to the earliest Christian times and relates to her complementing Christ in the salvation of mankind. Since the Original Sin was committed with the help of Eve, it is argued that only another woman without sin could be chosen by God to give birth to His instrument of redemption. Mary alone embodied sinless maiden purity and motherly love. Such a position generated debates over the centuries

\textsuperscript{59} Bernardone was born in Assisi in Umbria and took the name Francesco, which derives from a Germanic adjective meaning “French” and relates to his mother’s Provencal heritage. See \textit{Columbia Encyclopedia}, 2\textsuperscript{nd} ed., 711-12; Giorgi, \textit{Saints in Art}, 130; and O’Connell, ed., “A Practical Dictionary of Biblical and General Catholic Information,” 90.

\textsuperscript{60} Ibid., 113.

\textsuperscript{61} Goffen, \textit{Piety and Patronage}, 17, 20. There were eight altars consecrated to Marian themes at the beginning of the sixteenth century, and it is interesting to note that the number eight also has spiritual connotations for birth and renewal. The Church is also dedicated to St. Francis, among four other saints.
related to the timing of Mary’s freedom from sin, the nature of her human conception, her being subject to the law of death, and her role in human salvation beyond giving birth to Christ.\textsuperscript{62}

The Dominicans were the greatest proponents of a competing theory known as Sanctification. This hypothesis incorporated Mary into the natural laws of man, including being subject to Original Sin. But it then postulated that she was sanctified in her mother’s womb—similar to St. John the Baptist—and without further involvement in humankind’s salvation. Dominicans strenuously defended their point of view until Pius IX’s proclamation of 1854.

The doctrine of the Immaculate Conception originated in the West at Benedictine monasteries, and other monastic orders adopted it before the Franciscan Order existed. The Franciscans have become identified with the doctrine due to its articulate defense by one of their most celebrated members, Duns Scotus (c. 1266-1308). He explained that Mary’s soul was sanctified before her body by Divine Providence. Thus, when her soul was united with her body at conception, it was free of Original Sin—not by her nature but through Christ’s merit. Later, in 1476, Pope Sixtus IV, a Franciscan who had previously served at the Frari, approved the official feast of the Immaculate Conception to be celebrated each December 8, and in 1480 he approved the Office of its Mass.\textsuperscript{63}

As might be expected, the evolution of the dogma of the Immaculate Conception over centuries of debate produced instability in its iconography. In fact, one of the few situations where one can be certain that a painting or sculpture represents the subject is when it is (or was

\textsuperscript{62} Mirella Levi D’Ancona, \textit{The Iconography of the Immaculate Conception in the Middle Ages and Early Renaissance} (College Art Association of America in Conjunction with \textit{The Art Bulletin}, 1957), 5-6.

\textsuperscript{63} Ibid., 9-11. There seems to be some question as to whether the feast of the Immaculate Conception was established in 1476 or 1477. See Kelly, \textit{Oxford Dictionary of Popes}, 130 (1476); Goffen, \textit{Piety and Patronage}, 58, 74 (1476 and 1477); and Erica Tietze-Conrat, “The Pesaro Madonna, A Footnote on Titian,” \textit{Gazette des Beaux-Arts} 42 (October 1953): 177, stating that the feast was made official on February 27, 1477.
originally) on an altar or in a chapel dedicated to the Immaculate Conception.\textsuperscript{64} Initially the concept was illustrated within the framework of traditional themes like the Annunciation, the Nativity, and the Assumption of the Virgin by the inclusion of texts and inscriptions citing contemporary arguments supporting the position. Some stability was eventually achieved, but not before the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.\textsuperscript{65}

A common iconographic formula for the Immaculate Conception was to portray Mary as the so-called Apocalyptic Woman, showing her crowned with stars, standing atop a crescent moon, and surrounded by rays of the sun. The Virgin with symbols of the litanies represented Mary in Heaven. A different type of image includes the Doctors of the Church discussing the doctrine. The complexity of the iconography in art reflects the complexity of the doctrine itself, and more than one representation is often conflated into a single picture. Some examples are identified by scholars at the church of the Frari. Relevant to our discussion are the Pesaro Altarpiece for the altar of the Immaculate Conception and Titian’s \textit{Assunta} in the \textit{cappella maggiore}, whose iconography is occasionally associated with the Immaculate Conception.\textsuperscript{66}

Santa Maria Gloriosa dei Frari—a title relating to Mary’s Assumption—is the largest Franciscan church in Venice (figure 7).\textsuperscript{67} It is also, after San Marco, the second largest of all churches in the city, with the second highest campanile, and was known as the “Ca’ Grande of Venice” or the Frari.\textsuperscript{68} The present basilica was rebuilt over the original one on a site acquired in

\textsuperscript{64} D’Ancona, \textit{Iconography of the Immaculate Conception}, 16.
\textsuperscript{65} Ibid., 15-72, D’Ancona presents a thorough discussion through the early sixteenth century. See also Edward Dennis O’Connor, ed., \textit{The Dogma of the Immaculate Conception: History and Significance} (South Bend: University of Notre Dame Press, 1958), 476.
\textsuperscript{66} Goffen, \textit{Piety and Patronage}, 87, raises the issue of the Franciscans associating Titian’s \textit{Assunta} on the high altar with the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception. However, there are unexplained issues that call this into question. For discussion of the complex issue, with citation of additional literature, see Peter Humfrey, \textit{Altarpiece in Renaissance Venice} (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1993), 337, notes 11 and 17.
\textsuperscript{67} Goffen, \textit{Piety and Patronage}, 6, 17, 97. The church is dedicated to “S. Maria Gloriosse per festo assumptionis,” and the adjective \textit{Gloriosa} also signifies the Assumption.
\textsuperscript{68} Ibid., 4, 164, note 5. The word \textit{Frari} is Venetian dialect for “friars.”
1250 from the Doge. It took about a century to complete and was essentially built by 1428, when the friars established a bridge over the Rio dei Frari outside its entrance to facilitate access. The Venetian Gothic building was fully completed in 1446, and its high altar was dedicated to the Assumption of the Virgin in 1469. The basilica itself—Pope Pius XI elevated the Frari to the status of Basilica Minore in 1926—was dedicated to the Assumption of the Virgin in 1492.

The prelates of the Frari during the time of Titian’s paintings were (and are today) Conventuals, also known as Frati Minori or “Friars Minor.” They were sponsored locally by the Venetian government and by wealthy Venetian families, and nationally and internationally by the papacy. The Frati Minori were a successful mendicant order, and on May 15, 1256, were granted the exceptional privilege of burying the dead in their churches by Pope Alexander IV (a Franciscan Conventual). Bequests for interment in sanctified ground with masses and prayers were funded by perpetual endowments, as souls are considered immortal. Confraternities and the
Venetian government stepped in to continue financial support when mortal families were no longer able.  

The Frari wooed the Confraternity of St. Anthony—relevant to our discussion of the *Pesaro Altarpiece*—from a rival church in 1439 and had a law passed to enforce that it would be the only one of its kind in Venice. St. Anthony of Padua’s birthday was March 25, the same as the feast of the Annunciation as well as the mythical founding of Venice. He was a Conventual who personified the public life of scholarship and service to the faithful as professed by the Franciscans.

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8. Interior, the Frari, Venice

The Frari is a traditional friary rather than a parish church and has a tau-shaped interior layout, like other Franciscan churches, with seven apsidal chapels running across the top of the

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transept (figures 8-9). It has a high central nave separated from two side aisles by twelve pillars. The vaulted ceiling has ogival arches, and wooden tie-beams help to keep the vaults from

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70 Goffen, Piety and Patronage, 17, 19. The T-shaped building is probably meant to invoke St. Francis’ tau cross as a symbol of redemption. The tau symbol is ubiquitous throughout Assisi today, including large manicured hedges on the grounds of San Francesco. See R.P. Nicola Giandomenico, Art and History: Assisi (Florence: Casa Editrice Donechi, 2005), 7, for another association with the “tau cross, so dear to St. Francis, and the biblical sign of salvation.”
collapsing while also serving to reduce the impression of height by virtue of their horizontal forms. Red brick walls act as a foil to the white monuments and sculptures. Verona red marble and Istrian white stone tiles are laid diagonally in a checkerboard-patterned floor. In the early sixteenth century, the church was most elaborately decorated with frescoes and stained glass that have not survived. Furthermore, the tombs and sculptures would have been brilliantly polychromed and gilded, and on feast days the church would have been festooned with tapestries and banners. Although such ornamentation was against the letter and spirit of rules governing Franciscan architecture, it was not uncommon. The Frari would have afforded a grand visual setting in which to display the *Pesaro Altarpiece*.\(^7\)

The Pesaro families’ patronage dominated the decoration of the Frari’s interior. The sacristy is accessed from the right transept and is of particular import due to the patronage of the “San Benedetto” sect of the Pesaro family. It includes Benedetto Pesaro’s funerary monument around the entrance (figure 10), as well as Giovanni Bellini’s triptych of the *Madonna and Child with Saints Nicholas, Peter, Mark, and Benedict* on the altar of the sacristy’s apse.

