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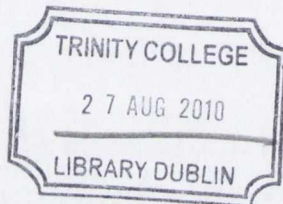
**THE LITERARY PATRONAGE OF  
LODOVICO II GONZAGA,  
MARCHESE OF MANTUA  
1444-1478**

**Ph.D. THESIS**

**UNIVERSITY OF DUBLIN  
TRINITY COLLEGE**

**2010**

**PAUL HARE**



*THOSIS*

*8932*

## DECLARATION

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## SUMMARY

The scope of my research was to bring to life the figure of Lodovico Gonzaga as an erudite humanist statesman. Although he is often framed in such terms, conventional definitions such as “pupil of Vittorino da Feltre” and “prince of arms and letters” are so often read as to have no real significance. His peer and former schoolmate Federico da Montefeltro in Urbino, memorably depicted in his study by Justus of Ghent, enjoys a deserved reputation for being a genuine humanist prince. No such portrait exists for Lodovico, but his achievements as Marchese of Mantua, in terms of both enlightened government and patronage of the arts, made me suspect that such feats must have been underpinned by a profound humanist education as well as, in all probability, a genuine interest in letters.

Following a thorough study of secondary sources, a partial picture began to emerge of a prince engaging with men of letters as well as artists and architects. In many cases, indeed, distinctions between fields were blurred; Mantegna the painter was also an antiquarian of some stature, while Leon Battista Alberti was a figure whose breadth of interests included many areas of scholarship and culture. From an early stage, therefore, it was evident that Lodovico’s court was a meeting place of diverse strands of art and learning, a scene of significant cultural cross-fertilisation.

My main focus, however, remained on Lodovico’s sponsorship of humanists and scholars. Following systematic research in the Archivio di Stato in Mantua, initially of the Buste Davari which, in turn, gave many indications of starting points in the vast Archivio Gonzaga, I was able to locate documents to supplement existing research on this area of the marchese’s patronage. While some figures and themes recurred in several contexts, it appeared to me that three broad areas could be defined.

The first of these was Lodovico’s continued investment in what I define as two outstanding cultural institutions: the Mantuan School, initially known as the *Casa Giocosa*, and the immense Gonzaga Library. After contextualising Lodovico’s own education, Chapter Three traces the succession of tutors in Mantua for the three decades after Vittorino, challenging the notion that the death of the great

pedagogue brought to an end humanist studies in Mantua. In the following chapter, meanwhile, following brief discussion of an inventory of 1407, I cast light on the marchese's external networks for the acquisition of books, concluding that, by the later decades of the Quattrocento, the Gonzaga Library must have been, at the very least, the equal of the more celebrated collections in Urbino and Ferrara. More so than in the arts, where the shift in taste from Gothic to Renaissance was more gradual, the library appears to have been expanded along humanist lines from the early years of Lodovico's rule.

Many of the volumes in the Gonzaga Library were physically created in Mantua, and the dynamics of this production are the focus of the next section. Although the evidence is fragmented and incomplete, the Archivio Gonzaga is rich in correspondence between the marchesi and numerous scribes and miniaturists. The arrival of the first print presses in the town, meanwhile, coincided with the final years of Lodovico's rule, and this is examined in relation to the remarkable figure of Pietroadamo de' Micheli. There follows analysis of the intensive activity in this area up to 1478, the year of the marchese's death. A recurring theme, both in handwritten and in printed volumes, is an insistence on the accuracy of the text - further cementing Lodovico's reputation as a discerning scholar and patron.

Lodovico's association with men of letters is the focus of the final section. Chapter Seven examines the lives, works and relations with the Gonzaga of three unexceptional but nonetheless fascinating local writers - Giovanni Pietro Arrivabene, Giovanni Francesco Suardi and Filippo Nuvoloni - while Chapter Eight analyses Lodovico's dealings with three of the most respected humanists of the century: Francesco Filelfo, Enea Silvio Piccolomini and Leon Battista Alberti. The picture that emerges is one of an erudite prince who not only enjoys the respect of each, but is comfortable conversing with scholars on their own terms. His relationship with Alberti in particular, traditionally defined in terms of patron and architect, must, I propose, be viewed primarily as a relationship between enlightened prince and humanist.



# THE LITERARY PATRONAGE OF LODOVICO II GONZAGA, MARCHESE OF MANTUA 1444-1478

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## NOTE ON THE TEXT

Every effort has been made to keep linguistic inconsistencies to a minimum. When referring to titles and offices, I have, as far as possible, adopted the practices prevalent in English language scholarship of Renaissance Italy. While, for example, titles such as *Re* and *Duca* have been replaced with their obvious English equivalents *King* and *Duke*, in referring to the Gonzaga I have adhered to the Italian terms *Marchese* and *Marchesa*, as the most familiar terms in English for Mantua's ruling dynasty. Terms with no obvious English counterpart, such as *contado* and *podestà*, have been left in their Italian form, as have some buildings and works of art, such as *Palazzo Ducale* and *Camera degli sposi*. Contemporary correspondence and literary texts, including their spelling and punctuation, are reproduced as they appear in cited primary and secondary sources, though full stops have been added where the sense would appear to require one.

### Key to Abbreviations in Footnotes

ASMn AG	Archivio di Stato di Mantova, Archivio Gonzaga
b.	busta
c.	carta
f.	foglio
Lib.	Libro
BCM	Biblioteca Comunale di Mantova
MS	Manuscript
BL	British Library
Add.	Additional

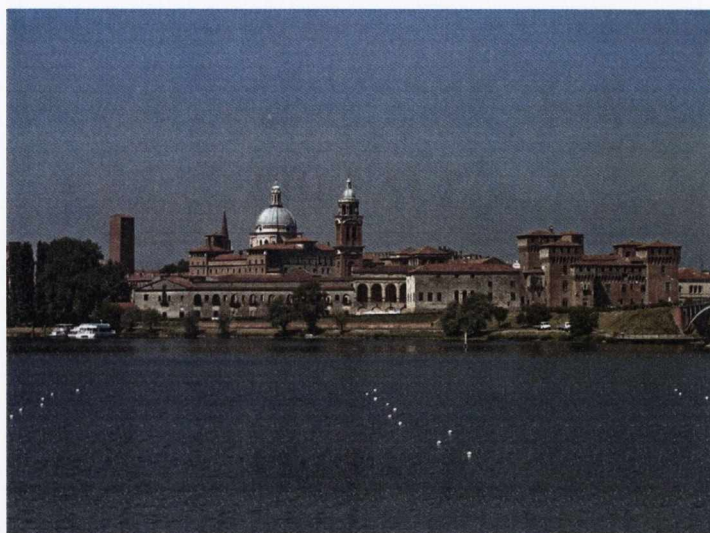




*In loving memory  
of my father,  
Ian Hare, 1942-2003*



## PREFACE



**Fig.1: View of Mantua from Lago Inferiore**

Mantua, today a town of modest dimensions in Eastern Lombardy, is a destination visited by many thousands each year, in part for its charming peninsular position on the waters of the Mincio but primarily for the historical, architectural and artistic legacies of the Gonzaga dynasty, with whom the town has become synonymous. Founded in the Etruscan period and renowned throughout the Middle Ages as the birthplace of the Latin poet Virgil, it was during the Renaissance that Mantua, under several generations of its remarkable and enduring ruling house, flourished as a centre of arts and learning. At its core was a court eager to embrace new cultural trends based on the exciting rediscoveries from antiquity which, having emanated for the most part from larger centres such as Florence, Venice and Padua, took root in princely states such as neighbouring Ferrara, ruled by the Este, and, further south, in Urbino under the Montefeltro. More so than either of the latter, however, the Gonzaga in Mantua realised a level and a diversity of achievement, in the arts as well as in learning, which distinguished their town as arguably the finest of the smaller centres in which the Renaissance took root.

The sixth ruler of the Gonzaga dynasty, Lodovico, who was Marchese of Mantua from 1444 to 1478, is a figure invariably mentioned by historians and art historians of the Italian Renaissance. While he is rightly renowned for his wise government,



his military exploits and his prolific patronage of art and architecture, this thesis aims to present a third facet of Lodovico's persona which is seldom afforded due consideration: his outstanding sponsorship of letters and learning, stemming from the thorough humanist education he received as a youth under the exceptional guidance of Vittorino da Feltre, the great humanist pedagogue. It will also be demonstrated that Lodovico's contribution in this area far exceeded that of mere patron; he was a ruler of considerable learning and discernment, an exemplary Renaissance prince of both arms and letters.

Lodovico's patronage of scholarship and literature cannot be seen in proper perspective without prior examination of Mantua's social and political background from the dynasty's origins to his own times, nor indeed without some limited evaluation of coeval artistic developments. Although these spheres are not the primary focus of this thesis, they are considered in Part One. The first chapter traces the roots of the Gonzaga family from their seizure of Mantua from the Bonacolsi clan in 1328. A brief account of the lives and achievements of the first five Gonzaga rulers follows, culminating in an evaluation of the legacy of Lodovico's father, Gianfrancesco, who secured for his dynasty the hereditary title of marchese from Emperor Sigismund in 1433. The remarkable marriage of Lodovico to Barbara of Brandenburg, stipulated in the imperial award of 1433, is then analysed, together with Barbara's contribution to many areas of state and government. Profiles of the children of Lodovico and Barbara are followed by a geopolitical contextualisation of Mantua in the Quattrocento, before Lodovico's career as *condottiere* is described. Lastly, I examine some of the key political achievements of his thirty-four years of rule.

The aim of chapter two is to assess Lodovico's role as patron of art and architecture, and to account for two major artistic developments during this time, both of which can also be traced to varying degrees in his sponsorship of letters and learning: a gradual transition in taste from the International Gothic style to the canons of neo-classicism and the emergence of Mantua as a leading Renaissance centre. Notable commissions and likely motives for patronage are discussed, and elements which appear to be consistent with the sponsorship of letters and learning are highlighted. The significance of Luca Fancelli, Andrea Mantegna and

Leon Battista Alberti is discussed, while two distinct periods of patronage are demarcated, the first aimed at the improvement of the territorial state and the second, from 1460, geared towards the urban renewal and embellishment of the capital, culminating in the splendid artistic and architectural maturity of the 1470s. Contributions by other leading figures and courtiers are examined, followed by a discussion of a large-scale project funded by Lodovico outside Mantua: the regeneration of the Church of the Santissima Annunziata in Florence. The next part of the chapter discusses painting in Mantua from the time of Pisanello, when the first signs of a new style coexisted with more traditional Gothic tastes, to the arrival of Andrea Mantegna and the dawn of a more mature classicism. The latter's dealings with Lodovico reveal a new model of patron-artist relations for the marchese, and Mantegna's most significant works in Mantua are also briefly taken into consideration. The final section examines other forms of art financed by the marchese, the so-called "arti minori", including weaving, jewellery, woodwork, metalwork, glasswork and items in leather. Particular mention is made of medals by Pisanello and a distinctive Mantuan school of successors in this field.

Part Two of the thesis opens with chapter three, which focuses on schooling in Mantua during Lodovico's lifetime. Following a brief introduction to humanism and the *studia humanitatis*, I account for the arrival of the great Renaissance pedagogue Vittorino da Feltre and the founding of the Casa Giocosa in 1423. There follows a discussion of the Gonzaga children and other notable pupils, some of whom went on to become scholars in their own right, while others nourished the Mantuan state apparatus. With the death of Vittorino occurring two years after Lodovico's succession, I then examine the marchese's sponsorship of the school and tutors over the next three decades, incorporating documentary evidence confirming his status as a patron of learning. There is also some discussion of the achievements of a succession of humanist tutors in Mantua, including Platina, Gregorio Tifernate, Giorgio Merula and Senofonte and Mario Filelfo, the latter two being sons of the renowned Hellenist Francesco. Having been educated in one of the great schools of the era, without question the central foundation of the Mantuan Renaissance, it is argued that Lodovico himself became a generous sponsor of education.



Chapter four presents the Gonzaga Library as a second great cultural institution of the Mantuan Renaissance, closely connected to the first in that its collections were constantly enriched through the presence of Vittorino and his successors. Having inherited the original library from the Bonacolsi dynasty, it is demonstrated that, during the course of the fourteenth century, the library was developed by the early Gonzaga *signori*, and especially by Guido, who was acquainted with Petrarch. Such was the growth of the Gonzaga collection at this time that, by the turn of the century, it was recognised by other statesmen as one of the finest libraries in Renaissance Italy. There follows a brief analysis of the inventory of 1407, with particular reference to the strong presence of the French-Arthurian genre. Although this tradition remained strong in Mantua and other princely states throughout the Quattrocento, it is demonstrated that, particularly after the arrival of Vittorino, the library assumed a predominantly humanist direction, which included the acquisition of many Greek texts. During the 1450s and 1460s in particular, Lodovico continuously added to his collections through a variety of channels, and his correspondence with humanists and other rulers shows him to have been a discerning reader for whom correctness of text was the utmost consideration. It is suggested, in conclusion, that the marchese's library, which included volumes in five languages over a broad range of religious, scientific, legal, courtly and humanist genres, rivalled the more famous library in Urbino of his close friend Federico da Montefeltro.

Part Three of the thesis examines the production of books in Mantua. Largely responsible for the growth of the library during the rule of Lodovico were the scribes and miniaturists whose services he engaged, and they are the focus of chapter five. In the first section I acknowledge the decoration of texts as a major area of activity in the Quattrocento, and a significant point of intersection of arts and letters. There follows a brief account of one of the most remarkable artefacts of the northern Italian Renaissance courts: the so-called *Messale di Barbara*. The importance of this volume, not merely as an exceptional work of art in its own right but also as a document of changing artistic currents in Mantua, is analysed in relation to the substitution of the Late Gothic miniaturist Belbello da Pavia with Mantegna's preferred choice of Gerolamo da Cremona. Some revealing contemporary correspondence regarding the *Messale* is also examined. The

remainder of the chapter aims to provide a comprehensive account of a series of scribes and miniaturists employed by Lodovico and Barbara, together with the tomes this investment generated. The correspondence included, as well as giving information on the volumes being produced, reveals interesting insights into the working and living conditions provided by the marchesi. In the concluding part of the chapter I suggest that the seemingly vast employment of practitioners in the copying and in the decoration of texts represents further irrefutable evidence of the appreciation of the written word not only on the part of Lodovico but also of Barbara, whose input in this sphere of patronage appears to have matched that of her husband.

Moving on to a very different type of book, it was during the later years of Lodovico's life that the first printing presses appeared in Italy, a development which was supported enthusiastically by the marchese. Early activity in Mantua in this field, therefore, is the focus of chapter six. Following some information on the life of Pietroadamo de' Micheli, a rare case of a native rather than a German providing the impetus for the first workshop in an Italian town, Lodovico's contribution to the first project is discussed. Although Pietroadamo's own business was short-lived, there followed an impressive series of other early printers in Mantua, whose dozens of volumes across a wide range of subject areas bear further testament to the literary culture around the Gonzaga court. It is argued, therefore, that activity in the production of early printed volumes represents another significant aspect of the Mantuan Renaissance in the age of Lodovico.

The fourth and final part of the thesis looks at the marchese's association with men of letters. In chapter seven I present three Mantuan writers of the age: Giovanni Pietro Arrivabene, Giovan Francesco Suardi and Filippo Nuvoloni. Following a contextualisation of the life and works of each, I explore the nature of their relations with Lodovico which, as well as providing further evidence of his literary interest, offer additional information on his relations with other rulers and artists of the period. Chapter eight, finally, examines Lodovico's acquaintance with three of the major humanists of the Quattrocento: Francesco Filelfo, Enea Silvio Piccolomini (Pope Pius II) and Leon Battista Alberti. Given the obvious difficulties in attempting to give ample treatment to such important figures, the



focus is restricted, as far as possible, to a Mantuan context and to their dealings and correspondence with Lodovico. The picture that emerges is one of mutual esteem and, in the case of Alberti, of genuine dialogue between patron and artist-humanist, particularly with regard to the building projects of the Mantuan churches. Finally, given the likelihood that Angelo Poliziano's *Orfeo*, one of the finest literary works of the entire Italian Renaissance, was written in the 1470s at the request of the marchese's son Cardinal Francesco Gonzaga, in an appendix to the chapter I briefly consider this most prominent humanist in relation to Mantua.

In conclusion, it will be argued, on the strength of evidence presented in the thesis, that Lodovico Gonzaga, as well as being a remarkable Renaissance prince and patron of arts, was a great sponsor of letters and a man of genuine learning. It will be acknowledged that the foundations laid by Gianfrancesco, his father and predecessor, were crucial to this development in that they included one of the finest schools of the age, as well as betrothal to Barbara of Brandenburg, who would become a wife with considerable aptitude for government during his frequent absences, able also to participate fully in his cultural initiatives. It will be suggested that literary patronage was consistent with artistic transformations in a period of transition spanning the central decades of the Quattrocento, when the language of Gothic chivalry coexisted with new currents of revived classicism. Central to all cultural evolution in Mantua was, it will be argued, the school, which even after the death of Vittorino continued to attract able humanist teachers to educate subsequent generations. Equally crucial to Mantua's development was a second great institution: the Gonzaga Library which, both as a resource for learning and as a personal pursuit of Lodovico, grew into one of the finest collections of the age, and undeniably worthy of greater study, which would surely confirm its status as equal, if not superior, to the celebrated Montefeltro library in Urbino. Closely connected to the library, of course, was the intense activity of scribes and miniaturists throughout the marchese's thirty-four years of rule, the volume of which, as is clear from related correspondence, reveals a genuine interest not only in the production of new volumes but also, and significantly, in the correctness of the text. The extent to which the production of the printed text took root in Mantua during the last few years of Lodovico's life offers further evidence, if any were needed, not only of his own enthusiasm for the new industry

but of a local climate well disposed to the arrival of books on the marketplace. Finally, through his correspondence with men of letters, ranging from Mantuans of relatively modest standing to some of the major figures of fifteenth-century Italian humanism, including Francesco Filelfo, Pope Pius II and Leon Battista Alberti, the clear picture that emerges is not one of a patron being flattered, but rather that of a genuinely erudite prince conversing with peers.



Fig.2: Mantua, Palazzo Ducale



# **PART ONE**

## **BACKGROUND**





# CHAPTER ONE

## LODOVICO AND MANTUA IN THE QUATTROCENTO

### The Gonzaga Dynasty

The Corradi of Gonzaga, a village some twenty kilometres south of Mantua, were a long established family whose wealth came from their status as landowners in the immediate vicinity of their feudal power base south of the river Po. They established themselves within a few decades of the founding of Mantua's commune in 1116, which was controlled for over two centuries by a small group of families until the leader of one of these clans, Pinamonte Bonacolsi (documented 1231-died 1293), seized control of the town's government in 1274. The following year, with the commune now dominated by the Bonacolsi, the Corradi regrouped around Gonzaga, of which they gained total control. For the next half century the Corradi continued to be a part of the Bonacolsi-dominated Mantua commune until, in 1328, they violently ousted the incumbent ruling family to take control of the commune for themselves (see Fig.3). The architect of this takeover was Luigi Corradi (c.1268-1360), who in 1335 secured an imperial charter authorising him to replace his family's appellation of Corradi with that of Gonzaga, their village of origin. Thus began a period of unbroken rule spanning almost four centuries.<sup>1</sup>



Fig.3: Domenico Morone, *La cacciata dei Bonacolsi*

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<sup>1</sup> On the seizure of Mantua by Luigi Corradi see Selwyn Brinton, *The Gonzaga Lords of Mantua* (London: Methuen, 1927), p.46 and Elizabeth Ward Mahnke, 'The Political Career of a Condottiere Prince: Ludovico Gonzaga, 1444-1466' (unpublished doctoral thesis, Harvard University, 1974), pp.1-19. Elizabeth Ward Mahnke will also be referred to as Elizabeth Ward Swain, depending on the dates of publication of her various articles cited in this thesis.

Luigi, the self-proclaimed first *capitano* of Mantua, ruled for thirty-two years until his death in 1360, at the grand old age of ninety-two. Depicted by Equicola as a strong and just ruler, Luigi had been backed in his coup by several other leading Mantuan families, and in 1330 he attained a status of some legitimacy with his investiture as imperial vicar.<sup>2</sup> Despite the menacing military and territorial ambitions of Mantua's neighbours, and in particular those of Luchino Visconti (1292-1349) of Milan and Cangrande della Scala of Verona (1291-1329), Luigi managed not only to defend his territory but also oversee a gradual expansion: an attack by Verona was repelled in 1341, while Visconti's forces were defeated in 1348.

Luigi was succeeded in 1360 by his son Guido (c.1290-1369), who was himself advanced in years at this stage, and there followed a decade of turbulence which saw bitter sibling rivalries result in bloodshed. In 1362 Guido orchestrated the murder of his brother Ugolino, husband to Caterina Visconti, which in turn prompted her uncle Bernabò Visconti (1323-1385) to launch a sustained campaign against Mantua throughout the 1360s, culminating in an attack in 1368. Peace with Milan may have been reached but Guido died aged seventy-nine the following year, making way for his only son, Lodovico *il capitano* (1334-1382). After the sinister events of the previous decade, Lodovico restored some stability to the Gonzaga line but, in marked contrast to the longevity of his father and his grandfather before him, he was to die after only thirteen years of rule in 1382, at the relatively early age of forty-eight.

The fourth *capitano* of the Gonzaga dynasty was arguably the first ruler of true stature. When his father died in 1382, Francesco Gonzaga (1366-1407) was only sixteen years of age and deemed too young to shoulder the burden of responsibility of government at a time when the Visconti were beginning to show acute signs of renewed Milanese territorial ambition.<sup>3</sup> To allow the youngster to come of age, the direct government of Mantua was delegated to the commune which, nominally at

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<sup>2</sup> Mario Equicola, *Dell'istoria di Mantova libri cinque scritta in commentarii da Mario Equicola* (Bologna: Forni Editore, 1968), pp.73-97.

<sup>3</sup> On Milanese expansionism in this period see *Storia di Milano*, 16 vols (Milan: Fondazione Treccani degli Alfieri per la Storia di Milano, 1953-1966), V, pp.487-567.



least, had survived successive annexation by the Bonacolsi and the Corradi, a fact which points to a gradual transition from commune to *signoria* rather than an abrupt revolution.<sup>4</sup> Already married to Agnese Visconti (1362-1391), daughter of Bernabò, Francesco took direct control of his state in 1388. Rather than attempt to placate the aggression of his increasingly threatening neighbour, Francesco coordinated a shameful episode in February 1391 which he must have known would result in provoking the wrath of his wife's cousin, Giangaleazzo Visconti (1351-1402, *signore* 1378-1495, duke 1395-1402) who, having dispossessed his uncle Bernabò in a coup of 1385, was now systematically conquering towns of northern Italy and bringing them under direct Milanese control. Accused of conspiring against her husband in favour of her cousin, Agnese was executed. The following year Francesco married Margherita Malatesta and entered the league of states opposed to Visconti. This was also the decade in which Francesco, understandably in view of his anti-Milanese stance, oversaw the construction of the *Castello di San Giorgio* by the architect and engineer Bartolino da Novara. The inevitable attack on Mantua by Visconti was repelled in the summer of 1397, and in May of the following year a ten-year truce was signed between Milan and Mantua.

The threat of Milanese expansion subsided, in the short term at least, in 1402, when Giangaleazzo Visconti died at the very time his troops were attempting to take Florence.<sup>5</sup> The following year Francesco was given the opportunity to cement his rule in Mantua when the Emperor, Robert of Bavaria, gave him the opportunity to purchase for himself the title of marchese, but the offer was declined due to the high price being asked. He did, nonetheless, prove himself to be a just and able ruler, and in 1405 accepted a *condotta* from Venice. He also fulfilled the role of patron to artists and architects, a tradition which would become firmly established by his successors over the course of the century.<sup>6</sup> Like his father before him,

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<sup>4</sup> An argument for this gradual transition from commune to *signoria* is also made by Ward Mahnke, 'The Political Career of a Condottiere Prince', p.8. The commune, she argues, retained nominal authority, while the *Consiglio Maggiore* came to be restricted only gradually by the Gonzaga.

<sup>5</sup> On the attack on Florence and Giangaleazzo's death see D.M. Bueno de Mesquita, *Giangaleazzo Visconti, Duke of Milan (1351-1402): A Study in the Political Career of an Italian Despot* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1941), pp.281-292 and Hans Baron, *The Crisis of the Early Italian Renaissance: Civic Humanism and Republican Liberty in an Age of Classicism and Tyranny* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1966), pp.28-46. For Florentine aspects see Gene A. Brucker, *The Civic World of Early Renaissance Florence* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977), pp.165-186.

<sup>6</sup> On Francesco as a patron of the arts and architecture see Brinton, *The Gonzaga Lords of Mantua*, pp.60-61.



however, Francesco was to expire prematurely, having reached the age of only forty when he died in 1407.

As had been the case with his father, Gianfrancesco Gonzaga (1395-1444), who at the time was only twelve years old, was deemed too young to assume control of government when he succeeded his father. Given his tender age, the succession was indeed no formality, but was eventually approved by the commune after his uncle, Carlo Malatesta (1368-1429), stepped in to act as guardian and temporary ruler until the boy came of age. He also did young Gianfrancesco a great service in his choice of bride for him: his niece in Rimini, Paola Malatesta (1393-1453), a woman of distinction whose influence on her husband and children would be comparable to that of future Gonzaga matriarchs Barbara of Brandenburg and Isabella d'Este (1474-1539).<sup>7</sup> In 1411, still aged only sixteen, Gianfrancesco entered into military service with Venice, thus beginning a series of *condotte* with his eastern neighbours which would continue unbroken for over thirty years. Gianfrancesco was, Ward Mahnke notes, the first Gonzaga ruler to establish a career as a *condottiere*, a sphere in which his heirs and descendants would also conduct themselves with varying degrees of distinction.<sup>8</sup>

Three decades of distinguished service to Venice, at a time when Milan was beginning to re-emerge as a threat under Filippo Maria Visconti (1392-1447, duke 1412-1447), son of Giangaleazzo, saw Gianfrancesco appointed *capitano generale* of the forces of the Venetian Republic in 1434. The previous year, meanwhile, Gianfrancesco had secured the standing and legitimacy of the Gonzaga family among the ruling dynasties of northern Italy when he paid Emperor Sigismund (1368-1437, Emperor from 1433) 12,000 gold florins for the title of marchese. Gianfrancesco's substantial investment also secured a marriage for his eldest son and heir into the highest echelons of the German imperial dynasty, as well as the right to include the four imperial eagles on the Gonzaga coat of arms.<sup>9</sup> The

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<sup>7</sup> On Carlo and Paola Malatesta see Philip Jones, *The Malatesta of Rimini and the Papal State: a Political History* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1974). On Isabella d'Este see Daniela Pizzagalli, *La signora del Rinascimento: vita e splendori di Isabella d'Este alla corte di Mantova* (Milan: Rizzoli, 2001).

<sup>8</sup> Ward Mahnke, 'The Political Career of a Condottiere Prince', pp.30-36. On Lodovico's career as a *condottiere* see pp.44-56 below.

<sup>9</sup> See Giuseppe Amadei and Ercolano Marani, *I Gonzaga a Mantova* (Milan: Cassa di Risparmio delle Provincie Lombarde, 1975), pp.38-40.

Emperor visited Mantua in person late in the summer of 1433 and, in a lavish ceremony on 22 September in Piazza San Pietro, formally invested Gianfrancesco with the imperial mantle and ring.<sup>10</sup> During the ceremony the Emperor also made Gianfrancesco's two eldest sons, Lodovico (1412-1478) and Carlo (1417-1456), knights of the empire.

While Gianfrancesco is duly remembered for his crucial role in securing the political advancement of his family, it was also under this first marchese that Mantua made its earliest significant cultural strides of the Quattrocento, elements discussed in the chapters which follow on artistic patronage and the Mantuan school. In the mid-1430s, meanwhile, a bitter dispute with Lodovico, following the latter's defection from Venice to the forces of Filippo Maria Visconti, saw Gianfrancesco name Carlo as his successor. Although the rift was healed in 1438 when Gianfrancesco joined his son on the Milanese side, making Lodovico once again heir to the *marchesato*, irreparable damage had been done to the unity of the family, as Lodovico and Carlo entered into a bitter sibling schism which would never be resolved.

When Lodovico became the second marchese following the death of his father in September 1444, his capacity to rule effectively had been seriously compromised by Gianfrancesco's determination to divide the Mantuan territories amongst his four sons (see Appendix 2). While the new marchese took control of the capital and key centres such as Goito, Marcaria and Ostiglia, his rival Carlo was given jurisdiction over Isola Dovarese, Rivarolo, Bozzolo, San Martino, Sabbioneta, Gazzuolo, Viadana, Luzzara, Gonzaga, Suzzara and Reggiolo. Alessandro (1427-1466), meanwhile, took control of villages including Canneto, Castelfoffredo and Castiglione, while Gianlucido's (1423-1448) inheritance comprised authority over Cavriana, Volta, Rodigo and some other small settlements.<sup>11</sup> Twenty-two years and the deaths of three brothers would pass before Mantua and its lands were united again under one marchese.<sup>12</sup> Nevertheless, the landowning classes of the territory had proved loyal to the Gonzaga over the first century of their rule, and the

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<sup>10</sup> See Brinton, *The Gonzaga Lords of Mantua*, pp.64-65.

<sup>11</sup> On the division of the Mantuan territory by Gianfrancesco see Giancarlo Malacarne, *I Gonzaga di Mantova: una stripe per una capitale europea* (Modena: Il Bulino, 2004), vol.2, p.95.

<sup>12</sup> Ward Mahnke, 'The Political Career of a Condottiere Prince', pp.42-53.



imperial investiture of 1433 significantly reduced the possibility of future uprisings from within the state.

### **Barbara of Brandenburg**

When Barbara of Brandenburg (1422-1481) arrived in Mantua on 22 November 1433 she was only eleven years old, a full decade younger than the man to whom she was betrothed. The situation must have been a very awkward one for both parties: the established tradition of diplomatic marriages among the ruling classes had forced upon Lodovico a mere child half his age, while, on the other hand, Barbara found herself in a foreign land and under close scrutiny at such a tender age. It must also be noted, however, that such circumstances were not uncommon at the time, and that Barbara was only slightly below marriageable age. Lodovico, we must assume, probably accepted the marriage without protest due to the clear political advantages on offer from such a union.<sup>13</sup>

The marriage, as has been noted, was contracted during the visit of the Emperor to Mantua earlier that same year. In previous generations the marital strategy of the Gonzaga had been to seek unions with neighbouring states, in order to raise their profile and to consolidate their standing among the other ruling families of the Italian peninsula.<sup>14</sup> For Gianfrancesco Gonzaga to have secured for his son and heir a betrothal to the daughter of Johan von Hohenzollern of Brandenburg (1406-1464), the Emperor's brother, also known as Johan the Alchemist, was an achievement not only disproportionate to the modest standing of his newly legitimised state, but one which brought the Gonzaga a prestige that could not have been achieved through a marriage contract with a neighbouring principality. While the political benefits of such a marriage to the Gonzaga are obvious, it must also be noted that it was convenient, albeit to a lesser extent, to the empire to increase its influence among the northern Italian ruling dynasties.<sup>15</sup> The wedding itself, which took place some months after Barbara's arrival, was not without its material costs for the Gonzaga. Not only was no contribution forthcoming from

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<sup>13</sup> Giuseppe Coniglio, *I Gonzaga* (Varese: Dall'Oglio, 1967), p.52.

<sup>14</sup> See Elizabeth Ward Swain, 'Strategia matrimoniale in casa Gonzaga: il caso di Barbara e Ludovico', *Civiltà Mantovana*, nuova serie, 14, (1986), 1-14.

<sup>15</sup> The point is made by Coniglio, *I Gonzaga*, p.52 and by Giancarlo Malacarne, *Barbara Hohenzollern Del Brandeburgo. Il potere e la virtù. Die Macht und die Tugend* (Rezzato: Magalini Editrice Due, 1997), p.6.



the Hohenzollern family, but Gianfrancesco had to pay an initial 25,000 florins to obtain Barbara's hand for his son, followed by a further 25,000 florins to be raised in revenues from the villages of Peschiera and Ostiglia. This situation, Ward Swain notes, was unique in that it was the solitary example in Quattrocento Italy of a marriage dowry being supplied by a male.<sup>16</sup> One might argue, however, that the political worth of the bride's family links far exceeded that of any dowry hitherto obtained by any Italian prince.

The young Barbara's early years in Mantua must certainly have been anything but dull. With Lodovico absent fulfilling his military commitments to Venice, the future marchesa received a thorough humanist education under the tutelage of the renowned pedagogue Vittorino da Feltre (1378-1446), who had been presiding over the school in Mantua since 1423. In the wake of Lodovico's shift to Milan in the mid-1430s, a move, as we have seen, which saw him stripped of his rights of succession, Barbara's long-term prospects looked bleak. While the reconciliation between her husband and father-in-law restored her to a position of prominence in Mantua, by the turn of the decade the pressure to produce a son and heir had become considerable. Once again, however, relief was to arrive before long, and in 1441 Barbara gave birth to her first child, and a son at that, Federico (1441-1484).

Over the next forty years Barbara played a crucial role in the government and cultural life of Mantua, while never neglecting her duties as a wife and mother. This will be clear throughout the chapters that follow, as I examine and refer to numerous examples taken from over three thousand extant letters, both sent and received by the marchesa, on a wide variety of subjects, ranging from the education of her children to the commissioning of manuscripts, and from the organisation of the Papal Congress of 1459 to work being carried out on the building sites of architectural commissions. Her almost unbroken chain of letters to and from her husband over four decades, moreover, bears witness not only to her daily

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<sup>16</sup> Ward Swain, 'Strategia matrimoniale in casa Gonzaga', p.4. There was, however, a precedent for such a marriage, with a dowry supplied by the male, when Giangaleazzo Visconti was betrothed to the French princess, Isabelle of Valois, in 1360. On this occasion, his father paid King Jean II three hundred thousand gold florins for feudal lands in France, which became Isabelle's dowry. See *Storia di Milano*, V, pp.409-411. Bueno de Mesquita, quoting from Froissart's *Croniques*, notes that Galeazzo Visconti "bought the daughter of King John for 600,000 francs". Bueno de Mesquita, *Giangaleazzo Visconti*, p.10.

involvement in the affairs of government and court, but also to the seemingly boundless faith Lodovico placed in her ability to deal with even the most delicate matters of state. In the figure of Barbara, Malacarne argues, one is dealing with a woman more important to the development of Mantua than even Isabella d'Este, as well as a crucial factor behind her husband's ascent to the realm of brilliant princes of the Italian Renaissance.<sup>17</sup>

The fact that Barbara was so central to the administration of the Mantuan state is, however, less extraordinary than these first impressions may imply. In an article examining the dynamics of marriage in fifteenth-century Italy, Ward Swain exposes a sharp contrast between the activities of the wives of *signori* and the roles of merchants' wives in Venice and Florence, the latter group finding themselves, with some notable exceptions, typecast by the humanist treatises of Francesco Barbaro (1390-1454), penned in 1416, and Leon Battista Alberti (1404-1472), written in 1434 and revised in 1440.<sup>18</sup> Often "hidden between betrothal and will," Ward Swain notes, the wives of the city merchants conducted largely anonymous lives, whereas the wives of the princes were more active, working with their husbands in matters of state, especially, but by no means exclusively, while they were absent on *condottiere* business.<sup>19</sup> Together with Bianca Maria Visconti (1425-1468) in Milan and Eleonora of Aragon (1450-1493) in Ferrara, both of whom were her contemporaries, Ward Swain considers Barbara to be one of the outstanding wifely figures in the courtly culture of the Quattrocento. All three, she notes, married down, and they also fulfilled their prime obligation to produce offspring, a strong prerequisite to social and political involvement in the times in which they lived.<sup>20</sup> These favourable circumstances clearly placed these women in positions of some

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<sup>17</sup> Malacarne, *Barbara Hohenzollern Del Brandeburgo*, pp.9-14.

<sup>18</sup> Elizabeth Ward Swain, "My excellent and most singular lord": marriage in a noble family of fifteenth-century Italy', *Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies*, 16, (1986), 171-195. Barbaro's treatise, *De re uxoria*, has been edited and published by A. Gnesotto in *Atti e memorie della Reale Accademia di scienze, lettere ed arti di Padova*, nuova serie, 32, (1915-16), 177-228. *I libri della famiglia* are found in Leon Battista Alberti, *Opere volgari*, ed. by Cecil Grayson, 3 vols (Bari: Laterza, 1960-73), I, pp.1-341. Two exceptions to the trend of anonymous wives of merchants were Margherita Datini, wife of the renowned merchant Francesco di Marco Datini, and Alessandra Macinghi Strozzi, widow of Matteo Strozzi. See Iris Origo, *The Merchant of Prato* (London: The Folio Society, 1984), pp.157-177 and Heather Gregory, ed., *Selected Letters of Alessandra Strozzi* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997).

<sup>19</sup> Ward Swain, "My excellent and most singular lord", p.194; Coniglio, *I Gonzaga*, p.57. Malacarne also notes that, on the occasions princes were absent, their wives assumed responsibility for government. Malacarne, *Barbara Hohenzollern Del Brandeburgo*, pp.5-6.

<sup>20</sup> Ward Swain, "My excellent and most singular lord", p.192 and p.195.



authority and, given the indistinctness which existed in the princely states between private and public domain, it is entirely unsurprising that they assumed roles of such prominence in the governments of Milan, Ferrara and Mantua respectively. Lodovico Gonzaga, moreover, would have cause to be thankful on many occasions for the close bond forged between Barbara and her counterpart Bianca Maria in Milan, as relations between the marchese and Bianca Maria's husband, Francesco Sforza (1401-1466, Duke 1450-1466), regularly descended into discord.

In essence, therefore, it remains difficult to define Barbara's precise involvement in the management of court and state, but she did, according to Coniglio, fulfil a substantial role in this respect, as well as being a partner in what seems to have been a genuinely happy marriage.<sup>21</sup> Her involvement in artistic commissions will be mentioned in the following chapter and, in the sphere of literature, it will be demonstrated in the course of this thesis that Barbara was actively involved in a wide breadth of literary activity, ranging from correspondence with men of letters to the acquisition of volumes for the Gonzaga library. It is in any case difficult to envisage how a long-term pupil of Vittorino, especially one as obviously intelligent as Barbara, could fail to carry forward into adulthood an enduring interest in classical literature, and not only in religious texts.<sup>22</sup>

The marriage of Lodovico Gonzaga and Barbara of Brandenburg would have been inconceivable without Gianfrancesco's purchase of the hereditary title of marchese in 1433. Although the years immediately following her arrival, as has been mentioned, were often problematic, for the forty years between the birth of her first son Federico in 1441 and her death in 1481 Barbara was one of the most able and versatile women of the Italian Renaissance. As well as fulfilling her work for court and state on a daily basis, she played an active role in the upbringing of her ten children who survived infancy. Through her vast legacy of correspondence we can see a figure of strong character and supreme integrity, both as a stateswoman and as a mother. Together with her husband, she contributed to and oversaw what Mazzoldi describes as "anni felici" in the history of Mantua, a period which included the Papal Congress of 1459 and the elevation of their son Francesco

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<sup>21</sup> Coniglio, *I Gonzaga*, p.88.

<sup>22</sup> Ward Swain suggests that Barbara's literary tastes were largely religious. Ward Swain, "My excellent and most singular lord", p.186.



(1444-1483) to the office of cardinal in 1461, while their state continued to prosper politically, economically and culturally.<sup>23</sup> In this respect Barbara is also given credit for having brought the first silkworm to Mantua, and in doing so having played a crucial role in the foundation of what was to become one of the town's key industries.<sup>24</sup> She was also instrumental in arranging the marriage of her eldest son and the third Marchese Federico, despite his initial protests, to Margaret of Wittelsbach (1442-1479), daughter of the Duke of Bavaria.<sup>25</sup> For another generation, it seemed, Barbara had ensured close ties between the Gonzaga and the highest echelons of German nobility, but Margaret, who suffered from poor health, was to die prematurely in 1479 at the age of thirty-four.

The Marchesa Barbara died of recurring fever in November 1481, aged fifty-nine. Following the death of her husband three years earlier, she had assumed a more withdrawn role in affairs of state, allowing Federico to govern in his own right. Having himself been widowed in 1479, Federico did, however, draw on his mother's vast experience, and the numerous surviving letters between the two reveal a relationship of genuine warmth and respect. Barbara was entombed in the chapel of Sant'Anselmo in the cathedral but a planned funerary monument was never delivered, largely because her second son Francesco, the cardinal, who, having been given the responsibility of chief patron, died himself in 1483.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Leonardo Mazzoldi, ed., *Mantova. La Storia. II. Da Ludovico secondo marchese a Francesco secondo duca* (Mantua: Istituto Carlo d'Arco per la Storia di Mantova, 1961), pp.21-22.

<sup>24</sup> Malacarne, *Barbara Hohenzollern Del Brandeburgo*, pp.5-6.

<sup>25</sup> Federico, it is reported, was opposed to the choice of bride imposed upon him, perhaps because he was in love with a young Mantuan woman or perhaps because of the unattractive appearance of Margaret. His intransigence brought him into conflict with his father, who was keen to see the marriage come to fruition. See Malacarne, *Barbara Hohenzollern Del Brandeburgo*, pp.49-51. See also Giuseppe Lanzoni, *Sulle nozze di Federico I Gonzaga con Margherita di Wittelsbach (1463)*, (Milan: Ferrero-De Moll, 1898); M.J. Rodríguez-Salgado, 'Terracotta and Iron. Mantuan Politics (ca.1450 – ca.1550)', in *La corte di Mantova nell'età di Andrea Mantegna*, ed. by Cesare Mozzarelli, Robert Oresko e Leandro Ventura (Rome: Bulzoni, 1997), pp.15-57, p.25.

<sup>26</sup> Malacarne, somewhat harshly, suggests that the failure to erect the funerary monument reflects poorly on the cardinal. Malacarne, *Barbara Hohenzollern Del Brandeburgo*, pp.201-205. Federico and his son Francesco, the fourth marchese, attempted on separate occasions to revive the project for a funerary monument to Barbara, enlisting at different stages both Fancelli and Mantegna. The reasons behind its abandonment remain unclear.

## Lodovico's Family

Lodovico's immediate family members will be mentioned at various points in this study, in relation to different aspects of the life of the marchese. It is, nonetheless, worthwhile to consider them at this stage.

Lodovico himself was born on 5 June 1412, the eldest child of Gianfrancesco Gonzaga and Paola Malatesta. Five years later a second son, Carlo, was born, followed a year later by a first daughter, Margherita (1418-1439). A further five years passed before the arrival of Gianlucido. A second daughter, Cecilia (1426-1451), was delivered before their sixth and final child, Alessandro. What is immediately striking from the dates of the five siblings is their consistently short life span: Carlo and Alessandro both died a year shy of their fortieth birthdays, while the other three passed away in their early twenties. Lodovico, who lived until he was sixty-six, could be said to have enjoyed considerable longevity by comparison.

Although he lived to what was a fairly mature age for his times, Lodovico did not have particularly good health, especially during the last ten years of his life.<sup>27</sup> A severe illness over the winter of 1468-69 left the marchese incapacitated for some six months, and during the 1470s he was frequently unwell, often reporting severe pains in his arms and legs. Ward Mahnke suggests that he never recovered properly, and that from 1469 until his death in 1478 he was effectively an invalid.<sup>28</sup> Nor were his children especially healthy, as is clear from an unfortunate catalogue of hunchback affliction, infant mortality and death in early adulthood.<sup>29</sup> Federico, the eldest son and heir, was the first of several Gonzaga hunchbacks, a condition that can be traced to his grandmother Paola Malatesta.<sup>30</sup> This genetic deformity, it would appear, contributed significantly to Federico's poor health and premature death at the age of forty-three. Following Francesco, who went on to become the first member of the Gonzaga dynasty to reach high office in the church when made cardinal in 1461, came the first daughter, Paola Bianca (1445-1447), who died

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<sup>27</sup> Mazzoldi, *Mantova. La Storia*, II, p.27.

<sup>28</sup> Ward Mahnke, 'The Political Career of a Condottiere Prince,' pp.305-317.

<sup>29</sup> For thorough profiles of Lodovico and Barbara's eleven children see Malacarne, *Barbara Hohenzollern Del Brandeburgo*, pp.49-60 and, by the same author, *I Gonzaga di Mantova*, pp.110-127.

<sup>30</sup> Coniglio, *I Gonzaga*, p.65.



in infancy. The third son, Gianfrancesco (1446-1496), was responsible for founding the Gonzaga line in Bozzolo. Physical deformity returned to afflict a second daughter, Susanna (1447-1481), and her wretched condition led to the formal annulment in 1457 of her betrothal to Galeazzo Maria Sforza (1444-1476, duke 1466-1476), an arrangement that would have seen her ascend to the position of Duchess of Milan. Following this cruel rejection, Susanna spent the remainder of her life in a convent founded by her grandmother thirteen years earlier and dedicated to Santa Paola. Susanna's place as the bride-to-be of the Milanese heir was taken by her younger sister, Dorotea (1449-1467), who in turn was also rejected in the wake of fears that she too was afflicted by the same physical deformity, an allegation furiously rejected by Lodovico.<sup>31</sup> Whatever the truth behind the various claims and counter claims, Dorotea's health was clearly not good, as she died at the early age of eighteen, two years after the dissolution of her engagement. The seventh child, Cecilia (1451-1478), was also troubled by gibbosity and, like Susanna before her, entered the convent of Santa Paola, which she was granted special licence by Sixtus IV (Francesco Della Rovere, 1414-1484, Pope 1471-1484) to leave on a few occasions each week in order to fulfil the role, entrusted to her by her father, of administrator of the Ospedale di San Leonardo, which had begun receiving patients in March 1472.<sup>32</sup>

Following three successive female births, a fourth son arrived in the spring of 1452. Rodolfo (1452-1495), who became *signore* of Luzzara, went on to have a distinguished career in arms, serving in succession Ludovico Sforza 'il Moro' (1451-1508, duke 1494-1499 and 1500) and the Venetian Republic (see Appendix 3). He was killed fighting against the invading French forces at the battle of Fornovo on 6 July 1495. Barbara (1455-1505), or "Barbarina" as she was affectionately named by her parents, was the first of Lodovico's daughters to

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<sup>31</sup> The circumstances of Sforza's rejection of Dorotea are the subject of much discussion. It is unclear whether Lodovico's objections were based on the genuine conviction that his daughter was perfectly healthy, or if they were the futile protests of the ruler of a small state resigned to the fact that the Duke of Milan understandably preferred to see his heir betrothed to Bona of Savoy, of the French house of Orléans. See Coniglio, *I Gonzaga*, pp.66-70; Ward Mahnke, 'The Political Career of a Condottiere Prince', pp.325-336; Mazzoldi, *Mantova. La Storia. II*, pp.19-20; Malacarne, *Barbara Hohenzollern Del Brandeburgo*, pp.118-123; Malacarne, *I Gonzaga di Mantova*, pp.135-140. For a Milanese interpretation of the affair see Gregory Lubkin, *A Renaissance Court: Milan under Galeazzo Maria Sforza* (Berkeley and London: University of California Press, 1994), pp.45-46.

<sup>32</sup> On the Ospedale di San Leonardo see L.Franchini, 'L'Ospedale di San Leonardo in Mantova sotto il titolo di Santa Maria della Coroneta', in *Ospedali Lombardi del Quattrocento. Fondazione, trasformazioni, restauri*, ed. by L.Franchini (Como: New Press, 1995), pp.73-92.



marry; in 1474, aged nineteen, she moved to Germany to become the wife of count Eberhard V of Wurtemberg (1445-1496), a man double her age. Lodovico (1460-1511) entered the Church at the age of nine and, following the death of his brother the cardinal in 1483, assumed responsibility for the diocese of Mantua as bishop-elect. Following a protracted dispute with his nephew Francesco, the fourth marchese (1466-1519, marchese 1484-1519), Lodovico moved to Gazzuolo, where he indulged his love of arts and letters. The eleventh and final child was Paola (1463-1497), who in 1477 left Mantua for Gorizia, where she married the count Leonhard (1440-1500, count 1454-1500).

Under the Marchese Lodovico, notes Carpeggiani, the Gonzaga dynasty decisively changed course. The tradition of his forefathers, that of the medieval courtly warrior prince, was now replaced by a new model of humanist *signore*.<sup>33</sup> While this fresh approach is understandably and most frequently identified in the marchese's remarkable commissions in the fields of painting and architecture, its wider significance impacted on how state and court conducted politics and diplomacy. The central objective of this thesis will be to examine Lodovico's humanist temperament, and the fruits it bore in another sphere, that of letters and learning.

### Mantua in the Quattrocento

Under Lodovico Gonzaga, Mantua would not only witness, but indeed contribute to, some of the most memorable achievements of the fifteenth-century Italian Renaissance. Before examining these in greater detail, it will be worthwhile to consider the geopolitical context of the town and its territory during the Quattrocento.

Hollingsworth notes that a significant factor underpinning Mantua's outstanding cultural achievements of the century was its political stability.<sup>34</sup> This was achieved despite the seemingly precarious geographical position of Mantua, landlocked between the shifting borders and expansionist ambitions of Milan and the Venetian Republic. Paradoxically, the closeness of two such territorially ambitious and

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<sup>33</sup> Paolo Carpeggiani, *Il palazzo gonzagesco di Revere* (Revere: Amministrazione Comunale, 1974), p.19.

<sup>34</sup> Mary Hollingsworth, *Patronage in Renaissance Italy: from 1440 to the Early Sixteenth Century* (London: John Murray, 1994), p.210.

opposed neighbours provides a second convincing reason to explain the survival of the Mantuan state, ensuring it was and remained a strategic buffer zone between them, while other small states were absorbed.<sup>35</sup> Even so, the unbroken rule of the Gonzaga dynasty in Mantua, which spanned three-hundred and eighty years from 1328 to 1708, was truly remarkable. Only Modena under the government of the Este (1288-1796) surpassed Mantua under the Gonzaga for endurance of a single-family régime.

The prosperity of the town was largely dependent on the agricultural richness of its plain and sprawling contado, while its waterways, both natural and man made, together with the position of the capital on the west bank of the Mincio some fifteen kilometres from its confluence with the Po, facilitated the transport of goods and control of profits by the Gonzaga. The economy centred on cloth and grain, both of which were exported in large quantities, and in particular to Venice, while the vineyards of the Po valley also returned a surplus of wine.<sup>36</sup> There was no institutionalised merchant banking, as impetus to trade was provided by Jews lending money. An edict introduced by Lodovico in May 1462, however, outlawed usury and established the *Casa dei Pegni*, but the marchese was forced to revoke the decree only four years later, a situation undoubtedly brought about because the engine of the economy was no longer receiving the oil it needed from the circulation of Jewish money.<sup>37</sup> In one further important development for the local economy, it was during the rule of Lodovico that the Mantuan mint produced its first gold coins: a ducat featuring the marchese in military pose on the obverse and Saint George on the reverse, and a *marchesano* depicting on its respective sides a portrait of Lodovico, wearing a laurel crown, and the chalice of the blood of Christ.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> The point is made by Ernesto Sestan, 'Prolusione: La storia dei Gonzaga nel Rinascimento' in *Mantova e i Gonzaga nella civiltà del Rinascimento* (Mantua: Città di Mantova, 1977), pp.17-27, p.17 and by M.J. Rodríguez-Salgado, 'Terracotta and Iron', pp.16-23.

<sup>36</sup> On the Mantuan economy in the time of Lodovico see Isabella Lazzarini, *Fra un principe e altri stati. Relazioni di potere e forme di servizio a Mantova nell'età di Ludovico Gonzaga*, (Rome: Istituto storico italiano per il medioevo, 1996) and Ward Mahnke, 'The Political Career of a Condottiere Prince,' pp.1-19.

<sup>37</sup> Mazzoldi, *Mantova. La Storia. II*, p.33; Coniglio, *I Gonzaga*, pp.56-57.

<sup>38</sup> On these coins see Parmiggiani, 'Riflessi donatelliani nel *Sangue di Cristo*', pp.1459-150 and Silvana Balbi De Caro, 'Mantova e i Gonzaga nel Quattrocento. Lineamenti di politica monetaria nell'età di Ludovico II', in *Le monete dei Gonzaga, addenda*, ed. by Roberto Gianolio (Milan: Electa, 2001), pp.10-14. Parmiggiani notes that the portrait of Lodovico on the *marchesano* was the first of its type on a monetary coin since Roman times.



The ability of the state to withstand natural disasters and epidemics was frequently put to the test during the rule of Lodovico. During a visit to Mantua in 1350, Francesco Petrarca (1304-1374), writing to his friend Lelio, had described the town in rather unhealthy terms:

[...] denique urbana omnia preter locum, qui qualis hieme sit, estas indicio est; nunc quidam muscarum domus ac culicum, quorum murmur admonuit maturius e convivio fugiendum; et ranarum exercitus accesserat, quas inter cenam caveis egressas et per cenaculum nundinantes cerneret. Evasi in cubiculum [...].<sup>39</sup>

Petrarch's unflattering account of flies, mosquitoes and the sound of armies of croaking frogs should not cause surprise, given what we know of Mantua's climate a century later. Flooding around the Po and the Mincio was particularly severe on three occasions, in 1454, 1467 and 1474, causing widespread damage to crops. On a more sinister level, as was common almost everywhere in the period, deadly waves of bubonic plague decimated Mantua and its territory; particularly savage outbreaks were recorded in 1451, 1463 and 1468. It was during a smaller but equally lethal epidemic in June 1478 that the marchese's own life came to an end at Goito.<sup>40</sup> A crisis of a different nature, meanwhile, occurred in 1462, when the waterways froze over, preventing the mills from producing flour and resulting in a shortage of bread.<sup>41</sup> Due to the frequent outbreaks of plague, large-scale and otherwise, the population of the town and contado at the time of Lodovico is difficult to gauge. In 1462, a year before one of the three particularly acute epidemics just mentioned, those living in Mantua numbered 26,407, while the population of the contado is estimated to have been around eighty thousand.<sup>42</sup> With over a decade having elapsed since the previous major plague, it is reasonable to assume that the figures pertaining to 1462 may well represent a demographic peak for the years of Lodovico's stewardship.

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<sup>39</sup> Letter Petrarch to Lelio, Luzzara, 28 June 1450. Published in Francesco Petrarca, *Epistole*, ed. by Ugo Dotti (Turin: UTET, 1978), pp.256-259.

<sup>40</sup> See Rodolfo Signorini, 'Ludovico muore', *Atti e Memorie dell'Accademia Nazionale Virgiliana*, nuova serie, L, (1982), 91-130.

<sup>41</sup> Mazzoldi, *Mantova. La Storia*, II, p.34.

<sup>42</sup> Ward Mahnke, 'The Political Career of a Condottiere Prince', pp.4-5. This estimate is supported by Hollingsworth, who notes that Mantua was similar in size to her neighbour Ferrara, but considerably smaller than Milan and Venice. Hollingsworth, *Patronage in Renaissance Italy*, p.210.



## Lodovico as *Condottiere*

The *condottiere*, writes Michael Mallett, was “the holder of a military *condotta*, or contract, for the raising and leadership of troops.”<sup>43</sup> If, as Mallett notes, by the end of the fourteenth century such contracts were the principal means by which armies were raised in Italy, it is equally true that by the middle of the following century they were one of the most crucial avenues of income for the rulers of small states such as Mantua.<sup>44</sup> In this respect Lodovico Gonzaga was no different from other more renowned *condottieri*-princes of the Quattrocento, such as his good friend Federico da Montefeltro of Urbino (1422-1482, *signore* of Urbino from 1444 and Duke from 1472). Far from being warmongers, however, these *signori* were “more keen to preserve peace than to provoke war”.<sup>45</sup> Diplomacy and intelligence were virtues valued on a par with, and often above, prowess on the battlefield, and this was especially relevant to Mantua, landlocked between the territorially hungry states of Venice and Milan. Lodovico was acutely aware of this, as he pursued a policy of peacetime diplomacy which included permanent embassies in Milan and Rome, as well as cordial relations with Venice.<sup>46</sup> More interested in political status than in military power, Ward Mahnke argues, the marchese’s main ambition, and indeed his foremost achievement, was to maintain his state and enhance the reputation of the Gonzaga dynasty.<sup>47</sup>

Although it is clear they went to great extremes to avoid military conflict, it was still of vital importance that the *condottieri*-princes played the game, as it were, and that they appeared able and willing to mobilise large armies at short notice. A fundamental element of the *condotta*, or contract, which must not be overlooked, is that here was a bond of service and dependency, and not a mutually convenient military alliance. Mantua’s geographical vulnerability ensured its loyalty to the provider of the contract, which during the rule of Lodovico was, apart from a few brief but notable interruptions, usually Milan. The decision whether to mobilise armies, therefore, was not the prerogative of the *condottiere*, which meant that

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<sup>43</sup> Michael Mallett, ‘Condottieri’, in *The Thames and Hudson Dictionary of the Italian Renaissance*, ed. by J.R. Hale (London, Thames and Hudson, 1981), p.96. See also Michael Mallett, *Mercenaries and their Masters: Warfare in Renaissance Italy*, (London: Bodley Head, 1974).

<sup>44</sup> The point is made by Amadei and Marani, *I Gonzaga a Mantova*, p.40.

<sup>45</sup> Ward Mahnke, ‘The Political Career of a Condottiere Prince’, p.450.

<sup>46</sup> Lazzarini, *Fra un principe e altri stati*, p.204.

<sup>47</sup> Ward Mahnke, ‘The Political Career of a Condottiere Prince’, p.18.

political and diplomatic shrewdness was often the difference between peace and prosperity on the one hand, and the obligation to partake in financially ruinous campaigns on the other. Nevertheless, the benefits for the rulers of small states who were employed as *condottieri* justified the political acrobatics they often had to perform to secure them: the unconditional protection of a larger state or states, as well as a considerable, though often erratically paid, stipend.

For the duration of his rule, Lodovico's services as a military chief were in demand, for a number of reasons. While being the ruler of a small state was not a prerequisite for a successful career as a *condottiere*, it was nonetheless a distinct advantage. As Mallett notes:

The *condottiere* [...] was invariably a man of substance possessing estates and permanent income which enabled him to maintain his principal followers between contracts and recruit rapidly from amongst his own tenants and dependants. These socio-economic conditions were of more importance than military reputation in dictating the size of the contract which a *condottiere* could obtain, and hence his prestige and reputation. Many of the leading *condottieri* were [...] independent princes like the Gonzaga lords of Mantua or the Este lords of Ferrara [...].<sup>48</sup>

Control of a small state, therefore, was in itself an important factor in securing a *condotta*, which in turn continuously enhanced the prestige and reputation of a *condottiere* the longer his career went on. There were, however, a number of further aspects which made Lodovico Gonzaga a much sought-after commander. In the first place, both Milan and Venice were keen to enlist his services for two reasons connected with Mantua's strategic position: having the marchese on the payroll would secure indirect control over the buffer zone which separated the two states, while the sheer vulnerability of Mantua's position would, it was assumed, guarantee his loyalty.<sup>49</sup> Particularly in the early years of his career, Lodovico also developed a reputation for being a fine warrior, resulting in the appellation of "il turco," such

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<sup>48</sup> Mallett, 'Condottieri', p.96. There were, it must be remembered, *condottieri* who did not enjoy the advantage of being rulers of small states. The most celebrated of these during the Quattrocento were Niccolò Piccinino (1386-1444) and Bartolomeo Colleoni (1400-1476). Francesco Sforza was another mercenary soldier who hailed from a non-noble background. He was contracted as a *condottiere* by Filippo Maria Visconti, whose daughter he married, before taking advantage of the problematical succession issues in Milan to ascend to the position of duke in 1450.

<sup>49</sup> The latter point is made by Ward Mahnke, 'The Political Career of a Condottiere Prince', p.36.



was the ferocity and bravery with which he was said to fight.<sup>50</sup> If skill in battle was what prospective employers admired in Lodovico as a young man, as a mature leader he was revered to an even greater extent for his political acumen and ability to manage troops, quite apart from his reputation as a respected and enlightened ruler.

The course of Lodovico's career as a *condottiere*, during which he was employed in turn by Filippo Maria Visconti, the Florentine Republic, the Venetian Republic, Francesco Sforza and Naples, has been expertly documented and analysed by Ward Mahnke in her doctoral thesis.<sup>51</sup> The complex dynamics and political rationale of this aspect of the marchese's life fall outwith the scope of the present thesis, but a brief account of his career in this domain may nonetheless be useful in enabling us to gain an appreciation of the base from which his cultural projects were launched. In essence, Lodovico's military career may be subdivided into three distinct periods: firstly, that of active service and frequent changes of employer, spanning from his first engagement in 1436 to the Peace of Lodi in 1454; secondly, there followed a long phase of peacetime attentiveness and loyalty to Milan, from 1454 until his serious illness of 1468-1469, during which time the marchese, though determined not to have to lead his troops into battle, was effectively leader of a large army ready to be deployed at short notice; finally, during the 1470s and until his death in 1478, he basked in the prestige reserved for a much respected elder statesman and arbitrator. I shall now outline very briefly some of the key facets of each of these periods.

The most eventful of the three stages was unquestionably the first, a period of active service lasting eighteen years. Lodovico's military career began under inauspicious circumstances in 1436 when, following a dispute with his brother Carlo, he rather irresponsibly disregarded his father's *condotta* with the Venetian Republic to commit himself to Milan. As has been mentioned above, this was a move which could have had disastrous consequences for Lodovico's succession, particularly after Gianfrancesco, whose prime concern would have been to reassure

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<sup>50</sup> Luigi Pescasio, *Ludovico II Gonzaga* (Suzzara: Edizioni Bottazzi, 1993), pp.30-31. An alternative hypothesis regarding the origins of the nickname is that, following his period of exile in the 1430s, Lodovico returned to Mantua with a long beard.

<sup>51</sup> See note 1, p.29.



his employers, banished his eldest son as a traitor.<sup>52</sup> Matters did not improve for Lodovico when he was captured later that same year by Francesco Sforza, who at the time was employed by Venice.<sup>53</sup> When Gianfrancesco himself signed a contract with Filippo Maria Visconti in 1438, Lodovico and his father were once again fighting on the same side. Having established himself as a fine soldier and commander, in 1444 Lodovico's value soared with his succession in Mantua. In September of 1445, a seven-year *condotta* was agreed with Milan to oppose Venice, Florence and Sforza, an arrangement which included a supplement of one thousand ducats per month in the event of war spreading to the *Mantovano*.<sup>54</sup> In 1447, however, with peace having been reached between Sforza and Visconti and the latter ill and close to death, Lodovico accepted the position of *capitano generale* of Florence, which now placed him not only on the side of Venice and the newly declared Ambrosian Republic but also in opposition to Sforza and his own estranged brother Carlo. This facilitated the contract of 1448 which Lodovico signed with Venice, fighting for whom he suffered the worst defeat of his military career at Caravaggio on 29 July that same year.<sup>55</sup> Although defeated and wounded in the battle, Lodovico did nonetheless distinguish himself at Caravaggio, a detail which must not have passed unnoticed by King Alfonso of Naples, with whom he signed a new *condotta* in 1449. In a period of constantly shifting political and military alliances, the marchese now found himself charged with defending the Ambrosian Republic against the ambitions of Venice, his previous employers, and against Sforza, who in the meantime had switched allegiances and joined the Venetians. For a brief period, moreover, Lodovico was now reunited with his brother Carlo, until the latter defected to join the Sforza-Venice alliance.

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<sup>52</sup> Ward Mahnke, 'The Political Career of a Condottiere Prince', pp.37-41.

<sup>53</sup> Lodovico's capture and short imprisonment at the hands of Sforza, notes Ward Mahnke, may have been a valuable experience in the long term. Ward Mahnke, 'The Political Career of a Condottiere Prince', pp.37-41.

<sup>54</sup> Ward Mahnke, 'The Political Career of a Condottiere Prince', p.65.

<sup>55</sup> See Elizabeth Ward Swain, 'The wages of peace: the condotte of Ludovico Gonzaga, 1436-1478', *Journal of the Society for Renaissance Studies*, vol.3, n.4, (1989), 442-452, p.442.



Fig.4: Pisanello, Medal of Lodovico Gonzaga to commemorate his nomination as *Capitano generale* of the Florentine forces

In March 1450 Sforza finally took Milan, and in November Lodovico signed a *condotta*, initially for a period of four years, with the newly invested duke. This first arrangement included an annual salary of 82,000 ducats in times of conflict and 47,000 in times of peace, as well as the promise of a marriage between Sforza's heir, the six-year old Galeazzo Maria, and Susanna Gonzaga.<sup>56</sup> Annual realignments with the two opposing alliances, however, were now a thing of the past, as Lodovico embarked on what would be a prolonged period of unbroken adherence to Sforza and Milan, which would be fractured only temporarily in the mid-1460s, following the humiliating rejection of Dorotea as future wife of Galeazzo Maria Sforza.<sup>57</sup> Not that these thirteen years passed completely without friction; salary payments were frequently in arrears as military expenditure spiralled, while Lodovico had to conceal from Sforza his increasingly frequent illnesses.<sup>58</sup> The early 1450s were, however, also a period of intense military activity. In May 1452, 2,000 Mantuan soldiers and five hundred knights accounted for around one quarter of the Milanese forces that thrust at Brescia and just over a year later, in June 1453, the marchese provided a similarly sizeable contingent to the success over the Venetian forces at the battle of Goito.<sup>59</sup> On the losing side on this occasion was

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<sup>56</sup> Ward Mahnke, 'The Political Career of a Condottiere Prince', pp.117-118.

<sup>57</sup> See p.40 above.

<sup>58</sup> Ward Swain, "My excellent and most singular lord", p.189; Ward Swain, 'The wages of peace', pp.446-447.

<sup>59</sup> Ward Mahnke, 'The Political Career of a Condottiere Prince', pp.136-137.



also Carlo Gonzaga, who had defected in 1451.<sup>60</sup> Carlo would never recover from this setback: he died in exile in Ferrara three years later, at the age of thirty-nine.

Exactly three weeks before the victory of Milan and her allies at Goito, a historic event had taken place, the aftermath of which would see the politics of Italy redefined for the next four decades. The fall of Constantinople at the hands of the Turks meant that the powers of Christendom, and in particular the small and fragmented states of the Italian peninsula, had to unite in order to stand firm against the genuine threat of the Sultan's armies advancing westward.<sup>61</sup> Peace on the home front, albeit an often fragile one, was now as inevitable as it was vital, and the *condottieri* would be obliged to adapt to the changing times. Goito, as it transpired, would prove to be Lodovico's final appearance on the battlefield, and thus began the second phase of his military career: that of peacetime commands.

The Peace of Lodi, agreed between Milan and Venice on 9 April 1454, was followed by the creation of an Italian defensive league which, barring a few notable exceptions, ensured "an unprecedented degree of peaceful coexistence in the peninsula until the beginning of the Wars of Italy in 1494."<sup>62</sup> His military career to all intents and purposes now over, Lodovico, like other rulers of small states, pursued an active policy of avoiding conflict.<sup>63</sup> In this new era of diplomacy, a greater importance was placed on values such as prudence and honour. The marchese had already gained a reputation for both in the ten years since he had become ruler of Mantua, and this was to his benefit after 1454, when Sforza renewed his *condotta*, albeit at the reduced peacetime rate of 36,000 ducats per annum.<sup>64</sup> While it is true that Lodovico effectively did very little to earn this salary, he was however obliged to keep an army in place, ready to be deployed at short notice should the threat of an attack by the Turks materialise, or, as was more likely, should the tenuous peace between the Italian states collapse. A further consequence of Lodi had been Milan's granting to Venice of Asola, Lonato and

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<sup>60</sup> Coniglio, *I Gonzaga*, p.61.

<sup>61</sup> See Steven Runciman, *The Fall of Constantinople, 1453* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1965).

<sup>62</sup> J.R.Hale, 'Peace of Lodi', in *The Thames and Hudson Dictionary of the Italian Renaissance*, p.190. See also Giovanni Soranzo, *La lega italiana 1454-5* (Milan: Università cattolica del Sacro Cuore, 1924).

<sup>63</sup> Carpeggiani, *Il palazzo gonzaghesco di Revere*, p.17.

<sup>64</sup> Ward Mahnke, 'The Political Career of a Condottiere Prince', p.157.



Peschiera, three disputed localities to the north of the *Mantovano* which Lodovico now had to accept would not be returned to Mantua.<sup>65</sup> This, it could be argued, was a small price to pay for the long-term security of his state. On the other hand, Lodi ensured the revival of trade with Venice, a vital element of the Mantuan economy, which had understandably suffered following Lodovico's contribution to their defeat at Goito.<sup>66</sup>

In essence, therefore, it can be argued that the marchese was among those who benefited most from the founding of The Italian League and the years of relative peace after 1454, a consequence of which for the leaders of the peninsula was the opportunity to indulge in patronage of artists and scholars. This was clearly the case for Federico da Montefeltro in Urbino who, like the Lodovico, was a *condottiere* whose services were in demand even in peacetime. Following a partial reconstruction of Urbino's finances, based on incomplete but reliable archival sources, Clough has suggested that a conservative estimate of Federico's annual surplus for cultural patronage might be a staggering 50,000 florins, and that in the peak years of his spending, between 1468 and 1482, his outlay on art and architecture was considerably greater than that of any other Italian state or ruling family, and probably in excess of any leader in Western Christendom.<sup>67</sup> In the case of Mantua, unfortunately, documents from the chancery in the time of Lodovico appear to have been entirely lost, meaning that any estimate regarding available funds for patronage would be entirely speculative. If, however, salaries attached to their respective *condotte* are indicative of wealth and income, Federico's stock was clearly higher; whereas in 1466 Lodovico secured a peacetime salary from Naples of 32,000 florins, the following year Federico's peacetime stipend as *capitano generale* of the Italian League was fixed at 60,000 florins, effectively double the earnings of the marchese.<sup>68</sup> This salary alone accounts for a larger sum than Federico's surplus for cultural patronage as projected by Clough, while further circumstantial

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<sup>65</sup> Coniglio, *I Gonzaga*, p.62.

<sup>66</sup> The point is made by Ward Mahnke, 'The Political Career of a Condottiere Prince', pp.144-152.

<sup>67</sup> Cecil H. Clough, 'Federigo da Montefeltro's Patronage of the Arts, 1468-1482', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, XXXVI, (1973), 129-144. By the same author see also 'Towards an Economic History of the State of Urbino at the Time of Federigo da Montefeltro and his Son, Guidobaldo', in L. de Rosa, ed., *Studi in memoria di Federigo Melis* (Naples: Giannini Editore, 1978), III, pp.469-504.

<sup>68</sup> On Federico's military contracts see Clough, 'Federigo da Montefeltro's Patronage of the Arts', p.130. On Lodovico's earnings see elsewhere in this section.

evidence from different periods throughout Lodovico's rule, including many letters in the Mantuan archives from unpaid artists requesting money, as well as admissions by the marchesi of financial troubles exacerbated by the late payment of *condotte* salaries and the staging of the Papal Congress in 1459-1460, seem far removed from the opulence of the Montefeltro. Meanwhile, in the midst of four decades of almost uninterrupted peace, the short and successful campaign with Florence against Volterra in 1472 resulted in a further windfall for Federico; as well as triggering the wartime rate for his *condotta* of 80,000 ducats, the material spoils of victory were considerable.<sup>69</sup>

For Lodovico, the remainder of the 1450s after Lodi was, as has been mentioned, a period of uninterrupted military commitment to Sforza, as military contracts by and large became more stable: three separate *condotte* ran their course without the marchese ever being obliged to send troops into battle. Compared to the previous decade, Lodovico's terms of service were clearly less burdensome, while his level of earnings remained lucrative. A few uncomfortable years followed the turn of the decade, as Pope Pius II (Enea Silvio Piccolomini, 1405-1464, Pope 1458-1464) persistently sought the financial and military support of the Italian princes in order to launch the crusade he had promised at the Congress of Mantua in 1459 and early 1460, but their anxiety was allayed with the death of the pontiff in 1464.<sup>70</sup> Around the same time Sforza and Lodovico also had to draw on all their diplomatic dexterity to avoid being drawn into a papal *condotta* which, if activated, could have obliged them to oppose an alliance of powers including Naples and France.<sup>71</sup> In 1463, meanwhile, shortly after a further renewal of his contract with Milan, an enormous chasm in relations with Sforza was caused by the latter's previously mentioned refusal of Dorotea Gonzaga as bride for his son and heir.<sup>72</sup> The three years that followed must have been acutely unsettling for the marchese, given his resolve not to campaign for Sforza, provoked by the offence caused by this second Milanese rejection of a Gonzaga daughter. At the same time, Lodovico began to make concerted attempts to free himself from his obligations to Sforza and to explore his other options; in 1465 he engaged in protracted but eventually

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<sup>69</sup> On the War of Volterra see Enrico Fiumi, *L'impresa di Lorenzo de' Medici contro Volterra* (1472) (Florence: La seppia, 1977).

<sup>70</sup> On Pius II and the Congress of Mantua see pp.319-333 below.

<sup>71</sup> Ward Mahnke, 'The Political Career of a Condottiere Prince', pp.244-258.

<sup>72</sup> See p.40 above.



fruitless negotiations to return to the employ of the Venetian Republic.<sup>73</sup> It was not straightforward, however, for the marchese to disentangle himself from his commitments to Sforza; as Evelyn Welch points out, quite apart from military and family links, there was a series of political, economic and cultural bonds which made any definitive divorce simply not feasible.<sup>74</sup> Resident Gonzaga ambassadors in Milan, the silk and armour trades and the fact that the young Cardinal Francesco was studying in Pavia were all further elements of the multifaceted and close association between the two states. Most crucially, however, ever since Lodi, Mantua's security had been inextricably tied to that of Milan.<sup>75</sup>

With the death of Francesco Sforza on 8 March 1466, however, the issue of Lodovico's reluctant adherence to Milan was resolved, and the following month a solution was reached which not only freed Lodovico from his contract with Milan but also preserved the balance of military alignment in the peninsula: in accepting the *condotta* tabled by King Ferdinand of Naples (1423-1494, King from 1458), the marchese was obliged in turn to defend his western neighbour and, as if to illustrate that nothing had actually changed, Milan agreed to pay two thirds of the annual stipend of 70,000 ducats in times of conflict and 32,000 in peacetime.<sup>76</sup> Thus, while his military duties remained largely the same, by changing employer Lodovico was able to repair, at least to some extent, the damage caused to his pride by Sforza's rejection of Dorotea three years beforehand. Moreover, given that this new arrangement with Naples also employed the marchese's sons Federico and Gianfrancesco, he was effectively able to retire from campaigning altogether, and avoid the unappealing prospect of having to take orders from the new duke, Galeazzo Maria Sforza, who had already proved himself to be a character of little integrity.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> Mazzoldi, *Mantova. La Storia. II*, pp.23-24.

<sup>74</sup> Evelyn Welch, 'The Gonzaga Go Shopping: Commercial and Cultural Relationships Between Milan and Mantua in the Fifteenth Century', in *Leon Battista Alberti e il Quattrocento. Studi in onore di Cecil Grayson e Ernst Gombrich*, ed. by Luca Chiavoni, Gianfranco Ferlisi and Maria Vittoria Grassi (Florence: Olschki, 2001), pp.269-284, p.269.

<sup>75</sup> The point is discussed by Ward Mahnke, 'The Political Career of a Condottiere Prince', pp.156-166.

<sup>76</sup> Coniglio, *I Gonzaga*, p.71; Ward Mahnke, 'The Political Career of a Condottiere Prince', pp.351-363.

<sup>77</sup> On Galeazzo Maria Sforza see Gregory Lubkin, *A Renaissance Court: Milan under Galeazzo Maria Sforza*.



From the late 1460s, therefore, we can chart the beginning of the third and final phase of Lodovico's career as a *condottiere*, that of elder statesman and arbitrator. At a time when, as has been mentioned, his health had begun to deteriorate severely, the marchese appeared determined to devote himself to private matters and those of state. This was around the time he commissioned Mantua's most outstanding works of art and architecture, which will be discussed in the following chapter; Andrea Mantegna (c.1431-1506) began work on the *Camera degli sposi*, while Leon Battista Alberti returned not only to assist in the completion of the church of San Sebastiano but also to provide plans for the magnificent basilica of Sant'Andrea.<sup>78</sup> For these and other projects, Mazzoldi notes, peace was required and, with the truce agreed at Lodi some fifteen years earlier still intact, the rulers of the Italian peninsula had the confidence to embark on extensive campaigns of sustained artistic patronage.<sup>79</sup>

No prince of a small state such as Mantua, however, could afford to withdraw completely from the military game, which continued to be played out against a backdrop of peace and prosperity never known previously. A defensive league established in 1470 saw Lodovico retain his position as commander of the Milanese armies, in an agreement which also included the consent of Florence and Naples and, two years later, a further *condotta* was granted by Galeazzo Maria Sforza.<sup>80</sup> By this stage, however, Mantuan troops accounted for a far smaller proportion of the total Milanese infantry than the figure of 1452: whereas twenty years earlier the marchese's men had comprised roughly a quarter of Francesco Sforza's forces, by 1472 they represented a figure close to one ninth, further evidence, if any were needed of the deterioration of relations between the Gonzaga and Sforza households, begun with the rebuff of Dorotea in 1463 and exacerbated by the succession of Galeazzo Maria three years later.<sup>81</sup> Beyond securing his succession, which it must be remembered contributed in turn to the stability of the peninsula, which was also clearly in Mantua's best interests, it is debatable whether Lodovico was willing to support the new duke to any degree at all; a request for

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<sup>78</sup> For a discussion of the works commissioned by Lodovico from Mantegna and Alberti see Chapter Two.

<sup>79</sup> Mazzoldi, *Mantova. La Storia. II*, pp.28-30.

<sup>80</sup> Coniglio, *I Gonzaga*, p.77.

<sup>81</sup> The figures are discussed by Ward Mahnke, 'The Political Career of a Condottiere Prince', pp.136-137.

troops in 1472 was declined as the marchese, despite having recently had his contract as commander of the Milanese armies renewed, appeared to place more value on his neutrality than on any obligations to his employer.<sup>82</sup> Given the blow to Gonzaga pride caused by the Dorotea episode, coupled with his personal contempt for the duke, it is difficult to imagine any circumstances at this time of peace under which Lodovico would have agreed to take part in a military operation with Galeazzo Maria Sforza.

During the 1470s the Italian powers continued to realign themselves with some frequency. In 1474, remarkably, Mantua found itself signatory of a pact which included not only Milan and Venice on the same side but also Florence. Not even the assassination of Galeazzo Maria Sforza on Saint Stephen's Day 1476 caused a spark which could have ignited a period of instability, though Lodovico, by now in a state of almost permanent invalidity, answered Duchess Bona's (1449-1503) appeals to travel to Milan the following week, despite having to do so on a stretcher.<sup>83</sup> Although for almost two decades the Sforza dynasty would now be considerably weakened by internal rivalries, in 1477 the marchese declined a *condotta* offered by the Emperor which would have seen him oppose Milan.<sup>84</sup> Later the same year Lodovico would enjoy one of his finest moments: following his intervention to resolve a border dispute between Pietrasanta and Camaiore, which had brought Lucca and Genoa into conflict, his efforts were recognised by Sixtus IV, who conferred upon the marchese the prestigious golden rose.<sup>85</sup> In 1478, the year of his death, Lodovico was still commander general of the Milanese armies, with an annual wartime and peacetime salary of 82,000 and 32,000 ducats respectively.<sup>86</sup>

Although his son and successor Federico was also tied to Milan through military *condotte*, it was not until after the French invasion of 1494 that a Gonzaga ruler

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<sup>82</sup> Coniglio, *I Gonzaga*, p.77.

<sup>83</sup> Mazzoldi, *Mantova. La Storia*, II, p.27.

<sup>84</sup> Coniglio, *I Gonzaga*, p.80. Galeazzo Maria was succeeded as duke by his seven-year old son, Giangaleazzo Maria, who died in mysterious circumstances in 1494. Giangaleazzo Maria was succeeded in turn by his father's younger brother, Ludovico 'Il Moro'. See *Storia di Milano*, 16 vols (Milan: Fondazione Treccani degli Alfieri per la Storia di Milano, 1953-1966), VII, pp.403-406.

<sup>85</sup> Amadei and Marani, *I Gonzaga a Mantova*, p.47. On the dispute between Pietrasanta and Camaiore see M.E. Bratchel, *Lucca, 1430-1494: the Reconstruction of an Italian City-Republic* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), p.77.

<sup>86</sup> Amadei and Marani, *I Gonzaga a Mantova*, p.48.



would again take to the battlefield, forty-two years after Lodovico's triumphant role at Goito. On 6 July 1495 at Fornovo, Lodovico's grandson, the Marchese Francesco II, was among the members of the anti-French Holy League who launched an attack on the forces of Charles VIII, who were returning north from Naples. Although the battle had been by no means a clear victory for the Venetian-led Italian states, Francesco triumphantly commissioned from Mantegna the *Madonna della Vittoria*, a votive altarpiece in which the marchese was depicted in full armour and kneeling in reverence before the Virgin and child (Fig.5). On every anniversary of the battle thereafter, the canvas was carried in ceremony through the streets of the town.<sup>87</sup>



Fig.5: Andrea Mantegna, *Madonna della Vittoria*

The military career of Lodovico Gonzaga, in short, was as crucial to the improvement of his own stock as it was to the consolidation of his state. The valour and leadership qualities shown by the marchese before 1454 allowed for a smooth transition to the new politics of prudence and diplomacy in the post-Lodi period, which in turn saw him reach a position of unassailable prestige during the last ten years of his life, despite his failing health. Wages earned from *condotte*,

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<sup>87</sup> See Alison Cole, *Art of the Italian Renaissance Courts* (London: Everyman, 1995), pp.158-159. The *Madonna della Vittoria* by Mantegna is now housed in the Louvre. On the battle of Fornovo see David Nicolle, *Fornovo 1495: France's Bloody Fighting Retreat* (London: Osprey, 1996) and Piero Pieri, *Il rinascimento e la crisi militare italiana* (Turin: Einaudi, 1970), pp.341-354.



though considerably less than those received by Federico da Montefeltro of Urbino and probably absorbed to a great extent by the costs of state apparatus, were fundamental to Lodovico's plans to regenerate the urban fabric of Mantua and to embellish it through cripplingly expensive building and regeneration projects. Performing political acrobatics and tolerating the late payment of salaries were the price that had to be paid to ensure the survival and prosperity of his vulnerably located state. Unlike his brother Carlo, notes Ward Mahnke, Lodovico could not afford to play "the game of war," given his responsibility to preserve his state; restrained by his obligations to defend Mantua, in fact, he never ventured far from home.<sup>88</sup> In the mid-1450s, indubitably a time for wisdom and prudence, Lodovico had both in abundance, and it was these qualities, together with a proven record of managing mercenaries, that ensured his services remained in high demand.<sup>89</sup> Some knowledge of his military career is crucial to an understanding of the backdrop against which the marchese's cultural goals were achieved.

### **Important Aspects of Lodovico's Rule**

Lodovico Gonzaga was Marchese of Mantua for thirty-four years during the central decades of a century of enormous change for the Italian states. In assessing the political legacy of his lengthy rule, Lazzarini notes four important areas in which Lodovico made significant and lasting contributions to the development of Mantua: the development of external relations; the organisation of his state; the evolution of society; and the transformation of government.<sup>90</sup> Before examining his more celebrated role as a patron of art and architecture, it will be worthwhile to consider, albeit briefly, each of these four main areas of policy of the marchese's government.

The polarisation of external relations was initially linked exclusively to Lodovico's military *condotte* but, from 1454, this became intrinsically connected to the political alignments of the Italian League. Nonetheless, far from assuming a withdrawn position, Lodovico engaged in an active role in the new landscape of political diplomacy. In 1454 the first permanent Mantuan envoy was established in Milan. For a full decade this position was occupied without interruption by Vincenzo

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<sup>88</sup> Ward Mahnke, 'The Political Career of a Condottiere Prince', p.8 and pp.99-104.

<sup>89</sup> Ward Swain, 'The wages of peace', p.443.

<sup>90</sup> Lazzarini, *Fra un principe e altri stati*, p.ix.

della Scalona, who would then be succeeded by Zaccaria Saggi, a close and longstanding confidant, who had fought alongside the marchese at Caravaggio and Goito.<sup>91</sup> Following the elevation of his son Francesco to the college of cardinals in January 1462, Lodovico also established the first permanent Mantuan embassy at the Curia. In the previous eighteen years of his rule the marchese had sent frequent delegations to Rome, often headed by Galeazzo Cavriani (1406-1466), the bishop of Mantua, who enjoyed good relations with, among others, Pope Eugenius IV (Gabriele Condulmer, 1383-1447, Pope 1431-1447) and Cardinal Colonna (c.1400-1472).<sup>92</sup> With his teenage son now placed at the highest echelons of the Church, however, Lodovico entrusted Bartolomeo Bonatto, his dependable secretary who had gained more experience than anyone from previous diplomatic relations with the Curia, with the position of permanent Mantuan ambassador in Rome. Due to Lodovico's more or less constant adherence to Milan and Sforza, diplomatic relations with Venice were inevitably less intensive but, given the strategic importance of the latter to Mantua's economy and security, short-term envoys were often sent to the Lagoon city. Mantuan officials and ambassadors deployed elsewhere in Italy were, according to Amadei, extremely important to the preservation of the Gonzaga dynasty.<sup>93</sup> By astutely using a network of able, trusted and respected representatives in the new era of diplomacy, therefore, Lodovico was able not only to detect at an early stage any developments elsewhere which could damage the interests of his state, but, more importantly, he was able to ensure that the interests of his family and those of Mantua were represented at the courts of the other major powers on the peninsula.

The second area in which Lodovico effected important changes was the organisation of his state, most notably in the political and economic integration of town and territory but also in the modernisation of commerce and industry, and in particular during the latter half of his rule.<sup>94</sup> This also involved large projects designed to improve roads and waterways, the latter involving the extensive employment of the renowned engineer Giovanni da Padova, whose most outstanding achievement in this respect was a canal dug between 1460 and 1461

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<sup>91</sup> Ward Mahnke, 'The Political Career of a Condottiere Prince', p.160.

<sup>92</sup> Ward Mahnke, 'The Political Career of a Condottiere Prince', p.207.

<sup>93</sup> Amadei and Marani, *I Gonzaga a Mantova*, p.43.

<sup>94</sup> Lazzarini, *Fra un principe e altri stati*, pp.x-xi.



which connected Mantova with Goito.<sup>95</sup> Mozzarelli views this process in terms of a tightening of jurisdiction over the *contado* by the marchese, as he embarked on a gradual but thorough programme of state centralisation of agriculture and the economy.<sup>96</sup> This was achieved in the first instance by relatively straightforward means, such as imposing on his subjects not only taxes but compulsory days of work on the land and on public building works.<sup>97</sup> A second and more systematic process initiated by Lodovico to exercise control over the territories of his state was the establishment of a series of administrative centres throughout the *Mantovano*. Existing and often decaying fortifications in villages such as Revere, Poggio Rusco, Gonzaga and Saviola were reinvented as residences able to house appointed officials and, if required, to accommodate on occasions the marchese and his entire court.<sup>98</sup> The development of the town, argues Carpeggiani, was dependent on the economic and military security of the *contado*.<sup>99</sup> Well aware of this, the northern *signori*, he notes elsewhere, oversaw the transformation of medieval fortifications into residences from which the business of the countryside, a key aspect of the economy, could be conducted.<sup>100</sup> In this way, in the *Mantovano* as in other places, rural areas were revolutionised politically, economically, hydraulically and architecturally. While the regeneration and the redecoration of fortifications by Lodovico throughout his state are usually discussed in terms of his extensive projects of architectural and artistic patronage, the significance of their reinvention as political centres must not be undervalued. Lawson, in his extensive study of the palace at Revere, acknowledges as much, listing among the building's practical purposes that of residential palace, guest house, administrative organ for

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<sup>95</sup> On the work carried out by Giovanni for Lodovico Gonzaga see Giovanni Rodella, *Giovanni da Padova. Un ingegnere gonzaghese nell'età dell'Umanesimo* (Milan: Franco Angeli, 1988).

<sup>96</sup> Cesare Mozzarelli, *Mantova e i Gonzaga dal 1382 al 1707* (Turin: UTET, 1987), pp.25-26.

<sup>97</sup> Amadei and Marani, *I Gonzaga a Mantova*, p.46; Coniglio, *I Gonzaga*, pp.55-56.

<sup>98</sup> Mozzarelli notes that country residences fulfilled the dual function of underlining the marchese's sovereignty in the *contado* and acting as temporary capitals. Mozzarelli, *Mantova e i Gonzaga*, pp.23-36.

<sup>99</sup> Paolo Carpeggiani, 'La fortuna di un mito: artisti e modelli fiorentini nell'architettura mantovana dell'Umanesimo (e nuovi documenti per la tribuna dell'Annunziata)', in *Filippo Brunelleschi. Le sue opere e il suo tempo. II*, Atti del convegno di Firenze 1977 (Florence: Centro Di, 1980), pp.817-837, p.828.

<sup>100</sup> Paolo Carpeggiani, 'I Gonzaga e l'arte: La corte, la città, il territorio (1444-1616)', in *Mantova e i Gonzaga nella civiltà del Rinascimento*, pp. 167-190, p.177.



the government of town and region, observation point for a major crossing over the Po and customs point on the same waterway.<sup>101</sup>

As well as being a turning point in his military career, 1454 was a year which signalled a notable shift in the organisation of Lodovico's state. The two developments, indeed, appear to be inter-related; no longer preoccupied to such an extent by the defence of his territory, which had been his main concern prior to the establishment of the Italian League, in the years following 1454 the marchese became increasingly interested in developing the commercial and industrial infrastructure of his small state. Although already well established elsewhere, silk was to become Mantua's flagship industry at a time when the town was gaining a reputation for producing materials of high quality, and it was this dynamism and growth of state-sponsored means of production which resulted in people from the surrounding areas being attracted to work in Mantua, while patents and licences were also granted to encourage skilled workers from other industries to establish themselves there.<sup>102</sup> Welch notes that in the third quarter of the fifteenth century Lodovico showed a willingness to invest in wool, and there was also an ultimately unsuccessful initiative to manufacture white soap.<sup>103</sup> Measures were taken by the marchese to safeguard the early development of these fledgling industries, as price controls were implemented and imports limited.<sup>104</sup> Moreover, Lodovico demonstrated in the management of the new cloth industries some tendencies which were both benevolent and paternalistic towards his subjects: concerned with ensuring that the less prosperous sections of society were not excluded from enjoying the benefit of the town's major products, in 1466 he issued a decree which ordered clothmakers to manufacture certain quantities of common cloth in order to meet the needs and budgets of all categories of customer.<sup>105</sup> Even by the end of the previous decade, however, Mantua was clearly producing cloths of

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<sup>101</sup> James G. Lawson, 'The Palace at Revere and the Earlier Architectural Patronage of Lodovico Gonzaga, Marquis of Mantua (1444-78)', (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Edinburgh, 1974), p.280.

<sup>102</sup> Lazzarini, *Fra un principe e altri stati*, p.84. Lodovico's strategy of investment in this area of the economy appears to have resulted in a valuable legacy for his successors, as Molà points out that, in the following century, Mantua emerged as a competitor to Venice's longer established silk industry. Luca Molà, *The Silk Industry of Renaissance Venice* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2000), pp.298.

<sup>103</sup> Evelyn Welch, *Shopping in the Renaissance: Consumer Cultures in Italy 1400-1600* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), p.249.

<sup>104</sup> Lawson, *The Palace at Revere*, p.6.

<sup>105</sup> Ward Mahnke, 'The Political Career of a Condottiere Prince', p.7.

impressive quality. On the momentous occasion of the arrival of Pius II in May 1459, the chronicler Schivenoglia was moved to write:

[...] era choverta da la porta de la Pradela per fino a santo Pedro de pano de lana de più cholore et de tellonij velutij et de drapij de oro et de seta et era cercha 500 zovenij con tuti dopiere in mano [...].<sup>106</sup>

Given the size and limitations of the Mantuan economy, however, it must be noted that the court was often reliant on goods available in larger neighbouring states. Although this was not, as has been demonstrated, a result of any lack of investment by the Gonzaga in their own state's industrial activity, Welch does define the ruling family as "sophisticated international consumers".<sup>107</sup>

While this wide-scale reorganisation of state and territory through agriculture, industry and commerce clearly had immense social implications for Lodovico's subjects, the very people whose lives and work were redefined by this new model, the marchese also implemented a number of more direct social measures which were clearly designed to contribute to the evolution of life in Mantua as he envisaged it. Renowned for his clement and merciful manner of rule and for his abhorrence of gratuitous violence, at some point during the 1460s Lodovico appears to have taken the remarkable step of banning the practice of jousting in Mantua.<sup>108</sup> While this may be regarded largely as a measure against the upper classes who would have participated in these tournaments, there can be no doubt that it would also have affected the ordinary people who flocked to spectate. Just and conscientious rulers with an interest in all areas of administration of state, the Gonzaga, Coniglio notes, ensured that daily life in Mantua was as smooth and as harmonious as could be expected from the times.<sup>109</sup> Furthermore, much of the work on buildings and town improvements commissioned in Mantua was of direct benefit to the people, the most notable example being the Ospedale di San

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<sup>106</sup> Giuse Pastore, *Schivenoglia Andrea. Cronaca di Mantova dal 1445 al 1484. Trascritta ed annotata da Carlo D'Arco* (Mantua: Edizioni Baldus, 1976), p.21.

<sup>107</sup> Welch, *Shopping in the Renaissance*, p.249.

<sup>108</sup> The information comes from a letter written by the marchese himself, in which he explains why no competitors from Mantua will be sent to a jousting competition in Milan. See letter Lodovico to Duke Galeazzo Maria Sforza, 7 April 1469 (ASMn AG, b. 2890 Lib. 62 f. 72r). Cited by Mazzoldi, *Mantova. La Storia. II*, p.30.

<sup>109</sup> Coniglio, *I Gonzaga*, pp.84-87.



Leonardo, opened in 1472 to provide refuge to the poor and the infirm.<sup>110</sup> Other new buildings financed by Lodovico which must have improved the quality of life for his subjects included the *Casa del mercato* and the clock tower in Piazza Erbe, also both completed in the 1470s.<sup>111</sup> Soon after the close of the Papal Congress in 1460, meanwhile, the marchese launched an extensive programme to pave the streets of the town, a project funded by direct taxation of house owners whose properties lined the main thoroughfares of Mantua.<sup>112</sup>

The fourth and final area which characterised the years of Lodovico's rule was the transformation of government into a model of tight oligarchy, if not indeed outright despotism. This, Lazzarini notes, was achieved only very gradually, and without an abrupt break from the regime inherited from his father. The first decade and a half or so of his rule, she notes, were strongly affected by institutions and figures that had been around since the time of Gianfrancesco, and these were allowed to expire naturally by the new marchese.<sup>113</sup> At the same time, the number of state officials employed by the Gonzaga multiplied between the 1450s and the 1470s, as the established tradition of the commune electing people to office was superseded by a new practice which saw Lodovico assume executive responsibility for nominating individuals to positions within a court and government infrastructure which he was wilfully enlarging, in order that it had the capacity to deal with the broader political and diplomatic demands of the mid to late Quattrocento.<sup>114</sup> In this respect, while during the years of Lodovico the Gonzaga succeeded in almost completely suppressing communal institutions and establishing a firmness of rule unknown to previous generations, they also created a political environment which allowed for, and indeed favoured, the emergence of a governing class drawn from the most prominent families in the town and territory, dynasties in their own right, such as the Arrivabene and the Andreasi,

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<sup>110</sup> See Franchini, 'L'Ospedale di San Leonardo in Mantova sotto il titolo di Santa Maria della Coroneta', pp.73-92.

<sup>111</sup> On the clocktower see Rodolfo Signorini, *L'orologio astrologico di Mantova* (Bozzolo: Arti grafiche Chiribella, 1992). On the Casa del mercato see Paolo Carpeggiani and Irma Pagliari, *Mantova. Materiali per la storia urbana dalle origini all'Ottocento* (Mantua: Gianluigi Arcari, 1983), p.27.

<sup>112</sup> Coniglio, *I Gonzaga*, p.53.

<sup>113</sup> Lazzarini, *Fra un principe e altri stati*, pp.x-xi and p.357.

<sup>114</sup> Lazzarini, *Fra un principe e altri stati*, p.117 and p.365.



who would go on to provide generations of loyal and able administrators to the state apparatus.<sup>115</sup>

During the early 1460s, exactly around the time cited by Lazzarini as that in which Lodovico was able to advance his own agenda following the retirement of his father's subordinates, a series of other measures was introduced which further strengthened the increasingly vice-like grip of the marchese and his family on Mantua's organs of authority. By 1460, the Gonzaga had gained complete control of all the town's ecclesiastical institutions: by steadily placing members of their own family and those of their close allies at the head of religious establishments they effectively eliminated the only authority able to check their power. The nomination of Francesco as cardinal early in 1462 meant that this domination of office was now cemented.<sup>116</sup> On 30 March 1461, meanwhile, a decree was passed which banned the donation of gifts to *consiglieri*.<sup>117</sup> While this legislation may well have been inspired by the honourable intention of eliminating corruption, it must have had the additional benefit of strengthening the marchese's authority, since an avenue through which third parties could attempt to influence his advisors was now blocked. In May of the following year Lodovico also implemented an important reform to the judicial system which, by regulating the form and procedure of its deliberations, was designed to increase his power even further.<sup>118</sup>

Thirty-four years of unbroken rule was a remarkable stretch of time for any *signore* of the Quattrocento to reshape his state. No previous Gonzaga ruler, indeed, had come close to achieving three and a half decades of leadership. Both the duration of his rule and the political climate of the mid-fifteenth century were in his favour

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<sup>115</sup> Lazzarini, *Fra un principe e altri stati*, p.xi and pp.184-197. Amadei talks of the collaboration with and loyalty to the Gonzaga of these families. Amadei and Marani, *I Gonzaga a Mantova*, p.46; Coniglio, *I Gonzaga*, p.44.

<sup>116</sup> The point is made by Lazzarini, *Fra un principe e altri stati*, p.xii. The success of the Gonzaga in dominating Mantuan religious institutions in the second half of the Quattrocento contrasts with the situation in Ferrara, where the Estensi's often difficult relations with the Church were partly a consequence of attempts to control the diocese more effectively. Only when Ippolito d'Este became his family's first cardinal in 1493, more than three decades after Francesco Gonzaga, did the ruling dynasty succeed in controlling local ecclesiastical institutions to the same degree to which the Gonzaga did in Mantua. See Marco Folini, *Rinascimento estense: politica, cultura, istituzioni di un antico stato italiano* (Rome: Laterza, 2004), pp.287-289.

<sup>117</sup> Lazzarini, *Fra un principe e altri stati*, p.120.

<sup>118</sup> Coniglio reports that judicial reforms were implemented on 7 May 1462. Coniglio, *I Gonzaga*, p.88.

as the marchese carried out gradual but significant changes to his state. External relations were polarised and consolidated in the post-Lodi era by a concerted agenda of political diplomacy, while the economy was both modernised and centralised through the development of agriculture, commerce, industry and transport routes. Society at large gained many benefits from the benevolent and paternalistic rule of Lodovico, a necessary price of which, it could be argued, was the definitive removal of all notions of communal liberty, coupled with an overtly despotic grip on government, Church and the judicial system. In much the same way as the years after 1454 afforded Lodovico the freedom he required to remodel the political landscape of his state, they also provided a backdrop of peace and prosperity against which he was able to advance his substantial patronage of arts and letters, and it is this aspect of his rule which is the focus of the following chapter.





## CHAPTER TWO

# PATRONAGE OF ART AND ARCHITECTURE

### Introduction

It was during the rule of Lodovico that Mantua emerged as a centre of outstanding achievement in building and in the arts. Not only did the patronage of the marchese in these areas far exceed that of his forefathers and predecessors, he also established a genuine climate of sponsorship of the arts among the foremost citizens of the capital. Burke notes that, during the Renaissance, three main motives underpinned patronage of art and architecture: piety, pleasure and prestige.<sup>1</sup> Lodovico's projects, which included Leon Battista Alberti's ambitious temple of Sant'Andrea and Andrea Mantegna's stunning fresco cycle for the *Camera degli sposi*, reveal elements of each of these, in differing degrees and depending on the nature and purpose of individual commissions. In terms of the style of art and building produced in Mantua, the era of Lodovico was equally significant. In a way paralleled by its emergence as a centre for humanism and the new learning, the accelerated transition, in less than a century, from the late Gothic vocabulary and chivalric themes of Pisanello, to the refined style and subject matter of Giulio Romano (c.1499-1546) and the Mantuan High Renaissance, can be understood only in terms of the cultural climate at Lodovico's court which, thanks to his own vision as patron and the predispositions of the outstanding artists he employed, saw Mantua transformed from a relative backwater into one of the leading centres of the period. The impetus given by Lodovico, and no less that provided by hugely influential and long-term appointments such as Mantegna and Luca Fancelli (c.1430-post 1494), go a long way to explaining why Mantua, although without an artistic school, was a prominent home of Renaissance culture.

Although the Marchesa Barbara's significant participation in affairs of state is incontrovertible, few critics have been quite as willing to recognise her contribution in the field of artistic patronage. Ward Swain maintains that Barbara was not involved in this area of her husband's activity, and that she did not share

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<sup>1</sup> Peter Burke, *The Italian Renaissance: Culture and Society in Italy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987), p.97.

Lodovico's tastes in literature.<sup>2</sup> While she may not have assumed an active role in relations with figures such as Donatello (1386-1466) and Andrea Mantegna, whose enduring fame often leads us to lose sight of the fact that Mantua and other towns and cities of the period were home to less notable artists across many disciplines, I have during the course of my research encountered numerous letters in which Barbara, either with her husband or directly with the practitioners themselves, corresponds on commissions for jewellery, tapestries, carvings, embroidery and furniture, activities which, though not traditionally afforded by scholars the same attention given to painting, were considered to be of equal or even greater standing at the time.<sup>3</sup> In the case of the *Camera degli sposi*, moreover, a room within their most intimate living quarters, the figure of Barbara is placed firmly at the centre of the court scene, dominating her surroundings (see Fig.6). Given her prominence in the pictorial decoration, it is surely not unreasonable to suppose that the marchesa was consulted by Lodovico and Mantegna prior to its execution.



**Fig.6: Andrea Mantegna, *Camera degli sposi*– Court Scene**

To provide, within this thesis, an ample portrayal of the artistic and architectural achievements of Mantua from 1444 to 1478 would be ambitious beyond prudence. In the pages that follow, therefore, I shall limit myself to a brief discussion of some

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<sup>2</sup> Ward Swain, “My excellent and most singular lord”, p.186.

