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VILLA GRIMANI MOLIN AVEZZÙ AT FRATTA POLESINE

COSMOLOGICAL THEMES IN DECORATIVE PROGRAMS
OF SIXTEENTH-CENTURY VENETIAN VILLAS

PART I of II – MAIN BODY TEXT

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ABSTRACT

The research project is dedicated to the fresco program of Villa Grimani Molin, today Avezzù (Fratta Polesine, RO). The study provides the first comprehensive iconological analysis for the decorations of the villa. The primary concern of the study has been the identification and interpretation, within the overall fresco program, of iconographical characteristics that converge in a single system of philosophical contents of a cosmological matrix, reflecting a true intellectual background that would have been shared by the patrons. A thorough contextual documentary research has preceded the iconological study, which was based the analysis of unpublished and published archival documents, with particular attention given to questions of economical strategies (sales and acquisition, dowry management and so forth). In addition, a special emphasis has been given to the direct involvement of the same patrons in the land reclamations operation in the lands surrounding Fratta Polesine. These activities, of predominant hydraulic character, establish a precise chronological framework on which it was possible to coherently position the construction and decorative interventions.

The documentary analysis has produced an unpublished plausible hypotheses for the dating and patronage of the villa and its decorative program, attributed respectively to Vincenzo Grimani and to his daughter Betta Grimani Molin, and ascribed to the seventh and eighth decades of the sixteenth century. Based on technical and stylistic evidence, and on several documentary indications that await a definitive future verification, the study has proposed as the author of the architecture the architect Vincenzo Scamozzi, and for the paintings, one or more painters from the Ferrarese Filippi family (originating from Lendinara).

In its essence, the fresco program of Villa Grimani Molin portrays many of the themes that formed the historical and cultural background in which it is located. It demonstrates a full awareness of the patrons and of the involved painters, who, updated in regard to the debates of natural philosophy in their epoch, testify their erudite cultural-intellectual background. However, both the treated themes and the principal subjects embody a strong female presence that ideally reflects the identity of the main patroness.

The iconographical program may be defined as a complex apparatus of cosmological philosophy, which is however intended not as a purely celestial-astronomical discipline, but rather, as a philosophy of nature, within the natural environment with all of its laws. The cosmological discipline had been understood in Renaissance culture in the same manner; without a major discrimination between the concept of 'cosmogony', pseudo-scientific and mystical elements tended to converge into a system of knowledge of laws that regulate a universe, which was conceived as a profoundly and transcendently ordered whole. The variety of cultural references and certain original iconographic choices, not without a certain inventiveness, have served the authors of the program as a method for exploring different systems of knowledge, culminating with the representation of a personification of Wisdom, which constitutes the core of the iconographical program.

ESTRATTO

Il progetto di ricerca è dedicato agli affreschi di Villa Grimani Molin, ora Avezzù (Fratta Polesine, RO). Lo studio fornisce la prima analisi iconologica d'insieme per le decorazioni della dimora. L'interesse principale dello studio è stata l'identificazione e l'interpretazione nel testo pittorico dei caratteri iconografici che convergessero complessivamente in un unico sistema di contenuti filosofici di matrice cosmologica, un vero e proprio *background* intellettuale che poteva essere condiviso dalle figure dei committenti. Una approfondita ricerca documentaria contestuale ha preceduto lo studio iconologico, e si è basata sull'incrocio di documenti d'archivio inediti e noti, con particolare attenzione alle questioni di strategia economica nella gestione dei capitali di famiglia (compravendite, gestioni di dote, ecc). Si è dato inoltre particolare risalto al coinvolgimento diretto degli stessi committenti nelle operazioni di bonifica dei terreni presso Fratta Polesine, attività in prevalenza di carattere idraulico che fissano un quadro cronologico preciso sul quale innestare coerentemente gli interventi edilizi e decorativi studiati.

L'analisi documentaria ha prodotto un'inedita ipotesi plausibile per la datazione e la committenza della villa e del suo programma decorativo, attribuibili rispettivamente a Vincenzo Grimani e alla sua figlia Betta Grimani Molin, e ascrivibili al settimo e all'ottavo decennio del '500. Sulla base di prove tecniche e stilistiche, e sulla base di indizi documentari diversi che attendono una verifica futura definitiva, lo studio vuole proporre come autore dell'architettura l'architetto Vincenzo Scamozzi, e per i dipinti uno o più pittori della famiglia ferrarese dei Filippi (originari di Lendinara).

Nella sua essenza, il programma degli affreschi di Villa Grimani Molin rappresenta molte delle tematiche che informano l'ambiente storico e culturale in cui si colloca. Esso dimostra una piena consapevolezza dei committenti e degli artisti coinvolti, che, perfettamente aggiornati sui dibattiti di filosofia naturale dell'epoca, testimoniano la loro erudita estrazione culturale-intellettuale. Ma sia le tematiche trattate che i soggetti principali tradiscono una forte presenza femminile che riflette idealmente l'identità del committente principale.

Il programma iconografico può essere definito come un complesso apparato di filosofia cosmologica, intesa però non come disciplina puramente celeste-astronomica, ma piuttosto come filosofia della natura, dunque dell'ambiente naturale con tutte le sue leggi. Così come la disciplina cosmologica era stata compresa nella cultura rinascimentale, e cioè senza grandi differenze da un concetto di 'cosmogonia', elementi pseudoscientifici e mistici tendevano a convergere in un sistema sapienziale di leggi che regolano un universo concepito come un insieme profondamente e trascendentemente ordinato. La varietà dei riferimenti culturali ed alcune scelte iconografiche originali non prive di una certa inventiva sono servite agli autori del programma come metodo per esplorare diversi sistemi di conoscenze, culminanti con la rappresentazione di una Sapienza personificata che costituisce il cuore del programma iconografico.

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INTRODUCTION

The fresco program of Villa Grimani Molin, today Avezzù, is the object of the current dissertation. The present research project has been developed as an attempt to provide a comprehensive iconological analysis for the late-sixteenth century decorations of the villa. The analysis relies on the reconstruction of the cultural framework that surrounded the fresco program and its inventors, a framework which has been reorganized based on new and updated documentary evidence. The primary concern of the study has been the identification and interpretation, within the overall fresco program, of iconographical characteristics that converge in a single system of philosophical contents of a cosmological matrix, reflecting a true intellectual background that would have been shared by the patrons. As a second objective, the study of the frescoes has been chosen as an opportunity for the examination of certain cosmological themes that appear in the decorations of various other Veneto villas in the second half of the sixteenth century.

Villa Grimani Molin is located in Fratta Polesine in the province of Rovigo. It is situated in the midst of the low and humid terrains in a peripheral area of the Veneto that was originally retained inhabitable, subject to frequent land mutations and water overflows, which were due to the plentiful convergences of river lines flowing towards the lagoon. In the sixteenth century, these unhealthy wetlands were taken in the determined hands of the Venetian patricians, sanitized by their expert engineers, and were transformed into a center of rich agricultural and cultural activity. In keeping with *Santa agricultura*, the new agricultural philosophy described by Alvise Cornaro, they were reorganized, based on a newborn corpus of empirical knowledge that was revolved towards new methods of land management. Villa Grimani Molin is just one of the proud results of this long and exhaustive process.

The success of the villa's construction may be perceived as a reflection of the capacity of its creators to understand and to control the ongoing threats and disasters provoked by nature, through the aid of their own intelligent technical innovations. In such a

challenging environment, their profound knowledge of nature's different physical components and philosophical properties was absolutely essential. This notion seems to have filtered into the decorative fresco program of the villa, where nature has been granted a privileged position within an extremely erudite iconographical program that depicts some of the principal philosophical and cultural ideas that intrigued the minds of the villa's members, who were associated with the Grimani family. The frescoes therefore provide an interesting, exemplary case study for the examination of cosmological representations in the decorations of the Veneto villas.

In the study of art and architectural history, scholars have found the reconstruction of the origins of Villa Grimani Molin to be quite a challenging endeavor, due to an apparently limited availability of documentary and historical evidence, and due to the various changes of ownership in the first decades following its construction. The original owner of the villa is recognized as Vincenzo Grimani (1525-1582), a Venetian nobleman who belonged to the prestigious lineage of the Grimani branch of Santa Maria Formosa. Vincenzo had been nominated as the universal heir of the family shortly after his birth, and seemed to have maintained a close relationship with his great uncle, Giovanni Grimani (1502-1593), Patriarch of Aquileia and one of the most conspicuous figures in the cultural and political ambience of the Venetian Republic during the sixteenth century.

Vincenzo received the property for the Fratta villa as a dowry through marriage to his first wife, Lucrezia Loredan, who died in 1556. By 1580, the fields and the residential property were divided between their three elder daughters and their Venetian patrician husbands, Andriana and Francesco Valier, Cornelia and Lunardo Emo, and Isabetta ('Betta'), by then already widowed from her husband Andrea da Molin¹. 35 years later, in 1615 the villa itself passed into the hands of the sons of Betta Grimani and Andrea da Molin. The difficulty in dating the villa by scholars has created problems in the attribution and in the identification of its architect, its painter/s and even of the main patron responsible for its actual edification and decoration. As a primary objective, I have set out

¹ The complete document exists in a copy in: BCVe, Ms. PDc. 2597/1b, c. 1r-4v (28 November 1580). See Appendix I, doc. 1.2.6.

to perform a documentary reconstruction of the figures and events that were related to the construction of the villa, and to the planning and execution of its fresco program.

The extensive archival campaign involved the careful analysis of published and unpublished materials, especially from the State Archives of Rovigo, Venice and Modena and from the Library of the Correr Museum in Venice. Some of the unpublished documents had been overlooked by scholars in the past, because of their treatment of disciplines that are not traditionally retained as relevant for the study of architectural manufactures. However, the cultural context of the villa required the evaluation of issues related to hydraulic operations of land reclamation in the area of Fratta Polesine, as well as considerations regarding economical aspects of dowry management in sixteenth century Venice. The study of these themes has brought to the discovery of some of the more valuable documents.

The first three chapters of the thesis perform an introductory function that lays the grounds for the following three chapters, which are dedicated to the iconographical analysis of the fresco program. The results of the archival campaign are presented in the first introductory chapter, which concludes with the identification of the figures that had commissioned the villa and its decorative program. The second chapter is dedicated to the description of the villa and its decoration. It includes proposals for the attribution of its architect and painter that are based on the conclusions derived from the archival campaign, and on the observation of the physical architectural and pictorial traits of the villa. To complete the introductory discourse to the fresco program, the third chapter opens with a review of the intellectual and philosophical dynamics in the Veneto at the eve of the Scientific Revolution, examining the influence of the shifts between the traditional Aristotelian viewpoint and the more mystical Neo-Platonist philosophical currents on the changing perceptions of cosmology. The chapter discusses the influence of these dynamics on the private circle of the members of the villa, in Fratta and in Venice, and discusses the motivation for the depiction of cosmological subjects in Villa Grimani Molin and in the broader perspective of the Veneto villa.

* * *

In the *Studia humanitatis* of the Renaissance universities, the theoretical branch of the discipline of Astronomy was named Cosmology, or *Filosofia Naturalis*, and was dedicated to the study of the formation and evolution of the present universe. During the Early Modern period, the study of Astronomy stood at the core of the philosophical discourse of the Western World; its eventual consequence was the substitution of the Aristotelian-Ptolemaic geocentric paradigm with the heliocentric system of the structure of the universe. This fundamental shift in cosmological philosophy was a result of the formulation of the new, empirical scientific method that is attributed to Galileo that marked the launch of the Scientific Revolution.

The development of the new approach to science was a gradual process; it owes a large debt to the humanist intellectuals who were operating in the Italian peninsula and in the Veneto in particular, in the noble courts, in the universities and in the private academies. The noblemen of the Venetian humanist circles were active and influential participants in the intellectual cosmological discourse during the second half of the sixteenth century. Their activities contributed significantly to the general scientific shift in Western Europe, since their philosophical views were shaped as the result of a unique fusion between the rigorous Aristotelian tradition of the universities and the Neo-Platonist tendencies that developed in the local intellectual ambience of Venice. At times, the Venetian patricians chose to manifest some of their opinions regarding cosmology through visual means in the architecture and decoration of their private households.

Scholars of Venetian art history have often attempted to identify and interpret certain fresco programs in an astronomical or cosmological iconographical key. Visual descriptions of cosmology have usually been identified in personifications of pagan divinities that represent celestial bodies such as planets, constellations and zodiac signs, and terrestrial themes such as the four elements or the four seasons. Most works, however, tend to overlook the fact that the study of cosmology was meant to provide the Renaissance intellectuals with answers to the more practical and fundamental questions of humanity:

Beyond the purely astronomical context, which concentrated on the celestial realm, cosmology was intended as Natural Philosophy, that is, a discipline that is preoccupied with

the past, present and future state of Nature, dedicated to explaining the function of the present natural environment, the concepts of its generation, its regeneration, and the role of the human race within it. In the case of Villa Grimani Molin, as in the case of other Veneto villas, the urge to represent such 'cosmological' viewpoints was also a result of the practical experience of its owners in controlling the natural forces in their own environment. The villa's decoration thus depicted aspect of the *macrocosm*, while the villa itself, its physical environment and the life within it, were considered as a *microcosm*.

The concept of 'macrocosm and microcosm' was one of the most basic components in classical cosmological thought in the study of Natural Philosophy. The idea dates back to the Pre-Socratic Greek philosophers of the sixth century BC, who developed it in their quest to explain the origins and creation of things, and to describe nature mathematically. According to the Pre-Socratics, the same patterns of structure, creation and reproduction can be recognized in all of the levels of the universe, from the largest scale of the macrocosm: the universe itself, to the smallest scale of all the elements that are contained in it: every living or static physical element, or even metaphysical.

The concept of 'macrocosm and microcosm' was discussed and expanded throughout the history of Western philosophy, and it has been expressed in several ideas such as the Golden Mean, the 'Vitruvian' Man or the Ideal City. Its extension and application to the field of architecture was initiated by the Florentine humanists of the fifteenth century, in particular by Leone Battista Alberti. The concept was also explained by Daniele Barbaro (1518-1570) in his Vitruvian commentary: the architect '*nell'Architettura dichiara la forma, la materia, la compositione delle opera, & imitando la natura per l'occulta virtù, che in lui si trova, dalle cose meno perfette alle più perfette, sempre discendente*'. The creation of an architectural masterpiece is equivalent to the process of the creation of things by nature, where divine form and earthly substance create a new terrestrial composition².

² Descending, because being a composition it is further away from the wholeness and perfection of pure form or material. Daniele Barbaro, *I dieci libri dell'architettura tradotti e commentate da Daniele Barbaro, 1567*, edited by M. Tafuri and M. Morresi (Milan: Il Polifilo, 1987), I.iii, 26.

In the context of 'the villa as microcosm', the process of its design and construction is equivalent to the process of the world's creation, the structure and components of the villa represent the elements that form the world, and the architect plays a role that is analogue to the role of the creator, understood to be nature, or even God.

The representation of cosmology received an additional significance in the case of the Venetian patricians, of whom many were involved in political affairs and desired to serve their state in an honorable manner. The Venetian aristocracy strived to achieve a proper Republican government, a '*buon governo*' that was based on classical ideals.³ The philosophical affinity between cosmology and state politics is deeply rooted in Classical tradition: Plato's most fundamental cosmological dialogue, *Timaeus*, was well known and highly esteemed throughout the Renaissance as the basis of platonic cosmology. It was composed as a political metaphor, implying that the secrets of nature's functionality are the same secrets that lie in the core of a functioning state.⁴ Cicero's *De re publica* is another familiar text that exemplifies the affinity of state and cosmos. In the sixth chapter of his dialog dedicated to Roman politics, Cicero employed a cosmological metaphor in The Dream of Scipio (*Somnium Scipionis, De re publica, 6.9-28*), a fictional dream vision of the Roman general Scipio Africanus, who finds himself taken to the heavens, from where he looks down on Earth and on other spheres of the universe.⁵

In practice, the variation and expansion of themes related to cosmology in the villas of the Veneto is quite remarkable. In interior villa decoration, common examples include the representation of various components of the Aristotelian-Ptolemaic, or the Neo-Platonist systems of creation (the twelve astrological constellations, the seven planetary

³ Manfredo Tafuri, *Venezia e il Rinascimento: religione, scienza, architettura* (Torino: Einaudi, 1985), 174-175.

⁴ Francis MacDonald Cornford, "Introduction," in Plato, *Plato's Cosmology: the Timaeus of Plato translated with a running commentary*, trans. and commentary by F. M. Cornford (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1966), 1-8.

⁵ Cicero himself had modeled the dialogue on a similar idea appearing in Plato's *Republica*, '*The myth of Er*' (10.614-10.621), a dialogue that served a similar purpose of a cosmological metaphor. The Dream of Scipio was known through its original source, but in the Venetian Renaissance it was most familiar through a commentary and interpretation of the text written by the late Neo-Platonist philosopher Macrobius (Ambrosius Theodosius Macrobius, 395-423 AD), a work assuming the Ptolemaic structure of the universe that was highly influenced by the cosmology of Porphyry of Tiro: Ambrosius Theodosius Macrobius, *Commentary on the Dream of Scipio*, trans., intro & notes W. Harris Stahl (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990).

divinities, the four elements, the four seasons), and the representation of related figures or episodes from Classical Mythology (such as Prometheus as creator of human knowledge). But above all, many of the cosmological representations appeared in more symbolic, allegorical forms, which were typical of the emblematic culture of the Venetian humanism in the sixteenth century, and which reflected the philosophical cosmological discourses that took place within the Venetian academies.

As an extension of the concept of 'macrocosm and microcosm', the present world was commonly compared to a theater or to a cave, and often references to the local environment of the villa and its surroundings were included in the frescoes. The ancient Roman art of the grotesque was an important instrument for the transmission of such abstract concepts, in addition to personifications of pagan divinities or other visual solutions inspired by the iconographical manuals (Alciato, Cartari, Valeriano), as well as other Renaissance sourcebooks. The iconographical message of these allegorical programs usually alluded to the human dimension of cosmology in a moral sense: to the role of the virtuous nobleman and the proper noblewoman within the society of the Republic, and within the household as producers of a new generation.

* * *

The iconographical program of Villa Grimani Molin complies very well with the humanist ideals of 'the villa as microcosm'. However, it also possesses certain characteristics that are unique when compared with the common decorative tradition of the Veneto Villa. The frescos rarely display a clear narrative, and even when such narrative appears, it is charged with additional layers of meaning. The allegories, dominated by the presence of pagan divinities, are inserted within an intricate decorative program, in which grotesques perform a functional role, and which is rich in humanist concepts and esoteric implications.

The unique character and elaborate content of the fresco program may be explained in relation to its probable patronage and authorship, which have been identified as a result of the documentary analysis that is presented in the first chapter. The ideation of the program is interpreted as the result of a combined effort; an initial initiative of Vincenzo Grimani, which would have been followed after his death by the adaptation, adjournment, and

realization by a very prominent female figure in the remaining Grimani household, the eldest daughter among the many children of Vincenzo, the widowed Betta Grimani Molin.

The iconographical program of Villa Grimani Molin results highly erudite, carefully planned, and at times, revealing an impressive innovative capacity on behalf of its creators. The study of the program suggests that their primary source of inspiration would have been the cultural interests and relationships that surrounded the Vincenzo's great-uncle, Patriarch Giovanni Grimani, whose palace in Santa Maria Formosa was originally meant to serve also as their own family residence. Artists and humanists were frequent and welcome visitors in the private palace of the Patriarch, who was one of the most important collectors of antiquities in the Renaissance, and whose private library accommodated the entire private library of Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, inherited from his uncle Cardinal Domenico Grimani. Giovanni Grimani's project for the renovation of the Grimani chapel and the church façade of San Francesco della Vigna in Venice involved many members of the Grimani family and their immediate relatives throughout the years. The project reflected his appreciation of the intellectual mysticism of the Franciscan friar and philosopher Francesco Zorzi, and contained subtle implications regarding the Patriarch's own religious beliefs, and regarding his lifetime conflict with the Roman church. In the formation of the iconographical program of Villa Grimani Molin Betta would have enjoyed the intellectual contributions of her family members, such as her sisters and their husbands. But in addition, the contents of the frescoes of the villa suggest that we shall also not exclude the participation of the Patriarch himself in formulating the original iconographical concept of the program, and his additional accompaniment, when the time came to promote its execution.

As a Venetian town where *villeggiatura* took place in its full form, Fratta Polesine itself provided the members of the Grimani household with a series of prestigious cultural stimulations and acquaintances. Above all, the typical natural water emergencies of the environment encouraged the innovative hydraulic and architectural initiatives inspired by the *Santa agricoltura*, on behalf of the Grimani family and of other Venetian noble families, especially their partners and neighboring cousins, Francesco Badoer and his four male heirs. The classical *vita activa* cultural pastime maintained a special place among the activities of

the Fratta noblemen, who regularly frequented their rural villas during summertime for the purpose of hunting in the nearby lands of the Ferrara duchy. *Vita contemplativa* had been practiced in Fratta in its full form, whose fame arrived above all from the court that gathered around the charismatic marquise Lucrezia Gonzaga, and from the activities and publications of the members of the Academy of the '*Pastori Fratteggiani*', founded by her friend and admirer Giovanni Maria Bonardo. In the second half of the sixteenth century Fratta was a cultural melting pot, unifying the vivacious noblemen from Venice with nobles and intellectuals from Rovigo and Vincenza, who were famous for their promotion of heretic ideas, and with the various intellectuals, mystics, magicians and other curious figures, who were frequent attendants of the noble courts of Ferrara and Mantua.

The three chapters dedicated to the iconographical study of Villa Grimani Molin have been conceived as a gradual, 'didactic' path through the various visual themes related to natural philosophy that one may expect to find in the decorative programs of the Veneto villas. The first chapter is dedicated to the definition of the basic visual language for representing cosmology. It begins with an introductory overview of the depiction of celestial and terrestrial components in the fresco programs of the Veneto villas, with special reference to the fresco program of Villa Grimani Molin. The next section of the chapter explores the use of grotesques as an instrument for the visual representation of cosmological concepts, with the particular study of the special character of the grotesques of Villa Grimani Molin in respect to other Veneto villas. In its third section the chapter deals with some of the specific visual references to the local microcosm of Fratta Polesine, which may be identified in the fresco programs of Villa Grimani Molin and its neighboring Villa Badoer.

The second chapter of the dissertation is dedicated to the study of theatrical aspects within the frescoes of Villa Grimani Molin. In addition to visual allusions to actual practice of humanist theater by the members of the Grimani household, above all, the theatricality of Villa Grimani Molin is expressed through a conscious reference to the humanist concept of the *Theatrum mundi*, which is essentially a cosmological metaphor. The chapter demonstrates how the painted ceiling of the villa's dining room evokes the metaphor of the *Theatrum Mundi* through its easily-identifiable visual source, Paolo Veronese's ceiling of the *Sala dell'Olimpo* in Villa Barbaro in Maser. The Fratta depiction should not be

considered as its superficial copy, but rather, as an original and erudite reference to the *Theatrum Mundi* within the specific ambience of the villa and its patronage. As the chapter argues, the composer of the program had employed specific contemporary treatises that define the cosmic and the physical roles of the virtuous Renaissance noblewoman within the Venetian household. The most conspicuous elements in the entire decorative cycle of Villa Grimani Molin are the two large frescoes that adorn the lateral walls of the central hallway. Both frescoes, conceived as actual theatrical performances, are in fact erudite iconographical compositions that conceal within them a double meaning, with references to Classical Roman history and to Classical Greek Mythology. Their methodic and careful analysis is performed in detail throughout the final section of the second chapter.

The third chapter discusses the allegorical depiction of cosmological speculations about the life and voyage of the souls in the cosmos beyond the present, terrestrial world. The main protagonist of the chapter is the concept of Metamorphosis and its interpretation within the private circle of the Grimani household. The chapter argues that the afterlife that awaits the Venetian Christian nobleman is perceived in the fresco program in a similar manner to the concept of the afterlife of the mystical currents of the Renaissance, and in particular as it has been defined by Francesco Zorzi. While in the church of San Francesco della Vigna these ideas had been represented by Giovanni Grimani through the employment of a religious visual language, in the rural villa the concept of Christian Resurrection is expressed through the mythological metamorphoses. Other aspects of the humanist representation of the idea of the afterlife are explored in the second section of the chapter, where the small vestibule in the ground floor of the villa is examined in relation to the concepts of the humanist grotto and the classical Greek atrium. The chapter continues with the examination of particular objects that dominate the grotesques, mirrors and precious stones, which were believed to possess the natural powers to communicate with spirits, forces which could be activated in a rational manner, through the employment of intelligence and human technique. The chapter concludes with the study of the key element that crowns the entire fresco program, the figure of an old sage, holding a white board with a curious Hebrew inscription, who dominates the small *Studiolo* of the villa. The interpretation of the Hebrew inscription and the visual sources that the figure alludes to,

return the iconographical focus of the entire fresco program to the concept of the Metamorphosis and to the mystical interpretation of the Christian Resurrection.

Above all, the fresco program reveals the desire of its creators to unify a wide range of viewpoints regarding natural philosophy: Classical, Christian and Jewish, natural, scientific and esoteric. The attempt to create an iconography that displays diverse forms of wisdom reflects the sort of syncretism that was originally identified with Venetian Neo-Platonism, but which in the last decades of the century has become a more acceptable component of an overall humanist desire to obtain many forms of knowledge. Cesare Vasoli, reviewing a series of relationships between intellectuals and religious culture in the ambience of Venice and Florence, has exclaimed: *'the figure of the scientist and that of the astrologer or the magician miracle worker were often confused and overlapped'*. This occurred because, for the men of the Early Modern period, doctrines such as astrology, geomancy, divinatory arts, physiognomy, alchemy and other forms of incantation and magical practice were living and operational forms of knowledge, beliefs that largely considered the same sort of scientific research⁶.

By the late sixteenth century, the diversity of forms of knowledge that are found in the fresco program of Villa Grimani Molin highly emphasizing aspects of practical, scientific themes, echoing the definition of the new form of universal knowledge, or *Pansofy*. By now, at the eve of the Scientific Revolution, the craving for universal knowledge was based on the idea that the key to full understanding laid in man's mental disciplines, especially in their hitherto unexploited powers, a concept which was shared with an occultist view of the world⁷.

⁶ «La figura dello scienziato e quella dell'astrologo o del mago taumaturgo si sono spesso confuse e sovrapposte.» Cesare Vasoli, *Profezia e ragione: studi sulla cultura del Cinquecento e del Seicento* (Naples: Morano, 1974), 447-448.

⁷ Robert John Weston Evans, *Rudolf II and his world: a study in intellectual history, 1576-1612* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973), 252.

1

VILLA GRIMANI MOLIN AVEZZÙ HISTORY AND CULTURE

1.1 THE VILLA AND ITS PATRONS, PRESENTATION AND METHODOLOGICAL NOTES

The general architectural scheme and the decorative program of Villa Grimani Molin recall many characteristics that are shared by the series of the villas that constitutes the tradition of the 'Veneto Villa' in the second half of the sixteenth century. The dimensions, the architectural language, the hydraulic systemization of the environment – all find counterparts in many of the first class rural residences that were commissioned by the noblemen of the Veneto from Andrea Palladio (1508-1580) from the 1550's to the 1570's, such as Villa Emo at Fanzolo, Villa Barbaro in Maser and its own neighbor in Fratta, Villa Badoer. At the same time, the plan of Villa Grimani Molin cannot be attributed to the Vicentine architect, and its last major construction phase probably occurred shortly after his golden era. The iconographical themes also demonstrate a certain affinity with the decorative tradition of Palladio's villas, although once again, they do not aspire from their common decorative schemes. Rather, they demonstrate a preference for visual sources deriving from the city of Venice itself, or from a more particular but popular Mantuan influence. The only exception is the decorative program of Villa Badoer, attributed to Giallo Fiorentino, which has clearly served the artist as a useful formal resource, especially for the modeling of human figures.

Villa Grimani Molin, whose original patron was the Venetian nobleman Vincenzo Grimani (1525-1582), resides in the town of Fratta Polesine in the province of Rovigo. The circumstances that tied Vincenzo to town were related to his first marriage, which took

place in January 1541¹. The wife, Lucrezia (1526-1556), was the daughter of Giovan Francesco Loredan (d. 1531) and Cornelia Corner (d. 1535); the latter was the paternal niece of the mythical Venetian Queen of Cyprus, Caterina Cornaro (1454-1510). Giovan Francesco began to acquire lands in Fratta and its surroundings as early as 1519, probably in partnership with the brothers of his wife, and possessed a house in the town at least since 1528². A significant portion of the agricultural lands surrounding Fratta were given to Vincenzo in 1545, after the death of Giovan Francesco and his son, Zorzi Loredan (d. 1539), and the villa had been set up in a strategic location, overlooking and controlling the fields.

To date, the villa and its garden are still positioned at the south-west border of the town, surrounded by agricultural soil to the west and south, and delimited by the Scortico River that runs along the east of the territory. To the north, the main façade of the villa faces Fratta, overlooking its closest neighbor, Villa Badoer. Francesco Badoer (1512-1572), the Venetian nobleman who was the original patron of the Palladian villa, was a counselor and senator, and captain in Bergamo. He was Vincenzo's brother-in-law through marriage: in 1536 he married Lucietta, another daughter of Giovan Francesco Loredan, who bore him four male sons: Giovanni, Andrea, Marc'Antonio and Piero³. After Francesco's death, the sons continued to frequent the villa regularly, and to manage the territories that their own father had also received as part of the bequest of Giovan Francesco Loredan.

Lucrezia bore Vincenzo four female daughters, Isabetta, Cornelia, Andriana and Paola. The year after Lucrezia's death, in 1557 Vincenzo married his second wife Andriana Emo (d. 1607), who bore him male and female children (**doc. fig. 1**)⁴. In the meantime, the four

¹ ASVe, *Avogaria di Comun*, reg. 145, cc. 137r-139v (29 January 1541, probably m. v.). Published in: *Villa Loredan Grimani a Fratta Polesine*, ed. R. Maschio (Rovigo: Minelliana, 2001), 159-161 n. 4.

² BCVe, Ms. PD c. 2346, n.8 (3 July 1519), and: BCVe, Ms. PD c. 1119/5, cc. 67r-70v. Several documents from the early years of Giovan Francesco Loredan in Fratta Polesine have been gathered and published in a registry by Luigi Contegiacomo, "Genesi di un sogno: le origini delle ville Loredan-Grimani e Badoer," in Maschio, *Villa Loredan Grimani*, 42-45.

³ ASVe, Marco Barbaro, *Arbori de Patritii Veneti*, cod. Miscellanea Veneta, I. Storia Veneta, n. 1 (A-B), 67-68.

⁴ The genealogical tree, unpublished to date, is found in: BCVe, Ms. PDc. 517/89, c. 1 (12 June 1615, according to the inscription at the back). According to the official state documents, Lucrezia died on 23 September

'Loredan' daughters had come to age and were to marry four Venetian noblemen. In 1564 Betta married Andrea da Molin (d. 1575). The following year Cornelia married Lunardo Emo (1532-1586), who was the cousin of Vincenzo's wife. The third daughter, Andriana, married Francesco Valier in 1574, and Paola married Federico Renier in 1579. Shortly after the last marriage, in 1580 the property of Villa Grimani Molin and its nearby fields had been divided between the daughters as the remaining part of the dowry of their mother (**doc. 1.2.6**)⁵. The house and its garden became the shared property of Francesco Valier and Andriana on one hand, and Betta Grimani, by now widowed from Andrea da Molin, on the other hand.

Vincenzo Grimani is generally considered as a rather enigmatic figure, whose adult life is scarcely documented. No significant notes about his profession or private life have emerged from scholarly research in recent years. Vincenzo did not seem to achieve any significant political status, he was not a high-ranking religious official, and he probably did not possess any magnificent artistic or archaeological collections. There is no indication whether he had assumed any official public role, such as a state diplomat or a military officer. The obscurity of information is set in sharp contrast with the rich political and cultural imprint left by his ancestors and contemporary relatives. Vincenzo was the son of Antonio Grimani, who was killed by his brother-in-law in 1527. The father was a cousin of the Patriarch of Aquileia Giovanni Grimani (ca.1505-1593); the Patriarch and the father were both grandchildren of Doge Antonio Grimani (1434-1523) and nephews of Cardinal Domenico Grimani (1461-1523).

Domenico and Giovanni were grand art collectors whose historical contribution to the world of collecting is highly praised to date. Both were very influential in the cultural politics of the Venetian State throughout their lives, while at the same time, they maintained affectionate relationships with controversial figures, retained as heretic by the Roman Church. Domenico holds the merit for the construction of the Grimani palace at the

1556: ASVe, *Provveditori alla sanità, Necrologi*, 797, 1555-1556. Published in Maschio, *Villa Loredan Grimani*, 166, n. 10. According to the above genealogical tree, she died on 25 September 1556.

⁵ The complete document exists in a copy in: BCVe, Ms. PDC. 2597/1b, c. 1r-4v (28 November 1580). A copy with a missing section is found in: ASVe, *Archivio privato Badoer*, b. 2/62, 1-1v and b.2/2, 13, and published in Maschio, *Villa Loredan Grimani*, n. 16, 171-173.

Quirinal Hill in Rome, today Palazzo Venezia, gathering the greatest architects and painters under his aegis for the execution of the project. His collection of original, Classical bronze statues was one of the earliest artistic donations made by private collectors to the Venetian Republic⁶. Giovanni's artistic activities included the reconstruction of the Grimani chapel and the façade of the church of San Francesco della Vigna in Venice, as well as the renovation of the family palace in the *contrà* of Santa Maria Formosa, creating what was probably the first true '*alla romana*' palace in the city. His contribution to the artistic heritage of Venice culminated in the donation of his private archaeological and artistic collections to the Republic upon his death, giving way to the foundation of the Venetian Archaeological Museum⁷. Giovanni's brother, Vettor (d. 1558), was a Procurator of Saint Mark's, and one of the main patrons of the architect Jacopo Sansovino (1486-1570). Vettor is credited for the design of the iconographical program of the Marciana Library, and probably for the decorative program for Villa Foscari, the Malcontenta, in Mira⁸.

Vincenzo, as the only male in the dynasty who bore children, and was not recruited for the service of the church, was destined to inherit the lands, real estate and the precious possessions of all of his predecessors. This fact, whose consequences are explored

⁶ For Domenico Grimani see, for example: Pio Paschini, "Domenico Grimani, cardinale di S. Marco (+1523)," in *Storia e Letteratura*, 4 (Rome: Edizioni di storia e letteratura, 1943); Rodolfo Gallo, "Le donazioni alla Serenissima di Domenico e Giovanni Grimani," *Archivio Veneto* LXXXII (1953): 34-77. For the art and sculpture collections of the Cardinal see: Irene Favaretto and Giovanna Luisa Ravagnan, eds., *Lo statuario pubblico della Serenissima: due secoli di collezionismo di antichità, 1596-1797* (Cittadella: Biblos, 1997); Michel Hochmann, "La famiglia Grimani," In *collezionismo d'arte a Venezia. Dalle origini al Cinquecento*, eds. M. Hochmann, R. Lauber and S. Mason (Venezia: Marsilio, 2008), 207-223.

⁷ For Giovanni Grimani see: Pio Paschini, "Giovanni Grimani accusato di eresia," in *Tre illustri prelati del Rinascimento. Ermolao Barbaro - Adriano Castellesi - Giovanni Grimani* (Rome: Lateranum, 1907), 131-196; *Ibid.*, "Il mecenatismo artistico del Patriarca Giovanni Grimani," in *Studi in onore Aristide Calderini e Roberto Paribeni* (Milan: Ceschina, 1965) v. III, 851-862; Gallo, "Le donazioni alla Serenissima," 34-77; Marina Stefani Mantovanelli, "Giovanni Grimani Patriarca di Aquileia e il suo palazzo di Venezia," *Quaderni Utinensi* II, n. 3-4 (1984): 34-35; Favaretto and Ravagnan, *Lo statuario pubblico*.

⁸ Antonio Foscari and Manfredo Tafuri, *L'armonia e i conflitti: la chiesa di San Francesco della Vigna nella Venezia del 500* (Torino: Einaudi, 1983), 133 and n. 9; Luciana Crosato Larcher, "Postille alla lettura del ciclo della Malcontenta dopo il restauro," *Arte veneta* 32 (1978): 223-229. Battista Franco (1468-1561), who had painted at the Malcontenta villa for Nicolò and Alvise Foscari, was invited by Giovanni Grimani immediately afterwards, in 1560, to paint the Grimani chapel in the church of San Francesco della Vigna.

throughout the current chapter, has shaped his personality, his knowledge, his interests and his capabilities. The Fratta villa, as we shall see, adheres precisely to this context.

In the history of art of the Veneto villa, the study of villa Grimani Molin has presented some particular challenges related to the dating and interpretation of its architecture and decorative program, which have always resulted somewhat inconclusive. A mere four decades have passed since the neighboring Villa Badoer was granted a detailed documentary analysis, headed by in the monograph of Lionello Puppi (1972), producing convincing attributions of the date, architect and painter (1553-1556, Andrea Palladio, Giallo Fiorentino)⁹. Despite recent attempts to perform in-depth research campaigns on Villa Grimani Molin and its decorative program, the results have been less fortunate. As stressed by Ruggero Maschio in the beginning of the last monograph dedicated to the villa (2001), the difficulty in determining its authorship stems from the lack of documents and their obscurity, which multiply the difficulty to untangle the complex parental and hereditary relationships, and to determine of the date of the villa's construction¹⁰.

While general Palladian characteristics may be identified in the architecture of Villa Grimani Molin, virtually all scholars reject its attribution to him. The Palladian hypothesis

⁹ Lionello Puppi, *La Villa Badoer di Fratta Polesine*. Vicenza: Centro Internazionale di studi di Architettura 'Andrea Palladio', 1972. More recent studies about villa Badoer include: Renzo Fontana, "Considerazioni intorno a villa Badoer di Fratta, con alcune notizie sul Giallo Fiorentino suo decoratore." In Alberti et al., *Palladio e palladianesimo in Polesine*, 39-51; Franca Trinchieri Camiz, "Significati iconografici degli affreschi delle ville Badoer e Molin-Avezzù a Fratta Polesine," in *Eresie, magia, società nel Polesine tra '500 e '600, atti del XIII convegno di studi storici, Rovigo, 21-22 novembre 1987*, ed. A. Olivieri (Rovigo: Minelliana, 1989), 118-144; Gert Jan van der Sman, *La decorazione a fresco delle ville venete del Cinquecento. Saggi di lettura stilistica ed iconografica* (Florence: Istituto universitario olandese di storia dell'arte, 1993), 159-188; Christine Jung, "I paesaggi nella Villa Badoer: Giallo Fiorentino e Augustin Hirschvogel," *Arte Veneta* 51 (1997): 41-49; Denis Ton, "Villa Badoer," in *Gli affreschi nelle ville venete: Il Cinquecento*, eds. G. Pavanello and V. Mancini, 249-255 n. 60 (Venice: Marsilio, 2008); repeated in: Vincenzo Mancini and Denis Ton, *Gli affreschi di villa Badoer e villa Loredan Grimani Avezzu a Fratta Polesine* (Rovigo: Minelliana, 2010), 21-71.

¹⁰ Ruggero Maschio, "Dimore degli dei. Il contesto, i committenti e i personaggi nelle vicende di Villa Loredan-Grimani, Molin, Avezzù," in Maschio, *Villa Loredan Grimani*, 9. «Le complicazioni che rendono il nodo di Villa Loredan Grimani Molin Avezzù particolarmente intricato, nascono anzitutto dall'impossibilità di appurare in modo inequivocabile l'autografia della villa. Per cui occorre constatare la carenza e l'oscurità di documenti che moltiplicano le difficoltà di districarsi tra complesse vicende parentali ed ereditarie, intrigate inoltre dall'oscurità che pare avvolgere una plausibile data di edificazione.»

had been promoted by Clauco Benito Tiozzo, who conducted the latest restoration campaign of the fresco program of the villa (ca. 1970-1972)¹¹. On the other hand, Renato Cavese has expressed perplexity regarding the attribution, and Bruno Gabbiani has denoted a great formal simplification in respect to Palladio's style¹². Luisa Castagnaro Barbuiani has criticized the layout of the villa complex, defining it as rigid and lacking a dialogue with its surroundings, and both she and Donata Battilotti have suggested assigning the project to Domenico Groppino¹³. In the recent monograph, Ruggero Rugolo had suggested to attribute the villa to Vincenzo Grimani himself, dating the construction to before villa Badoer¹⁴. However, the dating of the villa to latter decades of the sixteenth century had been proposed by several scholars throughout the years. In particular, Giuseppe Marchiori has noticed the '*Serlian inspiration of the late-sixteenth century villa*', and Franco Barbieri has emphasized its later character and technical-engineering superiority¹⁵. This hypothesis is further advanced in the current research, based on the analysis of published and newly found archival documents.

Without the support of an adequate documentary basis, the symbolic nature of the villa's fresco program, almost completely lacking narrative, tends to provoke a sense of uneasiness among every scholar who wishes to deal with its interpretation. Perhaps in order to compensate for the documentary gap, the cultural ambience of the patronage has often been widely considered when attempting to analyze the frescoes. Studies have paid particular attention to the cultural activities that took place in the environment of the villa in Fratta

¹¹ Clauco Benito Tiozzo, *Il Palladio e le ville fluviali: architettura e decorazioni* (Venice: Marsilio, 1981), 19.

¹² Renato Cavese, "Il Palladianesimo al tempo di Andrea Palladio," *Odeo Olimpico XV-XVI (1978-1980)*: 46; Bruno Gabbiani, ed., *Ville venete: la provincia di Rovigo: insediamenti nel Polesine* (Venezia: Marsilio, 2000), 264-266.

¹³ Luisa Castagnaro Barbuiani, "Villa Grimani Molin ora Avezzù a Fratta," in *Palladio e palladianesimo in Polesine*, L. Alberti et al., pres. M. Cavriani, intro. L. Puppi (Rovigo: Minelliana, 1984), 74; Donata Battilotti, *Le ville di Palladio* (Milan: Electa, 1990), 102-103.

¹⁴ Ruggero Rugolo, "La fabbrica e il suo sito: per 'pareggiar la Fratta a al'alta Roma'," in Maschio, *Villa Loredan Grimani*, 47-55.

¹⁵ Giuseppe Marchiori, "Ville della Provincia di Rovigo," in *Le ville Venete*, ed. G. Mazzotti (Treviso: Canova, 1954), 469-470; Franco Barbieri, "Vincenzo Scamozzi 2005: Il punto," *Annali di Architettura: rivista del Centro internazionale di studi di architettura Andrea Palladio 18-19 (2006-2007)*: 179.

Polesine, to the main protagonist of the villa and to the intellectual activities and artistic relationships of his great uncle, Patriarch Giovanni Grimani. Although methodologically well conducted and promising, these works have produced only partial or indeterminate interpretations and identifications, which were usually based on inaccurate assumptions regarding the possible dating of the villa and its decorative apparatus.

Franca Trinchieri Camiz and Gert Jan van der Sman have both preformed and overall examination of the frescoes, providing a series of iconographical considerations and attempting to identify their artistic sources and painters¹⁶. Francesca Bottacin had concentrated on questions of dating and attribution, assuming that the frescoes were painted before the death of Lucrezia Loredan and demonstrating that their executor could not have been Giallo Fiorentino¹⁷. Barbara Boccazzi Mazza had focused her analysis of the fresco program on the cultural ambient of Fratta Polesine and on the Grimani family, providing a hypothesis for the interpretation of the Hebrew inscription displayed in the *Studiolo* of the villa¹⁸. Simone Guseo had suggested that the frescoes and their authors should be evaluated in respect to the cultural and scientific interests of the members of the villa and their contacts with Venice and the mainland¹⁹. Denis Ton had recently provided an overview of the entire available scholarly literature regarding the frescoes, published in Giuseppe Pavanello and Vincenzo Mancini's extensive compilation on the frescoes of the Veneto villas, and in a separate dedicated to Villa Grimani Molin and Villa Badoer²⁰.

For a long time, scholars have retained that the current construction of the villa to be *ante*-1564. In consequence, studies about its fresco program presumed that it had been

¹⁶ Trinchieri Camiz, "Significati iconografici," 118-144; Van der Sman, *La decorazione a fresco*, 159-188.

¹⁷ Francesca Bottacin, "D'amore, di storia, d'alchimia e di agricoltura – la decorazione," in Maschio, *Villa Loredan Grimani*, 105-146.

¹⁸ Barbara Boccazzi Mazza, "Gli infiniti nomi di Dio: la decorazione dello 'studiolo' Grimani a Fratta Polesine," *Studi Veneziani* n.s. LII (2006): 243-264.

¹⁹ Simone Guseo, "Il mito dei Grimani nella villa di Fratta Polesine. Suggestioni esoteriche per una rilettura dei soggetti ermetici," *Terra d'Este* 31, XVI (2006): 119-144.

²⁰ Ton, "Villa Grimani Molin," in Pavanello and Mancini, *Affreschi ville venete*, 255-261 n. 61; repeated in Mancini and Ton, *Affreschi Badoer Grimani*, 73-121.

executed during the middle decades of the sixteenth century, sometimes even attributing it to Giallo Fiorentino himself²¹. However, both architecture and decoration seem to possess characteristics that render their early dating very problematic. The decoration appears only on the east side of the *piano nobile*, the painter cannot be identified with Giallo, and the artistic style does not resemble that of any of the major painters of the Veneto villas in the 1560's, although Vincenzo possessed the financial means and familial relationships to commission any familiar artist. In addition, the appearance of the Molin coat of arms, which dates to the original decorative campaign, is unthinkable before 1580, as the house was not in the possession of any Molin member up until then.

Camillo Semenzato, for example, advanced the hypothesis that the frescoes were commissioned by Andrea da Molin after his marriage to Betta (1564), and before his premature death (1575). He was followed by Tiozzo and Trinchieri Camiz²². However, no proof has been found by scholars in any archival document as for the possession of the villa by the Molin family before the 1580 division. Van der Sman has also expressed perplexity about the Molin marriage hypothesis, and Luigi Contegiacomo and Francesca Bottacin disregarded it as well²³. Generally, the authors preferred to date the frescoes of the villa to an even earlier phase, prior to the death of Lucrezia (1556), assuming again that the Molin coat of arms had been added during Andrea da Molin's lifetime.

However, such an early dating of the frescoes does not comply with the idea supported in the current dissertation, according to which the architecture should be dated to the latter decades of the sixteenth century²⁴. The structure of Villa Grimani Molin is barely compatible

²¹ Tiozzo, *Il Palladio e le ville*, 41, identified the painter as Giallo Fiorentino. Trinchieri Camiz, "Significati iconografici," 118, and Van der Sman, *La decorazione a fresco*, 172, agreed with the hypothesis without further inquiry. Bottacin, "D'amore, di storia, d'alchimia," has discarded the Giallo hypothesis on a stylistic and historical basis, and is supported by the successive researchers.

²² Camillo Semenzato, *Le ville del Polesine* (Vicenza: Neri Pozza, 1975), 55; Tiozzo, *Il Palladio e le ville*, 41; Trinchieri Camiz, "Significati iconografici," 123.

²³ Van der Sman, *La decorazione a fresco*, 173; Contegiacomo, "Genesi di un sogno: le origini," 36; Bottacin, "D'amore, di storia, d'alchimia," 105-107.

²⁴ Marchiori, "Ville della Provincia di Rovigo," 469-470; F. Barbieri, "Scamozzi Il punto," 179.

with the work of Palladio, although Vincenzo would have been easily able to commission him for the task in the 1560's. But most of all, the dating of the structure as *ante*-1564 had been based on a drawing of Villa Badoer and Villa Grimani Molin in a historical map drawn up that year, attributed to the cartographers and engineers Iseppo Pontoni and Francesco Trevisi (**map 1**)²⁵. As demonstrated in detail ahead in this chapter, the depiction of the two villas on the map cannot be retained contemporary to the original date of its preparation.

In identifying the problem of the reliability of the dating in the Pontoni-Trevisi map, an important methodological veil had been removed. The previous research campaigns concentrated on the analysis of archival documents from the early period of the presence Vincenzo in Fratta and of his relationship with the Loredan family. When dealing with later documents, their content was sometimes evaluated with insufficient attention. Even the title that is usually attributed to the villa, 'Loredan Grimani', results misleading and reflects the focus of scholars on the events of the Loredan household rather than on the course of life of Vincenzo Grimani and his heirs. For this reason, the current documentary research has set out two main objectives. The first, to reconstruct the sequence of events during the second half of the sixteenth century and up until 1615, when the second half of the villa was also acquired by the Molin family. The second objective is the detailed exploration of the cultural and familial relationships of Vincenzo Grimani and his heirs: the Loredan daughters, their husbands and their children. Through these reconstructions, it is my hope that the villa receives a more accurate dating, as does its fresco program; the iconographical interpretation, in turn, becomes linked to a cultural ambience related to the specific time and place in which the frescoes could have been planned and executed.

In the current research, the entire project of the villa is evaluated in light of the very same conditions that brought the noblemen of sixteenth century Venice to settle in Fratta Polesine. Documents from archives in Venice and the Veneto neatly recount how the village was founded as part of the large cultural-technological campaign of the Venetian

²⁵ Iseppo Pontoni and Francesco Trevisi, *Map of the Territory North of the Canal Bianco*, 21 April 1564, 2610×812 mm. ASVe, *Beni Inculti, Padova-Polesine*, rotolo 398ter, mazzo 49, disegno 9.

Republic for the land reclamation of un-sanitized areas of the Venetian lagoon²⁶. As a part of this process, Villa Grimani was created with an interdisciplinary approach: different scientific fields such as hydraulics, mathematics, geometry, astronomy and optics were combined by the architects, engineers and intellectuals in order to deal with the geological challenges of the construction of the villa and with the development of its surroundings. The rich cultural ambience that flourished in Fratta Polesine in the years following its foundation, once again favored the study of Villa Grimani in light of its scientific context.

A second key aspect that must be considered in the research on Villa Grimani Molin regards its economical definition and function. Unlike other sixteenth century projects of private residences that were commissioned by Venetian noblemen, the land property of the villa and its surrounding fields were part of a prestigious dowry, which Vincenzo received from his first wife. As such, it had to be handled according to the precise regulations of the Venetian Republic regarding the maintenance of the property, its debts and profits, and its eventual passage as inheritance. All of these issues should be considered when dealing with questions of patronage and ownership of the villa throughout the different phases.

The current chapter deals with the documentary research in a technological and economical key, without, however, neglecting the fundamental relationship of Vincenzo Grimani and his heirs with the cultural interests of his family in Venice. As demonstrated, this approach has opened a new range of interpretative possibilities regarding the dating of the villa, and in consequence, regarding the identification of its possible architect and decorators, and regarding the interpretation of the decorative program.

Above all, the dissertation aims to provide an iconographical analysis of the decoration of Villa Grimani Molin, as it is presented in chapters IV, V and VI. The general framework, as reflected in the title of the thesis, is indeed 'cosmological', but the text is substantially a work of iconographical interpretation of the fresco program of a sixteenth century, humanist

²⁶ The published corpus of documents relevant to the study of the villa has been analyzed especially in Puppi, *Villa Badoer; Maschio, Villa Loredan Grimani*, Which includes an appendix of document transcriptions (158-192) and the above mentioned registry in: Contegiacomo, "Genesi di un sogno: le origini," 42-45.

Veneto villa. As in the sixteenth century, the use of the terms 'cosmology' and 'natural history' is interchangeable in the dissertation, and reflects the string of thought that recurs in Venetian Humanism on the eve of the Scientific Revolution. Cosmology as a natural science was an ample discipline that explored the origins, present and future of nature and of the human race within it. The treatment of cosmology as a discipline that deals exclusively with celestial objects should be regarded as reductive in this context, as it does not reflect the perception of the discipline in the university culture of the Early Modern period.

The various iconographical themes that are treated in the course of the research, which are identified within the frescoes of the villa, are sometimes treated as fortunate occasions for performing an extended discussion about their visual representation in the Veneto villa. The cosmological contextualization of these issues is emphasized, and they are discussed in light of similar appearances in other decorative programs, in villas whose patrons share a common familial and/or cultural-philosophical ground with the patrons of Villa Grimani Molin.

The current chapter opens with the analysis of the major visual instrument related to the dating of Villa Grimani Molin, the Pontoni-Trevisi map. The overview is dedicated to its technical analysis, demonstrating its irrelevancy for the dating of Villa Grimani Molin as preceding 1564. The overview also performs a documentary interpretation of the hydraulic project represented in the map, drawing various conclusions that shall assist with the issues of its dating and attribution. In the next section, the cultural ambience of Fratta Polesine is delineated in light of the private activities and relationships of the figures who had been directly involved in the patronage of Villa Grimani Molin. In the final section, considerations regarding the dating of the villa are handled in detail, based on the preceding sections of the chapter, and within the context of the Loredan dowry and its management throughout the sixteenth century.

Following the documentary analysis of the current chapter, the questions of the attribution are discussed in detail in chapter II. As an introduction to the three iconographical chapters, Chapter III is dedicated to the consideration of the cultural

ambience of Fratta Polesine is considered in the broader perspective of the changes in scientific philosophy in Venice during the sixteenth century.

1.2 CARTOGRAPHY AND THE *SANTA AGRICOLTURA*

Much of the new documentation obtained during the current study of Villa Grimani Molin regarding the private lives of its owners was the result of a preliminary archival research campaign, whose orientation was actually rather technical. It is somewhat symbolic that the only known historical visual representation of the villa was found in a professional topographic map of hydraulic engineering, since the same hydraulic operations were an inseparable component that determined the history of the construction of the villa. The current section presents the study of the villa in the context of its immediate environment, as one of the areas that were mostly recognized with the land reclamation initiatives of the Venetian Republic during the sixteenth century²⁷. The main protagonists of this section are the historical hydraulic maps of the area, their designers, their clients, and their representation of Fratta and its nearby fields. The study has provided the key elements for the considerations regarding the dating and patronage of the villa, as they are presented towards the end of the chapter.

1.2.1 Venetian Land Reclamation and the Polesine

The Polesine, the eastern-most area of the large Po valley south to the Euganean Hills, is a land of ancient volcanic origins that possesses unique geological characteristics compared to the entire Italian and European territory. The almost total absence of significant

²⁷ See especially the publication following the conference dedicated to the topic in 2002: Gino Benzoni, ed, *Verso la santa agricoltura: Alvise Cornaro, Ruzante, il Polesine. atti del XXV convegno di studi dell'Associazione culturale Minelliana, Rovigo, 29 giugno 2002* (Rovigo: Minelliana, 2004).

variations of height in respect to the sea level, coupled with the elevation of plentiful convergences of river lines such as those of the Po and the Adige Rivers, have rendered the area a site of various hydro-geological mutations in the course of history (**fig. 1**)²⁸. The location of the water streams often affected the placement and duration of the human settlements, confined mostly to the rare slightly elevated zones. Etruscan settlements and Celtic presences are known to have existed in the Polesine near Adria, while the town of Fratta Polesine and its neighboring territory host the important ancient necropolis of Frattesina, a recent archaeological discovery that dates back to the Iron Age²⁹.

Throughout the Late Middle Ages and the Early Renaissance, much of the territory of the Polesine belonged to the Duchy of Ferrara. Following difficult Salt War against the Venetian Republic (1482-1484), in the peace treaty of Bagnolo (August 7, 1484) the territories north of the Canalbianco River were passed to the Venetians, Fratta Polesine included. The Canalbianco River, battlefield between Venice and Ferrara, was involved in the dramatic overflow of the Adige in the autumn of 1438, which destructively tumbled over the area of Badia Polesine, causing multiple casualties. Following the 'break' (*rotta*), the water from the Adige was harnessed by engineers of the Este into newly excavated lines giving rise to the Castagnaro and Malopera channels, which both poured into the reconstructed course of the ancient river Tartarus, then nominated Canalbianco because of its new pale look. Unfortunately, the Tartarus-Canalbianco did not succeed in clearing the excess water of the large valleys with sufficient speed, causing them to become progressively swampy³⁰.

By the sixteenth century, the Polesine possessed severe hydro-geological conditions: because of its swampy, humid, low and unfertile terrains, it was considered a practically inhabitable

²⁸ Claudio Datei, "Le rotte del Po," in *Il Fiume e la sua Terra: Tutela e gestione del territorio a quarant'anni dall'alluvione del Polesine 1951-1991. Atti del Convegno di Studi, Rovigo, 27-28 settembre 1991* (Venezia: Istituto Veneto di Scienze, Lettere ed Arti; Accademia dei Concordi di Rovigo, 1994), 15-45.

²⁹ Raffaele Peretto, "Lungo un antico ramo del Po," in *Fratta Polesine: la storia* (Rovigo: Minelliana, 1990), 11-20; Paolo Bellintani, "Frattesina, la scoperta e le ricerche," in *Ibid.*, 21-38; Luciano Salzani and Cecilia Colonna, *La Fragilità dell'Urna, recenti scavi a Narde, necropoli di Frattesina, XII- IX secolo a.C.* (Rovigo: Cierre, 2010).

³⁰ Bruno Rigobello, "Acqua e bonifiche," in Peretto et al., *Fratta Polesine*, 69; F. Cazzola, "Terra e Bonifiche nel Delta Padano (secoli XV-XVIII)," in Cazzola and Olivieri, *Uomini, terra e acque*, 15-17; Datei, "Le rotte del Po," 23-29.

zone, which had to be treated and sanitized by the expert Venetian engineers with great urgency. At the same time, Fratta Polesine obtained a rather privileged geographical location: the opening up of the Scortico River, which directly connects the Adigetto and the Castagnaro rivers through the center of the town, transformed Fratta into an important, obligatory passageway. Fratta dominated the control over a watercourse that was fundamental for military strategies and for general communication, as part of the Adige-Po navigation line³¹.

The administration of the Venetian Republic was a fundamental and integral participant in the process of land reclamation and water control. Since the beginning of its expansion to the mainland, the Republic had recognized the necessity of organized legislation regarding the hydraulic management of its territories. For this reason, the *Savi Esecutori alle Acque* were among the most ancient magistracies in the Venetian government, founded as early as the thirteenth century. In the sixteenth century, their responsibilities included controlling and limiting the abuse and modifications of the water currents by humans, performing interventions to prevent the damages provoked by natural phenomena, and maintaining the ability to navigate within the canals³².

In the middle of the century, the social conditions in the Republic required the establishment of another office, the *Provveditori Sopra i Beni Inculti*³³. The increase in the population after the recovery from the war of the League of Cambrai caused the need for a vast production of cereals, especially corn, without having to depend on other states or private investors. The Senate and the *Cosniglio dei Dieci* saw the necessity for immediate investment in the cultivation of territories that were still swampy and inhabited. However, preoccupied that the draining of the sweet water from the inland would damage the

³¹ Maschio, "Dimore degli dei," 12.

³² Sandra Vantini, "Periti, Agrimensori, Notai: cartografia e cartografi 'minori' tra amministrazione periferica e Magistrature centrali negli ultimi due secoli della Repubblica veneta," In *Cartografi veneti: mappe, uomini e istituzioni per l'immagine e il governo del territorio*, ed. V. Valerio (Padua: Editoriale Programma, 2006), 10.

³³ Roughly translated as the "Superintendents of the Uncultivated Goods" or in the words of James Ackerman, "Board of Uncultivated Properties". James S. Ackerman, *Palladio's Villas* (New York: Institute of Fine Arts J. J. Augustin, 1967), 9.

ecosystem of the lagoon, they preformed a series of studies during the 1540's that culminated in 1558 with the establishment of the office of the *Beni Inculti*. Founding the office, the Republic had officially recognized the need to reconcile the public needs with the needs of the private initiators, following the persistent vision of Alvise Cornaro and explicitly acknowledging his debt to his program of the '*Santa agricoltura*'³⁴. The tasks of the office included the supervision of the land reclamations and the irrigations, the foundation of the land reclamation consortiums ('*Consorti di Bonifica*'), and the formation of a registry of the possessors of the water sources, with civil and criminal jurisdiction on the usurpers³⁵.

In the rural residences erected by the noble Venetians in the mainland throughout the sixteenth century, patrons and engineers implemented plans of a modern speculative character, purchasing large and degraded low-cost areas, transforming them for rehabilitation and exploiting their agricultural and commercial revenues. These activities required fluent communication with the government water offices. Earlier in the century, in documents related to the foundation of the *Provveditori Sopra I Beni Inculti*, Alvise Cornaro coined the phrase *Santa agricoltura*, defining it as a celebration of the sense of emancipation granted from the work in the fields, in respect to commercial activities that were traditionally recognized with the Venetian Republic³⁶. As part of this process, Fratta Polesine and its sixteenth century villas can be considered as one of the landmarks in the formation of the concept of the Palladian villa in the Veneto, which is in itself a symbol of man's dominion over the relentless and eternal forces of nature.

³⁴ Maschio, "Dimore degli dei," 10. Many studies have been dedicated to Cornaro's initiative. See especially: Giuseppe Fiocco, *Alvise Cornaro: il suo tempo e le sue opere*. Vicenza: Neri Pozza, 1965; Lionello Puppi, ed., *Alvise Cornaro e il suo tempo: Padova, Loggia e Odeo Cornaro, Sala del Palazzo della Ragione, 7 settembre-9 novembre 1980* (Padova: Comune, 1980); Benzioni, *Verso la santa agricoltura*.

³⁵ Ackerman, *Palladio's Villas*, 8-10; Maschio, "Dimore degli dei," 10-11; Vladimiro Valerio, ed., *Cartografi veneti: mappe, uomini e istituzioni per l'immagine e il governo del territorio* (Padua: Editoriale Programma, 2006), 120.

³⁶ Cornaro's writings are conserved to date at: ASVe, *Beni Inculti, Materie Diverse*, b. 299 (1515-1557, "Scritture di Alvise Cornaro").

1.2.2 Mapmaking and the Venetian Mainland

Fratta Polesine and similar Venetian initiatives of settlement and land reclamation were represented in detailed topographical maps, which were drawn up by professional cartographers, surveyors working for the *Provveditori Sopra I Beni Inculti* and the *Savi Esecutori alle Acque*. The development of professional cartography was an interesting side effect produced by the activities of these offices, as the new maps designed by the surveyors reflected some of the most significant scientific advancements of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Most of the cartographers working for the *Beni Inculti* were also professional engineers; in fact, some of them were active participants in lively discourses regarding the latest scientific developments in their field.

Cristoforo Sorte (1506/10-after 1594), the first official expert surveyor (*perito ordinario*) to work for the *Beni Inculti*, was born in Verona. He was a distinguished hydraulic engineer, as well as a renowned painter and an architect³⁷. Sorte was the author of the *Trattato dell'origine dei fiumi*, an original manuscript essay combining practical hydraulic engineering materials with contemporary theories of Natural Philosophy; his book on painting, *Osservazioni nella pittura*, was used as a manual by painters in the seventeenth century³⁸. Sorte was also the author of a published discourse on the irrigation of the Veronesian territory and the regulation of the Adige River³⁹. The text included debates with Antonio Glisenti, known as Antonio il Magro (c.1540-c.1602), who was another cartographer who worked at the service of the *Beni Inculti*. Originating from the province of Brescia, Glisenti

³⁷ Juergen Schulz, *La cartografia tra scienza e arte: carte e cartografi nel Rinascimento italiano*, trans. T. D. De Zuliani (Modena: Panini, 1990), 65-69. On Sorte's reclamation work see: Silvino Salgaro, "Il governo delle acque nella pianura veronese da una carta del XVI secolo," *Bollettino della società geografica italiana* 10 (1980): 327-350. For additional bibliography on Sorte see: Valerio, *Cartografi Veneti*, 242-243.

³⁸ Schulz, *La cartografia tra scienza e arte*, 91. Cristoforo Sorte, *Trattato dell'origine dei fiumi...*, BNM., Ms. It. IV, 169 (5265), cc. 1r.-2v; *Ibid.*, *Osservazioni nella pittura...* (Venice: Girolamo Zenaro, 1580; reprint, *Trattati d'arte del Cinquecento*, ed. P. Barocchi. Bari: Laterza, 1960), 271-301, 526-539.

³⁹ Cristoforo Sorte, *Modo d'irrigare la campagna di Verona... & anco di m. Antonio Magro, e del sig. Theodoro da Monte* (Verona: Girolamo Discepolo, 1593).

possessed a solid scientific background, and often criticized Sorte for his technical skills⁴⁰. Glisenti himself was responsible for several publications on medicine, especially about plagues⁴¹, geography⁴², and even astronomy⁴³. Another important surveyor of the office, Ottavio Fabbri (1540's-after 1611), was probably born in Venice, and was a professional engineer, educated in mathematics, mechanics, hydraulics and architecture⁴⁴. Fabbri was famous for his invention of the *squadra mobile*, or *zoppa* ('folding square'), a perfected version of the graphometer, an optical surveying instrument used for angle measurements. His book on the subject was edited for the first time in 1568 in Venice, obtaining great success since its publication and into the seventeenth century⁴⁵. He had also probably published a book about the hydraulic treatment of natural water resources⁴⁶.

For the scientist-cartographers of Early Modern Venice, the representation of nature was achieved through observation, measuring, and empirical verification. In their desire for an accurately measured topography, they used the most recent technical instruments and applied the latest theories regarding the rules of perspective and mathematics⁴⁷. Nevertheless, it is important to acknowledge that the maps did not lack the symbolic intents

⁴⁰ Valerio, *Cartografi Veneti*, 232. He is often confused with the figure of his namesake who was probably his cousin (1512-1576), who was a rich and famous doctor.

⁴¹ Antonio Glisenti, *L' assoluta conclusione dell'humana liberta di Antonio Glisenti* (Venice: Gio. Antonio Rampazetto, 1597); *Ibid.*, *Il summario delle cause, che dispongono i corpi de gli huomini a patire la corrottione pestilente del presente anno 1576...* (Venice: Borgomineri, not before 1576).

⁴² *Ibid.*, *Replica di Antonio Glisenti in proposito della risposta de M. Cristoforo Sorte* (Venice, 1594); *Ibid.*, *Risposta di Antonio Glisenti al modo d'irrigare la campagna di Verona, d'introdurre più navigationi per lo corpo del felicissimo stato di Venetia, di M. Cristoforo Sorte* (Venice, 1594).

⁴³ *Ibid.*, *Dialogo del Gobbo da Rialto, et Marocco dalle pipone dalle colonne di S. Marco, sopra la cometa alli giorni passati apparsa su nel cielo. Di m. Antonio Glisente bresciano* (Venice, not before November 1577).

⁴⁴ For a bibliography on Ottavio Fabbri see: Valerio, *Cartografi Veneti*, 226-227.

⁴⁵ Four successive printed editions were published in 1598, 1615, 1670 and 1673. Ottavio Fabbri, *L'uso della squadra mobile...* (Venice: Francesco Barilletti, 1598).

⁴⁶ Valerio, *Cartografi Veneti*, 226. The book was probably published before the book on the *squadra mobile*, and entitled: *Trattato in materia delle Acque, non solo di tutti i mari, stagni, laghi, fiumi, Torrenti, et altri vasi, ò ricettacoli d'acque del mondo, ma gli effetti, motti, flussi, Riflussi loro, et come ogni sorte di Acqua, et corso di quella giustamente, et realmente si misuri, et come si regolino, et il frutto che da esse si possono trare, forse da altri non mai più inteso.*

⁴⁷ Silvino Salgaro, "Cartografi e cartografia come strumenti di controllo e gestione territoriale nella Repubblica di Venezia," in Valerio, *Cartografi Veneti*, 33.

that characterized the earlier mapmaking tradition. Just as in the case of any other work of art, today's criticism of historical cartography recognizes the different considerations on behalf of the cartographer to depict certain objects with exact precision, and other elements in a symbolic or approximate manner⁴⁸. Every map, even in modern times, contains a multiplicity of levels of fidelity, depending on the scope of its preparation⁴⁹.

The topographical maps were usually commissioned from the official surveyors by their offices due to a specific request that was sent to the office by private owners of lands in a particular holding (*'presa'*). The primary purpose for drawing the maps was the execution of specific hydraulic interventions, such as the construction of draining channels or water bridges. In the drawings, every water source was marked rigorously and accurately; the territories surrounding the water sources were delineated with the names of their owners, and occasionally private villas and public buildings were represented, usually symbolically, in a customary, 'pseudo isometric' three-dimensional manner. The drawings of the maps were difficult to achieve; they were usually executed on large sheets painted in watercolor and were drawn up only periodically, or when it was necessary to report major hydro-geological changes. Often, minor modifications that did not justify ordering a new survey were simply drawn on top of an existing map, and proposed projects were commonly marked in different colored ink, usually red, on top of a preceding drawing⁵⁰.

⁴⁸ Schulz, *La cartografia tra scienza e arte*, 9-11. The earliest cartography scholars (Charles Beazley, Nils Adolf Nordenskiöld, Manuel Santarém), in considering the quality of the maps, based their criticism on the concept of the mimetic imitation capabilities of their creators, just as in the traditional way of interpretation of the arts. Cartography was told as a chronology of the gradual success in the approximation of geographic and topographic truth, culminating in the late nineteenth century European cartography. According to the early historians, the key period for this sort of evolution was the Renaissance, with the first attempts of a scientific cartography.

⁴⁹ Schulz, "Mappe come metafore: cicli murali cartografi nell'Italia del Rinascimento," in Schulz, *La cartografia tra scienza e arte*, 97-113. Schulz discusses different types of historical maps drawn up for different reasons: large public cycles, city maps such as the Venice map of Jacopo de' Barbari (1500), and hydraulic surveys.

⁵⁰ The operations of modifications and overwriting in red ink are very often described by the surveyors of the *Beni Inculti* in their reports to the office. For the reports dating to the second half of the sixteenth century, see: ASVe, *Beni Inculti, Relazioni di Periti*, b. 262, b. 263 and b. 264.

These hydraulic maps lay the foundations of the modern-day management of lands in Italy by the *ConSORZI di Bonifica*, and are precious documents that can provide scholars with more information than their original designation. Because of the practical context of their commission, the scientific, historical and artistic significances of these maps are sometimes underestimated. However, the identification and consideration of their technical and artistic qualities enables their treatment as actual works of art that possess an archaeological value for art history research, in a similar manner to the close examination of an oil painting or a preparatory drawing that were executed by a famous artist.

1.2.3 Cartography in Fratta Polesine

Naturally, during the sixteenth century, the attempts to resolve the hydro-geological emergencies in the Polesine required frequent visits by the surveyors of the *Beni Inculti*. For example, in 1563, Cristoforo Sorte was commissioned to create a topographic relief in color of the entire territory along the Adige and Po Rivers (**map 4.1**)⁵¹. The importance of the settlement of Fratta can be deduced by its positioning in the exact center of this very large document, halfway through the Scortico River (**map 4.2**). Several maps that survive to date depict the specific area of Fratta Polesine in more detail; the Venice State Archive possesses three of them (**maps 1-3**). One particularly large and detailed map is dated to 21 April 1564, signed and prepared by the surveyors Iseppo Pontoni and Francesco Trevisi for the *Provveditori Sopra I Beni Inculti*, at the request of the presidents of the Vespara holding⁵².

⁵¹ Cristoforo Sorte, *Parte dei territori di Rovigo, d'Adria, di Lendinara, e delle valli del Veronese, e ferrarese, e mantovano*, 1563. Polychrome acquarel on paper, 209 cm × 56 cm. Source: ASMo, *Mappe e Disegni, Mappario estense, Topografia di territori*, n. 104. The map reads: «Io Christoforo Sorte ho fatto la perfetta copia ad istantia del spettabile m. bartolomeo verzerre adi 4 Settembre 1563. »

⁵² (1) For the Pontoni-Trevisi map see above note 25; (2) Nicolò Dal Cortivo and Giacomo Gastaldo, *Polesine., zona sotto Lendinara tra l'Adigetto, per Salvaterra, Lendinara, Villanova, Fratta ed il Canal Maestro, da Canda fino a Borsea e S. Appona*, 7 March 1557. 2408×786 mm. ASVe, *Beni Inculti, Padova-Polesine*, rotolo 364, mazzo 28, disegno 6; (3) *La Valle di San Biasio et Valle Dentro sotto Lendinara*, 1549. 1930×1005 mm. ASVe, *Miscellanea mappe*, n. 815.

The three maps demonstrate how the development of the sixteenth century Fratta rotates inseparably around the Badoer and Grimani villas. In addition to the information about the complicated history of the hydro-geological situation in the area, the evaluation of these historical visual documents provides a valuable contribution related to dating and attribution issues of the two households. Villa Badoer and Villa Grimani are depicted in the Pontoni-Trevisi map in particular detail, and in their already complete state, suggesting that they both already existed by the time that the map had been executed. Villa Badoer is considered with certainty a manufacture that preexisted to the commission of the map (1564). Based on documentary evidence, the villa is dated to 1556⁵³. Its main body and fenced courtyard are already represented in the map of the area dating to 1557, drawn by the *Beni Inculti* surveyors Nicolò Dal Cortivo and Giacomo Gastaldo (**map 2**).

However, the only support for the dating of Villa Grimani as *ante 1564* relies exclusively on its representation in the Pontoni-Trevisi map. For the lack of further archival documentation, its author and the definite date of its construction are still subject to confusion and speculation. In most of the literature about the villa, lacking an alternative suggestion, the interpretations of its architecture and decoration are still based on the 1564 hypothesis⁵⁴. This situation has changed recently, when a close observation of the artistic and technical characteristics of the Pontoni-Trevisi map was preformed by Simone Guseo (2008), raising some interesting questions regarding the date in which the two villas had been painted on it, and regarding the possible motivation for their depiction⁵⁵. Based on these new findings, in the current study I have preformed a further technical analysis of

⁵³ Puppi, *Villa Badoer*, 27.

⁵⁴ See the most recent: Ruggero Rugolo, "La fabbrica e il suo sito," 47; Ton, "Villa Grimani Molin," in Pavanello and Mancini, *Affreschi ville venete*, 255-261 n. 61, with additional bibliography.

⁵⁵ The doubts regarding the dating of the depiction of the villas on the map had first been raised and presented in: Simone Guseo, "Osservazioni," (paper presented at the conference *Le gemme degli horti di Fratta*, Villa Badoer, Fratta Polesine, 3 February 2006). They were acknowledged in: F. Barbieri, "Scamozzi Il punto," 185 n. 131. In 2008, the map was unrolled especially for the occasion at the seat of the Venice State Archive, at the presence of Simone Guseo, the chemical restoration analyst Roberta Giacometti, and Dr. Giovanni Caniato from the Venice State Archive. Following the inspection, the reports of Giacometti (17 March 2008) and Guseo (21 July 2008) were presented to the Venice State Archive. See Appendix I, docs. 2.3.1 and 2.3.2.

the map, and executed a detailed archival campaign that was destined to support the visual documentation. The results, as it seems, coincide well with the initial observations.

The research guided by Guseo has demonstrated that the small portion of the map in which villa Badoer and Villa Grimani are depicted was added to the paper in a phase that was successive to the original drawing phase (**doc. 2.3.2**). The conclusion was based on the visual examination of the original document with the combination of a technical-stylistic analysis of the material, and a technical-macroscopic analysis. The small portion where the two sixteenth century villas are depicted is positioned high up at the top margin of the paper, measuring only about four centimeters in diameter (**map 1.1**). They differ completely in their mode of representation in respect to the rest of the map. All of the other architectural manufactures are drawn in a single color and in a customary, 'pseudo isometric' three-dimensionality that is sufficient for the determination of their topographic value concerning the maintenance of the water resources of the territory. However, the two villas are represented in an unusual architectural, two-dimensional plan, and not in the traditional three-dimensional layout. The sharp dark red ink mark that is used for their representation differs significantly from muted tones of the surrounding colors in watercolor. The ink traces the floor plans of the two villas in correct scaling, and enriched with accurate geometrical and environmental information, which is striking when compared to the modern aerial view of the site (**figs. 2, 2.1**). The same unusual graphical characteristics identified in the villas are recognized in another portion depicted down the Zabarella road, where a canal bridge is drawn, accompanied with the inscription '*CH. SI VORIA FARE*' ('that it is desired to make') (**map 1.2**).

The non-invasive technical analysis of the inks performed by the restoration chemist Roberta Giacometti in 2008 has confirmed that indeed, the areas in question have been drawn in a different, later phase (**doc. 2.3.1**). According to the analysis, the red ink used for painting the portion of the two villas differs from the red ink that was originally present on the media. In addition, the same subsequent ink was used for the depiction of the area of

the canal bridge '*CH. SI VORIA FARE*'. This detail is of primary importance for the research campaign performed for the current dissertation.

The close observation of the Cortivo-Gastaldi map dated to 1557 provides further support to the idea that the villas were added later to the 1564 map (**map 2.1**). The entire town of Fratta Polesine, represented at the core of the early map on the right bank of the Scortico River, is completely absent from the Pontoni-Trevisi map. In the earlier map, Villa Grimani occupies a single structure with no flanking *barchesse* and its position is shifted southwards in respect to its actual location. Two smaller structures occupy the territory of the large backside garden; they do not appear in the Pontoni-Trevisi map, where the garden is covered with small plants in watercolor in a manner that recalls its modern state.

These details indicate that the 'Grimani' residence depicted on the 1557 map is another villa, perhaps the original Loredan edifice, which may have served the family until the construction of the new country house⁵⁶. This observation stands in contrast to an earlier hypothesis that assumed that the construction of Villa Grimani preceded that of Villa Badoer (1553-1556)⁵⁷. The hypothesis raised confusion regarding the somewhat coarse, non-Palladian characteristics of Villa Grimani⁵⁸, especially because Vincenzo Grimani shared the cultural ambience and financial capacities of Francesco Badoer and could have easily requested the services of the renowned humanist architect.

1.2.4 The Pontoni-Trevisi Map and the *Scolador* of the Vespara

In the search for archival evidence to support the findings of Guseo and Giacometti, documentary proof has recently been brought into light. The confirmation that the Pontoni-Trevisi map had been modified after its initial preparation was found in an

⁵⁶ The hypothesis regarding a previous Loredan residence results rather problematic. See below, note 171.

⁵⁷ Promoted for example by: Rugolo, "La fabbrica e il suo sito," 47-55.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 55-75, for a summary of the different opinions, including Rugolo's own hypothesis that the architect could have been Vincenzo himself.

unpublished manuscript conserved at the Correr Museum Library in Venice (Ms. PDC 2346/VIII), which contains a long registry of a hydraulic project preformed during the latter decades of the sixteenth century. The document was known, but it had been overlooked by scholars of art and architectural history, as its topic was considered irrelevant for the study of private residential manufactures⁵⁹. It contains valuable information regarding the official procedures and practical methods of water handling in the reclaimed lands of the Republic, but just as well, it provides an interesting contribution to the dating of Villa Grimani.

The long hand-written registry concerns a project that was executed in the land holding of the Vespara, where the agricultural fields of the residents of Fratta Polesine resided, and in particular the Grimani and Badoer fields of the Loredan inheritance. These holdings were also frequently called by the Venetians '*retrato*', a term that originates from the word 'retreat', which defined the drained lands. In his agricultural treatise, Giovanni Maria Bonardo explained the source of the term, commenting that these lands were particularly difficult to manage. Even when the terrain was considered fertile, it was necessary to plow it three times before sowing in order to produce any results⁶⁰.

1.2.4.1 The Vespara Hydraulic Project

The Correr registry begins in December 1563, when the initial idea for the project had been raised, and continues with the laborious process of its execution and maintenance lasting until the first decades of the seventeenth century⁶¹. The project concerned the construction of a '*scolador*', a long water-draining canal that would help drain the excess rainwater from the fields of the Vespara into the large Castagnaro River (the Canalbianco). A canal bridge, '*Ponte Canal*', was to be constructed at the western end of the *scolador*. The canal bridge was a relatively new engineering invention, which enabled a lower

⁵⁹ The folder contains also another file, 2346/VII, which contains various papers related to the holding and a few maps «però ai nostri fini irrilevante» according to Puppi, *Villa Badoer*, 64 n. 1.

⁶⁰ Rigobello, "Acqua e bonifiche," 70; Bonardo, *Le ricchezze*, chaps. 21-22.

⁶¹ There are two hand-written copies of the registry; one is partial, terminating in 1614. In the full version, the last register dates to 1627; according to the closing note, the registry had been presented to the *Avogaria de Comune* on 8 August 1634. In both copies, there is an information gap between 1576 and 1590.

watercourse to pass beneath a higher one, and in this case, enabled the new *scolador* to pass underneath the large Scortico River. In several points, where the *scolador* needed to cross the river and water channels of smaller dimensions, the control of the water levels was performed through the implementation of a '*chiavega*'⁶².

On 6 February 1564 (1563 *more veneto*), a request to construct a *scolador* at the Vespara was submitted to the office of the *Provveditori di sopra i Beni Inculti* in Venice on behalf of the presidents of the holding, noblemen Marc'Antonio Cornaro, Vincenzo Grimani and Marc'Antonio Badoer. The letter included a request that two surveyors would be sent to the area for the evaluation and planning of the project, and that they would draw a map for the purpose. The two engineer surveyors are explicitly named in the letter: '*Iseppo Pontonj, e Francesco Trevisi Ingengneri*'; identifying them with the same figures that drew the map conserved the Venice State Archive. Pontoni and Trevisi were commissioned by the *Beni Inculti* just two short days later. Their onsite report to the office is dated to 24 April 1564, three days after the date signed on the actual map (**doc. 2.1.4**). In it, they declared that they had visited the territory in order to evaluate where to position the *scolador* and the various components of the project, and specified that they had marked the future path of the *scolador* with a red line⁶³. The report concluded with instructions where to place the path of the *scolador*, beginning in the west at the bank of the Scortico River, where a *Ponte Canal* would be constructed near the lands of the neighboring Presciana holding, and terminating in the east, near the small island in the Castagnaro River, beyond the Molin Valley.

The description of the path of the *scolador* by the surveyors fits the Pontoni-Trevisi map with precision, with the exception of its west end, reflecting a later change in the project: in the map, the *scolador* crosses the fields of the '*Pizzon*', whereas in the description it passes

⁶² The name *chiavega* (*chiavica* or *chiusa* in Italian, *lock* in English) probably derived from the Italian word for key (*chiave*), as a key was necessary in order to let the water in and out of the device. If mishandled, it could cause a serious water overflow on the fields surrounding the canals. The realized canal bridge of the Vespara exists to date; it is also mentioned in: Rigobello, *Acqua e bonifiche*, 74.

⁶³ «fatto un disegno, qual è presentato in officio, il qual dimostra il modo di passare detto scolador come si dimostra per una linea rossa sopra di quello.»

above them, *'entrando nell'Arzere che divide il detto Pizzon della Frattesina'*. The different part in the map includes the canal bridge *'CH. SI VORIA FARE'*, whose ink is identical to that used for drawing the Grimani and Badoer villas.

The execution of the project of the *scolador* of the Vespara turned out to be a long and exhausting saga. The noblemen and Marc'Antonio Badoer in particular as the President of the Vespara, were subject to the constant opposition of the smaller landholders, who continuously wrote protests and contradictions, preoccupied that the new diggings would damage and overflow their own lands. The first voices against the project were sounded as early as March 1564, continuing well into the seventeenth century. A series of conventions was defined throughout the years in order to solve these problems, beginning with the visits of surveyors Giovan Battista Remi and Panfilio Piazzuola, sent by the *Beni Inculti* to the area during the early 1570's, who regularly visited the area in the next five years⁶⁴.

Unfortunately, the documents mentioned in the report until the mid-1570's are absent from the archival collections of the *Provveditori sopra i Beni Inculti* conserved in the Venice State Archive, since the collections contain a relatively small portion of documents from the first decades of the establishment of the office. The Correr registry skips directly from 1576 to 1590, but luckily, some original material exists in the Venice State Archive.

By 1579, the *scolador* of the Vespara was finished in its primary state (**doc. 2.2.7**)⁶⁵. However, the excess of rain that year had caused the Castagnaro River to rise too high, overflowing the lands of the Vespara. On 10 August 1579, the presidents of the Vespara sent an appeal to the office of the *Beni Inculti* for the extension of the *scolador* (**doc. 2.2.1**). On 31 October 1579, a letter was sent to the mayor of Rovigo by the *Beni Inculti* in the name of the presidents of the Vespara, stating their approval to construct the *scolador* (**doc. 2.2.2**). On 22 February 1580 the office commissioned the surveyors Giovan Battista Remi and Marchesino Marchesin to visit the area and to decide where to place the new extension (**doc. 2.2.3**).

⁶⁴ See for example doc. 2.1.5 and doc. 2.1.6.

⁶⁵ See also: Rigobello, *Acqua e bonifiche*, 70.

Remi, who was already a frequent visitor of the area, was a renowned surveyor and a friend of the Grimani family. Marchesin is remembered especially for his contribution to the planning of the stone Rialto Bridge with Antonio da Ponte⁶⁶. The suggested extension of the *scolador* would cross the lands of the holdings of Frattesina and the Campagna Vecchia, positioned to the northeast of Fratta Polesine, until the lakes of Adria⁶⁷. The reports of the two surveyors and their new drawing have not been identified in the Venice State Archive⁶⁸.

On 16 February 1590 (1589 m.v.), an important agreement was signed between Marc'Antonio Badoer as president of the Vespara and the presidents of the neighboring Presciana holding, Count Agostino Nani and Count Ferrante Estense Tassone (**doc. 2.1.8**). The presidents of the Presciana were interested in the extension of the *scolador* of the Vespara into their territories, profiting from its position in order to drain the excess water from their own lands. The extension required significant changes in the original project, and a detailed agreement was signed between the presidents of the two holdings. The agreement included a commitment on behalf of the Presciana presidents for significant financial participation⁶⁹. On the same date, Marc'Antonio Badoer, on behalf of himself and his brothers, expressed his preoccupation that the new modification of the *scolador* may cause

⁶⁶ For Marchesin's experience at the Rialto see: Donatella Calabi and Paolo Morachiello, *Rialto: le fabbriche e il ponte, 1514-1591* (Turin: Einaudi, 1987), 236n, 237n, 245 and n, 252, 272n, 281n..

⁶⁷ A map describing part of the area in question, the Campagna Vecchia and the 'Val di Adri', can be found in: ASVe, Beni Inculti, *Padova-Polesine*, rotolo 364, mazzo 28, disegno 1 (14 June 1621), entitled: "CAMPAGNA VECCHIA. zona al nord del canal Castagnaro in territorio di Adria, Polesine di Rovigo."

⁶⁸ Unfortunately, the project was eventually kept on hold for another year or so, because the presidents of the nearby Lendinara holding opposed to it. They claimed that the new extension would pass where they had already requested to position their own *scolador*, whereas the presidents of the Vespara responded that they had the right to continue with the plan, having already received the permission from the *Beni Inculti*. See: ASVe, *Beni Inculti, Suppliche*, b. 27, n. 69. (20 May 1580, "Request of the presidents of the Vespara from the *Beni Inculti*, to refuse to request of the presidents of the Lendinara holding to extend their *scolador* on the same territory that presidents of the Vespara were given permission to extend their own *scolador*"); *Ibid.*, b. 27, n. 81 (9 June 1580, "Request by the presidents of the Lendinara holding from the *Beni Inculti*, to discard the request of the presidents of the Vespara, and to continue to construct their own *Scolador* on the same territory").

⁶⁹ To be paid to the Vespara presidents in two installments. According to the voices in the registry, the Presidents of the Presciana paid their fees on schedule, as planned, in 1590 and in 1591.

damage to the personal water channels of the Badoer household, requiring the presidents of the Prisciana to assume full financial responsibility for any damage that might occur.

After Counts Tassone and Nani had fulfilled their financial obligation, on 18 December 1591, the presidents of the Vespara submitted their request to the *Beni Inculti* for the extension of their *scolador* into the territories of the Prisciana (**doc. 2.1.9**). On 8 January 1592, the two surveyors Antonio Glisenti 'Il Magro' and Ottavio Fabbri were sent to the area with the task to define of the new, modified path of the *scolador* (**doc. 2.1.10**)⁷⁰. Glisenti submitted his report to the office on 23 March 1592, Fabbri on March 26; both of the original documents are conserved in the Venice State Archive (**doc. 2.2.4 and doc. 2.2.5**). In his report, Glisenti declared that they have visited and measured the site for the project, and that he himself drew a map, using a red ink to mark the new project. Fabbri repeated the notification that the new project was drawn by Glisenti, and described in detail the new path of the *scolador*. Above all, the change in the project required shifting the location of the *Ponte Canal della Vespara* higher up in respect to its original position, in a way that would enable it to serve also the lands of Count Ferrante Tassone and Count Nani. On 25 September 1592, the office of the *Beni Inculti* authorized the presidents of the Vespara and the Prisciana to extend the *scolador* according to the guidelines and drawing of Magro and Fabbri⁷¹. On 26 October 1594 the surveyor Zuan Galesi was sent by the *Beni Inculti* to the Vespara holding (**doc. 2.1.13 and doc. 2.2.14**). In his report on the following 6 February 1595, he informed the office about the conclusion of the project (**doc. 2.1.15**)⁷².

A map in full color that accompanies the Correr registry describes the newly built canal bridge in its completed state (**map 5**)⁷³. According to the inscription on it, the drawing was

⁷⁰ See above biography and some bibliographical notes on the figures of Glisenti and Fabbri.

⁷¹ ASVe, *Beni Inculti, Investiture*, b. 410, c. 69 (25 September 1592).

⁷² Giovanni Alvise Galese was an engineer and surveyor at the *Beni Inculti*. In 1594 he was also Vice-Proto at the office of the *Magistrato alle Acque*, where he became Proto in 1602. He was considered an expert in hydraulics and was involved in regulation of fumes, especially of the Brenta. See: Valerio, *Cartografi Veneti*, 176.

⁷³ Lorenzo Giaccaria (after Michiel Borizzo), *Polesine. Dissegno...del sotto Ponte Canale della Brespara*, 7 September 1614. BCVe, Ms. PDC. 2346/VII.

executed on 7 September 1614 by Lorenzo Giaccaria, copied from an original drawing by a surveyor from Lendinara named Michiel Borizzo dating to 9 August 1614, at the request of '*signore Cavaliere et Procurator*' Nani, the heir of Agostino Nani.

1.2.4.2 Technical Analysis of the Pontoni-Trevisi Map

Following the analysis of the contents of the Correr manuscript, in July 2012 a second reading of the Pontoni-Trevisi map took place at the Venice State Archive⁷⁴. In the current observation, it was possible to identify beneath the *Ponte Canal 'CH. SI VORIA FARE'* clear traces of an earlier drawing executed with the older red ink, which had been erased. The erased ink represented the initial track of the *scolador* and *Ponte Canal* desired by Corner, Grimani and Badoer, just as described by the surveyors in 1564: '*entrando nell'Arzere che divide il detto Pizzon della Frattesina*' (**map 1.2**).

On the other hand, the red line that was drawn successively on the map, of the *Ponte Canal 'CH. SI VORIA FARE'*, corresponds perfectly to the modified project planned by Glisenti and Fabbri in 1592: '*remettendolo nello stesso fiume, ove al presente sbocca, mà à basso*'. To the left of the *Ponte Canal 'CH. SI VORIA FARE'*, a text appears in the same handwriting, assigning the part of the manufacture accessed by the Counts of the Persciana: '*CHIAVEGA DEL CONTE FERANTE ET MAG.CO NANI*'. In fact, the *Ponte Canal* in its modified state and the territorial modification of the fields of the Pizzon have survived to our modern days, and can be easily recognized in the aerial view and the photos of the site (**figs. 3, 4, 5 and map 1.2**).

As for the drawing of the two Fratta villas, recalling the Guseo-Giacometti analysis in 2008, their mode of representation differs from the representation of architectural manufactures in the rest of the map and their ink is also unique, and resembles the one used for the modified *Ponte Canal* project of 1592. Although it is probable, there exists no proof that Glisenti was the one to draw the new project or the two villas on the existing Pontoni-Trevisi

⁷⁴ The map was opened in July 2012 at my presence, with the presence and inspection of Prof. Bernard Aikema, Roberta Giacometti and Giovanni Caniato. I would like to express my sincere gratitude for their availability and contribution, and to thank Giovanni Caniato and the director of the Venice State Archive, Raffaele Santoro, for enabling us to perform the examination.

map. However, because the project was concluded by October 1594, it is reasonable to assume that the *Ponte Canal 'CH. SI VORIA FARE'* was added shortly after 1592, or at the most, as late as 1594. Villa Grimani and Villa Badoer could have been added at the same stage⁷⁵.

Above all, these findings have proved that the Pontoni-Trevisi map could not be considered as a valid document for dating Villa Grimani. With great probability, we can assume that it was not constructed in its modern form at the time of drawing the original map (1564). It is also probable that by 1594 it already existed in its present form. A close observation of the portion depicting the villas also reveals a certain discrepancy between the design of the villas and their text labels, which are written in a quick, unorganized manner, overridden by the red ink delineating the villas, as if they were painted after the writing.

1.2.5 Cartographical Observations

An interesting historical detail has come up through the observation of the Pontoni-Trevisi map: a plausible suggestion regarding the location of the house of Giovanni Maria Bonardo in Fratta Polesine⁷⁶. According to Luigi Groto, it is there where Bonardo lived in a solitary manner, performing much of his intellectual activities and conserving his many books⁷⁷. In his own will, Bonardo requested to carefully maintain his house intact, the house which he had personally built in the countryside of Fratta, together with its garden⁷⁸.

⁷⁵ In the late sixteenth century, architectural manufactures were represented in several occasions in plan instead of the traditional axonometry, appearing in maps of several surveyors, which are conserved in the *Beni Inculti* section in the cartographic collection of the Venice State Archive, including Glisenti and Galesi.

⁷⁶ For Giovanni Maria Bonardo and his influence on the cultural ambience of Fratta Polesine see below: 1.3.2.3. *A Crossroad of Cultural Influences: Fratta Polesine*.

⁷⁷ Bonardo, *La grandezza*, introductory letter by Luigi Groto. «copiosi libri ed honorati pensieri».

⁷⁸ ASRo, *Notarile, Simone Lachini*, b. 776, c. 142 (21 September 1590). Given in Fratta. Published in: Malavasi, *Giovanni Maria Bonardo*, 96-103. «a mantener in concio il casino di esso testatore, fatto fabricar da lui nella campagna della Fratta insieme con il giardino che gli è, in modo che non sii mai deteriorito, mai perpetuamente, ed insieme che detto casino dalli suoi heredi sia fabricato da muro, et cinto similmente di muro tutto il giardino in termine di anni cinque. »

When Paola, the youngest Loredan daughter, was to marry Ferrigo Renier, she had sold her cousins, the Badoer brothers, the other half of the Santa Maria Valley. The borders of the territory are accurately described in the notary document. In particular, to the east, it bordered *'mostly with the Scortico River'* and partially with the *'ragion util'* of Giovan Maria Bonardo, and with *'le ragioni'* of her three sisters that remained in their common property (**doc. 1.2.3**)⁷⁹.

The coordinates of the description can be easily identified on the Pontoni-Trevisi map. The east border of the Santa Maria Valley is delimited at its upper or northern end by the private garden of the Grimani villa, hence *'le ragioni'*. Moving downwards across the Scortico towards the Vespara-Presciana canal bridge, only a subtle width of land separates the Santa Maria Valley from the river. At the bottom or southern portion of the valley's east border, a larger piece of land with a large L-shaped porticoed manufacture is highly visible between the valley and the Scortico (**map 1.3**). According to the document, the territory belonged to Giovan Maria Bonardo. If the definition *'ragioni'* in the case of Villa Grimani referred to the domestic garden, and not to a portion of fields, the same definition may apply to the territory that according to the map is the *'ragioni util'* of Bonardo. The manufacture can be therefore identified as his actual house, while the word *'util'* may designate a more practical function of Bonardo's garden in respect to the domestic functionality of the Grimani garden. Another confirmation for the hypothesis is provided by a document some thirty-five years later, when the other half of Villa Grimani Molin had been sold to Vincenzo da Molin by Francesco and Andriana Valier. The property of the garden of the villa bordered to the south with: *'il cason che era, o è, del signor Bonardo Bonardi cavalier'* (**doc. 1.2.8**)⁸⁰.

An important contribution has recently been made to the study of Villa Grimani Molin and Villa Badoer in relationship to their geographical environment. The appearance and the gradual growth of a particular source of clean water in a straight relationship with the

⁷⁹ ASVe, *Notarile, Girolamo Savina*, b. 11889, c. 145v-148v (13 August 1579). Published in: Maschio, *Villa Loredan Grimani*, 169-70, n. 13. «restanti pro indiviso fra questi confini: a mattina il canal del Scortego, per la maggior parte et parte le ragion utili del magnifico cavallier Bonardo, et parte le ragioni di esse tre magnifiche sorelle restanti pro indiviso.»

⁸⁰ BCVe, Ms. PD. 515c/14, c. 1-8 (20 February 1615). Published in: Maschio, *Villa Loredan Grimani*, 174-176 n. 18.

construction of the villas have been identified through the observation of the three sixteenth century maps⁸¹. This typology of water source, called *gorgo*, refers to a small pool of water that is typically formed in the Polesine because of the tendency of the rivers and water channels to create 'breaks' or overflows. Gorgos were regularly marked as such in historical hydraulic maps. In the Pontoni-Trevisi map they appear several times, described as a round pool attached to a main linear water stream, usually denoted by a small inscription, '*gorgo*'. In the Cortivo-Gastaldi map, many *gorgos* are marked in the same manner, in the exact geographical coordinates as in the Pontoni-Trevisi map, with no inscription.

The Fratta *gorgo*, marked out but untagged in the Pontoni-Trevisi map, is of notable dimensions. It appears on the west bank of the Scortico River, where a strong tri-lateral relationship is visible to date in the planimetry, marked by two main poles, represented by the two villas and by the natural entity (**map 1.1**). Today, its exact location is identified with the notable depression of the terrain, covered in vegetation, where Via Bragola approaches the crossroads with Via Zabarella, turning halfway around the ex-*gorgo* (**fig. 2.1**).

The examination of the three historical maps shows how in 1549 the *gorgo* had not yet been formed (**map 3**). In 1557, a small *gorgo* is already clearly visible on the channel that leads up to Villa Badoer, which apparently did not drain into the Scortico River but stopped beforehand (**map 2.1**). The portion of the villas and *gorgo* on the Pontoni-Trevisi map, which was probably depicted in the date of the creation of the map, shows that by now, the *gorgo* has reached larger dimensions. Significantly, it is possible to identify in the 1564 map a series of small channels that had been dug up between the *gorgo* and the Badoer gardens, and between the *gorgo* and the Grimani territory, allowing the water to flow from the *gorgo* channel into the Scortico River north of the Grimani villa, and

⁸¹ The finding was presented in: Guseo, "I mezzi dell'arcano." The following passages are based on the recent conference paper which had discussed the evolvement of the research in the recent years: Meital Shai and Simone Guseo, "L'emergenza idrogeologica come opportunità: le bonifiche del Polesine nelle ville venete del '500" (paper presented at *Fuori dall'ordinario, la città di fronte a catastrofi ed eventi eccezionali*, the 5th Conference of the Italian Association of Urban History [AISU], Università Roma Tre, Rome, 8-10 September 2011, in course of publication).

southwards along the '*giardino*'. A small *chiavica* was positioned on the crossroad between both villas and the *gorgo*, marked in a small red line, enabling to control the water flow from the channel and into the villas.