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\(^7\) While the interior today is filled with elaborate monuments, one can only imagine how much more colorful it would have appeared in the early *cinquecento*. 
There was also a funerary monument to Benedetto’s son across the nave (now destroyed) and a later monument for Doge Giovanni Pesaro, *in situ* in the left aisle of the church since 1669.  

Another Pesaro altar, acquired in perpetuity for the family’s burials, is in the left side aisle in front of the Chapel of St. Peter and just before the choir screen (figure 12). It is not a chapel per se but a wall altar formally dedicated to the Immaculate Conception. A confraternity, the *Scuola*

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72 Bellini’s triptych was one of the first Venetian altarpieces dedicated to the Immaculate Conception after its feast day became official; Goffen, *Piety and Patronage*, xiv.

*dell’Immacolata*, took physical care of the altar itself and said prayers and daily mass for the Pesaro family dead, with Titian’s altarpiece serving as its focus of attention. Jacopo’s marble tomb monument is to the right of the altar, and a tomb slab for other family members is in the floor in front of it. These Venetian families and their importance at the Frari will be discussed in the next chapter.
Chapter 5: The Pesaro Families at the Frari

The Venetian nobili did not feel a need to impose their presence on churches in their own neighborhoods, as was typical of, say, upper-class Florentines. The Venetian patrician class was assured of its continuous political and social status by legislation of 1297, known as the Serrata, or “lock-up”; therefore, it was less neighborhood-conscious. Participation in the Great Council—required for all government offices—by males over the age of twenty-five from specifically identified families was then closed to members of any other family. Furthermore, Venetian noble families compiled the Golden Book—the Libro d’oro—to keep track of male births and subsequent marriages, which later became a legal requirement in 1506. Without a primary need to live near or affiliate with a neighborhood church, these patrician families chose to patronize churches anywhere in the city and often in more than one section of town. The Pesaro are a case in point, as one branch lived near and another far from the Frari.

The Pesaro family was among the original patrons of the Frari and can be documented as early as the first half of the duecento. Their family burial tombs within the Ca’ Grande have a long established tradition leading into the Renaissance. A major endowment from the “San Benedetto” Pesaro clan is its burial chapel in the sacristy, begun after 1478. It is significant as the first chapel constructed by the Pesaro—established as their personal and private space—and includes Giovanni Bellini’s altarpiece (figure 11), which is signed and dated 1488. The triptych, Madonna and Child Enthroned with Saints Nicholas, Peter, Mark, and Benedict, includes an inscription in the simulated gold mosaic in the semi-dome of the center panel. Its wording celebrates Mary as the “Sure Gate of Heaven,” which is further amplified by the Bible

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74 Goffen, Piety and Patronage, 184, note 122. Seventy-four Pesaro were members of the Council in the mid-trecento. It is easy to see that the greater the number of males within a noble family, the greater its clout within the Venetian government.
75 Ibid., 27-29.
76 Ibid., 31-32, 38. The chapel originally had an iron gate and displayed the Pesaro coat of arms.
held by St. Benedict being opened to Ecclesiasticus, and identifies the altar’s dedication to the Immaculate Conception, which may have been intended to please Pope Sixtus IV. Three Pesaro brothers, whose onomastic saints are included in the triptych, commissioned the chapel and its altar from an endowment of their mother.77

Benedetto (1433-1503) was the most successful and publicly dominant member of the “San Benedetto” Pesaro clan. Although he had an “audacious personality” and was inclined to rash judgment,78 he was finally elected to the wartime office of Generalissimo da Mar in 1500. He had immediate success against the Turks that year—he would have been about sixty-seven years old—and was rewarded by election to the Procuria de Supra in 1501. He had subsequent victories in Cepahalonia and (as already noted) Santa Maura and continued fighting for the Republic until his death in 1503. Benedetto was interred in his family’s chapel at the Frari according to the terms of his will and after an elaborate public funeral. His bequest provided instructions for the creation of a “noble marble monument” with inscriptions referring to his naval accomplishments that explicitly identify the Battle of Santa Maura (figures 10 and 13). It was probably sculpted by Lorenzo

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77 Ibid., 40, 57-61. This is the first Pesaro altar dedicated to the Immaculate Conception in the Frari. The mosaic inscription in Bellini’s painting stems from the Office used to celebrate the feast day. Chapter 24 in Ecclesiasticus is interpreted as attesting to Mary’s Immaculate Conception. Sixtus, who approved its institution, was known to have a strong personal devotion to the Immaculate Conception, and this was a particularly sensitive time of his reconciliation with Venice after his interdiction for their siege of Ferrara in 1483. The brothers’ names were Nicolò, Marco, and Benedetto.

78 Ibid., 62, provides the colorful descriptions for Benedetto.
Bregno and includes very little reference to Benedetto’s Christianity. It is a large columnar white marble tomb dominating the entrance to the sacristy from the right transept. At the top of the structure, Benedetto’s effigy stands wearing armor and holding a military banner, the attributes of his admiralship, which clearly indicate his intention of promoting his patriotic service to the Republic above all else.79

Jacopo was a prominent member of the “dal Carro” branch of the Pesaro family and, with his brothers, acquired the perpetual benefit to the altar of the Immaculate Conception at the Frari in January 1518.80 This privilege included the construction of a wall tomb to the right, as well as one in the floor in front of the altar for themselves and other family members. Their endowment required the payment of twenty-five to thirty ducats annually for candles and daily mass celebration in honor of deceased Pesaro souls. An additional two ducats was required at the celebration of the Immaculate Conception for the convent’s meal for the feast.81 Therefore, while the altar was spiritually and theologically important to the Franciscans as well as the Confraternity of the Immaculate Conception, it was foremost a funerary site for the Pesaro family patrons.

As the most celebrated and prominent member of his family, Jacopo received the wall tomb for his personal interment (figure 14). He was a major contributor to the family altar, negotiated its acquisition, and commissioned Titian to provide its decoration. His tomb is made of the same veined marble as the frame for the altarpiece, with porphyry and serpentine opus sectile, and has

79 Ibid., 62-64, 67-68. Benedetto had failed on two previous attempts to be named Generalissimo da Mar. Ironically, he died on the day that Venice returned Santa Maura—which he had recommended to be maintained as an important fortress—to the Turks in a peace treaty. Benedetto provided up to 1,000 ducats for his funerary monument and tomb.
80 Biadene, Titian, 194, cites a date of January 2; Goffen, Piety and Patronage, 118, uses January 3.
81 Ibid., 118-19. The Pesaro settled on the payment of thirty ducats annually at subsequent reaffirmations of their contract.
similar decorative motifs. Jacopo is depicted on his tomb in a traditional reclining position, wearing a bishop’s cope and miter, but exceptionally without inclusion of the Madonna and Child. There is also an inscription celebrating his office in the Turkish war, which reads, “Jacopo Pesaro, Bishop of Paphos, conquered the Turks in war and himself in peace.” At least one scholar conflates the wall tomb with the altar into a “dramatically revised version of older funerary types in which the deceased is presented twice, once in death and once as though in life.”

Jacopo had family business interests in the east prior to his ecclesiastical career; therefore, he was able to leave a substantial estate at his death. In addition to providing for his surviving brother and a nephew, he left fifteen ducats in perpetuity to fund a portion of the family’s funerary altar legacy at the Frari.

Jacopo (c. 1465-1547) was the second youngest of six brothers, the others being Francesco (1451-1533), Vittore (c. 1458-1510), Antonio (c. 1458-before 1529), Giovanni (1459-1533), and Fantino (1468-after 1547). Vittore and Antonio predeceased the other brothers, but theirs were the only lines with male issue. Since the brothers shared in the family’s funerary privilege, the fact that only four adults are depicted

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82 Ibid., 120. Similarities include Corinthian capitals, rosettes, and Pesaro coats of arms. For the attribution of the frame to Lorenzo Bregno, a leading sculptor of the Venetian Renaissance, see Humfrey, Altarpiece in Renaissance Venice, 304, 358, with further references. Bregno—or perhaps his brother Giambattista—was also responsible for the monument of Benedetto Pesaro at the entrance to the sacristy.