<sup>3</sup> A growing interest in the material culture of the Renaissance has, in recent years, seen scholars give increasing consideration to objects, smaller artefacts and interior decoration. See Richard Goldthwaite, *Wealth and the Demand for Art in Italy 1300-1600* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1993); Lisa Jardine, *Worldly Goods: A New History of the Renaissance* (London: Papermac, 1997); Evelyn S. Welch, *Shopping in the Renaissance: Consumer Cultures in Italy 1400-1600* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005); Peter Thornton, *The Italian Renaissance Interior 1400-1600* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1991); Marta Ajmar-Wollheim, Flora Dennis and Elizabeth Miller, *At Home in Renaissance Italy: [Published to Coincide with a Major Exhibition at the Victoria and Albert Museum]* (London: V&A Publications, 2006).



of Lodovico's most notable commissions and the likely motives behind his patronage, while also attempting to place these within the context and artistic currents of the period. Finally, given the primary focus of this thesis, I shall also highlight elements of the marchese's artistic programme which I believe to be consistent with his concurrent sponsorship of letters and learning.

### **Building Projects**

Prior to the time of Lodovico, the Gonzaga ruler who had shown the most propensity for building was his grandfather, Francesco I. As well as commissioning the Castello di San Giorgio to designs by Bartolomeo da Novara (see Fig.7), and the Giocosa building that would eventually house Vittorino's prestigious school, Francesco oversaw improvements to several churches, including Santa Maria delle Grazie and the cathedral. Marani and Perina note that Francesco absorbed influences from Lombardy, from Veneto and from Ferrara, therefore developing a vision that was expansive for his time.<sup>4</sup> Lodovico's father Gianfrancesco, meanwhile, showed himself to be less interested in building; apart from the Sant'Andrea bell tower and the church of Santa Maria degli Angeli, both in the Lombard Gothic style, the first marchese does not appear to have ordered any significant building projects.<sup>5</sup>



Fig.7: Mantua, Castello di San Giorgio

Any discussion, however brief, of the building projects commissioned by Lodovico Gonzaga must begin with the figure of Luca Fancelli. A mainstay in Mantua for all

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<sup>4</sup> Ercolano Marani and Chiara Perina, *Mantova. Le arti. II. Dall'inizio del secolo XV alla metà del XVI* (Mantua: Istituto Carlo d'Arco per la storia di Mantova, 1961), pp.7-8.

<sup>5</sup> Marani and Perina, *Mantova. Le arti. II*, pp.12-13.



but the first six of the marchese's thirty-four year tenure, Fancelli not only had a pivotal role in his programme of urban renewal, but also provided day-to-day input as sculptor, director of works and, increasingly, with the passing of the years, as architect in his own right. His influence, his industry and his versatility are confirmed by the hundreds of surviving letters he exchanged with both Lodovico and Barbara, amounting to a body of correspondence between patrons and artist unparalleled in volume and in detail.<sup>6</sup>

Born around 1430 in Settignano, close to Florence, Fancelli's early training may have been imparted by Michelozzo di Bartolomeo (1396-1472), one of the most influential architects of the Florentine early to mid-Quattrocento, who was responsible for the Palazzo Medici.<sup>7</sup> The work carried out in Tuscany by the teenage Fancelli must have been impressive, judging from the fact that, in response to a request by Lodovico for a Florentine architect, his letter of recommendation which he brought to Mantua in 1450 was written by Cosimo de' Medici (1389-1464) himself, the most influential figure in Florence and chief patron of Michelozzo and his workshop.<sup>8</sup> An interest in those who were practising the art of building in Florence was clearly something the marchese nurtured: in 1446, according to Vasari, Filippo Brunelleschi (1377-1446) came to Mantua for what appeared to be his third visit, while Antonio Manetti's (1423-1497) shelved plans for Sant'Andrea are documented in a letter written by Leon Battista Alberti in October 1470.<sup>9</sup> The arrival of Fancelli, however, was significant in two respects:

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<sup>6</sup> On Fancelli's correspondence with the marchesi see Corinna Vasic Vatovec, *Luca Fancelli architetto. Epistolario gonzaghesco* (Florence: Uniedit, 1979) and Paolo Carpeggiani and Anna Maria Lorenzoni, *Carteggio di Luca Fancelli con Ludovico, Federico e Francesco Gonzaga marchesi di Mantova* (Mantua: Gianluigi Arcari, 1998).

<sup>7</sup> On Michelozzo see H.M. Caplow, *Michelozzo* (New York: Garland, 1977).

<sup>8</sup> Marani and Perina, *Mantova. Le arti. II*, p.64. On Cosimo de' Medici's policy of placing Florentine artists in princely courts see Martin Warnke, *The Court Artist: On the Ancestry of the Modern Artist* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p.46.

<sup>9</sup> Giorgio Vasari, 'Vita di Filippo Brunelleschi', in *Le vite de' più eccellenti architetti, pittori, et scultori italiani, da Cimabue insino a' tempi nostri: nell'edizione per i tipi di Lorenzo Torrentino, Firenze 1550*, ed. by Luciano Bellosi and Aldo Rossi, 2 vols (Turin: Einaudi, 1991), pp.275-309, p.305. Brunelleschi's presence in Mantua, at the request of the Marchese Gianfrancesco, is documented in 1432 and 1436 and, although there is no documentary proof of a third visit, Vasari writes that in 1446, following an urgent plea by Lodovico to Cosimo de' Medici, Brunelleschi returned to Mantua to produce designs for re-enforcement works on the banks of the Po. On Manetti in Mantua see Paolo Carpeggiani, 'La fortuna di un mito: artisti e modelli fiorentini nell'architettura mantovana dell'Umanesimo (e nuovi documenti per la tribuna dell'Annunziata)', in *Filippo Brunelleschi. Le sue opere il suo tempo. Atti del convegno di Firenze 1977* (Florence: Centro Di, 1980), II, pp. 817-837. On Alberti's letter see p.346 below.

firstly, as Carpeggiani notes, his appointment heralded the first artist-courtier in Mantua; secondly, according to Amadei and Marani among others, with Fancelli the new Renaissance style appeared for the first time in Mantua.<sup>10</sup> For the next thirty-four years Fancelli was in charge of building for both Lodovico and his son and heir Federico, two patrons who clearly held him in very high esteem. With the succession of the young Francesco in 1484, however, Fancelli came to be overlooked, to the extent that he left Mantua to work in Florence and Naples.<sup>11</sup>

Although Fancelli's appointment in no way dampened Lodovico's desire to engage the services from time to time of other architects of a classical background, from Tuscany or elsewhere, no project was ever accomplished without the central involvement of his resident court architect. This situation has prompted several commentators to dismiss Fancelli as little more than a skilled artisan chiefly employed as executor of the designs of others, in particular those for Alberti's two Mantuan churches.<sup>12</sup> Several notable studies by Paolo Carpeggiani, however, have confirmed Fancelli's status as an influential architect in his own right.<sup>13</sup> If anything, his seemingly ubiquitous presence, coupled with the vast quantity of letters he exchanged with his enthusiastic patron, substantiates Carpeggiani's conviction that this was no simple tradesman providing support, but rather a central figure in operations, whose input was critical to the successful completion of the many buildings on which he worked.

In interpreting the numerous buildings to appear from Lodovico's direct patronage, Carpeggiani charts two distinct periods, separated by the Papal Congress held in Mantua from May 1459 until January 1460.<sup>14</sup> In the first of these the marchese focused on the regeneration of his territory and on the consolidation of his income there, as is evident from the extensive work carried out on various

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<sup>10</sup> Carpeggiani, 'La fortuna di un mito', p. 821; Giuseppe Amadei and Ercolano Marani, *I Gonzaga a Mantova* (Milan: Cassa di Risparmio delle Provincie Lombarde, 1975), pp. 166-169.

<sup>11</sup> Marani and Perina, *Mantova. Le arti. II*, p.66.

<sup>12</sup> This is the impression given by Marani and Perina, *Mantova. Le arti. II*, pp.85-87.

<sup>13</sup> See, in particular, Paolo Carpeggiani, 'Luca Fancelli architetto civile nel contado mantovano: ipotesi e proposte', *Civiltà Mantovana*, 20, (1969), 87-114 and, by the same author, 'Luca Fancelli, da tagliapietra ad architetto', in *Dal castello al palazzo. Storia e architettura in un'area di confine*, Atti del convegno di San Martino Gusnago, 16 novembre 1996, ed. by Mariano Vignoli (Bozzolo: Banca di Credito Cooperativo di Casalmoro e Bozzolo, 1997), pp.15-41.

<sup>14</sup> Paolo Carpeggiani, 'Ludovico Gonzaga, l'architettura e il progetto di <<Renovatio Urbis>>', in *La corte di Mantova nell'età di Andrea Mantegna*, ed. by Cesare Mozzarelli, Robert Oresko and Leandro Ventura (Rome: Bulzoni, 1997), pp. 243-253, p. 244.



residences throughout the *Mantovano*.<sup>15</sup> In the years following the Congress, however, Lodovico, with his knowledge and interest increasing and his taste becoming ever more refined, sponsored a large-scale programme of urban renewal in Mantua itself, based largely on classical models provided, in varying degrees, by Fancelli, Mantegna and Alberti among others. Dall'Acqua, in a view compatible with Carpeggiani's, argues that the Congress was responsible for the emergence of a new and fertile climate for cultural renewal. While the urban fabric of the medieval town may have been unalterable, by creating buildings of classical design Lodovico could at least change how it was read.<sup>16</sup>

A brief examination of the construction projects financed by Lodovico confirms the premise, articulated by Dall'Acqua and Carpeggiani and Pagliari, that there were two separate and well-defined phases in the marchese's architectural patronage. His first major undertaking, dating from the second half of the 1440s, was the construction of the palace at Revere (see Fig.8). Although it was there that Fancelli was primarily occupied for most of the decade that followed his arrival, his contribution was largely decorative, the main construction work having been completed before 1450, possibly by Manetti.<sup>17</sup> The construction and improvement of country residences such as Revere in this period were consistent with Lodovico's contemporaneous political objective of tightening his control over the territory. Rather than buildings commissioned from the outset with a strong aesthetic ethos, therefore, the palaces in the *Mantovano* were devised essentially as purely functional entities. The fact that the 1450s was also the decade in which the marchese, incontrovertibly influenced by Fancelli, began to demonstrate a keen interest in classical architecture and its motifs, ensured that the surface decoration

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<sup>15</sup> See p.58 above.

<sup>16</sup> Marzio Dall'Acqua, 'Storia di un progetto albertiano non realizzato: la ricostruzione della Rotonda di San Lorenzo in Mantova', in *Il Sant'Andrea di Mantova e Leon Battista Alberti. Atti del convegno di studi organizzato dalla città di Mantova con la collaborazione dell'Accademia Virgiliana nel quinto centenario della Basilica di Sant'Andrea e della morte dell'Alberti 1472-1972, Mantova 25-26 aprile 1972* (Mantua: Biblioteca Comunale di Mantova, 1974), pp. 229-236, pp. 229-230. Paolo Carpeggiani and Irra Pagliari make a similar point in *Mantova. Materiali per la storia urbana dalle origini all'Ottocento* (Mantua: Gianluigi Arcari, 1983), p. 26.

<sup>17</sup> James G. Lawson, while acknowledging Manetti's presence in Mantua from 1448, argues that there is no proof he was responsible for work at Revere before the arrival of Fancelli. James G. Lawson, 'The Palace at Revere and the Earlier Architectural Patronage of Lodovico Gonzaga, Marquis of Mantua (1444-78)' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Edinburgh, 1974), p. 89. See also Paolo Carpeggiani, *Il palazzo gonzaghesco di Revere* (Revere: Amministrazione Comunale, 1974), p.15.



of these buildings reflected the new style. In this sense, Revere, as Carpeggiani has pointed out, was a combination of local and Florentine designs, a fusion of late Gothic language with Florentine words.<sup>18</sup>



Fig.8: Revere, Palazzo Gonzaghese

A key figure in the improvement of the roads and waterways of the contado at this time was Giovanni da Padova, an eclectic engineer who appears to have carried out a series of projects for the marchese.<sup>19</sup> Engaged on a full-time basis from 1458, Giovanni's principal achievement was the redirection of water to create a canal which linked Mantua to Goito, including a series of canal locks at Governolo. As well as these, Giovanni worked on the maintenance and improvement of fortifications throughout the Mantuan territory. His works are documented in the many detailed letters he wrote to the marchese, letters which also show Giovanni to be a man of some considerable learning.<sup>20</sup> In 1459, meanwhile, during the months leading up to the Papal Congress, Lodovico showed a willingness to employ specialists from elsewhere on single projects where improvements were required: Aristotele Fioravanti (c.1420-1486), the architect from Bologna, was handsomely rewarded for his work on stabilising and straightening a tower in the city.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Carpeggiani, 'La fortuna di un mito', pp. 824-825.

<sup>19</sup> On Giovanni da Padova see Giovanni Rodella, *Giovanni da Padova: un ingegnere gonzaghese nell'età dell'Umanesimo* (Milan: Franco Angeli, 1988).

<sup>20</sup> These letters are published in Rodella, *Giovanni da Padova*.

<sup>21</sup> On Fioravanti see Paolo Carpeggiani, 'Aristotele Fioravanti al servizio di Ludovico Gonzaga. Documenti inediti', *Arte Lombarda*, 44-45, (1976), 83-87; Marzio Dall'Acqua, 'Mecenatismo e collezionismo dei Gonzaga da Ludovico a Isabella d'Este: la nascita dell'esperto e del dilettante' in Adriano Prosperi, ed., *La corte e il Cortegiano. II: Un modello europeo* (Rome: Bulzoni, 1980), pp. 295-319, pp. 313-314.

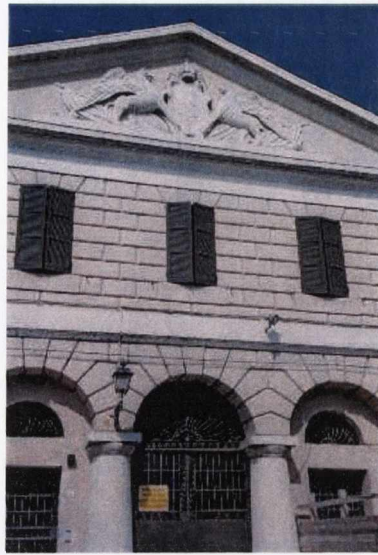


Fig.9: Mantua, Ospedale di San Leonardo

The marchese's preoccupation during the 1450s with the regeneration and modernisation of the hinterland did not prevent him from embarking on two significant developments in Mantua in the same decade. Following approval of the project by Pope Nicholas V (Tommaso Parentucelli, 1397-1455, Pope 1446-1455) in 1449, work commenced the following year on the Ospedale di San Leonardo (Fig.9), an institution destined not to be operational until 1472.<sup>22</sup> While the long duration and substantial scale of the construction makes Fancelli's involvement certain, Lawson contends that the original architect is more likely to have been Manetti, given his documented presence in Mantua between 1448 and 1452, coupled with the mature Florentine style of the building and the relative youth of Fancelli in 1450.<sup>23</sup> The second noteworthy achievement of the decade in the town was the rebuilding of the ailing Palazzo del Podestà (Fig.10), a project entrusted to Giovanni d'Arezzo, another Tuscan architect, albeit one less celebrated than Manetti.<sup>24</sup> Lastly, the 1450s saw the building of three churches in Mantua; these were Santa Maria del Carmine, San Pietro d'Ungheria and a third apparently unnamed small church.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> See L. Franchini, 'L'Ospedale di San Leonardo in Mantova sotto il titolo di Santa Maria della Coroneta', in *Ospedali lombardi del Quattrocento. Fondazione, trasformazioni, restauri*, ed. by L. Franchini (Como: New Press, 1995), pp. 73-92.

<sup>23</sup> Lawson, 'The Palace at Revere', pp. 200-218.

<sup>24</sup> On the Palazzo del Podestà see Pietro Gazzola, *Il Palazzo del Podestà a Mantova e i lavori eseguiti dalla Banca Agricola Mantovana nel centenario della fondazione* (Mantua: Banca Agricola Mantovana, 1973).

<sup>25</sup> Lawson, 'The Palace at Revere', p.232.





Fig.10: Mantua, Palazzo del Podestà

As was the case in other areas of Lodovico's cultural sponsorship, however, the years immediately following the Papal Congress signalled a marked switch in his patronage of architecture, both in terms of style and in intensity. While the arrival of Andrea Mantegna in the months during which Mantua was the capital of Christendom is highly significant, the presence of Leon Battista Alberti in Mantua in 1460 indubitably provided the marchese, almost certainly still slighted by the unflattering comments made by the Pope and other visiting dignitaries over the previous year, with extra momentum, if any were required, to sanction large-scale urban improvements.<sup>26</sup> Carpeggiani agrees that the Congress was a turning point, in the sense that it focused attention on Mantua and heralded the beginning of a new level of building on the part of Lodovico's administration.<sup>27</sup>

The biggest single building project of the 1460s was the church of San Sebastiano (Fig.11), executed by Fancelli to Alberti's extravagant design.<sup>28</sup> Lamoureux

<sup>26</sup> See Mary Hollingsworth, *Patronage in Renaissance Italy: From 1440 to the Early Sixteenth Century* (London: John Murray, 1994), p.216. For Pius's derogatory comments on Mantua see Enea Silvio Piccolomini, *I commentarii*, ed. by Luigi Totaro (Milan: Adelphi, 1984), Vol.1, Lib.1, pp.109-110.

<sup>27</sup> Carpeggiani, 'Ludovico Gonzaga, l'architettura e il progetto di <<Renovatio Urbis>>', pp.245-246.

<sup>28</sup> On the church of San Sebastiano see See Richard E. Lamoureux, *Alberti's Church of San Sebastiano in Mantua* (New York: Garland, 1979); Guido Guidetti, 'Leon Battista Alberti direttore della fabbrica di San Sebastiano', in *Vittorino da Feltre e la sua scuola: umanesimo, pedagogia, arti*. Atti del convegno di studi promosso dalla Fondazione Giorgio Cini di Venezia con altri enti nel sesto



proposes some reasons which may have been behind Lodovico's decision to build a church and to dedicate it to this particular saint.<sup>29</sup> Firstly, given that Mantua's geography had on previous occasions proved lethally receptive to outbreaks of plague, a monument to Saint Sebastian, renowned as a protector from the disease, is not in itself remarkable. Secondly, a dream, cryptically alluded to by the chronicler Schivenoglia and which may have tormented the marchese, could also have been a crucial motivation for the project.<sup>30</sup> Finally, Lamoureux suggests, the church might even have been originally conceived as a burial place for Lodovico and Barbara – a not unreasonable supposition when one considers that Alberti had designed a recently completed temple sepulchre in Rimini for Sigismondo Malatesta (1417-1468, signore of Rimini 1432-1468).<sup>31</sup> The building history of San Sebastiano during the 1460s was far from straightforward, however, and, although the foundations were dug in the spring of 1460, it was not completed before Alberti returned to Mantua in the autumn of 1470.<sup>32</sup> Judging from a letter written to the marchese by his son the cardinal shortly after the completion of the building, the novel design of San Sebastiano probably puzzled many of those who saw it. After referring to “quello viso fantastico de messer Baptista di Alberti”, Francesco candidly admits that “Io per ancho non intendeva se l'havea a reussire in chiesa o moschea o synagoga”.<sup>33</sup>

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centenario della nascita di Vittorino. Venezia-Feltre-Mantova, 9-11 novembre 1979, ed. by Nella Giannetto (Florence: Olschki, 1981), pp. 237-241; Arturo Calzona and Livio Volpi Ghirardini, *Il San Sebastiano di Leon Battista Alberti* (Florence: Olschki, 1994).

<sup>29</sup> Lamoureux, *Alberti's Church of San Sebastiano in Mantua*, pp.26-28 and pp.111-112.

<sup>30</sup> Schivenoglia gives only the information that the marchese “[...] fece chomenzare [...] per uno insonio chel se insonie una note et fo principiata tanto in freza [...]”.Giuse Pastore, *Schivenoglia Andrea. Cronaca di Mantova dal 1445 al 1484. Trascritta ed annotata da Carlo D'Arco* (Mantua: Edizioni Baldus, 1976), p.27. Lamoureux notes that classical authors such as Synesius, whose widely read *De insomniis* Lodovico would have been familiar with, as well as Pius II, who had recently left Mantua, could have made him “sensitive to the wisdom of dreams”. Lamoureux, *Alberti's Church of San Sebastiano in Mantua*, p.26. In correspondence of the period Lodovico mentions only that he wishes to build the church, without revealing the reasons behind his decision.

<sup>31</sup> On Alberti's temple in Rimini see Cetty Muscolino, *Il tempio malatestiano di Rimini* (Ravenna: Longo, 2000).

<sup>32</sup> See pp.333-350 below.

<sup>33</sup> Letter Cardinal Francesco Gonzaga to Lodovico, Bologna, 16 March 1473. (ASMn AG, b. 1141). Published in Lamoureux, *Alberti's Church of San Sebastiano*, pp.199-200.



Fig.11: Mantua, Chiesa di San Sebastiano

As well as at San Sebastiano, the 1460s saw work continue at the site of the Ospedale di San Leonardo and at the Castello di San Giorgio, the latter having become the permanent residence of the marchesi in the months prior to the opening of the Papal Congress in May 1459. While an urgency to create space in the Palazzo Vecchio to accommodate the many delegates from all over Europe appears to have provided the main impetus for the move, the new surroundings were clearly to the liking of Lodovico and his family, and the Castello was firmly established as their home during the 1460s. It was within the private apartments of the Castello that the Gonzaga library came to be housed in the time of Lodovico, and it was here too that Mantegna immortalised the family with his grand fresco cycle in the *Camera degli sposi*.<sup>34</sup> While this trend was consolidated by the creation of a classical courtyard in the 1470s, the marchese had demonstrated a desire to reform the Castello well before the Papal Congress: even before he had taken up residence in Mantua in 1459, Mantegna had provided Lodovico with an elaborate programme for the structure and decoration of a private chapel within the Castello.<sup>35</sup> The chapel no longer exists but its possible location within the complex is discussed by Ventura, who also suggests that several extant paintings by

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<sup>34</sup> For a discussion on the possible layout of the Castello see Leandro Ventura, 'Appunti su alcuni ambienti del Castello di San Giorgio a Mantova. La biblioteca di Ludovico II e la Camera Picta', *Civiltà Mantovana*, terza serie, 6, (1993), 77-81.

<sup>35</sup> Amadei and Marani, *I Gonzaga a Mantova*, pp.166-169.



Mantegna may have been commissioned by the marchese specifically for the chapel.<sup>36</sup>

### **Improvement of Mantua in 1460s and 1470s**

The main impetus for urban renewal provided by the Papal Congress is not, however, most accurately gauged by examining projects for individual buildings. In order to appreciate fully Lodovico's enduring contribution to the improvement of Mantua the focus must shift from architecture to a vast programme of repair to the urban fabric of the town, instigated during the early 1460s. An extensive programme, funded largely through taxes levied on citizens whose houses lined them, saw the streets of Mantua paved for the first time.<sup>37</sup> As well as improving the quality of the daily lives of his subjects who used the main arteries, their paving contributed to an improvement in the cleanliness and general health of the town.

At the time he was making the streets of his capital cleaner and more coherent the marchese commissioned several other works which revealed his spirit of public benevolence. Between 1460 and 1462 he oversaw the rebuilding of the Palazzo del Comune, as well as the restoration of a statue to Virgil which had been pulled down by Carlo Malatesta half a century earlier.<sup>38</sup> Far from viewing admiration for the greatest poet of Latin antiquity as something inappropriate, as his great uncle had done, the decision by Lodovico to restore the monument must be viewed as an unequivocal endorsement of, not to mention adherence to, a particularly strong and proud affection among subjects for a figure whose origins were local. In this respect, the marchese's experience at the school of Vittorino da Feltre is crucial in gaining an understanding of the changing attitudes of the Mantuan ruling house towards classical culture during the early to mid-Quattrocento.

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<sup>36</sup> Leandro Ventura, 'La religione privata: Ludovico II, Andrea Mantegna e la Cappella del Castello di San Giorgio', *Quaderni di Palazzo Te*, 7, (1987), 23-34 and 'Mantegna Architetto. Un'ipotesi di lavoro per la Cappella del Castello di San Giorgio a Mantova', *Civiltà Mantovana*, terza serie, 5, (1992), 27-51.

<sup>37</sup> Giuseppe Coniglio, *I Gonzaga* (Varese: Dall'Oglio, 1967), p.53.

<sup>38</sup> Elizabeth Ward Mahnke, 'The Political Career of a Condottiere Prince: Ludovico Gonzaga, 1444-1466' (unpublished doctoral thesis, Harvard University, 1974), pp.24-29. On Carlo Malatesta see p.32 above. Brinton notes that Carlo had the statue of Virgil removed due to concerns that his subjects afforded it undue adulation. Selwyn Brinton, *The Gonzaga Lords of Mantua* (London: Methuen, 1927), p.63.



Lodovico's project of urban regeneration was embraced and accelerated by some of his subjects who were beginning to enjoy its benefits. As the culture of renewal gathered momentum, the wealthier owners of some of the large houses which lined the newly paved streets of the medieval centre began to employ painters and sculptors to decorate their façades.<sup>39</sup> One particularly impressive example of this type of private patronage is the series of exterior adornments commissioned by Giovanni Boniforte da Concorezzo, a merchant whose house, known as the *Casa del mercante* (Fig.12), still stands today in Piazza Erbe.<sup>40</sup> An examination of the impressive façade of the building reveals charming and intricate symbols of some of the wares made available by Boniforte, all carved into the stone. From the 1460s, indeed, the trend of embellishing house fronts became firmly established; many such decorations from the period appear to have been executed by Fancelli and his assistants.<sup>41</sup> Marani and Perina note that, from around this time, many prominent Mantuans, such as the courtier Francesco Secco, added new features to their dwellings in an attempt to transform their medieval homes into more modern ones.<sup>42</sup> Given the absence of quarries in the area, marble adornments were usually restricted to main doors, and this helps to explain why decorative painting and sculpture on facades became such a common sight in the town. Manifestations of ornamentation such as these, though not coordinated and on a scale far smaller than Lodovico's centralised programme of improvements to the town, are significant in that they provide evidence of a climate of patronage among the more affluent Mantuans, fostered and underpinned by the marchese's own remarkable enthusiasm to make his capital as attractive as possible.

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<sup>39</sup> Lazzarini notes a gradual conversion of mostly extant town dwellings in Mantua, from the original family fortresses of the 1200s to interdependent complexes in the following century and, in the Quattrocento, to more identifiable individual residences. She also observes, from the 1460s, a new trend inspired by the marchese and Fancelli, similar to that in Florence but on a smaller scale, which saw leading families build larger houses outside the medieval centre. Isabella Lazzarini, *Gerarchie sociali e spazi urbani a Mantova: dal Comune alla Signoria gonzaghesca* (Pisa: GISEM, 1994), pp.71-72.

<sup>40</sup> On the *Casa del mercante* see Maria Rosa Palvarini, *La casa di Giovan Boniforte da Concorezzo: Una preziosa architettura del Quattrocento mantovano* (Mantua: Industria Grafica L'Artistica, 1964).

<sup>41</sup> Marani and Perina, *Mantova. Le arti. II*, p.82. On other façades the influence of Mantegna has been identified.

<sup>42</sup> Marani and Perina, *Mantova. Le arti. II*, pp.162-166. On Francesco Secco see Fermo Secco D'Aragona, 'Francesco Secco, i Gonzaga e Paolo Erba. Un capitolo inedito di storia mantovana', *Archivio Storico Lombardo*, anno LXXXIII, serie VIII, VI, (1957), 210-261. On Secco and other courtiers see Gianfranco Ferlisi, 'Le vicende di un cortegiano del '400: Francesco Secco da "fedelismo" di Ludovico II a protagonista di un'oscura congiura di palazzo', *Civiltà Mantovana*, 110, (2000), 33-37. In 1451 Secco married Lodovico's illegitimate daughter, Caterina.



Fig.12: Mantua, Casa del mercante



Fig.13: Mantua, Torre dell'Orologio

Given that essential civic works such as the new hospital, the rebuilding of the Palazzo del Comune and the paving of streets had been largely completed by the early 1470s, Lodovico was now in a position to explore ways in which he could add new aesthetic elements to his vastly improved urban fabric. The most intriguing of these was Mantua's outstanding tower with astrological clock (Fig.13), executed by Fancelli to designs by Bartolomeo Manfredi and completed in 1473.<sup>43</sup> Around the same time a new Casa del mercato, designed and built by Fancelli, was begun.<sup>44</sup>

Although the 1460s was a decade of sustained building on projects which were already underway, the only single major development to materialise as a direct consequence of the Papal Congress was, arguably, the church of San Sebastiano. The main effect of the aforementioned criticisms levelled by the pope appears to have been an acknowledgement on the part of the marchese that his town had to be improved in its most basic and indeed sanitary aspects. By the beginning of the

<sup>43</sup> On the clock tower see Costante Berselli, 'L'orologio in Piazza delle Erbe di Mantova', *Civiltà Mantovana*, nuova serie, 5, (1989), 85-99 and Rodolfo Signorini, *L'orologio astrologico di Mantova* (Bozzolo: Arti grafiche Chiribella, 1992). On Manfredi see p.128 below.

<sup>44</sup> Carpeggiani and Pagliari, *Mantova. Materiali per la storia urbana dalle origini all'Ottocento*, p.27. The *casa del mercato* no longer exists.



following decade, after these needs had been addressed, Lodovico was clearly very eager to change the focus of his programme of urban renewal from the purely essential to ways in which he could embellish the town, and it was in this context that he ordered the construction of the clock tower.

In his private and religious building projects, meanwhile, the marchese's patronage was beginning to show signs of maturity that ensured he would be remembered by posterity as an adherent to the new classical style which had, since the middle of the century, been gradually spreading from Florence to the northern Italian courts. Two projects of the 1470s in particular demonstrate that his appreciation for the ancient style had reached new levels. Firstly, and most significantly in terms of the history of architecture, the basilica of Sant'Andrea, though barely begun in the lifetime of the architect and far from complete when Lodovico died six years later, was and remains an imposing church incorporating numerous elements of classical design prescribed by Alberti and executed by Fancelli.<sup>45</sup> The second project, also begun in 1472, was the courtyard within the castello (Fig.14). Although much smaller in scale and ambition than Sant'Andrea, its columns and arcades bear eloquent witness to the marchese's progressive and ever more sophisticated sponsorship of architecture during the last decade of his life. Commentators have traditionally attributed the Mantuan courtyard to Luciano Laurana (c.1420-1479), largely owing to its similarity to the one designed by the same architect in Urbino.<sup>46</sup> In the view of Carpeggiani, however, the courtyard was created by Mantegna and Fancelli, possibly to designs drafted by Laurana around 1465-1466, when the latter's presence in Mantua was documented.<sup>47</sup> In much the same way as Sant'Andrea was a symbol of the new style juxtaposed on the medieval townscape, the classical style courtyard reveals Lodovico's desire to infuse an air of humanism into his castle which had been built in the late Gothic style. A courtyard of this design, Carpeggiani notes, reflects the prevailing new view of princely palaces at

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<sup>45</sup> On Alberti and Sant'Andrea see pp.344-349 below.

<sup>46</sup> See, for example, Guglielmo Pacchioni, 'L'opera di Luciano Laurana a Mantova', *Bollettino d'Arte del Ministero della Pubblica Istruzione*, nuova serie, (settembre 1923), 97-111. Other commentators have rejected the notion that Laurana was involved in the project. See, for example, C.Cottafavi, 'Le loggie del Castello di Mantova', *Atti e memorie dell'Accademia Virgiliana di Mantova*, nuova serie, XXV, (1939), 197-202.

<sup>47</sup> Around this time Laurana appears to have carried out a series of unspecified works for Lodovico at Goito, Borgoforte and Gonzaga. Marani and Perina, *Mantova. Le arti. II*, p.51.



this time: their primary function was no longer perceived to be that of a fortress, but rather that of a splendid residence fit for a prince.<sup>48</sup>



Fig.14: Mantua, Courtyard of Castello di San Giorgio

### Church of the Santissima Annunziata, Florence

One final project, financed in part by Lodovico Gonzaga, is worthy of particular note. Remarkably, it was a commission which was carried out neither in Mantua itself nor indeed anywhere in the territory. The church of the Santissima Annunziata in Florence (Fig.15), completely rebuilt between 1444 and 1477, was essentially a Medici undertaking which, from the moment Gianfrancesco Gonzaga's testament of September 1444 promised the contribution of two hundred ducats, would involve Lodovico for the entirety of his rule.<sup>49</sup> The building history of the SS. Annunziata was beset by long and frequent delays, caused not

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<sup>48</sup> Carpeggiani, 'La fortuna di un mito', pp.827-828. Amadei and Marani, meanwhile, credit Mantegna with the design of the courtyard: Amadei and Marani, *I Gonzaga a Mantova*, p.169. Mantegna certainly drew a design for the courtyard arcade but it is unclear if it was his own or based on a previous drawing produced by Laurana. On Laurana see Werner Lutz, *Luciano Laurana und der Herzogspalast von Urbino* (Weimar: Verlag und Datenbank für Geisteswissenschaften, 1995).

<sup>49</sup> On Lodovico's involvement in the rebuilding of the Santissima Annunziata see Beverly Louise Brown, 'The Patronage and Building History of the Tribuna of SS. Annunziata in Florence: A Reappraisal in Light of New Documentation', *Mitteilungen Des Kunsthistorischen Instituts in Florenz*, XXV, (1981), 59-146; S.Lang, 'The Programme of the SS. Annunziata in Florence', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, XVII, (1954), 288-300.

only by financial problems but also by a lack of continuity with regard to its chief architect, with Michelozzo, Manetti and Alberti all involved at different stages of the project.<sup>50</sup> The 1460s appears to have been a decade of almost complete inactivity at the site of the SS. Annunziata, a fact that may be due, at least to some extent, to the marchese's coeval preoccupation with his programme of urban renewal for Mantua. Confirmation of Lodovico's reluctance to divert scarce funds from Mantua at this stage can be found in a letter he wrote in May 1471 to the wealthy Florentine silk merchant, Piero del Tovaglia, who was acting as his agent, which he concludes by stating that it would be preferable "spenderli qua a Mantua che ha mazior bisogno de qualche bello tempieto che non ha Fiorenza".<sup>51</sup>



**Fig.15: Florence, Chiesa della Santissima Annunziata**

When work got underway again in 1470, Gianfrancesco's initial pledge of two hundred ducats had risen to the substantial sum of 5,000 florins. This increase can be accounted for largely by some outstanding military salaries owed to the marchese by Florence: with little hope of ever retrieving the full amount he was due, Lodovico appears to have cut his losses, as it were, by instructing the Medici to divert a sizeable portion of the balance into the SS. Annunziata project. Meanwhile, with a new design by Alberti having caused much discussion in Florence, the marchese was placed in the awkward situation of having to choose between the cheaper original plans of Michelozzo and Manetti and the more costly

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<sup>50</sup> For a concise synthesis of the building history of the SS. Annunziata see Carpeggiani, 'La fortuna di un mito', pp.829-830.

<sup>51</sup> Letter Lodovico to Piero del Tovaglia, 18 May 1471 (ASMn AG. b. 2891 Lib. 1 f. 24r-24c). Published in Carpeggiani, 'La fortuna di un mito', pp.832-833. On Piero della Tovaglia and his role as agent for Lodovico see Patricia Rubin, *Images and Identity in Fifteenth-Century Florence* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), pp.6-9.



and elaborate vision of Alberti, with whom he had developed a close working relationship during the previous ten years. In the end, in a demonstration of the type of tact for which he had become noted, Lodovico opted for the route of compromise, allowing Alberti to make some limited improvements to the details of the original plan.

While there can be no doubt that his father's pledge saddled the marchese with an immense burden which would not be lifted until the last year of his own life more than three decades later, it was probably this particular project which, more than any other single factor, brought Lodovico into close contact with the avant-garde architectural circles of Florence in the early years of his rule, at a time when the style of the buildings being produced there was still unknown further north. Similarly, this enforced commitment to the redevelopment of the church of SS. Annunziata, dating from 1444, may in part have been behind visits to Mantua during that same decade by Brunelleschi and Manetti, not to mention the appointment in 1450 of Fancelli, who had been trained by Michelozzo, the architect in chief. In this respect, Gianfrancesco Gonzaga's testament of September 1444 can be interpreted as the first crucial development in the chain of events which led to Mantua, under the rule of Lodovico, becoming one of the earliest centres north of Florence to embrace architecture in the classical style.

### **The Legacy of Lodovico's Architectural Patronage**

During almost two decades spanning the Papal Congress and the death of Lodovico Gonzaga, an ambitious programme of urban renewal, instigated by the marchese and carried out largely by Fancelli with the collaboration of Alberti and Mantegna, significantly and permanently changed the appearance of what was essentially a medieval town centre. Following an initial phase of improvements which included the paving of the Mantua's main arteries, Lodovico was able to build on solid new foundations, commissioning a series of public buildings as well as Alberti's churches of San Sebastiano and Sant'Andrea, the latter clearly conceived not only to the glory of God and the relic of the precious blood which it was to house, but also as testament to the munificence of its patron and an



advertisement of his power.<sup>52</sup> As Evelyn Welch observes in the case of the hospital and the cathedral in Milan, the fact that the opening of the Ospedale di San Leonardo coincided with the laying of the foundations for Sant'Andrea bolsters the notion that Lodovico was a ruler who wished to be seen to have the wellbeing of his subjects close at heart. While a hospital would see to the physical health of the Milanese, she notes, the new cathedral would convince them that their spiritual salvation was assured.<sup>53</sup> In this respect, it is extremely likely that Lodovico viewed his paternal role in relation to his own subjects in a way similar to that of the Sforza. Martin Warnke notes, moreover, that court building projects were the product of many complex and inter-related elements, and not simply manifestations of a prince's desire for fame. The Roman emperors, he argues, had understood that sponsoring architecture on a large scale was essential to maintaining the contentment of their subjects, as it was an activity which allowed them to give something back through the provision of work and the embellishment of towns and cities.<sup>54</sup>

The shift in architectural style, meanwhile, defined by Hollingsworth as a replacement of the language of Gothic chivalry with that of ancient Rome, must also be understood in terms of Gonzaga foreign policy which, compared to that practised by previous generations, now enjoyed much closer links with both the Papal and the Imperial courts.<sup>55</sup> This status required propaganda, and in this respect classical architecture was a worthy and fashionable vehicle. Both Antonio

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<sup>52</sup> Legend states that the Roman soldier Longinus, after piercing the side of the crucified Christ with his lance, gathered the soil from the foot of the cross onto which the blood had dripped. Having then converted to Christianity, Longinus eventually arrived in Mantua, bringing with him the soil in small vases, which are still stored below the main altar in Sant'Andrea. On the cult of the precious blood see Rodolfo Signorini, 'Il sangue più prezioso. Breve profilo storico sulla venerazione dell'insigne reliquia del Preziosissimo Lateral Sangue di Gesù Cristo custodita in Mantova', in *Mantova-Weingarten. Un gemellaggio europeo sulle tracce della storia*, ed. by Rodolfo Signorini and Hans Ulrich Rudolf (Mantua and Weingarten: Comune di Mantova, 1988), pp.3-23. Cesare Mozzarelli, meanwhile, discusses Lodovico's programme of urban renewal in terms of the consolidation of power. Cesare Mozzarelli, *Mantova e i Gonzaga dal 1382 al 1707* (Turin: UTET, 1987), pp.23-26.

<sup>53</sup> Evelyn S. Welch, *Art and Authority in Renaissance Milan* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), p.117.

<sup>54</sup> Warnke, *The Court Artist*, p.181 and p. 188. Warnke's point is supported by Alberto Tenenti, who notes that patronage of architecture, which was public, had more social implications than patronage of the decorative arts, which tended to be private. Alberto Tenenti, 'Committenza e mecenatismo nell'edilizia: Firenze, Urbino, Mantova (1430-1530)', in *Arte, committenza ed economia a Roma e nelle corti del Rinascimento 1420-1530. Atti di convegno internazionale, Roma 24-27 ottobre 1990*, ed. by Arnold Esch and Christoph Luitpold Frommel (Turin: Einaudi, 1995), pp.67-82, esp. pp.69-70.

<sup>55</sup> Hollingsworth, *Patronage in Renaissance Italy*, p.213.

Averlino (c.1400-1469), the Sforza architect better known as Filarete, and the humanist Flavio Biondo (1392-1463) went on record to praise the marchese's understanding of and taste in buildings in the ancient style.<sup>56</sup> While such contemporary comments may have been designed to flatter, Goldthwaite notes that patrons were indeed often keen to improve their knowledge of this area of creative interest, and that architecture was not only a means through which grandeur and magnificence could be achieved but also the most significant sign of nobility in Italian society.<sup>57</sup> Carpeggiani, while acknowledging that the change to the new style had occurred abruptly in Mantua, compared to the more gradual evolution witnessed in Florence, credits Lodovico with providing a new impetus for building which was seized and advanced by successive generations of Gonzaga rulers.<sup>58</sup>

### Painting in Mantua

Many of the motives, trends and shifts in taste evident in Lodovico's patronage of architecture over the course of his rule can also be perceived in his sponsorship of other art forms, of which painting appears to have been the most common. In other ways, however, developments in these two fields diverge. The cultural climate fostered by the marchese, nourished and advanced by his relations with some of the most forward-looking practitioners of the mid to late Quattrocento, ensured that the Mantuan court under Lodovico came to be seen as one of the most vibrant for the visual arts in the whole of Italy. In this respect, Argan notes an anomaly: though a prominent home of Renaissance culture, Mantua had no

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<sup>56</sup> See p.337 below. On Lodovico's interest in architecture see also Alison Cole, *Art of the Italian Renaissance Courts* (London: Everyman, 1995), pp.146-147.

<sup>57</sup> Richard Goldthwaite, *Wealth and the Demand for Art in Italy 1300-1600* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1993), p.219. Burke adds that, in projects for large buildings, patrons were gradually coming to take more credit than architects. Burke, *The Italian Renaissance*, p.122.

Carpeggiani, meanwhile, in an echo of Filarete's analogy in which the patron is the father and the architect is the mother, defines the building as the result of the relationship between patron and architect, the latter having given concrete form to the intentions of the former. Carpeggiani, *Il palazzo gonzaghesco di Revere*, p.15. In the case of Alberti, however, Opper argues that the architect achieved a level of intellectual independence which rendered his patrons subordinate to his own designs. John Opper, 'The Priority of the Architect: Alberti on Architects and Patrons' in F. W. Kent and P. Simons, eds, *Patronage, Art and Society in Renaissance Italy* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), pp.251-267.

<sup>58</sup> Carpeggiani, *Il palazzo gonzaghesco di Revere* (Revere: Amministrazione Comunale, 1974), p.30 and, by the same author, 'Ludovico Gonzaga, l'architettura e il progetto di <<Renovatio Urbis>>', p.252.



artistic school of its own prior to the arrival of Mantegna.<sup>59</sup> The same point is made by Marani and Perina, who also identify a second recurrent theme in Mantuan painting: the representation of power.<sup>60</sup>

With regard to the latter of these elements, the use of art to espouse political power was not an innovation of the fifteenth century. Evelyn Welch observes that, in Italy, art had been an ally of political control since ancient times, and that the Roman Emperors had been well aware of its usefulness in creating messages aimed at self-promotion and the legitimisation of power; essentially this is what Peter Burke defines as patronage for propaganda.<sup>61</sup> Taking the argument a step further, Martin Warnke contends that patronage, far from being a relationship between patron and artist based on the artistic tastes of the former, was in actual fact a key facet of social activity with the function of validating political rule.<sup>62</sup> Elsewhere, Warnke makes the point that, since the legitimacy of courts was often open to discussion, representation was invariably needed, and that in this light the court artist must be seen as an “image maker”.<sup>63</sup> Thus, while it is clear that this was a well established convention long before the age of Lodovico Gonzaga, it will be demonstrated that the legitimisation of power was a prime concern which lay behind a great many of his artistic commissions.

As for the lack of a local artistic tradition or, indeed, a climate well disposed to the employment of artists, again this was not at the time a situation unique to Mantua. It was not unusual for rulers of smaller states to acquire works of art in two main ways: by acquiring them from outside through intermediaries and by offering employment at court, be it short-term or long-term, to artists from elsewhere. As regards the first of these means, the Gonzaga, like other ruling dynasties of comparable size and wealth, were reliant on larger trading centres for the purchase of specialised goods; Welch has demonstrated this in her analysis of how Lodovico

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<sup>59</sup> Giulio Carlo Argan, ‘L’arte a Mantova’, in *Mantova e i Gonzaga nella civiltà del Rinascimento* (Mantua: Città di Mantova, 1977), pp. 163-166, p.163.

<sup>60</sup> Marani and Perina, *Mantova. Le arti. II*, p.3.

<sup>61</sup> Welch, *Art and Authority in Renaissance Milan*, p.3; On Burke and patronage for propaganda see note 1.

<sup>62</sup> Martin Warnke, ‘*Liberalitas principis*’ in *Arte, committenza ed economia a Roma e nelle corti del Rinascimento 1420-1530. Atti del convegno internazionale, Roma 24-27 ottobre 1990* (Turin: Einaudi, 1995), pp.83-92, p.83.

<sup>63</sup> Warnke, *The Court Artist*, p.23 and p.41.



and Barbara used their network of embassies and agents, particularly in Milan, to assist in the acquisition of jewels and artefacts.<sup>64</sup> As I shall demonstrate in chapter four below, these were also channels through which the marchesi acquired numerous books for their library. The appointment of artists at court, meanwhile, was a practice followed by the Gonzaga, in much the same way as it was by their Este neighbours in Ferrara. Burke states that, in order to be thriving centres of artistic production, smaller courts such as these relied heavily on the employment of artists trained in Florence and Venice. Furthermore, he notes that princes with a humanist education were often more prolific patrons than their contemporaries who had not fully absorbed the new learning.<sup>65</sup>

It would, nonetheless, be a mistake to assume that court appointments were always underpinned by the firm adherence of a prince to one particular artistic style, be that late Gothic or classical. Marani and Perina, in evaluating Mantuan art in the century and a half before the time of Lodovico, point to the coexistence of styles from Emilia, from the Veneto and from Lombardy, with none exercising dominance, as evidence that princes were more likely to be attracted by the fame and reputation of a given artist than by the style in which he painted.<sup>66</sup> While he does not deny that patrons were often swayed in this way, Warnke argues that the appointment of Fancelli, recommended to Lodovico by Cosimo de' Medici in 1450, represents the "first triumph of the Renaissance at court".<sup>67</sup> On reflection, indeed, in employing Fancelli the marchese was buying into the Florentine style of building, and not the renown of the architect himself, who at the time was unproven, having only recently completed his apprenticeship. If Fancelli's arrival signalled a pivotal and defining change in direction for Mantuan architectural policy, the marchese's vision with regard to his sponsorship of painting continued to oscillate between the old and the new styles for a further decade.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> Evelyn S. Welch, 'The Gonzaga Go Shopping: Commercial and Cultural Relationships Between Milan and Mantua in the Fifteenth Century', in *Leon Battista Alberti e il Quattrocento. Studi in onore di Cecil Grayson e Ernst Gombrich*, ed. by Luca Chiavoni, Gianfranco Ferlisi and Maria Vittoria Grassi (Florence: Olschki, 2001), pp.269-284, p.273. See also Warnke, *The Court Artist*, p.75.

<sup>65</sup> Burke, *The Italian Renaissance*, pp.99-100 and p.122.

<sup>66</sup> Marani and Perina, *Mantova. Le arti. II*, pp.254-255.

<sup>67</sup> Warnke, *The Court Artist*, p.48.

<sup>68</sup> Dall'Acqua, 'Mecenatismo e collezionismo dei Gonzaga da Ludovico a Isabella d'Este', p.295, describes the 1450s as a decade of artistic evolution in Mantua, from the Gothic to the new Renaissance style.

As Warnke points out, Mantua was the first court at which humanists attained a competence in artistic matters.<sup>69</sup> Vittorino da Feltre had included painting in his curriculum at the Casa Giocosa, while his pupil Bartolomeo Sacchi, also known as Platina (1421-1481), himself later a tutor in Mantua, advised Lodovico in 1459 on the creation of a new monument to Virgil.<sup>70</sup> Amadei and Marani, meanwhile, though acknowledging Vittorino's indisputable contribution to the advancement of humanism, contend that Gothic culture did not die quickly in Mantua.<sup>71</sup> In this respect, despite the arrival of Fancelli and occasional dealings with other Florentine artists such as Donatello, the 1450s can be defined as a period of transition during which the spirit of the Lombard Gothic artists continued to thrive alongside increasing elements of a classical nature.<sup>72</sup> The new style would come to dominate only after the arrival of Mantegna at the end of the decade.

### **Painting in Mantua before Mantegna**

Although northern *signori* may have fully embraced the new artistic styles of the Renaissance only after the middle of the fifteenth century, painting, along with other art forms, had been a constant feature of the northern Italian princely courts for a number of generations. In examining Mantua, Alison Cole suggests that Lodovico's ancestors had seen art, architecture and scholarship as three areas in which the investment of their revenues and *condottiere* wages could bring about an increase in prestige.<sup>73</sup> The dominant theme and subject matter of pre-Renaissance art was that of Gothic chivalry, which Marani and Perina acknowledge as providing a desirable image to *signori* whose affluence was often dependent on their reputations as military commanders.<sup>74</sup>

Gianfrancesco Gonzaga's life may have been over before Mantua became renowned as a Renaissance hub but, without the vision of his father and the investments he made, it is implausible to suppose that Lodovico would have been able to oversee such a glorious period of cultural achievement. In much the same

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<sup>69</sup> Warnke, *The Court Artist*, p.84. On the curriculum at the Casa Giocosa see pp.118-123 below.

<sup>70</sup> On Platina and the new monument to Virgil see p.76 above.

<sup>71</sup> Amadei and Marani, *I Gonzaga a Mantova*, pp.158-166.

<sup>72</sup> On Lodovico's relations with Donatello see pp.270-274 below.

<sup>73</sup> Cole, *Art of the Italian Renaissance Courts*, p.30.

<sup>74</sup> Marani and Perina, *Mantova. Le arti. II*, p.6. The point is also made by Hollingsworth, *Patronage in Renaissance Italy*, p.213.



way as he owed his thorough humanist education to Gianfrancesco's enlightened determination to bring Vittorino da Feltre to Mantua in 1423 to establish what came to be considered the finest school of its age, the marchese's patronage of artists was built upon the solid foundations laid by his predecessor in this field too. In 1420 Gianfrancesco created favourable economic conditions for practitioners of the arts who chose to settle in Mantua.<sup>75</sup> Among several artists who accepted the invitation and the initial five-year salaries, one of the earliest and most prolific appears to have been Stefano da Verona, a painter whose presence at court is documented until 1430.<sup>76</sup> Gianfrancesco's greatest artistic coup, nonetheless, was unquestionably his acquisition of the services of Pisanello, who first came to Mantua in 1425 and, despite a relationship continuously interrupted by frequent and prolonged commissions elsewhere, worked for the Gonzaga intermittently for the next twenty-two years.<sup>77</sup>

Although Pisanello's painting style and subject matter place him firmly in the category of the International Gothic style, of which he was an undisputed master, in the field of sculpture he was the creator and peerless exponent of a new genre: the Renaissance medal. In all probability, however, he was originally employed in Mantua as a painter, a supposition born out by the dearth of works of sculpture attributable to the period of Gianfrancesco; according to Marani and Perina, in fact, Pisanello was the only significant sculptor active in Mantua during the second quarter of the Quattrocento, and even then he was, in all likelihood, primarily commissioned to paint.<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> For Gianfrancesco's decree see Francesco Tarducci, 'Gianfrancesco Gonzaga signore di Mantova', *Archivio Storico Lombardo*, serie III, vol.XVII, (1902), 310-360 and vol.XVIII, (1903), 33-88.

<sup>76</sup> Marani and Perina, *Mantova. Le arti. II*, p.244. On other artists employed by Gianfrancesco see Amadei and Marani, *I Gonzaga a Mantova*, p.40.

<sup>77</sup> Pisanello (Antonio Pisano) is described by John White as "probably the most famous Italian artist of his day". John White, 'Pisanello', in *The Thames and Hudson Dictionary of the Italian Renaissance* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1981), p.253. On Pisanello in Mantua see Giovanni Paccagnini, *Pisanello e il ciclo cavalleresco di Mantova* (Milan: Electa, 1972), Joanna Woods Marsden, *The Gonzaga of Mantua and Pisanello's Arthurian Frescoes* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988) and Gianna Sùtner, 'L'età di Gianfrancesco Gonzaga e il Pisanello. La decorazione nel passaggio dal Tardogotico al Rinascimento', in *Pittura a Mantova dal Romanico al Settecento*, ed. Mina Gregori (Milan: Cariplo, 1989), pp.9-17.

<sup>78</sup> Marani and Perina, *Mantova. Le arti. II*, p.503.

Before discussing his remarkable medals, it must be noted that it was in Mantua that Pisanello produced what, despite its unfinished state, was arguably his most remarkable work: the fresco cycle in what has come to be known as the *Sala del Pisanello* (Fig.16) in the Palazzo Ducale.<sup>79</sup> Presumed completely lost until its rediscovery in the late 1960s by Giovanni Paccagnini, art historians have, over the past four decades, offered differing interpretations as to the identity of the sponsor of these extraordinary images. The central issue of this debate is incontrovertibly of great interest to any analysis of the cultural patronage of Lodovico; if it were to be proved that funding for this project had been provided exclusively by Gianfrancesco, and that the new marchese had no desire to see the frescoes completed following the death of his father in 1444, the case for a distinct break in artistic taste between father and son would be a convincing one. If, on the other hand, it were to be established that Lodovico had initiated or undertaken to complete the project, then those who argue in favour of continuity of taste in artistic patronage would be proven correct.



**Fig.16: Pisanello, *Sala del Pisanello***

On the one hand, commentators subscribing to a break in style between the two marchesi have attributed the Pisanello frescoes to the patronage of Gianfrancesco, highlighting the chivalric themes and Late Gothic style as being consistent with the

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<sup>79</sup> The bibliography on Pisanello's Mantuan frescoes is vast. For thorough, if slightly dated, examination of the cycle see the monograph by Giovanni Paccagnini, *Pisanello e il ciclo cavalleresco di Mantova* (Milan: Electa, 1972). See also Joanna Woods Marsden, *The Gonzaga of Mantua and Pisanello's Arthurian Frescoes* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1988).



rest of his cultural programme, while at the same time arguing that Lodovico, a prince of humanist learning and classical tastes, would not have identified with such a cycle. According to these commentators, therefore, the death of Gianfrancesco in 1444 would explain why the work was abandoned before it was finished. Other critics, meanwhile, keen to stress continuity of taste, contend that the frescoes were an early commission by Lodovico, and that the project was suspended due to the departure of Pisanello in 1447 or to a gradual shift in the marchese's artistic agenda.<sup>80</sup>

Although the identity of the patron of the frescoes in the *Sala del Pisanello* has without question been an intriguing debate in its own right for several decades, for the purposes of this particular study it is not my intention to enter into discourse with the critics from both sides who have made valuable contributions. It must be noted, however, that, while my research leads me to believe that the fresco cycle was commissioned by Gianfrancesco, commentators who have excluded the possibility, on grounds of taste alone, that the sponsor may have been Lodovico have ignored concurrent demonstrations of apparently conflicting cultural leanings, evident elsewhere in his artistic and literary patronage.

It has already been noted that the arrival of Vittorino in 1423 did not bring about a sudden humanist reaction against the Late Gothic ideals of courtly chivalry; on the contrary, the enthusiasm for such subject matter clearly lasted well into the rule of Lodovico, which began fully two decades after the establishment of the Casa

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<sup>80</sup> Since the fresco cycle was rediscovered by Paccagnini almost four decades ago, a large number of commentators have speculated on whether the patron of the commission was Lodovico or his father Gianfrancesco. Until the 1990s, contributions by various scholars continued to be divided, as discussions focused on the content of the frescoes, on the respective artistic tastes of the two marchesi and on available information surrounding Pisanello's movements. In 1992, however, Leandro Ventura published a convincing reconstruction of Pisanello's career, based on contemporary documents, demonstrating a long period of residence by the artist in Mantua until the summer of 1442, at which time he was summoned to Venice to be tried for speaking out against the government. Gianfrancesco Gonzaga, meanwhile, died in September 1444, before Pisanello was able to return to Mantua. Successive visits to Mantua by Pisanello were invariably brief, and were related to the medals commissioned by Lodovico. See Leandro Ventura, 'Noterelle pisanelliane. Precisazioni sulla data del ciclo cavalleresco di Mantova', *Civiltà Mantovana*, terza serie, XXVII, (1992), 2, 19-53. For a comprehensive review of the historiography and bibliography relating to the patronage of the frescoes see Tiziana Franco and Monica Molteni, 'Dipinti autografi' in Lionello Puppi, ed., *Pisanello: una poetica dell'inatteso* (Milan: Silvana, 1996), pp.45-97, esp. pp.64-71. For a concise overview see Giancarlo Malacarne, *I Gonzaga di Mantova: una stirpe per una capitale europea* (Modena: Il Bulino, 2004), vol.2, pp.79-84.

Giocosa.<sup>81</sup> Carpeggiani, in evaluating Lodovico's patronage of the arts, emphasises the fundamental differences between the marchese and his predecessors: here was a modern prince with a fine humanist education, who applied his new learning to the embellishment of town and state; a learned ruler, constantly monitoring developments in the arts and learning elsewhere, keen to imbue the present with new values inspired by an appreciation of antiquity.<sup>82</sup> While these qualities described by Carpeggiani are undeniably genuine, by no means do they provide a comprehensive profile of Lodovico's artistic interests during the first fifteen years or so of his rule. Marani and Perina, though they acknowledge the arrival of Vittorino as the dawn of the Mantuan Renaissance, argue that the new lessons of humanism combined with the spirit of courtly chivalry to produce an extraordinary cultural atmosphere.<sup>83</sup> Dall'Acqua, indeed, suggests that, during his formative years, the Gothic influence on Lodovico must have been rather alluring; the marchese's clear predilection for heraldry and emblems, evident even in his later years, betrays an entrenched adherence to the canons of pre-humanist art.<sup>84</sup>

If we are to acknowledge Dall'Acqua's view that Lodovico's cultural background was both Gothic and humanistic, it is not difficult to accept Lawson's conclusion that the marchese's attitudes in following the artistic fashions of the 1450s were somewhat leisurely.<sup>85</sup> To demonstrate his point, Lawson lists some of the artists employed by Lodovico before the arrival of Mantegna: on the one hand, Tuscan adherents to the new style in Donatello and Angelo da Siena; on the other, exponents of the Late Gothic style, such as Pisanello and the miniaturist Belbello da Pavia (active c.1425-1460s).<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> See note 68 above.

<sup>82</sup> Carpeggiani, *Il palazzo gonzaghesco di Revere*, p.19.

<sup>83</sup> Marani and Perina, *Mantova. Le arti. II*, p.45.

<sup>84</sup> Dall'Acqua, 'Mecenatismo e collezionismo dei Gonzaga da Ludovico a Isabella d'Este', pp.298-301. Dall'Acqua contends that the image of the Great Dane, present in both Pisanello's frescoes and in Mantegna's *Camera degli sposi*, is a legacy of Late Gothic culture. On the subject of the dog in Mantegna's fresco cycle see Rodolfo Signorini, 'Two Notes from Mantua. A Dog Named Rubino', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, XLI, (1978), 317-321.

<sup>85</sup> Lawson, 'The Palace at Revere', p.57.

<sup>86</sup> Lawson, 'The Palace at Revere', p.53. On Donatello in Mantua see pp.270-274 below. On Belbello da Pavia see pp.179-187 below.



Warnke notes that the transition in Mantuan painting from Gothic to Renaissance was a difficult one before Mantegna became court artist.<sup>87</sup> This is an observation consistent with Marani and Perina's opinion that Gothic painting remained strong in Mantua during the 1450s precisely because there was no internal stimulus for development.<sup>88</sup> A further point, made by Dall'Acqua, may also be helpful to understand why the Gothic style thrived in Mantua for so long: new artistic tastes tended to be more readily embraced by wealthy merchants than by the Church and aristocracy.<sup>89</sup> Whereas since 1450 building styles had become more coherent under the supervision of Fancelli, in the absence of a comparable figure to direct painting policy the marchese continued to support painters from both Gothic and classical backgrounds. Given, therefore, that at this stage a clear preference for either style was not apparent, it is fair to assume that the main motivation behind his choice of painters may have been the fame and reputation of those he employed.<sup>90</sup> Even as late as 1458, when negotiations to bring Mantegna to Mantua appeared to be stalling, Lodovico mooted the possibility of turning his attention to Michele Ungaro, a painter whose work in the Late Gothic manner was far removed from the pioneering neo-classicism of Mantegna.<sup>91</sup> Lawson makes the point that, even after his encounter with Donatello, one of the foremost revolutionary artists of the age, the marchese did not relinquish his fondness for the more traditional style of courtly art.<sup>92</sup>

The *Sala del Pisanello* was almost certainly commissioned by Gianfrancesco. Its state of incompleteness can be explained more convincingly in terms of Pisanello's departure from Mantua in 1442 than by an abrupt shift in artistic taste between the two marchesi. Lodovico, as has been noted, continued to sponsor artists who favoured the international Gothic style throughout the 1450s, right up to the permanent appointment of an artist truly committed to the neo-classical manner. To argue on grounds of taste alone, therefore, that Lodovico could not have

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<sup>87</sup> Warnke, *The Court Artist*, pp.48-49.

<sup>88</sup> Marani and Perina, *Mantova. Le arti. II*, p.239.

<sup>89</sup> Dall'Acqua, 'Mecenatismo e collezionismo dei Gonzaga da Ludovico a Isabella d'Este', p.303 and p.313. Dall'Acqua notes a gradual transition in Lodovico's artistic taste, spanning the 1450s and stemming from his frequent contact with Florence.

<sup>90</sup> See note 66.

<sup>91</sup> Marani and Perina, *Mantova. Le arti. II*, p.47.

<sup>92</sup> Lawson, 'The Palace at Revere', p.55.

endorsed Pisanello's fresco cycle would be to ignore a decade and a half of artistic patronage which oscillated between traditional and new styles.

Following the appointment of Mantegna, indeed, the period of dual taste would come to an almost immediate end; with one of the most progressive and visionary painters of the period now in seemingly complete control over the direction of all artistic policy at court, the long-term prospects for a parallel flourishing of Late Gothic and classical styles were far from promising. The internal stimulus for development, the absence of which had prevented Mantuan painting from witnessing a coherent transition from the old style to the new prior to 1460, was now in place and would remain in Mantua for half a century, after which Giulio Romano would be entrusted with the task of ensuring that the Gonzaga's artistic patronage aroused admiration well into the following century.<sup>93</sup>

### **Mantegna in Mantua**

When Andrea Mantegna finally took up his position as Lodovico's court artist over the winter of 1459-1460, the very months during which the Papal Congress was taking place, four years of protracted negotiations had finally reached a successful conclusion.<sup>94</sup> Doubtless aware of his reputation in humanist eulogies and of his early work in Ferrara and Padua, Lodovico first approached Mantegna around 1455-1456.<sup>95</sup> The four-year period which elapsed between the marchese's initial manifestation of interest and the artist's move to Mantua can be explained by the dynamics of the relationship between patron and court artist. Warnke notes that a permanent appointment at court represented the opportunity for an artist to achieve something great, given that princes tended to be far more ostentatious than

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<sup>93</sup> See note 87. On Giulio Romano see Manfredo Tauri, *Giulio Romano* (Milan: Electa, 1989).

<sup>94</sup> Considering these two events, Marani and Perina note that 1459 was an exceptional year for Mantua, *Mantova. Le arti. II*, p.48. See also Lionello Puppi, 'Il trasferimento del Mantegna a Mantova: una data per l'incontro con L'Alberti', in *Il Sant'Andrea di Mantova e Leon Battista Alberti*, pp. 205-207.

<sup>95</sup> Cole, *Art of the Italian Renaissance Courts*, p.148. Cole argues that Mantegna was a natural choice of artist for Lodovico, given the keen interest in antiquity shared by the two men. On the life and works of Andrea Mantegna see R.W. Lightbown, *Mantegna: with a complete catalogue of the paintings, drawings and prints* (Oxford: Phardon Christie's, 1986); Claudia Cieri Via, *Mantegna* (Florence: Giunti Gruppo, 1991); *Mantegna, la camera degli Sposi*, ed. by Michele Cordaro (Milan: Electa, 1992); Alberta De Nicolò Salmazo, *Mantegna* (Milan: Electa, 1996).



civic patrons; on the other hand, however, the hesitation of Mantegna may have been caused by a legitimate fear of being paid neither fully nor punctually.<sup>96</sup>

Even by the standards of the times, Lodovico's initial offers to entice Mantegna were rather generous: as well as a promised salary of 15 ducats per month and accommodation, the marchese pledged to send a boat to bring Mantegna and his family to Mantua and also assured him that he would receive wood, grain and food for six.<sup>97</sup> In 1457 Mantegna visited Mantua, perhaps for the first time, after which negotiations intensified with the involvement of Fancelli.<sup>98</sup> Although clearly reluctant to leave work elsewhere unfinished and move to Mantua, Mantegna retained close ties with Lodovico during the late 1450s; it was during this period that he began his first commission for the Gonzaga, providing architectural designs and perhaps some paintings for the marchese's private chapel in the Castello di San Giorgio.<sup>99</sup>

Warnke notes that while Lodovico and other princes of the Quattrocento often supplied very precise instructions to artists, Mantegna enjoyed a large degree of freedom to carry out projects according to his own artistic vision. This is a view supported by Dall'Acqua, who contrasts the free licence granted by the marchese to his court artist with the specific demands placed on others.<sup>100</sup> As well as the promise of substantial financial and material remuneration, therefore, Mantegna enjoyed in Mantua the autonomy to pursue his own artistic agenda with minimal interference. If, as Warnke suggests, senior court positions were gained through an artist's reputation rather than through competition, and given the huge efforts Lodovico made over half a decade to attract Mantegna to Mantua, it is not unlikely that, having secured his man, he was more than happy to allow him free rein to produce the type of work for which he had gained his reputation in the first place, in full confidence that his generous patronage would be revealed in the works his

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<sup>96</sup> Warnke, *The Court Artist*, p.58 and p.61. If Mantegna did indeed have such fears before accepting the position these were to be proved justified over the course of the following decades. Much of his correspondence with the three marchesi for whom he worked was in relation to late payment of his salary.

<sup>97</sup> Warnke, *The Court Artist*, pp.124-125 and p.130. See also Paul Kristeller, *Andrea Mantegna* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1901), p.182 and de Nicolò Salmazo, *Mantegna*, p.18.

<sup>98</sup> Marani and Perina, *Mantova. Le arti. II*, p.263.

<sup>99</sup> See note 35.

<sup>100</sup> Warnke, *The Court Artist*, p.195; Dall'Acqua, 'Mecenatismo e collezionismo dei Gonzaga da Lodovico a Isabella d'Este', pp.310-312.

artist produced.<sup>101</sup> Salary arrears, already noted as a probable reason behind Mantegna's hesitation to move to Mantua, often materialised; however, on several occasions when the Gonzaga cash flow dried up, he was granted land in lieu.<sup>102</sup> As well as accumulating an ever increasing property portfolio over the years, in 1469 Mantegna was able to reach an exceptional social position with the purchase from Emperor Frederick III, who at the time was in Ferrara, of the title of Comes palatinus.<sup>103</sup> Warnke contends that the principal impetus behind the concession of such an elevated title may have been a desire on the part of Lodovico to make Mantegna, whose litigious personality is well documented, more diplomatically acceptable when visiting the courts of other princes.<sup>104</sup> Even though his salary was paid erratically, and while acknowledging that Mantegna was by no means typical, the accrual of land and the award of an imperial noble title corroborate Burke's observation that the court gave artists both security and high status.<sup>105</sup>

In the months which followed his arrival in Mantua it can be safely assumed that Mantegna's prime task was the completion and decoration of the marchese's private chapel in the castello. Very few of Mantegna's surviving works are attributable to his early years in Mantua, and it is also clear that most, such as the fresco cycles which adorned the walls of the Gonzaga residences at Goito and Cavriana, have unfortunately been destroyed.<sup>106</sup> His seemingly prolific output in the early 1460s was achieved with the collaboration of assistant painters such as Samuele da Tradate, whose presence was documented in Cavriana at that time.<sup>107</sup> Having made substantial contributions in the fields of painting, architecture and tapestry design during his first five years in Mantua, in 1465 Mantegna embarked on his second major work for Lodovico: the so-called *Camera picta* or *Camera degli sposi*, again in the marchese's castello residence.

Famously described by Duke Galeazzo Maria Sforza of Milan, shortly after its completion, as "la più bella camera del mondo", this private chamber and its iconic

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<sup>101</sup> Warnke, *The Court Artist*, p.94.

<sup>102</sup> Kristeller, *Andrea Mantegna*, p.194; Marani and Perina, *Mantova. Le arti. II*, p.264.

<sup>103</sup> Kristeller, *Andrea Mantegna*, pp.202-203.

<sup>104</sup> Warnke, *The Court Artist*, p.158.

<sup>105</sup> Burke, *The Italian Renaissance*, p.94.

<sup>106</sup> Selwyn Brinton, *The Gonzaga Lords of Mantua* (London: Methuen, 1927), p.81; Marani and Perina, *Mantova. Le arti. II*, p.265 and p.270; Amadei and Marani, *I Gonzaga a Mantova*, pp.169-173.

<sup>107</sup> Marani and Perina, *Mantova. Le arti. II*, pp.315-316.



frescoes have been the subject of intense debate and speculation.<sup>108</sup> The many contributions which offer interpretations of the subject matter painted by Mantegna far exceed the scope of this thesis, though a few studies are worthy of particular note. Rodolfo Signorini, in a landmark article of 1975, ingeniously and convincingly linked the two wall scenes to two specific moments which occurred during the winter of 1461-1462: the court scene (Fig.6), he suggests, captures the moment in which Lodovico learns of a serious illness which has endangered the life of his employer Francesco Sforza, Duke of Milan; the meeting scene (Fig.17), meanwhile, represents a monumental moment in the history of the Gonzaga dynasty when the marchese, en route to Milan to support Sforza in his hour of need, meets his son Francesco, newly elevated to the office of cardinal, at Bozzolo.<sup>109</sup> Other noteworthy contributions to the debate have been provided by Andrew Martindale, who rejects Signorini's arguments and places the frescoes within the then well-established canons of wall decoration by noble families, while Daniel Arasse has examined both the classical and the contemporary themes which emerge from close study of the cycle.<sup>110</sup>



Fig.17: Andrea Mantegna, *Camera degli sposi* – Meeting Scene

<sup>108</sup> On the duke's praise for the fresco cycles, and on the disappointment caused by his portrait being omitted, see Rodolfo Signorini, *La più bella camera del mondo: la Camera Dipinta* (Mantua: Editrice MP, 1992), pp.130-132.

<sup>109</sup> Rodolfo Signorini, 'Lettura storica degli affreschi della <<Camera degli Sposi>> di Andrea Mantegna', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, XXXVIII, (1975), 109-135. Signorini bases his arguments on events documented by contemporary letters in the Archivio Gonzaga.

<sup>110</sup> Andrew Martindale, 'Mantegna's Camera Picta as Wall Decoration', in *La corte di Mantova nell'età di Andrea Mantegna*, ed. by Cesare Mozzarelli, Robert Oresko and Leandro Ventura, pp.179-187; Daniel Arasse, 'Il programma politico della Camera degli Sposi, ovvero il segreto dell'immortalità', *Quaderni di Palazzo Te*, 6, (1987), 45-64. On these and other interpretations of the *Camera degli sposi* see Antonio Paolucci, 'Il marchesato di Lodovico. Andrea Mantegna a Mantova', *Pittura a Mantova dal romanico al settecento*, ed. by Mina Gregori (Milan: Cariplo, 1989), pp. 17-23, p.20.

Without treating the fresco cycle of the *Camera degli sposi* in any great detail, other commentators have made more general but nonetheless pertinent observations which are worth consideration. Antonio Paolucci views the room as a celebration of a range of commendable elements with which Lodovico identified, including just government, dynasty, marriage and an appreciation of antiquity.<sup>111</sup> The marchese's decision to commission a representative cycle of frescoes within the castle is interpreted by Carpeggiani as an effort to free the building from its original military function – it had been the city residence of the ruling family since the time of the Papal Congress – while Cole defines the paintings in terms of a “celebration of Gonzaga prestige”, advertising not only Papal and Imperial connections but also the marriageability of Lodovico's daughters.<sup>112</sup> A further point, made by Warnke, may appear self-evident but is nonetheless important in relation to the *Camera degli sposi*: the decoration of rooms such as these, which were essentially the most private areas of a ruling family's residence, would have been intended for the pleasure of a particularly select audience.<sup>113</sup>

The *Camera degli sposi* remains the only surviving large-scale work by Mantegna from the lifetime of Lodovico. The artist's own house (Fig.18), though not completed until the late 1490s, was, however, begun in 1476, on land gifted by Lodovico in recognition of the recently completed frescoes.<sup>114</sup> By the time Lodovico died in 1478, quite apart from having created a private chapel for the marchesi and fresco cycles at Goito, at Cavriana and in the castello, Mantegna had established himself not only as court artist but as artistic director of all architectural and decorative projects commissioned by his chief patron. In this respect, to appreciate fully Mantegna's contribution to the visual arts under the patronage of Lodovico, it is necessary to look beyond the individual works he carried out. In so doing, it becomes clear that we are dealing with a figure whose influence informed and dictated artistic policy in every area of activity.

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<sup>111</sup> Paolucci, 'Il marchesato di Lodovico. Andrea Mantegna a Mantova', p.22.

<sup>112</sup> Carpeggiani, 'La fortuna di un mito', p. 826; Cole, *Art of the Italian Renaissance Courts*, p.155.

<sup>113</sup> Warnke, *The Court Artist*, p.197. Lubkin also makes this point in relation to Galeazzo Maria Sforza's commission of a cycle of frescoes for his private chambers at Pavia Castle, begun in 1469 by Bonifacio Bembo di Cremona. See Gregory Lubkin, *A Renaissance Court: Milan under Galeazzo Maria Sforza* (Berkeley and London: University of California Press, 1994), pp.83-84.

<sup>114</sup> Marani and Perina, *Mantova. Le arti. II*, p.147. On Mantegna's house see Earl E. Rosenthal, 'The House of Andrea Mantegna in Mantua', *Gazette des Beaux Arts*, (septembre 1962), 327-348.





Fig.18: Mantua, Casa del Mantegna

Several commentators over the years have noted that Mantegna and Lodovico shared many common interests, and not least among these a passionate one in classical antiquity.<sup>115</sup> Carpeggiani, moreover, has noted on several occasions the marchese's desire to instil classicism into the fabric of what were essentially a medieval court and town through the sponsorship of artists and litterati entrusted with the task of creating a new image with the use of the language of classical antiquity.<sup>116</sup> While Lodovico's disposition towards a change in artistic and literary policy cannot be contested, it would be inaccurate to suggest that the marchese himself was the sole driving force behind developments in these areas during his thirty-four years of rule. It has already been noted that the influence of Luca Fancelli was decisive in terms of the development of a new style of building from 1450.<sup>117</sup> Whereas Fancelli, when he arrived in Mantua, was a talented young exponent of the Florentine building environment in which he had just completed his apprenticeship, Mantegna was already a highly acclaimed and fully established master when he finally accepted Lodovico's persistent overtures to take up the position of court artist. Moreover, he was a devoted classicist in close touch with the avant-garde artistic currents then prevalent in Tuscany and the Veneto. To a greater degree than Fancelli, therefore, Mantegna was in a position to orientate the marchese's artistic taste and to influence the artistic direction of all his projects, in both the public sphere and in the private domain, in figurative, decorative,

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<sup>115</sup> See, for example, Kristeller, *Andrea Mantegna*, p.182 and Paolucci, 'Il marchesato di Lodovico. Andrea Mantegna a Mantova', p.18. The many surviving letters between the marchese and Mantegna confirm these shared interests.

<sup>116</sup> Carpeggiani, *Il palazzo gonzaghesco di Revere*, p.21 and 'I Gonzaga e l'arte: La corte, la città, il territorio (1444-1616)' in *Mantova e i Gonzaga nella civiltà del Rinascimento*, pp.167-190, esp. p.168 and p.177.

<sup>117</sup> See pp.67-69 above.

marchese's artistic taste and to influence the artistic direction of all his projects, in both the public sphere and in the private domain, in figurative, decorative, sculptural and architectural commissions.<sup>118</sup> In this respect it is not difficult to accept Marani and Perina's contention that a clear Renaissance vision in Mantua was in place only after the arrival of Mantegna: whereas over the previous century Mantua had been the theatre of an often fertile cross-fertilisation of artists from local, Gothic and early Renaissance backgrounds, only from 1459 would there be a coherent artistic policy at the Gonzaga court.<sup>119</sup>

A pertinent illustration of Mantegna's seemingly absolute authority to rule on all artistic matters at court is the decision taken in 1461 to replace the Gothic miniaturist Belbello da Pavia with the more classically inclined Gerolamo da Cremona (documented 1460-1483) as the artist responsible for the pictorial decoration of the Marchesa Barbara's Messale.<sup>120</sup> Likewise, his central input to the design of the courtyard for the Castello di San Giorgio, despite Fancelli having been chief builder and architect for over twenty years, indicates a status of some considerable sway in the field of building, doubtless earned from his designs for Lodovico's private chapel, submitted before he had even moved to Mantua.<sup>121</sup> Mantegna's very presence was enough to entice other artists to move to Mantua and to develop their style; one such figure was Niccolò di Verona, a Gothic painter whose frescoes in the Church of Ognissanti show evidence of a change in artistic direction under the guidance of his new master.<sup>122</sup> This increase in painting activity led to many individual citizens investing in pictorial decoration for their private dwellings and thus creating a new market for art alongside the traditional ones of Church and prince.<sup>123</sup>

While the importance of Mantegna and his fledgling Mantuan school to the overall evaluation of artistic output during the rule of Lodovico cannot be exaggerated, the marchese appears to have employed several other, albeit less distinguished, painters

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<sup>118</sup> The point is made by Amadei and Marani, *I Gonzaga a Mantova*, p.168.

<sup>119</sup> Marani and Perina, *Mantova. Le arti. II*, p.240 and p.255.

<sup>120</sup> See pp.187-191 below.

<sup>121</sup> On the courtyard see pp.79-80 above.

<sup>122</sup> On Niccolò and other assistants to Mantegna see Marani and Perina, *Mantova. Le arti. II*, pp.317-318.

<sup>123</sup> In many cases in Mantua this simply involved decorative patterns applied to façades. See Marani and Perina, *Mantova. Le arti. II*, p.322.



between the time of Pisanello and the arrival of Mantegna.<sup>124</sup> Unfortunately no surviving works give us any indication of the scale and nature of the commissions carried out by these less renowned artists, but their documented presence in Mantua reveals, if nothing else, that the period between the abandonment of Pisanello's chivalric fresco cycle and Mantegna's appointment as court artist was one in which painting, albeit on a seemingly smaller scale, continued to be sponsored by the marchese. With the arrival of Mantegna, however, Mantua became home to one of the truly outstanding and visionary painters of the period and, over the next half century, this was reflected in the art produced there, in both qualitative and quantitative terms, as a strong and permanent internal stimulus for development was now in place for the first time.

### **Other Forms of Art**

The artistic patronage of Lodovico Gonzaga, together with that of many of his contemporaries, is often and justifiably evaluated primarily in terms of painting and architecture, together with the sculpture which usually adorned the latter. To achieve a more complete picture of the creative output at a Renaissance court, however, and to gain a greater understanding of how patrons viewed their expenditure on aesthetic matters, one must look beyond the genres traditionally treated by art historians. After architecture, which was clearly the most expensive area of patronage, that which princes and wealthy merchants appear to have valued most was not painting, as the vast weight of art historiography would suggest, but rather tapestries, often relegated to the realms of the minor arts, but defined by Alison Cole as "the most costly items of furnishing".<sup>125</sup> Although somewhat dated, Antonino Bertolotti's late nineteenth-century review of the so-called minor arts of the Mantuan Renaissance, firmly based on documentary evidence, remains a valuable window to the vast range of artistic output overseen by the Gonzaga rulers of the period.<sup>126</sup> As well as weavers, Bertolotti presents evidence of

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<sup>124</sup> Among these painters in the 1450s the names Angelo da Siena, Michele da Pavia and Michele Ugaro recur in Gonzaga documents. See Lawson, 'The Palace at Revere', p.53. Lawson suggests that Angelo, given his Tuscan background, may have been an early classical influence on Lodovico's artistic tastes.

<sup>125</sup> Cole, *Art of the Italian Renaissance Courts*, p.30.

<sup>126</sup> Antonino Bertolotti, 'Le arti minori alla corte di Mantova nei secoli XV, XVI e XVII: ricerca storica negli Archivi mantovani', *Archivio Storico Lombardo*, XV, (1887), 259-318, 419-590, 980-1075.

Lodovico and Barbara having employed jewellers and coin and medal makers, as well as workers in wood, metal, glass and leather.

Renaissance coins and medals, of course, have long been the object of interest of numismatic historians, and the employment by Gianfrancesco and Lodovico of Pisanello, who as well as being a painter was also the most skilled and innovative medallist of the early to mid-Quattrocento, ensured that some of the most remarkable examples of the time were produced in Mantua and contained images of prominent Mantuan and Gonzaga figures.<sup>127</sup> Although it has been noted that by the middle of the century his pictorial style and subject matter were somewhat dated, Pisanello was peerless in the field of the commemorative medal. Between 1439 and 1448 he produced four outstanding specimens of his art for the Gonzaga.<sup>128</sup> The first of these depicted the Marchese Gianfrancesco Gonzaga, and the last his son Lodovico, on the occasion of his election in 1447 to the position of *capitano generale* of the Florentine troops (Fig.4).<sup>129</sup> Both medals have on one side the head of their patron and on the reverse show him on horseback, ready for battle. Beside the figure of Lodovico on horseback one also notes the presence of a radiant sun and a marigold flower – both recurring Gonzaga heraldic devices.<sup>130</sup> The other two medals, however, are arguably of greater interest: the first in celebration of Vittorino da Feltre (Fig.22); the second depicting Cecilia Gonzaga (Fig.19), whose religious vocation was evidently considered worthy of commemoration by her brother. The medal of Vittorino, commissioned shortly after his death in 1446, portrays on the obverse the head of the revered teacher. On the reverse there is the image of the pelican, a bird which feeds its young with its own blood; this was considered to be a potent and fitting image of Vittorino,

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<sup>127</sup> On medals commissioned in Mantua see Graham Pollard, 'Le medaglie dei Gonzaga', in *I Gonzaga. Moneta Arte Storia. Catalogo della mostra di Mantova (9 settembre – 10 dicembre 1995)*, ed. by Silvana Balbi De Caro (Milan: Electa, 1995), pp. 383-387 and, in the same volume, Massimo Rossi, 'Le medaglie dei Gonzaga. Catalogo', pp. 394-446.

<sup>128</sup> George Hill notes that Pisanello's medals rank much higher in the history of art than his paintings, even though he considered himself to be first and foremost a painter. George Hill, *Medals of the Renaissance. Revised and Enlarged by Graham Pollard* (London: British Museum, 1978), p.37.

<sup>129</sup> See pp.47-48 above.

<sup>130</sup> On these and other emblems used by the Gonzaga see Mario Praz, 'The Gonzaga Devices', in *Splendours of the Gonzaga*, Catalogue of the Exhibition, London, 4 November 1981 – 31 January 1982, ed. by David S. Chambers and Jane Martineau (London: Victoria and Albert Museum, 1981), pp. 65-72. The sun referred to Lodovico's zodiac sign, while the marigold appeared in several more of Lodovico's artistic commissions. On the medal itself see Paolo Parmiggiani, 'Riflessi donatelliani nel *Sangue di Cristo*', in *Andrea Mantegna e i Gonzaga. Rinascimento nel castello di San Giorgio*, ed. by Filippo Trevisani (Milan: Electa, 2006), pp.120-153, p.137.



who selflessly nourished his charges with the knowledge he housed within himself.<sup>131</sup> The medal of Cecilia Gonzaga, meanwhile, dated the following year, was not a commemorative one, as Cecilia was still alive at this point. The stunning reverse side of this particular medal celebrates Cecilia's nobility and integrity with a depiction of a virgin and tamed unicorn under a moonlit sky.<sup>132</sup>



Fig.19: Pisanello, Medal of Cecilia Gonzaga

Hill notes that in Mantua a distinct succession of medallists emerged over the course of the following decades.<sup>133</sup> Although none appears to have reached the levels of excellence visible in Pisanello's works, the Mantuan school nonetheless produced some competent artists and several memorable medals. One of these (Fig.20), with neither date nor signature, is an octagonal portrait attributed to Pietro da Fano and thought to have been executed in 1463 or 1464; it is a one-sided medal, depicting a bust of the Marchese Lodovico.<sup>134</sup> A more significant practitioner of the art was Bartolomeo Melioli (1448-1514), the first noteworthy medallist who was also a Mantuan by birth.<sup>135</sup> Melioli was employed primarily as a goldsmith and coin engraver, and his tally of six medals makes him the most

<sup>131</sup> On the analogy of Vittorino and the pelican see Rodolfo Signorini, *Venticinque anni di laboriose speranze (1970-1995)* (Mantua: Tip. Grassi, 1996), pp.7-11. On the medal of Vittorino see Parmiggiani, 'Riflessi donatelliani nel *Sangue di Cristo*', p.136.

<sup>132</sup> See Marani and Perina, *Mantova. Le arti. II*, p.505.

<sup>133</sup> Hill, *Medals of the Renaissance*, p.48.

<sup>134</sup> Rossi, 'Le medaglie dei Gonzaga. Catalogo', p.398; Parmiggiani, 'Riflessi donatelliani nel *Sangue di Cristo*', p.138.

<sup>135</sup> Stefano Davari, *Sperandio da Mantova e Bartolomeo Meliolo mantovano scultori-orefici del XV secolo* (Mantua: Eredi Segna, 1886). On his medals commissioned by Lodovico Gonzaga see Parmiggiani, 'Riflessi donatelliani nel *Sangue di Cristo*', pp.140-141.

prolific maker of medals in the town over the course of his career. The first three of these were produced during the last years of Lodovico's rule; two to commemorate the visit of King Christian of Denmark (1426-1481, King from 1448) (Fig.46) in 1474 were followed by another the following year to mark the marchese's project to build the new basilica of Sant'Andrea (Fig.49). The medal of Lodovico depicts on its obverse a portrait of the marchese, encircled by the inscription 'LVDOVICVS II MARCHIO MANTVAE QVAM PRECIOSVS XPI SANGVIS ILLVSTRAT', in reference to the relic of the precious blood which the new church was being built to house.<sup>136</sup> The reverse, meanwhile, shows Lodovico in full Roman armour and seated before Fides and Athena.



**Fig.20: Pietro da Fano (attributed), Medal of Lodovico Gonzaga**



**Fig.21: Bartolomeo Melioli, Medal of Lodovico Gonzaga**

In the last part of the fifteenth century a handful of Mantuan artists continued to make medals. These included Sperandio Savelli, whose fame, according to Hill, had spread all over northern Italy.<sup>137</sup> Although Mantuan by birth, Sperandio's artistic education appears to have taken place in Ferrara, where his father went in 1437, at which time Sperandio was probably only twelve years old. His best known medal commemorates the election of Francesco Gonzaga, Lodovico's son, as the first Gonzaga cardinal. Other Mantuan medallists of the period include Bartolo Talpa

<sup>136</sup> Rossi, 'Le medaglie dei Gonzaga. Catalogo', pp.398-399.

<sup>137</sup> Hill, *Medals of the Renaissance*, p.48.



(active in Mantua 1490-1495), who produced medals of Federico and Francesco, the two marchesi who succeeded Lodovico, and Jacopo Alari Bonacolsi (c.1460-1528), also known as L'Antico, who cast a medal of Lodovico's brother Gianfrancesco.<sup>138</sup> A number of other Mantuan medals of the mid to late Quattrocento are unsigned but one final important name in the field of numismatics was Cristoforo di Geremia, a Mantuan by origin but based in Rome, who also worked on sculpture and jewellery and whose patrons included Pope Paul II (Pietro Barbo, 1417-1471, Pope 1464-1471).<sup>139</sup> To demonstrate his versatility, a series of letters exchanged in the spring of 1462 reveal that Lodovico ordered from Cristoforo four ancient-style busts and a glass salt holder.<sup>140</sup>

As has been mentioned, weavers and tapestry makers were central to the supply of luxury objects to a Renaissance court and, in this respect, Mantua was no different from anywhere else in the Quattrocento, boasting a factory from at least 1421.<sup>141</sup> The many names listed by Bertolotti, together with those of others whose letters survive in the Archivio Gonzaga, are too numerous to list in this thesis. It is worth remembering that Flemish practitioners of the day enjoyed a reputation for being the most skilled, and Lodovico appeared to acknowledge this in his patronage of a certain Rinaldo di Gualtieri fiammingo, described by the marchese in 1457 as "già nostro tapezziere in casa" for the previous eight years.<sup>142</sup> Rinaldo appears to have left Mantua to work for the Este soon after this reference was provided, but he continued to correspond with Lodovico and to provide artefacts until 1474.<sup>143</sup> Visitors to the Palazzo Ducale in Mantua still find today many fine examples of weaving adorning the walls and floors, many of which date back to as early as the mid-fifteenth century. As was the fate of countless other objects, however, the vast majority of fine tapestries and carpets appear to have been removed during the sack of 1707. One final possible indication of the importance of tapestries to Lodovico and Barbara can be found within the most famous artistic commission

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<sup>138</sup> On these medals see Rossi, 'Le medaglie dei Gonzaga. Catalogo', pp.400-407. On Lodovico's brother Gianfrancesco see p.40 above.

<sup>139</sup> On Cristoforo di Geremia see Marani and Perina, *Mantova. Le arti. II*, p.524.

<sup>140</sup> See letter Bartolomeo Bonatto to Lodovico, Rome, 1 April 1462 (ASMn AG, b. 841 c.555) and letter Cristoforo to Lodovico, Rome, 6 April 1462 (ASMn AG, b. 841 c.596).

<sup>141</sup> Bertolotti, 'Le arti minori alla corte di Mantova', p.215.

<sup>142</sup> Letter Lodovico to Duke of Modena, Mantua, 16 March 1457 (ASMn AG, b. 2885 Lib. 29 f. 88r).

<sup>143</sup> Bertolotti, 'Le arti minori alla corte di Mantova', p.216.

of their rule. The *Camera degli sposi* has frescoes on only two of the four walls and the ceiling. Given the sheer volume of painted detail in these areas, it is difficult to bring oneself to accept that the marchesi left the two remaining walls unadorned. Signorini's discovery of holes which could have supported hooks is a convincing argument that Lodovico and Barbara valued tapestries at least as highly as they regarded Mantegna's pictorial cycles.<sup>144</sup>

A comprehensive survey of the so-called "arti minori" at the court of Lodovico would require painstaking research of tens of thousands of documents in archives not only in Mantua but throughout Italy and indeed other parts of Europe. In this necessarily brief account of expenditure on, and interest in, luxury and decorative items, however, what is evident from the apparent quantity and diversity of these is that genres of art history which have only relatively recently attracted the interest of scholars would not have been considered by those who commissioned them to be "minor" in any way, and certainly not any less prestigious than fresco painting.<sup>145</sup> Commentators have noted that the ubiquitous influence of Mantegna on artistic policy affected the practitioners of these many and varied forms of artistic output, and there also appears to have been inter-genre collaboration between artists in these areas, reflecting the developments in the field of architecture, where Fancelli, Mantegna, Alberti and others frequently made multiple contributions to individual projects, and giving further evidence that Mantua was a vibrant and bountiful forum for all the arts.<sup>146</sup>

## Conclusions

It has been suggested that, despite the often considerable scale of their investment, Renaissance princes were not always real enthusiasts for the arts.<sup>147</sup> The overwhelming impression one gets from even a brief overview of Lodovico

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<sup>144</sup> Rodolfo Signorini, *Opus hoc tenue: la camera dipinta di Andrea Mantegna: lettura storica iconografica iconologica* (Parma: Artegrafica Silva, 1985), p.250.

<sup>145</sup> See note 3, p.66 above.

<sup>146</sup> Hill notes Mantegna's influence on Bartolomeo Melioli, while Marani and Perina note, in turn, Melioli's influence on Cristoforo di Geremia. Hill, *Medals of the Renaissance*, p.49; Marani and Perina, *Mantova. Le arti. II*, p.525. An example of collaboration between artists in different fields occurs with designs supplied by Giacomo Bellanti, a miniaturist, for a tapestry to be made by Rinaldo Gualtieri. The project is mentioned by Bertolotti but I have been unable to locate any relevant documents in the Archivio Gonzaga. Bertolotti, 'Le arti minori alla corte di Mantova', p.216.

<sup>147</sup> Warnke, 'Liberalitas Principis', p.83.



Gonzaga's patronage, however, is that of a genuine devotee against whom such a charge cannot be levelled.

Over the three and a half decades of his rule, Mantua witnessed two inter-related and important artistic transitions: that from the Gothic to the new Renaissance style, reflected in the abrupt abandonment of Pisanello's fresco cycle; and that from a provincial outpost which occasionally attracted able practitioners for short periods to an outstanding centre of building and the arts. The appointments of Fancelli in 1450 and Mantegna a decade later were crucial to the establishment and development of internal stimuli and a new infrastructure which saw the development of distinctive Mantuan styles for the first time. The humanist seed, planted by Vittorino in 1423 and nurtured by his successors after 1446, had been perhaps even more significant than the employment of any particular artist; the prince whom the teacher intended to mould was to be a champion in all fields of the new learning, including those of building and the arts.<sup>148</sup> Thirty-six years of cultural and artistic maturation, begun by Vittorino and continued at different stages by Pisanello, Brunelleschi, Manetti, Donatello and Fancelli, reached a new level of maturity between 1459 and 1460, when the Papal Congress brought, among others, Alberti to Mantua and Mantegna took up residence at court. This was also, as has been noted, the time of a turning point in the policy of the marchese, as he turned his attention from the security and infrastructure of his territory to the improvement and embellishment of his capital, in doing so fostering a climate of patronage which saw wealthy citizens such as Giovanni Boniforte di Concorezzo and Francesco Secco invest in private projects of their own. In the 1470s, with Mantua now also vastly improved, Lodovico was able to indulge himself in public projects such as Sant'Andrea and the Casa del mercato, as well as private projects such as the courtyard and the completion of the *Camera degli sposi*, while also continuing to sponsor a broad range of decorative artists in several other fields.

If his artistic patronage, as Dall'Acqua defines it, was a celebration of power despite limited resources and occasional shortages of funds, it was also, as Carpeggiani notes, a means through which the marchese conducted cordial

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<sup>148</sup> On Vittorino and the curriculum of the Casa Giocosa see pp.118-123 below.

diplomatic relations with other rulers.<sup>149</sup> Just as significantly, if not indeed more so, these were the actions of an archetypal Renaissance prince of arms and letters with a passionate and genuine enthusiasm for his investments. Naturally, this key area of Lodovico's cultural sponsorship has been the subject of extensive study, of both an historical and an art historical nature. The main aim of this thesis will be to demonstrate the extensive breadth of another area of Lodovico's activity: his patronage of letters, which, though deeply learned and distinctive, was both consistent with and comparable in magnitude to his promotion of art and architecture. To gain an understanding of how and why the marchese became one of the most erudite rulers of the age, the next chapter will examine the role of education in his life; firstly, how as a child and youth he was shaped by an avant-garde humanist education and, secondly, by considering his own contribution in adulthood to the sponsorship of learning in Mantua.

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<sup>149</sup> Dall'Acqua, 'Mecenatismo e collezionismo dei Gonzaga da Ludovico a Isabella d'Este', p.295; Carpeggiani, 'La fortuna di un mito', p. 817.





# **PART TWO**

## **CULTURAL INSTITUTIONS**





## CHAPTER THREE

### THE MANTUAN SCHOOL

From the age of eleven, Lodovico Gonzaga was educated by Vittorino da Feltre, widely regarded as one of the most important early Renaissance humanist teachers. Before examining this great paedagogue's contribution to the cultural life of Mantua, which during his long stay developed into one of the most enlightened states in the Italian peninsula, it may be useful to reflect on what is meant by the term *humanism* in relation to education in this period.

#### Humanism

In recent years two scholars in particular, Ronald G. Witt and James Hankins, have offered alternative interpretations of the humanist movement, challenging established views with regard to the origins of both civic humanism and, of more relevance here, of humanism in relation to the *studia humanitatis*.<sup>1</sup> As well as rejecting Hans Baron's monumental theory that civic humanism originated in Florence during the struggle with Milan at the turn of the fifteenth century, Witt anticipates the dawn of humanist studies from the dominant figure of Petrarch to the two preceding generations of scholars in Padua, spearheaded by the pioneering efforts of Lovato dei Lovati (1240/41-1309) and Albertino Mussato (1261-1329).

By the early fifteenth century the princely courts of northern Italy had come to play an important role in the development of the *studia humanitatis*. Important schools were established first by Vittorino da Feltre in Mantua and then by Guarino Veronese (1374-1460) in Ferrara. In this respect Roberto Weiss notes:

The change from the free town to the principality was crucial since, once humanism had reached a certain stage, patronage became essential to its further development and the new Italian rulers were not slow in providing this patronage.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Hans Baron, *The Crisis of the Early Italian Renaissance: Civic Humanism and Republican Liberty in an Age of Classicism and Tyranny* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1955); Ronald G. Witt, *In the Footsteps of the Ancients: The Origins of Humanism from Lovato to Bruni* (Boston: Brill, 2000); James Hankins, ed., *Renaissance Civic Humanism: Reappraisals and Reflections* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

<sup>2</sup> Roberto Weiss, *The Spread of Italian Humanism* (London: Hutchison, 1964), p.22.



Here we can trace a parallel with the Florentine and Venetian artists of the period. Once they received their training in the workshops of these republican cities, they often had to secure a position at a princely court if they were to achieve financial security or the opportunity to carry out a large-scale project. Weiss continues:

In politics Petrarch may have yearned for the Roman Republic, advocated a revival in the ancient city of Rome, and deplored the evils which haunted the Italy of his day. But in practice he was glad to accept the patronage of some of the Italian rulers who in fact fostered the very evils against which he was so ready to inveigh. Between republican Florence and tyrant-ridden Milan he had no hesitation in choosing Milan as his residence for some years, and why? He knew very well that life would be more comfortable in the shadow of a princely court than in a free town.<sup>3</sup>

To accept Weiss's theory in its entirety would be to conclude that for those who preached its message humanism had a price. Such a conclusion, however, would be extremely harsh on the likes of Vittorino and Guarino, both of whom must be given credit for influencing the manner in which princes came to view their relationship with the world around them during the Quattrocento. A closer examination of the characteristics of humanism reveals a more rounded explanation as to why the phenomenon took root in despotic states such as Mantua.

Paul Oskar Kristeller notes that the term *humanism* comes from the *studia humanitatis*, traditionally taken to mean grammar, rhetoric, poetry, history and philosophy, while Benjamin Kohl maintains that around one third of all humanists at one time or another carried out the role of teachers.<sup>4</sup> A picture emerges, therefore, of an intimate connection between humanism and teaching. Nor was it exclusively republicans who wished their sons to be educated according to these canons; humanist education was seen as preparation for political life and thus applicable to both republics and ruling families. Princes found relevant messages in the study of the ancients and considered it absolutely imperative that their

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<sup>3</sup> Weiss, *The Spread of Italian Humanism*, pp.26-27.

<sup>4</sup> Paul Oskar Kristeller, 'The Cultural Heritage of Humanism: An Overview' in Albert Rabil Jr., ed., *Renaissance Humanism: Foundations, Forms and Legacy* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1988), vol.III, pp.515-528, esp. p.516; Benjamin G. Kohl, 'Humanism and Education' in Albert Rabil Jr., ed., *Renaissance Humanism: Foundations, Forms and Legacy*, vol.III, pp.5-22, p.5.

successors received a comprehensive humanist education. The purpose of the *studia humanitatis* was perceived to be a demonstration of how to live well and honestly, through virtuous precept and historical example, and this was clearly of the utmost importance for those who in adulthood were destined to become rulers, those whose actions would in turn have an influence on state and subjects.<sup>5</sup> A humanist education was as much about ethics as it was about the study of classical writers for philological purposes. The components of the *studia humanitatis* were studied not merely as an end in themselves but to be applied practically and wisely, reflecting the manner in which the Greeks and Romans had considered education.<sup>6</sup> The schools established by Vittorino in Mantua and by Guarino in Ferrara confirm this connection between life and learning. Gianfrancesco Gonzaga and Niccolò d'Este (1384-1441, marchese 1393-1441), having secured the social pre-eminence of their offspring, were clearly now concerned with their moral and intellectual well-being.

In 1403 in Padua Pietro Paolo Vergerio (1370-1444) outlined a programme for humanist education in his treatise entitled *De ingenuis moribus*, a work destined for wide circulation.<sup>7</sup> Novelties included a new importance placed on the study of history, moral philosophy and eloquence and a focus on the needs of individual students, as well as directives relating to the training of the body as well as the mind.<sup>8</sup> The spirit of humanist education was geared to the formation of the complete man: good citizen, able soldier, cultured, of refined taste and in harmony with the world around him. This identikit was equally if not more appropriate to a young prince as it was to the son of a merchant in Florence or Venice. Perhaps the single largest novelty in Vergerio's treatise was that the study of the classics no longer had to be justified by Christian beliefs. Indeed, as Witt points out, Vergerio, when he outlined the ideal education of a young man, did not mention religious education at all, as the new interest in Cicero was reducing the relevance of

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<sup>5</sup> For a thorough discussion on Renaissance attitudes to the *studia humanitatis* see Anthony Grafton and Lisa Jardine, *From Humanism to the Humanities: Education and the Liberal Arts in Fifteenth- and Sixteenth-Century Europe* (London: Duckworth, 1986).

<sup>6</sup> Grafton and Jardine, *From Humanism to the Humanities*, p.5.

<sup>7</sup> Pietro Paolo Vergerio, *De ingenuis moribus et liberalibus studiis adolescentiae*, ed. by Attilio Gnesotto. Offprint from *Atti e memorie della R. Accademia delle Scienze, Lettere ed Arti in Padova*, 34, (1917-1918). See also David Robey, 'Humanism and Education in the Early '400: the 'De ingenuis moribus' of P.P. Vergerio', *Bibliothèque d'humanisme*, 42, (1980), 27-58 and Paul Grendler, *Schooling in Renaissance Italy: Literacy and Learning, 1300-1600* (London: John Hopkins University Press, 1989), p.118.

<sup>8</sup> See also Witt, *In the Footsteps of the Ancients*, p.377.