Verifications developed in collaboration with the Adige Po Land Reclamation Consortium (*Consorzio di Bonifica Adige Po*), with the aid of Carlo Piombo and the engineer Giovanni Veronese, have put into evidence the direct dependence of the project of the settlement of the two households with the water of the *gorgo*. In particular, the west side of Villa Badoer contains an ancient construction, today covered in land, which was exposed during the latest works in its garden. A real and proper bath was destined for the collection of the water, which with great probability was that of the *gorgo*⁸².

The appearance of a *gorgo* represents a serious problem, since control of its water levels must be handled with great care. The reclamation of the *gorgo* was possible thanks to an artificial control system of its water through underground channels realized in terracotta and in brick, whose existence was confirmed during the last works of street and pavement restoration in the area between the two villas⁸³. Significantly, before draining its water in a nearby Canal Bridge, the channels brought it to the two villas. It was in fact healthy and resurgence water, which was not subject to any public tax.

⁸² The report dates to 29 September 2009, and is signed by C. Piombo, the general director of the Adige Adige-Canalbianco Consortium (today Adige Po), and Eng. G. Veronese. Several specific considerations of altitudes have compared the slopes of the nearby terrains and of the garden of Villa Badoer, with the hydraulic behavior and the directionality of the drainages. It has been demonstrated that it is plausible that a water upturn existed, which differed from the general system of the slopes, and was therefore completely autonomous. In regard to the *gorgo* the report states: «Interessante è considerare l'aspetto idraulico dei due prestigiosi fabbricati [*Villa Badoer and Villa Grimani*], in quanto serviti da notevoli quantità d'acqua provenienti sia dallo Scortico, attraverso una specifica derivazione, che da una risorgiva (*gorgo*) ubicata fra le due ville. »

⁸³ The last works of street and pavement restoration in the area between the two villas have confirmed the presence of underground terracotta water channels that were part of the complex system of the project, whose authors are necessarily related to the owners of the two villas. The series of underground channels has been covered up, but the hydraulic solutions are still evident today in a superficial manner, by several manufactures such as the *chiavicas* inserted just at the center of the indicated equilateral triangle, represent an original sign of Fratta of the sixteenth century.

The identification of the *gorgo* and its hydraulic manipulation enables the consideration of the project of the villas as a project in straight relationship with the presence of clean and healthy water, adapted for the realization of one or more fishponds, where it was easily possible to drink water, breed and conserve fresh fish and cure oneself. The hydraulic emergency that had been formed in their shared portion of the Santa Maria Valley was thus converted by the owners of the two villas into a precious water source by means of their technological ability⁸⁴. The operation, as we shall see ahead, was proudly and innovatively documented in the fresco program of Villa Badoer⁸⁵.

1.3 CULTURAL HISTORY

1.3.1 A Crossroad of Cultural Influences: Fratta Polesine

In its modern form, the town of Fratta Polesine was founded at the end of the eleventh century, and like much of the territory of the Polesine, throughout the Late Middle Ages and the Early Renaissance it belonged to the Duchy of Ferrara. During the sixteenth century, the town still enjoyed a strategic location as a crucial economical and cultural crossroad between Emilia Romagna and the Veneto. After the war of the League of Cambrai (1508-1516), the lands surrounding it had been auctioned by the Republic to its noblemen. It was then when Giovan Francesco Loredan and his partners, probably the Corner family, had acquired 2,000 fields at the Rialto on 13 July 1519 for the underrated cost of 23 ducats per-field⁸⁶.

Fratta profited from the arrival of the Venetian nobility, who traveled between Venice and the foreign courts and participated together with the local inhabitants in the academies

⁸⁴ For the Valley of Santa Maria as a shared Badoer-Grimani property see below, section 1.4.2.

⁸⁵ See chapter IV, section 4.3.2 and fig. 149.

⁸⁶ Maschio, "Dimore degli dei," 11; Puppi, *Villa Badoer*, 30 n. 15; and note 2 above.

and in 'villa culture'. Its special location enabled the formation of a cultural melting pot, fusing influences from the residing nobles and their visitors from the lagoon, from the nearby Rovigo, from Padua and Vicenza, as well as from the duchies of Ferrara and Mantua. To a wide extent, these contacts were maintained through relationships with the intellectual academies in the mainland, which themselves flourished in the Polesine. All of these factors determined Fratta's character as a dynamic center of lively cultural and intellectual activities, which were reflected in the formation of its two Venetian villas⁸⁷.

The most significant contribution to the formation of cultural activities in Fratta Polesine in the sixteenth century may be attributed to the charismatic and highly educated marquise Lucrezia Gonzaga. Lucrezia, who originated from the Gonzaga court at Gazzuolo in the Mantovano, arrived to town in 1541, to live at the palace possessed by her newly wed husband Giampaolo Manfrone, a captain at the service of the Serenissima. Manfrone died in 1552, and Lucrezia continued to live in Fratta until 1574, gathering in her tower and garden a group of literates from the first line, unified by the bond of friendship and courtesy, and maintaining regular and friendly contacts with the nobles that frequented the area⁸⁸.

Between 1548 and 1554 Lucrezia's counselor was Ortensio Lando (1510-c.1558), a the man of letters and one of the most interesting figures of Italian heterodoxy in the first half of the sixteenth century⁸⁹. When he had left, or passed away, Giovanni Maria Bonardo took his place as Lucrezia's right-hand man⁹⁰. Paolo Almerico was another dear friend of Lucrezia; he

⁸⁷ Aldo Stella, "Contatti di culture e movimenti eterodossi nel '500 polesano," in Olivieri, *Eresie, magia, società*, 13; Franco Rizzi, "Le socialità profonde: la famiglia di Luigi Groto il Cieco d'Adria," in *Luigi Groto e il suo tempo: atti del Convegno di studi, Adria, 27-29 aprile 1984*, eds. G. Brunello and A. Lodo (Rovigo: Minelliana, 1987), 40-49.

⁸⁸ In the last years of her life, Lucrezia Gonzaga moved to Mantua, where she died in 1576 of illness. See: Primo Griguolo, "Lucrezia Gonzaga (1524-1576)," in *Lettere: con appendice di nuovi documenti*, Lucrezia Gonzaga, eds. R. Bragantini and P. Griguolo (Rovigo: Minelliana, 2009), XXIX-XXX; *Ibid.*, "Fratta nel Cinquecento, aspetti e figure della cultura letteraria," in *Fratta Polesine: la storia* (Rovigo: Minelliana, 1990), 115-116.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 116. Lando had spent the years 1548-1554 in Fratta. He was an important religious reformist, known for his translation of Thomas More's *Utopia*, a fiction on political philosophy, merging Classical writings with the views of Erasmus. See: Luigi Firpo, ed., *Utopia*. Thomas More, trad. Ortensio Lando (Naples: Guida, 2000).

⁹⁰ Griguolo, "Fratta nel Cinquecento," 119.

was also introduced to Bonardo. Almerico is known to have visited Lucrezia in Fratta, inviting her to his own property in 1553, later to become a masterpiece of Palladio⁹¹.

In the letters written by Lucrezia Gonzaga to some of her friends and acquaintances, first published as early as 1552, Lucrezia demonstrated having a rather intimate relationship with Vincenzo Grimani, as well as Lunardo Emo, who later became his son-in-law. In her letter to Vincenzo, he received cynical treatment from her: because he had spoken rudely about women, Lucrezia saw it necessary to reprove him for his hunting hobby, which she described as dangerous and time-consuming. In her letter to Lunardo, he was warmly invited by her to stay at her humble hotel in Fratta. His intention to arrive at the town was communicated to her by their mutual and dear friend, Ortensio Lando⁹². A notary act from 1553 testifies the courtesy of Lucrezia concerning Vincenzo and Francesco Badoer, when she released the brothers-in-law from a long and binding land-leasing contract that they had previously accorded with her husband⁹³.

Giovanni Maria Bonardo, a native of Fratta Polesine, was an administrator and procurator in the town, but above all a man of letters, who wrote about arguments related to agriculture, astronomy and philosophy⁹⁴. He was not noble; earlier in the century, his father was the factor of the Loredan household in Fratta. However, his family possessed the financial means to support his studies, and throughout his life, he had acquired the

⁹¹ Stefania Malavasi, *Giovanni Maria Bonardo: agronomo polesano del Cinquecento* (Venice: Deputazione di storia patria per le Venezie, 1988), 34-35. Almerico is known to have visited Lucrezia in Fratta, and has invited her to his own property around 1553, which was later to become a masterpiece of Palladio, were some madrigals recited in honor of the event.

⁹² Gonzaga, *Lettere: con appendice*, n. XXXVIII and n. CCCIX. See also: Lucrezia Gonzaga, *Lettere della molto illustre sig. la sig.ra donna Lucretia Gonzaga da Gazuolo con gran diligentia raccolte, & à gloria del sesso femminile nuovamente in luce poste* (Venice: Gualtero Scotto, 1552), 51-52, 326.

⁹³ ASRo, *Notarile, Bartolomeo Bisogna*, b. 140, reg. P, c. 155v (8 February 1553, in Fratta). Published in: Contegiacomo, "Genesi di un sogno: le origini," 44 n. 29.

⁹⁴ On Giovanni Maria Bonardo see especially: Stefania Malavasi, *Giovanni Maria Bonardo*. Among his most familiar texts: *La grandezza, et larghezza, et distanza, di tutte le sfere...* (Venice: Fabio & Agostino Zoppini, 1584), contains a detailed commentary by Luigi Grotto; *Le ricchezze dell'agricoltura dell'illustre sig. Giovanmaria Bonardo Fratteggiano... Mandate in luce da Luigi Grotto, cieco di Hadria* (Venice: Fabio & Agostino Zoppini, 1584); *La minera del mondo...* (Venice: Fabio & Agostino Zoppini, 1585).

titles of Count, Cavalier, and even Baron. Bonardo received the title of Cavalier by Doge Francesco Valier in 1554. His nomination as Baron of the Order of the Golden Spur (*Ordo Militiae Aureate*), so far unpublished to my knowledge, was identified in series of investitures performed in his name, dating to the last years of his life, ca. 1588-1589⁹⁵.

The *Accademia dei Pastori fratteggiani*, founded by Bonardo around 1562, attracted to Fratta and to the court of Lucrezia Gonzaga figures such as Luigi Groto, the Florentine Ludovico Domenichi (1515-1564), the Venetian writer and publisher Ludovico Dolce (1508-1568), the writer and cartographer Girolamo Ruscelli (1518-1566), Giovan Battista Maganza, and Ortensio Lando. The Fratta academy also included heterodox nobles from Vicenza, such as Manfredo da Porto, the Thiene brothers Francesco and Sartorio, and Giacomo Tiepolo. In fact, nearly all of the members of the academy were associated with the heretic world of the period, and involved in trials for heresy⁹⁶. All of the figures in the academy were frequent attendants of Venice and Padua, enabling exchanges of ideas and above all, the diffusion of prohibited writings. Several members of the academy were book publishers, and the quest for books and their exchange among the members was a frequent activity of the academy⁹⁷.

The blind poet Luigi Groto was one of the more influential and culturally involved figures that regularly frequented Fratta Polesine in the second half of the sixteenth century, from 1563 until his death in 1585. Although he became blind shortly after birth, he began his literary career at a very young age, reciting orations and writing sonnets, and during his elderly life, he wrote many comedies and tragedies. Groto maintained multiple personal contacts with noblemen and with other influential figures in the Veneto. He first

⁹⁵ ASRo, *Notarile, Marino Filippi*, b. 502, reg. F, c. 1023, c. 1051, c. 1054 and c. 1125. Bonardo is nominated «Magnificus Comes, et Baronus». His heir and nephew, Bonardo Bonardi, had inherited the title: ASRo, *Notarile, Simone Lachini*, b. 776, c. 470 (8 June 1595) «Bonardo Bonardi Eques et Barones Illustrissime militie aureate».

⁹⁶ Malavasi, «Cultura religiosa e cultura laica», 63, 67. For Dolce and Domenichi: Malavasi, *Giovanni Maria Bonardo*, 25-27. For the Vicentines: Olivieri, *Palladio, le Corti*; Malavasi, *Giovanni Maria Bonardo*, 33-34.

⁹⁷ Malavasi, *Giovanni Maria Bonardo*, 21-22.

encountered Ludovico Dolce in 1564. In 1569, he exchanged letters and poetry with Lucrezia Gonzaga, and in 1571 he became a member of Bonardo's academy in Fratta⁹⁸.

Groto participated in many activities of academies in the Veneto throughout his life. In Rovigo he was a member of the *Accademia degli Addormentati*⁹⁹. In 1564 he founded in his native Adria the *Accademia degli Illustrati*, where many cultural discussions had been held¹⁰⁰. He was a member of the academy of Costozza during the same years that Bonardo was operating in Fratta. Groto makes specific reference to the Eolia academy in a letter to Francesco Trento in 1580¹⁰¹. In 1584, he accepted the invitation of the *Accademia Olimpica* in Vicenza to recite the part of Tiresia in Sophocles' *Oedipus*¹⁰².

Groto was particularly knowledgeable of the writings of Erasmus, which appear in many of his works, and are reflected by his connections with many figures associated with these forms of knowledge, as revealed in his publication *Lettere ai familiari*¹⁰³. In 1567, only 26 years old, he was processed for heresy, forced to public abjuration and banned from teaching. The action was taken against him after twenty-seven printed books and a manuscript were sequestered from his house in Adria, dealing with the incarnation of Christ and with the idea of love towards one's enemies. He was accused that being blind, in asking disciples to read for him, he had exposed them to his heretic ideas. Several books, such as Agrippa's *De vanitate scientiarum* and *De occulta philosophia*, had been acquired by him in Venice, while three books were given to him by Bonardo¹⁰⁴.

⁹⁸ "Cronologia." In Brunello and Lodo, *Luigi Groto e il suo tempo*, 15-21.

⁹⁹ Rizzi, "Le socialità profonde," 41.

¹⁰⁰ Malavasi, *Giovanni Maria Bonardo*, 31; Malavasi, "Cultura religiosa e cultura laica," 63.

¹⁰¹ On 13 September 1580, published in: Van der Sma, *La decorazione a fresco*, 64-65.

¹⁰² Brunello and Lodo 1984, *Luigi Groto e il suo tempo*, 20-21.

¹⁰³ Luigi Groto, *Lettere famigliari...* (Venice: Giuochino Brugnolo, 1601). As demonstrated by Malavasi, "La fortuna di Erasmo attraverso gli stampatori-tipografi dell'Accademia dei Pastori Frattegiani," in *Erasmus, Venezia e la cultura padana, Atti del XIX Convegno internazionale di Studi Storici, Rovigo 8-9 maggio 1993*, ed. A. Olivieri (Rovigo: Minelliana 1995), 293; Rizzi, "Le socialità profonde," 40.

¹⁰⁴ Giovanni Mantese and Mariano Nardello, *Due processi per eresia: la vicenda religiosa di Luigi Groto, il Cieco di Adria, e della nobile vicentina Angelica Pigafetta-Piovene* (Vicenza: Officine Grafiche, 1974), 41-50, 85-86; Rizzi, "Le socialità profonde," 39; Malavasi, *Giovanni Maria Bonardo*, 23.

The condemnation did not prevent Groto from continuing to develop his interest in sciences and in occult practices. Shortly afterwards, in 16 Nov 1567, he was at Fratta in the house of Bonardo at the presence of Venetian noblemen, where he predicted that in that year the rivers will overflow and cause damage all over Italy. He based his prediction on considerations from astronomy, natural physics and pure Cabala¹⁰⁵. In 1582, when the Gregorian calendar was introduced, he responded by providing his own ephemerid for the coming 18 years, 1583-1600¹⁰⁶. Groto performed one of his orations in 1584 in the Olivetan monastery of San Bartolomeo in Rovigo, where Barnaba Riccoboni was promoting his astronomical and astrological activities¹⁰⁷.

Lucrezia Gonzaga and her court are only one in a series of testimonies for the presence of figures from Mantua in Fratta during the sixteenth century. Mantuan presence is recorded in town since the time that the Loredan and Corner families had begun to acquire lands and houses in the area. The insertion of Giovan Francesco and his son Zorzi into Fratta in the first two decades of their arrival was gradual, and was particularly related to their business affairs with the influential family from Mantua, the Zafardi, who possessed properties in the area¹⁰⁸. In 1545, the joint factor or land manager of Vincenzo Grimani and Francesco Badoer was the Mantuan Girolamo de Toledo¹⁰⁹. Heretic and esoteric books also arrived to town from Mantua. Such is the example of an edition of Agrippa's *De occulta*

¹⁰⁵ Groto, *Lettere*, 182-183; Rizzi, "Le socialità profonde," 46.

¹⁰⁶ Groto, *Lettere*, 475-481; Rizzi, "Le socialità profonde," 47.

¹⁰⁷ Adriano Mazzetti, "L'ambiente culturale rodigino tra cinque e seicento. Le accademie." In Brunello and Lodo, *Luigi Groto e il suo tempo*, 79.

¹⁰⁸ Maschio, "Dimore degli dei," 12. See also: Contegiacomo, "Genesi di un sogno: le origini," 42 n. 2. ASRo, *Notarile, Giacomo Celega*, b. 394, reg. T, c. 34 (2 February 1528): Nicolò Zafardi from Mantua was present as testimony at the house of Giovan Francesco Loredan in Fratta; Contegiacomo, "Genesi di un sogno: le origini," 42 n. 9. *Ibid.*, reg. X, c. 42v (1 October 1531): at the house of Giovan Francesco, Nicolò sold a part of land, 'La Palina', probably the 'paulina' which will eventually pass into the Loredan property.

¹⁰⁹ Contegiacomo, "Genesi di un sogno: le origini," 43 n. 2. ASRo, *Notarile, Giovanni Andrea Litegati*, b. 859, reg. dell' anno 1545, c. 8v (19 January 1528). «Girolamo de' Toledo di Mantova, fattore, negoziatore e gestore di Francesco Badoer e di Vincenzo Grimani [...]»

philosophia, mentioned during the trial of Groto, which Bonardo informed the inquisitor that he had received from '*il Signor Silvio Calandra gentilhuomo mantovano*'¹¹⁰.

In an interesting letter recently found in the Mantua State Archives, it appears that before marrying Vincenzo's daughter Cornelia, Lunardo Emo had performed an official sojourn in Mantua. On 22 August 1554, he wrote a letter to the Ferrara Duke, Ercole II d'Este. At the time, Lunardo resided in Mantua, '*nilla arivatta del ser.mo di Boimia*'¹¹¹. Another letter testifying Lunardo's affairs with the Ferrara Duke to was found in the same collection of documents. It dates to 9 November 1557, and was written from Venice.

While a known notary document from 1579 informs that Bonardo's house confined with the territory of Villa Grimani Molin (**doc. 1.2.3**)¹¹², the current archival campaign in the Rovigo State Archive has raised some evidence regarding the close relationships that Bonardo maintained with the Badoer family. In the last years of his life, Bonardo was personally present in Villa Badoer during the performance of several notary acts. In July 1588, he operated as a mediator in the name of Marc'Antonio Badoer in a peace treaty between several inhabitants of the area¹¹³. The regular connections between the Bonardo and Badoer families proceeded with Giovanni Maria's nephew and heir, Cavaliere Bonardo Bonardi, who was often present in the Palladian villa and who was frequently involved in business with the

¹¹⁰ Malavasi, *Giovanni Maria Bonardo*, 24. See also above, note 104.

¹¹¹ ASMo, *Particolari*, b. 477, reg. Emo (22 August 1554). Addressed to the Duke of Ferrara and signed by Lunardo Emo. «Credo che la Eccellentia Sua inatta bonta et cortesia possi haver a memoria il principio della servitu mia verso di lei: havendomene gia dimostrato segno amorevolissimo. nel tempo lasi ritrovo in Mantoa nilla arivatta del ser.mo di Boimia: ch' la si degno accetarmi per suo vero et afficionado servitor come li son et sero in ogni grata occasion, et sapro mai poterli far servitio che da quil tempo impoi ho sempre attesto ad ogni mio desiderio di poter haver tanta gratia che si havisri possuto dimostrar giusto mio prontissimo animo [...]»

¹¹² See above note 78.

¹¹³ ASRo, *Notarile, Marin Filippi*, b. 502, reg. A, c. 27v (14 July 1588). «Havendo il Magnifico Signore Giovanni Maria Bonardo Cavaliere intervenente al nome del Clarissimo Signore Marc'Antonio Badoero a trattar pace fra messer Francesco Arivaben et figliuoli, et [...] per una parte. et Signore Antonio Maria Biscuola, et [...] per l'altra parte, di qui è che per tenor della presente scrittura il sopradetto signor Cavaliere, a Instantia delli sopradetti messer Francesco Arivaben, et [...], adimanda, in nome del sudetto Clarissimo Signore Marc'Antonio Badoero la Pace al sudetto Antonio Maria Biscuola, et [...]. et a prieghi del sudetto Signore Cavaliere Jo. ». Earlier that year, in January, Bonardo was present in Villa Badoer with Marc'Antonio Badoer and Camillo Zabarella, a nobleman originally from Padua who lived in Fratta: ASRo, *Notarile, Marin Filippi*, b. 502, reg. F, c. 1138.

Badoer family¹¹⁴. Giallo Fiorentino's fresco program of Villa Badoer has been associated by scholars with the poetic and esoteric activities of Bonardo's academy in Fratta, suggesting a cultural exchange of ideas between the two households. The relationships documented in the archive provide further support to the hypothesis that some activities of the academy may have taken place in Francesco Badoer's Palladian villa¹¹⁵.

1.3.2 The Grimani Household and the Venetian Patrician Circle

The main protagonist of the Villa Grimani Molin in Fratta Polesine was the only male figure to continue the dynasty of one of the pivotal noble families of sixteenth-century Venice, the Grimani of Santa Maria Formosa. Born on 28 January 1525 (1524 *more veneto*), Vincenzo is recognized as the universal heir of the family as early as 1529, a serious responsibility that would predispose his fortune throughout his life¹¹⁶. While it may have been a responsibility, it was also a grand privilege, since Vincenzo maintained regular contacts with some of the most intriguing figures of Venetian noblemen, humanists, churchmen, merchants, art collectors and politicians who had shaped the history and culture of the Venetian Republic throughout the sixteenth century. His many sons and daughters born through two successive marriages carried forward the family heritage, assuming pivotal religious roles and marrying noble men and women from the same intimate circle. These connections enabled the conception of the family villa in Fratta Polesine, determining the choice of its location, the

¹¹⁴ For example, Bonardo Bonardi was present as a witness on at least two occasions, when the Grimani family factor was signing a land lease contract on behalf of Cornelia Grimani Emo: ASRo, *Notarile, Simone Lachini*, b. 776, c. 5 and c. 209 (6 June 1597, and 12 December 1591). He was also a witness or participant in several acts that took place in Villa Badoer, such as: ASRo, *Notarile, Marin Filippi*, b. 503, reg. G, c. 1537 (1 November 1592, Investiture); *Ibid.*, c. 1945 (14 March 1596); *Ibid.*, reg. H, c. 2474 (28 October 1593).

¹¹⁵ Suggested for example by: Malavasi, *Giovanni Maria Bonardo*, 35.

¹¹⁶ Vincenzo was referred to as «herede unico et universale» by his grandparents in his arranged marriage contract with Lucrezia Loredan on 15 January 1529, a copy of which was presented when the actual marriage took place in 1541. ASVe, *Avogaria di Comun*, reg. 145, c. 137r-139v (18 January 1541). Printed in Maschio, *Villa Loredan Grimani*, 159-161 n. 4.

character of its engineering operations and its architectural design, and above all, the formulation of the erudite iconographical program of the fresco decorations of the villa.

Palazzo Grimani in Santa Maria Formosa was donated on 2 July 1500 by the future Doge Antonio to three of his sons, Vincenzo, Girolamo and Pietro. After the death of Pietro and Girolamo, the *piano nobile* remained in the hands of and Girolamo's sons Vettor, Marco and Giovanni. Vincenzo the Elder, the grandfather of the protagonist of the Fratta villa, occupied the second floor. Following the death of his son Antonio, the widowed Isabetta Pisani, Vincenzo Junior's mother, had received the second floor of the palace as part of the restitution of her dowry. When she remarried to Giovanni Mocenigo in 1532, she trusted her portion in the hands of Vettor Grimani. When Marco Grimani died in 1544, Giovanni and Vettor remained the only owners of the palace; when Vettor died in 1558, Giovanni acquired the entire second floor from Isabetta and from his deceased brother's wife, Isabella Giustinian, remaining the solemn owner of the palace¹¹⁷.

Desiring to secure the future of their grandson, on 15 January 1529 Vincenzo the Elder and Isabetta Soranzo signed an arranged marriage contract in the name of Vincenzo Junior, promising him to Lucrezia Loredan. On the occasion, Vincenzo was trusted in the hands of his future father-in-law, Giovan Francesco. However, Giovan Francesco died already in 1531, and the original custodian, Vincenzo the Elder, died in September 1532 **(doc. fig. 1)**. The only adult figures who therefore remained in charge of the education of the young child were the dominant grandmother Isabetta Soranzo, the mother Isabetta Pisani, who was however somewhat distant having just remarried, and the great uncles, the sons of Girolamo Grimani who were occupying the palace in Santa Maria Formosa.

It is certainly not casual that in 1567, when Vincenzo nominated the only four family figures that he retained the closest to him as his testament executors, they were his

¹¹⁷ Rodolfo Gallo, "Michele Sanmicheli a Venezia," in *Michele Sanmicheli: studi raccolti dall'Accademia di Agricoltura Scienze e Lettere di Verona per la celebrazione del 4. centenario della morte* (Verona: Valdonega, 1960), 127, 158 n. 3; Manuela Morresi, *Jacopo Sansovino* (Milan: Electa, 2000), 236. ASVe, *Archivio Privato Grimani di Santa Maria Formosa*, b. 1, c. 26-29.

second wife Andriana Emo, his mother, the patriarch of Aquileia Giovanni Grimani, and Antonio, at the time the Abbot-Elect of Sesto, the son of Vettor Grimani. After the death of Vettor, Vincenzo was the closest remaining relative of Giovanni Grimani. In his own will Giovanni, who eventually outlived his great-nephew, bequeathed the palace in Santa Maria Formosa to Vincenzo's sons. He also nominated them as his future heirs, and shortly after his death, they were already actively managing his properties¹¹⁸.

Throughout the years, Vincenzo Junior seems to have maintained regular contacts with the intimate circle of patricians that surrounded Vettor and Giovanni, in their palace, as in the family church, San Francesco della Vigna. In fact, he was involved quite early in his life in the proceedings for the erection of the façade of the vineyard church. As executors of the will of their uncle Domenico, in April 1542 Vettor and his brother Cardinal Marino (d. 1546) obtained a free license for the right to use the external façade as a site for the monument of their Doge grandfather¹¹⁹. Two months later, Vettor received permission from the friars of the monastery to make use of the internal façade, with the right to position monuments for himself and for his own heirs¹²⁰. Up until that point, the church of Sant'Antonio in Castello

¹¹⁸ For Giovanni Grimani's will see: ASVe, *Testamenti, Vettore Maffei*, b. 658, n. 396 (29 August 1592). Published in: Marina Stefani Mantovanelli, *Arte e committenza nel Cinquecento in area veneta: fonti archivistiche e letterarie* (Padova: Alceo, 1990), 51-56. After Giovanni's death see: ASVe, *Notarile, Gaspar Fabio*, b. 5860 (un-numbered pages, 17 November 1597), «Per il Testamento del quondam Illustrissimo, et Illustrissimo Monsignore Giovanni Grimani già Patriarcha d'Aquilegia, compito eroborato per messer Vettor di Maffei notaro di Venetia à doi Settembre 1592, è stato beneficiato il Reverendo Don Giovanni Ruscina[?] di Santo Daniele, già suo Capellano di ducati trentasei l'anno misura di livello, nonostante la quale con ordinatione contentandosi esso Reverendo Don Giovanni di quanto qui a basso si dirà, Spontaneamente Ha cesso, e liberamente rinunciato Al Clarissimo Domenico Grimani, fu del Clarissimo Signore Vicentio presente, et accetante per nome suo, e per nome anco delli altri Signori suoi fratelli e del nobile messer Vicentio Grimani loro nipote, fu del Clarissimo Piero ogni ragione, attione, e beneficio, che gli può spettare, et appartenere nelli beni, et heredità del sopradetto quondam Illustrissimo Signore Patriarcha per questione del detto suo legato, di modo tale, che il sopradetto Testamento quah esso sij cessata ogni sua presentione [...]».

¹¹⁹ ASVe, *S. Francesco della Vigna*, b. 2, part i, c. 437-440. Deborah Howard, *Jacopo Sansovino: architecture and patronage in Renaissance Venice* (New Haven; London: Yale university press, 1975), 173 n. 40.

¹²⁰ ASVe, *S. Francesco della Vigna*, b. 2, part i, b. 440-443. Howard, *Jacopo Sansovino*, 173 n. 42. According to Howard, the final outcome was that three Grimani sarcophagi, of the two Cardinals Domenico and Marino, and of the Patriarch of Aquileia, Marco Grimani, were erected on the inside of the facade wall above the main door. They were described in this position in all three editions of Francesco Sansovino's guide *Venezia città nobilissima*, but have since disappeared.

had been designated for the tombs of the Grimani family, where a monumental work for the commemoration of the Doge and his son Pietro had earlier been planned. In March 1544, supported by the request of the court of law, Vettor obtained the right to transform to San Francesco della Vigna the finances that were originally destined for the Castello church.

In December that year, Marino, as will executor, and his great-nephew Vincenzo agreed upon the erection of the monument on the façade of San Francesco della Vigna, '*where the foundations have been laid*,' with the accordance of Vettor¹²¹. At the time, the façade was to be trusted in the hands of Sansovino, who had already been working on the building for several years, though as for the façade, to date no documentary or visible traces remain from his work¹²². The monastery of Sant'Antonio in Castello continued to claim rights for the Grimani façade, which were transferred in a definite manner to San Francesco della Vigna after the death of Vettor, when Giovanni acquired the chapel that his brother had originally purchased for himself. Palladio completed the façade in 1565, two years before Vincenzo Junior wrote his will, in which he specifically required to be buried in San Francesco della Vigna. His namesake grandfather and custodian had already purchased the right for his own burial in 1538 (the third chapel on the left)¹²³.

Vincenzo was also closely related to other prominent patrician families involved in the reconstruction of the vineyard church, whether through marriage, through kinship, or both. He was a first-degree cousin of the Barbaro brothers, Daniele and Marc'Antonio (1518-1585). His mother Isabetta was the sister of their mother Elena Pisani. Daniele, who is remembered especially for his Vitruvian commentary and his collaboration with Palladio, published many books throughout his life, including a dialog on eloquence, a treatise on perspective and a manuscript on gnomonics. In 1550, he was selected by Giovanni Grimani as Patriarch Elect of Aquileia, and in the first half of the 1560's he directed the renovation

¹²¹ «ubi iam iacta sunt fundamenta». ASVe, *Sant'Antonio di Castello*, t. X, c. 58r-58v, 61r (6 December 1544).
Published in: Foscari and Tafuri, *L'armonia e i conflitti*, 202-204, app. 8.

¹²² Howard, *Jacopo Sansovino*, 69; Foscari and Tafuri, *L'armonia e i conflitti*, 135-136 and n. 19.

¹²³ Howard, *Jacopo Sansovino*, 159, app. II. «12 Apr 1537, Vincenzo Grimani Procurator, chapel n. 11, 200 ducats, b. 2, 250-255».

of the Franciscan church¹²⁴. According to Antonio Foscari and Manfredo Tafuri, he may have been the one to recommend Palladio for the work on the church façade¹²⁵. Marc'Antonio Barbaro led a long life and a highly respected political career as an ambassador of the Serenissima. He is remembered especially for his service in the court of Francois I, and for his position of the *bailo* of Constantinople during and after the battle of Lepanto (1571), after which he was awarded the honor of becoming Procurator of Saint Mark's for Life. Marc'Antonio was also a close friend and patron of Palladio, and of his most recognized successor, Vincenzo Scamozzi (1548-1616)¹²⁶.

Their father, Francesco Barbaro (1488/89-1549), was the first in a list of respectable patricians to obtain concession for burial rights and family a chapel in San Francesco della Vigna (before 21 November 1535). Daniele himself requested to be buried in a humble manner at the church courtyard in an unmarked location¹²⁷. Francesco's brother, Fra Zuanne Barbaro, played a crucial role in the initiation of the project of the renovation of the church in 1535. As the superior monk of the monastery, he took special responsibility for the administration of the new design by Sansovino with the recommendations of Francesco Zorzi¹²⁸. The combined initiative and energy of Zorzi and Barbaro in organizing the building of the new church is commemorated by an inscription on the choir¹²⁹. Vincenzo must have therefore known his

¹²⁴ For Daniele Barbaro: P. J. Laven, "*Daniele Barbaro: patriarch elect of Aquileia: with special reference to his circle of scholars and to his literary achievement*" (PhD diss., University of London, 1957), and the bibliography on Villa Barbaro below, note 130.

¹²⁵ Foscari and Tafuri, *L'armonia e i conflitti*, 143.

¹²⁶ For Marc'Antonio Barbaro see especially: Charles Yriarte, *La vie d'un patricien de Venise au seizième siècle* (Paris: J. Rothschild, 1874); Deborah Howard, *Venice Disputed: Marc'Antonio Barbaro and Venetian Architecture: 1550-1600* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2011).

¹²⁷ Howard, *Jacopo Sansovino*, 159, app. II. «pre-21 Nov 1535, Francesco Barbaro q. Daniele, chapel n. 5r, ? ducats, b. 2 part i, 367». For Daniele Barbaro's burial: Bruce Boucher, "The Last Will of Daniele Barbaro," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 42 (1979): 281.

¹²⁸ Howard, *Jacopo Sansovino*, 172 n. 26. On 25 May 1537 Fra Zuanne Barbaro was officially appointed «commissario e presidente della Fabrica» by the Provincial Superior and Committee of the Franciscan order, and given authority to concede altars and chapels. The General Ministry of the *Frați Minori* confirmed Barbaro's responsibility for the building on 28 May 1546.

¹²⁹ Howard, *Jacopo Sansovino*, 66. «HONORI AC MERITIS CLARISS. PATRVM NOBILIVM VENETOR. FRANCISCI ZORZI ET IO. BARBARO REGVL. OBSERV. S. P. N. FRANC. QVI DEI ZELO DUCTI IN EXCITANDO PERFICIENDO Q. HOC S. FRANC. VINEARUM TEMPLO STRENVE ADLABORARVNT. »

cousins Daniele and Marc'Antonio quite well, and there is good reason to believe that he had seen their villa at Maser, which was planned by Palladio and constructed between the years 1556-1558, and decorated by Veronese slightly later, around 1560-1562¹³⁰.

Both of Vincenzo's brothers-in-law from his first wife, Lucrezia Loredan, were related to the patrician circle involved in the renovation of the vineyard church. In 1531, Marietta the eldest sister married Giovan Francesco, the son of Girolamo Gustinian. The Giustinian family was involved in the erection of the highly praised Badoer-Giustinian chapel. The other partner in the erection and restoration of this unique fifteenth-century monument was the family of Francesco Badoer, the husband of the second sister Lucietta¹³¹. The Badoer-Giustinian chapel, positioned to the left of the presbytery, contains a denser concentration of late-fifteenth and early-sixteenth century marble sculpture than any other private Venetian chapel of the period. The chapel existed already in the gothic church, occupied the same relative position. It is first recorded in 1494 as the chapel of Girolamo Badoer (d. 1495/96), of the branch of the family in Santa Giustina. After his death the construction of the chapel proceeded with his daughter and only heir, Agnesina (c. 1472-1542), and was completed by 1509. Through Agnesina's second marriage in 1497 to Girolamo Giustinian (1469-1532), the patronage of the chapel passed to the Giustinian family¹³².

¹³⁰ The bibliography on Villa Barbaro is quite extensive. For the architecture, see for example: Ackerman, *Palladio's Villas*, 56-58; Bruce Boucher, *Andrea Palladio: the Architect in his Time* (New York: Abbeville Press, 1994), 131-136. For the fresco decoration: Nicola Ivanoff, "La tematica degli affreschi di Maser," *Arte Veneta* 24 (1970): 210-13; Richard Cocke, "Veronese and Daniele Barbaro: The Decoration of the Villa Maser," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 35 (1972): 226-246; Terisio Pignatti, *Veronese*, 2 vols (Venice: Alfieri, 1976), vol. I, 56-68; Luciana Crosato Larcher, "Considerazioni sul programma iconografico di Maser." *Mitteilungen des Kunsthistorischen Institutes in Florenz* 26 (1982): 211-256; *Ibid.*, "Postille al programma iconografico di Maser," *Ibid.* 45 (2001): 495-502; Inge Jackson Reist, "'Divine Love' and Veronese's Frescoes at the Villa Barbaro" *The Art Bulletin* 67, 4 (1985): 614-635; Douglas Lewis, "Classical Texts and Mystic Meanings: Daniele Barbaro's Program for the Villa Maser," in *Klassizismus. Epoche und Probleme. Festschrift für Erik Forssman zum 70 Geburtstag*. Hildesheim: G. Olms, 1987, 289-307.

¹³¹ About the chapel and its recent restoration by Toto Bergamo Rossi see: Anne Markham Schulz, *La Cappella Badoer-Giustinian in San Francesco della Vigna a Venezia* (Florence: Centro Di, 2003).

¹³² Anne Markham Schulz, "Rethinking the Badoer-Giustinian Chapel in San Francesco della Vigna," in *ibid.*, 13-17. Agnesina was wed in first marriage to Benedetto Badoer (d. 1494/95).

In the renovated church, the construction of the chapel was undertaken at the expense of their son, Marc'Antonio Giustinian (d. 1579), who was a patron and close friend of Jacopo Sansovino¹³³. Agensina and Girolamo constructed their country residence that is to date the oldest surviving villa in the Veneto, Villa Giustinian, the 'Castello' in Roncade in the province of Treviso (1511-1513)¹³⁴. Their other son was Giovan Francesco, who married Marietta Loredan. In his will, Vincenzo Grimani specifically referred to '*Magnifica Madonna Marieta Zustignan sua ameda et sui barbani*', ordering that in his absence they shall strive hard to accompany his wife Andriana in supporting the children¹³⁵. Earlier in the century, Marino Sanudo recounted that Vettor Grimani and Vincenzo Grimani the Elder were present in the marriage party of Marietta and Giovan Francesco as the latter's cousins¹³⁶. As for the Badoer, Pietro, the father of Francesco Badoer, purchased the concession for burial rights and family chapels in San Francesco della Vigna as early as 1535¹³⁷.

These networks of intricate relationships indicate that when in Venice, it is very probable that Vincenzo maintained an intimate contact with Giovanni Grimani and with Vettor, frequently visiting Palazzo Grimani and frequently present in San Francesco della Vigna. With great probability, he had witnessed the first decoration phase of the family palace

¹³³ Manuela Morresi, "Jacopo Sansovino architetto, scultore e 'restauratore' in San Francesco della Vigna," in *La Cappella Badoer-Giustinian in San Francesco della Vigna a Venezia*, ed. A. M. Schulz (Florence: Centro Di, 2003), 129. Howard, *Sansovino*, 68, 172 n. 37. Marc'Antonio Giustinian was sufficiently intimate to be nominated as Jacopo's testamentary executor in 1568 (ASVe, *Notarile, Testamenti, Zoliol*, b. 1258, n. 452).

¹³⁴ On the Villa Giustinian see: Carolyn Kolb Lewis, *The Villa Giustinian at Roncade* (New York; London: Garland, 1977); Douglas Lewis, "The Villa Giustinian at Roncade: Tullio Lombardo or Fra Giocondo? The evidence of a newly recognized marble banqueting table of c. 1515 for the atrium," *Annali di Architettura: rivista del Centro internazionale di studi di architettura Andrea Palladio* 22 (2010): 45-62.

¹³⁵ Referring to the aunts and uncles. Giuseppe Boerio, *Dizionario del dialetto veneziano*, 2nd ed., augmented and corrected (Venice: Cecchini, 1856; reprint, Florence: Giunti, 1998), 155. ASVe, *Notarile, Testamenti, Cesare Ziliol*, b. 1261, c. 891 (20 June 1567). Published in: Maschio, *Villa Loredan Grimani*, 166-167 n. 11.

¹³⁶ Vettor was married to Isabella Giustinian. Marin Sanudo, *I diarii* (Venezia: Visentini, 1879-1903; reprint, Bologna: Forni, 1879), vol. LIV, cl. 304. 20 February 1531. «In questo zorno fu compito le noze di sier Zuan Francesco Justinian di sier Hieronimo procurator in la fia di sier Zuan Francesco Loredan quondam sier Marco Antonio, con dota ducati 10 milia, bellissima zovene. Vene fuora vestita di restagno d'oro, con una zoia di seda con zoie e perle che piaceva e con curatori e tre cognati dello sposo, sier Zuan de Leze, sier Vetor Grimani, sier Vincenzo Grimani. »

¹³⁷ Howard, *Sansovino*, 159, app. II. «21 Nov 1535, Pietro Badoero, chapel n. 4r, 250 ducats, b. 2 part i, 366-9.»

around 1539-1541 commissioned by the Patriarch from the Roman artists Federico Zuccari, Francesco Salviati and Giovanni da Udine. He probably knew Sansovino, who was closely followed by Vettor but later abandoned by Giovanni in the favor of Palladio¹³⁸. Vincenzo had witnessed Giovanni extend the palace after Vettor's death with the second phase of its decoration (around 1560, with frescoes by Camillo Mantovano). He had also seen the growing collection of Giovanni's art and sculpture, and the many public officials, intellectuals and foreign visitors who had frequented the palace. It is quite reasonable to assume that he was familiar with the iconographical content of the decoration of Palazzo Grimani, and as the current dissertation argues, there seems to be a programmed relationship between the fresco program of the Fratta Villa and Giovanni Grimani's iconographical program for the façade and the chapel of San Francesco della Vigna.

1.3.3 The Grimani Household and the Contacts in the Mainland

On 27 August 1583, Vincenzo wrote his periodical '*conditione di decima*' for tax declaration for the *X Savi sopra le Decime di Rialto*, about three months before his death. In respect to the 1566 account, which was already rather saturated with properties, the later *conditione* is an endless list of houses and fields in Vincenzo's possession, which he regularly managed and rented to different owners, from which he collected rent (**doc. 1.3.1 and doc. 1.3.4**)¹³⁹. He owned houses in Venice, Murano, Chioggia; various houses in the territory of Vicenza, and two land holdings in the Polesine: Pontecchio, and the Salvadeghe. These did not include the old Loredan possessions, which by now had been

¹³⁸ Sansovino also worked for the façade of the church of San Gimignano, which used to be positioned in Piazza San Marco, under the supervision of Vettor Grimani and Antonio Capello (1557). Howard, Sansovino, 81-82; Foscarini and Tafuri, *L'armonia e i conflitti*, 175 n. 85.

¹³⁹ ASVe, *Dieci Savi alle decime in Rialto, Redecime*, 1566, b. 139, n. 624 (28 June 1566); 1582, b. 172, n. 1296 (27 August 1582). For the properties Vincenzo had inherited from his grandmother Isabetta Soranzo Grimani (19 September 1554) and from his great-uncle Vettor (3 January 1560) see: *Ibid.*, 1566, reg. 1475 c. 771v. For properties he inherited from the Emo family as additional dowry from his second wife see: *Ibid.*, 1566, Reg. 1482, c. 1033v. For Vincenzo's recovery of the *condizione* of Isabetta Soranzo see copy in: BCVe, Ms. PDc. 517/89, c. 19 (19 September 1554), see Appendix I, doc. 1.2.1.

passed to his sons-in-law. His widowed daughter, Betta, was living with her children in the house that he previously occupied when he wrote his *conditione* in 1566, his '*casa di statio*' in San Vio (San Vito). The house was very close to the *contrà* of Sant'Agnese, where Vincenzo's current palace, inherited from his grandmother, resided¹⁴⁰.

In addition to his stable residence in Sant'Agnese in Venice, by 1582 he owned an urban palace in Prato della Valle in Pauda, and another rural villa in Spessa, both, as he declared, for his personal, private use. Scholars have often remained perplexed because of Vincenzo's omission of the villa in Fratta Polesine from his *conditione* in 1566, while mentioning the adjacent fields that he received in the Loredan dowry, although virtually all theories assume that his palace existed by then. The mystery is perhaps not completely resolved by the examination of the 1582 *conditione*, but the situation receives a certain justification: The villa in Spessa was in Vincenzo's possession by 1566 (and probably also palace in Padua). However, like the Fratta villa, it was not mentioned in his *conditione* that year. As in the case of Fratta, in 1566 Vincenzo informed about the 650 fields that he owned in Spessa, without making any reference to the villa itself, while in 1582 he mentioned that he used it for living, '*per mio habitar*'¹⁴¹.

In Padua, beginning with Domenico Grimani, between 1520 and 1561 an entire block in Prato della Valle had been gradually acquired by the members of the Grimani family. Giovanni Grimani is known to have frequented the palace many a time, when he had gone to confess in the nearby monastery of Santa Giustina. In 1561, Giovanni Antonio Rusconi, who had substituted Michele Sanmicheli in the works of Palazzo Grimani in San Luca in Venice, was assigned for the task of executing an organic reorganization of the complex¹⁴².

¹⁴⁰ 1566: «Mi ritrovo in questa città beni stabili nella contra di s. Vio. la mia casa da statio, nella qual al presente io habito»; 1582: «Item mi trovo haver in contrà di. S. Vio una casa di statio: la qual io affitto a Madonna Betta mia fià. »

¹⁴¹ By 1560 Vincenzo had already inherited all of the possession of his grandparents. See above note 139.

¹⁴² The intervention had been interrupted and continued twenty years later when Rusconi's traces were lost in the project. For Palazzo Grimani, today Verson, see: Giulio Bresciani Alvarez, "*L'architettura civile del barocco a Padova*," in *Padova: case e palazzi*, ed. L. Puppi and F. Zuliani (Vicenza: N. Pozza, 1977), 169. Ibid., *Architettura a Padova*, eds. G. Lorenzoni, G. Mazzi, G. Vivianetti, intro. L. Puppi (Padua: Il poligrafo, 1999), 523-524.

In 1582, the villa in Spessa was a patrimony with no less than 550 fields (The lands he inherited in Fratta, for example, amounted to about 520 fields). The villa and its lands were acquired from the Quinto family of Vincenza by Cardinal Domenico Grimani around 1520, when he had terminated his service as Cardinal in Rome. Upon his death, they were inherited by Vincenzo the Elder, later passing to his nephew. To date, it is one of few historical fifteenth century rural Veneto villas, which have maintained their late-gothic form, such as the Villa Castello da Porto Colleoni in Thiene. In 1565, Vincenzo Junior had dug up a new canal in Spessa, known as the *'nuova Grimana'*. The fruitful operation of reclamation and irrigation of a previous water artery, perfectly functional to date, has proved vital for the farms of Spessa, and provided benefit also to the other inhabitants of the area¹⁴³.

In the Polesine, in addition to Fratta, Vincenzo possessed a large quantity of lands, about 380 fields, in the holding of Pontecchio. According to the *condizione* of Patriarch Giovanni Grimani, during the same period Vincenzo had rented a house from his great-uncle, which was located in the same holding¹⁴⁴. In Loreo in the Polesine, Vincenzo was the author of another important project of land reclamation and hydraulic operations, establishing the *'Silvestra'* land holding. On March 21 1580, he presented a request with a detailed project to the *Provveditori sopra I Beni Inculti* in Venice. The final license was finally granted on in 1589, to his son Domenico¹⁴⁵.

¹⁴³ Bernard Rupprecht, "Ville venete del '400 e del primo '500, forme e sviluppo," *Bollettino del C.I.S.A. Andrea Palladio* VI, 2 (1964): 239-250; Fernando Rigon, "Villa Spessa a S. Anna di Carmignano," *Bollettino del Centro internazionale di studi d'architettura Andrea Palladio* X (1968): 325-331; *Ibid.*, "1520: un cardinale in villa. Domenico Grimani acquista il 'palazzo' quattrocentesco a Spessa di Carmignano," *Venezia Cinquecento. Studi di storia dell'arte e della cultura* XI, 22 (2001): 23-38, esp. 35; Michelangelo Muraro, *Civiltà delle ville venete*, photos P. Marton (Udine: Magnus, 1986), 126-127.

¹⁴⁴ ASVe, *Dieci Savi alle decime in Rialto, Redecime*, 1566, reg. 368, n. 574, c. 901r-v. «Item sul Polesene di Rovigo in Pontecchio mi atrovo una casa con un brollo qual tien ad affitto M. Vincenzo Grimani mio nipote et paga ogni anno ducati vinti cinque. » Cited in: Marina Stefani Mantovanelli, "Presenze cinquecentesche documentate di famiglie veneziane in Polesine," in Olivieri, *Eresie, magia, società*, 389. Regarding the house of the Grimani family in the Pontecchio holding see: *Ibid.*, 388-389.

¹⁴⁵ The land was in his possession in 1580, but it is omitted from the 1582 *condizione*. For Vincenzo's request, followed by a survey performed by Cristoforo Sorte for Domenico (on 25 May 1589) see: ASVe, *Beni Inculti, Investiture*, b. 377. For Domenico, receiving approval for the project (24 January 1589), and requesting for the use of the water of the fountain known as the Grimani fountain (20 December 1591), see: *Ibid.*, b. 410,

Vincenzo's *condizioni di decima* of 1566 and 1582 paint the image of a Venetian patrician who may not have held any official office, but he was a busy property owner who was fully engaged in business affairs that involved the management of the possessions of the entire patrimony of the Grimani branch of Santa Maria Formosa. One can imagine how his daily routine involved collecting rents and calculating revenues, renovating houses and functional edifices and taking care of hydraulic situations. He would frequently move throughout the mainland from one residence to the other, between Padua, Vicenza and the Polesine, spending several weeks or months in each area every year, in order to keep constant control the properties.

Many of the lands around Fratta Polesine bordered with the territory of the Este duchy in Ferrara. For this reason, three letters that were recently found at the Modena State Archive, addressed to the Duke of Ferrara, carry the signatures Vincenzo Grimani and his friend, the Venetian nobleman Lorenzo Emo (1524-1572). The letters, which all date to the month of August in the years 1554, 1567 and 1570, confirm the contents of the letter of Lucrezia Gonzaga to Vincenzo. The two noblemen requested permission from the Duke – who was Ercole II d'Este until 1559, and afterwards his son Alfonso II d'Este – to hunt in his territories at the nearby towns of Copparo and Sabbioncello (**docs. 1.5.1, 1.5.2, 1.5.3**)¹⁴⁶.

The Ferrara lands were in fact partly agricultural and in part forests, and were therefore considered as ideal hunting locations. In the large Mesola fortress nearby, a wall had been built for the conservation of the forestry ambient. It was the favorite hunting territory of Alfonso II, where some of Italy and Europe's most respectable figures, such as cardinals, dukes and kings would receive special invitation to hunt¹⁴⁷. The ample time-span of the letters indicates that hunting was a long-term hobby of Vincenzo, and that he was regularly

c. 59 and c. 60. For the project, including copies of the original documents, see: Marina Stefani Mantovanelli, "Esempi di bonifica in agro veneto (veronese – polesano)," in *Uomini, terra e acque, atti del XIV Convegno di Studi Storici, Rovigo 19-20 novembre 1988*, eds. F. Cazzola and A. Olivieri (Rovigo: Minelliana, 1990), 150-151 and docs. 9-11. For additional documents found during the current research regarding the Loreo project see below, note 195.

¹⁴⁶ ASMo, *Particolari*, b. 477, reg. Emo (7 August 1554; 13 August 1557; 11 August 1570).

¹⁴⁷ For the large Mesola forest see for example: P. Stampi, "Il Gran Bosco della Mesola (Ferrara): notizie storiche, folcloristiche e geobotaniche," *Annali di Botanica* XXVII (1966): 599-612.

present in the area of Fratta and Ferrara in summertime for the purpose of hunting or *villeggiatura*. The language used in the letters is correct and polite but at the same time suggests a relationship of confidence between the two Venetian noblemen and Ercole II d'Este. In the latest letter, dating to the period of the reign of his son Alfonso, Vincenzo and Lorenzo seem to have annoyed the duke because of passing through his territories.

Lorenzo Emo was the son of Giovanni Emo (d. 1542) and the grandson of Zorzi Emo (1483-1516). The latter was a Procurator and the brother of Lunardo Emo the Elder (1471-1540): both of them bought many fields in the area of Fanzolo in the early 1500's. Lunardo's possessions passed to his grandson, the younger Lunardo, who constructed the villa in Fanzolo and married Vincenzo Grimani's daughter Cornelia. Lorenzo too owned lands in Fanzolo, which he inherited from his own grandfather. His branch of the Emo family originated from the *contrà* of Santa Marina in Venice, which confines with the *contrà* of Santa Maria Formosa. It is possible to imagine that he and Vincenzo, who were born in the same year, had formed a friendship at a young age that continued into their adult life, and was manifest in their regular summer excursions as hunting companions¹⁴⁸.

It seems that a close, ongoing relationship existed between the branches of the noble families Grimani, Emo and Badoer throughout the entire span of the sixteenth century. Lorenzo was present in the Polesine, hunting with Vincenzo, when the latter was still married to his first wife Lucrezia Loredan. Vincenzo's marriage to Andriana Emo was followed by the marriage of his daughter Cornelia to Andriana's cousin Lunardo¹⁴⁹. Lunardo was regularly present in Fratta before marrying Cornelia, as testified by the letter of Lucrezia Gonzaga. The

¹⁴⁸ For personal information on Lorenzo Emo see his will: ASVe, *Notarile, Testamenti, Cesare Ziliol*, b. 1259, n. 602 (29 June 1564) see Appendix I, doc. 1.4.2. In the will, Lorenzo mentions a dear brother named Lunardo, although the latter is not mentioned by M. Barbaro. Perhaps, he was affectionately referring to his cousin. For Lorenzo's lands in Fanzolo, about 254 fields in total see: Danilo Gasparini, "Di quanta spexa et interesse sono le possessione': le terre della famiglia Emo in Fanzolo," in *Villa Emo*, eds. D. Gasparini and L. Puppi (Vicenza: Terra ferma, 2009), 153-155. Gasparini has based most of his research on the documents of the Archivio Emo Capodilista in Fanzolo.

¹⁴⁹ The fathers of Andriana and Lunardo, Giovanni and Alvise, were brothers; thus, the grandparents of Andriana, Lunardo and Lorenzo Emo were all brothers.

rural residence of Lunardo and Cornelia in Fanzolo was already a decorated Palladian villa and functioning farmhouse when they married in 1565¹⁵⁰. In his will, written in 1584 and updated in 1586, Lunardo nominated a list of testament executors which includes his own wife, as well as her step mother Andriana, and the entire Grimani household: '*& tutti li fratelli, & Sorelle di mia Moger, & li Maridi de dette sue Sorelle*' (doc. fig. 2)¹⁵¹. The relationships extended beyond the Emo-Grimani nucleus: Lunardo Emo's mother was Andriana Badoer, the sister of Francesco Badoer. When Lunardo's father Alvisè died, as requested in his will, she remained in charge of the education of her children, '*tutrice e governatrice*' of Lunardo and the daughters. She was assisted by her other brother, Anzolo Badoer, who is mentioned in a document from 1536 as the personal governor of Lunardo¹⁵². It seems that when in the mainland, members of these families traveled continuously between Fratta and Fanzolo dealing with various issues of land management.

It was actually quite common for the men of the noble families belonging to the Grimani circle to trust their wives with a wide range of responsibilities, which they repeatedly emphasized in their wills. Vincenzo himself demonstrated a great deal of respect toward the capabilities of Andriana Emo. In addition to assigning her the role of '*tutrice e governatrice*' of their many children, he nominated her as the main figure among his four respectable testament executors, and she alone was eligible to decide how to administrate his entire patrimony until all of his sons arrive at the age of 20 years old. The 'Loredan' daughters of Vincenzo were therefore educated under the influential Andriana, who also bore him five boys and at least one daughter, and outlived her husband by 25 years.

¹⁵⁰ For Villa Emo at Fanzolo see: Ackerman, *Palladio's Villas*, 44-45; Boucher, *Andrea Palladio*, 139-145; Gert J. J. Van der Sman, "L'iconologia nella villa veneta del Cinquecento: l'esempio di villa Emo." *Storia dell'arte* 71 (1991): 37-58; Gasparini and Puppi, *Villa Emo*; Luciana Crosato Larcher, "Villa Emo," in Pavanello and Mancini, *Affreschi ville venete*, 224-238 n. 53, with additional bibliography.

¹⁵¹ BCVe, Ms. PDc. 2597/1 (16 November 1584, updated on 3 March 1586), in print. The printed copy probably dates to the beginning of the seventeenth century, as does the rest of the '*busta*' (reg. 1 and 1b), which contains a documents belonging to the two male heirs of Lunardo Emo, Zuanne and Lunardo.

¹⁵² Lorenzo Moraro, "Due Leonardo (e un'Andriana) per Villa Emo," In *Villa Emo*, eds. D. Gasparini and L. Puppi (Vicenza: Terra ferma, 2009), 41.

Lunardo Emo too demonstrated a very high level of confidence and respect concerning the personal and intellectual capacities of his wife. He died on 10 March 1586, leaving Cornelia in charge of the management of the large quantity of lands that he owned in the Veneto, in particular in Fratta and in Fanzolo. Although his will included a generous list of respectable and loving relatives as his testament executors, Cornelia was the one exclusively nominated as the personal tutor and governor of their eight daughters and two sons. Lunardo was well aware of the importance of granting a proper cultured education for the new generation, a topic that he expands upon in his will. Demanding the full respect of the children for Cornelia's authority, he warned that they should never refuse her position as their governor: they must obey her completely without ever questioning her motives, which she does not need to justify in any way or in any time. The other testament executors were left with the modest task of counseling and helping her¹⁵³.

Cornelia's influential position is recounted in an excerpt from a family booklet written in 1664 by Giovanni Emo (1607-1660), one of her grandchildren, who was a son of Lunardo di Lunardo Emo (1586-1639), her youngest son. Giovanni described his grandmother as an extremely virtuous woman. She was responsible and successful in the upbringing of her many children, caring for their high education and marrying them well, and was highly praised for the economical management of the household and properties¹⁵⁴.

After the death of Lunardo, Cornelia was cited in numerous notary documents as the person exclusively responsible for managing the lands in Fratta. She was often present in

¹⁵³ See above note 151 and Appendix II, doc. fig. 2.

¹⁵⁴ P. Molmenti, "Arte retrospettiva: la villa di un patrizio veneto," *Emporium* XI, 61 (1900): 30. Original location unknown today. Cited by: Van der Sman, *La decorazione a fresco*, 56 n. 9; Gasparini, *le terre della famiglia Emo*, 158. « Fù essa Signora Cornelia Gentildonna dotata di singolare virtù e prudenza, onde se bene rimasta Vedova in età Giovane con otto Figliole Femine, ed un Maschio, et gravida d'un altro che fù il Signore Lunardo mio Padre, interprese senza segomentarsi il Governo della Facoltà e della Casa, et vivendo senza rimaritarsi, seppe per tutto il corso dela vedovanza che fu di 25 anni, sostenerlo in maniera che senza aggravarsi di debiti, con le entrate sostenè la casa, allevò la numerosa figliuolanza senza risparmio di maestri, et con procurarle ogni sorta di virtù, collocò ancora tre delle sue Figliuole in Matrimonio conn Nibilissimi et ricchissimi soggetti della nostra Patria, et con floridissime Doti rispetto all'uso di quei tempi, altre quattro ne monacò in Monasterj principalissimi della città. Una non voluta maritarsi ne' monacare, visse in Casa con Lode di prudenza e di Virtù fino al temp della sua morte. »

town, sometimes as a guest in the family villa, even as late as 1609, when both of her sons, Giovanni (1580-1636) and Lunardo, have long reached legal age¹⁵⁵. A week after her husband's death she already hired the family factor, Giulio de Merescalchi, who was given the job in her name and in the name of the Valier and Molin families. She assigned him the faculty to manage, rent, buy and sell their properties in Fratta¹⁵⁶. The factor died on 1 December 1599 in his bedroom in the *barchessa* of the Fratta villa. His long inventory, drawn up following his death, shows that he lived with all of the necessary commodities, describing all of the rooms in his use, including spaces in the palace itself (**doc. 1.5.4**)¹⁵⁷. As his will executors Giulio named his neighbor Cavaliere Bonardo Bonardi and the notary Simone Lachini, who was a regular in resident in Villa Badoer, assigning them the faculty of educating his sons Antonio and Francesco¹⁵⁸. Giulio's mother was living in the *barchessa*

¹⁵⁵ Most of the documents, of land investitures and land rentals (*'livello'*), appear in the Rovigo State Archive under the notary acts of Marino Filippi q. Antonio from Rovigo. Filippi had operated and even lived in Fratta Polesine for the major part of his career. The identification of his corpus of notary documents during the current research was a significant finding, since besides Simone Lachini, no notary was known to have lived or worked in Fratta Polesine during the second half of the sixteenth century. His son and grandson, Filippo and Lorenzo, continued to practice the family profession in Fratta in the following decade. For the acts concerning Cornelia Emo, see for example: ASRo, *Notarile, Marino Filippi*, b. 503, reg. H, c. 2877 (12 July 1598), «Investitura di fondo in Vespara fatta a Veronese Domenico» in the name of Cornelia, which took place in Fratta Polesine in the Grimani villa. See also various acts between the years 1600-1609 in: *Ibid.*, b. 504, c. 3393 (15 January 1604, Cornelia Emo, «Investitura di terra in Vespara fatta a Stefani Gio Antonio e Stefano»); *Ibid.*, b. 505, c. 6272 (12 March 1607), Cornelia Emo, «Livello di terra in Vespara con Ferrari Giovanni»; *Ibid.*, c. 6433 (13 June 1608), Cornelia Emo, «Affitta terra in Fratta a Bacchiega Giacomo». See also: ASRo, *Notarile, Simone Lachini*, b. 776, c. 159 (27 Nov 1590), c. 161 (2 Dec 1590), c. 220 (23 Oct 1587), c. 312 and c. 319 (13 Jul 1592).

¹⁵⁶ ASVe, *Notarile, Girolamo Savina*, b. 11900, c. 575 (27 March 1586). «Procura N. D. Cornelia nil NV. N. D. Leonardi Aimò» The act took place in Venice, in the *contrà* of S. Pantalon in the current residence of Cornelia. As the main testament executor of Lunardo Emo, Cornelia hires Giulio de Merescalchi «de Padegno» - perhaps Pedena, a town in the province of Bologna. He is assigned the faculty of the «negotium gestorem» in «zona ipsius commissaria posita in villa frata dictus Rhodigij» as the factor of the Valier, Molin and Emo families.

¹⁵⁷ ASRo, *Notarile, Aurelio Biscaccia*, b. 181, c.166 (7 December 1599).

¹⁵⁸ ASRo, *Notarile, Simone Lachini*, b. 776, c. 761 (1 December 1999). Lachini wrote many acts in the Palladian villa, in particular during the years 1997-1999 and even when they did not directly concern the members of the Badoer family, suggesting that, he used a space in the villa as his office. See various acts in: *Ibid.*, b. 777.

until her death in 1597¹⁵⁹. After his death, both of the sons continued to act as the family factors maintaining a relationship of confidence with the owners¹⁶⁰.

Cornelia's sons continued to manage the family lands in Fratta when she passed away and were frequent visitors in town. Cornelia gave her will on 9 October 1613, and died two years later (**doc. 1.4.5**)¹⁶¹. Her will confirms her character as a confident and opinionated woman with a high degree of religious devotion. She cared to leave several ducats to each one of her assistants and servants and insisted on being buried in a humble manner, outside the church of Santi Giovanni e Paolo, virtually threatening her children that they would not receive their inheritance if they perform any pompous funeral for her. The youngest son, Lunardo, who married and bore heirs, received most of Cornelia's possessions in Venice and in Fratta, while Giovanni, received only a portion of the Fratta lands, the '*disdotto*' ('the eighteen').

Like his father-in-law and his brother-in-law, in 1575 Andrea da Molin trusted his wife with the family patrimony and with the upbringing of the children, insisting that she shall be the main testament executor, '*because I know her, she dominates with prudence and with governance and is full of love towards her children*'. At the same time, Andrea was very

¹⁵⁹ ASRo, *Notarile, Simone Lachini*, b. 776, c. 714 (7 July 1597). Giulio's mother, Lucietta, died in the *barchessa* where she lived with the rest of the Meresecalchi family, «giacendo in letto in una cameretta a svero della casa del fattor dell'Clarissimi Signori Valier et Molin nella terra della Fratta territorio di Rovigo».

¹⁶⁰ See various acts in: ASRo, *Notarile, Filippo Filippi*, b. 507-509, and: *Ibid, Lorenzo Filippi*, b. 487-498. The inventory of Antonio de Marescalchi registered after his death shows he was still living in the *barchessa* until his last day: ASRo, *Notarile, Lorenzo Filippi*, b. 489, c. 3423 (5 September 1640). Like his father, Francesco's will was also given in his deathbed in the villa: ASRo, *Notarile, Lorenzo Filippi*, b. 487, c. 1280 (23 July 1632). «Fù fatto, et ordinato il presente testamento per il sopradetto sigore testamento giacendo nel letto in una Camera superiore, verso levante, del palazzo delli Illustrissimi signori Andrea et fratelli Molini esistente nella terra della Fratta in Contrà della Vespara». The collaboration between Francesco and Marino da Molin, the son of Isabetta and Andrea, is evident in: ASRo, *Notarile, Simone Lachini*, b. 776, c. 946 (17 September 1607). The act recounts that on 26 May 1593 an investiture was made with Signor Bono Rigobello, who had to pay every year a '*livello*' to Giulio or to his heirs. The money «appaiono ricevuti fatti in diversi tempi per man del ditto messer Francesco at per mano del Clarissimo Marino da Molino fu de Signore Andrea per nome di esso messer Francesco.» In another occasion, Signor Vincenzo Bonega who once had to pay Giulio, was now paying Francesco at the request of Marino da Molin: *Ibid.* b. 776, c. 805 (1 August 1602).

¹⁶¹ ASVe, *Notarile, Testamenti, Andrea d'Ercole*, b. 357, c. 174. A copy exists in: BCVe, Ms. PDC. 2597/1b, 5r-7r. The sons participate in many acts drawn by Filippo Filippi and Lorenzo Filippi at the Rovigo State Archive; see also: BCVe, Ms. PDC. 2597/1 and 1b, for copies of many personal notary documents of the two.

protective of his wife, and warned that notwithstanding his genuine love towards her, if she ever remarried, she would be excluded from her position as executor (**doc. 1.4.4**)¹⁶². Andrea died the same year and Betta remained widowed, living in Venice in the old *casa di statio* of her father in San Vio, close to his palace, with her three sons and three daughters. In Fratta she kept frequenting the villa and managing her share in its surrounding fields¹⁶³.

1.4 PATRONAGE ISSUES

Villa Grimai Molin stands out in respect to other Veneto villas in its economical definition, being part of a dowry of a deceased mother that produced no male heirs. When Lucrezia had passed away, the villa and the rest of her dowry were no more in the the material possession of Vincenzo, or of the Loredan daughters. Reflecting a common problem involving dowry issues in the Early Modern Venetian Republic, the villa was destined to pass to the future husbands of the daughters when they married.

As explained by Paola Lanaro in her research about the complex process of dowry restitution in Venice, in the Early Modern period, the estimate of the dowry goods was a nerve wrecking moment in the marriage relationship. This was because Venetian legislation posed particular limits on the rights that the husband could exercise on the dowry goods, and because of the

¹⁶² ASVe, *Notarile, Testamenti, Cesare Ziliol*, b. 1256, c. 85 (8 March 1575). Published in Maschio, *Villa Loredan Grimani*, 167-168 n. 12. «perche io la conosco domina prudente et di governo et piena di amorevoleza ali suoi fioli»; «et caso che da mia consorte si maridase, che non il credo, voglio che la sij priva intuito et per tuto detta mia comisaria, né posia manizar un soldo, né comandar cosa alguna. »

¹⁶³ The daughters were Contarina, Lugretia and Cicilia, mentioned in Andrea's testament. The *Avogaria di Comun* registers five male sons (ASVe, *Avogaria di Comun, Matrimoni, con notizie dei figli*, "Molin Andrea fu Piero"); the youngest sons, Giovanni and Andrea, probably did not survive adulthood, since they are not mentioned in any of the archival documents. For Betta's *conditione* see: ASVe, *Dieci Savi alle decime in Rialto, Redecime*, 1582, b. 170, n. 786 (20 July 1582). In referring to the villa Betta declared «qual casa et prà si tengono in casa per bisogno».

concrete risk related to the possible future request of a restitution of the dowry. In the case of the early death of the wife, the official solution was quite uncertain and complex. Especially if there were no sons, despite the common law, the civil norms allowed the widowed husband the right to profit from the dowry itself completely or partially, not to return it, or to return it only in part to the father-in-law or to the heirs of the deceased wife. The provision ranged from the part of a fourth, a third, a half or the entire dowry¹⁶⁴.

Villa Grimani Molin, as an object of dowry, could only be managed and profited from in a specific manner depending on who was in its possession at any given time, whether a married husband, a widower, a married daughter and her husband, a widowed daughter or her male children. The history of the possession of the villa and its territories may therefore be recounted as the history of the various passages between different owners, through their marriage relationships and in accordance with the Venetian dowry conventions. This narration, combined with the information regarding the management of the lands obtained through the cartographical research, has provided the basis for the identification of the villa's patronage throughout its construction history.

1.4.1 The Grimani Marriage Contracts and the Dowry of Lucrezia Loredan

In 1529, Vincenzo was promised in an arranged marriage contract to Lucrezia Loredan. The actual marriage took place when he had turned eighteen, but eventually occurred slightly earlier, on 29 January 1541 (*m. v.*)¹⁶⁵. Vincenzo was quick to materialize his legitimate rights

¹⁶⁴ Paola Lanaro. "La restituzione della dote. Il gioco ambiguo della stima tra beni mobili e beni immobili (Venezia tra Cinque e Settecento)," *Quaderni storici* 45, 135 (2010): 753-778, esp. 764, 776-777 n. 42. also citing: Chiara Valsecchi, "'Ad sustinenda onera matrimonii'. Matrimonio e dote tra prassi et dottrina giuridica," in *Il matrimonio nei giuristi e nei poeti del Rinascimento. Le marriage chez les juristes et les poetes de la Renaissance. Atti del convegno tenutosi a Verona il 14-15 marzo 2008*, ed. Giovanni Rossi, in course of publication. The husband, for example, could also acquire of a third of the dowry goods, or in any case a sum lower than 1,000 ducats. In these cases, in Venice as in other places, the sources testify about unending quarrels and about the use of fraudulent means carried by the husband in order to escape the return of the goods.

¹⁶⁵ ASVe, *Avogaria di Comun*, reg. 145, c. 137r-139v (18 January 1541, *m. v.*). Printed in Maschio, *Villa Loredan Grimani*, 159-161 n. 4.

as a husband, and three months later, fulfilling the third voice in the contract, he reclaimed the remaining part of his dowry from his brothers-in-law Francesco Badoer and Giovan Francesco Giustinian¹⁶⁶. The dowry, amounting to 10,000 ducats, was regarded as a highly respectable sum, considering that in 1535 the Venetian government prohibited the patricians to provide their daughters with dowries higher than 4,000 ducats¹⁶⁷.

In December 1545, Vincenzo and Francesco received their share of the rest of the Loredan-Corner patrimony, which included the lands of the Vespara. The two were acting on behalf of the son of Giovan Francesco, Zorzi Loredan, who had died in 1539 with no heirs; the rest of the patrimony, which also included territories in the Vespara, was passed to Girolamo and Zuanne Corner, the brothers of Lucrezia's mother Cornelia¹⁶⁸. The lands given to Vincenzo would later become the major share of the dowry that Lucrezia had passed to her four daughters. One particular territory that was close to the center of Fratta, known as the '*Pascoli Loredan*' (Loredan Meadows) or the Valley of Santa Maria, remained '*pro-indiviso*', undivided and in common property of Vincenzo and Francesco.

The valley was named after the small church of Santa Maria that was positioned to its north, which can be easily identified in the Pontoni-Trevisi map (**map 1.3**). The Venice State Archives also possesses a small map of the valley, dated 16 April 1565, drawn up by the surveyor Domenico Gallo¹⁶⁹. The map depicts the road running along the Presciana Nuova,

¹⁶⁶ ASVe, *Notarile, Zuan Maria de Cavaneis*, b. 3348, c. 689 (1 april 1542). Printed in Maschio, *Villa Loredan Grimani*, 162-163 n. 6. Vincenzo received a series of houses in San Vito in Venice, to become part of the future that Lucrezia had passed to her four daughters.

¹⁶⁷ Stanley Chojnacki, *Women and Men in Renaissance Venice: Twelve Essays on Patrician Society* (Baltimore; London: The Johns Hopkins University press, 2000), 70-71.

¹⁶⁸ BCVe, Ms. PDC. 2661, n. 3, cc. 57r-88r, and also: BCVe, Ms. PDC. 2346/VII (14 December 1545). Printed in Maschio, *Villa Loredan Grimani*, 163-164 n. 7. According to the document, the third sister of Zorzi Loredan, Marietta Giustinian, had already received her share in the inheritance. It also states that a drawing of the area had been made by the Paduan surveyor Domenico Dall'Abaco for the occasion. Several documents regarding the Corner patrimony in the Vespara are conserved in: BCVe, Ms. PDC. 2346/IV.

¹⁶⁹ ASVe, *Miscellanea mappe*, n. 181. The inscription reads: « Io Domenico Gallo [...] per l'ordine dei provveditori sopra le Camere, ho fatto il presente disegno del tutta la pressiana fatto ad instantia del ditto officio fino dal 1563 in parte del passecolo possesso dal clarissimo magnifico s. Francesco Badoero et dal magnifico Vincenzo Grimani. In parte dela possession [...] possesa per il magnifico cavalier s. Silvestri di

parting at the east from the direction of Fratta, continuing westwards towards Badia. It contains a representation of the church and of its two *gorgos*, denominated in the map 'gorgi di santa Maria'. In the following 10 May, the map was presented in the office of the *Provveditori sopra le Camere* by Gallo, Francesco and Vincenzo.

A common assumption among scholars is that Villa Grimani Molin stands on the same territory on which the previous Loredan palace once resided¹⁷⁰. However, there seems to be no specific documentary or physical proof for such an idea, while a series of documents from the earlier phase of the settlement in Fratta suggests the contrary. The documents, collected and summarized by Luigi Contegiacomo in the latest monograph dedicated to the villa, indicate the presence of the Loredan residence as late as 1555, in a period parallel to the existence of houses belonging to Vincenzo and to Francesco Badoer¹⁷¹.

Rovigo.» The inscription continues; it is possible to identify fragments such as: «l'orto ditto el passocollo possesso al magnifici Badoeri et Grimani: el qual sono in origini della fossa di Santa Maria et fino al [...] ».

¹⁷⁰ Puppi, *Villa Badoer*, 24, supposed that the Badoer and Grimani families occupied the same palace before Francesco had built his Palladian villa, based on notary acts that took place in the private house of Vincenzo ca. 1548, and in their shared residence ca. 1553. However, the assumption that Vincenzo's house was the old Loredan residence had been posed as a suggestion. «è possibile ritenere che, intanto, a lui fosse prevenuta la casa dominicale eretta dai Loredan presso il centro di Fratta...». In the following years, the idea has been voiced in a more secure manner, but remained essentially no more than a logical assumption. See for example: Maschio, "Dimore degli dei," 16; Luigi Contegiacomo, "Genesi di un sogno: le origini," 33.

¹⁷¹ Contegiacomo, "Genesi di un sogno: le origini," 42-45 n. 25, n. 28, n. 31-32, n. 35, n. 38. On 26 April 1548, a notary act took place at the house of Vincenzo Grimani in Fratta (ASRo, *Notarile, Franco Franchi*, b. 523/I, rep. 449). Successively, in 1552 an act occurred "at the house of the heirs of Zorzi Loredan that was bought by the 'de Zefaradi'", the respectable family from Mantua («nella casa delli eredi del fu Giorgio Loredan acquistata dai de Zefaradi», *Ibid.*, *Bartolomeo Bisogna*, b. 140/P, c. 83). On 25 September 1553 two acts took place in the house belonging to both Vincenzo and Francesco Badoer (*Ibid.*, *Franco Franchi*, b. 524/Q, rep. 915, c. 53v. and rep. 916, c. 103v). The same year, Francesco bought the contiguous land for the construction of his Palladian villa, and so, on 17 March 1554 an act was held at the house of Vincenzo alone (*Ibid.*, b. 524/R, rep. 952). On 13 September 1555 an act took place once more at the house of the heirs of Giovan Francesco Loredan, with Vincenzo and Francesco present as witnesses, and thus, implying that they were not living there (*Ibid.*, *Bartolomeo Bisogna*, b. 140/R, c. 93v). It is important to note that the villa was indeed part of the Loredan dowry that later passed to the four daughters of Lucrezia. At the same time, on 1 April 1542 no property in Fratta is mentioned in the division of the dowry between Vincenzo and his brothers-in-law, and on 14 December 1545, Vincenzo and Francesco received only fields from the Loredan patrimony. What is missing is actual documentary evidence that would indicate that the villa was built on some sort of a Loredan field or house property.

Not having produced any male heirs from his first matrimonial union, Vincenzo re-married in the following year to Andriana Emo, who bore him male and female successors, the sons being Antonio Abbot of Sesto, Patriarch of Aquileia and Bishop of Torcello (1558-1629), Domenico (1562-1617), Zuanne Patriarch of Aquileia (1563-1592), Piero, and Vettore. The elder daughter Lucrezia married Francesco Tiepolo, the son of Procurator Alvise and bore him twelve children and the daughter Canziana married Girolamo Moro (**doc. fig. 1**)¹⁷².

In accordance with the dowry conventions of Venetian legislation, Vincenzo held the Fratta villa and lands in his material possession only until the death of his wife Lucrezia. Afterwards, not having produced any male heirs, her dowry remained his only in a state of custody, until the four daughters would marry, when it would become their own. In the meantime, Vincenzo was responsible for the management and maintenance of the dowry, which included the Fratta property, the Vespara fields, houses of San Vio in Venice and cash money, and was eligible for its profits. Alas, Vincenzo did not intend to give up his dowry when his wife had passed away so quickly: he continued to profit from its revenues for the next two and a half decades. When the marriage contracts of his daughters were signed, each bride brought to her husband 2,000 ducats in cash and 500 ducats in investments, and the promise that 'in the future' the husband would receive her portion of a fourth of her mother's dowry, worth 10,000 ducats.

An entire folder containing personal documents of Betta Grimani Molin has luckily survived to date, conserved at the library of the Correr Museum in Venice. Her marriage contract is the first of seven documents regarding her dowry and her future bequest to her sons¹⁷³. The

¹⁷² Lucrezia, named after Vincenzo's first wife, was already born by 1567 when he wrote his will. Her own will was found during the current research campaign: ASVe, *Notarile, Testamenti, Francesco di Michiel*, b. 646, c. 482 (24 August 1583). According to it, Lucrezia was married to Francesco Tiepolo, whose father, Alvise, was a Procurator. She gave her will pregnant in 1583, and was still alive in 1615, according to the family tree.

¹⁷³ BCVe, Ms. PD. 510c/9, entitled: «La Dote della N. D. Elisabetta Grimani de Signore Vicenzo, et sua Dimmissoria Consorte di Signore Andrea da Molin fu di Signore Piero.» It contains the following documents: (1) «contratto di nozze», 3 January 1564, with the signatures of Vincenzo Grimani and Andrea da Molin; (2) «contratto di nozze, et vestimenti», 3 September 1564, written by Vincenzo Grimani; (3) «inventario di robbe sono state dette in dote»; (4) «Vadimonio della Magnifica Signora Elisabetta Grimani», 28 June 1576; (5) «Molin videnda», 9 July 1576; (6) «stime Illustrissimo Grimani»; (7) «stima delle vache, et cavalle della

contract dates to 3 June 1564. In the agreement, Vincenzo promised Andrea da Molin the above-mentioned 2,500 ducats (**doc. 1.1.1**). He posed the additional condition that Andrea had three years to decide whether he wanted to wait for the remaining dowry quarter, or if he preferred to 'cash in' immediately. Choosing to wait, he shall receive his quarter 'in the future' – probably when the last of the daughters marries. Choosing to request the money immediately, Vincenzo was obligated to give him 10,000 ducats '*tanti contadi*'. The dowry would have thus amounted to a total of 12,500 ducats, and Betta's quarter of the Loredan dowry would have remained in the free use of Vincenzo, including the revenues of these lands which Andrea would have not be entitled to. However, if the period of three years had passed and Andrea did not present the request to renounce the Loredan dowry, Vincenzo would have no more been obligated to accept Andrea's request for cash.

The term continues, discussing how the dowry shall be managed in the unfortunate case that Andrea dies and Betta requests the restitution of her dowry. If Andrea did not request the monetary value within three years, then his heirs are obligated to return to Betta or her heirs the Loredan quarter of her dowry, and 1,500 additional ducats. One thousand remaining ducats shall not be returned, since they are gift to the bridegroom, traditionally labeled the *corredo* (*corredum*)¹⁷⁴. If Andrea did ask for the monetary value of the dowry within three years, Betta or her heirs shall receive 11,500 ducats from Andrea's heirs.

The marriage contract between Cornelia and Lunardo Emo, which took place on 10 May 1565, contains identical terms, with the exception that Lunardo was given only two years to present a request for the monetary value of the dowry (**doc. 1.1.3**)¹⁷⁵. Vincenzo's testament confirms that the dowry of all four daughters had to be handled in the same

fratta», 5 June 1567; (8) «conto fatto con il magnifico messer Vincenzo Grimani mio suocero», 15 June 1567, in the handwriting of Andrea da Molin; (9) «Succession presentata all'ufficio del Proprio per noi Piero da Molin et fratelli fo di messer Andrea nelli Beni di nostra madre morta ab intesta», 9 March 1601.

¹⁷⁴ Chojnacki, *Women and Men in Renaissance Venice*, 97.

¹⁷⁵ BCVe, Ms. PDC. 2597/1b, 10r-11v. The contract appears in a later copy, within a documents belonging to the sons Zuanne and Lunardo. The later document was drawn up after the death of Cornelia (1615), where the sons reclaimed possession of her portion of the Loredan dowry based on the marriage contract.

manner (**doc. 1.4.3**)¹⁷⁶. Eventually, Paola's dowry in her marriage to Federico Renier had been exchanged immediately with cash money (**doc. 1.1.4**)¹⁷⁷. In any case, it seems that the wait had been worthwhile: when the time came to divide the funds, the value of the portion of each daughter had been increased to 15,000 ducats.

The marriage contract of Betta Grimani Molin reveals the first important piece of information that directly regards the Fratta villa. The preliminary contract was drawn up on 3 June. The marriage was concluded with a second, concluding marriage contract exactly six months later, on 3 September 1564 (**doc. 1.1.2**)¹⁷⁸. In the document in question, the original contract was repeated, and was concluded with an appended note written by Vincenzo. There, he listed all of his possessions in Venice, Fratta Polesine and the Vespara that he had received as part of the Loredan dowry. When the time came, that is, probably when the last of the four daughters was to marry (although not necessarily), a quarter of the dowry would be passed to each one of the husbands, and in this case, to Andrea da Molin.

In the document, Vincenzo listed nine points, among them cash money, different houses in the *contrà* of San Vio in Venice¹⁷⁹, and the lands in the Vespara, including its animals and manufactures. There was also a barn that he proudly defined '*il piu bel fenil che sia in tutto il paese*'. The barn was positioned inside the territory that was shared with the Badoer family, the Valley of Santa Maria. It contained space for 220 cows and had a separate warehouse and a house for the workers, the latter had been constructed by Vincenzo himself for the cost of 400 ducats. The barn and house can be clearly identified in the Pontoni-Trevisi map:

¹⁷⁶ ASVe, *Notarile, Testamenti, Cesare Ziliol*, b. 1261, c. 891 (20 June 1567). Published in: Maschio, *Villa Loredan Grimani*, 166-167 n. 11. «Item lasso Andrianna e Paulla mie carissime fiolle per il suo maritar, dil mio, oltre tute le rason che li pol prevenir della roba de sua madre, ducati dui mille di contati et ducati cinquecento che lasin vestire per cadauna di esse caso che le se marida, e non altrimenti secondo che io ò fato al maritar delle altre due mie fiolle et sue sorelle Beta da Molin et Cornelia Emo come per sui contrati apar.»

¹⁷⁷ Had he not chosen the money, he would have received 2,500 ducats in cash and 500 ducats as investments, together with his share in the fourth of the Loredan dowry. The marriage contract can be found in: ASVe, *Notarile, Girolamo Savina*, b. 11889, c. 152v-153v (14 August 1579), and in a copy in: ASVe, *Archivio privato Badoer*, b. 2, 13v-15r. Partially published in Maschio, *Villa Loredan Grimani*, 171 n. 15.

¹⁷⁸ BCVe, Ms. PD. 510c/9, c. 2 (3 September 1564).

¹⁷⁹ See above note 166.

they are the large edifice with the word *'fenile'* (in Italian *'fienile'*) written beneath it and its adjacent house, positioned in the valley just beneath the *gorgo*. Both were drawn in traditional axonometry, indicating that they were probably already included in the original design of the map when it was designed by Pontoni and Trevisi in 1564.

However, most significantly, the fourth point in the document is dedicated to a piece of land in the territory of Fratta itself, where the villa is defined as a creation of Vincenzo, rather than a remodeling of a pre-existing old Loredan residence (**doc. fig. 3**)¹⁸⁰:

'Fourth. A piece of land in the town of Fratta, of nine fields, on which I have fabricated a beautiful house with two beautiful Tezze [barchesse]; One of them for the allocation of the factor, and the steward, with all of the commodities that one looks for, above which there is a beautiful granary, which can hold seven, or better, eight hundred venetian stari [measuring unit] of things; in the other Tezza there is a stable, that holds 20 horses in their places when still, and that contains straw, with servant rooms, and a place for cooking, with a granary above it that can hold about 400 Venetian stari of things. In all of these constructions I have spent about eight thousand ducats.'

The document, which has not been previously identified or published in the research history of the villa, provides the first written evidence for the identification of Vincenzo as the author and patron of the villa, at least in its preliminary structure. According to the description, the villa constituted of a central body and two *barchesse*: these elements appear in the description of the villa in the Pontoni-Trevisi map. However, unlike the *'fenile'*, which was also fabricated at the time by Vincenzo, the villa is not represented in a traditional axonometry: although it existed in 1564, it was not depicted on the map at the time of its original drawing. In the Cortivo-Gastaldi map, on the territory where the villa

¹⁸⁰ «4.o. Un Pezzo di Terra Nella Villa della fratta 'de campi Nove sopra il qual vi ho fabricato Una bellissima casa cò due bellissime Tezze, Una di esse e per stantia del fattor, et de'l gastaldo con tutte quelle comodita che si ricerca, sopra la qual vi e un bellissimo granaro, che tenira sette over ottocento stari Ven.i di robba; Nel'altra Tezza vi è Una stalia, che Tien xx cavalli cò li suoi luoghi da fermi, e da paglia recipienti Con Camere da servitori, et luogo da cocchio, cò Un granaro di sopra che puo tenir da stari 400 in ecirca Veneti de robba, Nelle qual Tutte fabriche ho speso da Ducati ottomille in ec.a. »

and garden were later to be constructed, there is one large house, a small house and a warehouse, an indication that Vincenzo did not build the villa before 1557.

The contents also provide an interesting detail regarding Vincenzo's personality, confirming his passion in constructing and maintaining houses in the countryside, and his particular interest in their technicality and functionality. While Vincenzo limited the description of the main body to '*a beautiful house*', and not even a palace, he was extremely enthusiastic about the *barchesse*, whose functional value, as dowry, he retained extremely important.

And yet, certain occurrences in the following decades indicate that the construction and decoration history of the villa did not terminate with the early campaign of Vincenzo.

1.4.2 The Fortune of the Remaining Dowry and Villa Grimani Molin

In August 14, 1579 at the advanced age of at least 23 years old, Paola, the youngest of the Loredan daughters, married Federico Renier. On the occasion, she desired to bring to the marriage as dowry, the money's worth of her portion of her mother's dowry. A piece of land in the Vespara estimated at the same value had been chosen in a manner that was easily to select and sell. The chosen territory was the Valley of Santa Maria, until then kept *pro-indiviso* between Vincenzo Grimani and Francesco Badoer's sons. On 13 August 1579, the day before she married, Paola officially extracted her portion from the unified property in the presence of her father and her sisters and their husbands. On the same day, Marc'Antonio and Zuanne Badoer bought the land from her for the sum of 15,000 ducats, out of which 7,000 would be given to her future husband when they marry, and the remaining sum shall be provided in eight yearly installments of 1,000 ducats. Paola's marriage contract, which was also handled by the Badoer brothers, also stated the value of

the land¹⁸¹. The remaining three quarters of the Loredan dowry were divided between the other three sisters and their husbands on 24 November 1580 (**doc. 1.2.6**).

When the portion of Paola is compared to the other three quarters, the estimate of 15,000 ducats may seem unproportional. The territory contained between 260 and 330 fields, which were however shared with the Badoer family, while each one of the other three portions specified in the 1580 document contained an average of over 200 fields, cash and houses¹⁸². In fact, the Valley of Santa Maria possessed specific characteristics that probably determined its increased value. Most of the land was not sowed and contained pastures, farm animals, a large barn and the house for the workers that was constructed by Vincenzo¹⁸³. A highly influential factor on the value of the land may have been the Badoer-Grimani *gorgo*, which was positioned at the northern end of the territory: actually, the transformation of the land to the Badoer would have also meant the transformation of the common water source. The function of the valley as pastureland is also hinted in its selling contract between Paola and her sisters. Paola was to remain the owner of the *chiavica* that was positioned between the

¹⁸¹ The main documents are registered in: ASVe, *Notarile, Girolamo Savina*, 11889. c. 145v-148v (13 August 1579, Paola extracts the land from her sisters), c. 149r-151r (13 August 1579, the Badoer buy the land from Paola), c. 152v-153v (14 August 1579, the marriage contract between Paola and Federico, see Appendix I, doc 1.1.4). All of the regarding acts are better documented in: ASVe, *Archivio privato Badoer*, b. 2: the Badoer registries also show that Federico had accepted the cash money from them on the following September, and by October he declared that he had received the initial amount of 7,000 ducats.

¹⁸² In 1564, Vincenzo claimed in front of his son-in-law that the valley contained a mere 330 fields, out of which only about 150 were good enough for sowing (doc. 1.1.2). However, two years later, in his 1566 *conditione*, Vincenzo himself declared that there were only 260 (doc. 1.3.1). In 1582, the Badoer brothers declared that the property contained 280 fields. «In ditta presa [*Vespara*] uno loco chiamato la valle hovero pascoli de Santa Maria et la zafardi campi duesento otanta à quella misuara. » ASVe, *Dieci Savi alle decime in Rialto, Redecime*, 1582, b. 162, n. 84 (6 March 1582).

¹⁸³ According to Vincenzo's *conditione* in 1566 (doc. 1.3.1), «nò si semina, né si cava piacer di sorta alcuna: ma se li tien del bestiame sopra per veder di bonificarla». According to Vincenzo in the marriage contract of Betta and Andrea (doc. 1.1.2), « 2do. Pascolo cò Un fenil suso, che Tiene Vacche dosento e vinti, de Cassi quindecj doppij, et è il piu bel fenil che sia in tutto il paese. Con la sua casina separata et casa per li casari che io ho fatto da novo cò tutte le sue comodità che mi costa ducati quatrocento in circa. Val – Denari 400. Et Medesmamente il Pascolo è miglio che sia in Tutti quelli contorni, Il qual è de campi Tresento e Trenta, et per indiviso cò il Magnifico messer francesco badoer si da Mita di esso saria campi centosessantacinque, li quali chi li Vollesse arare, se ne areria campi cento e cinquanta, li altri sariano bossissimj piadi.» In the *conditione* of the Badoer brothers in 1582, «campi [...] li quali per esser bassi non si possono seminare pero li manteniamo sopra delle vacche et cavalli. »

two households (and the *gorgo*), and responsible for its opening, closing and maintenance, allowing the stream from the Scortico to water the meadows according to specific regulations. Paola's responsibility for the *chiavica* suggests that she may have often been present in the Fratta villa. Perhaps she had even lived there before her marriage, as the unwed daughter, with the regular responsibility of controlling the *chiavica*.

Following the 1580 extraction, the villa remained *pro-indiviso* between Betta Grimani and Francesco and Andriana Valier. The division remained intact until 1615, when the Valier half was sold to Vincenzo da Molin and his brothers (**doc. 1.2.8**)¹⁸⁴. In 1564, when Vincenzo Grimani described the palace and its *barchesse* he mentioned that he had spent for their edification about 8,000 ducats. The later documents that regard the passage of the dowry provide sufficient details that enable the calculation of the approximate value of the villa when it changed hands in 1580, and in 1615. These estimates indicate that some important changes have occurred to its physical structure throughout the years. Moreover, these changes seem to have posed a significant weight in the events that brought to the 1580 division.

1.4.2.1 The Estimate Value of Villa Grimani Molin ca. 1580

After Paola had sold her share, the remaining three quarters of the Loredan dowry, containing fields in the Vespara, the Fratta villa, 13 houses in San Vio in Venice and the cash money were divided the next year into three parts of equal value¹⁸⁵. The three portions were defined in the following manner: (1) One-half of the palace and its garden, 110 fields, 89 fields, and two rented farmhouses that were in the 89-field section. (2) The other half of the palace and its garden, 104 fields, 83 fields and the structures holding animals in all of the above sections. (3) 104 fields, 110 fields, some un-inhabited sheds, and the Venetian houses. Because of the accurate descriptions in the document, the reconstruction of the territories can be outline without much difficulty in the Pontoni-Trevisi map (**map 1.4**). The reconstruction emphasizes how the first two portions not only shared the Fratta villa, but

¹⁸⁴ BCVe, Ms. PD. 515c/14, c. 1-8 (20 February 1615). Published in: Maschio, *Villa Loredan Grimani*, 174-176 n. 18.

¹⁸⁵ Appendix I, doc. 1.2.6. « posti per la maggior parte nella presa della Brespara, nel Polesene di Rovigo e parte qui in Venezia... hanno fatto delli sopradetti beni pro indiviso tre parti qui simili et eguali. »

also contained fields that were contiguous, selected in a manner that when the time comes, it will be easier for one side to acquire the remaining lands, or the other half of the villa.

Obtaining an estimate of the average value of a single field should enable to calculate the approximate value of the palace at the time of its division. Unfortunately, the division document does not provide enough information that enables to deduce their value; a document in the personal folder of Betta Grimani Molin provides some interesting clues.

The document is entitled simply '*stime illustrissimo Grimani*' (**doc. fig. 4**). The undated paper had been written for Andrea da Molin, and it is followed by two documents, an estimate of the cows and horses of Fratta, dated 5 June 1567, and an estimate made by Andrea with Vincenzo, dated 15 June 1567, and whose title implies that it had been personally written by Andrea da Molin. ('*conto fatto con... mio suocero*')¹⁸⁶. The first document thus could be dated any time between the marriage of Betta and Andrea, and Andrea's death, but its relevance to the following two estimates indicates that it is probably their contemporary.

The text, written in a neat and organized handwriting, is in fact a detailed description of all of the lands of the Vespara that form the large part of the Loredan dowry. The first six rows describe the six field portions divided between the three sisters, with their exact measurements in fields, '*campi*' and estimates in ducats. The seventh row, '*Pascolo delle vache*', is the Valley of Santa Maria that was held at the time *pro-indiviso* with the Badoer family. The eighth line, '*Brolo, cortivo*', describes the garden surrounding the Fratta villa; the final and ninth row describes the woods along the Castagnaro River, nominated '*I boschi di Ca' Grimani*' in later archival documents, which were shared with the Corner family. The document provides two estimates, the first, written to the left, is lower and seems to represent a previous estimate, whereas the second estimate, written to the right, is emphasized and contains corrections, and is probably the updated one.

¹⁸⁶ BCVe, Ms. PD. 510c/9, c. 6, c. 7, and c. 8.

The comparison between the fields included in the division of the dowry in 1580 and the '*stime illustrissimo Grimani*' is quit a simple task, resulting in the following estimates.

- (1) The portion that was eventually given to Francesco and Andriana Valier corresponds to the third and sixth rows in the document. 110 fields were worked by Baldissera Meschiato (Belin Meschiato in 1580), at a value of 55 ducats per-field, and 83 fields (89 fields in 1580) were worked by Piero Rizzato, at 45 ducats per-field.
- (2) The portion later given to Betta Grimani Molin contains the fourth and fifth rows. 104 fields were worked by Bastian Rizzato (Menego Rizzato in 1580) at 53 ducats per-field, and 87 fields (83 fields in 1580) were worked by Bellin Boaro at 48 ducats per-field.
- (3) The portion that was eventually given to Lunardo and Cornelia Emo were the first and second rows, two properties which were known as the '*disdotto*' and the '*Paulin*', measuring 104 and 110 fields respectively, both valued only 45 ducats per-field.

To these field estimates it is necessary to add the villa garden (8 fields at 80 ducats per-field), But also other elements which were mentioned by Vincenzo in the marriage contract of Betta and Andrea da Molin on 3 September 1564, and which appear in the 1580 division. These are the Fratta villa itself and the houses at San Vio in Venice (1,334 ducats).

The Grimani woods were not part of the divided property: they were not mentioned in the 1580 division, and seem to have remained in the shared property of the three owners¹⁸⁷. The cash money mentioned by Vincenzo in 1564 did not appear in part of the division document in 1580. In 1564 Vincenzo mentioned that the dowry included also 6,266 ducats in cash that by then had been reduced to 4,600. Therefore, it should be considered that each of the remaining three sisters could have received a third of whatever amount of the money had remained by then, which would have been anything between 0 and 1,533 ducats.

¹⁸⁷ Towards the end of the century, they still appear in archival documents under the communal denomination '*I boschi di Ca' Grimani*'. See for example: ASRo, *Notarile, Marino Filippi*, 503/G, c. 1426 (30 August 1591), an '*emptio*', a selling contract, performed for S. Bartolomeo Bertelli with «Clars.mi Nob. de Ca' Grimani» for a part of the «boschi di Ca' Grimani».

In the following documents, Andrea da Molin had listed estimates of cows and horses, cash money, the Venetian houses and different elements whose value still needed to be estimated at the time. Among the last group, there were sheep, cows, a small house, a house for the hunting sparrows (falcons), and even the old hay that has remained above the *barchessa*¹⁸⁸. In fact, when Paula had sold her portion for 15,000 ducats, the calculated sum must have included a large part of the animals. Her 260-323 fields were valued at 60 ducats per-field shared equally with the Badoer family, meaning that her half was worth 7,800-9,690 ducats. The remaining sum would have included much of the cows and horses, the manufactures such as the barn, and probably the *gorgo*.

The marriage contracts of Andrea da Molin and Lunardo Emo, and probably also Francesco Valier, describe a dowry in which the value of the Loredan portion that awaits them amounts to 10,000 ducats or greater. Together with the additional money that they had received on the day of marriage, it amounted to 12,500 ducats. When the division had been made, Paula brought to her marriage 15,000 ducats in cash as dowry. The remaining Loredan dowry was distributed in three equal parts. Significantly, the value of each third had not been mentioned in any of the documents. In order for each of the four sisters to receive an equal dowry in total, it is necessary to consider that each of the three portions amounted to 15,000 ducats *including* the earlier 2,500, leaving 12,500 ducats to be distributed in 1580.

