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INTRODUCTION

Charles M. Rosenberg

The six essays in this volume examine the patronage and production of art and architecture in a crescent of North Italian cities – Milan, Parma, Piacenza, Mantua, Ferrara, Bologna, Pesaro, Rimini, and Urbino – during the "Long Renaissance," a period extending roughly from 1350 to 1600 (Figure 1). Together, these chapters provide a rich supplement to the traditional narrative of Italian Renaissance art, which has tended to focus on the Florentine, Venetian, and Roman traditions.

One of the characteristics that distinguished the North Italian cities discussed here was the role that signorial governments played in most of them.[1] Traditionally, the *signori* have been characterized as despots, or tyrants,[2] labels that denote absolute rule by a single individual and, sometimes, the usurpation and questionable retention of that power, as well as a capriciousness, or even cruelty, in its exercise. John Addington Symonds painted just such a picture of the *signori* in his book *The Age of the Despots.*[3] Even as he acknowledged their contributions to the arts and refinement of life during the Renaissance, he asserted that they often exhibited a sadistic streak.[4] Jacob Burckhardt offered a similar appraisal. The *signore* were capable of inhuman actions,[5] but also epitomized the Renaissance ideal "self-made" man, an individual who succeeded because of his abilities, not his lineage. For Burckhardt, the courts that formed around these new rulers, a constellation of chancellors and ambassadors, humanists and artists, embodied a shift from a medieval, feudal model of government to one which was more rational and more "modern," consisting of incipient bureaucracies that allowed individuals to advance on the basis of their own skills and creativity. Recent discussions of the nature of signorial governments and individual dynasties by such scholars as John Larner, Giorgio Chittolini, John Law, Evelyn Welch, and Trevor Dean have provided a more nuanced, somewhat less judgmental, view of the *signori* and their modes of governing.[6] As Law has pointed out, it is difficult to offer a single model that describes the characteristics of signorial rule, because each example varied according to historical circumstances and the ruler's individual personality. Certain generalities, however, can be made. First, for the most part, once in power, *signori* went to great lengths to establish legitimate foundations for their patrimonial rule, foundations which were based on both legal and moral claims. The claims were often reinforced through symbolic means derived from broader princely ideals such as the display of public magnificence and private splendor,[7] as well as historical emulation and honor. As a result, the courts which formed around these rulers became centers of extraordinary intellectual and artistic creativity. Second, these princes exploited both older, traditional feudal forms of obligation and reward and a variety of emerging communal institutions in order to legitimize and exercise their authority. Third, although the *signori* possessed remarkable powers and resources which allowed them to undertake major public projects, their power was not absolute. Finally, although a *signore*'s public identity might be identified in a very personal way with the

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state which he controlled, it was neither unitary nor fixed.

Signorial governments first emerged in Italy in the thirteenth century, during a period characterized by rampant factionalism. The provinces of northern Italy, in particular, were the site of a struggle for power between the papacy and the emperor, each of whom claimed broad historical feudal rights in the region. Successive emperors asserted their strongest claims in Lombardy, while the papacy, particularly after 1278, laid claim to much of the Romagna (including Bologna and Ferrara) and the Marches of Ancona, the site of the future Papal States. Although these two "superpowers" asserted juridical and fiscal dominion in this region, their ability to enforce their claims was consistently challenged by aggressive city and town governments and by numerous well-established smaller rural feudal lords such as the Rossi of Torrechiara and San Secondo, and the Pallavicino of Bussetto. As a result, popes and emperors had to be content with governing by compromise and concession, exercising what control they had at a distance, through delegated authorities.[8]

The larger struggle between the papacy and the emperor for suzerainty was often exploited at the communal level, in contests for civic or territorial control among local competing interests. These parties might identify themselves as pro-papal (Guelph) or pro-imperial (Ghibelline), but were often actually motivated by more parochial interests, such as local struggles between urban and rural factions or among competing families. Welch's description of the rise of the Visconti and the Sforza in Milan, and Molly Bourne's account of the Gonzaga in Mantua, illustrate the typical course of signorial rule. The Visconti prevailed in their local struggle with the Della Torre family; the Gonzaga triumphed over the Bonacolsi. In each city, civic authorities typically named the head of the triumphant faction captain or captain-general of the people, titles bestowing signorial powers. Subsequently, the legitimacy of these locally appointed rulers was strengthened by their designation as "imperial vicars."