Christianity in the field of scholarship.<sup>9</sup> Man was perceived as both body and soul, both earthly and heavenly, both free and conditioned. The Church, for so long perceived to be a hindrance to free expression, could be overcome and even used as a resource for creativity. Unlike their medieval predecessors, humanists, dissatisfied with the diluted and incorrect versions in circulation, strove to acquire the original texts of the writers of antiquity. Further treatises during the early and middle decades of the fifteenth century by Leonardo Bruni (c.1369-1444), Enea Silvio Piccolomini (later Pope Pius II), Maffeo Vegio (1407-1458) and Battista Guarini (1434-1503) gave additional authority to the *studia humanitatis*.<sup>10</sup> The outcome, as Grendler notes, was a rare revolution instigated by Italian pedagogues between 1400 and 1450, a revolution in which long established curriculum authors such as Boethius, Facetus and Theodulus, as well as the Graecismus book, were replaced by Cicero, Terence and Caesar.<sup>11</sup> Robert Black, meanwhile, has argued the case for a large degree of continuity between medieval curricula and teaching methods and those prevalent in the early Renaissance.<sup>12</sup>

In order to guarantee sufficient income, humanists often took on jobs as secretaries, translators and tutors. As well as teaching, their duties often included the drafting of orations and official histories and the dispensing of advice on a wide range of literary matters. Nonetheless, it was through two remarkable institutions in Mantua, both of which were closely tied to education, that humanists there distinguished themselves. The first, which I am about to discuss, was the school established by Vittorino. The other, which will be examined in the next chapter, was the Gonzaga library.

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<sup>9</sup> Witt, *In the Footsteps of the Ancients*, p.383; Grendler, *Schooling in Renaissance Italy*, p.207.

<sup>10</sup> Leonardo Bruni, *De studiis et litteris*, in W.H.Woodward, ed., *Vittorino da Feltre and Other Humanist Educators* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1912), pp.119-133; Enea Silvio Piccolomini, *De librorum educatione*, ed. by Joel Stanislaus Nelson (Washington DC: Catholic University of America, 1940); Maffeo Vegio, *De educatione liberorum et eorum claris moribus libri sex: A Critical Text of Books*, ed. by Maria Walburg Fanning, and Anne Stanislaus Sullivan (Washington: Catholic University of America, 1933); Battista Guarini, *De ordine docendi ac studendi*, ed. by Luigi Piacente (Bari: Adriatica, 1975). On these treatises see Grendler, *Schooling in Renaissance Italy*, p.119.

<sup>11</sup> Grendler, *Schooling in Renaissance Italy*, p.141.

<sup>12</sup> Robert Black, *Humanism and Education in Medieval and Renaissance Italy: Tradition and Innovation in Latin Schools from the Twelfth to the Fifteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

## The Arrival of Vittorino and the Establishment of the Casa Giocosa

In 1423 Gianfrancesco Gonzaga and his wife Paola Malatesta, concerned about the education of their children, lured to their court from Venice the celebrated humanist pedagogue Vittorino Rambaldoni da Feltre. A public school had been established in Mantua during the previous decade, in which students read Virgil and studied logic and grammar.<sup>13</sup> In bringing Vittorino to Mantua, however, the Gonzaga were not only securing the services of one of the most brilliant and forward-looking teachers of his generation; they were also effectively sowing the seeds of the Renaissance in their town.

The pre-Mantuan years of Vittorino have been well documented and need not concern us in any great detail.<sup>14</sup> Vittorino was born in 1378 in Feltre, in the foothills of the Alps above Vicenza, to the Rambaldoni family, of noble stock but fallen into hard times. The young Vittorino grew up and received his early education in Feltre, which was then ruled by the Carrara lords of Padua. In 1392, the eighteen-year old Vittorino left Feltre for Padua, where he continued his studies under Giovanni Conversini of Ravenna (1343-1408), serving in the house of the pedagogue to earn his board and to pay for his lessons. Conversini appears to have exercised a strong early influence over Vittorino, imbuing him with a modesty in his dress and in his eating habits, restraint in his passions and resistance to discomfort, attributes which Vittorino in turn would transmit to his charges at the Giocosa. It was probably at this stage in Padua that Vittorino first met the

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<sup>13</sup> On education in Mantua prior to Vittorino see Romolo Quazza, 'L'ambiente e i tempi di Vittorino da Feltre', in *Vittorino da Feltre. Pubblicazione commemorativa del V centenario della morte* (Brescia: Editrice La Scuola, 1947), pp.33-41, esp. pp.36-37; Vito Venturini, *Nuovi accertamenti su Vittorino da Feltre e la sua scuola*, tesi di laurea, Università degli studi di Bologna, Facoltà di lettere e filosofia, anno accademico 1990-91, p.74.

<sup>14</sup> Contemporary accounts on the life of Vittorino include Bartolomeo Sacchi (il Platina), *Vita di Vittorino da Feltre*, trans. and ed. by Giuseppe Biasuz (Padua: Editore Liviana, 1948) and Francesco Prendilacqua, *De vita Victorini Feltrensis dialogus Francisci Prendilacqua Mantuani ex Codice Vaticano*, ed. by Natale Dalle Laste (Padua: J.Manfrè, 1774). The most comprehensive nineteenth-century contribution on Vittorino was Carlo De' Rosmini, *L'idea dell'ottimo precettore nella vita e disciplina di Vittorino da Feltre* (Remondiniana: Bassano, 1801) and, in the twentieth-century, William H.Woodward, ed., *Vittorino da Feltre and Other Humanist Educators: Essays and Versions. An Introduction to the History of Classical Education* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1905). See also the studies by Eugenio Garin, *L'educazione umanistica in Italia* (Bari: Laterza, 1949) and *Il pensiero pedagogico dell'umanesimo*, (Florence: Giunti, 1958).



other great pedagogue of his generation, Guarino Veronese (1374-1460), and the influential educational theorist Pietro Paolo Vergerio (1370-1444).<sup>15</sup>

Only a year after Vittorino's arrival in Padua, in 1393, Conversini left the city and Vittorino began to give classes. When, in 1406, Padua passed under the rule of Venice, new impetus for humanist studies was provided. The following year saw the arrival of Gasparino Barzizza (c.1360-1431), whose young students in Padua included Francesco Barbaro, Francesco Filelfo (1398-1481) and Leon Battista Alberti.<sup>16</sup> As well as forging a lasting friendship with Barzizza, Vittorino's attention must have been drawn to the promise shown by these young scholars. Towards the end of 1415 Vittorino moved to Venice where Guarino, following his time in Constantinople, had been teaching Greek for around five years. From Guarino Vittorino probably learned only the most elementary Greek, but their mutual interest saw the two pedagogues develop a working relationship which led to the exchange of manuscripts on a regular basis throughout their careers. In Venice Vittorino also established relations with a number of noble Venetian families, eager that their children be educated by the most able humanist teachers. An outbreak of plague saw Vittorino leave Venice during the summer of 1416 but he returned between 1418 and 1419 to found a school with Guarino and the young Filelfo. It was during this second period in Venice that Vittorino met George of Trebizond (1395-1486), with whom he carried out a fruitful exchange of Latin and Greek lessons. By now an established teacher, in 1420 Vittorino returned to Padua where he formed a boarding school similar to that which he later established in Mantua and, when in 1421 Barzizza left Padua to take up a position in Milan, Vittorino took his place at the university. Concerned by the overcrowded conditions in Padua and the lack of qualified teachers practising in Venice, in the autumn of 1422 Vittorino returned to the Lagoon city and formed a new school. In May the

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<sup>15</sup> For a comprehensive study of Guarino see Remigio Sabbadini, *La scuola e gli studi di Guarino Guarini Veronese* (Catania: F.Galati, 1896). For a discussion of his educational programme in Ferrara see Grafton and Jardine, 'The School of Guarino: Ideals and Practice' in *From Humanism to the Humanities*, pp.1-28. On Vergerio see David Robey, 'P.P.Vergerio the Elder: Republicanism and Civic Values in the Work of an Early Humanist', *Past and Present*, 58, (1973), 3-37.

<sup>16</sup> On Barzizza see R.G.G. Mercer, *The Teaching of Gasparino Barzizza, with Special Reference to his Place in Paduan Humanism* (London: Modern Humanities Research Association, 1979).

following year, however, the offer from Mantua arrived, an offer which, ultimately, Vittorino was unable to refuse.<sup>17</sup>



Fig.22: Pisanello, Medal of Vittorino da Feltre

The figure of Vittorino has been invariably portrayed in an almost saintly aura. Anecdotes describe how Lodovico, even after becoming marchese, would rise solemnly to his feet whenever Vittorino entered the room.<sup>18</sup> Vittorino's decision to accept the position in Mantua, however, was by no means a formality. A man of extreme modesty and steadfast religious devotion, he made no effort to veil his disdain for the excesses of the courtly lifestyle and all its whims but, in the end, the prospect of educating a prince proved irresistible. Nonetheless, almost as an early statement of his frankness, he gave Gianfrancesco some firm conditions of acceptance, mainly that he never be asked to do anything which might compromise his honour. This was the first but by no means the only time Vittorino had cause to speak his mind to Gianfrancesco. In the early 1440s he managed to quell the rage of the marchese and to force a reconciliation with Lodovico, who had joined the forces of Milan while his father was contracted by Venice.<sup>19</sup> In 1444 Vittorino resolved another thorny issue, this time between Gianfrancesco and his daughter

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<sup>17</sup> For an account of the circumstances surrounding Vittorino's arrival in Mantua see Emilio Faccioli, ed., *Mantova. Le Lettere. I. La tradizione virgiliana. La cultura nel Medioevo* (Mantua: Istituto Carlo d'Arco per la Storia di Mantova, 1959), pp.6-23.

<sup>18</sup> Faccioli, *Mantova. Le Lettere. I*, p.20.

<sup>19</sup> See Elizabeth Ward Swain, 'The wages of peace: the condotte of Ludovico Gonzaga, 1436-1478', *Journal of the Society for Renaissance Studies*, vol.3, n.4, (1989), 442-452; Leonardo Mazzoldi, ed., *Mantova. La Storia. II. Da Ludovico secondo marchese a Francesco secondo duca* (Mantua: Istituto Carlo d'Arco per la Storia di Mantova, 1961), pp.7-13.



Cecilia. Despite the marchese's insistence that Cecilia marry the Count of Gorizia, his daughter was intent on taking religious vows and entering a convent. Gianfrancesco's obstinacy was eventually overcome thanks to the intervention of Vittorino, alarmed by the prospect of the girl being denied the opportunity to fulfil her vocation while at the same time being forced into an undesired marriage.<sup>20</sup> In matters relating to the school Gianfrancesco and Paola afforded unwavering protection to Vittorino and were never anything less than extremely generous in their funding of the Casa Giocosa. Indeed the marchesa, more so than her husband, appears to have assumed the responsibility for the education of the Gonzaga children and for the cultural activity of the court.<sup>21</sup>

The Casa Giocosa, as far as can be understood, was a building which appears to have gradually fallen into ruin after Vittorino's death in 1446, and subsequently to have been entirely destroyed in the later decades of the century.<sup>22</sup> It stood in what today is Piazza Sordello, opposite the main façade of the *Palazzo Ducale* complex. Before Vittorino's arrival in Mantua the building, affectionately known as the Casa Zoiosa (Leisure House), had been used as a retreat by Gianfrancesco. Vittorino promptly renamed the building Casa Giocosa (Playful House), probably more in recognition of the youngsters and the climate he wished to instil than of the programme of studies he taught there. The school, though in all likelihood originally conceived to educate the children of the Gonzaga and those of their courtiers, grew steadily both in terms of student numbers and in prestige, to such an extent that a second house soon had to be built to accommodate the swelling numbers of new charges.

### The Curriculum of the Casa Giocosa

Lodovico Gonzaga was eleven years old when Vittorino arrived in Mantua. A year later, Guarino assured the young heir to the *marchesato* that the books of the

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<sup>20</sup> Faccioli, *Mantova. Le Lettere*. I, pp.26-27.

<sup>21</sup> Ubaldo Meroni, *Mostra dei codici gonzagheschi. La biblioteca da Luigi I ad Isabella d'Este (1348-1540)* (Mantua: Biblioteca Comunale, 1966), p.60.

<sup>22</sup> See Ercolano Marani, 'Realtà e ubicazione della Giocosa' in *Vittorino da Feltre e la sua scuola: umanesimo, pedagogia, arti. Atti del convegno di studi promosso dalla Fondazione Giorgio Cini di Venezia con altri enti nel sesto centenario della nascita di Vittorino. Venezia-Feltre-Mantova, 9-11 novembre 1979*, ed. by Nella Giannetto (Florence: Olschki, 1981), pp.171-187.

ancients offered better advice than adulatory courtiers.<sup>23</sup> From an early and impressionable age, clearly, it can be safely assumed that Lodovico was immersed in the ideology of the humanist educators.

Together with Guarino's school in Ferrara, the Casa Giocosa developed into one of the leading educational institutions of its time. While both offered programmes of study based on the works of classical authors, they differed in one important aspect: Vittorino's school focused on the education of princes while Guarino's placed the emphasis on careers.<sup>24</sup> Both, however, were boarding schools, probably the ideal milieu for an intensive programme of humanist studies. Grendler suggests that the boarding school and humanist studies complemented each other well, allowing the master effectively to create a miniature ancient world which came to be viewed as an essential component in the lives of the governing classes.<sup>25</sup>

Only a few sketchy testimonies of Vittorino's methods have survived, making it difficult to recreate a curriculum for the Casa Giocosa. One of these testimonies is a dialogue in Latin composed by Francesco Prendilacqua (1425/30-post 1509), himself a graduate of the school and subsequently employed by both Lodovico and his brother Alessandro. His *De vita Victorini Feltrensis*, dedicated to another of Vittorino's former charges, Federico da Montefeltro of Urbino, was written in 1447 to mark the anniversary of his teacher's passing. Other less well known accounts include the *De Victorini Feltrensis vita* by Sassolo da Prato, the only biography composed while Vittorino was still alive, Francesco da Castiglione's (1410/20-1484) *Vita Victorini Feltrensis* and Platina's *De vita Victorini Feltrensis commentariolus*, substantially a synthesis of the three works already mentioned.<sup>26</sup>

Vittorino appears to have incorporated several of Vergerio's recommendations, not least the emphasis on oratory, and to have made further innovations of his own. As well as the traditional seven liberal arts, comprising the *trivium* of grammar, rhetoric and logic and the *quadrivium* of arithmetic, geometry, music and astronomy, a central position was given to physical education. Religious education,

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<sup>23</sup> Grendler, *Schooling in Renaissance Italy*, p.120.

<sup>24</sup> Grafton and Jardine, 'The School of Guarino', p.24.

<sup>25</sup> Grendler, *Schooling in Renaissance Italy*, p.132.

<sup>26</sup> For an examination of these contemporary biographies of Vittorino see Venturini, *Nuovi accertamenti su Vittorino*, pp.11-26.



which Vittorino, unlike Vergerio, viewed as an important guide to life, was also a central element of his programme. Works were read in their original language – poetry and rhetoric were studied in Latin and Greek – and students frequently carried out grammatical analyses of Virgil and Cicero, as well as Homer and Demosthenes.

Perhaps surprisingly, neither of these influential pedagogues produced a major body of works. As far as we know, Vittorino composed only a short work on Latin orthography and a few letters for posterity, while Guarino's surviving works are limited to a translation of Plutarch's treatise on education and his Latin *Regulae*, a short grammar book written for his pupils.<sup>27</sup> Guarino's son Battista, himself employed as teacher to the court of Ferrara and one of the foremost representatives of the next generation of pedagogues, did commit his theories to writing. Despite the differing approaches of Vittorino and Guarino it can probably be safely assumed that their techniques and programmes had much in common, given the similar ages, geographic origins and educational experiences of the two pedagogues. Furthermore, it is difficult to imagine that Battista Guarini broke radically with the acclaimed methods of his father. In this light the body of scholarship on Guarino's school, from Sabbadini to Garin, is probably to a large extent indicative of parallel developments in Mantua. Basing their research both on Battista Guarini's treatise and on the work of Sabbadini and Garin, as well as existing notebooks belonging to students, Anthony Grafton and Lisa Jardine produced a lucid image of didactic methods used in the classrooms of the humanist boarding schools of the first half of the Quattrocento.<sup>28</sup>

Despite the enlightening allure normally attributed to humanist education, Jardine and Grafton suggest that, seen from the perspective of modern educational theories, the methods used by Guarino were dull, intensive and repetitive and must logically have resulted in boredom and fatigue for the students.<sup>29</sup> Nor were

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<sup>27</sup> On Vittorino's treatise see Antonio Casacci, 'Un trattatello di Vittorino da Feltre sull'ortografia latina', *Atti del Reale Istituto Veneto di Scienze, Lettere ed Arti*, 86, (1927), 911-945. On Guarino's treatise see Giovannangiola Tarugi, ed., 'The Historical Sources of Guarino's *Regulae grammaticales*. A Reconsideration of Sabbadini's Evidence', *Civiltà dell'Umanesimo: Atti del VI, VII, VIII convegno internazionale del Centro di Studi Umanistici, Montepulciano, Palazzo Tarugi, 1969, 1970, 1971*, (Florence: Leo S. Olschki, 1972), pp. 263-284.

<sup>28</sup> Grafton and Jardine, 'The School of Guarino'.

<sup>29</sup> Grafton and Jardine, 'The School of Guarino', pp.10-15.

students able to achieve a broad understanding of any body of works, given that in the early decades of the fifteenth century many elements of these had yet to be rediscovered. Instead they were expected to absorb the contents of their scribbled notebooks of fragmented facts, without any particular train of thought. Grendler also suggests that Renaissance educators believed very strongly in repetition and memorisation, especially at elementary level.<sup>30</sup> Guarino's system of education, Grafton and Jardine conclude, while through its sheer repetitiveness providing students with a thorough competence in classical Latin, produced not an array of brilliant scholars but rather a corpus of highly trained but above all obedient and docile young noblemen accustomed to taking orders.<sup>31</sup> Although this analysis may at first seem rather negative, it must be considered in relation to the practical realities of the time, in which such graduates were indispensable. Witt comes to a similar conclusion when considering Gasparino Barzizza's move to Pavia in 1421, pointing to a marginalisation of the leading families by the Visconti rulers which left less scope for the public dimension of humanism.<sup>32</sup> If this commodity of willing graduates from Guarino's school was valued by the ruling Este family in Ferrara, it must be assumed that the Gonzaga were equally keen to absorb similar young men emerging from the Casa Giocosa into the Mantuan state apparatus.

The authors and texts used by Vittorino were varied. Vito Venturini, in a revision of Vittorino's curriculum as proposed by Giuseppe Müller, who in turn had based his proposals largely on the contemporary testimonies of Prendilacqua, Sassolo, Castiglione and Platina, has produced a plausible reconstruction of a programme of study for the Giocosa.<sup>33</sup> Latin grammar had as its base Priscian before textual analysis of Virgil and Cicero, who represented the foundation of Latin teaching at the time. For poetry key authors were Virgil, Horace, Ovid, Persius, Lucan, Statius, Seneca, Terence and Plautus in Latin, as well as Homer, Aesop, Aristophanes, Euripides, Sophocles, Aeschylus, Hesiod, Theocritus and Pindar in Greek. Models for oratory and rhetoric were Quintilian, whose *Institutio oratoria* had been rediscovered in Saint Gallen by Poggio in 1416, and especially Cicero in Latin, and Aristotle, Hermogenes and Dionysius of Halicarnassus in Greek. In the field of

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<sup>30</sup> Grendler, *Schooling in Renaissance Italy*, p.196.

<sup>31</sup> Grafton and Jardine, 'The School of Guarino', pp.23-25.

<sup>32</sup> Witt, *In the Footsteps of the Ancients*, p.476.

<sup>33</sup> Venturini, *Nuovi accertamenti su Vittorino*, pp.135-136.



history, meanwhile, the Romans Livy, Sallust, Caesar and Valerius Maximus were taught alongside their Greek counterparts Plutarch, Thucydides, Xenophon, Apollonius of Rhodes and Arrian. Virgil and Cicero inevitably occupied positions of prominence. *De oratore*, *Brutus* and some letters, as was invariably the case in humanist schools at this time in the wake of the rediscovery of a large body of Cicero's works at Lodi in 1421, represented core texts.<sup>34</sup> For instruction in philosophy and ethics students at the Giocosa read Aristotle, Plato, Cicero and Seneca while religious education was based on the Bible and the Church Fathers.<sup>35</sup> For arithmetic and geometry Euclid was a central figure while the teaching of astronomy and music had its roots in a wide variety of sources.<sup>36</sup>

The strong presence of Greek classical writers in this programme, alongside their more familiar Latin counterparts, indicate that Hellenist studies were an important part of the curriculum at the Giocosa.<sup>37</sup> The study of Greek had gradually gained momentum in Italy since Manuel Chrysoloras (c.1355-1415) was brought to Florence in 1397 by Coluccio Salutati, the chancellor of the city. It was during his three years in Florence that Chrysoloras wrote the *Erotemata*, a Greek grammar book subsequently abridged by Guarino, which became the base from which analyses of Homer and Demosthenes were carried out. Inspired by Chrysoloras, Italian scholars such as Guarino himself and Francesco Filelfo spent several years in Constantinople during the early years of the fifteenth century.<sup>38</sup> At the Giocosa Greek was a compulsory part of the syllabus, even for the youngest children, and Woodward notes that Mantua's outstanding reputation as a centre for Greek studies was due to a more thorough and systematic approach than existed anywhere else in Italy in the time of Vittorino.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Grendler, *Schooling in Renaissance Italy*, p.121.

<sup>35</sup> Woodward notes that Vittorino acquired a fine copy of most of Plato's *Dialogues* around 1425. Woodward, *Vittorino da Feltre and Other Humanist Educators*, p.50.

<sup>36</sup> Venturini, *Nuovi accertamenti su Vittorino*, pp.135-137. Grendler suggests that Vittorino was the only great Renaissance pedagogue who had a keen interest in mathematics. Grendler, *Schooling in Renaissance Italy*, p.310.

<sup>37</sup> See Aldo Agazzi, 'L'esperienza della Ca' Giocosa', in *Vittorino da Feltre e la sua scuola: umanesimo, pedagogia, arti*, pp.55-93, p.74.

<sup>38</sup> On Chrysoloras and his influence on Italian humanists see Grendler, *Schooling in Renaissance Italy*, pp.124-125.

<sup>39</sup> Woodward, *Vittorino da Feltre and Other Humanist Educators*, p.54.

For his students Vittorino represented a high example of moral and religious life and this was reflected by the emphasis he placed on ethics in his teaching of the writers of antiquity. Vittorino's was an example of the arms and letters education considered essential for future rulers and officials, and he constantly looked to cultivate in his charges a sense of responsibility which would be invaluable in later life. A typical example of the restraint which Vittorino hoped to instil in his students is a fitness programme which he devised for the young Lodovico, who as a child was afflicted by obesity. Enforced moderation at the table, coupled with a vigorous programme of physical education, taught the young prince a valuable lesson in self-restraint. More importantly, a healthy and able body was particularly crucial for anyone harbouring ambitions of employment as a *condottiere*, or mercenary soldier, a career in which Lodovico later distinguished himself.<sup>40</sup>

During his lifetime Vittorino also attracted to Mantua from time to time some established teachers in a variety of disciplines. Grammar teachers included Guglielmo da Caravaggio and Bartolomeo Alboino della Volta, while George of Trebizond and Theodor Gaza (c.1400-1475) were recruited to teach Greek, in 1431 and 1441 respectively. Gradually, as Vittorino advanced in years, he distributed much of the teaching work of the Giocosa among the young scholars who had begun to emerge from the school. The following sections will examine some of the personalities who matured under Vittorino's guidance, together with the Gonzaga children whom he taught and who, one has the impression, received no special treatment from their teacher.

### The Gonzaga Children and Other Students

In his *De vita Victorini Feltrensis*, Prendilacqua describes at length and in fond detail Vittorino's liberality, discipline, humour and affection for his charges, who came from all over Italy and further afield.<sup>41</sup> Vittorio Rossi writes of princes such as Lodovico Gonzaga and Federico da Montefeltro emerging from the Casa Giocosa,

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<sup>40</sup> See Faccioli, *Mantova. Le Lettere. I*, pp.23-24. See also Rodolfo Signorini, '<<Manzare poco, bere aqua asai et dormire manco>>: Suggestimenti Congressetici vittoriniani di Ludovico II Gonzaga al figlio Gianfrancesco e un sospetto pitagorico' in *Vittorino da Feltre e la sua scuola: umanesimo, pedagogia, arti*, pp.115-148.

<sup>41</sup> See extracts in Faccioli, *Mantova. Le Lettere. I*, pp.29-31.



wise, virtuous and protectors of arts and letters.<sup>42</sup> But Vittorino's charges were by no means all the sons of princes. They hailed instead from a range of social classes, and admission was based on ability as much as it was on wealth. Having no children of his own, Vittorino charitably chose to reinvest much of his own modest wealth in the education of able children from less privileged backgrounds. Most of those who completed their studies at the Giocosa went on to find employment as notaries, secretaries, teachers and lawyers, many in the Mantuan administration.

Although it may be impossible to gauge the authenticity of contemporary accounts, it would appear that Lodovico and the other Gonzaga children excelled under the guidance of Vittorino.<sup>43</sup> Lodovico himself was eleven years old when Vittorino arrived and had therefore probably already completed his elementary education. At the Giocosa Lodovico advanced his knowledge of the subjects in the humanist programme and developed academic interests which he carried into adulthood and which justifiably led to him being portrayed as a wise and educated ruler. Carlo was six years old when Vittorino arrived. Though later disgraced and vanquished by Lodovico, Carlo is reported to have been well versed in letters, due in no small part to the fifteen years or so he studied at the Giocosa, and was himself a capable if somewhat unreliable *condottiere* until his untimely death in exile in 1456.<sup>44</sup> The most academically distinguished of all the Gonzaga children appears to have been Gianlucido.<sup>45</sup> As a child he is reported to have known the *Aeneid* off by heart and, aged only thirteen, he composed a poem in Latin comprising two hundred verses and describing Emperor Sigismund's entry into Mantua in 1433, a recital of which greatly impressed the humanist Ambrogio Traversari (1356-1439) during a visit to the school.<sup>46</sup> A year later, according to the same Traversari, the precocious Gianlucido confirmed his predilection in mathematics by adding two propositions to the geometry of Euclid which, as has been mentioned, was taught by Vittorino.

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<sup>42</sup> Vittorio Rossi, *Storia letteraria d'Italia. Il Quattrocento. Ristampa dell'ed. 1933 riveduta e corretta con aggiornamento a cura di Rossella Bessi*. (Padua: Piccin Nuova Libreria, 1992), p.62.

<sup>43</sup> Faccioli, *Mantova. Le Lettere. II*, pp.23-28.

<sup>44</sup> On Carlo Gonzaga see Ward Swain, 'The wages of peace' and Mazzoldi, *Mantova. La Storia. II*, pp.7-13.

<sup>45</sup> On Gianlucido and the other Gonzaga children at the Giocosa see Faccioli, *Mantova. Le Lettere. II*, pp.24-28.

<sup>46</sup> For an Italian translation of this account by Traversari see Faccioli, *Mantova. Le Lettere. II*, pp.24-25.

When he left the Giocosa in 1438 Gianlucido moved to Pavia where he continued his studies and read Greek under Francesco Filelfo, before dying in 1448 at the early age of twenty-seven. Alessandro probably entered the Giocosa around the age of four in 1431 and appears to have remained there until after Vittorino's death in 1446. Reports of a passion for letters and great religious devotion suggest he was profoundly influenced by Vittorino during his formative years. Barbara of Brandenburg, betrothed to Lodovico as a child, arrived in Mantua in 1433 aged only twelve and she too benefitted from a humanist education at the Giocosa. Of Lodovico's sisters we hear that Margherita, who married another cultured prince in Guarino's pupil Leonello d'Este (1407-1450, marchese 1441-1450) and who died in 1439 aged only 21, was very competent in both Latin and Greek, while in 1436 Cecilia, aged only ten, was the next Gonzaga child to impress Traversari, on this occasion with the quality of her Greek, which by the humanist's own admission made him feel ashamed.<sup>47</sup> Cecilia, like Margherita and Gianlucido, died early, in 1451, aged only 25, by which time she had entered a convent. It was with the future marchese, however, that Vittorino had most scope to put his teaching into practice.

As well as Lodovico Gonzaga, two other *condottiere*-princes emerged from Vittorino's school. Federico da Montefeltro of Urbino came under the guidance of Vittorino somewhat by chance, given that at the age of 12 he was sent to Mantua as a hostage to guarantee a peace agreement reached by his father Guidantonio (1378-1443, Count of Urbino 1403-1443) and Pope Eugenius IV.<sup>48</sup> Though he spent only two years at the Giocosa, Federico remained profoundly influenced by Vittorino. As well as sponsoring Prendilacqua's *De vita Victorini Feltrensis*, Federico commissioned from Justus of Ghent (1410-1480), his court artist in Urbino, a portrait of Vittorino (Fig.23), now in the Louvre, which he placed in his study alongside those of the great literary figures of antiquity.<sup>49</sup> A year after the arrival of the adolescent Federico, the *signore* of Faenza and Imola Guidantonio Manfredi (1407-1448), who was a cousin of Gianfrancesco Gonzaga, sent his five-year old

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<sup>47</sup> For these comments see Alessandro Dini-Traversari, *Ambrogio Traversari e i suoi tempi* (Florence: Seeber, 1912), pp.73-74. For an Italian translation of the letter see Faccioli, *Mantova. Le Lettere. II*, pp.16-17.

<sup>48</sup> On Federico da Montefeltro see W.Tommasoli, *La vita di Federico da Montefeltro* (Urbino: Argalia, 1978).

<sup>49</sup> Venturini, *Nuovi accertamenti su Vittorino*, pp.216-217.



son Taddeo (1431-c.1486) to receive his early education from Vittorino.<sup>50</sup> The young Taddeo stayed in Mantua for four years before returning to Faenza at the age of nine.<sup>51</sup> Thus while Federico spent in Mantua what were probably two crucial years of his education at an impressionable age, Taddeo could not have gained from Vittorino anything other than a solid basis upon which to build.



Fig.23: Justus of Ghent, Portrait of Vittorino da Feltria

Several of the prototype competent and docile courtiers mentioned by Jardine and Grafton in relation to Guarino's school seem to have been absorbed by the Mantuan court after graduating from the *Giocosa*.<sup>52</sup> The fact that many who went on to dedicate their careers to the service of Lodovico had often been classmates of the marchese from an early age testifies to lasting bonds of trust and friendship nurtured in Vittorino's school. Carlo Brognolo (1416-1489) was one such figure.<sup>53</sup> Son of Marco Brognolo, who from at least 1425 had been *massaro delle entrate* for

<sup>50</sup> On Taddeo Manfredi of Imola see Piero Zama, *I Manfredi: Signori di Faenza* (Milan: Gastoldi, 1955), pp.194-223.

<sup>51</sup> Venturini, *Nuovi accertamenti su Vittorino*, p.268.

<sup>52</sup> See note 31, p.121 above.

<sup>53</sup> On the life of Carlo Brognolo see Giuseppina Eramo e Rodolfo Signorini, 'La << luculenti oratio >> di Carlo Brognoli' in *Vittorino da Feltria e la sua scuola: umanesimo, pedagogia, arti*, pp.313-343; Venturini, *Nuovi accertamenti su Vittorino*, p.213.

Gianfrancesco, during Lodovico's reign Carlo carried out diplomatic duties in several cities, including Faenza, Ferrara, Verona, Vicenza and Venice. Well versed in letters, loyal and, it would seem, an able and persuasive orator and negotiator, Lodovico knew he could count on Brognolo to represent him efficiently and faithfully. Carlo's competence in Latin can be seen from an oration commissioned from him by the Marchese Gianfrancesco in 1440 in recognition of the outgoing *podestà* Sceva della Corte, pronounced before the entire court and his venerable old teacher.<sup>54</sup> During his long career in the service of three marchesi, Brognolo secured for his family and descendants a high level of social prestige and economic wellbeing.<sup>55</sup>

Carlo Brognolo's brother-in-law, Gabriele Crema (d.1466), was another student at the Giocosa who went on to serve Lodovico. The marchese had probably finished his studies by the time Gabriele enrolled, presumably in the early 1430s.<sup>56</sup> The Crema family was an exception among privileged land-owning families in Mantua in that its roots in the town dated back to the era of the *comune*.<sup>57</sup> Following in the footsteps of his father Simone (c.1375-1441), who had been a courtier in the time of Gianfrancesco Gonzaga, Gabriele was given a series of responsibilities by Lodovico during the 1450s. After being *fattore generale* in 1451 and *consigliere del consorzio* in 1453, he went on to hold the office of *podestà* first in Luzzara from 1453 to 1454 and then in Viadana between 1455 and 1460. Described in Prendilacqua's biography of Vittorino as possessing a *talento per gli studi letterarii* and *virtuosi costumi*, in 1458 Lodovico entrusted Gabriele with the duty of accompanying his son Gianfrancesco to the Imperial Court, and in 1462 he appears to have spent some time in the entourage of Cardinal Francesco Gonzaga in Rome.<sup>58</sup> No surviving sources tell us when Gabriele was born but he was presumably in his forties at the most when he died in 1466. An eloquent testimony to Gabriele's bent for letters is a sonnet he dedicated to the Marchese Gianfrancesco.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Eramo e Signorini, 'La << *luculenta oratio* >> di Carlo Brognolo?.

<sup>55</sup> Isabella Lazzarini, *Fra un principe e altri stati. Relazioni di potere e forme di servizio a Mantova nell'età di Ludovico Gonzaga*, (Rome: Istituto storico italiano per il medioevo, 1996), pp.221-226.

<sup>56</sup> Venturini, *Nuovi accertamenti su Vittorino*, p.226.

<sup>57</sup> On the Crema family see Lazzarini, *Fra un principe e altri stati*, p.329.

<sup>58</sup> Prendilacqua cited in Faccioli, *Mantova. Le Lettere. I*, p.31.

<sup>59</sup> Faccioli, *Mantova. Le Lettere. I*, p.31.



Perhaps the most colourful of Lodovico's courtiers to emerge from the Giocosa was Bartolomeo Manfredi (1410/20-1478), subsequently known as Bartolomeo *dell'Orologio*, in recognition of the clock which he designed and built onto the tower erected by Luca Fancelli in Piazza Erbe (Fig.24).<sup>60</sup> His remarkable clock was the subject of one of the very earliest books printed in Mantua, written by Pietro Adamo de' Micheli (c.1440-1481) and produced by the Puzbach printing press in 1473.<sup>61</sup> During his time under Vittorino the young Bartolomeo excelled in mathematics, music and astronomy. Lodovico would learn to put to good use Bartolomeo's talents as engineer, astronomer and even astrologer. In contemporary documents, indeed, Bartolomeo is often referred to as Lodovico's *astrologo di corte* and Lodovico, superstitious like many in his time, would consult him for the most propitious time of departure before setting out on any journey or taking any important decision relating to government.<sup>62</sup> Other astrologers frequently present at Lodovico's court were Antonio da Camera and Giovanni di Cattaneo.<sup>63</sup> His wide range of interests also led Manfredi to write prolifically about his work and his studies. As well as the mathematical works *Arismetica compilata* and *De geometricis propositionibus*, he dabbled in musicology and produced the *Aritmetica Boethii*, the *Musica Boethii compilata* and the *Quintus liber de vi armonie*.<sup>64</sup> This range of interests and abilities, nurtured in the Giocosa and later brought to fruition under the patronage of Lodovico, must have kept the marchese occupied and fascinated on many occasions. In a letter addressed to Lodovico of 29 June 1473, Manfredi explains how his clock can be used to read not only the time and the positions of the sun and the moon, but also to find out the best times to be bled, take medicine, carry out surgical operations and plant crops.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> See Costante Berselli, 'L'orologio pubblico di Mantova', *Civiltà Mantovana*, n.4, (1966), 46-58.

<sup>61</sup> See pp.235-240 below.

<sup>62</sup> Stefano Davari, 'Notizie storiche intorno al pubblico orologio di Mantova', *Atti e Memorie della Reale Accademia Virgiliana*, (1882-1884), 211-228, p.217; Ferdinando Gabotto, 'B.Manfredi e l'astrologia alla corte di Mantova', *Letteratura di Torino*, (1891), p.6; Attilio Portioli, *I Gonzaga ai bagni di Petriolo di Siena nel 1460 e 1461* (Mantua: Eredi Segna, 1869), p.4.

<sup>63</sup> Gabotto, 'B.Manfredi e l'astrologia alla corte di Mantova', p.21.

<sup>64</sup> See Rodolfo Signorini, *In traccia del Magister Pelicanus: Mostra documentaria su Vittorino da Feltre* (Mantua: Cassa di Risparmio di Verona, Vicenza e Belluno, 1979), pp.92-93.

<sup>65</sup> Letter Bartolomeo Manfredi to Marchese Lodovico Gonzaga, Mantua, 29 June 1473 (ASMn AG, b. 2416 c. 16). Published in Rodolfo Signorini, *L'orologio astrologico di Mantova* (Bozzolo: Arti grafiche Chiribella, 1992).



Fig.24: Mantua, Clock by Bartolomeo Manfredi

Not all of those who completed their studies at the Giocosa were absorbed automatically by the Mantuan state apparatus. Many went on to enjoy careers in the various courts and cities of the peninsula, as humanists, clerics, lawyers, doctors, *condottieri* and teachers. One of the most notable graduates from the school was Francesco Prendilacqua (1425/30-after 1509) who, as already mentioned, was the author of the *De vita Victorini Feltrensis*.<sup>66</sup> Born in Mantua into a poor family of Veronese origin, Prendilacqua is an example of the children supported by Vittorino himself.<sup>67</sup> Following the completion of his studies in the late 1440s, Prendilacqua was employed as secretary by Alessandro Gonzaga, who was around the same age.<sup>68</sup> During their time together at the Giocosa in childhood a strong bond of friendship must have developed between Prendilacqua and Alessandro, as has been noted was the case between Carlo Brognolo and Lodovico. Following Alessandro's premature death in 1466, Lodovico secured for Prendilacqua a position at the court of Federico da Montefeltro. No doubt inspired in part by Federico's fond reminiscences of his Mantuan days, it was during his time in Urbino that Prendilacqua composed his biography of Vittorino, which he dedicated to his new patron in the early 1470s. Other works by Prendilacqua include a memorable *Gratiarum actio*, composed while still at the Giocosa in recognition of the heroic efforts of his classmates who saved him from drowning in the Mincio during a sailing excursion, and an *Oratio consolatoria* dedicated to Barbara of Brandenburg shortly after the death of her daughter Dorotea in 1467. Faccioli reports that

<sup>66</sup> See p.119 above.

<sup>67</sup> Venturini, *Nuovi accertamenti su Vittorino*, p.222.

<sup>68</sup> Rodolfo Signorini, 'Francesco Prendilacqua salvato dalle acque. Avventura a lieto fine di un allievo di Vittorino da Feltre', *Atti e Memorie dell'Accademia Nazionale Virgiliana*, nuova serie, LI, (1984), 117-126, p.117.



Prendilacqua held the offices of *podestà* of Mantua in 1465 and *vicario* of Castelgoffredo in 1477, the year in which he appears to have returned to Mantua from Urbino.<sup>69</sup> Prendilacqua saw out the rest of his long life in Mantua, in the service of Lodovico, Federico and Francesco, and probably died well into his eighties around 1510.

A series of other humanists who made a name for themselves in the Quattrocento owed their early development to the teaching of Vittorino. Francesco Castiglione of Cercina (1410/20-1484), already noted for his biography of Vittorino, was present at the Giocosa for the last eight years of the pedagogue's life.<sup>70</sup> Castiglione then returned to Florence where he taught Greek and, following his entry into the Church, became dean of the faculty of Theology at the studium. He also earned renown as a translator of several Aristotelian texts and formed close ties with the intellectual circle of Marsilio Ficino.

Of Vittorino's early students in Mantua one of the most distinguished was Gregorio Correr of Venice (1409-1464).<sup>71</sup> Gregorio was 17 years old by the time he came to Mantua and already well educated so it must be assumed that his two-year experience at the Giocosa was akin to that which he would have had at a university of the time. During his time in Mantua the precocious Correr produced some notable works in Latin. His *Progne*, a tragedy inspired by his reading of Seneca and Ovid, was followed by the *Quomodus educari debeant pueri et erudiri*, a treatise dedicated to his brother Andrea on the eve of his wedding, and the *Hymnus ad pueros et vergines*, dedicated to Pope Martin V.<sup>72</sup> Like many humanists, Correr entered the Church and enjoyed an illustrious career as an official in the Curia, a career which saw him hold a series of offices in Basel, Florence, Bologna and Ferrara during the 1430s. It was probably when the Curia took up residence in Florence in 1434 that Correr first made contact with the circle of Bruni, Traversari, Niccoli and Tortelli.<sup>73</sup> In 1440 Correr engaged in a polemical exchange, from which he was to emerge with the upper hand, with Poggio Bracciolini, who had recently expressed his

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<sup>69</sup> Faccioli, *Mantova. Le Lettere*. I, p.28.

<sup>70</sup> On Castiglione see Venturini, *Nuovi accertamenti su Vittorino*, p.220.

<sup>71</sup> On Correr see Paolo Prete 'Correr Gregorio' in *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani*, vol. 29, pp.497-500 and Laura Casarsa, *Contributi per la biografia di Gregorio Correr* (Udine: Del Bianco, 1979).

<sup>72</sup> Prete, 'Correr Gregorio', p.497.

<sup>73</sup> Prete, 'Correr Gregorio', p.498.

contempt for the Venetian nobility in his *Dialogus de nobilitate*.<sup>74</sup> In 1443 Gregorio left Rome to follow his uncle, the Cardinal Antonio Correr (1359-1445), to the monastery of San Giovanni Battista in Padua. While in Padua Correr continued his studies at the university and established ties with humanists there. In the same year, encouraged by Vittorino, he composed the *Epistola ad Ceciliam virginem de fugiendo saeculo*, dedicated to Cecilia Gonzaga, alongside whom he had studied at the Giocosa and who was about to become a nun.<sup>75</sup> Following the death of his uncle in 1445 Gregorio returned to Rome, where he enjoyed the protection of Cardinal Domenico Capranica (1400-1458) before definitively leaving the Curia in 1448 to move to the monastery of San Zeno in Verona, where he also contributed to the work going on in the adjoining basilica and commissioned from Mantegna the altar-piece still housed there.<sup>76</sup> Ever keen to secure a bishopric in the Veneto, Gregorio suffered a series of disappointments before finally being nominated *patriarch* of Venice in October 1464 by Paul II. The following month, however, Gregorio died. Having studied together at the Giocosa, Correr and Lodovico maintained some level of correspondence through the years, albeit infrequent. Correr was also influential, it would appear, in convincing the hesitant Andrea Mantegna eventually to move Mantua in 1459.<sup>77</sup>

Several other less renowned but nonetheless significant humanists of the Quattrocento spent periods of their education at the Giocosa. One of these was Antonio Beccaria of Verona (1400-1474), already in his thirties and a cleric by the time he came to Mantua, where under the guidance of Vittorino he improved his knowledge of Latin and Greek.<sup>78</sup> During his time in Mantua Beccaria composed his *Oratio in Terentium* and developed his skills as a Latin poet and translator of Greek.

<sup>74</sup> Casarsa, *Contributi per la vita di Gregorio Correr*, p.47.

<sup>75</sup> Prete, 'Correr Gregorio', p.498.

<sup>76</sup> Gian Paolo Marchi, 'Discepoli di Vittorino da Feltre tra Mantova e Verona' in *Vittorino da Feltre e la sua scuola: umanesimo, pedagogia, arti*, pp.285-298, pp.290-291.

<sup>77</sup> It was from Verona, where he had been working on an altarpiece for the church of San Zeno, that Mantegna came to Mantua. See Lionello Puppi, 'Il trasferimento del Mantegna a Mantova. Una data per l'incontro con l'Alberti' in *Il Sant'Andrea di Mantova e Leon Battista Alberti. Atti del convegno di studi organizzato dalla città di Mantova con la collaborazione dell'Accademia Virgiliana nel quinto centenario della Basilica di Sant'Andrea e della morte dell'Alberti 1472-1972, Mantova 25-26 aprile 1972* (Mantua: Biblioteca Comunale di Mantova, 1974), pp.205-207.

<sup>78</sup> On Beccaria see G.Ronconi, 'Il grammatico Antonio Beccaria difensore della poesia e la sua *Oratio in Terentium*' in *Medioevo e Rinascimento veneto con altri studi in onore di Lino Lazzarini* (Padua: Antenore, 1979), pp.397-426; Venturini, *Nuovi accertamenti su Vittorino*, p.193; Cesare Vasoli, 'Beccaria Antonio' in *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani*, vol.VII, 1965, pp.447-449.



Shortly after concluding his studies in Mantua, in 1438 or 1439, Beccaria moved to the court of the Duke of Gloucester, brother of King Henry V (1486-1422, King 1413-1422) and literary patron, where he stayed until around 1446.<sup>79</sup> Once back in Italy he entered into the service of Ermolao Barbaro senior (1454-1493/95), Bishop of Verona and literary patron, and cultivated relations with leading scholars such as Francesco Filelfo.

Another humanist who came to Mantua to consolidate his studies in Greek was Basinio Basini (1425-1457), born in Parma to a family of Mantuan origin.<sup>80</sup> Basinio was particularly interested in the teachings of Theodore Gaza, whom he followed to the school of Guarino in Ferrara in 1446 after the death of Vittorino. Basinio stayed in Ferrara for four years, where he became a leading literary figure at the d'Este court, before moving to the court of Sigismondo Malatesta in Rimini. Basinio thus contributed to the cultural life of the court of Sigismondo during the early 1450s, a golden age for Rimini in which Leon Battista Alberti, Agostino di Duccio, Piero della Francesca and Matteo Pasti (1420-1467/68) also benefitted from the patronage of Sigismondo.<sup>81</sup> His main legacy was the epic poem *Hesperis*, comprising some eighteen-thousand lines in thirteen books dedicated to his Malatesta patron, and it was in Rimini that Basinio died at the early age of 32.<sup>82</sup> Niccolò Perotti of Fano (1429-1480), author of several commentaries and treatises as well as translations of Greek authors, came to the Giocosa around 1443.<sup>83</sup> Two years later he moved to the school of Guarino in Ferrara before spending seven years in the service of Cardinal Bessarion (1403-1472), who was undoubtedly instrumental in securing for Niccolò the favour of Pius II, by whom he was nominated bishop of Siponto in 1458. Niccolò was part of the Roman intellectual circle which included Lorenzo Valla (c.1407-1459), Pier Candido Decembrio (1399-1477), Gaza and Tortelli and contributed vociferously to the debate between Platonists and Aristotelians. Like Correr, he also engaged in an exchange of invective with Poggio Bracciolini in 1454.

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<sup>79</sup> Vasoli, 'Beccaria Antonio', pp.447-448.

<sup>80</sup> On Basinio see Augusto Campana, 'Basinio da Parma' in *Dizionario biografico degli italiani*, vol.vii, 1965, pp.89-98; Venturini, *Nuovi accertamenti su Vittorino*, p.198.

<sup>81</sup> Campana, 'Basinio da Parma', p.91. On Rimini and the court of Sigismondo see M.Tabanelli, *Sigismondo Pandolfo Malatesta: Signore del medioevo e del rinascimento* (Faenza: Fratelli Lega, 1977).

<sup>82</sup> Campana, 'Basinio da Parma', pp.93-94.

<sup>83</sup> On Perotti see Venturini, *Nuovi accertamenti su Vittorino*, pp.258-259.

Before considering the graduates of the Giocosa who contributed to the next generation of pedagogues, a few other figures educated by Vittorino are worthy of note. Lodovico della Torre (d. post 1480), of a noble Mantuan family, studied under Vittorino during the 1430s before reading law in Ferrara.<sup>84</sup> During a long career Lodovico held a series of high profile legal positions and frequently corresponded with both Gianfrancesco and Lodovico Gonzaga. Guarino Veronese, despite the fact that his own school in Ferrara was fully operational at the time, sent one of his younger sons, Gregorio Guarini, (1429/30-1461/62) to study in Mantua around 1439. Prendilacqua, in his biography of Vittorino, wrote that Vittorino taught Gregorio to pay off an outstanding debt to his fellow pedagogue.<sup>85</sup> Following his departure from Mantua around 1445 Gregorio returned to Ferrara, where he continued his education until 1449. After a brief period of study under Francesco Barbaro in Venice he again went back to Ferrara, where he completed his studies in 1452. Gregorio was practising medicine in Verona when he died in his early thirties.<sup>86</sup> Several of Vittorino's pupils are reported to have come from other countries. A letter by Decembrio mentions a certain Battista of Valencia, a Spanish humanist who studied Greek and Latin under Vittorino.<sup>87</sup> Two graduates of the Giocosa who went on to earn a living as *condottieri* are also worthy of mention. Gianfrancesco Bagni of Mantua (?-post 1480) served Carlo Gonzaga and Francesco Sforza while Cosimo Migliorati of Fermo (1426-1442/44), nephew of the marchesa Paola Malatesta, was killed in an unsuccessful attempt to free Fermo from the grip of Francesco Sforza while fighting in the Papal forces under the command of Nicolò Piccinino.<sup>88</sup>

While several of Vittorino's students went on to become his successors in Mantua during the reign of Lodovico, others who emerged from the Giocosa filled teaching positions elsewhere. Giampietro Vitali of Avenza (1400/1410-1457), often referred to as Giampietro of Lucca, studied under Guarino in Ferrara before coming to Mantua around 1440. Between 1444 and 1457 he taught in Verona, in

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<sup>84</sup> On Lodovico della Torre see Venturini, *Nuovi accertamenti su Vittorino*, pp.252.

<sup>85</sup> See Garin, *Il pensiero pedagogico dell'umanesimo*, pp.588-589; Venturini, *Nuovi accertamenti su Vittorino*, p.64.

<sup>86</sup> Venturini, *Nuovi accertamenti su Vittorino*, p.248.

<sup>87</sup> Letter cited by Venturini, *Nuovi accertamenti su Vittorino*, p.202.

<sup>88</sup> On Bagni and Migliorati see Venturini, *Nuovi accertamenti su Vittorino*, p.214.



Venice and in Lucca.<sup>89</sup> Baldo Martorelli of Ancona, meanwhile, went on to become tutor at the courts of Francesco Sforza in Milan and King Alfonso I of Naples, while others probably filled teaching positions in smaller centres in the Mantuan territory and elsewhere.<sup>90</sup>

### Patronage of the School by Lodovico

After the death of Vittorino in February 1446 Lodovico, his own family now expanding, continued to finance schooling in Mantua. The Casa Giocosa had become a school of great renown and had received the seal of imperial recognition as a *studio pubblico* on four occasions, in 1433, in 1439, in 1442 and in 1445, a status which placed the school on a par with the universities of Bologna and Paris. Nonetheless, as Agazzi notes, student numbers halved after the death of Vittorino and the decline was probably gradual until around 1460, by which time the numbers of those studying in Mantua appear to have fallen sharply and tutors seem to have been concerned only with the education of the Gonzaga children and those of Lodovico's courtiers.<sup>91</sup> Vittorino, one of the most illustrious pedagogues of his generation, had been the main reason why noble families from all of Italy and beyond had sent their children to be educated at the Giocosa. The new generation of teachers in Mantua was constituted for the most part by *discepoli* of Vittorino, guaranteeing a high degree of continuity. While it was inevitable that with the passing of the old master the school would lose some of its prestige, it must also be recognised his successors had been well groomed to succeed him.

From 1446 to 1449 Jacopo da San Cassano (c.1400-1452/56) was in charge of the school and the education of the Gonzaga children.<sup>92</sup> Jacopo himself had studied at the Giocosa, possibly since as early as the mid-1420s, and must have been one of Vittorino's foremost protégés and earliest colleagues, given that he inherited much of his old teacher's library. Given his advanced years, it is highly likely that Jacopo

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<sup>89</sup> On Vitali see Venturini, *Nuovi accertamenti su Vittorino*, p.234.

<sup>90</sup> On Martorelli see Venturini, *Nuovi accertamenti su Vittorino*, p.200. The presence of Vittorino in Mantua appears to have given impetus to schools throughout the state. In a letter of 1460, for example, the podestà of Ostiglia, writing on behalf of the men of the village, asks for the help of Lodovico to find a more able tutor for their children. Letter Rodiano *podestà* of Ostiglia to Lodovico, 14 May 1460. Cited by Davari, *Notizie storiche intorno allo studio pubblico*, p.11. I have been unable to find this document in the Archivio Gonzaga.

<sup>91</sup> Agazzi, 'L'esperienza della Ca' Giocosa', p.87.

<sup>92</sup> On Jacopo see Marco Palma, 'Cassiano Iacopo' in *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani*, vol.XXI, 1978, pp.478-479; Venturini, *Nuovi accertamenti su Vittorino*, p.249.

carried out a considerable amount of teaching while Vittorino was still alive. A close friend of Francesco Filelfo, in 1449 Jacopo, having taken religious orders around 1435, left Mantua for Rome to take up a position in the chancery of Nicholas V, armed with a glowing letter of presentation written by Lodovico and dated 7 June 1449.<sup>93</sup> Having already distinguished himself as an eager collector of manuscripts, in Rome Jacopo earned renown as a Hellenist and as a translator and was commissioned by the Pope to translate the works of Archimedes. Cesare Vasoli notes that Jacopo was instrumental in the revival of Archimedes' works.<sup>94</sup> Nor does he appear to have lost the friendship and respect of Lodovico after his move to Rome; in a letter of 3 April 1451 we find the marchese recommending Jacopo to Cardinal Colonna, a document which also confirms that he held the position of tutor in Mantua for three years.<sup>95</sup>

Jacopo was replaced in the summer of 1449 by Ognibene Bonisoli of Lonigo (1412-1474), a major figure of humanism in Vicenza noted for his abilities as grammarian, translator and commentator as well as teacher.<sup>96</sup> Lodovico had been trying to entice Ognibene to Mantua for the best part of a year and perhaps as early as the summer of 1448 Ognibene had already given his word that he would eventually come to Mantua, given that on 10 July 1448 Bianca Maria Sforza, the Duchess of Milan, felt obliged to ask the marchesa Barbara for the services of Ognibene to teach the young Galeazzo Maria.<sup>97</sup> A free passage for books granted to Ognibene on 11 June 1449 was probably connected with his move to Mantua, and in a letter from Revere of 31 July Lodovico talks of a house for the new teacher.<sup>98</sup> Perhaps a little unkindly to Jacopo, Agazzi claims that the school regained its prestige only after the arrival of his successor.<sup>99</sup> Ognibene had studied alongside Lodovico at the Giocosa between 1423 and 1433 and the marchese was particularly anxious to lure his old classmate back to Mantua following the

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<sup>93</sup> Faccioli, *Mantova. Le Lettere. I*, p.33; Palma, 'Cassiano Iacopo', p.478.

<sup>94</sup> Cesare Vasoli, 'Vittorino da Feltre e la formazione umanistica dell'uomo' in *Vittorino da Feltre e la sua scuola: umanesimo, pedagogia, arti*, pp.13-33, p.18.

<sup>95</sup> Letter Lodovico to Cardinal Colonna, Mantua, 3 April 1451 (ASMn AG, b. 2883 Lib. 15 f. 43r).

<sup>96</sup> On Ognibene see Grendler, *Schooling in Renaissance Italy*, pp.133-135.

<sup>97</sup> Letter Duchess Bianca Maria Sforza to Marchesa Barbara, Milan, 10 July 1448 (ASMn AG, b. 1607 c. 56).

<sup>98</sup> Letter Lodovico to Marchesa Barbara, Revere, 31 July 1449 (ASMn AG, b. 2882 Lib 12). See also Stefano Davari, *Notizie storiche intorno allo studio pubblico ed ai maestri dei sec. XV e XVI che tennero scuola in Mantova* (Mantua: Eredi Segna, 1876), pp.8-9.

<sup>99</sup> Agazzi, 'L'esperienza della Ca' Giocosa', p.87.



departure of Jacopo, bombarding the *comune* of Vicenza and Ognibene himself with persuasive letters.<sup>100</sup> During the 1440s Ognibene had established himself as a capable teacher in Treviso and in Vicenza and, as has been noted by Sabbadini, the lure of working for his old friend Lodovico Gonzaga was probably decisive in Ognibene's decision to move back to Mantua, despite the strong objections voiced by the governors of Vicenza.<sup>101</sup> Like Vittorino, by whom he was indubitably profoundly influenced, Ognibene was a man of devout religious integrity who followed his old tutor's lead by personally supporting through their schooling able boys from poor families.<sup>102</sup> In another respect, however, Ognibene differed from his predecessor and former teacher: he wrote and edited extensively throughout his career.<sup>103</sup> While in Mantua, Ognibene compiled a grammar book which was used by at least two generations of Gonzaga children. As late as 1473, some twenty years after Ognibene had left Mantua, Federico Gonzaga, having lost the original book, contacted Ognibene to arrange for a new copy to be made. Ognibene's delightful personality comes to the fore in the letter Federico wrote to his father on 1 May:

[...] Ugnabene che fu mio maistro a scola me fece altra volta regole per insegnare a putti e me ne lasso copia la quale è persa, e per haverne de novo copia scrissi piú di fa a decto Ugnabene che volesse farmela havere, e me rispose non se trovava haverne copia alcuna, ma che ben le havea a memoria e pigliaria il tempo de metterle in scritto e me le mandaria. E cussì adesso me le manda per el nepote che fu mio compagno, el qual vene per visitarme e per darne decte regole [...]<sup>104</sup>

Ognibene presided over the school in Mantua for four years before returning to Vicenza in 1453. Grendler suggests that the career of Ognibene typified the way in which humanism spread. Having mastered his subjects and taught the children of the political élite in Mantua during his four years as court tutor, he also worked for several years as an independent master and gave thirty years of service to the

<sup>100</sup> Letters mentioned by Davari, *Notizie storiche intorno allo studio pubblico*, p.8.

<sup>101</sup> Remigio Sabbadini, *Lettere inedite di Ognibene da Lonigo con una breve biografia* (Lonigo, Tipografia Giovanni Gaspari, 1880), p.15.

<sup>102</sup> Venturini, *Nuovi accertamenti su Vittorino*, p.260.

<sup>103</sup> Grendler, *Schooling in Renaissance Italy*, p.134.

<sup>104</sup> Letter Federico Gonzaga to Lodovico Gonzaga, Mantua, 1 May 1473. Published in Alessandro Luzio e Rodolfo Renier, 'I Filelfo e l'umanesimo alla corte dei Gonzaga', *Giornale storico della letteratura italiana*, 16, (1890), 115-217, p.142. Luzio and Renier left no clues as to the location of this letter in the Archivio Gonzaga and I have been unable to locate it.

school of the Vicenza *comune*. His combination of teaching, scholarship and contacts with the powerful, Grendler concludes, did much to facilitate the divulgation of the humanist programme of education in a variety of milieus.<sup>105</sup>

If Ognibene was Vittorino's most accomplished student, the pick of Ognibene's charges was Bartolomeo Sacchi, also known as Il Platina.<sup>106</sup> Just as Vittorino had been succeeded by his *discepoli* Jacopo and Ognibene, so in turn Ognibene was succeeded by Platina. Born in 1421 in Piadena, near Cremona, to a poor family, Platina was a soldier in the forces of Francesco Sforza until 1440, before devoting himself to the study of letters. Portioli suggested that Platina came to Mantua while Vittorino was still alive but historians since Luzio and Renier have been in agreement that his arrival was surely after 1446.<sup>107</sup> Platina took charge of the school when Ognibene left in 1453, assuming responsibility for the education of Lodovico's sons Federico, the future marchese, and Francesco, the future cardinal, and held the position of tutor until 1456, by which time he had developed a determination to go to Constantinople. Around the same time, however, the Greek scholar Argyropolus (1415-1487) moved to Florence, prompting Platina to head instead for Tuscany, where he developed close relations with Cosimo and Piero de' Medici (1418-1469) and the intellectual circles of their city.

In the early 1460s Platina left Florence for Rome with Cardinal Francesco, for whom he may also have briefly been secretary.<sup>108</sup> It must have been very reassuring for Lodovico to know that his son, recently elected to the position though still a mere teenager, was accompanied by someone he could trust to help him find his feet in the political minefield that was the Curia. Once in Rome Platina also found work in Pius II's College of Abbreviators, an institution later disbanded by Paul II. Over zealous criticism of the new pope's repressive actions led to Platina being imprisoned between October 1464 and January 1465, his release being secured

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<sup>105</sup> Grendler, *Schooling in Renaissance Italy*, p.135.

<sup>106</sup> On Platina see Augusto Campana e Paola Medioli Masotti, eds., *Bartolomeo Sacchi il Platina* (Padua: Antenore, 1986).

<sup>107</sup> Bartolomeo Sacchi (il Platina), *Divi Ludovici Marchionis Mantuae Somnium*, ed. by Attilio Portioli (Mantua: Eredi Segna, 1886), pp.10-11; Alessandro Luzio e Rodolfo Renier, 'Il Platina e i Gonzaga', *Giornale storico della letteratura italiana*, volume XIII, (1889), 430-440.

<sup>108</sup> David S. Chambers, 'Il Platina e il Cardinale Francesco Gonzaga' in Campana and Medioli Masotti, eds., *Bartolomeo Sacchi il Platina*, pp.9-19, p.12. Chambers contests the assumption that Platina served as Francesco's secretary.



largely thanks to the intervention of Cardinal Francesco.<sup>109</sup> Platina, meanwhile, had entered into the *Accademia Romana* of Pomponio Leto (1425-1498), where, according to Rossi, he soon became one of the foremost scholars.<sup>110</sup> Facing scathing charges of irreligion and immorality, Platina and his colleagues in the *Accademia* were arrested in February 1468 and imprisoned in Castel Sant'Angelo. Paul II, the Venetian Pietro Barbo, treated classical scholarship with suspicion and contempt but, despite his most determined efforts, he was unable to halt the momentum of the Roman humanists.<sup>111</sup> Platina's imprisonment seems to have lasted until March 1469, his release finally secured thanks in part once again to the efforts of Cardinal Francesco. Platina's controversial personality, as Chambers has noted, probably discouraged Cardinal Francesco from giving the humanist a permanent formal position in his household administration.<sup>112</sup> It was only when Paul II was succeeded in 1471 by Sixtus IV that Platina was able to live and work in Rome without fear of reprisal. The new pope even awarded him a position as a librarian which, together with his responsibilities for the management of the Castel Sant'Angelo archives, brought new wealth and prestige.<sup>113</sup> Such was Platina's status at the court of Sixtus that he was immortalised in a now detached fresco by Melozzo da Forlì (c.1438-1494) depicting the inauguration of the Vatican Library (Fig.25).<sup>114</sup>



Fig.25: Melozzo da Forlì, Portrait of Platina

<sup>109</sup> Chambers, 'Il Platina e il Cardinale Francesco Gonzaga', p.11.

<sup>110</sup> Rossi, *Storia letteraria d'Italia. Il Quattrocento.*, p.480.

<sup>111</sup> On Paul II and his treatment of the humanists of the *Accademia* see Eugenio Garin, 'L'«*accademia*» romana, Pomponio Leto e la congiura', in *Storia della letteratura italiana. Il Quattrocento e l'Ariosto*, ed. by Emilio Cecchi and Natalino Sapegno (Milan: Garzanti, 1966), III, pp.142-158.

<sup>112</sup> Chambers, 'Il Platina e il Cardinale Francesco Gonzaga', pp.15-17.

<sup>113</sup> On Platina and the Vatican Library see Egmont Lee, *Sixtus IV and Men of Letters*, pp. 110-119.

<sup>114</sup> Platina, *Vita di Vittorino da Feltre*, p.vii.

Several works of Platina's extensive corpus were of direct relevance to Lodovico Gonzaga and Mantua. In 1454 or 1455, while he held the position of tutor, he wrote and dedicated to Lodovico the *Divi Ludovici Marchionis Mantuae somnium*.<sup>115</sup> Written in what Portioli describes as elegant Latin, this short work conveys the dialogue of a dream in which Virgil appears to Lodovico, imploring him to initiate a campaign of corrections to his works, an initiative which may well have already been underway at this stage. Despite the fact that Platina was thirty-three or thirty-four years old when he wrote it, this was probably one of his earliest works and must be viewed primarily as a pretext to praise the marchese through the figure of Virgil. More than a decade later, on 9 July 1466, Platina wrote to Lodovico from Rome to announce that he had begun writing his *Historia urbis Mantuae Gonzagaeque familiae*.<sup>116</sup> Based largely on the *Cronaca* by Bonamente Aliprandi (c.1350-1417), Platina's *Historia*, which took him three years to complete, charts the history of Mantua from its origins right up to 1464 and was dedicated to his former pupil and patron Cardinal Francesco Gonzaga.<sup>117</sup> His other major work of relevance to Mantua was the *De vita Victorini Feltrensis commentariolus*, probably composed after he left Florence for Rome.<sup>118</sup> Having arrived in Mantua after 1446, it is highly unlikely that Platina ever met Vittorino. Venturini has suggested that Platina's biography is based largely on those by Prendilacqua and Castiglione, noting many similarities between the texts though not to such an extent that accusations of plagiarism could be levelled against him.<sup>119</sup> It is highly likely, moreover, that Platina took into account information and anecdotes from those of Vittorino's ex-pupils, not least the Gonzaga themselves, with whom he came into contact following his move to Mantua. Also instrumental was the figure of Baldassare Suardo, *discepolo* of Vittorino and close friend of Platina in Rome, to whom he dedicated the work,

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<sup>115</sup> See note 107, p.37 above.

<sup>116</sup> Letter Platina to Lodovico Gonzaga, Rome, 9 July 1466 (ASMn AG, b. 843 c. 241). The work was published again in the seventeenth century: Bartolomeo Sacchi (il Platina), *Historia inchoata Urbis Mantuae et serenissimae familiae Gonzagae (dalle origini al 1464)* (Vienna: Pietro Lambecio, 1675).

<sup>117</sup> Aliprandi's chronicle was published again in the early twentieth century: Bonamente Aliprandi, 'Aliprandina o Cronica de Mantoa dalle origini della città fino all'anno 1414', ed. by E.Orsini Begani, in *Rerum Italicarum Scriptores*, n.s., XIII, (1910), 25-180.

<sup>118</sup> See note 107.

<sup>119</sup> Venturini, *Nuovi accertamenti su Vittorino*, pp.20-23.



while his fervour for historical writing was surely instrumental in his decision to pay tribute to his most illustrious predecessor at the Mantuan school.<sup>120</sup>

As well as *De vita Victorini*, Platina wrote several other works of a biographical nature following his move to Rome. In 1466 he composed a biography of Pius II and, after the completion of the *Historia urbis Mantuae*, his next major project, carried out between 1471 and 1475, was the *Liber de vita Christi et Omnium Pontificum*, which traced the lives of the popes from Saint Peter through to his present employer Sixtus IV.<sup>121</sup> More attention was naturally given to contemporary popes, for whom more information was readily at hand. Unreserved praise for Pius II, Calixtus III and Sixtus IV was in sharp contrast to invective reserved for his tormentor Paul II. Rossi dismisses the work as a paraphrasing of its sources, arguing that only recent popes are thoroughly researched and accorded human qualities, while Luzio and Renier point to similarities with the *Historia urbis Mantuae*.<sup>122</sup> Platina was also the author of two political treatises. On 29 October 1471 he wrote to Lodovico presenting *De principe*, three books written in the house of Cardinal Francesco and dedicated to the future Marchese Federico, in which he discusses the private and public virtues of a prince, how to govern and how to conduct military affairs.<sup>123</sup> A similar work, his *De optimo cive*, though adapted to republican ideals, was dedicated to Lorenzo de' Medici (1449-1492).<sup>124</sup> Both works belong to the humanist effort to rationalise in the form of treatises the political landscape from 1450 onwards, a trend which reached its climax with Niccolò Machiavelli's work, *De principe*.<sup>125</sup> In a series of minor moral treatises Platina also dealt with topics such as love, the contemplative life and virtuous behaviour.

Platina never returned to live in Mantua after he left the position of tutor in 1456 to go to Florence, despite stating in a letter to Barbara of 26 September 1469 his

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<sup>120</sup> Platina, *Vita di Vittorino da Feltre*, p.x. On Suardo see Rodolfo Signorini, 'Baldassare Soardi dedicatorio della <<Vita>> di Vittorino da Feltre del Platina', in Campana and Medioli Masotti, eds., *Bartolomeo Sacchi il Platina*, pp.153-208.

<sup>121</sup> Bartolomeo Sacchi (il Platina), *Liber de vita Christi ac omnium pontificum*, ed. by Giacinto Gaida, (Città di Castello: S.Lapi, 1932).

<sup>122</sup> Rossi, *Storia letteraria d'Italia. Il Quattrocento*, p.304; Luzio e Renier, 'Il Platina e i Gonzaga', p.436.

<sup>123</sup> Bartolomeo Sacchi (il Platina), *De principe*, ed. by Giuseppe Ferraù, (Palermo: Il vespro, 1979).

<sup>124</sup> Bartolomeo Sacchi (il Platina), *De optimo cive*, ed. by F.Battaglia, (Bologna: Zanichelli, 1944).

<sup>125</sup> Platina, *De principe*, p.7.

intention to return to live under the protection of the Gonzaga.<sup>126</sup> He continued, however, to exchange letters on a regular basis with Lodovico, Barbara and Federico. In Florence Platina often acted as an agent for manuscripts on Lodovico's behalf and in 1459 he oversaw the production of a corrected version of Virgil's *Georgics*, following a direct request from the marchese on 8 December:

Nui voressimo che ce facesti uno apiacere, cioè che facestine subito scrivere una Georgica ben in littera corsiva e suso papero; ma che la fuse scripta cum li diptongi destesi, cioè *ae*, *oe*, e cum li aspirazione apuntate e le dictione scripte per ortographia, corecta secondo che sapete facessemo coregere la Bucolica, e che non gli manchi coelle, e scripta e corecta che li sia, vedeti di mandarla subito, perche' voressimo pur comenzar a scrivere il Virgilio nostro, in che non abbiano lo exemplo vostro de questa Georgica non o faremo comentiare. Voressimo, dopo ch'e' facto questo, vui ne facestine etiam scrivere una Eneyda, in quella forma, e secondo che la fosse scripta e corecta de libro in libro, cosi andastive dreto mandandocela, che ce ne fareti piacere assai advisandone de quello che costera' il scrivere, che nui ve manderemo i denari.<sup>127</sup>

Judging from his correspondence with Lodovico, this project seems to have continued until 1461.<sup>128</sup> He also procured for the marchese in Florence Bibles written in Hebrew and in Greek.<sup>129</sup> Contact with Mantua was not, however, limited to literature. On 15 May 1469, following Platina's release from prison in Rome, Lodovico wrote to congratulate him on the first draft of his *Historia urbis Mantuae*, promising him money and inviting the humanist to join him at the baths at Petriolo near Siena, a popular destination for the Gonzaga and other princes, to discuss the

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<sup>126</sup> Letter Platina to Marchesa Barbara, Florence, 26 September 1469 (ASMn AG, b. 1100, c. 440). Published by Rodolfo Signorini, 'Due lettere del Platina parzialmente inedite' in Campana and Medioli Masotti, eds., *Bartolomeo Sacchi il Platina*, pp.243-245, pp.244-245. Platina wrote the letter from the spa at Petriolo, where he had joined the Marchese Lodovico to discuss his recently completed *Historia Urbis Mantuae*.

<sup>127</sup> This letter was published by Willelmo Braghirolli, 'Virgilio e i Gonzaga' in *Album Virgiliano* (Mantua: Reale Accademia Virgiliana di Mantova, 1883), p.9 and by Faccioli, *Mantova. Le Lettere. I*, p.54. Meroni, *Mostra dei codici gonzagheschi*, p.59, was unable to locate the letter in the Archivio Gonzaga. Perhaps this project was connected to the unspecified Virgil produced by Giorgio Merula in 1464 (see p.150 below).

<sup>128</sup> Letter Platina to Lodovico, Mantua, 1 November 1461, published in Braghirolli, 'Virgilio e i Gonzaga'. See Luzio e Renier, 'Il Platina e i Gonzaga', p.431.

<sup>129</sup> Letter Platina to Lodovico, Florence, 14 June 1460 (ASMn AG, b. 1099 c. 693). Partially published by Faccioli, *Mantova. Le Lettere. I*, p.56. In this letter, as well as providing news on the progress of the *Georgics*, Platina mentions Bibles being copied in Greek and in Hebrew, the latter presumably the same one commissioned in Florence from Giannozzo Manetti. (see pp.168-169 below).



first draft of the work.<sup>130</sup> The marchese, evidently with time to devote to reading at Petriolo, was clearly engrossed in the *Historia* and the following day he wrote another letter to Platina, this time more critical, in which he alluded to discrepancies and insisted that the author come to Petriolo as soon as possible so that Lodovico could provide him with a more accurate version of events.<sup>131</sup> Platina's increased workload under Sixtus IV corresponds with a period of less frequent correspondence with the Gonzaga. From surviving letters, however, it is clear that there existed a great deal of affection between Platina and Lodovico and Federico Gonzaga. When Platina fell victim to plague in 1481, no one felt the sense of loss more than the Marchese Federico Gonzaga.<sup>132</sup>

Platina may not have been one of the most outstanding humanists of his generation but, as Viti notes, he made a significant contribution to the Vatican Library and to the definition of papal history.<sup>133</sup> He was distinguished by his firm belief that Latin was a living language and not merely the preserve of the writers of antiquity. His career as a man of letters, following his early studies in Mantua, assumed new dimensions first in Medicean Florence and then in Rome, where his achievements were rewarded by Sixtus IV.

Platina's successor as tutor was Bartolomeo Marasca (c.1420-1487), a Mantuan from an unprivileged social background.<sup>134</sup> Not much is known about the early life of Marasca other than the fact that he came from a family of fishweighers and that at an early age he devoted himself to the Church. He was also, in all likelihood, one of the poor students at the Giocosa whose studies were financed by Vittorino.<sup>135</sup> D'Arco notes that by the middle of the century he was a canon of the cathedral in

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<sup>130</sup> Letter Lodovico to Platina, Petriolo, 15 May 1469 (ASMn AG, b. 2891 Lib. 64 f. 2r). Published in Luzio e Renier, 'Il Platina e i Gonzaga', pp.435-436.

<sup>131</sup> Letter Lodovico to Platina, Petriolo, 16 May 1469 (ASMn AG, b. 2891 Lib. 64 f. 3v). Published in Luzio e Renier, 'Il Platina e i Gonzaga', p.436.

<sup>132</sup> In a letter of 5 October 1481 to his brother, the Cardinal Francesco Gonzaga, Federico mentioned "questo fratel che fu del Platina, la morte del qual m'è stata molestissima." Letter published in Luzio e Renier, 'Il Platina e i Gonzaga', p.440, without precise archival reference but cited as having been taken from *copialelettere libro 103*.

<sup>133</sup> Paolo Viti, 'L'umanesimo nell'Italia settentrionale e mediana' in *Storia della letteratura italiana. Vol.III. Il Quattrocento* (Rome: Salerno Editrice, 1996), p.620.

<sup>134</sup> The only comprehensive study of the life of Bartolomeo Marasca is David S. Chambers, 'Bartolomeo Marasca: Master of Cardinal Gonzaga's Household (1462-1469)', *Aevum*, 63, (1989), pp.265-283.

<sup>135</sup> Chambers, 'Bartolomeo Marasca', pp.265-266.

Mantua. Between 1456 and 1458 he taught in Mantua and his main responsibility was the education of Lodovico's adolescent son Francesco who, as was common for second born sons of princely families, was being groomed for a career in the Church.<sup>136</sup> Two documents point to Marasca being given the position of tutor in late 1456. In a letter to Guarino of 13 January 1457 Lodovico informs the pedagogue that he is unable to give work to the young scholar from Ferrara recommended to him, having recently taken on someone to act as tutor to his children.<sup>137</sup> Although Lodovico in this letter does not explicitly name Marasca, almost two years later, in a letter from Cavriana of 31 October 1458, Marasca writes that he has been teaching Francesco since 9 November 1456, and he also takes the opportunity to inform Barbara that her son's progress has been less than exceptional.<sup>138</sup> Only a month later, however, presumably to reassure the marchese on both the quality of his own teaching and, probably more importantly, on the progress of his son, Marasca told Lodovico that in the two years in which Francesco had been in his charge he had learned as much as would normally be the case in five years.<sup>139</sup> Marasca's presence in Mantua was probably not constant and his duties within the Church probably absorbed much of his time. In a letter to the *vicario* of Revere of 29 September 1457 Lodovico asks information about a certain *maestro*, concerned that at this juncture Francesco, Rodolfo and his daughters were without a tutor.<sup>140</sup>

By this stage Marasca also appears to have established professional relations with Guarino and in 1458 we find the marchesa Barbara asking him to teach Latin to Francesco, a duty which Marasca probably carried out until Francesco left for Pavia.<sup>141</sup> Having moved to Pavia as part of Francesco's entourage, in February 1462, two months after Francesco became cardinal, Marasca moved with him to Rome to fulfil the role of master of household, a position he held for seven years

<sup>136</sup> Carlo D'Arco, *Mille scrittori mantovani*, 7 vols, Archivio di Stato di Mantova, V, pp.40-45.

<sup>137</sup> Letter Lodovico to Guarino Veronese, 13 January 1457 (ASMn AG, b. 2885 Lib. 29 f. 42r). Published in Remigio Sabbadini, *Epistolario di Guarino Veronese. Raccolto ordinato illustrato da Remigio Sabbadini. Volume II: Testo, Miscellanea di storia veneta, serie terza, tomo XI*, (Venice: Reale Deputazione Veneta di Storia Patria, 1916), p.655.

<sup>138</sup> Letter Marasca to Marchesa Barbara, Cavriana, 31 October 1458 (ASMn AG, b. 2393). Published in David S. Chambers, *A Renaissance Cardinal and his Worldly Goods: The Will and Inventory of Francesco Gonzaga (1444-1483)*, (London: Warburg Institute Surveys and Texts, 1992), p.50.

<sup>139</sup> Letter Marasca to Lodovico, 30 November 1458 (ASMn AG, b. 2392 c. 244). See also Davari, *Notizie storiche intorno allo studio pubblico*, p.9.

<sup>140</sup> Letter Lodovico to *vicario* of Revere, 29 September 1457 (ASMn AG, b. 2885 Lib. 30 f.68r).

<sup>141</sup> See note 131.



before entering papal service in 1469.<sup>142</sup> Despite the fact that his pupil had now reached such an elevated position within the Church, Chambers suggests that Marasca never renounced his previous duties of tutor, spiritual adviser and guardian to the seventeen-year-old Francesco, undoubtedly much to the boy's annoyance. Indeed, relations between Francesco and Marasca appear to have become somewhat fraught following the first two years in Rome, judging from a letter written by the former to his mother the marchesa on 6 September 1464:

[...] voria che da qui inanti messere Bartholomeo Marascha havesse una camera da per sè, dove lui dormesse, e che pur non havesse a dormire cum me in letto [...] serìa meglio monstrasse levarsene da lui stesso, et domandasse una camera per lui, che aspettare che io ge dessi licentia fuori de la camera et lo scacciasì, che passaria cum suo maggiore carico. [...]<sup>143</sup>

Anxious to quell the irritable discontent which had clearly developed, Barbara replied on 5 October, urging her son to show Marasca more affection:

[...] el vene lì ad vui messer Bartolomeo Marascha, el qual n'è affectionatissimo quanto sia possibile [...] par sia innamorato de vui come serìa de uno putino. Monstrati de vederlo volentera et lo acarazati.<sup>144</sup>

Offices awarded to Marasca by Paul II between 1468 and 1473 included the papal depositary, mastership of the papal household, which he held until 1479, and papal chaplain, a role which he fulfilled until 1473. Chambers offers a series of possible explanations as to why Marasca was so heavily rewarded by the Pope: Paul II may have been impressed by a sermon delivered by Marasca on Good Friday 1468, not to mention the hospitality he received in the cardinal's house on 31 May. Probably more instrumental, however, were Marasca's loyal attitudes to the Pope and in opposition to the Academicians, led by Pomponio Leto and including Platina.<sup>145</sup>

Despite harbouring a desire to return to Mantua in 1474, Marasca was awarded the bishopric of Città di Castello and was made prefect of the apostolic chamber. By

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<sup>142</sup> Published in Chambers, *A Renaissance Cardinal and his Worldly Goods*, p.6.

<sup>143</sup> Letter Cardinal Francesco Gonzaga to Marchesa Barbara, Rome, 6 September 1464 (ASMn AG, b. 842 c. 305). Published in Chambers, 'Bartolomeo Marasca', pp.275-276.

<sup>144</sup> Letter Marchesa Barbara to Cardinal Francesco Gonzaga, 5 October 1464 (ASMn AG, b. 2889 Lib. 53 f. 25r). Published in Chambers, 'Bartolomeo Marasca', p.276.

<sup>145</sup> Chambers, 'Bartolomeo Marasca', pp.278-279.

1482 he had risen to the office of papal treasurer and, as papal *nuncio* for Sixtus, carried out diplomatic visits to Milan, the Imperial Court, Transylvania, Bohemia, Poland, Hungary, Switzerland, Tyrol and Germany. Under Innocent VIII (Giovanni Battista Cibo, 1432-1492, Pope 1484-1492) he was again sent to Germany and then appointed governor of Perugia, in the service of Cardinal Giovanni Arcimboldi (c.1430-1488), where he died in 1487. He was buried the following year in Santa Maria delle Febbre, beside Saint Peter's in Rome.<sup>146</sup>

Marasca's literary works were unremarkable and largely made up of sermons.<sup>147</sup> He dedicated to Lodovico Gonzaga a Latin grammar book, probably written during his time as tutor in Mantua. In the late 1460s he composed his *Libro de preparatione a la morte*, somewhat ominously dedicated to Susanna and Cecilia Gonzaga, which Faccioli discusses for its rare subject matter and the fact that it was written in the *volgare*, while Chambers, though acknowledging that this was the first such treatise in the *volgare*, notes that the theme was far from original.<sup>148</sup> In 1472 he wrote a tribute to Paul II, who had died the previous year, while among his many unpublished letters kept in the Vatican Archives are several long epistles written to Sixtus IV from Germany.

Volta describes Marasca as one of the most illustrious Mantuans of the century but, in all truth, his ascent through papal office was due more to competence than to any particular brilliance.<sup>149</sup> Throughout his time in Rome he maintained a lively and continuous correspondence with Barbara. From their letters it appears that his presence in their son's entourage was reassuring to the marchesa, though the combined role of pedagogue and spiritual adviser which Marasca looked to carry out probably greatly irritated the young cardinal.<sup>150</sup> Nor would he have appreciated letters written by Marasca to his mother such as that of 16 February 1463, in which he voices his concern about Francesco's lavish expenditure.<sup>151</sup>

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<sup>146</sup> Chambers, 'Bartolomeo Marasca', p.281.

<sup>147</sup> Chambers, *A Renaissance Cardinal and his Worldly Goods*, p.53.

<sup>148</sup> Chambers, 'Bartolomeo Marasca', p.275; Faccioli, *Mantova. Le Lettere. II*, p.34.

<sup>149</sup> Leopoldo Camillo Volta, *Biografia dei mantovani illustri nelle scienze, lettere ed arti. Accresciuta, corretta e riordinata da Antonio Mainardi* (Mantua: Fratelli Negretti, 1845-1846).

<sup>150</sup> Chambers, *A Renaissance Cardinal and his Worldly Goods*, p.17 and p.53.

<sup>151</sup> Letter Marasca to Marchesa Barbara, Rome, 16 February 1463 (ASMn AG, b. 842 c. 177).

Published in Chambers, *A Renaissance Cardinal and his Worldly Goods*, p.78.



Marasca, Chambers notes, was a socially mobile but officious and self-tormented cleric. Though originally hired as a teacher of Latin, Marasca was no humanist, nor did he appear to harbour any ambitions to become one. A decade of unwavering commitment as *maggiordomo* to Cardinal Francesco provided the platform from which Marasca launched into a successful career in the Curia in middle-age.<sup>152</sup>

After Marasca the succession of tutors in Mantua is less well documented. In 1459 Senofonte Filelfo (1433-1470), second son of Francesco, appears to have occupied the position for no more than a few months. Having received his early education from his illustrious father, Senofonte, together with a fine intellect, inherited from his father a litigious personality. Little is known about Senofonte's early years but it is highly likely that he moved with his father between Siena, Bologna and Milan.<sup>153</sup> In January 1452 in Rome Senofonte entered into the service of Galeazzo Cavriana, bishop of Mantua, in whose entourage he remained following Cavriana's departure from Rome in the wake of the death of Nicholas V. In 1453 Senofonte was dissuaded by his father from entering the Church and, following spells in Naples, Milan and Bologna, was once again in the house of Cavriana in Mantua in 1456. Davari notes that on 14 March 1459, in a letter from Milan, Gasparo da Vimercato congratulated Barbara for having employed Senofonte to educate her children, a letter in which he also praised the new tutor's intellect and literary culture.<sup>154</sup> Closer examination of this document, however, reveals that Gasparo's is a letter of recommendation and that Senofonte was not in actual fact, at least at this stage, tutor to the Gonzaga children.<sup>155</sup> Whether or not Senofonte ever actually taught in Mantua is open to question. Pignatti reports that Francesco Filelfo, keen that his son be placed in charge of the education of Federico Gonzaga, was unsuccessful in his attempts to secure the position of tutor in Mantua for Senofonte while Luzio and Renier and Faccioli note that he held the post for a few months in 1459.<sup>156</sup> No documents which confirm Senofonte's employment in Mantua have come to light. During the 1460s he eventually settled in Dalmatia, where he gained the office of

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<sup>152</sup> Chambers, 'Bartolomeo Marasca', p.265, p.270 and p.281.

<sup>153</sup> See Franco Pignatti, 'Filelfo Senofonte' in *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani*, vol.47, pp.631-633, p.631.

<sup>154</sup> Davari, 'Notizie storiche intorno al pubblico orologio di Mantova', p.10.

<sup>155</sup> Letter Gasparo da Vimercato to Marchesa Barbara, Milan, 14 March 1459 (ASMn AG, b. 1620 c. 509). Published by Luzio e Renier, 'I Filelfo e l'umanesimo alla corte dei Gonzaga', p.191.

<sup>156</sup> Pignatti, 'Filelfo Senofonte', p.632; Luzio e Renier, 'I Filelfo e l'umanesimo alla corte dei Gonzaga', pp.191-192; Faccioli, *Mantova. Le Lettere. II*, p.34.

*cancelliere del comune* in Dubrovnik. Less prolific a writer than his father and his brother Mario, Senofonte produced a handful of sonnets as well as his major work, the *Raguseide*, dedicated to Francesco Sforza on the origins of Dubrovnik. He does not appear to have exchanged letters with the Gonzaga after his departure from Mantua.

There is no news of a tutor in Mantua over the winter months between 1459 and 1460, the very months in which the Papal Congress was taking place in the town, but in the spring Lodovico secured the services of Gregorio Tifernate of Città di Castello (1414-1462ca). Recommended by both the Cardinal of Bologna and Pope Pius II, Gregorio was an experienced humanist and Greek specialist by the time he accepted the position in Mantua.<sup>157</sup> By May 1460 Gregorio was clearly established as tutor to the Gonzaga children and in a letter written by Lodovico to Barbara from Petriolo on the twenty-second of the month the marchese mentions “Gregorio da Città di Castello maestro in casa”, a letter in which he also instructs Barbara to pay off a debt of ninety-five ducats owed by Gregorio to a certain Fanaldo da Latina.<sup>158</sup>

In the summer of 1460 Gregorio was the subject of a delicate exchange of letters between the marchesi. While it must be recognised that corporal punishment administered by tutors was a common occurrence in the schooling of the age, Gregorio’s propensity to use force on the fourteen-year-old Gianfrancesco was clearly a matter of concern to Barbara, who on 31 August wrote to her husband:

[...] Zohannefrancesco nostro figliolo, adesso mi manda a dire per Serleone, che fin qui, bench’el fosse batuto dal magistro suo, mai non s’è vogliuto lamentare, né farmene dire parola, ma adesso vedendosse battere solamente per quare che ha esso suo magistro cum altri, e non perché non impari, ge rincesce troppo, né più pò tacere; e paremi, Segundo me dice Serleone, che ha enfiate e rotte le mani, così gli ha dato honestamente cum el manico de la scoriata [frusta], volendosse bene coprire la testa ed altroe dove gli daseva. Non so che altro farli se non darne aviso a la Celestudine Vostra, e paremi che questo bon homo, sia il gallo de India,

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<sup>157</sup> Letter Cardinal of Bologna to Lodovico, Florence, 8 April 1460 (ASMn AG, b. 1099 c. 656) and letter Pius II to Lodovico, Florence, 8 April 1460 (ASMn AG, b. 1099 c. 657). Letter from Pius II published in Ferdinando Gabotto, *Ancora un letterato del quattrocento (Publio Gregorio da Città di Castello)* (Città di Castello: S.Lapi, 1890), p.37.

<sup>158</sup> Letter Lodovico to Marchesa Barbara, Petriolo, 22 May 1460 (ASMn AG, b. 2096 c. 137).



che per zelosia volle battere ogniuno. Me rincresce ben a dare questo affanno ad essa Vostra Signoria, ma havendome il putto mandato a dire questo, affermandome Serleone così esser vero, perché l'hai visto, non ho potuto stare che non gene dia aviso [...].<sup>159</sup>

Even for the times, the manner of the punishment meted out to her son clearly appears excessive to the marchesa, as is obvious from her vivid descriptions of the beatings and of the injuries sustained by her son. Following consultation with her husband, however, rather than dispensing with their esteemed tutor, she opts for a tactful solution to the problem, not least for fear of becoming the subject of malevolent hearsay at the Papal Court. Gregorio had, after all, been recommended by the pope himself:

[...] Havemo visto quanto ne scriveti sopra el facto de Zohannefrancesco nostro figliolo [...] A mi è parso de scrivere a questo nostro, perché pur ch'el non batta nostro figlio cum cossa che glie possa nocer, come l'ha facto adesso; ne par meglio ancor supportarlo che venire a la rotta seco, et anche perché non se possa dire in corte de Roma, che per non voler lassar dare le botte a nostri figlioli, non sapiamo tenere uno valenthomo [...].<sup>160</sup>

Having avoided major confrontation with the marchesa over this issue, Gregorio must certainly still have been in Mantua during the summer of the following year. In a letter of 23 July 1461 we find Lodovico asking Vincenzo della Scalona, his ambassador in Milan, to procure material to make clothes for the teacher.<sup>161</sup>

Gregorio's early studies of Latin and Greek letters were followed by a prolonged visit to Greece, and when he returned to Italy he made a substantial contribution to the developing field of Greek studies, both through his translations and his teaching. In 1447 we find Gregorio in Naples, where he appears to have taught Giovanni Pontano and in 1449 he was employed at the court of Pope Nicholas V. From the papal court he moved to Milan where, largely thanks to Francesco

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<sup>159</sup> Letter Marchesa Barbara to Lodovico, 31 August 1460 (ASMn AG, b. 2096 c. 284). Published by Giancarlo Malacarne, *Barbara Hohenzollern Del Brandeburgo. Il potere e la virtù. Die Macht und die Tugend* (Rezzato: Magalini Editrice Due, 1997), p.135.

<sup>160</sup> Letter Marchesa Barbara to Lodovico, 1 September 1460 (ASMn AG, b. 2096 c. 78). Published by Malacarne, *Barbara Hohenzollern Del Brandeburgo*, pp.135-136.

<sup>161</sup> Letter Lodovico to Vincenzo della Scalona, 23 July 1461 (ASMn AG, b. 2888 Lib. 44 f. 75v-75r).

Filelfo, he was employed by Francesco Sforza before a spell of teaching in Paris.<sup>162</sup> He was lured back to Rome by Pius II and it is highly likely that he was part of the papal entourage which spent eight months in Mantua between 1459 and 1460, during which time Lodovico, it must be presumed, was looking for a suitable tutor for the school. Although he appears to have been keen to return to Milan, Gregorio remained in Mantua for just over two years, before moving to Venice in the summer of 1462, where he died shortly afterwards.

An accomplished translator and occasional Latin poet, Gregorio's major work was his completion in Milan of a project begun by Guarino Veronese. Having borrowed from Lodovico Gonzaga in 1456 a manuscript of Strabo's *Geographica*, Francesco Sforza commissioned from Guarino a Latin translation of *Europa*, the first book of the work. During his time in Milan Gregorio translated the second book, *Africa*, and the third book, *Asia*. In Mantua Gregorio continued the now established tradition of Greek teaching there and, as we shall see when we examine the Gonzaga library, Gregorio appears to have procured and copied for Lodovico a number of Greek texts.<sup>163</sup> Among his young charges in Mantua were two emerging humanists: Giorgio Merula of Alessandria (c.1430-1494), who would succeed him as tutor, and Battista Mantovano (1447-1516). The latter, also known as Battista Spagnuoli, went on to enjoy a distinguished ecclesiastical career as a reformer of the Carmelite Order, as well as establishing himself as a poet and humanist in Bologna and Rome, before returning permanently to Mantua in 1493 to take up the position of director of studies in the reformed Carmelite monastery, a position which allowed him to frequent the literary figures who gravitated around Isabella d'Este, including Baldassare Castiglione.<sup>164</sup>

Gregorio was succeeded in 1462 by Merula, an eager scholar who had been attracted to Mantua two years earlier by the prospect of following Gregorio's

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<sup>162</sup> Luzio e Renier, 'I Filelfo e l'umanesimo alla corte dei Gonzaga', p.147.

<sup>163</sup> Letter Gregorio to Lodovico, 19 May 1461 (ASMn AG, b. 2395 c. 554). Published in Rodolfo Signorini, 'Acquisitions for Ludovico II Gonzaga's Library', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, Volume 44, (1981), 180-183, p.182. See pp.166-167 below.

<sup>164</sup> On Battista Mantovano see Battista Spagnuoli Mantuanus, *Adulescentia: The Eclogues of Mantuan*, trans. and ed. by Lee Piepho (New York: Garland, 1989). See also Faccioli, *Mantova. Le Lettere. II*, pp.151-199.



lessons.<sup>165</sup> Nothing is known of Merula's childhood in Alessandria or what he may have studied there but from 1444 to 1446 he was among the charges of Francesco Filelfo in Milan. It was probably after his time under Filelfo's supervision that Merula's wandering in search of knowledge began. In Rome in 1450 he encountered Galeotto Marzio and was so impressed that he followed Marzio when he moved to Padua. In 1454 he returned to Milan where, as well as supporting himself through teaching privately, he attended the lessons of Gabriele Paveri Fontana. After moving to Mantua in 1460 and attending for two years the lessons given there by Gregorio, Merula held the position of tutor until 1465, when he left for Venice. He spent seventeen full years there before his services were acquired in 1482 by Lodovico Sforza 'Il Moro,' for whom he held the chair at the university of Pavia between 1483 and 1485. For the last nine years or so of his life, from 1485 to 1494, Merula taught at the *Accademia* in Milan.

Merula's career was marked with acrimonious critiques directed towards others and a hostility towards criticism of his own work levelled by his teachers and colleagues, character traits which led to clashes not only with the equally difficult Filelfo but also with Marzio, with Fontana and with Domizio Calderini (1446-1478). The majority of Merula's surviving works were produced in Venice during the early 1470s and include editions of Cicero's *De finibus bonorum et malorum* and twenty comedies by Plautus, as well as a critical essay for the *Emendationes in Virgilium et Plinium* and commentaries on Ovid, Juvenal and Cicero.<sup>166</sup> Merula's major work, however, was to remain unfinished when he died in 1494. From 1488 he had been working on his *De Antiquitatibus Vicecomitum* for Lodovico Sforza and, as well as the entire first decade, he produced the first four books of the second. Sabbadini has defined the work as Merula's best and one of the most noteworthy histories produced during the Quattrocento.<sup>167</sup> A series of letters exchanged by Lodovico and Merula in 1464 mentions an unidentified Virgil text but, following

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<sup>165</sup> See Ferdinando Gabotto and A. Baldini Confalonieri, *Vita di Giorgio Merula* (Alessandria: Tipografia J. Giovanni, 1893); Remigio Sabbadini, 'Merula, Giorgio' in *Enciclopedia Italiana Treccani*, edizione 1949, volume XXII, p.926; Remigio Sabbadini, *Le scoperte dei codici latini e greci ne' secoli XIV e XV*, ed. by E. Garin (Florence: Sansoni, 1967) pp.157-164. See also pp.205-206 below.

<sup>166</sup> Sabbadini, 'Merula, Giorgio', p.926.

<sup>167</sup> Sabbadini, 'Merula, Giorgio', p.926.

his departure from Mantua, Merula appears to have exchanged very few letters with the Gonzaga.<sup>168</sup>

After Merula it becomes difficult to reconstruct the succession of teachers in Mantua as contemporary documents which have come to light are few and far between. Perhaps in 1463, while Merula was still in Mantua, Emanuele Guarino, another of Guarino Veronese's sons to have embarked on a career as pedagogue, offered his services to Lodovico. In a letter from Goito of 15 December the marchese thanks Emanuele for an oration recently received and tenderly describes the affection of the Gonzaga family both for the now deceased Guarino and his offspring. While he states his intention to help in any way he possibly can, Lodovico tells Emanuele that, with great regret, he is unable at present to help his sister, given that the state finances are being stretched by the effort to combat an outbreak of plague.<sup>169</sup> Perhaps Emanuele in his original letter, which I have been unable to find, as well as asking to be employed as tutor, asked for assistance with the dowry for one of his sisters. Six months later, in another letter from Ferrara, Lodovico Strozzi gives the marchese details of a certain Marlinio Faletico (c.1430-c.1484), learned in Greek and Latin letters and willing to come to teach in Mantua.<sup>170</sup> Although Strozzi also reports that the teacher in question comes recommended by both Mario Filelfo (1426-1480) and Battista Guarino, Lodovico does not appear to have taken any initiative to employ Faletico. In the summer of 1468 Marsilio Andreasi, secretary to the marchese and occasional Mantuan diplomat, wrote from Modena of a Greek scholar currently visiting the duke but, once again, there is no evidence of the teacher in question ever being invited to Mantua.<sup>171</sup>

Of more substance is a decree of 3 November 1469 which mentions Bartolino da Carono and Giovan Giorgio Amaneo, *professori di grammatica*, both figures about whom absolutely no information has emerged, while in 1473 Lodovico employed

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<sup>168</sup> See letters Merula to Lodovico, Mantua, 26 January 1464, 8 July 1464 and 31 August 1464 (ASMn AG, b. 2401), Venice, 4 October 1469 (ASMn AG, b. 1431 bis, c. 722) and letter Lodovico to Merula, Mantua, 15 July 1464 (ASMn AG, b. 2889).

<sup>169</sup> Letter Lodovico to Emanuele Guarino, Goito, 15 December 1463 (ASMn AG, b. 2888 Lib. 45 f. 199v). Guarino Veronese had died three years earlier, in 1460.

<sup>170</sup> Letter Lodovico Strozzi to Lodovico, Ferrara, 10 June 1464 (ASMn AG, b. 1228 c. 482).

<sup>171</sup> Letter Marsilio Andreasi to Lodovico, Modena, 2 August 1468 (ASMn AG, b. 1228 c. 350).



as tutor for his younger children the obscure poet and grammarian Pietro Tribaco, who also taught Federico's children.<sup>172</sup> In a letter to Federico from Nuvolato of 6 September 1478 we also learn that Gianfrancesco Genovesi had been tutor to the Gonzaga children for some time before this.<sup>173</sup> The education of his daughters was also clearly a matter of importance for Lodovico, as it had been for Gianfrancesco, who, as we have already seen, sent all his children to study at the Giocosa under Vittorino. In a letter written from Cavriana by Bartolomeo Marasca to the marchesa Barbara on 9 August 1458 we discover that Cecilia, together presumably with her sisters Susanna and Dorotea, is being taught grammar by a Battista Genesisio, and dance by a certain Maestro Gasparo.<sup>174</sup> Still in 1458, on 13 May, Raffaele Berti (documented 1456-1464) wrote to Barbara to apologise for not having come recently to teach her daughters, from which we must conclude that the girls were also learning calligraphy.<sup>175</sup>

The last teacher to arrive in Mantua during the lifetime of Lodovico, though only just, was Mario Filelfo (1426-1480), eldest son of Francesco. Like his brother and predecessor in Mantua Senofonte, he inherited from his father not only a fine intellect but also an argumentative nature. Mario worked in a multitude of places during his career as a humanist and teacher, often being obliged to move on in acrimonious circumstances.<sup>176</sup> Constantinople, Savona, Marseilles, Turin, Paris, Milan, Venice, Bologna, Modena, Monferrato, Bergamo, Malpaga, Ancona and Urbino, a seemingly endless list of destinations, give an idea of his restless personality, to which Mario himself alluded when, on a diplomatic mission in Mantua for Federico da Montefeltro at the end of May 1478, he wrote to Lodovico, beseeching the marchese not only to provide him with employment but

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<sup>172</sup> ASMn AG, Libro Decreti 17 f. 84r. See also Davari, *Notizie storiche intorno allo studio pubblico*, p.10. Letter Federico to Lodovico, Mantua, 26 October 1475 (ASMn AG, b. 2102 bis, c. 505).

<sup>173</sup> Letter Giovan Francesco Genovesi to Marchese Federico, Nuvolato, 6 September 1478 (ASMn AG, b. 1354). Genovesi also alludes to an epitaph which he has composed for Lodovico, who died three months earlier. See also Luzio e Renier, 'I Filelfo e l'umanesimo alla corte dei Gonzaga', pp.197-198.

<sup>174</sup> Letter Bartolomeo Marasca to Marchesa Barbara, Cavriana, 9 August 1458 (ASMn AG, b. 2392 c. 242).

<sup>175</sup> Letter Raffaele scrittore to Marchesa Barbara, Mantua, 13 May 1458 (ASMn AG, b. 2390 c. 324). On Raffaele see pp.192-193 below.

<sup>176</sup> On the life of Mario Filelfo see Franco Pignatti, 'Filelfo Giovanni Mario' in *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani*, vol.47, 1997, pp.626-631.

to help him to bring to an end his existence “a la ventura.”<sup>177</sup> Davari reports that Lodovico satisfied Mario’s requests, while Pigatti writes that he was given the position of tutor by Federico only in August, two months after Lodovico had died.<sup>178</sup> Given that when Mario wrote this letter to Lodovico the marchese was in Goito, where he died just over a week later before being able to return to Mantua, it appears more plausible that it was indeed Federico and not his father who installed Mario as tutor. Nor does the *copialettere* containing Lodovico’s last letters from Goito include a reply to Mario. As well as concerns for his own health, which was rapidly deteriorating, Lodovico had to make provisions to combat the plague which was raging in the *Mantovano* so it is not surprising that the requests made by Mario Filelfo were ignored at this point. Two letters written to Federico in early September support the theory that the appointment was confirmed not earlier than late August. The aforementioned letter of 6 September from Gianfrancesco Genovesi refers to Mario’s recent appointment, and four days later Mario himself wrote to the new marchese from Borgoforte to give his first impressions of the twelve-year old heir Francesco, a letter in which he also encouraged Federico to attend his lessons.<sup>179</sup> If we add to this the fact that the first mention of Mario’s resignation from the service of Federico da Montefeltro was written on 28 August then it seems certain that before this stage he had received no concrete offer of employment from the Gonzaga.<sup>180</sup>

When Mario Filelfo came to Mantua in 1478 he was fifty-two years old and an established teacher and humanist. He was already known to the Gonzaga family, having come to Mantua with his father and Francesco Sforza for the Papal Congress of 1459. As well as a teaching career spanning at least thirty-two years he had also produced works of some importance, including epic poems in honour of Francesco Sforza and Federico da Montefeltro, the *Dentraretos* and the *Martiados* respectively, the *Glycephila*, an interpretation of the loves of Deifebus based on the obsession of Guido Antonio Lambertini of Bologna for a certain Glicefila and a

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<sup>177</sup> Letter Mario Filelfo to Lodovico, 30 May 1478. Published in Luzio e Renier, ‘I Filelfo e l’umanesimo alla corte dei Gonzaga’, p.195. I have been unable to locate this letter in the Archivio Gonzaga.

