

ATENEIO VENETO

Rivista di scienze, lettere ed arti
Atti e memorie dell'Ateneio Veneto



1812

ATENEIO VENETO
Rivista semestrale di scienze, lettere ed arti
Atti e memorie dell'Ateneo Veneto
CCX, terza serie 23/II (2024)

Autorizzazione del presidente
del Tribunale di Venezia,
decreto n. 203, 25 gennaio 1960
ISSN: 0004-6558
iscrizione al R.O.C. al n. 10161

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editing e impaginazione
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stampato dalla tipografia
Grafiche Veneziane soc. coop.
Spedizione in abbonamento



ATENEIO VENETO onlus
Istituto di scienze, lettere ed arti
fondato nel 1812
211° anno accademico

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della L.R. n. 17/2019 – art. 32

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ATTI DELL'ATENEO VENETO

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Myriam Pilutti Namer & Giulia A.B. Bordi

THE REUSE OF ANCIENT MATERIALS
IN THE CHURCH OF SAN FANTIN IN VENICE

Introduction

The church of San Fantin in Venice stands as a testament to the city's rich architectural and historical evolution. While its origins in the High Middle Ages remain uncertain, the current structure reflects its Renaissance transformation, shaped by successive phases of construction and renovation. Despite the lack of definitive evidence regarding its earliest form, a multidisciplinary approach combining digital modeling, material analysis, and archival research has provided new insights into its development.

This article is structured into two sections, each offering a distinct perspective on the church's architectural history. The first section, by Myriam Pilutti Namer, examines the reuse of materials in Venetian architecture, with particular attention to the types of marble incorporated into the church's fabric. The second section, by Giulia A.B. Bordi, investigates medieval material evidence and archival sources related to two water basins, shedding light on their functional and historical significance.

I. Reuse of ancient materials in Venice

The reuse of ancient materials in Venice was a fundamental practice that shaped the city's architectural development from its early medieval origins through the Renaissance and beyond. This phenomenon was largely influenced by the scarcity of natural stone in the Venetian lagoon, leading to the systematic recovery, transportation, and repurposing of materials from abandoned Roman sites in the *Venetia* and other Mediterranean regions. The practice was not merely a matter of economic necessity but also reflected cultural attitudes toward the past, a pragmatic approach to construction, and Venice's evolving role as a major maritime power.¹

¹ LORENZO LAZZARINI, MYRIAM PILUTTI NAMER, LUIGI SPERTI, *Ancient Marbles and*

The origins of material reuse in Venice date back to the early medieval period, when the settlement was expanding within the lagoon. With no local quarries available, Venetians turned to the nearby abandoned Roman city of *Altinum* and other mainland sites as sources of building materials. These materials, including marble and stone, were either repurposed directly or reworked into new architectural forms. Inscriptions and sculptural elements from earlier periods were frequently incorporated into new structures, demonstrating both a continuity with and a reinterpretation of the Classical tradition.²

From the 11th century onward, as Venice's wealth and technological capabilities grew, the city expanded its sources of reclaimed materials to include regions across the Adriatic and the broader Mediterranean. The conquest of Constantinople in 1204 during the Fourth Crusade played a crucial role in intensifying these practices. Large quantities of Proconnesian marble and other valuable stones were systematically looted from Byzantine buildings and transported to Venice, where they were integrated into civic and religious structures. The Basilica of Saint Mark, one of the most emblematic examples of this phenomenon, features an extraordinary array of reused materials, including columns, capitals, and friezes of varied origins, demonstrating the craftsmen's ability to synthesize diverse artistic influences.³

The organization of spoliation efforts in Venice suggests a high degree of coordination among merchants, patrons, and artisans. Unlike earlier, opportunistic reuse, which relied on nearby sources, the later medieval and Renaissance periods saw a more systematic approach to acquiring materials. Venetian merchants, who traveled extensively for trade, often brought back stone and architectural elements as ballast for their ships. This practice not only ensured a steady supply of building materials but also reinforced Venice's architectural grandeur by incorporating prestigious elements from across the Mediterranean world.

By the Renaissance, reuse remained a defining characteristic of Venetian architecture, though attitudes toward ancient materials

Stones in Venice. Architecture-Sculpture-Reuse, Venice, Istituto Veneto di Scienze, Lettere e Arti, 2024.

