

A New Document Relating to Stefano da Verona: Tarsia's Testament of 1458

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A new document recently discovered in the Archivio di Stato di Verona¹ helps to fill the *lacunae* in the documentation of the painter-draughtsman Stefano da Verona (b. 1375). It substantiates that he was married to Tarsia, daughter of Antoniazio from Verona and establishes that Stefano was probably dead long before 1458, most likely in the very early 1440's. The information also affects the assessment of Stefano's *oeuvre*, especially a number of drawings incorrectly attributed to him.

Stefano's marital status has been a matter of confusion and debate. Two wives have previously been identified, namely Tarsia from Verona and Alba from Padua. A number of reliable documents state that Stefano married Tarsia of Verona when he lived in Treviso². On September 18, 1399 Stefano married and received the dowry of his wife, Tarsia, of three hundred gold ducats.

Cum alias contractum fuerit legitimum matrimonium per verba de presenti inter discretum et prudentem iuvenem Staphanum pictorem quondam ser Iohannis de Herbosio, provincie Frantie, habitorem ad presens Tarvisii, parte una, et honestam dominam, dominam Tarsiam filiam providi et discreti viri ser Anthoniatii quondam ser Agerii de Verona, habitatoris Tarvisii, parte altera [...]. Nunc vero dictus Stefanus [...] confessus et manifestus fuit in se habere, habuisse et manu[a]liter recepisse in dotem et nomine dotis dicte domine Tarsie ducatos trecentos auri inter denarios et res mobiles [...].

The document sets forth that Tarsia's family was Veronese. She is identified as the daughter of Antoniazio, son of the late Agerio from Verona³. A second document of 1425⁴ testifies that Master Stefano, painter, was living with his wife Tarsia and their two female children Catalina, age four years, and Zuanita, six months, in the district of Isolo inferiore⁵ in Verona. Stefano was then fifty years old and Tarsia was thirty five. Stefano and his family were still living in Isolo inferiore in 1433⁶.

A contradicting document, however, dated 3 May, 1406 in Padua, refers to a receipt for a dowry from the widow Alba⁷.

Padue, in contrata S. Clementis supra platea dominorum nostrorum Venetorum, in domo habitationis honeste domine, domine Albe, filie quondam Iohannis, uxoris olim magistri Mathei armaroli, [...] magister Stefanus pictor, filius quondam Iohannis de Francia, et nunc habitator Paduae in contrata domi [...] manifestus fuit habuisse et recepisse ac in se habere disit a supradicta honesta domina, domina Alba ibidem presenti, libras quingentas soldos XVIII parvorum denariorum, videlicet in denariis et in rebus mobilibus [...] pro dotis ipsius domine Albe solempniter stipulanti [...].

The Paduan document concerning the lady Alba raises a question as to whether there were possibly two painters by the name of Stefano, son of Giovanni, in the Paduan area because Stefano had already married in Treviso in 1399.

Scholars have also speculated about Stefano's death date for which no known document exists. Some authors believe that Stefano died around 1438, the date of the last known document referring to him⁸. In this document dating October, 10, 1438, Tommaso Salerno ordered his executors to complete the altarpiece for the Saint Nicolò Chapel in Sant'Anastasia, Verona, already commenced by 'master Stefano, painter from Verona'. The document verifies the contract to master Stefano and indicates that the altarpiece was already begun, that its price had been determined by Salerno and Stefano, and that master Stefano had received an installment. It does not state who should complete this *ancona* which does not exist today. It is among the 'lost works' of the painter. In 1438 Stefano also signed the *Adoration of the Magi* in the Pinacoteca di Brera, Milan⁹.

Other scholars push Stefano's death date into the mid Quattrocento, even as

far as the 1460's. This is based on the attribution to him of a group of drawings depicting nude male figures in action representing *Cain and Abel*, *Sampson Fighting the Lion* and related drawings in the cabinets of the Uffizi, Louvre, Frits Lugt Collection, Pushkin Museum, Staatliches Graphisches Sammlung in Munich and the Lehman Collection of the Metropolitan Museum¹⁰.

