## On the dating of Vivaldi’s *Juditha triumphans* (RV 644)

Marshal Johann Mattheus von der Schulenburg (1661-1747), the dedicatee of Giacomo Cassetti’s libretto for the oratorio *Juditha Triumphans devicta Holofernis barberie* (RV 644), was almost a real-life analogue of the warrior-widow Judith, whose deeds the work recounts. It was he who, in the ostensible process of defending the Faith, led the Venetian defense of the island of Corfù, a Venetian possession since 1396. Recent reversals in the Peloponnese caused the central command of Venice’s naval resources to be concentrated on the Adriatic island. Crete had been lost in 1669, its Peloponnesian holdings in 1714. 1687?

The Venetian Republic shunned battles that did not involve agreements with the Papacy and the Empire, but satisfying the wishers of both could be challenging. Pope Clement XI was prompted by Philip V to consider the consequences of an attack on Naples (then under Spanish control), were the Adriatic to be compromised, as the Venetians were about the preservation of their dwindling trade routes.[[1]](#footnote-1) Their negotiations took place in November 1715. The Venetians were then coerced by the Austrians to guarantee their participation in the defense of Naples, should it become necessary. For them Corfù was a more convenient venue for battle. However, the Austrians did not formally take up arms until July 1, when Prince Eugene of Savoy left Vienna, joined other imperial forces numbering 65,000 men, and proceeded to quell 200,000 Turks in Hungary. In one way the annals of Eugene’s travels ran more parallel to the script of *Juditha triumphans* than did those of Schulenburg, for it was Eugene who wrote from the tent of the Grand Visier in late August to inform the pope of his victory. (Judith in the oratorio severed the head of an inebriated Holofernis in his/her tent.)

Cassetti’s libretto was dedicated to Schulenburg. A close reading of weekly newssheets almost always bears out the patron’s availability to attend an opening performance of an opera.[[2]](#footnote-2) Oratorio texts were infrequently dedicated to anyone, but *Juditha triumphans* is not a typical oratorio. Its motivation was ostentatiously political, somewhat in the manner of oratorios given in the Venetian *ospedali* in the 1680s. In the oratorio Judith commanded the equivalent of a legion of virgins, and it was here that the role of the Pietà’s *coro* was promoted to the same rank as the protagonist, though in a supporting role.

Schulenburg was Saxon by birth but also an imperial count. He had been retained as supreme leader (*generale di sbarco*) of the Venetian fleet in 1715. On 21 December of that year the Venetian Senate promoted several others in Schulenburg’s service to higher military ranks. Among them were the French major-general Grimaldi (now serving as *tenente generale*[[3]](#footnote-3)) and two *sargenti generali*, \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Sala and Gio. Battista Rossi.[[4]](#footnote-4) The Venetians wasted no time in coopting civilian efforts to prepare for battle. A total of eight warships was launched at the Arsenal over the coming months.

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In seeking to aligning public sentiment with the Serenissima’s objectives, San Marco introduced panegyrics into its normally pious observance of the first three days of January 1716. They had traditionally been reserved for displays of penitence in San Marco. Most years the nobility the basilica to pay homage to the Pala d’Oro (a Venetian analogue of sorts to the Crown Jewels). We read (4 Jan. 1716) that

Mercordì mattina primo giorno dell’Anno nuovo, per consagrar alla Maestà Divina le Primizie del medesimo, si fece per ordine Publico nella Chiesa Ducale di S. Marco con li due [giorni] susseguenti l’Esposizione del Venerabile con apparato, e sontuosa Musica; & ad essempio di Sua Serenità, che vi calò con la Seren[issima] Signorìa, e Monsig[nore] Nunzio Ponteficio, vi fù in detti 3 giorni un continuato concorso di Popolo à porgere fervorose Preghiere all’Altissimo, acciò si degni *benedire l’Armi della Seren*[issima] *Republica contro il commune Nemico*: e vi sermoneggiarono tanto la mattina, che nel doppo pranzoli più celebri Sacri Oratori; & hieri sera se ne fece la reposizione con una Processione seguita da Sua Serenità, Seren[issima] Signorìa, e Nobiltà tutta à due à due con Candele accese in mano.