² LAZZARINI, PILUTTI NAMER, SPERTI, *Ancient Marbles*, pp. 2-25.

³ LAZZARINI, PILUTTI NAMER, SPERTI, *Ancient Marbles*, pp. 90-181.

evolved. The appreciation for classical antiquity led to more selective reuse, often emphasizing the aesthetic and symbolic value of spolia. The presence of ancient elements in Venetian buildings was not merely functional but became a marker of prestige and continuity with the classical past. This shift is evident in both public monuments and private residences, where columns, reliefs, and decorative elements from earlier periods were deliberately displayed to emphasize historical depth.⁴

Even into the 19th century, the reuse of materials remained an active practice, particularly in restoration projects. More than six hundred stonemasons were documented working in Venice during this period, involved in demolition, reuse, and reconstruction efforts that continued the city's long-standing tradition of material recycling. This ongoing reliance on spolia highlights the resilience of Venetian architectural strategies and the craftsmen's ability to adapt its built environment to changing economic and political circumstances.⁵

1.1. Ancient Marbles in the Church of San Fantin

Among the various types of reused marbles in Venice, three stand out for their historical and symbolic importance: *verde antico*, red porphyry, and Proconnesian marble. These materials, originating from different regions of the ancient Mediterranean, were often repurposed in Venetian churches and palaces, serving both decorative and ideological purposes. The church of San Fantin in Venice is an important example of this practice. One notable element is the use in tondos of *verde antico*, a green-colored marble highly prized in antiquity for its rarity and beauty (Fig. 1). This marble, originally sourced from Greece, was commonly employed in Byzantine and then Venetian architecture due to its appreciation from the emperors of Constantinople.⁶

Red porphyry, another highly significant stone in Venetian architecture that was often employed in the decoration of basilicas and palaces, is particularly notable in San Fantin for its use in the tondos placed under the tomb of Vinciguerra Dandolo (Fig. 2). Red porphy-

⁴ LAZZARINI, PILUTTI NAMER, SPERTI, *Ancient Marbles*, pp. 30-65.

⁵ MYRIAM PILUTTI NAMER, *Spolia e imitazioni a Venezia nell'Ottocento: il Fondaco dei Turchi tra archeologia e cultura del restauro*, Venezia, Istituto Veneto di Scienze, Lettere e Arti, 2016.

⁶ LAZZARINI, PILUTTI NAMER, SPERTI, *Ancient Marbles*, p. 153, with further bibliography.

ry was among the most prestigious materials in antiquity, reserved for emperors and high-ranking officials due to its association with power and divinity. Quarried in Egypt, it was extensively used in Rome and Constantinople and since Medieval time it has been transported to Venice through trade and conquest.⁷

Finally, it is worth mentioning the Proconnesian marble, sourced from the island of Marmara in present-day Turkey, that was the most widely used marble in Venice. Unlike the rarer *verde antico* and red porphyry, Proconnesian marble was easily accessible and available in large quantities, making it the primary material for architectural elements such as columns, capitals, and facades. In San Fantin, the imitation of Proconnesian marble in wood panels plays a crucial role in the church's counter-façade (Fig. 3), contributing to the structure's overall architectural composition⁸. [MPN]

II. The Baptismal Font and the Holy Water Stoup of the Church of San Fantin

The church of San Fantin must have been adorned with precious marbles even in the facies preceding the reconstruction of 1507⁹, since

⁷ LAZZARINI, PILUTTI NAMER, SPERTI, *Ancient Marbles*, pp. 150-151.

⁸ LAZZARINI, PILUTTI NAMER, SPERTI, *Ancient Marbles*, pp. 67-88, 147-148.

