

WITH A MERCHANT'S EYE:
THE *MECENATISMO* OF PAOLO CASSOTTI

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By
Michelle DiMarzo
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Thesis Approval(s):

Dr. Tracy Cooper, Advisor, Art History
Dr. Marcia Hall, Advisor, Art History

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INTRODUCTION

During the early sixteenth century, the city of Bergamo experienced first-hand the trauma of the war of the League of Cambrai. Located at the extreme western edge of Venice's *terraferma* possessions, it was repeatedly occupied by Spanish, French, and Milanese troops, and faced internal struggles between the pro-Milanese nobles and the Venetian loyalists of the merchant class.¹ During this period of extraordinary tension, one of Bergamo's wealthiest merchants, Paolo Cassotti, constructed a villa outside the city walls. Designed by the city's most prominent architect, Pietro Isabello, the villa rose on the bank of a canal of the Serio river, surrounded by over 100 acres of arable land. In 1512, Cassotti commissioned Andrea Previtali, a local artist recently returned after years in Venice, to decorate a large ground-floor chamber with a fresco cycle depicting the practical arts.² The series of thirteen lunettes includes scenes of harmonious country and city life, as well as scenes that make clear reference to its patron's political loyalties and social class. My study will examine the relationship of this villa and its fresco cycle to the burgeoning villa culture of the greater *terraferma*. Using the cycle's political and ideological content, I will explore the ways in which Paolo Cassotti employed *mecenatismo* to shape an identity for himself and his family that went beyond what was typically open to a member of his social class.

¹ Francesco Colalucci, *Bergamo negli anni di Lotto; pittura, guerra e società* (Bergamo: S.E.S.A.A.B, 1998), 37-41. See below for a discussion of my use of the term "class."

² Gianmario Petrò, "Le case di Paolo e de Zovanino Cassotti," *La Rivista di Bergamo* 12/13 (1998): 116.

Artistic patronage offered a valuable opportunity for visibility and influence within Bergamo's highly stratified society. Cassotti took advantage of this opportunity throughout his life, beginning with the graceful homes he and his brother built in the prosperous merchant neighborhood of Via Pignolo, and the frescoes he commissioned for his family chapel in the church of Santa Maria delle Grazie.³ The construction of Villa Zogna likewise demonstrated his wealth and status; furthermore, the villa environment offered him greater freedom than frescoes commissioned for a sacred space. The cycle not only made potent reference to recent political events that vindicated the pro-Venetian allegiance held by most of the city's merchant class and Cassotti himself, but they also simultaneously presented that class as part of the foundation of an ordered, stable society.⁴

Relevant Literature

Due to its location on the very periphery of the Venetian *terraferma*, Bergamo was fairly removed from the cosmopolitan artistic currents, with the notable exception of Lorenzo Lotto, who resided there between 1513 and 1525.⁵ Outside of his regional context, therefore, Andrea Previtali's name is not well-known. Trained in Venice in the workshop of Giovanni Bellini, his altarpieces display a high level of technical proficiency,

³ Petrò, "Le case di Paolo e de Zovanino Cassotti," 116; Franco Mazzini, "Il ciclo di affreschi," in *Immagini di un ritorno: gli antichi affreschi francescani di Santa Maria delle Grazie a Bergamo*, ed. Gianni Carzaniga (Azzano San Paolo [BG]: Bolis, 2004), 24.

⁴ Colalucci, *Bergamo negli anni di Lotto; pittura, guerra e società*, 41-42.

⁵ Francesco Rossi, ed., "Immagine e mito di Venezia: Committenza artistica e progetto politico a Bergamo tra il 1512 e il 1525," in *Bergamo l'altra Venezia: il rinascimento negli anni di Lorenzo Lotto, 1510-1530* (Milano: Skira, 2001), 23.

as well as the ability to develop fresh narrative and iconographical solutions.⁶ In the limited attention paid to Previtali in the scholarly literature, however, the Zogna frescoes have been addressed only a handful of times, likely due to their somewhat damaged condition and inaccessibility.⁷ The frescoes were removed from the villa in 1866 and are today in the collection of the Conti di Suardi outside Bergamo.⁸

The implications of Renaissance patronage have received diligent attention from scholars in recent decades through a variety of approaches.⁹ By focusing on the *mecenatismo* of a wool merchant, my study foregrounds the particular impact that class had on patronage. My use of the term “class” relates directly to the stratified nature of Bergamasque society, which created a sharp distinction between the nobility and the remainder of the population. In some ways, the situation is similar to that of Venice;¹⁰ like the capital, Bergamo’s laws reserved participation in government to the members of

⁶ Mauro Lucco, “Andrea Previtali,” in *Bergamo l'altra Venezia: il rinascimento negli anni di Lorenzo Lotto, 1510-1530*, ed. Francesco Rossi (Milano: Skira, 2001), 104-7.

⁷ The chief sources are Filocolo, “Una villa bergamasca: La Zogna,” *Emporium* 33, no. 198 (1911): 465-478; Jürg Meyer ZurCapellen, “Andrea Previtali” (Ph.D. dissertation, Julius-Maximilians-Universität zu Würzburg, 1972), 156-158; Colalucci, *Bergamo negli anni di Lotto: pittura, guerra e società*, 42-3.

⁸ Meyer ZurCapellen, “Andrea Previtali,” 156.

⁹ A number of recent studies provide overviews of this field, including Jonathan Katz Nelson, *The Patron's Payoff: Conspicuous Commissions in Italian Renaissance Art* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008); Jill Burke, *Changing Patrons: Social Identity and the Visual Arts in Renaissance Florence* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2004); Giovanni Ciappelli and Patricia Lee Rubin, *Art, Memory, and Family in Renaissance Florence* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); Tracy Cooper, “Mecenatismo or Clientelismo: The Character of Renaissance Patronage,” in *The Search for a Patron in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance*, ed. David Wilkins and Rebecca Wilkins (Lewiston, NY: The Edwin Mellon Press, 1996), 19-32.

¹⁰ Venetian society featured a tripartite classification among the *nobili* (about 4% of the population); the *cittadini* (5-8 %) and the massive *popolo*. See James S Grubb, “Elite Citizens,” in *Venice Reconsidered: The History and Civilization of an Italian City-State, 1297-1797*, ed. John Jeffries Martin and Dennis Romano (Baltimore, Md: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000), 339-40; Dennis Romano, “City-State and Empire,” in *Venice and the Veneto*, ed. Peter Humfrey (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 16.

its elite group, and like Venice, too, this was a purely social rather than an economic distinction—even the wealthiest members of the Bergamasque middle class were ineligible for public roles. Unlike Venice, however, Bergamo's elite order was a feudal aristocracy, the members of which still controlled most of the land in and around the city during the Cinquecento, and who chafed at the restrictions placed on their traditional privileges under Venetian domination. At the same time, Bergamo's *borghesia* began to define itself in terms of newfound economic prosperity and political cohesion, particularly in terms of loyalty to the Republic.¹¹

Paolo Cassotti was one such prosperous member of the middle class. Lacking the political access enjoyed by the nobility, he employed patronage to shape a positive representation of himself and his fellow merchants, thereby accomplishing visually what he could not do socially. In this respect, Blake De Maria's dissertation and forthcoming publication offers much scope for comparison, as she explores the ways in which immigrants in Venice (including a Bergamasque merchant family) used the visual arts as a substitute for the political access they were denied by their status as *forestieri*.¹² Monika Schmitter's work on the patronage of Venetian *cittadini* also provides evidence that middle-class patrons could be innovators as much as imitators, a path certainly taken by Paolo Cassotti in his construction of a personal villa.¹³ Recent research in the field of

¹¹ This division also expressed itself in artistic commissions; the nobles preferred Cariani to paint their portraits, while the *borghesia* employed Lotto. See Enrico de Pascale, "Nobili e borghesi. Aspetti della committenza cittadina," in *Bergamo l'altra Venezia: il rinascimento negli anni di Lorenzo Lotto, 1510-1530*, ed. Francesco Rossi (Milano: Skira, 2001), 40.

¹² Blake De Maria, "The Merchants of Venice: A Study in Sixteenth-Century Cittadino Patronage" (Ph.D. dissertation, Princeton University, 2003).

¹³ Monika Schmitter, "'Virtuous Riches': The Bricolage of Cittadini Identities in Early-Sixteenth-Century Venice," *Renaissance Quarterly* 57, no. 3 (Autumn 2004): 908-969.

economic history, by Edoardo Demo and others, offers new information connecting the growth of cloth manufacture to the economic expansion of the *terraferma* during the Cinquecento, which spurred the growth of Bergamo's urban middle class.¹⁴ In light of these recent approaches, the course of Paolo Cassotti's *mecenatismo* offers fertile ground for exploration of the ways in which patronage could be employed as a substitute for other forms of power.

Approach and Methodology

Part of my methodology is comparative, as I develop an historical and artistic context for both Villa Zogna and its fresco cycle. I also address the frescoes on a more theoretical basis, analyzing their content in terms of the middle-class ideology and class identity that sets Paolo Cassotti apart from many other Renaissance patrons. My brief on-site research in Bergamo afforded me the opportunity to view two of the frescoes currently in the private collection of the Conti di Suardi, neither of which has ever been photographed in color. While I was unable to gain access to the villa itself, which is slated to be turned into apartment housing, research in the Biblioteca Civica Angelo Mai provided access to Mario Caciagli's *tesi di laurea* on Pietro Isabello, which included detailed plan, façade, and section drawings, as well as photographs of the façade and interior that I had not been able to obtain by other means.

¹⁴ Edoardo Demo, *L'anima della città: l'industria tessile a Verona e Vicenza, 1400-1550* (Milan: UNICOPLI, 2001); Edoardo Demo, "Wool and Silk. The Textile Urban Industry of the Venetian Mainland (15th-17thc)," in *At the Centre of the Old World: Trade and Manufacturing in Venice and the Venetian Mainland (1400-1800)*, ed. Paola Lanaro (Toronto: Centre for Reformation and Renaissance Studies, 2006), 217-43.

Thesis Outline

Each chapter of my thesis addresses one aspect of Paolo Cassotti's patronage in Bergamo, with the two central chapters focused on Villa Zogna and its frescoes. Chapter One will examine his civic and sacred patronage, including his construction of an elegant house on Via Pignolo, the main route for all those entering from Venice, and his decoration of a chapel in the local church of Santa Maria delle Grazie. Chapter Two will examine the origins of Villa Zogna's design and its relationship to similar structures in both Lombardy and the Veneto. Chapter Three will explore the political and ideological content of the frescoes, which I argue interpellate the viewer as a part of the very merchant class from which the villa's owner sprang. Chapter Four will examine Cassotti's 1524 commission of a devotional painting from Andrea Previtali that offers a kind of private apotheosis of the wealthy merchant, who lived to see his class enfranchised in the restructuring that followed the War of the League of Cambrai.

Although the city of Bergamo was at a distance from Milan, Venice and the other centers of Renaissance humanism, we find here the same impulse for self-fashioning so famously identified by Stephen Greenblatt, and the same eye for value and presentation described by Michael Baxandall. The case of Paolo Cassotti provides an opportunity to explore the strategies of *mecenatismo* employed by a man who was not a part of the political, social, or intellectual elite. An examination of his patronage offers a chance to view *il centro* from *la periferia*, much like Bergamo's relationship with La Dominante herself.

CHAPTER 1

PRIVATE WEALTH, PUBLIC PIETY

Private and Professional Life in Via Pignolo

Paolo Cassotti was the most prominent member of a merchant family that had established itself in Bergamo toward the end of the Quattrocento. In a legal document of 1500, the Consiglio Maggiore referred to him as “ille famosissimus mercator.”¹⁵ This document permitted him to purchase a plot of land that would allow him to regularize the walls of his home in the S. Giovanni neighborhood “ad maiorem ornatum et decorem ipsius civitatis.”¹⁶ Within a few years, he and his brother Zovanino di Antonello would purchase land on Via Pignolo in the S. Antonio neighborhood, a prosperous area in which many of the city’s merchants and tradesmen lived. Narrow and winding, Via Pignolo served as Bergamo’s major artery, climbing steeply through the *città bassa* to the Porta S. Agostino and then winding its way through the *città alta* to Piazza Vecchia, which housed the seat of the Venetian *rettori* in the Palazzo della Ragione. Anyone entering the city from Venice followed this route, including new Venetian officials as they arrived to take up their positions.¹⁷ Lined on both sides by rows of elegant palace façades, Via Pignolo gained new prominence during the early Cinquecento, both as a thoroughfare and as a processional space; it was here that Paolo Cassotti first employed architecture to

¹⁵ Graziella Colmuto Zanella and Vanni Zanella, “‘Città sopra monte eccellentissime situata’: evoluzione urbana di Bergamo in età veneziana,” in *Il tempo della Serenissima: l’immagine della Bergamasca*, ed. Aldo de Maddalena, Marco Cattini, and Marzio Achille Romani, vol. 1 (Bergamo: Fondazione per la storia economica e sociale di Bergamo, 1995), 92.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 93.

¹⁷ Andreina Franco-Loiri Locatelli, *Borgo Pignolo in Bergamo: Arte e storia nelle sue chiese*. (Gorle [BG]: Litostampa istituto grafico, 1994), 31.

make a statement of his social ambitions, as he would later do on a grand scale at Villa Zogna.¹⁸

Within the first decade of the Cinquecento, Paolo and Zovanino Cassotti constructed adjoining homes at Via Pignolo 70 and 72, respectively, while two of their cousins, Bartolomeo and Zovanino di Bertulino, shared a house at number 76.¹⁹ These houses, like all of the properties constructed on the western side of Via Pignolo, were long and narrow, with one or more workshops facing the street and a central courtyard behind. Living space was organized between the courtyard and a long garden at the rear.²⁰ These contiguous gardens formed a “wide expanse of joined green” (fig. 1.1) that was unusual in an urban setting during this period.²¹

A ground plan (fig. 1.2) demonstrates the similarities between Paolo and Zovanino’s pendant houses, the construction of which “initially proceeded in a parallel fashion, and from a single design.”²² They “presented a continuous and homogenous façade” on Via Pignolo (fig. 1.3), with shops located on the street level on either side of their twin gates.²³ The central *cortile* in each house, separated from the other by a high wall, consisted of a three-sided portico surmounted by a loggia on the *piano nobile*.²⁴

¹⁸ Zanella and Zanella, “Città sopra monte eccellentissime situada,” 93; Locatelli, *Borgo Pignolo in Bergamo*, 31.

¹⁹ Gianmario Petrò, “La casa di Bartolomeo e Zovanino Cassotti,” *La Rivista di Bergamo* 12/13 (1998): 120.

²⁰ Zanella and Zanella, “Città sopra monte eccellentissime situada,” 96.

²¹ Ibid.

²² “...procedono inizialmente in parallelo e secondo un unico progetto.” Ibid.

²³ Gianmario Petrò, “Le case di Paolo e de Zovanino Cassotti,” *La Rivista di Bergamo* 12/13 (1998): 116.

²⁴ Ibid., 117.

However, the course of their construction diverged around 1507, with the intervention in Zovanino's house of his son-in-law, Antonio Agliardi, son of the architect and engineer Alessio Agliardi.²⁵

The architect of Paolo's house is unknown, and a substantial remodeling by its owners during the eighteenth century erased nearly all traces of its Cinquecento appearance, particularly in the *cortile*.²⁶ However, the *cortile* of his cousins' house at Via Pignolo 76 can provide some indication of its original character, as it was built by Pietro Isabello—the future architect of Villa Zogna—based on the plan of Paolo's house.²⁷

The primary impact created by the *cortile* (fig. 1.4) is one of color; the columns and the window and door surrounds are made of *pietra arenaria*, or gray sandstone, a material commonly used in Bergamo thanks to a lack of local marble, while the arches, roundels, and stringcourses are formed of *terra cotta*. The resulting contrast of red and gray against the off-white *intonaco* was typical of Lombard architecture.²⁸ Similarly, the 2:1 ratio of the arches of the loggia to those of the portico was a motif common to both Lombard and Venetian architecture, and one found with particular frequency in rural

²⁵ Zanella and Zanella, “‘Città sopra monte eccellentissime situada’,” 96. Marcantonio Michiel identified the son of “Maestro Alessio di Archi” as the designer of Zovanino's house. See Marcantonio Michiel, *Notizia d'opere di disegno nella prima metà del secolo XVI, esistenti in Padova, Cremona, Milano, Pavia, Bergamo, Crema e Venezia* (Bassano, 1800), 53.

²⁶ Petró, “Le case di Paolo e de Zovanino Cassotti,” 116.

²⁷ Ibid. Today the seat of the Museo Bernareggi, Bergamo's diocesan museum, the house underwent a restoration that was completed in 2000. See “Palazzo Bassi Rathgeb,” *Museo Bernareggi*, <http://www.museobernareggi.it/>.

²⁸ Personal communication from Dr. Graziella Colmuto Zanella, meeting, March 7, 2010.

homes in Bergamo.²⁹ Isabetto would employ both this ratio of arches and the colorful contrast of building materials in his design, just a few years later, for the internal façade of Villa Zogna.

These Cassotti houses were among the first ‘modern’ residences being built in a middle-class neighborhood that, at the end of the Quattrocento, was occupied by the likes of “tailors, bakers, grocers...and blacksmiths.”³⁰ The distinction between the *città bassa* and *città alta* was not simply one of topography, but of social status; members of the Bergamasque nobility built their palaces almost exclusively in the *città alta*.³¹ The Cassotti *case* were thus in effective, if not directly visual, competition with the palaces occupied by those nobles.³²

The relief carvings on the columns in the *cortile* of Zovanino’s house (figs. 1.5-1.6) demonstrate how a member of the middle class could use architecture to express his pride: pride in his family, in his trade, and by extension, his social standing as a member of the *borghesia* as well. In addition to typical ornamental garlands and *putti* heads, the carvings on the fifteen columns include the Cassotti *stemma*, an arm holding a mace (fig. 1.7); Zovanino’s merchant’s mark, the letters Z and A (for Zovanino di Antonello) separated by a cross over an X (fig. 1.8); a bundle being weighed upon a balance; and a

²⁹ Luigi Angelini, *Chiostrì e cortili in Bergamo* (Bergamo: Conti, 1965), 68.

³⁰ “...sarti, fornai, fruttivendoli...e maniscalchi.” Zanella and Zanella, “‘Città sopra monte excellentissime situada’,” 92.

³¹ Andrea Bayer, “Bergamo and Brescia,” in *Venice and the Veneto*, ed. Peter Humfrey (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 285.