The newly discovered document in the Archivio di Stato di Verona, *Antico Ufficio del Registro*, Testamenti, mazzo 50, n. 59 (see Appendix) helps to clarify these issues. It is dated July 6, 1458, in Verona. The document is the testament of the lady Tarsia, presently the wife of 'Laurentii de Albuino' living in the *contrada* of Clavica (otherwise known as Santa Maria di Chiavica). It confirms that in a former marriage Tarsia was, indeed, married to master Stefano, painter, in Verona. It also corroborates the 1399 Trevisan document that Tarsia was the daughter of Antoniazio and establishes that she was living in Verona where, according to the 1399 document, the origins of her family are situated. Further, it reveals that she wished to be buried in the *contrada* of Isolo inferiore which is the same *contrada* where she had lived with Stefano and their children for many years, according to the registers of 1425 and 1433.

At the time that Tarsia dictated the 1458 document, she was on her deathbed, weak in body due to age. She was around 68 years old, based upon her age in the 1425 Veronese register. She was presently married to her second husband, Lorenzo 'de Albuino' and must have been married to him for a number of years, at least three or four since she designates Lorenzo as her heir and leaves all her goods and possessions for him to enjoy during his lifetime. However, based on her present age of 68, and the fact that she was fifteen years younger than Stefano da Verona (according to the register of 1425), it is more probable that she was married to Lorenzo for at least ten and possibly twenty years¹¹. It is unlikely that a widow in the Quattrocento married after the age of fifty¹². In fact, once a widow was into her thirties, her opportunities for remarrying diminished and it became more and more likely that she would remain in her late husband's home. In 1438 Tarsia would have been about forty-eight years old¹³.

In her will, Tarsia left no possessions to her children by Stefano, Catali-

na and Zuanita. If they were still alive, they probably were married since they would have been 37 and 34 years of age. Tarsia and Lorenzo did not have children since she left a dowry of «unum lectum vergatum cum uno plumatio de lectis» to Zilia, daughter of «Zenonis Delavantii de Quinzano» her godchild («figiocie») at the time of her marriage. If Tarsia and Lorenzo's marriage was recent (which is doubtful), Tarsia might have left her possessions to her children by Stefano.

If these hypotheses are correct, one can suppose a *terminus post quem* for Stefano da Verona's death date before 1450. It is likely that he could have died sometime after 1438, when he signed the *Adoration of the Magi* in the Pinacoteca di Brera, Milan and was mentioned in a document along with Tommaso Salerno who ordered the *ancona* in the family chapel of Sant'Anastasia to be completed, and long before 1450, probably in the very early 1440's.

How, then, do we explain the Alba document and resolve the issue of the attributed drawings? The 1406 Paduan document might lead one to believe that Stefano attempted or considered bigamy, or entered into a fraudulent contract or fictitious marriage¹⁴. According to Fruet's theory, a possible explanation for the existence of the Alba document could be that Stefano may have used a judicial artifice, pretending

a marriage that allowed him to become a citizen of Padua in order to further his career¹⁵. Soon thereafter, on June 23, 1407, Stefano was named a citizen of Padua by decree, which was notarized. This, in fact, helped his career since on June 12, 1412, Stefano was named *gastaldo* of the painters' guild of Padua¹⁶. For this honor, one was required to be a citizen for a number of years, a property owner, and, usually, a master of some reputation as well as a teacher. This hypothesis shows that an explanation is possible. The late Professor David Herlihy and Professor Charles Donahue Jr. (Harvard University School of Law) observe that the form of this dowry contract differs from the Trevisan one, which uses the binding 'de presenti form' in reference to the marriage between Stefano and Tarsia¹⁷. The Paduan document does not state that a marriage had already taken place, although Alba is called his wife. Instead, it merely is a receipt for the dowry. For Professor Donahue citizenship by decree suggests that Stefano (or Alba) may have had second thoughts about attempting a fraud. According to Donahue, medieval records are full of attempted fraud where nothing happens. All we know, however, is that Stefano and Alba registered a contract which may never have been used. Stefano may have bought the citizenship, and forgot the marriage route.

As for the drawings, the likelihood that they were executed by Stefano is negligible. They exhibit a ductus foreign to Stefano's manner. In 1438 Stefano was already 63 years old and his developed style was more graceful and timid. Even if Stefano lived past 1438, a possibility, and his draughtsmanship had evolved, the drawings should retain some features of the last paintings. The idea of depicting self-confident nude male figures in action is a subject foreign to the gentle and tender nature of Stefano although artists of a slightly later generation (Pisanello, b. 1395 and his generation) showed a great interest in this subject matter. The drawings in question exhibit thick, wiry and harder contour lines that are unlike the free and rapid penstrokes and loose patterns of Stefano. Stiff and mechanical contour lines restrict the movement of the figures. The images lack the ideal beauty, the grace and fluidity, the elegant line, the sense of weightlessness and absence of corporeal form found in Stefano's known paintings and secure drawings. The artist or artists, of a slightly later generation, are Veronese or Paduan from the middle of the fifteenth century, who show a more Renaissance preoccupation with anatomy, attempting to describe form and volume.