⁹ For insights into the different aspects of the church, please refer to the articles published in this issue of the journal. On the history of the church and the annexed *Scuola* see also: FRANCESCO SANSOVINO, *Venetia città nobilissima et singolare, descritta in XIII libri*, Venetia, Iacomo Sansovino, 1581, pp. 46v-48r; GIOVANNI STRINGA, *Venetia città nobilissima, et singolare, descritta già in XIII libri da M. Francesco Sansovino: et hora con molta diligenza corretta, emendata, e più d'un terzo di cose nuove ampliata*, Venetia, Altobello Salicato, 1604, pp. 91r-92r; GIUSTINIANO MARTINIONI, *Venetia città nobilissima et singolare, descritta in XIII libri [...] con aggiunta di tutte le cose notabili della stessa città, fatte, et occorse dall'anno 1580, fino al presente 1663*, Venetia, Steffano Curti, 1663, pp. 119-120; FLAMINIO CORNER, *Ecclesie venete antiquis monumentis nunc etiam primum editis illustratae [...], decas decima quarta, et decima quinta, et decadis decime sextae pars prior*, vol. XV, Venetiæ, Jo. Baptistæ Pasquali, 1749, pp. 318-337; FLAMINIO CORNER, *Notizie storiche delle chiese e monasteri di Venezia, e di Torcello [...]*, Padova, Stamperia del Seminario, Giovanni Manfrè, 1758, pp. 217-219; *I Diarii di Marino Sanuto*, a cura di Nicolò Barozzi, vol. IV, Venezia, Tipografia del commercio di Marco Visentini, 1880, col. 35 (1501, maggio); GIUSEPPE TASSINI, *Curiosità veneziane*, Venezia, Filippi Editore, 1970 (I ed. Venezia, Gio. Cecchini, 1863), pp. 231-232, 591-592; VITTORIO PIVA, *Il Patriarcato di Venezia e le sue origini*, vol. II, [Venezia], Studium Cattolico Veneziano, 1960, p. 86; *La visita pastorale di Giovanni Ladislao Pyrker nella diocesi di Venezia (1821)*, a cura di Bruno Bertoli e Silvio Tramontin, Roma, Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 1971, pp. 75-76; *Le visite pastorali di Jacopo Monico nella diocesi di Venezia (1829-1845)*, a cura di Bruno Bertoli e Silvio Tramontin, Vicenza, Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, Istituto per le ricerche di Storia sociale e di Storia religiosa, 1976, pp. 98, 100-102; GASTONE VIO, *I «mistri»*

Marco Antonio Sabellico, in his *De situ urbis Venetae*, composed at the end of the 15th century, describes it as having «frons ædis nitida, candidoque saxo nuper instaurata» («chapel with a clear façade and recently restored with white stones», author's translation)¹⁰. In the second half of the 15th century, therefore, the building must have undergone renovations that must have added new marble to its decoration. In this regard, it cannot be ruled out that it was precisely during the renovation and then reconstruction of the sacred building, that took place between the 15th and 16th centuries, or perhaps even with later acquisitions, that the two medieval works that are the subject of this section of the paper arrived. So far, in fact, it has not been possible to find any evidence in the sources that could ensure their original provenance from the medieval church of San Fantin.

These are, in particular, a baptismal font currently at mid-height of the right aisle (Fig. 4), and a holy water stoup (or possibly another baptismal font) at the foot of the left central pillar of the main nave of the church (Fig. 5).

The basin of the baptismal font (h ca. 34 cm x diameter ca. 64 cm x depth ca. 30 cm, thickness ca. 3.5 cm), made of Proconnesian marble, has smooth walls both internally and externally, with a double simple moulding with a rounded profile running just below the upper outer rim. The font is supported by a squat cylindrical shaft of the same mar-