When calculating the value of the fields according to the first estimate that is written to the left on the paper, the fields result at a value of about 6,500 ducats per-portion, which would have reflected an adequate estimate for a dowry that amounts to 10,000 ducats per-portion, leaving space for the additional parts of the dowry. On the other hand, when calculating their value according to the second estimate, the fields result at a value of about 10,000 ducats

¹⁸⁸ BCVe, Ms. PD. 510c/9, c. 8. « Item resta a vedr quello sia speso nella portiò della possession delli 18 moza [*referring to the additional expenses at the 'disdotto' fields*] dalla fratta; Item quello sia speso nella casa della motta; Item sia daveder quello sia spesso nella casa che si stava drieto; Item sia daveder quello sia pagato la casa di spalivieri; Item sia daveder quello sia pagato un pezzo di boscho; Item sia da stimar tutte le sudette si di pecore come di vache; Item sia da stimar tutte le robe della cassina; Item sia da stimar il fen vecchio che è rimasto sopra la teza. »

per-portion. This may be retained as an indication that the estimate made for Andrea da Molin had considered that the value of the dowry was now 12,500, higher than the original sum that had been promised in the marriage contracts of Andrea and Lunardo.

Because the portion of the dowry of Lunardo did not contain a part of the villa, it is possible to observe how it would have amounted to 12,500 ducats. His 214 fields, at the low value of 45 ducats per field, were worth 9,630 ducats. The houses in San Vio were valued by Vincenzo at 1,334 ducats in 1564, resulting in 10,964 ducats. The remaining sum, 1,536 ducats, may easily correspond to the last voice in Lunardo's portion, which he had received in addition to the fields and the San Vio houses: a section with inhabited houses in the Vespara. It may have also included whatever remained by 1580 from his third of the cash money.

The estimate may be considered quite credible, since Lunardo's *conditione* of 1582, written shortly after the division, reveals that neither the Vespara fields nor the houses in San Vio had incremented their value. Rather, the opposite was true. Regarding the houses in San Vio, Lunardo complained about their poor state, defining them as '*tristissime vecchissime et marce*' – very sad, very old and rotten. In 1564, Vincenzo had mentioned that the houses rendered 80-85 ducats per-year in rent, but according to Lunardo's *conditione*, by 1582 they barely rendered 74 ducats per-year¹⁸⁹. As for the Vespara lands, just like Betta Grimani Molin and Francesco Valier, in his *conditione* he complained that the lands are constantly subject to river overflows¹⁹⁰. But Lunardo, who seems to have been the

¹⁸⁹ ASVe, *Dieci Savi alle decime in Rialto, Redecime*, 1582, b. 162, n. 204 (10 March 1582). A copy exists in: BCVe, Ms. PDc. 2597/1, c. 21r-26v. «In Contrà di Sam Vio casete numero siedece mi sono toccate in division con miei cognati, et sono state poste per aggiunta della Division mità mità toccato per esser tristissime vecchissime et marce quali beni fù già tradotati diel nome de Vincenzo Grimani, quali sono doi zughe[?], quando s'affitta seno fusse, et si cavaria ducatti settanta quattro. »

¹⁹⁰ For Betta Grimani Molin: ASVe, *Dieci Savi alle decime in Rialto, Redecime*, 1582, b. 170, n. 786 (20 July 1582), see Appendix I, doc. 1.3.2 « nella presa della Vespara campi cento, e quaranta [...] qual lochi sono bassi, et si affo'dano dalle acque piovane, et son sottoposti à rotte di Po', et di Ladese. et sono bona parte di essi pascoli et prati, per non si poter usufruttuar tutti.» For Francesco Valier: *Ibid.*, b. 157bis, n. 583 (20 August 1582), see Appendix I, doc. 1.3.3 « nella presa della Vespara campi cento ottanta [...] le qual son sottoposte a Rotte di po, et ladese, et dalle acque piozane et tempeste, delli qual campi bona parte non si seminano per esser luochi bassi, oltre che parte di essi se ne lascia alli lavoradori per il vivere de loro animali, et per le rotte seguite si sono morte tutte le vide, et buona parte di albori.»

unluckiest of the three in the division, continued to complain, claiming that much of the land has not been sown because of its low altitude, that there were no trees or vines, and that *'they are the worst of the others in Fratta'*. He then mentioned that he had received them from Vincenzo together with the poor houses in San Vio, and requested the Senate to kindly consider their particularly low value in their estimate¹⁹¹.

A similar calculation can be performed for the remaining two portions of the dowry, which contain the combined value of 25,000 ducats, distributed between the Vespara fields, the extra rented houses and animals, the Fratta villa, its garden, and two thirds of whatever remained of the cash money. The fields of Francesco and Andriana Valier were valued at an estimate of 10,055 ducats ($110*55+89*45$), the fields of Betta Grimani Molin at 9,496 ducats ($104*53+83*48$), amounting to a total of 19,551 ducats. With the garden of the Fratta villa ($8*80$), 20,191 ducats, thus leaving 4,809 ducats to represent the estimate of the house itself, the extra rented houses and animals and perhaps some cash money. Even in considering that the estimate may be somewhat inaccurate, the resulting sum provides a general indication for the possible value of the villa, demonstrating that it was very likely significantly inferior in respect to the initial 8,000 ducats that Vincenzo had invested for its construction.

1.4.2.2 The Changes in Value between 1564 and 1615

In 1615, what brought to the decision to unite the palace under one owner was an initial, mutual desire on behalf of Betta Grimani Molin's sons and Francesco and Andriana Valier to divide it by physical means, so that each family could make use of one fixed half (**doc. 1.2.8**). According to the selling contract, a surveyor was employed for estimating the value of the palace, originally with the scope of determining how to divide it between the

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 1582, b. 162, n. 204. « Item mi attrovo nel Polesine di Rovigo in Villa detta Ca' delle Fratta nella presa della Vespara Campi cento, et vinti a quella misura, in [-], et banchi sottoposte alle acque piovane et Rotte dell'Adese, lavorati, per havertela mia Rittratto, delli quali gran parte non si semina per esser bassi, et però li Pradi se li dà per li animali, non vi sono arbori ne vide, per esser marcij li Arbori per le rotte seguite ultimamente, et li miei sono peggiori delli altri de Fratta. La [-], che alla mia parte s' tratta datto aggiuntale de San Vido di sopra nominate, et le semanze quei sotto, si che può considerar quanto sono peggiori fuori dai possessioni per uno li lava compreso la decima che c' noltra [...] »

two families. Unable to find a solution that would not *'damage the valuable palace'*, because of the nature of its structure, it was suggested that the house would be put to a draw, and that the side who won the possession would pay a half of its worth to the side who was obliged to renounce it. Vincenzo da Molin won the extraction, and bought the other half from Francesco and Andriana Valier for the sum of 5,000 ducats. The acquisition clearly indicates that the total value of the palace in 1615 was a mere 10,000 ducats.

Although Vincenzo Grimani had spent for the initial construction 8,000 ducats around the years 1557-1564, by 1580 the palace seems to have lost much of its worth. Thirty-five years later, the palace has again doubled its value. This seems like quite a convincing indication for the possibility that some sort of construction or renovation activity had taken place sometime in between that period. Interestingly, a suggestion regarding the period of the operation may also be deduced from the available corpus of archival documents:

When Paola extracted her portion of the dowry from her sisters in 1579 her motive, explicitly mentioned in the notary document, was not singular. While the second reason was to choose a portion that was easy to extract and to sell immediately, the first reason, which was therefore more significant, was that Paola wanted *'to escape from the expenses of the palace'*¹⁹². This curious affirmation receives a precise confirmation the following year. The division of the property between the other three daughters had been made because: *'each one of the above-mentioned parts desires to divide [the dowry] in friendship and without difficulty and without judicial noise'*, and *'to avoid the expenses and the disturbances that will follow, performing this division because of the palace'*¹⁹³.

Even in choosing to disregard the calculation of the possible estimate of the villa in 1580 completely, because of its relative complexity, the documents themselves testify that in the

¹⁹² See Appendix I, doc. 1.2.3. «per fuggir le spese del palazzo, et affine che più facilmente segua la vendita ne che detta magnifica madonna Paula intendi di fare »

¹⁹³ See Appendix I, doc. 1.2.6. «et desiderando cadauna delle parti sopradette dividerli amichevolmente et de plano senza strepito giudiziale et schivar le spese et li disturbi che seguiriano facendosi tal divisione per la via del palazzo.»

same period the structure was in a problematic state, and that it would soon be subject to significant changes. In any case, it was a house valued at 8,000 ducats in 1564, which was sold for the higher sum of 10,000 ducats forty-six years later; the only justification to sell an old building for a higher value would be if additional works had been performed on it.

A project for the renovation of the house may have already existed, and works were probably about to begin. More cautiously, it is at least clear that by 1579, and still in 1580, the palace was in a condition that required urgent intervening, and its deteriorating state was recognized by all of the figures participating in the division of the Loredan dowry. The '*expenses*' that Paola wanted to escape from and the '*expenses and disturbances*' that were expected following the division of the palace would have included the costs of the possible, partial demolition of the old residence, and the reconstruction of the new one, as well as the commission of its decorative program.

1.4.2.3 The Renovation Phase

Prior to the division, the land and villa properties were still under the custody of Vincenzo, and he was the only one entitled to manage, to maintain and to develop them. Vincenzo's awaking activity in the Polesine may also be considered as an indication that he was the one to initiate the villa's renovation project. Between 1564 and 1580, he seems to have regularly visited Fratta. He was usually in town in August for hunting purposes at least until 1570. On 15 July 1572 was still actively involved in the *scolador* project together with Marc'Antonio Badoer, and by 1582 he also owned fields in the Polesine holdings of Pontecchio and the Salvadeghe, in part acquired in the late 1570's¹⁹⁴. In July 1580, he had obtained permission from the *Beni Inculti* to create a *scolador* in Loreo, where his son Domenico would later continue his land reclamation operations¹⁹⁵.

¹⁹⁴ For Vincenzo's participation in the *scolador* project see Appendix I, doc. 2.1.2 (6 February 1564), and: BCVe, Ms. PDc. 2346/VII (15 July 1572). An addition of 30 fields in the Salvadeghe is found in an update to his 1566 *condizione*: ASVe, Dieci Savi alle decime in Rialto, Redecime, 1566, b. 146, n. 1232 (10 July 1576).

¹⁹⁵ ASVe, *Beni Inculti, Lettere dell'ufficio*, b. 107, c. 80r-80v (14 July 1580). Letter from the *Beni Inculti* to the mayor of Loreo. Vincenzo had obtained permission from the Beni Inculti «di far un scolador per ridur li luoi lochi a Cultura giusta la sua supplicatione all'ufficio [...] presentata sotto di 21 marzo prossimo passato». He

The period 1579-1580 revokes some particular events concerning the hydraulic works on the *scolador* of the Vespara. The division of the Loredan dowry was performed with the aid of the surveying capabilities of Giovan Battista Remi, who was credited for the job in the 1580 document, and defined as a common family friend¹⁹⁶. As mentioned above, the surveyors Remi and Marchesino Marchesin were in the Vespara sometime between November 1579 and May 1580 in order to decide where to place an extension for the *scolador* towards the territories of the Lendinara holding. They were required by the *Beni Inculti* to draw up a map for the occasion, to be appended to the map that the office already possesses, that is, the Pontoni-Trevisi map that contains the rest of the project of the *scolador* (**doc. 2.2.3**)¹⁹⁷.

It is probable that Remi and Marchesin brought the 1564 map from Venice to the site to assist them with the study and the design of the rest of the project, just as other surveyors have typically done when visiting the Vespara. Lendinara is located northwest of Fratta. Therefore, it is very likely that the extension of the *scolador* passed in the area just north to the two Fratta villas, where the inscription 'PONTE CANAL DELA VAL DENTRO' was probably added to the Pontoni-Trevisi map in a later phase. This is the only portion of the map that is drawn on the upper border of the paper, and the only northern portion on the map where a part of the *scolador* passes. Since Remi was the one to help divide the Loredan dowry into three (or even four) equal parts, we may also carefully suggest that he could have drawn the two villas on the map on the same occasion. Villa Grimani would have been drawn under these circumstances in the form of a technical graphic plan because it was part of the property to be divided with the Vespara lands, or because it was still an ongoing project. The depiction of the Badoer villa would have been justified because

then received permission from the mayor of Loreo to proceed with the operations (*Ibid.*, b. 108, c. 279). See also: Mantovanelli, "Esempi di bonifica," 150-151 and docs. 9-11.

¹⁹⁶ See Appendix I, doc. 1.2.6. « Dette parti concordemente hanno fatto delli sopradetti beni pro indiviso tre parti qui simili et eguali, che sia grato, comodo et possibile con l'aiuto et perizia de messer Zuanne Battista de Remi, publico agrimensore loro comune amico. »

¹⁹⁷ ASVe, *Beni Inculti, Mandati*, b. 75, c. 17 (22 February 1580). « farete un disegno da esser aggiunto a quello che al presente si trova nell'officio. »

of the involvement of the Badoer brothers in buying Paola's portion, with her maintaining control of the *chiavica*, and because of their profiting from the *gorgo*.

A comparison of Villa Badoer's description on the map with Palladio's plan for it in his *Quattro Libri* highlights the technical and environmental characteristics of the map drawing (**map 1.1, figs. 6-8**). While Palladio had accentuated the spatial sub-division of the interiors, in the Pontoni-Trevisi map, in both villas the designer was far more concerned with the outlines of the principal bodies and with the details of the Badoer garden. He had concentrated on the insertion of these elements within the surrounding hydraulic systems of the *scolador*, the Scortico River, the private water channels, the *gorgo* and the private gardens of both households. It is possible that at the time, both villas were undergoing a process of renovation of their surroundings, that was related either to the extension of the *scolador*, or to a private desire of the patrons of the villa to improve the hydraulic services and functionalities of their rural residences.

1.4.3 The Decoration Project and its Patronage

While the construction phase of Villa Grimani Molin seems to point to the patronage of Vincenzo Grimani, the decorative program of the villa recounts another narrative. The historical archival sources and the eventual iconographical content of the frescoes point to a period that was slightly posterior to Vincenzo's death, and to a patronage that includes an evident female presence. The main protagonist, responsible for the commission and payment, is likely to be identified with the eldest daughter of the Grimani-Loredan/Emo household, Betta Grimani, the widow of Andrea da Molin.

The strongest indication for the patronage of the decoration is obtained from the repeated, inescapable appearances of the Molin coat of arms in the frescoes. Their depiction has brought to hazardous assumptions on behalf of several scholars, who claimed with great certainty that the villa could have only been decorated up until the death of Andrea da

Molin (1575), although the latter had never actually possessed it¹⁹⁸. A non-invasive analysis of the frescoes performed at the villa has shown that the Molin coats of arms were all part of the original program, and that no other depiction or coat of arms had been painted underneath them in an earlier phase¹⁹⁹. In the examination of the south portal of the central hall, a hole had been identified in the plaster, which clearly shows that there had been no underlying paint (**fig. 9**). In addition, when the villa was restored around 1972, on the outside portal of the loggia, the original Molin coat of arms had been discovered beneath the coat of arms of the Bregadin family (**fig. 10**)²⁰⁰.

Perhaps, the assumption of these scholars had stemmed from a difficulty to consider that in the patriarchal society of Renaissance Venice, the commission a fresco program could have been initiated and executed by a respectable noblewoman. However, the contemporary Venetian society codes contained a set of clear rules regarding the activities expected from adult women of different status, whether they were unmarried and living at home, sent to live in a nunnery, married, or widowed.

The research of Monica Chojnacka has demonstrated that both patrician and common women were financial actors in Early Modern Venice, in particular unmarried, and especially widowed women. In the latter decades of the sixteenth century, Venice was filled with unmarried and widowed women. Many details about women's role as caretakers, possessors, protectors and managers of wealth are recovered from notary documents. Women could yield power through their wills, and many women were active financial agents who negotiated leases, challenged debts, and filed business proposals with the state. Women who had business interests in the mainland occasionally visited their properties. The 1582 *condizioni di decima* provide evidence for how widely different forms of property ownership were distributed in categories of class and marital status. A third of

¹⁹⁸ Semenzato, *Le ville del Polesine*, 55; Tiozzo, *Il Palladio e le ville*, 41; Trinchieri Camiz, "Significati iconografici," 123.

¹⁹⁹ The inspection was performed at my presence on 3 September 2012 by R. Giacometti and with S. Guseo.

²⁰⁰ Bottacin, "D'amore, di storia, d'alchimia," 106 and fig. 1.

the *condizioni* given in 1582 were by women, more than half of them widowed. They document women who managed their own wealth, as well as the wealth of others. An overwhelming number of noble widows who had inherited goods or money from their husbands, and often had children to support, headed their own households²⁰¹.

Certainly, neither of the Loredan daughters lacked the adequate educational background for the commission of an erudite decorative program for the villa. Their knowledge and manners, acquired under the guidance of their stepmother Andriana Emo, are also evident from the various compliments in their favor that appear in the husbands' wills. However, Betta held a special position within the expanded Grimani family. Her status would have legitimized her desire and her ability to commission a decorative program that carried the name of her wedded family, without having to excuse the presence of the Molin coat of arms in a house that was still held *pro-indiviso*, and still in use by three of the sisters.

Above all, Betta's status as a widowed wife was a notable advantage in terms of financial independence. If a widowed wife requested the restitution of her dowry from the Venetian office of the *Giudici del Proprio*, she became its legal manager and solemn owner. The dowry reclamation procedure, based on a regulation from the year 1242, was a two-stage process. In the first, *Vadimonium*, the widow or her heirs presented documentation of the dowry to the *Giudici del Proprio*. In the second, *Diiudicatus*, the same judges provided their sentence²⁰². Betta, who was widowed in a relatively early stage of her marriage, had indeed requested the restitution of her dowry from the *Giudici del Proprio* on 28 June 1576, and received approval from the same office on 9 July 1576 (**doc. 1.2.2 and doc. 1.2.7**)²⁰³.

²⁰¹ Monica Chojnacka, *Working Women of Early Modern Venice* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University press, 2001), esp. 24-30.

²⁰² Chojnacki, *Women and Men*, 53-75, 96-97.

²⁰³ For the request: ASVe, *Giudici del Proprio, Vadimoni*, b. 62, 65r-66r (28 June 1576). Copy in: BCVe, Ms. PD. 510c/9, c. 4. For the approval, there is a written affirmation of a notary in a later document: ASVe, *Notarile, Gaspar Fabio*, b. 5860 (3 December 1597). Copy in: BCVe, Ms. PDC. 515/10, c. 2. «Clarissima Signora Isabetta l'anno 1564 a tre gennaro dati in dote al predetto quondam Clarissimo Signore Andrea Molin fu suo marito, e poi per essa a nove luglio 1576 havuti in restituzione di dote dall'officio Clarissimo di Propio com'appare nelli atti di detto offitio da me infrascritto notaro visto, e letto».

Once she received the fields in the Vespara and half of the Fratta villa, they were hers to manage.

Moreover, in the years between her husband's and her father's death Betta's financial management was not entirely independent. Shortly after receiving the dowry, her father Vincenzo assumed the responsibility for the management of her funds and of the patrimony of Andrea da Molin. On 8 February 1576 (m. v.), Vincenzo called up his personal lawyer and drew up a standard agreement according to which he was now the manager of Betta's finances. The same agreement is cited on 20 June 1580, where Vincenzo, acting in the name of Betta who was the testament executor of her deceased husband, had paid off an old debt of 130 ducats of Andrea to another member of the expanded Molin family (**doc. 1.2.5**)²⁰⁴.

Betta Grimani was the eldest sister in the entire Grimani-Loredan and Grimani-Emo household, a status that would have justified a privileged relationship with her father. Having lost her husband at an early stage of her life, Betta lived with her young children in the old '*casa di statio*' of Vincenzo, near his own palace in Sant'Agnese, under his physical and financial supervision²⁰⁵. Being a young widow whose financial responsibilities were taken care of by her father, her main concern regarded the upbringing and education of her five children. It is probable that during that period she was able to continue to develop her own cultural and intellectual capacities. Significantly, she was the third 'Isabetta Grimani' in the family tree in the course of the sixteenth century: Vincenzo's mother and grandmother, both intriguing and influential figures, were both named Isabetta.

The will of Isabetta Soranzo, the wife of Vincenzo Grimani the Elder, has survived through a copy from the early seventeenth century that is conserved to date in the library of the Correr Museum (**doc. 1.4.1**)²⁰⁶. The important document draws an interesting picture regarding the desires and character of Vincenzo's influential grandmother. The document

²⁰⁴ BCVe, Ms. PD. 513c, c. 33 (20 June 1580).

²⁰⁵ When Andrea da Molin wrote his will, he was living in a rented house in Santa Giustina, located at the other end of town, close to San Francesco della Vigna. See Appendix I, doc. 1.4.4.

²⁰⁶ BCVe, Ms. PDc. 517/89, c. 6-18v (6 June 1549). Found during the current research campaign.

dates to 1549, but repeats the contents of the will drawn by Isabetta in 1528, a year after her son, Antonio, was killed by his brother-in-law Girolamo Paradiso. According to the will, Isabetta had completely alienated her daughter Elena from the family, who had married Girolamo without her consent, a decision that caused to the sequence of events that brought great shame and sorrow to the entire family. Isabetta nominated two testament executors, her husband (who was still alive) and her widowed daughter-in-law, Isabetta Pisani. Isabetta Soranzo cared very much for Vincenzo Junior's mother, nominating her as the person responsible to select any additional testament executors, accepting the fact that she might re-marry, and deciding that if Vincenzo Junior did not produce any heirs, his mother should profit from her goods while she is still alive²⁰⁷.

Isabetta Soranzo stated that she had recently performed an official donation of all of her possessions to Vincenzo Junior, who shall be entitled for them upon her death, when he arrived at the legal age of eighteen. The same donation was recorded in the marriage contract of Vincenzo and Lucrezia in 1529. Indeed, in 1554 Vincenzo officially claimed the transition of his grandmother's *condizione di decima* into his own account, acquiring all of her possessions (**doc. 1.4.1**)²⁰⁸. It was probably then when he had received the family palace at Sant'Agnese. In fact, the palace was registered under Isabetta Soranzo's possessions: her husband's original Venetian residence was the second floor in the Grimani palace in Santa Maria Formosa, donated to him by his father in 1500. In her will, Isabetta stated that after her death, her husband should continue to live in the palace in peace and without having to pay any form of rent.

Vincenzo did not mention the palace in his *conditione* of 1566, but rather, stated that he lived in his '*casa di statio*' in San Vio. However, he may have already physically transferred to the palace. In 1541 the marriage between Vincenzo and Lucrezia took place in the same palace, and in 1556, the death of Lucrezia had been registered in Sant'Agnese. In 1564, the

²⁰⁷ As mentioned above, in 1528 Isabetta Pisani received from her father-in-law a portion of the Grimani palace in Santa Maria Formosa, which she had profited from until she remarried in 1532.

²⁰⁸ BCVe, Ms. PDc. 517/89, c. 19 (19 September 1554).

marriage of Betta and Andrea already took place *'in casa di sposa, a S. Vito'*²⁰⁹. Although the palace in Sant'Agnese would have been where Vincenzo had spent most of his life as a young man, just like the other houses in his possession, the Fratta villa, the Spessa villa and the palace in Prato della Valle, Vincenzo made no mention of it in his *condizione*.

Towards the end of the century, on 3 December 1597, the 'young' Betta Grimani Molin, by now the solemn head of her family for over twenty years, had sold a portion of her Vespara fields to her sons Pietro, Marin, and Vincenzo. The latter, the youngest among the sons, was already a grown 27-year-old man (**doc. 1.2.7**). While in 1582 Betta and her children were living in her father's house in San Vio, when drawing up the act in 1597 she was living with her sons *'in domo habitationis... in contrà Sta' Agnesis'*²¹⁰. Betta also died there around 1601²¹¹. Because of her status as Vincenzo's eldest daughter, it is very likely that she was now living in the same family palace that her father had inherited from his grandmother.

The young Betta was probably very aware of her special status as the eldest daughter and as the namesake of Vincenzo's two dearest influential figures, and she would have seen herself as a representative of her respectable female ancestors²¹². Betta could have found the time and the justification for the commission of the fresco program after the death of her father, when her children were grown and her funds returned to her autonomous control.

Both the Molin and the Valier families made occasional use of the residence, as stated in their *condizioni di decima* given in August 1582, a year after the division was preformed (**doc. 1.3.2 and doc. 1.3.3**). However, being a widow whose principal material possessions were her portion of the Loredan dowry, Betta would have been the main person to visit the villa after the division. She did not pass the rest of her fields in the Vespara and the Fratta villa to her sons until after her death, although they were already managing some of their own

²⁰⁹ ASVe, *Avogaria di Comun, Matrimoni, con notizie dei figli*, "Molin Andrea fu Piero".

²¹⁰ «Actum Venetijs In domo habitationis [eup.sos?] Clarissimi matris et filiores posita in contrà Sta' Agnesis.»

²¹¹ See below note 214.

²¹² She probably knew her grandmother Isabetta Pisani very well; she was still alive in 1567, nominated as the testament executor of Vincenzo.

finances as early as 1582²¹³. Only when she had died in 1601, unfortunately without leaving a will, they were finally transferred to her sons²¹⁴. Francesco Valier was occasionally in Fratta, especially after 1597, when he replaced Marc'Antonio Badoer as the president of the Vespara. The *scolador*, however, had already been completed and extended, and his office involved general questions of orderly maintenance. In addition to the Loredan dowry, Francesco's patrimony included a house in Fratta that he had inherited from his father (rented out in 1582), as well as a series of properties around Treviso, including a small house with a piece of land in Melma, which he did not rent out but had kept for his own use.

The contents of the fresco program, which are studied throughout the following chapters, may be read in two different manners. On one hand, they represent Betta's status as an intellectual noble woman, a concept which culminates with the portrait of the young lady in her 30's, probably Betta herself, depicted in an illusionist perspective that recalls similar instances in the *Sala della Crociera* in Villa Barbaro at Maser (**figs. 11, 11.1**). On the other hand, the fresco program also strongly commemorates the figure of her father. It recalls the cultural interests and activities related to him and to his ancestors, and especially to Patriarch Giovanni, who was still alive after Vincenzo's death (**fig. 12**).

It is possible that a decorative program was at least partially prepared when Vincenzo initiated the renovation of the villa around 1579. It would have been thought up by him, probably with a great amount of participation and counseling on behalf of his great-uncle Giovanni. While it is plausible that both Betta and Francesco Valier paid for the

²¹³ In 1582 Piero, the eldest of the Molin sons, presented the *condizione* in the name of himself and his brothers. The children owned various properties in Venice and around Treviso, as well as a half of a '*casa da statio*', shared with their cousins, which was rented out. They probably lived with their mother, because of their young age, and as indicated by their declaration, which was performed from San Vio, on the same day as their mother's: ASVe, *Dieci Savi alle decime in Rialto, Redecime*, 1582, b. 170, n. 851 (20 July 1582).

²¹⁴ ASVe, *Giudici del Proprio, Successioni*, b. 7, reg. 16, c. 174 (9 March 1601). « [...] per Clarissimi D'ni Petrus, et Marinus, et Vincentius frés filij quondam Illustrissimi D'ni Andrea de Molina, et quondam Clarissima D'na Helisabeth Grimani lugalius, succedant, et per successione habere debant omnia bona mobiliia, stabilia, denarij, Montius [...] quondam Clarissima D'na Helisabeth morta eos matrius morta ab intestato in contrà S.te Agnesis [...]» A copy is in: BCVe, Ms. PD. 510c/9, c. 9., entitled: «Succession presentata all'officio del Proprio per noi Piero da Molin et fratelli fo di messer Andrea nelli Beni di nostra madre morta ab intesta»

construction of the new villa, having each inherited half of the construction, after Vincenzo's death times had changed. Betta was probably the only one who was still willing to proceed with the additional expenses of commissioning the decorative program. At that stage, she might have recovered the iconographical plan from Giovanni or from whoever had held on to it. She might have then created modifications, various additions and cancellations, with the help of her family members, and especially her sisters Cornelia and Andriana, who still occasionally frequented the villa in the years to come.

While the architect of the renewed villa was probably singled out by Vincenzo, Betta would have been the one who chose the artist or artists that were responsible for the execution of the fresco program. Their possible identity is discussed throughout the coming chapter.

STRUCTURE AND DECORATION

DESCRIPTIVE ISSUES

2.1 SITE AND ARCHITECTURE

2.1.1 Description and Analysis

Today, Villa Grimani Molin is positioned at the very heart of the territory of the municipality of Fratta Polesine (**figs. 2, 2.1, 13**). In the sixteenth century, its garden used to define the western border of the town, which overlooked the lands of the historical Vespara holding. To the east, the villa and garden are delineated by the course of the Scortico River, which passes through the center of Fratta, in front of Villa Badoer. The river crosses Villa Grimani Molin and continues southwards towards the Vespara Canal Bridge, after which it drains its water in the Canalbianco. The façade of the villa faces north, where it can be approached from the center of the town, communicating with its nearest neighbor, Villa Badoer.

The structure and its surroundings have undergone various modifications in the five centuries following its original construction. The current review does not intend to perform an exhaustive investigation and analysis of the architectural traits of the building and its successive modifications, which should be reserved to a research project that is dedicated to the architectural study of the villa. The chapter is primarily concerned with the characteristics and changes whose identification is essential for the study of the decorative program, and which provide indications regarding the possible author of the architectural project. These changes concern the state of the villa in the first decades of its construction, and in particular, its state after Vincenzo's creation had been modified and decorated, that is, during the penultimate decade of the sixteenth

century. While some of the later modifications can be identified within the available historical documentation of the villa, others may be identified only by way of a careful observation of the architectural and decorative details.

Only general information regarding the exterior outlines of the villa, its *barchesse* and its garden may be deduced from the sixteenth century maps, and from the Napoleonic and Austrian land registries of the area, which date to 1811 and 1845 respectively¹. The description of Villa Grimani Molin in the Pontoni-Trevisi map is provided only in a simplified plan, which however still complies with the dimensions and location of the physical elements in the modern state of the villa; indicating that with great probability, the depicted villa represents the present structure. Besides the fact that Vincenzo's original villa also contained a main body and two large *barchesse*, the available documentation does not enable the reconstruction of any hypothetic shape, or – assuming the old *barchesse* and/or villa were similar to the present state – of any hypothetic plastic articulation of the architecture.

The earliest and most concrete known document that recounts the state of the villa dates to 1783, two whole centuries after its construction. It was executed by the Venetian surveyor Giovanni Vettori following the request of Zuanne Francesco Correr, who had inherited the villa in 1748 from its last Molin owner, his uncle Antonio². Zuanne Francesco frequented the villa until he had decided it was time to make it available for rent. On 1 October 1783, he ordered from Vettori a detailed report of the villa, its two *barchesse*, courtyard and surrounding garden, accompanied by detailed measurements and drawings, in order to produce a value estimate of the property (**figs. 14-17**)³.

¹ The section of the center of Fratta Polesine in the '*Catasto napoleonico*', the Napoleonic land register, is found in: ASVe, *Catasto napoleonico, Fratta Polesine, Paolino*, foglio 292 (11 November 1811). Published in: Rugolo, "La fabbrica e il suo sito," fig. 21. For the depiction of Fratta in the '*Catasto austriaco*' see: ASRo, *Catasto austriaco-italiano*, foglio 9. Published in: Rugolo, *Ibid.*, fig. 28.

² Antonio was married to Virginia Correr, whose nephew and heir was Zuanne Francesco. Maschio, "Dimore degli dei," 21. For the report of Vettori see: ASPd, *Notarile, Antonio Brusoni*, b. 8342, n. 254, c. 151r-158v (10 April 1784, copy of the original from 1 October 1783). Published in *Ibid.*, *Villa Loredan Grimani*, 178-182 n. 20.

³ ASPd, *Ibid.*, drawings n. 2/I, n. 2/III, n. 2/II, and detail of drawing n. 1/I. For the entire selection of Venturi's drawings see: Rugolo, "La fabbrica e il suo sito," figs. 13-20.

The property was rented the following month by Giuseppe Sebastian Monti from Fratta, initiating a long history of ownership changes, until the villa was acquired in 1970 by its current owners, Avvocato Antonio Avezzù Pignatelli di Montecalvo and his wife Maria Carla Lorenzoni⁴. The current owners were responsible for the commission of the latest restorations works of the villa, which were terminated in 1972⁵.

The main body of the villa faces a green courtyard to the north. It was once flanked by the two large, quadrangular *barchesse* whose functionality was described accurately by Vincenzo Grimani in 1564⁶. The east *barchessa*, which stood between the villa and the Scortico River and which used to contain the stalls, was demolished sometime between 1811 and 1844⁷. The west *barchessa* that used to serve the Merescalchi family when they were the factors of the villa is still inhabited to date by the current factor (**figs. 18,18.1**). The large structure contains a rusticated loggia with five arches in a Doric-Tuscan order, which bares a notable resemblance to the exterior walls of Mantua's Palazzo Te (**fig. 19**). A similar decorative scheme was repeated by Michele Sanmicheli (1484-1559) in Villa Soranza around 1540 in Castelfranco Veneto, whose reconstruction was performed by David Hemsoll (**fig. 20**)⁸.

⁴ For a detailed review of the later history of the villa, see: Maschio, "Dimore degli dei," 21-25. During the years the villa had passed from the Correr, to the Monti, it had become the historical meeting place of the *Carbonari* patriots, and was divided between two sisters from the Emo family, until it was unified again under the ownership of Eng. Alessandro Crivellari Bregadin in 1885. When he had died in 1928, the villa passed to his daughter, Emma, who married General Domenico Guerrini, a distinguished military historian. In 1948 Emma Crivellari Bregadin died, leaving the house to her adopted heir Walter Mischiatti Crivellari Bregadin. In 1970 the villa was bought by the current owner, Avvocato Antonio Avezzù Pignatelli di Montecalvo.

⁵ The report of C. B. Tiozzo, who was responsible for the restoration of the frescoes, may be found in: Maschio, *Villa Loredan Grimani*, 189-191 n. 26.

⁶ See Appendix 1, doc. 1.1.2 « One of them for the allocation of the factor, and the steward, with all of the commodities that one looks for, above which there is a beautiful granary, which can hold seven, or better, eight hundred venetian *stari* of things; In the other *Tezza* there is a stable, that holds 20 horses in their places when still, and that contains straw, with servant rooms, and a place for cooking, with a granary above it that can hold about 400 Venetian *stari* of things. »

⁷ The east *barchessa* still appears depicted in the Napoleonic land register; by the time the Austrian register was drawn in 1845, the *barchessa* had been demolished. For the two land registries see note 2 above.

⁸ Rugolo, "La fabbrica e il suo sito," 69; David Hemsoll, "Le Ville di Sanmicheli. Architettura, cultura e linguaggio nel Cinquecento," in *Michele Sanmicheli: architettura, linguaggio e cultura artistica nel Cinquecento*, ed. Silvia Foschi (Milan: Electa, 1995), 98.

The main body of the villa was granted a simple and uniform quadrangular form, perceived as almost square. The enclosed geometrical shape is interrupted in the façade by a large loggia or portico surmounted by a pediment, which cover the main entrance portal to the villa. The portico front contains six large Doric or Tuscan columns. Their distribution, leaving the central opening slightly larger, corresponds to the articulation of the entrance portal below, to the bases of its five rusticated brick arches. An observation of a historical photo of the villa, dating to 1925, reveals that the portal that anticipates a *pronaos* that leads into the ground floor was once covered with plaster, just as in the existing state of the remaining *barchessa* (figs. 21, 21.1). According to the current owners of the villa, traces of the plaster covering were found on the bricks during the restoration works of 1970-1972. In sixteenth century Mantua, Giulio Romano was the architect who had originally applied the aesthetic solution of covering brick walls with a uniform plaster coating, creating a visual illusion of use of large stone slabs. The entire structure of the Palazzo Te is molded in the same manner⁹.

However, a more interesting and more contemporary point of comparison may be the rusticated ground floor façade of Sabbioneta's ducal palace (figs. 13, 22, 22.1)¹⁰. The palace was the first major structure to be built in Sabbioneta by Duke Vespasiano Gonzaga. It was constructed and decorated between the years 1559 and 1568, the year in which Vespasiano had gone to Spain, and completed after his return in 1577, with ulterior decorations and additional modification of the façade. While some of the painters have been identified by scholars, the author of the building is unknown. In respect to the façade of Palazzo Te, the Sabbioneta façade resembles the Fratta villa in the somewhat thicker articulation of the illusionistic stone form, which is lighter and more subtle in the Mantuan

⁹ Amedeo Belluzzi and Walter Capezzali, *Il Palazzo dei lucidi inganni: Palazzo Te a Mantova*, Intro. K. W. Forster (Florence: Centro di architettura Ouroboros, 1976), 57-67; Amedeo Belluzzi, *Palazzo Te a Mantova / The Palazzo Te in Mantua*, photos G. Sgrilli, contributions P. Robino and G. Roli, 2 vols. (Modena: Panini, 1998), vol. I, 101-111 (chap. IV, "Architettura e decorazione"), esp. 101.

¹⁰ I am thankful to S. Guseo for calling my attention to this important detail. For the Ducal Palace of Sabbioneta see: Paolo Carpeggiani, *Sabbioneta*, pref. L. Puppi (Quistello: Ceschi, 1972), 51-63, Giovanni Sartori, *Sabbioneta Illustrissima: la memoria ritrovata* (Sabbioneta: Comune di Sabbioneta, 2005).

example. In particular, there is a notable similarity in the key vault of the central arch of the villa, and in the solution of the treatment of the joints between the arches.

Two external staircases currently flank the façade of Villa Grimani Molin, leading into the loggia. According to Vettori, at the time of giving the report only the right (east) staircase had been present. Assuming, for aesthetic reasons, that there were probably originally two, Vettori had designed the left staircase in his report '*for accompaniment*' (figs. 14-16)¹¹. In fact, the left staircase had only been constructed around 1970 by the commission of the current owners. Ruggero Rugolo has explained that there is a very good reason to believe that neither of the external staircases were part of the original plan, but rather, they were part of a later modification phase of the villa that had been interrupted. Besides the structural motivations for his assumption, he noted the form of the balustrade, definitely posterior to the sixteenth century, and the presence of a frescoed satire (or faun) in the vault of the entrance vestibule of the ground floor, whose finger indicates the internal staircase to the visitor (fig. 20)¹².

Outside the property of the villa and its garden, in the old Santa Maria Valley, the large barn and mentioned by Vincenzo exists to date with slight modifications (map 1.1, fig. 2.1). The '*il piu bel fenil che sia in tutto il paese*' has maintained its original denomination, today called the '*fenilon*', a traditional didactic farm with an adjacent Bed and Breakfast. The latter is a small house that also appears in the Pontoni-Trevisi map. It may be the small house that was constructed by Vincenzo himself, or a house that was later built on its foundations¹³.

¹¹ « 12. Altra scala simile pur di pietra, disegnata per solo accompagnamento, cui al presente non più esiste, essendo affatto stata demolita caduta, ed è tutta mancante.» See Maschio, *Villa Loredan Grimani*, 178-182 n. 20

¹² Rugolo, "La fabbrica e il suo sito," 51-54. In a relief of the villa dating to 15 April 1844, and executed by Francesco Vaccari, the left staircase is also absent. See: ASVe, *Notarile, Antonio Santibusca*, serie II, b. 1095, lett. d, f. A IX – B X – C XI – D XII – E XII. Published in: Rugolo, *Ibid.*, figs. 23-26.

¹³ See Appendix 1, doc. 1.1.2. « Pascolo cò Un fenil suso, che Tiene Vacche dosento e vinti, de Cassi quindecj doppij, et è il piu bel fenil che sia in tutto il paese. Con la sua casina separata et casa per li casari che io ho fatto da novo cò tutte le sue comodità che mi costa ducati quatrocento in circa. » The *fenilon* and contiguous house are currently run by the Cagnoni family. See: <http://www.fenilon.it>, accessed on 24 February 2013.

2.1.2 Interpretation and a Suggestion for the Attribution

Scholars who have studied the architectural history of Villa Grimani Molin have suggested several architects who may have been responsible for its edification, from Palladio, to Domenico Gropino, to Michele Sanmicheli and to Vincenzo Grimani himself¹⁴. These hypotheses were usually based on a few historical or stylistic details, which have not found any confirmation within the available corpus of historical documents in previous research projects dedicated to the villa, or during the current archival campaign.

Above all, the results of the study have shown that it is necessary to differentiate between the two phases of the villa's construction. Vincenzo and his family were clearly able to assign the most famous and accomplished architects of their time for the original phase and in the renovation project. Although Vincenzo seemed to possess a great deal of experience in initiating operations of hydraulic engineering, it seems unlikely that he would have assumed on himself the architectural responsibility of designing an entire rural villa. Doubtless, he would have been a very involved and highly opinionated patron. In any case, the architect of both phases should have also been a professional hydraulic engineer, capable of confronting with and of making use of the important hydraulic situation in Fratta and its surroundings.

Obviously, any architectural attribution of the villa should be supported by an adequate documentary research campaign and by a thorough formal analysis that are oriented towards the specific architectural task. Such project could highly benefit from the documentary findings and their analysis that are provided in the current dissertation, utilizing them as a point of departure. In the meantime, it is possible to present the current hypothesis regarding the possible identification of the architect. The hypothesis is based on the results of the current archival research and especially on a series of stylistic traits and details, some of which have been recently recognized by Franco Barbieri¹⁵.

¹⁴ See above, chapter I, section 1.1 and notes 11-15.

¹⁵ Prof. Franco Barbieri had performed an on-site inspection of the villa in 2006. Most of the impressions from the visit have been published in: F. Barbieri, "Scamozzi Il punto," esp. 178-179, 185 n. 131. A definite

Regarding the major modifications to the villa in the years following its construction, confirmation for the hypothesis that the façade loggia had once been a closed structure was identified by Barbieri. In the west side of the loggia, as in the recently ‘restored’ east side, there is a change in the brick layout where the column base flanks the staircases, whose width corresponds to the width of the wall that connects between the column bases in the front. The change testifies that the loggia had been opened up in a subsequent phase in order to enable the joining of both staircases to it (**fig. 24**). The access to the loggia was obtained by the main portal from the central hall of the villa, and from two lateral doors that were once open, and lead into the lateral rooms.

While Rugolo assumed that the villa’s only entrance to the *piano nobile* would have been from the ground floor, an observation of the back façade suggests otherwise. On the south wall of the *piano nobile*, facing the back garden of the villa, a large portal had been blocked out with the same balustrade that currently adorns the exterior staircases of the façade (**figs. 25, 26 and details**). The visual result is an interrupted, disharmonic solution, which indicates that with great probability, the *piano nobile* had once been accessed directly from the south.

In the façade, the added staircases and the large portico are the main elements that have created the widespread impression that the villa is very ‘Palladian’, recalling especially Villa Foscari ‘La Malcontenta’ in Mira (**figs. 27, 28**). The Palladian hypothesis had been strongly disregarded on a basis of a series of considerations concerning the architectural style and technical capacities of the Vicentine architect¹⁶. Excluding the external staircase and considering the enclosed portico, the supposed similarity between the two villas remains very superficial. The stylistic difference is highly evident, for example, in the elaborate articulation of the back façade performed in the Palladian Villa, which is differs significantly from the simplified, clean forms that were chosen by the Fratta architect.

attribution of the architecture of the villa is currently in a stage of final research and formulation, and awaits a joint upcoming publication by F. Barbieri, S. Guseo and M. Shai.

¹⁶ Rugolo, “La fabbrica e il suo sito,” 55-61.

Assuming the original structure had an enclosed loggia and a backyard staircase leading into the *piano nobile*, Villa Grimani Molin may be placed under the stylistic typology of a series of villas that are attributed to, or strongly recognized with Palladio's most immediate follower, Vincenzo Scamozzi (1548-1615). Such a hypothesis may be retained valid once it is acknowledged that the representation of the villa in the historical map was posterior to the original drawing date of the map itself¹⁷. Rather than being an unsuccessful copy of an original Palladian villa, Villa Grimani Molin's architectural language is based on a maximum simplicity of its volumes and surfaces, and it possesses technical characteristics that may be identified with the work of Scamozzi. A sophisticated vault covers the entire central hall of the ground floor, which demonstrates a grand technical ability, and cannot be retained as a project thought up, for example, by the patron of the villa himself¹⁸.

Two villas that are highly comparable to the Villa Grimani Molin are Villa Molin at Mandria (Padua), described by Scamozzi in his architectural treatise and dated to 1597, and Villa Emo Capodilista at Rivella near Monselice (Padua), attributed to Scamozzi on stylistic basis in a project dating to 1588¹⁹. Villa Molin was constructed for Nicolò da Molin (1562-1608), a distant relative of Andrea da Molin from the same family branch, the 'Molin d'Oro'²⁰. The villa contains one of the most known examples of an enclosed loggia in the façade, in an Ionic order (**figs. 29, 30**). The entrance to the house was made possible from the front into the ground floor, or from the rear through an external staircase with converging ramps, overlooking the large garden of the villa. The general proportions of the building and the spatial distribution of the ground plan are also analogous to the Fratta villa.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 185 n. 131.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 179.

¹⁹ Sandra Vendramin, "Villa Emo a Monselice (1588)," in *Vincenzo Scamozzi, 1548-1616*, eds. F. Barbieri and G. Beltramini (Venice: Marsilio, 2003), n. 26; Elisabetta Molteni, "Villa Molin Alla Mandria," in *Ibid.*, n. 51. For Villa Molin see also: Mario Botter, *La villa Molin di Vincenzo Scamozzi in Padova* (Treviso: Canova, 1961); Muraro, *Civiltà delle ville venete*, 344-347.

²⁰ Vincenzo da Molin's grandfather and Andrea da Molin's grandfather were brothers. For a genealogical tree of the "Molin d'Oro" family branch see: Botter, *La Villa Molin*, 16-17.

Villa Emo Capodilista was constructed for the Contarini family, before passing to the Maldura family, and to the Emo Capodilista. Its Corinthian loggia is counteracted in the rear façade by a double-ramp staircase that curves up around the entrance portal of the ground floor, and follows into the portal that leads into the *piano nobile*, as a rear staircase in Villa Grimani Molin would have been modeled (**figs. 31, 32**). The comparison between the two villas shows that the rear façades contain corresponding proportions and a corresponding number and distribution of window openings. The similarity is so close that only a small effort has been necessary for creating a photomontage, mounting the staircase of Villa Emo on the back wall of Villa Grimani Molin (**fig. 33**).

The principal technical-environmental characteristics shared by Villa Molin at Mandria and Villa Emo Capodilista at Rivella are also comparable to the situation that had to be confronted by the architect of Villa Grimani Molin. The latter would have also probably been in charge of systemizing the garden and fishponds of Villa Badoer. In both of the ‘Scamozzian’ examples, the surroundings of the villa have been subject to a hydraulic engineering modification by the architect, utilizing the water of the Battaglia channel that connects between the Euganean Hills and the lagoon. Just like in Fratta Polesine, the technical expertise of the architect-engineer was necessary in order to shift the water from the nearby channel and incorporate it into a dynamic system of smaller channels that passes through the gardens and fishponds.

In Canda, very close to Fratta, Villa Nani Mocenigo was constructed around 1580-1584. The villa had been heavily renovated in the second half of the seventeenth century, only its rear façade and the layout of the central body maintaining their original form²¹. Considering that the original villa may have been a project of Scamozzi²², it is possible to

²¹ See *Ibid.* and F. Barbieri, *Vincenzo Scamozzi*, 190. For Villa Nani Mocenigo see: Donata Battiloti, “Villa Nani Mocenigo a Canda,” in F. Barbieri and Beltramini, *Vincenzo Scamozzi 1548-1616*, n. 10; Muraro, *Civiltà delle ville venete*, 330-331.

²² A hypothesis advanced for example by Giuseppe Fiocco (1915), Rodolfo Pallucchini (1935) and Antonio Paduan (1999). See Battiloti, “Villa Nani Mocenigo a Canda,” 201.

imagine how the architect would have been commissioned by Nani following his supposed hydraulic and architectural intervention in Fratta, or vice versa.

The conclusions of the documentary analysis obtained in the current dissertation also suggest that Vincenzo Scamozzi could have been the architect responsible for the renovation project of Villa Grimani Molin. The necessity for a series of hydraulic operations involving both Fratta villas around 1580, and again around 1590, has been raised evident through the archival analysis of the documents regarding Pontoni-Trevisi map and the construction of the *scolador* of the Vespara. The period between the late 1570's and early 1580's seems to be the period most likely for the intervention, considering Vincenzo Grimani's hydraulic activities in the Polesine and the exclamations of the Grimani sisters regarding the expenses expected for the palace.

At the time, Scamozzi was still at the early phase of his career, but he had already been commissioned to provide projects for villas and palaces of noble families in the mainland: Villa Verlatto at Villaverla for Leonardo Verlatto (1574-1576), the Rocca Pisani at Lonigo for Vettor Pisani (1576), Palazzo Trissino in Vicenza for Francesco Trissino (1577-1579). From the end of 1578, he had spent about a year and a half in Rome, while some of his projects in the Veneto were still being executed. In 1580, he replaced Palladio in the construction of Villa Capra 'La Rotonda', and from 1582 onwards, he had taken up the systemization of the Zecca, Libreria and Procuratorie in Saint Mark's Square in Venice²³.

Before beginning the works in Venice, Scamozzi was already singled out because of his talents by Vincenzo Grimani's cousin Marc'Antonio Barbaro, with whom he had visited Rome in 1579²⁴. The dating of Villa Nani Mocenigo to around 1580-1584 corresponds to the period suggested by the archival documents for the Fratta intervention.

²³F. Barbieri, *Vincenzo Scamozzi*, 121-129.

²⁴ For Marc'Antonio Barbaro and his friendship with Scamozzi see F. Barbieri, *Vincenzo Scamozzi*, 136. See also: Howard, *Venice Disputed*, for ex. 173-176.

In Vettori's drawing of the Fratta villa in the eighteenth century, only the triglyphs that surmount the columns have been designed (**fig. 14**). Although his depiction of the villa is rather idealized, for example, in the choice to depict the staircase to the left, Vettori has also depicted the pediment in a different manner, indicating that an intervention on the façade of the villa had taken place sometime after his survey. It is therefore possible that the alternate triglyphs and metopes had been added to the architrave in a later phase, creating the disharmonious aspect that characterizes the current loggia of the villa.

Without the alternating triglyphs and metopes that traditionally characterize the classical Doric order, the façade may be compared to Scamozzi's description of the Tuscan order in his architectural treatise, *L'idea dell'Architettura Universale* (**figs. 34, 35**). The proportions and distribution of the columns in the Fratta loggia are comparable to Scamozzi's *Colonnato Toscano*, who also creates an analogous, slightly larger opening at the center. The two lateral columns carry the architrave in a similar manner to Scamozzi's drawing. The column heads of the Fratta loggia correspond to Scamozzi's design with one small variation, where the echinus joins the necking with three narrow rings instead of the large and small ring described by Scamozzi (**figs. 36, 37**). The column bases are also similar, although in the Fratta base, the cushion that separates the column from the pedestal is absent (**figs. 38, 39**).

The entrance portal to the loggia, defined by Rugolo as *'the most happy and original architectural detail of the entire complex'*, is set within a concave niche (**fig. 40**). The curve is accentuated also in the cornice that surmounts the doorway. Rugolo suggested that the immediate counterpart of the portal could be the portal of Alvise Cornaro's Odeon in Padua, where the doorway is inserted within a concave niche (**fig. 41**)²⁵. However, the door of the Odeon Cornaro lacks a cornice, and the comparison results somewhat generic. Rather, the articulation of the curved cornice of Villa Grimani Molin finds its counterpart in the curved cornices that surmount the four doors of the central hall of the Rocca Pisani in

²⁵ Rugolo, "La fabbrica e il suo sito," 57. « L'elemento decisamente più felice ed originale di tutto il complesso frattense. »

Lonigo, constructed by Scamozzi in a project dating to 1576 (**fig. 42**). The curve and the cornice profile are practically identical in their details and proportions (**figs. 40.1, 42.1**).

Inside the villa, where there once would have been a rear entrance, the large indoor portal to the south is adequately decorated as an entrance portal, adorned with a pediment that is surmounted by two winged females that flank the Molin coat of arms. The painted cornice of the south portal and the stucco cornice of the portal that leads to the loggia recall Scamozzi's Doric portal in their positioning and in their design, as it appears in his treatise, and at the entrance loggia of the Rocca Pisani (**figs. 43-45**).

At the current state of the research, these similarities should be considered as a series of indications that await a definitive inspection and verification, and an ulterior expansion of the archival research. Nevertheless, the analysis sheds an important light on the architectural qualities of Villa Grimani Molin. As a structure most probably dating to the generation of villas that immediately followed Palladio's works, it possesses several traits that at first glance may seem somewhat less refined, but also a series of architectural details, technical advancements and livable qualities that are characteristic of the earlier projects of Palladio's immediate and most recognized successor.

2.2 INTERIORS AND DECORATION

2.2.1 Description

The simplified architectural forms that characterize the exterior of Villa Grimani Molin are reflected also in the interior division of the spaces, which is very symmetrical, 'Palladian', based on plain and clear forms and proportions (**figures 15, 16**)²⁶. The observation of

²⁶ The description of the interiors is based on the plans of the villa that appear in its latest technical report: Eng. Franco Pozzati, *Villa Molin Avezzù. Relazione tecnica* (Rovigo, 18 July 2006, Comune of Fratta Polesine, Province of Rovigo).

Vettori's plan is adequate for the current description of the interiors, since it does not depict the various sub-divisions that were performed to the structure in the last two centuries. These later modifications do not regard the frescoed spaces, and include especially the internal divisions of the west wing of the ground floor and the *piano nobile*.

The ground floor and the *piano nobile* are similar in plan. Each floor is divided into a large central hall and two lateral wings, wide roughly two thirds of the width of the central hall. The central hall crosses from the south to the north, where it is interrupted by a staircase (west) and a small room (east); the space between the room and the staircase forms a narrow passage. In the *piano nobile* the passage connects the central hall to the outer loggia. In the ground floor, the passage becomes the small, barrel vaulted entrance vestibule, which leads the arriving visitor into the central ground-floor hall and towards the internal staircase. Flanking the central hall, the rooms in the lateral wings are constructed in a similar manner in both floors. Each of the two wings in each floor is divided into two parts that are roughly equal, north and south, forming a large room in the northern side of the villa. The southern space in each wing is sub-divided: a square room is formed in the south, and a small, rectangular room remains between the square room and the large northern room. Above the *piano nobile*, the second floor is reached by a wooden staircase. It contains a small service room and a large, spacious attic whose ceiling is supported with a large central arch. The attic is endowed with a wooden floor, walls with large arch-openings and many small windows, which correspond in their location to the windows of the *piano nobile*.

Besides the frescoes, which cover all four walls of the large and luminous central hall of the *piano nobile*, the ceiling was once very likely a '*soffitto alla veneziana*'. Unlike the wooden beamed ceiling of the central hall of Villa Badoer, typical of Venetian palaces, in Villa Grimani Molin only a few wooden beams form nine large quadrangular spaces where canvas paintings would have once been incorporated (**fig. 47**)²⁷. Unfortunately, no

²⁷ I am grateful to Bernard Aikema for calling my attention to this detail. For a review of the Venetian Renaissance ceilings see the classical book on the subject by Juergen Schulz, *Venetian painted ceilings of the Renaissance* (Berkeley; Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1968).

information regarding their original commission, current location or possible content has come up as a result of any of the historical studies of the villa.

The spaces covered in frescoes are the three rooms of the eastern (left) lateral wing of the *piano nobile*, and the small entrance vestibule in the ground floor²⁸.

The ground floor vestibule contains a barrel vault, and at its center, the young faun points his finger towards the villa's internal staircase, inviting the visitor to approach the *piano nobile* (**fig. 23**). In the central hall, the north and south entrance portals are decorated and accentuated in their dimensions. The Molin coat of arms adorns both portals; on the south portal, the coat of arms is more conspicuous and is flanked by two winged Victories (**figs. 43, 44**). The Molin coat of arms appears also on the outside portal of the loggia, where it is flanked by two female figures, accompanied by a peacock and a cornucopia, the attributes of Juno and Ceres respectively (**fig. 40**). They are the only element that currently constitutes the exterior fresco decoration of the villa, and are visible when approaching the villa from the direction of the town.

Inside, the upper half of the walls carries the load of most of the fresco decorations of the central hall (**fig. 47**). These include two massive fresco paintings that describe epical or historical episodes, which are the most prominent frescoes in the entire decorative cycle of the villa. Each one of the paintings is flanked by a series of grotesques and by two female figures that represent female virtues, who are accompanied with their own grotesque schemes. Two more female virtues, amounting to a total of six, are depicted within a grotesques-framework on the north wall, flanking the entrance to the loggia. Beneath them, the doors on the left lead to a service room and to the staircase, and the doors on the right lead to a small chapel and to another service room. On the east and west, the lower half of

²⁸ Rugolo, "La fabbrica e il suo sito," 54, 99 n. 36, has denoted the possible presence of traces of additional fresco decorations in the ground floor in the past: «[...] la presenza di tracce di decorazione a fresco, non solo nel vestibolo ma anche in altri locali del pianterreno.»; «Tracce di affreschi furono rinvenute infatti nel corso dei suaccennati restauri di 1970-1971, secondo gentile comunicazione orale dall'attuale proprietario, Antonio Avvezù Pignatelli. »

each wall contains three doors that lead into the lateral rooms; in the spaces between them, there are horizontal quadrangular sections with grotesque schemes, four units in total. Each one of the sections hosts at its center a different monochrome painting within an oval frame.

The dining room is positioned at the southeast end of the *piano nobile*. In its present state, only the ceiling and the upper, curved part of the walls are frescoed (**fig. 48**). In Vettori's plan, the large room appears in its current form, but a drawing of the *piano nobile* in 1844 shows that in that period, the room had been divided into two smaller spaces²⁹. The original structure of the dining room had been recovered in the restoration of the villa in 1970. The frescoes, which were largely covered with plaster, were revealed during the works. No further fresco traces have been identified in the lateral walls. Unlike the rest of the frescoes of the *piano nobile*, the dining room decorations have remained largely untouched by the restoration campaign of the frescoes, and to date they conserve their original sixteenth century colors, which are notably less saturated in respect to the restored works.

In the central image of the dining room ceiling, Juno appears in a cloudy sky (**fig. 49**). She was once accompanied by Jupiter, whose portion of the fresco had fallen down during the demolition of the dividing wall. The depiction is surrounded by an illusionistic balcony inhabited mainly by human figures and with several animals, which strongly recalls the balcony painted by Paolo Veronese at the *Sala dell'Olimpo* in Villa Barbaro. Beneath the balcony, each of the upper sections of the four walls hosts in its center a personification of one of the four seasons, while the corners are adorned with elaborate grotesque schemes.

Despite its modest dimensions, the following room is the iconographical heart of the entire program. Denominated the *Studiolo*, the space can be accessed from both of its lateral rooms, as well as from the central hall. Its ceiling contains a central image of Venus, Mars and Cupid, surrounded by a rich grotesque scheme in which the presence of an extremely large variety of birds is particularly evident (**fig. 50**). Between the grotesques, each of the four vault curves contains an oval frame that hosts a female allegory. Underneath, each of

²⁹ See above note 11 and Rugolo, "La fabbrica e il suo sito," fig. 25.

the two lateral walls is dominated by two large baldachins, four in total, in which there are various grotesques and representations of the four male planetary divinities, Mercury, Mars, Jupiter and Saturn (**figs. 51, 52**). Between the baldachin couples, above the lateral doors, a reclining female nude is depicted on a *triclinium* bed. Their male counterpart is an old, bearded sage (**figs. 12, 53**). He is depicted on the upper part of the western wall of the *Studiolo*, above the door that leads into the central hall. The sage, reclining in profile on his own *triclinium*, holds a white trapezoid board containing a Hebrew inscription. Other grotesques adorn the wall, including two concave mirrors, which reflect the view that is supposedly visible from the large window of the east wall.

The third frescoed room positioned at the south end of the eastern wing of the *piano nobile*, denoted the *Salottino*, contains a large fireplace and a seating area. Its ceiling hosts the most impressive and elaborate grotesque scheme in the entire decorative program, composed of various hybrids, female figures, plants, animals and four coats of arms of the Molin family (**fig. 54**). At the center, a square frame encloses an image of Jupiter, Juno, and Jupiter's eagle. On the walls, five reclining female nudes are positioned on *triclinia*, and inserted within tall baldachins and grotesques, in a parallel manner to the four male planetary divinities that appeared in the *Studiolo* (**figs. 55, 56, 58**). A restoration intervention had probably taken place at some point on the north wall that leads to the *Studiolo* (**fig. 55**). It is evident in its two female nudes who display heavy repainting signs: the veil of the left figure is completely repainted, and the shadows of the legs of their baldachins have been partially cancelled. The right figure is depicted with a serpent revolved around her arm and biting her breast, and with a tear in her eye, and may thus be recognized as Cleopatra.

Above the fireplace on the east wall, a conspicuous grotesque scheme describes a hierarchy of elements that culminates with female a figure, which is positioned on top of an armillary sphere (**fig. 57**). On the opposite wall, the left side accommodates the door that leads to the central hall. To the right an illusionistic door is painted in symmetry, in which a young noblewoman is depicted in perspective, as if she were exiting from the door of the parallel room across the hall (**figs. 58**). The figure, looking directly at the viewer, recalls similar

counterparts depicted by Veronese in the *Sala della Crociera* in Villa Barbaro, or perhaps even more so, by Zellotti in the *Malcontenta* (figs. 11, 59, 60). The floor is painted beneath her in an extremely opaque dark red shade, most likely the result of a successive restoration, which had eliminated much of the original effect of the illusionistic perspective.

2.2.2 Interpretation and a Suggestion for the Attribution

In the history of the study of Villa Grimani Molin, scholars have always encountered a certain difficulty in determining the identity of the author of the fresco program. The pictorial style has been usually identified as ‘the school of Giallo Fiorentino’, or ‘the school of Francesco Salviati’, because of the affinity of many elements in the fresco program to the decoration of Villa Badoer³⁰. The ‘Salviati’ hypothesis has also been advanced because of the similarity of the female virtues in the central hall to images from the painter’s engravings to Francesco Marcolini’s *Le Sorti*, and because of the appearance of a typical ‘Salviati’ style in one of four monochrome scenes depicted in the central hall (figs. 129-133).

Nevertheless, Marcolini’s book or copies of Salviati’s engravings were highly accessible in the Veneto for painters from all schools, and the ‘Salviati’ monochrome is only one out of four monochromes that differ completely among themselves in their subject matter and style. The ample use of images from the decorative program of Villa Badoer cannot be retained as an indication for the identity of the Grimani Molin painter as ‘Giallesque’, since the Palladian villa’s vicinity also rendered it a convenient visual source for any painter, even if he did not directly belong to the same school or workshop. Giallo Fiorentino himself is a figure whose artistic oeuvre has not been extensively researched. Besides Palladio’s remark on Giallo painting Villa Badoer, not much is known regarding his own artistic formation or about the visual sources that he had adopted and adapted for the decoration of the Palladian villa. Finally, the original dating of Villa Grimani Molin to

³⁰ Ton, *Affreschi Badoer Grimani*, 116-118, with additional bibliography.

the middle decades of the sixteenth century has also created a difficulty to identify the particular painter or painters that would have been responsible for its decoration.

Based on the analysis of the historical documents, and on the visual examination of the frescoes, it is possible to suggest a hypothesis for the possible painter or painters that were responsible for the decorative program. At the current state, the attribution is proposed as an initial hypothesis that still awaits verification on documentary level: the closing down of the archives of Modena and Ferrara after the recent earthquake has limited the availability of the documentary resources for the investigation of the current dissertation.

2.2.2.1 Analysis of the historical documentation and of the visual attributes

The current research has highlighted a series of aspects that should be considered when attempting to identify the artist responsible for the decoration of the fresco program. In terms of dating, the painter should have been active during the last two decades of the sixteenth century, between the reconstruction of the villa and Betta Grimani Molin's death, or more precisely during the 1580's, assuming that the villa had been decorated shortly after its renovation. In terms of geographical provenance, the painter could have originated from a non-Venetian artistic workshop, which was experience with working in the ambient of the Polesine. During the sixteenth century, a multi-cultural, almost 'international' atmosphere characterized the social dynamics in Fratta. A relatively large number of Venetian nobles regularly frequented the town, who formed intimate contacts with figures from Mantua and Ferrara and sought to appropriate cultural aspects of these courts into their own circle.

In the middle of the century Villa Badoer was decorated by an artist that stood out in his origins and pictorial style in respect to the 'standard' Zellotti-Fasolo-Veronese circle of painters that operated in the Palladian villas during the same period. It would have only been a logical choice for the patrons of both Fratta villas to assume an artist that was accustomed to working in the area. The members of the Grimani household seemed to maintain feasible relationships with the high class figures of the Ferrarese duchy. Ferrante Estense Tassone was regularly present in Fratta as an important land owner in the Presciana holding that borders with the town and with the Vespara. Most of the holdings

owned by Vincenzo Grimani and managed by him were closer to the Ferrara border than to any other town or territory. He and Lorenzo Emo conducted yearly hunting campaigns in Copparo and Sabbioncello, and Lunardo Emo is also known to have written letters personally to Duke Ercole II. It seems quite clear that Vincenzo was very familiar with the Ferrarese area. He, and in consequence his daughter, would have been able to identify the adequate local painter to hire when the time had come to decorate the villa.

The chosen artist was required to possess a certain degree of prestige, appropriate and capable of decorating a respectable Venetian villa. Among his desired 'cultural' qualities was a competence in executing an elaborate, pre-defined iconographical program, and a certain capacity to paint Hebrew inscriptions. The identity of the patroness as a highly respectable female figure may also be reflected in the choice of artist for the project.

The stylistic and iconographical analysis of the fresco program in the current research has been able to identify additional visual sources used by the Grimani Molin artist, besides Giallo's work and the images from Marcolini's *Le Sorti*. These include especially a series of grotesque schemes and rather familiar frescoes and engravings from a clear Mantua-Fontainebleau derivation. They have been identified in Mantua's Palazzo Te, in Sabbioneta's Ducal Palace and Palazzo del Giardino, and in the church of San Sigismondo in Cremona, and in frescoes, paintings and engravings by Marc'Antonio Raimondi, Friedrich Sustris, Primaticcio, Domenico Fiorentino, Giulio Rubone, and Antonio and Giulio Campi. In one case, the artist had drawn an image of a unique statue from the Grimani archaeological collection.

The technical artistic capacity that most identifies the work of the Fratta fresco painter is his mastery of the grotesque art. The grotesques, described in detail in the first iconographical chapter of the thesis, are characterized by particularly large dimensions, which are conspicuous in respect to their average size in the tradition of interior mural decoration. Unlike their counterparts in other public and private residences, the distribution of the grotesques in Villa Grimani Molin is not limited to specific areas such as intimate *camerini* or vaulted ceilings. They do not assume a primarily decorative function or an iconographical meaning that is confined to their isolated interpretation, but rather, they

have been integrated homogeneously within the overall iconographical program and were depicted extensively throughout the entire decorative apparatus.

The human figures represented in the allegories and in the mythological and narrative scenes have been treated rapidly, with large brush strokes, little *chiaroscuro* effects, simplified forms and little attention to detail. The rather muscled volume of the bodies associates them with the anatomical tradition identified with the school of Michelangelo or even Paolo Veronese. When they are not copied directly from an engraving, most of the human appearances are repeated reproductions of the same bodies and facial expressions, adapted especially from the neighboring Badoer villa and from Marcolini's *Le Sorti*, visual sources which have endowed them with the familiar *Giallesque* and *Salviatian* features. The mythological and narrative scenes are all confined to the representation of limited number of isolated figures, with very little and very limited landscape.

On the other hand, the hybrid figures and the animals, and especially birds, are treated with great care and demonstrate a notable technical ability on behalf of the painter, even when compared to similar instances depicted by the likes of Zellotti, Eliodoro Forbicini and Bernardino India in the sixteenth century residence in the Veneto.

The rather eclectic collection of visual sources and the conflict between the quality and style of the different subject matters raises the question whether one or more artists had been assigned for the execution of the decorative project. It seems that in all of the cases when a visual source had been adapted for the iconographical program the adaptation was performed using the same logic or 'mastermind'. The images are barely identical copies, and are regularly manipulated in a creative and often surprising manner. Heads and upper and lower body parts are often interchanged and mirrored, compressed or elongated, to create the impression of variety while maintaining an overall uniform language. Engravings are usually chosen for purely formal reasons, and incorporated within a completely different iconographical context and with necessary additions and modifications. In certain cases, it seems that the visual source was based on the verbal communication of existing

models by the patron or by a distant memory of the artist himself, and it was necessary to come up with accessible visual material for the realization of these images.

It therefore seems likely that one principal leading painter was responsible for the planning of the decorative program of Villa Grimani Molin, a program which had been described to him in detail by the patron or patroness. The stylistic traits of the frescoes strongly suggest that the main specialty of the painter was a notable mastery of grotesque art. When required to draw full-form figures, mythological and narrative scenes, he was confronted with a certain difficulty that required the invention of specific solutions. The necessity to deal with the painting of large surfaces and the different levels of finishing imply that he would still have used the aid of a competent workshop. His large dependency on the visual material of Villa Badoer and the representation of a Greek Grimani statue suggest that he had been a welcome guest in the two households.

2.2.2.2 A suggestion for the identification

The identification of a possible candidate that would fit to the requirements and characteristics of the decorative program of the villa is not a simple task. Following the golden era of the painters who had decorated Palladio's villas names of renowned artists and workshops are less easy to identify. After conducting a series of stylistic and historical evaluations, the study has excluded the employment of familiar artists working in the Veneto such as Dario Varotari and Antonio Vassiliacchi, the more international figure of Friedrich Sustris or Mantuans such as Fornaretto Mantovano and Giulio Rubone.

Within the Ferrarese ambient, which the archival study had indicated as the most appropriate for the origins of the Fratta painter, one member of a particular family of painters has been singled out as a highly relevant candidate for the work.

During the second half of the sixteenth century Ferrara was one of the liveliest centers of literary, musical and theatrical production in Italy, although it was missing an architectural and pictorial artistic production that was comparable to the other arts. Within the artistic production, the kind of role that had been assumed earlier in the century by the likes of

Dosso Dossi (ca. 1490-1542) or Girolamo da Carpi (1501-1556) had not been assigned to any artist working for Duke Alfonso II. Perhaps the most prominent figure among the Ferrarese painters during the latter decades of the century was Sebastiano Filippi (ca. 1532-1602), known as Bastianino, to whom a series of studies and exhibitions have been dedicated in recent years³¹. Bastianino, whose oeuvre includes fresco paintings, portraits and altarpieces executed throughout the years with a series of collaborators, was the third generation in a family of painters, who began his career working with his father Camillo Filippi (ca. 1505/8-1574) and his younger brother Cesare Filippi (1536-after 1602).

Camillo Filippi was born in Lendinara, and is documented to have been in Ferrara since 1523, where his sons were born. He was considered a rather successful painter in his time, a young contemporary and follower of the generation of the Ferrarese masters Dosso Dossi, Girolamo da Carpi and Garofalo (ca. 1480-1559)³². Camillo had spent most of his professional career working in Ferrara, Rovigo and their provinces. From the early 1550's and in the following two centuries, his works were largely executed in collaboration with his two sons, creating a 'Filippi' standard in which the contribution of each one of the artists is difficult to distinguish to date³³. While Bastianino's career seems to have flourished after the death of his father, in the historiography of the Filippi family, Cesare's role has been overshadowed by the activities of his more famous and talented brother.

Cesare Filippi is considered a secondary figure in the Ferrarese painting of the second half of the sixteenth century. Traces of his works may be identified only in his collaborations with his father, and recovered from what the historiographers have recounted about him throughout the years. Cesare earned his fame especially as a talented grotesque painter, capable of painting lively arabesques, *putti* and beautiful faces, while contemporarily being

³¹ On Bastianino see especially: Francesco Arcangeli, *Il Bastianino* (Milan: Silvana Editoriale d'Arte, 1963); Jadranka Bentini, ed., *Bastianino e la pittura a Ferrara nel secondo Cinquecento* (Bologna: Nuova Alfa editoriale, 1985).

³² For Camillo Filippi, also with reference to his sons, see the latest monograph: Alessandra Pattanaro, *Camillo Filippi. «Pittore intelligente»* (Verona: Grafiche Aurora, 2012).

³³ Arcangeli, *Il Bastianino*, 5.

criticized for his rather poor execution of copies of the works of his elder brother³⁴. Although no archival material has yet been identified regarding his possible employment by the members of the Grimani household in Fratta Polesine, in the current state of the research, Cesare Filippi stands out as the painter whose identity complies best with the cultural and historical requisites, and whose technical capacities and available visual materials are compatible with the depictions in the Fratta villa.

The frequent presence of Cesare Filippi and his family members in the Polesine, and their possible connection to the Grimani family can be deduced from their professional career and from a series of factors. Cesare's grandfather, Sebastiano Filippi 'Il Vecchio', was an appreciated painter who lived and worked in Lendinara, situated at a stone's throw from Fratta³⁵. The earlier works of Camillo Filippi include collaborations with Battista Dossi, Girolamo da Carpi and Garofalo for the decoration of the castle in Copparo (after 1543-1547), the same town where Vincenzo Grimani regularly went hunting³⁶.

Although he would have often relied on contributions of his brother and on earlier drawings of his father, the list of Cesare's lost works provided by Bastianino's biographer Francesco Arcangeli testifies that Cesare was an autonomous artist in his own right. The list includes commissions for various convents and monasteries in Ferrara, including depictions of four Cardinal Virtues and Charity for the Convent of Saint Augustine, a few large religious canvas paintings, and grotesques in many vaults in the monastery of Sant'Antonio in Polesine. He also painted grotesques for the vault of the *Camerino del Fuoco* at the *Accademia degli Intrepidi* in Ferrara, and a large canvas with Diana the Huntress³⁷. The versatility of projects executed by Cesare, and especially his grotesque drawing capabilities, are compatible with the type of work executed at the Fratta villa,

³⁴ Jadranka Bentini and Luigi Spezzaferro, eds., *L'impresa di Alfonso II: saggi e documenti sulla produzione artistica a Ferrara nel secondo Cinquecento* (Bologna: Nuova Alfa editoriale, 1987), 85 n.8.

³⁵ Arcangeli, *Il Bastianino*, 7. See for example a 'Visitation' for the church of San Biagio, Lendinara, 1525.

³⁶ Bentini and Spezzaferro, *L'impresa di Alfonso II*, 8-9. ASMo, *Archivio Segreto Estense, Munizione e Fabbriche*, Memoriale 92 (1543), 94 (1544), 98 (1545), 100 (1546), 102 (1547).

³⁷ Arcangeli, *Il Bastianino*, 75.

which probably also included the commission of a series of nine large canvas paintings that were meant to be inserted in the ceiling of the central hall.

One of Cesare's more renowned lost works was a fresco of The Last Judgment for the façade of the church of San Silvestro in Ferrara. The work was a copy of his brother's Last Judgment, Bastianino's first significant project as an autonomous artist, executed for the Duomo of Ferrara around 1577, which was itself a copy of Michelangelo's painting in the Sistine Chapel³⁸. Cesare was criticized for the quality of his work, which did not achieve the technical expertise of his brother. In fact, Bastianino traveled to Rome around 1550 to study as a disciple of Michelangelo, where he had studied the original fresco in first hand performing a series of detailed figure drawings³⁹. If one chooses to assign the frescoes of Villa Grimani Molin to Cesare Filippi, his Last Judgment experience and his brother's studies in Rome may account for the 'second hand' *Michelangelesque* flavor of the human figures depicted throughout the fresco program.

In the two large frescoes that dominate the central hall of Villa Grimain Molin, the spatial distribution of the figures and landscape recalls what may be defined as the general 'Filippi' standard, in which the protagonists are positioned in the front plane of the painting, often grouped in attached clusters of four or five figures, against a landscape that resembles a simplified theatrical backdrop rather than a natural and open space. These spatial traits may be identified for example in the works of Ludovico Settevecchi, a close collaborator of Camillo, Bastianino and probably Cesare from 1559 onwards (**figs. 255, 256**)⁴⁰. In 1550, during the period when Camillo Filippi was working for Duke Ercole II in Ferrara, the tapestry maker Johannes Flamengus created eight tapestries for the Duomo with the stories of Saint George and Saint Maurelio, the protectors of Ferrara. The images were based on cartoons prepared by Garofalo and Camillo Filippi. The

³⁸ Bentini and Spezzaferro, *L'impresa di Alfonso II*, 85 n.8.

³⁹ Vittoria Romani, *Per Bastianino: le pale di San Paolo e un libro di disegni del Castello Sforzesco* (Cittadella: Bertoncetto artigrafiche, 2001), esp. 47. Arcangeli, *Il Bastianino*, 55; Bentini and Spezzaferro, *L'impresa di Alfonso II*, 49.

⁴⁰ Bentini and Spezzaferro, *L'impresa di Alfonso II*, 111, 136.

tapestries which were based on Camillo's designs highly recall the spatial distribution of the Fratta frescoes, as well as the costumes and poses of the figures (**figs. 257, 258**).

Two tapestries display images that appear in an altarpiece painting by Camillo Filippi, entitled *The Beheading of S. Pope Sixtus*, dating to 1550. The enthroned figure in the painting and in its respective tapestry bear a striking resemblance to the enthroned figure depicted in the narrative scene on the east wall of the central hall of Villa Grimani Molin (**figs. 205, 258, 259**). Although in its rendering, Camillo has employed a common formula for representing ancient rulers, the two rulers are practically superimposable in their pose, dress and throne. Prior to the discovery of the actual dating of the painting, it has been erroneously attributed to Cesare, who was however only 14 years old⁴¹. The early historiographers may have decided upon the attribution on a stylistic basis, because of their knowledge of his works that are now lost.

Camillo, Bastianino and Cesare had collaborated in extensive grotesque and figurative decorations with other Ferrarese painters on various projects in the Castello Estense in Ferrara, among which their signature at the *Sala dei Giochi* is particularly recognizable. In terms of stylistic influence, for the painters in Ferrara at the mid-century the nearby Venice was a constant point of reference, but also Rome, thanks to the presence of the Este Cardinals Ippolito and Luigi in the city. Mantova was especially regarded by the Ferrarese painters as a source of visual inspiration: the models formulated by Giulio Romano in Palazzo Te were frequently reused in their works, and are apparent in the decorative schemes of the Castello Estense throughout the years, up until the drawing of the *Sala dell'Aurora* by Bastianino after 1570⁴².

As young artists, Bastianino and Cesare worked with their father on two occasions which provide some interesting points of comparison with the grotesques of the Fratta Villa.

On the Corso Giovecca, the main road of Ferrara, the Palazzina Marfisa was constructed from 1559 onwards for the son of Duke Alfonso I, the Marquise Francesco d'Este (1516-

⁴¹ Arcangeli, *Il Bastianino*, 8.

⁴² Bentini, *Bastianino e la pittura a Ferrara*, XXIV.

1578) and for his daughter and heir Marfisa (1554-1608)⁴³. The vaults of the interiors are decorated with extensive grotesque schemes with single canvas paintings inserted in their center, most of them currently lost. The fresco program is attributed with great probability to Camillo and his sons, executed ca. 1560-1565. As such, it provides an important occasion for the identification of the general characteristics of grotesque mastership that the Cesare could have studied in his early years, which lay the foundations of his work in the nearly forty years of his upcoming artistic production.

The vaulted schemes of the Palazzina Marfisa contain a schematic layout and subdivisions into geometrical forms, constrained within narrow architectural limbs, which have been recognized as the main contribution of the Ferrara school to the development of the grotesque art (**figs. 260, 261**)⁴⁴. The same characteristic identifies the layout of the fresco program of Villa Grimani Molin, where the decorations are never loosely-wandering images, but rather, inserted within framed structures that create sub-divisions in the mural surface (**fig. 54**). Each of the three frescoed ceilings of the villa contains a framed central image surrounded by depictions of grotesques (a painted balcony in the case of the dining room). The Salottino displays a mural scheme that is highly coherent with the layout of the ceilings of the Palazzina Marfisa, and especially that of the first frescoed space, the *Sala delle Imprese*.

The two decorated ceilings contain a similar vault form, similar proportions between the grotesques and the central image, and certain analogous details. As in the Ferrara palace, in the Fratta villa four reclining female figures have been positioned around the central image (**fig. 261.1**). The four decorative units that connect between the corners of the vaults and the central image are adorned with identical pieces of 'hanging cloth' that are positioned in the exact same location in both ceilings (**fig. 261.2**). The chromatic choices of the grotesques in the Palazzina Marfisa are also highly compatible with the frescoes of Villa Grimani Molin, containing the predominance of the same shades of green, ochre and

⁴³ For the history of the palace ownership and its architecture see: Giuseppe Barbieri and Loredana Olivato, "La Palazzina di Francesco d'Este. Quarreo secoli di vicende edilizie," in Anna Maria Visser Travagli, ed., *Palazzina di Marfisa d'Este a Ferrara: studi e catalogo* (Ferrara: Fondazione Cassa di risparmio di Ferrara, 1996), 25-68.

⁴⁴ Bentini and Spezzaferro, *L'impresa di Alfonso II*, 219.

earthly red tones, employed especially but not exclusively for drawing variations of the acanthus flower (**figs. 261.2, 262**). Like the particular use of the acanthus variations, other details that appear frequently within the grotesque schemes of the Palazzina Marfisa appear quite frequently in the Fratta villa, such as black and white monochromes, winged harpies, particular masked vaults, certain types of hybrid and plants, birds and even butterflies, the latter adorn the vault of the *Logetta dei Ritratti* (**figs. 261-263**).

The main difference between the two decorative programs lies in the dimensions of the grotesques, which are significantly larger, fewer, and less varied in the fresco program of Villa Grimani Molin. These traits would have enabled their execution by a smaller workshop or by an artist with less time or financial resources in hand, in respect to the commission of the Ferrarese Marquise. The grotesques of the Palazzina Marfisa seem to have been executed with more patience, with a subtle employment of *chiaroscuro* effects that may be attributed to Camillo and Bastianino. In certain occasions, the pictorial quality of the Fratta grotesques exceeds its precedent, demonstrating that they were painted by an artist who had become highly specialized in their execution.

Shortly before working in the Palazzina, between the years 1555-1560 Camillo and his sons had worked together on a minuscule but precious project, the *Camerino delle Duchesse*, located at the wing of the Castello Estense that is connected to the central body of the palace through a covered passage. The room had been constructed and decorated for the daughters of Duke Ercole II d'Este, Eleonora and Lucrezia, who used it as their intimate and secretive space. The precious room had been completely covered up with wooden panels, decorated with grotesques on a prestigious golden background whose depictions were dedicated to the two daughters. Despite the completely different medium of panel painting, the small dimensions of the space and the careful *chiaroscuro* rendering of the decorations of the *Camerino*, the decorative program demonstrates some particular affinities with the layout and details of the fresco program of Villa Grimani Molin.

The lateral walls contain panels with baldachin structures which surround four female figures that are positioned on small pedestals. The structures with the caryatid poles, the figures within them, the pedestals and the overall proportions are extremely compatible with the

depiction of the four baldachins hosting the male planetary divinities in the lateral walls of the Studiolo of *Villa Grimani Molin* (figs. 87-90, 264, 265). The figure of Minerva in the *Camerino delle Duchesse* not only resembles Mars in the *Studiolo*, but also the representation of Minerva or Pallas in the narrative painting on the east wall of the central hall, and her parallel male figure in the painting across the hall, which is identified in the current research as Mercury (figs. 179, 204, 205, 264). Another female holding a cornucopia is highly comparable with Saturn and Mercury in the *Studiolo*. Beneath two of the baldachins, the Filippi artists have painted two aquatic battles that resemble a similar representation in the Salottino of the Fratta villa. The grotesques contain a series of additional details that are comparable, including animals, cameos, hybrids and acanthus foliage (figs. 158, 266-268).

The comparisons highly suggest that the artist who designed the fresco program of Villa Grimani Molin had possessed the cartons of the *Camerino dell Duchesse*. It is important to acknowledge that the *Camerino* was an intimate space; its decoration was thus executed as an exclusive project by the three members of the Filippi family, who had been especially selected for the job. It is therefore difficult to imagine that a painter not belonging to the tight Filippi circle could have owned drawings of this prestigious work, and then employed them in the Fratta villa about two centuries later.

Finally, both the *Camerino* and the *Palazzina* were works commissioned by the Filippi for the most important female figures of the Ferrara duchy. A choice of a member of the Filippi family by Betta Grimani would have thus been adequate for the decoration of the Fratta villa; Betta could have also specifically required that the frescos resemble the praised, probably renowned female model of the *Camerino*. It is easy to imagine how Cesare Filippi, had he been commissioned by the respectable Venetian noblewoman, would have selected his visual sources for the decoration of the Fratta villa from his precious and prestigious work at the *Camerino delle Duchesse*, as the most adequate visual source for the *Studiolo*, the most intimate decorated space in Villa Grimani Molin.

3

A CULTURAL INTRODUCTION TO THE FRESCOES

3.1 COSMOLOGY AT THE EVE OF THE SCIENTIFIC REVOLUTION

3.1.1 Astronomy and the Recovery of the Greek Heritage

From the fourteenth century onwards, the intellectual circles of the universities and the noble courts in the Italian peninsula played a pivotal role in the development of astronomical studies. The privileged geographical location of Italy on the crossroads between the transalpine countries, the Islamic world and the Byzantine Empire attracted traveling scholars and encouraged the arrival of astronomical instruments. The Italian universities began to teach astronomy in the 1420's, employing a large percentage of foreign scholars. The University of Padua hosted figures such as the German astronomer, mathematician and instrument maker Regiomontanus (Johannes Müller von Königsberg, 1436-1476) and the Polish astronomer Nicolaus Copernicus (1473-1543). Christophorus Clavius (1538-1612), another pivotal German astronomer and mathematician who spent most of his professional career in Rome, documented and predicted solar and lunar eclipses and was responsible for the reformation of the Gregorian calendar¹.

The rediscovered prestige of Astronomy in the *Studia humanitatis* owes much to the gradual expansion in the study of the Hellenistic language and culture. Greek was first taught in 1396 at the *Studio Fiorentino*, initiating the trend that culminated with the

¹ Michael H. Shank, "Astronomia tra corte e università," In *Il Rinascimento italiano e l'Europa*, vol. 5: *Le scienze*, ed. A. Clericuzio and G. Ernst (Treviso: Angelo Colla, 2008), 3, 5.

arrival of Byzantine churchmen and philosophers to Italy following the fall of Constantinople in 1453. The Islamic threat, which pushed forward the tentative to reconcile the Greek and Latin churches, enabled the introduction of the original Greek astronomical texts into the Western world. In the Ecumenical councils of Ferrara and Florence in 1438, the encounter of the representatives of the Latin Church with the Greek delegation revealed itself a cultural event of capital importance and of vast intellectual repercussions, initiating the cultural and religious collaboration between the churches. The delegation, headed by the Byzantine Emperor John VIII Palaiologos, included erudite scholars such as Pletho (Georgius Gemistus Plethon, 1355-1452/54), the Byzantine Neo-Platonist philosopher who reintroduced Plato's thoughts to Western Europe, and Cardinal Basilios Bessarion (1403-1472), who later became a Cardinal at the Roman Church. Following the councils the Emperor and his delegation were received in Venice by Doge Francesco Foscari (1373-1457), who greeted them on the *bucintoro*; the event marked the beginning of the long relationship between Bessarion and the Venetian Republic².

Bessarion is remembered in particular for the donation of his private library of Greek Classical texts to Venice in 1468. The collection included various texts that formed the foundations of the study of Astronomy in the Western World³. As a disciple of Pletho, Bessarion considered astronomy as an indispensable instrument to penetrate into the sublime mysteries of cosmic harmony. He was particularly interested in astronomy, an interest expressed also by acting as the personal patron of Regiomontanus in Rome⁴.

Venice played a significant role in the development of the study of Astronomy. The appraised stable political administration of the Republic was what assured Bessarione in his

² *Ibid.*, 3-4. For Bessarion and Venice see: Marino Zorzi, *La Libreria di San Marco: libri, lettori, società nella Venezia dei Dogi* (Milan: Mondadori, 1987), II, 23-44.

³ In particular, Euclid's *Elements* and Ptolemy's *Almagest*, as well as codices of ancient Greek philosophers. Shank, *Astronomia tra corte*, 3-4; M. Zorzi, *La Libreria di San Marco*, III, 45-61 for a study on Bessarion.

⁴ M. Zorzi, *La Libreria di San Marco*, 54. Regiomontanus lived with Bessarion in Rome and constructed a very prestigious and highly praised astrolabe for him, today in the Greenwich Maritime Museum, see: Derek de Solla Price, "The First Scientific Instrument of the Renaissance," *Physis* I (1959): 26-30.

choice to donate his library to the Republic. During the same years, Venice had become the bulwark of Christianity in the Orient and the protector of Hellenism⁵. The study of the Greek language in Venice assumed a significance that exceeded the standard humanist desire to assimilate Hellenistic culture. Having always maintained contacts with the Byzantine Empire, and lacking a tangible archaeological Roman history, Greek was considered a living language of political importance. Fluency in Greek enabled the Venetian ambassadors to communicate with their political counterparts in Constantinople and with their Greek speaking colonies, and they considered themselves patrons of the colonies of which their own origins, presumed to be Hellenistic, stemmed from⁶.

In their artistic patronage, from the fifteenth century onwards the Venetian patricians in general and the Grimani family in particular have always demonstrated a special preference for Greek manuscripts and original Greek art, which they retained more prestigious than their Classical Roman or Etruscan counterparts⁷. The archaeological collection of Giovanni Grimani was one of the most prestigious collections in the Western World containing original Greek objects⁸. In Villa Grimani Molin, this preference can be identified in some of the iconographical choices of the decorative program.

The distribution of the Greek language among the Venetian patricians has also enabled them access to many to philosophical and astronomical texts that were not translated into vulgar or Latin. Above all, the new book publishing industry that became an important part of Venetian economic life encouraged the mass distribution of the Greek astronomical legacy throughout Italy and the Western World. For example, the rich material in Bessarion's

⁵ Felix Gilbert, "Humanism in Venice," In *Florence and Venice, Comparisons and Relations: Acts of Two Conferences at Villa i Tatti in 1976-1977*, eds. S. Bertelli, N. Rubinstein, and C. H. Smyth (Florence: La nuova Italia, 1980), 13 and n. 3; M. Zorzi, *La Libreria di San Marco*, 77-85, for the donation; *Ibid.*, 87-119, for the institution of the library; *ibid.*, 87-119, for its construction.

⁶ Gilbert, "Humanism in Venice," 24.

⁷ Luigi Beschi, "Le sculture originali greche nello Statuario della Repubblica," in Favaretto and Ravagnan, *Lo statuario pubblico*, 89-96; Irene Favaretto and Gustavo Traversari, eds., *Tesori di scultura greca a Venezia. Raccolte private del '500 al Museo Archeologico* (Venezia: Cartotecnica veneziana, 1993), p. 12.

⁸ For the Grimani Greek collection, see catalog, *Ibid.*

collection inspired Aldus Manutius to establish in Venice a printing shop for the publication of reliable and inexpensive Greek and Latin texts that formed the basis for astronomical studies. The German printer Erhard Ratdolt also owned a publishing house in Venice, which he dedicated to the printing of astronomical mathematical books such as Euclid's *Elements*, Sacrobosco's *de Sphaera*, Ptolemy, recent treatises by Regiomontanus, and the Alfonsian tables that served for the calculation of planet positions⁹.

3.1.2 Astronomy as an Academic Discipline

Traditionally, Astronomy was taught in the Italian universities as part of a doctorate in Arts. Prior to the second half of the sixteenth century, the academic discipline of celestial studies was characteristically divided into two distinct fields. One was practical Astronomy, studied for medical, civic, dynastic or personal reasons. This *astrological* Astronomy was a mathematical discipline whose purpose was to produce reliable tables capable of permitting the prediction, or of reading the positions of the planets in an assigned moment. The canonical authority for this discipline was Claudius Ptolemy's *Almagest*, the second century treatise on the motions of the stars and planetary paths according to the geocentric model of the universe. The second branch in the study of Astronomy was a section of Natural Philosophy that treated the general theory of the universe and the heavens, dealing with the composition and the structure of the skies, and with the origins and reproductive process of the natural elements. The canonical authority for this *cosmological* Astronomy was Aristotle's *De coelo*. Both fields shared the same fundamental Aristotelian principles of Natural Philosophy, such as the centrality and the immobility of the Earth; the spherical form, the unity and the finiteness of the Universe, and the clear distinction between celestial and the sublunary regions with their different elemental

⁹ Shank, "Astronomia tra corte," 4-5.

compositions, which in turn recalls the perfection and the immobility of the celestial region¹⁰.

This program of astronomical studies was followed in most of the European universities, forming a common hegemony of the Aristotelian paradigm. The introduction of other philosophical currents such as Neo-Platonism and Stoicism brought to a questioning of several aspects of the celestial doctrine. These traditions assigned a role of prominence to the Sun in respect to the other five planets, and doubted the Aristotelian concepts of Aether (the fifth element, the substance of the celestial region) and the principle of motion of the celestial spheres. However, they still shared most of the fundamental Ptolemaic-Aristotelian principles. The Ptolemaic-Aristotelian model of cosmological order was accepted by the Church, as it supported the general standpoints of the Christian doctrine. The Church often employed astronomers at her service. The Aristotelian Greek philosopher George of Trebizond (1395 – 1472/3) who arrived from Constantinople worked for Pope Sixtus VI, and Christophorus Clavius in worked in the service of Pope Gregorius VIII (1502-1585).

The prominence of the Aristoelian-Ptolemaic model in the universities and its faithful support on behalf of the church can account for the difficulties in its abandonment. Western society was confronted with cultural, religious and psychological impediments between the publication of Copernicus in 1543 and the final acceptance of the heliocentric model in the seventeenth century following the works of Galileo and Kepler. There is a common agreement among many expert scholars of our times that this gradual process of acceptance was highly related to the developments in Venetian and in Paduan philosophy throughout the sixteenth century. It was there where we find the existence of the optimal conditions for the extraordinary event of the birth of the new Galilean science¹¹.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ Antonino Poppi, "Filosofia e scienza nel Rinascimento. Introduzione al problema," in *Cultura, scienze e tecniche nella Venezia del Cinquecento: atti del Convegno internazionale di studio Giovan Battista Benedetti e il suo tempo*, ed. A. Manno (Venezia: Istituto veneto di scienze lettere ed arti, 1987), 87-88.

3.1.3 The Development of Scientific Philosophy in the Veneto

Most of the greatest innovators of Western scientific knowledge were either formed as scholars in the University of Padua or taught there, ranging from Copernicus to Galilei, from Andreas Vesalius (1514-1564) to William Harvey (1578-1657). Aristotelian philosophy was largely elaborated within the university ambience, while in Venice the situation was more intricate. For example, the city's Rialto school, established in the beginning of the fifteenth century, was strictly Aristotelian. However, it was unable to teach the entire corpus of the '*studium generale*' because the Venetian government did not grant such permission to the existing schools, since it did not want any institution to encroach upon the fields of instruction offered at its state university, Padua. The limitations on public education in Venice, which persisted until the end of the republic, encouraged a considerable amount of the local Venetian noblemen to frequent the University of Padua. In the city itself, Venetian intellectual culture developed through the assignment of private tutors and through the formation of private academies¹².

The state of Venetian intellectual humanism in the beginning of the fifteenth century can be learned from the example of Francesco Barbaro (1390-1454), who was a respectable diplomat and the great grandfather of Daniele Barbaro and Marc'Antonio Barbaro. Francesco received the private Aristotelian tutoring of the most influential and most admired tutor Guarino Veronese (1374-1460), who held a school in Venice from 1415 to 1419. As a patron of arts, he engaged in the research, collection and translation of ancient manuscripts, his right-hand protégé being the Greek Aristotelian astronomer George of Trebizond. Francesco's Aristotelian background did not prevent him from maintaining warm and intellectual contacts with the Florentine court, contacts that were expressed in the dedication of his notable treatise *De re uxoria* to Lorenzo de' Medici¹³.

¹² Gilbert, "Humanism in Venice," 15-17.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 20-21; Francesco Barbaro, *Prudentissimi et graui documenti circa la eletion della moglie; dello eccellente & dottissimo M. Francesco Barbaro... nuouamente dal latino tradotti per M. Alberto Lollio* (Venice: Gabriel Giolito de Ferrari, 1548). On the history of the Barbaro family see the volume: Michela Marangoni and Manlio Pastore Stocchi, eds., *Una famiglia veneziana nella storia: i Barbaro: atti del*

Ermolao Barbaro (1453/4-1493), Francesco's nephew and Daniele and Marc'Antonio's great uncle, was a very central figure in the history of Venetian humanism who was most recognized for his Paduan Aristotelianism. However, he is also known for his assertive affirmation that the study of Neo-Platonism is necessary in a *historical* approach, as means for understanding Aristotle. Ermolao exchanged warm literary correspondences with Giovanni Pico della Mirandola (1463-1494) and with Elia del Medigo (1458-1493). The latter, a Jewish Cretan philosopher, was the head of the Jewish community in Padua for some time, and played an important role in the transmission of Cabalistic components of Neo-Platonism to the Italian peninsula. Ermolao also corresponded with Yohanan Alemanno (1435-1504), a respectable Jewish Cabalist philosopher who operated in Mantua and Padua, and who embraced theology, astrology and magic¹⁴. Girolamo Donà (before 1457-1511), another Venetian nobleman and humanist and a contemporary of Ermolao, invested much of his intellectual resources in the search for harmonizing Plato and Aristotle, obtaining that the common denominator between the two philosophies was another philosophy, which was more ancient than the two Greek philosophers¹⁵.

The Venetian academies were formed by the educated people of the nobility, who often attended the state university in Padua, but having achieved the doctorate, they did not continue to exercise the university profession. Instead, they engaged in the active political life that their families had destined them to conduct, though without abandoning their youthful philosophical studies, and actually returning to them in private form. The phenomenon of the '*cenacoli*' or the '*ridotti*' (lobbies) of the academies achieved a high degree in development of private philosophical culture. It is there where a large part of the

Convegno di studi in occasione del quinto centenario della morte dell'umanista Ermolao: Venezia, 4-6 novembre 1993 (Venice: Istituto veneto di scienze lettere ed arti, 1996).

¹⁴ William Melczer, "Il Neoplatonismo nel Veneto nell'epoca di Giorgione (1490 - 1510)," in *I tempi di Giorgione*, ed, R. Maschio (Rome: Gangemi, 1994), 65.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

Veneto Neo-Platonism of the sixteenth century was cultivated, in what can be considered a non-academic philosophy, or the philosophy of the non-professors¹⁶.