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Abbreviations

ASCv: Archivio Storico Diocesano, Verona;
ASv: Archivio di Stato di Verona.

¹ I thank Daniela Fattori, Vice Director, Biblioteca Civica, Verona for calling this document to my attention, Angela Miciluzzo, Director, Archivio di Stato di Verona, for checking the transcription, and don Franco Segala for his help at the Archivio Storico Diocesano of Verona.

² E. KARET, «Stefano da Verona: The Documents», *Atti e Memorie della Accademia di Agricoltura Scienze e Lettere di Verona*, ser. 6, vol. XLIII/CLXVIII (1991-1992), 375-466, esp. 384, 405-411; Treviso, Archivio di Stato, *Notarile*, 859 (formerly Sol, XII, anno 1399) ff. 301r-302r; Treviso, Biblioteca Civica, ms. 1411, *Spogli dai libri Sol*, 8 [12], c. 301.

³ About 'Agerius de Verona' identification with the painter Altichiero see KARET, 1991-1992, 408-411.

⁴ KARET, 1991-1992, 430-433; ASv, *Comune*, Anagrafi, reg. 480.

⁵ Otherwise known as Insolo inferiore, Isolo infra, Insolo infra, or Isolo di sotto. For the locations of the various *contrade* mentioned in this document, see E. MORANDO DI CUSTOZA, *Verona in mappa*, Verona 1977.

⁶ KARET, 1991-1992, 434-435; ASv, *Comune*, Estimi, reg. 252.

⁷ KARET, 1991-1992, 412-414; Padua, Archivio di Stato, *Notarile*, 652, c. 193r-v.

⁸ KARET, 1991-1992, 442-445; ASv, *Notarile*, Testamenti (anno 1438), n. 261.

⁹ For the dating of the *Adoration of the Magi*, see E. KARET, «Stefano da Verona's Brera

Adoration of the Magi: Patronage, Politics and Social History», *Arte Lombarda*, 113-115 (1995/2-4), 13-26, esp. 22 note 3.

¹⁰ See *Male Nude Figure Striding to the Right with Legs Cut under the Knees*, Gabinetto Disegni e Stampe degli Uffizi, Florence, inv. 59E; *Cain and Abel* (sometimes called *Hercules and Cacus* or *Sampson and the Philistine*), Pushkin State Museum of Fine Arts, Moscow, formerly Franz Koenigs Collection, Haarlem, the Netherlands, Koenigs, inv. I.476; Musée du Louvre, Département des Arts Graphiques, Paris, inv. RF 844; Institut Néerlandais, Frits Lugt Collection, Paris, inv. 1338; *Sampson Fighting the Lion* (sometimes called *Hercules and the Nemean Lion*), Institut Néerlandais, Frits Lugt Collection, Paris, inv. 1339; Staatliche Graphisches Sammlgung, Munich, inv. 1971.10; and *A Bearded Nude Figure Running toward the Right*, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Robert Lehman Collection, inv. 1975.I.422. These drawings have been attributed to Stefano by various scholars with differing dates. See E. KARET, *The Drawings of Stefano da Verona and his Circle and the Origins of Collecting in Italy: A Catalogue Raisonné*, Philadelphia 2002, 132-143, 146-149; E. KARET, *I disegni di Stefano da Verona e della sua cerchia e le origini del collezionismo in Italia: Catalogo Ragionato*, Verona 2003, 132-143, 146-149; *Cinque secoli di disegni veronesi*, exh. cat. by S. Marinelli, Firenze 2000, 25-26.