della chiesa di S. Fantin in Venezia, «Arte veneta», 31 (1977), pp. 225-231; LAURA ANDREATTI, *La chiesa di S. Fantin in Venezia*, tesi di laurea in Lettere, relatore Prof. Terisio Pignatti, Università Ca' Foscari di Venezia, a.a. 1979/1980; STEFANO MASO, *Intorno ad Antonio Proto. Il lavoro, la vita*, «Quaderni di Palazzo Te», 5 (1986), pp. 59-66: 63; ANTONIO SCORDINO, *La chiesa veneziana di San Fantino il calabrese*, «Brutium», 70, 1-2 (1991), pp. 10-11; GASTONE VIO, *Le Scuole Piccole nella Venezia dei Dogi. Note d'archivio per la storia delle confraternite veneziane*, Costabissara, Angelo Colla Editore, 2004, pp. 375-378; LUCIANO MENETTO, *L'Insula*, in ETTORE VIO et alii, *Venezia. Acqua, pietre e pagine. L'Insula di San Fantin*, Venezia, Centro internazionale della Grafica, 2008, pp. 47-76: 47; MERYL BAILEY, *Carrying the Cross in Early Modern Venice*, in *Space, Place, and Motion. Locating Confraternities in the Late Medieval and Early Modern City*, edited by Diana Bullen Presciutti, Leiden, Boston, Brill, 2017, pp. 244-269, with further bibliography; KATIA MARTIGNAGO, SIMONE PIASER, *Cripte di chiese costruite o ricostruite nel XVI secolo*, in *Le cripte di Venezia. Gli ambienti di culto sommersi della cristianità medievale*, a cura di Manuela Zorzi, Treviso, Chartesia, 2018, pp. 142-179 (San Fantin pp. 153-165); LUCIO MARTUCCI, *I Santi di Venezia. "Unde origo inde salus"*, Roma, Borè Srl, 2024, p. 127.

¹⁰ MARCO ANTONIO SABELLICO, *De situ urbis Venetae* [Venezia 1494], in JOANNES GEORGIUS GRAEVIUS, *Thesaurus antiquitatum et historiarum Italiae*, 5, 1, Leida, Petrus Vander, 1722, II, pp. 1-30: 18; also quoted by CORNER, *Ecclesiae venetae* (1749), p. 319.

ble. The artefact rests on a tripartite base articulated in torus, scotia and torus decorated with plain leaves at the four corners, placed on a high plinth of Istrian stone, perhaps not originally belonging to the artefact (Fig. 4).¹¹

On the left side of the nave of the church, at the foot of the central pillar, is a polylobate basin of a very fine-grained marble - perhaps Luni marble - (h 37 cm x max. diameter 55 cm x depth 22 cm, thickness 2.5 cm) supported by a fragment of a marble column (h 62 cm), characterised by an upward tapering that stands on an octagonal base (Fig. 5).¹²

The basin has a profile articulated in eight lobes of different lengths, along which sculpted reliefs of anthropomorphic and zoomorphic figures alternate. The high level of wear of these does not allow them to be easily read. If, therefore, for the zoomorphic elements it is possible to recognise the silhouettes of pairs of leaning back felines and small birds with intertwined tails and joined beaks, placed above what appear to be small basins, the identification of anthropomorphic subjects is much more difficult. In fact, there are four almost identical figures, placed in a frontal position, with arms stretched across the chest and faces too corroded to be able to specify their gender, characterized by smooth hair with a central parting and a length that almost reaches the shoulders, ending in curls.

As already mentioned, one of the problematic aspects concerning this sculptural work is the lack of data regarding its origin.¹³

¹¹ The sculptural work has been summarily noted in two recent dissertations: CARLOTTA ZARAMELLA, *La chiesa di San Fantin: ricerca storica e restituzione digitale*, tesi di laurea magistrale in Ingegneria Civile - Architettura, relatore Prof. Arch. Gianmario Guidarelli, correlatori Prof. Arch. Andrea Giordano, Prof.ssa Myriam Pilutti Namer, Università degli Studi di Padova, a.a. 2022/2023, pp. 91-92; GIULIA AMODIO, *Le acquasantiere figurate nell'Italia centro-settentrionale: iconografie, forme e modelli (XI-XIV secolo)*, tesi di dottorato in Storia dell'arte, tutor Prof.ssa Anna Maria D'Achille, Sapienza Università di Roma, a.a. 2024/2025, pp. 306, 310.

¹² Lastly: GUIDO TIGLER, *Cronologia e tendenze stilistiche della prima scultura veneziana*, in *Torcello. Alle origini di Venezia tra Occidente e Oriente*, a cura di Gianmatteo Caputo e Giovanni Gentili, Venezia, Marsilio, 2009, pp. 132-147, particularly p. 144; GUIDO TIGLER, *Scultura e pittura del Medioevo a Treviso, I. Le sculture dell'Alto Medioevo (dal VI secolo al 1141) a Treviso, nel suo territorio e in aree che con esso ebbero rapporti. Tentativo di contestualizzazione storica*, Trieste, CERM, 2013 (Studi, 10) p. 234 note 553; FRANCESCA CALUGI, *Le sculture del portale della pieve di San Giorgio di Argenta (Ferrara)*, «Commentari d'arte», 20, 58-59 (2014), pp. 14-27, particularly p. 25 note 53; AMODIO, *Le acquasantiere figurate*, pp. 305-310, with previous bibliography.