The tone is quite evocative of Cassetti’s libretto, and indeed he may have been formulating his conception of it at this time. If a performance had been intended as a send-off for the combined forces, however, it likely would have been thwarted by a rapid unfolding of events and the fact that oratorios were normally only performed during Advent (now past) and Lent (starting on 25 February 1716 and 9 February 1717). The Venetians were clearly in a frenzy of preparations and rhetoric. On 5 January the title of Capitano Generale was conferred on Michiel Morosini[[5]](#footnote-5) only to be rescinded a week later, when Andrea Pisani, who had recently served as Generale dell’Isole, was named to the same post.[[6]](#footnote-6) Carnival opened on 14 January in 1716, but the festivities were subdued by a week of extreme cold, such that the entire lagoon froze, and the preferred amusement became a walk on the ice between Venice and Mestre.[[7]](#footnote-7)

This freeze did not prevent the launch on the 23rd of a new “first-class ship” called the Madonna.[[8]](#footnote-8) Her launch was celebrated with the firing of 80 canons under the supervision of Marshal Schulenburg [25 January]. On 1 February Schulenburg was reportedly preparing for his departure for Corfù, Zante, and Cephalonia, after which he would take command of the army in Dalmatia. We know that he had arrived in Corfu by 15 February, having stopped first at other islands including Zante. Thus his departure is likely to have occurred during the first week of February. In a letter Schulenburg wrote on 19 February 1716[[9]](#footnote-9) he reported that a fire onboard one of his ships about ten miles from Corfu had resulted in the loss of 50 men. The cannon, he proudly stated, was saved!

[We know, however, that Schulenburg was already in Corfu, because the CO reports a letter dated 19 February [1716] in which the marshal reported that one of ships was sunk 50 miles off the coast of Corfù. While fifty men were lost, he proudly noted that the canon was saved! [avviso of 7 marzo 1716].==

Further news about Schulenburg and his movements is then eclipsed in news-sheets by the pending arrival of the duke of Bavaria and other important visitors including the duke of Saxony and the prince of Guastalla.[[10]](#footnote-10)

## Quarantine

Vivaldi lore has maintained for more than a generation that *Juditha triumphans* was performed in November 1716. The inference may have arisen from a cursory look at the aftermath of the battle, for troops under Schulenburg’s command began to set sail from Corfù in that month. When it came to returns from abroad, by land or by sea, the journey home was invariably retarded by quarantine regulations. The length of quarantine varied from two or five weeks, depending on the direction one had traveled and the current level of apprehension about health threats from that direction. The average was a month, though the implied 40 days was rarely reached. Weekly news reports occasionally relate astounding accounts of the inconveniences that Quarantine imposed. Among these the most memorable is that of the Hanoverian duke Johann Friedrich, who, attempting to reach Venice in time for Carnival 1679, was stopped at a border in the Trentino. Dissatisfied for the long period he was being asked to remain, he changed course to enter from Lombardia. This involving retreating to Augsburg, where he fell ill and died. These kinds of tales strengthened the hand of the Venetian health authorities, and cases in which fame or rank trumped health regulation are unknown.

So too with Schulenburg and his top officials. They were not readmitted to Venetian society until 3 January 1717. ==

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Despite out knowledge of the motivations for the composition of Juditha, the dating of the first performance has been problematical. It was exceedingly rare for an ambitious work, such as this one, to be premiered in the absence of the person to whom the text was dedicated.

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Oratorios were generally given only on Sundays of Advent and Lent. They were given only as deemed appropriate however. A really popular work might be repeated on consecutive Sundays, but planning was not carried out far in advance. Oratorios were also sometimes given to mark other important feasts of the Christian year. Assumption in particular attracted its fair share of works.