The office of vicar, or *vicarius*, had a venerable history going back to the time of Emperor Frederick II (HRE 1220–1250).[9] In Milan, the transformation of Matteo Visconti's position from captain of the people, a communal office, to imperial vicar was beneficial for both the emperor and the Visconti. From the perspective of Henry VII, who bestowed the title of *vicarious* upon Matteo, it represented an acknowledgment of the emperor's feudal overlordship by both the *comune* and its *signore*. For the Visconti, the vicariate gave their de facto and communal positions a new, external form of legitimacy, one which carried juridical and fiscal rights. During the second quarter of the fourteenth century, the papacy also began to use a vicarial strategy, employing it as a means of asserting its feudal supremacy in the Romagna and the Marches of Ancona. In 1329, Pope John XXII appointed Rinaldo and Obizzo III d'Este the first papal vicars of Ferrara. This new title provided the Este with a powerful legal foundation for their authority, but it also carried obligations. Acceptance of the papal vicariate entailed a public recognition of papal hegemony, a commitment to military service, and the payment of not only a substantial initial fee, but also an annual tribute.[10] The principal problem with vicarial titles, though, was not their cost, but their limited duration; initially, these titles were granted for only a fixed number of years. By the end of the fourteenth century, however, the major ruling families, including the Visconti, Este, Gonzaga, Malatesta, and Montefeltro, had been able to make their imperial and papal vicariates hereditary. The communal titles of *signore* and *capitano del popolo* soon became hereditary, as well. Although technically a new *signore* had to be confirmed by communal election, the confirmation process was normally conducted by a council whose membership was itself subject to signorial approval, an arrangement which assured dynastic succession.

Although communal elections and vicarial appointments provided local and international foundations for signorial rule, these offices did not carry the level of juridical and fiscal rights or public esteem associated with the more traditional feudal titles of count, marquis, and duke. While some of the ruling families already possessed feudal titles based on older imperial grants – the Este, for example, were marquises, and the Montefeltro were counts – others, such as the Visconti, Sforza, and Gonzaga, held no

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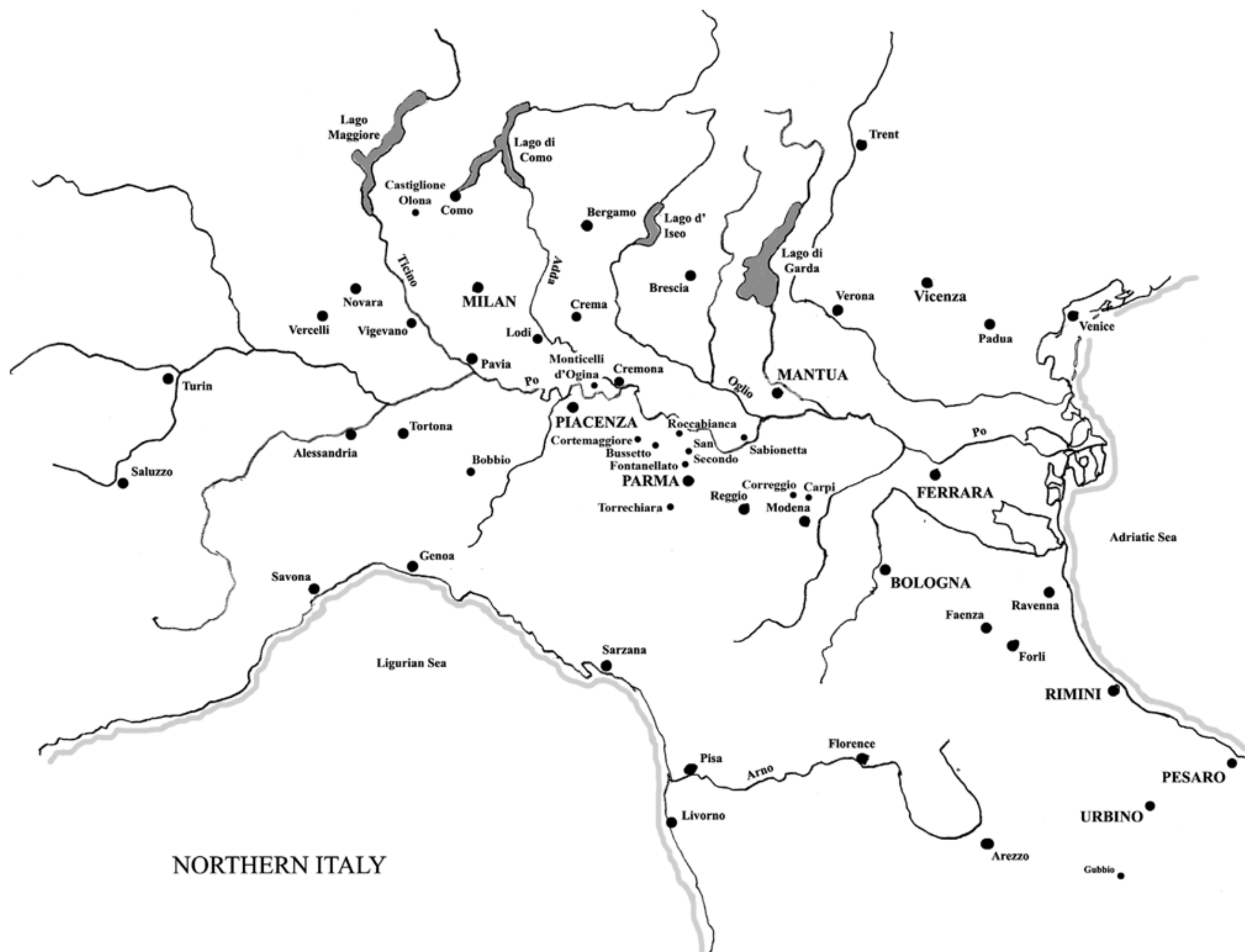