¹³ See also AMODIO, *Le acquasantiere figurate*, p. 306.

In the Apostolic Visitation of 1581 there is mention of a baptismal font «bene custoditus cum sua clavi» («well guarded with its lock», auth. transl.) in the altar of Saint Jerome¹⁴ that should have been removed for the liturgical adaptation of the altar¹⁵. However, the order was not carried out immediately, since during the Pastoral Visit in 1593 the basin was still found at the sacred table. From the description it seems, moreover, that the font was in some way connected to the altar, since it is reported: «[...] proseguendo la Visita andò nella cappelletta di san Girolamo, et nella mensa dell'altare ritrovò il Batisterio molto indecente» («[...] continuing the Visitation he went to the little chapel of Saint Jerome, and at the altar table he found the Batisterio very indecent» auth. transl.).¹⁶

In the current state of research, it is not possible to establish whether the furnishings mentioned in the ecclesiastical inspections can be identified with one of the two basins in the church today. However, considering that the above-mentioned reports would seem to indicate that the baptismal font was connected to the altar of Saint Jerome, one could reflect on this notation in relation to the singularly deep recesses at the base of four of the eight lobes of the figured holy water stoup, which would lead one to hypothesise its function as a housing for interlocking supports (Fig. 5). On the other hand, we should also consider the object's dimensions, which might have been too small for it to serve as a baptismal font.

To attempt a preliminary interpretation of the artefact, one can observe how the articulation of the basin could perhaps be read as a reference to the octagon that, in Christian symbolism, alludes to the Resurrection of Christ, in reference to the eighth day of Holy Week¹⁷ (Fig. 6).

¹⁴ VENEZIA, *Archivio Storico del Patriarcato*, Curia patriarcale di Venezia, Archivio "Segreto", Visite Apostoliche, *Visitationes apostolicae anno MDLXXXI*, 1581 maggio 26 - 1581 agosto 11 (henceforth ASPV, *Visitationes apostolicae*), c. 139r.

¹⁵ As ordered in ASPV, *Visitationes apostolicae*, c. 140r, where the furnishing is called «vas lapideum» («stone vase», auth. transl.).

¹⁶ VENEZIA, *Archivio Storico del Patriarcato*, Curia patriarcale di Venezia, Archivio "Segreto", Visite pastorali, b. 5, *Visitationes ecclesiarum. Liber primus. 1591*, 1591 maggio 19 - 1593 ottobre 14 (henceforth ASPV, *Visitationes ecclesiarum*), c. 457r.

¹⁷ ENRICO BASSAN, *ad vocem*, *Fonte battesimale*, in *Enciclopedia dell'arte medievale*, vol. V, Roma, Istituto della Enciclopedia Italiana, 1995, pp. 282-293, particularly p. 283.

Regarding the iconography, the animals represented in pairs along the shorter lobes of the basin, according to Christian exegesis, lend themselves to an ambivalent reading. The two felines, in fact - but only hypothetically due to the heavily abraded surface - could be identified with a pair of lions or lionesses, which in the biblical text and in the interpretations of Christian writers are the expression of both mighty and courageous creatures, who bring their strength to bear against the wicked, and ferocious and cruel creatures, who unjustly persecute the weakest¹⁸. So also the two birds joining in their beaks could be likened to the “sparrows” of the biblical vocabulary. These animals, in the Holy Scriptures, sometimes symbolize defenseless creatures, easy prey to pitfalls, but also, at the same time, capable of rising up towards Heaven, thus away from the iniquities of earth, nesting in the Kingdom of God; at other times, on the other hand, the flight of the sparrow is an allegory of the lightness of an inconstant soul, of intemperance, pride and yielding to worldly flattery that lead these animals to fall into a trap. The sparrow may, however, also be the personification of the risen and ascended Christ¹⁹. Interesting, however, is what Maria Pia Ciccicarese points out, namely that sometimes the symbolism of the sparrows is clarified by the number they are depicted. In particular, according to the scholar, the presence of the birds in the number of two would recall the passage from the Gospel of Matthew with the example of two sparrows sold for a penny: «Are not two sparrows sold for a small coin? Yet not one of them falls to the ground without your Father's knowledge» (Mt, 10, 29), representing, therefore, the soul redeemed by Christ²⁰. This reading would thence seem to be in keeping with the interpretation of the depiction of pairs of birds on a holy water stoup or baptismal font, as in our case.