83 Goffen, Piety and Patronage, 122.

84 Ibid., 119.
in the altarpiece is problematical; nevertheless archival research has helped shed some light on the issue.\textsuperscript{85}

Vittore died and was buried on Cyprus. Therefore, it has reasonably been deduced that he would not have been reinterred at the Frari, because the family chapel was not completed until sixteen years after his death. He had one illegitimate son, Giovanni Maria, who was not entitled to participate in the family’s legacy according to Venetian tradition.\textsuperscript{86} Since the portraits in Titian’s altarpiece are associated with traditional funerary and patronage imagery, neither Vittore nor his illegitimate son appears.\textsuperscript{87}

Antonio had also earned kudos for his contributions to the Republic’s war efforts against the Turks. He successfully managed a biscuit factory that supplied much-needed provisions for the Venetian fleet and died intestate with one qualified son, Leonardo. Leonardo was the sole responsible male of the next generation of the family, which is reflected in his status as executor of his uncles’ estates and primary beneficiary of Jacopo’s will.\textsuperscript{88}

Francesco was the oldest brother and head of the “dal Carro” branch of the Pesaro family. He was also a senator in service to the Venetian Republic. His name is singled out on the floor tomb of the chapel at the Frari, where an inscription refers to “Francesco and his brothers.” From the start of their acquisition of rights to the altar, it was Francesco, rather than Jacopo, who funded the daily mass covenant, probably as part of his role as supervisor of the family’s charitable accounts. However, he was also a major patron of the altar in his own right, bequeathing fifteen ducats in lasting funding of part of the family’s obligation to the Frari.

\textsuperscript{85} Ibid., 123, 125-26. Not much has been written about Giovanni and Fantino. Giovanni died intestate, and his wife was supported by Francesco and his estate, as he died shortly thereafter. Fantino was the only surviving brother after the demise of Jacopo, from whom he received a considerable inheritance.

\textsuperscript{86} It is interesting to note Vittore’s death in 1510 on Cyprus, where he was presumably conducting family business. Remember that Jacopo was the titular bishop of a Cypriot See, which was apparently defunct. Jacopo was the only brother who left a testamentary bequest to Giovanni Maria, albeit a small one.

\textsuperscript{87} Goffen, \textit{Piety and Patronage}, 123-25.

\textsuperscript{88} Ibid., 126.
Francesco also exhibited a strong personal piety and devotion to the Madonna, which is thought to have influenced the family’s choice of the Immaculate Conception altar at the Frari.\textsuperscript{89}

\textsuperscript{89} Ibid., 127-29.
Chapter 6: The Pesaro Altarpiece

Titian created the painting known by various forms of the title La Madonna di Ca’ Pesaro, identified hereinafter as the Pesaro Altarpiece, during the seven years 1519-26 (figure 15). It is a large—approximately 16′ high x 9′ wide—oil on canvas painting commissioned by the Pesaro family for its funerary altarpiece in a side aisle altar in Santa Maria Gloriosa dei Frari, Venice.\textsuperscript{90} The Franciscans also intended it to continue the theme of honoring the Virgin Mary as patron saint of the church, evinced by Titian’s earlier Assunta for its main altarpiece, as well as the titulus of the Immaculate Conception altar.\textsuperscript{91}

Although the Pesaro Altarpiece has been in situ most of the time since its creation, there are accounts of its being in the Accademia for restoration in 1842 and in the Palazzo Ducale in 1882-84, while repairs were made to the window behind the painting.\textsuperscript{92} It has an ornate, Lombardesque frame, which is thought to have been created by the important Venetian Renaissance sculptor Lorenzo Bregno (see also figure 12).\textsuperscript{93} The marble frame is elaborate, with a triple main order and two tiers, crowned by a pediment topped with two statues of angels holding shields adorned with the Pesaro family coat of arms. The painting is in remarkably good condition and was restored in 1977. X-ray technology has enabled art historians to evaluate the changes made to the composition during its lengthy painting process.

\textsuperscript{90} Minor variations in dimensions are recorded in the literature. It is not known whether they are attributable to errors in measurement, lack of uniform standards, effect of the frame, error in calculation to/from metric, or shrinkage over time. For example: Frederick Hartt and David G. Wilkins, History of Italian Renaissance Art, 5\textsuperscript{th} ed. (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 2003), 643 (16′ x 8′10″); Angelo P. Caccin, The Basilica of S. Maria Gloriosa dei Frari in Venice, trans. John Guthrie (Venice: Edizioni Zanipolo, 1964), 97, converted from metric (15′ 11″ x 8′ 10″); and Terisio Pignatti, Titian, ed. David Piper and Jane Carroll (London: Granada, 1981), 56, converted from metric (15′ 8″ x 8′ 9.5″).

\textsuperscript{91} Tietze-Conrat, “Pesaro Madonna,” 177, notes that early writers were unaware of the altar’s dedication to the Immaculate Conception. Although one writer identified it correctly in the seventeenth century, the fact was forgotten again until the late nineteenth century.


\textsuperscript{93} See note 82. Humfrey, Altarpiece in Renaissance Venice, 41-43, notes that the first examples of a Renaissance architectural style appeared in Venetian altarpiece frames, rather than in complete buildings as was the case earlier in Florence.
15. Titian, the *Pesaro Altarpiece*, the Frari, Venice
Jacopo Pesaro appears in profile in the left foreground of the painting—the superior, right side of the Madonna and Child and saints—reflecting a primary patronage role. The side placement is evocative of the Venetian tradition for votive pictures depicting the doge. Jacopo kneels at the foot of the throne, with his family members on the right, an unusual circumstance for Venetian altarpieces, which seldom included donor portraits.94 His head has the tonsure typical of Dominican friars,95 and he wears black over white clothing, which, while typical of the Dominican Order, is enriched with elaborate brocade and here associated with his papal office.

Although the subject of the painting is essentially a Virgin and Child enthroned with saints, as the Franciscans had instructed, Jacopo took license in using the opportunity to memorialize his admiralty commission as legate to the Holy See over two decades earlier. Art historians have generally related Jacopo’s circumstances in the painting with his success in the Battle of Santa Maura. The victory’s holiday was not celebrated on its August 30 anniversary but—by implication—on December 8, which coincided with the feast day of the Immaculate Conception, the honored theme for the altar and for which the Pesaro had to pay an additional sum.96

Pesaro family members are kneeling in the right foreground of the painting, and most are looking towards Jacopo (figure 16). The family composition is another departure from the

94 Humfrey, Altarpiece in Renaissance Venice, 304-06, states that Titian and the Pesaro were breaking new ground, as there was a Venetian tradition opposing such donor glorification. He accounts for this choice by citing Jacopo’s awareness gleaned from his younger days in the papal court at Rome, where there was a tradition of ecclesiastics being represented in religious paintings. Moreover, since the Pesaro were not the original founders of the altar and shared it with the Scuola dell’Immacolata, their recognizable portraits would serve as a reminder of their beneficial entitlements. Brown and Ferino-Pagden, Bellini, Giorgione, Titan, 10, propose that the traumatic environment resulting from war and disease motivated patrons to seek their salvation through commissioning devotional art.
95 O’Connell, ed., “Catholic Dictionary,” 236, defines the shaving of the head that marks a cleric, known as tonsure, as symbolizing the crown of thorns.
96 Tietze-Conrat, “Pesaro Madonna,” 182, recounts the legend in which St. Peter appeared to a shipwrecked abbot in response to a plea to the Immaculate Virgin. The abbot then set December 8 as his date to honor the Virgin. Goffen, Piety and Patronage, 136, believes that the Battle of Santa Maura was co-celebrated on December 8 by implication. Jacopo carried military banners to the family altar on the feast of the Immaculate Conception. Goffen, Piety and Patronage, 119, provides a translation of the original contract, which required the Pesaro to pay two ducats annually to provide a meal for the Franciscans at the Frari on the feast of the Immaculate Conception.
traditional *sacra conversazione* in which worshippers would have been grouped in a balanced, symmetrical arrangement around the Madonna and Child. Although the Pesaro faces are highly individualized and presumably correspond to their true likeness, there is no complete agreement as to their identification, as Jacopo had five brothers, and there are only four men and one boy represented. ⁹⁷

The figure in full profile across from Jacopo and dressed in a red senatorial robe is thought to be the oldest of the brothers, Francesco, who was head of this branch of the Pesaro family. ⁹⁸ He is also honored by association with his onomastic patron, St. Francis, who stands above him. Antonio and Giovanni, Jacopo’s older brothers, and the youngest, Fantino, are thought to be behind Francesco. Vittore Pesaro was buried on Cyprus

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⁹⁷ Patricia Fortini Brown, *Private Lives in Renaissance Venice* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2004), 95, refers to this as a collective celebration of the male contingent of the family group; in Brown, *Art and Life in Renaissance Venice*, 164-67, she adds that only male *stato da mar* patricians were represented in family paintings, which attested to strict inheritance legacies. Tietze-Conrat, “Pesaro Madonna,” 178-181, made one of several incorrect identifications naming Benedetto rather than Francesco, partly because she mistakenly believed that “none of the Pesaros was named Francis.”