The Paduan intellectuals generally identified themselves with the distinctly logical and physical conception of scientific knowledge, in accordance with the Aristotelian orientation that characterized their home University¹⁷. However, the Aristotelian method did not persuade all of the scholars, and criticism against the *Almagest* existed already throughout the fifteenth century. Regiomontanus for example, pointed out that the geometry of the Ptolemaic model contained consequences that could not be observed in a nude eye¹⁸. The Aristotelian method brought to a purely contemplative acquaintance with the phenomena of nature, which was non-operative and non-functional. It was an ideal scientific method, based on the necessity of essential causal connections. As a result, more and more concerns were raised by scholars who were inspired by ancient mathematical sources. Instead of Aristotelian cosmology, they preferred the Platonic vision, of the universe punctuated with rhythms of unity and of mathematical measure. Based upon a combination of observation, experimental verification, and the application of mathematical methods to physical phenomena, this approach to the study of the natural world proved fruitful for gaining new and valid knowledge¹⁹.

It was within the humanist ambience of Venice that Francesco Zorzi (Francesco Giorgio Veneto, 1466-1540) composed his *De harmonia mundi totius*²⁰. The musical and architectural cosmological treatise of the Venetian Franciscan friar and philosopher was first published in 1525, achieving a large distribution in various print editions across Europe

¹⁶ Giovanni Santinello, "Il pensiero platonizzante a Venezia e a Padova nel Cinquecento," in Manno, *Cultura, scienze e tecniche*, 139-141.

¹⁷ Poppi, "Filosofia e scienza," 87.

¹⁸ Shank, "Astronomia tra corte," 10-13.

¹⁹ Poppi, "Filosofia e scienza," 88; Charles Schmitt, "Giambattista Benedetti and the Aristotelian Tradition," in: Manno, *Cultura, scienze e tecniche*, 127-128.

²⁰ The current research makes use of the latest printed edition in Latin and Italian by Saverio Campanini: Francesco Zorzi, *L'armonia del mondo*, Intro., trans., notes and apparatus by S. Campanini (Milan: Bompiani Il pensiero occidentale, 2010).

throughout the sixteenth century. It was characterized, above all, by an attempt for a harmonic reconciliation of many philosophical currents that formed a part of Renaissance culture, save the Aristotelian one, which Zorzi repeatedly and polemically rejected²¹. In addition to Neo-Platonism, he incorporated Neo-Pythagorean mathematics and the mystical currents of cabala, magic and astrology into his treatise, as well as much “secretive” information that he related to as ancient knowledge, all of which he strived to harmonize and reconcile with the Christian idea of revelation. The treatise included three canticles. (I) On Harmony between the divine and the human, between the celestial and the super celestial, and between all of the inferior things, distributed with harmony and proportion. (II) On the correspondences of all of the things in Christ. (III) On the harmony in the structures of the human microcosm, for whom all things were made. It was precisely this hypothesis of one unique and unified universe, which enabled the new scientific research method that is based upon the establishment of the correspondences, the connections, and finally the constancy of the causal occurrence of events, in order to achieve a systematic, mathematical interpretation of experiments and empirical facts²².

Venetian culture in the sixteenth century was characterized by the same sort of cultural mission of harmonizing various currents, which can be seen as the keystone of the classicizing Renaissance, supported earlier by Pletho, Bessarion and the Florentine Neo-Platonists. Already in 1499, Aldus Manutius published in Venice the *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili* written by Francesco Colonna (1433-1527)²³. In the mysterious allegorical romance, which is one of the most famous examples of early modern printing, love and poetry, the infinite and the idea of approaching the infinite deities, mythology and Christianity, Cabala, Hermeticism, necromancy, magic, astrology and alchemy – all combine joyfully with one another, as conceptual fragments of a multicolored culture.

²¹ For example, «questo discepolo ingrato» is Zorzi's affirmation on Aristotle for his rejection of the idea of the creation of the universe. *Ibid.*, I, 8, 1.

²² Santinello, “Il pensiero platonizzante,” 142-143.

²³ Francesco Colonna, *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili* (Venice: Aldo Manuzio, 1499).

The text represents the belief that these vast combinations of uses and customs, traditional or esoteric, were in fact possible to harmonize²⁴.

Obviously, mystical Neo-Platonism could barely achieve serious consideration on behalf of the university circles, especially because throughout the fifteenth and sixteenth century these ideas became increasingly associated with magical practice. Many key Renaissance Neo-Platonists considered magic as an integral part of natural philosophy, defined as the manipulation of the natural forces through the application of the natural capacities of human beings²⁵. The philosophical debate on the possibility of natural magic was an important historical component of the century that preceded the Scientific Revolution²⁶. Authors such as Ficino, Pico, Zorzi, Girolamo Cardano, Giordano Bruno and Giovan Battista della Porta, and in the German speaking countries Johannes Trithemius (1462-1516) and his disciples Johann Reuchlin (1455-1522), Heinrich Cornelius Agrippa von Nettesheim (1486-1535) and Paracelsus (1493-1541), all well-educated humanists, wrote about natural magic. Many of them, like Reuchlin and Agrippa, had sharply criticized the medieval magicians, such as Roger Bacon (1214-1294), Pietro d'Abano (1256-1316) and the writer of the *Picatrix*, repudiating their non-natural theory of magic, while others like Trithemius and Paracelsus used many popular beliefs and sources for their magic, alchemy and medicine²⁷.

Renaissance authors generally distinguished between two main lines in their theory of magic: natural magic and spiritual or demonic magic. The former has been considered a part of natural philosophy or its perfection, while the latter, in its extreme forms, may come close to witchcraft²⁸. While it may be hazardous to consider natural magic as one of the pre-modern

²⁴ Melczer, "Il Neoplatonismo nel Veneto," 64-65.

²⁵ Among them Francesco Zorzi, and: Giovanni Battista della Porta, *Magia naturalis, sive de miraculis rerum naturalium – libri xx* (Naples 1589; reprint, *La magia naturale. i segreti e le meraviglie della natura*, Prato: Giunti Demetra, 2008). On magic as 'technique' see the upcoming discussion in the current research, chapter 3.1.1. *Cosmology and Villa Architecture, Creation and Technique*.

²⁶ The basic collection of articles about the debate in the sixteenth can be found in: Cesare Vasoli, ed., *Magia e scienza nella civiltà umanistica* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1976).

²⁷ Reuchlin was famous for his introduction of the Cabala into ceremonial magic in his books *De verbo mirifico* and *De arte kabbalistica*, both used by Agrippa for his famous encyclopedia *De occulta philosophia*.

²⁸ Paola Zambelli, *White Magic, Black Magic in the European Renaissance* (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 18.

forms of natural science²⁹, a more careful formulation limits the nexus to a 'practical orientation' on the part of scientists, which according to Eugenio Garin and Frances Yates, originated with the Renaissance magicians³⁰. In opposition to the classical speculative ideal, marked by Aristotle, the Renaissance insight, of which Ficino and Pico were the first exponents, held that practical application was of equal dignity as was theorizing³¹.

Towards the end of the sixteenth century, some of these ideas had finally entered the Aristotelian systems of the universities, when the conceptual principles of Neo-Platonist unity and of the Neo-Pythagorean application of mathematics were elaborated into a proper empirical scientific method. Galileo Galilei (1564-1642) is generally considered as the first who formulated and employed this innovation in a satisfactory and progressive manner. Although the new scientific method was already somewhat present in the activities of the mathematicians that preceded him, they had strongly continued to endure the fascination from the logical structure of Aristotelian science. It was a slow climb, with several hesitations and returns, before the metaphysical deductive certainty of the Aristotelians could be completely substituted with the mathematical-experimental method of Galileo³².

²⁹ Wayne Shumaker, "'La magia naturale' come forma 'premoderna' della scienza", in Vasoli 1976, 109-120.

³⁰ Eugenio Garin, *Medioevo e Rinascimento: Studi e ricerche* (1954; reprint, Rome; Bari: Laterza, 1990), 153; Frances A. Yates, *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition* (London; Chicago: Routledge and Kegan Paul, The University of Chicago Press, 1964), 155-156.

³¹ Zambelli, *White Magic, Black Magic*, 18. for Aristotle, on his '*bios theoretikòs*', see: Werner Jaeger, "Über Ursprung und Kreislauf des philosophischen Lebensideals," in *Sitzungsberichte der preußischen Akademie der Wissenschaften. Philosoph.-histor. Klasse* (Berlin 1928, 390-421; reprint, W. Jaeger, *Scripta minora*, Rome: Ediz. di storia e letteratura, 1960), 347-393.

³² Poppi, *Filosofia e scienza*, 88-90; Schmitt, "Giambattista Benedetti," 127-128.

3.2 PHILOSOPHY AND CULTURE IN FRATTA POLESINE IN THE SIXTEENTH CENTURY

3.2.1 Cosmology, Cultural Politics and the Veneto Villa

Generally speaking, after the first two decades of the sixteenth century Venice was a center of waking political and economical activity: a positive consequence that was born out of the necessity for coping with the results of the anti-Venetian alliance in the war of the League of Cambrai. Like many of the patricians of the Republic, the members of the Grimani family were active participants in the new developments. Since the early sixteenth century, they emerge as ecclesiastical and political mediators between the Serenissima and Rome and the Papal Court. They maintained close relationships with other Venetian families such as the Loredan, Badoer, Barbaro, Pisani, Foscari, Gritti and Giustinian, who all shared a general common cultural background and similar political aspirations, following objectives aimed at a political renewal of a 'Romanist' and oligarchic orientation, together with projects of scientific and intellectual renovation that were independent of the Paduan academic tradition. This social class of the 'old' Venetian aristocracy revolved towards classical and contemporary Rome as an overall source of inspiration, a dedication that was expressed in their study of the classical texts, in their grand passion for collecting classical antiquities and in a desire to imitate Roman art and architecture³³.

Venice's political aspiration to become the new Rome was realized in the plan of Doge Andrea Gritti (1455-1538) for the *Renovatio urbis* of the city, which was declared by his predecessor, Doge Antonio Grimani. In the second quarter of the sixteenth century, a new classical draping was endowed on Piazza San Marco by Jacopo Sansovino, who was brought to Venice by Doge Gritti following the Sack of Rome in 1527³⁴. Sansovino's work marks the symbolic launch of the prominence of an *a la Romana* architecture and decoration across the

³³ Foscari and Tafuri, *L'armonia e i conflitti*, 134, 142; Manfredo Tafuri, *Venezia e il Rinascimento: religione, scienza, architettura* (Torino: Einaudi, 1985), 173-175; Gaetano Cozzi, "La politica culturale della Repubblica di Venezia nell'età di Giovan Battista Benedetti" in Manno, *Cultura, scienze e tecniche*, 14.

³⁴ Howard, *Jacopo Sansovino*, 8-37.

Venetian Republic, which soon found its way into the private sphere. The rural villas of the Venetian patricians, in their architectural design and decorative apparatus, served as a stage for the manifestation of the knowledge, occupations and virtues of their owners. As such, they often assumed the character of a Roman *villa all'antica*, imitating various functional and aesthetic themes that the patrician circle identified in the ancient classical villas and in the great contemporary palaces of the Roman Popes and Cardinals.

The theoretical and practical roots of the Renaissance concept of the Roman *villa all'antica* were studied, above all, from the *Ten Books on Architecture* written by Vitruvius (Marcus Vitruvius Pollio, 1st ct. BC) and from a collection of letters written by Pliny the Younger (Gaius Plinius Caecilius Secundus, 61 – c. 112 AD). The texts of the Roman architect and the Roman historian, which received a privileged diffusion in the fifteenth century thanks to the invention of mass printing, supplied the humanists with the basic structural and conceptual guidelines for the edification of rural residences. Practical considerations included the choice of site for the villa, and the function, order and orientation of the various rooms, while social and ideological considerations regarded distinctions between service and habitable zones, between the private and the public sphere, and between the practice of *vita activa* and *vita contemplativa*. These issues were all discussed, rephrased and republished in the architectural treatise of Leone Battista Alberti (1404-1472) and were applied by architects to the rural private residences of the Italian nobility³⁵.

The study and application of the architecture of Vitruvius in Venice became even more accessible and more fashionable in 1556, with the publication of the commentary of Daniele Barbaro for the Vitruvian treatise, written in Italian and accompanied with

³⁵Vitruvius Pollio, *Ten books on Architecture: the Corsini incunabulum Vitruvius*, ed. I. D. Rowland (Rome: Edizioni dell'elefante, 2003); Pliny the Younger, *Letters*, trans. John Boyle, fifth earl of Orrery, *The Letters of Pliny the Younger, with Observations on Each Letter*, 2 vols., (London, 1751; rep. in Pierre de la Ruffiniere du Prey, *The Villas of Pliny from Antiquity to Posterity*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), II.17, V.6; Leone Battista Alberti, *De re aedificatoria* (Florence: Nicolo di Lorenzo, 1485). For the development of the concept of the Roman *villa all'antica* in the Veneto see: Ackerman, *Palladio's Villas*; Norbert Huse and Wolfgang Wolters, *The art of Renaissance Venice: architecture, sculpture, and painting, 1460-1590* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 115-116. For Villa Barbaro at Maser as an exemplar Roman *villa all'antica* see: Margarita Azzi Visentini, "Daniele Barbaro e l'architettura: considerazioni sulla villa di Maser," in Marangoni and Pastore Stocchi, *I Barbaro*, 397-433.

drawings by Andrea Palladio³⁶. Palladio was the architect who was best recognized as the leader of the *all'antica* trend in Venice in the second half of the sixteenth century, drawing his inspiration from his humanist education under the patronage of Giangiorgio Trissino (1478-1550) in his Academy in Vincenza, and later from his collaboration with Daniele Barbaro, who became his new patron³⁷.

Palladio's first major appointment in Venice was the façade of the church of San Francesco della Vigna (1564-1565). The work was done under the direction of Daniele Barbaro, completing a project originally undertaken by Jacopo Sansovino. The rather peripheral church was the private devotional temple of a small group of Venetian patricians that played a particularly influential role in the Venetian humanist scene. The group included the Grimani branch of Santa Maria Formosa, Daniele and Marc'Antonio Barbaro, Federico Badoer (1519-1593), founder of the *Accademia della Fama* and Andrea Gritti, Doge of the *Renovatio urbis* whose private palace shadows the church's façade. The remodeling of the façade and the addition of the Grimani chapel were probably Giovanni Grimani's most precious lifetime project³⁸. The façade had been based on the earlier memorial of Francesco Zorzi, who resided in the flanking monastery of San Francesco. His guidelines were based on principles appearing in *De harmonia mundi*, where he had formulated the application of musical harmony and geometrical proportions as means to translate celestial harmony into the terrestrial realm of architecture³⁹.

³⁶ Published in two editions (1556, 1567). Daniele Barbaro, *I dieci libri dell'Architettura di M. Vitruvio tradutti et commentati da Monsignor Barbaro* (Venice: Francesco Marcolino, 1556); *Ibid.*, *I dieci libri dell'architettura tradotti e commentate da Daniele Barbaro*, 1567, eds. M. Tafuri and M. Morresi (Milan: Il Polifilo, 1987). See also: Vincenzo Fontana, "Il 'Vitruvio' del 1556: Barbaro, Palladio, Marcolini," in *Trattati scientifici nel Veneto fra il XV e XVI secolo*, E. Riondato et al., intro. E. Riondato (Vicenza: Neri Pozza, 1985).

³⁷ Palladio had also conducted visits to Rome with both patrons. For his visits with Trissino: Rudolf Wittkower, *Architectural Principles in the Age of Humanism* (2nd ed., New York: W. W. Norton, 1967), 52-55. For his visit with Daniele Barbaro in 1554, see: Azzi Visentini, "Daniele Barbaro e l'architettura," 414.

³⁸ Howard, *Jacopo Sansovino*, 64-74; Foscari and Tafuri, *L'armonia e i conflitti*; Silvano Onda, *La chiesa di San Francesco della Vigna e il convento dei frati minori. storia, arte, architettura* (Venezia, Parrocchia di San Francesco della Vigna, 2008), esp. chap. 2.3, 88-98; Morresi, "Sansovino in San Francesco," 97-146.

³⁹ For the project of Giovanni Grimani: Foscari and Tafuri, *L'armonia e i conflitti*, chap. II. For the plan: Onda, *La chiesa di San Francesco*, chap. 2.1, 56-78, and chap. 2.4, 98-106. For the detailed analysis of Zorzi's memorandum see: Wittkower, *Architectural Principles*, 102-107; and as synthesized by: Howard, *Jacopo Sansovino*, 66-67: « In revising Sansovino's design for San Francesco, Zorzi aimed to achieve a perfectly

As emphasized by Rudolf Wittkower, the representation of Zorzi's philosophy in his plans for the vineyard church stimulated the interest of the intellectuals in the application of cosmological principles to architectural planning and design, which can be identified with particular intention in the Palladian villas of the following decades⁴⁰. The general distribution of iconographic choices in the fresco programs of the Venetian villas testifies that the Venetian nobility found cosmology a particularly adequate theme for the depiction of their humanist interests. This was true especially when it came to the decoration of their private residences in the manner of a Roman *villa all'antica*, a tradition that consciously considered the villa as the representation of a microcosm.

The intellectual nobility in Venice was an active participant in the gradual process that brought to the Scientific Revolution. Their political and religious connections with the Roman Church and their ample frequency of the University of Padua encouraged the support of the traditional Aristotelian method and the Ptolemaic conception of the universe. On the other hand, their activities within the private humanist sphere of the academies were a continuous source of stimulation for their curiosity regarding the other disciplines that were associated with Neo-Platonism. Perhaps the more easily acceptable of these disciplines regarded the employment of the principles of Pythagorean mathematics, although quite often, the patricians engaged in activities related to the mystical and esoteric currents of Cabala and Hermeticism, and even to heresy.

harmonious space within the church by relating all the dimensions to a basic unit of three *passi*. He founded his scheme on the Platonic conception of the number three as a divine number. In Christian theology, too, this number has divine significance since it symbolizes the Trinity. Zorzi proposed that the nave should be nine paces wide and twenty-seven paces long, and each of the side chapels three paces wide. Using the humanist analogy with the human body, Zorzi added that the chancel (the head) should be narrower than the nave (the body), and therefore suggested dimensions of nine paces in length and six paces in width for the chancel. [...] He was also concerned with practical problems, and his programme anticipated many features of Counter Reformation church design. »

⁴⁰ Wittkower, *Architectural Principles*, 100-103.

3.2.2 Intellect, Heresy and Magic: the Academies, the Polesine, the Grimani

The phenomenon of the academies, the groups of intellectuals and noblemen that gathered in order to discuss literature, politics and other cultural forms, was hardly unique to the city of Venice⁴¹. Venetian Academies were formed in the mainland especially in Vicenza and the Polesine, in what soon flourished into a network of mutual cultural interchange, as members maintained regular contacts with members of fellow academies. In addition to their engagement in literary activities, books on esoteric philosophy and practice, Cabala and magic, regularly circulated among their members. Moreover, the meetings of the academies often became political gatherings for the distribution of heretic, reformist practices and propaganda, and it was not uncommon that members were prosecuted and accused by the inquisition for their heretic activities⁴².

In Venice, the *Accademia della Fama*, founded by Federico Badoer, included many of the Republic's most active humanists and men of letters⁴³. It was founded in 1557, and in July 1560, it was granted permission from the Senate to perform its meetings in Titian's recently painted vestibule in the new Marciana Library of Sansovino⁴⁴. In 1561, it was dramatically shut because of heavy financial debts and for suspicions of heresy⁴⁵. In its cultural activities,

⁴¹ Academies were a form of cultural gathering that was common in some of the prominent humanist circles in Europe during the sixteenth century. See various articles in the volume: Laetitia Boehm and Ezio Raimondi, eds., *Università, Accademie e società scientifiche in Italia e Germania dal cinquecento al settecento* (Bologna: Il mulino, 1981). For additional bibliography see: Cesare Vasoli, "Le Accademie fra Cinquecento e Seicento e il loro ruolo nella storia della tradizione enciclopedica" in *Ibid.*, 81-82 n. 1-2.

⁴² In particular, for Calvinism and Anabaptism; for the different streams of heresy in the Veneto during the sixteenth century see: Aldo Stella, *Anabattismo e Antitrinitarismo in Italia nel XVI secolo. Nuove ricerche storiche* (Padova: Liviana, 1969).

⁴³ Paul Lawrence Rose, "The Accademia Venetiana: Science and Culture in Renaissance Venice," *Studi veneziani* 11 (1969): 199; Foscari and Tafuri, *L'armonia e i conflitti*, 124 n. 10; Tafuri, *Venezia e il Rinascimento*, 173-185; Lina Bolzoni, *La stanza della memoria: modelli letterari e iconografici nell'età della stampa* (Torino: Einaudi, 1995), 3-9, 21. At first numbers had been kept down to facilitate orderly discussions, but by 1560 there were at least a hundred members. Among them Domenico Venier, Paolo Manuzio, Girolamo Molin, Bernardo Tasso, Francesco Patrizi, Agostino Valier, Francesco Sansovino, and the composer Giuseppe Zarlino. Daniele Barbaro appears very close to the academy, as a close friend of Federico Badoer.

⁴⁴ Rose "The Accademia Venetiana," 209-212. Federico Badoer's request to the Procurators of Sant Mark's in 1560 (31 May 1560) was followed by an appended letter of approval on behalf of the Senate (12 July 1560). ASVe, *Procuratia di San Marco, De Supra*, atti, registro 129, cc. 34-37. Published in: *Ibid.*, 228-233, n. 6.

⁴⁵ For its closure due to financial debts: *Ibid.*, 212-215. Due to heresy: Tafuri, *Venezia e il Rinascimento*, 173-185.

the academy was famous for just the type of syncretism that characterized the works of Colonna, Zorzi and other figures associated with the mystical philosophical currents in Venice. Its members discussed a vast range of humanist, scientific and political issues, and were rather open to maintaining contacts with protestant countries. They took up the study of Hermetic and Neo-Platonist texts, and began to work on an edition in *volgare* to Zorzi's *De harmonia mundi*, the most representative work of Venetian Cabalistic thought⁴⁶.

The *Accademia di Costozza* united members of the Vicentine nobility around the figure of Francesco Trento (1528-1583/4) in his private residence at Costozza, the Villa Eolia. Members included several renowned humanists, such as Bernardino Trinagio (d. 1577), a public instructor in Latin and one of the founders of the *Accademia Olimpica* in Vicenza; Luigi Groto (1541-1585), the blind poet from Adria in the Polesine who was a regular visitor in Fratta; Paolo Almerico (1514-1589), the original patron of Villa Capra "La Rotonda" in Vicenza; the painter Giovan Battista Maganza (1509-1586); the young poetess Issicratea Monte (1564-c.1584); the doctor Elio, son of Valerio Belli and many others. The activities practiced within the academy primarily included reading and composing poetry, and in addition, organizing feasts and dinners, to which they also invited women, reciting comedies, reading literary texts in Latin, Greek and vulgar, conducting disputes about philosophic and theological arguments, and discussing of a series of emblematic images thought up by Francesco Trento with great allegorical significances⁴⁷.

In Vicenza, the academy had become the realm where the great religious debates were held. Many of the participants in the meetings of the *Accademia Olimpica*, founded in 1555, were somehow related to heretic practices or discourses, including many of the members of the Trissino, the Thiene and the Pojana families. Giulio Trissino, the son of Giangiorgio Trissino, was a known Calvinist who played a significant role in the

⁴⁶ Bolzoni, *La stanza della memoria*, 23 n. 21.

⁴⁷ Van der Sman, *La decorazione a fresco*, 58-59. Most of the information regarding the Eolia academy is derived from: Biblioteca Ambrosiana di Milano, codice A 16 inferiore, «Gasparis Trissinis aliorumque Illustrium Poetarum in effigiem & Aeoliam Per Ill.ris & Ecc.mi viri FRANCISCI TRIDENTI carmina» (Latina, Gaeca, Italica, Celtica, Et patavino-dorica scripta quedam sunt autographa quaedam exemplaria). Giuseppe Barbieri, "Il Vento e la Legge: Francesco Trento e il circolo di villa Eolia." *Studi Veneziani* n.s. VII (1983): 81-142.

introduction of Calvinism to Vicenza; another member of the family, Alessandro Trissino, was also a very active Calvinist⁴⁸. Giovan Battista Maganza, who participated in the academies of both Vicenza and Costozza, was an intimate friend of the Thiene household, whose members were recognized for their heretic activities.

Achile Olivieri has posed some significant questions concerning Palladio's own religious beliefs, enriching the image of his insertion into the reformist movement in Vicenza. Palladio maintained connections with heretics from Padua and Venice, and an intimate relationship with Odoardo Thiene, one of the main points of reference for Calvinist propaganda in Vicenza⁴⁹. Among Venetian patricians, the inclination towards reformist ideas was evident in the activities of the *Accademia della Fama*. There were also private figures who maintained documented contacts with members of heretic circle in Vicenza, such as Jacopo Contarini (1536-1595), a great patron and collector of arts⁵⁰.

Important figures of diverse cultural formation and disputable religious ideology crossed their paths in Rovigo, the capital of the Polesine, especially in the middle decades of the sixteenth century. The *Accademia degli Addormentati* was operating in the city between the years 1553-1562; it was extremely recognized for the heretic activities of its

⁴⁸ For Giulio Trissino: Achile Olivieri, *Palladio, le Corti e le famiglie: simulazione e morte nella cultura architettonica del '500* (Vicenza: Istituto per le ricerche di storia sociale e di storia religiosa, 1981), 32. For the Pojana family: *Ibid.*, 36. For Alessandro Trissino: Cesare Vasoli, "Il processo per eresia di Oddo Quarto da Monopoli," in *Civitas Mundi: Studi Sulla Cultura Del Cinquecento* (Rome: Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 1996), 155; Achile Olivieri, "Alessandro Trissino e il movimento calvinista vicentino nel Cinquecento," *Rivista di storia della chiesa in Italia XXI* (1967): 54-77.

⁴⁹ Foscari and Tafuri, *L'armonia e i conflitti*, 140-141. Although Palladio is presented as the architect that appears at a period when the writings of Zorzi began to be strongly accused as heretic, this does not mean that his image is an incarnation of the triumphal Counter-Reformation, and his relationships with influential members of the Vicentine heresy are perfectly documented. But although Palladio worked for patricians recognized as Calvinist or suspected for heresy, he still maintained courteous relationships with orthodox patrons. See also: Giulio Piovone, "Trissino e Palladio nell'Umanesimo vicentino," *Bollettino del C.I.S.A. Andrea Palladio V* (1963): 13-23; Olivieri, *Palladio, le Corti*, 43-52. Odoardo Thiene was also a very intimate friend of Palladio's son, Orazio. In 1566, Calvinist meetings took place in the house of Angelica Pigafetta, in which Palladio was present.

⁵⁰ Foscari and Tafuri, *L'armonia e i conflitti*, 168 n. 42. Contarini was the patron of Paolo Veronese and Jacopo Bassano and a collector of works by Giorgione, Tintoretto, Titian, Palma il Giovane and Francesco Bassano. On his collection see: Michel Hochmann, "La collection de Giacomo Contarini, dans Mélanges de l'École française de Rome," *Moyen Âge* 99 (1987): 447-489.

members⁵¹. The Calvinist attitudes of its founder, Giovanni Domenico Roncale, have been the object of many studies⁵². Roncale was also a very active businessman who maintained important economic relationships with some prominent noblemen in Vicenza. During the years 1559-1562, he was the member of a group of Protestants there that was formed around the Calvinist Count Ulisse Martinengo del Barco (c.1545-1570), who was active between Brescia and Ravenna. The group included also merchants, entrepreneurs and businessmen, all involved in the propagation of the ideas of reformation and the diffusion of prohibited and heretic books. In Rovigo, the *Accademia degli Addormentati* included members such as Luigi Groto, the man of letters Antonio Riccoboni, and Domenico Mazzarello, who later escaped to Geneva, where other heretics from Vicenza had escaped. Another polemic member was the renowned reformist Oddo Quarto, whose trial by the Inquisition in Padua, Monselice, Venice and Ferrara lasted five years (1563-1567)⁵³.

In 1590 Barnaba Riccoboni (1551-1627), the brother of Antonio Riccoboni, became the abbot of the Olivetan monastery of San Bartolomeo in Rovigo. Barnaba was famous for his astronomical and astrological activities, and also wrote about philosophy and religion. In the first years of his abbacy, he had founded the *Accademia degli Uniti*, from which written records remain from 1592-1594. Riccoboni wrote a manifest, '*Discorso per un accademico*', that was based on the tradition of Ficino and the sixteenth century Hermeticism. In it, he proposed a series of relationships between macrocosm and microcosm, relationships that expand themselves to the academy, which transformed itself into a symbol of the images of the macrocosm⁵⁴.

⁵¹ Stefania Malavasi, "Cultura religiosa e cultura laica nel Polesine del Cinquecento: le Accademie degli Addormentati e dei Pastori fratregiani," *Archivio veneto* s. V, CXXXII (1989): 61. For the academy see also: *Ibid.*, "Giovanni Domenico Roncalli e l'Accademia degli Addormentati di Rovigo," *Archivio veneto* s. V, XCV (1979): 47-58. The academy was closed in 1562 after the control of the Mayor Giacomo Foscarini, who wrote to the Senate, testifying about the heretic activities that were taking place within it.

⁵² For his activity in Rovigo and the academy see especially: *Ibid.*, 47-58.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 52. For Oddo Quarto see: Vasoli, "Il processo per eresia," 139-177. His trial is documented in: ASVe, *Sant'Uffizio*, b. 21.

⁵⁴ Mazzetti, "L'ambiente culturale," 79-95. In appendix: Barnaba Riccoboni, *Discorso per un accademico* (Ms. Conc. 137, cc. 159r-165r).

Rovigo and the major centers of the Polesine, although subject to Venice, continued to gravitate towards the cultural ambience of the Este in Ferrara. Until Barnaba Riccoboni began the activity of the academy, the Olivetan monastery kept quite close to the Abbacy of San Giorgio, and was a channel of communication between the ambience of Rovigo and the culture of the Este. Meetings and vivid and fruitful cultural exchanges were in fact quite common between the main monastic centers of the Polesine and the nearby cultural circles of Ferrara, Padua, Venice, Vicenza and the court of Mantua⁵⁵.

Significant cultural and economical relationships were maintained between various figures from the Polesine and Mantua. The rule applied also for occultists, game players, mystics and Jews, who were all particularly active within the Gonzaga court, and who often found their way to Ferrara and to the Polesine. Laura Romano has demonstrated how throughout the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, many magicians and sorcerers practicing witchcraft continuously wandered between the Gonzaga court in Mantua and the Polesine, as part of a general phenomenon of intellectual hobos that were traveling between these two centers. The superstitious atmosphere at the ducal court is neatly described in her essay⁵⁶.

In Mantua and its surrounding areas, the Jews maintained a lively community, which was relatively protected by the dukes Guglielmo Gonzaga (1538-1597) and his son and successor Vincenzo (1562-1612). A Jewish press existed in Mantua from the end of the fifteenth century onwards, surpassed in Italy only by the Hebrew press in Venice. Under the patronage of Duke Vespasiano Gonzaga (1531-1591), a Hebrew press was established in Sabbioneta. The duke turned his capital into a 'Little Athens', ignoring the efforts of the Church to destroy Hebrew literature, and inviting Jews to live in his town. Rabbis of the Jewish community in Mantua were regularly appointed for service in the Jewish community of Rovigo, and several prominent figures from Mantua were regular visitors in Venice and in the Ferrarese court⁵⁷. Giulio Busi has demonstrated the cultural role of Ferrara in the

⁵⁵ Stella, "Eterodossi nel Polesano," 13; Mazzetti, "L'ambiente culturale," 79, 80, 92; Malavasi, "Cultura religiosa e cultura laica," 61.

⁵⁶ Laura Romano, "Il giocogliere e l'eretico – il Polesine e la corte di Mantova" in Olivieri, *Eresie, magia, società*, 33-45. Most of her research is based on documents conserved at the Modena State Archive.

⁵⁷ Shlomo Simonsohn, *History of the Jews in the Duchy of Mantua* (Jerusalem: Kiryath Sepher, 1977), 23-28, 682-684.

late-fifteenth and sixteenth centuries as a place of encounters between Christianity and Judaism, beginning with Pellegrino Prisciani (1435-1510), who was a passionate disciple of the Jewish Mantuan scholar Avraham Farrisol (1451-1525)⁵⁸.

In the second half of the sixteenth century, the most famous among the Jews that frequented the ducal courts was Abramo Colorni (1544-1599). The many talents of Colorni, who was the only true engineer among the Jews of Mantua, included expertise in applied mathematics and engineering, and in particular hydraulic engineering. He had built fortifications and bridges, and invented weapons, but was above all a renowned charlatan, an alchemist and an expert escapologist. Because of these talents he served the Dukes of Mantua and Ferrara, Emperor Rudolph II of Prague and Duke Federic of Württemberg⁵⁹.

Colorni's only printed book deals with cryptic methods of writing, *Scotographia*, dedicated to Rudolph II⁶⁰. He was particularly famous for his translation from Latin of the important occult text, the *Clavicula Salomonis*, for Duke Guglielmo or Vincenzo Gonzaga. The *Clavicula* enjoyed a particular diffusion in Venice, and during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, many figures, including noblemen, were processed by the *Sant'Uffizio* for its possession and for practicing its magical rituals⁶¹. While at the service of Alfonso II d'Este in Ferrara, Colorni wrote a manuscript, an investigation of physiognomy and chiromancy that he dedicated to Duke Vincenzo Gonzaga, in which he objected to the superstition prevalent

⁵⁸ Giulio Busi, "Officina ebraica ferrarese," in *Il succo dei favi: studi sull'umanesimo ebraico* (Bologna: Fattoadarte, 1992), 65-93.

⁵⁹ See especially the recent monograph dedicated to Colorni: Ariel Toaff, *Il prestigiatore di Dio: avventure e miracoli di un alchimista ebreo nelle corti del Rinascimento* (Milan: Rizzoli, 2010). See also: Simonsohn, *History of the Jews in Mantua*, 650, 704-705. For the study of Colorni in the context of Villa Grimani Molin see: Guseo, "Il mito dei Grimani," 128-129.

⁶⁰ Toaff, *Il prestigiatore di Dio*, 167-190. Abramo Colorni, *Scotographia ouero, Scienza di scriuere oscuro, facilissima, & sicurissima, per qual si voglia lingua; le cui diuerse inuentioni diuisi in tre libri, seruiranno in più modi, & per cifra, & per contra cifra* (Prague: Giovanni Sciuman, 1593).

⁶¹ Federico Barbierato, *Nella stanza dei circoli: Clavicula Salomonis e libri di magia a Venezia nei secoli XVII e XVIII* (Milan: Sylvestre Bonnard, 2002), 41-49. Abramo Colorni, *Salomon Rex Judaeorum, Zercobeni ouero Clavicula... tradotta dall'idioma Hebraico all'italiano dal... Abraam Colorno ad istanza del Serenissimo di Mantova*. The title of Colorni's version is recovered from a process of the Sant'Uffizio: ASVe, *Sant'Uffizio*, b. 85 (26 August 1627, denunciation of fra' Angelo da Venezia against fra' Stafano Peranda).

in these 'sciences', and proposed his own approved methods for their practice⁶². As a scientist and magician, Colorni was also an expert in optics and optical illusions. One of his alleged optical inventions was an unrealized instrument that resembled a telescope, much appreciated by his admirer Tommaso Garzoni (1549-1489) and highly criticized by Giovan Battista della Porta⁶³. Garzoni highly praised Colorni's special capacities as a magician, and in particular his ability to create incredible illusionist effects with mirrors, '*ogni sorta di specchi mostruosi e bizzari*'⁶⁴.

When Colorni was at the service of the Ferrara duke, he met many important scientists, intellectuals and noblemen in addition to Garzoni, such as Conte Francesco Zorli from Bagnacavallo, an expert card player and a famous escapologist. The duke's collection of artist and poets included several chosen Jews, such as Abram Budrio, a master in spagyric medicine (the production of herbal medicines using alchemical procedures), and such as the renowned mathematician and physician Rafael Mirami⁶⁵.

The latter was an expert in gnomonics, capable of creating sundials by a sophisticated manipulation of rays of light using mirrors, which were allegedly so accurate that they functioned even during the dark hours of the day. Mirami's treatise on the art of mirrors, or *Specularia*, was printed in 1582 in Ferrara, with the promising title '*Introduzione alla prima parte della specularia*' and with introductory notes that indicated that the publication had only been the first in a series of books on the subject⁶⁶. In the note to the readers, he had

⁶² Toaff, *Il prestigiatore di Dio*, 71-88. Abramo Colorni, *Nova Chiriofisionomia e censura contra tutte le superstiziose vanità che in tali suggeti sono state da molti trattate, nella quale si mostra et insegna quello che più veramente e ragionamente per fondamenti cavati dalla Theologia, Filosofia e Medicina credere si possa o debba, e tutto chiaramente et utilmente*. Written around 1588, a copy of the manuscript is conserved in: Herzog August Bibliothek, Wolfenbüttel, Cod. Guelf. 4.9 Aug. 4.

⁶³ Eileen Adair Reeves, *Galileo's Glassworks: The Telescope and the Mirror* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008), 70-71, 109.

⁶⁴ Tommaso Garzoni, *La piazza universale di tutte le professioni del mondo* (Venice: G. B. Somasco, 1587), 12r. For Colorni as a magician see: Toaff, *Il prestigiatore di Dio*, 71-88.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 49-51.

⁶⁶ Rafael Mirami, *Compendiosa introduzione alla prima parte della specularia, cioè della scienza de gli specchi* (Ferrara: Rossi & Tortorino, 1582). In the context of Villa Grimani Molin: Guseo, "Il mito dei Grimani," 123-131.

also mentioned the 'telescopic' invention of Colorni, '*ingegnossissimo ingegnere*'⁶⁷. Sundials based on reflections were probably an invention of Copernicus around 1520. Mirami was the first to introduce them into Italy, and he is considered their true inventor. The treatise was followed the same year by a publication of accompanying tables for the first part; the rest of the treatise had never been found⁶⁸.

As stressed by Olivieri, just as in other cultural centers such as Vicenza and Mantua, in the Polesine, heresy was not formed in the margins of society, but within '*the families, the religious orders, within the villas*'⁶⁹. The entire tribe of the Roncale and Quarto families participated in the meetings of the *Accademia degli Addormentati*; groups of families were formed, communicating with each other, creating a sort of 'heretic genealogy'. Heretics were intellectuals, merchants, nobles and artisans, and many of the Polesine's most prominent public figures had been processed or accused for heretic practices and beliefs. Olivieri also notes that the heretic world in the Polesine was rich in female presence. In the case of the Roncale family, for example, the meetings of the members took place within the private palace of Barbara Roncale in Rovigo. The Oddo group also included two females, Cornelia and Laura Oddo. The role of woman within the heretic circles involved the practice of magic, the preparation of love potions and the practice of giving previsions, and woman performing magic were regarded as virtuous 'fairies'⁷⁰.

Stefania Malavasi sustains that after the *Accademia degli Addormentati* had been closed for suspicions of heresy, most of the activities of its members had shifted to Fratta, further away from the public eye. There, Giovanni Maria Bonardo (1523-1590) founded the

⁶⁷ Rafael Mirami, *Introduttione alla prima parte della specularia*, introduction to the reader. « misurare con la vista, le profondità e le distanze, come ampiamente ne discorre in un suo Trattato M. Abramo Colorni Hebreo, ingegnossissimo ingegnere del Serenis. Duca di Ferrara »

⁶⁸ Rafael Mirami, *Tavole della prima parte della specularia, cioè della scienza de gli specchi* (Ferrara: Rossi & Tortorino, 1582).

⁶⁹ A. Olivieri, "Introduzione," in Olivieri, *Eresie, magia, società*, 5; Among the Vicentine families see: Olivieri, *Palladio, le Corti*, 31.

⁷⁰ Olivieri, "Introduzione," 7-8.

Accademia dei Pastori Frateggiani following the closure of the Rovigo academy, and a group of humanists and nobles gathered around the figure of Lucrezia Gonzaga (1522-1576)⁷¹.

Heretic implications, especially Erasmian, were not absent from the private nucleus of the Grimani family in Venice. Patriarch Giovanni Grimani had spent the second half of his life, nearly half a century, defending himself from accusations of heresy. Because of letter he wrote in 1547 regarding the questions predestination and the grace, he was accused of being pro-Lutheran, and denied the privilege of ever becoming Cardinal⁷². Giovanni's Cardinal uncle Domenico studied in Florence, where he knew Angelo Poliziano (1454-1494) and Pico della Mirandola, and he had later inherited the entire corpus of Pico's private library. The relationship between Domenico and Francesco Zorzi was quite profound, and he was an intimate friend of Erasmus of Rotterdam (1466-1536), who visited him in Rome in 1509⁷³.

Virtually all of the scholars who have studied Giovanni Grimani's iconographical program for the Grimani chapel in the church of San Francesco della Vigna have noticed that it responds directly to the controversial personal life of the Patriarch. Scholars have generally sustained that he constructed the chapel following his accusation in order to prove his utmost orthodoxy to the Roman Church⁷⁴. However, in a recent study Joan Mut Arbós has demonstrated that both the chapel and the church façade are part of a unified iconographical program, which hides within it a deliberate heterodox provocation. In the program, which is centralized on the concept of the Christian Resurrection, Giovanni evokes some of the very same polemic doctrines for which he had been accused⁷⁵.

⁷¹ Malavasi, "Cultura religiosa e cultura laica," 61, 66.

⁷² Paschini, *Tre illustri prelati del Rinascimento*, 131-196; P. J. Laven, "The 'Causa' Grimani and its Political Overtones," *The Journal of Religious History* IV (1967): 184-205.

⁷³ For Domenico Grimani, Francesco Zorzi and the convent of Santa Chiara in Murano see: Foscarini and Tafuri, *L'armonia e i conflitti*, 14-15. Erasmus' visit is testified in a letter that he had sent to the philosopher Agostino Steuco (1497-1548) on 27 March 1531. See: Paschini, "Domenico Grimani, cardinale," 134-136 and notes.

⁷⁴ Foscarini and Tafuri, *L'armonia e i conflitti*, 149; Massimo Firpo "L'iconografia come problema storiografico. Le ambiguità della porpora e i diavoli del Sant'Ufficio. Identità e storia nei ritratti di Giovanni Grimani," *Rivista storica italiana* 117, 3 (2005): 856. According to Firpo, the church is a kind of an «open marble book», in which it was possible to read the apology destined to proclaim for the centuries to come the innocence of Grimani.

⁷⁵ Joan Mut Arbós, "Contributi per l'interpretazione del ciclo pittorico della cappella Grimani a San Francesco della Vigna," *Venezia Cinquecento* 37 (2009): 137-202.

3.3 COSMOLOGY AND VILLA ARCHITECTURE, CREATION AND TECHNIQUE

In the decorative tradition of the Palladian villa, the visual representation of cosmological themes echoes the physical contextualization of the villa itself in its natural environment. The Palladian villa is a residential architectural manufacture containing elements and mechanisms that were developed in order to be able to operate within the challenges of the rural environment of the Venetian mainland. The humanist architects of Early Modern Venice were conscious of the existence of the historical symbolic analogy between the physical structure of the villa within the temporal world and the philosophical concept of 'microcosm and macrocosm'. As Daniele Barbaro described the relationship between architecture and nature in his commentary for Vitruvius, the process of creating an architectural masterpiece is similar to the process of the creation of things by nature⁷⁶. The analogy between the Architect and the Creator was well known since ancient times, and was shared by the major currents of Western philosophy. For instance, Francesco Zorzi also wrote that '*because the elements are four, the architects, in fact, imitating nature, construct the buildings providing them with four angles so that they are stable. The Supreme Architect, since the beginning, put four bases to support the entire edifice of the world*'⁷⁷.

Western cosmology owes a heavy debt to Plato's cosmological dialog *Timaeus*, which laid the foundations of natural philosophy in its mission to explain the origins of all things and the process of their creation and reproduction⁷⁸. Plato related to the universe as a large macrocosm, which contains a variety of living and still objects that are each considered as a microcosm in its own right, born through the combination of a divine form with a physical material substance. The *timaeon* narrative describes a chronology of creation beginning

⁷⁶ Barbaro, *I dieci libri 1567*, I.iii, 26. «nell'Architettura dichiara la forma, la materia, la compositione delle opera, & imitando la natura per l'occulta virtù, che in lui si trova, dalle cose meno perfette alle più perfette, sempre discendente. »

⁷⁷ F. Zorzi, *L'armonia del mondo*, 1:3:13, 313.

⁷⁸ Andrew Gregory, "Chapter 9: Plato" in *Ancient Greek Cosmogony* (London: Duckworth, 2007), 140-162. For an English translation of the *Timaeus* with a running commentary, see: Plato, *Plato's Cosmology*.

with the primary materials of the universe, in a progressive development of the natural static and living elements within it; to each of them Plato attributes a soul. The meticulous classification and description of elements did not remain restricted to the Platonic schools of thought. It is also a characteristic component of the Aristotelian cosmology, which was practiced in the medieval and early modern universities. It also guided the private academies in the Veneto during the sixteenth century, where the encyclopedic approach was perceived as an ideal instrument for the comprehension of the various components of natural elements and of the methods of their creation and reproduction⁷⁹.

Manfredo Tafuri has spoken of 'the *classificatory encyclopedism* of the Venetian Academy', which characterized the intellectual discourses of the members of the *Accademia della Fama*. Lina Bolzoni explained how in their writings, the *encyclopedism* was represented through the topical figure of the human body as a microcosm, which served as the global metaphor which was capable of providing all of the necessary correspondences. The members of the academy declared having no higher objective than to restore the world to what they considered 'the golden era'⁸⁰. The objective was followed by an attempt to achieve a 'totalizing order', which meant the accurate classification of the materials and by an almost obsessive preoccupation with their exhaustive and universal qualities, and above all with their final reduction into order⁸¹.

The concept of *order* in true mortal entities, one of the basic terms of cosmological thought in sixteenth century Venice, was introduced in ancient times into Western cosmology. It appears in Plato's cosmological treatise, which also discusses other

⁷⁹ The encyclopedic approach characterized the activities of academies in other centers in Italy besides Venice, such as Florence and Padua. Vasoli, "Le Accademie nella tradizione enciclopedica," 81-115. Regarding the Accademia della Fama see: Lina Bolzoni, "L'Accademia Veneziana: splendore e decadenza di una utopia enciclopedica," in Boehm and Raimondi, *Università, Accademie e società scientifiche*, 117-167.

⁸⁰ « nothing more worthy of an endeavor than to restore to the world that age of gold », "Preface" to: *Libri che... ha nuovamente mandato l'Accademia Venetiana alla Fiera di Francfort* (Accademia Veneta, 1559). Cited by: Rose, "The Accademia Venetiana," 195.

⁸¹ Bolzoni, "1.3. L'enciclopedia ordinata e visualizzata," in *La stanza della memoria*, 10-13. Rose, "The Accademia Venetiana," 191-242.

founding ideas in Renaissance cosmology such as the concepts of universal harmony and the attribution of a supreme intelligence to the Demiurge. In Renaissance Venice, the fundamental importance of order as necessary for the success in creating things was the basis of Daniele Barbaro's religious and scientific philosophy, which emerges especially from a series of theological letters written to his aunt in the mid-century⁸².

"La sapienza vuole ordinare e distinguere". According to Daniele, the Christian order of creation by God contains three "marvelous" levels – Creation, ordering, and adorning, out of which the role of "distinguishing and ordering" is attributed to wisdom⁸³. Once the Creator created the "World Machine", he "disposed, ordered and sustained every single thing in a certain determined number, weight and measurement"⁸⁴. God created and God maintains the order of time and space, and even the Holy Scripture "narrates in order about the sufficiency of the doctrine"⁸⁵. God contains within him the order of nature in his existence, the order of wisdom in his arranging, the order of goodness in doing good things to us; He preceded the order of nature, existing before time began to pass⁸⁶. In fact,

⁸² Daniele Barbaro, *Lettere di Daniel Barbaro date in luce la prima volta per l'ingresso di monsignor illustrissimo e reverendissimo Sebastiano Soldati alla sede vescovile di Treviso* (Padua: Tipografia del Seminario editr., 1829). The letters were written between 1549 and 1551 to his aunt Cornelia Barbaro, the paternal nun of the monastery of Santa Chiara in Murano. They were conserved by Barbaro himself in one single codex, which he entitled «Registro di certe lettere a suor Cornelia Barbaro di diverse cose di teologia».

⁸³ Barbaro, *Lettere*, F, 26-27 (24 February 1550). «In questa sola a Dio conveniente creazione riluce una eccellenza di tre gradi meravigliosa, perché il creare, ch'è il fare di niente, risponde all'imnipotenza; lo distinguere ed ordinare alla sapienza; l'adornare ed abbellire il mondo alla bontate. La creazione adunque richiede che di nulla il tutto avanti ogni tempo si faccia; La sapienza vuole ordinare e distinguere, e però secondo tre gradi in tre giorni fu fatta la distinzione [...]»

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, F, 15 (24 February 1550). «Dico adunque che fatta la macchina del mondo, e ciò che in essa si contiene visibile ed invisibile, o con corpo o senza, tutto di niente da uno primo principio solo e sommo è stato prodotto immediate, e la potenza di quel principio, benché sia infinita ed immensa, ha però disposto, ordinato e stutuito ogni cosa in certo e determinato numero, peso e misura. »

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, G, 30 (22 March 1550). «Siccome Iddio glorioso ha fatto le cose ordinatamente quanto al tempo, e con ordine quanto al sito le ha disposte; così ordinatamente le governa quanto alla influenza della sua sapienza e bontade, e la sacra Scrittura per ordine le narra quanto alla sufficienza della dottrina. »

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, G, 31 (22 March 1550). «E perché il primo principio del quale tratta la Scrittura, contiene in se l'ordine di natura nello essere, l'ordine della sapienza nel disporre, l'ordine della bontate nel farci bene in modo che secondo l'ordine di natura viene a dimostrare la somogianza e l'equalitate, e secondo l'ordine della sapienza considerare ciocché vien prima e ciò che segue, e secondo l'ordine della bontade nello influire significa la maggioranza e minoranza; però dovemo avvertire che la divina illuminazione delle sacre cose per

Barbaro sees such a complete parallelism between the concept of order and goodness, insomuch that he defines the original sin and the actual mortal sins as 'disorder'⁸⁷.

Although he could hardly be regarded a Neo-Platonist or an esoteric⁸⁸, this aspect of Daniele's cosmological perception reflects a fundamental component in the tradition of Alchemical thought: only in following the alchemical processes with an absolutely perfect, or even divine precision and order, can the alchemical process of the transmutation of materials succeed. Like the architect, the alchemist too perceived the chemical process as analogous to the creation of the world by God, basing his philosophy on the Book of Genesis and on the *Tabula Smaragdina*. This parallelism reflects how "Science", as we understand the term today, is a perception which emerged only during the seventeenth century. It was then that the natural sciences became separated from the general scheme of knowledge embedded in the tradition of philosophy, which had dominated from antiquity⁸⁹.

In recent decades, a large corpus of studies has emphasized the importance of esoteric tendencies for the intellectual history of the Renaissance. The essential difference between 'Aristotelian' conventionalism and 'Neo-Platonist' esotericism lies in the rejection (conventionalism) or the acceptance (esotericism) of the existence of causal relations between the sign and the signified. In a view that goes back to Plato's *Cratylus*, the two traditions which contributed most significantly to the rise of Renaissance esotericism, Neo-

dimostrarci l'ordine di natura determina, come era conveniente, che Dio facesse ed operasse, cioè che nel principio prima che il tempo cominciasse a scorrere fu di non essere all'essere prodotta quella natura di tre maniere che io dissi nella lettera precedente. »

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, J, 43 (17 June 1550). «Il peccato adunque per essere disordine e mancamento non ha causa efficiente, ma deficiente, cioè il difetto della voluntate creata.» And: *Ibid.*, M, 53-54 (9 September 1550), in discussing the Actual Sin. «Il peccato attuale è adunque disordine attuale della volontà, la quale si parte dl primo principio, dovendo essere da quello, per quello, e secondo quello commossa; laddove se quel disordine è tanto che egli rovina di fatto l'ordine della giustizia, senza dubbio egli è peccato degno di morte ed operatore di morte. Ma se disturba alquanto la giustizia, non ci mette in inimicizia con Dio, ma presto si può perdonare. »

⁸⁸ For Barbaro's Aristotelianism and 'conventionalism' see: Branco Mitrovic, "Paduan Aristotelianism and Daniele Barbaro's Commentary on Vitruvius' De Architectura," *Sixteenth Century Journal* 21, 3 (1998): 678-679.

⁸⁹ Schmitt, "Giambattista Benedetti," 127-128. For the chemistry stemming from alchemy, and 'scientific' alchemy versus 'mystical' alchemy see: Maurice P. Crosland, "Chapter 1: Allegory and Analogy in Alchemical Literature" in *Historical Studies in the Language of Chemistry* (London: Heinemann, 1962), 3-24. For the *Tabula Smaragdina* see: *Ibid.*, 19.

Platonism and Cabala, assumed the existence of a real, natural relation between words and their meanings, believing that the manipulation of words could cause changes in the material world⁹⁰. Already Ernst Gombrich warned about the Renaissance tendency to confuse symbols with their references. If signs are naturally, and not conventionally, related to material objects, then by manipulating signs one can manipulate objects⁹¹.

Obviously, the definition of the human capacity to create received a different interpretation in these two completely different philosophies, one positioning human potency within the limits of human intelligence, the other claiming that the same human intelligence has 'unseen' capacities, such as communicating with angels or activating secret forces of words by the act of their verbal pronunciation⁹². However, in sixteenth century Venice supporters of both standpoints could explain the human creational ability in a manner that reflected their common background within the cultural, social and economic activities of the epoch.

In 1540 the Florentine humanist Benedetto Varchi (1502/3-65) was a founding member of the *Accademia degli Infiammati* together with Daniele Barbaro in Padua. In a famous letter from 1544, Varchi, who also translated many of Aristotle's works, wrote an apology about the capacity of chemistry that can transform all things. He affirmed that alchemy does not belong to those who manufacture poisons, falsify coins or seek the Philosopher's Stone, but to those who, in the field of *technique*, realize glass, mirrors, brass, gunpowder and so on. By 'technique', Varchi was referring to the chemistry that operates on the elements that exist in nature with the methods and the instruments already used in a long artisan practice⁹³. The phrase actually echoes a much discussed passage in Plato's *Laws*

⁹⁰ Mitrovic, "Paduan Aristotelianism," 677-678.

⁹¹ Ernst Hans Gombrich, "Icones Symbolicae: The Visual Image in Neoplatonic Thought," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 21 (1958): 176.

⁹² Mitrovic, "Paduan Aristotelianism," 678; Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, *Opera omnia* (Basel, 1572), 155, 157. Defending natural signification by referring to Plato's *Cratylus*, Pico stated that certain figures, numbers and names contain secret meanings, and claimed that certain Hebrew words possessed special forces. Mitrovic quotes for example Reuchlin, *De arte cabbalistica*, who wrote that it is possible to perform miracles by knowing the divine names and by invoking angels by their names. Johannes Reuchlin, *L'arte cabbalistica: De arte cabalistica*, eds. G. Busi and S. Campanini (Florence: Opus, 1995), 67, 161, 165.

⁹³ Vasoli, *Profezia e ragione*, 482-483.

(X, 889c-d)⁹⁴, cited explicitly by Francesco Zorzi, who at the turn of the sixteenth century had also emphasized the role of technique in the human ability to create.

In the third book of *De Harmonia mundi*, Zorzi dedicated two chapters to a discussion about magic and nature⁹⁵. Following a long list of figures from the past and present who have claimed to perform miracles, ranging from the talking statues sculptured by the ancient Egyptians to Leonardo da Vinci's designs of flying machines, he exclaimed: "Some, in virtue of their *technical ability*, were considered extremely acute imitators of nature." Regarding this concept, he cited the passage by Plato, to explain that technique was given to humans in order that they produce '*secondary realities, not participating in the divine truth*'⁹⁶. Accordingly, what enables a person to do things that for the public seem like miracles is his ability to anticipate the timing of the forces that already exist in nature, through a combination of the technical ability with an acute investigation of nature⁹⁷.

⁹⁴ Plato, "Laws," in *Plato in Twelve Volumes*, trans. R.G. Bury (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press; London: William Heinemann Ltd., 1967 and 1968), 10. 889c-889e. «[889c] soft with hard, and all such necessary mixtures as result from the chance combination of these opposites,—in this way and by those means they have brought into being the whole Heaven and all that is in the Heaven, and all animals, too, and plants—after that all the seasons had arisen from these elements; and all this, as they assert, not owing to reason, nor to any god or art, but owing, as we have said, to nature and chance. As a later product of these, art comes later; and it, being mortal itself and of mortal birth, begets later playthings [889d] which share but little in truth, being images of a sort akin to the arts themselves—images such as painting begets, and music, and the arts which accompany these. Those arts which really produce something serious are such as share their effect with nature,—like medicine, agriculture, and gymnastic. Politics too, as they say, shares to a small extent in nature, but mostly in art; and in like manner all legislation which is [889e] based on untrue assumptions is due, not to nature, but to art.» For the passage in the context of the treatment of poetry and art in Plato's *Laws* see: J. Tate, "On Plato: Laws X 889CD," *The Classical Quarterly* 30, 2 (April 1936): 48-54.

⁹⁵ F. Zorzi, *L'armonia del mondo*, III:4: 9, 2088-2099 ("La condizione variegata e mirabile dell'operare e del dominio"); III:4:10, 2100-2103 ("Quali sono le opere naturali, quali i falsi e quali i veri miracoli e qual è la potenza legittima che consente il dominio").

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, III:4: 9, 2091: « Alcuni inoltre, in virtù della loro abilità tecnica, sono stati considerati acutissimi imitatori della natura. A proposito di questo sapere tecnico il personaggio dell'ateniese del decimo libro delle Leggi di Platone afferma: "la tecnica fu data i mortali perché producessero alcune realtà secondarie, non partecipi della verità e della divinità, quanto piuttosto come immagini a essi note." »

⁹⁷ *Ibid.* « Alcuni, però, non accontentandosi delle possibilità della tecnica e dedicandosi all'indagine accuratissima della natura, si sono sforzati di produrre gli effetti già disposti dalla natura, applicando le forze attive agli elementi passivi, prima del tempo stabilito dalla stessa natura. Perciò il volgo credette che fossero in grado di compiere miracoli, mentre in realtà si trattava di fenomeni naturali semplicemente anticipati. » In the second chapter, Zorzi explained that only the ones who are capable of using technique, intelligence

In Plato's dialog the Athenian, who glorifies mindless nature as the creator of the real world, dismisses the products of human intelligence as '*toys (paidai) containing little reality, counterfeits like those of painting, music and the like*'. To create anything *spoudaion* (serious, worthy), men must cooperate with nature⁹⁸. According to the opinion expressed by Varchi and Zorzi, the lesson was that through intelligence, human artisan practice should become technique, adapting the artisan inventions to cooperate with and to profit from the forces of nature. If to cite Cesare Vasoli, in the social and economical evolution of European society, what was now in the front plane was the figure of the practical technician on an expert level, the 'engineer' that constructs fortifications or that projects machines⁹⁹.

We may therefore comprehend how in the context of the Palladian villa, the visual representation of *Filosofia naturalis* actually alludes also to a very practical dimension. The depictions of iconographical themes related to cosmology and cosmogony becomes a metaphor for the challenges that are confronted with in constructing a rural residence in the Venetian *terraferma*, resolved through the virtue of the technical capacities of the architects and the engineers that were involved in its creation.

and nature, and anticipating nature's timing, may be considered as wise, as authentic philosophers or as magicians in a positive manner, since in their operations they testify the nativity of God. *Ibid.*, 2099.

⁹⁸ William K. C. Guthrie, *Plato, the Man and his Dialogues: Earlier Period* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 166.

⁹⁹ Vasoli, *Profezia e Ragione*, 483. In chapter IV in the book, "A proposito di scienza e tecnica nel Cinquecento," 479-505, Vasoli narrates how from the end of the fifteenth century and during the sixteenth century, the once 'simple artisan' had now become a prestigious 'technical engineer', in a process provided an important contribution to the arrival of the scientific revolution.

4

THE PRAISE OF *FILOSOFIA*

NATURALIS

The fresco program of villa Grimani Molin creates the overall impression that it possesses a very symbolic nature, containing very few narrative scenes and an imposing amount of hybrid figures, jewelry, plants, animals and little human creatures of all ages, all depicted in vivid colors on a white background in the artistic tradition of the 'grotesque'. As its main objective, the current chapter seeks to demonstrate that these decorative details can be interpreted as belonging to the well-defined tradition in Early Modern villa decoration of the visual representation of Natural Philosophy. Their presence within the overall iconographic program reveals itself to be anything but marginal, forming both the physical-decorative and the conceptual-metaphorical background for the other subject that are depicted in the frescoes.

4.1 THE VISUAL DESCRIPTION OF COSMOLOGY

4.1.1 Aspects of the World Diagram in the Frescoes of the Veneto Villas

One of the visual intellectual outcomes of the employment of the encyclopedic approach to cosmology was the appearance of visual diagrams describing the structure of the universe. With the rising interest in defining the position of Man in the universe that is so identified with the period of the Renaissance, world diagrams appeared in philosophical and astronomical treatises in a range and variety that surpasses any other period in Western history. Generally, the representations seem to reflect a desire to describe the

world as a complete and harmonic structure, identifying and isolating its different components and describing the relationships between them¹.

Usually, the description of the universe displayed its form according to the Ptolemaic Aristotelian model, just as described in the famous remark by Daniele Barbaro in 1550 (**fig. 61**)². The four terrestrial spheres, which are the four elements, are positioned at the bottom or the center of the structure. They are followed by ten celestial spheres, which are the Sun, the other six known planets of the solar system, the Firmament (the starlit sky), and finally the invisible Crystalline and the Empyrean spheres (the realms of the angels and God).

Elaborations and variations on the basic diagram included the creation of different divisions into groups of four according to the Pythagorean theory, representing the four elements, the four temperaments, the four cardinal winds, the four seasons, the four ages of man and so on. Examples for such elaborate diagrams existed already in the middle ages, and they were published as early as the fifteenth century with the invention of print (**fig. 62**). By the sixteenth century they were extremely common; a particular diagram appearing in 1535 in the treatise of the French mathematician and cartographer Oronce Finé (1494 – 1555) was later copied by Daniele Barbaro and published in his Vitruvius commentary in 1556 (**fig. 63**). Ideas related to the Renaissance mystic currents of Hermeticism and Christian Cabala were incorporated into the world diagrams by several authors throughout the sixteenth century, expressed through the inclusion of various alchemical properties or of the ten cabalistic spheres of the universe (**figs. 64, 65**). The concept of Universal Harmony was often represented

¹ Simeon K. Heninger, *The Cosmographical Glass: Renaissance Diagrams of the Universe* (San Marino, California: Huntington Library, 1977), XV.

² Barbaro, *Lettere*, F, 26-27 (24 February 1550). «Quanto all'essere della natura corporale, si vede tutta la macchina del mondo essere posta nella natura celeste ed elementare. La celeste è divisa in tre cieli principali (the cloudy zone beyond the architectural frame in the frescoed ceiling of the Salone), nell'empireo, nel cristallino, e nel firmamento ch'è il cielo delle stelle. Dentro il firmamento sono sette giri di sette pianetti; ma la natura elementare è divisa in quattro sfere, nel fuoco, nell'aere, nell'acque e nella terra, e questa è la costituzione di tutta la macchina del mondo ordinata distinta e perfetta [...]». Cited by: Inge Jackson Reist, "'Divine Love' and Veronese's Frescoes at the Villa Barbaro," *The Art Bulletin* 67, 4 (1985): 618.

by the description of the world as a system of harmonic music proportions or as a system that is incorporated inside the form of the human body as a microcosm (**figs. 66, 67**).

How these diagrams were transformed from the pages of the humanist books to the mural decoration of the Veneto villa can be explained in relation to a series of consequences, and is above all related to the Venetians' desire to construct their private residence as microcosms in evoking the tradition of the Roman villa *all'antica*. Renaissance artists and patrons often used both texts and illustrations of mythological books for the creation of iconographical representations to decorate their household. In a similar manner, it seems only natural that the illustrations of diagrams, so frequent in the Renaissance in astronomical and cosmological texts, would receive visual translation into iconographical representations. Indeed, in the decorative tradition of the Veneto villa, the mythological and historical scenes of the iconographical program were often accompanied by depictions of various components of the universe, in a manner that underlined the microcosmical role of the villa. Representations of the four elements, the seven planetary divinities, the four seasons and so forth, appear either as single instances or as part of a wider cycle that is representative of the universe and of the circle of life within it.

The most detailed example of a depiction of a comprehensive world diagram can probably be ascribed to the villa of brothers Daniele and Marc'Antonio Barbaro at Maser, designed by Palladio, constructed mainly during 1556-1558 and painted by Veronese probably during the early 1560's. The Barbaro brothers and in particular Daniele, whose passion and competence as a professional astronomer are well known³, destined the villa to function as

³ Daniele Barbaro was known for his passion for astronomy by his contemporaries, an interest that is manifest also in long digressions in his Vitruvius commentary. In the ninth book of the commentary he added an expanded discourse on astronomy, and in particular about gnomonics, the construction of sundials; he was also the author of a manuscript on gnomonics, *De Horologis Describendis libellus* [Bibl. Mar. Cod. Lat. VIII, 42, (3097)]. He possessed astronomical instruments that he both bought and prepared by himself, and in the frontispiece for the 1556 edition of the Vitruvius commentary, he is portrayed dedicating himself to the study of astronomy. See: Boucher, "The Last Will of Daniele Barbaro," 281; Manfredo Tafuri, "Daniele Barbaro e la cultura scientifica veneziana del '500," in Manno, *Cultura, scienze e tecniche*, 68ff.; Fontana, "Il 'Vitruvio' del 1556," 55-59.

an astronomical monument. As a real '*macchina del mondo*', Villa Barbaro is perfectly orientated as a celestial observatory, dominating the view of the northern hemisphere of the Earth by night, thus enabling its inhabitants to follow the motions of the constellations, the planets and the sun. The exteriors include a large astronomical clock and sundial as a manifestation of the practice of astronomy by the household members.

In the fresco decoration, the central *Sala dell'Olimpo* is entirely dedicated to an astronomical description of the universe (**fig. 68**). Surrounding the unique allegorical representation of a total and annular solar eclipse, the seven planetary divinities with their adequate constellations are positioned in the heavenly realm⁴. The planets are ordered in the precise astronomical sequence considered correct according to the traditional Aristotelian model of the universe, and as recorded by Daniele himself⁵. Beneath the planetary divinities, in a painted illusionistic architectural frame that symbolizes the entry into the earthly realm, the four elements are positioned as metaphorical pendants for the world at the corners of the ceiling vault. The cosmic order continues underneath the curve of the vault with allegorical representations of the four seasons, Bacchus and Ceres on the north wall representing summer and autumn, Vulcan and Venus on the south as winter and spring. The depictions probably also represent the tropics of Cancer and Capricorn respectively⁶.

Another example of a rural residence built and decorated with a high degree of cosmological consciousness is the Villa Eolia, constructed around 1560, residing at the town

⁴ See the upcoming: Meital Shai and Simone Guseo, "La tecnologia come strumento di interpretazione iconografica. La Villa Barbaro di Maser e l'Astronomia," in *New Perspectives New Technologies*, international conference held in Venice-Pordenone, 13-15 October 2011, eds. Ludovica Galeazzo and Elisa Mandelli, Università Cà Foscari - Banca Friuladria, in course of publication. The recent research paper identified the female figure that crowns the ceiling frescoes of the *Sala dell'Olimpo* as a personification of a total and annular solar eclipse, which eventually occurred on 9 April 1567. The same iconographical concept is repeated in another ceiling fresco of the villa, the 'Allegory of Faith' in the *Stanza della Lucerna*.

⁵ See above note 2.

⁶ The cosmic order continues in a more detailed manner that is beyond the scope of the current dissertation; some of its aspects shall be treated throughout the coming chapters.

of Costozza in the province of Vicenza⁷. The villa was dedicated by its owner, the humanist Francesco Trento, to the reign of Eolus, the lord of the winds, and thus to the element of Air. The structure, which is rendered as a singular pavilion for guest entertainment rather than as an encompassing structure of a villa, contains an underground floor that exploits a system of a series of connected grottos, by means of appropriate ducts that were opened artificially, serving above all as ventilated a wine cellar. Above the central underground hall, the main floor contained the frescoed *Sala Apolline*. The literary and esoteric activities of the Costozza academy took place in meetings that were organized within this decorated hall, whose ceiling vault was painted by Giovan Antonio Fasolo around 1567-70⁸.

The eight angles of the villa coincide with the eight cardinal winds, whose names are inscribed in the underground hall under the niches on marble slabs, essentially indicating that the villa is oriented towards precise astronomical elements⁹. The hall became known as a 'wind prison' (*'carcere dei venti'*), since it was connected to the upper *Sala Apolline* through a round opening, as part of an air conditioning system enabling the air to pass between the floors and to ventilate downstairs for the wine mixing¹⁰. The same sort of roundel was designed by Palladio for Bonifacio Pojana in his villa at Pojana Maggiore, connecting the entrance hall to it parallel space in the ground floor (ca. 1555)¹¹, and for

⁷ For Villa Eolia see: Sandro Sponza, "Della villa 'Eolia' per il 'Genio' della Rotonda," *Bollettino del C.I.S.A. Andrea Palladio XXIV* (1982-1987): 211-222; Giuseppe Barbieri, "Il Vento e la Legge: Francesco Trento e il circolo di villa Eolia," *Studi Veneziani* n.s. VII (1983): 81-142; *Ibid.*, "«Finxit in effigiem moderantum cuncta deorum»: un ritratto in sembianze di Prometeo," *Humanistica* 1/2 (2006): 167; Gert J. J. Van der Sman, "L'Eolia di villa Trento: arte e umanesimo letterario nel vicentino," *Arte Veneta* 42 (1988): 58-67; *Ibid.*, *La decorazione a fresco*, 139-158; Barbara Kenda, ed., *Aeolian Winds and the Spirit in Renaissance Architecture: Academia Eolia Revisited* (London: Routledge, 2006); Francesca Lodi, "Villa Trento detta 'Eolia'," in Pavanello and Mancini, *Affreschi ville venete*, 217-222 n. 51, with additional bibliography.

⁸ Sponza, "Della villa 'Eolia'," 211; Kenda, *Aeolian Winds*, 2; Van der Sman, *La decorazione a fresco*, 140; G. Barbieri, "Finxit in effigiem," 167.

⁹ Sponza, "Della villa 'Eolia'," 217.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*; Van der Sman, *La decorazione a fresco*, 139.

¹¹ For the history and architecture of Villa Pojana see: Ackerman, *Palladio's Villas*, 62-63; Boucher, *Andrea Palladio*, 85-91. For the fresco program, painted by Bernardino India and Anselmo Canera, see for example Van der Sman, *La decorazione a fresco*, 85-100.

Paolo Almerico's Villa Rotonda in Vicenza (ca. 1570)¹². Following the Eolia experience, Almerico, who knew Francesco Trento and participated in the meetings in Costozza, asked Palladio to construct the villa with a strongly oriented relationship with its environment, aligned with the cardinal winds, to represent a universe that is organized geometrically¹³.

In the upper floor of Villa Eolia, the *Sala Apolline* includes to date a ceiling painted with representations allegorical figures of the four seasons, inserted within a celestial scheme depicting the seven planetary gods and cupid (**figs. 69, 70**). Each divinity rides a carriage pulled by the animals attributed to the divinity in competence with the descriptions in Cartari's *Immagini*¹⁴. The exact location on the wind rose of each planetary divinity is not casual: their order conforms to the Ptolemaic-Aristotelian tradition, beginning from Diana-Luna at the west wall and proceeding in a circle so that Apollo appears in the east, just as in Villa Barbaro¹⁵. Each carriage is painted in the color of the metal that is traditionally associated with each of the planets in the practice of alchemy¹⁶. The spatial organization of the figures, of the large throne-carriages to the right pulled leftwards by the animals, strongly recalls the engravings that appear in one of the earliest and most popular astronomical books of the Early Modern period, Albumasar's *Flores astrologiae*, printed by Erhard Ratdolt in Augsburg and in Venice as early as 1488 (**fig. 71**)¹⁷. The carriages are adorned with a small symbol that represents zodiac constellations that are associated with

¹² Ackerman, *Palladio's Villas*, 68-71; Sponza, "Della villa 'Eolia'," 211-219. When Almerico died in 1588, the villa passed to his heir, Virgilio Bartolomeo, who sold it in May 1591 to the Capra family.

¹³ Sponza, "Della villa 'Eolia'," 217.

¹⁴ Vincenzo Cartari, *Le imagini de i dei de gli antichi*, eds. Ginetta Auzzas et al. (Vicenza: N. Pozza, 1996).

¹⁵ The order is indeed similar. The comparison with Villa Barbaro's *Sala dell'Olimpo* may cause confusion, because the Maser paintings were meant to be viewed looking to the south, and those of Costozza face a viewer that is looking towards north.

¹⁶ Lodi, "Villa Trento detta 'Eolia'," 221. Apollo-gold; Diana-Silver; Mercury-quicksilver; Venus-copper; Mars-iron; Jupiter-tin; Saturn-lead. For alchemical colors see: Crosland, *Historical Studies in Chemistry*, 33.

¹⁷ Gafar Abu Masar. *Flores astrologiae* (Venice: Erhard Ratdolt, 1488). Another astronomical book by Abu Masar, printed in Venice in 1515, recycled simplified versions of the engravings. Abu Masar, *De magnis coniunctionibus annorum reuolutionibus ac eorum profectioibus octo continens tractatus* (Venice: Melchiorem Sessa, 1515). A copy of both books is conserved in Venice, at the Marciana Library.

each planet, in a similar manner to the *Flores astrologiae*, where the symbols appear inside the wheels. Some visible symbols are: Diana-Cancer; Venus-Taurus; Jupiter-Pisces.

Unfortunately the frescoes have not survived in perfect condition and a large part of the astronomical details has been lost. Above each divinity, in the cloudy sky, a zodiac constellation is represented in a rather simplified manner, tracing the pictorial form of a zodiac symbol and not describing the actual positions of the stars within the constellation. Only two signs can easily be identified: Pisces above Apollo and Taurus above Mars. In both cases the constellations are not associated with their corresponding divinity: an obvious astrological reference to the positions of the planets, just enough to hint that a precise astronomical moment was originally represented in the program¹⁸. A codex at the Ambrosiana includes a letter attributed to Francesco Trento, describing the entire iconographic program that was once painted on the walls. It contains a description of the natural and supernatural subjects that were to be depicted beneath each planet, corresponding to the activities that describe men born under their influence¹⁹.

The figure that crowns the astronomical sky of the Eolia emphasizes the importance of the human race within the cosmological narrative and within the concept of the villa as a microcosm. Prometheus, the creator of human knowledge, appears with his bright torch in his hand, surrounded with a bright light at the center of the clouds²⁰. Prometheus animated the first human soul with the fire stolen from the sky from the carriage of Sol,

¹⁸ Van der Sman, who did not consider the possibility of an astrological significance, suggested that the representation of Pisces and Taurus may be relative to the personification of Spring. Van der Sman, "L'Eolia di villa Trento," 62 n. 42; *Ibid.*, *La decorazione a fresco*, 156.

¹⁹ Biblioteca Ambrosiana di Milano, codice A 16 inferiore, «Gasparis Trissinis aliorumque Illustrium Poetarum in effigiem & Aeoliam Per Ill.ris & Ecc.mi viri FRANCISCI TRIDENTI carmina» (Latina, Gaeca, Italica, Celtica, Et patavino-dorica scripta quedam sunt autographa quaedam exemplaria). G. Barbieri, "Il Vento e la Legge," 81-142. The manuscript contains a collection of praises to Francesco Trento and about his 'Eolia' in Costozza, historical notices of various nature, a portrait of the patron painted on parchment, as well as the *Disegno delle pitture che sono nella stanza Apolline edificata sopra l'Eolia*. The latter document is published in: Van der Sman, "L'Eolia di villa Trento," 65-66 n. 3; *Ibid.*, *La decorazione a fresco*, 145-147.

²⁰ G. Barbieri, "Finxit in effigiem," 174; Van der Sman, "L'Eolia di villa Trento," 64.

creating the arts of the world²¹. His representation in the Villa Eolia is one instance in a respectable iconographic tradition of depictions of the titan in the Venetian Republic, beginning with the reliefs on the façade of the Marciana library constructed by Jacopo Sansovino, as part of a program ordered by the Procurator Vettor Grimani, Vincenzo's great uncle. Giuseppe Barbieri has demonstrated how In the cultural context of the Veneto, Prometheus, often figured during the moment of his liberation and not during the agony that he was condemned to by Jupiter, emerges as an emblem of intellectual activity, as a pivot of civil society and as a symbol of a new civic and social organization. His insertion in the program of the Marciana Library can be seen as part of the context of the *Rennovatio urbis*²². In the context of the Veneto *villa*, it is possible to add that the intellectual gift of the titan to humanity can be regarded as the gift of *technique*, of the architectural and engineering ability required for the construction of these private rural residences.

Prometheus was depicted by Fasolo also above the entry staircase of Villa Caldogno at Caldogno (before 1565)²³, where he welcomes the visitor to the villa at the center of a heavenly gathering of couples of Olympic divinities. At Villa Godi in Lonedo, at the ceiling of the *Stanza dei Trionfi*, Giambattista Zellotti painted a scene of Hercules freeing Prometheus (early 1560's)²⁴. The Titan is positioned in a privileged position in the fresco program of

²¹ Nicola Ivanoff, "Il mito di Prometeo nell'arte veneziana del cinquecento," *Emporium* 69 (1963): 51-58.

²² Giuseppe Barbieri, "L'incontro tra Prometeo e Ganimede nei sottarchi della Marciana: qualche considerazione e un precedente," in *L'attenzione e la critica. Scritti di storia dell'arte in memoria di Terisio Pignatti*, eds. M. A. Chiari and A. Gentili (Padua: Il Poligrafo, 2008), 155; *Ibid.*, "Finxit in effigiem," 180-181; M. Zorzi, *La Libreria di San Marco*, 139- 141.

²³ For Villa Caldogno (Caldogno, Vicenza), constructed by Palladio ca. 1542-1567 for Losco Caldogno see: Ackerman, *Palladio's Villas*, 41-43; Van der Sman, *La decorazione a fresco*, 119-138; Alfredo Dagli Orti, *Villa Caldogno. Una villa veneta restituita. Restoration of a Venetian Villa* (Vicenza: Comune di Caldogno, 2006); Francesca Lodi, "Villa Caldogno," in Pavanello and Mancini, *Affreschi ville venete*, 183-194 n. 32, with additional bibliography.

²⁴ Luciana Crosato Larcher, "Villa Godi a Lonedo," in Pavanello and Mancini, *Affreschi ville venete*, 277-278. Villa Godi (Lonedo, Vicenza) was constructed by Palladio ca. 1537-1542 for the brothers Girolamo, Pietro and Marcantonio Godi. It was frescoed by Gualtiero dall'Arzere (Gualtiero Padovano) ca. 1550, and by Giovan Battista Zellotti in the early 1560's. See: Ackerman, *Palladio's Villas*, 50-52; Boucher, *Andrea Palladio*, 63-71; Van der Sman, *La decorazione a fresco*, 59-84; Larcher, *Ibid.*, 272-286 n. 68, with additional bibliography.

Villa Malcontenta at Mira, painted again by Zellotti (after 1561)²⁵. Prometheus, carrying the fire to humanity, is positioned half-way between the Olympic heavens, where a banquet of the gods takes place, and the earth beneath it, where the first humans spend their lives. Here, the titan is probably represented for his dual influence on humanity, as the one who brought both human progress and negative elements to the world, since he is depicted near a scene of the great flood that alludes to the decadence of the human race²⁶.

In the case of Villa Eolia, the existence of a possible portrait of Francesco Trento in the figure of Prometheus adds a particularly personal aspect to the cosmological allegory. Prometheus is in fact in the origins of the arts and therefore of art of portraits, and represents the similitude between men and gods; the portrait can be seen as a manner of involving Francesco in the human activities that originally adorned the walls²⁷.

In the Villa Castello of Thiene (Zellotti and Fasolo, ca. 1560-1565), a monochrome of Prometheus and the eagle is positioned on top of the fireplace (**fig. 72**)²⁸. It was with the help of Vulcan that Prometheus reached the sky and stole the fire, perhaps explaining why the titan is represented as an accompanying element to the main decoration of the fireplace itself, where Vulcan, Venus and Cupid appear as full-colored figures.

The appearance of the two lovers above fireplaces is in fact rather common in the decoration of the Veneto villa. While Vulcan is an obvious allusion to the element of Fire, Venus and Cupid are generally perceived as allegorical representations of the opposite

²⁵ Villa Foscari 'La Malcontenta' (Mira, Venice) was constructed by Palladio during the late 1550's for Nicolò and Alvisè Foscari. The frescoes, by Zellotti and Battista Franco, are dated to after 1561. See: Ackerman, *Palladio's Villas*, 53-55; Boucher, *Andrea Palladio*, 145-149; Luciana Crosato Larcher, "Postille alla lettura del ciclo della Malcontenta dopo il restauro," *Arte veneta* 32 (1978): 223-229; Van der Sman, *La decorazione a fresco*, 229-252; Alessandra Lotto, "Villa Foscari detta 'La Malcontenta'," in Pavanello and Mancini, *Affreschi ville venete*, 311-317 n. 75, with additional bibliography.

²⁶ Van der Sman, *La decorazione a fresco*, 237; Lotto, "Villa Foscari," 311.

²⁷ G. Barbieri, "Finxit in effigiem," 177-179, 183.

²⁸ For the Villa Castello Porto-Colleoni-Thiene, originally constructed for Francesco da Porto in the fifteenth century, see: Rupprecht, "Ville venete del '400 e del primo '500," 239-250; Van der Sman, *La decorazione a fresco*, 101-118; Manuela Morresi, *Villa Porto Colleoni a Thiene: architettura e committenza nel Rinascimento vicentino* (Milan: Electa, 1988).

element, water. In Villa Godi, above the fireplace of a room in the left wing, Zellotti painted Venus and Cupid in a matrimonial bed, while Vulcan is seen forging in the background²⁹. In Villa Caldogno Vulcan and Venus are depicted above the fireplace of the *Stanza di Sofonisba* in a close embrace. In the iconographical program of the small room in the ground floor of the Villa Castello of Thiene two other predominant divinities appear above the painted illusionistic pediment that leads to the main entrance to the villa, in the wall facing the fireplace. They are Mercury and Athena-Pallace, which among other things are common representatives of the elements of Air and Earth respectively.

Iconographical representations of the four elements commonly appear in the Veneto villas in a variety of media such as painting, stucco reliefs or self-standing sculpture. Their high diffusion and material variety reflect their fundamental role in the creation of the material world, regarding nature but especially human qualities and capacities, as emphasized by Cesare Ripa³⁰. They are usually depicted as personifications of various mythological divinities, and not as metaphorical or symbolic allusions, echoing Ripa's requirement that they be represented for their '*visible effects, without a metaphorical hieroglyph*'³¹.

In Villa Barbaro the four elements appear as divinities in classical vestments within the world diagram of the *Sala dell'Olimpo* (**fig. 68**). Attention has also been provided by Veronese for their positioning according to their traditional cardinal directions. The cold and humid Earth/Cybele and Water/Neptune are represented on the north wall, and the hot and dry Fire/Vulcan and Air/Juno appear on the south wall. The idea also reflects the

²⁹ Larcher, "Villa Godi a Lonedo," 284.

³⁰ Ripa defined the term 'Elements' in the following manner: «I Quattro Elementi, per compositione de i quali si fanno le generazioni naturali, partecipano in sommo grado delle quattro prime qualità, et con tal rispetto si trovano nell'huomo quattro complessioni, quattro virtù, quattro scienze principali, quattro arti le più nobili del mondo, quattro tempi dell'anno, quattro siti, quattro venti, quattro differenze locali, quattro cause, ò cagioni delle humane scienze. Et verranno questi quattro Elementi bene, et piacevolmente rappresentati co i loro visibili effetti, senza hieroglifico metaforico... » Cesare Ripa, *Iconologia: ovvero descrizione di diverse imagini Cavate dall'antichità, e di propria inventionione*, intro. Erna Mandowsky (Rome, 1603; reprint, Hildesheim; Zurich; New York: G. Olms, 1984), 122.

³¹ Fernando Rigon, "I 'quattro elementi' negli affreschi delle ville palladiane," *Antichità viva* 14, iv (1975): 15.

distinction between the light elements, fire and air, and the heavy ones, earth and water, a concept also emphasized by Ovid (*Met.* I, 5-75; XV, 240-272)³².

In Villa Emo at Fanzolo (Zellotti, ca. 1565)³³, the elements are painted as four illusionistic bronze statues of mythological divinities, and are positioned in a privileged location, flanking the two main historical scenes that adorn the central hall (**figs. 73, 74**). The mythological divinities resemble those of Villa Barbaro, with the exception of fire, this time represented by Jupiter. Earth and Water appear on the west wall as heavy elements, fire and air on the east wall as light elements, respecting the distinction as mentioned by Ovid³⁴. In the two small rooms the elements were interpreted by Zellotti in a particular emblematic and symbolic manner, perhaps the only instance in the tradition of the Veneto villa that does not respect Ripa's affirmation to avoid their representation as a 'metaphorical hieroglyph' (**figs. 75, 76**). Within the grotesque schemes that constitute the entire mural decoration, the east room is dedicated to the elements of earth (a statue of Persephone) and water (Amphitrite with the dolphin), and the west room to fire (the adoration of the fire) and air (Pan)³⁵.

According to Fernando Rigon, in Villa Godi the four elements are represented by four masculine Olympic divinities as illusionistic niche statues in the *Sala di Venere* (Zellotti, early 1560's). Neptune appears as the common personification of water, Jupiter as fire, Pluto accompanied by Cerberus represents earth and Saturn/Chronos represents air³⁶.

At Palazzo Thiene in Vicenza, in the room dedicated to Persephone, Alessandro Vittoria created four male divinities rendered in stucco relief in the four angles of the ceiling representing allegories of the four elements and the four temperaments³⁷. In the *Sala dei*

³² *Ibid.*, 14. Ovid, *Met.*, I, 52-53), referring to primordial chaos and its separation into the four elements by a god: «imminet his aer; qui, quanto est pondere terrae, pondere aquae levior, tanto est onerosior igni»

³³ For a bibliography on Villa Emo in Fanzolo see above, chapter I, section 1.3.3, note 150.

³⁴ Rigon, "I quattro elementi," 14.

³⁵ Van der Sman, "L'iconologia di Villa Emo," 54.

³⁶ Rigon, "I quattro elementi," 15.

³⁷ Fernando Rigon, "I soffitti con decorazioni di affreschi e stucchi," in *Palazzo Thiene a Vicenza: sede storica della Banca Popolare di Vicenza*, eds. G. Beltramini, H. Burns and F. Rigon (Milan: Skira, 2007), 217-307. The

Dei, the four elements are represented by the same divinities as in Villa Barbaro in four ceiling canvases attributed to Anselmo Canera. Earth: Cybele with lions, animals and hunters; water: Neptune in an aquatic battle; fire: Vulcan with Venus, each with a cupid; air: Juno as a matron. The elements surround the main canvas, an allegory of Astrology, who is rendered as a male figure riding a snake surrounded by the entire cycle of the Zodiac signs³⁸.

The four seasons are another common decorative theme in the Veneto Villa, which can be interpreted in relationship to its rural context, alluding to the cyclicity of Nature that enables the annual cycle of agricultural production. Often, the seasons receive their iconographic attributes according to the description of Ovid in the *Metamorphoses* (II, 27-30)³⁹ and in the *Remedia amoris* (XI, 187-188)⁴⁰. Spring and summer are thus depicted as female personifications, spring crowned by flowers, summer accompanied with wheat. Autumn and winter are represented as male figures, autumn accompanied by grapes or an apple and winter is demonstrated that he is cold and 'white', that is, old and bearded.

This iconography characterizes the personifications depicted by Zellotti and Fasolo, who describe the seasons as series of four illusionistic bronze niche-statues, which are painted in a similar manner in at least four villas. Zellotti painted the seasons in Villa Godi in a room in the ground floor whose main theme celebrates the victory of virtue over vice. At the Malcontenta, the bronze monochrome seasons are depicted in the lateral sides of the cross-shaped central hall (**fig. 77**). In Villa Emo, autumn and spring appear in the room dedicated to the myth of Io,

decorations were commissioned for Iseppo da Porto. According to Rigon: Mercury: air, sanguine; Hercules: fire, choleric; Jupiter: water, phlegmatic; earth, melancholic. In fact, it is probable that Mercury represents water and Jupiter represents air, see below section 3.1.3.2.

³⁸ See the discussion regarding this figure in relation to the fresco program of Villa Grimani Molin in the upcoming chapter V, section 5.3.2.2.

³⁹ Ovid, *Metamorphoses: in two volumes*, trans. Dryden, Pope, Congreve et al., vol. I (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1844), II, 34-37. «Here Spring appears; with flowery chaplets bound: Here Summer, in her wheaten garland crown'd; Here Autumn the rich trodden grapes besmear; And hoary Winter shivers in the rear. » In Latin: Ovid, *Met.*, II, 27-30. « Verque novum stabat cinctum florente corona, stabat nuda Aestas et spicea sarta gerebat, stabat et Autumnus calcatis sordidus uvis, et glacialis Hiems canos hirsuta capillos. »

⁴⁰ Ovid, *Remedia amoris*, ed., intro., commentary A. A. R. Henderson (Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, 1979) XI, 187-188. «Autumn gives its apples: summer is lovely with harvest: spring offers flowers: winter's eased with fire. »; «Poma dat autumnus: Formosa est messibus aestas, / Ver praebet flores: igne levatur hiemps».

winter and summer in the Room of the Arts (**fig. 78**). In Villa Eolia, the four seasons painted by Fasolo at the ceiling vault of the *Sala Apolline* resemble the Zellotti prototype (**fig. 69**).

The iconographic description of the seasons in Cartari's *Immagini* is commonly accepted as the source for the personifications of the seasons in Villa Barbaro, beneath the curves of the vault of the *Sala dell'Olimpo* (**figs. 79, 80**)⁴¹. In fact, Cartari himself cited Ovid in the *Metamorphoses* when suggesting the four pagan divinities that can commonly represent the seasons⁴². According to Cartari, Bacchus and Ceres represent autumn and summer respectively, probably because they are divinities that are usually accompanied by grapes and wheat, as required by Ovid. In Villa Barbaro the two gods are depicted immersed within the worldly agricultural products of grain and wine. Cartari suggested that Venus should represent spring and Vulcan or Eolus should represent winter, explaining in accordance with Ovid that the fire of Vulcan heats and Eolus recalls the cold winter. In Villa Barbaro, Veronese depicted Venus and Vulcan in a scene that is abundantly animated with flowers. Persephone is also depicted in the scene, as the divinity that spends the cold months of the year in the underworld and returns to the earth in time for spring.

As in the case of the four elements, the four seasons are sometimes disposed according to the directions of the cardinal winds, placing spring on the east wall, of summer on the south, autumn on the west, and winter on the north wall. The concept may refer to the parallelism between the annual and daily cycles of nature, beginning the year with spring on the east, where the sun rises, passing through daytime when the sun is in the south (summer) and sunset (autumn, west), to conclude with the night, when the sun is underneath the horizon (winter, north). In Villa Eolia, in competence with the precise

⁴¹ Luciana Crosato Larcher, "Considerazioni sul programma iconografico di Maser," *Mitteilungen des Kunsthistorischen Institutes in Florenz* 26 (1982): 248.

⁴² Cartari, *Le immagini de i dei*, 42, speaks of the seasons citing Ovid, in his chapter about Janus. « Coronata di fior la primavera, / La nuda età cinta di spiche il crine, / L'autunno tinto i piè d'uva spremuta / E l'inverno agghiacciato, orrido e tristo. Sono ancora le stagioni dell'anno mostrate alle volte in questo modo: mettesi Venere per la primavera, Cerere pe la estate, per l'autunno Bacco e per l'inverno talora Volcano, che sta alla fucina ardente, e talora i venti con Eolo re loro, perché questi fanno le tempeste, che nell'inverno sono più frequenti che ne fli altri tempi. »

astronomical orientation of the planets, the seasons correspond to this directionality. The same principle is followed at the Malcontenta, where Winter (north) and spring (south) appear on the right, west wing of the hall, and summer (south) and autumn (north) on the left in the west wing. In Villa Emo the choice does not seem to follow this principle, perhaps because the seasons appear in two separate rooms⁴³.

In Villa Pisani at Montagnana (1553-55), the only decorative element that survived are the four monumental sculptures of the four seasons at the corners of the central hall, which were some of the earliest works of Alessandro Vittoria⁴⁴. The villa is not perfectly oriented (the back façade towards the main road overlooks south-south-west), and therefore it is difficult to determine whether the position of the statues was chosen with a specific intention. Spring and summer are both rendered as female figures, winter and autumn as male, but the representations do not seem to adhere to any common literary source⁴⁵.

4.1.2 ‘World Components’ in the Frescoes of Villa Grimani Molin

The iconographic program of Villa Grimani Molin contains several representations that can fit into the category of world diagram components. Although these depictions were granted a relatively dominant presence in the decorative scheme, their rendering is generally reduced to some minimal essential attributes. Although the iconographic choices are often quite erudite, they do not seem to be based on common visual precedents. In any case, the cosmological iconography of the villa does not limit itself to these elements, whose contribution remains rather modest in respect to the role of the grotesques, of the theatrical metaphor and of other concepts that shall be reviewed throughout the research.

⁴³ In Villa Emo the seasons of autumn and spring appear in the east wing, and winter and summer in the west wing of the villa. Villa Barbaro is an exception that shall be discussed in chapter V, section 5.2.2.2.

⁴⁴ For Villa Pisani (Montagnana, Vincenza), constructed by Palladio ca. 1552-55 for Francesco Pisani, see: Ackerman, *Palladio's Villas*, 58-59; Boucher, *Andrea Palladio*, 112-117; Muraro, *Civiltà delle ville venete*, 200-203.

⁴⁵ Upon entering from the garden, looking left, autumn is represented by Bacchus, and spring by a female holding a small cluster of vegetation. Looking right, winter is an old man whose eyes are kept shut, possibly from the cold, and summer is a female figure holding a cornucopia, perhaps Ceres.

4.1.2.1 The Dining Room: The Four Seasons

The upper section of the dining room walls contains allegories of the Four Seasons (figs. 49, 81-84). Each season appears on a different wall, represented by a single reclining figure that occupies a quadrangular space. The depictions respect the adequate orientation according to the cardinal directions: spring is represented on the east wall marking the birth of the year and the beginning of the new day; the yearly/daily cycles continue with summer on the south wall, autumn on the west, and finally winter on the north wall. Compared to the usual practice in the Veneto villas, the iconographical attributes associated with each personification follows the Ovidian tradition with particular care, assuming the characteristics of each season from the *Metamorphoses* as well as from the *Remedia amoris*.

Spring is depicted as a fully dressed female surrounded by flowers (*'cinctum florente corona'*, *'Ver praebet flores'*). Summer is represented by a female figure with exposed breasts and nude feet (*'stabat nuda Aestas'*) that holds a cluster of dry wheat (*'et spicea sarta gerebat'*). Winter is represented with a conscious attention on behalf of the painter to render its cold physical and emotional state: a nude male, whose white beard and hair (*'canos hirsuta capillos'*) are blown in the cold wind, is portrayed shivering (*'glacialis Hiems'*). His arms and shoulders are folded to protect himself from the chill, and he is leaning on a pile of firewood whose heat will relieve his cold (*'igne levatur hiemps'*).

Closing the cycle, autumn is as a male figure with dark hair and a dark beard, reclined with ease, whose torso is covered with a piece of red cloth. Here, the author of the program has chosen to modify the traditional iconographical choice: instead of accompanying the figure with vines and grapes or with an apple, the 'Poma' mentioned in the *Remedia amoris* is interpreted as a pomegranate (in Latin *'malum granatum'*, literally a seeded apple). A couple of juicy pomegranates are hanging down from a branch, one of which autumn is holding and observing. The choice probably stems from the desire to emphasize the presence of the pomegranate in another important fresco in the villa, on the west wall of the central hall, where the fruit plays a central role in the large epic or historical scene.

The stylistic rendering of the four figures does not seem to base itself on known precedents of the four seasons, but rather, on some basic formulas that the artist has adapted from the fresco program of Villa Badoer. The artist has isolated various figures from their original iconographical context in the neighboring villa, and elaborated their volumetric and chromatic appearance to create a typology of males and females that he uses repeatedly in various occasions throughout the decorative program of villa Grimani Molin.

In the case of the four seasons, summer and spring resemble the four reclining females that adorn the entrance portico in the exterior of Villa Badoer, and especially two right figures (**figs. 85, 86**). Autumn and winter may be interpreted as male versions based on the female prototypes: autumn based on the figure of summer, winter based on the figure of spring. Autumn and summer are in fact both portrayed leaning to the left, resting their right arm on an object that is positioned behind their backs, and their left arm is raised upwards to the center of the image. Winter and spring lean to the right, and the somewhat clumsy physiognomy of winter, whose large back barely fits into the picture space, can testify to the attempt of creating original forms by an artist which was used to working with ready-made templates.

In the context of the dining room, the representation of the seasons may be interpreted as an allusion to the role of the cyclicity of nature in the process of the production of alimentation for the members of the household and for their visitors. Two ovals with figures of young men flank the personification of spring on the north wall. They are portrayed in an outdoor (or agricultural) environment, carrying the products of the land, flowers and vegetation, which they are revolving towards the actual dining table beneath them. On the opposite wall, flanking the personification of autumn, two young females are portrayed in an interior (or domestic) environment, carrying what seems like small liquid containers and looking down at the table as well. The goods brought by the men and women may be interpreted as symbolic donations for the dining table as a blessing for the people who are dining and enjoying the fruits of the land labor.

4.1.2.2 The *Studiolo*: Four Planetary Divinities

The two main walls of the small *Studiolo* host representations of four planetary divinities: Mercury and Mars on the northern wall, Jupiter and Saturn on the southern wall. In their style, layout and iconography, they contain several peculiar characteristics that are quite alien to the decorative tradition of the Veneto villa (**figs. 87-90**). Each figure is inserted within a unique baldachin framework, standing on a pedestal base and in minute dimensions, which differ from the more 'carnal' and realistic bodies of many of the other figures in the villa; in great contrast, for example, with the two nude females that appear above the *Studiolo* doors.

On the north wall and first to the left, Mercury is depicted as a young god who wears only a short beard, dressed in a simple short Greek military dress and equipped with winged hat and boots. He is holding the caduceus in his left hand, a simple, slender long wooden stick terminated at the top by two slender serpents whose tongues show. To his right, Mars is a beardless warrior, in short, red Greek armor, including a helmet and a shield. In his right hand he holds an object that looks like a sword or wooden weapon, whose sharp top has been broken off. On the south wall to the left Jupiter is represented as an elder divinity, wearing a long brown beard. His Greek dress is particularly regal, as a golden cloth is tied to his shoulders. He is holding up a thunderbolt in his left hand and a large eagle accompanies him, depicted on the pedestal behind his feet. Finally Saturn is an old man, with white hair and a white beard, barefoot, looking down wearing a serious facial expression. A red cloth is tied to his shoulders, and in his right hand, he is holding his long scythe.