As for the anthropomorphic sculptures, it is not possible to determine whether they were originally conceived as monstrous beings. What is noticeable, despite the state of wear and tear, is that the four figures appear to have their wrists restrained by something overlapping them, in a manner perhaps similar to what can be seen on the holy

¹⁸ MARIA PIA CICCARESE, *Animali simbolici. Alle origini del bestiario cristiano. II (Leone - Zanzara)*, Bologna, EDB, 2007, pp. 11-48.

¹⁹ CICCARESE, *Animali simbolici*, pp. 125-145.

²⁰ CICCARESE, *Animali simbolici*, pp. 128-129.

water stoup in the parish church of Santa Maria Assunta of Rubbiano, in the province of Parma - dated before the middle of the 12th century -, where two figures with human features are restrained by the paws of the monstrous creatures that flank them²¹. One could, therefore, perhaps hypothesize that in the San Fantin font, below the anthropomorphic figures, there were originally fantastic beings that would have been completely abraded. Otherwise, our four figures could have been depicted in the pose of holding bifid-tailed mermaids with their hands; in that case, however, they would not have been depictions of sirens, who are almost always represented with bare chests and uncovered breasts, since it is quite clear that the figures in the San Fantin basin wear a sort of tunic with a circular cut at the base of the neck. In this regard, one might then recall - but only as a suggestion that we intend to explore in a forthcoming study - the bifid tritons wearing a sort of cape from the baptismal font at Saint George's in Anstey, County Hertfordshire, dated between the late 12th and early 13th century²² (Fig. 7).

However, it does not seem to be possible to go any further with the hypothesis at present, due to the complete removal of the decoration of the lower register of the bowl. As the areas of abrasion occur in the same register as the deep recesses, it cannot be ruled out that the chiseling of any parts emerging from the body of the basin and the creation of the recesses occurred at the same time, for the same reason.

In Venice or in Northern Italy, at least to the writer's current knowledge, there do not seem to be any other holy water fonts/baptismal fonts that could serve as a fitting comparison for San Fantin's work. Consequently, in the present state of research, there appears to be insufficient robust grounds to integrate the work into a broader typological discourse that would not prove to be excessively generalized. Moreover, it cannot even be ruled out that its eight-lobed form stems from the reworking of a polylobed capital²³, although this hypothesis

²¹ SIMONA MORETTI, *La sirena e l'acquasantiera nel Medioevo: un binomio difficile*, «De Medio Aevo», 13 (2019), pp. 77-90, particularly p. 82, with further bibliography.

²² MORETTI, *La sirena e l'acquasantiera*, pp. 84, fig. 16, 86-87, fig. 19.

²³ The derivation from a reworked capital has also been discussed by various scholars, even as recently as Amodio, who remains cautious about it: AMODIO, *Le acquasantiere figurate*, p. 306, with previous bibliography.

does not seem highly probable given the volume of work that would have been necessary on the artifact. Nevertheless, a very brief review of cases that seem to share certain characteristics with the lustral font under consideration here will be offered, even while acknowledging that these are by no means exact comparisons.

A small holy water stoup with eight lobes, bearing on its four sides figures of archangels holding a globe, can be found in Saint Mark's Basilica, but it is a much smaller one than San Fantin's basin, which has been hypothesized to have been readapted as a lustral font by reworking a small capital. The date, placed at the 11th century²⁴, is also likely much earlier than that of the San Fantin bowl, which could perhaps be placed between the 12th and 13th centuries.²⁵

An eight-lobed stoup in "Greek marble", dated to the second half of the 13th century, is now preserved in the church of Santa Maria degli Angeli in Murano, although it has been hypothesized that it came from the monastery of San Lorenzo on the lagoon island of Ammiana, which was suppressed and incorporated into the aforementioned parish of Venice in 1438²⁶. However, the stoup, not much smaller in diameter than the one in San Fantin, has completely plain sides, devoid of decoration.