⁹⁸ Richard Stemp, *The Secret Language of the Renaissance: Decoding the Hidden Symbolism of Italian Art* (London: Duncan Baird, 2006), 184, cites Venetian sumptuary laws that prescribed dress and jewelry, noting that “Senators, such as Francesco Pesaro, could wear red damask robes.” Francesco’s brocaded clothing was extremely expensive and could be worn only by the highest ranks of Venetian society.
prior to the acquisition of the altar and hence does not appear in the painting; nor does his only male heir, an illegitimate son who was excluded from most Pesaro wills.

The Battle of Santa Maura, which most scholars associate with the altarpiece, also had significance for Antonio, who received praise for effectively supplying the Venetian fleet during the campaign. He is further honored by the inclusion of his patron saint, Anthony of Padua. The young boy who looks out at the viewer is considered to be a nephew, Leonardo (son of Antonio). Leonardo received a significant bequest from Jacopo’s estate and was expected to continue funding the family’s altar endowment into the future. There are conflicting opinions as to the significance of Leonardo’s gaze. Most think it is an invitation to viewers to join in with the Pesaro in devotion to the Virgin and Child and saints.\(^9\)

The twentieth-century artist Mark Rothko has noted that the function of large paintings was historically to be “grandiose and pompous,” words that can apply to the Pesaro Altarpiece. He further claimed that his intent in painting large pictures was to make them “intimate and human,” because “you are in it.”\(^10\) Leonardo’s gaze enables the viewer to share the viewpoint of the Pesaro within the large painting. Furthermore, the space between Jacopo and Francesco serves as a “guaranteed vantage point” for the viewer.\(^11\) Perhaps Titian already knew the importance of evoking human intimacy through the size of his painting, its composition, and the overt actions of his figures.

It has been suggested that these family members are represented chronologically according to their ages: Francesco, Antonio, Giovanni, Fantino, and Leonardo.\(^12\) The contract between

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\(^9\) By contrast, Patricia Meilman, *Titian and the Altarpiece in Renaissance Venice* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 14-15, suggests that Leonardo’s gaze “reinforces our exclusion from the tightly knit groups.”


Titian and the Pesaro family specifically required the Pesaro to be painted in full kneeling profile.\textsuperscript{103} Since Titian cropped Fantino’s image and composed two of his brothers and nephew such that parts of their bodies are hidden has not been explained, but these may be devices to express their subordinate status. Or perhaps the Pesaro just bowed to Titian’s artistic sensibilities.\textsuperscript{104}

Jacopo is accompanied or flanked on his left by a soldier clad in armor—sometimes referred to as the standard-bearer or knight—and two dark-skinned infidels, a Turk wearing a white turban and a Moor, who some think is a slave. The literature is inconclusive as to the identity of the soldier. It is possible, that this figure was intended as no more than a generic representation of a warrior.\textsuperscript{105} Some have speculated that he might be a portrait of Benedetto Pesaro, but this idea may be dismissed by referring to Benedetto’s rivalry with Jacopo Pesaro, as well as to Benedetto’s clean-shaven visage on his nearby tomb. Other commentators, beginning with Vasari, have more plausibly identified him as the warrior saint George. However, the iconography of St. George calls for a clean-shaven rather than a bearded figure, who should be carrying a lance rather than a banner or standard.\textsuperscript{106} Still more plausible, because of its patriotic connotations, is the theory identifying the figure as St. Theodore, another warrior saint and one

\textsuperscript{103} Humfrey, \textit{Altarpiece in Renaissance Venice}, 304.
\textsuperscript{104} Bruce Cole, \textit{The Renaissance Artist at Work} (New York: Harper and Rowe, Publishers, 1983), 165-66, recounts that this was a time when portraiture was evolving away from the pure profile to include three-quarter and full face, making eye contact with the viewer.
\textsuperscript{106} Philip Fehl, “The Pesaro Madonna,” in \textit{Decorum and Wit: The Poetry of Venetian Painting} (Vienna, IRSA, 1992), 34, 36, makes these observations. Previously, Estelle M. Hurl, \textit{Titian} (Boston, New York, Chicago, and San Francisco: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1901), 80, had considered St. George to be an appropriate candidate, since he was not only a warrior saint but also a “patron of Venice.” Although such was not the case, Muir, \textit{Civic Ritual in Renaissance Venice}, 94-97, notes that sixteenth-century Venetians honored St. George because the church of San Giorgio Maggiore claimed to possess the relic of his head.
with specific Venetian connections, since Theodore was the first patron saint of Venice and second only to St. Mark, who replaced him, as a political and military symbol of the Republic.  

More intriguing is the argument suggesting that the soldier is St. Maurice, whose name would be a punning reference to the Battle of Santa Maura. This identification seems to have achieved currency among scholars, although there is little evidence to support it.  

Maurice was a third-century warrior saint from Thebes in Egypt. A Christian convert who was martyred for refusing to worship pagan Roman gods, St. Maurice is best known as the “first saint to be portrayed as a black man in Western Christian iconography” (figure 17 is an example). The name Maurice derives from the word “Moorish,” and he is often represented as dark-skinned and dressed as a Roman soldier or in medieval armor with a red cross on his chest. Thus St. Maurice’s proper iconography seems to preclude serious consideration for his appearance in the Pesaro Altarpiece, especially since he has no known connection with the city of Venice, the Pesaro, or the Franciscans.

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107 This identification goes back at least as far as the early nineteenth century, appearing in Giannantonio Moschini, Guida per la Città di Venezia (Venice, 1815), 194.
108 See, among others, Hope, Titian, 46, and Goffen, Piety and Patronage, 166. According to Fehl, “Pesaro Madonna,” 36, the figure is “customarily identified as St. Maurice.”
Any reference to St. Michael the Archangel as the soldier standard-bearer is conspicuously absent from the literature. Using the same argument employed in interpreting Titian’s *St. Peter Enthroned, with Donor and Pope*—that Pope Alexander VI had to die and attain heaven in order to stand in the presence of St. Peter—we can similarly conclude that the standard-bearer in the *Pesaro Altarpiece* can only be a saint. Furthermore, the fact that the soldier-saint is bearded—like St. Peter—helps to distinguish him from the contemporary world of the clean-shaven Pesaro.

Before explaining why St. Michael is a sensible choice, two possible anomalies must be considered. Unlike most angels in the history of art, the warrior in the painting is not only bearded but also wingless. Although no Venetian precedents can be cited, early Christian depictions of bearded and wingless angels are not unknown. Any reference to St. Michael the Archangel as the soldier standard-bearer is conspicuously absent from the literature. Using the same argument employed in interpreting Titian’s *St. Peter Enthroned, with Donor and Pope*—that Pope Alexander VI had to die and attain heaven in order to stand in the presence of St. Peter—we can similarly conclude that the standard-bearer in the *Pesaro Altarpiece* can only be a saint. Furthermore, the fact that the soldier-saint is bearded—like St. Peter—helps to distinguish him from the contemporary world of the clean-shaven Pesaro.

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111 Marco Bussagli, “Angels: From their Origins to the Middle Ages Theology and Iconography,” in *Between God and Man: Angels in Italian Art*, ed. Robin C. Dietrick (Jackson, Mississippi: Mississippi Museum of Art, 2007), 16, discusses the early Christian depiction of angels in art as wingless and with a beard, which, although rare, is significant.
A well-known example from the early sixteenth century is Michelangelo’s fresco of a wingless angel expelling Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel, which predates the Pesaro Altarpiece by several years (figure 20). Michelangelo’s Last Judgment (1536-41), also in the Sistine Chapel, omits wings from angels and

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112 Dr. Bussagli, Professor, Accademia delle Belle Arte in Rome, cautions against the significance of St. Michael’s wingless representation in this statue, believing that archangels in cinquecento art “must” include wings. Furthermore, he wisely observed that the missing lance in the Frari statue raises the question of whether St. Michael is similarly missing his “original wings.” I appreciate his bringing this to my attention in personal correspondence. However, the shallow niche in which this statue is located and the small amount of space in which wings might have been included discount a “missing original wings” theory, in my opinion.
provides an artist’s rationale for their omission “perhaps because they seemed hindrances to the expression of bodily perfection as he understood it.”\textsuperscript{113} Representations of archangels with beards appear to be “sporadic” during the \textit{cinquecento}. One example is an early fifteenth-century fresco in a Franciscan church at Galatina in Puglia (figure 21).\textsuperscript{114} Additionally, although archangels have male names, they are considered to be neither male nor female. The standard-bearer in the \textit{Pesaro Altarpiece} is definitely a bearded male, which runs counter to the norm.