One problem with speculating about *Juditha*’s place in the Christian year is that it is celebratory rather than penitential (as Lent required). It is certainly not linkable with Advent, nor hardly suited to Lent. Venice was overflowing with important visitors throughout 1716 and into 1717. The clearest driver of likely placement was Schulenburg himself. The marshal spent long years of residence in Venice, where he was a notable patron of painters and sculptors but also an advocate for opera singers. It is entirely believable that would have appreciated the amazing variety of timbres and their carefully crafted correlates with the confrontation between the Jewish heroine, Juditha, and the bellicose, drunken Assyrians under Holofernis’ command.

The amount of effort required to compose, rehearse, and perform *Juditha* was far greater than that for a Te Deum, which was customarily performed under the auspices of an allied diplomat immediately upon receiving news of a welcome victory.

==An alternative path to dating *Juditha triumphans* has been to trace references to oratorios given at the Pietà in weekly news reports. We shall also weigh the evidence from this activity. Schulenburg’s own movements between December 1715 and January 1717 are traced below.

[report of 28 december 1716].

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The idea of Juditha could have been hatched during the preceding winter, when the duke of Saxony was winding up his spectacular 17-month stay in Venice. He was greatly and repeatedly feted, primarily in gondolas on the grand Canal, during the last three days of Carnival [23-25 February 1716], culminating in a banquet at the Teatro San Gio. Grisostomo (a theater in which no Vivaldi opera was ever staged).



==The actual battle took place between 25 July and 20 August 1716.

We next hear of Schulenburg on the island of Zante on 15 September 1716 [letter reported on 10 October]. The conclusion of the battle of Temesvar was announced on 11 October upon the arrival of two couriers from Vienna [issue of 14 October]. So now the Turks had been quelled on land. It remained to secure Corfù in order that Venice might retain a grip on the Adriatic.

Since Carnival would open in 1717 on 4 January, circumstances indicate that January 3rd would have been an optimal date for the performance of *Juditha*. The 3rd was a Sunday, which was the normal day for the performance of oratorios in the four *ospedali*. The work would have been performed after *pranzo*, that is in the afternoon, before a select audience of Schulenburg’s entire contingent. As we see from the brief report on 9 Gennaro 1716/7, this select but possible weary group would have had little time to prepare for the treat. They had been in quarantine at the Old Lazzareto since December 6.

[Report of 9 Gennaro below]

La mattina di Domenica [3] sortì poi da questo Lazzareto vecchio il maresciallo Generale Conte di **Sciulemburgo** col Generale Sala, & altri Ufficiali, che vennero dal Levante, doppo havervi terminata la scritta loro contumacia di 28 giorni.

==From the corriere ordinario:

La mattina di Domenica [3.i.1717] sortì poi da questo Lazzareto vecchio il maresciallo Generale Conte di **Sciulemburgo** col Generale Sala, & altri Ufficiali, che vennero dal Levante, doppo havervi terminata la scritta loro contumacia di 28 giorni.

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Sept. 7, 1716: a papal party sang a Te Deum for Eugene’s victory in Hungary and that of the Venetians in Corfu in the catacomb of Domitilla (Rome). (pope book, p. 510). As rrecorded by an inscription in the catacomb itself.

## Music as evidence

The titlepage of the libretto:

hisce belli temporibus

a psalentium virginum choro

in templo pietatis canendum

Jacobi Cassetti Eq.

metrice votis expressum

piissimus ipsius orphanodocii praesidentibus

ac gubernatoribus submisse Dicatum

musice expressum

ab admed. Rev. D.