Fig. 1. Map of Northern Italy.

such noble titles. During the course of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, acquisition and/or elevation of noble titles became a matter of political ambition and familial pride.[11]

However, once authority was obtained, it was not always a simple matter to maintain and carry out an orderly succession of power, even when dynasties had established their legal rights by means of communal and feudal titles. The larger political events which swept through the Italic peninsula in the late fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, including the waxing and waning of papal power, the ebb and flow of Venetian *terra firma* ambitions, and the successive invasions of the French (1494) and Spanish Imperial (1521) forces, affected all of these cities and their rulers. In addition, internal threats to individual princes and their plans for dynastic continuity arose from popular uprisings, intrafamilial rivalries and conspiracies, insubordinate vassals, and a lack of legitimate male heirs. The Long Renaissance was, in short, a period in which rulers' political acumen and vigilance were essential for survival.

One of the most common political strategies pursued by the ruling families of northern Italy was the creation of alliances by marriage. In the course of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, the Este of Ferrara, for example, became related by marriage to the Sforza, Gonzaga, Montefeltro, Malatesta, Bentivolgio, Medici, Borgia, and Aragonese, as well as to King Louis XII of France and Holy Roman Emperor Ferdinand I. Likewise, in the sixteenth century, the Farnese consolidated their position in territories

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surrounding Parma and Piacenza through a number of strategic marriages.[12] These kinds of conjugal ties not only helped to cement political relations among the various courts, but also encouraged a free flow of cultural information. Visits occasioned by weddings and funerals, Carnival and other holy days, entries and other state occasions; the exchange of letters and gifts; the transmission of formal and informal ambassadorial reports filled with news and gossip; and the circulation of artists,[13] writers, texts, and even dancing masters[14] among various courts, all encouraged the creation of a shared cultural language, as well as a certain measure of cultural rivalry. There was a tacit understanding of what it meant to be a legitimate ruler and, even more significant, of what constituted appropriate public and private manifestations of power. As a result, although acts of patronage by any individual ruler reflected his or her own distinct personality and particular historical circumstances, certain common themes and strategies can be discerned.[15]

The patronage of architecture, public sculpture, and spectacle, all manifestations of the concept of public magnificence, was a striking way in which power could be directly and symbolically manifested. In the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, massive fortresses serving both practical and emblematic purposes were constructed by the Visconti and Sforza in Milan, Parma, and Piacenza;[16] the Gonzaga in Mantua (Figure 92); the Este in Ferrara (Figure 131);[17] and the Malatesta in Rimini (Figure 201).[18] Towered, walled, and crenellated, these urban citadels, usually built at the edge of the city in order to command not only the countryside but also the *comune*,[19] were physical manifestations of the prince's commitment to defending himself and his city from both internal and external enemies.[20] Such imposing fortresses were not only signs of authority, but also architectural symbols of masculine *virtù*, martial strength, and fortitude.[21] The northern *signori* placed a premium on these virtues not only because of the traditional feudal associations of nobility with combat and military service, but also because many of these rulers were *condottieri,* mercenary generals who depended upon the revenue they received from their *condotte* (retainers) for a sizable portion of their income in times of both peace and war.[22] It was important, therefore, for these princes to flaunt their military prowess. The function of fortified castles as symbols of personal virtue and power is illustrated by the medals which Sigismondo Pandolfo Malatesta and Costanzo Sforza commissioned from Matteo de' Pasti (Figure 201) and Gianfrancesco Enzola (Figure 219), respectively. Matteo's medal bears Malatesta's likeness on the obverse and a portrait of the Castel Sismondo on its reverse.[23] Enzola's medal depicts Sforza on the obverse and the Rocca Costanza on its reverse.[24] Although the specific form of urban citadels changed with advances in military technology and theory, fortresses continued to be built as defensive structures and prominent symbols of authority in these North Italian cities well into the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.[25]

The scale and magnificence of a ruler's palace were also signs of his nobility and power.[26] In the fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries, signorial urban residences were often rather modest structures, but eventually, rulers' palaces became considerably larger and more complex, with a proliferation of more specialized interior spaces and elaborate interior and exterior decorations. The expansion and embellishment of these buildings reflected both an amplification of the concept of princely magnificence and an increase in the complexity of ducal protocols and government. This evolution is well illustrated by the history of the Palazzo ducale in Mantua (Figures 91 and 92), which Bourne sketches in Chapter 3. By the end of the sixteenth century, the Gonzaga residence had been transformed from a sprawling, heterogeneous collection of fourteenth-, fifteenth-, and sixteenth-century buildings into a "princely city" worthy of a duke.[27]