³² Zanella and Zanella point to a general “gara di emulazione tra i nobili e i ricchi mercanti.” See Zanella and Zanella, “‘Città sopra monte excellentissime situada’,” 93.

man sitting at a writing desk with a balance.³³ Another carving depicts two dolphins flanking Neptune's trident, a motif that also appears, as we will see below, in Bartolomeo and Zovanino's chapel in Santo Spirito.³⁴ While such nautical symbolism could refer to the Cassotti's overseas trade, it could also easily suggest the family's pro-Venetian political sympathies, which would be demonstrated in their other artistic commissions. The very design of Zovanino's house, in fact, demonstrated Venetian influence; instead of a traditional arched portico, the *cortile* of his home featured a flat architrave, while inside the house was a Venetian-style staircase that was not present in Paolo's house next door.³⁵

Trade was the source of the fortunes that permitted such expansive architectural and artistic commissions. The Cassotti family was involved in the sale of wool cloth and other goods throughout Italy, especially in the Marches, Puglia, and Naples, but they also traded as far away as Cairo and Alexandria.³⁶ Like other wide-ranging merchants, they did not actually produce wool themselves, but rather imported the raw material and supervised the processes of weaving and dyeing.³⁷ As Blake de Maria notes, during the Cinquecento "textile production on an international level was not the purview of the

³³ Angelini, *Chiostrì e cortili in Bergamo*, 65-66. The Cassotti were not the only merchants to have the mark of their trade carved into their houses; the Grassi in Via Masone and the Gozzi at Via Pignolo 23 did likewise. See Zanella and Zanella, "'Città sopra monte eccellissime situada,'" 92.

³⁴ "...due dolfini affrontati, e in centro, il tridente di Nettuno." Angelini, *Chiostrì e cortili in Bergamo*, 65.

³⁵ Colmuto Zanella, pers. comm. Both of these features are attributable to the intervention of Antonio Agliardi, whose father Alessio worked extensively for the Venetian government.

³⁶ Gianmario Petrò, "I mercati Cassotti de Mazzoleni," *La Rivista di Bergamo* 12/13 (1998): 113.

³⁷ Locatelli, *Borgo Pignolo in Bergamo*, 32.

craftsman, nor even the simple merchant, but rather the merchant entrepreneur.”³⁸

Despite the international character of the Cassotti family business, however, at least some part of the complex system of cloth production took place quite close to home. The basement level of Zovanino’s house contained wool-working shops in addition to storage space for the finished product, and the fundamental similarity in plan between the two brothers’ houses suggests that Paolo’s house, too, once boasted similar facilities.³⁹

Between them, the brothers also owned at least three *tintorie*, or dye-shops, on the Roggia Nuova, which ran through their neighborhood and which provided the necessary water power for the dyeing process.⁴⁰ There may also have been a *tintoria* at Villa Zogna, which was located on a canal of the river Serio.⁴¹ Dyeing was by far the most lucrative aspect of cloth production, adding at least ten percent to its value, but it was also the most expensive due to the high cost of dye materials, such as woad and madder. The fact that rich merchants throughout the *terraferma*, including those of much greater consequence than the Cassotti, owned and operated *tintorie* suggests their capacity for commercial profit.⁴²

³⁸ Blake De Maria, “The Merchants of Venice: A Study in Sixteenth-Century Cittadino Patronage” (Ph.D. dissertation, Princeton University, 2003), 32.

³⁹ Petró, “Le case di Paolo e de Zovanino Cassotti,” 116. For the production of woolen cloth, see Edoardo Demo, *L'anima della città: l'industria tessile a Verona e Vicenza, 1400-1550* (Milan: UNICOPLI, 2001), 90.

⁴⁰ Locatelli, *Borgo Pignolo in Bergamo*, 32; Demo, *L'anima della città: l'industria tessile a Verona e Vicenza, 1400-1550*, 108.

⁴¹ Zanella and Zanella, “Città sopra monte eccellentissime situada’,” 95.

⁴² Demo, *L'anima della città: l'industria tessile a Verona e Vicenza, 1400-1550*, 108. The presence of a *tintoria* in a populated area could also cause trouble, for they produced foul odors and poisonous fumes. In Vicenza and Verona, for example, neighbors frequently brought lawsuits against their owners for this reason.

In addition to their prosperous mercantile activities, the Cassotti brothers invested money in property. They owned three other houses on the western side of Via Pignolo, which were destroyed during the creation of Via Verdi in the 19th century.⁴³ They also owned fields, gardens, and rental properties not only in Bergamo proper, but also in neighboring villages, including Locate, Almenno, Mapello, Presezzo, and Barzana.⁴⁴ Yet the source of their economic prosperity remained the cloth trade, which was materially present in the houses on Via Pignolo, just as it would be at Villa Zogna.

Charity and Confraternity

For Paolo Cassotti, conspicuous wealth was tempered by equally public piety. He was a member of three religious confraternities: the Consorzio di Sto. Spirito, the Consorzio della Maddalena, and the Consorzio di S. Giuseppe.⁴⁵ His corporate behavior may not have been motivated solely by spiritual concerns, for membership in confraternities, like artistic patronage, “served as an arena for political activity and influence by members of the middle class or elites who were denied access to politics in the state.”⁴⁶ Yet Cassotti must have distinguished himself within these groups, for during the 1520s he would be elected minister of each of the three confraternities of which he

⁴³ Zanella and Zanella, “‘Città sopra monte eccellentissime situada’,” 95.

⁴⁴ Locatelli, *Borgo Pignolo in Bergamo*, 33.

⁴⁵ Francesco Colalucci, *Bergamo negli anni di Lotto; pittura, guerra e società* (Bergamo: S.E.S.A.A.B, 1998), 125.

⁴⁶ Christopher Henry Carlsmith, “Schooling and Society in Bergamo, 1500-1650” (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Virginia, 1999), 66.

was a member.⁴⁷ Two of these confraternities centered on his own neighborhood of S. Antonio.

While both the Consorzio della Maddalena and the Consorzio di S. Giuseppe were charitable confraternities, the Consorzio della Maddalena was a penitent confraternity, whose members, known as *disciplini bianchi*, were largely drawn from the middle class.⁴⁸ Penitent confraternities typically had stricter rules for their members than those of the charitable variety. For example, members of Bergamo's largest charitable confraternity, the Miseracordia Maggiore, were only required to confess twice a year and did not have to hear Mass regularly, while members of the Consorzio della Maddalena were required to confess monthly and its officers were urged to hear Mass every day. The Consorzio's members were also required to participate in monthly processions through the city, during which the male members of the confraternity flagellated themselves publicly, in order to demonstrate repentance for their own sins, as well as to obtain God's grace on behalf of the entire city.⁴⁹ The fact that Cassotti was twice elected minister of this confraternity suggests that he was deeply involved in its activities, and speaks to his standing in the community.

The church that housed the Consorzio della Maddalena was dedicated to St. Bernard of Siena, a Franciscan monk famous in Bergamo for pacifying a conflict between the Guelphs and Ghibellines around 1420. This saint was also credited with founding the

⁴⁷ Colalucci, *Bergamo negli anni di Lotto*, 125. He would be elected minister of the Consorzio di Santo Spirito in 1523; of the Consorzio della Maddalena in 1523 and 1526; and of the confraternity of S. Giuseppe a San Gottardo in 1527.

⁴⁸ Francesco Colalucci, "Lorenzo Lotto, e altri, nelle chiese di Borgo Sant'Antonio a Bergamo," *Venezia Cinquecento* 8, no. 15 (1998): 154.

⁴⁹ Roisin Cossar, *The Transformation of the Laity in Bergamo, 1265-C. 1400*, *Medieval Mediterranean* v. 63 (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 26-27.

monastery of Santa Maria delle Grazie, located just outside the city walls.⁵⁰

Paolo and Zovanino Cassotti held the patronage rights to a chapel in the church associated with the monastery, and in 1507 they commissioned a local artist, Jacopo Scipioni, to fresco it with scenes from the life of St. Francis.⁵¹

Fresco cycles based on St. Francis' life were a common sight in late medieval churches, of which the most famous example is the cycle in the upper church of S. Francesco in Assisi, executed around the beginning of the Trecento. The literary source for such programs was the *Legenda Maior* of St. Bonaventure, which had been declared to be the official biography of S. Francesco in 1266.⁵² The cycle that Scipioni created for Paolo's chapel, however includes an episode that does not appear in Assisi, which was "the most extensive...illustration of the life of St. Francis anywhere": that of the saint selling cloth in order to raise funds to repair the church of S. Damiano (fig. 1.9).⁵³ In the left half of the composition, Scipioni depicts the saint, dressed in contemporary Italian garb, praying inside S. Damiano, where he hears the voice of God instructing him to repair the damaged church. This miraculous event, known as the Vision of S. Damiano, appears frequently in Franciscan cycles, including at Assisi (fig. 1.10). The right half of

⁵⁰ During his sojourn in the city he introduced the Christological trigram, IHS, in order to replace the factions' symbols. The trigram appears among the carvings on the columns in the *cortile* of Zovanino's house, suggesting that he may also have been involved with the confraternity. See Colalucci, "Lorenzo Lotto, e altri," 159.

⁵¹ Ibid., 155. These frescoes have only been recently reunited, having been scattered when the church was demolished in 1856. See Bruno Cassinelli, "Ipostesi ricostruttiva della chiesa antica di S. Maria delle Grazie," in *Immagini di un ritorno: gli antichi affreschi francescani di Santa Maria delle Grazie a Bergamo*, ed. Gianni Carzaniga (Azzano San Paolo [BG]: Bolis, 2004), 11.

⁵² Joachim Poeschke, *Italian Frescoes, the Age of Giotto, 1280-1400*, 1st ed. (New York: Abbeville Press, 2005), 64.

⁵³ On Assisi, see *ibid.* For Scipioni's frescoes, see Colalucci, *Bergamo negli anni di Lotto*, 28. I have not been able to find any example of a fresco cycle in which this scene appears.

the fresco illustrates the events that immediately following the miracle, according to Bonaventura:

Accordingly he rose up, and, fortifying himself with the sign of the cross, he put together cloth stuffs for sale, and hastened unto the city that is called Foligno, and there sold the goods he had brought...then this joyful merchant, putting together his gains, departed on his return for Assisi.⁵⁴

The text at the base of the fresco, now damaged, would have clearly identified the less-than-familiar narrative moment for the viewer.⁵⁵ Its inclusion in the chapel program can only be read as a complimentary reference to the Cassotti's own profession as cloth merchants.⁵⁶ Though such self-promotion was common for the period, the scene's distant placement under the arch of the vault, above two or three tiers of frescoes, would certainly have rendered it more subtle.⁵⁷

The chapel in Santa Maria delle Grazie was not the only opportunity the collective Cassotti family had to gain visibility through patronage. Paolo's cousins, Bartolomeo and Zovanino, also owned the rights to a chapel in the church of Santo Spirito on Via Pignolo, which housed the charitable confraternity of which Paolo was a member. Around 1511, Pietro Isabello had begun to transform the fabric of the medieval church, removing its side aisles and creating a single large nave with nine lateral chapels,

⁵⁴ The original Latin text reads: "Surrexit proinde, signo crucis se muniens, et assumptis pannis venalibus, ad civitatem quae Fulginium dicitur festinus accessit, ibique venditis quae portarat, equum cui tunc insederat, felix mercator, assumpto pretio, dereliquit; rediensque Assisium." See the "Legenda Maior," *The Franciscan Archive*, II, 6-7, <http://www.franciscan-archive.org/index2.html>.

⁵⁵ Franco Mazzini, "Il ciclo di affreschi," in *Immagini di un ritorno: gli antichi affreschi francescani di Santa Maria delle Grazie a Bergamo*, ed. Gianni Carzaniga (Azzano San Paolo [BG]: Bolis, 2004), 21.

⁵⁶ Colalucci, *Bergamo negli anni di Lotto*, 28. See also Mazzini, "Immagini Di Un Ritorno," 24.

⁵⁷ Cassinelli, "Ipotesi ricostruttiva della chiesa antica di S. Maria delle Grazie," 11.

similar to Alberti's design for San Andrea in Mantua.⁵⁸ At least four of these chapels were purchased by wealthy merchant families from the neighborhood of S. Antonio.⁵⁹ The Cassotti chapel, which was the first to be built, displayed the family *stemma* and the initials of the two brothers on the minor order of columns supporting the entablature. The motif of a pair of dolphins flanking a trident appears on these columns as well as on the giant order framing the chapel (fig. 1.11). These carvings create a similar combination of familial and pro-Venetian motifs to those found at Paolo's brother's house.⁶⁰

The Cassotti family's political allegiance is also clearly present in the chapel's altarpiece (figs. 1.12-1.13), commissioned from the recently returned Andrea Previtali in 1512 but not completed until 1515.⁶¹ In the *Pala di Santo Spirito*, John the Baptist, patron saint of Bergamo, stands on a broken piece of marble, surrounded by a group of figures that include Bartolomeo's name-saint, St. Bartholomew; St. Nicholas of Bari, the patron of merchants and navigators; St. Joseph; and the local saint Beato Giacomo di Bergamo.⁶² In light of the city's recently-ended French occupation, the juxtaposition of the ruined classical architecture against the verdant landscape in the background suggests that this is a votive painting giving thanks for Bergamo's salvation.

⁵⁸ Mario Caciagli, "Isabello Pietro Cleri, detto Abano," *La Rivista di Bergamo* 28 (2004): 33.

⁵⁹ Colalucci, "Lorenzo Lotto, e altri," 176; Locatelli, *Borgo Pignolo in Bergamo*, 76. Isabello also built houses on Via Pignolo for two of these merchant families, the Angelini at no. 56 and the Gozzi at no. 23. See Locatelli, *Borgo Pignolo in Bergamo*, 67.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 76.

⁶¹ Colalucci, *Bergamo negli anni di Lotto*, 51. During his visit in 1516, Marcantonio Michiel noted that the altarpiece in this chapel was "fu de man de Andrea di Privitali Bergamasco discepolo de Zuan Bellino." See Michiel, *Notizia d'opere di disegno nella prima metà del secolo XVI, esistenti in Padova, Cremona, Milano, Pavia, Bergamo, Crema e Venezia*, 51.

⁶² Colalucci, *Bergamo negli anni di Lotto*, 52-3.

The presence of St. Joseph also indicates the desire for continued protection, for he was the focus of a popular new cult formed in March of 1512, a few months before the altarpiece's commission, at a time when Bergamo's future had seemed desperate. After its Venetian liberators had been forced to leave the city to go to Brescia's aid, the French resumed control of the city. With a plague also threatening widespread destruction, the citizens turned to St. Joseph, whose feast day is March 19, in the hopes that he would be able to intercede on their behalf with the Virgin Mary. On March 28, he was made an official patron saint of the city, and a new confraternity, the *Consorzio di S. Giuseppe*, was founded in his honor.⁶³ Thanks to the intercession of this newest patron saint (it was believed), Bergamo was ultimately spared the worst of both the plague and the French, who were driven out again in May of 1512, just before Previtali's return.⁶⁴

The figure of St. John the Baptist in the altarpiece also suggests an analogy between recent political events in the city and the prophet's role in the New Testament. Amid the pagan ruins, he gestures to the banner of Christianity, symbolizing the birth of a new, peaceful world order, a symbolism that can easily be extended to the reassertion of Venetian control in May 1512.⁶⁵ Since commerce cannot thrive under wartime conditions, one can also infer a sense of personal gratitude on the part of the Cassotti patrons, both of whom are represented in the painting by their name-saints, for the city's

⁶³ Ibid., 125. Paolo Cassotti would also become a member of this confraternity, and be elected its minister in 1527.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 38-9.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 52.

return to the *status quo*.⁶⁶ According to Francesco Rossi, this was the first clearly pro-Venetian painting commissioned in Bergamo by a member of the *borghesia*.⁶⁷ Taken together with the motif of the dolphins and trident that decorate the columns in the chapel, the same motif found in the *cortile* of Paolo's brother's home, this altarpiece suggests the political sympathies not only of Bartolomeo and Zovanino Cassotti, but of the larger Cassotti family. As we will see, Previtali would encode similar pro-Venetian messages within the secular context of the frescoes at Villa Zogna.

A Merchant's Faith and Fear

Francesco Colalucci suggests that Paolo Cassotti's membership in several confraternities and his patronage of the chapel in Santa Maria delle Grazie were linked to feelings of insecurity about his chances for salvation, given the nature of his occupation as a merchant.⁶⁸ However, by the late Middle Ages, trade was no longer viewed as a suspect occupation by the Catholic church; in fact, the Scholastic theologians offered a justification based on good intentions for those merchants who profited from their enterprises, perhaps most notably St. Augustine, who wrote: "If a person engages in trade with an eye to the public utility and wants things necessary to existence not to lack in the country, then money, rather than being the end of the activity, is only claimed as remuneration for labor."⁶⁹ As a cloth merchant, Paolo Cassotti could well have regarded

⁶⁶ Ibid. Zovanino is another spelling of Giovanni.

⁶⁷ Francesco Rossi, ed., "Immagine e mito di Venezia: Committenza artistica e progetto politico a Bergamo tra il 1512 e il 1525," in *Bergamo l'altra Venezia: il rinascimento negli anni di Lorenzo Lotto, 1510-1530* (Milano: Skira, 2001), 26.

⁶⁸ Colalucci, "Lorenzo Lotto, e altri," 155.

⁶⁹ Jacques Le Goff, *Time, Work & Culture in the Middle Ages* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 63-65.

himself as providing “things necessary to existence.” Further, if he was truly afraid of being damned for his mercantile activities, it seems unlikely that he would have permitted Jacopo Scipioni to include a reference to that very trade in his chapel in Santa Maria delle Grazie. In fact, that fresco can provide its own justification based on good intentions, for like the “joyous merchant” of Bonaventure’s text, Paolo Cassotti employed the profits he earned from the sale of cloth for the benefit of a church.

It is more plausible to attribute the motive of Cassotti’s charitable and religious activities at least in part to the prominent place occupied by the Church in daily life. Religion had a public and civic character during this period, as well as one that was private and personal. Just as his construction of a house on Via Pignolo satisfied his civic obligations by adding to the beauty of the city, he fulfilled the obligations of public piety appropriate to a man of his wealth and relative prominence by helping to alleviate the suffering of the poor, participating in confraternities, and patronizing a chapel in one of the city’s churches. Writing about confraternities in Bergamo during the age of the commune, Lester Little observes:

If giving alms helped to wash away sin, then helping the poor was a way for the wealthy to gain salvation. Just as the confraternity was a mutual aid organization that provided insurance against a sudden plunge from prosperity to poverty, so it was also, through the opportunity to give to the poor, a mean of acquiring insurance for the life eternal.⁷⁰

There was also undoubtedly a more personal motive at work. The highly stratified nature of Bergamo’s society afforded few opportunities for a middle-class merchant to increase his own visibility within the community, but strategies of

⁷⁰ Lester K. Bravi Little, *Liberty, Charity, Fraternity: Lay Religious Confraternities at Bergamo in the Age of the Commune* (Northampton, MA: Smith College, 1988), 97.

mecenatismo in the chapel in Santa Maria delle Grazie and the house on Via Pignolo offered Cassotti a very public way to display his affluence and taste. The level of visual sophistication demonstrated by his brother and cousins suggests that he was not the only member of the family to be so inclined, yet Paolo must have had even greater ambitions than his relatives, as he alone turned his attention to the construction of a suburban villa—an amenity enjoyed by few even among the noble class. The secular site of Villa Zogna would offer him greater scope for self-definition than anything he might build or decorate within the city walls.