Antonio Vivaldi

Translation:

In these times of war
by psalentium virgin choir
in the temple of love songs
James Cassetti EQ.
represented the wishes expressed
most of orphanodocii presidency
and pilots to submit Dedicated
music expressed
by admed. Rev. D.
Antonio Vivaldi

Juditha allusions

I-MOas

MOas: Venetia 18 Decembre 1677

2r) Il S*igno*r Duca di Razivil continua à divertirsi nel vedere le cose notabili della Città insieme con la Consorte. Martedi fà a sentire un'Oratorio recitato in Musica dalle figlie dell'Hospital dell'Incurabili rappresentate *La Vita, e morte di Santa Teresa*,[[11]](#footnote-11) restandone molto sodisfatto . . . .

I-Rvat NV: Venezia 18 Xbre [Dicembre] 1683

f.1204v) Martedi nella Chiesa dell'Ospedale degl'Incurabili si fece un Oratorio in Musica da q*ue*ste figliole che cantano, rappresentando sta [sic] Guera, ed ebbi concorso grande.

MOas: Venetia 7 Xbre [Dicembre] 1686

1r) Hanno fatto punto fermo le Opere in Musica in questi Teatri, e le Comedie ancora, mentre restano sospesi tali divertimenti durante tutto l'Advento affinche si disponghino gli Animi de' Xpriani [xx] ad attendere con la mag*gio*r divotione la nascita del Salva*to*re Mercordi doppo pranzo si gode bensi un divertim*en*to Sp*ecia*le nella Chiesa de' gl'Incurabili con un' Or*atori*o cantato da quelle Figlie intitolato *il Trionfo dell'Innocenza*[[12]](#footnote-12) opera della penna erudita del Sig*no*r Pal*l*avicino, che cantata poi dalle suoi Angeliche di quelle Figlie ne riportò un' appaluso grandiss*i*mo. La Chiesa che è ben grande, e capace era ripiena di Nobiltà, e damme, et il concorso fù tale, che chi tardi ad andarvi non hebbe luogo. Durò il spatio di 3 hore, e si crede ch*e* sarà replicato, mentre che la hanno di sentirlo di nuovo hà fatto mag*gio*re in chi una volta l'ha goduto.

MOas: Venetia p*ri*mo Febraro 1686 [M.V.]

2r) [Elector of Baviera]...Hieri fù alla Chiesa degl'Incurabili à sentire l'Oratorio replicato per la 3:za volta[[13]](#footnote-13) da quelle figlie, e vi fù pure il Ser*enissi*mo di Mantova, P*re*n*ci*pe, e P*re*n*ci*pessa di Baraith con molti altri soggetti di gran conditione, et il concorso [2v] fù tale, che ancor che la Chiesa sia molto capace, non puotero molti havervi l'ingresso.

MOas: Venetia 15 Febraro 1686

2v) È state tale la sodisfattione della Sig*no*ra P*re*n*ci*pessa di Barait [look up Marmee Eddy and Rosenmueller] nel sentir l'Oratorio[[14]](#footnote-14) cantato dalle figlie del Pio luoco dell'Incurabili, che hà desiderato vederle, onde giovedi fù à trovarle, e dalle medesime fatto gli sentire privatamente altro Oratorio, non poteva trattenersi di comendarli, e le lasciò il regalo di 50 Ongari.

 I-Vas PV: 3-10.XII.1701

f.2/24) Alla Pietà [Domenica] per la Novena si elleggerà dà quelle Cantani l’oratorio del Sig. Sandrinelli intitolato | *Triumphus Divinae Misericordiae* | che con tutto il studio fù posto in Musica dal Sig. Maestro [Francesco] Gasparini....

PV: 17.-24.XII.1701

f.1/27) Riesce cosi caro alla divotione de Fedeli l’aspettazione del Parto Verginale, che in quest’Inclita non vi è per cosi dire Basilica che non Venghi dal Com[m]une concorso frequentata tratenendosi in pie contemplazioni, ed’ in quei esercitij Spirituali, che compongono la Novena; e fra le altre singolari quella del pio Luogo della Pietà, oue da quelle erudistiss*im*me figlie viene ogni giorno cantato il già scritto Oratorio, che sembra peola loro melodia e Nepie degli Angeli cantate nel presepio. [revised]