The northern *signori,* their families, and their supporters also underwrote the creation and decoration of major chapels, churches, and monastic complexes. In addition to being centers of spirituality, these buildings sometimes served other purposes: as individual or familial mausolea; as a means of associating a ruler and his family with important civic relics and saints; and/or as permanent testaments to divine intervention on behalf of a ruler and/or his state, physical emblems of a ruler's gratitude to God for military victories, the birth of an heir, or the deliverance of his subjects from the plague or other

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disasters.[28] Overall, this type of religious patronage demonstrated the piety of the prince and/or his consort and family in a conspicuously public and enduring manner. Although these types of ecclesiastical commissions may have been motivated – at least in part – by a desire to project a conspicuous image of princely piety, there can be little doubt that patrons were also vitally concerned with assuring their own spiritual well-being and that of their families and subjects. They saw such acts of largesse as investments in the welfare of their souls.[29]

The Long Renaissance also witnessed a number of ambitious civic projects in the cities discussed in this volume. Directed toward reordering, modernizing, and expanding the basic urban fabric, major enterprises included lengthening, straightening, and broadening streets (Giovanni II Bentivoglio in Bologna, Costanzo Sforza in Pesaro, and Ottavio Farnese in Parma and Piacenza); digging and deepening canals (Giovanni II Bentivoglio in Bologna and Francesco Sforza in Parma); carving out and regularizing piazzas (Milan, Vigevano, and Bologna); building, rebuilding, and extending defensive walls (Ercole d'Este and Alfonso d'Este in Ferrara, Ferrante Gonzaga in Milan, and Pier Luigi Farnese in Parma); constructing major new neighborhoods (Costanzo Sforza in Pesaro, Lodovico Sforza in Milan, and Ercole d'Este in Ferrara); and erecting whole new cities (Vespasiano Gonzaga created Sabbioneta). These types of urban projects reflected not only responses to demographic, defensive, and economic circumstances, but also a desire on the part of individual rulers to create larger and more impressive capitals which would mirror the honor, strength, and magnificence of the patron and his state. In this context, contemporaries likened both Duke Ercole I d'Este and Giovanni II Bentivoglio to Augustus, the emperor who transformed his city "from brick to marble."[30] Such large-scale urban projects often entailed the usurpation and/or destruction of communal, ecclesiastical, or private property, as well as the imposition of significant economic burdens on the general populace, actions which sometimes caused friction between the prince and the *comune*, individual subjects, religious groups, and/or guilds. Records of complaints and even open opposition by citizens and courtiers illustrate both the scope of princely ambition and its limitations.[31]

Public sculpture and sculptural decorations provided other prominent means of expressing authority and glorifying and commemorating individuals. Monuments to living and deceased rulers were designed to craft an enduring collective memory of an individual and his family and to ensure their fame. For rulers, these monuments most commonly took the form of equestrian statues (Figures 8, 27, 150, 152, and 153) which had military and imperial associations,[32] or seated figures (Figures 151 and 193), which bore connotations of dominion and justice.[33] Placed at significant points within the cities of Ferrara, Bologna, Milan, Sabbionetta, and Guastalla (Figure 120) – in public squares, on the façades of churches or rulers' palaces, or on the ravelins of fortresses – these statues celebrated princely virtues, while also conveying dynastic and other political messages.[34] Other types of public sculpture, such as the reliefs of Roman emperors on the facade of the Palazzo del Corte in Ferrara, and the 72 limestone reliefs of military machines and engineering devices set into the base of the facade of the ducal palace in Urbino, offered more allusive commentaries on the character of their patrons. The Ferrarese *all'antica* reliefs not only contributed to the modernization of the city's main piazza, but also suggested that Ercole, the palace's occupant, deserved a place in a pantheon of exemplary, imperial rulers. The reliefs at Urbino, based on drawings by Francesco di Giorgio, Taccola, and Roberto Valturio,[35] alluded to the duke's martial skills and also, for those who recognized the sources of the images, celebrated his intellectual engagement with engineering and military theory. In a sense, the Urbino reliefs complemented the more private images and spaces within the palace itself, such as those found in the *studiolo* (Figure 214), where intarsia decorations, along with Joos van Ghent's portrait of the duke and his son, Guidobaldo (Figure 208), portrayed Federico as a man of both arms and letters.

Finally, public rituals and spectacles, staged in conjunction with religious events, entries, marriages, and funerals, offered numerous opportunities for the symbolic display of civic and princely honor, piety, and magnificence.[36] Celebrations of holy days such

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as the Feast of Saint George in Milan, SS. George and Maurelius and Corpus Domini in Ferrara, the Ascension in Mantua, and SS. Peter and Petronius in Bologna, sanctified the host city and confirmed its social hierarchy through carefully choreographed processions and displays. Typically, archery contests, jousts, and/or races on foot or on horseback were held in conjunction with these festivals. Such competitions offered entertainment for the citizens and allowed rival factions within the city, as well as neighboring princes and nobles, to vie with one another for prizes and distinction.