CHAPTER 2

FUNCTIONAL ELEGANCE: VILLA ZOGNA

The Historical Context

The construction of Villa Zogna took place during the War of the League of Cambrai, in which the Papal States, France, Spain, and the Holy Roman Empire formed an alliance to counter Venice's supposed imperial ambitions.⁷¹ The Republic suffered a crushing defeat at the battle of Agnadello in May 1509, leaving Lombardy, and ultimately all of its *terraferma* possessions, in the hands of the French.⁷² Bergamo surrendered immediately, paying thousands of ducats for the privilege.⁷³ Old rivalries between the Guelph and Ghibelline factions flared during the nearly three-year French occupation that followed. The members of the nobility were largely Ghibellines, who were resentful of the curtailment of their traditional exercise of power under the Republic; they saw an opportunity to advance their position by allying themselves with the city's new French rulers. The middle class, in contrast, was fiercely Guelph and pro-Venetian.⁷⁴

⁷¹ As will be discussed below, the inclusion of the date 1512 in one of the frescoes provides a *terminus ante quem* for the building's construction. Zanella and Zanella suggest construction was underway in 1510; see Zanella and Zanella, "'Città sopra monte excellentissime situada'," 134.

⁷² John Julius Norwich, *A History of Venice* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1983), 395, 398-9.

⁷³ Colalucci, *Bergamo negli anni di Lotto*, 9-10.

⁷⁴ Enrico de Pascale, "Nobili e borghesi. Aspetti della committenza cittadina," in *Bergamo l'altra Venezia: il rinascimento negli anni di Lorenzo Lotto, 1510-1530*, ed. Francesco Rossi (Milano: Skira,

After the Venetian army liberated nearby Brescia in January of 1512, many of Bergamo's Ghibelline nobles fled to Milan to escape their inevitable punishment. The Venetian army entered Bergamo on February 6 without encountering opposition from the French forces, who shut themselves up in the fortress of San Vigilio in the *città alta*. However, the city's reunification with the Republic did not last; as mentioned above, the Venetian army left Bergamo on February 17th to go to the aid of Brescia, though they arrived too late to prevent the massacre of between 10,000 to 14,000 of its citizens by the vengeful French army.⁷⁵ After their departure from Bergamo, French soldiers emerged from San Vigilio and reasserted their dominance over the city, extracting a fine of 60,000 ducats for its disloyalty, but otherwise sparing it from Brescia's fate.⁷⁶

This new period of occupation lasted until the summer of 1512, by which time the political balance of the conflict had shifted dramatically. Venice, now reconciled with the Papal States, joined with the Holy Roman Empire to form a Holy League to force the French out of Italy. In May 1512, Swiss mercenaries ousted the French from Milan.⁷⁷ Expecting an immediate invasion, the French governor fled Bergamo, but when Venetian army failed to arrive, the city found itself without an official governing power.

2001), 37; Colalucci, *Bergamo negli anni di Lotto*, 9-10. Edward Muir notes that this phenomenon of loyalties divided by class repeated itself across the *terraferma*: "In rebelling against Venice provincial oligarchs did not overtly seek to re-establish their own independent republics but to construct an imperial bulwark against the economic hegemony of Venice." See Edward Muir, "Was There Republicanism in the Renaissance Republics? Venice after Agnadello," in *Venice Reconsidered: The History and Civilization of an Italian City-State, 1297-1797*, ed. John Jeffries Martin and Dennis Romano (Baltimore, Md: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000), 149.

⁷⁵ Andrea Bayer, "Brescia After the League of Cambrai: Moretto, Romanino and the Arts" (Ph.D. dissertation, Princeton University, 1991), 27.

⁷⁶ Colalucci, *Bergamo negli anni di Lotto*, 38-9.

⁷⁷ Norwich, *A History of Venice*, 422-23.

Ultimately, the citizens themselves elected a ten-person council to decide the city's allegiance, and on June 12, 1512 they voted unanimously to return to Venetian control.⁷⁸

It was in this turbulent period that Paolo Cassotti commissioned Pietro Isabello to design Villa Zogna on a large parcel of land south of Borgo Santa Caterina, which, though it was outside the city walls, was still only a mile from the house on Via Pignolo (fig. 2.1).⁷⁹ The property was comprised of one hundred acres of farmland surrounded by a high stone wall. In 1525 it would be valued at 4,000 *scudi*, double the value of the house on Via Pignolo.⁸⁰ A map of Bergamo executed in 1660 demonstrates the property's relative expanse (figs. 2.2-2.3).

Cassotti had already demonstrated his financial acumen through other investments in land and property, which promised a much more stable return than the vagaries of international trade. However, the strategic value of this purchase, which amounted to more of an estate than a simple plot of land, could have not been solely economic. Villa Zogna was the first of its kind in Bergamo, a suburban villa built for a member of the *borghesia*, and as such, it must have been a powerful statement of its patron's social

⁷⁸ Colalucci, *Bergamo negli anni di Lotto*, 41. The city's newfound freedom would last only a year. On June 24, 1513, the city surrendered to the Spanish viceroy in Milan, and control of the city would continue to shift dizzyingly among the various powers until the conclusion of the war in 1516. See *ibid.*, 71-9.

⁷⁹ He had purchased the land around 1507, when Scipioni was working on the frescoes for his chapel in Santa Maria delle Grazie. Petrò, "Le case di Paolo e de Zovanino Cassotti," 116. No documents exist to prove definitively that Isabello was in fact the architect, but his authorship is the universal attribution. Mario Caciagli skeptically notes that "qualsiasi palazzo che possedga un portico, una loggia, o una finestra di epoca rinascimentale, per i bergamaschi, è dell'Isabello." See Mario Caciagli, "Pietro Cleri Isabello, detto Abano, architetto bergamasco del Cinquecento" (Tesi di laurea, Milan: Università degli studi di Milano, Facoltà di lettere e filosofia, 1989), 161. However, Graziella Colmuto Zanella pointed out in a personal communication that since Isabello worked as an architect, foreman, engineer, and fortifications expert, there is virtually no early Cinquecento project in Bergamo in which he was likely to have been uninvolved.

⁸⁰ Zanella and Zanella, "'Città sopra monte eccellentissime situada'," 134.

aspirations, stymied though they were within the city's walls.⁸¹ By taking such a step, Paolo Cassotti became the first member of Bergamo's middle class to engage, even on a rudimentary level, with the concept of *villeggiatura* that was beginning to emerge in the eastern *terraferma*.

The Structure of Villa Zogna

Villa Zogna rises on the southern bank of the Roggia Serio, a canal of the larger river Serio. Seen today, it is a rectangle enclosing a courtyard, with the longer northern side flanking the canal (fig. 2.4). However, much of the present complex is the result of additions and alterations over the course of the villa's storied past, during which it has done duty as a spinning mill, an army hospital, and an army barracks.⁸² The northern and eastern wings, which form an L-shape, are original to the building, while the western wing and the enclosure on the southern side were added in the 18th century.⁸³ The northern wing was originally only one level, and a tower rose above its wide portal, as depicted in a 19th-century watercolor (fig. 2.5).⁸⁴ The tower was destroyed sometime after 1885, when the complex was turned into a hospital. During the same phase, the northern wing was raised by one floor and its façade was re-done in the neo-Renaissance style visible today (fig. 2.6). The lane that ran alongside the canal from the portal to a

⁸¹ Zanella and Zanella note the appearance in the early Cinquecento of "le prime dimore signorili nella zona pianeggiante del suburbia con vasti terreni coltivati, come la villa dei Tasso alla Celadina o quella Cassotti alla Zogna." See *ibid.* However, the Tasso family's villa seems to have been built in the second half of the century, only after the family had risen to a noble state.

⁸² *Ibid.*

⁸³ Luigi Angelini, "La Zogna," *La Rivista di Bergamo* (1983): 10. Angelini, an architect rather than a historian, does not cite documents to support his assertions regarding the building's history. However, the government inventory document cited below confirms at least some of his account.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

nearby bridge, and which served as the main access route from the city, fell into disuse in the 20th century.⁸⁵

The eastern wing of the complex, which functioned as “*la parte padronale*,”⁸⁶ has likewise undergone some alterations since the Cinquecento. A comparison of a late 20th-century drawing of the façade by Mario Caciagli (fig. 2.7) with one from the 19th-century by A. Piccinelli (fig. 2.8) demonstrates many of these changes. The addition of the southern wing caused the last bay of the arcaded portico to be blocked off, while the loggia on the *piano nobile* has been enclosed and five of its bays completely filled in.⁸⁷ Many of the decorative details of the façade have been lost, including the large roundels between the arches of the loggia on the *piano terreno*, and smaller ones on the *piano nobile*. The oval apertures under the cornice may have been closed when the roof was lowered while being replaced.⁸⁸

Piccinelli’s drawing reveals the villa’s façade as it likely appeared in the early Cinquecento: a graceful two-story structure with the clear inflections of early Renaissance architecture. The width of the ground-floor arches is twice that of those on the upper floor, producing a rhythm across the façade that is more pleasing than that of the cramped *cortile* at the house belonging to Paolo’s cousins. The horizontal aspect of the façade is further emphasized by stringcourses above each level of arches. The arches,

⁸⁵ Ibid., 11.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 10.

⁸⁷ A 20th-century government inventory document notes: “nelle trasformazioni verso il 1885 in ospedale militare e poi in caserma chiusura della loggia nel lato Est del cortile, e radicali trasformazioni soprattutto nel corpo Ovest.” See Gatti Zanella, *Ex Villa Zogna Ora Caserma Scotti*, Inventario dei Beni Culturali e Ambientali (Comune di Bergamo, 1972), 1.

⁸⁸ Caciagli, “Pietro Cleri Isabello, detto Abano,” 162.

stringcourses, and roundels are formed of *terra cotta* while the columns are sandstone, creating the familiar Lombard contrast of gray, red, and off-white *intonaco*.⁸⁹ This building, too, was emblazoned with the Cassotti *stemma*, in this case on one of the foliated Ionic capitals (fig. 22)⁹⁰

A cross-section of *la parte padronale* (fig. 2.9), also produced by Piccinelli, demonstrates the distribution of the villa's interior space, with rooms arranged parallel to the loggias on each level. Previtali's frescoes appear in lunettes around the upper walls of a large reception room on the *piano terreno*. The remainder of the *piano terreno* contained service rooms, including the kitchen, as demonstrated in Caciagli's ground plan (fig. 2.10).⁹¹ Bedrooms occupied the *piano nobile*, while more service areas, along with storage and housing for servants, were located in the subsidiary northern wing.⁹²

Villeggiatura and Villa Culture

Villas of any variety were an uncommon sight in Bergamo during the early Cinquecento. Thanks to its status as a border province, most extra-urban dwellings in the late Quattrocento were towers, castles, or otherwise heavily fortified structures.⁹³ In contrast to the eastern *terraferma*, where villa construction boomed during the second

⁸⁹ The window and door surrounds were apparently a combination of sandstone and *terra cotta*. See Zanella, *Ex Villa Zogna Ora Caserma Scotti*, 1.

⁹⁰ It is possible that other carvings decorated the shafts of the columns, but this is impossible to determine from Caciagli's photographs, in which the columns appear in a state of severe deterioration.

⁹¹ Angelini, "La Zogna," 10. The author of this article, himself a well-known Bergamasque civil engineer and architect, provides an indispensable description of the interior of the villa complex, which is no longer open to visitors or scholars.

⁹² Ibid. The drawing also shows a low attic level, but Angelini does not mention this in his article.

⁹³ Carlo Perogalli, *Ville delle province di Bergamo e Brescia* (Milano: SISAR, 1969), 34.

half of the 16th century, very few villas were built in the entire province of Bergamo until the 17th and 18th centuries.⁹⁴

The rise of the villa form in Italy was inextricably linked to the concept of *villeggiatura*, or villa living, which was in fact “a literary before an architectural phenomenon.”⁹⁵ Drawn from the ancient Roman concept of *otium*, or dignified leisure, it was revived in the Trecento by Petrarch, who had a villa in the Colli Euganei near Padua and who wrote eloquently of the pleasures of quiet reflection, far removed from the hustle and bustle of city life, in his *De Vita Solitaria*.⁹⁶ During the next two centuries, idea of the villa received renewed attention, as recently rediscovered Roman sources like Pliny, Cicero, and Seneca all wrote of the virtue of life outside the city. Petrarch’s contribution would not be forgotten; in fact, his *De Vita Solitaria* was one of his most transcribed texts during the Quattrocento.⁹⁷

Villeggiatura flourished during the Quattrocento, as economic shifts increased the private ownership of land throughout Italy.⁹⁸ Meanwhile, in Florence, humanists developed the paired concept of *utilitas-delectatio* that defined villa life as both useful

⁹⁴ Ibid., 33.

⁹⁵ Bruce Boucher, *Andrea Palladio: The Architect in His Time* (New York: Abbeville, 2007), 61.

⁹⁶ Giuseppe Mazzotti, *Ville venete* (Treviso: Canova, 2000), 41-43; Grazia Gobbi, *The Florentine Villa: Architecture, History, Society*, English language ed., [The Classical tradition in architecture (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2007), 18.

⁹⁷ Victoria Kirkham and Armando Maggi, *Petrarch: A Critical Guide to the Complete Works* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 180.

⁹⁸ Gobbi, *The Florentine Villa*, 19; Paola Lanaro, “Il contesto economico e territoriale nei secoli XV-XVIII,” in *Andrea Palladio e la villa veneta : da Petrarca a Carlo Scarpa. Ex. cat.*, ed. Guido Beltramini (Venezia: Marsilio, 2005), 148.

and pleasurable.⁹⁹ This combination of economic factors and literary culture was the perfect climate for the idealization of *villeggiatura* as the pursuit of the virtuous (and wealthy) citizen. Indeed, as Alberti wrote in his treatise *Della Famiglia*, “What man does not take great pleasure in his villa?”¹⁰⁰

The dearth of Quattrocento and Cinquecento villas in Bergamo makes it clear that the concept of *villeggiatura* did not take hold there like it did in many other parts of Italy. One reason for this delay may have been Bergamo’s lack of exposure to the writings, both ancient and contemporary, that praised villa life. Yet even though no books were printed in Bergamo until the middle of the century, they certainly must have been consumed, for the city had a high level of literacy.¹⁰¹ About fifty percent of the Bergamasque expatriates in Venice who signed the oaths of free state that would permit them to marry specifically mentioned their level of education, and even individuals of fairly low state demonstrated their ability to sign the documents capably.¹⁰² While he acknowledges that the city was by no means “a triumph of humanism,” Christopher Carlsmith has challenged the idea of Bergamo as an provincial intellectual desert, calling attention to the city’s explicit interest in providing a humanist education for its citizens through the tradition of hiring “a famous outside humanist” to teach letters, grammar, and

⁹⁹ Gobbi, *The Florentine Villa*, 19. See also Amanda Lillie, *Florentine Villas in the Fifteenth Century: An Architectural and Social History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

¹⁰⁰ Alberti has his interlocutors Carlo and Gianozzo ask “Quale uomo è, che non traga grande spasso e piacere della villa?” which serves as an opening for Agnolo to deliver a lengthy oration on the pleasures of villa life. Leon Battista Alberti, *Trattato del governo della famiglia* (Napoli: Officina tipografica, 1839), 60.

¹⁰¹ Christopher Henry Carlsmith, “Schooling and society in Bergamo, 1500-1650” (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Virginia, 1999), 22.

¹⁰² Andrea Zannini, “Flussi d’immigrazione e strutture sociale urbane. Il caso dei bergamaschi a Venezia,” *Bollettino di demografia storica* 19 (1993): 211.

rhetoric.¹⁰³ For example, in 1505 the city's contract with the Bolognese humanist Giovan Battisia Pio required him to offer two public lessons daily in these subjects, in addition to teaching a school.¹⁰⁴ Still, while we can be certain that Cassotti himself was literate—it would have been an indispensable tool for a merchant—his engagement, if any, with ancient and humanist ideas of the villa, is impossible to determine.

Another prominent explanation for Bergamo's relative indifference to villa culture is that its position on the very periphery of the *terraferma*, some 230 km from Venice, denied it a great deal of contact with the capital city, and by extension, practical knowledge of the culture of *villeggiatura* further east. By way of comparison, we may look to Bergamo's neighbor to the east, Brescia, which abutted the villa-rich province of Verona; villas appeared in Brescia much earlier than they did in Bergamo, though these still trailed the developments further east by at least a century.¹⁰⁵

Carlo Perogalli has suggested that the very topography of the city of Bergamo may also explain its lack of interest in the villa form. In contrast to the cities of the Veneto, which were largely built on the plain and had little access to open, green space, Bergamo was built on a hill, with plenty of fresh air, gardens, and fields, rendering the need for suburban housing less urgent.¹⁰⁶ Alvise Cima's map of the city demonstrates the amount of open space that still existed in the *città bassa* in 1693 (fig. 2.12). Indeed, as we have seen, Paolo Cassotti's house on Via Pignolo was particularly privileged in

¹⁰³ Carlsmith, "Schooling and society in Bergamo, 1500-1650," 19.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 15-16.

¹⁰⁵ Perogalli, *Ville delle province di Bergamo e Brescia*, 33.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

terms of its access to open land. If he was spurred on neither by the desire to escape the city, nor by the literary glorification of *villeggiatura*, his decision to construct a villa outside the city walls becomes even more unusual.

Architectural Sources and Precedents

In the absence of local prototypes for Villa Zogna, Pietro Isabello may have looked to the local tradition of the *casa rustica*, which gave birth to the villa in various forms across the *terraferma*.¹⁰⁷ An example of the Bergamasque *casa rustica* is one in Chiuduno, east of Bergamo (fig. 2.13). Perogalli notes that “arcades were common, often with loggias (or wooden balconies) on the upper floors, having a function similar to those of the Venetian ‘*barchesse*.’”¹⁰⁸ Such farmhouses typically followed a U-shaped ground plan. Many of the villas that would be built in Bergamo in later centuries adopted this same type of plan, indicating their genealogical relationship with the earlier structures.¹⁰⁹ However, Villa Zogna’s L-shaped plan, formed by the conjunction of a separate, functional wing with the residential part of the building, suggests that Isabello drew his inspiration from something beyond the local *casa rustica*: the *villa veneta*.¹¹⁰

Though the Venetian villa, as both an architectural type and literary ideal, would not reach its apogee until the second half of the Cinquecento, villas began to be built in the Veneto during the early Quattrocento. One of their distinguishing features was the

¹⁰⁷ Martin Kubelik, “Palladio's Villas in the Tradition of the Veneto Farm,” *Assemblage*, no. 1 (October 1986): 93.