PV: 11-18.II.1701

f.2/34) Dalle Melodiche Sirene del Coro degl’Incurabili si recitò Venerdi l’Oratorio di *S. Orsola* del Sig*no*r Polarolo, ove scielse gll’inarivabili accenti la Famosa Palavicina, che che riportò gll’un*ivers*ali applausi. [corrected]

PV: 18.-25.II.1701 M.V.

f.1/35) Il Sig. Pollarolo fece nell’Incurabili recitare il scritto Oratorio che ebbe centaplicati li viva, e il di lui famoso drama in Milano intitolato *il Grand’ Arrenione* [lit. Antonino] ha toccata la metta di quello applauso di cui sin ora s’è vero degno il solo suo grande inemitabile ingegno.

PV: 25.II.1701/2-4.Marzo.1702

f.2v/38v) Lunedi si repplicherà a divertim*en*to della divot*io*ne ed à gloria delle Figlie Cantanti degl’Incurabili il famoso Orat*ori*o il *S. Orsola*, manifatura applausibile del Polarolo.

PV: 18-25 Marzo 1702

f.2v/44v) Martedì alla Pietà si reciterà il di già scritto Oratorio.

I-Vas Avvisi: Venetia 23. Marzo 1720 [Alvisi]\*

1r) Seguì poi Sabbato matt*in*a della scorsa il Trattam*en*to [sic] che fece la Pub*li*ca Deputaz*io*ne in Murano al Palazzo di Casa Pesaro al Sig*no*re P*re*n*ci*pe di Modena, che fù assai lauto e generoso di sopra 40 posate, ma no*n* vi fù nella sera la festa di Ballo, in quello di Casa Cornaro, come si credeva, e fù fatto vedere à S.A. la manifatt*ur*a de Cristallij e de Specchi, e nella dom*eni*ca doppo pranso fù pure servita à sentire un Oratorio in musica [none listed in Arnold], che fù fatta dalle figlie del Pio Ospitale de mendicanti dov’era in quel g*ior*no la solennità p*er* la festa di S. Lazaro. [Vivaldi]

I-Vas Avvisi: Venetia 13 Febraro 1722 M.V. [Alvisi]

2/2v) È insort [xx] al Ospitale degl’Incurabili un grand’Incendio, ch’ebbe l’origine sin dalla decorsa Domenica ma solamente mercordi verso l’ora di pranzo scopiarono improvisam*en*te la fiamme le quali consumarno tutto quell’Oratorio, ove solevano andare molti devoti à far le loro Orazioni,...Le Putte del Coro passarono in una Casa particolare, e v’è state poco d’aver preservata la Chiesa, che e frà le due laterali dell’Ospitale dalla voracità delle fiamme....

I-Vas Avvisi: Venetia 24 Agosto 1726 [Alvisi] \*

1r) Giunse poi Dom*eni*ca in q*ue*sta Ser*enissi*ma Dominante l’avvisato S*igno*r Card*ina*le Bentivogli che parti martedi sera essendo prima passate le reciproche visite con q*ue*sta Em*inenz*a Ottoboni, il quale nella sera di d*et*ta Dom*eni*ca fece fare nel proprio Palazzo un’ Oratorio in Musica [Marcello??] al quale intervenne gran N*umer*o di q*ue*ste Dame, e Cav*alier*ri à cui furono distribuiti abbondantiss*i*mi rinfreschi d’ogni sorte, avendo l’Em*inen*za Sua nel g*ior*no anteced*en*te fatto dispensare à tutti li Poveri della sua contrada larga elemosina.

I-Vas Avvisi: Venetia 24 Agosto 1726 [Donado] \*

1r) La sera del sudetto giorno l’Em*inen*za S*ua* [?? fix this elsewhere] Cardinale Ottononi diede nel proprio Palazzo il divertimento d’un Oratorio à 5 Voci [whose?] e una gran sinfonia intitolato l’*Annunciatione della Beata Vergine* [whose?], e vi intervennero molti Cav*allie*ri e Dame oltre oltre [sic] essere il distinzione à durante questo trattenimento fece l’Em*inenz*a S*ua* dispensare colla solita sua generosita Copiosi ed squisiti rinfeschi.