<sup>178</sup> Davari, *Notizie storiche intorno allo studio pubblico*, p.11; Pignatti, ‘Filelfo Giovanni Mario’, p.630.

<sup>179</sup> See note 163. See also Luzio e Renier, ‘I Filelfo e l’umanesimo alla corte dei Gonzaga’, p.195.

<sup>180</sup> Luzio e Renier, ‘I Filelfo e l’umanesimo alla corte dei Gonzaga’, p.195.



*Vita di Dante*, as well as eight books on the history of Ancona.<sup>181</sup> Several of Mario's works were also of significance to the Gonzaga. His *De comunis vitae continentia*, a moral dialogue dedicated to Sixtus IV in 1473, had as one of its main protagonists Cardinal Francesco.<sup>182</sup> His initial letter to Lodovico Gonzaga of 30 May 1478 was accompanied by an oration in memory of Cecilia Gonzaga, and on 28 June the following year he informed Federico that he had composed another oration to mark the anniversary of the death of Lodovico.<sup>183</sup> As he had done for his previous patrons in Milan and in Urbino, Mario composed an epic poem, the *Fredexeida*, to celebrate the feats of his new patron in Mantua.

During his two years of service Mario corresponded on a regular basis with Federico, especially on the occasions when he took his charges away from Mantua. In a letter of 7 October 1478 he wrote to the marchese from Borgoforte, informing him that his children were progressing well with their studies and asking that they be provided each with their own books in order to study more effectively, to waste less time and to learn things off by heart, this last aspect suggesting that the teaching methods described by Grafton and Jardine were still in force at this stage.<sup>184</sup>

## Conclusions

The Casa Giocosa was unquestionably one of the great schools of the Italian Renaissance. The willingness of Gianfrancesco, Lodovico and Federico to sponsor education was rewarded as the humanist teaching tradition initiated by Vittorino da Feltre led to a succession of educated rulers, who in turn became patrons of arts and letters in their own right. In this respect the experience of the Giocosa must be considered crucial in laying the foundations of the Renaissance in Mantua.

The early decades of the Quattrocento, blazing in the trail marked by Vergerio and Conversini, were revolutionary years for education in northern Italy. Admittedly,

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<sup>181</sup> Pignatti, 'Filelfo Giovanni Mario'.

<sup>182</sup> Chambers, *A Renaissance Cardinal and his Worldly Goods*, p.66.

<sup>183</sup> Letter Mario Filelfo to Marchese Federico, 28 June 1479. Letter mentioned in Luzio e Renier, 'I Filelfo e l'umanesimo alla corte dei Gonzaga', p.203.

<sup>184</sup> Letter mentioned in Luzio e Renier, 'I Filelfo e l'umanesimo alla corte dei Gonzaga', p.199. See also Grafton and Jardine, *From Humanism to the Humanities*, p.11.

viewed from the perspective of modern techniques, methods of teaching the new curriculum may have been dull and repetitive but with the new generation of humanist teachers an important scholarly tradition began and, through Vittorino and Guarino's application of ethics, a direct link could be traced between humanist education and the government of Mantua, Urbino and Ferrara. Moreover, the state apparatus of centres with humanist schools was enriched by able and loyal graduates.

Although Vittorino was in many ways irreplaceable, his successors did manage to ensure a measure of continuity, even if the school inevitably witnessed a reduction in its intake levels. Education in Mantua continued, however, to produce able humanists and important patrons, and the Gonzaga continued to commission and to inspire a range of humanist writing. The Papal Congress of 1459 provided new impetus and prestige at an important stage, launching a new cycle of education under Gregorio Tifernate. The lack of documents from the late 1460s probably reflects the lack of a formal school, but Lodovico and Federico never neglected the education of their children.

The building of the Casa Giocosa was probably in decline as early as 1462 but, as we have seen, the Gonzaga continued to employ able educators. The death of Vittorino inevitably led to less renown for the school and a reduced number of pupils who came to Mantua from elsewhere, but the younger members of the Gonzaga family continued to be educated according to the canons of humanist education first brought to their town by Vittorino. The following chapter will examine a second great Mantuan Renaissance institution, often closely connected to the school but with more enduring success over the entire period of Lodovico's rule: the outstanding Gonzaga library.





## CHAPTER FOUR

# THE GONZAGA LIBRARY

### From the Origins until Lodovico's Time

In his article of 1972, Cecil Clough argues that the library of the Gonzaga was one of the most outstanding in Renaissance Italy.<sup>1</sup> Together with the school, the library was unquestionably one of the town's principal cultural institutions and was continuously nourished by enlightened rulers, dedicated teachers and a lively humanist court.

The origins of the Gonzaga library can be traced back to the ruling Bonacolsi family, whom the Gonzaga overthrew to take control of Mantua in 1328. Several books which had belonged to the Bonacolsi are listed in the three surviving inventories of the Gonzaga library, recorded in 1407, in 1541 and in 1542.<sup>2</sup> The library which came to be renowned during the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries, however, was almost certainly established during the 1350s and the 1360s by Guido Gonzaga (d.1369). Around this time Guido was in regular contact with Petrarch (1304-1374) and, like his learned friend and correspondent, by whom he must have been strongly influenced, Guido was interested both in the ancients and in works written in the *volgare*.<sup>3</sup> In addition to Guido, Petrarch appears to have corresponded frequently with Andrea Painelli and Ottonello Descalzi, both of whom were employed in the Mantuan chancery.<sup>4</sup> Painelli and Descalzi acquired several books for Guido's library through Petrarch, while the latter may also have

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<sup>1</sup> Cecil H. Clough, 'The Library of the Gonzaga at Mantua', *Librarium*, XV, (1972), 50-63.

<sup>2</sup> The inventories are examined by Clough, by Ubaldo Meroni, *Mostra dei codici gonzagheschi. La biblioteca dei Gonzaga da Luigi I ad Isabella d'Este (1348-1540)* (Mantua: Biblioteca Comunale di Mantova, 1966) and by Irma Pagliari, "Una libreria che in Italia non v'era una simile ne' anco a Roma". *La biblioteca dei Gonzaga*, in *Gonzaga. La celeste Galleria*. (sic) *L'esercizio del collezionismo* (Milan: Skira Editore, 2002), pp.111-125.

<sup>3</sup> From a letter addressed by Petrarch to Guido Gonzaga it is apparent that the two corresponded frequently and intimately. See Francesco Petrarca, 'Familiarium rerum', III, 11, in *Canzoniere - Trionfi - Familiarium rerum libri*, ed. by Gianfranco Contini, Ferdinando Neri, Guido Martellotti, Vittorio Rossi and Umberto Bosco (Florence: Sansoni, 1975), pp.360-362.

<sup>4</sup> On Petrarch and Mantua see Giuseppe Billanovich, 'Il Petrarca e il primo umanesimo a Mantova' in *Il Sant'Andrea di Mantova e Leon Battista Alberti. Atti del convegno di studi organizzato dalla città di Mantova con la collaborazione dell'Accademia Virgiliana nel quinto centenario della Basilica di Sant'Andrea e della morte dell'Alberti 1472-1972, Mantova 25-26 aprile 1972* (Mantua: Biblioteca Comunale di Mantova, 1974), pp.127-130.



availed of the Mantuan collection to acquire copies of volumes such as Pliny's *Historia Naturalis* in 1350.<sup>5</sup> Guido's successor and son, Lodovico *il capitano* (d.1382), was also a man of letters and, as his father had done with Petrarch, he continued the liberal practice of granting scholars free access to his collection, which would become a tradition in Mantua through the following century and beyond.<sup>6</sup>

By the later decades of the fourteenth century the Gonzaga library was becoming renowned far and wide, not only for the richness of its contents but also for the liberal access and lending policy practised by its owners. As was the case with the library in neighbouring Ferrara, requests for loans from other rulers and statesmen were not infrequent, and by the time the next Gonzaga ruler, Francesco I (1366-1407), was exchanging letters with the likes of Luchino Visconti of Milan and the Florentine Chancellor Coluccio Salutati (1331-1406), the Mantuan library was rightly regarded as one of the finest anywhere in Italy.<sup>7</sup> Francesco added manuscripts relevant to a variety of subjects to the Gonzaga collection, making his library one of the richest in Europe for the number, variety and quality of the works it housed.<sup>8</sup> He also built on another tradition within the library, that pertaining to the many Arthurian, Carolingian and Breton romances, which must have kept not only the Gonzaga rulers and their immediate families but also the entire court and perhaps even people in the town square entertained on many occasions.<sup>9</sup> Braghirolli explained the large presence of French texts in the 1407

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<sup>5</sup> This is deduced by Billanovich from two letters written to Andrea Painelli, in which Petrarch reveals that he has recently been troubled by the words of a detractor. In the first of these letters Pliny's work is mentioned, though Petrarch does not explicitly reveal that his familiarity with the text is due to a copy acquired during a recent visit to Mantua. The letters are included in Francesco Petrarca, 'Familiarium rerum', V, 11 and 12', pp.460-461. On Petrarch's visit to Mantua in 1350 see p.43 above.

<sup>6</sup> Caterina Santoro, 'La biblioteca dei Gonzaga e cinque suoi codici nella Trivulziana di Milano' in *Arte, pensiero e cultura a Mantova nel primo Rinascimento in rapporto con la Toscana e il Veneto. Atti del VI convegno internazionale di studi sul Rinascimento, 27 settembre – 1 ottobre 1461* (Florence: Sansoni, 1965), pp.87-94, p.88.

<sup>7</sup> Coluccio Salutati's praise for the Gonzaga library appears in his *Epistolario*, vol.III, ed. by Francesco Novati (Rome: Istituto storico italiano, 1896), p.102: "Sentio, magnificentissime Domine mi, penes te maximam copiam esse librorum, multosque te congregasse qui non possent alibi forsitan reperiri [...]. Scio autem te nolle libros includere sed habere, nec usui tantum dedicare tuo, sed ipsos, ut sunt scribentium destinatione, reputare communes." On lending from the Este library see Amedeo Quondam, ed., *Il libro a corte*, (Rome: Bulzoni, 1994), pp.9-10.

<sup>8</sup> Meroni, *Mostra dei codici gonzagheschi*, pp.31-32.

<sup>9</sup> Grendler suggests that the entertainment value of chivalric romances appealed as much to the sophisticated and highly literate courtier as it did to the minstrel who would recite such tales to an eager audience in *piazza*. See Paul Grendler, *Books and Schools in the Italian Renaissance* (Aldershot: Variorum, 1995), pp.89-90.

inventory by suggesting that Francesco purchased many of them during his trip to France in 1389. Subsequent research by Novati, however, proved that many of these texts had been acquired by Francesco's predecessors Guido and Lodovico *il capitano*.<sup>10</sup> Francesco, to his credit, also increased his father's commitment to ensure that the library continued to facilitate the study of letters and sciences.

To grasp some idea of what the library contained at this point it is worth looking in some detail at the inventory of 1407, the first document which refers to an organised collection of books in Mantua and one of the earliest records of its kind anywhere in Italy.<sup>11</sup> The library was already very rich by this stage and the inventory gives a total of 392 manuscripts, subdivided into twelve listed categories: 86 *libri sacre Scripture*; 18 *libri Decretalium*; 12 *libri iuris civilis*; 36 *libri istoriografici*; 21 *libri cronicarum*; 24 *libri poetarum*; 36 *libri philosophie moralis*; 15 *libri naturalis*; 17 *libri medicine, gramatice et multarum aliarum rerum*; 28 *libri astrologie, geomancie et experimentalium*; 32 *libri in lingua vulgari*; 67 *libri in lingua francigena*.<sup>12</sup> Here it is interesting to note, alongside traditional medieval genres such as religious books, the single most numerous section, law books, books of decretals and chronicles, the presence not only of thirty-two books in *volgare* but, more significantly, a notable number of books belonging to the developing humanist genres of moral philosophy and the sciences. Of particular interest are the sixty-seven French language books, amounting to more than double the number of texts in *volgare*, virtually if not all of which are bound to have been tales of chivalry belonging to the matter of France. As Quondam notes, chivalric culture was deeply rooted in the courts of northern Italy, where tales of errant knights with all their feats and loves found fertile ground and fascinated audiences.<sup>13</sup> Clough suggests that the Gonzaga library boasted the single largest collection of French tales in the Italian peninsula at least until the 1430s, when the collections of the Visconti of Milan in particular and the

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<sup>10</sup> Willelmo Braghirolli, Paul Meyer e Gaston Paris, 'Inventaire des manuscrits en langue française possédés par François Gonzaga I capitaine de Mantoue, mort en 1407', *Romania*, IX, (1880), 497-514; Francesco Novati, 'I codici francesi dei Gonzaga secondo nuovi documenti', *Romania*, XIX, (1890), 161-200.

<sup>11</sup> The point is made by Irma Pagliari, 'La biblioteca della corte dei Gonzaga. Un itinerario di ricerca storica e un progetto multimediale per ricostruire la collezione di codici dei signori di Mantova', *Civiltà Mantovana*, n.105, anno XXXII, (novembre 1997), 33-44 (p.35).

<sup>12</sup> Pagliari, 'La biblioteca della corte dei Gonzaga', p.35.

<sup>13</sup> Quondam, *Il libro a corte*, p.14.



Este of Ferrara began to rival that of their Mantuan neighbours.<sup>14</sup> In any case, at the turn of the fifteenth-century, as Novati notes, literary culture at the Italian courts was still almost entirely French.<sup>15</sup>

Although the categories are general and the exact contents difficult to ascertain, it can be demonstrated that from 1407 onwards the library was extended along humanist lines, though it must be stressed that this policy did not exclude the peaceful cohabitation of French romances and traditional medieval genres beside new humanist additions on the same shelves. Indeed, as De Robertis points out in the case of Ferrara, but the same was certainly true of Mantua, chivalric literature continued not only to survive but to flourish alongside the classical and scientific texts of the humanities.<sup>16</sup>

Arguably the most powerful single influence on the development of the Gonzaga library was Vittorino da Feltre, entrusted with the running of the Gonzaga collection when he arrived in Mantua in 1423. Patronage of a library, as Clough notes, was a source of great virtue for a liberal prince and, according to Irma Pagliari, while books in the private sphere of a prince reflected his culture and refinement, those in the public sphere projected an image of ostentation, wealth and power.<sup>17</sup> Vittorino was responsible for incorporating into the collection of his patrons a comprehensive working library for the purposes of teaching, and it was probably from the great pedagogue that Gianfrancesco and, to a lesser extent, Lodovico learned to appreciate the merits of a solid and accurate working library above the lure of ornate but often incorrect texts.<sup>18</sup> The library over which Vittorino presided was used primarily for didactic purposes. He also carried on the

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<sup>14</sup> Clough, 'The Library of the Gonzaga at Mantua', p.52. An inventory recorded in 1436 of the Este Library in Ferrara includes thirty-five romance epics, of which twenty-seven are in French language. The Gonzaga Library, it has been noted, boasted a remarkable sixty-seven French language volumes as early as 1407. See Jane E. Everson, 'Read What I Say Not What I Read: Reading and the Romance Epic in Fifteenth-Century Ferrara', *Italian Studies*, LVIII, (2003), 31-48, p.38.

<sup>15</sup> Novati, 'I codici francesi dei Gonzaga', p.161.

<sup>16</sup> Domenico De Robertis, 'L'esperienza poetica del Quattrocento. La letteratura dell'Italia del nord. La situazione fuori Toscana' in *Storia della letteratura italiana. Volume terzo. Il Quattrocento e l'Ariosto*, ed. by Emilio Cecchi e Natalino Sapegno (Milan: Garzanti, 1966), pp.567-574, esp. p.570. See also Everson, 'Read What I Say', who observes that chivalric literature not only survived but also flourished in Ferrara well beyond the Quattrocento.

<sup>17</sup> Clough, 'The Library of the Gonzaga at Mantua', pp.57-58; Pagliari, 'La biblioteca della corte dei Gonzaga', p.40.

<sup>18</sup> The point is made by Santoro, 'La biblioteca dei Gonzaga e cinque suoi codici', p.90.

now customary Mantuan tradition of a rare and praiseworthy lending policy, to such an extent that in 1434 Gianfrancesco was obliged to pronounce a decree calling for all those who had borrowed books to return them at once or incur a fine of twenty-five ducats and lose favour with the marchese.<sup>19</sup>

Any inventory for a library of this period must be considered as merely indicative, since contents must rarely have been static. Growth could occur through purchases, confiscation, dedication, copying and gifts, while on the other hand volumes may often have been loaned out and never returned or perhaps swapped for other volumes from the libraries of others. On the whole, nonetheless, the early part of the Quattrocento must undoubtedly have been a period of sustained growth for the library of the Gonzaga. Vittorino would have made sure that the collection catered sufficiently for his avant-garde humanist programme of education, which in turn would have seen scribes commissioned throughout Italy to copy rediscovered texts of antiquity in both Latin and Greek. If we consider the cultural momentum provided by Gianfrancesco, together with the influence exercised by Vittorino, Clough is probably correct in arguing that the main impetus behind the growth of the Gonzaga library was genuine literary interest rather than ostentation.<sup>20</sup>

A limited number of contemporary documents give some indication of how the library was enriched during the period of Lodovico's parents, Gianfrancesco Gonzaga and Paola Malatesta. Meroni suggests that Gianfrancesco was particularly keen to acquire Greek texts and, in this respect, he was probably encouraged by Vittorino.<sup>21</sup> During a visit to Mantua in 1433 Ambrogio Traversari had commented on the number of Greek texts in the Gonzaga collection at that stage, while in a letter to Guarino of 21 July 1444 we find the marchese asking for a copy in Greek of the sermon of Giuseppe de Antiquate.<sup>22</sup> The library was continuously enriched

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<sup>19</sup> Emilio Faccioli, *Mantova. Le Lettere. II. L'esperienza umanistica. L'età isabelliana. Autunno del Rinascimento mantovano* (Mantua: Istituto Carlo d'Arco per la storia di Mantova, 1962), pp.16-17. Everson notes that the Este rulers in Ferrara operated a similarly liberal policy of lending books to other rulers, to courtiers, to scholars and even to members of the public. Everson, 'Read What I Say', p.42.

<sup>20</sup> Clough, 'The Library of the Gonzaga at Mantua', p.51.

<sup>21</sup> Meroni, *Mostra dei codici gonzagheschi*, p.47.

<sup>22</sup> Traversari's comments are published in Alessandro Dini-Traversari, *Ambrogio Traversari e i suoi tempi* (Florence: Succ. B. Seeber, 1912), pp.73-74: "[...] Adire illum (Vittorino) visendae



by volumes dedicated to Gianfrancesco: Leon Battista Alberti's *De Pictura*; translations carried out by Ognibene da Lonigo of Aesop's *Fables* and Plutarch's *Life of Camillo*; the *Artificialis memoriae regulae* by Giacomo Ragona.<sup>23</sup> In 1414 a considerable number of books, mostly of a religious nature, were absorbed into the library after being confiscated from the Albertini brothers of Prato, and from their accomplices, Martino dei Pegorini and Gabriele Faraone.<sup>24</sup> Meroni goes on to give a list predominantly of obscure calligraphers and miniaturists whose names appear in the account books of the period, several of whom appear to have been foreigners: the calligraphers employed by the Gonzaga include Ramo Ramedelli (mentioned between 1398 and 1430), Antonio da Parma (1417-1419), Jacopo da Galopini (1417-1418), Antonio da Bonomia (1417-1418), Maestro Donino (1417-1420), Cristoforo da Parma (1417), Jacopo da Richa (1417-1429), Alfonso di Spagna (1419), Martino da Sisso (1419), Maestro Enrico (1420-1441) and Enrico di Germania (1421-1433). The miniaturists who must frequently have embellished the work of the calligraphers appear to have been Jacopo cappellano di San Martino (1419-1425), Maestro Pietro Matteo (1421), Giovanni di Germania (1442) and Belbello da Pavia (1443-1444), who continued to be employed by Lodovico and Barbara to work on the marchesa's *Messale*.<sup>25</sup> Venetian rule in the Eastern Mediterranean, meanwhile, facilitated the arrival in the Italian peninsula of artists such as Pietro di Creta and Gerardo di Patrasso, who were employed by Gianfrancesco to copy Plutarch's *Lives* and Suidas' *Lexicon Graecum* for Vittorino.

Further evidence of Gianfrancesco's desire to enrich his collection is an appeal emitted in 1434, in which he offered a reward for anyone able to provide a good

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Bibliothecae illius gratia, ubi perreximus occurrit nobis cum Mantuani Principis filiis, quos instituendos acceperat, aliisque nobilibus ac studiosis; ab que his omnibus deducti, expositam Graecorum voluminum struem evertimus, ibique non nihil peregrinitatis offendimus. Nam praeter ista communia Platonis, Plutarchi, Demosthenis et caeterorum tum Philosophorum, tum Oratorum, tum Poetarum, tum Historicorum; Orationes quasdam Iuliani Caesaris, Homeri vitam ab Herodoto scriptam, Quintiliani (Aristide) Musicam et alterius senis (Bacchio Geronte) de Musica opus et Augustinum de Trinitate et quaedam alia notavimus [...]" See also letter Gianfrancesco Gonzaga to Guarino Veronese, Mantua, 21 July 1444 (ASMn AG, b. 2882 Lib. 7 f. 49r). On the same day the marchese wrote to Domenico Grimaldo, requesting that he find a good copy of the same text during a forthcoming visit to Constantinople (ASMn AG, b. 2882 Lib. 7 f. 49r).

<sup>23</sup> Meroni, *Mostra dei codici gonzagheschi*, p.48.

<sup>24</sup> Meroni, *Mostra dei codici gonzagheschi*, pp.48-50. In March 1414 the Albertini, Counts of Prato and podestà of Mantua, were tried and found guilty of plotting against the Gonzaga. Following their incarceration, the brothers' possessions, which included many books, were seized by Gianfrancesco.

<sup>25</sup> On Belbello da Pavia and the *Messale* see pp.179-187 below.

copy of Boccaccio's *De genealogiis deorum gentilium*.<sup>26</sup> Furthermore, the registers of 1432 record purchases made by Vittorino of an *Evangelistario* in Greek and a copy of Donato's grammar book for Cecilia Gonzaga.<sup>27</sup>

### The Library in the Time of Lodovico

When Vittorino died in 1446 Lodovico had been marchese for two years and evidence suggests that the momentum for growth was still considerable at this stage. In the very year of Vittorino's death, Lodovico pronounced a decree similar to that of his father in 1434, calling for the return of all books which had been borrowed from the library, with the added threat this time that those who failed to return books were to be prosecuted for theft, a clear indication of just how strongly the new marchese was attached to his collection.<sup>28</sup> Lodovico, himself a former pupil and *discepolo* of Vittorino, had grown up to be a keen reader and not merely a bibliophile. Barbara too had studied under Vittorino and must surely have shared both her husband's passion for books and his desire to see their children receive a thorough humanist education, for which a continuously developing library was essential. By this stage the Gonzaga library, it must be noted, had also absorbed a considerable part of Vittorino's own private working library.<sup>29</sup>

Like many of his companions at the Casa Giocosa, including his brothers and sisters and Federico da Montefeltro in Urbino (Fig.26), Lodovico continued to be a collector of texts for the whole of his adult life.<sup>30</sup> In this activity he was assisted by an elaborate network of humanist contacts, and credit for the growth of the Gonzaga library must consequently be extended to many of the humanists who at one stage or another came into contact with the court. These contacts were often facilitated by marital and military links. Family ties with the Este of Ferrara, for

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<sup>26</sup> ASMn Buste Davari 5 (9). The archivist gives insufficient clues as to the location of the original document in the Archivio Gonzaga.

<sup>27</sup> Libro di spese di Paola Malatesta Gonzaga dal 1430 al 1435 (ASMn AG, b. 410A, registro 28 f. 63v, 1432). The reference is given by Meroni, *Mostra dei codici gonzagheschi*, p.51.

<sup>28</sup> The decree issued by Lodovico is published as an appendix in Alessandro Luzio e Rodolfo Renier, 'La cultura e le relazioni letterarie di Isabella d'Este Gonzaga', *Giornale storico della letteratura italiana*, 42, (1903), p.76.

<sup>29</sup> Clough, 'The Library of the Gonzaga at Mantua', p.58.

<sup>30</sup> On the library of Federico da Montefeltro see Cecil H. Clough, 'The Library of the Dukes of Urbino', *Librarium*, IX, (1966), 101-105 and 188-189; Sheila R. Herstein, 'The Library of Federico da Montefeltro', *The Private Library*, series ii, IV, (1971), 113-128; Marcello Simonetta, ed., *Federico da Montefeltro and his Library* (Milan: Y Press, 2007).



example, allowed easy access to the many Greek texts which first Guarino, and then the Sicilian humanist Giovanni Aurispa (1376-1459) had brought to Ferrara from Constantinople, while military ties with Milan meant that Lodovico frequently came into contact with another leading Greek scholar in Francesco Filelfo.<sup>31</sup> Indeed, as Weiss notes, during the second half of the Quattrocento the libraries of princes became the main repositories of Greek texts.<sup>32</sup>



**Fig.26: Pedro Berruguete,  
Portrait of Federico da Montefeltro and his son Guidobaldo**

Documents dating from the mid-1450s to the late 1460s reveal a particularly intense policy of acquisition at this stage. In 1456 the calligrapher Raffaele, who, as we have seen, also taught Lodovico's daughters, dedicated to the marchese the *Pharsalia* by Lucan (Fig.27) now kept at the Biblioteca Trivulziana in Milan, while in the same year we find Francesco Sforza requesting that Lodovico send a volume of

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<sup>31</sup> Lodovico's sister Margherita, who died in 1439, had been married to Leonello d'Este, while the pedagogue Guarino Veronese was a long-term correspondent of the marchese. Aurispa, meanwhile, was responsible for bringing some two-hundred and thirty-eight manuscripts to Italy, prompting Sandys to draw comparisons with Poggio Bracciolini, the renowned hunter of Latin texts. See John Edwin Sandys, *A Short History of Classical Scholarship from the Sixth Century B.C. to the Present Day* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1915), pp.174-175. On Filelfo and Mantua see pp.311-319 below.

<sup>32</sup> Roberto Weiss, *The Spread of Italian Humanism* (London: Hutchinson, 1964), p.40.

Strabo's *Europa* to Milan for copying.<sup>33</sup> Perhaps more significant than any reference to the purchase of individual texts is a letter written by Lodovico to Giovanni Tomari on 8 March 1459, in which he mentions twelve cupboards he is having made to store books.<sup>34</sup> Around this time other work appears to have been carried out on the library in the Castello di San Giorgio, which had recently become the residence of Lodovico and Barbara, following a move from the main court complex forced upon them by preparations for the Papal Congress of 1459-1460.<sup>35</sup>



Fig.27: Lucan, *Pharsalia*, Milan, Biblioteca Trivulziana, MS 692

While the Pope and his entourage were in Mantua the movement of books appears to have intensified. On 8 December Lodovico, no doubt stimulated by the many humanist visitors present in Mantua, asked Platina to provide a revised and corrected edition of Virgil's *Georgics*, a letter which testifies to the marchese's

<sup>33</sup> On the Lucan by Raffaele see p.193 below. See also letter Francesco Sforza to Lodovico, Milan, 27 September 1456 (Archivio di Stato di Milano, Potenze Estere: Mantova 1456-1465).

<sup>34</sup> Letter Lodovico to Giovanni Tomari, Mantua, 8 March 1459 (ASMn AG, b. 2886 Lib. 35 f. 84r). Published in Rodolfo Signorini, 'Acquisitions for Ludovico II Gonzaga's Library', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 44, (1981), 179-183, p.183.

<sup>35</sup> See Leandro Ventura 'Appunti su alcuni ambienti del Castello di San Giorgio a Mantova. La biblioteca di Ludovico II e la Camera Picta', *Civiltà Mantovana*, terza serie, n.6, (1993), 77-81.



scrupulous insistence on the quality of the text.<sup>36</sup> Five days later, on 13 December, Lodovico wrote to Leon Battista Alberti, requesting that he send a copy of Vitruvius for the pope himself.<sup>37</sup> In another letter written during the same month, Baccio Ugolini, who at the time was acting on behalf of the Gonzaga in Rome, informed the marchese that within a few months he intended to bring to Mantua a selection of manuscripts, some copied and some purchased, including a Tibullus, an Ovid and a Petrarch.<sup>38</sup>

Perhaps it was an early corrected draft of the *Georgics* which Lodovico had Barbara send him while he was at Petriolo in May 1460, together with the aforementioned Lucan, a Quintus Curtius also copied by Raffaele and a copy of Saint Augustine's *De Civitate Dei*.<sup>39</sup> To what extent these volumes had been integrated into the library or, for that matter, to what extent the library was organised at all, must be called into question by Lodovico's instructions to Barbara regarding the whereabouts of the requested volumes. For the Lucan and the Quintus Curtius he vaguely tells her that Pietro Filippo knows where they are, while he suggests that Perino de Gazo will know where to find *De Civitate Dei*. As for the corrected *Georgics*, the marchese simply requests that Marsilio Andreasi, Pietro Spagnolo and Pietro Filippo hunt for it everywhere. In August of the same year, in a letter to Guarino, Lodovico refers to a new Virgil text, almost certainly the now completed corrected version edited by Platina.<sup>40</sup>

During his time as teacher in Mantua between 1460 and 1462 Gregorio Tifernate also appears to have occupied himself with copying Greek manuscripts.<sup>41</sup> Still in 1460, Pier Candido Decembrio dedicated to Lodovico his *De natura avium et*

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<sup>36</sup> Letter published in Willelmo Braghirolli, 'Virgilio e i Gonzaga' in *Album Virgiliano* (Mantua: R. Accademia di Mantova, 1883), p.9. Like Meroni, I have been unable to locate this letter in the Archivio Gonzaga. On Platina see pp.137-142 below.

<sup>37</sup> See p.328 below.

<sup>38</sup> See Alessandro Luzio and Rodolfo Renier, 'I Filelfo e l'umanesimo alla corte dei Gonzaga', *Giornale storico della letteratura italiana*, 16, (1890), 115-217, p.145; On Baccio Ugolini and his relations with princes and humanists see Mauda Bregoli Russo, *Letterati a corte. Ferrara Firenze Mantova* (Naples: Loffredo Editore, 2004), pp.134-135.

<sup>39</sup> See letters Lodovico to Barbara, Petriolo, 9 May 1460 (ASMn AG, b. 2885 Lib. 31 f. 59v) and 12 May 1460 (ASMn AG, b. 2885 Lib. 31 f. 59r). Both letters are published in Attilio Portioli, *I Gonzaga ai bagni di Petriolo di Siena nel 1460 e 1461* (Mantua: Eredi Segna, 1869), pp.10-13.

<sup>40</sup> Letter Lodovico to Guarino Veronese, 18 August 1460 (ASMn AG, b. 2888 Lib. 48 f. 22r). Published in Emilio Faccioli, *Mantova. Le Lettere. I. La tradizione virgiliana. La cultura nel Medioevo* (Mantua: Istituto Carlo d'Arco per la Storia di Mantova, 1959), p.57.

<sup>41</sup> On Tifernate see pp.147-149 below.

*animalium* and, so impressed was the marchese with the work that on New Year's Eve he wrote to Decembrio requesting drawings of the animals described in the volume, so that those who read it might have a clearer idea of their forms.<sup>42</sup> The following month Lodovico received a letter from Bartolomeo Brunacci in Ferrara, in which he was given the opportunity to acquire the library of Giovanni Aurispa, the Ferrarese humanist and Greek scholar who had recently died.<sup>43</sup> Luzio and Renier, having been unable to locate a reply from Lodovico, assumed that he simply did not have the funds available to make an offer for Aurispa's collection, and Clough also reports that Lodovico turned down the opportunity to purchase Aurispa's library.<sup>44</sup> Rodolfo Signorini, however, later found two documents which demonstrated that this was not the case. A letter of 19 May from Tifernate to Lodovico lists the Greek texts recently acquired from Aurispa's library for the cost of sixty ducats: the Suidas in two volumes; a commentary on Demosthenes' *Orations*; the *Bibliotheca Historica* of Diodorus Siculus; the *Orations* of Aristides; a commentary on Homer in two volumes; four other unspecified texts.<sup>45</sup> Five days later the marchese wrote back to Tifernate, expressing his satisfaction and pledging to provide the money as soon as he could.<sup>46</sup> Thus while Lodovico may have been selective in the volumes he acquired from Aurispa's library, he certainly did not miss the opportunity to enrich his own collection. Moreover, if, as Clough argues, at this time the impetus for collecting manuscripts was slowing as libraries were becoming complete, then there is every reason to imagine that the Gonzaga library, clearly one of the richest anywhere in this period, already had on its shelves and in its recently ordered new cupboards many of the volumes on offer from Aurispa's collection.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Letter Lodovico Gonzaga to Pier Candido Decembrio, Mantua, 31 December 1460 (ASMn AG, b. 2888 Lib. 45 f. 6v). Published in Luzio and Renier, 'I Filelfo', p.148. On 6 January 1461 Lodovico's ambassador in Milan, Vincenzo della Scalona, wrote to inform the marchese that he had met with Decembrio to discuss the request (ASMn AG, b. 1621 c. 552). See also Meroni, *Mostra dei codici gonzagheschi*, p.58.

<sup>43</sup> Letter Bartolomeo Brunacci to Lodovico, Ferrara, 17 January 1461 (ASMn AG, b. 1228 c. 347). Published in Luzio e Renier, 'I Filelfo e l'umanesimo alla corte dei Gonzaga', pp.149-151.

<sup>44</sup> Luzio e Renier, 'I Filelfo e l'umanesimo alla corte dei Gonzaga', p.152; Clough, 'The Library of the Gonzaga at Mantua', p.59.

<sup>45</sup> Letter Gregorio Tifernate to Lodovico, Mantua, 19 May 1461 (ASMn AG, b. 2395 c. 554r). Published in Signorini, 'Acquisitions for Ludovico II Gonzaga's Library', p.182.

<sup>46</sup> Letter Lodovico to Gregorio Tifernate, Milan, 24 May 1461 (ASMn AG, b. 2888 Lib. 44 f. 52v). See Signorini, 'Acquisitions for Ludovico II Gonzaga's Library', p.181.

<sup>47</sup> Clough, 'The Library of the Gonzaga at Mantua', p.59.



Lodovico at this stage was without doubt still looking to fill the gaps in his collection. On 10 February 1461 he wrote to his ambassador in Milan, Vincenzo della Scalona, asking him to procure copies of the ancient inscriptions collected by Ciriaco D'Ancona (1391-1453/55).<sup>48</sup> Meanwhile he commissioned two further manuscripts from Agamennone Tiberti da Cesena: *De Plantis* by Theophrastus and *De Astrologia* by Firmicus Maternus.<sup>49</sup> The commissioning of both these works, by no means mainstream texts, not only adds further weight to the theory that the Gonzaga library was becoming complete at this stage but also offers eloquent testimony to Lodovico's wide range of interests and learning.

It was also around this time, on 14 February 1461, that Lodovico contacted Vespasiano da Bisticci (1421-1498), the renowned Florentine bookseller and biographer, to cancel an order for some unspecified epistles.<sup>50</sup> Some fourteen months later, on 19 April 1462, Gianfrancesco Manetti, son of the renowned scholar Giannozzo, wrote to Lodovico from Florence, asking for instructions and payment for a Bible in Hebrew which he was copying for the marchese.<sup>51</sup> Lodovico, however, having heard negative reports on the quality of Manetti's work, on 26 April instructed his agent in Florence, Antonio da Ricavo, to have the work inspected. The marchese's concerns regarding the quality of the text and the pride he has in his library are evident in the opening lines of the letter:

[...] Nui siamo mezi impazati cum quello Zo. Francesco scriptore che ne dovea scrivere la Bibia hebrea: credevamo de

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<sup>48</sup> Letter Lodovico to Vincenzo della Scalona, Mantua, 10 February 1461 (ASMn AG, b. 2886 Lib. 38 f. 94r). Published in Luzio e Renier, 'I Filelfo e l'umanesimo alla corte dei Gonzaga', p.159.

<sup>49</sup> See letters Lodovico to Agamennone Tiberti, Mantua, 10 February 1461 (ASMn AG, b. 2886 Lib. 38 f. 94r), 11 April 1461 (ASMn AG, b. 2888 Lib. 48 f. 26v) and 23 August 1461 (ASMn AG, b. 2888 Lib. 48 f. 56r). See also letter Agamennone Tiberti to Lodovico, Cesena, 30 April 1461 (ASMn AG, b. 841 c. 375). These four letters are published in Signorini, 'Acquisitions for Ludovico II Gonzaga's Library', pp.181-182.

<sup>50</sup> Letter Lodovico to Vespasiano da Bisticci, Mantua, 12 February 1461 (ASMn AG, b. 2888 Lib. 48 f. 2v). See Luzio e Renier, 'I Filelfo e l'umanesimo alla corte dei Gonzaga', p.152. Apart from this letter published by Luzio and Renier, the Archivio Gonzaga does not seem to contain any further correspondence between the marchese and Vespasiano. Dorothy Robathan describes Vespasiano as "the last of the medieval scribes and at the same time the first of the modern booksellers". Dorothy Robathan, 'Libraries of the Italian Renaissance' in James W. Thompson, ed., *The Medieval Library* (New York: Hafner, 1957), pp.509-588, esp. p.512. On Vespasiano da Bisticci see also Enrico Frizzi, *Di Vespasiano da Bisticci e delle sue biografie* (Rome: A.Polla, 1974).

<sup>51</sup> Letter Gianfrancesco Manetti to Lodovico, Florence, 19 April 1462 (ASMn AG, b. 1100 c. 130). Luzio e Renier, 'I Filelfo e l'umanesimo alla corte dei Gonzaga', p.153.

haver una digna cosa da mettere in la nostra libreria, ma per quello ne fu dicto l'è una trista lettera [...].<sup>52</sup>

On 4 May Antonio replied to Lodovico and, while he did not offer any comment of his own, he reported that Vespasiano da Bisticci had praised the Bible being copied by Manetti as a very beautiful piece of work.<sup>53</sup> Lodovico, nonetheless, stood firm in his conviction and cancelled the commission. Perhaps there was ill feeling between Lodovico and Vespasiano, or maybe the marchese really did have it on good authority that Manetti's work was substandard. If the latter were true, this would constitute further evidence of Lodovico's overriding interest in the quality of the text above the beauty of the volume as a whole. Indeed, whether patrons were more interested in accuracy of text than in beauty of script is an issue on which several commentators have speculated. Cecil Clough, for instance, picking up on comments made by Poliziano on the poor quality scripts of some volumes in the Urbino library, most of which came from the same workshop of Vespasiano so mistrusted by Lodovico, suggests that of prime concern to Federico da Montefeltro was not the philological accuracy of his manuscripts, but rather the elegant style in which many were written by his copyist Federico Veterani.<sup>54</sup>

The library of Federico da Montefeltro, so praised by the same Vespasiano da Bisticci who made substantial profits from supplying it, and glorified even further by its position of prominence in the architectural splendour of the *Palazzo Ducale* in Urbino, enjoys deserved fame as one of the outstanding collections of volumes in Quattrocento Italy. Nonetheless, a detailed comparison with Lodovico's library in Mantua, a task made virtually impossible by the lack of an inventory for the period, would surely reveal the latter to be at least the equal of Federico's in terms of quantity, and probably its superior in terms of quality. As early as 1407 the Gonzaga owned 392 manuscripts and, as has been suggested, Gianfrancesco was also an avid investor in the library. The arrival of Vittorino da Feltre in 1423, meanwhile, would surely have seen this figure swell still further in the intervening

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<sup>52</sup> Letter Lodovico to Antonio da Ricavo, Mantua, 26 April 1462 (ASMn AG, b. 2887 Lib. 39 f. 17v). Published in Luzio e Renier, 'I Filelfo e l'umanesimo alla corte dei Gonzaga', p.153.

<sup>53</sup> Letter Antonio da Ricavo to Lodovico, Florence, 4 May 1462 (ASMn AG, b. 1100 c. 165).

<sup>54</sup> Clough, 'The Library of the Dukes of Urbino', p.102. If Peruzzi's estimate that Federico's collaboration with Vespasiano da Bisticci began around 1464, this would mean that Lodovico had explored this means of enriching his library at least three years before his former schoolmate and fellow prince. Marcella Peruzzi, 'The Library of Glorious Memory: History of the Montefeltro Collection', in Simonetta, ed., *Federico da Montefeltro and his Library*, pp.29-39, p.30.



decades before the beginning of Lodovico's rule. When Federico became *signore* of Urbino in 1444, the same year in which Lodovico became marchese, the Montefeltro library, in contrast, contained barely one hundred volumes.<sup>55</sup> Studies have shown that, despite the establishment of a scriptorium, the vast majority of the one thousand plus items in the Urbino library were acquired during the last two decades of Federico's life, and that half of these were acquired directly from Vespasiano.<sup>56</sup> From this it could be surmised that Federico's apparently impulsive urge to collect may have been influenced by a chaotic desire to invest money in a scheme closely tied to his palace and the image of learned prince that he wished to project, not to mention some astute marketing on the part of Vespasiano, while the Mantuan library, during three and a half decades of rule by Lodovico, continued to develop gradually and along scholarly lines, in an environment in which textual accuracy was the patron's prime concern. Finally, the fact in itself that Federico purchased so many manuscripts in a relatively short period of time is probably indicative of an awareness, no doubt rendered more acute by discussions with his main supplier Vespasiano, that his library was lacking many of the volumes already possessed by his peers in Ferrara and in Mantua.

Despite the fact that the finest libraries were becoming ever more complete and that a general change in the climate of patronage was leading princes away from manuscripts towards art and architecture, literary activity remained lively at the Mantuan court throughout the 1460s.<sup>57</sup> In 1464 we find Lodovico borrowing a Pliny from Borso d'Este (1413-1471, Marchese of Ferrara from 1450 and Duke from 1471), presumably as it was deemed to be a more correct version of *Historia Naturalis* than the one he already owned.<sup>58</sup> On 21 August, 1466, meanwhile, the miniaturist Matteo Contugi da Volterra wrote to the marchese to justify the slow

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<sup>55</sup> Peruzzi, 'The Library of Glorious Memory', p.29.

<sup>56</sup> Clough, 'Federigo da Montefeltro's Patronage of the Arts, 1468-1482', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, XXXVI, (1973), 129-144, p.138; Maria Moranti, 'Organizzazione della biblioteca di Federico da Montefeltro', in *Federico da Montefeltro: le arti* (Rome: Bulzoni, 1986), pp.19-51.

<sup>57</sup> The point is made by Clough, 'The Library of the Gonzaga at Mantua', p.59.

<sup>58</sup> From a letter from Borso d'Este to Lodovico, Ferrara, 22 January 1465 (ASMn AG, b. 1182) it is clear that the marchese had borrowed the volume some time beforehand. Given, as mentioned above, that a manuscript of Pliny's *Historia Naturalis* probably belonged to the Gonzaga Library as early as 1350, the text referred to in this letter must have been considered to be a more correct copy. On this Pliny see *Andrea Mantegna e i Gonzaga. Rinascimento nel Castello di San Giorgio*, ed. by Filippo Trevisani (Milan: Electa, 2006), pp.234-243.

pace at which he was copying a work by Leon Battista Alberti.<sup>59</sup> On 23 May 1469, in a letter addressed to Barbara, Giovanni Pietro Arrivabene (1439-1504) asks to borrow a Pliny for the Pope, perhaps the same volume copied from that belonging to the Duke of Ferrara. Around the same time Arrivabene also acquired for Lodovico an Appian and a copy of the *Libro di divina dottrina* by Saint Catherine of Siena<sup>60</sup> Nor did the humanist climate appear to quell the passion which burned deep inside the princes of northern Italy for the old romances of the matter of France and, during the week before Christmas 1468, Lodovico wrote to Borso d'Este to ask that a Lancelot be returned to Mantua.<sup>61</sup>

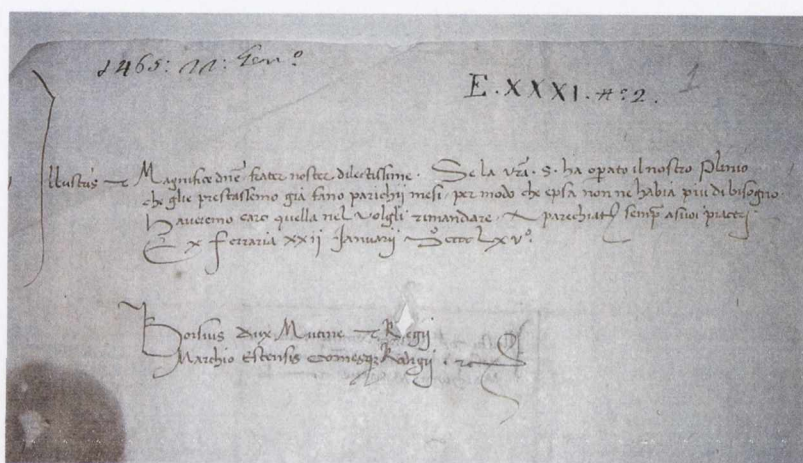


Fig.28: Letter from Borso d'Este to Lodovico, Ferrara, 22 January 1465 (ASMn AG, b. 1182)

Although I have suggested that Lodovico's main concern was that texts were correct, he also appears to have been more inclined than his father to have the volumes he commissioned decorated. Alongside scribes we find miniaturists such as Giacomo Bellanti and Girolamo da Cremona employed throughout his rule.<sup>62</sup> It also was during these later years, in 1472, that the first printing press was established in Mantua. The first book printed in Mantua, by the Puzbach brothers, was Boccaccio's *Decameron* and it comes as no surprise to learn that the best text available was deemed to be that of the Gonzaga library which, in time honoured

<sup>59</sup> Letter Matteo da Volterra to Lodovico, Mantua, 21 August 1466 (ASMn AG, b. 2405 c. 232). On Matteo da Volterra see pp.198-204 below.

<sup>60</sup> See letters Giovanni Pietro Arrivabene to Barbara, Rome, 20 May 1469 (ASMn AG, b. 843 c. 720) and 23 May 1469 (ASMn AG, b. 843 c. 721). On Arrivabene see pp.257-266 below. On Saint Catherine of Siena and her *Libro di divina dottrina*, often referred to as her *Dialogo*, see Francis Thomas Luongo, *The Sainly Politics of Catherine of Siena* (New York: Ithaca, 2006), p.2.

<sup>61</sup> Letter Lodovico Gonzaga to Borso d'Este, Goito, 19 December 1468 (ASMn AG, b. 2889 Lib. 63 f. 13v). Published in Luzzio e Renier, 'I Filelfo e l'umanesimo alla corte dei Gonzaga', p.160.

<sup>62</sup> On these and other miniaturists see chapter five below.



fashion, Lodovico duly made available to be copied, in order that the large number of printed copies would be as correct as the cherished manuscript.<sup>63</sup> This was the first step in what was to be a gradual conversion of the Gonzaga from manuscripts to printed texts, and the library continued to swell under Lodovico's immediate successors, Federico, Francesco and his wife Isabella d'Este.<sup>64</sup> Clough notes that the arrival of printing changed the nature of libraries: the pride of an owner who enhanced his reputation by collecting high quality texts was irreversibly modified as an element of exclusivity had now been removed from the equation.<sup>65</sup> In his biography of Federico da Montefeltro, Vespasiano da Bisticci's comment that a printed book would have been "ashamed" if placed alongside the finely crafted manuscripts in the Urbino library appears somewhat idealistic, especially in light of evidence that Federico's library did indeed include many printed volumes from the 1470s.<sup>66</sup> Nonetheless, the desire of patrons to have their volumes decorated survived the transition to the new form and, for several decades following the arrival of printing in Italy, collectors continued to employ scribes and miniaturists with the intent of personalising their books to a greater or lesser extent.<sup>67</sup>

## Conclusions

Unfortunately no inventory of the Gonzaga library carried out during or soon after Lodovico's rule has come to light. While the inventory of 1407 is useful in so far as it gives us some indication as to the foundations upon which Lodovico was building, it must also be remembered that the intervening years had seen the arrival of Vittorino and the establishment of the Casa Giocosa, as well as three decades of frenetic activity by Gianfrancesco. From the inventories of 1541 and 1542, on the other hand, it would be very difficult to distinguish the volumes obtained by

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<sup>63</sup> On the printing activity in Mantua see chapter six below.

<sup>64</sup> See Meroni, *Mostra dei codici gonzagheschi*.

<sup>65</sup> Clough, 'The Library of the Gonzaga at Mantua', p.59.

<sup>66</sup> Bisticci, Vespasiano da, *Le vite*, ed. by Aulo Greco, (Florence: Istituto Nazionale di Studi sul Rinascimento, 1976), I, p.398. Vespasiano, during a visit to Urbino before 1498, valued Federico's collection of manuscripts at more than thirty thousand ducats, a figure which Clough considers plausible. Clough, 'Towards an Economic History of the State of Urbino at the Time of Federico da Montefeltro and his Son, Guidobaldo', in L. de Rosa, ed., *Studi in memoria di Federico Melis* (Naples: Giannini Editore, 1978), III, pp.469-504, p.492.

See also Elizabeth L. Eisenstein, *The Printing Press as an Agent of Change: Communications and Cultural Transformations in Early-Modern Europe*, 2 volumes (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), I, p.48. On the printed books owned by Federico see Martin Davies, "Non ve n'è ignuno a stampa": The Printed Books of Federico da Montefeltro', in Simonetta, ed., *Federico da Montefeltro and his Library*, pp. 63-79.

<sup>67</sup> Clough, 'The Library of the Dukes of Urbino', p.103.

Lodovico from those acquired by his successors, quite apart from the fact that some of the volumes belonging to the library in Lodovico's time may have been lost by this stage. Thus, with no real prospect of constructing an accurate catalogue of the Gonzaga library during the mid to late fifteenth-century, we must look to contemporary documents in order to glean what information we can regarding the commissioning, purchase and trading of manuscripts.

If, as Clough argues, the Gonzaga library really did rival the Gonzaga art collections in both quantitative and qualitative terms, the sad truth is that it suffered the same fate.<sup>68</sup> Three centuries of growth were abruptly halted by the sack of 1630 and the losses of that year will probably never be known in any detail. If we add to this picture a trend of steady decline, the division of the library through wills and the complete dispersal with the sale of 1707, we must reluctantly accept that we shall never know precisely which books made up the library during Lodovico's era.

What is certain from the copious volume of correspondence relating to books, however, is that Lodovico, following his education under Vittorino, was without question not only a child of humanism himself but also one of the great literary patrons of the Italian Renaissance. Here was clearly an example of a collection reflecting the culture of the collector, the library housing an astounding number of volumes on diverse subjects in Latin, Greek, Hebrew, French and the *volgare*. Despite the onerous architectural and urban projects to which he was committed during the 1460s and the 1470s, Lodovico never lost sight of the importance of a comprehensive working library for his court and for the teachers of the Gonzaga children, a library which he constantly strove to enrich. As he did in the fields of art and architecture, Lodovico presided over a key phase in the literary transition of Mantua from Gothic to Renaissance.<sup>69</sup> Perhaps the Gonzaga library has seldom received the attention it deserves because, as Clough points out, Lodovico Gonzaga does not appear in Vespasiano da Bisticci's *Vite*, while his friend and companion at the Giocosa, Federico da Montefeltro of Urbino, was included and

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<sup>68</sup> Clough, 'The Library of the Dukes of Urbino', p.51.

<sup>69</sup> For an outline of this transition in art and architecture see Alison Cole, *Art of the Italian Renaissance Courts* (London: Everyman, 1995), pp.143-155 and Paolo Carpeggiani, '<<Renovatio Urbis.>> Strategie urbane a Mantova nell'età di Ludovico Gonzaga (1444-1478)' in *Leon Battista Alberti*, ed. Joseph Rykwert e Anne Engel, *Catalogo della mostra di Mantova 10 settembre-11 dicembre 1994*, (Milan: Electa, 1994), pp.178-185.



has ever since basked in the glory reserved for the great patrons and protectors of letters.<sup>70</sup> Ubaldo Meroni's study and exhibition catalogue of 1966 has done much to restore some prestige to the Gonzaga collections of the Quattrocento but this is clearly a subject which deserves to be more thoroughly examined.<sup>71</sup> In the absence of relevant inventories the only means of doing so would appear to be through the painstaking combing of documents relating to expenses, which are also sadly scant for this period, and correspondence with humanists, ambassadors, scribes, miniaturists, agents and traders. This would appear to be the only hope of achieving a clearer picture of which volumes were added to the library after 1407. While by no means exhaustive, the next chapter will focus on the marchesi's relations with scribes and miniaturists, the people whose work would fill the shelves and cupboards which Lodovico had to order to store his ever increasing number of books.

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<sup>70</sup> Vespasiano da Bisticci, *Le vite*, ed. by Aulo Greco, (Florence: Istituto Nazionale di Studi sul Rinascimento, 1976). Having examined two contemporary inventories for the Urbino library at the time of Federico da Montefeltro, as well as Giovanni da Bisticci's biography of Federico, Herstein estimates the number of manuscripts owned by Federico at between eight hundred and eleven hundred, a figure that included volumes in all areas of religious, scholarly and literary writing, but did not include the many printed volumes purchased since the early 1470s. Herstein, 'The Library of Federigo da Montefeltro', pp.119-120.

<sup>71</sup> Meroni, *Mostra dei codici gonzagheschi*.

# **PART THREE**

## **PRODUCTION OF BOOKS**





## CHAPTER FIVE

### MINIATURISTS AND SCRIBES

#### Introduction

In much the same way as information on artistic and architectural commissions may be gleaned from correspondence to and from artists and architects, data on the substantial patronage of books can be found in letters which were exchanged between the Gonzaga family and a succession of miniaturists and scribes. In keeping with the marchese's clear literary agenda with regard to the purchase of books, outlined in the previous chapter, the Mantuan court in the pre-printing era appears to have been a busy centre for the reproduction and decoration of texts. The miniaturists and scribes employed by the Gonzaga during the rule of Lodovico, some permanently in Mantua and some based elsewhere, were many and varied and, consequently, enjoyed differing types of relationship with the marchesi.

Often considered to be an *arte minore*, though not, it must be noted, by the patrons or artists of the era, the genre of decorated manuscripts is now firmly established as an important area of Italian Quattrocento art. The purpose of *miniatura*, note Formaggio and Basso, was twofold. Firstly, its decorative purpose reflected the ancient desire to decorate scripts. Secondly, its illustrative value gave an extra dimension to the words penned by the scribes.<sup>1</sup> The original milieu for this form of art was monasteries but by the fifteenth century it had taken firm root in the northern courts. While, as was also the case with other forms of art, the passage from the Gothic to the Renaissance style occurred in Florence in the early decades of the century, the revolution in *miniatura* in the northern courts did not take place until the 1450s. In this respect developments in Mantua occurred a little later than elsewhere; Canova notes that, although the new style appeared there only in the early 1460s following the arrival of Mantegna, it soon developed a level of artistic

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<sup>1</sup> Dino Formaggio and Carlo Basso, *La Miniatura* (Novara: De Agostini, 1960), p.5.



maturity unmatched in neighbouring states.<sup>2</sup> These years following the Papal Congress and the arrival of Mantegna, indeed, can be viewed as a turning point for Lodovico; whereas his humanist education under Vittorino had understandably conditioned the marchese to consider books to be instruments of learning, the increasing popularity of textual decoration saw miniaturists employed more frequently from the early 1460s.<sup>3</sup> The workmanship and artistry of the many volumes copied and decorated in Mantua is matched by considerable contemporary correspondence relating to various stages of their completion, revealing much about patrons, artists, scribes and artistic development during a period of cultural change.<sup>4</sup>

Unlike that of most other manuscripts and works of art belonging to the Gonzaga dynasty at the time of the sack of Mantua by the Imperial forces in 1629-30, the fate of the outstanding Mantuan *Messale*, usually referred to as the *Messale di Barbara* and not to be confused with another *Messale* commissioned by Lodovico now in Naples, was not removal to Vienna.<sup>5</sup> In his book of 1912, the Turin art historian Pietro Toesca reveals that he has discovered in the library of the Cathedral of Mantua a “ricchissimo codice.”<sup>6</sup> Upon its completion in 1467, the *Messale* was given by Barbara to her son, Cardinal Francesco, who in turn left it to his brother Lodovico, who was bishop of Mantua from 1483 to 1511. It reappears in 1525 in an inventory of the possessions of Cardinal Sigismondo Gonzaga (1469-1525), who was nephew to both Francesco and Lodovico, before being owned by Ercole Gonzaga (1505-1563), who was bishop of Mantua from 1521 and a cardinal from

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<sup>2</sup> Giuseppa Z. Zanichelli, ‘Miniatura a Mantova 1430-1460’, in *Andrea Mantegna e i Gonzaga. Rinascimento nel castello di San Giorgio*, ed. by Filippo Trevisani, (Milan: Electa, 2006), pp.90-93.

<sup>3</sup> The point is made by Zanichelli, ‘Miniatura a Mantova al tempo della dieta’, in *Il sogno di Pio II e il viaggio da Roma a Mantova*, Atti del convegno internazionale (Mantova, 13-15 aprile 2000), ed. by A. Calzona, F.P. Fiore, A. Tenenti and C. Vasoli (Florence: Olschki, 2003), pp.403-421.

<sup>4</sup> For a comprehensive account of the *Messale* see Giuse Pastore and Giancarlo Manzoli, *Il Messale di Barbara* (Mantua: Editrice Sintesi, 1991).

<sup>5</sup> On Lodovico’s *Messale*, begun around 1460, see Ubaldo Meroni, *Mostra dei codici gonzagheschi. La biblioteca da Luigi I ad Isabella d’Este (1348-1540)* (Mantua: Biblioteca Comunale, 1966), p.87; Trevisani, ed., *Andrea Mantegna e i Gonzaga*, pp.218-221.

<sup>6</sup> Pietro Toesca, *La pittura e la miniatura nella Lombardia* (Milan: Hoepli, 1912), p.221. For a brief account of the fortune of the *Messale* see Costante Berselli, ‘Il messale miniato del Duomo di Mantova’, *Civiltà Mantovana*, n.s., n.4, (1984), 21-43 and Pastore and Manzoli, *Il Messale*, pp.27-35.

1527. During the extensive refurbishment of the cathedral initiated by Giulio Romano in 1545, Ercole donated the *Messale* to the chapter house, fully aware that its presence there would further embellish the church. In the early twentieth century it was discovered that some pages had been removed and, following their recovery and at the behest of the Ministero della Pubblica Istruzione, the volume was rebound in 1935 and moved to Palazzo Ducale. With the opening of the new Museo Diocesano in 1983, however, the *Messale* was returned to the cathedral, where it is housed to this day.

### **Belbello da Pavia: The First Artist of the *Messale***

Belbello da Pavia was, according to the *Dictionnaire des Miniaturistes*, the most remarkable miniaturist active in Italy during the first half of the Quattrocento, epitomising the crowning achievement of the old Lombard tradition before the definitive triumph of the new currents.<sup>7</sup> Cipriani describes Belbello's work as the last and most intense episode of late Gothic Lombard art before the Renaissance, while Formaggio and Basso talk of unparalleled imagination. The Mantuan *Messale*, according to Pastore, represents the culmination of his work and Samek Ludovici suggests that Belbello brought the curtain down on a golden age of Italian miniatures.<sup>8</sup> Toesca, whom Berselli credits with the rediscovery of Belbello after more than four centuries, stated his belief that Belbello was an artist to whom "si conviene dar merito di aver preannunziato, e preparato in parte, più d'ogni altro artista il singolare fiorire della miniatura in Lombardia e nell'Emilia nella seconda metà del Quattrocento."<sup>9</sup> Before discussing this remarkable work and Belbello's relations with the Gonzaga, it is worth piecing together what is known about the life of this artist.

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<sup>7</sup> Paolo D'Ancona and Erhard Aeschlimann, 'Bellanti Giacomo', in *Dictionnaire des Miniaturistes*, 2<sup>e</sup> edition, (Milan: Hoepli, 1949), p.24.

<sup>8</sup> Renata Cipriani, 'Belbello Luchino', in *Dizionario biografico degli italiani* (Rome: Istituto della Enciclopedia Italiana, 1965), VII, pp.546-547, p.547; Formaggio and Basso, *La Miniatura*, pp.127-129; Pastore and Manzoli, *Il Messale*, p.44; Sergio Samek Ludovici, *Belbello da Pavia* (Milan: A.Martello, 1954), p.7.

<sup>9</sup> Toesca, *La pittura e la miniatura*, pp.221-226. Cited in Berselli, 'Il messale miniato', p.21.



The years of birth and death of Luchino Belbello da Pavia remain obscure but he appears to have been active from around the late 1420s to the early 1460s.<sup>10</sup> His services were in demand at some of the most prestigious courts of the era. Following a *De oratore* of the late 1420s, he completed an *Offiziolo* for Filippo Maria Visconti, previously begun by Giovannino de' Grassi (documented 1389-1398) and his brother Solomone (documented 1398-1400) for Giangaleazzo Visconti.<sup>11</sup> Other early works attributed to Belbello include a *Brevario* for Maria of Savoy, completed between 1432 and 1435, and a Bible for Niccolò d'Este of Ferrara, left incomplete in 1434.<sup>12</sup> Critics also recognise the hand of Belbello in two volumes of *Acta sanctorum* written in 1431 by Giovanni de' Porcelli for the Certosa of Pavia, an *Antifonario* housed in the Biblioteca Malatestiana in Cesena, in an *Apollinaris quaestiones* in Venice's Biblioteca Marciana and in the *Bibbia gallica* of the Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, originally in Modena, a magnificently decorated volume often referred to as the *Bibbia Estense*.<sup>13</sup> As well as the Gonzaga, therefore, Belbello worked for a series of other prestigious patrons, including members of the Visconti and Este dynasties and Cardinal Bessarion.

Belbello's working relationship with the Gonzaga family spanned no fewer than twenty years and three patrons. The *Messale*, it would appear, was initiated in early 1442 at the request of Lodovico's brother Gianlucido, who in October of the same year authorised payment not only for Belbello but also for the scribe Pietro Paolo Marono, who had completed eight sections.<sup>14</sup> Progress probably continued over the next year or two but we have no news of the *Messale* during the mid-1440s. Following Gianlucido's untimely death at the age of 25 in February 1448, responsibility for the completion of the project was assumed by his mother Paola Malatesta Gonzaga. Perhaps as the decade had passed work on the *Messale* had

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<sup>10</sup> Ubaldo Meroni, 'Giustizia per Giovanni Belbello,' *Civiltà Mantovana*, 8, (1967), 115-116, p.116; Samek Ludovici, *Belbello da Pavia*, p.7.

<sup>11</sup> Pastore and Manzoli, *Il Messale*, p.43; Cipriani, 'Belbello Luchino', p.546.

<sup>12</sup> Pastore and Manzoli, *Il Messale*, p.43.

<sup>13</sup> Cipriani, 'Belbello Luchino', p.546.

<sup>14</sup> Pastore and Manzoli, *Il Messale*, p.13. For documentation of Belbello's presence in Mantua see Berselli, 'Il messale miniato'. In the following decade Marono worked in Ferrara on the renowned *Bibbia Estense*. See Giordana Mariani Canova, 'I libri miniati dei Gonzaga: un percorso di gusto e di cultura', in *Andrea Mantegna e i Gonzaga*, pp.83-89, p.84.

stalled but the death of the original patron seems to have prompted Paola to honour the memory of her son by injecting new impetus. From 1448 to 1450 a flurry of activity on the *Messale* is traceable from a series of surviving correspondence.



Fig.29: *Belbello da Pavia, Messale di Barbara, Mantua, Museo Diocesano*

In an undated letter of 1448 Belbello, working in Milan but clearly having been made aware of Paola's intention to resurrect her deceased son's project, approached Vincenzo della Scalona, the resident Gonzaga ambassador at the Sforza court, requesting that the work in its current state be sent from Mantua to Milan.<sup>15</sup> In his letter Belbello also set out his rates for the decoration of large letters and small letters and, perhaps as a reaction to the changing artistic tastes which would finally deny him the opportunity to complete his work on the *Messale*, asked Vincenzo to appeal to Paola to allow him to work exclusively on the decoration of the manuscript, without input from other miniaturists. From a letter of 24 April of

<sup>15</sup> Letter Belbello to Vincenzo della Scalona, 1448. Published by Samek Ludovici, *Belbello da Pavia*, p.23. See also Berselli, 'Il messale miniato', p.32.



the same year it would appear not only that Paola gladly accepted Belbello's terms but that the latter had already resumed working intensively on the *Messale*. After offering his condolences to Paola and praising Gianlucido's earthly virtues, the artist reveals that he has recently sent some completed sections of work to Mantua. He also mentions that he has recently discussed rates of pay with a certain Antonio da Viadana and closes the letter with a polite request for money.<sup>16</sup>

It is not clear if on this occasion Belbello's request was satisfied but it must be assumed that relations between the artist and the Gonzaga were going well at this stage. This is clear from a letter written by Lodovico to Pietro Paolo Marono, over a year later, in which the marchese asks the scribe to come to Mantua to join Belbello, who is making good progress with the *Messale*.<sup>17</sup> This letter, moreover, indicates that Lodovico, though not directly responsible for the patronage of the text, was taking an active interest in its progress. One of the most informative letters concerning the *Messale*, and by far the most amusing, was written by Lodovico on 31 March 1450 to the Bishop of Mantua. The marchese, after confirming that the original patron of the *Messale* had been his brother Gianlucido, informs the bishop that the text is intended for the family priest and expresses his concern that King Alfonso of Naples (1396-1458, King 1443-1558), having heard of this *Messale* "bello et ornatissimo cossi de litera et scriptura como de iminiatura," is now coveting the text for himself. Lodovico concludes the letter by asking the bishop for co-operation in his plan to resist the attempts to wrest the *Messale* to Naples by leading the King to believe that the work, upon completion, has already been promised to the Pope.<sup>18</sup> Leaving aside the amusing scenario of Lodovico approaching the bishop for collusion in his attempt to deceive the King, the fact of the matter is that, by early 1450, word must have been spreading among the major courts of the peninsula that the *Messale* being produced in Mantua by Marono and Belbello was a work of exceptional quality.

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<sup>16</sup> Letter Belbello to Marchesa Paola Malatesta Gonzaga, Milan, 24 April 1448 (ASMn AG, b. 1620 c. 176). Published by Samek Ludovici, *Belbello da Pavia*, pp.23-24.

<sup>17</sup> Letter Marchese Lodovico to Pietro Paolo Marono, Mantua, 4 August 1449 (ASMn AG, b. 2882 Lib. 12 f. 69v). Published by Samek Ludovici, *Belbello da Pavia*, p.24.

<sup>18</sup> Letter Marchese Lodovico to Galeazzo Cavriani, Mantua, 31 March 1450 (ASMn AG, b. 2883 Lib. 14 f. 26v-27r n. 180). Published by Samek Ludovici, *Belbello da Pavia*, p.24.

This rare, extremely fruitful phase in the production of the *Messale* was interrupted some six months later, in October 1450, when Belbello found himself accused of sodomy by Giovanni Antonio Manfredini.<sup>19</sup> Condemned, as was not uncommon at the time, to be burnt at the stake and to have his goods confiscated, continuation of his work on the *Messale* was clearly no longer possible. For reasons which have not come to light, however, but which may have included the collaboration of the Gonzaga in ensuring a safe passage away from Mantua, the sentence imposed on Belbello was not carried out and there followed an interval of eight years without documentation of Belbello working on the *Messale*. After Belbello's forced exile, nonetheless, Marono appears to have worked towards the completion of the written element. On 12 August 1453, almost three years after Belbello's departure, Lodovico received a written request from Marono, in which the scribe, his work probably complete, asks for permission to leave Mantua.<sup>20</sup> At this point work on the *Messale* appears to have been suspended for another lengthy interval, this time spanning five years.

For the next documented reference to Belbello we must wait until 1458. In a letter from Milan of 26 August 1458 Bartolomeo Bonatto informs the marchesa Barbara that he has met Belbello and that the *Messale* has been discussed. From Bonatto's letter it is clear that any potential recriminations in Mantua are no longer an issue for Belbello and we learn that the artist is keen to resume work on the project, either in Milan or in Mantua.<sup>21</sup> This fact that Bonatto's letter was addressed to Barbara also reveals that, following the death of her mother-in-law Paola Malatesta Gonzaga in 1453, responsibility for the completion of the *Messale* had now fallen to the marchesa. The Gonzaga were clearly keen for Belbello to resume for a second

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<sup>19</sup> Pastore and Manzoli, *Il Messale*, p.18. On the practice of sodomy and its implications see Guido Ruggieri, *The Boundaries of Eros: Sex, Crime and Sexuality in Renaissance Venice* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985) and Michael Rocke, *Forbidden Friendships: Homosexuality and Male Culture in Renaissance Florence* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996).

<sup>20</sup> Letter Pietro Paolo Marono to Marchese Lodovico, Mantua, 12 August 1453 (ASMn AG. b. 2390 c. 181). See also Pastore and Manzoli, *Il Messale*, p.18.

<sup>21</sup> Letter Bartolomeo Bonatto to Marchesa Barbara, Milan, 26 August 1458 (ASMn AG, 1620 c. 478).



time his decorative work on the text, which, as has been suggested, had probably been complete since Marono left Mantua in 1453.<sup>22</sup> The timescale of Belbello's work, however, is not clear at this stage. In December of 1459 Belbello was clearly not in Mantua, though this need not imply that he had not been working solidly on the *Messale* once again for over a year. In a letter written in Mantua on 10 December 1459 Lodovico informs Belbello that, with the Papal Congress currently in session in the town, he is too busy to send him sections of the *Messale*. The marchese makes it clear, however, that he wishes Belbello to see his work through to its conclusion, reassuring the artist that the remaining sections will be dispatched after the congress.<sup>23</sup>

The first signs of deterioration in the relationship between the Gonzaga and Belbello appear during the spring of 1460. It would seem that Lodovico was as good as his word and that the *Messale* was indeed sent on to Belbello for completion after the congress. Replying to a letter in which Baldassare Suardo relays Belbello's complaints at not having received the *Messale*, on 21 May 1460 Barbara confirms that it has indeed been sent to Milan with Vincenzo della Scalona. Barbara goes on to make it clear that Vincenzo is now authorised to act on her behalf in any dealings with Belbello.<sup>24</sup> Perhaps the *Messale* had not found its way to Belbello because the artist was in actual fact in his native Pavia rather than in Milan. This would appear to be the case from a letter written a month later by Barbara to her son Francesco, who was studying in Pavia, in which the marchesa instructs the boy not only to have the *Messale* brought to Pavia from Milan but also to negotiate terms with Belbello and to assure him that money will soon be forthcoming from Mantua.<sup>25</sup> This intervention by Francesco on behalf of his mother may have been enough to placate Belbello for some time. A subsequent period of more than fourteen months without documented complaints from the

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<sup>22</sup> See note 20, p.183 above.

<sup>23</sup> Letter Marchese Lodovico to Belbello, Mantua, 10 December 1459 (ASMn AG, b. 2886 Lib. 37 f. 12r). Published by Berselli, 'Il messale miniato', p.33. See also Pastore and Manzoli, *Il Messale*, p.15.

<sup>24</sup> Letter Marchesa Barbara to Baldassare Suardi, Mantua, 21 May 1460 (ASMn AG, b.2886 Lib. 37 f. 93). Published by Berselli, *Il messale miniato*, p.33.

<sup>25</sup> Letter Marchesa Barbara to protonotary Francesco Gonzaga, Mantua, 22 June 1460 (ASMn AG, b. 2888 Lib.47 f. 6). See also Berselli, *Il messale miniato*, p.33.

artist could be interpreted as a spell of settled work without undue concerns regarding remuneration and conditions.

Further discontent on the part of Belbello can be gleaned from a letter sent to his mother from Pavia by Francesco on 5 November 1461. Together with the letter Francesco encloses a completed segment of the *Messale* and relays the artist's recent complaints at having received only twenty-five ducats for his efforts.<sup>26</sup> Francesco concludes the letter by asking his mother's advice on what to tell Belbello and, judging from the *post scriptum* in which he reports that the artist is willing to return to Mantua, it must be assumed that Belbello's complaints did not represent a critical obstacle to the continued progress of the *Messale* at this stage. Perhaps it was these complaints from Belbello which finally exceeded the limits of Barbara's patience. On 10 November, in a momentous letter, the marchesa replied to her son, asking him to inform Belbello that his services would no longer be required. As well as signalling the end of Belbello's involvement in the *Messale*, the letter can be interpreted as an indication of the changing trends affecting artistic taste in Mantua at this time and, for this reason, is worth examining in some detail. Following the usual cordial introduction and discussion of another matter regarding the purchase of books for the boy's studies, Barbara informs her son:

[...] Havemo etiam ricevuta la parte del messale ne scrivi mandare. E perchè qui n'è stato proposto un zovene di questa terra el quale minia molto bene, havemo deliberato fare compire a lui esso messale et cussì havemo commisso ad Andrea Mantegna che se accordi con lui et non daremo più faticha a Belbello.<sup>27</sup>

Here, for the first time, is explicit evidence of Mantegna's influence on artistic policy in Mantua. Barbara's reference to Mantegna's involvement in the choice of artist to continue work on the *Messale* would also suggest that the decision to replace Belbello, far from being simply a reaction to his constant complaints, had already been discussed and agreed with the new resident court artist, whose

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<sup>26</sup> Letter protonotary Francesco Gonzaga to Marchesa Barbara, Pavia, 5 November 1461 (ASMn AG, b. 1621 c. 1128-1129). See also Berselli, *Il messale miniato*, p.33.

<sup>27</sup> Letter Marchesa Barbara to protonotary Francesco Gonzaga, Mantua, 10 November 1461 (ASMn AG, b. 2888 Lib. 49 f. 8). Published by Samek Ludovici, *Belbello da Pavia*, p.26.



classical education and style were clearly incompatible with the late Gothic art favoured by Belbello.<sup>28</sup> Barbara, for her part, probably not relishing the prospect, may have been awaiting a suitable opportunity to relieve Belbello of his duties, an opportunity now unwittingly provided by the artist himself. In his reply of the following week Francesco promises to inform Belbello of his mother's decision and assures the marchesa that the sections of the *Messale* still in Pavia will soon be returned to Mantua.<sup>29</sup>

Francesco may not have relished the task of informing Belbello of his mother's decision either and, judging from the length of time which passed before Belbello's inevitable letter of protest, it would seem that Francesco waited almost four months before discussing the matter with the artist. On 19 March 1462, however, Belbello, by now desperate and helpless to stop the changing artistic currents, wrote to Barbara to express his dismay at her decision to dispense with his services.<sup>30</sup> After an appeal to the marchesa in which he underlines the importance of having the *Messale* "compito tuto de una mano," far from reiterating his complaints of the previous autumn, Belbello offers to come to Mantua even without any advance payment. Finally, he presses Barbara for a swift reply, informing her that, should his services no longer be required in Mantua, he is not short of offers to work for other appreciative patrons. Barbara's reply, if indeed she did reply, must have been lukewarm to say the least. Nor does Belbello appear to have been inundated with offers of work. Later the same year, on 18 October, we find the artist Giorgio Valagussa petitioning the *duchessa* of Milano, Bianca Maria Sforza, in an attempt to secure some patronage for his friend Belbello.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Emilio Faccioli, *Mantova. Le Lettere*, 3 vols (Mantua: Istituto Carlo d'Arco per la Storia di Mantova, 1962), II, pp.337-338.

<sup>29</sup> Letter protonotary Francesco Gonzaga to Marchesa Barbara, Pavia, 19 November 1461 (ASMn AG, b. 1621 c. 1133). See also Berselli, *Il messale miniato*, p.34.

<sup>30</sup> Letter Belbello to Marchesa Barbara, Pavia, 19 March 1462 (ASMn AG, b. 1622 c. 518). Published by Samek Ludovici, *Belbello da Pavia*, p.27.

<sup>31</sup> Letter Giorgio Valagussa to *duchessa* Bianca Maria Sforza, Archivio di Stato di Milano, Autografi-Artisti. Published by Samek Ludovici, *Belbello da Pavia*, pp.27-28.

Belbello must have been aware of the changing artistic climate. While he had been at the top of his trade when he began work on the *Messale* in 1440, his style had clearly become dated by 1460. By this latter date, argue Pastore and Manzoli, his style was more suited to a monastery than to a Renaissance court.<sup>32</sup> What is beyond doubt is that Belbello was the protagonist of a golden age for text decoration in the Italian peninsula. His dismissal owed to the fact that his late Gothic style had become an anachronism in a court where an artist such as Mantegna, apprentice-served in the Padua workshop of Francesco Squarcione (1397-1468) and of classical and antiquarian preferences, was in charge of artistic policy. In this sense, the replacement of Belbello in 1461 marks not only the end of a relationship with the Gonzaga spanning two decades and three patrons but also the end of an era.<sup>33</sup> While Samek Ludovici acknowledges the assertion of D'Ancona and Aeschlimann that Belbello was linked to French currents, he argues that the artist was influenced primarily and fundamentally by Lombard styles.<sup>34</sup> The *Messale*, he concludes, was probably Belbello's last major work.<sup>35</sup> At some point during the early 1460s Belbello moved to Venice, where, in all likelihood, he spent the rest of his days. The letters he exchanged with the Gonzaga remain the only contemporary documentation of this remarkable artist and his work. It was only after 1475, argue Formaggio and Basso, that miniaturists in Lombardy absorbed the artistic lessons of the Renaissance.<sup>36</sup> Belbello's replacement on the *Messale*, however, was one of the first practitioners of this art in northern Italy whose work departed from the traditional Gothic style in favour of a new classically inspired approach.

### **Gerolamo da Cremona: The Second Artist of the *Messale*.**

The "zovene de questa terra," drafted in by Mantegna to replace Belbello and mentioned by Barbara in her letter of 10 November 1461, was Gerolamo Corradi

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<sup>32</sup> Pastore and Manzoli, *Il Messale*, p.51.

<sup>33</sup> Pastore and Manzoli, *Il Messale*, p.47.

<sup>34</sup> Samek Ludovici, *Belbello da Pavia*, pp.16-19; D'Ancona and Aeschlimann, 'Bellanti Giacomo', p.24.

<sup>35</sup> Samek Ludovici, *Belbello da Pavia*, p.13.

<sup>36</sup> Formaggio and Basso, *La Miniatura*, p.129.



or, as he is sometimes referred to, Gerolamo da Cremona.<sup>37</sup> A family of painters, the Corradi, as Gerolamo's full name suggests, were originally from Cremona but had been based in Mantua since at least 1419. Before Gerolamo, members of the previous generation of the family, Zanino and Bartolomeo, had also worked for the Gonzaga. Gerolamo was the son of Giovannino (Zanino) Corradi, whose presence is documented at the Gonzaga court between 1419 and 1443, and by the time the family was counting three generations in Mantua the appellation Da Cremona appears to have been discarded, which explains Barbara's definition of Gerolamo in 1461.<sup>38</sup> It must also be noted, however, that the identity of Gerolamo has not always been an issue on which all critics agreed. In his interpretation of Giorgio Vasari's (1511-1574) *Vita di Boccaccino*, in which the author mentions a certain "Gerolamo miniatore" active in Lombardy, Milanesi concluded that the miniaturist in question was Gerolamo di Giovanni Bembo. A series of other critics, however, including Gerola, Levi d'Ancona and Pastore and Manzoli, have been unanimous in their belief that the second artist of the *Messale* was indeed Gerolamo Corradi or, as he is more commonly referred to, Gerolamo da Cremona.<sup>39</sup>

In stark contrast to the case of Belbello, no exchange regarding Gerolamo's work on the *Messale* is documented in any contemporary correspondence, probably owing to the fact that he lived in Mantua for the duration of his work on the project.<sup>40</sup> For this reason very little can be gleaned about his working relationship with the marchesa Barbara, the principal patron of the *Messale*. Gerolamo's presence in Mantua is, however, confirmed by the record of payments made to him and from which it would appear that he was active there from the time of his appointment in 1461 through until 1466 or 1467.<sup>41</sup> Gerolamo, therefore, spent a lengthy period of more than five years working on the *Messale*, during which time,

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<sup>37</sup> See note 27, p.185 above. For a concise summary of Gerolamo's career in Mantua see Federica Toniolo, 'Girolamo da Cremona miniatore alla corte dei Gonzaga', in *Andrea Mantegna e i Gonzaga*, pp.94-101.

<sup>38</sup> Pastore and Manzoli, *Il Messale*, p.120. On the documented presence of Zanino Corradi in the employ of Gianfrancesco Gonzaga see Toniolo, 'Girolamo da Cremona miniatore alla corte dei Gonzaga', p.95.

<sup>39</sup> Pastore and Manzoli, *Il Messale*, pp.119-122.

<sup>40</sup> Pastore and Manzoli, *Il Messale*, p.119.

<sup>41</sup> Ubaldo Meroni, *Mostra dei codici gonzagheschi*, p.56.

note Pastore and Manzoli, his art matured considerably.<sup>42</sup> In the late 1460s, following the completion of his contribution to the *Messale* and his departure from the Gonzaga court, we find Gerolamo active in Siena, employed at the *Duomo*, where he produced more than sixty miniatures before 1475.<sup>43</sup>

When proposing the candidature of Gerolamo as the most suitable successor to Belbello, Mantegna had probably drawn Barbara's attention to the high quality of the miniatures he had executed in a Bible of exceptional quality commissioned by Borso d'Este, a project which also included contributions by two other renowned miniaturists of the period, Taddeo Crivelli of Ferrara (c.1420/30-1476/79) and Franco de' Russi of Mantua (active 1455-1482).<sup>44</sup> Pastore and Manzoli, furthermore, hypothesise that Gerolamo may have been the artist responsible for work carried out at the refectory of Santa Maria delle Grazie, only a few miles from Mantua.<sup>45</sup> L'Occaso, meanwhile, has found evidence that Gerolamo was known as a painter in Mantua as early as July 1459, at which time he was mentioned in a document relating to a dispute with another artist.<sup>46</sup> Both the Ferrara Bible and the Mantua *Messale*, conclude Pastore and Manzoli, give indications of an early artistic formation in Padua where, as well as with those of Mantegna, the young Gerolamo may have made contact with the circles of Donatello, Vivarini and Jacopo Bellini (c.1396-c.1470).<sup>47</sup> Following his years in Mantua and his time in Siena, which stretched to around 1475, Gerolamo appears to have moved to Florence before ending his working life in Venice, where we find his latest attributions in 1483.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Pastore and Manzoli, *Il Messale*, pp.121-122.

<sup>43</sup> Guglielmo Pacchioni, 'Belbello da Pavia e Girolamo da Cremona miniatori. Un prezioso Messale gonzaghese del secolo XV', *L'arte*, XVII, (1915), p.31; Faccioli, *Mantova. Le Lettere*, II, p.338.

<sup>44</sup> On Gerolamo's contributions to the Bibbia Estense see M.Righetti, 'Indagine su Girolamo da Cremona miniatore', *Arte Lombarda*, 41, (1974), 32-42 and Federica Toniolo, *La Bibbia di Borso d'Este. Cortesia e magnificenza a Ferrara tra Tardogotico e Rinascimento. Commentario al codice, vol.II* (Modena: Panini, 1997), pp.433-447.

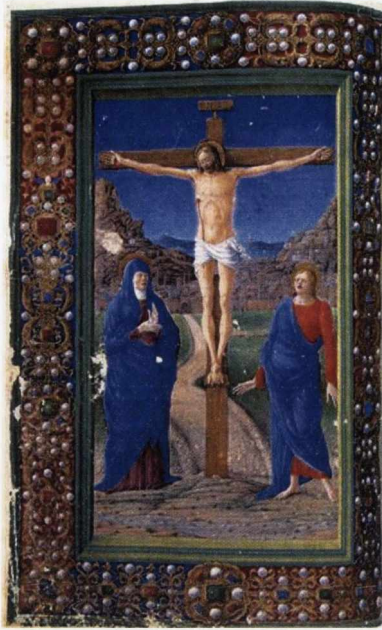
<sup>45</sup> Pastore and Manzoli, *Il Messale*, pp.123-125.

<sup>46</sup> Stefano L'Occaso, *Fonti archivistiche per le arti a Mantova tra Medioevo e Rinascimento (1382-1459)* (Mantua: Gianluigi Arcari, 2005), p.29.

<sup>47</sup> Pastore and Manzoli, *Il Messale*, p.128.

<sup>48</sup> Pacchioni, 'Belbello da Pavia', p.31 and p.130.





Figs.30 and 31: Gerolamo di Cremona, *Messale di Barbara*, Mantua, Museo Diocesano

With the contribution of Gerolamo the *Messale* may well have reached its completion but, although no evidence in support of the theory has emerged from the Mantuan archives, some art historians have identified in a small number of the miniatures stylistic elements which suggest the hand of a third artist.<sup>49</sup> If it is true that a third artist was indeed employed on the *Messale*, then his involvement must have been very brief, given that on 20 May 1467, around the time of Gerolamo's departure from Mantua, Cardinal Francesco wrote to his mother from Rome:

[...] Mando a la Excellentia vostra per Rolandino di Maffei el messaletto piccolo che quella altra fiata me donoe e pregola che la voglia mo' mandarmi quello altro messale grande che gli ho fatto richiedere, ché me ne farà singulare piacere. [...]<sup>50</sup>

It may have taken the marchesa over two months to be able to satisfy her son's request, perhaps the time required by the third artist to add the few remaining images, given that the next letter on the *Messale* from the cardinal is dated 10 August:

<sup>49</sup> Pastore and Manzoli, *Il Messale*, pp.165-166.

<sup>50</sup> Letter cardinal Francesco Gonzaga to Marchesa Barbara, Rome, 20 May 1467 (ASMn AG, b. 843). Published by Berselli, *Il messale miniato*, p.35. Toniolo states that Gerolamo left Mantua for Siena in 1469. Toniolo, 'Girolamo da Cremona miniatore alla corte dei Gonzaga', pp.98-99.

[...] Non puoria la Vostra excellentia havermi mandato cosa più accepta che questo suo messale portato per Baldassare Suardo, el qual ho tanto grato che ugni fiata che vado a Marini o vengo qui, sempre voglio haverlo drieto, né mai me trovo senza esso, e perhò di questo tanto maggiore gratie referisce a Vostra Signoria più excede el piacere che ne ricevo. [...]<sup>51</sup>

Assuming the *Messale* sent to Cardinal Francesco is indeed the one which had been sponsored by Gianlucido, Paola Malatesta and Barbara, involving as well as three patrons a series of artists and scribes and taking a quarter of a century to complete, then the conclusion of the project can be dated with certainty to the summer of 1467. The prolonged episode of the Mantuan *Messale* is an unequivocal testimony to the importance of miniature as a form of art to the Gonzaga family, reflecting not only its established position of importance within a Renaissance court following its previous restriction to monasteries, but also its significant passage of style from Gothic to Renaissance in Mantua under the artistic management of Andrea Mantegna. Belbello may have been the most prominent miniaturist in northern Italy when the *Messale* was first commissioned, so much so that in 1450 King Alfonso of Naples, as we have seen, was eager to take over patronage of the work; however, Belbello's working relationship with the Gonzaga family, which spanned two decades, was, as has been shown, fraught with difficulties and he was powerless to resist the sweeping new trends which led to his definitive replacement in 1461.

### **Other Scribes and Miniaturists**

The Archivio Gonzaga is rich in documents which indicate relations between the marchesi and a wealth of scribes and miniaturists. Many of these are mentioned in only a handful of documents while the names of others recur over the years and, while some appear to have been resident in Mantua for spells of varying length, others seem to have visited Mantua only very rarely or perhaps never at all. As is the case with other artists and men of letters, however, we must be mindful that

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<sup>51</sup> Letter cardinal Francesco to Marchesa Barbara, Rome, 10 August 1467 (ASMn AG, b. 843).  
Published by Berselli, *Il messale miniato*, p.35.



the scribes, calligraphers and miniaturists mentioned only occasionally in writing may very well have been those who spent most time working in the shadow of the court, their constant presence allowing for business to be conducted orally. While it is unrealistic to hope that close examination of existing documents regarding these figures will allow us to develop a fully comprehensive picture of all activity in this area during the rule of the Marchese Lodovico, a large number of letters offer valuable morsels of data regarding the people he employed to satisfy his endless desire to add new volumes to his library and, very often, some scraps of information on the texts themselves. In the pages that follow I will look at some of the scribes and miniaturists who seem to have been most closely involved in the literary commissions of Lodovico. With documents referring to these individuals being often extremely fragmentary, as has been acknowledged, I shall consider them in the order they first appear in the marchese's correspondence.

The first recurring name to appear in Gonzaga correspondence is that of Raffaele *scrittore*, identified by Zanichelli as Raffaello Berti di Pistoia.<sup>52</sup> In a letter from Mantua of 13 May 1458 addressed to the marchesa Barbara, Raffaele reveals that he has been responsible for teaching the Gonzaga daughters, presumably in the art of calligraphy, for two years.<sup>53</sup> Although on this occasion Raffaele makes no mention of his work as a scribe, he does, however, sign the letter with the appellation *Raphael Scriptor*, which would indicate that his perceived main role in Mantua was that of scribe and not teacher, and not viceversa. For explicit reference to texts copied by the hand of Raffaele we can look to a letter of 9 May 1460, written by Lodovico to Barbara from Petriolo, a spa town near Siena, where the marchese was spending a few days during a diplomatic visit to Tuscany.<sup>54</sup> In this letter the marchese asks his wife to have some volumes sent to Petriolo, including a Lucan and a Quintus Curtius "de mane de Rafaelo." The third and last known

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<sup>52</sup> Zanichelli, 'Miniatura a Mantova 1430-1460', p.92.

<sup>53</sup> See letter Raffaele to Marchesa Barbara, Mantua, 13 May 1458 (ASMn AG, b. 2390 c. 324). See also Stefano Davari, *Notizie storiche intorno allo studio pubblico ed ai maestri dei sec. XV e XVI che tennero scuola in Mantova* (Mantua: Eredi Segna, 1879), p.9. See also p.153 above.

<sup>54</sup> Letter Marchese Lodovico to Marchesa Barbara, Petriolo, 9 May 1460 (ASMn AG, b. 2885 Lib. 31 f. 59v). Published by Attilio Portioli, *I Gonzaga ai bagni di Petriolo di Siena nel 1460 e 1461* (Mantua: Eredi Segna, 1869), pp.10-11.

document concerning Raffaele is a letter he wrote to Lodovico on 3 January 1462 from Vicenza.<sup>55</sup> Raffaele begins this lengthy letter by apologising to the marchese for not having accepted an invitation to return to Mantua, citing two reasons to excuse his absence. After insisting that, while he had been in Verona for four months the previous autumn, no invitation to resume work at the Gonzaga court ever reached him there, he goes on to talk in vague terms about a possible prison sentence hanging over him should he ever return to Mantua. Finally, he reiterates a wish also made at the beginning of the letter to complete an Appian on which he had been working while he was still there.

No further correspondence between the Gonzaga and Raffaele has come to light, nor is it known if he was given the opportunity to complete the Appian he mentioned in his letter of 3 January 1462. It is perhaps reasonable to suppose that, given his concerns about his safety in the event of a return to Mantua, he chose to remain in the Veneto. The Lucan and the Quintus Curtius mentioned by the marchese in his letter of 9 May 1460, however, have been identified. The Lucan is, in all likelihood, the *Pharsalia* of the Biblioteca Trivulziana in Milan, signed “Raphael B. de F.” and dated 1456 while the Quintus Curtius, suggests Meroni, is the Quintus Curtius Rufus of the Vatican Library, undated but apparently completed before 1460.<sup>56</sup>

Another name which recurs in Gonzaga correspondence, over an extended period, stretching from 1458 to 1475, is that of the miniaturist Giacomo Bellanti, who came from San Pietro di Galatina in Apulia.<sup>57</sup> Works by Bellanti explicitly referred to in surviving letters include the drawing of a great dane for Lodovico, site maps

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<sup>55</sup> Letter Raffaele to Marchese Lodovico, Vicenza, 3 January 1462 (ASMn AG, b. 1431 c. 431).

<sup>56</sup> Caterina Santoro, ‘La biblioteca dei Gonzaga e cinque suoi codici nella Trivulziana di Milano’ in *Arte pensiero e cultura a Mantova nel primo Rinascimento in rapporto con la Toscana e il Veneto. Atti del VI convegno internazionale di studi sul Rinascimento, 27 settembre – 1 ottobre 1461* (Florence: Sansoni, 1965), pp.87-94, pp.93-94. Santoro suggests that Raffaele wrote the Lucan during a spell of imprisonment in Mantua. See also Alessandro Luzio e Rodolfo Renier, ‘I Filelfo e l’umanesimo alla corte dei Gonzaga’, *Giornale storico della letteratura italiana*, XVI, (1890), 119-217, p.146 and Meroni, *Mostra dei codici gonzagheschi*, p.57.

<sup>57</sup> On Bellanti see D’Ancona and Aeschlimann, ‘Bellanti Giacomo’, p.24; Meroni, *Mostra dei codici gonzagheschi*, pp.54-56.



and an unspecified Dante. Meroni, Toniolo and Canova attribute to Bellanti drawings in a surviving Gonzaga *Brevario* now in Naples, while Faccioli and Bertolotti suspect that he was also involved in the production of tapestries.<sup>58</sup>

Braghirolli reports that Bellanti was first mentioned in a letter written by the Mantuan Nicolò dei Cattabeni dated 21 August 1458 but for the artist's first mention in a letter penned by the Gonzaga we must wait until the following month, for a letter of 20 September from Barbara to Lodovico, in which the marchesa informs her husband:

[...] Jacomo miniatore non haveva ancor compito quello  
dessoigno del cane allano, che la richiedeva, e pur questa  
mattina s'è havuto.<sup>59</sup>

The drawing of the great dane was not without significance, as Lodovico had adopted this breed of dog as a symbol of strength and fidelity. On the walls of Mantegna's *Camera degli sposi*, indeed, great danes are depicted in both the court scene and the meeting scene and evidence would suggest that the marchese did indeed keep such dogs in Mantua.<sup>60</sup> Lodovico clearly appears to have deemed Bellanti's work harmonious to the style he wished to convey in his heraldic devices, judging from a letter written by Barbara to the artist on 6 December 1460, a letter which also confirms Faccioli's notion that Bellanti was involved in the design of tapestries. Barbara instructs the artist to attach Lodovico's arms to an oak tree,

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<sup>58</sup> Meroni, *Mostra dei codici gonzagheschi*, p.56; Toniolo, 'Girolamo da Cremona miniatore alla corte dei Gonzaga', p.100; Canova, 'I libri miniati dei Gonzaga', p.84; Faccioli, *Mantova. Le Lettere*, II, p.581. Bertolotti even suggests that Bellanti may have provided designs for the Flemish weaver Rinaldo di Gualtieri, active in northern Italy around this time. Antonino Bertolotti, *Le arti minori alla corte di Mantova nei secoli XV, XVI e XVII: Ricerca storica negli archivi mantovani* (Milan: tip. Botolotti, 1889).

<sup>59</sup> Letter Marchesa Barbara to Marchese Lodovico, 20 September 1458, cited in Willelmo Braghirolli, *Lettere inedite di artisti del secolo XV cavate dall'Archivio Gonzaga* (Mantua: Eredi Segna, 1878), p.36.

<sup>60</sup> See Rodolfo Signorini, 'Two Notes from Mantua. A Dog Named Rubino', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, XLI, (1978), 317-321. The dog resting faithfully below the marchese's chair in the meeting scene, suggests Signorini, is Lodovico's favourite dog, Rubino. On the symbolic value of dogs in art see Lucia Impelluso, *A Guide to Imagery: Nature and its Symbols*, trans. by Stephen Sartorelli (Milan: Mondadori, 2003), pp.203-211, who notes that dogs in secular portraits normally represent fidelity.

another symbol favoured by the marchese, in order that it could then be used “per mettere in alcune tapezzerie.”<sup>61</sup>

Bellanti, indeed, seems to have been an artist whose talents were by no means restricted to any single field. Davari concludes from a document of 28 May 1461 that he was employed in the drawing of maps.<sup>62</sup> In a letter written to Barbara a few days earlier, however, on 23 May, the marchese announces that “Jacopo miniatore” has recently arrived in Borgoforte and that he is ready and willing to work.<sup>63</sup> Four weeks later, on 21 June, the marchesa wrote a letter to her husband in which she requests that he send someone, possibly the aforementioned Jacopo miniatore, to draw an unspecified site in Mantua.<sup>64</sup> Only three days later, on 24 June, we learn from another letter by the marchesa that Bellanti is already at work on the site.<sup>65</sup> Despite this versatility, however, it is interesting to note that, although the decoration of manuscripts does not feature in this exchange of correspondence, both Lodovico and Barbara continuously refer to Bellanti as *Jacopo miniatore*, which would imply not only that his reputation was founded on his work as a miniaturist but also that Lodovico and Barbara first and foremost regarded him as such. So impressed with his work the marchesi must have been, that on 17 May 1462 we find Lodovico appealing to the prince of Taranto for Bellanti to be allowed to stay on in Mantua, despite the former’s specific request for the artist to be sent back to Apulia.<sup>66</sup> Whether or not Bellanti returned south at this point is not known but by the late autumn of the following year he was clearly once again in Mantua. In a letter of 29 November 1463 Bellanti informs Lodovico that, in order to finish some unspecified work, he has taken his assistants to Marmiolo, as working in

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<sup>61</sup> Letter Marchesa Barbara to Marchese Lodovico, 6 December 1460, cited in Braghirolli, *Lettere inedite*, p.36.

<sup>62</sup> ASMn Buste Davari 5 (9). The archivist gives insufficient clues as to the current collocation of this letter in the Archivio Gonzaga.

<sup>63</sup> Letter Marchese Lodovico to Marchesa Barbara, Borgoforte, 23 May 1461 (ASMn AG, b. 2096 bis c. 424).

<sup>64</sup> Letter Marchesa Barbara to Marchese Lodovico, Mantua, 21 June 1461 (ASMn AG, b. 2888 Lib. 47 f. 61v-61r/ASMn AG, b. 2096 bis c. 697).

<sup>65</sup> Letter Marchesa Barbara to Marchese Lodovico, Mantua, 24 June 1461 (ASMn AG, b. 2888 Lib. 47 f. 63v/ASMn AG, b. 2096 bis c. 700).

<sup>66</sup> Letter Lodovico to *principe* of Taranto, Mantua, 17 May 1462 (ASMn AG, b. 2887 Lib. 39 f. 25v).



Cavriana was proving to be problematic.<sup>67</sup> The following day the marchese replied to Bellanti, indicating his satisfaction at the work being carried out and reassuring the artist that he had his complete backing in any such decisions, as well as promising him that candles, oil, wood and financial remuneration would soon be forthcoming from the Gonzaga *fattore* in Marmirolo.<sup>68</sup> If Lodovico's desire to accommodate Bellanti's wishes is to be interpreted as an indication of the marchese's esteem for his work then it is clear that he had an extremely high regard for the artist.

Although the work being undertaken by Bellanti in Marmirolo is not specified in the exchange of correspondence just alluded to, Braghirolli, in the light of a letter penned by Bellanti to the marchese on 2 April 1464, maintains that at this point the artist and his assistants were occupied with the decoration of a series of texts copied by Matteo da Volterra and Andrea da Lodi.<sup>69</sup> Following an exchange of letters between the two during the early months of the year, in which Bellanti's requests for provisions were placated by Lodovico's promises of imminent relief, the former finally gives his patron a written report on the work he is carrying out, albeit at the end of yet another letter in which he urges the marchese to ensure that some payment is made. Careful not to offend Lodovico, Bellanti aims his frustration at the *fattore* of Marmirolo, amusingly concluding that "Prima intenderai i secreti de l'Apocalissi che la natura sua." In the closing part of the letter he provides the marchese with a detailed account of work being concluded on an unidentified Dante manuscript:

[...] Do avviso a quella come ho fenito tute le letere de le Comedie de Dante, le quali sono posti li corpi d'oro e sono capezate d'azuro ultra marino e d'altri diversi collori, secondo m'è parso siano stati più belli, e sono fioriti li diti corpi de diversi fioretti e etiandio ho fiorito di penna nel spacio del margine secondo m'è parso siano state più digne: son certissimo quando la Vostra Ill. Signoria li vedrà li delecterano. El principio del supra ditto libro ne l'intrata de l'Inferno è

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<sup>67</sup> Letter Bellanti to Lodovico, Marmirolo, 29 November 1463 (ASMn AG, b. 2399).

<sup>68</sup> Letter Lodovico to Bellanti, Dosolo, 30 November 1463 (ASMn AG, b. 2888 Lib. 45 f. 99v).

<sup>69</sup> Letter Bellanti to Lodovico, Marmirolo, 2 April 1464 (ASMn AG, b. 2402 c. 676). Published in Braghirolli, *Lettere inedite*, pp.11-12.

fenito, salvo la testa de Dante: el principio de Purgatorio è designato e posto d'oro, e vo seguitanto per fenire più presto me sia possibile per satisfare a la mente de la Vostra Ill. Signoria. [...]

From this letter it would appear that Bellanti was keen to provide the marchese with a vivid image of how he intended to decorate the text. Discussion of the forms and colours of letters, their spacing on the page, the use of the margin and a consideration for the marchese's personal tastes all indicate a relationship based on a constructive exchange of ideas between a master of the art and an appreciative patron.

Bellanti's pressing desire to receive payment during the early months of 1464, coupled with the fact that by the beginning of April he was putting the finishing touches to the *Commedia* he had been commissioned to decorate, could be interpreted as evidence that his services were required elsewhere, possibly in Taranto where, as we have seen, his presence had been requested almost two years earlier. Although it cannot be established when exactly he left Mantua, a final letter of 15 April, in which he reiterates his desire to finish his work and once again petitions Lodovico for payment, is the last news we have of Bellanti until March 1466, when from his home town of San Pietro di Galatina he wrote to the marchesa Barbara to inform her that his return to Mantua was being delayed by the recent death of his mother and by the unfavourable conditions at sea.<sup>70</sup> Over the course of the following weeks Bellanti sent two further apologies to Barbara but it is not clear if at this time he did indeed return north to work for the Gonzaga. What is evident is that, even if over the course of the following decade Bellanti never went back to Mantua, he did however maintain cordial relations with the marchesi. Nowhere is this more clear than in a letter he wrote to the marchesa on 24 March 1474, by which time he was employed in Naples at the court of Ferrante of Aragon. After paying his due respects to his previous employers Bellanti states:

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<sup>70</sup> Letter Bellanti to Lodovico, Marmirolo, 15 April 1464 (ASMn AG, b. 2402 c. 677); Letter Bellanti to Barbara, San Pietro di Galatina, 3 March 1466 (ASMn AG, b. 843). Meroni notes that Bellanti left Mantua for Naples, and not for the Otranto area, around 1465. Meroni, *Mostra dei codici gonzagheschi*, p.56.