Similarly articulated in eight lobes is the white Verona marble stoup placed along a wall of the church of San Benedetto in Gonzaga, in the province of Mantua, dated to a period after the construction of the building, i.e. after 1330. In this case, however, the lobes are uniformly decorated with vertical bullae interspersed along the upper margin with small ovoli, and there are no figured elements.²⁷

²⁴ Catalogo generale dei Beni culturali, former *Soprintendenza per i beni artistici e storici di Venezia*, OA C 05 00070768, author RENATO POLACCO, 1990 (<https://catalogo.beniculturali.it/detail/HistoricOrArtisticProperty/0500070768>).

²⁵ We agree here with the caution and with the dating expressed by AMODIO, *Le acquasantiere figurate*, pp. 305-306, which also accounts for the chronologies oscillating between the 12th and 13th centuries proposed by previous scholars.

²⁶ Catalogo generale dei Beni culturali, former *Soprintendenza per i beni artistici e storici di Venezia*, OA I 05 00071255, author A. FANTONI, 1990 (<https://catalogo.beniculturali.it/detail/HistoricOrArtisticProperty/0500071255>).

²⁷ Catalogo generale dei Beni culturali, former *Soprintendenza per i Beni Storici Artistici ed Etnoantropologici per le province di Mantova Brescia e Cremona*, OA P 03 00136956, author D. MARCHI, 1994 (<https://catalogo.beniculturali.it/detail/HistoricOrArtisticProperty/0300136956>).

An alternation of longer and shorter lobes, according to a scansion more similar to that in the lustral pile of San Fantin, occurs, on the other hand, in the eight-valves basin from the Albertian temple of San Sebastiano in Mantua, built from the seventh decade of the 15th century. The presence on the artefact of the Gonzaga enterprise of Olympus, also depicted in Mantegna's *Camera degli Sposi* (1465-1474), would constitute a further clue for the chronological placement of the work in the late 15th century and, therefore, at too low a chronological height to constitute a term of comparison for the basin of the church of San Fantin.²⁸

What we can note in conclusion is that perhaps in the holy water stoup now preserved in San Fantin, the possible symbolic meaning alluding to eternal life through the Resurrection, inherent in the choice of a polylobate form articulated in eight lobes, could have been reinforced by the subjects that were sculpted in it, which perhaps, in the overall representation, staged a contrast between symbols of Good (the animals?) and symbols of Evil (the potential monstrous beings) or depicted a series of figures alluding to the necessity, for access to Salvation, of purification, ensured by the blessed water that had to be contained in the lustral pile. [GABB]

* Please note that some content from this article has been published in the forthcoming article, *The Church of San Fantin in Venice: Digital Modeling, Archival Research, and the Reuse of Ancient Marbles*, by Carlotta Zaramella, Myriam Pilutti Namer, and Giulia Anna Bianca Bordini, «Archeologia e Calcolatori», 36.2 (2025). Myriam Pilutti Namer would like to express her gratitude to Prof. Arch. Gianmario Guidarelli and Carlotta Zaramella, whose Master's thesis in Civil Engineering and Architecture at the University of Padua, entitled "La chiesa di San Fantin: ricerca storica e restituzione digitale", she co-supervised together with Prof. Arch. Andrea Giordano during the academic year 2022–2023. This collaboration provided the opportunity to inspect the ancient marble conserved in the church and discuss its display within the architectural context. Giulia A. B. Bordini wishes to express

²⁸ Catalogo generale dei Beni culturali, former *Soprintendenza per i Beni Storici Artistici ed Etnoantropologici per le province di Mantova Brescia e Cremona*, OA C 03 00038934, author U. BAZZOTTI, 1979 (<https://catalogo.beniculturali.it/detail/HistoricOrArtisticProperty/0300038934>).

her sincere gratitude to Prof. Simone Piazza, Prof. Alessandra Guiglia, and Prof. Lorenzo Lazzarini for their invaluable assistance and insightful advice. Special thanks are also extended to Arch. Andrea Gallo for his kind support in facilitating the inspections of the church, and to Carlotta Zaramella and Dr. Giulia Amodio for generously sharing their knowledge. She would like to thank Prof. Arch. Gianmario Guidarelli and Prof. Myriam Pilutti Namer for the opportunity to publish in this review. Finally, Giulia A. B. Bordi is deeply grateful to Dr. Laura Levantino (Archivio Storico del Patriarcato di Venezia) for her invaluable support and generous commitment to the archival research.