¹¹ I searched at the ASv, in the Antico Archivio del Comune, in the Campioni d'Estimo (surviving years 1425, 1433, 1445, 1447, 1456) and in the Archivio del Comune di Verona, Cancelleria dell'Estimo, Anagrafi,

serie Città e Provincia, between the years 1425-1465 in the surviving records in all *contrade* of Verona for any spellings of the name of Lorenzo 'de Albuino' and found no document. All other records of the notary Gerardus of the present document have been burned in a fire. There are no marriage contracts for these years in the ASv. In the *Ufficio del Registro*, serie Testamenti, Indice 638, I found no record of a testament for 'Laurentius de Albuino'. At the ASCv, *Indice Generale* I found no marriage records existing for the period in question. Marriage records for Santa Maria in Chiavica only begin in 1577-1633 and those for San Tomaso Cantuariense (Becket) (in Isolo inferiore) begin in 1577-1655, the two *contradas* where Tarsia and Lorenzo 'de Albuino' were situated. According to don Franco Segala, Director ASCv, marriage records are rarely found during the Quattrocento in Verona since they were not obligatory. Only after the Council of Trent must registers be kept for marriage or baptism. See also KARET, 1991-1992.

¹² D. Herlihy and C. Klapisch-Zuber (*Tuscans and their Families: A Study of the Florentine Catasto of 1427*, New Haven - London 1985, 217) state that widows in the early 1400's remarried only reluctantly and that this hesitation was pronounced in the cities.

¹³ See I. CHABOT, *Lineage strategies and the control of widows in Renaissance Florence, in Widowhood in Medieval and Early Modern Europe*, ed. by S. Cavallo and L. Warner, New York 1999, 140.

¹⁴ According to Herlihy (oral communication, 1989) bigamy was rather common in an itinerant society. However, since it was illegal

and discouraged by the Church, few statistics exist, evidence having been suppressed.

¹⁵ G. FRUET, «Stefano da Verona e Stefano di Francia», *Civiltà Mantovana*, XXVI (1971), 101-115, esp. 103-104, 112, n. 21. For a comprehensive summary of marriage laws and types of marriage contracts during the medieval period, see A. ESMEIN, *Le mariage en*

droit canonique, I-II, Paris 1891; N. TAMASSIA, *La famiglia italiana*, Milano 1910; J. DAUVILLIER, *Le mariage dans le droit classique de l'église*, Paris 1933; M. BELLOMO, *Ricerche sui rapporti patrimoniali tra coniugi. Contributo alla storia della famiglia medioevale*, Milano 1961, 12-13; A. MOHLO - J. KIRSCHNER, «The Dowry Fund and the Marriage Market in Ear-

ly Quattrocento Florence», *Journal of Modern History*, L (1978), 403-438; G. BRUCKER, *Giovanni e Lusanne, Love and Marriage in Renaissance Florence*, Berkeley 1986; J. BRUNDAGE, *Law, Sex and Christian Society in Medieval Europe*, Chicago 1987.

¹⁶ See KARET, 1991-1992, 416-417, 426-429.

¹⁷ Oral communication, 1989.

APPENDIX

Archivio di Stato di Verona, *Antico Ufficio del Registro*, Testamenti, mazzo 50, n. 59.

6 July 1458

Testamentum domine Tarsie uxor ser Laurentii de Albuino.

In Christi nomine amen. Anno natiuitatis eiusdem millesimo quadringentesimo quinquagesimo octavo, indictione sexta, die Jovis sexto mensis Julii, Verone in contrata Clavice in turri pontis novi in qua dicta testatrix tempore presentis testamenti habitabat, presentibus prudente viro Alvisio de Monteselic notario condam domini Bartholomei de Clavica Verone, rogato in solidum de his una cum me Gerardo notario infrascripto conficere publicum instrumentum et scribere et subscribere prout infra, Bartolino formacerio clerico quondam Manfredi de Sancto Thoma Verone, Filippo condam Zugni de la Stopazola, Dimitrio quondam Mathei ospite ad Ciconiam, Cristoforo abudellis condam Anzelini, Ruffino et Antonino fratribus bechariis condam Bartholomei, civibus Verone et Leonardo de Tavanaria condam Petri, omnibus de Clavica Verone, omnibus testibus idoneis notis ad hoc rogatis et specialiter convoca-

tis et infrascriptam testatricem cognoscen-
tibus ut dicitur.

Honesta domina Tarsia filia quondam Antonacij de Somagia et uxor in primo matrimonio Magistri Stephani pictoris de Verona et de presenti uxor ser Laurentii de Albuino contestabilis ad pontem novum, sana mente et intellectu licet serio (?) affecta ac corpore infirma, existimans huius labilis vite infinita pericola et nolens intestata decedere, testamentum suum nuncupativum modo et ordine condidit subnotatis.

Primo namque, anima sua omnipotenti Deo eiusque beatissime Virgini Marie devote commissa, sepulturam sui corporis elegit in cimiterio ecclesie Sancti Tomasii in Insulo infra Verone.

