



Veronese  
Venetian, 1528 - 1588

# *The Martyrdom and Last Communion of Saint Lucy*

c. 1585/1586

oil on canvas

overall: 139.7 x 173.4 cm (55 x 68 1/4 in.)

framed: 189.2 x 222.6 x 7.5 cm (74 1/2 x 87 5/8 x 2 15/16 in.)

Gift of The Morris and Gwendolyn Cafritz Foundation and Ailsa Mellon Bruce Fund 1984.28.1

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## ENTRY

The picture is first unambiguously recorded in 1723 as above the door to the campanile in the church of Santa Croce, Belluno (see Provenance). This is unlikely, however, to have been its original position, and it was probably painted for the side wall of the nearby chapel of Saint Lucy, to complement an altarpiece consisting of a triptych of gilded wooden statues. The displacement of Veronese's painting was probably necessitated by the commission of the local Bellunese painter Giovanni Fossa (1645–1732) to decorate the chapel with a new scene of the saint's martyrdom, probably in fresco. The circumstances of Veronese's commission are undocumented, but the body responsible for supervising the extensive redecoration of the church in the late 16th century, often employing painters from Venice, was a leading local devotional confraternity, the Compagnia della Croce. [1] The likelihood that the Compagnia played a major role in the commission is confirmed by Carlo Ridolfi, who listed among Veronese's works "E per la Compagnia della Croce di Ciuidale la figure di Santa Lucia" (And for the Compagnia della Croce in Cividale [di Belluno] the figure of Saint Lucy). [2]

Saint Lucy was a virgin martyr of Syracuse, who was put to death at the beginning of the 4th century during the persecutions of the emperor Diocletian. According to the account of her life given in the *Golden Legend*, numerous unsuccessful attempts were made to force her to abjure her Christian faith. Whole teams of oxen were unable to drag her to a brothel. In exasperation, the Roman governor commanded that she be burned at the stake, but before this could happen, one of his henchmen plunged his sword into her throat. She remained alive long enough for a priest to arrive to administer the last rites. While alluding to the episodes of the burning and the oxen in the sketchily executed background, and including on the far left the half-cropped figure of Lucy's mother, Eutychia, Veronese conflated in the right foreground the two aspects of the story that would have been of particular interest to post-Tridentine religion: Lucy's martyrdom and her reception of the sacrament of the Eucharist. Even as she sacrifices her life for the love of Christ, she is seen accepting that the soul's salvation is achieved only through the sacraments of the Catholic Church; while the executioner bends over her almost tenderly to perform his brutal task, she gazes in tearful rapture at the Eucharistic wafer. As pointed out by Beverly Brown, Veronese's affective emphasis on the redemptive power of the Eucharist may have been inspired by the description of Lucy's martyrdom in Lorenzo Surio's *De Probatis Sanctorum Historiis*, published in Venice in 1575. But as Brown also noted, Surio said that the executioner stabbed the saint in the abdomen, whereas Veronese, adapting the iconography of Saint Justina, showed her being stabbed in the breast. [3]

The picture is not dated, but ever since its first public display at the *Italian Art and Britain* exhibition in 1960, there has been general agreement that it is an autograph work of high quality, datable to the last decade of Veronese's life, between circa 1582 and his death in 1588. Analyzing the x-radiographs [fig. 1] and the pentimenti they reveal, Brown has drawn attention the spontaneity of the design process. [4] Rodolfo Pallucchini, Alessandro Ballarin, and Brown have dated the picture to the earlier part of the decade, to circa 1580/1582, [5] whereas Terisio Pignatti and Filippo Pedrocco, as well as W. R. Rearick, have seen it as a very late work of circa 1585/1586. [6] In favor of the latter dating is the dusky color range and the picture's very close stylistic similarity to the documented *Miracle of Saint Pantaleon* of 1587 (San Pantalon, Venice), in which a vested priest similarly ministers to a suffering victim with deep compassion.

Brown has noted two early copies, both probably dating from the earlier 17th century: one, a small oval on panel, in the Gallerie dell'Accademia, Venice, formerly

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in the monastery of San Michele in Isola; and the other, larger and less faithful, in an English private collection. [7] Brown also traced the inspiration of the painting on later Venetian painters, such as Sebastiano Ricci and Giovanni Battista Tiepolo.

Peter Humfrey

March 21, 2019

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## COMPARATIVE FIGURES



**fig. 1** X-radiograph, Veronese, *The Martyrdom and Last Communion of Saint Lucy*, c. 1585/1586, oil on canvas, National Gallery of Art, Washington, Gift of The Morris and Gwendolyn Cafritz Foundation and Ailsa Mellon Bruce Fund

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## NOTES

- [1] See Peter Humfrey, “The Provenance of Veronese’s *Martyrdom of St Lucy* in Washington,” *Arte veneta* 43 (1989–1990): 89–90.
- [2] Carlo Ridolfi, *Le maraviglie dell’arte, ovvero Le vite de gl’illustri pittori veneti, e dello stato*, ed. Detlev von Hadeln (Berlin, 1914), 1:317. In his editorial annotation, Hadeln noted the connection with Belluno, but described the picture as lost.