Flanking each divinity beneath the baldachin are two female hybrids that stem from flower bases, holding flower vases (Mercury), vegetable branches (Mars), white spheres (Jupiter) and small white ewers (Saturn). Above the female hybrids, each divinity is paired with two oil lamps with a flame in a different state of burning: Mercury's flames are about to be turned off, Mars' flames are bright and shiny, and the flames in the lamps of Jupiter and Saturn are all lit and steady. With the exception of Mars, above the heads of the divinities there are various combinations of oil lamps and jewels.

As an iconographic choice, the selection of four planetary divinities out of the total of seven requires an explanation. Assuming that the idea of the program was to depict male divinities, the elimination Diana and Venus may seem justified, but this assumption would not help to justify the absence of Apollo. Indeed, the iconographical traditions of cosmology and astrology provide a specific explanation for the role of Mercury, Mars, Jupiter and Saturn – as personifications of the four temperaments.

The terms ‘temperaments’ or ‘complexities’ have been employed since early antiquity in order to define the correct mixture and temperature of the four basic fluids or humors, in a doctrine that was maintained throughout the entire Medieval and Renaissance times. The origins of the temperaments go back to Hippocrates, and were later developed further and recorded in writings by Celsus, Soranus, Aretaeus and others, as well as by Arabic astrologers of the ninth and tenth centuries. According to this astrological theory, the four planetary divinities were assigned bodily fluids, or biles, corresponding to the nature of these planets, as well as the organs that the humors influence. This is illustrated in the following types: Mercury: cold and damp, white bile, lungs, phlegmatic; Mars: warm and dry, yellow bile, liver, choleric; Jupiter: warm and damp, green bile, liver, sanguine; Saturn: cold and dry, black bile, spleen, melancholic. Each planet or temperament was also associated with one of the four elements that form the cosmos: ‘phlegmatic’ Mercury: water, ‘choleric’ Mars: fire, ‘sanguine’ Jupiter: air, and ‘melancholic’ Saturn: earth. Further associations of the temperaments with other natural elements were known as well, such as the four seasons, the four cardinal directions or various types of aquatic animals, volatiles or mammals⁴⁶.

The temperaments therefore encompass many sets universal components within them, resulting adequate for explaining the choice in the *Studiolo* as a unified, non fragmental program. In fact, traditionally, the four planetary divinities are the most common choice for

⁴⁶ Raymond Klibansky, Erwin Panofsky and Fritz Saxl, *Saturno e la melanconia: studi su storia della filosofia naturale, medicina, religione e arte* (Torino: Einaudi, 2002), 7-19 (“1.1. La Dottrina dei Quattro Umori”); Sigmund Hurwitz, *Lilith - The First Eve: Historical and Psychological Aspects of the Dark Feminine* (Einsiedeln: Daimon Verlag, 2009), 165-166; Hope B. Werness, *The Continuum Encyclopedia of Animal Symbolism in World Art* (New York: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2006), p. 95.

the visual representation of the four temperaments⁴⁷. The facial expressions of the four divinities in the frescoes also seem to comply with their respective temperaments. The oil-lamps in different stages of burning may also refer to the idea, as phlegmatic Mercury's flame is fading away and choleric Mars' flame is particularly energetic.

The lamps, however, may also allude to the astrological identity and function of the divinities. They may represent a different state of the planet in the sky in a specific moment that was chosen by the creator of the iconographic program: rising (Mars), in mid-heaven (Jupiter, Saturn), or setting down the horizon (Mercury).

4.1.2.3 The *Studiolo*: Four Female Allegories with Animals

Four female allegories appear on the ceiling of the *Studiolo*, in four ovals, on each part of the fourfold vault, in lively and elegant pastel colors (**figs. 50, 91-94**). The representations are reduced to the depiction of a single female figure with an accompanying animal. On the north, a female is depicted in a cloudy sky, crowning a ram with a garland. On the east, a female is embracing and kissing a swan, once again in a cloudy sky. On the south, a female rides a white bull who wears a garland on his head; they are swimming in water. On the west wall, a woman is depicted again on a cloudy surface, and in the company of a peacock.

It is possible to associate some of the images with more specific astronomical or mythological identifications. The women with the swan and bull are obvious allusions to the mythological metamorphosis episodes of Leda and the Swan and of The Rape of Europa. The garland on the head of the bull and the presence of the water appear as part of a very common iconographic tradition of the myth, found in the Renaissance painting tradition throughout the Veneto and beyond. The affectionate kiss between Leda and the Swan is also a very common identifier for the mythological story, which is often depicted with an emphasis on the carnal or erotic connection between the two figures⁴⁸.

⁴⁷ Klibansky et al., *Saturno e la melanconia*, 274.

⁴⁸ Malcolm Bull, *The Mirror of the Gods, How Renaissance Artists Rediscovered the Pagan Gods* (New York and London: Oxford University Press, 2005), 167.

The peacock is a clear attribute of Juno, but the scene does not seem to recall a specific myth. The ram is most commonly associated with the constellation or zodiac sign of Aries, but it is difficult to explain the presence of the woman in this context. The Hellenistic myth related to the constellation recounts that the young girl Helle and her brother Phrixos, the children of king Athamas and his first wife Nephele, were both rescued in flight by a golden ram from the king's second wife, Ino. But in their escape Helle tragically fell off the ram and died in the Dardanelles, also called the Hellespont in her honor. Her brother was the rescued protagonist: not exactly an adequate reason for her depiction on the *Studiolo* ceiling in the company of the happy fates of the two other females and divinity⁴⁹.

For Trinchieri Camiz three of the four female allegories represent the zodiac signs of the spring season that open the zodiac year: Aries (female and ram), Taurus (Rape of Europa) and Gemini (Leda and the Swan). Juno symbolizes air, which Trinchieri Camiz explains is a key element and instrument of the entire creation and the cosmic ceiling⁵⁰. This affirmation creates a difficulty, above all because it is uncommon that out of four similar representations, one would represent a completely different concept than the others.

For Van der Sman, the allegories represent the spring months that mark the rebirth of nature. They allude to the concept of female fertility as the fertility of nature, as a celebration of the power of love as a universal principle that governs nature and that precedes the dynamics of the elements⁵¹. According to this hypothesis March is represented by the ram and the zodiac sign of Aries, April by the bull as the zodiac sign of Taurus, May by the result of Leda's coupling with the swan, as a reference to the zodiac sign of Gemini. The month of June would thus be represented by Juno, as she appears, for example, in the fresco of the month painted by Giovanni Maria Falconetto at the Palazzo d'Arco in Mantua. However, since this idea is based on the assumption that the other months are represented by the allegories of their corresponding constellations, Juno

⁴⁹ Ovid, *Fasti* 3. 853 ff; Pseudo-Apollodorus, *Bibliotheca* 1. 80.

⁵⁰ Trinchieri Camiz, "Significati iconografici," 126.

⁵¹ Van der Sman, *La decorazione a fresco*, 177.

should be associated with the zodiac constellation of Cancer, which is difficult to explain in terms of a mythological story. It therefore seems necessary to exclude the possibility that four young females may somehow refer to astrological depictions of zodiac signs.

Any interpretation assuming only a partial representation of the annual cycle can be more easily regarded as an incomplete compromise, rather than a representation of a “beginning of a cycle”. Significantly, the four female allegories of the *Studiolo* ceiling are not ordered “chronologically”: the bull does not directly follow the ram, and neither does the peacock follow the swan; there are two metamorphosis scenes, one depiction of a goddess and her attribute and one unfamiliar scene; there are two volatile animals which face each other (peacock, swan) and two terrestrial animals facing each other (bull, ram). These details create a difficulty in accepting the possibility that depictions would refer to an ordered sequence or to a cycle of astronomical events or astrological representations.

One interpretation that can comply with the depictions is the idea that the allegories represent the four elements, with reference to the animals that are depicted in each oval: the ram represents fire; the swan, water; the bull, earth; the peacock, air. However, this suggestion does not comply with the iconographic representations with great accuracy. All of the scenes occur in the cloudy sky, save the bull which is clearly set in water, a choice that is not adequate for representing the element of earth. Although the swan often associated with water, it is still a volatile, and here it is depicted in the clouds.

As it seems, just as in the case of the four planetary divinities on the walls of the *Studiolo*, the four female allegories may be interpreted as representations of the four temperaments, this time in their female version. Representations of the temperaments or humors as female figures have existed at least since the end of the twelfth century⁵². In

⁵² Klibansky et al., *Saturno e la melanconia*, 275-276. In pp. 274-289, Klibansky, Panofsky and Saxl explain that the temperaments are known to have been represented as a series of isolated figures the first time that in a xylography of a text dated ca. 1100, *Tractatus de quaternario*, conserved at Cambridge (Cambridge, Caius College, Ms 428, fol. 27v). The four figures represent the four ages of man, as female figures. The notes in the margins explain that the figures also represent the four humors that prevail from the four temperaments (infancy/phlegmatic; youth/sanguine; virility/yellow bile; decadence/black bile).

reviewing the personification types of the four temperaments during the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, Klibansky, Panofsky and Saxl have noted that they are usually described through figures that represent concrete personalities that are associated with them, sometimes accompanied by animals that symbolize these personalities⁵³. Accordingly, the iconographic tradition does not seem to dictate only one specific animal to each temperament, but rather, choices that reflect its character.

In a series of four engravings by Virgil Solis after Georg Pencz (1539-1562), each temperament is depicted as a beautiful young female, accompanied by two animals and a Latin inscription (**figs. 95-98**). The engravings, conserved in the British Museum, are mentioned by Klibansky, Panofsky and Saxl but their iconography is not analyzed in depth. A review of the iconographical choices of the images is helpful for the identification of the four *Studiolo* allegories as representations of the temperaments that belong to a similar tradition.

The sanguine temperament is recognized with the element of air, represented within a cloudy sky, carrying lute and musical notes. She is accompanied by a horse and a peacock. Similarly, in Fratta the figure of Juno and her accompanying peacock may represent the sanguine temperament. Juno is appropriately a divinity associated with air, and she is also the female companion of Jupiter, who is the male planetary divinity associated with the sanguine temperament.

In the engraving of the choleric temperament representing the element of fire, the female is set in the midst of flames, holding a torch in her right hand and a heart pierced by an arrow in her left hand. She is accompanied by an eagle, king of the volatiles and by a lion, king of the mammals. Klibansky, Panofsky and Saxl also associate the choleric temperament with the lion⁵⁴. At Villa Grimani Molin the female allegories are accompanied by no eagle or lion. Nevertheless, the most immediate astrological

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 274-319, esp. 278.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 278. During the fifteenth century, other animals were sometimes represented in relation to the temperaments: monkey/sanguine; lion/choleric; boar/melancholic; sheep/phlegmatic.

association of the ram is with Aries, the first zodiac sign in the yearly cycle, which represents Mars and the element of fire. The female figure is crowning the ram, an idea that has been identified with no particular myth: she may be attributing to the animal a regal status, as the status of the eagle and lion represented in the engraving.

In the engraving of the phlegmatic temperament representing the element of water, the female is riding a donkey on the water, with an owl on her shoulder. Also in this case, the Fratta frescoes offer no immediate parallel, but provide an interesting point of comparison in the depiction of Europa and the Bull. Interestingly, the engraver has chosen to position the female figure on the ass in a similar manner to the traditional seating of Europa on the bull, just as in the Fratta fresco. In addition, in both representations the animal is immersed in water. But most significantly, the bull is very similar to another animal that is known as a common representative of the phlegmatic temperament: the ox. In Albercht Dürer's first signed print, *Adam and Eve* (1504), the artist surrounded humankind's first ancestors with animals symbolizing the four temperaments, choosing the ox as a representative of the phlegmatic temperament⁵⁵.

The last of the four engravings depicts the melancholic temperament, associated with the element of earth. A female is resting her hand on a stone on the earth, holding a geometrical instrument and accompanied by a swan and a stag. The presence of the swan points to the visual relationship of the engraving with the final fresco in the series of the Fratta *Studiolo*, in the depiction of Leda and the Swan.

4.1.2.4 Some Considerations on Melancholy: Villa Grimani Molin and Villa Barbaro

In the *Studiolo*, above the doors that lead to the lateral rooms and between each two planetary divinities, a reclining female nude appears on a *triclinium* bed (**figs. 99, 100**). Although both of them are fair, fleshy nude females, they differ significantly from each other.

⁵⁵ Erwin Panofsky, *The Life and Art of Albrecht Dürer* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1955), 84, 120. cat/choleric (cruelty, pride); rabbit/sanguine (sensuality); elk/Melancholic (gloom); ox/phlegmatic (sluggishness, sloth).

The figure on the north wall between Mercury and Mars is wearing jewels on her arms and her hair is neatly organized. Her right arm is supporting her head in a manner that is typically recognized with the visual representation of the Melancholic temperament, an attribution that is confirmed by her serious facial expression and her eyes that are shed downwards. Above her there is a depiction of an owl on a dark red background. To her left, on top of the baldachin of Mercury, two *putti* are playing with oil lamps, and to her right above Mars two *putti* are holding small spheres, perhaps golden spheres.

The figure on the south seems like her complete opposite. She lacks any ornament, and her right arm is leaning on the *triclinium* but does not support her head. Instead, her left arm reaches above her head and her nude body is described in a more sensuous and exposed manner. Her facial expression denotes pleasure or ecstasy through her glossy eyes and partially opened mouth (**fig. 100.1**). This type of depiction strongly recalls the iconography of the Maenaeds, the female followers of Dionysus in ancient Greece, often portrayed as inspired by him into a state of ecstatic frenzy. Above her, the owl is replaced by a hoopoe. To her left, on top of the baldachin of Jupiter, one *putto* echoes her ecstatic position while pouring down red wine from a vase; his companion pours down red wine as well. To her right above Saturn one *putto* holds a basket with red fruit and the other holds a basket with wheat.

A visual precedent for the two reclining figures can be found in a print by Marc'Antonio Raimondi entitled *Cleopatra or Ariadne* (1515-1527), representing a reclined female figure in her sleep (**fig. 101**)⁵⁶. As in similar cases in the villa that shall be discussed further, the artist has made an intelligent use of the print or of a copy of it. He manipulated it and adapted the lower section of the hips and legs for the first, 'melancholic' figure, and the upper section of the chest, arms and head for the second figure, 'opening' her eyes to create the ecstatic expression. The upper section of the first

⁵⁶ Probably after a similar Hellenistic sculpture, the *Sleeping Adriana*, for long called also *Cleopatra*, Pergamene school, second century BC, Rome, Vatican Museums.

figure was probably based on the upper section of the nymph that accompanies Diana, in one of the images that adorn the central hall of Villa Badoer (**figs. 102, 102.1**).

The representation of the first figure can be identified, without much difficulty, as part of the tradition of melancholy in Renaissance culture; positioned in the *Studiolo* it can be an allusion to the intellectual qualities and artistic capacities that are commonly associated with the melancholic temperament. Although the representation of the other female figure may seem alien to the iconographic tradition of melancholy, she in fact results quite relevant when exploring the origins of the philosophical conception of melancholy.

Klibansky, Panofsky and Saxl explain that the idea of melancholy in Western thought was formed when the purely medical notion of melancholy and the platonic conception of fury were united by Aristotle in his *Problems* (XXX, I)⁵⁷. Aristotle began his discussion saying that all of those who have arrived to excellence in philosophy, politics and poetry suffered from disturbances provoked by melancholy and the black bile. To explain why this occurs, he proposed an analogy between melancholy and wine. Wine, in a great quantity, produces in humans an effect similar to melancholy. In different measures and temperatures wine changes the personality of people, and they often become fretfulness or benevolent, compassionate and rash, and also amorous and luxurious.

Black bile was naturally cold, but could also become too cold or heat up. Aristotle associates melancholic depression or the 'cold' phase of the influence of the black bile with the irrationality and the effects of wine. Unlike the other humors, the black bile had the characteristic of influencing the soul. Just like wine, according to its temperature and quantity, it produced different types of emotional effects, rendering humans happy or sad,

⁵⁷ Klibansky et al., *Saturno e la melanconia*, 19- 39 ("1.2. come fu rivoluzionata la nozione di melanconia dai peripatetici: Il Problema xxx, i").

talkative or silent, delirious or apathetic, with the difference that while the effects of wine wore off after some time, the black bile had a permanent affect⁵⁸.

These remarks on the 'ill' nature of melancholy, well known in the Renaissance theory, comply very well with the depiction of the ecstatic female figure in the *Studiolo*. While the typically "melancholic" female represents the melancholic in his wise and productive state, the ecstatic female represents the melancholic in his unbalanced state.

The owl that appears above the first figure is typically associated with the wise goddess Athene. The burning oil lamps may be allegorical allusions to the soul, the sun, knowledge, intellect and so on. The golden spheres strongly recall Dürer's own representation of a prominent, round sphere at the bottom left of his engraving *Melancholia I*⁵⁹. The *putto* in the extreme left points his finger down to Mercury, perhaps indicating Hermetic or other high forms of knowledge associated with the divinity. On the other hand, the hoopoe is associated with negative and uncontrollable characteristics such as the dirt of sin, as a bird related to mourning because she builds her nest on graves, and as a symbol of ingratitude. In accordance with the current context, the hoopoe is also considered as a bird of representing the mortal sin of Luxuria, since she builds her nest in the dirt despite her beautiful feathers⁶⁰. The wine directly recalls the state of the figure according to the Aristotelian allegory, and the food is another earthly necessity that comes is represented to provide contrast to the intellectual and spiritual properties associated with the balanced state of melancholy.

Together, both figures represent the complete state of the melancholic type as a gifted wise man, who is represented in the west wall of the *Studiolo* in an analogous manner, an

⁵⁸ Aristotle in his *Problems* (XXX, I); Klibansky et al., *Saturno e la melanconia*, 26, 28, 40-41. While Aristotle explained why melancholic people were "different", he did not explain in what way; it was from the stoics onwards that melancholy became specifically associated with wisdom. For the stoics, a wise man could have fits of melancholy. They considered melancholy as a disease, like before Aristotle, but also as a negative privilege of the wise man.

⁵⁹ Albrecht Dürer, *Melencolia I*, engraving, 1514, 23.9×28.9 cm, Staatliche Kunsthalle, Karlsruhe.

⁶⁰ Mirella Levi D'Ancona, *Lo zoo del rinascimento: il significato degli animali nella pittura italiana dal XIV al XVI secolo* (Lucca: Maria Pacini Fazzi, 2001), 220-221.

old and wise Saturnian, nude, reclining on his *triclinium*, and holding a table with Hebrew letters that declares his spiritual capacities and intellectual knowledge.

The intellectual and spiritual qualities of melancholy also occupy a special place in the decorative program of Villa Barbaro, where they appear in two different occasions.

The *Stanza di Bacco* of Villa Barbaro represents issues that concern the importance of the proper upbringing of children by the wife, who should provide them with food and with education⁶¹. In the ceiling, Bacchus is represented as the god of music, love and fertility, accompanied by two *lares*, by a muse and *putti* who are playing musical instruments, and by a personification of Sleep, which is also a mundane necessity (**figs. 103, 103.1**). Sleep is a reclining male figure equipped with attributions according to Cartari: he wears black and white, and holds a staff and a horn⁶². It has often been overlooked that the figure rests its hand on his chin in the position of the melancholic, an intentional depiction, which requires an explanation.

Among the great variety of issues that Daniele Barbaro had studied and written about, there was also a little booklet dedicated to dreams, published by Daniele under the false name Hypneo da Schio in Venice in 1542⁶³. In the booklet, he discussed the origins of dreams, in the form of a poem, as part of a long classical tradition of literature on the subject by philosophers and poets such as Artemidorus, Aristotle, Homer and Ovid⁶⁴. In his interpretation, he described dreaming as an ordered, spiritual-intellectual journey which contains seven different phases. The final phase, of the truest dream, is that in which the

⁶¹ Crosato Larcher, "Considerazioni sul programma di Maser," 215.

⁶² Richard Cocke, "Veronese and Daniele Barbaro: The Decoration of the Villa Maser," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 35 (1972): 234; Crosato Larcher, "Considerazioni sul programma di Maser," 220-230; Julian Klieman, "Villa Barbaro: Allegories and Landscapes," in *Italian Frescoes: High Renaissance and Mannerism 1510-1600*, 3 vols., ed. S. Roettgen (New York: Abbeville Press, 2004), 414; Reist, "'Divine Love' at the Villa Barbaro," 630.

⁶³ Daniele Barbaro, *Predica de i sogni composta per lo reuerendo padre d. Hypneo da Schio* (Venice: Francesco Marcolini da Forli, 1542).

⁶⁴ An academic thesis has been dedicated to the booklet: Tiziana Friggione, "La 'Predica de i sogni' di Daniele Barbaro. Edizione e commento" (Tesi di laurea in Beni Culturali, Università degli Studi della Tuscia, 2003-2004, rel. Paolo Procaccioli).

dreamer arrives to a maximal capacity of wisdom. Essentially, only an extremely wise philosopher or humanists is capable of arriving to the seventh and final phase. This, in fact, is the same degree of excellence that is embodied in the character of the melancholic⁶⁵.

Bacchus and his *lares* in the *Stanza di Bacco* represent the physical needs that the children should be provided with, as does the personification of Sleep, and Music reminds us that knowledge is extremely important for those who aspire to have good virtues⁶⁶. However, Sleep is represented beneath music as an embodiment of Melancholy: Sleep, therefore, contributes to the development of the intellect. The combined personification becomes the allusion to knowledge *par excellence*, providing a strong emphasis on the importance of knowledge and wisdom for the Renaissance man and his children.

In the ceiling of the *Sala dell'Olimpo*, in one of the four monochrome allegories, Mother Nature is seen feeding the ground beneath her (**figs. 68, 104**). The image contains some details that have been overlooked in scholarly literature. The female is feeding the earth with four breasts. A tambourine leans behind her; it is identical to a similar musical instrument that appears in the hands of one of the *putti* at the ceiling of the *Stanza di Bacco*. Although Nature is feeding the ground, the ground is not vital but remains sad, dry and unfertile, a detail evident especially when comparing the image to the rich vegetation and blooming flowers that are depicted in the south monochrome. Significantly, the female is reclining on the ground in the typical position of the melancholic: besides the position of her arm, she even possesses the traditional stone beneath her head.

Mother Earth is therefore combined with the figure of the Melancholic and with a series of cosmological themes. Saturn as Melancholy is often associated with the element of earth, which would explain the choice of the melancholic temperament for the personification of

⁶⁵ The choice of the number seven as the final degree of truth in the dream was not casual; Saturn, the planet of the Melancholic, is the seventh celestial sphere. According to the Ficinian hierarchy of the universe, the *Mens contemplatrix*, the third and highest level of human states, is identified with Saturn, the planet most distant from the sphere of the Earth. For more on the subject see: Renata Piccininni, "Il mito di Ganimede in ambiente veneto fra '400 e '500," in *Giorgione Giorgione e la cultura veneta*, 152, 154.

⁶⁶ Crosato Larcher, "Considerazioni sul programma di Maser," 222.

Mother Nature. As *Natura lactans*, she feeds the earth with four breasts because all natural elements are a product of the combination between the four elements, which are all depicted in the same ceiling fresco. The earth is dry and in peril because it still has to receive life from Mother Nature, but also probably because the Saturnian black bile is dry and cold. Finally, the musical instrument alludes to the high intellectual capacities of melancholy, as recorded in the ceiling of the *Stanza di Bacco*. But above all it alludes to musical harmony, which is the embodiment of the harmony of Mother Nature.

4.2 REPRESENTING NATURE AND THE GROTESQUE

4.2.1 I Symbolic Syntax: the Grotesque and the Veneto Villa

In the course of the sixteenth century, the same encyclopedic approach that characterized the discourses of the Renaissance academies also found its way into the practical realm of private collecting, which at the time had begun to take a specific cultural form, strongly oriented towards the knowledge of Natural Philosophy. The Cabinets of Curiosities, *Wunderkammern* or *Kunstkammern*, were a genre of private exhibition spaces that was planned in a manner that enabled the collector to display his vast collections of natural elements and artistic artifacts, all positioned in a particular, planned and highly justified order. Alchemical studies and activities usually prevailed in such ambiances, but above all a strong cosmological consciousness and desire to seize a piece of every element of the universe and insert it within the private exhibition space⁶⁷.

⁶⁷ The bibliography on the *Wunderkammern* is vast, and is recounted in the history of private collectors around Western Europe during the entire Early Modern and Modern periods. See for example: Barbara Jeanne Balsiger, *The kunst-und Wunderkammern: a catalogue raisonne of collecting in Germany, France and England, 1565-1750* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh, Ann Arbor, 1970); Julius von Schlosser, *Raccolte d'arte e di meraviglie del tardo Rinascimento* (Florence: Sansoni, 1974); Adalgisa Lugli, *Naturalia et mirabilia: il collezionismo enciclopedico nelle Wunderkammern d'Europa*, 2nd ed. (Milan: Mazzotta, 1990);

Palazzo Grimani in Venice, Santa Maria Formosa, was enlarged in the mid-sixteenth century with the intention to provide a new space that would be adequate for the display of the archaeological collections of Patriarch Giovanni Grimani, in what was one of the first examples of a modern museum created by a private collector. The so called “Dining Room” is one of the more ideal examples for the decoration of a private residence with an encyclopedic catalog of natural elements. In the ceiling, painted by Camillo Mantovano in the 1560’s, a rich catalogue of intermingling plants, trees and birds of all known species is knitted into an ample natural fabric that covers the entire ceiling (**fig. 105**)⁶⁸. The natural collection depicted in this central hall of the main display wing of the palace served as a complementary element for the archaeological collections of the Patriarch, sheltering the grand variety of antique human made artifacts that was displayed in the space beneath it.

From the sixteenth century onwards, in architectural interiors and in closed gardens, it was the *grotesque* that became the most common, ideal visual instrument for depicting iconographical concepts related to natural philosophy. This ancient Roman decorative art, creative and fantastic, which possessed an extremely symbolic potential, was recovered from the grottos of Nero’s *Domus Aurea* at the end of the fifteenth century and developed into an elaborate *all’antica* form of decoration by the artists working in the school of Raphael in Rome⁶⁹. The spread of the grotesque decorations throughout Italy is well documented in art history literature⁷⁰. Following their employment in Rome, at the Vatican

Eugenio Lo Sardo, ed., *Athanasius Kircher: il museo del mondo* (Rome: De Luca, 2001); Helmar Schramm, Ludger Schwarte and Jan Lazardzig, eds., *Collection, Laboratory, Theater: Scenes of Knowledge in the Seventeenth Century* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2005).

⁶⁸ Marina Stefani Mantovanelli, “Giovanni Grimani Patriarca di Aquileia e il suo palazzo di Venezia,” *Quaderni Utinensi* II, 3-4 (1984): 41.

⁶⁹ The discovery occurred ca. 1480. See for example: Elisabetta Saccomani, “Le grottesche di Bernardino India e di Eliodoro Forbicini,” *Arte Veneta* 26 (1972): 59.

⁷⁰ See for example: Nicole Dacos, *La découverte de la Domus aurea et la formation des grotesques à la Renaissance* (London: The Warburg institute; Leiden: Brill, 1969); André Chastel, *La grottesca*, trans. S. Lega (Milan: Abscondita, 2010). For the Veneto, see: Wolfgang Wolters, *Plastische Deckendekorationen des Cinquecento in Venedig und im Veneto* (Berlin: W. de Gruyter & Co., 1968); *Ibid.*, “La decorazione plastica delle volte e dei soffitti a Venezia e nel Veneto nel sec. XVI,” *Bollettino C. I. S. A. Andrea Palladio* X (1968): 268-278; Saccomani, “Le grottesche di India e Forbicini,”; *Ibid.*, “Le ‘grottesche’ venete del ‘500,” *Atti dell’Istituto Veneto di Scienze, Lettere ed Arti* CXXIX (1970-71): 293-343.

Logge, in Villa Madama and the Farnesina, especially after the sack of Rome in 1527, Raphael's disciples promoted their elaborations of the rediscovered artistic language throughout the main courts of Italy and beyond the Alps⁷¹.

Artists and patrons were intrigued by the infinite visual permutations that emerged from the representation of these minuscule subject matters on a flat uniform background. The technique involved the choice of objects from an endless vocabulary subjects including living creatures, fantastic hybrids, vegetation and inanimate elements, ordered together with great mastership in an intentional syntax to produce what could be perceived as a true symbolic phrase. The choice and position of every subject on the timeless blank surface was intentional, its significance sometimes surpassing the superficial value of the aesthetic result. In fact, an important question that is raised upon the examination of a grotesque scheme is whether the choice of subject and the compositional choices of the artist were based purely on aesthetic considerations, or whether there existed a higher, more complex symbolism that was portrayed in some or all of the elements in the depiction.

The Neapolitan architect and painter Pirro Ligorio (1513-1583) spoke about the symbolic character of the grotesques, perhaps implying that they contained an esoteric value, in his *Libro delle antichità*: '*although to the public they seemed as fantasies, they were all symbols, not made without mysteries... actually they are made in order to cause awe and wonder*'⁷². In his article on the symbolic function of the grotesques in the second half of the sixteenth century, Philippe Morel emphasized the significance of the grotesques in relation to the tradition of the Renaissance hieroglyphs and emblems⁷³.

⁷¹ Polidoro da Caravaggio, Giulio Romano, Giovan Francesco Penni, Giovanni da Udine and Perino del Vaga.

⁷² «Se bene al vulgo pareno materie fantastiche, tutte erano simboli, et cose industrie, non fatte senza misterio... anzi loro son fatte per arrecare stupore et meraviglia [...] ». Pirro Ligorio, "grottesche," in *Libro di m. Pyrrho Ligori napolitano, delle antichità di Roma, nel quale si tratta de' circi, theatri, et anfiteatri. Con le paradosse del medesimo autore...* (Venice: Michele Tramezzino, 1553), IV, 151-161.

⁷³ Philippe Morel, "Il funzionamento simbolico e la critica delle grottesche nella seconda metà del Cinquecento," in *Roma e l'antico nell'arte e nella cultura del Cinquecento*, ed. M. Fagiolo (Rome: Istituto della Enciclopedia Treccani, 1985), 149-178.

The relationship is demonstrated in the treatise on art written in 1584 by the Milanese painter and writer Giovanni Paolo Lomazzo (1538-92)⁷⁴. Lomazzo dedicated an entire chapter to the composition of the grotesques, of which he analyzes their symbolic function in a detailed manner: *'In these grotesques, the painter expresses the things and the concepts, not with themselves, but with other figures... like we use in the emblems'*⁷⁵. In regard to their affinity with the ancient hieroglyphs Lomazzo continued, explaining that the grotesques did not receive their name because the ancients liked to escape to the grottos with their lover for their own enjoyment and delight, but because in the grottos the ancients made *'enigmas, or digits, or Egyptian figures like hieroglyphs, to signify some concept or thought under other figures, like we use in the emblems'*⁷⁶.

However, in both Ancient and Renaissance cultures ambiguous voices were heard regarding the decorative concept of the grotesque⁷⁷. The reservation from their depiction probably derived from their association with an anti-classic decorative style, as well as from the esoteric aura that is generally associated with their significance. The remark of Vitruvius that the grotesques contradict classicism is well known⁷⁸; in sixteenth century Venice Daniele and Marc'Antonio Barbaro preferred to maintain a minimum of grotesques in their villa at Maser, and Daniele preach against their employment in his commentary to

⁷⁴ Giovanni Paolo Lomazzo, *Trattato dell'arte de la pittura di Gio. Paolo Lomazzo milanese pittore. Diuiso in sette libri. Ne' quali si contiene tutta la theorica, & la prattica d'essa pittura* (Milan: Paolo Gottardo Pontio, 1584).

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 351 ("XLIX. Compositione delle grottesche"). « In queste grottesche, il pittore esprime le cose ed i concetti, non con le proprie, ma con altre figure [...] come noi usiamo nelli emblemi e nelle imprese ». As Morel explains, the words *'emblema'* and *'impresa'* are used by Lomazzo in the same general meaning. Morel, "Il funzionamento simbolico," 162.

⁷⁶ Lomazzo, *Trattato dell'arte de la pittura*, 355: « [...] che queste grottesche non siano cosi dette dale grotte, perché gli antichi vi solessero talvolta ricoverarsi nascostamente per piacere e diletto con qualche sua amata; ma perché a proposito venivano fatte non altrimenti che enimmi, o cifre, o figure egizie dimandante jeroglifici, per significare alcun concetto o pensiero sotto altre figure, come noi usiamo negli emblemi, e nelle imprese. »

⁷⁷ An extremely useful overview of the treatment of the grotesques and the attitudes towards them in the sixteenth century is found in Chastel, Chastel, *La grottesca*, 9-41.

⁷⁸ Vitruvius Pollio, *The Architecture of Marcus Vitruvius Pollio. In Ten Books*, trans. Joseph Gwilt (London: Priestly and Weale, 1826) VII, v, 2. 210-211. « But those which were used by the ancients are now tastelessly laid aside: inasmuch as monsters are painted in the present day rather than objects whose prototype are to be observed in nature [...] because similar forms never did, do nor can exist in nature. These new fashions so much prevailed, that for want of competent judges, true art is little esteemed. »

Vitruvius. Daniele's opinion was well known through his Vitruvius commentary by the intellectuals of the last decades of the sixteenth century. He is cited for example by Lomazzo, in the opening discourse of his chapter on the grotesque.

The beginning of the tradition of grotesque painting in the Veneto is generally recognized in the works of Gualtiero Padovano in the Odeo Cornaro at Padua (1535), in the Villa dei Vescovi at Luvigliano (1542-43), and toward the end of his life in Villa Godi at Lonedo (1551-52). In the mid-sixteenth century, many of the grotesques in the palaces and in the Palladian villas of the noblemen of the Veneto were executed by the grotesque specialists Bernardino India and Eleodoro Forbicini⁷⁹. The grotesques at Villa Emo in Fanzolo and at the Malcontenta are attributed to Zellotti, who also executed other subjects in the decorative program. According to Palladio himself, the painter responsible for the grotesque decorations of Villa Badoer in Fratta Polesine was Giallo Fiorentino⁸⁰.

Scholars who have studied the grotesques of the Veneto villas generally agree that they demonstrate a series of new symbolic meanings and elaborations, especially in respect to the earlier experiences by the school of Raphael in Rome⁸¹. Elisabetta Saccomani saw the beginning of the insertion of an actual symbolic meaning into the grotesques in the Veneto with the frescoes of the Odeo Cornaro, but especially in the decoration of Zellotti in the two small rooms of Villa Emo at Fanzolo (**figs. 75, 76**). In addition to the allegorical representations of the four elements, Zellotti depicted references to '*cults and rural superstitions*', to death and to magic⁸². Van der Sman tended to associate a more moderate spiritual meaning to the same grotesques. He suggested that the motifs that surround the four elements were rather random allusions to the fertility and richness of

⁷⁹ Bernardino India had decorated a room in Verona's Palazzo Canossa (before 1550); he later worked at Palazzo Thiene in Vicenza (1552-56), in Villa Pojana (1555-60), and at Palazzo Trevisan in Murano (1559). Eleodoro Forbicini decorated Villa Trissino at Melodo, Palazzo Chiericati in Vicenza (1557), Villa Capra 'La Rotonda' in Vicenza, and Villa Emo Capodilista at Montecchia. Saccomani, "Le grottesche di India e Forbicini," 61-72.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 64. Andrea Palladio, *The Four Books on Architecture*, trans. R. Tavernor and R. Schofield (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1997) L, II, 48.

⁸¹ Saccomani, "Le 'grottesche' venete," 296.

⁸² Saccomani, "Le grottesche di India e Forbicini," 65.

nature, which he retained as appropriate subjects for representation of a villa as a place connected to nature. He also emphasized the presence of allegorical grotesques in the quadrangular spaces near the doors, which can be interpreted as emblems of time (clock, celestial globe, astrology book) and poetry (Apollo, the Lire, the portrait of Marsyas and the bagpipe). The allegory of time refers to the dynamic and active forces of nature (**fig. 106**). The allegory of the divine Apollonian music suggests that universal harmony participates in the natural process of creation⁸³.

An art history thesis by Francesca Manea should be credited as the most serious attempt in scholarly literature in deciphering the hidden meanings in the grotesques of the Veneto⁸⁴. Using a methodic approach, Manea acknowledges the relationship between the grotesque and the tradition of the Renaissance emblem. She interprets a series of examples executed by India and Forbicini according to Valeriano's *Hieroglyphica* and to other sources on Emblems from the sixteenth century such as Alciato's *Emblemata* and Cartari's *Immagini*.

For example, in Villa Pojana, she analyses the symbolic significance of certain details that appear in the *Sala dei Cesari* (India, c. 1555-60). According to Ripa, the concept of 'Time' is traditionally represented with a head of an old man on which there are an hourglass and scales⁸⁵. According to Plato, a caged bird is a common allusion to the soul that is restricted to the body (such as the one in the frescoes of Villa Badoer)⁸⁶. The program of the *Camerino delle Grottesche* is provided with an intricate philosophical interpretation as the visualization of the Platonic concept of the soul, intended as an eschatological meditation on the destiny of the individual (**figs. 107, 108**)⁸⁷. Manea interpreted many of the depicted details according to the Plato's dialogues *Phaedrus* and *Phaedo* and the last book of the *Republic*, and recalls

⁸³ Van der Sman, "L'iconologia di Villa Emo," 53.

⁸⁴ Francesca Manea, "Cose che pareno insogni e cose studiose: motivi a grottesca nella decorazione vicentina dei secoli XV e XVI" (Tesi di laurea in Conservazione dei beni culturali, Udine: Università degli studi, 1998-99, rel. Giuseppe Barbieri).

⁸⁵ Ripa, *Iconologia*, 439; Manea, "Cose che pareno insogni," 238.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 252; Plato, *Teeteto*, 197 d-e.

⁸⁷ Manea, "Cose che pareno insogni," 241.

the existence of references to Apuleius' *Metamorphosis*. She also noted that the grotesques contain symbols related to the agricultural and pastoral world, which connect them to the agricultural rites to propitiate the annual cycle of vegetation. They allude to the parallelism between agriculture and the destiny of man brought to the Eleusinian mysteries of Demeter, which would have secured for the initiated a blessed life after death⁸⁸.

Attempts to identify symbolic meanings in the grotesques have also been performed by scholars who have studied grotesque schemes from other cultural ambiances. For example, Chiara Tellini Perina has demonstrated that esoteric symbolism appears in the decorative grotesque frieze in Villa Bianchi Negri, at Cesole in the province of Mantua, attributed to Fornaretto Mantovano (1582). In addition to general symbolic allusions to agricultural rites, three details in the fresco may refer to alchemical elements, representing the alchemical stove, the philosophical stone and the vase as a matrix of the alchemical operations⁸⁹.

In her analysis of the grotesques of India and Forbicini, Sccomani assumed that their artistic influence was not derived directly from the Roman experience. They had been filtered through the earlier examples of the Odeo Cornaro and the Villa dei Vescovi, influenced by the depictions of Camillo Mantovano at Palazzo Grimani in Santa Maria Formosa in Venice, and by the remainders of the visit of Vasari to Venice in 1542⁹⁰. She also noted that the grotesques of Forbicini and India do not demonstrate any influence from the Mantua tradition, although they were both formed and educated as painters in the nearby Verona in the ambience of Michele Sanmicheli. Saccomani affirmed that generally speaking, it is quite rare to find representations copied from Mantua's Palazzo Te in Venetian art⁹¹.

As it seems, the grotesques of Villa Grimani Molin are the exception of the rule. However, the Mantua influences seem to be combined with elements that appear in the neighboring

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 241-244.

⁸⁹ Chiara Tellini Perina, "Contributo alla storia delle grottesche: Fornaretto Mantovano a Sbbioneta e a Cesole," *Quaderni di Palazzo Te* IV, 6 (1987): 65-70.

⁹⁰ Saccomani, "Le grottesche di India e Forbicini," 60, 65.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 60; Wolters, "La decorazione plastica delle volte," 274.

Villa Badoer, as well as in the decorative tradition of the grotesques of the Veneto villa, forming a particular visual language that is unique to the grotesques of this residence.

4.2.2 The Grotesques of Villa Grimani Molin: Methodological Considerations

The grotesques in the Fratta villa are distributed homogeneously as an integral part of the decoration, not restricting themselves to specific rooms or spaces. The program is dominated by the clean white background of the grotesque, containing human figures of all ages, vegetation, endless variations of the Acanthus flower, animals, birds, insects, hybrid creatures and precious stones. The role of these representations transforms dynamically throughout the villa according to their context within the iconographic program, creating variety and vivacity throughout the entire decorative apparatus.

Discussing the grotesques of Villa Grimani Molin presents several methodological challenges. Their dominant presence and their multiple significances cause a difficulty in determining a convenient order of analysis that does not create repetitions or confusion. Their enigmatic and highly erudite nature creates a challenge in determining when a representation is primarily decorative, requiring no elaborate discussion, and when a representation instead saturated with symbolic meanings that deserve an adequate iconographic interpretation. Often, it is unclear whether certain depicted elements should be referred to as self-standing allegories, and when they should be considered as part of a large grotesque scheme. This difficulty stems especially from the particularly large dimensions that characterize the grotesques in the villa, which stand out in respect to their average size in the tradition of interior mural decoration.

An example for such typical 'oversized' grotesque scheme can be found in the lateral walls of the *Studiolo*, in the representation of the four male planetary divinities (**figs. 87-90**). The gods are depicted in their full attributes, in dimensions that are smaller than life-size but still much larger than any traditional grotesque representation; their presence in the *Studiolo* as representations of the four temperaments certainly provides a major

contribution to the iconographical significance. At the same time, the gods are painted positioned on pedestals in a manner typical to grotesque decorations, and they are inserted within a baldachin scheme containing hybrids, plants, burning lamps, and jewelry. The same baldachin variants are also employed in the structures that frame the five female figures in the adjacent *Salottino*. To a certain extent, the baldachins painted by the artist resemble similar structures in the grotesques of Villa Badoer. The grotesque programs of However, in certain cases the immediate visual parallel may be found in the Mantuan ambience. For example, in Sabbioneta, at the ground floor of the Ducal Palace, in the grotesques of the *Sala di Diana*, executed by Giulio Rubone during the early 1580's, the baldachin structure is remarkably similar to the one that accompanies the large reclining female in the *Salottino*, but the difference in the dimensions is significant (**figs. 58, 109**).

A similar evident proportional discrepancy occurs at the central hall, in the four quadrangular grotesque units in the lower half of the lateral walls (**figs. 110-113**). There again, the subjects are almost life size, but the most similar precedent is once again four miniscule grotesque schemes by Rubone in Sabbioneta (**fig. 114**). Rubone, in turn, seems to have derived his inspiration from the grotesques painted in Mantua's Palazzo Te by Giulio Romano, in the ceiling of the small Cross-Vaulted Room. Despite the great similarity in the subjects and their disposition, the difference in the dimensions between the Fratta and the Mantuan examples is striking: while Rubone's harpy measures about ten centimeters in height, the same creature in Villa Grimani Molin is about ten times bigger. The aesthetic quality of the harpies and putti in the villa is quite poor. Their distorted form and perspective imply that they could have been copied from a minuscule precedent by an artist who was not trained in painting large figures, who was required to adapt the smaller template into the large surface.

A third example occurs once again in the *Studiolo*, where three birds: an owl, a hoopoe, and a crow or raven, are painted above the two nude reclining female figures and the old sage (**figs. 12, 99, 100**). The birds are positioned on a violet flower, and in the case of the owl and hoopoe the flowers stem out of a face mask. The most immediate familiar precedent for such a subject can be found in another decorated space at Sabbioneta's Ducal Palace, in the

grotesque schemes of the ceiling vault of the *Sala dei Cesari*. In the four angles of the vault, dated to the 1570's and executed by an unknown artist, four different birds appear on colored backgrounds, sometimes seated on the exact same violet flower, sometimes stemming from the same masked face (**fig. 115 and details**). A precedent for this scheme can be found, in turn, attributed to Raphael and his assistants at the Villa Farnesina Rome, in the interior grotesque vault decorations of the Loggia of Amor and Psyche (1518). It is probable that these images had served as the source for the Sabbioneta decorations through the mediation of Giulio Romano and his drawings or his grotesque frescoes in Mantua's Palazzo Te and Ducal Palace. The Roman source may also be recognized as a precedent for the forms that appear in Palazzo Grimani by Francesco Salviati, in the corners of the ceiling of the *Camerino di Apollo*. The Sabbioneta frescoes differ from the Roman precedent in the degree of decorative detail, which is somewhat inferior in the later example, and in the subject matter within the colored spaces, that is dedicated exclusively to birds in Sabbioneta and contains a variety of depictions in Rome. The Fratta examples are similar to the Sabbioneta version in the choice of the birds as the central subject matter; the decorative details are even more reduced as well. As in the entire fresco program of the villa the capacity of the artist to draw the volatiles is significantly superior in the Fratta example. The main difference lies once again in the dimensions of the depictions, which are larger and much more noticeable in Fratta and carry specific iconographic meanings.

The enigmatic character of the grotesques of Villa Grimani has brought scholars to consider them as part of a tradition of alchemical representation, or to attribute to them a high degree of esoteric or Neo-Platonist symbolism, characteristics that are usually associated with the grotesques of the Veneto Villa. However, the discourse on the subject has always remained very generic, without providing any specific examples. In fact, esoteric and alchemical symbols that can be found in alchemical manuals can rarely be identified in the

frescoes, for example a phoenix, caduceus, turtle, pelican or lion – while they are present in grotesques of other Veneto villas or in Mantuan examples such as the Cesole villa⁹².

However, it seems that a certain degree of reference to alchemical symbolism was employed in several cases in the Fratta grotesques. In the visual tradition of alchemy, representations of alchemical subjects may have various typologies and objectives: images of proper alchemical practice, general genre images that portray the alchemist and his environment, images appropriating alchemical motifs as a kind of disguised symbolism, and images that show structural affinities with alchemy without necessarily alluding to its iconography⁹³. As the current chapter seeks to demonstrate, the Fratta examples may refer to the third typology, relating to a culture that sees the symbolism of the alchemical language as an integral part of the symbolism used in the tradition of the Renaissance emblem for the representation of concepts related to natural philosophy.

The analysis of the role and characteristics of the grotesques of Villa Grimani Molin requires a flexible approach. Because it is virtually impossible to isolate their treatment from the analysis of the overall iconographic program, a thematic approach discussing their characteristics may leave some important details unobserved, while an ordered review of all of their appearances throughout the frescoes may result inefficient and repetitive. The choice has been therefore to present some general characteristics and main themes in the current chapter, and to discuss additional aspects of the grotesques as part of the iconographic in the subjects reviewed throughout the pages of the dissertation.

⁹² For symbolism in alchemical manuals see for example: Crosland, *Historical Studies in Chemistry*, 33; Stanislas Klossowski de Rola, *The Golden Game. Alchemical Engravings of the Seventeenth Century* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1988); Mino Gabriele, *Alchimia e icolonogia* (Udine: Forum, 1997).

⁹³ Jacob Wamberg, ed., *Art and Alchemy* (Copenhagen : Museum Tusculanum Press, 2006), 13-15.

4.2.3 General Characteristics Referring to Natural Philosophy

The common intention of the entire iconographic theme of the grotesques of Villa Grimani Molin can be described as a desire to provide a visual response to the encyclopedic approach for the study of Natural Philosophy. The artists and the inventors of the iconographical program have chosen to represent objects from nature and their composite results, as well as visual symbols that recall basic natural concepts such as fertility and regeneration. The intentional thematic selection of elements for the grotesque decoration, such as insects, birds, plants, minerals, human beings and hybrid animals, ensures that each representation is granted with a general natural symbolism even when its function is merely decorative, and not associated with any elaborate iconographical concept.

The particular intention to depict natural elements is evident in the example of the four quadrangular grotesque units in the lower section of the walls of the central hall (**figs. 110-113**). Here, the artist has made use of several details that appear in Rubone's grotesques in Sabbioneta, such as the harpies and their vases, the cornucopia and the *putti* and even the masks positioned beneath the monochrome images. In addition, the depictions in the Fratta villa contain a selection of green and dry wheat, blooming flowers in the hands of the *putti*, insects, precious stones and night butterflies – a variety of natural components that by far exceeds the vegetal decorations that accompany the Sabbioneta examples. Together, these depictions form an allegorical representation of Nature in a sort of blessing for its victory, symbolized by the *putti* who are raising their hands, and for its abundance and fertility, symbolized by the cornucopia and the wheat.

As it seems, the choice of painter or painters for the execution of the fresco program of the villa gave high precedence to the ability to paint natural elements. The capacity of the artists to depict realistic portraits of humans or to create elaborate compositions is quite questionable, as other depictions in the villa such as human figures and their garments or still objects are rather simplified and repetitive. However, the degree of accuracy in which animals, and in particular birds are depicted is striking. The birds, especially those visible in the ceilings of the dining room and the *Studiolo*, are executed in a vivacity, flexibility, variety

and quantity that exceed the usual depiction of animals in other Veneto villas, including Villa Badoer (**fig. 116**). On the same token, the eight night butterflies in the four quadrangular spaces in the central hall are each rendered in a completely different manner (**fig. 117**).

Minerals, represented through the depiction of lucid, precious stones, appear very frequently throughout the grotesques of the villa. A use of a particular decorative border embedded with precious stones surrounds many central depictions in the three frescoed rooms. In the *Studiolo*, the green color prevails and forms a background to the composition of red stones and white pearls within a golden pattern (**fig. 118**), while in the *Salottino* the roles of the red and green colors are inversed. The presence of cameos enriched with small precious stones, green, red or white, is very frequent in the villa. The green and red jewels are a recurring motif in the grotesques of many villas of the Veneto, appearing for example in the central hall of Villa Badoer, and in the salon of Villa Trissino in Melodo. They may be interpreted as representatives of gemstones or minerals, and as such, as an allusion to the ancient discipline of mineralogy, documented in the lapidaries that have been published and studied at least since Pliny's chapter on the subject in his *Storia Naturalis*, throughout medieval times and during the Renaissance⁹⁴.

In addition to the general association of gemstones with natural history through the discipline of mineralogy, Manea has interpreted their presence in the Veneto villas in a specific Platonic key⁹⁵. They may represent the precious stones that appear in the inhabited caves of man, which are enriched with gems. According to Plato's dialog *Phaedo*, these natural gems are nothing but a faded example of the brilliance and purity of the true jewels that can be found above the earth⁹⁶. The presence in the frescoes of the cameos

⁹⁴ For a bibliography and discussion on the subject in the context of Villa Grimani Molin see below, chapter V, section 5.3.1.

⁹⁵ Manea, "Cose che pareno insogni," 303.

⁹⁶ Plato, "Phaedo," in *Plato in Twelve Volumes*, vol. 1, 110d-11a « [110d] ...In fact, our highly prized stones, sards and jaspers, and emeralds, and other gems, are fragments of those there, but there everything is like these or still more beautiful. And the reason of this is that there the stones are pure, and not corroded or defiled, as ours are, with filth and brine by the vapors and liquids which flow together here and which cause

enriched with small precious stones, in particular red and green, makes a precise reference to the sards (or Carnelians) and the emeralds. Their representation may therefore contain a warning of a moralizing nature, indicating the vanity in enjoying of the terrestrial life in respect to the much more precious riches that the future life offers, which is exclusively reserved to the blessed, pure souls that will join it after their mortal life⁹⁷.

The grotesques in Villa Grimani Molin also contain small jewels, cameos containing human figures, designed lightly and elegantly with a white brush. Similar depictions appear in various occasions within the grotesques of other Veneto villas, such as the *Camerino delle Grottesche* in Villa Pojana (**fig. 105**) and the *Sala delle Metamorfosi* in Palazzo Thiene in Vicenza, both attributed to India. However, in Villa Grimani Molin the cameos appear in particular on brown, red and green backgrounds, recalling again Plato's dialogue. The same semi-precious stones were also used for the production of actual jewelry and cameos in ancient times, especially in Ancient Greek and Rome, adding an archaeological, 'collectorist' value to the representations in the villa and recalling the great collection of the *Cammei Grimani*⁹⁸.

An example for the type of cameo that could have provided inspiration for the decorators of Villa Grimani Molin can be found in the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris, in an original Greek carnelian cameo with an engraving of female holding a scepter, dating to the early first century BC. The gem is embedded in a golden frame, which contains green emerald and red garnet gems (**fig. 119**)⁹⁹. Besides the common use of red and green stones, their embedding on the gold background recalls the decorative borders that trace the main

ugliness and disease in earth and stones and animals and plants. And the earth there is adorned with all the jewels and also with gold and [111a] silver and everything of the sort. »

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 114c.

⁹⁸ See: "Sard" in High Chisholm, ed., *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 11th ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1911). For the collection of the Grimani cameos and gemstones see: Irene Favaretto, *Arte antica e cultura antiquaria nelle collezioni venete al tempo della Serenissima* (Rome: L'Erma di Bretschneider, 1990); Gemma Sena Chiesa, "'Cammei di tanta rara e suprema bellezza...': la glittica nello Statuario Pubblico della Serenissima," in Favaretto and Ravagnan, *Lo statuario pubblico*, 122-131.

⁹⁹ Carnelian *intaglio* with a Ptolemaic queen holding a sceptre, early 1st century BC, gold, garnet, emerald and glass paste mount, 1724, Département des Monnaies, Médailles et Antiques. Paris, Bibliothèque nationale.

decorations in the frescoed rooms of the Fratta villa, implying that they may have also been inspired by the decorative style of original ancient jewelry.

Mirrors are also depicted quite frequently within the grotesques, usually reflecting images of figures inside them. Mirrors were saturated with symbolic significances, and served for various scientific applications. They were commonly found in Renaissance *Studioli*, hanging on a wall above a desk or cabinet, or set on a small wooden stand¹⁰⁰. Mirrors were also related to precious stones, because both objects possess a refractive index that enables their use as optical instruments. The possible relationship of these topics to the frescoes of the Fratta villa shall be discussed in more detail in the sixth chapter of the dissertation (section 6.3.1).

The acanthus flower appears as a decorative leitmotif in the grotesques throughout the entire fresco program of the villa, in a manner that exceeds its usual presence in the grotesques of the villas of the Veneto. The acanthus has been employed as a decorative motif since Ancient Greece; it has been an integral component of ornamental tradition throughout Western history, including the entire Mediterranean and India. It is most characteristically used as a decorative motif of Corinthian and Composite capitals. Besides the multiple decorative variations and permutations that the nature of this particular plant provides for the artist, the acanthus is saturated with symbolic significances.

Vitruvius recounts that the Corinthian order had been invented by a Greek architect and sculptor named Callimachus, who was inspired by the sight of the acanthus when he saw it growing through a woven votive basket that had been left on a grave of a young girl. Indeed, acanthus motifs, which can be found already in Classical Greek grave *stelai*, were common in funeral contexts, and often appear as decorative motifs in funerary art. In ancient Greece, the plant was a clear reference to life emerging from a grave, alluding to the concept of the cyclicity of life. In Rome, the symbolism associated with the acanthus was that of enduring life, and the plant was traditionally displayed at funerary celebrations.

¹⁰⁰ Dora Thornton, *The Scholar in His Study. Ownership and Experience in Renaissance Italy* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1997).

It is also recognized as an Apolline and Dionysiac symbol of regeneration and immortality, and its wild variety was believed by the Romans to possess potent apotropaic powers¹⁰¹.

In Christianity, the acanthus has been associated with the Resurrection of Christ, probably as a transposition of its pagan symbolism, with the Passion of Christ, because of the spear that was pierced in Christ's side, and sometimes with the Virgin Mary¹⁰². The multiple Classical symbolic meanings of the acanthus are particularly related to the cosmological theme of the fresco program of Villa Grimani Molin. As an ornamental theme, the stylistic variations of the plant may be interpreted in the cosmological context as well, as dynamic visual representations of the reproductive force of the plant.

Typically to grotesque art, the program of the villa also contains a notable presence of hybrid creatures. In the context of natural philosophy, the depiction of hybrids, which are in fact a combination between different types of natural components, emphasizes the *timaeian* concept of creation, according to which elements from different groups in nature combine together, to produce new elements of a new nature.

In Villa Grimani Molin nearly all of the hybrids are creatures that are somehow combined with the acanthus flower. In the dining room ceiling, human *putti* ride the backs of an animal that is composed of a hoarse body and torso that grows out of a variation of the acanthus flower (**fig. 120**). Similarly, young human torsos spring out of the flower bases of acanthus flowers in the ceiling of the *Studiolo* and in the *Salottino* (**figs. 121, 122**). In the *Studiolo* ceiling, flanking each of the female allegories of with the ram and Taurus, a hybrid

¹⁰¹ John Pollini, "Two Bronze Portrait Busts of Slave Boys from a Shrine of Cobannus in Gaul," in *Studia Varia: From the J. Paul Getty Museum*, eds. M. True and M. L. Hart (Los Angeles, California: J. Paul Getty Museum; Garsington: Windsor, 2001), 133-134; *Ibid.*, "The Acanthus of the Ara Pacis as an Apolline and Dionysiac Symbol of Anamorphosis, Anakyklesis and Numen Mixtum," in *Von der Bauforschung zur Denkmalpflege, Festschrift für Alois Machatschek* (Vienna: Phoibos-Verlag 1993), 181-217, n. 12 for further bibliography.

¹⁰² Mirella Levi D'Ancona, *The Garden of the Renaissance: Botanical Symbolism in Italian Painting* (Firenze: L. S. Olschki, 1977), 34; Alfredo Cattabiani, *Florario* (Milano: Mondadori, 1996), 591. « Era considerato simbolo di verginità in quanto pianta spontanea che cresce in terra non coltivata. Raffigurazioni delle sue foglie adornavano le vesti delle personalità più importanti. Nel cristianesimo primitivo e poi in quello medievale l'acanto era simbolo della Resurrezione. »

creature is depicted with an animal head, vegetal body, wings and human female breasts. In the *Salottino* ceiling, winged white horses with aquatic paws grow out of Acanthus leaves (**fig. 123**). Winged creatures with a human face and torso are similarly rendered with hoarse legs, paws of an aquatic animal and an acanthus tail. Considering the symbolism of the acanthus as related to the cyclicity of life, this joining provides an additional dimension to the cosmological significance of the representation of the hybrids in the villa.

The grotesques also contain a variety of nude, male and female human figures, in different ages. Just as all natural elements participate in creation in the universe, human beings possess their own cosmic role in reproduction. The importance of the continuity of generations is emphasized in the grotesques with other means. Four pairs of birds, each mother paired with her own offspring, are depicted in a visible position on the small barrel vault that covers the vestibule in the ground floor, welcoming the visitor upon his entry to the residence (**fig. 124**). The choice of birds may represent humans in particular, since according to the common symbolism based on Plato, birds are allegories of the human soul¹⁰³. The philosophical concept of the *'Theatrum mundi'* is an elaboration of the role of the human race within the cosmos, which played an important role in the humanist thought in Venice throughout the sixteenth century; it is discussed in the following chapter.

4.2.4 The Central Hall: Grotesques with Six Female Virtues

The fresco program of the central hall contains six female personifications of virtues (**figs. 125-130**). The allegories occupy the lower sections of six vertical quadrangular spaces, while the upper sections contain a variety of grotesque schemes. Besides the study of the iconography of the virtues, their review provides an opportunity to discuss some more stylistic and symbolic characteristics of the grotesques of the villa. The virtues and grotesques are placed within a unifying frame of green foliage on a yellow background, suggesting that they

¹⁰³ Manea, "Cose che pareno insogni," 252; Plato, *Teeteto*, 197 d-e.

should be interpreted as a single unit; indeed, in some of the cases it is possible to individualize a symbolic relationship between the virtue and its corresponding grotesque scheme.

4.2.4.1 Iconography and Style of the Female Virtues

Upon entering from the south, to the right on the east wall, the female personification is identified as Fortune, seated on its traditional wooden wheel and holding a vase with riches. Across the hall to the west, the next personification has been identified by scholars as a representation of Occasion, a virtue which is commonly depicted seated on a round sphere. The identification is also based on a general comparison with the frescoes of Villa Badoer, where in the *Sala di Ganimede* the allegories of Fortune and Occasion are paired together in two parallel quadrangular spaces. However, the depiction in Villa Grimani Molin contains completely different attributes, all rendered in a luxurious gold color: a gold scepter, a gold belt, gold coins, a gold crown and a gold sphere. These elements are attributes of the virtue of Richness, which may therefore be a more appropriate identification for the personification. According to Ripa, Richness is “a woman in regal wear, holding an imperial crown in her right hand and a scepter in her left hand and that has a golden vase at her feet, demonstrating that the first and principal richness in the possession of the will of men, like kings do, and the second is money”¹⁰⁴.

On the east wall versus the loggia, the personification of Chastity appears seated on a unicorn, its traditional attribute¹⁰⁵. Parallel to it on the west wall Fidelity is accompanied by a dog. In accordance with the description of Ripa, the dog is white; its faithful character is explained by Pliny in his *Storia Naturalis*¹⁰⁶. The allegories on the north wall, flanking the

¹⁰⁴ Ripa, *Iconologia*, “Richezza.” « DONNA, in abito Regale, che nella man destra tenga una Corona Imperiale, e nella sinistra uno Scettro, e un Vaso d'Oro à piedi. La Corona in mano, e il Vaso à piedi, mostrano, che la prima, e principal ricchezza è possedere la volontà de gli uomini, come fanno i Rè; la seconda è il danaro. » And also « DONNA, vecchia, cieca, e vestita di panno d'oro... »

¹⁰⁵ John Cherry, “Unicorns,” in *Mythical Beasts*, ed. J. Cherry (London: British Museum Press, 1995), 44-71.

¹⁰⁶ Pliny the Elder, *Historia Naturalis*, VIII, 40. « Fidelissimi ante omnia homini canis atque equus”; Ripa, *Iconologia*, “Fedeltà”. «DONNA, vestita di bianco, come la Fede, con due dita della destra mano tenga un Anello, overo Sigillo, e a canto vi sia un Cane bianco. Si fà il Sigillo in mano per segno di fedeltà, perché con esso si serrano, e nascondono i secreti. Il Cane perché è fedelissimo avrà luogo appresso questa imagine per

door that leads to the outside portico, have been identified as the virtues of Fortitude, a female riding a lion and holding a club (right), and Regality or Magnanimity, a female seated on a lion and crowning the animal (left)¹⁰⁷. It is agreed by scholars that both virtues are based on the prints of Giuseppe Porta Salviati for Francesco Marcolini's *Le Sorti intitolate giardino d'i pensieri*, a book dedicated to a card game, printed in Venice in 1540 (figs. 131, 133)¹⁰⁸. However, in the *Sorti* the figures assume different meanings: the female riding a lion with the club in her hand is the virtue of Virility, and the female seated on a lion and holding a crown is described as an allegory of Nobility.

In fact, the examination of the stylistic character of the six female virtues reveals that their painter was inspired in all of them from the engravings in Francesco Marcolini's book, or with prints that followed it. In the book, Virility is riding the lion with one leg on each side while Nobility is a female seated sideways on a lion, with both legs in the same direction. The right hand of Nobility rests on the head of the lion and her left hand holds up a crown at the height of her head. The Fratta personifications seem to have been modeled as variations on these two prototypes, in mirrored and direct body poses. As in the book, the female identified as Fortitude/Virility is riding the lion with one leg on each side, while her counterpart, Regality/Nobility rests both legs on the same side of the animal, almost folded together. The two lions have identical faces but the lion of the first virtue faces right (mirrored in respect to the *Sorti* depiction of Virility) and the lion of the second faces left (as in the original depiction of Nobility). The figure of Fidelity in the villa is seated in a

l'auttorità di Plinio nel VIII. lib. dell'Historia Naturale, dove racconta in particolare del Cane di Tito Labieno, veduto in Roma nel consolato d'Appio Iunio, e Publio Sillio, il quale, essendo il sopradetto Tito in prigione, non si partì mai da giacere per quanto poteva vicino a lui, e essendo egli finalmente come Reo gittato dalle scale Gemonie, supplicio, che si usava in Roma con quelli, che erano condannati dalla giustizia, stava il Cane intorno al corpo del già morto padrone, mostrando moltissimi effetti di dolore, e portando tutto il cibo, che gli si dava alla bocca d'esso; essendo alla fine il cadavero gittato nel Tevere, il Cane ancora di propria voglia vi si gittò, reggendo sopra l'acque per buono spatio quel corpo con infinita meraviglia de' riguardanti. Si legge ancora [...] Molti altri essempli raccontano diversi altri auttori in questo proposito, a noi bastano questi. »

¹⁰⁷ See for example: Trinchieri Camiz, "Significati iconografici," 124, and: Ton, *Affreschi Badoer Grimani*, 76, who summarizes the available literature on the subject.

¹⁰⁸ Van der Sman, *La decorazione a fresco*, 185 n. 75; Francesco Marcolini, *Le sorti intitolate giardino d'i pensieri* (1540; reprint, Treviso: Fondazione Benetton Studi Ricerche ; Rome: Viella, 2007).

manner similar to the fresco and engraving of Fortitude/Virility, but both of her legs were painted by the artist, while the dog is rendered exactly in the position of the lion in the fresco and engraving of Regality/Nobility. Charity and her unicorn, in turn, are a mirrored image of Fidelity and her dog. The position of the arms of the virtue is different, and the position of the legs is copied from the folded legs of Regality/Nobility. Richness and Fortune are also mirrored images, in which case the figures are “riding” a sphere and a wheel and vase, instead of the animals. Fortune recalls the allegory of Nobility in the *Sorti* in particular, both in its body position and in the manner that she holds the treasure box upwards, that substitutes the crown that is displayed by Nobility. Another virtue in the *Sorti*, Richness, is depicted by Porta Salviati seated on a square box with a crown to her feet (**fig. 132**). Although the position of the figure is not similar to the Fratta example, the box recalls the round sphere and the crown is positioned on the ground in a similar manner.

Based on the familiarity of the artist with the engravings of Porta Salviati (or with copied versions of them), it is likely that the two virtues on the north wall in the Fratta villa represent Nobility and Virility. Such identification is also justified on an iconographical basis. The stylistic examination suggests that the allegories were modeled as pairs of personifications facing each other: Fortune/Richness, Chastity/Fidelity, and Virility/Nobility. The common ground of Fortune and Richness can be easily explained as two very similar aspirations of the owners for the fate of the household¹⁰⁹. Chastity and Fidelity are two virtues which are specifically associated with the qualities of the Renaissance noblewoman. Their representation appears in the villa in a second instance, at the ceiling of the dining room in the same female significance and shall be discussed in the next chapter. In accordance with the theme suggested by the previous couple, Nobility and Virility are two qualities that can be associated with the virtuous Renaissance nobleman.

¹⁰⁹ For example, Ripa describes another image of “Richezza” as a blind woman, in an analogy to the traditional attributes of Fortune. Fortune, in turn, is often displayed with riches and treasures.

4.2.4.2 Riches and Brains

The analysis of the grotesque schemes that accompany the female virtues begins with the allegory of Richness, the young female seated on a golden sphere. A series of jewels and precious stones adorn the upper part of the image, including two monochrome cameos with mirrored images that reflect her position on both sides. In this case, the particular emphasis on the use of gold in the description of the virtue is complimentary to the grotesque scheme that is represented above her, in one of the few grotesques that may easily be interpreted as a symbolic representation.

In the upper section above the virtue, a white space contains two male figures (**fig. 126**). To the right an odd, sympathetic looking, beardless man covers his face to hide from a round white sphere positioned above him while he is looking at the viewer. To the left another man, perhaps identical to the first man but this time wearing a beard, is depicted with his body stretched out, looking at the sphere and pointing towards it. On the ground next to the first figure, to the left, a snail is depicted, followed by a zoomorphic bookstand that supports two open books, one facing each man¹¹⁰. In alchemical tradition, the snail is commonly associated with slow and steady processes, symbolized by his slow motion. Similarly, in the iconographical tradition of Renaissance painting the snail often denotes patience. Its slow rhythm and tendency to stay inside its shell for a long period has rendered it fit for religious paintings describing the isolation of saints or monks in the desert¹¹¹.

Read together, the scene suggests that after a long and patient process of learning and accumulating knowledge, symbolized by the open books, one obtains confidence or bravery, represented in the changed body language of the left figure, and wisdom, indicated by his newly grown beard. Above the two men two shells are tied to burning lamps. Since burning

¹¹⁰ A close examination of the distant fresco shows that it is nothing but pseudo-text.

¹¹¹ Ripa, *Iconologia*, "Pazienza", 405. « DONNA, con un Torchio acceso in una mano, con la quale versi cera liquefatta sopra l'altro braccio ignudo, e a piedi per terra vi saranno alcune Lumache, le quali si pongono per la Pazienza, per secondare i tempi, e starsi molti giorni rinchiuse nelle loro cocciole, finché viene il tempo a proposito da uscir fuori.» For the snail in Renaissance art see: Mirella Levi D'Ancona, *Lo zoo del Rinascimento: il significato degli animali nella pittura italiana dal XIV al XVI secolo* (Lucca: Maria Pacini Fazzi, 2001), 157.

flames are commonly associated with knowledge and shells are common symbols of eternal life, their representation may allude to these two concepts.

The grotesque representation is connected to the allegory beneath it both visually and conceptually. On a visual scale, the top of the grotesques is dominated by the white or silver sphere, which is the opposite color of the rich gold sphere with identical dimensions on which Richness is seated. Conceptually, the gold and silver spheres immediately recall the parallelism between the sun and the moon, an allegorical theme that is extremely common in alchemical practice. Alchemical manuals contain a vast amount of imagery dedicated to the sun as moon, whose combination is perceived as a symbol of reproduction. The encounter between the sun and the moon is the first phase of the alchemical process, the *coniunctio*¹¹². The sun is regarded as a masculine fertilizer and the moon is regarded as passive and feminine. The moon, defined by Paracelsus as “the very fertile wife of every star”, is not considered an inanimate body but a means of transport of energy from the various astral objects, which are the stars, to the terrestrial bodies¹¹³.

In alchemical terms, gold, which is the metal associated with the sun, is a particularly appropriate choice for the description of the material richness that is embodied in the figure of the female virtue. It is the noblest of metals, just as the precious stone is the most precious of all stones, the lion the most precious among the animals and the human among the living things on earth¹¹⁴. The moon is associated with the silver metal, and its depiction within the grotesque scheme may refer to the high and especially obscure forms of knowledge that the moon is often associated with. In Astrology, in addition to the solar

¹¹² After which, the next phases are the *putrefactio*, the death of the initial material, and the *sublimatio*, which is the soul that is freed from the material in order to go back up to the divine, and the arrival to gold or the philosophical stone. Maurizio Fagiolo dell'Arco, “‘Peritissimo alchimista’: analisi del Parmigianino,” *L'arte*, n. ed. 2, 72 (1969): 126.

¹¹³ M. Grazia Fiorini Galassi, “Simbologia Astrale della stanza detta dello Zodiaco, nel palazzo Ducale di Mantova,” *Civiltà Mantovana* ns. 3 (1984): 81, 87.

¹¹⁴ Titus Burckhardt, *L'alchimia* (Torino: Boringhieri, 1961), 70. Alchemy for example sees gold as the best of all metals, just like the precious stone is the best of all stones, like the lion the best among the animals, and like and the human-being the best among the living things on earth.

astrology there exists also a lunar or draconic astrology, in which the planets and constellations are calculated according to the phases of the moon. Lunar astrology is considered particularly esoteric, revealing the innermost secrets of the soul¹¹⁵.

In the decorative tradition of the Veneto, the sun and the moon are paired in a fresco in Vicenza, Palazzo Chiericati, in the *Sala del Firmamento* by Domenico Brusasorci (1558). The central rectangle includes a depiction of Sol on his carriage that turns towards the sunset, while the one of Diana is rising above the horizon. The image was based on the model of Giulio Romano in Mantua, Palazzo Te (**fig. 134**), in the painting that crowns the ceiling of the Room of the Sun and the Moon (1525-1535). In both cases, the silver or white *mezzaluna* is placed on top of the golden sun, in a manner that recalls the symbolic image in Fratta.

Read together, the virtue and its accompanying grotesque scheme describe an allegorical parallelism between material richness, symbolized by the material value of gold, and spiritual richness, symbolized by the knowledge and education that are represented in the grotesques by the studying men and the intellectual properties associated with the moon.

4.2.4.3 Chastity and Charity

The virtue of Chastity is a female seated on the back of a pure white unicorn, exchanging affectionate looks with the animal (**fig. 127**). Her hand gesture signifies chastity, and it is found repeated two other times in the villa: on the west wall of the central hall, in the gesture of the female figure in the large epical or historical painting, and in the frescoed ceiling of the dining room, by another young female. Above her head the painter has depicted a jewel with a large white precious stone, whose bright lucid color may refer to the purity of chastity.

¹¹⁵ On Lunar astrology see: Charles Burnett, "Lunar Astrology: The Varieties of Texts Using Lunar Mansions, with Emphasis of Jafar Indus," in *Micrologus XII, 2004. Il sole e la luna. The Sun and the Moon* (Florence: Sismel Edizioni del Galluzzo, 2004) , 43-133; Silke Ackermann, "The Path of the Moon Engraved: Lunar Mansions on European and Islamic Scientific Instruments," in *Ibid.*, 135-164.

Above the grotesque scheme that accompanies the allegory, a mother bird shelters four chicks beneath her wings. The representation strongly recalls the iconographical tradition of the *Madonna della Misericordia*, that shelters children or elder human beings beneath her spread cape. This Christian theme has a long visual tradition in both sculpture and religious painting at least since the fifteenth century, and was a very common representation of the Madonna in Venice, where artworks on the theme were commissioned for the Scuola Grande della Misericordia. A chain of red beads is tied underneath the bird and her chicks, perhaps recalling the Marian rosary.

The Christian idea of the 'Misericordia', which means piety, grace or charity, is highly competent with representation of the virtue of Chastity beneath the grotesque scheme, which is another fundamental female characteristic associated with the Virgin Mary. The Virgin herself is often depicted as a *Madonna della Castità*, accompanied with a unicorn¹¹⁶. In the context of natural philosophy, the depiction of a mother bird and her baby chicks also recalls the concept of birth and reproduction of animals and human beings, which is also represented in the grotesques in the vestibule vault in the ground floor.

4.2.4.4 Symmetry, Nature and Anthropomorphism

A symmetric grotesque scheme completes the representation above the allegory of Fidelity (**fig. 128**). Symmetry, besides recalling one of the most basic attributes of nature, is often employed in the grotesques of the villa through a choice of specific combinations that create the semblance of symbolic vaults, constructed with grotesque elements that seem to create eyes, a central nose and a mouth.

In the current example, two acanthus flowers form the eyes; the nose is formed from the common root of the flowers which is also the base of the hybrid creature. A piece of fabric hanging between the hands of the marks the position of eyebrows, and the mouth is formed by a red precious stone that is positioned horizontally, while it is normally

¹¹⁶ Cherry, "Unicorns," 44-71.

positioned in a vertical manner. A similar situation occurs above the allegory of Fortune (**fig. 125**), where a face is formed by two insects that represent eyes, decorative vegetation marking the eyebrows, a lamp representing a nose that in itself contains a representation of a face and finally the mouth that is represented by a horizontally positioned red jewel.

On a larger scale, the entire west wall of the *Studiolo*, where the old sage is depicted, is arranged in a manner that recalls a face (**fig. 53**). The eyes are formed by the two convex mirrors on both sides of the sage: being mirrors, they also represent eyes in a metaphorical manner. The grotesque unit between the two doors represents the nose and mouth. The visual game is brought to a level of mastership in the intricate grotesque program of the square ceiling of the *Salottino*, where four pairs of eyes are formed on each side of the central fresco of Jupiter and Juno (**fig. 54**). Their lozenge form is created by the green garlands in *mezzaluna* form attached to the central fresco and the pupils are marked by pairs of different animals on each side: a pair of symmetric roosters, falcons, honeysuckles and bears or monkeys. The faces are formed with a marked nose and mouth in two modes: either by looking at one of the sides or by observing an angle that unifies two sides. In the latter case, the vault results particularly intimidating (**fig. 135**).

The examples in the frescoes are numerous and go beyond the possibility of a casual formation of a face that may occur when we are dealing with symmetric decoration. The depiction of symbolic vaults in grotesque art is not an invention of the painter of the Fratta villa, and can be often identified when the grotesques are organized in wide surfaces that enable this sort of manipulation. For example, they are found in the *Camerino delle Grottesche* in Villa Pojana, in many instances of the symmetrical disposition of the grotesques. As in Villa Grimani Molin, the eyes are often formed by India as a pair of volutes of a flower that stem from the same base, which marks the nose (**fig. 136**).

The phenomenon of “seeing faces” seems to extend itself to other depicted subjects throughout the fresco program. A subtle representation of faces is very often present in the various burning lamps in the grotesques, especially in the main hall and in the *Studiolo*. More noticeable is the molding of the various parts of the Greek costumes with vaults, especially

on the upper part of the boots and on the shoulders, but also in belts and furniture forms such as the wooden boats, the *triclinium* beds and the regal thrones (fig. 137).

The lamps and other zoomorphic and human faces hidden in the frescoes are actually part of a known phenomenon in Italian art in the late fifteenth century and the sixteenth century, in which hidden vaults are intentionally depicted especially within images of natural forms such as rocks. The idea was confronted in different ways by Alberti, Mantegna, Leonardo, Carpaccio and many other renowned and influential painters¹¹⁷.

Jurgis Baltrusaitis is probably the first modern Western scholar to have identified the appearance of animals and faces in the rock forms of medieval Chinese painting, exploring how these images may have entered the West¹¹⁸. Many classical authors treated the topic of animation of stones, such as Apollodorus and Pindar¹¹⁹. In Christianity, Saint John the Baptist affirmed that God could make the sons of Abraham appear from the stones of the desert¹²⁰. In fact, the phenomenon was associated with scientific-alchemical origins in all periods, mentioned already by Pliny and raising the interest of Albertus Magnus, Alberti, Piero Pomponazzi, Gerolamo Cardano, Ulisse Aldrovandi, Athanasius Kircher and many others¹²¹. During the Renaissance the concept was mentioned by Leonardo in his painting treatise as a technique to increase the *ingegno*¹²². Significantly, it was also associated with the rediscovery of the grotesques at the end of the fifteenth century. In his *Disegno* (1549), Anton Francesco Doni defines a parallel between the formation of the grotesques

¹¹⁷ Enrico Guidoni, *Giorgione e i volti nascosti: la riscoperta di un segreto dell'arte occidentale* (Rome: Bonsignori, 1996).

¹¹⁸ For the identification of animal forms and faces in rock forms see: Jurgis Baltrusaitis, *Il Medioevo fantastico: antichità ed esotismi nell'arte gotica*, intro. M. Oldoni (Milan: Adelphi, 1973), 228-238 and figs. 145-152.

¹¹⁹ Apollodorus, 1, 7, 2; Pindar, *Olimp.*, 9, 45.

¹²⁰ Patrizia Castelli, "L'antro delle Ninfe," in *Artifici d'acque e giardini: la cultura delle grotte e dei ninfei in Italia e in Europa*, eds. I. Lapi Ballerini and L. M. Medri (Florence: Centro Di, 1999), 159. (Mt., 3, 3-9; Lc., 3, 8).

¹²¹ Guidoni, *Giorgione e i volti nascosti*, 11.

¹²² *Ibid.*, 15 n. 12. Leonardo da Vinci, when discussing ways to increase the '*ingegno*' of painting with various inventions, mentioned the technique in his treatise on painting. Leonardo da Vinci, *Trattato della pittura*, I, 63.

and the interpretations of the forms that we see in stains and in clouds, identifying the imaginative activity that the grotesques generate¹²³.

The adorning of parts of armor with faces also recalls the Roman and Medieval decorative phenomenon known as 'grills', studied by Baltrusaitis (**fig. 138**). Grills are human faces painted especially on animal bodies, common in Roman engraved precious stones, to which magical powers were often attributed. The grills re-appeared as a revived 'classical' form in the Romanesque in the early thirteenth century, where they were often depicted as parts of helmets and on elements such as knee joints on costumes of human beings¹²⁴.

Trying to impose one encompassing explanation on such a vast phenomenon would be imprudent¹²⁵. It is, however, possible to suggest reasons according to specific contexts. In religious paintings of hermits in their isolation in the desert such as San Girolamo, in their spiritual voyage in the midst of nature, the representation of vaults in the rocks refers to the inanimate qualities of the natural components. Human vaults in rocks appears also in the works of the mannerist artist Giuseppe Archimboldo, who is above all remembered for his paintings of the four seasons as human portraits combined of different natural elements. The desert paintings, the seasons and Archimboldo's depiction of hidden vaults may all be considered as allusions to the animated properties of all natural elements, still and living. In the Fratta villa, because of the cosmological context of the grotesques, the various types of hidden facial depictions may allude to the same concept.

In addition, the larger vaults, in particular those of the *Studiolo* and the *Salottino*, may possess the same apotropaic function of the large eyes in Classical Greek vase art. The term 'apotropaic eyes' is used in Greek art to describe occurrences of large pairs of eyes that are painted especially on cups or drinking ewers, 'Kylix', observing the viewer. Such eyes are particularly common in a Dionysian context, protecting the wine drinker, or rather, looking

¹²³ Morel, "Il funzionamento simbolico," 152.

¹²⁴ Baltrusaitis, *Il Medioevo fantastico*, 45-46, 63-64.

¹²⁵ Guidoni, *Giorgione e i volti nascosti*, 13.

at him with an intimidating and moralizing look after he had exaggerated in his drink (**figs. 139, 140**). Similarly, the eyes in the grotesques produce a sense of being observed, protected, and at the same time they provide a constant warning for the inhabitants of the villa to maintain an appropriate and virtuous behavior. The idea is actually very competent with another protective and moralizing theme in the frescoes of Villa Grimani Molin, the concept of the *Theatrum mundi*, which is discussed in the fifth chapter.

4.2.4.5 A Conceptual Iconographical Choice

Following Aby Warburg's historical research on the frescoes of the *Sala dei Mesi* at Palazzo Schifanoia in Ferrara, Arthur M. Hind has identified a visual and conceptual relationship between the astrological program of and the 'Mantegna' tarot cards, one of the first and most famous decks in western art history¹²⁶. The first mention of the Mantegna game cards in Ferrara was in 1422¹²⁷. As other decks in the period, they were created as a pleasurable game for pastime activity, which however included a significant educative dimension as didactic images that were composed for instructing young people¹²⁸. In fact, the cards were divided into iconographical groups according to the order that Christian theology assigns to the universe, containing the planets and the stars of the universe (A), the cosmic principles and virtues (B), the Liberal Arts (C), Apollo and the Muses (D), and human conditions (E)¹²⁹.

The emblematic nature of the images and their cosmological contextualization may cause us to think, misleadingly, that the cards were associated with esoteric and obscure practices such as fortune telling or divination, as they are in modern times. However, tarot cards were born as a society game, a court pastime that later became a popular game.

¹²⁶ Aby Warburg, *Arte e astrologia nel Palazzo Schifanoia di Ferrara*, trans. E. Cantimori, essay by Fritz Saxl (Milan: Abscondita, 2006); Marco Bertozzi, "Gli affreschi di Palazzo Schifanoia e i 'Tarocchi del Mantegna': ancora un enigma," in *I tarocchi: gioco e magia alla corte degli Estensi*, eds. G. Berti and A. Vitali (Bologna: Nuova Alfa, 1987), 44-48.

¹²⁷ Claudia Cieri Via, "I Tarocchi del cosiddetto 'Mantegna': origine, significato e fortuna di un ciclo di immagini," in *Ibid.*, 49-77.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, 49; Bertozzi, "Gli affreschi e i Tarocchi," 45.

¹²⁹ Cieri Via, "I Tarocchi del cosiddetto 'Mantegna'," 54; Bertozzi, "Gli affreschi e i Tarocchi," 46.

Their use for cartomancy is documented only from the eighteenth century onwards, and it is not mentioned in the writings of any of the great esotericists known in the Renaissance such as Agrippa von Nettesheim (1486-1535) or Paracelsus (1493-1541)¹³⁰.

Francesco Marcolini's *Sorti* belongs to the same tradition of enjoyable and intellectual social card games of its period, invented for the pleasure and the education of the Venetian noble society of the mid-sixteenth century. As in similar card games, the symbolic nature of its images is a part of the Renaissance culture of visual emblems. In the frescoes of Villa Grimani Molin the images from the *Sorti* were used for depicting virtues that appear with the grotesques, which are another important visual manifestation of the Renaissance emblem. The virtues and the grotesques are collocated in a unified, vertical quadrangular space that recalls the classical game card form. Whether intentional or not, the choice provides a visual reference to the depiction of elements from the Mantegna cards in the *Sala dei Mesi* of Palazzo Schifanoia. But above all, the representations in the villa become a sort of allegorical game cards, connected with this noble intellectual and cultural pastime.

4.3 THE LOCAL MICROCOSM – VILLA BADOER AND VILLA GRIMANI MOLIN

4.3.1 References to the Local Environment in a Cosmological Context

The architecture of the Veneto villa is renowned for expressing its bond with its natural environment, a concept that is often represented in the fresco programs of the villas. The presence of physical components in the structure of the rural villa such as pigeonholes, *barchesse*, wine cellars and water fountains expresses the necessities and the challenges

¹³⁰ For a history of tarot cards and their use in the western world since the fourteenth century, including their educative use and occult practice, see: Giordano Berti, *Storia dei tarocchi. Verità e leggende sulle carte più misteriose nel mondo* (Milano: Mondadori 2007). On the birth of cartomancy see esp. chapter V, 93-110.

that had to be dealt with in the construction and maintenance. In the decorative programs, corn, wheat and wine are often represented as the immediate agricultural outcomes of land cultivation within the cycle of nature, depicted as elements in grotesque schemes, on painted ceiling pergolas or through allegorical divinities such as Bacchus and Ceres.

At Fanzolo for example, Villa Emo was particularly dependent on the cultivation of the fields of crops in possession of the various members of the Emo family, an aspect raised evident in the architecture by the presence of the wide ramp leading to its entrance portico in the piano nobile and by its particularly long *barchesse*¹³¹. In the decoration, the personification of Agriculture welcomes the visitors above the *entrance portal of the loggia*¹³². Depictions of corn (**fig. 76**) and the small vegetal pergola that is painted on the vestibule ceiling are joined with the more general cosmological contextualization, which is embodied in the depiction of the universal themes of the four seasons and the four elements.

In Villa Barbaro, the presence of the *nymphaeum* is the greatest testimony for the dependence of the villa on the use of fresh, flowing water, which was directed and controlled by a hydraulic system that Palladio was proud to mention in this architectural treatise (**fig. 141**)¹³³. In the decoration, the *Stanza di Bacco* contains references to the agricultural environment through the figure of Bacchus, alluding to the crops and the vines. The prayer for the success of the crops is represented through the textual evocation of the house gods or guardians, the *geni* and the *lares*, who are also depicted helping Bacchus to produce wine from the grapes. In the *Sala dell'Olimpo* Bacchus and Ceres appear with their wine and crops on the north lunette, repeating the same concept (**figs. 79, 103**)¹³⁴.

¹³¹ Boucher, *Andrea Palladio*, 139.

¹³² Van der Sman, "L'iconologia di Villa Emo," 39, according to Ripa, *Iconologia*, 9-10.

¹³³ Palladio, *The Four Books on Architecture*, XIV, 51. «[...] This fountain forms a little lake that serves a fishpond; having left this spot, the water runs to the kitchen and then, having irrigated the garden to right and left of the road which gently ascends and leads to the building, forms two fishponds with their horse troughs on the public road; from there it goes off to water the orchard, which is very large and full of superb fruit and various wild plants.»

¹³⁴ Thomas Puttfarcken, "Bacchus und Hymenaeus: Bemerkungen zu zwei fresken in der Villa Barbaro in Maser," *Mitteilungen des Kunsthistorisches Institut in Florenz* 24 (1980): 1-14.

In Villa Pojana, which is also set in the midst of vast fields and dependent on nearby watercourses, the blessing for the prosperity of the lands appears in the ceiling of the entrance portico, where allegories of fortune, time and fame are surrounded by four river gods that appear at the four angles of the ceiling (**fig. 142**)¹³⁵. Another representative case is the early Palladian Villa Chiericati in Vancimuglio, Vicenza, commissioned by Giovanni Chiericati around 1554¹³⁶. To date, this rural villa is completely surrounded by a vast plane of agricultural terrains, all entirely dedicated to the cultivation of corn (**fig. 143**). The only decorative elements that have survived in it are five statues of Olympic divinities that crown the villa's temple front, and above all two prominent sculptures of Bacchus and Ceres in the niches of the entrance gate, which allude directly to the agricultural context of the natural environment (**figs. 144, 145**).

A significant portion in the cosmological decorative program of Villa Grimani Molin is dedicated to the symbolic representation of natural elements that appear in its immediate physical environment. The same type of iconographic references can also be identified in the fresco program of the neighboring Villa Badoer, reflecting the common challenges that Nature had provided to their architects and engineers in Fratta Polesine. The frescoes of both villas contain frequent citations of the presence of water in their surroundings in a variety of modes of representation. These citations allude to the hydraulic interventions that were necessary in the territories of the villas and their adjacent fields, and in particular, the lengthened project of the construction of the *scolador* of the Vespara, and the utilization of the private resurgence water provided by the *gorgo* for both households.

¹³⁵ Luciana Crosato Larcher, *Gli affreschi nelle ville venete del Cinquecento* (Treviso: Canova, 1962), 170-172.

¹³⁶ In 1574 the house was bought by Ludovico Porto. It was finished by Domenico Groppino ca. 1584. See: Boucher, *Andrea Palladio*, 122-123.

4.3.2 Villa Badoer

Upon entering the *piano nobile* of Villa Badoer from the loggia, in the central hall one encounters the figure of a river god immersed in a swampy landscape. The divinity is located above the back door that observes the garden and the fertile terrains of Fratta Polesine. Its location directs the attention of the viewer to the actual sight of the outside view that appears in the door and windows beneath it. As suggested by Puppi and Van der Sman, the figure may very well be an allegorical representation of the nearby Scortico River (**fig. 146**)¹³⁷.

In the same hall, on the south wall two landscapes act as theatrical backgrounds for two scenes that are dominated by the figure of Diana and her hounds (**figs. 102, 147**). In one of the scenes the divinity is accompanied by a water nymph and a pastor, in the other scene she is nude, and a satire hides behind a tree and spies on her. The representations can easily be interpreted in relation to the cultural activities that took place in the villa and its surroundings, which were considered as a sort of *arcadia*. Here, Diana the huntress represents the activity of hunting, above all of birds, which are depicted in one of the frescoes. Her presence recalls the hunting activities practiced by the patricians of Fratta Polesine in the vast territories of the Polesine and in the lands controlled by the Este dukes, and in particular the activities of Vincenzo Grimani and Lorenzo Emo, as recorded in the first chapter. As suggested by Lionello Puppi, the goddess Diana probably also symbolizes the activity of civilization and control over the savage nature of the site on behalf of the inhabitants of Fratta themselves¹³⁸.

As recognized by Puppi, Trinchieri Camiz and other scholars who have studied the fresco program, Diana, the pastors, the nymphs and the satires, are all typical protagonists of the pictorial, poetic and theatrical theme known as the *Pastoralia*¹³⁹. The pastoral genre was

¹³⁷ Puppi, *Villa Badoer*, 91; Van der Sman, *La decorazione a fresco*, 173.

¹³⁸ Puppi, *Villa Badoer*, 91-92.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*; Trinchieri Camiz, "Significati iconografici," 120; Ton, *Affreschi Badoer Grimani*, 68.

probably born in the Hellenistic period in the poetry of the Sicilian poet Teocrito, whose work was then revised by Virgil in his *Bucoliche* and *Georgiche*. Based on this cultural background, the pastoral fables (*'favole pastorali'*) were born in the cultured ambiances of the Late Renaissance. The theatrical genre was inspired also by the satirical drama of Greek origins, located in sites such as the forest and the countryside, inspired by the descriptions of Vitruvius¹⁴⁰. It is quite probable that the pastoral fables were discussed and also recited in the cultural ambience of Villa Badoer; this is usually indicated in scholarly literature in reference to the pastoral fable published in 1586 by Luigi Groto. In the tale, entitled *'La Calisto'*, a pastor named Endimione falls in love with Diana, in the observing company of several nymphs and satires that follow the goddess¹⁴¹. As mentioned in the first chapter of the current research, it is quite plausible that the villa could have served as a seat for the reunions of Giovanni Maria Bonardo's *Accademia dei Pastori Fratteggiani*.

In the north wall of the central hall, two more allegorical scenes demonstrate the strong relationship of the frescoes with the hydraulic interventions of land reclamations in Fratta. One of the scenes contains three nymphs in a pastoral landscape, alluding once more to the ideal of the *pastoralia* (**fig. 148**). Two of the nymphs are accompanied with musical instruments, perhaps recalling the concept of musical, natural and cosmological harmony. The third figure is a water nymph, leaning on a vase of pouring water.

The iconographic representation of the second scene is very particular: it seems likely that it is a unique allegorical representation of the specific hydraulic operation executed in Fratta Polesine, in the joint property of the Badoer and Grimani households (**fig. 149**). Here again, immersed in a humid and swampy landscape, Giallo had depicted two bearded male figures as typical depictions of river gods, which recall the *'Scortico'* depicted on the west wall. The river god on the right is leaning on the traditional attribute of vase with pouring

¹⁴⁰ Cesare Molinari, *Storia del teatro*, 14 ed. (Rome; Bari: Laterza, 2001), 93.

¹⁴¹ Luigi Groto, *La Calisto noua fauola pastorale. Di Luigi Groto cieco di Hadria. - Nuouamente stampata* (Venice: Fabio and Agostin Zoppini, 1586). While the descriptions do not directly allude to the content of Groto's tale, it should still be noted that the fable was published in 1586, but was recited in an earlier version in Adria as early as 1561.

water, so common for the representation of rivers. On the other hand, the second figure does not possess any vase. He conveys the impression of being somewhat younger, since his white hair and beard are cut particularly short. In addition, instead of the vase, he is positioned within a form that resembles a small puddle, which seems to derive directly from the linear water stream that pours out the vase of the other river god. The figure of the river god can therefore be identified as the Scortico River, or better, the local channel that passes from the direction of the town of Badia Polesine in the west, through the fields of the ancient Presciana, and pours its water into the Scortico between Villa Badoer and Villa Grimani Molin. The second figure can therefore represent a unique personification of the *gorgo* that was once located between the two villas, which was probably formed only a few short years earlier, in the scene as in reality, by the same subtle watercourse.

Other references to the theme of the dominance of water are evident in the significant diffusion of the maritime or lake-like representations in the landscapes depicted in the south east room. In the small room on the right (south), above a doorway a female figure represents an allegory of Victory (**fig. 150**)¹⁴². Above another door in the room a similar figure is depicted, that however holds a vase with pouring water, probably a water nymph (**fig. 151**). Read together because of their symmetrical disposition and similar rendering, the two allegories can be interpreted as a celebration of the victory in confronting with the hostile presence of the water in the local ambience of the villas in Fratta.

4.3.3 Villa Grimani Molin

The decoration above the entrance portal at the upper loggia in Villa Grimani Molin contains an allegorical blessing for the agricultural prosperity of the villa, which can be seen from a distance upon approaching it (**fig. 40**). Flanking the Molin coat of arms, to the right Ceres is represented with a cornucopia full of fruit and flowers, denoting the goddess as a

¹⁴² Ton, *Affreschi Badoer Grimani*, 56.

protector of the agriculture and as a divinity of Abundance. Juno is represented to the left with her attribute, the peacock, as a symbol of richness¹⁴³.

The grotesque decorations of Villa Grimani Molin and Villa Badoer both contain representations of gemstones and jewelry in a notable quantity and detail, referring to the classical and contemporary materials on precious stones and mineralogy, as mentioned earlier in this chapter. Until the end of the sixteenth century, these sources also sustained that crystal and several transparent gemstones were actually the fruit of water: water that was condensed in the cold, ice that was so cold that it could not melt again.

The word crystal itself derives from the Greek term that means 'ice'. Pliny the Younger claimed that crystal could be found in places where the chill is the harshest, and that the best crystal is born in places that are higher than the Alps¹⁴⁴. The Byzantine philosopher Psello recounts in his lapidary that rock crystal or quartz is similar to water, being perfectly transparent, and that because the ancients believed that crystal was water, they named it ice¹⁴⁵. In the same century a lapidary belonging to the Este family, conserved today in the Estense Library in Modena, remarks that crystal '*is water frozen in a place too cold*'¹⁴⁶. In Renaissance Venice Francesco Zorzi was also convinced that crystal and ice were the same substance, an opinion explained in the chapter 'Ice and Crystal' in his *De Harmonia Mundi*¹⁴⁷. In fact, this belief was so common that the first cases of denial appear only in the seventeenth century, for example in a chapter in the book of the Jesuit historian Daniello Bertolli from Ferrara, entitled "Twenty-second experiment: rock crystal was never either water or ice"¹⁴⁸.

¹⁴³ Van der Sman, *La decorazione a fresco*, 173.

¹⁴⁴ Pliny the Elder (Gaius Plinius Secundus), *The Natural History*, eds. J. Bostock et al. (London: Taylor and Francis, 1855), XXXVII, ii.

¹⁴⁵ Michele Psello, *Sulle proprietà delle pietre*, Costantinople, 11th century.

¹⁴⁶ Piera Tomasoni, ed., *Lapidario Estense* (Milano: Bompiani, 1990), XVII, 69. «Cristallo è una petra clara e bianca et è aqua zelata in tropo fredo logo e llà ò regna per onne tempo, in Alemagna»

¹⁴⁷ F. Zorzi, *L'armonia del mondo*, 1:7:20, 835-837 ("Il Ghiaccio e il Cristallo").

¹⁴⁸ Daniello Bertolli, *Del ghiaccio e della coagulatione* (Rome: il Varese, 1681). « Sperienza Ventesimaseconda: Il cristallo di rocca non fu mai acqua nè ghiaccio. »

In addition to the gemstones, the grotesques of both villas contain naturalistic representations of many birds and plants. In Villa Grimani Molin a particularly large variety of bird species and of autochthon plants of the Polesine, as demonstrated by a comparison with a manual of the varieties of common birds in the area (**figs. 152-154**)¹⁴⁹. The autochthon birds are painted in a great technical capacity and elegance especially in the ceiling of the *Studiolo*. In particular, the ceiling contains a representation of two identical falcons (**figs. 155, 155.1**). Their positions are not mirrored, disrespecting the accurate symmetrical disposition of the rest of the ceiling (**fig. 50**). The viewer is therefore required to pause, in order to notice the one unequal detail between the two falcons: a tiny hunting bell is tied to the paw of one of them, alluding to the favorite pastime activity of Vincenzo Grimani, of hunting with falcons.

The allusion to water is evident in the frequent appearance of river gods throughout the grotesques. Above the south windows of the central hall, a male river god (right) and a female water nymph (left) appear as a central element in the two grotesque schemes, recalling the presence of the 'Scortico' at the same position in Villa Badoer (**figs. 156, 157**). In the *Salottino*, the central elements in three similar grotesque schemes are swans, an aquatic battle and a dolphin (**figs. 158, 159**).