\textsuperscript{113} Hartt and Wilkins, \textit{History of Italian Renaissance Art}, 693.
\textsuperscript{114} I am grateful to Professor Bussagli for identifying “sporadic” (his word) examples from the fourth to seventeenth centuries and providing me with his copy of the fresco at the Church of St. Catherine of Alexandria (figure 21).
Absent timely Venetian examples of bearded angels in art, contemporary grooming styles offer insight to local traditions. A procession in the Piazza San Marco (figure 22) painted by Gentile Bellini in 1496 captures a cross-section of Venetian male society and does not include a single beard, indicating the prevailing fashion. However, the early cinquecento was a transitional period in which once forsaken beards were returning to vogue. We only have to look at male portraits painted around the second decade of the sixteenth century to see that beards were becoming common (figures 23-24). The argument that a bearded St. Michael would add to the impression of separation of his heavenly domain from the earthly realm of the clean-shaven Pesaro is countered by the reality of contemporary fashion. Therefore, we should consider the possibility that the Pesaro, an old-line family, were set in the clean-shaven tradition. Earlier, we saw Titian’s disregard for iconographic purity in his rendition of Peter’s red dress in *St. Peter*.

115 Fehl, “Pesaro Madonna,” 36, refers to the effigy of Benedetto Pesaro on his Frari monument (begun 1503) as clean-shaven, “in keeping with the fashion for gentlemen of the day.”
Enthroned, with Donor and Pope. So we are left to speculate that perhaps Titian, like Michelangelo, preferred to express his own artistry, which is, indeed, intrinsic to the Pesaro Altarpiece.

Bearing all of this in mind, cogent arguments serve to identify the warrior in the painting as St. Michael the Archangel, who has great significance for the Franciscans, foremost as the victorious soldier and standard-bearer for Christ, who receives the souls of the saints and leads them into paradise.\textsuperscript{116} St. Francis was noted for his personal devotion to and love for Michael “because it is the [archangel’s] task to bring souls before God.”\textsuperscript{117} The stigmatization of St. Francis is closely associated with the cult of St. Michael. It was Francis’ veneration of Michael that motivated his spiritual retreat to Monte della Verna, during which he received the stigmata. The Franciscans of the Frari were very much sympathetic to such a view, as there has been a chapel dedicated to St. Michael the Archangel in the church since 1348 (figures 9 and 19 right panel).\textsuperscript{118} Furthermore, angels in general are significant to Franciscans. St. Francis is considered to be the Angel of the Sixth Seal from the Book of Revelations. The cupid-like angels holding a crucifix in the upper portion of the painting reinforce both the Franciscan association with angels and their veneration of the cross. St. Francis’ stigmata are considered a divine approval of the saint and his order as well as of his power as mediator during the Last Judgment.\textsuperscript{119} There can be no doubt that the Franciscans related to their founder, applauded his divine endorsement, and understood his mission to be symbolized by St. Michael leading souls to heaven.

\textsuperscript{117} Goffen, \textit{Piety and Patronage}, 20.
\textsuperscript{118} Marini, \textit{Frari’s Basilica}, 25.
\textsuperscript{119} Goffen, \textit{Piety and Patronage}, 20, thoroughly develops the associations among St. Francis, St. Michael the Archangel, and angels in general, but overlooks their relevance to the \textit{Pesaro Altarpiece}. Fehl, “Pesaro Madonna,” 38, identifies the crucifix in the painting as the true cross, which Jacopo served in his papal crusade; he also claims that it also represents the gift of salvation upon which the exemplary Pesaro meditate. Bussagli, “Angels: Theology and Iconography,” 19-20, discusses the depiction of angels as \textit{putti} or cupid-like. Such associations reflected the general Renaissance interest in Classical antiquity, as well as a theological didacticism that related angelic nature to the winds that give wings to angels.
Furthermore, given that Titian’s altarpiece is located in the family’s funerary chapel, it may be significant that St. Michael the Archangel was to be “invoked for a good death,” thus providing spiritual relevance for the Pesaro. The Catholic mass for the dead includes an offertory anthem to St. Michael. He is “charged with the care of all departed souls,” and as “standard-bearer [my emphasis] may introduce them to the holy light.” Thus St. Michael the Archangel would have been another relevant messenger upon whom the Pesaro could meditate for the salvation of their souls.

The soldier-saint ascends the stairs of the throne, one level higher than the Pesaro. In his left hand, he carries a flag bearing the emblem of Pope Alexander VI—the Borgia coat of arms surmounted by the crossed keys and triple tiara of the papacy—as well as the Pesaro escutcheon in the lower section, all of which is topped by laurel or olive leaves symbolizing either victory or peace. With his right hand, he leads two captives as an offering to the Virgin and Child in a manner that has been described as “a gentle act of tender and noble mercy.” Another explanation deems that the scene “explicitly refers to the Venetian containment of Moslems, with the African and Turk brought under the leadership of Bishop Jacopo, to acknowledge the hegemony of the church,” in which case a laurel branch of victory would be atop the standard. While their postures are not clearly visible, the captives appear to be standing in the presence of

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120 Giorgi, Saints, 274, identifies this as a special devotion to St. Michael.
122 Wethey, Paintings of Titian, vol. 1, 102, describes the leaves as laurel, while Hartt and Wilkins, History of Italian Renaissance Art, 644, use the term “olive-crowned” to describe the same foliage.
123 Fehl, “Pesaro Madonna,” 34.
124 Francis Amesk-Lewis and Anka Bednarek, eds., Decorum in Renaissance Narrative Art (London: University of London, 1992), 114. Cecilia Sica, “Between God and Man: The World of Angels and Images of a Path between Heaven and Earth,” in Between God and Man, ed. Dietrich, 25, notes that archangels had the greatest contact with the world and the lives of human beings. They have individual names and iconography. Since Michael is a warrior angel who led the heavenly militia against the rebel angels, Jacopo Pesaro could have related to him vicariously.
saints,\textsuperscript{125} which could possibly denote their death, conversion, and attainment of heaven. If so, the scene might be interpreted as a prayer for peace and the spiritual conversion of the captives symbolized by an olive branch above the flag.\textsuperscript{126}

The intercessory role of the angels in the painting may be further emphasized by the onomastic association of Jacopo with the Old Testament patriarch Jacob. A biblical depiction of the angelic intermediary function is found in Genesis 28:11-17, where Jacob dreamt of a ladder that was used by angels to travel between heaven and earth. Artists have frequently pictured Jacob’s ladder with stairs leading to heaven (figures 25-26), and this could be the case with the Pesaro Altarpiece. Jacopo’s isolation within the painting further dramatizes the biblical association of this story with angelic intermediation.\textsuperscript{127}

\textsuperscript{125} Fehl, “Pesaro Madonna,” 34, characterizes the captives as a “Turk and his Negro slave standing [my emphasis] behind Jacopo Pesaro.”

\textsuperscript{126} Describing the first two decades of the cinquecento as marked by difficult wars to maintain Venetian territories, Humfrey, \textit{Painting in Renaissance Venice}, 115, 117, observes that art propagandized Venice’s defensive and peace-seeking foreign policy.