I-Vas Avvisi: Venetia 21 Giugno 1727 [Alvisi]

1r) Nella Chiesa di San Michele di Murano de Monaci Camaldolesi, si diede martedì matt*in*a con straord*ina*ria pompa principio ad un’ Triduo solito farli dalla d*ett*a religione ogni cento anni, essendo questo il settimo dalla gloriosa morte del loro Patriarca San Romualdo Abbate con messa Pontificale in musica, e Panegirico, e nel doppo pranso un’Oratorio similm*en*te in musica, come seguì nelli due giorni susseguenti, e nel doppo pranzo dell’ultimo il Vespro Cantato, e Te Deum, essendo con ciò terminata tal solenne funzione, che fù preceduta il doppo pranzo del lunedi, come p*er* introduz*io*ne da un’ Accademia in lode del med*esi*mo Santo.

I-Vas Avvisi: Venetia 12 Luglio 1727 [Alvisi]

1r) Dom*eni*ca matt*in*a li P.P. Carmelitani Scalzi diedero nella loro Chiesa principio all’Ottavario in onore di San Gio*vanni* della Croce, annoverato già alc*un*i mesi, dal Pontef*ic*e frà gli altri Santi, qual funzione viene molto applaudita dal continuo, e numeroso concorso, si p*er* la vaghezza, e distribuiti in d*ett*a Chiesa, essendovi stata nel p*ri*mo g*ior*no tanto alla messa cantatavi da q*ue*sto monsig*no*r Patriarca, che al Vespro, scelta musica de Voci, et Istrumentj d’ogni sorte, e nelli susseguentj il Canto figurato, et è pur stata assai ammirata l’eloquenza di gl’Insigni Oratori, che hanno pronunciatj I Panejgirici in lode d’esso Santo, et ogni doppo pranzo vi è stato esposto il Venerabile col quale si farà dimani solenne Process*ion*e e con ciò si darà fine à quest’Ottavario.

1. Second book, pp. 122f. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Schulenburg himself was to be the dedicatee of Fortunato Chelleri’s *Amalasunta* (Sant’Angelo, 27 December 1718). [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. *Annals of the wars of the eighteenth century*, comp. Edward Cust. Vol. 1 (1700-1739). London, 1857. Ludwig Pastor, *The History of the Popes from the close of the middle ages*. Vol. xxxiii (1700-1721). London: Kegan Paul et al., 1941. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Sala’s first name is unknown. He commanded a troop of Parmesan fighters that sustained a high rate of casualties. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Report of 11 January 1716. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Report of 18 January. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Report of 25 January. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. In fact four new warships were launched in the middle of February 1715. They were Il Terrore Veneta, S. Francesco Xaviero, la Madonna della Salute, and La Fenice. [CO, report of 16 feb 1715]. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Cited in an *avviso* of 7 marzo 1716. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Guastalla would be the dedicatee of *L’incoronazione di Dario*, premiered at Sant’Angelo on 23 January 1717. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Not listed for this year in Denis and Elsie Arnold, *The Oratorio in Venice* (Royal Musical Association Monographs, 2; London, 1986). Indeed, the earliest oratorio listed for the Incurabili, Pallavicino's *S. Francesco Saverio*, said (p. 83) to be cited in Caffi's notes for this same year. But the Arnolds do list, provisionally for 1687, a work entitled *Fuga trionfante nella nascita, vita e morte di Santa Teresa* [music by Pallavicino on a text by F. M. Piccioli]. Theer citation comes from Allacci's *Drammaturgia*. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Generally cited for the year 1687; Pallade Veneta reports a performance given on 12 January [the following month]. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Il trionfo dell'innocenza. See above. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Apparently Il trionfo dell'innocenza. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)