In the *Studiolo*, eight river gods dominate in the four angles of the ceiling vault. Eight allegorical hybrid figures appear beneath the river gods, whose appearance one would typically expect to find in grotesque decorations (**fig. 160**). Each creature is composed of an animal body with four legs and a human female chest and head. They resemble, for example, the luxurious female hybrids painted by Giulio Romano in the grotesque ceiling of the Cross-Vaulted Room in Palazzo Te, constituted of a lion body and female chest and head (**fig. 161**). The Fratta hybrids are reclining on a green grass surface, their exposed breasts are highly visible and their head is covered with a piece of dark cloth. Four of them

¹⁴⁹ Alessandra Giovannini and Davide Malavasi, *I gorgi del Polesine, singolari luoghi da scoprire* (Rovigo: Provincia di Rovigo, Assessorato alla Cultura, 2011).

communicate affectionately with a large and elegant aquatic bird that appears as part of the grotesque scheme of the ceiling. The figures seem to describe an allegorical aspect of the element of earth, complementary to the water element that is represented above them by the river gods. The breasts attached to the ground recall representations of *Natura lactans*, Mother Earth that feeds the land with her breasts, as represented in an allegory in Marcolini's *Le Sorti*, and in the melancholic figure at the *Sala dell'Olimpo* in Villa Barbaro at Maser (**figs. 104, 162**). The covered head adds a sacred dimension to the creatures, recalling scenes of sacred altars and sacrifice that often appear in grotesques.

The iconographical theme of the four seasons in the dining room once again represents nature, Mother Earth and her gifts, as do the various *putti* that appear throughout the grotesques in the villa carrying fruit baskets and corn. The same natural-agricultural context, as a blessing for prosperity, is the iconographical theme proposed in the four quadrangular grotesque schemes in the lower portions of the central hall.

The *Salottino* contains many representations of elements that are related to the agricultural fruit of the lands. Its five earthly, luxurious, reclining female nudes form a great visual contrast to their male counterparts in the *Studiolo*, who are instead four small, restrained, upright, fully dressed males of that represent celestial spheres. Each female is reclining with ease on her *triclinium*, wearing a golden belt and jewels on her hair and arms. Among them, the figure of Cleopatra, being killed by the serpent, may be interpreted as a moralistic reference against Luxury and over indulgence (**figs. 55, 163**). Above the females on the baldachins, there are representations of cornucopia, corn and wine (**figs. 164, 165**). The intricate grotesque program of the ceiling contains a selection of hybrids intermingled with the acanthus motif, animals, birds and river gods, eight young female figures holding cornucopia, fruit, plants and the Molin coat of arms (**fig. 54**). Four more female figures appear within the decorations in quadrangular spaces, perhaps the four goddesses Cybele, Diana, Athena and Ceres.

The visual representations in the frescoes elevate the physical engineering activities that were required for the construction of the villa to the level of a philosophical discourse on

the cosmological harmonic relationship between man and nature. The summary of the local cosmological allegory of Villa Grimani Molin is located in the *Salottino* on top of the fireplace, where an intricate grotesque scheme can be read from the bottom upwards, *dall'infimo al supremo* (**fig. 57, 166**). In a progressive order from earthly to spirituality, the acanthus and hybrids represent the primordial forces of nature and reproduction, purposely tinted by the artist in dark tones that represent the underground. They are blocked beneath the shade of an allegorical representation of Nature or of Mother Earth, a novel, bright, nude female, reclining on green grass on a warm red background. Above her, a celestial globe or armillary sphere represents the heavens, including the tropics and the zodiac constellations. The success of nature in the private sphere of Fratta Polesine is celebrated by two hybrids with a *putti* head and body and goat feet, one more female, one more male, probably *lares* that protect the household. Each one of these creatures is leaning on a water vase and holding crops of corn, corn and water being the main natural treasures in the environment of the villa. Governing the entire scheme, the celestial globe is crowned by the figure of the *Spiritus Mundi*, or the world soul, she who gives life, spirit, to the entire universe, and permits the ongoing development of nature and humankind.

5

A LIVING THEATER OF THE WORLD

The fresco program of Villa Grimani Molin contains many references to theater, alluding both to the activity of theatrical performance, and to the philosophical implications of Renaissance theatrical culture. These references reflect the reciprocal cultural relationship that existed during the sixteenth century between the development of the humanist theater and the development of the concept of the humanist villa. Some of the representations of theatrical references in the villa refer to similar familiar depictions in the tradition of the Veneto villa, while others are unique in their subject matter and philosophical elaboration; all of these elements deserve a unified examination within the interpretation of the cosmological iconographical decorative program.

5.1 HUMANISM, THEATER AND THE VENETO VILLA

5.1.1 The Formation of Theatrical Space and its Influence on Villa Architecture

In the humanist ambience of the Veneto in the sixteenth century, the space dedicated to theatrical performances began to develop from the private residences of the Venetian noblemen in a gradual process that brought to the construction of dedicated theatrical manufactures, a process whose culmination is usually seen in Palladio's *Teatro Olimpico*. At the same time, the architecture and decorative programs of the villas and palaces continued to demonstrate an appreciation of theatrical culture on their own behalf, and in particular of the practice of classical theater and its cosmological symbolism.

As an integral part of the rediscovery of classical antiquity, Classical Theater was studied, written and practiced in the humanist circles of the Veneto in the Early Modern period. The

first comedies that were printed in Venice in 1518 not only expanded the knowledge of the Venetians of Classical Theater, but also provided an important contribution to the development of scenography¹. Their illustrations presented actors in front of architectural structures that resembled private residences, within colonnades and pavilions that constituted a classical interpretation of the late-medieval mansions. They offered a first model for the loggia that the theater of the beginning of the sixteenth century recovered and modernized². Throughout Italy, theatrical spectacles were initially performed inside already existing edifices, especially in the residences of the great dukes of Mantua, Ferrara, Florence and Milan. The development of an autonomous space for theatrical performances in the Veneto began when spectacles were performed in front of existing buildings whose façade came to serve as a theatrical backdrop, substituting the Classical *scaenae frons*.

The Loggia of the Odeon of Alvise Cornaro in Padua, constructed by Giovan Maria Flaconetto in 1524 is probably the architectural space that is most recognized in the Veneto for its function as a backdrop for theatrical performances. In 1526, Marin Sanudo wrote that three theatrical shows were performed in the courtyard of Palazzo Trevisan in the island of the Giudecca. In 1539 in Vicenza, in the courtyard of the palace of Francesco da Porto, Sebastiano Serlio constructed a mobile theater for a comedy for a *compagnia della calza*. In 1542 in the *sestiere* of Cannaregio in Venice, in a building still under construction, the comedy *Talanta* of Aretino was represented by the Compagnia della Calza dei Sempiterni in an apparatus that whose construction was directed by Giorgio Vasari.³

Palladio is the architect who is most renowned for his influence on the definition and characterization of theatrical architecture in sixteenth century Venice. His studies of the

¹ The comedies of Plautus, published in Venice by M. Sessa and P. de' Ravani in 1518, and Terentius (Lione: Trechsel, 1493; Strasburgo: Grüniger, 1496; Venice: Rusconi, 1518 and G. de Fontaneto, 1524).

² Ludovico Zorzi, *Il teatro e la città. Saggi sulla scena italiana* (Torino: Einaudi, 1977), 293.

³ *Ibid.*, 95, 98-99; Morresi, *Villa Porto Colleoni*, 136; Inge Jackson Reist, "Renaissance Harmony: The Villa Barbaro at Maser," (Ph.D. Diss., Columbia University, 1985, Ann Arbor: UMI, 1990), 284. Sanudo, Marin Sanudo, *I diarii*, XL, col. 789. «In questa sera, a la Zueca, in chè Trevixan, fo fatto uno bellissimo banchetto et recitate tre commedie, una per Cherea, l'altra per Ruzante e Menato e la vilanescha, l'altra per el Cimador et fiol di Zan Polio, bufona.»

Classical Theater were performed with Daniele Barbaro for the writing of the commentary of the architectural treatise of Vitruvius (1556, 1567). Their study of theatrical structures was extremely influential on humanist research on the subject, bringing to the formation of an interpretation of Classical Theater that Palladio employed in his temporary and permanent theatrical constructions. In the commentary for Vitruvius, Daniele and Palladio restored the building principles of the classical theater, and in the process of writing they conducted autonomous and encompassing research campaigns on theater structures in Verona, Vicenza and Pula. For example, in the commentary, Palladio's drawing for the theater is based on his study of the ruins of the Roman theater of Berga in Vicenza⁴.

Palladio's practical experience in constructing spaces for theatrical performances came almost entirely as a product of his involvement in the Accademia Olimpica of Vicenza, founded in 1555, of which he was one of the founding members. In 1561 he received from the academy the commission to construct a theater in the large fifteenth century salon of the Palazzo della Ragione, commonly known as the Basilica, for the representation of two theatrical performances written by his contemporaries: Alessandro Piccolomini's comedy *Amor costante*, recited in 1561, and *Sofonisba*, recited in 1562, the tragedy written by the Gian Giorgio Trissino (1478-1550), the Vicentine humanist that was Palladio's patron and instructor⁵. The performances are documented in two monochrome frescoes in the antechamber of the Teatro Olimpico. In Venice, in 1564-1565 Palladio constructed a large wooden theater for the *Compagnia della Calza degli Accesi*, either in the cloister of the Venetian convent of the Carità or in the courtyard of Palazzo Dolfin at Rialto. The structure, which was decorated by Federico Zuccari, was probably destined for permanent use. On 27

⁴ Nino Pirrotta and Elena Povoledo, *Music and the Theater from Poliziano to Monteverdi*, trans. K. Eales (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 327; Licisco Magagnato, "The Genesis of the Teatro Olimpico," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 14 (1951): 213; Reist, "Renaissance Harmony," 291. » Barbaro, *I dieci libri 1567*, 167: « di più siamo [*myself and Palladio*] aiutati dalle rovine di un teatro antico che si trova a Vicenza, tra li orti e le case di alcuni cittadini, dove si scorgono tre nicchie della scena [...] »

⁵ Trissino completed his tragedy in 1515, becoming the first original tragedy in Italian in imitation of the Senecan and Greek theater. Glynne Wickham, *A History of the Theatre* (Oxford: Phaidon, 1985), 102; Nicola Magini, "Il teatro Veneto al tempo della controriforma," in Brunello and Lodo, *Luigi Groto e il suo tempo*, 125-126.

February 1565 the tragedy *Antigono* of the Conte di Monte was represented in it. At the same, time ca. 1564 Palladio and Zuccari were also collaborating as architect and painter in another project – Giovanni Grimani’s renovation of the façade and Grimani chapel in the church of San Francesco della Vigna⁶. In 1579-1580 Palladio designed and began to construct the Teatro Olimpico, again for the commission of the Vicentine academy. The building was completed in 1583-1584 after his death by Vincenzo Scamozzi. It was inaugurated in March 1585 with the presentation of *Oedipus Tyrannus* by Sophocles, which was translated into vulgar by the Venetian senator and poet Orsatto Giustiniani (1538–1603), and also represented within the monochromes of the theater’s antechamber⁷.

Parallel to the evolvment of the autonomous structure for performance of Classical Theater, the design principles of the ancient theaters seem to have left their own imprints on the design concepts of the Renaissance Villa. Daniele Barbaro and Palladio formed their experience in stage design contemporarily with their research of the ancient villas while working on the commentary for the Vitruvian treatise. Palladio himself received his education in classical and contemporary Roman architecture when in the 1530’s he became followed by Giongiorgio Trissino, and in 1541 he performed a first trip to Rome⁸. Theatrical stylistic elements were in fact considered as an important component in the Renaissance ideal of the Roman villa *all’antica*⁹. Already in Classical Rome, Pliny the Elder defined a metaphorical relationship between the structure of a theater and his villa in Tusculum, describing the site as an “immense amphitheater”¹⁰. The villa of Emperor Hadrian near Tivoli

⁶ « *mezzo teatro di legname a uso di colosseo*», which was destructed in a fire in 1630. Magini, “Il teatro Veneto,” 125; Pirrotta and Povoledo, *Music and the Theater*, 327. T Foscari and Tafuri, *L’armonia e i conflitti*, 149.

⁷ Wickham, *A History of the Theatre*, 103; Magini, “Il teatro Veneto,” 130.

⁸ Ackerman, *Palladio’s Villas*, 3, on the relationship of Palladio’s architecture with Classical monuments in Rome.

⁹ Reist, “Renaissance Harmony,” 270. For the Renaissance Roman villa *all’antica* see discussion and bibliography above, chapter III, section 3.2.1, note 35.

¹⁰ Pliny the Younger, *Letters* (London: W. Heinemann; Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1915), V.vi, 1, 380f. « *Magnam capies voluptatem, si hunc regionis situm ex monte prospexeris. Neque enim terras tibi, sed formam aliquam ad eximiam pulcritudinem pictam videberis cernere: ea varietate, ea descriptione quocumque inciderint oculi reficientur.* » Pliny the Younger, *The Letters with Observations*, V.6. «You would be most agreeably entertained by taking a view of the face of this country from the mountains: you would

contained a famous maritime theater that was known already during the Renaissance, and that was probably also seen by the two humanists in their visits to the area. Rome also offered them an opportunity to study the modern architecture of the villas and palaces of the great popes and cardinals. A conceptual and practical relationship with the structure of the Classical Theater could be identified in the courtyard of the Villa Belvedere in the Vatican (Bramante, for Julius II and later Pirro Ligorio for Pius VI), in Villa Madama (Raphael, 1518) and in Villa Giulia (Jacopo Barozzi da Vignola, 1555). The references appear as part of the *all'antica* character of the villas, demonstrating the theatrical metaphor in their architecture and design characteristics, while Villa Madama also contains an actual theater¹¹.

Together, Daniele and Palladio were able to comprehend a theatrical ideal that they retained similar to what the ancient Romans expressed in the architecture of their villas and theaters¹². The practical results of this experience can be identified in the programs of some of the villas designed by Palladio, dedicating a particular attention to the theme in the plan of Villa Barbaro. The theatrical design principles employed by Palladio included general formal references, such as the use of perspective views, and choosing a privileged position that dominated the landscape¹³, or the incorporation of elements that symbolize the components of the Greek Theater such as the *cavea* and the *scaenae frons*¹⁴. Barbaro and Palladio also demonstrated their appreciation of a culture that assigns cosmological

imagine that not a real, but some painted landscape lay before you, drawn with the most exquisite beauty and exactness; such an harmonious and regular variety charms the eye which way soever it throws itself. »

¹¹ For Villa Madama see: David R. Coffin, "The Plans of the Villa Madama," *The Art Bulletin* 49, 2 (Jun. 1967): 118-119; Reist, "Renaissance Harmony," 276-280. For Villa Giulia see: John Coolidge, "The Villa Giulia: A Study of Central Italian Architecture in the Mid-Sixteenth Century," *The Art Bulletin* 25, 3 (Sep. 1943): 215. For the Belvedere see: James S. Ackerman, "The Belvedere as a Classical Villa," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 14, 1/2 (1951): 72-76, 83.

¹² Reist, "Renaissance Harmony," 296.

¹³ Echoing a similar affirmation by Pliny, Palladio wrote in regard to the Rotonda «circondata da... amenissimi colli che rendono l'aspetto di un molto grande Theatro. » Andrea Palladio, *I Quattro libri di Architettura* (Venice: Domenico de' Franceschi, 1570), II, iii.

¹⁴ Azzi Visentini, "Daniele Barbaro e l'architettura," 409-410; Reist, "Renaissance Harmony," 298; Pierre de la Ruffiniere du Prey, *The Villas of Pliny from Antiquity to Posterity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 15, 20-22; Richard Turner, *The Vision of Landscape in Renaissance Italy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1966), 194-195.

symbolic interpretations to the architecture of the Classical Theater, a theme that was introduced to Western architectural theory by Vitruvius and elaborated within the humanist culture of sixteenth century Venice.

5.1.2 *Theatrum Mundi*: Theater, Cosmology and the Humanist Villa

Essentially, the symbolic interpretation of theatrical architecture in a cosmological key reflects similar tendencies within the practice of theater itself. As in ancient Greece, during the Renaissance theatrical performances, treating mundane issues such as politics or private lives, were often interpreted in an allegorical, moralistic manner, as representatives of the large-scale human situation. Theater therefore received a cosmological contextualization, and was considered as an allegorical microcosm.

Luigi Groto, who was known for his playwriting skills just as much as he was remembered for his humanist activities, consciously and purposefully treated his own plays as allegories to the larger-scale events of nature as a macrocosm. For instance, his dedication of his pastoral fable *La Callisto* to Duke Alfonso II d'Este opens with a detailed encyclopedic listing in which each pagan divinity is matched with its corresponding plant and animal. In the dedication of another comedy, *La Alteria*, to Giovanni Maria Bonardo, he opened with a discourse about the sun's shadow, after which he turned to present his play as an allegory to nature, as he explicitly denoted: '*as in natural philosophy...*'¹⁵. The genre of *pastoralia* was perceived by Groto as a discussion about nature and fantastic creatures, and he considered theater, nature, and humanity as different aspects of the same concept.

The kind of thought expressed by Groto represents the general Renaissance conception as the theater as a metaphor for the world. The idea, denoted '*Theatrum mundi*', refers to a concept of 'a play within a play', according to which human beings in the world-macrocosm

¹⁵ Groto, *La Calisto noua fauola pastorale*, dedication to Duke Alfonso II d'Este, 1 September 1580; *Ibid.*, *La Alteria: comedia noua di Luigi Grotto Cieco d'Hadria dedicata al molto illustre sig. conte e caualier il sig. Gio. Maria Bonardo Fratteggiano*. Venice (Fabio and Agostin Zoppini, 1587), dedication to Bonardo.

and the inhabitants of the villa-microcosm, are perceived as actors within a universal theater, who operate under the observing eyes of the forces from above: may these forces be god, a pagan divinity or any sort of mystical entity. The immediate moralizing lesson of such a conception was that the controlling audience from above conditioned the human beings to behave according to the Renaissance values of good behavior¹⁶.

The metaphor of the *Theatrum mundi* was openly and naturally welcomed into the decorative aesthetics of the Renaissance villa in the Veneto. Having already defined the relationship villa-microcosm and villa-theatre, representing theater as a microcosm in villa architecture and decoration was simply the definition of the third side of a conceptual equilateral triangle that was drawn between the villa, the theater and the microcosm.

The fresco program of Villa Barbaro contains one of the more coherent iconographical interpretations for the concept of the villa as *theatrum mundi*. Beneath the cosmological description of the universe in the *Sala dell'Olimpo*, a baldachin contains human figures that represent the household members, but that are in fact part of the cosmological scheme (**fig. 66**). They are the living members of the microcosm that is the villa, who fulfill their cosmic role by behaving according to the values and virtues of the Renaissance patricians, which are in turn described in the four ceiling allegories of the other frescoed rooms¹⁷.

In Fratta Polesine, the ceiling of the Dining Room in Villa Grimani Molin contains a related iconographic layout that shall be discussed in detail ahead in the current chapter.

¹⁶ An extensive bibliography exists for the *Theatrum mundi*, which was a particularly important concept in sixteenth century England and in Shakespearian Theater. To cite two of the most classical texts on the subject: Richard Bernheimer, "Theatrum Mundi," *The Art Bulletin* 38 (1956): 225-247; Frances A. Yates, *Theater of the World* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1969), esp. 164-165.

¹⁷ The idea has been proposed and studied by: Reist, "Renaissance Harmony," chapter IV; summarized in: *Ibid.*, "Divine Love' at the Villa Barbaro," 627.

5.1.3 The *Theatrum Mundi* as a Philosophical Extension to the World Diagram

In the humanist ambience of Venice in the sixteenth century, the connection of the villa with the theatrical metaphor could also be understood on the basis of a more elaborate philosophical concept. Within the academic discourses, the concept of the *Theatrum mundi* had been perceived as an encompassing definition of humanist disciplines, which included theater, cosmology, architecture and the art of memory. All of these themes were interpreted in regard to their relationship with nature. Their common denominator was their relevance to the theory of harmonic proportions.

5.1.3.1 Harmonic Proportions in Villa and in Theater Architecture

In architectural history, Rudolf Wittkower is famously credited for having demonstrated how the principle of harmony, which also is the basis of all world diagrams, had become fundamental principle in Renaissance architectural theory. According to cosmological principles which were elaborated by Pythagoras and Plato, the harmony between musical notes was considered to express the harmony that is embodied in Nature. Their theory of mathematical proportions defined the relationships between small integers, the harmony of musical sounds, and the harmony of the universe¹⁸. In Renaissance architectural aesthetics, it had become a known practice, theorized and practiced as early as the mid-fifteenth century by Alberti, to incorporate the measurements of the building-microcosm into a single system of proportions that corresponded to musical harmonic proportions¹⁹.

For Daniele Barbaro and Palladio, the work on the façade of the church of San Francesco della Vigna represented the first practical experience of in the field of application of harmonic proportions to architecture, following the guidelines provided by Francesco Zorzi. Daniele considered it an essential foundation of the discipline, expanding on the theme in his commentary to Vitruvius²⁰. Palladio was the first to apply harmonic proportions to secular

¹⁸ Wittkower, *Architectural Principles*, 91-92, 97, 103.

¹⁹ Leone Battista Alberti, *L'Architettura (De re aedificatoria)*, Latin text and Italian trans. G. Orlandi, notes and intro. P. Portoghesi, 2 vols (Milano: Il Polifilo, 1966), IX, vi, 824-834 ("Ornamenti per edifici privati").

²⁰ Wittkower, *Architectural Principles*, 113, 119-120

architecture and to all the parts of a building, not limiting himself to a single element such as a façade²¹. Nevertheless, research conducted in recent years on Palladio's villas has shown that in practice, his interest in architectural proportion was actually quite limited, especially in the years that preceded the construction of Villa Barbaro²². In Villa Barbaro, the desire to adapt the program to the requirements of Daniele is highly noticeable, since the numbers that appear in Palladio's drawing contain completely harmonic proportions²³.

The association between architecture and universal harmony appears as early as the first century AC, when Vitruvius defined the existence of a relationship between the architecture of the theater and of the astrological map of the universe, claiming that the structure of the theater represented the proportions of the universe²⁴.

The first in the Renaissance to associate between the architecture of the Vitruvian theatre and the cosmological diagrams of the universe was probably the Friulian magus Giulio Camillo Delminio (1479-1544)²⁵. In his most influential essay, *La idea del Teatro*, Camillo introduced his famous memory theater (*'teatro della memoria'*), a conceptual *macchina del mondo* which was roughly based on the form and symbolism of the Vitruvian theater²⁶.

²¹ As Alberti for example, when planning the church façade of Santa Maria Novella in Florence.

²² Deborah Howard and Malcolm Longair. "Harmonic Proportion and Palladio's 'Quattro Libri'," *The Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 41, 2 (May 1982): 119; Branco Mitrovic and Ivana Djordjević, "Palladio's Theory of Proportions and the Second Book of the 'Quattro Libri dell'Architettura'," *The Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 49, 3 (September 1990), 279, 292.

²³ Howard and Longair, "Harmonic Proportion," 119; Wittkower, *Architectural Principles*, 111-112, 118-119.

²⁴ Vitruvius, *The Architecture in Ten Books*, V, vi, 1.

²⁵ For Camillo's biography, his theater and his relationship with some of the most prominent humanist figures of his time see: Frances A. Yates, *The Art of Memory* (1966; reprint, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1972), VII; Sylvie Béguin, "Two Notes on Decorations in the Galerie François I at Fontainebleau," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 57 (1994): 270-278; Giuseppe Barbieri, "La natura discente: Daniele Barbaro, Andrea Palladio e l'arte della memoria," in *Palladio e Venezia*, ed. L. Puppi (Florence: Sansoni, 1982), 29-54; Loredana Olivato, "Per il Serlio a Venezia: documenti nuovi e documenti rivisitati," *Arte Veneta* 25 (1971): 284-291; *Ibid.*, "Dal Teatro della memoria al grande teatro dell'architettura: Giulio Camillo Delminio e Sebastiano Serlio," *Bollettino C. I. S. A. Andrea Palladio* 21 (1979): 233-252.

²⁶ The text was written shortly before his death and first printed in Venice in 1550. The little number of texts that remains from Camillo's literary production was collected in a codex that was edited by Ludovico Dolce in 1552. Giulio Camillo Delmino, *G. Camillo. Tutte le opere*, ed. Ludovico Dolce, 2nd ed (Venice: Gabriel Giolito de Ferrari, et fratelli, 1554). There is still a certain debate whether the theater actually existed or was just a mental image; the physical reconstruction of Francis A. Yates has been subject to much scholarly debate. Béguin, "Two Notes on

The memory theater was Camillo's personal elaboration of a world diagram through an allegorical language in the tradition of the Renaissance emblem. Each of the theater's seven grades described a different phase of creation combining Christian, Neo-Platonist, Hermetic and Cabalistic concepts, in the typical syncretistic attitude that characterized many of the mystic intellectuals in the Veneto during the sixteenth century. Even after Camillo's death, the text enjoyed a fortunate distribution in the course of the sixteenth century. It appeared in a printed edition with other writings by Camillo, edited by Ludovico Dolce in 1552, and was also studied in the meetings of the *Accademia della Fama*.

Camillo described the memory theater as a physical a wooden structure containing an ordered series of visual or mental images that was to function as a mnemonic instrument, assisting the orator in the memorization of his speech. Much like the ordered proportion and harmonic distribution of a successful rhetorical discourse, the theater reflects the world of divine, harmonic proportions in its architecture, and also in its series of images.

5.1.3.2 Cosmology, Architecture and the Art of Memory

In sixteenth century Venice, the awareness of the relationship between mnemonics and cosmology was by no means unique to Camillo. Mnemonics, the art of memory, was known to the Renaissance humanists from the Classical rhetoricians of the Roman Republic, who emphasized the fundamental role of human memory in the conservation of all five parts of rhetoric, namely Quintilianus, Cicero, and the anonymous *Ad Herennium*²⁷. The mnemonic technique associates the memory to a series of places (*loci*), which are provided by the choice of an adequate architectural structure. Visual images (*imagines*) are then placed in each one of the *loci*. The *imagines* are the frescoes and various ornaments of the building;

Decorations," 273; Douglas Radcliff-Umstead, "Giulio Camillo's Emblems of Memory," *Yale French Studies* 47 (1972): 47; Olivato, "Dal Teatro della memoria," 236-239; Yates, *The Art of Memory*, 135, 138-140.

²⁷ The five parts of rhetoric are described as: *inventio, dispositio, elocution, memoria, pronuntiatio*. In particular the texts referred to were Cicero's *De oratore*, Quintilianus' *Institutio oratoria* and the anonymous *Ad Herennium*. See: Marcus Tullius Cicero, *De oratore*, trans. E. W. Sutton and H. Rackham (London: Loab Classical Library, 1942); Marcus Fabius Quintilianus, *Institutio oratoria*, trans. H. E. Butle, (Cambridge: Harvard University press, 1920); *Ad Herennium*, trans. H. Caplan (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989).

their role is to provoke the mind to remember certain ideas or words that regard the argument of the speech. According to the classical sources, the chosen edifices should possess various and interesting components and mediocre, perceivable dimensions, and images that are easily recognizable and easy to memorize²⁸.

The relationship between cosmology and mnemonics was studied and discussed within the academies, based on the identification the concept of order as the common denominator that is fundamental for the existence both disciplines. For instance, Francesco Patrizi, member of the *Accademia della Fama*, discussed the foundation of a new rhetoric, recognizing the correspondence between the structures and the development of the human discourse, the structure of the universe, and the development of the divine ideas. As explained by Tafuri and Bolzoni, the analogy is in fact a renewed edition of the analogy between the macrocosm and the microcosm, which also had echoes in the writings of Paolo Manuzio and Federico Badoer, who were members of the same academy²⁹. In his text, Paolo Manuzio emphasized the importance of the *dispositio* in the oration, that is, the order in which the material is disposed. Celebrating order as a human element *par excellence*, derived from the first order of God, he noted that the love for order is the fruit of the imprint of God himself, which he had left both in Man and in the order of the universe³⁰.

²⁸ For the art of memory see: Paolo Rossi, *Clavis universalis. Arti mnemoniche e logica combinatoria da Lullo a Leibniz* (Milan and Naples: Ricciardi, 1960); Yates, *The Art of Memory*; Bolzoni, *La Stanza della memoria*.

²⁹ Paolo Manuzio, "Discorso intorno alle cinque parti dell'oratore," in *Lettere uolgarie di m. Paolo Manutio diuise in quattro libri* (Venice: Manuzio, 1560), 38-39; Tafuri, "Daniele Barbaro e la cultura scientifica," 55-81; Bolzoni, *La Stanza della memoria*, 10.

³⁰ *Ibid.* «Dio creò l'huomo, sì come creò il mondo: e sì come prima il mondo con meravigliosa temperatura creò, così dappoi, osservando il medesimo ordine, creò l'huomo: accioché l'huomo al mondo, et il mondo all'huomo si rassomigliasse, e l'huomo e l'altro rassomigliassero a lui. »

Daniele Barbaro was interested in rhetoric and in mnemonics in particular³¹. Like his friends in the *Accademia della Fama*, in his dialogue *Della Eloquenza* (1557), he emphasized the importance of mnemonics, or artificial memory, in respect to the memory of the written word. According to Daniele, artificial memory is meant to assist in resolving the problem of memory, which is perceived as a moral problem of imbalance. '*Nasce la memoria dal bene ordinare*': unlike the eternal order of nature, human beings are mutable and possess contrasting desires. Their memory is the only stable thing within their fragile structure that is guarded by nature, and which preserves the order of the universe³².

As stressed by Giuseppe Barbieri, the awareness of the relationship between mnemonics and architecture was also highly acknowledged by the Renaissance humanists. Serlio, for example, referred to the measure of efficiency of the writings of Vitruvius, remarking that anyone could notice that the architecture itself '*wrote better and more learnedly than him*'. Similar references can also be found in the writings of Alvisio Cornaro and Gian Giorgio

³¹ In 1542 he edited the Dialoghi of Sperone Speroni, in which he himself participated in discourses regarding the problems of the art of memory. In 1544 he published Artistotle's Rhetoric, and in his comments he related to the mnemonic techniques. In 1557 he published his own dialogue on eloquence, which he wrote in the 1530's, when he was still a student at the University of Padua. Sperone Speroni, *Dialogi di M.S. Speroni nuovamente ristampati, & con molta diligenza riveduti & corretti* (Venice: Aldus, 1543); Daniele Barbaro, *Della eloquenza, dialogo del reuerendiss. monsignor Daniel Barbaro...Nuouamente mandato in luce da Girolamo Ruscelli* (Venice: Vincenzo Valgrisiso, 1557). See also: G. Barbieri, "La natura discente,"³⁴.

³² Barbaro, *Della eloquenza*, 7, 12: « ARTE. Chi s'accorgerebbe che in alcuna di voi, o Anime, io mi ritrovassi, se non fusse la memoria come guardiana e tesoriera di tutte le parti dello ingegno? Onde con verità si dice che tanto sa l'uomo quanto si ricorda. Nasce la memoria dal bene ordinare, l'ordine dallo intendere e dal pensiero. Però posso io con le immagini in alcuni luoghi ripote artificiosamente indurre la memoria delle cose. NATURA. A lungo andare tu lei sei più tosto di danno che di pro alcuno; però non mi piace che uno esercizio di essa memoria che si fa mandando molte cose a mente. ARTE. Che sai tu di esercizio, o Natura, l'ordine della quale è sempre conforme? Il tuo fuoco sempre tira all' insù, la tua terra per lo dritto all'inghiù scende, e col suo giusto peso al centro rovinando, a modo alcuno non si può usare alla salita. [...] Ogni tua legge è impermutabile. [...] Ma l'anime da uno in altro contrario trapassando, buone di ree e ree di buone divengono. NATURA. [...] Ma ben ti dico che la memoria da me con molto cura è ben guardata nella composizione dell'uomo. » See also: G. Barbieri, "La natura discente," 33; *Ibid.*, *Andrea Palladio e la cultura veneta del Rinascimento* (Rome: Il Veltro, 1983), 182.

Trissino. In some of the later writings of Palladio, he referred to Daniele Barbaro's comments on the importance of knowledge and on the advantages of mnemonics³³.

Much like in classical and medieval times, Daniele's thoughts regarding mnemonics also considered the virtue of Prudence³⁴. In the sixteenth century, the virtue of Prudence was also acknowledged as one of the most important characteristics of the architect³⁵. According to Daniele, Prudence was considered essential for the architect who had a good sense of judgment, '*buon giuditio*'. Good judgment was the main competence needed from the architect, since it enabled him to deal with the extensive range of subjects that he must know as part of his job. The importance of good judgment was also stressed by Sebastiano Serlio, who wrote in his treatise how the undisciplined architects behaved in a manner that was opposite to the good judgment and prudence of the proper, successful architect³⁶.

The virtue of Prudence therefore received an additional significance, as the unifying element between memory and architecture, which created a stable combination, imitating the order of nature³⁷. Just as Prudence was considered essential for memory, for Daniele, the most important instrument in the hands of the architect who possesses good judgment was the virtue of Prudence. In order to realize it, in his Vitruvian commentary he proposed a specific methodology, the art of memory³⁸.

³³ Sebastiano Serlio, *Sebastiano Serlio on Architecture*, trans. V. Hart and P. Hicks (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), III. XLVI. «niuno si vede che l'architettura habbia scritto meglio e più dottamente di lui. » G. Barbieri, *Andrea Palladio e la cultura*, 85, 212.

³⁴ Yates, *The Art of Memory*, 36.

³⁵ For the importance of Prudence in architecture in the Veneto during the sixteenth century, and in particular for Sebastiano Serlio and Andrea Palladio, see G. Barbieri, "L'architetto prudente" in *Andrea Palladio e la cultura*, 199-246.

³⁶ Serlio, *Sebastiano Serlio on Architecture*, III.XLVI; G. Barbieri, *Andrea Palladio e la cultura*, 84.

³⁷ G. Barbieri, "La natura discente,"34.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 35. Barbaro, *I dieci libri 1567*, I.i, 10: «Il giudicare, è cosa da prudente, la prudenza compara le cose seguite [...] le cose seguite per memoria si hanno, però è necessario al ufficio del giudicare, il quale conviene all'Architetto, haver la memoria ferma delle cose passate, ma la memoria ferma si fa per la lettione perche le cose stanno ne gli scritti fermamente, però bisogna, che lo Architetto habbia la prima Arte, detta Cognitione di lettere, cioè del parlare e dello scrivere drittamente, fermasi adunque la memoria; con la lettione de commentarij, il nome stesso lo dimostra, perciò che commentario è detto, come quello ch'alla mente commenta le cose: & è succinta, & breve narratione delle cose, la dove con la brevità sovviene alla memoria,

In Daniele's professional oeuvre, the first practical experience in uniting cosmology, architecture and the art of memory can be identified his design for the *Orto Botanico*, the botanical garden for the Faculty of Medicine in the University of Padua, dating to 1545. The plan has been recognized by scholars as an abstract, harmonic diagram of the universe, for its division of a circle into four equal parts, and to additional sub-divisions, as an analogy to the Pythagorean division of the world into groups of four³⁹. Loredana Olivato has demonstrated that the garden also functions as a mnemonic structure, destined for the specific context of the medicine faculty, for the creation of a universal catalog of medical plants and herbs⁴⁰.

Cosmology, architecture, rhetoric – in the metaphor of the *Theatrum mundi* of Giulio Camillo these three themes are united under the concept of harmonic proportions, and within a structure of a Classical Theater. It is practically unthinkable that Daniele Barbaro, a devoted churchman and renowned Aristotelian, would support the contents of Camillo's memory theatre, which contain many esoteric implications and reflect the extremely mystical, even heretic philosophy of Camillo. Nevertheless, some noticeable philosophical traces of the *mental structure* of the theater, emptied out of its contents, are apparent in both Daniele's writings, as well as in the decoration of Villa Barbaro.

Daniele, as a careful 'conventionalist', refused to accept the existence of causal relations between the sign and the signified. For this reason, his application of harmonic proportions in architecture and rhetoric was performed for the advantage given by their numerical significance, not mystical. In regard to rhetoric, in his *Della Eloquenza*, he spoke about the ability to succeed in giving a speech thanks to the numerical value of the pronounced words, which he defined as purely physical qualities: '*measured with the time of uttering*,

bisogna adunque leggere, & le cose lette per la mente rivolgere, altrimenti male n'haverebbe della inventionione delle lettere, come dice Platone, perciò che gl'huomini fidandosi negli scritti si fanno più pigri, & negligenti. »

³⁹ Margarita Azzi Visentini, *L'Orto botanico di Padova e il giardino del Rinascimento* (Milano: Il polifilo, 1984); Reist, "Renaissance Harmony," 131-134, with additional bibliography.

⁴⁰ Olivato, "Dal Teatro della memoria," 247.

*the number which we reason is born, a true child of the composition and terms of speech*⁴¹. Similarly, harmonic proportions in architecture simply reflected the harmony in nature, and thus, created a more beautiful architectural manufacture⁴².

5.1.3.3 *Theatrum Mundi* and the World Diagram in Villa Barbaro

The ceiling of the *Sala dell'Olimpo* in Villa Barbaro represents the traditional world diagram according to Aristotle and Ptolemy, of the geocentric universe with its ten spheres and its four elements (**fig. 68**). Within the diagram, several iconographical details allude to some of the specific ideas that Daniele associates with architecture, thus, reflecting the philosophical relationship between cosmology and architecture.

Architecture, above all, is a creation process that emulates the process of the creation of things by nature⁴³. The *putto* that accompanies Neptune is holding a seashell, is a common allusion to the element of water. The shell, easily identified as a symbol of the golden mean, is also a reference to the concept of harmonic proportions, that unifies the world and that is desired in the creation of an architectural masterpiece.

Another *putto* in the celestial realm accompanies Venus; the text in his tables reads a paraphrase of a verse from the Book of Proverbs (8, 15): '*Per me legum conditores justa decernunt*'. According to Luciana Crosato Larcher and Julian Klieman, the reference alludes to the proper judgment that Divine Wisdom performs, relating to the political roles of

⁴¹ Mitrovic, "Paduan Aristotelianism," 679-680. Daniele Barbaro, *I dieci libri dell'Architettura di M. Vitruvio tradutti et commentati da Monsignor Barbaro* (Venice: Francesco Marcolino, 1556), 42. « misurato col tempo del proferire, partorisce il numero del qual ragioniamo, vero figliuolo della composizione e dei termini del parlare.» His expectations from artificial memory were quite practical, as he expressed them in the words of Art in his dialogue: Barbaro, *Della eloquenza*, 35: « con le imagini in alcuni luoghi riposte artificiosamente indurre la memoria delle cose. »

⁴² Wittkower, *Architectural Principles*, 119-120.

⁴³ Barbaro, *I dieci libri 1567*, I.iii, 26. «nell'Architettura dichiara la forma, la materia, la compositione delle opera, & imitando la natura per l'occulta virtù, che in lui si trova, dalle cose meno perfette alle più perfette, sempre discendente. »

Daniele and Marc'Antonio as ambassadors in the Republic⁴⁴. However, in the cosmological-architectural context, it is quite probable that the inscription alludes to the characteristic of the great architect, the *buon giuditio*: only with a good sense of judgment can the architect successfully reproduce the process of creation by Nature.

Eloquence, as the representative of rhetoric and the art of memory, also appears in the cosmological scene; it is the instrument proposed by Daniele for the realization of his Prudence, by the architect who possesses the *buon giuditio*.

In Renaissance tradition, eloquence is commonly represented by the moly, the flower given to Odysseus by Mercury before going to meet Circe, to protect him from her spells through the gift of eloquence⁴⁵. The story and the flower are famously depicted in many engravings in the various editions of Alciato's *Emblemata* under the motto '*Fecundia difficilis*' ('Eloquence is hard')⁴⁶. There, the moly is described in accordance with Homer, as containing a dark stem and white petals, and a small inflorescence in the center (**fig. 167**).

In the ceiling of the *Sala dell'Olimpo* Juno, representing air, holds a flower that has been rather generally identified as the lily, commonly associated with the Virgin Mary, and without providing an explanation for the choice (**fig. 168**)⁴⁷. The lily and the moly are in fact quite similar flowers; both of them contain white petals and a medium-sized stem. However, the petals of the lily are pointy at their edges and its pollens are yellow, while the petals of the moly have rounded edges and the flower contains white pollens with black ends; when the lily is closed its form is sharp and elongated, and the shape of the closed moly is round (**fig. 169**). The flower in the hands of Juno does not resemble the depictions of the lily by Veronese,

⁴⁴ Crosato Larcher, "Considerazioni sul programma di Maser," 248. This assumption is based on the identification of the figure at the centre of the world diagram as Divine Wisdom. However, the figure may instead be read as a unique personification of a solar eclipse, see above, chapter IV, section 4.1.2, note 4.

⁴⁵ Hom. *Od.* 10. 270ff.

⁴⁶ Andrea Alciato, *Emblemata* (Lyon, 1550), 195. « Antidotum Aëæ medicata in pocula Circes / Mercurium hoc Ithaco fama dedisse fuit. / Moly vocant, id vix radice evellitur atra, / Purpureus. sed flos, lactis & instar habet. / Eloquii candor facundiaque allicit omnes: / Sed multi res est tanta laboris opus. »

⁴⁷ Rigon, "I quattro elementi," 16.

who often paints the lily in scenes of the Announcement with its traditional characteristics (**figs. 170, 171**)⁴⁸. Juno's flower is clearly the moly, the flower of Eloquence, as it appears in the engravings by Alciato, with its loose, round petals and pollens with black ends.

Eloquence is also represented by the animals depicted by Veronese in the ceiling of the *Sala dell'Olimpo* and in the adjacent *Stanza del Cane*. The parrot, an obvious reference to eloquence, appears in Ripa's description of Eloquence⁴⁹. The other two animals, the dog and monkey, are not so clearly associated with eloquence. However, Ripa connects them with another issue that is related to art of speech, *Persuasion*: a woman who holds a rope with a three-headed animal that has the heads of a dog, a cat and a monkey⁵⁰. The three heads represent the three preparatory actions that are required by the orator. The first action, symbolized by the dog, is the *attentum parere*, obtaining the attention of the audience; the second action, symbolized by the cat, *benevolum parere*, creating good will for listening among the audience; the third head is symbolized by the monkey and represents the *docilem parere*, which is the presentation of the subject which the orator would like to argue about⁵¹. A small dog and a monkey appear on both sides of the ceiling vault, but the cat is absent. However, the same small dog calls the attention of the viewer to an identical dog that is depicted on the south wall of the *Stanza del Cane*; on the opposite wall, beneath the window overlooking the garden, Veronese painted a small cat (**figs. 172, 173**).

⁴⁸ For example in an *Annunciation* painting dated to 1558, shortly before painting the frescoes of the villa. Paolo Veronese, *Annunciation*, oil on canvas, 340x455cm, commissioned for the chapel of the Madonna del Rosario, SS. Giovanni e Paolo, Venice.

⁴⁹ Ripa, *Iconologia*, 127. « ELOQUENZA. Donna vestita di rosso [...] vi sarà ancora gabbia aperta con un papagallo sopra. [...] Il papagallo, è simbolo dell'eloquente, perché si renda meraviglioso con la lingua, & con le parole, imitando l'uomo, nella cui lingua solamente consiste l'esercizio dell'eloquenza. Et dipinge il papagallo fuori della gabbia, perché l'eloquenza non è ristretta a termine alcuno, essendo l'offitio suo di saper dire probabilmente di qualsivoglia materia proposta, come dice Cicerone nella Rettorica, & gl'altri, che hanno scritto prima, & dappoi. »

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 349. « PERSUASIONE. Una Matrona in habito honesto, con bella acconciatura di capo, sopra alla quale vi sia una lingua, sarà stretta con molte corde, & ligaccie d'oro, terrà con ambe le mani una corda, alla quale sia legato un'animale con tre teste, l'una di Cane, l'altra di Gatto, la terza di Scimia." »

⁵¹ Heinrich Plett, *Rhetoric and Renaissance Culture* (Berlin, New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2004), 510; Heinrich Lausberg, *Handbuch der literarischen Rhetorik: Eine Grundlegung der Literaturwissenschaft* (Stuttgart: F. Steiner, 1990), 150-157.

Although there exist no documents that testify the iconographical intentions of Daniele Barbaro, one is tempted to wonder whether the villa itself had been designed as a mnemonic instrument; if not physically, then least conceptually. It is difficult to ignore the fact that the villa and its decorations comply with the indications of classical mnemonics, as defined by Cicero, Quintilianus and the *Ad Herenium*. As a mnemonic *locus*, the villa is a spacious and luminous, but modestly dimensioned architectural structure. It contains different rooms and a garden with various sculptures. The mnemonic *imagines* may be each one of the sculptural or pictorial subjects that decorate the villa. The decorative scheme is similar in all of the rooms, thus creating order and harmony; yet no image or combination of images repeats itself more than once. In the cross-shaped hall, for example, each medallion contains a different equestrian, each *suonatrice* is different (**fig. 174**). The same idea continues in the exterior walls of the villa, where the sculptures of the *barchesse* and the pigeonholes create a uniform view, but each one of them describes a different figure (**fig. 175**). The fresco programs of other Palladian villas are not organized in such a clear manner, and it is often difficult to recollect where the various depictions are positioned, or where one image ends and the next image begins. In Villa Barbaro, the variety of images provides many mnemonic spaces, while the order, uniformity and clarity facilitate the memory. In accordance with the recommendations of Quintilianus, it is possible to imagine how the orator who tries to recall his speech walks through the rooms of the villa, and the images that he encounters in his walk, succeed in evoking his memory of the arguments in the right order

As explained above, the architecture of Villa Barbaro contains several elements that allude to the architecture of the Classical Theater recalling Vitruvius, especially in the employment of harmonic architectural proportions. Veronese's artistic style in the villa has also been recognized by scholars for its theatricality⁵². The iconographical significance of the fresco program as a *Theatrum mundi* appears through the depiction of the figures of the house

⁵² In certain cases, the artist even chose elements that appear in Palladio's designs for the Berga Theater in the Vitruvian commentary. See especially: Reist, "Renaissance Harmony," 482-485, 496; David Rosand, "Theater and Structure in the Art of Paolo Veronese," in *Painting in Sixteenth-Century Venice: Titian, Veronese, Tintoretto* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982), 145-181.

members, who fulfill their cosmic role in the world beneath the observing eyes of the gods. But above all, the metaphor of the *Theatrum mundi* appears in Villa Barbaro as a series of links between different humanist disciplines. It recalls the same concepts that were defined in the mental structure of Camillo's *Idea del Teatro*: a cosmological diagram, theater, architecture, rhetoric – all united by the concept of harmony.

5.1.4 Theater as a Humanist Activity in the Polesine

Theater must have had an important role within the rich cultural ambience of Fratta Polesine. Besides the fact that theatrical performances and literature constituted a great part of the intellectual activities of most of the academies of the Veneto, Fratta in particular enjoyed the constant presence of Luigi Groto and his playwright skills, and of renowned book publishers, above all Ludovico Dolce. In the culture of the academies, and especially in the *Accademia Olimpica* in Vicenza, the performance of theater was considered a highly cultured intellectual achievement, which reflected the growing interest of Renaissance culture in classical antiquity. However, at least in certain environments, theater tended to be considered as politically incorrect, as socially improper, and perhaps even as containing esoteric connotations – Fratta, as a place where ‘border-line’ cultural activities took place with relative liberty, may be no exception.

A hint for the possible theatrical activities of the Venetian noblemen in Fratta arrives from their close Venetian circle. Patriarch Giovanni Grimani was highly protective of his artistic heritage. In his last will, on 29 August 1592, he bequeathed his palace in Santa Maria Formosa to the four male sons of Vincenzo Grimani and Andriana Emo: Antonio the Bishop of Torcello, Zuanne, Domenico and Vettore. In addition to insisting that the property never be transferred and sold to people outside its close family circle, Giovanni dictated the strict condition that the palace shall not be used for activities of *'comedianti*,

where one can offend God and where very little honor is given to private persons⁵³. As noted by Marina Stefani Mantovanelli, this comment may refer to the specific theatrical interests demonstrated by some of the members of the Grimani family, of which Giovanni was critical, and perhaps tried to pose limits to⁵⁴.

By the end of the sixteenth century, actual theatrical performances had become naturally associated with the activities held in the humanist villa. This was due to the relationships between theater and villa culture and architecture, but also because the rural villa was an ideal place for pastime activities, as well as for activities that were better kept away from public eye. Significantly, Fratta Polesine is particularly remembered for the rich history of esoteric interests and heretic activities attributed to many of its inhabitants that took place especially during the mid-sixteenth century, which are discussed to length in the first chapter of the current thesis.

It is practically impossible to ignore the imposing presence of the two jongleurs that welcome the visitor upon entering the loggia of Villa Badoer (**fig. 176 and details**). The depictions allude to the joyous figures that promoted the entertainment activities of the *Compagnie della Calza*. These associations of young nobles that had an important social and cultural role in Venice during the fifteenth and sixteenth century, that typically engaged in the performance of comedies. Their appearance in Villa Badoer probably commemorates the personal activity of the villa's patrons as members of such associations, as documented by Marin Sanudo. In 1533, he mentioned Francesco Badoer and his brother-in-law Zorzi Loredan as two out of fourteen members of a *Compagnia della Calza dei Cortesi*⁵⁵.

⁵³ For Giovanni Grimani's will see: ASVe, *Testamenti, Vettore Maffei*, b. 658, n. 396 (29 August 1592). Published in: Mantovanelli, *Arte e committenza nel Cinquecento*, 51-56. « non lo possono mai vender ne impegnar ne divider ne dare in dote ne imprestare se non a figli, a fratelli, a sorelle, a generi e a soceri, e soprattutto non voglio che la ditta casa sia imprestata a comedianti, dove si vuol fare offese a Dio et dove si procura poco onore alle private persone »

⁵⁴ Mantovanelli, *Arte e committenza nel Cinquecento*, 37.

⁵⁵ Puppi, *Villa Badoer*, 19-21, 30 n. 29. Sanudo, *I diarii*, vol. LVII, cl. 550; LVIII, cll. 183-384.

Two young and mischievous jongleurs are also depicted in the fresco program of Villa Grimani Molin (**fig. 177**). They appear in the balcony at the ceiling of the dining room, and within an iconographical scheme that is in itself a representation of a *Theatrum mundi*. The depiction is a similar allusion to the central role of spectacle and entertainment as in Villa Badoer, and strongly suggests that also the third brother-in-law, Vincenzo Grimani, and his own heirs, may have been involved in similar theatrical activities.

As demonstrated ahead in the chapter, the two large epic or historical scenes that cover the lateral walls of the central hall in the villa are rendered as theatrical performances. In these scenes, as in many other occasions in the fresco program, the figures possess a vivid and expressive body language that is typically associated with theatrical culture. All of these indications imply that there was an active interest in theater on behalf of the inventors of the fresco program of Villa Grimani Molin, and it is not implausible that certain theatrical activities took place in both of the villas of Fratta Polesine, and in particular in Villa Grimani Molin.

5.2 MARRIAGE, REPRODUCTION AND THE THEATRICAL METAPHOR

5.2.1 The Cosmological Role of Marriage

The theatrical metaphor in Villa Grimani Molin emphasizes the *human* dimension of the overall cosmological iconographic theme, in which human beings were considered as active participants in the repeated creational cycles of the universe. This perception, reflected in the cosmological and social-cultural writings of the humanists in sixteenth century Venice, was based on the *timaeian* idea according to which all natural things such as plants, minerals and animals possess the force of self-reproduction, human beings being no exception. The importance of the regeneration of the human race was explained in Renaissance writings on cosmology through the influence of various classical authors and philosophers, usually

late Neo-Platonists, whose influences on the cosmological theories of the early modern culture were essential for encouraging the arrival of the Scientific Revolution.

The cosmological human potency and obligation to reproduce was defined by the Pythagorean Neo-Platonists as '*Generatio*', the last in a series of the six hierarchical forces, lights or energies that they regarded as the source for the creation of all the material and celestial things in the world. Francesco Zorzi dedicated an entire chapter in his treatise to a general discourse on the productive and creative powers of light⁵⁶, but the consideration of six specific forces as part of the late Neo-Platonist philosophy was recounted in Latin by Marsilio Ficino in his commentary to Plato's *Timaeus*⁵⁷, and later, highly accessible in the vulgar Italian language, in Giulio Camillo Delminio's *Theatro della memoria*⁵⁸. The first of the six forces, *Sol*, is associated with God in Christianity. The second, *Lux*, associated with Christ; *Lumen* is the force of the angels; *Splendor* is the primary material, the chaos; *Calor* is the World Soul, the *Spiritus mundi*, the breath of the world. Finally, *Generatio* is the creative force that is possessed by humans, the only thing they can create autonomously.

In another variation of the definition of the generative power of coupling and reproduction, what some philosophers defined as 'light', others described as 'love'. Empedocles in the third century AD was the first to describe the cause for the generation and corruption of all

⁵⁶ F. Zorzi, *L'armonia del mondo*, III: vi.

⁵⁷ Marsilio Ficino, *Platonis opera quae ad nos extant omnia per Ianvm Cornarivm Latina lingua conscripta Eiusdem Iani Cornarii eclogæ decem, breuiter et sententiarum et genuinæ verborum lectionis, locos selectos complectentes ; Additis Marsilii Ficini argumentis et commentariis in singulos dialogos cum indice rerum memorabilium elaboratissimo*, Ouvrage complet (Basel: officina Frobeniana, 1561), 703-727, in part. 707. «Sol, lux, lumen, splendor, calor, generatio, similiter unitas, bonitas, intellectus, anima, natura, corpus mundi, imago mundorum superiorum. Cap. X»

⁵⁸ Giulio Camillo Delminio, "La idea del teatro." in *G. Camillo. Tutte le opere*, 72-73. «[...] Et per dir in questo soggetto quello, che al presente ci occorre della generatione delle cose; fanno i pithagorici una connumeration di sei principij, da quali voglion che tutte le cose provengano; et questo chiamano Gamone, et questo è tale. Sol lux lumen splendor calor Generatio. Et per lo Sole intesero Dio padre, per la luce il figliuolo, per lo lume la mente angelica, o il mondo intelligibile, per lo splendore l'anima del mondo, o diciamo il Chaos, et per lo colore lo spirito del mondo, o sia il fiato dell'anima: et così sarà il Gamone. Sol: Deus Pater; Lux: Deus Filius; Lumen: Mens angelica, Mundus intelligibilis; Splendor: Anima mundi, Chaos; Calor: Spiritus mundi; Generatio: Flatus animae. Et in questa loro divisione è da notar che così i Pithagorici, come Plotino, trattando delle Idee non volsero collocare quelle in Dio per esser semplicissimo [...] »

things as dependent on the four elements, on friendship (love) and on non-friendship (strife)⁵⁹. In the beginning of the sixteenth century his philosophy was updated and elaborated in the *Dialoghi d'Amore* of Leone Ebreo. The Jewish Neo-Platonist philosopher saw creation as a result of coupling of masculine and feminine elements: it is the masculine sky that seeds the feminine chaos, or *materia prima*, provoking the generation of things⁶⁰. Leone Ebreo defined the 'generative love' embodied in the chaos as '*the reason for the generation and for all of the generable things*'⁶¹. Depending on the degree of the intensity of the love between the Four Elements, first of all still objects are created in nature, such as stones and minerals, and if the love is very strong they create things with a soul, first vegetables, then animals, and in the fourth and final step they create human beings, '*an eternal and intellectual form, annexed to the celestial bodies*'⁶².

Venetian literature, in the practical approach so typical to Venetian humanism, provided a very specific definition for the way that human beings should realize their role in the creation of their future generation, and idea that was expressed in the literature dedicated to the Renaissance Noblewoman. In 1415, Francesco Barbaro wrote *De re uxoria*, the first Venetian humanist treatise on the subject, written in Latin and dedicated to Lorenzo de' Medici for his marriage to Ginevra de' Cavalcanti⁶³. Francesco's sources were mainly Greek, Christianized and adapted to the environment of the author or to his dedicatee: Aristotle (*Oeconomica*), Xenophon (*Oeconomicus*, *Cyropaedia*), Plutarch (*De liberis educandis*), *Moralia (Coniugalis praecepta)* with elements from Cicero, Saint Augustine and others⁶⁴.

⁵⁹ Andrew, *Ancient Greek Cosmogony*, 78-101 ("V. Empedocles").

⁶⁰ Juda ben Isaac Abrabanel (Leone Ebreo), *Dialoghi d'amore*, ed. S. Caramella (Bari: Laterza, 1929), 81.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 76: «si che l'amor generativo di questa materia prima e il desiderio suo sempre del nuovo merito che li manca, e la diletatione che riceve nel nuovo coito, è cagion de la generazion di tutte le cose generabili. »

⁶² *Ibid.*, 78. «forma eterna e intellettuale, anessa a li corpi celesti. »

⁶³ Francesco Barbaro, *Prudentissimi et graui documenti circa la eletion della moglie; dello eccellente & dottissimo M. Francesco Barbaro... nuouamente dal latino tradotti per M. Alberto Lollo* (Venice: Gabriel Giolito de Ferrari, 1548).

⁶⁴ Mary Rogers, "An Ideal Wife at the Villa Maser: Veronese, the Barbaros, and Renaissance Theorists of Marriage," *Renaissance Studies* 7, 4 (1993): 386.

Many of these writers were also cited, or echoed, by other Renaissance writers on marriage. Barbaro's initiative was followed by several treatises during the next decades, including the third book of Alberti's *Della famiglia* (1430's and early 1440's)⁶⁵. However, a true literary genre of treatises and dialogues dedicated to the patrician women developed especially during the middle of the sixteenth century, a genre whose main purpose was to defining the social and cultural exemplary roles and behaviors of the noblewoman within society⁶⁶. Discourses on the subject were quite probably held in the Venetian academies, and during the late 1530's and early 1540's the *Accademia degli Infiammati* in Padua had two registered members who wrote their own contributions on the subject, Alessandro Piccolomini and Sperone Speroni⁶⁷. Speroni was also a dear friend of Daniele Barbaro, who was also introduced as a speaker in some of the dialogues⁶⁸.

By the second half of the sixteenth century, *De re uxoria* had become a cult text in the literary tradition of the Renaissance noblewoman. It was translated into 'vulgar' by Alberto Lollio and published in Venice in 1548, achieving many reprints in the following years. The translated edition was dedicated to Federico Badoer, the founder of *the Accademia della Fama*.

In 1545 Ludovico Dolce published his own treatise about the life and duties of the Renaissance woman, *Dialogo della institution delle donne*. The dialogue was heavily inspired

⁶⁵ Leon Battista Alberti, *I libri della famiglia*, eds. R. Romano and A. Tenenti, 3rd ed. (Turin: Einaudi, 1980), book III. For a comprehensive bibliography on Renaissance marriage see Ruth Kelso, *Doctrine for the lady of the Renaissance* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1956), esp. chapter V, 78-135.

⁶⁶ Early treatises have been produced for example by: G. F. Capella (1525, 1526), B. Castiglione (1528-1606), E. C. Agrippa (1530, 1544, 1545/9). In the mid century: L. Dolce (1545/7, 1553/9, 1560, 1622), L. Domenichi (1549, 1551/2/4), Paolo Coggio, (1552); F. Luigini (1554/69), F. Piccolomini, and S. Speroni. In the 1560's, Giacomo Lanteri, *Della economica* (Venice 1560); Luigi Dardano, *La bella e dotta difesa delle donne* (Venice 1554); Alessandro Piccolomini, *Della nobilita et eccellenze della donna* (Venice 1549). See Rogers, "An Ideal Wife at the Villa Maser"; Adriana Chemello, "L'Institution delle donne di Ludovico Dolce," in *Trattati scientifici nel Veneto fra il XV e XVI secolo*, essays and studies by E. Riondato et al., intro. E. Riondato (Vicenza: Neri Pozza, 1985), 103-134.

⁶⁷ Alessandro Piccolomini, *Della institutione de la felice vita dell'uomo nato nobile et in citta libera* (Venice 1543/45/52). Much of the book concerned marriage, family life and the education of children. It was printed several times, before being expanded into the *Della institutione morale* (Venice 1560).

⁶⁸ Daniele wrote for Sperone Speoni the introduction to his 1542 dialogues, which included several dialogues related to 'women's issues' such as love, childbirth and family life. See: Speroni, *I dialoghi*, 1542 n. 3, n.5, n.6 and 1550 n.2, n.8. In two of the dialogues Daniele is also introduced as speaker.

by the text of Francesco Barbaro and probably achieved great success, having been published in four revised editions within the short span of fifteen years (1545-1560)⁶⁹. Texts written and published by Dolce, his humanist interests and ideas, had a particularly easy distribution in the exclusive cultural ambience of Fratta, as he was often personally present in town for attending the meetings of the *Accademia dei Pastori Frattegiani*, of which he was a registered member. In the *Institution*, Dolce's contribution to the existing literary tradition was in a thematic arrangement of the materials, filtered through a more modern and more secular flavor in a form of a vivid and fluid dialogue between Flaminio, the knowledgeable male and Dorothea, the young and curious female⁷⁰. He assumed the dialog structure from Baldassarre Castiglione, Piccolomini and Speroni, dividing it into three chapters that were dedicated to the three states of the noble woman: damsels, wives and widows.

Dolce introduced the cosmological role of the human race in the first pages of the second chapter of the dialogue dedicated to the married wife. There, Flaminio explains the creation of Man from God, and of Woman in order to assist man; he says that God created Man and Woman, '*one generating, the other producing children*' and that the office of marriage joins them in a tight union that has '*the scope of generating*'⁷¹. Dolce supported his claim for the importance of marriage citing Francesco Barbaro: '*marriage is a perpetual joining of man and woman, ordered on the account of creating legitimate children, and to escape adultery; without it there would not be neither love nor concord among mortals*'⁷². The closing discourse at the end of Dolce's book is dedicated entirely to the comparison of the correct house government and matrimonial life to the government of world harmony.

⁶⁹ The current research uses the fourth edition. Lodovico Dolce, *Dialogo di m. Lodouico Dolce della institution delle donne. Da lui stesso in questa quarta impressione riueduto...* (Venice: Gabriel Giolito de' Ferrari, 1559).

⁷⁰ Chemello, "L'Institution delle donne," 114-116.

⁷¹ Dolce, *Della institution delle donne*, 38r. «l'uno generando, & l'altro producendo figliuoli»; «E' adunque l'ufficio del matrimonio congiugere il Marito & la Moglie con si stretta unione, che non siano piu che uno; & il fine è il generare. »

⁷² *Ibid.*, « il matrimonio essere un perpetuo congiungimento di huomo & di donna, ordinato per cagione di crear legittimamente figliuoli, & di fuggire adulterio; senza il quale non sarebbe ne amore ne concordia alcuna fra mortali. »

Francesco Barbaro himself turned to Lorenzo de' Medici in the concluding remarks of his treatise, affirming that men and women were joined together '*principally for the generation of children*', and comparing the human race to '*many and many animals*' that follow a certain '*determined order of Nature; which has posed to them almost a law of joining*'. He continued and explained that '*we have to mix with the wife*', not for '*that short and elusive pleasure, but only to produce the offshoots, and to leave some successive offspring after us*'⁷³. The cosmological metaphor receives an additional elaboration in the case of Francesco Barbaro, who connects the domestic cosmic order to political cosmic order, echoing the familiar analogy between the microcosm and the functioning Republic. According to his view, the domestic order, imposed by the wife on her husband's behalf, fosters a particular political order, both natural, God-given and beautiful, analogous to the order of the heavens or the concord of instruments sounding in harmony⁷⁴.

Both humanist writers, in complying with the moral values of the society of Renaissance Venice, insisted that the cosmic role of *Generatio* could only be fulfilled if the children are born from a legal union between the man and the woman.

In the Venetian patrician society, where material possessions passed through heredity, through an infinite set of laws that defined the treatment the property possessions inherited through wills and dowries, no Venetian nobleman was unaware of the social importance of

⁷³ F. Barbaro, *Circa la elettion della moglie*, XV, 52-52v. « Vedesi per cotidiana esperienza, che quali sono i cibi che noi mangiamo, tali etiandio i notturni nostri congiungimenti succedono. Laqual cosa per molte cagioni, & per via di molti essempli facilmente se può verificare. Parmi M. LORENZO carissimo, che io non possa, ne debba, da altro che dall'istessa Natura torre il principio di questa materia. La onde essendo stata introdotta la compagnia dell'huomo & della donna (come habbiam detto di sopra) principalmente per la generatione de' figliuoli: cosi l'huomo da questa sola speranza mosso, et da questo honestissimo desiderio sospinto; deve co' la moglie congiungersi. In molti e molti animali veggiamo servarsi un certo determinato ordine di Natura; la quale ha posto loro quasi una legge nel coito; affinche il caduco & corruttibile seme de mortali, con la perpetua succession delle prole, ad un certo modo immortale & eterno ne divenisse. Nella qual cosa ci dimostrano con lo essemplio, che non per cagione di quel breve & fugace piacere, ma solo per produr la sobole, & per lasciar dopo noi qualche posteritade, dobbiamo con la moglie mescolarci. »

⁷⁴ Rogers, "An Ideal Wife at the Villa Maser," 393. F. Barbaro, *Circa la elettion della moglie*, I, 8. « & una perpetua unione del marito & della moglie, legittimamente, & per la creatione de figliuoli, & per ischifar la fornicatione ordinata.»

the generational reproduction. The role of Regeneration had particular relevance in the case of Vincenzo Grimani, whose fortune as the universal heir of the Grimani branch of Santa Maria Formosa was decided upon his birth. Vincenzo probably had no specific profession but managing the heredities that he received from his ancestors and the dowry from his wife Lucrezia, and his male sons were the ones who inherited most of the possessions that he inherited from his wealthy ancestors. In that sense, despite his short life and lack of public office, his role in continuing the generation was considered a success.

5.2.2 The Grotesques and the Cosmological Role of Human Reproduction

The human role of reproduction finds specific allusions in the 'natural catalogue' in the grotesques throughout the villa. Curiously, almost each time humans appear they are paired, systematically, the right figure is male, and the left figure is female. The male figure is usually identified with a square bust with visible abs and a square shaped face, while the female version has breasts and more soft and elongated facial features. Male and female parallelisms occur already in the vestibule in the ground floor, in two full-figure frescoes executed like quick drawings in a brown brush inside two small niches (**figs. 178, 179**). Both figures are clad in armor; the figure on the right is male, on the left female, but they lack any further attributes that would identify them with specific mythological divinities. In the *piano nobile* many examples repeat the masculine-feminine parallelism (**figs. 180-183**). Gender distinction is even noticeable in the hybrid creatures, and in the decorative details that adorn the two large scenes in the central hall: on the west wall the column bases and regal throne have features of male hybrids, and on the east wall the same elements have female features (**figs. 184-187**).

The almost perfect consistency of these representations suggests that they were executed for a reason that is not purely aesthetic. In fact, the representation of male and female parallelisms is a typical characteristic of alchemical visual tradition. Alchemical theory interpreted the sexual union between a masculine and a feminine element as the main drive for creation of natural elements. Sexual symbolism was used frequently by medieval

writers, who often worked out the parallel between sexual union and the process of alchemy in some detail. The *Rosarium Philosophorum*, printed in Frankfurt in 1550, is an example for a text that provides illustrations as well as discourses on this topic⁷⁵.

In alchemical practice, references to male and female constituents of a mixture were not unusual. Gold was compared to the male and silver was compared to the female. As long as the early chemists believed that metals were produced by the union of sulfur and mercury, it was natural for them to speak metaphorically of these two substances as 'father and mother' or 'male' and 'female'⁷⁶. Sometimes, the roles between the two metals were reversed, and Mercury was considered male; there was no outstanding reason, the main point being that the union of the two was considered necessary to produce a metal. Another association was between the volatile parts of a chemical reaction (female) and the fixed or non-volatile parts (male). Yet another analogy was to call a substance which was able to coagulate another substance male (such as vinegar), and a substance which would be coagulated was female (such as milk). A few alchemical writers who used such sexual analogies went to the extreme of basing chemical reasoning upon it. Thus, in a certain chemical reaction, not more than two substances are said to be necessary '*because wedlock is the union of two people only*'⁷⁷.

The masculinity and femininity of the humans and hybrids in the frescoes of Villa Grimani Molin are easy to differentiate, but in many representations they are not very distinct and remain somewhat androgynous. Often, there seems to be an intentional reference to confusion in sexes in order to emphasize the gender issue: this too is a practice common to alchemical imagery. The idea of sexual ambiguity and gender reversals has been present in

⁷⁵ "Rosarium philosophorum" in *De alchimia opuscula complura veterum philosophorum, quorum catalogumsequens pagella indicabit* (Frankfurt: Cyriaci Iacobi, 1550).

⁷⁶ «Sulphur enim est quasi pater, argentum vivum quasi mater metallorum.» Albertus Magnus (attr.), "Compositum de Compositis," in *Theatrum chemicum, præcipuos selectorum auctorum tractatus de chemiæ et lapidis philosophici antiquitate, veritate, jure, præstantia, & operationibus, continens...*, ed. L. Zetzner et. al., 6 vols (Argentorati, 1659-61), IV, 825-826.

⁷⁷ "Arcanum Hermeticae," in *Biblioteca Chemnia Curiosa*, ed. J. J. Magnet, 2 vols. (Geneva, 1702), II, 652. See: Crosland, *Historical Studies in Chemistry*, 17-19.

the tradition of alchemical imagery since medieval times. Adopting the gendered presumptions of Hellenistic science, alchemical philosophers described the components of the basic physical matter with polarized masculine terms (Sulphur: hot, dry, fixed) and feminine terms (Mercury: cool, moist, volatile), whose purification and unification creates the Philosopher's Stone⁷⁸. The theme of male and female ambiguity reoccurs throughout the fresco program of the villa in many interesting and surprising variations, which may be interpreted as a kind of allegorical allusion to this alchemical tradition.

In his treatise on the Renaissance noblewoman, Dolce provided an interesting conscious allusion to the alchemical concept of the combined sexuality representing a generative union. He explained, perhaps allegorically, that man and woman, *'when joint together, from two bodies results just one; and they form from them that wonderful Hermaphrodite, that it is impossible to divide.'*⁷⁹ For Dolce, the 'alchemical' union was strictly related to the practical marriage duties of men and woman in society: in the following phrase in the text he immediately explains that *'therefore, the office of marriage is to join the husband and the wife in a tight union, so that they are more than one; and the scope is generating'*⁸⁰.

5.2.3 The *Theatrum Mundi* and the Dining Room Ceiling

The reproductive duty of the human race can be read within the interpretation of the iconographic program of the frescoes of the ceiling of the dining room, which contains many references to the humanist tradition of the *Theatrum mundi*.

⁷⁸ Marjorie E. Warlick, "Fluctuating Identities: Gender Reversal in Alchemical Imagery," in *Art and Alchemy*, ed. J. Wamberg (University of Copenhagen: Museum Tusulanum Press, 2006), 103-128.

⁷⁹ Dolce, *Della institution delle donne*, 38. « Onde congiunti insieme, di due corpi divengono un solo; & ne formano quel mirabile Hermafrodito, che non si puo dividere. »

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, « E' adunque l'ufficio del matrimonio congiungere il Marito & la Moglie con si stretta unione, che non siano piu che uno; & il fine è il generare. »

5.2.3.1 Description and Formal Analysis

In the central image a cloudy sky hosts a depiction of Jupiter and Juno (**fig. 188**). The figure of Jupiter is completely absent, since the piece of the fresco that contained the divinity fell off the ceiling during the last restoration. Only the two nude feet are still painted on the surface; Jupiter's identity can be determined by his accompanying eagle. Juno is represented in full form and in luminous but delicate pastel colors as a young woman clad in white, accompanied by her traditional attribute of the peacock. The position of the feet of Jupiter indicates that he is revolving towards Juno, which is facing him and stretching her right arm in his direction.

The scene is surrounded by a decorative border that resembles the borders depicted in the other two frescoed rooms, with a series of golden forms, embedded with little white and green gemstones, 'knitted' on top of a deep red background. As if it were the border of a huge tapestry that depicts the two Olympic gods, it is sustained by six painted wooden poles that are set on top of the architectural balcony. The balcony is painted in an illusionistic perspective and is inhabited with a series of human figures and animals. In one case, beneath the figure of Jupiter, the upper bust and head of a female figure has fallen off with the plaster, leaving only her feet and arm visible, and the face of the male figure that accompanies her had also been quite seriously damaged. Surrounding the balcony, the upper sections of the walls contain the four allegorical depictions of the seasons, the four young male and female figures and a series of rich grotesque schemes.

The balcony, its figures and its illusionistic perspective were designed in a clear reference to a respectable visual decorative tradition of noble interiors, whose origins are usually recognized in the *Camera degli Sposi* in the tower of Mantua's Ducal Palace (**fig. 189**). There, at the end of the fifteenth century Andrea Mantegna painted for the Gonzaga duke an oculus with a balcony animated with joyous figures of *putti* facing an open sky in an accentuated illusionistic perspective. In the 1540's Giulio Romano created a fresco inspired by the Mantegna experiment at the *Sala dei Giganti* in Mantua's Palazzo Te, where the perspective illusion became an encompassing experience, in a borderless dark space that

melted into a fantastic spiral describing the Fall of the Giants, a space who's only 'light at the end of the tunnel' was the bright oculus painted up at the center of the vault (**fig. 190**).

In the early 1560's, in the fresco of the *Sala dell'Olimpo* at Maser, Paolo Veronese restored the illusionistic experience to the more '*Mantegnesque*' classical and perceivable dimensions, replacing the traditional oculus with a scheme inserted in a space with a barrel vault, of a central octagon and a classical balcony supporting Solomonic columns (**fig. 68**). Veronese also defined a pictorial architectural octagonal border between the celestial realm of the gods and the terrestrial realm of the four elements, and depicted figures whose identity and accompanying animals and objects encompassed symbolic meanings.

One of the later adoptions of the Veronese balcony, although lacking the 'celestial' element, can be found in Sabbioneta around 1590, in the interior decoration of the *Teatro Olimpico*. Above the seating area, there is an upper frieze with a series of lively representations of noble men and women that are observing the theatrical spectacle (**fig. 191**). In Villa Emo Capodilista Dario Varotari, one of Veronese's followers, created a balcony inhabited with *putti* and animals (*Camera della Vigna*, 1579-80). The fresco recalls the Maser ceiling vault, but Varotari combined it with the tradition of the 'vegetated ceilings' that are also characteristic of the Venetian residences (**fig. 192**)⁸¹. Appearing early in the sixteenth century in the vault of a small room at the Odeo Cornaro, variants of the 'vegetated ceilings' are known also in Camillo Mantovano's ceiling of the dining room at Palazzo Grimani in Venice (**fig. 105**), in a small pergola by Zellotti in Villa Emo at Fanzolo, and by Veronese in Villa Barbaro in the two southern frescoed rooms.

The ceiling of the dining room of the Fratta villa adopts the Veronese model in a manner that exceeds the superficial copying of the decorative articulation of the balcony. Here too, the decorative border with precious stones marks the different between the celestial space, represented by the Olympic divinities, and the physical realm of the villa and its

⁸¹ For Villa Emo Capodilista see: Muraro, *Civiltà delle ville venete*, 350-355; Selvazzano Dentro, *Villa Emo Capodilista "La Montecchia"* (Saonara: Il Prato, 2004).

inhabitants, where the fresco program continues with elements that belong to the human sphere and to the natural environment. However, the motif of a fake tapestry originates from the school of Raphael, or more precisely, from the painting tradition of the Mantua circle⁸². As in Villa Barbaro, a balanced and restricted number of figures is represented in the balcony, and unlike most of the human figures in the villa, they are not repetitive stock images but are all individual in their pose, age, facial features and facial expression. Each figure performs an action, or is accompanied by an object or animal that can receive a specific iconographical interpretation that is related to the overall concept of the frescoes.

5.2.3.2 The Cosmic Importance of Matrimonial Union

On the east wall, facing the viewer upon entering from the central hall, three couples of males and females are leaning over the balcony (**figs. 193-195**). They are all rather young, as the males are either wearing a short beard and dark hair, or are completely beardless. The figures can all be recognized as nobles because of their costumes: each male wears a different outfit with a well defined collar and sleeves, and the females wear fancy dresses with pearl necklaces and elaborate hair styles. The cloths all adhere to the typical fashion of the noble men and women in the second half of the sixteenth century⁸³.

The ladies, as well as the other two noblewomen depicted at the other side of the balcony, resemble the depiction of the female matron in Veronese's painting in Villa Barbaro (**figs. 196, 197**). In their physical attributes they seem to follow the proper dress code that is described in some of the more familiar treatises dedicated to the noble woman. For Francesco Barbaro, Speroni, Piccolomini and Dolce, 'beauty' was defined as well proportioned face and features, enhanced with attractive hair which should be adorned in ways appropriate to the status of her husband's family, and not too elaborate or lavish⁸⁴.

⁸² Van der Sman, *La decorazione a fresco*, 176.

⁸³ Comparable with the Renaissance wear appearing in: Auguste Racinet, *The Complete Costume History: From Ancient Times to the 19th century: all plates in colour* (Paris, 1888; reprint, Koln: Taschen, 2006), n.287-289.

⁸⁴ F. Barbaro, *Circa la elettion della moglie*, V, 21-24; Dolce, *Della institution delle donne*, I, 28 and II, 56v. Rogers, "An Ideal Wife at the Villa Maser," 387-388.

Jewels were particularly acceptable; they were considered to reflect favorably on the husband's wealth and generosity, rather than as exposal the wife's folly. As described by Barbaro: '*he [the husband] can honestly adorn the wife with gold, pearls, and other precious stones. Since these things demonstrate above all the richness and the magnificence of the husband, rather than the lust or the vanity of the woman*'⁸⁵.

The left and right couples are engaged in a lively conversation, represented through their active body gestures and partially open mouths. It is possible to perceive that the couple at the center, with the 'absent' woman, is not conversing, since their bodies are turning in opposite directions (**fig. 194**). The man supports a falcon with his hand with what seems like an adequate leather glove, and is accompanied by a hunting hound. His depiction recalls the favorite *vita activa* pastime of the Venetian noblemen, the activities of Vincenzo Grimani and his hunting companion Lorenzo Emo, and the house for the hunting falcons in the property of Villa Grimani Molin⁸⁶. Hunting was in fact considered by the humanist writers as the most important activity displaying magnificence, second only to horse-riding, and it was the favorite pastime of many kings, dukes and Roman popes and cardinals⁸⁷. The open white vest of the man differs from the vestments of his male companions in the fresco, and may represent a typical hunting fashion.

The female stretches her only visible hand towards a little squirrel that is painted on the top of the balcony. The squirrel may carry several possible meanings. In her book on animal iconography, Mirella Levi d'Ancona suggested two interpretations based on Filippo Picinelli (ca. 1681): the squirrel may symbolize the Cross of Christ because of its ability to stay

⁸⁵ F. Barbaro, *Circa la eletion della moglie*, 49v: « egli possa honestamente adornare la moglie d'oro di perle, & d'altre pietre pretiose. Percioche queste cosa mostrano piu tosto la ricchezza, & la magnificenza del marito, che la lascivia, o la vanità della donna. »

⁸⁶ See Appendix I, docs. 1.5.1, 1.5.2, 1.5.3, and chapter 1, section 1.3.3 note 146.

⁸⁷ Jeremy Kruse, "Hunting, magnificence and the court of Leo X," *Renaissance Studies: Journal of the Society for Renaissance Studies* 7, 3 (1993): 243-257. Kruse lists figures such as the Popes Clement VI, Alexander VII and Julius II, Duke Federico Gonzaga, Alfonso II d'Este, and so on. According to Marino Sanudo, popes who did not hunt were actually considered as exceptions (Sanudo, *I diarii*, XLI, cl. 283).

balanced on a narrow branch;⁸⁸ it is also retained as a symbol of divine providence, protecting the humans from hate and passion, as it appears in various paintings of saints⁸⁹. However, in Fratta the iconographical context has a more secular nature, and the squirrel appears in the context of a mundane female figure, requiring a different interpretation. Like in Fratta, the squirrel accompanies a respectable noble matron in two sixteenth century paintings, by Paris Bordone and by Hans Holbein the Younger⁹⁰.

Levi d'Ancona cites Bordone's portrait as an example where the squirrel symbolizes divine providence, yet without providing a specific explanation. In the context of secular painting in the Veneto it is more likely that the animal may be represented for its prophetic abilities: As explained by Augusto Gentili, this interpretation was based on Pliny's *Historia Naturalis*, according to which the squirrels are capable of forecasting the arrival of a storm, they prepare for the winter in anticipation by accumulating food, and they sleep throughout the winter – rendering the animal a symbol of forecasting and provision, in particular of bad weather or a storm⁹¹. The example cited by Gentili is also closer in its iconographical context to the Fratta fresco: A Portrait of Spouses by Lorenzo Lotto, where a squirrel sleeps on top of a table with the inscription '*HOMO NVMQVAM*', a motto that signifies that what

⁸⁸ Filippo Picinelli, *Mundus Symbolicus*, V, xlv, 420 ("Sciurus"). See: Levi D'Ancona, *Lo zoo del rinascimento*, 195, who mentions that the squirrel is represented in the painting of the *Annunciation* by Cosmè Tura (Ferrara, Museo dell'Opera del Duomo), balancing on a string above the head of the Virgin.

⁸⁹ Picinelli, *ibid.*, n. 623. See: Levi D'Ancona, *Lo zoo del rinascimento*, 195-196. Mentioning two paintings of *San Girolamo in the Dessert* by Giovanni Bellini (Florence, Collezione Contini Bonacossi; Washington DC, National Gallery of Art, Kress Collection), a *Madonna with a Squirrel* by Giovanni Giacomo Cavasio (or Cavazza, Bergamo, Sant'Alessandro in Colonna) and in a painting of Giovanni del Biondo representing the *Stigmata of San Francesco*, Castelfiorentino (Florence), San Francesco (dettached fresco).

⁹⁰ Paris Bordone, *Principessa Labia*, ca. 1550, Cape Town; Hans Holbein the Younger, *Portrait of a Lady with a Squirrel and a Starling*, 1527-1528, London, National Gallery.

⁹¹ Augusto Gentili, "Biografie di donne nel ritratto veneziano del Cinquecento," in *Biografie difficili*, ed. D. M. Ciani Forza (Venice: Università Ca' Foscari, 2003): 74. « Gli scoiattoli prevedono la tempesta, e allora, otturata la tana dalla parte dove spirerà il vento, praticano aperture dalla parte opposta; per il resto è la coda assai pelosa a far loro da coperta. Per alcuni d'inverno è provveduto il cibo; per altri, invece del cibo, il sonno. » - translating Pliny, *Storia naturale*, VIII.138 (58), ed. G. B. Conte (Torino: Einaudi, 1982-1988), II, 230-231. « Provident tempestatem et sciuri obturatisque, qua spiraturus est ventus, cavernis ex alia parte aperiunt fores. De cetero ipsis villosior cauda pro tegumento est. Ergo in hiemes aliis provisum pabulum, aliis pro cibo somnus. »

the man should never do is exactly what the squirrel is doing at that moment, that is, surrender to the forecast, seek refuge in sleep, and give up on the provision (**fig. 198**)⁹².

Although it is difficult to suggest a meaning related to prophecy, it is possible that the squirrel that accompanies the Fratta woman alludes to the characteristics of the animal according to Pliny. Rather than provision, the depiction may refer to the tendency of squirrels to accumulate food. In providing food for the family the man, the 'active' spouse, assumes the evolutionistic role of the hunter, while the woman, the 'passive' and domestic spouse, fulfills her natural role as the collector and conserver of the food.

The three couples are positioned beneath a uniting Jupiter and Juno, the two Olympic divinities mostly renowned for their long lasting matrimonial relationship, and within a visual scheme that strongly recalls the ceiling of the *Sala dell'Olimpo* at Maser. The iconographical contextualization implies that they allude to the importance of regeneration through matrimonial relationships within the *Theatrum mundi*.

In the fresco programs of Villa Pojana and Villa Caldogno it is possible to identify a similar allusion to the cosmic importance of coupling (and marriage). Surrounding the figure of Prometheus and his intellectual gift to humanity, an open sky is depicted with eight couples of male and female Olympic gods, similarly representing the cosmic duty of reproduction.

5.2.3.3 Virtuous Venetian Noblewomen

On the south wall of the dining room, a single young figure is holding an empty container and looking downwards (**fig. 199**). Her hairstyle encloses her female gender, whereas she is wearing a simple red garment that looks like trousers, as the painter wanted to emphasize, showing only one of her legs behind the balcony. The young woman may be a representation of the duties of the woman within the household, especially as an unmarried damsel. The figure is positioned above the allegory of summer, looking down at it, as if ready to collect the grains that Summer is holding in her hand and to place them in the empty container.

⁹² Gentili, "Biografie di donne," 75.

Another single female figure is depicted across the room on the north wall (**fig. 200**). In contrast with her south wall companion, she is portrayed as a married woman, wearing a simple red gown and a white head cover. The painter has granted her with very pronounced facial features, with wrinkles on her forehead and between her eyebrows, in order to emphasize her old age, which complies with the age of the personification of winter depicted beneath her. Her eyes are revolved downwards and her mouth has a slight curve upwards, creating the impression of a humble old lady. In her left hand, she is holding an upright pole with a conical white element on top of it, and in her right hand, showing behind the balcony, she is holding a small white object with a piece of string attached to it.

The woman is in fact demonstrating the labor of producing fabric: the instrument is the *distaff* (in Italian *conocchia*), a tool of ancient origins that predates the spinning wheel, which is designed to hold the un-spun fibers, keeping them untangled and thus easing the spinning process. The distaff is most commonly used to hold linen, and sometimes wool, but can be used for any type of fiber. Its traditional form is a staff, held under one's left arm while using a *spindle* (in Italian *fuso*), which is kind of small weight that assists in the spinning. Significantly, the iconographical choice complies in a very accurate manner with Ludovico Dolce's ideas regarding the Renaissance noblewoman:

For Dolce, spinning was a very important and recommended labor for women, to which he dedicated a long passage in the first chapter of his treatise⁹³. In the dialogue, Filmone explains that unlike the modern times, when sowing is considered a work for poor woman, in ancient days, the labor most identified with the noblewomen was '*il filo et la lana*' with their traditional instruments, which he explicitly mentioned in the passage: '*il fuso & la conocchia*'⁹⁴. '*I think that it is very important that our Women work either the*

⁹³ Dolce, *Della institution delle donne*, 10v-12.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 11. « Vengo ai lavori. voi dovete, Signora Dorothea mia, sapere, chèl lavoro delle Gentildonne antiche era il filo et la lana: due cose di grande utile alla conservation delle famiglie. Hoggidi sono ambedue rimase alla femine di basso grado: col picciolo guadagno delle quali sostengono la lor povera famigliuola. O ventosa vanità, o delicatezza dannosa delle Nobili del nostro secolo; poi, chèqueste si recano a vergogna quello, che in tutte le età fu di sommo honore alle Donne d'alta fortuna, & celebrate per molte virtù. Ridotto tutto lo imperio del mondo sotto la podestà d'Augusto, non hebbe questo buono & prudente Imperadore per cosa vile, che la

*linen or the wool: as both of them equally belong to the necessary usages, and have always been an honest labor of the valuable young women*⁹⁵. Dolce provides examples of virtuous woman from ancient times that made threading their principal occupation, such as Penelope, Queen of Ithaca, as well as queens from the modern times: the Queens of Portugal, Spain and England⁹⁶. But above all, he considers threading as extremely useful for the conservation of the family, since it helps to distract the woman from other mundane pleasures, and thus maintains her chastity⁹⁷.

In the Veneto, the production of silk fabrics, their export and use were extremely important for the economical activity of the Republic. The activity of threading silk strings from the mulberry cocoons was common especially among women, and was still preformed by females until the twentieth century⁹⁸. According to Luca Molà, silk was actually produced in the Polesine; but weaving of other fabrics was also common, and as it seems, threading

figliuola & le nipoti ne i lavori della lana si esercitassero. Era etiandio costume di tutte le Romane, il giorno, che nella casa del novello sposo si trasferivano, in questa con esso loro portare il suso & la conocchia: & toccando le foglie della porta con certa quantità di lana, di essa, a guisa di ghirlande, la coronavano. »

⁹⁵ Ibid., 11v. « “Ne penso, che molto importi, che piu o lana o lino dalle nostre Donne si lavori: quando ambedue appartengono parimente a gli usi necessarij, & furono sempre honestissima fatica delle Giovani di valore. »

⁹⁶ Ibid., 11v. « Anna moglie di Heleane tesseva con le proprie mani tutte le camicie, chèl suo figliuolo Samuele portava. & la casta Penelope, Reina de gli Ithachi, col tesser della sua lunga tela ingannò vent’anni di vana aspettation di coloro, che le sue nozze sollecitavano: dopo i quali ritornò a lei il suo caro & desiderato marito. Che dirò io delle Reine di Macedonia, & di Epiro; lequali tessavano ancora elle, et cucivano lel vesti dè mariti, dè fratelli, dè figliuoli, & dè parenti loro? Odo, che la Reina Issabella moglie di Ferdinando, volle, che quattro sue figliuole (che tante n’hebbe) sapessero filare, cucire, et raccamare maestrevolmente; delle quali le due prime furono Reine di Porthogallo; la terza Reina di Spagna, madre del presente Carlo Quinto Imperatore; & la quarta Reina d’Inghilterra, Donna di Henrico ottavo. »

⁹⁷ Dolce performs an entire discourse on the subject in p. 12, for example: « [...] perciocche che faranno elle? consumeranno sempre le hore tra la moltitudine delle Damigelle & dè Cortegiani? Quali ragionamenti saranno i loro? parleranno sempre di motti d’argutie? o pure novelleranno? non havranno questi ragionamenti mai fine? A che daranno poi opera? penseranno mi risponderà alcuno. i pensieri feminili sono per lo piu veloci, instabili, leggieri, erranti, & non sanno dove fermarsi. leggeranno. ottimo esercizio, al quale primieramente debbano indrizzar l’animo. ma sempre non si puo leggere: & lo stare in ocio, come piu inanzi si dira, è cosa tanto dannosa, che nulla piu [...]» He also provides the example of Tanaquil, the wife of Tarquino Prisco, who was adorned as a goddess because she remained at home to thread wool waiting for her husband to return from battle.

⁹⁸ See especially: Luca Molà, *The Silk Industry of Renaissance Venice* (Baltimore; London, Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000), and the large volume: Luca Molà, Reinhold C. Mueller and Claudio Zanier, eds., *La seta in Italia dal Medioevo al Seicento: Dal baco al drappo* (Venice: Marsilio, 2000).

wool and linen could have also been an activity that took place in Villa Grimani Molin. Sheep were present at the fields of the Vespera, as documented by Andrea da Molin in his account of the Loredan dowry, and linen was growing in the fields owned by both Betta Grimani Molin and Francesco Valier, as testified by their respective *conditioni*⁹⁹. Significantly, the inventory of the house factor in 1599 cites the existence of a '*Camera dal Lin*', a special room for linen in the ground floor of the villa¹⁰⁰.

It is also interesting to note that according to Cartari, Jupiter was considered '*Capo e duce delle Parche*', who sewed the thread of destiny. This would suggest another justification for the depiction of the old women on the north end of the ceiling, beneath Jupiter.

On the west wall, above the entrance door, an adult female noblewoman is holding a hat and a small white dog with brown spots (**fig. 196**). Her female companion, another noble wearing a green dress and a lot of jewelry, has one hand resting on her breast, the other stretched downwards and holding a pear; a parrot on the balcony faces her. The presence of the parrot and the puppy identifies the visual source of the representation with the two women painted by Veronese in the ceiling of the *Sala dell'Olimpo* in Villa Barbaro, who are also accompanied by the same parrot and dog (**fig. 197**). Nevertheless, the similarity is rather superficial, rendering the impression that the painter designed the scene based on his weak memory or on an inaccurate description from an oral or written source: Although the artist drew the same type of puppy, with brown and white spots, the dog is completely different in its pictorial style, position and pose; the Fratta parrot also differs from the Maser version and is identical to the parrots painted in the ceiling of the adjacent *Studiolo*.

Studies of the fresco program of Villa Barbaro have demonstrated that the two ladies represent the governess the household, probably Giustiniana Giustinian, the wife of Marc'Antonio Barbaro, and the house wet nurse, while the three male children are likely to represent the sons of the Barbaro couple. The iconographical attributes of the figures

⁹⁹ For Andrea da Molin: chapter 1, section 1.4.2.1 note 188. For the *conditioni*: Appendix I, docs. 1.3.2, 1.3.3.

¹⁰⁰ Appendix I, doc. 1.5.4. « Nella camera dal Lin, Un barile senza coperto con chiodi avreto in casta; un scagno de Nogara; una carriola da letto. »

were planned in accordance with the periodical academic discourses and writings on the Venetian noble woman, with particular reference to the treatise of Francesco, the ancestor of the Barbaro brothers. Inserted within the context of the cosmological diagram above them, the mother, the wet nurse and the three sons, represent the reproductive role of the human race, as well as the role of the wife in creating a family environment whose harmony echoes that of the divinely structured cosmos¹⁰¹.

In Fratta, the two ladies do not seem to allude so hermetically to the treatise of Francesco Barbaro. No roses were depicted in the hand of either of the women; they were not represented as a governess and her old and tanned wet nurse, but are both rather young, fair-haired noblewomen. However, their pose and accessories seem to allude to an intentional symbolism of its own, designed by the creator of the iconographical program.

The figure on the right performs an important hand gesture that can be easily recognized as indicating chastity, an identification that is based on the comparison with the gestures of the virtue of chastity represented in the central hall¹⁰². One of the particular concepts that characterizes Dolce's treatise is his insistence, more than anything, on the fundamental importance of the virtue of chastity for the noblewoman, in particular for the unmarried damsel and for the married wife. Dolce assumes a clear 'no tolerance' policy towards the unchaste woman, explaining that if a woman offends chastity, she fails to fulfill the cosmic role of regeneration in every possible manner: she offends God, the sacred bond of marriage and every single one of her family members, '*breaking the very sacred bond of human unification*'. He warns that when bearing illegal children the woman would become an insane mother, whose children will not be able to listen to without feeling shame, and not knowing who their real father was¹⁰³.

¹⁰¹ Rogers, "An Ideal Wife at the Villa Maser," 382; Crosato Larcher, "Considerazioni sul programma di Maser," 214-220, 248-250.

¹⁰² The same gesture is repeated by the female figure in the large scene on the west wall, which is commonly identified as the chaste bride the Scipio Africanus had returned to Alucius. See below, section 4.3.1.1.

¹⁰³ Dolce, *Della institution delle donne*, 40-40v. « La castità (di cui si parlò hieri assai abondevolmente) si convien maggiore nella maritata, che ella non conviene peravventura in alcuno de gli altri stati. conciosia

The woman holds a pear in her left hand, which is very often a symbol of the Virgin Mary because of the sweetness of its taste, according to many writers such as Saint Bernard of Clairvaux, Saint Bonaventure, and Joannes Bauhinus¹⁰⁴. Sometimes Mary is the pear tree who bore the pear, which symbolizes Christ. Weather interpreted as Christ or as the Virgin Mary herself, the representation of the pear in the left hand of the young lady symbolizes the concept of chastity, complying with the significance of the gesture of her right hand.

On the same token, the puppy held by the left female may symbolize fidelity, as it can be found, for example, in the Portrait of Spouses by Lorenzo Lotto (**fig. 198**)¹⁰⁵. The pairing here of fidelity with chastity recalls another similar pairing at the central hall of the Fratta villa, where the female allegory of Fidelity is positioned across the hall, right in front of the allegory of Chastity. Indeed, according to Dolce, chastity and fidelity were two complementary virtues that should be found in the wife: *'Among all of the virtues that belong to the married woman she has two that are major than the others, which, if she has them with her, will be able to make the marriage firm, stable, perpetual, easy, tender and really blessed. ...these are chastity in her, and love towards her husband'*, an affirmation that he supports in the following lines by providing examples of the *uxor fidelis* in the figures of historical women such as Andromache, Alcestis and Pauline¹⁰⁶.

cosa, che la moglie, che offende questa, offende primieramente Dio, con l'autorità di cui è fatto il matrimonio; & a cui giurò la purità del letto matrimoniale. dappoi fa ingiuria al marito, alqual solo ha data lae medesima: fa ingiuria alla carità del prossimo; perche non se ne trova a lei alcun maggiore di colui, che le è padre, fratello, compagno, marito & Signore. Diparte la unione, di cui fra mortali non è la piu stretta, ne la piu santa. Spezza il legame santissimo del congiungimento humano. rompe la fede laqual molti col proptio danno sebarono per insino a nimici. Leva la compagnia civile: offende le leggi & la patria: flagella il padre, la madre, le sorelle, i fratelli, i parenti, & gli amici. è di cattivo esempio a suoi, infama la famiglia: & poi, ch'è divenuta madre, è madre così iniqua & sclerata, che i figliuoli udir ragionar di lei non possono senza vergogna; ne ricordare il nome del padre senza dubbio d'esser suoi figliuoli. Onde in un medesimo temoi è & spergiura & sacrilega: percioche per sacramento & voto sono i corpi non pur dedicati a Dio; ma, come disse Dante, sue Vittime si fanno. [...] Certo questa castità, come la Donna è maritata, non è piu di lei, ma diposta nella sua fede & raccomandatale dal Marito. »

¹⁰⁴ Levi d'Ancona, *The Garden of the Renaissance*, 296-297.

¹⁰⁵ Gentili, "Biografie di donne," 75.

¹⁰⁶ Chemello, "L'Institution delle donne," 128. Dolce, *Della institution delle donne*, 40. « Fra tutte le virtù pertinenti alla Maritata ve n'habbia due che dall'altre tengano la maggioranza, le quali se con lei saranno,

The chaste woman revolves her look towards the two figures painted to her right, two males in jongleur cloths; one wears no beard and has short dark hair; the other, dark hair and a short beard. Their representation recalls the *Compagnie della Calza* of the young noblemen, their comedy performances and their mission to entertainment, adding a more practical dimension to the theoretical iconographical interpretation of the *Theatrum mundi*.

5.2.4 A Cosmological Epilogue: Sabbioneta and the *Theatrum Mundi*

The concept of the *Theatrum mundi* was extended in the sixteenth century to other fields besides the Veneto villa, obtaining particular significance also beyond Italy, in ambiances such as such as the English theater¹⁰⁷. In Sabbioneta, the theatrical cosmological ideal is not restricted to a single architectural manufacture. It is represented in an amplified urban scale; but at the same time, it also performs a particular reference to the theatricality and to the cosmological iconographical context of the Veneto villa¹⁰⁸.

The '*città ideale*', ideal or utopian city, was a concept that had been studied by the renaissance humanists since the fifteenth century. In the classical period, it bears its roots as far as Plato's *Timaeus* and Cicero's *De re publica*, who treat the cosmos as an analogy to the functioning state. Essentially, it is the search for a way to construct a city as a microcosm, interpreted as a completely functioning entity with all of its necessary services, and with its adequate aesthetic requirements on the level of urban city planning. The concept of the ideal city was during the fifteenth century in treatises by Alberti, Filarete ('*Sforzinda*'), and Francesco di Giorgio Martini. In practice, examples for attempts to transform existing cities into a *città ideale* occur in Pienza, Urbino, Sabbioneta, and later, to

potranno far quel Matrimonio fermo, stabile, perpetuo, facile, lieve et veramente beato. [...] Queste sono castità in lei, et amore verso il marito. »

¹⁰⁷ See above note 16.