¹⁰⁸ Perogalli, *Ville delle province di Bergamo e Brescia*, 33.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ By the end of the Quattrocento, the increase in population began to see a corresponding increase in the cost of food, particularly cereals, which made investment in land ever more profitable. See Lanaro, “Il contesto economico e territoriale nei secoli XV-XVIII,” 148.

barchessa, an “agricultural annex” attached to the main residence.¹¹¹ Martin Kubelik identifies the Villa Corner dall’Aglia (fig. 2.14), built in 1492, as an example of how this functional element affected the early villa aesthetic; the villa’s off-center portico confused scholars until an 18th-century map (fig. 2.15) revealed the presence of a now-destroyed *barchessa* that formed an L-shape with the main building.¹¹² Like at Villa Corner, the northern wing of Villa Zogna was lower in height than the main body of the complex. Carnelli’s 19th-century watercolor demonstrates that its rusticated gate featured *terra cotta* roundels and stringcourses which have since been lost (fig. 2.16), indicating that Isabello was interested in maintaining some kind of stylistic unity between *la parte padronale* and the functional *barchessa*.¹¹³

Another frequent characteristic of the *ville venete* was the combination of a portico surmounted by a loggia.¹¹⁴ As in Bergamo, this was a fully functional feature derived from rustic farmhouses. The portico provided the villa’s inhabitants with respite from the sun and protected agricultural tools from the elements, while the loggia may have originally served as a place to dry grapes.¹¹⁵ Over time, however, the portico-loggia combination of these early villas became quite sophisticated. In Kubelik’s survey of Quattrocento villas, *Die Villa im Veneto*, it serves as one of the typological characteristics that he uses to determine a villa’s placement in the earlier or later part of

¹¹¹ Kubelik, “Palladio’s Villas in the Tradition of the Veneto Farm,” 95.

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ Angelini, “La Zogna,” 10; Zanella, *Ex Villa Zogna Ora Caserma Scotti*, 1.

¹¹⁴ Mazzotti, *Ville venete*, 50.

¹¹⁵ Stefania Ferrari, *Ville Venete. La provincia di Verona* (Venezia: Marsilio : Istituto regionale per le ville venete, 2003), 330.

the century. For example, he writes of Villa del Bene in Verona (fig. 2.17) the façade of which bears a striking resemblance to that of Villa Zogna: “the well-developed symmetry of the portico and the loggia suggests a date in the second half of the 1400s.”¹¹⁶ The refinement of the portico and loggia motif likely stemmed from the growing Renaissance interest in symmetry and proportion, which, as we will see below, was already present in Bergamasque architecture.

On the basis of the arrangement of the villa complex, Villa Zogna appears more closely related to Villa Corner dall’Aglia and other *ville venete* than to any typical Bergamasque *casa rustica*. To my knowledge, Isabello’s division of functional and residential space was a completely new solution in Bergamo, suggesting that the architect was aware of how these elements were handled elsewhere in the Veneto. Though the dearth of facts about Isabello’s life precludes any assumptions about his experience outside his home province, his master, the architect and engineer Alessio Agliardi, spent a great deal of time traveling between Bergamo and Venice, where he was frequently employed by the Republic toward the end of the Quattrocento.¹¹⁷ Even if Isabello never traveled outside Bergamo himself, his time as Agliardi’s student could have provided a connection to building traditions elsewhere in the Veneto.

However, the internal arrangement of space at Villa Zogna sets it apart from many examples on the eastern *terraferma*. As Caciagli’s plan demonstrates, *la parte padronale*

¹¹⁶ “Die weit entwickelte Symmetrie des Portico und der Loggia sprechen für eine Datierung in die zweite Hälfte des '400, jedoch sind die geringe Zahl der Bogen sowie deren Proportionen ein Hinweis dafür, dass das Baudatum etwas früher anzusetzen ist.” Martin Kubelík, *Die Villa im Veneto: Zur Typolog. Entwicklung im Quattrocento* (München: Süddeutscher Verlag, 1977), 104.

¹¹⁷ Luigi Angelini, “Agliardi, Alessio, il Vecchio,” *Dizionario biografico degli italiani*, 1, <http://www.treccani.it>.

did not afford great depth; its single row of rooms occupies an axis that is parallel to the façade. In contrast, the plans of the residential wings of many of the early *ville venete*, such as Villa del Bene, were block-like, and rooms were frequently arranged around a central *salone* that was perpendicular to the façade. Kubelik identifies this so-called “Venetian plan” as a derivation from houses along the Venetian canals, which utilized long *porteghi* to introduce light and air into the surrounding rooms.¹¹⁸ Such a plan would have been marked by the cultural influence of the capital, which, as we have already seen, was lacking in Bergamo; however, Bruce Boucher argues convincingly that there is in fact no such typology between the residences of Venice and the *ville venete*,¹¹⁹ so Isabetto may have had another reason for utilizing a single-axis plan.

I have already suggested that without existing precedents for a suburban villa in Bergamo or its province, the local tradition of *case rustiche* may have provided Isabetto with inspiration. These structures, lacking a large number of specialized functions, likely featured a simplified arrangement of space. Since we lack information on the ground plans of such buildings in the province of Bergamo, we may look to the designs for *case rustiche* in Book VI of Sebastiano Serlio’s *I sette libri di architettura* for some examples from the Veneto.¹²⁰ In his design for the most basic thatched-roof farmhouse (fig. 2.18), a single row of rooms is arranged parallel to a portico. From the portico, a door gives onto a large central chamber; to the right of this central room is another of almost equal

¹¹⁸ Kubelik, *Die Villa im Veneto*, 41.

¹¹⁹ Boucher, *Andrea Palladio*, 61.

¹²⁰ Though the first book in this series did not appear until the 1530s—and indeed Book VI was never published at all—the type of traditional farmhouse that he depicts must have had a long history in the region. See Sebastiano Serlio, *Sebastiano Serlio on Architecture, Volume 2: Books VI-VII of "Tutte l'opere d'architettura et prospetiva" with "Castrametation of the Romans" and "The Extraordinary Book of Doors"*, trans. Vaughan Hart and Peter Hicks (Yale University Press, 2001).

size, while to the immediate left is a staircase, and beyond it a small service room. The arrangement of rooms and their relative proportions closely matches that of Villa Zogna. If the design of Venetian *case rustiche* was in fact analogous to those found in Bergamo, such farmhouses could have formed the basis for Isabello's plan for Villa Zogna.

Of course, the level of refinement of Villa Zogna's architectural language could not have emerged solely from *case rustiche*; Isabello must also have looked at architecture in the city itself. One of the high points of Renaissance architecture in the city is the so-called Casa dell'Arciprete (fig. 2.19), which was once attributed to Isabello himself, but is now given to Mauro Codussi on the basis of its Venetian inflection.¹²¹ The Lombard influence is also often clearly felt in early Cinquecento architecture in the city, particularly in the now-familiar motifs of the combination of sandstone and *terra cotta*, and the double ratio of arches. In addition to the *cortile* of Paolo's cousins' house, Isabello also employed these motifs in two cloisters he constructed in Bergamo during the first decade of the Cinquecento.

The *chiostrino* at the monastery of S. Benedetto has been identified as one of his early works, commissioned from him in 1504.¹²² Conceived as an entrance space separate from the larger *chiostro* that he would design later, the *chiostrino* features six sandstone columns on high bases, Ionic columns with *foglie angolari*, and details in *terra cotta*. Mario Locatelli characterizes it as "manifest[ing] a surprising freedom of

¹²¹ Gianmario Petró, "Tra Bergamo e Venezia non solo pittori," *La Rivista di Bergamo* 26 (2001): 66.

¹²² Mario Locatelli, *Bergamo nei suoi monasteri: storia e arte nei cenobi benedettini della diocesi di Bergamo* (Bergamo: Il Conventino, 1986), 323.

invention and a full compositional understanding.”¹²³ On a larger scale, but demonstrating similar features, is the *chiostro* of S. Marta (fig. 2.20). It is clear from these examples that Isabello chose to apply techniques with which he was already conversant to the new environment of Villa Zogna, rather than evolving a new architectural language. As Caciagli observes, while Isabello “was certainly not an innovator...he was capable of fully interpreting the early Cinquecento Bergamasque taste, which combined a Lombard matrix with frequent Venetian citations.”¹²⁴ From this blend of sources emerged something completely new to Bergamo: the suburban villa.

Between Farmhouse and Villa

On the difference between the farmhouse and the villa, James Ackerman writes:

Though the villa may also serve as the center of an agricultural enterprise, the pleasure factor is essentially what distinguishes this type of residence from the farmhouse...the farmhouse tends to be simple in structure and to perpetuate formal solutions that do not require the intervention of a designer. The villa, typically the product of an architect’s imagination, asserts its modernity.¹²⁵

Does Villa Zogna pass the test to be considered a true villa? The complex was the product of Isabello’s imagination, and although it is not complex in its ground plan, its very novelty in Bergamo was an assertion of modernity. The one hundred acres of farmland that surrounded the villa made it “the center of an agricultural enterprise,” and in fact, in addition to agricultural production, I think it is possible that some aspects of cloth production also took place there. Its location on a river would have provided the

¹²³ “...manifesta una sorprendente libert  d’invenzione ed una compiuta sapienza compositiva.” Ibid.

¹²⁴ “Non fu certo un innovatore...sicuramente fu capace di interpretare a pieno il gusto di quell primo Cinquecento bergamasco che univa la matrice lombarda alla frequenti citazioni veneziane.” Caciagli, “Isabello Pietro Cleri, detto Abano,” 30.

¹²⁵ James Ackerman, “The Villa as Paradigm,” *Perspecta* 22 (1986): 11.

necessary running water for a *tintoria*—which, as we will see, was the subject of one of Previtali’s frescoes adorning the *salone*—and the north wing of the building, running alongside the canal, would have had plenty of space for workshops.¹²⁶ The villa could have offered more storage, one imagines, than the house on Via Pignolo, and as we know that the Cassotti were not averse to locating some parts of the production of cloth in their homes in the city, it seems possible that Paolo Cassotti might have done the same at his suburban residence.

Villa Zogna appears to satisfy the criteria of an architect, a claim to modernity, and a position as a production center, but it is the “pleasure factor,” which Ackerman identifies as the key trait of a true villa, that is the most obvious obstacle. We do not know how Paolo Cassotti and his family used this space—whether they lived there only in the summer, as in many villas further east, or if they visited more frequently, due to its proximity to their main residence. It is evident both from its sophisticated appearance and the presence of bedchambers on the *piano nobile* that the complex was not intended for business and agriculture alone, but the exact nature of its relationship to the family is unclear.

Another aspect of the “pleasure factor” that Villa Zogna lacked was a sense of openness and engagement with its environment that would likewise come to characterize the villa form later in the Cinquecento. Lordly views over the surrounding fields would have been difficult to obtain from Villa Zogna’s *piano nobile*, thanks to the walls that surrounded the complex (though its fortified tower might have offered an enviable

¹²⁶ In fact, the villa’s position was so accommodating that in the late eighteenth century it was turned into a *filatoio*, a spinning mill, and two large paddlewheels were built to harness the power of the Roggia Serio. Angelini, “La Zogna,” 9.

perspective if it doubled as a *belvedere*). There is also nothing to suggest that Villa Zogna ever had any gardens, which would have allowed interpenetration between nature and architecture.

The early date of Villa Zogna's construction must have played a part in its lack of participation in the pleasure aspect of *villeggiatura*. A Bergamasque villa of 1512 was simply not a part of the same historical, literary, and cultural milieu as a Vicentine, Veronese, or Paduan villa built in the same year. Without any direct precedent in Bergamo to help establish a standard of the kind of "dignified leisure" that should take place in a villa, its functional qualities likely took greater precedence for its merchant-patron. Consequently, the best categorization for Villa Zogna seems to be an intermediate one, somewhere between a farmhouse and a true participant in *villeggiatura*. Isabetto's intervention raised it far above the aesthetic level of the former, but its peripheral position and early date precluded its involvement in the latter.

We can regard Villa Zogna as a "working villa" in the fullest sense of the term, as a place for mercantile as well as agricultural activity. Above all, however, it functioned as a site for the active display of Paolo Cassotti's wealth and status. It is in the sense of the villa as "sign" that Villa Zogna comes closest to the spirit of *villeggiatura* as it would be practiced in the great villas of the second half of the Cinquecento. In their iconic study, Reinhard Bentmann and Michael Muller identified these Venetian villas as concrete expressions of the hegemonic control of the upper classes over the surrounding countryside and its inhabitants.¹²⁷ Naturally, as a middle-class merchant, Cassotti did not

¹²⁷ Reinhard Bentmann and Michael Müller, *The Villa as Hegemonic Architecture* (Atlantic Highlands, N.J: Humanities Press, 1992), passim.

occupy the same privileged social position as a Venetian patrician, and could not make the same pretensions to power. Yet his act of building a villa was not simply that of a member of the *borghesia* aping the behavior of his social betters—for as we have seen, there was no such trend in Bergamo. Nor did Villa Zogna merely advertise his enviable economic situation. Rather, Cassotti took advantage of an ideological formulation—one revived by humanist circles but in circulation since Roman antiquity—that viewed the villa as an inherently ennobling space, set apart both from the common people of the *campagna* and from the bustle and dirt of the city. Few families in Bergamo had a subsidiary residence outside the city, and certainly none had one so graceful, so evidently modern, as the one built for Paolo Cassotti by Pietro Isabello. The mere act of possessing such an estate—for an estate it truly was—indicated, albeit symbolically, his elevated social position. Writing of the allure of the villa in Florence, Giovanni Cherubini observes:

Land, a house in the country, just like property in the city, lent that prestige, that air of gentlemanly self-sufficiency, which even the man from the meanest lodging often regarded as the ultimate goal of his social advancement, almost the clearest sign of a change of status.¹²⁸

Such a sign must have had an even stronger impact in Bergamo, where the presence of an entrenched noble class with reserved rights and privileges greatly limited the mobility of the middle class. Even without fully engaging with the culture of *villeggiatura*, Paolo Cassotti was able to harness the signifying power of the villa to create a statement of his own worth, social as well as economic. So important was this message that it is carried

¹²⁸ Giovanni Cherubini, *Signori, contadini, borghesi. Ricerche sulla società italiana del basso Medioevo* (Firenze: La nuova Italia, 1974), 382. In Gobbi, *The Florentine Villa*, 11-12.

throughout the villa complex, finding its amplified echo in Previtali's fresco cycle in the ground-floor *salone*

CHAPTER 3

CONSTRUCTING A MERCHANT'S EYE: THE FRESCOES AT VILLA ZOGNA

The Context of Palace Decoration in the Renaissance

Secular fresco decoration in Italy began around the middle of the 13th century, “in settings from fairly humble private palaces to the great princely estates.”¹²⁹ Patterns were by far the most common form of ornamentation, since they were less expensive than figural decoration.¹³⁰ Landscape paintings were also popular. A typical example that combines both of these types of early fresco decoration is the house of the merchant Francesco Datini in Prato, painted by Agnolo Gaddi and Bartolomeo Bertozzo in the 1390s (fig. 3.1). The artists adorned the ceiling of the large ground-floor chamber that served as an office with heraldic patterns and gold stars, while on the walls they produced a marvelous woodland landscape, complete with birds and wildlife, which extends to the lunettes of the vault.¹³¹

Themes of courtly enjoyment and recreation were frequently found in palaces and castles belonging to members of the noble class throughout Italy. Andrew Martindale writes that “...the best available artists (such as Giotto) were used by the principal secular patrons for art which was there essentially to beguile their waking hours, to charm their

¹²⁹ Anne Dunlop, *Painted Palaces: The Rise of Secular Art in Early Renaissance Italy* (University Park, Pa: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2009), 6.

¹³⁰ Ibid.

¹³¹ Similar, though less extensive examples of landscape painting exist from other Florentine palaces of the period. Bruce Cole, “The Interior Decoration of the Palazzo Datini in Prato,” *Mitteilungen des Kunsthistorischen Institutes in Florenz* 13, no. 1/2 (December 1967): 65-8.

guests and to amaze their rivals.”¹³² Other popular themes during the medieval period included scenes from romances, portraits of “famous worthies,” and illustrations of occupations related to the months of the year.¹³³ Family portraits became common in the Trecento, while contemporary portraits made their appearance on the walls of palaces and castles beginning in the early Quattrocento.¹³⁴

In contrast to these precedents for the decoration of noble dwellings, there was no example for Paolo Cassotti to follow in selecting the decoration of Villa Zogna. He lacked a series of noble or famous ancestors, and courtly entertainments would have looked out of place in a villa that was clearly intended to be functional as well as recreational, particularly if the *salone* was intended to accommodate clients and fellow merchants as well as members of the family. The simplest choice, and the most economical—which was surely a consideration for a prosperous merchant—would have been to have the walls of the villa decorated with patterns. More elaborate and impressive would have been landscapes linked to the months, seasons or astrological cycles. How, then, did he decide upon a cycle depicting the mechanical arts? Once again, the lack of documentation means that there can be no decisive answer, but perhaps the choice of a more complex and innovative theme had something to do with the new availability of a Venetian-trained artist, Andrea Previtali.

¹³² Andrew Martindale, *Painting the Palace: Studies in the History of Medieval Secular Painting* (Pindar Press, 1995), 2.

¹³³ Ibid., 3-5.

¹³⁴ Ibid., 9, 13.

From Venice to Bergamo

Previtali returned to Bergamo in the summer of 1512, just as the city celebrated its reunification with Venice following the end of the nearly three-year French occupation.¹³⁵ The Cassotti family, who would prove to be among Previtali's greatest patrons over the next decade, likely had a hand in his homecoming, and he received three commissions from them upon his arrival: the *Transfiguration* for Paolo's chapel in Santa Maria delle Grazie; the *Pala di Santo Spirito* for Bartolomeo and Zovanino Cassotti's chapel in Santo Spirito; and the frescoes for Villa Zogna.¹³⁶

Born into a Bergamasque merchant family, Previtali had spent nine years in the capital, first in Giovanni Bellini's studio and then as an independent artist.¹³⁷ The artist proudly attested to his training in the signatures on his early paintings, signing the *Madonna Enthroned with Sebastian* of 1502 "Andrea Bergomensis Joanis Bellini Dissipulus pinxit."¹³⁸ The impact of his training in the early Cinquecento Venetian milieu is also apparent in his frequent citations of the work of his master, as well as that of Cima da Conegliano and Giorgione. Giorgione's influence appears mostly frequently

¹³⁵ Colalucci, *Bergamo negli anni di Lotto*, 51.