\textsuperscript{127} According to Dietrich, \textit{Between God and Man}, 82, the stone upon which Jacob rested foreshadowed the altar he would erect to honor the place of his dream. It is easy to speculate that in our painting Jacopo (Jacob) is portrayed kneeling before his stairs (ladder), upon which St. Michael the Archangel acts as his heavenly intermediary. It is also not much of a stretch to envision the remnant of the original background of the painting as an illusionistic reference to the actual altar.
St. Peter is centered horizontally and pivotally positioned at the next higher level just below the Virgin and Child and at the center of double diagonals extending from Jacopo’s head to that of the Virgin and from Francesco’s to the top of the banner. He is portrayed in his typical iconography of yellow over blue garments and an aged face with white hair and beard; a silver key with a gold knob is visible below his feet. As chronicled in the Gospel of St. Matthew 16:19, Jesus said to Peter, “And I will give thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven.” Accordingly, St. Peter is “regarded as the guardian of the Gate of Heaven and his attribute is a key, or a bunch of keys.” He stops from reading a book to gaze down at Jacopo on his right while leaning back in contrapposto to intercede with the Virgin on Jacopo’s behalf. The purpose of his central position—he is also the only fully frontal figure—is not adequately discussed in the literature. It could highlight the central role of the Church, which Christ built upon his pietra. Peter. In his role as papal saint, Peter was depicted as sponsoring Jacopo in Titian’s earlier ex

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128 Ann Sutherland Harris, “Letters to the Editor,” *Art Bulletin* 54 (March 1972): 117, comments on D’Ancona’s failure (see note 149) to spot the second key on the step. Crowe and Cavalcaselle, *Life and Times*, 307, refer to the expected “keys” of St. Peter lying on the steps, and David Rosand, “Titian in the Frari,” *Art Bulletin* 53 (June 1971): 203, note 27, claims that a second, barely discernible key, lies on the tread near St. Peter’s foot. A second key is not readily visible to the naked eye, as corroborated by Mark and Susan Zucker—art history professors at Louisiana State University—during a trip to the Frari in the summer of 2007. Whenever two keys are illustrated for Peter’s iconography, one is typically gold and the other silver. Since the key in the *Pesaro Altarpiece* is both silver and gold, it may conceivably represent both ideas—heaven (gold) and earth (silver).

129 O’Connell, “Catholic Dictionary,” 182, describes the symbolism of the keys as based upon Jesus’ promise to entrust his entire household to followers of Peter.
voto canvas for the same patron, and St. Peter has also been identified as a patron saint of the Franciscans. St. Francis is positioned on the same saintly level as St. Peter on the right-hand side of the painting. He is the founder of the Franciscan Order of friars of which the Conventuals at the Frari were an offshoot, as well as the patron saint of Francesco Pesaro. He is represented in traditional iconography as follows: brown robe with knotted rope sash, tonsured head, and barely visible stigmata. The stigmata were considered a heavenly approval of the saint and his Order guaranteeing him his role as a compassionate intermediary. He is gesturing between the Pesaro below him and the Christ Child above in his role as intercessor.

St. Anthony of Padua, the principal Franciscan saint after Francis himself, is shown clad in Franciscan garb and is somewhat lost in the shadow behind St. Francis. He holds a book symbolizing the public life of scholarship and service of the Conventuals to the faithful. The Frari is the only church in Venice with a Confraternity of St. Anthony, which further accounts for his presence here. He is also the patron saint of Antonio Pesaro, and seems to look simultaneously out at the viewer and down towards the family.

Although no throne is visible, the Virgin is seated on a high socle looking down toward St. Peter, Jacopo, and the captives. She is not painted in the traditional frontal or central position

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130 Goffen, *Piety and Patronage*, 110, 225, note 8, identifies Peter as the patron saint of St. Francis himself, whom Franciscans compared to the church founder, Peter. Goffen also states that Peter was Jacopo Pesaro’s patron saint, but she cites no convincing evidence to support the claim.

131 Gary Wills, *Venice: Lion City* (New York: Washington Square Press, 2001), 287, describes St. Francis’ posture as reminiscent of that in Giovanni Bellini’s *Ecstasy of St. Francis* in the Frick Collection, New York, but whether or not this famous painting depicts the stigmatization has never been settled. In any case, the pose of St. Francis in the *Pesaro Altarpiece* does suggest a deliberate display of the wounds.

132 Since Anthony appears with no unequivocal attributes, it is worth noting that Tietze-Conrat, “Pesaro Madonna,” 181, observed “some resemblance to the saint in Titian’s murals at the Scuola del Santo” in Padua.

133 Bellini’s triptych of the Immaculate Conception for the Pesaro Chapel in the Frari’s sacristy (figure 11) similarly omits a throne for Mary, possibly implying that Mary herself is the “Seat of Wisdom” on which Christ, the “true wisdom,” sits enthroned.
that distanced her from her patrons, but at an angle so as to appear engaged with them. She is
dressed in her traditional blue mantle over a red dress and holds the nude Christ Child, who
stands looking down at St. Francis. A white veil covers both the Virgin and the Child,
symbolically identifying Mary as both mother and bride of Christ.\(^{134}\) The Child lifts the mantle,
which is also a symbol of her protective powers as well as the shroud in which Christ would be
wrapped after his Crucifixion.\(^{135}\) The nude
Christ Child raises his leg and glances toward
St. Francis, while simultaneously leaning back
against Mary, whose hand he touches.
Allusions to Christ’s Passion continue to
appear in the scene of two \textit{putti} lifting a large
wooden cross in the dense clouds that float
above all the figures. One \textit{putto} has his back to
us and legs positioned so that they appear to
echo the image of the Christ Child in reverse.
The clouds cast a dark shadow on the column
to the right, ominously presaging the darkness
of Christ’s Crucifixion and the inevitable
deaths of the Pesaro.\(^{136}\)

\(^{134}\) For the Christ Child’s nuptial gesture of pulling Mary’s veil over his head, see Leo Steinberg, “Animations,” \textit{Art Bulletin} 71 (September, 1989): 490, including a thorough discussion of the Virgin as mother and spouse. Renaissance artists were particularly sensitive to representing Jesus as an infant so as to avoid any suggestion of incestuous scandal.


\(^{136}\) See Luke 1:79 for a prophecy of Christ “to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death.”
The painted architectural setting of the work is known to have had a long gestation period, possibly owing to Titian’s awareness that the altarpiece would be difficult to view in its intended location. In any case, the background is thought to have been painted from 1519 to 1525, while the figures were completed in 1525-26.137 The asymmetrical composition is thought to have been planned to consider the viewer’s perspective upon first glimpsing the altar diagonally from the nave (figure 27), and then viewing it frontally from a position right before it (figure 15). Viewers would see the altar on the left wall parallel to their walking path towards the main apse. Approaching it from the left, they would have a similar perspective as Jacopo, viewing the Virgin and Child from the painted steps in front of the throne. If all this is true, then it is clear that Titian keenly exploited the surrounding environment of the Frari for his painting.138 However, suggestions that the two large painted columns deliberately mimic the actual piers of the Frari, creating the illusion that the painting is an extension of the church, can easily be dismissed by direct comparison (figures 28-29).139 The torus and plinth of the painted and actual column bases are clearly different. Furthermore, the smooth column shafts of the painting are monolithic, while the shafts of the actual columns have conspicuous sections.140

In fact, x-ray photography during the painting’s restoration in 1977 revealed two previous changes to the architectural backdrop during the long period of execution. Installments of

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137 Pedrocco, Titian, 142; and Biadene, Titian, 194. This was also a thriving business period for Titian, filled with important commissions including the Gozzi Altarpiece (1520), the Averoldi Polyptych (1522), frescoes for Doge Gritti in the Palazzo Ducale (1523), three canvases for Alfonso d’Este’s Camerino in Ferrara (1518-23/25), and numerous portraits. X-rays of the painting reveal pentimenti identified with three different backgrounds.

138 David Rosand, Painting in Sixteenth-Century Venice: Titian, Veronese, Tintoretto, rev. ed. (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 41-43, 47. See also Sherman, Only Connect, 99, with the opinion that the altarpiece was designed to be seen frontally, but with the viewer retaining a “subliminal” sense of having reached it obliquely.

139 Fehl, “Pesaro Madonna,” 42-43, is one of several scholars who finds deliberate correlations between the architecture of the church and that of the painting.

140 The actual columns are not made with Classical drums, but have segmented tiers.
Titian’s fee are associated with his starting and restarting the background. Initially, a vaulted loggia creating a sense of an indoor chapel was painted in an oblique view with an illusionistic linkage to the actual marble frame (figure 30). There is an incongruous columnar base almost in the center of the finished painting above St. Peter’s head that could be a remnant of the original plan, as it seems to reflect the similar architecture of the frame. The second plan incorporated a diagonally draped curtain between two large Corinthian capitals (figure 31).

141 Wethey, *Paintings of Titian*, vol. 3, 259, identifies the contract dated April 28, 1519, for which Titian received four payments that year totaling forty-one ducats, three payments totaling twenty-two ducats in 1522, fifteen ducats in 1525, and two final payments through June 30, 1526, for a grand total of 102 ducats. Biadene, *Titian*, 194, relates that Titian was paid 102 ducats, including six for the stretcher. Hope, *Titian*, 73-74, equates the fee to Titian’s charge for an important portrait. Humfrey, *Altarpiece in Renaissance Venice*, 152-53, notes that the average fee for his surveyed altarpieces was 110 ducats, which included materials, frame, delivery, and installation.