The arrival of an emperor, pope, prince, or noblewoman presented a special opportunity not only for magnificent civic display and the reaffirmation of the social hierarchy, but also for the representation of complex political and cultural arguments. Cities were transformed into stages on which carefully scripted dramas were enacted, creating visual and conceptual frames, converting contemporary actors into timeless archetypes. The transformation of the urban landscape could be ephemeral, as when Bologna was recast as an *alter Roma* for the Congress of Pope Clement VII and Charles V in 1529–1530, or more permanent, as when Ferrara's main square was modernized and embellished in the early 1470s, in anticipation of the arrival of Duke Ercole I's princess bride, Eleanora of Aragon.[37] Similarly, in the late 1560s, the streets and squares of Parma and Piacenza were regularized, and palace facades in the cities modernized, prior to visits by Duke Ottavio Farnese's daughter-in-law, Maria of Portugal.[38] Progressing through the city streets along a prescribed path strewn with flowers and overlooked by windows and balconies hung with tapestries, dignitaries would often move from one painted arch and living tableau to the next.[39] As noble visitors rode through the city, they became actors in the drama themselves, functioning as both observers and the observed. The reciprocal splendor which clothed the urban stage and the visitors moving through it was meant to dazzle the crowd and confirm the significance of the occasion and the reality of the social order which was directly and/or indirectly celebrated. Such events employed one language of overt magnificence which could be "read" by all, and another of symbolic allusion, ancient myth, history, and allegory which would have been fully intelligible only to an informed elite. Although these celebratory occasions unified the audience by engendering a common pride in elegant spectacle, they also served as tangible representations of the considerable economic, cultural, and political gulf which separated the masses from their masters.

In the late fourteenth century and much of the fifteenth, these sorts of spectacles were reported in letters sent by ambassadors and participants and were recorded in local chronicles, but by the end of the fifteenth century, this kind of description had begun to be supplemented by printed official and unofficial accounts.[40] Published *livrets*, or *libretti*,[41] served three important functions: Since festival iconography became progressively more elaborate and complex over the course of the sixteenth century, official printed accounts provided participants and observers with a means of deciphering what they had seen.[42] In addition, published descriptions created a wider audience for an event, both geographically and temporally. Finally, they gave permanence to something that was essentially ephemeral.

Beginning in the fifteenth century, there was a demonstrable shift in taste towards more classical content in public spectacles and festivities,[43] but throughout the Long Renaissance, medieval chivalric elements persisted as well, resulting in the kind of eclecticism that characterized many aspects of both public and private court life right through the sixteenth century.[44] Jousts and tournaments, which often followed elaborate scripts invoking the world of Charlemagne and/or that of ancient Rome,[45] were regularly staged as components of extended festivities which might also include triumphal arches and/or performances of the comedies of Plautus or Terence.[46] In the early 1470s, the facades of the buildings on three sides of the main piazza in Ferrara were painted with images of paladins, probably medieval knights in procession or battle, while the loggia of the Palazzo del corte, which looked out onto the same space, was decorated with *all'antica* reliefs bearing marble profile portraits of Roman emperors.[47] In the fourteenth, fifteenth, and sixteenth centuries, rooms in the palaces of North Italian princes typically were dedicated not only to such mythic figures as Hercules and Jupiter, but also to Lancelot

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and other heroes of Carolingian and Arthurian legend.[48]

The literature read at and produced at and/or for these courts evinced the same eclectic taste. Inventories reveal that the libraries of the Visconti-Sforza,[49] Gonzaga,[50] and Este[51] included not only classical texts, but also examples of French and Arthurian romances in the vernacular.[52] In the course of the fifteenth century, neo-Latin historical epics modeled on Virgil's *Aeneid* and Statius's *Thebiad* were written in honor of Francesco Sforza (Francesco Filefo, *Sforziad*; and Antonio Cornazzano, *Sforziad*), Lodovico Gonzaga (Gian Pietro Arrivabene, *Gonzagiad*), Borso d'Este (Tito Vespasiano Strozzi, *Borsiad*), Sigismondo Pandolfo Malatesta (Basinio Basini da Parma, *Hesperis* [Figure 200]), and Federico da Montefeltro (Porcellio Pandoni, *Feltriad*; and Giovanni Mario, *Mariad*).[53] These texts, populated with Roman gods and goddesses, firmly situated the North Italian princes within the tradition of the founders and heroes of ancient Rome.[54] At virtually the same time, the story of Roland and the French chivalric heroes of the court of Charlemagne, and the legends of King Arthur and the Holy Grail, all of which had survived in the songs of bards and the verses of Tuscan vernacular poets, were being revived in a more sophisticated courtly form, in verse, at the court of Ferrara.[55] In the early 1470s, Matteo Maria Boiardo, the Count of Scandiano, began composing his famous epic romance, *Orlando inamorato*,[56] a work which would be eclipsed in the following century by Lodovico Ariosto's magnificent *Orlando furioso*.[57] Both works represented Ferrarese revivals of a French chivalric literary tradition that had never really gone out of style.