¹³⁶ Ibid.

¹³⁷ Gian Alberto Dell'Acqua, et. al., ed., *I pittori bergamaschi dal XIII al XIX secolo*, vol. 1 (Bergamo: Poligrafiche Bolis, 1975), 87.

¹³⁸ Antonia Abattista Finocchiaro, "La situazione dopo 1513: Andrea Previtali," *La Rivista di Bergamo* 26 (2001): 36. This practice ended after his return to Bergamo in 1512. See Colalucci, *Bergamo negli anni di Lotto*, 51.

in Previtali's treatment of landscape, while the artist drew on Cima and Bellini for compositional elements and figural poses throughout his career.¹³⁹

The signature that appears on the base of the prie-dieu in Previtali's *Annunciation* of c. 1508 (fig. 3.2), for example, identifies him again as Bellini's disciple, but the composition, especially the framing element of the biforate window, owes much more to Cima's *Annunciation* of 1495 (fig. 3.3).¹⁴⁰ At the same time, the angel's hair is bound in the *lenza lombarda*, reminiscent of Leonardo's head of Isabella d'Este, while the landscape borrows less from the cityscape visible through Cima's window than from Albrecht Durer's *Saint John Before the Throne of God* of 1495 (fig. 3.4).¹⁴¹ These choices, which might be termed eclecticism, reappear in other work by the artist and prevent him from being a mere copyist or follower. His technical proficiency is also evident in this work, particularly his superlative ability to mimic textures, such as the heavy shot silk of Mary's robe, and the wicker basket that sits atop an oriental carpet (itself an inclusion that speaks to a clearly Venetian sensibility).

Working in Bergamo, Previtali had imbued a borrowed composition with fresh meaning when he drew on Cima's c. 1493-5 *St. John the Baptist Altarpiece* (fig. 3.5) for the *Pala di Santo Spirito*, investing it with a political significance, discussed above, that

¹³⁹ Gian Alberto Dell'Acqua, et. al., *I pittori bergamaschi dal XIII al XIX secolo*, 1:140; Jürg Meyer ZurCapellen, "Andrea Previtali" (Ph.D. dissertation, Julius-Maximilians-Universität zu Würzburg, 1972), 45.

¹⁴⁰ Mauro Zanchi, *Andrea Previtali: il coloritore prospettico di maniera belliniana* (Clusone: Ferrari, 2001), 24. Peter Humfrey notes that Cima himself had adapted the composition from Bellini's organ doors for the church of the Miracoli in 1490. See Peter Humfrey, *Cima Da Conegliano* (Cambridge ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 32.

¹⁴¹ Zanchi, *Andrea Previtali*, 28. According to the Louvre's description of a drawing by Raphael in the manner of Leonardo, this hairstyle "was popular in Lombardy until 1510." Federica Mancini, "Head and shoulders of a woman, in three-quarters profile facing left, with folded arms," *Musée du Louvre*, <http://www.louvre.fr/>.

was not present in the original. More innovative still was the altarpiece he created for Paolo's chapel in Santa Maria delle Grazie (fig. 3.6); though the subject was the Transfiguration of Christ, the artist combined the traditional iconography of that scene with that of the Baptism. The painting presents the three Persons of the Trinity: Christ, the dove of the Holy Spirit, and God the Father, present as golden rays emanating from a cloud. Moses and Elijah are both conspicuously absent, and Previtali has transformed Mount Tabor into a gentle rolling swell of ground backed by a Giorgionesque landscape. On the scroll at the right appear God's words: "*hic est filius meus dilectus*," or "This is my beloved Son," a statement he made at both the Baptism and the Transfiguration.¹⁴² The suppression of the traditional iconography for the Transfiguration thus suggests a combination of the two episodes, both of which confirm Jesus' divinity. Rather than developing this unusual concept himself, Previtali likely acted under the advice of one of the Franciscan monks at Santa Maria delle Grazie. Colalucci suggests that a possible motive may have been the recent Council of Pisa, called by Emperor Maximilian I in October 1511 as an attempt to force reform within the Church; faced with the threat of schism, Previtali's altarpiece may have represented "a hope of unification in the faith."¹⁴³ Despite any advice he received, however, the successful execution of this iconographic blend in the *Transfiguration* altarpiece was Previtali's alone.¹⁴⁴

¹⁴² Matthew 3:17, narrating the Baptism: "et ecce vox de caelis dicens hic est Filius meus dilectus in quo mihi conplacui." Matthew 17:5, narrating the Transfiguration: "adhuc eo loquente ecce nubes lucida obumbravit eos et ecce vox de nube dicens hic est Filius meus dilectus in quo mihi bene conplacuit ipsum audite." For Vulgate text see "Gospel of Matthew," <http://theology101.org/bib/vul/mar016.htm>.

¹⁴³ "...una speranza di unificazione nella fede." Colalucci, *Bergamo negli anni di Lotto*, 52.

¹⁴⁴ Colalucci suggests that this painting's unique representation of the three Persons inspired Lorenzo Lotto's *Trinity*, commissioned for the church of the Trinità in 1519. This would allow for a

The Fresco Cycle

Previtali's ability to creatively reinterpret work he had seen in Venice would come in handy on the third project that the Cassotti family commissioned from him, and the first one he completed: the decoration of the *salone* at Villa Zogna. According to Mario Caciagli's ground plan, two doors opened onto this large chamber from the portico, and fourteen lunettes occupied the upper part of the walls. A. Piccinelli's cross-section shows that beneath the lunettes ran a frieze, while the remainder of the wall surface seems to have been decorated with some kind of painted architectural framework, as an interior photo taken by Caciagli (fig. 3.7) shows no articulation of the wall surface of the kind that appears in Piccinelli's drawing beside the capitals at the springing of the lunettes. The drawing also suggests that the large fireplace, which occupies one of the lunettes, was ornamented as well, perhaps with the family *stemma*. The frescoes that Previtali executed in the other lunettes in the *salone* were removed from the villa by its last private owners, the Conti di Suardi, sometime before its conversion into an army hospital in 1885. They remain in the family's private collection in the nearby town of Trescore Balneario.¹⁴⁵

Six of the thirteen paintings, which today are all in fairly poor condition, represent bucolic scenes of life in the countryside and the town. They included depictions of a farmer and a shepherd, a barbershop and a metal-smith, and builders and wood-workers (figs. 3.8-3.13). Three other scenes make reference to Bergamo's status as a subject city:

reciprocal exchange between the two artists, rather than assuming, as is commonly done, that Previtali absorbed the influence of the more-talented Lotto. Ibid., 125.

¹⁴⁵ Filocolo, "Una villa bergamasca: La Zogna," *Emporium* 33, no. 198 (1911): 466. I was able to view and photograph two of the frescoes in the collection of the Conti di Suardi thanks to the assistance of Prof. Graziella Colmuto Zanella.

a scene of a Bergamasque council; a view of Venice toward the *piazzetta*; and a depiction of the doge of Venice administering justice (figs. 3.14-3.16). The remaining four frescoes make indirect reference to their patron, Paolo Cassotti; these include scenes of trade and navigation, a *tintoria*, and a depiction of a painter at work creating the portrait of a lady (figs. 3.17-3.20).

Previtali's fresco cycle participated in a tradition of depicting the practical or mechanical arts—which in the early 16th century still included sculpture and painting—as part of an allegorical series.¹⁴⁶ The artist may not have been familiar with perhaps the most well-known medieval example, the series of reliefs executed by Andrea Pisano (possibly designed by Giotto) for the campanile of the Duomo in Florence in the 1330s.¹⁴⁷ Part of a larger program intended to convey the movement of mankind toward redemption since the Fall, each relief depicts the legendary founder of one of the arts and crafts, which include navigation, agriculture, weaving, law, and painting.¹⁴⁸ The *Scultura* relief, for example (fig. 3.21), depicts the Greek sculptor Phidias seated on a bench, his hammer and chisel in hand, as he carves a small statue of a man with one arm raised. Previtali might have been more familiar with the “*capitelli dei mestieri*” that decorated the western entrance of the Palazzo Ducale in Venice, which were executed between 1340 and 1355.¹⁴⁹ As in Florence, the attributes of each craft are rendered as simply as

¹⁴⁶ Catherine King, *Representing Renaissance Art, C.1500-C.1600* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007), 21-22.

¹⁴⁷ Luisa Becherucci and Giulia Brunetti, eds., *Il Museo dell'Opera del Duomo a Firenze* (Venezia: Electa, 1971), 234-5.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 234.

¹⁴⁹ Antonio Manno, *I mestieri di Venezia: storia, arte e devozione delle corporazioni dal XIII Al XVIII secolo* (Cittadella: Biblos, 1995), 142.

possible to allow for the greatest legibility from below; thus, the figure atop the *Barbitonsore* capital (fig. 3.22) brandishes his shears, while the one on the *Fabbro* capital (fig. 3.23) grips a hammer over an anvil.

The activities of the Venetian *mestieri* were depicted in greater narrative detail on the guild signs, or *insegne delle arti*, that were publicly displayed at the Palazzo dei Camerlenghi. Used as a type of bulletin board under which new rulings relating to each guild might be posted, each of these signs bore the coat of arms of the guild above a scene demonstrating the craft of its members.¹⁵⁰ The sign executed in 1508 for the *mureri*, or wall-makers, presents four men of the guild practicing their profession (fig. 3.24): two men work on window casements, a third applies cement to a brick with a trowel, while in the center, the fourth man measures a standing column with a plumb line. Like their sculptural precedents, each figure is clearly represented in action, wielding a characteristic attribute of their trade. Though the context of a painting allowed for greater detail and narrative expansion than sculpture, the anonymous artist kept things simple, representing all four figures on the same ground line using the device of the platform. The wall behind them cuts off the progression of the picture plane, creating a frieze-like composition.

Whether Paolo Cassotti had already decided on the theme of the fresco cycle when he offered Previtali the commission or the artist suggested it, he could easily have drawn on what he had seen in Venice in deciding which *arti e mestieri* to include and how to portray their activity. Four men are hard at work in a courtyard in the fresco

¹⁵⁰ This information comes from the didactic panel in Sala 48-49 of the Museo Correr, Venice, in which the *insegne delle arti* are exhibited.

depicting *Architettura e scultura*, for example, and like the *mureri*, they are physically involved in their labor, bent over their picks and hammers. Here, too, the central figure measures a column, but he does so with a ruler and compass as it is laid out on the ground. Previtali may not have quoted directly from these guild signs in the same manner as he borrowed from Bellini and Cima, but they would likely have been in his mind as he composed his own versions. The greatest difference between the two works is Previtali's facility with perspective, which extends the scene beyond the courtyard to a hilly landscape in the background. In fact, besides the two interior scenes (the council and the doge administering justice), all of the frescoes include elements of landscape, which was a common requirement for the decoration of villas.

Previtali departed from other cycles of *arti e mestieri* in the three scenes with expressly political imagery: the council scene, the doge administering justice, and the view of Venice. These frescoes suggest that Previtali's cycle is not merely a general allegory of good government, but rather highlights a more specific theme: the return to peace and prosperity under the Serenissima and a celebration of the Cassotti family's vindicated political allegiance.¹⁵¹ The scene depicting a council of ten individuals records that proud moment of civic self-definition that had taken place in June of 1512 when the middle-class citizens of Bergamo chose their own allegiance to the Republic. The specific reference is made clear by the inclusion of the date MDXII on the podium and, above the chair (though it is frankly illegible in reproduction), the initials BMDD,

¹⁵¹ Colalucci, *Bergamo negli anni di Lotto*, 42.

which stand for “Bartholameus Mostus et Decem Deputati.”¹⁵² Bartolomeo Mosto was the Venetian *provedditore* who arrived in Bergamo on June 24 only in time to ratify what the council of citizens had already decided.¹⁵³ Though Paolo Cassotti was not a part of this council, it must have been a triumphant moment for him as a prominent member of the merchant class, as evidenced by the fact that he instructed Previtali to include it in the fresco cycle painted that very year.

This same triumphant spirit is echoed in another scene that proclaims Bergamo’s reunification with Venice. There could be no clearer signal of Cassotti’s sympathies than a depiction of the Venetian head of state, particularly one portrayed in the very act of exercising authority over his subjects.¹⁵⁴ Seated on a dais, the doge passes judgment on a man whose arms are held by two guards, while a secretary busily records the decision. In the center of the room, two well-dressed men converse with a halberd-bearing guard, and at the far right, another guard blocks a man from entering the council chamber. In Piccinelli’s drawing (fig. 3.25), this scene and that of the council appear in the lunettes flanking the fireplace—which, as mentioned above, was likely to have been emblazoned with the Cassotti arms. As a drawing by Caciagli after Piccinelli demonstrates more clearly (fig. 3.26), the presence of the Cassotti *stemma* between one fresco commemorating the loyalty of the middle class in Bergamo, and another depicting the

¹⁵² According to Filocolo, Bergamo’s librarian determined the full inscription on the basis of “delle poche lettere che ancora si scorgono.” Filocolo, “Una villa bergamasca: La Zogna,” 477; Colalucci, *Bergamo negli anni di Lotto*, 42.

¹⁵³ Filocolo, “Una villa bergamasca: La Zogna,” 476.

¹⁵⁴ It is unclear if Previtali intended the figure of the doge to be a portrait of the current officeholder, Leonardo Loredan, but if so, he may have been familiar with the portrait of the doge executed by Bellini in c. 1501.

authority of the doge in Venice, would have formed a powerful statement of the patron's class pride and political loyalty.

The lunette depicting a view of Venice, though not included in this pendant arrangement, is likewise symbolic. The inclusion of the lone figure who gazes across the *bacino* toward the potent symbols of the Republic's glory in Piazza S. Marco renders this fresco unique among the cycle. His position, with his back to us, is reminiscent of the technique first employed by Giotto in the Arena Chapel in Padua in order to include the viewer within the field of the painting; by looking over his shoulder, we are ourselves transported to the city of Venice. Though Venice was often called the *Serenissima*, the title used with reference to her subject cities was *La Dominante*,¹⁵⁵ and the presence of this scene inside a villa hundreds of kilometers away reaffirms that dependent relationship. Merchants entering Paolo Cassotti's *salone* on business would have been reminded of the government to whom they owed not just political, but economic fealty, while anyone who had never traveled there might merely have been awed by the grandeur of the city rising from the sea, an environment vastly different than Bergamo's mountain terrain.

The political tenor of these scenes was clearly keyed to Paolo Cassotti's pro-Venetian sympathies, which indicates that he must have requested them specifically. Such paintings would have been inconceivable within a different context in Bergamo—for instance, one would not expect to find a validation of the Republic's power on the wall of a home belonging to one of the Ghibelline nobles. Beyond this political sketch,

¹⁵⁵ James S Grubb, *Firstborn of Venice: Vicenza in the Early Renaissance State* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1988), 8.

however, another sub-group of four frescoes comprise an indirect portrait of Cassotti himself as merchant and patron. His merchant mark—the initials P.A., for Paolo di Antonello—appears on a bale of goods in the scene of trade (fig. 3.27), its presence emphasized by the indexical gestures of the Turkish and Italian merchants.¹⁵⁶ The inclusion of exotic characters suggests Cassotti's wide-ranging commercial interests, as does the scene of a ship in full sail, leaving what may represent the entrance to the Venetian Arsenal.¹⁵⁷ Meanwhile, the *tintoria* scene demonstrates a part of his trade that occurred closer to home. The fresco represents three phases of the dyeing process: on the right, workers in a large building dip woolen cloth into steaming vats of dye; in the center, the lengths of cloth dry in the sun; and on the left, workers rinse the finished material in a canal.¹⁵⁸ The setting of this scene in a large building on the bank of a canal, surrounded by open countryside, is strongly reminiscent of the setting of Villa Zogna itself. If wool cloth was in fact dyed at Villa Zogna, then this scene, like Scipioni's fresco in Santa Maria delle Grazie, is very much self-referential. Finally, the scene in which a painter is depicted in the act of making a portrait of a seated lady calls to mind the considerable expense that Paolo and his family members were currently exerting in artistic patronage, the only public path open to them as members of the merchant class.

¹⁵⁶ Meyer ZurCapellen claims the initials are instead the signature "Previtalus Andreas," an idea disputed by Colalucci. See Meyer ZurCapellen, "Andrea Previtali," 45, 156. Though I have not seen any other examples of Paolo's mark, that of his brother Zovanino di Antonello, which includes the initials Z.A., is carved on a column in the cortile of his home in Via Pignolo; an image is reproduced in Petró, "Le case di Paolo e de Zovanino Cassotti," 116.

¹⁵⁷ Filocolo, "Una villa bergamasca: La Zogna," 474.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid.

Reception and Audience

It must have been Cassotti's decision to frame the hearth, emblazoned with his family's insignia, with the two scenes most clearly linked to his pro-Venetian political sympathies. However, we have no information regarding the original arrangement of the other eleven frescoes. The cycle lacks any internal progression, such as months or seasons, and the numbers of country and urban scenes are not equal. Certain of the frescoes do suggest that they may have been paired, such as *Architecture and Sculpture* and *Woodworkers*, which both focus on scenes of manual labor that are depicted within similar compositional frameworks. Other pairs that demonstrate these affinities include the scenes of *Trade and Navigation*, and *Agriculture and Shepherds*. The ultimate organizational scheme, of course, is lost.

Despite this lack of information, it is possible to analyze the cycle and its relationship with the viewer as part of a constructed environment (fig. 3.28). The presence of these paintings within a large, ground-floor chamber that likely functioned as a site for commercial activity suggests that both artist and patron directed their efforts toward a particular audience, one that would have been defined by gender as well as class. In order to attempt to reconstruct the position of the early 16th-century viewer for whom these frescoes were intended, a viewer who was likely both male and a fellow member of the merchant class, we should, to alter slightly Michael Baxandall's phrase, consider the frescoes with a "merchant's eye."¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁹ Michael Baxandall, *Painting and Experience in Fifteenth Century Italy: A Primer in the Social History of Pictorial Style*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 29-103. I cite here the portion of Baxandall's book in which he develops the concept of the period eye as it applied to Quattrocento Florentines.