142 Thanks to Baton Rouge artist Susie Blyskal for bringing this to my attention. I believe that this “remnant” further highlights Titian’s artistic preference for painterly illusion over accurate representation.
Finally, Titian settled on two enormous columns extending through the top of the painting and seeming to reach endlessly up into the sky. They are enigmatic in the sense that they seem to have neither architectural purpose, nor relation to each other spatially. One is noticeably thinner than the other, suggesting it is further back in space, yet they both have a similar proximity to the figures, creating a visual paradox. Thus they appear to have primarily an aesthetic rather than a

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143 Humfrey, *Altarpiece in Renaissance Venice*, 306, cites the original scientific research and reconstruction by Francesco Valcanover prior to the 1977 restoration. Valcanover himself, *La Pala Pesaro*, in *Quaderni dell Soprintendenza ai beni artistici e storici di Venezia* (1979), 67, states that the first fictive architecture conformed to the “actual” structure of the Lombardesque altar, but that Titian then replaced this “illusionistic” architecture with two grandiose capitals covered crosswise by a wide piece of drapery falling vertically on the right. Wills, *Venice*, 293, quotes the architect Sebastiano Serlio to the effect that “Corinthian, the most feminine column, is appropriate for churches dedicated to the Virgin.”
functional purpose, bringing unity to the entire composition, adding grandeur to it, and creating
an impression of depth behind the figures.\footnote{Hope, \emph{Titian}, 47, also notes that the columnar feature was widely admired and imitated in Venetian altarpieces into the eighteenth century. Large columns were also incorporated into other types of paintings, even by non-Italian artists, such as Van Dyck’s portraits.}

At one time in the recent past, there had been some scholarly debate over whether these columns were painted by Titian or added by a painter from the next century.\footnote{See especially Staale Sinding-Larsen, “Titian’s Madonna di Ca’ Pesaro and Its Historical Significance,” \emph{Institutum Romanum Norvegiae} 1 (1962): 139-69; also idem and Helen Ettlinger, “Letters to the Editor: The Columns in Titian’s Pesaro Altarpiece,” \emph{Art Bulletin} 62 (June 1980): 304.} More recently, however, technological investigation has put that debate to rest, and Titian is generally recognized as the artist of the entire painting as we know it today. The unrealism of the simulated architecture suggests that further interpretation may be useful. Columns are emblematic of mysterious places and form a link in paintings between earthly and spiritual values.\footnote{Georges Didi-Huberman, \emph{Fra Angelico: Dissemblance and Figuration}, trans. Jane Marie Todd (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1995), 149.} Apart from this general idea, scholars have made several different proposals regarding their significance in the \emph{Pesaro Altarpiece}, interpreting them to represent the Gates of Heaven, the Temple of Solomon, and the Immaculate Conception.\footnote{See Goffen, \emph{Piety and Patronage}, 76-77, 132, for a summary.}

One scriptural prefiguration of the Virgin identifies her with the Gate of Heaven and the Closed Gate of Ezekiel. Accordingly, it can be argued that the painting’s architectural background looks like a church or building entrance, and that the columns lead upward to heaven. The Virgin is then seen as being seated within the Gate of Heaven, with its keeper, St. Peter, nearby. Since St. Peter is represented uncharacteristically with only one key at his feet, this singular key establishes his link with the Gate, rather than representing an element of his traditional iconography; thus, the Gate of Heaven is also the Closed Gate of Ezekiel.\footnote{D’Ancona, \emph{Iconography of the Immaculate Conception}, 70, note 162, subscribes to the theory that St. Peter’s usual two keys are symbolic of earthly and spiritual power, but concludes that one key alone cannot represent his
Reference to the columns as those of the Temple of Solomon derives from III Kings 7:15, where they are described and named Jachin and Booz (Boaz). However, the scripture also indicates that the Temple pillars were made of brass and were of spiral design with vegetal capitals. The columns of Bernini’s baldacchino at St. Peter’s in Rome are noted examples of the traditional imagery of the pillars at the entrance to the Temple of Solomon. Clearly, however, the columns of the Pesaro Altarpiece are unrelated to this tradition.

One persistent reference to these columns as symbolic of the Immaculate Conception is predicated on an incorrect translation of Ecclesiasticus 24:7. According to this theory, the columns are a direct illustration of the scriptural passage “et thronus meus in columna nubis,” which has been translated to read “and my throne is a cloudy pillar.” This reading permits one to interpret the columns in the painting, partly covered by clouds, as a direct visualization of Ecclesiasticus. But the correct translation—“and my throne is a pillar of clouds”—supports no such interpretation, since the columns are obviously not made of clouds.

While there is a considerable body of literature establishing a relationship between the passage from Ecclesiasticus and a defense of the Immaculate Conception, there is no evidence to associate the iconography of Titian’s columns with the doctrine. To be sure, the painting does have a clear

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149 See also II Paralipomenon (Chronicles) 4:11.
150 Helen S. Ettlinger, “The Iconography of the Columns in Titian’s Pesaro Altarpiece,” Art Bulletin 61 (March 1979): 59, 66. Ettlinger also incorrectly gives the King James Version of the Bible as the source of the quote. Ecclesiasticus is an apocryphal book that is not contained in Protestant bibles, like King James, but is in Catholic versions. Ettlinger has graciously acknowledged her error in a personal communication, but failed to provide the requested actual source that she used. Goffen, Piety and Patronage, 132, 90, uses a correct interpretation of Ecclesiasticus, but still refers to Ettlinger and endorses her mistaken interpretation of the iconography.
151 Special thanks to Althea Ashe of the Department of Foreign Languages and Literatures at Louisiana State University for corroborating the correct translation, which is the same as that in O’Connell, The Holy Bible. Coincidentally, Dr. Ashe had visited the Frari in 2006, saw the Pesaro Altarpiece, and concurs with my conclusion.
connection to the Immaculate Conception, but only because it is located in a chapel with that dedication.\textsuperscript{152}

Finally, two more interpretations for the iconography of the columns may be developed to set up a conclusion that discounts such improvisations. The first association is with the Columns of Justice in the Piazzetta of San Marco, which are well-known attributes of Venice. They were the first monuments seen by passengers arriving in the city by ship, be they visitors or citizens returning from mercantile or military endeavors. An eighteenth-century painting depicts how these columns might have looked to arriving travelers (figure 32). In the \textit{Pesaro Altarpiece}, Jacopo is positioned in front of the two columns and segregated from the rest of the Pesaro. Since he was a Dominican bishop—an Order that strongly opposed the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception—his pictorial isolation enabled Titian to characterize Jacopo without regard to the altar’s \textit{titulus}. The Virgin is associated with Venice, just as Jacopo pays homage to the Virgin, who personified the Republic.

Thus it is permissible to speculate that the two columns in the \textit{Pesaro Altarpiece} pay homage to Venice, just as Jacopo pays homage to the Virgin, who personified the Republic.

\textsuperscript{152} Tietze-Conrat, “Pesaro Madonna,” 177; see note 63. Wethey, \textit{Paintings of Titian}, vol. 1, 102, states that the painting has “no part” in the Immaculate Conception tradition; however, he fails to notice the obvious \textit{titulus} location, which negates his conclusion.
A case can also be made for interpreting the columns as a complimentary reference to the most powerful monarch in Europe. Twin pillars were included in the impresa of Charles I, King of Spain (figure 33). He subsequently became Holy Roman Emperor Charles V in 1519, which coincides with Titian’s commencement of the *Pesaro Altarpiece*. In 1521, Charles invaded Northern Italy, which had previously been controlled by France, and triumphed over Francis I, who, in defeat, signed the Treaty of Madrid in 1526, which coincides with Titian’s completion of the painting. We have seen that Titian was the first artist to develop an international reputation and attract patronage from the leading religious and ruling nobility. We also know that he was politically astute. Could the two columns in the *Pesaro Altarpiece* have represented Titian’s homage to Charles V, who soon became a lifelong patron and honored the artist with titles and medals?

Discussions over the iconography of the columns in Titian’s *Pesaro Altarpiece* have engaged art historians for decades, but all the mentioned interpretations should be considered speculative, as they are based on undocumented hypotheses. It is reasonable to conclude that, so far, art historians have not established satisfactory interpretations of the iconographic significance of Titian’s enigmatic columns.

In any case, these columns also reflect contemporary Venetian taste in architecture. Venice was improving its image after the Turkish conquest of Constantinople (1453) and

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asserting its imperial claims through a grand building program.  

It has been said that “The experience of Venice’s architecture takes on the unreal quality of a theatrical production,” and that its structures “share many features with stage design.”  

As painter to the Republic and intimate of Doge Andrea Gritti (reigned 1523-38)—promoter of a renovatio urbis including new architectural styles—Titian would have been attuned to such stylistic nuances. Titian considered architecture as a pictorial element in his compositions. Therefore, it is likely that his progressive changes to the background of the Pesaro Altarpiece reflected his ideas about the stylistic evolution of Venetian High Renaissance architecture.