[...] Et se Dio m'avesse conservato in quella sanità in Mantova in che sono stato et al presente me retrovo dopo me ne partieti, mai harei deliberato vivere nè morire in altra casa che de V.S. [...] <sup>71</sup>

As well as Braghirolli, D'Ancona and Aeschlimann allege that Bellanti was once again in Mantua in 1475, though they are unable to provide any further information regarding dates or commissions. No concrete evidence of a reappearance by Bellanti in Mantua during the 1470s has come to light, nor has any news of his activities after the letter just mentioned.

Another figure whose name appears in court circles over a prolonged period of time is Matteo Contugi, a scribe originally from Volterra in Tuscany. Matteo's earliest letters to the Gonzaga were written in 1463, the year he probably entered their service. The fact that he carried out his work in several small centres throughout the *Mantovano*, allied to the fact that he was indeed a writer by profession, resulted in an abundant series of letters penned by Matteo. Many of these letters go beyond updates on work being carried out and tedious requests for money, often moving into the realm of analysis of political events. From 1471 to 1478, indeed, Matteo frequently wrote to the marchesi with news and comment from the court of Urbino and in late 1478 we find him in Ferrara, from where he wrote at least a further two letters containing political news to the new Marchese Federico.<sup>72</sup> From Ferrara Contugi returned to Urbino, and continued to correspond with the Gonzaga rulers until 1486.

Contugi appears to have been an extremely industrious scribe and this impression is substantiated upon examination of his first exchange of letters with Lodovico in the autumn of 1463, when the former was resident in the nearby village of Governolo. In a letter of 8 November, Contugi informs the marchese that he has

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<sup>71</sup> Letter Bellanti to Barbara, Naples, 29 May 1474. (ASMn AG, b. 805 c. 340). Partially published in Braghirolli, *Lettere inedite*, pp.37-38.

<sup>72</sup> Letters Contugi to marchese Federico, Ferrara, 16 October 1478 (ASMn AG, b. 1229 c. 55) and 28 November 1478 (ASMn AG, b. 1229 c. 59).

recently finished copying Cicero's *De officiis* and is about to embark on a Pliny.<sup>73</sup> From the same letter it would also appear that his entry into the employment of the Gonzaga has taken place only very recently, given his concerns about the lack of expenses provided for accommodation and his appeals for more financial assistance from Lodovico. While a satisfactory solution to Contugi's grievances regarding the funding of his living arrangements appears to have been a persistent obstacle, progress on the Pliny is also reported in letters throughout November and December, together with frequent requests for supplies of paper.<sup>74</sup> By the turn of the year, however, the scribe's patience had run out and on 11 January 1464 he wrote to the marchese:

[...] Come sa la Ill. S.V. che gia uno mese et mezo o circa quella si degno farmi scrivere una lettera nella quale si conteneva del fatto de le carte del plinio et etiam di quisto fitto di questa stanza io tengo, dicendomi io havessi pazienza, per la qual cosa perfino a oggi non ho scripto per non havere carte [...] io farei volentieri senza scrivere se io havessi per il modo à vivere ma il bisogno mi forza a molestare la Vra. Ill. S. quella mi vogli providere a l'una e l'altra cosa [...] se la Vra. Ill. S. volesse fare transcrivere in questo mezzo qualche altra opera io volentieri non vorrei fare in de meno. [...]<sup>75</sup>

While we have no reason to doubt the sincerity of Contugi's complaints regarding his living conditions, his claims that work on the Pliny was at a standstill due to low supplies of paper may very well have been a calculated attempt to spur the marchese into addressing his persistent grievances. Contugi's reasoning was probably that constant pleading for financial remuneration would only be effective if accompanied by the threat of his work grinding to a halt. The deadlock appears to have been resolved to some extent by 2 February, when in a letter to Lodovico the scribe, while reminding his patron of his financial predicament, refers to discussions with the *vicario* of Governolo regarding plans to begin a Valerius Maximus.<sup>76</sup> Even if Contugi had not been paid by this stage, the fact that he was

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<sup>73</sup> Letter Contugi to Lodovico, Governolo, 8 November 1463 (ASMn AG, b. 2399).

<sup>74</sup> Letters Contugi to Lodovico, 12 November, 23 November and 9 December 1463 (ASMn AG, b. 2399, c.639, c.640, c.641 and c.644).

<sup>75</sup> Letter Contugi to Lodovico, Governolo, 11 January 1464 (ASMn AG, b. 2402, c.470).

<sup>76</sup> Letter Contugi to Lodovico, Governolo, 2 February 1464 (ASMn AG, b. 2402).



entertaining the idea of embarking on a new volume would infer that he felt there was at least some prospect of imminent financial relief.

Despite his incessant complaints, Contugi appears to have remained in the service of the Gonzaga for the remainder of the 1460s and beyond, a prolonged spell during which he produced a prolific quantity of volumes. Documented correspondence is at times fragmentary but Contugi's letters contain no little information on the books he had been commissioned to copy. From Mantua on 27 September 1465 he informs the marchese that a Petrarch *Canzoniere* for his youngest son Gianfrancesco has just been completed, while also reminding him that suitable paper is still required for the remaining work on the Pliny.<sup>77</sup> The following summer the scribe was still resident in Mantua and, in a letter of 21 August, keen to underline to the marchese his industry and to deny recent rumours of slothfulness:

[...] io habbi scripto assai, per che pur io ho perso tempo per non havere carte et ho scripto quelle opere di Tullio et ho fatto uno offitiolo a Madonna et uno a messer Federigo et uno Petrarcha a messer Gianfrancesco poi come per la V. S. ho aduitato a correggere quelle opere di Tullio et quello Appiano et poi ho fatto piu che i duo terzi del Plinio, sicche io pregho la V.S. che non voglia dare fede ale triste informazioni [...]<sup>78</sup>

Clearly stung by accusations of laziness, Contugi in this letter reminds Lodovico of works recently completed – two *Offitioli* and a Petrarch – as well as corrections carried out on a Cicero and an Appian. Once again, he also places the onus on the marchese, reminding him that payment for work completed has not been forthcoming and that a failure to provide paper has resulted in the Pliny still being only two thirds complete. The Appian mentioned in Contugi's letter also appears in a letter written to Lodovico from Milan on 26 December by a writer by the name of P.Candulus, whom Meroni suspects to be none other than the celebrated humanist Pier Candido Decembrio, who, as we have seen, had in 1460 dedicated

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<sup>77</sup> Letter Contugi to Lodovico, Mantua, 27 September 1465 (ASMn AG, b. 2401).

<sup>78</sup> Letter Contugi to Lodovico, Mantua, 21 August 1466 (ASMn AG, b. 2405 c. 232).

his *De natura avium et animalium* to the marchese.<sup>79</sup> The letter from Milan reveals that the volume on which Contugi based his copy is owned by a certain Giovanni Matteo Butigela in Milan, a volume which the correspondent claims is “tuto correcto.”

News of Contugi continues to appear in fits and starts during the late 1460s, though he never seems far from the Gonzaga court. Two letters penned by the scribe in August 1467 reveal that he has begun copying a Valerius Maximus and from a further three letters written the following April we learn that the Pliny (Fig.32) is at an advanced stage.<sup>80</sup> Each of these letters, unsurprisingly, contains further pleas to the marchese for money and assistance with living expenses. Later that same year, in October 1468, Contugi reveals that the Pliny, after five years, has finally been completed in Revere and that the volume from which he has been copying can be sent back to the Duke of Modena.<sup>81</sup> He also recommends the miniaturist Guglielmo Giraldi del Magro (documented 1441-1494) as an artist capable of decorating the text and, while he was certainly given the job in the first instance, in 1506 another miniaturist, Pietro Guindaleri (documented 1464-1506), still had not completed the embellishment of Contugi's Pliny.<sup>82</sup> The fact that the scribe specifies that the master volume belongs to Borso d'Este can be taken as a strong indication that here we are dealing with the same Pliny begun in 1463, given that almost four years earlier, on 22 January 1465, Borso had written to Lodovico requesting that the marchese return the volume borrowed some time beforehand.<sup>83</sup> Lodovico appears to have welcomed the completion of the volume and on 6 October, in a further letter to the marchese, Contugi thanks his patron for payment received and mentions a dialogue he has had with a certain Luca Agrippa regarding variations between the new text and the Este volume from which it has been

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<sup>79</sup> Letter P.Candulus to Lodovico, Milan, 26 December 1466 (ASMn AG, b. 1623 c. 238). See also p.167 below. See Meroni, *Mostra dei codici gonzagheschi*, p.58.

<sup>80</sup> Letters Contugi to Lodovico, Mantua, 20 August 1467 (ASMn AG, b. 2409 c. 150), 25 August 1467 (ASMn AG, b. 2405 c. 538), 17 April 1468 (ASMn AG, b. 2410 c. 384), 18 April 1468 (ASMn AG, b. 2410 c. 385), 19 April 1468 (ASMn AG, b. 2410 c.383).

<sup>81</sup> Letter Contugi to Lodovico, Revere, 2 October 1468 (ASMn AG, b. 2409 c. 151).

<sup>82</sup> See Canova, 'I libri miniati dei Gonzaga', p.88.

<sup>83</sup> Letter Duke Borso d'Este to Lodovico, Ferrara, 22 January 1465 (ASMn AG, b. 1182).



copied.<sup>84</sup> Despite Contugi's continual complaints about not being paid for his work on the Pliny, complaints spanning a period of five years, it is clear that Lodovico authorised payment as soon as the scribe completed the volume. Perhaps, after all, the marchese had genuine reason to give credence to the rumours which suggested that Contugi was indeed a slow worker and felt that, only by withholding payment until the completion of the work, would the scribe ever provide him with the Pliny he so obviously coveted.



Fig.32: Pliny, *Historia Naturalis*, Turin, Biblioteca Nazionale Universitaria, MS J.I. 22-23

A letter written by Giovanni Pietro Arrivabene to Lodovico in the spring of 1469 casts further light on the long toil to own a correct Pliny. Writing from Rome, Cardinal Francesco's secretary requested from the marchesa Barbara:

Essendo Papa Pio a Mantova diede a lo Illustrissimo Signore un Plinio de puocho valore e molto scorecto, et intendo che doppo Sua Ex. ne ha facto scrivere un bellissimo e corecto da una copia del Duca di Modena. Questi sono libri che se trovano rari, le facultate mie non patiscono de comprarne et in prestito mal se trovano, e pur sono de grande utilitate. Haveria bisogno de studiarlo, unde non essendo quello che lascioe el Papa de più valuta nè bontate, supplico a V. Ex. che se digni veder se possibel fosse haverlo, non so se me debba commettere a tanta presumptione de dire in dono o in prestito, che me darà occasione de studiarlo et anche me

<sup>84</sup> Letter Contugi to Lodovico, Mantua, 6 October 1468 (ASMn AG, b. 2410 c. 386).

bastarà l'animo de emendarlo, et puoi cussì aconzo se  
dispuonerà secundo el commandamento de S.S. [...]<sup>85</sup>

Arrivabene, as we have seen, was himself a man of letters and a bibliophile and the plight of the marchese to obtain a top quality Pliny had clearly been a topic of conversation within the cardinal's household and perhaps even in the wider literary circles of the Curia. Assuming that Arrivabene's sources are reliable, from this letter we are able to chart Lodovico's pursuit of a scholarly and correct version of the works of this celebrated writer of Roman antiquity. Unhappy with a volume acquired from Pope Pius II during the Papal Congress held in Mantua over 1459 and 1460, the quest for a better copy led to Borso d'Este who, as we have seen, in January 1465 and probably after a considerable period of time had elapsed since he had granted Lodovico the loan of his own Pliny, requested that Lodovico have the text returned to Modena immediately.<sup>86</sup> Arrivabene's acknowledgement that volumes like the one recently completed by Contugi are "libri che se trovano rari" may help to explain the marchese's determination to own one, as well as the time taken to locate an example worth copying and for the scribe to reproduce it. Chambers suggests that the volume in question is indeed the *Historia Naturalis*, which at this time was notoriously corrupt.<sup>87</sup>

As well as the volumes just mentioned, news of one further text copied by Contugi is contained in a letter of 1471, the year he left Mantua for Urbino. On 4 March the scribe informs Lodovico that he has received instructions from Pietro Spagnolo to copy Leon Battista Alberti's treatise *De Iciarchia*, but also that he is unable to commence the commission due to problems surrounding the original text and his current financial predicament.<sup>88</sup> The monetary difficulties encountered by Contugi in 1471, it should be noted, no longer appear to have been caused by any tardiness on the part of the marchese in paying the scribe. In a letter of 10

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<sup>85</sup> Letter Giovanni Pietro Arrivabene to Lodovico, Rome, 23 May 1469 (ASMn AG, b. 721 c. 843). Published in Luzio e Renier, 'I Filelfo', pp.157-158. On Arrivabene see pp.257-266 below.

<sup>86</sup> See note 74.

<sup>87</sup> David S. Chambers, 'Giovanni Pietro Arrivabene (1439-1504): Humanistic Secretary and Bishop', *Aevum*, 58, (1984), 397-438, p.420.

<sup>88</sup> Letter Contugi to Lodovico, Mantua, 4 March 1471 (ASMn AG, b. 2413 c. 215).



September, the last he wrote from Mantua before his departure, Contugi acknowledges a loan of twelve ducats conceded by Lodovico the previous year.<sup>89</sup> In the same letter he apologises that he is still unable to pay his debt and declares himself available to carry out work for the marchese.

Contugi, as we have noted, continued to correspond with the Gonzaga after his departure from Mantua right up to 1486, the year of his last letter from Urbino and, perhaps, the year of his death.<sup>90</sup> Surviving works by this long-serving scribe have been identified as the Gonzaga Pliny now in the Biblioteca Nazionale in Turin, Cardinal Francesco's Petrarch now in the British Museum and a Plautus (Fig.33) now in Madrid.<sup>91</sup> Well travelled around the courts of northern Italy and willing to carry out commissions for Lodovico in the smaller centres of the *Mantovano*, Contugi's undoubted industry is charted, as we have seen, by a steady flow of letters which alternate pleas for money and provisions with political analysis. While stung on one occasion by rumours of laziness, Contugi, whenever his financial plight appears to have been particularly precarious, was prepared to threaten the marchese with a standstill in his work.<sup>92</sup> The quality and clarity of his calligraphy, evident not only in the three surviving attributable volumes but also in his many letters housed in the Archivio Gonzaga, was also praised, as we have seen, by a contemporary critic in Giovanni Pietro Arrivabene.<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> Letter Contugi to Lodovico, Mantua, 10 September 1471 (ASMn AG, b. 2413 c. 216).

<sup>90</sup> See note 72, p.198 above.

<sup>91</sup> Meroni, *Mostra dei codici gonzagheschi*, p.57. Manuscript classifications for these volumes are as follows: Turin Pliny - M.S.II.22-23; British Museum Petrarch - Harley Manuscript 3567; Madrid Plautus - M.S.V.22-5.

<sup>92</sup> See note 88, p.203 above.

<sup>93</sup> See note 85, p.203 above.



Fig.33: Plautus, *Comodiae*, Madrid, Biblioteca Nacional, MS Vit. 22-25

A further two names appear in relation to the copying of texts in Mantua in 1464. The first is that of Giorgio Merula of Alessandria who, as we have seen, was resident tutor at the Gonzaga court from 1462 until 1465.<sup>94</sup> Three separate letters written by Merula to Lodovico in 1464 refer to a Virgil which the former was copying.<sup>95</sup> The fact these letters were written in Latin remind us that Merula was primarily a humanist and educator whose copying was inspired by literary interest rather than by the prospect of a career as a scribe. Indeed, the work was, in all probability, the initiative of Merula himself rather than a project financed by the marchese. The Virgil mentioned in this exchange of correspondence is not, however, the only evidence we have of Merula's activity as a calligrapher. As well as the Virgil of 1464, notes Meroni, two "ufficioli" were ordered from Merula in 1460, the year in which he moved to Mantua to follow the lessons of Gregorio Tifernate.<sup>96</sup> Meroni, while revealing the existence of a handful of precious documents which testify to Giorgio da Alessandria's activity as a scribe, fails to note that he is in fact dealing with Giorgio Merula the humanist and tutor to the

<sup>94</sup> On Merula see pp.149-151 above.

<sup>95</sup> Letters Merula to Lodovico, Mantua, 26 January 1464, 8 July 1464 and 31 August 1464 (ASMn AG, b. 2401).

<sup>96</sup> Fragment of *registro di spese* of 1460 (ASMn Documenti Portioli, b. 13 c. 132v). Cited by Meroni, *Mostra dei codici gonzagheschi*, p.57.



Gonzaga children, simply listing him among the “copisti di questo periodo”.<sup>97</sup> Also mentioned by Meroni as “calligrafo e precettore” Andrea da Lodi, a somewhat obscure figure also alluded to by Luzio and Renier.<sup>98</sup> Only two known surviving documents, written six years apart, provide any news of texts copied by Andrea. The first is an entry in an accounts register of 1458 which records payment made in relation to two religious works, a *Vita aliquarum sanctarum virginum* and a *Transitus S. Hieronimi*.<sup>99</sup> Of more interest, however, is a letter written by Andrea to Lodovico on 30 January 1464.<sup>100</sup> Based in Mantua at the time, the scribe, after a brief reference to recent letters, petitions the marchese for money to support himself and his family. He then mentions a *Philocolo* on which he is currently working, a text which he promises is “el piú iusto e piú correcto de quanti ne ho mai scripto.”

Another key name which appears over a prolonged period in connection with the production of texts in Mantua is that of Pietro Guindaleri.<sup>101</sup> Originally from Cremona and very probably a disciple of Gerolamo da Cremona, Guindaleri belonged to the school of Andrea Mantegna and, like the great court painter, served the Gonzaga rulers for most of his career, until his death in 1506. In a letter of 30 November 1489 addressed to the Marchese Francesco, Guindaleri reminds his patron that he has been serving the family for twenty-five years.<sup>102</sup>

News of Guindaleri’s presence in Mantua and his works can be charted from surviving letters in the Mantuan archives. On 15 August 1468, for instance, we find the miniaturist in Mantua. Concerned by news of plague and burdened by having to care for his elderly mother, he asks Lodovico for money in order to render the difficult climate a little less troublesome.<sup>103</sup> From a letter written by the marchese to Guindaleri the following year we learn that the latter is working on designs for

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<sup>97</sup> Meroni, *Mostra dei codici gonzagheschi*, p.54 and p.57.

<sup>98</sup> Meroni, *Mostra dei codici gonzagheschi*, p.54 and Luzio and Renier, ‘I Filelfo’, p.132.

<sup>99</sup> Fragment of *registro di spese* of 1458 (ASMn Documenti Portioli, b. 13 c. 182v). Cited by Meroni, *Mostra dei codici gonzagheschi*, p.57.

<sup>100</sup> Letter Andrea da Lodi to Lodovico, Mantua, 30 January 1464 (ASMn AG, b. 2401).

<sup>101</sup> On Pietro Guindaleri see D’Ancona and Aeschlimann, ‘Bellanti Giacomo’, p.102; Meroni, *Mostra dei codici gonzagheschi*, pp.56-57; Braghirolli, *Lettere inedite*, pp.41-43.

<sup>102</sup> Letter published in Braghirolli, *Lettere inedite*, pp.41-42.

<sup>103</sup> Letter Guindaleri to Lodovico, Mantua, 15 August 1468 (ASMn AG, b. 2410 c. 111).

brocade material.<sup>104</sup> On 10 July 1471 Guindaleri is mentioned in a letter to the *marchese* from his architect and builder Luca Fancelli, in which he mentions blue pigment received from “Pietro miniatore”.<sup>105</sup> In another letter written in the spring of 1473 the artist again petitions the *marchese* for money, reminding him that he has received the paltry sum of only five ducats in the past year.<sup>106</sup> The death of Lodovico in 1478 clearly had no negative repercussions of Guindaleri’s prospects of employment at court, as can be seen from a series of letters of 1479 regarding a project he had undertaken to decorate an unidentified *ufficiolo grande* for Cardinal Sigismondo Gonzaga.<sup>107</sup> D’Ancona and Aeschlimann also mention a small *ufficio* decorated by Guindaleri in 1479 for the Lateran friars at the monastery of San Vito in Mantua, perhaps the same *ufficio* mentioned by the artist in a letter of 16 February 1479, in which he asks the *Marchese* Federico for his thoughts on which saints ought to be depicted alongside the text.<sup>108</sup> In further letters of April the same year Guindaleri appeals to the *marchese* for remuneration for his work and asks for instructions regarding which parts of the text to decorate, to which Federico, on 1 May, replies with the request that he illustrate the scene of the apparition of the Holy Spirit.<sup>109</sup>

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<sup>104</sup> Letter Lodovico to Guindaleri, undated. (ASMn AG, b. 2891 Lib. 63 f. 78v). Cited in Meroni, *Mostra dei codici gonzagheschi*, p.56.

<sup>105</sup> Letter Luca Fancelli to Lodovico, Gonzaga, 10 July 1471 (ASMn AG, b. 2412 c. 425). For a comprehensive record and analysis of correspondence between Fancelli and Lodovico see Paolo Carpeggiani and Anna Maria Lorenzoni, *Carteggio di Luca Fancelli con Ludovico, Federico e Francesco Gonzaga marchesi di Mantova* (Mantua: Gianluigi Arcari, 1998).

<sup>106</sup> Letter Guindaleri to Lodovico, Mantua, 28 March 1473 (ASMn AG, b. 2416).

<sup>107</sup> See Meroni, *Mostra dei codici gonzagheschi*, p.56 n19.

<sup>108</sup> Letter Guindaleri to Federico, Mantua, 16 February 1479 (ASMn AG, b. 2422). See also D’Ancona and Aeschlimann, ‘Bellanti Giacomo’, p.102.

<sup>109</sup> Letter Guindaleri to Federico, Mantua, 26 and 28 April 1479 (ASMn AG, b. 2422) and letter Federico to Guindaleri, Gonzaga, 1 May 1479 (ASMn AG, b. 2896, Lib. 93 f. 50v).



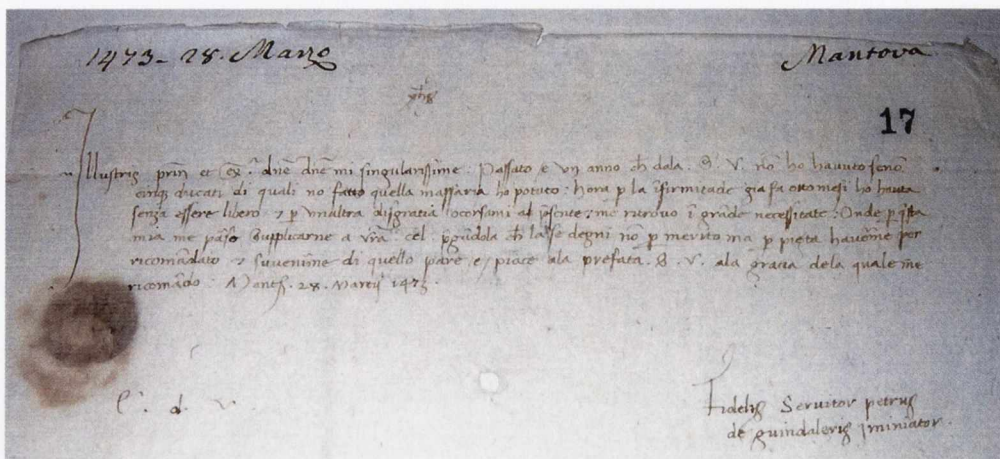


Fig.34: Letter Guindaleri to Lodovico, Mantua, 28 March 1473 (ASMn AG, b. 2416)

Perhaps the most notable and lengthy commission carried out by Guindaleri, however, was the decoration of the Turin Pliny. While, as we have seen, Matteo Contugi had recommended that his text be complemented by the art of Guglielmo Giraldo, a letter of 10 December 1506 written by the Marchesa Isabella d'Este Gonzaga to the *conte* Fregosino confirms that the recently deceased Guindaleri, and not Giraldo, had been responsible for the decoration of the Pliny and that the project had been left incomplete.<sup>110</sup> Noting stylistic similarities between the Turin Pliny and two other volumes commissioned by the Gonzaga, the Oxford *Philocolo* and the Madrid Plautus, the latter also copied by Matteo Contugi, Meroni argues the case for Guindaleri having been the miniaturist responsible for the embellishment of all three texts.<sup>111</sup>

Pietro Guindaleri, if we are to take as reliable his letter of 30 November 1489, spent over four decades in the employ of the Gonzaga.<sup>112</sup> In this space of time he must clearly have been entrusted with the decoration of numerous texts over and above the handful mentioned here and his seemingly uninterrupted physical proximity to the court and close relations with a succession of marchesi could help explain the dearth of written correspondence in the Mantuan Archives. Despite

<sup>110</sup> See note 73. See also letter Isabella d'Este Gonzaga to *conte* Fregosino, 10 December 1506. Published in Braghirolli, *Lettere inedite*, pp.42-43.

<sup>111</sup> Meroni, *Mostra dei codici gonzagheschi*, pp.56-57.

<sup>112</sup> See note 102, p.206 above.

this long and distinguished service, however, evidence suggests that Guindaleri's was a life of hardship and, according to the aforementioned letter of 1506 by the Marchesa Isabella, he died leaving his wife and children in a state of poverty.<sup>113</sup>

Guglielmo Giraldo del Magro, as has been mentioned, was another name linked to the decoration of texts in Mantua, despite, it would appear, being overlooked for the commission of decorating Matteo Contugi's Pliny.<sup>114</sup> Ferrarese by birth, Giraldo was, according to the *Dizionario dei miniatori*, one of the most renowned miniaturists at the courts of Borso and Ercole d'Este and also embellished texts for Federico da Montefeltro in Urbino.<sup>115</sup> Probably a disciple of Giorgio Tedesco (documented 1441-1479) in Ferrara, in collaboration with whom he produced a *Breviario* for Leonello d'Este in 1445, surprisingly few works are attributable with certainty to this prominent practitioner of his art.<sup>116</sup> The only evidence of direct contact between Giraldo and the Gonzaga is a letter he wrote from Ferrara on 12 May 1469 to the Marchesa Barbara, a letter informative on a variety of levels and worth examining in its entirety:

[...] Non havendo possuto vegnire questa Pascha proximo passata da la S.V. per quilli cinque ducati che sono resto del pretio de l'officiolo el quale vendi alla S.V. a principio de quadregesima quando fui a Mantoa per i libri del S.N. da miniare. Per tanto al presente mando Alexandro mio nepote exhibitore de questa, al quale prego la S.V. li piazza darli dicti cinque ducati acio possa provedere ad alcune mie necessita et seramo gratia singulare. Et acio la S.V. non habia a dubitare de esso Alexandro Andrea Mantegna servidore del S.N. et servidore Matheo, caduno de loro possono rendere buona testimonianza de esso, e fare certa la S.V. che dandoli dicti dinari seranno bene dati.[...]<sup>117</sup>

From this letter we learn not only that Giraldo has been directly commissioned by Lodovico to decorate some unspecified texts but also that he has recently agreed to sell a completed *officiolo* to the marchesi. That Giraldo was in a position to sell works to those who were not directly responsible for their patronage implies that,

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<sup>113</sup> See note 110, p.208 above.

<sup>114</sup> See note 82, p.201 above.

<sup>115</sup> D'Ancona and Aeschlimann, 'Bellanti Giacomo', p.93.

<sup>116</sup> Paolo D'Ancona, 'Guglielmo Giraldo', in *Enciclopedia Treccani*, p.279.

<sup>117</sup> Letter Giraldo to Barbara, Ferrara, 12 May 1469 (ASMn AG, b. 1228 c. 752).



at the end of the 1460s, his status as a miniaturist was indeed such that his works were in demand, probably due in no small way to the fame accrued for his service to the Estensi. Finally, the fact that he assures the marchesa that his nephew Alessandro is known both to Mantegna and to Matteo (presumably Contugi) is evidence in itself that Giraldo was not unused to liaising with the highest circles of artists operating in Mantua. Quite why Lodovico had rejected Contugi's request of the previous autumn that the decoration of his Pliny be entrusted to Giraldo is not clear. It is highly unlikely that the marchese was unfamiliar with this renowned miniaturist of the Ferrarese court and his works, so it can only be assumed that he was equally appreciative of the art of Pietro Guindaleri. There are no further surviving clues as to the time scale of Giraldo's involvement with the Gonzaga and in 1475 he was working in Modena with Alessandro dei Leoni, the nephew he had sent to Mantua in May 1469.<sup>118</sup>

Two final names connected with the copying of texts for the Gonzaga during the rule of Lodovico are those of the calligrapher and miniaturist Bartolomeo Sanvito (1435-1511) from Padua and the calligrapher Giuliano da Viterbo, though both, it must be noted, had as their principal patron Cardinal Francesco and not his parents, Lodovico and Barbara.<sup>119</sup> Born in 1435 into a Paduan family of ancient descent, from his early working years in Padua Sanvito cultivated relations with artists, writers and scientists of the era.<sup>120</sup> A celebrated and pioneering miniaturist and scribe in the new style, over a number of years Sanvito copied and decorated several volumes for the cardinal's personal library, including a Homer now in the Vatican Library (Fig.35), a *De principe* (Fig.36) now in Mantua, a *De officiis* now in

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<sup>118</sup> D'Ancona, 'Guglielmo Giraldo', in *Enciclopedia Treccani*, p.279.

<sup>119</sup> Gennaro Toscano, 'Bartolomeo Sanvito e Gaspare da Padova. *familiares et continui commensales* di Francesco Gonzaga' in Trevisani, ed., *Andrea Mantegna e i Gonzaga*, pp.103-111.

<sup>120</sup> On Sanvito see also T. De Marinis, 'Nota per Bartolomeo Sanvito calligrafo del Quattrocento', *Mélanges Eugène Tisserant*, IV, (1964), 185-188; Silvio De Kunert, 'Un padovano ignoto ed un suo Memoriale de' primi anni del cinquecento (1505-1511) con cenni su due codici', *Bollettino del Museo Civico di Padova*, a.X, (1907), 1-16; David S. Chambers, *A Renaissance Cardinal and his Worldly Goods: The Will and Inventory of Francesco Gonzaga (1444-1483)* (London: Warburg Institute Surveys and Texts, 1992), pp.59-69; Meroni, *Mostra dei codici gonzagheschi*, pp.54-60.

Naples and an *Orationes ad principes Italie*.<sup>121</sup> Patronage of Sanvito by the Marchese Lodovico appears to have been very limited, though in the early 1460s he was commissioned to copy and decorate the first *Decade* of Livy.<sup>122</sup> For the next two decades Sanvito worked largely in Rome, often in partnership with the miniaturist Gaspare da Padova (active 1446/47-c.1493), availing of the hospitality of Cardinal Francesco before becoming a librarian for Sixtus IV in 1475. Meanwhile, in a letter from Bologna dated 3 December 1478, some six months after Lodovico's death, Giovanni Pietro Arrivabene wrote to Federico, alerting him that Sanvito too was in Bologna and willing to move to Mantua to serve the new marchese.<sup>123</sup> It would appear, however, that Federico chose not to pursue the opportunity to employ Sanvito in Mantua. Like Sanvito, the somewhat obscure figure of Giuliano da Viterbo was a scribe employed from time to time by Cardinal Francesco and not by his parents.<sup>124</sup> Chambers notes that Giuliano was employed by Francesco in 1466, while Meroni lists the commissions carried out as a *Tractatus grammaticalis*, a *Libro minore de geomantia*, a copy of Guarino's *Carmina differentialia* now in the Biblioteca Estense in Modena and an Ovid now in the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris.<sup>125</sup>

<sup>121</sup> These volumes are listed in the inventory of Cardinal Francesco Gonzaga carried out in 1483. See Chambers, *A Renaissance Cardinal*, p.61. The manuscript classifications are as follows: Vatican Homer - Vat.greco 1626; Mantua *De principe* - Ms.A.I.13; Naples *De officiis* - Ms.IV.G.65.

<sup>122</sup> Toscano, 'Bartolomeo Sanvito e Gaspare da Padova', p.103. This volume is cited by Canova as an early example of Mantegna's influence in textual decoration. Canova, 'I libri miniati dei Gonzaga', p.86.

<sup>123</sup> Letter Giovanni Pietro Arrivabene to marchese Federico Gonzaga, Bologna, 3 December 1478 (ASMn AG, b. 1141 c. 565).

<sup>124</sup> On Giuliano da Viterbo see Meroni, *Mostra dei codici gonzagheschi*, pp.54-58.

<sup>125</sup> Chambers, *A Renaissance Cardinal*, p.59; Meroni, *Mostra dei codici gonzagheschi*, pp.54-58. On Giuliano da Viterbo's grammar book for Francesco Gonzaga see Roberta Iotti, 'Il Tractatus Grammaticalis del Cardinale Francesco Gonzaga', *Civiltà Mantovana*, terza serie. n.6, (1993), 49-61. Manuscript classifications are as follows: Modena *Carmen differentialia* - M.S.1101; Paris Ovid - Cod.Lat.10311.





Fig.35: Homer, *Iliad*  
Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana  
Vat. gr. 1626

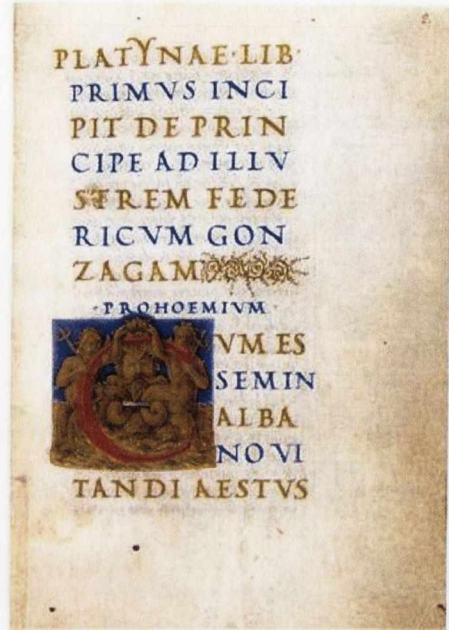


Fig.36: Platina, *De Principe*  
Mantua, Biblioteca Comunale, MS13

## Conclusions

The manuscript scene in Mantua during the rule of Lodovico Gonzaga, as we have seen, was an area of constant activity. Be it in the copying of texts or in their subsequent artistic decoration, Lodovico and Barbara always had various commissions in progress, most of which demanded their close personal attention not only in the choice of texts but also in the coordination of the work of a long series of scribes and miniaturists. At this point it is also worth underlining and reiterating the significant interest taken by the marchesa in these commissions, an element which serves to remind us that she too, having studied under Vittorino da Feltre, was a learned lady of letters and a noteworthy patroness of scribes and miniaturists. The nature of correspondence with practitioners, whether oral or written, would clearly have been determined among other things by their geographical proximity to the court at any given time, so it is therefore with great caution that we must infer, for example, that Matteo Contugi was a more prolific or longer-serving scribe than, say, Pietro Paolo Marono. The wide range of texts, many of which can be identified with certainty, mentioned in the exchanges of

letters between the Gonzaga and these calligraphers and miniaturists bears testimony not only to the humanistic learning of Lodovico and Barbara but also to their religious devoutness. It must also be noted that the copying of manuscripts continued in Mantua after the arrival in the early 1470s of the town's first print presses, which will be the focus of the next chapter.



## Introduction

The purpose of this study is to investigate the effects of the proposed changes on the system's performance and user satisfaction.

The study is organized as follows: Section 2 describes the system and the proposed changes. Section 3 discusses the methodology used in the study.

Section 4 presents the results of the study, and Section 5 discusses the conclusions and future work.

The study is based on a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods, including interviews, surveys, and experiments.

The results of the study show that the proposed changes have a positive impact on the system's performance and user satisfaction.

The study also identifies several areas for further research, including the impact of the proposed changes on different user groups and the long-term effects of the changes.

The study is limited by the sample size and the duration of the study, and the results may not be generalizable to all users and systems.

The study is a preliminary study and the results should be confirmed by further research.

## CHAPTER SIX

# THE INTRODUCTION AND EARLY YEARS OF PRINTING IN MANTUA

### Introduction

During the rule of Lodovico a momentous event occurred which was to revolutionise the nature of books through to the present day: the invention of printing. Following the first experiments in Germany during the early 1460s, some of the earliest practitioners of this craft soon exported their skills to the fertile literary centres of the Italian peninsula. The first germs of printing activity south of the Alps are to be found in Rome and in Subiaco in 1465 and during the following years the novelty spread to the major cultural centres.<sup>1</sup> In 1469 the first printing presses were established in Venice and Milan, while the fledgling industry took root the next year in Verona, Foligno and Trevi. By 1471 the first books were being produced by new printing presses in the university towns of Bologna, Ferrara, Naples, Pavia and Florence while Mantua, firmly established since the time of Gianfrancesco Gonzaga and Vittorino da Feltre among the cultural and intellectual vanguard of the northern courts, was to embrace the industry over the winter of late 1471 and early 1472.<sup>2</sup> By the end of 1472 there appear to have been four separate workshops producing books in Mantua, a statistic which, when we consider that in the same year there were only two in Milan, gives some idea of the enthusiasm with which printing was greeted not only by the Gonzaga and their court but by the town and territory at large.<sup>3</sup> While, as I have noted, printing was normally brought to Italian cities by Germans experienced in the trade, remarkably,

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<sup>1</sup> Rodolfo Renier, *Il primo tipografo mantovano* (Turin: Vincenzo Bona, 1890), p.7; Luigi Pescasio, *L'arte della stampa a Mantova nei secoli XV-XVI-XVII* (Mantua: Editoriale Padus, 1971), p.10.

<sup>2</sup> For a comprehensive account of the early years of printing in Italy see Brian Richardson, *Print Culture in Renaissance Italy: The Editor and the Vernacular Text, 1470-1600* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994) and, by the same author, *Printing, Writers and Readers in Renaissance Italy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999). See also Elizabeth L. Eisenstein, *The Printing Press as an Agent of Change: Communications and Cultural Transformations in Early-Modern Europe*, 2 volumes (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979). On the form of, and subjects covered by, early Italian printed volumes see Paul Grendler, 'Form and Function in Italian Renaissance Popular Books', *Renaissance Quarterly*, 46, (1993), 451-485.

<sup>3</sup> Ubaldo Meroni, *Libri stampati a Mantova nel secolo XV. Catalogo della mostra* (Mantua: Biblioteca Comunale, 1959), prefazione.



if not indeed uniquely, the initial impulse to establish a local printing industry in Mantua was provided not by a German but by a native Mantuan.

### Pietrodamo de' Micheli

The Mantuan responsible for the arrival of the printing industry in his home town was Pietrodamo de' Micheli (c.1440-1481), defined by Signorini as “un personaggio così importante per la cultura rinascimentale mantovana.”<sup>4</sup> Before examining the precise nature of Pietrodamo's role in bringing the printers to Mantua and his contribution to the town's first printed texts both as printer and as publisher, two roles which are now distinct but which usually overlapped during the early years, let us first examine his life and background.

The year of Pietrodamo's birth cannot be proved with any degree of certainty but it is likely to have been around 1440, given that on 21 December 1459 he was granted a free passage by Lodovico to take his belongings to Ferrara, where he was about to embark on his legal studies.<sup>5</sup> Most students intent on forging a legal career at the time would probably begin their specialised studies around the age of twenty. Nor are we able to establish much about his family. Described by D'Arco as “illustre,” the de' Micheli clan were distant relations to the Gonzaga with a long history of political service in Mantua.<sup>6</sup> A certain Benvenuto de' Micheli had served as one of the one hundred *anziani* of the commune in the mid-thirteenth century and in 1430 one of Pietrodamo's uncles had served as secretary to the Marchese Gianfrancesco.<sup>7</sup> Schivenoglia is somewhat brief in his treatment of the family and makes no mention of Pietrodamo's printing and publishing activities:

Francesco, messer Pedro Adamo zudexo [giudice], di Michely, fradelly; la soa stancia si è lì da santa Croxe; lore vivanza con certi soy posisioncelly. Citadin antigi.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Rodolfo Signorini, 'Inediti su Pietrodamo de' Micheli. Il protostampatore, l'uomo di legge e la sua morte violenta', *Civiltà Mantovana*, nuova serie, I (1983), 43-62, p.43.

<sup>5</sup> Published in Luigi Pescasio, *Pietro Adamo de Micheli protoeditore mantovano* (Mantua: Editoriale Padus, 1972), p.36.

<sup>6</sup> Andrea Schivenoglia, *Istoria delle famiglie di Mantova*, Biblioteca Comunale di Mantova, MS II.2; Carlo D'Arco, *Mille scrittori mantovani*, 7 vols (Mantova, Archivio di Stato di Mantova), V, pp.109-114; Renier, *Il primo tipografo*, p.5. Pescasio notes that in a letter of 4 June 1481 (ASMN AG. b.2424) Pietrodamo claims to be a distant relative of the Gonzaga family. Pescasio, *Pietro Adamo*, p.28. For a discussion of the letter see Signorini, 'Inediti', pp.47-48.

<sup>7</sup> Renier, *Il primo tipografo*, p.5; Pescasio, *Pietro Adamo*, p.28.

<sup>8</sup> Schivenoglia, *Istoria delle famiglie di Mantova*, cited in Giancarlo Schizerotto, *Libri stampati a Mantova nel Quattrocento. Catalogo della mostra 1-20 ottobre* (Mantua: Biblioteca Comunale, 1972), p.15, n.8.

The de' Micheli owned a large house in Mantua but their power base was a fief at Correggio Micheli, close to Governolo. Renier, however, notes that by the middle of the Quattrocento the family's finances were strained, an observation that finds confirmation in several letters of the 1460s.<sup>9</sup> In a letter written to Lodovico from Ferrara on 12 April 1462 Pietroadamio informs the marchese that he has no money to buy the books he needs for his legal studies while in another letter dated 9 November 1465 he acknowledges that the family house in Mantua is in a poor state.<sup>10</sup>

Nothing is known of Pietroadamio's early years but, like Filippo Nuvoloni (1441-1478), who was around the same age, he may have studied in Mantua, if not under Vittorino then almost certainly under Jacopo da San Cassano, Ognibene and Platina.<sup>11</sup> Schizerotto suggests that there existed a close friendship between Pietroadamio and Nuvoloni, forged in childhood in Mantua and later matured in Ferrara.<sup>12</sup> His father, Lodovico, and his grandfather had practised the legal profession and Pietroadamio too was ushered towards this career, beginning his studies, as we have seen, in Ferrara in early 1460.<sup>13</sup> His progress there must have been far from spectacular, given that some eleven years later, in 1471, Pietroadamio was still defined as *legum scholaris*. Signorini among others has suggested that this lack of zeal points to a lack of interest in his studies but this slow pace, as Pesenti notes, may also have been due in some degree to the precarious financial position in which the de' Micheli family found itself by the early 1460s.<sup>14</sup>

The only source of biographical news regarding Pietroadamio's years in Ferrara is a handful of letters he wrote to Lodovico. In 1462 he appears to have become embroiled in a scandal with a local girl and, such was the nature of the incident,

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<sup>9</sup> Renier, *Il primo tipografo*, p.4.

<sup>10</sup> Letter Pietroadamio to Marchese Lodovico, Ferrara, 12 April 1462, published in Pescasio, *Pietro Adamo*, p.9 and letter Pietroadamio to Marchese Lodovico, Ferrara, 9 November 1465, published in Pescasio, *L'arte*, pp.15-16.

<sup>11</sup> See sections on teachers in Mantua (pp.134-154 above) and on Filippo Nuvoloni (pp.285-306 below).

<sup>12</sup> Schizerotto, *Libri stampati a Mantova*, p.12.

<sup>13</sup> Signorini, 'Inediti', p.45.

<sup>14</sup> Rodolfo Signorini, *L'orologio astrologico di Mantova* (Bozzolo: Chiribella, 1992), p.19; Tiziana Pesenti, 'De Micheli, Pietro Adamo', in *Dizionario biografico degli italiani* (Rome: Istituto della Enciclopedia Italiana, 1990), XXXVIII, pp.638-639, p.638.



Pietrodamo was compelled to flee from Ferrara and return temporarily to Mantua. Antonio Da Cappel wrote an outraged letter to Lodovico from Ferrara on 12 March 1463, describing how Pietrodamo, having “compromessa” the daughter of a certain Niccolò Galluzzo who was *scudiero* to Borso d’Este, now refused to marry the girl. Da Cappel seems sure that Pietrodamo is back in the *Mantovano* and urges Lodovico to confront Pietrodamo and ensure that he returns to Ferrara to fulfil his responsibilities, going as far as to state that “miser Piedro predicto sta a grande pericolo sì de la vita sì etiam de l’honore.”<sup>15</sup> In a letter of 12 April Pietrodamo gave his own version of events and, judging from the fact that at this point he was back in Ferrara, the situation must have calmed to some extent.<sup>16</sup> After acknowledging his debt to Da Cappel, who had helped Pietrodamo to buy books when his brother could not, he goes on to explain that Da Cappel had also arranged a marriage for Pietrodamo with the girl in question, a union which would have included a dowry of some three hundred ducats and board in her father’s house until the completion of his studies in Ferrara. Pietrodamo, however, had no intention of going through with the marriage and, despite describing her as “zovane e bella e ferraresa,” he also expresses his reservations about her integrity, concluding that the girl “non era de quelle che si sposano.”

Quite why Pietrodamo, given his dire financial circumstances, chose to break the engagement and to renounce the protection of the girl’s family and the promise of a reasonable dowry is not clear. Perhaps Pietrodamo’s reservations were genuine or perhaps, despite the family’s protection, his short-term finances continued to be precarious, given that at this point he was clearly at an early stage of his studies and the prospect of marriage and the promised dowry appeared too distant to be worth the commitment being asked of him. A small number of further letters containing scraps of information on Pietrodamo during the 1460s have come to light. On 30 September 1463 Pietrodamo, apparently having announced to Lodovico that he intended to visit Correggio Micheli, was warned by the marchese of the raging plague and warned to stay in quarantine before entering the *Mantovano* from

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<sup>15</sup> Letter Antonio Da Cappel to Marchese Lodovico, Ferrara, 12 March 1463, published in Pescasio, *Pietro Adamo*, pp.32-34.

<sup>16</sup> Letter Pietrodamo to Marchese Lodovico, Ferrara, 12 April 1463, published in Pescasio, *Pietro Adamo*, p.34.

Ferrara.<sup>17</sup> In a letter of 23 February 1465 Lodovico informs an un-named Ferrarese gentleman that books stolen from the son of Albertino Pavese, his treasurer, have been found in Ferrara by Pietroadamo while in November of the same year Pietroadamo was once again at the family holding in Correggio and had clearly arranged to visit Lodovico, who gave him permission to postpone his visit until he recovered from fever.<sup>18</sup>

News of Pietroadamo during the late 1460s and early 1470s then dries up, until his printing and publishing activities which began in late 1471. During these years he must have made some progress, albeit slow, in his studies in Ferrara, given that his name appeared on a Mantuan legal register of June 1475. His legal career probably began following his final publishing project in 1474 and before the autumn of 1476 Pietroadamo had taken minor orders.<sup>19</sup> This revelation is to be found in a letter of 10 September 1476 written from Borgoforte by Lodovico to the *vicepodestà* of Mantua, in which the marchese orders that “Petroadam di Micheli non sia più, da mo’ inanti, lassato procurare li in pallazo, perché non volemo procuratori che se faciano chierigi et che de loro manchamenti se faciano absolvere in pallazo.”<sup>20</sup> The precise nature of the incident which provoked the wrath of Lodovico is not known but the wording of his letter suggests an intolerance for churchmen claiming the benefits of clergy and Pietroadamo, who had taken orders as a prerequisite for representing the legal matters of the bishopric, was possibly being made to pay for previous abuses of other clergymen in Mantuan legal circles. The following day Lodovico, in a letter to the archdeacon of the cathedral, Carlo degli Uberti, reiterated his resolve to prevent clergymen with their own agendas from practising law in Mantua, and closed his letter with the resounding declaration, though perhaps also exaggerated, that “non volemo per niente che preti siano quelli che signorezano Mantua.”<sup>21</sup> Lodovico had for some time sought to harness the power

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<sup>17</sup> Letter Marchese Lodovico to Pietroadamo, Mantua, 30 September 1463 (ASMn AG, b. 2887 Lib. 42 f. 35v), published in Signorini, ‘Inediti’, p.56.

<sup>18</sup> Letter Marchese Lodovico to un-named Ferrarese, Mantua, 23 February 1465 (ASMn AG, b. 2889 Lib. 53 f. 31v), published in Signorini, ‘Inediti’, p.54 and letter Marchese Lodovico to Pietroadamo, Mantua, 10 November 1465 (ASMn AG, b. 2889 Lib. 54 f. 71v), published in Signorini, ‘Inediti’, pp.56-57.

<sup>19</sup> Signorini, ‘Inediti’, pp.45-46.

<sup>20</sup> Letter Marchese Lodovico to *vicepodestà* of Mantua, Borgoforte, 10 September 1476 (ASMn A.G, b. 2894 Lib. 81 f. 61r), published in Signorini, ‘Inediti’, pp.58-59.

<sup>21</sup> Letter Marchese Lodovico to Carlo degli Uberti, Borgoforte, 11 September 1476 (ASMn AG, b. 2894 Lib. 81 f. 61v), published in Signorini, ‘Inediti’, p.59.



of the Church in Mantua and he had clearly hoped that, with a cardinal in the family since 1461, he would be able to do so effectively. The marchese, however, continued to be frustrated on occasion by Church authority, the most pertinent example being the prolonged struggle to gain control of the church and monastery of Sant'Andrea, the old buildings eventually being knocked down and the new basilica designed by Alberti begun in 1472.<sup>22</sup> The decision to banish Pietroadamio from the legal register, therefore, must be considered within this broader context.

With his printing and publishing career apparently over by this stage there is no news of how Pietroadamio occupied himself in the late 1470s after being excluded from the legal register in Mantua. The decree of 22 January 1481 signed by the Marchese Federico, originally thought by Renier and others to have coincided with the beginning of Pietroadamio's legal career, must be viewed, notes Signorini, as the restitution of his licence to practise.<sup>23</sup> Perhaps during the intervening years Pietroadamio had completed his studies in Ferrara, or perhaps he had dedicated his life to his new role within the Church. It is also possible that, no longer able to carry out legal duties in Mantua, he practised law elsewhere, though no evidence of his activities has thus far come to light.

Shortly after the resumption of his professional career in Mantua, in the summer of 1481, Pietroadamio became involved in a violent dispute destined to result in a tragic outcome. Concern for his own safety was evident in the last letter which Pietroadamio wrote to Federico, on 4 June 1481.<sup>24</sup> From the letter we learn that Teseo da Sesso, son of the *conte* of Rolo, has taken as his wife Lucrezia, the niece of Pietroadamio, and that he has since attempted to annul the marriage, complaining that he had been tricked by Pietroadamio into agreeing to marry the girl. In the letter Pietroadamio insists that Teseo wholeheartedly desired the marriage and also informs the marchese that he has been receiving threats from Teseo and his brother Francesco. Eager to clear his name and to give his own version of events to Federico, Pietroadamio finishes the letter with a request for an audience and,

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<sup>22</sup> On Lodovico's struggle to secure permission to have Sant'Andrea demolished and rebuilt see David S. Chambers, 'Sant'Andrea at Mantua and Gonzaga Patronage, 1460-1472', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, XL (1977), 99-127; Eugene J. Johnson, *S. Andrea in Mantua. The Building History* (Pennsylvania and London: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1975), pp.8-10.

<sup>23</sup> Renier, *Il primo tipografo*, p.4; Signorini, 'Inediti', p.47; Pescasio, *Pietro Adamo*, p.35.

<sup>24</sup> Letter cited in note 6.

rather ominously, for a guarantee of protection from the physical aggression of the da Sesso brothers.

Pietroadamo's concern for his physical safety was clearly justified, judging by the gruesome revelations in a letter of 15 August from Francesco da Sesso to Federico.<sup>25</sup> After informing the marchese that he has just heard of Teseo's attack on Pietroadamo, he goes on to tell him that it had been his own intention to come to Mantua to demonstrate "per via de la raxione" that Pietroadamo was "uno malo homo" but that illness had prevented him from doing so. Had he been fit to travel to Mantua, insists Francesco, he would have been able to prevent the excesses of his brother. In a poorly articulated defence of his brother's murderous actions, however, Francesco goes on to describe Pietroadamo's constant provocations, concluding that "non vidi may homo più presumtuoso de luy." Whether Francesco da Sesso had been aware of Teseo's intentions or whether he genuinely had no control over his brother's actions we shall never know for sure. What can be established with some degree of certainty is that the crime took place on either 14 or 15 August 1481. Not only must Francesco da Sesso have been anxious to justify his brother's attack and have written to Federico immediately, but a notarial act dated 16 August 1482 refers to Pietroadamo as being "qui ab anno citra decessit."<sup>26</sup>

While relations between Federico and the da Sesso family continued uninterrupted, in a letter of 13 June 1482 to Azzo *conte* of Rolo, the marchese reiterated his disgust at the latter's son's brutal murder of Pietroadamo the previous summer, reminding him that Teseo had committed "uno tanto eccesso come amazare messer Petroadam et nel modo ch'el fece" and thus refusing Azzo's request that his son be allowed to travel through Mantuan territory.<sup>27</sup> Federico also reminds Azzo that, should Teseo show up in Mantua, he would be fined one thousand lire and have his assets confiscated as well as having his pending death sentence carried out. Eight years later, on 23 February 1490, a deed of peace was signed by Teseo da Sesso and Pietroadamo's brother Francesco and, two days later, the Marchese

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<sup>25</sup> Letter Francesco da Sesso to Marchese Federico, Rolo, 15 August 1481 (ASMn AG, b. 1357), published in Signorini, 'Inediti', p.60.

<sup>26</sup> Signorini, 'Inediti', p.49.

<sup>27</sup> Letter Marchese Federico to Azzo da Sesso, Mantua, 13 June 1482 (ASMn AG, b. 2898 Lib. 105 f. 88r), published in Signorini, 'Inediti', p.61.



Francesco Gonzaga issued a decree which after almost nine years officially pardoned Teseo for the murder. Two years later, rather ironically, the matter was finally drawn to a close when Francesco de' Micheli was ordered to pay Teseo da Sesso the sum of two-hundred gold ducats as a dowry for the marriage of his daughter Lucrezia.<sup>28</sup>

Having examined in some detail the available particulars surrounding the life of Pietroadamo, let us now turn to the initiative for which he is justifiably most acclaimed: the appearance in Mantua of the town's first printing press. The letter of 25 November 1471 in which he announces the arrival of the first printers is rich in detail and worth examining in its entirety. After the customary formal greeting addressed to Lodovico, Pietroadamo continues:

[...] Perché io ho condotto per un anno qua a Mantua certi maestri per far stampare principalmente libri de lege in una bellissima littera, li quali concedendo la divina gratia cominciaranno ad lavorare questa septimana presente, et volendo mi nel principio far qualche operetta de mediocre grandezza, vendibile et grata universalmente ad molte et di varie condition persone, ho proposto far el Centonovelle: et perché intendo ad tutto mio poter farlo correctissimo, humilmente priego la prefata Ill. S. V. si degni farmi prestar el suo per un mese o circa, qual intendo esser assai correcto, il che per singular gratia recognoscerò da quella [...].<sup>29</sup>

From this short letter we can glean much information regarding the arrival of the first printers in Mantua and Pietroadamo's reasons for bringing them. Firstly, we learn that Pietroadamo planned for them to stay for one year, during which they would print essentially law books in fine letters. Secondly, we understand that the un-named "maestri" are ready to begin work within the week. It is also clear that Pietroadamo has carried out some kind of market research before embarking on the production of the first volume: his insistence that the first project ought to be a work of "mediocre grandezza," suggests that he has taken into consideration production costs, while his opinion that it must be "vendibile et grata universalmente" demonstrates that he is acutely aware that, in order to get his venture off to a successful start and recoup his financial outlay, he has to produce a book which will appeal to potential customers of differing social backgrounds and

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<sup>28</sup> Signorini, 'Inediti', p.51.

<sup>29</sup> Letter Pietroadamo to Marchese Lodovico, Mantua, 25 November 1471 (ASMn AG, b. 2413, c. 227), first published in Renier, *Il primo tipografo*, p.12.

wealth. Having concluded that Boccaccio's *Decameron* met these various criteria, Pietroadamo then shows his awareness that the copy housed in the Gonzaga library was of such renowned philological worth that it represented the ideal specimen from which to copy his new printed edition.

As noted in the introduction to this chapter, Mantua represented a rare case of a local and not a German providing the main impetus for the establishment of a printing press. What is certain, however, is that the *maestri* mentioned by Pietroadamo in his letter were themselves German and almost certainly the brothers Jorg and Paul Puzbach, recorded as being active in Mantua shortly afterwards.<sup>30</sup> In another letter to Lodovico penned on 29 November 1471 Pietroadamo provides an update of developments, informing the marchese that the *maestri* had invited a colleague by the name of Nicolò todesco, “compositore a l'arte del stampar libri,” presumably a specialist in creating print casts.<sup>31</sup> This would imply that the *maestri* were themselves German. Pietroadamo's failure to name them has, however, given rise over the years to differing theories regarding their identity. While Volta was unable to identify them, Mainardi ruled out the possibility that the first printers brought to Mantua were the Puzbach brothers, insisting instead that they came later.<sup>32</sup> Renier and Meroni, meanwhile, limit themselves to the assertion that the *maestri* brought to Mantua by Pietroadamo could have been any of the early German printers who established workshops there.<sup>33</sup> In all probability, however, the printers mentioned by Pietroadamo were indeed the Puzbach brothers. A document of 21 January 1472, only eight weeks after Pietroadamo's initial letter and the arrival of the *maestri*, refers to material being kept for “meser Pedro Adam” and “maestro Zorzo stampidor,” presumably Jorg Puzbach.<sup>34</sup>

Pietroadamo, as we have seen, was by no means a wealthy man. Nor, as a student of law, is he likely to have been highly experienced in the technical aspects of

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<sup>30</sup> On the Puzbach brothers, pp.243-249 below.

<sup>31</sup> Letter Pietroadamo to Marchese Lodovico, Mantua, 29 November 1471 (ASMn AG, b. 2413 c. 228), first published in Renier, *Il primo tipografo*, pp.12-13.

<sup>32</sup> Leopoldo Camillo Volta, *Saggio storico-critico sulla tipografia mantovana del secolo XV* (Venice: Coleti, 1786); Antonio Mainardi, *Storia dell'arte tipografica in Mantova* (Mantua: Luigi Segna, 1868).

<sup>33</sup> Renier, *Il primo tipografo*, p.6; Meroni, *Libri stampati a Mantova*, p.39.

<sup>34</sup> Signorini, 'Inediti', p.44.



printing. It is also improbable that by 1471 a great many printed books were circulating in Ferrara. Given these considerations, it is worth reflecting on why he became so involved in bringing the new industry to Mantua at all. If Pietroadamio invested any of his own money in the venture then he must have been rather brave to do so given his already precarious finances and the inevitable uncertainty regarding how the Mantuan public would take to printed books. In this respect Richardson makes the important point that the initial outlay for any printing venture was always significant, and that the patrons whose investment was required may have been enticed by the prospect of potentially high profit margins.<sup>35</sup> Perhaps, having seen printing enthusiastically embraced in Ferrara, he was sure that it would be well received in Mantua, and by Lodovico in particular, and in this respect the initiative was possibly one which Pietroadamio hoped would improve his economic conditions. Pescasio, indeed, suggests that Pietroadamio's impetus was attributable to the cultural climate generated in Mantua by Lodovico and that, in a general atmosphere of indifference, the new technology was bound to find enthusiasts there.<sup>36</sup> The letter of 25 November 1471, notes Renier, can be seen as an appeal to Lodovico for moral and indeed financial assistance.<sup>37</sup> Nonetheless, it may be argued, what Pietroadamio lacked in money and experience he more than compensated for in curiosity and artistic taste.<sup>38</sup>

The precise nature of Pietroadamio's role in the early printing activity in Mantua has been the subject of some discussion. It has never been clear to what extent he was involved in the mechanical process of printing or whether his activities were limited to editing the texts selected for production. Returning to the letter of 25 November, the source of so much information, the fact that Pietroadamio attributes the ability to print books to the *maestri* and asks the marchese if he can borrow his *Decameron* because he understands that it is an accurate text gives the distinct impression that at this stage Pietroadamio's duties were those of the modern day publisher and editor. This is the view that has been taken by Meroni,

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<sup>35</sup> Richardson, *Printing, Writers and Readers*, pp.25-26. Richardson goes on to define printing as an "expensive and uncertain business", and comments that, in the early days, the Church showed more willingness to offer support than the courts or the republics. He also notes that private partners and merchants were often more important than the state as a source of finance. See *Printing, Writers and Readers*, pp.27-28.

<sup>36</sup> Pescasio, *Pietro Adamo*, p.27.

<sup>37</sup> Renier, *Il primo tipografo*, p.6.

<sup>38</sup> Signorini, *L'orologio*, p.19.

Pescasio and Pesenti, who argue that Pietroadamo's role did not extend to the mechanical composition of the texts he was involved in producing.<sup>39</sup> Others have suggested that Pietroadamo was in fact trained in the technical aspects of printing. Renier, in giving his article the title *Il primo tipografo mantovano*, clearly believed that Pietroadamo's contribution extended beyond that of mere editor while Signorini offers evidence that he was indeed printer as well as editor.<sup>40</sup> In a document drawn up by the notary Sigismondo de' Preti on 6 August 1474 Paul Puzbach is recorded, among other transactions, as having paid Pietroadamo one ducat for a variety of printing equipment. Signorini concludes, therefore, that, alongside the title of *protoeditore*, Pietroadamo must also be remembered as Mantua's *protostampatore*.<sup>41</sup> While Pietroadamo's books of 1472 were produced in collaboration with the *maestri* he brought from Ferrara, the Puzbach brothers were eventually to establish their own independent printing press, although this did not prevent collaboration between the two parties. In order to understand how and with whom Pietroadamo operated let us now look in turn at each of the printed texts for the production of which he was to some degree responsible.

The first two books produced by Pietroadamo's fledgling workshop, both in 1472, were the *Decameron* (Fig.37) and the *Tractatus Maleficiorum*, a legal treatise written by Angelo de' Gambiglioni of Arezzo. It is not clear, however, which of the two came first and can, as a consequence, lay claim to the title of the first book to have been printed in Mantua. While Meroni and Pescasio opt for the *Decameron*, others such as Rhodes, Schizerotto and Pesenti believe that the *Tractatus Maleficiorum* was Pietroadamo's first project, in keeping with his studies and with his stated desire to produce "principalmente libri de lege."<sup>42</sup> The fact that Pietroadamo requested to borrow from Lodovico his copy of the *Decameron* does not in itself prove that this was the first book he had printed: having studied law in Ferrara for ten years at this stage he no doubt possessed a copy of Gambiglioni's treatise. His desire, however, to produce "nel principio" a volume which would be of "mediocre grandezza" and

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<sup>39</sup> Meroni, *Libri stampati a Mantova*, prefazione; Pescasio, *L'arte*, p.12; Pesenti, 'De Micheli', pp.638-639.

<sup>40</sup> Signorini, 'Inediti', pp.44-45.

<sup>41</sup> Contract agreed by Pietroadamo with Puzbach brothers (ASMn Archivio Notarile, Filza del notaio Sigismondo de' Preti n. 140 1468-1484), published in Signorini, 'Inediti', pp.57-58.

<sup>42</sup> See letter of 25 November 1471, cited in note 28. See also Meroni, *Libri stampati a Mantova*, p.12; Pescasio, *Pietro Adamo*, p.51; Schizerotto, *Libri stampati a Mantova*, pp.10-11; Pesenti, 'De Micheli', p.639; Dennis E. Rhodes, 'A Bibliography of Mantua', *La Bibliofilia*, LVII (1955), 173-187, p.175.



“vendibile et grata universalmente ad molte et di varie condition persone” suggests not only that Pietroadamo’s first book had to be both economically viable in terms of production costs and a successful seller across the market but that he was also aware of its significance and widespread appeal. Given the specialised nature of the *Tractatus Maleficiorum* and its limited appeal to those interested in the study of legal matters, it must surely be safe to assume that the volume universally appealing to people of differing backgrounds, referred to by Pietroadamo, is indeed Boccaccio’s collection of entertaining stories.

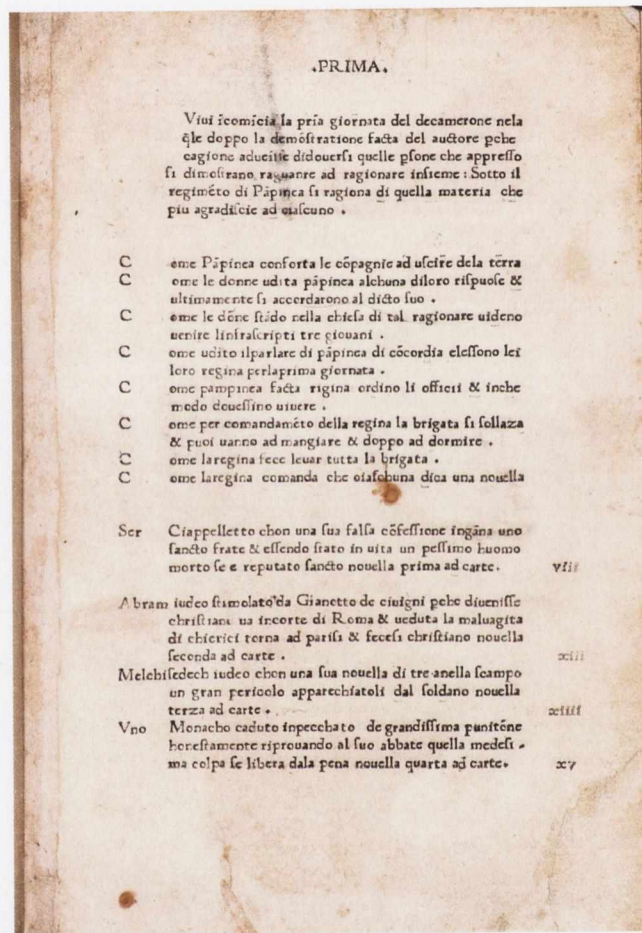


Fig.37: Boccaccio, *Decamerone* (Mantua: Pietroadamo de' Micheli, 1472)

There are four known surviving copies of Pietroadamo’s *Decameron*: at the British Library, at the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris, in Manchester and in Nuremberg. The volume contains two-hundred and sixty-four leaves with forty-one lines to a page.<sup>43</sup> Meroni praises the book for the beauty of its characters and for the philological quality of the text, the latter observation giving reason to suppose that

<sup>43</sup> Rhodes, ‘A Bibliography of Mantua’, p.176.

philological quality of the text, the latter observation giving reason to suppose that Lodovico acceded to Pietroadamo's request to borrow the copy kept in the Gonzaga library. This scrupulous preoccupation with basing his printed edition on the marchese's manuscript indicates that Pietroadamo clearly intended to do things well from the beginning.<sup>44</sup> Pescasio too alludes to the high quality of the text and points to the involvement of experienced printers, believing its splendour to be beyond the reach of a novice printer.<sup>45</sup> There can be no doubt, indeed, that the Mantuan *Decameron* of 1472 was produced in collaboration with the *maestri* brought from Ferrara and that Pietroadamo's role in the production of this early printed volume was both editorial and that of co-printer.

The Mantuan *Decameron* is an impeccably printed volume which, though its pages are finished with a tasteful gold rim, contains neither coloured ink nor pictorial decoration, meaning that it must have appeared somewhat dull to readers accustomed to the elaborate manuscripts produced in Mantua. Pescasio, perhaps drawing conclusions from Pietroadamo's financial problems of the following year, argues that it could not have been the hugely successful venture its creator had hoped it would be.<sup>46</sup> It is not known how many copies were printed or to whom they were sold but Renier, expanding on notions expressed by Manni, Mazzuchelli and Volta, points to evidence from 1573, almost exactly a century after it was printed, which could indicate that Pietroadamo's *Decameron* was held in high regard among literary circles.<sup>47</sup> In 1573 a committee of *Deputati* in Florence responsible for producing a corrected version of the *Decameron* worked from two volumes.<sup>48</sup> The first was a Medicean manuscript, which they named "l'ottimo," and the other a printed edition, which they referred to as the "secondo." The "secondo," they observed, "ha già intorno a cento anni" and, while outdated in terms of style and quality of print, justified its role of prime importance in the editing process of the new text "perché si conosce cavato da buon testo et, ne' luoghi importanti, si trova quasi sempre conforme all'Ottimo, et pure alcuna volta è diverso."<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Meroni, *Libri stampati a Mantova*, p.12.

<sup>45</sup> Pescasio, *Pietro Adamo*, pp.48-49.

<sup>46</sup> Pescasio, *L'arte*, p.12.

<sup>47</sup> Renier, *Il primo tipografo*, p.8, n4-6.

<sup>48</sup> See Giuseppe Chiecchi, *Le annotazioni e i discorsi sul 'Decameron' del 1573 dei deputati fiorentini* (Rome: Editrice Antenore, 2001).

<sup>49</sup> Chiecchi, *Le annotazioni e i discorsi sul 'Decameron'*, p.15; Renier, *Il primo tipografo*, p.8, n3.



Pietroadamio's, it must be emphasised, is one of the very few early printed editions of the *Decameron* datable with certainty and the fact that the *Deputati* state in 1573 that the "secondo" is around one hundred years old means that it could perhaps have been the Mantuan edition of 1472. Their praise for the quality of the text, moreover, conforms with Pietroadamio's view that Lodovico's manuscript was the best available text to put into print.<sup>50</sup>

The other candidate for the epithet of first book printed in Mantua, as we have mentioned, is the *Tractatus Maleficiorum* by Angelo Gambiglioni, produced, like the *Decameron*, by Pietroadamio in 1472. The *Tractatus*, one-hundred and eight pages in length, with two columns to a page and fifty-one lines to a column, is of the same high quality as the *Decameron* and survives in two known copies, again in the British Museum and in the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris.<sup>51</sup> Clearly the first of the "libri de lege" which Pietroadamio wished to print, the *Tractatus* would unquestionably have been a text which Pietroadamio knew well from his studies and, just as he reflected thoroughly on his reasons for printing the *Decameron*, so too must he have speculated on the potential demand for Gambiglioni's treatise, which, as Pescasio notes, was among the first works to be printed in several cities over the following years.<sup>52</sup> Its commercial appeal is confirmed by editions in Paris in 1476, in Venice in 1479, in Toulouse and in Speyer in 1480, in Milan in 1481 and by a second Venetian edition in 1486. The Mantuan edition, as well as being the first known print of Gambiglioni's work, is also notable in that it was printed on its own and not as part of a larger anthology of legal treatises, a fact which Pescasio suggests may be a further indication of the financial constraints affecting Pietroadamio's activities.<sup>53</sup>

Pietroadamio's decision to print the *Tractatus* in the first place and on its own may even have arisen from the possibility that he attended lectures by Gambiglioni in Ferrara during the early years of his studies. Gambiglioni, also known as Angelo Aretino, was one of the foremost Italian legal figures of the early to mid-

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<sup>50</sup> Chiecchi does not speculate on the identity of the printed edition consulted by the *Deputati*.

<sup>51</sup> Rhodes, 'A Bibliography of Mantua', p.175; Pescasio, *Pietro Adamo*, p.54.

<sup>52</sup> Pescasio, *Pietro Adamo*, p.54.

<sup>53</sup> Pescasio, *Pietro Adamo*, p.52.

Rome, in Città di Castello and in Norcia. Following a short spell of imprisonment resulting from accusations of malpractice Gambiglioni became professor of law briefly in Bologna and then moved to Ferrara, where he appears to have died between the late 1450s and the early 1460s, just around the time Pietroadamo moved there to begin his studies.

Another book widely attributed to Pietroadamo's workshop, despite being without signatures or information regarding where, when and by whom it was printed, is an early printed edition of Flavio Biondo's *Roma Triumphans* (Fig.38) The volume was not even mentioned by Volta while Proctor attributed it to the print press of Pietro Villa in Brescia around 1473.<sup>55</sup> With good reason, Rhodes, Meroni, Pescasio and Schizerotto, however, although unable to date the volume, forcefully argue on aesthetic grounds that the *Roma Triumphans* was printed by Pietroadamo in Mantua.<sup>56</sup> When examined alongside the latter's *Decameron*, indeed, the typefaces appear to be identical, despite differing sizes of page and print plate.

Flavio Biondo was born in Forlì and spent the last thirty years of his life as a distinguished humanist at the Curia. It is likely, however, that from an early age he established connections within Mantuan circles given his acquaintance with Paola Malatesta of Pesaro, Lodovico's mother, who married the Marchese Gianfrancesco Gonzaga in 1410.<sup>57</sup> In Rome he made a significant contribution to the development of Renaissance historiography and in his *Historiarum ab inclinatione Romanorum imperii decades*, written between 1437 and 1442, he provided an innovative survey of the previous ten centuries of European history.<sup>58</sup> The *Roma Triumphans*, his last notable work, was an account in ten books of a range of aspects of the public and private lives of the ancient Romans.

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<sup>55</sup> Attribution cited in Pescasio, *Pietro Adamo*, pp.60-61. See also Rhodes, 'A Bibliography of Mantua', p.176.

<sup>56</sup> Rhodes, 'A Bibliography of Mantua', p.176; Meroni, *Libri stampati a Mantova*, p.12; Pescasio, *Pietro Adamo*, pp.60-61; Schizerotto, *Libri stampati a Mantova*, pp.11-12.

<sup>57</sup> Pescasio, *Pietro Adamo*, pp.58-60.

<sup>58</sup> George Holmes, 'Biondo, Flavio', in *The Thames and Hudson Dictionary of the Italian Renaissance* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1981), p.51.



BLONDI FLAVII FORLIVIENSIS IN ROMÆ  
TRIUMPHANTIS LIBROS PROEMIVM.

Redenti uirtute præstantiq; ingento ferme ones quæ  
de gestis rebus deque cæteris mortalium uitæ partibus  
latine scribendi libido cepit: ut ad urbem sese uerte-  
rint: gentiq; romanæ factû uidemus: pbibili sîd certe  
ac necessaria ratione. ea enî fuit ciuitas ut cicero iquit  
ex nationum cõuentu instituta: quæ ppter uirtutem  
omnibus nationibus imperauit: peculiaris cuius fuit dignitas: ut re-  
ges: ut nationes extræ: ut gentes ultimæ non minus eam amauerit q;  
timuerint: quæ firmissimum uel ea ratione habuit imperium quod eo  
obedientes gauisî sunt: romanis magistratibus sua consilia: sua studia  
in sîd maiori ex parte conferentibus: ut hi qui in eorû imperio erant q;  
beatissimi essent. Quæ ratione Cicero ipse non indigne eam urbem  
terrarum orbis: atq; omnium gentium arcem appellauit: & Plinius p-  
prie scripsit: romam terrarum commercio patentem undiq; & tanquã  
ad mortales adiuuandos natam esse. quod imperii maiestati orbi terrarû  
communicata societas fæta pacis: omniumq; etiam quæ prius occultæ  
fuerant promiscuus usus sic effecta. romani enî maximam orbis pte  
sue subsidi ditiori ita pacauerunt: cultuq; bonis moribus & artibus  
reddiderunt. Ve distinctæ mari montibusq; & fluminibus separatæ  
gõtes: ac linguis litteraturaq; differetes populi: per latinæ lingue cõ-  
munionem: per quæ cõmunes omnibus romanos magistratus una eisdemq;  
ciuitas sint effecti. quod quidem maximum humani generis beneficiu  
dei potius q; hominum opus fuisse uidetur: licetq; dicere & Cicero de  
responsis differens inquit: debere qui deos esse intellexerint etiam  
intelligere: eorum numine hoc tantû imperium esse natum & uactum &  
retentum. Nam ut ab italia incipiã: roma annis iam trecentis condita  
hetruicî romaniq; silua intercedente cimina nunc uicibus imminente  
paulo plus minus triginta milibus ab urbe distante nullum inter se co-  
mercium habuerunt. Lutatius enî patavinus sic habet in nono. Silua erat  
cimina magis tum inuia atq; horrenda q; nuper fuere germanici saltus.  
nullus ad eam diem ne mercatorum quidem abditæ ea intrate aut ferre  
quicquam præter duos ipsum audebat. Et proximos romæ ad tertium  
lapidem sabines lingua moribus & institutis differetes a romanis fuisse  
eodem doctæ constat: qui pariter estendit: circa mutinam bononiam q;  
et proxima loca nunc totius italiæ antecessima siluas omnia obtinuisse.  
remotiores uero ab urbe regiones campaniam Lucaniam appuliam: ca-  
labros & brutios maiori ex parte grecis subditas. nec latinis nec sabi-  
nis: neq; etiã hetruicis per linguarum diuersitatem satis cõmunicasse

Fig.38: Flavio Biondo, *Roma Triumphans* (Mantua, Pietroadamo de' Micheli, 1472)

*Roma Triumphans* was not a law book, and it was probably not a text which Pietroadamo had originally intended to produce. Biondo's text, however, was in vogue at the time and, if sales of Gambiglioni's *Tractatus* had been disappointing, suggests Pescasio, then the *Roma Triumphans* probably represented the prospect of recouping some outlay and possibly even of making a profit.<sup>59</sup> One-hundred and eighty leaves with forty-one lines to a page, the production is of the same high quality as Pietroadamo's previous two efforts. There are ten known surviving copies, in London, Manchester, Oxford, Paris, New York, Venice, Padua, Ferrara, Bologna and Parma.<sup>60</sup>

Another book sometimes attributed to the print press of Pietroadamo is a treatise on orthography edited by Cristoforo Scarpa, essentially a revised edition of a guide

<sup>59</sup> Pescasio, *Pietro Adamo*, p.58.

<sup>60</sup> Rhodes, 'A Bibliography of Mantua', p.176.

to the use of diphthongs composed by Guarino Veronese, which survives thanks to a single copy housed at the British Museum.<sup>61</sup> While Schizerotto places Scarpa's treatise alongside the *Decameron*, the *Tractatus Maleficiorum* and the *Roma Triumphans* as an initiative of Pietroadamo, others such as Rhodes and Meroni have argued that its style is that of a different workshop some years later.<sup>62</sup> Following more than an entire year of inactivity, Pietroadamo did, however, print one final text: the aforementioned *Oratio ad Serenissimum Dominum Christiernum* written and delivered by Filippo Nuvoloni to mark the visit to Mantua in May 1474 of King Christian of Denmark.<sup>63</sup> Schizerotto, pointing to his inactivity of 1473, suggests that Pietroadamo had abandoned printing by the time of Christian's visit and that the *Oratio* may in fact have been produced by one of the other printers established in Mantua by the summer of 1474.<sup>64</sup> Other critics, however, have accepted Rhodes' observation that the printed characters are unquestionably those of the plates used for Pietroadamo's previous three volumes.<sup>65</sup> Unlikely to have represented the solution to Pietroadamo's mounting financial problems, the *Oratio* may have been commissioned as political propaganda by Lodovico to mark the visit of the Danish monarch.<sup>66</sup> The less elaborate presentation of this fourth and last work, when compared to his previous three printed editions, may be further evidence of the decadent state of Pietroadamo's activity in 1474, by which time he probably also operated without the expert experience of the Puzbach brothers. The *Oratio*, a mere ten leaves each containing twenty-three lines, is preserved in four known copies: in Venice, in the Vatican Library, in San Marino California and in Cambridge Massachusetts.

So what of Pietroadamo's financial problems and the cessation of his printing activity? Fortunately, just as Pietroadamo was explicit in his letter to Lodovico of 25 November 1471 in which he outlined the reasons for his decision to bring the first printers to Mantua, he was equally candid in another surviving letter which he

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<sup>61</sup> Dennis E. Rhodes, 'A Bibliography of Mantua', p.176.

<sup>62</sup> Schizerotto, *Libri stampati a Mantova*, p.11; Rhodes, 'A Bibliography of Mantua', p.176; Meroni, *Libri stampati a Mantova*, p.14.

<sup>63</sup> On Filippo Nuvoloni see pp.301-305 below.

<sup>64</sup> Schizerotto, *Libri stampati a Mantova*, pp.11-12.

<sup>65</sup> Rhodes, 'A Bibliography of Mantua', p.180.

<sup>66</sup> Pescasio, *Pietro Adamo*, pp.65-66.



wrote to the marchese on 17 February 1473. After paying his due respects Pietroadamo wrote:

[...] Occurrendomi necessità di trovar al presente circha sesanta ducati per satisfar ad alcuni mei debiti fatti per far stampare libri de diverse maniere di quali ne ho per pretio de più de seicento ducati a butargli via, non havendo al presente altro modo de minor interesse per poco tempo, priego humilmente la illustre S.V. che quella potendo senza alcuna sua incommodità se degni per sua clementia prestarmi per tri mesi solamente un pegno de sesanta ducati: finché in questo mezo io possa più habilmente spaciare li mei libri per le circostanti terre, del cui guadagno ex nunc offerisco alla fabrica de Sancto Andrea la parte sua, promettendo etiam alla prefata S.V. infra ditto termino restituire infalibilmente ditto pegno cum quelle cautioni che commandarà quella: alla qual recorro cum ferma fede e speranza et a quella sempre humilmente me recommando.<sup>67</sup>

This letter, although short and apparently the only one he wrote to the marchese around this time, contains a wealth of information and clues with regard to the economic difficulties facing Pietroadamo after the production of three books in little more than a year of printing. Firstly, Pietroadamo explicitly mentions debts accumulated due to his printing activities, debts which must have been to the tune of sixty ducats at the very least. He then mentions a quantity of unsold books he has in stock amounting to the substantial value of six-hundred ducats, books which, if granted the loan of sixty ducats for three months, he will attempt to sell while travelling around the surrounding towns over the next month. Finally, in an astute appeal to a cause which was very dear to the marchese, Pietroadamo promises that, as well as repaying interest on the loan, he will donate a slice of the profits generated from the sale of his books to the fund for the construction of the ambitious programme for Sant'Andrea, begun only a few months earlier.<sup>68</sup> Renier, in a less sceptical analysis of Pietroadamo's intentions, cites this incident as an example of the prevailing artistic interaction in Lodovico's Mantua.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> Letter Pietroadamo to Marchese Lodovico, Mantua, 17 February 1473 (ASMn AG. b. 2416). First published in Renier, *Il primo tipografo*, p.13.

<sup>68</sup> For a history of the construction of Sant'Andrea see Johnson, *S. Andrea in Mantua*.

<sup>69</sup> Renier, *Il primo tipografo*, p.6.

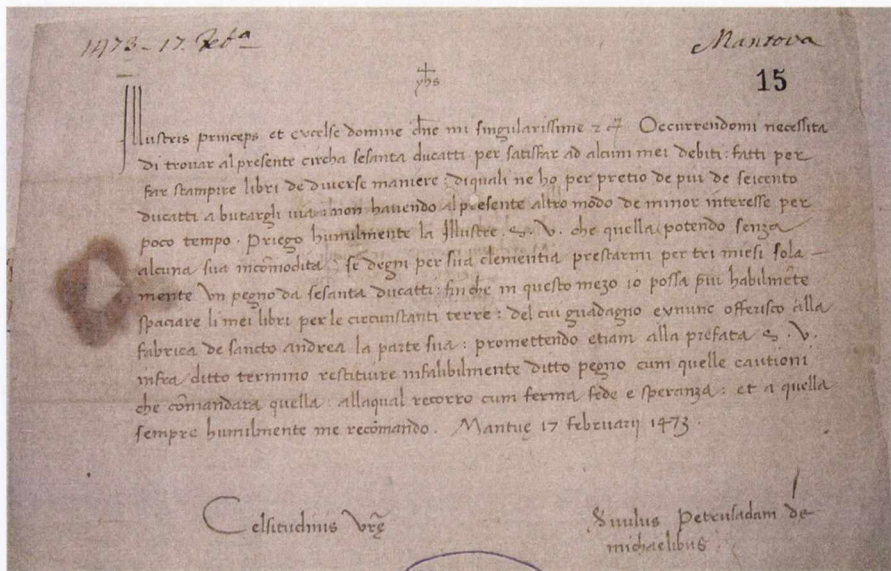


Fig.39: Letter Pietroadamo to Marchese Lodovico, Mantua, 17 February 1473 (ASMn AG. b. 2416)

We can only speculate as to how, over the duration of 1472, Pietroadamo's initiative, despite producing printed books of a high quality, resulted in such abject financial failure. The most obvious reason is that he was simply unable to sell his books, a fact confirmed by Pietroadamo himself when he referred to six-hundred ducats' worth of unsold stock. The *Decameron*, despite its anticipated wide appeal, may have tested the market but was perhaps not, to use modern publishing terminology, the best-seller for which he had hoped. Nonetheless, it was probably Gambiglioni's *Tractatus Maleficiorum*, the first of an intended series of law books, that did not sell well in Mantua and represented the beginning of Pietroadamo's troubles. The flocks of law students in Ferrara simply did not exist in Mantua and it is significant that his next book, Flavio Biondo's *Roma Triumphans*, was again an appeal to the wider reading public and a further diversion from his intended programme of law books. By this time, presumably in the second half of 1472 and with stocks and debts continuously mounting, Pietroadamo clearly could not sustain another failure but the letter of 17 February 1473 is conclusive evidence that the *Roma Triumphans* did not attract a sufficient number of buyers. With no money to continue and no further printing activity, there is little news of Pietroadamo in 1473. If Lodovico provided the requested loan of sixty ducats then perhaps Pietroadamo spent much of the spring and summer touring the *Mantovano* in a desperate attempt to recoup some finances. The *Oratio*, printed in 1474 almost two years after the previous three editions, could have been, suggests Pescasio,



repayment in kind to Lodovico for having granted the loan in February 1473.<sup>70</sup> With so much time having passed since he printed the *Roma Triumphans*, and having accumulated substantial debts and a considerable stock of unsold books, it is difficult to conceive another explanation as to why, at this stage, Pietroadamo would expose himself to the risk of further ruin. What is certain, however, is that the *Oratio* brought down the curtain on Pietroadamo's printing activity and that, if indeed Lodovico granted Pietroadamo those sixty ducats, then at the very most they were used towards paying off existing debts and not towards investment in new printed books.

Another possible reason for Pietroadamo's failure is that the debts mentioned in the letter to Lodovico included money owed to the Puzbach brothers for having taught him the trade and for having provided him with equipment. From the aforementioned notarial document of 6 August 1474 it transpires that at this time Pietroadamo owed the Puzbach brothers 50 ducats in currency, 25 ducats' worth of printed books and 25 ducats' worth of cloth and other unspecified goods. In the same document Paul Puzbach acknowledges a debt of one ducat for printing materials and characters acquired from Pietroadamo.<sup>71</sup> From this document it is clear that Pietroadamo was without doubt involved in the practical aspects of printing and that his role in the production of the first Mantuan printed texts extended beyond that of editor or publisher, disproving Pescasio's assertion that Pietroadamo never possessed any printing machinery of his own.<sup>72</sup> In light of this consideration, it must also be presumed that his initiative to bring the Puzbach brothers to Mantua in November 1471, far from being simply a gesture of erudition, was closely tied to his own plans to establish himself as a printer in his own right and to earn a living from this activity, willing as he was to contract debts with established printers for the benefit of their experience and the use of their equipment. While Pietroadamo was forced to abandon his activity under the strain of mounting financial difficulties, the Puzbach brothers, as we shall see, remained in Mantua well after the initial one-year period mentioned by Pietroadamo in November 1471. Perhaps the joint venture between Pietroadamo and the Puzbach brothers failed to generate enough turnover to sustain all three of them. Having

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<sup>70</sup> Pescasio, *Pietro Adamo*, p.93.

<sup>71</sup> See note 41, p.225.

<sup>72</sup> Pescasio, *Pietro Adamo*, p.92.

gone their separate way after the expiry of what appears to have been a one-year contract with Pietroadamo, they continued to print books well into the next decade, succeeding where Pietroadamo failed: in establishing themselves and their trade in the town.

Together with these material explanations we must also consider some ideological factors that may help us to understand why Pietroadamo's printing activity foundered. At this stage, it must be remembered, printing was still a new concept and often met with hostility. Humanists and bibliophiles valued the beauty and exclusivity of an original manuscript, despite the textual accuracy of an aesthetically less attractive printed text like Pietroadamo's *Decameron*.<sup>73</sup> Perhaps to some extent this trend was particularly accentuated in Mantua, where we find the Marchesa Isabella, originally an Este, zealously collecting manuscripts well into the sixteenth century. Pietroadamo, argues Pescasio, was the first to challenge this mentality and the first to pay the price.<sup>74</sup> It has already been suggested that, though by no means ugly, these first printed volumes must have appeared unattractive to those with access to decorated manuscripts, but probably more damaging to Pietroadamo was a local readership simply not appreciative of his works, which in turn led to unsold books and the cessation of his activity. None of this explains why other printing workshops soon began to prosper in Mantua. Perhaps Pietroadamo's printed volumes, all but one of which were produced during the first months after he brought the Puzbach brothers to Mantua and before the market was mature enough to respond, would have met with more acclaim some years later. How sadly unfortunate, indeed, that the man with the vision to import the new technology of printing to his native town was the first to see his enterprise fail while successive German printers found Mantua to be a prosperous location in which to operate.

As well as a student of law and as the impetus behind the arrival of printing in Mantua, Pietroadamo must also be remembered as a writer, though his only surviving work of any significance is extremely difficult to categorise. In the same year as the remarkable court astrologer, mathematician and engineer Bartolomeo

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<sup>73</sup> The point is made by Curt F. Bühler, *The fifteenth century Book: The Scribes, The Printers, The Decorators* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1960), pp.15-19 and p.62.

<sup>74</sup> Pescasio, *Pietro Adamo*, p.58.



Manfredi completed the clock which was attached to Luca Fancelli's tower in Piazza Erbe, Pietroadamo composed a treatise discussing the new mechanism's many functions and how these could be interpreted.<sup>75</sup> The treatise was printed by the Puzbach brothers in 1473, the year of Pietroadamo's already documented financial difficulties in which he appears to have suspended his own printing activities. While Renier, Mainardi, Ferrarini and Brinton all understandably but mistakenly assumed that the treatise was printed by the author, Rhodes, Meroni, Schizerotto, Faccioli and Pescasio confirm that the treatise was in actual fact printed by Pietroadamo's erstwhile associates.<sup>76</sup> Perhaps Pietroadamo originally intended to print the treatise himself, despite his own admission of financial difficulties in February 1473. If by this stage, however, the prospect of bringing a new project to press was already an unrealistic one and a deal had been arranged with the Puzbach brothers to print the treatise, then it would appear increasingly probable that Pietroadamo's decision to print Nuvoloni's *Oratio* the following year was indeed a means of repaying Lodovico for the loan he requested to travel around the countryside to peddle his stocks of unsold books.

Printed, as we have said, by the Puzbach brothers, *L'orologio di Mantova* of 1473 survives in only one complete copy, kept at the Biblioteca Nazionale in Florence. It is forty pages in length and has between twenty and twenty-three lines to a page. Another copy, badly damaged and missing the first six pages, belongs to the Biblioteca Comunale in Mantua.<sup>77</sup> Such must have been its appeal to the people of Mantua that a new edition of the treatise appeared in Mantua during the following century, edited and printed in 1547 by Giacomo Ruffinelli.<sup>78</sup> How ironic that Pietroadamo, who as a printer failed to sell the books he produced, should posthumously become a marketable author!

Turning now to the treatise itself, following an introduction by the author, it is divided into two main parts.<sup>79</sup> The first of these is by far the more interesting and

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<sup>75</sup> On Manfredi see p.128 above. On the design and construction of the clocktower by Manfredi and Luca Fancelli see Pietro Gazzola, *Il Palazzo del Podestà a Mantova* (Mantua: Banca Agricola Mantovana, 1973), pp.62-68.

<sup>76</sup> For a discussion of these various interpretations see Pescasio, *Pietro Adamo*, p.98.

<sup>77</sup> Rhodes, 'A Bibliography of Mantua', p.179.

<sup>78</sup> Renier, *Il primo tipografo*, p.9; Pescasio, *Pietro Adamo*, p.96.

<sup>79</sup> Signorini, *L'orologio*.

discursive, presenting a detailed technical discussion of the clock itself and guidance in how to interpret its many functions. In the introduction, Pietroadamo informs us that in the first part:

[...] chiaramente vi monstrerò la vera forma, grandeza et movimento degli cieli et de tutti gli corpi celesti, l'ambito, le zone, gli climi et l'habitation de tutta la Terra, el sito e il proprio loco de tutte le principal città del mundo et la vera distantia da l'una a l'altra, et tutti gli termini de astrologia, cose tutte singularissime e magne.<sup>80</sup>

The second part, in contrast, is of a more monotonous nature and follows a fixed formula of advice on how to act and behave as the clock passes through the various phases of the zodiac. The author, again in his introduction, simply states that:

[...] ordinatamente vi monstrerò quanti et quali siano gli effetti de questo instrumento et ad sapergli conoscere.<sup>81</sup>

While critics have invariably described the treatise in terms of two parts, Pietroadamo mentions a further third part which, judging by the manner in which he defines it, was perhaps the part which he anticipated would be of the greatest practical benefit to the majority of its readers:

[...] copiosamente vi instruerò quanta utilità di ciò conseguirite cum alcune belle et aeree regulette raccolte da libri autentici, come è de trovar furti et molte altre gentileze che intender si possono per questo instrumento.<sup>82</sup>

Finally, Pietroadamo urges his readers:

Vogliatelo adonque cum dilligentia e studio intendere chè, così facendo, ingrati non vi monstreteti ad chi, de così cara gioia, liberalissimo donator vi è stato.

The introduction is contextualised by a metaphor, in which Pietroadamo reveals the content of a dream:

Come Pieradam sognando vede Lumbardia in Italia in forma d'un giardino, in una gran campagna, et le città de Lumbardia in forma de donne seder in quel giardino, tra quali Mantua el priega che gli dechiarì questo orologio, mostrandogelo lei in forma d'un specchio.<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> Signorini, *L'orologio*, p.72.

<sup>81</sup> Signorini, *L'orologio*, pp.72-73.

<sup>82</sup> Signorini, *L'orologio*, p.73.

<sup>83</sup> Signorini, *L'orologio*, p.67.



The author goes on to describe the setting of his dream in some detail.<sup>84</sup> The garden in his dream, he tells us, is full of beautiful women and one of these in particular astounds him with her splendour. Accompanied by her loving husband, the woman beckons Pietroadamo to her side, and informs him that she has a favour to ask of him, for which she promises he will be rewarded. At this point she reveals a mirror with magical powers, an item highly coveted by the other women in the garden. Some days after this dream, Pietroadamo continues, he reflected that the feeling of awe inspired in him by the mirror was comparable only to that experienced when Bartolomeo Manfredi's clock-face was revealed to the people of Mantua. It is at this point that Pietroadamo understands the significance of his dream and is able to unravel the metaphor contained within: the woman in the garden represents "la gloriosa città de Mantua," her loving husband "l'illustrissimo principe nostro Lodovico da Gonzaga" and the coveted magic mirror which allows the future to be predicted symbolises the new clock. Before outlining the contents of his treatise, Pietroadamo acknowledges the momentous importance of the new clock and goes to pains to emphasise to his fellow citizens the usefulness of their new monument:

O gloriosa et felicissima città, sempre de spiriti gentil fecunda  
matre e antiquo albergo, qual sì retroso o de virtù svogliato in  
te si troverà ch'el mirrabil effetto de così cara e pretiosa  
gemma intender non voglia? O felicissimi noi ad questi tempi  
reservati, chè quello che de' nostri antecessori puochi, cum  
grandissima et rencresevol fatica, et revoltar de carte et  
calcular de numeri et sciemar de cervelli, tardo, puoco et le  
più volte falso cognoscevano, ora ognuno, senza fatica  
alcuna, in un momento, infinite, belle et vere cose intenderà.<sup>85</sup>

The treatise, unfortunately, contains no information relating to Pietroadamo's life and works. Having been composed in 1473, and given the adulatory nature of the introduction, it is possible that Pietroadamo, in an effort to improve his precarious financial circumstances, not only intended to profit from the sales of a printed text but intended to kindle the beniginity of the marchese. Nor is it beyond the realms of possibility that, having failed to achieve the expected levels of sales for the *Decameron*, the *Tractatus Maleficiorum* and the *Roma Triumphans*, the treatise on the

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<sup>84</sup> Signorini, *L'orologio*, pp.67-72.

<sup>85</sup> Signorini, *L'orologio*, p.72.

clock tower was nothing more than a desperate last attempt to produce a book which would prove popular among the wider Mantuan public. He may even have originally intended to print the book in his own workshop, a plan which may have been scrapped following further failure to recoup capital through the trading of his large stock of unsold books.

Whatever Pietrodamo's motives for writing the treatise, what is certain is that here was an individual of unquestionable culture and admirable initiative. Following a lengthy training in the legal profession Pietrodamo, as we have seen, changed the direction of his interests by providing the impetus which brought the first printing press to a town whose ruler prided himself on being in the vanguard of change at a time of great innovation. Then, refusing to succumb to what appears to have been inevitable financial ruin for his print press, Pietrodamo valiantly turned his hand to writing an informative treatise on a subject far removed from his own field of expertise. Pietrodamo, suggests Pescasio ruefully, had he not been so involved in printing and editing, could surely have produced more of his own works. Pointing also to his impressive handwriting and good written style in the surviving letters addressed to Lodovico Gonzaga, Pescasio argues that, for Pietrodamo, Manfredi's clock may simply have been a pretext for the presentation of a series of astronomical and astrological discussions.<sup>86</sup> Signorini too credits the author with a sound understanding not only of the clock but also of astronomy and astrology while Schizerotto goes as far as to suggest that for the well-read Pietrodamo the study of law may simply have been a means through which to guarantee a professional career, a theory which may also help to explain why his studies took so long and why, upon his return to Mantua from Ferrara, he immediately occupied himself with other activities related to his passion for letters.<sup>87</sup> Had he encountered more success in his printing and editorial activities, it might be suggested, perhaps Pietrodamo would never have entered the legal profession at all.

It is also worth reflecting on the significance of astrology during the fifteenth century, a field which, as Pietrodamo's treatise testifies, was considered to be of

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<sup>86</sup> Pescasio, *Pietro Adamo*, pp.95-98.

<sup>87</sup> Schizerotto, *Libri stampati a Mantova*, p.14.



fundamental importance. Bartolomeo Manfredi, indeed, among his many duties appears to have occupied the role of court astrologer.<sup>88</sup> Lodovico frequently sought Manfredi's advice on a variety of matters, ranging from the most auspicious times at which to take prescribed medicines to the astrological significance of political events. A fine demonstration of the central role played by Manfredi at Lodovico's court is found in a letter from the spa town of Portioli of 9 May 1460 written by Zaccaria Saggi, Lodovico's secretary, to the Marchesa Barbara who had stayed behind in Mantua.<sup>89</sup> Before describing in great detail the journey of the marchese from Mantua to Tuscany and a lavish reception accorded by Cosimo de' Medici in Florence, Saggi makes a point of praising Manfredi for having dispensed sound advice concerning the most propitious time for the travelling party to embark on their journey:

[...] sia benedetto quello divino astrologho che ellesse una così felice e ben fortunata hora per lo nostro Illustrissimo Signore nel suo partire, mediante el favore de la quale Sua Illustrissima Signoria con tuta sua famiglia è giunta a salutiffero porto.<sup>90</sup>

Quite apart from his legal studies, therefore, Pietroadamo clearly cultivated a range of literary interests which extended to other genres and give an unmistakable indication of his diverse cultural tastes. Schizerotto, moreover, refers to an unpublished document in the Archivio Gonzaga which lists the manuscripts possessed by the man responsible for bringing printing to Mantua.<sup>91</sup> As well as the treatise on the clock, Pietroadamo appears to have composed a number of poems in *volgare*. Magliabechi attributes to Pietroadamo two sonnets in a manuscript housed in the Biblioteca Nazionale of Florence, the second of which, notes Schizerotto, has been attributed to several other writers.<sup>92</sup> The first of these two sonnets has occasionally been attributed to another figure closely linked to Mantuan literary circles, the copyist and miniaturist Bartolomeo Sanvito.<sup>93</sup> If this sonnet, addressed to Sanvito, was indeed written by Pietroadamo rather than Sanvito himself then we are faced, notes Schizerotto, with another example of

<sup>88</sup> See Ferdinando Gabotto, 'B. Manfredi e l'astrologia alla corte di Mantova', *Letteratura di Torino* (1891); Luigi Pescasio, *Ludovico II Gonzaga* (Suzzara: Edizioni Bottazzi, 1993), pp.67-74.

<sup>89</sup> Letter Zaccaria Saggi to Marchesa Barbara, Petriolo, 9 May 1460, published in Attilio Portioli, *I Gonzaga ai bagni di Petriolo di Siena nel 1460 e 1461* (Mantua: Eredi Segna, 1869), pp.4-9.

<sup>90</sup> Portioli, *I Gonzaga ai bagni*, p.4.

<sup>91</sup> Schizerotto, *Libri stampati a Mantova*, p.15, n7.

<sup>92</sup> Schizerotto, *Libri stampati a Mantova*, p.16, n10.

<sup>93</sup> Schizerotto, *Libri stampati a Mantova*, p.16, n10. On Bartolomeo Sanvito see pp.210-211 below.

interaction between two literary figures at the Mantuan court, this time in the form of a discussion of the shortfalls of politics at the Curia. For Schizerotto the last six lines of the first sonnet in the Florentine manuscript, with their references to the legal studies of the writer, point to Pietroadamo as the more likely of the two to have written the verses:

Ma pur questo anno incomintia li tituli  
del Sexto, del Decreto e del Clementio  
sì che m'aspecti fin ch'io discapituli.  
Sapi ch'io fazzo frituli  
per dar novizze al mio Digesto e Codico,  
benché de l'uno e l'altro ne so modico.<sup>94</sup>

Schizerotto briefly lists a handful of other poems attributed by Magliabechi to Pietroadamo, the subjects of which include echoes, the Turks taking Otranto, praise for Giovanni Andrea Lampugnano who assassinated the Duke of Milan Galeazzo Maria Sforza, criticism of Pope Sixtus IV for having refuted the possibility that Saint Catherine of Siena had received stigmata and an invective against those who attempt to predict future events. As well as an interest in political matters of the mid-1470s, this small collection of works give evidence of the writer's anti-papal feelings, his justification of tyrannicide and an intolerance of soothsayers, the last of which appearing in some ways inconsistent with Pietroadamo's own treatise on the Mantuan clock and its functions. In his defence, however, it must be remembered that Pietroadamo's instructions for interpreting future events were based on astrological and astronomical knowledge, and his disdain was in all likelihood reserved for those whose methods of predicting the future had no such theoretical basis.