Of course, enthusiasm for such contemporary neo-chivalric works did not preclude a continuing engagement with the traditions of intellectual humanism and the recovery of ancient texts and artifacts at the courts and in the cities of northern Italy. The University of Bologna (Figure 190), one of the oldest and most prestigious schools in all of Europe, was a center for the study of the traditional liberal arts and law, as well as the "experimental sciences," and it played a vital role in the political and cultural life of the city.[58] The universities of Pavia and Ferrara, also important centers of law, theology, and humanistic studies, were actively supported by noble families, the former by the Visconti and Sforza, and the latter by the Este.[59] Such humanists, scholars, and antiquarians as Guarino da Verona, Vittorino da Feltre, Francesco Filefo, Leon Battista Alberti, Filarete, Maria Equicola, Enea Vico, Celio Calcagnini, and Pirro Ligorio were all, at one time or another, beneficiaries of the largesse of the North Italian princes discussed in this volume. As regards the interest in antiquities, the act of collecting ancient Roman and Greek coins and sculpture became progressively more important as a sign of cultural and social status. Although the Gonzaga and the Este did not have the resources of a pope or a king, they actively competed for treasures in the antiquities market.[60]

The most widely distributed form of imagery during the Renaissance was contemporary coinage, an art form that began to be used in an extraordinarily imaginative manner for political purposes in the course of the fifteenth century. One of the most significant numismatic innovations of the time was the creation of the Renaissance portrait coin, or *testone*. Placing a ruler's portrait on his coinage circulated his image amongst his contemporaries and provided a means of preserving his likeness and name in perpetuity, as surviving Roman imperial coins clearly demonstrated. As Luke Syson has observed, the "invention" of this new coin type at the Milanese court of Francesco Sforza in the mid-fifteenth century represented not only a conscious revival of an ancient model, but also a response to prevailing political circumstances. Sforza's usurpation of the duchy of Milan in 1450 placed him in a particularly precarious position, for the dynastic basis for his claims to the title was suspect, at best. As a result, Francesco sought to establish his right to rule on the basis of character, rather than blood. As Syson has suggested, Sforza's production of the first true portrait coin may have been intended to broadcast the new ruler's virtue through the circulation of his likeness, for, according to ancient and Renaissance physiognomic theory, an individual's character could be discerned in his features.[61] The figure of a horse and rider galloping forward into battle on the reverse of Francesco's gold ducat reinforced the message of princely virtue visible in the portrait on the obverse

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and implied dynastic continuity, since the martial image was based on one which had appeared on the reverse of a gold florin struck by Francesco's predecessor, Filippo Maria Visconti.[62] The emblems of both the Visconti and Sforza, the *biscia* and *sedola*, were represented on the caparisons of Francesco's warhorse, emphasizing the usurper's ties to the Visconti family through marriage. Finally, the military character of the figure alluded not only to Sforza's vocation as *condottiere*, but also to his courage and valorous deeds.

By the end of the third quarter of the fifteenth century, portrait coins had become established as a common Italian numismatic type, particularly in the duchies, marquisates, and counties of northern Italy. The striking of a gold ducat or silver *testone* became a mark of rulership, a sign of legitimacy, and a public declaration of the identification of a state with its prince. Welch's description of the manipulation of images on Milanese *testoni* during the last two decades of the fifteenth century, the period in which Ludovico il Moro gradually wrested power away from his sister-in-law and nephew, reveals one of the most audacious examples of this phenomenon.[63]

The reverses of North Italian *testoni* often bore complex images and erudite inscriptions that alluded to specific events or individual accomplishments. In fact, Renaissance gold and silver coins such as those struck by Ercole I d'Este and his son and successor, Alfonso I, actually rivaled contemporary medals in their artistry, level of sophistication, and subtlety of argument.[64]

The authority and legitimacy of rulers was promoted in private venues, as well as public forums. In addition to their impressive urban palaces and fortresses, the princes of northern Italy constructed and embellished a substantial number of suburban and rural villas.[65] These residences, built at the edges of major cities, included the Palazzo di San Sebastiano and the Palazzo Te (Figure 115), in Mantua; the Villa Belfiore, the Palazzo Schifanoia, the Villa Belvedere, and the Montagna di San Giorgio, in Ferrara; and the Palazzo del Giardino, in Parma. More remote country retreats, such as La Sforzesca,[66] the Villa Imperiale, Revere (Figure 101), Bosco della Fontana (Figure 128), Benvegnante (Figure 143), Belriguardo, Copparo, and Urbania, might have been less well known to the general public, but would certainly have been familiar to the circle of courtiers and bureaucrats who served the prince, and to visiting nobles and retainers who would have been entertained there. As Bourne has observed in respect to the Gonzaga family's network of villas, these rural retreats, some of which were associated with working farms and substantial game preserves, provided refuge from summer heat, supplied appropriately splendid settings for the entertainment of visiting dignitaries, and offered ample spaces for the traditional aristocratic pastimes of hunting and hawking. They also facilitated travel and the administration and surveillance of subjects and events in the countryside.[67]