Members of the Bergamasque *borghesia* were neither naïve nor entirely provincial in their tastes, but their exposure to large-scale secular artistic decoration must have been limited. As discussed above, Villa Zogna was the first of its kind in the city, and its fresco cycle was equally unprecedented among the merchant class, who mainly commissioned portraits or small devotional images.¹⁶⁰ The potential visual impact of the frescoes should therefore not be underestimated. Yet whatever they may have lacked in connoisseurship, merchants who came to the villa to trade in cloth or other commodities would have recognized the expense inherent not only in the construction of such a villa but also in its decoration.¹⁶¹ Those with a particularly discerning eye would have been in a position to compare Previtali's technical proficiency to that of other homegrown artists, such as Scipioni. Admittedly, the quality of Previtali's work in fresco is far below that of his work in oil, but his use of perspective and his complex construction of space demonstrate a level of skill greater than that of locally-trained artists. That Cassotti was able to employ an artist of such quality, especially one who had trained in Venice with the famous Giovanni Bellini, offered a further testament to his own economic superiority. It was also undoubtedly a political statement, one that linked him even more closely with the capital city.

As Albertian "strong subjects," these merchants stood at the apex of the visual pyramid, the focus of not just the perspective lines of each scene, but of the sum total of the visual space organized around them. They could read in these images reflections of the type of prosperous economic and agricultural activity on which their own livelihoods

¹⁶⁰ Pascale, "Nobili e borghesi," 35-39.

¹⁶¹ Zanella and Zanella, "'Città sopra monte eccellentissime situada'," 143.

depended, and recognize the depiction of the city of Venice as the hub of mercantile activity in northern Italy. Yet the frescoes themselves were far from passive. The presence of text in two of the scenes required the merchant-viewer to do more than simply look—he had to decode their significance. The council scene, for example, lacks specific context apart from the inscriptions of MDXII and BMDD, but once these are decoded, they identify the scene not only as a precise moment in recent Bergamasque history, but as a potent reminder of the role played by the merchant class as a whole at a pivotal moment in the city's recent history. The cycle pre-supposed a merchant-viewer with similar pro-Venetian sympathies, one who would have equally appreciated the scenes depicting Bergamo's voluntary re-submission to the Republic, its head of state, and the capital city itself.

At the same time, the frescoes did not merely comment on past events and loyalties. The War of the League of Cambrai was by no means over in 1512, and as mentioned, the city would be captured and freed twice more before the conflict ended in 1516.¹⁶² Amid this continuing instability, the fresco cycle was an active player, continually constructing a pro-Venetian identity for the viewers who came and went within the *salone*. In this context, the sign formed by Cassotti's proprietary mark on a bale of goods could be read as a reminder of the economic benefits of peace and prosperity—both of which, it is implied, are to be had only under the dominion of the Republic.

Thus far I have examined those political and socio-economic messages encoded into the fresco cycle by its artist and patron. I also argue that it functioned on another,

¹⁶² Colalucci, *Bergamo negli anni di Lotto*, 71-79.

more subtle level, that of ideology. The 20th-century Marxist intellectual Louis Althusser defines ideology as “the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence.”¹⁶³ Though there can be many ideologies over time, Ideology itself is both eternal and universal; it exists in the practices that reproduce it, including systems of education, government, commerce, and even artistic production. Ideology also requires subjects, and Althusser identifies the mechanism through which the individual becomes the subject as interpellation, or hailing. His primary example is that of a policeman who shouts “You there!” on a crowded street; the individual, voluntarily identifying himself as the one being addressed, turns around, and in that action becomes a subject.¹⁶⁴ In the middle of the 20th-century, those who viewed the recruitment slogan “Uncle Sam wants YOU!” and thought, “That’s me, he’s speaking to me!” were, in that very reaction, interpellated as subjects.

Key to the functioning of this mechanism is the individual’s recognition of his or herself as the party being hailed. A fresco cycle such as the one at Villa Zogna was particularly well-adapted to such a purpose. Even before the visual recognition of any individual scene, the decorated space involved the viewer on a physical level. In a Lacanian sense, we might say that the viewer was “looked at from all sides;” equally, for Althusser, he was hailed from all sides by the frescoes’ ideological content.¹⁶⁵ The dominant ideology in the 16th-century Veneto was, arguably, the proto-capitalism from

¹⁶³ Louis Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy, and Other Essays* (London: New Left Books, 1971), 153.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 163-4.

¹⁶⁵ Jacques Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1998), 72.

which Bergamo's merchant class derived its new bourgeois status. Once the merchant-viewer recognized that he was being addressed as a part of the great economic machinery that encompasses the represented world of barbershops and shepherds, of fellow merchants and councilors, he was interpellated as a subject. Thus, the ultimate effect of the fresco cycle was to support and confirm the ideological system of which the cycle itself was a tangible expression.

For Althusser, interpellation is a recurring process, in which the individual's status as a subject is constantly being reaffirmed.¹⁶⁶ In other words, a 16th-century merchant did not simply walk into this room as an individual, and walk out a subject. Ideology is always present in some form, hence the French philosopher's well-known phrase, "individuals are always-already interpellated."¹⁶⁷ However, as a site in which the mechanism of interpellation would have been repeatedly deployed as merchants moved through the space to conduct business, the fresco cycle at Villa Zogna offers us a concrete example of how this phenomenon functioned in a specific time and place.

The ideological content I have discussed would have been invisible or unrecognizable to the 16th-century observer, yet it blended harmoniously with those messages that were purposefully encoded into the paintings. The fresco cycle thus enjoys agency on two levels. Artist and patron engineered a visual environment that not only presented Cassotti's own political and socio-economic views, but encouraged and expected the merchant-viewer to follow suit, while beneath the surface, interpellation reinforced the dominance of the system that made the existence of such a merchant class

¹⁶⁶ Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy, and Other Essays*, 164.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid.

possible. The Bergamasque merchants who came to Villa Zogna to trade with Paolo Cassotti undoubtedly felt that they alone held the power to look, but in more than one way, the frescoes themselves were looking back.

CHAPTER 4

THE *MADONNA CASSOTTI*: FAMILY MEMORY IN VIA PIGNOLO

Between 1520-24, Paolo Cassotti commissioned a final painting from Andrea Previtali, the *Madonna Cassotti* (fig. 4.1).¹⁶⁸ A great deal had changed in the years between the completion of the frescoes at Villa Zogna and this commission. The War of Cambrai had ended in 1516 with Venice reclaiming all of her mainland possessions through diplomatic, rather than military means.¹⁶⁹ Across the *terraferma*, the Republic moved swiftly to check the power of the noble classes that had proved so politically unreliable during the conflict.¹⁷⁰ In Bergamo, this took the form of a restructuring of Bergamo's city council to include elected representatives from each of the city's nineteen neighborhoods—thereby permitting non-nobles access to government for the first time in the city's history.¹⁷¹ During the first round of elections in 1517, Paolo Cassotti was elected to serve as representative for the neighborhood of S. Antonio, realizing, at long last, his political ambitions, and vindicating once again the loyalty to La Dominante that Previtali's fresco cycle had expressed so clearly in 1512.¹⁷² In 1520, Cassotti further

¹⁶⁸ Mauro Lucco, "Andrea Previtali," in *Bergamo l'altra Venezia: il rinascimento negli anni di Lorenzo Lotto, 1510-1530*, ed. Francesco Rossi (Milano: Skira, 2001), 134. Lucco assigns the painting a date of 1520 based on style, which is echoed by the Accademia Carrara's catalogue. Colalucci, suggests a date of 1523 which makes more sense in terms of its relationship to Lotto, discussed below. See Colalucci, *Bergamo negli anni di Lotto*, 144.

¹⁶⁹ Norwich, *A History of Venice*, 432.

¹⁷⁰ Muir, "Was There Republicanism," 147-9.

¹⁷¹ Pascale, "Nobili e borghesi," 36; Petroni, "I mercati Cassotti de Mazzoleni," 113.

¹⁷² Pascale, "Nobili e borghesi," 37.

cemented his entrance into the upper echelons of Bergamasque society when he married Agnese Avinatri, the daughter of a nobleman.¹⁷³

The *Madonna Cassotti* is set in an interior space, as indicated by the cornice barely visible in the shadows at the upper edge of the painting. Framed against a scarlet cloth of honor, the Virgin holds her Son on her lap, tenderly holding one of his feet in her hand. She is flanked by the standing figures of Paolo, whose gaze is fixed on the spectator, and Agnese, who seems to look off into the distance. Kneeling before the Virgin are the patrons' name saints; St. Paul folds his hands as he receives the Christ-child's blessing, while the magnificently dressed St. Agnes throws out her left hand in supplication, her eyes on the Virgin's face.

Typical of Previtali, textures and details are minutely observed, like the Virgin's diaphanous veil and the silk of St. Agnes's gaily striped sleeve. He also continued, even at this late date, to draw on the artists to whom he was exposed in Venice. The position of the Madonna holding her Son's foot recalls a pose used by Bellini, such as in the *Madonna and Child* of c. 1505-9 in the Galleria Borghese (fig. 4.2), as well as by Cima, for example in the *Madonna and Child with Saints Francis and Clare* of 1510 (fig. 4.3), in which the Christ-child leans away from the Virgin to deliver a blessing, just as in Previtali's panel.

However, as we have seen, Previtali was capable of much more than mere quotation, and this piece, with its unusual treatment of the *sacra conversazione* format, is no exception. Cima's Cleveland *Virgin and Child with Saints and Donors* of c. 1515 (fig.

¹⁷³ Petrò, "I mercati Cassotti de Mazzoleni," 113. This was his second marriage; he had six daughters from the first.

4.4) offers a traditional demonstration of this format, with the patrons' name saints standing on either side of the Virgin and Child, introducing their kneeling charges. In the *Madonna Cassotti*, Previtali inverts this hierarchical arrangement, placing Paolo and Agnese in the positions of honor flanking the Virgin and Child, while St. Paul and St. Agnes kneel before the holy pair in supplication. Equally curious is that the way that the patrons do not focus their attention on the miraculous scene before them; Paolo's outward gaze, in particular, interrupts the contemplative atmosphere by making a direct address to the viewer. Only the holy figures are truly participating in this *sacra conversazione*.

Beyond the innovative arrangement of figures, some aspects of this composition can be attributed to Previtali's exposure to a powerful new artistic influence in the years since his last commission from Paolo Cassotti: Lorenzo Lotto. Lotto spent twelve years in Bergamo between 1513 and 1525, the longest he remained in any place during his entire career.¹⁷⁴ Like Previtali, he found the greatest support among the wealthy merchants of the middle class.¹⁷⁵ He would be employed to paint several pictures for Paolo's brother Zovanino, most famously the wedding portrait of his son Marsilio and wife Faustina in 1523 (fig. 4.5).¹⁷⁶ Though competition for commissions could easily have made them rivals, the two artists seem to have been friends. Lotto's professional esteem for Previtali is made clear by letters to the council in Bergamo following his departure in 1525, in which he requested that Previtali be entrusted with the task of

¹⁷⁴ Mauro Lucco, "Bergamo, 1513-1525: gli anni d'oro," in *Bergamo l'altra Venezia: il rinascimento negli anni di Lorenzo Lotto, 1510-1530*, ed. Francesco Rossi (Milano: Skira, 2001), 50.

¹⁷⁵ Pascale, "Nobili e borghesi," 37-38; Rossi, "Immagine e mito di Venezia: Committenza artistica e progetto politico a Bergamo tra il 1512 e il 1525," 25.

¹⁷⁶ Colalucci, *Bergamo negli anni di Lotto*, 143.

carrying out his designs for a series of intarsia panels in the choir of Santa Maria Maggiore.¹⁷⁷ Previtali learned a great deal from Lotto, who is perhaps best known for the complex and often mysterious symbolism of his portraits, as well as their strong sense of psychological insight.¹⁷⁸ The paintings Previtali created after Lotto's arrival in the city demonstrate a new interest in this approach, as well as in Lotto's manipulation of light and atmosphere. His *Compianto sul Cristo morto* of 1523 is, according to Colalucci, "his closest approach to Lotto's treatment of emotion and affect."¹⁷⁹

A possible inspiration for Paolo's position in Previtali's painting is the *Nozze mistiche di Santa Caterina* (fig. 4.6), painted for the merchant Niccolò Bonghi in 1523, in which the patron appears kneeling behind the chair in which the Virgin is seated. Lotto frames the scene as a mystical vision to which Bonghi is a privileged witness, but though he adopts a gesture of surprise, with one hand over his heart and the other raised, his eyes are fixed on the viewer. A crucial difference here, however, is that the sacred figures also acknowledge the viewer's presence—the Virgin makes eye contact with the spectator, while the Christ Child and St. Catherine incline their heads. In contrast, the holy figures in the *Madonna Cassotti* form a closed triangle, with no acknowledgement of anything outside it, including the patrons. In addition, where Niccolò's gesture is open, Paolo's hands are hidden from view, leaving only his eyes to form an expressive connection with the viewer.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid., 165.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid., 31.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid., 166.

The unusual nature of Previtali's composition has engendered debate over its meaning. Colalucci suggests that Previtali painted the work during Agnese's first pregnancy following the couple's marriage, hoping to ensure healthy delivery of a son and heir by commending her to the care of the Virgin.¹⁸⁰ However, as Mauro Lucco points out, their general self-awareness and lack of humility undermines this assessment. By placing himself on the same level as the Virgin and making eye contact with the spectator, Paolo becomes "the true protagonist" of the painting.¹⁸¹ Certainly the lack of ostentation in the sober black gown and plain cap offer no distraction from his face, which emerges from the surrounding darkness as an imposing presence. The artist closely observed his sitter's features, down to the wrinkles above the arched eyebrows and the thin, pursed lips. Most striking, however, is the undeniable sense of psychological awareness in Paolo's steady, appraising gaze. The clearest indication of the influence of Lotto's portraits, it gives the spectator the sensation of being observed in her observation.

Lucco characterizes the *Madonna Cassotti* as Paolo's "public consecration," a work that celebrates his advantageous marriage and elevated status.¹⁸² Yet the painting seems to be characterized by solemnity, rather than triumphalism, and the fairly reduced scale (95cm x 121cm), together with the placement of the figures so close to the picture plane, creates a heightened sense of intimacy. This is an "up close and personal" portrait

¹⁸⁰ Ibid., 144.

¹⁸¹ "...il protagonista vero." Lucco, "Bergamo L'altra Venezia," 134.

¹⁸² "...la sua pubblica consacrazione." Ibid., 134-6. Tobias Leuker's attempt to challenge this interpretation is less than convincing; he identifies textual sources for S. Agnese's luxurious appearance, as well as S. Paolo's "timidity," but does not provide a convincing explanation for the reversal of the positions between patrons and saints. See Tobias Leuker, "Orgoglio e devozione, iconografia e funzione della Pala Cassotti di Previtali," *Arte Veneta* 60 (2005): 139.

of Cassotti, one undoubtedly informed by the long association between artist and patron. Consequently, I would suggest that the function of this painting, which remained in the house at Via Pignolo 70 until the family died out in the Settecento, was primarily a commemorative one.¹⁸³ The fact that there are no Cassotti symbols anywhere in the painting (a striking departure from the other examples of the family's patronage we have examined), combined with the veristic representation of the *paterfamilias*, indicates that the painting was intended to be seen by those who would already be familiar with its subject: Paolo's descendants.¹⁸⁴ At the same time, the painting's extraordinary inversion of the *sacra conversazione* format says a great deal about its patron's sense of his own importance, without the need to resort to other signs or symbols.

Family memory was evidently important to Paolo's brother Zovanino, as well. Lorenzo Lotto's account books list five paintings that Zovanino had commissioned from him; one of these was a *sacra conversazione* that included Zovanino himself, together with his name saint, St. John the Baptist, St. Julian, and St. Catherine, while another *Madonna and Child* included portraits of his eldest son Giovan Maria, his daughter-in-law, and his two granddaughters.¹⁸⁵ The only painting of the group that has survived is the wedding portrait of Marsilio and Faustina. What is particularly noteworthy about

¹⁸³ Lucco, "Bergamo L'altra Venezia," 134.

¹⁸⁴ A similar phenomenon can be found in the study of commemorative busts in Florence during the Quattrocento. The identifying inscriptions were hidden from view with the expectation that viewers would be familiar with the visages of their ancestors. See Geraldine Johnson, "Family Values: Sculpture and the Family in Fifteenth-Century Florence," in *Art, Memory, and Family in Renaissance Florence*, ed. Giovanni Ciappelli and Patricia Lee Rubin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 223; Jane Schuyler, "Florentine Busts: Sculpted Portraiture in the Fifteenth Century" (Ph.D. dissertation, Columbia University, 1972), 11.

¹⁸⁵ Beverly Louise Brown, "The bride's jewellery : Lorenzo Lotto's wedding portrait of Marsilio and Faustina Cassotti," *Apollo*, no. January (2009): 48-49.

these paintings is that Lotto recorded their locations within the family home; they were evidently divided between Zovanino's bedroom and those of his sons, thereby emphasizing a private, familial context for viewing rather than public display.¹⁸⁶ Paolo and his brother clearly followed similar patterns of patronage, not only in their adjoining houses and their joint chapel, but also in the decoration of their homes with images that reflect the Cassotti family. While no record exists for Previtali's painting, perhaps the *Madonna Cassotti* was similarly located in a bedchamber.

The goal of the *Madonna Cassotti* is very different from the products of Paolo's previous commissions. Throughout his decades-long campaign of patronage, he had left his mark, often literally, on his environment. Yet by the time of the *Madonna Cassotti*'s creation, he had gained access to political power and married a member of the nobility, paths that must have once seemed irrevocably closed to him, and he likely felt less of an urgent need to promote and redefine the role of a member of the *borghesia*. The painting emerges as a private, rather than a public, consecration, one that was intended to serve as his memorial within the house he himself built. Considering the level of visual sophistication demonstrated by both artist and patron, it is fitting that before the *Madonna Cassotti* the spectator is eternally the object of Paolo Cassotti's gaze, of his appraising merchant's eye.

The *Madonna Cassotti* served as a stirring coda to Cassotti's already impressive legacy of *mecenatismo*. In his stately home on Via Pignolo, his chapel in Santa Maria delle Grazie, and, most prominently, at Villa Zogna, Cassotti employed art and architecture to fashion a self-image that challenged the boundaries of what was open to a

¹⁸⁶ Ibid.

member of the *borghesia*. He certainly achieved his upwardly-mobile ambitions—not only did he himself gain access to the upper echelons of Bergamasque society, but in a testament of 1545, a citizen described his son Giovan Francesco Cassotti as “nobilis bergomensis.”¹⁸⁷ This honorific represented a dramatic ascent, over the course of a single generation, for the family of the “famossissimus mercator.”