Item reliquit eadem testatrix Zilie filie Zenonis Delavantii de Quinzano eius figiocie unum lectum vergatum cum uno plumatio de lectis dicte testatricis quando dicta Zilia maritabitur.

In omnibus autem aliis suis bonis mobilibus iuribus et actionibus presentibus et futuris ubicumque sint et esse reperitur suum heredem universalem usufructuarium instituit, ordinavit et esse voluit dilectum maritum suum ser Laurentium de Albuino, hac conditione, quod dictus ser Laurentius teneatur et debeat, secuta morte dicte testatricis, fieri facere inventarium bonorum dicte domine et usufructuarie toto tempore

vite dicti ser Laurentii; morto autem dicto ser Laurentio usufructuario, tunc commissarii infrascripti dicte testatricis teneantur et debeant primo assignare alium lectum dicte testatricis fratribus et monasterio Sancti Thomasii de Verona pro anima dicte testatricis et restum dictorum bonorum debeat vendi per eos commissarios et precium ex eis capiendum debeant commissarii infrascripti exerogare et dare infrascriptis locis, videlicet fratribus Sancti Petris Martiris in Sancta Anastasia Verone et fratribus Sancti Zenonis in Monte ac fratribus Sancti Thomasii non tantum ratam pro rata sed illam quam dicti commissarii cuilibet ipsorum exerogare voluerint et hoc pro anima dicte testatricis et suorum commissariorum peccatorum et suorum predecessorum.

Commissarios autem suos et huius sui testamenti et ultime voluntatis executore ordinavit et esse voluit prudentes viros Paulum de Regio de Clavica Verone ac Nicolaum de Zambonardis de Pigna Verone. Quibus commissariis suprascriptis dicta testatrix dedit et contulit plenum, liberum et generalem mandatum cum libera administratione exequenti predicta et prout et quemadmodum dicta testatrix vivens facere potuit et potuisset.

Ego Gerardus filius Iohannis Donati a Capello de Sancto Benedicto Verone publicus imperiali auctoritate notarius predictis omnibus interfui et singulis etc. etc.

Anticipazioni su Girolamo Della Porta detto Novarino

L'attività nel Duomo e il primo progetto per la chiesa di San Giuseppe a Milano (1519)

FRANCESCO REPISHTI

Esiste un'innegabile difficoltà nel chiarire con precisione il ruolo di alcuni architetti-ingegneri di primo Cinquecento formati nei più importanti cantieri e per i quali il confine tra i ruoli di progettista e di capomastro è spesso indefinibile. Secondo una prassi diffusa, infatti, le figure di progettista, impresario e capomastro arrivano talvolta a coincidere, almeno sino alla metà del secolo.

Anche lo stesso stato degli studi sul Duomo milanese sembra finora manca-

re di un quadro più preciso sull'attività di alcuni ingegneri non direttamente responsabili del cantiere. Chiarite alcune figure di protagonisti come Giovanni Antonio Amadeo¹ e Cristoforo Lombardo², studiate quelle di Andrea Fusina e Vincenzo Seregni³, andrebbero verificati con attenzione i contributi di personalità che vi svolgono una diversa carica come Cristoforo Solari⁴, Giovanni Giacomo Dolcebuono, Bernardo da Treviglio, Girolamo Della Porta, Baldassarre Vianello.

La presenza di Solari, l'artista milanese più celebrato della prima metà del Cinquecento⁵, assoluto protagonista in molte fabbriche milanesi e no, e finissimo cultore dei temi dell'antico, ricorre più volte in riferimento ad alcuni aspetti dell'attività di uno dei suoi allievi, Girolamo Della Porta detto il Novarino⁶, figura sulla quale questo contributo vuole offrire un primo quadro documentario anche alla luce di un inedito contratto che lo vede progettista nel 1519 della chiesa milanese di San Giuseppe⁷.

Per tracciare una prima nota biografica su Girolamo e su alcuni personaggi della famiglia Della Porta non ci discosteremo dalla documentazione del più importante cantiere cittadino, che lo vede impegnato dal 1490 alla fine del terzo decennio del Cinquecento, in un periodo artistico fondamentale, segnato dall'avvicendamento tra il dominio francese e la presenza degli Asburgo nel Ducato, e che si chiude con la morte dei più importanti protagonisti. Nel 1522 muore infatti Giovanni Antonio Ama-