- [3] Beverly Louise Brown, "Paolo Veronese's *The Martyrdom and Last Communion of Saint Lucy*," *Venezia arti 2* (1988): 66–67; Beverly Louise Brown, "Replication and the Art of Veronese," *Studies in the History of Art* 20 (1989): 119–120.
- [4] Beverly Louise Brown, "Paolo Veronese's *The Martyrdom and Last Communion of Saint Lucy*," *Venezia arti 2* (1988): 62–63; Beverly Louise Brown, "Replication and the Art of Veronese," *Studies in the History of Art* 20 (1989): 113–114, 119–120.
- [5] Rodolfo Pallucchini, *Veronese* (Milan, 1984), 185; Alessandro Ballarin, "Osservazioni sui dipinti veneziani del Cinquecento nella Galleria del Castello di Praga," *Arte veneta* 19 (1965): 79; Beverly Louise Brown, "Paolo Veronese's *The Martyrdom and Last Communion of Saint Lucy*," *Venezia arti 2* (1988): 61.
- [6] Terisio Pignatti and Filippo Pedrocchi, *Veronese* (Milan, 1995), 2:489–491; W. R. Rearick, *The Art of Paolo Veronese* (Cambridge, 1988), 188–189.
- [7] Beverly Louise Brown, "Paolo Veronese's *The Martyrdom and Last Communion of Saint Lucy*," *Venezia arti 2* (1988): 63. See also Terisio Pignatti and Filippo Pedrocchi, *Veronese* (Milan, 1995), 2:491.
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## TECHNICAL SUMMARY

The picture is painted on a plain-weave, medium-weight fabric, consisting of three pieces, the largest of which is joined to the two smaller ones along a horizontal seam running approximately 39 centimeters above the lower edge. A vertical seam in Saint Lucy's robe joins the two smaller pieces of fabric. The painting has been lined, and although the original tacking margins are now missing, it appears to be close to its original dimensions. The paint was applied fluidly over an off-white preparation, thinly in the darker areas, more thickly in the light colors, and more thickly still in the highlights. The x-radiographs [fig. 1] show extensive pentimenti as in the positions of Saint Lucy's head and outstretched hand, in the hand of the kneeling figure, in the area above Lucy's cap, in the architecture above the executioner's head, in the man in the background sitting on the well, and elsewhere. There are several old tears in the original fabric support; the most prevalent ones are located in Saint Lucy's neck, in the head and scarf of the left-most figure, and in the blue garment of the kneeling figure. The surface is somewhat abraded, and the thinly painted architecture has darkened, in a way that compromises the spatial relationship of foreground to background. The painting was treated in 1982 before it entered the collection.

Peter Humfrey and Joanna Dunn based on the examination report by Jia-sun Tsang

March 21, 2019

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#### TECHNICAL COMPARATIVE FIGURES



**fig. 1** X-radiograph, Veronese, *The Martyrdom and Last Communion of Saint Lucy*, c. 1585/1586, oil on canvas, National Gallery of Art, Washington, Gift of The Morris and Gwendolyn Cafritz Foundation and Ailsa Mellon Bruce Fund

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#### PROVENANCE

Santa Croce, Belluno;[1] sent 1808/1811 to Milan.[2] Generale Conte Teodoro Lechi [1778-1866], Brescia, Italy, by 1814 (no. 49 in 1814 inventory);[3] acquired 1827 by (James Irvine, London and Rome) for Sir William Forbes of Pitsligo, 7th bt. [1773-1828], Fettercairn, Kincardineshire, Scotland; by inheritance to his son, Sir John Stuart Hepburn Forbes, 8th bt. [1804-1866], Pitsligo and Fettercairn;[4] (Forbes sale, by Alexander Rainy, London, 2 June 1842, no. 30, as *The Martyrdom of St. Giustina*, not sold);[5] by inheritance to his daughter, Harriet Williamina Hepburn-Forbes Trefusis, baroness Clinton [1835-1869], Heanton Satchville, Huish, near Merton,

Devon, and Fettercairn; by inheritance [either directly from his mother or through his father, 20th baron Clinton, who died 1904] to Charles John Robert Hepburn-Stuart-Forbes-Trefusis, 21st baron Clinton [1863-1957], Heanton Satchville and Fettercairn; by inheritance to his daughter, Fenella Hepburn-Stuart-Forbes-Trefusis [1889-1966, Mrs. John Herbert Bowes-Lyon], Fettercairn; gift to her daughter, Diana Cinderella Bowes-Lyon [1923-1986, Mrs. Peter Somervell]; (Somervell sale, Christie, Manson & Woods, London, 25 June 1971, no. 23); purchased by Eisenbeiss, private collection, Germany; (sale, Christie, Manson & Woods, London, 10 April 1981, no. 78); (Matthiesen Fine Art, Ltd., London); sold 1984 to NGA.