Yet there is an irony here as well, for although Paolo Cassotti commissioned work from Scipioni, Isabetto, and Previtali with the goal of improving his own social status, individually these works celebrated the very *borghesia* that his son quickly left behind. The house at Via Pignolo 70 placed Paolo on the map, so to speak, by tastefully demonstrating, on the *città bassa*’s main thoroughfare, the wealth he had accumulated through trade, while Scipioni’s cycle in Santa Maria delle Grazie reminded the viewer that that very trade could be praiseworthy if its fruits were directed toward virtuous ends. The construction of Villa Zogna, and its decoration with a fresco cycle that explicitly valorized the contributions of the merchant class to a stable, Venetian-dominated society, offered an even stronger statement of his pride in his class, as well as in himself. Like so many other Renaissance patrons, Paolo Cassotti employed art and architecture as sophisticated tools to shape perception, but it is the striking way in which those altered perceptions became a new reality that renders the patronage of this Bergamasque merchant particularly memorable.

¹⁸⁷ Colalucci, “Lorenzo Lotto, e altri,” 155.

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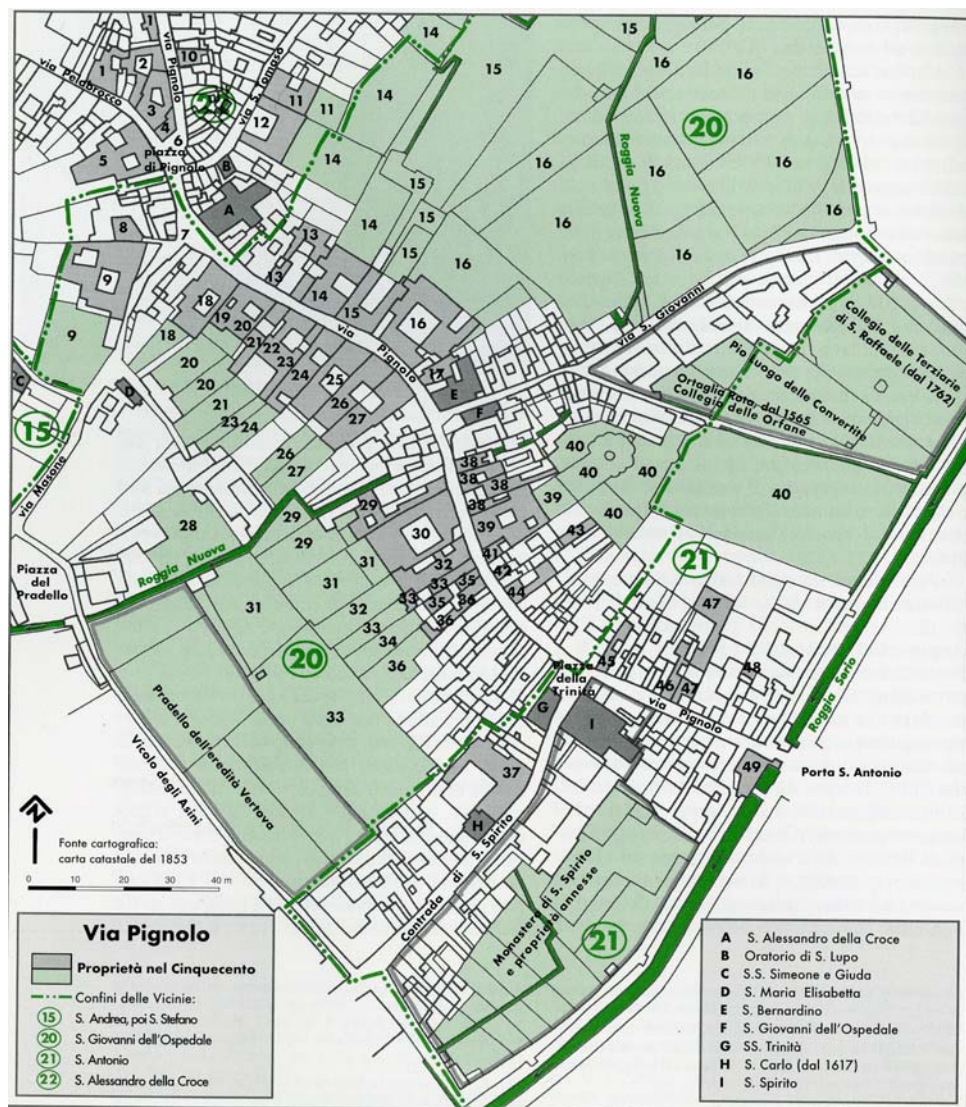


Figure 1.1 Via Pignolo in the Cinquecento, from Zanella and Zanella, “Città sopra monte eccellentissime situada’: evoluzione urbana di Bergamo in età veneziana,” 89-90. Paolo Cassotti’s house is number 27; his brother Zovanino’s is number 26, and their cousins’ house is number 24.

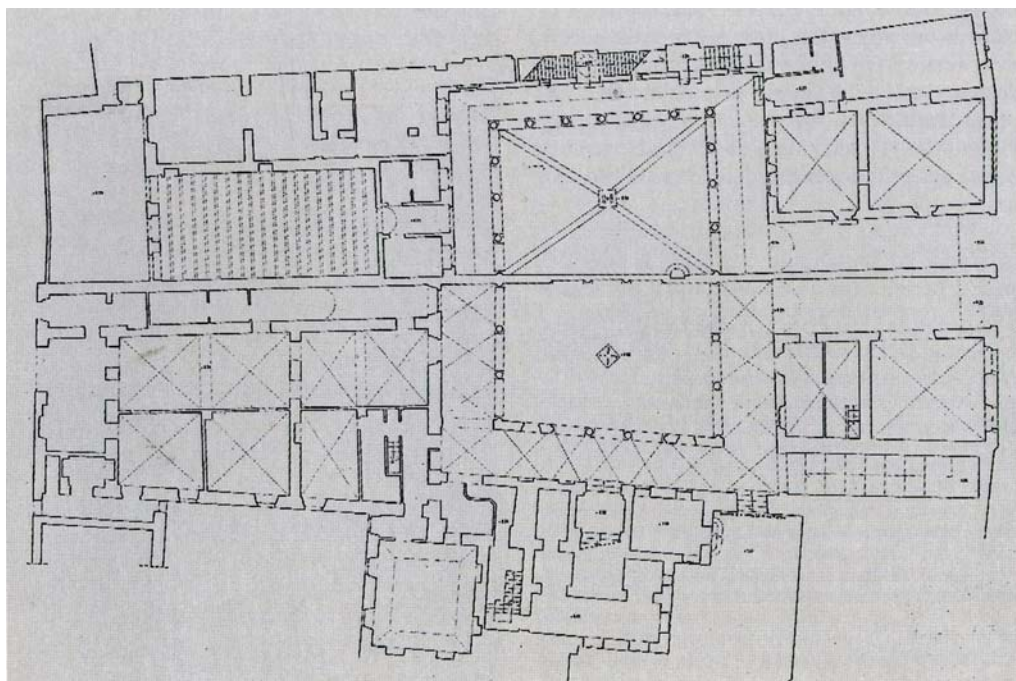


Figure 1.2 Plan of Paolo Cassotti's and Zovanino Cassotti's adjoining houses on Via Pignolo, from Zanella and Zanella, "Città sopra monte eccellentissime situada': evoluzione urbana di Bergamo in età veneziana," 98.



Figure 1.3 Façades of Via Pignolo 70 (left) and 72 (right).



Figure 1.4 *Cortile* of Bartolomeo and Zovanino Cassotti's house at Via Pignolo 76, today Museo Bernareggi.



Figure 1.5 *Cortile* of Zovanino Cassotti's house at Via Pignolo 72.



Figure 1.6 *Cortile* of Zovanino Cassotti's house at Via Pignolo 72, detail.



Figure 1.7 *Stemma* of the Cassotti family from the *cortile* of Via Pignolo 72.

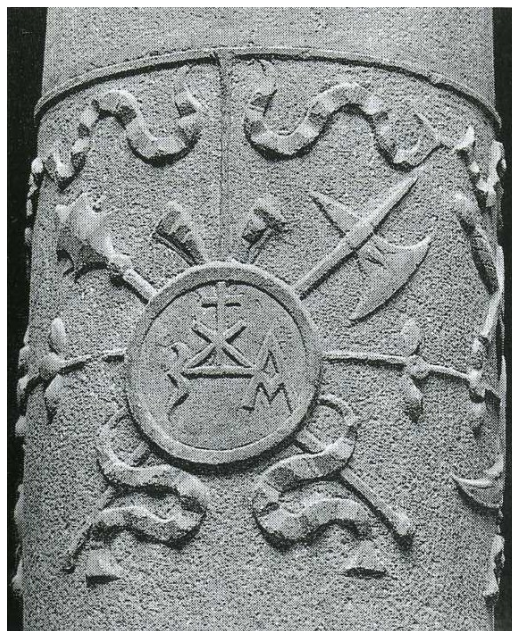


Figure 1.8 Zovanino Cassotti's merchant mark on a column in the *cortile* of his house.



Figure 1.9 Jacopo Scipioni, *Prega nella chiesa di S. Damiano/ Prende delle stoffe e va a Foligno a venderle*, 1507, fresco. Formerly Santa Maria delle Grazie, now Provincia di Bergamo.

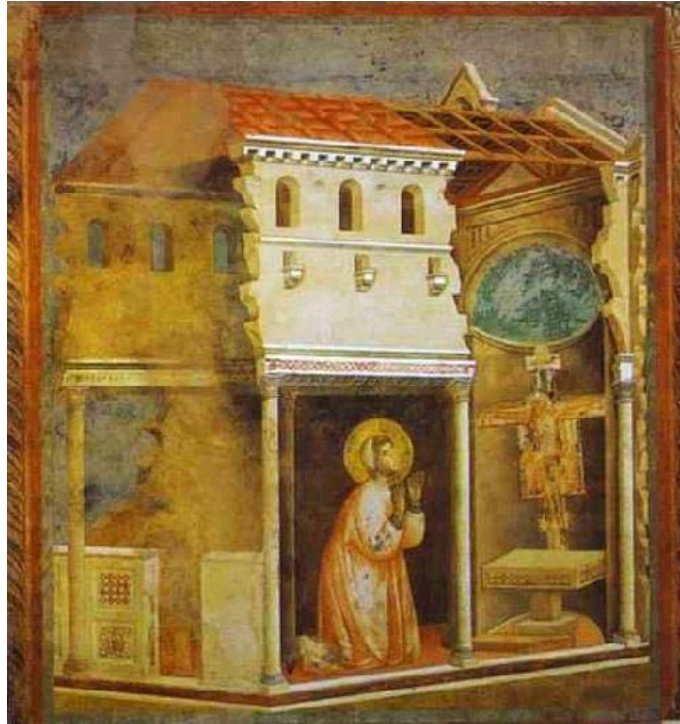


Figure 1.10 Giotto or a follower, *The Vision of San Damiano*, c. 1307, fresco. Upper church of S. Francesco, Assisi.



Fig 1.11 Dolphin motif on minor order (lower left) and giant order (center) in the Cassotti chapel in Santo Spirito.



Figure 1.12 The *Pala di Santo Spirito* (today in the first chapel to the left of the entrance, formerly in the Cassotti chapel) in Santo Spirito.



Figure 1.13 Andrea Previtali, *Pala di Santo Spirito*, 1512-3, oil on panel. Santo Spirito, Bergamo.



Figure 2.1 Satellite image demonstrating relative locations of Via Pignolo 72 and Villa Zogna (approximately one mile).

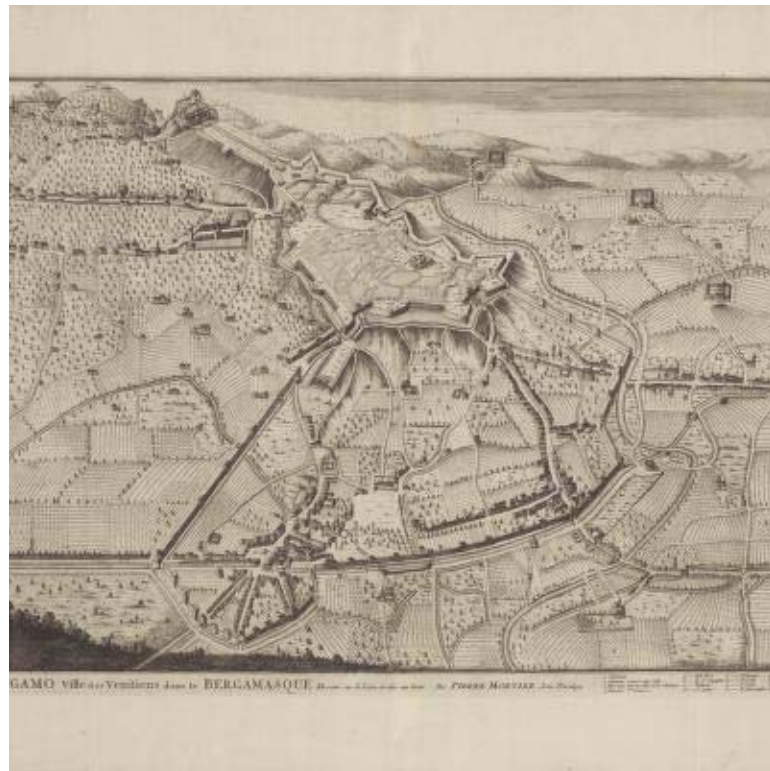


Figure 2.2 Pierre Mortier, *Bergamo, Ville Des Venitiens Dans Le Bergamasque*, 1660.



Figure 2.3 Pierre Mortier, *Bergamo, Ville Des Venitiens Dans Le Bergamasque*, 1660, detail showing Villa Zogna and surrounding property.



Figure 2.4 Satellite image of Villa Zogna.



Figure 2.5 Giuseppe Carnelli, View of Villa Zogna's gate and tower, 19th century, watercolor.



Figure 2.6 The northern wing of Villa Zogna today.



Figure 2.7 Modern façade of Villa Zogna, from Mario Caciagli, “Pietro Cleri Isabetto detto Abano architetto bergamasco del Cinquecento” (Tesi di laurea, Milan: Università degli studi di Milano, Facoltà di lettere e filosofia, 1989), tavola VZ3.

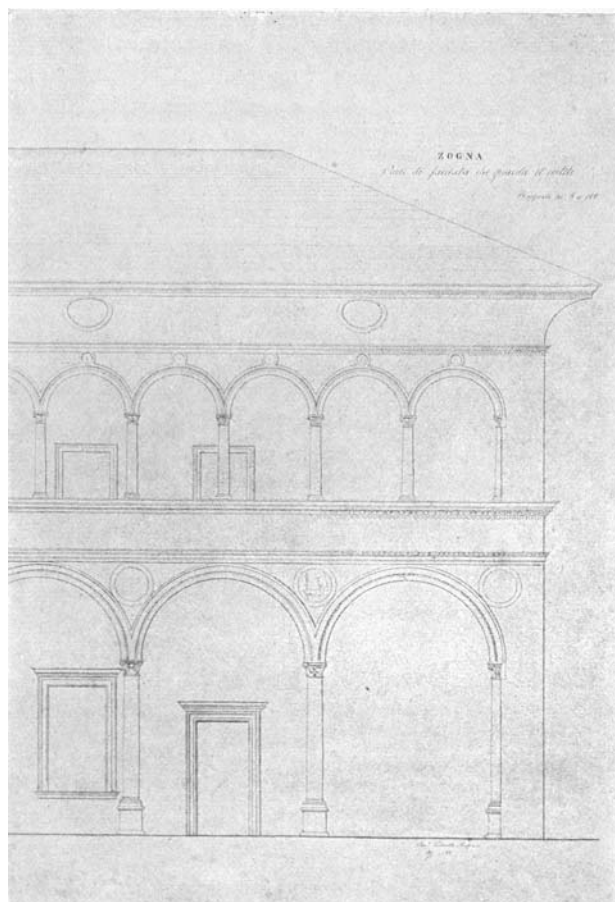


Figure 2.8 A. Piccinelli, façade of Villa Zogna, 19th century, drawing.



Figure 2.9 Cassotti *stemma* on a capital on the façade of Villa Zogna.

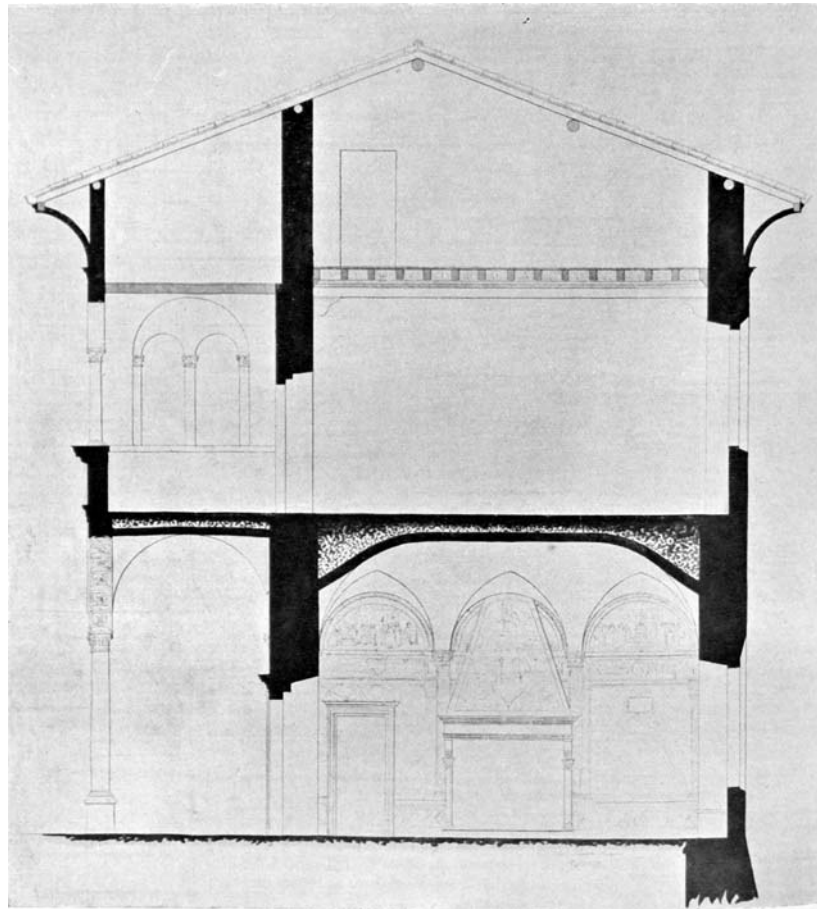


Figure 2.10 A. Piccinelli, cross-section of Villa Zogna, 19th century, drawing.