¹⁰⁸ For Sabbioneta and all of its main monuments see: Carpeggiani, *Sabbioneta*; Ugo Bazzotti, Daniela Ferrari and Cesare Mozzarelli, eds., *Vespasiano Gonzaga e il ducato di Sabbioneta: atti del Convegno .Sabbioneta-Mantova, 12-13 ottobre 1991* (Sabbioneta: Accademia Nazionale Virgiliana di Scienze Lettere ed Arti, 1993). Giovanni Sartori, *Sabbioneta Illustrissima: la memoria ritrovata* (Sabbioneta: Comune di Sabbioneta, 2005).

a certain extent, in Palmanova. The attempt to attribute straightforward cosmological meanings to the new structure appears already in the late fifteenth century, when the city of Pienza was re-organized by Enea Silvio Piccolomini, Pope Pius II, where the central piazza was re-ordered with particular astronomical and cosmological intentions¹⁰⁹.

In the second half of the sixteenth century, Duke Vespasiano Gonzaga (1531-1591) constructed his own ideal city in a process that lasted from the 1560's into the last decades of the century. Vespasiano was an erudite humanist, a collector, and the cousin of Guglielmo Gonzaga who governed Mantua at the time. In accordance with his desire to create his own ultimate, ideal city, Vespasiano aspired to inhabit his city with a large range of humanists and intellectuals. One way for achieving this objective was ignoring the Papal orders, and offering all the Jews a place of honor in the town, where they had founded a printing industry for Hebrew literature. Their synagogue, enabling them to publicly practice their religious rites, was attached to the official headquarters of the town, near the major churches and the Ducal Palace¹¹⁰.

Vespasiano transformed his walled town into a microcosm with very evident allusions to theatrical culture, creating an ideal city that actually conformed to the metaphor of the *Theatrum mundi* (**fig. 201**). The small proportions of the edifices in the town and the perspective views that are created among the streets, conserved almost intact to this day, create the impression of walking inside a theatrical setting. In order to make the small city seem larger, he employed an old trick in theatrical perspective: the view was cut before each

¹⁰⁹ The bibliography on the concept of the Ideal City is indeed vast; the following citations regard some of the materials that are more relevant to the current study. Gabriella Morisco and Alessandra Calanchi, eds., *Le corti e la città ideale: atti del convegno, 15-16-17 novembre 2002, Università degli studi di Urbino Carlo Bo* (Fasano: Schena, 2004). For the history of the Ideal City since the fifteenth century see in the same volume: Vita Fortunati, "Progetti utopici ed architettonici: la città ideale nell'Italia del rinascimento," in *Ibid.*, 33-51. For a comprehensive study on the ideal city, with the examples of Pienza, Sabbioneta and later European examples see: Hanno Walter Krufft, *Le città utopiche: la città ideale dal XV al XVIII secolo fra utopia e realtà* (Bari: Laterza, 1990), especially: Introduction, chapter 1 ("Pienza"), chapter 2 ("Sabbioneta").

¹¹⁰ Sabbioneta possessed two important print houses. Simonsohn, *History of the Jews in Mantua*, 682-684; Sartori, *Sabbioneta Illustrissima*.

of the main doorways, the *Porta Vittoria* and the *Porta Imperiale*. The same method had been applied by Piccolomini in Pienza, when he organized the main piazza of his town¹¹¹.

In 1588 Vespasiano invited Vincenzo Scamozzi, who was considered the greatest expert in humanist theater after the death of Palladio, to construct his own *Teatro Olimpico* in Sabbioneta (**fig. 202**)¹¹². Alluding to the glory of its Classical origins, Vespasiano inscribed in clear Roman characters on the façade of the theater: 'ROMA QUANTA FUIT IPSA RUINA DOCET'. The structure, inaugurated in carnival in 1590, was retained so important that it was positioned at the very heart of the city, in the crossroad between its two main streets.

The decorative choices for the fresco program of the theater testify how by the late 1580's Villa Barbaro was considered as an exemplum for the concept of the *Theatrum mundi*, as a combination of theatricality in architecture with cosmological allusions¹¹³. The villa was well known to Scamozzi, who was closely supported by Marc'Antonio Barbaro and also joined him on a trip to Rome ca. 1579-1580¹¹⁴. In the early 1590's Scamozzi was brought by Marc'Antonio to assist in the construction of the Venetian fortress of Palmanova in Friuli, another urban setting which had several characteristics of an ideal city¹¹⁵.

Inside the theater in Sabbioneta, the anonymous artist of the frescoes had employed the same arches that were painted by Veronese in the *Salla della Crociera* in Villa Barbaro, with an identical style of landscapes, containing Roman ruins which are set in the midst of a

¹¹¹ For Pienza see as an ideal city, including Piccolomini's systemization of the streets, and especially his re-arrangement of the central *piazza* in a specific astronomical disposition, see the study of: Jan Pieper, *Pienza: il progetto di una visione umanistica del mondo* (Stuttgart: Axel Menges, 2000).

¹¹² For Scamozzi and the *Teatro Olimpico* of Sabbioneta see: Stefano, Mazzoni and Ovidio Guaita. *Il teatro di Sabbioneta* (Florence: L. Olschki, 1985), esp. chapter III; Carlo Togliani, "Il teatro ducale di Sabbioneta: storia e contro storia," in *Teatri storici nel territorio mantovano*, ed. N. Zuccoli (Mantua: Arcari, 2005), 63-80.

¹¹³ For a short history of the *Teatro Olimpico*, with reference to its decorative program, see: Antonio Paulucci and Umberto Maffezzoli, *Sabbioneta. Il Teatro all'Antica* (Modena: Il Bulino, 1993).

¹¹⁴ F. Barbieri, *Vincenzo Scamozzi*, 136.

¹¹⁵ For the activities of Marc'Antonio Barbaro as *Provveditore Generale* in Palmanova and his attempt to involve Scamozzi in the planning see: Gino Pavan, ed., *Palmanova: fortezza d'Europa 1593-1993* (Venice: Marsilio, 1993), and the recent book by Deborah Howard, *Venice Disputed*.

natural environment, at times copied directly from Veronese's example (**figs. 174, 203**)¹¹⁶. On the side of the *cavea*, where the viewers are seated, the upper section of the walls contains a long balcony with figures painted in various dynamic positions and gestures, in contemporary wear (**fig. 191**). While in Villa Barbaro and in Villa Grimani Molin the figures participate in a purely symbolic Globe Theater, the figures in Sabbioneta are positioned within a physical environment that materializes the theatrical metaphor, since indeed, they are present as an audience, together with the actual spectators that are observing the live spectacle.

Allusions to Villa Barbaro can also be found in the chromatic choices of the exterior treatment of the theater, and in the positioning of the Roman inscription on the building, echoing the mottos inscribed on the *avancorpo* of the Maser villa. It is also interesting to note the resemblance of the façade of Villa Barbaro to another major structure in Sabbioneta: the Ducal Palace (**fig. 22**). The façade of the palace, whose second construction and decoration phase had begun around 1578, was painted in 1584 by Bernardino Campi and Michelangelo Veronese, the later being the author of the '*trofei finti di bronzo*'. However, there exists no documentation as for who had been responsible for the architectural work¹¹⁷.

The *piano nobile* bears particular resemblance to the Barbaro façade: it recalls its chromatic choices, the alteration between the round and angular pediments of the windows, and the Roman inscription that appears beneath them, as well as the centralizing element of the balcony window (**figs. 22.1, 175.1**). The resemblance may be retained as a confirmation to the idea that by the time that the palace was being renovated, Villa Barbaro had been clearly recognized as a clear symbol of a *Theatrum mundi*, and its formal language found adequate for the adornment of a palace that governs its own microcosm. The resemblance also suggests that it is possible that the architect responsible for the renovation of the

¹¹⁶ As in other occasions in the various buildings of Sabbioneta, the identity of the fresco painters of the *Teatro Olimpico* is unknown to date. Paulucci and Maffezzoli, *Sabbioneta*, 39.

¹¹⁷ The construction history of the palace: Sartori, *Sabbioneta Illustrissima*; Carpeggiani, *Sabbioneta*, 51-63.

palace may have even been Scamozzi himself, who is recognized also as a serious candidate for the 1580's reconstruction of the Fratta Villa.

5.3 A THEATRICAL SPECTACLE: THE NARRATIVE SCENES IN THE CENTRAL HALL

The theoretical and cosmological allusions to theater in the frescoes of Villa Grimani Molin are accompanied by two large theatrical depictions in the lateral walls of the central hall (figs. 204, 205). The scenes stand out as an exception in the decorative program that is almost entirely based on symbolic representations of single figures or couples. The two frescoes differ in their narration character from most of the representations of historical, mythological or biblical episodes in the Palladian villas, and seem to represent historical or mythological scenes that are re-enacted as an actual theatrical performance.

Both of the frescoes contain a limited number of figures which are all positioned in the front plane of the picture, within a very narrow setting, who are using a very expressive body language. The furnishings and accessories are also very limited. The background of the west scene contains a greenish screen behind the figures, resembling a theatrical backdrop, which could have easily been eliminated from the depiction without influencing the narrative. In the east image, the same background appears with a long grey balcony painted above it and another portion of grey wall attached to it, in a composition that resembles an architectural façade of a villa, the ambient that was commonly used in the Veneto for theatrical performances. The boats, especially those depicted on the west wall, have molded animal heads at their ends, in a manner typical to the celebrative boats used in Venice during the regatta of the carnival, as they appear in a text of the following century¹¹⁸. All of the figures are dressed in Greek armor, with the typical helmet, boots, shield and dress. The only exception is a figure depicted on the scene of the eastern wall, of a young man in contemporary Renaissance cloths and haircut, which provides confirmation for the validity of the theatrical hypothesis.

¹¹⁸ Bernardo Sartorio, *I numi a diporto sull'Adriatico. Descrizione della Regatta solenne disposta in Venezia a godimento dell'altezza serenissima di Ferdinando terzo prencipe di Toscana* (Venice: Andrea Poletti, 1688). Includes drawings by Ludovico Lamberti and Giovanni Carbonari, engraved by Alessandro della Via in 14 tables.

In a known practice in Renaissance tradition, Ovid's *Metamorphoses* were read according to the four modes of interpretation which had been defined for biblical exegesis. Based on the assumptions that pagan fable concealed veiled truths, they could be interpreted in accordance with one or all of the four modes or 'senses': the natural or physical sense; the historical sense; the tropological or moral sense; and the allegorical allegoric sense, in a spiritual or theological vein¹¹⁹. In a similar manner, the Venetian painters of the Renaissance were particularly renowned for their ability to provide symbolic elaborations to mythological episodes, which exceed the explicit level of their rather straightforward, allegorical reading. The composer of the iconographical program of the two scenes in Villa Grimani Molin demonstrates a particular ability to present his own interesting elaboration of the concept of providing multiple meanings to a single scene. His program reflects the Pansophic desire, so identified with the Grimani ambience, to unite ancient, modern, pagan and monotheist religions under the same mystical world view: it is possible to identify in each scene references to at least two levels of interpretation, one more straightforward, based on classical history, and one mythological and more allegorical.

5.3.1 Governance and Magic: the West Wall of the Central Hall

The fresco on the west wall of the central hall contains a group of figures at the first plane, and in the background, a wall with a limited landscape with a military camp composed of four simple tents, three large Greek combat boats, two boat-poles with smokes visible on top of the tents, a couple of drinking ewers, and two treasure cases. The left side of the painting is dominated by a large baldachin and throne, where a male figure is seated. He has dark blonde hair and a fully-grown beard; he is wearing Greek armor, as all of the other male figures. His body and head face right, but his torso is revolved in the opposite

¹¹⁹ Simona Cohen, *Animals as Disguised Symbols in Renaissance Art* (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2008), 152; Claudia Cieri Via, "Dall'allegoria al simbolo: ipotesi interpretative sul mito come ideologia per immagini," in *Giorgione e la cultura veneta*, 146-148. St. Augustine, in relation to the Holy Bible, described four different types of meanings addressed for audiences of different intellectual capabilities.

direction. His right arm is supported by the throne and his left arm is stretched out and pointing at where his is also looking, at the man at the right of the human group.

The man on the right has dark hair and a short beard. He kneels towards the enthroned figure, his left hand raised towards him and his right hand set on a decorated vase; a treasure box is positioned on the ground at his feet. A young beardless man stands behind the enthroned figure, holding a long scepter in his right hand, his left hand set downwards, supporting a shield that is set on the ground. The scene includes only one female figure: a young and beautiful woman, who wears a simple white top over a reddish dress with a golden belt decorated with gems tied around her hips. The woman is revolved towards the enthroned figure; she looks downwards and positions her hand on her chest, and is accompanied by three male figures that all shed their eyes in a sad facial expression.

5.3.1.1 Illustrious Ancient Governors I: the Possible Representation of Scipio Africanus

The scene is commonly identified by scholars as *The Continnence of Scipio*, a subject with a long history of visual representation in the tradition of the Veneto Villa and beyond it. The choice of theme places the patron in a dialogue with other important patricians and with some of the most important noble and regal courts of the sixteenth century.

In the historical episode recounted by Titus Livius and Valerius Maximus, the Roman General Scipio Africanus, on his quest to conquer Spain in 209 BC, took a beautiful virgin as a prisoner. The bride was engaged to Allucius, a prince of the Celtiberi people of northern Europe. He therefore brought his tribe to support the Roman armies. As a sign of gratitude to Allucius, Scipio returned the bride to him; he refused the gift that her parents offered him, giving the treasures to Allucius instead¹²⁰. According to this interpretation, the enthroned man is Scipio and the kneeling figure at the extreme right is identified as Alucius, begging or thanking for the restitution of his bride, who is depicted at the center¹²¹.

¹²⁰ Titus Livius, *Ab urbe condita libri*, xxvi. 50; Valerius Maximus, iv. 3. § 1.

¹²¹ Van der Sman, *La decorazione a fresco*, 174; Bottacin, "D'amore, di storia, d'alchimia," 123.

The Continnence of Scipio is a common theme in the decorative programs of many Veneto Villas. It appears at the Villa Castello di Thiene, Villa Godi, Villa Emo at Fanzolo, Villa Emo Capodilista at the Montecchia, and villa Caldogno. It was also depicted by Andrea Mantegna, in a series of tapestries by Giulio Romano and in Fontainebleau. While the choice of the exact moment of the episode that is represented may vary, in all of the examples, Fratta included, Scipio is seated on a separate or higher seat, performing the same hand gesture towards Allucius. The bride is also always present in the scene.

Van der Sman has identified the moment of the episode that is depicted in the fresco in Villa Grimani Molin as the moment in which Scipio gave up the compensation in gold by the father of the bride in the favor of Allucius¹²². At Fanzolo, the scene also contains the golden treasures, but it is the previous moment in the episode, in which the old father of the bride offers them to Scipio (**fig. 73**)¹²³. At the Montecchia, Dario Varotari depicted *The Continnence of Scipio* in the south loggia of the upper floor after Zellotti's example, but the moment depicted is different: Scipio is seated on a high throne and Allucius bows in front of him, both him and the bride share the same hand gesture which probably means pleading for the young woman's release. In Thiene, Scipio is depicted at the following moment of restoring the bride. In both paintings the riches are not depicted (**fig. 206**)¹²⁴.

Usually, in the Veneto villas, *The Continnence of Scipio* is depicted as an *exemplum* for good government, in which Scipio appears as part of a series of '*Uomini Illustri*' of Roman kings and military generals. It displays the generosity with which the Roman general who won over Cartago, returns to Allucius the young lady that expected him as war booty¹²⁵. For example, at Fanzolo the story appears in a privileged position in the central hall, in front of another episode of exemplary Roman virtue recounted by Titus Livius, *The Death of Virginia*. Together the stories represent as examples of good government (Scipio) and bad

¹²² Van der Sman, *La decorazione a fresco*, 174.

¹²³ Crosato Larcher, "Villa Emo," 227.

¹²⁴ Van der Sman, "L'iconologia di Villa Emo," 42; Pavanello and Mancini, *Affreschi ville venete*, 373.

¹²⁵ Van der Sman, *La decorazione a fresco*, 174.

government (Virginia). They are accompanied by busts of Roman emperors, trophies and mighty prisoners, evocating the glory and honor of ancient Rome¹²⁶.

At Fratta, the representation carries an additional important feminine moral message that justifies the representation of the scene in the villa¹²⁷. The accentuated hand gesture of the bride, symbolizing chastity like in the two other similar appearances in the villa (as a virtue in the central hallway, and in the ceiling of the dining room), renders the scene an allegory for the chastity of the young woman and the married wife, an absolutely fundamental quality of a Renaissance noblewoman, as emphasized by Ludovico Dolce. Her look downwards can be interpreted as a humble and shy pose, expressing the two virtues that Dolce attributes to the young virgin: '*Vergogna, & timidità*'¹²⁸.

5.3.1.2 Mythological and Mystical Contextualization: Odysseus and Circe

Although the distribution of the figures in the scene seems intentionally typical to the subject, the Fratta *Contenance of Scipio* differs from its Venetian counterparts in a few details. The figures are clearly wearing Greek armor, whereas the story occurred in Rome: in other depictions the cloths are either more generic or actually Roman. The soldiers that accompany the bride have peculiar facial expressions: their eyebrows are folded down in a manner that expresses sorrow. Observing the figure of the young man standing behind the enthroned man, one notices two little wings stem from his helmet, a clear indication that the young man is in fact the god Mercury. His facial features and the color of his cloths are also similar to those of Mercury in the *Studiolo*, only the latter version represents an elder Mercury, who is wearing a short beard. These details are alien to the visual and literary tradition of the story of the Contenance of Scipio.

¹²⁶ Van der Sman, "L'iconologia di Villa Emo," 40-42; For Virginia see: Titus Livius, *Ab Urbe Condita*, III, 48.

¹²⁷ Trinchieri Camiz, "Significati iconografici," 124, suggests a rather general explanation, according to which the description of the Scipio scene in Villa Grimani Molin may allude to the obligations of Vincenzo Grimani of judicial service in the Republic as a venetian patrician.

¹²⁸ Dolce, *Della institution delle donne*, index ("I. X. Due virtù, nelle quali si dee principalmente ammaestrarla: Vergogna, & timidità"). In Villa Emo at Fanzolo the bride bows in an honorable manner, with less an explicit allusion to chastity. The same hand gesture is represented in the Scipio scene in the Villa Castello of Thiene.

Circe, the mythical sorceress, is introduced into Greek mythology in Homer's *Iliad* when Odysseus and his men arrive to her island. The story of Odysseus and Circe, which involves the presence of Mercury, a beautiful young woman, a respectable young man and earthly treasures, seems like as an adequate candidate for the interpretation of the Fratta fresco.

In book 10 (and in book 11 in part), Homer recounts how Odysseus and his men ended up in Circe's island Aiaia where they stayed for a year, before moving on to Hades, the next stop in their voyage to return to Ithaca. The plot begins when upon arriving to Aiaia some of Odysseus' men are invited by Circe to a feast. Laced with one of her magical potions, she turns them into animals with a wand after while they eat.

Only Eurylochus, suspecting treachery from the outset, escaped to warn Odysseus and the others who had stayed behind at the ships. Odysseus set out to rescue his men, but was intercepted by young Hermes in disguise, who told him to use the herb Moly to protect himself from Circe's potion; having resisted the potion, he must draw his sword and act as if he would attack Circe. Hermes tells Odysseus that once he overcomes the spell, he will have to resist her magic wand with his sword, that is, resist her command that he share her bed. He will go to her after making her swear that she would produce no further harm. Odysseus proceeds to his encounter with Circe. Upon his arrival she positions him on a rich and beautiful chair, and presents him with her evil potion. Protected by the Moly he resists the spell of transformation and is invited by Circe to her bed, accepting, not before making her swear that she would cause no more harm.

From this point on in Homer's myth, Circe uses her powers beneficently. She never lies to Odysseus and never threatens him. After the act his men are transformed and become younger, taller and more handsome. They cry in their emotion and Circe herself is '*moved to pity*'. Odysseus and his men remain on the island for some time; the hero and the sorceress become lovers. Eventually he prepares to leave. Circe pleads him to stay and when he refuses, she provides him with detailed guidance how to arrive to the next stop in his journey, the mighty Hades, where he will have to seek the spirit of Theban Teiresias, the blind seer. He orders the men to collect their treasures and store them back on the ships

and prepare the boats to leave. When they are about to leave the comfortable life in Aiaia in favor of a voyage into the Underworld, they '*shed mighty tears*'¹²⁹.

The Fratta fresco seems to contain many of the elements included in the episode, which may represent the moment in which Odysseus and his men are about to leave Circe and Aiaia. The enthroned figure can be identified as Odysseus, who Circe had positioned on a '*beautiful chair*' upon his arrival. Mercury/Hermes stands behind him as his protector. He is depicted young and in disguise just as described by Homer; the staff in his hand is probably the caduceus, whose serpent part is hidden behind the body of Odysseus. Odysseus' twisted body pose, with the torso completely revolved towards the viewer in what may seem as "heavy mannerism", can actually be interpreted as an indication of movement and can signify that the hero is about to get up and leave for the voyage.

Circe, who at this phase is a kind and loving person, begs Odysseus to stay; she is extremely beautiful and wearing a golden belt and a veil, as recounted by Homer. A comparison with the six female figures representing virtues at the same hall suggests that the belt seems to have been depicted with a specific intention. Fortitude, Regality, Fidelity and Chastity all wear simple belts; Fortune and Richness wear golden belts, since they are intentionally depicted with golden jewelry. Circe's hand gesture, which can be seen as indicating chastity, may also be interpreted as a body language a woman begging her admired man to stay, or as a hand that is pointing towards the camp of Odysseus and the boats that are preparing to leave. The kneeling soldier can be one of Odysseus' men, ordered by him to take all of the treasures onto the boats, which are appropriately depicted in the background, and to prepare for the leave. The other men, who have been turned into humans for some time, are beardless and so rather young, following the transformation. Unwilling to go to the Hades and to abandon the good life on the island where they ate and drank with no preoccupations, implied by the drinking ewers and vases, they weep in sorrow before they leave.

¹²⁹ Homer, *Odyssey*, 10. 135 - 12. 156; Homer, *The Odyssey*, trans. A.T. Murray (Cambridge, MA., Harvard University Press; London, William Heinemann, 1919). See also: Judith Yarnell, *The Transformations of Circe. The History of an Enchantress* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1994), 9-25.

Homer depicts the sorceress from Aiaia in a rather positive light; especially once her amorous affair with Odysseus begins, she takes good care of him and his men and later assists the hero and his crew in the voyage to Hades. In the literary and visual tradition, attitudes towards Circe and her power has gone through many transformations from Homer's time to that of other ancient writers, from the Renaissance to modern times. In Virgil's *Aeneid* for example, Circe appears briefly as the ruler of a promontory where the air vibrates with the howls of chained and enraged beasts, in a place to be avoided at all costs. On the other hand, for the Neo-Platonists, she turns the symbolic wheel that governs the incarnation, the endless series of births and deaths in Neo-Platonic allegory¹³⁰. In the sixteenth century, Circe represents two opposing entities: the first, which dominates the tradition of the moral allegories, as a malicious sorceress, and the second as a beneficial, more cryptic, initiatory and alchemical enchantress¹³¹.

In painting, when the scene is represented as a moral allegory, Odysseus is depicted receiving from Hermes the moly, the remedy against the seductions of Circe's voluptuousness. This image appears in the tradition of the Renaissance emblem: in Alciato's *Emblemata* as a depiction of the emblem of Eloquence (**fig. 167**), and in Achille Bocchi's *Symbolicarum Quaestiones*. In Rome, Palazzo Farnese, Annibale Caracci drew Circe in an elegant pose, offering Odysseus her potion while Hermes is standing behind him as the protector (ca. 1597) (**fig. 207**). The image is rendered in a manner that implies attraction between the two figures and thus questioning Odysseus' chastity. In the oval space right above the painting there is a young woman holding a turtledove, representing an allegory of Chastity, and thus emphasizing the role of Circe in the image beneath it as a symbol of temptation and *Luxuria*, who Odysseus resists thanks to the help of Hermes¹³². Caracci's painting was inspired by Pellgrino Tibaldi's version of the story at Bologna's Palazzo Poggi (ca. 1550-51) (**fig. 208**). Judith Yarnell has interpreted that

¹³⁰ Yarnell, *The Transformations of Circe*, 1-2, 144.

¹³¹ Marco Lorandi, *Il mito di Ulisse nella pittura a fresco del Cinquecento italiano*, with Orietta Pinessi (Milan: Jaca book, 1996), 453; Yarnell, *The Transformations of Circe*, 99-126 ("V. Renaissance Circes").

¹³² Yarnell, *The Transformations of Circe*, 119; Lorandi, *Il mito di Ulisse*, 466-468.

painting as a '*straightforward unallegorical homage to its hyper-masculine hero*', while Marco Lorandi suggested a moral key based on a long literary tradition, in which the men transformed into animals symbolize different human vices¹³³.

The positive aspect of Circe's existence is clearly demonstrated in the painting dedicated to the sorceress by Dosso Dossi (1518), where a luminous nude Circe teaches mysteries from her tablets to a small group of animals and birds gathered around her (**fig. 209**). Perhaps, as Yarnall suggests, the painting refers to the remark of Homer, according to which the transformed men still maintained their human consciousness¹³⁴. In Florence, Palazzo Portinari Salviati, Alessandro Allori painted Circe in the front plane of the fresco, while in the background Hermes is handing Odysseus the Moly (1575-76) (**fig. 210**). Circe represents the world of spells and mystery within an atmosphere of a terrestrial paradise, in a calm and silent atmosphere where lions and wolfs are presented together in a heraldic and almost static pose. Like in Dossi's painting, she is equipped with a wand and a book, and her hand is leaning on the stone in a melancholic pose, as a symbol of her wisdom¹³⁵.

Different paintings describe different moments in the episode. In Florence, at the *Studiolo* of Francesco I at the Palazzo Vecchio, the scene depicts Odysseus receiving the Moly from Hermes while in the background Circe is transforming the men into animals (1570-72). In a fresco in the Gallery of Odysseus in Fontainebleau by Primaticcio (1547-49), which survived in copies in an engraving by Th. van Thulden (1559-70) and in an oil painting, Odysseus is offered the potion by Circe, protected by Hermes, while in the background the soldiers are shown in the process of transformation into animals. The same moment is depicted by Caracci; Tibaldi, however, depicts the moment after drinking the potion, when Odysseus raises his sword. At Villa Lanzi di Borlago, in the province of Bergamo, a fresco by Giovanni Battista Castello depicts Odysseus and Circe talking after the men were transformed (at the *Sala della Perfettura*, ca. 1555). In Genoa, Palazzo della

¹³³ Yarnell, *The Transformations of Circe*, 118-119; Lorandi, *Il mito di Ulisse*, 457.

¹³⁴ Yarnell, *The Transformations of Circe*, 115.

¹³⁵ Lorandi, *Il mito di Ulisse*, 464-465.

Meridiana, either Castello or Luca Cambiasso painted the episode of Odysseus and Circe (1560-65). No animals are present in the painting because the fresco depicts the moment of the arrival of Odysseus and his men to Circe's island¹³⁶.

In accordance with the Homeric tradition, the fresco in Villa Grimani Molin depicts Circe as a benevolent person who takes care of Odysseus and his men, pleading him to stay but accepting his leave, and guiding him in his following mission in the Hades. Circe uses her powers beneficently; she never lies to Odysseus and never threatens him. In the copies after Fontainebleau and in particular in the engraving, Odysseus is depicted in an age, location in the image and body posture that recall the Fratta version. Like in the representational tradition of Odysseus, he is wearing Greek armor and accompanied by a cape, which is set on his lap. The Fratta painter had no need for representing animals because the chosen moment is posterior to their re-transformation into human beings.

The particular moment of Odysseus preparing to leave could have been chosen for two main reasons. Odysseus parts from Aiaia to Hades, a stop in his journey that is relevant to the secondary interpretation of the scene depicted in the large fresco on the east wall, as we shall see ahead. In addition, the topic was probably chosen in order to avoid the necessity to depict details that were too specific for the story, which would have eliminated the possibility of attributing multiple representations to the image. Painting animals, for example, so alien to the representative tradition of *The Continnence of Scipio*, would have interfered with the original representation and would have neutralized the mysterious dimension of the ulterior meaning. On the other hand, details like the positioning of the figures, the fact that Scipio and Odysseus are both highly esteemed military figures, that both the bride and Circe are beautiful women, the riches and the military context exist in both stories, and create a harmonic union between the two representations.

The representation Odysseus and Circe is not a common subject in the visual tradition of the Veneto villa. However, the concepts of magic and witchcraft and the positive characteristics

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, 461.

recognized with Circe are not alien the cosmological and agricultural contextualization of the humanist rural residences. The relationship between agriculture, alchemy and magic, had been recognized since ancient times. Both disciplines required similar operations and capacities in controlling and manipulating the forces of nature through the application of human *technical* abilities, recognizing an analogy between the microcosm and the macrocosm, and much like the construction of a new building by an architect¹³⁷.

Astrology, magic, agriculture and architecture were all associated with the influence of the planet Saturn. This is the reason why, for example, Circe in Allori's painting adapts the physical pose of the Saturnian melancholic. In the manuscript describing the images that Francesco Trento planned for the walls of the *Sala Apollina* in Villa Eolia, beneath the planet of Saturn he instructed the painter to depict '*whoever is inclined to the magical arts and agriculture*'. Next to '*an agronomist that cultivates the land*' he required '*a sorceress similar to a Medea that is in a circle and is casting a spell*', and also '*people who are making a beautiful building*', another related characteristic that is identified with the objectives of the Veneto villa that is also associated with Saturn¹³⁸.

5.3.2 Honor and Mysteries: the East Wall of the Central Hall

The fresco scene of the east wall is arranged in a composition that is analogous to its west wall counterpart (**fig. 205**). Both depictions contain a similar enthroned figure with a young assistant behind him, several Greek soldiers, a screen and boats in the background. However, the east fresco contains several unique details whose iconographic context is particularly difficult to interpret in a decisive manner and to attribute to an existing visual precedent.

¹³⁷ Ruggero Rugolo, *Agricoltura e alchimia nel Rinascimento: un'introduzione allo studio della villa veneta*. (Pisa: Giardini, 1995, excerpt from: *Studi veneziani*, n.s. 27), 132. The article is dedicated to the connection between alchemy and agriculture in the culture of the Veneto Villa.

¹³⁸ « Sotto Saturno chi inclina a arte magica e agricultura a edifici a pregioni a minere a mercantia. Una maga a similtudine di una medea che sia in circolo et faccia incantatione, Uno aratore che coltivi la terra, Persone che facino una fabrica bella, Navi in mare che discargino merce. » Published in: Van der Sman, *La decorazione a fresco*, 146.

A male with a short beard is seated on a throne beneath a baldachin, wearing a crown that identifies him as a king. A dog stands at the feet of the throne, carrying an alert facial expression and revolving his head backwards, looking outside the scene. The left arm of the king is positioned on the throne, his right arm is stretched out and holding a pomegranate whose outer shell is partially peeled, revealing its red seeds. A soldier kneels in front of him, wearing a denser beard and smiling. The helmet of the soldier is set on the ground at his feet, his right hand is folded towards his chest and his left arm reaches for the fruit.

A very young man with short hair stands behind the enthroned king. His contemporary Renaissance outfit, a simple ochre vest with a white collar and a crossed belt, stands in sharp contrast to the classical Greek armor of the rest of the figures in the fresco. The position of the boy echoes that of Mercury/Hermes in the parallel scene; they also wear the same colored outfit. In his gesture, the boy seems to be guiding the king towards the kneeling soldier, recalling the gesture of a stage producer in a theatrical performance. In the plane behind the kneeling soldier there is another soldier, partially kneeling towards the king as well. This soldier is wearing white cloths, he is facing the first soldier and his hands are showing the king's direction. A third bearded soldier stands to the left in an upright, rather awkward position. His helmet is set next to him on the ground, he places his left hand behind his hip and his right hand is raised upwards with its palm folded inwards, facing the direction of the pomegranate. His head is turned right towards the main scene and his body is turned to the other side, calling the attention of the viewer to the figure at the extreme left of the human group.

The armed figure can be identified as the female goddess Athena-Pallas (**fig. 137**). Athena is traditionally represented as a female, and therefore beardless figure, in military wear; here her Greek shield contains depiction of a nude female figure. She seems to be performing a mediating role between the viewer and the scene that is analogue to the role of Mercury in the previous fresco. She is looking at the viewer with a serious facial expression, her left hand supports the shield and her right hand is pointing to the right of the image at the event that occurs with the king and his subject. To her left, in the extreme left of the

painting there is a large white case with a base, with a pair of sculptured winged female beasts, similar to the hybrid that appears on the throne of the king beneath his arm. The case is depicted only in part, as indicated by its ornamentation that is cut by the border of the painting, indicating that is probably a classical sarcophagus.

To the left of the fresco, above the representation of the virtue of Chastity there is a small monochrome executed in a very quick and simple manner in a white brush on a black background (**fig. 211**). The drawing is not casual; it depicts all of the major elements of the large fresco to its right, in a mirrored view. The concept is a visual game that can be seen as part of the culture of the grotesque, indicating, in a playful and emblematic manner, what are the important details in the large fresco that the viewer should pay attention to. These are the king and his baldachin, the kneeling man, who receives here a scepter instead of a pomegranate, and the sarcophagus, which is extremely large and shown in a frontal view.

Unlike the fresco on the west wall, the east painting seems to have no common visual precedent that is clearly identifiable in Venetian or Renaissance art, requiring an attentive analysis. The key for the interpretation may therefore lie in the pomegranate presented by the king, which is very conspicuous in the fresco but is rarely represented in the decorative tradition of the Palladian villa. As in the case of the fresco on the west wall, it is possible to suggest two different types of iconographical references: the first alluding to Roman history, and the second, related to mythology and to esoteric rituals or practices.

5.3.2.1 Illustrious Ancient Governors II: the Possible Representation of King Darius

Trinchieri-Camiz has suggested that the fresco recounts another scene in which Scipio Africanus is the protagonist. She identifies the scene with an episode where the Roman General tries to mediate between the centurion Quintus Trebellius and the seaman Sesto Digitio, who competed for the honor of being the first to climb the walls of New Cartago¹³⁹. However, as noted by Van der Sman, the scene has no precise description in the writings of

¹³⁹ Trinchieri Camiz, "Significati iconografici," 124. The commanders Lelio Tuditano and Caudino who were called in to help with the dispute would be present in the scene (LIV., XXVI, xlviij).

Titus Livius, no tradition of visual representation in the sixteenth century, and nothing to do with the pomegranate, which is the central element in the fresco¹⁴⁰. In addition, unlike in the case of the other scene, here the enthroned figure is crowned, indicating that he is not just a military official, but should receive a regal identification.

Van der Sman suggested, on his behalf, to interpret the scene according to the symbolic significance of the pomegranate, which he interpreted as a symbol of union and concord, citing Valeriano, Cartari and Ripa¹⁴¹. The most famous visual precedent in Renaissance art which he is able to identify that includes a king holding pomegranate is the tapestry by Rosso Fiorentino in the gallery of Francois I of Fontainebleau, "The Unity of State", which appears in an engraving by Antonio Fantuzzi (**fig. 212**). There, an armed king in Roman armor shows an open pomegranate to various representatives of the regime that have gathered in a circle around him¹⁴². Van der Sman stated that doubtless, the concept of union is at the base of the representation in the Fratta fresco. But while the Fontainebleau version alludes to the concentration of the power in the hands of the king (based on Concord and Friendship), he supposed that in Fratta the scene refers to the mediating capacities of the ancient sovereign, accentuating the duties of political-judicial service that Vincenzo Grimani, as a Venetian nobleman, had to assume¹⁴³.

However, the identification fails to consider several details that appear in the painting, such as the presence of Athena, of the dog and the sarcophagus, and the Greek wear of the participants. The Fratta king is enthroned, while in the engraving and tapestry he is

¹⁴⁰ Van der Sman, *La decorazione a fresco*, 174.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 174-175. Piero Valeriano wrote that because all of the seeds of the fruit are kept together within one peel, it is a symbol of union, «multarum gentium societas», intended as the church that unites within it many popoli and many believers. Piero Valeriano, *Hieroglyphica sive de Sacris Aegyptiorum literis commentarii* (Basel: Palmasing, 1556), c. 398r. According to Ripa, *Iconologia*, 82, «Concordia degl'Antichi». For Cartari, beyond the Christian context, the pomegranate becomes an attribute of Concord the souls, which should have concordance and union among themselves like the seeds of the pomegranate. Their union shall bring forth the birth of Abundance, «che è il nervo di vivere politico e concorde.»

¹⁴² Erwin Panofsky, "The Iconography of the Galerie Francois Ier at Fontainebleau," *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* LII (1958): 131-137. The scene is figured in a print by Fantuzzi, and in a tapestry in Vienna.

¹⁴³ Van der Sman, *La decorazione a fresco*, 175: « [...] sembra riferirsi alle capacità mediatrici e conciliatrici del sovrano antico, accennando appunto ai doveri di servizio politico-giudiziario che Vincenzo Grimani, in quanto nobile veneziano, era tenuto ad assumersi.», quoting: Trinchieri Camiz, "Significati iconografici," 124.

standing in the midst of his subjects. There are two pomegranates in the earlier version, one in the hand of the king, the other in the hand of the young boy that bows in front of him. In addition, the reference to Vincenzo's 'duties of political-judicial service' is somewhat problematic on the account that he probably did not possess any public office or official role in the Republic besides that of an important, rich nobleman.

In fact, there exists a commonly known episode from Greek history that includes the presence of a king and a Pomegranate: a brief Persian eulogy recorded by Herodotus about Megabazus, the competent military General of the Persian king Darius (550 – 486 BC).

*'Darius having marched across Thrace, came to Sestos, in the Chersonesus, from whence he himself passed over on ship-board into Asia, leaving, as Commander in Europe, a Persian, Megabazus. This person Darius had formerly much honored by the following words, which he pronounced at the presence of the Persians. Darius being about to eat some Pomegranates, his brother Artabanus asked him, as soon as he had opened the first, what he should like to have in as great abundance as there were seeds in the pomegranate; whereupon Darius said, 'that he would rather have as many Megabazuses than have all of Greece subject to him.' Thus did he honor him in the presence of the Persians: and, at this time, he left him, as commander-in-chief, with eighty thousand of his troops.'*¹⁴⁴

In accordance with the text, the enthroned figure in the Fratta fresco could be identified with Darius. The kneeling soldier would therefore be Megabazus, whose gesture can be interpreted as gratitude for being honored, his facial expression demonstrating his grand satisfaction. The man behind him clad in white could be Artabanus, the brother of Darius, whose white cloths may be an indication for his high social rank. The boats in the

¹⁴⁴ Herodotus, *Histories*, 4., 142-143. The tale is also told by Eustace (ad. Il. ii. , 182, 27). Eustathius, the Archbishop of Thessalonica, wrote the *Commentari ad Homeri Iliadem*. His text had a respectable diffusion in the Renaissance, and the existence of the commentary manuscript in the Gonzaga library is well documented. For its employment by Giulio Romano at Mantua's Ducal Palace see: Bette L. Talvacchia, "Homer, Greek heroes and Hellenism in Giulio Romano's Hall of Troy," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 51 (1988): 235-242. For Eustathius see: Eustathius Thessalonicensis. *Eustathii Archiepiscopi Thessalonicensis Commentarii ad Homeri Iliadem ad fidem exempli romani editi* (Hildesheim; New York: Georg Olms Verlag, 1970). For Herodotus see: Herodotus, *The nine books of the History of Herodotus*, trans. T. Gaisford, with notes and a summary by P.E. Larent (Henry Slatter, High Street, 1846).

background may refer to the boats of the king, on their way to cross from *Sestos* towards Asia. Athena represents the goddess of war through the use of wisdom rather than brutal force, and therefore here she may allude to the good military management of Megabazus. Rather than the concept of sovereignty through concord or union, *honor* becomes the main iconographical purpose of the scene, alluding to one of the most important qualities of the Renaissance nobleman, which had also been discussed among the academies.

Scenes recounting episodes from the life of Darius are not completely alien to Venetian painting, although the Persian king usually plays the secondary role of the opponent of Alexander the Great. In Villa Godi, Zelloti and Moro painted in the central hallway scenes from the life of Darius¹⁴⁵. *The Battle of Issus* is painted on the right, where Alexander is presented as a triumphant warrior, conqueror of Asia or the world, accompanied by allegories of provinces and military trophies¹⁴⁶. On the left, *The Death of Darius* refers to the profound morality of Alexander¹⁴⁷. At the same villa in the *Stanza dei Trionfi* in a monochrome above a door, Alexander the Great grants his grace to the family of Darius, ordering his soldiers to treat them with humanity and with regard due to their rank¹⁴⁸. The monochrome on another door of the room depicts a *Contenance of Scipio*.

The pairing between Darius and Scipio recurs once again in a Veneto villa: *The Family of Darius before Alexander* was also painted at the Montecchia by Antonio Vassilliachi (1579-1580). The image appears at the north loggia of the upper floor while in the southern loggia Scipio is depicted restoring the bride to Allucius. In Venice, Veronese was commissioned to depict *The Family of Darius before Alexander* by the Coccina family, which he painted in 1565-7 in a style and composition that contain visual references to theater culture.

As discussed in the introductory chapter to the frescoes, the closest prototype to the figure of the enthroned king and to the theatrical layout of the scene may be found in the painting of the Beheading of Saint Sisto by Camillo Filippi. The stylistic typology of figure of

¹⁴⁵ Van der Sman, *La decorazione a fresco*, 59ff.

¹⁴⁶ ARR., II, x, 3ff.; DIOD. An. XVII, 35; CURT., III, xi, 1ff.

¹⁴⁷ PLUT. Alex. XLIII, 5.

¹⁴⁸ PLUT, Alex. XXXIII, 21; VAL. MAX. IV, vii.

the king was quite a common visual formula in several artistic ambiances during the Renaissance, employed for the representation of historical or mythological sovereigns, especially of exotic origins. In Venice, the baldachin throne and the bearded king in profile appear for example in a perspective elaboration in Veronese's *Triumph of Esther* representing the Persian king Ahasuerus in the nave of the Church of San Sebastiano in Venice (1556). In the area of Mantua, during the 1570's and can be found in particular in drawings by the painter from Cremona Giulio Campi. In fact, the fresco in Fratta highly resembles a preparatory drawing by Campi for a scene depicting King Solomon, destined to become a fresco in the church of San Sigismondo in Cremona; the drawing is more similar to the Fratta version than the final result of the fresco in the church (**figs. 213, 214**).

However, an even more similar image of an enthroned king was painted by Friedrich Sustris, the son of the Lambert Sustris and a successful painter in his own right. The painting, which dates to about 1590, was one of two pictures executed by Friedrich for the Grottenhof buildings in the Munich Residenz and is considered one of his finest achievements (**fig. 215**). It depicts an episode during Alexander the Great's military campaigns, *Darius Rejecting the Advice of Charidemus*. According to the story Charidemus, a leader of mercenary troops is warning Darius II the king of Persia, to beware of Alexander's army. His warning goes unheeded, but the army can be seen in the background on the left¹⁴⁹.

Not only are the baldachin, throne and posture of the king identical to the Fratta depiction, but the painting also contains a statue of Athena as a symbol of wisdom. The story does not include a pomegranate but it involves the same protagonist, king Darius, who is presented in a positive light as in Fratta, and unlike the usual Venetian depiction of Darius as Alexander's opponent. In addition, a very small boy with short red hair and what seems like a sixteenth century dress is depicted at the feet of the throne of the Persian king, strongly resembling the young man in Renaissance cloths that accompanies the Fratta king.

However, it is difficult to retain the image as a visual source for the frescoes of Villa Grimani Molin, above all for its late dating, which likely to be posterior to the depiction in Fratta. In

¹⁴⁹ Thea Vignau-Wilberg, *In Europa zu Hause: Niederländer in München um 1600* (Munich: Hirmer, 2005), 292-293.

addition, the young boy in the Fratta fresco seems to be copied from a different source that dates to an earlier period: a young page in fresco painted by Antonio Campi at the church of San Sigismondo in Cremona, *The Feast at the House of Simon*, dated 1577 (**fig. 216**). Despite the completely different subject matter and layout of the image, the similarity between the two figures is striking, from the hair, to the facial features, to the identical cloths and similar role as a page that accompanies a regal figure. In the Scipio scene the position of the kneeling man echoes that of a similar, but female figure in another image from the church of San Sigismondo, this time a painting attributed to Giulio Campi describing Salomon and the Queen of Saba. Salomon once again highly resembles the king holding the pomegranate in the Fratta scene (**figs. 217, 218**).

It is possible that the painter in Fratta had based his fresco on a drawing of a scene that was similar to the material that Friedrich Sustris had in hand. In any case, the painter demonstrates a convincing familiarity with the frescoes and/or preparatory drawings executed by the Campi artists in Cremona for the church of San Sigismondo. As in other occasions in the villa, the visual precedents are employed in an intelligent manner and adapted to the requirements dictated by the iconographical program. At the same time the appearance of a few details in the fresco, such as the furious dog and the sarcophagus, justifies a further examination of the iconographical identification.

5.3.2.2 Mythological and Mystical Contextualization: The Underworld and its Mysteries

The pomegranate is a fruit that is saturated with symbolism in Western visual culture, some of its prestigious qualities related to fertility, marriage, death and even reincarnation¹⁵⁰. It is therefore logical to expect that some aspects of this rich symbolism would be enclosed in the pomegranate represented in the fresco. In Greek mythology the fruit is identified above all with goddess Persephone, who was condemned to life in the underworld because of eating just one of its seeds. Fragments of the story are mentioned by many sources, which is told in the most detailed manner (although still in a fragmented manner) in the Homeric

¹⁵⁰ See for example: Levi D'Ancona, *The Garden of the Renaissance*, 312-318 ("Pomegranate").

Hymn dedicated to Demeter, the mother of Persephone¹⁵¹. The appearance of the myth in the ancient Greek literature is justified for two reasons: in order to recount the story of Persephone, and in order to explain the origin of the Eleusinian mysteries, which were dedicated to the goddess. The main occurrences of the plot are as follows:

One day the young goddess Persephone went with the nymphs, with Athena and Artemis to collect flowers, when she was suddenly kidnapped by Hades, the God of the Underworld. Hades constrained her to his carriage pulled by furious horses, carrying her into his dark realm. Persephone's mother Demeter was struck by extreme sorrow and pain, crying endlessly and searching for her beloved daughter in the most hidden and inaccessible places, until exhausted, distraught, she abandoned the Olympus and went down to Eleusis, to be isolated in her pain. The land, which now remained abandoned, lacking any protection, became barren, and the men and the plants risked perishing miserably. The situation required Zeus to intervene, and to order that the young girl be restored to her mother. But because she was misled by Hades, Persephone ate a seed of a pomegranate in the Underworld, binding her eternally to the place. As a compromise, Zeus decided that she spend eight months of the year on Earth and four months in the darks realm of Hades. Persephone therefore reappeared on Earth, and was given the name "perse-fone", she who wins life and overcomes death. Upon her return, her mother taught the people of Eleusis the rites of the mystery. Persephone's repetitive visits to the Underworld and returns to Earth have come to determine the annual cycle and the change of the seasons: in November the goddess disappeared together with the productive force of the Earth, and when she returned in Spring the earth was covered again with green fields and flowers, as in for a new life¹⁵².

The cult of Persephone was connected among the Hellenists by the ancient theogonies to the myths that were once practices in Eleusis in honor of Dionysus. Persephone was adored as protector of agriculture and of the fertility of the fields. She was also called Kore, meaning 'daughter', recalling her role as the daughter of Demeter. The two goddesses, that

¹⁵¹ Filippo Cassola, ed., *Inni omerici* (Rome: Fondazione Lorenzo Valla; Milan: A. Mondadori, 1975).

¹⁵² *The Homeric Hymn to Demeter*. See also: Vincenzo Nusdeo, *Persefone Hipponiate, Il suo mito, il suo rito, il suo tempio* (Vibo Valentia: Mapograf, 1984), 12-15.

in the Eleusinian cult constituted an inseparable unity, were venerated in the most fertile regions of Ancient Greece, from which the cult was then diffused in the west, in Sicily and in Magna Graecia at Locri, and above all at Hipponion¹⁵³.

In fact, in the decorative tradition of the Veneto villa, Persephone often appears in the context of the seasons. In Villa Barbaro she represents the cold seasons, as part of her role as the wife of Hades. In Palazzo Thiene in Vicenza, an entire room is dedicated to Persephone in a cosmological context. Four scenes of the Ovidian tale appear on the ceiling together with a representation of four male pagan gods that represent the four elements and the four humors (Persephone collects flowers in the meadow, accompanied by Diana and Minerva, Venus and Cupid; Pluto rapes Persephone on his carriage; the carriage with the two gods goes down to Hades; Ceres her mother sets fire to the earth with her sorrow; and in the center – Persephone is returned to the Olympic forum)¹⁵⁴.

The Fratta fresco contains many elements that are competent with the mythological context. The setting of the story within the underworld is indicated through the representation of the classical sarcophagus, as emphasized in the grotesque monochrome. The enthroned figure can represent Hades, king of the Underworld, who is often portrayed with regal attributes such as a scepter and a crown. Like in several traditional representations of Hades, the king is seated on a throne accompanied by a dog that is looking at all directions with a serious and alert facial expression, as his guardian. It is true that Cerberus is often represented with two or three heads, but not necessary; in fact, Homer does not mention his visual aspect, and the attribution of three heads to him is mentioned only since the time of Apollodorus. The boats in the background may allude to the boat of Charon, the ferryman that brings the souls to the underworld¹⁵⁵. As in the case of the transformation of Odysseus' men into animals, depicting more heads in the figure of

¹⁵³ Nusdeo, *Persefone Hipponiate*, 11 ("The Persephone Cult and Orphism").

¹⁵⁴ Rigon, "I soffitti con decorazioni di affreschi e stucchi," 218-222

¹⁵⁵ Maurice Bloomfield, *Cerberus, the Dog of Hades: The History of an Idea* (Chicago: The Open Court Publishing Company, 1905), 1-8.

Cerberus would have immediately enclosed the identification of the king as Hades, and would have eliminated the possibility to attribute a different interpretation to the scene.

While the mythological description may describe the location of the fresco, the scene that is depicted does not seem to match any specific episode told by Homer or by any other classical author. However, two heroic figures are said to have visited the realm of Hades according to Homer: Odysseus, the protagonist of the companion fresco and Orpheus, whose mystic cult was related to Persephone in ancient Greece. Both figures could have been represented in the scene; in this case it may be interpreted as a symbolic, allegorical representation of an idea, rather than a specific episode of a Homeric tale.

Odysseus visited the Underworld with his men after leaving Circe, following her instructions and assistance, in order to find the Theban seer, Tiresias, a blind prophet who would foretell the future of his journeys. While in Hades, Odysseus crosses paths with many men and women that have affected his life at some point in time, such as his family members and friends, heroes, heroines and Sufferers. While the interpretation could create continuity with the other scene on the main wall, it seems that the continuity is maintained only in the choice of location. The fresco does not contain any of the figures or elements that participate in Odysseus' adventure. Of all the people that he saw in the underworld he did not meet Hades, and the pomegranate is not mentioned in any occasion.

In keeping with the Homeric theme, the figure kneeling in front of the king could also be Orpheus, who is known to have visited Hades¹⁵⁶. According to Homer, one day a snake bit Eurydice, Orpheus' wife. She died from the snake's venom and went to the Underworld. Orpheus, saddened, decided to go to the Underworld and ask Hades back for Eurydice. His music charmed Hades and Persephone, who agreed to let Eurydice out of the Underworld on one condition: he should walk in front of her and not look back until they had both reached the upper world. Orpheus set off with Eurydice following, but in his anxiety, as soon as he reached the upper world he turned to look at her. Eurydice, who did not yet step into the sunlight, was immediately pulled back into the Underworld, this time for eternity.

¹⁵⁶ Hom. *Od.* 11.1.; Adele D. Richardson, *Hades* (Mankato, Minn.: Capstone Press, 2003), 17-19.

The scene of Orpheus and Eurydice in front of Hades appears in a fresco by assistants of Giulio Romano in Mantua, Palazzo Te, on the south wall of the *Room of Ovid* (ca. 1527). There, in a dark space, Hades is an enthroned figure represented as a king with Cerberus at his feet, much like in the Fratta villa (**fig. 219**). The rest of the scene, however, differs significantly. Persephone is seated behind Hades and Orpheus is playing his lute in front of them, with Eurydice tied behind him, and in the presence of three other dead souls.

Although the tail does not include a pomegranate, and Eurydice is absent from the scene, it is important to acknowledge that the myth of Persephone found particular points of reference and fusion with Orphism, the great mystical and religious movement which appeared in Greece in the sixth century BC, and that is traced to Orpheus. Orpheus, the gifted musician and poet, was above all a great thinker and theologian, who knew how to mutate and to adapt the primitive and savage Dionysian mystery into a theological and moral system that made man derive from the sky and the earth, equipped with material body and eternal spirit. The Orphic followers practiced a life of extremely rigorous ethic and morality, so that the spirit maintains its pure state, among the temptations and deceptions of terrestrial life. They reunited in conferences reserved only to initiate people, they repeated the myths of the ancient theogonies, discussed and deepened the problem of the existence and of eternal bliss, that they thought that they could obtain among the woods and the meadows of Persephone in an everlasting spring¹⁵⁷.

To a certain extent, the fresco recalls a tradition of classical imagery which depicts Orpheus in front of Hades and Persephone, in which the hero is depicted in front of the gods who are enthroned and within a classical architectural environment (**figs. 220, 221**).

Alberto Bernabé has attempted to reconstruct a common conceptual paradigm of the Orphic Underworld, based on classical textual (The Gold Lamellae, the Homeric Hymns) and iconographic sources (mainly pottery from Magna Graecia). He explained that while the Homeric image of Hades is negative, dark, sad and hateful without exception, in the

¹⁵⁷ Vincenzo Nusdeo, *Persephone Hipponiate, Il suo mito, il suo rito, il suo tempio* (Vibo Valentia: Mapograf, 1984). 19-20.

Gold Lamellae it is a dual place, with prizes and punishment¹⁵⁸. In the Orphic tradition the Underworld is a 'well built house', ruled over by Persephone and Hades¹⁵⁹. There is even a secret privileged place in Hades, a *locus amoenus* defined as Persephone's sacred meadow, accessed only through initiation¹⁶⁰. The Underworld has two roads or fates for its inhabitants; the prizes are related to the idea of proximity to the divine, and they are symbolized by the presence of the mediators.

There is a divine mediator, Dionysus, and a human one, Orpheus, who is always represented at the frontier between the palace and the rest of the space, sometimes with the clear presence of the believer¹⁶¹. Orpheus went down to Hades on the quest to bring back his dead wife, and was therefore considered by the users of the Gold Lamellae as a human mediator, who through initiation explains the path that the souls have to follow to achieve their salvation. His presence in the netherworld is related not to the search for Eurydice (who never does appear, at least in an unequivocal manner), but rather to his role as a protector of certain souls on their arrival to the Underworld¹⁶².

Not a lot is known about the procedures of the ancient Eleusinian and Orphic mysteries, whose rites were sometimes so secretive and sometimes so obvious, that they are not recounted in detail by the ancient authors¹⁶³. In the Eleusinian mysteries the pomegranate was considered as a symbol and means for entering the afterlife and a symbol of immortality. During the Eleusinian mysteries the priests of Demeter had to carry on their heads a crown of pomegranate branches, and all of the participants in these rites had to refrain from eating the fruit¹⁶⁴. Traces of pomegranates have been

¹⁵⁸ Hom. *Od.* 20. 64-65. « dark and dank abode, for which the very gods have loathing »

¹⁵⁹ Hipponion, 2

¹⁶⁰ It is called «meadow of the blessed» (Diod. Sic. 1.96.2-5) or «Persephone's meadow» (Thur. 487. 5-6; Orph. Hymn. 29.12, cf. 18.2), it is a place reserved for those who are in a situation of ritual purity.

¹⁶¹ Alberto Bernabé, "Imago Inferorum Orphica," in *Mystic cults in Magna Graecia*, eds. G. Casadio and P. A. Johnston (Austin: University of Texas press, 2009), 95-109, 119-120.

¹⁶² *Ibid.*, 112-114

¹⁶³ For a collection of the ancient sources referring to the Eleusian mysteries see: *Eleusi, dionisismo, orfismo* (Rome: Fondazione Lorenzo Valla; Milan: A. Mondadori, 2002).

¹⁶⁴ Cecilia Gatto Trocchi, *Enciclopedia Illustrata Dei Simboli* (Rome: Gremese, 2004), 235.

found in certain archaeological sites of ancient temples in Magna Graecia, where Eleusinian mysteries are known to have been practiced.

Several elements suggest that the authors of the fresco in Villa Grimani Molin had intended to depict a rite that was taking place, perhaps secretive, perhaps as an allusion to the Eleusinian mysteries, an initiation ceremony that is highly related to femininity and to the blessing of the agricultural cycle in nature. The myth of Persephone itself is related to the land, to cyclicity of life, to birth and rebirth. The presence of Athena, the patron of the Athenians, may allude to the Athenian feast of the walking to Eleusis which took place every year. While the scene occurs in the Underworld, there is no reason to seek for a representation of Persephone, who does not personally participate in the actual rite. Her presence is symbolized by the pomegranate, as in the tradition of the mysteries.

In Villa Grimani Molin a priest, represented in the guise of Hades, plays the leading role in the ceremony. The theatrical sequence of events is guided and controlled by the page that stands behind him, whose costume reminds us that the event is a reenactment, and not a historical occurrence. The location of the scene in the realm of Hades, emphasized by the grotesque monochrome, represents the transformation to the afterlife through the mediation of Orpheus, who in receiving the pomegranate also receives the means and the consent, as an initiate, to transcend into the afterlife.

TRANSCENDING NATURE

Some of the iconographic themes introduced in the last two chapters imply that the inventors of the fresco program of Villa Grimani Molin possessed an interest in *Filosofia naturalis* that transcended the purely theoretical debate. The indications of alchemical theory found in the grotesques, the super-natural female force embodied in the figure of the sorceress and the allusion to secretive initiation ceremonies suggested in the two dominant frescoes in the central hall – all demonstrate a consciousness of the patrons regarding the ability of humans to provoke the performance of the forces of nature through the aid of their intellectual capacities. In that, they were echoing Francesco Zorzi's affirmation that some people, '*in virtue of their technical abilities, were considered acute imitators of nature*' and following Plato, '*technique was given to the mortals so that they produce some secondary realities*'¹. Through the review of several key themes in the frescos, the current chapter accompanies the attempts of the Fratta inhabitants to explore the limits of human potency through scientific and spiritual practice, based on their interpretations of pagan mythology, Neo-Platonism, Hebrew culture and Christian mysticism.

6.1 CHRISTIAN FAITH AND PAGAN METAMORPHOSES

6.1.1 Pagan Myths and the Venetian Renaissance

The representation of the concept of metamorphosis by the depiction of couples of pagan divinities appears in the fresco program in various occasions. It can be found in the three central images that adorn the ceilings of the three painted rooms, in at least three of the four monochromes at the center of the four grotesque quadrangular spaces in the central hall, and in two of the four females coupled with animals in the vault of the *Studiolo*.

¹ F. Zorzi, *L'armonia del mondo*, III:4:9, 2091; Plato, *Laws*. 10, 889c-d and Zorzi, *idem*.

The treatment of pagan myths as a legitimate component of the Christian Renaissance has its late medieval roots in the literary works such as Petrarch's *Trionfi* and Pierre Bersuire's *Ovidius Moralizatus* (1340, the mythography that transformed the classical work of Ovid into a literature of Christian moralization). In art history, many of the most familiar paintings of pagan subjects in fifteenth and sixteenth century Italy and the Veneto, have been interpreted as allegories of Christian virtues or moral messages, usually in the context of Neo-Platonist philosophy and of its Christian moral overtones. Botticelli's *Primavera* and *Birth of Venus* (1480's), Titian's *Danae* series (1545-1554), representations of *Sacred and Profane Love* are some of the most studied examples².

In the Palladian villas, the representation of pagan subjects and in particular Ovidian myths as allegorical representations of Christian virtues was extremely common. The visual execution often made use of the iconographical language that was studied from the ancient archaeological artifacts and monuments and summed up in the emblematic publications by Alciato, Cartari, Valeriano and Ripa. Villa Emo at Fanzolo is an example for a villa whose decoration is almost entirely based on Ovidian stories and on the representation of pagan virtues. The myth of Juno, Diana and Callisto adorns the entrance portico; four rooms are dedicated to the myth of Hercules, Venus and Adonis, Jupiter and Io, and Mercury and Argos. Another room is dedicated to the Liberal Arts, which are represented by personifications within a classical setting. The central hall contains monochromes of Apollo and Daphne, Apollo and Marsyas, and scenes of *Trionfi* inspired by ancient Roman sacrifice scenes. The purely religious themes representing Christ, the Madonna and San Girolamo are constrained to illusionistic painted frames above the doors

² Erwin Panofsky, *Renaissance and Renascences in Western art* (Copenhagen: Russak, 1960.); Edgar Wind, *Pagan Mysteries in the Renaissance*, new and enlarged edition (London: Faber and Faber, 1968); Rona Goffen. *Titian's Women* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 1997). On the opposite side of the scale, there have been scholars such as Leonard Barkan, who claimed Renaissance art is a complete celebration of beauty, free from medieval moralization, a period which he nominates '*Ovide imagisé*,' as opposed to the *Ovide moralisé* of the Middle Ages. Leonard Barkan, *The Gods Made Flesh: Metamorphosis and the Pursuit of Paganism* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1986), 172-73 ("V. Metamorphosis, Paganism, and the Renaissance Imagination," 171-242).

of the rooms³. Villa Barbaro as well, contains a fresco program that is almost completely based on the representation of mythological divinities, in particular according to the descriptions of Cartari. Two images of the Madonna and Child are the only Christian images in the decorative program, which are once again delimited within in an illusionistic frame. In the *nymphaeum*, a poetic iconographic program was composed by Marc'Antonio Barbaro displaying couples of pagan divinities and mortal heroes mentioned by Ovid⁴.

However, an important distinction should be made between the 'common' interpretations of the classical myths as allegories of Christian morality, and the particular interpretation of the myths of pagan metamorphoses as representative of ideas related to Neo-Platonism and Christian mysticism, and to the perception of path of the soul in the afterlife. The choice of pagan themes in decorative programs such as those of Villa Emo and Villa Barbaro, demonstrates that the owners were not particularly preoccupied with such ideas related to Renaissance mysticism. In accordance with the commercial and political interests of the members of these families, the main iconographical concepts represented in the allegories regard the role of the Renaissance noblewoman and nobleman in society. Above all, they contain guidance and warnings about their obligation produce a successive generation of intellectual and virtuous humanists, who would fulfill their cosmic role in life by the contribution to the Republic through their religious and political office⁵.

On the other hand, the selection of pagan themes in the private residence of the Venetian Patriarch, Palazzo Grimani at Santa Maria Formosa, seems to derive from a completely different iconographical objective. In the old wing of the palace, Giovanni da Udine created

³ Katia Brugnolo Meloncelli, "Villa Emo: il ciclo pittorico, l'apparato decorativo e il rapporto con l'antico," in *Villa Emo*, eds. D. Gasparini and L. Puppi (Vicenza: Terra ferma, 2009), 81.

⁴ Carolyn Kolb and Melissa Beck, "The Sculptures on the Nymphaeum Hemicycle of the Villa Barbaro at Maser," *Artibus et Historiae* 18, 35 (1997): 15-40.

⁵ Many of these issues have been discussed in the previous chapters. For Villa Emo see: Giuseppe Barbieri, "Sui significati della decorazione di Battista Zelotti," in Gasparini and Puppi, *Villa Emo*, 47-77; Annalisa Tessarolo Rossi, "Battista Zelotti: Concordia maritate ed Economia a villa Emo a Fanzolo," *Arte documento* 11 (1997), 98-101; Van der Sman, "L'iconologia di Villa Emo," 37-58. For Villa Barbaro see especially: Cocke, "Veronese and Daniele Barbaro," 226-246; Crosato Larcher, "Considerazioni sul programma di Maser," 211-256; Reist, "'Divine Love' at the Villa Barbaro," 614-635; Rogers, "An Ideal Wife at the Villa Maser."

stucco reliefs depicting Callisto the nymph, who had been transformed into a bear by Juno because her chastity had been ruined by Jupiter (1537-39). Instead of death, Jupiter granted Callisto and their son the most supreme gift, that of eternal life through their transformation into the constellations of the Ursa Major and Ursa Minor⁶. In the adjacent room, Francesco Salviati depicted the contest between Apollo and Marsyas, based on an ancient Roman precedent, with stucco moldings by Giovanni da Udine (1540). The four scenes are a moral warning against crossing the boundaries when trying to compete with God; at the center, the carriage of Sol flies into the sky⁷. The ceiling is surrounded by a frieze of pagan sacrifice elements, perhaps representing the ancient pagan altars found in Sesto, where Giovanni Grimani was an abbot before becoming Patriarch⁸.

In the ceiling of the following room, four scenes from Apuleius' stories of Psyche were painted by Francesco Menzocchi, surrounding a large octagonal canvas by Francesco Salviati, representing Psyche adored as a divinity (1539)⁹. The story of Psyche was perceived as an allegory of the journey of the soul until its final victory, in a transformation that is symbolized by Psyche's joining the Olympus. It appears in renowned precedents: in Rome, in Raphael's *Loggia of Psyche* at Villa Farnesina, and in Mantua, at Palazzo Te by Giulio Romano¹⁰. Finally, at the end of the new wing of Palazzo Grimani, appended in mid-air beneath the coffered ceiling of the tall tower of the *Tribuna*, a Classical sculpture of Jupiter raping Ganymede had been carefully placed. The myth represents yet another story

⁶ Marilyn Perry, "A Renaissance Showplace of Art: The Palazzo Grimani at Santa Maria Formosa, Venice," *Apollo* CXIII (1981): 217. For the significance of the myth of Diana and Callisto in the ambience of the Veneto see: Marcia Mercalli and Simonetta Tozzi, "Il mito di Callisto," in *Giorgione e la cultura veneta*, 155-160.

⁷ Perry, "A Renaissance Showplace of Art." 217-218.

⁸ Annalisa Bristot, ed., *Palazzo Grimani a Santa Maria Formosa: storia, arte, restauri* (Verona: Scripta edizioni, 2008).

⁹ Today, what remains is the large octagonal canvas by Francesco Salviati, *L'offerta di Doni a Psiche*. The remaining scenes were described by Vasari as: Cupid falls in Love with Psyche; Cupid abandons Psyche; Psyche in Hell; Psyche in front of Persephone. Alberto Craievich, "Una proposta per la 'Psiche' di Francesco Salviati a palazzo Grimani," *Arte veneta* 58 (2001): 94-101 ; Mantovanelli, "Giovanni Grimani Patriarca," 40-41. For a short history of the visual representation of the myth of Amore and Psyche in the Renaissance see: Rigon, "I soffitti con decorazioni di affreschi," 222-225.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 222.

of a metamorphosis of a young man, who was transformed into the eternal constellation of Aquarius, a companion of Psyche in the Olympus, as the cupbearer of the gods¹¹.

Through the metamorphosis, the protagonists of the decorative program of Palazzo Grimani become elevated into the realm of the gods, thanks to their virtues or fortune. The upper part of the *Tribuna* tower and the ceiling of its adjacent room are both decorated with an imitation of the coffered ceiling of the Pantheon, recalling its function as the pagan, and later Christian eternal realm of the souls. The ensemble of iconographic choices was inserted within an architectural framework that was designated to hold the archeological and artistic collections of the Patriarch, objects that rendered the palace an allegorical microcosm containing natural artifacts. The iconographical choices for the decoration of the palace suggest that perhaps, the real aspiration of the collector was to *transcend* that same natural universe that was represented by his collections.

The decorative program of Palazzo Grimani in Santa Maria Formosa seems to be just one exemplary instance within a wider phenomenon of visual representation of Renaissance mystical and Neo-Platonist thought, that appears in the decorative programs of various prestigious private residences throughout Italy. For example, in Palazzo Thiene in Vicenza, the program contains themes that discuss the transformation of gods and humans into the supernatural realms. These images appear together with the representation of the present universe, those embodied in the depictions of the seasons, the elements and the zodiac constellations. The 'supernatural' themes include a room with a cycle dedicated to Persephone who reins the Underworld, with her return to the Olympus depicted at the center of the ceiling; a cycle dedicated to Psyche, emphasizing her apotheosis to the Olympus; and a room dedicated to scenes from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*¹². In Villa Badoer, two rather prominent frescoes describe Ganymede's rape into the heavens, and the adventure of Leda with the Swan. Significantly, these are the only two mythological stories

¹¹ For the significance of the myth of Ganymede in the ambience of the Veneto see: Piccininni, "Il mito di Ganimede in ambiente veneto," 149-154.

¹² For the iconography of Palazzo Thiene see: Rigon, "I soffitti con decorazioni di affreschi," 217-307.

that break the symbolic sequence of the decorative program, which is dominated by grotesques and by rather generic scenes of nature and *pastoralia*.

However, the mystical implications do not disregard the existence of an important Christian moral message, embodied, in the case of Palazzo Grimani, in the depiction of the story of Apollo and Marsyas. While the aspiration of the Renaissance man to divine realm is highly desired, the ascent should be done only under certain, careful circumstances. Humans must remember their place within the cosmic hierarchy and refrain from trying to surpass their human capacities; thence they shall fail, and be severely punished. The representation of mythological stories of figures that sought to become supernatural in their audacity and failed is a very common decorative theme in the fresco decorations in Mantua, in the Gonzaga ducal residences during the second half of the sixteenth century.

For example, in Sabbioneta's *Palazzo del Giardino*, the *Sala dei Miti* gathers five myths that reproduce the same theme¹³. The myth of Daedalus and Icarus recounts how the young boy's desire to fly too high caused the wax in his feathers to melt and brought to his death¹⁴. Arachne, the great mortal weaver who boasted that her skill was greater than that of Minerva, was turned into a spider by the goddess¹⁵. Phaethon failed to control his father Helios' chariot and risked setting the Earth on fire, when he was killed by Zeus' thunderbolt to prevent further disaster¹⁶. The satire Marsyas, who challenged Apollo to a contest of music, lost his life, his skin nailed by Apollo to a pine tree¹⁷. The nymph Philyra, who conducted an affair with Chronos, gave birth to a half-horse, half-man hybrid, the centaur Chiron. To ease her shame, Chronos transformed the girl into a linden tree¹⁸.

¹³ Laura Di Calisto, "La sala dei Miti. Evocazione dell'assenza ed elogio della virtù tra memoria familiare e affermazione dinastica," in *Dei ed eroi nel palazzo Giardino a Sabbioneta: miti e allegorie per un principe umanista*, ed. Leandro Ventura (Rome: Bulzoni, 2008), 141-168.

¹⁴ *Ov., Met.*, VIII, 183-235.

¹⁵ *Ov., Met.*, VI, 5-54 and 129-145.

¹⁶ *Ov., Met.*, II, 1-328.

¹⁷ Apollodorus, *Bibliotheca*, 4, 2; *Ov., Met.*, VI, 383-400.

¹⁸ Apollonius Rhodius, *Argonautica*, 2, 1231ff.

In Giovanni Grimani's project for the church of San Francesco della Vigna, certain aspects deal openly but also enigmatically with the mystical implications of the Christian idea of Resurrection¹⁹. These implications bring into mind Francesco Zorzi's views on Christian devotion. In *De harmonia mundi*, Zorzi widely discussed the idea of the Resurrection of Christ, and the eventual resurrection of the entire human race in the afterlife, promising that '*Tutti risorgeremo ma non tutti saremo trasformati*'. Significantly, he explained that the most important part of the Resurrection, which promises the passage into the celestial realm, is the *transformation*²⁰. '*Those who will be transformed in a better condition are only those who, raped beyond human condition, will reach the dignity of gods and the company of the Supreme Creator in person*'²¹. The aspiration of the devoted human being should therefore be to become like a god, and so, he should be interested in achieving this sort of spiritual union with Christ through meditations and devotion²².

The representation of pagan scenes of metamorphoses therefore becomes an analogy to the resurrection of Christ, or in the singular human case, to the final transformation of the human soul through the mediation of Christ, just as the mortals in the myths were assisted by the pagan divinities. This concept seems to be shared by the inventors of the fresco program of Villa Grimani Molin, appearing in the form of the metamorphoses scenes, and is supported by the Hebrew inscription in the *Studiolo*, whose discussion closes the current chapter.

6.1.2 The *Metamorphoses* and the Decorative Program of Villa Grimani Molin

The *Metamorphoses* depictions seem to play an important role in the overall significance of the cosmological program, which is implied by their dominant positions and quantity. In the

¹⁹ See especially: Mut Arbós, "Il ciclo pittorico della cappella Grimani" and the discussion at the end of the current chapter.

²⁰ See especially the chapter dedicated to the subject in Zorzi's treatise. F. Zorzi, *L'armonia del mondo*, III: vii ("on the harmony of the body and the soul, elevated to a better condition through the fire and the resurrection").

²¹ *Ibid.*, III:vii:10, 2245: «Dunque saranno trasformati per una condizione migliore soltanto coloro che, rapiti oltre la condizione umana, raggiungeranno la dignità di dei e la compagnia del sommo Artefice in persona. »

²² Francesco Zorzi's *De Harmonia Mundi* speaks a lot about mystical Meditations on Christ, ideas such as the assimilation with Christ, and his being a mediator through which humans can reach God through religious devotion. See especially the last chapter of the second book of the treatise.

villa, these scenes generally contain a reduced representation, describing a male and a female with only very few details. The identification of visual precedents that could have served the artist for their compilation, results quite challenging. Having witnessed the intelligent adaptations of paintings and engravings by the artist in other occasions in the villa, it is possible to observe that here too the scenes had been invented by the painter in order to comply with the requirements of an original iconographical program.

6.1.2.1 Four Monochromes in the Central Hall

Four scenes that are probably related to Ovid's *Metamorphoses* are represented in the central hall in oval monochromes, inserted within the four quadrangular grotesque schemes in the lower section of the walls. The four ovals seem very different in style, suggesting that they were either depicted by different artists, or copied from different sources, or both.

On the west wall, upon entering the villa from the south, to the right, an elongated oval in a warm ochre monochrome contains a very particular description of the story of *Leda and the Swan* (**fig. 222**). Leda, a nude feminine figure painted in long, Parmigianino-style brush strokes, is reclined with her long back turned to the viewer on a bed-like space marked by a simple piece of cloth and a pillow, in front of a dark veil. She grasps the bottom of the beak of the swan in a gesture that almost seems violent, and the tongues of the two figures connect very visibly, in a manner that is very uncommon even for a subject like *Leda and the Swan*, which is known to be of a very sensual iconography²³. The reclining posture of Leda is also unique: it does not seem to derive from any familiar precedents from artistic centers such as Rome, Florence or Mantua. The story commonly appears in the initial 'L' in printed books by the large Venetian print houses, but the Fratta Leda does not seem to be copied from any of these examples either.

Leda does not resemble in any manner the female with the swan in the *Studiolo* of the villa, or the scene of Leda and the Swan depicted in Villa Badoer, where she is depicted within a Flemish landscape, together with her newborn children. The Leda at the central hall is

²³ Bull, *The Mirror of the Gods*, 167.

reclining, but it bears no resemblance to the common prototype developed after Michelangelo (**fig. 223**). What identifies the Fratta Leda is the particular position of her leg, which is folded backwards, whereas in the traditional representations the leg is always folded forwards. Another peculiar detail is revealed when looking up in the cloud, where a small masculine vault is depicted, nearly invisible, watching the amorous couple.

In fact, the only precedent of a female that bears a convincing resemblance to the figure of Leda does not depict Leda, but Venus: an engraving of *Venus, Cupid and Mars*, dated c. 1540-45 and executed by Domenico del Barbieri (1506-1570), also known as Domenico Fiorentino (**fig. 224**)²⁴. The posture of the figures is very similar, including the curved back line. The piece of cloth covering Venus' thigh has been eliminated from Leda but the artist has maintained its role as a sheet to the left of the figure. The heads bear particular resemblance, with the same angle, facial features and even haircut, with the exception that a long tail of hair beginning behind Leda's ear is sensually sliding on her back. While Venus' back is straight and firm, Leda's neck is pushed forward in a strange manner. The discrepancy reveals the fact that when copying the image the artist, perhaps not very trained, ran out of space for Leda's head at the top of the painting because of the oval form of the monochrome, and was constrained to shift her head to the right.

Domenico del Barbieri was a painter, stucco artist and engraver. He was of Tuscan origins, mentioned by Vasari, and in the 1530's he transferred to France, where he worked in Fontainebleau with Primaticcio and Rosso Fiorentino. The engraving may have been copied from various sources, as Domenico's production as an engraver was quite versatile²⁵. The painter of Villa Grimani Molin may have used Domenico's engraving, or another copy of the original work from which he had produced the engraving, which could have been especially Florentine or Mantuan, considering the influences on the Fontainebleau circle.

²⁴ The engraving is conserved at the Albertina. Published in: Henri Zerner, ed., *The Illustrated Bartsch: 33: Formerly volume 16: Italian artists of the sixteenth century school of Fontainebleau* (New York: Abaris Books, 1979); Rebecca Zorach, *Blood, Milk, Ink, Gold: Abundance and Excess in the French Renaissance* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2005), 11.

²⁵ His engravings can be found in: Zerner, *The Illustrated Bartsch*.

On the same wall, the north monochrome, painted in a narrower oval space and in a cold blue-grey color, depicts two figures in another uncommon iconographical choice (**fig. 225**). The background is similar to the scene of *Leda and the Swan*, containing a dark screen to the left and an open but minimal landscape to the right. Here, the female is grasping the chin of the male in a manner that is identical to Leda's grasp of the swan in the previous painting, indicating that the representation may refer to the episode that just preceded Jupiter's fecundation of Leda²⁶. The monochrome is therefore likely to represent Leda and her husband Tyndareus. In their matrimonial love, Leda became pregnant with Castor and Clytemnestra the very same night that her union with Jupiter brought to the birth of Helen and Pollux. Leda's head is covered, probably as an indication of her married status, and Tyndareus is pointing his finger to the right, where across the wall his wife is represented with the Swan.

A possible visual precedent for the scene of *Leda and Tyndareus* is offered by a painting of Primaticcio, *Odysseus and Penelope*, 1563 (**fig. 226**). The image, which was probably known to the Fratta artist through engravings, depicts the couple in the same posture, but with the roles of the male and female reversed²⁷. Odysseus, like Leda, is positioned to the left. His right arm supports the piece of cloth that covers his legs, which in the case of Leda covers only a part of her thigh. His left hand is holding the chin of Penelope just as Leda is holding Tyndareus' face. His nude chest and body are very similar to the body of Leda, which is 'smoothened' with added breasts, revealing why her body, in fact, seems so rigid and masculine. Leda's vault is extremely simplified and not executed very well, a fact explained when considering that the painter had to substitute Odysseus' head by a female version. The nude torso of Tyndareus indicates that the fresco may have been modeled after an engraving that is slightly different from the original painting by Primaticcio.

²⁶ Trinchieri Camiz, "Significati iconografici," 124, suggested with little justification that the scene represents Venus and Hercules.

²⁷ It is very likely that there were various copies of the same image. There exists, for example, a famous painting of Nicolò dell'Abate after Primaticcio, *Amor and Psyche*, in which the protagonists share the same positions (1550-70, Detroit, The Detroit institute of arts, Robert H. Tannahill Fund, n°65-347).

However, it is also possible that his body it had been modeled on the basis of Odysseus's torso, this time maintaining its muscular elaboration, its bottom part shortened because Tyndareus' right leg is folded upwards. Penelope's hands are both pointing to the right. The Fratta painter, leaving Tyndareus' masculine chest exposed, has depicted his right arm resting on Leda's back in a non-convincing manner, practically detached from his shoulder. The painter has attached the palm of Penelope's right hand to Tyndareus' pointing left hand: in both cases, the palms are pointing using two fingers.

Despite the common setting, the stylistic characteristics of the figures in the two monochromes are very different from each other. Leda and Tyndareus are portrayed in cold blue tones in an orange frame with rigid, square-ish forms, they are seated together nude as lovers but they barely touch. Leda and the Swan, on the other hand, are portrayed in opposite colors, in warm orange tones within a blue frame. The soft, curvy lines of the swan comply very well with the curved body of Leda; she results more soft and feminine than in the engraving by Domenico del Barbieri, who depicted a muscular Venus with a straighter back. The difference may be explained because of the different visual sources used for the paintings or because of their possible execution by two different painters. However, it may also be ascribed to an attempt on behalf of a single painter to create a stylistic distinction that represents the difference between terrestrial, matrimonial love between Leda and Tyndareus, and the spiritual, passionate love of Leda in her union with the god.

Across the hall, on the north side a dark violet monochrome represents again two figures, this time standing in a dark background with trees that seem to represent a deep forest. The scene can be identified as the myth of *Diana and Endymion* (**fig. 227**)²⁸. Diana, recognized by the small moon at the top of her head, is waving her right hand on the young hunter's head in an action that should transform him into a deer, to be tragically hunted by his own companions. However, it is necessary to emphasize that not every figure that is crowned with a moon immediately represents the goddess. In fact, the visual source

²⁸ Trinchieri Camiz, "Significati iconografici," 124.

suggested for the figure of Diana originates from a particularly interesting subject, object and location: a prestigious Greek statue of a priestess of Bacchus - Maenad or Bacchante, which belonged to the private collection of Giovanni Grimani (**fig. 228**). The sculpture, dated to the second half of the second century BC, is a unique example of a self-standing image of a Maenad that is not set within an embossed relief, which probably has no counterpart in the entire known medley of surviving Hellenistic sculpture²⁹. In Villa Grimani Molin, the artist seems to have been familiar with the original work and conscious of its prestige; he copied the pose and volume of the statue in quite a faithful manner, and inserted it into a new media within a new iconographical context.

The last monochrome, a wide oval painted in a stronger violet blue shade, contains an unrecognized scene (**fig. 229**). A series of armed soldiers is painted in a style usually recognized as typical to the circle of Salviati³⁰. As in the presumed Endymion scene, the background depicts a dark forest. One of the figures is shown riding a horse with its back to the viewer, holding a javelin (*saetta*) that he is directing towards a *herm*, a statue of a female bust on a triangular elongated base, which recalls Diana, as Artemis of Ephesus. All of the other figures resemble soldiers, probably in Roman armor. The group of soldiers is standing firm, and the front figure holds his hand out, his thumb, index and central fingers stretched forward, perhaps signifying the number three.

The difficulty of identifying the scene may also be due to the difficulty in identifying its visual precedent. The horse seen from the back is a common formula in certain ambiances in Renaissance art. It appears for example in various engravings by Antonio Tempesta, and in Sabbioneta's *Palazzo del Giardino*, one of two monochromes with military scenes depicts a similar horse and rider. The riding motion towards the herm with a *saetta* brings to mind one of the functions of the goddess Artemis, '*Artemis Akontistera*' or '*Artemide*

²⁹ Irene and Traversari, *Tesori di scultura greca a Venezia*, 146 and fig. 58.

³⁰ Ton, *Affreschi Badoer Grimani*, 76.

Saettatrice', Artemis the hurler of javelins. However, this definition still does not seem to provide a specific identification for the scene.

6.1.2.2 The Three Amorous Couples in the Three Ceilings

The three scenes that crown the ceilings of the frescoed rooms represent three amorous couples of pagan divinities that seem to be related to each other, organized in a reading sequence whose order can easily be determined. A *putto* in the central hall, above the virtue of Fortitude, points his finger towards the door of the dining room, indicating where the reading should begin (**fig. 130**). Afterwards, it is enough to observe the direction in which the three ceiling frescoes can be viewed upright: the dining room fresco can be seen properly upon entering from the central hall, the *Studiolo* fresco when entering from the dining room, and the *Salottino* fresco from the entrance via the *Studiolo*.

The three frescoes are all ceiling frescoes, but they are barely rendered in perspective. It is likely that their rendering had been determined by the visual sources used by the painter. The iconographical sequence discussed in the following paragraphs seems to be an original invention, for which it is difficult to identify a particular precedent. In terms of stylistic influence, the visual precedents for the figures of all three paintings seem to be derived from examples found in the neighboring Villa Badoer, where Giallo's images offered various typologies of male and female figures for the artist. For example, the figure of Mars in the *Studiolo* had been based on the shepherd that appears in one of the pastoral images that decorates the central hall of Villa Badoer, although his cloths resemble the armor worn by the soldiers in the central hall of Villa Grimani Molin (**figs. 230, 102, 204**). In the *Salottino*, Jupiter is a clear copy of the figure of the presumed Scortico River in Villa Badoer, and the position of Juno recalls the position of Diana in the same pastoral painting (**figs. 231, 102, 146**).

In the dining room, Jupiter is revolved towards Juno in a motion that indicates that the two divinities are probably about to embrace each other (**fig. 188**). The couple is not represented in youthful age, but the figures are not too old either, judging by Juno's delicate facial features and by the swift motion of Jupiter's feet. Their ages are appropriate for a married couple, and together they represent the earthly manifestation of a union, marriage. The

concept appears in full correspondence with the iconographical theme depicted in the terrestrial realm, in the balcony beneath them, where three married couples are depicted among the subjects of the allegory of the *Theatrum mundi*. It is also similar to the message expressed in the story of *Leda and Tyndareus* depicted in the central hall.

The concept of union seems to continue in the *Studiolo* ceiling, where a rather young Mars and Venus embrace, as if completing the action begun by Jupiter and Juno in the previous room, and with the support of Cupid who clings to Venus from the left (**fig. 230**). Although rather synthetic, the representation contains several curious details. Anxious to perform the union, Venus has carelessly abandoned her bronze carriage, Mars has taken off his sword and armor, and Cupid has thrown his bow and arrows behind. Two doves are flying on the left of the image, as if they have just escaped from the carriage of Venus, in mirrored positions, one flying upward and one downward. Mars and Venus embrace each other with their arms, but both of them seem disinterested in the hug, their bodies and eyes revolved in opposite directions. Venus is exchanging warm looks with Cupid while Mars revolves his head behind the shoulders of Venus and looks at one of the two doves. Cupid and Mars are not completely alien but are connected to each other, since Cupid rests his hands on the hands of Mars that are stretched out on Venus. Cupid's right wing is rendered in a continuous line with the wing of the dove on his left, with a white upper section that recalls the wings of the dove. His wing and arm form a curved arch that echoes the form of the dove above him. Together, Mars, Cupid and the two doves create a closed visual unit with Venus enclosed in between.

While Jupiter and Juno traditionally represent conjugal union, Mars and Venus are often considered as an embodiment of spiritual union³¹. According to Pico della Mirandola, Venus, who has a good influence on Mars, is able to break down his destructive and corruptive nature³². According to the Pythagoreans, the union between the two gods is the

³¹ A similar idea was suggested by: Trinchieri Camiz, "Significati iconografici," 127. Van der Sman, *La decorazione a fresco*, 176, also suggested that the figures represented celestial love.

³² G. P. della Mirandola, "Commento sopra una canzone de amore composta da Girolamo Benivieni," in *De homini dignitate...* (Florence, 1942), 495-496. See also: Eugenio Garin, "Venere e la teologia poetica di Giovanni Pico," in *La Nascita di Venere e l'Annunciazione del Botticelli restaurate* (Florence: Centro Di, 1987), 13-15.

source for the birth of harmony, which is responsible for the motion of the celestial spheres³³. In his *Symposium*, Plato refers to two kinds of Aphrodite (Venus): Heavenly Aphrodite, the daughter of Uranus, with whom he associates 'Heavenly Love', and Common Aphrodite, daughter of Zeus and Dione, who is considerably younger than Heavenly Aphrodite, and with whom he associates 'Common Love'³⁴.

Mars and Venus are embracing in a union that is not carnal, but spiritual, their hands perform the physical union but their bodies and looks enclose its symbolic significance. Mars, in his utmost interest in the dove, confirms that his own objective in the union with Venus is the spiritual significance symbolized by the white volatile. As the god of discord and war, he has abandoned his weapons in order to embrace the goddess of love³⁵. Cupid, disarmed, is disinterested in performing further operations of creating terrestrial couplings, and concentrating on the union between the two divinities.

The importance of spiritual union conforms to the sort of activities that one would expect to find in a *Studiolo*, a space dedicated to isolation, study and contemplation, in great contrast with the earthly activities associated with the dining room. The theme of intellectual activity is provided with further iconographical support by the presence of the *triclinium* female nudes as allegories of melancholy, and by the key position of the old sage.

The symbolic significance of the doves, positioned in a rather awkward and conspicuous location in the painting, requires an interpretation. Doves are extremely common in the history of Western art and may receive a large set of interpretations. The dove is recognized as the bird of Venus, as a symbol of peace, of God, of the Holy Spirit, as the Trinity, as the Virgin Mary or as her Immaculate Conception or her Coronation, as a symbol of purification, as an attribute of different saints, of widows or matrimonial fidelity³⁶. In the

³³ Trinchieri Camiz, "Significati iconografici," 125. Citing: N. Comes, *Mythologiae* (Venice, 1581), I, 661. « Harmonia dicta est Veneris & Martis filia... Harmoniam esse putarunt eam, quam Pythagorici in motibus sphaerarum, corporum coelestium fieri crediderunt. »

³⁴ Plato, *Symposium*, 180 ff.

³⁵ Van der Sman, *La decorazione a fresco*, 176.

³⁶ Levi D'Ancona, *Lo zoo del rinascimento*, 101-106.

context suggested for the fresco, two doves may refer to some of the pure or sacred meanings of the bird, supporting the idea of spiritual union.

The description of one bird flying up, the other flying down, recalls the visual representation of alchemical tradition, where the process of distillation is described as a combination of evaporation, with a bird flying upwards, and condensation, with a bird flying downwards³⁷. The mirrored depiction also recalls the decorative theme of mirrors and reflections that is repeated throughout the grotesques of the villa and in some prominent positions in the *Studiolo*. They may also recall the doctrine of the *coincidentia oppositorum*, according to which the world is composed by things that are created from the four elements, together with pairs of opposites. Perhaps, the most suitable interpretation is that the birds are an iconographical reference to the hand gestures of the two philosophers by Raphael in *The School of Athens* at the Vatican. In the fresco, the hands of Plato and Aristotle point up and down respectively to denote the Platonic *idea* and the Aristotelian *fisica*. In the context of the spiritual union, the birds in the Fratta fresco may represent the different points of view that Renaissance Natural Philosophers aspired to reconcile with the unification of Platonism and Aristotelianism.

In the central fresco of the *Salottino* ceiling, a rather old, bearded Jupiter is represented at the center with his eagle to the left and with Juno to the right, now clearly a woman of older age (**fig. 231**). The couple is close but not embracing, and Jupiter seems to be ignoring his wife completely. Juno's hand is touching his face: it seems as if she is striving to revolve his look towards her own direction, in order to prevent him from looking towards his eagle. She tries to prevent Jupiter from the inevitable process of his metamorphosis into an eagle, a process that has nearly or already begun, as can be determined by his right hand that is starting to transform into an eagle's paw, echoing his companion eagle in an exact manner.

While the resemblance of Jupiter to the figure of the Scortico river god in Villa Badoer is quite straightforward, the fresco seems to derive inspiration from an additional visual

³⁷ Crosland, *Historical Studies in Chemistry*, 33.

source. In Palazzo Te in Mantua, the vault of the *Camera dei Venti* contains images of Olympic divinities inserted within geometric forms within a large framework of astrological subjects. Each scene occurs in a cloudy sky. Despite the renowned technical capacities ascribed to Giulio Romano and his assistants, the perspective of the figures is not executed 'di sotto in su' typical to ceilings, but as in an upright wall painting, like in the three scenes in the Fratta villa. In the image with Jupiter, Juno and Ganymede, the cupbearer appears on the right, bowing and presenting Jupiter with his cup (**fig. 232, 232.1**). To the left, Jupiter is set between Juno and the eagle, the three of them forming a visual unit that is separate from Ganymede. Jupiter embraces the eagle and looks at him, his thunderbolt highly visible. Juno is behind him, a woman in an advanced age whose head is covered.

The three figures are arranged in the same order and dimensions as in the fresco of Villa Grimani Molin, including the eagle that is almost as large as the two divinities. As in the villa, Jupiter is concentrating on his eagle and ignoring Juno. What differs is the exact pose of the figures, which has been inspired by the Badoer frescoes, and the allusion to the act of the metamorphosis. In another similar example, Juno in Palazzo Te recalls Juno at the ceiling of the Fratta dining room. She appears with her peacocks to the right in a lunette, pointing left at a figure of Psyche (**fig. 233**). The character of these visual analogies resembles a similar situation in the fresco program of the villa, in the dining room, where the artist painted the two noblewomen that recall the matron and her wet nurse from Villa Barbaro's *Sala dell'Olimpo*. As it seems, the artist may have seen and remembered the Mantuan examples in an inaccurate manner, or received a verbal description by the inventor of the iconographical program, and tried to create an image that would comply with the instructions, adapting it to the new iconographical context.

Read in sequence, the three frescoes of the ceiling of the decorated rooms represent three steps of union that form a part of the humanist existence. Conjugal union, represented in the dining room, can be seen as the mundane objective in the life of the Renaissance man. Spiritual union, represented in the *Studiolo*, is his intellectual or contemplative objective. Finally, in accordance with the spiritual concept of the

metamorphosis in Renaissance culture, the absolute culmination of the concept of unity can be found only where the woman is not only exterior to it, but tries to prevent it. In the final phase of life, the object of the union becomes the metamorphosis, or the transformation into the afterlife in the company of the gods.

6.2 THE VESTIBULE AS GROTTO-ATRIUM

6.2.1 Description of the Entrance Vestibule

The ground floor vestibule that leads to the *piano nobile* contains particular architectural form, stylistic pictorial attributes and iconographical representations. These characteristics suggest that its presence in the villa possesses symbolic values that are not inferior in respect to its pure structural function: a double symbolism, acting both as a grotto and as an atrium.

The humble and narrow space, covered in a barrel vault and containing two small niches in its lateral walls, is completely tinted in a grayish plaster in a coarse wash effect (**figs. 124**). The color scheme, with its prevailing ochre and brown monochrome and earthly shades of yellow, red and green, stands in strong contrast with the vivid and luminous coloring of the frescoes in the upper floor. The geometrical underlying scheme of the depictions is strongly engraved in the stone and is almost as visible as the images themselves (**fig. 234**).

The iconographic program is simple and roughly symmetrical. A young faun is depicted in a circle at the center of the vault in a sepia monochrome. The nude adolescent with the goat feet and the pointy ears appears semi-reclined on an earthly surface, indicating with his hand the way to the inner staircase of the villa, which leads to the upper floor. Stylistically, his figure is an adaptation of the pastor in Villa Badoer, the same one which served the artist for the depiction of Mars in the *Studiolo* ceiling (**fig. 102**). The faun is surrounded by a series of circular sepia colored decorative motifs that divide the rest of the ceiling vault into four even sections, each one containing a similar grotesque scheme.

In the grotesques, variations of the acanthus motif and empty oval cameos or mirrors appear similar to the upper floor. Each section contains a different bird with its corresponding young offspring above her. The niche of the west lateral wall contains an ochre monochrome of a male soldier, and on the east wall, the niche contains a similar figure, this time an armed female. Both depictions seem like quick and professional preparatory drawings, an effect that results from the strong visibility of the underlying engraving and from the light aquarelle- execution style of the overlying painting.

6.2.2 The Grotto in Classical Antiquity and in Renaissance Architectural Theory

The impression that one receives by the vestibule when entering the villa is that of a 'coarse' look, a material substance that has not yet been molded into its finished form. The presence of the grotesques in the earthly scheme encloses the main symbolic function of the space, as an actual grotto, like the underground lore of the covered-up *Domus Aurea* in Rome, where the decorative, but also enigmatic and intellectual art of the grotesque had been discovered. The grotto is quite a common architectural element in the gardens of the Renaissance villas, in Rome, but also in the Veneto, an architectural theme that obtained important symbolic significances also throughout the seventeenth century, in the wealthy residences to the north of the Alps. Its presence in Villa Grimani Molin may be reduced to a physical minimum, but is nevertheless saturated with symbolism.

6.2.2.1 The Grotto in Ancient Greek Culture, Porphyry and the Cave of the Nymphs

The grotesques acquired their name from a completely manmade structure. In the classical world, a cave, or grotto was considered as such because of its functionality, indifferently weather it was natural or manufactured. Caves could be found everywhere in Greek and Roman paganism. They were dwelling places for various creatures unwelcome to the civil world, such as monsters and exiles. They were perceived as metaphor of the womb of the earth, and were therefore connected with cults involved with fertility and with chthonic cults. For example, in the cult of mysteries of Demeter, piglets were deposited in

underground chasms and later collected; heroic and divine unions are often consummated in caves: Peleus and Thetis, Jason and Medea, Aeneas and Dido³⁸.

Yulia Ustinova has studied the oracular quality of caves and artificial grottos, considering the impact of their environment on the minds of people who entered them. Her research has shown how the activities of prophecy and the quest for ultimate truth are connected with grottos in so many cases that the association cannot be coincidental. Since the dead were believed to know more than the living about earthly affairs, it would seem only natural to consult them close to their dwelling, in a cave or subterranean chamber, and thus, for the oracles to be located in grottos, inside the earth. Since the states of altered consciousness often occur when people are exposed to sensory deprivation, seers, shamans, and other mediators between god and mortals undergo long isolated sojourns in caves and other closed spaces in their quest for ecstatic illumination³⁹.

The association of prophecy with caves is reflected in mythology, linking the cave with some interesting cosmological concepts. According to the Orphic theogonies, Zeus was born learnt his fate from the Night in its gloomy cave, the dwelling of Phanes the demiurge. Thus, the cavern from which creation started was the place where the primordial prophecy was given. Caves were sacred to the nymphs, youthful and mischievous residents of water springs, rivers, mountains and groves. Pan, the god of wild nature, dwelt in caves, and he was often worshipped in conjunction with the nymphs. In Greek, Pan means 'everything', representing the universal, ordered nature. In Renaissance tradition, his birth is considered as a metaphor to the moment of the separation of the Four Elements from the primary material, born in the moment when the universe is given a regulative principle⁴⁰.

³⁸ Yulia Ustinova, *Caves and the Ancient Greek Mind: Descending Underground in the Search for Ultimate Truth* (Oxford: Oxford University press, 2009) 2-3.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 7, 53.

⁴⁰ Elena di Gioia and Fabio Fiorani, "Il mito di Pan e Siringa," in *Giorgione e la cultura veneta*, 174. Citing Boccaccio, *Genealogia degli Dei* (Venice, 1554), 9-10, chapter named «Pan Figlio di Chaos e Demigorgone.»

The grotto assumes a very central allegorical function in Platonic and in Neo-Platonist cosmology. The most famous image of a cave is drawn by Plato in the seventh book of the Republic, as a dark place that symbolizes world, in which he describes the human condition of the unenlightened, who believe that the shadows of the real objects are the truth⁴¹. In the myth of Er, Plato described the cave as a place that has two openings: through one, one goes back up to the sky, through the other one goes down on the earth⁴².

Based on this idea, in his *Cave of the Nymphs*, the Neo-Platonist philosopher Porphyry of Tiro (233/4 -305 AD) provided his own influential contribution to the concept of the cave and its two doors, perceived as an allegory for the journey of the souls from the heavens to earth and their return upwards⁴³. Porphyry translated the allegory into a cosmological vision according to which the two openings of the cave were regarded as the tropics of Cancer and Capricorn. His perception, surviving throughout the middle ages, was widely adopted by his followers and was well known in the Renaissance. It played an important role in shaping the spiritual conception of the grotto by the Renaissance humanists, and in consequence, influencing their interpretation of the grotto as a natural or manmade structure.