ABSTRACT

La chiesa di San Fantin a Venezia, posizionata nel cuore del centro storico della città lagunare, ha origini remote, che affondano probabilmente nell'Alto Medioevo; tuttavia, la sua attuale configurazione è l'esito di numerose trasformazioni che si sono succedute nel corso dei secoli, a partire dalla ricostruzione della fabbrica *a fundamentis* iniziata nel 1507.

Questo articolo si concentra sull'analisi di alcune testimonianze materiali lapidee, antiche e medievali, reimpiegate nell'edificio ecclesiastico moderno. Nello specifico, Myriam Pilutti Namer indaga il fenomeno dei prodotti di reimpiego a Venezia, con particolare attenzione ai tipi di marmi antichi integrati nella decorazione della chiesa, mentre Giulia A.B. Bordi prende in esame un fonte battesimale e un'acquasantiera (che, nondimeno, avrebbe anche potuto servire per la somministrazione del Battesimo), conservati nell'aula sacra, ma di provenienza incerta.

The church of San Fantin, located in the heart of the historic centre of Venice, has ancient origins, probably dating back to the early Middle Ages; however, its current configuration is the result of numerous transformations that have taken place over the centuries, starting with the reconstruction of the building from the ground up, which began in 1507.

This article focuses on the analysis of some ancient and medieval stone artefacts that have been reused in the modern church building. Specifically, Myriam Pilutti Namer investigates the phenomenon of reused materials in Venice, with particular attention to the types of ancient marble integrated into the decoration of the church, while Giulia A.B. Bordi examines a baptismal font and a holy water stoup (which could also have been used for administering baptism), preserved in the sacred hall but of uncertain origin.



1. Main altar of the Church of San Fantin, Venice, 16th century. The verde antico tondos are employed in the design of geometric patterns (quincunx), alongside tondos of red porphyry and other marbles. Photo: Giulia A.B. Bordi. Courtesy of the Patriarcato di Venezia, Ufficio Beni culturali ed Edilizia di culto. All rights reserved.

2. Tomb of Vinciguerra Dandolo in the Church of San Fantin, Venice, 16th century. Beneath the tomb are two slabs, each featuring three tondos of red porphyry. Photo: Giulia A.B. Bordi. Courtesy of the Patriarcato di Venezia, Ufficio Beni culturali ed Edilizia di culto. All rights reserved.



3. Counterfacade of the Church of San Fantin, Venice, 16th century. Wooden slabs are arranged to replicate an architectural portal in Proconnesian marble. Photo: Giulia A.B. Bordi. Courtesy of the Patriarcato di Venezia, Ufficio Beni culturali ed Edilizia di culto. All rights reserved.



4. Proconnesian Marble Baptismal Font in the Church of San Fantin. Photo: Giulia A.B. Bordi. Courtesy of the Patriarcato di Venezia Ufficio Beni culturali ed Edilizia di culto. All rights reserved.

5. Holy Water Stoup or Baptismal Font in the Church of San Fantin. Photo: Giulia A.B. Bordi. Courtesy of the Patriarcato di Venezia, Ufficio Beni culturali ed Edilizia di culto. All rights reserved.



6. Holy Water Stoup or Baptismal Font in the Church of San Fantin, view from above. Photo: Simone Piazza. Courtesy of the Patriarcato di Venezia, Ufficio Beni culturali ed Edilizia di culto. All rights reserved.

7. United Kingdom, Anstey, Saint George's Church, Font. Photo: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:St_George,_Anstey,_Hertfordshire_-_Font_-_geograph.org.uk_-_362984.jpg