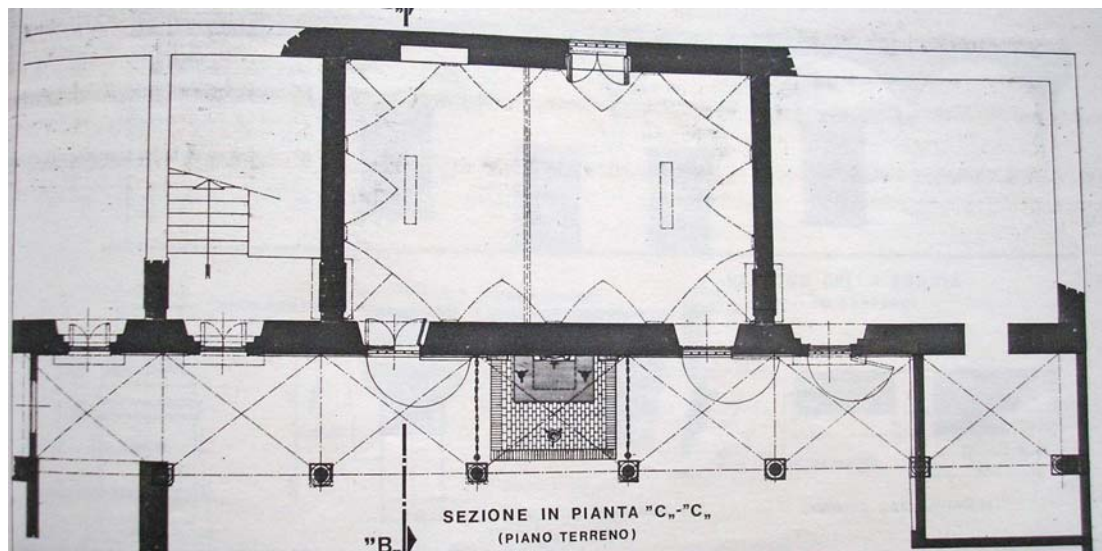


Figure 2.11 Plan of Villa Zogna's *piano terreno*, from Mario Caciagli, "Pietro Cleri Isabello detto Abano architetto bergamasco del Cinquecento," tavola VZ3.



Figure 2.12 Alvise Cima, *Descrittione della noblissima et antichissima città di Bergamo havanti fosse fortificata cavata dall'antico con li luoghi antichi et moderni*, 1693.



Figure 2.13 A Bergamasque *casa rustica* near Chiudono.

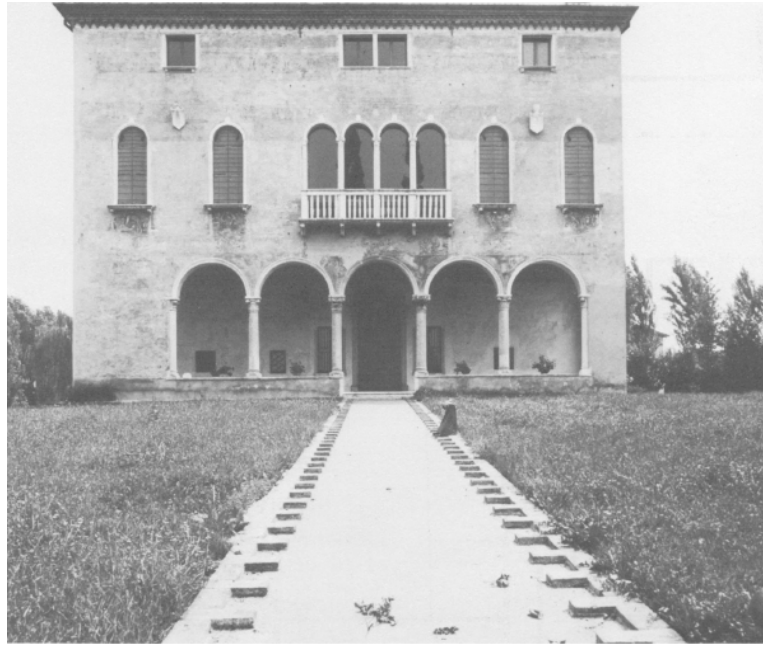


Figure 2.14 Villa Corner dall'Aglio, Lughignano sul Sile, frontal view, from Martin Kubelik, "Palladio's Villas in the Tradition of the Veneto Farm," *Assemblage*, no. 1 (October 1986), 95.

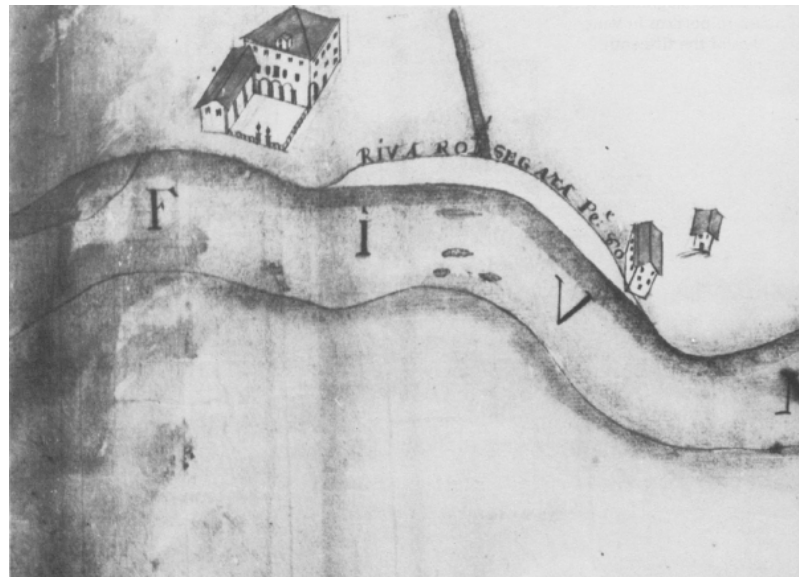


Figure 2.15 Villa Corner dall'Aglio, Lughignano sul Sile, bird's-eye view from the 18th century, from Martin Kubelik, "Palladio's Villas in the Tradition of the Veneto Farm," 95.



Figure 2.16 The portal of Villa Zogna today.



Figure 2.17 Façade of Villa del Bene, Volargne, Verona.

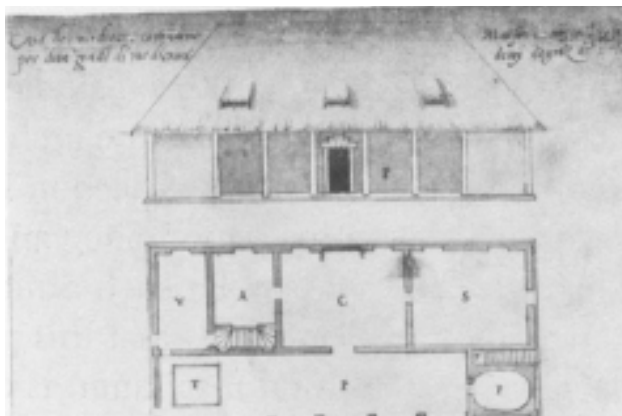


Figure 2.18 Sebastiano Serlio, *I sette libri di architettura*, Book VI, project B2.



Figure 2.19 Mauro Codussi, Casa dell'Arciprete, Bergamo.



Figure 2.20 Pietro Isabello, *Chiostro* of S. Marta, first decade 16th c., Bergamo.



Figure 3.1 Agnolo Gaddi and Bartolomeo Bertozzo, *salone* of Palazzo Datini, Prato, 1390s.



Figure 3.2 Andrea Previtali,
Annunciation, c. 1508, oil on canvas.
Sta. Maria del Meschio, Vittorio Veneto,
Treviso.



Figure 3.3 Cima da Conegliano,
Annunciation, 1495, tempera and oil on
canvas transferred from wood. The
Hermitage, St. Petersburg.



Figure 3.4 Albrecht Dürer, *John Before the Throne of God*, 1496-8, woodcut.



Figure 3.5 Cima da Conegliano, *St. John the Baptist Altarpiece*, c. 1493-5, oil on panel. Madonna dell'Orto, Venice



Figure 3.6 Andrea Previtali, *Transfiguration*, 1513, oil on panel. Pinacoteca di Brera, Milan.

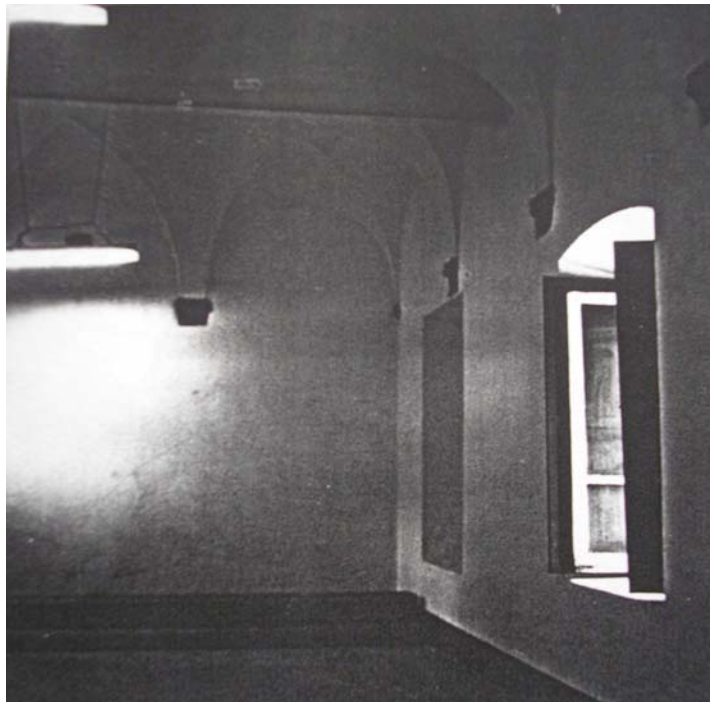


Figure 3.7 Interior of the *salone* at Villa Zogna.



Figure 3.8 Andrea Previtali, *Agriculture*, 1512, fresco. Collection of the Conti di Suardi, Trescore Balneario.

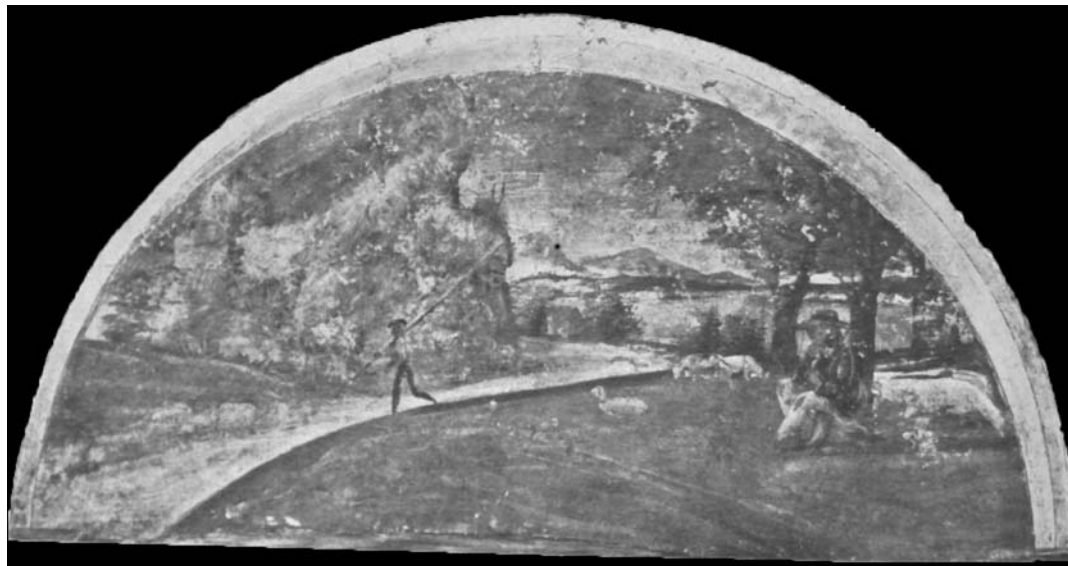


Figure 3.9 Andrea Previtali, *Shepherds*, 1512, fresco. Collection of the Conti di Suardi, Trescore Balneario.



Figure 3.10 Andrea Previtali, *Barbershop*, 1512, fresco. Collection of the Conti di Suardi, Trescore Balneario.



Figure 3.11 Andrea Previtali, *Metalworkers*, 1512, fresco. Collection of the Conti di Suardi, Trescore Balneario.



Figure 3.12 Andrea Previtali, *Architecture and Sculpture*, 1512, fresco. Collection of the Conti di Suardi, Trescore Balneario.



Figure 3.13 Andrea Previtali, *Wood-workers*, 1512, fresco. Collection of the Conti di Suardi, Trescore Balneario.



Figure 3.14 Andrea Previtali, *Council*, 1512, fresco. Collection of the Conti di Suardi, Trescore Balneario.



Figure 3.15 Andrea Previtali, *View of Venice*, 1512, fresco. Collection of the Conti di Suardi, Trescore Balneario.



Figure 3.16 Andrea Previtali, *Doge of Venice Administering Justice*, 1512, fresco. Collection of the Conti di Suardi, Trescore Balneario.



Figure 3.17 Andrea Previtali, *Trade*, 1512, fresco. Collection of the Conti di Suardi, Trescore Balneario.



Figure 3.18 Andrea Previtali, *Navigation*, 1512, fresco. Collection of the Conti di Suardi, Trescore Balneario.



Figure 3.19 Andrea Previtali, *Tintoria*, 1512, fresco. Collection of the Conti di Suardi, Trescore Balneario.



Figure 3.20 Andrea Previtali, *Painting*, 1512, fresco. Collection of the Conti di Suardi, Trescore Balneario.



Figure 3.21 Andrea Pisano, *Scultura*, 1330s. Museo dell'Opere dell Duomo, Florence.



Figure 3.22 *Barbitonsore* capital, west portal, Palazzo Ducale, c. 1340-1355.



Figure 3.23 *Fabbro* capital, west portal, Palazzo Ducale, c. 1340-1355.



Figure 3.24 *Insegna dell'arte dei mureri*, 1508, oil on panel. Museo Correr, Venice.

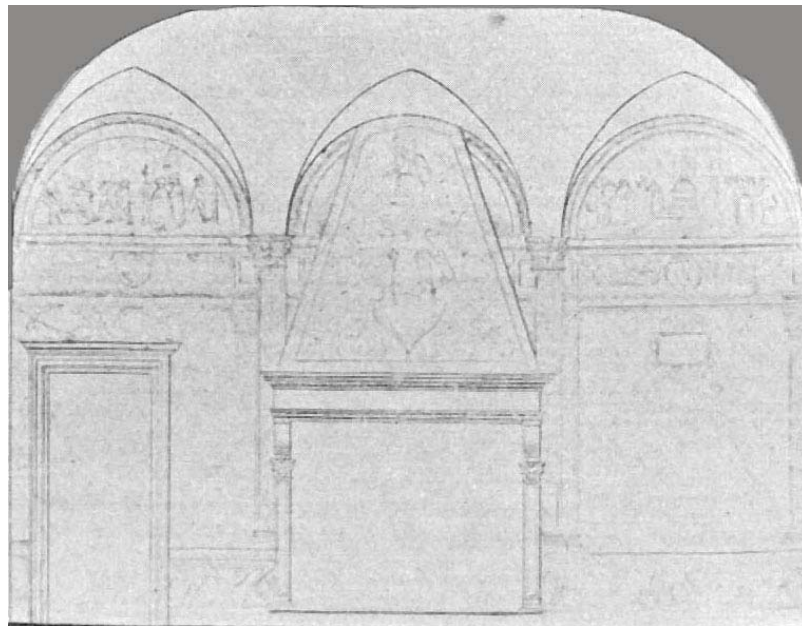


Figure 3.25 Detail of Figure 23 showing the scene of the doge (left) and the council (right) flanking the fireplace in the *salone*.

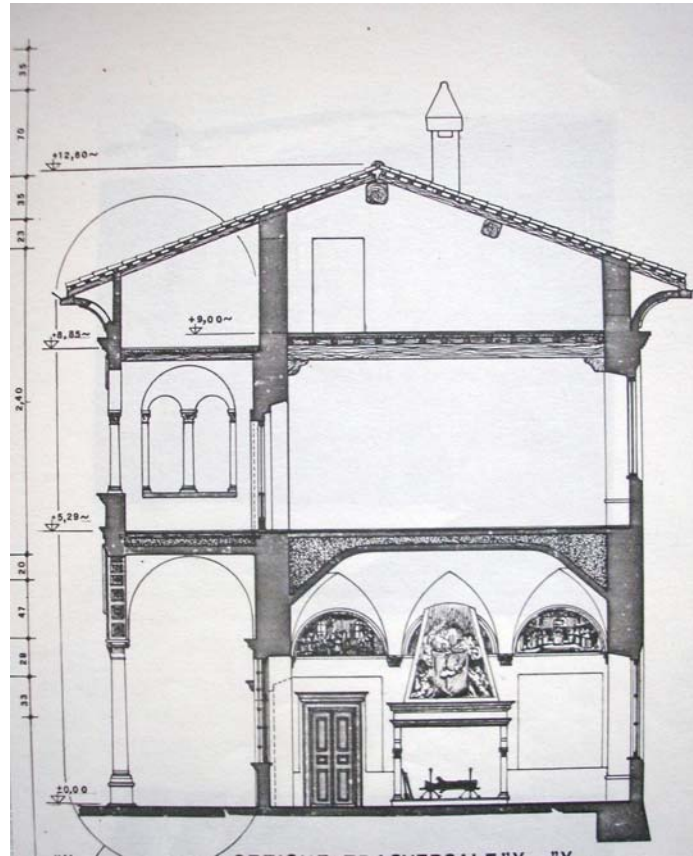


Figure 3.26 Drawing after Piccinelli, from Mario Caciagli, "Pietro Cleri Isabello detto Abano architetto bergamasco del Cinquecento," tavola VZ7.



Figure 3.27 Detail of Figure 50 with Paolo Cassotti's merchant mark.



Figure 3.28 Reconstruction of the *salone* at Villa Zogna using Piccinelli's drawing.



Figure 4.1 Andrea Previtali, *Madonna Cassotti*, c. 1520-24, oil on panel. Accademia Carrara, Bergamo.



Figure 4.2 Giovanni Bellini, *Madonna and Child*, c. 1505-9, oil on panel. Galleria Borghese, Rome.



Figure 4.3 Cima da Conegliano, *Madonna and Child with Saints Francis and Clare*, c. 1510, oil on panel. Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.



Figure 4.4 Cima da Conegliano, *Virgin and Child with Saints and Donors*, c. 1515, oil on panel. The Cleveland Museum of Art.



Figure 4.5 Lorenzo Lotto, *Marsilio and Faustina Cassotti*, 1523, oil on canvas. Museo del Prado, Madrid.



Figure 4.6 Lorenzo Lotto, *Nozze mistiche di Santa Caterina*, 1523, oil on canvas. Accademia Carrara, Bergamo.