One further *strambotto* attributed by Magliabechi to Pietroadamo is worthy of inclusion for its tragic irony. Addressed to a certain *conte Hieronymo*, the writer urges his reader not to procrastinate in his actions, reminding him that death can strike unexpectedly and put an end to our earthly plans:

Faccia chi può, ch'ogni buon tempo passa  
et spesso a mezzo el corso el vento manca.  
Faccia chi può, ch'altrui fortuna lassa,  
mentre si monstra men fugace et stanca.  
Faccia chi può, ché in un momento abbassa  
chi in alto sta né mai più si rinfranca.

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<sup>94</sup> Schizerotto, *Libri stampati a Mantova*, p.16, n10.



Faccia chi può, ché li mortal disegni  
morte irrompe, tempo, ira et sdegni.<sup>95</sup>

Although the family's finances were clearly decadent by Pietroadamo's time, the de' Micheli belonged to the landed aristocracy of the Mantuan state and, as distant relations of the Gonzaga, enjoyed reasonably close relations with the ruling family. The tone of Pietroadamo's letters to Lodovico, which as we have seen included direct appeals for financial assistance, was at the same time formal and familiar, proof of his family's position of relative privilege and of Pietroadamo's close links with the cultural and political environment of Lodovico's court.<sup>96</sup>

While, as has been mentioned, Signorini has labelled Pietroadamo "un personaggio così importante per la cultura rinascimentale mantovana," in many respects the life of this remarkable figure was a succession of failures and sad ironies.<sup>97</sup> The main impulse behind the introduction of printing in his home town and the only such example in Italy, his workshop was the first there to fail. Hailing from a landowning and wealthy family boasting close affiliations with the Gonzaga, his life was beset by a series of financial difficulties. The last of a family line of legal officials, his studies and career were frequently interrupted and even forfeited as he pursued in vain a career in letters. After having produced an astrological treatise he eventually undertook a legal career in the Church which, suggests Schizerotto, probably afforded Pietroadamo a comfortable lifestyle during his last years.<sup>98</sup> Were it not for his few surviving letters written to Lodovico Gonzaga, notable according to Pescasio for the sense of humour and intelligence of the writer which shine through, very little about Pietroadamo and his momentous involvement in the arrival of printing in Mantua would ever have come to light.<sup>99</sup>

While Pietroadamo was without doubt as remarkable a figure in life as he was a tragic one in death, his outstanding contribution was undeniably the impetus he provided in bringing the first printing press to Mantua. Driven by an overwhelming desire to learn the trade and to print books as well as the Germans

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<sup>95</sup> Signorini, 'Inediti', p.52.

<sup>96</sup> Schizerotto, *Libri stampati a Mantova*, p.14.

<sup>97</sup> See p.216 above.

<sup>98</sup> Schizerotto, *Libri stampati a Mantova*, p.13.

<sup>99</sup> Pescasio, *L'arte*, p.17.

who dominated this fledgling industry at the time, Pietroadamo, whose brave initiative must have been reassured by the favourable reaction of Lodovico, threw himself with such vigour into his new career that by February 1473 the value of his unsold stock amounted to the figure which he himself estimated at six-hundred ducats.<sup>100</sup> Involved, as we have seen, in the roles of both printer and editor, Pietroadamo proved extremely flexible in his printing programme, modifying at an early stage his intention to produce legal books in an attempt to appeal to a wider reading public. The cultural climate of the town, according to Pescasio, was not, at least at this stage, mature enough to embrace fully the phenomenon of the printed text.<sup>101</sup> Undeterred by Pietroadamo's ultimately unsuccessful venture, however, a series of other printers saw the potential of establishing workshops in the shadow of an erudite court and, even as early as the last few years of Lodovico's life, several such printers began to operate with varying degrees of success.

### **Other Early Printing Activity in Mantua**

Between 1471, the year in which Pietroadamo brought the first *maestri stampatori* to Mantua, and the turn of the century a total of forty-nine printed volumes were produced in the town by ten separate workshops.<sup>102</sup> Eight practitioners had produced printed texts by 1478, the year of the death of the *Marchese* Lodovico. This appears a remarkable flurry of activity, especially when considered in relation to Pescasio's assertion that in 1474, the year of Pietroadamo's definitive withdrawal from his printing activity, the climate in Mantua was not mature enough to appreciate printed texts.<sup>103</sup> Moreover, several of these more successful printers, most notably the Puzbach brothers, were operating in Mantua at the same time as Pietroadamo. All of which leads one to wonder why Pietroadamo, though erudite and dynamic and the pioneer of printing in the town, saw his initiative ultimately fail while associates and competitors, albeit to differing degrees, prospered during the very same period. Before attempting to arrive at any conclusive explanations, it

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<sup>100</sup> Letter Pietroadamo to Marchese Lodovico, Mantua, 17 February 1473, published in Pescasio, *Pietro Adamo*, p.92.

<sup>101</sup> Pescasio, *Pietro Adamo*, pp.57-58.

<sup>102</sup> Emilio Faccioli, *Mantova. Le Lettere*, 3 vols (Mantua: Istituto Carlo d'Arco per la Storia di Mantova, 1962), II, p.114 and pp.142-144, n238; Meroni, *Libri stampati a Mantova*, Rhodes 'A Bibliography of Mantua'.

<sup>103</sup> See note 101 above.



may be useful to examine briefly the other printers at work in Mantua up to and including 1478, together with the texts their workshops produced.

Although Pietroadamo neither named nor quantified his “maestri stampatori,” it would appear certain that these were the brothers Jorg and Paul Puzbach.<sup>104</sup> While Volta and Mainardi cast doubt on this, the document of 21 January 1472 regarding the ownership of printing materials, published by Signorini and linking Pietroadamo to the Puzbach brothers less than two months after his return to Mantua, must be taken as conclusive proof that the brothers were indeed the printers referred to at the outset.<sup>105</sup> Other elements also point to their association with Pietroadamo. In 1473, it is worth remembering, the Puzbach brothers put Pietroadamo’s treatise on the clocktower into print.<sup>106</sup> Moreover, if they were not brought by Pietroadamo, it is not known how the Puzbach brothers ever found themselves in Mantua in the first place.

Very little is known about the Puzbach brothers and how they arrived in Italy. Schizerotto reveals that they took their name from their native village in Germany, close to Mainz in the Wiesbaden region.<sup>107</sup> Together they produced only three printed volumes in Mantua, Jorg staying little over a year and perhaps moving to Brescia in 1473, where he may have produced in collaboration with Pietro Villa the entire works of Virgil.<sup>108</sup> Paul, on the other hand, chose to settle in Mantua, where he produced a further thirteen volumes before embarking on a new career as a book trader. Having gained Mantuan citizenship from Lodovico, a series of documents records him resident in the *contrada del leopardo* in 1476, in the *contrada del falcone* in 1479 and in the *contrada del cervo* in 1491.<sup>109</sup> His activities must have been modestly rewarding to say the least, enabling him to invest in property not only in Mantua but also in Suzzara and in Gonzaga, while at the same time reinvestment first in his printing business and then in his book dealing activity led to further growth and prosperity.

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<sup>104</sup> See note 28.

<sup>105</sup> See note 33.

<sup>106</sup> See p.236 above.

<sup>107</sup> Schizerotto, *Libri stampati a Mantova*, p.26.

<sup>108</sup> Faccioli, *Mantova. Le Lettere*, II, p.113 and pp.142-143; Schizerotto, *Libri stampati a Mantova*, p.26.

<sup>109</sup> Schizerotto, *Libri stampati a Mantova*, p.26.

Assuming that the Puzbach brothers were the first printers brought to Mantua by Pietroadamo, and the available evidence would overwhelmingly suggest that they were, the nature of their working relationship, notes Pescasio, remains somewhat unclear.<sup>110</sup> Pietroadamo's initial letter of 25 November 1471 provides us with another possible clue to an initial agreement, when he informs the marchese that he has brought the printers to Mantua for a period of one year.<sup>111</sup> While Pescasio among others suggests that Pietroadamo's role in operations was that of publisher and that the Puzbach brothers alone owned the machinery, the document of 6 August 1474 published by Signorini refers to material acquired by Paul Puzbach from Pietroadamo.<sup>112</sup> Nonetheless, while Pietroadamo in his eagerness to establish himself appears to have invested in machinery at an early stage, it is highly likely that the machinery used to create the first printed books in Mantua was indeed that brought from Ferrara by the Puzbachs, who were clearly established printers at this stage. The financial difficulties of the early editions involving Pietroadamo, examined in the previous section, were probably instrumental in prompting the three parties to go their separate ways once the initial one-year period elapsed. The Mantuan market at the end of 1472 was evidently not lucrative enough to nourish a workshop seeking to provide a living for three and this would explain why Pietroadamo produced nothing until Nuvoloni's *Oratio* in May 1474 and why Jorg Puzbach left for pastures new, leaving Paul, still in possession of the necessary means of production, in a position to continue to print books independently from 1473.

No documents have come to light which give us any information regarding the ages or the year of death of the Puzbach brothers. Paul Puzbach, however, stayed in Mantua for at least twenty years. A document drafted by the notary Antonio Vignono in 1479 refers to a company in which he owned a third share, Marco Mazzola and Paul Puzbach being the other partners.<sup>113</sup> On 12 December 1481 we find Puzbach buying a quantity of linen from Alvise Saliprandi.<sup>114</sup> In November

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<sup>110</sup> Pescasio, *Pietro Adamo*, p.38.

<sup>111</sup> See note 29, p.222 above.

<sup>112</sup> Pescasio, *L'arte*, p.32; Signorini, 'Inediti', pp.44-45.

<sup>113</sup> ASMn Archivio Notarile, *Estensioni*, a. 1479 ff. 584-585. Published by P. Arnaudet, 'Les associations d'imprimeurs et de libraries à Mantoue au XV<sup>e</sup> siècle', *Le Bibliographe Moderne*, 2 (1898), pp.97-101. See also Schizerotto, *Libri stampati a Mantova*, p.26.

<sup>114</sup> Schizerotto, *Libri stampati a Mantova*, p.26.



1483 in a letter to Zaccaria Saggi the Marchese Federico asks that arrangements be made to facilitate Puzbach's visit to that city and two years later, on 20 June 1485, the Marchese Francesco wrote to the *duchessa* of Ferrara, Eleonora of Aragon, requesting that Puzbach be allowed to bring a quantity of books back to Mantua from Ferrara free of charge, having already paid the transit duty on his outward journey.<sup>115</sup> Finally, as we have seen, a document of 1491, the latest news we have of either of the brothers, records Paul Puzbach as being resident in the *contrada del cervo*.<sup>116</sup>

As well as with Pietroadamo, the Puzbach brothers forged professional relations with other elements in Mantuan literary circles. For their first project in 1472, one of the earliest print runs of the *Commedia* (Fig.40) they secured the editorial collaboration of the humanist and future tutor to the Gonzaga children, Colombino Veronese, whose introduction to the text was dedicated to Filippo Nuvoloni.<sup>117</sup> The Puzbachs' *Commedia*, notes Pescasio, was the third Italian printed version of Dante's poem, following those produced in Foligno and Venice and pre-dating the first Neapolitan edition.<sup>118</sup> More significantly, of the three Dante volumes printed in 1472, the Mantuan one was the only attempt at a new edition, Colombino having responded to the literary climate around the Mantuan court by contributing to the project his seemingly substantial philological knowledge.<sup>119</sup> Meanwhile, the other two printed volumes produced by the Puzbach partnership before Jorg left Mantua in early 1473 were Cristoforo Scarpa's edited version of

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<sup>115</sup> Letter Marchese Federico to Zaccaria Saggi, Mantua, 24 November 1483 (ASMn AG, b. 2899 Lib. 113 f. 45v) and letter Marchese Francesco to Duchess Eleonora d'Este of Ferrara, Mantua, 20 June 1485 (ASMn AG, b. 2901 Lib. 123 f. 74v). See Schizerotto, *Libri stampati a Mantova*, p.27.

<sup>116</sup> See note 107, p.244 above.

<sup>117</sup> Editors of early printed books were normally humanists or teachers, like Colombino, who collaborated with printers on individual texts as and when their services were required. See Richardson, *Print Culture in Renaissance Italy*, pp.1-18, esp. p.8. On the relationship between authors and editors see Martin Lowry, *The World of Aldus Manutius. Business and Scholarship in Renaissance Italy* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1979), pp.217-256.

<sup>118</sup> Pescasio, *L'arte*, p.34.

<sup>119</sup> On the Mantuan *Commedia* edited by Colombino see Aldo Vallone, *Storia della critica dantesca dal XIV al XX secolo* (Padua: F.Villardi, 1981), pp.236-238 and Anna Maria Chiavacci Leonardi, 'Il libro di Dante dalle prime copie manoscritte all'edizione della Crusca', in *Pagine di Dante: Le edizioni della Divina Commedia dal torchio al computer. Catalogo della mostra Foligno Ravenna 1989, Firenze 1990* (Foligno: Oratorio del Gonfalone, 1989), pp.51-64.

Guarino Veronese's *Opusculum de diptongis* and, as we have seen, Pietroadamò's treatise on Bartolomeo Manfredi's clock.<sup>120</sup>



Fig.40: Dante Alighieri, *Commedia* (Mantua: Jorg and Paul Puzbach, 1472)

From 1473 to 1481 Paul Puzbach was responsible for the production of some thirteen printed texts, the large majority of which were of a religious nature. As well as two Confessional books, a treatise with the title *De Excommunicationibus* (Fig.41) by the Archbishop of Florence Antonio Forcigliani (1389-1459) and various New Testament commentaries by Niccolò de Lyra, he also printed, with the aid of the Carmelite monk and humanist Lodovico Ghezzi of Cremona, Thomas Aquinas' *Summa Theologica*. Selected legal treaties and commentaries included works by Joannes Versor, Alessandro Tartagni of Imola and Bartolomeo da Sassoferrato. Puzbach was also responsible for a work of humanist interest,

<sup>120</sup> Rhodes, 'A Bibliography of Mantua', p.176 and pp.178-179. See also pp.236-241 above on Pietroadamò's treatise.



Pietro di Abano's commentary on Aristotle's *Problemata*, printed in Mantua earlier the same year by Johan Baumeister, and a work of scientific interest, Saint Albert the Great's *De animalibus*.<sup>121</sup> While Pescasio points to Puzbach's thirteen volumes as proof that the Mantuan public, following Pietroadamo's failure, was becoming increasingly more receptive to the phenomenon of the printed text, Schizerotto views Puzbach's decision to wind up his workshop in 1481 in favour of a new career as a book trader as an indication that printing did not, even by this stage and for such an established professional, offer the prospect of guaranteed prosperity. The appearance of new workshops, continues Schizerotto, together with a customer base largely limited to court and Church, were probably instrumental in Puzbach's decision to limit his outlay and to become purely a trader, an activity which he carried out in Mantua for at least a further ten years.<sup>122</sup>

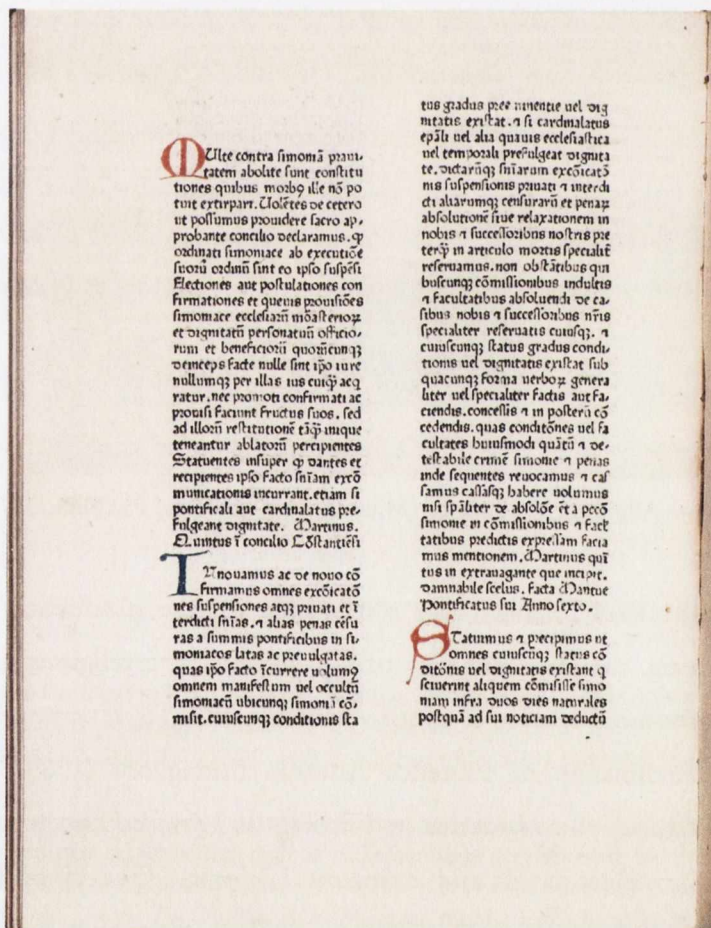


Fig.41: Antonio Forciglioni, *De Excommunicationibus* (Mantua: Paul Puzbach, 1475)

<sup>121</sup> Rhodes, 'A Bibliography of Mantua', pp.176-186; Schizerotto, *Libri stampati a Mantova*, pp.24-28; Pescasio, *L'arte*, pp.29-43. On Lodovico Ghezzi see Schizerotto, *Libri stampati a Mantova*, pp.39-43.

<sup>122</sup> Pescasio, *Pietro Adamo*, p.92; Schizerotto, *Libri stampati a Mantova*, p.27.

Whether after the demise of Pietroadamo's activity a wider Mantuan reading public did indeed finally embrace the printed text or whether this reading public remained within the confines of court and Church will remain a difficult matter to resolve. What is clear, however, is that, together with Pietroadamo and the Puzbach brothers, a small group of active printers appeared in the town during the early to mid-1470s. Not surprisingly, most of these practitioners of the trade were German, probably attracted to Mantua by the prospect of providing books for Lodovico and his courtiers. Before reaching any concluding remarks on the Mantuan printing industry of the 1470s, it may be worthwhile to look at these other printers and the type of volumes their workshops produced.

Apart from Pietroadamo and the Puzbach brothers, most printing activity during the early years in Mantua centred around Johan Vurster. The fact that his workshop produced printed texts in Mantua as early as 1472 prompted Meroni to wonder whether Vurster and his associates numbered among the "maestri stampatori" brought to the town in November 1471 by Pietroadamo, though, as Pescasio points out, no evidence linking the two has emerged.<sup>123</sup> Volta and Mainardi, on the other hand, maintained that Vurster arrived in Mantua independently, one of the many exponents of the trade on the move in Italy at that time.<sup>124</sup>

Hailing from the town of Kempten in Bavaria, Vurster is recorded as being active in Mantua between 1472 and 1473 and, following an interlude during which he worked in Bologna, Modena and Padua, he returned to Mantua in 1475. He appears to have left Bologna for Padua due to an obscure but clearly controversial episode there in 1475 which saw him narrowly escape legal action initiated by a professor of astronomy named Moreto. After having settled his dispute with Moreto, however, Vurster was able to go back to Bologna before returning to Mantua later the same year.<sup>125</sup> During the first period in Mantua he printed the *Elegantiolae* by Agostino Dati and the *De arte cognoscendi venena* by Arnaldo di

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<sup>123</sup> Meroni, *Libri stampati a Mantova*, p.18; Pescasio, *L'arte*, p.47.

<sup>124</sup> For a discussion of these opinions see Pescasio, *L'arte*, p.47.

<sup>125</sup> For details of Vurster's printing activity outside Mantua see Schizerotto, *Libri stampati a Mantova*, p.39. On his dispute with Moreto see Meroni, *Libri stampati a Mantova*, p.18.



Villanova (Fig.42), the latter an attractive little volume with red and blue capitals, after having put into print, together with his associate Thomas Siebenburger, three volumes by Pietro di Abano.<sup>126</sup> In collaboration with another associate, Johan Baumeister, he produced an edition of Aristotle's *Problemata*, probably during his second spell in Mantua in 1475. The volume was based on a translation carried out by Theodor Gaza and, in a rare case at the time in Mantua, without accompanying notes by Pietro di Abano.<sup>127</sup> Vurster very seldom dated his books and no news of him or volumes produced after 1475 have come to light.

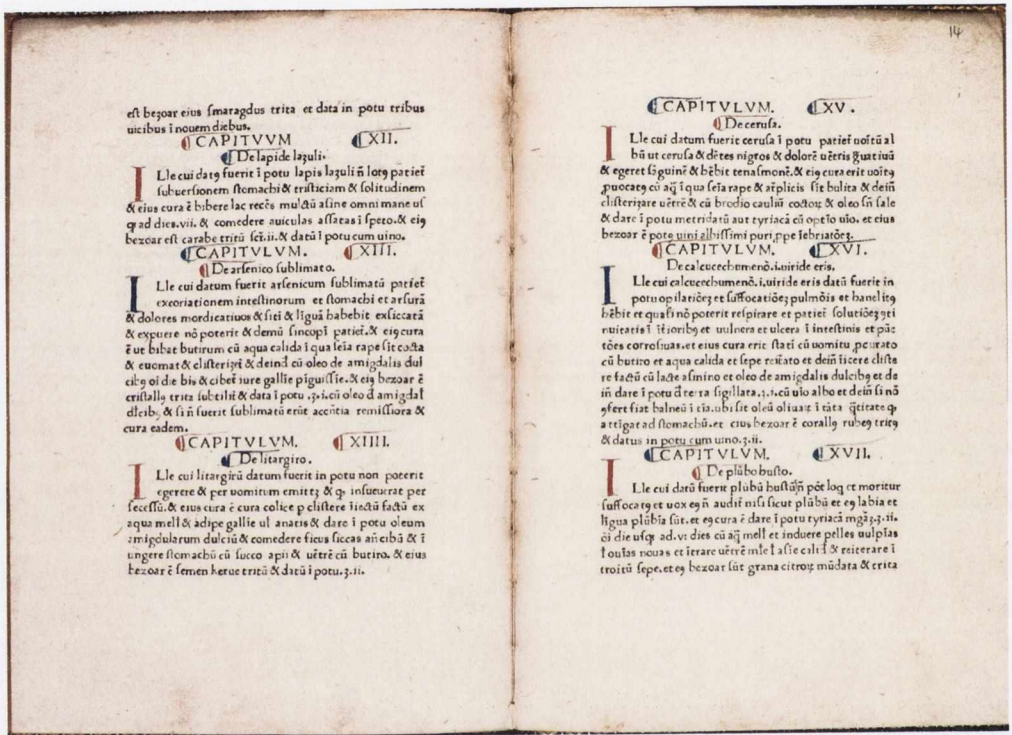


Fig.42: Arnaldo di Villanova, *De arte cognoscendi venena* (Mantua: Johan Vurster, 1473)

Nor do we know much about Siebenburger or Baumeister.<sup>128</sup> Neither appears ever to have printed alone, probably collaborating instead, suggests Pescasio, with various printers in an *ad hoc* manner from book to book.<sup>129</sup> Hailing from Hermannstadt (now Sibiu) in Transylvania, Siebenburger's recorded activity in Mantua is exclusively in collaboration with Vurster and Baumeister. Schizerotto produces evidence of Siebenburger in Modena in 1481, where he printed an

<sup>126</sup> Meroni, *Libri stampati a Mantova*, p.18; Pescasio, *L'arte*, p.46.

<sup>127</sup> Schizerotto, *Libri stampati a Mantova*, p.43, n18.

<sup>128</sup> On these two figures see Meroni, *Libri stampati a Mantova*, pp.18-19; Schizerotto, *Libri stampati a Mantova*, pp.38-39; Pescasio, *L'arte*, pp.45-54.

<sup>129</sup> Pescasio, *L'arte*, p.50.

*Aesopus moralisatus* in collaboration with Domenico Rocciola and Giovanni Francesco de' Coroni.<sup>130</sup> Even less is known about the other partner, Johan Baumeister, whose only recorded activity in Mantua was in the production of Vurster's Aristotle of around 1473.

Another figure actively involved in printing in Lodovico's Mantua was yet another German, by the name of Johan Schall.<sup>131</sup> From Hirschenfeld, near Cassel, Schall defines himself as "doctor artis" on the title page of his first Mantuan edition, a religious treatise by Paolo da Santa Maria. In 1479, moreover, in his dedicatory note to the Marchese Federico which he included at the beginning of his *Eusebius Pamphilus*, he referred to himself as "physicus."<sup>132</sup> Schall probably arrived in Mantua in 1475, the year of his first edition in the town, perhaps attracted, suggests Pescasio, by an opening in the market vacated by the disbanding of the Vurster-Baumeister-Siebenburger association, which meant that he represented the only workshop operating in competition with the Puzbach brothers.<sup>133</sup> The premises of his workshop, notes Davari, were probably in the district of Santa Barbara and within the buildings of the Church of Sant'Alessandro, subsequently destroyed in 1587.<sup>134</sup> Of the seven known texts produced by Schall in Mantua six were of a religious nature and one was historical, a compendium of extracts from the Roman historian Sallustius.<sup>135</sup>

A final name to appear amongst the printers active in Mantua during the lifetime of Lodovico is that of Abraham Ben Salomon Conath, a Jewish doctor from the town whose six known works were printed in a rare Hebrew character.<sup>136</sup> Conath's activity in the industry appears to have been carried out in two short spells. The first of these was in 1476, when his press produced Jacob Ben Ascer's *Semita vitae* and Jedaia Apeninus's *Examen mundi* and then, following a period of inactivity spanning some three years, he produced four further works on such diverse

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<sup>130</sup> Schizerotto, *Libri stampati a Mantova*, p.39.

<sup>131</sup> On Schall see Meroni, *Libri stampati a Mantova*, pp.20-21; Schizerotto, *Libri stampati a Mantova*, pp.46-47; Pescasio, *L'arte*, pp.56-62.

<sup>132</sup> Schizerotto, *Libri stampati a Mantova*, p.47, n1.

<sup>133</sup> Pescasio, *L'arte*, p.57.

<sup>134</sup> See Stefano Davari, *Notizie storiche intorno allo studio pubblico ed ai maestri del secolo XV e XVI che tennero scuola in Mantova* (Mantua: Eredi Segna, 1876), p.9; Meroni, *Libri stampati a Mantova*, p.47, n4.

<sup>135</sup> Schizerotto, *Libri stampati a Mantova*, p.46.

<sup>136</sup> Meroni, *Libri stampati a Mantova*, pp.22-23.



subjects as rhetoric, history and geography.<sup>137</sup> The presence in Mantua of printed texts in Hebrew as early as 1476 may reflect a thriving market among the town's Jewish population and no little astuteness on Conath's part to service this demand, but it may also have been encouraged to some degree by the marchese himself who in 1461, as we have seen, had commissioned from Giannozzo Manetti (1396-1459) in Florence a Bible in Hebrew and appears to have been able to read this language.<sup>138</sup>

## Conclusions

The arrival of printing in Mantua, as we have seen, was not the result of any direct input by the Marchese Lodovico Gonzaga. In this respect the inclusion in this thesis of such a monumental event for the town may be considered entirely casual. What is definitely not of a coincidental nature, however, is the fact that between early 1472 and 1478, the year of the marchese's death, Mantua witnessed a remarkable intensity of activity in this new industry and, although Pietroadamo had spent the previous decade in Ferrara, the episode bears witness to the cultural climate fostered during the reign of Lodovico. The extent to which printing took root in the shadow of the Gonzaga court is evident from the early proliferation of practitioners, resulting in four separate workshops producing texts from their presses within a year of Pietroadamo bringing the first "maestri stampatori."

The most remarkable element in the arrival of printing in Mantua, and almost certainly a unique occurrence anywhere in Italy, is to be found in the fact that it was brought to the town not by a German but by a native. In many respects Pietroadamo fits the model of Burckhardt's "many-sided" Renaissance man.<sup>139</sup> Student and practitioner of the legal profession, writer and astrologer, printer and publisher and even man of the Church, a glance at the life of Pietroadamo de' Micheli reveals a remarkable character of many facets. His persuasive and enthusiastic appeals to the marchese to support his initiative to ensure that Mantua was at the forefront of an exciting new development bears testimony to Pietroadamo's extraordinary vision and, while it is an unfortunate irony that his

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<sup>137</sup> On the texts printed by Conath see Meroni, *Libri stampati a Mantova*, p.22.

<sup>138</sup> See pp.168-169 above.

<sup>139</sup> Jacob Burckhardt, *The Civilisation of the Renaissance in Italy* (London: Penguin, 1990), p.102.

own ill-fated workshop foundered on financial difficulties, he must be given credit for beating the path which others followed to make the town one of Italy's most productive centres of the printed text in the last quarter of the Quattrocento.

An analysis of known printed texts produced by Mantua's print presses between the arrival of the *maestri stampatori* in late 1471 and the year of Lodovico Gonzaga's death, in 1478, reveals eight practitioners affiliated to five workshops, producing thirty-three texts in three languages spanning ten subject areas. While almost half of these early books dealt with religious subjects and while all but six were in Latin, the appearance of texts, as we have seen, on such diverse subjects as law, *volgare* literature, Roman history, orthography, rhetoric, philosophy, geography and the mechanical and astrological aspects of the town's clock tower point to a local readership, albeit an apparently limited one, of eclectic tastes.<sup>140</sup> In much the same way as neighbouring Ferrara, therefore, Mantua must be counted amongst the foremost centres of the early printed text. The arrival of a succession of early practitioners resulted in a remarkable flurry of activity during the 1470s, giving the impression of a bountiful market and making the failure of Pietroadamo's workshop all the more mystifying. Without the contribution of this remarkable local figure, however, clearly worthy of Signorini's definition as "un personaggio così importante per la cultura rinascimentale mantovana," Mantua's early prestige in the revolutionary new industry of printing and, as a consequence, the reputation of her rulers as generous patrons of letters might have been far less significant.<sup>141</sup> The following chapter will examine the marchesi's relations with three other local men of letters, each of whom, like Pietroadamo, made his own contribution to the literary culture of Lodovico's rule.

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<sup>140</sup> Meroni, *Libri stampati a Mantova*, p.4, n18, alludes to an interest in philosophy among the early printers operating in Mantua.

<sup>141</sup> See note 4.





# **PART FOUR**

## **WRITERS AND HUMANISTS**





## CHAPTER SEVEN

### THREE MANTUAN WRITERS

Having examined in previous chapters the Mantuan school, the Gonzaga Library and the production of both manuscript and printed volumes, attention will now be focused on three native Mantuan writers. Largely ignored until the twentieth century, none of the three writers to be examined, Giovanni Pietro Arrivabene, Giovan Francesco Suardi and Filippo Nuvoloni, has ever been placed by critics among the leading literary figures of the Quattrocento. While no effort will be made to argue that the works of these three writers ought to be given greater coverage, it will be demonstrated how each in his own way made a significant contribution to cultural activity at the court of Lodovico Gonzaga.

#### Giovanni Pietro Arrivabene

Giovanni Pietro Arrivabene (1439-1504), though he did not produce any outstanding literary work of his own, is a fine example of the new generation of secretaries boasting a humanist education. Too young to have been influenced by Vittorino, Arrivabene was educated in Milan by Francesco Filelfo before becoming secretary to the Protonotary Francesco Gonzaga during the Congress of Mantua in 1459. Del Lungo reports that, before entering the service of Francesco, Arrivabene had been *cancelliere* to the Marchese Lodovico, but Chambers, having established that he was born at the end of the 1430s and not earlier, as had often been assumed, is almost certainly correct in suggesting that his professional career began with entry into Francesco's entourage.<sup>1</sup> Soon after his appointment Arrivabene moved with Francesco to Pavia, a milieu with which he was undoubtedly familiar following his studies at the Sforza court, before moving to Rome in early 1461 when Francesco was granted the cardinal's hat. For the next twenty-two years, the remainder of Francesco's life, he filled the roles of *cancelliere* and *segretario*, following the cardinal in his various duties in Bologna, Ferrara, Florence and especially in Rome, where Arrivabene soon established a fine career in the Curia, as well as a

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<sup>1</sup> Isidoro Del Lungo, 'L'Orfeo del Poliziano alla corte di Mantova', *Antologia*, 15 (1881), 283-349 (p.302); David S. Chambers, 'Giovanni Pietro Arrivabene (1439-1504): Humanistic Secretary and Bishop', *Aevum*, 58 (1984), 397-438 (p.398).



glowing reputation throughout the princely courts for his qualities as humanistic cleric and remarkable letter writer.<sup>2</sup>

Though born in Mantua into an established local family, the education and career of Giovanni Pietro Arrivabene took place outside the territory of the Gonzaga. Many offices in Mantua, however, were held by other members of the Arrivabene family, a clan which gained notable social advancement through a policy of fidelity and service to the Gonzaga. Chambers describes the family as a “dynasty of secretaries.”<sup>3</sup> His father Pietro had been secretary to the Marchese Gianfrancesco and his brother Giovanni succeeded their father in this office and often carried out duties as emissary for Lodovico.<sup>4</sup> Arrivabene’s own career, in turn, facilitated those of at least three nephews; Alessandro was destined to enter the Mantuan chancery, while two others, Cristoforo Arrivabene and Rufino da Galdonetta, served the Protonotary Lodovico, Cardinal Francesco’s younger brother.<sup>5</sup> Lazzarini notes that by the era of Lodovico Gonzaga the amount of land owned by the Arrivabene family was not exceptional and that most of the clan had its residence in the city. Most of the property which the family did possess was at Canneto, on the Oglio, while Giovanni Pietro and his brother Giovanni focused their attention on the newly acquired Gonzaga areas in the vicinity of Gabiano and at Quistello.<sup>6</sup>

The Arrivabene developed a strong ecclesiastical tradition typical of important families of the period and Giovanni Pietro was the first prelate in the family to embark on a successful career in the Curia. Although he may have been, as Chambers points out, the longest serving official and closest *familiaris* of Cardinal Francesco, he also corresponded extensively with Lodovico and, even more so, with the Marchesa Barbara, whom he provided with endless news of her son’s activities in Rome.<sup>7</sup> Arrivabene may seldom have returned to Mantua, but his letters from Rome include political observations and occasional comments on

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<sup>2</sup> Chambers, ‘Giovanni Pietro Arrivabene’, p.397.

<sup>3</sup> Isabella Lazzarini, *Fra un principe e altri stati. Relazioni di potere e forme di servizio a Mantova nell’età di Ludovico Gonzaga* (Rome: Istituto storico italiano per il medioevo, 1996), pp.188-192; Chambers, ‘Giovanni Pietro Arrivabene’, p.398.

<sup>4</sup> Emilio Faccioli, *Mantova. Le Lettere*, 3 vols (Mantua: Istituto Carlo d’Arco per la Storia di Mantova, 1962), II, p.57; Chambers, ‘Giovanni Pietro Arrivabene’, p.397 and p.414.

<sup>5</sup> Chambers, ‘Giovanni Pietro Arrivabene’, pp.414-415.

<sup>6</sup> Lazzarini, *Fra un principe e altri stati*, p.187 and pp. 193-194; Chambers, ‘Giovanni Pietro Arrivabene’, p.415.

<sup>7</sup> Chambers, ‘Giovanni Pietro Arrivabene’, pp.398-400.

major figures such as the Duke of Ferrara Ercole d'Este and Cardinal Giuliano della Rovere, later Pope Julius II, while his correspondence with the Marchese Federico during the last few weeks of Cardinal Francesco's life provides a detailed account of his patron's final illness. Often sceptical, Arrivabene's letters from Rome, according to Chambers, show that he saw the world in its true colours and had a realistic view of papal politics.<sup>8</sup>

By the time Cardinal Francesco died in 1483 Arrivabene was indeed an established figure in Rome and his wide range of acquaintances there ensured that the Curia, where he was highly esteemed, represented his best prospect of employment. By this time he had also held office as a scriptor of the Papal Penitentiary for some seventeen years.<sup>9</sup> He did not have long to wait before other high profile offices and assignments were put his way. In May 1484 he was sent by Sixtus IV as papal ambassador to the court of King Ferrante of Naples and, following an abortive mission to Milan on behalf of the young Marchese Francesco Gonzaga over the winter of 1484-85, Arrivabene returned to Rome to resume his career as an accomplished Papal bureaucrat and apostolic secretary.<sup>10</sup> It was also at this relatively late stage in life, in 1488 and aged almost fifty, that Arrivabene took holy orders and became an apostolic protonotary.<sup>11</sup>

Three years later, in 1491, Arrivabene was rewarded for more than three decades of service to the Church with the bishopric of Urbino, an appointment which prompted the congratulations of Angelo Poliziano (1454-1494).<sup>12</sup> Around this time there was also speculation regarding a candidature for the cardinal's hat but nothing materialised. Meanwhile, Arrivabene acted as secretary to Innocent VIII for at least another year, dividing his time between Rome and Urbino.<sup>13</sup> As fate would have it the last few years of Arrivabene's life were to be turbulent ones for

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<sup>8</sup> Chambers, 'Giovanni Pietro Arrivabene', pp.408-409 and p.412.

<sup>9</sup> Chambers, 'Giovanni Pietro Arrivabene', p.422.

<sup>10</sup> Chambers, 'Giovanni Pietro Arrivabene', pp.398 and 428.

<sup>11</sup> Lazzarini, *Fra un principe e altri stati*, p.191; Emilio Faccioli, *Mantova. Le Lettere*, II, p.60; Chambers, 'Giovanni Pietro Arrivabene', p.429.

<sup>12</sup> See Concetta Bianca, 'Poliziano e la Curia', in Vincenzo Fera e Mario Martelli, eds., *Angelo Poliziano. Poeta Scrittore Filologo. Atti del convegno internazionale di studi. Montepulciano, 3-6 novembre 1994*, (Florence: Le Lettere, 1998), pp.459-475, p.469. The letter is published in Angelo Poliziano, *Opera omnia*, ed. by Ida Maier (Turin: Bottega d'Erasmus, 1972), vol.I, pp.111-112. See also Chambers, 'Giovanni Pietro Arrivabene', p.431.

<sup>13</sup> Chambers, 'Giovanni Pietro Arrivabene', pp.431-432.



Urbino, the town being occupied by Cesare Borgia from 1502 to 1503 following the defeat of the Montefeltro dynasty. Arrivabene died in Urbino on 18 March 1504 and was buried in the chapel in the cathedral which he himself had financed.

Arrivabene's few surviving literary works, largely composed during the early years of his career, reveal very little about his character and intellect. The most remarkable of these contributions was his *Gonzagidos*, an epic poem in Latin hexameters and spanning four books which describes Lodovico's victories over Venice while in charge of the Milanese forces, aided by the ancient Gods and culminating with the battle at Goito on 14 August 1453.<sup>14</sup> Written, in all probability, during the early years of service to Cardinal Francesco, the *Gonzagidos* was probably the consequence of several coinciding factors. Having studied under Francesco Filelfo, Arrivabene must have been familiar with the *Sforziade*, his former teacher's epic Latin poem, and may even have been actively encouraged by Filelfo to compose a similar work for Lodovico. His conscious decision to model his work on the *Aeneid*, on the other hand, as Chambers notes, probably denotes an awareness of the marchese's taste for Virgil.<sup>15</sup> It must also be assumed that Arrivabene was familiar with Platina's *Divi Ludovici*, another work which has Lodovico as the central character in a supernatural setting and which was composed at the Mantuan court around a decade earlier. As is to be expected from a juvenile work of such ambitious proportions, the *Gonzagidos* has many flaws. Faccioli, the commentator to have treated the work most thoroughly, despite acknowledging the young Arrivabene's many erudite citations, identifies in the author an over-riding desire to report facts in a manner reminiscent of a chronicler, in a scheme amounting to little more than verbal mimicking of Virgil, devoid of a conscious style and personal language.<sup>16</sup> Nothing is known about Lodovico's reaction to the *Gonzagidos*, but perhaps Chambers is not far from the truth in suggesting that the reaction of those who read it was lukewarm and perhaps even discouraging, given that Arrivabene appears to have composed no further Latin poetry.<sup>17</sup> Nor was the work to enjoy any degree of success over the following

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<sup>14</sup> It is not known to what extent *Gonzagidos* was circulated in its time. The only known surviving manuscript is to be found in Gotha, Germany.

<sup>15</sup> Chambers, 'Giovanni Pietro Arrivabene', p.399.

<sup>16</sup> Emilio Faccioli, *Mantova. Le Lettere*, I, pp.63-66.

<sup>17</sup> Chambers, 'Giovanni Pietro Arrivabene', p.400.

decades, being published for the first time, in a volume containing other relatively obscure literary works, only in 1738.<sup>18</sup>

At around the same time as he was writing the *Gonzagidos*, during the 1460s, Arrivabene also composed a long panegyric in verse dedicated to Pope Pius II, the *Carmina ad Pium II*. Enea Silvio Piccolomini, a notable humanist and promoter of letters in his own right, was also the Pope who had awarded the cardinal's hat to Francesco Gonzaga and was therefore indirectly responsible for Arrivabene's fledgling career in the Curia.<sup>19</sup> Nor should we under-estimate the impact on the young Arrivabene of coming into contact with Pius during the Congress of Mantua. As he does in the *Gonzagidos*, moreover, in his *Carmina ad Pium II* Arrivabene describes the marchese as "Ludovicos heros." Other juvenile works by Arrivabene include eighteen Latin epistles concerning the War of Rimini addressed to Giacomo Ammanati Piccolomini, Cardinal of Pavia, and the *Epistolario Francisci Philelphi*, in honour of his former teacher.

More so than in his juvenile literary works, Arrivabene demonstrated his humanistic pedigree and his personal and intellectual qualities in the thousands of letters he penned over five decades, both in his own name and on behalf of Cardinal Francesco.<sup>20</sup> It was primarily through his Latin letters, lucid, brimming with erudition and produced in an exemplary handwritten script, that Arrivabene won the respect of his fellow humanists such as Poliziano and Ammanati. His vernacular letters, on the other hand, hundreds of which survive in the Mantuan archives, deal with a huge range of subjects and are both varied and direct.<sup>21</sup> Almost all of the letters sent in Francesco's name were written in the hand of Arrivabene, and Chambers suggests that in most cases he was probably the author as well as the scribe.<sup>22</sup> Indeed, Arrivabene appears to have taken it upon himself to organise Francesco's writing office, distribute the work and train assistants. This dedication and conscientiousness as secretary to the cardinal, Chambers suggests,

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<sup>18</sup> Giovanni Pietro Arrivabene, 'Gonzagidos', in J.G.Meuschen, ed., *Vitae summorum dignitate et eruditione virorum ex rarissimis monumentis liberato orbe restituta*, III, (Coburg: Steinmarck, 1738).

<sup>19</sup> On Pope Pius II see pp.319-333 below.

<sup>20</sup> Chambers, 'Giovanni Pietro Arrivabene', p.397.

<sup>21</sup> Chambers, 'Giovanni Pietro Arrivabene', p.404.

<sup>22</sup> Chambers, 'Giovanni Pietro Arrivabene', p.403.



probably resulted in Arrivabene renouncing many literary and scholarly ambitions.<sup>23</sup>

Alongside these more or less official duties of composing panegyrics and writing letters Arrivabene distinguished himself through his fervent activity as book collector, copier and editor, activities which Chambers suggests must have increased the cultural prestige of Cardinal Francesco.<sup>24</sup> Del Lungo, meanwhile, went no further than describing Arrivabene as a keen collector of manuscripts and *anticaglia*.<sup>25</sup> Chambers, however, is most probably correct in his assertion that Arrivabene, only four years older than the cardinal, was probably the dominant cultural influence on him, both in his literary taste and in his impetus for collecting antique objects.<sup>26</sup> Many of the books which belonged to Arrivabene are still housed in the Vatican Library and, as secretary, he was probably responsible for the management of Cardinal Francesco's library and dealings with calligraphers and miniaturists. Several of these volumes appear to have been inherited by Arrivabene after the cardinal's death, judging by the initials *G.A.* penned alongside many of those listed in the cardinal's will, of which Arrivabene, together with Alvise Capra, was executor.<sup>27</sup> There is also evidence of transcriptions and editorial activity carried out by Arrivabene himself. In 1469 he appears to have copied and corrected an Appian and a Pliny, and his scholarly competence was confirmed by an annotated version of Saint Augustine's *Epistolae* of 1493. Chambers considers it highly likely that an initiative to have produced parallel texts of Homer in Latin and Greek was also launched by Arrivabene: he may also have presided over a scriptorium in Cardinal Francesco's chancery, of which Bartolomeo Sanvito seems to have been an important element.<sup>28</sup> As well as having Sanvito copy his *Orationes ad principes Italiae*, in a letter from Bologna of 3 December 1478 Arrivabene recommended the

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<sup>23</sup> David S. Chambers, *A Renaissance Cardinal and his Worldly Goods: The Will and Inventory of Francesco Gonzaga (1444-1483)*, (London: Warburg Institute Surveys and Texts, 1992), p.53.

<sup>24</sup> Chambers, 'Giovanni Pietro Arrivabene', p.421.

<sup>25</sup> Del Lungo, 'L'Orfeo del Poliziano', p.302.

<sup>26</sup> Chambers, *A Renaissance Cardinal*, p.53 and p.76.

<sup>27</sup> Chambers, 'Giovanni Pietro Arrivabene', pp.418-420; Chambers, *A Renaissance Cardinal*, p.109 and pp.123-124.

<sup>28</sup> On Sanvito see pp.210-211 above.

calligrapher to Federico Gonzaga, praising the standard of his work and referring to him as "Sanvito nostro."<sup>29</sup>

Arrivabene's position in Rome, meanwhile, was exploited by his master's parents back in Mantua, who were always looking to add to their own collections of manuscripts and artefacts. Two letters penned within a week in 1469 demonstrate that Arrivabene and the marchesa were willing to assist one another in enriching their respective libraries. On 20 May, presumably in response to a request made by Barbara, Arrivabene informs her that he is unable to find in Rome a good copy of Saint Catherine of Siena's *Libro di divina dottrina* but that, having heard of a correct copy at the Certosa of Pisa, he has written to the prior there asking for a copy. Three days later, on 23 May, Arrivabene again wrote to Barbara, this time to ask for a reproduction of the Pliny copied by Matteo da Volterra from the manuscript possessed by Borso d'Este. He also mentions an incorrect version which had been donated by Pius II during the Congress of Mantua ten years earlier. As well as his literary pedigree and his eagerness to satisfy the marchesa's requests, these two letters testify to Arrivabene's knowledge of extant manuscripts not only in Mantua and in Rome but also elsewhere in Italy.<sup>30</sup> Arrivabene was also willing to act as an intermediary for the Gonzaga in the acquisition of valuable objects. On 6 April 1475, for example, he wrote to Lodovico from Rome with information on gold fringes from Florence made by Giacomo da Paviglioni and acquired through Piero della Tovaglia for a chair belonging to Cardinal Francesco.<sup>31</sup>

Following the deaths of Barbara in 1481 and Cardinal Francesco in 1483, the two members of the Gonzaga family with whom he enjoyed most intimacy, Arrivabene's correspondence with Mantua, notes Chambers, became more formal

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<sup>29</sup> Letter Arrivabene to Marchese Federico Gonzaga, Bologna, 3 December 1478 (ASMn AG. busta 1141, f. 565); Chambers, 'Giovanni Pietro Arrivabene', p.420; Chambers, *A Renaissance Cardinal*, pp.59-61.

<sup>30</sup> Letters from Arrivabene to Marchesa Barbara Gonzaga, Rome, 20 May 1469 (ASMn AG. b. 843 f. 720) and 23 May 1469 (ASMn AG. b. 843 f. 721). See also Ubaldo Meroni, *Mostra dei codici gonzagheschi. La biblioteca da Luigi I ad Isabella d'Este (1348-1540)* (Mantua: Biblioteca Comunale, 1966), p.59. On Saint Catherine of Siena and her *Libro di divina dottrina* see p.171 above.

<sup>31</sup> Letter Arrivabene to Lodovico Gonzaga, Rome, 6 April 1475 (ASMn AG. b. 845, f. 469). On Piero della Tovaglia and his role as agent for Lodovico in Florence see Beverly Louise Brown, 'The Patronage and Building History of the Tribuna of SS. Annunziata in Florence: A Reappraisal in Light of New Documentation', *Mitteilungen des Kunsthistorischen Instituts in Florenz*, XXV (1981), 59-146.



and impersonal.<sup>32</sup> He did, however, become the guardian of Francesco's bastard son, and in the summer of 1484 he accepted an offer from the new Marchese Francesco to enter Gonzaga service. Following an unsuccessful diplomatic mission to the court of Lodovico Sforza during the following winter, Arrivabene returned to Rome and his failure the next year to secure the Cardinal's hat for the Protonotary Lodovico Gonzaga, Cardinal Francesco's younger brother, appears to have brought to a close relations with the marchese.<sup>33</sup>

Arrivabene's letters also testify to a large number of humanist and literary contacts and the fact that he moved to Rome at an early stage of his career must have been a crucial factor in this respect. By no means, however, were these contacts restricted to humanists employed at the Curia. As well as his long-time friend Marsilio Andreasi and the emerging young Battista Mantovano back in Mantua, through Cardinal Francesco's diplomatic contacts he also established relations with Lorenzo de' Medici and Angelo Poliziano in Florence.<sup>34</sup> With Poliziano, Arrivabene may have formed a solid acquaintance and perhaps even a lasting friendship. Del Lungo hypothesises that the teenage Poliziano may have met Arrivabene together with Cardinal Francesco during an early visit to Rome and that, being already established in the Papal administration, Arrivabene possibly represented for Poliziano an encouraging example of a humanist education leading to a rewarding career in the Curia.<sup>35</sup> A more substantial testimony to the relationship between the two may be the letter of congratulation penned by Poliziano to Arrivabene upon his nomination as bishop of Urbino in 1491, a document in which the poet praises Arrivabene's eloquence in Greek as similar to that of Plato.<sup>36</sup> Although these comments were clearly flattery on this occasion, given Poliziano's reputation as a Hellenist in Italy and as an established poet and teacher, and not forgetting that Arrivabene had been educated as a youth by Francesco Filelfo, it must be assumed that he had indeed some competence in the Greek language to be praised in such terms. In the same letter he also thanks Arrivabene for having helped him in a time of need, though the nature of this favour is not revealed. Del Lungo suggests that the favour in question may have

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<sup>32</sup> Chambers, 'Giovanni Pietro Arrivabene', p.422 and p.428.

<sup>33</sup> Chambers, 'Giovanni Pietro Arrivabene', p.421, p.423 and p.428.

<sup>34</sup> Emilio Faccioli, *Mantova. Le Lettere, II*, pp.58-60. On Poliziano see pp.353-360 below.

<sup>35</sup> Del Lungo, 'L'Orfeo del Poliziano', p.303.

<sup>36</sup> See Del Lungo, 'L'Orfeo del Poliziano', pp.303-304.

been an introduction to Cardinal Francesco but it is more likely that the initial introduction was the initiative of Lorenzo. Moreover, as Chambers notes, very little evidence has emerged regarding Arrivabene's relationship with Poliziano.<sup>37</sup>

Although he was a humanist in Rome during the difficult pontificate of Paul II, Arrivabene seems to have steered well clear of the controversial *Accademia*, an institution which absorbed his fellow Mantuan and member of Cardinal Francesco's entourage, Platina.<sup>38</sup> The fact that little has come to light regarding relations between Arrivabene and Platina, unquestionably the two most accomplished elements of the cardinal's retinue, would suggest that the two followed entirely different agendas in Rome. Chambers, while emphasising that the matter is unclear, suggests that Arrivabene had only a qualified respect for Platina.<sup>39</sup> Arrivabene's devotion to duty and workload, not to mention his more prudent personality, probably also meant that he had neither the time nor the inclination to frequent Pomponio Leto's circle.<sup>40</sup>

Arrivabene also used his wealth and position of eminence to make some contributions to the patronage of art and architecture. The family palace, still standing in Mantua, was probably begun by Arrivabene, together with his brother Giovanni, in the late 1470s.<sup>41</sup> He was also responsible, as bishop of Urbino, for the restoration of the cathedral and Palazzo Episcopale there, a project which cost somewhere in the region of 1500 ducats.<sup>42</sup> Of more interest, perhaps, is his own burial chapel which he commissioned in the *Duomo*. Dedicated to Saint Martin of Tours and Saint Thomas of Canterbury, the chapel cost one hundred ducats to construct and furnish and came with an endowment of three-hundred ducats.<sup>43</sup> Unfortunately the frescoes decorating the chapel, commissioned from Girolamo Genga (c.1476-1551) and representing the legends of the dedicatory saints, have been lost, while in the surviving altarpiece by Viti (Fig.43), now housed in the nearby Galleria Nazionale, Arrivabene himself is depicted, alongside Guidubaldo

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<sup>37</sup> Del Lungo, 'L'Orfeo del Poliziano', p.304; Chambers, 'Giovanni Pietro Arrivabene', p.404.

<sup>38</sup> Del Lungo, 'L'Orfeo del Poliziano', p.302.

<sup>39</sup> Chambers, *A Renaissance Cardinal*, p.54.

<sup>40</sup> Chambers, 'Giovanni Pietro Arrivabene', p.417.

<sup>41</sup> Lazzarini, *Fra un principe e altri stati*, pp.187-188; Chambers, 'Giovanni Pietro Arrivabene', p.416.

<sup>42</sup> Faccioli *Mantova. Le Lettere*, II, p.61; Chambers, 'Giovanni Pietro Arrivabene', pp.435-436.

<sup>43</sup> On the chapel see Franco Negroni, *Il Duomo di Urbino* (Urbino: Accademia Raffaello, 1993), pp.73-74; Chambers, 'Giovanni Pietro Arrivabene', p.436.



della Rovere, kneeling in adoration before his two chosen saints.<sup>44</sup> Also housed in this chapel, until the cathedral was rebuilt, was one of Arrivabene's last literary works, the epitaph on his tomb which he himself composed:

Jo. Petrus Arrivabenus Mantuanus trium pontificum  
romanorum secretarius domesticus et unius ex ipsis apud  
regem Ferdinandum orator et Urbinas episcopus hoc  
sepulcrum sibi faciendum curavit.<sup>45</sup>

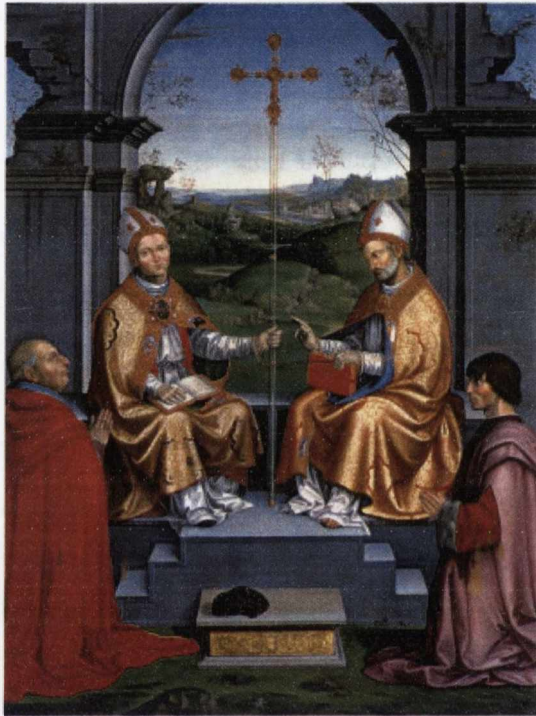


Fig.43: Timoteo Viti, Altarpiece of Arrivabene (left) and Guidubaldo della Rovere kneeling before Saint Martin of Tours and Saint Thomas of Canterbury

### Giovan Francesco Suardi

Giovan Francesco Suardi (1422 circa-1468/69) was another Mantuan who, like Arrivabene, was to distinguish himself largely away from the Gonzaga court. Though born in Verdello, close to Bergamo, the family moved to Mantova while Giovan Francesco was an infant.<sup>46</sup> The Suardi family was, indeed, one of the leading families in Bergamo, whose origins dated back some four centuries by the 1420s, and his father Giovanni had briefly been *signore* of the town in 1407, before the arrival of Pandolfo Malatesta (c.1369-1427). In 1410 Giovanni married his first

<sup>44</sup> Faccioli *Mantova. Le Lettere, II*, p.61; Chambers, 'Giovanni Pietro Arrivabene', p.436.

<sup>45</sup> Chambers, 'Giovanni Pietro Arrivabene', p.436.

<sup>46</sup> Faccioli, *Mantova. Le Lettere, II*, p.65.

cousin, Maddalena Suardi, and around the same time moved his family home to Verdello, where he had a small castle.<sup>47</sup> Giovanni entered the service of Gianfrancesco Gonzaga, Marchese of Mantua, in 1427 and on 12 June was made *podestà* of Ostiglia, an office which he held faithfully for thirty-two years until his death in 1459.<sup>48</sup> The young Giovan Francesco, therefore, had the good fortune to arrive in the *Mantovano* just when the Casa Giocosa was establishing itself as one of the most prestigious courtly schools in Italy and, being the son of an important official in the marchese's administration, the opportunity of a humanist education under Vittorino was assured. Exactly when his studies were entrusted to Vittorino we cannot be certain, but it may have been as early as 1427, the year of his family's arrival, by which time he was around five years old. What is certain is that he was still at the Giocosa in 1445, the year of his departure for Ferrara to embark on his legal studies.<sup>49</sup> Although during his years under Vittorino Giovan Francesco had demonstrated a propensity for letters and had cultivated an interest in poetry, it had always been his father's wish that he forge a career in the legal profession, in keeping with the traditions of the family.<sup>50</sup>

From 1445 Suardi studied law at the *Università dei Giuristi* in the Ferrara of Leonello d'Este. Despite the fact that, by all accounts, he distinguished himself in his studies, economic difficulties had become so onerous by 1449 that he was unable to continue. For the next three years he was given the opportunity to teach as a *lettore scolaro* at the *studio* of Ferrara, but his annual salary was still too meagre to allow him to complete his studies.<sup>51</sup> For a brief spell following the death of Leonello in 1450, Suardi spent some months in Rome, where he may have made contact with the circle of Pomponio Leto, before returning to Ferrara where, despite the succession of Borso d'Este, the same frugal lifestyle awaited him.<sup>52</sup> His conditions were to improve in 1452, when two events worked in his favour. This was the year in which Emperor Fredrick III visited Ferrara and, desperate not to

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<sup>47</sup> Antonio Belloni, 'Un lirico del Quattrocento a torto inedito e dimenticato, Giovan Francesco Suardi', *Giornale storico della letteratura italiana*, LI (1908), 147-206, pp.153-154.

<sup>48</sup> Belloni, 'Un lirico del Quattrocento', p.154; Faccioli, *Mantova. Le Lettere*, II, p.65.

<sup>49</sup> Faccioli, *Mantova. Le Lettere*, II, p.65.

<sup>50</sup> Carlo De' Rosmini, *L'idea dell'ottimo precettore nella vita e disciplina di Vittorino da Feltre*, (Bassano: Remondiniana, 1801), p.208; Belloni, 'Un lirico del Quattrocento', p.155; Lazzarini, *Fra un principe e altri stati*, p.353.

<sup>51</sup> Belloni, 'Un lirico del Quattrocento', p.155; Faccioli, *Mantova. Le Lettere*, II, p.69.

<sup>52</sup> Carlo D'Arco, *Mille scrittori mantovani*, 7 vols (Mantova, Archivio di Stato di Mantova), V, 240-244; Belloni, 'Un lirico del Quattrocento', p.155.



miss the opportunity of purchasing a *laurea* for his son, Giovanni Suardi managed to secure from Lodovico and Barbara the arrears of his own salary and sent to Giovan Francesco the seventy ducats required to buy the imperial degree, subsequently conferred during a lavish ceremony in Ferrara on 11 May.<sup>53</sup>

With the problem of achieving a professional qualification now successfully overcome, it was not long before Suardi received more concrete recognition for the promise he had shown as a student. In a decree issued by Borso d'Este on 1 January 1453 Suardi was made *podestà* of the commune of Massa Lombarda. In this decree the Duke of Ferrara also refers to Suardi as *milite*, a detail which prompted Belloni to wonder if this title was purchased from the Emperor the previous spring together with the *laurea*.<sup>54</sup> In his biography of Vittorino da Feltre, Francesco Prendilacqua also refers to Suardi as *cavaliere*.<sup>55</sup> His monthly salary from by the commune of Massa Lombarda was not always paid punctually and in 1454 Giovan Francesco returned briefly to his father's home in Ostiglia before leaving for Ancona where, following his performance in Massa Lombarda, he was invited to serve as *podestà* from October 1454 to April 1455.<sup>56</sup> Following this spell in Ancona in 1455 Suardi returned to Ostiglia, where he remained until the following spring, before taking the position of *podestà* of Urbino on 25 March 1456.<sup>57</sup> By this time Suardi's professional reputation clearly commanded widespread respect and an even more prestigious office awaited him in September of the same year, when he was named *capitano del popolo* for six months by the Florentine *signoria*.<sup>58</sup> From Florence he returned to the *Mantovano* in March 1457, where he stayed until the beginning of 1458. Clearly impressed by his competence in Florence, on 1 January the Sienese commune elected Suardi *podestà* of their city and such must have been the impact he had there that, when this office expired, the same commune on 1

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<sup>53</sup> Belloni, 'Un lirico del Quattrocento', pp.155-156; Faccioli, *Mantova. Le Lettere, II*, p.69; Lazzarini, *Fra un principe e altri stati*, p.353.

<sup>54</sup> Belloni, 'Un lirico del Quattrocento', p.156.

<sup>55</sup> Prendilacqua's account of the life of Vittorino is found in Eugenio Garin, *Il pensiero pedagogico dell'umanesimo* (Florence: Giuntine, 1958), pp.553-668. See also Faccioli, *Mantova. Le Lettere, II*, p.69.

<sup>56</sup> Belloni, 'Un lirico del Quattrocento', p.165; Faccioli, *Mantova. Le Lettere, II*, p.71; Lazzarini, *Fra un principe e altri stati*, p.353.

<sup>57</sup> Belloni, 'Un lirico del Quattrocento', p.166; Lazzarini, *Fra un principe e altri stati*, p.353.

<sup>58</sup> Belloni, 'Un lirico del Quattrocento', p.166; Faccioli, *Mantova. Le Lettere, II*, p.71.

September made him *capitano di giustizia*, ensuring that his stay in Siena would be prolonged by a further six months.<sup>59</sup>

This position in Siena was to be Suardi's last outside the *Mantovano*. After six years in which he had filled a range of offices in north-central Italy, the death in 1459 of his father Giovanni, who had been Lodovico's main administrator in Ostiglia, prompted the marchese to instal Giovan Francesco as his successor there, ensuring a smooth transition to an experienced governor who knew the area well. Francesco Sforza, Duke of Milan, had around the same time offered Suardi the office of *podestà* in Como but, whether for Lodovico's determination to have him in his own administration or for Suardi's own desire to come home, the offer from Sforza was politely declined.<sup>60</sup>

Suardi's return to Ostiglia resulted not only in a change in the nature of his duties, which now included monitoring the education of the Gonzaga children and the wellbeing of the young Cardinal Francesco, but also in an alteration of his lifestyle. In 1460, seemingly due to an initiative by the Marchesa Barbara, he married Orsina, daughter of the *conte* Alberico da Barbiano.<sup>61</sup> Marriage was soon followed by fatherhood as Orsina gave him four sons. Meanwhile, much of Suardi's time was also now occupied monitoring the education and wellbeing of the Gonzaga children. In the summer of 1460 we find Suardi at the Gonzaga residence in Revere, reporting back to Barbara on the progress of her daughters and, more alarmingly, on the excessive severity of their teachers.<sup>62</sup> Probably more onerous were his responsibilities in the entourage of the young Francesco Gonzaga during the early years of his cardinalship. During the spring of 1462 Suardi accompanied the Gonzaga cardinal on his travels to Bologna, Florence, Siena and Rome.<sup>63</sup> The presence of a young but experienced diplomat in his retinue must have been a source of great reassurance for Francesco, especially when visiting Florence and Siena, where Suardi must undoubtedly have been accorded a warm welcome.

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<sup>59</sup> Belloni, 'Un lirico del Quattrocento', p.170; Faccioli, *Mantova. Le Lettere, II*, p.73; Lazzarini, *Fra un principe e altri stati*, p.353.

<sup>60</sup> Belloni, 'Un lirico del Quattrocento', p.179; Faccioli, *Mantova. Le Lettere, II*, pp.73-74; Lazzarini, *Fra un principe e altri stati*, p.353.

<sup>61</sup> Belloni, 'Un lirico del Quattrocento', pp.179-180; Faccioli, *Mantova. Le Lettere, II*, p.74.

<sup>62</sup> Five letters by Suardi to the Marchesa Barbara, Revere, summer 1460 (ASMn AG. b. 2394). See also Belloni, 'Un lirico del Quattrocento', p.180 and Faccioli, *Mantova. Le Lettere, II*, p.74.

<sup>63</sup> Belloni, 'Un lirico del Quattrocento', pp.180-181; Faccioli, *Mantova. Le Lettere, II*, p.74.



Although he appears to have been in Rome once again in the autumn of the same year, and although he accompanied the cardinal on several trips to spa towns throughout the 1460s, Suardi's service to Francesco by no means appears to have been permanent.<sup>64</sup> Given that by this stage he was more or less absorbed into the domestic service of the Gonzaga, Suardi's activities during the 1460s are more difficult to trace. In 1466 Lodovico clearly felt the need to have Suardi's services close at hand, appointing him to the office of *podestà* of Mantua.

With plague raging in Ostiglia in the autumn of 1468, Lodovico sent Suardi there to fill the emergency office of *commissario ducale* and, although the plague had abated by the following spring, Suardi himself was not spared.<sup>65</sup> We cannot be certain when exactly he expired, certainly some time before 15 May, when Lodovico Gonzaga wrote to Suardi's widow Orsina, confirming her status as guardian to the four young children.<sup>66</sup>

Although during the 1450s Suardi had been employed by the governments of the cities where he worked and not by the Gonzaga, unlike for example Bartolomeo Bonatto and Vincenzo della Scalona who were employed by Lodovico as ambassadors in other courts, his correspondence often rivalled that of the resident ambassadors in terms of both quantity and content. While he sent many letters to the marchesi on a variety of subjects from Massa Lombarda, Ancona, Urbino and Florence, it was during his time in Siena that Suardi's full value as a diplomat came to the fore, as he occupied himself with matters of importance to Lodovico.

An interesting exchange of letters between Suardi and Lodovico occurred in 1458, when the marchese deployed Suardi to attempt to convince Donatello to return to Mantua to complete a project which he had begun there during a brief visit eight years earlier, an *arca* dedicated to Saint Anselm inside the cathedral, a structure intended to house the remains of the city's patron saint.<sup>67</sup> Before leaving, it would

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<sup>64</sup> Belloni, 'Un lirico del Quattrocento', pp.180-183; Faccioli, *Mantova. Le Lettere*, II, p.75.

<sup>65</sup> Belloni, 'Un lirico del Quattrocento', p.183; Faccioli, *Mantova. Le Lettere*, II, p.75.

<sup>66</sup> Letter cited by Belloni, 'Un lirico del Quattrocento', p.183. See also Faccioli, *Mantova. Le Lettere*, II, p.75.

<sup>67</sup> On Donatello and the project of the arca di Sant'Anselmo see Willelmo Braghirolli, 'Donatello a Mantova. Con documenti inediti', *Giornale d'erudizione artistica di Perugia*, II (1873), 4-9; Giovanni Battista Intra, 'Donatello e il marchese Lodovico Gonzaga', *Archivio Storico Lombardo*, seconda serie, III (1886), 666-669; Lawson, 'New Documents'.

seem, Donatello had given Lodovico some kind of assurance that he would soon return to Mantua to complete the project. Two years later, on 26 February 1452, the marchese wrote to Donatello to ask him if he intended to return to Mantua, telling the artist that if he had no intention of doing so then he would look for someone else capable of finishing the job.<sup>68</sup> Given his substantial military commitments at this time, however, Lodovico was probably forced to shelve the project and no further efforts to convince Donatello to return to Mantua appear to have been made until 1458, by which time the artist was working in Siena.

Ever since Braghirolli's article of 1873 it had been assumed that the new set of negotiations in 1458 between Donatello and Lodovico were initiated by the latter, but in 1974 Lawson demonstrated that the first approach was made by the artist, using as an intermediary Suardi, who at this time was based in Siena. In a letter of 5 June 1458 Suardi informed the marchese that Donatello had expressed an interest in returning to Mantua to complete the *arca* and, with the letter, Suardi forwarded some unspecified gifts from Donatello for Lodovico.<sup>69</sup> Not surprisingly, Lodovico was extremely receptive to the proposal and on 18 June he wrote back to Suardi, instructing him to send Donatello to Mantua as soon as possible. As an incentive to the artist he also enclosed a payment of 10 ducats and the offer of a Gonzaga horse for the journey north.<sup>70</sup> Difficulties in negotiations do not appear to have been considered insurmountable by the persistent Suardi, who on 18 August wrote to the marchese again. In the same letter, in which he reveals that from the first of September he will hold the office of *capitano di giustizia* in Siena, he reports Donatello's stated intention to leave for Mantua at the end of the month, while also expressing his own doubts with regard to the artist's sincerity, describing him as "molto intricato," and promising Lodovico that he will continue to do all he can to persuade him to return to Mantua to complete the *arca*.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> Letter Marchese Lodovico to Donatello, Mantua, 26 February 1452 (ASMn AG, b. 2885 Lib. 28 f. 91r), published in Braghirolli, 'Donatello a Mantova', p.5.

<sup>69</sup> Letter Suardi to Marchese Lodovico, Siena, 5 June 1458 (ASMn AG, b. 1099 c. 306), published in Lawson, 'New Documents', p.361.

<sup>70</sup> Letter Marchese Lodovico to Suardi, Mantua, 18 June 1458 (ASMn AG, b. 2886 Lib. 34 f. 34v), published in Lawson, 'New Documents', p.361.

<sup>71</sup> Letter Suardi to Marchese Lodovico, Siena, 18 August 1458, published by Braghirolli, 'Donatello a Mantova', p.6. I have been unable to locate this document in the Archivio Gonzaga.



Despite the reservations of Suardi in Siena, Lodovico was keen to press on not only with negotiations and but also with arrangements in Mantua for Donatello's arrival. Writing from Milan on 25 August, Lodovico again urged Suardi to keep up the pressure on Donatello. His admission that Donatello "ha un cervello facto a questo modo che se non viene de li non li bisogna sperare" would suggest that the marchese, while optimistic that Donatello would eventually return to Mantua, appreciated the difficulty facing Suardi in convincing him to do so. In the same letter he also instructed Suardi to offer Donatello the incentive of a further eight ducats for agreeing to return.<sup>72</sup> Meanwhile, the following day, Lodovico wrote to Barbara to advise her of Donatello's arrival in the *Mantovano* within the next two weeks and asked her to make provisions for the artist at Revere, where the marchese intended him to stay for a few days as a precautionary measure to ensure that he did not carry the plague into the city.<sup>73</sup>

On 31 August Barbara replied to her husband, informing him that Donatello had yet to arrive and that, if he came, she would indeed have him stay for a few days at Revere and ensure that he had some work there to be getting on with before coming to Mantua.<sup>74</sup> It was during this visit by Lodovico to Milan that news broke of Enea Silvio Piccolomini's election as Pope Pius II, and on 10 October the new Pope announced that on the first of June the following year he intended to convene the Congress at which the rulers of Christendom would organise a crusade to defeat the Turks, who in 1453 had taken Constantinople.<sup>75</sup> While the choice of Mantua as the venue promised immeasurable prestige to the Gonzaga, the cost of preparing for and hosting such a huge event was clearly going to be extremely onerous. The first element of these costs was the preparation of the city, both in terms of the creation of new projects and the completion of those already underway. The *arca* of Saint Anselm clearly belonged to the second category and a further two months had now elapsed without Donatello showing up in Mantua.

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<sup>72</sup> Letter Marchese Lodovico to Suardi, Milan, 25 August 1458 (ASMn AG, b. 2885 Lib. 28 f. 91r), published by Braghirolli, 'Donatello a Mantova', p.7.

<sup>73</sup> Letter Marchese Lodovico to Marchesa Barbara, Milan, 26 August 1458 (ASMn AG, b. 2885 Lib. 28 c. 92r), published by Braghirolli, 'Donatello a Mantova', pp.7-8.

<sup>74</sup> Letter Marchesa Barbara to Marchese Lodovico, Mantua, 31 August 1458, published by Braghirolli, 'Donatello a Mantova', p.8. Again, I have been unable to locate this document in the Archivio Gonzaga.

<sup>75</sup> Elizabeth Ward Mahnke, 'The Political Career of a Condottiere Prince: Ludovico Gonzaga, 1444-1466' (unpublished doctoral thesis, Harvard University, 1974), pp.219-222.

On the same day in November as he wrote a further pressing letter to Suardi, in which he described the deplorable condition of the *arca* and expressed his concern that the Pope would consider it in its current state a sight worthy of “poca extima,” he also despatched one of his most trusted diplomats, Zaccaria Saggi of Pisa, to Tuscany.<sup>76</sup> As well as bringing the aforementioned letter to Suardi and being charged with negotiating with the Sieneese authorities Donatello’s release, Saggi delivered another letter by the marchese en route to Siena, a plea to Cosimo de’ Medici to intercede and to use his influence in persuading Donatello to head to Mantua.<sup>77</sup> The following day Lodovico wrote to Cosimo once again to reiterate his desire to have Donatello back at work in Mantua, unequivocally stating his wish to have the *arca* completed before the arrival of the Papal court.<sup>78</sup>

Lawson is almost certainly correct in suggesting that a letter missing the bottom right-hand corner and therefore void of date and provenance, but clearly written by Suardi, is the reply to Lodovico’s letter of 7 November.<sup>79</sup> Although he does not mention Saggi by name, Suardi alludes to the arrival in Siena of a “cavalaro de la V.S.” and goes on to outline the stubborn refusal of the Sieneese authorities to release Donatello from the Cathedral doors project in which he is involved. Interestingly, however, Suardi then gives details of the financial rewards reportedly due to Donatello for completion of the doors, three ducats, and expresses his concern that Donatello has said this simply “per poter metere maggiore taglia.” In other words, Suardi believed that Donatello was using the situation to his advantage, inferring that a return to Mantua would result in loss of income in Siena and therefore holding the marchese to ransom for the best possible deal, regardless of the conditions set down by the Sieneese government.

What is clear is that Donatello, seventy-two years old by the time of these negotiations with Suardi and Lodovico, never returned to Mantua to complete the *arca*. Nor in all probability did he ever intend to: Lawson’s theory that the initial

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<sup>76</sup> Letter Marchese Lodovico to Suardi, Mantua, 7 November 1458 (ASMn AG, b. 2886 Lib. 35 f. 12v), published by Braghirolli, ‘Donatello a Mantova’, p.9

<sup>77</sup> Letter Marchese Lodovico to Cosimo de’ Medici, Mantua, 7 November 1458 (ASMn AG, b. 2886 Lib. 35 f. 12v), published by Braghirolli, ‘Donatello a Mantova’, p.8.

<sup>78</sup> Letter Marchese Lodovico to Cosimo de’ Medici, Mantua, 8 November 1458, (ASMn AG, b. 2886 Lib. 35, f. 13v). See Lawson, ‘New Documents’, p.358.

<sup>79</sup> Letter Suardi to Marchese Lodovico, date missing (ASMn AG, b. 2393 Senza Provenienza n. 14 (1458)). Published by Lawson, ‘New Documents’, p.362.



approach by the artist to the marchese through Suardi in June 1458 was a means to sting the Sienese government into awarding him more lucrative commissions is a convincing one.<sup>80</sup> What is really of interest to us here, however, is not so much the outcome of negotiations as the lucid manner in which Suardi expressed himself in his correspondence on the matter with Lodovico. As well as a dedicated servant, Suardi comes across as an astute and eloquent observer, never more so than when describing the difficult character of Donatello, a view clearly shared by the marchese, and when discussing with scepticism Donatello's reasoning in relation to the financial implications of leaving Siena for Mantua. If the wily old artist believed he could use Suardi as an instrument of leverage to secure an exorbitant offer from Lodovico then he had underestimated the astuteness of the man who had become one of the most sought after legal officials of the decade in north-central Italy.

The episode concerning Donatello may to posterity appear the most interesting exchange with Lodovico during the diplomatic career of Suardi but it was by no means the only such incident. Wherever he happened to be employed Suardi frequently relayed news and his political reflections to the marchesi. In February 1459, while the organisation of the Congress was still hanging in the balance, Suardi was occupying himself in Siena to ensure a smooth journey north for the Pope and his cardinals, many of whom harboured not only scepticism with regard to the wisdom of the proposed crusade but also serious misgivings concerning the Gonzagas' ability to host the Congress in Mantua.<sup>81</sup> When in the travelling entourage of Cardinal Francesco in the spring of 1462 Suardi, like Marasca and Arrivabene when reporting matters concerning the young prelate, addressed his letters to Barbara, further indication that it was Barbara and not Lodovico who was primarily interested in the day-to-day life of their second son.<sup>82</sup> Furthermore, it can be reasonably assumed that a long relationship of trust and probably also friendship existed between Suardi and Barbara, given their almost identical age which meant that they must have spent many years studying together at the Casa Giocosa.

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<sup>80</sup> Lawson, 'New Documents', p.360.

<sup>81</sup> Letter Suardi to Marchese Lodovico, Siena, 27 February 1459, mentioned by Belloni, 'Un lirico del Quattrocento', p.170. For an analysis of negotiations to bring the Papal Congress to Mantua see Ward Mahnke, 'The Political Career of a Condottiere Prince', pp.219-234.

<sup>82</sup> Belloni, 'Un lirico del Quattrocento', p.181.

In addition to his career as an administrator, Giovan Francesco Suardi was a poet who drew the inspiration for his works from the world around him.<sup>83</sup> His most frequent subject matter was the cities in which he lived and worked during the 1450s, and in particular his employers and his female acquaintances. The first signs of his poetic vein appeared in 1450 when still in Ferrara. When Leonello d'Este, in response to allegations of excessive revelry, placed a ban on the use of masks during the carnival period Suardi articulated the discontent of the city's student population in a sonnet addressed to Leonello, an appeal which failed to move the Este ruler:

Lassane transvestire  
E magior gratia non ci poi gia fare  
Che con la cappa non se puo ballare.<sup>84</sup>

A similar appeal in the form of a *canzone* was later presented by Suardi to Leonello's successor Borso, but the response was the same and the ban on masks remained in force.<sup>85</sup> This *canzone*, nonetheless, is worthy of some attention. Suardi addresses his subject in the second person and begins by lavishing praise upon Borso:

Principe excelso glorioso e digno  
Novo Alexandro o Cesar liberale  
Triumphante magnanimo e benigno [...].

He proceeds to tell Borso of the discontent prevalent in Ferrara, not just among the student population, caused by the recently reconfirmed law prohibiting the use of costumes and masks, and reminds Borso that this diversion has traditionally been allowed by the Este governors:

Tutta Ferrara el popolo principale  
Insieme con scolari si lamenta  
La plebe e mal contenta  
Del edicto che hai facto novamente [...]  
E questo al mio parere  
E nova lege e odiosa assai  
Contra lusança stata sempre mai.<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> Before Belloni's article of 1908, only a few of Suardi's poems had been published sporadically in nineteenth and early twentieth century anthologies. Nor does he appear to have been widely circulated in his own time, as the only known integral manuscript of his work is the one belonging to the Biblioteca Comunale di Mantova (Fig.44), containing one hundred and eighty poems, which was studied by Belloni and which dates from the sixteenth century. *Fragmenta vulgaria Io. Francisci Suardi*, Biblioteca Comunale di Mantova, MS 72. Examination of the Mantuan manuscript shows Belloni's transcriptions to be erratic and, occasionally, gravely erroneous.

<sup>84</sup> Mantua, BCM, MS 72, fols 7r-7v.

<sup>85</sup> Belloni, 'Un lirico del Quattrocento', pp.147-151; Faccioli, *Mantova. Le Lettere, II*, pp.66-69.

<sup>86</sup> Mantua, BCM, MS 72, fol 51v.



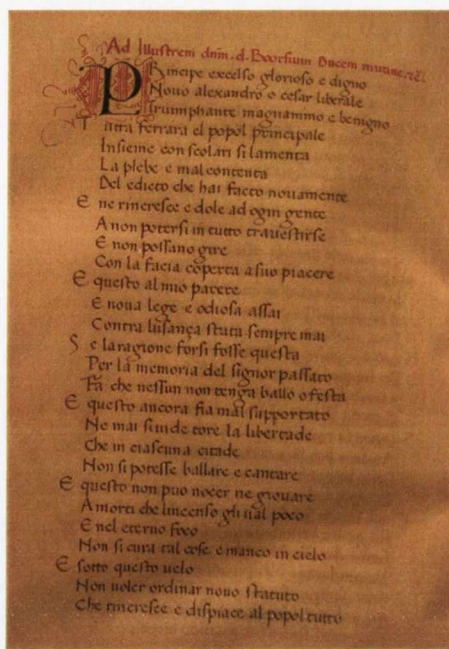


Fig.44: Biblioteca Comunale di Mantova, MS 72

Suardi then goes on to discuss the possible justifications for outlawing such activities and in each case offers a counter-argument as to why the revelry should be allowed to take place. While in the next part of the *canzone* Suardi acknowledges the recent passing of Leonello d'Este, he argues that nowhere else does the death of a *signore* lead to curbs on the right of the population to sing and dance, and he also states that it cannot affect the souls of the dead. He then concedes that in cities where the population is discontented with its rulers such occasions could spark disorder and revolt, before pointing out that Ferrara is a haven of peace and unflinchingly loyal to the Este dynasty, taking the opportunity to praise the ruling family for its virtuous government:

In altri luoghi si fa per suspecto  
 Dove sono le guerre o per le parte  
 Ma in questa terra non e tal diffecto  
 E sai con quanto ingiegno e con quante arte  
 I tuoi passati tanno conquistato  
 E mantenuto el Stato  
 Pacifico tranquillo fermo e certo.<sup>87</sup>

Suardi then offers his own reassurances to Borso that he has nothing to fear, before chastising him once again for his insistence on banning the festivities:

E ciascun di bon core  
 Te reverisse adora teme e ama

<sup>87</sup> Mantua, BCM, MS 72, fol 52r.

Ma assai desidera e brama  
La preciosa libertade e cara  
Che novamente hai tolta di Ferrara.

Such forthright language clearly reflects strong feelings in Suardi, but his indignation may also be a sign that the atmosphere in which he grew up in Mantua was considerably more liberal. He does, however, proceed to urge Borso to punish wrongdoers, but warns him not to place restraints upon the liberty of law-abiding citizens and their freedom to enjoy themselves:

E fa per la citade ben cercare  
E se tu puoi purgala de cativi  
Ma i boni non sian privi  
Del suo solazo e honesto piacere  
E pero non volere  
Privarli del arbitrio alor concesso  
Ma luomo lo usi come piace ad esso.

Suardi then devotes several lines to a discussion of the innocuous nature of wearing masks and donning disguises before addressing to Borso a further reproach:

Siche ciascun si duole  
E maraviglia assai per che cagione  
Non muti questa mala opinione.<sup>88</sup>

In the closing verse Suardi makes one final appeal for the ban to be lifted, returning to the subject of Borso's benignity. His final plea also encourages Borso to take the opportunity of showing himself to be a liberal ruler in this the first year of his reign. Although Suardi fails to speculate on the consequences of the new Este ruler standing firm in the face of public pressure, the final three lines of the canzone could very well be interpreted as an example of reverse blackmail:

E sempre mai a te si racomanda  
Che ti digni lasciarli transvestire  
E tu dei consentire  
Gratioso e benigno al suo volere  
Che possano vedere  
In nel principio di tua Signoria  
El gran valore e la tua cortesia.

Despite this second attempt by Suardi to convince the establishment otherwise, the ban on dressing up and wearing masks appears to have remained firmly in place. Perhaps Borso was unmoved by Suardi's verses and indifferent to the wishes of the

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<sup>88</sup> Mantua, BCM, MS 72, fol 52v.



people of Ferrara. Or perhaps Suardi was taking liberties in suggesting that the community at large was behind him. It is not unlikely that to the citizens of Ferrara the festivities of the students were indeed a source of exasperation and that Borso, in upholding the ban put in place by Leonello, had the backing of the large majority of his subjects.<sup>89</sup>

A large part of Suardi's surviving works are related to the offices he held around north-central Italy. In 1453 he wrote a somewhat self-glorifying though probably also jocose poem to commemorate his nomination as *podestà* of Massa Lombarda:

Io son pur quel predicto e honorevole  
potesta de la Massa di lombardi  
Misser Giovanfrancesco di Suardi  
cavaliere e doctor convenevole.<sup>90</sup>

In 1455 he composed a sonnet in which he praised the *signori* of Ancona before his departure from the city:

Magnifici Signori io ho tenuto  
Questa bachetta come mi fu data  
Dritta rotonda bianca immacolata  
Questi sei mesi, col celeste aiuto.<sup>91</sup>

And another to the *rettori* of Florence when he left in 1457:

Siati adunque veri imitatori  
Di bon romani e di lor santi gesti  
Sença ricordo e sençaltri protesti  
Magnifici et excelsi mei Signori [...]<sup>92</sup>

Also of interest is a nostalgic *canzone* he wrote upon his return to the *Mantovano* from Florence in 1457, in which, like Petrarch a century earlier, he evoked unhealthy images of the city and compared it rather unfavourably to the delights he had left behind in Tuscany:

Ne posso poner fine al mio dolore  
Mentre chio lassi i colli e lucide acque  
E torni al fango ale palude al basso.<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> Belloni, 'Un lirico del Quattrocento', p.151.

<sup>90</sup> Mantua, BCM, MS 72, fol 4v.

<sup>91</sup> Mantua, BCM, MS 72, fol 49v.

<sup>92</sup> Mantua, BCM, MS 72, fols 49v.

<sup>93</sup> Mantua, BCM, MS 72, fol 39r. On Suardi's time in Siena see James G. Lawson, 'New Documents on Donatello', *Mitteilungen des Kunsthistorisches Instituts in Florenz*, XVIII (1974), 357-362 (p.361). On Petrarch's comments see p.43 above.

Suardi goes on to describe the flowers and green fields of the Florentine countryside and to bemoan the rain in Mantua. Perhaps it would be a little unfair to imagine that such words were simply the articulation of his strong resentment at returning to Mantua. In 1453, following his arrival in Massa Lombarda, he wrote a sonnet in which he expressed his nostalgia for Ferrara, his home for over seven years:

Io ho cangiato una cita gentile  
In una vilaciola dolorosa  
E la mia casa, chera si gioiosa  
E divenuta un tristo pecorile.<sup>94</sup>

The sonnet goes on to lament the abandoning of the Emilian springtime and to describe the cold and windy conditions still prevalent in Massa, before quoting Boethius via Dante:

Per che non si puo aver magior dolore  
Che ricordarsi esser stato felice  
Ne la miseria fuor dogni speranza.<sup>95</sup>

He treated the same theme in a separate sonnet which he dedicated to Isotta d'Este (1425-1456):

Io t'abbandono o mia cita dolente  
Sença conforto e sença pace alcuna  
O mal destino e mia fera fortuna  
Tanto crudele e acerba e sconoscente  
Abandonata lascio la mia gente  
Matre sorelle e mie fratelli ognuna  
Vedova sconsolata in veste bruna  
In tante pene e tante amare stente  
Ma il doloroso e tristo cuor vi lasso  
Che da voi non potrebbe esser diviso  
Ne sa star meco se con voi non sono  
I mene vado e mi volgio ogni passo  
A riguardarti o mio sol paradiso  
Che con sospiri e pianti hora abandono.<sup>96</sup>

Suardi's most frequent subject matter, however, was neither the cities he left behind nor the governors who employed him. He preferred, instead, to eternalise in verse the ladies who fired his imagination during the course of his travels. Again

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<sup>94</sup> Mantua, BCM, MS 72, fol 38v.

<sup>95</sup> *Inferno* V, 121-123.

<sup>96</sup> Mantua, BCM, MS 72, fols 5r-5v.



his departure from Ferrara prompted reflections and, at the same time as he was writing the sonnets just mentioned, he also had in mind a woman in Ferrara whose identity remains obscure, but who was the motivation for disconsolate verses, clearly a poor imitation of Petrarch:

[...] Levomi col pensiero spesso a volo  
Dove ella si legiadra ballar suole  
E fa cantando nascer le viole  
I fiori e le rosette a si gran stuolo  
Dicio mi pasco poi che la fortuna  
Mi dilongato incarcerato e avvinto  
Chio non posso mirar pu qui begli occhi  
Vedovo sconsolato in veste bruna  
E di negro color ho il cor dipinto  
Aspectando la morte sol che scocchi.<sup>97</sup>

Suardi's travels were to bring him into contact with more subjects for his verses and it was during his spell in Florence that he was to meet another woman, Lodovica Sozzini, who would preoccupy him for several years. The closing lines of a poem he addressed to her with these words:

E chi e colei che cosi bella or mira  
Chel popol tutto par che vi sinchini  
Madonna Lodovica de Soccini.<sup>98</sup>

In the aforementioned verses in which the poet laments his return to the wet and flat *Mantovano* from the lush Tuscan hills, he also leaves us in no doubt that the lady who had obsessed him during his six months in Florence was central to his perception of this beauty:

Io mando i sospir mei tutti a quel colle  
Che madonna col sguardo riverdisse  
Quando e piu secco e carchasi di fiori  
E di rosette ove calca il bel pede  
E dove parla ride o gira gli occhi  
Ridono i prati le campagne ei sassi.<sup>99</sup>

Suardi's return to Tuscany in January 1458 brought about at least one further meeting with Lodovica but this time, although his feelings for her were still clearly

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<sup>97</sup> Mantua, BCM, MS 72, fol 20v.

<sup>98</sup> Mantua, BCM, MS 72, fol 34v. Lodovica was the daughter of the distinguished Siense judge and teacher Mariano Sozzini, who was the recipient of a celebrated letter written by Enea Silvio Piccolomini, one of his former pupils. See p.322 below.

<sup>99</sup> Mantua, BCM, MS 72, fol 22r.

very strong, the verses which he addressed to her were less idealistic and written in a more resigned tone:

[...] Lodovi che vogliate aver pietade  
O madonna crude amei tormenti  
Datime pace amei grammi tormenti,  
O chiaro fonte e specchio di beltade [...]  
Gratiosa madonna altera e bella  
Il vostro servo avoi si racomanda;  
Rendete pace a lalma tapinella  
A voi piangendo e sospirando forte  
Richiede gratia come amor comanda  
Dovel conduce preso a crudel morte.<sup>100</sup>

This desperate appeal to Lodovica appears to have been the last occasion on which Suardi addressed her in verse and his sojourn in Siena brought new loves into his life, most notably a lady by the name of Lucrezia, to whom he dedicated the following sonnet, based on classical and mythological references:

Lucrecia che ebbe a Roma el degno vanto  
Unde gli nacque poi lesser si bella  
Come volsero i cieli e la sua stella  
Rompendo quella pace e ocio santo  
E Progne e Filomena col suo canto  
Cassandra e Polisenia sua sorella  
Insieme con Medea la poverella  
A cui foe poi iasone ingrato tanto  
Queste fuor tutte belle e triumphale  
Se si da fede ala gran fama e al grido  
Di cui ne scrisse in alto stile e divo  
Ma una Helena novella, unaltra Dido  
Una Venere propria e naturale  
Daltra excellentia e questa di cui scrivo.<sup>101</sup>

Suardi's departure from Siena and subsequent marriage to Orsina in Mantua in May 1459 brought to an end his poetry dedicated to the women he idealised. Around this time he wrote a sonnet in a rather more pessimistic key, in tones of resignation at having finally been forced to concentrate on his new responsibilities and to renounce the free spirit of his earlier verses. The sonnet begins with Suardi directly addressing love and setting forth his accusations:

Orsina gionti dove vole amore  
Orsina presi e legati a suo modo  
Orsina mostro che non scocha a nodo  
Orsina demonstrato il nostro errore [...]<sup>102</sup>

<sup>100</sup> Mantua, BCM, MS 72, fol 19r.

<sup>101</sup> Mantua, BCM, MS 72, fol 3v.



It carries on in this vein before coming to a somewhat sardonic conclusion:

Orsina posto al collo il suo bel giogo  
Orsina confinati nelle sue mura  
Orsina qui legati in sempiterno.

Suardi clearly relished writing for the women who came into his life but, given that every poet had to have a woman, it is difficult to judge whether there was any real feeling in his verse; the fact that he wrote about several makes it even more difficult to gauge the strength of his sentiments. While poets never wrote for their wives, no poems or verses have emerged which he may have dedicated to Orsina before they married, which leads one to wonder if the marriage was thrust upon him by Lodovico and Barbara, given that by the time he returned to the *Mantovano* to assume a position of political importance he was almost forty years old. It would be mistaken, however, to assume that marriage brought to an end his versifying creativity and, to mark the birth of his first son the following year, he dedicated to Barbara a *canzone* entitled *Donatio pueri primogeniti ad Ill. d. d. Marchionissam Mantuae*. In the following passage Suardi reminds the marchesa that both he and Orsina have been raised as faithful subjects of the Gonzaga before commending the child to her care:

Questo di novo e nato in casa tua  
Cui nutriti cresciuti e alevati  
El patre insieme con la matre sua  
E li avi suoi si sono governati  
Sol del tuo pane gran tempo e pasciuti  
Si che non noi siam tenuti  
E obligati sempre esser tuoi servi  
Ondio ti prego che accepti e conservi  
Costui chio ti presento do e dono  
Per tuo si come io sono  
E sarò sempre mai mentre chio viva  
Eccellente mia diva  
Chio cedo a te tutte le mie ragione  
e tene facio libra donatione [...].<sup>103</sup>

Meanwhile, over the winter of 1459-1460, Mantua was hosting the Papal Congress convened by Pius II. In the midst of continuous diplomatic delegations Ippolita Sforza (1445-1488), daughter to the Duke of Milan, delivered an impressive oration

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<sup>102</sup> Mantua, BCM, MS 72, fols 34v-35r.

<sup>103</sup> Mantua, BCM, MS 72, fol 36v.

in Latin to the Pope and his retinue. Suardi may have been present when the fourteen year-old Ippolita spoke, given that he went on to write a *canzone* of two-hundred and sixty-nine verses in her praise. Conventionally, he draws comparisons between Ippolita and notable women from antiquity and, in a manner similar to that of his adulatory sonnets of the 1450s, Suardi praises the girl's beauty with seeming conviction but conventional images:

Che sio miro i begli occhi el gentil riso  
E le chiome rivolte in perle d'oro  
Con tante gemme e tanto altro thesoro  
Le suavi parole el dolce riso  
Parmi vedere in mezzo il paradiso  
Una vera angeletta [...] <sup>104</sup>

Ippolita was also the subject of a further *sestina* and a number of other sonnets by an evidently impressed Suardi.<sup>105</sup> Perhaps it was these verses, together with a probable meeting in Mantua during the Papal Congress, which prompted Francesco Sforza to offer Suardi the office of *podestà* in Como, an office which, as we have seen, he was forced to decline, having recently committed himself to the service of the Gonzaga following his return from Siena. It is not known if these verses were an effort by Suardi to ingratiate himself to Sforza or whether, like others around this time, he was genuinely impressed by the precocious Ippolita.<sup>106</sup>

Despite Belloni's lengthy article of 1908 in which he published many of the poet's works for the first time, Suardi has remained an obscure figure on the periphery of Quattrocento courtly literature. Perhaps this fate has been due in some degree to the difficulty noted by Faccioli in reconstructing his poetic programme.<sup>107</sup> His writings were produced almost entirely between 1450 and 1460, drawing inspiration, as we have seen from the sample of his works examined, from differing elements such as public feeling, love, painful separations, nostalgia and devotion to his employers. Pleasant enough to read, they have the tone of verses written by a poet laureate for courtly occasions. The responsibilities of marriage and fatherhood coincided almost simultaneously with and probably prompted the

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<sup>104</sup> Mantua, BCM, MS 72, fol 16r.

<sup>105</sup> Belloni, 'Un lirico del Quattrocento', pp.177-179.

<sup>106</sup> Ippolita Sforza was both admired for her beauty and renowned for her literary culture. See Gregory Lubkin, *A Renaissance Court: Milan under Galeazzo Maria Sforza* (Berkeley and London: University of California Press, 1994), p.25.

<sup>107</sup> Faccioli, *Mantova. Le Lettere, II*, p.77.



end of Suardi's poetic productivity. On a technical level, while Suardi has never been elevated to the status of the foremost poets of his era, critics have pointed to a series of qualities inherent in his works. Belloni, indeed, was the first to describe Suardi as a *rimatore facile e caldo* with "musicalità di accenti, varietà e vivacità di tavolozza, delicatezza d'immagini e sincerità e forza di sentimento." He also noted similarities in style and subject matter to the works of the Venetian poet Leonardo Giustinian (d.1446), whom Suardi may have read as a youngster in Mantua. While also acknowledging some grammatical irregularities such as the use of the singular verb form with a plural subject, Belloni is largely complimentary and concludes that, on the whole, Suardi successfully manages to eliminate colloquial elements and that his language is rich in "gemme toscane."<sup>108</sup>

In his re-evaluation of Suardi's works some sixty years later, Faccioli justified the use of Giustinian models for the expression of his individual feelings and diverse subject matter and, although he agreed with Belloni that Suardi's poetry was "non certo povera nè maldestra," he remained less convinced that the cohesion of his work was not compromised by differing linguistic influences inherited on his travels. Nonetheless, in Suardi's favour, Faccioli noted strong personal feelings in his poetry, even when it came to eulogising rulers, in such a way that his verses were not simply deferential and gratuitous praise.<sup>109</sup> Vittorio Rossi, in his authoritative history of Quattrocento literature, notes in Suardi "una certa originalità di spirito arguto, e delicatezza d'immagini e musicalità non volgare di ritmi", but stopped short of acknowledging him as a great poet.<sup>110</sup> De Robertis and Brambilla Ageno, meanwhile, draw comparisons between Suardi's verses and those by Francesco Arsochi, with whom he would have been acquainted in Siena.<sup>111</sup>

Whatever the qualities and shortcomings of Suardi's work, his verses chart the journeys, offices and passions of a Quattrocento diplomat over the course of an

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<sup>108</sup> Belloni, 'Un lirico del Quattrocento', pp.185-187.

<sup>109</sup> Faccioli, *Mantova. Le Lettere*, II, p.77, p.80 and p.84; Belloni, 'Un lirico del Quattrocento', p.176.

<sup>110</sup> Vittorio Rossi, *Storia letteraria d'Italia. Il Quattrocento. Ristampa dell'ed. 1933 riveduta e corretta con aggiornamento a cura di Rossella Bessi*. (Padua: Piccin Nuova Libreria, 1992), p.369.

<sup>111</sup> Domenico De Robertis, 'L'esperienza poetica del Quattrocento. La letteratura dell'Italia del nord. La situazione fuori Toscana', in *Storia della letteratura italiana. Il Quattrocento e l'Ariosto*, ed. by Emilio Cecchi and Natalino Sapegno (Milan: Garzanti, 1966), III, pp.567-570; Franca Brambilla Ageno, 'La prima ecloga di Francesco Arsochi e un'imitazione di Giovan Francesco Suardi', *Giornale storico della letteratura italiana*, CLIII, (1976), 523-548.

eventful decade. Although his father dictated from an early age that he would enter the legal and administrative sphere, Suardi is an example of how the value of a humanist education under Vittorino could complement a professional career and prove enriching in its own right. While his eulogies to cities and women may at times seem somewhat mechanical in structure and conventional in their imagery, they are pleasant enough to read. Other elements, such as the unfavourable comparison of the wet and muddy *Mantovano* to the lush Tuscan countryside, still prompt humorous reflection more than five centuries later.

### Filippo Nuvoloni

Unlike Arrivabene and Suardi, who as we have seen were Gonzaga employees whose literary works were a secondary activity, Filippo Nuvoloni was a courtier whose principal pursuit was writing. Largely forgotten until Zonta's book of 1908, Nuvoloni was born in 1441 either in Mantua itself or in nearby Poletto Mantovano before being taken by his family to Ferrara two months short of his second birthday.<sup>112</sup> His father Carlo, from an established Mantuan family whose members had occupied positions in the communal era, under the Bonacolsi and under the Gonzaga, as well as a range of episcopal offices, was himself a man of letters closely tied to Leonello d'Este and, since 1433, had held the position of Ferrarese ambassador to the Mantuan court.<sup>113</sup> After leaving for Ferrara with his family Carlo continued to correspond with both Gianfrancesco and Lodovico Gonzaga on a variety of political matters.<sup>114</sup> Filippo's mother Agnese was herself from Ferrara, daughter of the nobleman Bartolomeo Pendaglia, who in turn was granted Mantuan citizenship by Gianfrancesco Gonzaga in 1441.<sup>115</sup> The family, therefore, was equally at home both in Mantua and in Ferrara and for the duration of his life Filippo too was to divide his time between the courts of the Gonzaga and the Este dynasties.

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<sup>112</sup> On the life of Nuvoloni see Giuseppe Zonta, *Filippo Novoloni e un suo dialogo d'amore* (Modena: Provincia, 1905) and Rodolfo Signorini, 'Contributo alla biografia di Filippo Nuvoloni', *Civiltà Mantovana*, 35 (1972), 318-323. Signorini produces new documentation which confirms that Nuvoloni was born in 1441 and not, as Zonta concludes from his interpretation of the chronicler Schivenoglia, in 1436.

<sup>113</sup> Zonta, *Filippo Novoloni*, p.6; Lazzarini, *Fra un principe e altri stati*, p.390, p.399 and p.401; Faccioli, *Mantova. Le Lettere*, II, p.85. See also Antonio Mainardi, *Cenni storico-biografici intorno ad alcuni scrittori mantovani* (Mantova. Luigi Segna, 1863), p.6.

<sup>114</sup> Dennis E. Rhodes, 'Filippo Nuvolone of Mantua (1436-1478). A Supplement to the Work of Giuseppe Zonta', *Rinascimento*, 5 (1984), 291-298, pp.295-296.

<sup>115</sup> Signorini, 'Contributo', p.320.



Nothing has been recorded of Nuvoloni's early education, but if we are to assume that it began in Ferrara around the mid-1440s then there is every reason to suppose that it was imparted by Guarino Veronese. In 1450, however, Carlo Nuvoloni died and Agnese left Ferrara to return to Poletto Mantovano with the nine year-old Filippo and his three sisters, where they lived in rather precarious financial conditions.<sup>116</sup> Whether Filippo during the 1450s studied under Vittorino's successors in Mantua has not come to light. For the first news of Filippo we have to wait until 30 September 1460 when, in what was in many ways an early sign of his litigious personality, Nuvoloni wrote to the *podestà* of Ostiglia to express his displeasure at hearing that he had spoken of him unfavourably to Lodovico.<sup>117</sup> The nature of the *podestà*'s complaints is not revealed in the letter but, as we shall see, Nuvoloni's relations with authority were very often fraught with accusations and counter-accusations.