The existence of chapels and *studioli* makes it clear that these villas served as sites for introspective pursuits, as well as for more hedonistic aristocratic pleasures.[68] Indeed, the villa which Borso d'Este began to construct at the very end of his life (1469) on an artificial hill, about twenty kilometers from Ferrara, may have been intended to serve as a sacral pendant to the nearby Villa Belriguardo, a pastoral retreat which had its own splendid chapel painted by Cosmè Tura.[69] These two structures – the Montesanto[70] and the Villa Belriguardo – may have been inspired by Petrarch's classic description of his two gardens at Vacluse, one "suitable only for study and sacred to our Apollo" and the other "a delight to Bacchus."[71] Borso had already created a suburban palace on the grounds of the Carthusian monastery in Ferrara, and had decorated the walls of his apartments there with images from the lives of three hermit saints.[72] Though painted with gold and other expensive materials, this palace offered him a more "spiritual" alternative to the Palazzo Schifanoia and the nearby Villa Belfiore.

The extraordinary importance of architecture and architectural patronage as a sign of princely magnificence[73] and military stature helps to explain why the office of ducal architect or engineer was one of the few regular, salaried positions open to artists during the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries.[74] Large-scale urban projects, including the construction of defensive walls, fortresses, palaces, parks, and villas, required careful oversight throughout an extended period of time by an expert with organizational, engineering, and design skills. The fact

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that many of the North Italian princes were *condottieri* meant that they also had a special interest in military matters and the invention and construction of the machines of war. It is not surprising, then, that several of the architects and engineers employed by the Sforza, Malatesta, and Montefeltro produced theoretical and practical treatises dealing not only with urban design and architecture, but also military and civil engineering. Examples include Filarete's *Sforzinda*, Roberto Valturio's *De re militari*, and Francesco di Giorgio's *Codicetto*.

Access to princely palaces, fortresses, and villas would naturally have been restricted, and much of the decoration in these spaces would have been created with informed viewers of a certain standing in mind.[75] The principal surviving examples of painted and stucco decorations in rooms of state discussed in this volume – the *Sala del Pisanello* (Figure 99), *Camera Picta* (Plate XII), and *Sala di Troia* (Figure 116) in the Palazzo ducale, and the *Sala dei Cavalli*, *Camera di Amore e Psyche* (Plate XIV), and *Sala dei gigantic* (Plate XV) in the Palazzo Te in Mantua; the *Salone dei mesi* (Figure 139) and *Sala degli stucchi* in the Palazzo Schifanoia in Ferrara; the *Camera di Griselda* at Roccabianca Figure 45); and the *Sala d'oro* at Torrechiara (Plate VII and Figure 12) – show a common interest in identifying their patrons through overt and allusive means, including portraits, coats-of-arms, and *imprese*,[76] and in commenting on their patrons' character and familial honor through the inclusion of, and reference to, exemplary actions and/or figures. The same strategy was evidently employed in the lost or unrealized cycles which would have adorned the public rooms of Galeazzo Maria Sforza in the Sforza castles in Pavia and Milan;[77] the Gonzaga villa at Marmirolo and the Palazzo di San Sebastiano in Mantua;[78] the loggias and rooms of villas of Belfiore and Belriguardo;[79] the Bentivoglio palace in Bologna;[80] and the *Sala degli Affreschi*, *Sala della Iole*, and *Sala del Trono* in the Palazzo ducale, in Urbino.[81] Many of the surviving and lost fresco cycles not only incorporated portraits of the ruler, his family, and the court, engaged in typical courtly activities – meeting with petitioners, conducting the business of state, hunting, feasting, and riding – but also commemorated specific events (e.g., jousts and processions) and rituals (e.g., the New Year's Day celebration in Milan and the St. George's Day festivities in Milan and Ferrara). In this way, they created what were to be permanent visual records of otherwise ephemeral events.

Tapestries were also an important part of the décor in the larger and more public rooms of princely palaces and villas (Figures 28, 78, 121, and 136). Their subject matter varied from narrative to purely ornamental, and visitors commented on their content, beauty, and value, confirming the hangings' important role in the theater of court life. Often quite expensive and elaborate, these precious objects, woven with wool, silk, silver, and gold thread, not only served the practical function of insulating drafty halls and chambers from the cold and damp, but also contributed to the aura of richness which private splendor required.[82]

In addition, in the late fifteenth century and throughout the sixteenth century, collections of paintings and ancient and modern sculpture, displayed in the halls and galleries of aristocratic palaces, grew in importance as symbols of princely magnificence.[83] Spaces designed specifically for the display of art and antiquities, such as the *Loggia de Marmi* (Figure 117) created by Giulio Romano in the Palazzo ducale in Mantua in the late 1530s,[84] the galleries added to the palace at the end of the sixteenth century by Vincenzo Gonzaga (Plate XVII and Figure 127),[85] and the *Antichario* designed by Pirro Ligorio for the Castelvecchio in Ferrara in the 1570s,[86] attested to the growth and importance of these types of collections.