Because of his mediating qualities, in the Renaissance Porphyry's works reflected the sort of philosophical shifts that characterized the last decades of the sixteenth century. Porphyry is best recognized as the first Neo-Platonist philosopher who tried to mediate between the thoughts of Plato and Aristotle⁴⁴. He was determined to demonstrate that these were two philosophies of the same importance of innovativeness and contribution. His works marked the birth of the authentic, positive and constructive interest in Aristotle in Neo-Platonism,

⁴¹ Plato, *Republic*, 514A-521B.

⁴² Plato, *Republic*, 614 c-d; *Ibid.*, 615 d; Giuseppe Girgenti, *Il pensiero forte di Porfirio: meditazione fra henologia platonica e ontologia aristotelica* (Milan: Vita e pensiero, 1996), 292.

⁴³ Hom. *Od.* 13. 103-113; Porphyry. *De antro* 1-4.

⁴⁴ For a biographical summary on Porphyry see: Giuseppe Grigenti, *Introduzione a Porfirio* (Roma, Bari: Laterza, 1997), 10-26; Laura Simonini, "Introduzione," in *L'antro delle ninfe*, Porfirio, ed. L. Simonini (Milan: Adelphi, 1986), 25-32.

defining Aristotle as an obligated reference point for teaching and research⁴⁵. Only eleven out of his eighty works have survived completely, including *The Cave of the Nymphs* and the *Isagogue*, an introduction to Aristotle's *Categories*. Among the 31 works surviving in fragments, there is a commentary on the *Timaeus* and a tract *Against the Christians*⁴⁶.

Porphyry's writings gained a wide publicity in the middle ages, through his citations by the late Neo-Platonist philosopher Macrobius (Ambrosius Theodosius Macrobius, 395-423 AD) in his commentary to Cicero's *Somnium Scipionis*⁴⁷. Macrobius' work was used, for example, by the Dominican Friar Vincent of Beauvais and by Dante⁴⁸. Porphyry was considered a fundamental reference point for Renaissance Neo-Platonism, and was rediscovered by Ficino and Pico. In the *Oratio de hominis dignitate*, Pico hailed his richness and his '*multiigua religio*'. Ficino translated his works together with those of Plotinus from Greek into Latin, and the entire corpus was printed in 1492⁴⁹. The first printed edition of *The Cave of the Nymphs* was published in Rome in 1518, edited by Ianus Lascaris. It was later printed in 1521 in Asola by Francesco Torresa, in 1539 in Strasbourg by Iacobus Bedrat, by Giacomo Micillo and Giacchino Camerario with the *Odyssey* in 1541, and with the *Iliad* in 1551. In 1542, it was translated from Greek into Latin by Conrad Gesner⁵⁰.

The Cave of the Nymphs is the only allegorical commentary on a poetic text that has survived since antiquity by any classical author. The text is an interpretation of the few verses from canticle 13 in Homer's *Odyssey* in light of a theme that was fundamental in Neo-Platonist thought: the drama of the descent of the soul into the world of generation

⁴⁵ Girgenti, *Il pensiero forte di Porfirio*, 22-23; Francesco Romano, *Porfirio di Tiro: Filosofia e cultura nel 3 secolo d. C.* (Catania: Università di Catania, Facoltà di Lettere e Filosofia, 1979), 13, 19. For an expansion on Porphyry's philosophy see for example: Girgenti, *Il pensiero forte di Porfirio*, 12-17, 39-40, 164.

⁴⁶ For a listing of Porphyry's works as a poet, philosopher, hierophant and scientist see: Girgenti, *Introduzione a Porfirio*, 4, 24. See also: Yates, *The Art of Memory*, 56.

⁴⁷ Ambrosius Theodosius Macrobius, *Commentary on the Dream of Scipio*, trans., intro & notes W. Harris Stahl (New York: Columbia university press, 1990).

⁴⁸ Jean Pépin, *Mythe et allégorie. Les origines grecques et les contestations judéo-chrétiennes* (Paris: Études Augustiniennes, 1976), 527-536.

⁴⁹ *The Cave of the Nymphs* was however not included in the corpus of Porphyry's translations by Ficino.

⁵⁰ Simonini, "Introduzione," 17-18.

and of its return to the divine realm⁵¹. The verses regard the return of Odysseus on the ships of the Phaeacia people in Ithaca, where he is left, still sleeping, on the beach of the sacred port of Pohrkis. This is where the cave of the nymphs is located, where Odysseus counseled by Athena and hides the gifts of the Phaeacians: bronze, gold and vestments⁵².

For Porphyry, the cave represents the cosmos, the nymphs and the bees - the souls, the purple mantles knitted by the nymphs signify the formation of the body around the bones; the two doors of the cave are the paths of descent and re-ascent in the cosmic journey of the soul, corresponding to the tropics of Cancer and Capricorn. In the last chapters, the interpretation is expanded to the entire Homeric poem, which is read by Porphyry as a drama of Odysseus, who is a symbol of the soul that has passed through the generation and is approaching its true home. The context of *The Cave of the Nymphs* is exegetic, but it is also occultist⁵³. The allusions to the material, to the eternal flow of the water, to the structure of the man and its parallelism to the cosmos, as well as to its obscurity and sweetness, make *The Cave of the Nymphs* an exemplary text for understanding the concept of the eternity of matter and of its mutations⁵⁴.

The content of the text, rich as it is in imitable *exempla*, has constructed itself as a model for grottos and gardens in the sixteenth century. As emphasized by Patrizia Castelli, this does not mean that all of the artists and patrons were such strong Neo-Platonists; the essence of Porphyry's text was in fact no stranger for the Aristotelians. In any case, the artists and patrons definitely aspired to translate the fantasies of the intellectuals into grotto and garden structures that were new and expensive experiments for the delight of very few.⁵⁵ As the current research demonstrates, this perception is extended not only to the symbolic

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 18.

⁵² Hom. *Od.* 13. 103-113.

⁵³ Grigenti, *Introduzione a Porfirio*, 15.

⁵⁴ Patrizia Castelli, "L'antro delle Ninfe," in *Artifici d'acque e giardini: la cultura delle grotte e dei ninfei in Italia e in Europa*, eds. I. L. Ballerini and L. M. Medri (Florence: Centro Di, 1999), 159.

⁵⁵ Castelli, "L'antro delle Ninfe," 159-160.

significance of the decorative elements of the Renaissance grotto, but in certain cases also inside the residences, to the cosmological iconographical program of the Veneto villa.

6.2.2.2 The 'Porphyrian' Grotto, the Renaissance Villa, and the Case of Villa Barbaro

According to Porphyry, the Homeric cave represents the universe: it is made of material, and like the universe, it is dark and shady, but inside it, there are forms that make it become beautiful and loved⁵⁶. In correspondence with Porphyry's materialistic conception of the grotto, Castelli identified 'Porphyrian' influence on the artificial grotto in the sixteenth century in the tendency of modeling grottos with a strong emphasis on their materiality, imitating the natural and artificial grottos of the ancients.

The decorative elements used for the purpose are mentioned, for example, in a letter written by Giulio Romano to Duke Federico Gonzaga in 1528 regarding the garden of Palazzo Te. There, the artist mentions the majolica, the shells that are necessary for the decoration of the grotto as well as the sponge stones, the reddish tone of the walls and the fountain. All elements destined to simulate the 'cosmic' material⁵⁷. Philippe Morel has studied the qualities and origins of the typical sandstone of the mannerist grottos in their desire to imitate nature. The Renaissance perceptions of the subject were influenced by the theories of Aristotle, Theophrastus, Avicenna and Albertus Magnus, who believed that fossils or stones were formed by water and earth through the process of *congelatio*, the solidification of something liquid⁵⁸.

The first example in large dimensions of a grotto in a 'Porphyrian' sense can be found in Florence in the period of Francesco I⁵⁹. The grotto of Bernardo Buontalenti in the Boboli gardens (1583-93) contains complex iconographic allusions whose significance is still

⁵⁶ Porphyry, *On the Cave of the Nymphs*, trans. and introd. R. Lambertson (Barrytown, N.Y.: Station Hill Press, 1983). See also Girgenti, *Il pensiero forte di Porfirio*, 288-290.

⁵⁷ Castelli, "L'antro delle Ninfe," 160.

⁵⁸ Philippe Morel, *Les grottes manieristes en Italie au XVI siècle: Theatre et alchimie de la nature* (Paris: Macula, 1998), 5-42.

⁵⁹ Castelli, "L'antro delle Ninfe," 160-161.

difficult to decipher to date. Its greatest achievement is in the imitation of the Porphyrian model through the allusion to the 'material' by the means of technological inventions, through experiments related to the use of certain construction materials and through the quest to imitate rare and precious natural materials. The ordering of the glass, the crystals and the water in the high part of the Boboli grotto, the imitation and use of the stalactites and the rocks, the insertion of the maidenhair plant on the walls where the water drips – clearly demonstrate the revolution, but at the same time the overcoming of the ancient models, in order to create new effects.

Physical structures of grottos existed in the Veneto villas during the second half of the sixteenth century, often accompanied by a *nymphaeum*. Their planning and invention was performed by figures that were updated by the recent technological advancements in the field of hydraulics, humanists and technical engineers. Having seen many examples of grottos in their visit to Rome in 1554, Daniele Barbaro and Palladio had constructed a grotto at Palazzo Trevisan in Murano (1557) and in Villa Barbaro⁶⁰. Another grotto and *nymphaeum* were constructed in the Veneto in the Villa Castello of Thiene. They were added to the structure in the 1580's by Cristoforo Sorte⁶¹. Vincenzo Scamozzi constructed the Neptune Grotto at the bottom floor of Villa dei Vescovi in Luvigliano⁶².

The architecture and decorative program of Villa Barbaro provide an interesting case study for the examination of the evolution of the Porphyrian allegory of the world as cave. In *The Four Books on Architecture*, the grotto and *nymphaeum* of the villa received a long comment by Palladio, who appreciated the technical innovativeness of their hydraulics in determining the course of the water throughout the villa, but also did not neglect to mention the '*elaborate ornamentation of stucco and painting*' of the *nymphaeum*⁶³. The

⁶⁰ On the structure of the grotto and *nymphaeum* in Villa Barbaro and its sixteenth-century Roman origins in Villa d'Este's in Tivoli and in Villa Giulia see: Azzi Visentini, "Daniele Barbaro e l'architettura," 410-411.

⁶¹ Morresi, *Villa Porto Colleoni*, 54-56.

⁶² F. Barbieri and Beltramini, *Vincenzo Scamozzi, 1548-1616*, n. 27.

⁶³ Palladio, *I Quattro libri di Architettura*, II, xiv. «una fontana con infiniti ornamenti di stucco, e di pittura.»

hemicycle of the fountain, whose decoration is attributed to Marc'Antonio Barbaro, contains male and female divinities and legendary mortals. Each figure is accompanied by an inscription of a poetic verse; they are arranged in male and female couples representing opposing pairs⁶⁴. Inside the central arch, highly inspired by Roman models, the small cave contains a reclining river god and a young *putto* embracing a large bird, within a typical imitation of stalactites and rocks. On the ceiling, Veronese painted an allegory of Peace.

The grotto and *nymphaeum* hemicycle in the garden are best observed in their elegance and grandeur from the north door of the *Sala dell'Olimpo* (**fig. 141**). The hall itself contains a cosmic diagram that is one of the most scientific and detailed in the history of Villa decoration (**fig. 68**). Looking out, the material structure of the grotto and the water springing from the *nymphaeum* become part of the cosmological allegory of the world as cave. Porphyry's philosophy was very familiar to Daniele Barbaro. His own experience in interpreting Porphyry is proved in the commentary that he wrote on the *Isagoge*, Porphyry's introduction to Aristotle's Categories, during the latter part of his sojourn in Padova⁶⁵. In Cartari's *Immagini*, on which the iconographical program of Villa Barbaro is largely based, citations of Macrobius and Porphyry occur frequently. Cartari also made particular references in his text to the allegory of the world as cave⁶⁶.

The Porphyrian worldview had also been represented within the cosmological scheme of the ceiling of the *Sala dell'Olimpo*. It is identifiable especially in the four dark quadrangular allegorical monochromes, and in the positioning of the four seasons. According to Porphyry, the Homeric cave it is made of material, meaning that it was created after the four elements had already existed. It is dark and shady, but inside it there are forms that

⁶⁴ Kolb and Beck, "The Sculptures on the Nymphaeum Hemicycle of the Villa Barbaro at Maser," *Artibus et Historiae* 18, 35 (1997): 15-40.

⁶⁵ Daniele Barbaro, *Exquisite in Porphirium commentationes Danielis Barbari P.V. artium doctoris* (Venice: eredi di Aldo Manuzio, 1542).

⁶⁶ Mentioned also by: Crosato Larcher, "Considerazioni sul programma di Maser," 248. «Non è mancato il suggerimento del Cartari che descrivendo "l'antro dell'Eternità", riporta i versi di Claudiano [...]»

make it beautiful and loved⁶⁷. '*Broadly speaking, caves have their own separate nature and identity, but one which is inseparable from that of the earth, surrounded as they are by homogeneous rock, hollow within, but on the outside extending to the infinity of the earth*'⁶⁸. The four monochromes that are inserted in the earthly realm between the four elements may be regarded as representations of the cave, since their stone is set in darkness, and includes the pitch-black hollow opening (**figs. 68, 104, 235**).

The irregular position of the four seasons, winter and spring on the south lunette, and summer and autumn on the north lunette, may also be easily explained in relationship to the two openings of the cave described by Porphyry (**figs. 79, 80**). The north opening of the cave of the nymphs, associated with the tropic of Cancer and with the descent of the souls to earth, is also associated with the season of summer depicted on the north lunette. Similarly, the south opening of the cave is associated with the tropic of Capricorn, with the return of the soul to the heavens and with the winter, depicted on the southern lunette⁶⁹. The north wind, *Boeas*, is cold and nurturing, and the earth in these lands is fertile and humid, complying with the depiction of the elements of water and earth on top of the north lunette. In the north lunette, the depiction of wine, food and sleep represents all of the earthly necessities of the humans. The south wind is hot and drying, symbolized in the *Sala dell'Olimpo* by the placement of the elements of fire and air above the south lunette. The lunette depicts the spiritual love associated with Venus and Vulcan, and Persephone, whose presence symbolizes the idea of transferring from the material world to the spiritual world⁷⁰.

The images within the monochromes also contain certain elements that recall the Porphyrian allegory, that combine with their more general emblematic significance, and that relate to the depictions of the seasons and the elements. Certain Porphyrian themes

⁶⁷ Porphyry, *On the Cave of the Nymphs*, trans. and introd. R. Lambertson (Barrytown, N.Y.: Station Hill Press, 1983). See also Girgenti, *Il pensiero forte di Porfirio*, 288-290.

⁶⁸ Porphyry, *On the Cave of the Nymphs*, 59.5, 24.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 71.21-22, 33.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 73-75.25-28, 34-36.

are also reverberated in some of the adjacent rooms. All of these issues shall be treated appropriately as the object of a future, separate study.

6.2.2.3 The Allegorical Grotto in the Decoration of the Veneto Villa

The cosmological diagram in Villa Barbaro is unique in its scientific and philosophical complexity, reflecting the professional astronomical capacities of its owners. It is quite improbable that such an explicit conception of the Porphyrian cave would be found in the decorative programs of other residences. However, some elements in the interior architectural space of the Veneto villas and in their fresco decoration can be interpreted as a visual allegory alluding to the concept of the artificial grotto. Such allusions are more symbolic than the straightforward allusions to material, found in the self-standing structures of grottos and *nymphaea* that are placed outside in the villa gardens or palace, which were often constructed throughout the noble courts of the Italian peninsula.

It is quite common to encounter within the spatial articulation of the Veneto villas small and intimate rooms completely decorated with grotesques, which are nearly always covered in a barrel vault. The presence of the grotesques, associated with the concept of the grotto since their discovery, and the intimate dimensions of these spaces, provide them with a certain intellectual and spiritual aura, destining them to be observed with great contemplation. The barrel vault and small space may be perceived as a symbolic allusion to the form of the natural or artificial grotto. The concepts depicted in the grotesques of these small rooms are often related to cosmological or mystical ideas, strongly suggesting that their presence as symbolic caves is actually conscious of the Platonic, and especially the Porphyrian allegory of the world as a cave.

In Villa Pojana, the *Camerino delle Grottesche*, the small barrel vaulted room that connects the central hall with the frescoed wing of the *piano nobile* is completely covered with an intricate grotesque scheme (**figs. 107, 108**). Manea has provided the decorations with a philosophical interpretation as the visualization of the Platonic concept of the soul,

intended as an eschatological meditation on the destiny of the individual⁷¹. The theme does not deviate much from that of the Porphyrian allegory. In Villa Emo in Fanzolo, two small rooms contain grotesque schemes that represent the four elements, another cosmological theme traditionally also associated with the grotto (**figs. 75, 76**)⁷². At the Malcontenta in Mira, two small, barrel vaulted rooms are covered with grotesques that denote the concepts of time and fame. Both Villa Badoer and Villa Capra contain two small and obscure barrel vaulted spaces that are entirely covered with grotesques.

In Villa Grimani Molin, it is the vestibule, which assumes the function of a symbolic grotto. It is a small, barrel vaulted space covered in grotesques, adhering to the standard found in the Veneto villas. The decorative themes of the grotesques include mother birds and their offspring, and two armed guardians painted on the lateral walls, one of which is male, and the other, female (**figs. 124, 178, 179**). Through the iconographic allusions to fertility and reproduction, the decorative program emphasizes the concepts of the creation of man and his soul.

Much like in the Renaissance tradition of the external garden grottos, in Villa Grimani Molin the grotto allegory takes a further step with a desire to provide a sense of material, earthly substance. Although here, within the interiors of a villa, instead of shells or stalactites, the artist has used the coarse, rustic lines, and the simple designs; he has chosen earthly colors and has left the underlying engraving highly visible, with well-defined geometrical shapes, which recall the pure forms from which nature is composed (**fig. 234, 179.1**). In employing this visual language, he has created an underground realm that alludes to the ancient Greek natural and artificial grottos, to their various mystical functions and to their cosmological significance.

⁷¹ Manea, "Cose che pareno insogni," 241.

⁷² Brugnolo Meloncelli, "Villa Emo: il ciclo pittorico," 80-84.

6.2.3 The Greek Atrium

Vitruvius, followed by Palladio and Scamozzi, all discussed the structure of the ancient Greek and Roman houses in their architectural treatises⁷³. The Classical house possessed a series of characteristics regarding its orientation and its spatial disposition, reserving certain areas for different seasons, and positioning rooms with certain functionalities in precise locations⁷⁴. The decorative principles of the Classical house also followed a well-defined set of rules. Dining rooms contained depictions of food; kitchens, depictions of still nature; and mythological scenes could usually be found in the living rooms, or in the inside garden, where it was also common to find frescoes and sculptures of gods such as Priapus, as bringer of fertility and good fortune⁷⁵. One of the most important architectural components in the ancient house was the atrium, the small entrance hall that the owner or the visitor would encounter immediately after passing through the main entrance door. In the atrium, images and sculptures of an apotropaic nature often appeared. In particular, the Faun and the *Lares*, who guarded the owners from evil spirits and unwelcome guests.

The Faun was considered as a protective demon, a mythical creature with a human body and goat feet. It appeared, for example, as a bronze sculpture in the atrium of the House of the Faun in Pompeii⁷⁶. In Classical Rome, The Latin *Lares* and *Penates* were the deities of the household. Cicero, in his *De natura deorum*, explained that ‘*the Penates or household gods, a name derived either from penus, which means a store of human food of any kind, or from the fact that they reside penitus, in the recesses of the house.*’⁷⁷ *Lar*, in Latin, means ‘hearth’. As a figure of speech, *Lar* could also mean ‘home’, as found in Ammianus

⁷³ Vitruvius, *The Architecture in Ten Books*, VI, esp. x; Palladio, *I Quattro libri di Architettura*, II, xi (the Greek house); Scamozzi, *L'idea dell'architettura universale*, p. I, b. III, iii (the Greek house) and iv (the Roman house).

⁷⁴ For a history of the Classical Greek house see: Bertha Carr Rider, *The Greek House: Its History and Development from the Neolithic Period to the Hellenistic Age* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1965); Janett Morgan, *The Classical Greek House* (Exeter: Bristol Phoenix Press, 2010).

⁷⁵ See for example the decoration of the House of the Vettii in Pompeii: John R. Clarke, *The Houses of Roman Italy, 100 B.C.-A.D. 250: Ritual, Space, and Decoration* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 210.

⁷⁶ For the House of the Faun see: Clarke, *The Houses of Roman Italy*, 79-85.

⁷⁷ Cicero, *De natura deorum*, trans. H. Rackham (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994), 2. 68, 189.

Marcellinus: *'So then he entered Rome, home [larem] of empire and of every virtue'*⁷⁸. Some people retained that the *Lares* were not divinities, but rather the souls of the dead who came back either to look after their family members or to persecute them. Because they were drawn towards the households, it was assumed that their persistence resulted from a strong attachment to the living⁷⁹. As the souls of the ancestors of the living family, they were treated with great respect. Often, the kitchen of the ancient house contained a small sacrifice altar dedicated to the *Lares*, as a blessing for the abundance of food in the house.

In the Renaissance, the humanists of the Veneto were familiar with notion of the ancient protective demons. In the literature, Cartari spoke much about *Lares* in his treatise, basing his impressions on ancient texts such as Ovid's *Fasti*. Ovid referred to the *Lares* in his poetic interpretation of the Roman year: *'The Kalends of May witnessed the foundation of an altar to the Guardian Lares, together with small images of the gods... The reason for the epithet [guardians] applied to them is that they guard all things by their eyes. They also stand for us... and bring us aid. But a dog, carved out of the same stone, used to stand before their feet. What was the reason for it standing with the Lar? Both guard the house: both are faithful to their master.'*⁸⁰ For Cartari, *'The Lar or Lares (since they were numerous) were certain gods or better yet demons that the ancients worshipped in the homes as their custodians.'* Because they were *'the demons who guarded the private homes, the Lares were depicted as young men clothed with dog skin, who also kept a dog at their feet.'* The dog's presence signified that the demons were *'faithful and diligent guardians of the household'*. And *'some believed that the Lares were our souls when they escaped from the human bodies. When these souls came to these celebrations they needed to find some kind of body where they could rest'*⁸¹.

⁷⁸ Ammianus Marcellinus, trans. John C. Rolfe (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1963), I. xvi. 10, 13, 249.

⁷⁹ Armando Maggi, *In the Company of Demons. Unnatural Beings, Love, and Identity in the Italian Renaissance* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 10, 171-172.

⁸⁰ Ovid, *Fasti*, trans. James George Frazer (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996), V, 129-130-139, 269, 271.

⁸¹ Cartari, *Le imagini de i dei de gli antichi*, 395.

In the Veneto Villas, as in many grotesque schemes that adorned the residences of the Italian courts, allusions to the protective demons of the household may be found in various sacrifice scenes within the grotesques as a typical esoteric characteristic. Such an example may be identified in the grotesques painted by Zellotti in Villa Emo at Fanzolo (**fig. 236**)⁸². In Villa Godi, Gualtiero Padovano painted a sacrifice scene, in an apotropaic location that recalls the ancient tradition, above the entrance door at the entrance loggia of the villa (**fig. 237**).

The visual evocation most cited in literature of the protection of the house gods in a Venetian villa appears in Villa Barbaro, in the *Stanza di Bacco*. Two *Lares* accompany Bacchus in the ceiling fresco and assist him with the production of the house wine, depicted with accompanying dogs and wearing dog skin beneath their capes, in accordance with Cartari (**fig. 103**). Above the door, the inscription '*et genio et laribus*' explicitly evokes the house gods. The main iconographic motif of the room is the maintenance of the agricultural products of the villa, its crops and vines. Much like placing a sacrifice altar for the house gods in the kitchen, the inscription is a symbolic request from the house gods that they help providing good profit from the land for the benefit of the owners⁸³.

In Villa Grimani Molin, fauns, goat-footed creatures, appear in the fresco program in locations that demonstrate that the inventor of the iconographical program was aware of their symbolic function as protective demons. The most easily identifiable house god is the young faun depicted in the ground floor vestibule, at the center of the vault (**fig. 124**). The vestibule itself, in its small dimensions and location as the first space that greets the visitor upon entering the house, assumes the function of Greek atrium. This function is emphasized by the depiction of the faun, typical to atria in Greek culture; his hand, indicating the way up into the *piano nobile*, emphasizes the functionality of the vestibule as the main entrance space to the house. His presence thus acquires the ancient function of protecting the house, its inhabitants and its visitors from the negative influences that may access it from outside.

⁸² In Villa Pojana a large sacrifice scene is painted on the wall of the *Stanza dei Cesari*, but it is interpreted as a sacrifice for peace, in a room dedicated to the representation of triumphs of Roman emperors.

⁸³ Crosato 222-223.

In the *piano nobile*, two pairs of young male and females with goat feet and pointed ears appear in the two grotesque schemes that are positioned above the large windows of the south wall, flanking the old back entrance door (**figs. 156, 157**). Here too, the fauns represent the *Lares*, assuming their traditional apotropaic function. Their presence provides a certain confirmation to the hypothesis that in the past the door had been functional, enabling direct access to the *piano nobile* of the villa from an outside staircase positioned in the south. On the other hand, the north wall of the central hall contains no fauns, but only 'ordinary', nude, human figures, confirming that in the past access was not possible from the front loggia, whose staircase was added to the structure only in a later phase.

The goat-footed *Lares* or *Geni* appear also in several occasions in the *Salottino* frescoes, whenever wine or crops are depicted, much like in the case of the *Stanza di Bacco* in Villa Barbaro, as a prayer on behalf of the owners to keep the fertility of their lands (**figs. 164, 165**). The prayer for agricultural fertility becomes a universal desire in the grotesque scheme that crowns the fireplace, where the fauns are depicted above Mother Earth, holding crops and leaning on water vases, flanking the armillary sphere and the *Spiritus mundi* (**figs. 166, 166.1**).

6.3 A SPIRITUAL LABORATORY: THE *STUDIOLO*

6.3.1 Mirrors and Precious Stones

At the very core of the fresco program of the villa, an impressive accumulation of iconographical themes is condensed in the small space of the *Studiolo*, some of which deserve a particular attention in the context of the current chapter. Despite the highly erudite nature of the program, it is unknown whether its innovator, or whoever was destined to occupy the room, had possessed particular artistic or archaeological collections to display, or what sort of activities they had performed in this small space.

However, some of the iconographical themes provide several interesting hints regarding the possible function of the room as a *Studiolo*, and regarding the possible scientific practices and the intellectual and spiritual interests of its owners.

6.3.1.1 Mirrors, Precious Stones and their Transparent Qualities

On the west wall of the *Studiolo*, flanking the figure of the old sage, two objects with pairs of playful *putti* above them are concave mirrors positioned on a base (**fig. 12**). The mirrors are probably reflecting an imaginary view from the actual window that is set in the east wall in front of them, with trees and a far away water and town. On the east wall, two cylindrical-convex mirrors again reflect the view from the two concave mirrors (**figs. 238, 239**). In the ceiling grotesques, surrounding the allegory of Mars and Venus, the rich hybrid, floral, aquatic and volatile motifs also contain four objects that can be recognized as mirrors with figures reflected in them (**figs. 240, 240.1**). The theme of mirroring and reflections can also be identified in the grotesques of the central hall in the mirror-cameos that reflect the positions of the female virtues, and in other similar appearances (**figs. 241, 129, 130**).

The presence of mirrors can be interpreted as an accompanying theme, for example, to the concept of symmetry and balance. However, they seem to be defined in the frescoes as particular objects, suggesting that their employment in the program may allude to a more specific activity related to their function. By the sixteenth century, the mirror was almost an obligatory accessory of the Renaissance *studiolo*. Mirrors were often found in the studies, hanging on a wall above a desk or a cabinet, or set on a small wooden stand. Mirrors became scholarly attributes because of their association with writing. Small convex hand mirrors, for example, were used as optical glasses for reading, and mirrors were thought to focus and concentrate light, and reflect it on to one's desk⁸⁴.

Because mirrors were so desirable, objections to them had been voiced on the moral grounds, and they became recognized as instruments of vanity and of worldliness, as

⁸⁴ On the uses and diffusion of mirrors in the Renaissance *studioli* and as objects desired by humanists, artists and collectors see: Thornton, *The Scholar in his Study*, 167-174.

represented, for example, in Giovanni Bellini's allegory of *Vanitas*⁸⁵. Such was the remark of Rafael Mirami, who in his introduction to his book on the *Specularia* explained that he was rescuing the mirror from its decorative function and lascivious use by women, and elevating it into its proper scientific use⁸⁶. At the same time, medieval and Renaissance allegory included a mirror as an attribute of the cardinal virtue of Prudence, who is often portrayed staring directly into it, because of its property as truth revealing⁸⁷.

Within the intellectual context of the *Studiolo*, the representation of mirrors and reflections may allude to the science of optics, based on Euclidian geometry, which is manifest in the calculations of reflective and refraction angles. Euclidian geometry and its technological innovations occupied the scientific interests of the humanists in the Veneto and around Europe during the second half of the sixteenth century, in a study whose culmination can be seen with the invention of the telescope by Galileo at the turn of the new century⁸⁸. In the context of Natural Philosophy, optics was particularly applied to the field of mineralogy. Therefore, the iconographical intent behind the depictions of mirrors and reflections in the villa may be part of the same iconographical intent that has brought to the inclusion of precious stones, which are also very dominant in the entire decorative program⁸⁹.

In the evolving scientific atmosphere of the sixteenth century, a particularly large amount of lapidaries was printed, copied and republished with different editions and variations, in a vast literary production that ranged from the studies of Pliny's chapter dedicated to

⁸⁵ Giovanni Bellini, *Vanitas/Luxuria*, 1490. Venice, Gallerie dell Accademia.

⁸⁶ Rafael Mirami, *Introduttione alla prima parte della specularia*, introduction to the reader. «Onde specchiandosi in questa maniera si viene a fare acquisto d'altri ornamenti che di vaghezza di Donne, conciosia cosa, che (al mio parere) in questa maniera procedano, si può dagli Specchi cogliere il frutto di tutta la prospettiva: e si può scorgere l'alto valor delle Maternatice, c'hanno alzato uno istrumento lascivo, a tanti, & honorati officij.»

⁸⁷ Thornton, *The Scholar in his Study*, 173. On the cultural significance of mirrors since antiquity to the Early Modern period, including scientific and occult uses of mirrors, see the fundamental: Jurgis Baltrušaitis, *Lo specchio: rivelazioni, inganni e science-fiction*, trans. Claudio Pizzorusso (Milan: Adelphi, 1981), for the mirror as a representation of virtues and vices see esp. chapter 10, "Abusi, errori e inganni."

⁸⁸ One book on the topic is: Eileen Adair Reeves, *Galileo's Glassworks: The Telescope and the Mirror* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008).

⁸⁹ Guseo, "Il mito dei Grimani," 128-131.

stones and minerals in his *Storia Naturalis*, to the lapidaries of the middle ages, to authentic Renaissance publications⁹⁰. Even within the tight cultural circle of Fratta Polesine, Giovan Maria Bonardo and Ludovico Dolce each published their own lapidary⁹¹. Dolce for example, as many lapidary writers before him, based his work on a synthesis of earlier texts, which he cited in one of the first pages of his treatise. The list included: ‘*Dioscoride, Aristotele, Hermete, Evase, Serapione, Avicenna, Giovanni, Mesue, Salomone, Fisiologo, Plinio, Solino, Alberto Magno, Vincenzo storico, il Lapidario, Helimanto, Isidoro, Arnaldo, Iuba, Dionigi Alessandrino, Theres Rabano, Bartolomeo di riva Romana, Marbodius Vescovo d’Ortolano, il libro delle Pandete, Cornucopia, Chirando, e’l libro della natura delle cose.*’⁹² However, in his citations he had ‘neglected’ to mention his main source of inspiration was another, nearly contemporary lapidary: that of the doctor and astrologer Camillo Leonardi, *Speculum Lapidum*. Leonardi’s lapidary, published in Venice in 1502 and 1516 by the same publisher who published Dolce’s own lapidary, is almost copied in its integrity into the latter’s treatise, roughly translated from Latin to vulgar⁹³.

Within the cosmological natural catalogue in the decorative program of Villa Grimani Molin, the depiction of precious stones may be interpreted as an allusion to minerals. Granted, the choice of depicting ornamental gemstones in the frescoes of the Fratta villa, rather than simple stones or rocks, may be justified based on simple aesthetic, decorative considerations. However, such a choice may also be interpreted as a conscious desire to

⁹⁰ For a thorough historical review of lapidaries since classical times to the Early Modern period see: Adalberto Pazzini, *Le pietre preziose nella storia della medicina e nella leggenda* (Rome: Casa Editrice Mediterranea, 1939). For a study of lapidary culture in the sixteenth century see: Evelien Chayes, *L’Éloquence des Pierres précieuses. De Marbode de Rennes à Alard d’Amsterdam et Remy Belleau. Sur quelques lapidaries du XVI^e siècle* (Paris: Honoré Champion, 2010).

⁹¹ Giovanni Maria Bonardo, *La miniera del mondo...* (Venice: Fabio & Agostin Zoppini, 1585); Ludovico Dolce, *Libri tre di m. Lodouico Dolce; ne i quali si tratta delle diuerse sorti delle gemme, che produce la natura...* (Venice: Gio. Battista, Marchio Sessa, et Fratelli, 1565).

⁹² Dolce, *Delle diuerse sorti delle gemme*, 23-23v.

⁹³ Camillo Leonardi, *Speculum lapidum clarissimi artium et medicine doctoris Camilli Leonardi Pisarenensis* (Venice: Giovanni Battista Sessa, 1502). See also: Carla De Bellis, "Astri, gemme e arti medico-magiche nello ‘Speculum Lapidum’ di Camillo Leonardi," in *Il mago, il cosmo, il teatro degli astri: saggi sulla letteratura esoterica del Rinascimento*, ed. G. Formichetti (Rome: Bulzoni, 1985), 68-69.

emphasize specific qualities that appear in transparent or lucid stones within the natural science of mineralogy, or more precisely, an allusion to 'transparent minerals' as opposed to 'opaque minerals', which are clearly distinguished in the lapidaries.

As explained by Francesco Zorzi, '*Without a doubt, all of the elements contribute to the formation of the stones, but in particular the earth and the water, which is why the opaque stones are called terrestrial and the transparent ones are called aquatic*'⁹⁴. The great tradition found in the lapidaries in the Classical, Medieval and Renaissance periods preformed a detailed encyclopedic classification of the various types of rocks and stones that may be found on Earth, much like has been done in natural history the study of other groups of elements found in nature, such as plants or animals. The authors of the lapidaries described the physical properties of each stone or mineral, based on its observation and examination, referring to categories such as color, texture, weight, dimension, density, and when dealing with transparent stones, also to their refraction index. Just like mirrors, the refractive indices of the precious stones determine their quality and their uses. Optics in relation to mineralogy dealt in particular with stones that possessed a certain degree of transparency, which enabled the manipulation of light and the creation of optical effects.

In her essay that discusses the semantics of crystals especially during the sixteenth century, Patrizia Castelli has emphasized how the three main practices of divination had a common element based on the reflection of light, these practices being hydromancy (reading the future from a water-mirror), catoptrics (reading the future from a mirror), and crystallomancy⁹⁵. The discussion about mirrors is an object of particular attention in Agrippa's *De occulta philosophia*, written in 1510 but published in 1533⁹⁶. Arippa

⁹⁴ F. Zorzi, *L'armonia del mondo*, I:iii:15, 323. «Senza dubbio tutti gli elementi contribuiscono alla formazione delle pietre, ma in particolare la terra e l'acqua, perciò le pietre opache sono dette teree, mentre quelle trasparenti sono dette acquee».

⁹⁵ Patrizia Castelli, "La mantica e i cristalli," in *Cristalli e gemme: realtà, fisica e immaginario simbolico, tecniche e arte*, ed. B. Zanettin (Venice: Istituto Veneto di Scienze, Lettere ed Arti, 2003), 551.

⁹⁶ Henricus Cornelius Agrippa von Nettesheim, *De occulta philosophia* (Cologne: Karl Anton Nowotny, 1533; facsimile, Graz: Akademische Druck und Verlagsanstalt, 1967).

nominated various divinatory practices, explaining that geomancy was based on the knowledge of the motion of the land, hydromancy on that of the water and so forth. Chapter 35 in the second book discusses how to realize mirrors, some concave, some cylindrical, that create optical illusions. He also added that it was possible to construct certain mirrors through which the surrounding air becomes filled with amazing ghosts⁹⁷.

In the late sixteenth century, the *Compendiosa introduzione alla prima parte della specularia* of Rafael Mirami demonstrates how by then, the occult scientific literature dealing with optics had turned to deal more publically with *Specularia*, the science of mirroring⁹⁸. Many of these humanist scientists were called to live and work within the courts of Alfonso II in Ferrara, Guglielmo and Vincenzo Gonzaga in Mantua, Emperor Rudolph II of Prague and Duke Federic of Wurtemberg, where they had been encouraged to develop their technical abilities in the fields of alchemy, medicine, engineering, and so forth⁹⁹. In the realm of optics, Euclidean geometry and natural philosophy were recruited by figures such as Abramo Colorni and Rafael Mirami for the development of new methods and applications for the creation of optical illusions, by means of mirrors and precious stones¹⁰⁰.

Towards the end of the century, in his rather popular *Magia naturalis* (1589), Della Porta wrote in chapter II about the magician and the cognitions that are indispensable for him. He asserted that the magician must master an extremely broad range of aspects of natural philosophy, possess good knowledge of medicine, and as a third and final aspect, achieve great knowledge in optics and in the arts. '*Magic contains a reflective power that refers to the eyes, and in order to trick them, it evokes visions in water and in round mirrors, concave and convex...*'¹⁰¹. In book XIX, entitled 'Optical Experience', following an explanation on

⁹⁷ Ibid, 567.

⁹⁸ Rafael Mirami, *Introduzione alla prima parte della speculari*; *Ibid.*, *Tavole della prima parte della specularia*.

⁹⁹ For the court of Rudolph II in Prague, for example, see: Evans, *Rudolf II and his world*, 196-242 ("6. Rudolf and the Occult Arts").

¹⁰⁰ Guseo, "Il mito dei Grimani," 123-131.

¹⁰¹ Giovanni Battista della Porta, *Magia naturalis, sive de miraculis*, b. II, 29. « La magia contiene una potenza speculativa che si riferisce agli occhi e, per ingannarli, essa suscita visioni nelle acque e negli specchi rotondi, concavi e convessi [...]»

sunlight and on the *camera obscura*, the three latter sections deal with optical illusions with prisms and mirrors. Using both prisms and mirrors, Della Porta explained how to create a rainbow of colors by projecting sunlight on the walls of a room. Using mirrors, he discussed how to obtain multiple visions, how to transform the dimensions of an object, and how to obtain the effect of a man walking in two different directions. The last chapter is dedicated to concave mirrors, to their capacity to change the perceived dimensions of an object and to catch rays of sunlight for creating fire¹⁰².

Since the time of Paracelsus, crystallogancy has also been called *Beryllistics*, the art of observing visions that appear in small mirrors. The denomination came after the Beryl stone, whose transparency and relative softness compared to rock crystal enabled its cutting and thus its manipulation. For these qualities, the beryl was probably the stone most recognized with the development of lenses for vision. The transparency qualities of the Beryl, a variant of the Emerald, had been recognized already by Pliny, who recounts how Nero looked at gladiatorial performances through it¹⁰³. In the mid-fifteenth century the Beryl was the object of a treatise by Nicholas of Cusa, in which the precious stone was described as a metaphorical eye that conducts to divine wisdom, or to God¹⁰⁴. The stone became very fashionable in the sixteenth century, when the Spanish conquistador Hernan Cortéz (1485-1547) brought a large quantity of beryl stones into Europe¹⁰⁵.

In Venice, as the realm of supreme glass works, and above all as a maritime mercantile Republic where exotic materials and artifacts were generally more accessible, there was also a widespread commerce of precious stones. The documents about the correspondences of the Mantuan dukes Guglielmo and Vincenzo with figures in Venice, collected in the Mantua State Archive and published in two volumes by Daniela Sogliani

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, b. XIX, 204-207.

¹⁰³ G. Ten Doesschate, "Some Historical Notes on Spectacles and on Beryllus," *British Journal of Ophthalmology* 30 (1946): 661-662, Pliny, *Storia naturalis*, XXXVII, xvi

¹⁰⁴ Nicholas of Cusa, "Il berillo," in *Opere filosofiche*, ed. G. Federici Vescovini (Turin: UTET, 1972), 641-687; Castelli, "La mantica e i cristalli," 562.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 561.

and Michaela Sermidi respectively, reveal the impressive extent of objects that were exchanged between various nobles and statesmen in Venice and the dukes, which included many jewels and cameos¹⁰⁶. During his reign Duke Vincenzo Gonzaga (1588-1612) was especially known for his hobby to *'acconciare ogni sorte di pietre gioiose'*, and some of his most luxurious acquisitions in Venice are of precious stones of all sizes and shapes, including an interest in some of the original Grimani cameos¹⁰⁷.

The German merchants working in the two centers played an important role in the commerce of these prized objects, and were often operating as mediators in between the two centers. Augusta Girolamo, Christophe Ott, and Hans Jacob König, are some of the figures frequently mentioned in these letters. A large, marvelous precious stone, easily identified as a Beryl because of its hexagonal cylindrical form and green color, was painted by Paolo Veronese around 1575 in the hands of the German merchant Hans Jacob König (before 1536-1603) (**figs. 242, 242.1**). Born in Füssen, König was a goldsmith and an imperial antiquarian who lived in Venice during the 1570's, and often travelled to Florence, Naumburg, Prague, Rome and Vienna. The portrait, recorded in an inventory compiled in the first decade of the seventeenth century by König's heirs, probably entered the collection of Rudolph II in Prague¹⁰⁸.

6.3.1.2 Lapidary Culture and the Virtues of Precious Stones

Typical esoteric speculations brought to the attribution of special virtue or of curative, medicinal qualities to certain precious stones, usually referring to their use as talismans or magical amulets. In his lapidary, Dolce (after Leonardi) discussed whether precious stones

¹⁰⁶ Michaela Sermidi, *Le collezioni Gonzaga. I. Il carteggio tra Venezia e Mantova, 1588-1612* (Cinisello Balsamo: Silvana, 2003); Daniela Sogliani, *Le collezioni Gonzaga. II. Il carteggio tra Venezia e Mantova (1563-1587)* (Cinisello Balsamo: Silvana, 2002).

¹⁰⁷ Michaela Sermidi, "Vanità, lusso, arte e scienza. Il collezionismo onnivoro di Vincenzo I Gonzaga a Venezia," in *Ibid.*, *Le collezioni Gonzaga. I.*, 40-41.

¹⁰⁸ For a short history of the portrait see: Garton, John. *Grace and Grandeur: The Portraiture of Paolo Veronese* (London; Turnhout: Harvey Miller, 2008), 216. See also: Andrew John Martin, "I rapporti con i Paesi Bassi e la Germania. Pittori, agenti e mercanti, collezionisti," in Hochmann et.al., *Il collezionismo d'arte a Venezia*, 143-164.

could contain virtues. He cited King Solomon, who had said that stones contained virtues such as making people loved, wise, or invisible, extinguishing poisons etcetera, concluding that *'everything that can be imagined by man, can be fulfilled with virtue of the stones'*. According to the Pythagoreans, Dolce continued, stones have their own souls, just like all inferior things; virtues were found within the stones through means of their soul. Dolce himself did not agree that the stones contained virtues because of their souls, but rather, *'because of the qualities and species of the stone itself, as we shall clearly demonstrate with the authority of the philosophers'*¹⁰⁹. In providing this 'natural' and 'learned' explanation, in the mind of the Renaissance man the mystical attribution of virtues of stones becomes a reasonable and legitimate chemical-alchemical attribution.

The gilt and embedded decorative borders in fresco that embellish the rooms in Villa Grimani Molin depict precious stones of three main colors: green, which is most identified with the Emerald, red, that can be the sard, carnelian or ruby, and white pearls (**fig. 118**). The various gemstones that decorate the other parts of the overall fresco program contain the same gems, with several representations of another white and particularly brilliant stone, whose angles are neatly cut, that may be interpreted as a beryl (**figs. 126, 127, 129**).

According to most lapidary writers, including Dolce and Leonardi, the beryl was said to have donated strength to whoever wore it, made the love of the husbands towards the wife grow, and ease the difficulty and eliminate the pain of the women who give birth. The beryl was the twelfth stone in the Priestly breastplate of the High Priest described in Exodus; it was a symbol of *miser cordia*, of charity and of magnanimity. Dolce emphasized in his lapidary the optical qualities of the gemstone, explaining that the most precious variant is the one that originates from India, which is the most transparent and lucid, and that the

¹⁰⁹ Dolce, *Delle diuerse sorti delle gemme*, 19-20v. « E per concludere, tutto quello, che puo essere imaginato dell'huomo, puo essere adempiuto per virtù delle pietre. [...] le virtù, che si trovano nelle pietre, non procedono da anima, ne da gli elementi solamente: ma, come diremo piu oltre, dalla qualità e specie di essa pietra : come chiaramente con l'autorità de' Filosofi dimostraremo.»

round variants function like concave mirrors¹¹⁰. Most of the above 'feminine' characteristics are compatible with placement of the stone in a very prominent position just above the virtue of Chastity in the central hall, who is also accompanied by an allegory of *misericordia* in the grotesque scheme above her (**fig. 127**).

Despite their different origins, pearls have been part of lapidaries since ancient times because of their precious value and because of the mysteriousness surrounding their birth from the depth of the ocean, which had brought to their association with many strange legends and characteristics. Due to their pure white color, the most common belief regarding pearls was that whoever wore them would become chaste¹¹¹. In accordance with this belief, in the dining room ceiling of the Fratta villa, one of the wives wears a pearl necklace, and the female figure with the chaste hand-gesture is endowed with a pearl necklace and pearl earrings, which she displays with great visibility (**figs. 195, 196**).

The sard is believed to disable the bad influence of the Onyx, which can cause no harm in its presence. The ruby is associated victory, force and vital spirit, and its main virtue is regarded as an ability to strengthen the body from its illness and weaknesses. It was often compared to a drop of blood, and in Christian symbolism, it was associated with Christ and his Incarnation¹¹². In the past, the name emerald denoted many types of green-shaded stones; twelve of them are mentioned by Pliny, who also notes its correspondence with the beryl. One of the most famous uses of the emerald was in the most fundamental monument of alchemical tradition, the *Tabula Smaragdina*, which had been legendarily engraved by

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 33v-34. « BERILLO e pietra di color Oliva, overo di acqua del mare. [...] rende una bellissima forma di sei angoli. L'India produce Berilli bianchi, come l'acqua del mare percossa da i raggi del Sole. [...] La curiosa antichità hebbe in maggior prezzo i simili all'acqua del mare. E i moderni quelli, che hanno colore di cristallo non oscuro, essendo piu simili al Diamante. [...] Ma gl'Indici avanzano gli altri di prezzo, essendo molto trasparenti. [...] se questi si ritondino in forma di palla, e si soppongano a raggi del Sole, mandano fuori raggi, come fanno gli specchi concavi. Ha questa pietra gran virtù: fa chi la porta pronto e gagliardo. Conserva & accresce l'amore dè maritati. Cura tutti i mali, della gola, e delle fauci, che procedono dalla humidità della testa, e da quelli gli conserva. Preso e mescolato con altrettanto peso di argento, guarisce la lepra. L'acqua, dove esso sia stato alquanto, presa, giova a gli occhi : e bevuta leva i sospiri : e sana i mali del fegato. Giova anco alle gravide, che non facciano sconciatura, e che non sentino doglie. »

¹¹¹ Pazzini, *Le pietre preziose nella storia*, 306-309.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 318-320.

Hermes Trismegistus. Many magical and therapeutic virtues had been attributed to the stone, and as its simile, the beryl, one of its principal virtues was conserving the chastity of whoever wore it, and assisting women who gave birth. Dolce again has emphasized its optical qualities, its reflection capacities like a mirror, as well as its many virtues¹¹³.

In addition to the representation of mirrors and precious stones, the *Studiolo* contains another decorative element that suggests an interesting relationship to the tradition of the lapidaries, in particular to the versions of Dolce and Leonardi. The third book of both lapidaries is dedicated to a description of 'sculptures that are found in stones' ('*Delle Sculture, che si trovano nelle pietre*'), referring to talismans or magical amulets of ancient origins¹¹⁴. Dolce's book, closely following Leonardi, gathers information from various ancient lapidary authors regarding different images that are found within stones and their attributed virtues. One particular chapter, XIV, cites examples from a lapidary of a certain Ragieli, in his Book of Wings (*libro delle ali* according to Dolce, *librum alarum* according to Leonardi). Under the voice 'hoopoe' the text of Dolce reads:

HOPOE. The figure of this bird with the herb Dragontea around it, found in a beryl, shall have the virtue to gather the aquatic spirits, and to constrain them to speak; and many other things¹¹⁵.

In the *Studiolo*, above the luxurious figure, a grotesque element appears with a clear depiction of a hoopoe, which is surrounded by foliage of the *Dragontea*, or *Dracunculus vulgaris* in its Latin botanical denomination (**figs. 243, 244**). The artist has even taken care to depict the white stripes of the foliage, which are not painted, for example, in the plant that surrounds the owl that is painted above the other melancholic female. The mention of the

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 321-326. Dolce, *Delle diuerse sorti delle gemme*, 70v-71. « E' comoda questa pietra a coloro, che amano la castità: percioche non sostiene, che una vergine sia violata, ma si spezza. Frena il movimento della lascivia. Accresce la sostanza. Le illusioni dè Demoni e le tempeste vieta. La vista affaticata ristora, e la fa piu efficace: & ha molte altre virtù, ma queste sono le principali. »

¹¹⁴ For a comprehensive study on ancient magical amulets of Egyptian, Greek, Jewish origins, their images and inscriptions, see: *Campbell Bonner, Studies in Magical Amulets. Chiefly Greco-Egyptian* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1950).

¹¹⁵ Dolce, *Delle diuerse sorti delle gemme*, 80v. « UPUPA. La figura di questo augello con l'herba Dragontea innanzi, trovandosi in un Berillo, havrà virtù di ravnar gli spiriti acquatici, e costringerli a parlare; e diverse altre cose. »

beryl stone recalls the reference to the optical qualities of the precious in the fresco program of the room, in the vibrating reflections of the painted concave and cylindrical mirrors. The desire to gather aquatic spirits recalls the figures of the eight river gods in the corners of the ceiling vault (fig. 162). The remaining virtues of the image, contained in Dolce's exclamation '*and many other things*', may be easily recovered from Leonardi's version:

UPUPAE. figura cum dragontea herba ante se in Berillo reperiatur, erit virtus eius invocare aquaticos spiritus ac loqui cohibere; *Mortuos quoque notos ad se revocare ac de quaesitis ab eis responsa recipere*¹¹⁶.

-suggesting, that the amulet has the virtue of summoning one's dead acquaintances, and receiving responses from them. In the domestic context of a humanist villa, the function of the described amulet according to Leonardi recalls the presence of the *Lares*.

Unfortunately, it has not been possible to recover the original version of the lapidary cited in chapter XIV by Dolce and Leonardi, a task attempted also by other scholars of lapidaries¹¹⁷. It may be a lapidary from the eleventh century, written by the court astrologer of the Tunisian prince Aly Aben Ragel (Abû I-Hasan 'Alî ibn Abî I-Rijâl), who was also known by the name of Raziël or Ragiël. However, Aben Ragel's only currently known book is *The Complete Book of the Judgment of the Stars*, translated by Yehudâ ben Moshe into Old Castilian for Alfonso X of Castile in 1254, and translated again into Latin and published by Erhard Ratdolt in Venice in 1485, under the title *The Very Famous Complete Book on the Judgment of the Stars*. It was reprinted at least two times, in 1503 and 1571¹¹⁸.

¹¹⁶ Camillo Leonardi, *Speculum lapidum*, LVII.

¹¹⁷ In addition to my own attempts, Kunz described it as «one of the curious treatises composed about the thirteenth century under the influence of Hebrew and Greco-Roman tradition. Although it owes its name to the original 'Book of Raziël,' it bears little of any likeness to that work. » George Frederick Kunz, *The Curious Lore of Precious Stones* (Philadelphia and London: J. B. Lippincott Company, 1913), 132. See also: Carla De Bellis, "Astri, gemme e arti," 102-103.

¹¹⁸ Albohazen Haly, *Finit feliciter liber completus in iudicijs stellarum quem composuit albohazen Hali filius abenragel: bene reuisus & fideli studio emendatus per dominum Bartolomeum de Alten de Nusia germanum artium & medicine doctorem excellentissimum* (Venice: Erhard Ratdolt, 1485).

It is possible that the author of the iconographical program of the *Studiolo*, who was probably familiar with the marvelous collection of the Grimani cameos, was also familiar with the lapidary of Dolce, Leonardi or even the original Ragiel version. If that is the case, the three birds painted in *Studiolo* above the two nude females and the old sage – the owl, the hoopoe and the raven – may represent virtues that may be found within precious stones. In another chapter in the lapidary, Dolce referred to the role of the owl as the bird of Pallas, as a sign of wisdom, and to its virtue as enabling the man that carries it *'letteratissimo e bel parlatore'*¹¹⁹ – qualities that may be ascribed to the melancholic female painted beneath the owl in the *Studiolo*, which are however also qualities associated with the animal in general Western culture. In the visual tradition of the Renaissance, the three birds share one common denominator: they are all birds of ill omen, related to nocturnal, funerary and infernal connotations¹²⁰. The choice for their representation may have therefore stemmed from a desire to evoke certain apotropaic qualities through their possible function as painted amulets.

6.3.2 *Sapienza Universalis*: the Hebrew Inscription and the Old Sage

The core of the decorative program of Villa Grimani Molin includes an inscription in Hebrew letters, painted on the white board carried by the figure of the old sage that is positioned on top of the main entrance door to the *Studiolo* (**fig. 12**). Since the 1460's, Hebrew inscriptions have appeared in Christian art in an erudite employment of Hebrew sources, and with a conscious evocation of the prestige of Hebrew antiquity. Some of the earlier examples are provided in the works of the Ferrarese painters Cosmè Tura and Ercole de' Roberti, and by Venetian masters like Cima da Conegliano and Vittore Carpaccio¹²¹. Despite

¹¹⁹ Dolce, *Delle diverse sorti delle gemme*, 95v. « CIVETTA. La figura d'una Civetta, essendo ella Augello di Pallade, se sia trovata scolpita in una pietra, fara' l'huomo, che la portera' seco, letteratissimo e bel parlatore.»

¹²⁰ Levi d'Ancona, *Lo zoo del rinascimento*, 99-100, 110-113, 220-221.

¹²¹ Giulio Busi, "Invenzione simbolica e tradizione ebraica nel Rinascimento italiano. Alcuni esperimenti figurativi," *Henoch* 21 (1999): 166.

their relatively high diffusion throughout the late fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, the iconographical study of the Hebrew depictions has rarely been the object of a methodic research. Besides several singular initiatives by scholars such as Giulio Busi and Avraham Ronen, art historians have generally preferred to treat the inscriptions as part of a common cultural citation within the entire iconographical program of the painting, and without attaining to the evaluation of their content. In the beginning of the current century, Gad Ben Ami Sarfatti has examined a series of 260 representative examples, including the Fratta villa, as a starting point for a future research on the subject¹²².

In his study of Hebrew inscriptions in the fifteenth century, Ronen has grouped the various typologies that may be found in the paintings into four main categories. (1) Pseudo-writing using indescribable letters; (2) a random choice of Hebrew letters that do not form words; (3) Latin transcriptions in Hebrew writing; (4) inscriptions with very limited meanings such as the Hebrew alphabet; (5) and meaningful Hebrew expressions¹²³. Naturally, within the erudite iconographical program of Villa Grimani Molin, one would only expect to find an inscription that belongs to the fifth category, whose content is completely coherent and justified.

As a cultural phenomena, a particular importance should be ascribed to the insertion of Hebrew letters in the *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili*, the most celebrated of the illustrated books of the Renaissance. The author has incorporated into the text translations of his own phrases, proposed also in Latin and Greek, symbolizing the new use of the language as an exemplary ancient language of mystery, necessary for the important passages of the mystical research of the protagonist of the allegorical tale¹²⁴. A similar employment of Hebrew letters appears for example in Venice around 1553, on the

¹²² Gad B. A. Sarfatti, "Hebrew script in western visual arts," *Italia: studi e ricerche sulla storia, la cultura e la letteratura degli Ebrei d'Italia* 13-15 (2001): 451-547, esp. 451, and "Addenda," *Ibid.* 16 (2004): 135-156. For the study of Hebrew inscriptions in art see also: Avraham Ronen, "Iscrizioni ebraiche nell'arte italiana del Quattrocento," in *Studi di storia dell'arte sul medioevo e il rinascimento. Atti del Convegno internazionale Arezzo-Firenze 1989*, 2 vols (Florence: Polistampa, 1992), vol. 2, 601-624; Giulio Busi, "Officina ebraica ferrarese," in *Ibid.*, *Il succo dei favi*, esp. 80-93; *Ibid.*, "Invenzione simbolica e tradizione ebraica," 165-177.

¹²³ Ronen, "Iscrizioni ebraiche nell'arte," 602.

¹²⁴ Colonna, *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili*; Busi, "Invenzione simbolica e tradizione ebraica," 167.

façade of the church of San Zulian, where the portrait of Tommaso Rangone was erected by Jacopo Sansovino and Alessandro Vittoria, with a prominent and detailed commemorative inscription for the deceased in Latin, Hebrew and Greek¹²⁵.

According to Busi, the development of the use of Hebrew outside the biblical dimension reflects the theoretical process that began in the last decades of the fifteenth century by the Christian scholars of rabbinic Judaism and cabalistic literature, such as Pico della Mirandola in Florence and Joannes Reuchlin in Germany. Above all, the motivation for their study of Hebrew culture lay in their conviction that they would find in Judaism the real truth of Christian faith. As affirmed by Pico, '*I saw [in the Hebrew books] – and God is my witness – not the Mosaic religion as much as the Christian one. Therein the mystery of the Trinity, therein the Incarnation of the Verb, therein the divinity of the Messiah... I have read the same things that every day we read in Paul and Dionysius, in Jerome and in Augustine*'¹²⁶. The idea that the Hebrew texts foreshadowed the evangelic revelation without having the Jews themselves know it, posed Judaism as equal to other traditions of the Classical epoch, such as Pythagoreanism, Neo-Platonist philosophy and Hermeticism, as one of the many elements of the mosaic of the humanist culture¹²⁷.

A significant example for the use of Hebrew as an iconic brand of humanist invention is found in the emblem book of Achile Bocchi (1488-1562), *Symbolicarum quaestionum...*¹²⁸. In the book, the Hebrew is often juxtaposed with the two other alphabets of ancient wisdom, Greek and Latin. The Hebrew is integrated by Bocchi in a knowledgeable manner that seeks to stupefy for its complexity and invite the reader to reveal the hidden knowledge. In one particular example, the author has depicted God in the action of

¹²⁵ Sarfatti, "Hebrew script in western visual arts," 538-539.

¹²⁶ Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, *De hominis dignitate, Heptaplus, De ente et uno e scritti vari*, ed. E. Garin, (Florence: Vallecchi, 1942), 161. «ho visto [nei libri ebraici] – Dio mi è testimone – non tanto la religione mosaica quanto quella Cristiana. Ivi il mistero della Trinità, ivi l'incarnazione del Verbo, ivi la divinità del Messia... ho letto le stesse cose che ogni giorno leggiamo in Paolo e Dionigi, in Girolamo e Agostino. »

¹²⁷ Busi, "Invenzione simbolica e tradizione ebraica," 167.

¹²⁸ Achille Bocchi, *Symbolicarum quaestionum de universo genere quas serio ludebat libri quinque* (Bologna: in aedibus novae Academiae Bocchianae, 1555).

creating the world by blowing air through a long pipe (**fig. 245**). The air contains God's word, or his concept and power – all elements necessary for creation according to a familiar allegory by Nicholas of Cusa¹²⁹. Around the globe, Bocchi added four winged figures, allegories of the four Platonic elements. The Hebrew inscription performs the role of the integration of the Platonic cosmogony of the *Timaeus* with principles of the Christian vision. Translated as '*And the spirit of God floats above the water*', it affirms that the soul does not reduce itself in confronting with the material composition of the four elements¹³⁰.

The creation of things through God's use of the word, evoked also by Bocchi in the above engraving, is a Christian concept that is derived from a long cabalistic tradition. The cabalistic *Sefer Yetzirah* (The Book of Formation, ca. third century AD), is probably the ancient text most recognized with the attribution of primordial creative forces and mystical meanings to the letters of the Hebrew alphabet¹³¹. As its main objective, *Sefer Yetzirah* provides a structure of the entire reality, classifying it into ten *Sephiroth* and into the Hebrew letters. To date, it is retained by scholars as the most important link between the ancient esotericism and medieval and modern cabalistic thought, and is still considered as an indispensable instrument for accessing Hebrew symbolism¹³².

A copy of the *Sefer Yetzirah*, with a commentary by Mosheh ben Nahman da Gerona, was present in the private library of Cardinal Domenico Grimani. In 1498, the Cardinal acquired in Florence the library of Pico della Mirandola which included 123 Hebrew manuscripts. By the time he wrote his will in 1520, his library consisted of 193 volumes that reflected the cultural interests of its two collectors. The inventory of the collection, conserved to date at the Marciana Library, contains also a volume of *Sitre Tora* with a

¹²⁹ Nicholas of Cusa, *Idiota; De possest; Compendium; De apice theoriae*, ed. Giovanni Santinello, 2 vols. (Bologna: Zanichelli, 1965-1980), vol. I, *Idiota, De mente*, 13.

¹³⁰ For a more detailed analysis of the image and its Christian theological sources see: Busi, "Invenzione simbolica e tradizione ebraica," 171-173.

¹³¹ Gadiel Toaff, preface and notes, *Sefer Yezirah: il libro della creazione* (Rome: Carucci, 1979).

¹³² Giulio Busi, "Introduzione al Sefer Yetzirah," in *Mistica ebraica: testi della tradizione segreta del giudaismo dal III al XVIII secolo*, eds. G. Busi and E. Loewenthal, intro. G. Busi (Turin: Einaudi, 1995), 33.

commentary by the same author. The volume is a part of the Cabalistic Zohar that contains a collection of essays on the Book of Genesis, dealing with the concepts of creation, '*Olam Ha-Ba*' (the next world) and the soul¹³³.

In *De harmonia mundi*, Francesco Zorzi provided his own synthesis and interpretation of the cabalistic significance given to letters and to the pronunciation of entire words. For Zorzi, words operated as a mediating energy between speaker and the listener, able to '*transform not only he who listens, but often also other objects*'. In fact, '*Christ would not have said «In my name shall they cast out devils»¹³⁴ if the pronunciation of that name did not contain a certain efficient force in confronting with the demons, the ill and similar.*' In particular, the Hebrew words are '*signs and sacraments of celestial realities, and are therefore blessed with a power that is similar to that of the sacraments... The Hebrew words represent in the most efficient and mysterious way divine reality, just as celestial reality and even natural reality...*'¹³⁵. In an Analogue manner to the creative power attributed to the Hebrew word in the Cabala, according to the Christian doctrine of the Incarnation, Christ, the *Logos*, was created through the verbal pronunciation of God the Father, as described by John the Evangelist, '*And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us*'¹³⁶.

In the iconographical study of the fresco program of Villa Grimani Molin by scholars throughout the years, only Gert Van der Sman (1993) and Barbara Bocazzi Mazza

¹³³ Bibl. Mar., ms. lat. Classe I, n.182 (=4669). Giuliano Tamani, "I libri ebraici del cardinal Domenico Grimani," *Annali di Ca' Foscari* XXXIV, 3 (1995): 7, 44, 49.

¹³⁴ Mark, 16:17.

¹³⁵ F. Zorzi, *L'armonia del mondo*, III:3:10, 2035, 2037. «Le parole, infatti, sono un elemento intermedio tra chi parla e chi ascolta e trasportano non solo il pensiero del parlante, ma anche la sua potenza, operando come un'energia in chi ascolta e la riceve. Per questo le parole sono in grado di trasformare non solo chi ascolta, ma spesso anche altri oggetti. Cristo, infatti, non avrebbe detto: *Nel mio nome scacceranno i demoni*, se nel pronunciare quel nome non fosse contenuta una qualche potenza efficace nei confronti dei demoni, dei malati e di altri simili. [...] Le parole, inoltre (soprattutto quelle ebraiche) sono altrettanti segni e sacramenti delle realtà celesti, perciò sono dotate di una potenza affine a quella dei sacramenti [...] Ora, poiché le parole ebraiche rappresentano in modo più efficace e misterioso tanto le realtà divine quanto quelle celesti e persino quelle naturali, Orfeo comanda di non modificare i nomi barbari, cioè ebraici, nelle cerimonie sacre, so vogliamo operare efficacemente.»

¹³⁶ John, 1:14.

(2006) have attempted to provide an interpretation for the Hebrew inscription displayed by the old sage¹³⁷. The challenge of arriving to a definite reading of the text may stem from its synthetic nature, containing only two short words and the letter *aleph*, but above all it may be ascribed to various restoration operations that it has undergone throughout the centuries, which have rendered the identification of the letters quite difficult.

Both Van der Sman and Mazza Bocazzi, whose proposals shall be addressed with further attention in the current chapter, have suggested interpreting the text as an evocation of Christ as the *Logos*. Although such a reading does not deviate much from the conclusions of the current research, it was somewhat inaccurate. First, the difficulty to identify the Hebrew letters has led each one of them to interpret the words in a different manner, whereas the text may be also read in at least two more ways. Second, their unfamiliarity with the Hebrew language had limited their interpretation to readings suggested by external consultants, who often did not specialize in the iconographical program of the villa. As the current writer, in addition to possessing the required linguistic knowledge, I have based the interpretation on a preliminary study, which sought to provide the most possible accurate identification of the Hebrew letters.

6.3.2.1 The Hebrew Inscription in the *Studiolo*: Identification

The inscription has been read in a different manner by Van der Sman (*'Davar Sallal Aleph'*, דבר מלל א) and Mazza Bocazzi (*'Davar Millel Aleph'*, דבר סלל א). Both readings suggest phrases that may possess a certain meaning in the Hebrew language, but at the same time, they are rather forced formulas of speech. Sarfatti has read *'Rabach Sallal Aleph'* (רבך סלל א), a completely meaningless phrase, which however best reflects the current appearance of the text following its latest restoration¹³⁸. The main issue in the interpretation of the inscription lies therefore in the fact that some of the letters are not easily identifiable. The inaccuracy may be ascribed the artist himself, or to the latest and possibly additional, previous restorations. The letters are currently designed over a very

¹³⁷ Van der Sman, *La decorazione a fresco*, 177; Bocazzi Mazza, "Gli infiniti nomi di Dio," 261-4.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*; Sarfatti, "Hebrew script in western visual arts," 478.

strong and opaque white layer of paint that does not reveal any previous variations of the text beneath it. The only available useful instrument for the identification is a black-and-white photography of the fresco from before the last restoration, when the letters had been 'lightened' (**fig. 246**)¹³⁹. Its quality is not exceptionally high, but it is sufficient for the recognition of certain characteristics that disappeared during the restoration.

The inscription contains two words, ambiguously identifiable, and the letter 'א', *aleph*, the first of the Hebrew alphabet. The cultural and mystical significance of the letter *aleph* is well known from *Sefer Ytetzirah*, where God is nominated with the word 'Einsof' (אֵינְסוֹף), meaning infinite. The letter *aleph*, as the first letter in the word, has become recognized as a symbol of infinity, a symbol of the primordial beginning of things, of the 'Primo principio', of God himself¹⁴⁰. The examination of the other two words depicted in the fresco suggests that the key to their interpretation lies in the identification of typeface that was used by the artist, which in the case of the current inscription possesses some specific characteristics. Usually, the Hebrew font that is employed in Venetian art or print makes use of the same letters of the Holy Scriptures, a traditional, elaborate 'square' typeface, usually decorative, called simply 'print' (*defùs*). In the fresco, the print typeface was used in order to describe the letter א.

However, the two other words seem to employ a particular but common *semi-cursive* font, known as Rashi script. The typeface, named after the author of the most famous rabbinic commentary on the Hebrew Bible and the Talmud, is based on fifteenth century Sephardic semi-cursive handwriting (**fig. 247**). It was taken as a model by early Hebrew typographers such as Abraham Garton, the Soncino family and Daniel Bomberg, a Christian printer in Venice, in their editions of commented texts. The purpose of its use was to distinguish the rabbinic commentary from the text itself, for which a proper square typeface was used. From the sixteenth century onwards, the semi-cursive typeface has appeared frequently in

¹³⁹ I would like to thank Avvocato Antonio Avezzù for providing the photography, and for explaining that the letters had been purposefully '*alleggerite*' in the course of the last restoration.

¹⁴⁰ Gershom Sholem, *I segreti della creazione: un capitolo del libro cabalistico "Zohar"* (Milan: Adelphi, 2003), 40.

the printed editions of various types of Hebrew books in the entire European continent, Mantua, Sabbioneta and Venice included, not exclusively for writing commentaries¹⁴¹.

It seems that the Fratta artist had used precisely this 'commentary font' for the inscription of the villa (figs. x, x, x). This is particularly evident upon the examination of the second word. The first letter, erroneously interpreted as 'מ' (*mem*) or 'ס' (*samech*) because of the evaluation of the restored inscription, is in fact a print 'ה' (*heh*), or rather, 'ה' in the semi-cursive font. The thin joining line on the upper left of the letter seen in the modern restoration did not exist in the original version, and the bottom of the letter was much more curved and accentuated. Curved letters, in general, are typical in the semi-cursive font and are not used in traditional print, which contains very square outlines. In the restored version, the upper left end contains a decorative 'crown' motif that was entirely added by the restorer, in a modern attempt to imitate the decorative character of the print typeface that is generally associated with the Holy Scriptures. These pseudo-Hebrew decorative details have no place in the stylistic execution of the semi-cursive typeface, which had been invented with the intention of creating a simple and simplified alphabet that does not attract the attention away from the holy texts.

The remaining letters of the second word are two identical letters, in print 'ל' (*lamed*) and in semi-cursive 'ל'. The letters are quite similar in both old and restored version; they are also defined in a similar manner in both typefaces. The execution in the Fratta inscription is still more similar to the semi-cursive version, which tends to elongate the upper line of the letter downwards, into the middle zone of the text, and to push the entire letter a little bit downwards. Although he insisted upon the addition of the decorative details, the restorer still maintained the typical semi-cursive shift of the letters downwards from the middle zone. The complete word should therefore not be read as print typeface 'מלל' (*mallal* or *millel*, meaning 'pronounced') or 'סלל' (*sallal*, meaning 'paved', or 'set up'), but should be interpreted as the semi-cursive 'הלל' (*hallel*), meaning 'glory' or 'hail'.

¹⁴¹ "'Rashi" Script," in *The Jewish Encyclopedia: A Descriptive Record of the History Religion, Literature and Customs of Jewish People from the Earliest Times to the Present Day*, 12 vols (New York; London: Funk and Wagnalls Company, 1901-1906), X, 326-328.

The identification of the first word presents a more complicated challenge, since it was not depicted in an accurate manner by the artist (or by an even earlier restorer), as can be seen even in the pre-restoration version. Beginning the identification from the last letter, which is more easily identifiable, it is almost certainly a 'ר' (*reish*) in print or 'ר' in semi-cursive font. The depiction of the letter carries no significant deviations from either typeface. The lower line that is slightly elongated downwards in the restored version, which had caused Sarfatti to read it as a 'ך' (*chaf sophit*, 'final *chaf*'), is different in the pre-restoration version, where it is short and aligned with the other letters of the word.

The second letter in the first word may only be understood if interpreted as a semi-cursive letter, 'ב' (*beit*), whose print version is 'ב'. The semi-cursive *beit* differs significantly from any other letter in both typefaces. Its identification in the Fratta inscription provides a convincing indication that the semi-cursive script was indeed used by the artist. The form of the letter can clearly be identified in the pre-restoration version of the fresco, by the two rather short, and equal, upper and lower lines, and by the characteristic bend at the center of the joining vertical line. In the restoration, the restorer has exchanged the bend with a decorative rhombus point that has no parallel in the traditional elaboration of any Hebrew letter.

In order to be very cautious, it is necessary to consider that because of the unclear depiction, there may be a slight chance that it represents another letter. The print letter, 'נ' (*nun*, 'נ' in semi-cursive), may sometimes result similar to the semi-cursive *beit*. If that is the case, we would have to assume that the letter *nun* is the only letter that is not semi-cursive in the two words. For safety, the significance of a word shall also be examined with a print *nun* instead of a semi-cursive *beit*. The last letter that remains to be interpreted is the first letter of the first word. This is the letter most difficult to identify, since even in the pre-restoration image it was not spelled in a clear manner. The letter may be interpreted as either a semi-cursive 'ד' (*daleth*, in print 'ד') or a semi-cursive 'ו' (*vav*, in print 'ו').

In order to resolve the doubts in the identification of the first two letters of the first word, it is necessary to check which words result from the various possible combinations of the letters. Considering that the first letter is a semi-cursive *vav*, the resulting word would be 'וּבָר' (*vabar/vaber/vebar/ubar* etc.), a combination of letters that forms no significant

meaning or root in the Hebrew language. We may try to read it with the *beit* substituted with a *nun* in print typeface, 'ונר' (*ve-ner* or *va-ner*); in that case, the word 'and candle'. Alternatively, the word with the first letter interpreted as *daleth* and the second as *beit* reads 'דבר' (*davar* or *diber*). The word contains multiple meanings, since the three letters *daleth*, *beit* and *reish* form the roots of the words 'talk', 'pronounce' and 'thing'. Finally, the word with the first letter interpreted as *daleth* and the second as *nun* reads 'דנר' (*denar* or *danar*), carrying no significance in the Hebrew language.

The examination has therefore suggested two possible readings for the text. The first reading: 'ונר הלל א' (*Ve-Ner Hallel Aleph*), with the first letter of the first word interpreted as semi-cursive *vav* and the second as a print *nun*. The second reading: 'דבר הלל א' (*Davar Hallel Aleph*), with both words written exclusively in the semi-cursive typeface. A strong, black point is visible after the letter *aleph* in the old photography, which is completely absent from the restored version, perhaps as an indication that the three words should be read as an entire phrase and not as single and detached appearances. In any case, the letter *aleph* has been preserved in its print form. This may be attributed to its significance as a word designating God, and because the semi-cursive *aleph*, 'א', differs significantly from the familiar print form, and its representation would not have been recognizable by visitors who are not intimately familiar with Hebrew writing.

6.3.2.2 The Hebrew Inscription in the *Studiolo*: Interpretation

Before delving into the research of a possible biblical citation for the phrase, it is important to note that the first reading, *Ve-Ner Hallel Aleph*, contains no immediate significance within the Hebrew language. However, the second suggestion, *Davar Hallel Aleph* (or *Hillel* in past tense), is read as an actual phrase whose significance may be interpreted as 'The *Davar* Praised the Lord', or 'The Lord has Praised the *Davar*'. In the Hebrew version of the Gospel of John, Christ is referred to with the word *Davar*, which in Hebrew means 'thing', but also 'word' or even 'notion'. In the Vulgate Latin and in consequence, in the Italian and English versions, the word *Davar* has been translated as '*Verbum*'. Thus, the primordial existence of Christ as the *Logos* together with God the Father is declared in John 1:1, and the allusion to

the doctrine of the Incarnation appears in John 1:14¹⁴². The phrase written in the inscription of the *Studiolo* may therefore be interpreted as an appraisal of Christ as the *Logos*. For a more specific reference to the concept of the Incarnation, it is necessary to identify the possible biblical source from which the phrase would have been copied.

The interpretation of the text complies with the hypothesis of Van der Sman, who, without indicating the comprehensive meaning of the written phrase, suggested that *aleph* refers to God, and *Daver* to Christ as the *Logos*. Stating that until further verification his proposal shall remain a hypothesis, he suggested that the text may evocate the Ficinian theory of the Incarnation as the core moment of the perennial communication of the eternal Divine good¹⁴³.

Boccazzi Mazza has also suggested a similar interpretation to *aleph*, and regarded *Davar* as one of the infinite names of the Lord, relating the inscription to a general evocation of the role of Christ in the creation of the universe¹⁴⁴. She was strongly inclined towards reading the inscription as a Hebrew variation of the Latin '*in principio erat Verbum*'. However, the text of the Hebrew Gospel in the same lines differs significantly in its content and meaning, and reads '*Bereshit Haya Ha-Davar*' (בְּרֵאשִׁית הָיָה הַדָּבָר). Her attempt to contextualize the inscription within the cultural ambience of Giulio Camillo Delminio and his memory theater is also little convincing. First, no particular element within the entire fresco program of the villa has been identified as a citation of Camillo's treatise. Second, while Camillo's theater indeed discusses Christ as the *Logos* according to the Gospel of John, the issue appears as one of many popular theological, mythological, hermetic and cabalistic themes that Camillo discusses in his theater regarding the concept of creation.

¹⁴² John, 1:1 « in principio erat Verbum et Verbum erat apud Deum et Deus erat Verbum. hoc erat in principio apud Deum.» In English: «In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning.» In Hebrew: «הָיָה עִם הָאֱלֹהִים, דָּבָר, וְהַדָּבָר בְּרֵאשִׁית הָיָה הָ» «.. הוא הָיָה בְּרֵאשִׁית עִם הָאֱלֹהִים דָּבָר וְאֵלֵּי הָיָה הָ» In English «And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us.» In Hebrew «נִהְיָה בְּשָׂר וְשָׁכַן דָּבָר הָ» «בְּתוֹכֵנוּ». For the English translation see: *Holy Bible, New International Version, NIV* (Zondervan, Hodder & Stoughton and others: Biblica, 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011).

¹⁴³ Van der Sman, *La decorazione a fresco*, 177. For the Ficinian theory of the Incarnation: Vasoli, *Profezia e ragione*, 45-52.

¹⁴⁴ Boccazzi Mazza, "Gli infiniti nomi di Dio," 259-261.

The first chapter in the Gospel of John contains no mention of the word *Hallel* or *Hillel*, and no general reference to the idea of praising the Word or the *Logos* of God. Therefore, the Hebrew inscription in the villa cannot be regarded as its direct citation. In an examination in a Biblical Concordance of the first hypothesis for reading the first word in the inscription, *Vener*, no specific biblical reference has been found for any phrase with this word or its roots¹⁴⁵. The voice of the word *Davar*, however, has brought up an interesting proposal. In the entire Bible, the three words *Davar*, *Hallel* and God appear together in the same phrase exclusively only in Psalms, 56. The same phrase appears in the psalm in three different instances, in lines 4 and 10. A vulgar translation from a 1573 edition reads:

4. Nella parola di Dio mi glorierò, in Dio ho sperato, non temerò di cosa che mi faccia la carne.

10. Nella parola di Dio mi glorierò, nella parola del Signor mi glorierò¹⁴⁶.

The saying in Italian '*Nella parola di Dio mi glorierò*', in Latin '*Deo laudabo verbum*', and in English '*In God, whose word I praise*'¹⁴⁷, is equal to the Hebrew '*Be-Elohim A-Hallel Davar*' (בַּאֵלֹהִים אֶהְלֵל דָּבָר) as it appears in the original Hebrew version of the psalm. Psalm 56 was written as a prayer of David to God when he escaped from Achish, the king of the Philistines in Gath. The phrase is a promise of David the Lord, that if he rescued David from his enemies, he would praise his '*Davar*'. In the context of the psalm, the word *Davar* can mean either 'word', 'fame' or 'the word of being saved by' the Lord.

The inscription in Villa Grimani Molin may be regarded as a paraphrase of the original verse. In the original phrase (בַּאֵלֹהִים אֶהְלֵל דָּבָר), the first letter, *beit*, means 'in', and the *aleph* that precedes the word *Hallel* forms the future tense of the word. Their elimination in the Fratta inscription (אֶהְלֵל דָּבָר) could be the result of a translation from a Latin version, preserving only the synthetic core of the phrase. The reversal of the word order

¹⁴⁵ I am grateful for Professor Giuliano Tamani for his precious assistance and suggestions in the identification and interpretation of the phrase, and in searching for its possible biblical contextualization.

¹⁴⁶ David, *I salmi di David tradotti con bellissimo e dottissimo stile dalla lingua ebraica, nella latina e volgare, dal S. Pellegrin Heri modonese. E dal medesimo con molta dottrina e pietà dichiarati. ... Con tre tauole* (Venice: Giordano Ziletti, 1573), 181. In the same edition, the Latin original reads as follows: 4. «In Deo laudabo verbum eius, in Deo speravi, non timebo quid faciat mihi caro. / [...] / 10. In Deo laudabo verbum, in Domino laudabo sermonem.»

¹⁴⁷ *Holy Bible, New International Version, NIV*, Psalms, 56: 4, 10.

may simply be because the artist had read the script from left to right when copying it. Even when reversed, the phrase is still coherent and produces the same significance.

The motivation for inscribing David's praise of the Lord's word in the core of the fresco program of Villa Grimani Molin may be explained based on the popular interpretation of lines 4 and 10 in Psalm 56 during the sixteenth century. Books of Psalms enjoyed a fortunate distribution in Renaissance Venice: they were published in the city but also in Lion, Modena, and Ferrara, and the large quantity of printed books that exists to date in the Venetian libraries testifies their diffusion in the city. Besides reprinting the classical Latin version, the sixteenth century publications demonstrate a particular, conscious intention to render the text more accessible to the less-learned public. Books of Psalms were published in various vulgar translations, accompanied by commentaries and theological and literary interpretations of the original text, a format of a Christian sermon. Many of these books were published in very small dimensions, '*tascabili*', that could be carried close to the heart of the faithful throughout the day. One could find books in Latin, Greek, Hebrew and Vulgar – all within a unified publication. There was even a popular version of a shortened booklet, printed in various editions, which included seven penitential psalms that were commented by Pietro Aretino¹⁴⁸. The quantity, variety and communicative character of these books indicate that they were probably part of the basic collection of any private library of a devoted Venetian nobleman.

In particular, a Latin version named '*Psalterium paraphrasibus illustratum*' was originally printed in 1535, and as testified by the copies conserved to date in libraries around Venice, it was printed in Köln in 1538, and at least six different editions in Lion between the years 1545-1571¹⁴⁹. The book, which enjoyed great popularity in Western Europe,

¹⁴⁸ Pietro Aretino, *I sette salmi de la penitentia di David* (Venice: Francesco Marcolini da Forlì, 1536). Another 'simplified' edition of the Psalms was published in Modena: *Alcuni salmi, e canzoni di Dauide profeta, tradotti dall'hebreo in lingua volgare, e parafresati con l'argomento, e somma che contengono. Del padre frate Domenico d'Arimino, dell'ordine di San Domenico* (Modena: Paolo Gadaldino, & fratelli, before 1569).

¹⁴⁹ *Psalterium paraphrasibus illustratum, seruata ubique ad verbum Hieronymi translatione, Raynerio Snyogoudano authore. Accessere ad postremam hanc aeditione, singulis psalmis argumenta, quae veram genuinamque Prophetarum intelligentiam pio lectori commonstrabunt* (Cologne: Johann Gymnich, 1538; Lion: Jean & François Frellon, 1545, 1559; Lion: Vincent Antoine, 1559, 1561, 1571).

was a translation and commentary of the Psalms by the Flemish doctor and theologian Reinier Snoy (1477-1537). Snoy, a native of Gauda, is known to have studied medicine in Bologna. He served as an ambassador at the court of Charles V in 1513, later in the courts of Scotland and Danmark, and was related to the circle of Erasmus¹⁵⁰. Every psalm had received by Snoy an introduction and an in-line interpretation that purposefully tied the original biblical verses to the principals of the Christian faith, and especially to the life of Christ. In Psalm 56, maintaining the cursive text and the character dimensions in their original form, the two lines read:

4. In Deo *meo* laudabo verbum *eius*...

10. In Deo *patre* laudabo verbum *incarnatum, praedicando cum consubstantialem patri, & coaeternum in Domino Iesu Christo, laudabo sermonem & eius regulam vivendi, quam mundo praestitit.*¹⁵¹

In line 10, the repeated evocation of God's name in two different ways had been interpreted once as God the Father, and the second time as Christ. Recalling the verses of John 1:1 and 1:14, Christ is defined as the Verb made in flesh by the word of God, as one substance with the father, co-eternal with him. As the Verb, he is glorified. In other words, David's prayer becomes the glorification of the Incarnation of Christ through the Verb.

Regarding the inscription in the *Studiolo*, it is possible that the citation of the specific phrase from Psalms 56 had been aimed as a conscious reference to the Incarnation of Christ through the Verb. It could have been either a direct citation of the *Psalterium paraphrasibus illustratum*, or perhaps, more likely, a reference to a common contemporary theological interpretation of the phrase, which would have been known from sermons or from other editions of the Psalms. Domenico Grimani possessed at least three versions of Psalms in his personal library¹⁵². In the façade of the church of

¹⁵⁰ C. G. van Leijenhorst, "Reyner Snoy," in *Contemporaries of Erasmus. A Biographical Register of the Renaissance and Reformation*, eds. P. G. Bietenholz and Th. B. Deutscher (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1987), vol. 3, 261-262.

¹⁵¹ David. *Psalterium paraphrasibus illustratum, servata ubique ad uerbum Hieronymi translatione. Raynerio Snoygoudano authore. Accessere ad postremam hanc aeditionem, singulis psalmis argumenta, quae veram genuinamque prophetae intelligentiam pio lectori commonstrabunt* (Lion: Jean & François Frellon, 1545).

¹⁵² Tamani, "I libri ebraici del cardinal Domenico Grimani," 43, 45. «Salmi Proverbi Ecclesiaste Lamentazioni», «Cronache Salmi Proverbi Daniele Ezra», and «Salmi, comm. di David Qimhi»

San Francesco della Vigna, Giovanni Grimani positioned his own citation from Psalms, 103:5, with the prominence of the word *'renovabitur'* above the eagle that crown the façade, *'Renovabitur ut aquilæ juvenus tua'* (**fig. 248**)¹⁵³.

The use of Hebrew inscriptions, especially certain verses of the Psalms, was also considered very appropriate for magical amulets. These amulets were widespread among Christians, Venice included, as can be testified by various trails of the *Sant'Uffizio* that were held in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries¹⁵⁴. One example for such objects is a sixteenth century crystal block, a mirror for divinatory practices currently conserved in Graz (**fig. 249**). The object carries the names of the four angels who supervise the different parts of the universe. At the center, a Latin inscription is an abbreviation of the second half of the exact same line in the psalm that seems to be cited in the inscription of the *Studiolo*: *'†DEUS†caro†mihi'*, as in *'Deo speravi, non timebo quid faciat mihi caro'*¹⁵⁵.

In Villa Grimani Molin the reference to the incarnation, in its religious contextualization, may be interpreted as a parallel to the secular, mythological concept of the metamorphosis. *'Tutti risorgeremo ma non tutti saremo trasformati'*¹⁵⁶ – the old sage, glorifying the incarnation of Christ, is glorifying his transformation into his human form upon Earth. At the opposite end of the universal scale, the metamorphoses sequence of frescoes that crowns the three ceilings is read as a glorification of the eventual transformation of the human being beyond the Earthly realm, and into the company of the Lord. What results is a theological cosmology, which evokes the concept of the cyclicity of the universe, of life and death, of birth and rebirth.

The Hebrew words and the secular metamorphoses scenes also recall Giovanni's iconographical program for the vineyard church, which is centralized on the concept of the

¹⁵³ Foscari and Tafuri, *L'armonia e i conflitti*, 159; Mut Arbós, "l'interpretazione della cappella Grimani," 184.

¹⁵⁴ Barbierato, *Nella stanza dei circoli*, esp. 305-306.

¹⁵⁵ Psalms, 56:5. «In Deo laudabo verbum eius, in Deo speravi, non timebo quid faciat mihi caro.» Castelli, "La mantica e i cristalli," 588-590.

¹⁵⁶ F. Zorzi, *L'armonia del mondo*, III:vii:10, 2245. «Dunque saranno trasformati per una condizione migliore soltanto coloro che, rapiti oltre la condizione umana, raggiungeranno la dignità di dei e la compagnia del sommo Artefice in persona. »

Christian Resurrection, and for his Venetian palace, which represents mythological figures who have found the way to dwell among the Gods. The figure that holds the words of wisdom in the Fratta villa unites in one phrase both the Hebrew Scriptures and knowledge, and the Christian doctrine. In a similar manner, in San Francesco della Vigna, Giovanni had placed on the façade the figures of Moses, '*Ministro umbrarum*' and Saint Paul, '*Dispentori lucis*' (Tiziano Aspetti, completed ca. 1592). Both figures probably appear also in the chapel arch (Battista Franco, ca. 1561), reverberating the message on the façade¹⁵⁷.

It seems that the old sage had been conceived by the authors of the iconographical program of Villa Grimani Molin in considering the respectable visual tradition of the representation of the virtue of *Sapienza* in the Venetian ambient. One of the more familiar examples for the allegory of Wisdom, which were definitely known to the painter of the allegory in the *Studiolo*, appears in Salviati's engravings for Marcolini's *Le sorti* under the title '*Sapere*'. The general identity of the old nude man of the *Studiolo*, his white beard, pose, style, and volumetric rendering, all bear a notable resemblance to the engraving, as well as to other similar figures of philosophers that appear in the book (**figs. 12, 250, 251**).

The image probably most recognized with the representation of Divine Wisdom in sixteenth century Venice is Titian's allegory at the anti-chamber of the Marciana Library (**fig. 252**). It was commissioned shortly after 1560, during the period when the members of the *Accademia della Fama* were regularly conducting their meetings in the library. In 1591, the same hall had been transformed into the museum hosting the collections donated to the Venetian Republic by Giovanni and Domenico Grimani. The allegory of Divine Wisdom had been chosen as the thematic theme of the entire library complex, as a true temple of human science. The personification is accompanied by an Eros that closes the mystery of creation, according to the Platonist doctrine. Interestingly, Nicola Ivanoff has identified the object that the allegory holds not as a simple book, but as a mirror¹⁵⁸.

¹⁵⁷ Foscari and Tafuri, *L'armonia e i conflitti*, 159; Mut Arbós, "l'interpretazione della cappella Grimani," 177.

¹⁵⁸ Nicola Ivanoff, "La Libreria Marciana: arte e iconologia," *Saggi e memorie di storia dell'arte* 6 (1968): 65; Roland Krischel, "La 'Sagesse' de Titien," *Revue de l'art* 160 (2008): 23-34.

The mirror, in addition to its association with prudence and vanity, is also a traditional attribute of Wisdom. Jurgis Baltrušaitis has emphasized how since ancient times the mirror, as an object for obtaining one's knowledge of oneself, lay at the base of wisdom. The mirror, as an allegory of exact vision, is also the profound thought and the work of the spirit who carefully examines the details of a problem¹⁵⁹. In Bocchi's *Simbolicarum questionum*, Wisdom is figured admiring herself in the mirror and in the act of extinguishing a dragon with her foot (**fig. 253**). The same figure, which is probably the prototype of Titian's allegory, had been painted by Anselmo Canera in the ceiling of the Sala dei Dei at Palazzo Thiene in Vicenza (**fig. 254**). Here, Wisdom is depicted as Prudence, and as an evocation of Astrology. She is accompanied by a serpent and a mirror, the traditional attributes of Prudence, surrounded by the symbols of the Zodiac, and located between four allegories of the elements¹⁶⁰.

The old sage in the *Studiolo* of Villa Grimani Molin seems to imitate Canera's Wisdom in a rather conscious manner. Both figures are reclining to the left with an analogous positioning of their arms and legs. As in Palazzo Thiene, the object held by the *Studiolo* figure is not a rectangle or a parallelogram, but contains a particular trapezoid shape. In Canera's allegory, the object is clearly a mirror, as can be deduced by its coloring, frame and reflection. In the *Studiolo* the object has similar dimensions and a similar shape. It should also not be excluded that the current, extremely opaque white color had been added in a later phase to cover a different execution, perhaps an actual depiction of a mirror. While Canera's allegory is looking away from the mirror, the old sage of the *Studiolo* is gazing directly into the white object. This action is a clear citation of the gaze of the ultimate Venetian *exemplum* of *Divine Wisdom*, Titian's allegory at the *anti-sala* of the Marciana Library.

¹⁵⁹ Jurgis Baltrušaitis, *Lo specchio*, 9-13 ("Prefazione").

¹⁶⁰ Ivanoff, "La Libreria Marciana," 65. See also: Ripa, *Iconologia*, 416-418 ("PRUDENZA"), and citing Matthew, 10:16. «estote prudentes sicut serpentes. »

CONCLUSIVE REMARKS

The present research project has been dedicated to the study of Villa Grimani Molin Avezzù with a twofold objective. The first objective was to provide a new corpus of documentation for an integrated historical review of the villa, considering a wide range of environmental, economical, social and cultural aspects that had influenced the story of its construction and decoration. The archival study of land reclamation and hydraulic operations near Fratta has uncovered an unpublished corpus of historical documents that directly regard the 'Pontoni-Trevisi' map dating to 1564, demonstrating that the representation of the villa on it had been successive to the original drawing phase. The shifting of the possible dating of the villa has opened the road to an extensive research campaign concentrating on the figures that owned and inherited the Fratta residence in the following decades.

The exhaustive study of new and existing materials about the daughters of Lucrezia Loredan, and Vincenzo Grimani's management of her large and respectable dowry, have enabled to perform a series of hypotheses regarding the patronage and attribution of the architecture of the decorative program of the villa. It was in an overlooked matrimonial contract dating to 1564, that Vincenzo Grimani proudly recounted that he himself had fabricated the villa, *'una bellissima casa cò due bellissime Tezze'*. The low estimate of the value of the villa around 1580, and documentary evidence regarding the expected expenses for it on behalf of the Loredan sisters during the same period, suggested the early 1580's as the most plausible date for a second reconstruction of Vincenzo's original structure.

Both phases of the architectural initiative have been assigned with great probability to Vincenzo Grimani. The architect suggested as responsible for the reconstruction phase of the villa was Vincenzo Scamozzi, based on stylistic and technical evidence and on several documentary indications that await a definitive future verification. The dating of the fresco program to the penultimate decade of the sixteenth century, shortly after the completion of

the renovation works, has been identified with the patronage of the eldest and most respectable daughter of Vincenzo Grimani, the widow Betta Grimani Molin. As the most plausible candidate for the painter of the villa, the research has proposed a member or members of the Filippi family from Ferrara, originating from Lendinara, and especially Cesare Filippi, a specialist in grotesque art and the brother of the more famous Bastianino.

The second objective of the dissertation was to perform a thorough iconological study of the frescoes, in accordance with the cultural contextualization that has resulted from the historical research. In its essence, the fresco program of Villa Grimani Molin depicts many of the issues that formed the historical and cultural background in which it is located. It demonstrates a full awareness of the patrons and of the involved painters, who, updated in regard to the debates of natural philosophy in their epoch, testify their erudite cultural-intellectual background. The level of intellectual complexity complies with the cultural interests of the Grimani family and with the status of Vincenzo as its universal heir. However, a strong female presence vibrates in the style and in the iconography that ideally reflects the identity of the main patroness, manifest in the depiction of moralistic issues that regards the married state of the Renaissance noblewoman.

The study of the iconographical program has been planned in an overall thematic approach. The subjects were identified for their relationship to the context of Natural Philosophy, and their significance had been studied in light of similar instances in the iconographical programs of private residences of a similar character and culture. As cosmological themes, the intelligent manipulation of the grotesques, the metaphor of the world as theater and the metaphor of the world as cave have all been widely discussed throughout the pages of the dissertation. The role of the Renaissance noblewoman is repeated in various occasions through the virtues of fidelity and chastity, provided with the 'cosmological justification' that only a wife possessing these qualities may be able to fulfill her cosmic role in the upbringing of the following generation. The importance of matrimonial union, represented in the ceiling fresco of the dining room, is combined with the metaphor of the *Theatrum mundi*, rich with detailed iconographical references, citing the treatise of Ludovico Dolce, honoring the regular

presence of the Venetian humanist in Fratta Polesine. Theater has also come to play a special role in the two large scenes dominating the lateral walls of the central hall, where a surprising attempt to combine multiple narrations in the same scene has been identified.

The iconographical program may be defined as a complex apparatus of cosmological philosophy, which is however intended not as a purely celestial-astronomical discipline, but rather, as a philosophy of nature, within the natural environment with all of its laws. The cosmological discipline had been understood in Renaissance culture in the same manner; without a major discrimination between the concept of 'cosmogony', pseudo-scientific and mystical elements tended to converge into a system of knowledge of laws that regulate a universe, which was conceived as a profoundly and transcendently ordered whole. The variety of cultural references and certain original iconographic choices, not without a certain inventiveness, have served the authors of the program as a method for exploring different systems of knowledge. *'La sapienza vuole ordinare e distinguere'*. The remark by Daniele Barbaro perfectly defines the essence of the program of Villa Grimani Molin, whose culmination is presented in the representation of the personification of Wisdom, which constitutes the core of the iconographical program.

In the *Studiolo*, an allegory of Spiritual Union is represented in the central ceiling fresco as a celebration of the value of wisdom. Around the central representation, on the vault and in the lateral walls, the depiction of the four temperaments in their female and male identities has been chosen for their allusion to a wide range of universal properties. Melancholy, as the utmost representation of Wisdom, has earned its dominant presence in the room. The mirrors depicted in the vault and on the walls are an embodiment of scientific knowledge, which is also evoked by the allusion to precious stones and to their natural and mysterious qualities. Nature is given a place of honor through the birds represented in a rich variety and a particularly high quality in the ceiling vault, and through the depiction of the eight river gods and allegories of fertility. Within a room so rich with pagan imagery, a Hebrew citation appears in the hands of the old sage, who seems to communicate an important mystical lesson regarding the resurrection of Christ, in an

exemplary manifestation of syncretism. The wise man also provides also indicates where the knowledge of the Spiritual Union shall bring the faithful, as the contents of his inscription call out the viewer's attention to the last image in the ceiling sequence, in the *Salottino*, to the transformation of an old and wise Jupiter into an eagle, echoing the phrase of Francesco Zorzi: *'Tutti risorgeremo ma non tutti saremo trasformati'*.

The study of the fresco program of Villa Grimani Molin has still not been entirely exhausted. Several iconographical issues remain somewhat ambiguous and require further interpretation and analysis, which could highly profit from the conclusions of the current research. The documentary campaign has opened up new directions of investigation that can still be further expanded and explored, and hopefully bring to more definite attributions of the patronage and authorship of the villa and its decorative apparatus. Hopefully, the references to natural philosophy that have delineated in the course of the dissertation will be able to serve as an instrument for the interpretation and identification of similar themes in other decorative programs from the last decades of the sixteenth century. In programs in the Veneto, but also those of the humanists in the Italian peninsula and beyond the Alps, who at the eve of the Scientific Revolution, would have found cosmology just as intriguing.