The chronicler Andrea Schivenoglia (c.1411-1484) described Nuvoloni in the following terms: "Lui si è bello, grando, balla volontera, con la lingua dize zo chel vuole, zoga voluntera, de li femini zo che lui ha el ge spende cortexe."<sup>118</sup> A handsome young man from a privileged background, fun loving, eloquent and with a weakness for pretty girls, it is not difficult to imagine how Nuvoloni frequently found himself in trouble. In September 1461 Nuvoloni appears to have been responsible to some degree for a young girl escaping from home with a sizeable part of her father's possessions. In response to a letter from Lodovico informing him of Bernardino da Poletto's determination to be compensated for the goods taken by his daughter, Nuvoloni pleads his innocence firstly to the marchese and then to Barbara, denying responsibility for having induced Bernardino's daughter to leave home and assuring them that none of the goods taken has come into his possession.<sup>119</sup> Again it is unclear to what extent Nuvoloni was involved in this episode but Lodovico and Barbara stood firm in their insistence that he

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<sup>116</sup> Zonta, *Filippo Novoloni*, p.8.

<sup>117</sup> Letter Nuvoloni to podestà of Ostiglia, Mantua, 30 September 1460, cited by Zonta, *Filippo Novoloni*, pp.13-14.

<sup>118</sup> Andrea Schivenoglia, *Istoria delle famiglie di Mantova*, Biblioteca Comunale di Mantova, MS II.2, n. 1019, f. 56r. Cited by Signorini, 'Contributo', p.319.

<sup>119</sup> Letter Nuvoloni to Marchese Lodovico, Poletto Mantovano, 3 October 1461, and letter Nuvoloni to Marchesa Barbara, Poletto Mantovano, 6 October 1461. Both letters published in Zonta, *Filippo Novoloni*, pp.15-16.

compensate Bernardino for the disappearance of his daughter and the missing items.

From a letter which he wrote to Barbara in 1464 we learn that Nuvoloni had been in Ferrara the year before.<sup>120</sup> Zonta suggests, and probably correctly, that for Nuvoloni 1463 must have been a year of further conflict and confrontation, given the tone of a letter he wrote to Lodovico from Poletto Mantovano on 16 January 1464, in which he vows to change his ways and promises the marchese that “mai più venga a la S.V. minima querela di me che con el tempo chonza ogni cosa.” In the same letter he also informs Lodovico of a new love interest and asks permission to come to visit him in Mantua.<sup>121</sup>

Only six weeks passed, however, before Nuvoloni was forced to turn to Lodovico once again. In a letter of 4 March 1464 he explains the difficult situation in which he now finds himself in Borgoforte, having come into conflict with the *giudice* Giovanantonio da Sacchetta over recently constructed sewers.<sup>122</sup> Later the same year another ongoing quarrel with a certain Pierantonio came to a head and once again Nuvoloni sought the favourable intervention of the marchese, describing in a letter of 11 November how he has had to pawn rings to appease the demands of his adversary. Perhaps Pierantonio was an associate of Giovanantonio, who is again mentioned in relation to forty *vilani* being sent to Nuvoloni's home. On 22 November Nuvoloni wrote to Lodovico once again, apologising for drawing him into these conflicts before mentioning a disagreement with two unnamed brothers.<sup>123</sup> During a visit to Ferrara at Christmas Nuvoloni offered his services to Borso d'Este, but the offer was declined and in April 1465 Nuvoloni again approached the Ferrarese *signore*, but once again Borso failed to grant him a position.<sup>124</sup> In what was clearly a turbulent period judging from the desperate

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<sup>120</sup> Zonta, *Filippo Novoloni*, pp.18-20; Rhodes, 'Filippo Nuvolone of Mantua', p.296.

<sup>121</sup> Letter Nuvoloni to Marchese Lodovico, Poletto Mantovano, 16 January 1464. Published in Zonta, *Filippo Novoloni*, pp.18-20.

<sup>122</sup> Letter Nuvoloni to Marchese Lodovico, Poletto Mantovano, 4 March 1464. Published by Zonta, *Filippo Novoloni*, p.22.

<sup>123</sup> Letters Nuvoloni to Marchese Lodovico, Poletto Mantovano, 11 November 1464 and 22 November 1464. Published by Zonta, *Filippo Novoloni*, p.23.

<sup>124</sup> Letter Nuvoloni to Duke Borso d'Este, Poletto Mantovano, 10 April 1465. Published by Zonta, *Filippo Novoloni*, p.24.



letters he wrote to Lodovico, the hope of a move to Ferrara, where his family was widely respected, appears to have been an attractive prospect for Nuvoloni.

Between 1465 and 1468 there is little news of Nuvoloni. During this period he probably continued to reside at the family holding in Poletto Mantovano. He was certainly in Poletto in early 1468, when another clash with authority again saw Lodovico drawn into Nuvoloni's affairs. On 16 April 1468 Giovanfrancesco Scaldamazza, *vicario* of Poletto Mantovano, wrote to Lodovico to inform him of "algune femmine che lui tene per fante e infame pubbliche," before going on to tell the marchese that when he had confronted Nuvoloni about his dubious guests he had initially pledged to get rid of them but, after much procrastinating, he had resorted to insults.<sup>125</sup> The *vicario* then describes how he recruited a group of men from the village to remove the women by force, prompting further unfulfilled promises and subsequent insults from Nuvoloni. On 19 April Nuvoloni received a letter in which Lodovico reprehended him, a letter to which he immediately replied, denying having insulted Scaldamazza, vouching for the integrity of his guests and describing the accusations made by the *vicario* as "chazate."<sup>126</sup>

Given these continuing and ever more damning accusations being levelled towards him in Poletto Mantovano, Nuvoloni continued to petition Borso d'Este for employment in Ferrara and, in late August 1468, his wishes were finally satisfied.<sup>127</sup> Borso placed Nuvoloni at Bolletta, bestowing on him the titles of *famigliare* and *aulico ducale*, together with a monthly salary of twelve lire.<sup>128</sup> The following year the position became permanent, by which time Nuvoloni had integrated fully into the lively Ferrarese courtly circle where ceremonious display was very much the norm. This was also the Ferrara of the teachers Battista Guarino and Lodovico Carbone (1430-1485) and of the writers Teofilo Calcagnini and Matteo Maria Boiardo (1441-1494). At this time Nuvoloni also forged a close friendship with Alberto

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<sup>125</sup> Letter Giovanfrancesco Scaldamazza to Marchese Lodovico, Poletto Mantovano, 16 April 1468. Published by Zonta, *Filippo Novoloni*, pp.26-27.

<sup>126</sup> Letter Nuvoloni to Marchese Lodovico, Poletto Mantovano, 19 April 1468. Published by Zonta, *Filippo Novoloni*, pp.27-29. See also Faccioli *Mantova. Le Lettere*, II, pp.87-89.

<sup>127</sup> Faccioli *Mantova. Le Lettere*, II, p.89.

<sup>128</sup> Zonta, *Filippo Novoloni*, p.29.

d'Este (c.1437-1502), bastard son of Niccolò d'Este, and Filippo della Tavola, who had visited Mantua in 1461 and was himself a worthy patron of letters.<sup>129</sup>

Nuvoloni was clearly not over-worked in his new position, judging from the evidence of his activities in Ferrara. At the age of twenty-seven he took the belated opportunity to study letters under the guidance of Battista Guarino and Lodovico Carbone and on 12 October 1468 he asked Lodovico Gonzaga to send to Ferrara three Greek texts, namely a Herodotus, a Homer and a *Suidas* encyclopaedia, in order that he might copy them for his two distinguished tutors. In the same letter he also reminds the marchese of the passion for letters which he has cultivated since childhood, giving us further reason to suppose that, following his family's return to the *Mantovano* in 1450, the young Nuvoloni may have studied under the likes of Ognibene da Lonigo and Platina.<sup>130</sup> Although there is no evidence of new petty disputes in Ferrara, Nuvoloni's lifestyle was probably far from exemplary: Zonta talks of extravagance and the accumulation of debts and in 1470 he was granted leave by Borso to return to Poletto Mantovano to settle some ongoing squabbles.<sup>131</sup> Nuvoloni was back in Ferrara by March 1471, in time to join the entourage accompanying Borso to Rome for the investiture of the *ducato* of Ferrara by Pope Paul II, formally declared at a ceremony in Saint Peter's on 14 April.<sup>132</sup> When Borso died in suspicious circumstances only four months later, a bitter dispute for succession broke out between Niccolò, son of Borso's brother and predecessor Leonello who had died in 1450, and Ercole, third brother behind the deceased Leonello and Borso. Like most of Alberto's associates, Nuvoloni numbered among Niccolò's supporters, so when on 20 August Ercole secured succession to the *ducato* Nuvoloni decided to flee Ferrara.<sup>133</sup> On 23 September Ercole issued a decree offering armistice to sympathisers of the vanquished Niccolò, giving them one month to return to Ferrara without fear of reprisal on the condition that they now swore loyalty to the new *duca*. In Piazza Castello on 24 November, some weeks after the deadline, a list of those who had declined the

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<sup>129</sup> Zonta, *Filippo Novoloni*, pp.30-31; Faccioli, *Mantova. Le Lettere*, II, p.89.

<sup>130</sup> Letter Nuvoloni to Marchese Lodovico, Ferrara, 12 October 1468 (ASMn AG, b. 1228 c. 732). Published by Zonta, *Filippo Novoloni*, p.34. See also Faccioli *Mantova. Le Lettere*, II, pp.89-90.

<sup>131</sup> Zonta, *Filippo Novoloni*, pp.35-36.

<sup>132</sup> Zonta, *Filippo Novoloni*, pp.37-38; Faccioli *Mantova. Le Lettere*, II, pp.90-91.

<sup>133</sup> On the succession of Ercole d'Este see Werner L. Gundersheimer, *Ferrara: The Style of a Renaissance Despotism* (New Jersey: Princeton, 1973), p.180.



offer to return was read out, and among those defined as “inimici e ribelli del duca Ercole [...] perchè non sono venuti in termine de le gride soprascritte” we find the name of Filippo Nuvoloni.<sup>134</sup>

Being considered among the “inimici e ribelli” of the new duke meant that by returning to Ferrara Nuvoloni would have risked being sentenced to death, but he somehow seems to have found favour with Ercole, who in January 1472 paid Anselmo Salimbene twenty-eight lire towards expenses for a journey to Rome undertaken with Nuvoloni.<sup>135</sup> Until 1477, however, there are very few indications as to where Nuvoloni resided and what he was doing, though it is highly likely that during this period he resided for the most part at Poletto Mantovano.<sup>136</sup> We know for certain that he was in Mantua in May 1474 to pronounce an oration in Latin to mark the visit of King Christian of Denmark, who rewarded him for his eulogy by nominating him a knight of the *Order of the Elephant* and bestowing upon him the title of *miles*.<sup>137</sup> A letter written by Nuvoloni to Lodovico on 1 April 1477 from San Benedetto reveals a new financial feud with his long-standing adversary Giovanantonio da Sacchetta: Nuvoloni asks the marchese to ensure that his belongings are not possessed and sold on by Gianfrancesco and pledges to satisfy all his creditors in due course.<sup>138</sup>

Perhaps during the 1470s Nuvoloni was becoming gradually more occupied with his military career, given that by September 1477 he had reached the rank of *comestabile* in the Venetian army, and was given command of troops in Friuli as the *Serenissima* sought to oppose the progress of the Turks into the heart of Europe.<sup>139</sup> In the same month, however, his forces were defeated at Ponte di Isonzo and Nuvoloni was among ten Venetian officials captured by the Turks and taken to Constantinople. The Venetians immediately despatched their envoy Tommaso Malipiero to negotiate their release and, at the same time, Nuvoloni’s cousin Carlo

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<sup>134</sup> Zonta, *Filippo Novoloni*, pp.38-39.

<sup>135</sup> Zonta, *Filippo Novoloni*, pp.46-47.

<sup>136</sup> Lazzarini, *Fra un principe e altri stati*, p.404.

<sup>137</sup> Rhodes, ‘Filippo Nuvolone of Mantua’, p.297; Rodolfo Signorini, ‘Le discours latin de Filippo Nuvoloni à Chretien I roi de Danemark, Norvège et Suède à Mantoue le 12 mai 1474’, *Genealogia et Heraldica*, (1980), 43-52, p.49.

<sup>138</sup> Letter Nuvoloni to Marchese Lodovico, San Benedetto, 1 April 1477. Published in Zonta, *Filippo Novoloni*, p.47.

<sup>139</sup> Zonta, *Filippo Novoloni*, pp.48-50; Faccioli *Mantova. Le Lettere*, II, p.93; Lazzarini, *Fra un principe e altri stati*, p.404.

de' Maffei set off on a long journey from Mantua to Costantinople.<sup>140</sup> On New Year's Day 1478 Carlo wrote to Lodovico from Dubrovnik, expressing his concern at the imminent dangers of his journey.<sup>141</sup> Despite his concerns, however, Maffei's mission was not a pointless one: for a sum of 2700 ducats he secured the release of Nuvoloni and nine of his companions, arriving back in Venice on a Florentine galley and with Malipiero at the beginning of May. This happy news was communicated by Nuvoloni himself in a letter written to Lodovico from Venice on 3 May.<sup>142</sup> In another letter five days later Nuvoloni proudly described to the marchese how, following his return, he had been lavishly received by the Venetian government "a la venetiana con la eloquentia loro, che fia impossibile scriverlo."<sup>143</sup>

These triumphant letters from Venice were to be the last written by Nuvoloni to Lodovico Gonzaga. On 11 June the marchese died at Goito, and the plague which was raging in the *Mantovano* was of an equally lethal intensity in Venice and had infected Nuvoloni. Having received from his mother a letter containing news of Lodovico's passing, on 15 June Nuvoloni expressed his condolences in a letter to Federico Gonzaga, without giving any indication of his own dire predicament.<sup>144</sup> The following day Nuvoloni lost his own six-day battle with the plague and died at the age of thirty-seven. The news was written to the new marchese by Carlo de' Maffei.<sup>145</sup>

Zonta, having found no evidence that Nuvoloni ever married and probably influenced by evidence of a promiscuous lifestyle, asserted that he had only a natural son named Carlo.<sup>146</sup> Having located his will, however, Signorini was able to demonstrate that Carlo was in fact Nuvoloni's legitimate son, born from his marriage to Zardina, daughter of the Cremonese nobleman Ponzino de' Ponzoni.

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<sup>140</sup> Zonta, *Filippo Novoloni*, pp.49-50; Faccioli *Mantova. Le Lettere*, II, p.93.

<sup>141</sup> Letter Carlo de' Maffei to Marchese Lodovico, Dubrovnik, 1 January 1478. Published in Zonta, *Filippo Novoloni*, p.50.

<sup>142</sup> Letter Nuvoloni to Marchese Lodovico, Venice, 3 May 1478. Published in Zonta, *Filippo Novoloni*, p.51. See also Faccioli *Mantova. Le Lettere*, II, p.93.

<sup>143</sup> Letter Nuvoloni to Marchese Lodovico, Venice, 8 May 1478. Published in Zonta, *Filippo Novoloni*, pp.51-52.

<sup>144</sup> Letter Nuvoloni to Marchese Federico Gonzaga, Venice, 15 June 1478. Published in Zonta, *Filippo Novoloni*, p.53.

<sup>145</sup> Letter Carlo de' Maffei to Marchese Federico Gonzaga, Venice, 16 June 1478. Published in Zonta, *Filippo Novoloni*, p.54. See also Faccioli *Mantova. Le Lettere*, II, p.94.

<sup>146</sup> Zonta, *Filippo Novoloni*, p.55.



An illegitimate daughter, Speranza, is also mentioned in the will.<sup>147</sup> Nuvoloni was remembered by Sparaviero Veronese in an epitaph which recalled among other things his capture by the Turks and his military achievements:

Splendidus hic tegitur Nuvolona e stirpe Philippus  
Gloria militae: Thespiadumque decus.  
Turcorum capto, cui saeva pepercerat ira  
Sceptus ab innumero quum fuit hoste miser  
Hunc rapuit Lachesis vix nuper ab hoste reversum  
Tempore quo fuerat vivere dulce magis.  
Nulla fides: pietasve juret: nil inclyta virtus,  
Nil captivorum turba redempta ducum.  
Ossa licet jaceant: licet umbra quieverit astris  
Perpetuo in terris nomine vivus erit.<sup>148</sup>

In his introduction to the early Mantuan printed edition of the *Commedia* in 1472, the Gonzaga tutor Colombino Veronese, who was also the editor, dedicated the work to Filippo Nuvoloni.<sup>149</sup> After a remarkable comparison with Virgil in the opening lines, Colombino goes on to mention unspecified works by Nuvoloni, informing us that he has composed verses in *volgare*, in Latin and even in Greek, as well as prose in *volgare* and in Latin. If we are to believe what Colombino writes in his dedication, then very few of Nuvoloni's works have survived. In *volgare* there are two surviving autograph manuscripts: a *Canzoniere* in the British Museum and a *Polisofo* without sonnets in Padua. In Genoa there is a seemingly later copied version of the *Polisofo* with sonnets, while in Modena we find two sonnets dedicated to the painter Andrea Mantegna included in a collection of poetry by various writers and edited by Felice Feliciano. The only evidence of any work in Latin is a small number of printed editions of the oration written for King Christian of Denmark in 1474.<sup>150</sup> Of the verses in Greek mentioned by Colombino there is no trace whatsoever.

Most of Nuvoloni's surviving work may have been produced in Ferrara under the patronage of Alberto d'Este after 1468, but he had clearly begun to write as a youngster in Mantua. In a letter to the Marchesa Barbara of 11 November 1461

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<sup>147</sup> Signorini, 'Contributo', p.321.

<sup>148</sup> Zonta, *Filippo Novoloni*, p.56.

<sup>149</sup> Mainardi, *Cenni storico-biografici*, pp.3-4; Zonta, *Filippo Novoloni*, pp.41-46. On Colombino see p.246 above.

<sup>150</sup> For precise bibliographical details of these manuscripts and surviving prints of the *Oratio* see Signorini, 'Contributo', p.318. On the antiquarian Felice Feliciano and his relations with Mantegna and Mantua see Giovanni Mardersteig, *Feliciano Veronese* (Verona: Alphabetum Romanum, 1960).

Nuvoloni, presumably in reaction to comments which were circulating, refers to himself in the third person, stating that “ciò che continuamente dittasse e componesse fosse d’amore e in cose vane” (sic) assuring her that his works were in no way immoral. To strengthen further his moral self-defence, he also informs Barbara that he has written “alchune cose circha il morale e spirituale,” which he now sends her in order that she may verify that his writing is indeed worthy and honourable.<sup>151</sup> In the aforementioned letter from Poletto Mantovano of 16 January 1464, in which Nuvoloni asks permission to visit Lodovico in Mantua and promises the marchese that there will be no further feuds, he includes the following sonnet, informing Lodovico that “io ho trovata una amorosa qui e hogli facto questo sonetto”:

Una altra Vener bella e un chiaro sido  
con duo lumi da far lieto Saturno  
e con un viso angelico et eburno  
da inspaurir la possanza di Cupido,  
E’ porsa e nata qui d’uno aureo nido  
sì lucente chel di fare nocturno  
e di notte splendor chiaro e diurno  
e Pluto in ciel regnar e Jove in strido.  
E con due stelle coruscante in fronte  
con ventillante chiome in or nodate  
che i raggi fina al ciel lustra e risplende.  
M’ha posto in seccho, e m’ha nutrito in fonte  
né mi lassa spartir, né mi si prende,  
né crudeltà mi mostra né pietate.<sup>152</sup>

Although Nuvoloni neither openly asks Lodovico for employment as a poet nor dedicates any poetry to the Gonzaga, the very fact that he chose to include a recently composed sonnet in a letter in which he also states his desire to visit Mantua indicates that he was keen to show the marchese what he could offer. The sonnet itself is largely unremarkable, with predictable and conventional imagery, and metrically mediocre.

The London *Canzoniere* manuscript (Fig.45) gives no indication of the year in which it was written and various attempts by critics have failed to date the work

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<sup>151</sup> Letter Nuvoloni to Marchesa Barbara, Poletto Mantovano, 11 November 1461. Published in Zonta, *Filippo Novoloni*, p.13 and p.18.

<sup>152</sup> Letter Nuvoloni to Marchese Lodovico, Poletto Mantovano, 16 January 1464. Published by Zonta, *Filippo Novoloni*, pp.18-20.



precisely.<sup>153</sup> The metaphor of *donna* and *stella* in the introduction to the *Canzoniere* led Zonta to suggest that Nuvoloni composed the work around the same time as the sonnet included in the letter to Lodovico of 16 January 1464.<sup>154</sup> Faccioli, however, citing the dedication to Alberto d'Este, suggests that the *Canzoniere* was written following the poet's move to Ferrara, between 1468 and 1471, while conceding that many of its contents may have been written beforehand.<sup>155</sup> Taking both hypotheses into consideration, it is not unlikely that for Nuvoloni the *Canzoniere* represented a continuously expanding store in which to house his poetic production and that updated versions were distributed to different people at different times. The London manuscript, which contains a long dedication to Alberto d'Este in the form of a *canzone*, followed by eleven further *canzoni* and one hundred and ten sonnets, was transcribed and partially published by Zonta as an appendix in his book of 1905.<sup>156</sup>

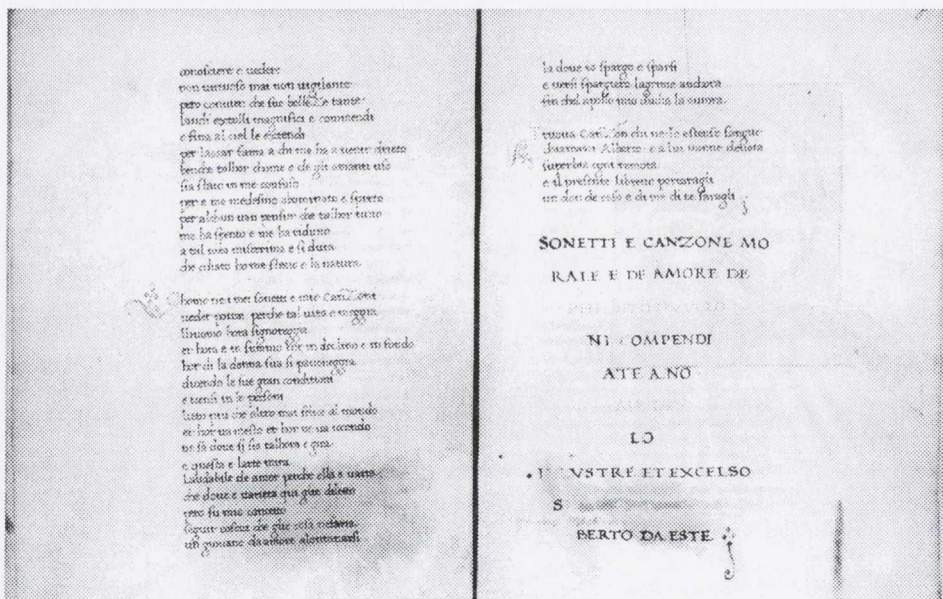


Fig.45: British Library, Add. 22335

The dedicatory *canzone* opens with praise lavished upon Alberto:

Splendore e gloria eterna immortale  
 triumpho e fama e honor di la tua prole  
 in giesti et in parole

<sup>153</sup> *Sonetti e Canzone morale e de amore de Philippo Nuvoloni, compendiate a nome de lo illustre et excelso signore misere Alberto da Este*, British Library, Add. 22335.

<sup>154</sup> Zonta, *Filippo Novoloni*, p.21.

<sup>155</sup> Faccioli *Mantova. Le Lettere*, II, p.95.

<sup>156</sup> Zonta, *Filippo Novoloni*, pp.111-125.

in costumi e in virtú vero camino [...],<sup>157</sup>

before dedicating to his patron what is about to follow:

[...] e intitularti in rima el mio latino  
disposto ho il cuore: e de i mei frutti darti  
Signor per consolarti [...].

The second verse begins with Nuvoloni placing Alberto alongside Venus and Apollo as the addressees of his poetry:

Che chome già inochar solevo in versi  
or venere or apollo or altro idio  
in qualche iscriver mio  
non vo piu lor, ma te mio Alberto invocho [...],

giving as his reason for doing so the desire to confide his sentimental tribulations to Alberto, “*experto de amor.*” The source of the poet’s agitation is once again the star-woman metaphor alluded to in the letter addressed to Lodovico and he goes on to explain at length to Alberto how the unnamed woman, incarnated from a star, came before him at a time when he was young and inexperienced in love. Appropriating a basic feature of the *dolce stil novo*, illustrated explicitly by Dante when defining Beatrice as “*una cosa venuta di cielo in terra a miracol mostrare*”, Nuvoloni talks of the extreme intensity of the feelings his subject provoked and expresses his conviction that she had been born among divinity and sent to earth as a mediatrix between God and man, before returning to her origins on high:

[...] che nata enfra li dei  
dignossi di venir qua giuso in terra  
non per farsi mortal: ma per far fede  
di quella eterna sede  
e del alta belta che li si serra  
e tornar poi la dove era venuta  
piu bella e piu compiuta  
e non terrena o transitoria cosa  
ma celeste immortale e gloriosa.<sup>158</sup>

Nuvoloni then describes how his encounter with this divinely conceived woman has imbued him with a new spirituality, to such an extent that he now harbours his own ambitions for fame and glory through his poetry, in which he aspires to convey heavenly elements:

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<sup>157</sup> BL, Add. 22335, fols 2r-2v.

<sup>158</sup> BL, Add. 22335, fols 3v-4r. Dante’s words appear in the sonnet “*Tanto gentile e tanto onesta pare*”, *Vita Nova*, XXVI.



[...] reprobando a miglior vita me indusse  
e mostrommi a far versi e dire in rima  
e la natura prima  
perturbando spezò, ruppe e concusse  
e drizonmi la mente e la memoria  
a voler fama e gloria  
fina a dir con la lira al improvviso  
e cose recitar del paradiso.

Before the end of the introduction, however, Nuvoloni gives the first indication of the negative aspects of his experience, most notably the miserable conditions brought about by the woman's departure:

[...] benche talhor chome e degli amanti uso  
sia stato in me confuso  
per e me medesmo abominato e spreto  
per alchun van pensier che talhor tutto  
me ha spento e me ha ridotto  
a tal vita miserrima e sì dura  
che odiato ho me stesso e la natura.<sup>159</sup>

The content of the *Canzoniere* itself is repetitive and mediocre, as Nuvoloni reiterates the themes set out in the introduction with very few moments of poetic intensity. While Zonta notes the use of Petrarchan models, in particular the metric forms of sonnets and *canzoni*, with metaphors taken to extremes, Faccioli identifies an attempt, albeit unsuccessful, to reconcile platonic ideals with Christian tradition, the result of which places the woman in an ambiguous position between beauty and divinity. This confusion, argues Faccioli, is reflected in Nuvoloni's own conflicting desires both to portray the celestial sanctity of his subject and to secure earthly glory and posthumous fame for himself. Nonetheless, while he presents earthly beauty as a gift from heaven, Nuvoloni also demonstrates an awareness of the dangers inherent in such unrestrained love.<sup>160</sup> Faccioli does concede, however, that the poetic activity of Nuvoloni is largely tied to the Petrarchan style, with little energy of its own.<sup>161</sup>

The theme of the divinely conceived woman sent to earth is once again the central theme in another of Nuvoloni's works, the *Polisofo* or *Dialogo d'amore*. The work survives in two extant manuscripts: one in Genoa, which contains an interlude of

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<sup>159</sup> BL, Add. 22335, fol 4v.

<sup>160</sup> Zonta, *Filippo Novoloni*, p.58 and pp.62-63; Faccioli, *Mantova. Le Lettere*, II, pp.96-101.

<sup>161</sup> Faccioli *Mantova. Le Lettere*, II, p.111.

thirty-two sonnets, and one in Padua, which does not.<sup>162</sup> The differences between the two manuscripts and the lack of date on either means that the contextualisation of the work has proved problematic. For Zonta the tone and subject matter excluded the possibility that the *Polisofo* was composed for Lodovico Gonzaga or Borso d'Este, the former having married well before Nuvoloni could have written it and the latter never having married at all, suggesting instead that the first version of the work was presented to Alberto d'Este and dedicated to the woman he loved, while the second version with corrections was dedicated to the protonotary Francesco Gonzaga before he became cardinal in February 1461.<sup>163</sup> In an article some fifty years later, Perosa expressed his uncertainty that the *Polisofo* was initially written for Alberto.<sup>164</sup> Not only does the Paduan manuscript contain no sonnets, notes Perosa, but nor is it introduced by a dedication. He thus suggests that the version now in Padua was for Nuvoloni's personal use and probably put together over an extended period of time. Perosa convincingly argues that the dedication *Ad illustrem et reverendissimum dominum* in the Genoa manuscript was probably initially written for the young Gonzaga prelate during the early 1460s in a manuscript now lost, and that the Genoa edition was a revised one supplemented by the thirty-two sonnets and presented to Alberto while Nuvoloni was living in Ferrara between 1468 and 1471. Finally, to add further weight to his theory, Perosa notes the addition of Greek citations in the Genoa manuscript, probably a result of Nuvoloni's studies in Ferrara under Battista Guarino and Lodovico Carbone.

The plot of *Polisofo* is quite straightforward: Polisofo, the teacher, realises that his pupil and *signore*, Arcofilo, is troubled by the pains of love. Following an initial reluctance to confide in his teacher, Arcofilo goes on to tell of the dreadful torment he is enduring after having made the acquaintance of Archiginia, a woman sent by the gods and endowed with every possible exceptional quality. After listening in awe to the description of the woman, Polisofo is anxious to see her for himself and at the end the two embark on a journey to visit her.<sup>165</sup> The dialogue between the two is lengthy and extremely tedious, even though the themes it treats are limited and identical to those of the *Canzoniere*. The thirty-two sonnets spoken

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<sup>162</sup> Signorini, 'Contributo', p.318.

<sup>163</sup> Zonta, *Filippo Novoloni*, pp.69-70.

<sup>164</sup> A. Perosa, 'Filippo Nuvolone', *Rinascimento*, 8, (1957), 297-300, pp.298-300.

<sup>165</sup> Zonta, *Filippo Novoloni*, pp.64-67.



by Arcofilo appear out of place and often out of context, leading one to imagine that Nuvoloni was simply looking for a means of publicising them.

Zonta notes that the extraction of a confession about tormented love, in this case prompted by Polisofo's interrogation of Arcofilo, has its origins in Boccaccio's *Filostrato* in which Pandaro induces his friend Troilo to reveal his obsessive love for Criseida.<sup>166</sup> Zonta goes on to give examples of other authors to have used this device, including Leon Battista Alberti in his *Deifira*, Enea Silvio Piccolomini in his *Pestellino* and *Storia di due amanti* and Angelo Poliziano in the introduction to *Orfeo*.<sup>167</sup> The *Polisofo*, argues Zonta, is a rhetorical enlargement of the episode in Boccaccio's *Filostrato* and, while in no way original or sophisticated, Nuvoloni's dialogue reflects in many ways transitional Quattrocento theories on love.<sup>168</sup> Following on from the chivalric ideals of the *Trecento*, Nuvoloni wrote at a time in which the neoplatonic ideals of love were yet to reach maturity, the last years of the so-called *secolo senza poesia*. Faccioli notes in the *Polisofo*, despite Nuvoloni's best attempts to create a coherent theory on love, confused elements drawn from a range of sources, including Cicero's metaphysical love, the Florentine *stil novo*, Petrarch, the courtly tradition of chivalry and the emerging neoplatonic school, resulting in a lack of intimacy required for an effective synthesis of thought.<sup>169</sup>

Two further sonnets by Nuvoloni have survived thanks to the diligence of the Veronese antiquarian Felice Feliciano. A manuscript edited by Feliciano, containing works by many contemporary poets and now in Modena, includes a pair of sonnets written by Nuvoloni for Feliciano's great friend Andrea Mantegna, Lodovico Gonzaga's court painter from 1459.<sup>170</sup> Zonta suggested that Nuvoloni composed the sonnets in Ferrara in 1469, when Mantegna came to the Este court to visit the Emperor and receive the title of *Count Palatine*.<sup>171</sup> Following a more detailed study of the Modena manuscript Signorini, though unable to date the

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<sup>166</sup> Zonta, *Filippo Novoloni*, pp.71-73.

<sup>167</sup> Zonta, *Filippo Novoloni*, pp.74-81.

<sup>168</sup> Zonta, *Filippo Novoloni*, p.82.

<sup>169</sup> Faccioli *Mantova. Le Lettere*, II, p.107.

<sup>170</sup> Rodolfo Signorini, 'Due sonetti di Filippo Nuvoloni ad Andrea Mantegna' in *Studi in onore di R.Spongano* (Bologna: M.Boni, 1980), pp.165-172.

<sup>171</sup> Zonta, *Filippo Novoloni*, p.35; Signorini, 'Due sonetti'. On Renaissance Ferrara and the Este rulers see Gundersheimer, *Ferrara: The Style of a Renaissance Despotism, La corte e lo spazio, Ferrara estense*, ed. by Giuseppe Papagno and Amedeo Quondam (Rome: Bulzoni, 1982) *Storia di Ferrara. Volume VI: il Rinascimento: situazioni e personaggi*, ed. by Adriano Prosperi (Ferrara: Corbo, 2000).

sonnets precisely, placed the period of composition between December 1461 and June 1465. Firstly, Signorini notes that in his introduction to the anthology the editor states that the copying is being carried out “per mane di me Felice Feliciano negli anni de Christo 1460 del mese de luglio.” The dedication by Nuvoloni to Mantegna, however, as Signorini also notes, describes the artist as “compatre del Reverendissimo cardinale mantuano,” meaning that the sonnets must have been composed after 18 December 1461, when the seventeen year-old Francesco Gonzaga was named cardinal by Pius II.<sup>172</sup> The position of the two sonnets in the manuscript, along with some other late entries at the end of a body of works arranged alphabetically by poet, indicates that they were added by Feliciano well after the time when he had begun copying in July 1460. Signorini notes that after a sonnet written by Feliciano himself for the Mantuan medallist Cristoforo di Geremia the editor has added the note “Florentie anno gratie MCCCCLXV. Quinto Kalendas Iulias,” which demonstrates that some of the works in the manuscript were added in 1465, five years after Feliciano had begun to copy his manuscript.<sup>173</sup> Nor is there any evidence that the two sonnets were indeed conceived together though, as Signorini again points out, the use of “dunque” in the third last line of the second sonnet seems to pull everything together, as Nuvoloni presents Mantegna with a series of “frotule e rime,” possibly a version of the *Canzoniere* as it stood in the early to mid-1460s.<sup>174</sup>

The poems, both of which are *sonetti caudati*, are worthy of discussion.<sup>175</sup> The first one follows Feliciano’s introduction “P(er) philippum nuolonum vir(um) clar(um) ad Andream mantegnam pictorem.”

Convere' che 'l figliol di Citarea  
me avesse vinto e colligato el cuore  
s'io dovesse esser condecete auttore  
scriverti in rima, o glorioso Andrea.  
Ma quel dolce che in te sempre pareo  
mentre insieme eravam, quel grande amore  
m'insegna farti reverenza e onore  
e a te scrivendo tutto mi ricrea.

<sup>172</sup> Signorini, 'Due sonetti', p.169.

<sup>173</sup> Signorini, 'Due sonetti', p.168.

<sup>174</sup> Signorini, 'Due sonetti', p.170.

<sup>175</sup> An interesting feature of these sonnets is the coda attached to the end of the standard Petrarchan fourteen-line model, an addition which could be interpreted as vanity on the part of the poet. The coda comprises one seven-syllable line followed by two eleven-syllable lines, with the rhyme pattern of e-f-f in relation to the rest of the sonnets.



Sì che tu, fonte d'ogni inzegno altiero  
 in cui natura ben quell'arte puose  
 sopra gli ambi roman Parasi e Apelle  
 a te mie rime drizan el sentiero  
 seco portando mille altre mie cose  
 forse indigne a te, dotto, a me alte e belle.  
 E fa' che ti sian quelle  
 ioconde e grate come io te le mando  
 tua persona gentil sempre affettando.<sup>176</sup>

Addressed to Mantegna in the second person, the direction of this first sonnet is not difficult to follow. In the opening lines Nuvoloni states that he is unworthy to render the painter justice in his poetry, before explaining in the second part that, despite these shortcomings, such is the love and affection he has for Mantegna that the impulse to compose the rhymes has been irresistible. Nuvoloni then proceeds to place Mantegna's talent above that of the Roman painters of antiquity, Parrhasius and Apelles; favourable comparison with famous figures of the ancient world was a common means of flattery in the Quattrocento, in relation to artists as well as to writers, as we have seen from Colombino Veronese's dedication of the first printed Mantuan *Commedia* to Nuvoloni.<sup>177</sup> The last part of the sonnet presents the rhymes to Mantegna and expresses Nuvoloni's hope that they will be appreciated.

Feliciano introduces the second *sonetto caudato* with the words "El dito ph(ilippo) havendoli p(re)sentato un libro pien di Rime e frotule in dono":

O sopra tutti gli altri incliti e insegni  
 roman passati di alta fantasia  
 che ebbe mai a ritrar modo né via  
 pien di sublimi e natural disegni  
 o specchio, o lume dei perfetti ingegni  
 di ognun ch'è ora e che fu o che mai fia  
 salito in ciel ne l'alta ierarchia  
 veder quei visi angelicati e degni  
 per dimostrar che quel che la natura  
 non sol natura, ma l'eterno Idio  
 ha fatto in cielo e tu 'l figuri in terra  
 con tuoi colori, ogni inclita figura  
 che par che l'alma seco si conserra  
 e monti e valli et ogni fiume e rio.

<sup>176</sup> Signorini, 'Due sonetti', pp.171-172.

<sup>177</sup> On Colombino, Nuvoloni and the first printed Mantuan *Commedia* see p.246 above. On Parrhasius and Apelles see Pliny the Elder, *Natural History: A Selection*, ed. by John F. Healy, (London: Penguin, 1991), pp.330-334.

A te dunque mando io  
frotule e rime, qual luntan ti abraza  
se non sì degne, almen con lieta faza.<sup>178</sup>

This second poem, notes Signorini, is less poetically valid and contains none of the affection, sincerity or powerful images of friendship present in the first. Familiar expressions now make way for simple adulation, as Nuvoloni reiterates the painter's superiority to the ancient Roman painters and credits Mantegna with depicting in his works an earthly beauty matched only by God's divine creations in Heaven. While the first sonnet recalls a period of past friendship, the second closes with the expression "qual luntan ti abraza," which indicates a separation. Since Mantegna's presence in Mantua appears to have been almost constant between December 1461 and July 1465, the dates between which it has been established the sonnets must have been composed, it is not unlikely that the separation came about due to Nuvoloni's absence from court, either during a prolonged stay at Poletto Mantovano or perhaps during the poet's journey to Venice and Ferrara in 1463.

The two sonnets composed by Nuvoloni for Andrea Mantegna are for the most part unremarkable. Faccioli, somewhat cruelly but probably also truthfully, has suggested that the sonnets are notable for the fame of their subject rather than for the talent of their author.<sup>179</sup> Whatever the disproportionate respective merits of Nuvoloni and Mantegna, what is of interest here is the relationship forged between Mantegna, an artist by trade but also an obsessive antiquarian and man of letters, and Nuvoloni, a poet courtier who in the two sonnets which he addresses to Mantegna praises the painter's works, albeit on a superficial level and using set models. The episode represents a moment of interface between two protagonists from different fields in Mantua, the court painter and the local poet, and is evidence of a lively court in which the fusion of differing cultural currents was not uncommon.

As well as the two sonnets addressed to Andrea Mantegna, another work by Nuvoloni has survived thanks to the prestige of the dedicatee. On 12 May 1474 Nuvoloni, having accepted the invitation of Lodovico and Barbara, pronounced an

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<sup>178</sup> Signorini, 'Due sonetti', p.172.

<sup>179</sup> Faccioli *Mantova. Le Lettere, II*, p.90.



oration in Latin to mark the visit to Mantua of King Christian of Denmark, whose wife, Dorothy of Brandenburg, was Barbara's sister.<sup>180</sup> The oration is known today thanks largely to an edition printed in Mantua the same year by Pietroadamo de' Micheli and rediscovered in Venice at the beginning of the twentieth century, a discovery, according to Rhodes, which ensures for Nuvoloni a place in the literary history of Mantua.<sup>181</sup>

The oration was the only work by Nuvoloni printed during the fifteenth century and its context is well documented.<sup>182</sup> Having been in Rome to receive the papal rose from Sixtus IV, Christian was on his way back to Denmark, having received money and privileges from several Italian rulers. The adulation reserved for Christian in Italy was at the time unprecedented for the visit of a northern monarch, commemorated not only in various archives and in Nuvoloni's oration, but also in paintings in Malpaga and in the church of Santo Spirito in Rome, in Mantegna's *Camera degli sposi* and on a medal by the Mantuan Bartolomeo Melioli.<sup>183</sup> The Mantuan chronicler Schivenoglia informs us that the king had stopped in Mantua some seven weeks earlier, while on his way south to Rome:

Adij 22 de marzo 1474 vene in Mantoa el re de Dacia [...] el qual re andaxia a Roma per avire con ordene la chorona [...].<sup>184</sup>

After a physical profile of Christian and his company of two hundred horsemen, Schivenoglia goes on to describe the efforts made by the Gonzaga to welcome the king and his entourage:

A questo re el sior mes. lo marchexo de Mantoa ge mandoe in chontra tuta la nobiltade de corte soa [...] poij introe dentro de Mantoa et era con baldachino aparechiato con moltij dotorij, chavalerij e zudexi e se ge fe honore grando [...].

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<sup>180</sup> Signorini, 'Le discours', Faccioli, *Mantova. Le Lettere, II*, pp.93-94; Rhodes, 'Filippo Nuvolone of Mantua', pp.297-298.

<sup>181</sup> Rhodes, 'Filippo Nuvolone of Mantua', pp.297-298. On Pietroadamo and the printed edition of Nuvoloni's oration see pp.233-234 above.

<sup>182</sup> Giuse Pastore, ed., *Schivenoglia Andrea. Cronaca di Mantova dal 1445 al 1484. Trascritta ed annotata da Carlo D'Arco* (Mantua: Edizioni Baldus, 1976). See also bibliography in Signorini, 'Le discours', pp.49-51.

<sup>183</sup> Signorini, 'Le discours', p.44.

<sup>184</sup> Pastore/Schivenoglia, *Cronaca di Mantova*, p.46.

Nor were the efforts to impress the visiting monarch restricted to the Gonzaga and their courtiers, as the whole town became involved in the general euphoria of hosting such a distinguished visitor. The following day, continues Schivenoglia,

[...] foe fato le più belij boteghij per Mantoa che mai foxeno fate et foe mexe fora denanze deij garzarij panij intregghij de lana cercha 5000; ma questo foe fato per mostrare la richeza de la tera a questij todeschij.

And finally:

Faria gran fadiga a dire et scrivere lo honore che ge fece a lo re lo marchexo de Mantoa.

Although Schivenoglia mentions nothing of the Danish monarch's second visit to Mantua in May, it would appear that a similarly lavish reception was organised, the focal point of which was to be Nuvoloni's Latin oration. Exactly why Nuvoloni, a controversial personality at the best of times, was commissioned to write and deliver the oration is open to speculation. Rhodes suggests that the approach was probably instigated by Barbara to impress her illustrious brother-in-law with a show of local talent in an act of diplomacy. Moreover, adds Rhodes, the invitation after many years away from the Mantuan court to deliver the oration is proof of the esteem in which the marchesi held Nuvoloni's talents as a writer and a Latinist.<sup>185</sup> Faccioli too considers the commission as evidence that Nuvoloni was highly thought of by Lodovico and Barbara while Signorini believes that Lodovico probably considered Nuvoloni to be competent enough in Latin to impress the king.<sup>186</sup> Another possibility may be that, on his way south at the end of March, Christian intimated to Lodovico that he would visit Mantua once again during his return north and, with little over six weeks to prepare another suitable reception, Lodovico perhaps turned to Nuvoloni in nearby Poletto Mantovano to compose the oration simply because he was available and had sufficient competence in Latin.

As in the *Polisofo*, in his oration to King Christian Nuvoloni follows a formula already mapped out.<sup>187</sup> Reasonably well written though by no means original, the oration emphasises the contrast between previous barbarian rulers to have invaded

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<sup>185</sup> Rhodes, 'Filippo Nuvolone of Mantua', p.297.

<sup>186</sup> Faccioli *Mantova. Le Lettere*, II, p.93; Signorini, 'Le discours', p.46.

<sup>187</sup> Faccioli *Mantova. Le Lettere*, II, p.95.



Italy and the magnanimous and Christian monarch now among them. Rome, having once been set ablaze by the invading rabble, now embraces the northern king as her new emperor.<sup>188</sup> Christian is praised beyond measure over all other monarchs and referred to as “Caesar Augustus.”<sup>189</sup> Nuvoloni also deals with some other issues in the oration; as well as alluding to the happiness and honour of Lodovico brought about by the visit of the king and their family relationship, Nuvoloni, in what Signorini considers to be a humanist swipe at the established nobility, embarks on a long discussion of the merits of succession secured by a monarch’s virtue as opposed to his material privileges, and he highlights the supremacy of honours won over honours inherited. He also mentions his own career as a man of arms and how he has achieved nobility through his own efforts.<sup>190</sup>



Fig.46: Bartolomeo Melioli, Medal of King Christian of Denmark

The oration was delivered to King Christian in the *Loggia di Cesare*, a part of the *Palazzo Ducale* complex no longer identifiable, in the presence of the Gonzaga family, their courtiers and a variety of prominent figures from the leading Mantuan families. The monarch seems to have appreciated the efforts of Nuvoloni, as Pietroadamo’s printed edition of 1474 tells us that, after having delivered it, Nuvoloni “creatus est miles cum magno applausu.”<sup>191</sup> The following week, in a

<sup>188</sup> Signorini, ‘Le discours’, p.47.

<sup>189</sup> Signorini, ‘Le discours’, p.45.

<sup>190</sup> Signorini, ‘Le discours’, pp.47-48.

<sup>191</sup> Faccioli *Mantova. Le Lettere, II*, p.95.

letter of thanks to his sister-in-law for the reception accorded, Christian refers to Nuvoloni as “militem nobis dilectum.”<sup>192</sup> Critics have been less enthusiastic about Nuvoloni’s oration. Rhodes criticises its “flowery and adulatory language” and, like Faccioli, points to its lack of originality.<sup>193</sup> Signorini, while acknowledging that the oration is nothing more than a eulogy, does, however, argue that from this work it is clear that Nuvoloni was a writer of some competence.<sup>194</sup>

While Rhodes maintains that, although scarcely studied, the life and works of Filippo Nuvoloni contain much of interest, Faccioli believes that his few surviving works amount to too little evidence for a proper evaluation to be made, especially with regards to his use of the classical languages as alluded to by his contemporary Colombino Veronese.<sup>195</sup> Apart from the oration for King Christian and a brief introduction to the *Polisofo*, defined by Zonta as being technically poor, we have no other evidence of Nuvoloni’s writings in Latin, while, as has been noted, nothing at all which he may have written in Greek has come to light.<sup>196</sup> Because of this Nuvoloni has tended to be judged solely on his surviving works in *volgare*: the London *Canzoniere*, the *Polisofo* and the two sonnets written for Mantegna. Written in a language defined by Zonta as “il tipo ibrido della lingua ferrarese,” these works, as we have suggested, are largely unoriginal, both in form and content.<sup>197</sup>

Apart from the commission to write the oration for King Christian of Denmark, Nuvoloni was never officially employed by the Gonzaga marchesi. When in Poletto Mantovano Nuvoloni lived rather like a lord and, when in Ferrara, enjoyed the close friendship of Borso and Alberto d’Este and the protection of the court. His connections with Lodovico and Barbara, notes Lazzarini, were amicable without being exceptionally close and it is not unlikely that, given Nuvoloni’s confrontational personality and his tendency to draw the Gonzaga into his personal disputes, the marchesi were keen to keep a diplomatic distance.<sup>198</sup> As was the case with other figures I have examined thus far, Nuvoloni maintained an

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<sup>192</sup> Letter Christian to Marchesa Barbara, 18 May 1474. Cited in Signorini, ‘Le discours’, p.45.

<sup>193</sup> Rhodes, ‘Filippo Nuvolone of Mantua’, p.297; Faccioli *Mantova. Le Lettere, II*, p.95.

<sup>194</sup> Signorini, ‘Le discours’, p.47.

<sup>195</sup> Rhodes, ‘Filippo Nuvolone of Mantua’, p.294; Faccioli, *Mantova. Le Lettere, II*, p.94.

<sup>196</sup> Zonta, *Filippo Novoloni*, p.57.

<sup>197</sup> Zonta, *Filippo Novoloni*, p.63.

<sup>198</sup> Lazzarini, *Fra un principe e altri stati*, p.403.



amiable correspondence with Barbara.<sup>199</sup> The Mantuan archives also contain many letters written by Nuvoloni from Ferrara between 1463 and 1471 and while some, such as that addressed to Lodovico of 2 September 1468, are little more than supplications for financial assistance, others are of more interest, such as that of 12 October already examined in which he asks the marchese to send two Greek texts to Ferrara.<sup>200</sup>

## Conclusions

Giovanni Pietro Arrivabene, Giovan Francesco Suardi and Filippo Nuvoloni are not names ever likely to appear alongside those of the literary giants of the Italian Quattrocento. Indeed, were it not for the largely unheralded work of a handful of scholars including Chambers, Belloni and Zonta respectively over the past century, the modest works of these three representatives of Mantuan literary activity might have disappeared without trace. Yet each of the three figures offers elements of interest to the wider picture of Mantua and its position within the broader context of the Renaissance. Each was born into a family which had served the Gonzaga dynasty to a greater or lesser degree and each studied under some of the most renowned pedagogues of the period. Be it Arrivabene the secretary, Suardi the diplomat or Nuvoloni the litigious courtly writer, each in his own way continued and intensified the family tradition of devotion to the *signori* of Mantua and, while Arrivabene's letters and treatises, Suardi's personal verses and Nuvoloni's poetic works may have been composed largely away from Lodovico's court, each considered himself first and foremost to be Mantuan.

Giovanni Pietro Arrivabene, in many ways, was Mantuan by birth alone. Following his education in Milan under Francesco Filelfo, his professional career comprised twenty-four years in the service of Francesco Gonzaga, initially in Pavia while his patron was still only Protonotary and then in Rome after he became Cardinal. Following the death of Cardinal Francesco in 1483 Arrivabene continued to prosper in the Curia, culminating in his nomination as Bishop of Urbino in 1491. Despite seldom returning to his native city, his correspondence with Lodovico and

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<sup>199</sup> Rhodes, 'Filippo Nuvolone of Mantua', p.296. See also sections in this thesis on Marasca, Arrivabene and Suardi.

<sup>200</sup> Letter Nuvoloni to Marchese Lodovico, Ferrara, 2 September 1468 (ASMn AG, b. 1228, c. 729) and letter Nuvoloni to Marchese Lodovico, Ferrara, 12 October 1468 (ASMn AG, b. 1228 c. 732).

especially Barbara testifies to a strong bond with the marchesi, and the civic pride which he felt in being Mantuan is all too clear from the epitaph which he himself composed. Although he produced no literary work of exceptional quality, his humanist credentials earned him the recognition and friendship of some of the foremost writers of the period, his letters earned the admiration of his correspondents and his conscientiousness, strong moral qualities and devotion to duty earned him various offices and prestigious diplomatic duties. The fact in itself that he was competent in Greek is testimony to his stature, while fervent activity as collector, copier and editor of manuscripts was coupled with patronage of art and architecture both in Mantua and in Urbino. All things considered, though he never worked at the court of the Gonzaga rulers in the city of his birth, Giovanni Pietro Arrivabene must go down as one of the most accomplished Mantuans of the Quattrocento.

Unlike Arrivabene, who as we have seen was, strictly speaking, Mantuan only by birth, Giovan Francesco Suardi was not born in Mantua yet was educated by Vittorino da Feltre and spent much of his life in the service of the Gonzaga, both directly and indirectly. Although most of his poetic activity was produced away from the Mantuan court, Suardi was clearly a product of the climate established by Vittorino. His legal career, far from extinguishing a passion for letters cultivated under the charge of Vittorino, provided the life experience and subject matter for a dynamic and diverse poetic programme. The visit of the Emperor to Ferrara in 1452 and resulting conferral of the *laurea* was in many respects a stroke of good fortune for Suardi but, when Borso d'Este propelled him into a legal career with a first position in Massa Lombarda at the age of thirty, he proved more than capable of meeting the challenge, securing further positions in Ancona, Urbino, Florence, Siena and Como. Both devoted and competent as an unofficial representative of the marchese, the tone of his letters is formal but familiar. After accepting Lodovico's call to return to the *Mantovano*, where he was initially responsible for matters in Ostiglia, Suardi's crowning recognition was his nomination as *podestà* of the city in 1466.

Suardi's poetry was in every sense empirical: he drew his subject matter from events and people which directly affected his life, from the ban on masks in



Ferrara to the *signori* of Ancona, from his various prestigious appointments to the rain and mud of the *Mantovano*. If driving every poet there is a dominant female figure then for Suardi this was Lodovica, for whom his verses reached an intensity which he never again matched. His lively subject matter, coupled with a technical competence undoubtedly conceived under the guidance of Vittorino, make of Suardi's poetry a colourful chronicle charged with genuine feelings of a brief but eventful career.

Although largely a mediocre one, Filippo Nuvoloni, unlike Arrivabene and Suardi, was by profession a man of letters, a life-style afforded him by the long established Mantuan roots of his father's family and the noble Ferrarese lineage of his mother. The unremarkable quality of his few surviving works lead one to imagine that perhaps little would be known about him at all were it not for Colombino's flattering introduction to the *Commedia*, Schivenoglia's memorable description and the sonnets composed for Andrea Mantegna. His life was divided between Mantua and Ferrara and his education rooted in both courts. His extravagant lifestyle and fraught relations with authority prompted frequent rebukes from Lodovico and Barbara, the marchesi proving far less tolerant of the misdemeanours of Nuvoloni than of those of their equally confrontational court painter, Mantegna, for whom Lodovico defused many potentially explosive situations. Following a succession of turbulent confrontations in the *Mantovano* during the 1460s, Nuvoloni eventually secured a position at the court of Borso d'Este. These favourable conditions, however, were to be short-lived, with Borso dying in 1471 and being succeeded by the less sympathetic Ercole, while only seven years later, following his capture and release by the Turks, Nuvoloni was to be struck down by plague.

None of the works briefly discussed in this chapter merits a place in an anthology of the finest literary productions of the Quattrocento but Giovanni Pietro Arrivabene, Giovan Francesco Suardi and Filippo Nuvoloni do, I firmly believe, warrant some recognition in any thesis examining cultural activity at the court of Lodovico Gonzaga. Each acted as an interface between Lodovico and other *signori*, republican governments or the Church and Papacy, and the study of each reveals channels of communication between the marchesi and some of the foremost literary, artistic and political figures of the age. The result of their combined

production does not, unfortunately, include a Mantuan literary masterpiece. It does, however, offer valuable information, new perspectives and fascinating fragments of interest with regard to Lodovico and his relations with a host of renowned figures. The final chapter will now examine the Mantuan involvement of four humanists who, unlike the three just discussed, are unanimously considered to be among the most prominent literary figures of the entire Renaissance.





## CHAPTER EIGHT

### LODOVICO AND THE MAJOR HUMANISTS

Like those of his peers in the neighbouring northern principalities of Milan and Ferrara, as well as that of his good friend and childhood classmate Federico da Montefeltro in Urbino, Lodovico's network of scholarly acquaintances included some of the most renowned Italian humanists of the Quattrocento. This chapter will explore the nature of the marchese's involvement with three such figures: the pioneering Hellenist and pedagogue Francesco Filelfo, the remarkable Enea Silvio Piccolomini who as Pope Pius II put Mantua on the map by choosing it as the venue for his Papal Congress on 1459-1460 and Leon Battista Alberti, the archetypal Renaissance man with whom Lodovico enjoyed a particularly cordial and productive association. Finally, the figure of Angelo Poliziano will be discussed in relation to Mantua and to Cardinal Francesco Gonzaga, though without any evidence linking him directly to the marchese. In conclusion, it will be argued that the involvement of these figures with Mantua at the time of Lodovico bear further testimony to the literary culture of the marchese and his court.

#### Francesco Filelfo

Although only a marginal figure for Mantua, Francesco Filelfo (1398-1481) was a renowned humanist of the Quattrocento whose writings and travels brought him into close though only occasional contact with Lodovico Gonzaga. Born to a poor family at the turn of the century in Tolentino in the Marches, Filelfo was a scholar defined by Sapegno as the most famous of the "avventurieri della penna", in other words those humanists willing to travel for money, working as teachers, either as tutors to the children of princes or as readers in the universities, but also writing praise for recompense.<sup>1</sup> As a writer, on the other hand, he was as controversial as he was skilful, as capable and likely to pen invective as he was to lavish praise. A literary figure whose many patrons afforded him a degree of intellectual autonomy, Filelfo's confrontational personality ensured that his enemies remained as plentiful as those he counted amongst his friends. Having spent almost an entire decade

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<sup>1</sup> Natalino Sapegno, *Compendio di storia della letteratura italiana. Vol.I. Dalle origini alla fine del Quattrocento* (Florence: La Nuova Italia, 1961), p.305.



collecting manuscripts in Constantinople during the 1420s, Filelfo must be considered to have been ahead of his time, returning to Italy with an unrivalled mastery of Greek at a time when such knowledge was extremely rare, before continuing to write extensively in the language. Since the arrival of Manuel Chrysoloras in Florence in 1397, indeed, there had been a persistent thirst throughout the peninsula for an increased understanding of Hellenist studies.

It was indeed in Florence in 1429, three decades after the departure of Chrysoloras, that Filelfo was appointed to the chair of Greek first occupied by that illustrious predecessor. Almost inevitably, Filelfo's stay in Florence was a troubled one. His open support of the Albizzi party during the politically volatile years of the early 1430s, when Florence was at war with Lucca, brought him into conflict with the increasingly potent Medici clan. Indeed, in a letter to his former pupil Enea Silvio Piccolomini written six years later, Filelfo claims that an attempt was made on his life on the morning of 18 May 1433, as he was walking to the studio to deliver his lectures.<sup>2</sup> In the wake of the ascent to power of Cosimo de' Medici in 1434, Filelfo moved firstly to Siena and then, in 1438, to Milan, where he was given employment in the first instance by Filippo Maria Visconti and, subsequently, by Francesco Sforza. Although patrons recognised that Filelfo was a gifted scholar with a rare knowledge of Greek, frequent conflicts with his employers, often a result of his obstinate personality, hindered him from securing long-term and meaningful work.<sup>3</sup>

In the introduction to her book on Filelfo, Diana Robin challenges the hitherto prevalent notion of him as a court humanist used by Sforza as a tool to justify tyranny, offering instead a re-evaluation in the light of his literary works and the relationships he cultivated with his patrons.<sup>4</sup> Far from being a publicist for Sforza

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<sup>2</sup> Letter Filelfo to Enea Silvio Piccolomini, 28 March 1439. Published in Diana Robin, *Filelfo in Milan* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), pp.169-172.

<sup>3</sup> Robin, *Filelfo in Milan*, p.6. Following Filelfo's departure from Florence the Medici employed Carlo Marsuppini (1399-1453) in the chair of Greek. See Eugenio Garin, 'La letteratura degli umanisti', in *Storia della letteratura italiana*, ed. by Emilio Cecchi and Natalino Sapegno (Milan: Garzanti, 1966), II, 1-353, pp.116-118.

<sup>4</sup> Robin, *Filelfo in Milan*, pp.3-4. For less flattering analyses of Filelfo and other humanist courtiers see Lauro Martines, *Power and Imagination: City-States in Renaissance Italy* (New York: Knopf, 1979), pp.191-214 and Eugenio Garin, 'L'età Sforzesca dal 1450 al 1500,' in *Storia di Milano*, 16 vols (Milan: Fondazione Treccani degli Alfieri per la Storia di Milano, 1953-1966), VII, pp.541-597. For a collection of essays on the life and works of Filelfo see *Francesco Filelfo nel quinto centenario della morte:*

or any other potentate, Robin argues, Filelfo neither openly praised nor opposed his patrons. His observations, frequently ironic, are very often woven with hostility and mockery. Without the benefits enjoyed by priests or men of property, Filelfo depended exclusively on his numerous patrons and yet, in maintaining these relationships, enjoyed far greater autonomy, albeit less security, than that enjoyed by clients of single patrons.<sup>5</sup> Rossi, indeed, notes that Filelfo chose not to take orders because he believed he could chart a more lucrative career precisely by working for multiple patrons.<sup>6</sup>

Although Mantua does not seem to have figured all that largely in his ambitions, several factors unquestionably facilitated contact between Filelfo and the Gonzaga family from the mid-1430s. The most straightforward of these was his residence in Milan, close to Mantua both geographically and, for the most part, politically and diplomatically.<sup>7</sup> Even before the rule of Lodovico, Filelfo was a regular correspondent of Gianfrancesco Gonzaga and it is possible, Luzio and Renier argue, that the first marchese and the humanist were introduced by Vittorino da Feltre, tutor at the Mantuan school since 1423 and erstwhile colleague of Filelfo in Venice.<sup>8</sup> A second consequence of Filelfo's employment at the Milanese court during the 1440s was his acquaintance with another branch of the Gonzaga family in the form of Lodovico's estranged brother Carlo.<sup>9</sup> For Carlo's *condotta* with the Milanese Republic in 1449, indeed, Filelfo penned a celebratory oration, while

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*atti del XVII Convegno di studi maceratesi, Tolentino, 27-30 settembre 1981* (Padua: Antenore, 1986). See also Eugenio Garin, 'La letteratura degli umanisti', pp.118-121.

<sup>5</sup> Robin, *Filelfo in Milan*, pp.4-6.

<sup>6</sup> Vittorio Rossi, *Storia letteraria d'Italia. Il Quattrocento. Ristampa dell'ed. 1933 riveduta e corretta con aggiornamento a cura di Rossella Bessi*. (Padua: Piccin Nuova Libreria, 1992), p.52.

<sup>7</sup> On Mantua's military alignment at different times with Milan and Venice see Elizabeth Ward Mahnke, 'The Political Career of a Condottiere Prince: Ludovico Gonzaga, 1444-1466' (unpublished doctoral thesis, Harvard University, 1974). The proximity of Mantua to Milan also appears, on occasion, to have resulted in sporadic appearances at both courts of the little known Spanish poet, Giovanni da Valladolid. See Emilio Motta, 'Giovanni da Valladolid alle corti di Mantova e Milano (1458-1473)', 'Giovanni da Valladolid alle corti di Mantova e Milano (1458-1473)', *Archivio Storico Lombardo*, serie II, anno XVII, VII, (1890), 938-940.

<sup>8</sup> Alessandro Luzio e Rodolfo Renier, 'I Filelfo e l'umanesimo alla corte dei Gonzaga,' *Giornale storico della letteratura italiana*, 16, (1890), 115-217, p.165. The authors are unable to corroborate their assertion with documentary evidence, though they refer to letters which demonstrate close ties between the two humanists and confirm that Filelfo entrusted the education of several of his sons to Vittorino in Mantua. On Vittorino and the Casa Giocosa see pp.115-134 above.

<sup>9</sup> On the feud between Lodovico and Carlo see Leonardo Mazzoldi, ed., *Mantova. La Storia, II. Da Ludovico secondo marchese a Francesco secondo duca* (Mantua: Istituto Carlo d'Arco per la Storia di Mantova, 1961), pp.7-13.



further praise was reserved for him in the *Sforziade*, an epic work written over the following two decades.<sup>10</sup>

During the thirty-four years of Lodovico's rule, Filelfo was a frequent correspondent and occasional visitor to the Mantuan court. While it must be acknowledged that a large proportion of his letters were little more than appeals for money, on several occasions the issues discussed moved beyond the realms of the humanist's seemingly constant precarious financial plight, enabling us to gauge not only the extent to which the marchese valued Filelfo's work, but also to what degree the latter esteemed Lodovico as a learned ruler capable of appreciating his scholarship.

A letter of 8 January 1451 demonstrates that Filelfo's relationship with Lodovico was not simply that of a humanist seeking patronage. In this document, addressed to Jacopo da San Cassano, former tutor at the Mantuan school, the marchese reveals that Filelfo has requested to borrow a book on logic which had belonged initially to Vittorino da Feltre, before being inherited by Jacopo.<sup>11</sup> The esteem in which both Lodovico and Barbara held Filelfo's abilities as a humanist and orator is clear in a letter written some eight years later, in which the marchesa commissions from him an oration to be delivered by her son Francesco, the future cardinal, in the presence of the pope during the Congress due to get underway two and a half months later.<sup>12</sup> Clearly keen to oblige, Filelfo sent a flattering letter of reply from Milan twelve days later, enclosing the oration for Francesco.<sup>13</sup> Filelfo also attended the Congress in person, in his role as orator to the Duke of Milan.<sup>14</sup>

An overwhelming proportion of the letters exchanged between Filelfo and the marchese during the 1460s, a period of exceptionally acute financial difficulty for

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<sup>10</sup> On Filelfo's praise of Carlo Gonzaga see Luzio e Renier, 'I Filelfo', pp.166-167 and Robin, *Filelfo in Milan*, p.62.

<sup>11</sup> Letter Lodovico to Jacopo da San Cassano, Mantua, 8 January 1451 (ASMn AG, b. 2883 Lib. 15 f. 3r).

<sup>12</sup> Letter Barbara to Filelfo, Mantua, 7 March 1459 (ASMn AG, b. 2886 Lib. 35 f. 82v). Published in Luzio e Renier, 'I Filelfo', p.171.

<sup>13</sup> Letter Filelfo to Barbara, Milan, 19 March 1459 (ASMn AG, b. 1620). Published in Luzio e Renier, 'I Filelfo', pp.53-54.

<sup>14</sup> Letter Vincenzo della Scalona to Barbara, Milan, 6 September 1459 (ASMn AG, b. 1620 c. 712). Vincenzo informs the marchesa that Filelfo will give an oration in Mantua in the presence of the Pope.

the former, particularly after the death of his principal patron Francesco Sforza in 1466, testify to almost incessant requests for money by the humanist, with Lodovico oscillating uncomfortably between apologetic refusal and limited benevolence.<sup>15</sup> In early 1473, however, there is some evidence of an interesting trade of Greek verses by the two. A eulogy sent by Filelfo to Lodovico was mentioned initially in the eighteenth century by Bettinelli and in the nineteenth century by Luzio and Renier.<sup>16</sup> Although, unfortunately, no copy of this eulogy has survived, that it was written by Filelfo and dedicated to the marchese is beyond question, as is apparent from a letter of 19 February of the same year, in which Federico Gonzaga mentions to his father some recent correspondence from Zaccaria Saggi, the Mantuan envoy in Milan, together with which he had forwarded twenty Greek verses composed by Filelfo.<sup>17</sup> Perhaps surprisingly, Federico implies indirectly that Lodovico, though of course he would have studied no little Greek under the guidance of his old tutor Vittorino da Feltre, is unable to appreciate the verses in their original form, informing the marchese that he intends to have them translated by Pietro Tribaco, who at that time was tutor to the Gonzaga children.<sup>18</sup> A mere three days later, Federico sent his father the translated verses, accompanied by a letter in which he makes known Tribaco's willingness to compose further verses with which to reply to Filelfo's.<sup>19</sup>

The *Sforziade*, as has been mentioned, was Filelfo's chief literary accomplishment. An epic Latin poem spanning nine books, it was published in stages between 1455 and 1461. There are eight known extant manuscripts of the *Sforziade* but, although widely circulated during the writer's lifetime, there has never been a published edition.<sup>20</sup> Knowledge of the work has been unsatisfactorily diffused by what Robin

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<sup>15</sup> Robin notes that Sforza was far from appreciative of Filelfo, and that the humanist's plight in Milan worsened still in 1466, when the duke's death removed what little security he had enjoyed there. With the climate in Rome too uncertain, Filelfo appealed to other possible patrons, including Lodovico. See Robin, *Filelfo in Milan*, pp.82-85 and p.138.

<sup>16</sup> Saverio Bettinelli, *Delle lettere e delle arti mantovane* (Mantova, Errede di Alberto Pazzoni, 1774), p.33; Luzio e Renier, 'I Filelfo', p.65. I have been unable to locate the letter and verses in the Mantuan archives.

<sup>17</sup> Letter Federico Gonzaga to Lodovico, Mantua, 19 February 1473 (ASMn AG, b. 2101 c. 400).

<sup>18</sup> On Pietro Tribaco see p.152 above.

<sup>19</sup> Letter Federico Gonzaga to Lodovico, Mantua, 22 February 1473 (ASMn AG, b. 2101 f. 403).

<sup>20</sup> Manuscripts of the *Sforziade* are kept in the Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana in Florence, in the Biblioteca Trivulziana and in the Biblioteca Ambrosiana (two manuscripts) in Milan, in the Biblioteca Casanatense in Rome, in the Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana and in the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris. Some excerpts are also housed in the Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana in Venice.



calls the misconceptions of Filelfo's nineteenth-century critics.<sup>21</sup> It has usually been referred to as a celebration of the military accomplishments of Sforza who, having been employed as a *condottiere* by Filippo Maria Visconti and having been granted the hand in marriage of his daughter Bianca Maria, ascended to the position of Duke of Milan in 1450. One of the main thrusts of Robin's study, however, is her assertion that the *Sforziade*, though dedicated by Filelfo to his main patron, was in actual fact always intended for wider and more erudite consumption.<sup>22</sup> His target audience, Robin contends, rather than being the type of *condottiere* mercenary so often reviled by the author, would have been exalted princes of arms and letters such as Lodovico Gonzaga and his erstwhile companion at the Casa Giocosa, Federico da Montefeltro, Duke of Urbino. She also suggests that fellow professional humanists, on reading the *Sforziade*, would recognise that Filelfo, far from praising Sforza, was in actual fact broadcasting veiled criticism of him.<sup>23</sup> As early as 1453, during his tour of some of the princely courts of the peninsula, including Mantua, Rimini, Urbino and Naples, Filelfo began to circulate instalments of the *Sforziade*, and did so for a further twenty years. During this visit to Mantua in the summer of 1453, Filelfo promised Lodovico verses in the *Sforziade* in exchange for a contribution of two-hundred and fifty ducats to his daughter's dowry, an offer which, according to Luzio and Renier, the marchese was happy to accept.<sup>24</sup> In 1455, meanwhile, writing the fifth book of another work, the *Odae*, and clearly still in search of employment, Filelfo made a further direct appeal for work to the princes he had visited two years earlier.<sup>25</sup>

As with other humanists, he often emphasised to his patrons that he had the power to give praise or infamy, and that they had to pay for the former or risk the latter. Garin notes that this became a frequent tactic of the ageing Filelfo who, having discovered that his encomia had real monetary value, gave popes and princes the opportunity to purchase tributes which would ensure that they were

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See Robin, *Filelfo in Milan*, pp.251-252. Given that few of Filelfo's works have been published, they will be referred to in Robin's volume.

<sup>21</sup> Robin, *Filelfo in Milan*, p.60. Robin is critical of the treatment of the *Sforziade* by critics such as Burckhardt, Voigt and Symonds, while acknowledging Rosmini as the one scholar of the period to have known the poem well.

<sup>22</sup> Robin, *Filelfo in Milan*, p.7 and pp.59-60.

<sup>23</sup> Robin, *Filelfo in Milan*, p.4 and pp.59-60. Luzio e Renier, 'I Filelfo', p.169.

<sup>24</sup> Luzio e Renier, 'I Filelfo', p.169.

<sup>25</sup> Robin, *Filelfo in Milan*, p.85.

looked upon kindly both by their contemporaries and by subsequent generations.<sup>26</sup> On the other hand, failure on the part of a potential patron to respond favourably could, of course, result in Filelfo turning honey to poison in an act of retribution. The work in which Filelfo reserves most adulation for the marchese, however, is the *Psychagogia*, composed during the years of hardship following Sforza's death in 1466. The writer introduces a fresh and direct plea for sponsorship, framed within fifty-eight lines of Latin verse in elegiac meter, by recalling Lodovico's munificence towards three other scholars of Greek, namely Vittorino da Feltre, Guarino Veronese and Giovanni Aurispa.<sup>27</sup> Eager to flatter his reader and at the same time rekindle his enthusiasm for Hellenist studies, Filelfo praises the marchese for being the only hope of the muses, an Ares in war and a Heracles in body and heart. Some fifteen pages later, the writer turns his attentions once more to Lodovico, constructing forty-four rather blunt lines in Sapphics in which, in exchange for financial relief, he promises to compose poems which will immortalise his glory and magnanimity.<sup>28</sup>

Cardinal Francesco Gonzaga was also singled out for attention in the *Psychagogia*, written at around the same time as Filelfo began to ask the marchese to recommend him to his son in Rome.<sup>29</sup> Perhaps it is no coincidence that it was precisely in this period, following the death of Pius II, his erstwhile pupil and, latterly, vociferous opponent, that Filelfo turned his attentions to a possible career in the Roman Curia under Paul II. Such had been the disappointment of Filelfo in the face of repeated refusal by his former pupil to employ him in the Curia that he marked Pius's death in 1464 with lines of invective so intense that both he and his son Mario were temporarily jailed.<sup>30</sup>

In contrast to what he wrote about Lodovico while he was alive, Filelfo's regrettable proclivity for speaking unkindly of the deceased resurfaces in a letter he

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<sup>26</sup> Eugenio Garin, 'La letteratura degli umanisti', p.119.

<sup>27</sup> Robin, *Filelfo in Milan*, p.219. There is no published edition of the *Psychagogia* but it is discussed by Robin. The reference given by Robin is Book 2, fols. 27v-29v.

<sup>28</sup> Robin, *Filelfo in Milan*, p.221. The reference given by Robin is Book 2, fols. 44v-46.

<sup>29</sup> Robin, *Filelfo in Milan*, p.223. The reference given by Robin is Book 2, fols. 62v-63v. See also letter Filelfo to Lodovico, Milan, 7 August 1466 (ASMN AG, b. 1623 c. 191). The letter is published in Luzio e Renier, 'I Filelfo', p.60.

<sup>30</sup> The news is reported from Milan by Vincenzo della Scalona to Lodovico. See Luzio e Renier, 'I Filelfo', p.176 and Robin, *Filelfo in Milan*, pp.119-120.



wrote to Zaccaria Saggi in the summer of 1478, only weeks after the death of the marchese. Expressing his concerns that his successor, Federico, may not prove to be a generous patron of men of letters, Filelfo gives an assessment of the previous two Gonzaga rulers:

[...] Lo Ill. Signore Marchese Johan Francesco fu dignissimo et liberalissimo signore quanto alchuno altro havesse l'Italia. Seguitò di po' lui lo Ill. Signore Marchese Lodovico il quale fu molto meno liberale dil signore suo patre [...].<sup>31</sup>

By the time Federico Gonzaga became marchese of Mantua in 1478 Filelfo was eighty years old and approaching the end of his long life. Although there is no evidence that Federico actually satisfied any of the aged humanist's ongoing demands for monetary support, in a letter of 16 April the new marchese does acknowledge the debts left by his father, before reminding Filelfo that his son Mario is currently employed as tutor in Mantua.<sup>32</sup>

Filelfo paid a last brief visit to Mantua in July 1481, during his final journey to Florence, where he died only a few weeks after reoccupying the teaching chair he had vacated forty-eight years earlier. His life and career had been tormented, punctuated with high profile clashes with humanists and rulers alike, as well as long periods of financial difficulty, brought about by a combination of his lavish lifestyle, his arrogant requests and the onerous financial strains of supporting his many offspring. Nor did Francesco Sforza's regrettable habit of not paying on time, a constant source of irritation also to Lodovico during his many years of military affiliation to the duke, contribute to relieve Filelfo's needy predicament.<sup>33</sup> Regardless of his flaws, which it must be recognised were many, Filelfo is rightly acclaimed as one of the finest early Italian scholars of Greek. His writings and travels brought him into contact initially with the Mantuan court of Gianfrancesco Gonzaga and Vittorino da Feltre and, subsequently, with that of Lodovico Gonzaga, one of the multiple patrons referred to by Robin. Although he managed to steer clear of the type of tirades aimed by Filelfo at the Florentine humanist Niccolò Niccoli and the late Enea Silvio Piccolomini, the marchese's relationship

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<sup>31</sup> Letter Filelfo to Zaccaria Saggi, Milan, 8 July 1478. Published in Luzio e Renier, 'I Filelfo', pp.164-165.

<sup>32</sup> Letter Federico to Filelfo, Mantua, 16 April 1478 (ASMn AG, b. 2897 Lib. 98 f. 49r). Published in Luzio e Renier, 'I Filelfo', pp.189-190.

<sup>33</sup> On Lodovico's *condotte* with Sforza see pp.48-52 above.

with this most volatile of humanists was, nonetheless, fraught with frequent tensions, which regularly related to requests for patronage met with respectful refusals. Both the geographical proximity of Mantua to Milan and the usually close political ties between Francesco Sforza and Lodovico Gonzaga ensured that, when the former failed to support him, he would often turn to the latter in the hope of finding some financial relief, which he was granted on more than a few occasions. The request for a book in 1451, the provision of an oration in 1459 and the dedication of some Greek verses in 1473, together with a positive appraisal of the marchese in the *Psychagogia*, indicate long-term, albeit infrequent, exchanges between Filelfo and Lodovico, and a relationship based not only on hopes of sustained patronage but also on a mutual and sincere respect between an ageing and capricious humanist and an enlightened ruler with a genuine interest in classical scholarship.

### **Enea Silvio Piccolomini**

Another major humanist to have enjoyed close ties with the Mantuan court of Lodovico Gonzaga was the distinguished Sienese scholar and careerist Enea Silvio Piccolomini (1405-1464), elected Pope Pius II in 1458.<sup>34</sup> Although as rulers of a not insignificant marquise the Gonzaga were accustomed to conducting political relations with the Roman Curia, a number of factors contributed to the strengthening and consolidation of these relations during the pontificate of Piccolomini. With Constantinople having fallen to the Turks only five years earlier, high on the agenda of the new Pope was the prompt organisation of a crusade, involving as many of the political leaders of Christendom as could be persuaded to take part, to wage war on the Ottoman Sultan Mohammed (1431-1481, Sultan

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<sup>34</sup> For an autobiographical account of the life of Pius II see Enea Silvio Piccolomini, *I commentarii*, ed. by Luigi Totaro (Milan: Adelphi, 1984), a parallel Latin text and Italian translation. A Latin-English parallel text in two volumes, edited by Margaret Meserve and Marcello Simonetta, has recently been published in the I Tatti Renaissance Library series (Cambridge Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2003-2007). *I commentarii* were first published in 1584, one hundred and twenty years after his death. There is a lack of adequate modern treatment of Piccolomini, with the exception of the volume of essays *Pius II, "el più expeditivo pontefice": Selected Studies on Aeneas Silvius Piccolomini, 1405-1464*, ed. by Z.R.W.M. von Martels and Arie Johan Vanderjagt (Boston: Brill, 2003). Two other notable works on the life of this remarkable figure, though somewhat dated, are Cecilia M. Ady, *Pius II (Aeneas Silvius Piccolomini), The Humanist Pope* (London: Methuen, 1913) and R.J. Mitchell, *The Laurels and the Tiara: Pope Pius II, 1458-1464* (London: Harvill Press, 1962). L.Pastor, *History of the Popes*, Vol. III, ed. by Frederick Ignatius Antrobus (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner, & Co., Ltd, 1910) also examines in detail the pontificate of Pius II. Finally, for syntheses of his life and career, see Richard P. McBrien, *Lives of the Popes. The Pontiffs from Saint Peter to John Paul II* (New York: Harper, 1997), pp.261-263.



1444-1446 and 1451-1481) and to wrest back not only the Eastern capital of the Holy Roman Empire but also the holy city of Jerusalem itself. In order to convince the various European leaders to commit to the cause, Pius decided to convene a congress in a location accessible to the greatest number and, despite the vociferous objections of a large number of cardinals, the pontiff opted for Mantua as the setting for one of the biggest international gatherings ever witnessed.<sup>35</sup>

While geographical position was undoubtedly a major factor in the choice of venue, of no less significance were surely the close ties Lodovico Gonzaga could boast with German imperial circles, the marchese having married Barbara of Brandenburg, niece of Emperor Sigismund. These were elements which would have been central to the Pope's thinking in his desire to secure pledges from the Emperor and his supporters, reflecting that they would be more likely to agree to travel to Mantua than to Rome. Moreover, while the standing of Mantua and the Gonzaga family was such that leaders from around Europe would not be indignant at the choice of venue, it was not a large enough state to provoke jealousies among the major powers. Also in Mantua's favour was its reputation as a thriving centre of art and culture, not to mention the birthplace of Virgil, two factors not to be underestimated when considering Piccolomini's disposition and cultural agenda.

Before examining in greater detail the Congress of Mantua and Pius's cultural relations with Lodovico Gonzaga, whom he does not appear to have met before he became pope, it is worth reflecting a little on a remarkable man of letters who rose to the highest office in the Church. His extensive list of roles fulfilled during an eclectic career, which indicate the importance of this figure in terms of the Renaissance, have recently been catalogued as "humanist, author, courtier, inveterate traveller, conciliarist, papalist, priest, bishop, pope, urban architect of Pienza, grand patron of the arts and would-be crusader".<sup>36</sup> Following the completion of his humanist studies in his home city of Siena, the young Piccolomini served as secretary to a number of prominent ecclesiastics. In 1436 he took up residence at the Council of Basel, where his talents saw him forge a

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<sup>35</sup> On the choice of Mantua and the objections of the cardinals see Ward Mahnke, 'The Political Career of a Condottiere Prince: Ludovico Gonzaga, 1444-1466' (unpublished doctoral thesis, Harvard University, 1974), pp.219-234; Pastor, *Lives of the Popes. Vol.III*, pp.45-46.

<sup>36</sup> Von Martels and Vanderjagt, eds., "*el più expeditivo pontefice*", p.vii.

promising career, and in 1440 he became secretary to the newly elected anti-Pope Felix V. His strong support for the Council was expressed in two important literary works of the early 1440s: an essay defending the conciliar theory, *Libellus dialogorum de auctoritate generalium conciliorum et gestis basileensium*, and a political pamphlet celebrating the achievements of the Council entitled *De rebus basiliae gestis commentarius*. The triumphant mood of these works was, however, short-lived, as within the space of a year it became clear that Felix did not enjoy widespread support. The majority of European states recognised the Roman pontiff as the true successor of Saint Peter, while the Germanic territories under the Emperor remained neutral. From the point of view of a career within the Church, Piccolomini's prospects were now bleak, having cast his lot with the losing side.

The year 1442 was a monumental one; the Emperor Frederick III visited Basel and, impressed with Piccolomini, offered him a position as a secretary at the imperial court, and with it an escape route from the impasse in which he found himself. Moreover, perhaps more in recognition of his outstanding abilities as a humanist and his potential usefulness to the Emperor than for the Latin verses he had composed over the previous two decades, on 27 July Frederick indulged his new charge by crowning him poet laureate, an honour enjoyed by Petrarch in the previous century. Piccolomini's Latin poetry, some of which has been lost, dates largely from his early years; his poetic reputation prior to receiving the laurel seems to have rested largely on *Cinthia*, nineteen poems inspired by a Sieneese girl of the same name, but also on the *Eclogue of Lake Orta*, several religious poems and possibly the erotic *Nymphilexis*, while his numerous *Epigrammi* date from a range of periods, from his early years right through to his pontificate, by which time his poetic interests had been almost entirely superseded by zeal for other fields of humanist study.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> On Piccolomini's poetic output see Francesco Arnaldi, ed., *Poeti latini del Quattrocento* (Milan: Ricciardi, 1964), pp.123-124 and Jean-Louis Charlet, 'La poésie latine de Enea Silvio Piccolomini', in *Pio II umanista europeo: Atti del XVII convegno internazionale, Chianciano-Pienza 18-21 luglio 2005*, ed. by Luisa Secchi Tarugi (Florence: Cesati, 2007), pp.81-88. On his surviving poetry in Latin, often given the generic title of *Carmina*, see also Gioacchino Paparelli, *Enea Silvio Piccolomini: l'umanesimo sul soglio di Pietro* (Ravenna: Longo, 1978) and Enea Silvio Piccolomini, *Carmina*, ed. by Adrian Van Heck (Vatican City: Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, 1994).



His experiences at the imperial court were not, however, what he had hoped for; apart from having to establish himself in a new and competitive environment at the age of thirty-seven, he soon discovered that enthusiasm for the new humanist learning, so central to life both in Siena and in Basel, was merely lukewarm in his new environment. From this perspective Piccolomini's years in Vienna appear to have been largely unfulfilling, as is clear from the tone of one of his works of those years, *De curialium miseris*.<sup>38</sup> His disillusionment with the uncongenial surroundings may in part explain why in these years he appears to have indulged in the more frivolous elements of life at court, from wanton revelry to the writing of *Eurialus et Lucretia*, a highly original love story containing epistolary exchanges between the protagonists, written as part of a letter to Mariano Sozzini (1397-1467), his former tutor in Siena.<sup>39</sup> It was also in this period that Piccolomini fathered an illegitimate son.

Despite these blemishes, nonetheless, Piccolomini remained determined to improve his personal circumstances, and between 1443 and 1444 he effected a remarkable transformation, successfully distancing himself from his previous career as a staunch supporter of the Council of Basel in favour of reconciliation with Eugenius IV, who had been the target of his pro-conciliar writings.<sup>40</sup> His focus now turned to working towards a rapprochement between Frederick and Eugenius, and the potential benefits such an outcome would have for his own career prospects. In 1445, as part of an imperial delegation to Rome, Piccolomini unconditionally renounced his previous support for Basel and Felix; Eugenius, for his part, undoubtedly hopeful that Piccolomini would prove instrumental in bringing Frederick and his territories back under the spiritual tutelage of Rome, received his penitent visitor and pardoned him. It was in this context of his dual role as imperial secretary and pro-Roman agent that Piccolomini, surely at this stage envisaging a promising career in the Church after several years of dissatisfaction in the wake of being alienated Felix, was himself belatedly ordained in March 1446 at the age of forty-one. In the same year he was involved in the Diet of Frankfurt, which formalised the reconciliation between Emperor and Pope.

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<sup>38</sup> Ady, *Pius II*, p.76.

<sup>39</sup> Piccolomini's letter to Mariano Sozzini is published as an appendix in Giuseppe G. Ferrero and Maria Luisa Doglio, eds, *Novelle del Quattrocento* (Turin: UTET, 1975), pp.857-957.

<sup>40</sup> McBrien, *Lives of the Popes*, p.262.

Having served as bishop firstly in Trieste and then in Siena, and having been made a cardinal by Calixtus III in 1456, Piccolomini emerged from the conclave two years later as Pius II. His *Commentarii*, begun in the spring of 1462 and to this day the only autobiography of a pope, are a lucid and comprehensive account of his life and pontificate spanning thirteen books and revealing, according to Ady, a thirst for glory characteristic of a true humanist.<sup>41</sup> They are, justifiably, the most celebrated elements of a body of scholarly works embracing such diverse genres as history, educational theory, poetry, comedy and historical topography. One of his works in this last genre, *De Asia*, was studied by Christopher Columbus, it has been said, before he set sail for the New World in 1492.<sup>42</sup> Piccolomini was in every sense a most important humanist; he was a product of the new learning, who cultivated a wide range of interests which saw the production of a vast corpus of writing in Latin. The licentiousness which often characterised not only his early poetry but also works written during his employment at the imperial court, which as well as the aforementioned *Eurialus et Lucretia* included a Latin comedy entitled *Chrysis*, was absent from the scholarly historical and topographical works he produced in the years after his ordination, firstly as a deacon and as a bishop, then prolifically as a cardinal and finally as Pope. Meanwhile, as a professional humanist and secretary in Basel he composed, as has been mentioned, several essays and treatises on aspects of conciliar theory, and it was for this genre that he was best known among his contemporaries. For the Emperor, meanwhile, he wrote a dialogue entitled *Pentalogus* which extolled the political value of humanist learning. The year before his death, evidently weary of detractors highlighting the apparently irreconcilable nature of his unrestrained early poetic works and his anti-Roman writings with his role as head of the Church, he issued a Papal Bull with the title *In minoribus*, in which he urges his readers to “reject Aeneas, accept Pius”.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Ady, *Pius II*, p.295.

<sup>42</sup> J.R. Hale, ‘Pius II’ in *The Thames and Hudson Dictionary of the Italian Renaissance* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1981), pp.254-255. On *De Asia* see Benedikt Konrad Vollmann, ‘Aeneas Silvius Piccolomini as a Historiographer: Asia’, in Von Martels and Vanderjagt, eds., “*el più expeditivo pontefice*”, pp.41-54.

<sup>43</sup> On *In minoribus* see Thomas M. Izbicki, Gerald Christianson and Philip D.Krey, eds., *Reject Aeneas, Accept Pius: Selected Letters of Aeneas Sylvius Piccolomini (Pope Pius II)* (Washington D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2006), pp.391-406.



The fall of Constantinople had clearly brought once more to the fore the issue of the crusades. Although support among western princes for Eugenius IV's failed crusade of 1444 had been far from enthusiastic, Pius's immediate predecessor, Calixtus III, had secured a sizeable Mantuan donation to his abortive expedition of 1456.<sup>44</sup> Cardinal Trevisano of Aquilea, a close friend of Lodovico, was the papal treasurer charged with the responsibility of financing the fleet and he was able to secure from the marchese the promise of both monetary and military contributions. Whatever his motives and whether he was swayed by his ties with Trevisano or the lure of future favour, argues Ward Mahnke, Lodovico was a genuinely pious prince faithful to the Church.<sup>45</sup> In October 1458, soon after his election, Pius announced that a congress to make plans for war on the Turks would get underway on 1 June the following year, either in Mantua or in Udine. Although Pius had privately assured the Mantuan ambassador at the papal court, Bartolomeo Bonatto, that the Gonzaga would host the Congress as a reward for previous support, the winter months were an anxious time for the marchese. The crippling expense incurred by hosting the Curia and a multitude of European leaders would be a small price to pay for the enormous prestige that would go with staging an event on such a scale. All too conscious of the intentions of a significant movement of cardinals and Italian leaders to dissuade the Pope from moving his court to Mantua, Lodovico frequently despatched his envoy, Antonio Donato, south to gauge the mood of the Pope and his entourage and, by the end of April and after a meeting between Pius and Cosimo de' Medici in Florence, it was clear that the Pope was not going to be talked out of having the Congress, and having it in Mantua.<sup>46</sup>

At the end of a long journey north from Rome, which had taken four months, Pius arrived in Mantua on 27 May 1459. The chronicler Schivenoglia describes a lavish reception by the marchese and the city:

[...] introno dentro Mantoa con gran trionfo avixandote chel sig. mes. lo marchexo, el fradelo e fiolo el sig. Sigismondo e dolori medexi zudexi portono dentro de la cita el santo padre suxo una magna sedia et era choverta de la porta de la Pradela per fino a santo Pedro de pano de lana de più cholore

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<sup>44</sup> On the crusade launched by Eugenius IV, defeated at Varna in 1444, see Pastor, *History of the Popes. Vol. II*, pp.325-329.

<sup>45</sup> Ward Mahnke, 'The Political Career of a Condottiere Prince', pp.215-216.

<sup>46</sup> Ward Mahnke, 'The Political Career of a Condottiere Prince', p.226.

et de tellonij velutij et de drapij de oro e de seta et era cercha 500 zovenij con tuti dopiere in mano aprexo foe estimato dreto el borgo per fina a corte tra tererij, forasterij a pede et a chavalo cento e cinquanta millia personij et con questo trionfo fo achompagnato per fino in san Pedro e poij in corte e lij se alzoe in corte.<sup>47</sup>

Not since the visit of the Emperor Sigismund in 1433 had Mantua been so honoured or so crowded. Pius's retinue also included three future popes: the cardinals Pietro Barbo (Paul II) and Rodrigo Borgia (Alexander VI), as well as Francesco della Rovere, not yet a cardinal but a future pope as Sixtus IV.<sup>48</sup> The population of Mantua at the time of the Congress would have numbered around thirty thousand and, although the one hundred and fifty thousand present described by Schivenoglia to greet the Pope on his arrival doubtlessly included a large number of short-term visitors, the town was clearly overcrowded for the duration of the papal visit.<sup>49</sup> Such swelling numbers on the streets of the town, one can only imagine, must have done little to assuage the concerns of those cardinals who had expressed their reservations about the ability of Mantua to host an event of such magnitude. While Pius was housed in the Palazzo Vecchio, an integral part of the Gonzaga *reggia*, the cardinals were lodged in the houses of the leading Mantuan families, where living conditions, while certainly not dire, must surely have fallen short of the levels of luxury to which they would have been accustomed in Rome.<sup>50</sup> Moreover, although, as has been noted, Lodovico Gonzaga basked in the reputation among his contemporaries of being an erudite ruler of a cultured court, there is every reason to believe that his subjects in Mantua were considered to be a little less than sophisticated by the many distinguished visitors at this time. The simple fascination and backwardness of the locals, notes Ward Mahnke, can be gleaned from Schivenoglia's *cronaca*.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Giuse Pastore, ed., *Schivenoglia Andrea. Cronaca di Mantova dal 1445 al 1484. Trascritta ed annotata da Carlo D'Arco* (Mantua: Edizioni Baldus, 1976), p.21.

<sup>48</sup> Giovanni Ruffini, 'Il concilio del 1459-60 indetto da Papa Pio II', *La Reggia*, anno IV, n.4, (dicembre 1996), 6-7.

<sup>49</sup> Italo Bini, 'Mantova sede papale durante la Dieta convocata da Pio II', *Civiltà Mantovana*, nuova serie, 3, (1984), 7-28, p.11. While Schivenoglia's estimate of the number of people on the streets to welcome the pope may be somewhat inflated, Bini states that in 1459 the population on Mantua "contava non più di trentamila anime". What is clear, however, is that that the town was congested by a large number of extra visitors.

<sup>50</sup> See Ruffini, 'Il concilio del 1459-60', p.7.

<sup>51</sup> Ward Mahnke, 'The Political Career of a Condottiere Prince', p.239.



Although the Gonzaga gained considerable prestige from staging it, the Congress of Mantua was an unqualified failure for Pius and the pro-crusading camp. During his eight-month sojourn in the town, Pius received delegations from virtually all the leaders of Christendom but these tended to be brief visits and at different times, meaning that attendance at the thrice weekly sessions, the first of which on 26 September 1459 was recorded in a memorable fresco by



Fig.47: Pinturicchio, *Pius II Convokes Diet of Princes at Mantua*

Pinturicchio (Fig.47), was as erratic as it was low.<sup>52</sup> The Pope must have been extremely frustrated by the inconclusiveness of the Congress and by the intransigence of those who attended, but also by the “revolving door” nature of the embassies, from his arrival in May 1459 until 18 January 1460, when he issued the Bull *Execrabilis* and returned to Rome.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Bernardino di Betto (1454 –1513), also known as Pinturicchio, was commissioned in 1501 by Francesco Todeschini Piccolomini, Enea Silvio’s nephew who in 1503 would be elected as Pope Pius III, to create the frescoes for the Libreria Piccolomini, an annex of the Cathedral of Siena.

<sup>53</sup> Ward Mahnke, ‘The Political Career of a Condottiere Prince’, pp.241-242. For a thorough discussion of the political issues of the Congress see pp.244-259.

Of more interest to this thesis than the political issues of the Congress is the cultural agenda which Pius brought to Mantua, as well as his interaction with Lodovico Gonzaga in this sphere. Hale suggests that, after his election as Pope, Piccolomini had less available time in which to pursue his career as a man of letters, but his visit to Mantua, according to contemporary evidence, included several opportunities for the pontiff to indulge his literary passions.<sup>54</sup> As has already been suggested, the appeal of Virgil may very well have had some bearing on the Pope's determination to bring the Congress to the town. In his own *Commentarii*, Pius describes a pause from his journey along the waterways, on the eve of his arrival in Mantua, to visit a hill on the left bank of the Mincio, a place he describes as sacred for having been where Virgil's house once stood.<sup>55</sup> Given his exalted office in the Curia and the purpose of his journey to Mantua, it is indeed noteworthy that the Pope should wish to record such open homage to a poet of pagan antiquity, albeit one of singular status, whose principal work, the *Aeneid*, was indeed considered by many contemporary scholars to be a proto-Christian allegory. The image of the Pope navigating the banks of the river until he found the correct spot, before obliging his sizeable and very tired entourage to join him in his pilgrimage, is a captivating one indeed. At least two of those who accompanied Pius to Mantua, however, must have been equally thrilled to visit the supposed birthplace of the most celebrated Latin poet of antiquity: Cardinal Bessarion, as renowned for being a bridge between Greek and Latin humanism as he was for being an eminent ecclesiastic, and Leon Battista Alberti.<sup>56</sup> Several other cultural figures were drawn to Mantua during the months of the Congress: Francesco Filelfo attended with the Sforza delegation, while Andrea Mantegna, who at the time was still showing reluctance to accept the position of court painter, came to view the chapel in the Castello di San Giorgio, the decoration of which was to be

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<sup>54</sup> Hale, 'Pius II', p.254. En route to Mantua, Pius also stopped in Ferrara to meet with the renowned humanist pedagogues Guarino Veronese and Gasparino Barzizza. See Piccolomini, *I commentarii*, Vol.1, Lib.2, pp.408-409. See also Mitchell, *The Laurels and the Tiara*, pp.149-150.

<sup>55</sup> Piccolomini, *I commentarii*, Vol.1, Lib.2, pp.412-413.

<sup>56</sup> The most comprehensive study of the life and works of Bessarion remains that of Ludwig Mohler, *Kardinal Bessarion als Theologe, Humanist und Staatsmann* (Paderborn: Görres-Gesellschaft, 1923). See also Henri Vast, *Le Cardinal Bessarion (1403-1472) Étude sur le chrétienté et la renaissance vers le milieu du XV<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Paris: Hachette et Cie, 1878). On Alberti in Mantua see pp.333-350 below.



his first major project for the marchese.<sup>57</sup> It was during this visit that Mantegna met Cardinal Lodovico Mezzarota, who commissioned a portrait from the artist.<sup>58</sup>

While Pius and Lodovico Gonzaga must both have been preoccupied with their respective roles for the duration of the Congress, it does appear that the two managed to find some time to converse on and to indulge in their shared passion for humanistic subjects. Returning to the Pope's *Commentarii*, again an invaluable resource for the understanding of Pius's contemporaries with whom he engaged, we find the following portrayal of Lodovico, written some years later but retaining an esteem for the marchese's ability in both arms and letters:

[...] Ex his ortus est Ludovicus, qui per tempora Pii papae huic urbi praefuit, armorum et litterarum peritia clarus. Nam et parentis gloriam militaris adaequavit et Victorinum oratorem audiens, praeceptoris propemodum doctrinam assecutus est. Mitis ingenii et iustitiae observantissimus [...].<sup>59</sup>

On the Marchesa Barbara, also singled out for praise, Pius continues:

[...] uxorem duxit ex familia Brandeburgensi, Barbaram nomine, praestanti animo atque ingenio foeminam et quae dominandi artem calleret [...].<sup>60</sup>

A letter from the months of the Congress shows evidence of the Pope taking a break from his efforts to unite the powers of Christendom to the cause of the crusade, and choosing instead to indulge his humanist interests with his host and his entourage. On 13 December 1459, the marchese wrote to Alberti:

[...] Havendone la Sta. domine nostro padre facto richiedere in prestito Vetruvio re architectura ne parso mandarvi aposto questo nostro cavallaro e pregarvi che per luy ce lo vogliati mandare [...].<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> On Filelfo in Mantua see pp.311-319 above. On Mantegna's project for the chapel see Leandro Ventura, 'La religione privata: Ludovico II, Andrea Mantegna e la Cappella del Castello di San Giorgio', *Quaderni di Palazzo Te*, n.7, (1987), 23-34. In a subsequent article, the same author credits Mantegna not only with the decoration of the chapel, but also its architectural conception. Leandro Ventura, 'Mantegna Architetto. Un'ipotesi di lavoro per la Cappella del Castello di San Giorgio a Mantova', *Civiltà Mantovana*, terza serie, n.5, (1992), 27-51.

<sup>58</sup> See Bini, 'Mantova sede papale', pp.12-13. The portrait of Cardinal Mezzarota is now housed in the Staatliche Museum, Berlin.

<sup>59</sup> Piccolomini, *I commentarii. Liber secundus*, p.416.

<sup>60</sup> Piccolomini, *I commentarii. Liber secundus*, p.416.

<sup>61</sup> Letter Marchese Lodovico to Leon Battista Alberti, Mantua, 13 December 1459 (ASMn AG, b. 2885 Lib. 31 f. 47v).

Three months after leaving Mantua, on 8 April 1460, Pius wrote to Lodovico, asking that he employ as tutor Gregorio Tifernate of Città di Castello, a request which the marchese granted.<sup>62</sup> Finally, in a letter written from Rome to the Marchesa Barbara almost a decade later, Giovanni Pietro Arrivabene mentions a Pliny donated by Pius to the Gonzaga library during the Congress.<sup>63</sup> Although these letters are fragmentary, they point to Pius indulging his interests in architecture, pedagogy, history and patronage of men of letters during his stay in Mantua, while no doubt also being facilitated and pandered to by Lodovico Gonzaga, his erudite courtiers and visiting delegates of a humanistic disposition.

For the remaining four years of Pius's life after the Congress, relations with the Gonzaga, it must be conceded, were often somewhat fraught. During late 1460 and early 1461 the marchese antagonised the Pope by refusing to accept a *condotta* with the forces of the papacy against the Angevins, who at that time were aligned with Mantua's powerful neighbour Venice. Persistent evasiveness on the part of the Italian leaders to commit themselves fully to the crusade irritated the Pope still further, at the very time Lodovico was lobbying hard for his son Francesco to be elevated to the position of cardinal.<sup>64</sup> At this time the marchese appointed Bartolomeo Bonatto as permanent ambassador to the Curia, while Francesco himself was sent to study in Pavia, where he would be close to the Sforza court. Gentle pressure on the Pope was also applied by the German cardinal Nicholas of Cusa who, though a reformer and intellectual who would no doubt be privately sceptical about the young man's readiness for such elevated office, was in all likelihood heavily prompted by Albert of Brandenburg.<sup>65</sup>

On 14 December 1461, seventeen-year-old Francesco Gonzaga, at the time still a novice student, was indeed named a cardinal by Pius. Never had Gonzaga connections with the imperial court been so clear to see. Those who had petitioned

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<sup>62</sup> Letter Pius II to Marchese Lodovico, Siena, 8 April 1460 (ASMn AG, b. 1099 c. 657). Letter published in Ferdinando Gabotto, *Ancora un letterato del quattrocento (Publio Gregorio da Città di Castello)* (Città di Castello: S.Lapi, 1890), p.37. On Gregorio see pp.147-149 above.