The most private spaces within the noble palaces and villas of northern Italy were the *studioli* and *camerini,* located deep within the apartments of a ruler. The decorations of these spaces were more personal and provocative, and could often be quite enigmatic. This volume includes discussions of several such decorative programs: the frescoes from the *studiolo* at Torrechiara;[87] the paintings and *intarsie* from Isabella d'Este's *Camera grande, Grotta* (Figures 110 and 111)*,* and *studiolo* (Figure 109)*,* and Federico II Gonzaga's apartments in the Palazzo ducale complex, in Mantua;[88] the mid-fifteenth-century cycle of Muses from the *studiolo* at Belfiore (Figure 142), and the paintings and sculptures from the *camerini* of Alfonso I d'Este, in Ferrara (Plate XVIII

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and Figures 134–135);[89] and the painted portraits and *intarsie* from the *studioli* in Urbino and Gubbio (Figures 208 and 214–215).[90] Anthony Colantuono's observation regarding the program of the *studiolo* at Belfiore – that it was "designed for viewing over a long period of time, probably with the intention of inspiring learned conversation or interpretative writing"[91] – applies to all of these highly personal spaces. It is also in the context of the decoration of these spaces, specifically in Alfonso d'Este's employment of Bellini, Titian, and Raphael in his *camerino*, and Isabella d'Este's unsuccessful pursuit of Bellini and Leonardo for her *studiolo*, that there is evidence of aristocrats' growing desire to own and exhibit works by specific artists in order to foster comparisons, stimulate discussion, and garner the cultural capital which could accrue to a patron through association with the most famous artists of the day.[92]

Female patrons such as Isabella d'Este figured prominently as creators of their own private spaces. These projects included the oratory, secret garden, and *studiolo* in the Castelvecchio in Ferrara built for and furnished by Duchess of Ferrara Eleonora of Aragon (Figure 133);[93] the *Camera grande, Grotta, studiolo*, and gardens in the apartments of Isabella d'Este, first in the Castello and later in the Corte Vecchia, in Mantua (Figures 109 and 110–113);[94] Paola Gonzaga's room of Diana and Actaeon painted by Parmigianino in the Rocca di Fontanellato (Figure 65);[95] and the apartments of Giovanna da Piacenza, abbess of the Benedictine convent of San Paolo in Parma, whose rooms were decorated with enigmatic mythological and allegorical frescoes by Alessandro Araldi and Correggio (Figures 59 and 61).[96] The decorations in these feminine retreats, like those of the *studioli* and *camerini* of princes, were idiosyncratic and personal. Gender played a role in regard to the virtues which were emphasized and the exemplars who were invoked; both tended to allude more directly to feminine ideals. In general, however, the objects gathered within these spaces, and the paintings which adorned their walls and vaults, were not categorically different from those found in the private chambers of princes. Although it has been suggested that men were the authors of, or at least collaborators on, the complex iconographic programs which characterized these rooms, the spaces and their decorations are, nonetheless, testimony to the education and cultural engagement of the powerful women for whom they were created.[97]

In addition to creating intimate personal spaces, the noble women of northern Italy engaged in significant acts of religious patronage. Examples include altarpieces such as the one dedicated to SS. Daria and Grisante created by Bonifacio Bembo, commissioned by Bianca Maria Visconti for the chapel of Sant'Agostino in Cremona (Figures 17 a and b),[98] and Parmigianino's *Madonna of the Long Neck*, commissioned by Elena Baiardi for the Church of the Servites in Parma;[99] chapels, including the one dedicated to the Holy Cross in the Church of Sant'Antonio in Parma, commissioned by Giovanna Cavalcabò to commemorate a trip to the Holy Land by her husband, Pietro de' Rossi,[100] and one built by the Blessed Elena Duglioli dall'Olio and dedicated to Santa Cecilia in San Giovanni in Monte above Bologna (Plate XXVII);[101] and churches, such as San Nicola, Santa Maria della Pace, and San Pietro in Gessate, underwritten by Duchess Bianca Maria Sforza, in Milan.[102] Noblewomen also provided financial support for monastic communities, including the Clarissans of Santa Chiara in Milan,[103] Corpus Domini in Bologna,[104] Sant'Orsola and Corpus Christi in Mantua,[105] and Corpus Christi in Ferrara.[106] These convents served as retreats where the unmarried daughters of aristocrats could be safely tucked away, where a duchess or marchioness could retire for prayer and solitude, and where a patroness might find a final resting place.[107] Although they may have had fewer resources at their disposal than their male counterparts, these powerful women still played a significant role in the cultural life of the court and city throughout the Long Renaissance.[108]

Artists typically collaborated on large-scale projects during this period, not only for court commissions, but also other major civic and religious initiatives such as the decorations at Mezzaratta outside Bologna (Figure 162). In respect to Milan, Welch notes that artists and merchants who worked for the court often formed consortia as a practical strategy for distributing economic risk. Similar sorts of companies were known in Florence, where the

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