In conclusion, it can be stated that the Pesaro Altarpiece is a religious painting for the chapel of the Immaculate Conception and a funerary altarpiece for the Pesaro family. It is a Venetian pala and sacra conversazione but transforms these traditions in novel ways. By creating an asymmetrical composition, Titian was able to introduce the donors in traditional profile views, but by placing the Virgin and Child on the right-hand side, rather than the center, he was able to create a sense of interaction and engagement that is lacking in the traditional sacra conversazione. The altarpiece is one of eight Marian paintings in the Frari and its iconography is in keeping with the Franciscans’ direction to honor the Virgin, an outward sign of their piety and a most important Venetian attribute. The Pesaro depicted in the painting are buried under and adjacent to the altarpiece. While most scholarship names Jacopo as the patron, it was “probably a joint commission between two brothers, Jacopo and Francesco.”

None of the saints have haloes, but they are distinguished from the mortals through their iconography, their actions, and their expressions. While there is action at the heavenly plane,

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156 Wills, Venice, 318.
159 Stemp, Secret Language, 184.
there is serenity reflected in the pious meditation of the worldly Pesaro. Unlike earlier artistic traditions that include donors who look in on a scene and appear not to be noticed by the saints, just the opposite occurs here. The saints look upon the Pesaro in a variety of ways. The Pesaro are above but also part of the viewer’s world and unaware of the saintly interaction as they meditate on the salvation of their souls.

At a secular level, the painting may be considered a votive to honor the accomplishments of Jacopo Pesaro for his victory in the papal crusade against the Turks. As a papal legate, Jacopo spent time in Rome, where he would have seen similar works honoring the accomplishments of real people, even though this was not customary in Venice. He was ambitious and tried on several occasions to have his bishopric moved to Venice without success. He was also proud of his accomplishments and annoyed that his cousin, Benedetto, received much attention and took credit for the victory in the Battle of Santa Maura (and promoted such with his funerary sculpture also in the Frari), even though Jacopo was mainly responsible for the feat itself. By the same token, the painting can also be viewed as an expression of the family’s civic pride, another great Venetian value.

It is also a worldly, sensuous, and lushly colored Venetian painting that is enjoyable to behold. There are diagonal and triangular pictorial effects that serve to unify it through “invisible lines of force” in the expressions and gestures of the participants, as well as the placement of color and replication of shapes.\footnote{The expression “invisible lines of force” was first coined by Professor Mark J. Zucker of Louisiana State University.} This provokes a sense of complex but balanced movement, yet the setting is serene. Titian’s use of color did not differentiate foreground and background—rather, form did—in this way setting the standard for a Venetian tradition.\footnote{Wilde, \textit{Venetian Art}, 159-60.} He also established a rich new development in Venetian painting through illusionism and movement.
to lead through and unify the whole painting.\textsuperscript{162} The \textit{Pesaro Altarpiece} marks a transition from early cinquecento painting that focused on bright colors and meticulous attention to surface finish, to a mid-cinquecento approach characterized by looser brushwork, without clearly defined lines, and complementary coloration. Titian added drama and movement to the tradition of the timeless and motionless \textit{sacra conversazione}.\textsuperscript{163} His altarpiece is energetic, with large figures, painted with bold light and color in response to the changing environment, that elicit emotion rather than Bellinesque tranquility.\textsuperscript{164}

Titian understood the two-dimensional constraint of his medium and chose painterly devices over precise realism or perspective. He used \textit{repoussoir} elements to create the illusion of depth, and his repetitive use of shapes against negative spaces adds interest for a viewer’s probing eye.\textsuperscript{165} While it epitomizes the Venetian High Renaissance, the \textit{Pesaro Altarpiece} also inspired the future period of Baroque art.

\textsuperscript{162} Ibid., 173.
\textsuperscript{163} Humfrey, \textit{Altarpiece in Renaissance Venice}, 248.
\textsuperscript{164} Ibid., 301.
\textsuperscript{165} Special thanks to Baton Rouge artist and Louisiana State University professor of art Michael Crespo for his insights into Titian’s technique, which helped form my conclusion for the painting in the following chapter.
Chapter 7: Conclusion

Titian was a master of creating art that appealed to every stakeholder involved with his paintings. This thesis has addressed two early paintings: *St. Peter Enthroned, with Donor and Pope* and the *Pesaro Altarpiece*. Conclusions about their meanings are presented from the viewpoints of Titian, the Pesaro, and the Franciscans of the Frari, not to mention the viewpoints of art historians—thus “different strokes for different folks.”

Dating for *St. Peter Enthroned, with Donor and Pope* is fixed at 1506 to the first half of 1507, establishing it as Titian’s earliest extant work. It is an *ex voto* painting and a self-promotional one, commemorating Jacopo Pesaro’s high ecclesiastical and military commission by the Holy See. Scholarship that narrows its interpretation to the Battle of Santa Maura has been discounted as myopic. Religious interpretations of Christianity’s victory over paganism are interesting, but irrelevant to the probable private venue of the painting. Any relevance of such exogenous descriptions may be understood within Venetian cultural norms that rationalized personal promotion as a reflection of civic and religious ardor. Titian’s most “primitive” and Bellinesque painting shows tentative steps in the direction of the *colorito* and loose brushwork that became his trademark, as well as providing a glimmer of insight into the competitive nature that drove him to seek fame.

The *Pesaro Altarpiece* remains *in situ* in a public religious setting that also allowed for secular aggrandizement. It is a religious painting honoring the Immaculate Conception, which is the *titulus* of the altar on which it is located. This meaning reflects the original direction of the Franciscans, in whose church it is displayed, and the focus of the Scuola that maintained it. It also includes key patron saints as intermediaries and models of ideal Franciscan behavior. It is a funerary altarpiece for the Pesaro family, whose members are buried in adjacent wall and floor
tombs. It is a devotional image reflecting the Pesaro family’s religiosity, all the while representing them in the sumptuous dress of the high-ranking patriciate and in a location that has honored them for centuries. It is a contractual reminder to the Franciscans and the Scuola dell’Immacolata to pray for the souls of the deceased Pesaro. It is an invitation for viewers to join in salvific meditation with the Pesaro, as well as to appreciate their family’s social status. It also provides separate acknowledgments of Jacopo Pesaro’s special honor as papal legate and of his military success in the Turkish crusade. Art historical attempts at additional interpretations, such as those that purport to account for the columns, have been considered spurious and extraneous to the real intent of the painting.

If this is all that can be stated about the Pesaro Altarpiece, then I do not think it would have reached the cult status it has attained. Titian adroitly addressed the needs of each stakeholder in the painting, but in an artistic manner that added to his own fame and prestige. He altered the tradition of the static sacra conversazione by designing an asymmetrical grouping of figures with diagonal and triangular effects that imbue the painting with visual movement. Elements in the composition do not follow the strict rules of Albertian one-point perspective. Titian used his own sensibilities to create pictorial tension as well as to add a mystique of illusions and revelations, as captured by the following sentiment:

Too often art historians write of pictorial space as though it replicated physical space, whereas Renaissance painting at its most refined is a process whereby thought becomes incarnate in design: in doing so space becomes luminous, self-evident, revelatory.¹⁶⁶

¹⁶⁶ Hills, Venetian Color, 171.
It is Titian’s masterful artistry that endears this painting to us more than its intellectual content. It is his painterliness in the widest possible sense of the term—his gift for creating “different strokes for different folks”—that made Titian the leader of the Venetian school with an international reputation that still resonates today.
Bibliography


Vita

Carl Edward Blyskal, a native of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, has lived with his family in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, since 1979. He received a Bachelor of Business Administration degree in 1966 from the University of Miami, Florida, where he was elected to *Who’s Who Among Students in American Universities and Colleges*. He continued his graduate studies at Pennsylvania State University where he earned a Master of Business Administration degree in 1967. He retired after a thirty-year business career in executive positions in the restaurant, bond, newspaper, and real estate industries. He then received a Master of Science degree in finance at Louisiana State University in 2004.

He is enrolled in the graduate program of art history at Louisiana State University, concentrating in Renaissance painting. He is appreciative of Professors H. Parrott Bacot for stimulating an early interest in art history during his first introductory course and subsequently teaching him the Englishness of English art, Darius A. Spieth for demonstrating the breadth of enjoyment for all periods of art, and particularly Mark J. Zucker for nurturing and guiding his interest in the Renaissance, which will continue to enhance his life and travels. He plans to graduate in May 2008.