<sup>63</sup> Letter Giovanni Pietro Arrivabene to Marchesa Barbara, Rome, 23 May 1469 (ASMn AG, b. 843 c. 721). On Arrivabene see pp.257-266 above.

<sup>64</sup> On the positions taken by Lodovico on the *condotta* offered by Pius and on the crusade see Ward Mahnke, 'The Political Career of a Condottiere Prince', pp.244-259.

<sup>65</sup> Ward Mahnke, 'The Political Career of a Condottiere Prince', p.260. On Nicholas of Cusa see Edward F.Cranz, *Nicholas of Cusa and the Renaissance* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000).



the Pope on behalf of Francesco must also have drawn his attention to some other advantages which would result in the elevation of this fresh protonotary to the college of cardinals: Francesco's sister Dorotea was betrothed to Galeazzo Maria Sforza, heir to the Duke of Milan, while a new cardinal from a ruling family of the standing of the Gonzaga could clearly be expected to have the obligation and the means to make substantial contributions both to the crusade and to the development of Pienza. Nor, finally, should the hospitality of the marchese during the months of the Congress be undervalued as a factor in his son's rapid rise to the highest echelons of ecclesiastic office.

His pontificate was characterised by two major goals: the aforementioned crusade and a vision to convert the modest village of his birth, Corsignano, firstly into a bishopric closely controlled by the Piccolomini family and subsequently, with the financial aid of the cardinals and their families, into a jewel of Renaissance architecture with the new appellation, immortalising his name, of Pienza.<sup>66</sup> Despite having been bishop of Siena from 1450, and despite his elevation to the College of Cardinals in 1456, Piccolomini had found it difficult to dominate Siennese politics and its deeply rooted nobility. Frustrated by this state of affairs, he turned his attention to the development of Corsignano, a village in which his family was by far the most influential. Soon after becoming Pope in 1458, Piccolomini engaged the architect Bernardo Rossellino (1409-1464) and, for the next four years, he followed events with the interest of an enthusiastic patron, the highlights he witnessed being the creation of a new cathedral and a lavish new family residence.<sup>67</sup> In 1459 Piccolomini was able to effect the ecclesiastical separation of Corsignano from Siena and, following the establishment of a new bishopric, on 12 February 1462 the village was formally renamed Pienza, underlining the cult of fame which

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<sup>66</sup> See Charles R. Mack, *Pienza: The Creation of a Renaissance City* (London: Cornell University Press, 1987). On the political implications of Pienza and its newly formed ecclesiastical institutions under the control of the Piccolomini family see Giuseppe Chironi, 'Pius II and the Formation of the Ecclesiastical Institutions of Pienza', in Von Martels and Vanderjagt, eds., *"el più expeditivo pontefice"*, pp.171-185. On p.185 Chironi concludes that the project of Pienza, far from being merely a programme of artistic self-indulgence, was based on "a precise strategy of political and patrimonial preservation".

<sup>67</sup> See Frommel, Christoph Luitpold, 'Pio II committente di architettura' in Arturo Calzona, Francesco Paolo Fiore, Alberto Tenenti and Cesare Vasoli, eds., *Il principe architetto. Atti del convegno internazionale, Mantova, 21-23 ottobre 1999* (Florence: Olschki, 2002), pp.327-360; Luciano Patetta, 'Enea Silvio Piccolomini e l'architetto Rossellino', in *Pio II e la cultura del suo tempo*, ed. by Luisa Rotondi Secchi Tarugi (Milan: Guerini e Associati, 1991), pp.59-76. In the same volume, see Aldo Franci, 'Pio II e Pienza', pp.39-46.

was such a central part of his humanism. The following day, a bull was issued threatening ex-communication to anyone who dared to alter Rossellino's newly consecrated cathedral.<sup>68</sup>

Several senior churchmen, in their attempts to gratify the pontiff, pledged to fund buildings, while the level of pressure brought to bear by the financially stretched pope on reticent cardinals, whom he considered able to add to the extending urban fabric of Pienza, is unambiguously clear from a letter of 19 August 1462, written from Rome by Cardinal Francesco to his mother:

[...] Essendo ieri dalla Santità di Nostro Signore, quella mi comincioe a fare istanza de dovere edificare una casa in Corsignano, e rispondendo io da essa che non me ritrovavo il modo et che m'era forza da farne una a Roma et scusandomi io d'essere povero, allegorono che se non ero ricco di benefitti aveva ben lo illustre mio signor padre che era potente e che mi aiuteria. Disse Nostro Signore: non sarà questa spesa più che mille Ducati e che me daria puoi il primo buon vescovato che vacasse. Vuole Sua Beatitudine che ad ogni modo se cominci quest'anno il lavoro, acciocché ritornandosi l'anno seguente, come mostra avere intentione, possi vedere l'edificio [...].<sup>69</sup>

The flippancy with which the Pope suggests that Francesco turn to his father for the sum of one thousand ducats, together with his shameless promise of the reward of Church office for contributing to what was a private venture, come into even sharper focus in a further letter written nine days later, in which Francesco informs his father of a conversation which he has overheard in Corsignano, between Pius and one of his courtiers:

[...] Disse il Papa: "Ben credi tu che il cardinale di Mantua farà la casa qui?" Et avendogli risposto lui che si, soggiunse il Papa: "Se non la farà e che venghi a vacare lo vescovado di Mantua, anche noi lo daremo ad un altro". Sicché comprendo sarà ogni modo necessario farla, e cusì bisognerà lo aiuto di Vostra Signoria, la quale prego voglia soccorrermi e darmi modo: ne bisogna che la cosa si conduca troppo in lungo. [...].<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> Franci, 'Pio II e Pienza', p.44.

<sup>69</sup> Letter Cardinal Francesco Gonzaga to Marchesa Barbara, Rome, 19 August 1462 (ASMn AG, b. 841). Published in Bini, 'Mantova sede papale', p.17.

<sup>70</sup> Letter Cardinal Francesco Gonzaga to Marchese Lodovico, Rome, 28 August 1462 (ASMn AG, b. 841). Published in Bini, 'Mantova sede papale', p.17.



Given that the Pope's promise of reward had now become the threat of the bishopric of Mantua being removed from the sphere of influence of the Gonzaga, it is not unlikely that Pius was only too aware that the naïve young cardinal was within earshot, and that he would relay the content of the exchange to his anxious parents. Despite the expense, onerous in itself, of keeping Francesco and his entourage in Rome, Lodovico had no choice but to provide further funds for the construction of a house in Pienza. The following winter, in February 1463, the first moves were made, the marchese sending an agent to Tuscany to assess the undertaking.<sup>71</sup> In his *Commentarii* Pius gives no information about the house commissioned, mentioning only that Francesco was one of the first cardinals to purchase land there.<sup>72</sup> In her biography of Pius, Ady interpreted the Pope's comment to mean that the acquisition of the land had been the limit of Gonzaga investment, arguing that Pius's death the following year spared them from having to carry out the project.<sup>73</sup> Bini, however, maintains that the house was completed, in the form of an extension to a previous building financed by Cardinal Rodrigo Borgia.<sup>74</sup> Either way, the Pope seems to have been satisfied by Francesco's pledge; in February 1463, the very month in which the Gonzaga agent visited Pienza, the young cardinal had the bishopric of Sant'Agata in Suburra bestowed on him.<sup>75</sup>

The following summer Pius died, bringing to an end a relationship between Pope and marchese which had been closer politically, spiritually and culturally than any previous association between a Gonzaga ruler and a pontiff. Connections with Europe's most powerful temporal leader, secured through his marriage to the Marchesa Barbara, had contributed significantly to the establishment of close relations with the continent's foremost spiritual leader. While it must be acknowledged that hosting the Congress placed almost unbearable strain on the finances of Mantua, a burden which was subsequently increased by the cost of maintaining a court in Rome, and by pressure from the Pope to contribute not only to the crusade but also to Pienza, the consequences of its cancellation would

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<sup>71</sup> Ward Mahnke, 'The Political Career of a Condottiere Prince', p.263.

<sup>72</sup> Piccolomini, *I commentarii*, Vol.2, Lib.9, pp.1770-1771.

<sup>73</sup> Ady, *Pius II*, p.275. Following the death of Pius in 1464, and with pressure no longer being applied on cardinals and their families to build there, the urban development of Pienza understandably lost all momentum.

<sup>74</sup> Bini, 'Mantova sede papale', pp.17-18.

<sup>75</sup> Ward Mahnke, 'The Political Career of a Condottiere Prince', p.263.

have been far worse. The long-term rewards were inestimable: the creation of the first Gonzaga cardinal ensured that the family would begin to enjoy a previously unattainable level of influence in the Church, so often an encumbrance to the political aspirations of the marchese in the early years of his rule.<sup>76</sup> Moreover, the small marquisate had been put firmly on the map as a noteworthy centre for art and culture and, as a result of this, Lodovico began to enjoy more widespread renown as a prince of arms and letters. The failure of the Congress to bring together in Mantua the leaders of Christendom and to extract from them firm pledges to the crusade was no reflection on the staging of the event by the Gonzaga and the town. Furthermore, the reluctance on the part of the marchese to accept a papal *condotta*, to commit himself more fully to the crusade and to apportion large sums of money to the construction of a Gonzaga house in Pienza was a result both of the precarious financial circumstances of his state and the delicate political climate in the Italian peninsula of the early 1460s; it would be mistaken to interpret these factors as evidence that Lodovico was anything other than a genuinely pious prince and loyal to the Church. Recognition of his service and devotion arrived the following decade, on 31 July 1477, when Sixtus IV conferred on the marchese the Golden Rose.<sup>77</sup>

### **Leon Battista Alberti**

Memorably described by Burckhardt as the greatest of the many-sided men of the Renaissance, Leon Battista Alberti arguably enjoyed more influence over Lodovico Gonzaga in matters of patronage and humanism than any other single figure, without even the exception of Mantegna.<sup>78</sup> His considerable breadth of interests, which generated a vast body of writing both in Latin and in the vernacular, included humanist scholarship, mathematics, the natural sciences, ethics, cryptography and the theory and practice of the visual arts, have ensured that Alberti has remained immune to classification in any single field.<sup>79</sup> While this thesis is not the place for an exhaustive examination of the extensiveness of Alberti's

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<sup>76</sup> See, for example, pp.219-220 above on Lodovico's objections to the Church's influence over legal procedures in Mantua.

<sup>77</sup> On the award of the Golden Rose see p.54 above.

<sup>78</sup> Jacob Burckhardt, *The Civilisation of the Renaissance in Italy* (London: Penguin, 1990), p.102.

<sup>79</sup> For a discussion of Alberti's interests see Alberto Tenenti, 'Leon Battista Alberti umanista' in Joseph Rykwert and Anne Engel, eds., *Leon Battista Alberti* (Milan: Electa, 1994), pp.38-45. On Alberti's architecture see Anthony Grafton, *Leon Battista Alberti Master Builder of the Italian Renaissance* (London: Penguin, 2000).



cultural agenda, such was his relationship with the marchese, however, and on a variety of levels, that he must be included in any work which discusses the major protagonists of Quattrocento humanism to have forged close ties with the Gonzaga.

Born in Genoa in 1404 as the illegitimate son of an exiled Florentine merchant, before the age of ten Alberti moved to Venice.<sup>80</sup> Within the space of a few years Alberti was sent to Padua, where he received a thorough humanist education at the school of Gasparino Barzizza, before progressing to the University of Bologna, from which, despite consistently poor health, he graduated in canon law in 1428. For the next four years Alberti was temporarily employed by several eminent men of the Church, while also writing some of his early works in Latin, including *Deiphira* and *Ecatonphilea*.<sup>81</sup> In 1432 he moved to Rome, having secured an appointment as secretary to Eugenius IV, and in October of the same year he was ordained, the pope having overturned a previous decision which prevented Alberti, as someone born outside wedlock, from entering the ranks of the clergy.

This new career in the Church, Elam notes, afforded Alberti the security to embrace the literary life he had yearned for.<sup>82</sup> The years immediately following his appointment, indeed, were particularly productive; it was during the first half of the 1430s that he wrote, among other works, the first three books of *Della famiglia*, a series of discussions of domestic morality, as well as his comedy, *Philodoxeos fabula*, and the *Descriptio urbis Romae*. Having visited Florence on several occasions with Eugenius, this was also the period in which the first flames of his interest in the visual arts were kindled. After having seen the works of Brunelleschi, Donatello and Masaccio (1401-1428), an inspired Alberti embarked on a new and innovative field of study which was unarguably his most significant literary legacy: the theoretical treatment of art and architecture. His *De pictura* of 1435, which he dedicated to Gianfrancesco Gonzaga, attempted to consolidate intellectual respect

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<sup>80</sup> On the implications of Alberti's illegitimacy see Thomas Kuehn, 'Reading Between the Patriline. Leon Battista Alberti's *Della Famiglia* in Light of his Illegitimacy' in *Law Family and Women. Toward a Legal Anthropology of Renaissance Italy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), pp.157-175.

<sup>81</sup> Leandro Ventura, ed., 'Leon Battista Alberti. Note bio-bibliografiche', *Civiltà Mantovana*, terza serie, n.12-13, (1994), 11-21, p.12.

<sup>82</sup> Caroline Elam 'Alberti, Leon Battista', in *The Thames and Hudson Dictionary of the Italian Renaissance* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1981), pp.18-20, p.19.

for painting, which since ancient times had been widely considered as a mere mechanical activity. Rational laws based on mathematical perspective are accompanied by recommendations for subjects in a literary work which not only became a practitioners' guide but the basis of subsequent academic art theory.<sup>83</sup> It also had the effect of linking painting to arithmetic and geometry, which were part of the liberal arts curriculum. An Italian version followed a year later and Alberti, acclaimed by patrons and artists alike, reinvented himself as an artistic consultant to the princely courts. His interests in art also rapidly moved beyond painting, producing *De statua*, a treatise on sculpture, while the 1440s saw an increasing interest in architecture, transcending the literary dimension and culminating in the design and completion of the façade of the Palazzo Rucellai in Florence (1447-1451) and that of the Tempio Malatestiano in Rimini (early 1450s).<sup>84</sup> Despite this growing tendency towards architecture, Alberti continued to make contributions in a variety of fields, including language (a first *Grammatica della lingua toscana* c.1440), optical and mechanical features (*Ludi mathematici*, 1448, dedicated to Meladio d'Este), moral philosophy (*Della tranquillità dell'animo*, 1440s) and satire (*Momus*, 1450, widely regarded as a comic masterpiece).

It is in the field of architecture, however, that the most prominent of Alberti's numerous contributions to the Renaissance are to be found. Perhaps more significant than any of the building projects he fashioned was his opus magnum: *De re aedificatoria*, a body of ten books based on his meticulous study of Vitruvius, completed in 1452 and posthumously published in 1485. *De re aedificatoria* ensured that the good practice of the ancients was codified for architects and patrons of the late Quattrocento, and was fundamental to the new heights scaled by Donato Bramante (1444-1514) and Michelangelo Buonarroti (1475-1564) in the early decades of the following century. The work also set the tone for the last two decades of Alberti's life, in which the design of buildings, and especially churches, became the main focus in an eclectic career.

Although Alberti's first confirmed visit to Mantua was as a member of the entourage of Pius II for the Congress of 1459-1460, Grayson suspects that this

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<sup>83</sup> Elam, 'Alberti, Leon Battista', p.19.

<sup>84</sup> Grafton, *Leon Battista Alberti*, pp.182-184 and pp.316-317.



may not have been his first trip to the city.<sup>85</sup> Alberti was, by this stage, a well travelled and well connected humanist, and it ought to be remembered that a quarter of a century prior to the Congress he had dedicated the Latin version of his treatise *De Pictura* to Lodovico's father, the Marchese Gianfrancesco Gonzaga. If, as Carpeggiani suggests, the Papal Congress shifted Lodovico's attention from the regeneration of his territory to the urban renewal of his capital, then the presence of Alberti in Mantua during these months probably represented a unique opportunity for both men; for the marchese here was an opportunity to engage the talents of the first *intellettuale-architetto*, as opposed to the old breed of *artigiano-architetto*, exemplified in Mantua in the figure of Luca Fancelli, and, for Alberti, the prospect of a patron willing to provide a stage and means for him to give expression to his fantastic architectural forms inspired by the ancient world.<sup>86</sup> If Alberti, notes Carpeggiani, had been mobile, the marchese had always been equally keen to engage the talents of artists and practitioners from far beyond the *Mantovano*.<sup>87</sup> In this respect, following Alberti's first visit to Mantua, this particular patron-architect relationship was very much a natural development for both men.

While the following pages are not intended to be an examination of the buildings to have emerged from the collaboration between Lodovico and Alberti, it is worth remembering, briefly, what these were.<sup>88</sup> The first was the Church of San Sebastiano, begun hastily after the closure of the Papal Congress, in the early months of 1460.<sup>89</sup> During the early 1460s plans were also drawn up for a classical restoration of the Rotonda di San Lorenzo, though this project never came to

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<sup>85</sup> Cecil Grayson, 'Leon Battista Alberti: vita e opere' in Joseph Rykwert and Anne Engel, eds., *Leon Battista Alberti*, pp.28-37, p.36.

<sup>86</sup> Paolo Carpeggiani, 'Ludovico Gonzaga, l'architettura e il progetto di <<Renovatio Urbis>>' in Cesare Mozzarelli, Robert Oresko e Leandro Ventura, eds., *La corte di Mantova nell'età di Andrea Mantegna* (Rome: Bulzoni, 1997), pp.243-253, pp.244-246. For a general discussion of Lodovico's patronage of architecture see Howard Burns, 'The Gonzaga and Renaissance Architecture' in David S. Chambers and Jane Martineau, eds., *Splendours of the Gonzaga*, Catalogue of the Exhibition, London, 4 November 1981 – 31 January 1982 (London: Victoria and Albert Museum, 1981), pp.27-38.

<sup>87</sup> Paolo Carpeggiani e Irma Pagliari, *Mantova. Materiali per la storia urbana dalle origini all'Ottocento* (Mantua: Gianluigi Arcari, 1983), pp.26-27.

<sup>88</sup> For a series of examinations of Alberti's Mantuan commissions see *Il Sant'Andrea di Mantova e Leon Battista Alberti*. Atti del convegno di studi organizzato dalla città di Mantova con la collaborazione dell'Accademia Virgiliana nel quinto centenario della basilica di Sant'Andrea e della morte dell'Alberti 1472-1972, Mantova 25-26 aprile 1972 (Mantua: Biblioteca Comunale di Mantova, 1974) and Joseph Rykwert e Anne Engel, eds., *Leon Battista Alberti*.

<sup>89</sup> On San Sebastiano see Arturo Calzona and Livio Volpi Ghirardini, *Il San Sebastiano di Leon Battista Alberti* (Florence: Olschki, 1994).

fruition. The third, hatched a decade later after a period of apparent hiatus in their relationship, was the awesome temple of Sant'Andrea.<sup>90</sup> Around the same time Alberti was finalising his designs for Sant'Andrea, Lodovico also assumed responsibility for the renewal of the Church of the Santissima Annunziata in Florence, a commission for which he clearly considered Alberti the most qualified specialist available.<sup>91</sup> Although neither lived to see the completion of the Mantuan churches, both San Sebastiano and Sant'Andrea remain dazzling testimonies of a fertile and reciprocal discourse between a revolutionary designer and a learned patron. Nor, it must be added, does the notion of the marchese as a keen devotee of the new style of architecture emerge merely from his close relations with Alberti. In his *Trattato di architettura*, written in the early-1460s in exactly the same years Lodovico and Alberti were working on the projects of San Sebastiano and the Rotonda di San Lorenzo, the Sforza architect Antonio Averlino, better known as Filarete, paid glowing tribute to the marchese and his taste for classical architecture:

[...] Siche conforto ciascheduno, ch'investichi e cerchi nello edificare il modo antico di fare, e husare questi modi. Che se non fusse più bello e più utile, a Firenze non s'userebbe, come ò detto disopra. Nè anche il Signore di Mantova, il quale è intendentissimo, non l'userebbe, se non fusse quello che dico. E che sia vero, una casa ch'elli à fatto fare a uno suo castello insù il Po, la quale ne dà testimonianza [...].<sup>92</sup>

Although not purely classical in style and form, the palace at Revere, given that it had been conceived in the north of Italy in the middle of the century, clearly made an impression on those who saw it. The Papal humanist and historiographer Flavio Biondo, in his *Italia Illustrata*, commented:

[...] in Padi ripa est Reverum novum oppidum e regioni Ostilie situm: quod Ludovicus Gonzaga Marchio Mantuanus

<sup>90</sup> On Sant'Andrea see Eugene J. Johnson, *S. Andrea in Mantua. The Building History* (Pennsylvania and London: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1975).

<sup>91</sup> On Lodovico's involvement with the Santissima Annunziata see S.Lang, 'The Programme of the SS. Annunziata in Florence', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, vol.17, (1954), 288-300 and Beverly Louise Brown, 'The Patronage and Building History of the Tribuna of SS. Annunziata in Florence: A Reappraisal in Light of New Documentation', *Mitteilungen Des Kunsthistorischen Instituts in Florenz*, XXV, (1981), 59-146.

<sup>92</sup> Antonio Averlino detto il Filarete, *Trattato di architettura*, ed. by A.M.Finoli and L.Grassi, Libro VIII (Milan: il Polifilo, 1972). Filarete is clearly referring to the palace at Revere, commissioned by Lodovico around 1450. See also Paolo Carpeggiani, *Il palazzo gonzaghese di Revere* (Revere: Amministrazione Comunale, 1974) and James G. Lawson, *The Palace at Revere and the Earlier Architectural Patronage of Lodovico Gonzaga, Marquis of Mantua (1444-78)*, Ph.D. thesis, University of Edinburgh, 1974.



validissimus cōmunitum menibus: pulcherrima domo ornare  
perseverat [...].<sup>93</sup>

Other contemporaries to have praised Lodovico's knowledge of building include the architect Giovanni da Gaiole, the Florentine Giovanni Aldobrandini, who defined the marchese as "esperto di queste cose", and the Mantuan humanist Platina, who commemorated the passing of his former patron in 1478 with a eulogy which included the term "de architectura aliquid disputantem".<sup>94</sup>

While we must be cautious that these comments may have been made to flatter, Lodovico's profound understanding of and practical competence in building has been firmly established by recent scholarship which has examined the relationship between patron and architect in the Italian Renaissance. In his recent evaluation of the artistic patronage of Lorenzo de' Medici, Kent notes that both Lorenzo and Lodovico Gonzaga acquired a great deal of knowledge through mixing with skilled artisans, concluding that, though by no means relationships of equals, their contact with those in their employ was beneficial to both patron and artist.<sup>95</sup> Nor is Kent's choice of Lodovico as a model for the prince well versed in the art of building coincidental; the marchese's credentials have also recently been confirmed by three other scholars keen to expose Lodovico's deep understanding of architecture and his remarkable enthusiasm for practical involvement in the buildings he commissioned.<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>93</sup> Flavius Blondus, *Italiae Illustratae Libri VIII* (Rome: Johannes Philippus de Lignamine, 1474), c.95r.

<sup>94</sup> On these three contemporary comments see Franco Borsi, 'Giovanni di Domenico da Gaiuole: da legnaiolo a legnaiolo' in Franco Borsi, Gabriele Morelli e Francesco Quinterno, eds., *Brunelleschiani* (Rome: Officina edizioni, 1979), pp.46-50; G.Gaye, *Carteggio inedito d'artisti dei secoli XIV, XV, XVI* (Florence: Giuseppe Molini, 1839-1840), vol.1, p.226; Lawson, *The Palace at Revere*, p.226.

<sup>95</sup> F.W. Kent, *Lorenzo de' Medici and the Art of Magnificence* (London: John Hopkins University Press, 2004), p.55 and p.89.

<sup>96</sup> The three contributions cited by Kent appear in a volume of conference proceedings edited by Arturo Calzona, Francesco Paolo Fiore, Alberto Tenenti and Cesare Vasoli, *Il principe architetto. Atti del convegno internazionale, Mantova, 21-23 ottobre 1999* (Florence: Olschki, 2002). On Lodovico's profound knowledge of architecture see Calzona, 'Ludovico II Gonzaga Principe 'intendentissimo nello edificare'', pp.257-277. On his enthusiasm for practical involvement in his commissions see Livio Volpi Ghirardini, 'La presenza di Ludovico II Gonzaga nei cantieri delle chiese albertiane di San Sebastiano e di Sant'Andrea', pp.279-296. Lastly, on the marchese's taste and stylistic preferences see Gianfranco Ferlisi, 'I palazzi dei cortegiani e le scelte architettoniche e urbanistiche di Ludovico Gonzaga', pp.297-326.

The keen and often hands-on interest in the architectural projects he financed, indeed, comes consistently to the surface in contemporary correspondence. In his many letters addressed to Luca Fancelli, the marchese frequently refers to his interlocutor as “el maistro” and to himself as “el discipulo.”<sup>97</sup> In 1458 Marsilio Andreasi wrote from Revere to the Marchesa Barbara, informing her that her husband, on his return from Ostiglia and Ponte Molino, “[...] ritorno qui a XXII hore e subito se mise a dissignare le botege che'l vole far qui cum una casa de munitione [...]”<sup>98</sup> Three years later, in another letter addressed to Barbara, Antonio Donato wrote from Ponte Molino that:

[...] El Signore fu heri a Pontemolino et a la torre de mezo dove Sua Signoria fece certo desegno per fortificare quello loco cioe la torre per accesso. Poi vene ala rocha de hostia e li fece certo altro desegno [...].<sup>99</sup>

To substantiate Lodovico's credentials and reputation as a prince who took more than a passing interest in his architectural commissions, many other contemporary sources, and in particular extracts from letters exchanged with Fancelli and the engineer Giovanni da Padova, have been published by Calzona.<sup>100</sup> These letters reveal not only an almost obsessive involvement in the buildings he commissioned, but also a sound understanding of drawing and other technical aspects of the building process, to the extent that the author is able to credit the marchese with substantial contributions to the construction and structural improvement of several projects.

It could be argued that the patron Alberti found in Lodovico Gonzaga closely resembles the patron Filarete had hoped to find in Francesco Sforza. Evelyn Welch notes that Filarete's analogy of the patron as the father and the architect as the mother of a building project was not reflected in the reality of his fourteen years of

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<sup>97</sup> See, for example, letter Lodovico to Luca Fancelli, Borgoforte, 20 August 1476 (ASMn AG, b. 2894, Lib. 81 f. 43v). Published by Corinna Vasic Vatovec, *Luca Fancelli architetto. Epistolario gonzaghesco* (Florence: Uniedit, 1979), p.365. For a thorough examination of correspondence between Lodovico and Fancelli see also Paolo Carpeggiani and Anna Maria Lorenzoni, eds., *Carteggio di Luca Fancelli con Ludovico, Federico e Francesco Gonzaga marchesi di Mantova* (Mantua: Gianluigi Arcari, 1998).

<sup>98</sup> Letter Marsilio Andreasi to Marchesa Barbara, Revere, 15 March 1458 (ASMn AG. b. 2393). Cited by Lawson, *The Palace at Revere*, pp.274-275.

<sup>99</sup> Letter Antonio Donato to Marchesa Barbara, Ponte Molino, 4 January 1461 (ASMn AG. b. 2396, c. 3). Cited by Lawson, *The Palace at Revere*, p.275 and by Calzona, 'Ludovico II Gonzaga', p.266.

<sup>100</sup> Calzona, 'Ludovico II Gonzaga Principe 'intendentissimo nello edificare'', esp. pp.266-275.



service to the Duke of Milan between 1451 and 1465. Florentines in particular, Welch continues, often placed unrealistically high hopes in princely patrons, and Sforza clearly shared neither the marchese's professional respect for practitioners with vision nor his enthusiasm for erecting great buildings.<sup>101</sup>

By the time Lodovico came into contact with Alberti, it can probably be assumed that, having mastered at least some of the basic principles of building, he must have been at least partially equipped to engage in discussions with the latter on how to develop through architecture the image of himself which he wished to portray: that of a legitimate and learned ruler. Given Alberti's broad range of classical interests, moreover, it is to be imagined that Lodovico, a prince of arms and letters educated by Vittorino da Feltre, probably connected with him on a series of levels and in several subject areas.<sup>102</sup> By its very nature, however, and due above all to the scale and magnificence of the basilica of Sant'Andrea, the outstanding legacy of this particular patron-client relationship will always be remembered as one of architectural merit. On closer examination of surviving letters between the two, however, it becomes clear that Lodovico's huge respect for Alberti, which at times borders on complete deference, places the relationship on a different level from that of his association with, say, Luca Fancelli, on whom the marchese constantly attempts to impose his will. For this reason alone, I believe, Alberti must be included among the humanists, rather than among the artists and craftsmen, to have been accepted by Lodovico and his court.

During the course of the Papal Congress, as has been mentioned, Lodovico requested from Alberti a copy of Vitruvius to be lent to the Pope, proving that, besides organising the crusade against the Turks, there was time for discussion between the marchese and his distinguished guests on matters somewhat less

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<sup>101</sup> Evelyn S. Welch, *Art and Authority in Renaissance Milan* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), pp.145-147. Filarete's analogy of the patron-father and architect-mother is discussed in his treatise of 1465, *Trattato di architettura*, in which he depicts an image of Sforzinda, an imaginary city in honour of his reluctant patron.

<sup>102</sup> Calzona makes the point that, as well as Lodovico, others educated by Vittorino, including Federico da Montefeltro and the Marchesa Barbara, display in their letters a knowledge of architectural design. In the case of the marchesi, Calzona continues, this was clear even before Alberti's first visit to Mantua in 1459. Calzona, 'Ludovico II Gonzaga Principe 'intendentissimo nello edificare'', p.269.

pressing.<sup>103</sup> While Pius II departed Mantua after bringing the Congress to a close in January 1460, at the end of the following month Alberti was still there, occupied with providing blueprints for the restoration of the Rotonda di San Lorenzo and for the new church of San Sebastiano. In a letter of 27 February, in which he informs Lodovico that his plans for the two projects are ready to be viewed and discussed, Alberti also, and somewhat boldly, notifies the marchese, who was on business in Milan at the time, that he has already arranged to spend a few days at the villa in Cavriana. In a tone far removed from that which one would expect to read in a letter from an artist whose working relationship with his patron had begun only a few months earlier, Alberti writes:

[...] Ma perche io me sentiva non molto fermo della persona e alchuni prudenti amici me chonfortavano chio mutassi per qualche dì aere, pero pregai Piero Spagnuolo, segretario Vostro, provedesse in qualche una delle vostre ville dove io per qualche dì potessi ricrearmi. Parse allui et imprima a me apto luogho la Chavriana, dove spero ire forse Sabato o lunedì proximo. De questo mi parse avvisarne la S.V., et ingratiare della beneficentia quale io ricevo [...].<sup>104</sup>

There are several elements of this letter which are striking, in that they reveal Alberti's confident assurance in informing the marchese of a decision already reached and arrangements made. Firstly, he had deemed it sufficient to ask the favour of Pietro Spagnolo, a secretary, rather than of Lodovico himself. Secondly, Alberti decided which of his patron's villas he would like to visit and, thirdly, he selected days of his own choosing for his sojourn, without considering it necessary to secure the approval of Lodovico beforehand. Essentially, this is a letter reporting a *fait accompli*, rather than the request for a favour one might reasonably be expected to find composed in such circumstances. For Alberti to be able to write to the marchese with a tone bordering on superciliousness, it could be argued, their relationship, forged in the elite humanistic ambience of the Papal Congress, was on an entirely different level from those which Lodovico conducted

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<sup>103</sup> See p.166 above.

<sup>104</sup> Letter Alberti to Lodovico, Mantua, 27 February 1460. Published by Willelmo Braghirolli, 'Leon Battista Alberti a Mantova. Documenti e notizie inedite', *Archivio storico italiano*, vol.9, n.1, (1869), 3-31, pp.7-8. The letter is also examined by David S. Chambers, *Patrons and Artists in the Italian Renaissance* (London: Macmillan, 1970), pp.112-113.



with the other key figures involved in his artistic and architectural projects at this point.<sup>105</sup>

After having overseen the design and perhaps also the early stages of construction of the church of San Sebastiano, Alberti appears to have left Mantua in the summer of 1460. He returned in 1463, perhaps for most of that year, again to follow closely the building of his church.<sup>106</sup> During the interlude, however, a letter he received from Lodovico shows that Alberti had petitioned the marchese for a job for his brother Carlo. Though unable to satisfy him on this occasion, the tone of the Lodovico's letter was both apologetic and sympathetic, demonstrating considerable respect for Alberti and his family.<sup>107</sup> The marchese also chose to compose the letter in Latin, a language normally reserved for correspondence with foreign rulers, with the Church or with learned humanists. For Lodovico to write in Latin to someone he considered as a mere artist would have been unthinkable.<sup>108</sup>

The next known evidence of Alberti in Gonzaga correspondence occurs in January 1465 when, with the former having recently arrived in Rome, the marchese wrote to Paul II, urging the new Pope to employ Alberti as an abbreviator, just as his predecessor Pius II had done.<sup>109</sup> Four days later, Lodovico dispatched a letter to his son the cardinal, requesting that he too seek to bring to bear any possible influence on the pontiff to employ Alberti in Rome.<sup>110</sup> For the next five years there is no documented contact between Alberti and the marchese, until, in the autumn of 1470, Alberti returned to Mantua, perhaps to give some impetus to the stalled project of San Sebastiano. A letter of 14 October shows that, notwithstanding an

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<sup>105</sup> In his correspondence with Fancelli, for example, Lodovico often forced the former into submission on a variety of issues and, although Mantegna would come to hold a large degree of influence over the marchese, the artist had at this stage been in Mantua merely a couple of months. Calzona argues that Alberti's visit to Cavriana may also have been linked to work being carried out there at that time to convert the Gonzaga castle into a princely palace. Calzona, 'Ludovico II Gonzaga Principe 'intendentissimo nello edificare'', p.273.

<sup>106</sup> For a series of letters which mention Alberti in Mantua in 1463 see Braghirolli, 'Leon Battista Alberti a Mantova', p.11.

<sup>107</sup> Letter Lodovico to Alberti, Mantua, 12 February 1461 (ASMn AG, b. 2888 Lib. 48 f. 2v). Published in Braghirolli, 'Leon Battista Alberti a Mantova', pp.10-11.

<sup>108</sup> For a discussion of the evolution of the status of artists in Italy during the Renaissance see Martin Warnke, *The Court Artist: On the Ancestry of the Modern Artist* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

<sup>109</sup> Letter Lodovico to Pope Paul II, Mantua, 1 January 1465. Published in Braghirolli, 'Leon Battista Alberti a Mantova', p.12.

<sup>110</sup> Letter Lodovico to Cardinal Francesco Gonzaga, Mantua, 5 January 1465. Published in Braghirolli, 'Leon Battista Alberti a Mantova', pp.12-13.

absence of five years, Lodovico has lost none of the esteem he had for the authoritative judgments on architecture and design pronounced by Alberti. His words, addressed to Fancelli, offer a resounding endorsement of the architect's inclinations and, despite a solid working knowledge of his own, betray once again a position of unequivocal deference:

[...] Havemo visto quanto per la tua ne scrivi del parere de don Baptista de li Alberti circa el minuire quelli pillastri del portico et cetera, dil che assai te comendiamo et poich'el pare cussì a lui, cussì pare anche ad nui. [...] <sup>111</sup>

Rather than referring to Alberti's thoughts on elements of the design of San Sebastiano, the letter appears to have been written with regard to the smaller project of a commemorative monument in honour of the previous marchese, Lodovico's father Gianfrancesco. This emerges from another letter of the following week, again addressed to Fancelli, from which it is clear that Alberti's principal input to this creation was to be the inscription:

[...] Havemo visto quanto per la tua ne scrivi de la torre se depinze et del spatio lassato per quelle littere, dil che te comendiamo e pare-ne che tu te trovi cum don Baptista d'i Alberti et lo pregi che lui te faccia la forma de esse littere, le quale, secundo nui, erano queste, cioè: <<Iohannes Franciscus primus marchio Mantue et cetera>>, se anche lui paresse che le se facessero in altra forma o per altro modo, avisacene [...] <sup>112</sup>

And finally, in a further letter to Fancelli four days later:

[...] Havemo ricevuta la tua et quella de don Baptista de li Alberti cum quello tondo notato cum quelle littere se hano a depingere suso la torre, le quale ne piaceno, et cussì ne pare se faciano come esso ordinarà. [...] <sup>113</sup>

Alberti, it seems clear from these three letters, was in Mantua on business not considered by the marchese to be pressing enough to require his own return to the capital from Gonzaga. Whether the more urgent purpose for Alberti's visit was to supervise the work in progress at San Sebastiano or to provide consultancy on the

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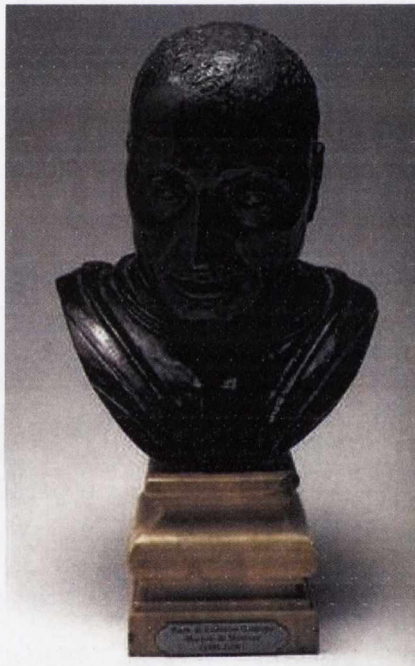
<sup>111</sup> Letter Lodovico to Luca Fancelli, Gonzaga, 14 October 1470 (ASMn AG, b. 2891 Lib. 66 f. 54.v). Published by Vasic Vatovec, *Luca Fancelli architetto*, p.100.

<sup>112</sup> Letter Lodovico to Fancelli, Gonzaga, 19 October 1470 (ASMn AG, b. 2891, Lib. 66 f. 61v). Published by Vasic Vatovec, *Luca Fancelli architetto*, p.190.

<sup>113</sup> Letter Lodovico to Fancelli, Gonzaga, 23 October 1470 (ASMn AG, b. 2891 Lib. 66 c. 66r). Published by Vasic Vatovec, *Luca Fancelli architetto*, p.190.



design of the monument for his late father, what is extraordinarily evident in each of these letters is that Lodovico repeatedly and blindly places greater importance on the opinions of Alberti that he does on those of Fancelli, despite the fact that the latter had been the main protagonist in construction and design in Mantua for the previous twenty-three years. If only in the instance of the small project under discussion, Fancelli is reduced by the marchese to the role of executor of Alberti's will and, given that the focal point was a Latin inscription, one could talk in terms of collaboration between artist and humanist.<sup>114</sup> It may also have been around this time that a bronze bust of Lodovico, now in Paris and attributed to Alberti, was commissioned (Fig.48).<sup>115</sup>



**Fig.48: Leon Battista Alberti, Bust of Lodovico Gonzaga**

At this very time, nonetheless, the marchese's attention was becoming ever more focused on his next and biggest ever architectural project. For the duration of the

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<sup>114</sup> The previously accepted view that Fancelli's main function in Mantua was to execute the designs of others has been successfully challenged in numerous studies by Paolo Carpeggiani, who has raised Fancelli's status to that of architect in his own right. See, in particular, 'Luca Fancelli architetto civile nel contado mantovano: ipotesi e proposte', *Civiltà Mantovana*, n.20, (1969), 87-114; *Il palazzo gonzaghesco di Revere* (Revere: Amministrazione comunale, 1974); 'Luca Fancelli, da tagliapietra ad architetto' in Mariano Vignoli, ed., *Dal castello al palazzo. Storia e architettura in un'area di confine*, Atti del convegno, San Martino Gusnago, 16 novembre 1996, (Bozzolo: Banca di Credito Cooperativo di Casalmoro e Bozzolo, 1997), pp.15-41.

<sup>115</sup> On this bust, and a similar one in Berlin often attributed to Donatello, see Paolo Parmiggiani, 'Riflessi donatelliani nel *Sangue di Cristo*', in *Andrea Mantegna e i Gonzaga. Rinascimento nel castello di San Giorgio*, ed. by Filippo Trevisani, (Milan: Electa, 2006), pp.120-153, pp. 126-127.

1460s, ever since the end of the Papal Congress and the start of an urge to renew the urban fabric of Mantua in response to the stinging criticisms of visiting dignitaries, Lodovico had been embroiled in a bitter feud with the Abbot Carlo Nuvoloni of the monastery of Sant'Andrea, over plans to destroy the ancient church and replace it with a monumental basilica.<sup>116</sup> As long as the immovable abbot was alive, however, the frustrated marchese was unable to circumvent the wearisome impasse, despite repeated efforts, largely through his son the cardinal, to lobby two popes. At times Lodovico even resorted to efforts to besmirch the abbot and the religious practices within the monastery. In March 1470 Abbot Nuvoloni died, resulting in Sant'Andrea being placed under episcopal control and therefore becoming accessible to the Gonzaga through Cardinal Francesco. Designs drawn up by the Tuscan architect Antonio Manetti some nine years earlier, which had to be shelved until the death of the abbot, could now be dusted down and implemented.

With the original architect having died shortly after completing his design for Sant'Andrea in 1460, a full decade later Lodovico was still anxiously awaiting Papal approval for the new church, which Sixtus IV would eventually give in a Bull of June 1472. In the meantime, however, the marchese appears to have been keen to discuss the matter with someone of Alberti's indubitable authority, in anticipation of soon being able to commission the final project. Lodovico concludes a letter from Gonzaga of 23 October 1470, in which he approves Alberti's choice of words and letters for the aforementioned inscription, with the acknowledgement:

[...] Havemo etiam visto el designo de quello tempio ne haveti mandato, el quale prima fatie ne piace; ma perche non lo possiamo ben intendere a nostro modo aspieteremo che siamo a Mantova; poi parlato che habiamo cum vui et dictovi la fantasia nostra et intesa anche la vostra faremo quanto ne parera sia il meglio [...].<sup>117</sup>

With plans for the monument to Gianfrancesco Gonzaga now complete, Alberti had written to the marchese confirming that a decision on the form and content of the inscription had also been reached. After a brief description, Alberti turns his

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<sup>116</sup> For an extensive discussion on the background to the difficult acquisition of Sant'Andrea by Lodovico see David S. Chambers, 'Sant'Andrea at Mantua and Gonzaga Patronage', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 40, (1977), 99-127.

<sup>117</sup> Letter Lodovico to Alberti, Gonzaga, 23 October 1470 (ASMn AG, b. 2891 Lib. 66, f. 66r.).



attention to Sant'Andrea, in a letter described by Ercolano Marani as “un momento di rilevanza capitale nella storia dell'arte”<sup>118</sup>:

[...] Ceterum io intesi a questi dì che la signoria vostra et questi vostri cittadini ragionavano de edificare qui a Sancto Andrea. Et che la intentione principale era per havere gran spatio dove molto populo capesse a vedere el sangue de Cristo. Vidi quel modello del Manetti. Piaquemi. Ma non mi par apto alla intentione vostra. Pensai et congettai questo qual io ve mando. Questo sarà più capace, più eterno, più degno, più lieto. Costerà molto meno. Questa forma de tempio se nomina apud veteres etruscum sacrum. Sel ve piaserà darò modo de notarlo in proportione. [...].<sup>119</sup>

In this letter Alberti shows all the astuteness of a shrewd humanist, attempting to make his proposal appeal to Lodovico on a various different levels.<sup>120</sup> Firstly, he alludes to a large church where the crowds could visit a relic intimately connected with Gonzaga rule. While treading carefully in an effort not to dismiss the marchese's artistic taste, he then reveals that he has seen the plan by Manetti and that he likes it, albeit and tellingly without revealing why he likes it. In referring to the “intentione vostra” Alberti then takes the letter onto a theoretical level in which he, as a prospective architect and from a position of expertise and authority, is able to take the initiative in convincing his patron to opt for the model now being proposed. After listing a series of adjectives carefully chosen to evoke the desired images in the mind of his reader, Alberti also make a barely disguised effort to appeal to him on a much less austere, but perhaps equally important, level by stating frankly that his model will cost less than Manetti's to build. Even with the enclosed basic design, which unfortunately is no longer extant, Lodovico must surely have been mesmerised by a style defined as “etruscum sacrum,” a terminology lifted by Alberti from Vitruvius for this specific project.<sup>121</sup> The

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<sup>118</sup> Ercolano Marani, ‘La lettera albertiana del 21 ottobre 1470 (nel cinquecentesimo anniversario)’ in *Il Sant'Andrea di Mantova e Leon Battista Alberti*, pp.427-431, p.429.

<sup>119</sup> Letter Alberti to Lodovico, Mantua, October 1470 (ASMn, AG, raccolta autografi, cassetta 7, cartella Alberti). Although the letter is undated, Marani asserts that it was probably written on 21 October. Marani, ‘La lettera albertiana’, p.429.

<sup>120</sup> Johnson notes that this letter was specifically written in an attempt to secure the commission. See Johnson, *S. Andrea in Mantua*, p.8.

<sup>121</sup> Carpeggiani views Sant'Andrea as the “templum etruscum” described by Vitruvius. John Onians, on the other hand, while acknowledging Alberti's exploitation of Mantua's Etruscan origins to create a unique style, suspects that the architect's knowledge of Etruscan architecture was in reality rather superficial. See Carpeggiani, ‘La città sotto il segno del principe’ in *Mantova. Materiali per la storia urbana dalle origini all'Ottocento*, p.28 and John Onians, ‘Leon Battista Alberti. The Problem of

confident authority of the letter's tone, together with the tantalising prospect of a novel style being proposed to an erudite patron, was probably too much for the marchese to resist, and Alberti unquestionably anticipated this.



Fig.49: Mantua, Basilica di Sant'Andrea

As has been mentioned, neither Lodovico nor Alberti would live to see Sant'Andrea finished; Alberti, indeed, died in April 1472, before even the first stone was laid. Although Alberti returned to Rome after submitting his design for the basilica, the prospect of following the progress of arguably his most audacious project ever, coupled with the still incomplete state of San Sebastiano begun over a decade previously, clearly resulted in a rapprochement between the two after a period of apparent silence during the latter half of the previous decade. In the last known letter exchanged between the marchese and his esteemed humanist-architect, the former dispenses advice on acquiring property in the *Mantovano*. Alberti's visit to Mantua in the autumn of 1470 appears to have been his last, but he features heavily in correspondence of the following year between Lodovico and his agents in Florence in relation to work being carried out at the church of the

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Personal and Urban Identity' in *La corte di Mantova nell'età di Andrea Mantegna*, pp.207-215, pp.213-215 and pp.243-253.



Santissima Annunziata.<sup>122</sup> Also in 1471, on 4 March, the scribe Matteo da Volterra informs Lodovico that he is currently copying Alberti's *De iciarchia*.<sup>123</sup> Written in 1468, during the apparent five year interlude in relations between the marchese and Alberti, one can probably safely assume that this treatise had been brought to Mantua by Alberti the previous autumn and, if this were true, it would lend further weight to the argument that their relationship was considered by Lodovico first and foremost to be one of patron and humanist rather than one of patron and artist.

Lodovico, according to Burns, was fortunate to have obtained the services of Alberti, who complemented in the field of architecture what Mantegna provided in painting.<sup>124</sup> More accurate in my opinion, however, is Marani's view that their meeting represented a great opportunity for Alberti to achieve what Heydenreich describes as the "pinnacle of his architectural career" in Sant'Andrea.<sup>125</sup> In any event, what is clear, as Hollingsworth notes, is that the marchese's association with Alberti represents a major development in the dynamics of the relationship between patron and architect in the Quattrocento; while Lodovico continued to contribute ideas, he was fully aware that in Alberti he had found someone able to create an impressive image of power.<sup>126</sup> Alberti, a humanist and architect hailing from no single local tradition, depended on his adaptability for survival; to achieve this, Onians observes, he created his own space, his own persona and his own image, the very assets desired by the patrons with whom he engaged.<sup>127</sup> Reading the fourth book of his seminal treatise *De re aedificatoria*, it becomes clear that Alberti was well aware of this; as well as promoting the figure of the architect as a new model of intellectual working in public service, as Alberti firmly believed he had been in the ancient world, he also subordinates the patron to such an extent

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<sup>122</sup> Several such letters, mostly exchanged between the marchese and Piero della Tovaglia, are published in Brown, 'The Patronage and Building History of the Tribuna of SS. Annunziata in Florence'. On the project of the church of the Santissima Annunziata see pp.80-84 above.

<sup>123</sup> *De Iciarchia* is published in Leon Battista Alberti, *Opere volgari*, vol.II, ed. by Cecil Grayson (Bari: Laterza, 1966).

<sup>124</sup> Burns, 'The Gonzaga and Renaissance Architecture,' p.28.

<sup>125</sup> Marani, 'La lettera albertiana del 21 ottobre,' p.429; Ludwig H. Heydenreich, *Architecture in Italy 1400 to 1600* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1974), p.36.

<sup>126</sup> Mary Hollingsworth, *Patronage in Renaissance Italy: From 1400 to the Early Sixteenth Century* (London: John Murray, 1994), p.217-218.

<sup>127</sup> Onians, 'Leon Battista Alberti. The Problem of Personal and Urban Identity', pp.207-209.

that the architect need not sacrifice any of his independence.<sup>128</sup> Luca Fancelli, though often referred to by the marchese in the 1470s as his “architecto,” enjoyed none of this independence, as becomes evident from an examination of the copious surviving correspondence between the two, in which Lodovico’s interest frequently borders on interference.<sup>129</sup> Nor were the differences in the marchese’s relationships with the two restricted to the former’s degree of deference to their opinions; while Fancelli, whom Lodovico considered fundamentally to be a craftsman, received financial and material benefits befitting this modest status, Alberti, like the other eminent humanists of his time, was rewarded with political support and protection. A final important distinction in the marchese’s attitudes is clear from the levels of formality used in his correspondence; while he addresses Alberti with *voi* form, in his letters to Fancelli he uses the less formal *tu*.

Leon Battista Alberti, as I have acknowledged, was not merely a humanist in the eyes of Lodovico Gonzaga, but I would argue that it was his status as an authority on the humanities and the ancient world which endeared him so much to the marchese. Their relationship was clearly multi-faceted, which undoubtedly allowed them to connect on a series of levels and in different areas of interest; as we have seen, Alberti was consulted on literary works, treatises, inscriptions and, probably most frequently, on architectural commissions. It was the nature of these buildings, however, which set Alberti apart from other architects, such as Luca Fancelli, employed by Lodovico to create a new image for Mantua, its territory and the Gonzaga dynasty. In his designs for the Mantuan churches Alberti provided his patron with a powerful and evocative style rooted in antiquity, which in the case of Sant’Andrea was also personalised and adapted to a Mantuan context. This basilica would have been inconceivable without a comprehensive awareness of classical styles and their significance on Alberti’s part. Other elements which I have mentioned, such as the confident and often intimate tone of Alberti’s letters, as well as requests for and concessions of political favours, indicate that Alberti

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<sup>128</sup> For a discussion of Alberti’s interpretation of Vitruvius and his views on the role of the architect-intellectual see John Oppel, ‘The Priority of the Architect: Alberti on Architects and Patrons’ in F.W. Kent and P. Simons, eds., *Patronage, Art and Society in Renaissance Italy* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), pp.251-267. Likewise, Hollingsworth notes that the disassociation of the architect from the craftsman led to a diminished role for the patron. Mary Hollingsworth, ‘Alberti: A Courtier and his Patrons’ in *La corte di Mantova nell’età di Andrea Mantegna*, pp.217-224, p.221.

<sup>129</sup> See Carpeggiani e Lorenzoni, eds., *Carteggio di Luca Fancelli con Ludovico, Federico e Francesco Gonzaga marchesi di Mantova*.



enjoyed the privileges reserved for Lodovico's most trusted courtly circles, a milieu occupied more habitually by humanists than by artists and architects.

## **Conclusions**

While Francesco Filelfo, Enea Silvio Piccolomini and Leon Battista were three major humanists by any standards, the dynamics of their respective relationships with Lodovico Gonzaga differed substantially.

Lodovico's contact with Pius II and Alberti was a direct consequence of the Papal Congress staged in Mantua in 1459-1460, while by that stage Filelfo had been an acquaintance of the Gonzaga for several decades. All three, as has been mentioned, attended the event; Alberti as an abbreviator in the papal entourage, and Filelfo as part of the retinue of Francesco Sforza. To varying degrees, moreover, Mantua's hosting of the Papal Congress enabled Lodovico to profit from the authority of the pope and from the skills of Filelfo and Alberti. The crippling costs of staging such a large and important event were offset by increased prestige for his city and house while, in more tangible terms, the award of a place in the College of Cardinals for his teenage son represented the first accession of a family member to the highest echelons of the Church. While Pius' decision to elevate the young protonotary to such high office would have unquestionably been influenced by gentle pressure applied by the Hohenzollern and their contacts in the College, Francesco's reading of the oration, commissioned from Filelfo prior to the Congress, may also have been instrumental. With regards to Alberti, his presence alone seems to have been sufficient to ignite one of the most remarkable documented patron-artist/humanist relationships of the entire Quattrocento, which resulted in Lodovico commissioning two of the most notable buildings of the age.

The marchese's association with these figures was at times, however, fraught with tension. Refusal of Filelfo's overtures had to be weighed up against the possibility of this most capricious of humanists publishing invective, veiled or otherwise, which could damage his reputation among contemporaries and with posterity. Even more problematic for Lodovico were the two main goals of Pius' pontificate, namely the crusade and the conversion of Corsignano to Pienza, both projects for

which the pope expected significant Gonzaga contributions. A reluctance by Lodovico to appease Pius in the first and most immediate of these projects could clearly damage Francesco's prospects of becoming a cardinal, while any perceived lack of enthusiasm to contribute to the embellishment of the pope's birthplace could be paramount to political suicide once that office had been secured. Nonetheless, judging from the limited criticism by Filelfo and the unreserved praise in Pius' *Commentarii*, both appear to have remained not only respectful but also hopeful to the last for the financial backing of the marchese, which in truth he may never have intended to bestow. While Piccolomini's election and crusading zeal had put Mantua on the map and ultimately rewarded Lodovico with high office for his son, the pope's death in the summer of 1464 removed the marchese's obligation to pay for these substantial political gains.

In some respects the fall of Constantinople in 1453 can be seen as a stroke of good fortune for Lodovico; his imperial family ties and the advantageous geographic position of his small state, coupled with the Pope's attraction to the reputed birthplace of Virgil, made Mantua the ideal choice of venue for the Congress, the failure of which to inspire a general crusading zeal was no reflection on its host. Thanks to Pius's nomination of the adolescent Francesco as cardinal in 1461, the Gonzaga dynasty's ties to and influence within the Curia were cemented, despite a dragging of heels regarding commitments to military contracts and investment in property in Pienza.

From 1458 all the rulers of the Italian peninsula and beyond were compelled to pay Piccolomini homage and, at the very least, to conduct cordial relations with him as Pontiff. In the case of the marchese, however, dealings with Pius clearly moved beyond the realm of the spiritual and political into the sphere of letters and the humanities. On a humanistic level, moreover, Pius, who was in the unique position of being not only a distinguished scholar but a patron of unrivalled means, made significant contributions both to the Gonzaga library, in the form of a Pliny and possibly other volumes, and to the Mantuan school, in his recommendation as tutor of Gregorio Tifernate. Looking beyond the political circumstances which thrust the two together, and leaving aside for one moment considerations of costs incurred and gains enjoyed by Lodovico, the Congress of Mantua must also be



recognised as a meeting of two kindred spirits, between one of the period's most enlightened rulers and one of its most eminent humanists.

In the cases of Filelfo and Alberti, it is difficult to imagine two figures who could illustrate more clearly Clough's observation that traditional scholars suffered after 1460, just as patrons' attention was moving towards large-scale architectural projects.<sup>130</sup> Consequently, whereas a large proportion of correspondence with Filelfo comprises pleas for money and respectful refusals, Alberti's letters give the impression of someone whose services were in such demand that he was able almost to bend the marchese's will to secure precisely the commissions he wished to carry out. If Lodovico represented for Filelfo a more learned and desirable prince than Sforza, for Alberti he must have epitomised the ideal patron. Not until the early decades of following century, when Julius II and Leo X indulged the ambitions of Bramante and Michelangelo at Saint Peter's, would Renaissance Italy see a ruler give such complete backing on a large enough scale to design a project for a new basilica. In this respect the marchese's association with Alberti perhaps fits more comfortably into the category of patron-artist, but it must be remembered that the relationship between the two began and endured as one of patron-humanist. Both the architectural vocabulary which Alberti possessed and Lodovico's eagerness to engage it stemmed from a shared understanding of classical building, rooted in turn in a knowledge of Vitruvius and the study of antiquity.

The arrival of Vittorino da Feltre, a major figure of a previous generation of humanists, had heralded a new age of enlightenment for Mantua and the Gonzaga dynasty. Lodovico, the family's first ruler to be educated at the school, not only governed according to the principles with which he had been imbued there, but showed a propensity to cultivate relations with men of learning for the duration of his rule, and in doing so cemented his court's reputation, among the foremost scholars of the period, for being an attractive milieu, conducive to their disposition and their talents.

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<sup>130</sup> Cecil H. Clough, 'Federigo da Montefeltro's Patronage of the Arts, 1468-1482', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, XXXVI, (1973), 129-144, p.142.

## Appendix: Angelo Poliziano

Although the temptation to include Angelo Poliziano among Lodovico Gonzaga's humanist interlocutors is indeed a strong one, no evidence to link the two figures has ever emerged. Nor indeed is there even any consensus that this most prestigious *cliens* of Lorenzo de' Medici's literary circle visited Mantua before 1480. The focus of this academic debate is not, it must be stressed, on whether Poliziano ever met the marchese; what the numerous debaters of this issue have instead been attempting to establish is the date of composition of *Orfeo*, a highly significant work in the history of Quattrocento Italian literature, given that it was not only the "primo testo della nostra drammaturgia profana volgare," but an extremely influential one.<sup>131</sup> While some critics have made strong cases for its having been written no earlier than 1480, it must be noted that three major scholars make a case for the 1470s as the most probable period of composition and, given that almost all agree that it was indeed written in Mantua, this would place one of the most exalted literary works of the entire Renaissance in the Mantua of Lodovico Gonzaga. While there can be little doubt that the patron was Cardinal Francesco Gonzaga, I feel duty-bound to examine the possibility, however small, that Lodovico may have been close to the composition and first performance of this much celebrated literary work.

There are no surviving letters between Poliziano and the Gonzaga family, which means that, even if Cardinal Francesco were the patron behind the inception of *Orfeo*, as seems likely, neither he nor his father enjoyed relations with the poet that could be defined as either long-standing or enduring.<sup>132</sup> One undated letter written by Poliziano does, however, unambiguously locate the work in a Mantuan context.<sup>133</sup> Addressing the Mantuan Carlo Canale (pre-1450-1500), a courtier of Cardinal Francesco and clearly well known to the writer, Poliziano reveals that the *Fabula di Orfeo* was composed "a requisizione del nostro reverendissimo Cardinale Mantuano, in tempo di dua giorni, intra continui tumulti".<sup>134</sup> Unfortunately, Poliziano fails to disclose where or when he wrote the work, omissions which,

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<sup>131</sup> Angelo Poliziano, *Poesie volgari. Vol.I. Testi*, ed. by Francesco Bausi (Rome: Vecchiarelli, 1997) p.xix.

<sup>132</sup> Isidoro Del Lungo, *Florentia. Uomini e cose del Quattrocento* (Montepulciano: Le Balze, 1897), p.290.

<sup>133</sup> Letter Poliziano to Carlo Canale. Published in Angelo Poliziano, *Stanze Orfeo Rime*, ed. by Davide Puccini (Milan: Garzanti, 1992), pp.145-146.

<sup>134</sup> Letter Poliziano to Carlo Canale. Published in Poliziano, *Stanze Orfeo Rime*, pp.145-146.



from the time of Del Lungo's pioneering but, since then, revised studies, have given rise to the debate surrounding the period of composition of the *Orfeo*. Something of which there can be no doubt, however, is the identity of the patron. While bearing in mind that the writer makes no mention of the marchese, and that the sponsor of the work was without doubt Cardinal Francesco, it may be interesting to examine the hypotheses which propose the 1470s as the era in which it was composed, arguments which link Lodovico Gonzaga, albeit indirectly, to this illustrious writer and his celebrated work in *volgare*.

Although this thesis is not the place to chart each individual contribution to a debate which began over a century ago, in order to establish whether Lodovico Gonzaga ever met Poliziano in Mantua we must examine some of the key arguments put forward.<sup>135</sup> Writing at the end of the nineteenth century, Isidoro Del Lungo argued for 1471 as the year of composition.<sup>136</sup> He reasoned that the introduction to *Orfeo* was linked to the death of Pope Paul II and he suggested that the visit to Mantua of the Milanese Duke Galeazzo Sforza and Bona of Savoy in July of the same year may have been a plausible occasion for its performance, a theory which, if correct, would place Lodovico Gonzaga extremely close to the event and make him an indirect patron.<sup>137</sup> Although almost two decades later Del Lungo, in his introduction to an article written by his student Giovanni Battista Picotti, suggested 1480 as a more likely year of composition, three other significant twentieth-century critics, with more documentation available to them, opt for the 1470s.<sup>138</sup> The first of these is Antonia Tissoni Benvenuti who, rather than listing convincing reasons as to why the *Orfeo* may have been composed in the 1470s, presents a series of arguments outlining the problems in opting for 1480. The most resounding argument for a date prior to 1480, argues Tissoni Benvenuti, is that the two most likely occasions for a performance in that year – carnival and, in June, the visit of the future Marchesa Isabella d'Este – both fell within eight months of the death of the Marchesa Margherita Gonzaga, at a time when, according to

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<sup>135</sup> For a summary of contributions to the debate see Attilio Bettinzoli, 'Rassegna di studi sul Poliziano (1972-1986)', *Lettere Italiane*, XXXIX, (1987), 53-125 (pp.107-117).

<sup>136</sup> See note 132, p.353 above.

<sup>137</sup> On Galeazzo Sforza's visit to Mantua see Gregory Lubkin, *A Renaissance Court: Milan under Galeazzo Maria Sforza* (Berkeley and London: University of California Press, 1994), pp.100-101.

<sup>138</sup> Del Lungo's change of opinion is expressed in his introduction to Giovanni Battista Picotti, 'Sulla data dell'«Orfeo» e delle «Stanze» di Agnolo Poliziano', *Rendiconti della R.Accademia dei Lincei*, vol.XXIII, (1915), 319-357, pp.319-320.

Tissoni Benvenuti, a compulsory year of mourning would have excluded the possibility of such festivities.<sup>139</sup> Nor, she notes, is there any mention of such a performance in the lengthy contemporary accounts of the pre-marriage festivities in honour of Isabella d'Este and Francesco Gonzaga, left by Gabriele Tassino, the Milanese ambassador to Ferrara, or in those of Francesco Peregrini Ariosti, the Ferrarese chronicler.<sup>140</sup>

Mario Martelli, one of the foremost authorities on Poliziano, also considers *Orfeo* to be a work of the 1470s. While Tissoni Benvenuti's argument is based largely on circumstances in Mantua and Florence, Martelli's suggestion is the result of meticulous analyses of the work in the context of Poliziano's career and other writing. The myth of Orpheus, he notes, was a popular theme in Florence during the 1470s, a decade during which the works of Poliziano and Lorenzo show some convergences.<sup>141</sup> Martelli also draws on an interpretation of the political climate in Medici circles in the aftermath of the Pazzi conspiracy of 1478.<sup>142</sup> Before the murder of his brother Giuliano (1453-1478) and the attempt on his own life, he continues, Lorenzo had a cultural agenda that was almost exclusively Tuscan and vernacular but, after the conspiracy, Latin regained some ground, in order that he might forge and maintain close ties with other political powers. Although Lorenzo wrote and sponsored vernacular works right up to his death in 1492, his politically motivated decision in 1478 to steer a significant part of Poliziano's literary activity to Latin was to have repercussions; while the 1470s were characterised by poetry both in Latin and his greatest works in *volgare*, from 1480 he concentrated on philological readings of Latin and Greek works and writing erudite poetry mainly in Latin, though some also in vernacular.<sup>143</sup>

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<sup>139</sup> Antonia Tissoni Benvenuti, 'Il viaggio d'Isabella d'Este a Mantova nel giugno del 1480 e la datazione dell' "Orfeo" del Poliziano', *Giornale Storico della Letteratura Italiana*, CLVII, (1980), 369-383, p.374. Also by Tissoni Benvenuti, see *L'Orfeo del Poliziano con il testo critico dell'originale e delle successive forme teatrali* (Padua: Editrice Antenore, 1986), esp. pp.58-70. Margherita Gonzaga died on 12 October 1479.

<sup>140</sup> Tissoni Benvenuti, 'Il viaggio d'Isabella d'Este', pp.369-371.

<sup>141</sup> Mario Martelli, *Angelo Poliziano. Storia e metastoria* (Lecce: Conte Editore, 1995), p.42 and pp.90-91. Also by Martelli, see 'Il mito d'Orfeo nell'età laurenziana', *Interpres*, 8, (1988), 19-20.

<sup>142</sup> On the Pazzi conspiracy see Harold M.M. Acton, *The Pazzi Conspiracy: The Plot against the Medici* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1979). For a pro-Pazzi account see Lauro Martines, *April Blood: Florence and the Plot against the Medici* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2003).

<sup>143</sup> Martelli, *Angelo Poliziano*, pp.49-50.



Given that *Orfeo* sits more comfortably in the former period, Martelli maintains that it is likely to have been composed prior to 1480, and probably also before the Pazzi conspiracy, mainly because it yields most meaning when subject to allegorical and neo-Platonist interpretation, but also because it shows an awareness of the most important dramatic genre in the Florentine Quattrocento, the *sacre rappresentazioni*. This theory, it must be noted, is consistent with Martelli's contention that Poliziano's vernacular production was largely concentrated between 1473 and 1478.<sup>144</sup> Martelli's contentions are supported and supplemented by Francesco Bausi, the most authoritative editor of Poliziano's vernacular writings, who identifies in the myth of Orpheus a recurring allegorical and moral theme in Laurentian Florence in the 1470s.<sup>145</sup> The observation that *Orfeo* reveals a predominantly moral and religious approach, without the erudite philological content of Poliziano's later years, is a persuasive one.

Despite the coherence and persuasiveness of the political and literary arguments by Martelli and Bausi for *Orfeo* having been written in the 1470s, much circumstantial evidence points to 1480 as the likely year of composition. It must be added, moreover, that a sizeable cluster of respected commentators have offered compelling counter-arguments to oppose the theories of critics such as Tissoni Benvenuti and Martelli. Vittore Branca, for instance, is among those who argue in favour of 1480, contesting Tissoni Benvenuti's claim that ruling families of the period observed such a lengthy interval of mourning following the death of a consort.<sup>146</sup>

Perhaps the most persuasive argument for 1480, however, is the documented presence of Poliziano in Mantua in that year. Having left Florence under a shadow cast by problems with Lorenzo in late 1479, Poliziano appears to have been looking for a possible other patron. He travelled north to join the entourage of Cardinal Francesco Gonzaga, who at that time was based in Bologna. Around the same time, meanwhile, Lorenzo embarked on a lengthy diplomatic journey to Naples and Poliziano, irritated by the fact that he had not been invited, wrote to

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<sup>144</sup> Martelli, *Angelo Poliziano*, p.39.

<sup>145</sup> Bausi, *Poesie volgari*, I., pp.xxi-xxv.

<sup>146</sup> Vittore Branca, *Poliziano e l'umanesimo della parola* (Turin: Einaudi, 1983), p.12 and p.61.

his erstwhile patron, asking to be readmitted to the Medici circle.<sup>147</sup> On 29 May Poliziano was finally reconciled with his patron, given the chair of “professore di arte oratoria e poetica” at the Florentine *Studio* and reappointed tutor to Lorenzo’s son Piero.<sup>148</sup> If Poliziano was indeed back in Florence on this date, it would make it highly unlikely that *Orfeo* was written, as has often been assumed, for the festivities of 22 June to mark the engagements of Francesco Gonzaga with Isabella d’Este and Chiara Gonzaga (1465-1503/05) with Count Gilbert of Montpensier (1443-1496, Count 1486-1496). Of course, he could have written the work while in Mantua a few months earlier but it must be remembered that, in the above mentioned letter to Carlo Canale, Poliziano reveals that he has written the work “in tempo di dua giorni, intra continui tumulti”.<sup>149</sup> While at first the reference to the time scale of the composition would seem to indicate that Poliziano had been working to a strict deadline, such a statement can also be interpreted as acknowledgement of an established literary topos; Tissoni Benvenuti, indeed, observes that this may be a reference lifted directly from the dedicatory letter with which Statius introduces the first book of the *Silvae*.<sup>150</sup> Some critics, meanwhile, have perceptively suggested that the “continui tumulti” may refer to the preparations for Shrove Tuesday, which in 1480 fell on 15 February, while he was still in Mantua.<sup>151</sup> Cardinal Francesco, notes Pirrotta, threw a banquet for his family on that day.<sup>152</sup> Whatever the nature of the “tumulti,” according to Puccini, it is clear that Poliziano expected the meaning to be evident to Canale, therefore implying that *Orfeo* was indeed composed in Mantua.<sup>153</sup> If, on the other hand, Poliziano’s “tumulti” are a reference to the Pazzi conspiracy and its aftermath, he could written it in Florence as an offering to a prospective new patron, while reasonably assuming that Canale would have understood the allusion. It is not, however, inconceivable that, at this time, Poliziano really was asked to compose a dramatic piece only two days beforehand, to be performed at the planned celebrations. Another critic who embraces the suggestion of the *Orfeo* having been

<sup>147</sup> Letter Poliziano to Lorenzo de’ Medici, Mantua, 19 March 1480. See Martelli, *Angelo Poliziano*, p.34.

<sup>148</sup> Poliziano, *Stanze Orfeo Rime*, p.xvii.

<sup>149</sup> See note 134, p.353 above.

<sup>150</sup> Tissoni Benvenuti, ‘Il viaggio d’Isabella d’Este’, p.379.

<sup>151</sup> See M.Vitalini, ‘A proposito della datazione dell’*Orfeo* del Poliziano’, *Giornale Storico della Letteratura Italiana*, CXLVI, (1969), 245-251 and, with some caution, Nino Pirrotta, *Li due Orfei. Da Poliziano a Monteverdi* (Turin: Einaudi, 1981), p.9.

<sup>152</sup> Pirrotta, *Li due Orfei*, p.38.

<sup>153</sup> Poliziano, *Stanze Orfeo Rime*, pp.lii-liii.



commissioned for a pre-Lenten celebration is Davide Mattellini.<sup>154</sup> Expanding on the hypotheses of Vitalini and Pirrotta, Mattellini presents further evidence in favour of a Shrove Tuesday performance. The repeated closing incitements of the Baccanti, argues Mattellini, are a clear invitation to those present to indulge themselves in eating, drinking and sexual activity:

Ognun segua, Bacco, te!  
Bacco Bacco, euoè!  
Chi vuol bere, chi vuol bere,  
venga a bere, venga qui. [...]<sup>155</sup>

At this point it must be noted that, as Bausi has observed, this *baccanale* is based on Greek sources, and cannot be interpreted exclusively as a pre-Lenten celebration.<sup>156</sup> The double entendres, moreover, reveal an invitation to unbridled sexual licentiousness. Mattellini, however, unearths other indications in the text which lead him to conclude that *Orfeo* was composed in Mantua for the carnival of 1480, including an ironic use of Lombard dialect and the dismembered *Orfeo*, abandoned to his fate, as an analogy of Poliziano himself in exile.<sup>157</sup> Nor, he notes, in much the same way as it was for the protagonist of the play, was 1480 a particularly happy year in love for Federico, a further element which may have influenced the choice of subject matter.<sup>158</sup> Mattellini also suggests that the themes of death and the macabre would have exalted the carnival spirit, and he draws attention to a tendency at this time to offer Christian interpretations of classical myths; the dominant theme of the necessity of Orpheus' death could have been viewed as a parallel to the Christian death and Resurrection which mark the end of Lent. Finally, Mattellini suggests, *Orfeo* would appear to be a fitting performance for a carnival banquet organised by a cardinal who was interested in fashionable paganism.<sup>159</sup> Mattellini also explicitly rejects Picotti's assertion that *Orfeo* would have represented suitable subject matter for the double engagement celebrations,

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<sup>154</sup> Davide Mattellini, 'Poliziano, il Cardinale, Il Carnevale: Contributi per una rilettura della <<Fabula di Orfeo>>', *Civiltà Mantovana*, XXXIII, n.106, (1998), 103-131.

<sup>155</sup> Angelo Poliziano, *Fabula di Orfeo*, versi 309-312. See Bausi, *Poesie volgari*, vol.I, p.55.

<sup>156</sup> Bausi, *Poesie volgari*, vol.I, p.xxiv.

<sup>157</sup> Mattellini, 'Poliziano, il Carnevale, il Cardinale', p.110.

<sup>158</sup> Mattellini, 'Poliziano, il Carnevale, il Cardinale', p.116.

<sup>159</sup> Mattellini, 'Poliziano, il Carnevale, il Cardinale', pp.118-119.

arguing instead that it would have been an entirely inappropriate accompaniment to such an event.<sup>160</sup>

The problems in establishing a firm date for the writing of *Orfeo*, as has been demonstrated, are many and complex, and very little information surrounding Poliziano's relations with the Gonzaga family and his only known visit to Mantua can be ascertained. While an analysis of the fragmented information available may point to 1480 and, if true, the Shrove Tuesday banquet staged on 15 February by Cardinal Francesco Gonzaga, only one certain date demarcates the possible period of composition: 21 October 1483, when the cardinal died. An important element not considered thus far, but one which several critics have treated, is the age of Poliziano during this ten-year period. Born in 1454, Poliziano was only nineteen years of age when he was first employed by Lorenzo in 1473, a factor which Tissoni Benvenuti, perhaps unjustly, acknowledges as potentially problematic in presenting a convincing case for the first half of this decade. She does, however, point to similarities between *Orfeo* and an elogy in Latin which Poliziano wrote for Albiera degli Albizzi on 14 July 1473, by which time, she argues, he was an established author in the vernacular.<sup>161</sup> In deconstructing the theory of his mentor Del Lungo, Picotti was the first to cite the problems relating to *Orfeo* being composed by a mere youth, while Mattellini also alludes to Poliziano's young age in the early 1470s as part of his case for 1480 and, albeit somewhat dismissively, suggests that Cardinal Francesco was also an obscure figure at this stage.<sup>162</sup> To exclude the early 1470s on the grounds of Poliziano's tender years alone, however, would be to underestimate the precocious talent of this finest of humanists, and indeed that of his patron Lorenzo, who was writing the *Uccellagione* in his teens. Given, moreover, his other early works of the 1470s, including the *Stanze* and translations of books two to five of the *Iliad*, it cannot reasonably be argued in this case that the difference of these few years is of any real consequence to the debate.

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<sup>160</sup> Mattellini, 'Poliziano, il Carnevale, il Cardinale', p.106; Picotti, 'Sulla data dell'«Orfeo»', p.338. This point, it must be noted, fails to consider the two octaves from verse 293 of *Orfeo*, in which it is revealed that the protagonist has been dismembered precisely for having scorned the "teda legittima", or the bond of matrimony, in favour of homosexuality.

<sup>161</sup> Tissoni Benvenuti, 'Il viaggio d'Isabella d'Este', p.380.

<sup>162</sup> Picotti, 'Sulla data dell'«Orfeo»', pp.327-328; Mattellini, 'Poliziano, il Carnevale, il Cardinale', p.108.



All things considered, to place the creation and first performance Poliziano's *Orfeo* within the court of Lodovico Gonzaga would be at best tenuous and at worst implausible. While, it must be acknowledged, there are no certainties regarding date and place, circumstantial evidence linked to historical events in Mantua, as has been discussed, has convinced some commentators that 1480 is the most likely year of composition. Perhaps on firmer scientific ground, however, are the textual analyses carried out by Tissoni Benvenuti, Martelli and Bausi, each of whom places *Orfeo* in the 1470s and therefore within the lifetime of Lodovico. Even if we were to accept that it was written in the 1470s, we must also acknowledge that, while there can be no doubt that a Gonzaga was the patron, the work was, in all likelihood, composed and performed not in Mantua but in Rome or Bologna, where the cardinal had residences.<sup>163</sup> No thesis which aims to examine the humanists to have benefited from the patronage of this particular marchese, however, can fail at least to take into consideration the beguiling notion that Lodovico could have been involved in the conception of one of the most outstanding literary works of the entire Italian Quattrocento.

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<sup>163</sup> Bettinzoli makes the point that, because Poliziano's letter to Carlo Canale makes it clear that Cardinal Francesco Gonzaga is the patron, several critics have injudiciously assumed that *Orfeo* was composed in Mantua, and for this reason have felt compelled to link its first performance to a recorded event there. Bettinzoli, 'Rassegna di studi sul Poliziano', p.111.

# CONCLUSIONS





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The violent seizure of Mantua by his ancestor Luigi in 1328 stands in sharp contrast with the peace, prosperity and territorial security of the latter years of the rule of Lodovico Gonzaga. Having proved himself during the early years of his rule as a worthy Renaissance prince in domestic politics and in warfare, the Peace of Lodi in 1454 led to a new climate in which the marchese was able to make a major impact not only in the increasingly important arena of peninsular diplomacy but also in his prolific sponsorship of arts and letters. This was bolstered by the prestige gained from hosting the Papal Congress in 1459-1460, and by the definitive reunification of the Mantuan territories in 1466.

Even without its own artistic school, Mantua under Lodovico became a major centre for art and architecture. Perhaps the most notable element of the marchese's patronage, apart from its sheer volume, was the coexistence of the late Gothic alongside the neo-classical in his commissions, until the arrival of Mantegna in 1459. A prince in the Quattrocento used representation in art as a means of legitimisation and, while the images of the warrior depicted in the frescoes and medals by Pisanello would have been a priority in the first decade of his rule, in later commissions the superficial classicism of the early works by Fancelli had developed into the mature versions evident in the courtyard and in Sant'Andrea, spawned from dialogue with Mantegna and Alberti respectively, as Lodovico sought to project a more modern image of learned prince. Whereas the arrival of Mantegna heralded a change in style, the concurrent Papal Congress prompted a shift in attention from territory to town, a move which was embraced by courtiers and citizens in a new climate of civic patronage and embellishment. The new style may have arrived somewhat abruptly in Mantua, but in Lodovico, who provided huge impetus, one perceives a genuine devotee of art, whose patronage was also a personal learning curve.

No firm and unambivalent direction may have been given to artistic policy until Mantegna arrived, but in the field of humanist studies Mantua had been at the forefront since Vittorino accepted Gianfrancesco's invitation to establish a



school almost four decades earlier. The desire to shape a prince having proved an irresistible lure for the pedagogue, Lodovico and Barbara benefitted from the finest education available in the period, an experience which was fundamental in shaping them both not only as rulers but also as patrons. Vittorino would also bring to bear his considerable influence not only on the marchese's siblings but also on Federico da Montefeltro, another outstanding statesman of the period, while countless other pupils would go on to enjoy careers as teachers, humanists, secretaries, diplomats and administrators, each reinforcing the humanist ethos instilled by Vittorino and ensuring that these values remained central foundations of government and society in Mantua and elsewhere. The death of Vittorino was followed by an inevitable but only gradual regression of standards of schooling in Mantua, as the legacy of the Casa Giocosa was a series of highly competent teachers, including the young humanist Platina, sponsored by Lodovico and charged with the education of his own children.

If the Mantuan School is rightly considered as one of the finest of the period, at least during the twenty-three years of Vittorino's tenure, recognition of the Gonzaga Library as the peer of its counterparts in Ferrara and Urbino has often been less forthcoming. Already renowned by the time of the 1407 inventory, the arrival in 1423 of Vittorino provided the library with new impetus precisely during the years in which many of the literary works of Roman and Greek antiquity were being rediscovered and circulated throughout the Italian peninsula. The pedagogue's overriding concern for the accuracy of the text was subsequently nurtured by Lodovico who, inspired by genuine literary interest, acquired manuscripts through other courts, agents and tutors at the school. While one could argue that the Urbino library enjoys greater fame due to its glorified physical setting, the account of Vespasiano da Bisticci and a relatively short period of intensive acquisition, the Gonzaga collection, which dated back at least until the early years of the previous century, was in all probability significantly more comprehensive, especially once it absorbed the volumes owned personally by Vittorino after his death in 1446. The lack of an inventory compiled during the rule of Lodovico may be regrettable but the vast amount of correspondence in the Archivio Gonzaga relating to the acquisition

of books offers sufficient evidence that the marchese was one of the most ardent bibliophiles of the Italian Renaissance. As was the case in patronage of the visual arts, late medieval and Gothic elements continued to coexist alongside classical elements in the Gonzaga Library during the Quattrocento; while it took until the arrival of Mantegna and Alberti to provide clear direction in that field, however, the policy of literary acquisition appears to have been less ambiguous since Vittorino, whose influence ensured that Mantua was a leading seat of humanist studies several decades before it embraced the new currents of art and architecture. A sustained and systematic effort to piece together the contents of the library before its dispersal between 1630 and 1707 would, one feels, reveal a collection at least the equal of the best ones of the time.

A large proportion of the library's manuscripts, indeed, were produced in Mantua by various scribes and miniaturists. The decoration of texts, hitherto the preserve of monasteries, became a mainstream sphere of artistic output in the Italian courts of the mid to late Quattrocento and, although in Mantua this field blossomed later than elsewhere, the arrival of Mantegna was followed by the production of miniaturism of the highest quality. The substitution of Belbello da Pavia with Gerolamo da Cremona as the artist of the *Messale*, the finest Gonzaga manuscript of the century, can be viewed as a microcosm of the cultural change which occurred in Mantua and neighbouring territories during the central decades of the century, when the prevalent taste at court shifted from Late Gothic to classical. The large volume of surviving correspondence between the marchesi and numerous scribes and miniaturists reveals not only vast output by the latter but also the literary tastes of Lodovico and Barbara which, although increasingly more centred on the rediscovered works of antiquity, continued to accommodate tales of chivalry and, of course, religious texts. Closer examination of the letters reveals Lodovico's prime preoccupation with textual accuracy but also, after 1460, an increasing interest in how the volumes he commissioned were decorated. Finally, these documents provide fascinating insights into the personalities of the scribes and miniaturists, the conditions in which they lived and worked and their relations with the marchesi, whose prolific patronage was both erudite and devout.



As was the case with the decoration of manuscripts, the first initiatives in printing occurred in Mantua a few years later than in other centres in the peninsula. The fact that the initial impetus was provided by Pietroadamo de' Micheli, a unique instance of a local rather than a German introducing the first printing press to an Italian city, was remarkable in itself but the appearance within a year of three further businesses would suggest that, despite Pietroadamo's own failure caused by adverse financial circumstances, early printed texts were well received in Mantua. During the last seven years of Lodovico's life, indeed, thirty-three texts spanning three languages and ten subject areas were produced by no fewer than eight practitioners in five workshops. These figures not only reveal an extraordinary intensity of printing apparently unmatched elsewhere in the period but also lead one to conclude that Mantua was home to an enthusiastic reading public of eclectic taste. While a large number of these volumes, though well produced, are of limited philological significance, Pietroadamo's *Decameron*, which was based on a fine manuscript copy possessed and willingly loaned by the marchese, and Colombino Veronese's edition of the *Commedia*, only the third of its type and published in collaboration with Paul Puzbach, were and remain important editions of these two most significant works of vernacular literature. To depict Lodovico as the driving force behind the explosion of printing in Mantua in the 1470s would be both misleading and inaccurate, but it would be difficult to underestimate his contribution to the development, not only at court but also in the city and indeed the wider Mantuan territory, of a broad readership eager to embrace the new printed texts. In this respect, the astonishing output of the early Mantuan printing presses can be considered, to some degree at least, a consequence of the marchese's literary interests and cultural patronage.

These literary interests were very much evident in relations Lodovico conducted with men of letters. Although Mantua produced no outstanding writers during the three and a half decades of his rule, Giovanni Pietro Arrivabene, Giovan Francesco Suardi and Filippo Nuvoloni were three erudite figures whose letters and literary works represent episodes of interest in relation to the cultural climate fostered by the marchese. In the case of

Arrivabene, though in his early career he wrote encomiastic works for both Lodovico and Pope Pius II, it is in his correspondence with the marchesi, rather than in his literary works, that one grasps his true worth, as collector of manuscripts and antiquities and interlocutor with princes and humanists, not to mention patron of art and architecture in his own right. Suardi, meanwhile, may have been technically more accomplished as a writer than Arrivabene, but the two shared a predilection for composing informative and intriguing letters on matters of cultural interest – arguably none more so than those sent by Suardi from Siena during the protracted negotiations with Donatello. The enigmatic figure of Nuvoloni, finally, also comes to life in the letters he exchanged with Lodovico and Barbara, revealing a quarrelsome but nonetheless highly esteemed personality, praised by Colombino Veronese and apparently a close friend of Andrea Mantegna, whose similar character traits may have been a key element in the friendship forged between the two. While no Mantuan literary masterpiece can be attributed to any of these three figures, each linked Lodovico and Barbara to institutions and individuals elsewhere in the peninsula and, though for the most part they lived and worked away from Mantua, they all remained loyally devoted to the Gonzaga.

If correspondence with Arrivabene, Suardi and Nuvoloni is evidence that Lodovico enjoyed engaging with men of letters, his dealings with Filelfo, Pius II and Alberti reveal a prince at ease conversing with three of the major humanists of the century. While relations with Filelfo were often, though not exclusively, limited to appeals for money and polite refusal, a mutual respect is nonetheless clear from the tone of the letters they exchanged, and the fact in itself that, apart from giving occasional praise, this most prickly of humanists never openly criticised the marchese in his published writings is another indication that the latter, unlike other past and potential patrons, enjoyed Filelfo's esteem. Cordial and political relations with the pontiff were, of course, *de rigueur* for any Quattrocento prince but in the case of Lodovico and Pius II these were extended to the spheres of letters and architecture. The fall of Constantinople and the subsequent choice of Mantua to host the Papal Congress may have been the initial context in which the two became well acquainted but, once in Mantua, this most versatile of humanist scholars

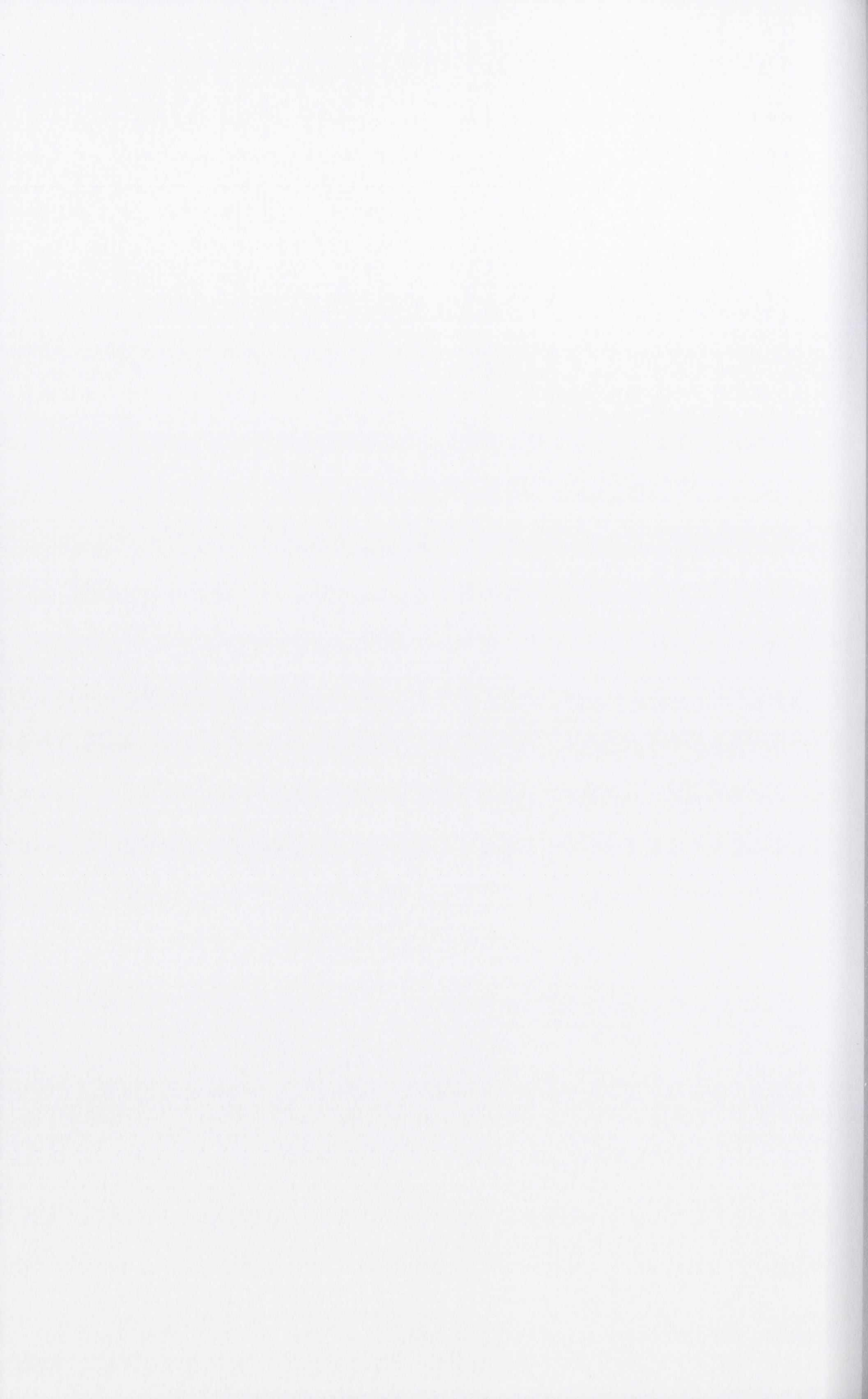


conversed with the marchese on a number of subjects of shared cultural interest, including Virgil, Vitruvius and the Mantuan school. Although during the early 1460s much pressure was brought to bear by the pope's requests for firm military pledges and the construction of a palace in Pienza, the marchese, for whom the Congress had been extremely costly, was able to build on the prestige gained from having hosted the event by securing a place in the College of Cardinals for his teenage son, while also continuing to enjoy the esteem of Pius, whose high praise of Lodovico and Barbara in the *Commentarii* is unequivocal. In the case of Alberti, it is clear from the tone of their correspondence that Lodovico considered this remarkable figure as a humanist and *architetto intellettuale*, in sharp contrast to Luca Fancelli, who was addressed as an artisan and given orders accordingly. The relationship between the marchese and Alberti, indeed, is a major landmark in fifteenth-century patron-architect relations, in that their association, as well as being based on genuine and informed dialogue, gave both men exactly what they wanted, albeit posthumously: for Alberti the opportunity to produce the monumental temple which represented the pinnacle of his career, and for Lodovico a lasting tribute to his erudition, benevolence and piety. Finally, while Poliziano's *Orfeo* cannot be attributed to the patronage of Lodovico, it can be connected to the cultural climate in Mantua during the latter years of his rule.

It has been demonstrated, in conclusion, that, as well as being worthy of the reputation he enjoys as a warrior and as a patron of art and architecture, Lodovico Gonzaga must also be recognised as a prince of letters. A modern and thorough humanist education, under the guidance of one of the finest pedagogues of the epoch, instilled in Lodovico from a young age a love of literature which he continued to nurture for the duration of his life, and which resulted in the growth of the remarkable Gonzaga Library, not only through the purchase of manuscripts from elsewhere but also, and especially, through the employment of scribes and miniaturists in Mantua. Support for the first printing press in the town, moreover, where this new form of book soon caught on and became a major local industry during the final years of his life, was a natural act by a ruler who counted among his acquaintances not only local men of letters but also some of the most renowned humanists of the

period. Despite its overuse, there can be no dispute whatsoever that Lodovico Gonzaga is as worthy as any ruler of the label “prince of arms and letters”.





# APPENDIX 1

## POLITICAL MAP OF ITALIAN PENINSULA, c.1500



*The Thames and Hudson Dictionary of the Italian Renaissance* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1997), p.351

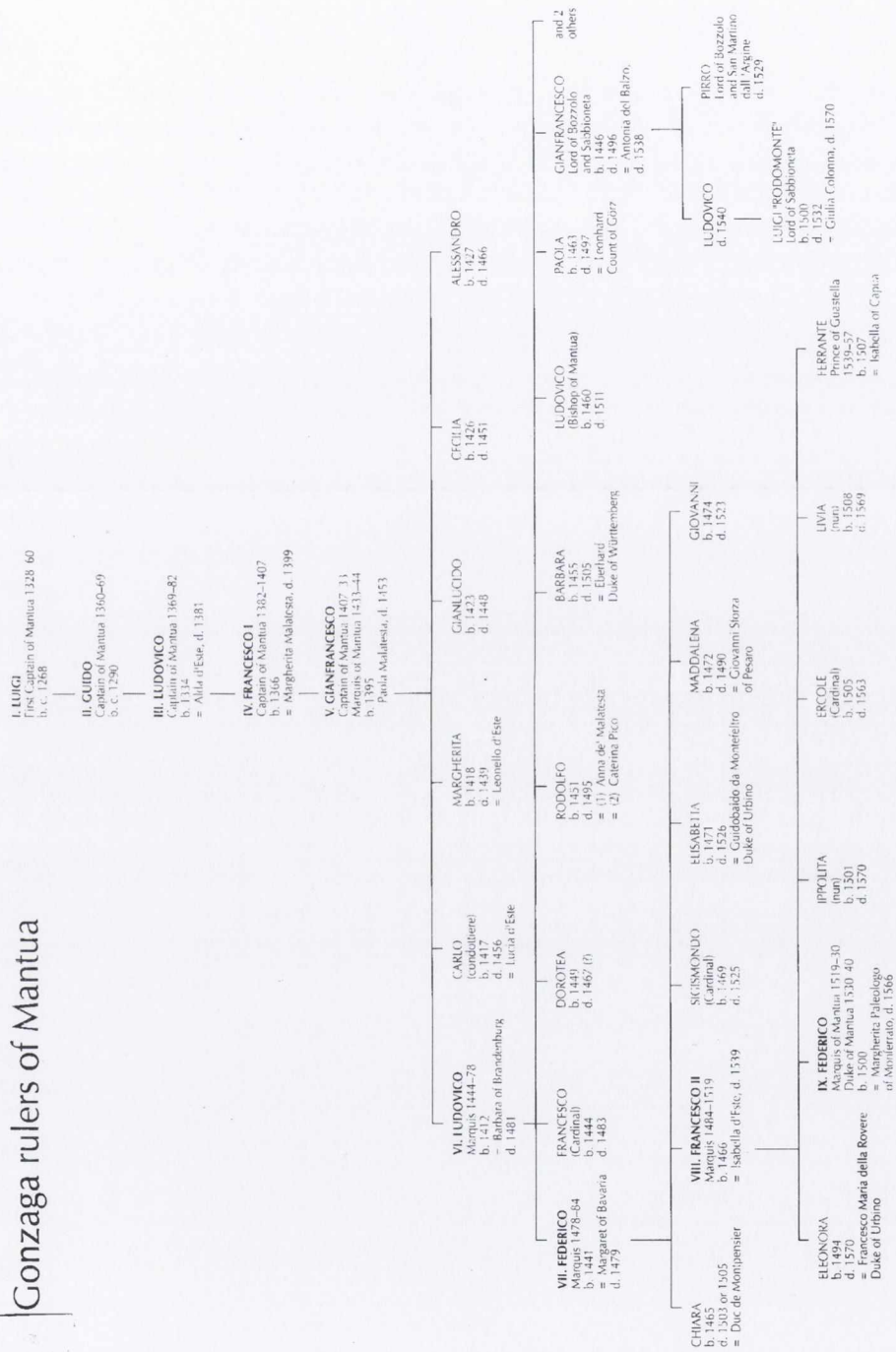




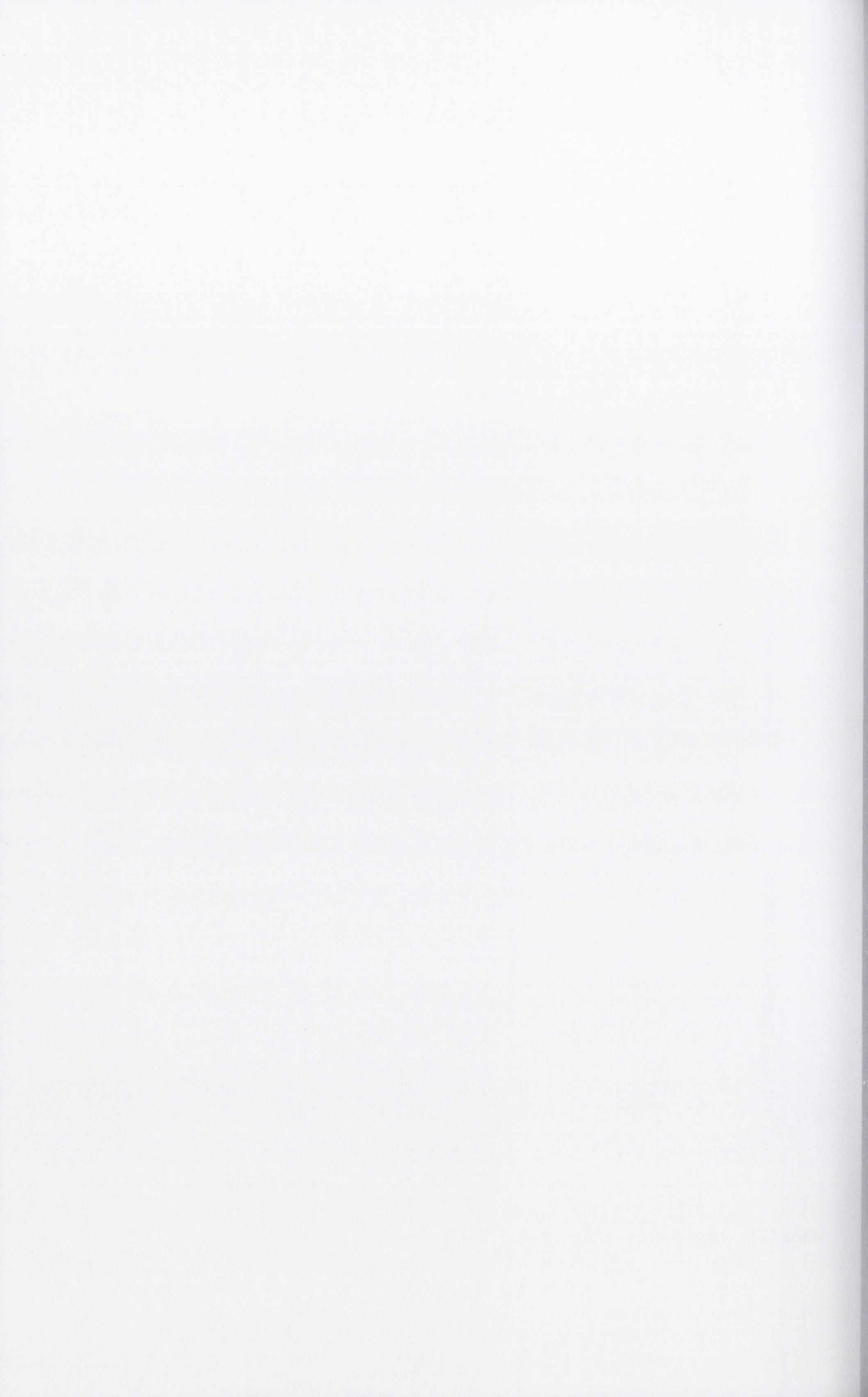
# APPENDIX 3

## GENEALOGY OF THE GONZAGA OF MANTUA

Gonzaga rulers of Mantua







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- Fig.4 Filippo Trevisani, ed., *Andrea Mantegna e i Gonzaga. Rinascimento nel Castello di San Giorgio* (Milan: Electa, 2006), p.137
- Fig.5 <http://cartelfr.louvre.fr/cartelfr>
- Fig.6 [http://www.geocities.com/dabell\\_2000/Mantegna\\_la\\_corte.jpg](http://www.geocities.com/dabell_2000/Mantegna_la_corte.jpg)
- Fig.7 <http://turismo.comune.mantova.it>
- Fig.8 <http://www.turismo.regione.lombardia.it>
- Fig.9 <http://www.liberatiarts.com/inac/ospedale.html>
- Fig.10 <http://turismo.comune.mantova.it>
- Fig.11 <http://www.italiantourism.com/fotoenit/mantova13.jpg>
- Fig.12 <http://turismo.comune.mantova.it>
- Fig.13 *Electa Art Guides: Mantua* (Milan: Electa, 1992), p.27
- Fig.14 Trevisani, ed., *Andrea Mantegna e i Gonzaga*, p.27
- Fig.15 Personally owned photograph
- Fig.16 *Electa Art Guides: Mantua*, p.39
- Fig.17 <http://www.paisan.it/images/mantegna.JPG>
- Fig.18 *Electa Art Guides: Mantua*, p.58
- Fig.19 <http://www.nga.gov/exhibitions/2001/virtuebeauty/fig02.htm>
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- Fig.21 Trevisani, ed., *Andrea Mantegna e i Gonzaga*, p.141
- Fig.22 Trevisani, ed., *Andrea Mantegna e i Gonzaga*, p.136
- Fig.23 <http://images.chapitre.com/ima0/big1/118/5814118.jpg>
- Fig.24 <http://turismo.comune.mantova.it>
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- Fig.26 <http://www.goldsilverwholesale.com>
- Fig.27 Trevisani, ed., *Andrea Mantegna e i Gonzaga*, p.215
- Fig.28 Archivio di Stato di Mantova
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- Fig.30 Trevisani, ed., *Andrea Mantegna e i Gonzaga*, p.221
- Fig.31 Trevisani, ed., *Andrea Mantegna e i Gonzaga*, p.223
- Fig.32 Trevisani, ed., *Andrea Mantegna e i Gonzaga*, p.235
- Fig.33 Jonathan J.G. Alexander, ed., *The Painted Page: Italian Renaissance Book Illumination, 1450-1550* (Munich: Prestel, 1994), p.78



- Fig.34 Archivio di Stato di Mantova
- Fig.35 Alexander, ed., *The Painted Page*, p.103
- Fig.36 Trevisani, ed., *Andrea Mantegna e i Gonzaga*, p.249
- Fig.37 John Rylands University Library, Manchester
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- Fig.43 <http://imagecache.allposters.com/images/pic/BRGPOD/80456>
- Fig.44 Biblioteca Comunale di Mantova
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- Fig.46 Trevisani, ed., *Andrea Mantegna e i Gonzaga*, p.140
- Fig.47 <http://www.flickr.com/photos/snarfel/3084354457/>
- Fig.48 Trevisani, ed., *Andrea Mantegna e i Gonzaga*, p.127
- Fig.49 *Electa Art Guides: Mantua*, p.30