[1] The picture is first certainly recorded in the pastoral visitation of the church undertaken by Bishop Rota in 1723: “Vicino all’altar di Santa Lucia sopra la porta del campanile ... una bellissima pittura del Martirio di Santa Lucia dipinta da Paolo Veronese” (near the altar of Saint Lucy above the door to the campanile ... a very beautiful painting of the Martyrdom of Saint Lucy by Paolo Veronese) (quoted in Mario Dal Mas and Attilio Giacobbi, *Chiese scomparse di Belluno*, Belluno, 1977: 104). It is again recorded in the church in 1780 by Lucio Doglioni, *Notizie storiche e geografiche della città di Belluno e sua provincia: Con dissertazioni due dell’antico stato, e intorno al sito di Belluno* (1780), rev. ed., Belluno, 1816: 36. These references confirm that Ridolfi was referring to the present picture in his laconic mention of a “figura di Santa Lucia” by Veronese in Santa Croce. See Carlo Ridolfi, *Le maraviglie dell’arte, ovvero Le vite de gl’illustri pittori veneti, e dello stato* (Venice, 1648), ed. Detlev von Hadeln, 2 vols., Berlin, 1914-1924: 1(1914):317; and Peter Humfrey, “The Provenance of Veronese’s Martyrdom of St Lucy in Washington,” *Arte veneta* 43 (1989-1990): 89–90. The church was demolished in 1830.

[2] The picture is described with some precision in an inventory of paintings from suppressed religious foundations sent by the superintendent of paintings in Venice, Pietro Edwards, to Milan between 1808 and 1811 as “Il Martirio di Santa Lucia nell’atto di essere comunicata” (The martyrdom of Saint Lucy as she is taking communion) (see Vittorio Malamani, *Memorie del Conte Leopoldo Cicognara*, 2 vols., Venice, 1888: 2:378). The picture was probably initially destined for the Brera Gallery in Milan, but like many others it was selected by the viceroy Eugène de Beauharnais for his own collection, and was then sold off after the collapse of the Napoleonic regime in 1813/1814.

[3] *Indice e descrizione dei quadri del Sig. Generale Conte Teodoro Lechi di Brescia esistenti nella sua casa in Milano*, Milan, 1814: no. 49; Fausto Lechi, *I quadri delle collezioni Lechi in Brescia*, Florence, 1968: 184, no. 107, with the information that the Napoleonic general Lechi, a former companion-in-arms of Eugène de Beauharnais, acquired the picture in Milan.

[4] The sale to James Irvine is recorded by Fausto Lechi, *I quadri delle collezioni Lechi in Brescia*, Florence, 1968: 184, no. 107. In a letter of 10 July 1827, Irvine wrote to Forbes: "I forgot to say that the P. Veronese is the best of several he (Lechi) has got, but the subject will not perhaps please you. The saint is receiving the sacrament while the executioner is plunging a dagger in her breast, but it is less shocking than such subjects generally are." Then, after visiting Brescia in September to conclude the purchase, he sought to provide more reassurance: "The Paul Veronese exceeded my expectation on seeing it down, and I think it may be called his finest work and much superior to all the others in this collection" (letters of 10 July and 24 October 1827, in private family papers; see Peter Humfrey, in *The Age of Titian: Venetian Renaissance Art from Scottish Collections*, ed. Aidan Weston-Lewis, exh. cat., Royal Scottish Academy, Edinburgh, 2004: 192). Sir William died in the following year without ever seeing the collection that Irvine had assembled for him, and it was in vain that the latter tried to elicit some enthusiasm for it from Sir William's son and heir, Sir John Forbes. See William Buchanan, *William Buchanan and the 19th Century Art Trade: 100 Letters to His Agents in London and Italy*, ed. Hugh Brigstocke, London, 1982: 29-30.

[5] After Sir John Forbes had failed to sell the picture in London in 1842, William Buchanan tried to sell it on his behalf to King Willem II of the Netherlands, but without success, and it remained in the possession of Forbes's descendants until 1971. See William Buchanan, *William Buchanan and the 19th Century Art Trade: 100 Letters to His Agents in London and Italy*, ed. Hugh Brigstocke, London, 1982: 29-30; and Erik Hinterding and Fenny Horsch, "A Small but Choice Collection: The Art Gallery of King Willem II of the Netherlands (1792-1849)," *Simiolus* 20 (1989): 31.

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## EXHIBITION HISTORY

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*Italian Paintings of the Sixteenth Century*

1960 Italian Art and Britain. Winter Exhibition, Royal Academy of Arts, London, 1960, no. 67, repro.

1988 Paolo Veronese: Disegni e dipinti, Fondazione Giorgio Cini, Venice, 1988, no. 66, repro.

1988 The Art of Paolo Veronese, 1528-1588, National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., 1988-1989, no. 97, repro.

2004 The Age of Titian: Venetian Renaissance Art from Scottish Collections, Royal Scottish Academy Building, Edinburgh, 2004, no. 71, repro.

2012 Paolo Veronese: A Master and His Workshop in Renaissance Venice, The John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art, Sarasota, 2012-2013, no. 26, repro.

2014 Paolo Veronese. L'illusione della realtà, Palazzo della Gran Guardia, Verona, 2014, no. 5.18, repro.

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